

A DAUGHTER OF THE SIERRA

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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CHAPTER XXVII

DONA BEATRIZ GIVES HER ORDERS

It was a scene Isabel Rivers never forgot—that which awaited them when they entered the great court of the house. Here deeper shadows than those outside had gathered; and the lamps hanging at intervals in the corridors had been lighted, bringing out the massive walls, the forms of the arches, the dim distances where silent draped figures passed to and fro...

Dona Beatriz held out her hand to Lloyd with a gesture of cordial greeting. "Senor," she said in her full, sweet voice, "you are always welcome at Las Joyas, but never more welcome than when you come as a true friend to bring us a warning."

"I am happy, senor, if my warning has come in time to be of service," Lloyd answered, with a deference and grace of manner which the spectator thought altogether worthy of the occasion. "But I would suggest that Don Arturo should lose no time in going to the mine."

"I should have been on the road now," Arturo interposed abruptly. "If Dona Beatriz had not interposed and said—oh, I cannot repeat it! It is past patience!" the young man cried, with all the indignation which clearly possessed him during expression in his voice.

"Dona Beatriz turned with an air of gentle command and laid her hand on his arm. "Be quiet, Arturo!" she said. Then she looked at Lloyd. "He is not willing to go," she explained, "because he does not wish to carry my orders to the mine."

"No!" Arturo said violently. "I will not carry such orders! If we are forbidden to defend the mine, I for one, will not go near it!" "Forbidden to defend the mine!" Lloyd repeated with astonishment. He glanced from Dona Beatriz to Victoria. The girl had stepped to her mother's side, as if to support her in whatever she might say, but her eyes were downcast, so that she did not meet his glance; and it was plain from her compressed lips that she found it difficult not to echo Arturo's indignant protest.

"That surely can not be your order, senora?" he said. "It is impossible!" "My order," Dona Beatriz replied, "is that no blood shall be shed to defend my property. If those who come to take the mine are to be repulsed without bloodshed, let it be done; but I will not incur the responsibility of sending any soul out into the world for such a cause."

"But the responsibility will not be yours," Lloyd said. "It will belong to those who are the aggressors in the matter."

all its wealth, is as nothing, but, while he permits this, I am sure there is one thing He does not permit, and that is that I shall defend myself or my property by any act of wrongdoing."

There was a moment's pause. Every one of those present shared more or less in the indignant anger and protest which Arturo had so openly and vehemently expressed; yet every one was touched, almost awed into silence, by the attitude of this woman, by the loftiness of the spirit with which she met the culminating injury which confronted her. Lloyd, conscious of admiration and exasperation in equal proportion, turned to the silent girl, who stood by the side of the noble figure, mutely supporting even while mutely protesting.

"Dona Victoria," he said, "can you not persuade your mother that there is no wrongdoing in defending her rights?" In response to this appeal, Victoria lifted her eyes and met his gaze, throwing back her head a little as she did so. Her expression was sad but proud.

"Senor," she answered, "my mother has spoken for me in speaking for herself. What she says, I must say also."

"Ah!" It was Isabel Rivers who uttered this quick, irrepressible exclamation, which conveyed to one ear at least the passionate admiration it expressed. For who knew so well as she what those words meant—she who had won her way deep into the heart of the Mexican girl; who had seen its fiery passion, its strength of force determination laid bare? And having seen, having sympathized with all which was in that heart, she now felt herself thrilled, as we can be thrilled only by that which touches upon the heroic, by this brief utterance, which expressed such intense loyalty of affection, such difficult submission, such hard self-conquest.

Lloyd, on his part, quietly bowed. "In that case," he said, "I can offer no further advice."

"But my mother does not mean," Victoria went on eagerly, "that we are ungrateful for your warning, or that we mean to disregard it. She has asked Arturo to go to the mine to see that the men are in readiness for an attack."

"But to forbid them to use their weapons—to request them to permit themselves to be shot down without resistance!" Arturo interrupted bitterly. "I refuse to carry such an order. You understand, senor, that it is absurd—that the men will never submit—it is asking too much of them. If they are forbidden to defend the mine in the only way in which it can be defended, they will throw down their arms and leave it, and no one could blame them."

"It is true," Lloyd said, addressing Dona Beatriz. "If you wish to give up your mine, you have the right to do so, but you have not the right to forbid these men who are in your service to defend themselves. That, as Don Arturo says, is asking too much."

Dona Beatriz looked at him with a sudden passion of appeal in her gaze. "What am I to do, senor?" she asked. "How can I endure to bring upon my soul the guilt of shedding blood? Ab, you do not know," she cried, "what I have suffered from the fear of this! It has deprived me of peace by day and sleep by night; but I have hoped and prayed that it might not come—that, knowing we were prepared for resistance, those who thought to surprise the mine would not make the attempt. And I had begun to think that my prayers were answered and to have a little peace of mind and soul; and now—now—she suddenly broke down and flung herself weeping into a chair near by. "God has not heard my prayer," she said, "and I know not what to do!"

Lloyd and Victoria looked at each other across the table. If there had been appeal in the mother's eyes a moment before, there was a much deeper appeal now in the daughter's—an appeal which Lloyd read clearly: "Is there no way to help her?—no way to lift this burden of frightful responsibility which is crushing her who has already borne so much?" Victoria's gaze asked with a mute passion which, together with the soul of the woman whose self-control had so suddenly yielded under the strain laid upon it, stirred Lloyd's chivalry to its depths. And the girl, whose eyes were fastened upon his, was conscious of this—conscious that her appeal was understood and answered; conscious of a magnetic current of comfort and sympathy; an assurance of the help she asked—a sense of reliance—a conviction that he would relieve this sensitive soul of the fears which tortured it. She seemed to know what he would say when he bent down to Dona Beatriz.

"And order my mule, Arturo. I will go also," Victoria said. Lloyd turned to her quickly. "Let me beg that you will do nothing of the kind," he said. "The mine-to-night—is no place for you."

"You are mistaken," she answered quietly. "It is the place for me, not only because it is right to be there, but also because the men obey no one as they obey me."

"Nevertheless," he urged earnestly, "there is no need—"

"There is need," she interrupted, drawing her dark brows together with the expression of determination he knew so well. "And even if there were not, nothing could prevent me from going, Arturo, order my mule."

Half an hour later—for Dona Beatriz insisted that Lloyd should take some supper before leaving the house—again—the saddled animals were before the door; and he came out to them, carrying with him a sense of disappointment and pain; for he had looked around the corridors for Miss Rivers in order to say a farewell word, and had failed to find her. Putting this avoidance—for he was sure it could be nothing else—together with the new coldness which he had heard in her voice and felt in her manner when they met at the time of his arrival, he felt a conviction that something had occurred to change her feelings toward him—that frank, delightful friendly feeling which had been to him like water in the desert to the thirsty, and to make her withhold even a word of interest and goodness when he was leaving on an errand which at another time would have commanded her keenest sympathy.

Many men would have found solace for disappointment in recalling time-worn and not wholly unjustified sayings about feminine variability and caprice; but Lloyd knew Isabel Rivers better than to think, or even pretend to think, that such sayings could be applicable to her. Neither variability nor caprice had place or part in her, he was sure; and it followed that she must have a reason for this great change, and that reason he instinctively knew to be a serious one. It was, therefore, with a keen consciousness of the disappointment and pain already mentioned, that having shaken hands with Dona Beatriz, and assured her again that he would do everything in his power to fulfil her wishes, he walked out to the corridor where the horses waited—and there found two feminine figures already mounted.

He paused for an instant, amazed and startled. Then he walked up to the side of the one whom even obscurity of night there was no mistaking.

"Miss Rivers," he said gravely, "pardon me for telling you that this is a great mistake. You should not think of going to the mine tonight."

"I supposed you would probably say so," Miss Rivers replied calmly, "and so I took care to be mounted and ready to start when you came out. Since Victoria goes, I am going with her."

"I must remind you that the cases are very different. I disapprove of Dona Victoria's going, but she has the right of the owner to be there. And I have the right of the friend of the owner. Please don't delay any longer, but please don't delay any longer by arguing the matter, Mr. Lloyd. I am going."

"I am sure that your father would never permit—"

9 served, 978; 155 have lost their lives; 9 are missing; 21 are prisoners of war; and 197 have been wounded. Of war honors the following have been awarded to Stonyhurst men: Victoria Cross, 3; Distinguished Service Order, 25; Military Cross, 65 (six with bar); and 152 have been mentioned in dispatches for distinguished service.—Catholic Bulletin.

BACKWATERS

A landscape white with snow that is beginning to melt; brown rifts of earth and brown shrivelled foliage; a hill to the left; remnants of forest to the right; and the wide plain between, sad, winter sodden, winnowed. A little back from this arena of whiteness, to the west of it, are the bone like remains of a village that has been repeatedly shelled. Not a wall stands, but some broken shafts of masonry still erect, a few stone piles, an occasional fragment of roof-tiling. Beneath the wreckage, a post has been established, and superior officers congregate in what was once a cellar—a large low cave, where the taller man can barely stand upright, and where mattresses are laid upon the floor for beds. A deal table, two broken armchairs, and a chair that wobbles furnish the apartment; and outside is the incessant boom and reverberation of battle, the whir of airplanes, the nearer sinister ringing of telephones that seem to be possessed by forebodings of evil.

There are only three men in the underground office temporarily, and they smoke but do not speak. The General bends over his official writing, the glow of the lamp—for daylight never reaches this burrow—bringing out vividly the silver gloss of his hair and the furrows of his countenance. Opposite him, his aide is writing home, and a quite young ensign, tilted back in his hobnobbing chair, reads a yellow backed novel.

The General lifts his head and pauses a moment to listen. "Seems to be getting pretty hot out there!" "Big pots and little pots!" the junior replies.

"And a chance for everybody to dance!" "It's unbelievable," the aide growls, "that they should never get tired."

"I think, my dear Vernay, that we can consider our return equal if not superior. I was out on the Ridge last night. You should have seen what went on! I don't believe I ever in my life saw a finer, more spectacular display of fireworks. If you had not been so tired I would have had you called. (There they go again!) Do go up and see what is happening. De-lorme. And our little fellows—how they came up! Breathless, straining with the guns, some of them bereaved, which is criminal. But how are you going to tell these grown-up children to keep on their hats, as a scolding nurse would, when they are playing the big game of life so gallantly? Poor little poltroons, so brave and so unconscious of their heroism!"

"Seeing the elder's face alight and his eyes gleaming, the younger man puts down his pipe and rises. "I wish you had me called, General; though I have not addressed for three weeks now, and I am so sleepy I can scarcely keep one open eye. But let me tell you, before De-lorme returns, that I have a message for you."

"You have a message for me and you don't deliver it?" "It would have been impossible before, sir. I saw Raoul yesterday."

In a moment the light had gone from the old man's face, leaving it in its physical reality—worn, suffering, full of anxiety and care. "You saw Raoul, and then?" "He seemed to be very sad, and spoke of his great wish to see you."

"What does he want to see me for?" "I do not know, sir. He did not tell me. If I may venture to express an opinion, it is perhaps that your long displeasure weighs upon him."

If you had loved him as I loved him, you would understand why I can not forgive him. Come, De-lorme. "There is concentrated firing upon our position, sir, along the extent of a kilometre to a depth of five hundred yards. We are bringing up fresh batteries to the south of the Ridge."

"Good! I will come and see." All through the long day the General came and went—a dogged, energetic figure, full of reserve force. Here, he stood observing, silent; there he gave orders, briefly. For the advancing column he had a word of cheer and encouragement; for the wounded carried past him, a glance of tenderness. As they came near him the eyes of the men instinctively turned towards him. They knew they could trust him. They knew that, so far as fore-knowledge and wisdom and love for them could make them safe, they were safe in his hands. And if he hit them doing daring things it was because the daring things must be done, and they were glad and proud that he had chosen them.

Toward the middle of the afternoon coffee was brought in a tin cup to where he stood watching the action, through the field-glasses steadied against a tree notch. At midnight the firing would probably cease. The only use of the light of day was for destruction. He remembered, at sight of the coffee, that he had taken no food; but he was neither weary nor faint. Too great things were encompassing him for that. Like Vernay, like so many others, he had not addressed for three weeks; and he was so sleepy—or he would have been if his mind moment upon himself. Dusk brought the expected lull, yet a lull full of dangers and of apprehensions—a lull in which watching must not relax for it might prove the forerunner of surprises.

Mess was served, incomplete and halting, in the ruins of a tottering house; and, as night advanced, the aged chief withdrew, alone, leaving the younger men to smoke a while before returning to their posts. As he entered his own collar sleeping room and office, the place, in spite of its bareness and discomfort, seemed friendly and inviting. The lamp shone upon the deal table and upon his papers and writing material. The figure of another young man had taken the place of the subaltern of the novel, in the chair that hobbled. They came and went all day, as their duties took them or released them. This one rose and clicked his heels together; and the General, pulling off his cap, acknowledged the courtesy without looking. Then, seeing that the young man remained standing, his presence suddenly struck him with a new significance. He turned and grew motionless.

"You?" he ejaculated. "I was tall figure, and rather slender; dark of hair and eyes; a slight pallor as of fatigue overcasting the handsome countenance; and a sensitiveness, as though long months of horror and of death surrounding him had left their mark upon a delicate organism. Yet he stood erect, with the stamped ineffaceable training of soldiery."

"I must beg your pardon for forcing myself upon you, sir! But I had only one hour, stolen out of my trench, and I do not know when I can have another—perhaps never."

"Perhaps! And after five years of honor, you have suddenly found yourself with something so pressing to say that it cannot wait one moment!" "You have expressed it exactly, sir."

"May I inquire what this imperative need is?" "I have a curious feeling that I am not to live. I may be making a mistake. But you, more than anybody else, know what an officer's life is worth in the first line trenches."

"A soldier must take the risk." "I do not object to it, sir. But if I am to go out, there is something I want to say before I go. And I have a letter from my mother that I wanted to show you."

"D your mother tell you to come to me?" "No, sir, she did not; though she has often urged me to, at other times. But this is about other things. She knows my danger; and, a future life being very real to her, she is trembling for my soul. It is a wonderful letter—I think the most wonderful that I have ever received from her; and you know how she can plead. She has been pressing me for a long time to return to my religious duties. You will see here how she reminds me—how she rings upon my very heart the remembrance of our Februarys in that happier, sunnier part of France when I was a child. She says my faith and my love for Christ's Holy Mother were so great that on this day I used always to go out into the woods, eager for the first violet, and sure that its blue mystery and fragrant breath would be there unfailingly, either on the 2nd of February or in the days immediately succeeding it, in honor of Our Lady's Candlemas. It seems that I was never disappointed. Mother remembers it all. And I decided to do what she wished, just because she wished it."

"I attended our military Mass last Sunday. It was the first time in many years. Something about it—I know not what, the little ruda alter under the fir boughs, the bowed heads of my men as they knelt, (they who believe) or some other secret thing that came over me at the Elevation of the Host—made me resolve to satisfy my mother in full. I made

my confession yesterday, kneeling in the mud of the trench, which seemed to me the same as my own soul. I had not thought twelve years of sin could have been wiped out so quickly or so easily. But as God pardoned me, as I never deserved it, so I have dared to hope that perhaps I could win your pardon, too, my father!"

The old man's eyes were wide open, tense in wonder. It was the boy himself—the boy Raoul whom he had lost, who would come in the old days (for the confidence he had in him) and tell him his inmost thoughts. His breath ebbed short in the labor of untold anguish.

"You offended me cruelly, Raoul, in the thing that I hold most dear—my honor, the honor of my regiment. You brought disgrace upon us all. I paid your debts and brushed the scandal, and you never thanked me. It has been five years of hell!"

Father, you might say even harder things to me. It is true I have been a thankless cur, but I was almost mad with the pain of the thing you did to me. I deserved it, but it broke my very soul. If I live, you will see that you have a new son. I have always loved you—nothing could make any difference to that."

The old man turned away his face, white to the lips; and between them, in their profound trouble, the whole past swept in a tide of emotion, that flooded and submerged all other things. What was the underground hole with the mattresses upon the floor? What those sounds that still came at intervals, awful and ominous, from without? What the whole material world surrounding them, and war or peace, or life or death?

It was the spirit that mattered—the two living, anguished souls with their long record, photographically, phonographically distinct—now as things that have but just happened, old as with the everlastingness of eternity: memories, sorrows, love—those things that mattered most. Each felt the vivid nearness of the other in some intimate poignancy of grief, but neither moved; and the averted face of the father, haggard and convulsed showed some tremendous agency of pain that pierced the depths of the son's being.

"Father!" he cried at last desperately, and threw himself upon him as in the days of old, in some boyish trouble—"father, you must forgive me!"

In an instant, over the mask hardened by long years of self-restraint, austere and iron-like from a habit of command, at the touch of his son's body, the storm of pent-up sorrow broke. Tears poured from the aching eyes, rained down over the mouth, and upon the cloth of his coat and the ribbons of his decorations. His arms flung open, and, the years of manhood forgotten, he strained to his heart fiercely, passionately, this child whom he had loved so much.

"My boy—my boy—my Raoul!" The young man did not weep. He could not. But all the agony, all the remorse and self-hatred that had concentrated in a human face were crowded into his; also the immense shame and pity of having broken down his father's strength through pain. His hands still clung lovingly, sorrowfully, upon his father's arms while the unspeakable anguish of his eyes yearned over him.

"O father, if I could only make amends—"

"General, if you please!" The voice sounded close behind them, precise and cool. The young man turned, picked up his cap and vanished. The older one, caught in the act, with tears upon his face, did not attempt to conceal them. The newcomer stood dumbfounded. "I beg your pardon, General—a thousand pardons!" he stammered at length. "Don't, my dear friend—don't! This is no place for 'scenes intimes.' But it was unavoidable. The poor boy—the poor, poor boy—he was asking my pardon!"

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