

The Land of Broken Promises

A Stirring Story of the Mexican Revolution

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CHAPTER XXII—Continued.

"Let the Mexicans fight it out," he said. "They might resent it if you took sides, and that would make it bad for us. Just wait a while—you never can tell what will happen. Perhaps the rurales and federals will stand them off."

"What, that little bunch?" demanded Bud, pointing scornfully at the handful of defenders who were cowering behind their rock piles. "Why half of them polones don't know what a gun was made for, and the rurales—"

"Well, the rebels are the same," suggested the superintendent pacifically. "Let them fight it out—we need every American we can get, so just forget about being a Mexican."

"All right," agreed Bud, as he yielded reluctantly to reason. "It ain't because I'm a Mexican citizen—I just want to stop that rush."

He walked back to the house, jiggling his useless gun and keeping his eye on the distant ridges. And then, in a chorus of defiant yells, the men in the federal trenches began to shoot.

In an airline the distance was something over a mile, but at the first scattering volley the rebels halted and fired a volley in return. With a vicious spang a few stray bullets smashed against the reverberating steel tank, but no one was hurt, and the defenders, drunk with valor, began to shoot and yell like mad.

The bullets of the rebels, fired at random, struck up dustjets in every direction and from the lower part of the town came the shouting of the non-combatant Mexicans as they ran here and there for shelter. But by the trenches, the great crowd of onlookers persisted, ducking as each successive bullet hit the tank and shouting encouragement as the defenders emptied their rifles and reloaded with clip after clip.

The rifles rattled a continuous volley; spent bullets leaped like locusts across the flat; men ran to and fro, now crouching behind the tank, now stepping boldly into the open; and the deafening shouts of the defenders almost drowned the wails of the women. Except for one thing it was a battle—there was nobody hurt.

For the first half-hour the Americans stayed prudently under cover, busying themselves at the suggestion of a few American women in providing a first-aid hospital on the sheltered porch. Then, as no wounded came to fill it and the rebels delayed their charge, one man after another climbed up to the trenches, ostensibly to bring down the fire.

As soldiers and bystanders reported no one hit, and the bullets flew harmlessly past, their solicitude turned rapidly to disgust and then to scorn. Strange as it may seem, they were disappointed at the result, and their remarks were derogatory as they commented on the bravery of polones and Mexicans in general.

From a dread of imminent attack of charging rebels and retreating defenders, and a fight to the death by the house, they came suddenly to a desire for blood and battle, for dead men and the cries of the wounded, and all fear of the insurgents left them.

"Come away, boys," grunted the burly roadmaster, who up to then had led in the work; "we wasted our time on that hospital—there'll be no wounded. Let's take ourselves back to the house and have a quiet smoke."

"Right you are, Ed," agreed the master mechanic, as he turned upon his heel in disgust. "This ain't war—them Mexicans think they're working for a moving-picture show!"

"I bet you I can go up on that ridge," announced Hooker, "and clean out the whole bunch with my six-shooter before you could bat your eyes."

But the superintendent was not so sure.

"Never mind, boys," he said. "We're worth a lot of ransom money to those rebels and they won't give up so quick. And look at this now—my miners coming back! There are the boys that will fight! Wait till Chico and Ramon Mendosa get after them!"

He pointed as he spoke to a straggling band of Sonorans, led by the much-touted Mendosa brothers, as they hurried to save the town, and a cheer went up from the trenches as the federals beheld reinforcements. But a change had come over the firing-miners and they brought other rebels in their wake.

As they trudged wearily into town and sought shelter among the houses a great body of men appeared on the opposite ridge, firing down at them as they retreated. The battle rapidly turned into a long-distance shooting contest, with the rebels on the ridge and the defenders in the valley, and finally, as the day wore on and a thunderstorm came up, it died out altogether and the rebels turned back to their camp.

Except for one lone federal who had shot himself by accident there was not a single defender left, and if the enemy had suffered losses it was only by some chance. But when the dawn came, holding up their empty belts, came clamoring for ammunition, the men, by the big house

took in the real catastrophe of the battle.

Seventeen thousand rounds of the precious thirty-thirties had been delivered to the excited miners and now, except for what few the Americans had saved, there was not a cartridge in camp. Very soberly the superintendent assured the leaders that he had no more; they pointed at the full belts of the American guard and demanded them as their right; and when the Americans refused to yield they flew into a rage and threatened.

All in all, it was a pitiful exhibition of hot-headedness and imbecility, and only the firmness of the superintendent prevented a real spilling of blood. The Mexicans retired in a huff and broke into the cantina, and as the night came on the valley re-echoed their drunken shoutings.

Such was war as the Sonorans conceived it. When Hooker, standing his guard in the corridor, encountered Gracia Aragon on her evening walk, he could scarcely conceal a grin.

"What are you laughing at, Señor Hooker?" she demanded with asperity. "Is it so pleasant, with a household of frightened women and screaming children, that you should make fun of our plight?"

"No, indeed," apologized Bud, "nothing like that. Sure must be had in there—I stay outside myself. But I reckon it'll soon be over with. The Mexicans here in town have shot off all their ammunition and I reckon the rebels have done the same. Like as not they'll all be gone tomorrow, and then you can go back home."

"Oh, thank you for thinking about me!" she returned with a scornful curl of the lip. "But if all men were as open as you, Mr. Hooker, we women would never need to ask a question. This morning you told me I did not know what I was talking about—now I presume you are thinking what towards the Mexicans are!"

"Oh, I know! You need not deny it! You are nothing but a great big—Tejano! Yes, I was going to say 'brute,' but you are a friend of dear Phil's, and so I will hold my tongue. If it wasn't for that, I'd—"

"Oh, I do wish he were here," she breathed, leaning wearily against the white pillar of an arch and gazing down through the long arcade.

"It was so close in there," she continued, "I could not stand it a minute longer. These Indian women, you know—they weep and moan all the time. And the children—I am so sorry for them. I cannot go now, because they need me; but tomorrow—if Phil were here—I would leave and ride for the line."

"Have you seen Del Rey today? No? Then all the better—he must be policing the town. It is only of him I am afraid. These rebels are nothing—I agree with you! No! I am not angry with you at all now! But tomorrow, just at dusk, when all is still as it is at this time, then, if Phil were here I would mount my brave horse and ride out by the western pass."

She ended rather inconclusively, letting her voice trail off wearily as she waited for him to speak, but something within moved Hooker to hold his peace, and he looked out over the town without commenting on her plans. It was evident to him that she was determined to enlist his sympathy and involve him in her wild plot, and each time the conversation veered in that direction he took refuge in a stubborn silence.

"What are you thinking of, Mr. Hooker?" she asked at last, as he gazed into the dusk. "Sometimes I scold you and sometimes I try to please you, but I never know what you think! I did not mean that when I said I could read your thoughts—you are so different from poor dear Phil!"

"M-m-m," mumbled Bud, shifting his feet, and his face turned a little grim.

"Ah!" she cried with ill-concealed satisfaction, "you do not like me to call him like that, do you? Poor dear Phil—like that! But do you know why I do it? It is to punish you for never coming near me—when I signed to you—when I waited for you—long ago! Ah, you were so cruel! I wanted to know you—you were a cowboy, and I thought you were brave enough to defend me—but you always rode right by. Yes, that was it—but Phil was different! He came when I sent for him; he sang songs to me at night; he took my part against Manuel del Rey, and now—"

"Yes!" commented Bud bruskly, with his mind on "dear Phil's" finish, and she turned to peer into his face.

"Oh!" breathed Gracia, and then, after a pause, she came nearer and leaned against the low wall beside him.

"If I would speak from my heart," she asked, "if I would talk plain, as you Americans do, would you like me better then? Would you talk to me instead of standing silent? Listen, Bud—for that is your name—I want you to be my friend the way you were a friend to Phil. I know what you did for him, and how you bore with his love-madness—and that was my fault, too. But partly it was also your fault, for you made me angry by not coming."

"Yes, I will be honest now—it was you that I wanted to know at first, but you would not come, and now I am promised to Phil. He was brave when you were careful, and my heart went out to him. You know how it is with us Mexicans—we do not love by reason. We love like children—suddenly—from the heart! And now all I wish in life is to run away to Phil. But every time I speak of it you shut your jaws or tell me I am a fool."

"Ump-um," protested Bud, turning stubborn again. "I tell you you don't know what you're talking about. These rebels don't amount to nothing around the town, but on a trail they're awful. They shoot from behind rocks and all that, and a woman ain't no ways safe. You must know what they're like—these old women don't think about nothing else—so what's the use of talking! And besides," he added grimly, "I've had some trouble with your old man and don't want to have any more."

"What trouble have you had?" she demanded promptly, but Hooker would not answer in words. He only shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"If Phil were here, he'd take me!" countered Gracia, and then Bud lost his head.

"Yes," he burst out, "that's just what the matter with the crazy fool! That's just why he's up across the line now a hollering for me to save his girl! He's brave, is he? Well, why don't he come down, then, and save you himself? Because he's afraid to? He's afraid of getting shot or going up against Manuel del Rey. By grab, it makes me tired the way you people talk! If he'd done what I told him to in the first place he wouldn't have got into this jack-pot!"

"Oh my!" exclaimed Gracia, aghast. "Why, what is the matter with you? And what did you tell him to do?"

"I told him to mind his own business," answered Hooker bluntly. "And what'd he say?"

"He said he'd try anything—once!" Bud spat out the phrase vindictively, for his blood was up and his heart was full of bitterness.

"Oh dear!" faltered Gracia. "And so you do not think that Phil is brave?"

"He's brave to start things," answered Bud, "but not to carry 'em through!"

For a moment Gracia huddled up against a pillar, her hand against her face, as if to ward off a blow. Then she lowered it slowly and moved reluctantly away.

"I must go now," she said, and Bud did not offer to stay her, for he saw what his unkindness had done.

"I am sorry!" she added pitifully, but he did not answer. There was nothing that he could say now.

In a moment of resentment, driven to exasperation by her taunts, he had forgotten his pledge to his partner and come between him and his girl. That which he thought wild horses could not draw from him had flashed out in a fit of anger—and the damage was beyond amendment, for what he had said was the truth.

CHAPTER XXIII.

There are two things, according to the saying, which cannot be recalled—the sped arrow and the spoken word. Whether spoken in anger or in jest, our winged thoughts will not come back to us and, where there is no balm for the wound we have caused, there is nothing to do but let it heal.

would sway him from his purpose. But now she was waiting for some answer—some word from him, though the question had never been asked. And yet he knew what it was.

She wanted him to steal away with her in the evening and ride for the border—and Phil. That was what she always wanted, no matter what she said, and now she was calling him a coward.

"Sure them bronco-riders are brave," he said in vague defense; "but there's a difference between being brave and foolish. And a man might be brave for himself and yet be afraid for other people."

"How do you mean?" she asked. "Well," he said, "I might be willing to go out and fight a thousand of them insurgents with one hand, and at the same time be afraid to take you along. Or I might—"

"Oh, then you will go, won't you?" she cried, clasping him by the hand. "You will, won't you? I'm not afraid!"

"No," answered Bud, drawing his hand away. "That's just what I won't do! And I'll tell you why. That country up there is full of rebels—the lowest kind there are. It just takes one shot to lay me out or cripple one of our horses. Then I'd have to make a fight for it—but what would happen to you?"

"I'd fight, too!" spoke up Gracia resolutely. "I'm not afraid."

"No," grumbled Bud. "You don't know them rebels. You've been shut up in a house all the time—if you'd been through what I have in the last six months you'd understand what I mean."

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nostrils as he stepped out to speak with the guards, and as he stood there waiting for the full daylight the master mechanic joined him.

He was a full-blooded, round-headed little man with determined views on life, and he began the day, as usual, with his private opinion of Mexicans. They were the same uncompromising remarks to which he had given voice on the day before, for the rebels had captured one of his engines and he knew it would come to some harm.

"A fine bunch of hombres, yes," he ended, "and may the devil fly away with them! They took No. 9 at the summit yesterday and I've been listening ever since. Her pans are all burning out and we've been feeding her bran like a cow to keep her from leaking steam. If some ignorant Mex gets hold of her you'll hear a big noise—that'll be the last of No. 9—her boiler will burst like a wet bag."

"If I was running this road there'd be no more No. 9—no since what I saw over at Aguascalientes on the Central. One of those bum, renegade engine drivers had burned out No. 743, but the rebels had dented four of our best and we had to send her out. Day after day the boys had been feeding her bran until she smelled like a distillery. The mash was cooking up to the ears as Ben Tyrrell pulled up to the station, and a friend of his had come down from the north took one sniff and swung up into the cab."

"Ben came down at the word he whispered—for they'd two of 'em blown up in the north—and they sent out another man. Hadn't got up the hill when the engine exploded and he blew the poor devil to hell! I asked Tyrrell what his friend had told him, but he kept it to himself until he could get his time. It's the fumes, boys—they blow up like brandy—and old No. 9 is sour!"

"She'll likely blow up, too. But how can we fix her with these ignorant Mexican mechanics? You should have been over at Agua the day they fired the Americans."

"No more Americans," says Maderno, "let 'em all out and hire Mexican. The national railroads of Mexico must not be in the hands of foreigners."

"So they fired us all in a day and put a Mexican wood-passer up in the cab of old No. 111. He started to pull a string of empties down the track, and threw on the air by mistake. Pulled stopped her on a dead-center. Pulled out the throttle and she wouldn't go, so he gave it up and quit."

"Called in the master mechanic then for an hour, right there on the track, until she went dead on her hands. Then they ran down a switch engine and took back the cars and called on the roadmaster—a Mex. He cracked the nut—built a shoofty around No. 111 and they left her right there on the main track. Two days later an American hobo came by and set down and laughed at 'em. Then he throws out the center with a crowbar, and runs her to the roundhouse by gravity. When we left Agua on a handcar that hobo was running the road."

"Ignorantest hombres in the world—these Mexicans. Shooting a gun or running an engine, it's all the same—they've got nothing above the eyebrows."

"That's right," agreed Bud, who had been craning his neck; "but what's that noise up the track?"

The master mechanic listened, and when his ears, dulled by the clangor of the shops, caught the distant roar he turned and ran for the house.

"Get up, Ed!" he called to the roadmaster, "they're sending a wild car down the canyon—and she may be loaded with dynamite!"

"Dynamite or not," mumbled the grizzled roadmaster, as he roused up from his couch, "there's a derailer I put in up at kilometer seventy the first thing yesterday morning. That'll send her into the ditch!"

Nevertheless he listened intently, cocking his head to guess by the sound when it came to kilometer seventy.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

GATHER AT LINCOLN'S STATUE

Children Seem to Recognize Companion and Friend in Bronze Representation of President.

HINT EASY TO UNDERSTAND

English Farmer Had Made Old Mistake of Counting Chickens Before They Were Hatched.

An old farmer in the Midlands was anxious to marry, but could not make up his mind between the charms of a certain comely widow in the neighborhood and her equally charming daughter.

At last he resolved to let chance solve the problem.

"I'll ax th' one I just sees a goin' in," he muttered, and off he started on his amatory errand. But when he arrived both mother and daughter were sitting in the doorway.

"Dang it!" he cried. "Here was I comin' to ax one o' 'ee to marry me, an' I swore the fust 'un should ha' the chance. But there ye both be together. I'll shet my eyes now, an' the one as doan't want me mun go indoors. Th' one as stays is my wife to be."

Shutting his eyes the old farmer counted ten solemnly; there was a subdued chuckle, but when he opened them both women had gone—London Tit-Bits.

ITCHING BURNING ECZEMA

R. F. D. No. 3, Caldwell, Ohio.—"When our baby was about two months old she broke out over her body, face and head with eczema. It was bad, about as thick as it could be. It broke out in a kind of pimples. They were red and sore. She was very cross and restless. The eczema would itch and burn till she couldn't sleep. It looked very badly and would pop off where the places were. Her clothes would irritate the eruption."

"We gave her medicine, but it didn't do any good. We had heard about Cuticura Soap and Ointment so we sent for a sample and it was not very long till she was better. I bought some more Cuticura Soap and Ointment which cured her completely." (Signed) H. K. Smith, Mar. 21, 1914.

Cuticura Soap and Ointment sold throughout the world. Sample of each free, with 32-p. Skin Book. Address post card "Cuticura, Dept. L, Boston." Ad.

How Ice Man Got the Boor.

The day was hot and the patient man had taken his usual care in getting the ice in the box just right and then mopping up the little water that got on the floor in the operation. He really was a good ice man and deserved to be rewarded.

"Here is a bottle of beer, you need it on a hot day like this," said the housewife.

"I can't accept anything from a tress, lady," the ice man said, as he eyed the bottle lovingly.

"Well, if that is orders, all right, the customer said."

Still the ice man pondered. "But," he added, as an afterthought, "if you put it on the back porch I'll deal it. There isn't any rule against stealing things."—Indianapolis News.

Stork's Good Memory.

While visiting the Berlin botanical gardens, says Lustige Blätter, little Gretchen saw a great white bird standing on one leg in a cage. She threw in a piece of candy. The bird gobbled it up eagerly, and thrust his head through the wire for more.

Presently Gretchen's mother came along. "O mother, see here! What kind of a bird is this?" The mother pointed to the bird in the cage, which read, "The stork." "The stork!" cried the little girl enthusiastically. "O mamma, do you know, he's actually recognized me!"



"I'd Fight, Too!" Spoke Up Gracia.