

The Land of Broken Promises

By DAN COOLIDGE

"The Fighting Fool," "Hidden Waters," "The Texican," etc. Illustration by BOB J. LAVIN

gathered all the insurgents in the country together—Campos, Rojas, the brothers Escobedo—and they may crush him with their numbers. But now there is other news—that they are marching upon Fortuna and El Tigre, to seize the mines and mills and hold the rich American companies up for ransom.

"No, señores, you must not return to your camp. Remain here, and you shall still have your room, though Spanish gentlemen sleep on the floors. No, allow me, Don Felipe! I wish to show you how highly I value your friendship! Only because we cannot disobey the rurales did I suffer you to lie in jail; but now you shall be my guest, you shall—"

"Nope," answered Bud; "we're safer out at the mine."

He glanced at De Lancey, in whose mind rosy visions were beginning to gather, and he, too, declined—with a sigh.

"Make it a bed for the night," he said. "I've got to get out of this town before I tangle with Del Rey again and find myself back in jail. And now load me to it—I'm perishing for a bath and a sleep!"

They retired early and got up early—for Bud was haunted by fears. But as they passed through Old Fortuna the worst happened to him—they met Gracia, mounted on a prancing horse and followed by a rural guard, and she smote him to the heart with a smile.

It was not a smile for Phil, gone astray and wounding by chance; it was a dazzling, admiring smile for Bud alone, and he sat straighter in his saddle. But Phil uttered a groan and struck his horse with the quirt.

"She cut me!" he moaned.

"Aw, forget it!" growled Bud, and they rode on their way in silence.

CHAPTER XVI.

At their camp by the Eagle Tail mine, even though they held it still and were heirs to half its gold, the two partners were glum and sorrowful. The treacheries which Bud had forgiven in a moment of exaltation came back to him now as he brooded; and he eyed his friend askance, as if wondering what he would do next.

He recalled all the circumstances of their quest—the meeting with Kruger, Phil's insistence on the adventure, the oath of loyalty which they had sworn; and then the gradual breaking down of their brotherly devotion until now they were strangers at heart.

Phil sat by himself, keeping his thoughts to himself, and he stood aloof while he waited for the worst to happen.

From the first day of their undertaking Hooker had felt that it was unlucky, and now he knew that the end was coming. His friend was lost to him, lost alike to a sense of loyalty and honor; he gloomed by himself and thought only of Gracia Aragon.

The oath which Phil himself had forced upon Bud was broken and forgotten; but Bud, by a sterner standard, felt bound to keep his part. One thing alone could make him break it—his word to Henry Kruger. The Eagle Tail mine he held in trust, and half of it was Kruger's.

"Phil," he said at last, when his mind was weary of the ceaseless grind of thoughts, "I believe that mineral agents is holding back our papers. I believe old Aragon has passed him a hundred or so and they're in cahoots to rob us. But I'll tell you what I'll do—you give me a power of attorney to receive those papers for you, and I'll go in and talk Dutech to the whole outfit."

"What do you want to do that for?" demanded, ife Lancy querulously. "Why can't you wait a while? Those papers have to go to Moctezuma and Hermosillo and all over the City of Mexico, and back, and it takes time. What do you want to make trouble for?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Phil," answered Bud heavily. "I've got a hunch if we don't grab those papers soon we won't get 'em at all. Here these rebels are working closer all the time, and Aragon is crowding us. I want to get title and turn it over to Kruger, before we lose out somewhere."

"What's the matter with me going in and talking to the agent?" suggested Phil. Then, as he saw his partner's face, he paused and laughed bitterly.

"You don't trust me any more, do you, Bud?" he said.

"Well, it ain't that so much," evaded Hooker; "but I sure don't trust that Manuel del Rey. The first time you go into town he's going to pinch you, and I know it."

"I'm going to go in all the same," declared De Lancey, "and if the little squirt tries to stop me—"

"Aw, Phil," entreated Bud, "be reasonable, can't ye? You got no call to go up against that little feller. He's a bad actor, I can see that, and I believe he'll kill you if he got the chance. But wait a little while—maybe he'll get took off in the fights this summer!"

"No, he'll get me for that!" muttered De Lancey, but he seemed to take some comfort in the thought.

As for Bud, he loated around for a while, cleaning up camp, making smoke for the night, and looking

ing over the deserted mine, but something in the changed atmosphere made him restless and uneasy.

"I wonder where that dogged Indian went to," he said for the hundredth time, as the deep shadows gathered in the valley. "By Joe, Phil, if Amigo comes back I'm going to go ahead on that mine. I want to keep him around here, and we might as well get out some ore, if it's only for a grub-stake. Come on—what do you say? We'll open her up—there's nothing to hide now. Well, I'll do it myself, then—this setting around is getting on my nerves."

His far-seeing eyes, trained from his boyhood to search the hills for cattle, scanned the tops of the ridges as he spoke; and while he sat and pondered they noted every rock.

Then at last he rose up slowly and gazed at a certain spot. He waved his arm, beckoning the distant point of blackness to come in, and soon from around a point in the canyon the Yaqui appeared, bearing a heavy Mauser rifle on his arm.

Across his broad breast hung the same familiar cartridge-belt, two more encircled his hips, and he walked with his head held high, like the warrior that he was.

Evidently his flight had led to the place where his arms had been hid, for he wore the regulation knife-bayonet at his hip and around his hat was the red ribbon of his people, but Bud was too polite to ask him about his journey. Since his coming the Yaqui had always maintained a certain mystery, and now, though his eyes were big with portent and he smiled at the jests about his gun, he simply waved his hand to the south and east and murmured:

"Muchos revoltosos!" "Seguro," answered Bud jokingly; "but have you killed any?" "Not yet!" returned the Indian, and he did not smile at that.

"I wonder what that Indian is waiting around here for?" remarked Phil in English. "He must have his eye on somebody."

"Yeah, I bet," agreed Bud, regarding his savage friend with a speculative interest. "Most of them Yaqui soldiers was farmhands in this country before they rounded them up. I reckon he's looking for the man that had him deported."

"Tired, Amigo?" he inquired in Spanish, and Ignacio gravely acknowledged that he was, a little.

"Then drink plenty coffee," went on Hooker. "Eat lots—tomorrow we go to work in the mine."

"Tomorrow?" repeated the Indian, as if considering his other engagements; "good!" He nodded a smiling assent.

After a month and more of idleness Bud and Amigo performed prodigies of labor in the cut, rolling down boulders, lifting them up on the tram, and clearing away the face of the cliff. Their tram was ramshackle, their track the abandoned rails from older workings, and their tools little more than their hands, but by noon the last broken fragments were heaved aside and the shattered ledge revealed.

A low cry of wonder escaped the Yaqui as he gazed at the rich vein of ore, and as he saw the grim smile on Bud's rugged countenance he showed his white teeth in sympathy.

"Que bueno!" he murmured. "How good!" gathering the precious fragments in his handkerchief.

At the camp they crushed the picked ore in a mortar and panned it in the creek, and for the moment De Lancey dropped his air of preoccupation as he stared at the streak of pure gold. Like a yellow film it lay along the edge of the last fine tailings, and when skillful washing had left it bare, it gleamed like a jewel in the pan.

"By Jove, Bud!" he cried, "that's the real stuff—and it goes a dollar to the pan easy!"

"Sure thing!" answered Bud. "Let's pound a lot of it, and wash it as we go—then we'll have some getaway money when things break loose here!"

"I'll go you!" answered Phil, and Bud's heart warmed toward him as he watched him pound up a piece of ore and go to swirling the dirt in the pan.

But alas for the fond hopes he cherished! Even as he washed out the gold Phil's mind wandered far away, back to the hotel where Gracia Aragon sat watching by the window.

Her hair was the color of gold, spun fine and refined again; yes, it was worth more than this golden dross that he caught in the bottom of his pan. And what was gold if he could not have her?

He paused in his labor and a dreamy smile parted his lips—then he broke into a song:

Sweet honey bee, be sweet to me, My heart is free, but here's the key; Lock up the garden gate, honey, you know I'll wait, Under the ramblin' rose tree—

Once more he returned to his work, humming now the dulcet strains of "The Merry Widow," and when Bud came back from the cut it was to hear a coon song:

"Cos I want yer, me honey, yes, I want yer, want yer;

"Cos I want yer, ma honey, yes I do!

So he labored and sang, until finally the labor ceased, and then the song. He went about other things, and other thoughts, not so cheerful, filled his mind.

Bud returned sadly to the company of the Yaqui and gave it up. Perhaps his partner had been right when, riding out of Agua Negra, he had enlarged upon the dangers of Old Mexico, "the land of manana and broken promises." Certainly his speech had been prophetic in regard to dark-eyed women; for, even as he had said, nothing seemed to please them better than to come between man and man.

It was a madness, he felt sure—the spell of the hot country, where the women look out from behind barred windows and men slug beneath their balconies at midnight. Already it had cost him his partner—would it conquer his will as well and make him forget his trust?

In his impotence the idea of some perverse fate—some malign influence over which he had no control—was strong with Hooker; yet when the blow fell he was not prepared for it. It was the third day of their mining and, with Amigo, he had been driving into the face of the cliff.

Already their round of holes was drilled, the fuses cut, the charges set, and as he retreated before the blast he noticed absent that Cruz Mendez was in camp. The shots followed, one



Thrust His Rifle Into Its Sling and Started for Town.

after another, and he counted them to make sure there was no miss-fire—then he looked around and discovered that Phil was gone.

"Where is Don Felipe?" he inquired of Mendez, and that low-browed brother of the burro bowed fawningly before he replied.

"He has gone to Fortuna," he said, wiping his face with a bath towel which he wore about his neck.

"And what for?" demanded Bud impatiently.

"I don't know, señor," writhed Mendez. "I brought him a letter."

"From whom?"

"I don't know. It was given to me by Juana, the servant of the Senorita Aragon."

"Ah!" breathed Bud, and pretended not to be surprised.

"Well, let 'im go," he said to himself, and went back into the mine. It was what he had expected, in a way, and his code book kept his hands off. But the next morning, when the evil was already avoided or done, he thrust his rifle into its sling and started for the town. At the jail he halted and gazed in through the windows—then he rode up to the hotel and asked for Phil.

"What? Have you not heard?" clamored Don Juan. "Ah, it is most unfortunate—I would not have had it happen for the world!"

"What?" inquired Bud succinctly.

"Why, the quarrel—the encounter with Captain del Rey! I did my best, I assure you, to prevent it, for the town has been put under martial law and the captain is in full charge. They quarreled over the favor of a lady, and now your friend is in jail."

"I didn't see him when I come by," observed Hooker.

"Ah, no—not in the carcel—in the court, the guardhouse of the rurales!"

"Much obliged!" nodded Bud, and rode out through the town. The street of the Mexican quarter was filled with strange people hurrying to and fro; long packtrains loaded with trunks and curious bundles, came swinging up from below; and a pair of rurales, looking fierce under their huge sombreros stood guard by the court door.

"Where is the captain?" demanded Hooker. After requesting him to hang his pistol-belt on his saddle-horn, a sergeant showed him in to the chief.

Manuel del Rey was very busy with papers and orders, but as the American appeared in the doorway he rose and greeted him with a bow.

"Ah, good morning, señor," he said, with one swift glance to read his mood. "You are in search of your friend—no?"

"Si, señor," answered Hooker, but with none of the animosity which the captain had expected. "Where is he?"

"I regret very much," began the officer, speaking with military formality, "but it is my duty to inform you that the Señor De Lancey has left Fortuna. Last night he did me the honor to enlist in my company of rurales—he is now on his way to the north to assist in guarding the railroad."

"What?" shouted Bud, hardly able to believe his ears. But when the captain repeated it he no longer doubted his Spanish.

"But why?" he cried; "why did he join the rurales?"

"Ah, señor," shrugged Del Rey, "was he not a Mexican citizen? Very well, then; he could be summoned for military service. But the circumstances were these. Your friend came yesterday to this town, where I am at present military commander, and made an unprovoked assault upon my person. For this, according to law, he should have been shot at sunrise. But, not wishing to occasion unpleasantness with the Americans now residing here, I offered him the alternative of military service. He is now enlisted as a rural for a term of five years."

"Five years!" exclaimed Hooker; and then, instead of starting the expected rough-house—upon which the rural guards were prepared to jump on his back—he simply threw down his hat and cursed. Not anyone in particular, but everything in general; and at the end of it he turned once more upon the watchful captain.

"Disposo, señor," he said, "this is the truth, is it?"

"Si, señor," returned Captain del Rey. "But before leaving with his detachment your friend wrote this letter, which he requested me to deliver to you."

He offered with a flourish a sealed envelope, from which Bud extracted a short note.

Dear Bud: When you get this I shall be far away. I must have been mad, but it is too late now. Rather than be executed, I have enlisted as a rural. But I shall try to be brave for her sake. Take care of her, Bud—for me! PHIL.

Bud read it through again and meditated ponderously. Then he folded it up and thrust it in his pocket.

"Muchas gracias, señor capitán," he said, saluting and turning upon his heel; and while all the Mexicans marveled at the inscrutable ways of Americans, he mounted and rode away.

CHAPTER XVII.

There was a world of Mexicans in the plaza when Hooker rode down through the town. Never, it seemed to him, had he seen so many or liked them less.

To the handful of Americans who remained to man the mill and mine, they were easily a hundred to one; and though their eyes were wide with fear of the imminent rebels, they had an evil way of staring at him which he did not relish.

Even at the hotel, where the Spanish-Mexican aristocracy was massed ten deep, he sensed the same feeling of veiled hostility and wondered vaguely what it might portend. If Philip De Lancey, for making love to a girl, was drafted into the army, what would happen to him if these people should ever break loose? And did they have the courage to do their worst?

He lingered around the door for a while, hoping to meet Don Juan or some American who would tell him the news; then, disgusted with everything, he swung away and left them to themselves. Fortuna was not a white man's country—he could see that without a diagram—but at the same time he intended to hold his mine until he could hear from Phil.

Let the tides of insurrection come and go, let the red-flags take the town and the federals take it back again—at the end he would still be found at the Eagle Tail, unless Phil received his title to the mine.

As for Aragon, whose fine Italian hand he perceived behind the sudden taking off of Phil, let him make what trades he would with the rurales and Manuel del Rey, even to the giving of his daughter's hand; but if, taking advantage of the unsettled times, he dared to try to steal their mine, then there would be war to the knife.

It is a fine, comforting thing to be single-minded and of one purpose. All the rest of life is simplified and ordered then, and a man knows when to raise his hand and when to hold it back.

In his letter Phil had said nothing about their mine, but he was a Mexican citizen still, and the mine was in his name. Bud was his partner and free to hold it in his stead; and that he determined to do—not only hold it, but work it for a stake. Then, when the tide was passed and all made certain, they could turn it over to Kruger and quit the accursed country.

As for the girl, Bud decided that she could take care of herself without any assistance from him; and dismissed her from his mind.

Back at the mine he found Amigo guarding camp from the hilltop, and after telling him the gist of his troubles, the two of them went to work. Every day, while one of them dug out the ore, the other crushed and washed it and watched as he horned out the gold. Their rifles they kept beside them and pistols in their belts; and every time a Mexican dropped into camp, as one did now and then in the general unrest, he felt the silent menace of arms in readiness and continued on his way.

For a week they labored on together, grim, watchful, expectant—then, at the break of day, they heard a distant rattle of arms, like the tearing of a cloth, and knew that the battle was on.

The great whistle at Fortuna opened with its full, bass roar, and Amigo snatched up his gun and went loping down the canyon, drawn irresistibly by the sound of conflict. Bud lingered, climbing higher and higher to get a view of the country. But his young blood clamored for action too, and soon he was mounted and gone.

The fighting was not at the American town, but down the valley by Old Fortuna, and as Hooker galloped on toward the sound of the firing he noticed that it was on the move. Already the cowardly rebels were retreating—the volunteers from Fortuna were hurrying to get closer to them, the rurales were riding to flank them; and when Bud jumped his horse up the last hill and looked down into the broad, cultivated valley he saw the dust of their flight.

Down the fenced trail that led to the lower country the mounted insurgents were spurting in a rout; across the newly plowed field, of Aragon the men on foot were making a short cut for the hills; and all about them, like leaping grasshoppers, sprang up puffs of dust.

Now they plunged into the willow brush along the river, where it swung in against the ridge; and as their pursuers broke into the open they halted and returned the fire. The bullets struck up the dust like hailstones in front of the oncoming irregulars, a man or two in the lead went down, and they faltered. Then, as frantically as the rebels, they turned and ran for cover.

While defenders and invaders shot back and forth across the broad field, Bud put spurs to his horse and rode closer, and when he came out on another hilltop he was just in time to see the rurales come pelting in from the west and take the revoltosos on the flank. There was a great deal of long-distance firing then, while the rebels slowly retreated, and finally, with a last defiant volley, the defenders turned back from their pursuit and marched triumphantly to Old Fortuna.

There, amid numerous vivas, Don Cipriano rolled out a cask of mescal and, after a fiery speech, invited the victors to help themselves. So they fell to drinking and carousing, and the one defender who had been wounded was bandaged and made much of, while a great crowd from the upper town looked on in awe and admiration.

At last Manuel del Rey and his rurales returned from harassing the enemy and with several wounded prisoners in their midst, the valor-drunk Mexicans formed a riotous procession and went marching back to town. Every horse and mule was carrying double, guns were being dropped, broad hats knocked off, and ever, as they marched, they shouted:

"Viva Madero! Viva Mejillo! Muerte a los revoltosos!"

It was an edifying spectacle to an American, and with the rest Bud tagged along to the plaza, where they had speeches and cheers galore and more mescal at the company's cantina. But in the midst of it, while he sat laughing on his horse by the hotel, Bud felt a gravel strike his broad hat from above and, looking furtively up, he beheld Gracia Aragon smiling down at him from the balcony.

She beckoned him with a swift movement and gazed out over the assemblage again, and after a few moments of deliberation Hooker tied his horse and wandered into the hotel.

A finge of excitement went over him as he tramped up to the ladies' parlor, for he had never met Gracia face to face. But he disguised his qualms by assuming a masklike grimace of countenance and, when the glorious Gracia glided out of her room to meet him, he only blinked and stood pat.

A long experience as a poker player was all that saved him from betrayal, for there was something in her very presence which made his heart leap and bound. But he only gazed at her soberly, without even so much as raising his hat.

Back in Texas, in his social world, it was considered almost unmanly to thus salute the ladies. So he stood there, his big sombrero pulled down over his mop of light hair, gazing at her without a blink.

Perhaps it was not altogether as friendly a scrutiny of her charming features as Gracia expected, for he remembered what she had done to his partner; but if she sensed such a rare thing as disapproval from a young man, she was too excited to show it. Her lips trembled, and she looked back furtively, meanwhile drawing him into an alcove by the slightest twitch of his sleeve.

"Don't talk too loud," she whispered. "My mother is listening from the room—but for the love of God, tell me, where is Phil?"

"I don't know," answered Bud, trying to lower his big voice to a banal softness; "he joined the rurales and was ordered north—that's all I know."

"Yes, yes, to be sure; but haven't you heard from him?"

She seemed to be all impatience to snatch his news and fly with it, but Bud was in no such hurry. And so far was he from being a carpet knight that he immediately raised his voice to its normal bass. It was all right for Phil and his kind to talk by signs and whispers, but that was not his style.

"Not since he went away," he said. "He left me a little note, then, saying—"

"Saying what?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Well, saying that he had enlisted"

(To be continued.)

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