HEART of the SUNSET

By REX BEACH

Author of "The Spoilers," "The Iron Trail," "The Silver Horde," Etc.

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CHAPTER XXI—Continued.

—21—

"So! Let us go outside and learn more about this." Longorio waved his men before him, and followed them out of the room and down the hall and into the night.

When a moment or two had dragged past, Dolores quavered. "What are they going to do with him?"

"I don't know. Anyhow, you need not fear—"

There sounded the report of a gunshot, deadened indeed by the thick adobe walls of the house, yet sudden and loud enough to startle the women.

When Longorio reappeared, he found Alaire standing stiff and white against the wall, with Dolores kneeling, her face still buried in her mistress' gown.

"Give yourself no concern," he told them, quickly. "I beg a thousand pardons for Felipe. Henceforth no one will molest you."

"Was that a—shot?" Alaire inquired faintly.

"Yes. It is all settled."

"You killed him?"

The general nodded. "Purely for the sake of discipline—one has to be firm. Now your woman is badly frightened. Send her away so that we may reach an understanding."

"Oh—h! This is frightful," Alaire gasped. "I can't talk to you. Go—Let me go."

The man pondered for an instant. "Perhaps that would be better," he agreed reluctantly, "for I see you, too, are unstrung. Very well! My affairs will have to wait. Take a few hours to think over what I have told you. When you have slept you will feel differently about me. You will meet me with a smile, eh?" He beamed hopefully.

"Sleep? You expect me to sleep?"

"Please," he begged. "Beauty is like a delicate flower, and sleep is the dew that freshens it. Believe me, you can rest in all security, for no one can come or go without my consent. You are cruel to postpone my delight; nevertheless, I yield to your feelings. But, star of my life, I shall dream of you, and of that little priest who waits with the key to Paradise in his hands."

He bowed over Alaire's cold fingers, then stood erect until she and Dolores had gone.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Priest From Monclova.

That was a night of terror for the women. Although Longorio's discipline was in some ways strict, in others it was extremely lax. From some quarter his men had secured a supply of mescal, and, forgetful of Felipe's unhappy fate, they rendered the hours hideous. There were singing and quarreling, and a shot or two sounded from the direction of the outbuildings. Morning found both Alaire and Dolores sadly overwrought. But they felt some relief upon learning that the general had been unexpectedly summoned from his bed at daylight, and had ridden to the telegraph office.

Profiting by his absence, Alaire ventured from her room, racking her brain to devise some means of escape. But soldiers were everywhere; they lolled around the servants' quarters; they dozed in the shade of the ranch buildings, recovering from the night's debauch; and an armed sentinel who paced the hacienda road gave evidence that, despite their apparent carelessness, they had by no means relaxed their vigilance. A round of the premises convinced Alaire that the place was actually guarded, and showed her the futility of trying to slip away. She realized, too, that even if she managed to do so, her plight would be little better. For how could she hope to cover the hundred miles between La Paria and the Rio Grande when every peon was an enemy?

She was standing in one of the open, sashless windows when her former protector, the old lieutenant, bade her good morning and paused to smoke a cigarette.

"Well, it was a great night, wasn't it?" he began. "And we have great news this morning. We are going to fight you gringos."

"I hope not."

"Yes; it will probably go hard with you. Tell me, this city of Washington is a fine city, and very rich, is it not?"

"Oh, yes."

"It's full of loot, eh? Especially the president's palace? That is good. One can never believe all one hears."

"Why do you ask?" Alaire was curious.

"I was thinking it would pay us to go there. If your soldiers march upon Mexico City, it would be a brilliant piece of strategy for General Longorio to invade the United States, would it not? It would be funny to capture Washington and hold your president for ransom, eh?"

"Very funny," Alaire agreed dryly. "How would you go about it?"

Pancho shrugged. "That is the trouble. We would have to march around Texas, I presume."

"Around Texas?"

"Yes. You see, Texas is a bad country; it is full of—barbarians who know how to fight. If it were not for Texas, we would have the United States at our mercy." After some consideration, he ventured this opinion: "We could afford to pay the Texans for allowing us to ride through their country, provided we stole nothing and paid for the cattle we ate. Well, Longorio is a great one for schemes; he is talking over the telegraph with somebody at this moment. Perhaps it is the president of Texas."

"You are a poor man, are you not?" Alaire inquired.

"Miserably poor."

"Would you like to make a great deal of money?"

"Dios! That is why I'm a soldier."

"I will pay you well to get me two horses—"

But old Pancho shook his head vigorously. "Impossible! General Longorio is going to marry you. We all got drunk last night to celebrate the wedding. Yes, and the priest is waiting."

"I will make you rich!"

"No! I wouldn't live to spend a single peso. Felipe disobeyed orders, and the general shot him before he could cross himself. Boom! The poor fellow was passed in a minute. No. We will all be rich after we win a few battles and capture some American cities. I am an old man; I shall leave the drinking and the women to the young fellows, and prepare for my old age."

Seeing that she could not enlist Pancho's aid, Alaire begged him to fetch the priest.

"You wish spiritual comfort, senora?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, he doesn't look like much of a priest, but probably he will do. As for me, I don't believe in such things. Churches are all very well for ignorant people, but we Mexicans are too intelligent; we are making an end of them."

The priest was a small, white-haired man with a gentle, almost timid face, and at the moment when he appeared before Alaire he was in anything but a happy frame of mind. He had undergone, he told her, a terrible experience. His name was O'Malley. He had come from Monclava, whence the rebels had banished him under threat of death. He had seen his church despoiled of its valuables, his school closed; he himself had managed to escape only by a miracle. During his flight toward the border he had suffered every indignity, and finally Longorio had intercepted him and brought him here, practically in chains.

"What a situation! What chaos!" he lamented. "The land is overrun with bandits; there is no law, no authority, no faith; religion is made a mockery. The men are becoming infidels and atheists, and in many places they will not allow us to give comfort even to their women."

"Is it as bad as that?"

Father O'Malley shook his head sadly. "You've no idea. What do you think of a people who forbid the mention of God's name in their schools? That is what the revolutionists are doing. Candelaria claims that the churches are the property of the state. He confiscates them, and he charges admission. He has banished all except a few of us priests, and has shamefully persecuted our Sisters of Mercy. Oh, the outrages! Mexico is, today, the blackest spot on the map of Christendom." His voice broke. "That is the freedom, the liberty, the democracy, for which they are fighting. That is the new Mexico. And the federals are not a bit better. This Longorio, for instance, this—wolf—he brings me here, as his prisoner, to solemnize an unholy marriage! He treats me like a dog. Last night I slept in a filthy hovel—"

"Oh! I'm sorry," Alaire exclaimed. "But I'm half crazed with my own troubles. You must come into the house; the best I have is yours. You shall be as much my guest as I can make you, and—perhaps you will help me to escape."

"Escape?" The little man smiled mournfully. "You are watched and guarded, and so am I. Even if you got away from here, what then? You can't imagine the condition of the country."

"I won't marry him!" Alaire cried, with a shudder. "I won't!"

"He can't very well force you to do so. But remember, these are war times; the man is a fiend, and he puts no restraint upon his desires. If he is madly bent on having you, how can you prevent it? In normal times he would not dare injure one so prominent as you, but now—" Father O'Malley lifted up his hands. "I only wonder that he suggests a lawful marriage. Suppose you refuse? Will he not sacrifice you to his passions? He has done worse things." After a moment's consideration, he said: "Of course it is possible that I misjudge him. Anyhow, if you desire me to do so, I will refuse to perform the ceremony. But—I'm afraid it will just mean ruin for both of us."

"Surely he wouldn't harm you?"

The father shrugged. "What am I? An obscure priest. Many of my brothers are buried in Mexico. However, I shall do as you wish."

As the day wore on Alaire realized even more clearly the fact that she was Longorio's prisoner. His men, in spite of their recent debauch, kept very good watch over her, and it was plain that they would obey his orders, no matter how extreme. It occurred to her finally that he was staying away purposely, in order to give her a fuller appreciation of her position—so that she might beat her wings against the cage until exhausted.

Afternoon came, then evening, and still Longorio did not return. Father O'Malley could give scant comfort; Dolores was a positive trial.

Half distracted, Alaire roamed through the house, awaiting her captor's coming, steeling herself for their final battle. But the delay was trying; she longed for the crisis to come, that this terrible suspense might be ended. At such an hour her thoughts naturally turned to Dave Law, and she found herself yearning for him with a yearning utterly new. His love had supported her through those miserable days at Las Palmas, but now it was a torture; she called his name wildly, passionately. He knew her whereabouts and her peril—why did he not come? Then, more calmly, she asked herself what he, or what anyone, could do for her. How could she look for succor when two nations were at war?

Night had come before she finally gave up, and acknowledged the hopelessness of her situation. She had fought bravely, but with darkness her fears grew blacker. She was on the verge of her first breakdown, when, in the early dusk outside, she heard voices and the stamping of horses' hoofs. The sounds were muffled by the heavy wooden shutters she had taken pains to close and bar, but they told her Longorio had returned. Since it was futile to deny him entrance, she waited where she was. Old Pancho's voice sounded outside; then there came a knock upon the door of the room in which she stood.

"Come in," she said tensely.

The lieutenant thrust his head in, and, removing his hat, announced, "There is someone here to see General Longorio on important business. He says you will do."

"I?"

"Yes. He says he is one of us—"

Pancho was pushed aside, the door was flung back, and a man strode

She Heard Dave's Voice Faintly.

swiftly into the lamplight. He paused, blinking as if momentarily blinded, and Alaire clutched at the nearest chair for support. A roaring began in her ears; she felt herself sway forward as if the strength had left her knees. She heard Dave's voice faintly; he was saying:

"Take care of my horse. Feed and water her well. Understand? When General Longorio comes tell him I am waiting here."

As if in a dream, Alaire saw the Mexican go out, closing the door behind him. Then she saw Dave come toward her, heard him speak her name, felt his arms around her.

Alaire did not swoon, but she never could remember very distinctly those first few moments. Scarcely knowing what she did, she found herself clinging to her lover, laughing, weeping, feeling him over with shaking hands that would not be convinced of his reality. She was aware of his kisses upon her lips, her eyes, her hair; he was saying something which she could not understand because of that roaring in her ears.

"You heard me calling," she told him at last. "Oh, I was—so frightened!" She clung closer to him. After a time she discovered that she was mechanically nodding and shaking her head at the questions he was putting to her, but had only the vaguest idea what they were. By and by she began to tell him about Longorio, speaking in a sort of hypnotic murmur, as if her words issued at his mental suggestion. And all the time she snuggled against his breast.

"Dearest!" Dave held her away in gentle hands. "I was afraid you'd go to pieces like this, but I had to break through the best way I could. I learned you were here and something about what was going on from the people at the next ranch. But I expected to find him here, too."

"How did you manage to get here?"

"I hardly know. I just wouldn't let 'em stop me. This lieutenant wouldn't let me in until I told him I was from Monterey with important news. I don't remember all I did tell him. I tried to get here last night, but I had trouble. They caught me, and I had to buy my way through. I've bribed and bullied and lied clear from Romero. I reckon they couldn't imagine I'd risk being here if I wasn't a friend."

It was more Dave's tone than his words that roused Alaire to an appreciation of what he said.

"Are you alone?" she asked, in vague dismay. "Then what are we going to do?"

"I don't know yet. My plans ended here."

"Dave! You rode in just to find me! Just to be with me?"

"Yes. And to get him." Alaire saw his face twitch, and realized that it was very haggard, very old and tired. "They lifted my guns—a bunch of fellows at the Rio Negro crossing. Some of them were drunk and wouldn't believe I was an amigo. So I finally had to ride for it."

"Can't you take me away?" she asked, faintly. "What will you do when—he comes?"

"I reckon I'll manage him somehow." His grip upon her tightened painfully, and she could feel him tremble. "I was afraid I wouldn't find you. I—O God, Alaire!" He buried his face in her hair.

"I had at terrible scene with him last night. He insists upon marrying me. I—I was hoping you'd come."

"How could I, when nobody knew where you were?"

"Didn't you know? I wrote you." He shook his head. "Then how did you learn?"

"From Jose. I caught him within an hour of the murder, and made him tell me everything."

Alaire's eyes dilated; she held herself away, saying, breathlessly: "Murder! Is that what it was? He—Longorio—told me something quite different."

"Naturally. It was he who hired Jose to do the shooting."

"Oh-h!" Alaire hid her face in her hands. She looked up again quickly, however, and her cheeks were white. "Then he won't spare you, Dave." She choked for an instant. "We must get away, before he comes. There must be some way of escape. Think!"

"I'm pretty tired to think. I'm pretty near played out," he confessed.

"They're watching me, but they'd let you go."

"Now that I'm here I'm going to stay until—"

She interrupted, crying his name loudly, "Dave!"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Wait! Let me think." She closed her eyes; her brows drew together as if in the labor of concentration. When she lifted her lids her eyes were alight, her voice was eager. "I know how. I see it. He won't dare— But you must do what I tell you."

"Of course."

"No questions. Understand?"

When he nodded impatiently she ran to the door and, flinging it open, called down the hall:

"Father! Father O'Malley! Quick!" Then she summoned Dolores.

The priest answered; he hurried from his room and, with a dazed lack of comprehension, acknowledged his swift introduction to Dave. Alaire was keenly alive and vibrant with purpose now. Dolores, too, came running, and while the men were exchanging greetings her mistress murmured something in her ear, then hastened her departure with a quick push. Turning upon the others, Alaire explained:

"I've sent for some of the women, and they'll be here in a minute. Father, this man has come for me. He loves me. Will you marry us before Longorio arrives?"

"Alaire!" Dave exclaimed.

She stilled him with a gesture. "Quick! Will you?"

Father O'Malley was bewildered. "I don't understand," he expostulated.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Clever Burro.

A friend tells us the following about Rowdy, a burro he bought as a foal in Colorado and brought home to Massachusetts for his children: "Rowdy is now an aged pensioner, but he has been as clever a little pet and servant as one could wish. His friendship for the family cow has been one of the distinguishing features of his career. They used to stand side by side in the stable, and in the pasture would actually play tag. The cow began years ago with her rough tongue to lick Rowdy's face. When he attempted to reciprocate the courtesy, his smooth tongue made no impression. This then is what we have seen him do a hundred times: He would find a small stick, take it in his teeth, and scratch the cow all about the eyes, and ears and horns." Can anyone call this instinct? Was such an idea tucked away in Rowdy's brain when he was born, a part of his inheritance from generations of ancestral burros? That would seem out of the question. We are inclined to think that Rowdy thought out the stick idea for himself. —Our Dumb Animals.

Trapped!

Witness—He looked me straight in the eye and—!

Lawyer—There, sir, you've flatly contradicted your former statement.

"How so?"

"You said before that he bent his gaze on you. Will you please explain how he could look you straight in the eye with a bent gaze?"

Witness collapses.

INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By E. O. SELLERS, Acting Director of the Sunday School Course in the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)

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LESSON FOR JULY 29

GOD'S GRACIOUS INVITATION.

LESSON TEXT—Isaiah 55:1-11.

GOLDEN TEXT—Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.—Isa. 55:6.

The Bible is throughout a forward looking book. No matter how dark the light, it looks forward to the dawn of a new and better day. Whenever written, the prophet looks forward toward the end of the Babylonian exile. Isaiah died about 142 years before that event. The exile is laid in Babylonia. Isaiah prophesied in Jerusalem.

I. The Invitation, (vv. 1-8) In order to understand the fullness and blessedness of this invitation, we should read in its connection chapters 53 and 54. In chapter 53 we have a prophecy and vision of the Messiah, making his atonement for sins, "wounded for our transgressions." Again we have in this connection a picture of the Messiah as our leader and Savior. In chapter 55 we have the invitation and joyous welcome to the beautiful city which he is establishing for us.

(1) Who Is Invited? The word "Ho" is perhaps an abbreviation of the word "Hold," used to excite attention. This invitation is extended to every one: (a) the "thirsty," to those who are needy; (b) the poor and the rich; those "without money," and the supply is abundant, even as the water. Every one is invited without limitation or distinction. The greatness of a man's spirit is measured by the numbers of his desires and thirsts, by their qualities and by his capacities or the intensity of his thirst. Those invited were to have "wine," a luxury, and "milk," a staple necessity, without money and without price. The currency of the kingdom of Heaven is grace (v. 1).

(2) Who Will Come? (v. 3). Only those who are listening and who are attentive. Many fail of eternal life because they do not pay attention to the claims of religion. "Come unto me," (Matt. 11:28). We go to God for salvation and help, and we find life. Life is more than mere existence. It is the natural, harmonious, joyous activity of every part of our being. The result of coming is, "your soul shall live," and the surety of it is, "an everlasting covenant." Literally, an agreement with promises which can never be broken, namely, "the sure mercies of David." (See II Sam. 12:29; I Cor. 17:27; Ps. 89:1-4; also Luke 20:41, 44). We are bought but we did not pay the price. The mercies of David are the antitype of our Savior; the mercy of grace. True satisfaction is in its right order, (See vv. 2, 3). Christ is a faithful witness, the exalted one, (v. 5) to this covenant.

(3) When to Come (v. 6). While he may be found, and while he is near, implying a time when he may not be found and a time when he will not be near. All of God's promises are conditional.

(4) The Way to Come (v. 7). Forsake open sin, turn from unrighteous thought, turn to the Lord and receive his "multiplied pardon." Man is everywhere depicted in the Scriptures as wandering away from the true God and there is no salvation if we insist on continuing in sin.

II. The Transformation (vv. 8-13). God's promises have back of them all the power of the universe and are as certain as the process of the seasons. In working out his transformation in the character of man, we are to think his thoughts after him. We see and know only very little of this spirit, but God sees, knows and controls the universe, which is at his command. (I Cor. 10:13; Phil. 4:19). We are to enter into his ways, and his ways are as the heavens, higher than those of the earth. Having entered into his ways we are to bring his fruits (see John 15). If the Divine seed (v. 11) is implanted within us, then we may expect to see the fruits of the kingdom of God, which are born of the spirit. (Gal. 5:22-26). This transformation involves service, for we are to have a mission, "go out to all the earth," being led by the Messiah and thus receive "joy and peace." As sure as "the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven and returneth not but watereth the earth," so is the seed of the Word in the hands of the sower, to become bread to the eater. As we go forth we have his promise (v. 11) that, "it shall not return void but shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

As a result the "thorns" (evil) shall be displaced by "fig trees" (good). God's word bears fruit in implanted lives. (John 6:33; James 1:18; I Peter 1:23). God calls this word, which is spoken of by the prophet, "My word." What the prophet says, God says. What an inspired man says, God inspires him to say. God's promise will be consummated in redeeming society, as well as redeeming creation (vv. 12,13; Ch. 35:10; 49:9,10; 51:11; Jer. 31:12-14; Isa. 35:1,2). The language about the mountains and hills breaking forth into singing, is interpreted in Psalms 65:11,13.

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She—How?

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Poultry Flocks Smaller.

Reports recently gathered concerning 5,298 flocks of poultry on farms and in small towns in all parts of the country show that the average number of hens per flock this year is 107, as compared with 146 in 1914. This information, which was obtained by an incubator manufacturer in the middle West, indicates that shortage of supply has been an important factor in producing present high prices for poultry and eggs. It appears that a very considerable number of poultry raisers have sacrificed many of their hens for the sake of immediate profits—a policy the effects of which are now being felt by the entire country.—Popular Mechanics Magazine.

Funny Big Boy Scouts.

Two Ohio members of the officers' reserve corps at Fort Benjamin Harrison were walking along East Tenth street, near the technical high school campus, two weeks ago. They passed a group of small boys, who gazed, so the men thought, in tremendous admiration and awe. Just as the near-officers maybe puffed out their chests in just pride, one of the young irrepressibles shouted:

"Oh, Jimmy, look at the funny big Boy Scouts."—Indianapolis News.

Improving the Chances.

Madge—The war is taking all the boys away.

Marjorie—We should worry. Won't all the rich old fellows be left?—Town Topics.

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