

Our Weekly Serial Story Installment

MISTRESS of MONTEREY

VIRGINIA STIVERS BARTLETT

© Virginia Stivers Bartlett

WNU Service

SYNOPSIS

In Spanish-governed California of 1763 a conflict between Church and State is represented by two friendly enemies, frail old Fray Junipero Serra, Franciscan missionary, and Don Pedro Fages, civil governor. After telling Serra he is sending to Mexico for his wife and son, whom he has not seen for eight years, he refuses his aid toward founding the Santa Barbara Mission. In Mexico City, Dona Eulalia, accompanied by her daughter, Angustias, arrives at the embassy in response to a letter from her husband, Don Pedro. She agrees to go to California. Don Pedro sends for Serra, telling him that two priests are on their way from Mexico with Eulalia and young Pedro and that he is leaving to meet them. Fages engages a young Indian girl, Indezuela, as maid for Eulalia. Eulalia sails from San Blas. It is a desolate trip. From the port of Loreto, a large cavalcade loaded with Eulalia's party starts out for the long overland trip. Eulalia, accustomed to luxury and comfort, bitterly regrets having been persuaded to come. The two priests, Fray Mariano and Fray Bartolomeo, call on her and arouse her suspicions as to their genuineness. At the cavalcade stops at various missions, Eulalia hears rumors of the approach of her husband. While Don Pedro plans a great fiesta to welcome his wife, Eulalia plans her costume.

CHAPTER VIII

Pedro Fages leaped from out the darkening, shark-infested water of the Gulf of California and raced a few times up the beach, shouting and beating his chest. Then he dressed carefully, combed his beard and hair with his fingers, and went to his tent.

Escabellito, the wee Indian, awaited him there, and the two walked toward the roaring fire. The smoky air was filled with the odors of roasting flesh. Two casks, one of wine, and one of aguardiente from the Franciscan mission of San Gabriel Arcangel in California Alta, stood ready for the broaching.

Don Pedro strolled restlessly about. The bay was now flooded with moonlight, which emphasized mountains, palms, men and horses in black silhouette. Again he peered into the tent. A little fire had been built before the entrance and its reflection made the barbaric interior glow like a jewel.

When he looked again toward the fire he saw three figures rise slowly toward the camp: a woman, a child and a man. Behind them a long caravan defiled out of the arroyo.

"Ah," choked the Governor. As he went toward them a thousand confused thoughts, memories, desires raced through his mind. Eulalia, his wife—his Eulalia—eight years—the babe at the mother's breast—beautiful Eulalia—lonely years—beloved, riding to me out of the wilderness—I will crawl to your feet—kiss your little shoes—core of my heart—hope of my loneliness—mine to possess—soon.

"Ah," choked the Governor of California.

He made his way with dignity toward her, helped her from the saddle, kissed her hand timidly. And said only:

"Well! Well, well, well!"

There were confused greetings, cries, laughter; a milling of people and horses. The Governor found his legs held in a tight grip. He looked down.

"Hello! And who is this?"

"I am Pedro Fages the Younger. Are you my father? Are you truly? I didn't think I had a father, really. I thought he was like Sencé Jesus, or San Francisco, or—"

Fages swung the child into his arms and carried him to the fire. He looked into the clear eyes, devoured the brown face, felt the straight little back and limbs, and buried his cheek in the boy's warm neck.

"I am your father—I am indeed. And you are my chamo, my little boy!"

Pedro Fages the Younger wriggled in delight.

"Then it's all right. Al, I have so many things to tell you, and ask you, Father! That sounds funny, doesn't it? I've heard other

boys say that, but I never could."

"Young Pedro, you are bothering your father! And I want to speak to him. Greetings, Don Pedro—or should I say, your Excellency?"

"Dona Angustias! Well, well—" And he stooped to kiss the withered virgin's cheek. She giggled and produced her pet, to hold him up proudly like a child. "Look, sir! Chichi! And he has borne the trip thus far nobly, nobly, I say."

"Chichi! My God, the same Chichi!"

"Oh, not the same Chichi, there have been several Chichis since the one you saw last, but there is just one, always and the same Chichi!"

Fages felt his hand tugged gently, and looked down into the somber eyes of a tiny Indian. He took him by the hand and led him to where Eulalia sat enthroned beneath a ramada by the fire.

"Senora," he said formally, "here is a gift I have brought you all the way from Monterey, a gift which I hope you will appreciate, and use. This is Escabellito."

"Escabellito! Little Foot-Stool!" exclaimed the lady. "What a strange name!"

"He has no other. And that is what he is. Your little foot-stool." He whispered in the brown ear. The child dropped on his round belly and wriggled to the lady's feet, turning his head toward the Governor, begging for approval with a black bright eye.

"There you are! Put your feet on him, Lady. Do not be afraid. That is what he is for, he has been trained for you, the little savage."

Eulalia put one foot, then the other, gingerly on the small round body, then relaxed.

"Ah," she laughed, "he is a comfortable Escabellito! This is nice of you, your Excellency. Queens and the mistresses of kings have their little blackmoors, and I have my wee Indian."

The Governor bowed low.

"Right and fitting, Dona Eulalia."

"Ah, my heart, my beautiful—more beautiful than I remembered in my most solitary lonely dreams—"

Now the casks were broached, the wine and brandy flowed and the feast began.

The Governor and Captain Canete raised wine-horns to each other.

"Good man! Brave fellow!" murmured the Governor. The Captain smiled quizzically and retired.

During the feast Fages sat where he could see Eulalia, watching the firelight brighten the little Maia's jacket, and wink on the bright buttons. Watched her hands as she ate fastidiously.

Then, when venison, antelope, quail, rabbits, frigoles, tortillas, and dried fruits were mere scraps, an old leather-jacket began plucking music by the roots out of his guitar—a guitar that had traveled from the province of Catalonia in Spain, across the Atlantic, across Mexico, and up and down the Californias. Baja and Alta. Voices rose in the beloved songs of the old country, soldiers' songs, gipsies' roundelays and haunting Oriental strains that had persisted in Spain since the days of the Moors.

Pedro Fages lifted a horn of wine. "I give you a toast, my men! To his Majesty King Carlos the Third of Spain, and to his Royal Spouse!"

They drank the toast standing, amid cheers.

The Governor refilled his horn.

"And I give you Eulalia, the Queen of the Californias!"

He drank deeply, then threw the empty horn into the dying fire.

Snapping lightly, he lifted Eulalia from the dais, held her aloft a moment, then strode away with her to the tent.

CHAPTER IX

Early one morning couriers had dashed into the presidio at San Diego announcing that El Senor Gobernador and his lady, La Goberna-

dora, were at the very gates of the citadel.

Lieutenant Jose de Zuniga, in charge of the presidio, issued orders right and left. There must be royal entertainment prepared, and at once! A dispatch must be sent to good Padre Lasuen at the mission to come and celebrate a thanksgiving for the distinguished travelers; he must bring his Indian musicians. There would be music, dancing; food must be prepared—a bull slaughtered. The arms and equipment of the little garrison must be in perfect order. Guns must be made ready for salutes.

The women listened to the Commander's orders, nodded among themselves and went to work. The Indian servants stared in stupid wonder. Never had they seen the gente so hard at work. Such a scrubbing and cleaning, such an aroma of food in the air!

Carefully hoarded clothes—for who could tell when they could be replaced?—were drawn from chests where they reposed from funeral to funeral, christening to christening. The best silk quilts and bed furnishings were carried to the room set apart for the almost-royal guest-chamber. When all this was done, and the children cleaned and dressed, the women-folk fixed their men-folk's hair; trimmed it, combed it, braided it into queues.

Suddenly there was a volley of shots, a prancing of hoofs, shouts and cries, and the caravan came in



Now the Casks Were Broached and the Feast Began.

sight. The people of San Diego pressed forward to see—there was El Gobernador—Don Pedro himself, his brown eyes twinkling, his mouth stern, riding proudly between his lady and his son.

"Ah, his son!" they chattered. "That would be Pedro the Younger of course. A princeling, yes, a princeling. But look you—the lady—La Gobernadora!"

La Gobernadora rode into the compound proudly, head high, eyes level. She saw the jolly clamor around the Governor, a respectful intimacy that established at once in her mind the relations of her husband with these people that he governed. She did not approve of it—this backslapping and joking. After all he was the Governor, the King's own representative in this province and should demand and receive more dignified attention.

For a moment she looked around her. The adobe stockade was lined with huts that followed the contours of the hills. Living quarters, storehouses, chapel, huddled under the flag of Spain. To the east great mountains, the Cuyamarcas and Palomar, lifted profound white brows into the sunset sky—remote, impassable.

Prison walls—shuddered the lady. To the west the South Sea spread like a carpet of red gold clear to the setting sun. Into it old Point Loma glowed like the prow of a ship.

So this was California Alta—and here was she, at last.

Fray Mariano and Fray Bartolomeo

meo were being led away, after a joyful greeting from Padre Lasuen, to their quarters. They too looked about them doubtfully.

"So this is California Alta!" whispered Fray Mariano. "What next?" "Sh-h!" warned his brother as Padre Lasuen overtook them. They walked beside him, hands clasped piously over their stomachs, their eyes cast downward.

After a thanksgiving service in the chapel, there was a merry feast in the quarters of the Lieutenant Zuniga that night. The food was good, wine flowed and the Indians from the Mission San Diego de Alcalá made amazing music.

Eulalia was dazed, tired, a little ill. But the Governor was in fine fettle. Over and over he told of the long journey north, relating news of this one and of that, praising La Gobernadora's courage and fortitude. Every one hung on his words, laughed at his sallies, encouraged him to talk; occasionally they would address her gallantly, but she was unresponsive.

She wanted to retire. Angustias, where was she? Talking amiably in a corner with the fat wife of the sergeant. They were chatting confidentially, laughing, whispering with arched eyebrows. Even Pedro the Younger, and the little Indian Escabellito, were busy friend-making. Eulalia could hear their voices out-of-doors, screaming and laughing at some game.

Every one was gay but she. She couldn't bear it.

"Your Excellency!" she called peremptorily to her husband.

He came to her.

"Well, my dear, he said jovially, "isn't this fine! Ah, the kind friendly hearts of my people—my friends! Don't they warm your heart?" He was flushed with wine.

"Pedro," Eulalia said warningly, "be careful. You are so full of wine you need no more warming. But I am not warm. I am cold, and tired, and oh, how I want to go to bed. Please, Pedro, may I be excused? Will the gentlemen pardon me?"

"But—but," spluttered the Governor, "all the ladies have been waiting to talk with you."

"But I'm so weary, Pedro."

"You mustn't disappoint them. Just a few moments, my dear, visit with the ladies."

"Ladies!" La Gobernadora flared at him. "Ladies! Soldiers' women."

"Eulalia!"

"Camp followers!"

"Eulalia, hush! Stop this at once."

His mouth tightened. "I will not permit you to speak this way," he went on in a low tone. "You are tired, I know. Perhaps you had better retire now. But tomorrow you must see them. You will make

them some little gifts, you must be kind, cordial to them."

"I must?" She was trembling. "You must. Those are my orders. The orders of the Governor of the Californias, eh, my little Gobernadora? Run along to bed." He beckoned to Angustias who left her gossip reluctantly.

Eulalia bit her lips to control their trembling and strained her eyes to keep back a rush of tears.

"Oh, oh! How could he . . . how dare he . . . Dios mio . . ." A nausea gripped her. The low-ceiled room, close with smoke and tobacco and fumes of wine, swam before her. Her limbs quaked, and her hands were clammy, but she rose grandly from her chair. The company sprang to their feet.

"Viva la Gobernadora!" toasted the men.

She managed a graceful bow, and left the room, Angustias in her wake, eying her anxiously.

The women gathered in corners and whispered, then slipped away, leaving the men to their talk.

Don Pedro watched his wife depart, with a slight frown, and a doubtful unhappy feeling in his heart. Then he strode to the table and poured himself another cup of wine.

"By heaven!" he roared, "you San Diegans make the best wine I ever drank! Look at it, clear, sparkling, ruby-red! And how it warms a man's heart after a long wearisome journey. I tell you, my friends, there is no vintage to match it in Italy, or Mexico, or Mother Spain herself!" He raised his glass. "To the wine of California! And to California herself!"

"Viva! Viva! Viva!"

"A moment, my brothers, before we proceed . . ." All turned toward the speaker. It was the newly arrived Franciscan, Fray Mariano Rubi. " . . . I am a newcomer here . . . that is to say, I have been sent here . . . among you, as a . . . I am . . . I want to propose a toast, also. I . . . say, a toast to California . . . her grapes . . . her wine . . ." He turned to his brother friar who had risen beside him and taken his arm.

"What was I . . . about to say . . . eh, mi veijo?" he asked.

Padre Lasuen was watching him with dawning horror in his fine old eyes.

"Come, come, my Brother," Fray Bartolomeo murmured thickly, looking wildly around at the company. "Come . . . you must rest . . . He is tired," he explained, "I shall put him to bed. I have often done so. I mean I must assist him to his devotions . . . pardon us, please . . ." The two tottered from the hall, Fray Mariano still trying to remember the toast he had composed.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Grouse Bird of Importance to Scots, According to an Authority in London

How in the course of a century and a half the grouse has become a bird of national importance in Britain, is related by Henry Douglas Home in the Field of London:

"It is a fine morning in August, 1773. Boswell turns to Johnson, whose eyes are still weak from the firewater, drunk by barbarians beyond the Solway: 'Do you suppose these hills will become valuable on account of these excellent moor-fowl?' 'Please don't be stupid at this early hour. These barren mountains will never produce anything of value to a civilized people. No one can stomach their melancholy emptiness.'"

"The disgruntled doctor would have been astonished to learn that the moor-fowl would prove more valuable to the Scots than the host of quails which saved the Israelites from an awkward predicament. Perhaps in some far distant sphere Boswell turns to Johnson each twelfth of August: 'I told you so.' (The doctor's reply would be banned in the Field.)"

"A century later the grouse had become a bird of national importance in the internal economy of

Scotland. Some idea of its value at the beginning of this century may be gathered from the fact that the Committee of Enquiry into Grouse Disease estimated the annual income from grouse rents in Scotland to be over 1,000,000 pounds. The grouse has introduced prosperity into many poor districts. It has been a cause of railway and trade expansion. It has supplied the necessary funds for the increasing demands of education, roads and other public services."

Indians Suspicious of Books.

Many Indians were suspicious of white men reading. And white men, knowing this, were careful to put aside their few books when Indians were near, says the Cleveland Plain Dealer. Books were somewhat of a mystery to most Indians, but they believed these things inspired the white men to lay claim to Indian territory. So if a number of Indians reported within a short period of time that they had caught the settlers looking into books, they feared more of their territory was at stake. Sometimes the redskins would work themselves into an uprising.