

CLEMENCIA'S CRISIS

By EDITH OGDEN HARRISON



IT SEEMED to Barrington that he had made a great effort to obey and that when he opened his eyes he was in a strange room, evidently a library, for he saw bookcases and a writing table.

Through the open windows he could see the blue waves of the ocean and the scent of heliotrope with the perfume of many other flowers came to him. The voice which had bidden him open his eyes addressed him quietly again. It was a rich, musical voice and belonged to a woman.

"Do not struggle to see anyone but me," it said. "It is not necessary that you should see anyone else yet. But please look at me. I am waiting."

He turned in the direction of the voice and saw a young woman. She was tall, with dark glowing eyes and golden hair. Save for the fact, however, that the color of her hair was unusual she was of the strictly Spanish type.

He gazed upon her without speaking, startled by her beauty, it is true, but even more startled by the troubled look in her eyes. In them was a piteous appeal which touched him profoundly. Her voice, though low, was very distinct and she was speaking directly to him.

"I am very unhappy," she said. "Will you help me?"

"I will do all that I can," he replied impulsively, surprised at his own earnestness. "But if you really mean to help me you must fight."

"I am not a coward, senorita. Believe me, I will fight for you with all my soul."

It seemed to him a little strange that they should be speaking Spanish, although it was a language with which he was perfectly familiar.

She smiled, showing milk white teeth, but as he leaned forward to take her hand she moved back a step.

"Not yet," she said. "There is plenty of time to meet me in the flesh. I wanted only to be sure that you would help me and so I came in spirit."

She kept moving farther and farther away as she spoke. Fearing lest she should leave the room, he said eagerly:

"But tell me, how can I help you? I do not know what trouble you are in. I do not even know your name!"

"Alas!" she said sadly, her hand on the door. "That you must find out for yourself. I have no power to say more. Good by."

He sprang forward, but in an instant the woman disappeared and he found himself sitting up in his chair holding tightly to a spray of heliotrope which he had pulled from a vase standing on the table by his side.

It was still a long time till dawn. He was healthy, young and tired. So darkening the room he went to bed and was soon asleep again.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next afternoon, when Lieutenant Barrington met Padre Galvez at the appointed hour, the priest greeted him warmly.

"The Senora Castellanos has consented to entertain the fleet when it arrives in Santa Barbara," he said. "Manuel Sanchez has just brought me the message. He is her cousin and the manager of her estate. His influence is great with her."

"With the senora's consent I am satisfied

the welcome of the few Spanish people here will be no small part of the great preparations."

"I am glad," responded Barrington, "because although the Spaniards are few in number the President especially desired them to be prominent in the festivities."

"I am glad, too, my son, glad also that many weeks must yet elapse before the arrival of the fleet. It will give me time to become acquainted with you after all these years of separation from your parents. But I must not be selfish. Your letters to our leading people here must not be forgotten. While you present the one to Mr. Grigsby Helton this afternoon I will make arrangements to call with you another day upon Senora Castellanos."

"Padre," said the young man, "tell me something of the ranch life. What is its attraction for people of culture?"

"That is easily seen, my son. Take these beautiful homes, almost in the mountains and yet in sight of the Pacific, fill them with people of wealth and refinement and there you have the basis of California ranch life."

"Whose is the white palace on the summit of the hill?"

"It is occupied by a beautiful woman in the English Court set. But it is no more popular than the small one hidden a few miles distant, the home of the widow of a famed writer."

"Intellectually should govern wherever it rests, of course, but how seldom it does," said Barrington, musingly.

"My son, do not judge all the representatives of prosperity by the disgusting vulgarity of some."

"I assure you, padre, that I have no desire to disparage them," the officer answered, "but you must admit that our wealthiest Americans are not always those of whom we are most proud."

"Ah," eagerly interposed the priest, "admitting this, there are still many whose power has been given by money whose lives are simple and wholesome—many who, though not blind to the advantages of wealth, take them like sane, healthy mortals. For such as these surely our country has only a feeling of pride."

And later Barrington thought the Grigsby Heltons should be included in the best type of Santa Barbarans. Mr. Helton was president of one of the greatest railroads in the West, a mighty artery connecting the two oceans. He was only 40, but already his splendid executive ability had tended considerably toward his road's success. It was in this railroad magnate's beautiful Santa Barbara home that Barrington made his entree to California society. Mrs. Helton was 28, in the flush of youth and very popular. It was natural, therefore, that their house should be a social center.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO days later at 4 in the afternoon Lieutenant Barrington in response to an invitation called upon Mrs. Helton. He found her a charming woman, and when they had spent a few minutes in conversation she arose saying:

"I must not be utterly selfish, Lieutenant Barrington. I have other guests who desire to meet you. We will go to the library, where tea will be served."

They crossed a spacious hall filled with wonderful potted plants and entered the library.

It was well that Mrs. Helton was leading, else she might have been surprised at the young officer's face. When they entered the room he paled visibly. It took all his self-control to prevent his exclaiming aloud:

"The room he had entered was the room of his dream!"

He pulled himself together only by a powerful effort. He felt that he must control his facial expression, that he must not betray his emotions. He was as certain, though, that he would see the girl of his dream as he was that he was following Mrs. Helton and the thought actually made him afraid to lift his eyes.

And then he saw her. He never quite forgot the thrill of that moment. Indeed, it seemed to him that he never afterward forgot the slightest thing in connection with her.

She was standing in a group of young people and was easily distinguishable from the rest. It may have been the peculiar combination of dark eyes and light hair. It may have been the unusual haughtiness of her carriage. It may have been her beautiful face. But whatever it was he knew from the first glance that the Spanish girl had come into his life now and forever.

Following his glance his hostess said warmly:

"That is Clemencia Castellanos, my best friend. I shall take great pleasure in presenting you. But let me warn you in advance. She is a veritable enchantress and you must not succumb to her charms."

He laughed pleasantly, but did not reply. His hostess lowered her voice and whispered:

"Really, I am in earnest, Lieutenant Barrington. It would be hopeless, you know, for she is already promised."

At a loss as to what to say in reply to this strange confidence Barrington answered lightly:

"She is young. She cannot have been promised very long."

"She was promised in childhood."

"Forbidden fruit," he jested, "is always the choicest. Then, too, I have heard of broken promises."

"True. But your arts would be useless here. Her smiles would never be for you. She is bound as securely as though a chain of our glittering Sierras held her hidden in their midst."

"Are the Spaniards so tenacious of their promises?"

"This one would die before she would break hers."

"But, madame," he protested, "you are making me curious about your beautiful Spanish siren. In fact, I am so interested that I cannot promise not to enter the lists as a suitor for her smiles."

"Then your fate be on your head," she laughed.

Suddenly, however, her face grew grave and she added:

"If I thought you were serious I would not present you. The girl is beautiful as an angel, but she is really promised. Her word will never be retracted. Never. Never."

For a moment he felt quite thrilled by the solemnity of her words, but recovering his poise he murmured under his breath:

"Lucky the man who has won such devotion." Then aloud: "Lead on, I am ready to face your enchantress!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AND so Arslan Barrington stood before the beautiful girl of his dream, finding her even more entrancing in life. Her lips and skin were luminous. Her figure was superb. She bore herself with an indescribable stateliness which was charming in one so young.

Mrs. Helton left them alone after she had presented the young officer and for a moment neither spoke. Then Barrington, bowing ceremoniously, said:

"Senorita, may I have the pleasure of drinking tea with you?"

"Certainly, Lieutenant Barrington. Are you not the guest of honor?"

He smiled down on her. She had promptly dealt his vanity a blow. But he answered lightly:

"Would you imply, then, that politeness alone impels you to accept my invitation?"

"Would you have me acknowledge more on a moment's acquaintance?" came the quick retort.

"Senorita, I throw myself upon your mercy. I refuse to enter into a combat of words with one so eminently skilled in their use."

"You seem quite able to defend yourself," she laughed.

"But why should you assure me that you are not free to refuse my request?" he jested.

"Why should I flatter you by saying anything else?"

"Senorita Castellanos, again I sue for mercy. Should we fight now I feel sure that I would go down in defeat. Therefore I shall bring your tea at once."

She laughed heartily. "An officer!" she mocked, "and so lacking in courage!"

"I shall hope to regain mine over the tea cups," he said.

All the time they had been talking, although they had both spoken lightly, there had been a subtle something in the girl's manner which savored of embarrassment.

But at his last words she laughed again and seemed to lose the indefinable something. Thereafter she appeared more natural. She motioned to a corner of the room, saying:

"I shall wait for you there. Lemon and one lump of sugar, please."

"Miss Castellanos," he said, approaching and handing her the cup, "I am to call at your home tomorrow and meet your grandmother. I consider it a great honor that she has consented to receive me."

To his astonishment a most peculiar expression crossed her face—one which he could not analyze. Had he said something to displease her? And if so, what was it?

"Yes," she replied. "I was surprised to learn that she had consented to entertain the Fleet at your request."

"You do me too much honor, Senorita. The request comes from the President of the United States. I am only the humble bearer of it. May I venture to hope, however, that your grandmother's consent is not unpleasant to you?"

"And if it were," she broke in hastily, "it would make no difference. Senor Sanchez controls my grandmother in all worldly matters."

Barrington was decidedly taken aback. The conversation had suddenly become awkward. If he were to make headway at all with Miss Castellanos he must change the subject.

"Senorita," he said abruptly, "I lit a candle in the Mission today and made a wish for the greatest desire of my heart."

She was looking at him with amiable curiosity.

"The greatest desire of your heart?" she echoed. "You must want it very much."

"I do," he replied. "Do you think I shall get it?"

In some way his earnestness seemed to impress her. She flushed a bit under his look.

"Did you ask something impossible?" she queried.

"I asked for a miracle."

"A miracle! In these days?" she scoffed.



He Gazed Upon Her Without Speaking, Startled by Her Beauty, but Even More Startled by the Troubled Look in Her Eyes. In Them Was a Piteous Appeal Which Touched Him Profoundly.

"Why not?" he asked coolly.

"And you think you will get it?" she parried, ignoring his question.

"When I lit the candle I confess I did not. I was very skeptical. But that hour has passed now."

"Why?"

"Because part of the miracle has already come true," he said in a low voice.

Again his manner stirred her. She moved uneasily under his gaze.

"Already come true? What can you possibly mean?"

He bent his head lower, compelling her to return his powerful gaze.

"Yes. This afternoon a part of the miracle has come true. Do you believe in mental telepathy?" he asked suddenly.

Before she could lower her eyes he saw a flash of terror creep into them. She shivered a little. Then she replied:

"How tragic, Lieutenant Barrington. For a moment your question startled me. But no, I do not believe in mental telepathy at all."

"Remember. I told you that a part of the miracle had already come true."

She handed him her empty cup and arose, saying in the coolest of voices:

"How interesting! Perhaps some time you will tell me more of the miracle. Just now I feel that I must not keep you longer. Besides, I must be going."

He saw her perturbation and was triumphant. "She is afraid," he said to himself, "and she understands; just how much I am not sure, but she understands."

Aloud he continued: "May I hope to see you tomorrow, Senorita, when I call?" Her natural poise had returned. She nodded pleasantly.

long in Santa Barbara you will find that in an interview between my grandmother and Padre Galvez I am of small importance."

CHAPTER IX.

THE next afternoon Padre Galvez guided Lieutenant Barrington to the home of Senora Castellanos. Most of the estate lay along a rolling upland, above Santa Barbara. Back of it were the mountains and stretching between them lay the valley filled with trees. Gliding over the broad acres was a silver stream. The house itself stood on a little knoll. Its thick walls, its small windows and its long porches were characteristic of Spanish-American architecture.

As the young officer entered the house he was impressed by the elegance and beauty of the interior. He and the priest were ushered into a room eighty feet long and nearly forty feet wide.

After a few minutes had passed a tall, dignified woman of perhaps 65 entered. Her white hair was parted in the middle and drawn back from her face. Her blue eyes were unusually bright and penetrating and her handsome, though rather stern countenance evidenced remarkable strength of character. The Senora Castellanos was accounted the richest woman in California.

She greeted her guest, however, as cordially as her cold, stern nature would permit.

"I am glad to welcome you," she said, "although I am sorry to tell you that Senor Sanchez was called away this morning and cannot be with us. In fact, his business is likely to detain him several weeks in San Francisco."

"When I read the papers this morning I feared he would not be able to join us," the padre responded.

The senora inclined her head gravely. "He

left at once," she murmured; then turning to Barrington she continued: "Our business interests throughout the state are sufficiently large to cause us great uneasiness over the tremendous conspiracies being uncovered in some of our large cities."

Barrington was aware, of course, that a big city in California was in the throes of reform. The gigantic swindle in which some of her able and most distinguished men were involved was being exposed.

One of the results traced to it was a bad railroad strike which affected properties in which the Senora Castellanos was vitally interested. It was eventually proved that the strike was instigated by leaders of the great steal. But, though members of the gang were arrested and tried, the "man higher up" always evaded justice.

At this particular time the leaders of a disastrous strike that tied up railroad construction work in the foothills of the Sierras were being tried for a crime they had not committed, namely, throwing chains across live trolley wires. In this short-circuiting of the wires a great deal of damage was caused to the power-houses, and many of the engineers and electricians would have been killed but for timely warnings from some mysterious source. The men themselves were always cautioned about the danger in time to escape.

It was to these events that the senora referred and when she had voiced her regret that Sanchez could not join them Barrington said:

"It was doubly kind of you to receive me, Senora Castellanos. I believe you usually empower Senor Sanchez to complete all business arrangements."

[To be continued next week.]

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