

CLEMENCIA'S CRISIS

A California Romance

By EDITH OGDEN HARRISON



MISS MORRO, however, gave him no opportunity to question her. Work was prepared and she at once delved into it. After a few minutes she had passed Barrington interrupted boldly. He knew that Sanchez was expected and would join them within an hour.

"Miss Morro," he said, "please let the work wait a minute. Since yesterday I feel that I must ask you a question. You owe me an explanation."

"Of what, Senor Barrington?" the girl replied, with a look of surprise in her eyes and a haughty toss of her head.

"Of the scene I witnessed the first day I saw you."

"You are extremely impertinent, senor," she said slowly.

"Is it possible that you do not know that Senor Sanchez is engaged?"

"What do you mean?" she screamed. Barrington was utterly unprepared for such an outburst. She broke out furiously in a storm of denial. Was she acting? Was it possible that she had never heard it before?

"It is false, Senor Barrington, absolutely false," she stormed, her face convulsed with anger.

Appalled at the violence of her temper he could scarcely find words to reply. But he realized the importance of calming her.

"Miss Morro," he said, "you must control yourself. Remember, we may be interrupted at any minute."

"Senor, you came unbidden to my help once. Will you not help me now?"

"I would gladly do so if I could," he replied. "But I cannot prevent the marriage. Neither can you keep a man who has ceased to love you!"

"It is more than the mere fact that I love him," she said in a low voice. "He must make me an honest woman. He has sworn to marry me. Oh, senor, help me to win him back!"

"Would to God that I could, Miss Morro! But if you have no claim upon him I see no way."

"They will never marry. I have told you that often. But if he continues to love her I will kill her."

occupied with her own thoughts, conscious that a combat of will, if such ensued, would be violent. With all the respect which Clemencia bore her grandmother there had been times of late when she had found it difficult to acquiesce unquestionably to many of her wishes.

A low fire burned on the hearth in the senora's study and a bright reading lamp stood beside an open book. She motioned Clemencia to a chair.

"It is quite late, grandmamma," the girl protested, "and my packing is not quite finished. Will you keep me long?"

"Not longer than is necessary."

Clemencia shivered a little as she sank back into the soft cushions. She recalled that other evening many years ago when she learned that she was to go to an American school. Tonight the determination written in the senora's eyes was hardly less pronounced than then.

in his heart. He loves you tenderly."

"He is too selfish to love anyone tenderly. He knows that I despise him. Yet he tortures me daily."

"You are unjust and wrong. His is a devoted affection."

"But I, at least, am truthful. Manuel always puts me on the defensive with you. It is always Manuel whom you believe. Never for a moment do you judge me except through his eyes."

"I repeat that his influence has nothing whatever to do with my views this time."

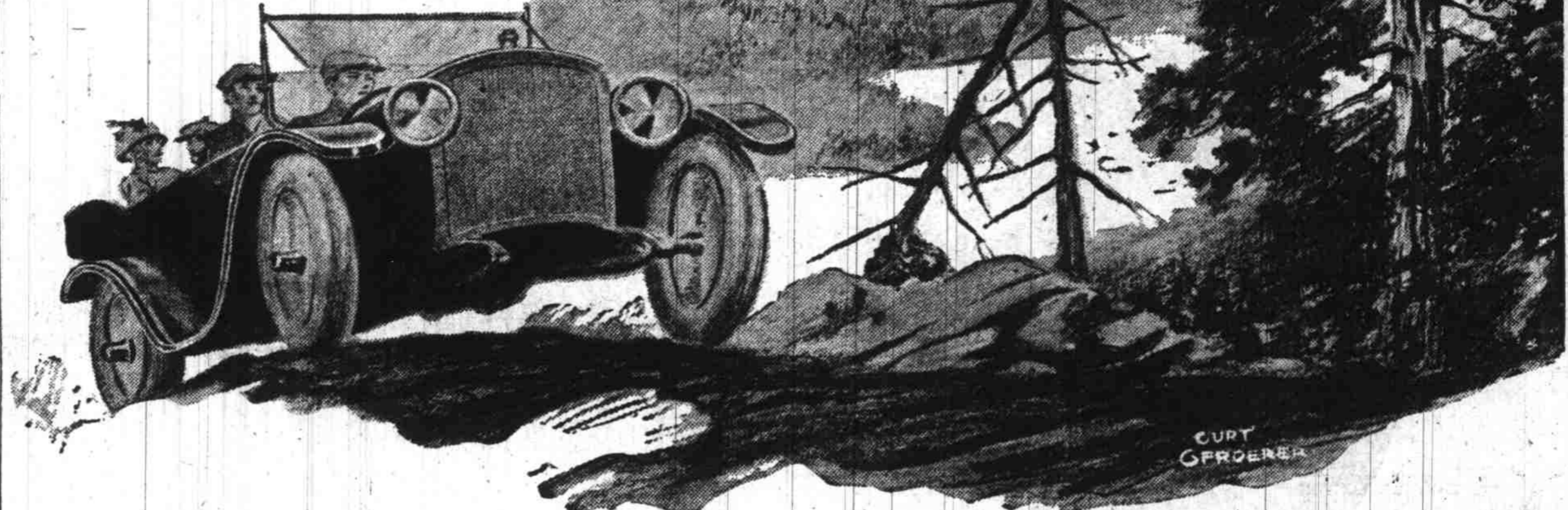
A word of the episode under the great pepper tree in the lower valley. It seemed like sacrilege to mention that experience to others. He felt he had stumbled accidentally upon a tragedy, and the proximity of the scene recalled vividly that picture of a woman's misery.

Mrs. Helton's gay voice interrupted his reverie and he looked up to see both women watching him. But in the eyes of Miss Castellanos there was not the surprise or amusement he detected in those of Mrs. Helton.

"Do you know that you broke off abruptly in the description of your walk and have not spoken a word for five minutes?"

Barrington apologized for his abstraction and though temporarily embarrassed was soon at his ease. But he found himself wondering why Clemencia had given him that quick, frightened look.

"There," he said, to relieve the strain, "I stood watching the widespread beauty before me. There lay Santa Barbara bathed in the pure riches of the sun."



The Little Party Did Not Lack Enthusiasm. Coursing Along in the Fleet-Flying Automobile, the Bright Spangled Light Falling About Them, They Seemed to Be Floating Through an Enchanted World. Leaving the Pass They Descended Rapidly, Soon Reaching Ventura and the Open Sea.

gress, "but a curse will surely come upon him if he marries her."

"Why will you not tell me what I want to know?" he demanded sternly. "If you are his wife, say so. If not, what claim have you upon him?"

"I will not answer your question. The affair is mine, and his. But this much I will tell you. He shall never marry another, that I swear!"

me and I determined to have a weapon to fight him with if he did."

"And you have such a weapon?"

"I have, and if I can hold him no other way I can do so by means of this."

known that Sanchez was not to be of the party."

"Surely you cannot hold me responsible for that!" exclaimed the girl.

"Not responsible, perhaps, but you should have declined to accept an invitation which did not include him!"

"I do not care to discuss that," she answered, rising from her chair.

"I think you were partly to blame, but keep your seat and your temper," her grandmother added dryly, "for I have by no means finished what I wish to say."

Clemencia settled back. "You have never liked Agatha," she said hotly, and her voice held a suspicion of tears.

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT night, under the eucalyptus trees, Juanita Morro sobbed out her story to the naval officer. Standing in the shadow of the great trees she said tragically:

CHAPTER XX.

IT WAS the night before Clemencia was to accompany the Heltons to Coronado Beach. Her packing was almost finished and she stood eyeing the last bag thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE strike made travel by railroad uncertain, so Mrs. Helton determined to make the trip to Coronado by motor instead of in her husband's luxurious private car.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE lovely spring weather there was little danger from storms, and then there was the delight of running over the mountains and across the valleys at a speed that suited one's mood.

Here the mission and the whole country around it were full of reminiscences of Ramon and her sheep-shearing ranch.

"Look, Barrington, look at those two palms!"

"Glancing in the direction indicated the young man saw two date palms, erect as sentinels, guarding the entrance to that vast stretch of golden sands. Their size was unusual even in this country of large palms, and their trunks, looking like huge pineapples held aloft the colossal leaves curving and swaying like ostrich feathers."

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