

CLEMENCIA'S CRISIS

A Romance of Sunny California

By EDITH OGDEN HARRISON



CHAPTER XXXIII.
HE friendship between Barrington and Padre Galvez was a source of much pleasure to both. Somehow the old padre always reminded the young American of the knights of old—those men who had fought to win or die. Interest between the two was strengthened by associations of the past. In her girlhood Barrington's mother had

known and admired the young Spaniard who had become Padre Galvez. The elder Galvez, his father, had been an uncle of the King of Spain. He had held an important post at Madrid. The son, Ricardo, was 27 years of age and already remarkable for his learning when he met Barrington's mother, then in the first flush of youth. But the spoiled and lovely girl had also a brilliant mind. She was quick to discern a kindred spirit in the young Spaniard. The latter recognized in the imperious beauty a worth far beyond the physical attraction which she undoubtedly possessed. Unconsciously they had been drawn together into a memorable intimacy. In those days, long ago, Maude Arslan had said to herself many times:

"Ricardo alone understands me, and it is because his love is not the love of man for woman; it is true comradeship; it will last forever."

But with all her wisdom and acumen she had failed to know the heart of Ricardo Galvez. He loved her with a passionate but silent love. To the serious-minded young Spaniard nothing was so alluring as this audaciously cool Irish girl, whose bewitching manners and beauty bewildered him.

Yet as strongly attached as Ricardo was to the girl, when he saw that she had given her heart to John Barrington he went his way and she never dreamed of the true nature of his devotion. But often, as he walked in the warm sunlight among the trees and flowers, he would see again, in retrospect, her face as she had once turned it toward him and whispered:

"Ricardo, my only friend, I am so happy that you alone have understood my heart from the very first, because of our warm friendship. Even John has not understood so well."

Galvez had smiled courageously and kissed her hand, thanking God that she did not know his heart as he knew hers. Now, after all these years, he could truthfully say that the husband was not less dear to him than this white love of his youth. The coming of their son to him had touched the dry places in his heart, making them to bloom again with memories of the past.

Padre Galvez was too keen an observer of men not to see that Barrington's mind was weighted with some secret matter of import. The two men were seated together on the balcony built around the mission turret. Everything was in readiness for the festival which Senora Castellanos was about to give for the entertainment of the fleet. Padre Galvez felt great satisfaction that the senora had been placated, for he knew that she could be relied upon to dispense true Spanish hospitality in her own home.

Barrington's voice at last broke the stillness. "Padre," he said, "I am in dire distress. Would you help me if I needed your assistance?"

The old priest looked up in amazement, as if trying to grasp the full meaning of his friend's words. Then he said slowly and as though a little hurt:

"Can you doubt it, my son?"

Instinctively the priest had put out his hand. The younger man grasped and pressed it. Padre Galvez awaited Barrington's confidence.

"Padre, I love a woman." His voice was low and tense. "I love her with all the strength that is in me. I have reason to believe that she is interested in me, but there is a duel between us because she feels that it would be a sin to yield, so she is fighting me." Barrington ceased speaking. He nervously paced the balcony to ease the stress of his emotions.

The priest did not answer at once. When he did speak his voice was quite grave.

"Why does she feel so, my son? You are not bound?"

"No, padre, but she has made a mistake in her life. She fancies herself held by a vow and turns from me, refusing to free herself. Yet no bonds on earth shall separate us if I find that her heart is mine. Right or wrong, she shall belong to me."

The priest's face paled with anger and surprise. He arose and when he spoke his voice was sharp and thin and lashed like a whip.

"Not yet, padre. She is not yet ready to hear the truth from you."

Reluctantly the priest signified his consent to silence. His arms went affectionately across the young man's shoulders.

"If your faith be as great as a grain of mustard seed you can move mountains. If you win her you will gain a wonderful soul to cherish your life long through, and the blessings of the holy mother church will be yours."

The Vastness and the Beauty of the Night Was Upon Them. The Man in Him Was Crying To Be Heard.

"I retract the offer made a moment ago, sir. I spoke hastily when I promised to aid you."

Absorbed in his own thoughts and forgetting that he had not revealed the nature of the bond which held Clemencia, Barrington answered bitterly:

"If your God is a just God He will give me the woman I love. But even if the church refuses its blessing I shall bid her come to me without it."

"You speak blasphemously, sir. You are no Catholic. No true son of the church would use such words."

The long, dark face of the priest showed pinched and drawn in the evening shadows. The expression in his eyes was the same as if a knife were being turned in his heart. He realized how he had idealized this young man, the son of the girl whom he had loved, and he thought he saw how far his idol had fallen. His words, though spoken in a low, even tone, were heavy with contempt:

"The bond of marriage is lasting forever and a day. Divorce never frees a Catholic man or woman. You cannot marry her and keep your church."

The two men faced each other in a tumult of distress. As they stood thus there flashed before Barrington's mental vision the luminous face of his beloved. Her pale beauty haunted him. He gave the priest look for look.

"Padre," he said, "I have misled you. The bond which holds the woman I love is not marriage."

"Not marriage?" exclaimed the astonished priest. "What bond then could separate you?"

"Are there not other vows, my padre, which are held just as binding in the sight of our church? Oh, padre, trust me. I cannot tell you more now."

The priest grasped the hand extended to him, but he was puzzled. He could not understand. At that moment, however, the bell in the tall spire of the nunnery pealed forth. The priest suddenly thought of Clemencia, as he always did whenever the nuns came to his mind. His spirit was constantly troubled about the girl. Like an electric shock it flashed upon him. He knew, of course, of Arslan's friendship with her. He searched the young man's face anxiously, and as he did so his own lighted up with a strange, soft glow.

"The fancied bond," he questioned, "which holds this woman is a holy one, is it not?"

The American nodded. Padre Galvez's face was eloquent in its agitation.

"My son," he said, "there is no need to tell me her name; it is engraved here." The priest laid his hand upon his heart.

"Then, padre," Barrington said impulsively, "cherish it in that sanctuary as I cherish it in mine, and until she herself speaks let it be guarded well."

"But, my son, why could I not aid you better if I spoke?"

That night Padre Galvez knelt in the sanctuary of the mission. He lit two candles and stayed through all the hours that they burned. In his heart the good old priest was saying exultantly:

"Her son is a knight of King Arthur—he is straight like a cedar of Lebanon—straight and strong. He is worthy of her."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PERHAPS the prime requisite for a successful career is adaptability. Unless one can adapt one's self to change much suffering lies along and at the end of the road. Often if grave and serious matters are determined upon in early youth we find later these principles have assumed the grotesque.

But Senora Castellanos was not adaptable; she was of another time than the present; nor was she of those women who shape events to their own ends. The senora was an old-school Spaniard to the core. Her hatred of all things American was proverbial among those who knew her. Added to this national dislike, which was ingrained in the old dowager, was that closer and more personal hatred which centered about the tragic life of her beloved daughter, Clemencia's mother.

Small wonder, then, that the good residents of Santa Barbara were deeply surprised when they learned that the Senora Castellanos had consented to open her magnificent grounds and her home for a fête in honor of the American fleet.

But though the acquaintances of the senora knew of her hate for men and things American, they did not guess of the poison of her rancor. Not even Padre Galvez, who was her confessor, knew, and often as the old priest paced his pillared cloister, reading his breviary and meditating upon the evanescence of earthly things, he sighed sadly as he thought of the stern old woman and of the girl who was her grandchild. More than once the padre and the Senora Castellanos had spoken on the subject of Clemencia.

"It is not true," he had said on one occasion, "that God always demands sacrifices from his elect."

To this the senora had answered:

"But these are the impressionable years—the years during which she should learn the sterner side of life."

taken by the frivolities natural to one of her age."

Santa Barbara was welcoming the stately great ships. Bronze-faced bluejackets and jocular marines, no less tanned, thronged the streets of the California city. By day and by night processions bearing banners on which were written welcoming legends paraded the wide thoroughfares.

This was the night of the Senora Castellanos' festival. Very regal she looked as she stood with her granddaughter to receive the guests in the large reception hall which ran the entire length of the patio. Her hair, snowy white, was drawn simply back and without adornment. Her black dress was relieved of somberness by trimmings of priceless lace. The old woman's dark patrician face and her vivid black eyes lent her the appearance of some aged yet still vital empress who gave audiences to those who paid her fealty.

Clemencia, like a slender lily, jewelled, stood beside her. In her simplicity she was strikingly beautiful. Her garments, like the morning mists, were filmy white, but she stood in them like Phoebe emerging from the clouds. Manuel Sanchez, the nearest relative, was there also. At the senora's request he was dispensing hospitality as man of the house. Handsome in his dark, daredevil way, he mingled with the guests and was conspicuous wherever he went. Near by Padre Galvez, dignified and courtly, held his coterie, and the few priests present, coming and going in their dark gowns among the gayly dressed women and gold-braided officers, seemed to add to the charm peculiar to that wonderful valley of California.

There is no more courtly class in the world than the cultivated Spaniard. Padre Galvez and his hostess each showed the marks of gentle blood in their bearing, though they represented widely dissimilar types. Clemencia was representative of still another type; the blood of a younger and more virile race flowed warmly in her veins.

The grandmother, perhaps, was the most strongly individualized of the three. And yet the austere calm face of the padre was one to remember. In it shone the light of a great spiritual happiness, a happiness which clothes only those who give their lives for

others. He believed that the real workers of the human race, hearing the cry of destiny and pushing onward with heads erect, will in time overcome all obstacles, because, above the silence of the stars, their work is planned, and that some day, the great work accomplished, we shall reach the peaks of wisdom.

The echo of laughter and merry talk was everywhere. It seemed as if some gay magician had waved a mysterious wand over the house and grounds of the Castellanos. All about the place were hung innumerable little Chinese lanterns, and above the open and wooden floored tents for the dancers fluttered vivid pennants. Soft-footed servants glided in and out among the guests.

A number of festivities had been planned, but the feature of the evening would be the dancing of a bevy of Spanish girls and their partners in the patio at 10 o'clock. The dance would end all entertainment save the dancing of the guests. A hush fell upon the crowd when promptly at 10 o'clock the four dancing girls entered. They were followed by four young men. The girls wore brilliant yellow gowns with trimmings of gold, and represented priestesses of the Sun God. The dress of the men were of the same color, with sashes of red, symbolizing the fiery beams of the sun. All of them carried sunlike disks as shields.

They then began a weird and curious dance, with graceful and intricate figures representing ceremonies sacred to the Sun God.

In and out the gayly appareled dancers trod to the measure of music that sometimes spoke in low tones of passion and sometimes sounded trumpets of battle.

Barrington had never before witnessed the Sun dance. He found that it stirred him strangely, and he wondered just how fine the line is that separates the so-called love of culture and civilization from the savage.

The young naval officer was quick to discern that the one whom he loved was also deeply moved. She stood at some distance and on the other side of the dancers from him, but in her heightened color, her glowing eyes and the quick tapping of her right foot on the floor he read other emotions than those which welcome behind the peaceful doors of a nunnery.

Quick and hearty applause marked the end of the dance, after which the patio was deserted for the pavilions.

Barrington and Clemencia had taken but a

few steps of an intoxicating walk when he drew her out of the pavilion. In silence they walked to a distant corner of the grounds where the artificial lights could not disturb a clear view of the night.

There they found a bench and rested upon it. There was no moon and the constellations looked larger, more luminous, while the air between seemed to twinkle in purple lights. Barrington spoke softly.

"The whole of nature seems to change under the sheen and sparkle of the sky jewels, don't you think so?"

Clemencia sighed. "No tongue or pen can tell the glory of the heavens," she answered.

"True," he said. "Yet looking once into that dome of blue with its jeweled tap-



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etry, even though he should never see it again, the soul of man could never forget."

"I feel as you do. Those tiny curtains of flame fluttering between dusk and dawn have no match in the whole universe for charm and mystery."

The vastness and the beauty of the night was upon them both. It was the first time for several days that they had been alone. The man in him was crying to be heard. He could not neglect this opportunity.

"Miss Castellanos," Barrington's voice was very soft and pleading, "I frightened you the other night by my vehemence. I entreat your pardon. My feelings carried me to the point of selfishness. I wished to convince you by reason that you had no right to become a nun. I failed utterly because the personal note was too strong."

"Why is it," she answered in a cool voice which ignored a part of his sentence, "that you persist in saying that I have no right to become a nun?"

"I will tell you," he said, his voice gaining strength. "You have no right to become a nun because deep down in your nature you realize that you were bound by a promise before you understood the import of the oath that you took, and because, though once ignorant and therefore happy, you have now awakened to the seriousness of your vow. There is in you now a dumb protest. You know now that you will not be content in a nunnery. Is it not true?"

Barrington's eyes were full of fire as he spoke, and Clemencia shrank from his gaze. Her mind was a chaos of wild thoughts. What was this elemental tumult within her?

CHAPTER XXXV.

WITH a pang of fear the girl sensed that this man's argument carried a dangerous appeal. The fear was not lessened when she found that his viewpoint did not outrage her own feelings.

What if, after all, she were only a religious fanatic? But her grandmother—surely her grandmother, who loved her best, was right. This man spoke only out of his own worldly wisdom.

"You are mistaken; I am quite free to choose. No one compels my choice."

Clemencia's color was heightened and her breathing was rapid, but she looked straight into Barrington's eyes with an undisturbed glance. The man gazed back at her and voiced a little laugh.

(To Be Continued Next Week)
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