

The Land of Broken Promises

A Stirring Story of the Mexican Revolution

By DANE COULDRIDGE

Illustrations by DON J. LAVIN

CONTINUED FROM YESTERDAY

CHAPTER VII.

There are doubtless many philanthropists in the Back Bay regions of Boston who would consider the whipsawing of Cruz Mendez a very reprehensible act.

But Bud and Phil were not traveling for any particular uplift society, and one hundred pesos was a lot of money to Cruz Mendez.

He came to the hotel very early the next morning and lingered around an hour or so, waiting for the American gentleman to arise and tell him his fate.

A hundred dollars would buy everything that he could think of, including a quantity of mescal. His throat dried at the thought of it.

Then the gentlemen appeared and asked him many questions—whether he was married according to law, whether his wife would sign the papers with him, and if he believed in a hereafter for those who played false with Americans.

Having answered all these in the affirmative, he was taken to the agente mineral, and after signing his name—his one feat in penmanship—to several imposing documents, he was given the precious permit.

Then there was another trip to the grounds with a surveyor, to make report that the claim was actually vacant, and Mendez went back to his normal duties as a packer.

In return for this service as a dog's locator, and to keep him under their eye, the Americans engaged El Tuerto, the one-eyed, to pack out a few tools and supplies for them; and then, to keep him busy, they employed him further to build a stone house.

All these activities were, of course, not lost on Don Cipriano Aragon y Tres Palacios, since, by a crafty arrangement of fences, he had made it impossible for anyone to reach the lower country without passing through the crooked street of Old Fortuna.

During the first and the second trip of the strange Americans he kept within his dignity, hoping perhaps that they would stop at his store, where they could be engaged in conversation; but upon their return from a third trip, after Cruz Mendez had gone through with their supplies, he cast his proud Spanish reserve to the winds and waylaid them on the street.

"Buenas tardes, señores," he saluted, as they rode past his store, and then, seeing that they did not break their gait, he held up his hand for them to stop.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, speaking genially but with an affected Spanish lisp. "I have seen you ride past several times, you working for the big company up at New Fortuna?"

"No, señor," answered De Lancey courteously. "We are working for ourselves."

"Good!" responded Aragon with fatherly approval. "It is better so. And are you looking at mines?"

"Yes," said De Lancey non-committally. "We are looking at mines."

"You can't help palavering 'em, can you, Phil?" he said. "No matter what you think about 'em, you got to be polite, haven't you? Well, that's the way you get drawn in—next time you go by now the old man will pump you dry—see. No, sir, the only way to get along with these Mexicans is not to have a thing to do with 'em. No savvy—that's my motto!"

"Well, muchas gracias is mine," asserted De Lancey. "It doesn't cost anything, and it buys a whole lot."

"Sure," agreed Bud; "but we ain't buying nothing from him—he's the one particular hombre we want to steer clear of, and keep him guessing as long as we can. That's my view of it, pardner."

"Oh, that's all right," laughed De Lancey. "He won't get anything out of me—that is, nothing but a bunch of hot air. Say, he's a shrewd-looking old guinea, isn't he? Did you notice that game eye? He kept it kind of drooped, almost shut, until he came to the point—and then he opened it up real fierce. Reminds me of a big fighting owl waking up in the daytime. But you just watch me handle him, and if I don't fool the old boy at every turn it'll be because I run out of bull."

"Well, you can hand him the bull if you want to," grumbled Bud, "but the first time you give anything away I'm going to pick such a row with the old cuss that we'll have to make a new trail to get by. So leave 'im alone, if you ever expect to see that girl!"

A close association with Phil De Lancey had left Bud not unaware of his special weaknesses, and Phil was undoubtedly romantic. Given a harred and silent house, shut off from the street by whitened walls and a veranda screened with flowers, and the queering eyes of Mr. De Lancey would turn to those barred windows as certainly as the "die seeks the pole."

On every morning and going, he had opened the Aragon house from the vine-covered corridor in front to the walled-in summer garden behind, hoping to surprise a view of the beautiful daughter of the house. And unless rumor and Don Juan were at fault, she was indeed worthy of his solitude—a gay and sprightly creature, brown-eyed like her mother and with the same glorious chestnut hair.

Already those dark, mischievous eyes had been busy and at the last big dance at Fortuna, she had set many heads whirling. Twice within two years her father, in a rage, had sent her away to school in order to break off some ill-considered love affair; and now a battle royal was being waged between Manuel del Rey, the dashing captain of the rurales stationed at Fortuna, and Felis Luna, son of a rich haciendado down in the hot country, for the honor of her hand.

What more romantic, then, than that a handsome American, stepping gracefully into the breach, should keep the haughty lovers from eloping, each other by bearing off the prize himself?

So reasoned Philip De Lancey, musing upon the ease with which he could act the part; but for prudential purposes, he said nothing of his vaunting ambitions, knowing full well that they would receive an active veto from Bud.

For, while De Lancey did most of the talking, and a great deal of the thinking for the partnership, Hooker

looked back, he was left standing in the middle of the street. "That's the way to handle 'im," observed Hooker, as they trotted briskly down the lane. "Leave 'im to me!"

"It'll only make him mad," objected De Lancey absently. "What do you want to do about that?"

"He's mad already," answered Bud. "I want to quarrel with him, so he can't ask us any questions. Get him so mad he won't talk—then it'll be a fair fight and none of this snake-in-the-grass business."

"Yes, but don't put it on him," protested De Lancey. "Let him be friendly for a while. If he wants to, 'Can't be friends," said Bud laconically; "we jumped his claim."

"Maybe he doesn't want it," suggested Phil hopefully. "He's dropped a lot of money on it."

"You bet, he wants it," returned Hooker, with conviction. "I'm going to camp out there—the old boy is liable to jump us."

"Aw, you're crazy, Bud!" cried Phil; but Hooker only smiled.

"You know what happened to Kruger," he answered. "I'll tell you what, we got to keep our eye open around here."

They rode on to the mine, which was only about five miles from Fortuna, without discussing the matter further; for, while Phil had generally been the leader in this particular case Kruger had put Bud in charge, and he seemed determined to have his way so far as Aragon was concerned. In the ordering of supplies and the laying out of development work he deferred to Phil in everything, but for tactics he preferred his own judgment.

It was by instinct rather than reason that he chose to fight, and people who follow their instincts are hard to change. So they put in the day in making careful measurements, according to the memoranda that Kruger had given them; having satisfied themselves as to the approximate locality of the lost vein, they turned back again toward town with their heads full of cunning schemes.

Since it was the pleasure of the Señor Aragon to make war on all who entered his preserves, they checked an attempt on his part to locate the lead by driving stakes to the north of their ledge; and, still further to throw him off, they decided to mark time for a while by doing dead work on a cut. Such an approach would be needed to reach the mouth of their tunnel.

At the same time it would give steady employment to Mendez and keep him under their eye, and as soon as Aragon showed his hand they could make out their final papers in peace and send them to the City of Mexico.

And not until those final papers were recorded and the transfer duly made would they so much as pick a pick into the hillsides or show a lump of quartz.

But for a Spanish gentleman supposed to be all supple curves and sinuous advances, Don Cipriano turned out somewhat of a surprise, for when they rode back through his narrow streets, again he met them squarely in the road and called them to a halt.

"By what right, gentlemen—" he demanded in a voice tremulous with rage. "—by what right do you take possession of my mine, upon which I have paid the taxes all these years, and conspire with that rogue, Cruz Mendez, to cheat me out of it? It is mine, I tell you, no matter what the agente mineral may say, and—"

"Your mine, nothing!" broke in Hooker, scornfully, speaking in the ungrammatical border-Mexican of the cowboys. "We meet one Mexican—he shows us the mine—that is all. The expert of the mining agent says it is vacant—we take it. Stawano!"

He waved the matter aside with masterful indifference, and Aragon burst into a torrent of excited Spanish.

"Very likely, very likely," commented Bud dryly, without listening to a word. "At, señor, no piense!"

A wave of fury swept over the Spaniard's face as this time and he turned suddenly to De Lancey.

"Very well," he said at last. "I perceive that you are a gentleman and have acted in good faith—it is only that that fellow Mendez has deceived you. Let it pass, then—I will not quarrel with you, my friend—it is the fortune of war. But stop at my store when you go by and come and see me. It is indeed lonely here at times, and perhaps I can pass a pleasant hour with you. My name, señor, is Don Cipriano Aragon y Tres Palacios—and yours?"

He held out his hand with a little gesture. "Philip De Lancey," replied Phil, clasping the proffered hand, and with many expressions of good-will and esteem, with a touching of hats and a wiggling of fingers from the distance, they parted, in spite of Bud, the best of friends.

CHAPTER VIII.

There are some people in this world with whom it seems impossible to quarrel, notably the parents of attractive daughters.

Perhaps, if Gracia Aragon had not been watching him from the window Philip De Lancey would not have been quite so cordial with her father—at least, that was what Hooker thought, and he was so badly peeved at the way things had gone that he said it, too.

Then, of course, they quarreled, and, one thing leading to another, Phil told Bud he had a very low way of speaking. Bud replied that, whatever his deficiencies of speech might be, he was not fool enough to be drawn in by a skirt, and Phil rebuked him again. Then, with a scornful grunt, Bud Hooker rode on in silence and they said no more about it.

It was a gay life that they led at night for the Fortuna hotel was filled with men of their kind, since all the staid married men had either moved across the line with their families or were under orders to come straight home.

In the daytime the hotel was nearly deserted, for every man in town was working for the company; but in the evening, when they gathered around the massive stove, it was a merry company indeed.

There were college men, full of good stories and stories not so good, world-wanderers and adventurers with such tales of the East and West as never have been written in books. But not a college boy could match stories with Phil De Lancey, and few wanderers there were who could tell him anything new about Mexico. Also, when it came to popular songs, he knew both the words and the tune. So he was much in demand, and Don Juan passed many drinks across the bar because of him.

In all such festivities the two partners stayed together, Bud with a broad, languid grin, listening to the end, and Phil, his eyes alight with liquor and good cheer, talking and laughing far into the night.

Outside the winter winds were still cold and the Mexicans went wrapped to the eyebrows; but within the merry company was slow to quit, and Phil, making up for the lonely months when he had entirely lost an audience, sat long in the seat of honor and was always the last to go.

But on the evening after their spat Bud sat off to one side, and even Phil's sprightly and ventriloquist conversation with the little girl behind the door called forth only a smiling smile.

Bud was thinking, and when engaged in that arduous occupation eyes the saucy little girl behind the door could not beguile him.

But, after he had studied it all out and come to a definite conclusion, he did not deliver an ultimatum. The old, good-natured smile simply came back to his rugged face; he rolled a cigarette; and then for the rest of the evening he lay back and enjoyed the show. Only in the morning, when they went out to the corral to get their horses, he carried his war-horse with him and, after throwing the saddle on to Cooper Bottom, he did the same for their spare mount.

"What are you going to pack out, Bud?" inquired Phil, and Bud stopped his canvas-covered bed for an answer. "None, with a heave, he snatched it out of the harness-room where it had been stored, and slung it deftly across the pack-saddle."

"Why, what's the matter?" said De Lancey, when they were on their way; "don't you like the horse?"

"That's fine," commented Bud, "but I reckon I'd better camp out at the mine. Want to keep my eye on that Mexican of ours."

"Aw, he's all right!" suggested Phil. "Sure," said Bud. "I ain't afraid he'll steal something, but he might take a notion to quit the company."

"Why, what for?" challenged De Lancey. "He's got his wife and family here."

"That's nothing to a Mexican!" countered Bud. "But I ain't figuring on the excuse he'd give that won't buy me nothing. That I want to go to keep him from going, because if we lose that 'ax now, we lose our mine."

nothing—except what I say. If you want to palaver around with Aragon, go to it. I'll round up Mendez and his family and keep 'em right there at the mine until we get them papers signed—after that I don't care what happens."

"Oh, all right," murmured De Lancey in a subdued tone; but if his conscience smote him for the moment it did not lead to the making of any sentimental New Year's resolutions, for he stopped when he came to the store and exchanged salutations with Aragon, who was lounging expectantly before his door.

"Buenos dias, Don Cipriano!" he hailed. "How are you this morning?"

"Ah, good morning, Don Felipe," responded Aragon, stepping forth from the shadow of the door. "I am very well, thank you—and you?"

"The same," answered Phil, as if it were a great piece of news. "It is fine weather—no?"

"Yes, but a little dry!" said Aragon, and so they passed it back and forth in the accepted Spanish manner, while Bud hooked one leg over the horn of his saddle and regarded the hacienda with languid eyes.

But as his gaze swept the length of the vine-covered corridor it halted for a moment and a slow smile came over his face. In the green depths of a passion-flower vine he had detected a quick birdlike motion; and then suddenly, like a transformation scene, he beheld a merry face, framed and



It Was a Merry Company, Indeed.

Illuminated by soft, golden locks, peering out at him from among the blossoms. Except for that brief smile, he made no sign that he saw her, and when he looked up again the face had disappeared.

Don Cipriano showed them about his mescal plant, where his men kept a continual stream of liquid fire running from the copper worm, and gave each a raw drink; but though De Lancey gazed admiringly at the house, and praised the orange trees that hung over the garden wall, Spanish hospitality could go no farther, and the visit ended in a series of adioses and much-as-gracias.

"Quick work!" commented Phil, as they rode toward the mine; "the old man has got over his grooch."

"Um," mused Bud, with a quiet, brooding smile; and the next time he rode into town he looked for the naked face among the flowers and smiled again. That was the way Gracia Aragon affected them all.

He did not point out the place to Phil, nor betray her by any sign. All he did was to glance at her once and then ride on his way, but somehow his heart stood still when he met her eyes and his days became filled with a passive, brooding melancholy.

"What's the matter, Bud?" railed Phil, after he had pulled him for a week; "you're getting mighty quiet lately. Got another hunch—like that one you had up at Agua Negra?"

"None," grinned Bud; "but I'll tell you one thing—if old Aragon don't spring something pretty soon I'm going to get nosy. He's too dog-goned good-natured about this."

"Maybe he thinks we're stuck," suggested De Lancey.

"Well, he's awfully happy about something," said Bud. "I can see by the way he droops that game eye of his—and smiles that way—that he knows we're working for him. If we don't get a title to this mine, every tap of work we do on it is all to the good for him, that's a cinch. So sit down now and think it out—where's the joker?"

"Well," mused Phil, "the gold is here somewhere. He knows we've got it, and he knows we're not right after it, the way we're driving this cut in. Our permit is good—he hasn't filed to buffalo Mendez—and he's a cinch he can't denounce the claim himself."

"Maybe he figures on letting us do all the work and pay all the development fees and then spring something big on old One-Eye," pronounced Bud. "Scare 'im up or by 'im, or and have him transfer the title to him. That's the way he worked Kruger."

know we're in bad somewhere, but burying up won't help none. "Now I tell you what we'll do—you go to the mining agent and get copies of all our papers and send them up to that Gadsden lawyer. I'm going to go down and board with Mendez and see if I can read his heart."

So they separated, and while Phil stayed in town to look over the records Bud ate his beans and tortillas with the Mendez family.

They were a happy little family, comfortably installed in the stone house that Mendez had built, and rapidly getting fat on three full meals a day. From his tent farther up the canyon Bud could look down and watch the children at play and see the comely Indian wife as she cooked by the open fire.

Certainly no one could be more innocent and contented than she was, and El Tuerto was all bows and protestations of gratitude. And yet, you never can tell.

Bud had moved out of the new house to furnish quarters for El Tuerto and had favored him in every way; but this same consideration might easily be misinterpreted, for the Mexicans are slow to understand kindness.

So, while on the one hand he had treated them generously, he had always kept his distance, lest they be tempted to presume. But now, with Phil in town for a few days, he took his meals with Maria, who was too awed to say a word, and made friends with the dogs and the children.

The way to the dog's heart was easy, almost direct, and he finally won the attention of little Pancho and Josefa with a well-worn Sunday supplement. This gaudy institution, with its spicy stories and startling illustrations, had penetrated even to the wilds of Sonora, and every Sunday as regularly as the paper came Bud sat down and had his laugh over the funny page.

But to Pancho, who was six years old and curious, this same highly colored sheet was a mystery of mysteries, and when he saw the big American laughing he crept up and looked at it wistfully.

"Mira," said Bud, laying his finger upon the smiling visage of one of the comic characters, "look, and I will tell you the story."

And so, with laborious care, he translated the colored fun, while the little Mendezes squirmed with excitement and leaped with joy. Even the simple souls of El Tuerto and Maria were moved by the comings, and Mendez became so interested that he learned the words by heart, the better to explain them to others.

But as for Mexican treachery, Bud could find none of it. In fact, finding them so simple-hearted and good-natured, he became half ashamed of his early suspicions and waited for the return of Phil to explain Don Cipriano's complacency.

But the next Sunday, as Bud lay reading in his tent, the mystery solved itself. Cruz Mendez came up from the house, hat in hand and an apologetic smile on his face, and after the customary roundabout remarks he asked the boss as a favor if he would lend him the page of comic pictures.

"Seguro!" assented Bud, rolling over and fumbling for the funny sheet; then, falling to find it instantly, he inquired: "What do you want it for?"

"Ah, to show to my boy!" explained El Tuerto, his one eye lighting up with pride.

"Who—Pancho?"

"Ah, no, señor," answered Mendez simply, "my boy in La Fortuna, the one you have not seen."

Bud stopped fumbling for the paper and sat up suddenly. Here was a new light on their faithful servant, and one that might easily take away from his value as a dummy locator.

"Oh!" he said, and then: "How many children have you, Cruz?"

Cruz smiled deprecatingly, as parents will, and turned away.

"By which woman?" he inquired, and Bud became suddenly very calm, fearing the worst. For if Cruz was not legally married to Maria, he could not transfer the mining claim.

I should like to show the picture paper to my boy."

Bud regarded him in meditative silence, then he rose up and began a determined search for the funny sheet.

"All right," he said, handing it over, "and here is a panocha of sugar for your little girl—the one in La Fortuna. It is nothing," he added, as Mendez began his thanks.

"But oh, you marrying Mexican," he continued, relapsing into his mother tongue as El Tuerto disappeared; "you certainly have dished us right!"

(To be continued.)

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Micawber Wouldn't Shine as a Gymnast, Would He?

YOU remember how Mr. Micawber, in Dickens' story, was always waiting for something to turn up. Said one to David Copperfield: "You are no stranger to the fact that there have been periods of my life when it has been requisite that I should pursue until certain expected events should turn up, when it has been necessary that I should fall back before making what I trust I shall not be accused of presumption in terming a square. The moment in one of those momentous stages in the life of man. You find me fallen back for a spring, and I have very reason to believe that a vigorous leap will shortly be the result."