

# RAINBOW'S END

A NOVEL  
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"THE IRON TRAIL" "THE SPOILERS" "HEART OF THE SUNSET" ETC.  
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Following Judson's glance, O'Reilly beheld an emaciated figure lying in the shade of a nearby guava bush. The man was clad in filthy rags, his face was dirty and overgrown with a month's beard; a pair of restless eyes stared unblinkingly at the brazen sky. His lips were moving; from them issued a steady patter of words, but otherwise he showed no sign of life.

"You said he was starving," Johnnie dismounted and leant Judson a hand with his task.

"That's what I thought at first, but he's sick. I suppose it's that infernal duncun fever. We can swing him between our horses, and—"

Judson looked up to discover that Johnnie was poised rigidly, his mouth open, his hands halted in midair. The sick man's voice had risen, and O'Reilly, with a peculiar expression of amazement upon his face, was straining his ears to hear what he said.

"Eh? What's the matter?" Judson inquired.

For a moment O'Reilly remained frozen in his attitude, then without a word he strode to the sufferer. He bent forward, staring into the vacant, upturned face. A cry burst from his throat, a cry that was like a sob, and, kneeling, he gathered the frail, filthy figure into his arms.

"Esteban!" he cried. "Esteban! This is O'Reilly. O'Reilly! Don't you know me? O'Reilly, your friend, your brother! For God's sake, tell me what they've done to you! Look at me, Esteban! Look at me! Look at me! Oh, Esteban!"

Such eagerness, such thankfulness, such passionate pity were in his friend's hoarse voice that Judson drew closer. He noticed that the faintest flame of reason flickered for an instant in the sick man's hollow eyes; then they began to rove again, and the same rustling whisper recommenced. O'Reilly held the boy tenderly in his arms; tears rolled down his cheeks as he implored Esteban to hear and to heed him.

"Try to hear me! Try!" There was fierce agony in the cry. "Where is Rosa? . . . Rosa? . . . You're safe now; you can tell me. . . . You're safe with O'Reilly. . . . I came back . . . I came back for you and Rosa. . . . Where is she? . . . Is she—dead?"

Other men were assembling now. The column was ready to move, but Judson signaled to Colonel Lopez and made known the identity of the sick stranger. The colonel came forward swiftly and laid a hand upon O'Reilly's shoulder, saying:

"So! You were right, after all. Esteban Varona didn't die. God must have sent us to San Antonio to deliver him."

"He's sick, sick!" O'Reilly said, huskily. "Those Spaniards! Look what they've done to him!" His voice changed. He cried, fiercely: "Well,



"Esteban! This is O'Reilly!"

"I'm late again. I'm always just a little bit too late. He'll die before he can tell me—"

"Wait! Take hold of yourself. We'll do all that can be done to save him. Now come, we must be going, or all San Antonio will be upon us."

O'Reilly roused. "Put him in my arms," he ordered. "I'll carry him to camp myself."

But Lopez shook his head, saying, gently: "It's a long march, and the litter would be better for him. Thank heaven we have an angel of mercy awaiting us, and she will know how to make him well."

When the troop resumed its retreat Esteban Varona lay suspended upon a

swinging bed between O'Reilly and Judson's horses. Although they carried him as carefully as they could throughout that long hot journey, he never ceased his babbling and never awoke to his surroundings.

### CHAPTER XV.

#### Norine Takes Charge.

During the next few days O'Reilly had reason to bless the happy chance which had brought Norine Evans to Cuba. During the return journey from San Antonio de los Baños he had discovered how really ill Esteban Varona was, how weak his hold upon life. After listening to his ravings, O'Reilly began to fear that the poor fellow's mind was permanently affected. It was an appalling possibility, one to which he could not reconcile himself. To think that somewhere in that fevered brain was perhaps locked the truth about Rosa's fate, if not the secret of her whereabouts, and yet to be unable to write an intelligent answer to a single question, was intolerable. The hours of that ride were among the longest O'Reilly had ever passed.

But Norine Evans gave him new heart. She took complete charge of the sick man upon his arrival in camp; then in her brisk, matter-of-fact way she directed O'Reilly to go and get some much-needed rest. Esteban was ill, very ill, she admitted; there was no competent doctor near, and her own facilities for nursing were primitive indeed; nevertheless, she expressed confidence that she could cure him, and reminded O'Reilly that nature has a blessed way of building up a resistance to environment. As a result of her good cheer O'Reilly managed to enjoy a night's sleep.

He was up at daylight to offer his services in caring for Esteban Varona, but Norine declined them.

"His fever is down a little and he has taken some nourishment," she reported. "That food you boys risked your silly lives for may come in handy, after all."

"I dare say he won't be able to talk to me today?" O'Reilly ventured.

"Not today, nor for many days, I'm afraid."

"If you don't mind, then, I'll hang around and listen to what he says," he told her, wistfully. "He might drop a word about Rosa."

"To be sure. So far he's scarcely mentioned her. I can't understand much that he says, of course, but Mrs. Ruiz tells me it's all jumbled and quite unintelligible."

It was a balmy, languid morning about two weeks after O'Reilly's return to the City Among the Leaves. In a hammock swung between two trees Esteban Varona lay, listening to the admonitions of his nurse.

Johnnie O'Reilly had just bade them both a hearty good morning and now Norine was saying: "One hour, no more. You had a temperature again last night, and it came from talking too much. Remember, it takes me just one hour to make my rounds, and if you are not through with your tales of blood and battle when I get back you'll have to finish them tomorrow." With a nod and a smile she left.

As Esteban looked after her his white teeth gleamed and his hollow face lit up.

"She brings me new life," he told O'Reilly. "She is so strong, so healthy, so full of life herself. She is wonderful! When I first saw her bending over

me I thought I was dreaming. Sometimes, even yet, I think she cannot be real. But she is, eh?"

"She is quite substantial," O'Reilly smiled. "All the sick fellows talk as you do."

Esteban looked up quickly; his face darkened. "She—er—nurses others, eh? I'm not the only one?"

"Well, hardly."

There was a brief pause; then Esteban shifted his position and his tone changed. "Tell me, have you heard any news?"

"Not yet, but we will hear some before long I'm sure."

"Your faith does as much for me as this lady's care. But when you go away, when I'm alone, when I begin to think—"

"Don't think too much; don't permit yourself to doubt," O'Reilly said, quickly. "Take my word for it, Rosa is alive and we'll find her somewhere, somehow. General Gomez will soon have word of her. That's what I've been waiting for—that and what you might have to tell me."

"You know all that I know now and everything that has happened to me."

"I don't know how you came to be in a cell in San Antonio de los Baños, two hundred miles from the place you were killed. That is still a mystery."

"It is very simple, amigo. Let me see: I had finished telling you about the fight at La Joya. I was telling you how I fainted. Some good people found me a few hours after I lost consciousness. They supposed I had been at-

tacked by guerrillas and left for dead. Finding that I still had life in me, they took me home with them. They were old friends from Matanzas by the name of Valdes—cultured people who had fled the city and were hiding in the mangua like the rest of us."

"Not Valdes, the notary?"

"The very same. Alberto Valdes and his four daughters. Heaven guided them to me. Alberto was an old man; he had hard work to provide food for his girls. Nevertheless, he refused to abandon me. Oh, they were faithful, patient people! You see, I had walked east instead of west, and now I was miles away from home, and the country between was swarming with Spaniards who were burning, destroying, killing. You wouldn't know Matanzas, O'Reilly. It is a desert."

"I finally became able to drag myself around the hut. But I had no means of sending word to Rosa, and the uncertainty nearly made me crazy. My clothes had rotted from me; my bones were just under the skin. I must have been a shocking sight. Then one day there came a fellow traveling east with messages for Gomez. He was one of Lopez' men, and he told me that Lopez had gone to the Rubi Hills with Maceo, and that there were none of our men left in the province. He told me other things, too. It was from him that I learned—" Esteban Varona's thin hands clutched the edges of his hammock and he rolled his head weakly from side to side. "It was he who told me about Rosa. He said that Cobo had ravaged the Yumuri and that my sister—was gone!"

"There, there! We know better now," O'Reilly said, soothingly.

"It was a hideous story, a story of rape, murder. I wonder that I didn't go mad. It never occurred to me to doubt, and as a matter of fact the fellow was honest enough; he really believed what he told me. After the man had finished I felt the desire to get away from all I had known and loved, to leave Matanzas for new fields and give what was left of me to the cause. I was free to enlist, since I couldn't reach Lopez, and I came to join our forces in the Orient."

"That is how you found me in this province. Lopez' man never delivered these dispatches, for we were taken crossing the trocha—at least I was taken, for Pablo was killed. They'd have made an end of me, too, I dare say, only I was so weak. It seems a century since that night. My memory doesn't serve me very well from that point, for they jalled me, and I grew worse. I was out of my head a good deal."

The two men fell silent for a while. Esteban lay with closed eyes, exhausted. O'Reilly gave himself up to frowning thought. His thoughts were not pleasant; he could not, for the life of him, believe in Rosa's safety so implicitly as he had led Esteban to suppose; his efforts to cheer the other had sapped his own supply of hope, leaving him a prey to black misgivings. He was glad when Norine Evans' return put an end to his speculations.

"Have you harrowed this poor man's feelings sufficiently for once?" she inquired of O'Reilly.

"I have. I'll agree to talk about nothing unpleasant hereafter."

Esteban turned to his nurse. "There is something I want to tell you both."

"Wait until tomorrow," Norine advised.

But he persisted: "No! I must tell it now. First, however, did either of you discover an old coin in any of my pockets—an old Spanish doubloon?"

"That doubloon again!" Norine lifted her hands protestingly, and cast a meaning look at O'Reilly. "You talked about nothing else for a whole week. Let me feel your pulse."

Esteban surrendered his hand with suspicious readiness.

"You were flat broke when we got you," O'Reilly declared.

"Probably. I seem to remember that somebody stole it."

"Doubloons! Pieces of eight! Golden guineas!" exclaimed Norine. "Why those are pirate coins! They remind me of Treasure Island; of Long John Silver and his wooden leg; of Ben Gunn and all the rest."

Esteban smiled uncomprehendingly. "Yes! Well, this has to do with treasure of the Varonas. My father buried it. He was very rich, you know, and

he was afraid of the Spaniards. O'Reilly knows the story."

Johnnie assented with a grunt. "Sure! I know all about it."

Esteban raised himself to his elbow. "You think it's a myth, a joke. Well, it's not. I know where it is. I found it!"

Norine gasped; Johnnie spoke soothingly:

"Don't get excited, old man; you've talked too much today."

"Ha!" Esteban fell back upon his pillow. "I haven't any fever. I'm as sane as ever I was. That treasure exists, and that doubloon gave me the clue to its whereabouts. Don Esteban, my father, was cunning; he could hide things better than a magpie. It remained for me to discover his trick."

"He is raving," O'Reilly declared, with a sharp stare at his friend.

The girl turned loyally to her patient. "I'll believe you, Mr. Varona. I always believe everything about buried treasure. The bigger the treasure the more implicitly I believe in it. I simply adore pirates and such things; if I were a man I'd be one. Do you know, I've always been tempted to bury my money and then go look for it."

"There is no doubt that my father had a great deal of money at one time," Esteban began; "he was the richest man in the richest city of Cuba."

O'Reilly shook his head dubiously and braced his back against a tree trunk; there was a look of mild disapprobation on his face as he listened to the familiar story of Don Esteban and the slave, Sebastian. When Esteban

was raving, Norine drew a long breath.

"Oh! That lays over any story I ever heard. To think that the deeds and the jewels and everything are in the well at this minute! Suppose somebody finds it?" Norine was agast at the thought.

"Not much chance of that. The treasure has lain there for a generation, and the story itself is almost forgotten," Esteban turned triumphantly to O'Reilly, saying, "Now, then, do you think I'm so crazy?"

O'Reilly didn't have it in his heart to say exactly what he really thought. What he more than half suspected was that some favored fancy had formed lodgment in Esteban's brain.

"It's an interesting theory," he admitted. "Anyhow, there is no danger of the treasure being uncovered very soon. Cuetto had a good look and made himself ridiculous. You'll have ample chance to do likewise when the war is over."

"You must help me find it," said Esteban. "We shall all share the fortune equally, you two, Rosa and I."

"We? Why should we share in it?" Norine asked.

"I owe it to you. Didn't O'Reilly rescue me from a dungeon? Haven't you nursed me back to health? Don't I owe my life to you both?"

"Nonsense! I, for one, shan't take a dollar of it."

"Oh, but you must. I insist. Nursing is a poorly paid profession. Wouldn't you like to be rich?"

"Profession! Poorly paid!" Norine spluttered, angrily. "As if I'd take pay!"

"As if I would accept a great service and forget it, like some miserable beggar!" Esteban replied stiffly.

O'Reilly laughed out. "Don't let's quarrel over the spoil until we get it," said he. "That's the way with all treasure-hunters. They invariably fall out and go to fighting. To avoid bloodshed, I'll agree to sell my interest cheap, for cash. My share of the famous Varona fortune going for a dollar!"

"There! He doesn't believe a word of it," Esteban said.

Norine gave an impatient shrug. "Some people wouldn't believe they were alive unless they saw their breath on a looking-glass. Goodness! How I hate a sneering skeptic, a wet blanket."

O'Reilly rose with one arm shielding his face. "In the interest of friendship, I withdraw. A curse on these buried treasures, anyhow. We shall yet come to blows."

As he walked away he heard Norine say: "Don't pay any attention to him. We'll go and dig it up ourselves, and we won't wait until the war is over."

An hour later Esteban and his nurse had their heads together. They were still talking of golden ingots and from the Caribbean the size of when they looked up to see

O'Reilly running toward them. He was visibly excited; he waved and shouted at them. He was panting when he arrived.

"News! From Matanzas!" he cried. "Gomez' man has arrived."

Esteban struggled to rise, but Norine restrained him. "Rosa? What does he say? Quick!"

"Good news! She left the Pan de Matanzas with the two negroes. She went into the city before Cobo's raid."

Esteban collapsed limply. He closed his eyes, his face was very white. He crossed himself weakly.

"The letter is definite. It seems they were starving. They obeyed Weyler's bando. They're in Matanzas now."

"Do you hear, Esteban?" Norine shook her patient by the shoulder. "She's alive. Oh, can't you see that it always pays to believe the best?"

"Alive! Safe!" Esteban whispered. His eyes, when he opened them, were swimming; he clutched Norine's hand tightly; his other hand he extended to O'Reilly. "A reconcentrado! In Matanzas! Well, that's good. We have friends there—they'll not let her starve. This makes a new man of me. See! I'm strong again. I'll go to her."

"You'll go?" quickly cried Miss Evans. "You'll go! You're not strong enough. It would be suicide. You, with a price upon your head! Everybody knows you there. Matanzas is virtually a walled city. There's sickness, too—yellow fever, typhus—"

"Exactly. And hunger, also. I suppose no one has taken Rosa in? Those concentration camps aren't nice places for a girl."

"But wait! I have friends in Washington. They're influential. They will cable the American consul to look after her. Anyhow, you mustn't think of returning to Matanzas," Norine faltered; her voice caught unexpectedly and she turned her face away.

O'Reilly nodded shortly. "You're a sick man," he agreed. "There's no need for both of us to go."

Esteban looked up. "Then you—"

"I leave at once. The Old Man has given me a commission to General Bencourt, and I'll be on my way in an hour. The moon is young; I must cross the trocha before—"

"That trocha!" Esteban was up on his elbow again. "Be careful there, O'Reilly. They keep a sharp lookout, and it's guarded with barbed wire. Be sure you cut every strand. Yes, and muffle your horse's hoofs, too, in crossing the railroad track. That's how we were detected. Pablo's horse struck a rail, and they fired at the sound. He fell at the first volley, riddled. Oh, I know that trocha!"

(To Be Continued.)

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