

Jim the Conqueror

By Peter B. Kyne

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WNU Service

CHAPTER XIII—Continued

Hobart looked back. In the distance he could see his five men following him. He waved his hat and one of them waved in return; so without further ado he rode down to join Roberta.

The girl held up her hand, enjoining silence, as Hobart reined in beside her. "Listen!" she commanded.

He bent his head. Faintly to him came the report of rifles.

"There were twenty herders with the band an hour ago," the girl reported. "Don Jaime counted them. There doesn't appear to be that many now."

Hobart swept the scene with his binoculars. "Ten! Half the gang went ahead to preempt the water, and Don Jaime has walked into them. He's alive and kicking, though. If he were not, there wouldn't be any shooting. And Julio hasn't got there yet. Well, he'll be careful. He'll probably come in from the rear and help the boss out. I wish I knew whether Jaime is in the old corral or at the water-hole. Smokeless powder, you see. One cannot tell. But the sheep move forward! That indicates confidence. Yes, Dingle has the water!"

"Then Don Jaime's fighting ten of them."

"Looks that way. He must be in the old corral, because he wouldn't last a minute in the open. The corral is boarded close and the light is falling. If he keeps moving he will not be too easy to hit."

Julio rode out into the open a quarter of a mile south of them. Instantly Hobart pulled his rifle, sighted carefully and threw up the dirt in front of the boy to attract his attention. When Julio pulled up and looked around to see where the attack came from, Hobart waved his hat at him and moved out from the sheltering fringe of bushes onto the grassy floor of the valley, Roberta by his side. Instantly Julio recognized them.

"You stay where you are, girl," Ken Hobart commanded. "My other five men will be riding down the hill pretty soon. You tell them my orders are to charge the men with the sheep immediately."

"What are you going to do, Mr. Hobart?"

"I'm going to join Julio, and the two of us will advance along the south side of this valley toward the water-hole. The range will be too long for the herders with the sheep to stop us, I think. Jimmy's in a jackpot and needs help mighty bad, so Julio and I will furnish what we can. Adios!"

He galloped away diagonally across the valley, motioning for Julio to join him. The boy did not hesitate. Roberta watched them in an agony of apprehension.

The herders with the sheep were firing at Hobart and Julio, galloping across their front. Ken had stated that the range would be too long for effective fire by men not versed in the science of accurate shooting at extreme ranges, but nevertheless the girl saw Julio's pinto go down, saw the boy shoot out over the animal's neck. He was up instantly and back beside the horse.

"Getting his rifle," Roberta thought. Ken Hobart had pulled up and was riding back to Julio, who, in turn, was running to meet him. There was not an instant's pause in the stride of the horse, yet Julio mounted double behind Hobart, the horse whirled, and the daring pair were on their way again.

There, alone at the foot of the hill watching this drama, Roberta prayed for those men as she had never prayed before; she cried out in agony when Ken Hobart's horse went to its knees, rose again—and stood still. Even one so unversed in warfare as Roberta could realize that the poor brute had been hit and crippled. She saw Hobart and Julio dismount and, kneeling some twenty feet apart, open fire on the distant herders as calmly as if shooting at a mark!

And then, over the crest behind her, came the five men detailed to follow Ken Hobart. They came down the slope at a fast gallop, spurred on by the sounds of conflict in the valley below, but slackened speed as they sighted the girl, holding up her hand in a signal to halt.

She trembled so she could, with difficulty, speak coherently. "Don Jaime—engaged at the water-hole with ten men—Ken Hobart and Julio over south—shooting at the herders—Ken says—rear attack."

The three American riders gazed at her, not quite comprehending, desirous, perhaps, of receiving more explicit instructions in such an emergency.

"What are you standing there for?" Roberta cried hysterically. "Follow me. I'll show you." With a savage little dig of her dull dress spurs she was off, the five men streaming behind her. Across the northern flank of the valley they raced, the patter of rifle fire from the herders probably drowning the sound of their thudding approach, for they were within a hundred yards of the nearest men before the latter saw them. One of them fired at Roberta. . . . She thrilled with a cold fear and a wild exaltation as the bullet whispered past her head . . .

afterward she had a faint recollection of a dark, frightened, but defiant face that loomed for an instant in front of her before she rode the man down. Pistol shots . . . then a backward look. Behind her the five rode with upraised pistols, flourishing them at her, yelling a fierce approbation of her leadership.

The sheep, in panic, fled wildly, leaping over each other, bleating, leaving a cloud of grayish white dust behind them. Roberta rode into the cloud—rode through the fringe of stragglers, knocking them down, leaping over and among them. Her horse, plunging and swerving, with common sense rather uncommon in a horse, to avoid the woolly bodies under his feet, and Roberta was forced to ride as she had never ridden before. Pistols popped behind her. . . . She was clear of the sheep. . . . Her dull little riding academy spurs prodded her mount's flanks; the quirt rose and fell. . . .

She caught the gleam of sunshine as the last level rays of the dying day were reflected on a pool. Among some rocks beyond the pool three figures moved, the crackle of fire grew louder; she could discern the sharp, spiteful reverberation of it now. Where was the corral? Don Jaime was there, wounded, dying perhaps. . . .

She saw it—a circle of weather-beaten boards, nailed so close together that the fence appeared like a wall. Straight at it she drove her mount, realizing vaguely as she did so that it was a hurdle at least a foot higher than she had ever faced in sport.

She saw her horse's ears flicker, felt his stride slacken a little; then his head shot forward and his ears came up straight. Good horse! He was not going to refuse the jump! She felt him gather himself for the leap, and took a firm grip on the reins.

"Alley oop!" she cried.

While in midair she saw Don Jaime off on the right flank, standing in the bed of a wagon, firing over the fence; then she was over and inside the corral with him.

"Jimmy!" she shouted.

He turned, staring at her amazed. Then he jerked the bolt of his Springfield and yelled:

"Down! Flat!"

She rode up to the wagon, slipped off, pulled the rifle from the scabbard and untied the cartridge belt from her pommel. Then, with a slap on her horse's rump, she sent him trotting across the corral.

And then Don Jaime acted. He leaped down at her, his powerful arm swept her backward and off balance; she slid down his body gently to the ground and he threw himself beside her.

"Oh, my G—d, sweetheart, why did you come?" he almost moaned.

"Because I love you, Jaime Miguel Higuenes. You are in danger and I couldn't stay away, I'll help you, Jimmy. If you have to die I—want you to know before that happens—that life without you—will be desolate—"

He crooned to her in Spanish, his hot eyes devouring her, his grimy perspiring hands caressing her cheek. "I always knew you were a thoroughbred," he gulped finally. "Lie here and do not move. This is a private gift and you haven't been invited. I've got to keep moving. I've run miles from one side of this corral to the other, firing through knotholes and gaps in the boards. If I stay still they'll locate me and I can't afford that—now!"

He rolled away like a tumbleweed. A bullet crashed through the fence and struck where he had been lying a second before. And then Roberta proved herself a woman. She fainted.

CHAPTER XIV

She came to lying in Don Jaime's arms in the dry grass beside the water-hole. She looked up at him without understanding, then closed her eyes again.

"Well, Jimmy," she murmured presently.

"We're back in the sheep business again," he assured her solemnly.

A silence. Then: "Any casualties, Jimmy?"

"Yes. Three dead horses and two wounded and about a dozen sheep with broken backs and legs. It seems you rode over them. Ken Hobart's pinked, but nothing worse than what he's been used to. Adolfo de Haro, one of my riders, is dead, and Lambert, O'Grady, and Martinez Trujillo are badly hit, but I do not think they will die. Julio Ortiz has lost a little finger. Dingle and nine of his men are dead to date and the final returns from the river should make the affair unanimous. Fraser, Juan Espinosa, and Julio Ortiz are following them. They took our mounts and now I'll have to get busy, load our wounded on Dingle's chuck wagon and go home."

"Was that his chuck wagon in the corral?"

"Well, it used to be your Uncle Tom's, so I presume it's yours now. Dingle got here first, ran his chuck outfit into the old branding corral to camp for the night and turned his mules loose there. Then he occupied the rocks beyond this water-hole and waited to see what might turn up be-

fore dark. I turned up—unexpectedly—rode wide around the herders, approached the corral from the rear and had opened the gate and entered before either side discovered I was trapped. They couldn't see me clearly, but through the chinks in the corral boarding they could see something moving against the light. At that they wouldn't be sure that something was me, my horse, or their mules, and they didn't want to hit the mules, so they were careful.

"It was close work and after I'd moved around a lot and had located all the knot-holes and wide chinks in the boards I made them keep their heads down. Then when the firing started out on the flat, and they saw Ken's men, led by you, making a pistol charge on the men with the sheep, Dingle got cold feet. You rode through quite a barrage, sweetheart, but once you'd topped the corral they figured I had reinforcements, so they ran for their horses and rode south. That is, some of them did. I climbed upon the wagon seat and fanned the rear; as they fled down the south side of the valley they bumped into Ken and Julio, who emptied two saddles each. Do you know, darling, that you have a pistol bullet through the muscles of your back, rather well on the right side? Nothing fatal, but you'll sleep on your left side for a month!"

"I'm a little fool," Roberta murmured weakly.

"Yes, but a gallant little fool. You have some of your late Uncle Tom's ferocity and courage in you, Bobby. Oh yes, old Tom always preferred odds and good shelter in combat, but he would stand up to it when he had to. He couldn't be bluffed off his range and he forced me to make good."

"Are you hurt, Jimmy?"

"Not a scratch."

She raised her left arm and curled it around his neck; he lowered his face until his cheek touched hers. "You're such a terrible man!" she whispered. "Oh, such a terrible man!"

"But you love me, just the same?"

"Yes, but I wouldn't have told you—I'd have died first. It's all due to Ken Hobart. He told me—"

"Hush, sweetheart. He's confessed. He told you a few of the most wonderful lies on record, and when he found you'd been hit he cried like a baby. Swore that if you died he'd commit suicide—provided I didn't kill him first!" He lifted her to a sitting position. "There's old Cupid Hobart sitting over yonder. Look at him. He's still blubbering."

"Ken!" Roberta called weakly.

The ex-ranger got up and limped painfully over to her, knelt and took her hand. "You're a grand liar," she murmured, "and a grand fighter, and a grand friend—and now I'm going to decorate you, Ken Hobart—on the field of battle."

"Kiss her, fool," Don Jaime roared. "And you can kiss her again the day we're married. That's the privilege of the best man, but after that, believe you me, partner, she's not going to give away any more samples to hard-boiled old waddies like you."

"Oh, my God, forgive me," Ken sobbed childishly, and brushed her pale cheek with his tobacco-stained lips.

"On the lips, man," Don Jaime commanded. "You don't know good kissing when it's offered to you."

"I been chewin' tobacco," the victim protested.

"I don't care," Roberta assured him. "Jimmy chews it, too."

So the embarrassed wretch obeyed orders, and Roberta fainted again.

"Alley Oop!" She Cried.

"Don Jaime, this time it's your fault," Hobart almost moaned.

"Fan her and mop her face with this wet bandanna," Don Jaime commanded. He went to the corral and searched in the chuck wagon for the tin box containing the small field first-aid kit he suspected might be there. It was, so he returned to the girl, cut her clothing away from the wound and applied first aid in a singularly workmanlike manner. Thereafter he attended to his wounded men and when that task was done he caught the chuck wagon mules in the corral, har-

nessed and hitched them, spread out on the floor of the wagon box the bedding rolls he found there and loaded his casualties into the wagon.

"Home, James," he called cheerily to an imaginary chauffeur, climbed up onto the seat and gathered the reins. He peered down between his legs at Roberta's face upturned to him from the wagon bed.

"You'd have to live a few lifetimes in Dobbs Ferry, Westchester county, New York, before you'd get your teeth into life as deeply as you have in the past hour and a half," he assured her cheerfully. "Whose spunky old sweetheart are you?"

"Youse," said Roberta wearily.

"Giddap," yelled Don Jaime, and flicked the rumps of the leaders with his long whip. Gently he eased the mules into their collars and rolled away up the valley into a long draw that wound between the hills and eventually led them out to where the deserted motorcar waited. Here he transferred his wounded—Lambert O'Grady, and Martinez Trujillo on the rear seat, with Ken Hobart on the front seat. Lastly he lifted Roberta up into Hobart's arms, after which he braked the chuck wagon, unhitched the mules and tethered them to the wheels.

"Guess they can stand a night of watchful waiting," he declared, and climbed in back of the wheel. "And maybe I wasn't a smart boy when I put Mrs. Ganby on the payroll permanently. Nothing like having a good trained nurse around in an emergency like this. Hold on, everybody!"

He switched on the lights and toiled the car carefully down through the sage to the Los Algodones road, after which they made fast time to the ranch. Here one of the hands took the car and departed for Los Algodones to bring back the only two doctors there, while Don Jaime aided Mrs. Ganby to make her patients comfortable.

About noon the next day Jaime Miguel Higuenes came into Roberta's room and sat down on her bed.

"Caraveo and his men have just got back safely," he informed her. "Not a man of that bandit gang got back across the river, so I venture to say this has been a lesson to them. I imagine the Rancho Valle Verde will be regarded in beyond-the-Border circles as a good place to keep away from hereafter. How's the future Mrs. Higuenes feeling now?"

"Not very chipper, Jimmy. How do you feel?"

"Guiltily as a sheep-killing dog. Still every cloud has a silver lining. Dingle's dead and I imagine he died intestate. At any rate I have a suspicion nobody is going to come around and claim a ten per cent interest in my lambs. And I have a telegram from your Uncle Bill. It seems that when the news of the battle got to Los Algodones last night, via the man I sent after the doctors, the editor of the local palladium of liberty, the Los Algodones Herald, considered it of sufficient importance to put on the wire to the El Paso office of the United Press. So it was in the El Paso papers this morning, and your Uncle Bill read it there."

"Uncle Bill? Why, what was he doing in El Paso?"

"En route to Valle Verde, my dear. I'd wired the old gentleman a hearty invitation to come down and visit us, and he has accepted and was on his way." Thus Jaime Miguel Higuenes—the liar! However, he comforted himself with the thought that it was only a white lie and was to be preferred to violating his word of honor to Crooked Bill not to reveal to his niece the news that only two days previous he had been in Los Algodones, plotting against their peace and happiness.

"You're such a dear, Jimmy. So thoughtful. Dear Uncle Bill. I know he's missed me. Does he know I'm hurt?"

"Yes, the papers carried the story. I've wired him on the train to save his tears until our wedding day."

"Are we engaged, Jimmy? I can't remember that you've ever asked me to marry you."

"Oh, didn't I, sweetheart?"

"Never."

He rubbed his tanned chin and his lazy eyes roved over her whimsically. "I suppose I was afraid I might speak out of my turn, but of course when you came stampeding into that corral yesterday and broke the glad news to

me, I couldn't, as a man of honor, pretend I didn't understand you. So I rather took it for granted."

He bent low over her and swept her cheeks with his eager lips. "Still interested in those bumper lambs, boll-weevil and irrigation, brown babies and cholo men and women, heat, dust and purple lights on the buttes at dawn and sunset, darling?"

She nodded. "I can be a good partner, Jimmy. I never had any responsibilities—and now I want so badly to share yours—always. How are your wounded men?"

"Taking an interest in life. I sent them over a quart of thirty-year-old Bourbon whisky a friend gave me recently. Mrs. Ganby is still weeping

with joy over our engagement, and Robbie is jealous as a collie dog. He has an idea that when we're married he'll have to leave the ranch."

"I wouldn't even have a ground squirrel leave that ranch, Jimmy."

"Then we'll keep Robbie and his ma on the payroll."

"Does Uncle Bill know of our engagement?"

Don Jaime produced the telegram and read:

"I never figured on you taking over my principal responsibility but now that you insist on being reckless take a tip from one who knows quick relief and quiet nerves because it cleared her system of poisonous wastes—made bowel action easy and regular. Thousands take NR daily. It's such a sure, pleasant corrective. Mild, non-habit-forming. No bad after-effects. At your druggist—

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TOMORROW ALRIGHT

"TUMS" Quick relief for acid indigestion, heartburn. Only 10c.

"UNCLE BILL"

"Why does he sign himself 'sheepishly yours,' Jimmy dear?"

"Some far-fetched allusion to the sheep that brought you here, Bobby. Just some of his gringo humor, I imagine."

"I see." She was silent, turning his brown, strong, useful hands, counting the calluses on them. Hands that had known toil and would always know it, the hands that build empires, hands that, when folded at last in the peace that would mean their parting, would be kissed by lowly people and sprinkled with their tears.

"It will be forever and ever, Jimmy," she whispered, "and I'm so happy—and grateful."

"The Higuenes men keep their women," he assured her gravely.

She thought of Glenn Hackett. "Poor dear," she murmured absently.

"He never had a chance," Don Jaime assured her, with a flash of that prescience, that clairvoyancy, that would always make him, for Roberta, a new, puzzling, yet wholly understandable human being and a joy forever. Yes, he would be the same always, yet always new, always challenging her interest, always holding it. Of him (the girl thought) it might be said that age could not wither nor custom stale his infinite variety.

"I'll get my guitar and sing you a little Spanish love song my grandmother taught me," he suggested. "It's very old. It came into Peru with Pizarro and worked north. Oh, by the way, I forgot something! Let's get this on record officially. Miss Antrim, will you do me the great honor to marry me?"

"You outrageous Celt," she laughed. "You're the last of the troubadours. Of course I will."

[THE END.]

Hot Towel Unknown to Chinese Street Barber

One of the coldest jobs in Shanghai is that of the itinerant boy barbers who hang out their poles at any street corner and minister to their clients on the spot. The only point of dissension lies in the possibility that the client is colder than the barber. Icy cold water rubbed into the beard and the pate, the rude scraping of an old-fashioned Chinese razor—something like an inverted chisel—while the thermometer stands at freezing point and wind and sleet whistle around the client's ears, must be an unpleasant experience.

Still, most of these boys, who earn a very meager living, treat their clients to the semblance of a nice, clean towel or sheet around the neck, which is an improvement on the days when water was never used at all.—North China Herald.

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Of all known drugs, creosote is recognized by high medical authorities as one of the greatest healing agencies for persistent coughs and colds and other forms of throat troubles. Creomulsion contains, in addition to creosote, other healing elements which soothe and heal the infected membranes and stop the irritation and inflammation, while the creosote goes on to the stomach, is absorbed into the blood, attacks the seat of the trouble and checks the growth of the germs.

Creomulsion is guaranteed satisfactory in the treatment of persistent coughs and colds, bronchial asthma, bronchitis and other forms of respiratory diseases, and is excellent for building up the system after colds or flu. Money refunded if any cough or cold, no matter of how long standing, is not relieved after taking according to directions. Ask your druggist. (Adv.)

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Dog's Brain Not Unlike That of Average Child

The dog piles up his knowledge almost wholly by association of ideas, especially pleasurable associations; and this comes very near to a perception of cause and effect, Sir W. Beach Thomas writes, in the Atlantic Monthly.

He can learn up to about 100 words. He can acquire a strong artistic sense—that is, can tell fine shades of black and gray, and distinguish a very round ellipse from a circle. He can distinguish both separate notes and ranges of notes.

His brain matter behaves very much

as a child's, especially in shutting off attention from things that bore him by their unintelligibility, and can so concentrate on things that interest him that all the rest of his mind, and indeed, his other senses, are shut down.

The study of the dog's actual brain has given concrete evidence of how like it is to the mind of the child. Though soon the human mind climbs to heights that tower over the dog's attainment, its loss is permanent if it misses the perceptions proper to its doglike infancy.