

Rainbow's End *A Novel*

By REX BEACH

Author of "The Iron Trail," "The Spoilers," "Heart of the Sunset," Etc.

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SECRET OF THE HIDING PLACE OF THE VARONA TREASURE IS LOST

Synopsis.—Don Esteban Varona, a Cuban planter, hides his wealth—money, jewels and title deeds—in a well on his estate. The hiding place is known only to Sebastian, a slave. Don Esteban's wife dies at the birth of twins, Esteban and Rosa. Don Esteban marries the avaricious Donna Isabel, who tries unsuccessfully to wring the secret of the hidden treasure from Sebastian. Angered at his refusal, she urges Don Esteban to sell Evangelina, Sebastian's daughter. Don Esteban refuses, but in the course of a gambling orgie, he risks Evangelina at cards and loses.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

Don Pablo, in whom the liquor was dying, cursed impatiently: "Caramba! Have I won the treasure of your whole establishment?" he inquired. "Perhaps you value this wench at more than a thousand pesos; if so, you will say that I cheated you."

"No! She's only an ordinary girl. My wife doesn't like her, and so I determined to get rid of her. She is yours, fairly enough," Varona told him.

"Then send her to my house. I'll breed her to Salvador, my cochoero. He's the strongest man I have."

Sebastian uttered a strangled cry and rose to his feet. "Master! You must not—"

"Silence!" ordered Esteban. "Go about your business. What do you mean by this, anyhow?"

But Sebastian, dazed of mind and sick of soul, went on, unheeding. "She is my girl. You promised me her freedom. I warn you—"

"Eh? The planter swayed forward and with blazing eyes surveyed his slave. "You warn me? Of what?" he growled.

At this moment neither master nor man knew exactly what he said or did. Sebastian raised his hand on high. In reality the gesture was meant to call heaven as a witness to his years of faithful service, but, misconstruing his intent, Pablo Peza brought his riding-whip down across the old man's back, crying:

"Ho! None of that!"

A shudder ran through Sebastian's frame. Whirling, he seized Don Pablo's wrist and tore the whip from his fingers. Although the Spaniard was a strong man, he uttered a cry of pain.

At this indignity to a guest Esteban flew into a fury. "Pancho!" he cried. "Ho! Pancho!" When the manager came running, Esteban explained: "This fool is dangerous. He raised his hand to me and to Don Pablo."

Sebastian's protests were drowned by the angry voices of the others.

"Tie him to yonder grating," directed Esteban, who was still in the grip of a senseless rage. "Flog him well and make haste about it."

Sebastian, who had no time in which to recover himself, made but a weak resistance when Pancho Cueto locked his wrists into a pair of clumsy, old-fashioned manacles, first passing the chain around one of the bars of the iron window grating which Esteban had indicated.

Cueto swung a heavy lash; the sound of his blows echoed through the quinta, and they summoned, among others, Donna Isabel, who watched the scene from behind her shutter with much satisfaction. The guests looked on approvingly.

Sebastian made no outcry. The whip bit deep; it drew blood and raised welts the thickness of one's thumb; nevertheless, for the first few moments the victim suffered less in body than in spirit. His brain was so numbed, so shocked with other excitements, that he was well-nigh insensible to physical pain. That Evangelina, flesh of his flesh, had been sold, that his lifelong faithfulness had brought such reward as this, that Esteban, light of his soul, had turned against him—all this was simply astounding. Gradually he began to resent the shrieking injustice of it all, and unsuspecting forces gathered inside of him. They grew until his frame was shaken by primitive savage impulses.

After a time Don Esteban cried: "That will do, Cueto! Leave him now for the flies to punish. They will remind him of his insolence."

Then the guests departed, and Esteban staggered into the house and went to bed.

All that morning Sebastian stood with his hands chained high over his head. The sun grew hotter and ever hotter upon his lacerated back; the blood dried and clotted there; a cloud of flies gathered, swarming over the raw gashes left by Cueto's whip.

Since Don Esteban's nerves, or perhaps it was his conscience, did not permit him to sleep, he arose about noontime and dressed himself. He was still drunk, and the mad rage of the early morning still possessed him; therefore, when he mounted his horse he pretended not to see the figure chained to the window grating. Sebastian's affection for his master was dog-like and he had taken his punishment as a dog takes his, more in surprise than in anger, but at this proof of callous indifference a fire kindled in the old fellow's breast, hotter by far than the fever from his fly-blown sores. He

was thirsty, too, but that was the least of his sufferings.

Some time during the afternoon the negro heard himself addressed through the window against the bars of which he leaned. The speaker was Donna Isabel.

"Do you suffer, Sebastian?" she began in a tone of gentleness and pity.

"Yes, mistress." The speaker's tongue was thick and swollen.

"Can I help you?"

The negro raised his head; he shook his body to rid himself of the insects which were devouring him.

"Give me a drink of water," he said, hoarsely.

"Surely, a great gourdful, all cool and dripping from the well. But first I want you to tell me something."

"A drink, for the love of heaven," panted the old man, and Donna Isabel saw how cracked and dry were his thick lips, how near the torture had come to prostrating him.

"I'll do more," she promised, and her voice was like honey. "I'll tell Pancho Cueto to unlock you, even if I risk Esteban's anger by so doing. Will you be my friend? Will you tell me something?"

"What can I tell you?"

"Oh, you know very well I've asked it often enough, but you have lied, just as my husband has lied to me. He is a miser; he has no heart; he cares for nobody, as you can see. You must hate him now, even as I hate him. Tell me—is there really a treasure, or—?"

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tian's voice gathered strength. "Ten thousand men in ten thousand years would never find the place, and nobody knows the secret but Don Esteban and me."

"I believe you. I knew all the time it was here. Well? Where is it?"

Sebastian hesitated and said, piteously, "I am dying—"

Isabel could scarcely contain herself. "I'll give you water, but first tell me where—where! God in heaven! Can't you see that I, too, am perishing?"

"I must have a drink."

"Tell me first."

Sebastian lifted his head and, meeting the speaker's eyes, laughed hoarsely.

At the sound of his unnatural merriment Isabel recoiled as if stung. She stared at the slave's face in amazement and then in fury. She stammered, incoherently, "You—you have been—"

"Oh no! The treasure is there, the greatest treasure in all Cuba, but you shall never know where it is. I'll see to that. It was you who sold my girl; it was you who brought me to this; it was your hand that whipped me. Well, I'll tell Don Esteban how you tried to bribe his secret from me! What do you think he'll do then? Eh? You'll feel the lash on your white back—"

"You fool!" Donna Isabel looked murder. "I'll punish you for this; I'll make you speak if I have to rub your wounds with salt."

But Sebastian closed his eyes wearily. "You can't make me suffer more than I have suffered," he said. "And now—I curse you. May that treasure be the death of you. May you live in torture like mine the rest of your days; may your beauty turn to ugliness such that men will spit at you; may you never know peace again until you die in poverty and want—"

But Donna Isabel, being superstitious, fled with her fingers in her ears; nor did she undertake to make good her barbarous threat, realizing opportunely that it would only serve to betray her desperate intentions and put her husband further on his guard.

As the sun was sinking beyond the farther rim of the Yumuri and the valley was beginning to fill with shadows Esteban Varona rode up the hill. His temper was more evil than ever, if that were possible, for he had drunk again in an effort to drown the memory of his earlier actions. With him were Pancho Peza, and Mario de Castano, Col. Mendoza y Linares, old Pedro Miron, the advocate, and others of less consequence, whom Esteban had gathered from the Spanish club. The host dismounted and lunched across the courtyard to Sebastian.

"So, my fine fellow," he began. "Have you had enough of rebellion by this time?"

Sebastian's face was working as he turned upon his master to say: "I would be lying if I told you that I am sorry for what I did. It is you who have done wrong. Your soul is black with this crime. Where is my girl?"

"The devil! To hear you talk one would think you were a free man." The planter's eyes were beamed and he brandished his riding-whip threateningly. "I do as I please with my slaves. I tolerate no insolence. Your girl? Well, she's in the house of Salvador, Don Pablo's cochoero, where she belongs."

Sebastian had hung sick and limp against the grating, but at these words he suddenly roused. He strained at his manacles and the bars groaned under his weight. His eyes began to roll, his lips drew back over his blue gums. Noting his expression of ferocity, Esteban cut at his naked back with the riding-whip, crying:

"Ho! Not subdued yet, eh? You need another flogging."

"Curse you and all that is yours," roared the maddened slave. "May you know the misery you have put upon me. May you rot for a million years in hell. May your children's bodies grow filthy with disease; may they starve; may they—"

Sebastian was yelling, though his voice was hoarse with pain. The lash drew blood with every blow. Meanwhile, he wrenched and tugged at his bonds with the fury of a maniac.

"Pablo! Your machete, quick!" panted the slaveowner. "I'll make an end of this black fiend, once for all."

Esteban Varona's guests had looked on at the scene with the same mild interest they would display at the whipping of a balky horse; and, now that the animal threatened to become dangerous, it was in their view quite the proper thing to put it out of the way. Don Pablo Peza stepped toward his mare to draw the machete from its scabbard. But he did not hand it to his friend. He heard a shout, and turned in time to see a wonderful and a terrible thing.

Sebastian had braced his naked feet against the wall; he had bowed his back and bent his massive shoulders—a back and a pair of shoulders that looked as bony and muscular as those of an ox—and he was heaving with every ounce of strength in his enormous body. As Pablo stared he saw the heavy grating come away from its anchorage in the solid masonry, as a shrub is uprooted from soft ground. The rods bent and twisted; there was

a clank and rattle and clash of metal upon the flags; and then—Sebastian turned upon his tormentor, a free man, save only for the wide iron bracelets and their connecting chain. He was quite insane. His face was frightful to behold; it was apellike in its animal rage, and he towered above his master like some fabled creature out of the African jungle of his forefathers.

Sebastian's fists alone would have been formidable weapons, but they were armored and weighted with the old-fashioned, hand-wrought irons which Pancho Cueto had locked upon them. Wrapping the chain in his fingers, the slave leaped at Esteban and struck, once. The sound of the blow was sickening, for the whole bony structure of Esteban Varona's head gave way.

There was a horrified cry from the other white men. Don Pablo Peza ran forward, shouting. He swung his machete, but Sebastian met him before the blow could descend, and they went down together upon the hard stones. Again Sebastian smote, with his massive hands wrapped in the chain and his wrists encased in steel, and this time it was as if Don Pablo's head had been caught between a hammer and an anvil. The negro's strength, exceptional at all times, was multiplied tenfold; he had run amuck. When he arose the machete was in his grasp and Don Pablo's brains were on his knuckles.

It all happened in far less time than it takes to tell. The onlookers had not yet recovered from their first consternation; in fact they were still fumbling and tugging at whatever weapons they carried, when Sebastian came toward them, brandishing the blade on high. Pedro Miron, the advocate, was the third to fall. He tried to scramble out of the negro's path, but, being an old man, his limbs were too stiff to serve him and he went down shrieking.

By now the horses had caught the scent of hot blood and were plunging furiously, the clatter of their hoofs mingling with the blasphemous of the riders, while Sebastian's bestial roaring made the commotion even more hideous.

Esteban's guests fought as much for their lives as for vengeance upon the slayer, for Sebastian was like a gorilla; he seemed intent upon killing them all. He vented his fury upon whatever came within his reach; he struck at men and animals alike, and the shrieks of wounded horses added to the din.

It was a frightful combat. It seemed incredible that one man could work such dreadful havoc in so short a time. Varona and two of his friends were dead; two more were badly wounded, and a Peruvian stallion lay kicking on the flagging when Col. Mendoza y Linares finally managed to get a bullet home in the black man's brain.

Those who came running to learn the cause of the hubbub turned away sick and pallid, for the paved yard was a shambles. Pancho Cueto called upon the slaves to help him, but they slunk back to their quarters, dumb with terror and dismay.

All that night people from the town below came and went and the quinta resounded to sobs and lamentations, but of all the relatives of the dead and wounded, Donna Isabel took her bereavement hardest. Strange to say, she could not be comforted. Now, when it was too late, she realized that she had overreached herself, having caused the death of the only two who knew the secret of the treasure. She remembered, also, Sebastian's statement that even the deeds of patent for the land were hidden with the rest, where ten thousand men in ten thousand years could never find them.

CHAPTER III.

"The O'Reilly."

Age and easy living had caused Don Mario de Castano, the sugar merchant, to take on weight. He had, in truth, become so fat that he waddled like a penguin when he walked; and when he rode, the springs of his French victoria gave up in despair.

In disposition Don Mario was practical and unromantic; he boasted that he had never had an illusion, never an interest outside of his business. And yet, on the day this story opens, this prosaic personage, in spite of his bulging waistband and his taut neckband, in spite of his short breath and his prickly heat, was in a very whirl of pleasurable excitement. Don Mario, in fact, suffered the greatest of all illusions; he was in love, and he believed himself beloved. The object of his adoration was little Rosa Varona, the daughter of his one-time friend Esteban. To be sure, he had met Rosa only twice since her return from her Yankee school, but twice had been enough; with prompt decision he had resolved to do her the honor of making her his wife.

Notwithstanding the rivulets of perspiration that were coursing down every fold of his flesh, and regardless of the fact that the body of his victoria was tipped at a drunken angle, as if struggling to escape the burdens of his great weight, Don Mario felt a jauntiness of body and of spirit almost like that of youth. He saw himself as a splendid prince riding toward the humble home of some obscure maiden

whom he had graciously chosen to be his mate.

His arrival threw Donna Isabel into a flutter; the woman could scarcely contain her curiosity when she came to meet him, for he was not the sort of man to inconvenience himself by mere social visits. Their first formal greetings over, Don Mario surveyed the bare living room and remarked, lugubriously:

"I see many changes here."

"No doubt," the widow agreed. "Times have been hard since poor Esteban's death."

"What a terrible calamity that was! I shudder when I think of it," said he. "A shocking affair, truly! and one I shall never get out of my mind."

"Shocking, yes. But what do you think of a rich man, like Esteban, who would leave his family destitute? Who would die without revealing the place where he had stored his treasure?"

Donna Isabel, it was plain, felt her wrongs keenly; she spoke with as much spirit as if her husband had permitted himself to be killed purely out of spite toward her.

"As if it were not enough to lose that treasure," the widow continued, stormily, "the government must free



The Slave Leaped at Esteban, and Struck, Once.

all our slaves. Tse! Tse! And now that there is no longer a profit in sugar, my plantations—"

"No profit in sugar? What are your crops do not pay, then Pancho Cueto is cheating you. Get rid of him. But I didn't come here to talk about Esteban's hidden treasure, nor his plantations, nor Pancho Cueto. I came here to talk about your step-daughter, Rosa."

"So?" Donna Isabel looked up quickly.

"She interests me. She is more beautiful than the stars." Don Mario rolled his eyes toward the high ceiling, which, like the sky, was tinted a vivid cerulean blue.

"She is now eighteen," the fat suitor went on, ecstatically, "and so altogether charming— But why waste time in pretty speeches? I have decided to marry her."

"Rosa has a will of her own," guardedly ventured the stepmother.

Don Mario broke out, testily: "Naturally; so have we all. Now let us speak plainly. You know me. I am a person of importance. I am rich enough to afford what I want, and I pay well. You understand? Well, then, you are Rosa's guardian and you can bend her to your desires."

"If that were only so!" exclaimed the woman. "She and Esteban—what children! What tempers—just like their father's! They were to be their father's heirs, you know, and they blame me for his death, for our poverty, and for all the other misfortunes that have overtaken us. We live like cats and dogs."

Don Mario had been drumming his fat fingers impatiently upon the arm of his chair. Now he exclaimed:

"Your pardon, senora, but I am just now very little interested in your domestic relations. What you say about Rosa only makes me more eager, for I loathe a sleepy woman. Now tell me, is she— Has she any—affairs of the heart?"

"No, unless perhaps a flirtation with that young American, Juan O'Reilly." Donna Isabel gave the name its Spanish pronunciation of "O'Reilly."

"Juan O'Reilly? O'Reilly? Oh, yes! But what has he to offer a woman? He is little more than a clerk."

"That is what I tell her. Oh, it hasn't gone far as yet."

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To drive a tank, handle the guns, and sweep over the enemy trenches, takes strong nerves, good rich blood, a good stomach, liver and kidneys. When the time comes, the man with red blood in his veins "is up and at it." He has iron nerves for hardships—an interest in his work grips him. That's the way you feel when you have taken a blood and nerve tonic, made up of Blood Root, Golden Seal root, Stone root, Cherry bark, and rolled into a sugar-coated tablet and sold in sixty-cent vials by almost all druggists for past fifty years as Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. This tonic, in liquid or tablet form, is just what you need this spring to give you vim, vigor and vitality. At the fall end of a hard winter, no wonder you feel "run-down," blue, out of sorts. Try this "Medical Discovery" of Dr. Pierce's. Don't wait! To-day is the day to begin! A little "pep," and you laugh and live.

The best means to oil the machinery of the body, put tone into the liver, kidneys and circulatory system, is to first practice a good house-cleaning. I know of nothing better as a laxative than a vegetable pill made up of May-apple, leaves of aloe and jalap. This is commonly sold by all druggists as Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets, and should be taken at least once a week to clear the twenty-five feet of intestines. You will thus clean the system—expel the poisons and keep well. Now is the time to clean house. Give yourself a spring house cleaning.—Adv.

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