

# Rainbow's End

A NOVEL by REX BEACH

Author of "THE IRON TRAIL," "THE SPOILERS,"  
"HEART OF THE SUNSET," Etc.

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## CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

"I can't stand that," he confessed. "I can't sleep when people are starving to death alongside of me. This money burns my pocket. I—I—"

Jacket read his purpose and laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"It will save our lives, too," he said simply.

"Bah! We are men. There are women and children yonder—"

But Jacket's sensibilities were caloused, it seemed. "Of what use would your few pesetas be among so many?" he inquired. "God has willed this, and he knows what he is doing. Besides, your 'pretty one' is probably as hungry as these people. No doubt we shall find that she, too, is starving."

O'Reilly slowly withdrew his hand from his pocket. "Yes! It's Rosa's money. But—come; I can't endure this."

He led the way back to the Plaza of Liberty and there on an iron bench they waited for the full day. They were very tired, but further sleep was impossible, for the death wagons rumbled by on their way to collect the bodies of those who had died during the night.

Neither the man nor the boy ever wholly lost the nightmare memory of the next few days, for their search took them into every part of the reconcentrado districts. What they beheld aged them. Day after day, from dawn till dark, they wandered, peering into huts, staring into faces, asking questions until they were faint from fatigue and sick from disappointment.

As time passed and they failed to find Rosa Varona a terrible apprehension began to weigh O'Reilly down; his face grew old and drawn, his shoulders sagged, his limbs began to drag. It was all that Jacket could do to keep him going. The boy, now that there was actual need of him, proved a per-



"I Can't Stand That," He Confessed.

fect jewel; his optimism never failed, his faith never faltered, and O'Reilly began to feel a dumb gratitude at having the youngster by his side.

Jacket, too, became thin and gray about the lips. But he complained not at all and he laughed a great deal. To him the morrow was always another day of brilliant promise toward which he looked with never-failing eagerness; and not for a single moment did he question the ultimate success of their endeavor. Such an example did much for the older man. Together they practiced the strictest, hardest economy, living on a few cents a day, while they methodically searched the city from limit to limit.

At first O'Reilly concerned himself more than a little with the problem of escape, but as time wore on he thought less and less about that. Nor did he have occasion to waste further concern regarding his disguise. That it was perfect he proved when several of his former acquaintances passed him by and when, upon one occasion, he came face to face with old Don Mario de Castano. Don Mario had changed; he was older, his flesh had softened, and it hung loosely upon his form. He appeared worried, harassed, and O'Reilly recalled rumors that the war had ruined him. The man's air of dejection seemed to bear out the story.

They had been enemies, nevertheless O'Reilly felt a sudden impulse to make himself known to the Spaniard and to appeal directly for news of Rosa's fate. But Don Mario, he remembered in time, had a reputation for vindictiveness, so he smothered the desire. One other encounter O'Reilly had reason to remember.

It so chanced that one day he and Jacket found themselves in the miserable rubble which assembled at the railroad station to implore alms from the incoming passengers of the Habana

train. Few people were traveling these days, and they were, for the most part, Spanish officers to whom the sight of starving country people was no novelty. Now and then, however, there did arrive visitors from whom the spectacle of so much wretchedness wrung a contribution, hence there was always an expectant throng at the depot. On this occasion O'Reilly was surprised to hear the piteous whines for charity in the name of God turn suddenly into a subdued but vicious mutter of rage. Hisses were intermingled with vituperations, then the crowd fell strangely silent, parting to allow the passage of a great, thick-set man in the uniform of a colonel of volunteers. The fellow was unusually swarthy and he wore a black scowl upon his face, while a long puckering scar the full length of one cheek lifted his mouth into a crooked sneer and left exposed a glimpse of wolfish teeth.

O'Reilly was at a loss to fathom this sudden alteration of attitude, the whistle of indrawn breaths and the hissed curses, until he heard some one mutter the name, "Cobo." Then indeed he started and stiffened in his tracks. He fixed a fascinated stare upon the fellow.

Colonel Cobo seemed no little pleased by the reception he created. With his chest arched and his black eyes gleaming malevolently he swaggered through the press, clicking his heels noisily upon the stone flags. When he had gone Jacket voiced a vicious oath.

"So that is the butcher of babies!" exclaimed the boy. "Well, now, I should enjoy cutting his heart out."

O'Reilly's emotions were not entirely unlike those of his small companion. His lips became dry and white as he tried to speak.

"What a brute! That face—Ugh!" He found himself shaking weakly, and discovered that a new and wholly unaccountable feeling of discouragement had settled upon him. He tried manfully to shake it off, but somehow failed, for the sight of Rosa's arch-enemy and the man's overbearing personality had affected him queerly.

Cobo's air of confidence and authority seemed to emphasize O'Reilly's impotence and bring it forcibly home to him. To think of his lustful persecution of Rosa Varona, moreover, terrified him. The next day he resumed his hut-to-hut search, but with a listlessness that came from a firm conviction that once again he was too late.

That afternoon found the two friends among the miserable hovels which encircled the foot of La Cumbre, about the only quarter they had not explored. Below lay San Severino, the execution place; above was the site of the old Varona home. More than once on his way about the city O'Reilly had lifted his eyes in the direction of the latter, feeling a great hunger to revisit the scene of his last farewell to Rosa, but through fear of the melancholy effect it would have upon him he had thus far resisted the impulse. Today, however, he could no longer fight the morbid desire and so, in spite of Jacket's protest, he set out to climb the hill. Of course the boy would not let him go alone.

Little was said during the ascent. The La Cumbre road seemed very long and very steep. How different the last time O'Reilly had swung up it! The climb had never before tired him as it did now, and he reasoned that hunger must have weakened him even more than he realized. Jacket felt the exertion, too; he was short of breath and he rested frequently. O'Reilly saw that the boy's bare, brown legs had grown bony since he had last noticed them, and he felt a sudden pang at having brought the little fellow into such a plight as this.

"Well, hombre," he said when they paused to rest, "I'm afraid we came too late. I'm afraid we're licked." Jacket nodded listlessly; his optimism, too, was gone. "They must all be dead or we would have found them before this," said he. When O'Reilly made no answer he continued, "It is time we thought of getting away from here, eh?"

Johnnie was sitting with his face in his hands. Without lifting his head he inquired: "How are we going to get away? It is easy enough to get into Matanzas, but—" He shrugged hopelessly.

Jacket brightened at the thought of escape. "Ho! I'll bet we can find a hole somewhere," said he. "We're not like these others. They haven't the spirit to try." There was a moment of silence, and then: "Caranaba! You remember those jutias we ate? They were strong, but I would enjoy the smell of one now. Eh? Another week of this and we shall be living on garbage like the rest of these poor people."

Leaving Jacket to take his time, Johnnie completed the climb alone, meditating upon the boy's words. "The spirit to try!" Where had his spirit gone, he wondered. Perhaps it had been crushed beneath the weight of misery he had beheld; surely he had seen enough. Hourly contact with sickness and misfortune on such a gigantic scale was enough to chill anyone's hopes, and although his sensibilities

had been dulled, his apprehensions had been quickened hour by hour. Now that he looked the matter squarely in the face, it seemed absurd to believe that a tender girl like Rosa Varona could long have withstood the hardships of this hideous place; stronger people than she had succumbed, by the hundreds. Even now the hospitals were full, the sick lay untended in their hovels. No one, so far as O'Reilly knew, had undertaken to estimate how fast they were dying or the number of dead which had already ridden out of Matanzas in those rumbling wagons, but there were many. What chance was there that Rosa had not been among the latter?

As he breathed the summit of La Cumbre, O'Reilly beheld at some distance a bent figure of want. It was a negro woman, grubbing in the earth with a sharpened stick. After a suspicious scrutiny of him she resumed her digging.

Nothing but a heap of stones and plaster remained of the Varona home. The grounds, once beautiful even when neglected as in Donna Isabel's time, were now a scene of total desolation. A few orange trees, to be sure, remained standing, and although they were cool and green to look at, they carried no fruit and the odor of their blooms was a trial and a mockery to the hungry visitor. The evidences of Cueto's vandalism affected O'Reilly deeply; they brought him memories more painful than he had anticipated. Although the place was well-nigh unrecognizable, nevertheless it cried aloud of Rosa, and the unhappy lover could barely control the emotions it awakened. It was indeed a morbid impulse which had brought him thither, but now that he was here he could not leave. Unconsciously his feet turned toward the ancient quarry which had formed the sunken garden—his and Rosa's trysting place.

O'Reilly desired above all things to be alone at this moment, and so he was annoyed to discover that another person was before him—a woman, evidently some miserable pacifico like himself. She, too, appeared to be looking for roots, and he almost stumbled over her as he brushed through the guava bushes fringing the depression.

His sudden appearance alarmed the creature and she struggled, panic-stricken, out of his path. Her rage could not conceal the fact that she was deformed, that her back was crooked, so he muttered a reassuring word to her.

This place was more as he had left it—there was the stone bench where he had said good-by to Rosa; yonder was the well—

"Senior!" Johnnie heard himself addressed by the hunchbacked woman. Her voice was thin, tremulous, eager, but his thoughts were busy and he paid no heed. "Senior! Do you look for something—some one—"

"No, yes—"

"No, yes—"

"No, yes—"

"No, yes—"

"No, yes—"

"No, yes—"

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"No, yes—"

"No, yes—"

"No, yes—"

"No, yes—"

After a time she smiled up into his eyes and her words were scarce more than a murmur:

"God heard my prayers and sent you to me."

"Rosa! You are ill, you are weak—"

Her eyelids fluttered. "I am dying, O'Reilly. I only waited to see you."

"No, no!" In agony he gathered her once more into his arms.

"Oh, yes!" Her bloodless fingers touched his face again, then his thin, worn rags. "You, too, have suffered. How came you to be so poor and hungry, O'Reilly?"

"I'm not poor, I'm rich. See!" He jingled the coins in his pocket. "That's money; money for you, sweetheart. It will buy you food and medicine, it will make you strong again. Rosa, dear, I have looked for you so long, so long—"

His voice broke wretchedly and he bowed his head. "I—I was afraid—"

"I waited as long as I had strength to wait," she told him. "It is too bad you came so late."

Once again she lapsed into the lethargy of utter weakness, whereupon he

and pretty enough for any American. Her skin is like milk, too, and her hair—she used to put flowers in it for you, and then we would play games. But you never came. You will make allowances for her looks, will you not?"

"Poor Rosa! You two poor creatures!" O'Reilly choked; he hid his face upon his sweetheart's breast.

Rosa responded; her fingers caressed him and she sighed contentedly.

O'Reilly's ascent of the hill had been slow, but his descent was infinitely slower, for Rosa was so feeble that she could help herself but little and he lacked the strength to carry her far at a time. Finally, however, they reached the wretched hovel where Asensio lay, then leaving her there, Johnnie sped on alone into the city.

He returned soon with several small bundles concealed about his person, and with Evangelina's help he set about preparing food.

Neither Rosa nor the two negroes had any appetite—their hunger had long since passed the point at which they were conscious of it—and O'Reilly was compelled to force them to eat. When he had given them all that he dared he offered what food was left to Jacket.

The boy moistened his lips and his fingers twitched, but he shook his head. "Oh, I'm not so hungry," he declared, indifferently. "I have a friend in the market place; I will go down there and steal a fish from him."

O'Reilly patted him on the shoulder, saying: "You are a good kid, and you understand, don't you? These sick people need more food than we can buy for them, so we will have to draw our belts tight."

"Of course. Eating is a habit, anyhow; and we men know how to get along without it. I will manage to find something for you and me, for I'm a prodigious thief. I can steal the hair from a man's head when I try." With a nod he set off to find his benefactor's supper.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Haunted Garden.

Rosa Varona did not die. On the contrary, under her lover's care she made so amazingly swift a recovery that improvement was visible from hour to hour; she rallied like a wilted flower under a refreshing rain. It was O'Reilly's presence as much as the nourishing diet provided by his money which effected this marvel, although the certainty that Esteban was alive and safe put added force into her determination to live. Rosa found hope springing up in her breast and one day she caught herself laughing. The marvel of it was unbelievable. O'Reilly was sitting beside her bed of leaves at the time; impulsively she pressed his hands to her lips.

"Such happiness as mine belongs in heaven," she managed to tell him. "Sometimes it frightens me. With you by my side this prison is a paradise and I wait for nothing. War, suffering, distress—I can't imagine they longer exist."

"Nevertheless, they do, and Matanzas is anything but a paradise," said he. "We must set about quickly to get out of it."

"Escape, you mean? But that is impossible. Asensio can tell you all about that. The Spaniards used to issue passes for the men to go outside the lines in search of food. It was just a trick. They never came back—all of them were killed. Everyone knows better than to try now."

"Nevertheless, we can't stay here much longer." In answer to the girl's puzzled inquiry he explained: "My money is gone—all but a few cents. This is the last of our food and there is no chance of getting more. Jacket has some mysterious source of supply and he manages to bring in something every now and then, but there are five of us to feed, and he can't furnish more."

O'Reilly bent lower, and in a strong, determined voice cried: "You are not going to die. I have money for food. Rouse yourself, Rosa, rouse yourself."

"She prayed for you every night," the negro volunteered. "Such faith! Such trust! She never doubted that you would come and find her. Sometimes she cried, but that was because of her brother. Esteban, you know, is dead. Yes, dead, like all the rest."

"Esteban is not dead," O'Reilly asserted. "He is alive. Rosa, do you hear that? Esteban is alive and well. I left him with Gomez in the Orient. I have come to take you to him?"

"Esteban alive? Ha! You are fooling us." Evangelina wagged her head wisely. "We know better than that."

"I tell you he is alive," O'Reilly insisted. He heard Jacket calling to him at that moment, so he hallowed to the boy; then when the latter had arrived, he explained briefly, without allowing Jacket time in which to express his amazement:

"Our search is over; we have found them. But they won't believe that Esteban is alive. Tell them the truth."

"Yes, he is alive. We found him rotting in a prison and we rescued him," Jacket corroborated. He stared curiously at the recumbent figure on the bench, then at O'Reilly. He puckered his lips and gave vent to a low whistle of amazement. "So. This is your pretty one, eh? I—She—Well, I don't think much of her. But then, you are not so handsome yourself, are you?"

Evangelina seemed to be stupid, a trifle touched, perhaps, from suffering, for she laid a skinny claw upon O'Reilly's shoulder and warned him earnestly: "Look out for Cobo. You have heard about him, eh? Well, he is the cause of all our misery. He hunted us from place to place, and it was for him that I put that lump on her back. Understand me, she is straight—straight

fell to stroking her hands, calling upon her to come back to him. He was beside himself now; a terrible feeling of impotence and despair overcame him.

Hearing someone speak, he raised his eyes and discovered at his side that figure of want which he had seen digging on the slope below. It was Evangelina. The negroess was little more than skin and bones, her eyes were bleared and yellow and sunken, her face had grown apellike, but he recognized her and she him.

"You are the American," she declared. "You are Rosa's man."

"Yes. But what is wrong with her? Look! She is ill—"

"She is often like that. It is the hunger. We have nothing to eat, senior. I, too, am ill—dying; and Asensio—Oh, you don't know how they have made us suffer."

"We must get Rosa home. Where do you live?"

Evangelina turned her death's head toward the city. "Down yonder. But what's the use? There is no food in our house and Rosa is afraid of those wagons. You know—the ones with the corpses. She bade me bring her here to die."

The girl was not wholly unconscious it seemed, for she stirred and murmured faintly: "Those wagons! Don't let them put me in there with the other dead. They pile the bodies high—"

A weak shudder convulsed her.

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