

THE ROAD OF HATE

By CHARLES SAXBY

THE October day was drawing to its close as Walking Ann reached the gate of the Rancho de las Palomas y Mar.

Behind her the road dipped abruptly to the beach, a dusty ribbon betwixt the base of the mountains and the surf; before her it wound evenly over the shelf of bean flats upheld by the bluffs. An enticing road, smoothly metalled, faded away across the lawnly bean stubble into the golden haze of the California afternoon, a sapphire of sea on the one hand; on the other the peaks of the Cuyama, amber and languid with fall, between them the narrow, 20-mile stretch of the Rancho of the Doves and the Sea, but that road was not for chance feet, for across the whole mesa ran a wicked-looking barrier of mingled barbed wire and prickly-pear, broken by a five-bar gate bristling with locks and chains, bearing the sign:

"Private. Keep out. Absolutely no passing across this ranch."

"By order, ELLEN GLYNDE."

"Looks like some folks' idea o' heaven," Ann murmured as she gazed. "All just like it oughter be, an' most everybody else outside." She knew that gate; with its counterpart 20 miles north it was known to the whole coast from Santa Barbara to the Montaras; known even to all California, now that the county's suit to force the GlynDES to open the road was before the state supreme court. For nearly 30 years it had been closed, cutting off the dwellers in the mountain ranches behind it—and especially those in the Nacimiento. Ann pondered that a moment and there came a picture of a bitter-mouthed woman, her eyes haggard with gazing over the road she might never travel.

"Hi—If you want a real quarrel you sure got to go to your own family to get it," Ann remarked to the unresponsive gate. "Well, I guess I'll rest me a bit anyhow; not even Ellen GlynDE can jail a body for looking at her ranch."

An odd figure she made, a woman alone in that expanse of mountain, sky, and sea. . . . A woman probably older than she looked, since, despite her white hair and puckered, berry-brown skin, there was so much unquenched vitality still lingering in her bony frame, in sun-bonnet and decent dress of drab denim, pack and rolled blanket on her back, she sat like one surveying the world with a glance of twinkling shrewdness.

Just who Ann was it would be difficult to say, since no one really knew and she herself vouchsafed no information. From fall till spring she was swallowed up in that great winter refuge of Los Angeles, far to the south, but with each April, as the skies cleared of the rains and roses and poppies flamed in the foothills, would come a day when her winter haunts knew her no more. Even whatever name by which she might be known in the city would drop from her, and up through the fastnesses of the coast range or out where the seventh furnace of the San Joaquin dips down to the desert lonely dwellers would begin to wonder if "Walking Ann" would come their way that year. Nor did she give any explanation of that, either, possibly not even to herself. There were many who questioned her, comfortable people following accepted paths, amused or slightly aghast at the sight of her tall old form passing on its solitary way, but to each she would give the same answer:

"Well, it's kind of good to be on your way—and it's kind of good to think maybe you're goin' to rest somewhere sometime."

That was all, and she would go, with never a backward glance, her gaze always before her into that allotment of sheer distance.

"Guess I'll catch 'em by the Nacimiento and look in on Jane Donohue tomorrow," she planned. "Land's sakes, if the court opens that there road 'tis she as'll be the first to go sky hooin' across it—and a bitter pill for Ellen GlynDE 'twill be."

"For years I been wantin' to see it," she continued aloud, as if to herself, "but I've been alone. 'The gates o' hate they call 'em back there in the mountains. Well, you be big and ugly enough, Lord knows."

It was an automobile that aroused her from her self-communing, an imported gray-gleaming car which came purring up the slope from the beach in a perfect of wrought-iron lug. As the chauffeur alighted with jingling key chain the other occupants of the car turned a battery of cold inquiry on Ann. Entirely out of place she seemed, sitting there unmoved, yet with something of the naturalness of those chapparal bushes at her back, and a hint of their barbed potentials as well.

"The woman in the car spoke first, gray-haired, with a certain controlled sweetness in face and voice, every detail as soberly perfect as those of her husband."

"My good woman, are you in trouble?"

"Not as I know on, thank you, Miss GlynDE," Ann precisely answered.

"The sat still, her lowered face quiet under the eaves of her sunbonnet. The answer seemed hardly what the other woman had expected, and a shadow of authority crept into her conscious benevolence.

"It seems very strange, your being here alone."

"There's many strange things in this world, ma'am," Ann mildly answered.

It was the man in the front seat who spoke next; a little fellow, already portly, his face overlaid, as by a mask, with an awareness of heaven-given authority.

"We don't allow strangers to cross the ranch."

"I've heard you allow 'em to bring out their dead, but I ain't quite ready for that."

"What are you doing here?" he rasped.

"A setting on the public lands, sir, and if I set long enough maybe I'll hatch something."

"Oh, Fred, perhaps the poor old lady is lost."

"That was barely more than a murmur, but as might come from one accustomed to being disregarded. It was the girl who spoke; seated in the tonneau, overshadowed by the presence of Ellen GlynDE, she had escaped Ann's notice. Now, as she leaned forward, she showed a fragile, drooping prettiness, like that of a plant kept too long in a sunless place."



The girl crept out into the night from the great house among the cypress trees.

flushed as by a concealed excitement, the girl hurried back along the road; the bag lay there in full view, but her gaze seemed deliberately to avoid it as she made a slight detour that brought her close to where Ann sat.

"I—Groped my wrist bag," she laughed nervously.

"Did you, now?" Ann queried with some astonishment. Their glances met in a bland unconcernedness of the lost article lying within three feet of them, and with some embarrassment the girl went on:

"It isn't valuable at all, there's no money in it. I mean I never have any of my own."

"She wants me to do something and she's tellin' me as she can't pay me for it," Ann silently translated as she listened.

"Of course, my aunt is most generous," the girl amended. "I've never really needed it."

"Except for a dollar or two to spend as she pleases," commented Ann to herself. Then, rising, she spoke aloud.

"We'll have to look for 't, that's all."

Like the girl's, her own gaze seemed suddenly and violently astigmatic as, bending over the road, she passed within six inches of the girl's hand, and she saw the girl's eyes fixed on her.

"Lucy GlynDE's flush deepened as with a frightened glance toward the car she fumbled in the recesses of her motor coat."

"I—I have one written."

Ann stared strally up from her search of the road, a search so perfect that it had achieved the feminine pinnacle of desisting herself. She knew nothing of the opera, she would probably have dismissed it as "apassel o' dog ketchin'," but as the girl drew out that note her chuckle was an echo of Figaro's at sight of Rosina's "vigiletto."

"So you got it writ, have you?" she twinkled.

"Don't you hand it to me, gal—you just drop it as you pick up that bag," said Ann, "and get your head outter the car a-watchin' of you."

"Oh—"

An added wave of red flowed up over the girl's face; her glance met Ann's with a look, part fear, part gull, largely courage, some gratitude, and completely of a strange mutual understanding. The next instant she had stooped, caught up the bag, and was flying back to the waiting car. And Ann, looking down at the dust, saw a folded note plainly inscribed "Mr. Terry Donohue, Rancho Nacimiento."

Not until the gates were locked again and the car had disappeared in a dip in the road did she pick it up. Raising her skirt she stored it away in a little bag slung from her waist which contained her most intimate belongings.

a crystal pool where water beetles skated on the surface and a huge black and yellow butterfly sailed on a festal barge of a fallen leaf. Laying out her blanket with neat exactness, she took from her pack a coffee pot and folding fire grid, kindling a clean, hot fire of dry chips. Her silence grew deeper as she set out her meal, the scanty fare of the seasoned "hiker," a pile of oatmeal crackers, a bunch of Tokay grapes, redly translucent on a platter of green leaves.

With a self-control that was almost ominous she waited until the coffee boiled, then she delicately into a cracker meanwhile. Then that control broke, the coffee pot flew through the air and crashed against a tree, and after it, pungent and scalding as its contents, went Ann's words.

"Rats bite 'em—take that! I wish 'twas Ellen GlynDE as I am almin' at. I'd teach her to 'my good woman' 'Walking Ann."

"It's mother hit the trail again, I be too blin' to make camp," she scolded on. "Tis a plumb sin for folks to be goin' around makin' a body so mad as I be right now. But 'tis queer, too; the wickeder I gets the spryer I be. I'll lay as I fetch the Nacimiento afore I quits hikin' this night."

Carefully drenching the ashes of her fire, she struck again up the trail. The short twilight had gone, the full moon still a pale promise behind the ridge. The spring chorus of the mocking birds was stilled, and even the stream's voice hushed by the long months of summer drought; all was silence, leaving the humid coolness of the beach behind her, she went on and up into that Californian reversal of the higher the hotter. A dry-heat, the breath of the desert seeking the sea, bringing a sense of vastness as though the dark bubble of the night were distended by it. From behind Cuyama peak the moon came up, reddish and huge, poisoning an instant on the crest like some strange beacon fire before it swung off into limitless spaces.

It was at the Nacimiento Forks that she came upon Terry Donohue. She had heard him for some time, the beat of a horse's hoofs, an occasional quivering word as his rider urged it along the narrow trail. Then suddenly he came upon her untried, a bend, his pony shying violently in towards the bank as she stepped down from the outer edge to let it pass.

Leaning from his saddle, Terry Donohue scanned her closely.

"Walking Ann, is that you?—Thank God!"

"Amen to that, though what it be about I don't rightly know," Ann answered.

"It's mother—she has one of her spells, he went hastily on. "I was riding out to see if I could get some, one from one of the ranches; there's only old Telestora with her now."

"Them Mexicans is no good," sniffed Ann. "If you don't watch out she'll be stickin' needles into your ma to drive out the devil. You take me right to her."

"That's sure a relief," he said as he dismounted. "Give me your pack. Could you ride my pony?"

"Young feller," returned Ann severely, "when the Indians quit the reservation back in the '80s 'twas me as rid 40 mile to Laramie to take the word."

"The moon was flooding the canon as they turned up it, the bare bank of the trail gleaming yellowly amongst the chapparal. Scarlet-stemmed madrones with glossy leaves, mottled ghosts of sycamores were with fall, rock pinnacles fantastic and macabre under the eerie light. Ann rode silently considering Terry Donohue as he strode ahead, slim-legged, erect, her pack and blanket on his shoulders.

"So you got back from Siberia at last?"

"Yep. Just my luck to get sent there. 'I guess you be right glad to be back."

are in the same old place with the same old hate."

"Well, you done a good work, lad, helpin' to make the world safe," Ann soothed, but the young fellow's smoldering resentment burst out again.

"Yes, safe for Fred GlynDE and that Jap partner of his to corral all the potatoes from here to the Mexican line and hold up the price."

"I'll never live to see it. Just heaven, what have I done that I should be tormented so?"

"You you as be doin' the tormentin'," Ann put in. "Terry could have a road through to the valley in three months if you'd but let him."

"Terry owns the ranch and I have told him to do as he pleases."

"Yes, I heard you tellin' him so as I come in," Ann returned.

Again their glances met and Jane Donohue raised herself on her elbow.

"I can't give up—I can't. Oh, if I could but ride once across that ranch and laugh in Ellen's face as I go—"

Her hand, a mere bunch of fevered bones, fell on Ann's wrist and at its hot clasp the other started in genuine alarm.

"Woman, you are real sick."

"Sick—Ann stick to death," moaned Mrs. Donohue as she fell back on her pillows again. "But I will never give in."

A quiver of pity crossed Ann's face. Wasted, narrow, held by that almost fanaticism of stubbornness, the woman lay between her masses of hair, and from her eyes, as from two windows, there seemed to her the very presence of that obsessing demon—the same one that, except for those drawn shades of blank delectation, might have looked from the eyes of Ellen GlynDE and her son. As Ann raised her an uncontrollable spasm shook her frame, causing her to fight for breath.

"There's naught will cure her but to get what she wants," Ann thought. "And so long as she lives she'll keep Terry cooped up here and begin dyin' whenever he talks o' quittin'."

"Lay you still, Jane Donohue," she went on aloud. "I got to speak to Terry a bit and then you and me is due for a talk."

Terry was sitting on the veranda steps, chin in hand, staring gloomily down at the moon-wooded vale toward Las Palomas. Holding out the note picked up in the wake of the GlynDE car, Ann spoke:

He did not stop to ask how she had obtained it; his eyes raced greedily over the lines, then sought the gleaming night dial of his wrist watch.

"Ten o'clock already," he exclaimed.

"Most likely she'll be waitin' for you," Ann encouraged.

"She's been waitin' since before the war," said Terry bitterly. "If mother would only let me do something I'd have had her out of Las Palomas long ago. I'm only waitin' until I have something to offer her."

"She won't thank you none for that waitin'."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I been a gal myself—you didn't think that of old Ann, did you? But I know, and you take her, lad—take her quick."

"How can I ask her to come here from all she has down there?"

"She's awonderin' how you can't."

"She wants to see me tonight—but there's mother sick again," he hesitated with a glance at the house.

"Don't worry none about yur ma. I'll stay with her till you gets back."

A glance of gratitude, warmly feeling, and he was mounted and off, galloping down the vale with a lover's recklessness. Seated on the steps Ann pictured him passing on his way, insulated from all the world about him by the joy of that coming meeting, in his face a light that shamed the mid radiance of the moon. Then the girl, seemingly so meek and fragile, creeping out into the night from the great house among the cypress trees.

"I could help break that if mother would only listen," he went on. "There's men would finance me in putting a road through the back range to strike the S. P. at Carmelo; it would make the ranch worth half a million at least. But no, mother must go out over Las Palomas or not at all, and here I am, poor as a chole, with all this land going to waste."

He had turned, standing bareheaded on the trail, the straightness of his features accentuated by the deep shadows of the moon, his eyes blackly bright under blacker brows and hair.

Even so his father might have stood before him, Ann thought; that dead Terence Donohue, too handsome, too winning, too impulsive—in short, too Irish. Ellen Fall, they said, would have given the heart from her body for him in those days. It might have been a match had not her sister Jane returned suddenly from the east. In two weeks Donohue had married her and carried her off to the Nacimiento; a month later Ellen had married old Peter GlynDE of Las Palomas and promptly sealed his gates.

The woman sighed with the hopelessness of 20 years of unavailing litigation. Her boom, pinched and moaned as though all its vitalities had been drained away by her consuming resentment, rose and fell in convulsive gasps.

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"Me o sabb."

From the knot of men at Terry's b murmur went up. "One of them GlynDE Japs"—Refusing to let us bring of it, from where she sat on the cracked wooden wagon, came Ann's cracked wan

"Terry Donohue—break that gate."

"The Japanese was more insolent now, silent as only one of his race can be when by white authority. The sight of a gun hand brought an answering and wicked of steel amongst the crowd—to hell with GlynDES!"

"Kill the yellow-skinned devil!"

Then a sudden, concerted shout: "Come on, boys!"

An ugly moment, half hidden by a tree of fog; a snarl like that of fighting's the sound of crashing timbers, of a shot. As the vapors thinned again the solid mass of a mass of splinters on the ground and the nose was flying down the road, already in the smoke-wreathed mist.

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There was a bitterness also in the house of the Doves and the Sea that more Ellen GlynDE took counsel with her son, called, in the fashion of the '90s, his inquired windows looking out on the twisted cypresses, the house was never thing but a gloomy place. Now, in the chill of fog and keen-edged sea-wind, something of the cheerlessness of a building.

"You are sure that the supreme court ruled against us?" she asked incredulously. Fred GlynDE stopped his pacing in irremembrance.

"Good heavens, mother, you heard. I message yourself, didn't you?"

"I can hardly believe it," she said. Gowned in sober perfection even at the hour, still preserving her superficial place she sat there like the superb, of some of the institution which that room was face. But beneath that surface it was as if her world were being rocked by sub earthquakes. To her the 30-year seal those gates had almost the sanction of light, while their forced opening and the pect of her sister riding across the ranch with the shock of sacrilege.

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