

THE INSURGENTS

by

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PROLOGUE

It began like a soft rumble. From the market place, where Alfredo was collecting rent for the stalls, he could hear the approach of horses and firing of rifles. He hurried to finish. When the crackle of gunfire got closer, Alfredo ran for his horse and rode to the empty building of the Fabrica de Fundicion at the north end of town. He climbed to the roof to watch what he knew would be a hopeless battle for the insurgents.

The Federales followed strict military procedure. Buglers sounded the call for pursuit. The splendid looking soldiers mounted their horses. Only half of the five hundred federales mounted for the attack. They were magnificent in their French Foreign Legion-styled uniforms

of white square brimmed kepi, blue coats and trousers, and were armed with the latest bolt-action Mausers.

Alfredo watched General Lejero's men ride to reinforce the defense positions at the south edge of town. Before the soldiers reached their post, a concealed rebel force broke from cover and surrounded the government soldiers. Rebels advanced half-crouching, half-crab fashion, their weapons halfway to their shoulders, their conical hats flopping in the brisk wind as they fired into the federales ranks. Fast riding rebels entered the city and closed ranks around the federales, who were now caught in the cross-fire. Rifles of the federales flashed upward as horses reared. Flanks collapsed as the insurgents tightened around the federal soldiers. It was man to man, Colt and machetes, riflebutts and knives worked against bayonets. Blue-coated men dropped from their horses. Other men began riding from their positions, racing back to the plaza in panic.

Charging from doorways and buildings, local rebels fired at the soldiers. Armed peasants emerged from hiding, and howled, "Viva la revolucion!" It was a mad house, a slaughter house. Federales fled in all directions. The townspeople had disappeared behind closed doors, but faces could be seen watching from windows. From a rooftop near Alfredo, a cry of: "Viva Mexico! Viva Madero y Villa!" and tin-can grenades arched through the air towards fleeing blue coats.

Standing in an open window, a peasant wearing a straw hat fired and shouted to the fleeing soldiers, "You dirty sons of lice-ridden mothers! I'll nail you," and he leaped from the window, firing his Mauser as he fell. Federal soldiers shot and rode over him, but the peasant pulled a grenade from under his shirt and hobbled forward trying to light the fuse. A bayonet caught him in the groin, and he folded.

The federales who had not ridden with the first assault held positions in buildings and on rooftops. Although Alfredo was some distance from the plaza, he had a clear view of the city. He saw that the insurrecto leaders seemed to have lost control of the situation, as the rebels looted and killed indiscriminately.

A shell exploded against the roof of the Court House, sending up a shower of federal soldiers, rifles and adobe dust. Black smoke concealed the building from view. Moments later, rebels emerged from the smoke carrying rifles and bottles of liquor. They drank and passed around the bottles.

In another part of town, rebels fired machineguns through the front portico of a hotel near the market. The hotel was owned by Carlos and Julius Sternau, friends of Alfredo's father. "Oh my God!" Alfredo gasped to himself as Julius was dragged by a rope and hung from a beam that protruded from the building's entrance. The government soldiers were not defending the city. Their retaliation was

sporadic. The only blue coats Alfredo could see were the bloody ones left in the street, where dogs wandered licking up the blood.

Eventually, even the gunfire of the rebels was erratic. Across the street Alfredo saw a Chinese banker emerge from the bank. Cautiously, the man looked down the street where puffs of black smoke obscured the view of the plaza. A dusty gust of wind blew the Chinaman's cutaways behind him like a forked tail. His gray striped trousers clung to his legs. Alfredo could see rebels approaching from around the corner of the bank.

"Get inside!" Alfredo shouted. The small man looked up in terror and stumbled backwards into the bank, closing the door behind him. All the shades in the windows of the three story building were drawn. The immaculate structure looked impenetrable.

The rebels knew where they were going as they turned the corner and began machinegunning the front door of the bank. The door erupted into flying metal and splintering wood. Serapes flew high as men jumped from horses and made a rush for the entrance.

"Eiy, cabrones. Kill the bastards. What are you waiting for?" shouted the leader.

Alfredo heard gun shots and high pitched shrieks coming from inside the bank. Then from the third story windows, bodies burst through the shades, shattering glass.

"Carramba! We'll piss on all you piojoso faces before the night's out," yelled a rebel, as others emptied machinegun fire into the contorted bodies.

Then out of the bank came rebels with a rope tied around the neck of Dr. Lim, president of the Chinese banking institution of Mexico. "You can't do this," he said tugging at the rope which tightened around his neck as rebels jerked him into the street. The rebels mounted their horses and began dragging him down the center of the dusty street. He fought helplessly until his body grew limp and tumbled like a gunny sack at the end of the rope. He was dragged around the plaza several times, then shot.

Alfredo did not move until dark. The city was still under rebel attack, but most of the intermittent shooting centered near the plaza. Alfredo climbed down from the roof and entered the gutted factory where he had left his horse. Leading his horse by the reins, he moved close to the buildings to avoid the smell of death. He mounted his horse when he reached the edge of town and rode home.

One week later the New York Times, May 22, 1911, reported the capture of Torreon:

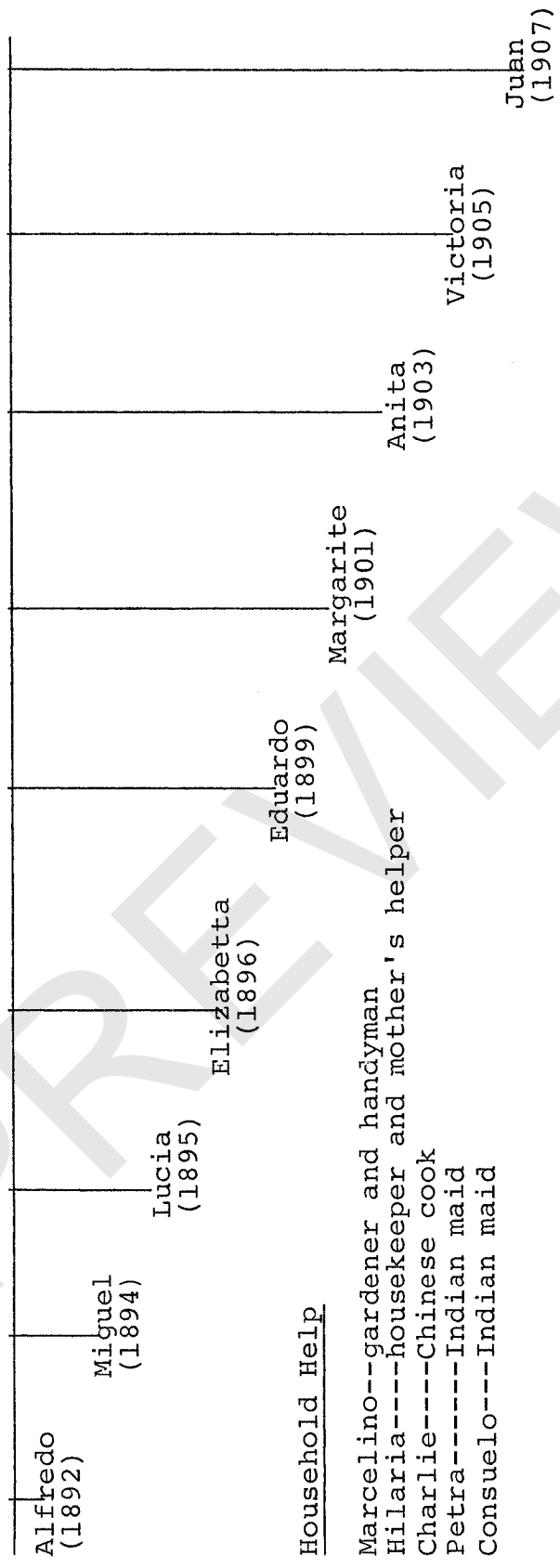
REBELS KILL CHINESE BANKER.

Drag Him in Streets of Torreon--
Hard Fighting for Three Days.

LAREDO, Texas, May 21.--A few details of the heavy fighting a week ago which resulted in the capture of the important city of Torreon by the Mexican rebels reached here to-day. The fighting took place May 13, 14, and 15.

Tomas Michael Ryann

m. Paula Anita Rubio



Household Help

- Marcelino---gardener and handyman
- Hilaria---housekeeper and mother's helper
- Charlie---Chinese cook
- Petra---Indian maid
- Consuelo---Indian maid

Family Friends

- Fernando Bernardini---Italian and French Consul
- Adelita Bernardini---daughter
- Camilio Bernardini---son
- Sister Mary Louise---Nun

Revolutions are not made; they come. A revolution is as natural a growth as an oak. It comes out of the past. Its foundations are laid far back.

Wendell Phillips, Speech
January 8, 1852

I
ANITA

It was a hot July day in Torreon, eight months since Francisco Madero had called for Revolution with his plan of San Luis Potosi, promising in October, 1910 that he would overthrow the government of General Diaz and change would come fast: "the Mexican people will reconquer their liberty." Despite the unrest, Anita and her little sister, Victoria, played with the mudcracks, peeling the miniature dishes from the ground, stacking them in a basket they had confiscated from Hilaria in their escape from the stock house behind the rustic hacienda, a walled fortress of terra cotta sheltered against the dusty Torreon desert.

This was the first time the girls had been outside the confines of the hacienda since Madero's mounted peons had arrived in Torreon. Eight year old Ana was a willful

child, unafraid and daring like her mother. She was the seventh child of nine, and by her actions, she always demanded attention. Because her hair was white blond and straight like icicles, she was called La Reina de Hielo, the Icicle Queen. She was so fair that her family wanted her out of sight, but the day Madero's revolutionaries rode into town in a blaze of gunfire and galloping horses, she climbed to the roof to watch with her older brothers. She was promptly sent down by them, screaming in her high thin voice. Since then, she was guarded closely by Hilaria, her pilmama, mother's helper.

Anita and Victoria were Hilaria's responsibility, but Hilaria had many other duties in the household. Each morning she collected vegetables from the garden, gathered eggs and killed and dressed fowl for the kitchen. Until today, Anita and Victoria were kept in the patio with Marcelino while Hilaria took care of her job behind the hacienda. However, Anita begged Hilaria to let them accompany her to the garden because no soldiers had been around for days. The Maderistes were in town, some distance away, so Hilaria felt she could let them go to the garden with her.

The two children waited outside the hen house because the rooster guarded the hens with ferocious tenacity and attacked anyone entering the gate. Hilaria carried a long stick to fend him away while she gathered warm eggs

from beneath the hens. Guns, ammunition and silver serving pieces were buried in the ground next to the hen house after the Maderistes began confiscating arms.

Hilaria left the vegetable basket outside the gate. Ana took it and grabbed Victoria by the hand, pulling her all the way to the side of the hacienda where they usually played.

Under the hot sun the small girls collected curled dried mud which they used for tea party dishes. "Here Victoria. Be careful so they won't break."

"Anita, I'm scared," Victoria said. "Why did you make me come out here. Mama will be angry."

"Just hurry. Get a whole bunch."

Anita continued crawling around on her knees gathering the mud dishes in one hand and passing them to Victoria with the other. Sulking, Victoria followed with the basket. Then suddenly Anita heard galloping horses. Victoria dropped the basket and screamed. Anita scampered for a few more mudcracks as Victoria stood paralyzed above her. Before they could run, horses were above them. From beneath a horse, Anita peered up into a foamy sweating horse belly. Angrily she began kicking and fighting. The horse reared, and she dashed free. However, she was still imprisoned by the circle of riders. A dark dusty man nudged her with the barrel of his rifle and said, "Little girl, where is your Papa."

Anita could not see the face of the man for the mass of horse flesh, silver spurs and dust that choked her. She was more angry than afraid. Being under horses didn't frighten her since she spent hours climbing over and under the family's horses and mules. But she did feel fright when she saw the dusty raucous looking men as they pushed her nearer Victoria whose scream was not choked by the dust. "Mama, Mama," Victoria shrieked in terror.

A half-dozen peons wore cartridge belts criss-crossed over their chests, holsters with pistols on their hips. Rifles were in their saddle scabbards. Huge straw sombreros shaded their dusty faces, but white smiling teeth confused the children. "Get your Papa!" ordered the middle aged peon whose fat brown jowls quivered as he spoke. His paunch rolled against the saddle horn as he rode towards the girls. Taking off his sombrero, exposing dusty tousled hair, he leaned from the saddle and pushed Anita forward with his huge hat. Even though his hat covered the length of her body, she spun around and snatched it, then proceeded to use it as a weapon, swinging and bashing at the horses. She made a dash for the stock house.

"Run Victoria, run," she yelled back. But one young rider pulled Victoria up on his horse. She kicked and continued screaming while the horse danced in circles. The fat peon raised his rifle and fired.

"Attention!" he bellowed at his men, whose conical hats flopped with their playful game. Immediately all play stopped. The Captain was an old vaquero out of the north; these vaqueros were well known for their specialized insolence. It was dangerous to offend them and nobody had the courage to do so. The men came to attention.

"Yes, my Captain," the men responded, halting their horses.

Coming from the hacienda, Paula ran into Anita who was still swinging the hat. "Mama, they have Victoria."

"Take her into the house," Paula said sternly to Hilaria who followed closely behind Paula with chickens strung by the legs slung over her right shoulder. Hilaria reached for Anita and pulled her arm angrily as chickens wriggled down the flat of Hilaria's back and the rest dangled uneasily over her full breast.

The mother walked directly to her kicking child, "Put my child down." She ignored the rifle of the crude leader and took her child from the revolutionary who was no older than her eldest son.

"Stop screaming and go inside," she said to Victoria in a calm quiet voice of authority as she carried the child away from the horses. Paula watched her until she was out of sight, then she turned towards the men, looking directly at the leader whose rifle had dropped to his side and hung in his hand down below the stirrup.

"What do you want?" Paula asked.

"Where is your husband?"

"He is not here. Leave my family alone."

"We have orders to collect guns and ammunition. We are told that he has some. We'll search."

"No you won't. My sons have their guns aimed at your skull; if you move towards me or the hacienda, they will fire. We have only the guns we need to defend ourselves." Then, turning to the young peon whose lean body bowed in deference as she pointed a finger at him. "And you, does your mother know that you terrorize children? Is that for the good of Mexico? Mexicans do not inflict cruelties against their children in the name of liberty. Get out of here and do not come back. You act like bandits, not saviors."

The Captain turned his bulk in the saddle and ordered his men to leave. But before he left, he looked down at Paula, "We will be back. Tell your husband to be ready."

Alfredo's Mauser rifle lay balanced between the red tiles of the hacienda roof and his muscular arms. His finger barely touched the trigger as he witnessed his mother's bold reproach of the Maderistes below.

Alfredo heard a sound from behind and rolled to his back with his rifle aimed. There was Anita worming her way across the hot tiles, protected by hand-me-down breeches of her brother's with her dress tucked in at the waist.

"Alfredo, how is Mama?"

"My God Anita, I could have shot you. Never sneak up behind someone with a gun." He just looked at her for a moment amazed, then he said between clinched teeth, "Get down. How did you get away again?"

Anita ignored her brother and looked down at her mother. "Mama's not afraid. Look at her." Anita was excited. "Were those the men that killed the Chinese? Did you recognize any of them," she asked, as if she had every right to discuss the subject of the massacre that Alfredo had witnessed.

Alfredo was noticeably perturbed, "Get down Anita."

She could not understand his agitation. All the talk of violence and now the excitement with the revolutionaries was a threat beyond her comprehension. Her mother showed no signs of fear or doubt, why should she. Below, her mother bent and gathered her full skirt in one hand, lifting the hem from the ground as dust settled all around her. Strands of straight black hair had sprung loose from her melota at the nape of her neck. Her face was flushed. She looked around, saw the basket still full of mudcracks. She paused, then walked a few steps and picked up the basket.

Alfredo raised himself on his elbows and shouted, "Mama, what are you doing? Get inside!"

"She's just getting my dishes, Alfredo," Anita said.

"To Hell with your dishes! That's how this whole thing happened. You are an intolerable child. I hope Papa punishes you properly."

Anita was hurt by his strong words; Alfredo was her hero. She followed him around and listened to his conversations with their father and his friends. She would hide behind doors or chairs just to learn about the world outside of her own. Men had such exciting and interesting lives. She wished she were a boy so she could dress in pants all the time. You couldn't do anything in dresses except sit in a chair with your legs crossed like her mother always reminded her to do.

She remembered the night Alfredo had returned from town about two months ago. She had not gone to sleep on purpose because she knew the family was anxiously waiting for his return. So she too waited, and when she heard him ride into the stables, she hid behind the kitchen door to listen to the conversation. She did not see that he was pale and tense, but she heard his excited voice telling about the murder of the Chinese bankers: how they were dressed, in cutaways and grey striped trousers. All the details were more vivid than the Dickens' stories she heard when the family read aloud to each other. She had cried for Little Nell, but to hear that Dr. Lim was dragged at the end of a

rope down the dusty road to the plaza and how he became limp like a dirty rag; how the other bankers were thrown from windows of the bank was too grotesque for her to imagine as a reality. She sat in her nightgown, knees drawn up under her chin and shivered as the story unfolded.

She could not hear her father's questions, for he spoke so quietly. But Charlie, their Chinese cook's voice was shrill with questions.

Alfredo related the scene step by step. She heard how machine guns shattered the front door of the bank, but she could not picture how that could be done because when the revolutionaries had first ridden into town they had blasted their hacienda with gunfire and the front doors only had bullet holes in it. The reality of the story could not penetrate her understanding. That night, she could not sleep because the detail paraded before her, and she wanted to ask so many questions. Days later, in one of her hiding places, she learned that at least two hundred Chinese had been shot or stabbed to death by the end of three days of bloodshed. She was afraid for Charlie, but she knew he was safe with them.

Paula entered the patio and called up to Alfredo, "Alfredo, go find your father and warn him." Then she called to her quiet, gentle seventeen year old son, "Miguel, are you there?"

"Yes Mama, over here on this side."

"Stay there. Call if anyone approaches."

"Mama here is Anita," Alfredo said pulling Anita by the feet to the edge of the roof.

"You're hurting me," Anita fussed.

Paula reached to help Anita down, "What are you doing up there? You have caused trouble all morning." Paula swatted her bottom. "How did you get away from Hilaria again."

"Victoria kept crying, so she told me to go to the patio and stay. I'm not afraid, Mama. I'm like you."

"Well, you should be afraid. You put all of us in danger because you disobeyed me," she scolded. "Go to your room."

Alfredo stood next to his mother holding his rifle, "I'll give this rifle to Marcelino and take my revolver."

"Hurry! Papa is probably still at the mines. Be careful."

II

Tomas Ryann was an American, an import-export broker who owned the Studebaker wagons that transported all the equipment to and from the mines. He owned and rented the stalls at the local market place. He contributed money and gifts to Sagrado Corazon Catholic Church and school which his children attended. His best friend was the French and Italian consul, Fernando Bernardini. Those things that had once made him a popular figure now threatened him and his family.

He was part of the foreign threat that Madero was revolting against. Foreigners dominated mining, utilities, industry and commerce. Americans and Englishmen controlled the cement industry, electric power, trolley lines, water companies and railroads. The French controlled the textile

industry and monopolized the large department stores. The Germans controlled the hardware business; the Spanish took over foodstores. In Torreon the Chinese had owned and run the bank. Torreon was now the northern target.

Until recently, the revolutionaries had only raided and stolen stock. Several times the family had replaced chickens, horses and a cow. When the raids began, the family immediately began hiding guns and ammunition. Later they hid valuables. But they did not expect that Madero's men would harm the family.

In 1888, Thomas Ryann had come to Mexico selling Singer Sewing Machines. He sold one to the family of Emilio Holguin and fell in love with their beautiful daughter who was only sixteen. At first the Holguins were suspicious of the suave American, but two years later they allowed the two to be married. He was thirty-one and became a tutor to his young bride. Thomas, now Tomas, and Paula had nine children. He established a comfortable and secure life for his family in Mexico. Respected by his associates and workers, he was a fair businessman who paid honest wages to the peons who worked for him. These peons lived in adobe dwellings surrounding the main hacienda, and all shared in the bounty of the garden and stock.

The Ryann marriage was the blend of two contradictory historical attitudes: Tomas' drive for perfection, and Paula's belief in redemption. Neither the Mexican nor the

North American was able to achieve this reconciliation, but Paula and Tomas weaved their attitudes into a blend of traditions. Spanish was spoken in the home and although the children studied English in school and wanted to practice speaking it in the home, their father would not allow it since Paula could not speak the language. Yet he introduced the Anglo-Saxon classics, translated into Spanish, to the family. Each evening the family read to each other. As each child learned to read, he became a reader, and the book was passed from reader to reader.

In this insulated tradition, the family was secure in the warmth of the family; they knew little of the outside world. Naturally the older boys were familiar with the outside world, but the rest of the children had no exposure. Anita was the only child who dared to investigate. Her brothers could experience the life outside the home. She could only listen and learn, but when she had a chance, she defied the rules of the home. She could not understand that she was disobedient, because she was just responding to her own needs.

She sat on her bed looking down at her hands which rested on her crossed legs. She picked at her nails, and wondered why her mother was so cross and why Alfredo had fussed at her.

Across the room Hilaria was rocking her sister Victoria, who continued to whimper. Anita looked curiously