

THE BRIDE OF THE SUN

BOOK I: THE GOLDEN SUN BRACELET

CHAPTER I

As the liner steamed into Callao Roads, and long before it had anchored, it was surrounded by a flotilla of small boats. A moment later, deck, saloons and cabins were invaded by a host of gesticulating and strong-minded boatmen, whose badges attested that they were duly licensed to carry off what passengers and luggage they could. They raged impotently, however, around Monsieur François-Gaspard Ozoux, the worthy member of the Institute, Department of Inscriptions and *Belles-Lettres*, of Paris, who sat enthroned on a pile of securely locked boxes in which were stored his cherished manuscripts and books.

It was in vain that they told him it would be two full hours before the ship came alongside the Darsena dock. Nothing would part him from his treasures; nothing would induce him to allow these half-crazed foreigners to hurl his precious luggage overside into those frail-looking skiffs.

When this was suggested to him by a tall, handsome young man who called him “uncle,” the irascible Academician explained with fluency and verve that the idea was an utterly ridiculous one. So Raymond Ozoux shrugged his broad shoulders, and with a “See you soon” that hardly interrupted his uncle’s flow of words, beckoned to a boatman.

A moment later, the young man had left the ship’s side and was nearing the shore—the Eldorado of his ambition, the land of gold and legends, the Peru of Pizarro and the Incas. Then, the thoughts of a young girl’s face blotted out those dreams to make way for new ones.

The monotonous outline of the waterfront brought no disappointment. Little did Raymond care that the city stretched out there before his eyes was little more than a narrow, unbeautiful blur along the sea coast, that there were none of those towers, steeples or minarets with which ancient ports beckoned out to sea that the traveler was welcome. Even when his boat had passed the Mole, and they drew level with the modern works of the Muelle Darsena, well calculated to excite the interest of an engineer like him, Raymond remained indifferent.

He had asked the boatman where the Calle de Lima lay, and his eyes hardly left the part of the city which had been pointed out to him in reply. At the landing, he threw a hand-full of *centavos* to his man, and shouldered his way through the crowd of guides, interpreters, hotel touts and other waterside parasites.

Soon, he was before the Calle de Lima, a thoroughfare which seemed to be the boundary line between the old city and the new. Above, to the east, was the business section—streets broad or narrow fronted with big, modern buildings that were the homes of numerous English, French, German, Italian and Spanish firms. Below, to the west, was a network of tortuous rows and alleys, full of color, with colonnades and verandas encroaching on every available space.

Raymond plunged into this labyrinth, shouldered by muscular Chinese carrying huge loads, and by watchful natives. Occasionally, one would notice a sailor leaving or entering one of the many cafés which opened their doors into the cool bustle of the narrow streets. Though it was his first visit to Callao, Raymond hardly hesitated. Then he stopped short against a decrepit old wall close to a veranda from which came the sound of a fresh young voice—young but very assured.

“Just as you like, señor,” it said in Spanish. “But at that price, your fertilizer can only be of an inferior quality.”

For a few minutes, the argument went on within. Then there was an exchange of courteous farewells and a door was closed.

Raymond approached the balcony and looked into the room. Seated before an enormous ledger was a young girl, busily engaged in transcribing figures into a little notebook attached by a gold chain to the daintiest of waists. Her face, strikingly beautiful, was a little set under its crown of coal-black hair as she bent over her ledger. It was not the head of a Southern belle—rather the curls of a Carmen, a blue-eyed Minerva, a goddess of reason and a thorough business-woman.

At last she lifted her head.

“Marie-Thérèse?”

“Raymond!”

The heavy green ledger slipped and crashed to the floor, as she ran toward him, both hands outstretched.

“How is business?”

“So, so... And how are you? I did not expect you until tomorrow.”

“We made a rather good time.”

“How is Louise?”

“She’s quite grown-up now. I suppose you’ve heard? Her second baby was born just before we left.”

“And dear old smoky Paris?”

“It was raining hard when last I saw it.”

“Where is your uncle?”

“Still on board. He won’t leave his collection... Does nothing all day but take notes for his next book... Wait a minute, I’ll come in. Where’s the door? I suppose it would be bad form to climb in through the window? Won’t I be in the way, though? You seem awfully busy...”

“I am, but you may come in. Round the corner there, and the first door on your right.”

He followed her indications and found an archway leading into a huge courtyard crowded with Chinese coolies and Quichua Indians. A huge dray, coming from the direction of the harbor, rumbled under the archway, and wheeled in the court to let an empty one pass out. People and things seemed to unite in making as much dust and noise as possible.

So she manages all this, he reflected as he made his way toward a door at which she had appeared.

“You may kiss me,” she said as she closed the door behind them.

He took her in his arms and held her to him, by far the more troubled of the two. Again it was she who spoke first.

“So you really have not forgotten?”

“Could you believe it, darling?”

“Well, you were so long in coming...”

“But I wrote, and...”

“Well, never mind now. It is not too late. I have just turned down my fourth suitor, Don Alfonso de Cuellar. And father, I think, is furious with me for refusing the most eligible young man in Lima... Well, why don’t you say something?”

“Forgive me, darling... How is your father? I hardly know what I am saying...”

“Father is very well, and very glad to hear that you were coming. To tell the truth though, he is far more interested in your uncle’s visit. He has arranged a meeting at the Geographical Society for him. And for the past month he has been thinking and talking of nothing but archaeology. They have been digging up all kinds of things.”

“And so, he has been angry with you?”

“He seems to think he has every reason to be. I am twenty-three and he already sees me as an old maid... It’s awfully funny! Do you know what they call me in Lima now? The Bride of the Sun!”

“What does that mean?”

“Aunt Agnes and Aunt Irene will explain better than I can. It’s something like one of the Vestals—an old Inca legend.”

“Hum, some superstitious rot, no doubt... But you know, Marie-Thérèse, that I’m an awful coward. Do you think that your father...”

“Of course! He’ll do anything I like if he is asked at the right moment We’ll be married in three months’ time at San Domingo. Truly we will!”

“Darling! But I’m only a poor devil of an engineer, and he may not think much of me as a son-in-law for the Marquis de la Torre.”

“Nonsense, you’re clever, and I’ll make you a gift of the whole of Peru. There’s plenty to do here for an engineer.”

“I can hardly believe my luck, Marie-Thérèse! That I... But, tell me, how did it all happen?”

“The old, old way. First, you are neighbors, or meet by accident. Then, you are friends... just friends, nothing else... And then...?”

Their hands joined, and they remained thus for a moment, in silence.

Suddenly, a burst of noise came from the courtyard, and a moment later, a hurried knock announced the entrance of an excited employee. At the sight of the stranger, he stopped short, but Marie-Thérèse told him to speak. Raymond, who both understood and spoke Spanish well, listened.

“The Indians are back from the Islands, señorita. There has been trouble between them and the Chinese. One coolie was killed and three were badly wounded.”

Marie-Thérèse showed no outward sign of emotion. Her voice hardened as she asked:

“Where did it happen? In the Northern Islands?”

“No, at Chincha.”

“Then Huascar was there?”

“Yes, señorita. He came back with them, and is outside.”

“Send him in.”