

# AN UNEXPECTED SOLUTION

By B. TRAVEN

*Her father thought his parents were the craziest people in the world. Were they?*

SIX months after he had married, Regino Borrego realized that something in his new station of life was not at all what he had expected it should be. To his friends he explained the situation by telling them that he was finding married life rather cold, uneventful and quite different from what he had been made to believe. For him there was no fun in having a female companion by his side day and night, and miserably he added that he had no idea what to do in this case. This problem of his seemed to be still more difficult to comprehend, since Manola Lobo, his wife, was not only young but also very pretty and highly attractive.

From the time Regino was six and Manola four they had been together every day. And every day they had been told that they would marry to each other as soon as reaching the proper age. Among the two no mystery of any sort existed. And where no mystery remains romance may find it hard to enchant her victims.

About that time it so happened that Concha Lobo, Manola's mother, fell sick. After her daughter's marriage she had moved to gay Mexico City to live there. A widow for the last seven years she still felt young; and vigorous enough to live her life independently, trying to get as much out of it as a woman, of not yet forty and of means, could hope for.

Manola left immediately for the capital and when after six weeks being with her mother the doctor told her that mother was out of danger, she decided to return home.

She did not surprise her husband by dropping in at a time when he least expected her. She announced her return one day before she arrived.

Taking off her hat and letting him help her out of the light coat she wore, with a motherly smile upon her lips, she said: "Now let's see how he looks, this big old boy of mine. I've almost forgotten your face." Then she grasped firmly his head between her hands, kissed him heartily, and while nestling her head against his shoulders said, kingly: "I love you so very much, Reggi. Honest, I love you, dear. I never knew before how much I

loved you. You are such a fine and decent fellow, really you are. What a big mistake I've made during all these months since we married, always fighting and not appreciating you the way I should. Well, darling, it's never too late, you know, as long as there's life, there's also love." Again she covered his face with kisses.

Never before had she shown such an affection.

When he mentioned this change of attitude to his friends they just laughed: "All you needed was a vacation from marriage. That was just the trouble with you folks."

One Sunday morning, not very long afterwards, her face getting flushed all over, she said: "Well, dear, I guess we'll have to prepare for a visitor."

"Who's coming," he asked innocently, "your brother? Whoever comes is welcome."

"No," she said, "you're mistaken. I mean a real newcomer, a new member of the family."

He now understood. Even Adam would with that smiling red face before him.

It was a boy. His father could well be proud of him, and he was. He acted as if there had never been a father before him anywhere under the sun.

Regino and Manola had been married now for twenty-three years, and Cutberto, their only offspring, happened to be heavily in love with Vera, the only child of Señor Jenaro Ochoa, a very well-to-do dentist in town. Vera was about the same age as Cutberto. However, they could not get married because of the opposition on the part of Cutberto's parents.

On the other hand, the dentist whose wife had died four years ago, was all jubilant over that match because he thought Cutberto the finest boy on earth.

Cutberto had somehow got the idea in his mind that marrying without the blessing of the parents of both parties concerned might turn out unlucky, but as soon as he brought up the question before his parents, Regino would say: "You may marry anyone else you please, I promise you not to object. But I do object fiercely to your marrying that Ochoa girl."

"If only you would tell me," Cutberto protested, "why you don't want me to marry the Ochoa girl. Is she pretty or not?"

"More than pretty, she is a beauty."

"Do you know anything about her not being a decent girl?"

"She is a model for a young woman of today."

"Well, then, what is the objection?"

"I simply don't want you to marry that girl, that's all. You have to get her out of your mind."

Cutberto went to see his mother. "You have heard what your father said," she would say, "you can't marry Vera. I can't say anything against her. She is a good girl, the finest I know. But you cannot have her. She is not the right party for you. Forget her. Any other one you bring along I will receive her with open arms. But not Vera. Your father knows what he is talking about."

At this juncture Señor Ochoa came to the rescue. "I'll talk this thing over with your old man," he said, "he is just a stubborn ass, that's what he is. I'll tell him so plainly and straight at his face. I wonder what is back of it? He cannot have some other girl in mind for you, can he?"

"Certainly not. If so he would have told me long ago."

"Well, I'll go around and see him. Just wait."

Señor Ochoa came to the house and he and Señor Borrego had a talk.

"Just tell me," Ochoa began, "isn't my daughter good enough for your boy? I'd like to hear your straight opinion on that point. Come, come!"

Regino felt uneasy. All he could say for the moment was: "I never said anything about your daughter not being good enough for our boy or not educated properly. Why, she had a better education than I could afford for our boy. It's not that."

"Well, what is it then?" The dentist bellowed, getting red in his face. "Perhaps she hasn't money enough. Huh? Out with it. Just say so. I'm waiting for that."

"I can't tell you, Jenaro Ochoa, that's all. I dislike that match. Please, do understand." Regino tried to pat Ochoa on the shoulder.

Señor Ochoa jumped back and yelled: "Don't you touch me unless you want to be slaughtered. And you?" He now turned to Manola who had entered on hearing that heated argument. "And you? What have you to say? Answer, please!"

"I agree with my husband," she said in a quiet

and low voice.

"Now, listen, you folks." Ochoa shook his fist at their faces. "I am through with stubborn mugs like you. We'll get along without your consent, damn it. This marriage will not turn out unhappy if they marry without your blessing. The blessing of people like you isn't worth anything, anyway. The couple will get twice, a hundred times your blessing from me. And happy they shall be in spite of you and just because of you." With this Señor Ochoa went out, banging the door behind him so that the whole house trembled.

That night when Cutberto came home he said: "Well, Saturday next we'll get married. That's fixed now for good, no more stalling. We won't and we don't wait any longer. If you don't come to our wedding it'll be very hard for me. I've tried my best. Since there seems no other way out we'll have to do without you. But the wedding will take place Saturday at noon. Good night!" He left them and went up to his room.

A strange stillness settled over the place after Cutberto had gone.

Meditating for a while Manola looked at her husband and said: "I know quite well, why I object to this marriage. Only what I don't know is why you object also. You can't say anything against the girl, can you?"

"Perhaps you can," Regino snapped nervously.

"I never said that. I only said that I have a queer feeling that the marriage cannot take place ever."

"Exactly. Same feeling here."

He fell silent. Then he rose and began to walk about the room. Finally he stopped in front of Manola and said: "I'll have to tell the boy. I don't see any way out of it."

"What is it you'll have to tell the boy?" she asked eagerly, her face showing an expression of fear.

"That he cannot very well marry his own sister."

Manola jumped up from her chair, but right away fell back into it while her face got very pale. "How do you know?" she asked, practically without breath. "How did you come to know that? How did you find out? Was it Ochoa who put you wise? Or who was it? Besides, Ochoa doesn't know it."

"Ochoa? No. He didn't say a word. I don't even think that he knows anything about it. It was while

you were with your mother when she was sick. Ochoa was not in town at that time. I felt sort of lonesome. Maybe she did, too. The Ochoa woman, I mean. I don't know. So it happened. To cut it short, the Ochoa girl, Vera I mean, is my daughter. Now, you see, that Cutberto can't marry her and we have to tell him. Rather a delicate business, isn't it?"

His story finished, Regino looked at Manola to see how she had taken it.

To his surprise a whimsical smile played on her lips when she asked: "Are you quite sure, I mean absolutely certain that Vera is your daughter and not the old man's? Absolutely and positively certain?"

"Absolutely and positively certain, so help me. We knew it before Ochoa came home."

Manola, with a jolly snigger in her voice, now said: "If you are absolutely and positively sure that Vera is your daughter, then there is no danger whatsoever in her marrying Cutberto. Because if you are sure that she is your daughter then Cutberto cannot be her brother."

"How is that?" He asked innocently and in a tone of surprise.

"Cutberto can't be her brother because he is not your son."

"What? Whose son is he then if not mine?"

"Ochoa's. He happened to be in the capital also when I was there with mother. He was taking a sort of post-graduate course in some kind of his studies. We didn't fall in love with each other. It wasn't like that. Perhaps it was the romantic surrounding and the beautiful summer, and we were caught in a terrible rain storm. So it happened. Before I returned home I discovered that you couldn't be the father. Well, there it is, the whole truth."

Regino took a deep breath. Finally, he remarked: "This kind of blow I never expected. Something new worries me now."

"What is it, darling?"

"That all this is not going to break up our marriage."

"That would be foolish and altogether impossible," she said quietly with a sweet smile on

her lips. "Life is by far more satisfying the way we've had ours since that long time when I came home a new woman. Ochoa, who was so much older than you were at that time, and so much more experienced in all human things taught me a good deal while we were in the capital. Of course, I never had anything to do with him afterwards. Never. He was forgotten on the very day I came home. I had always loved you and only you, but I did not know it."

"Well, old girl, let's forget it. What do you say?" He took her in his arms.

At that moment Cutberto dropped in again, looking for something which he had forgotten to take upstairs with him.

"Why has this boy to be in the habit of appearing when least wanted and not at all expected," Regino whispered into Manola's ear. "Forever butting in at the wrong time."

And without letting her out of his arms he called out: "What is the matter with you anyhow? Can't you ever get to sleep? Running about the house all night long. Yes, of course, we agree and we'll be at the wedding. Saturday or any odd day. Who says otherwise, call him a big liar. And let me tell you, young man, if you took us seriously then you made an awful fool of yourself. We both were just kidding you all the way to see how long it would last. In fact, we're glad to see you marry Vera. You'll have to make good, very good to live up to that wonderful girl. She is the finest girl under heaven. Her father knows."

Cutberto did not hear these last words because he had left already, storming to Ochoa's with the great news.

"Listen, son, I'll tell you something, a great secret," Señor Ochoa said. "You're a regular guy, but your folks are the funniest and craziest people I've ever known in all my life. A couple of hours ago they were all set to commit suicide rather than give their consent. And just an hour later they'd like you to get married right away even in the middle of the night. Ten months ago I should've talked to them the way I did today. This would've been the right thing for me to do."