

July 1963



AN AA FABLE

THE village of El Prado, hidden away in a remote part of Old Mexico, is almost the same as it was one hundred years ago. The simple peasant folk still wrestle their living from the stony soil, tend their goat-herds, sin a little in the village cantina and salve their souls before Padre Gonzales each Sunday at the old Spanish Mission.

When I say it is almost the same as it used to be there is one small but significant difference, in the person of one Pepi Valquez, and thereby hangs this tale.

Pepi's life, up until some months

ago, had been that of the average villager: He had a fine herd of milking goats; perhaps a little more land than the average. He enjoyed his cervesas and tequilla at the cantina after a hard day's work, and perhaps got a little boisterous on fiesta days, but did not everyone? But something seemed to happen to Pepi ... the goatherds began to know him less while the cantina knew him more. He was never seen at Sunday Mass, and where was the joy in sinning at the cantina if one could not confess these sins before the good Padre the next day? Such sinning was sacrilege.

Pepi was no longer the gay, singing paisan who made them laugh over their tequillas; he would insult them by going to sleep in their company, and then, to add insult to injury, at the time of the daily siesta he would humiliate this fervent time by becoming roaring drunk and singing at the top of his voice. Truly, whispered the villagers, Pepi has become possessed by a devil.

Sometime later, history was made in El Prado, when the town was invaded by an Americano motion picture group who had chosen this particular spot for its authenticity. Never had there been such excitement in the village since Pancho Villa, the Magnifico, had marched into town years ago.

It started one night at the cantina—Pepi who usually drank alone, was sitting in a corner intently listening to one of the visiting Americanos. Then a week or so after the departure of the film company, Pepi walked into the Post Office and, in full view of all present, unwrapped a package containing a blue book printed in Spanish. Holding the book tightly in

his hand Pepi was seen almost running to the Mission for the good Padre to read it to him. And here the picture seemed to change again—the cantina saw less of Pepi while the Mission saw more of him and the blue book.

Suspicion was once again rabid in the minds of the villagers, for they had known only one book in all their lives—the good black book that the Padre always carried, and if this good black book could accomplish nothing for Pepi, what kind of evil magic did this new book contain? In fact the whole village became so incensed that the Padre ordered the Mission bell to be rung for one and all to assemble.

In the simple language they all understood, they were told that the new blue book was written in parts from the old black book for people with the sickness that was Pepi's, and that the El Dios Divino must have been present at its writing. With this, he opened the book and commenced to read in Spanish—"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path,"....

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