Mariquita

by John Ayscough, 1858-1928

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TO SENORITA MARIQUITA GUTIERREZ

Senorita,

It is, indeed, kind of you to condone, by your acceptance of the dedication of this small book, the theft of your name, perpetrated without your knowledge, in its title. And in thanking you for that acceptance I seize another opportunity of apologizing for that theft.

I need not tell you that in drawing Mariquita's portrait I have not been guilty of the further liberty of attempting your own, since we have never met, except on paper, and you belong to that numerous party of my friends known to me only by welcome and kind letters. But I hope there may be a nearer likelihood of my meeting you than there now can be of my seeing your namesake.

That you and some others may like her I earnestly trust: if not it must be the fault of my portrait, drawn perhaps with less skill than respectful affection.

John Ayscough.

Chapter I

A whole state, as big as England and Wales, and then half as big again, tilting smoothly upward towards, but never reaching, the Great Divide: the tilt so gradual that miles of land seem level; a vast sun-swept, breeze-swept upland always high above the level of the far, far-off sea, here in the western skirts of the state a mile above it. Its sky-scape always equal to its landscape, and dominant—as the sky can never be imagined in shut lands of close valleys, where trees are forever at war with the air and with the light.

Here light and life seeming twin and inseparable: and the wind itself but the breathing of the light. What is called, by the foolish, a featureless country, that is with huge, fine features, not to be sought for but insistent, regnant, everywhere: space, tangible and palpable, height inevitably perceptible and recognizable in all the unviolated light, in the winds' smash, and the sun's, in the dancing sense of freedom: yet that dancing not frivolous, but gladly solemn.

As to little features they are slurred (to the slight glance) in the vast unity: but look for them, and they are myriad. The riverbanks hold them, between prairie-lip and water. The prairie-waves hold them. Life is innumerably present, though to the hasty sight it seems primarily and distinctly absent. There are myriads of God's little live preachers, doing each, from untold ages to untold ages, the unnoted things set them by Him to do, as their big brothers the sun and the wind, the rain and the soil do.

Of the greater beasts fewer but plenty—fox, and timber-wolf, and coyote, and still to-day an antelope here and there.

Of men few. Their dwellings parted by wide distances. Their voices scarce heard where no dwelling is at hand. But the dwellings, being solitary and rare, singularly home-stamped.

Chapter II

Mariquita came out from the homestead, where there was nobody, and stood at its verge (where the prairie began abruptly) where there was nobody. She was twenty years old and had lived five of them here on the prairie, since her mother died, and she had come home to be her father's daughter and housekeeper, and all the servant he had. She was hardly taller now, and more slim. Her father did not know she was beautiful—at first he had been too much engaged in remembering her mother, who had been very blonde and fair, not at all like her. Her own skin was dark; and her rich hair was dark; her grave, soft, deep eyes were dark, though hazel-dark, not black-dark: whereas her mother's hair had been sunny-golden, and her eyes bright (rather shallow) blue, and her skin all white and rose.

Her mother had taught school, up in Cheyenne, in Wyoming, and had been of a New England family of Puritans. Her father's people had come, long ago, from Spain, and he himself had been born near the desert in New Mexico: his mother may have been Indian—but a Catholic, anyway.

So, no doubt, was José: though he had little occasion to remember it. It was over fifty miles to the nearest church and he had not heard Mass for years. He had married his Protestant wife without any dispensation, and a judge had married them.

Nevertheless when the child came, he had made the mother understand she must be of his Church, and had baptized her himself. When Mariquita was ten years old he sent her to the Loretto nuns, out on the heights beyond Denver, where she had been confirmed, and made her first Communion, and many subsequent Communions.

For five years now she had had to "hear Mass her own way." That is to say, she went out upon the prairie, and, in the shade of a tree-clump, took her lonely place, crossed herself at the threshold of the shadow, and genuflected towards where she believed her old school was, with its chapel, and its Tabernacle. Then, out of her book she followed the Ordinary of the Mass, projecting herself in mind and fancy into that worshipping company, picturing priest and nuns and school-fellows. At the Sanctus she rang a sheep-bell, and deepened all her Intention. At the Elevation she rang it again, in double triplet, though she could elevate only her own solitary soul. At first she had easily pictured all her school-fellows in their remembered places—they were all grown up and gone away home now. The old priest she had known was dead, as the nuns had sent her word, and she had to picture a priest, unknown, featureless, instead of him. The nuns' faces had somewhat dimmed in distinctness too. But she could picture the large group still.

At the Communion she always made a Spiritual Communion of her own—that was why she always "heard her Mass" early, so as to be fasting.

Once or twice, at long intervals, she had been followed by one of the cowboys: but the first one had seen her face as she knelt, and gone away, noiselessly, with a shy, red reverence. Her father had seen the second making obliquely towards her tree-clump, had overtaken him and inquired grimly if he would like a leathering. "When Mariquita's at church," said José, "let her be. She's for none of us then."

And they let her be: and her tree-clump became known as Mariquita's Church by all the cowboys.

One by one they fell in love with her (her father grimly conscious, but unremarking) and one by one they found nothing come of it. Whether he would have objected had anything come of it he did not say, though several had tried to guess.

To her he never spoke of it, any more than to them: he hardly spoke to her of anything except the work—which she did carefully, as if carelessly. If she had neglected it, or done it badly, he would have rebuked her: that, he considered, was parental duty: as she needed no rebuke he said nothing; his ideas of paternal duty were bounded by paternal correction and a certain cool watchfulness. His watchfulness was not intrusive: he left her chiefly to herself, perceiving her to require no guidance. In all her life he never had occasion to complain that anything she did was "out of place"—his notion of the severest expression of disapproval a father could be called upon to utter.

It was, in his opinion, to be taken for granted that a parent was entitled to the affection of his child, and that the child was entitled to the affection of her father. He neither displayed his affection nor wished Mariquita to display hers. Nor was there in him any sensible feeling of love for the girl. Her mother he had loved, and it was a relief to him that his daughter was wholly unlike her. It would have vexed him had there been any challenging likeness—would have resented it as a tacit claim, like a rivalry.

Joaquin was lonelier than Mariquita. He did not like being called "Don Joaquin"; he preferred being known by his surname, as "Mr. Xeres." One of the cowboys, a very ignorant lad from the East, had supposed "Wah-Keen" to be a Chinese name, and confided his idea to the others. Don Joaquin had overheard their laughter and been enraged by its cause when he had learned it.

He had not married till he was a little over thirty, being already well off by then, and he was therefore now past fifty on this afternoon when Mariquita came out and stood all alone where the homestead as it were rejoined the prairie. At first her long gaze, used to the great distances, was turned westward (and south a little) towards where, miles upon miles out of sight, lay the Mile High City, and Loretto, and the Convent, and all that made her one stock of memories.

The prairie was as empty to such a gaze as so much ocean.

But the sun-stare dazzled her, and she turned eastward; half a mile from her, that way, lay the river, showing nothing at this distance: its water, not filling at this season a fifth of the space between banks was out of sight: the low scrub within its banks was out of sight. Even its lips, of precisely even level on either side, were not discernible. But where she knew the further lip was, she saw two riders, a man and a woman. A moment after she caught sight of them they

disappeared—had ridden down into the river-bed. The trail had guided them, and they could miss neither the way nor the ford.

Nevertheless she walked towards where they were—though her father might possibly have thought her doing so out of place.

Chapter III

Up over the sandy river-bed came the two strangers, and Mariquita stood awaiting them.

The woman might be thirty, and was, she perceived (to whom a saddle was easier than a chair) unused to riding. She was a pretty woman, with a sort of foolish amiability of manner that might mean nothing. The man was younger—perhaps by three years, and rode as if he had always known how to do it, but without being saddle-bred, without living chiefly on horseback.

His companion was much aware of his being handsome, but Mariquita did not think of that. She, however, liked him immediately—much better than she liked the lady. The lady was not, in fact, quite a lady; but the young man was a gentleman; and perhaps Mariquita had never known one.

"Is this," inquired the blonde lady—pointing, though inaccurately, as if to indicate Mariquita's home, "where Mr. Xeres lives, please?"

She pronounced the X like the x's in Artaxerxes.

"Certainly. He is my father."

"Then your mother is my Aunt Margaret," said the lady in the smart clothes that looked so queer on an equestrian.

"My mother unfortunately is dead," Mariquita informed her, with a simplicity that made the wide-open blue eyes open wider still, and caused their owner to decide that the girl was "awfully Spanish."

Miss Sarah Jackson assumed (with admirable readiness) an expression of pathos.

"How very sad! I do apologize," she murmured, as if the decease of her aunt were partly her fault.

The young man was amused—not for the first time—by his fellow-traveller: but he did not show it.

"You couldn't help it," said Mariquita.

("How very Spanish!" thought her cousin.)

"Of course you did not know," the girl added, "or you would not have said anything to hurt me. And my mother's death happened five years ago."

"Not *really!*" cried the deceased lady's niece. "How wholly unexpected!"

"It wasn't very sudden," Mariquita explained. "She was ill for three months."

"My father was quite unaware of it—entirely so. He died, in fact, just about that time. And Aunt Margaret and he were (so unfortunately!) hardly on terms. Personally I always (though a child) had the strongest affection for Aunt Margaret. I took her part about her marriage. Papa's own second marriage struck me as less defensible."

"My father only married once," said Mariquita; "he is a widower."

"Oh, quite so! I wish mine had remained so. My stepmother—but we all have our faults, no doubt. We did *not* live agreeably after her third marriage—" (Mariquita was getting giddy, and so, perhaps, was Miss Jackson's fellow-traveller.)

"I could not, in fact, live," that lady serenely continued, with a smile of lingering sweetness, "and finally we differed completely. (Not noisily, on my part, nor roughly but irrevocably.) Hence my resolve to turn to Aunt Margaret, and my presence here—blood is thicker than water, when you come to think of it."

"I met Miss Jackson at —" her fellow-traveller explained, "and we made acquaintance—"

"Introduced by Mrs. Plosher," Miss Jackson put in again with singular sweetness. "Mrs. Plosher's boarding-house was recommended to me by two ministers. Mr. Gore was likewise her guest, and coming, as she was aware, to your father's."

Don Joaquin, besides the regular cowboys, had from time to time taken a sort of pupil or apprentice, who paid instead of being paid. Mariquita had not been informed that this Mr. Gore was expected.

"So," Mr. Gore added, "I begged Miss Jackson to use one of my horses, and I have been her escort."

"So coincidental!" observed that lady, shaking her head slightly. "Though really—now I find my aunt no longer presiding here—I *really*—"

Chapter IV

Don Joaquin expressed no surprise at Mr. Gore's arrival, and no rapture at that of Miss Jackson. But he appeared to take it for granted both would remain—as they did.

He saw more of the young man than of the young woman, which seemed to Mariquita to account for his preferring the latter. She had to see more of the lady. Miss Jackson was undeniably pretty, and instantly recognized as such by the cowboys: but she "kept her distance," and largely ignored their presence—a fact not unobserved by Don Joaquin, who inwardly commended her prudence. Of Mr. Gore she took more notice, as was natural, owing to their previous acquaintance. She spoke of him, however, to her host, as a lad, and hinted that at her age, lads were tedious; while frequent in allusion to a certain Eastern friend of hers (Mr. Bluck, a man of large means and great capacity) whose married daughter was her closest acquaintance.

"Carolina was older than me at school," she would admit, "but she was more to my taste than those of my own age. Maturity wins me. Youth is so raw!"

"What you call underdone," suggested Don Joaquin, who had talked English for forty years, and translated it still, in his mind, into Spanish.

"Just that," Sarah agreed. "You grasp me."

He didn't then, though he would sooner or later, thought the cowboys.

Miss Jackson, then, ignored the cowboys, and gave all the time she could spare from herself to Mariquita. When not with Mariquita she was sewing, being an indefatigable dressmaker. She called it her "studies."

"It is essential (out here in the wilderness) that I should not neglect my studies, and run to seed," she would say, as she smilingly retreated into her bedroom, where there were no books.

Mariquita would not have been sorry had she "studied" more. Sarah did not fit into her old habits of life, and when they were together Mariquita felt lonelier than she had ever done before. Indoors she did not find the young woman so incongruous—but when they were out on the prairie together the elder girl seemed somehow altogether impossible to reconcile with it.

"One might sketch," Miss Jackson would observe. "One *ought* to keep up one's sketching: I feel it to be a duty—don't you?"

"No. I can't sketch. It can't be a duty in my case."

"Ah, but in *mine!* I *know* I ought. But there's no feature." And she slowly waved her parasol round the horizon as though defying a "feature" to supervene from any point of the compass.

Though she despised her present neighborhood, Sarah never hinted at any intention of leaving it: and it became apparent that her host would not have liked her to go away. That her presence was a great thing for Mariquita it suited him to assume, but he saw no necessity for discussing the matter, nor ascertaining what might in fact be his daughter's opinion.

"I think," he said instead, "it will be better we call your cousin 'Sarella'. It is her name Sarah and Ella. 'Sarella' sounds more fitting."

So he and Mariquita thenceforth called her "Sarella."

Chapter V

Don Joaquin never thought much of Robert Gore; he failed, from the first, to "take to him." It had not delighted him that "Sarella" should arrive under his escort, though how she could have made her way up from Maxwell without him, he did not trouble to discuss with himself. At first he had thought it almost inevitable that the young man should make those services of his a claim to special intimacy with the lady to whom he had accidentally been useful. As it became apparent that Gore made no such claim, and was not peculiarly inclined to intimacy with his late fellow-traveller, Don Joaquin was half disposed to take umbrage, as though the young man were in a manner slighting Miss Jackson—his own wife's niece.

As there were only two women about the place, indifference to one of them (and that one, in Don Joaquin's opinion, by far the more attractive) might be accounted for by some special inclination towards the other. Was Gore equally indifferent to Mariquita?

Now, at present, Mariquita's father was not ready to approve any advances from the stranger in that direction. He did not feel he knew enough about him. That he

was sufficiently well off, he thought probable; but in that matter he must have certainty. And besides, he thought Gore was sure to be a Protestant. Now he had married a Protestant himself: and that his wife had been taken from him in her youth had been, he had silently decided, Heaven's retribution. Besides, a girl was different. A man might do things she might not. *He* had consulted his own will and pleasure only; but Mariquita was not therefore free to consult hers. A Catholic girl should give herself only to a Catholic man.

That Mariquita and Gore saw little of each other he was pretty sure, but it was not possible they should see nothing. And it soon became his opinion that, without much personal intercourse, they were interested in each other.

Mariquita listened (without often looking at him) when Gore talked, in a manner he had never yet observed in her. Gore's extreme deference towards the girl, his singular and almost aloof courtesy was, the old man conceived, not only breeding and good manners, but the sign of some special way in which she had impressed him; as if he had, at sight, perceived in her something unrevealed to her father himself. In this, as in most things, Don Joaquin was correct in his surmise. He was shrewd in surmise to the point almost of cleverness, though by no means an infallible judge of character. It did not, however, occur to him that the young stranger was right in this fancied perception, that in Mariquita there was something higher and finer than anything divined by her father, who had never gone beyond admitting that, so far, he had perceived in her nothing out of place.

If anything out of place should now appear he would speak; meanwhile he remained, as his habit was, silent and watchful; not rendered more appreciative of his daughter by the stranger's appreciation, and not inclined by that appreciation more favorably to the stranger himself.

That Gore was not warmly welcomed by the cowboys neither surprised nor troubled him. There were no quarrels, and that was enough. He did not expect them to be delighted by the advent of a foreigner in a position not identical with their own. What they did for pay, he paid for being taught to do—that was the theory, though in fact Gore did not seem to need much teaching. Some, of course, he did need: prairie-lore he could not know, however practised he might be as a mere horseman. Don Joaquin was chiefly a horse-raiser and dealer, though he dealt also in cattle and even in sheep. By this time he had the repute of being wealthy.

Chapter VI

It was true that the actual intercourse between Mariquita and her father's apprentice or pupil was much less frequent or close than might be imagined by anyone strange to the way of life of which they formed two units.

At meals they sat at the same table, but during the greater part of every day he was out upon the range, and she at home, within the homestead, or near it. Yet it was also true that between them there was something not existing between either and any other person: a friendship mostly silent, an interest not the less real or

strong because of the silence. To Gore she was a study, of profounder interest than any book he knew. To make a counter-study of him would have been alien from Mariquita's nature and character; but his presence, which she did not ponder, or consider, as he did hers, brought something into her life. Perhaps it chiefly made her less lonely by revealing to her how lonely she had been. Of his beauty she never thought—never till the end. Of hers he thought much less as he became more and more absorbed in herself—though its fineness was always more and more clearly perceived by him.

On that first afternoon, when he had first seen her, it had instantly struck him as possessing a quality of rarity, elusive and never to be defined. Miss Jackson's almost gorgeous prettiness, her brilliant coloring, her attractive shapeliness, had been hopelessly and finally vulgarized by the contrast—as the two young women stood on the level lip of the river-course in the unsparing, unflattering light.

That Miss Jackson promptly decided that Mariquita was stupid, he had seen plainly; and he had not had the consolation of knowing that she was stupid herself. She was, he knew, wise enough in her generation, and by no means vacant of will or purpose. But she was, he saw, stupid in thinking her young hostess so. Slow, in some senses, Mariquita might be; not swift of impression, though tenacious of impression received, nor willing to be quick in jumping to shrewd (unflattering) conclusion, yet likely to stick hard to an even harsh conclusion once formed.

These, however, were slight matters. What was not slight was the sense she gave him of nobility: her simplicity itself noble, her complete acquiescence in her own complete ignorance of experience—her innate, unargued conviction of the little consequence of much, often highly desired, experience.

Of the world she knew nothing, socially, geographically even. Of women her knowledge was (as soon he discovered) a mere memory, a memory of a group of nuns—for her other companions at the Convent had been children. Of men she knew only her father and his cowboys. And no one, he perceived, knew her.

But Gore did not believe her mind vacant. That rare quality could not have been in her beauty if it had been empty. Yet—there was something greater than her mind behind her face. The shape of that perception had entered instantly into his own mind; and the perception grew and deepened daily, with every time he was in her presence, with every recollection of her in absence.

Her mind might be a garden unsown. But behind her face was the light of a lamp not waiting to be lit, but already lighted (he surmised) at the first coming of conscious existence, and burning steadily ever since. Whose hand had lighted it he did not know yet, though he knew that the lamp, shining behind her face, her mere beauty, was her soul. Her father was not mistaken in his notion that the young man regarded the girl to whom he addressed so little of direct speech, with a veneration that disconcerted Don Joaquin and was condemned by him as out of place. Not that he, of course, found fault with respect: absence of that he would grimly have resented; but a *culte*, like Gore's, a reverence literally devout, seemed to the old half-Indian Latin, high-falutin, unreal: and Don Joaquin abhorred unrealities.

Probably the young man condemned the old as hide-bound in obtuseness of perception in reference to his daughter. As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout she

may well have seemed to him. If so, some inkling of the fact would surely penetrate the old horse-raiser's inner, taciturn, but acutely watchful consciousness. His hide was by no means too thick for that. And, if so again, that perception would not enhance his appreciation of the critic.

Elderly fathers are not universally more flattered by an exalted valuation of their daughters than by an admiring estimation of themselves.

To himself, indeed, Gore was perfectly respectful. And he had to admit that the stranger learned his work well and did it well—better than the cowboys whom Don Joaquin was not given to indulge in neglect or slackness.

He had a notion that the cowboys considered Gore too respectable—as to which their master held his judgment in suspense. In a possible son-in-law respectability, unless quite suspiciously excessive, would not be much "out of place"—not that Don Joaquin admitted more than the bare possibility, till he had fuller certainty as to the stranger's circumstances and antecedents, what he called his "conditions." Given satisfactory conditions, Mariquita's father began to be conscious that Gore as a possible son-in-law might simplify a certain course of his own.

For Sarella continued steadily to commend herself to his ideas. He held her to be beautiful in the extreme, and her prudence he secretly acclaimed as admirable. That she was penniless he was quite aware, and he had a constant, sincere affection for money; but, unless penniless, such a lovely creature could hardly have been found on the prairie, or be expected to remain there; an elderly rich husband, he considered, would have much more hold on a young and lovely wife if she *were* penniless.

That the young woman had expensive tastes he did not suppose, and he had great and not ungrounded confidence in his own power of repression of any taste not to his mind, should any supervene.

Don Joaquin had two reasons for surveying with conditional approval the idea of marrying Sarella—when he should have made up his mind, which he had not yet done. One was to please himself: the other was in order that he might have a son. Mariquita's sex had always been against her. Before her arrival he had decided that his child must be a boy, and her being a girl was out of place. He disliked making money for some other man's wife.

Chapter VII

Jack did not like Sarella, and so it was fortunate for that young person that Jack's opinion was of no sort of consequence. He had been longer on the range than anyone there except Don Joaquin, and he did much that would, if he had been a different sort of man, have entitled him to consider himself foreman. But he received smaller wages than anyone and never dreamt of being foreman. He was believed never to have had any other name but Jack, and was known never to have had but one suit of clothes, and his face and hands were much shabbier than his clothes, owing to a calendar of personal accidents. "That happened," he

would say, "in the year the red bull horned my eye out," or "I mind—'twas in the Jenoorey that my leg got smashed thro' Black Peter rollin' on me..." He had been struck in the jaw by a splinter from a tree that had itself been struck by lightning, and the scar he called his "June mark." A missing finger of his right hand he called his Xmas mark because it was on Christmas Day that the gun burst which shot it off. These, and many other scars and blemishes, would have marred the beauty of an Antinoüs, and Jack had always been ugly.

But, shabby as he was, he was marvellously clean, and Mariquita was very fond of him. His crooked body held a straight heart, loyal and kind, and a child's mind could not be cleaner. No human being suspected that Jack hated his master, whom he served faithfully and with stingily rewarded toil: and he hated him not because he was stingy to himself, but because Jack adored Mariquita, and accused her father of indifference to her. He was angry with him for leaving her alone to do all the work, and angry because nothing was ever done for her, and no thought taken of her.

When Sarella and Gore came, Jack hoped that the young man would marry Mariquita and take her away—though he would be left desolate. Thus Mariquita would be happy—and her father be punished, for Jack clearly perceived that Don Joaquin did not care for Gore, and he did *not* perceive that Mariquita's departure might be convenient to her father. But Jack could not see that Gore himself did much to carry out that marriage scheme. That the young man set a far higher value on Mariquita than her father had ever done, Jack did promptly understand; but he could perceive no advances and watched him with impatience.

As for Sarella, Jack was jealous of her importance: jealous that the old man made more of his wife's niece than of his own daughter; jealous that she had much less to do, and specially jealous that she had much smarter clothes. Jack could not see Sarella's beauty; had he possessed a looking-glass it might have been supposed to have dislocated his eye for beauty, but he possessed none—and he thought Mariquita as beautiful as the dawn on the prairie.

To do her justice, Sarella was civil to the battered old fellow, but he didn't want her civility, and was ungrateful for it. Yet her civility was to prove useful. Jack lived in a shed at the end of the stables, where he ate and slept, and mended his clothes sitting up in bed, and wearing (then only) a large pair of spectacles, though half a pair would have been enough. He cooked his own food, though Mariquita would have cooked it for him if he would have let her.

Sarella loved good eating, and on her coming it irritated her to see so much excellent food "made so little of." Presently she gave specimens of her own superior science, and Don Joaquin approved, as did the cowboys.

"Jack," she said to him one day, "do you ever eat anything but stew from year's end to year's end?"

"I eats bread, too, and likewise corn porridge," Jack replied coldly.

"I could tell you how to make more of your meat—I should think you'd sicken of stew everlastingly."

"There's worse than stew," he suggested.

"I don't know what's worse, then," the young lady retorted, wrinkling her very pretty nose.

"None. That's worse," said Jack, triumphantly.

"It seems to me," Sarella observed thoughtfully, "as if you're growing a bit oldish to do for yourself, and have no one to do anything for you. An elderly man wants a woman to keep him comfortable."

Jack snorted, but Sarella, undefeated, proceeded to put the case of his being ill. Who would nurse him?

"Ill! I've too much to do for sech idleness. The Boss'd stare if I laid out to get ill."

"Illness," Sarella remarked piously, "comes from Above, and may come any day. Haven't you anyone belonging to you, Jack? No sister, no niece; you never were married, I suppose, so I don't mention a daughter."

"I was married, though," Jack explained, much delighted, "and had a daughter, too."

"You quite surprise me!" cried Sarella, "quite!"

"She didn't marry me for my looks, my wife didn't," chuckled Jack. "Nor yet for my money."

"Out of esteem?" suggested Sarella.

"Can't say, I'm sure. I never heerd her mention it. Anyway, it didn't last—"

"The esteem?"

"No. The firm. She died—when Ginger was born. Since which I have remained a bachelord."

"By Ginger you mean your daughter?"

"That's what they called her. Her aunt took her, and she took the smallpox. But she didn't die of it. She's alive now."

"Married, I daresay?"

"No. Single. She's as like me as you're not," Jack explained summarily.

Sarella laughed.

"A good girl, though, I'll be bound," she hinted amiably.

"She's never mentioned the contrary—in her letters."

"Oh, she writes! I'm glad she writes."

"Thank you, Miss Sarella. She writes most Christmasses. And she wrote lately, tho' it's not Christmas."

"Not ill, I hope?"

"Ill! She's an industrious girl with plenty o' sense ... but her aunt's dead, and she thinks o' taking a place in a boarding-house."

"Jack," said Sarella, after a brief but pregnant pause of consideration, "bring her up here."

Jack regarded her with a stare of undisguised amazement.

"Why not?" Sarella persisted. "It would be better for you."

"What's that to do with it?"

"And better for Miss Mariquita. It's too much for Miss Mariquita—all the work she has to do."

"That's true anyway."

"Of course it's true. Anyone can see that." (That Sarella saw it, considerably surprised Jack, and provided matter for some close consideration subsequently.)

"Look here, Jack," she went on, "I'll tell you what. You go to Mr. Xeres and say you'd like your daughter to come and work for you..."

"And he'd tell me to go and be damned."

"But you'd not go. And he wouldn't want you to go. And *I'll* speak to him."

Jack stared again. He hardly realized yet how much steadily growing confidence in her influence with "the Boss" Sarella felt. He made no promise to speak to him: but said "he'd sleep on it."

With that sleep came a certain ray of comprehension. Miss Sarella was not thinking entirely of him and his loneliness, nor entirely of Miss Mariquita. He believed that she really expected the Boss would marry her (as all the cowboys had believed for some weeks) and he perceived, with some involuntary admiration of her shrewdness, that she had no idea of being left, if Miss Mariquita should marry and go away, to do all the work as she had done. Once arrived at this perception of the situation, Jack went ahead confident of Sarella's quietly persistent help. He had not the least dread of rough language. He had no sensitive dread of displeasing his master. He would like to have Ginger up at the range especially as Ginger's coming would take much of the work off Miss Mariquita's hands. He even made Don Joaquin suspect that if Ginger were not allowed to come he, Jack, would go, and make a home for her down in Maxwell.

It did not suit Don Joaquin to lose Jack, and it suited him very well to listen to Sarella.

So Ginger came, and proved, as all the cowboys agreed, a good sort, though quite as ugly as her father.

Chapter VIII

"Mariquita," said her father one day, "does Sarella ever talk to you about religion?"

Anything like what could be called a conversation was so rare between them that the girl was surprised, and it surprised her still more that he should choose that particular subject.

"She asked me if we were Catholics."

"Of course we are Catholics. You said so?"

"I didn't say 'of course,' but I said we were. She then asked if my mother had become one—on her marriage or afterwards."

Don Joaquin heard this with evident interest, and, as Mariquita thought, with some satisfaction.

"What did you say?" he inquired.

Mariquita glanced at him as if puzzled. "I told her that my mother never became a Catholic," she answered.

"That pleased her?"

"I don't know. She did not seem pleased or displeased."

"She did not seem glad that I had not insisted that my wife should be Catholic?"

"She may have been glad—I did not see that she was."

"You did not think she would have been angry if she had heard I had insisted that my wife should be Catholic?"

"No; that did not appear to me."

So far as Mariquita's information went, it satisfied her father. Only it was a pity Sarella should know that her aunt had not adopted his own religion.

Mariquita had not probed the motive of his questions. Direct enough of *impression*, she was not penetrating nor astute in following the hidden working of other persons' minds.

"It is," he remarked, "a good thing Sarella came here."

"Poor thing! She had no home left—it was natural she should think of coming to her aunt."

"Yes, quite natural. And good for you also."

"I was not lonely before—"

"But if I had died?"

Mariquita had never thought of his dying; he was as strong as a tree, and she could not picture the range without him.

"I never thought of you dying. You are not old, father."

"Old, no! But suppose I had died, all the same—before Sarella came—what would you have done?"

"I never thought of it."

"No. That would have been out of place. But you could not have lived here, one girl all alone among all the men."

"No, of course."

"Now you have Sarella. It would be different."

"Oh, yes; if she wished to go on living here—"

"If she went away to live somewhere else you could go with her."

Mariquita did not see that that would be necessary, but she did not say so. She was not aware that her father was endeavoring to habituate her mind to the permanence of Sarella's connection with herself.

"Of course," he said casually, "you might marry—at any time."

"I never thought of that," the girl answered, and he saw clearly that she never *had* thought of it. Gore would, he perceived, not have her for the asking; might have a great deal of asking to do, and might not succeed after much asking.

It was not so clear to him that Gore himself was as well aware of that as he was.

That she had never had any thoughts of marriage pleased him, partly because he would not have liked Gore to get what he wanted, so easily, and partly because it satisfied his notion of dignity in her—his daughter. It was really his own dignity in her he was thinking of.

All the same, now that he knew she was not thinking of marrying the handsome stranger, he felt more clearly that (if Gore's "conditions" were suitable) the marriage might suit him—Don Joaquin.

"There are," he observed sententiously, "only two ways for women."

"Two ways?"

"Marriage is the usual way. If God had wanted only nuns, He would have created women only. That one sees. Whereas there are women and men—so marriage is the ordinary way for women; and if God chooses there should be more married women than nuns, it shows He doesn't want too many nuns."

The argument was new to Mariquita: she was little used to hear *any* abstract discussion from her father.

"You have thought of it," she said; "I have never thought of all that."

"There was no necessity. It might have been out of place. All the same it is true what I say."

"But I think it is also true that to be a nun is the best way for some women."

"Naturally. For some."

Mariquita had no sort of desire to argue with him, or anyone; arguments were, she thought, almost quarrels.

He, on his side, was again thinking of Sarella, and left the nuns alone.

"It would," he said, "be a good thing if Sarella should become Catholic. If she talks about religion you can explain to her that there can be only one that is true."

Mariquita did not understand (though everyone else did) that her father wished to marry Sarella, and, of course, she could not know that he was resolved against provoking further punishment by marrying a Protestant.

"If I can," she said, slowly, "I will try to help her to see that. She does not talk much about such things. And she is much older than I am—"

"Oh, yes; quite very much older," he agreed earnestly, though in fact Sarella appeared simply a girl to him.

"And it would not do good for me to seem interfering."

"But," he agreed with some adroitness, "though a blind person were older than you (who can see) you would show her the way?"

Mariquita was not, at any rate, so blind as to be unable to see that her father was strongly desirous that Sarella should be a Catholic. It had surprised her, as she had no recollection of his having troubled himself concerning her own mother, his beloved wife, not having been one. Of course, she was glad, thinking it meant a deeper interest in religion on his own part.

Chapter IX

Between Mariquita and her father there was little in common except a partial community of race; in nature and character they were entirely different. In her the Indian strain had only physical expression, and that only in the slim suppleness of her frame; she would never grow stout as do so many Spanish women.

Whereas in her father the Indian blood had effects of character. He was not merely subtle like a Latin, but had besides the craft and cunning of an Indian. Yet the cunning seemed only an intensification of the subtlety, a deeper degree of the same quality and not an added separate quality. In fact, in him, as in many with the same mixture of race, the Indian strain and the Spanish were really mingled, not merely joined in one individual.

Mariquita had, after all, only one quarter Spanish, and one Indian; whereas with him it was a quarter of half and half. She had, in actual blood, a whole half that was pure Saxon, for her mother's New England family was of pure English descent. Yet Mariquita seemed far more purely Spanish than her father; he himself could trace nothing of her mother in her, and in her character was nothing Indian but her patience.

From her mother personally she inherited nothing, but through her mother she had certain characteristics that helped to make her very incomprehensible to Don Joaquin, though he did not know it.

Gore, who studied her with far more care and interest, because to him she seemed deeply worth study, did not himself feel compelled to remember her triple strain of race. For to him she seemed splendidly, adorably simple. He was far from falling into Sarella's shallow mistake of calling that simplicity "stupidity"; to him it appeared a sublimation of purity, rarely noble and fine. That she was book-ignorant he knew, as well as that she was life-ignorant; but he did not think her intellectually narrow, even intellectually fallow. Along what roads her mind moved he could not, by mere study of her, discover; yet he was sure it did not stagnate without motion or life.

* * * * *

About a month after the arrival of Sarella, one Saturday night at supper, that young person observed that Mr. Gore's place was vacant.

Mariquita must equally have noted the fact, but she had said nothing.

"Isn't Mr. Gore coming to his supper?" Sarella asked her.

Don Joaquin thought this out of place. His daughter's silence on the subject had pleased him better.

"I don't know," Mariquita answered, glancing towards her father.

"No," he said; "he has ridden down to Maxwell."

Sometimes one or other of the cowboys would ride down to Maxwell, and reappear, without question or remark.

"I wonder he did not mention he was going," Sarella complained.

"Of course he mentioned it," Don Joaquin said loudly. "He would not go without asking me."

"But to us ladies," Sarella persisted, "it would have been better manners."

"That was not at all necessary," said Don Joaquin; "Mariquita would not expect it."

"*I* would, though. It ought to have struck him that one might have a communication for him. I should have had commissions for him."

It was evident that Sarella had ruffled Don Joaquin, and it was the first time anyone had seen him annoyed by her.

Next day, after the midday meal, Sarella followed Mariquita out of doors, and said to her, yawning and laughing.

"Don't you miss Mr. Gore?"

Mariquita answered at once and quite simply:

"Miss him? He was never here till a month ago—"

"Nor was I," Sarella interrupted pouting prettily. "But you'd miss me, now."

"Only you're not going away."

"You take it for granted I shall stop, then?" (And Sarella looked complacent.) "That I'm a fixture."

"I never thought of your going away," Mariquita answered, with a formula rather habitual to her. "Where would you go?"

"I should decide on that when I decided to go." Sarella declared oracularly. But Mariquita took it with irritating calmness.

"I don't believe you will decide to go," she said with that gravity and plainness of hers that often irritated Sarella—who liked *badinage*. "It would be useless."

"Suppose," Sarella suggested, pinching the younger girl's arm playfully, "suppose I were to think of getting married. Shouldn't I have to go then?"

"I never thought of that—" Mariquita was beginning, but Sarella pinched and interrupted her.

"Do you *ever* think of anything?" she complained sharply.

"Oh, yes, often, of many things."

"What things on earth?" (with sudden inquisitive eagerness.)

"Just my own sort of things," Mariquita answered, without saying whether "her things" were on earth at all. Sarella pouted again.

"You're not very confidential to a person."

Mariquita weighed the accusation. "Perhaps," she said quietly, "I am not much used to persons. Since I came home from the convent there was no other girl here till you came."

"So you're sorry I came!"

"No; glad. I am glad you did that. It is a home for you. And I am sure my father is glad."

"You think he likes my being here?" And Sarella listened attentively for the answer.

"Of course. You must see it."

"You think he does not dislike me? He was cross with me last night."

"He did not like you noticing Mr. Gore was away—"

"Of course I noticed it—surely, he could not be jealous of that!"

"I should not think he could be jealous," Mariquita agreed, too readily to please Sarella. "But I did not think of it. I am sure he does not dislike you. You cannot think he does."

Sarella was far from thinking it. But she had wanted Mariquita to say more, and was only partly satisfied.

"He would not like me to go away?" she suggested.

"Oh, no. The contrary."

"Not even if it were advantageous to me?"

"How advantageous?"

"If I were to be going to a home of my own? Going, for instance, to be married?"

"That would surprise him…"

Sarella was not pleased at this.

"Surprise him! Why should it surprise him that anyone should marry me?"

"There is no reason. Only, he does not imagine that there is someone. If there is someone, he would suppose you had not been willing to marry him by your coming here instead."

("Is she stupid or cautious?" Sarella asked herself. "She will say nothing.")

Mariquita was neither cautious nor stupid. She was only ignorant of Sarella's purpose, and by no means awake to her father's.

"It is terribly hot out here," Sarella grumbled, "and there is such a glare. I shall go in and study."

Chapter X

Mariquita did not go in too. She did not find it hot, nor did the glare trouble her. The air was full of life and vigor, and she had no sense of lassitude. There was, indeed, a breeze from the far-off Rockies, and to her it seemed cool enough, though the sun was so nearly directly overhead that her figure cast only a very stunted shadow of herself. In the long grass the breeze made a slight rustle, but there was no other sound.

Mariquita did not want to be indoors; outside, here on the tilted prairie, she was alone and not lonely. The tilt of the vast space around her showed chiefly in this—that eastward the horizon was visibly lower than at the western rim of the prairie. The prairie was not really flat; between her and both horizons there lay undulations, those between her and the western rising into mesas, which, with a haze so light as only to tell in the great distance, hid the distant barrier of the Rocky Mountains, whose foothills even were beyond the frontiers of this State.

She knew well where they were, though, and knew almost exactly beyond which point of the far horizon lay Loretto Heights, beyond Denver, and the Convent.

Somehow the coming of these two new units to the range-life had pushed the Convent farther away still. But Mariquita's thoughts never rested in the mere memories hanging like a slowly fading arras around that long-concluded convent life. What it had given her was more than the memories and was hers still.

As to the mere memories, she knew that with slow but increasing pace they were receding from her, till on time's horizon they would end in a haze, golden but vague and formless. Voices once clearly recalled were losing tone; faces, whose features had once risen before the eye of memory with little less distinctness than that with which she had seen them when physically present, arose now blurred like faces passing a fog. Even their individuality, depending less on feature than expression, was no longer easily recoverable.

She had been used to remember this and that nun by her very footsteps; now the nuns moved, a mere group in one costume, soundlessly, with no footstep at all.

Of this gradual loss of what had been almost her only private possession she made no inward wishful complaint; Mariquita was not morbid, nor melancholy. The operation of a natural law of life could not fill her with the poet's rebellious outcry. To all law indeed she yielded without protest, whether it implied submission without inward revolt to the mere shackles of circumstance, or submission to her father's dominance; for it was not in her fashion of mind to form hypothesis—such hypothesis, for instance, as that of her father calling upon her to take some course opposed to conscience. Though her gaze was turned towards the point of the horizon under which the Convent and its intimates were, it was not simply to dream of them that she yielded herself.

All that life had had a centre—not for herself only, but for all there. The simplicity of the life consisted, above all, in the simplicity of its object. Its routine, almost mechanically regular, was not mechanical because of its central meaning. No doubt the "work" of the nuns was education, but their work of education was

service of a Master. And the Master was Himself the real object, the centre of the work, as carried on within those quiet, busy walls. Mariquita no longer formed a part, though the work was still operative in her, and had not ceased with her removal from the workers; but she was as near as ever to its centre, and was now more concerned with the ultimate object of the work than with the work.

Her memories were weakening in color and definiteness, but her possession was not decreased, her possession was the Master who possessed herself.

The simplicity that Gore had from the first noted in her, without being able to inform himself wherein it consisted—but which he venerated without knowing its source, that he knew was noble—was first that Mariquita did in fact live and move and have her being, as nominally all His creatures do, in the Master of that vanished convent life. What the prairie was to her body, surrounding it, its sole background and scene and stage of action, He was to her inward, very vivid, wholly silent life; what the prairie was to her healthy lungs, He was to her soul, its breath, "inspiration." Banal and stale as such metaphor is, in her the two lives were so unified (in this was the rarity of her "simplicity") that it was at least completely accurate.

With Mariquita that which we call the supernatural life was not occasional and spasmodic. That inspiration of Our Lord was not, as with so many, a gulp, or periodic series of gulps, but a breathing as steady and soundless as the natural breathing of her strong, sane, flawless body.

She did not, like the self-conscious pietist, listen to it. She did not, like the pathological pietist, test its pulse or temperature. The pathological pietist is still self-student, though studious of self in a new relation; still breathes her own breath at second-hand, and remains indoors within the four walls of herself.

Of herself Mariquita knew little. That God had given her, in truth, existence; that she knew. That she was, because He chose. That He had been born, and died, and lived again, for her sake, as much as for the sake of any one of all the saints, though not more than for the sake of the human being in all the world who thought least of Him: that she knew. That He loved her incomparably better than she could love herself or any other person—that she knew with a reality of knowledge greater than that with which any lover ever knows himself beloved by the lover who would give and lose everything for him. That He had already set in her another treasure, the capacity of loving Him—that also she knew with ineffable reverence and gladness, and that the power of loving Him grew in her, as the power of knowing Him grew.

But concerning herself Mariquita knew little except such things as these. She had studied neither her own capacities nor her own limitations, neither her tastes, nor her gifts. That Sarella thought her stupid, she was hardly aware, and less than half aware that Sarella was wrong. No human creature had ever told her that she was beautiful, and she had never made any guess on the subject with herself. She never wondered if she were happy, or ever unjustly disinherited of the means of happiness. Whether, in less strait thrall of circumstance, she might be of more consequence, even of more use, she never debated. She had not dreamed of being heroic; had no chafing at absence of either sphere or capacity for being brilliant. Her life was passing in a silence singularly profound among the lives of God's other human creatures, and its silence, unhumanness, oblivion (that deepest of

oblivion lying beneath what *has* been known though forgotten) did not vex her, and was never thought of. Her duties were coarse and common; but they were those God had set in her way and sight, and she had no impatience of them, no scorn for them, but just did them. They were not more coarse or common than those He had himself found to His hand, and done, in the house at Nazareth where Joseph was master, and, after Joseph, Mary was mistress, and He, their Creator, third, to obey and serve them.

It would be greatly unjust to Mariquita to say that the monotone of her life was made golden by the bright haze in which it moved. She lived not in a dream, but in an atmosphere. She was not a dreamy person, moving through realities without consciousness of them. She saw all around her, with living interest, only she saw beyond them with interest deeper still, or rather their own significance for her was made deeper by her sense of what was beyond them, and to which they, like herself, belonged. She was very conscious of her neighbors, not only of the human neighbors, but also of the live creatures not human; and each of these had, in her reverence, a definite sacredness as coming like herself from the hand of God.

There was nothing pantheistic in this; seeing everything as God's she did not see it itself Divine, but every natural object was to her clear vision but a thread in the clear, transparent veil through which God showed Himself everywhere. When St. Francis "preached to the birds" he was in fact listening to their sermon to him; and Mariquita, in her close neighborly friendship with the small wild creatures of the prairie, was only worshipping the ineffable, kind friendliness of God, who had made, and who fed, them also. The love she gave them was only one of the myriad silent expressions of her love for Him, who loved them. They were easier and simpler to understand than her human neighbors. It was not that, for an instant, she thought them on the same plane of interest—but we must here interrupt ourselves as she was interrupted.

Chapter XI

Mariquita had been alone a long time when Gore, riding home, came suddenly upon her.

She was sitting where a clump of trees cast now a shadow, and it was only in coming round them that he saw her when already very near her. The ground was soft there, and his horse's hoofs had made scarcely any sound.

She turned her head, and he saluted her, at the same moment slipping from the saddle.

"I thought you were far away," she said.

"I have been far away—at Maxwell. It has been a long ride."

"Yes, that is a long way," she said. "But I never go there."

"No? I went to hear Mass."

She was surprised, never having thought that he was a Catholic.

"I did not know you were a Catholic," she told him.

"No wonder! I have been here a month and never been to Mass before."

"It is so far. I never go."

"You *are* a Catholic, then?"

"Oh, yes; I think all Spaniards are Catholics."

"But not all Americans," Gore suggested smiling.

"No. And of course, we are Americans, my father and I."

"Exactly. No doubt I knew your names, both surname and Christian name, were Spanish, and I supposed you were of Catholic descent—"

"Only," she interrupted with a quiet matter-of-factness, "you saw we never went to Mass."

"Perhaps a priest comes here sometimes and gives you Mass."

"No, never. If it were not so very far, I suppose my father would let me ride down to Maxwell occasionally, at all events. But he would not let me go alone, and none of the men are Catholics; besides, he would not wish me to go with one of them; and then it would be necessary to go down on Saturday and sleep there. Of course, he would not permit that. But," and she did not smile as she said this, "it must seem strange to you, who are a Catholic, to think that I, who am one also, should never hear Mass. Since I left the Convent and came home I do not hear it. That may scandalize you."

"I shall never be scandalized by you," he answered, also without smiling.

"That is best," she said. "It is generally foolish to be scandalized, because we can know so little about each other's case."

She paused a moment, and he thought how little need she could ever have of any charitable suspension of judgment. He knew well enough by instinct, that this inability to hear Mass must be the great disinheritance of her life here on the prairie, her submission to it, her great obedience.

"But," she went on earnestly, "I hope you will not take any scandal at my father either—from my saying that he would not permit my going down to Maxwell and staying there all night on Saturday so as to hear Mass on Sunday morning. (There is, you know, only one Mass there, and that very early, because the priest has to go far into the county on the other side of Maxwell to give another Mass.) We know no family down there with whom I could stay. He would think it impossible I should stay with strange people—or in an hotel. Our Spanish ideas would forbid that."

"Oh, yes; I can fully understand. You need not fear my being so stupid as to take scandal. I have all my life had enough to do being scandalized at myself."

"Ah, yes! That is so. One finds that always. Only one knows that God is more indulgent to one's faults than one has learned to be oneself; that patience comes so very slowly, and slower still the humility that would teach one to be never surprised at any fault in oneself."

Gore reverenced her too truly to say, "Any fault would surprise *me* in you." He only assented to her words, as if they were plain and cold matter-of-fact, and let her go on, for he knew she had more to say.

"I would like," she told him, "to finish about my father. Because to you he may seem just careless. You may think, 'But why should not *he* take her down to Maxwell and hear Mass himself also?' Coming from the usual life of Catholics to this life of ours on the prairies, it may easily occur to you like that. You cannot possibly know—as if you had read it in a book—a man's life like my father's. He

was born far away from here, out in the desert—in New Mexico. His father baptized him—just as *he* baptized me. There was no priest. There was no Mass. How could he learn to think it a necessary part of life? no one can learn to think necessary what is impossible. From that desert he came to this wilderness; very different, but just as empty. No Mass here either, no priest. How could he be expected to think it necessary to ride far, far away to find Mass? It would be to him like riding away to find a picture gallery. He *couldn't* be away every Saturday and Sunday. That would not be possible; and what is not possible is no sin. And what is no sin on three Sundays out of four, or one Sunday out of two, how should it seem a sin on the other Sunday? I hope you will understand all that."

"Indeed, yes! I hope you do not think I have been judging your father! That would be a great impertinence."

"Towards God—yes. That is His business, and no one else understands it at all. No, I did not think you would have been judging. Only I thought you might be troubled a little. It is a great loss, my father's and mine, that we live out here where there is no Mass, and where there are no Sacraments. But Our Lord does the same things differently. It is not hard for Him to make up losses."

One thing which struck the girl's hearer was that the grave simplicity of her tones was never sad. It seemed to him the perfection of obedience.

"My father," she went on, "is very good. He always tells the truth. Those who deal in horses are said to tell many lies about them. He never does. He is very just—to the men, and everybody. And he does not grind them, nor does he insult them in reproof. He hates laziness and stupidity, and will not suffer either. Yet he does not gibe in finding fault nor say things, being master, to which they being servants may not retort. That makes fault-finding bitter and intolerable. He works very hard and takes no pleasure. He greatly loved my mother, and was in all things a true husband. That was a great burden God laid on him—the loss of her, but he carried it always in silence. You can hardly know all these things."

Gore saw that she was more observant than he had fancied—that she had been conscious of criticism in him of her father, and was earnest in exacting justice for him.

"But," he said, "I shall not forget them now."

"I shall thank you for that," she told him, beginning to move forward towards the homestead that was full in sight, half a mile away. "And it will be getting very late. Tea is much later on Sunday, for the men like to sleep, but it will be time now."

They walked on together, side by side, he leading his horse by the bridle hung loosely over his shoulder. The horse after its very long journey of to-day and yesterday was tired out, and only too willing to go straight to his stable.

They did not now talk much. Don Joaquin, watching them as they came from the house door, saw that.

Chapter XII

"Mr. Gore came back with you," he said to Mariquita as she joined him. Gore had gone round to the stables with his horse.

"Yes. As he came back from Maxwell he passed the place where I was sitting, and we came on together—after talking for a time."

Mariquita did not think her father was cross-examining her. Nor was he. He was not given to inquisitiveness, and seldom scrutinized her doings.

"Mr. Gore," she continued, "went to Maxwell for the sake of going to Mass."

"So he is a Catholic!" And Mariquita observed with pleasure that her father spoke in a tone of satisfaction. He had never before appeared to be in the least concerned with the religion of any of the men about the place.

That night, after Sarella and Mariquita had gone to bed, Don Joaquin had another satisfaction. He and Gore were alone, smoking; all the large party ate together, but the cowboys went off to their own quarters after meals. Only Don Joaquin, his daughter, Sarella and Gore slept in the dwelling-house. So high up above sea-level, it was cold enough at night, and the log fire was pleasant.

What gave him satisfaction was that Gore asked him about the price of a range, and whether a suitable one was to be had anywhere near.

"It would not be," Don Joaquin bade him note, "the price of the range only. Without some capital it would be throwing money away to buy one."

"Of course. What would range and stock and all cost?"

"That would depend on the size of the range, and the amount of stock it would bear. And also on whether the range were very far out, like this one. If it were near a town and the railway, it would cost more to buy."

Gore quite understood that, and Don Joaquin spoke of "Blaine's" range. "It lies nearer Maxwell than this. But it is not so large, and Blaine has never made much of it—he had not capital enough to put on it the stock it should have had, and he was never the right man. A townsman in all his bones, and his wife towny too. And their girls worse. He *wants* to clear. He will never do good there."

The two men discussed the matter at some length. It seemed to the elder of them that Gore would seriously entertain the plan, and had the money for the purchase.

"I have thought sometimes," said Joaquin, "of buying Blaine's myself."

"Of course, I would not think of it if you wanted it. I would not even make any inquiry—that would be sending the price up."

"Yes. But, if you decide to go in for it, I shall not mind. I have land enough and stock enough, and work enough. I should have bought it if I had a son growing up."

It was satisfactory to Don Joaquin to find that Gore could buy a large range and afford capital to stock it. If he went on with such a purchase it would prove him "substantial as to conditions." And he was a Catholic, also a good thing.

Only Sarella should be a Catholic also. "So you went down to Maxwell to go to Mass," he said, just as they were putting out their pipes to go to bed. "That was not out of place. Perhaps one Saturday we may go down together."

Gore said, of course, that he would be glad of his company.

"It would not be myself only," Don Joaquin explained; "I should take my daughter and her cousin."

When Gore had an opportunity of telling this to Mariquita she was full of gladness.

"See," she said, "how strong good example is!"

"Is your cousin, then, also a Catholic?" he asked, surprised without knowing why.

"Oh, no! My father regrets it, and would like her to be one. That shows he thinks of religion more than you might have guessed."

Gore thought that it showed something else as well. It did not, however, seem to have occurred to Mariquita that her father wanted to marry her cousin.

Sarella strongly approved the idea of going down, all four of them together, to Maxwell some Saturday.

"Of course," she said, "it would be for two nights, at least. He couldn't expect us to ride back on the Sunday. It will be a treat—we must insist on starting early enough to get down there before the shops shut. I daresay there will be a theatre."

Mariquita, suddenly, after five years, promised the chance of hearing Mass and going to Holy Communion, was not surprised that Sarella should only think of it as an outing; she was not a Catholic. But she thought it as well to give Sarella a hint.

"I expect," she said, "father will be hoping that you would come to Mass with us."

"I? Do you think that? He knows I am not a Catholic—why should he care?"

"Oh, he would care. I am sure of that."

Sarella laughed.

"You sly puss! I believe you want to convert me," she said, shaking her head jocularly at Mariquita.

"Of course I should be glad if you were a Catholic. Any Catholic would."

"I daresay *you* would. But your father never troubles himself about such things—he leaves them to the women. He wouldn't care."

"Yes, he would. You must not judge my father—he thinks without speaking; he is a very silent person."

Sarella laughed again.

"Not so silent as you imagine," she said slyly; "he talks to me, my dear."

"Very likely. I daresay you are easier to talk to than I am. For I too am silent—I have not seen towns and things like you."

"It does make a difference," Sarella admitted complacently. Then, with more covert interest than she showed: "If you really think he would like me to go with you to Mass, I should be glad to please him. After all, one should encourage him in this desire to resume his religious duties. Perhaps he would take us again."

"I am quite sure he would like you to hear Mass with us," Mariquita repeated slowly.

"Then I will do so. You had better tell me about it—one would not like to do the wrong thing."

Perhaps Mariquita told her more about it than Sarella had intended.

"She is tremendously in earnest, anyway," Sarella decided; "she can talk on *that* eagerly enough. I must say," she thought, good-naturedly, "I *am* glad *her* father's giving her the chance of doing it. I had no idea she felt about it like that. She is good—to care so much and never say a word of what it is to her not to have it. I

never thought there was an ounce of religion about the place. She evidently thinks her father cares, too. I should want some persuading of *that*. But she may be right in saying he expects me to go to his church. She is very positive. And some men are like that—their women must do what they do. They leave church alone for twenty years, but when they begin to go to church their women must go at once. And the Don is masterful enough. Perhaps he thinks it's time he began to remember his soul. If so, he is sure to begin by bothering about other people's souls. She thinks a lot more of him than he thinks of her. In his way, though, he is just as Spanish as she is; I suppose that's why I'm to go to Mass."

Chapter XIII

Don Joaquin had sounded Mariquita with reference to Sarella's religion. It suited him to sound Sarella in reference to Mariquita—and another person. This he would not have done had he not regarded Sarella as potentially a near relation.

"Mr. Gore talks about interesting things?" he observed tentatively.

"What people call 'interesting things' are sometimes very tedious," she answered smartly, intending to please him.

He was a little pleased, but not diverted from his purpose. He never was diverted from his purposes.

"He is a different sort of person from any Mariquita has known," he remarked; "conversation like his must interest her."

"Only, she does not converse with him."

"But she hears."

"Oh! Mariquita *hears* everything."

"You don't think she finds him tedious?"

"Oh, no! She does not know anyone is tedious." It by no means struck her father that this was a fault in her.

"It is better to be content with one's company," he said. Then, "He does not find her tedious, I think, though she speaks little."

"Mr. Gore? Anything but!" And Sarella laughed.

Don Joaquin waited for more, and got it.

"Nobody could interest him more," she declared with conviction, shaking her head with pregnant meaning.

"Ah! So I have thought sometimes," Don Joaquin agreed.

"*Anyone* could see it. Except Mariquita," she proceeded.

"Mariquita not?"

"Not she! Mariquita's eyes look so high she cannot see you and me, nor Mr. Gore."

After "you and me" Sarella had made an infinitesimal pause, and had darted an instantaneous glance at Don Joaquin. He had scarcely time to catch the glance before it was averted and Sarella added, "or Mr. Gore."

Don Joaquin did not think it objectionable in his daughter "not to see" "you and me"—himself and Sarella—too hastily. But it would ultimately be advisable that

she should see what was coming before it actually came. That would save telling. Neither would he have been pleased if she had quickly scented a lover in Mr. Gore; that would have offended her father's sense of dignity. Nor would it have been advisable for her to suspect a lover in Mr. Gore at any time, if Mr. Gore were not intending to be one. Once he was really desirous of being one, and her father approved, she might as well awake to it.

"It is true," he said, "Mariquita has not those ideas."

There was undoubtedly a calm communication in his tone. Sarella could not decide whether it implied censure of "those ideas" elsewhere.

"Not seeing what can be seen," she suggested with some pique, "may deceive others. Thus false hopes are given."

"Mariquita has given no hopes to anyone," her father declared sharply.

"Certainly not. Yet Mr. Gore may think that what is visible must be seen—like his 'interest' in her; and that, since it is seen and not disapproved..."

"Only, as you said, Mariquita *doesn't* see."

"He may not understand that. He may see nothing objectionable in himself..."

"There is nothing objectionable. The contrary."

And Sarella knew from his tone that Don Joaquin did not disapprove of Mr. Gore as a possible son-in-law.

"How hard it is," she thought, "to get these Spaniards to say anything out. Why can't they say what they mean?"

Sarella was not deficient in a sort of superficial good-nature. It seemed to her that she would have to "help things along." She thought it out of the question for Mariquita to go on indefinitely at the range, doing the work of three women for no reward, and rapidly losing her youth, letting her life be simply wasted. There had never been anyone before Mr. Gore, and never would be anyone else; it would be a providential way out of the present impossible state of things if he and Mariquita should make a match of it. And why shouldn't they? She did not believe that he was actually in love with Mariquita yet; perhaps he never would be till he discovered in her some sort of response. And Mariquita if left to herself was capable of going on for ten years just as she was.

"Mr. Gore," she told Don Joaquin, "is not the sort of man to throw himself at a girl's head if he imagined it would be unpleasant to her."

"Why should he be unpleasant to her?"

"No reason at all. And he isn't unpleasant to her. Only she never thinks of—that sort of thing."

Her father did not want her to "think of that sort of thing"—till called upon. Sarella saw that, and thought him as stupid as his daughter.

His idea of what would be correct was that Gore should "speak to him," that he should (after due examination of his conditions) signify approval, first to Gore himself, and then to Mariquita, whereupon it would be her duty to listen encouragingly to Mr. Gore's proposals. Don Joaquin made Sarella understand that these were his notions.

("How Spanish!" she thought.)

"You'll never get it done that way," she told him shortly. "Mr. Gore will not say a word to you till he thinks Mariquita would not be offended—"

"Why should she be offended!"

"She would be, if Mr. Gore came to you, till she had given him some cause for believing she cared at all for him. He knows that well enough. You may be sure that while she seems unaware of his taking an interest in her, he will never give you the least hint. He doesn't *want* to marry her—yet. He won't let himself want it before she gives *some* sign."

Sarella understood her own meaning quite well, but Don Joaquin did not understand it so clearly.

He took an early opportunity of saying to his daughter:

"I think Mr. Gore a nice man. He is correct. I approve of him. And it is an advantage that he is a Catholic."

To call it "an advantage" seemed to Mariquita a dry way of putting it, but then her father *was* dry.

"Living in the house," he continued, wishing she would say something, "he must be intimate with us. I find him suitable for that. One would not care for it in every case. Had he turned out a different sort of person, I should not have wished for any friendship between him and yourselves—Sarella and you. It might have been out of place."

"I do not think there would ever be much friendship between Sarella and him," said Mariquita; "she hardly listens when he talks about things—"

"But *you* should listen. It would be not courteous to make him think you found his conversation tedious."

"Tedious! I listen with interest."

"No doubt. And there is nothing out of place in your showing it. He is no longer a stranger to us."

"He is kind," she said. "He worked hard to help Jack in getting his shed fit for Ginger. It was he who built the partitions. Jack told me. Mr. Gore said nothing about it. Also, he was good to Ben Sturt when he hurt his knee and could not ride; he went and sat with him, chatting, and read funny books to him. He is a very kind person. I am glad you like him—I was not sure."

"I waited. One wishes to know a stranger before liking him, as you call it; what is more important, I approve of him, and find him correct."

Whether this helped much we cannot say. Sarella didn't think so, though Don Joaquin reported it to her with much complacence.

"She must know now," he said, "that I *authorize* him."

Chapter XIV

Jack sounded Mr. Gore's praises loudly in Mariquita's ears, and she heard them gladly. She thought well of her fellow-creatures, and it was always pleasant to her to hear them commended.

Jack also bragged a little of his diplomacy, bidding his daughter note how Miss Mariquita had been pleased by his praise of her sweetheart.

"Miss Mariquita has not got even a sweetheart," Ginger declared, "and maybe never will. It isn't the way of her. She was just as proud when you said a good word for Ben Sturt."

"Ben Sturt! What's *he* to the young mistress?"

"Just nothing at all—not in that way. Nor yet Mr. Gore isn't. And the more's the pity. But she's good-hearted. She likes to hear good of folk—as much as some likes to hear ill of anybody, no matter who."

Jack was a little discouraged—but not effectually.

Mr. Gore was much too slow, he thought. Why should Miss Mariquita be thinking of him unless he "let on" how much he was thinking of her?

"Did you ever lie under an apple-tree when the blossom was on it?" he asked Gore one day.

"I daresay I have."

"And expected to have your mouth full of apples when there was only blossom on it?"

Jack forced so much meaning into his ugly old face that Gore could discern the allegorical intent. He was very amused.

"There'd never be much chance of apples," he said carelessly, "if the tree was shaken till the blossom fell off. The wind spoils more blossom than the frost does."

Jack was not the only one who thought Gore slow in his wooing; the cowboys thought so too, though they did not, like Jack, find any fault with him for his slowness. In general they would have been more critical of rapidity and apparent success. Ben Sturt had learned to like him cordially, and wished him success, but Ben was of opinion that more haste would have been worse speed. He thought that Gore deserved Mariquita if anyone could, but was sure that even Gore would have to wait long and be very patient and careful. To Ben Mariquita seemed almost like one belonging to another world, certainly living on a plane above his comprehension, where ordinary love-making would be, somehow, unfitting and hopeless. It had always met with her father's cool approbation that Mariquita kept herself aloof from the young men about the place. But she was not wanting in interest for them. They were her neighbors, and she, who had so much interest for all her little dumb neighbors of the prairie, had a much higher interest in these bigger, but not much less dumb, neighbors of the homestead. They were more than a mere group to her. Each individual in the group was, she knew, as dear to God as herself, had been created by God for the same purpose as herself, and for the soul of each, Christ upon the Cross had been in as bitter labor as for the soul of any one of the saints. She was the last creature on earth to regard as of mere casual interest to herself those in whom God's interest was so deep, and close, and unfailing.

Perhaps they were rough; it might be that of the great things of which Mariquita herself thought so habitually, they thought little and seldom: but she did not think them bad. She thought more of them than they guessed, and liked them better than they imagined. She would have wished to serve and help them, and was not indolent, but humble concerning herself, and shy. She worked for them, more perhaps than her father thought necessary; in that way she could serve them. But she could not preach to them, nor exhort them. She would have shrunk instinctively, not from the danger of ridicule, but from the danger that the ridicule

might fall on religion itself, and not merely on her. She would have dreaded the risk of misrepresenting religion to them, of giving them ideas of God such as would repel them from Him. She knew that speech was not easy to her, eloquent speech was no gift of hers; she did not believe herself to have any readiness of expressing what she felt and knew, and did not credit herself with great knowledge. She did not really put them down as being entirely ignorant of what she did know.

The idea of a woman's preaching would have shocked Mariquita, to her it would have seemed "out of place." She was a humble girl, with a diffidence not universal among those who are themselves trying to serve God, some of whom are apt to be slow at understanding that others may be as near Him as themselves, though behaving differently, and holding a different fashion of speech.

God who had made them must know more about them, she felt, than she could. She did not think she understood them very well, but God had made the men and knew them as well as He knew the women. She was, with all her ignorance and her limited opportunities of observation and understanding, able to see much goodness among these neighbors of hers; He must be able to see much more.

In reality Mariquita did more for them than she had any idea of. They understood that in her was something higher than their understanding; that her goodness was real they did understand. It never shocked them as the "goodness" of some good people would by a first instinct have shocked them, by its uncharity, its self-conscious superiority, its selfishness, its complacence, its eagerness to assume the Divine prerogative of judgment and of punishment. They were, perhaps unconsciously, proud of her, who was so plainly never proud of herself. They knew that she was kind. They had penetration enough to be aware that if she held her own way, in some external aloofness, it was not out of cold indifference, or self-centred pride, not even out of a prudish shrinking from their roughness. They became less rough. Their behavior in her sight and hearing was not without effect upon their behavior in her absence. She taught them a reverence for woman that may only have begun in respect for herself. Almost all of them cared enough for her approval to try and become more capable of deserving it. Some of them, God who taught them knows how, became conscious of her lonely absorption in prayer, and the prairie became less empty to them. Probably none of them remained ignorant that to the girl God was life and breath, happiness and health, master and companion: the explanation of herself and of her beauty. They did not understand it all, but they saw more than they understood.

The loveliness of each flower preached to Mariquita; sometimes she would sit upon the ground, her heart beating, holding in her hand one of those tiny weeds that millions of eyes can overlook without perceiving they are beautiful, insignificant in size, without any blaze of color, and realize its marvel of loveliness with a singular exultation; she would note the exquisite perfection of its minute parts—that each tiny spray was a string of stars, white, or tenderest azure, or mauve, gold-centred, a microscopic installation hidden all its life on the prairie-floor, as if falling from heaven it had grown smaller and smaller as it neared the earth. Her heart beat, I say, as she looked, and the light shining in her happy eyes was exultation at the unimaginable loveliness of God, who had imagined this minutest creature, and thought it worth while to conceive this and every other lovely thing for the house even of His children's exile and probation, their waiting-

room on the upward road. So it preached to her the Uncreated Beauty, and the unbeginning, Eternal Love. As unconscious as was the little flower of its fragrance, its loveliness and its message, Mariquita, who could never have preached, was giving her message too.

Her rough neighbors saw her near them and (perhaps without knowing that they knew it) knew that that which made her rare and exquisite was of Divine origin. She never hinted covert exhortation in her talk. If she spoke to any of them they could listen without dread of some shrewdly folded rebuke. Yet they could not get away from the fact that she was herself a perpetual reminder of noble purpose.

Chapter XV

What the cowboys had come, with varying degrees of slowness or celerity, to feel by intuitions little instructed by experience or reasoning, Gore had to arrive at by more deliberate study.

He was more civilized and less instinctive. He knew many more people, and had experience, wanting to them, of many women of fine and high character. What made the rarity of Mariquita's instinct did not inform him, and he had to observe and surmise.

He saw no books in the house, and did not perceive how Mariquita could read; she must, in the way of information and knowledge such as most educated girls possess be, as it were, disinherited. Yet he did not feel that she was ignorant. It is more ignorant to have adopted false knowledge than to be uninformed.

Every day added to Gore's sense of the girl's rarity and nobility. He admired her more and more, the reverence of his admiration increasing with its growth. Nor was his appreciation blind, or blinded. He surmised a certain lack in her—the absence of humor, and he was, at any rate, so far correct that Mariquita was without the habit of humor. Long after this time, she was thought by her companions to have a delightful radiant cheerfulness like mirth. But when Gore first knew her, what occasion had she had for indulgence in the habit of humor?

Her father's house was not gay, and he would have thought gaiety in it out of place. Loud laughter might resound in the cowboys' quarters, but Don Joaquin would have much disapproved any curiosity in his daughter as to its cause. He seldom laughed himself and never wished to make anyone else laugh. His Spanish blood and his Indian blood almost equally tended to make him regard laughter and merriment as a slur on dignity.

Some of those who have attempted the elusive feat of analyzing the causes and origin of humor lay down that it lies in a perception of the incongruous, the less fit. I should be sorry to think that a complete account of the matter. No doubt it describes the occasion of much of our laughter, though not, I refuse to believe, of all.

That sense of humor implies little charity, and a good deal of conscious superiority. It makes us laugh at accidents not agreeable to those who suffer them, at uncouthness, ignorances, solecisms, inferiorities, follies, blunders,

stupidities, unconsciously displayed weaknesses and faults. It is the sort of humor that sets us laughing at a smartly dressed person fallen into a filthy drain, at a man who does not know how to eat decently, at mispronunciation of names, and misapplication or oblivion of aspirates, at greediness not veiled by politeness, at a man singing who doesn't know how. Now Mariquita had no conceit and was steeped in charity in big and little things. In that sort of humor she would have been lacking, for she would have thought too kindly of its butt to be able to enjoy his misfortune. And, as has been already said, she had no habit of the thing.

Gore, in accusing her of lack of humor, felt that the accusation was a heavy one. It was not quite unjust: we have partly explained Mariquita's deficiency without entirely denying it, or pretending it was an attraction. No doubt, she would have been a greater laugher if she had been more ill-natured, had had wider opportunities of perceiving the absurdity of her contemporaries.

As for those queer and quaint quips of circumstance that make the oddity of daily life for some of us, few of them had enlivened Mariquita. The chief occasion of general gathering was round the table, where hunger and haste were the most obvious characteristics of the meeting. Till Gore came, there had been little conversation. It was not Mariquita's fault that she had been used neither to see or hear much that was entertaining. Perhaps the facility of being amused is an acquired taste; and even so, the faculty of humor is almost of necessity dormant where scarcely anything offers for it to work or feed upon.

Chapter XVI

The projected visit to Maxwell did not immediately take place. Don Joaquin was seldom hasty in action, having a chronic, habitual esteem for deliberation and deliberateness too.

Sarella would have been impatient had she not been sufficiently unwell to shrink for the moment from the idea of a very long ride. For the mere pleasure of riding she would never have mounted a horse; she would only ride when there was no other means of arriving at some object or place not otherwise attainable.

Gore, however, was again absent on the second Saturday after his first visit to Maxwell. And on this occasion his place was vacant at breakfast. Nor did he return till Monday afternoon.

On that afternoon Mariquita had walked out some distance across the prairie. Not in the direction of the Maxwell trail, but quite in the opposite direction. Her way brought her to what they called Saul Bluff—a very low, broken ridge, sparsely overgrown with small rather shabby trees. It would scarcely have hidden the chimneys of a cottage had there been any cottage on its farther side; but there was none anywhere near it. For many miles there was no building in any direction, except "Don Jo's," as, to its owner's annoyance, his homestead was called.

When Mariquita had reached the top of the bluff she took advantage of the slight elevation on which she stood, to look round upon the great spread of country stretching to the low horizon on every side. It was, like most days here, a

day of wind and sun. The air was utterly pure and scentless; the scent was not fir-scent, and the scattered, windy trees gave no smell. She saw a chipmunk and laughed, as the sight of that queer little creature, and its odd mixture of shyness and effrontery always made her laugh.

It was even singularly clear, and the foothills of the Rockies were just visible. The trail, which ran over the bluff a little to her left, was full in sight below her, but so little used as to be slight enough. A mile farther on it crossed the river, and was too faint to be seen beyond. The river was five miles behind her as well as a mile in front, for it made a big loop, north, and then, west-about, southward.

She sat down and for a long time was rapt in her own thoughts, which were not, at first, of any human person. Perhaps she would not herself have said that she was praying. But all prayer does not consist in begging favors even for others. Its essence does not lie in request, but in the lifting of self, heart and mind, to God. The love of a child to its father need not necessarily find its sole exercise and expression in demand. Her thought and love flew up to her Father and rested, immeasurably happy. The real joys of her life were in that presence. The sense of His love, not merely for herself, was the higher bliss it gave her: not merely for herself, I say, for it spread as wide as all humanity, and her own share in it was as little as a star in the milky way, in the whole glory, what it is for all the saints in heaven and on earth, for all sinners, for His great Mother, and, most immeasurable of all, the infinite perfection of His love for Himself, of Father and Son for the Holy Spirit, of Son and Spirit for the Eternal Father, of Spirit and Father for the Son. This stretched far beyond the reach of her vision, but she looked as far as her human sight could reach, as one looks on that much of the mystic ocean that eye can hold. Not separable from this joy in the Divine Love was her joy in the Divine Beauty, of which all created beauty sang, whether it were that of the smallest flower or that of Christ's Mother herself. The wind's clean breath whispered of it; the vast loveliness of the enormous dome above her, and the limitless expanse of not less lovely earth on which that dome rested, witnessed to the Infinite Beauty that had imagined and made them.

But sooner or later Mariquita must *share*, for in that the silent tenderness of her nature showed itself: she could not be content to have her great happiness to herself, to enjoy alone. So, presently, in her prayer she came, as always, to gathering round her all whom she knew and all whom she did not know. As she would have wished *them* to think in their prayer of her, so must she have them also in the Divine Presence with her, lift their names up to God, even their names which, unknown to her, He knew as well as He knew her own.

Her living father and her dead mother, the old school-friends and the nuns, the old priest at Loretto, and a certain crooked old gardener that had been there (crooked in body, in face, and in temper), Sarella, and Mr. Gore, and all the cowboys—all these Mariquita gathered into the loving arms of her memory, and presented them at their Father's feet. Her way in this was her own way, and unlike perhaps that of others. She had no idea of bringing them to God's memory, as if His tenderness needed any reminder from her, for always she heard Him saying: "Can you teach Me pity and love?" She did not think it depended on her that good should come to them from Him. Were she to be lazy or forgetful, He would never let them suffer through her neglect. They were immeasurably more His than they

could be hers. But she could not be at His feet and not in her loving mind see them there beside her, and she knew He chose that at His feet she should not forget them. She could not dictate to Him what He was to give them, in what fashion He should bless and help them. He knew exactly. Her surmises must be ignorant.

Therefore Mariquita's prayer was more wordless than common, less phrased; but its intensity was more uncommon. Nor could it be limited to those—a handful out of all His children—whom she knew or had ever known. There were all the rest—everywhere: those who knew how to serve Him, and were doing it, as she had never learned to serve; those who had never heard His name, and those who knew it but shrank from it as that of an angry observer; those most hapless ones who lived by disobeying Him, even by dragging others down into the slough of disobedience; the whole world's sick, body-sick and soul-sick; those who here are mad, and will find reason only in heaven; the whole world's sorrowful ones, the luckless, those gripped in the hard clutch of penury, or the sordid clutch of debt; the blind whose first experience of beauty will be perfect beauty, the foully diseased, the deformed, the deaf and dumb whose first speech will be their joining in the songs of heaven, their first hearing that of the music of heaven... all these, and many, many others she must bring about her, or her gladness in God's nearness would be selfishness. That nearness! she felt Him much nearer than was her own raiment, nearer than was her own flesh...

Chapter XVII

It was long after Mariquita had come to her place upon the bluff, that the sound of a horse cantering towards it made her rise and go to the farther westward edge of the bluff to look. The horseman was quite near, below her. It was Gore, and he saw her at the same moment in which she saw him. He lifted his big, wide-brimmed hat from his head and waved it. It would never have even occurred to her to be guilty of the churlishness of turning away to go homeward. Her thoughts, almost the only thing of her own she had ever had, she was always ready to lay aside for courtesy.

He had dismounted, and was leading his horse up the rather steep slope. She stood waiting for him, a light rather than a smile upon her noble face, a light like the glow of a far horizon...

"I thought," she said, when he had come up, "that you had gone to Maxwell."

"No, I went to Denver this time," he told her, "beyond Denver a little. Where do you think I heard Mass yesterday—this morning again, too? for both of us, since you could not come."

"Not at Loretto!"

But she knew it was at Loretto. His smile told her.

"Yes, at Loretto. It was the same to me which place I went to. No, not the same, for I wanted to see the place where you had been a little girl, so that I could come back and bring you word of it."

"Ah, how kind you are!" she said, with a sort of wonder of gratefulness shining on her.

("She is far more beautiful than I ever knew," he thought.)

"Not kind at all," Gore protested. "Just to please myself! There's no great kindness in that except to myself."

"Oh, yes! for you knew how it would please me. It was wonderful that you should be so kind as to think of it."

"It gave *me* pleasure anyway. To be in the place where you had been so happy—"

"Ah, but I am always happy," she interrupted. "Though indeed I was happy there, and sorrowful to leave it. But I did not leave it quite behind; it came with me."

"I have a great many things to tell you. They remember you *most* faithfully. If my going gave *me* pleasure, it gave them much more. You cannot think how much they made of me for your sake; I stayed there a long time after Mass yesterday, and they made me go back in the afternoon—I was there all afternoon. And all the time we were talking of you."

"Then I think," Mariquita declared, laughing merrily, "your talk will have been monotonous."

"Oh, not monotonous at all. Are they not dear women? They showed me where you sat in chapel—and the different places where you had sat in classrooms, and in the refectory, when you first came, as a small girl of ten, and as you rose in the school."

"I did not rise very high. I was never one of the clever ones—"

"They kept that to themselves—"

"Oh, yes! They would do that. Nuns are so charitable—they would never say that any of the girls was stupid."

"No, they didn't hint that in the least. Sister Gabriel showed me a drawing of yours."

"What was it?"

"She said it was the Grand Canal at Venice. I have never been there—"

"Nor I. But I remember doing it. The water wouldn't come flat. It looked like a blue road running up-hill. Sister Gabriel was very kind, very kind indeed. She used to have hay-fever."

"So she has now. She listened for more than half-an-hour while I told her about you."

"Mr. Gore, I think you will have been inventing things to tell her," Mariquita protested, laughing again. She kept laughing, for happiness and pleasure.

"Oh, no! On the contrary, I kept forgetting things. Afterwards I remembered some of them, and told her what I had left out. Some I only remembered when it was too late, after I had come away. Sister Marie Madeleine—I hope you remember her too—she asked hundreds of questions about you."

"Oh, yes, of course I remember her. She taught me French. And I was stupid about it..."

"She was very anxious to know if you kept it up. She said you wanted only practice—and vocabulary."

"And idiom, and grammar, and pronunciation," Mariquita insisted, laughing very cheerfully. "Did you tell her there was no one to keep it up with?"

He told her of many others of the nuns—he had evidently taken trouble to bring her word of them all. And he had asked for news of the girls she had known best, and brought her news of them also. Several were married, two had entered Holy Religion.

"Sylvia Markham," he said, "you remember her? She has come back to Loretto to be a nun. She is a novice; she was clothed at Easter. Sister Mary Scholastica she is—the younger children call her Sister Elastic."

"Oh," cried Mariquita, with her happy laugh, "how funny it is—to hear you talking of Sylvia. She was harum-scarum. What a noise she used to make, too! How pretty she was!"

"Sister Elastic is just as pretty. She sent fifty messages to you. But Nellie Hurst—you remember her?"

"Certainly I do. She was champion at baseball. And she acted better than anybody. Oh, and she edited the Magazine, and she kept us all laughing. She *was* funny! Geraldine Barnes had a quinsy and it nearly choked her, but Nellie Hurst made her laugh so much that it burst, and she was soon well again..."

"Well, and where do you think she is now?"

"Where?" Mariquita asked almost breathlessly.

"In California. At Santa Clara, near San José. She is a Carmelite."

"A Carmelite! And she used to say she would write plays (She did write several that were acted at Loretto) and act them herself—on the stage, I mean."

It took Gore a long time to tell all his budget of news; he had hardly finished before they reached the homestead, towards which the sinking sun had long warned them to be moving. And he had presents for her, a rosary ("brought by Mother General from Rome and blessed by the Pope,") a prayerbook, a lovely Agnus Dei covered with white satin and beautifully embroidered, scapulars, a little bottle of Lourdes water, another of ordinary holy water, and a little hanging stoup to put some of it in, also a statue of Our Lady, and a small framed print of the Holy House of Loretto.

Mariquita had never owned so many things in her life.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "And I had been long thinking that I was quite forgotten there; I am ashamed. And you—how to thank you!"

"But you have been thanking me all the time," he said, "ever since I told you where I had been. Every time you laughed you thanked me."

They met Ben Sturt, who was lounging about by the gate in the homestead fence; he had never seen Mariquita with just that light of happiness upon her.

"Here," he said to Gore, "let me take the horse; I'll see to him."

He knew that Mariquita would not come to the stables, and he wanted Gore to be free to stay with her to the last moment.

As he led the horse away he thought to himself: "It has really begun at last;" and he loyally wished his friend good luck.

Within a yard or two of the door they met Don Joaquin.

"Father," she said at once, "Mr. Gore didn't go to Maxwell this time. He went all the way to Denver—to Loretto. And see what a lot of presents he has brought me from them!"

Gore thought she looked adorable as, like a child unused to gifts, she showed her little treasures to the rather grim old prairie dog.

He looked less grim than usual. It suited him that she should be so pleased.

"Well!" he said, "you're stocked now. Mr. Gore had a long ride to fetch them."

"Oh, yes! Did you ever hear of anybody being so kind?"

Her father noted shrewdly the new expression of grateful pleasure on her face. It seemed to him that Gore was not so incompetent as he had been supposing, to carry on his campaign. Sarella came out and joined them. "What a cunning little pin-cushion!" she exclaimed. "Isn't it just sweet?" The Agnus Dei was almost the only one of Mariquita's new treasures to which she could assign a use.

"Oh, and the necklace! Garnets relieved by those crystal blobs are just the very fashion."

"It is a rosary," Don Joaquin explained in a rather stately tone. It made him uneasy—it must be unlucky—to hear these frivolous eulogies applied to "holy objects" with which personally he had never had the familiarity that diminishes awe.

Mariquita had plenty to do indoors and did not linger. Gore went in also to wash and tidy himself after his immensely long ride.

Sarella, who of course knew long before this where Mariquita had received her education, and had been told whence these pious gifts came, smiled as she turned to Don Joaquin.

"So Gore rode all the way to Denver this time," she remarked.

"It is beyond Denver. Mariquita was pleased to hear news of her old friends."

"Oh, I daresay. Gore is not such a fool as he looks."

"I am not thinking that he looks a fool at all," said Don Joaquin, more stately than ever.

("How Spanish!" thought Sarella, "I suppose they're *born* solemn.")

"Indeed," she cheerfully agreed, "nor do I. He wouldn't be so handsome if he looked silly. He's all sense. And he knows his road, short cuts and all."

Don Joaquin disliked her mention of Gore's good looks, as she intended. She had no idea of being snubbed by her elderly suitor.

"Mariquita," he laid down, "will think more of his good sense than of his appearance. I have not brought her up to consider a gentleman's looks."

Sarella laughed; she was not an easy person to "down."

"But you didn't bring *me* up," she said, "and I can tell you that you might have been as wise as Solomon and it wouldn't have mattered to me if you had been ugly. I'd rather look than listen any day; and I like to have something worth looking at."

Her very pretty eyes were turned full on her mature admirer's face, and he did not dislike their flattery. An elderly man who has been very handsome is not often displeased at being told he is worth looking at still.

"So do I, Sarellita," he responded, telling himself (and her) how much pleasure there was in looking at her.

Stately he could not help being, but his manner had now no stiffness; and in the double diminutive of her name there was almost a tenderness, a nearer approach to tenderness than she could understand. She could understand, however, that he was more lover-like than he had ever been.

A slight flush of satisfaction (that he took for maiden shyness) was on her face, as she looked up under her half-drooped eyelids.

"Perhaps," he said in much lower tones than he usually employed, "perhaps Mr. Gore knows what you call his road better than I. But he does not know better the goal he wants to reach."

("Say!" Sarella asked herself, "what's coming?")

Two of the cowboys were coming—had come in fact. They appeared at that moment round the corner of the house, ready for supper.

"So," one of them said, with rather loud irritation, evidently concluding a story, "my dad married her, and I have a step-ma younger than myself—"

Chapter XVIII

Everyone on the range, from its owner down to old Jack, considered that Gore made much more way after his trip to Denver. Mariquita, it was decided, had, as it were, awakened to him. It was believed that she and he saw more of each other, and that she liked his company.

Sarella thought things were going so well that they had much better be left to themselves, and this view she strongly impressed upon Don Joaquin. He had gradually come to hold a higher opinion of her sense; at first he had been attracted entirely by her beauty. Her aunt had not been remarkable for intelligence, and he had not thought the niece could be expected to be wiser than her departed elder.

Sarella, on the other hand, did not think her admirer quite so sensible as he really was. That he was shrewd and successful in business, she knew, but was the less impressed that his methods had been slow and unhurried. To her eastern ideas there was nothing imposing (though extremely comfortable) in a moderate wealth accumulated by thirty years of patient work and stingy expenditure. But she was sure he did not in the least understand his own daughter, in whom she (who did not understand her any better than she would have understood Dante's Divina Commedia) saw nothing at all difficult to understand. The truth was that Don Joaquin had never understood any woman; without imagination, he could understand no sex but his own—and his experience of women was of the narrowest. Nevertheless, he was nearer to a sort of rough, nebulous perception of his daughter than was Sarella herself.

His saying that Mariquita would not "consider" Gore's good looks, a remark that Sarella thought merely ridiculous, was an illustration of this. In his *explicit* mind, in his conscious attitude towards Mariquita, he assumed that it was *her* business and duty to respect *him*. He was her parent, so placed by God, and he had a great and sincere reverence for such Divine appointments as placed himself in a condition of superiority. (Insubordination or insolence in the cowboys would have gravely and honestly scandalized him). All the same, in an inner mind that he never consulted, and whose instruction he was far from seeking, he knew that his daughter was a higher creature than himself; all he *knew* that he knew was that a young girl was necessarily more innocent and pure than an elderly man could be (he himself was no profligate); that in fact all women were more religious than men, and that it behooved them to be so; nature made it easier for them.

He had after deliberate consideration decided that it would be convenient and suitable that his daughter should marry Gore; the young man, he was sure, wished it, and, while the circumstances in which she was placed held little promise of a wide choice of husbands for her, he would, in Don Joaquin's opinion, make a quite suitable husband. To do him justice, he would never have manoeuvred to bring Gore into a marriage with Mariquita, had he appeared indifferent to the girl, or had he seemed in any way unfit.

But, though Don Joaquin had reached the point of intending the marriage, he saw no occasion for much love-making, and none for Mariquita's falling in love with the young man's handsome face and fine figure. Her business was to learn that her father approved the young man as a suitor, and to recognize that that approval stamped him as suitable. That Mariquita would not *suddenly* learn this lesson, Sarella had partly convinced him; but he did not think there would now be any suddenness in the matter. He would have spoken with authoritative plainness to her now, without further delay; but there was a difficulty—Gore had not spoken to him.

Don Joaquin thought it was about time he did so.

"You think," he remarked when they were alone together over the fire, "that you shall buy Blaine's?"

Now Gore would certainly not buy a range so near Don Joaquin's if he should fail to secure a mistress for it in Don Joaquin's daughter. And he was by no means inclined to take success with her for granted. He was beginning to hope that there was a chance of success—that was all.

"It is worth the money," he answered; "and I have the money. But I have not absolutely decided to settle down to this way of life at all."

"I thought you had."

"Well, no. It must depend on what does not depend upon myself."

Don Joaquin found this enigmatical, which Gore might or might not have intended that he should. Though wholly uncertain how Mariquita might regard him when she came to understand that he wished for more than friendship, he was by this time quite aware that her father approved; and he was particularly anxious that she should not be "bothered."

Don Joaquin diplomatically hinted that Blaine might close with some other offer.

"There is no other offer. He told me so quite straightforwardly. I have the refusal. If he does get another offer, and I have not decided, he is of course quite free to accept it. He does not want to hurry me; I expect he knows that if I did buy, he would get a better price from me than from anyone else."

Gore might very reasonably be tired after his immensely long ride, and when he went off to bed Don Joaquin could not feel aggrieved. But he was hardly pleased by the idea that the young man intended to manage his own affairs without discussion of them, and to keep his own counsel.

Chapter XIX

"Just you leave well alone," said Sarella, a little more didactically than Don Joaquin cared for. "Things are going as well as can be expected" (and here she laughed a little); "they're moving now."

Don Joaquin urged his opinion that Mariquita ought to be enlightened as to his approval of her suitor.

Sarella answered, with plain impatience, "If you tell her she has a suitor she *won't* have one. Don't you pry her eyes open with your thumb; let them open of themselves."

Don Joaquin only half understood this rhetoric, and he seldom liked what he could not understand.

He adopted a slightly primitive measure in reprisal—

"It isn't," he remarked pregnantly, "as if the young man were not a Catholic—I would not allow her to marry him if he were not."

"No?"

And it was quite clear to Don Joaquin that he had killed two birds with one stone; he saw that Sarella was both interested and impressed.

"Catholics should marry Catholics," he declared with decision.

"You didn't think so always," Sarella observed, smiling.

"If I forgot it, I suffered for it," her elderly admirer retorted.

Sarella was puzzled. She naturally had not the remotest suspicion that he had felt his wife's early death as a reprisal on the part of Heaven. She knew little of her aunt, and less of that aunt's married life. Had there been quarrels about religion?

"Well, I daresay you may be right," she said gravely. "Two religions in one house may lead to awkwardness."

"Yes. That is so," he agreed, with a completeness of conviction that considerably enlightened her.

"And after all," she went on, smiling with great sweetness, "they're only two branches of the same religion."

This was her way of hinting that the little bird he had married would have been wise to hop from her own religious twig to his.

This suggestion, however, Don Joaquin utterly repudiated.

"The same religion!" he said, with an energy that almost made Sarella jump. "The Catholic Church and heresy all one religion! Black and white the same color!"

Sarella was now convinced that he and his wife had fought on the subject. On such matters she was quite resolved there should be no fighting in her case; concerning expenditure it might be necessary to fight. But Sarella was an easy person who had no love for needless warfare, and she made up her mind at once.

"I understand, now you put it that way," she said amiably, "you're right again. Both can't be right, and the husband is the head of the wife."

Don Joaquin accepted this theory whole-heartedly, and nodded approvingly.

"How," he said, "can a Protestant mother bring up her Catholic son?"

Sarella laughed inwardly. So he had quite arranged the sex of his future family.

"But," she said with a remarkably swift riposte, "if Catholics should not marry Protestants, they have no business to make love to them. Have they?"

Her Catholic admirer looked a little silly, and she swore to herself that he was blushing.

"Because," she continued, entirely without blushing, "a Catholic gentleman made love to *me* once—"

"Perhaps," suggested Don Joaquin, recovering himself "he hoped you would become a Catholic, if you accepted him."

"I daresay," Sarella agreed very cheerfully.

"But you evidently did not accept him."

"As to that," she explained frankly, "he did not go quite so far as asking me to marry him."

"He drew back!"

"Not exactly. He was interrupted."

"But didn't he resume the subject?"

Sarella laughed.

"I'd rather not answer that question," she answered; "you're asking quite a few questions, aren't you?"

"I want to ask another. Did you like that Catholic gentleman well enough to share all he had, his religion, his name, and his home?"

Don Joaquin was not laughing, on the contrary, he was eagerly serious, and Sarella laughed no more.

"He never did ask me to share them," she replied with a self-possession that her elderly lover admired greatly.

"But he does. He is asking you. Sarella, will you share my religion, and my name, my home, and all that I have?"

Even now she was amused inwardly, not all caused by love. She noted, and was entertained by noting, how he put first among things she was to share, his religion—because he was not so sure of her willingness to share that as of her readiness to share his name and his goods, and meant to be sure, as she now quite understood. It did not make her respect him less. She had the sense to know that he would not make a worse husband for caring enough for his religion to make a condition of it, and she was grateful for the form in which he put the condition. He spared her the brutality of, "I will marry you if you will turn Catholic to marry me, but I won't if you refuse to do that."

She smiled again, but not lightly. "I think," she said, "you will need some one when Mariquita goes away to a home of her own. And I think I could make you comfortable and happy. I will try, anyway. And it would never make you happy and comfortable if we were of different religions. If my husband's is good enough for him, it must be good enough for me."

Poor Sarella! She was quite homeless, and quite penniless. She had not come here with any idea of finding a husband in this elderly Spaniard, but she could think of him as a husband, with no repugnance and with some satisfaction. He was respectable and trustworthy; she believed him to be as fond of her as it was in his nature to be fond of anybody. He had prudence and good sense. And his admiration pleased her; her own sense told her that she would get in marrying him as much as she could expect.

"Shall you tell Mariquita, or shall I?" she inquired before they parted.

"I will tell her. I am her father," he replied.

"Then, do not say anything about her moving off to a home of her own—"

"Why not?" he asked with some obstinacy. For in truth he had thought the opportunity would be a good one for "breaking ground."

"Because she will think we want to get rid of her; or she will think *I* do. Tell her, instead, that I will do my best to make her happy and comfortable. If I were you, I should tell her you count on our marriage making it pleasanter for her here."

Chapter XX

When her father informed her of his intended marriage, Mariquita was much more taken aback than he had foreseen. He had supposed she must have observed more or less what was coming.

"Marry Sarella, father!" she exclaimed, too thoroughly astonished to weigh her words, "but you are her uncle!"

Don Joaquin, who was pale enough ordinarily, reddened angrily.

"I am no relation whatever to her," he protested fiercely. "How dare you accuse your father of wishing to marry his own niece? How dare you insult Sarella by supposing she would marry her uncle?"

It was terrible to Mariquita to see her father so furious. He had never been soft or tender to her, but he had hardly ever shown any anger towards her, and now he looked at her as if he disliked her.

It did astonish her that Sarella should be willing to marry her uncle. Sarella had indeed, as Don Joaquin had not, thought of the difficulty; but she saw that there appeared to be none to him; no doubt, he knew what was the marriage-law among Catholics, and perhaps that was why he was so insistent as to her being one.

"I know," Mariquita said gently, "that there is no blood relationship between her and you. She is my first cousin, but she is only your niece by marriage. I do not even know what the Church lays down."

Her father was still angry with her, but he was startled as well. He did not know any better than herself what the Church laid down. He did know that between him and Sarella there was no real relationship—in the law of nature there was nothing to bar their marriage, and he had acted in perfect good faith. But he did not intend to break the Church's law again.

"If you are ignorant of the Church's law," he said severely, "you should not talk as if you knew it."

She knew she had not so talked, but she made no attempt to excuse herself.

"It is," she said quietly, "quite easy to find out. The priest at Maxwell would tell you immediately."

She saw that her father, though still frowning heavily, was not entirely disregardful of her suggestion.

"Father," she went on in a low gentle tone, "I beg your pardon if, being altogether surprised, I spoke suddenly, and seemed disrespectful."

"You were very disrespectful," he said, with stiff resentment.

Mariquita's large grave eyes were full of tears, but he did not notice them, and would have been unmoved if he had seen them. It was difficult for her to keep them from overflowing, and more difficult to go on with what she wished to say.

"You know," she said, "that there are things which the Church does not allow except upon conditions, but does allow on conditions—"

"What things?"

"For instance, marriage with a person who is not a Catholic—"

Don Joaquin received a sudden illumination. Yes! With a dispensation that would have been dutiful which he had done undutifully without one.

"You think a dispensation can be obtained in—in this case."

"Father," she answered almost in a whisper, "I am quite ignorant about it."

He had severely reprimanded her for speaking, being ignorant. Now he wanted encouragement and ordered her to speak.

"But say what you think," he said dictatorially.

"As there is no real relationship," she answered, courageously enough after her former snubbing, "if such a marriage is forbidden" (he scowled blackly, but she went on), "it cannot be so by the law of God, but by the law of the Church. She cannot give anyone permission to disregard God's law, but she can, I suppose, make exception to her own law. That is what we call a dispensation. God does not forbid the use of meat on certain days, but she does. If God forbade it she could never give leave for it; but she often gives leave—not only to a certain person, but to a whole diocese, or a whole country even, for temporary reasons—what we call a dispensation."

Don Joaquin had listened carefully. He was much more ignorant of ecclesiastical matters than his daughter. He had never occupied himself with considering the reasons behind ecclesiastical regulations, and much that he heard now came like entirely new knowledge. But he was Spaniard enough to understand logic very readily, and he did understand Mariquita.

"So," he queried eagerly, "you think that even if such a marriage is against regulation" (he would not say "forbidden"), "there might be a dispensation?"

"I do not see why there should not."

"Of course, there is no reason," he said loftily, adding with ungracious ingratitude, "and it was extremely out of place for you to look shocked when I told you of my purpose."

Mariquita accepted this further reproof meekly. Don Joaquin was only asserting his dignity, that had lain a little in abeyance while he was listening to her explanations.

"I shall have to be away all to-morrow," he said, "on business. I do not wish you to say anything to Sarella till I give you permission."

"Of course not."

Don Joaquin was not addicted to telling fibs—except business ones; in selling a horse he regarded them as merely the floral ornaments of a bargain, which would have an almost indecent nakedness without them. But on this occasion he stooped to a moderate prevarication.

"Sarella," he confidentially informed that lady, "I shall be up before sunrise and away the whole of to-morrow. Sometime the day after I shall have a good chance of telling Mariquita. Don't you hint anything to her meanwhile."

"Not I," Sarella promised.

("A hitch somewhere," she thought, feeling pretty sure that he had spoken to Mariquita already.)

When Don Joaquin, after his return from Maxwell, spoke to Mariquita again, he once more condescended to some half-truthfulness—necessary, as he considered, to that great principle of diplomacy—the balance of power. A full and plain explanation of the exact position would, he thought, unduly exalt his daughter's wisdom and foresight at the expense of his own.

"The priest," he informed her, "will, *of course*, be very pleased to marry Sarella and myself when we are ready. That will not be until she has been instructed and baptized. It will not be for a month or two."

Mariquita offered her respectful congratulations both on Sarella's willingness to become a Catholic, and on the marriage itself. She was little given to asking questions, and was quite aware that her father had no wish to answer any in the present instance.

Neither did he tell Sarella that a dispensation would be necessary; still less, that the priest believed the dispensation would have to be sought, through the Bishop, of course, from the Papal Delegate, and professed himself even uncertain whether the Papal Delegate himself might not refer to Rome before granting it, though he (the priest) thought it more probable that His Excellency would grant the dispensation without such reference.

Don Joaquin merely gave Sarella to understand that their marriage would follow her reception into the Church, and that the necessary instruction previous to that reception would take some time.

Chapter XXI

As the marriage could not take place without delay, Don Joaquin did not wish it to be unreservedly announced; the general inhabitants of the range might guess what they chose, but they were not at present to be informed.

"Mariquita may tell Gore," he explained to Sarella, "that is a family matter."

"And I am sure she will not tell him unless you order her to," said Sarella; "she does not think of him in that light."

"What light?" demanded Don Joaquin irritably.

"As one of the family," Sarella replied, without any irritation at all. Her placidity of temper was likely to be one of her most convenient endowments.

"I shall give her to understand," said Don Joaquin, "that there is no restriction on her informing Mr. Gore."

Sarella shrugged her pretty shoulders and made no comment.

Mariquita took her father's intimation as an order and obeyed, though surprised that he should not, if he desired Mr. Gore to know of his approaching marriage, tell him himself. Possibly, she thought, her father was a little shy about such a subject.

Mr. Gore received her announcement quite coolly, without any manifestation of surprise. It had not, as Don Joaquin had hoped it might, the least effect of hurrying his own steps.

"Am I," he inquired, "supposed to show that I have been told?"

"Oh, I think so."

So that night when they were alone, after the others had gone to their rooms, Gore congratulated his host.

"Thank you! You see," said Don Joaquin, assuming a tone of pathos that sat most queerly on him, "as time goes on, I should be very lonely."

He shook his head sadly, and Gore endeavored to look duly sympathetic.

"Sarella," the older man proceeded, "could not stop here—if she were not my wife—after Mariquita had left us."

Gore, who perfectly understood Mariquita's father and his diplomacy, would not indulge him by asking if his daughter were, then, likely to leave him.

So Don Joaquin sighed and had to go on.

"Yes! It would be very lonely for me, dependent as I am for society on Mariquita."

Here Gore, with some inward amusement, could not refrain from accusing his possible father-in-law of some hypocrisy; for he was sure the elderly gentleman would miss his daughter as little as any father could miss his child.

"Certainly," he said aloud, "it is hard to think how the range would get on without her."

No doubt, her absence would be hard to fill in the matter of usefulness, and Gore was inclined to doubt whether Sarella would even wish to fill it. He was pretty sure that that young woman would refuse to work as her cousin had worked.

"It *must* get on without her," Don Joaquin agreed, not without doubt, "when her time comes for moving to a home of her own."

Still Gore refused to "rise."

"We must be prepared for that," Mariquita's father went on, refilling his pipe. "She is grown up. It is natural she should be thinking of her own future—"

Gore suddenly felt angry with him, instead of being merely amused. To him it appeared a profanation of the very idea of Mariquita, to speak of her as indulging in surmises and calculations concerning her own matrimonial chances.

"It would not," he said, "be unnatural—but I am sure her mind is given to no such thoughts."

Don Joaquin slightly elevated his eyebrows.

"I do not know," he said coldly, "how you can answer for what her mind is given to. I, at any rate, must have such thoughts on her account. I am not English. English parents may, perhaps, leave all such things to chance. We, of my people, are not so. To us it seems the most important of his duties for a father to trust to no chances, but arrange and provide for his daughter's settlement in life."

Here the old fellow paused, and having shot his bolt, pretended it had been a mere parenthesis in answer to an implied criticism.

"But," he continued, "I have wandered from what I was really explaining. I was telling that soon I should, in the natural course of things, be left here alone, as regards home companionship, unless I myself tried to find a mate, so I tried and I have succeeded."

Here he bowed with great majesty and some complacence, as if he might have added, "Though you, in your raw youthfulness and conceit, may have thought me too old a suitor to win a lovely bride."

Gore responded by the heartiest felicitations. "Sir," he added after a brief pause, "since it seems to me that you wish it, I will explain my own position. I can well afford to marry. And I would wish very much to marry. But there is only one lady whom I have ever met, whom I have now, or ever, felt that I would greatly desire to win for my wife."

So far Don Joaquin had listened with an absolutely expressionless countenance of polite attention, though he had never been more interested.

"The lady," Gore continued, "is your daughter."

(Here that lady's father relaxed the aloofness of his manner, and permitted himself a look of benign, though not eager, approval.)

"It may be," the young man went on, "that you have perceived my wishes…"

(Don Joaquin would express neither negation nor assent.)

"Anyway, you know them now. But your daughter does not know them. To thrust the knowledge of them prematurely upon her would, I am sure, make the chance of her responding to them very much less hopeful. Therefore I have been slow and cautious in endeavoring to gain even a special footing of friendship with her; I have, lately, gained a little. I cannot flatter myself that it is more than a little; between us there is on her side only the mere dawn of friendship. That being so, I should have been unwilling to speak to yourself—lest it should seem like assuming that she had any sort of interest in me beyond what I have explained. I speak now because you clearly expect that I should. Well, I have spoken. But I am so greatly in eager earnest about this that I ask you plainly to allow me to endeavor to proceed with what, I think, you almost resent as a timidity of caution. It is my only chance."

Don Joaquin did not see that at all. If he were to inform Mariquita that Mr. Gore wished to become her husband and he, her father, wished her to become Mr. Gore's wife, he could not bring himself to picture such disobedience as any refusal on her part would amount to.

"Our way," he said, "is more direct than your fanciful English way; it regards not a young girl's fanciful delays, and timid uncertainty, but her solid welfare, and therefore her solid happiness. In reality it gets over her maiden modesty in the best way—by wise authority. She does not have to tell herself baldly, 'I have become in love with this young man,' but 'My parents have found this young man worthy to undertake the charge of my life and my happiness, and I submit to their experience and wisdom.' Then duty will teach her love; a safer teacher than fancy."

"I hope, sir," said Gore, "that you do not yourself propose that method."

"And if I did?"

"I would, though more earnestly desirous to win your daughter than I am desirous of anything in this life, tell you that I refuse to win her in that way. It never would win her."

"'Win her'! She is all duty—"

"Excuse me! No duty would command her to become my wife if she could only do so with repugnance. If you told her it was her duty I should tell her it was no such thing."

Don Joaquin was amazed at such crass stupidity. He flung his open hands upwards with angry protest. He was even suspicious. Did the young man really *want* to marry his daughter? It was much more evident that he was in earnest now, than it had been to Don Joaquin that he was in earnest before.

The elderly half-breed had not the least idea of blaming his own crude diplomacy; on the contrary, he had been pluming himself on its success. For some time he had desired to obtain from Gore a definite expression of his wish to marry Mariquita, and he had obtained it. That it had been speedily followed by this further pronouncement, incomprehensible to the girl's father, was not his fault, but was due entirely to the Englishman's peculiarities, peculiarities that to Don Joaquin seemed perverse and almost suspicious.

"If you were a Spaniard," he said stiffly, "you would be grateful to me for being willing to influence my daughter in your favor."

Gore knew that he must be disturbed, as it was his rule to speak of himself not as a Spaniard, but as an American.

"I am grateful to you, sir, for being willing to let me hope to win your daughter for my wife—most grateful."

"You do not appear grateful to me for my willingness to simplify matters."

"They cannot be simplified—nor hurried. If your daughter can be brought to think favorably of me as one who earnestly desires to have the great, great honor and privilege of being the guardian of her life and its happiness, it must be gradually and by very gentle approaches. I hope that she already likes me, but I am sure she does not yet love me."

"Before she has been asked to be your wife! Love you! Certainly not. She will love her husband, for that will be her duty."

Gore did not feel at all like laughing; his future father-in-law's peculiarities seemed as perverse to him as his own did to Don Joaquin. He dreaded their operation; it seemed only too possible that Don Joaquin would be led to interference by them, and such interference he feared extremely; nor could he endure the idea of Mariquita's being dragooned by her father.

"If," he declared stoutly, "you thrust prematurely upon your daughter the idea of me as her husband, you will make her detest the thought of me, and I never *shall* be her husband."

Don Joaquin was offended.

"I am not used to do anything prematurely," he said grimly. "And it may be that I understand my daughter, who is of my own race, better than you who are not of her race."

"It may be. But I am not certain that it is so. Sir, since you have twice alluded to that question of race, you must not be surprised or displeased if I remind you that she is as much of my race as of your own. Half Spanish she is, but half of English blood."

Don Joaquin *was* displeased, but all the same, he did feel that there might be something in Gore's argument. He had always thought of Mariquita as Spanish like himself; but he had never been unconscious that she was unlike himself—it might possibly be by reason of her half-English descent.

"The lady," Gore went on, "whom you yourself are marrying, would perhaps understand me better than you appear to do."

This reference to Sarella did not greatly conciliate her betrothed. He did not wish her to be occupied in understanding any young man. All the same, he was slightly flattered at Gore's having, apparently, a confidence in her judgment. Moreover, he knew that it was so late that this discussion could not be protracted much longer, and he was not willing to say anything like an admission that he had receded (which he had not) from his own opinion.

"Her judgment," he said, "is good. And she has a maternal interest in Mariquita. I will tell her what you have said."

Gore went to bed smiling to himself at the idea of Sarella's maternal interest. She did not strike him as a motherly young lady.

Chapter XXII

Sarella found considerable enjoyment in the visits to Maxwell necessitated by her period of instruction. Each instruction was of reasonable length and left plenty of time for other affairs, and that time landed Don Joaquin in expenses he had been far from foreseeing. Sarella had a fund of mild obstinacy which her placidity of temper partly veiled. She intended that considerable additions to the furniture of the homestead should be made, and she did not intend to get married without some considerable additions to her wardrobe as well. Her dresses, she assured Don Joaquin, were all too youthful. "Girl's clothes" she called them. She insisted on the necessity of now dressing as a matron. "Perhaps," she admitted with sweet ingenuousness, "I have dressed too young. One gets into a sort of groove. There was nothing to remind me that I had passed beyond the stage of school-girl frocks. But a married woman, unless she is a silly, must pull herself up, and adopt a matron's style; I would rather now dress a bit too old than too young. You don't want people to be saying you have married a flapper!"

She got her own way, and Don Joaquin, had he known anything about it, might have discovered that matronly garments were more expensive than a girl's. "A girl," Sarella informed Mariquita, "need only be smart. A matron's dress must be handsome."

To do her justice, Sarella tried to convince her lover that Mariquita also should be provided with new clothes; but he would agree only to one new "suit," as he called it, for his daughter to wear at his wedding. He had no idea of spending his own money on an extensive outfit "for another man's wife." That expense would be Gore's. Even in Sarella's case he would never have agreed to buy all she wanted had it been announced at once, but she was far too astute for any such mistake as that. It appeared that there must be some delay before their marriage, and she utilized it by spreading her gradual demands over as long a time as she could.

Some of the expense, too, Don Joaquin managed to reduce by discovering a market he had hardly thought of till now, for the furs of animals he had himself shot; some of these animals were rather uncommon, some even rare, and he became aware of their commercial value only when bargaining for their making up into coats or cloaks for Sarella. His subsequent visits to this "store" in order to

dispose of similar furs against a reduction in its charges for Sarella's clothing, he studiously concealed from her, but Sarella knew all about it.

"Why," she said to herself, really admiring his sharpness, "the old boy is making a *profit* on the bargain. He's getting more for his furs than he's spending."

She was careful not to let him guess that she knew this; but she promised herself to "take it out in furniture." And she kept her promise. It was Sarella's principle that a person who did not keep promises made to herself would never keep those made to other people.

"You really must," she told him, "have some of those furs made into a handsome winter jacket for Mariquita. They cost you nothing, and she must have a winter jacket. The one she has was got at the Convent—and a present, too, I believe. It was handsome once—and that shows how economical good clothes are; they last so—"

(Don Joaquin thought, "especially economical when they are presents.")

"—But Mariquita has grown out of it. She is so tall. A new one made of cloth from the store would cost more than one for me, because she is so tall. But those furs cost you nothing."

She knew he would not say, "No, but I can sell them."

"Besides," she added, "if you offered them some more furs at the store they might take something off the charge of making and lining. It is often done. I'll ask them about it if you like."

Don Joaquin did not at all desire her to do that.

"No necessity," he said hastily; "Mariquita shall have the jacket. I will take the furs and give the order myself."

"Only be sure to insist that the lining is silk. They have some silvery gray silk that would just go with those furs. And Mariquita would *pay* good dressing. Her style wants it. She's solid, you know."

Mariquita did get the jacket. But it was not of the fur Sarella had meant—her father knew by that time the value of that sort of fur. And Sarella knew that she had made it quite clear which sort she had asked him to supply. She was amused by his craftiness, and though a little ashamed of him, she was readier to forgive his stinginess than if it had been illustrated in a garment for herself. After all, it was perhaps as well that Mariquita's should not be so valuable as her own.

"And married women," she reminded herself, "do have to dress handsomer than girls. And Mariquita will never know the difference."

"I suggested," she told her cousin, "the same gray fur as mine. But I daresay a brown fur will suit your coloring better, and it's younger. Anything gray (in the fur line) can be worn with mourning, and nothing's so elderly as mourning."

It was the first present her father had ever given Mariquita, and she thanked him with a warmth of gratefulness that ought to have made him ashamed. But Don Joaquin was not subject to the unpleasant consciousness of shame. On the contrary, he thought with less complacence of Mariquita's thanks than of the fact that he had given her a necessary winter garment at a profit—for he had taken the other furs to the store and received for them a substantial cash payment over and above the clearing of the charges for making up and lining the commoner skins of which the winter jacket was made.

"I wonder," thought Sarella, "what that lining is? It looks silky, but I'm sure it isn't silk. I daresay it's warmer. And after all, Gore can get it changed for silk when it's worn out; the fur will outlast two linings at least. It's not so delicate as mine. I'm afraid mine'll *flatten*. I must look to that."

Chapter XXIII

Meanwhile the instructions did proceed, and Sarella did not mind them much. Perhaps she was not always attending very laboriously—she had a good deal to think of; but she listened with all due docility, and with quite reasonable, if not absorbed, interest; and by carefully abstaining from asking questions, did not often betray any misunderstanding of the nun's explanations, for it was by one of the nuns that all but the preliminary instructions were given. Sarella rather liked her, deciding that she was "a good sort," and, though neither young nor extremely attractive, she was "as kind as kind," and so intensely full of her subject that Sarella could not help gathering a higher appreciation of its importance. In Sarella the earnest expounder of Catholic doctrine and practice had no bigotry and not much prejudice to work against; only a thick crust of ignorance, and perhaps a thicker layer of natural indifference. The little she had heard about the Catholic Church was from Puritan neighbors in a very small town of a remote corner of New England, and if it had made any particular impression, must have been found unfavorable; but Sarella had been too little interested in religion to adopt its rancors, her whole disposition, easy, self-indulgent and material, being opposed to rancor as to all rough, sharp, and uncomfortable things.

Perhaps the nun was hardly likely to overcome the indifference, and perhaps she knew it. But she prayed for Sarella much oftener than she talked to her, and had much more confidence in what Our Lord Himself might do for her than in anything that she could.

"After all," she would urge, "it is more Your own business than mine. I did not make her, nor die for her. Master, do Your own work that I cannot."

Besides, she, who had no belief in chance, would cheer herself by remembering that He had so ordered His patient providence as to bring the girl to the gate of the Church, by such ways as she was so far capable of. He had begun the work; He would not half do it. He would make it, the nun trusted, a double work. For in, half-obstinately, insisting that Sarella must become a Catholic before he married her, the old Spaniard, half-heathen by lifelong habit, had begun to awake to some sort at least of Catholic feeling, some beginning of Catholic practice, for now he was occasionally hearing Mass, and that first lethargic movement of a better spirit in him might, with God's blessing, would, lead to something more genuinely spiritual.

The nun attributed those beginnings to the prayers of the old half-breed's daughter. As yet she knew her but little, but already, by the *discretio spiritum*, which is, after all, perhaps only another name for the clear instinct in things of

grace earned by those who live by grace, the elderly nun, plain and simple, recognized in Mariquita one of a rare, unfettered spirituality.

Sarella had not, at all events consciously, to herself, told her instructress much about her young cousin.

"Oh, Mariquita!" she had said, not ill-naturedly, "she lives up in the moon."

("Higher up than that, I expect," thought Sister Aquinas, gathering the impression that Mariquita was not held of much account in the family.)

"But she is not an idler?" said the nun.

"Oh, not a bit," Sarella agreed with perfectly ungrudging honesty. "An idler! No; she works a lot harder than she ought; harder than she would if I had the arranging of things. Not quite so hard as she used, though, for I have made her father get some help, and he will have to get more if Mariquita leaves us."

Perceiving that the nun did not smile, but retreated into what Sarella called her "inside expression," that acute young woman guessed that she might have conveyed the idea that her future stepdaughter was to be sent away on her father's marriage.

"There's always," she explained carelessly, "the chance of her marrying. She is handsome in her own way, and I don't think she need remain long unmarried if she chose to marry. Not that *she* ever thinks of it."

("I expect not," thought Sister Aquinas.)

This was about as near to gossip as they ever got. Sarella, indeed, would have liked the nun better if she had been "more chatty." I don't know that Sister Aquinas really disliked chat so long as it wasn't gossip, but the truth was, she did not find the time allowed for each instruction at all superfluously long, and did not wish to let it slip away in mere talk.

Chapter XXIV

It was only occasionally that Mariquita accompanied Sarella when the latter went to the convent for instruction. On one of those occasions the Loretto Convent near Denver was mentioned, and Sister Aquinas said:

"I had a niece there a few years ago—Eleanor Hurst. I wonder if you know her?"

"Oh, yes! Quite well." Mariquita answered, with the sort of shining interest that always made her look suddenly younger. "A friend of ours brought me news, lately, that she has become a Carmelite."

"What is a Carmelite?" Sarella asked.

"A nun of one of the great Contemplative Orders," Sister Aquinas explained, turning politely to Sarella. "It is a much rarer vocation than that of active nuns, like ourselves. Carmelites do not teach school, or have orphanages, or homes for broken old men or women, nor nurse the sick, either in their homes or in hospital."

"Sounds pretty useless," Sarella remarked carelessly; "what do they do anyway?"

"They are not at all useless," the nun answered, smiling good-humoredly. "Married women are not useless, though they do not do any of those things either."

"Of course not. But they *are* married. They make their husbands comfortable—"

The nun could not help taking her own turn of interrupting, and said with a little laugh:

"Not quite always, perhaps."

"The good ones do."

"Perhaps not invariably. Some even pious women are not remarkable for making their husbands comfortable."

Sarella laughed, and the elderly nun went on.

"Of course, it is the vocation of married women to do as you say. And I hope most do it, that and setting the example of happy Christian homes. I do not really mean to judge of the vocation by those who fail to fulfill it. It is God's vocation for the vast majority of His daughters. But not for all."

"There aren't husbands enough for all of us," Sarella, who was "practical" and slightly statistical, remarked, with the complacence of one for whom a husband had been forthcoming.

"Exactly," agreed the elderly nun, laughing cheerfully, "so it's a good thing, you see, that there are other vocations; ours, for instance."

"Oh," Sarella protested with hasty politeness, "no one could think people like you useless. You do so much good."

"So do the Carmelites. Only their way of it is not quite the same. Would you say that Shakespeare was useless, or Dante?"

To tell truth, Sarella had never in her life said anything about either, or thought anything. Nevertheless, she was aware that they were considered important.

"They did not," the nun said eagerly, "teach schools, or nurse the sick, or do any of those things for the sake of which some people kindly forgive us for being nuns—not all people, unfortunately. Yet they are recognized as not having been useless. They are not useless now, long after they are dead. Mankind admits its debt to them. They *served*, and they serve still. Not with physical service, like nurses, or doctors, or cooks, or house-servants. But they contributed to the *quality* of the human race. So have many great men and women who never wrote a line—Joan of Arc, for instance. The contribution of those illustrious servants was eminent and famous, but many who have never been famous, who never have been known, have contributed in a different degree or fashion to the quality of mankind: innumerable priests, unknown perhaps outside their parishes; innumerable nuns, innumerable wives and mothers; and a Carmelite nun so contributes, eminently, immeasurably except by God, though invisibly, and inaudibly. Not only by her prayers, I mean her prayers of intercession, though again it is only God who can measure what she does by them. But just by being what she is, vast, unknown numbers of people are brought into the Catholic Church not only by her prayers but by her life. Some read themselves into the true faith, into any faith; they are very few in comparison of those who come to believe. Some are preached into the Church—a few only, again, compared with the number of those who do come to her. What brings most of those who are brought? I believe it is a certain quality that they have become aware of in the Catholic Church, that brings the immense majority. The young man in the factory, or in the army, in a ship, or on a ranch—anywhere—falls into companionship with a Catholic, or with a group of Catholics; and in him, or them, he gradually perceives this *quality*

which he has never perceived elsewhere. It may be that the Catholics he has come to know are not perfect at all. The quality is not all of their own earning; it is partly an inheritance: some of it from their mothers, some from their sisters, some from their friends; ever so much of it from the saints, who contributed it to the air of the Church that Catholics breathe. The Contemplatives are contributing it every day, and all day long. Each, in her case, behind her grille, is forever giving something immeasurable, except by God, to the transcendent quality of the Catholic Church. This may be, and mostly is, unsuspected by almost all her fellow-creatures; but not unfelt by quite all. A Carmelite's convent is mostly in a great city; countless human beings pass its walls. They cannot *help*, seeing them, saying to their own hearts, 'In there, human creatures, like me, are living unlike me. They have given up *everything*—and for no possible reward *here*. Ambition cannot account for *any part of it even*. They cannot become anything great even in their Church, nor famous; they will die as little known or regarded as they live. They can win no popularity. They obtain no applause. They are called useless for their pains. They are scolded for doing what they do, though they would not be scolded if they were mere old-maids who pampered and indulged only themselves. The wicked women of this city are less decried than they. They are abused, and they have to be content to be abused, remembering that their Master said they must be content to fare no better than Himself. It is something above this world, that can only be accounted for by another world, and such a belief in it as is not proved by those who may try to grab two worlds, this one with their right hands, the next with their left. The life almost all of us declare impossible here on earth, they are living.' Such thoughts as these, broken thoughts, hit full in the face numbers of passers-by every day, and how many days are there not in a year—in a Carmelite's own lifetime. They are witnesses to Jesus Christ, who cannot be explained away. A chaplain told me that nothing pleased his soldiers so much as to get him in the midst of a group of them and say, 'Tell us about the nuns, Father. Tell us about the Carmelites and the Poor Clares—'"

"I knew a girl called Clare," Sarella commented brightly; "she was as poor as a church mouse, but she married a widower with no children and a *huge* fortune. I beg your pardon—but the name reminded me of her."

Sister Aquinas laughed gently.

"Well, she was a useful friend to you!"

"Not at all. She never did a hand's turn for anyone. I don't know what she would have done if she *hadn't* married a rich man, she was so helpless. But you were saying?"

"Only, that his soldiers loved to hear the chaplain tell them about the Contemplative nuns. Nothing interested them more. I am sure it was not thrown away on them. It was like showing them a high and lovely place. I should think no one can look at a splendid white mountain and not want to be climbing. That was all."

Would Sarella ever want to climb? Sister Aquinas did not know, nor do I know.

Her eagerness had been, perhaps, partly spurred by other criticism than Sarella's; Sarella was not the only one who had told Nelly Hurst's aunt that it was a pity the girl had "decided on one of the useless Orders."

That every phase of life approved by the Catholic Church, as the Contemplative Orders are, must be useful, Sister Aquinas knew well. And it wounded her to hear her niece's high choice belittled. She could not help knowing that this belittling was simply a naive confession of materialism, and an equally naive expression of human selfishness. We approve the vocation of nuns whose work is for our own bodies; we cannot easily see the splendor of *direct* service of God Himself who has no material needs of His own. That God's most usual course of Providence calls us to serve Him by serving our fellows, we see clearly enough, because it suits us to see it; but we are too purblind to perceive that even that Service need not in every case be material service, and it scandalizes us to remember that God chooses in some instance to be served directly, not by the service of any creature; because the instances are less common, we are shocked when asked to admit that they exist. If Christ were still visibly on earth, millions would be delighted to feed Him, but it would annoy almost all of us to see even a few serving Him by sitting idle at His feet listening. Hardly any of us but think Martha was doing more that afternoon at Bethany than her sister, and it troubles us that Jesus Christ thought differently. It was so easy to sit still and listen—that is why the huge majority of us find it impossible, and are angry that here and there a Contemplative nun wants to do it.

Of liberty we prattle in every language; and most loudly do they scream of it who are most angry that God takes leave to exist, and that many of His creatures still refuse to deny His existence; that many admit His right to command, and their own obligation to obey. These liberty-brawlers would be the first to concede to every woman the "inalienable right" to lead a corrupt life, destructive of society, and the last to allow to a handful of women out of the world's population the right to live a life of spotless whiteness at the immediate feet of the Master they love.

Was Sister Aquinas so carried away as to be forgetful that Sarella was not the only auditor? Mariquita had listened too.

Chapter XXV

During these weeks of Sarella's instruction she achieved something which to her seemed a greater triumph than her succession of cumulative triumphs in the matters of trousseau and of furniture. She persuaded Don Joaquin to buy a motor-car!

She would not have succeeded in this attempt but for certain circumstances which in reality robbed her success of some of its triumph. In the first place, the machine was not a new one; in the second, Don Joaquin took it instead of a debt which he did not think likely to be paid. Then also he had arrived at the conclusion that so many long rides as Sarella's frequent journeys to Maxwell involved, were likely to prove costly. They took a good deal out of the horses, even without accidents occurring, and an accident had nearly occurred which would have very largely reduced the value of one of the best of his horses—the one, as it happened, best fitted for carrying a lady. Sarella all but let the horse down on a piece of ragged, stony road: Don Joaquin being himself at her elbow and watchful,

had just succeeded in averting the accident; but lover as he was, he was able to see that Sarella would never be a horse-woman. She disliked riding, and he was not such a tyrant as to insist on her doing a thing she never would do well, and had no pleasure in doing. On the whole, he made up his mind that it would be more economical to take this second-hand car in settlement of a bad debt than continue running frequent risks of injury to his horses.

The acquisition of the car made it possible to shorten the period of these journeys to Maxwell; it did not require a night's rest, and the trip itself was much more rapidly accomplished.

The period of Sarella's instruction was not one of idleness on Gore's part, in reference to Mariquita. It seemed to him that he really was making some advance. He saw much more of her than used to be the case. She was now accustomed to chance meetings with him, or what she took for chance meetings, and did not make hasty escape from them, or treat him during them with reserve. They were, in fact, friends and almost confidential friends; but if Gore had continued as wise as he had been when discussing the situation with her father, he would have been able to see that it did not amount to more than that; that they were friends indeed because Mariquita was wholly free from any suspicion that more than that could come of it. She had simply come to a settled opinion that he was nice, a kind man, immensely pleasanter as a companion than any man she had known before, a trustworthy friend who could tell her of much whereof she had been ignorant. She began in a fashion to know "his people," too; and he saw with extreme pleasure that she was interested in them. That was natural enough. She knew almost nobody; as a grown-up woman, had really known none of her own sex till Sarella came; it would have been strange if she had not heard with interest about women whose portraits were so affectionately drawn for her, who, she could easily discern, were pleasant and refined, cheerful, bright, amusing, and kind, too; cordial, friendly people.

All the same, Gore's talk of his family did connote a great advance in intimacy with Mariquita. He seemed to assume that she might know them herself, and she gathered the notion that when he had bought a range, some of them would come out and live with him, so that she said nothing to contradict a possibility that he had after all only implied. Gore, meanwhile, with no suspicion of her idea that his sisters might come out to visit him, and noting with great satisfaction that she never contradicted his hints and hopes that they might all meet, attached more importance to it than he ought. Perhaps he built more hope on this than on any one thing besides. He was fully aware that in all their intercourse there was no breath of flirtation. But he could not picture Mariquita flirting, and did not want to picture it. Meanwhile their intercourse was daily growing to an intimacy, or he took it for such. He did not sufficiently weigh the fact that of herself she said little. She was most ready to be interested in all he told her of himself, his previous life, his friends; but of her own real life, which was inward and apart from the few events of her experience, she did not speak. This did not strike him as reserve, for those who show a warm, friendly interest in others do not seem reserved.

Gore never startled her by gallantry or compliments; his sympathy and admiration were too respectful for compliment, and a certain instinct warned him that gallantry would have perplexed and disconcerted her.

None the less, he believed that he was making progress, and the course of it was full of beautiful and happy moments. So things went on, with, as Gore thought, sure though not rapid pace. He was too much in earnest to risk haste, and also too happy in the present to make blundering clutches at the future. Then with brutal suddenness Don Joaquin intervened.

Chapter XXVI

He met his daughter and Gore returning to the homestead, Mariquita's face bright with friendly interest in all that Gore had been telling her, and the young man's certainly not less happy. Don Joaquin was out of temper; Sarella and he had had an economic difference and he had been aware that she had deceived him.

He barely returned Gore's and Mariquita's greeting, and his brow was black. It was not till some time later that he and Gore found themselves alone together. Then he said ill-humoredly:

"You and Mariquita were riding this afternoon—a good while, I think."

"It did not seem long to *me*, as you can understand," Gore replied smiling, and anxious to ignore the old fellow's bad temper.

"Perhaps it does not seem long to you since you began to speak of marrying my daughter."

"I did not begin to speak of it. I should have preferred to hold my tongue till I could feel I had some right to speak of it. It was you, sir, who began."

"And that was a long time ago. Have you yet made my daughter understand you?"

"I cannot be sure yet."

"But I must be sure. To-morrow I shall see that she understands."

Gore was aghast.

"I earnestly beg you to abstain from doing that," he begged, too anxious to prevent Don Joaquin's interference to risk precipitating it by showing the anger he felt.

"Perhaps you no longer wish to marry her. If so, it would be advisable to reduce your intercourse to common civilities—"

"Sir," Gore interrupted, "I cannot allow you to go on putting any case founded on such an assumption as that of my no longer wishing to marry your daughter. I wish it more every day..."

The young man had a right to be angry, and he was angry, and perhaps was not unwilling to show it. But it was necessary that he should for every reason be moderate in letting his resentment appear. To have a loud quarrel with a prospective father-in-law is seldom a measure likely to help the suitor's wishes.

He in his turn was interrupted.

"Then," said Don Joaquin, "it is time you told her so."

"I do not think so. I think it's *not* time, and that to tell her so now would greatly injure my chance of success."

"I will answer for your success. I shall myself speak to her. I shall tell her that you wish to marry her, and that I have, some time ago, given my full consent."

Gore was well aware that Don Joaquin could not "answer for his success." It was horrible to him to think of Mariquita being bullied, and he was sure that her father intended to bully her. Anything would be better than that. He was intensely earnest in his wish to succeed; it was that earnestness that made him willing to be patient; but he was, if possible, even more intensely determined that the poor girl should not be tormented and dragooned by her tyrannical father. That, he would risk a great deal to prevent, as far as his own power went.

"I most earnestly beg you not to do that," he said in a very low voice.

"But I intend to do it. If you choose to say that you do not, after all, wish to marry her, then I will merely suggest that you should leave us."

"I have just told you the exact contrary—"

"Then, I shall tell Mariquita so to-morrow, stating that your proposal meets with my full consent, and that in view of her prolonged intimacy with you, her consent is taken by me for granted. I do take it for granted."

"I wish I could. But I cannot. Sir, I still entreat you to abandon this intention of yours."

"Only on condition that you make the proposal yourself without any further delay."

From this decision the obstinate old father would not recede. The discussion continued for some time, but he seemed to grow only more fixed in his intention, and certainly he became more acerbated in temper. Gore was sure that if he were allowed to take up the matter with his daughter, it would be with even more harshly dictatorial tyranny than had seemed probable at first.

Finally Gore promised that he would himself propose to Mariquita in form on the morrow, Don Joaquin being with difficulty induced to undertake on his side that he would not "prepare" her for what was coming. He gave this promise quite as reluctantly as Gore gave his. The younger man dreaded the bad effects of precipitancy; the elder, who had plenty of self-conceit behind his dry dignity, relinquished very unwillingly the advantages he counted upon from his diplomacy, and the weight of his authority being known beforehand to be on the suitor's side. If Gore were really so uncertain of success, it would be a feather in the paternal cap to have insured that success by his solemn indications of approval. But he saw that without his promise of absolute abstention from interference, Gore would not agree to make his proposal, so Don Joaquin ungraciously yielded the point perhaps chiefly because important business called him away from the morrow's dawn till late at night.

Chapter XXVII

After breakfast next morning Sarella, not quite accidentally, found herself alone with Gore.

"You gentlemen," she said, "did go to bed sometime, I suppose. But I thought you never *were* going to stop your talk—and to tell you the truth, I wished my bedroom was farther away, or had a thicker wall. *I* go to bed to sleep. You were at it two hours and twenty minutes."

Gore duly apologized for the postponement of her sleep, and wondered *how* thin the wooden partition might be between her room and that in which the long discussion had taken place.

"These partitions of thin boarding are wretched," she informed him, "especially as they are only stained. If they were even papered it would prevent the tobacco-smoke coming through the cracks where the boards have shrunk." Gore could not help smiling.

"I think," he said, "you want to let me know that our talk was not quite inaudible."

"No, it wasn't. Not quite. I'll tell you how much was audible. That you were talking about Mariquita, and that you were arguing, and I think you were both angry. I am sure *he* was."

"So was I; though not so loud, I hope."

"Look here, Mr. Gore. You weren't loud at all. But I knew you were angry. And so you ought to have been. Why on earth can't he keep his fingers out of the pot? You and Mariquita didn't interfere in his love affair, and he'll do no good interfering in yours."

Gore laughed.

"So you heard it all!" he said.

"No. If you had talked as loud as he did I should. But you didn't. It was easy to hear him say that to-morrow he would go and order Mariquita to marry you. If that had been the end of it, I just believe I should have dressed myself and come in to tell him not to be silly. But it wasn't the end. Was it?"

"No. To *stop* that plan I promised I would propose to Mariquita to-day—only he was to say nothing about it to her first."

"Well, then, I don't know as he has done any harm. You might do worse."

"I might do better."

"What better?"

"Wait a bit."

"I'm not so sure. I don't know that any harm would come of waiting a bit, and I daresay it's all very pleasant meanwhile. But you can go on with your love-making after you're engaged just as well as before."

"Ah! If we *were* engaged!"

"Pfush!" quoth Sarella, inventing a word which stood her in stead of "Pshaw."

Gore had to laugh again, and no doubt her good-natured certainty encouraged him—albeit he did not believe she knew Mariquita.

"What o'clock shall you propose?" she inquired coolly.

Of course he could not tell her.

"I guess," she said, "it will be between two and three. Dinner at twelve. Digestion and preliminaries, 12:45 to 1:45. Proposal 2:45 say. You will be engaged by 2:50."

As before, Gore liked the encouragement though very largely discounting its worth.

"On the whole," Sarella observed, "I daresay my old man has done good—as he has made himself scarce. If he hadn't threatened to put his own foot in it, you might have gone on staring up at Mariquita in the stars till she was forty, and then it might have struck you that you could get on fine without her."

Sarella evidently thought that nothing was to be done before the time she had indicated; during the morning she was in evidence as usual, but immediately after dinner she retreated to her studies, and was seen no more for a long time.

Gore boldly announced his intention to be idle and told Mariquita she must be idle too, begging her to ride with him. To himself it seemed as if everyone about the place must see that something was in the wind; but the truth was that everyone had been so long expecting something definite to happen without hearing of it, that some of them had decided that Gore and Mariquita had fixed up their engagement already at some unsuspected moment, and the rest had almost ceased to expect to hear anything.

As to Mariquita, she was clearly unsuspicious that this afternoon was to have any special significance for her. Always cheerful and unembarrassed, she was exactly her usual self, untroubled by the faintest presentiment of fateful events. Her ready agreement to Gore's proposal that they should ride together was, he knew well, of no real good omen. It made him have a guilty feeling, as if he were getting her out under false pretences.

There was so happy a light of perfect, confiding friendliness upon her face that it seemed almost impossible to cloud it by the suggestion of anything that would be different from simple friendship. But must it be clouded by such a suggestion? "Clouding" means darkening; was it really impossible for that light, so trusting and so contented, of unquestioning friendship, to be changed without being rendered less bright? Must Gore assume her to be specially incapable of an affection deeper than even friendship? No; of anything good she was capable; no depths of love could be beyond her, and he was sure that her nature was one of deep affectionateness, left unclaimed till now. The real loneliness of her life, he told himself, had lain in this very depth of unclaimed lovingness. And he told himself, too, not untruly, that she had been less lonely of late.

Gore might, he felt, hope to awake all that dormant treasure of affection—if he had time! But he had no longer time. He did truly, though not altogether, shrink from the task he had set himself to-day. He had a genuine reluctance to risk spoiling that happy content of hers; yet he could not say it was worse than a risk. There was the counter possibility of that happy content changing into something lovelier.

That she was not incapable of love he told himself with full assurance, and he was half-disposed to believe that she was one who would never love till asked for her love.

Sarella might be nearer right than he had been. She was of much coarser fibre than Mariquita, and perhaps he had made too much of that, for she was a woman at all events, and shrewd, watchful and a looker-on with the proverbial advantages (maybe) over the actors themselves. Sarella knew how Mariquita spoke of him, though he did not believe that between the two cousins there had been confidences about himself; not real confidences, though Sarella was just the girl to "chaff" Mariquita about himself, and would know how her chaff had been taken. At

all events, Don Joaquin must be forestalled; his blundering interference must be prevented, and it could only be prevented by Gore keeping his word and speaking himself.

Chapter XXVIII

He had kept his word, and had spoken. They had been out together a long time when the opportunity came; they had dismounted, and the horses were resting. He and she were sitting in the shade of a small group of trees, to two of which the horses were tied. Their talk had turned naturally, and with scarcely any purposeful guidance of his, in a direction that helped him. And Mariquita talked with frank unreserve; she felt at home with him now, and her natural silence had long before now been melted by his sincerity; her silence of habit was chiefly habit, due not to distrust nor a guarded prudence, but to the much simpler fact that till his arrival, she had never since her home-coming been called upon to speak in any real sense by anyone who cared to hear her, or who had an interest in what she might have to say.

His proposal did not come with the least abruptness, but it was clear and unmistakeable when it came, and she understood—Mariquita could understand a plain meaning as well as anyone. She did not interrupt, nor avert her gaze. Indeed, she turned her eyes, which had been looking far away across the lovely, empty prairie to the horizon, to him as he spoke, and her hands ceased their idle pulling at the grass beside her. In her eyes, as she listened, there was a singular shining, and presently they held a glistening like the dew in early morning flowers.

Gore had not moved any nearer to her, nor did he as he ceased. One hand of hers she moved nearer to him, now, though not so as to touch him.

"That is what you want?" she said. "Is that what you have been wanting all the time?"

Her voice was rather low, but most clear, and it had no reproach.

"Yes. What can you say to me?"

"I can only say how grateful it makes me."

Her words almost astonished him. Though he might have known that she must say only exactly what was in her mind. They conveyed in themselves no refusal, but he knew at once there was no hope for him in them.

"Grateful!" He exclaimed. "As if I could help it!"

"And as if I could help being grateful. It is so great a thing! For you to wish that. There could be nothing greater. I can never forget it. You must never think that I could forget it... I—you know, Mr. Gore, that I am not like most girls, being so very ignorant. I have never read a novel. Even the nuns told me that some of them are beautiful and not bad at all, but the contrary. Only, I have never read any. I know they are full of this matter—love and marriage. They are great things, and concern nearly all the men and women in the world, but not quite all. I do not think I ever said to myself, 'They don't concern *you*.' I do not think I ever thought about it, but if I had, I believe I should have known that that matter would never concern me.

Yet I do not want you to misunderstand—Oh, if I could make you understand, please! I know that it is a great thing, love and marriage, God's way for most men and women. And I think it a wonderful, great thing that a man should wish that for himself and me; should think that with me he could be happier than in any other way. Of course, I never thought anyone would feel that. It is a thing to thank you for, and always I shall thank you…"

"Is it impossible?"

She paused an infinitesimal moment and said:

"Just that. Impossible."

"Would it be fair to ask why 'impossible'?"

"Not unfair at all. But perhaps I cannot answer. I will try to answer. When you told me what you wanted it pleased me because you wanted it, and it hurt me because I (who had never thought about it before) knew at once that it was not possible to do what you wanted, and I would so much rather be able to please you."

"You will never be able to do anything else but please me. Your refusing cannot change your being yourself."

Gore could not worry her with demands for reasons. He knew there was no one else. He knew she was not incapable of loving—for he knew, better than ever, that she loved greatly and deeply all whom she knew. Nay, he knew that she loved *him*, among them, but more than any of them. And yet he saw that she was simply right. What he had asked was "impossible, just that." Better than himself she would love no one, and in the fashion of a wife she would love no one, ever.

Yet, he asked her a question, not to harry her but because of her father. "Perhaps you have resolved never to marry," he said.

"I never thought of it. But, as soon as I knew what you were saying, I knew I should never marry anyone. It was not a resolution. It was just a certainty. Alas! our resolutions are not certainties."

"But," Gore said gently, feeling it necessary to prepare her, "your father may wish you to marry."

She paused, dubiously, and her brown skin reddened a little.

"You think so? Yes, he may," she answered in a troubled voice; for she feared her father, more even than she was conscious of.

"I think he does," Gore said, not watching the poor girl's troubled face.

"He wants me to marry you?" she inquired anxiously.

"I am afraid so; ever since he made up his mind. I do not think he liked the idea of letting you marry me till long after he saw what I hoped for. You see, I began to hope for it from the very first—from the day when we first met, by the river. He did not like me then; he did not know whether to approve of me or not. And at first he was inclined to approve all the less because he saw I wanted to win you for myself. I don't know that he likes me much even now; but he approves, and he approves of my plan. You know that once he has made up his mind to approve a plan, he likes it more and more. He gets determined and obstinate about it."

"Yes. He will be angry."

"I am afraid so. But—it is because he thinks it a father's duty to arrange for his daughter's future, and this plan suited him."

"Oh, yes! I know he is a good man. He will feel he is right in being angry."

"But I don't. He will be wrong. Though he is your father, he has not the right to try and force you to do what you say is impossible."

"Yes," she said gently, "it is impossible. But I shall not be able to make him see that."

"I see it. And it concerns me more than it concerns him."

"You are more kind than anyone I ever heard of," she told him. "I never dared to hope you would come to see that—that it is impossible."

"Can you tell him why?"

"Perhaps I do not quite understand you."

"It seems a long time ago, now, to me since I asked you if you could come to love me and be my wife. Everything seems changed and different. I wonder if I could guess why you knew instantly that it was impossible. It might help you with your father."

Mariquita listened, and gave no prohibition.

"I think," he said, "you knew it was impossible, because my words taught you, if you did not know already, that you could be no man's wife—"

"Oh, yes! That is true."

"But perhaps they taught you also something else, which you may not have known before—that you could belong only to God."

"I have known that always," she answered simply.

Chapter XXIX

When Don Joaquin returned, he was in an unusually bad temper, and it was well that Mariquita had gone to bed. Gore was sitting up, and, though it was long past Sarella's usual hour, she had insisted on sitting up also. This was good-natured of her, for there was no pleasure to be anticipated from the interview with Don Joaquin, and she disliked any derangement of her habits. Gore had begged her to retire at her ordinary hour, but she had flatly refused.

"I can do more with him than you can," she declared, quite truly, "though no one will be able to stop his being as savage as a bear. I'm sorry for Mariquita; she'll have a bad time to-morrow, and it won't end with to-morrow."

Meanwhile she took the trouble to have ready a good supper for Don Joaquin, and made rather a special toilette in which to help him to it. Sarella was not in the least afraid of him, and had no great dread of a row which concerned someone else. Don Joaquin was not, however, particularly mollified by the becoming dress, nor by finding his betrothed sitting up for him, as she was sitting up with Gore.

"Where's Mariquita?" he asked, as he sat down to eat.

"In bed long ago. I hope you'll like that chicken; it's done in a special way we have, and the recipe's my patent. I haven't taught it to Mariquita."

"Why aren't *you* in bed?"

"Because I preferred waiting to see you safe at home," Sarella replied with an entrancing smile.

"Was Mr. Gore anxious too?" Don Joaquin demanded sarcastically.

"It is not a quarter of an hour later than my usual time for going to bed," Gore answered. "And I thought it better to see you; you would, I believe, have *expected* to see me."

"Very well. You have done as you said?"

"Yes." Gore glanced at Sarella, and Don Joaquin told her that she had now better sit up no longer.

"*I* think I had," she told him; "I know all about it."

"Is it all settled?" Don Joaquin asked, looking at Gore. "Have you fixed it up?"

Gore found this abruptness and haste made his task very difficult.

He had to consider how to form his reply.

"He proposed to Mariquita," Sarella cut in, "but she refused him."

"Refused him!" Don Joaquin almost shouted.

"Unfortunately, it is so," Gore was beginning, but his host interrupted him.

"I do not choose she should refuse," he said angrily. "I will tell her so before you see her in the morning."

Gore was angry himself, and rose from his seat.

"No," he said; "I will not agree to that. She knows her own mind, and it will not change. You must not persecute her on my account."

"It is not on your account. I choose to have duty and obedience from my own daughter."

"Joaquin," said Sarella (Gore had never before heard her call him by his Christian name), "it is no use taking it that way. Mariquita is not undutiful, and you must know it. But she will not marry Mr. Gore—or anybody."

"Of course she will marry," cried the poor girl's father fiercely. "That is the duty of every girl."

Sarella slightly smiled.

"Then many girls do not do their duty," she said, in her even, unimpassioned tones.

Her elderly *fiancé* was about to burst into another explosion, but she would not let him.

"Many Catholic girls," she reminded him, "remain unmarried."

"To be nuns—that is different."

"It is my belief," she observed in a detached manner, as if indulging in a mere surmise, "that Mariquita will be a nun."

"Mariquita! Has she said so?" he demanded sharply.

"Not to me," Sarella replied, quite unconcernedly.

"Nor to me," Gore explained; "nevertheless, I believe it will be so."

"That depends on *me*," the girl's father asserted with an unpleasant mixture of annoyance and obstinacy. "I intend her to marry."

"Only a Protestant," said Sarella, with a shrewd understanding of Don Joaquin that surprised Gore, "would marry her if she believes she has a vocation to be a nun. I should think a Catholic man would be ashamed to do it. He would expect a judgment on himself and his children."

Don Joaquin was as angry as ever, as savage as ever, but he was startled. Both his companions could see this. Gore was astonished at Sarella's speech, and at her acumen. He had wished to have this interview with Mariquita's father to himself, but already saw that Sarella knew how to conduct it better than he did.

She had clearly been quite willing that "the old man" (as he disrespectfully called him in his own mind) should fly out and give way to his fiery temper at once; the more of it went off now, the less would remain for poor Mariquita to endure.

"If I were a Catholic man," Sarella continued cooly, "I should think it *profane* to make a girl marry me who had given herself to be a nun. I expect the Lord would punish it." She paused meditatively, and then added, "and all who joined in pushing her to it. I know I wouldn't join. I think folks have enough of their own to answer for, without bringing judgments down on their heads for things like that. It won't get me to heaven to help in interfering between Mariquita and her way of getting there."

All the while she spoke, Sarella seemed to be admiring, with her head turned on one side, the prettiness of her left wrist on which was a gold bangle, with a crystal heart dangling from it. Don Joaquin had given her the bangle, and himself admired the heart chiefly because it was crystal and not of diamonds.

"Isn't it pretty?" she said, looking suddenly up and catching his eye watching her.

"I thought you hadn't cared much for it," he answered, greatly pleased. He had always known she would have preferred a smaller heart if crusted with diamonds.

Gore longed to laugh. She astonished and puzzled him. Her cleverness was a revelation to him, and her good-nature, her subtlety, and her earnestness—for he knew she had been in earnest in what she said about not daring to interfere with other people's ways of getting to heaven.

"That old man who instructs her," he thought, "must have taught her a lot."

Of course, on his own account, he was no more afraid of Don Joaquin than she was. But he had been terribly afraid of the hard old man on Mariquita's, and he was deeply grateful to Sarella.

"Sir," he said, "what she has said to you I do feel myself. I am a Catholic—and the dearest of my sisters is a nun. I should have hated and despised any man who had tried to spoil her life by snatching it to himself against her will. He would have to be a wicked fellow, and brutal, and impious. God's curse would lie on him. So it would on me if I did that hideous thing, though God knows to-day has brought me the great disappointment of my life. Life can never be for me what I have been hoping it might be. Never."

Sarella, listening, and knowing that the two men were looking at each other, smiled at her bangle, and softly shook the dangling heart to make the crystal give as diamond-like a glitter as possible. Gore's life, she thought, would come all right. She had done her best valorously for Mariquita; women, in her theory, behooved to do their best for each other against masculine tyrrany ("bossishness," she called it), but all the time she was half-savage, herself, with the girl for not being willing to be happy in so obviously comfortable a way as offered. It seemed to her "wasteful" that so pretty a girl should go and be a nun; if she had been "homely" like Sister Aquinas it would have been different. But Sarella had learned from Sister Aquinas that these matters were above her, and was quite content to accept them without understanding them.

"Ever since I came here," Gore was saying, "I have lived in a dream of what life would be—if I could join hers with mine. It was only a dream, and I had to awake."

Don Joaquin did not understand his mind, but he was able now to see that the young man suffered, and had received a blow that, somehow, *would* change his life, and turn its course aside.

"Anything," Gore said, in a very low, almost thankful tone, "is better than it would have been if I had changed my dream for a nightmare; it would have been that, if I had to think of myself as trying to pull her down, from her level to mine, of her as having been brought down. I meant to do her all possible good, all my life long. How can I wish to have done her the greatest harm? As it would have been if, out of fear or over-persuasion, she had been brought to call herself my wife who could be no man's wife."

("*How* he loves her!" thought Sarella.)

("I doubt it has wrecked him a bit," thought Don Joaquin.)

Chapter XXX

Mariquita awoke early to see Sarella entering her room, and it surprised her, for her cousin was not fond of leaving her bed betimes.

"Oh, I'm going back to bed again," Sarella explained. "We were up to all hours. Of course, your father made a rumpus."

Mariquita heard this with less surprise than concern. It really grieved her to displease him.

"He has very queer old-fashioned notions," Sarella remarked, settling herself comfortably on Mariquita's bed, "and thinks it's his business to arrange all your affairs for you. Besides, you know by this time that any plan he has been hatching he expects to hatch out, and not to help him seems to him most undutiful and shocking."

"But I *can't* help him in this plan of his," Mariquita pleaded unhappily.

"I suppose not. Well, he flared out, and I was glad you were in bed. Gore behaved very well. It's a thousand pities you can't like him."

"But I do like him. I like him better than any man I ever knew."

"Oh, yes! Better than the cowboys or the old chaplain at Loretto. *That's* no good."

All this Sarella intended as medicinal; Mariquita, she thought, ought to have some of the chill of the late storm. She was not entitled to immediate and complete relief from suspense. But Sarella was beginning to feel a little chill about the legs herself, and did not care to risk a cold, so she abbreviated her disciplinary remarks a little.

"I'm a good stepmother," she remarked complacently, "not at all like one in a novel. I took your part."

"Did you!" Mariquita cried gratefully; "it was very, very kind of you."

"I don't approve of men having things all their own way—whether fathers or husbands. He has been knocked under to too much. Yes, I took your part, and made him understand that if he kept the row up he'd have three of us against him."

"What did you say?"

"All sorts of things. Never mind. Perhaps Mr. Gore will tell you—only he won't. He said a lot of things too. We made your father think he would be wicked if he went on bullying you."

Of course, Mariquita did not understand how this had been effected.

"He would not do anything wicked," she said; "he is a very good man."

"He'd be a very good mule," Sarella observed coolly, considerably scandalizing Mariquita.

"You'd have found him a pretty unpleasant one, if Gore and I had left you to manage him yourself." Sarella added, entirely unmoved by her cousin's shocked look. "We managed him. He won't beat you now. But you'd better keep out of his way as much as you can for a bit. If I were you, I'd have a bad headache and stop in bed."

"But I haven't a headache. I never do have headaches."

Sarella made a queer face, and sighed, then laughed.

"Anyway, you're not to be made to marry Mr. Gore," she said.

Mariquita looked enormously relieved, and began to express her grateful sense of Sarella's good offices.

"For that matter," Sarella cut in, "neither will Mr. Gore be made to marry *you*—so if you change your mind it will be no good. He thinks it would be wicked to marry you."

Mariquita perfectly understood that Sarella was trying to make her sorry, and only gave a cheerful little laugh.

"Then," she said, "I shall certainly not ask him. It would be quite useless to ask him to do anything wicked."

"The fact is," Sarella told her, "that you and he ought to be put in a glass case—two glass cases, you'd both of you be quite shocked at the idea of being in *one*—and labelled. It's a good thing you're unique. If other lovers were like you two, there'd be no marriages."

She got up, and prepared to return to her own room.

"Hulloa!" she said, "there's the auto. Your father's going off somewhere, and you can get up. Probably he is taking Gore away."

"Is Mr. Gore going away?"

"He'll have to. There's no one here for him to marry except Ginger; but no doubt you want him to become a monk."

"A monk! He hasn't the least idea of such a thing."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Sarella, instantly changing the sigh into a laugh. "How funny you people are who never condescend to see a joke."

"I didn't know," Mariquita confessed meekly, "that you had made one."

Chapter XXXI

Don Joaquin was not yet recovered from his annoyance. As Sarella had perceived, he could not easily condone the defective conduct of those who, owing

him obedience, refused to carry out a plan that he had long been meditating. But he had been frightened by the picture she had suggested of Divine judgment, and wondered if the hitches that had occurred in the issue of the dispensation for his marriage had been a hint of them—a threatening of what would happen if he opposed the Heavenly Will concerning his daughter's vocation. It was chiefly because the plan of her marriage had been deliberately adopted by himself, that he was reluctant to abandon it. Her own plan of becoming a nun would, he gradually came to see, suit him quite as well. And presently he became aware that, financially, it would suit him even better. If she "entered Religion," he would have to give her a dowry; but not, he imagined, a large one, five thousand dollars or so, he guessed. Whereas, if she married Gore, he would be expected to give her much more. Besides, her marriage would very likely involve subsequent gifts and expenditure. It would all come out of what he wished to save for the beloved son of whom he was always thinking. As a nun, too, Mariquita would be largely engaged in praying for the soul of her mother, and for his own soul and Sarella's and her brother's.

By the time he and Mariquita met he had grasped all these advantages, and, though aloof and disapproving in his manner, he did not attack her.

As it pleased him to admire in Sarella a delightful shrewdness in affairs, he gave her credit for favoring Mariquita's plan because it would leave more money for her own children. In this he paid her an undeserved compliment, for Sarella did not know in the least that Mariquita would receive less of her father's money if she became a nun than if she married Mr. Gore. She had not thought of it, being much of opinion that Gore would ask for nothing in the way of dowry and that Don Joaquin would give nothing without much asking.

Don Joaquin was considerably taken aback to learn that Mariquita had formed no definite plans yet as to her "entering Religion." He had promptly decided that, of course, she would go back to Loretto as a nun, and he was proportionally surprised to find that she had no such idea. This surprise he expressed, almost in dudgeon, to Sarella. He appeared to consider himself quite ill-used by such vagueness; if young women wanted to be nuns it behooved them to know exactly where they meant to go, and what religious work they felt called to undertake.

"If I were you," Sarella told him, after some hasty consideration, "I would let her go to Loretto—on a visit. You will find she makes up her mind quicker there—with nothing to distract her. Sister Aquinas talks of Retreats—Mariquita could make one."

"Who's to do the work here while she's away?" grumbled Don Joaquin.

"It will have to be done when she's gone for good. We may just as well think it out."

Sarella was quite resolved that she would never be the slave Mariquita had been, and did not mind having the struggle, if there was to be one, now.

"Whether Mariquita married or became a nun," she went on, "she would be gone from here. Her place would have to be supplied—more than supplied, for a young wife like me could not do nearly so much work. I should have things to do an unmarried girl has not, and be unfit for much work. I am sure you understand that. Sister Aquinas knows two sisters, very respectable and trustworthy, steady,

and not too young. I meant to speak to you about them. They would suit us as well. They will not separate, and for that matter, we can't do with less than two."

Sarella's great object was to open the matter; she intended to succeed but did not count on instant success, or success without a struggle. Don Joaquin had to be familiarized with a scheme some time before he would adopt it. He rebelled at first and for that rebellion she punished him.

"Mariquita's position was wrong," she told him boldly. "It tended to make her unlike other girls and give her unusual ideas. She was tied by the leg here, by too much work, and her only rest or recreation was solitary thinking. If she had been taken about and met her equals she would have been like other girls, I expect. She was a slave and sought her freedom in the skies."

Don Joaquin enjoyed this philippic very little; perhaps he only partly understood it, but he did understand that Sarella thought Mariquita had been put upon and did not intend being put upon herself. He would have been much less influenced if he had thought of Sarella as specially devoted to his daughter or blindly fond of her, but he had always believed that there was but a cool sympathy between the two girls, and that Sarella would have found fault with Mariquita quite willingly if there had been fault to find.

"You have taken up the cudgels," he said sourly, "very strongly for Mariquita of late."

"As time goes on I naturally feel able to speak more plainly than I could when I first came here. I was only your guest. It is different 'of late.' And I am 'taking up the cudgels' for myself more than for Mariquita."

"Oh, I quite see that," he retorted with a savage grin.

Sarella determined to hit back, and she was by no means restrained by scruples as to "hitting below the belt."

"Fortunately for her," she said, "Mariquita has splendid health, and work did not kill her. She has the strength of a horse. Her mother did not leave it to her. I have always heard in the family that Aunt Margaret was delicate, physically unfit for hard work. Men do not notice those things. She died too young, and might have lived much longer if she had not overtaxed her strength. She ought to have been prevented from doing so much work. You were not too poor to have allowed her plenty of help—and you are much better off now."

Don Joaquin almost jumped with horror; he had really adored his wife, and now he was being flatly and relentlessly accused of having perhaps shortened her life by lack of consideration for her. And was it true? He could not help remembering much to support the accusation. She had been a woman of feeble health and feeble temper; her singular beauty of feature and coloring had been in every eye but Joaquin's own, marred by an expression of discontent and complaining, though she had been too much in awe of her masterful husband to set out her grievances to him; he guessed now that she must have written grumbling letters to her relations far away in the East. The man was no monster of cruelty; he was merely stingy and money-loving, hard-natured, and without imagination. Possessed of iron health himself, he had never conceived that the sort of work his Indian mother had submissively performed could be beyond the strength of his wife. It was true that he was much richer now than he had been when he married, and Sarella had herself accustomed him to the idea of greater expenditure,

however dexterously he might have done his best to neutralize those spendings. He was more obstinately set upon marrying her than ever, because he had for a long time now decided upon the marriage; he was nervously afraid of her drawing back if he didn't yield to her wishes, the utterance of which he took to be a sort of ultimatum.

"Are these two women Catholics?" he demanded, feeling sure that Sister Aquinas would only recommend such; "I will not have Protestant servants in the house."

"They are excellent Catholics," Sarella assured him, "educated in the convent."

"Then I will consider the plan. You can ask Sister Aquinas about the conditions—wages, and so forth."

"What a pity," thought Sarella, when the interview had ended, "that Mariquita never knew how to manage him."

Chapter XXXII

There was no pomp of leave-taking about Mariquita's departure for Loretto. She was only going on a visit, and would return.

"Whatever you decide upon," Sarella insisted, "you must come back for your father's wedding."

Mariquita promised, and went away, her father driving her all the way to Loretto in the auto. Her departure did not move him much, though he would have been better pleased, after all, if she were going away to a husband's house. Sarella, watching them disappear in the distance, felt it more than the stoical old half-breed.

"I shall miss her," she said to herself; "I like her better than I thought I should. She's as straight as an arrow, and as true as gold. I suppose this watch is gold; he'd never dare to give me *rolled* gold... Only nine o'clock. It will be a long day, and I shall miss her all the time. Quiet as she is, it will make a lot of difference. No one has such a nice way of laughing, when she does laugh. I wonder if she guesses how little her father cares? He won't miss her much. Some men care never a pin for a woman unless they want to marry her. *He* has no use for the others. I expect it makes them good husbands, though. Poor Mariquita! I think I should have hated him if I had been her. It never occurred to her; at first I thought she must be an A-Number-One hypocrite, she seemed to think him so exactly all that he ought to be to her. Then I thought she must be stupid—I soon saw she was as sincere as a baby. But she's not stupid either. She's just Mariquita; she really does see only the things she ought to see, and it's queer. I never saw anyone else that way. I thought at first she *must* be jealous of me, the old man put her so completely on one side, and made such a lot of me. Any other girl would have been. I soon saw she wasn't; it never entered her head that he might leave me money that ought to be hers—it would have entered mine, I know. But 'she never thought of that,' as she used to say about everything." Oddly enough, it was at this particular

recollection that a certain dewy brightness (that became them well) glistened in Sarella's pretty eyes.

"Well," she thought, "I'm glad I can call to mind that I did the best I could for her. It made me feel just sick to think of the old man brow-beating and bullying her. I saw a big hulking fellow beat his little girl once, and I felt just the same, only I could do nothing then but scream. I was a child myself, and I did scream, and I bit him. I'm glad I did bite him, though I was spanked for it. I suppose I'll have to confess biting him, though I don't call it a sin. What on earth can Mariquita confess? At first her goodness put my back up. But I wish she was back. It never occurs to her that she's good. I soon found that out. And she thinks everyone else as good as gold. She thinks all these cowboys good, and she does almost make them want to be. It was funny that she didn't dislike me. (I should have if I'd been in her place.) When she kissed me good-bye and said 'Sarella, we'll never forget each other,' it meant more than pounds of candy-talk from another girl. Forget her! Not I. Will Gore? He will never think any other girl her equal. Mrs. Gore may make up her mind to that. Perhaps he'll marry someone not half so good as himself and rather like it. Pfush! It feels lonesome now. I often used to get into my own room to get out of Mariquita's way, and stretch the legs of my mind over a novel. I wish she was here now..."

And Sarella did not speedily give over missing Mariquita. She was a girl who on principle preferred men's society to that of other women, but in practice had considerable need of female companionship. She liked to make men admire her, but she did not much care to be admired by the cowboys, and took it for granted that they already admired her as much as befitted their inferior position. She had always been too shrewd to try and make other women admire her, but she liked talking to them about clothes, which no man understands; and, though Mariquita had been careless about her own sumptuous affairs, she had been a wonderfully appreciative (or long-suffering) listener when Sarella talked about hers.

"And after all," Sarella confessed, "she had taste. My style would not have suited her. That plain style of her own was best for her."

When Don Joaquin returned from Denver he seemed unlike himself, almost subdued. He had been much impressed by the great convent and its large community; the nuns had made much of him, and of Mariquita. They spoke in a way that at last put it into his head that he had under-valued her; there is nothing for awaking our appreciation of our own near relations like the sudden perception that other people think greatly of them. Gore's respect and admiration for his daughter had not done much, for he had only looked upon it as the blind predilection of a young man in love with a beautiful girl. Several of the nuns, including their Reverend Mother, had spoken to him apart, in Mariquita's absence, not immediately on his and her arrival, but on the evening of the following day; on the morrow he was to depart on his return to the range, and in these conversations the Sisters let him plainly see that they regarded the girl as peculiarly graced by God, and of rarely high and noble character.

He asked the Superior if she thought Mariquita would wish to stay with them and become one of themselves.

"No," was the answer. "She is a born Contemplative. Every nun must be a contemplative in some degree, but I use the word in its common sense. I mean

that I believe she will find herself called to an Order of pure Contemplatives. She will make a Retreat here, and very likely will be shown during it what is God's will for her."

It surprised the kind and warm-hearted Religious that he did not inquire whether that life were not very hard. But she took charitable refuge in the supposition that he knew so little about one Order or another as to be free from the dread that his child might have a life of great austerity before her.

"You may be sure," she said, in case later on any such affectionate misgiving should trouble him, "that she will be happy. Unseen by you or us she will do great things for God and His children. You shall share in it by giving her to Him when He calls. She is your only child ("As yet," thought Don Joaquin, even now more concerned for her brother, than for her) and God will reward your generosity. He never lets Himself be outstripped in that. For the gift of Abraham's son He blest his whole race."

Don Joaquin knew very little about Abraham, but he understood that all the Jews since his time had been notably successful in finance.

It did not cause him any particular emotion to leave his daughter. She was being left where she liked to be, and would doubtless be at home among these holy women who seemed to think so much of her, and to be so fond of her. He had forgiven her for wishing to be a nun and thought highly of himself for having given his permission.

The nuns thought he concealed his feelings to spare Mariquita's, and praised God for the unselfishness of parents.

Mariquita had never expected tenderness from him, but she thought him a good man and a good father, and was very grateful for his concession in abandoning his insistence on her marriage, and sanctioning her choice of her own way of life. And he did embrace her on parting, and bade God bless her, reminding her that it would be her duty to pray much for himself and Sarella. At the range he found a letter, which had arrived late on the day on which he had left home with her, and this letter he took as a proof that she had prayed to some purpose. The dispensation was granted and he could now fix his marriage for any date he chose.

"Did she send me her love?" Sarella asked, jealous of being at all forgotten.

"Yes, twice; and when I kissed her she said, 'Kiss Sarella for me.' Also she sent you a letter."

Sarella received very few letters and liked getting them. She was rather curious to see what sort of letter Mariquita would write, and made up her mind it would be "nunnish and poky."

Whether "nunnish" or no, it was not "poky," but pleasant, very cheerful and bright, and very affectionate. It contained little jokish allusions to home matters, and former confidential talks, and one passage (much valued by Sarella) concerning a gown, retracting a former opinion and substituting another backed by most valid reasons. "If those speckled hens go on eating each other's feathers," said the letter, "you'll have to kill them and eat them. Once they start they never give it up, and it puts the idea in the others' heads. Feathers don't suit everybody, but fowls look wicked without them. I hope poor old Jack doesn't miss me; give him and Ginger my love, and ask him to forgive me for not marrying Mr. Gore—he gave me a terrible lecture about it, and Ginger said, 'Quit it, Dad! I *knew* she

wouldn't. I know sweethearts when I see them—though I never did see one—not of my own.' I expect Larry Burke will show her one soon, don't you, Sarella? It will do very well; Larry will have the looks and Ginger will have the sense, and teach him all he needs. He has such a good heart he can get on without too much sense..."

Sarella liked her letter, and decided that Mariquita was not lost, though removed.

Chapter XXXIII

"I suppose," Don Joaquin remarked in a disengaged manner, "that, after all your preparations, we can fix the day for our wedding any time now."

Sarella was not in the least taken in by his elaborate air of having been able, for *his* part, to have fixed a day long ago.

It was, however, part of her system to fall in with people's whimsies when nothing was to be gained by opposing or exposing them.

"Oh, yes," she agreed, most amiably. "It will take three Sundays to publish the banns—any day after that. Meanwhile I should be received. Sister Aquinas says I am ready. As soon as we have settled the exact time, we must let Mariquita know, and you can, when the time comes, go over and fetch her home."

Don Joaquin consented, and Sarella thought she would go and deliver Mariquita's message to Jack and his daughter. She found them together and began by saying, smilingly:

"I expect you have known for a long while that there was a marriage in the air?"

Old Jack had not learned to like her, and Ginger still disliked her smile.

"I don't believe," she said perversely, for, of course, both she and her father understood perfectly, "that Miss Mariquita is going to be married. She's not that way."

This was a discouraging opening, for it seemed to cast a sort of slur on young women who *were* likely to be married.

"Mr. Gore's never asked again!" cried Jack.

"Dad, don't you be silly," Ginger suggested; "everyone knows Miss Mariquita wants to be a nun."

"Yes," said Sarella with impregnable amiability, "but we can't all be nuns. Miss Mariquita doesn't seem to think you likely to be one. She sent me back by her father such a nice letter. She sends Jack and you her love, and, though she doesn't send Larry Burke her love, thinking of you evidently makes her think of him."

Ginger visibly relaxed, and her father stared appallingly with his one eye.

"Good Lord!" quoth he in more sincere than flattering astonishment.

"Well, he is good," Ginger observed cooly, "and there's worse folk than Larry Burke, or me either."

"Miss Mariquita thinks it would be such a good thing for him," Sarella reported. "So must any one."

Ginger felt that this, after her unpleasantness to the young lady who brought the message, was handsome.

"He might do better," she declared, "and he might do worse."

"Has he said anything?" her father inquired with undisguised incredulity.

"What he's said is nothing," Ginger calmly replied. "It's what I think as matters. He's no Cressote, but he's got a bit—or ought, if he hasn't spent it. I'd keep his money together for him, and he'd soon find it a saving. And I could do with him—for if his head's soft so's his heart. I think, Dad," she concluded, willing "to take it out" of her father for his unflattering incredulity, "you may as well, when Miss Sarella's gone, tell him to step round. I'll soon fix it."

"I couldn't do that," Jack expostulated.

"Why not?" Ginger demanded with fell determination.

"I really don't see why you shouldn't," Sarella protested, much amused though not betraying it. "It's all for his good," she added seriously.

Jack was shaken, but not yet disposed to obedience.

"Larry," Sarella urged, "won't be so much surprised as you think. Miss Mariquita, you see, wants him and Ginger to make a match of it—"

"But does *he?*" Jack pleaded, moved by Mariquita's opinion, but not so sure it would reduce Larry to subjection.

"Tut!" said Ginger impatiently. "What's *he* to do with it? If he don't know what's best for him, I do. So does Miss Sarella. So does Miss Mariquita."

"And," Sarella added, "you may be sure Miss Mariquita would never have said a word about it if she hadn't felt pretty sure it was to come off. She's never been one to be planning marriages. Why, Larry must have made it as plain as a pikestaff that he was ready, or she would never have guessed it."

The weight of this argument left Jack defenseless.

"Hadn't you better wait, Ginger," he attempted to argue with shallow subtlety; "he's like enough to step round after supper. Then I'd clear, and you could say when you liked."

"No," Ginger decided, "I'm tired of him stepping round after supper, just to chatter. He'd be prepared if you told him I'd said he was to come. He'd know something was wanted. In fact, you'd better tell him."

"Tell him? Me? Tell him what?"

"Just that I'd made up my mind to say 'yes' if he'd a question to ask me."

"Why," cried Jack, aghast, "he'd get on his horse and scoot."

"Not far," Ginger opined, entirely unmoved. "He'd ride back. He's not pluck enough to be such a coward as to scoot for good. Just you try."

The two women drove the battered old fellow off, Ginger laughed and said:

"Aren't men helpless?"

Sarella was full of admiration of her prowess.

"Well, *you're* not," she said.

"Not me. But, Dad won't find Larry as much surprised as he thinks. It's been in the silly chap's head (or where folks keep their ideas that have no head) this three weeks. I saw, though he never said a lot—"

Overpowered by curiosity, Sarella asked boldly what he did say.

"Oh, just rubbish," Ginger answered laughing; "you're as clean as a tablet of scented soap, anyway," says he, first. Then he said, "Ginger, I've known pretty

girls with hair not near so nice as yours—not a quarter so much of it." Another time he asked if I kept a tooth-brush. "I thought so," says he, quite loving; "your teeth's as white as nuts with the brown skin off, and as regular as a row of tombstones in an undertaker's window. I never *did* mind freckles as true as I stand here..." and stuff like that. But the strongest ever he said was, "Pastry! What's pastry when a woman don't know how to make it. I'd as soon eat second-hand toast. Yours, Ginger, is like what the angels make, *I* should say, at Thanksgiving for the little angels.'"

"Did he, really!" said Sarella, feeling quite sure that Larry would not "scoot."

"I told him," Ginger explained calmly, that if he didn't quit such senseless talk *he'd* never get any more of my pastry. He looked so down that I gave him a slice of pumpkin pie when he was leaving. "The pastry," says I, "will mind you of me, and the pumpkin of yourself." But he got his own back, for he just grinned and said, "Yes, I'll think o' them together, Ginger, for the pie and the pumpkin belongs together, don't they?"

Sarella laughed and expressed her belief that after all Jack's embassy was rather superfluous.

"Maybe so. But I knew he'd hate it, and he deserved it for seeming so unbelieving. If my mother had been *lovely* I'd have been born plain; it's not *him* as should think me too ugly for any young fellow to fancy. I daresay I shouldn't have decided to take Larry if Miss Mariquita hadn't sent that message. I was afraid she'd think me a fool. Here's Larry coming round the corner, looking as if he'd been stealing his mother's sugar."

"He's only thinking of your pastry," said Sarella. "I'll slip off. May I be told when it's all settled?"

"Yes, certainly, Miss Sarella, and I'm sure I wish all that's best to the Boss and yourself. It's not everyone could manage him, but *you* will. Poor Miss Mariquita never could. She was too good."

With these mixed compliments Sarella had to content herself.

Chapter XXXIV

When she answered Mariquita's letter she was to report not only the judicial end of the plumiverous and specked hens, but the betrothal of Larry Burke and Ginger. "Nothing," she wrote, "but his dread of your displeasure could have overcome his dread of what the other cowboys would say on hearing of his proposing. After all, he has more sense than some sharp fellows who follow at last the advice they know is worth least..."

In her next letter Sarella said:

> "I am to be made a Catholic on Monday next; so when you're saying your prayers (and that's all day) you can be thinking of me. Perhaps I gave in to it first to satisfy your father; but even then I thought 'if it makes me a bit more like Mariquita he'll get a better bargain in me.' I shan't ever be at all like you,

but I shall be of the same Religion as you, and I know by this time that it will do me good. It's all a bit too big for me to understand, but I like what I do understand, and Sister Aquinas says I shall grow into it. Clothes, she says, fit better when they're worn a bit, and sit easier. She says, 'It has changed you, my dear child, already; you are gentler, and kinder.' She said another thing, 'Your husband has been a Catholic all his life, but you will gradually make him a better one. He is a very sensible man, and he can't see you learning to be a Catholic and not want to learn what it really means himself. He is too honest.' She likes your father a lot, and never bothers him. 'I know,' she said, 'you will not bother him either. Some earnest Catholics do bother their men-folks terribly about religious things—and for all the good they seem to do, might be only half as earnest and have a better effect.' I make my First Communion the day after I'm received. And, Mariquita, my dear, we are to be married that day week. Your father will fetch you home, and mind, mind, you come. I should never forgive you if you didn't. Shall I have Ginger for a bridesmaid? I know some brides do choose ugly ones to make themselves look better. The cowboys (this is a dead secret told me by Ginger) have subscribed to give us a wedding-present. I hope it won't be one of those clocks like black-marble monuments with a round gilt eye in it. I expect the cowboys laugh at both these marriages. But they rather like them. They make a lark, and they never do dislike anything they can laugh at. They certainly all look twice as amiably at me when we meet about the place since they knew I was going to be married. And Ginger finds them so friendly and pleasant I expect she thinks she might, if she had liked, have married the lot. But that's different. I daresay you notice that I write more cheerfully, now it is settled. Yes, I do. I like him a great deal more than at first. It began when he gave in about what you wanted. I really believe I shall make him happy—and I fancy I think of that more—I mean less of his making me happy. And, Mariquita, it isgood of me to have wanted you to be let alone to be a nun if you thought it right, because, oh dear, how I should like you to be living near or at the next range! Before I got to know you, it was just the opposite. I hoped you'd get a husband of your own and quit; I did. I thought you'd hate your father marrying again, and (if you stayed on here) would be looking disapproval all day long, and perhaps I thought you would not be best pleased at not getting all his money when he died. (I think when people go to Confession they ought to confess things like that. Do they?) Oh, Mariquita, you will be missed. But I'd rather miss you, and know you were being what you felt yourself called away to, than think I had helped to have you interfered with..."

Mariquita, reading Sarella's letter, felt something new in her life, something strangely moving, that filled her eyes and heart with something also new—happy tears. The free gift of tenderness came newly to her; and, it may be, she had least of all looked for it from Sarella.

"'Do people,' she quoted to herself from Sarella *herself*, 'confess these things?' I will, anyway."

It hurt her to think that she who so loved justice and charity, must have been both uncharitable and unjust.

But can we agree? Had not Sarella's unforeseen tenderness been her own gift to her? Had Sarella brought tenderness with her from the East?

At the stranger's first coming Mariquita had not judged but felt her, and her feeling (of which she herself knew very little) had been instinctively correct while it lasted.

Chapter XXXV

Of course Mariquita kept her promise of being present at her father's marriage. It had never occurred to her that she could be absent; it was a duty of respect that she owed to him, and a duty of fellow-womanhood that she owed to Sarella.

It amused her a little to hear that a certain Mrs. Kane was to be present, in a sort of maternal quality, and that Mr. Kane was to give the bride away as a sort of official father. Mr. Kane might have seen Sarella a dozen times—in the parlor of the convent, which she was much given to frequent. Mrs. Kane had, so far as Mariquita was aware, never seen her at all—except at Mass.

They were Kentuckians who had moved west some twelve years earlier than Sarella herself, and, though they had not made a fortune, were sufficiently well off to be rather leading members of the congregation. Mrs. Kane's most outstanding characteristic was a genius for organizing bazaars, on a scale of ever-increasing importance; the first had been for the purchase of a harmonium, the last had been to raise funds for a new wing to the Convent; all her friends had prophesied failure for the first; no one had dared predict anything but dazzling success for the last. Mr. Kane was not less remarkable for his phenomenal success in the matter of whist-drives—and raffles. He would raffle the nose off your face if you would let him, and hand over an astonishing sum to the church when he had done it, with the most exquisite satisfaction that the proceeding was not strictly legal.

Both the Kanes were extremely amusing, and no one could decide which was the more good-natured of the two. Of week-day afternoons Mrs. Kane was quite sumptuously attired, Mr. Kane liked to be rather shabby even on Sundays at Mass, which caused him to be generally reported somewhat more affluent than he really was. He had always been supposed to be "about fifty," whereas Mrs. Kane had, ever since her arrival, spoken of herself as "on the sensible side of thirty."

At Sarella's wedding Mrs. Kane's magnificence deeply impressed the cowboys; and Mr. Kane's elaborate paternity towards the bride, whom he only knew by her dress, would have deceived if it had been possible the very elect; they were not precisely that and it did not deceive, though it hugely delighted them.

"I swear he's *crying!*" whispered Pete Rugger to Larry Burke. "He cried just like that in the play when Mrs. Hooger ran away with her own husband that represented the hero."

"Well," said Larry, "a man can't help his feelings."

He was secretly wondering if Mr. Kane would give away Ginger—he would do it so much better than Jack.

Mrs. Kane affected no tears. She had the air of serenely parting with a daughter, for her own good, to an excellent, wealthy husband whom she had found for her, and of being ready to do as much for the rest of her many daughters—Mr. and Mrs. Kane were childless.

Perhaps this attitude on her part suited better with her resplendent costume than it would have suited her husband's black attire—which he kept for funerals.

Little was lost on the cowboys, and they did not fail to note that the gray which of recent years had been invading the "Boss's" hair had disappeared.

"In the distance he don't look a lot older than Gore," Pete Rugger declared to his neighbor.

Gore supported Don Joaquin as "best" or groomsman.

It was significant that on Mariquita's appearance no spoken comment was made by any of the cowboys, though to each of them she was the most absorbing figure. Her father had fetched her from Loretto three days before the wedding, and at the Convent had been introduced to a learned-looking but agreeable ecclesiastic who was a rector of a college for lay youths.

Don Joaquin, much interested, had plied the reverend pundit with inquiries concerning this seat of learning, not forgetting particular inquisition as to the terms.

On their conclusion he took notes in writing of all the replies and declared that it sounded exactly what he would choose for his own son.

"I would like," he said, with a simplicity that rather touched the rector, "that my lad should grow up with more education than I ever had."

"Your son," surmised the rector, "would be younger than his sister?"

"He would," Don Joaquin admitted, without condescending upon particulars.

Chapter XXXVI

When Gore next saw Mariquita in public she herself was dressed as a bride. It was a little more than a year later. After her return to Loretto she remained there about three weeks, at the end of which she went home to the range for a week. Her parents (as Don Joaquin insisted on describing himself and Sarella) had returned from their wedding trip, and she could see that the marriage was a success. The two new servants were installed, and Ginger was now Mrs. Lawrence Burke and absent on *her* wedding journey.

Mariquita's father made more of her than of old, and inwardly resolved to make up to "her brother" for any shortcomings there might have been in her case.

Sarella was unfeignedly glad to have her at home, and looked forward sadly to her final departure. Of one thing she was resolved—that Mariquita should be taken all the way to her "Carmel" in California by both "her parents." And, of course, she got her own way.

The extreme beauty of the Convent and its surroundings, the glory of the climate, the brilliance of its light, the splendor of the blue and gold of sky and hills, half blinded Sarella to the rigor of the life Mariquita was entering—till the

moment of actual farewell came. Then her tears fell, far more plentifully than Mr. Kane's at her own wedding.

Still she admitted that the nuns were as cheerful as the sky, and wondered if she had ever heard more happy laughter than theirs as they sat on the floor, with Mariquita in their midst, behind the grille in the "speak-room." As a postulant Mariquita did not wear the habit, but only a sort of cloak over her own dress; her glorious hair was not yet cut off.

Don Joaquin did not see the nuns, as did Sarella, with the curtains of the grille drawn back. It seemed to him that the big spikes of the grille were turned the wrong way, for he could not imagine anyone desiring to get forcibly *in*. He watched everything, fully content to take all for granted as the regulation and proper thing, without particularly understanding any of it. It gave him considerable satisfaction to hear that Saint Theresa was a Spaniard, and he thought it sensible of Mariquita to join a Spanish order. He had no misgivings as to her finding the life hard—he did not know in the least what the life was, and made no inquisition; he had a general idea that women did not feel fastings and so forth. He would have felt it very much himself if he had had to rise with the dawn and go fasting till midday, instead of beginning the day with a huge meal of meat.

The old life at the range, as it had been when Sarella first came, was never resumed. She was determined that its complete isolation should be changed, and she changed it with wonderful rapidity and success. The friendly and kind-hearted Kanes helped her a great deal. They had insisted, at the wedding itself, that the bride and bridegroom should pay them a very early visit, after their return from their wedding-journey. It was paid immediately on their getting back from California, and it lasted several days. During those days their host and hostess took care that they should meet all the leading Catholics of the place, to whom Sarella made herself pleasant, administering to them (in her husband's disconcerted presence) pressing invitations to come out to the range: though they all had autos it was not to be expected that they would come so far for a cup of tea, and they came for a night, and often for two or three nights. Naturally the Kanes came first and they spoke almost with solemnity (as near solemnity as either could attain) of social duty. It was an obligation on all Catholics to hang together, and hanging together obviously implied frequent mutual hospitalities. Don Joaquin had found that the practice of his religion did imply obligations and duties never realized before, and he was a little confused as to their relative strictness. On the whole, he succumbed to what Sarella intended, with a compliance that might have surprised Mariquita had she been there to see. Some of the cowboys were of the opinion that the old man was breaking. He was only being (not immediately) broken in. A man of little over fifty, of iron constitution, does not "break," however old he may appear to five-and-twenty or thirty. The sign that appeared most ominous to these young men was that "the Boss" betrayed symptoms of less rigid stinginess; there was nothing really alarming about the symptoms. Such as they were they were due, not so much to any decay in the patient's constitution, as to a little awakening of conscience referable, such as it was, to the late-begun practices of confession. Old Jack was made foreman, at an increase of pay by no means dazzling, but quite satisfactory to himself, who had not expected any such promotion. Larry and Ginger settled, about two miles from

the homestead, in a small house which they were permitted by Don Joaquin to build. Two of the cowboys found themselves wives whom they had first seen in church at Sarella's wedding; these young ladies, it appeared, had severally resolved that under no circumstances would they marry any but Catholics, and their lovers accepted the position, largely on the ground that a religion good enough for Miss Mariquita would be good enough for them.

"Too good," grimly observed one of their comrades who was not then engaged to marry a Catholic.

Don Joaquin allowed the two who were married to have a little place built for themselves on the range. And as the brides were each plentifully provided with sisters it seems likely that soon Don Joaquin will have quite a numerous tenantry. It also appears probable that a priest will presently be resident at the range, for one has already entered into correspondence with Don Joaquin on the subject. Having recently recovered from a "chest trouble," he has been advised that the air of the high prairies holds out the best promise of continued life and avoidance of tuberculosis. There is another scheme afoot of which, perhaps, Don Joaquin as yet knows nothing. It began in the active mind of Sister Aquinas, and its present stage consists of innumerable prayers on her part that she may be able to establish out on the range a little hospital, served by nuns, for the resuscitation of patients threatened with consumption. She sees in the invalid priest a chaplain plainly provided as an answer to prayer; Mr. and Mrs. Kane, her confidants, see in the scheme immense occasion for unbridled bazaars and whist drives. All friends of Mr. Kane meet him on their guard, uncertain which of their possessions he may have it in his eye to raffle. Even as I write, I hear that another answer to the dear nun's prayers looms into sight. A widowed sister of her own, wealthy, childless and of profuse generosity, writes to her, and the burden of her song is that she would not mind (her chest having always been weak) going to the proposed sanatorium herself, at all events for a few years, and bringing with her Doctor Malone: Dr. Malone is of unparalleled genius in his profession, but tuberculous, and it is transparently plain that his kind and affluent friend wishes to finance him and remove him to an "anti-tuberculous air."

It seems to me certain that Sister Aquinas's prayers will very soon be answered, and the sanatorium be a fact. She has, I know, mentally christened it already, "Mariquita" is to be its name.

Chapter XXXVII

Mariquita's profession took place fourteen months after her father's second marriage. Her brother was already an accomplished fact; he was, indeed, six weeks old and present (not alone) on the occasion. He was startlingly like his father, a circumstance not adverse to his future comeliness as a man, but which made him a little portentous as a baby. Don Joaquin on the day of his birth wrote to the rector of the college whom he had met at Loretto with many additional inquiries. Mariquita first beheld her brother when, fortunately, his father and her

own was not present, for she laughed terribly at the great little black creature with eyes and nose at present much too big. He looked about fifty and had all the solemnity of that distant period of his life.

"*Isn't* he a thorough Spaniard?" Sarella demanded, pretending to pout discontentedly. But Mariquita saw very clearly that she was as proud of her baby as Don Joaquin himself. Since his birth Sarella's letters had been full of him, and she thought of *his* clothes now. She had persuaded her husband, as a thank-offering for his son, to give a considerable piece of ground, in a beautiful situation, not a mile from the homestead, as the site of the future Church, Convent, and Sanatorium.

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The beautiful and bright chapel of the Carmelite convent was free of people; two prie-dieus, side by side, had been placed at the entrance of the church. Towards these Mariquita, dressed as a bride, walked, leaning on her father's arm. She had always possessed the rare natural gift of walking beautifully. No one in the church had ever seen a bride more beautiful, more radiant, or more distinguished by unlearned grace and dignity.

Among the congregation, but nearest to the two prie-dieus, knelt Sarella and Mr. Gore.

Behind their grille the nuns were singing the ancient Latin hymn of invocation to the Holy Ghost.

Presently the Archbishop in noble words set out the Church's doctrine and attitude concerning "Holy Religion," especially in reference to the Orders called Contemplative, for no Catholic Order of religion can be anything but contemplative, in its own degree and fashion. He dwelt upon the thing called Vocation, and the vocation of every human soul to heaven, each by its own road of service, love, and obedience; then upon the more exceptional vocation of some, whereby God calls them to come to Him by roads special and less thronged by travellers to the Golden Gate; pointing out that the Church, unwavering guardian of Christian liberty, in every age insisted on the freedom of such souls to accept that Divine summons as the rest are free to go to Him by the ways of His more ordinary and usual Providence. He spoke of the Church's prudence in this as in all else, and of the courses enjoined by her to enable a sound judgment to be made as to the reality of such exceptional vocation; and so of postulancy, novitiate, and profession.

His words ended, the "bride" and her father rose from their knees and after (on his part the usual genuflection) and on hers a slow and profound reverence, they turned and walked down the church as they had come, she leaning upon his arm. After them the whole congregation moved out of the chapel, and went behind them to the high wooden gates behind which was the large garden of the "enclosure." Grouped before these gates all waited, listening to the nuns slowly advancing towards them from the other side, out of sight, but audible, for they were singing as they came. Slowly the heavy gates opened inwards, and the Carmelites could be seen. In front stood one carrying a great wooden crucifix. The faces of none of them could be seen, for their long black veils hung, before and behind, down to the level of their knees, leaving only a little of the brown habit visible.

Mariquita embraced her father, and Sarella spoke a low word to Gore, who stood on one side of Sarella, went forward with a low reverence towards the Crucifix, kissed its feet, and then turned; with a profound curtesy she greeted those who had gathered to see her entrance into Holy Religion, and took her farewell of "the world," the gates closed slowly, and among her Sisters she went back to the chapel.

The congregation returned thither also. Many were softly weeping; poor Sarella was crying bitterly. Her husband was not unmoved, but his grave dignity was not broken by tears. Gore could not have spoken, but there was no occasion for speech.

Behind the nun's grille in the chapel the little community was gathered, Mariquita among them, no longer in her bride's dress, but in the brown habit without scapular or leathern belt.

The Archbishop advanced close to the grille and put to her many questions. What did she ask? Profession in the order of holy religion of Mount Carmel. Was this of her own free desire? Yes. Had any coerced or urged her to it? No one. Did she believe that God Himself had called her to it? Yes. And many other questions.

Then the Archbishop blessed the scapular, and it was put upon her by her Sisters, as in the case of the belt. So with each article of her nun's dress, sandals and veil.

Thereafter, upon ashes, she lay upon the ground covered by a Pall, and De Profundis was sung.

So the solemn rite proceeded to its end. Afterwards the new Religious sat in the parlor of the grille, or "speak-room," and the witnesses kept it full for a long time, as in succession they went to talk to her where she sat behind the grille.

The last of all was Gore. He only went in as the last of the groups came out.

"I was afraid you might not come," Mariquita told him. "Thank you for coming. If you had not come I should have been afraid that you felt it sad. There is nothing sad about it, is there?"

"Indeed nothing."

There was something in her voice that told him she was gayer than of old, happy she had always been. Though she smiled radiantly she did not laugh as she said:

"I know the *ceremonies* are rather harrowing to the lookers-on. (I heard someone sob—dear Sarella, I'm afraid.) But not to *us*. One is not sad because one has been allowed to do the one thing one wanted to do? Is one?"

"Not when it is a great, good thing like this."

"Ah, how kind you are! I always told you you were the kindest person I had ever met. Yes the *thing* is great and good—only you must help me to do it in God's own way, in the way He wishes it done. You will not get tired of helping, by your prayers for me, will you?"

"Of course I never shall."

Presently she said, not laughing now either, but with a ripple like the laughter of running water in her voice, "You can't think how I like it all, how amusing some of it is! One has to do 'manual labor'—washing pots and pans, and cleaning floors; I believe it is supposed to be a little humiliating, and meant to keep us humble. And you know how used I am to it. I'm afraid of its making me conceited—I do it

so much better than the Sisters who never did anything like that at home. Mother Prioress is always afraid, too, that I shan't eat enough, and that I shall say too many prayers. I fell into a pond we have in our garden, and she was terrified, thinking I must be drowned; no one could drown in it without standing on her head. I was trying to get a water-lily, so I fell in and came out frightfully muddy and smelly, too... You must be kind to Sarella; she is so good, and has been so good to me. I shall never forget what you and she did for me. Write to her if you go away, and tell her all about yourself."

"What there is to tell."

"Oh, there will be lots. You are not such a bad letter-writer as that..."

So they talked, the small, trivial, kindly talk that belongs to friendship, and showed him that Mariquita was more Mariquita than ever, now she was Sister Consuelo. Her father liked the Spanish name, without greatly realizing its reference to Our Lady of Good Counsel.