

THE ROSE DAWN

9

"No, never time for flowers, *señora*; for men are not blind."

Two of the tables at the end were covered with white tablecloths, and furnished out with china and glassware and silver. This was for the Colonel's personal guests as distinguished from the ranch retainers and those of his neighbours. Here two pretty girls were engaged, selecting from some wash tubs of roses. They were very pretty in a soft young rounded fashion, with the lustrous, dreamy eyes and shining hair of their race. Not yet had they begun to ape the complexities of the American toilette. Their rather full, curved young figures were clad in plain white starched muslin, and their hair was parted smoothly and confined in the back by high fan-shaped combs. Each had thrust one of the roses intended for the decorations over her left ear. I regret to say also that each had plastered on an inordinate quantity of white powder; but that was the custom. At the Colonel's approach with Manuelo they ceased their activities and stood side by side.

"The table is most beautiful," said the Colonel.

"*Si, señor*," they bobbed together, breathlessly.

"You have plenty of roses?"

"*Si, señor*."

"Do you enjoy yourselves at the *merienda*?"

"*Si, señor*."

The Colonel surveyed them quizzically. They were very correct, very respectful, very much in earnest to do the right thing before the master of the Rancho. His hand sought his coat-tail pocket.

"Did you ever see anything like that before?" he demanded, holding up one of his peppermint lozenges.

They looked at each other, and their hands groped for each other seeking encouragement at so embarrassing a question.

"Señorita Ynez Calderon, and you, Señorita Dolores Ygnacio," said the Colonel, "you are a pair of solemn frauds. You treat me, *me*, as though I were the holy father and the blessed San Antonio and a total stranger, all in one. And last year," he turned to the saturnine Manuelo, "last year, mind you, they stood before me barefoot, in *camisa* only, and begged me for these!" Again he held up the peppermint.