

THE ROSE DAWN

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"Not one drop, José, most worthy José, when we tell you that our throats are dry from the telling of your praises? And see, we have ridden across the arroyo trail since last evening. It is a long ride, as you well know. Ours is not a case like all of these others. If Don Ricardo were to know of us he would instantly command us refreshments."

"He can easily know of it. Tell him yourself. Here he comes," growled José, with considerable relish.

The two youths took one glance of consternation over their shoulders and fairly ran right and left like scattered quail, pursued by delighted laughter from all those who had heard.

After a word with the grim old guardian of the wine, the Colonel passed to the open-air kitchen. The young men instantly arose to their feet, offered and received a stately greeting, and as instantly slid back into their strenuous occupations.

"How is the meat, Benito?" the Colonel asked the cook. "Does it meet with your approval? Will it be worthy of our guests and of your skill?"

Benito's smooth, brown moon-face took on an expression of ludicrously painful consideration.

"The beef, Don Ricardo," he replied, "is the best we have had since the year when the blessed Virgin sent the October rains. Especially is that true of the roasting beef; which is, of course, as it should be. But the mutton——" he turned half away in an eloquent movement, as though abandoning the whole question in despair.

"The mutton is as good as the beef," struck in Manuelo. "I myself gave orders for it to come from the hills on Los Quitos. I myself saw it both before and after killing. The mutton is good."

"It is undoubtedly as the Señor says," replied Benito politely, conveying quite the opposite opinion.

"We have good mutton at Los Quitos," said the Colonel, "and both Mariano and Manuelo should know how to select. What is the matter with this, Benito?"

"The mutton is good, I do not deny, Señor. It is in prime condition, it is tender. But the mutton of the Island is better. There is a flavour, very faint to be sure, but which one can