

**THE
LITTLE LADY OF
THE HORSE**

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHAPTER XV.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LITTLE LADY OF THE HORSE.



I told thee so, señor! See! she is leading him as gentle as a lamb.

CHAPTER I.



Old Sutro and young Steenie were where they might have been found on almost every day at the same hour,—down on the beach, where the great cañon cut through the *mesa* to the sea.

A group of rocks, roughly piled, and a few evergreen shrubs clustering about them, made a pleasant break in a long, monotonous stretch of coast, and the coolness of the spot was always refreshing after their canter in the sunshine. Their

horses had been unsaddled and set free to browse upon the herbage up the cañon; and these moved here and there, lazily, as if—like the old *caballero* himself—they felt the languor of that midday hour.

“Sutro, what makes the water so bluey-green?” asked the little girl, who had been sitting silent for full one minute and gazing dreamily at the shining waves.

“*Caramba!* How can I tell?”

“But you should know, shouldn’t you? Doesn’t everybody keep learning things all the time? If I were a’most a hundred, like you, I should know everything, I think. In verity, I should be able to answer a simple question such as that. And so I tell you.”

“*Si?* Thou wouldst find thou knew nothing at all, maybe; and thou wouldst not trouble if it were so. Because, if the good *Dios* wished to make us wise He would put wisdom into our heads without labor to us, wouldn’t he? *Why not?*”

“Fie, my Sutro! Do I learn reading that way? But no. I should wait a long time first, my father says. Well, then, if you do not know what makes the water green, I s’pose, at least, you can tell what lies beyond the water?”

“Ah, that I can! Beyond the water lies the sky. Thou canst see that for thyself,” answered the old man, with a chuckle of delight, and pointing to the horizon, where, in truth, the sky and ocean seemed to blend.

“No, that is a mistake, begging your pardon, dear Sutro, though it looks so. For my father says that it is only seeming; and that if I were to sail ’way, ’way over ever so far, it would be just as it is here,—the water so low down and the sky so high up above my reach. But, dearie me, I s’pose you will never tell me anything, Sutro! I must find out all things for myself. I wish my father wasn’t so busy. I wish my mother hadn’t died when I was a baby. I wish I knew what makes the road-runners such silly birds. Why should they keep always in front of one in a chase after them? Why don’t they fly up out of the way? But, of course, you can’t tell. And I wish—I wish—What makes people grow wrinkley when they get old? You can’t help being wrinkley, I know that, dear Sutro, but what makes it?”

“*En verdad!* It may be answering thy idle questions, Little Un; yet there is one thing I would have thee know, and remember it. My soul! if thou dost not, I will be—”

“Not angry, please, Sutro!” cried Steenie, in sudden alarm.

“Maybe no. Not angry, truly. But wilt thou remember? I cannot be a hundred till the *Natividad* (Christmas) comes round five-and-ten times more. When I am a hundred years, thou wilt be a woman. This I know, because I asked Father Antonio when I was last at his house. My father was a hundred and ten when he died; and his father even more than that. The Vives’ family lives long in this world, and—*Guay!* wouldst thou lie down without thy blanket?”

For Steenie had thrown herself full length on the mass of sea-pink vines, and would have been asleep in another moment; but kind old Sutro spread his gay Navajo blanket further up,

under the shelter of the rocks, and, after the child had curled herself upon it, arranged with utmost care the branches of the chaparral till she was wholly screened from sunlight. Next, he whistled for the horses, who came obediently back to the mouth of the cañon; and then he went speedily to sleep, as Steenie had done. But for himself he made no screen, save his arm across his eyes, nor any bed softer than the warm sand.

During the next half hour these two odd comrades slumbered so peacefully that the teal in the pool beyond the rocks, and the sand-pipers in the rushes, went on about their business as fearlessly as if no human intruders were near; but when the half-hour was up, the girl awoke as suddenly as she had slept. Sitting on her blanket, she pushed her brown curls from her blue eyes, and looked mischievously around at old Sutro, whom she began to pelt with the crimson-rayed pinks, aiming so deftly that one gold-hearted blossom landed plump in the open mouth of the sleeper. "*Hola! hola!* that was well sent!" shouted she.

Sputtering the flower from his lips, the Spaniard retorted, "In verity, I—"

But if he meant to scold his darling he was not allowed; for she leaned over him, patted his brown cheeks, and kissed him squarely on the forehead, in the very thickest tangle of the wrinkles she so disliked. "There, there, that will do, Señor Sutro Vives! If I was rude, you will forgive me; and if I hurt you, the wound will heal."

“Thou hast healed it already, Little Un, and hast gladdened the heart of thy slave!” answered the other, with the extravagance of expression to which his tongue was prone.

“Pooh, my Sutro, you my slave,—the proudest of proud on all Santa Felisa ranch! My father says that the blood of three races runs in your veins, and that you have kept the best part of each. What does he mean by that? I heard him talking thus, once, with some strangers, who came to see the place. It was when you rode away on Mazan’, there; and one of the gentlemen said you were a very picture-y, or something, kind of a man, and—”

“Ten thousand pardons, Little Un, but it is false!”

“Why, Sutro, what do you mean? Isn’t it fine to be picture-y? I’m sure the stranger thought so, for he noticed everything about you,—your buckskin leggings, your sombrero, your big saddle, your lariat, and all. He said you were a most int’resting kind of a ‘type,’ and an ‘old Californian,’ and so on. I didn’t like the ‘old’ part of the talk, though, ’cause if you have to be called old, I’d rather do it myself, wouldn’t I?”

Sutro vouchsafed no reply. His brow had grown moody, and his movements betokened anger; for he picked up the blanket, and folded it with unusual precision, and, if it were possible, threw his shoulders back more squarely than ever. At that moment, from the snap of his black eyes and the rigidity of his upright figure, he might have been eighteen instead of eighty-five, which was the number of years Father Antonio’s reckoning accorded him.

Steenie became silent, for the one thing she feared was anger; but when the *caballero* whistled for Mazan', she puckered her own red lips into a summons for Tito, who answered by a loving neigh and an immediate approach.

Not so the brown mare, Mazan', to whose sensitive ears Sutro's whistle had conveyed the information that her master was cross; and when that was the case, it were well that all tender-hearted creatures kept out of his way. So, instead of trotting forward to be mounted, pretty Mazan' trotted off up the beach, and at a distance of a few rods broke into a wild gallop toward home.

Then Steenie laughed; she couldn't help it, though she trembled instantly, fearing she had made matters worse.

But no. There was something so merry and infectious about that laugh that doting old Sutro was not the one to withstand its influence; his frown relaxed to a smile. "Well, well, *En verdad!* Mazan' knows something after all! For she would be a foolish thing to come back for a beating she did not deserve, would she not, *mi niña* [my little one]?"

"So I should think, indeed! But what fun! You shall mount with me, and we will chase her. She'll not stop to think that Tito can run her two to one, will she?"

"No, no!" assented the *caballero*, vaulting up behind his young favorite, and making ready for use the lariat which had been wound around his waist while he rested; also, for once, accepting without challenge Steenie's declaration that Tito was the fleeter animal.

Such a race as that was! Save themselves and the fleeing mare, not a moving thing was in sight; for, leaving the *mesa* bluff and the cañon, they left also the teal and the sand-pipers and the few creeping creatures which lived in the chaparral. To the west glittered the rich-hued Pacific Ocean; before them and behind them lay miles and miles of yellow beach, while far eastward towered the mountains which formed the boundary of the great Santa Felisa rancho.

Lonely? Why, yes, it may have been; but so free, so roomy, and so sunny, that these two who darted athwart the picture never thought of loneliness. Besides, why should they? Santa Felisa was home to them; and during the few short years that Steenie Calthorp had lived she had viewed just such wide stretches of this lovely world, and no other; for a city, or even town, she had never seen.

As they rode they talked,—the girl asking and her attendant parrying questions without number, till he cried out, impatiently, "If thou wilt chatter always, Little Un, how can Tito win the race? Be quiet now, for just two minutes, and my lady Mazan' shall feel the rope about her throat, if Sutro's hand has not lost its cunning, with all this tiresome talk of 'old,' 'old'!"

"*Ce, ce, ce!*" echoed Steenie, softly, in her eagerness using the familiar Spanish injunction to silence, and bending low to whisper a few encouraging words in Tito's ear. Like an arrow he shot forward, and in a brief space had gained so close to Mazan' that Sutro made ready to throw.

"Whiz-z! Swish!" The rope had cut the air in shining circles above the runaway's straining head, and descended with

unerring exactness to her steaming neck; who, at the first touch of the cord, understood its meaning, and stood stock-still,—a throbbing, beautiful, but wholly conquered thing.

“Caramba! Señ’rita Mazan’! Wouldst serve thy master so? Take that—”

But the uplifted hand was stayed, as suddenly as the mare’s flight had been, by Steenie’s clutch of Sutro’s wrist, and her rebuke: “What! would you strike her, really,—Mazan’, who never knew stroke or blow! Or has this been your habit, and I s’posing you so gentle! For shame to you, Sutro Vives! and shame ten thousand times! What is she but—”

“A vixen! so I tell thee, who must be broken of her evil tricks. *Caramba!* Thus I will have it. ‘Women and mares and a spaniel dog—”

“Sutro! Leave your dirty Spanish jabbering, and listen to me. If you strike her you shall not ride on the beach—for—one—whole—week! And ‘so I tell thee’! I will take—let me see—maybe Nicoloso Barbazon, instead.”

“*Si?* but thou wilt not, Little Un! What does the stupid Nicoloso know of what a señorita’s body-servant should be? Answer me that. *Caramba!*”

“Ah, ha, my Sutro! Somebody is silly still; but it isn’t Mazan’, nor Tito, nor me! And you make me think you are not well: you are so very, very cross. Never mind, poor thing! Get upon your pretty beast, who stands so quiet now, and let us go on. I am as hungry as hungry; aren’t you?”

“But—Nicoloso?”

“Pooh! for Nicoloso! He needn’t come if you are good, need he? Sutro, what makes one so uncomf’table to be hungry? If it weren’t for that queerness inside of me I could stay out all day, and maybe all night.”

“Ten thousand pardons, Señ’rita, but thou couldst not. What would thy father do if dinner came but not his little daughter?”

“Sure—what could he? He couldn’t live without me, could he? And there’s the house. Another race, ’tween Tito and Mazan’ this time, not Tito catching her. To the house. I’ll beat you, my Sutro!”

They struck into it briskly; but, as they neared the goal, both riders slackened pace at sight of a strange carriage standing before the ranch-house door, with several of the household servants grouped excitedly about it.

“More strangers!” cried Steenie, regretfully. “It is nothing but comp’ny all the time, nowadays; and I get no more nice times with papa, because he must always attend to them. I wish they wouldn’t come; don’t you, Sutro?”

But she received no answer; for the old *caballero* had muttered two words, “The master!” then had dashed around the building toward the kitchen court.

“The master? Who can he be? Isn’t my father the master? Except, of course, that great rich lord who owns Santa Felisa, and never comes near it at all,—not once in all my life, my father says; and I’m sure I hope he hasn’t now, for I should be

dreadfully afraid of a lord who wore a gold cornet on his head, as Suzan' says 'every lord does who is any 'count at all.'"

But he had indeed come; and the little girl, who had trotted slowly up to the verandah, was lifted from her saddle, and duly presented by her father, the manager, to a stout, red-faced old gentleman as, "My Lord, my daughter."

"So? Hm-m. Let me see. Wife died. Only one? So, so. Nice child. Run along, Sissy. Hm-m. I'd like dinner now. Great country for appetite—California. Afterward, business."

Mr. Calthorp bowed gravely and respectfully; and, loosing Steenie's hand, bade her make herself ready for the table as soon as possible. She held up her face for a kiss, then sped away, thinking she had never seen her father look so serious, and wondering why. "Was he afraid of a lord, too? And was the cor'net under the man's hat?"

Customs were simple at Santa Felisa; for, till now, the household had been practically that of the manager alone, and, in default of an older person, Daniel Calthorp had liked to have his little daughter preside at table. So it seemed strange to none but Lord Plunkett himself when, a little later than usual, she entered the dining-room and took her usual place. Feeling she must honor such a wonderful occasion, she had taken uncommon pains with her toilet; and, fortunately, the guest was too indifferent to such matters to be shocked by the rather striking combination of a red sash, a blue throat-knot against the white frock, and a mass of reddish-brown curls bound into a stiff little knot by a band of green velvet.

Sutro followed her. As the oldest resident of the rancho, he felt that he fully understood the requirements of the hour; and he had also hastily arrayed himself in his gayest apparel, to take his place solemnly behind his little “señorita’s” chair. There he stood, perfectly motionless, apparently not noticing anybody,—even Steenie herself,—and reminding the amused Lord Plunkett of nothing in the world save one of the wooden figures outside a tobacconist’s shop.

A Chinese waiter, instructed and assisted by the valet, Dorsey, served the unexpected guest, and the housemaid attended to the others. But nobody ate very much except the stranger; for Mr. Calthorp was too busy answering his lordship’s questions, and Steenie too curiously regarding his lordship’s appearance.

Suddenly that gentleman looked up. “Well, Sissy! What d’ye think? Seem to be staring sharp. Children read folks. Hope you’ll like me. Fond of children. If they don’t talk. You don’t talk. Look as if you wished to. Out with it! Don’t be afraid.”

“Oh, no! I’m not afraid, now. Ought I to be? But, will you please tell me where you keep it? And why don’t you wear it?”

“Eh? How? Keep it? Wear it? What?”

“Your cor’net. Suzan’ says you can’t be a real lord, ’n’ess you have one.”

“Steenie!” reproved Mr. Calthorp, smiling in spite of himself.

“Good. Good. Let her alone. Hm-m. Coronet. Suzan’ ought to know. Well. Didn’t bring it.”

“Oh!” In a tone of deep regret.

“No. Sorry now. If I’d imagined disappointment—might. But—inconvenient. Don’t wear it often.”

“Oh,” said Steenie again, surprised by the twinkle in the nobleman’s eyes. “I didn’t know. I s’posed you had to. But I should think it would be uncomf’table; ’cause gold is so heavy, and your head so smooth and shiny. I s’pose it would slip off.”

His lordship’s manners certainly were peculiar. He nearly choked himself trying to suppress a laugh and to eat at the same time; but finally yielded to a real guffaw, as noisily as any cow-boy on the *hacienda*.

“Steenie!” said the manager once more, this time with real severity, and comprehending for the first time how sadly neglected the child had been.

But, fortunately, Lord Plunkett was very good-natured, and wisely divined that his small new acquaintance was rude from ignorance, not intention. Dinner over, he made friends with her directly, and explained away the mistaken notions with which the housemaid had filled her head; while Steenie listened eagerly, delighted to find at last somebody who had both leisure and patience to answer “foolish questions.”

Lord Plunkett did this without waste of words; and at the same time went poking about the place, enjoying the novelty of all he saw, and gaining from Steenie’s talk a pretty fair idea of the daily life at San’ Felisa. “Hm-m. So I see. Brought yourself up, my dear. No mother. Father busy. Servants ignorant. No church. No school. Well, well. Good thing for you, bad for me. Pity about his eyes. Bad, bad. Hope he won’t be blind. Permanently.”

"I hope so, too; though I don't know who you mean," said the little girl, sweetly.

"Good child. But—don't know? Why—father. Your father, of course. Hope he's the only one losing eyesight and going away. Hate new men. Old ones invaluable. Hope he'll get better. Come back. Bad country for eyes. Too much sunshine. Not enough green."

Steenie stopped short on the path. "What was that, sir, please? My—father—blind? My father—going away? Oh, dear Lordship, is that what you said?"

"Yes. Yes. Certainly. What? Not know it? Why else should I come? Hm-m. Queer. Starts in few days. Operation—maybe cure—"

But he did not finish his sentence; for the child had suddenly darted away from him, and to the side of the "tobacconist's sign," who was crossing the court at that moment. "Sutro! O my Sutro! My father is blind—and—going—away!"

"It is false!" cried the old Spaniard, with his ready and angry defiance of all things unpleasant.

"No, no—it is true! 'Cause the cor'net man said so!" And clinging to her ancient playfellow, Steenie buried her face in his blanket, and sobbed bitterly.

CHAPTER II.



KENTUCKY BOB.

There, she's found it out! And it's a deal worse than if her papa had told her first off!" said Suzan', at the kitchen door. "I never saw Miss Steenie cry about anything before, and I wish now that I'd a broke it to her myself."

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

