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PART I.

This year the great spring round-up was to take place at Agua Caliente. To this round-up, which, with the sports that followed, was the great fiesta of the opening summer season, Chiquita was going, and Chiquita, therefore, was as excited and happy as only a girl can be when on the eve of her first great social event. She had risen long before daylight, and sang to herself a little Spanish hymn of thanksgiving as she polished her silver beads, taken from their hiding place in the old vegetable can, and laid out the brightly colored handkerchiefs for her neck, and the white stockings, which were the first stockings that Chiquita had ever possessed, and were to be worn for the first time today.

Chiquita was particularly anxious to look well on this occasion. It was only last night that Manuel had spoken to her and had received his answer. She had always known that Manuel would speak in this way to her, sooner or later; had known it for years, ever since she was old enough to understand anything about such things, and that was a very long time ago. For Chiquita was nearly seventeen. But Manuel waited, for he knew that neither Chiquita's father nor the padre, who was as a second father to all of his little flock, would give their consent until Manuel could make some show of worldly prosperity. For two years he had been trying to gather together a herd of his own, working in the meanwhile as a vaquero and buying cattle with what money he could save, and at last he had registered the brand of a really promising. The brand had been devised by Chiquita herself. Manuel had asked her to, in order, as he said, to bring luck to the herd, and Chiquita at last had hit upon the device that was the distinguishing mark of Manuel's outfit—the crossbow.

Chiquita dressed herself and hurried to the door of the little adobe house just as the sun shot up over the level edge of the desert, bringing the scene at once from darkness into broad day; for there is little or no twilight in Arizona near the Mexican border-line. It piled the camp fires that glowed along the trail that lay a white streak along the desert of yellow sand; and from around the fires there came a hum of voices and an occasional shout as the campers made ready their morning meal, or gathered their horses and saddled them, ready to start for the fiesta where all were bound.

Never before, at one time, had Chiquita seen so many people. The trail was covered by horsemen and cattle and great six-horse wagons that were already under way. Around the well near the house men were clustered like bees as they struggled to get water from its shallow spring, which they

muddled and then swart at. The great cities, of which Chiquita had heard vague accounts, must be something like this, she thought, and there would probably be more houses in a city—ten or twenty, or possibly even fifty.

A call from inside the house fell unheeded on Chiquita's ear. It was repeated several times; then old Margarita, who had attended to Chiquita since the death of the mother she could not remember, hobbled out of the house and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"The frioles are ready, and you must eat quickly or the Senora will be here," she said in the soft Mexican Spanish, "and the Senora, one must not keep waiting." Chiquita did not wish for any breakfast, and said so, but Margarita must be obeyed, and Chiquita danced into the house to struggle with the stewed beans that never before had seemed so persistently and unsatisfyingly hot. She ate alone, for the father and the brothers were away with the rest of the men at the herding. She had just struggled with the last scalding spoonful of her beans, being forced to the bitter end of them by the ever watchful eye of Margarita, when there was a rickling and hallooing outside that announced the coming of Senora Valdes, who was to take Chiquita to the fiesta and act as her chaperone. It was a great honor for the little Mexican girl, this passing, even for a day, under the protection of the Senora, for the Senora was a power in the land. She was a great lady in every way. She filled to overflowing the seat of the carriage in which she sat. Never before had Chiquita ridden in a carriage—had never seen any, except this one from the hacienda, from which it was only taken on state occasions, and she regarded it with awe as the symbol of all that was great in the household from which it came. Indeed, it would have attracted attention anywhere, Chiquita thought, and she was not far wrong, for its solid wheels, canopy top with festooned curtains of faded green and its four trotting oxen that drew it by means of yokes tied to their horns were different from things ordinarily seen.

Even before Chiquita had climbed into the place that the Senora with an effort made on the seat beside her, the driver dressed in a gray frock coat and a straw hat with a long thick pole that he carried for that purpose. One of them had seized the opportunity to lie down, and it was a work of some time to get him up again. Finally the wheels creaked complacently, and with a strain and a groan the equipage started on its way down the road; Chiquita, with a happy little sigh, settling into her light place.

As far away as the eye could reach there were dotted with moving bunches of cattle. Sometimes these bunches would break, and then a speck that Chiquita knew to be a cowboy or

vaquero—both words mean the same, but signify the different nationality of those in whom they are applied—would dart forth, and the bunch would resume its integrity. The wagons were thicker than ever along the trail, and so were the horsemen, and even people on foot, Indians and the poorer Mexicans, thronged the road. The air was ringing with the shouts of the Americans and the shriller screams of the Mexican contingent. Everybody was going to the fiesta, and everybody looked with respect on the carriage of the Senora—even the Americans respected it, for the most part—and the heart of Chiquita rejoiced at the dignity that it reflected on her little brown self.

Once when a runaway steer had passed close to the carriage, making the pedestrians scatter and dodge to get out of the way, Manuel had dashed by in pursuit, with a flutter of his gay serape and a dash of his white teeth as he adroitly the carriage. Chiquita jumped up and down on her seat with excitement as she waved her hand in return. Close behind him rode Pablo Vellos, who scowled as he gazed and did not look at Chiquita. He, also, had spoken to Chiquita as Manuel had spoken, but the answer was different from that which Manuel had received, about Manuel and what he intended doing to Manuel that Chiquita did not like to recollect. As she remembered them she shrank closer to the Senora, who passed a protesting arm around the girl.

"Fear nothing, little one," said the great lady, patting Chiquita's hand. "The heart of young Vellos is bad, but his words are empty. Manuel is not in danger from him; or that you may assure yourself." Chiquita looked at her protectress in astonishment.

"He—he only spoke—it was only last evening," she said, wonderingly, "and I told no one. How did you know, Senora?" The Senora laughed a little as she withdrew her arm with a final pat.

"Those things are difficult to conceal, my child," she said, Chiquita saw that the Senora did not care to speak further on the subject, and therefore forbore to question, though for a time she wondered greatly. Then Ramon the quesadilla rode by with glitter of bright colors and silver lace. He was the magnate of the district; his estates were vast, and his cattle were more than he could count. His family was

with its shibing particles, could not lessen her pride. But she was used to the dust—was born in it—so she hardly gave it a thought.

The sun rose higher until it hung directly overhead, a brazen ball set in the light blue sky. So scorchingly hot was it that even the little lizards that dash over the plains retired to whatever place it is that they go to when they wish for seclusion. The voices along the trail became less noisy and finally stopped. The Senora was nodding; her fat, good-natured face relaxed, and she only waved her peacock feather fan at spasmodic intervals. For fear of disturbing the

ground, holding a rifle in his hand. He rested over a wheel, took a hurried aim and fired. As the report rang sharply over the plain, the pursued reeled in his saddle. Another shot followed, and the gray horse sprang to one side, stumbled, recovered himself and raced on. The man who had fired quickly jumped a third shot into his Winchester and raised it, but one of the pursuers was in line now, and, with an oath, the man lowered his piece.

"I'd a got 'm that time, if the foot Greaser hadn't poked right into the ribs," Chiquita heard, when his first crop of explosives had subsided. Then, evidently in answer to a question asked



A MAN TUMBLED FROM HIS SADDLE.

by some one inside the wagon he added: "What was it I was a-firin' at? I dunno, some Greaser or other. Seen 'im round here 'ad' right; if I don't mistake myself. What'd he done ter he shot at? How'n blazes should I know? The boys was a-chasin' 'im, wasn't they? Well, ain't that enough?"

With a shuddering cry, Chiquita clung to the Senora, hiding her face on the ample shoulder of her friend. Shooting, even when men were the targets, was not a thing entirely new to Chiquita. It seldom is to a person born and reared in Arizona, near the Mexican frontier.

Shading her eyes with her fan, the Senora was looking at the scene with much interest. It was a welcome diversion from the monotonous travel over the heated road. Still, she could make allowance for the nerves of others. Once the Senora herself had been young—and foolish.

"It is nothing," she said to Chiquita, soothingly. "Look up, little one—it is nothing. Why, the man is not killed—not even wounded, for wounded men do not ride as he rides. Look up and see." Chiquita looked. Again Manuel had changed his course and was riding for a gap between two high sand dunes that lay a quarter of a mile away. He was riding straight, too, and riding superbly. Once he turned, raising his right hand, and, for the first time that day, it was hidden by a puff of smoke. A man tumbled from his saddle and lay still, his horse galloping madly on. Some of the pursuers checked their horses and dismounted, gathering around the fallen man. Others kept up the chase, but with rather less enthusiasm. They did not fire again—



FEAR NOTHING, LITTLE ONE.

greater even than that of the Senora. Like the others he saluted the Senora's carriage, and then seeing Chiquita he bowed to her, too, lowering his silver-trimmed hat almost to his knee. Chiquita swelled with pride. She wished that Manuel could have seen that—and Pablo also. Even the puff of dust that rose from the road and hung over them, powdering Chiquita's black hair

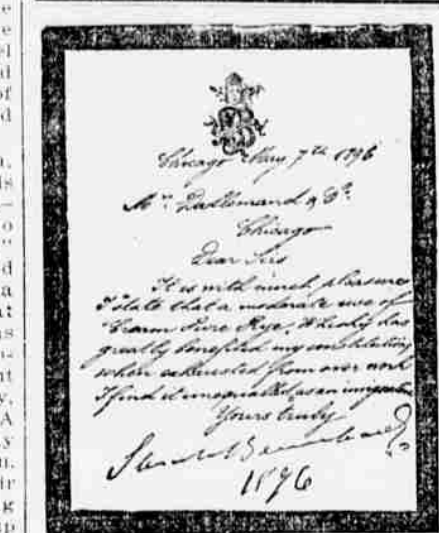
probably their pistols were empty. Then Manuel passed between the two sand hills and out of Chiquita's sight.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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What Sarah Bernhard says

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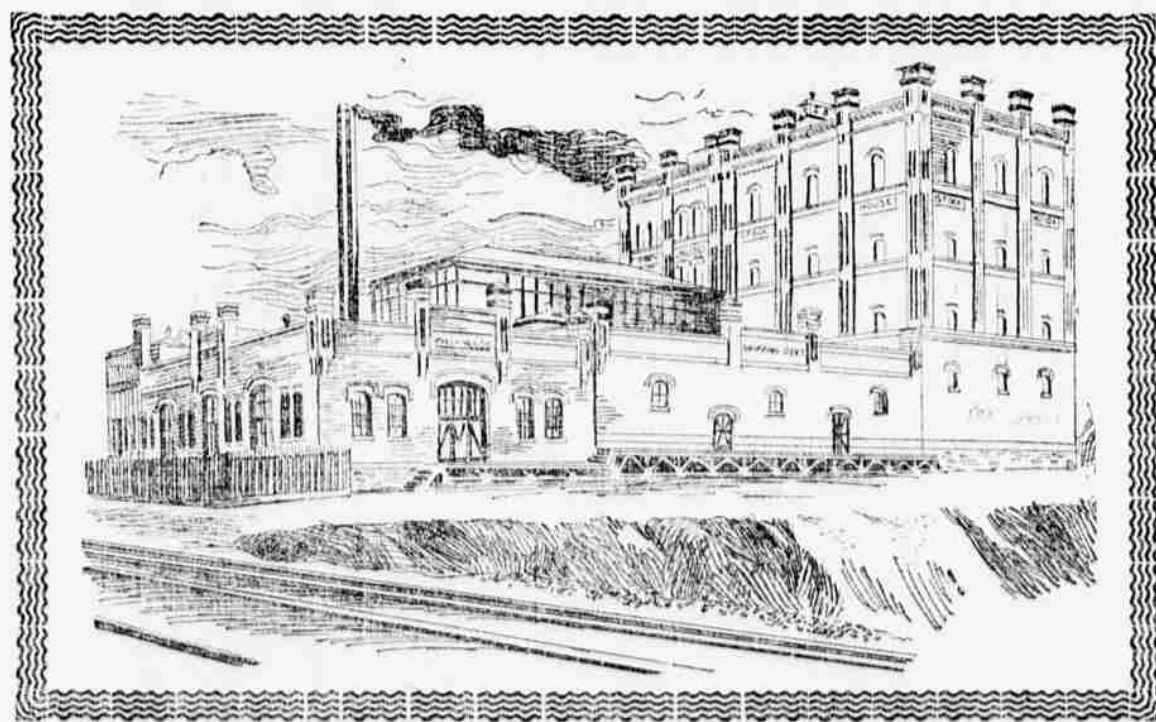
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