

Talbot Mundy



*Her
Reputation*

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Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338093134

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1. "A scene—a scandal—at church— on Easter Sunday of all days in the year— with nearly everybody in the county looking on!"

CHAPTER 2. "One may safely leave fond nurses to discover ways and means."

CHAPTER 3. "Andres, I have distressing news for you."

CHAPTER 4. "Come now. Listen to me, Consuelo."

CHAPTER 5. "Put not your trust in princes, Jacqueline."

CHAPTER 6. "Poison—brewed in mine own house!"

CHAPTER 7. "Some one's going to suffer, Sherry Mansfield, but I'll make it!"

CHAPTER 8. "You are a prince and I will put my trust in you!"

CHAPTER 9. "Do it again, Desmio!"

CHAPTER 10. "Let me speak to her! Just one word with her!"

CHAPTER 11. "By God! The devil's own!"

CHAPTER 12. "Me—I'm made!"

CHAPTER 13. "Facts presented with a punch!"

CHAPTER 14. "Consuelo—what is a coroner?"

CHAPTER 15. "Conchita!"

CHAPTER 16. Sherry and nuts

CHAPTER 17. "Who'd believe a word of it?"

CHAPTER 18. "Tell me—Conchita—"

CHAPTER 19. "You to repay—"

CHAPTER 20. "Not easy to trace."

CHAPTER 21. Bells obey the ears that listen

CHAPTER 22. The underworld

CHAPTER 23. "The Tribune be damned!"

CHAPTER 24. "Young nicee girlee—catchee lich man!"

CHAPTER 25. "Who's that girl?"

CHAPTER 26. "I hate the Tribune!"

CHAPTER 27. "All the news the public wants."

CHAPTER 28. "Does she remind you of any one?"

CHAPTER 29. "Meat and drink for him!"

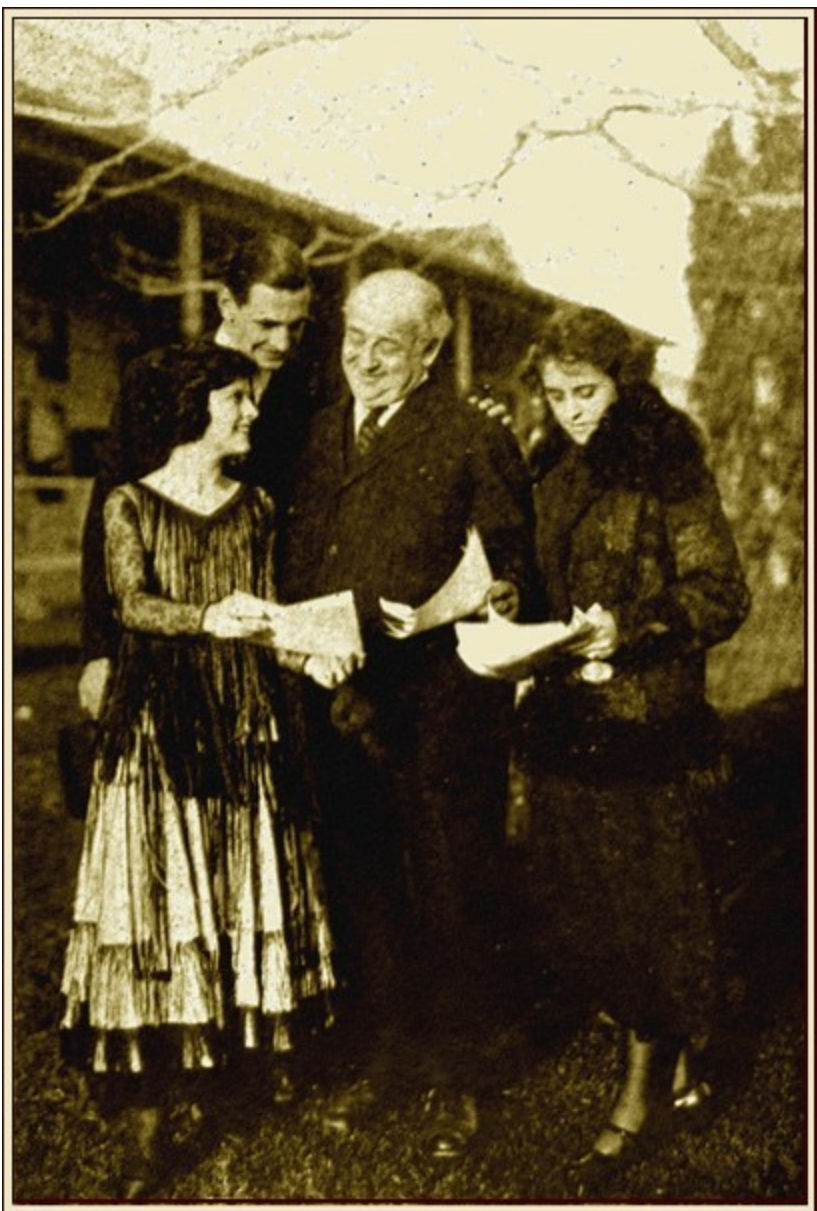
CHAPTER 30. "I've heard threats before—lots of 'em!"

CHAPTER 31. "The devil—half-roasted!"

CHAPTER 32. "D'you suppose we're very wicked people?"

CHAPTER 33. "And you shall sit in the patio all day long and boss the niggers."

THE END



May McAvoy, Brinsley Shaw and Winter Hall discuss the manuscript with Bradley King, co-author.

(Photoplay edition "Her Reputation.") (Thomas H. Ince Production)

INTRODUCTION

[Table of Contents](#)

It has happened, times out of number, that in mid-Africa, in India, in the deserts of Transjordan*—on an ant-heap in the drought, or in the mud of the tropical rain—I have felt a yearning for white lights, a dress suit and a tall silk hat, that corresponds, I suppose, in some degree to the longing a city man feels for those open spaces and far countries which it has been my destiny to wander in and to write about. A traveler, if he is wise, comes home at intervals to meet old friends and to remind himself that a gentler, more conventional world exists, in which events occur and problems arise, and in which delightful people live and move and have their being.

[* *Transjordan*—The Emirate of Transjordan was an autonomous political division of the British Mandate of Palestine, created as an administrative entity in April 1921 before the Mandate came into effect. It was geographically equivalent to today's Kingdom of Jordan, and remained under the nominal auspices of the League of Nations, until its independence in 1946. Excerpted from *Wikipedia*.]

Writing books is only another phase of living life—reliving it, perhaps, in which the appeal of the stiff white shirt transforms itself into a desire to write "civilized" stories. So this story, which is in an entirely different field from my usual haunts in Africa and India, may be said to represent a home-coming, between long journeys; and I hope the public, which has followed me with such encouraging persistence to comparatively unknown places, will concede that I still know how to behave myself in a civilized setting.

But this story is no more mine than is the life of the big cities into which I plunge at long, uncertain intervals. To

Bradley King, chief of the Thomas H. Ince staff of editors, belongs the credit for the plot; her genius, art and imagination, and the creative vision of my friend Thomas Ince combined to produce a plan of narrative, now lavishly offered to the eye in a motion picture, which appealed me so strongly that the impulse to transform it into a written book was irresistible. The writing has been a delight to me, and I trust it may prove as entertaining to the public.

Bradley King detected, tracked, ran down and caught the idea for the story —a much more difficult thing to do than those who have never hunted such elusive game will ever guess. She trained it to perform; I wrote this book; and Mr. Ince has made the picture. We hope the book will be accepted by the reader, as it was written, purely to entertain; and that fellow newspaper men will recognize the friendly and entirely sympathetic illustration of the way in which the mighty and far-reaching power of the Press occasionally is abused by individuals.

—T.M.

CHAPTER 1.
"A scene—a scandal—at church—
on Easter Sunday of all days in the
year—
with nearly everybody in the county
looking on!"

[Table of Contents](#)

There is an hour of promise, and a zero hour; the promise first; and promises are sometimes even sweeter than fulfillment. Jacqueline Lanier was unconscious of her hour of blossoming, and so the outlines of young loveliness had not been hardened by habitual self-assertion. Since she came under Desmio's care her lot had been cast in very pleasant places, and she was aware of it, wondering a little now and then, between the thrills of appreciation; but at seventeen we are not much given to philosophy, which comes later in life when we are forced to try to explain away mistakes.

She had come into the world a stormy petrel, but Consuelo and Donna Isabella were the only ones who remembered anything of that, and Consuelo took as much pains to obscure the memory as Donna Isabella did in trying to revive it. Both women were acceptable because everything whatever that belonged to Desmio was perfect—must be. Jacqueline used to wonder what under heaven Desmio could have to confess to on the occasions when he went into the private chapel to kneel beside Father Doutreleau. She herself had no such difficulties; there were always thoughts she had allowed herself to think regarding

Donna Isabella. It had cost Jacqueline as much as fifty pater nosters on occasion for dallying with the thought of the resemblance between Donna Isabella and the silver-and-enamel vinegar cruet on the dining-room sideboard. And there was always Consuelo, fruitful of confessions; for you accepted Consuelo, listened to her comments, and obeyed sometimes—exactly as might happen.

Consuelo presumably had been born middle-aged and a widow, and so would remain forever, as dependable as the silvery Louisiana moon that made the plantation darkies love-sick, and as the sun that peeped in every morning between the window-sill and the lower edge of the blind.

You brush your own hair at the convent, but that makes it no less desirable to have it brushed for you at home during the Easter Congé, especially if the hair grows in long dark waves like Jacqueline's. At the convent you stand before a small plain mirror, which in no way lessens the luxury of a chair at your own dressing-table, in your own delightful room fronting on the patio balcony, in Desmio's house, while Consuelo "fixes" you.

At the convent you wear a plain frock, all the girls dressed alike; but that does not detract from the virtue of silken underwear and lacy frocks at home.

"Hold your head still, Conchita!"

All Easter week Consuelo had been irritable, and Jacqueline's blue eyes watched curiously in the mirror the reflection of the duenna's plump face and the discontented set of the flexible mouth. There was a new atmosphere about the house, and the whole plantation vaguely re-suggested it, as if Desmio's indisposition were a blight. Yet

Desmio himself, and the doctor and Father Doutreleau, and Consuelo had all been at pains to assure her that the illness was nothing serious. True, Donna Isabella had dropped ominous hints; but you could not take Donna Isabella's opinions quite seriously without presupposing that there was nothing good in the world, nor any use hoping for the best.

"Why are you worried, Consuelo?"

The critical lips pursed, and the expression reflected, in the mirror became reminiscent of younger days, when a child asking questions was discreetly foiled with an evasive answer.

"Because your hair is in knots, Conchita. At the convent they neglect you."

"I am supposed to look after myself in the convent."

"Tchutt! There is no reason why they should teach you to neglect yourself."

"They don't. The sisters are extremely particular!"

"Tchutt! They don't know what's what! It's a mystery to me they haven't spoilt your manners—"

"Why—Consuelo!"

"Nobody can fool me. You'll never have to look after yourself, Conchita —whoever says it!"

That was one of those dark sayings that had prevailed all week. Jacqueline lapsed into silence, frowning; and that made Consuelo smile, for as a frown it was incredible; it was just a ripple above lake-blue eyes.

"You can't tell me!" exclaimed Consuelo, nodding to her own reflection in the mirror as she put the last few touches to the now decorously ordered hair. Next day's

rearrangement at the convent would fall short of this by a whole infinity.

"Can't tell you what, Consuelo?"

Pursed lips again. But the evasive answer was forestalled by a knock on the door, and Jacqueline drew the blue dressing-robe about her; for there was no doubt whose the knock was, and you never, if you were wise, appeared in disarray before Donna Isabella. You stood up naturally when she entered. As the door moved Consuelo's face assumed that blank expression old servants must fall back on when they dare not look belligerent, yet will not seem suppressed.

"Jacqueline—"

Donna Isabella alone, in all that house, on all that plantation, called her Jacqueline and not Conchita.

"—don't keep the car waiting."

Jacqueline glanced at the gilt clock on the dressing-table. There was half an hour to spare, but she did not say so, having learned that much worldly wisdom. She watched Donna Isabella's bright brown eyes as they met Consuelo's. Consuelo left the room.

Donna Isabella Miro stood still, looking like one of those old engravings of Queen Elizabeth, until the door closed behind her with a vicious snap in token of Consuelo's unspeakable opinion.

It was one of her characteristics that she kept you standing at attention quite a while before she spoke.

She had her brother's features, lean and aquiline, almost her brother's figure; almost his way of standing. Dressed in his clothes, at a distance, she might even have been mistaken for him. But there the resemblance ended. To

Jacqueline, Don Andres Miro had been Desmio ever since her three-year-old lips first tried to lisp the name. It had been easiest, too, to say "Sabella," but at three and a half the Donna had crept in, and remained. At four years it had frozen into Donna Isabella, without the slightest prospect of melting into anything less formal.

"I hope, Jacqueline, that in the days to come you will appreciate how pleasant your surroundings were."

"Do I seem not to appreciate them, Donna Isabella?"

The older woman smiled—her brother's smile, with only a certain thinness added, and an almost unnoticeable tightening of the corners of the lips.

"I hope Don Andres' kindness has not given you wrong ideas."

"Donna Isabella, how could Desmio give anybody wrong ideas? He's— he's—"

Words always failed when Jacqueline tried to say what she thought of Desmio.

"He is absurdly generous. I hope he has not ruined you, as he would have ruined himself long ago, but for my watchfulness."

"Ruined me? How could he?"

"By giving you wrong notions, Jacqueline."

"Wrong, Donna Isabella?"

Jacqueline had all her notions of life's meaning from Desmio. His notions! None but Donna Isabella would have dreamed of calling them by that name! They were ideals; and they were right—right—right—forever right!

"Wrong notions about your future, Jacqueline. Fortunately"—how fond she was of the word fortunately!

"Don Andres can never adopt you legally. There is no worse nonsense than adopting other people's children to perpetuate a family name, and we have cousins of the true stock."

Lanier blood is good, and Jacqueline knew it; but, as Consuelo said, the convent had not spoiled her manners. She said nothing.

"So—incredibly kind though Don Andres has been to you—you have no claim on him."

The frown again—and a half-choke in the quiet voice; "Claim? I'm grateful to him! He's—"

But words failed. Why try to say what Desmio was, when all the world knew?

"Do you call it gratitude—after all he has done for you—knowing what his good name and his position in the country means to him—to make a scene—a scandal—at church on Easter Sunday, of all days in the year, with nearly everybody in the county looking on?"

"I made no scene, Donna Isabella."

"Jacqueline! If Don Andres knew that Jack Calhoun had walked up the middle of the aisle during High Mass, and had given you an enormous bouquet which you accepted—"

"Should I have thrown the flowers into the aisle?" Jacqueline retorted indignantly. "I put them under the seat —"

"Accepted them, with half the county looking on!"

"I didn't want to make a scandal—"

"So you encouraged him!"

Jacqueline controlled herself and answered calmly, but the incorrigible frown suggested mirth in spite of her and

Donna Isabella's lean wrists trembled with suppressed anger.

"I have always avoided him. He took that opportunity for lack of a better, Donna Isabella."

"Can you imagine a young gallant bringing flowers to me during High Mass?"

It was easy to believe that the whole world contained no gallant brave enough for that effrontery! Her narrow face was livid with malice that had seemed to increase since Desmio's illness.

"If Don Andres knew that for months Jack Calhoun—"

"Let me tell him!" urged Jacqueline. Her impulse had been to tell him all about it long ago. He would have known the fault was not hers, and would have given her good advice, instead of blaming her for what she could not help; whereas Donna Isabella—

Donna Isabella stamped her foot.

"I forbid! You cause a scandal, but you never pause to think what it will mean to those it most concerns! As if your name were not enough, you drag in one of the Calhouns—the worst profligates in Louisiana. The shock will kill him—I forbid you to say a word!"

One learns obedience in convents.

"Put your frock on now, and remember not to keep the car waiting. You can say good-by to Don Andres in the library, but don't stay too long in there. He mustn't be upset. Try this once to be considerate, Jacqueline."

There is virtue even in spitefulness, for it makes you glad when people go, which is better after all than weeping for them. Jacqueline's quick movement to open the door for

Donna Isabella failed to suggest regret. Consuelo's—for her hand was on the door-knob on the far side—deliberately did not hint at eavesdropping; she was buxom, bland, bobbing a curtsey to Donna Isabella as she passed, and in haste to reach the closet where the frocks hung in two alluring rows.

"The lilac frock, Conchita?"

Then the door closed, a pair of heels clip-clipped along the balcony, and Consuelo's whole expression changed as instantly as new moons change the surface of the sea. With a frock over her arm she almost ran to Jacqueline, fondling her as she drew off the dressing robe.

"What did she say, honey? Conchita—was she cruel? Was she unjust?"

But at seventeen we are like birds, who sing when the shadow of the hawk has passed, and Jacqueline's smile was bright—invisible for a moment—smothered under a cloud of lilac organdy.

"Careful, Consuelo! There's a hook caught in my hair!"

Whereat much petting and apology. Clumsy, Consuelo—kindness crystallized—and adding injury to insult! Consuelo self-abased:

"Mi querida—tell me—did she speak of that young cockerel?"

There are some fictions we observe more carefully the more opaque they are. Consuelo had been listening, and Jacqueline knew it. The evasive answer works both ways.

"She said I must be quick, Consuelo."

Hats—a galaxy of hats—Consuelo would have had her try on half a dozen, but Jacqueline snatched the first one and was gone, as a young bird leaves the nest. Sunlight

streamed into the patio and touched her with vague gold as she sped along the balcony. Down the wide stone stairs latticed shadows of the iron railing produced the effect of flight, as if the lilac organdy were wings. Then—for they teach you how to walk in convents —across the courtyard between flowers and past the gargoyle fountain toward Desmio's library, Jacqueline moved as utterly unconscious of her charm as Consuelo, watching in the bedroom doorway, was aware of it.

And something of the fear that she had seen in Don Andres' eyes of late, clutched at the old nurse's heart. Lanier beauty—Lanier grace— the Lanier heritage of sex attraction—Jacqueline had them all. An exquisite tropical butterfly, fluttering on life's threshold, unconscious of covetous hands and covetous hearts that would reach out to possess her. What lay ahead of those eager little feet?

"Oh, Mary, take care of her!" she muttered—adding more softly, "Poor Calhoun!" Then thoughts reverting to Donna Isabella—"She would turn my honey-lamb out into the world! Not while I live! Not while I have breath in me!"

But Jacqueline's only thought was Desmio. It banished for the moment even the memory of Donna Isabella. We can be whole-hearted at seventeen; emotions and motives are honest, unconcerned with side-issues. She entered the library as she always did, frank and smiling, glad to see him and have word with him, and as she stood for a moment with the sunlight behind her in the doorway, he rose to greet her. Father Doutreleau rose too, out of the depths of an armchair, eager to persuade his friend to sit down again,

but neither priest nor physician lived who could persuade Don Andres to forego courtesy.

"So you are on your way again, Conchita—and so soon!"

"It was your wish that I should attend the convent Desmio."

"How is the heart?" she asked him.

"Yours, Conchita! You should know best!"

So he had always spoken to her. Never, from the day when Consuelo carried her in under the portico, and Desmio had taken her into his arms and keeping, had he ever treated her as less than an equal, less than a comrade.

He was not more than middle-aged, but his hair and the grandee beard were prematurely gray. Short lines about the corners of his bright brown eyes hinted that to walk the earth with no dignity is no way of avoiding trouble and responsibility. He sat in the high-backed chair as one of his forebears might have sat to be painted by Velasquez, and it called for no great power of imagination to visualize a long rapier at his waist, or lace over the lean, strong wrists. Yet, you were at ease in his presence.

"You will come to see me, Desmio?"

His answering smile was much more eloquent than if he had said "of course." It implied that his indisposition was only temporary; it mocked his present weakness, and promised improvement, asking no more for himself than a moment's forbearance. If he had said wild horses should not prevent him from visiting Jacqueline at the convent, words would have conveyed less than the smile.

"I shall come to the convent to listen to the Sister Superior's report of you—and shall return to Father

Doutreleau to sit through a sermon on pride!"

"Desmio, you are incorrigible."

"So says Father Doutreleau! The fault is yours, Conchita. How shall I not be proud of you?"

Jacqueline leaned on the arm of the chair and kissed him, making a little moue at Father Doutreleau, who sat enjoying the scene as you do enjoy your patron's happiness. There was a world of understanding in the priest's round face, and amusement, and approval; better than most, he knew Don Andres' sheer sincerity; as priest and family confessor, it was his right to approve the man's satisfaction in such innocent reward. But it was the priest's face that cut short the farewell. Jacqueline detected the swift movement of his eyes, and turned to see Donna Isabella in the door.

"Consuelo is waiting for you in the car, Jacqueline."

Don Andres frowned. He disliked thrusts at Jacqueline. For a moment his eyes blazed, but the anger died in habitual courtliness toward his sister. Blood of his blood, she was a Miro and entitled to her privileges.

"Good-by, Conchita," he said, smiling.

Jacqueline's hand, and Father Doutreleau's kept him down in the chair, but he was on his feet the moment she had started for the door. She glanced over her shoulder to laugh good-by to him, but did not see the spasm of pain that crossed his face, or the uncontrolled movement of the hand that betrayed the seat of pain. She did not see Father Doutreleau leaning over him or hear the priest's urging:

"Won't you understand you must obey the doctor?"

All Jacqueline heard was Donna Isabella's voice beside her, as usual finding fault:

"Perhaps, while you are at the convent we may be able to keep Don Andres quiet. At the convent try to remember how much you owe to Don Andres' generosity, Jacqueline—and don't dally with the notion that he owes you anything. Good-by."



CHAPTER 2.

"One may safely leave fond nurses to discover ways and means."

[Table of Contents](#)

And so to the convent, with Donna Isabella's farewell pleasantries not exactly ringing (nothing about that acid personage could be said to ring, true or otherwise) but dull in her ears. Consuelo did not help much, she was alternately affectionate and fidgety beside her—fearful of Zeke's driving, and more afraid yet of the levees, where the gangs were heaping dirt and piling sand-bags against the day of the Mississippi's wrath.

Consuelo bemoaned the dignified dead days of well-matched horses. But, like everything else that was Desmio's, Jacqueline loved the limousine. Stately and old-fashioned like its owner, it was edged with brass, and high above the road on springs that swallowed bumps with dignity. Desmio's coat-of-arms was embroidered on the window-panels; and, if the speed was nothing to be marveled at, and Zeke's driving a series of hair-breadth miracles, it had the surpassing virtue that it could not be mistaken for anybody else's car. Men turned, and raised their hats before they could possibly have seen whether Desmio was within or not.

"You throw away your smiles, Conchita!"

"Should I scowl at them, Consuelo?"

"Nonsense, child! But if you look like an angel at every jackanapes along the road, what kind of smile will you have

left for the right man, when the time comes—the Blessed Virgin knows, that's why young Jack Calhoun—"

Jacqueline frowned.

"Mary, have pity on women!" she muttered half under her breath. "I wish I might tell Desmio."

"Tchutt! You must learn for yourself, Conchita. Don Andres has enough to trouble him."

The frown again. Learn for herself. In the convent they teach you the graces; not how to keep at bay explosive lovers. Though he had seized every opportunity for nearly a year to force himself on her notice, she had never been more than polite to Jack Calhoun, and she had been a great deal less than polite since she had grown afraid of him.

Consuelo had studied that frown for seventeen years.

"You'll be safe from him in the convent, honey," she said, nodding, and Jacqueline smiled.

But as they drove along the convent wall toward the old arched gateway —the smile changed suddenly, and something kin to fear— bewilderment at least—wonder, perhaps, that the world could contain such awkward problems—brought back the frown, as Consuelo clutched her hand.

"Look daggers at him, child!"

You can't look daggers with a face like Jacqueline's. That is the worst of it. You must feel them first, and faces are the pictured sentiments that we are born with, have felt, and wish to feel. Not even at Jack Calhoun could she look worse than troubled. And it needed more than trouble—more than Consuelo's scolding—more than Zeke's efforts at the throttle and scandalized, sudden manipulation of the wheel, to keep

Jack Calhoun at a distance. He had been waiting, back to the wall, twenty paces from the gate, and came toward them sweeping his hat off gallantly. One hand was behind him, but it would have needed two men's backs to hide the enormous bouquet. Love —Calverly—Calhoun brand, which is burning desire—was in eyes and face—handsome face and eyes—lips a little too much curled—chin far too impetuous—bold bearing, bridled —consciousness of race and caste in every well-groomed inch of him. He jumped on the running-board as Zeke tried vainly to crowd him to the wall, and the bouquet almost choked the window as he thrust it through.

"Miss Jacqueline—"

But a kettle boiling over on the stove was a mild affair compared to Consuelo. She snatched the flowers and flung them through the opposite window.

"There, that for you!" She snapped her fingers at him, and Jacqueline learned what looking daggers means. "I know you Calhouns! Be off with you!"

Jack Calhoun laughed. He liked it. Lambs in the fold are infinitely more sweet than lambs afield. He loved her. He desired her. So should a Calhoun's wife be, as unattainable as Grail and Golden Fleece, that a Calhoun might prove his mettle in the winning. He had a smile of approval to spare for Consuelo; her wet cat welcome left him untouched, just as Jacqueline's embarrassment only piqued his gallantry.

"Miss Jacqueline—"

He had a set speech ready. He had phrased and memorized it while he waited. By the look of his horse, tied under a tree a hundred yards away, he had been there for

hours, and it was a pity that the fruit of all that meditation should be nipped by the united efforts of a Consuelo and a Negro coachman. But so it fell; for Zeke leaned far out from the driver's seat and tugged at the big bell-handle by the gate; and Consuelo, leaning her fat shoulder on the car door, opened it suddenly, thrust herself through the opening and, forced Jack Calhoun down into the dust.

"That much for you!" she exploded, and he laughed at her good-naturedly; so that even Consuelo's angry brown eyes softened for the moment. He had breeding, the young jackanapes, and the easy airy Calhoun manners. She almost smiled; but she could afford it, for the convent gate swung open and lay-sister Helena stepped out under the arch to greet Jacqueline.

Jack Calhoun was balked, and realized the fact a second too late. He ran around the limousine; but by the front wheel Zeke blocked the way with the wardrobe trunk, and Jacqueline was already exchanging with Sister Helena the kiss the convent rules permitted.

Accept defeat at the hands of women and a Negro coachman, God forbid! Jack Calhoun ran around the limousine again, jumped through the door and out on the convent side, too quick for Consuelo, who tried in vain to interpose her bulk.

"Miss Jacqueline—!"

Sister Helena drew Jacqueline over the threshold. That was sanctuary. Not even a Calhoun would trespass there without leave; and there were Zeke and Consuelo, beside ample lay-help near at hand. Also, there was human

curiosity —the instinct of the woman who had taken vows, which in no way precluded interest in another's love-affair.

"May I—won't you say good-by to me, Jacqueline?"

Why not! What wrong in shaking hands at convent gates? Sister Helena glanced at Consuelo, but Consuelo was inclined to pass responsibility; her guardianship ended where the convent wall began, and she was definitely frankly jealous of the sisters. She looked vinegary, non-committal.

"It will be so long before I can see you again!"

Jacqueline shrank back for no clear reason, but instinctively. There was a look in his eye that she did not understand. It suggested vaguely things the convent teaching did not touch on, except by way of skirting deftly around them with mysterious warnings and dim hints. The wolf knows he is hungry. The lamb knows she is afraid. The onlooker reckons a sheepfold or a convent wall is barrier enough.

"Won't you tell me good-by, Jacqueline?"

She held out her hand, with the other arm around Sister Helena, ashamed of her own reluctance. Why! By what right should she refuse him common courtesy? He had never done a thing to her but pay her compliments. Jack Calhoun crossed the threshold, seized her hand and kissed it. She snatched the hand away, embarrassed—half-indignant—still ignorant of causes.

"There—there—now you've had your way—be off with you!" Consuelo thrust herself between them, back toward Jacqueline and face to the enemy.

Calhoun backed away, hardly glancing at Consuelo, watching Jacqueline over the fat black-satined shoulders. There was acquisition in his eyes now —the look of the practiced hunter whose time is not quite yet, but who has gauged his quarry's points and weakness. Three paces back he bumped into Zeke with the trunk. The trunk fell on his feet but he ignored it; if it hurt him, none but he knew; Zeke's protestations fell on deaf ears. Midway between gate and limousine he stood watching the trunk rolled in, and Consuelo's wet-eyed leave-taking—watched Consuelo come away, and saw the great gate slowly closing—watched like a hunter. Then, with the gate half-shut, he caught Sister Helena's eye, and the appeal in his made her pause. Hearts melt under dark-blue habits easily. The gate re-opened by as much as half a foot, disclosing Jacqueline again. Eyes met hers brimming full of tenderness for Consuelo, who had said such foolishness as nurses do say—tender, and then big with new surprise.

It was Jack Calhoun's heart leaping now. Had he won already? Was she as glad as all that for another glimpse of him? The hot blood rose to his temples, and the hot assurance to his lips. He would have been no Calverly-Calhoun if he could keep that tide within limits.

"I love you, Jacqueline—I love you!" he almost shouted. Then the gate shut—tight. He heard the chain-lock rattle and the key turn; and he laughed.

Consuelo's voice beside him brought him out of reverie.

"She's not for you—not for the likes of you!"

"Did you hear me say I love her, Consuelo?"

He was watching Consuelo's face, pondering how to turn an adversary into a confederate, probing to uncover her weakness. She being Consuelo, and he a Calverly-Calhoun, he was absolutely certain to guess wrong as he was sure his guess would be infallible.

Consuelo looked almost panic-stricken, and Jack Calhoun's lip curled again in that heredity-betraying smile. He thought he saw the joint in her armor. Old nurses, pension in view, may well dread dismissal and the search for new employment. Doubtless Don Andres would visit his wrath on Consuelo if he should think she had failed in her task as duenna. He knew the Calhoun reputation and could guess what Don Andres thought of it.

"I will call on Don Andres," he repeated.

"No, no!" She was almost imploring now. "Worry on Miss Jacqueline's account would kill him! He is seriously ill. You must—"

"What then," he interrupted. His hand went to his pockets, and the offer of a bribe was plain enough if she would care to take it.

"What then, Senor? Aren't you a Calhoun? Aren't you a gentleman?"

He put his hands behind him—legs apart—head thrown back handsomely. He had Consuelo at his mercy; he was sure of it; and none ever accused the Calverly-Calhouns of being weakly merciful.

"To oblige you, Consuelo, I'll say nothing to Don Andres at present —provided you reciprocate."

"In what way, Senor?"

He laughed. "One may safely leave fond nurses to discover ways and means," he answered. "Are letters mailed to young ladies at the convent censored by the nuns?"

"Of course, Senor. What are you thinking of?"

"If you will smuggle in a letter to Miss Jacqueline, I will not mention to Don Andres that you have permitted me more than one interview with her. Otherwise,—my sentiments toward her being what they are—you leave me no alternative."

For a second his eyes glanced away from Consuelo's. She understood the glance; Zeke was listening. Jack Calhoun's smile left his lips and crept into his eyes. Consuelo began to stammer something, but he interrupted.

"I will write a letter to Miss Jacqueline. Tomorrow I will call on Don Andres to inquire after his health. If you should meet me in the patio, and take the letter, I will make no intimate disclosures to Don Andres. Are we agreed?"

Consuelo bit her lip, and nodded.

"Tomorrow then—in the patio—shortly before noon. Don't disappoint me!"

Consuelo could not trust herself to answer, but stepped into the limousine, nodding to him a second time through the window. Words would have choked her. Jack Calhoun, smiling as his father used to smile when ships left port with contraband, gave Zeke a fifty-dollar bill—checked the old darky's exclamations with a gesture—waved the limousine on its way—and stood watching until it was nearly out of sight. Then he went for his horse and rode homeward at full gallop, using the spurs unmercifully.

"My Jacqueline! My Jacqueline!" he sang as he rode. "I love her and she's mine! My Jacqueline!"

The gangs mending a levee had to stop work and scatter to let him pass. His horse knocked a man down, and a foreman cursed him for it, calling him by name.

"Ye daren't get off that horse and act like a man! Ye're all dogs, you Calhouns!"

Jack did not hesitate a second, but reined it and dismounted. When he rode away five minutes later the foreman was a bruised and bleeding wreck, unfit for work for a week to come.



CHAPTER 3.

"Andres, I have distressing news for you."

[Table of Contents](#)

Consuelo, leaning back against the cushions in the limousine, her fat bosom heaving as if she had run uphill, did not dare trust herself to let a thought take shape for twenty minutes. She could not have defined her own emotions. Fury—indignation—fear for Jacqueline—contempt for Zeke, who had accepted a bribe—an old nurse's faithful love, that can be tigerish as well as sacrificing—a ghastly, sinking sense of the dilemma facing her—and helplessness, were all blended into one bewildering sensation. And through that drummed the certainty that she, Consuelo, must do something about it.

She knew that Don Andres loved Jacqueline with infinitely more delight that he had loved his own daughter, whose resemblance to Donna Isabella had been too obvious, even at the age of ten, to stir paternal sympathies. Her death, leaving him with no direct heir and a widower, had hurt his family pride more than his affection, and it was not until Jacqueline entered his household that his inmost heart was really touched. Jacqueline, at three, had stepped into an empty place, and filled it. Spanish herself, Consuelo knew the depths of Don Andres' distaste for public scandal. Gossip and the name of Calverly-Calhoun were almost synonymous terms. Gossip and Don Andres Miro were as fire and water.

Zeke being nearest, was the first who must be dealt with. She began at once:

"How much did he give you, Zeke?" she asked, sliding back the glass panel behind the driver's seat.

Zeke attended to the driving thoughtfully for a good long minute before he showed her the crow's-footed corner of an eye and a silhouette of snub nose over pursed protruding lips.

"Didn't yo' see?"

He returned to his driving. His shoulders grew eloquent of marvelous unconcern for Consuelo, or anything connected with her.

"You—Zeke—why did he give it to you?"

Another minute's silence—then Zeke's eye, wide-open trying to look around the corner of his head, and thick lips opened impudently:

"He likes muh—don't you s'pose?"

Enough of Zeke. He would tell what he knew, or not tell, with or without exaggerations, as Calhoun might instruct. Meanwhile, he would use his own discretion, and by night the servants' hall would have three versions of the affair, as surely as Zeke would have a headache on the morrow. And by morning Donna Isabella would have her own embittered version of the scandal.

Consuelo leaned back again against the cushions, thinking. Hers was a lone hand. Somewhere midway between master and domestics, with no clearly defined position in the household now that Jacqueline was growing up, she had the distrust of both sides to contend with. Insofar as she ever came in contact with Don Andres he was