

CARITA: A CUBAN ROMANCE

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Carita: A Cuban Romance by Louis Pendleton

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LOUIS PENDLETON

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By

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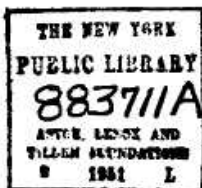
Author of "The Sons of Ham," "The Wedding
Garment," "In the Wire-Grass," "King
Tom and the Runaways," etc., etc.



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Carita

I

"La Reclusa Hermosa"

IT was morning at Buena Esperanza. The old Cuban sugar plantation, once in harmony with its cheerful name, was now the abiding-place of despair rather than of the 'good hope' of its first owners. The rich earth still nourished a riotous luxuriance of tropical vegetation, but giant weeds blossomed and ripened in lieu of grain. The vast cane fields were silent and deserted. Gone were the sad-visaged Chinese coolies, the merry, song-loving negroes, part free, part slave, who together had tilled the ground and reaped the harvest. The broad lands of Buena Esperanza were fast returning to a state of nature.

But an inextinguishable beauty remained as a part of this scene of desolation. The long avenue of royal palms leading from the plantation gates to the old residencia, the great, umbrella-like ceiba trees, the delicate foliage of the tamarinds, the yellow jasmine and the morning-glory clambering over tottering coral-rock fences and hedges of aloe and Spanish bayonet, the flamboyant whose gorgeous blossoms lay along the ground like sheeted flame, — all this was a continuing joy to the eye under that soft morning atmosphere and brilliant purple sky.

The only outward sign of life was a middle-aged man of the peasant class who lazily ploughed a small patch of cultivated ground within a hedge of bitter orange. The plough was similar to the crude instrument that has been used in Egypt for some three thousand years, being little more than the crooked branch of a tree, attached by a rope to the head of a sleepy ox, and succeeding in raking out a furrow