

JOSÉ

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ARMANDO PALACIO VALDÉS & MINNA CAROLINE SMITH

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AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION
FROM THE ORIGINAL OF
ARMANDA PALACIO VALDÉS
Author of "The Joy of Capt. Ribot,"
"The Fourth Estate," etc.

BY
MINNA CAROLINE SMITH

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Author's Introduction

If some day you come to the province of Asturias do not go away without taking a peep at Rodillero.

It is the most strange and curious place there, if not the most beautiful. Yet in point of beauty I consider that it can hold its own with any other, although this is not the general opinion. The majority of people smile compassionately when speaking of Rodillero, even as when, in conversation, mention is made of a cripple or hunchback, or any other mortal marked in a grotesque way by the hand of God. This is unjust. I confess that Rodillero is not genteel, but it is sublime, which is more important.

Imagine a road winding down the coast like a high stairway, picturesque and pleasant. One comes upon scattered white houses fronting on it, half hidden by the foliage of trees, and country places from whose orchards clusters of

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golden and rosy apples hang over the road. A crystal brook winds through the middle, spreading cheer and freshness. Before extends the great blue plain of the ocean. Behind are the distant peaks of mountains, which form a dim, rugged barrier round about the arable lands that stretch away low and level. Already nearing the sea, you begin to descend rapidly, following the stream towards a grim black chasm; at the bottom of it is Rodillero. But this chasm is found to be cut in the shape of a sickle, and offers not a few crooks and turns before it opens upon the ocean. On both sides the cottages that make up the village are fastened to the cliff itself, as the high walls that shut it in do not give more than enough space for the stream and a narrow street that borders it. Street and brook go on making S's in such a fashion that sometimes you come up against the mountain in front of you and hear the sound of the sea behind it, not knowing where to go to see it; that same brook will tell you. Escape from this spot; pass down in front of yet another pile

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of houses, ranged one below another like a flight of steps; again you come upon the cliff obstructing your way. The sounds of the sea become stronger, the street begins to widen; here you stumble on a boat that has been careened; farther on, upon several seine-nets stretched on the ground; you perceive the sickening odor of the spoiled remains of fish. The stream flows dirtier and more slowly, and there are boats floating upon it. At last, on turning round a cliff, you find yourself facing the sea. The sea penetrates, suddenly, the dark, widening current of the stream. The beach which is discovered below is not of sand, but of pebbles. There is no wharf, nor any construction whatever, for the protection of the boats. When the mariners return from fishing, they are obliged to haul their boats up to get them into safety.

Rodillero is a village of fishermen. The houses, in general, are small and poor, and have no outlook except in front. At the back they are sagging away from the cliff to which

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they are attached. There are some less ill-looking ones that belong to the few persons of importance who live in the place, most of them enriched by the trade in canned fish. They alone have a garden worked out of the mountain side, with entrance from their second story. There are, further, three or four ancestral mansions, uninhabited, half ruined. I knew that the hidalgos who had lived in them had long ago fled from the sombre and monotonous existence of that singular village. When you visit it, you will see the reason. To live in the depths of that dismal chasm, where the noises of the sea and of the wind are like moans in a winding stairway, must be very melancholy.

In Rodillero, however, nobody is bored; there is no time for that. The rude, incessant struggle with the ocean, that that handful of beings is obliged to maintain for their food, absorbs their attention in such a manner that they do not miss the enjoyments that great cities afford. The men go out upon the sea at midnight or in the morning, according to their station, and