

**HIS LADY'S
PLEASURE**

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His lady's pleasure by Harold Bindloss

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" ' I've seen ye looking at her like a laddie eyeing a
butterscotch,' he said." (Chapter II.)

His Lady's Pleasure

[*Frontispiece*]

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By

HAROLD BINDLOSS

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I JACINTA BROWN	5
II AN OVERHEATED JOURNAL	13
III ON THE VERANDAH	24
IV A BIG CONTRACT	32
V THE TOMATO FINCA	41
VI AUSTIN'S POINT OF VIEW	47
VII AT THE BULL-FIGHT	56
VIII JEFFERSON FEELS THE STRAIN	64
IX AUSTIN MAKES A VENTURE	74
X JACINTA IS NOT CONTENT	85
XI THE LAND OF THE SHADOW	90
XII NOCTURNAL VISITORS	97
XIII TOIL	104
XIV JEFFERSON'S REMONSTRANCE	111
XV STARTING THE PUMP	119
XVI ELUSIVE GUM	128
XVII AUSTIN GOES DOWN RIVER	134
XVIII JACINTA BECOMES INDIGNANT	143

CHAP.		PAGE
XIX	CONDEMNED UNHEARD	152
XX	JACINTA MAKES NO EXCUSE	161
XXI	THE PICTURES	168
XXII	FUNNEL-PAINT'S PROPOSITION.	177
XXIII	FUNNEL-PAINT MOVES AGAIN.	185
XXIV	AUSTEN FINDS A CLUE	192
XXV	HOVE OFF	199
XXVI	JEFFERSON FINDS THE GUM	207
XXVII	AUSTIN'S TOAST	217
XXVIII	IN COMMAND	227
XXIX	AUSTIN IS MISSING	237
XXX	JACINTA CAPITULATES	246

HIS LADY'S PLEASURE

CHAPTER I

JACINTA BROWN

IT was about seven o'clock in the evening when sobrecargo Austin boarded the little mail-boat *Estremadura* as she lay rolling at anchor on the long, moonlit heave that worked into the roadstead of Santa Cruz, Palma. Sobrecargo means much the same thing as purser, and Austin was an Englishman, though the *Estremadura* was to all intents and purposes a Spanish steamer. She traded round the islands of the Canary archipelago with mules and camels, tomatoes, bananas, onions, and sea-sick English tourists, as fortune favoured her. Now, as the heavily-sealed document Austin carried in his pocket declared, she was to sail for Las Palmas, Grand Canary, with the Cuban mail, by the gracious permission of the young King of Spain.

He was a young man of average stature, and there was nothing especially distinguished in his appearance, though he had good grey eyes, and a pleasant, bronzed face. He was somewhat lightly made, though he looked wiry, and held himself well, and there was a certain languidness in his smile which seemed to suggest that he was not addicted to troubling greatly about anything. Because his white uniform jacket with the resplendent buttons had been sold a day or two before by the Scotchman who ran the *Estremadura's* engines, he was just then attired somewhat incongruously in a white cap

with the very large and imposing badge of the Spanish mail service, a brown alpaca jacket, white duck trousers, and pipe-clayed shoes.

That evening the steamer hummed with life, and the clatter of polyglot tongues. Parsee dealers in silver-thread embroideries, German commercial travellers, Madeiran Portuguese, Canario hillmen, and Peninsular Spaniards, moved amidst the straying live stock, while a little group of Anglo-Saxons naturally sat apart upon the hatch. There were, as is usual when Englishmen foregather in a country where wine is cheap, empty bottles scattered about the latter. The engineer from the sister ship and an athletic tourist, stripped, at least as far as was permissible, were wrestling in Cumberland fashion on the hatch, with much delicate manœuvring of their feet and futile clutches at each other's waists. Macallister, who, when he felt inclined, superintended the *Estremadura's* machinery, alternately encouraged them sardonically and solaced himself with one of the bottles. He was a big, gaunt man, and just then extremely dirty, and when he saw Austin, looked up with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"I have been waiting for ye anxiously," he said. "Ye may now have the pleasure of lending me five dollars."

"I'm afraid not!" said Austin decisively. "For one thing I haven't got them. I very seldom have—as you ought to know."

Macallister made a little gesture of resignation. "Well," he said, "ye have always your clothes, and if ye had known us better ye would not have brought so many of them on board the *Estremadura*. I'm half expecting yon Jackson o' Las Palmas, who gave us two dollars for the last white suit, to come round for some more o' them when we get in."

Austin tried the door of his room close by, and was consoled to find it locked, as he had left it.

"They cost me five, and I naturally never saw a