

DONA LUZ

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Dona Luz by Juan Valera

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JUAN VALERA

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BY

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I.—THE MARQUIS AND HIS STEWARD	7
II.—SOME TIRESOME BUT INDISPENSABLE EXPLANATIONS	17
III.—CONCERNING OTHER DETAILS WHICH THE CONSCIENTIOUS SCRUPLES OF THE NARRATOR WILL NOT PERMIT HIM TO PASS OVER IN SILENCE	26
IV.—THE INTIMATE FRIENDS OF DOÑA LUZ	35
V.—THE FRIENDSHIP OF DOÑA MANOLITA	48
VI.—THE CONFIDENCES OF DOÑA LUZ	62
VII.—FATHER ENRIQUE	73
VIII.—FATHER ENRIQUE'S MANNER OF LIFE IN THE TOWN	79
IX.—HOMILY	91
X.—AN ILLUSTRIOUS CANDIDATE	107
XI.—PREPARATIONS FOR THE ELECTION	126
XII.—THE TRIUMPH	141
XIII.—CRISIS	158
XIV.—THE SOLUTION OF THE CRISIS	172

117

	PAGE
XV.—FIRST SKETCH OF A MATRIMONIAL IDYL . . .	187
XVI.—MEDITATIONS	200
XVII.—THE WEDDING	215
XVIII.—A GLORIOUS TRANSLATION	224
XIX.—DON GREGORIO'S MISSION	244
XX.—THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER	263
CONCLUSION	276

DOÑA LUZ.

I.

THE MARQUIS AND HIS STEWARD.

VILLABERMEJA is not of necessity to be the scene of all my stories. The events I am now going to relate—events of a very interesting nature—took place not many years ago in a town not far distant from Villabermeja and which I shall call Villafria, keeping its real name for a more important occasion. And then between Villabermeja and Villafria the difference is but slight; for if it be true that Villabermeja possesses a patron saint of more miraculous power, Villafria, on the other hand, enjoys a wider extent of territory, has a larger population, finer houses, and wealthier land owners.

Prominent among these latter was the Señor Don Acisclo, so called since he had attained his forty-fifth year, before which time he had been called "Aciscillo" up to the age of twenty-eight, and afterward "Uncle Acisclo." The title "Don" had come later, and was prefixed to the "Acisclo" in consequence of the in-

creased dignity and importance imparted to the good man by the wealth which by honest industry he had succeeded in acquiring.

The favorable reputation which he enjoyed extended throughout the entire province. He was esteemed, not only as a "warm" man, and one who, in case of necessity, could lay his hand upon two or three millions of reals, but he was also extolled as a man of parts, upright in all his dealings and firm as a stone wall; and so conscientious, so exemplary in his devotions to the Virgin and so full of the fear of the Lord, that he fell little short of being a saint, notwithstanding all that malicious tongues—which, indeed, for that matter, are never idle—might say to the contrary.

The truth is that Don Aciselo had known how to reconcile self-interest with probity and justice. He had acted as the steward of the Marquis of Villafria for at least twenty years, and he had managed matters in such a way that the possessions of the marquisate had passed, little by little, from the hands of their owner into his own more industrious and careful hands.

This transmission had taken place in an altogether natural and legitimate manner. Don Aciselo was in no wise to blame because the marquis was extravagant and dissipated, and far from being imputed to him as a fault it was rather to be esteemed as a merit that he himself had been intelligent, economical, and shrewd.