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The Golden Child  
By Don Glassman

Felipe, the ranchero of Zapochila, had an understandable predilection for blondes. He often received letters from his cousin in Spain, the celebrated matador Castellano, married to a Catalonian blonde, whom he described as bright and beautiful and fragrant.

Felipe often meditated on the delight of having for one's self a wife with pulchritude. Remote from a center of population, he certainly had need of a woman to fill the vacancies of his days and light the shadows of his nights.

Thirty miles from a railroad station, Zapochila lay under a scorching sun and made a vainglorious claim to culture, to wit, a brass band, a small municipal library, and a large tarnished edificio, used as a public school.

Felipe had examined Zapochila's eligible daughters and found them wanting. He longed to visit the Capital and meet one of the fine-mannered ladies, such as are pictured in the periodicals. He had a perfect right to be fastidious. He was well-born and lived on an inheritance which included a well-developed rancho of one thousand hectares. He himself was slight in stature, but right handsomely built.

One day Felipe received a large envelope from Spain, containing a photograph of Castellano, his wife and child. What fascinated Felipe was not Castellano's magnificent matador's costume, but the odd loveliness of his wife and child; both wore such an air of gentle charm and unassuming virtue that Felipe resolved at once that he would marry none other than a Catalonian who, with the aid of Providence, would bear him children such as Castellano's.

Felipe had seen blondes during several visits to the Capital, but they were either German or American-born, and he could not understand the squawking garrulous words they used for a language. But Castellano's photograph had aroused Felipe's strongest envy and he determined to marry...
none but a Catalan blonde with tested Spanish blood in her veins.

He wrote direct to Castellano for advice and was pleased when the matador replied that a number of Catalonians, with blonde chromosomes in the genealogical tree, had settled recently in the Capital, and among them Felipe might find several families distantly related to his own blonde wife.

Family connections often succeed where other connections fail. Felipe hurried to the Capital, where he was cordially received by the Catalonians and introduced to their marriageable daughters, some blonde, some brunette, others with common hair of ebony. At length he encountered one who was piquant, vivacious, fair-skinned, and blonde as a sunflower. She was called Juana. He even imagined that she bore a resemblance to Castellano’s wife, and Felipe was so fearful lest he lose his prize that he pressed negotiations with her parents against all hazard. The marriage contract was drawn up in haste, all to the benefit of Juana’s parents, for they conveniently forgot to give Felipe the customary dowry.

But Felipe was already in love with his Catalan beauty, and neither dowries nor family considerations mattered. To him it seemed that her white skin, her china blue eyes, her flaxen hair, her winsome smile, were qualities poetic, ethereal—almost divine.

The day after their marriage the couple deserted the Capital and boarded a long dust-covered train which deposited them at the rail junction, Esposito.

Felipe was anticipating the exaltation of harboring his young bride in the very house he had built, on the very soil he owned. He adored her all the more for the trusting way she accompanied him to a rancho far from the gay life of the Capital, far from family and friends. But, he told himself, it merely indicated the complete devotion and fidelity he might expect from her.
At last, after a noisy train journey and a four-hour ride in a phaeton, which Felipe's man had brought to the station, they reached the rancho.

Dusk came upon their arrival. Felipe took advantage of the last rays of daylight to point out the principal sights, the house, the out-buildings, the huts of the hired men.

She sat on the verandah, looking at the things he pointed out. She wore a jaunty hat, which did not conceal a thick twist of hair which glowed with the luster of metal in the twilight.

"Santa Maria!" cried Felipe, noting the enhanced sheen of her hair, "What a beautiful dream I am in! What—I wonder, did the good Saviour create this treasure for me?"

And then he heard her voice, pitched lower than the voices to which he was accustomed. And what she said deepened the wells of blue mystery in her eyes. She had such strange features and delectable charms. But O Christ! what would he not give for her hair!

The day's travel had fatigued her and she pleaded to retire early. With a gesture of conscious but untimely gallantry, Felipe offered her the key to the house—he would sleep outside. She blushed in refusing, saying in a sweet voice, "Will you let me sleep here, alone? . . . in this great house, alone? . . . I am now your wife, Felipe . . . I love you . . ."

"Love me! My adorable Juana, you fill me with everlasting joy! Never, so long as we live . . . never will I leave you alone . . . for I too, love you, Juana, as no man has ever loved before."

Thus several days were spent in the throes of each other's adorations, in yielding to each other's desires, in trading compliments and pleasuranties.

At length they were seen to mount horses and ride off in a holiday spirit, traveling half way up the slope of the sierra, into Zapochila itself, through fields and past houses, behind whose windows Felipe's astonished neighbors saw
Juana at close range for the first time. Of course, they knew Felipe well, and those whom he met whipped off their sombreros and extended the politest of good mornings. And rooted to the ground like tree stumps, they stared after the receding riders, retaining a vivid memory of Juana's ivory complexion, her face, round as a gibbous moon, and the luminous halo that seemed to radiate from her head of golden hair.

Not even the saint had dazzled their eyes with a head of hair such as she wore for her crown. Was she a goddess of the sun?

And although Felipe's Catalanian beauty was the cynosure of attention, they did not fail to note the uncontrolled pride in his smile. Felipe was undoubtedly happy.

The ride through the country was Juana's first and last contact with those who lived near the rancho. From Ixtapetl to Chapatzalco people were drawn around tables by stories about the newcomer, who rapidly acquired the name of La Mujer de Oro, a startling apparition in the form of a woman.

And in the company of Felipe! Lord in Heaven! How did Felipe come by an angel?

The families who lived on Felipe's land traded briskly on the excitement, and it was they who retailed savoury morsels of gossip concerning Felipe's fair one. Conochito, the serving girl, was the ranking authority on Juana's hair. The strands, she confided to avid listeners, were thicker than any she had previously seen. The golden hair reached below the Señora's waist! "Ah!" she sighed, "I could weep on seeing the Señora dress her hair last night; it fell like a shower of sparks around her shoulders, and each strand glowed of itself like the fire in an eagle's eye."

None was happier than Felipe, the man of bronze beloved by a woman so fair. His male friends choked with jealousy, but they managed to find words wishing him golden days and—golden children.
"Ah!—our children! Juana! I am so anxious—when will they come?"

"In autumn—perhaps," she replied.

Whereupon he lent his thoughts to music and sang almost constantly. At any hour of the day you could hear his ecstatic voice issue from the house or from a neighboring field.

"Why does Felipe sing?" some asked.

"To celebrate the coming of a golden child."

"La Mujer de Oro will bear Felipe a golden child."

Felipe described the coming child before his cronies in Zapochila. "It will have the complexion of milk, eyes like a dove's, a head of virgin gold, and the soul of a saint! You shall see—wait and see, my friends, what a masterpiece this child shall be!"

"But where," someone asked, "is the Señora? We have seen her but once. Does she ever come to the market?"

"No," answered Felipe, "she is always at home, attending to her duties and to mine."

"But I have never seen her—not once—broke in one whose secret adoration of blondes made him loathe Felipe. "For one glimpse of her hair, Felipe, I would give five pesetas!"

"Five! Is that all?"

"Make it seven."

"Hold on," put in Christofo, "if you bring your Juana to my sister's house tomorrow, I will give you—"

"Look, Felipe—my grandfather drew this sword at Buena Vista—will you take it for one look at your Juana?"

"Hahaha!" Felipe laughed grotesquely. "Boobies! Wait until you are invited to see her. And assure yourselves that nothing on earth can buy one shred of her hair ... and by whose commands; my fine fellows, must I place my wife on public view as if she were a thing for sale ... ? H'm! You question my rights? Be off! Find comfort in your own wives, you whining pups! Felipe has nothing to show ... and less to share."
But secretly he was elated to know that his Juana was thought so desirable. Ah! the wonder of it! Everybody looked up to him as the spouse of this rare beauty and the father of her forthcoming child.

Men loathed him for his snobbery and his unwillingness to bring her forth. And the Zapochilan women, consumed by envy, sought advice from clerics and medicos, and sent letters to the Capital, begging for hair dyes and bleaches. None could survive the ruthless comparisons which men drew between them and La Mujer de Oro. “Lord of Lords!” the women prayed, “rid us of this witch who poisons the thoughts of men.”

But Felipe wore his indelible smile, his charm and buoyancy increasing with each passing month. He spoke prophetically about many things, and good-naturedly resisted the bribes of those who longed for a sight of his Juana.

Then autumn!

One night it seemed that the very wind carried word that La Mujer de Oro had given birth to a boy. Felipe had said he would name it Dorado, the synonym for gold.

But did anybody see Felipe?

In the few weeks after the birth no one saw him or the child. None save El Padre, who was non-committal in such matters.

Have you seen Felipe?

“Noo-o-o-o! Felipe is—Have you seen his child? his Dorado?” All shook their heads.

One day Felipe came to the market.

“How is your son, Dorado?”

“Well, thank you—quite well,” and went on his way.

But soon the truth traveled around, first in furtive whispers, then in sighs, and then amidst jolts of laughter.

That miraculous son of Felipe’s—haha haha-a! whom he had named Dorado . . . had the same complexion as his father . . . Caramba! . . . people will break their ribs for
laughing ... no wonder Felipe avoids us now ... his golden-haired bride has deceived him—or he has deceived her! haha hahaa-a-aa! No more songs ... Felipe! where in the devil are your songs? No more laughter! Haha! Felipe has forgotten how to laugh ... no more boasting ... Poor Felipe ... life is wretched without a boast ... hahahahaha-a-a-a! Ho ho! and no more gold. Bah! Felipe Bah!

The rascals were delirious with joy over Felipe's predicament. They sent him a basketful of eggs dipped in gold paint, and with a note saying, "Hatch these, dear Felipe, and you will have better luck!"

Felipe avoided the jibes, as became a martyr. As for Juana, little did she know of what went on in the village. Felipe was laconic and uncommunicative. But did she care? They loved each other, and she felt no hardship in having to live practically alone on the rancho.

The little boy, rechristened Pablo, grew sturdy, and his resemblance to Felipe was no longer doubtful.

"Do you mind his dark complexion?" Felipe would ask anxiously.

"No, darling, I do not mind. He is our child and I love him, no matter what his hair or complexion."

But scarcely had Pablo learned to walk than a second child was on its way. And again Felipe was unable to conceal his hopes and joys.

"This time," he said to his friends, "I am sure that some holy saint will take a hand in the birth of my son ... keep your peace, you fellows, and you shall see a child of gold, the very image of its mother."

But no one was convinced of Felipe's alleged privilege to invoke the power of a saint.

"How long, O Lord, how long must we wait for this miracle, Felipe?" someone asked maliciously.

"It may come in the spring."

True, May witnessed the arrival of Juana's second child, a girl, but also dark, with the hair, eyes, and complexion of Felipe.
The laughter, this time pitiless, scornful laughter, pursued Felipe wherever he went.

Juana called her new daughter May, after the month of her birth. The very sight of the animated infant revived Felipe's forlorn spirit and made him share Juana's joy.

"This is your creation, Felipe," she said, caressing him with her smile.

"I adore our beautiful daughter," he assured her, "but tell me, Juana," a spark of hope flashing in his eye, "will you ever bear a real child of gold?"

"Ah, Felipe, you have made me happy with these two children... but I shall try ever so hard to bear a child of gold... with the aid of our Almighty... Do you think, Felipe, I ought to visit a medico and ask his advice?"

"No... no, Juana, a medico cannot do what God cannot do."

"And you think that God will give what you ask?"

"God provides all... he will not deny us... only have faith, Juana, and you shall conceive a child of gold."

By this time the story of Felipe and his forlorn hope was a saga, passing from mouth to mouth, and bearing wide repetition.

The pity of it! Just one disappointment marred Felipe's marriage, and every child in Zapochila could tell you what it was... hope and prayer availed nothing... El Padre chanted a *Te deum laudamus* for their harrowed souls and Felipe gave him a handsome sum for his trouble.

With the coming of a third child, Felipe's hopes revived, but fate delivered a boy with the hair and complexion of his father. The pain of sadness drew lines of Felipe's face.

"She is but one of a kind," the gossips whispered about... she cannot conceive children like herself... who bewitched poor Felipe into believing that she could? Who knows whether this woman is not a mistress of the devil?"

"Children—children!" lamented Felipe. "But no head of gold."
Were the saints reviling him? Aware of her failure to fulfill his wish, Juana asked, "Am I to blame?"

"You—you? My innocent! You are blameless... without a fault... it is merely the will of our lord that these children are after my own image..."

"But you love them no less, Felipe... tell me, truly."

"I love them," he assured her in self-deceit.

But he was haunted by a sense of shame, of disillusionment, and ridicule. He bit his lip when his erstwhile good friends extended pity, which he regarded as alms, fit only for the poor. Behind his back, he knew they mocked at his misfortune.

No one was surprised when the news spread that Felipe had sold his rancho to a rich haciendado from Tabasco, and then literally flown to the Capital with his family.

The sudden transplantation to the city upset him for a time. He was no longer a lord of the ground he walked on, and the scarcity of space irked him.

But one day he had a chance meeting on the street with his boyhood friend, Manuel Gomez Cassana, the powerful politico from Morelos. And it was through this happy encounter and Felipe's knowledge of agrarian conditions that he won a post in the Interior Ministry. The new work let him forget his vexations, and he was able to settle in Tacubaya, near to the Capital.

Juana was happy, for she was once more with her family and friends, all of whom she had missed. The children, Pablo, Mayo, Fernandez, and Benito, were duly appraised, and approved. They were plump, good-natured, and prepossessing youngsters, and easily won compliments and presents from the relatives who swarmed to see them.

"Now," declared Felipe, "I am happy," for he was convinced that others were fond of his children.

"Ah," said Juana, "it was a wise decision to leave that frightful place, Zapochila."

"Indeed! I am glad," he replied. "Here we are befriended by people who count... we are received by the best..."
families of the Capital . . . it is our turn to laugh at those swine. . . ."

In his new mood of joviality, he bent his mind on forgetting the tragic disappointment he had suffered. In truth, he no longer cherished a hope for a golden-haired boy. Hence, when in the course of events, Juana was delivered of her fifth child, barely six months after their arrival in the Capital, he had no forebodings when he cried: "Any news? . . . Ah, another boy! what! . . . a-a blonde boy! fair and blonde! fair and—my soul! A-a golden boy!"

He hastened to Juana, exclaiming in his vibrant voice, "God has answered!" and kneeled at her bedside, choking back the sobs in his throat.

It was for joy that she touched his head and said soothing words that filled him with ecstasy.

"What shall we name him?" she said at length.

"Dorado! No other name is enough! . . . at last we have him, our Dorado! you have fooled them all, Juana! Thank God! It was no curse on us . . . no curse on our son, Dorado! . . . Ha! I should like to show him to those scoundrels in Zapochila! . . . and let our golden-haired son see their shame . . . Dorado! Think of it! He will look like you, Juana!"

As time wore on, Dorado fulfilled Felipe's expectations. His hair had the shade and luster of Juana's. His blue eyes roved and met his father's victorious smiles.

Singly and in groups Juana's family arrived to behold and to appraise what Felipe loved so desperately.

"Mercy!" cried Juana's Aunt Maria, whose tongue wagged like a mongrel's tail, "what will you do with a blonde? A white sheep born in our family!"

Felipe seethed within. He wanted to hurl this magpie through a window!

"It will be hard for your other children to bear, my dear," she continued provokingly, "and hard for people to see—why, they will say, your children are so unalike . . . from the shade of gold to the shade of copper! My soul! if
I had been told ... Bless you! Juana, you must dye this child's hair..."

"Nonsense!" cried Felipe, unable to control himself any longer. "Dye this head of gold? Are you mad...?"

"I would certainly dye this child's hair to keep people from talking..." she went on contemptuous of his temper. "The most scandalous rumors fly about these days... take care, Juana, I warn you... or this child will be the unhappiest wretch..."

"Wretch!" snapped Felipe, resenting the insult. "You—will you please go. Go—go! for God's sake, go!"

"You are very rude, Felipe... I am older than you..." said Aunt Maria, confronting him with her old-maidish dignity. "A bit of counsel from one experienced in such matters would..."

Felipe left the room in a frenzy and sought the outdoor air where he freed his emotions.

Aunt Maria was not the sort who would forget that little incident. Neither Felipe or any other man, for that matter, had ever bested her in a contest with verbiage. She had time on her hands, a forceful will, and a practiced tongue. From cousins to tradesmen, from neighbors to grandsires, she carried the story of Felipe's shameful behavior, his lack of respect, his stubborn nature, his hatred of his first four children; his hostility toward his wife's relatives—and what's more, he had no earthly right to be the father of a blonde son... will anybody believe that he, Felipe! could be father to a blonde son? Will he try this deception on people when... And think of the poor child's humiliation!... and what of the other poor children, Pablo, Mayo, Fernandez, and Benito! How they will starve for a father's true affection! Will they be able to endure their little blonde brother Dorado, pampered and spoiled by a doting father—at their expense! and finally: Our poor dear Juana! Why did we ever allow her to marry this monster!"
Felipe burst into fire when the heard repetitions of Aunt Maria’s sacrilegious gossip.

"Now people are laughing at me, Juana, because of what this terrible person, your Aunt Maria, spreads with her poisonous tongue ... O good Lord! tell me, has everybody gone mad? Tell me, are we not all worthy of the same treatment in your hands? Are we not equal before your eyes? Oh, Juana, will they ever let us alone? ... why aren’t they happy with our Dorado as we are?"

Indeed, he began to notice the sly glances with which he was pursued. And his children were pointed out as the offspring of odd unmatched parents. Little Pablo, the first-born, just turned seven, understood too well the meaning of those jeers and taunts ... they pinched and made him feel sore ...

Felipe recoiled and sought to escape the jests and jibes ... he stayed home, avoiding even relatives and friends ... He found his greatest source of comfort in Juana, whose simple devotion and calm made him a willing slave to her pleasure. Love and companionship and spiritual fervor came through her ... Sometimes, as they sat in the silence of their home after the children had gone to sleep, Felipe thought he heard the mockery from without, and he would observe to Juana, busy knitting for her children, but secretly alert to his thoughts and words:

"How strange people are! Their sense of humor is always in bad taste! In Zapochila, they laughed because you did not bear me a golden child, and here, in this great Capital, where it seems most likely that people should have sound minds and good sense—here amidst our dear friends and intimate family, we are scorned because God has blessed us with a golden child ... if I must say the truth, Juana, which I hope will cause you no hurt ... verily, I believe they are all fools—a pack of stupid, contemptible fools!"