

## ISIDRO

All the boy's spirit rushed into his eyes.

"No," he said.

"What?" cried Escobar.

El Zarzo looked flushed and mutinous.

"No," he said, "for I shall be upon the sea with you there."

"Why, what will you do?" said Escobar.

"What will you do, señor, there in Mexico?"

"I will serve God," said Isidro; and being an honest youth, he added, "I will also see the world."

"I also serve God and see the world," said El Zarzo; but the words were bolder than his eyes, — "serve God and you, señor." He had at times a certain quick and wistful air of depreciation, very engaging.

"Well spoken for an adventurous youth," laughed Isidro, and but for his late warning would have clapped him on the shoulder again.

## X

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F Padre Saavedra had been as wise in the ways of sinners as of saints he would never have sent his search party groping so far afield for the renegade neophyte, Mascado, who, having nothing to hope for from the clemency of the Padres, had not exposed himself at San Carlos without reason. The business that led him to brave the whipping-post would hold him in that neighborhood until it should be accomplished. His appearance in any quarter meant mischief; since nothing had happened it was safe to conclude him still within reach, as, in fact, he was, made comfortable by several of the Padre's flock. Neither had Peter Lebecque, who had a hand in that business, anticipated so much hardihood. As much as in him lay, the old trapper wished good to the wild Briar that had grown up beside his door,



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but his love of provoking led him farther than he knew. Mascado, misled by the old Frenchman's ribaldry, believed that Escobar had done dishonorably what he, as much as he was able, meant to do openly, and with credit, as, indeed, the temper of gallantry at that time gave him warrant for believing. He was ignorant of Isidro's ignorance, and Lebecque thought it a point of humor to let him remain so. But Lebecque supposed by this time that Zarzito would be under the protection of the Father President, and in such case as to put an end to the Indian's coveting. Also he thought Mascado very much of a coward, and expected no such good joke as that he would really go up to Monterey to find where the truth of the matter lay. The young man's passion, though he sensed the fact of it, seemed to the trapper wholly ridiculous. But Mascado was minded to sift the affair, and this is what he found: first, the body of a slain man lying not far from the path of Escobar; then this fine gentleman with blood specks on his linen, giving himself priestly airs at San Carlos, where Zarzito passed for a servant and slept at

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his door. Mascado made very sure of these things; he went into the church and saw the great eyes of El Zarzo, wistful and amazed, watching Escobar while he prayed, and wished for no further proof. After that he made his lair in the pitted oak, meditating vengeance. By night he sought food in his own fashion, and by day he sat among the dunes, and whetted his knife and his heart, wishing Isidro injury, but not able to compass it.

Escobar had done him a kindness, you will remember, under an oak in a certain open glade, but he had also done him a wrong. He had killed Juan Ruiz indubitably, and he had stolen Zarzito.

"Eh, he would have a Briar, would he? Well, here was one that would prick;" he stuck his knife furiously into the tree. His rage was great, but his passion overrode it; but still — Zarzito — to have her — to hold, to keep — rifled, despoiled, — but still to have her! Dimly it grew in his mind that when he had become a little less afraid of her, when use had dulled a little the edge of his desire, he might take it out of her, — might repay himself in her pangs for this keen



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tooth of injury. Perhaps in time he might beat her, but now he knew if she so much as noticed him it sent his wits all abroad. Body of her he would have though Escobar had her soul, — and Escobar had unquestionably saved his life; so he sat and fumed.

Meanwhile, Isidro and Zarzito had been to Santa Cruz and back, Father Saavedra had dispatched his search party on the renegade's trail, — for that purpose Mascado had openly left a trail, — and Don Valentin had come to an understanding with the Comandante. He had gone south by the coasting schooner, Jesús Maria, at Castro's cost, to find Padre Bonaventura and bring back the heir of the Ramirez; to marry her if she proved marriageable. Delgado admitted to himself that the condition allowed a good deal of latitude. Finally, the day was set for the departure of the Father President.

About this time, Ramon, shepherd to Mariano the Portuguese, came fumbling up from Pastería with a great tale for the alcalde of Monterey. Mascado, threading catlike between the pine boles behind the town, came upon him camped over a

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tiny winking fire at the end of his day's trudge, and gave him a wayfarer's hail. They two had supped by the same fire before now. Ramon, who was full of his tale, and, barring the gift of speech, more simple than his own dogs, unburdened himself. It was well that he had found stuff to practice his maunderings upon, otherwise the alcalde would have gotten a sorry tangle. Under Mascado's guidance he got it fairly into shape.

It seemed that while he, Ramon, and Nicolas kept Mariano's sheep in the northern end of Pastería, sometimes called Angustora, a fortnight since, there had come riding a fine caballero, and that thin lad of Lebecque's, him with the married brows and pricking tongue, having in charge the flock and the dogs of Juan Ruiz. And the caballero — yes, an Escobar; so the lad named him — had told a most strange story of finding the sheep of Ruiz, but no Ruiz, at the ford of Oak Creek. The flock was whole, but the dogs looked to have been at each other's throats. The Señor Escobar had passed on toward Monterey. "And after," said Ramon, "we went with the



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sheep to look for Ruiz; it was slow going, for the trail was cold." Here Mascado might have helped him, but he chose rather to hear the end. "But this was most strange; Señor Escobar told that he found the flock at Oak Creek, but *we* found Ruiz at the Mesa Buena Vista in a new dug grave. Yes, we uncovered enough to see that it was a man; the coyotes had been at it. And look you, Mascado, whatever was done evilly was done at that place; so thinks Nicolas, so think I; for Noé here," — he touched the dog at his feet, — "Noé, when we came towards that place, when we were no more than at the borders of the Mesa Buena Vista, made so great a howling that the hair of our flesh stood up. And Nicolas thinks, and so think I, that whatever was done there the dogs were witness of it." The man's voice fell off to a whisper; he edged a little away from Noé, making the sign of the cross surreptitiously. "And when we came to the grave, — it was but poorly dug with a knife, as if one had come back hastily with fear upon him to cover it up, — when we came to that place, I say, Noé here left minding the flock, and went

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whining in his throat, so that we fell a-praying just to hear it. And there is more. When we went about with the flock to bring them towards the place of The Reed, at the edge of the mesa we came upon a track of a horseman riding, such a track as might have been made by the caballero who brought us the sheep at Pastería; and the dogs, when they had found it, made as if to be pleased. Eh, what make you of that, Mascado?"

Mascado made murder of it, and smacked the word as if it had a fine savor. Still there was more. The shepherds, it appeared, had taken thought to carry their news to Mariano, but when they came by the place of The Reed they found the door of the house open, and rabbits running in and out. Worse, they found the box at the bed's head broken open and not a real left in it, not a real. Mascado shrugged away a suspicion of denial that lingered in the other's voice; that Mariano had been robbed was very much to his purpose, — by whom, not so much.

"To the alcalde!" he cried, shaking with an evil joy; "to the alcalde; the caballero shall



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swing for it! These will be witnesses, you and Nicolas, Peter Lebecque and I."

"And the boy," said Ramon.

Mascado thought not. "We are four men," he said. "What do we want of the boy?"

The morning of the day that was to see the Father President started on his journey there was high mass at the Mission San Carlos. Within the church was a flare of color like a trumpet burst. Sheaves of poppies, last of the spring splendor, burned under the Stations of the Cross; el Capella de los Dolores glowed like a forge; wisps of incense smoke floated before the high altar like fog across the sun. All San Carlos huddled in the aisle. The candle lights of the high altar glimmered on the bare bronze skin of the worshipers. The eyes of most burned with a sombre fire. Isidro was beginning the practice of his priestly vocation by serving at mass. Saavedra himself officiated, glowing, like the Host, with a fervor of devotion. It passed over the kneeling horde, reached the acolyte and wrapt him as a flame. El Zarzo stood in the

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bell tower with the ringers, who made the sign of the cross with the ropes as they rang the chimes.

There went a little flicker of curiosity over the congregation toward the middle of the Introit, when the alcalde of Monterey, with two officers of the constabulary, came well forward into the body of the church and knelt among the neophytes. Isidro felt their presence a check upon his devotion; the Father President made a motion of unease, but it passed; he was too full of his holy office. His voice streamed upward in a ghostly triumph, wavered into tenderness, turned upon the note of fatherliness into the deep wrack of a purely human concern, rose again through faith, and carried the hearts of his people to the barred door of Heaven itself.

"Lord have mercy on us!"

"Christ have mercy on us!"

The wail of the people beat upon it in an agony of entreatment; almost the door gave back. The naked souls of his cure, accustomed to the self-hypnotism of their own wild immemorial chants, missed no point of the spiritual



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exaltation. The people bowed, rose, and bowed again at the Elevation of the Host; the chimes rang in the tower. The smoke of incense passed, the murmur of devotion fell off into the rustle of departing, the people came blinking out into the sun, last of all Isidro and Saavedra, stripped of their vestments and spent with spiritual passion. The alcalde, lingering by the great oaken doors, came up to them; there was bowing and a display of manners. But the alcalde had a taste for dramatics; the moment was propitious. He waved up his deputies and disposed them on either side of the young man with a gesture.

"Señor Escobar," said he, "I have the exceeding regret to inform you that you are arrested for the murder of Juan Ruiz." He might have managed differently, but, in fact, the alcalde was a little big man and a stickler for the Republic; he suspected the Padre Presidente of an intention to cry down his authority. To come into the Padre's own jurisdiction and carry away his acolyte almost from the steps of the altar was a vindication of the civil right.

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The blow was a shrewd one; you could see horror and amazement widening in the faces of the bystanders as a circle widens on the surface of a smitten pool. Isidro was simply puzzled and dumb. Saavedra rallied first. He fetched up a tolerable smile.

"A mistake, Señor Alcalde," he said, "most annoying and yet almost laughable, but wholly a mistake. Juan Ruiz is not dead." And then his smile slipped from him and left his mouth stretched and gray. The pallor reached his eyes, his tongue curled dryly in his open mouth, for he remembered what he knew of Juan Ruiz and how he knew it, and the inviolable seal of the confessional was over it all.

"You will have ample space to prove it, Padre," the alcalde was saying; "I hope it may be so. There is also a charge of robbery."

"Señor Alcalde," said Saavedra, "there is much here that wants explaining." The good Padre must be forgiven for regarding this as a new onset of the temporal powers against the spiritual business of the Brothers of St. Francis. Almost as if they guessed his purpose with



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Escobar, here was a plot to snatch him away out of the Padre's power. As for the charge, he believed nothing of it; he had confessed Isidro as well as Juan Ruiz, and rejoiced to find him as clean as a maid.

"No doubt the Señor Escobar will be happy to explain upon all proper occasion," said the alcalde. "In the mean time I must ask him to go with these gentlemen."

"By whom is the charge preferred?" asked Saavedra; his wits were all abroad after Juan Ruiz, — how to come at him, how to shoulder the crime upon him and remain within his priestly prerogative.

"By his companions, Nicolas and Ramon, shepherds to Mariano, who have found the body." The alcalde threw out his hands. "Forward, gentlemen." The deputies took Escobar each by an elbow.

"Fear nothing, my son," said Saavedra. "I have that in mind which shall loose all bonds."

"And I," said the alcalde, "have a duty to perform; we will go at once, if you please."

"I go," said the Padre, "to bring that which

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shall clear you. Go in peace, my son, and may the God of peace go with you."

Isidro said nothing at all. Ten minutes later El Zarzo came out of Marta's hut and dogged them unseen to Monterey.



# XI

## THE QUEST OF JUAN RUIZ

**I**N the orchard closes of San Carlos Isidro had been smitten with a sense of the sufficiency of the Mission Fathers as men. Now he was to have a revelation of the men as priests. The Brothers of St. Francis, who admitted no material hindrance, who dug, hewed, and planted, unbound all considerations of want and toil, were themselves in bondage. Men who made themselves masters of a raw land and unkempt thousands of its people were overmastered by their own vows. If they loosed others, themselves they could not loose.

Vicente Saavedra was a man of parts, great in dignities, honored in place, but before all a priest in orders and a servant of God. His great work as Father President of Missions was not set before his greater service in the cure of souls. Within his province he could plot to use the Escobar

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connection to the advantage of the missions, and be commended for the contrivance by the measure of its success; but he could not, to further that design, abrogate his position as spiritual father to a filthy shepherd with a stain of murder on his soul.

Except by the greatness of his determination, in the present trouble he was no greater than the meanest of his priests. He had the whole tale of suspicion from the shepherd Ramon, the whole business of Noé and Reina Maria from Escobar, and the confession of Juan Ruiz to make all straight. As for the robbery, he took no account of it, not being able to lay it to either party. What he knew to be truth was that Mariano, not Ruiz, lay out in the unblest grave on the Mesa Buena Vista, and Ruiz, not Isidro, was the murderer, but knew it by such means as made his surety impotent. Not for any of the considerations entering here might the seal of the confessional be broken. What he must do was to find Ruiz, and by the sword of the Spirit bring him to open confession; and now that prompting of the Spirit that had secured from the penitent



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the right to seek him out in the interest of one unjustly accused in his stead, assumed in the Padre's devout mind the proportions of Divine Intervention. Saavedra might not declare Isidro's innocence, but Juan Ruiz was pledged to it could he be found. Forthwith the good father set about it. He visited Isidro in the calabozo at Monterey and comforted him. "God," he said, "permits his people to be vexed for no light purpose. Do you, therefore, my son, set yourself to discover the meaning of God behind this visitation of humiliation, and so nourish yourself in the wisdom of the Spirit. Meanwhile, I go to bring that which will serve you this turn." So having made the best disposition that he might of present affairs, Saavedra set off with an Indian tracker, and very light of baggage, upon the trail of Juan Ruiz.

It was, after all, though tedious, an affair of no great magnitude to follow and find the vanished shepherd of Mariano. There were not at that time above two thousand souls in Alta California not of the native races, — *gente de razon* they were called, and of these was Juan

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Ruiz. His mother was a Mexican; his father might have been Mariano as well as any other. He was well known to hunters and trappers and the riffraff of population that floats into new lands; within a fortnight he had been heard of at Santa Cruz hearing mass at the Church of the Holy Cross.

This business of the mass had stripped him of all his poor earnings, and left him bare to the purpose that lay all this while at the back of his mind like a stone in a pool, — not revealed because of the troubling of the waters. Rid of the witnesses and the fear of dead men walking on his trail, the thoughts of Ruiz began to turn toward the strong box at the head of Mariano's bed in the hut at the place called The Reed. It was not for that he had killed Mariano, but the Portuguese being dead, and Ruiz impoverished for the good of his soul, it was fitting that Mariano should pay. By now the sweat of fear began to leave him, and Ruiz recovered the low cunning which was the habit of his mind. So, on the day that Isidro and El Zarzo rode into Santa Cruz, Ruiz went out, telling no man, with



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no baggage but his shepherd's staff and a parcel of bread and meat, bound for the place of The Reed.

He went south all day by piney wood and open slope, meeting no one, walked on into the night as long as the moon lasted, and slept under an oak. He supped next night at an Indian rancharia, where they shared with him what fare they had, and asked no questions. The third day brought him early to the place of The Reed, having made good time; for ever as he trudged there grew in him the lust of gold, — the touch and sight of it, the clink of bright pieces falling together. He ate very little, feeding on the pleasures he would buy with Mariano's coin, the bustle and change, fine clothes, the lusting, the feasting, the drink — ah, well, not so much of that, perhaps; the Padre had forbidden it; but there must be money enough in that strong box to make peace with God in charities and devotions for such small transgressions without curtailing them. Oh, the golden coins, the golden days! Then from glowing hot he grew cold to think of his treasure — *his!* It had come to

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that with him now, — lying there in the tenantless hut for any wandering thief to take. Who knew if Mariano had made fast the door, seeing, when he went out of it last, he had no notion of being so long away? Suppose Nicolas and Ramon had been there before him, scurvy rogues both. So he hurried his going, ready to do killing again for the sake of the slain man's treasure, until he came to the place of The Reed, where he was brought up again by the fear of Mariano.

The hut looked low and menacing in the evening light, shut and barred, weathered and soiled and mean. The pool, reflecting all the light waning from the concave heaven, glimmered palely at him like an eye. He heard the reeds whispering above it all night long. Ruiz had not dared to come into the hut in the dark, but lay out near it, watching, watching, lest any come out of it to surprise him where he lay in long pauses of strained wakefulness and snatches of haunted sleep. But when earth and sky had cleared to a cool gray, and rabbits began to stir in the long grass, he was up and had broken the



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lock with a stone. He found the box at the bed's head, as he had known it, but bound with iron, studded with nails, double-locked, a weary piece of work. He tried the lock with his stone, tried the wood with his knife, fumbling and hurried; bethought himself at last to stumble about the dark and filthy corners of the room for a mattock. The clank and thud of it upon the chest rolled out and scared the rabbits from the pool; it jarred Ruiz to a fury of haste and fear. So between pounding and running to the door to see if any one spied upon him, he wrestled with the chest in the darkling hut until the gold poured out of the riven wood, and he knew himself shepherd no longer, but his own man, and rich. He was quieter after that, looked about him, found a bag for his coin, found food, and remembering that Mariano would have wine—he felt the want of it by now—looked for it until he found it in a kind of crypt under the bed, and carried away as much as he could handle. Then, being laden and wearied, he turned south slowly to fetch up with the place where he had left Mariano. Father Saavedra, you will remember, had

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bidden him bury the man, and, in fact, Ruiz would hardly have any peace until he had seen the sod upon him.

On this business, chiefly because of great fatigue, he was three days more, meeting no one but Indians, and reached the Mesa Buena Vista shortly after Mascado had visited it. Here he fell into a new terror, greater than all, for he found the fresh-dug grave sunken to the shape under it. Here was discovery hot upon his track; Mariano's death known, himself, no doubt, guessed as the murderer. Sick, shaken, he went back to where he had covered his gold, for he would not come into the presence of Mariano with it, and drew together his wit, which had gone all abroad with fancying himself cunning and rich and altogether a fine fellow. But because his wit was slow, he went on a day and a half in his old course before he was able to shape a new one. First, his plan had been to work down to Santa Barbara to take ship there and away; to live well, and to take pains never to confess to the theft of the money until after he had spent it. Now he thought best that he should



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turn north, skirt the vast, dim valley of the San Joaquin, cross the river, and so make the Russian colony out of the bounds of Alta California. So he planned, and, returning by the end of the Mesa Buena Vista, was in time to see Nicolas and Ramon, with Noé and Reina Maria, digging up what remained of Mariano. By this time he was clean daft with terror, and lay out in the scrub for a day, drinking Mariano's wine. He took to the trail again while the drink was still in him, and so had a fall in a stony place, wrenching his foot. Then he began to want food, being afraid now even of Indians. In a day or so the need sobered him even of the drunkenness of fear; the habit of his shepherd life began to assert itself. He began to study the land, to lay the shortest course, to find roots and fruits, contriving that he should fall in with the bands of renegade Indians who, under Urbano, laired like beasts in the Tulares. But Urbano at that time had other affairs in hand. Ruiz kept to the border of the hill country; eastward lay the lineless valley, full of a brooding mist, formless and blue; dark and low on the horizon lay the Tulares, and

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the river in the midst of them maundering down to the bay.

Meantime, Father Saavedra, with Saco the tracker questing like a hound, followed the shepherd's trail. Learning at what time he had left Santa Cruz, and guessing his errand in part, they had turned directly toward the Mesa Buena Vista, since it seemed likely Ruiz had not heard that any one had been before him with the burial. They pushed the way very shrewdly, and before long had trace of him. Among the Indians whom Ruiz met was a woman to whom he had given a gold piece, thinking himself a man of means and able to requite favors handsomely. The woman made a hole in the coin and strung it about her neck, having, in fact, no other use for it. This Saco spied, questioned, and reported. So the robbery was accounted for, and Father Saavedra went with his head sunken on his breast for the space of several hours. He could not escape the conclusion that Ruiz must have gone fresh from the confessional and the sacrament to this new transgression. Approaching Buena Vista, Saco found the place where Ruiz



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had hidden his treasure while he went to look his last on Mariano, and found the newer trail going from it; later they found an empty bottle where he had cast it from him, and a coin in the grass where the shepherd had dropped it in his drunken walk. Finally, they struck into his very path and the print of his limping foot.

Riding out from the Mission the Father President had sat his horse cheerfully, resting the issue of the affair, as his habit was, on God. He had in him that spirit of delighted service which informed the labors of Junípero Serra, craving whatever circumstance of labor or sorrow that brought him into touch with the Divine Will. Come what might of this business of Juan Ruiz, Padre Vicente had no doubts; he was still able to interrogate every anguish, What lesson hast Thou? A little as a lover rides into the garden of his mistress, expecting sight or reminder of her at every turn, so rode the Padre upon his errand to surprise the purposes of God. Thus at first, but the long journey wearied him. The evidence of the shepherd's fresh crime, following closely on the sacrament, gave him heart-sickness.

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The lust of man-hunting, which glowed in Saco as he pricked forward on the freshening trail, oppressed his soul. Lastly, he began to be troubled for the physical distress of the fugitive himself; the dragging foot, the rag of torn clothing by the brook where he had bound it up, the holes where he had dug feverishly for the roots of wild hyacinths, the wavering of the course which betokened unease of mind, gave the good father concern. In the beginning, he had ridden this quest for the sake of justice and Isidro; at the end, he pushed it hard for the sake of mercy and Juan Ruiz.