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in check for a time, but there must come an hour of weakness, of fatigue, a moment of darkness and surprise, — she grew sick to think of it. And then across it all would come the dream of ineffable sweetness, — the joyous road to Monterey, the strolls on the beaches, the sea music and the sea air, Escobar walking with his hand upon her shoulder, the vesper hour when, kneeling on the bare tile flooring, she had leave and liking to watch Escobar through the changes of the hour's devotion. Little looks, little ways, a trick of tossing back his hair, a gentle irony of laughter, the way his fine hand lay on the bridle rein, — all these came back and pierced her with seductive pain. So the day wore on warm and still into the afternoon.

## XV

### THE RESCUE

**S**AAVEDRA, working back toward Carmelo with the confession of Juan Ruiz in his wallet, had lost time on the last day's travel by reason of over-full creeks and flooding fords from recent rains on the seaward slope of the hills, and camped for the night several hours out on the trail. Saco, who knew every foot of that region as a man knows his own dwelling, would have pushed on through the dark, but the Padre fancied the horses too much fagged, and managed to do with one more night away from his own bed. He was up and stirring with the dove's first call to dawn, and got into the Mission for the eight o'clock breakfast with Padres Gomez and Salazar. The table was set in the corridor looking toward the bay, and white drift from the pear trees blew in on the morning air. Leisurely, as concerned their several juris-



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dictions, the Brothers of St. Francis gave him news of flock and folk, — of a death in Monterey and a christening set for Wednesday of that week, of a sail sighted off the Point of Pines, and much small talk of the garden and field.

"And yesterday," concluded Padre Salazar, sipping his chocolate comfortably, "I found in the alms-box this packet, which, as it bore no name or superscription, I judged best left to your reverence's disposal."

Saavedra took the thin, oblong packet of black silk and turned it over absently. "Quite right, brother," he said, "quite right. I cannot at this moment conjecture what it may contain, but I will make the earliest occasion to examine its contents, when I have this affair of Escobar off my mind. As for the calves, Brother Pablo, I always say you know more of that matter than myself, and I will be pleased if you will continue to follow your own excellent judgment. I will look at the garden, Ignacio, on my return from Monterey, where I must be almost immediately in the interest of this young man, whose affairs I trust presently to put in better shape."

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It was a piece of the Father President's humility that he never rode on any affair of the Mission when he could walk, and in that he patterned after the sainted Serra; but this morning toward the Presidio of Monterey he rode at a smart pace, with Fages cantering at his back, very keen to know, but not daring to ask, what the journey promised Escobar. It had occurred to him that the youth was too forward in the Father President's favor for his — Fray Demetrio's — good. He had experienced a pious glee in Isidro's arrest, which it now appeared was ill timed. The padre was too cheerful and too much in haste not to be the bearer of good news.

They rode at once to the alcalde, whom they found at breakfast, very well disposed toward the Father President now that he conceived himself to have the upper hand, and toward the family of Escobar, which he esteemed discreetly. He had had his fill of puffing and importance in the week past, and answered expansively to the tactful courtesy which Saavedra, in any affair not directly impugning his authority, knew well how to display, and between them they made a very pleasant



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occasion. The alcalde was charmed, overjoyed in fact, to learn that the young man, of whom, except in his capacity as magistrate, he had never a suspicion, should have come so handsomely off. But an affair of the state, you understand, my dear Padre, — it could not be dropped, dismissed as one might say the word. There were formalities — the circumstance had been noised abroad — it was due to himself as the civil authority, — a mere servant of the Republic, my dear Padre, — and to the young man, to give the fullest publicity to his justification. But under the circumstances he saw no reason why the youth — truly a most admirable young man — should not go at large. He would see to it, — if the Padre Presidente would excuse him until he put on his street-going clothes? Yes, and in the mean time try a glass of wine which had come around the Horn?

The alcalde bustled himself into the house; the Padre sat in the gallery and sipped his wine, and having a quarter of an hour of undisposed leisure, took out Padre Ignacio's packet from the bosom of his gown, and broke the confining threads. When the silk kerchief was unwrapped there fell

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out of it two folded papers, the merest glance at which gave the Padre as near to a shock as was possible to his well-ordered mind. They were the marriage certificate of Jesús and Ysabel Castro and the baptismal certificate of Jacinta Concepcion, their child.

Saavedra stood up suddenly, betraying his years as he did in any sudden tide of excitement, and called to Fray Demetrio. The secretary came running and agog, hoping for news. "Do you, brother," said Saavedra, "do me the kindness to remain here and wait upon the alcalde — this packet — I have business with the Comandante. Neglect nothing which may be for the Señor Escobar's relief, and bid him wait for me presently. I will be with Castro." With that he gathered up the papers and the skirt of his cassock, and made hastily across the plaza, at that hour beginning to fill with children and dogs and a detachment of soldiery turned out to drill. The secretary managed the release of Isidro to the alcalde's satisfaction and his own, each swelling with authority and disposed to yield to the other's pretensions to save the more credit for his own;



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they were, in fact, a pair. Within another quarter of an hour Isidro had walked out into the morning, and shaken off both those worthies, who seemed disposed to bestow upon him their company. He walked seaward, and watched the fisher boats beat in across the bright, blue stillness of the bay. He wished that Saavedra might be speedily done with this business of the Comandante's. The week of incarceration made the strange town and strange folk seem more strange. He was hankering for the company of his horse, which he had raised from a colt, and the lad Zarzito, whom he had known quite four days longer than any one in Monterey. He wondered that the boy had not visited him in prison; now that he thought of it, it might have been arranged; but of course El Zarzo would have been too shy to have put himself forward, — shy and, no doubt, lonely in his turn. Isidro walked down to the sea border, and strolled in the wet track of the retreating tide, which was the place Delfina had elected for her morning walk.

There is no doubt Delfina had a nose for affairs; she had scented something going forward at the

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alcalde's, and had come out with her shoe-laces untied, and a *manta* covering the inadequacies of her morning toilet, with all the mincing airs of a woman wishing to inaugurate an acquaintance with a young man to whom she has not been properly introduced. You can guess that Isidro, notwithstanding his vocation, made no great difficulty at this juncture.

"It is the Señor Escobar, is it not? Yes, — you must pardon my forwardness; it is impossible not to take an interest in one so estimably regarded and so grossly accused." To the natural insinuation of manner Delfina added the play of her fine eyes.

"There is no pardon — rather cause for gratitude," said Isidro, making her a bow and a compliment after the fashion of the time. "You add to my freedom the contemplation of beauty and the society of the graciously inclined." He fell into a certain familiarity of exaggerated deference with remarkable ease for a man who was to become a priest.

"But, no doubt," Delfina watched him sidewise through dropped lids, "there are others — one



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other — whom the Señor Escobar would have wished to see."

"On my soul, señora, not one."

"Oh, the men, the men!" fluttered Delfina; "oh, the faithless ones! and the poor girl in such straits, too!"

"If it pleases you to jest, señora" —

Delfina assumed a grave and monitory air. "It is no jest to her, I'll warrant, señor. Indeed, I am not one to cry down my own sex; she was most faithful, Don Isidro, visited the prison every day in hopes to have sight of you, and went not away except by force, and most unwillingly, — that I can testify."

"But she, señora, *she*?" cried Isidro. "What the devil does the woman mean?"

"Ah, if the señor wishes to preserve the incognito," said Delfina, beginning to be mischievous and amused, — "but with *me*, señor? Well, then, the wild Briar that keeps its roses for secret plucking, the mestizo lad, — or is she Indian? — whom you brought out of the hills, — El Zarzo."

"El Zarzo, — what of him?"

"She is gone, señor," cried Delfina, with a

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sweeping air, — "seized, stolen, ravished, murdered and buried by now for all I know."

"But how? When?" cried Isidro.

"Last night, by an Indian, I think; at least he had no clothing. We were walking here on the beach, but up at the prison I had just discovered — I wished to know — she was about to tell me, and we heard the guard coming."

"But she, *she*!" cried Isidro.

Delfina looked at him in a momentary blankness. "Does the man mean to say that he does not know?" she said, and then dismissing it as wholly absurd, returned to her gurgle of secret amusedness.

"Oh, the men, the men!" she said. "We were walking here, Don Isidro, where we now stand, and it was just the edge of dark; suddenly there came a hissing through the air, — a riata, I think, — and I saw a rider draw up to her and she drew to him, but she went unwillingly enough, — and in a moment he had her in front of him and was away."

"El Zarzo?"

"El Zarzo, so called."



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If Isidro appeared cool at that moment it was because he was too much confounded. Delfina was too circumstantial to be greatly doubted. She put him through all the steps of the evening's performance; showed him the evidence of struggle, the galloping hoof prints that began where the shoe prints ended. The horse she judged to be a pinto pony, the man an Indian. Isidro quested forward on the trail; Delfina panted beside him.

"Arnaldo," she said, "is the best tracker in Monterey."

"Send him to me," said Isidro curtly. He had all the woman could give and wished to be rid of her. Delfina took her dismissal cheerfully; she needed the rest of the morning to spread her news abroad. She had mixed herself with what might prove a most interesting scandal, and stumbled on a hint of a really untenable situation. "For suppose," she said to herself, "the man really did *not* know!" and she dwelt upon that point until she was back in her house behind the wall.

Arnaldo the tracker, a short, keen man, came

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on his horse; in those days, in that land, a man saddled and bridled to go the length of his own dooryard. Isidro sent a boy to bring his own horse from the pastures of Carmelo. Arnaldo made a detour of half an hour to fetch necessities for the day; together they worked on over the cold trail. There seemed a promise of mischief in the rider's haste,—in the broken bushes, deep hoof scars, flakes of black loam cast up by running.

"It might be Mascado," said the tracker; "he has been seen lately in this quarter. He has a pinto of about that stride, and he rides like the devil."

"On the devil's errand," said Isidro; but the name, which he remembered only as the name of a renegade wanted at Carmelo, carried no information. He was in great confusion of mind, which found no relief except in haste, though he could scarcely have told to what end he hurried the tracker on the open trail. He would say that the lad El Zarzo was in peril. But why? Why? A lad by his own account half Indian carried off by another. But if he believed his own judgment



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the lad was no Indian, and if he believed the woman Delfina, no lad. Well, then, if a maid, peril enough and reason enough. He began to recount occasions and circumstances, — the lad's personal reticence, a certain avoidance of innuendo and embarrassing incident too constant, now that he recalled it, not to imply an intention; and, on the other side, a certain fearless matter-of-factness, an impertinence, as it were, directed to no person but to events, to destiny, endearing in a boy, but hardly to be looked for in a girl. But the lad was a good lad, — well, a girl, then, if it must be, — so no doubt a good girl. Here Delfina's amused insinuating gurgle recurred to him; it brought a hot flush and certain sickly prickings of shamefacedness.

"Sacred Name of a Name!" What was the woman doing now but spreading her news in Monterey, — excellent gossip about an Escobar who set out to be a priest. In his hurry he had neglected to stop her mouth, as he reflected he might have done with a compliment and silver.

Isidro was, first of all, a clean and honorable

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youth. If he regarded the priesthood as an opportunity rather than a renunciation, he was not single in his time, and though he purposed a discreet use of its prerogatives, he meant sincerely to keep within its restrictions. He had respect to its orders, and as a man and priest he wished to stand well with the Father President, and he had all the high and formal breeding which runs with pure Castilian blood: the finikin hospitality and that exaggerated punctiliousness toward women which often consists with no very high estimate of the possibility of feminine virtue. If Delfina said truth, — and, though he rejected it, he found his mind working around toward conviction as fast as the tracker worked over the trail, — if it were true that the boy was no boy, then he had set a pretty snare for his reputation to fall into. Peace he might make with Saavedra through the confessional, but his father, the old Don, would be furious that he had so far forgotten the manners of an Escobar as to take a mistress, in the guise of a servant, under the Father President's roof, and having so conducted his journey to Monterey as to have himself accused of murder and sus-



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pected of theft, had no sooner come free of that taint than he was off hot-foot after the girl and her Indian lover. That was the construction that would be put upon his behavior, and Isidro owned that he would probably have believed it in the case of any other. As for the girl, she was quite ruined in reputation, and any explanation of his would add a touch of ridicule to reproach. If these considerations had occurred to him earlier it is probable Isidro would have waited to take counsel with Saavedra before committing himself to the trail; but by the woman's account there was the lad, whom he loved for his endearing boyishness and clean, companionable talk, ahead of him on that road at the expense of who knew what indignity; and though the fact of El Zarzo's being a maid had not possessed his consciousness, it stirred in him an apprehension of unnamable disaster. As often as he thought of her it was of the nimble and teachable lad who had come through the hills with him in golden weather, or of the pleasant companion he had promised himself on a pilgrimage through Alta California, — but a maid — Oh, a pest on it!

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Escobar felt himself aggrieved that his servant had not stayed a boy.

The sun beat upon them, and the trail stretched out mile by mile. Arnaldo hung above it from his saddle, finding it too plain for dismounting. By noon they arrived where Mascado had stumbled on Saavedra's camp, and Arnaldo chuckled to see how nearly the mestizo's haste had been his undoing.

"If it were Mascado he would sooner see the devil than his reverence," said the tracker.

After that it seemed the rider had taken a craftier way among the hills, concealing his trail more, and pursuit lagged through a hot, breathless afternoon. Later they came to where Mascado had kept the dark watch under the oak. Here Isidro looked for some signs of a struggle, not assured but relieved to find none. Here El Zarzo had sat, and here Mascado; here the horse cropped at the end of the rope. Isidro by this time fumed with impatience and saddle weariness. He rode after a week's inaction, and his breakfast had been prison fare.

"Caramba! but I could eat," he said.



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Arnaldo swung the food bag forward on the saddle.

"Eat," he said; "the trail freshens."

"And where," cried Isidro, "do you think we shall come up with him?"

"*Dios sabe*, but it leads toward Las Chimineas. That is the refuge of many a hunted one. We should be there in an hour," said the tracker.

"We must find him before night." Isidro bore forward in his saddle with eagerness; as if some impalpable thread of intelligence ran between him and the girl, his sense of urgency lengthened with the shadows. They had made good time, almost as good as Mascado, saving the dark hours. It appeared the mestizo had ridden without fear of pursuit, and ridden, moreover, in the night, while they had the day for following. It was four o'clock when Arnaldo pointed out from a knoll the tall, single stones of Las Chimineas.

"From here we go cautiously," he said.

Meanwhile Saavedra had finished his talk with the Comandante. They had taken a long time to it, beating through all the possibilities that the

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appearance of the two certificates at this juncture implied. Finding no thoroughfare, they came back to suck such comfort as they could from the mere fact of the papers spread out on the Comandante's desk. Castro was trembling, expectant, and confused; the Padre hopeful and confounded. The question was, from what source had the packet come? By all accounts no strangers or suspicious persons had come or gone about the Mission or Monterey that week past. Then could it have been dropped by any one resident in the capital or at Carmelo? At this suggestion, that one who had knowledge of Ysabel's child might walk within daily sight of him, Castro shook as with an ague. Padre Vicente sighed; he thought to have known the hearts of his people. Padres Pablo and Ignacio had been warned if the matter came up in confession to use all permissible means to bring it to light. As yet from this source nothing had transpired. It had not been possible to keep the affair out of common talk, perhaps not advisable. It appeared the flood of gossip had floated this packet out of the backwater of an unconscience-



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able mind, — gossip, and not the searching sword of the Church. Therefore the good Padre sighed; therefore the Commandante fell sick. The word of each ran with power in their several provinces, but they could not compel a favorable issue of their own affairs. But why had the packet come to light and not the heiress? why the evidence and not the claimant? and why this concealment of the source? who held the information that would connect the papers with Ysabel's daughter? Ah, who, who? Was this flotsam all that was to come up out of the depth? Was it fear that kept the informant in the background, or was it simply that the child was not? Here Saavedra came to the surface with a practical suggestion, — a paper pinned to the church door offering a reward for knowledge of Castro's heir. The pride of the Castros demurred. Well, then, for information concerning the packet found in the alms-box on such a date? This was better, and was so agreed. Then, for sheer unwillingness to leave the conference with so little accomplished, they fell to talking of other things. Of this affair of Escobar, which the Padre wished put in the best

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countenance; of the report, founded on nods and winks and suspicions, that Indians on the eastern border along the San Joaquin and the Tulares, under Urbano, fomented disturbances. The Padres had never pushed their labors very far from the coast. Inland the unregenerate lived in native savagery, and gathering to themselves malcontents and deserters from among the neophytes, became a menace to the peaceful establishments of the Mission. From Solano and San José came news of cattle carried off, and mutterings, and restlessness.

Father Saavedra was as loath to report these matters as to believe them, but felt something due to the Comandante. Urbano was rumored to be massing his followers in the wooded regions to the east.

"Saw you any such intimations on your journey, Padre?" asked Castro.

"None," answered Saavedra. "Now I think of it I saw not a dozen Indians this week past, nor came upon more than one camp which was not at least three days cold. It is surprising, I think, considering the report."