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with the news to spread it all abroad. Here are you departed, by your own account with scant leave, into the hills with the girl. Who knows that she is still a maid? Who knows that you have married her, — and deserted her at the altar? You, also, by your own account, in the way of being a priest! All Monterey will be humming like a hive. Think you Castro will thank you for this, or Saavedra? Best get you back to your wife and to Monterey with all speed. By the mass, but you will find a hornet's nest if you are overlong on the road."

Escobar saw the force of that. If he would make this marriage perform the service he intended in saving the girl's good name, he must be forehanded with his news. By the break of day he was out with Arnaldo beating about for a trail which should take them a short cut to Monterey. His wife he thought safe in person at San Antonio. To save her reputation he rode to Saavedra at Carmelo.

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FROM Peter Lebecque's hut and the Cañada de las Viñas Isidro and the tracker climbed up steadily by the swelling hill-front, seeing the isle of vines dwindle and shrink at the bottom of the swale. The spring, which had been a lusty beauty when Isidro rode first through that country, was now running fast to seed. No rains would come that way again for a good three quarters of a year. Wild oats and alfilaria curled sun-cured on the eastward slopes; stubbly growth of shrubs on the west, favored a little by far-blown dampness of the sea, hinted at their ashy midsummer hue. Streams rippled shallowly at the fords; young of wild creatures of that season's litter began to run freely in the chaparral. The trail went sidling on the flanks of the hills, and at each upward turn flung them a wider arc of boss and hollow,

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drowned by a blue mistiness that thickened on level mesas to the waters of mirage. The crests of the hills were mostly bare to the windy flood of cooler air, but a wood of oaks, buckeye, and madroño swept about their bases and lapped upward in sheltered coves along the water courses. Their outlines showed dim and indistinguishable through the haze, like clumps of weed at the bottom of full, still bays of sea water. Out of one of the pools of leafage which lay below them, and yet overlooked in its turn a considerable stretch of sunken rolling land, rose up a column of thin smoke, pale against the dark blueness of the wood.

"Indians at last," said Isidro. "I began to think it true, what I heard at San Antonio, that they had left this country to harbor with Urbano in the Tulares. And look, another." Faint and far the second wisp of smoke rose up straightly and fanned out into the still atmosphere. The next turn of the trail showed them a third.

"Signal fires," said Arnaldo. "Now what the devil will they be about?"

By the middle of the hot morning the riders

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had sighted five pillars of white smoke that neither increased nor grew less, but welled up from steadily tended fires, wagged a little at the impulse of an unfelt wind, broke high up against a level of cooler air, and rolled out along the sky. Later in the day Arnaldo pointed out a party of Indians in hunting gear on the trail below them, but when the two men came up to the place the hunters had melted like quail into the chaparral.

They rode all that breathless morning, following the looping and sagging of a shallow trail, but in the main rising toward the crest of the Santa Lucia, and then lay by for a long siesta while the horses fed. They made it long by intention, purposing to ride by the light of the moon, which was nearing its prime and rose early on the red track of the sun. With this in mind they kept saddle in the pure pale twilight of high altitudes, and on until the full yellow orb rose up and walked along the hills.

They rode through a longish shallow valley, open in the middle by a blind sunken water course, but having a thick strip of wood along the bases of the hills. Shortly before moonrise, while

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the earth under foot still melted into dusk, and the sky whitened to the nearing light, they became aware of a flutter and a hint of motion, a whisper and beat translating itself to the sense without sound. It came out of the wood ahead of them on their right; it seemed to roll along the earth, and underlaid, yet was a part of, the multitudinous small noises of the night. It grew as they gave it attention, and came sensibly from a close-grown tongue of wood that ran into the open hollow, and resolved itself into a wailing croon, supported by a soft pounding pulse of sound. The wail flared and waned and fell off like the flame of wood fire, glints of which began to show between the close stems of trees. The padding was muffled and incessant. The two men dropped their spurs on the saddle-bow; they crept forward until they found a peephole in the screen of leaves. In a cleared grassy place lit by a brush-wood flare figures came and went like puppets in a showman's box. Figures of Indians, naked except for trappings of beads and feathers and stripings of gaudy-colored earths. Huge coronets of feathers of the chaparral cock, the *corredor*

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del camino, surmounted their heads and streamed down the naked backs. They wore kilts woven of fine feathers of water fowl; necklaces of beads, bears' claws, elks' teeth, and bits of bright shell hung down over painted ribs and glittered intermittently with flashes of the fire. The earth under their feet was beaten to an impalpable dust.

"Big Medicine," whispered Arnaldo under the click of rattles and the steady drum of heels. Flashes from the fire showed, besides the dancers, circles of squatting savages whose spirits, raised by the hypnotic movement and beat of the ceremonial dance, fluttered in their throats. Arnaldo the tracker drew Isidro softly by the sleeve and backed away toward the horses.

"What do you think?" whispered Escobar.

"Devil's work," said Arnaldo, and crossed himself as a good Christian; after which he delivered himself as a man of sense. "It is not the time of their regular dances. If they do it now it is because they have some business afoot."

"Think you they were Urbano's men?"

"Who else? One was the renegade Manuel; I knew him; and he that had the feather coat on

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his shoulders was a Channel Indian. Three others were Tuolomnes. Where else will you find the slum of all the tribes except with Urbano? They are not drawn together by love of each other, but for love of mischief."

"What can they do?"

"Set on some silly shepherds with their sheep, run off a few of the Mission beeves, entice a few neophytes from the Missions." Arnaldo had not a great opinion of the native tribes of Alta California. They let the priests sit too easily on their necks, and were frightened by the popping of firecrackers.

The two men rode on in the trail, and the moon rose new washed from the sea. The trail lay mostly in open ground and was not hard to seek. Twice in the fringe of the woods they saw lights low and twinkling on the ground.

"We must by all means keep on until we have crossed the ridge out of this country," said Arnaldo. "To-night they are busy with dancing, but to-morrow they may take a notion to stop us, particularly if they mean raiding in the direction of Soledad or Santa Cruz."

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Isidro had no mind for such an interruption to his affairs. They kept on after this until they struck the wood again and the beginning of rising ground. Here they dismounted, for the trees were low and grew all abroad with gnarly boughs. The trail went faintly among them with many windings. Isidro whistled softly to himself while the tracker puzzled out the way.

"No noise, señor," said the tracker. Isidro stopped short. They went on for a quarter of an hour in the hot dark. Outside of the fence of trees the earth was gloriously light. Arnaldo began to halt at intervals and make signs of listening.

"Heard you anything?" he whispered.

"A cricket chirp and a wakeful bird."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"Move on a little."

Presently Isidro heard. Out of the dark a slow padding on the fallen leaves seemed to follow them. They stopped, it stopped; they went on, it began again, — a mere whisper of sound.

"Man or beast?" Isidro asked.

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"*Dios sabe*," shrugged the Indian. They went on steadily for another quarter of an hour and heard no more of it.

"It must have been a bobcat or cougar," said Escobar.

"Perhaps so; keep as much in the shadow as you may."

Where the wood was thin and straggling it was clearly no night for men who must make way cautiously to be abroad in. Rounding a blunt cape of hills they came suddenly on a camp of a dozen savages asleep, or smoking and a-doze. Arnaldo's horse knew the trick of stillness following a certain touch on his shoulder; but the other, winded a little, for the ground rose steeply, drew in his breath until the saddle-girth creaked. Several of the Indians sat up alert, but a ruffle of wind among the leaves smothered all smaller sounds and covered the retreat of the horsemen. Now they were forced out of the trail and went heavily through the brush, smelling trouble on all sides. A group of ponies feeding in a meadow snorted recognition to their horses, and got a smothered whinny in return. Arnaldo swore.

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Isidro, never so merry as when he had need of all his wits, laughed under his breath.

"No laughing matter," said the tracker; "there must be threescore of the swine hereabouts. They might object to you getting on to Monterey."

"What will we do?"

"What we can; just ahead of us is a good level stretch; make the most of it."

They put their horses at a jogging trot; this lasted until the close growth of scrub and trees forced them to a slower pace. Instantly the long padding tread came out of the dark, following. It was light on the grass, but not so light that no twig snapped under it and no leaf rustled. Now and then they heard the swish of a bent bough springing back to place.

"Bungling work," said the tracker; then he laid hand lightly on the other's arm. Forward a stone-cast, the moon glinted on what was neither leaf, nor bark, nor stone. Across the grass the broken and dappled light through the latticed shadow of the trees was cut off and reappeared as under a sliding screen.

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"The devil!" said Isidro.

"Evidently," shrugged the tracker.

The wood was full of hints of presence, sense of movement, little prickings of the flesh, uneasy sniffs of the horses. The trail ran here in an easy swale narrowly between two great bluffs of stony earth. The wood, pinched to a file of scant-limbed pines, ran between them and spread into a pool of dark beyond. The defile, opening toward the moon, was searched and rifled by the light. It was not a bowshot wide from wall to wall. Beyond this a little way lay an open country affording no cover for spies and the chances of swifter travel for the horses. Riding toward it Isidro and the tracker started a herd of deer, does with young fawns, feeding by a spring. The does threw up their heads to snuff the tainted wind and began to trot steadily toward the pass. But here their fine sense served them, and the men behind them, an excellent turn. At the mouth of the defile they swerved, halted, and wheeled, struck a brisker pace, avoided the pass, and disappeared in a dry gully toward the hills.

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"Where the deer will not go there is no going for us," said Arnaldo; "wait."

He flung off his horse into the thickest shadow. Isidro held both bridle reins and waited, heard a night bird call and the wind tread lightly on the creaking boughs of pines, saw the shadows shrink as the moon rode higher, saw small furry things come out in the light and play; at last saw the tracker rise up out of the dark without a sound.

"Well?"

"Señor, you wish to get to Monterey with all speed?"

Isidro thought of the case in which he stood, — of his breach of behavior to Saavedra, of Delgado hurrying to the Comandante, of Delfina — "By the mass, yes!" he cried.

"Do as I say, then," said Arnaldo; "the moon is too much for us." He led the horses with unconcern back to the spring where the deer had been drinking and threw off the saddles.

"Make as if to camp," he said, "and lie down as if to sleep, but do not sleep; keep your pistol close."

They lay down to watch the ebb of the moon-

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light and the slow oncoming of the tide of shadow that reached its flood some hours before dawn. They heard no more of any Indians, but no deer came that way, by which they judged there must be men about in the cañon below them and in the pass above. When the moon was low and the black splotches of forest began to run together in the bottoms of the cañons drenched in shadow, they began to move again with incredible stillness, drawing out of the wood toward the bare slopes of hill up the gully by which the deer had gone. Nothing moved behind them but the light wind in the leaves; before them they had the steep tireless scarp of the hill. They would ride a little, and then Arnaldo would quest forward on his feet a little, exploring the way, incredibly tedious, but they had no serious impediment. Once Isidro's horse struck a loose stone that went rolling and rattling to the bottom of the hill with a small avalanche of coarse gravel and set their hearts pounding with apprehension, but no alarm followed it. They came at last to open country about moonset, found it firm under foot and admitting of some speed. They

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began to go down presently, and by dawn had come to clumps of thin pines and dwarfish oaks. They rode and saw deer bedded unstartled in the fern, and all the ease of wild life, warrant that no men had lately passed that way. A million wild pigeons began to stir and voice the bluish light of dawn; their calls and the incessant rustle of their wings rolled together like soft thunder among the trees. The two men pushed their jaded horses, breakfasting, without lighting, on jerke of wild venison which they had from Peter Lebecque, reached the foot of the grade, struck the level of a valley, crossed it three hours after sunrise, and in the hot palpitant forenoon began to wind and turn in the intricate shallow cañons of low hills. They had come upon no camps nor fresh trail of Indians, saw no signal fires nor any sign of pursuit; not so much as a crow flapped or a jay squawked suspiciously away from the trail.

"The rogues are behind us," said Arnaldo, "we have thrown them off our trail; nevertheless, we must get on to Monterey. We shall have a word for the Comandante."

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"What word?" said Escobar, thinking of his own affair.

"There were no women among them. Some of them had guns; they have been trading with the Russians. It will take more than holy water to keep these bears away from the calf-pens of the Padres," Arnaldo chuckled.

"Do you think they are for San Antonio?"

"That or Soledad; they might reach either easily from where they are now camped. They may have accomplices among the Mission neophytes. The word that has gone about that the Padres are to be sent out of the country has bred maggots in their heads."

"And what," said Isidro, "if that word were true?"

"Eh," said the tracker, "they are swine; they will return to root in the earth where they were bred."

"They have been made Christians, and the Padres have taught them to save their souls from hell," said the young gentleman, who still had thoughts of becoming a padre himself.

Arnaldo showed a dry and twinkling mirth.

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"Manuel," he said, "was a Christian. I remember an Easter when he served the mass. That was he you saw last night, with the rattle of ram's horn and a bear's teeth grinning on his shoulders."

They were both beginning to weary of the ride. The horses drooped and looked hungrily at the grass by the water courses. The air in the close little cañons was still and hot.

"*Dios!* but I could sleep," cried Escobar, yawning.

"Sleep, then," said the tracker; "here is feed for the horses."

They unsaddled, set the horses to the stake rope, crept themselves under the low screen of a live oak that dropped its branches to the ground. The hills were sunk in a midday drowse. That was a time when, except for some such seldom mischance as had fallen to them the night before, a man might lie down and sleep under any tree in Alta California, and take no account of risk or time. As the mood of the land never swayed much between the extremes of heat and cold, fury and calm, it bred even in its savage races