

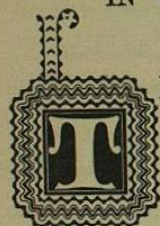
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an equable and tractile mind. If the Franciscans found great scope for material advantage they found little for martyrdom. It is a tradition that bullocks' blood went to the cementing of adobe foundations, but little was shed of another sort.

Isidro and the tracker had expected no harm the night before but an annoying detention and interruption to the former's affairs; therefore they slept heavily, that danger over, and woke past noon to find Mascado sitting over them, very still, with Escobar's pistols laid across his knees.

XX

IN WHICH JACINTA RIDES TO MONTEREY



THE Franciscans of Alta California in the year when Isidro Escobar should have begun his novitiate sat tight, kept the affairs of the Missions in close order, and prayed or plotted, as their vocation lay, against the decree of secularization. The prayers, it seemed, found no advocate. The plots, like that of Saavedra's for turning the family of Escobar to priestly use, took a color, perhaps, from the lotus-eating land, were large and easy and too long in execution. For the most part they kept a quiet front in California, and trusted to the Brotherhood in Old Mexico. At that time of tedious communication it was hardly possible for the Padres of the Missions to know how nearly their college of San Fernando was demolished by the unfriendly Republic. The possibility of swift revolution that

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harbors in Latin blood, their faith in St. Francis, strengthened by long immunity amid conflicting decrees, prompted to a cheerful view ; but being, on the whole, accustomed to let no event meet them unprepared, they made ready for secularization, in case they found no way of avoiding it, according to their several notions. It was believed in some quarters that the Franciscans were converting the herds and flocks into coin, which was sent out of the country ; it was known that others went about fitting the neophytes for the change by new and tremendous labors, or by larger freedom and greater responsibility. These are the pipes of history, the breadth of whose diapason sets many small figures going to various measures like midges in the sun. They go merrily or strenuously, with no notion of how they are blown upon ; but let the great note of history be stilled, and they fall flat and flaccid out of the tune of time. If you would know how Demetrio Fages and the Comandante, how Isidro and Mascado, Peter Lebecque and his foster child, called the Briar, played out their measure, you must know so much of the note of their time.

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Chiefly, then, you will understand how Saavedra, being troubled and a little offended at Isidro's disappearance immediately following the Father President's great labors in his behalf, could not on that account delay his annual visit of counsel and inspection to the Missions, where affairs stood in the case I have stated.

When Padre Saavedra left his conference with Castro he looked about first for the young man, and learned that he had last been seen walking upon the beach below the town. The Padre himself started in that direction, saw only the children racing with the tide, took a turn about the streets, and saw nothing of the young man, sent Fages, still nothing ; whereupon he concluded that Isidro had preceded him to Carmelo, and leaving his secretary to attend to some small matters, rode back to the Mission. Here the Padre's slight annoyance grew into a measure of unease as the day passed and no Escobar. At noon, when the Indians came up from the field, he learned that two hours since the youth had sent for his horse and saddle ; reminded by that of the lad Zarzito, he sent to seek him in the hut of

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Marta, and learned that nothing had been seen of him since the evening before. The report served to give an edge to the Father President's alarm. Then about the hour of vespers came the secretary choked with news; he could hardly deliver it at once, turning and smacking it upon his tongue. He had been with Delfina, and learned things of Escobar that fell in pat with his own desires. Fray Demetrio had a dull sort of climbing ambition, which he thought threatened by the proximity of the young gentleman, and had the natural gratification of the baser sort of men in seeing others brought down. As he stood twiddling his thumbs in the presence of Padre Saavedra, his expression of pained virtuosity would have done credit to the wooden image of a saint.

Señor Escobar, he said, had last been seen riding eastward from Monterey in company with Arnaldo the tracker.

"Heard you anything of his errand?"

The secretary cast up his eyes. "It is thought," he said, "that he rides upon the trail of that brand of the burning, Zarzito."

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"Ah yes, the Indian lad; what of him? He has not been seen since last evening."

The Padre's tone was one of gentle wonderment. Fages took his opportunity deliberately, watching from under cover of his stubby brows.

"Your Reverence," said he, "it is shown by the most credible of all testimony, an eye-witness in fact, that El Zarzo was taken forcibly and carried away by an Indian yesterday at dusk from the beach below the calabozo. It is further averred that Señor Escobar has gone in search of them."

Saavedra revolved this for a little space; he was not one to make gossip with an underling.

"Señor Escobar was concerned for the lad's soul," he said at last, "and his zeal outrunneth discretion. But strange that an Indian should by force carry off another Indian, especially a lad."

"Especially," said the secretary, "if a lad." The turn of his voice upon the supposition was slight but pregnant. Saavedra put out his hand. His instincts were quick; perhaps he had seen Fages at mischief before now.

"Demetrio, Demetrio, Demetrio," he said, three times, and the first was the cry of his heart

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to be spared unhappy news, the second was a priestly reproof against malice, the last a command.

The secretary understood that he was now free to deliver all Delfina's adventure, a little colored by the tone of the minds through which it passed. The shame of the whole relation he took for granted; as, in fact, did the Padre; as any one of that time must have done. Saavedra was both hurt and sick; such duplicity, — to make himself a warrant for the girl's lying at his door, the pretense of concern for El Zarzo's soul; let alone his sacred calling, the boy's breeding should have saved him from such an offense to hospitality, — the case for Escobar was black enough without that. Walking out in the garden with his deep concern, he passed the hut of Marta, and paused before it.

"My daughter," he said, "how long have you known that El Zarzo is a girl?"

The woman looked up with something quick and apprehensive in her eyes. "Padre, from the beginning," she said; going on defensively, answering the rebuke of his gaze, "she was newly

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from the hills, she brought me news of my son. I had not seen him for two years," she finished simply.

The Padre turned away, pacing slowly between the vineyard and the pears, baffled and hurt at heart.

The next day, with no further inquiry about Escobar and no message left for him, Saavedra started toward Santa Cruz, to visit the missions that lay northward. By so doing he missed meeting with Delgado, who came up from San Antonio two days later with the young wife of Escobar in his train.

Valentin Delgado could be trusted not to miss a pretty girl anywhere, much more if he found her where he had looked to find only priests, a corporal, a private soldier or two, and some hundreds of Indians. He saw her first in the evening glow walking in the pomegranate path of the Mission San Antonio where he had put in for the night. A light wind shaped her clothing to her young curves as she walked, the rebozo had fallen back from her head, her hands were folded at her throat. Delgado arranged his cloak, set

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his hat a-cock, and sought Padre Tomás. In an affair of ladies he judged the round priest the better man. But what he heard put all thoughts of gallantry out of his mind. The slim crescent beauty was no señorita, but the Señora Escobar. That was the name that pricked all Delgado's wits forward. "If you do not find her," said Lebecque, "ask Escobar."

The whole story of the virgin marriage gushed from Padre Tomás of the Stripes like a living spring, a strange thing to tell and a new ear to hear it, following on a comfortable meal! He had not enjoyed himself so much for a long time. The hour enticed to companionable talk; Indians in the cloister began to croon a hymn. The young straight figure paced up and down by the pomegranate hedge that stood out sharply against a saffron sky. Delgado drained the Padre dry of news, learned how the girl was no maid, being married, and no wife, being deserted at the church door; went so far as to be sure that the Padre was sure the marriage was a cloak for no unchastity, but no farther. Padre Tomás knew nothing back of the hour when Isidro and the

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girl came riding out of the wood; or, if he knew it, kept it under the seal of the confessional. The young man did not, therefore, open his own budget at that time. He must know how Escobar came by the girl; was she the same reared by Peter Lebecque's Indian wife in the hut of the Grapevine, called, because of her pricking tongue, "the Briar"? The Padre helped him there.

"And she had not even a name, this beautiful one; yes, she is beautiful; even I, a poor brother of St. Francis, can see that; so we wrote in the register the name of her foster father, Lebecque, nothing more. The young man was to bring a name on his return; that was the purpose of his going, that and some business with the Father President. So I understood. But it was most irregular; Padre Carrasco was of the opinion that I should have withheld the sacrament. But I hold that since the girl was plainly a Christian she must have had a name, though it was for the time mislaid, as you might say."

Still Don Valentin kept his thought,—took a whole night, in fact, to set it out in his mind. By morning he had it shaped thus: that, not to

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be balked of all reward, he would take the girl to her father; and, as for the unconsummated marriage, there might be more doing. The girl was still her father's ward, — under age, married without his consent, — ravishment, married out of her name, — false pretense, only half married at that; no knowing what might come of it. The first thing was to get her out of the way of Escobar, who deserved it for being a fool.

Soon after the hour of compline he set Padre Tomás's ears tingling with more news than he had heard during his incumbency of San Antonio. Here, as at Peter Lebecque's, he told his story very much to the point, and so convincingly that within half an hour he had the girl in to hear it in the Padre's parlor, where the chief furniture was plaster saints in niches blackened by candle smoke. She came stilly, keeping close by the wall, a little pinched about the mouth, but with level eyes, young limbs, lithe and quick, unaccustomed to the trammels of her dress. The corporal's wife had stuck a pomegranate blossom in the smoky folds of her hair; it served to warm a little the pure pallor of her skin.

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"Eh, come, come, child!" cried Padre Tomás de las Peñas when he heard her in the corridor; "come and see what we have for you; come and hear a tale. Ah, ah! Our Lady and St. Francis have been working for you. Is it a name you lack? Well, you shall have it, and not only a name, a most honorable name, but a family, a father in short, a notable and worthy parent, and not only a father, but a fortune, estates, immense! Ah, all this for a beautiful young woman who has already a handsome husband!" Delgado looked at him rather sourly for this. The girl simply stared; the breath came through her parted lips like a child's.

"Sit down, sit down!" cried the Padre; "you shall hear." She sat on the edge of the carved bench boyishly. The corporal's wife trailed in her wake as a dueña, plumped down beside her, untangled a fat arm from her rebozo, and held one of the girl's hands. It was doubtful if Jacinta understood all the explanations, but she answered their questions plainly enough. She was the French trapper's foster child. She had known that the Indian woman was not her mo-

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ther, but she would always call her so. It was her mother's wish that she should go dressed as a boy. In that fashion she had left Cañada de las Uvas a month back. So far she was docile and apt, but if they questioned her upon her life in Monterey, and how she came to be riding into San Antonio de Padua with Señor Escobar from an easterly direction, when Monterey lay north and west, then she fell dumb. Her Indian training wiped all vestige of expression from her face, set her eyes roving past the plaster saints and the candles, out of the deep casement toward the Mission fields. Curious as Delgado and the Padre both were, they had to let her be. The young man, watching, thought her not so much cold as childish, immature, a great beauty, and plainly a Castro. The puzzle of the last two days' work had drawn proud lines of pain such as he knew in the Comandante's face, knit the fine brows, and tightened the small mouth. The likeness came out wonderfully when one looked for it. But Don Valentin thought her what she was not, timid and awed by his splendid appearance. She looked not so much at him as at his em-

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broideries and the turquoise in the cord of his sombrero. He thought her dazzled when, in fact, the little god of love had made her blind. The young man took a high hand, — the part became him, — showed letters from Castro delegating parental authority, required that the girl be delivered to him and by him to the Comandante. The Padre boggled at that; the lady had been left expressly in his charge by her husband. Husband, ah, husband, is it?

"A word in your ear, Padre; how can the young man be a husband and he a priest? If not actually beginning his novitiate, at least dedicate, bound." Delgado had heard that story at Monterey. "Did he not tell you at parting that he had business with the Father President? Ay, truly. What sort of a husband is it that leaves his wife at the altar, tell me that? In fact, the fellow dared go no farther." Under such skillful handling the marriage assumed the proportions of a crime with the Padre as accomplice. The young man checked off the points of offense as you have heard them. The Padre polished his rosy countenance until it shone with perplexity,

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but it came to this, that he would do nothing without consulting his confrère Reyes Carrasco. Padre Carrasco being at that moment in the farthest precincts marking out cattle for slaughter, the business hung in suspense until the evening of that day, as was in keeping with the movement of that time, nobody suffering inconvenience on that account.

Padre Carrasco was as shrewd as dry. He came in with the skirt of his cassock tucked under his girdle, and gave it as his opinion that the lady's husband could not but be gratified by his wife's good fortune, and seeing he had already gone to the capital it could do no harm for her to meet him there; but, nevertheless, the lady should have her own free will to go or stay. Jacinta, when she was called to counsel, said very quietly that she would go to Monterey. It seemed to her the quickest way to Escobar.

"Señora," said Don Valentin on the road, edging his horse as near to her as the way allowed, "let me beg you to draw your rebozo closer about your face, otherwise I do not know

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how we shall get to Monterey; your beauty sends my wits astray."

"In that case," said Doña Jacinta, "you had best ride a little distance forward."

"Useless," he said, pranking his horse across the trail; "the music of your voice draws me back again."

"So we shall get on faster if I do no talking," said she.

"Ah, cruel, cruel!" he sighed.

The lady was out of tune with such pointed blandishments. At the crossing of a brook he offered her drink from his own silver cup, though the strictest behavior owed the first attention to Señora Romero, the dueña.

"Drink, most beautiful," said the young man, "and no other shall drink after you."

"It would be a pity," said she, "on that account, to spoil so excellent a vessel." And she waited until the corporal's wife had done with her gourd.

"It is not for nothing you were called the Briar," said Delgado, and he put up his cup. Finding he made no way with her by compli-

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ments, he left off teasing his horse, and talked of the family of Ramirez, their estates and fame, to which she listened with patience and collected looks. He had a guitar in his pack, a necessary part of a young gentleman's baggage, which he fingered skillfully, letting the bridle rein hang on the saddle-bow. It was a warm day livened by a damp wind. Westward a bank of roundish cloud reflected a many-tinted radiance from the sea. The rim of his sombrero made a half moon of shadow on his face as he tilted up his chin for singing; the light warmed his throat ruddily and glinted on the jewel in his hat. He sang an aria called "The Dove," and "La Nocha esta Serena," but got no notice from the lady until he struck into a little tender air of absent love, which Escobar had used to hum wordlessly under his breath. That fluttered her, as Don Valentin was quick to see, so he rode, singing, while the cavalcade jogged forward to the twanging of his guitar, well pleased with himself and revolving many things.

The trail ran from San Antonio de Padua to Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, with a branch run-

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ning off toward Monterey, uniting again at Santa Cruz. Delgado, who had reasons of his own for prolonging the way, chose to go by way of Soledad, and Doña Jacinta made no objection.