XXIII

HIDDEN WATERS

URBANO, captain of the rag-tag of tribesmen, whose right hand was Mascado, was not the stuff of which new civilizations are made. That was about all there was behind his defection from Santa Clara. He and some dozens of his following wished not to live always in one place, wear clothes, marry one wife and stay by her; preferred to gather wild grapes rather than plant vineyards, to set snares for the wild fowl of the Tulares rather than raise barley for clucking hens; wished to have the wind on their faces, the stars over them, the turf under foot. There were some savages in his fellowship, chiefly mestizos, begotten upon Indian women by drunken sailors or convicts sent into the country to serve as soldiers; but of scalping, tortures, massacres, all the bloody entourage of traditional Indian warfare, they knew as little as of the

Christian virtues. They hated holy water, houses, field labor, stocks, the whipping-post, the sound of a church bell; and as much as the Padres stood for these things, hated them also. But they had really not much grievance. Some of them had been detained in the Missions against their will, and that is an offense upon any grounds. Some had been hunted by soldiers in hills where their fathers were mesne lords, and whipped for seeking every man's right to live in what place best pleases him; that was the full extent of imposition. The Missions never appropriated to their own use one half the lands claimed by the tribes they baptized, and since the Padres preferred raising cattle to hunting deer, the wild game increased without check. The remnant of the tribes, having more ground to hunt in than they could well cover, were not happy in it. They missed the excitement of tribal feasts and dances, feuds and border wars, the stir of a numerous people in large land.

So for sport they took to cattle-stealing, relishing the taste of Mission beef, and coveting the knives, beads, and ammunition which the Rus-

sians paid them for hides, pleased, no doubt, to harry the Padres on any account. Possibly they dreamed, as their numbers were augmented by success, of driving out the Franciscans and restoring the old order, for no better reason than that they wished it so. Beginning in a small way, running off two or three head of stock at a time, they grew in impertinences until they had planned and executed in full force the raid on Soledad, and so brought out the Comandante fuming from Monterey, and the ruin of their company.

Urbano, *El Capitan*, had deserved his election. He was shrewd, hearty, temperate, and expedient. Mascado, who had joined him to slake a private vengeance, ended by giving him a full measure of regard. The expedition had come through the hills in open order, not too carefully, since there were none stirring in the region to carry alarm to the Missions, and with so little soldierly attention to their rear that Isidro Escobar and Arnaldo the tracker had come well within their lines before discovery. Even then, had the two men given no evidence of suspicion, of having noted the camps and the numbers of them,

they might have passed without hindrance; and Arnaldo's ruse of lying down as if for the night's sleep within cry of their sentries had almost served, would have answered, perhaps, to throw off pursuit; but word of their passing had reached Mascado, and acted as an irritant to the unhealed scratches he had brought away from Las Chimineas.

Mascado had not two thoughts in his head when he set himself upon the trail of Escobar. He followed it as a hound follows the slot of a stag, merely pursuing, and whetting pursuit by the freshness of the trail. He wished to come up with the young man, to take him, and to take him by his own hand; to wreak himself not merely on the inert body, as he might have done when Isidro lay asleep under the oak, but upon his mind and spirit. Mascado had a good hour of gloating as he sat by the sleepers, feeding his jealous rage by every point of the other's advantage: race, beauty, fine clothing, the lordly air, —yet he held himself the better man; so his musing hate advanced by leaps until it burned through the curtain of oblivion and woke Escobar from sleep.

Mascado should really have killed him as he lay, for no sooner was the caballero awake than his spirit was up to cope with the mestizo's and beat it down. In the first of their encounter Isidro had saved Mascado's life from the buck that had him down, and at their next meeting, which was really of Mascado's own provoking, had offered him fair battle which had been taken unfairly. The sense of these things turned the scale a little between them. Isidro, as he looked into his own weapon, yawned to cover any amazement, looked the mestizo over, looked up the trail and saw a dozen of Urbano's men come riding on stolen ponies, and turned back affable and smiling.

"*Buenas dias*, Mascado," he said, "how did you get loose?"

"Eh, have you not heard?" said Arnaldo, taking the cue. "One beast helps another out of a trap; his brother the coyote came in the night and gnawed his bonds."

Mascado flinched at the insult that he, who was *El Capitan's* best man, should be called kin to the dog of the wilderness; but without replying got them up and to the trail, had them bound

and placed on their own horses brought up by the riders, and so to Urbano, since he could not at that moment think of any better thing to do with them. He would have liked to meet Escobar man to man as they had met at Las Chimineas with the girl looking on; then, — but he blinked the possibility of ending as the other encounter had ended, — against all odds he would not miss his stroke another time. Urbano, however, would allow no outrage. He understood too well the advantage of a hostage, and perhaps an advocate, in case of evil days. Mascado would have kept the captives trussed like fowl, but *El Capitan* had a trick worth two of that, — he put the young man upon parole. Urbano was a man of middle years, and understood the ways of the *gente de razon* much as he understood those of deer and elk. To a caballero of Isidro's make-up he realized that his word held where no bonds would, so he was allowed to move about the camp of the renegades hardly constrained, but making no attempt to escape. Arnaldo, whose ingenuity showed him a thousand expedients, fretted continually.

"Let us be off," he said; "we have affairs in Monterey. What is your word to these swine?"

"*No hay cuidado*," said Isidro; "swine they are, but it is the word of an Escobar."

There was one other besides Arnaldo the tracker in the camp of the renegades who found himself put out of calculation by Escobar's devotion to his parole. That was Urbano's right hand, Mascado. Owing his life and some courtesy to Escobar, the mestizo admitted that he needed a provocation to the attack, — outbreak or attempted escape, or, at the least, an occasion for holding him in less esteem, since, though he schemed night and day to make good the humiliation of Las Chimineas upon the other's body, circumstances were in a fair way of making them friends.

Urbano's men had come coastward as far as a certain cover of dense forest, heading up among the hills, fortunately situated for defense, and admitting of raids from it to Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, or Soledad, but far enough from these to allow of such twists and turnings of retreat as would throw pursuit off the trail. There

was not one of the renegades but believed himself better at such ancient crafts than any Mission-bred Indian of the lot.

The main body of the cattle thieves did not go at once to the rendezvous, but spread abroad in the country about Soledad, expecting communication with a disgruntled neophyte within its walls. Meantime a dozen of the less adventurous fighting men and a few women, coming on slowly behind the company, established a camp and base of supplies at Hidden Waters. The place lay toward the upper side of a triangular cape of woods that spread by terraces down from the highest ridges of those parts. The wood was fenced on two sides; south by the Arroyo Seco, boulder-strewn wash of an intermittent river; north by a wide open draw, almost a valley, a loose sandy soil affording foothold only for coarse, weedy grass. Eastward the redwoods thinned out toward the high, windy top of the ridge, passing into spare, slanting shrubs.

About the middle of this tongue of forest, one of the terraces, which promised from its approaches to be exactly like all others, hollowed

abruptly to a deep basin of the extent of two hundred varas. On its farther rim a considerable spring welled insensibly out of a rock, and, after circling the hollow, slipped tinkling under boulders, to reappear on a lower terrace a runnel of noisy water. Scattered over the basin, islands of angular rock lifted up clumps of redwood and pine to the level of the unbroken terrace, and gave it the look of a continuous wood. Tortuous manzanita clung about the shelving rim and masked the hollow; no trail led into it; the Indians saw to that; more than a rod away it would be scarcely suspected. Only from the slope above, looking down, one might have glimpses of wet flowery meadow between the tall sequoias, but be puzzled how to come at it.

In this pit of pleasantness, then, the renegades made their camp of refuge, there to bring their prisoners and wounded, or to lie quiet until pursuit had blown by. Escobar, however, was not at first placed at Hidden Waters. He was, in fact, on the night his wife and Delgado's party rested at Soledad, bound to a madroño tree not far from the Mission inclosure, waiting the result of the

raid. He made out so much of Urbano's plan, that the cattle were to be parted in three bands, one to go to the rendezvous at Hidden Waters, the other two by devious ways to go east and east till they came to the wickiups of home, where the women and children awaited them, where at the worst they might be driven into the marshes of the great river beyond any pursuit. Escobar, believing his wife still at San Antonio, and fretting at his delay, was driven with the third part of the cattle to the camp in the triangular wood of sequoias, Mascado heading that expedition. But the renegades missed reckoning with their own savagery. The detachment having one band of cattle in care turned in at Las Chimineas and camped there until they had killed a beef and stuffed themselves with it, being so overtaken by the twelve soldiers from Monterey. Themselves they hid in the rocks among the gray chimneys, but the cattle they could not hide. The soldiers found these in the meadow, and driving them down, drew the Indians from their holes. Then both sides smelled powder, saw their dead, and called it war.

The first move of the renegades was to draw into Hidden Waters to council, and await the return of their men who had gone eastward with the remaining cattle. This gave Castro time to get his troops in order, and Escobar and the mestizo to become a little acquainted.

Isidro, always under necessity of keeping a keen edge on his spirit by trying it on another, used Mascado, who could no more keep away from him than an antelope from a snare. Escobar mocked him and his new dignities, frothed his anger white, or cleared it away with nimble turns of speech, and Mascado was always coming back to see if he could not learn the trick, or at least bear himself more to advantage. It was very pleasant there at Hidden Waters, the days soft and languorously warm, the nights scented and cool. The camp lay on an island of redwoods raised a few feet above the rank, blossoming meadow. The litter of brown needles looked not to have known a foot for a hundred years. Waning lilies stood up among the coarse deep fern; the wild rose bushes hung full of shining scarlet fruit. Deer went by in troops; great

nodding, antlered stags came and looked into the hollow with gentle, curious eyes; a bear came poking about the half-ripened manzanita berries on the rim; hot noons were censed by the odorous drip of honey from the hiving rocks. Scouting parties came and went softly, keeping watch on the soldiers who had drawn off to wait reinforcements from the Presidio. The camp needed little guarding; one man might keep watch of the whole south side of the forest, fenced by the mile-wide open gully, over which not a crow could flap unspied upon. On the north, sentries were posted among the rocks, where the river, only such during the brief torrent of winter rains, now ran no farther than the point of fan-shaped wood. Higher up it showed broad, shallow pools strung on a slender thread of brown water.

Then came word of the Comandante's sally from Monterey, and Urbano kept away from the camp, beginning a game of hide and seek to draw the soldiers and all suspicion away from Hidden Waters, and tire them in the fruitless hills. Then, Mascado being left with the rem-

nant to keep the camp, Isidro would make sport of him, gambling every day afresh with Arnaldo for the few coins he had in his pocket.

"Why do you stay so close in the camp, Mascado?" he would say. "Is it because you know the Father President is looking for you?" Or if the mestizo went abroad in the wood, "Were you looking for birches, Mascado? They grow better at Carmelo, I am told, and no doubt the Padre has one peeled for you."

"At least they have no right to whip me," said Mascado, stung to retort. "My father was of the *gente de razon*, though because the Church meddled not at my begetting they hold me as one of the Mission."

"Is it so, señor?" said Escobar, with exaggerated amazement. "Then I am no longer at a loss to account for your capacity and discernment." Then, human interest coming uppermost, "Was it for that you left the Mission?"

"No," said Mascado; "it was for leaving I was whipped. Much good may it do them! I left because, being a free man, I wished to live freely."

This was a sense of the situation which, Escobar recalled, Zarzito had expressed. It seemed to him rather a singular one for an Indian.

"In the Mission," he said, "you were clothed and fed?"

Mascado grunted. "You also, señor, have eaten well; do you wish nothing more?"

What Escobar wished, very badly, was to get back to his wife, but that would not bear saying. He began to take an interest in Mascado on his own account, and took occasion to talk with him oftener as men talk with men, though with a quizzing tone; and Mascado, being never able to keep up with his nimble tongue, paid him an odd kind of respect for it, though it also augmented his hate. One thing that drew him continually within reach of Escobar's tongue was the hope that he might drop a hint of the Briar; but Isidro, because she was now his wife, and for several reasons he could not very well define, would not bring her into the conversation. That did not prevent her being much upon his mind. He wanted her if for no other reason than to share the jest against Mascado or the zest of

this entertainment of events. If she were but stretched beside him on the brown litter, — of course that could not be since she was a girl, — but if the boy El Zarzo lay there beside him, it would give new point to his invention; also they could watch the squirrels come and go, or read the fortunes of Urbano in the faces of his men. And in the early dark, when a musky smell arose from the crushed fern, they might hear the whisper of the water and piece out the sense of sundry chirrupings and rustlings in the trees, — and of course she might very well be lying there and no harm, for was she not his wife? Then he bethought himself that there were sundry matters upon which he should have questioned her more closely. It became at once important to him to know how she thought upon this matter or that. He had been wrong to leave her in ignorance at San Antonio, believing herself only Peter Lebecque's foster lad when she was a great lady and an heiress. No question he owed her explanation for that. He began to hold long conversations with her in his mind, in which everything conduced to the best understanding.

With this he occupied much of his time, for

though he fretted at the enforced hiatus in his affairs, he was not greatly alarmed, even when Mascado gloomed on him, and now and then a wounded man came into camp and gave him black looks as being of the party that dealt the wound. For it began to appear that Castro was not to be drawn off from making an end of the freebooters. He owed something to destiny for the turns she had served him; he wanted nothing so much as to get back to his daughter; he had his adieux to make to the office of Comandante, — reasons enough if a soldier had wanted any for pushing a campaign. He had scouts as cunning as any of Urbano's, and, having an inkling of the camp at Hidden Waters, began to push steadily in that direction. The renegades had more than one brush with him, and when Escobar caught a presage of defeat in the air he left off bantering Mascado. It was a consideration the mestizo felt himself incapable of under the same conditions, and though he held Escobar in a little less esteem as being so womanish as not to twit an enemy in distress, he, curiously enough, began to like him a little on that account.