

## XXIV

### THE LADY'S SECOND FLIGHT



O softly, dear lady," said Marta, "the horses are not far. In that clump of willows José should have left them. It is wet under foot; stay you here."

The night was soft black, woolly with sea fog; under foot was the chug of marsh water livened by croaking toads, overhead some strips of starry sky between pale wisps of cloud. From the willow thicket where the horses champed upon their heavy bits rose the odor of crushed spikenard.

"Mount here," said the Indian woman; "I must find a boulder or a stump; I am not so young. The horses are not much, but I had to give that José two reals to get them. He said the thing had a secret look and lay upon his conscience. Ts! st! Two reals' worth! Can you manage without a saddle?"

### THE LADY'S SECOND FLIGHT

"I have seldom used one," said the girl.

"Now," said Marta, "go lightly across the field until we are safe from the town; then we find the road and hard riding."

Hereabout the ground was swampy and sucked at the horses' feet. All lights were out in Monterey; to the left they heard the rustle of the tide along the foot of a hanging wall of fog. The riders kept to the turf for an hour; it seemed longer. The fog cut in behind them, flanked them right and left, folded them in a pit, at the top of which they could see some specks of light pricked in the velvet blackness.

Once on the road the horses struck into a jiggling trot, which is the pace for long journeys as a tearing gallop is for short ones. Jacinta rocked to the motion, and drew deep breaths of freedom and relief.

"What an excellent beast a horse is!" she said. "How long shall we be upon the road?"

"Until we are both well weary," said Marta.

The girl swung herself for pure delight from one side of the horse to the other.

"That will be long, then," she said. "How



## ISIDRO

good boy's clothes feel again! I doubt I shall ever grow to like skirts."

"I see no use in them myself," said the older woman; "it was not so in my mother's time, but is a custom of the Missions. No doubt it is an offense to God to look on a priest or a woman and know that they have two legs."

"I would that the moon shone, — then we might try a gallop," said Jacinta.

"With a moon," said Marta, "we could hardly have come so easily off from Monterey."

The girl was alive with the joy of motion and the freedom of the road. She had a thousand speculations, questions, and surmises, but got very little out of the older woman, whose thoughts were all of their errand and how to accomplish it. After a time Jacinta began to come under the spell of her taciturnity. The damp of the fog penetrated to the marrow and dripped from them like rain. They rode and rode. It should have been about one of the clock, and a sea wind cutting the fog to ribbons, when they turned from the highway into a deer trail, followed that until they came to a creek, turned up it and kept the

## THE LADY'S SECOND FLIGHT

middle of the stream for an hour. The horses needed urging for that work, — the water was cold and rushing, the creek bed shifty with loose cobbles. It was necessary to go cautiously, to break no smallest bough of leaning birch and alder and so leave a trail.

"For we will surely be followed," said the Indian woman.

From the creek they led the horses up by a stony place to firmer ground. Jacinta was stiff with cold, slipped and stumbled.

"Have a good heart, my Briar," said Marta, "it is not long to rest." She chafed the girl's hands between her palms; the walking relieved the numbness of the limbs. Another hour began to show a faint glow in the east. They had come clear of the fog, though the drenching grass showed it had been before them in the night. When the peaks of the high hills eastward began to show rosily light, Marta grew talkative and cheerful.

"It is not far, dear lady, it is near at hand," she said. "I remember the place very well; a safe hollow under hanging rocks. It has a blasted



## ISIDRO

pine before it. I was there with my father when I was a child, and that was the first time of my being in the hills, for I was Mission-born. My father, though he was captain of his people, had seen that the God of the Padres was greater than his god, and what they wrought was good; therefore he was baptized, and all his people. But he was a man grown, and it is ill learning when the youth is spent, so it irked him to live always in one place, and because he was chief to have one say to him, Stay, and he should stay. So when I was grown to the height of his thigh he took me and my mother and came away in the night. It was the spring of the year, about the time when roots began to be good to eat and wood doves were calling all the smoky days. We came to this place where we will soon be, most beautiful, and it was all set about with flowers by the spring, and had a pleasant smell. Never will I forget the smell of the young wood in the spring. But it came up a storm of rain and wind, and my father saw that God was against him, for it was not the time of storms. Then it increased with thunder, and fire out of heaven struck a great pine in front

## THE LADY'S SECOND FLIGHT

of where we lay. It ran like a snake into the earth, with a noise so that we were all as one dead. Then my father was afraid, and he took my mother and me back to Carmelo. So because he came back of his own accord, and because he was of great influence, he was not whipped. That was in Serra's time."

"I have heard Señor Escobar speak of him; he was a great saint, was he not?"

"God knows; he was a great man; for though my father had seen the miracle of the blasted pine which was performed for a warning, he could in no way shut his mind to the call of the wild. So at the time of the year when he was weary of his life because of it, he went to the Padre Serra and begged a little leave to go into the hills, loose and free. Otherwise he would be drawn by the evil of his heart to run away and bring great scandal on the community, and on himself the wrath of God. Now look you, it may be that the Padre was a saint, for my father has told me that no sooner had the word passed between them than he felt the evil go out of him like sickness. And when Serra had considered



## ISIDRO

the matter, he sent my father apart into the hills to gather herbs; and so every year. At the end of a month my father came again to Carmelo, and there was no further talk of running away. Afterward my father took me with him and taught me the virtues of all plants. Padre Serra wished the knowledge not to die out among his people. He told my father once he had been cured of an ulcer by the use of Indian herbs. That was how I came to know this place, for as often as we came we rested here the first night, and saw the blasted pine pointing like the finger of God."

It was full moon when they came to the place of hanging rocks and found deer tracks in the soft mud by the spring. An evergreen oak grew out of a cleft of the rocks and, spreading downward, formed a screen. Here they cooked a meal, and when Jacinta had eaten she stretched her limbs and slept with her head on the Indian woman's knee. Marta waked her in an hour, and though the night's excitement and hard riding left her stiff and fagged she set her face and rode steadily through the blazing sun.

They took some degree of caution as they

## THE LADY'S SECOND FLIGHT

went, looking out from every high ridge, but saw nothing moving, neither Indians nor soldiers. They watched too, as they rose on the crest of the range, the white Mission road like a snake among the pines, but saw no shadow of pursuit upon it. The news of their flight was not confirmed at Monterey until mid-morning of that day.

They rode without talking, drank at springs, ate what they had with them, and though the girl bent heavily forward on her horse with sleep, Marta allowed no rest until four of the afternoon, when they had come to a little meadow beset with trees, which she judged safe, and affording pasture for the horses. They rested here for the night.

Thereafter they had no thought of interference from Monterey, but bent all upon getting to the camp of the renegades. The night's rest put them in better trim for what was before them. Jacinta had times of trembling, falling sick and afraid, thinking how she would present herself to Escobar in boy's dress when his expressed wish was that she should remain at San Antonio in



## ISIDRO

proper guise. She wished to talk of him, but Marta would hear only of Mascado. Nothing strange, she said, that he should take to the mountains and freedom from the law, for he was begotten in lawlessness in these same hills. It was a famine time in the Mission, when the old corn was exhausted and the new corn just springing in the field, and the men of the Mission were sent out to seek their meat from God.

"I had come," she said, "with Manuel and his wife and a party of hunters, she to cook and I to gather roots. It was a golden time, and the quail went up in pairs to the nesting. Hereabouts we fell in with a party of soldiers from Santa Clara hunting for runaways from their Mission. Mascado's father was a soldier. It is true I was taken by force, but my heart consented. It was mating weather and we both young. When all was known the Padre would have had us to marry, but it was discovered he had a wife already. Santa Maria! it was no doubt a great sin, but my heart consented."

By this time, although they had seen no Indians, they knew well enough by the stillness of

## THE LADY'S SECOND FLIGHT

the wood that they had come within their borders. No deer cropped by the water courses, no beasts larger than the squirrels were stirring or abroad, rabbits cowered trembling in the thickets, or ran like gray flashes in the meadow, proof enough that they had been lately hunted. The gossiping jays let them pass with no outcry, sign that men were no strange sight to them. Marta would be often getting down from her horse to study signs unguessed by the girl, muttering to herself or breaking out with snatches of reminiscence of the youth of Mascado. Her mind dwelt more and more upon him as they went through the wood, tiptoe with expectancy. Once they made sure of an Indian moving at a distance parallel to their course, possibly spying upon them, but they could not come up with him nor get speech. Here the forest grew more openly, and they rode abreast, steering by certain points of the hills, but keeping a sharp lookout for signs. They had so arranged their course that they would strike the corner of the forest where the Indians had their camp at about midway of one side of the triangle. To do this they had to cross the stony open space



## ISIDRO

that fenced it from the rest of the tree-covered country, at that point nearly a mile of tedious riding.

It was while they were picking a way among broken boulders that they heard afar off, toward the point of the fan-shaped wood, the noise of firing. The shots came faintly and confused, mere popping and bluster, and held on at the same rate for as long as the horses stumbled in the stony waste, and at last drew near and sharper. But it seemed to them then and afterward that they had a sound different from all other shots, biting and waspish. It seemed as if a prescience of disaster settled upon them as they entered the rustling tongue of woods. The light was low and came slanting and yellowly through the pines. Fragments of lost winds went mournfully among the trees. The two women pressed close together, crowding the horses on toward Hidden Waters. They had not the material for guesses or surmises. The firing had fallen off, but not the sense of battle, which rested on them like a thing palpable. The common noises of the wood were of ominous presage. Suddenly Marta laid a hand

## THE LADY'S SECOND FLIGHT

on the other's bridle; the two horses were neck and neck; from the close thickets before them an Indian broke running, his bonnet of feathers torn by the hanging boughs, the streaks of paint on his body smudged with blood; his gun trailed uncocked from his hand. Beyond him were three others bent and running, with broken bows. Then one plunged through the buckthorn, panting, swinging a maimed arm, welling blood from a shoulder wound. His legs crumpled under him from weakness, but he sprang up with a bound and died in mid air, dropping limply back to earth.

"Beaten, beaten," said Marta. Her voice was a mere whisper, but it took on a tinge of a savage wail. The place seemed full of flying Indians. They came in groups, sometimes supporting the wounded, but mostly these were left to themselves, trailing the blood of their hurts across the sod. A panic of haste laid hold of the two women; they pressed the horses, but kept with the main body of the fleeing, dreading as much to be alone ahead of them as behind. It was frank and open flight; where the trees parted to



## ISIDRO

a kind of swale or draw, smooth and treeless, the lines of refugees converged, making for the easiest path toward Hidden Waters. It was here the women had first sight of Mascado. He came out of the forest on their right, fit to burst with running, holding a spear wound in his side, the blood of which ran down between his fingers. He was sick and reeling with fatigue. Marta saw him first. Jacinta had no eyes but for the trail, no fears but for Escobar. The Indian woman's first impulse was to get down from her horse in the common extremity of haste when it seems nothing carries so fast as one's own feet. She went ploughing across the meadow, pulling the horse, panting, not sparing breath to cry out; he not observing her, but running with his head down like a dog; both forging forward, but slantwise of the swale, so that they came together at the head of the open where it merged again into the wood. They bumped together as not being able to check the speed of their flight, and Marta had her arms about him to steady him from the shock. He shook her off, not yet recognizing his mother, and at that moment Jacinta, who had

## THE LADY'S SECOND FLIGHT

followed Marta's lead without understanding it, drew up and dismounted beside them.

Mascado shook the mist of wounds and battle out of his eyes and saw her there in her boy's dress, the same slim lad of the Grapevine, rounded and ripened to the woman of his desire. It flashed on him that she had sought him in the forest as the partridge comes shyly to the drumming of her mate, come of her own accord to the call of the tribesman, his, *his*, and the savage in him cried with delight; from the consciousness of the finer strain that lay fallow in him swept up a flood of self-abasement that made his love clean for her handling. Then all went down before the common, curious wonder of her glance. He threw open his hands with the motion of defeat.

"Son, son, you are hurt!" cried Marta. The blood welled from his side, and he drooped downward, grunting. Marta eased him to the ground, tore strips from her dress and bound up the gash, a lance thrust, Jacinta fetching water from a creek that babbled mindlessly among the grass. The act and her quiet rendering of it