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"It is a hurt fox at the water's edge," answered Isidro.

"It is a woeful sound," she said.

"Do not hear, then ;" he sheltered her head within his arm.

The cloud of smoke passed a little from them.

"I would Marta were with us," said she.

"Am I not enough, Heart's Dearest?"

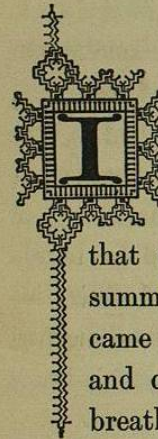
"You will not leave me," breathed the girl.

"Never while my life lasts," said he.

Presently he raised her face between his hands and kissed her with a tender passion. The tall buck stooped above them and breathed lightly on their hair.

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SIDRO roused out of a doze, leaning against the buck, to hear the slow soft trickle of the water that had come back to its borders, sure sign that the fire had raged out on the bald summit of the hill. The night wind which came from the sea blew up the arroyo and cleared the smoke ; it was possible to breathe freely. He could see through the murk a fringe of red fire outlining the bulk of the hills. Heat and smoke still rose from the burnt district ; logs snapped asunder in glowing coals ; tall trunks of standing trees burned feebly at the top like half-extinguished torches. In pits and hollows, where two or three had fallen together, the fire still ripped and flared.

The Indians had drawn out of the water and slept on the warm stones, but the wild things



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looked not to have moved all night, their eyes were all open and a-gaze. The air lightened a little to approaching dawn.

Jacinta slept on his breast, standing deep in the water; her face made a pale disk in the dark. The heat, the suffocation, the acrid smoke, the tepid, ash-impregnated water full of crowding men and beasts and small charred bodies, the intolerable tedium of the night, had no more poignant sense for Escobar than the feeling of the soft young body within the hollow of his arms. If he had not felt the want of a wife before he felt it now. It was something to comfort and protect, something to wear against his heart to keep it warm.

The sky lightened behind its veil of smoke. The sun rose above the ranges, shorn of all his rays. The Indians began to stir; Jacinta woke.

Her first inquiry was for Marta. Isidro avoided it, drawing her out of the pool to dry their clothing on the still heated boulders.

"You said that you saw her come safely out of the burning," she insisted.

"She came, yes," said Escobar, driven to man-

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nish bluntness by distress. "But when she saw Mascado was not with us she ran back."

"Back there! Into the fire? Marta?" The girl started up for an instant as if she would have gone after her. "And you let her go? You let her go?"

Isidro took her by the shoulders.

"I had you to see to; it was done all in a moment; no one could have prevented her. She had something, a candle I think, which she took from her bosom."

"I know; a blessed candle from the church at Carmelo. She burned one always for Mascado before San Antonio and the Child."

"She ran with it among the trees. No doubt San Antonio had her in hand. The flames seemed to part to let her through."

"Oh, but you should not have let her go!" cried Jacinta; "you should not have let her go." She sobbed dryly; the heat and exhaustion had stopped the source of tears. The girl's grief was genuine; Isidro let it have way. Marta had been the first to show her tenderness since her foster-mother had died.



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They sat down with their backs to a boulder, hand in hand, doubtful what the Indians would do to them. They had little matter for conversation; now and then Jacinta gave a shudder and a shaking sob and Isidro pressed her hand.

The Indians got together. Most of them were scorched along their naked backs, many were badly burned. Including Marta, five of their party had failed to win through. They did not talk much. One of them had killed a deer with his knife where it stood beside him in the pool, and they ate of it in the same sombre silence. Isidro, seeing no motion in his direction, cut strips of the flesh with his own knife, and toasted them on the coals for himself and the girl. After food the courage of them all revived. The blueness of smoke hung thick in the air, relieved a little above the cañon of the stream, which made a little draft of wind.

The renegades, with no debate, but as if by the concerted instinct which sets a herd of deer in motion, began to move upstream, taking with them what was left of the meat. They walked in the track of the water and gingerly among

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the hot stones of its borders. They looked not once nor spoke to Escobar. Upstream and over the blackened ridge lay a safe green country full of game, and beyond that was home. By twos and threes they vanished into the mist of smoke. One of them, hesitating, at the last, half turned toward Escobar with a gesture of dismissal. Their game was up; they wanted no more of him.

All this time the animals in the water had not moved, shocked into quietude by the disorder of their world. The pool reddened still with the blood of the slain deer.

"Wife, let us go," said Escobar.

Jacinta waded out to the buck and put her arms up to his neck; he suffered it with timidity. She laid her cheek to his throat and blessed him, signing the cross on his shoulders.

"Let none come after thee to hurt thee, and none lie in wait by night. Let no arrow find thee, no, nor hunger, nor forsaking of thy kind. Blessed be thou among beasts."

She came up out of the water, and Isidro took her hand. They went downstream.



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"What shall we do?" said Jacintha when they had traveled in silence a painful quarter of an hour. The broadening day brought them an accession of embarrassment, mixed with a deep satisfaction of each other's company.

"Yesterday," said Isidro, "the Comandante must have been at the lower part of the wood. I trust he is not far removed. We may come up with him. If Arnaldo made his way safely as I have no doubt he did, he may be looking for us."

"He — my father — does not know that I am here," faltered Jacinta. She was still greatly in awe of the comandante.

"No matter," said Escobar stoutly; "it is proper that you be with me."

The implication of his words reddened her pinched and weary face.

They made way very slowly, being stiff with the strain and exertion of the night and day. They met animals, rabbits, ground inhabiting things, bobcats, and a lean cougar mother mousing three dead kittens, herself all singed and scarred, and came frequently on dead bodies of

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beasts lying in the wash. Then Jacintha would think of Marta, and her face would quiver and draw pitifully, until Isidro would quiet her with audacious tenderness and set her glowing as from a delicate inner flame. Once after such a sally she smiled up to him.

"You are too good to me, señor."

"Eh, what!" cried Isidro in mock amazement. "Is that a name for a man's wife to give him? Señor, indeed!"

"Am I really that to you, Don Isidro?"

"Are you what?"

"What you said."

"My wife? As much as the sacrament can make you!" was his assurance; the look that went with it said much more.

"And you wish it so?"

"Must I tell you that, my Briar?"

"But you are vowed to Holy Church."

"No vow of mine; an old promise made before I was born. I am convinced that I have no vocation."

"And after all," she said wistfully, "I am really the comandante's daughter."



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"You are — Ah, I do not know what you are. I think I shall need all my life to find you out, all my life and heart. Ah lad, lad!" It was always after a word of supreme endearment between them. He held both her hands and drew her up to him.

Castro, having delivered his final stroke at the stronghold of the renegades, drew off to wait and see what came of it, and to deliberate how he should strike as effectively at the remnant under Urbano. The condition of mission affairs, and the spirit of insurrection kept alive among the neophytes by the successes of Urbano's men, justified, in his sight, the severest measures. He esteemed the fire roaring up the terraces of Hidden Waters a splendid engine of war, but not for long. That was the day and, when the fire raged the hottest, the hour when Pascual and Don Valentin dropped in upon his camp on the scarp of a low hill, with fagged horses and bloody spurs.

Pascual, mindless of military dignities, called out to him as man to man.

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"My brother, Escobar, have you got him? Is he yet with the rascals? What is that fire?" The two men had smelled the burning an hour since, and guessed what Castro was about. Don Valentin spoke more to the point and at length.

"Is Señor Escobar a prisoner with the renegades?" said the Comandante, visibly disturbed. "How long has this been known?"

"Since Tuesday of this week. It was at first a rumor hardly believed."

"We lost our way in these damnable hills," exploded Pascual, "or you should have heard of it soon enough. Did you light that fire?"

Delgado waved him aside.

"Send out the men," he said; "there is more."

Castro gave the order. "My daughter?" he said.

"Señorita Castro and the woman Marta have been missing since Wednesday morning. It is believed they have gone in search of him. Marta is Mascado's mother."

Castro's body strained with the impotent vio-



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lence of nightmare. The news seemed to divide him body and spirit. He made as if he would have struck Delgado for his disastrous tidings.

He saw the men's eyes upon him from a little distance under the trees, and gulped back a momentary control.

"Montaña! Montaña!" he cried out to his lieutenant, and lapsed weakly to his seat; his hands moved fumbling across his lips.

"Put out the fire, Montaña," he said in a dead, flaccid voice.

"Pardon?" said the puzzled lieutenant.

"I said put out the fire, the fire on the mountain;" he moved with a feeble impatience at the other's slowness. "My daughter is there on the mountain; she will burn."

Delgado went to him. "Senor Comandante, it is best that you lie down. I will see that Montaña understands."

All the while Mascado and Escobar, with the girl between them, were making their running in the redwoods above Hidden Waters; all that night, when they stood against the tall buck in the pool, Castro lay in his blankets, burying his

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head in them to shut out the shriek and snapping of the fire, the roseate purple glow, the great roar of the pitchy smoke going skyward. Bodily weakness served to intervene between him and the force of his mind's distress, which returned upon him at intervals like a spasm of pain. He thought Montaña and the men busy about putting out the fire, asking Delgado continually how they sped, and Delgado humored him.

Montaña had, in fact, dispatched men up the arroyo and along the open south side, but the first came back reporting the trees afire on both sides of the wash and the passing dangerous; the others found only Arnaldo nearly dead with running, and no comforting news.

"How does it now?" questioned Castro from his bed when they had turned him away from gazing on the hills.

"It dies out along the lower edges," said Don Valentin, propping his tired eyes upon his hand.

"Does it burn fast?"

"Hardly so fast as an Indian can run," said the conscienceless Delgado.



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"And Marta had horses, you say?"

"She had; José, Martinez's man, got them for her."

"Besides," said Castro for the thousandth time, "they may not yet have reached the camp."

Delgado, who had seen Arnaldo, had nothing to say to that. Pascual groaned. Then they fell into silence and a doze of deep exhaustion, until Castro roused them, fretting from his bed.

"How does it now?"

"It burns slowly where the bluffs are treeless and steep."

"Will they win through, think you?"

"By the grace of God, I am sure of it."

And so on through the hours until the fire passed thinly to the tree line, and the smoke hid all but the red reflection on the sky.

Pascual and Don Valentin got some needed sleep at last. Castro's strength began to come back to him, and with it his collected spirit, which, though it quickened the agony of apprehension, helped him to spare others the exhibition of it. By morning, which broke dully, blurred

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with smoke, he was able to mount and ride; but the ten years which it was said he had lost since his daughter was found came back and settled heavily on his shoulders and bent him toward the saddle-bow.

From Arnaldo's account he judged it best seeking up the arroyo. He sent the tracker with men to try if possible to cross the hot ashes to the camp, and follow the probable line of flight, for he knew now all that Arnaldo could tell him of Escobar and his daughter.

Castro, Pascual, Delgado, and six men rode up the stony wash. The stench of burning, the acrid ash that whirled about in the wind, the difficulties and discomforts of the way, took the edge off of anguished expectation. The men rode in advance, — Castro had no hope to spur him forward, — and whatever of dead they found they hid out of the way.

Isidro and the girl heard the clank of shod hoofs on the boulders. Escobar raised a cracked, dry halloo. The answer to it set them trembling with the eagerness of relief.

"*Virgen Santissima*, Mother inviolate, Mary



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most Holy, Queen of the Angels," murmured the Comandante in deep thankfulness, as he saw her come.

Not the greatest moments are long proof against daily habits and hates. Castro's anxiety for his daughter's life was not of such long standing that his prejudice against Escobar was not longer; but his habit of authority was older than both. It fretted him in his enfeebled state, almost before he had done returning thanks, to have her appear so in boyish disguise before his men; chafed his new dignity as a parent to have her leave his house and go running to the woods after this young sprig Escobar; and since his daughter was above all blame, he blamed Escobar. There was a moment of embarrassment and chill after the greeting and congratulation. Don Isidro had that in his heart which fortified him against all frostiness of behavior. Castro turned to his men.

"Miguel and Pedro," he said, "will give up their horses to Señor Escobar and my daughter." He kept fast hold of the girl, but Isidro claimed her with his eyes. The men led up the horses.

*Soledad Corral*

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She, who a month before had been free to vault Indian-like from the ground, suffered herself to be lifted up ladywise. Castro reserved that occupation for himself, though he was hardly able for it. Isidro went on quietly shortening the stirrups; the two men eyed each other over the horse's shoulders.

Said Isidro, courteous and smiling, "I give madam my wife into your keeping, Señor Comandante, until we come to a better state."

The Comandante turned abruptly to his own horse and broke twice in the effort to mount. One of the troopers gave him a hand. Isidro's hand was on the girl's, her eyes on his eyes. She stooped lightly; the young man brought his horse alongside, one foot in the stirrup; her soft hair fell forward, his eyes drew her, they kissed.

"March!" cried the Comandante. The horses clattered on the start; then they struck into a trot.

Pascual burst out a-laughing. "By my soul, brother," he cried, "but you begin well for a priest!"