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Knights of the Chapparal

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Knights of the Chaparral

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
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by

Neal Alan Lange

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Chapter 1  Rope to a Knife Fight

Por supuesto, the padres wanted the Indians to do their bidding and we wanted the Indians to do ours. And like a child whose parents could not agree, poor Agapito was caught in the middle. Worse for him he was a clever Indian, and made the finest woolen cloth in Alta California. So we schemed all the more to entice him away from the mission and the padres, and now he was sure to pay.

“Capitan! They took Agapito away, the mission vaqueros,” said the young man at the door, trying to catch his breath. My heart sank and I felt the sting of shame. I was supposed to look after Agapito and make sure this did not happen, and I would have to answer for it. I looked at Felipe sitting behind his small desk in the corner. He set down his reed pen and shook his head.

“Goddamn it. Which vaqueros came to get him?” he asked.

“It was Thomas. Thomas and Quiverra. They chased him around the shop and hit him with sticks and kicked him. They tied his hands and put him on a horse.”

“But it’s still morning,” Felipe said and looked at me. “Didn’t you tell him not to come in the mornings, Pablo, so he wouldn’t get caught?”

“I did. He obviously didn’t pay it any mind.” Had I? I couldn’t remember. But Agapito had every reason to be careful without instructions from me. He knew the risks and he knew when the padres made their rounds. How could I tell him the best times to come and go?

“Young man, was Agapito at the looms yesterday morning as well?” asked Felipe.
“Yes Capitan. He has been there all day, between morning and evening mass, for
the last five days.” My God, I thought, How could he be so foolish?

“All day? Five days! Pablo, weren’t you supposed to be looking in on him?”

“I’ve stopped by there every afternoon. Things looked well. I can’t sit at the
looms all morning to watch for him and shoo him away.” Of all people Felipe would
know this. My morning hours were spent copying his letters and reports to send to
Monterrey, Arizpe and Mexico City.

“But you told him not to come in the morning?”

“Of course!” I supposed I should have. But still, I never thought he would leave
his post at the mission for so many hours, with such disregard.

Felipe leaned back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling in thought. The Indian
looked up at the ceiling too, as if there were something there. I thought I recognized him
now as one of the younger sons of Chief Panay.

“In what state is the wool?” asked Felipe.

“It has been washed and dried Capitan. Some of it, I think some of it has been
carded.” Felipe sighed deeply and stroked his scraggly red beard.

“Alright. Pack it up for the time being, tightly to keep out dust and moisture. Tell
the Indians at the weavery we will send for them when we can continue. If they want to
come here we probably have other work for them.”

“What is your name?” I asked him.

“My name is Francisco, Capitan.” The Indians called anyone of the least
importance Capitan, and no one bothered to correct them. But surely they understood
some ‘Capitans’ were above others, that Felipe was the head man of the presidio, and I his right hand.

“Is your father Chief Panay?” I asked.

“Yes Capitan.”

“Really?” said Felipe. “But I’ve never met you. How did you know who he is Pablo?”

“I’ve seen him now and then, coming with others from islands to trade. Chief Panay introduced me to him a few months ago. He was raised out there on Santa Cruz by one of his wives, at Swaxpili I think.”

“Yes, Swaxpili,” he said.

“Ah, that is why you speak so strange. You are here to stay?” asked Felipe.

“Yes Capitan. I stay here with my father now.”

“You must know I am a good friend of your father’s.”

“Of course Capitan. You pledge to let us stay in our villages.”

“That’s right. I pledged that to your father and Chief Yanonali, that I would not let the padres force them to move to the mission. You saw today what tyrants they can be, what a short leash they keep their charges on. But don’t you worry about that. I know just how to handle those bald-headed old fools. In fact, you could help us Francisco. You know you have a half-brother at the mission, Jose Maria?”

“Yes Capitan.”

“Your father sent him to be baptized at the mission when it was founded. He became the favorite of Padre Tapis, and was made the head alcalde. If Agapito is lashed,
he will probably be the one holding the whip.” Felipe stood up and walked over to a cabinet and opened a drawer. He pulled a cloth sack and a small knife from it, then walked back to his desk and set them down.

“Jose Maria was supposed to help influence the padres in our favor, but it seems the years he has spent there have made him forget whose side he is on. Perhaps you can remind him. Go to the mission afterwards and ask him what will happen to Agapito.”

Felipe stuck his hand in the sack and pulled out a string of red glass beads. He wrapped the string many times around his hand, then cut it and tied a knot at the end. I saw Francisco’s eyes widen for a moment. You would think it was gold or pearls the way those savages lusted after those goddamn beads, mere trinkets that could only amuse imbeciles or halfwits. They were building the whole presidio brick by brick for beads, hunted otter for beads, gave their women for beads. Just last month, an Indian was killed at the mission for gambling away his wife’s bead necklace. If we had enough beads I believed they would make a bridge to the moon.

“Offer this to him, and tell him there is more if he can see to it that Agapito returns,” Felipe said and handed the bag to Francisco.

“These are for you.” He gave Francisco the string that had been wrapped around his hand. “I know you will do your best to get your brother on our side.”

“Yes Capitan,” Francisco smiled and nodded his head. He tucked them into a little satchel on his belt. “I will speak with my brother, tell him to help Agapito.”

“Very well.” Francisco turned and stepped out. I heard the presidio gate creak open as his footsteps pattered through the courtyard. Felipe looked out the window.
“How did this happen?” he said turning to me. “He was away from the mission for days and you didn’t think the padres would notice?”

“I told him to use discretion, to only come if—”

“An Indian doesn’t know any goddamn discretion!” I sat up in my chair. “It’s like telling a child to keep a secret. You, you, you expect him to know how to avoid detection? Nonsense!”

I knew the Indians had many secret comings and goings, but I refrained from saying so. I waited a moment to make sure he was done, keeping my face from becoming tense and thus betraying my emotions.

“What are we going to do now? We’ve got a half done batch of wool that’s going to be boxed up.”

“Hilario knows about processing wool. If they are far enough along he could fill in until—”

“We can’t just make another batch of passable cloth! That was fine last year when we started, but this time it was to be the best quality, something special. A texture delicate and refined, worth a premium of several pesos for each blanket. And for that we must have Agapito.”

I struggled to think of a way to turn his anger back at the missionaries, but I could not. They were merely doing what we expected them to do if we were caught. I sensed there was some explanation for Agapito’s foolishness, and in it was my defense.

“I understand that Capitan. Agapito said that the washing and carding are very important to the ultimate quality of the fabric. Perhaps that is why he felt he must be
“Not all goddamn day he didn’t.”

“You say we need the best quality. He’s the master weaver. That’s why we hired him right?”

“No, of course. What’s your point?”

“If he didn’t think he absolutely needed to be there, I’m sure he would not have risked it. Why would he risk punishment if it wasn’t important for him to be there?”

“He probably wanted to finish the job faster, to get paid.”

“Felipe, please. Whatever their other faults, Indians do not rush things involving craftsmanship. You have seen them no doubt, spending days, weeks, smoothing some piece of wood on a rock, or straightening it in fire, until it is perfectly straight and smooth.”

“Yes, fine. But why didn’t he take his time with the wool?”

It was just then that I stumbled on an explanation, one that made good sense, was probably even the truth.

“That’s the problem,” I answered, “Agapito wasn’t rushing. The wool was. Once it is washed, it won’t wait for Agapito to return to start drying. And it if it sits too long it will get dusty and dirty again. So it must be carded immediately. So you see, this part of the process must be done all at once, under his supervision. Only then could the remaining steps be postponed.”

Felipe took a deep breath and rubbed his beard, his eyes facing the wall behind me, but focused on nothing. He shook his head slowly.
“That damn Padre Tapis. I asked to rent Agapito out a month ago, the proper way, and he kept delaying and delaying.”

“Any longer and we wouldn’t finish in time before the Princessa arrives,” I said.

“That’s right! I’ll bet he’s doing this on purpose to shut down our enterprise. He can’t stand to see us sell our own goods instead of depending on him. He’s worse than an Ottoman cutthroat!” Having deflected his ire back to its regular source, I was almost out of danger.

“They already finished their batch this season. They don’t even need Agapito right now,” I said, prodding him on to greater rage.

“Just to spite me, I tell you! Just to spite me!!” I repressed a smile. Padre Tapis had no idea how many times he had saved me from Felipe’s wrath.

“This is going to ruin everything,” he said. “We’re not going to be able to repay Capitan Gurrola for all the weaving equipment he bought for us. He may take it all back, or just refuse to unload our goods from the Princessa and keep them for himself.” It had been so long since we had made the deal with Capitan Gurrola, over one year, I had nearly forgotten what was at stake. And now I remembered all my promises to Maria, made some time ago, and was filled with dread.

*   *   *   *   *

I spent the day outside of the presidio gates, attending to various errands. I was glad to be away from Felipe. It was dreadful to tiptoe around his quarters when he was in a bad mood, which oppressed anyone around him, guilty and innocent alike. I went to the weavery to speak with the Indians there about the situation with Agapito and ensure
the wool was properly stored. Then I visited the soldiers guarding our small herds of sheep and cattle on the grassy meadow by Las Cieneguitas. I returned to the presidio to see that construction on the fourth and final wing was under way.

The spring rains had ended and the summer heat had returned, so the conditions were right for the Indians to make adobe bricks. I trotted by and inspected them, set aside in groups of fifty, to ensure that each man had met his daily quota. A couple of boys stood to guard them from being disturbed by stray animals while they dried. They smiled and waved to me as I passed by. Some other children carried clay jars of water from the nearby marsh to those who were still mixing mud and pouring it into rectangular wooden molds.

This last wing would enclose the open courtyard of the square fortress and our homes within, ensuring the safety of our families in this barbarous land. I could not help but wonder if the Indians knew it was to protect us from them as much as any foreign ship that might attempt a landing. It could not completely escape them. Besides the workers, we still forbade them from congregating within the walls or from having their bows strung when nearby. Still, I don’t think they understood how intractable our foothold would be here once the quadrangle was completed at the end of summer. They were ignorant of defenses and siege warfare, and even with their large numbers, could never displace us. But they were not troubled by those things. They saw only the coming or setting sun, the future a complete mystery. Besides, we were friends, and our alliance with Yanonali was stronger than ever.

The walls were solid, the beams were straight, the whitewash evenly applied.
Every surface and joint displayed the outstanding workmanship of the Chumash, our presidio as sturdy and handsome as any on the frontier. The forts at Monterrey and San Diego were hovels in constant need of repair, as I saw when I lived in the barracks before I was married. I had heard San Francisco was even worse, so I appreciated the difference all the more. But there was a price to pay.

For the last few years, every soldier had been contributing a good amount of his pay to fund the construction of the presidio, including Felipe and myself. We all paid for the beads to pay the builders, which was the only reason it was feasible on our meagre salaries. Beads were cheap, yet it was a great sum of them. We had all agreed to this. Though it was the King’s fortress, Felipe had explained that most of us would be living here at least ten years, some much longer. Some were sure to die here. But as a result we had all been deprived of almost any improvements in our clothing and homes for some time. No one had ordered anything nicer than wool or linen in years. Our clothing was turning to rags, and we ran out of spices months before new ones arrived. My wife Maria had had enough.

I heard the bells start ringing and looked toward the bright whitewashed mission in the foothills below the mountains. It was waking the Indians from their afternoon siestas to return to their work in the fields, the workshops, and the completion of the mission quadrangle. I yawned, lamenting I had been unable to have a siesta myself. Next to the creek by the mission garden, I saw two Indian men on horseback letting their animals drink. Instead of the plain woolen clothes issued to all the neophytes, they were dressed as Spanish riders. It was the vaqueros Thomas and Quiverra!
I pressed my knees into the sides of my horse and galloped along the well-worn path between the presidio and mission. Soon I was upon them. They steered their horses away from the water and turned toward me with wide eyes as I approached. I skid to a stop just short of them, the hind quarters of my horse almost hitting theirs and creating a cloud of dust that engulfed them.

“You two! You took Agapito!” I said.

“Yes! He belong to Padre Tapis,” said Thomas in fearful, jumbled Castilian. I walked my horse in a circle around them, their heads turning each way to follow me.

“You would never have dared if I were there. Let me catch you around the presidio trying to kidnap someone else working for us. After I smack you around I’ll send you walking home instead of riding.”

“You do nothing! I tell Padre Tapis!”

“Go ahead!” I yelled. “And when an officer approaches you dismount!” He looked at me with confusion. “Capitan!” I cried, tapping on my tri-cornered hat, then pointed to the ground. “Dismount! Get off your horses!”

“No!” he said. I approached him and reached for his shirt sleeve, but he trotted away.

“Get over here you mongrel!” He took off at a gallop and I followed. I easily over took him and turned in front of his horse, forcing it to stop and turn around. I reached for my lasso and threw it before he could gain speed to flee in the other direction. He was easy prey, and the rope dropped over his shoulders. As it cinched around his arms his horse rode out from under him and he fell into some sage brush. I dragged him
for a few seconds then slackened the rope as I approached.

“You fool! You didn’t think I could ride you down?” I asked as he removed the rope and staggered back from me.

“I should have dragged you into a cactus patch and torn you to bits.” Quiverra rode over and got between us. I pointed to the ground, and with a sullen look he dismounted.

“You’re no goddamn riders. You hear me? You can wear those clothes and rope a calf, but don’t you ever challenge me again. And stay the hell away from the presidio.”

The Indian is not my equal. He is not my equal in reason, he is not my equal in battle, he is not my equal before God. Little better than the beasts of the field, at his best he has the understanding of a child, and if he forgets this I will show him. I spit on the ground and sneered at them before trotting off.

* * * * *

I held the evening formation and roll call at sunset, which equaled ten men when including myself. Of the forty remaining soldiers, twelve were stationed at Mission San Buenaventura on the east end of the channel and twelve were stationed at Mission La Purisima Conception on the west end. A mere three guarded Mission Santa Barbara right behind us, less than I thought proper, but Felipe had great faith in our close proximity to aid them. Of the remaining dozen men, three stayed overnight in the fields to guard our herds, three were on mail runs to Monterrey and San Diego, one was in Los Angeles, one was an aid to Felipe, and the last few were invalids.

Ignacio Valencia and Antonio Valverde stood at attention when I entered the
guardhouse. I put them at ease and examined the daily log. They had just relieved Isidro German, Luis Lugo and Juan Romero who had been on watch all day. These soldiers were all married and we tried to have them stationed at the guardhouse as much as possible so they might stay with their families.

“Where is Sergeant Leyva?” I asked. He was in charge of the presidio guard and to be available day or night.

“He is up on the bastion,” replied Ignacio. I should have known, having found him there many times. I left them and walked to the southeast corner of the fort and up the stairs to the diamond shaped parapet, where I found Sergeant Leyva standing next to a small artillery cannon aimed at the beach. He exhaled smoke from a cigarillo and turned toward me. His pale skin, dark beady eyes, angular nose and prominent front teeth had given him the name _El Raton_ with the men. If he knew of it I don’t think he minded. The men may joke behind his back, but they knew well not to cross him.

“Lieutenant, hello,” he said and looked back out to sea. I set my hat down on the wall next to his and felt the cool air blow on my sweaty head, the heat of the day finally abating. Though the sun had dropped below the horizon, fading gold and purple danced on the belly of the clouds above the dark outline of Santa Cruz Island. I could still make out the foam of the breakers rolling onto the coastline as it stretched west to the village of Syhuntun, then disappeared around a point.

“It feels as if we are exiles here, sometimes,” he said.

“True. I feel it also. We all do, I’m sure.”

“I’m surprised. You have a family.”
“Yes, and they are good company. But we are still exiled here with you, even if we are together. Maria is madder than a hermit for some visitors. She longs to return to Sonora, to take the children from town to town, to shops full of all the goods of New Spain. She worries, will they know how to behave there, after growing up surrounded by heathens? If you spoke with her, you might consider yourself better suited in this place as a bachelor.”

“We might as well be on that island.”

“Indeed.” It was true. Our only contact with civilized people was by ship, once or twice a year. In earlier times there was hope to establish a trail from Sonora for trade and travel. Colonel Anza was able to bring the soldiers and settlers that established the presidio of San Francisco and the pueblo of San Jose. A few years later, another large land party came to found this presidio and the pueblo of Los Angeles. They forded the Colorado River at the Yuma crossing and had almost arrived here when we received word of the massacre. The Yuma’s killed every Spaniard in sight and destroyed the nascent colony meant to hold the crossing, the only feasible route to link us with New Spain. Since then we have been castaways on a strip of coast from San Francisco to San Diego, pressed against the sea.

As I scanned the horizon for a vessel in the final moments of twilight, even a pirate ship might have been a welcome sight. The Princessa would arrive soon enough, packed full of the comforts of home and all the things that made life less dreary. It would deliver the more civilized life I had promised Maria through these last desperate years. Now that Agapito was gone, I had to find a means to pay for it all, and quickly.
“I wanted to speak with you about repositioning the guard until the last wing is completed,” I said.

“Yes?”

I heard the gate open and saw Padre Cortes pass through. He strutted across the courtyard and entered the Lugo home in the corner of the fort opposite of myself. Moments later, my wife Maria and the widow Candelaria exited and began knocking on doors of the other families.

“Excuse me Sergeant,” I said and headed back down the stairs to see Maria. She was knocking on the door of the Romero home when she turned and saw me approach.

“My Dear, what is happening?” I said. Lugarda Romero opened the door.

“The infant Maria Petra is dying,” my wife said to her.

“My God,” she gasped.

“The padre is giving last rites. We are going to the chapel to pray for her life.”

“I see. I will join you shortly,” said Lugarda before closing her door.

“The second one,” Maria said softly with a look of despair. Antonia Lugo bore the twins one year ago, and the first had already died. “Supper is on the table. Please tell Polonia to bring the others to the chapel when they are done eating.”

After changing and rinsing my face I came out of my room. Little Francisco and Manuela were still eating, but Polonia was clearing the rest of the dishes off the table.

“Papa. Can we have chocolate after dinner?” asked Francisco.

“I told you, there’s no more chocolate for now,” I said and sat down. Polonia brought me a bowl of steaming pozole and I scooped out a large chunk of meat to chew.
“I want chocolate.”

“Why aren’t you two finished? Mother is waiting for us,” said Polonia.

“I want chocolate.”

“Are you done? I’m telling mama you didn’t finish your bowl.”

“I’m telling mama you’re rushing me.” Polonia grabbed his bowl and dumped the remainder into mine.

“No! I’m still hungry! No! Papa she took my pozole!” he cried out and started sobbing.

“You should listen to your sister. Quit giving her trouble.” I blew on a spoonful from my bowl and lifted it to his mouth, but he continued.

“Hello? Can I come in?” I said in a funny voice and wiggled the spoon. He took the bite, chewing as a tear came down his cheek. I brought him another, then another.

“Hello? Is there room for me in there?” I said. He shook his head to say no, his cheeks puffing out. I stuffed my mouth until my cheeks were full and bugged my eyes out at him, causing him to chuckle.

“Keep your mouth closed,” said Polonia. “Don’t be disgusting.”

“I’m finished,” said Isabel, a few years younger than Polonia.

“Me too,” said Manuela. Polonia looked in her bowl to make sure it was empty, then took it away.

Manuel, our eldest came out of the children’s room and sat down.

“You were not hungry?” I asked.

“No Papa.”
“You are too thin,” I told him.

“You are too fat Papa!” said Maria.

“Papa is fat!” said Francisco and they joined in laughter. It was true. In spite of our poverty, we were not short of food. But I was not so big as Ortega the Elder, who strained his poor stallion. No more wheat or corn had to be brought by ship, as the missions were now able to provide more than enough for all. We even told the soldiers not to sow this year, as we did not want the mission surplus to go to waste. Beef too was in steady supply.

“Enough. Let’s go,” said Polonia. She grabbed some candles before shuffling the children out the door.

I finished my meal in silence before joining them at the chapel. Inside were all the mothers living at the presidio, most of the older children and a few of the men. They kneeled in silence on reed mats, holding a candle before them, their faces glowing and eyes closed. Aside from the candles around the altar, all was darkness. Manuela German, the wife of Isidro, held her crying infant daughter Juana Felicia over her shoulder, patting her back and gently hushing her. Her daughters Gertrudis and Dionysia quieted her infant boy Cristobal.

I kneeled at the empty place between my wife and the children of the widow Candelaria, who was always by our side at mass. Behind us I saw that Sergeant Ignacio’s wife, Maria Feliz, had come from the mission with her two young sons. I looked at my daughters’ faces and I thought of the infant Maria Petra and her mother Maria Antonia. I prayed to Mary that she would save that poor child, that as the mother of our Lord she
would be moved to pity and intercede on our behalf against the forces of death.

My wife believed that Maria Antonia Lugo had something of a curse on her. Back in Sonora, she became pregnant at a young age by the scoundrel Thomas Lara. He fled but was tracked down by her family and forced to marry her. They came to this land with the settlers of Los Angeles but Thomas was deemed worthless, and discovered to be a bigamist. Because of this he was sent back to Sonora that he might reconcile with his first wife, leaving Maria Antonia here with three children.

But why should she be cursed? Thomas was the bigamist. And the first twin that died was the child of her new husband Luis Lugo, as was Maria Petra. Why should he too be punished? But my wife believed family tragedy could always be traced to great family sins, as God would not allow such suffering for mere caprice. I was not so sure, but I knew at this moment she was praying with all the blood in her heart that Maria Petra would live.

Padre Cortes came in and said the child was still struggling and flush with fever. He led the group in saying the rosary several times and gave some words of comfort. At one point, Maria Rita Valencia approached the altar with all her children and came near the statue of Mary. She cradled her infant boy Miguel Antonio, then held him out before the Mother of Our Lord. I watched the face of the statue closely to look for a sign, and though the soft smile and sad eyes seemed alive in the shimmering candlelight, they did not move. After one hour, the children were taken home. After the next, myself and the other men left. I kissed Maria goodnight and left the mothers at their vigil.

*   *   *   *   *

17
Maria was sleeping sound when I sat up on our bed, if it could be called that, a raised surface of adobes cushioned by blankets. I planned to have a real bed built soon, as the carpenters at the mission showed great aptitude. This was just one of the many, many improvements that were imminent, if Maria could wait a just a little longer.

The deprivations of the frontier had driven her to despair, almost madness. Last year she had threatened to return to Sonora with the children, to await my reassignment or eventual retirement. She had even written a letter to Governor Borica requesting permission to do so, which had been intercepted and given to me by one of the mail carriers. But a letter to her father did reach Arizpe, and his plea to the Governor caused me no little trouble. She even seemed desperate enough to try to bribe the Capitan of a foreign vessel if the opportunity presented itself.

But I could never be separated from my family so long, having half my heart thousands of miles away. So after some help from Padre Tapis, I convinced her that this was the year of our deliverance. We made a list of all her desires: clay tiles to cover the dirt floor, fine dresses for the girls to wear to mass, china dishes for the kitchen. Since then her acute yearnings to flee this place had quieted, but they surely lay dormant, waiting to reemerge.

“Oh God, the child!” I said. “Maria, wake up for a moment please.” I gently pushed her bare shoulder. She moaned.

“My Dear, does Maria Petra live?” Last night I had expected her to die, as most did in these cases. But perhaps the Queen of the Angels had heard the tears of the mothers of Santa Barbara.
“No,” she breathed, and drifted back to sleep. A miracle had not been forthcoming, but at least the child’s suffering had ended. But the long suffering of Maria Antonia Lugo had begun anew.

I thought that the whole family was still sleeping, exhausted from the vigil last night. But when I went into the main room I saw that someone had opened the door for our tortillero, an Indian boy from Syhuntun named Primitivo. He was making a fresh stack of tortillas for the day. Because Indian women were banned from the presidio, Indian boys like him were hired to do all the work normally done by female servants. Through our back door I saw his friend Rafael cleaning the dishes from last night, and knew him as our garden bird-boy. They were both wearing old woolen shirts that Manuel had outgrown, their wages for the last few months.

He cooked some of the tortillas in a mixture of cinnamon and sugar and served them to me with a cup of coffee.

“You should learn to make wool instead of tortillas,” I said.

“Capitan?” His Castilian was not so good.

“Wool. You should make wool,” I said, touching the sleeve of his shirt.

“Wul,” he said and nodded in acknowledgement.

“If it’s as good as Agapito’s, we’d pay you three reals a day. That’s what we could use anyway.” He understood three reals, that I could tell.

“What does your father do?” I asked.

“Hunt, fish.”

“Just find food eh? No skill?”
“He is good hunter Capitan.”

“Well, I’d like him to trap some fine woolen blankets for me.”

“Yes Capitan.” He nodded and went back to his work, and after eating I went to morning formation.

* * * * *

Felipe and I tied up our horses and entered the gate of the mission courtyard. Inside there were Indians cutting pines into beams with a two-man ripsaw, some scraping the last remnants of sinew and flesh from cowhides, some working leather into shoes and engaged in other skilled crafts. Above all the din of activity we heard the pounding of iron coming from the blacksmith shop. We recognized many of them from their visits to the presidio to work for beads. Those who had piecemeal work, such as the brick makers, we saw almost every day. They were often able to finish their daily quota at the mission before noon, and worked for us in the afternoons. Most of the others, such as those who worked in the fields, did not have this type of arrangement. But many of them came on Sundays, holidays and on paseo. Such was their enthusiasm for beads and trinkets, and proof that they preferred working for us over life at the mission. Felipe would be sure to point this out, as we were here to plead for the release of Agapito and greater access to others who had attained mastery of such crafts.

Those we passed closely said a polite hello, including Lamberto the shoe maker and Pancracio the mason. A few others nodded or waved. But it seemed many were hesitant to openly acknowledge us, afraid of the watchful eyes of those who were most loyal to the padres. It was no secret who went to the presidio, yet at this time and place
they felt the need to curtail any blatant show of friendship. And there I saw Agapito in
the corner with three of his apprentices, their hands and heads hanging out of the stocks.
He was gazing at the ground, his face forlorn and spent.

“Agapito,” said Felipe, getting down on one knee.

“Capitan?” he said and looked up.

“I’m sorry they did this to you.”

“Padres very angry. I no know what will happen.”

“I will speak to them and plead for leniency. I gave your beads to you wife, and
some extra for all this trouble.”

“Thank you Capitan.”

A man approached us, dressed from head to toe as a Spaniard, distinguishing him
from all the others in their plain woolen garb. It was Jose Maria, head of the mission
alcaldes and Chief Panay’s son.

“I believe these are yours,” he said, holding out a cloth bag. I recognized it as the
bag of beads we gave his brother Francisco to give to him.

“They are for you. Why are you returning them?”

“My loyalty is not to be bought Capitan.” I had to admire him. I had never seen
an Indian turn down beads for anything.

“It was only a gesture of friendship,” said Felipe.

“It is an enticement to betray the padres. And look at the last man who took your
beads,” he said and nodded toward Agapito. “Will you take them back or not?” he asked
Felipe, straightening and extending his arm to bring them closer to him.
“No. It is an insult to me to take back a gift, as it would be to one of your chiefs.”

The rejection of a gift or invitation was a declaration of war between the pagans.

“Very well,” Jose Maria said and dropped the bag on the ground. The men in the stocks all stared at it slack-jawed. Others working in the courtyard looked over.

“If they are meant to be any enticement, it is to persuade you to help your family,” said Felipe. What about your father? Will you speak to him?”

“He may come to visit me any time here, though he does not.”

“He does not come here because the padres harangue him about moving his village to the mission. I’m sure he would like to see you otherwise.”

“I will see him the next time I go on paseo. Come now. Padre Tapis is waiting for you.” I took one last look at Agapito before we followed him across the courtyard. We entered the mission sitting room, the walls lined with bookshelves, filled with old books.

“Ah good morning Capitan, Lieutenant Cota,” said Padre Tapis as he stood up from a chair in the corner.

“Hello Padre Tapis. Thank you for seeing us,” Felipe said.

“Good morning Padre,” I said and removed my hat. I had the idea to hug him and kiss him on the cheeks, an impulse from my youth, as we did whenever we greeted the priest of our little church in Loreto. He was a fat, cheerful old man and I loved to hug his big belly. But the priests here were skinny old cranks, and we’d had nothing but trouble with them from the beginning.

“Please seat yourselves.” He gestured to the French couch at the other end of the
room. It was upholstered with fine red and gold embroidery, one of the few pieces of
good furniture the padres had managed to bring to this forsaken corner of the world.

“Some tea?” he asked.

“Yes please,” said Felipe.

Jose Maria poured into two cups and brought them over to us. I looked at the fine
china of which the vessels were made and thought my wife Maria would find them most
pleasing.

“Is there anything else I may do for you Padre?” Jose Maria asked Padre Tapis.

“That is all for now my son. May God bless you for your steadfast servitude,” the
padre replied. He stood and made the sign of the cross on Jose Maria, touching his
forehead, chest and shoulders. Jose Maria kissed his hand in turn.

“Thank you Padre.” Jose Maria bowed slightly and exited through the door. I
thought it quite strange. Here they were acting as father and son, while Jose Maria’s own
father awaited to hear any word from him.

“Padre Cortes wanted to be here as well,” began Padre Tapis, “but he was called
to the infirmary to administer last rites, and he has a funeral after that. A poor old Indian
woman and two young children. I don’t know if you know Capitan, but the pleurisy that
began to spread in winter has become an epidemic.”

“I have heard of a sickness spreading throughout the villages and reckoned it
began here, but I did not know it was that serious.

“Yes, every week some are being buried. We are going to have to start putting the
bodies in a mass grave soon.”
“That sounds terrible padre,” said Felipe.

“It is. They cough up blood and writhe in pain for days. Many of them are young children. They are looking to us and wondering why we cannot stop it. They are becoming desperate. The stocks have been full of witch doctors we have caught performing their quackery.”

“Along with Agapito of course,” I said.

“Yes Lieutenant. Enough of my trifling troubles, which might require an increase in the mission guard mind you. You are here to speak about Agapito.”

“We can discuss adding a couple men to the guard Padre. But yes, we came here to ask about Agapito,” said Felipe.

“He will remain in the stocks for the next few days and be flogged publicly with eight lashes, a rather mild punishment in light of the crime I think, and only due to the intercession of Jose Maria and Padre Cortes.” Perhaps Jose Maria had helped our cause in spite of what he had said in the courtyard. But would it free Agapito to return to us?

“I hope it will yet serve as a strong enough example to the others. We have enough trouble keeping order around here without your enticements, Capitan.”

“Just to be clear, he was not asked to leave the mission during work hours, only offered the job and the wages,” said Felipe.

“I see. So you didn't tell him to do wrong, you simply tempted him and watched him do it for five days?”

“We weren’t watching his comings and goings, just checking the results. Besides, for all we knew he was on paseo,” I said.
“Alright Lieutenant. So it’s fine with you if I hire out Manuel for a week without asking. If he comes to work, I’ll just assume he is free to do so.”

“That’s not the same!” I said, spilling some tea on my leg. It burned but I ignored it. It enraged me that he always came after myself with this argument, as Felipe had no children to attack.

“Oh it is exactly the same, in principle, and by law mind you. But even a boy like Manuel is not so much an imbecile as to grovel for beads. So much the more do they need my protection from the likes of you who tempt them with such trifles!”

“Well, if Manuel was a master craftsman of some kind, I would not be so stingy with his talents. I would not keep him from where he would be of great use, just out of spite!” I cried and spilled more tea on my leg. I stood up and my cup slipped out of my hand and shattered on the floor.

“Easy Pablo. Calm down,” Felipe stood and put his hand on my shoulder.

“Julio!” Padre Tapis called into the other room. A wide eyed Indian boy scurried through the doorway.

“Yes Padre?”

“Clean up that mess over there and bring the Lieutenant another cup of tea.

“No. No more please,” I said. The boy ran out and returned with a small basket and a rag. Felipe and I sat down again while he picked up the bigger pieces of the china.

“Well Padre, if it is not out of spite, why would you not rent Agapito out to us when we asked, before all this? You’re not even shearing this season.” Padre Tapis took a sip of his tea and paused for a few moments.
“Perhaps it is out of spite, Capitan, or more correctly, a just grievance against you.”

“Padre, if you cannot forget our past troubles, we will always be in strife.”

“Oh, this trouble is quite current Capitan. I’ve been waiting for word from Monterrey while they investigate. But I’m sure you can confirm your hand in this.” He grabbed a scroll from the table and walked over to us, handing it to Felipe. He returned to his seat while Felipe unrolled it and started reading. I looked over his shoulder. It was addressed to Padre Tapis, and below several paragraphs of introduction, a distinct list of questions caught my eye.

What proof can you furnish that the neophytes understand the articles of religion?
What measures are taken to prevent runaways from being baptized twice?
How much are the neophytes fed daily? Do they show signs of hunger?
Under what circumstances are the neophytes given corporal punishment? Is the punishment ever excessive or unwarranted?

Are the neophytes prevented from visiting the presidio, or punished for doing so?

The report! It had been so long I had forgotten about it, but it must have been forwarded to the Viceroy and he had finally acted on it!

“Do those questions look familiar to you Capitan?” said the padre, glaring at Felipe.

“Yes.” Felipe crossed his left leg and closed his hands together.

“Well? Where have you seen them?”

“Governor Borica sent them to me sometime early last year.”
“And we heard nothing of it. So you were asked to spy on us by the Governor?”

“It was sent in confidence Padre, which I honored, but do not twist it into something devious. I was not asked to spy. I was told to give an account of what I had already seen.” We had both been overjoyed at receiving the questionnaire from the Governor, a heaven sent chance to expose the padres and pry the Indians from their hands. The padres could keep their souls, but their labor would be all ours, and some day their land. Otherwise, none of our families had any hope of living decently once we retired and moved from the presidio. And why shouldn’t we? Why else had we come to this Godforsaken place, so far from the comforts of home?

“As the questions are nothing more than thinly veiled accusations, it’s clear enough how you answered. You could not let this chance to slander us pass, could you Felipe?”

“I gave nothing more than what was asked of me.”

“Speak plainly. Did you make these accusations or not?”

“I did, and I stand by them.”

“Lies! Every one of them!” He raised his voice and his cheeks became red. “How can you speak such bold falsehoods, to the Viceroy no less!?”

“If they are so bold, why was I asked in the first place? To investigate what others—”

“Others? It was one person. One!” He held up his index finger in reproach. “One madman and his mouth, from one mission, not even in your district mind you. Everyone knows Padre Conception went insane, and we never thought anyone in Mexico
City would listen to his nonsense."

"Padre, they sent the questions to me and I answered. And I won't apologize for it."

"So, you are concerned the neophytes do not understand our faith? Perhaps you do not hear them reciting the Doctrina every morning and evening. Or perhaps since you do not come to mass regularly you do not hear the sermons preached to them."

"The ones I speak to don't understand at all."

"Oh yes? Do you ask them in between hands at cards? That is something they know well, as you and your soldiers have taught them so diligently. Perhaps you had them take a vow of poverty? As they often return to the mission naked and empty handed, having lost all at gambling."

"We don't play cards with Indians," I said, "but if the men want to, that is their affair."

"And you are concerned the neophytes are going hungry? You do not see their bowls filled with pozole in the mission courtyard three times a day? They have only to ask for more, and we have never refused them."

"I only know that they ask for food when they come to the presidio," said Felipe.

"Of course they do! For them the entire day is a meal! And we both know how charitable your soldiers are to the young women who manage to sneak over there, giving them some tortillas or a watermelon to prostitute themselves," he said and looked over at me.

"Why do you look at me when you say that?"
“It was not meant to accuse you Lieutenant. But perhaps you have a guilty conscience?”

“Perhaps you have caught the madness of Padre Conception!”

“Madness indeed! Don’t bother asking to rent out any of the Indians. The answer is no! And the ones living in the villages that you keep from baptism, and the ones you have corrupted— the damnation of their souls will be on your conscience, and you will be held accountable before God for them! And do not bother asking for any of the comforts and concessions of our faith. If you seek any of the sacraments, we will not provide them to you while you make war against the church.”

“Very well! Such petty tyranny is what we have come to expect from you! You need not ask for an escort when going into the interior. And you need not ask—” I stopped myself to hear the rising commotion coming from outside. There were footsteps and men shouting.

I opened the door and saw the hide cleaners fighting with the brick makers, punching and wrestling one another to the ground, which was scattered with beads. Women and children crawled on the ground and reached for beads that had landed at the outskirts of the melee. I saw that where the fighting was fiercest, one of the brick makers clung tightly to the bag of beads, his companions defending his every side from the devils trying to claw their way through. Some of them were bloody with cuts, and I saw some slashing and stabbing wildly with knives.

“What on earth is going on out there?” said Felipe looking over my shoulder.

“It’s the beads,” I said, “They’re fighting over the bundle of beads!”
“We’ve got to get to our horses and get the men!” Felipe said with wide eyes. “Let’s make a run for it!”

“Have someone sound the alarm, then lock this door!” I yelled at Padre Tapis before I took off across the courtyard, Felipe close behind me. Some men who were fighting one another blocked our way. One of them raised his knife to stab another man in the back. I drew my sword and jabbed him in the leg. He cried out and stabbed at my chest but the blade glided off the thick layers of my leather jacket. One of his companions stabbed my thigh and I reeled back in pain. Suddenly Felipe came flying through and elbowed him in the head as he passed, knocking him down. I slashed the first man across the shoulder and he retreated, allowing me to run through the gap and follow Felipe toward the gate. I could feel warm blood running down my leg.

The mission bell began ringing frantically to alert those at the presidio. I saw Jose Maria trying to pull two men apart, and the soldier Hilario at the gate leveled his musket at them. “No! Stop!” cried Felipe. Hilario looked up. “Go get help!” The three of us ran out the gate and mounted up. I was gasping for air, as I had not ran in quite some time, and had become heavy set in recent years. Hilario dashed off to the mission guard house. As we rode back through the gate, I saw three of the mission alcaldes run up and assist Jose Maria, restraining the men around him and going into the fray. Padre Tapis appeared, waving his arms crying out, “No my children! Stop this madness!”

I fired my musket into the air and my horse reared up, the men fighting around me flinched and some froze in fear. Felipe did the same, and the men around us became frightened and drifted away from the fight. “Get out of here! Go!” Felipe shouted at
them. But the main element was still unfazed.

I holstered my musket and rode into the far corner behind them. I threw my lasso at the one holding the bundle of beads, but one of his companions bumped him away a moment too soon and stepped into the opening. I tightened the noose around his arms, but one of his friends slashed the frayed section close to the knot and cut it clean.

I dropped the rope and grabbed my great lance from behind me with both hands. Instead of holding the steel tip out, I held it in reverse with the blunt wooden end and advanced. I swung side to side and poked the brawlers out of my way, some of them fleeing from me, others ignoring the blows and resuming the fight. I approached the men with the bead bag and poked through them, rapping the knuckles of the one holding it and causing him to drop it. They looked up at me in confusion, then fear, and began to disengage from one another.

“Stop! Oh my God! Please stop this my sons!” Padre Tapis cried out and ran into the midst of them. He grabbed the bag and the alcaldes surrounded him. “Go sit against the wall! All of you!” cried out Jose Maria waving his wooden staff. “Now!” They began to do so, and ones who moved slowly were pushed by the alcaldes. Three soldiers rode in on horseback. It was Sergeant Olivera and the mission guards, Hilario Carlon and Ignacio Higuerra. They approached the Capitan who instructed them to come over and surround myself and the main group. Padre Tapis strutted toward the Captain like an angry cock.

“Take the devils plunder away from here!” he cried out and shoved the bag of beads in Felipe’s hands, then strutted back to Jose Maria and began giving orders to the
alcaldes. Five soldiers from the presidio rode in through the gate, headed by Sergeant Leyva. After speaking with the Capitan, they dismounted and quickly cut some pieces of rope from their packs, then began tying the hands of those sitting against the wall.
Chapter 2  Beneath the Cold Dirt Floor

_Domingo por la mañana_ I laid in bed watching Maria dressing for church. She put on the pearl earrings and necklace her mother had given to her right before we left Sonora. They were quite large, and a fitting complement to the delicate beauty of her light skin. She spent some time arranging her long blonde hair, using a small mirror in a gilded frame on our dresser. Every now and then she would peak over her shoulder to see me watching. She would give a delicious look, a mischievous smile, but said nothing. After applying some rouge she left the room to check on the children.

Francisco and Manuela ran into the room. “Easy! Be gentle! Papa is still hurt,” I cried out before they reached the bed. “Stay away from my legs,” I said. They crawled up gingerly and hugged my chest.

“Does it still hurt Papa?” Manuela asked.

“Just a bit my little angel. I will be better in no time.”

“You will walk again?”

“Of course.”

“Can I see it Papa?” asked Francisco.

I had been in bed all week and was curious how the wound had progressed. Padre Tapis used animal fat to stop the bleeding, but cleaned it well the following day before stitching it closed. I pulled the blanket from my right leg and then peeled away the loose bandage. Beneath the stitches was an ugly gash about six inches long. The cut was almost to the bone, but thankfully was straight and clean, so I had good hope it would
heal properly. Also, it was in the meatiest part of the front of my leg, and had hit no
tendons or ligaments. I felt good enough to try walking on it later today with the use of a
crude crutch the carpenter had made.

“Did you stab the Indian back Papa?” asked Francisco.

“I got his friend, but we had to run to our horses. There were too many for me to
fight.”

“I don’t like the Indians Papa.”

“Don’t you worry. We have all the bad ones locked up now. They will be
punished, and the rest of them promised to be good.”

“Why are the Indians restless Papa? Is it safe for us to go to church at the
mission?”

“Oh yes. Capitan Felipe and the men will be with you. Besides, the Indians were
fighting one another. We were just trying to keep them from killing themselves.”

“Mama says the Indians are animals, and we should chain them all up,” said
Juana.

“She is right. They are like very clever beasts. But Chiefs Yanonali and Panay
are helping me and the Capitan, so they are our friends. And the priests at the mission are
teaching the rest of them to be good Christians, so one day they can all be like us.”

“Mama says the niggers in Los Angeles are only one step above the Indians, such
as the Rosas family, and the filthy Romeros are little better than them.”

“I suppose that is about right.” Though I thought Juan Romero a good man, even
if he could not keep his family looking presentable. All our children wore ragged
clothing, but the little Romeros were naked and excessively unclean. They had not bought even the cheapest cloth in years, nor soap to clean, nor thread to fix. Offended at their nakedness, the padres had sent woolen clothes for the children. Like many of the soldiers, Juan gambled too much, and did not set aside funds to maintain his weapons and uniform. But the other soldiers still managed to obtain some things in the way of decency. He and his family did not, and were held in special contempt.

“We’re leaving. Come now, all of you!” Maria cried from the front room. Francisco and Juana crawled off the bed and ran out the door. I wrapped my bandage back up and pulled the blanket over my leg. Maria came back in, Polonia and Isabela behind her. They all leaned over and kissed me goodbye. Maria headed for the door, but Polonia stood still.

“Come on,” Maria said, “I don’t want to be late.”

“I want to stay here and wait on Papa,” said Polonia.

“What? He is resting. It is better that you go to church and pray for him.”

“But I, Mama please. What if he needs something to drink? Or his bedpan changed?”

“Enough! We have to go now! Come on.” Manuel, Manuela and Francisco stood outside the door.

“Go to the gate, I will meet you there,” she snapped at them. They shuffled out and Maria indignantly glared at Polonia.

“Please Mama, I want—”

“Now!”
“Let her stay,” I said.

“Pablo this is ridiculous. We’re leaving.” She grabbed Polonia’s arm and dragged her toward the door.

“Let her stay!” I yelled. Maria gave me a look of shock.

“What is wrong with you?”

“She is right. I might need help. Go along without her.”

“My God! I don’t have time for this!” She said and strutted out, but Isabela did not follow.

“I want to stay with Polonia and help Papa.”

“You too? Now I’ve had it!” Isabela started crying and Maria grabbed her and dragged her out the room.

“I hope you teach Polonia to respect her mother, since you are keeping her from church!” she yelled before the front door slam shut. Polonia sat down on the bed and grabbed my hand, holding it softly and rubbing it. We sat there quietly for a few minutes, hearing the families walking through the courtyard, chatting and mounting their horses.

“I don’t know how she can leave you here Papa,” she said.

“She is right. I am not hurt so badly as to need attendance, but I am glad you asked.

“Papa, I was so worried about you when I heard you were hurt.” She hugged me tight and pressed her cheek against mine. I could feel a hot tear drip down.

“Oh, come now my dear. I’m sorry it scared you. It’s alright. It’s alright now.” I patted her back and she sobbed a little more. Then she kissed me and sat back up.
“Papa, it just seems sometimes, that Mama doesn’t care for you enough.”

“Oh, I see how you might think that, but you children require all her energies. That is the way it should be for a mother, the way it must be. When we are alone she is most tender and caring. Your mother loves me very much, I assure you. If I was really hurt I’m sure she would have stayed.”

“Still, she seems so cold to you.”

“Well, she is a tough woman, a bit haughty perhaps. That’s why I fell in love with her my Dear. The other young girls were so full of emotion, but your mother was controlled, mysterious.”

“But doesn’t she worry about you?”

“Of course she does. I think growing up on the frontier in Sonora hardened her to the threats of the Indians. They were always threatening and raiding on horseback, the Apaches. They killed one of her brothers. So she learned to keep her fear at bay, which for the most part I admire. And compared to the Apaches on horseback, the Indians here appear docile to her, which is not entirely unfounded.”

“If she is so hardened, why is she always complaining about missing the comforts of New Spain?”

“Ha ha ha! Oh my dear, it’s true. She is indifferent to the threat of Indians, but a lack of silk causes her despair! Well, even in Sonora, she was used to good society. Your mother comes from a good family, and they had a very nice home. Despite the Indian raids, they had access to much of the finery in Mexico City. Here we can hardly get anything. I think the nice things remind her of her family, of home, and proper company.
Women live for social intrigue my Dear, just like you and your little friends.”

“There is no intrigue in my circle Papa,” she smiled and gave me a playful tap on the shoulder.

“Oh I think there is. What do you think of Juana Maria getting married?” The eldest daughter of Maria Antonia Lugo was Polonia’s best friend, and engaged to be married. After the recent death of Maria Petra, perhaps it would give her some respite from her mourning.

“I am happy for her, of course.”

“Are you jealous?”

“Jealous of the soldier Hilario? Papa please.”

“No, jealous of all the attention.”

“A bit perhaps. Or maybe I’m just tired of hearing about it. It’s all she speaks of.”

“Ha! And you will not do the same when your wedding approaches?”

“I will not Papa!” she smiled. “I will not chatter about it night and day like that!”

We both laughed heartily. She kissed me and stood.

“Would you like something to drink? Something to eat papa?”

“No, I am alright.”

“Then I will let you rest. Do you want the door closed?”

“Yes please. I will call out if I need anything. Thank you my lovely.” She smiled and blinked at me before closing the door. I thought a bit about the fight, and I believed that when I was younger I would have been swifter and not been stabbed. My age had
slowed the quickness of my hands, if but a second or two, it was enough to make the
difference. I thought about Maria and the children, concerned for their safety when
surrounded by the Indians at church. But all the soldiers would be around them, armed
and alert, especially now. And many of the most able bodied male Indians had been
locked up. I laid there for some time with my eyes open, then drifted off to sleep.

When I awoke Polonia stood over me with a rather sad look in her round hazel
eyes. She had her mother’s strong cheekbones and pouty lips.

“What is wrong?” I asked.

“I thought I heard you muttering to yourself.”

“How long have I been sleeping?”

“Just a couple of hours. It’s almost noon.”

“They are not back?”

“No.”

“Get me my crutch.”

“Are you sure you should walk Papa?”

“Yes, it is feeling better. And I am tired of staying in bed all day. Bring me some
pants and a cloth shirt too.”

She brought my crutch and left while I dressed myself. When I came out she
offered me some atole. I went to our small backyard to pick an apple from our tree and
inspected our garden. Everything was ripe and ready to be picked, and we would plant
anew for the fall. Except in the coldest of winters, almost all fruits and vegetables could
be grown year round in this country, and this resplendent bounty on our table was in a way a small recompense for the scarcity of other goods. Next year, an outer defense wall was to be built that would enclose our backyards and provide a space to corral the horses outside the courtyard.

A few homes down I heard the voice of a man yelling, the sound of a chair strike the ground, a woman crying and being hit. It was the soldier Jose Valverde beating his Juliana again, Sunday being the day he got drunk and punished her for any of her domestic shortcomings. A dirty floor, a tear in the children’s clothing, no meat in the supper; these were some of the crimes I heard him accuse her of. Yet it was himself who was guilty of not providing a broom, nor needles, nor thread, nor meat. He had bartered family goods for brandy and gambled himself into debt with the other soldiers. It did not seem just to me, but it was his home to govern. I returned my attention back to my garden, kneeling down to get a closer look. The bugs had gotten to some of my tomatoes and the watermelons did not grow quite as big as last year, but otherwise all looked well.

There was a knock at the door after I finished my meal. I hobbled to the door and answered. It was Calistra Rosas, the mother of the prisoner Antonio. She was short and had black negro skin, her lips puckered in a sour look she must have worn much of her hard life, her eye lids languishing over her defiant eyes, her grey disheveled hair puffing out of the sides of her blue rebozo.

“I am here to see Antonio please.”

“Yes of course. I will get the key.”

We walked across the dirt courtyard, a faded Spanish flag hung limply from the
flagpole in the center. She hobbled along ahead of me, leaning heavily on her cane, and I following on my crutch. The lines on her hand were deep and wrinkled, but became flat and shiny when she gripped the cane tight. She never said very much to me during these visits, once every month from Los Angeles. I figured her to be a woman of few words, the harshness of life leaving no place for niceties and chatter. But I always wondered what anger smoldered in her toward me, as I had been assigned as Antonio’s prosecutor. The initial outrage of his act and Maria’s strong prodding caused me to argue forcefully for his conviction, and those in Mexico City saw death as fit punishment. The results of his final appeal were due to arrive any day.

Almost all of the soldiers took to Antonio’s defense and I’m sure not a few of them still saw me as his oppressor, though his fate now was completely out of my hands. Felipe assured me I had only performed my duty, and that Antonio was the one who placed himself in this predicament. He and Padre Tapis had pleaded eloquently in the last appeal, pointing out his young age and difficult upbringing, as his defender Ortega the younger had. I now hoped they would prevail and Antonio would be spared, even if Maria felt differently.

We entered the guardhouse and the soldier Salvador stood up from his seat at attention. He and Guillermo had returned from taking the mail, one to San Diego and one to Monterrey. They were to be here watching the gate during the day for the next week, that they might get some rest in the barracks and see to their affairs. The soldier Guillermo looked over his shoulder and saw me, then slowly stood up, as if confused and annoyed, and stared at the wall slouching. He looked like a grumpy baby imp, with his
balding head and fat cheeks and pot belly and squat stature. He had a pathetic scraggly mustache on his pouty baby face. He always dragged away like a slug when marching or after formation was dismissed. He was either unconscionably lazy or thought a snappy response below his dignity, as if he was a man of importance. Both thoughts made my blood boil, and I would require this squat half-breed to act like a soldier yet.

“Sorry to trouble you Guillermo,” I said. He blinked at me with a stupid pouty look. “Has the trail filled your head with dust? Did you forget how to act when you see an officer?” An apology or answer might have calmed me, but none came. “Stay standing until I return. Salvador, you may carry on.” Guillermo looked over his shoulder at me, again with that look. I stared him down with furrowed brows as I passed into the jail followed by Calistra Rosas. I simmered, hoping he would defy me.

The jail was more crowded than ever with men from the fight, as we had locked up every Indian who had drawn blood with his blade. They were huddled close together in the low light coming from the lone window facing the courtyard, the sound of their shackles clinking as they looked to see us enter, their eyes tiny points of light. In the corner sat Antonio and Francisco Avila, our frequent guest from Los Angeles, causing trouble of all sorts with the wives of the other setters. Senora Rosas stayed at the door while I walked over to Antonio and unlocked his chains. He looked at me with neither sadness nor anger, only resignation on his face smudged with sweat and dirt. His shackles fell to the ground and he walked to his mother with a bit of a limp, his legs being sore from lack of use.

“Hello Mama. Thank you for coming.” he said softly before embracing her. I
heard her give a quiet whimper, then she kissed him on both cheeks. They exited and the Indian in front of me asked something, though I could not understand.

“What?”

“He wants to know how long we are to be here,” said a man behind him that spoke passable Castilian. “The hearing will begin in one week,” I said. “In the meantime, you will be released on work detail starting tomorrow.”

I exited and saw Salvador sitting at the table, playing cards with Guillermo who was still standing. Salvador set down his cards and stood up, but Guillermo held on to his. I walked up and snatched them out of his hands.

“A set of cups?” I said looking at them. “Not bad. But I don’t think you will finish this hand. Whose cards are these?”

“Mine,” said Guillermo. I grabbed the rest of the cards off the table. “You mean, ‘Mine Sir.’ You’ll get these back when you learn some respect for your betters. I don’t know where you get the gall to act like that, you little brown pile of dung, but next time you see me you snap to it or it will be the stocks.”

I exited the guardhouse and passed by Antonio and his mother sitting on a bench in the shade of the courtyard. He was to remain within the gates and be locked back up by sundown. She sat there and cleaned his face with her silk handkerchief while they spoke. How any one of the Rosas family could acquire a silk handkerchief astounded me, such was their poverty. It reminded me of the many bolts of fine cloth we were expecting to arrive soon, and I was troubled. During the week I had Felipe’s aid Maximo Pina inspect our hides in the warehouse and inventory our stock in the fields. We would
not have nearly enough to pay Captain Gurrola even if we slaughtered every mature cow. The gates opened and I saw Maria entering with the children, Francisco and Manuela running toward me. The sunlight hit her pearl earrings and necklace, and it was then that a new idea came upon me.

* * * * *

After evening formation I saw the younger children gathered in a circle in the northwest corner of the courtyard. In the middle was my son Francisco and his playmates Vicente Valencia and Luciano Valverde. They were poking with sticks at something on the ground as the little ones around them cheered them on.

I approached and saw that they were poking at three caterpillars crawling toward a line drawn in the dirt. I noticed their sleeve cuffs and shirts were all hanging open, loose threads hanging from where the buttons had been cut off. When I got closer I could see the pile of buttons at their feet, the pot into which they had wagered.

“Even if he wins, Rita is going to tan his bottom for cutting those buttons off.” It was his father Ignacio Valencia, one of the few soldiers who kept his family presentable and his children well behaved.

“Why don’t we include that in the wager? If one of our children wins, the other’s wife will sew the original buttons back on, and the child keeps the extra ones.”

“Such daring stakes! One of us will surely have an unpleasant evening.” Luciano’s caterpillar took the lead.

“So if Luciano wins, it’s a draw between us?”

“Yes. How about a few cigarillos as well, so that it is not just our wives who must
sacrifice.

“Alright!” he said and we came closer to see better, looking over the children’s heads. Vicente’s caterpillar took the lead, with Francisco’s close behind.

“Oh dear,” I said. I would have to see what kind of mood Maria was in tonight. If she was in bad spirits, I would ask Polonia to sew the buttons on. The children jumped and cried out as the caterpillars approached the finish line. They crowded in so closely that we could not see. There was a great shout and I saw Francisco jump up and down. The other caterpillar had turned to the side and his had stayed straight.

“I win! I win!” he cried out and grabbed the pile of buttons.

“I guess I should stick to cards and horse racing. Here you are Lieutenant,” said Ignacio in good cheer. He reached into his coat pocket and handed me three cigarillos.

“Want to smoke?” I asked.

“Sure.” I handed one back to him and put one in my mouth. He struck a match against the wall and lit them. Francisco walked over with his hands full of his winnings and a caterpillar balled up on top.

“Papa! Papa! Frijolito won the race.”

“I watched him do it. Well done. You are the big winner.” Little Vicente approached with a frown, holding his caterpillar at his side.

“You are sad because you lost?” asked Ignacio.

“He turned away from the finish line. Stupid bug!” he said and threw it toward the flagpole.

“Oh, let me take his jacket and the buttons for it. I will give them to Rita.”
“Give me those and take your shirt off,” I said to Francisco.

“Why Papa?”

“To have the buttons sewn back on. You can keep the rest.” They all fit into my left hand, so with my right hand I picked out eight of them that matched. I handed them and his shirt to Ignacio.”

“Pablo, dinner is ready!” I heard Maria cry from our front door.

“Come on,” I said to Francisco. “Good luck,” I said to Ignacio.

“I’ll have them for you tomorrow,” he said. I knew he would, and I knew his son Vicente would somehow have some buttons back on his shirt tomorrow. Many of the other families would not care, but the Valencia’s did.

“Where is his shirt?” asked Maria when we entered.

“It is at the tailors.” I said with a smile.

“Look what I won Mama,” he said holding up the buttons.

“Give me those!” she said and took them.

“Rita Valencia is putting his buttons back on, and her son’s. He’ll have it back tomorrow.”

“Oh God. You should be stopping him, not encouraging him.”

After I changed I sat at the head of the table across from Maria at the other side, Manuel and Polonia on either side of me.

“Don’t make me ask for you again!” Maria called the children’s room while she served steaming pozole into our wooden bowls. Isabel, Manuela and Francisco came out and took their seats and I said grace. I thanked God for keeping us from hunger,
sheltering us from cold, and for our health. In the background I thought I could hear a boy screaming, probably Luciano being punished by his father for losing his buttons. I dug my spoon into my bowl of pozole until I found a nice big chunk of meat, which I chewed contentedly. After staying off my horse while I was healing, my bottom and thighs were sore from much riding throughout the week. My joints were hurting more too, perhaps because of my age.

“I won’t let her go to first communion in a dress like that,” Maria said. I looked up from my bowl at her. “She was supposed to do it this month, with the Romero and German girls. But I saw Padre Tapis after church and told him it must wait until after the Princessa arrives and she has a decent dress to wear. He agreed and is going to tell the other families.

“That sounds fine my Dear. It will be soon enough.”

“I cannot wait for that ship to arrive. Oh God I cannot wait,” she sighed deeply.

“I know dear. Just a few more weeks I’m sure.”

“The Lugo’s are postponing Juana Maria’s wedding until then as well. Everyone has ordered much this year, everyone is waiting.”

Manuela stood to reach something and Maria grabbed the hem of her dress.

“Look! Look at what you’ve done to this dress again! I told you to stay off the ground.” Manuela pouted her lips and looked away. “Look here.” Maria pinched her chin and made her look down at the dirty shredded hemline. “You want to look like those filthy Romero girls, walking around here in rags, in disgrace?”

“No mama,” she said shaking her head.
“You know Pablo, I’m worried about all these new clothes coming if we still have a dirt floor. They will need to last. The tiles are coming on the ship as well?”

“The Indians are making them at the mission.”

“Yes? They can do so?”

“Sure. They’ve already made some for the church. They are good.”

“And they will be ready soon?”

“Yes. They will start installing them as soon as the ship arrives with my beads.”

“Oh goodness! Finally! That is so wonderful.”

Maria was in an agreeable mood and the rest of the meal was quite pleasant. She seemed light and relaxed, as if she had quit fighting the specter that tormented her. We went into the children’s room and laid on the two beds in the glow of several candles. Maria and I held Francisco and Manuela on one bed, while Isabel sat with Polonia and Manuel. The rhythmic pulsing of frogs and crickets could be heard through the open back door.

“Papa, I saw them having another funeral at the mission today,” Manuel said.

“Yes?”

“There were three bodies.”

“It is very sad for them right now. There is much sickness of the chest spreading among them, pneumonia and the pleurisy.”

“Papa, are they going to come back as ghosts?” Francisco asked.

“No. They were baptized, so of course they will go to heaven like us.”

“What about the pagan Indians?” asked Polonia.
“I suppose they could come back as ghosts, but most likely they will go straight to hell.”

“Sergeant Ortega’s wife Maria Feliz says they see a ghost in the canyon of the mission sometimes,” said Manuel.

“Yes, she told me as well,” said my wife. “They believe it is the spirit of an old Indian who died there alone years ago. When the village by there was chosen for the mission site, he did not want to convert and move with the rest. He had no family and moved into the canyon, doing his dances and witchcraft until he died a short time later. They’ve heard him singing and dancing and howling on windy nights. Most of the mission Indians will not go there at night. They say he wants to bewitch Christians for the Devil. That is why you always wear this,” my wife said, pulling her rosary from under her dress. She kissed the crucifix. “No ghost or demon can hurt you under its protection.”

There was a moment of quiet. Francisco was listening with his mouth agape, then suddenly started crying and shedding tears.

“Uh, go, uh,” he babbled, starting to lose his breath. “Mama I don’t have one!” he gasped, “They are going to get me tonight!” Maria pulled him closer into her lap.

“Oh no dear...you don’t have to be afraid. God and Mama and Papa are all here to protect you,” she said, pulling her rosary off and putting it onto him. “There, you have one now. Nothing can hurt you. I will get one from Padre Tapis tomorrow.”

“Will you be safe tonight Mama?”

“Yes, yes. There are no ghosts here. And your father is a brave and godly man.”
He wrapped his arm around Maria’s waist and laid his head in her bosom. As we all lay still, the only movement was our chests rising and falling against one another, and the sound of soft breaths.

“Have you ever seen a ghost Mama?” asked Polonia.

“Oh, I think we have frightened Francisco enough for tonight. He won’t be able to sleep.”

“You have? Please tell what you saw. Please Mama.”

Maria looked down at Francisco, who gripped his rosary with both hands and smiled.

“When I was a girl in Sonora, on some nights we could hear a woman crying in the darkness. Some said she was looking for her lost children, some said she had murdered them, and if she caught any children late at night she would take them away. Once, when a little girl disappeared from our town, they said she had gotten her. I never saw her, but I heard her often, and sometimes she would get close to my bedroom window. I was scared, but I knew she could not enter the house because a padre had blessed it.”

“Is our house blessed mama?” Francisco asked.

“Oh, of course. Padre Tapis did it when you were a baby.”

“When I was a little older, around Polonia’s age,” Maria continued, “My friend and I saw two lights floating in the woods at night. We ran toward town and watched them from far away until they suddenly disappeared. We were sure they were spirits, but never saw them again.”
“Have you ever seen any ghosts Papa?” Manuela asked.

“No,” I said.

“Why not?”

“They are afraid of your father,” Maria answered, “He is a brave and godly man.”

We put the children to bed and went to our bedroom. I wanted to have Maria’s attention all to myself while she was in such a pleasant mood. Most of the other homes in the presidio were one room, so we were one of the few couples who had such privacy. We undressed and laid down in bed.

“You know Pablo, I would suffer any of this myself. It is for their sake I worry.”

“I know.”

I looked into her brown eyes beneath her long lashes, and at the pout of her full lips. She was twenty years younger than me, and still quite beautiful. Even after all this time, she was aloof to me in some manner, her haughtiness hinting at rejection, which made me want her even more. I brushed away strands of hair from her face and gave her a soft kiss, half expecting her to push me away. Our lips parting slightly, and I caressed her stomach. I made love to her quickly and passionately and she responded with great enthusiasm. She did not just lie there as she had been doing for some time. She grabbed me, kissed me, gave back to me, and afterward I was much contented.

* * * * *

I was in good spirits the next week as I trotted down the path to the village of Syhuntun, on the coast just below the presidio. Their round thatch huts occupied rises
and mounds flanked by a marsh, right above a strand of beach that began where the mission creek emptied into the ocean and ending at a shallow point of land that curved out into the water, beyond which were seaside cliffs. I relished any chance to get on my horse and ride away from the confines of the presidio gates.

The trial for the rioters had required copying endless depositions by the combatants. Felipe testified that once Jose Maria had dropped the bag of beads it became *Res Nullius* and up for grabs. Agapito had yelled to some of his friends, the tanners, to get the bag of beads for him, but the brick maker Effrain had grabbed it first. It became his legal property at that instant, so he and those who came to his aid were justified in defending it. Agapito and the tanners said surely the bag was intended for Agapito, as he was the Capitan’s good friend. Felipe explained to them that though they were friends, it was no longer his to give.

Taking into account their ignorance of the law, and that they had not shed blood in malice, most of the participants were given amnesty, but a dozen were sentenced to three months labor at the presidio. These included the man who had stabbed me, the tanner who drew first blood, and the men who had most severely injured others during the fight, as it was deemed their force was excessive even if they thought they were defending themselves and their property. They also included the master tanner Luminado and the master mason Pancracio, as the first could help us prepare what hides we had for Capitan Gurrola, and the second could help us speed the construction of the presidio. Of course these two were innocent, but Felipe had made a deal with them for very few beads. Their real incentive was three months away from the watchful eyes of the padres, and freedom
to come and go as they please in the afternoons, evenings and Sundays. They would be allowed to sleep in their villages and be given a few worn articles of clothing. We even considered trying to accuse Agapito of inciting the riot, but as he was in the stocks the padres would have had a strong case against us if we had done this.

Children rushed toward me and ran alongside my horse. “Capitan! Capitan!” they cried out, and pretended to hold reins and ride alongside me. “Do you have sweets Capitan?” some asked. I held my hand out so some of the taller ones could jump up and smack it. Smoke rose from the holes at the top of their huts, as they kept their fires smoldering all day and night. I turned away from the water to avoid some men holding fishing lines that extended past the frothy shore break. The sea was a bit choppy from the afternoon breeze, but the sky was clear. The three islets of Anapaxa were visible to the east of the large island of Santa Cruz.

I approached a great mound at the western end of the village where Chief Yanonali and his headmen had their homes, wider and taller than any others. I passed by a group of women pounding acorn nuts in large stone mortars between their legs. Among them I saw the wives of Yanonali and Panay. The older ones wore no top as they had before we came, their shriveled teats trembling as they pounded away. I had never fancied the native women of California, even when I was younger, but the Chumash women were the best formed, and some of the young ones were tolerably good looking. The soldier Hilario (Jimenez, not Carlon) had even married one after the presidio was founded, and though the only union of its kind, the match had turned out well enough.

I had dismounted and was about to stoop beneath the whalebones at the entrance
to Yanonali’s enormous hut when a runner approached me. “Capitan, Yanonali has heard of your arrival. He is at the sweathouse.” I was not happy with this news, as it meant I would have to go in.

I tied up my horse and removed my leather jacket, coat and undershirt. I kept my pistol belt on but left my sword and musket in their holsters on my saddle. I should have left the musket at home, I scolded myself, but had brought it out of habit. But what if something unexpected happened, like the riot? I thought better of it now, and comforted myself with the thought that anyone who dared steal it would be stealing from Yanonali.

I walked up the gentle rise of the sweathouse, partially submerged in the ground and the top covered in dirt, so it appeared only to be a mound of earth to the careless observer. I followed the footsteps along two sturdy planks that led to the hole on top and lowered myself down the notched pole to the bottom. As my eyes adjusted to the low light, I felt the simmering heat and heard the laughing chatter of the men in the circle around me.

“Capitan Pablo, come sit with here!” I heard Yanonali cry out from the din of voices, opposite the large circular hearth of stones with a great pile of glowing coals. I could make out their smiling faces. They were all naked and in good cheer from chewing their mixture of tobacco and lime. I sat between Yanonali and Chief Panay, amongst the other gray haired men. Except for a few cripples, even these elders were able bodied and sinewy with muscle, unlike our stout old men. Sometimes greeting Yanonali called for a bit of ceremony, but this was not the place for such things.

“Good to see you friend. I am glad you have come to visit,” said Yanonali, who
gave me a light pat on the back. He had large eyes and a gentle dignity despite his savagery, a charm even, which had made our alliance possible. Where most of the other chiefs seemed hopelessly brutish, there was a spark of intelligence in his speech and manner.

“Thank you friend. I bring greetings from Capitan Felipe, who wishes you well.”

There was a great commotion and a large pile of beads and trinkets was being assembled as stakes for a game of peon. It was the game they preferred above all others, and they never tired of it. A man would hold out his closed fists in front of himself, one of them containing an old bone. Another sitting opposite him would guess which hand contained the bone, a correct guess earning his team one scoring stick. The first team to take all the scoring sticks of the other team, a dozen or so, won the stakes. Though before I thought them imbeciles for their enthusiasm, I had learned it involved great strategy and bluster, every facial tic or squeeze of the hand being a bluff or a tell. Instead of being stone faced, many of them would make outrageous movements with their eyes and mouths, provoking laughter and keeping their opponents guessing. Another trick was to puff up the wrong hand to make it appear to grip the hidden bone.

Yanonali threw in many strings of beads into the pot, matched by a young man on the other side. The men egged them on. Yanonali threw in some more beads, followed by an empty glass bottle from Francisco, the son Chief Panay who we had spoken to after Agapito’s arrest. The scorekeeper distributed the scoring sticks to both sides and the old man by the fire threw some more wood on. Panay handed me a long thin piece of bone shaped into a scoop and I scraped the sweat off my stomach and shoulders.
The men quieted down a bit in order to concentrate on the game and watch closely the face of the man with the bone. I watched a few turns, then thought it a good time to ask about my request, as there was no rushing these men. After seeing Maria’s pearls I had thought about the pearl fisheries of Baja California. There were no such fisheries here, but it had made me think of the sea for something to offer Capitan Gurrola, which normally did not cross my mind, as I was no seaman and we had no boats. There was something in the ocean worth more than fine woolen blankets or cow hides—otter skins. Though soldiers had traded for some here and there, I would seek as many as could be found up and down the coast in the next month.

“My friend, I have come here to ask—” I began, ready to broach the subject, but was cut off when Yanonali pulled a juicy wad of tobacco from his mouth to pass to me. It had gone the circle round from man to man. I looked at the wet brown stringy lump clenched between his long dirty fingernails and tried not to vomit. It was a great insult to refuse anything from them, such things being the cause of wars between them. That of course would not happen with me, but any offense could be critical in gaining his full cooperation for my desperate project.

“Could I have a fresh piece?” I asked.

“Certainly,” Yanonali said. Instead of a refusal, I had offered him a chance to give greater hospitality, and thank God for it. He said something to Panay, who pulled one of the large reed tubes they kept in their pierced ears, and from it he dumped a good lump of tobacco, already mixed with lime and ready to chew, and handed it to me. Yanonali threw the old lump across the room and into the coals of the hearth where it smoked and
sizzled.

The lime complimented the musty tobacco flavor with a light tanginess that made it tolerable to me, but after only a few moments I felt half drunk. I removed it and handed it to Chief Panay who took it without hesitation and put it into his mouth. The combination of the tobacco and the oppressive heat were too much for me. I ran to the crude ladder and crawled up as quickly as I could. I heard some of the men laughing at my escape, having no doubt it was my low tolerance for the substance they took with impunity. I hopped down to the ground and ran to a small grove of trees where I vomited. I was soon joined by Yanonali, Panay, and two other elders. They approached leisurely, laughing at me, and vomited also, as was their custom.

“Capitan, are you alright?” Chief Panay asked.

“I am better now,” I said, still drooling a bit.

“You have never taken well to the pespibata,” he said and chuckled with Yanonali.

“Not as you men do, no. I enjoy it in small doses. Thank you for providing it.”

Yanonali and Panay sat on some smooth rocks nearby, and I followed suit. Away from all the homes was their cemetery, and I noticed four gravediggers hard at work. Two of them were old women and two were men dressed as women, wearing skirts of deerskin and long hair hanging down. This sight of these men, *Aqi* they called them, filled me with revulsion. Yanonali had always insisted that they were not men dressed as women, not man nor woman, but something else, and that only they could safely handle the dead.

“The sickness? Is that what killed them?” I asked Yanonali.

“Yes.” I knew to ask nothing more. At their funerals and mourning ceremonies
they screamed lamentations all night for their lost loved ones. But aside from this, they
did not speak of the dead, even in general, without the greatest discomfort. And to speak
the name of a dead relative, even with no ill intent, would surely result in an attack and
feud for generations.

Disease was also a sore point of discussion with Yanonali and Panay. They
insisted that any such deaths were the certain result of witchcraft by their enemies, which
Felipe and I tried to tell them was impossible. Their prime suspect was always Luihansu,
the Chief of the village of Mikuw at the place we called Dos Pueblos, and a wizard of
great renown. Dos Pueblos was just outside the western limits of Yanonali’s alliance,
which ended with the large settlements at Mescaltitan Island. So if there was to be a
great war between Yanonali and his enemies, we looked for it there. But Yanonali knew
it would greatly disturb the Capitan and I if he were the aggressor.

“I was told about your wound. It is better?” Yanonali asked.

“Yes. Thank goodness.”

“Why those boys at the mission fight for beads? No one here fights for beads.”

I shook my head in agreement. These type of events always pushed Yanonali
closer to us, and strengthened his resistance to the padres. I saw a tomol paddling with a
few men in it, just past the shore break in the light of the setting sun.

“Yanonali, I am here to see you about the Brotherhood of the Canoe. Capitan
Felipe and I are in great want of otter skins. We need as many as can be found by the
next moon, and will pay well for them.”

“Otter skins?”
“Yes.” He looked out at the sea, thinking for a moment. A breeze cooled the sweat pouring down my chest and back.

“*El Raton* and some other soldiers have been buying otter skins from some of the fishermen,” he told me. I already knew this, as they sold them to the presidio for three pesos each.

“Yes?”

“Not many, just a few they kill here and there when they go fishing.”

“Well, tell them and the rest to stop selling otter skins to anyone but myself and the Capitan. We can pay better, a *ponco* or two more per skin at least, for any brought in before our ship arrives next month.”

“Very well Capitan. I will tell the Brotherhood to seek out otter skins and only sell them to you. But I also have something to ask.”

“What is it?”

“One of the men who was arrested after the fight, he is the cousin of one of the tomol owners. He would like to return to the mission as soon as possible.”

“He prefers the mission to the presidio? We are treating them all very well.”

“He misses his wife and children.”

“Oh. I see. What is his name?”

“Carlos.”

“Oh dear. He’s the one who stabbed my leg.”

“He did not mean to hurt you Capitan. He was wild eyed in the heat of the fight, unable to distinguish friend from foe.”
“Yes. Yes, he said as much in his testimony. I’m sure I can arrange his release.”

“Very good Capitan Pablo.” He always seemed to have these requests at hand, as if he had prepared them for my coming. But most of them were reasonable enough. I grabbed some beads from my saddlebag and went back in with them. If I was going to stay a while, placing some wagers on the peon games would make it more interesting. Felipe would surely understand if I did not return until evening, as nothing brought the good will of Yanonali more than spending time in leisure with him.

* * * * *

“So for the time present, we have a monopoly on otter skins. Yanonali has sent runners to all the villages announcing the bounty we have placed on them. From Mescaltitan Island to Rincon, all the canoes will be hunting otter for us,” I told Felipe at lunch in his dining room. It had a long dining table and cabinets along the wall with glasses and china. Felipe’s pay was not that much more than mine, but his power as Commandante of the presidio brought him extra goods in various ways, and he had no family to support. So he was able to live more or less how Maria wanted us to live, and without her demands and protests. His servant Valentine Planeves, a kindly old Catalan, poured us some red wine.

“Very good Pablo. That was an excellent idea. Do you think they will catch enough?”

“It remains to be seen. Thus far they have only caught them occasionally as opportunity presented itself. They have never applied themselves solely to the task with this kind of incentive. But I am certain they will catch a great many. With the hides and
“I am sure you are right. You should know I resumed operation of the looms. Since Agapito is denied to us indefinitely, I had Hilario Carlon continue where he left off. Some woolen blankets are better than no blankets. Even if they are not as good as we promised Capitan Gurrola, they are still worth something to trade for.”

“Indeed. That is most prudent.” I was still a bit sore that he had yelled at me for this very idea.

“So, Maria must be getting very excited at the approach of the Princesa.”

“She is. She is overlooking all the little deprivations that have troubled her before. Last night she discovered that mold had infested some of our wooden plates and bowls. ‘No matter,’ she said, ‘Our clay dishes and china will be here soon.’ and tossed the wooden ones into the fireplace.”

“I know last year was especially tough for you, with her desperation to leave.”

“Yes. Who knows if she would have gone through with it? But just the thought of being stuck in this godforsaken land without them...”

“Unimaginable for a father, a real family man like yourself,” he said. “But some of these dogs would do a jig if their families left!”

“What about you Felipe? Do you still think about marriage, a family?”

“No white women from a decent family will come here. You know that.” The military laws required an officer to marry a woman of the same casta, and to provide an appropriate dowry. It was very difficult to find the woman with the right combination of good standing and a high tolerance for the depredations of the frontier. Yet I had found
Maria, and most other officers had wives.

“Have you heard any word from you sisters?” In particular, his eldest sister Anastasia had looked hard for a bride for him.

“After much discouragement, they have given up.”

“It is a shame. It has been Maria’s dream for some time that you would bring a wife here, and that she would have a woman of proper standing to associate with.” This was even truer since Ortega the Younger and his family had been assigned to Mission La Purisima. His wife Francisca was Maria’s best friend, and from a good family in Sonora.

“You might as well tell her it will never happen. Don’t let her torture herself with the hope of such a thing.”

“Does it trouble you?”

“It is lonely here sometimes, especially in my position. I feel like an exile in these vast lands. What crime did I commit to be placed here? But when I see the strains of this place on the women, I think, perhaps it is for the best. I will return to New Spain one day and marry well. They can’t keep me here forever.”

I lit a cigarillo and glanced over at Valentine by the door.

“Do you need anything Master Pablo?”

“Oh no. I’m fine.” I exhaled and took a sip of my wine.

“I’ll have a cigar please,” said Felipe. Valentine went into his office, returned with a large cigar and lit it for him.

“That will be all for now. You can go have a siesta.”

“Thank you kind Sir,” he said and bowed slightly before leaving.
“He keeps me company too,” he said of Valentine. “We’ve been together so long, and we sit and speak of Alamos sometimes. He reminds me of many people and good stories.” Valentine had been his family’s servant in Sonora and had come here with him. I could see how even one person from home could ease the longing to return.

“I heard Padre Tapis is furious,” he said and laughed while puffing on his cigar. “He figured out what happened with the skilled workers we poached from the trial, or someone told him. But there’s nothing he can do!” he said and chuckled some more.

“A great windfall for us, no doubt. The construction of the final wing is going so smoothly under Pancracio, they might begin work on the outer defense wall by the end of summer. It’s possible they could complete one or two sides before the weather cools.

“Excellent!”

“To appease Padre Tapis, I’m going to return some of the prisoners before the Princessa comes. It will make things look less suspicious should he decide to complain to the Governor. But for now, he is in no position to make accusations.”

“The same Indians are still coming on the afternoons and Sundays. I’m surprised Padre Tapis has not forbidden them, in retaliation.”

“He knows that will only prove the accusations in the secret report. They are trying to make it all appear false by treating the neophytes better, accounting for baptisms more closely, and the like. He even had the nerve to send me a letter asking for a detachment to retrieve some runaways, including Domingo the vaquero. Even if I wanted to be helpful, we hardly have the men, and he knows we are not to enter the villages without the Governor’s permission, though he ignores such an order.”
“I’ve heard Padre Presidente Lausen will be coming soon,” I said. This was from one of the Indians who worked closely with Jose Maria and came to the presidio to make adobes.

“Yes. He is going to review and endorse the response to the charges in the report, written by Padre Tapis, before they send it to Mexico City.”

“What do you think will be the result?”

“With so many accusations, some must be found true. And if so, I know Governor Borica will support our plan to remove corporal command of the neophytes from the missionaries. Then they will only have spiritual authority, as it should be. And we will be unfettered to pursue many industries with the cheap labor of the neophytes!”

“God willing.”

“God willing indeed!” He said. We clinked glasses in a toast and drank.

“I almost forgot. Yanonali had a small request for his cooperation with the otter skins.”

“Yes?”

“He asked that the Indian Carlos be freed and returned to the mission.”

“Isn’t that the one that stabbed you?”

“Yes.”

“Is he just a brick maker?”

“That’s right.”

“We have plenty of those. Well, if you’re alright with it, and you don’t think he’s dangerous, send him back.” I sipped my wine and inhaled from my cigarillo.
“Oh, I need to tell you something. Something most unpleasant...”

“Yes?”

“I received a letter from Mexico City yesterday. The viceroy has denied the appeal of Antonio Rosas. He is to be executed in one month, here, by a firing squad.” I felt a dull pain in my chest.

“I can’t believe it!” I said. “God, I can’t...”

“It's not your fault Pablo,” he said. “Someone had to be prosecutor. You only did your duty.” At the time I had thought I was asking for righteous justice against Antonio for his abomination. Maria, her friend the widow Candelaria and some of the other women also demanded the highest punishment. We had not been content to rely on the justice of the Almighty. I had asked for blood, and now we would receive it.

“I thought surely they would give some other punishment. Any other punishment!”

“I know. We all asked for mercy. You signed the appeal.” I never told Maria about my change of heart, and that I had made a statement asking to revoke the death penalty.

“Pablo, the Viceroyalty is making the final decision. Not you. It’s out of your hands.” He paused. “I'm sending a letter to his family in Los Angeles.”

“I'll go tell him.”

“Are you sure? I was going to do it myself.”

“No. I'll do it right now.”

“Alright.”
I walked out of his office and into the dirt courtyard. In the center was the flagpole with the tattered Spanish flag flapping in the breeze. I stopped next to it and looked back. I looked over at the gate and saw Manuel mounting the old mare I had agreed to let him use. He smiled to me and waved as the gate opened, then trotted out. I stood there for a minute watching them close the gate.

I unlocked the jail and entered. Close to the door there were a few Indians in the stocks. Antonio was at the end of the room in shackles, alone. His young face looked sullen and dirty.

“Antonio. The viceroy denied your appeal. You are to be executed in one month. I'm sorry.”

He looked up at me. There was no reaction in his face. He took a deep breath and nodded his head.

“Captain Goycochea is sending word to your family. I'm sure they will come soon.”

He still gave no reaction, no pouting, no anger. I stood for a few moments then left. I admired his stillness to the news. I believe I would have done the same.

* * * * *

Ortega the Elder was dead. Some Indians saw him fall from the side of his horse on his way to the village of Qasil, on the coast below Rancho Refugio. He had not been thrown. He had just fallen off at a slow trot, so it was suspected his heart gave out. He was well on in years and quite obese after all. But I had seen him very infrequently the last few years, so the news was sudden. In a way I suppose every man’s death is a
surprise, no matter how close we see it approaching. That final leap into darkness cannot be grasped until it is made, that singular moment that awaits each man, the certain approach of infinite uncertainty.

We had gone to the mission to attend his funeral. Though most soldiers were buried at the presidio, Capitan Ortega had requested to be buried in a plot in the mission cemetery right next to the church. An ocean breeze provided some relief from the mid-summer heat, the sun setting behind us to the west cast our shadows over his body. It lay in a crude pine casket behind the grave awaiting to receive it, dressed in the Franciscan habit, the brown robe of the padres.

“Capitan Jose Francisco Ortega was a true Christian soldier, a man of courage in battle, an officer of the King, and a devout penitent of our most holy faith. Rarely do these things inhabit the same man to such a sublime degree as they did in him. Though he did his duty in this world, you can see from the burial clothing he requested that his ultimate allegiance was to the next,” eulogized Padre Tapis.

Hidden in his praise of Ortega the Elder were certain to be many veiled criticisms of Felipe and myself. Capitan Ortega was the first commander of the presidio and a great friend of the padres. Junipero Serra had even requested his selection as the governor of Alta California, to no avail. So it was only natural that they compare their old supporter to their current troubles with Felipe. It was not just for my association with him that I was seen as no particular friend of the padres. In fact, Capitan Ortega had removed me from the command of the guard at Mission San Buenaventura on the complaint of the padres there. But he did it with no malice, and in a way that looked like a transfer and
did not harm my record. No, I had nothing but fondness for Papí. Everyone did.

“He was a man with little care for the strivings of this world, and we all loved him for it. Papí, as he was affectionately known, was like a father to his soldiers, always looking out for their welfare. He was a fat cheerful man to the end, never fearful, and loved a good joke with the men,” continued the padre.

Though he had commanded at San Diego and Monterrey, an opinion developed that in his old age he had become too fraternal with his subordinates, no longer strict enough to hold such a position. That was why Felipe was brought here to take command of the presidio from him. It was time for him to retire anyway and it was handled as such. When he retired his accounts were out of order and he owed a large debt to the royal government. Part of the reason was because he had always been sympathetic to the poverty of the soldiers. When someone ran out of wheat for their family, needed to replace a broken lance, wore out their boots, he often provided the goods even if they did not have the credit, and sometimes would not deduct it from the accounts. That was the reason he was granted Rancho Refugio, so that he could repay the debt. His son, Sergeant Jose Maria Ortega, would inherit both. He would be allowed keeping command of the guard at Mission La Purisima Conception while he managed the ranch nearby. He stood closest to the grave with his wife and children.

“...and a devoted father and husband. Portola described him as a tireless pathfinder during the sacred expedition to claim this land. I have no doubt that the saving of pagan souls drove him through the canyons, across the streams and over the mountains. The excitement of claiming virgin soil for Christ sending him far and wide in
his duties…”

Many of the old veterans from the Portola expedition had come. Among them were Sergeant Olivera of the mission guard and Sergeant Carrillo from San Buenaventura. There were many Indians in attendance from the village of Qasil, who had worked and traded at Refugio. Yanonali and Panay were here too. It was Capitan Ortega’s good humor and charisma that had forged the alliance with Yanonali in the early years. At first Yanonali did not want the presidio in his land, but Papí soon won him over. When Felipe came, Capitan Ortega ingratiated him with Yanonali and the other chiefs, cementing the relationship that continued.

“…and so, he has had a hand in saving the souls of many pagans, and all the heavenly glory appointed for the saints will be his!”

After Padre Tapis finished, the top was nailed down on the casket. In my last glimpse, it seemed to me there was a mild smirk still on his jolly fat face. Using ropes we slowly lowered the casket until it came to rest. I could feel the coolness and damp from the earth below. Some of the mission Indians grabbed shovels and started filling the grave. Sergeant Ortega’s wife Francesca sobbed loudly, as did some of the other women. Maria drifted over and put her arms around her. In the back the Indian women wailed and screamed in their manner, confounded with grief. The warmth of his memory mixed with the bitterness of his departure. Goodbye Papí. The cares of this world are gone now, though they troubled you not. And if you were sent to Hell I know you’d be charming the Devil himself.
Chapter 3   The Settling of Accounts

Gloria a Dios y Jesus y Mary! The day of our deliverance was at hand. A great boom sounded and we felt the force come across the water and rattle the platform of the parapet beneath us. Smoke wafted from the cannons of the frigate Princessa, having anchored and fired its final salute. The men around me shouted out greetings of joy and release. Here was a vessel full of our countrymen, with tidings and news of New Spain. With this ship we were once again reunited with our home, the hull packed full of the comforts and novelties of civilized life. We were not forgotten, we were not abandoned.

I had great trepidation as the men loaded and lit the primer on the brass six pounder that pointed out to sea. It had not been fired in almost a year and a great deal of rust had just been scrubbed from the bore. Sergeant Olivera had come from the mission to oversee the firing of our salute, as he had the most experience with artillery. He instructed Isidro German, Hilario Jimenez and Juan Romero in this duty, which they performed once or twice a year. Isidro looked at me as I backed away to the walled edge of the diamond shaped bastion on which it was mounted. The ground beneath us shook, the air itself rattled and acerbic white smoke filled our nostrils.

“Going somewhere Lieutenant?” Isidro grinned at me.

“Straight to Heaven, hopefully,” I laughed.

“If the cannon explodes, you won’t be safe back there anyway.”

“I know.”

I walked up and stood at the side of the men as they rammed the bore and inserted
another round with powder. If the first shot was fine, I was no longer afraid of the next. I shook my head again, cursing the fact that no artillerymen had been sent from the unit of Catalanian volunteers that arrived a few years ago. They had all been sent to the other three presidios, which had more guns of a larger caliber and guarded the entrance to harbors. Granted, we only had two brass six pounders and no port to defend, but just one experienced artilleryman would make using this gun safer and more effective should we need it. We fired two more rounds in salute to the Princessa, the red and yellow flag of Castile flapping from her mast as she lowered her boats. Men crowded at her ramparts to wave and cry out to us. The mission bells rang in the distance.

We stood waiting on the beach with Padres Tapis and Cortes, which was a bit uncomfortable, but our animosities gave way to the great expectations of the moment. Yanonali, Panay and their headmen also stood by and several Chumash canoes paddled up to the ship and followed the passenger boats to the shore. The first boat came carrying the ships officers, including Capitan Alejandro Gurrola. He wore a tri-cornered hat above his curly black and grey locks and a grizzled beard that could have been a bird’s nest. I could feel the presence of his soft smile and twinkling old eyes well before his face became visible upon their approach. He had a majestic calmness about him, not the nonchalance of some arrogant pretender, but honest serenity. It seemed to arise from a force of nature and flow through him. I think the ocean had both humbled him and made him immune to all anxiety. He had told us many stories of being the master of a craft tossed about in the middle of the Pacific in the blackness of a moonless night, fearful
waves crashing over him, the ship listing over so much that the deck almost touched the surface. So many tales of that deep, terrifying, impenetrable mystery he had, and nothing left to fear. As a result, his gratitude for being on land, just being alive perhaps, made him most pleasurable company and someone the Capitan and I awaited with joy.

But in business he was shrewd and uncompromising. I had been keeping track of the otter skins the Indians had caught for us until yesterday, still not nearly enough pay him. A broken promise would be the end of our dealings with him and he would surely keep some portion of our extra goods and take the loom equipment. I had hoped the ship would be delayed to provide enough time to catch more skins. But I had a desperate plan that would could work if Felipe would allow it.

Four men jumped out and dragged the small boat onto the sand. One of them helped Capitan Gurrola who struggled a bit to get his other boot over the bow.

“Alejandro! Praise be to God you are here again safely!” Felipe cried out to him.

“Yes. Praise be to God Almighty! Bless you Felipe!” he said. He hugged Felipe and kissed both his cheeks. “The sight of an old friend makes the heart sing.” He noticed Padre Tapis looking expectantly over Felipe’s shoulder. Felipe turned and Capitan Gurrola threw his arms out and embraced the Padre as if he were his own father.

“Padre Tapis, a joy to see you. Praise be to Holy Mother Mary!”

“My goodness!” the Padre said. “Praise Mary indeed! Welcome back.”

“It is so good to be among the Californios once more!” he cried and kissed the Padre.

“Come, come,” said Padre Tapis, “We have a meal already on the table for you.”
He put his hand on Alejandro’s back and they started walking away. Alejandro looked over his shoulder.

“Wait, isn’t Felipe coming?”

“I don’t know,” said Padre Tapis and looked at us.

“Yes, of course. Let’s go Pablo.”

As we walked up the beach, I watched the soldiers, sailors and Indians begin unloading cargo ferried from an endless procession of row boats coming back and forth from the Princessa. Yanonali had arranged for four of his large canoes and four others from Mescaltitan Island to help. These were magnificent seaworthy crafts, swift and graceful, and I estimated that they made three trips for each one made by the row boats. No other Indians in California made anything like them except for the Indians to the south, in the bays of Santa Monica and San Pedro. Unlike common reed canoes, these were made of wooden planks, shaped and fashioned with no metal tools, and held together with fibers, tar and pitch.

The Padres dining table was arrayed in splendor with fruits, vegetables, beef, lamb and some specially prepared baked delicacies. I took a secret pleasure in partaking of their hospitality when I knew it was grudgingly given. Conviviality was the order of the day, and the Padres would be loathe to play the spoiler with Capitan Gurrola and his officers present. We peppered him with questions as he told us many tiding from New Spain and beyond. The price of pepper in Mexico City, Apache raids on the northern frontier, tensions with England on the seas, for one hour he humored us with answers to
the most pertinent questions that had grown in our minds for the last year.

His first officer Ensign Martin Echea was a Basque like Felipe, so they sat next to one another and discreetly chatted in their language in spurts between the conversation of the larger group. This did not bother me so much with others present, but annoyed me greatly when I was the only person there. He did this sometimes with Padre Presidente Lausen and Governor Borica, making me feel as if I were excluded from the close talk of family or friends. Felipe laughed out loud. He always laughed more and was greatly animated when he spoke the tongue of his forefathers in that ancient land that spanned the borders of Spain and France.

“I’ll give you something else to be gay about Felipe,” said Alejandro.

“Yes?”

“We don’t need to talk business yet, but I did want to tell you that everything you ordered for this year was found, and at no wild fluctuations of price.”

“That is a first! Outstanding!”

“I cannot wait to feel this exceptional wool fabric you’ve told me about. My buyers have found a high-end market in Sinaloa that is willing to pay what those blankets are truly worth.”

“Oh, well, we should discuss that later,” said Felipe. Everyone stopped talking and looked at him. I could detect an almost imperceptible smile on the face of Padre Tapis.

“You’re right. We shouldn’t discuss business in front of the padres. How rude of me.”
“We don’t mind at all,” said Padre Tapis. “There are many things to attend to, and if they arise in your talk do not delay on our account.” My blood began to warm, this man of God, thinking he was so crafty that he would humiliate us like this. But I knew something he did not, something even Felipe did not know.

“Are you sure Padre?”

“Yes, of course. There are no women here. Who said this table is only for chit chat?”

“Is there a problem Felipe?”

“There are no blankets Alejandro, well, not of the quality we discussed.”

“No? What happened?”

“Ask Padre Tapis,” I said. “He took away the master weaver we told you about and refused to let him help us.”

“ Took him away? You mean took back a fugitive you were sheltering.”

“Please,” said Felipe, “Let’s not fight in front of our guests.”

“We might as well have it out, Capitan,” said Padre Tapis. “I’d rather do it in front of Capitan Gurolla where I can defend myself from your lies.”

“Never mind that,” I said. “You can tell him all about it without a rebuttal from us. I don’t care. We have around fifty blankets of average quality. The soldier Hilario Carlon did the best he could for us.”

“I’m sorry gentlemen. I don’t want any of them. It’s not at all what we agreed,” said Alejandro. I could see Felipe tense up.

“That’s fine Alejandro,” I said and sipped my wine. “They will find willing
homes among the Indians and poor soldiers. And you’re right, it’s not what was spoken. But you have to understand, in this forgotten place things happen that are out of our control, that we cannot predict. We bargain in good faith, and God laughs at our plans.”

He paused and considered my last statement.

“True enough Pablo.” I lit a cigarillo.

“But we have something of equivalent value to the blankets. Something of universal value that you will be most pleased with,”

“Cow hides?”

“Some, and some tallow. But mostly otter skins.”

“Otter skins? Yes, those are always in demand.”

“Would you agree one skin is worth one blanket?”

“Yes. Yes I’d say that’s right. How many do you have?”

“We have almost one hundred and fifty. There are thirty hides and some barrels of tallow so that should be worth two hundred—”

“What?” said Felipe. “I thought we had just over one hundred so far?”

“I was able to get the rest from other Indians further south,” I said and gave him a slight nod to let him know I would explain later.

“So that will do Alejandro?”

“One fifty skins, thirty hides and some tallow?

“That’s right,” I said.

“Yes, that is fair.”

“I apologize for the change Alejandro,” said Felipe, “but as Pablo said, we did
bargain in good faith. Things are...unpredictable out here.”

*    *    *    *    *

Only two crates fell into the waves all day long, both filled with linen. They were retrieved, washed in the mission creek and hung to dry. They were red and blue, so I wondered if they were part of my order. The spirit of the soldiers rose, having other countrymen to speak with and share news. And of course there were the usual good natured taunts soldiers have for men of the sea.

Four men were assigned to guard the crates of cargo around the clock until the shipment could be inspected, inventoried and signed for by Capitan Goycochea. I requested that two of these men be sailors, as there would be a smaller chance for collusion among strangers. Sergeant Leyva was to watch them, and they would be fools to try and sneak something under his watch. He had the mind of a criminal, could predict their every scheme. We knew he had schemes of his own, though we had never caught him. So with a thief watching the thieves, we assigned Sergeant Olivera from the mission guard to watch Sergeant Leyva.

“How on Earth did you get fifty more otter skins?” asked Felipe.

“I’m taking the ones the men sold us already, in the warehouse, from the last year. They still have their accounts credited for the sale. The Indians will continue to hunt for us, and in a few months they will be replaced.”

“I forgot about those. You know I don’t like fixing the account books, but I’ll make an exception this time. However, if the governor were to audit us before the skins are replaced, you are the one who will have to account for them.”
“Fair enough.”

“I wish you would have told me of this before. I could have misconstrued it as stealing Pablo.”

“I only thought of it today. And nothing is being stolen. It’s just a short term loan.”

“It’s a bit on the shady side, but that’s the kind of quick thinking that makes a good officer.”

“Capitan Goycochea,” said Sergeant Leyva as he entered. “I just caught Juan Valverde trying to steal some spices and rum from one of the crates.”

“Yes? You saw it?”

“I went and sat behind some brush for a while. The guards of course went to talking and nonsense, as I knew they would. He crept over to some open crates around the corner and reached in and put some items in a saddlebag. I stopped him as he was leaving and found these in the saddlebag.” He produced two bottles of rum and a small sack of spices.

“He’s trying to lie his way out of it of course. But Isidro and Luis witnessed me search him and produce the evidence.”

“I’m not surprised,” I said. “He always seemed the type for petty thievery. Is he in shackles?”

“Yes.”

“Take him out and give him eight lashes,” said Felipe. “After a short trial, we’ll see if he deserves more. But I want the men to see a speedy punishment to deter them.”
“Yes Capitan,”

“That’s all. Well done Sergeant Leyva.” He nodded, then turned and left.

“Goddamn, he’s good,” I said.

“Go see Sergeant Olivera and ensure he is keeping a close eye on him. I want a report each day until the inventory is signed.”

* * * * *

There were days when even this wild land looked beautiful to me. There is yet life, there is yet hope, there is yet cause for celebration. With the renewal of my spirit comes the renewal of the world. We would be having a day of celebration tomorrow, since the inventory would be done and everyone could then enjoy their goods, so we had determined to find a large bear to fight a bull for the festivities. That night, four of us headed north to a large canyon in the foothills, halfway to the pass of San Marcos. We had two oxen tow a carretta with the carcass of a cow strapped to it.

It was getting dark when we arrived. We unhitched the oxen and took them to graze in a side canyon a half mile back down the road we had came. We made camp on a ridge looking down into the large canyon, the carretta in a grove surrounded by oak trees. Before we left it we stabbed the carcass a few times so it would bleed and create a strong smell.

Sergeant Ortega brought a few men from Mission La Purisima to help, since our men were so busy with the cargo and preparations for the feast. One of the soldiers kept watch on the carcass while we ate around the campfire. The vaqueros Thomas and Quiverra from the mission sat with us, having come to watch us lasso the bear.
I also brought Manuel to watch. Though he had been exploring the canyons nearby since he was a boy, it was time to teach him how to ride well and work on horseback. The death of Ortega the Elder had made Manuel’s upbringing become more important to me. I thought of his son Jose Ortega and what a fine soldier and leader he was. I wanted to die with a firstborn son I could be proud of, who knew how to behave, who had courage. That is the greatest legacy a father can leave to this Earth.

“There were many more bears north of here, when we first arrived,” I told him while we ate. All the other men were experienced at the hunt, but they looked over at me with what I took to be interest, so I continued.

“Between here and San Luis Obispo, we named one valley the Valley of the Bears, because they seemed to be behind every other tree. They were especially wild, savage grizzly bears, the largest I had ever seen. We came down to hunt them there during the first years, because we were all hungry and the crops were not yet good.

“How is the meat?” asked Manuel.

“Not bad, but quite tough in some places. Yes, that was how we learned to master the great beast. But before we had quite learned, I was almost killed by one. The rope of the man opposite of me broke, so the bear was free to charge in my direction, which he did. He took a swing and broke the front leg of my horse, which fell on top of me. He took a big bite of the neck, the circled around to attack me. I was helpless! Ortega the Elder fired with his musket and hit the jugular vein. It fell dead just feet from me.”

“Praise be to God,” said one of the soldiers and made the sign of the cross. I did as well.
“Praise be indeed. That is the only way to kill a bear in it's tracks, shoot at the base of the neck and hit the jugular. If you shoot at the skull, it is so thick that it will often bounce off, enraging the beast.”

The men watched in shifts all night. We all woke in the earliest dawn light to wait, because that is when the bears hunt the most. And shortly after, a large dark shadow appeared from the trees. It circled the carcass sniffing. It got on top of it and started eating, and we could then clearly see it was the object of our desire.

“You stay here and watch,” I told Manuel.

We dashed downhill on our horses, ropes swinging, to see who would be the first to lasso it. It's head went up and looked at us. The others got ahead of me, one soldier went for the neck but missed. It jumped off the carcass and stood on it's hind legs. Sergeant Ortega threw the next rope and succeeded in ringing the neck. It started chasing him. He released slack and rode away from it in a circle.

One of the other soldiers threw his lasso on the ground in front of the bear and pulled up when it stepped inside. He tied the rope around the hitch of his saddle and held his horse firm. The bear was then trapped between the tension of the two ropes. It was not long before we had all of it's limbs roped and each of us keeping tension to control it's movements. I directed the men to pull the bear back onto the cart. While we did so, the vaqueros pushed the carcass off the cart and the bear fought madly, constantly changing directions, requiring us to adjust our strength and movements. But after a bit it could fight our combined power no more, and we succeeded in dragging it onto the cart and tying it down tightly from every direction. The oxen were brought and tied back up to
the cart.

Everyone cheered our arrival back at the presidio and the Indians came from miles around to see the great captive animal. We received word that a very mean bull had been found far out in the fields, an equal to our ferocious prisoner.

* * * * *

Padres Tapis and Cortes were in their finest vestments for high mass and everyone was dressed in their gay new clothing. My wife and girls all wore white dresses with lace trim and fine blue rebozos around their heads. Manuel and Francisco were both dressed like little gentlemen in fine blue silk shirts and cotton breeches. I wore a brand new uniform, the blue with red trim was bright and radiant, the brass buttons reflecting the light from the windows above. Though God accepts the lowliest beggars to kneel before him, it was a pleasure to appear before Him and His saints in dress that suited the holiness and refinement of this sanctuary. Even the Indians appeared respectable, as they were all wearing new woolen garments distributed by the padres this time of year.

“Let us celebrate today the glorious bounty that has come by ship from afar, including a new statue of Saint Joseph you see above me and some gold candleholders. It is invigorating to see all of you in your bright new colors and soft cloth. Praise be to God and Mary! Thank them for all these things, which are good and gifts from above. It pleases God that we should have some comforts and pleasures in this land. Let us celebrate and glorify him today. Let the pagans see the abundance our Lord provides, that they may come and receive his spiritual blessings.

The troubles of this life are but shadows. They are nothing. Let us celebrate life
today, though it is a fleeting gift from God. Let us be overjoyed by his promise, the future gift of eternal salvation and heaven.”

Heaven. I was think about it more these days. My body was becoming weak and tired, it’s final corruption slowly becoming a genuine fact to me. With the death of Ortega the Elder, I was to grasp some meaning in it. The veterans of the Portola expedition were dying off, the next generation of Californios was coming of age. My children would remember me and tell their children, and their children’s children of the first Californios. I resolved to pay more attention to them, to show affection and guide them in their development, especially Manuel. He had conducted himself well during the bear hunt, showing no predilection for foolishness or imprudence. He rode tolerably well and it was time to show him how to handle the cattle and use weapons. I was considering whether to have him be an aid to Felipe or to send him among the soldiers who watched the presidio herds. He would be a young man soon, and the head of the family some day. If I could get a land grant he might not have to become a soldier, but I would prepare him for the art of soldiering either way.

I prayed for him, that he might become a good man, a respectable man and reflect well on myself as Jose Ortega did for his father. I prayed he would care for his mother should I pass, and always protect and provide for his sisters. I prayed for my own soul, that God have pity on me though I was a lowly sinner, that he forgive me as a believer in his most holy Catholic faith. I thanked Mary the Mother of All that able to provide for my family and please Maria. I believed she had intervened to see to it that I was able to keep my promise to Maria, that as the Mother of God she was loath to see a family
An hour later we sat in the mission quadrangle where some crude benches and tables had been placed. Children were running around chasing one another and laughing. Captain Gurrero sat between us and the Padres while we feasted. Some of the Indians played violins and some married couples danced among the soldiers and their wives. The other Indians were gathered in groups, some gambling, some telling stories, but most of them were in front of the mission in a large circle dancing and singing their primal songs. Some had also come from other villages to trade for Spanish goods and join in the feast. Most preferred to eat their traditional acorn gruel and fish, which was being prepared in a large cauldron out front. But the vaqueros, foremen and skilled workers sat and ate meat with us and the Padres, including Jose Maria.

“Excuse me everyone,” Felipe boomed above the chatter. “I have an important announcement to make.” The musicians stopped playing and the dancers stopped dancing. Everyone was hushed in anticipation.

“Because of the rapid progress on the presidio construction this year, and because of the large amount of beads we have received in this shipment, payroll deductions for the presidio construction will end immediately!” A roar of approval went up from the crowd and Maria kissed me. We had many toasts in celebration.

After the feast we cleared out and the bear was carted into the quadrangle, then the bull was let in through the gate. They stared at each other, unsure of what to do at first. The bear approached the bull, who charged and hit him. The bear fell back and the
bull tried to trample him and gouge him before he got up. But he dodged to the side and stood. As the bull came forward, he swatted with his paw and broke its back. We cheered the great reversal of fortune. The bear came forward and tore out the throat of the helpless bull, ending the contest. It was somewhat unexpected, as the bull often won because the bears arrived tired and worn out. There was talk of releasing him back to the wild for his victory, but one of the soldiers wanted the bear skin, so he and three others shot it to death.

Late in the evening after all had left, myself, Felipe, Sergeants Carrillo, Olivera and Leyva sat in the dining room of Felipe’s quarters with Ortega the Younger. We were flush with brandy and cigar smoke filled the room.

“...so we tell the Indians, ‘Please do not return tonight. We must sleep. You can sing and dance for us in the morning.’ But they come back for the third time around midnight! They are singing and rattling their turtle shells and playing those infernal deer bone flutes right next to us while we try to sleep. And your father jumps up and yells, ‘Get the hell out of here with those Goddamn flutes!’ and they all took off running over the hills!” Sergeant Carrillo said and we all laughed heartily. We had been telling stories about the Portola Expedition and the early years for hours.

“I remember when he introduced me to Yanonali,” began Felipe. “We went to the sweathouse, and he warned me, ‘Don’t chew the tobacco for more than a second, it will make you drunk.’ But he tried to impress Yanonali by keeping it for a bit longer. When he stood to go outside and vomit with the rest, he swayed and went head first through the
thatch and earthen side of the structure, poking outside from his shoulders up. He said, ‘You’ve got a new doorway now Yanonali. It’s much easier this way!’ We went outside and looked at him, sticking out of the wall, his head and shoulders covered in dirt. He said, ‘I feel like a Goddamn gopher! Get me out of here!’ We broke into a roar of laughter, Sergeant Olivera almost falling out of his seat.

Even from beyond the grave, Papí was warming our hearts. Laughter was what he left us, better than gold it seemed. I could tell it was of great comfort to his son to listen to our stories. He was a good boy too. The sons of some commanders are haughty and full of pride, but Jose had his father’s easy disposition, and sought to live up to his reputation instead of riding on it.

“I’ll never forget when some of Yanonali’s men went to help build the adobes at Refugio,” I said. “They returned saying he was working them too hard. I said, ‘Papí? A slave driver? I don’t believe it.’ But they insisted. I asked, ‘How many bricks are you making a day?’ They said fifty. ‘That is fine,’ I said. ‘What’s the problem?’ They showed me one of the adobe molds he gave them to make the bricks. It was enormous, twice as big as normal! What a rascal he was!”

“Actually,” said Jose with a smile, “That was my idea.”

“You scoundrel! Oh those poor Indians!” said Sergeant Carrillo.

“To Papí!” I said and we lifted a toast and drank.

* * * * *

We stayed in a recently completed room of west wing while the tile was being laid in our home. We had brought only our beds to sleep there and ate in Felipe’s dining room
for our meals. The sun went down late this time of year, not until late in the evening did
the twilight began to fade. “I went and looked at them laying the tiles today,” said Maria.

“Yes?”

“They are over half done. It looks wonderful. Simply wonderful!”

“I am glad you like it. They should be done by the end of next week.”

“I just can’t wait to move back in and walk on it, and unpack all our things. They
are safe for now, right Pablo?”

“Yes, the crates were nailed shut and are locked in one of the storehouses.”

“Good. I don’t want anything going missing with thieves like Jose Valverde
around.”

“He’s still locked up. He won’t be released until the Princessa leaves.”

“Serves him right. But how embarrassing for his poor wife Juliana.”

“With him locked up, the scoundrel can’t beat her. I think she’s rather enjoying
the whole thing, especially the lashes he received in front of everyone.”

“I saw Maria Rosas at the presidio gate. She is here from Los Angeles, for
Antonio’s execution,” said Polonia. I felt a sadness and discomfort.

“I feel terrible for her,” said Maria. “Any mother would. But we cannot have
such filth among the sons of California. I don’t think even a savage Indian could conceive
of such an...abomination. Only from that hovel of half-niggers they call a pueblo at Los
Angeles could someone like that come. You girls are never to marry, no, never to even
speak to any man from Los Angeles.”

“Mama, what did Antonio do?” asked Isabel. Everyone looked up.
“Something too shameful to say. That is all you need to know.” I saw a little smirk on Manuel’s lips, just barely perceptible. It was hard to keep these thing from the older children, but as long as he had the decency to not tell his siblings I would not be concerned.

“Why are you itching your head so much Isabel?” Maria asked her.

“I don’t know Mama.”

“Come over her by the candle.” Isabel did so and lowered her head as Maria spread her hairs and looked closely.

“Oh God! It’s lice! Where have you been today?”

“I was in the courtyard playing.”

“With who?”

“Rafaela and Josepha.”

“I knew it! I told you to stay away from those filthy Romero girls! You see why now?!”

“Yes Mama,” she said tearing up.

“You’re going to have to sleep on the ground in the corner, away from your sisters until I can treat it and the nits are gone.”

“I’m sorry Mama,” she said and began sobbing. Maria walked over and swung the door open and strutted across the courtyard like an angry cock.

“Come here,” I said to Isabela and she sat on my lap. Through our doorway we watched her bang on the Romero’s door. Lugarda Romero answered.

“Your filthy girls gave Isabela lice!” I heard her yell. I saw Lugarda throw up her hands but could not hear her response.
“That’s right! I know it was them because that’s who Isabel was with today.”

Lugarda said something back to her, this time a little louder.

“What? Isabel? I bathe *my* children regularly, and clothe them decently! I hope you ordered some clothes so you daughters are not naked anymore.”

Lugarda slammed the door in her face. Maria pounded on it with her fists.

“Mama is angry,” said Isabel. I was taken aback, but I had to admire her.

“The Romero’s have lice!” she shouted out in the courtyard for all to hear, then re-entered. “Just when we are starting to live decently, they still haven’t changed their rags. I want all of you girls to stay away from them! Understand me?”

“Yes Mama,” said Isabel.

“Yes Mama,” echoed from Polonia and Manuela.

* * * * *

Antonio Rosas was to be executed at eleven. We were already in glum spirits since the *Princessa* set out for Monterrey that morning. Padre Tapis had performed last rites and been comforting his mother since she had arrived. I did not envy him. I would not trade the worst of our duties, even shoveling horse shit, for such a dreadful task. It is hard enough to comfort someone after a loss, but to do it beforehand, to a mother awaiting the death of her son in the prime of his youth – Oh dear God.

She had requested to see the Captain, no doubt for a final appeal. But it was pointless, nothing could be done. She shuffled in with a cane and Padre Tapis supporting her. She had dark wrinkled skin obscuring her facial features and bright white hair somewhat disheveled. As Padre Tapis gently seated her, her long calico dress touched the
It worn from much use, but probably her Sunday dress by necessity. She also wore a red muslin rebozo over her head.

“Senora Rosas,” said the Captain, “I am filled with sorrow for the fate of Antonio. How much more terrible for you and your family. Both I and Padre Tapis begged for clemency to the Viceroy, but he would not relent. None of us wanted this, not the men or any of the other families. But it has been decided and we must obey.”

“Thank you for your kind words Capitan,” she said, then in a high pitch whimper, “but is there nothing that can be done?” Her eyes began to water.

“Oh that I wish there was. But the verdict and the execution order are final. There are no more appeals.”

“But, perhaps, perhaps he could disappear, an accidental escape, and never return again.”

“Senora Rosas, I might do such a thing if it didn't require the silence of so many. Surely it would be used against me and could end my career, or even my life.”

“But we are so far away from New Spain. They would have no idea. And as you said, everyone wants him to live. They would gladly do it for him.”

“That is true, but there are too many to keep quiet. It would only take one sinister heart to break our confidence. I could be betrayed to the next supply ship, or even the next mail rider.”

“Oh please Capitan please!! To see my poor Antonio shot! I can't bear it.”

“You should not watch the execution Dona Rosas. I am sorry. I must follow the orders given, no matter how repugnant. That is the essence of being an officer and
commander. We cannot have every man do what is right in his eyes, or what pleases him.”

“But, but,” she sputtered. Her eyes widened and her voice became angry. “There are murderers locked up here! Murderers!! Rapists and killers! Almost all of them imprisoned or banished. Antonio hurt no one! How can you kill him and let them live?”

“Senora, I, we all agree with you. It does not seem right, but the Viceroy considers it an abomination, a crime against God and nature.”

“A crime against God? A crime against God? He cannot forgive my son?” she said turning to Padre Tapis.

“Of course he will,” he said rubbing her shoulder, “I assure you, because of his penitence he will not be damned.”

“Then how can God let this happen? Why will he not save my Antonio?”

“In the next life Senora Rosas. In the next life,” he said as she wept into her own hands.

She looked up at me, her eyes full of rage.

“And you! You had to ask for the death penalty! You merciless swine!”

“Please calm yourself,” said the Captain, “It's a capital crime. Someone had to be the prosecutor and he was chosen.”

“He did not have to argue so, so passionately for my son's blood. I hope to see the agony in your eyes when one of your children die! You've been fortunate so far, but one day --”

“Enough! That's quite enough,” said the Captain. “I don't think there's anything
else worth saying.”

She struggled up and stood. Padre Tapis held her arm and started walking her out.

“And you don't even have any sons,” she yelled to the Captain from the doorway.

“May your cold cowardice die with you!”

We both took deep breaths and the Captain stroked his beard.

“The love of a mother turns to rage in defense of her children,” he said.

“As it should,” I said and lit a cigarillo.

It was a beautiful sunny day, the morning fog had dissipated into a clear sky. Except for the guard all soldiers from the presidio were present, about a dozen, including the mail carriers, invalids and retired. The Captain was not making an example of Antonio, but felt the others should not continue their duties as normal while he was being executed. Most of the families had come too, not to watch and jeer as for a criminal, but to somberly recognize the end of this young man's life.

Senora Rosas, her two sons and two daughters were among them. They had said his father was too old and infirm to come, and his other siblings could not. I wondered if any of them had stayed away due to shame. They walked him out unfettered. I think perhaps they had given him a bit of brandy to dull the senses because he seemed numb and stumbled a bit.

As they tied his hands behind a post I heard Senora Rosas began sobbing, then wailing. They glared at one another in silent agony, as if no one else was present. Then they tied his blindfold.
“Don't cry mother,” Antonio shouted. “It will be over soon.”

“Oh God! Antonio!! My poor son!”

Captain Goycochea nodded to the three men who were to be the executioners. Jose Valverde had been chosen because of his recent crime. I chose Juan Romero, because I was disgusted by his dirty family and that his daughter gave Isabel lice. Lots were drawn for the third man, and Ignacio Higuerra had drawn the short one. They took their places in front of Antonio.

“By order of the Viceroy of New Spain, Jose Antonio Rosas is to be executed for the crime of Bestialitate, contra natura y contra Dios. He has been given his Last Rites and the concessions of our faith from Padre Tapis. May God have mercy on his soul.” He nodded toward me.

“Ready...Aim...” I stopped because Jose Valverde did not lift up his musket. Ignacio and Juan looked over at him. “Jose, aim your musket!” I yelled. He stood there, then dropped his musket on the ground.

People started murmuring and I could feel tension in the crowd. I walked up to him.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I won’t do it,” he said.

“You’ll steal but you won’t follow orders, eh? This is a lawful execution.” I considered yelling at him to pick up his musket, but I didn’t want a rebellious soldier holding a loaded weapon. I felt my pistol grip beneath my leather jacket.

“Fine. I’ll give you some more lashes myself later.” I said.
“Isidro, lock him back up.” I picked up his musket from the ground and Isidro came over and took him by the arm.

“Oh God! Oh God bless you Jose Valverde! Someone here has mercy!” cried out Senora Rosas. I was looking around for another man to take his place.

“If won’t do it, I won’t do it either,” said Juan Romero.

“Me too,” said Ignacio. I could feel this sentiment passing among the soldiers as they looked at one another.

“Isidro!” He had not gone too far and came back. “Two more,” I told him, and they went with him toward the presidio gate.

“Oh my Lord! Jesus and Mary!! They are not killers like you Pablo Cota!”

The chatter in the crowd was becoming louder and I was getting nervous. I walked up to Felipe and Sergeant Leyva.

“This is getting out of hand,” said Felipe. “Grab any three men and get it over with.”

“They won’t do it,” I said. “Now that the first three have refused, so will the others. We can’t lock them all up.” He looked around at the soldiers.

“Damn. You’re right.”

“I’ll do it,” I said.

“Sergeant Leyva?” Felipe asked him.

“Alright.”

“Should I send for Sergeant Olivera?” he asked me.

“We can't wait. Besides, three officers shooting a soldier won’t look good. It’s
better that it’s just two.” In fact, this was why I knew Felipe could not do it.

On my command,” I said. We centered ourselves on Antonio and raised our rifles.

“Ready. Aim. Fire!” I shouted and our muskets discharged, mine just an instant before his. Both bullets hit him in the chest. He cried out then fell to the ground. His legs twitched a few times, then were still.

“Oh God, oh God, oh no!!” cried Senora Rosas. “Are you happy now?” she screamed at me. “You've killed him yourself! Is his blood enough for you?”

As we reloaded our muskets as a man brought the donkey tied to a rope. They removed Antonio's body and tied the donkey to the post.

“Ready. Aim. Fire!” I shouted. The rounds hit the neck and head. It cried and wailed, showing our shots had not hit true. The crying was disturbing me, so I walked up and slit its throat. Shortly after, there was silence.
Chapter 4  Removing the Tumor

Todo estaba tranquilo esta dia. Felipe and I had been filling out reports and writing letters all morning. We sent word to both Monterrey and Mexico City about the successful shipment of goods from the Princessa, the execution of Antonio Rosas, and troop strength. We had also received some mail with word of the impending arrival of Padre Presidente Fermin Lausen. I went out for some fresh air and stood in the doorway of the Commandancia watching the children play in the dirt courtyard. Francisco was running after Manuela and Isabel, laughing and breaking off in different directions. Polonia was helping her mother of course, and I had sent Manuel to help with the presidio herd to advance his understanding of animal husbandry and the duties of ranching. I had acquired an old musket for him and had him drill in loading and firing it until I was satisfied that he would not hurt himself.

I saw the presidio gate open and an Indian boy dressed in mission clothing run in.

“El Capitan! El Capitan!” he cried and ran toward me. I stepped aside and he ran into the office.

“Capitan, Padre Tapis needs you at the mission urgently!” I heard him cry out before I followed him inside.

“There has been an attack on a village! They have fled to the mission,” he continued.

“We'll be right there,” said the Captain, rolling up a scroll. He put on his wide brimmed hat and grabbed his brace of pistols. I grabbed mine as well. I alerted Sergeant
Leyva to the danger and awoke Luis Lugo and Juan Romero who had been on the night shift. I wanted them to come with us in case there was trouble.

Sergeant Olivera greeted us when we arrived at the mission.

“Good morning Capitan, Lieutenant,” he said and saluted us. “Padre Tapis is waiting for you in his quarters.”

“Is there an immediate threat?” asked Felipe.

“I don't think so, but I pulled Hilario from his mayordomo duties for now. He's patrolling with Ignacio around the perimeter of the mission.”

“Any word from those watching the presidio herds?” I asked, remembering Manuel.

“Yes, we sent a vaquero there to alert them of the danger. He returned with no report of any hostilities.”

The Indians working in the quadrangle stopped and looked up at us as we walked by. Two large Indian men opened the door for us and we found both Padres in his waiting room.

“Captain Goycochea, thank you for coming right away. You too Lieutenant,” said Padre Tapis who stood up from his desk.

“Of course Padre,” he replied and removed his hat. I removed mine.

“Please seat yourselves,” he said and gestured to the red couch between bookcases.

“Hel'xman was attacked in the middle of the night and burned to ruins. It is a small village on the Santa Inez river, in the valley just over the mountains. Some of the
survivors, mostly women and children, arrived here this morning. Some of the others went to Dos Pueblos.”

“Where are they now?”

“Those with injuries are in the infirmary. The rest are in the guest quarters. I had asked them to stay in the mission village, but they are so full of fear I yielded to them. I'll send a translator with you if you want to speak with them after this.”

“Have you questioned them about the cause?”

“Only the chief's wife has given an account. She said around a ten warriors were led by the one called El Buchon, a petty chief from far in the interior, out toward the Tulares. She said they were attacked solely because she is the sister of Chief Temiacucat of the Cuyamu village at Dos Pueblos. They regard him as the author of the Pleurisy epidemic.”

“Witchcraft?”

“Yes, once again. So pointless and futile. Now Temiacucat will be wanting blood. Most of the male survivors went to Dos Pueblos to seek his help in avenging them,” the padre replied and shook his head.

“I see,” said the Captain. He took a deep breath and stroked his beard. “Generally, we do not want to get involved in any skirmishes between the villages of the valley and the interior beyond. Keeping the peace of the coastal villages around the missions is my first priority, and we are stretched quite thin doing that.”

“Well, if you can keep Temiacucat from retaliating, then perhaps the trouble will remain in the interior.”
“I will prepare to a squad to react quickly if they attack on this side of the mountains. Otherwise, we need to complete our investigation and write to Governor Borica to allow a punitive expedition in the Tuleares. Also, I will speak to Yanonali to see if he cannot intervene for peace.”

“Very well. Tell him, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.’”

I sent for Manuel to return that afternoon. I did not want him out with the herds until we understood the danger and knew if there was a threat to our people. We had heard of El Buchon before, so named for the large tumor on the side of his neck. Great was the fear with which he was held throughout this country, even here on the coast far from his village. He resided below the mountains before the Great Valley, in which a gigantic lake was surrounded by swamp lands filled with tule reeds. The Indians in the vicinity of the Tuleares were more savage and warlike than the ones by the coast, but El Buchon was a menace even to them.

He ruled the villages around him like a petty tyrant, demanding tributes of food and goods where ever he went. He had killed any chiefs that resisted some time ago, and now raided further away to gain new conquest. Sometimes he harassed the smaller villages over the mountains in the Great Valley, but recently he had been coming closer and closer to the valleys and canyons approaching the coast.

We had no desire to interfere with the tribes of the interior and their petty wars. Let them kill each other if they like, and let the strongest of them prevail. But the Santa Inez valley was too close to ignore, and the padres hoped to establish a mission there in a
few years. The Indians there traveled and traded frequently along the entire coast. They had relatives by marriage and blood living here. Yanonali had alliances with them, and so did his enemies. We had to find out if this was just another raid for spoils or if El Buchon had a greater agenda. That would determine if we would ignore him, parley with him or punish him.

* * * * *

That Sunday was to be Isabel’s first communion, then later the wedding of Hilario Carlon to the Chumash girl Juana Maria. We all had breakfast before we dressed so that the children would not make a mess on their fine new clothes. I had to admit, the new tile floor gave our home a sense of civility and refinement. Our feet were no longer dirty all the time and the children’s clothing did not get stained with dirt. Well, they did occasionally, but we justly punished them as now there was no excuse. We were no longer animals living on the earth. We were separated from the ground and barbarity. All the new dish-ware and utensils gave the kitchen and dining area a feeling of cleanliness and order. Most notable to me was the improvement in my back since we had gotten our new bed of rawhide straps and removed the adobes we slept on.

The tortilleros Primitivo and Rafael hummed and chatted as they worked and served us a fresh batch of tortillas with some atole, then made some for the rest of the week.

“Have you boys eaten yet?” Maria asked when they were finished.

“No Senora, but we must be going to the Valverde home,” said Primitivo. Rafael said something to him I did not understand, but his tone seemed to admonish him.
“Oh please have something to eat. That thief Jose and his family can wait. You shouldn’t hurry for them. In fact, you tell me if they give you any trouble.” Jose had been locked up with the other soldiers who had refused to shoot Antonio. The others were reprimanded, fined and released shortly after, but Jose had just been released last week. I was developing a strong dislike for him. His heavy hand with his wife, their slovenly home and unkempt children, and his thievery all painted a disgraceful and ignorant man. Most of all it was his haughty manner, like that of Guillermo, that made me look for the chance to chastise him once more. Who was he to be treated like an honorable man? I loathed these obstinate half-breed peasants from Sonora that I had to command. Good men would do their duty out of honor, but they had to be watched and prodded to do what any man of dignity would do on his own.

“Very well Senora. Thank you,” said Primitivo and they each took a tortilla and took a bite.

“You can’t eat standing like that. We’re done here. Why don’t you pour yourselves a drink and sit down?” The children left their places and went into their rooms to get dressed and the two boys sat.

Maria and I went into our room to dress as well. She hummed to herself as she combed her hair, then looked at her new dresses hanging in the corner.

“Goodness, I am having trouble choosing Pablo,” she said merrily. She had continued to be in good spirits since the departure of the Princesa. I caught her admiring our new things at meal time and looking at the tile floor in the mornings. She had renewed her habit of praying with the children in the mornings and evenings every
day, which she had only been doing twice a week in the last few months. She had even renewed their reading and writing lessons, and spoken to the other mothers about contributing to hire a school teacher next year. She put on her pearl earrings and necklace and applied a bit of rouge to her cheeks. I was almost done putting on my bright new uniform when she sat down on the bed to put some heeled slippers on.

She had on one when I kneeled down and kissed her delicate white foot.

“Pablo!” she laughed and pulled it away from me. I stood and straddled her and kissed her neck, then her lips. I looked at her bosom squeezed tightly together by her dress.

“Tonight Pablo, tonight,” she whispered softly.

We emerged from our room to find the boys gambling for buttons at the kitchen table with Primitivo and Rafael. Maria grabbed Francisco’s new shirt sleeve and examined it, then Manuel’s.

“I swear to God, if you cut anything from your new clothes your father will lash you until you scream!” said Maria to them.

“No mama, these are from my old clothes,” said Francisco.

“You just remember that. I mean it.” Polonia, and Manuela came out in dresses of purple and blue, Isabel in white. The style and cut were some new fashion I had never seen.

“Oh my goodness!” said Maria with a gasp. “Look at them Pablo!” She walked over and felt the cloth and spun them around. I ran my fingers over Isabel’s hair braided tightly down her back.
“You three look wonderful, like little ladies. Just wait until the padres see how
nice you look at church.” she said. I think she took more joy in their splendid appearance
than her own.

“Come now, let’s get going,” she said and the children filed out the door. I
brought out some of Manuel’s old shirts and pants and gave them to Primitivo and Rafael.

“You may take a few measures of wheat as well,” I said and they poured some of
the wheat into a cloth bag.

“Thank you Capitan,” said Primitivo and they walked to the door. “Oh Capitan,
there is one thing,” he said and looked out toward doors of the other homes. “The
Valverdes have not paid us in several months. We don’t want to go there anymore but we
are afraid the Señor will get mad at us.”

“Not paid for months? That scoundrel! Don’t go there. If he says anything to
you, tell him to come speak to me! That is, if I do not see him first. If he does not pay
you soon, I will take it out of his pay! Don’t you worry. I’ll get it for you. And don’t
work for him anymore.”

“Thank you Capitan,” he said. I rubbed his hair and they ran off toward the gate.

Padre Cortes performed the rite of First Communion for Isabel and some of the
other children. The choir played as they walked up the aisle carrying candles. Isabel
looked over at soaked up our admiration as she passed. Her smile glowed in the flicker
of candlelight, and she proceeded to the altar with the others in a little solemn march that
children do when they are trying to walk like adults.
We sat in the front row and watched as the children handed their candles to Padre Cortes who placed them on the altar. Then they kneeled down on thatch mats just below the steps while he gave a brief sermon.

“At eight years old, you have now crossed into the age of conscience, meaning, you are old enough to know right from wrong, and God holds you accountable for your sins. Though you inherited your sinful nature from Adam, whatever transgressions you commit from this point forward are yours alone.

That is why we have taken haste to perform your first confession and communion, as God and his servants are in want to keep little Christians far away from damnation. You are yet children, but now you are held by God and your parents to a higher standard of behavior. Today you will consume the body and blood of Christ. You will taste of his great sacrifice for all your sins to come, and with this gift comes great responsibility. You must never take the Eucharist if you have committed a mortal sin and not confessed. Such is a grave offense to the Almighty.”

He admonished them to pray their rosary daily and to pray additional prayers to Mother Mary, as she watches out for little children. He insisted that they must honor their parents in all things, as the mother and father are the authority of God within the home. Finally, he performed the act of transubstantiation and fed them the Eucharist and a sip of wine.

After the children were seated, Hilario and the Chumash girl Juana Maria approached the altar. She wore a simple white linen dress brought by the Princessa. Most of the Indians wore their woolen clothing issued by the missionaries, but as she was
marrying a Spaniard, it was more fitting that she wear something more refined.

She was rather handsome for an Indian girl, and I though Hilario quite cunning for taking up with her, as almost none of the other men would ever consider marrying an Indian girl, wretches that they are. He was a poor half-breed with no family here and no connections back in Sonora, and she offered him more than any bride that might have been desperate enough to come here. Juana Maria’s brother was Lamberto the shoemaker, who often worked at Ignacio Higuerra’s home. He was well respected at the mission and his work was sought after. Though young, he would become an alcalde soon when an opening presented itself. Also, her uncle was high up in the Brotherhood of the Canoe and would likely own a tomol to pass down. The canoe owners did good trade with the islanders and coastal villages, and could acquire large fish and sea animals.

Yanonali and his retinue were in attendance too, as this marriage was an important strengthening of the alliance between the presidio and Syhuntun. Both the Capitan and I had been looking for one of the soldiers to marry a Chumash girl, as it would please Yanonali and cost us nothing, and now it was done. Why should the men not sire children with these native women? They’re all half-breeds anyway!

The men had collected money for a modest meal and reception for the newly weds, held back at the presidio courtyard. There was food and wine and dancing. Two young Chumash men had managed to get some brandy earlier in the day and were already drunk, stumbling about the crowd. Yanonali gave a nod to his men and had them removed before any trouble started.
Felipe and I sought him out as the festivities went into the night. We had finished our investigation into the attack at Hel’xman. After taking statements from the adults here, Sergeant Olivera had ridden to Dos Pueblos to speak with the Chief Temiacucat and the men who had fled there. The initial report we had heard was confirmed. *El Buchon* had attacked the village because the chief was married to the sister of Temiacucat, who he suspected of using wizardry to spread the epidemic far into the interior. We sent beads as gifts and a plea to not attack any of the coastal villages, even if he retaliated against *El Buchon*.

“We need to ask you about the attack on Hel’xman,” said Felipe. “Is *El Buchon* an ally of yours?”

“He has been a friend for some time, and his father a friend to my father.”

“Did you order him to attack the relatives of Temiacucat?”

“No Capitan. I seek to live in peace, even if Temiacucat makes my people cough blood. Instead of fighting him, I have asked the padres to pray for us and overcome the evil sickness. My shaman are stronger than him, and I have no doubt he will be overcome with the sickness soon.” I did not believe him. I have watched many Indians say that day is night and up is down with no hint of impropriety. And an Indian never forgives an attack. The idea is alien to them. They always have vengeance in their hearts, even if they act coolly.

“So he did this on his own, because of the sickness?”

“Yes Capitan. He is far away from my people on the coast. He does not sit in the reeds, waiting for my commands.”
“We are counting on you to keep things peaceful here on the coast. We cannot have fighting in this district, or we would be forced to act. I am your good friend and ally Yanonali, and would rise up in your defense at any threat, but you cannot strike first. Can you promise me, that neither you nor the settlements at Mescaltitan Island will attack Dos Pueblos?”

“We will only defend ourselves Capitan,” he said and excused himself. Yanonali did not enjoy enduring lectures from Felipe, even if he was our friend.

“I think I know what I need to,” he said. “Let’s talk later.” At the end of the night Hilario carried Juana Maria to their new home, one of the finished adobes in the west wing. The women had spread white linen over the bed and lit candles though out. Some of the men fired their pistols and all shouted encouragement for the consummation of their union. He set her down on the bed and waved to us before closing the door.

* * * * *

We were to see Padre Presidente Lausen who had arrived from Monterrey a few days earlier. He was making final changes before approving the defense Padre Tapis prepared for the charges in the secret report to Governor Borica. It would be sent to the Viceroyalty in Mexico City, without a chance for us to view it, of course. But Padre Lausen wanted to give us his rebuttal to the charges to us in person.

Runners were sent back and forth the days before trying to arrange the place and time. We requested that Padre Lausen come to the presidio. Not only would it be more convenient for us, but it would deter Padre Tapis from coming. Padre Lausen was a practical man and a discussion with him alone would reach a greater understanding if not
a greater agreement. A runner returned asking for us to come to the mission because Padre Lausen had much to do there on his short visit and must continue on to San Gabriel within the week. If Padre Tapis had asked for this we would have surely taken it as a slight, an attempt to assert his way, but with Padre Lausen we took it as a genuine plea.

We were just about to leave for the mission when a runner arrived, saying Padre Lausen would be coming to the presidio after all. He wanted to speak with Yanonali at Syhuntun so he would stop and see us on his way.

“Excellent!” Felipe said. “Valentine, please bring some sliced apples and wine.”

Felipe seemed genuinely excited to see the old Basque, in spite of the business to be discussed. I suppose I was as well. He was rare company indeed, a man of refinement, good standing and good humor.

“Hello? Felipe?” we heard him say as he appeared in the reception area between our office and the dining room where we awaited him.

“Fermin, please come in and sit down with us,” said Felipe. He stood up and hugged him around his faded brown robe.

“Ah, hello my old friend,” he said. He had a deep voice, a long face, gentle eyes and a ring of silver hair cut in the manner of the Franciscans. I stood and hugged him. He and Felipe chatted in Basque for a couple of minutes, in a hyper smattering of exchanges and jokes.

“Oh, excuse us,” said Fermin. “We didn’t mean to leave you out of the conversation Pablo. Anyway, yes, things are going fine in Monterrey. The Princessa arrived with great excitement before I left. We received some new altar pieces and
statues for the missions in our district and some much needed tools for the craftsmen.”

“And Governor Borica?”

“He had influenza earlier this year but has recovered completely.”

“Well, I suppose you are here to discuss the report,” said Felipe. I was surprised. Usually they had small talk for some time before the discussion turned itself to business. Perhaps Felipe was anxious to be done with it. Padre Lausen shifted in his seat and he became serious.

“Felipe, I don’t understand why you would make such false and far ranging accusations against us. The work we are trying to do is so difficult, our resources so meager, and the stakes are so high. Many pagan souls hang in the balance. To stab us in the back like this..it’s a grievous injury.”

“I was only answering about Padre Tapis and Padre Cortes. For all I know, there are none of those problems at your mission or any of the other missions. I never meant it as an attack on you Fermin.”

“Well, I can tell you, every mission has it’s problems, in spite of our best efforts. Yes there are runaways. Yes the understanding of the Indians is not perfect. But the situation you describe is in most cases a great exaggeration and in others completely false. And you do not mention the great counter measures we take to correct these problems. What we need is more priests, more necessities and more support from the soldiers, not slander and backbiting.

When you attack Padre Tapis and Padre Cortes, you are attacking me. They labor under my instructions, and quite frankly, they are some of the most resourceful and
dedicated missionaries we have. I would never entrust the large population of the Chumash under a fool or a hothead.”

“I understand that. But I only reported what I saw, without exaggeration.”

“Be forthright Felipe. You saw a chance to turn the critical gaze of the Viceroy against us. It is clear you are trying to reinstate the proposed doctrine of Governor Neve and remove temporal authority from us. Let me be clear. It will never happen. If it is attempted, we will threaten to withdraw from California, and just as before, the Viceroy will quickly renege.”

“If it was given a chance, the Viceroy would quickly see the benefits—”

“Given a chance? The benefits? The last time it was attempted, the result was the massacre in Yuma! And the closing of California by land. How we have suffered for it, and what might have been.”

“That was a completely different situation. They thoroughly antagonized the Yuma. We have a good relationship with the Chumash, better than the mission does!”

“I don’t think we’ll ever agree on these matters Felipe. But I have come to tell you, the report by Padre Tapis convincingly rebuts every charge you made. The Viceroy will rule on our side, I assure you. And our exoneration will be the end of your tales, and your career.”

“I will defer the Viceroy’s final decision, whatever it is.”

“Very well. There is a most urgent matter we need your co-operation with.”

“Yes?”

“The attack on Hel’xman. Are you planning to chastise the perpetrators?”
“No. After our investigation we decided it is best not to interfere. Let them fight in the mountains. It’s none of our business. We barely have enough men to watch the Indians right here.”

“Well, you may need to reconsider it. Three Christians on paseo were killed that night. Their villages were down the river, so we thought they were safe and awaited their return from their trips. We found out later they had been killed in a separate raid while the war party was at Hel’xman. It was the fugitive Domingo, working with El Buchon, to take vengeance on the mission. He also killed some cattle in the mission herd last week.”

“My goodness...that is serious.”

“Indeed. I know your main concern is that Yanonali and his alliance might be drawn into a great war with those at Dos Pueblos. But we have intercepted messages from Domingo that we find just as troubling. He is inciting the neophytes to runaway, commit sabotage, even to rise up in armed rebellion. He is also meeting other chiefs along the river and out in the Tulares district, mainly those who are not allied with Yanonali. If he were to convince them to put aside their petty rivalries and act against us, if he were to awaken in them a feeling of common purpose, if they sensed the power of their great numbers...” He did not have to finish. We looked gravely at one another in silence.

“Five neophytes ran away this week. We don’t know if they were responding to his incitement, but there were also two cattle killed the day after they fled. They might have done it themselves. Every day Domingo is free it makes us look weak and impotent. Some of the neophytes do not feel safe to go out on paseo. You must act now
to capture him and crush *El Buchon.*”

“I agree with you Fermin. But you know we are forbidden to send expeditions into the interior without permission from the Governor. I will send a rider to Monterrey with an emergency request to—”

“That will take weeks. We know where he is right now, at the large village of Tequepsh on the Santa Inez River, not far from Hel’xman. You see with what boldness they stay in the same area they attacked, and so close. They are no doubt trying to incite the headmen of Tequepsh to join them in their rebellion.”

“But you know the strictness with which Governor Borica enforces his orders. Even if we capture Domingo without a fight, he will be outraged.”

“You have the latitude to act. Consider this: Domingo is a known fugitive, guilty of a capital crime and a great danger to our entire settlement. You do not need permission from the Governor to capture a fugitive! You are not sending an expedition, you are acting on intelligence in a timely manner. If you do not act now, they could flee far into the Tulares, a much more dangerous place to pursue him.”

“Yes. You, you are right. Capturing a fugitive of his type is my prerogative, my duty. Pablo, go get a squad ready to leave early tomorrow morning.”

* * * * *

That night, Maria Antonia Campos went into labor with twins, and again my wife and the women of the presidio gathered in the chapel to pray for the lives of her children. We had been overjoyed months earlier when she confirmed that she could feel two babies kicking inside of her. It was seen as consolation from the Almighty for her twins who
had already perished, including Maria Petra who had died earlier this year. Perhaps the curse of her husband had been removed, my wife said.

But now the twins were a threat to her life. We heard the screams from Maria Antonia as Padre Cortes removed the first one from her womb. There were complications, and Maria Antonia had a high fever. For an hour Padre Cortes tried to maneuver the other child, who’s head was not facing the proper direction. He was able to find and cut the umbilical cord to prevent it from being choked to death. Then slowly he pulled out the torso feet first.

At that time Maria Antonia cried out her last breath. She expired shortly before the head was removed and the child’s screams were heard. Both of the infants lived, praise be to God. Though Maria Antonia had perished, it was believed that the survival of her twins was God’s final deliverance from her curse before she passed on into the bosom of the Mother of All in the hereafter. For the sins of her first husband, the bigamist Lara, she had made the ultimate sacrifice of a mother, a death as glorious as many a saintly martyr.

* * * * *

Arrangements for the funeral of Maria Antonia were still being made when we set out for the interior. I went to see her husband Luis Lugo to express my grievance and sorrow. He sat in bed with the children clinging to them, holding one of the crying twins while the eldest daughter Juana Maria held the other. I told him we were filled with grief for his loss of Maria Antonia and that he was relieved from duty indefinitely to attend to his family affairs. The men had already taken up a special collection from our pay, and
some foodstuffs and livestock were also to be donated later that day. Those riding with me finally went in to see him right before we left. They would not be here for the funeral, and without this ceremony they were befuddled as how to address such a great loss to a man. Men face death with less confusion than the attempt to comfort the living. What is one to say? What comfort is there to offer but the thought of the next life?

But it was time for me to put my mind to the things of this earth. Because of the loss of Luis Lugo, I rode with only four men instead of five. I was glad to leave the presidio and do some real soldiering. I was not underestimating El Buchon, nor was I afraid. He was known to be a fierce warrior. But with the correct use of our horses and arms there was no reason we could not overcome any Indians that might attack us. I was ready for an attack, but would do my best to avoid a fight if possible. We only wanted Domingo. If El Buchon would give him up and show contrition for the neophytes he had killed we would make peace.

I rode out with Salvador Gonzales, Nicolas Cortes, Maximo Pina, Ignacio Higuerra and two young neophyte men from the mission as translators. We could have rode directly into the valley over the San Marcos Pass and be at Tequepsh in one day, but we would arrive shortly before nightfall and I preferred to confront them at dawn. So we masked our intentions by riding north along the coast. We stopped at the Helo settlements, three villages surrounding the tiny island of Mescaltitan in a large estuary, on which was the village of Helo. This was the great bulwark of Yanonali’s alliance between his enemies at Dos Pueblos to the north, and it would have looked suspicious indeed if we did not stop here to give gifts and confer with them. I told the two chiefs present that
we were riding north to Monterrey where these men were being transferred. They seemed satisfied. And why shouldn’t they be? What did an Indian know of troop assignments and the like.

We remained there for sometime before continuing on, almost until it was dark. We passed the time by bringing out cards and gambling with them. By traveling at twilight, I wanted it to make it harder for them to see us stop at Dos Pueblos. None of them would get too close, but they would surely be watching from afar. It was dark when we reached Dos Pueblos and we turned into a grove of oak trees instead of the normal route in. We met with Chief Temiacucat and held council. He confirmed that his spies knew El Buchon and Domingo spent last night at Tequepsh. I told him that he must keep this meeting secret, that it must not look to Yanonali that we were in league with him.

In the moonlight we continued up Dos Pueblos canyon into the foothills, then into a grove of oak trees before the path rose sharply over the mountains to the valley beyond. If we had crossed into the valley at daylight, El Buchon and Domingo would be alerted. But we would cross over before dawn tomorrow and be upon them at sunrise.

We made no campfire, which normally served to frighten animals away, so I was a bit concerned about bears. Maximo Pina had the first watch until midnight, then Nicolas Cortes would have the second watch and wake us all a few hours before sunrise. I did not sleep well, hearing all kinds of critters crawling in the bushes at and the horses becoming excited. “Nicolas!” I cried out, “See what is frightening them and quiet them down!” Whatever it was must have fled because he was able to quiet the horses and there were no further incidents. I listened most intently for the grunting of bears and was alert
for their smell.

“It’s time Sir,” Nicolas said in still darkness. The other men were not long in mounting up, as we had all slept in uniform with our weapons at the ready. It was just light enough to follow the path through the fog and over the crest of the mountains. We stopped at the top and saw a uniform blanket of fog stretching across the sea. Once we dropped into the valley the fog dissipated and the light slowly grew. We were at the river and under the canopy of trees before the light became great enough to see us from a distance. Just a few miles east was Tequepsk.

We stopped and ate some tortillas and spoke in whispers. It was not quite light enough to attack. We needed to be able to identify Domingo if a group of them fled. Half an hour later the time was right. We held out our lances and rode with speed down the river.

The fright of some old men bathing in the river showed that we had not been detected on our approach. We rode into the heart of the village to the largest homes where the chiefs and headmen live. Only a few men and women were walking about, and they fled inside their homes from which we heard murmuring as we passed.

The men watched the rear of the village for anyone fleeing as I dismounted. I came to the entrance of a large hut and had my translator demand the chief and any men inside to come out. I could see the frightened faces of women peeking behind reed curtains within.

“What is the meaning of this?” asked the heavy set chief as he emerged. That much I understood, before he went on some rant complaining of our trespass.
“Domingo! El Buchon!” I said. “Where are they?” I yelled and drew a dagger and held it to his throat. I had to take control and overwhelm him right away. “Tell him we know they are here! And if they don’t give him up now, we will kill him.” I said to the young man.

“He says he is not here. They left one hour ago to return back to the Tulares.”

“Don’t lie to me!” I screamed and cut his shoulder. He twisted out of my grasp and fell to the ground.” I sheathed my dagger and drew my sword. “Tell him we will search every home and burn it down if they don’t give him up right now.” “Dismount!” I yelled to the men. “Go through these huts and find Domingo!” They jumped off and started tearing into the homes and forcing the men outside to have myself or the Indian boys look at them.

An arrow slammed into my leather jacket. Five Indians crouched behind a thicket and took aim. I grabbed my shield from my horse and held it up just as two arrows slammed into it, right where my face would have been. I grabbed my pistol and was almost as surprised as they were when it fired. It missed but they ducked their heads. When they emerged I heard a musket shot and saw one of them fall to the ground. I turned and saw it was Hilario. The men fled and he rode after them.

The soldiers and Indian boys went into each hut around me, and all the large huts of the headmen had been searched when the chief made pleas to me to listen to him. I called one of the translators over.

“He swears they left already. He says you can see their tracks leaving the village right next to the river.”
“Ask him if they saw us coming.”

“He says no, they planned to leave this morning and did not see you. They are returning to the Tulares.”

I went over by the river and saw the footprints of a dozen men going east. But these could have been anyone. When I saw the horse hooves I knew he wasn’t lying. It was Domingo, and he was on horseback!

The chief returned to me to plea some more.

“He says he will have all the men come out and you can see Domingo is not here. He asks you to halt the soldiers.” I saw Maximo kicking a man on the ground and his wife crying for him to stop. Women fled into the trees, but no men.

“Stop! Stop!” I cried out to the men. “He’s not here! Mount up!”

The men looked at me dumbfounded. “There are horse tracks. The chief is telling the truth.”

We mounted up and Hilario returned from chasing those who had shot us.

“Look here,” I said and showed them the tracks. They only left an hour ago and most of them are on foot.”

We rode with speed up the river and passed a few villages. But their tracks then turned to a wide prairie toward the mountains. We stopped and surveyed.

“I can see them!” said Salvador. “They are approaching the mountains.” We galloped with great abandon. They began to rise into the foothills when we came within a mile of them. I knew they spotted us because I saw a trail of dust fly up from Domingo’s horse, a sign that he had left the others on foot. His trail broke right into a
canyon while the others continued straight up into the mountains.

“Forget the Indians. Follow the trail of Domingo!” I said and shortly we approached the canyon and rode into it. Domingo had learned to ride as a vaquero, but I would be damned if I would let some sheep herder outride me. There was a bend ahead of us where I was sure we would come upon him. We came around it I saw his horse with no rider, panting heavily and drinking from a stream. We rode past it and circled around into the trees and searched for any sign of him. For a few minutes we searched frantically in the brush along the canyon walls.

I shook my head and laughed. “He’s not here,” I said. “He’s with the others.” It was a pretty good trick for an Indian. He must have scared his horse into galloping away and gone with the others.

We were shortly back where the others had gone up into the mountains. The trail got steep and rocky. They had done what I had feared, gone where our horses could not go. We came to a ridge of boulders that was impassable on our mounts. We would have to dismount and fight them on foot.

“Tie them up there,” I said, pointing to some scrub oak.

“You stay here with the horses,” I told Salvador “and fire at them if they shoot at us from the ridge line.” I would rather have one less man to fight than risk them doubling back and running off our horses. The rest of the Indians could not ride, but if Domingo was smart enough for that last trick, he surely could run off our horses.

The four of us grabbed our muskets and began climbing the boulders. We were halfway up to the top of the ridge when the Indians above popped up and released a
volley of arrows before we could even take aim. Almost every one hit true, each one of us struck in the torso by three or four arrows which slammed into our leatherjackets. The impact knocked my breath away and felt like a hammer blow to my chest. I heard the other men gasp and groan in anguish. We all dropped down behind some boulders.

“Are you hit in the arm or leg? Did one get beneath your jacket?” I asked them.

“No,” Nicolas coughed. The others said they were fine. I peeked up and saw the Indians with their bows already drawn and aimed at us, then I ducked back down. A musket shot sounded, it was Salvador below.

“Come on!” I yelled and we hopped over the boulder in front of us, since the Indians had taken cover. “Just go one at time, in between shots to keep them down.” I peeked up again and saw the Indians aiming. I put my barrel in a small crack between two rocks and was able to take good aim without being exposed. I fired and barely missed the head of one, a large chuck of rock smashed to bits right next to him.

“Again!” I cried and we jumped ahead to another large boulder. We were almost to the top now. Maximo stood up and was struck by a volley of arrows right before his musket fired. He cried out and fell to the ground. One of the arrows had hit him in the leg. He tried to stand up behind the rocks but could not.

“Stay here and shoot at them for us,” I told him. “Right there, in that small crack between those two rocks, you can kneel on one knee and fire safely.” He tried to stand again and groaned.

“Stop that! Reload and crawl over there!” I said. He began to reload his musket as did I. When I was finished, Hilario shot at the Indians and we advanced again. He
reloaded and Nicolas tried to aim but kept ducking to avoid being hit. Instead of firing volleys, the Indians were now shooting one at a time, waiting for us to appear and aim our muskets.

“One at a time,” I told them, “Wait for Maximo.” We heard Maximo fire, then I peaked up and aimed and fired right as an Indian appeared. I hit the rock below him. Then I moved behind the other two and Nicolas fired, then a minute later Hilario fired. By that time I had reloaded I fired and killed one of the Indians. Then Nicolas fired from down below, then Salvador from the bottom. The five of us rotated like this, firing one at a time while the others reloaded. We could each reload in a couple minutes, so as a group we were able to fire every half minute or so. Two Indians were hit in the shoulder, and then they appeared no more.

“Reload and we’re going to charge the top,” I said. We did so, and waited for Nicolas and Salvador to fire. We hopped up and scurried to the top as fast as we could. Just as I reached the top one of the Indians heads appeared and I smashed it with the butt of my musket. I heard a loud crack and it spurted blood. Others appeared and the three of us took aim and fired, hitting three of them while the others fled toward a dense thicket of scrub oak.

“Charge!” I said and drew my sword. The others did so and we ran after them with swords raised. Some had made it into the thicket when El Buchon and four of them stopped and turned. He was a large man and I could tell from his fierceness it was him. Seeing there were only three of us, without our muskets ready, they turned to fight. We ran at them while they drew arrows and aimed. Hilario and Nicolas reached them and
slashed two of them before they could fire, but I was a few steps behind. I pulled my pistols and fired both of them, one of them misfiring and the other hitting El Buchon before two arrows hit me in the jacket. I slashed El Buchon but missed and he hit me with a war club in the shoulder. I fell back and he charged at me and knocked me to the ground. Behind me, he raised his war club for a great blow to my head. I slashed him in the gut and rolled before his club hit the ground with a deep thud. I jumped up and this time he smacked the side of my skull.

I saw a bright light and felt dizzy and was about to collapse when I heard a musket shot and saw El Buchon fall. It was Maximo, who had somehow made it up to the top of the ridge. I ran to Salvador who had an Indian on top of him. I ran over and kicked him in the face, then slashed his neck with my sword. He was gurgling blood and gasping as the rest of the Indians fled. I dispatched him with another big cut to the neck.

“Over here!” cried Maximo. “Domingo is fleeing!” I ran over there and looked into the valley below, the one where we had found Domingo’s horse. A trail of dust floated up from Domingo’s horse riding at a furious gallop, the rider shouting and gouging with his spurs. He disappeared under the cover of oaks, heading out of the valley and deeper into the mountains. I felt dizzy again and became overwhelmed. I sat down. “Lieutenant, are you alright?” There was brightness, then darkness, then silence.

* * * * *

“I’m very disappointed Pablo,” Felipe said and shook his head. “There are so few men here that I can truly count on, and you are one of them. It’s not as if you had to find Domingo, nor was he far away. You were sent right to him, just one day’s march away,
and you let him escape.” I sat and waited. It was always best to wait until he was done, however hard it was to bite my tongue. “And he has fled deep into the Tulares, no doubt. Now I will have to send an expedition to find him. What should have been accomplished quickly, and with few men, will take two squads and much more time, and be much more dangerous as well.”

“You did not send enough men with me.”

“I could hardly spare that many. You know that.”

“You could have pulled one or two men each from the other missions.”

“I’m not sure Sergeant Ortega or the others would agree with that.”

“But we were going into a fight. What is one less man to watch the herds or on guard duty in comparison?”

“How many men did El Buchon have?”

“Almost two dozen.”

“Two dozen? Five men held off a thousand Indians at San Diego in ‘75!”

“That’s different. They were defending from a structure. We were attacking, dismounted, up a hill and over boulders.”

“So all the Indians have to do is climb a pile of rocks to escape us!”

“They did not escape. We killed them, including El Buchon.”

“I can’t believe you didn’t secure Domingo’s horse. That is the most insulting part of all of this, that he fooled you and was able to escape on horseback. It’s the kind of trick a shepherd boy would use.”

“But I was correct, he was with El Buchon. He just managed to find a path back
down to the valley. It was pure luck.”

“Why didn’t you go to the other side of the ridge and wait for them? You could have had all of them trapped easily.”

“No Felipe. All surprise was lost. We could not just go ahead and wait for them. They could have double backed to the river, they could have waited until dark, they could have followed the ridge away from the valley, they could have ambushed us in the dark—”

“Do you know how weak this makes us look to the Indians? That we can’t catch one runaway, taunting us from right over the mountains. And to barely overcome a couple dozen Indians—”

“We killed them damn it! They put up a good fight. I killed El Buchon, the most feared Indian in the backcountry and you think we look weak? That’s—”

“I’ve heard enough! If I didn’t have a presidio to command I would have done it myself. Next time I’m sending someone else, someone who will have the prudence and tenacity to see the job done. And I’m reprimanding you for neglect of duty in my report of this incident—”

“Neglect of duty? I almost got killed!” I said pointing to the bandage wrapped around my head. “How about endangering your men by sending so few out into the wilderness to hunt down a neophyte? And what if the villagers had attacked? Or El Buchon had gathered more allies?”

“None of that happened, or would have happened under the right officer! Get the hell out of here!”

“Very well!” I said and stormed out, before I might really speak my mind. This
was the most treacherous thing he had ever done, to send me into a fight undermanned and blame me like this, with no consideration for the danger, the death of El Buchon, my wounds and the wounds of my men. He had become a coward who only sought to protect himself from the Governor and those above him, and he had lost sight of how fierce the Indians can fight when they have the right advantage. The completeness of the betrayal cut bitterly, from this man I had considered a friend and a good officer.

* * * * *

Maria kissed me softly on the lips and rubbed the back of my neck as I stood at the doorway to depart.

“Be careful,” she said.

“Oh dear, I’m just going to the mission. Padre Tapis does not bite.”

“I love you.” We kissed again and I left the presidio gates. I took my time, not going straight to the mission, but first riding north along the coast and looking over the coastal bluffs at Syhuntun below and out to sea at the channel islands. Maria had been so tender with me the last few weeks, attending to me so closely that Polonia could hardly do the same, and we had been making love more than ever. The closeness and affection soothed my wounds from the fight with El Buchon and the stalemate between Felipe and myself. Maria had also been more affectionate with the children, even our neighbors. It seemed the death of Maria Antonia Campos had made her contemplate the transitory nature of this life, and the lives those around her.

Felipe and I had hardly spoken. I knew which reports needed to be drafted, which needed to be copied and such, so I worked at home while Maria made sure the children
did not bother me too much. I also had plenty of errands to do away from the presidio. I was going to the mission to check the guard logs and speak with the padres about the next expedition to capture Domingo.

I watched the smoke from the many hearths of Syhuntun rise into the air and waft away in the ocean breeze. The native women were out pounding their acorns and seeds in their stone mortars, chatting, laughing and watching their children run and play along the beach and in the estuaries. I watched a group of men enter the sweathouse and some old men dancing and singing close by. A few canoes glided west just outside the surf, the men rowing in a rhythm under the spell of some mystic chant.

I wondered, as I often did, how long these savages had been here living this way, without God, without King, without law. How long had they fished these waters and hunted these fields and chanted their primal screams to demons by the firelight in the darkness of night, in total ignorance of the one true God, in total ignorance of reason and understanding of man’s higher nature? How long would they have continued if we had not come? And how many others were still out there, people without reason, in the terrifying emptiness and indifference of the hostile wilderness around them?

I found it hard to acknowledge that I envied them. Despite the occasional hunger and depredations, they were free to roam the land, free to come and go on this earth, only their bellies to answer to and family to attend to. No orders to follow, to creditors to pay, no alcaldes to lock them up. It was during times like this that I most desired their unfettered ways.

I stopped by the guard house at the mission. Ignacio Higuerra was not there, but I
flipped through the log book anyway. Everything looked well and quiet. There had been no more stock missing or wounded since the death of *El Buchon*, as I had expected. The river tribes had come to show gratitude with gifts of baskets and skins. They no longer had to fear him or pay tribute.

I had recommended Ignacio Higuerra for promotion to Corporal. He had shown a calmness and determination in the fight with *El Buchon*, and as mayordomo of the mission he had shown good judgment in supervising the Indians, when to punish them and when to be permissive. In spite of our hostilities, I thought Felipe would have to agree and accept my recommendation. He needed good Corporals and Sergeants more than he might want to spite me, and Ignacio had shown himself the man for this position.

“Greetings Lieutenant,” said Jose Maria when I entered the courtyard. “Please come with me.” I was surprised when he took me to the padre’s dining room instead of their study, and that Padre Cortes was also present.

“Please join us for a meal Pablo,” said Padre Tapis. He rarely called me by my first name, only during confession and when we were obligated to sit together at dances and feasts.

“Thank you,” I said and sat down. There was an abundance of fine fruit, tortillas and meat prepared. I grabbed an apple and bit into it.

“Some wine?” asked Padre Cortes.

“Ummm, yes, well, perhaps a short cup of brandy first.”

“Brandy?”

“Yes. I feel like a good strong drink and a smoke to stoke my appetite.”
“Very well. Jose, some brandy!” barked Padre Cortes. I heard a boy in the other room scurry away.

“How are your wounds healing? Has your head been hurting since the fight?”

“Only for the first few days. It seems to be fine now.”

“Thank God. I went to see Maximo and Nicolas Cortes yesterday. The sutures that I sewed in their wounds are healing well, and they have fought off infection.”

“Yes, thank God. We cannot afford to spare them.”

“And your family. How are Maria and the children?”

“Yes, I’m sure we can discuss them later. Have you had any word you have from the Indians in the interior?”

“We’re enjoying our meal Pablo. Please, there’s no urgency for that, unless a decision is pending for Capitan Goycochea.” The boy brought in my brandy. I took a sip and lit a cigarillo.

“You knew I when I was coming. You couldn’t finish eating so we could talk?”

“My goodness? Have you turned into an Englishman? In too much of a hurry to enjoy some food and chatter?”

“Yes, feed me and console me so you can turn me against the Capitan. You know we are fighting and that’s why you’re being so nice.”

“My God! I cannot believe your cynicism! In spite of our disagreements, we do care about your spiritual welfare, and the welfare of your family. What kind of priest does not ask about a man’s family? It must be for some kind of agenda?”

“And meeting here instead of your office? Putting out all this food and wine?”
“What? We have many visitors come eat with us. You know that. We are enjoying an extended meal. Is that so unusual?” I took another sip and a puff off my cigarillo.

“I’m really hurt Pablo, that you think us so conniving. Yes we know of your troubles with the Capitan. Who doesn’t? But that we cannot speak to you as one Spaniard to another, or offer you food without arousing your suspicion—perhaps we should meet another time, a formal time, in our office.” I looked at him in the face, his blue eyes below bushy eyebrows raised in a look of sorrow. He looked over at Padre Cortes, then back to me.

“I, no, let us eat. I’m sorry. It just seemed strange.”

“It should not. We pray for you, you know, often. For the Capitan too, despite what you may think.”

“Maria is fine, better that ever in fact. So are the children, all in good health, and behaving well, except for Francisco, who is somewhat rambunctious.”

“Ah yes. I see him squirming in Maria’s lap during mass. But I’ve noticed the children are so much more attentive during the service, especially Isabel since her First Communion.”

“Yes, well Maria has been seeing to their lessons and Bible readings most diligently. Some primers and rosaries came with our goods on the Princessa, which she has been putting to good use.”

“Oh dear. To see little ones so well instructed makes my heart raise with joy. Surely Mother Mary will bless her for guarding their precious souls.”
“Yes. Praise be to God. A mother is the spiritual heart of the home, even if the father is the head.”

“If things are going so well at home, why do you seem tired and despondent.”

“Just so many things to do around the presidio, and this business with the Capitan.”

“I understand. Well, I won’t ask about the Capitan. I don’t want you to think we are prying. But I hope you take good care of yourself, seek solace in prayer, get some sleep.”

“I’m certainly eating enough,” I said, patting my belly. “And Maria looks after my health as best she can.”

We talked for some time, and in fact, we never got around to discussing the expedition. I said I had better return to the presidio, and that we could discuss it another day as the Capitan was still waiting for word from Governor Borica. In the mean time, I asked that they forward any word of Domingo’s movements and activities in the interior, as their charges on paseo would surely hear of him.