

Walt Disney's  
**Zorro**



Authorized

**TV**  
Edition

*Bill Edwards*







WALT DISNEY'S


# Zorro



Told by  
Steve Frazee

Adapted from the Walt Disney television series ZORRO,  
featuring the famous character created by  
Johnston McCulley.

Illustrated by  
Henry Luhrs



Authorized Edition

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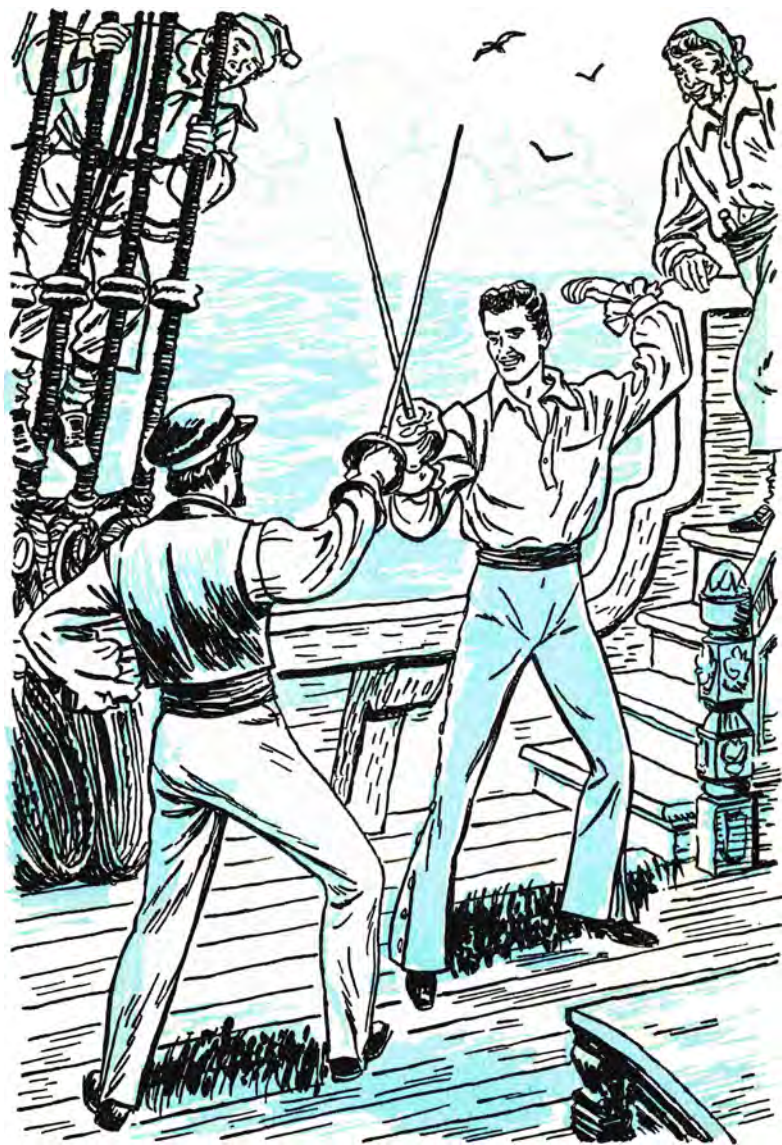
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## Chapter 1

## The Swordsman

Early morning fog was beginning to break away slowly as the *Queen of Castile* moved under shortened sail across blue Pacific water toward the green land showing in the distance. A sturdy ship she was, although she appeared awkward because of standing so high in the water; during the months-long voyage from Spain, the *Queen* and her crew had stood up well under the battering of fierce storms.

And now she was easing in slowly toward her destination, California, in the year of 1820.

Bare to the waist, some of them shivering a little in the chill of dawn, brown sailors climbed nimbly in the rigging, taking orders from a bull-voiced first mate standing on the foredeck. Now and then, like the sailors, the mate took his eyes from his work to watch with admiration the terrific contest going on below him on the waist of the ship.

Two young men whose faces shone with excitement were fighting with swords that flashed and darted like tongues of pale fire. It appeared to be a deadly fight, as first one man and then the other gave way before the nimble blade of his opponent.

The shorter of the pair was Rafael Valdez, first lieutenant of the ship, and one of the best swordsmen in all the service of his Majesty King Ferdinand of Spain. The full sleeve of his white shirt leaped to the movements of his wrist as his sword forced the tall man before him back toward the grating of a cargo hatch.

"*Ahora!*" Valdez cried. Now! He doubled his efforts, lunging, parrying, then driving ahead again. The tip of his sword seemed to twine around the gray steel of his opponent's weapon.

The tall man seemed to be tiring. He was slender, this Don Diego de la Vega. During his idle moments on the ship it had appeared that he lacked fire and eagerness. Although he was defending himself well now, he was in danger of being driven over the hatch and on beyond to the gently lifting rail of the ship.

Valdez was strong and determined. He pressed in even harder than before. "*Ahora!*" he cried again.

The sailors in the rigging forgot all their duties for a few moments as they peered down to see the finish of the contest, and the first mate let them loaf because he, too, was watching closely. Surely, the lazy *Señor* Diego de la Vega, one who read so many books, would have to give way before Valdez.

Diego did not give way. He did not even go back as far as the grating behind him. Valdez made a hard straight thrust. Diego's white-sleeved arm rolled sidewise and Valdez's blade went harmlessly to one side, steel ringing on steel.

"*Bueno!*" Valdez cried. Good! He recovered quickly for a man who looked so short and heavy. Diego's sword was reaching toward his chest when Valdez parried it aside and followed in riposte, or with a thrust of his own.

Once more, with what seemed a careless movement of his wrist, although as fast as lightning, Diego turned the thrust aside. The hilts of the swords came together with a clash and the two men were close together for a moment, their arms straining hard. They grinned into each other's sweating faces and then leaped back.

"It is almost time for breakfast," Diego said. His sword began to move with blinding speed, as if it were a flicking,

living part of him. It was he who crowded Valdez then.

In short steps the ship's officer fell back before the whistling, dancing point of Diego's sword. He made a stand, fighting with all his skill. Diego's blade slipped across his shoulder. The hopeless but good-natured expression on Valdez's face said that he knew the blade could have pierced his shoulder, if Diego had so wished.

Valdez was not one to quit. He tried a special trick that he had practiced secretly in his cabin. The tips of the swords were crossed, with the intent eyes of the two men sighting across the points at each other.

"Bind!" Valdez muttered, as if rehearsing his moves. He beat aside the point of Diego's sword. The next movement was *disengage*. He muttered that under his breath as his sword dropped from contact with the other steel. The tip of Valdez's sword went under Diego's weapon and then in one continuous movement thrust straight at Diego's chest.

It was fast and well done. Valdez was sure of it. But something happened. Diego's wrist rolled and twisted. His sword engaged Valdez's weapon and seemed to twine around it.

The next instant Valdez was standing unarmed as his sword skidded across the planks of the deck. And then

Diego's point was at his throat. Valdez grinned and threw up his hands in despair. "I yield. *Touché!* And may the devil be stuck in the tail with that sword of yours."

The two men laughed. They drew out handkerchiefs and wiped their sweating faces.

The first mate bellowed for the sailors to resume their work.

As Diego and Valdez started off to get breakfast, the ship's officer cast a long look toward the shore and said, "I'll miss these daily bouts, Diego. I hate to see you leaving us."

It had been a good voyage and Diego had enjoyed it, especially the fencing contests with Valdez; but now he thought there might be something more than just regret at parting in Valdez's tone. "You seem worried about my going, Rafael."

Valdez shot him a quick glance. "You've been away three years. You will find changes, I'm afraid." He hesitated, as if intending to say a great deal more on the subject. Then he shook his head and smiled. "I don't like to croak of bad events while eating, so let us make our last breakfast together a happy one."

They went on to the officers' mess, late as usual. The

mess boys hopped about quickly to serve them, since this was Diego's last meal on the ship and he would likely leave a fat gold coin as a tip.

Although he was more than curious to know about the changes at which Valdez had hinted, Diego asked no more questions during the meal. When they returned to the deck after eating, they leaned on the rail, observing that the land had come a great deal closer to them.

"Your skill with the sword may serve you well in California," Valdez said, "especially the way things are there now."

"Oh?"

The first lieutenant's fingers tapped the damp wooden rail. "Trouble in Spain . . . trouble here too." Valdez shook his head. "Military force has replaced the gentle rule that used to be in California."

"Why didn't you tell me this before, Rafael?" Diego asked. "And how do you know, since you haven't been here for more than a year yourself?"

"You remember we met the *Santo Dom* sailing home from here two days ago, when we stopped and the capitan and I were rowed over for a visit. That is when we learned what is happening in California."

In his last letter from his father, Diego had received a strong hint that things were going badly in California, but old Don Alejandro de la Vega had not explained what the trouble was. The fact that he had asked Diego to come home at once, however, indicated that something was very seriously wrong. At first Diego had thought it might be that his father was sick.

“What’s the trouble, Rafael?” Diego asked. They were working closer to land all the time.

“I didn’t want to make your last two days aboard the *Queen* unpleasant with worry,” Valdez said, “so I held off telling you what I heard until the last. It’s like this: A year ago a new military commandante named Monastario was appointed at Los Angeles. Since then he has done everything possible to crush freedom in California, at least that part of it which he controls.”

“How?” Diego asked.

“With taxes that no one can pay. By accusing people of treason, then throwing them in jail. By all the thousand ways that any man in power can use to destroy freedom.”

“What is behind all this?”

Valdez frowned. “The officers of the *Santo Dom* seemed

to think this new commandante wished to crush the land-owners near the pueblo of Los Angeles in order to gain their ranchos for himself. It has been done before, you know.”

“So that is it?” Diego’s hand touched the handle of his sword.

Valdez watched him with a worried look. “I know your love for California, Diego, and your hatred of tyranny. I said your skill with a blade would stand you in good stead, but I am also afraid of where it might lead you.”

“So? Where is that?”

“Your unexpected return will make Monastario wonder why you came, beyond doubt. He is a suspicious man, I hear. The instant you reveal your swordsmanship or speak against what the commandante is doing—you will probably do both, if I know you—then do you have to ask me where you will end?”

“Dead or in jail, you mean?” Diego said.

Valdez nodded. “You are quick to act, Diego. I know. Once you act quickly against this new commandante, with his whole garrison of lancers behind him, and all the people of the country in fear of him . . .” Valdez shook his head gloomily.



“What would you have me do, Rafael—stand aside idly and say nothing while this scoundrel steals the very land where I was born?”

“I don’t know what you can do,” Valdez said, “but I am trying to tell you not to act hastily. No one man can defeat a whole garrison of soldiers.” He shrugged. “Perhaps I worry too much. Perhaps conditions ashore are not as bad as the officers of the *Santo Dom* said.”

“They were in Los Angeles, weren’t they?”

“Yes,” Valdez said. “They were ashore, while we will be here only long enough to let you off before going on to Monterey.” The ship was getting very close now to the San Pedro landing. “I must attend to my duties, Diego. I will tell you good-by when you are ready to go ashore.”

Valdez hurried away.

Until he knew for himself about the actions of the commandante, Diego could not be sure that the story told by the officers of the *Santo Dom* was completely the truth. But he feared that it was. There was the letter from his father that indicated something far more than ordinary trouble.

Valdez was right; in case conditions were as bad as Diego suspected they were, it would be a bad mistake to reveal

himself openly against Commandante Monasterio. Diego stood at the rail, thinking, and then he went to his cabin.

It was a small, stuffy place, untidy now with leather chests packed for going ashore. Bernardo, Diego's Spanish servant, was peering from a porthole with an expression that said he was not quite sure what this strange new land was made of.

"Is everything packed, Bernardo?"

Bernardo nodded vigorously. He was not a young man any longer, although he was healthy and active. He could, when he wished, appear to be stupid and unheeding. Thick, curling hair grew in a ruff above his ears but he was bald on top. Honest and devoted to Diego, Bernardo was an excellent companion. From birth he had been mute, unable to speak.

Diego stepped over and around the chests and bags on the deck. He picked up his guitar from a bunk and looked at it briefly before putting it down again. "Where'd you put my father's letters, Bernardo?"

Bernardo hopped over to a small leather valise and opened it. He found a packet of letters quickly and gave them to Diego. Diego untied the ribbon around them, and, frowning slightly, sought out his father's last letter.



He stared at the words that had been troubling him more since talking with Valdez a few moments before: "It is with heavy heart, dear son, that I ask you to give up your studies at Salamanca and come home. Certain matters have arisen which I can no longer face alone. What is needed here now is the strength and courage of youth . . . ."

Now that Valdez had given him a brief picture of the troubles around Los Angeles, Diego knew how very urgent his father's request had been. Don Alejandro was a rugged, independent man, with a strong temper when aroused. Things had to be really bad before he called for help.

Diego gave the letter to Bernardo. "Burn it. No one must know what brought me home." He watched while Bernardo burned the letter in a charcoal brazier on the table. "I have just learned that our pueblo is under the heel of a tyrant, the military commandante of Los Angeles."

Bernardo stared with a sober expression.

"Until I have some idea of how Monastario is working his vile schemes, I must pretend that I know nothing of them," Diego said. "But afterward I will fight him."

Bernardo picked up the sword that Diego had laid on a bunk. He made a hard thrust with it and then looked at Diego for approval.

“Yes, I will use the sword if necessary, but I can’t do it openly against the commandante’s whole force.” Diego peered out the porthole. “Of course it is only natural that he will suspect why I have returned, but perhaps I can deceive him a little.”

Bernardo unstrapped one of the chests and took a book from it.

“If I am to be effective at all, the commandante must not know that I can use a sword well, or ride well, or do anything that might be a threat to him. I must convince him that I am a harmless young man who left the university because part of the training was too rough. Do you have any suggestions, Bernardo?”

Bernardo nodded eagerly. He opened the book and pretended to read like a man who had no other interest in life besides keeping his nose in a book. His face was so close to the pages that his eyes crossed, and as he tried to pace the tiny room he stumbled against a chest and almost fell.

Diego’s smile broadened. “When you cannot wear a lion’s skin, put on the skin of a fox.” He would have to change his whole way of acting, even to the point of deceiving his father.

He laughed as Bernardo looked at him inquiringly to

see if he had grasped the idea of the book. A plan was forming swiftly. "Wonderful, Bernardo!" Diego said. "That's what I will pretend to be, an innocent scholar. I will act as though these books are my most prized possession." Actually the great number of books Diego was bringing from Spain had been purchased to give to his mission priest.

Bernardo nodded brightly.

"Now," Diego said, "all my awards for fencing—throw them out into the ocean. Unpack my fanciest clothes. I will dress like a useless gentleman and act like one too."

Diego was changing his clothes rapidly when he saw Bernardo hesitating at the porthole with his hands full of small, silk-lined boxes that held medals and awards for swordsmanship.

"No!" Diego said. "Not a single one. Throw them all away. From now on I will have a new character." He stopped in the act of pulling on tight-fitting pants. "And you, too, Bernardo, you must have a new character also. Instead of being the sharp-witted rascal that you are, you will be a foolish man who cannot hear. That way you will be of great value in learning much from the real fools who can speak and who let their tongues wag carelessly."

Bernardo grinned from ear to ear. He threw the medals into the sea. He cupped one hand behind his ear, squinted his eyes, and let his mouth hang open, so that he looked completely stupid.

"That's it!" Diego cried. "We will work as a team. I will be the fox and you will be my eyes and ears, and no one will know that we have set ourselves to fight injustice wherever we find it."

There came a knock on the door and a sailor shouted, "We are anchoring, *señor*. The boat will be going ashore in a few minutes."

"*Muchas gracias.*" Diego was silent until the sailor's footsteps receded down the passage.

"And now," Diego murmured, "what kind of dishonesty and cruelty will we find on reaching Los Angeles?"

Bernardo, still playing his part, cupped his hand behind his ear and put on his silly look.

"Not alone with me, you rascal!" Diego laughed. "Do your pretending before others."

They heard the first mate shouting orders, and the creaking of davits as the sailors on deck lowered a boat. Don Diego knew he would soon find out for himself why his father had called him home.



## Chapter 2

## The Tyrant

When the carriage was stopped by two armed soldiers just inside the gate of the pueblo, a tall young man in highly decorated clothes climbed out as if he had hardly any energy. He held a book in his hands. He stared around him as if saying, “What is this miserable little place?”

He was the same Diego de la Vega who had whisked the sword from Rafael Valdez’s strong hand that very morning, but during the carriage ride from the sea he had already begun to live the part he was playing.

*El Pueblo Nuestra Señora Reina de los Angeles*—hardly anyone ever said the full name, and clerks groaned when they had to write it on documents—was spread out before Diego. The church was still unfinished, but the barracks of the soldiers were in strong, good order. The pueblo was quite small: a few houses dozing in the sun, a tiny market



place, an inn. Great trees stood in the background.

Everything looked much as it had when Diego went away. But there was a different feeling in the air, and the soldiers were everywhere.

"All baggage and papers will be inspected!" a loud voice bawled. Sergeant Miguel Garcia, fat faced, round, and sweating, came waddling out from a shady place. He stopped suddenly. "Don Diego de la Vega! We thought you were still in Spain."

"Now you know better, Garcia." Diego looked beyond the sergeant, toward the *cuartel* where the commandante would be. He had no great quarrel with Garcia. The man was not very smart, which was not his fault, and he had to obey orders from the commandante, of course.

"I am sorry, *Señor* Diego," Garcia said, "but I will have to look at the baggage. The Capitan Monastario . . ." He shrugged his heavy shoulders. Diego waved him toward the carriage and then pretended to talk in sign language to Bernardo.

Garcia's mouth fell open. "He is deaf and dumb?"

Diego nodded. He looked at his book while Bernardo began to remove the baggage from the carriage. Garcia's inspection was thorough. When he had finished going

through the baggage, he said to Diego, "I will tell the capitan that you are here."

Diego nodded carelessly.

The clop of hoofs behind him made him turn. Coming through the pueblo gates were mounted lancers. In their midst, bound, his face cut and bleeding, a dazed expression in his eyes, was Don Nacho Ignacio Torres. He was a respected ranchero, an old friend and neighbor of the de la Vega family.

Diego could hardly hold his rage, but he knew that he must. So dazed and beaten was Don Nacho that, as he passed by, the old man did not recognize Diego. People of the town were peering angrily at the spectacle, some of them murmuring protests.

"So you are Don Diego de la Vega, yes?" an insulting voice said, and Diego turned to see a tall man with a thin chin beard and cruel, mocking eyes. The man was smiling, and that was an insult, too.

"At your service," Diego said. "You are the new—"

"Commandante. Capitan Sanches Monastario, at your service, Don Diego."

"Pardon, commandante," Diego said, "but what is Don Nacho Torres charged with?"

"Treason!" Monastario looked hard at Diego. "You do not plan to interest yourself in the matter, I hope?"

"Oh, no, no!" Diego said. He fumbled with his book. Monastario glanced at the volume and plainly showed that he considered himself a man of action who had no time for silly things like books.

The lancers were taking Don Nacho through the *cuartel* gate, into the walled area where the jail and stables were.

"Your father has often said that you would be in Spain another year, Don Diego," Monastario said. It was a question.

"I had hoped to." Diego shook his head. "But there were so many violent things at the university—riding, sword practice, all sorts of rough events that I was supposed to take part in. There was even dueling!"

Monastario's lips twisted in a sneer. Garcia had reported that Diego's luggage was full of books. There was no danger in this soft, helpless young man who looked so shocked when he spoke of dueling. Let him go on home.

Once more in the carriage, Diego and Bernardo grinned at each other. Diego began to tell the servant about a black stallion, Tornado, which Diego had kept hidden from his father in a secret pasture.

“My father always said he was too dangerous for me to ride, so I had the Indians take care of Tornado and keep him out of sight. He will be the third member of our team, Bernardo.”

Bernardo pointed to Diego, then to himself, and then he made the motions of a galloping horse with his fingers.

“Yes,” Diego said. “You, me, and Tornado. My name will be Zorro, Zorro the Fox. Tonight we have work to do.”

Bernard pointed back toward the town, and Diego nodded.

Now it was dusk. Diego sat at the piano in his room on the second floor of his father’s house, lightly touching the keys as his father Don Alejandro paced back and forth.

“Taxes, outrages!” Alejandro said. “There is no freedom here now. If a man cannot pay the heavy taxes that Monastario imposes, then he is put in jail and loses his land.” He frowned at his son. “Are you listening, Diego?”

“Yes, father. I think the rancheros should go to the courts to—”

“Courts! There is no justice in them any more. Monastario has brought in a crooked lawyer from Mexico City to make his robbery and abuse seem lawful.” Alejandro

clapped his hands together. "Stop that playing! Is that all you learned at the university?"

Diego stopped playing. He was ashamed to act like a spineless coward, for the stories of the injustice in the land made him very angry inside. He was going to fight against the commandante's tyranny, but only he and Bernardo must know who Zorro really was. "Can not there be protests to the governor?"

"Protests!" Alejandro said. "Monastario controls the mail. Let a ranchero write a letter of protest and he is soon in jail, and then he is tried for treason." He began to calm down, but he looked doubtfully at his son. "All this that I have been telling you is the reason why I asked you to come home." He seemed to be thinking that he knew now how useless it had been to send for Diego.

But Don Alejandro did not say so. He bowed his white head for a moment and then he said, "We will talk about it later, in the morning, when you are rested."

"Yes, father," Diego said meekly. When his father was gone, Diego rose and grasped his sword. Angry because he had had to play the part of a coward, he slashed out at a sheet of music on the piano.

In a lightning movement the tip of the sword cut a Z

in the sheet. That was his mark. That was the sign that Zorro would leave wherever he went to fight against wrong.

Tonight Zorro would ride for the first time.

In the candle-lighted office of the commandante, Capitan Monastario glared at the oily little lawyer Bustamente Pina. "You are nervous, Pina, but you will do as I say! When the guards are dozing, as they always do, you will unlock Don Nacho's cell and free him."

"But something may go wrong," Pina whined.

"Tell him you have considered his case and decided to free him. Tell him to go quickly." Monastario tapped a heavy flintlock pistol on his desk. "The prisoner will be killed 'while escaping.' His land will then be forfeit because he was a traitor, and with your knowledge of the law, I see no reason why you and I will not own the Rancho Torres before long." Monastario waited. "Well, Pina?"

Pina licked his lips. "I will do as you say."

Outside in the darkness, Zorro dropped over a wall and crouched close to the ground. All in black he was, a long black cloak, black mask and hat, and he even wore black boots. The *cuartel* gate was open, unguarded. At the gates of the town, two sentries had slumped down against the

wall and were snoring softly in their sleep.

Zorro moved softly to where four horses stood saddled and ready for any night patrol the commandante might order. He loosened the cinches. He ran into the *cuartel*, to the cell where Don Nacho was being held. "Señor Torres!"

"Who comes?" the prisoner whispered hopefully.

"A friend. Who has the keys?"

"Sergeant Garcia. What do you—"

"Courage," Zorro whispered. "I will be back." He faded silently into the darkness.

In his quarters Garcia had removed his coat and sword belt and laid them on the table. He was in his chair and had just taken off his boots when the door behind him opened quietly. The first he knew that he had a visitor was when the icy point of a sharp sword touched his back. "A-i-e-e!"

"Silence, Garcia," a cool voice said. "Give me your keys."

"I—I—" Garcia stammered, "the commandante has them."

"Stand up. Face the wall," Zorro said. Garcia obeyed; he could do no other with the point of a sword against his back all the time. He did not know that Zorro had

taken the sword from the table, leaned the point of it into Garcia's back, and braced the hilt against the table. "Do not move," Zorro said.

Garcia thought he was still there as Zorro tiptoed out. "I have done nothing," Garcia said, as, face to the wall, he stood in fear, afraid to look around, held where he was by his own weapon.

Pina's hands trembled as he unlocked the cell door. "You are free, Don Torres. Go quickly now and do not rouse the guard."

"Why do you do this?" Torres said, suspicious of the little lawyer.

"I have studied your case, and the commandante has agreed to let you go. Hurry now."

Torres was rightfully wary as he came slowly to the door of the jail. "I do not understand this. I think—"

"I think so too, Don Torres," a quiet voice said behind Pina. "It is treachery, but it was kind of this man to save me the trouble of looking for the keys."

Pina gasped as cold steel touched his back. "Inside," Zorro said. "Chain him, Torres." Pina staggered into the dark cell. The rattle of chains told that Torres was securing



him, and a few moments later the ranchero stepped out.

“Who are you?” Torres asked.

“Zorro. Quickly now, over the wall. There is a horse waiting for you under the Tree of the Ancients. Go to Padre Felipe at San Gabriel Mission. He will give you sanctuary so that even the commandante cannot touch you.”

Zorro was boosting Torres up to a roof so that he might cross to escape over the wall, when Capitan Monastario came quietly to the gate of the *cuartel*. Things were going well. Pina was helping Don Nacho to the roof. The commandante walked closer to get a good shot. In fact, he walked right up to a black-garbed figure before he realized that something was wrong.

He heard the whisk of steel. The pistol was knocked from his hand. Monastario drew his sword as he fell back. He was engaged in bitter sword work as Don Nacho ran across the roof and escaped.

In the gloomy *cuartel* neither Zorro nor the commandante could see well, and so they had to guide their movements by keeping contact with each other's weapons. Monastario was an excellent swordsman, as Zorro soon found out. Zorro knew that the clashing steel would soon rouse soldiers, so he put extra vigor into his work.

He forced Monastario to turn and then with a fierce attack bore him back until the commandante was close to the open door of the cell. Zorro disarmed him.

The commandante leaped back then, which was of course just what Zorro wanted. With the point of his blade he drove Monastario on through the doorway of the cell.

In an instant Zorro slammed the door and snapped the heavy lock in place. Soldiers were coming, some of them half dressed, shouting questions. Garcia was among them, for he had looked around at last and had seen how simply he was being tricked.

Zorro turned just in time to meet Garcia's charge.

"Cut him down! Kill him!" Monastario howled from the jail. It was not until Pina, in the cell beside him, spoke up in a scared and squeaky voice that the commandante even knew who his opponent had been.

"Who is this man Zorro?" Pina asked.

"You fool! You bungled everything!" Monastario raged. "Zorro?" He had never heard of such a man, but he yelled loudly, "Kill Zorro, you soldiers!"

The soldier who was trying, Garcia, was having poor success. He was no match at all for Zorro, but the black-garbed swordsman did not kill him, as he could have



easily. Zorro chose to drive him back until Garcia fell with a mighty splash into the trough where horses drank. Garcia's sword went clanging away and he gasped as cool water ran over his fat belly.

But he did not give up. He struggled to his feet, shouting, "After him! Kill him!"

The soldiers were confused.

"On the roof! There he goes!" Garcia bawled. "Your lances, fools!"

Only two of the soldiers had grabbed their lances from the rack near the barracks door. They hurled them at the fleeing man on the roof, but lances are made for use on horseback, not as spears.

A black cloak swirled against the dim night sky. A mocking laugh came back. Zorro was gone.

"Ride after him!" Monastario shouted.

Four lancers grabbed the reins of the saddled horses. Moments later the lancers were sitting on the ground, for the instant they put weight into a stirrup, the saddles turned and let them down. Monastario groaned.

Out in the cool night, Zorro grinned as he heard the shouting. He lifted Tornado until the stallion's forelegs raked toward the sky, and then he set the horse down

again and rode away at a gallop, his first task done.

While order was being restored in Los Angeles, Garcia brought to the commandante's office a note that a soldier had found pinned to a wall with a dagger. Garcia didn't bother to say that there had been a large Z cut into the wall of the jail with a sword point.

Monastario read the note:

“Beware, commandante, my sword is a flame  
To right every wrong, so heed well my name:  
Zorro!”

The commandante crumpled the note and threw it down. “Pina!” he growled. “Write this down.” He paced the floor while he dictated: “A reward of five hundred pesos is offered for the capture of the traitor, Don Nacho Ignacio Torres. For the capture, dead or alive, of the bandit who calls himself Zorro, one thousand pesos is offered. By order of the Commandante, Pueblo of Los Angeles.”

“Have big signs made and posted everywhere,” Monastario said. “We shall see about this fox. In a week I will have his skin nailed on the wall!”



### *Chapter 3*

### **The Secret Passage**

Worriedly the mute Bernardo paced the balcony outside of Diego's room. He kept looking up the road, for Diego had been gone all night. Suddenly a slight sound in his master's room caused Bernardo to turn with a start. He went to the door and peered in.

Diego was there. A moment before he had not been there, and Bernardo knew beyond doubt that he had not entered by the door or from the balcony windows.

Smiling, Diego watched Bernardo for a moment, and then he said, "Of course you are surprised, Bernardo. Here, let me show you something." He went to the wall and touched a spot beside the fireplace.

With a gasp of surprise Bernardo saw an entire panel swing outward, revealing a tiny room behind it. Diego motioned for his servant to follow. A moment later they

were both standing in the tiny room, with cool air from a dark tunnel opening flowing against them. The secret door swung shut quietly. Diego lighted a candle.

On a rude table lay the dark cloak, mask, hat, and sword of Zorro. "Even my father doesn't know this place exists, although there is a secret panel opening from his study. I discovered it when I was a boy. My grandfather, I believe, had it built to provide escape from Indians long ago."

Bernardo nodded, looking around him uneasily. Diego took a candle and signaled for him to follow. They went down a dusty stairs and into a tunnel carved from rock. Bernardo stayed very close to Diego as they walked for what seemed a long time.

Slowly the passage ahead grew lighter. They came out in a large cave screened by heavy undergrowth. A trickle of water made a pool on one side of the cavern. Tornado was there, munching a bundle of meadow hay. Diego said, "It will be your duty to see that he always has plenty of hay and grain when he is here."

Bernardo nodded vigorously. He was greatly relieved to be out of the dark tunnel. He pointed toward the heavy undergrowth questioningly. It seemed almost solid, but Diego parted the brush without hesitation and the two

men stepped out into sunlight.

A narrow passage lay before them. Beyond it, Bernardo caught a glimpse of trees and grass and huge rocks.

"That is also a hidden, secret place down there," Diego said. "Every day you must exercise Tornado." He smiled. "And now we will go back."

Bernardo looked toward the cave and hunched his shoulders.

"Yes, the secret passage, Bernardo. You will get used to it. Always be very careful that no one is around when you use the secret door."

They went back into the cave. Bernardo shuddered a little as they entered the tunnel.

On his way in the carriage to the mission of Padre Felipe, Diego stopped briefly at the home of Nacho Torres to tell his wife and daughter that he had heard that Torres was safe. "I cannot reveal who told me, but believe me, I am sure that it is true."

The beautiful Elena Torres was greatly relieved to hear such news. She rushed at once to tell her mother, and Diego proceeded on his journey to the mission.

The padre, Father Felipe, was a brown-faced little man



in brown robes. He was very happy to get the books that Diego had brought, but Diego could see that there was a worry on his mind.

“You have heard of the arrest of our good friend Nacho Torres?” the padre asked.

“Ah, yes. It was a terrible thing.”

“Have you heard of his escape?”

“He escaped!” Diego cried.

Padre Felipe nodded happily. “Aided by a man named Zorro. Come, I will show you something.”

They went into the church. “Zorro?” Diego mused. “Who is this fox?”

“No one knows, but bless him,” the padre said, and just then Torres stepped from a doorway into the church.

“Don Nacho!” Diego said. “You are safe! Even Monastario would not dare invade the sanctuary of the church.”

“I am safe, thanks to a man named Zorro and the good Padre Felipe,” Torres said, “but I worry about my family. Will you stop and reassure them of my safety on your way home?”

“I shall call on them on my way home, Don Nacho.” Diego shook his head sadly. “The terrible things that are happening to our beautiful country . . . .” Diego, of course,

had already talked to Elena Torres, but he could not say so without revealing that he was really Zorro.

The horses of lancers were in the yard when Diego returned home. For a moment he was dismayed, but he let his face show nothing of that as he started into the house.

Monastario was sitting on the patio, and on the table before him was a black mask, a hat, a sword, and a black cape. Diego looked up and caught a glimpse of Bernardo on the balcony. The servant shook his head and disappeared.

Diego looked in a puzzled way at the clothes.

"A copy of the costume Zorro wore last night," the commandante said. "I have a simple plan. Anyone I suspect of being Zorro will wear these clothes, and then by his bearing and his style with the sword I will know him."

"Oh?" Diego frowned. "Many men would look like this Zorro fellow, I suppose, if they wore that costume."

"No, no. He is of my height. I know his looks, and I will know him by how he uses his sword."

"Even I might look like him—in costume," Diego said.

Monastario laughed. "You are about his height, yes, but there all similarity ends. You, Zorro! Impossible!"

"I demand that you let me wear the clothes. As a citizen,

I have the right to be cleared of suspicion.”

Only with difficulty could Monastario keep from roaring with laughter as Diego began to put on the clothes. Diego got the sword entangled in the cloak. Smiling with contempt, Monastario rose and drew his own sword.

Diego fenced with him clumsily. The commandante flicked the sword from his hand with a bind and twist, and then laughed at Diego’s bewildered expression. “Enough, enough, Don Diego. You were the least likely Zorro suspect in all of California, to begin with.”

“You do not need to mock me because I am so clumsy.”

“My apologies,” the commandante said, smiling.

A sudden commotion in the yard made them turn. Garcia was there with four soldiers who were holding Benito Avila, the head vaquero, or cowboy, of the de la Vega rancho. There was blood on his face and the soldiers were struggling to hold him.

“This is Zorro!” Garcia cried. “He would not say where he was last night, and he tried to escape when we wanted to talk to him.”

“Not Benito,” Diego said. “This is a mistake.”

“We shall see,” Monastario said. “Come here, Avila, and put on these clothes.”

The soldiers pushed Benito over to the table. Slowly Benito began to don the garments. With each piece that he put on, his resemblance to Zorro, naturally enough, increased. When he had the full costume on, Monastario was nodding and smiling. "I think he is our man, Sergeant Garcia."

Garcia smirked all over his fat face.

"I am no outlaw, I tell you!" Benito protested.

"So?" Monastario said. "Where were you last night?"

"I—I was here," Benito stammered.

"The other vaqueros say you were not," Garcia said.

"Well, yes . . . I did ride out looking for a lion that has been bothering the cattle."

"And where is the lion? You killed him, of course?" Monastario asked.

Benito shook his head. He looked miserable, and he glanced at Diego for help. This was one of the worst dangers in being Zorro, Diego thought, causing an innocent person to be accused. He didn't know what to do to save Benito. "I have known this man all my life, commandante, and I will swear that he is no outlaw."

"Very interesting," Monastario said. "I think he is."

At that moment little Pepito Mendez, the son of one of

Don Alejandro's servants, came running to the patio. He had been hiding by a tree, watching and listening. "No, no!" he shouted. "Benito is not an outlaw. I know."

"Go back to the stables, Pepito," Benito said quickly.

"Yes, boy, go away." Garcia pushed the boy aside roughly.

"Wait." Monastario raised his hand. "Speak up, Pepito. What are you trying to tell us?"

"Nothing!" Benito cried. "Be quiet, Pepito!"

The boy was frightened. He hesitated, and then he plunged ahead. "My friend Benito is not an outlaw. He was not in your old pueblo last night. He was walking in the moonlight with *Señorita* Torres, because I saw them."

"He is mistaken!" Benito said.

Monastario rubbed the light fringe of beard on his chin. "Ah, this is indeed interesting. A bandit vaquero makes love to the daughter of the traitor Torres, for whom there is a large reward."

Benito tried to leap toward the commandante, but the soldiers grabbed him. "It is not so!" the prisoner yelled.

"Of course it isn't," Diego said. "Obviously, Benito is only trying to protect *Señorita* Torres."

"We will test that," the commandante said. "We will

take this outlaw to the lady and see what she has to say.” He rose suddenly. “Tie the prisoner and put him on his horse, and shoot him if he tries to escape.”

Pepito’s face was a picture of misery. Diego put his arm around the boy. “It’s not your fault, Pepito. I’m sure that Benito will find some way to convince Capitan Monastario of his innocence.”

Monastario grunted. “I’m afraid you’re as simple in your thinking as this boy, Don Diego. You spend too much time with books and music.” He strode over to his horse.

Pepito was crying as the soldiers rode away with Benito.

“Stop it, stop it,” Diego said gently. He left the boy and went inside, racing upstairs to his room just as Bernardo came from the balcony. Bernardo nodded toward the fireplace.

“Yes,” Diego said, “Zorro must ride tonight.”

It was just getting dark when the black-clad figure led Tornado through the undergrowth at the entrance of the cave. Zorro mounted and let the black stallion pick his way down the narrow passage and through the rocks and trees. A few minutes later they were on the road.

Tornado’s mane and tail streamed out as he broke into a gallop, bearing his rider swiftly toward the Torres rancho.



## Chapter 4

## The Spy

Sergeant Garcia and the lancers were on guard outside the Torres house. Inside, candlelight lost itself against the dark beams of the ceiling and made shadows on the faces of the three people in the living room. Benito was still wearing the Zorro costume. *Señorita* Elena watched him nervously.

Monastario said, "We have heard that you were seen with this man last night, *señorita*. Could that be true?" The sneer that came so easily to him was on his face. "I cannot believe that a girl of your position, the daughter of Don Nacho, traitor though he may be, would have anything to do with a common vaquero."

"That is true," Benito said. "She has had nothing to do with me." He looked quickly at Elena.

"Then, since you cannot account for where you were

last night, I must assume that you were at the pueblo." The commandante was pleased with himself.

"Yes, I was there!" Benito said.

"No, he was not. He was with me, just as you have heard," Elena said. "I swear it is the truth."

Monastario smiled. "I think I know the truth, but to make the final test. . . ." He raised his voice and shouted, "Garcia, bring me your sword." When the sergeant entered, Monastario gave his sword to Benito. "Now we will see."

"I am no swordsman," Benito protested.

"*En garde!*" Monastario made a thrust at Benito, and Benito had to defend himself. He had told the truth, Benito; he was no swordsman. Monastario drove him across the room and would have pierced him if Benito had not kicked a chair in the commandante's way.

Monastario leaped the chair and thrust again. His blade cut Benito's cheek. "Come, come, *Señor Zorro*, I know you can do better than that," Monastario said, gloating.

"He is not Zorro!" Elena cried. "Stop it!"

Monastario pushed her aside. His mind was made up, and from the look in his eyes he was determined to kill Benito. Without mercy he drove the vaquero through an arched doorway and across a hall to the foot of a stairs.



"I know you can do better, *Señor Zorro*," Monastario repeated.

Benito slipped as he tried to back up the steps, and it was then that Monastario's thrust, only partly blocked, ran into his shoulder. He dropped his blade. At that instant a cool voice said, "Commandante." The real Zorro was standing at the top of the stairs.

He had crept in at the back of the house, climbed to the balcony unseen, and now with drawn sword he slid down the smooth bannister as Monastario fell back. It took only a few moments after the two swords began to clash for the commandante to know he was facing the real Zorro.

They fought across the broad hallway and into the living room. With his free hand Monastario whipped a Moorish rug from a table and tried to entangle Zorro's sword. The masked man stepped aside and came on. Monastario hurled a heavy candlestick. Zorro ducked, and his flickering blade stabbed the commandante in the arm.

"Garcia! Sergeant Garcia!" Monastario bawled.

Garcia entered the room. He saw two Zorros, the one Elena was helping toward the kitchen, and the other one who was driving the commandante toward the wall.

"Shoot him!" Monastario cried.

"Which one?" Garcia asked, bewildered.

"This one, you fool! The real one!" Monastario leaped behind a table to get away from Zorro's blade.

Garcia tugged at his pistol. Zorro turned and ran into the hall. He was going up the steps in great leaps when Garcia and Monastario reached the hall at the same time. They collided, staggering each other. Garcia fired. His shot broke glass in one of the balcony windows. Zorro disappeared into the shadows.

"Outside!" Monastario howled. "Surround the house!"

Once more he and Garcia collided as they both tried to run through a doorway.

On the rear balcony Zorro whistled shrilly. A great black horse came running from the trees, as Zorro was climbing down. He was in the saddle when Garcia came panting around the corner of the house. Tornado reared and ran straight at the sergeant, who yelped in alarm as he dived sidewise into some bushes.

Then Zorro was thundering away into the night. When he looked back through the pale starlight, he saw riders coming after him. He could not lead them directly to his home, so he cut off the road and raced Tornado toward a deep, rocky crevice. The great horse did not falter. His



powerful hindquarters bunched. He leaped. Zorro's cape stood out behind him as they sailed across the dangerous place. Tornado's hoofs clashed on the rock beyond. He gained his balance and Zorro sent him into the dark trees ahead.

When Monastario and Garcia with the lancers came to the jump, they pulled their horses to a quick stop. "Go on, after him!" the commandante ordered.

"I am too heavy," Garcia said. "My horse cannot carry me across such a jump."

"Coward!" Monastario said. "I would jump it myself—if it were daylight." He started along the edge of the crevice. "Come, we must find a way around this."

Once more Bernardo was fretting, and with good reason. From the balcony he could hear the pounding of hoofs on the road, and Diego was not yet back. Bernardo kept running to look in his master's room.

Soldiers were pounding on the door below—and still Diego had not come. In a loud voice Monastario cried, "Open in the name of the King!"

It was then that the fireplace swung out soundlessly and Diego stepped into the room. With a great sigh of relief

Bernardo sank down into a chair. He held his hand over his heart and shook his head to show how much he had been worrying.

Diego grabbed up a dressing robe and put it on over his clothes. "I had to go a long way around to keep them from following me here. Apparently they gave up chasing me and took the road." He took a lighted candle from the table and stepped out on the balcony.

"We search for the outlaw Zorro," Monastario called. "We think he came this way. Have you heard anyone?"

"No one," Diego said.

"That's strange. You must have been awake, Don Diego. There was a light in your room."

"I fell asleep while reading, commandante, until your knocking roused me," Diego said. "But the outlaw—I thought you had him, the vaquero Benito. Did he escape?"

"No," Monastario growled. "He was not the right man, so I let him go." He turned on Garcia. "It's all your fault, idiot! Anyone would know that Benito was not Zorro."

"Pardon, capitan," Garcia said, "but you did not know. You said—"

"Be quiet!" Monastario thundered. "On to the next rancho. We will find this fox yet."

Diego smiled at Bernardo as he stepped back into the room. They listened to the sounds of the soldiers leaving.

Diego said, "Day after tomorrow we will go again to the mission to see how Don Nacho is getting along."

Two days later Padre Felipe and Don Nacho were talking in the sacristy of the church. Don Nacho was anxious to leave and Padre Felipe was trying to persuade him to stay longer. "The commandante often has patrols on the roads as far north as San Fernando," Padre Felipe said.

"I know, but I must get to Monterey to see the governor. He will know the difference between a traitor and an honest man, I am sure." Don Nacho looked around the small room restlessly. "Besides, I cannot expect this man Zorro, whoever he is, to fight my battles while I huddle here in safety. Another thing, you may get in trouble with the commandante by sheltering me."

"He doesn't know that you are here, and it is very unlikely that he will find out," Padre Felipe said. "I beg you, Don Nacho, stay longer until we are sure that the hunt for you is quieting down."

"I must get to the governor and lay my case before him as soon as possible. You will tell my family where I have gone, or have Don Diego tell them?"

Padre Felipe nodded. "When do you plan to leave?"  
"Soon. Perhaps tomorrow."

Padre Felipe tried once more. "Would it not be better to remain longer in the sanctuary of the church? Even if Monastario knew you were here, he would not dare invade the church to take you."

"The sooner I leave, the better," Don Nacho said.

Outside the high window a little man with a face like a curious monkey's was repairing a crack in the wall. He had listened with a greedy expression ever since he heard Don Nacho's name spoken.

Five hundred pesos for Don Nacho Torres! That was what the commandante's notices said. He could not read, this spy, but he had heard people talking about the reward. Crespo was his name. He put down his trowel and walked away from the church.

Five hundred pesos. What a great fortune that was! At first Crespo walked slowly, and then a little faster, and then still faster. After he went through the gates of the mission he began to trot toward the pueblo of Los Angeles to tell his secret and gain five hundred pesos, more money than he had ever thought to have in all his life.

His bare feet splashed dust as he ran.



## *Chapter 5*

## **Zorro Goes to Church**

Almost exhausted, Crespo paused to rest beside the road when he saw a carriage coming. The young Don Diego was riding on the seat with Bernardo, going toward the mission. Crespo watched them pass without particular interest, although it did occur to him that he would buy beautiful clothes such as Don Diego wore just as soon as he got his five hundred pesos.

He trotted on to Los Angeles. A lancer stopped him at the gate, and while Crespo was trying to explain that he must see the commandante, Sergeant Garcia came clumping over to see what the argument was about. Crespo was excited and not making much sense. Garcia was telling him to go away and not bother the commandante, when Monastario himself heard the loud talk while crossing the plaza. He came over.



“What is going on here, Garcia?”

“This little nothing wants to speak to you, capitan. I told him that—”

“Never mind what you told him,” Monastario said. He looked at Crespo. “What do you want? Speak up.”

“I want the reward for saying where is *Señor* Torres.”

“You know where he is?” Monastario demanded sharply.

“*Si, si*, capitan. At the mission of San Gabriel. I myself heard him talking this morning and I—”

“Enough!” Monastario tossed two small coins in the dust at Crespo’s feet. “Garcia, order the lancers out at once.”

Crespo sat against the wall by the market and watched the soldiers ride off. In his grimy hand was scarcely enough money to buy a drink of sour wine, and for this he had thrown away a man’s life. He felt miserable.

The troop of lancers came up with a rush behind the carriage of Don Diego. Bernardo barely had time to pull off to the side of the road before the lancers, with Monastario in the lead, went sweeping by in a cloud of dust.

Diego and Bernardo exchanged glances. “Quickly,” Diego said, “give me the lines.” With Diego driving, the carriage was soon rolling at breakneck speed, and Bernardo was hanging on to the swaying seat as tightly as he could.

Undoubtedly the soldiers were on their way to San Gabriel.

All was peaceful at the mission. The Indians, who loved Padre Felipe, were gathering oranges to store in the *bodega*. The padre was out working with them as they carried the fiber sacks. Don Nacho had come from the church and was walking in the warm sunshine.

And then Padre Felipe heard the horses of the lancers. He looked up the road. "Get back inside the church!" he called to Don Nacho. "The soldiers come!"

The lancers arrived a few moments later. Monastario leaped from his horse. "Have the whole area surrounded, Garcia. Torres will not escape this time."

Padre Felipe motioned to the Indians to continue their work. "Peace to you, capitan. So you know that Don Nacho is here. You know also that the church is his sanctuary."

"That is an outrageous law!" Monastario said. "This mud church of yours is a long way from Rome, Padre Felipe."

"True, but it is always close to God, and it is not *my* church," Padre Felipe said gently.

Monastario cooled down, but there was no change in his determination to capture Torres. He said, "There's no law that says I, too, cannot enter the church."

“You should—more often. Just remove your sword and hat, and leave something in the poor box, commandante.”

Monastario grunted, but he obeyed before he went into the church, with Padre Felipe walking behind him. Torres was kneeling in prayer, facing the altar.

“How long—” Monastario’s voice was too loud. He lowered it. “How long can the church shelter this traitor?”

“Forty days,” Padre Felipe said. “Did you bring a tent?”

“The choir is all that’s sanctuary.”

“In this case, an unusual one, the entire church is sanctuary. Be very sure of that, commandante.”

Monastario swung around angrily and started out. “You are making a mistake, Padre Felipe.”

“I think not.” Padre Felipe smiled. “But now I must go back to work. I am short of help and we must store our orange crop in the *bodega* before night. Come again, capitan. Confessions every Wednesday and Saturday at seven.”

There was a thoughtful, sly expression on Monastario’s face as he strode out. Don Diego was just arriving, at a slow speed now, like a lazy man who did not care to be jounced about in a carriage.

Diego got down, dusting himself. “I see you have the

whole army out, commandante. Is there a war somewhere?"

"Why are you here?" Monastario asked roughly.

"To get some oranges from Padre Felipe, of course."

"Oh? You hadn't heard, of course, that Torres has taken sanctuary in the church?"

"He has?" Diego exclaimed.

"Yes! And I'm thinking of hauling him out by his neck." Monastario began to buckle on his sword.

"If I were a young capitan, I wouldn't want the King of Spain and the Pope angry with me at the same time," Diego said. He gave an apologetic laugh as he walked to the church.

Don Nacho had finished his prayers. He clasped Diego by the shoulders. "You have told my family?"

"Yes, I have reassured them."

Don Nacho began to pace. "I can't stay here forever. I must go to see the governor in Monterey."

"Perhaps my father could plead your case."

"No, no! I cannot have him involved in my trouble. Monastario would accuse him of treason too," Don Nacho said.

"If you think that I could help—"

"No, no," Don Nacho said gently. "Thank you, Diego.

This is not for you. You stay with your books and your music. My problems are for someone like Zorro, a fighter—but even Zorro cannot help me now.”

“That show-off,” Diego muttered.

From outside came a frightened yell, and then Monastario’s voice, “Don’t let any of them get away!”

Diego and Don Nacho ran to the door of the church. The soldiers were herding the mission Indians into a tight group with their lances. Padre Felipe had dropped a sack of oranges and was running toward the scene. “What are you doing to my children?” he cried.

“You have your law of sanctuary. I have a few laws too,” Monastario said. “As commandante I have the right to take men wherever available for the King’s work. I have decided that we need a new highway here.”

Padre Felipe caught his breath. He spoke quietly. “I understand your anger with me because of Don Nacho, but please, do not make these simple people suffer for it. With a few moments of unkindness you can undo all the work we have done here. You can make them fear and hate us again. I beg of you, commandante. . . .”

Monastario was walking away. “Sergeant Garcia, I want a new road built from here, through the edge of that orange

grove, and over to those big trees." Monastario pointed.

"Through the orchard? Through those large rocks?" Garcia asked. "Pardon, capitan, but already there is a good road which—"

"Silence, fool! Put the Indians to work!"

The next few hours passed slowly. From the doorway of the church Don Nacho and Diego watched the soldiers driving the Indians hard. The rocks were large. The troops kept prodding the Indians with their sharp lances whenever the workers tried to rest a moment. Some of the Indians were old people who had come to the mission to live out their last years in peace and quiet.

All of them were terrified, and almost exhausted by the furious speed that Monastario had insisted on. One line of trees at the edge of the orange grove had been chopped down. Padre Felipe alone was trying to gather the orange crop. Sometimes the soldiers, following Monastario's orders, kicked over the sacks the priest was filling and trampled through the spilled oranges.

"I cannot stand it any longer!" Don Nacho cried. "He is doing this to get me out of the church. I won't let all Padre Felipe's loving work with the Indians be sacrificed for me. I am going out."

Don Diego struggled with him. "Don't do it. Wait till nightfall. Perhaps then we can think of some plan."

They argued. Don Nacho still tried to go out and give himself up, but Diego was surprisingly strong and would not let him go. "Please, Don Nacho. Wait until night."

At last Don Nacho promised to wait, but he was sick at heart. It didn't help any when Monastario called, "See all the trouble you are causing, Torres!"

Don Nacho turned back into the church to pray. Diego walked out to Bernardo. With his finger Bernardo made the sign of the Z. Diego nodded. Softly he said, "Go home and bring Tornado. It will be dark by the time you reach the cave. Hurry, Bernardo, but stay off the main road."

By the time night came, the road was built. But the commandante was not finished. He had big torches lighted, and then he ordered Garcia to have the Indians move to the other side of the road all the rocks they had pushed aside.

Monastario came striding up to the church. "Soon we will start using whips. Those dogs of Indians are growing tired, but whipping will liven them up. How do you like what you are causing, Torres?"

Don Nacho's face was sick with misery. He walked farther into the church and knelt.

"Let me talk to him, commandante," Diego said softly. "Perhaps I can convince him he must give himself up."

"Talk to him then," Monastario said roughly. "That's one of your best talents—talking. But I will give you only ten minutes, and then we start using the whips. A few screams from those worthless Indians will bring Torres out of here quicker than any of your talking."

The commandante laughed and walked away. As Diego turned, he saw Bernardo coming along the wall of the church. The mute pointed toward the garden wall. He made the sign of a horse rearing.

"The sword and clothes, too?" Diego asked, and Bernardo nodded, holding his hands across his face as if masked. "Good," Diego said. "Here's what we'll do. . . ."

Bernardo moved away quietly into the darkness. Wherever he found a horse tied to a bush or to one of the rings in the wall around the mission, he untied the reins. He could not free all the horses because there were sentries close to some of them, but he untied as many as he could.

Diego had just reached Tornado at the north wall of the garden, when the Indians began to cry out in pain. Monastario had not kept his word about allowing ten minutes for Diego to talk to Don Nacho. His command-



ing voice roared out in the still night, "Beat them! Use those whips! Make them work!"

Diego began to change clothes as fast as he could. It would take him a little time, and during that period Don Nacho might be drawn from his sanctuary by the cries of the poor Indians, but Diego had to take the risk.

As Don Diego he could do little for Torres. As Zorro, he could do much.

Prodded on by Monastario, the soldiers were whipping the Indians at the least sign of faltering in moving the heavy rocks. Two of the Indians escaped into the orange grove and ran away, but that was all.

Don Nacho could not stand it longer. He ran from the church, and the sentry near the gate saw him. "Stop it, stop hurting them!" Don Nacho cried. The sentry recognized his voice and grabbed him.

"Sergeant Garcia!" the soldier yelled. "Here is Don Nacho!"

Padre Felipe, running to see if he could stop the whipping of the Indians, saw the sentry holding Don Nacho. "Go back into the church!" Padre Felipe cried. He, too, grabbed Don Nacho by the arm and tried to tug him away from the sentry.

"No, I will give myself up," Don Nacho said. "No one must suffer more because of me."

"Garcia, Garcia!" the sentry bawled.

Garcia came stumbling down the newly built road when he heard the call. Monastario was farther away, and he ran toward his horse, at the same time calling to the soldiers to watch the Indians closely. One of the Indians tried to escape during the excitement, but a corporal brought him down by wrapping his whip around the man's legs with a vicious slash.

And then, from around the corner of the garden wall, a black horse charged like some demon from the night. Into the smoking light of the torches the horse and rider thundered. "Zorro!" Garcia gasped. He turned and ran after the black stallion.

The corporal who had tripped the Indian with his whip was lashing the fallen man. He whirled when the sound of hoofs was close upon him, even as he was raising the whip for another stroke.

In mid-air Zorro caught the snaky leather and jerked the whip from the soldier's hand. "Run!" he called to the Indians. "Scatter and get away into the trees!"

Both the Indians and soldiers were now yelling, "Zorro!"

On down along the line of smoking torches Zorro rode. A soldier raised his musket, and the whip in Zorro's hand flicked out. Like a living thing it wrapped itself around the musket. Zorro jerked the weapon from the soldier's hands. The man backed away in fear and fell over a rock behind him.

"Run!" Zorro yelled at the Indians.

More and more of them were escaping in the confusion. The horses that Bernardo had freed were plunging around excitedly. Zorro whacked a couple of them with his whip to increase the disorder. Although he was having trouble trying to catch his mount, Monastario took time to shout two orders:

"Catch those Indians! Take Zorro alive!"

The orders were easy to give but harder to carry out. Two soldiers ran a few steps toward Tornado. One of them threw his lance. He would have done better to hold it and jab, but he didn't care to get that close to Tornado. The lance wobbled and fell away in flight and did no more than whack Tornado across the front legs.

Zorro wheeled the stallion then and charged the two soldiers, who fled in terror before the big horse and the black-cloaked rider with the raised whip.

The soldiers jostled each other as they ran, and one of them covered his head with his hands and howled, "Help!"

Behind them the black stallion pounded, with Zorro cracking his whip above the heads of the fleeing men. One of them afterward swore that fire was coming from the nostrils of the horse and that the whip in the hand of the rider was a spitting snake.

Monastario had just succeeded in catching his horse, when Zorro wheeled around and went back toward the mission, driving before him several horses.

The panting Garcia was running toward the scene when three riderless horses, whipped on by Zorro, came rocketing at him. "A-i-e-e!" Garcia yelled, and he jumped to the side just in time to keep from being trampled.

The horses went galloping down the road. Zorro followed only as far as where Padre Felipe, the sentry, and Don Nacho were standing. Both the padre and the sentry still held Don Nacho, but they were no longer struggling. All of them were too busy watching Zorro.

Zorro brought Tornado to a plunging stop. "Back inside the church, Don Nacho!" he shouted. "Go back! The Indians are escaping!"

Looking up in fear at the mysterious Zorro, the sentry,



who had only a sword, suddenly let go of Don Nacho and ran to get behind the garden wall.

Monastario and a lancer were coming now, riding like fury past the torches, with the lancer in front. Zorro turned to meet them. Padre Felipe and Don Nacho ran toward the church.

"Easy, Tornado," Zorro said. He held the horse steady as he faced the charge of the soldier, who had his long lance extended beside the neck of his horse. It seemed certain that the two horses would crash together, or that the lance would be driven through Zorro.

From the doorway of the church Padre Felipe watched in horror. "Get out of the way!" he cried.

Zorro did get out of the way. Suddenly he whirled Tornado to the side, as if he and the horse were a single living thing. The soldier had no time to shift his lance or check his speed. He flashed by within a few feet of the dark-clad man.

Almost delicately, and with perfect timing, Zorro made a stroke with his arm held high. The writhing whip came down and spun around both the wrist and the lance of the soldier, and Zorro set himself for the sudden shock.

The lancer was torn from his saddle almost as if he had

ridden into a low limb at full tilt. His horse kept running, but the soldier was on the hard-packed ground, trying to regain the breath that had been knocked out of him by the fall.

Zorro had trouble getting his whip loose. He worked it in quick back-and-forth motions like a man sending ripples down a rope. At last it came free, but by then Monastario was upon him with his own whip raised and ready.

The commandante grunted with effort as he made a savage stroke. All Zorro could do was swing low with his left hand raised to protect his face from the blow. The lash barely missed his head, and the full force of the braided leather came down on Tornado's neck.

The stallion squealed with pain and anger, rearing and striking out at Monastario's horse, which tried to turn to run away. But the commandante was a skilled horseman himself. He brought his mount around and raised the whip again.

This time Zorro was ahead of him. His lash came down and curled itself in a tight coil around Monastario's wrist.

While the commandante struggled violently to free his arm, his horse once more began to plunge in fear of the great black stallion. Suddenly Zorro let slack into the whip,

and then he sent a rolling loop which fell around Monastario's arms.

Zorro hauled in tight. Monastario's arms were helpless. He tried to spur his horse away, but it turned instead and put one more wrap around its rider's body. The coils of the lash were overlying and tight. They held a livid, angry prisoner.

Zorro gave one more hard jerk, and then he put Tornado in close to the terrified horse and reached out to whack it soundly with his hand. At the same moment he let go of the whip. With a leap Monastario's horse started down the road.

Zorro laughed. "There'll be no more trouble tonight, Padre Felipe. The great builder of roads has suddenly found business in Los Angeles."

Garcia had recovered by now. He was trying to rally the lancers. Some of them had gone chasing after Indians, and others were after the horses, but there were still enough to give Zorro trouble.

"*Buenos noches!*" Zorro shouted. "Good night." And then he sent Tornado flying down the road. When he was out of earshot of the mission, he slowed the stallion to a trot, and then to a walk, and then he turned and started



quietly back through the trees to where Bernardo would be waiting behind the garden wall.

Padre Felipe came slowly into the church. He had been out in the night, calling to the Indians, telling them to return now that all the soldiers had ridden away. A few of the Indians had come back, timidly. A few more would straggle in later, the padre knew; and perhaps all of them would return in time because they knew he loved them and had always treated them well.

Don Nacho met him just inside the doorway, a question on his face.

“Yes, they will return,” Padre Felipe said. He looked around the church. Only a few candles were burning, so that deep shadows lay in the corners and along the walls. “There have always been Monastarios. They die, as all men die, but this—” he looked around the church with a soft light shining in his tired eyes “—all this lives forever.”

Don Nacho nodded solemnly. “I am sure they will return.”

“By the way,” Padre Felipe said, “where is Diego? I don’t remember when I saw him last. Before Zorro came, I think. Or was it?”

"I don't remember either," Don Nacho said.

They both heard the noise then. From a deeply shadowed doorway near the altar Diego appeared, stepping out with hesitation. "Are they all gone? I mean, is all the trouble over?"

"It was Zorro!" Padre Felipe said. "Zorro himself! You should have seen it, Don Diego. He was like a flame, a scourge on that great black horse."

"I heard the noise, yes," Diego said. He turned as Bernardo came through the doorway. "There is so little strength in my sword, Padre Felipe, that I—well, I thought there might be more help in my prayers, and so I was in that little room there. . . ."

"Of course, of course, my son," Padre Felipe said. "I should be punished for talking so happily about violence." He smiled. "But still it was magnificent." He went over to Diego and put his hand upon the young man's shoulder. "Now let us all pray."

Just before they knelt before the altar, Diego and Bernardo exchanged glances that carried tiny smiles.



## *Chapter 6*

## **Zorro's Failure**

Capitan Monastario was angry when he went to bed and even more angry when he got up the next morning. His horse had carried him almost to the gates of Los Angeles before he managed to get that accursed whip loose. And then his disorganized lancers had come straggling in with one Indian they had captured from the whole bunch that had escaped at the mission.

Because of Zorro and Don Nacho Torres, people were laughing at Monastario behind his back. Even some of the soldiers were laughing, he knew, although he could never catch them in the act. Even worse, if he didn't do something quickly about Zorro and Don Nacho, the rancheros and others would become less afraid of him. Monastario would find it more and more difficult to gain land for himself by imposing heavy taxes that no one could pay.

Monastario's servant brought him a silver pitcher of hot chocolate. The commandante drank as he paced around the room, trying to figure out a plan. Zorro—that one was like smoke when it came to catching him. Don Nacho—at least Monastario knew where he was.

The idea came at last. As usual, the commandante shouted for Sergeant Garcia, who came trotting.

“That Indian we captured last night, Garcia—”

“Inocente, capitan. That is his name. He—”

“I don't care about his name, and don't interrupt me again, you fat baboon.” Monastario scowled. “That *Indio* is going to make a confession, sergeant. He is going to confess that all his people, angry because I made them work a little yesterday, are planning to attack the mission.”

“They are?” Garcia asked stupidly.

“Of course, you fool! Have the Indian tied to the post in the plaza. Get Corporal Ortega with his whip.”

“Pardon, capitan,” Garcia said, “but Inocente will not be beaten into such a confession, I am sure. He will die first. These *Indios* are stubborn people.”

“Confession or not, before we are through with him he will be so frightened that he will not dare deny the confession when I make it for him later at the mission.” The

commandante smiled. "Now do you understand?"

Garcia smiled back. "No."

"Never mind, carry out my orders."

In Diego's room at the Rancho de la Vega, Diego was trying to teach his servant how to play the guitar. "This is important, Bernardo. At times when I am gone on the work of Zorro, you must be here in the room making music so that my father will think I am here."

Bernardo nodded, but he looked doubtfully at the guitar. He tried to play the simple chords that Diego had shown him. The sound was horrible. "Try again," Diego said.

After two hours of practice, Diego said it was time to rest. He dug his finger into his ear as if something were stuck there. Then his face sobered and he said, "I am afraid the commandante will make another try for Don Nacho, so I'm going to ride to the mission to see what's happened since we left." Bernardo, fascinated with his own music, didn't want to stop practicing, so Diego left quickly.

On Padre Felipe's advice, Don Nacho had not yet left for Monterey. The two of them were talking in the garden when once more they heard the sound of lancers coming.

"Again?" the padre groaned. "Will he never leave us

alone? Get back into the church, Don Nacho.”

The lancers came sweeping in and Monastario gave his orders. This time he had soldiers posted all around the mission. The first thing Padre Felipe saw when he came out was the Indian being dragged forward by Corporal Ortega.

“Inocente!” the padre cried. “What have they done to you?” He ran forward.

“Leave him alone,” Monastario said. “He is a prisoner.”

“I suppose you’ve come with some new foul plan to break sanctuary,” Padre Felipe said.

Monastario smiled. “Oh, no, padre. I am here to protect church property and all your lives against attack by Indians.”

“What kind of silly talk is that?”

“This savage,” Monastario said, pointing at Inocente, “has confessed that his people are planning to burn this mission.”

“That is an untruth!” Padre Felipe said angrily. “Isn’t it, Inocente?” As a matter of fact, not as many of the mission Indians had returned as Padre Felipe had expected, but he had faith in them and he knew they had faith in him. This was another of Monastario’s filthy tricks.

“Is what I said the truth, Inocente?” Monastario demanded. His hand was on his sword, and, unseen by the padre, the corporal holding Inocente pressed a dagger against his back. Inocente still would not speak the lie, but in fear of his life he nodded his head slightly, and then he stared at the ground.

“This is a shabby, cruel trick!” Padre Felipe cried.

“On the contrary,” Monastario smiled, “I am merely doing my duty by protecting this mission. Lock the prisoner up!” Ortega began to drag Inocente away. “Now, Padre Felipe, this mission is under my command. You will provide food and lodging for my soldiers, and all my orders will be obeyed.”

There was nothing Padre Felipe could do about it.

It was into this situation that Diego came a short time later, riding clumsily on a fat horse. A sentry stopped him until Garcia appeared and allowed Diego to go on to see Padre Felipe, who explained the vile ruse that Monastario had used to take over the mission.

“But still he cannot take Don Nacho from the church, can he?” Diego asked.

“No, he won’t do that,” Padre Felipe said bitterly, “but he has given orders that no food or water shall be taken into

the church, and soldiers are posted to see that his orders are observed. How long can Don Nacho last?"

"What a terrible thing," Diego said helplessly. "Now you can understand why I prefer my books and music to the rough world." He sighed. "Well, I will go tell my father about this. He knows the law and perhaps he can do something. Perhaps. . . ." He shrugged sadly.

Padre Felipe watched Diego leave. He liked the young man and could not blame him for being afraid, but still the padre would have preferred at the moment someone with more forcefulness, someone like Zorro.

Look at Don Diego, so afraid of all roughness that he even rode a fat old horse. In spite of that, Diego had trouble getting into the saddle. The sentries in front of the church looked at each other and grinned.

But he was a gentle man, Diego, the good padre thought, and in his way he was attempting to help Don Nacho. Then Padre Felipe forgot about Diego as he tried to plan some way to get food and water to Don Nacho. It would not be easy.

There was a narrow door that led from the cemetery beside the church into a small room near the altar, and it was by that entrance that Padre Felipe tried that night



to take a basket of food and a bottle of water to Don Nacho.

In the soft night Padre Felipe moved quietly on his sandaled feet. His brown robes brushed gently against the church wall. He came to the arched door, which he had opened earlier that day since the hinges creaked.

Farther down this side of the church two lancers were guarding the big door, and dimly through the candlelight within the church Padre Felipe could see two lancers at the main entrance outside. He would not disturb them.

Softly he moved inside. Don Nacho was probably in the sacristy. It was going well. And then a hand came from the shadows beside the doorway and took the basket from Padre Felipe, and Monastario's jeering voice said, "Thank you, father, I was growing hungry."

"You are inhuman!" Padre Felipe said. "At least let me take the water to him."

"Let him drink the holy water if he thirsts." Monastario began to munch on the corncakes and chicken in the basket.

Padre Felipe raised his right hand, as if to strike, and then let it down slowly. "When you reach purgatory, may there be the hottest place of all reserved for you."

Monastario laughed. "You will help pray me out, I'm sure. This is excellent food, Padre Felipe. Thank you."

Where an old wall built many years before as protection against Indians was now crumbling away against a heavy growth of trees and bushes, a black-clothed figure peered out at the main buildings of the mission. Behind Zorro the horse Tornado was concealed in the trees. Over Zorro's shoulder hung a goatskin water bag and another pouch containing food.

Sergeant Garcia was at the gateway of the mission, rubbing his back against the corner of the entrance. Then he yawned and began to relax, leaning contentedly against the gateway. He might even have been dozing.

Zorro crept toward the church. He froze suddenly where a bush was growing in the ruined wall. Monastario came striding into view. "Garcia!" he called.

From the way the fat Garcia jumped and stumbled around it was plain that he had been dozing. "Yes, capitán!" he said.

"Were you asleep?" Monastario asked suspiciously.

"Oh, no, I was resting my eyes only for a moment between times of looking sharply for Indians and things."

Monastario grunted. He strode over to lecture Garcia on the penalty of sleeping on duty, and it was then that Zorro slipped farther along the ruined wall and leaped through



a broken place in it. Now it would be simple to reach that little side door near the altar.

Corporal Ortega, from his post in the shadows of the yard, saw something black move through the hole in the broken wall. It was just a glimpse and then it was gone. He thought about it for a while. Perhaps it was nothing. Then, again, perhaps he had better tell Garcia.

Monastario was going toward the church when Ortega went to tell Garcia about a mysterious black thing that had seemed to flow like water through the old wall.

And thus it was that Zorro became trapped in the church.

He didn't know that Monastario had left the side door open on purpose, after surprising Padre Felipe when the priest was bringing food to Don Nacho. Zorro slipped inside.

Don Nacho was seated in one of the pews, resting his head on the back of the pew in front of him. He was not aware that anyone was in the church until Zorro was quite close. "Don Nacho," Zorro whispered.

Don Nacho raised his head in surprise. With a finger on his lips Zorro cautioned silence, and then he gave the water bag and pouch of food to the worried ranchero.

"Thank you, *Señor Zorro*," Don Nacho breathed, "but

you should not risk your life again to aid me.” He drank deeply from the water bag.

There was a clatter of boots at the main doorway of the church. Monastario came in with two lancers, all three of the men with drawn swords. Zorro whirled toward the side entrance. That, too, was blocked by soldiers.

“Ah, my fine *Señor Zorro*,” Monastario said, “this time you are trapped.”

Zorro darted toward the narrow door by which he had entered. Two soldiers with leveled lances stepped through it. Zorro saw that he had little chance, but even though his life was in danger he would not resort to violence within the church. Monastario made his concession to the church also. He said, “Take him alive!”

They were closing in toward Zorro when he leaped into the narrow passage that led up to the bell tower.

“There’s no escape from there!” Monastario shouted. “After him! Take him alive if you can.”

No soldier was anxious to go up the narrow stone steps that led to the bell tower, not with Zorro’s blade waiting for them, but Monastario forced one man to go with him and led the way, as a good commandante should.

Step by step they went up. They found no one, and even

when they stepped out on the narrow ledge outside of the sound openings of the tower, there was no sign of Zorro.

“He has vanished into the air,” the soldier muttered. He crossed himself quickly.

It was more than strange; even hard-headed Monastario was disturbed by the mystery of it. Then the commandante saw the bell rope leading over the edge of the narrow ledge, tightly drawn against the angle of the masonry. Monastario peered down. Zorro was below, sliding down the rope.

The commandante began to hack at the rope with his sword. The strands frayed. They began to separate. Savagely and fast Monastario chopped away. Half the rope was cut. Zorro was still a long distance from the ground. A few more strokes. The rope was severed.

“Garcia!” the commandante yelled. “In the cemetery! Zorro is there!”

The hard fall had jarred the breath from Zorro. He was stunned for a time. He heard Garcia coming with soldiers. Still shaken, but with his wits about him, Zorro crawled over to the cemetery gate and tied one end of the rope to the lower hinge. Then he let the rope lie on the ground and pressed himself back into bushes near the wall.

“Follow me!” Garcia shouted as he came lumbering.

The lancers, three of them, were close at his heels. They all became part of a great sprawling tangle of arms and legs that resulted when Zorro pulled the rope tight so that it caught the running men just below the knees.

They were still threshing on the ground when Zorro slipped through the gate and ran to Tornado. The commandante raced from the church with a soldier at his heels.

As Zorro galloped away into the moonlight, Monastario ordered a detachment of his soldiers to give chase. "Guard Torres well!" he shouted at Garcia. "We are not done with this mission yet."

The commandante and his lancers went pounding after Zorro. They gave the masked man a long, hard chase that night, until he circled around by secret trails the Indians had shown him when he was a boy, and at length got back to the cave with Tornado.

He had failed this night because of too much confidence, and because he had pitted himself against too many men. Don Nacho was still a prisoner in the church.

The next time, and it must be soon in order to save Don Nacho, Zorro knew he must live up to his name—the Fox.



## *Chapter 7*

## **The Ghostly Monk**

Diego was eating breakfast with his father, while Bernardo waited on them. Don Alejandro was in a bad mood. "I wish you'd go to bed at night," he grumbled, "instead of playing the guitar." His white beard fairly bristled. "Such music it was too! You did better when you were just learning."

Diego saw Bernardo turn away to smile. "I was composing a song, father."

"Composing! I thought you were beating the guitar to death with a cat." Alejandro had to smile, but he still regarded his son with a puzzled look. "I don't understand you, Diego. Since you came back from Spain all you seem to think of is music and books. You didn't used to be that way. You roamed the hills, you rode, and—"

"I guess the university changed me," Diego said.



Don Alejandro nodded, as if he wanted to say that he disliked the change but would not criticize. "Today I am going to one of my outlying ranchos to see about some horses. Perhaps you would like to come along?"

"I'm sorry, father, but I must take an old manuscript to Padre Felipe. He wanted very badly to see it."

"Yes, yes," Alejandro said, and he left the table.

Sergeant Garcia was in charge when Diego reached the mission, since Monastario, worn out by chasing Zorro the night before, was taking a long nap. A lancer told Diego that he must have Garcia's permission before seeing Padre Felipe.

Seated in a chair under a giant pepper tree, Garcia was trying hard to appear important. "Purpose of visit?" he demanded, when Diego asked if he could see Padre Felipe.

Diego gave the sergeant a rolled parchment. Garcia cleared his throat and studied it. The writing was in Latin, but that was no matter. Garcia couldn't read Spanish either. "Very interesting," the sergeant said. "I won't go through it all. Tell me about it instead."

"This tells of the monk who was captured and tortured by Indians when this mission was first built in 1771. He

was tied to this very tree—of course it was smaller then—and tormented until he went mad.”

Garcia looked uneasily at the tree.

“Ever since,” Diego said, “his ghost has haunted this mission. When the ghost walks, the church bell rings, exactly at midnight, although no man is near the bell.”

“So?” Garcia muttered. “What then?”

“This cowed monk rises from a grave in the cemetery beside the church. He moans and laughs in a wild way. He has no face, only darkness where his face should be. In this manuscript it tells how a man came face to face with him one night, under this very tree. The next day the man was found dead, with terror twisted into his expression, lying right where your chair now rests.”

Garcia swallowed slowly. His eyes were big. Then he gave a yelp of terror and leaped from his chair as a cowed figure suddenly appeared. But it was only Padre Felipe. “Come, come,” Diego said. “You are too intelligent to believe in ghost tales, Garcia.”

“Of course I am.” Garcia sat down again. As Diego and Padre Felipe walked away, the sergeant’s eyes rolled nervously, looking into the branches of the tree above him. He picked up his chair and moved away.

Padre Felipe and Diego found a place out of hearing of the lancers, a quiet place in the garden. "I have a plan," Diego said. "You will not approve of using superstition, I know, but—"

"Let me hear the plan, Don Diego, and then we shall see what I approve of."

Padre Felipe was smiling when he heard everything that Diego had to say.

It was a dark, soft, moonless night. Ortega and Garcia stood close together near the church. "We do not believe this tale of the Ghost Monk, do we?" Ortega asked. "This fearsome thing you read in the manuscript, it could not be so, could it?"

"A tale for children only," Garcia said, looking around him at the dark.

"The soldiers believed it when you told them."

"We are too intelligent for that," Garcia said. "Besides, I have posted Contreras in the bell tower. Even a ghost cannot ring the bell with him up there. Of course there is no ghost."

"Then why did you place Contreras in the bell tower?"

"Because— You ask too many questions, Ortega!"

They stood together in silence for a long time, until Ortega said, "I think it is almost midnight now."

As if he had given the signal by speaking, there came a *bong* from the bell. Ortega and Garcia grabbed each other. From the belfry came the quavering voice of Contreras, "Who pulled the rope?"

"There is no rope!" Garcia said. "You rang the bell."

"I did not!" Contreras replied. "By all the saints, I did not!"

"Then who is there with you?" Garcia asked.

"No one!" A moment later Contreras said in a shaking voice, "There is something moving in the cemetery!"

"Go see about it, Ortega," Garcia said.

Once more the bell rang, a ghostly sound in the night.

Ortega said, "You are the sergeant, Garcia, you should lead."

Garcia grabbed the corporal by the arm. Together they went slowly to the cemetery gate. Together they saw in the cold starlight a cowed figure rising from behind a gravestone, a cowed monk with nothing but darkness where his face should have been. A deep moan came from the ghost.

Garcia and Ortega turned and ran. They ran straight

into Monastario, who had risen from his bed to see why the bell had rung. They knocked him down and sprawled over him. They would have run some more, if the commandante had not grabbed them when they all got up. "What's going on?"

"The Ghost Monk!" Garcia wailed. "We saw him in the graveyard! He has no face and yet he moans!"

"Bah! There are no ghosts," Monastario growled. "Come with me, and we'll see what this phantom is." Ortega got away, but Garcia was forced to accompany Monastario.

They saw the ghost. It disappeared through a gate at the far end of the garden. "There!" Garcia moaned. He moaned louder an instant later when dim light fell upon him, and he turned to see a cowed figure standing behind him. "Protect us!" he cried, and he jumped behind Monastario.

"It's Padre Felipe, idiot!" the commandante said. "Let go of me." Obviously, there was no need to ask the padre if he had been walking in the graveyard, for he was here, and the Ghost Monk had just gone out the gate.

"Come with me, Garcia," Monastario ordered, and he ran to chase the ghost. They caught another glimpse of it, over by the huge pepper tree where Garcia had first

heard the story of the Ghost Monk. Garcia held back and let the commandante charge ahead.

The ghost went behind the tree. From a distance Garcia watched Monastario run around the trunk, once, and then again. "It disappeared," Monastario said, bewildered and angry. Then it occurred to him to look up into the tree, but before he could move his head, he collapsed and fell to the ground.

From a distance Garcia could not tell that a rock had been dropped from the tree on Monastario's head. It seemed to Garcia that the curse of the Ghost Monk had struck again.

Scared and excited soldiers had come from their posts and from the rooms where they had been asleep. Contreras and Ortega were telling them of the fearful thing they had seen, and it was then that Garcia came running faster than he had ever moved before.

"Run for your lives!" he shouted. "The Ghost Monk has killed the commandante!"

The Ghost Monk was not far behind Garcia. Faceless, moaning, it strode from around the cemetery corner, and the terrified soldiers fled as if they had seen a thousand fiery devils. No one could have held them.

Los Angeles would be much safer, they all thought, and the first one there would be the safest of all.

At the stone *bodega* where Inocente was locked up, the Ghost Monk took off his robes and the black piece of cloth over his face. Underneath he was Zorro. He lifted the bar on the heavy door and called, "Inocente, you are free. Go tell your people that they can return to the mission. No more soldiers will be here."

Inocente was cautious about coming out. When he did emerge, there was no one in sight. He ran to find his people.

Zorro met Bernardo over in the trees. In his hand Bernardo still held the slingshot he had used to throw rocks up against the bell. He pointed toward the pepper tree and nodded his head, indicating that Monastario would be all right.

"It's been a good night," Zorro said. "Shall we go home before my father begins to wonder why there is no guitar playing in my room?"

Bernardo shook his head, pointing north.

"That's right," Diego said. "My father will be gone all night at his outlying rancho. Why, we can do a lot more tonight, Bernardo."

There was no sound at all around the mission when the

commandante staggered to his feet, holding his hand to a lump on his head. He stumbled over the rock that had been dropped on him. Ghost Monk, bah! Ghosts, if there were any, didn't drop rocks from trees. He had a fair idea of who had been behind this night's work.

Those ignorant, superstitious soldiers! It wouldn't surprise him if they had all run clear back to Los Angeles, with Garcia in the lead, fat as he was.

Monastario was right. Every last one of the lancers was gone. The commandante had to find his horse and do his own saddling. Not that he had any hopes of getting the soldiers to return to the mission by night, but at least he would establish order when he found them at the pueblo.

Padre Felipe played it safe to the last. From the church doorway he watched Monastario ride away, and then he said to Don Nacho, "Let us go to my quarters to eat. You must have a good meal before setting out for Montercy."

"But what scared them all away? I never heard such panic."

"It was a small miracle, brought about by that clever young scholar Diego." Padre Felipe smiled and led the way to his quarters. "And I think he may have had some help from a certain gentleman known as the Fox."





## Chapter 8

## Arrested!

A soldier's duty is to obey orders, a fact which Sergeant Garcia knew very well, but when Capitan Monastario told him to take a detail of lancers and go to the Torres home to arrest *Doña* Luisa and her daughter, Elena, Garcia could hardly believe his own ears.

"But—but they are women, commandante," he said.

"The wife and daughter of the traitor who has escaped us and gone north to Monterey. Arrest them and bring them here to jail, Garcia." Monastario rapped his clenched hand on his desk.

Garcia twisted around uncomfortably. This was one order he did not wish to obey. Making war on men was one thing, but dragging off to jail the family of a Spanish don, well liked and respected, even though the commandante said he was a traitor, was quite another thing.

"Pardon, capitan, but the people will not like this thing," Garcia said. "They will shout insults and perhaps throw stones at me and the soldiers."

"Are you afraid of a few stones, Garcia? If so, I had better make someone else sergeant."

"No, no, commandante, I am not afraid, but . . . ." Garcia spread his hands helplessly. It was difficult for him, a soldier, to tell the commandante, who was from a great noble family in Spain, that arresting women was a very bad thing.

"As for the people not liking it," Monastario said, "who cares? They are cattle. They laugh behind my back and sneer because this outlaw Zorro has eluded me. I've no doubt that they help him to hide and know very well who he is."

"No, no, commandante, they do not know, I swear! My soldiers listen to everything that is said in the inn and around the pueblo. No one knows who Zorro is."

Monastario considered that statement for a moment. Then he assumed his strictest military manner. "Enough talk, Sergeant Garcia! Proceed at once to carry out your orders."

"Yes, capitan." Garcia saluted. He started toward the

door, hating what he had to do.

“And, sergeant . . . .”

Garcia turned and waited.

“Bring them in a cart,” Monastario said.

Garcia saluted again. The family of Don Nacho Torres in a cart! A cart for hauling wood. With a heavy heart he went out.

On his way to the Rancho Torres with the lancers, Garcia decided there would be no cart. That was the least he could do for the good wife and daughter of Don Nacho. He would have to lie to the commandante, perhaps tell him there were no carts at the rancho. Oh, he would make up some kind of story, even if he were punished.

In spite of being a soldier, Garcia took off his hat when he knocked at the Torres door. A servant came, looking at the sergeant as if he smelled bad. When Garcia said that he wished to see *Doña* Luisa, the servant beckoned him inside.

Stern, and with her head held high, *Doña* Luisa came into the room and waited quietly for Garcia to state his business.

“A thousand pardons,” Garcia said, “but I have come to arrest you and your daughter. You must come to Los

Angeles with me." He gulped, waiting for *Doña* Luisa to speak.

"And what is the charge?" *Doña* Luisa asked coldly.

Garcia began to fumble for the paper Monastario had given him. "Never mind," *Doña* Luisa said. "That insolent beast of a commandante has no doubt written more lies on that warrant than I would care to read."

"You will not go then?" Garcia asked. He was sweating. It would be terrible if he were forced to call the lancers to put two fine ladies under arrest like criminals.

"Yes, we will go," *Doña* Luisa said quietly. "Have our carriage brought to the gate." She walked into another room.

Garcia let out a great sigh of relief.

And so it was that the family of Don Nacho Torres came to the pueblo of Los Angeles in their own coach, instead of being jolted and bounced in a rude cart. Garcia had hoped to enter the pueblo quietly, but of course the lancers were escorting the coach, so the people guessed what was going on.

The people of the town gathered and made a crowd around the coach. They took off their hats to the women and trotted beside the vehicle. They jeered at the soldiers



and were most nimble in keeping from being trampled by the horses of the lancers. Some of the people threw stones and pieces of dried mud at the soldiers.

Garcia himself was struck by a rock that knocked his hat sidewise. All this, of course, did not change the fact that he had to put the two ladies in jail.

From a window of his office in the barracks, Monastario looked out and saw *Doña* Luisa and Elena being helped from their carriage by the respectful Garcia.

That stupid pig of a sergeant! Monastario was sure he knew what had happened at the Rancho Torres. The women of Don Nacho had made such a fuss about being brought here in a cart that Garcia had been afraid to insist. Maybe it was just as well. The people below were making more protest about the arrest than one would have thought.

They were angry and shouting. It was surprising. The commandante had thought he had frightened them enough to keep them quiet at times like this. But still they were cattle. What could they do against the power of the military? Nothing.

The little lawyer Pina came rushing into the room. His oily face was twisted with mingled fear and anger. "What are you doing now, Monastario?" he demanded.

“Calm yourself, Pina. What you see down there is a military matter.”

Pina did not calm himself. “Accusing Torres of treason is reasonable, but putting his wife and daughter into that stinking jail is unthinkable! Don’t you hear those people down there protesting?”

Monastario smiled. “Let them scream. The louder they wail, the better it suits my purpose. Those miserable pigs can’t hurt us. The only one who can harm us is Zorro. The people are making an idol of him, and idols must keep doing great deeds. Now do you understand?”

Pina wiped his face on his sleeve. He was calmer. “Perhaps I do. You think then that Zorro will try to rescue Don Nacho’s family, is that it?”

The commandante nodded. “If he doesn’t, the people will begin to lose faith in him. If he does, we will be more than ready for him. It will be the last of Zorro.”

Below, the women had been locked up. The lancers were driving away the crowd near the *cuartel*. At the far end of the plaza, workmen on scaffolding at the unfinished church were watching the excitement. A brown-robed Franciscan monk was climbing down one of the ladders, holding up his robes with one hand to keep from tripping.

“Zorro or no Zorro, I am still afraid of the people,” Pina said.

Monastario swung toward the lawyer and spoke harshly. “Stop whining. We want the Rancho Torres, at least for a start. By accusing Torres of treason, we took a large step toward gaining his lands. He even helped us by escaping, which made him seem guilty of the charge.”

Pina nodded. “That is true.”

“Very well, my nervous friend. Now we have arrested his wife and daughter. Before we release them, they will sign confessions in which they admit the treasonable statements made by Torres.”

Pina kept nodding. “Torres has escaped and gone to the governor, beyond doubt, to present his case. But it will be most damaging to him when we can show signed statements of his own family in which they admit he often spoke of treason.”

“It’s that simple,” Monastario said.

“But how do you get them to sign the statements?”

Monastario laughed. “Remember how much you disliked the few minutes you were chained in jail?”

“Oh, no!” the lawyer cried. “You won’t chain them?”

“No, that won’t be necessary. Besides the confinement,



I will find other ways to break down their resistance, you can rest assured. Once we have the confessions, they will be released.”

Down in the plaza, the Franciscan monk, Padre Felipe, was being turned away from the jail by two soldiers.

Don Alejandro had just heard the news of the arrest and imprisonment of the Torres women. He was so angry that his white beard seemed to quiver as he paced his study, now and then glaring at his son Diego, who was slouched comfortably in a chair, tapping his leg with a riding crop.

“Are you just going to sit there?” Alejandro said angrily. He was limping because of an injured leg.

“What can I do, father? The law is on the side—”

“The law! There is no justice left in the law since Monastario came here! Get my carriage made ready. I’ll go to the ranchos of Caldon, *Valle Inclan*, Cardoza—everywhere. They are all friends of Don Nacho. I’ll raise a fighting army that will show this commandante what the people of California think of him!”

Diego shook his head. “Open rebellion will only make matters worse. Don Nacho has taken his case right to the

governor. Supposing the governor starts to investigate down here and finds armed rebellion against the King?"

Alejandro knew that his son was making sense, but still the old man was angry. "Monastario is not the King," he growled.

"He is the King's appointed man. He is the military commandante of this district, with his power coming directly from the Crown. Right now Ferdinand is having so much trouble of his own in Spain, that if he ever heard of our little squabbles here, he would be forced to take the side of the commandante."

"Little squabbles!" Alejandro said. "I tell you this Monastario is a madman who is seeking to gain terrible power here, and to take our lands."

Diego nodded. "I agree with everything you say, except Monastario is not mad. He knows what he's doing."

Alejandro sat down suddenly when his leg, injured when a horse fell with him a few days before, began to hurt so badly that he could not stand longer. "What do you suggest, Diego?"

"I'll go at once to the pueblo to see what I can do."

Alejandro watched his son go out. Alejandro shook his head sadly. Diego would try. Oh, yes, he would do what

he could, but he was not the man for the job. A sudden twinge of pain made Alejandro straighten his leg and clench his teeth.

As soon as he could ride, even in the carriage, he himself would see what could be done about this latest outrage.

Bless Diego, but he was not strong enough for the times.

One of the stable boys was saddling Raton, the fat old horse that Diego rode in daytime, when Benito Avila, the head vaquero of Rancho de la Vega, came over to Diego. He was strong and straight-looking, Benito, and it was no secret that he loved Elena Torres. He said, holding back anger, "It is true that the commandante has arrested *Señorita* Elena?"

Diego nodded.

"What will be done to her?"

"I don't know, Benito. I'm going now to find out and see what I can do."

Benito's anger got away from him. "I know what I would do, I would kill Monastario!"

"Gently, gently," Diego said. "Philosophy teaches us that violence is no solution to our troubles." Then he smiled grimly. "But it is a tempting thought, yes?"

There were times when Benito believed that there was more to young Don Diego than people thought. Just now, when he had smiled, there was nothing soft in his look. His expression was that of one who could be dangerous.

“Stay away from Monastario,” Diego advised.

“I am not afraid of him.”

“I know. A man in love is seldom afraid of anything.”

Diego got on Raton. As he rode away, Benito changed his mind about that smile that had seemed so revealing. Look at that horse, a fat mouse. No young man who was dangerous would go bumping down the road on a thing like that. Diego would be of little help to Elena and her mother.

Only Zorro could help.

Suddenly Benito’s eyes narrowed as he got an idea.

Padre Felipe was directing some of the work on the church when Diego rode into Los Angeles. Diego gave Raton into the care of a barefooted boy and went at once to where Padre Felipe was watching Indians mix mortar.

“Have you talked to them?” Diego asked, nodding toward the jail.

“They are allowed no visitors,” Padre Felipe said. “I

went to the commandante but he would not allow me to go to the cells.”

Diego glanced at the scaffolding before the church. It was made of small poles, and since there were no nails, the whole structure was bound together with rawhide. “Garcia is a great wine drinker, Padre Felipe,” Diego said. “I could give him money to sample the new barrels of northern wine that just came to the tavern, and in the doing perhaps we could get permission to—”

“No, my son. We must not tempt the weakness of any man.” The padre smiled. “Besides, drinking wine from the north of California is treason, in a way, since our wines made here are superior.”

“Then let us both go to see the commandante about visiting the ladies.”

Monastario was eating heartily when Corporal Ortega admitted Padre Felipe and Diego to see him. The commandante wiped his lips with the back of his hand and stared narrowly at Diego. “What are you doing here? Whenever I have trouble, you seem to appear.”

“My father sent me,” Diego said. “Since we are old friends of the Torres family, he thought—”

“He would have done better to have come himself,”

Monastario said insolently. "Not that anyone will be able to intercede on behalf of the prisoners."

"Not even the church?" Padre Felipe asked softly.

Monastario filled his mouth with goat stew. He chewed and swallowed and took time in answering. "The Torres family is a military matter, father, not a problem of the church. Do not think differently."

"I must disagree with that," Padre Felipe said.

Monastario laughed. "You had your law of sanctuary, father. I did not violate that. Now I have my law, and so you must not try to violate that either."

Diego spoke hesitantly. "Do I understand that you intend to hold the ladies as hostages, commandante?"

"Hostages? No! I will hold them only as long as they withhold the truth from me." Monastario took a drink of wine. "Excellent, this northern wine."

"I disagree with that also," Padre Felipe said.

Diego asked, "What truth are they withholding, may I ask?"

"You are a polite and stupid young man," Monastario said. He poured himself more wine. "What truth? First, the Torres women were well aware of all the traitorous speeches and plans that Don Nacho made. They did not

report any of this to me, the commandante.”

“There seems to have been no need,” Diego said gently. “You are now claiming that you knew everything which no one else in all California knew.”

Monastario gave him a long, hard look. “Your tongue would not move so freely if it were jerked out, Don Diego.” He kept staring until Diego lowered his eyes. “Second, the Torres family helped the traitor to escape.”

Diego and Padre Felipe looked quickly at each other.

“Oh, yes, they aided him,” Monastario said. “After he left sanctuary in your church, Padre Felipe, he did not go directly north. He returned to his home for a short time.”

“But surely you could not expect his wife and daughter to drive him away,” Padre Felipe protested.

“He is a traitor. They knew it and still they aided him. That is part of the confession they must sign before they can be released. How long it takes them to make up their minds is their affair. Until then, they are the King’s prisoners and no one may visit them.”

Diego shrugged helplessly.

“And now,” the commandante said briskly, “I know you still have much work to do in helping your assistant Padre Juan with the church, father. And you, Don Diego, must

be anxious to get back to your father, where your insolent tongue will not be in such great danger.”

Diego lowered his head to hide his expression. He was so angry that he wanted to seize the commandante by the throat. He forced himself to rise and go to the door without looking at Monastario. Once outside, he was able to bring his emotions under control.

Again he was the foppishly dressed, lazy son of Don Alejandro. “Will you have supper with me at the inn, padre?” he asked.

“Thank you, I will, but give me a few minutes while I talk to the workmen at the church.” Padre Felipe went across the plaza.

It was the opportunity Diego needed, for he had spotted Bernardo lounging near the cantina. Since everyone thought that he was deaf, as well as mute, the servant was able to pick up a great deal of information.

Diego strolled toward Bernardo. Garcia came from the tavern, wiping his lips. He glanced with a guilty expression toward the windows of the commandante’s office, and then he waddled away to check the guards at the jail.

“Two things I must be most careful about,” Diego thought. The first was spies. Monastario had known that



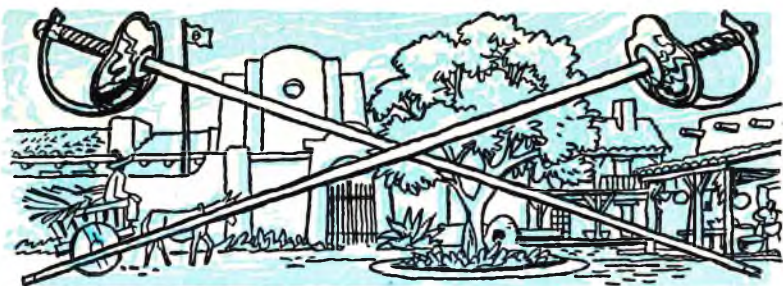
Don Nacho had visited his home before going to Monterey. Diego and his father had been at the Rancho Torres that night, and had talked to Don Nacho, but they had told no one he was there, and Torres' family would not have told.

Yet Monastario had found out in some manner, so he must have spies. From now on Diego knew he must be more careful than ever to protect the secret of Zorro's identity.

The second thing he must watch was his tongue. From now on, when he insulted Monastario, it must be done in such a way that it would seem that he, Diego, was more silly than intelligent.

He came up to Bernardo and pretended to talk to him in sign language. The mute made his own fingers move rapidly. On the palm of his hand he made a quick Z.

"Yes," Diego said, moving his lips no more than necessary and keeping his voice to a whisper. "Tonight there will be work for Zorro." While he continued to make meaningless signs with his fingers, he told Bernardo where to meet him after dark.



## Chapter 9

## Hang Him!

A lancer, yawning as he walked, made his rounds along the wall of the *cuartel*. When he had passed, a black-cloaked figure with a mask slipped from the darkness under a tree and ran quickly to the wall. The man leaped and caught the top, pulling himself over.

He made a thudding sound when he landed inside. The soldier heard the noise and turned. He peered for a while into the shadowy compound, saw nothing, and faced the other way again.

Silently the black-cloaked figure came along the wall. It flowed across a dim pool of light coming from the windows of the barracks. The lancer at the gate cleared his throat and scratched the side of his neck. The dark figure froze. Then it was moving stealthily again.

The soldier heard the faint scrape of feet behind him

when the cloaked man was almost upon him. He whirled but it was too late. The handle of a sword swung against the side of the lancer's head. He fell, and an instant later he was being dragged back into the shadows inside the gate.

There was a faint clink of iron as the masked man took the heavy ring of keys from the guard's belt. A few moments later *Doña* Luisa and Elena gasped with surprise when they saw the man outside their cell.

"Zorro!" Elena cried. She leaped up from the rough bench where she had been resting.

The man outside tried a key. It did not fit. He tried another and that, too, was the wrong one. In all, there were about fifteen heavy keys on the ring. The masked man was still trying to find the right one when a soldier, making his patrol along the wall of the compound, saw that no one was on guard at the gate. Puzzled, the man peered inside and saw the feet of the fallen guard. Then he saw the dark-cloaked man at the cell door.

"Guard! Guard! Turn out the guard!" the lancer yelled.

The masked man might have escaped by climbing the wall again, but he still tried desperately to find the right key. He gave up and drew his sword only when a dozen soldiers were rushing at him.

“God protect you, *Señor Zorro*,” *Doña Luisa* murmured, but she knew it was hopeless. The masked man had no chance against the numbers coming at him.

At the last moment he tried to climb to the roof of the cells, but the lancers were upon him. They grabbed his legs, hauled him down, and piled on top of him. “We have captured Zorro!”

Monastario and Garcia came running. “Lift him up and let me tear that mask from him!” the commandante shouted.

He gloated a moment while the masked man struggled in the grip of the soldiers, and then he used the edge of his sword to cut the tie string of the mask. The identity of the cloaked figure was revealed.

A crowd had gathered, among them Padre Felipe and Diego, who had spent a long time over their supper.

“Oh, no!” Padre Felipe cried. “I never would have suspected Benito Avila!”

“Benito is Zorro!” The awed people stared at each other in astonishment.

“This lovesick Indian, Zorro?” Monastario growled. “You are all fools. He is not Zorro—he is a foolish man who thought to release the *Señorita Elena*.”



"Do not harm him," Elena pleaded. "He did it for me, not knowing how foolish it was."

"Oh, I won't harm him—much," Monastario said. "I will merely have him hanged. Garcia, prepare a gallows at the gate of the pueblo within ten minutes! Move, you wine-soaked idiot!"

Padre Felipe pushed forward. "You cannot deny him the comfort of confession, commandante."

"Later, later!" Monastario said curtly. "Corporal Ortega, clear this compound at once!"

"It is not his fault," Elena said. "Please, commandante, do not hang him." She clung to the bars in despair.

Monastario's sharp, cruel eyes watched her keenly. He turned away with a thoughtful expression. "Perhaps there is a way he can be saved," he called back over his shoulder.

Not long afterward, the compound cleared and quiet once more, a soldier came to the cell where *Doña* Luisa and her daughter were and gave them a paper and pen and ink. "The commandante says you are to be freed when you both sign this."

"And Benito?" Elena asked.

"Yes, the commandante says he will be freed also."

"Leave us alone," Elena said.

“Pardon, *Señorita* Torres,” the soldier said, “but there is not much time. The gallows is almost ready.” He walked toward the gate of the compound and waited.

*Doña* Luisa was holding the paper close to the one candle in the cell. “If we sign this, we are accusing your father of treason. I will not sign such a paper!”

“We must,” Elena said. “Father will be cleared when he talks to the governor, and we can prove that we were forced to sign this false confession of his guilt.”

“I will not sign it!”

“For Benito’s life, mother!”

“You love him greatly?” *Doña* Luisa said.

“Yes.”

*Doña* Luisa called to the guard to come back. When the soldier was again outside the cell, the woman held the candle so that the light fell on his face. “Will the comandante free Benito Avila if we sign this paper?”

“*Si, si, Señora* Torres! He said—”

“Do you believe what he said, soldier?” *Doña* Luisa asked.

“Oh, *si!*” The soldier nodded, but the truth was apparent all over his face: Monastario had sent him with a big lie, and even the lancer knew that it was a lie. Suddenly he put

his face close to the bars and whispered, "No, *Señora* Torres, nothing will save Benito Avila now."

*Doña* Luisa stepped back and put her arm around her daughter. "What can we do?" Elena sobbed.

"This!" The mother tore the paper into small bits.

Secretly pleased that the women had not been tricked into signing a false confession, the lancer went back to report to Monastario. The commandante was mounted and looking across the plaza to where Garcia was completing arrangements for the hanging.

"So they are stubborn," Monastario said, when he heard the soldier's word. "We will see." He rode over to the gates of the pueblo.

Padre Juan was helping Benito up on a cart, since the man could hardly move, so heavily was he chained. Garcia was already on the cart, holding the rope that was tied to the crossbeam of the gate. Lanterns dimly illuminated the scene.

Once on the cart, Padre Juan knelt with Benito. The priest's cowl was so loose that it covered the upper part of his face. He did not push it back, perhaps because he was ashamed to look fully on injustice.

"Enough praying," Monastario said curtly. "Put the rope



around the Indian's neck, Garcia."

Padre Juan and Benito rose. Garcia put the noose around the prisoner's neck. In their hurry to get things ready, the soldiers had grabbed Raton and hitched him to the cart, and now the fat horse was dozing as he stood there.

"May I die without chains?" Benito asked.

Monastario hesitated. Then he said, "Remove the chains from him, Garcia." That was done, and Benito was free except for the cruel rope around his neck.

"When I give the signal, lash that fat horse of Don Diego's and drive the cart away quickly." The commandante raised his sword. "When I bring the sword down. Ready?"

Garcia stooped to pick up the lines.

After that, things happened so quickly that no one who was watching told exactly the same story afterward.

It began when Padre Juan put his foot against the rear of Garcia and kicked him face forward off the cart. Then the priest threw off the robes and the cowl that had almost covered his face.

He was not Padre Juan, he was Zorro!

He drew a knife and slashed the rope above Benito's head. Benito grabbed the lines and shouted at Raton. The

cart was beginning to move when Monastario sent his horse lunging closer to it, and slashed with his sword at Zorro.

It was a poor stroke, given with more hatred than skill. Zorro parried the blow and sent the blade flying from the commandante's hand.

Then the masked man jabbed the point of his sword lightly into the flank of Monastario's horse. It was not enough to hurt the animal much, but it was a painful, startling stab that caused the commandante's mount to rear and jump and kick out wildly as if a giant bee had stung it.

Soldiers running toward the cart had to leap aside as Monastario's horse pitched and bucked around the plaza. For a time it was all the commandante could do to stay in the saddle while he tried to get the animal under control.

Benito was lashing Raton now with the whip. The fat horse was so greatly startled by such unusual treatment that he put on a burst of speed the likes of which he had not shown since he was two years old.

Bouncing and shaking, the cart went through the gateway. Before the commandante could calm his horse and give orders to the lancers to mount and chase Zorro and Benito, the cart was well into the darkness beyond the gates.

It was a poor vehicle for escaping, and it became even worse when one of the solid wooden wheels fell off. Only by holding to each other and the wooden side did Zorro and Benito avoid being thrown to the ground as the cart slewed from side to side while Benito was getting Raton stopped.

They both leaped down then. Zorro cut the traces with his knife. "Take the horse," he said. "They cannot catch you in the darkness."

"And you? How will you—"

"Don't worry about me. Ride!" Zorro ran into the darkness, circling to get behind the church.

Benito leaped up on Raton and rode away.

Mounted lancers were streaming through the gateway now, but Zorro doubted greatly that they would catch Benito. If they did get close to him, Benito would wait quietly among the trees until they had passed, and then he would ride on, following some of the little-known trails he had shown Zorro when the two of them were boys.

Panting from his run, Zorro came to where Bernardo was waiting behind piles of adobe bricks at the rear of the church. They could hear some excitement in the plaza yet.

"Take Tornado home," Zorro said. He took off his black

cloak and mask and donned the flashy clothing that Bernardo was holding. "Go carefully. You know how to keep from sight."

Once more it was young Diego de la Vega who strolled across the plaza as if he had been there all the time. He joined Padre Felipe, who once more was trying to talk his way in to see *Doña* Luisa and Elena. The guard at the gate to the *cuartel* had been doubled, and the gate was closed now. Padre Felipe could not get in, but he told Diego that he had shouted to the women that Benito had escaped.

"There is nothing more we can do then," Diego said. "Ah, that Zorro! It was frightening to see him appear so suddenly from under the robes of a priest."

"It was also pleasing," Padre Felipe said, smiling.

They were crossing the plaza to go to the inn for another bite to eat, when an Indian came running with the robes that Zorro had dropped on the cart. "Take them over to the church, Pepe," Padre Felipe told the Indian.

As they walked on toward the inn, he said, "Old ones, but Padre Juan will be glad to have them safely back. He wears them while working on the church. You know, only for an instant did I think it was Padre Juan there on the cart—and then I remembered that he had left before dark

to visit a sick vaquero at the Rancho La Brea.”

“I myself was deceived until the last moment—like the brave commandante,” Diego said. “Of course, I did not know that Padre Juan had gone to the Rancho La Brea.” This was a small lie only, Diego reasoned, and necessary to help keep the identity of Zorro well hidden. It would not be fair to the good padre to put the burden of Zorro’s secret on him.

Monastario and his soldiers returned an hour later. The commandante was learning that it was a waste of time to chase Zorro in the dark.

Padre Felipe and Diego were coming from the inn as Monastario rode past. The commandante gave Diego a narrow look, and he then rode over to Garcia, who had been left behind to guard the *cuartel* while the chase after Zorro was going on. “Where was Don Diego during the trouble?” Monastario asked.

“Why—why—” Garcia could not remember where anyone but himself had been during the excitement, but he did not wish to appear stupid. Estimating the passage of time has tricked smarter men than Garcia. He did remember that he had seen Diego not very long after the cart went into the dark outside the gates, so it was natural to assume that Diego

had been in the plaza all the time.

"He was here," Garcia said. "I saw him standing by the inn even as I was rolling to escape the kicks of the fierce horse hitched to the cart, after I fell off the cart."

"You are sure?" Monastario asked.

"*Si*, capitan! With my own eyes I saw him!"

"Fierce horse!" Monastario said. "He stood asleep. A horse by the name of Raton. A mouse!"

"He must have some fierceness," Garcia said innocently, "because the two outlaws escaped on him, and you could not—"

"Keep your silly thoughts to yourself!"

Monastario was going toward the barracks when Diego came out and called to him. The young man hurried over while the commandante waited impatiently.

"My horse," Diego said, "it was stolen by Zorro, and I have no way to return home tonight. Since you are the commandante, entrusted with keeping the law and punishing those who steal horses—"

"Don't tell me my duties! Your own vaquero stole your worthless horse, as far as I'm concerned."

"But I cannot get home," Diego said weakly.

The commandante started to turn away, and then his

eyes fell on Corporal Ortega's horse. It was a mean animal and hard to ride. Monastario pointed. "Take that horse there."

Diego walked over to the animal and gingerly took the reins. The big sorrel began to sidle away as Diego tried to get close enough to swing up. By lightly tugging on the reins Diego made the Spanish bit in the sorrel's mouth so uncomfortable that the horse grew even more nervous.

Then he made a clumsy attempt to grab the horn and get his left foot into the stirrup. The horse pulled away. Diego lost the reins, his foot came down as if he had stepped into a hole, and he fell flat.

The soldiers roared with laughter. One of them said, "We will have to catch Zorro and that mouse-horse, or Don Diego will never be able to ride anywhere again!"

Monastario raised one hand in a gesture of mingled amusement and disgust. "Give him Garcia's horse. That one is almost as tame as Garcia himself."

"Thank you, commandante," Diego said.

Monastario went on to his quarters. To think that even for a moment he had suspicioned such a clumsy clown as Don Diego of being Zorro!



## Chapter 10

## Alejandro's Anger

*Doña* Luisa and Elena were still in jail, and so closely guarded was the *cuartel* now that people shook their heads, saying privately that even Zorro could not help them. Not far above their miserable cell, Monastario and the lawyer Pina were sitting in the commandante's comfortable office, with warm California sunshine coming through the windows.

Pina was reading a document. “. . . and it is further charged that *Señora* Luisa Torres, wife of the traitor Don Nacho Torres, and *Señorita* Elena Torres, daughter of the aforesaid traitor, did knowingly and with wilful intent conspire to defy the legal representatives of the King's army while engaged in his Majesty's—”

A commotion broke out below, a voice speaking coldly and with anger, and then a soldier saying apologetically,



"But I have my orders. You must see the commandante."

Monastario and Pina went to a window. Don Alejandro de la Vega was limping toward the barracks entrance.

"He is a very influential man, capitan," Pina said. "It would not be wise to slight him when he asks to see the prisoners."

"Is that legal advice, Pina?" Monastario growled.

"It is the advice of one who knows the pride and anger of rancheros, capitan. You must not underestimate these old California families."

Monastario thought for a time. He strode to the door and spoke to the sentry in the hall. "Bring Corporal Sanchez here. On your way down, tell Don Alejandro to wait below. Tell him I will see him in a few minutes."

When Monastario went down a little later, he apologized for keeping Alejandro waiting. The commandante was all smiles and politeness. "Of course you may see the prisoners, Don Alejandro. I could not refuse one so respected as you."

The women had been moved sometime before to the end cell in the *cuartel*, separated from the stables by a thick partition. Alejandro's first glimpse of their faces made him turn white with anger. They were wan and pale, as if they were not getting enough to eat, and the crudeness of the

cell was shocking to the white-haired ranchero.

"That pig of a commandante!" the old don said, his voice shaking with anger. "He will pay for this."

"We are all right," *Doña* Luisa said hastily. "When Don Nacho has talked to the governor—"

"But to be kept in here!" Alejandro cried. "It is not fit for cattle, this place. I will—"

"Please, Don Alejandro," *Doña* Luisa said. "There is nothing you can do but get into trouble if you try to help us. Wait until—"

"I will not wait!" Alejandro glanced toward the guards at the gate. He lowered his voice. "This very night I am going to have a meeting at my home of all the rancheros. I will call upon them to tear this place apart! I will . . ."

He went on talking, unaware that in the stable on the other side of the end wall Corporal Sanchez was crouched beside a hole that extended almost through the wall. Sanchez heard every word Alejandro spoke.

They met that night at the Rancho de la Vega, the leading rancheros of the area, Don Antonio, Don Pablo, Don Alonso, and others. Don Alfredo O'Donnojou was late, although he had promised to come, so after waiting

a half hour, Alejandro decided to go ahead with the meeting.

He wasted no time in coming to the point. "Two fine and gentle Spanish ladies who had long been our friends and neighbors are held unjustly in a foul jail. The only honorable thing that we can do is to demand their release, all of us!"

Don Pablo shook his head doubtfully. "It will do no good to demand anything from the commandante."

"Then we will ride in force with trusted men from our ranchos and tear the commandante's vile jail apart!" Don Alejandro said heatedly.

The others warmed slowly to the idea. They were discussing Alejandro's suggestion when Don Alfredo arrived. "I am sorry to be late," he said, "but I was detained while gaining information from a drunken lancer who visits with a servant woman at my rancho." Don Alfredo frowned. "I found out from this lancer that the commandante will release Don Nacho's family only if they sign a confession saying that Don Nacho is indeed a traitor."

At once there was an angry buzz in the room.

"He has been withholding food from them too," Alfredo said. "Are we going to do nothing about this?"

The buzz became a roar. "Let us kill the monster and tear his foul lair apart!" Don Pablo shouted, and others were loud in agreement.

Diego had been saying nothing, sitting quietly in a corner, but now he tried to calm the violent spirit of the older men. "I beg of you, consider. If you attack the *cuartel*, you will all be branded as rebels against the King."

As usual, Don Alejandro was disappointed in his son. "Only against the commandante are we rebels," he said coldly.

"I plead with you all—have patience," Diego said. "In time, the wrong done will be righted by the workings of law."

Alejandro hung his head in shame that his only son should be so meek. Some of the dons turned their backs on Diego. Their minds were set for violence to correct violence, and they wanted no mild talk. They began to lay their plans. They would use force, but also strategy.

In the bushes that grew thick against the wall outside Don Alejandro's study, Corporal Sanchez listened to the plan, and when he thought he had heard enough, he crept across the patio and disappeared into the trees.

When the dons had gone back to their ranchos to gather



trusted men for the attack that night, Diego tried to argue his father out of going. "You can hardly walk with that injured leg. It will be suicide to attack the *cuartel*."

Don Alejandro rose and limped around the room. "I would go if I had but one leg," he said grimly. "And you?"

Diego lowered his eyes. "I will wait for justice to come from the law," he mumbled.

"You are my son, but—" Alejandro said hotly. Just barely did he restrain his temper by turning away from Diego. "All men are what they are, I guess." Having a coward for a son was almost more than he could bear.

It was a deadly trap the dons were riding into later that night, but they did not know it. The guards had been taken from the closed gate of the *cuartel*. Like all the other soldiers, they had been posted out of sight, for as soon as Corporal Sanchez, the spy, had reported to the commandante, Monastario had set his forces so that the dons and their men would be allowed to enter the plaza without being challenged.

Then when the rancheros made their move to force the *cuartel* gate, it would in effect be treason, and Monastario could say that he was justified in defending the King's

property. At the commandante's shouted order—he had made it very clear that no concealed soldier was to move until he gave the command—the hidden lancers would spring from cover and hack the dons to pieces.

Monastario was well pleased with his own cunning. There would be far fewer wealthy landowners after this night's work. More land that would become prey to his and little Pina's designs . . . land that would have to be forfeited to the King because its former owners had become traitors. Certainly attacking the *cuartel* was treason!

The King was thousands of miles away. As far as Monastario was concerned, he was the king of southern California.

Monastario was waiting inside the *cuartel* gate when he heard the thud behind him. He whirled around. Zorro had come along the stable roof and was leaping to the top of a carriage.

The commandante stood very still. Let Zorro come on down to the ground. The stable held six soldiers, and there were others in unlocked cells.

But Zorro was suspicious of something—the quiet, the absence of guards. He crouched on the top of the carriage, looking around the *cuartel*. And then, slowly as if suspect-

ing the trap, he climbed down.

Monastario drew his sword and ran toward him, at the same time calling on his soldiers. "Zorro is here!"

Lancers came pouring from the cells and from the stable. They crowded so close against each other that they had no room to swing their sabers. Zorro's streaking sword drove them back. A soldier with a musket raised it to shoot the black-cloaked man.

Another lancer crowded against the musket man and accidentally jarred him, so that the shot tore through the brim of a lancer's hat and powder stung the man's cheek. The soldier dropped to the ground, howling that he had been shot.

"Fools, idiots!" the commandante yelled. He engaged Zorro himself. "Spread around him!"

With a rush of flashing steel that wounded Monastario in the left arm, Zorro drove him back, and then before the commandante could guess his intentions, Zorro whirled back toward the carriage. He stepped to the hub of the front wheel, then to the rim of the wheel, and then he scrambled to the top again as a lance whacked into the door.

The commandante dropped his sword and drew his pistol. By then Zorro had leaped to the stable roof and was



running toward the outer wall. It was a hard shot, but Monastario tried it anyway. He knew he had missed when a taunting laugh came back from the stable roof, and then Zorro was gone over the wall.

Garcia came panting up to Monastario. "We will ride after him, capitan?"

"No!" The commandante picked up his sword. He thought a moment. "Yes, you will take half of the lancers, Garcia. You will pretend to chase him, but that is all."

"I do not understand," Garcia said.

"He wants us to chase him, so that there will be no soldiers here, or only a few, when the dons come."

"Oh! I see."

"I hope you do, fat one," Monastario said. "Do not go far away. Keep scouts on the road, so that when the dons approach, you can bring your troop back. That way we will crush the dons between two forces."

Shortly afterward, Garcia led the lancers out. Pursuit of Zorro was not difficult this time, for Zorro was waiting not far beyond the gates, and then Garcia knew how wise the commandante was.

Still, it was difficult not to keep after Zorro, for he stayed not far ahead, calling back insults at Garcia, such

as "Fat pig!" and "Coward!" and "Wine belly!"

Angry as all that made Garcia, he remembered his orders and did not go more than a quarter mile from the pueblo, even when Zorro shouted worse insults from the darkness.

And in the pueblo Monastario changed his plans a little. He left the gate of the *cuartel* open and concealed all of his lancers around the plaza. Now when the dons came, he would let them rush into the *cuartel*, close in behind them with his soldiers, and kill them all.

Don Alejandro and the others suspected nothing. They wondered a little about the riders somewhere on the road ahead of them, two unseen riders who galloped away when they heard the dons coming. Those two were Garcia's scouts, but of course the dons did not know that.

By ones and twos the dons entered the pueblo, leaving their horses outside with vaqueros. Everything looked so easy. No people were about, except inside the *posada* and at the cantina. No soldiers were in sight. The gate of the *cuartel* was open.

Don Pablo became suspicious then. He said, "I do not like this, Alejandro. It smells like an evil trap."

In truth, Alejandro was of the same opinion, but they were here. He felt that they must take the chance. "I

will go alone into the *cuartel* and see if there is some kind of trap," he said.

"I'm afraid of it. Perhaps—" Don Alfredo said.

"Wait here. We will see." Alejandro walked away.

He was inside the *cuartel* and the other dons were moving across the plaza, when a black stallion came thundering through the gates of the pueblo. "A trap, a trap!" Zorro shouted. "Leave the pueblo!"

He cut across the path of the dons and they hesitated. "Run!" Zorro shouted. "Run for your lives!"

Monastario saw his clever ambush ruined. "Attack!" he bellowed at his hidden men.

The dons escaped, running to their horses outside, but Alejandro was trapped inside the *cuartel*. The great black horse went lunging to his assistance, scattering soldiers who were running from the houses and other buildings. Zorro leaped down beside his father. "Outside!" he yelled at Tornado, and whacked the stallion on the rump.

The horse charged through the *cuartel* gate. The lancers under Garcia were just returning. Tornado met them at the pueblo gates, squealing his rage, not because he understood what was happening, but because it was natural for a stallion to hate all gelded horses.

For several moments Tornado created panic among the close-packed riders as he struck at their mounts with his forefeet. Two soldiers were unhorsed before the stallion broke through into the night.

Inside the *cuartel*, Alejandro and Zorro were being hard-pressed. Because of his age and his injured leg, Alejandro was having trouble defending himself. In a fury, his eyes glinting darkly, Zorro drove two lancers back, wounding one in the shoulder. And then Zorro fell back to Alejandro. "The carriage!" he said. "And then over the wall from the roof!"

The younger man's lightning sword was everywhere while Alejandro painfully hauled himself to the top of the carriage. A soldier leveled a musket. Zorro's blade pierced his hand and the man dropped the weapon, yelling in pain.

Monastario lunged furiously. But Zorro was fighting for his father's life as well as his own, and he struck the blade from the commandante's hand. He backed Monastario against the stable wall, holding the point of his sword at the commandante's throat, and looked at the soldiers.

"Back up to the gate," Zorro ordered. "Back away or he dies!"

A nearby soldier muttered, "Who would care?"

Sergeant Garcia was of a different mind. "Obey him," he told the lancers, "or the commandante will die!"

"You are wise, Garcia," Zorro said, as the soldiers began to back toward the *cuartel* gate. He glanced toward the stable roof. Alejandro had made it, but he had fallen down when he leaped from the carriage, and now he was dragging himself painfully toward the outer wall.

Zorro pulled his blade back from Monastario's throat. "Lie down, pig! Quickly!"

The commandante had to obey. He lay down on his side. Zorro turned and sprinted to the carriage. He seemed to run up the side of it as his feet found the hub, the wheel, the driver's seat, and the luggage rack.

When he reached his father, he put his sword away and grabbed Alejandro under the arm. They hurried toward the outer wall. Then a pistol shot cracked through the night, and Alejandro slumped. Zorro had to lift him, lower him over the wall, and let him drop.

In a quick glance over his shoulder Zorro saw Monastario standing on top of the carriage with a smoking pistol in his hand. "Around the wall!" the commandante shouted.

Zorro leaped off the wall far to one side of where Alejandro had dropped. He came down hard and for a moment

could not get his breath to whistle for Tornado.

Alejandro was trying to struggle to his feet. "Go now, Zorro," he muttered. "I am an old man and I am shot. Leave me and escape."

Zorro helped him to his feet. He whistled again, and he heard Tornado trotting close in the darkness. "I will put you behind the saddle," Zorro said. "Hold hard to me, Don Alejandro."

Lancers on horses and some on foot were rushing around the corner of the wall when Zorro and Don Alejandro rode off.

For a while Tornado was a match for all of them, and then he began to tire under the double weight. Zorro used several tricks to lose his pursuers, but they were close upon him, and each trick served only to delay them slightly.

Alejandro was clinging to him weakly. "Hang on," Zorro said. "Just a short way now." He urged Tornado into a burst of speed that made the great stallion's sides heave. They gained a few hundred yards on the lancers and came to one of the secret trails long used by Indians.

Zorro turned into the trees for a short distance and stopped. He heard the soldiers ride past the place where he had turned off. He urged Tornado on then, into the hills

about a half mile. There, dismounting, he lowered his father gently to the ground.

It was a long way to the Rancho de la Vega, and the lancers might be watching it. To go deeper into the hills would not be good, for Alejandro needed medical care.

Tonight the lancers had been very close; they had chased Zorro so many times that they were catching on to his tricks. They knew Alejandro was with him, and wounded. Monastario would make a hard hunt this time, Zorro was sure. The chances were that they would not find his trail in the dark, but when morning came they would backtrack and discover the place where he had turned off.

This wasn't like the other times when they had pursued him, when he had ridden Tornado all over the hills, changing directions and mixing trails to confuse the soldiers.

Zorro picked up his father and began to walk. He would get as close to the cave as he could before daylight. But he did not try to fool himself. The chances of escape this time were very poor, and he knew that Monastario would show no mercy, even to a wounded man.

Zorro walked through the night with Tornado following along behind. Unconscious, weak from loss of blood, Don Alejandro groaned as his son carried him.



## *Chapter 11*

## **Wild Ride**

At dawn, beside a spring in a densely wooded gully, Zorro examined his father's wound. The ball from the commandante's pistol had gone through Alejandro's side. The old man was conscious now, for they had been resting at the spring for some time. He was tough, Alejandro. With proper care he had a good chance of recovering, Zorro thought. But it was still a mile of hard going to the cave, and Alejandro had lost a lot of blood.

Still dressed in his black costume, Zorro moved out of sight among the trees long enough to remove his shirt. Alejandro watched him with feverish eyes as the masked man washed and bandaged the wound. Now, with a little luck . . . .

Zorro saw Tornado turn and prick up his ears, looking in the direction they had come. A few moments later Zorro



heard the sounds. The lancers were coming.

“*Señor* Zorro, while there is yet time, save yourself.” Alejandro’s voice was a hoarse whisper.

Zorro shook his head. He picked up his father once more and started on.

The noise of the soldiers came closer. They, too, were walking and leading their horses because it was impossible to ride through the dense woods. Zorro heard Garcia’s voice. “They cannot be far ahead now, capitan. They are on foot.”

“I have eyes,” Monastario said. “I can see their tracks.”

They would overhaul him soon, Zorro knew, unless he could think of something to throw them off. Not far ahead was rocky ground where they would have a very difficult time following tracks, but he wasn’t going to make it before they caught up.

“Please, *Señor* Zorro,” Alejandro muttered, “go on and leave me.”

Zorro laid his father on the ground. He ran to Tornado and turned him downhill. “Home, Tornado!” he said in a low voice. “Go home!” “Home” to Tornado was of course the cave and the little secret pasture in the rocks below it.

Tornado hesitated. Zorro whacked him on the rump

with his hand and shouted loudly, "Hang on, Don Alejandro, let's ride!"

Tornado leaped down the hill. He made loud, crashing sounds as he tore through the undergrowth and raked tree limbs with his saddle. After the first two jumps he was out of sight.

"They are getting away!" a soldier yelled.

"Do you see them?" Monastario demanded.

"I heard them talking as they rode away!" Garcia said excitedly. "There, I saw the horse!"

If he had seen Tornado at all, it was only the briefest kind of glimpse, Zorro knew. He waited anxiously. Then Monastario shouted, "Down the hill, lancers!"

At once the soldiers went crashing away. One of them yelped as a limb slashed his face. "How do they ride in these accursed trees?" he wanted to know.

Zorro picked up Alejandro and went on toward the cave. There was a chance that the lancers would trail Tornado to the cave, but there was rocky ground close to it, and the narrow passage that led to the entrance was all rock. Following tracks would be hard.

Zorro was also hoping that when the soldiers got close to the de la Vega house, they would assume that the horse

had gone there and would ride on to the hacienda.

Zorro reached the cave. He made a bed of hay for his father. The old man was very feverish now, muttering to himself and rolling his head weakly. It was impossible to take him on to the house, because it would be searched.

Zorro left him in the cave and ran through the tunnel to get Bernardo, who was skilled in treating wounds. He paused in the tiny room behind the wall of his quarters just long enough to rid himself of his costume, and then he turned the catch and swung the panel out.

There was no one in the room. In a small chest in Bernardo's room were medicines and bandages and certain surgical tools, but as Zorro started to go for them, he heard the pound of hoofs and shouts in the yard.

Quickly he crossed the room and looked out through the balcony doors. Monastario had just arrived with his soldiers. "Search the house!" the commandante ordered.

Lancers were tramping around the lower floor in no time. Diego—he was no longer Zorro now—had no chance to go for medicine, or to search for Bernardo.

Downstairs, Monastario found the frightened house-keeper Juana, a part Indian woman who was the mother of Benito Avila. "Where is your master?" he shouted.

“He went last night somewhere and did not return.”

“And Don Diego?” Monastario demanded.

“He sleeps late in his room, as always,” Juana said.

“We will break him of that habit. Garcia, take two men and search the upper rooms. Ortega, go to the stables and all other buildings,” Monastario ordered.

Diego’s shirt was already gone, used to bandage his father’s wound. He pulled his boots off quickly and threw them under the bed, and it was then he saw the blood on his hand. There was no time to wash it off. He grabbed a robe and put it on.

He leaped to a table where papers were scattered. With a small knife used for sharpening quill pens he made a cut in the tip of his finger. Just before his door burst open, he saw with sinking heart that the panel had not swung quite shut. There was a gap of an inch or more between one side of it and the wall.

Sergeant Garcia, Corporal Delgado, and a lancer named Alvarado came into the room. They looked around quickly. “Search the other rooms,” Garcia said. “I will stay here until you report to me.”

Diego looked mildly surprised. He yawned. “What is going on, sergeant? You come with a drawn sword into—”

"A thousand pardons, Don Diego, but it is your father we seek. Last night he tried to free the prisoners, *Doña* Luisa and her daughter. Where is he?"

"Oh, my poor father," Diego groaned. "I told him not to go."

"Now he is wounded, perhaps dead," Garcia said. Then, when he saw the expression on Diego's face, he added, "I am sorry, Don Diego. Perhaps it is not that bad. Just moments ago I myself saw him and Zorro in the trees very close to here, but they escaped."

"How?"

"We chased the accursed black fiend of a horse that Zorro rides, but they were not on it when we saw it again close to your house." Garcia shook his head. "Perhaps it is true that this Zorro can vanish into the air as some of the people are saying. When we saw the horse with no one on it . . . ." Garcia frowned. "Surely I saw two men on it when it crashed through the trees. I think I did."

"You captured Zorro's horse?" Diego asked.

"No, we let it go when we saw no riders, because we were sure they had come here and there was no time to chase horses. That is a very wicked stallion, Don Diego."

"I have heard so. Sit down, Sergeant Garcia. You must

be tired from your long chase.”

Garcia sank into a comfortable chair, stretching his feet far in front of him. He sighed. “I am indeed tired.” He leaped up in alarm a moment later when Bernardo came quietly into the room. “Oh, I thought it was the commandante.” Garcia sighed and sat down again.

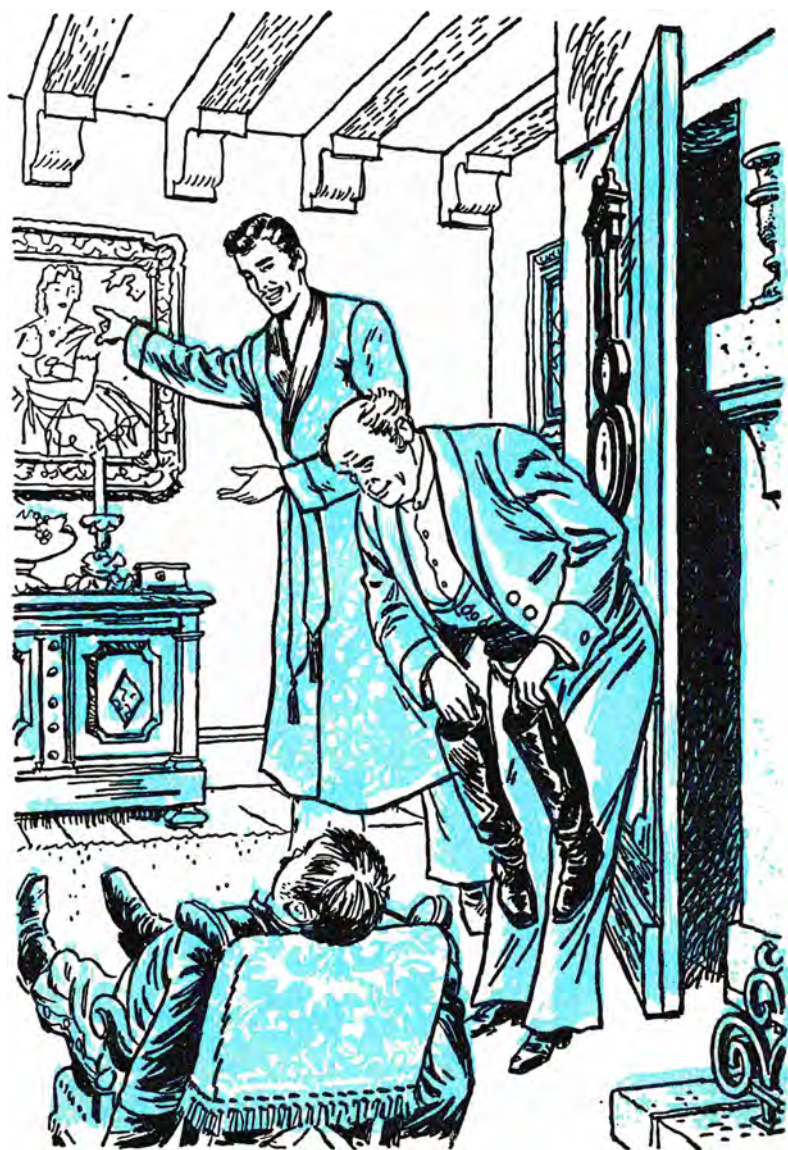
Bernardo’s eyes widened in alarm as he saw that the panel was not quite shut. He picked up a pair of Diego’s boots and pretended to be brushing dust from them as he went across the room, turning his back to the fireplace. His eyes pleaded for Diego to draw Garcia’s attention away.

“Have you ever seen a painting like that, Sergeant Garcia?” Diego asked, pointing to the opposite end of the room. Garcia blinked at the painting. “No,” he grunted.

During that instant Bernardo dropped the boots. He stooped quickly to pick them up, and as he did so he leaned back against the secret panel and closed it. It was not a second too soon, for Monastario pushed the door open and stepped inside.

Garcia leaped up so quickly that he almost tripped over his sword. Monastario had no time for sergeants just then. He walked over to where Diego was sitting.

“And what did you do last night, Don Diego, while your



father and others were plotting treason in this house?"

"I did not know it was treason," Diego stammered. "I— I heard them say something about going to the *cuartel* and I told my father it was not a good thing, but the dons did not let me stay to hear everything they were saying."

"So?" Monastario said arrogantly. "Still you did not report this treason to me."

"I didn't know what was going on!" Diego said. It was difficult to sit when he wanted to get up and run a sword through the commandante.

"Perhaps," Monastario said. "Where did you get that blood on your hand?" he asked sharply.

By now the blood from the small cut Diego had made in his finger was smeared all over his palm. "I cut myself while sharpening a pen to write a poem, commandante."

Monastario grabbed the hand. He peered at the finger and saw the cut. "A poem! No wonder it is your father, rather than you, who causes me trouble. Where is the traitorous dog?"

"He is no dog." Diego lowered his eyes. "I do not know where he is."

Corporal Delgado and Alvarado came into the room. "Don Alejandro is not here, commandante," Delgado said.



Monastario swung away from Diego. "And not in the stables or the lower floor or cellar." He scowled, swinging back to Diego. "Are there hiding places in this house, poet?"

"Oh, no, commandante," Diego said.

"You wouldn't know if there were," Monastario growled.

Diego saw Bernardo letting his breath out in a long sigh. Then Monastario knelt and peered under the bed. "Do you always keep your dusty boots under your bed, Don Diego?"

"My lazy servant," Diego said. "I've been wondering where those boots were since last week." He glared at Bernardo, and at the same time he slid back a drawer in the table and put his hand on a loaded pistol.

If Monastario pulled those boots out, he would see that under the dust on them, which had come from the dry part of the secret tunnel, there was mud—fresh mud from the hills.

The commandante was no fool; he would know. Diego cocked the pistol.

Monastario got to his feet. "Enough talk with one who writes poems early in the morning. Garcia, remain here with Delgado and Alvarado. Guard Don Diego. If I do not find his traitorous father, I will arrest him for not reporting to me when he knew treason was being planned."

From the windows that looked out on the balcony Diego watched Monastario ride away with his soldiers, leaving two on guard in the patio. The commandante would go back to where he had last seen Tornado, Diego knew, and try from there to pick up the tracks of two men.

Diego picked up his guitar. "Rest yourselves," he told the lancers. "Since I am a prisoner, I feel in the mood for a sad song." He began to play.

"I'll sing a sad story to make your heart bleed,  
Of a lion once noble and bold,  
Who was torn by a coyote, a cowardly coyote,  
Who struck when the lion was old."

Diego glanced at Bernardo, who was puzzled, and then continued the song.

"What can we do, *caballeros*?  
Surely the lion will die,  
Though the fox took him deep  
In a cave to hide, in a cavern  
So deep in the rocks  
That no one can find it.  
Oh, no one can find it at all,  
Unless he's a friend of the fox!"

The next time Diego glanced at Bernardo, the servant gave a tiny nod to show that he understood. Diego went on singing until he seemed to run out of words. "Let us go to the living room below," he said. "Juana can bring us wine and we will be more comfortable."

"We must guard you," Garcia said. "The commandante—"

"Surely you must guard me, Sergeant Garcia. Am I a dangerous person who will eat all three of you if you do not keep a sword at my throat?"

"No, no," Garcia said. He scowled at Delgado. "Get off Don Diego's bed! You are in the house of a gentleman who has offered us wine, not in the barracks. Try to act like me, your superior officer."

Garcia rose and opened the door for Don Diego, and all of them except Bernardo went down to be more comfortable and have wine. The soldiers liked Don Diego; secretly they thought he was not much a man for the rough side of life, but he did not hold them in contempt as did other wealthy young men.

He treated them like gentlemen. They drank their wine like soldiers, which meant they drank a lot of it and as fast as Juana brought it. After a time, they even let Don

Diego go to the cellar for the wine. He was a good host, and even if he was a prisoner to be guarded, they knew he was a gentle young man who would not try to escape. Not Don Diego, the poet, the musician, the reader of books.

Garcia and his men didn't do much guarding. They did drink a great amount of wine.

When Bernardo came into the room, they scarcely knew whether he had been there all the time or not, nor did they care. He was only a servant who could not speak or hear, so they paid him no attention.

Bernardo pointed to a picture of Don Alejandro. He shook his head. Diego did not at first understand, and for one terrible moment he thought that Bernardo meant that Alejandro was dead.

"I'll bring more wine, *caballeros*," Diego said. He motioned for Bernardo to come with him. In the kitchen, out of sight of the soldiers, Bernardo pointed toward the cave and shook his head. Then he spread his hands in the universal gesture that means, "I don't know."

"Do you mean he's there but you can't help him?" Diego whispered.

Bernardo threw his hands away from his body.

"He's gone? You mean he isn't there?"

The servant nodded to indicate this was true.

“Is Tornado there?”

Bernardo nodded.

The soldiers hadn't found Don Alejandro, Diego knew, or else they would have come through the tunnel to the house. Then what had happened to him? Diego had to find out quickly.

He ran to the cellar with Bernardo. This time they loaded baskets with bottles of wine, the strongest wine that Don Alejandro had, and carried it all to the soldiers in the living room. “Be happy. Drink well,” Diego told them. And then he asked Garcia, “Is it all right if I rest a few minutes in my room? I was up late last night writing poems.”

Garcia waved a bottle of wine. “Of course, Don Diego. I trust you.” He was not too full of wine to add, “But we all must be together when the commandante returns.”

“I'll remember.” Diego walked slowly up the stairs.



## *Chapter 12*

## **Fight With Lances**

Zorro ran from the tunnel into the cave. Don Alejandro was gone. Tornado had come back and was now eating corn that Bernardo had left for him the night before. Bernardo had thought to put the bars across the mouth of the cave to keep Tornado from going back out through the concealing underbrush.

There was only one way that Don Alejandro could have gone, and by now he might have wandered straight into Monastario's hands.

As Zorro rode to find his father, he didn't know how right he was: Alejandro was indeed almost in the hands of the lancers. He was a healthy, strong old man, and his fever had given him more strength. He had seen Tornado come through the brush into the cave, and while he was too delirious to know where he was or what he was doing,

Alejandro had it in his mind to go forth and fight his enemies.

He had stumbled down the narrow passage outside the cave, on down through the rocks and trees beyond Tornado's pasture, and almost to the road. There he had fallen. Now he was lying with his sword in hand.

He heard the soldiers riding toward him, and he gained enough strength to roll on his side. He tried to raise his sword as he croaked weakly, "Cowards! Cowards!"

They hadn't seen him yet, but they would have found him anyway. Monastario raised his hand and halted the lancers. "Where did that cry come from?" he asked.

A soldier who had a better view through the trees to the opening where Don Alejandro lay now saw the figure on the ground. "A man, commandante! A man lying down!"

They rode up on Alejandro. He was too sick and fevered to know who they were, but he got to one knee and faced them. Monastario laughed. "There is the pig who tried to raise the rancheros against me! Look at him!"

The soldiers looked in sympathy on the brave old man, but they said nothing.

"Do you know how pigs are hunted?" the commandante

asked. The soldiers looked at him uneasily.

“I will show you, and let no one interfere.” The commandante grabbed a lance from a soldier. It had no blade because the lancer had broken it off the night before when he hurled it at Zorro and struck some iron braces on the carriage. Monastario slammed the lance back into the soldier’s hand and grabbed another with a sharp point.

“Pigs are made to be stuck.” He lowered the lance and ran his horse at Don Alejandro.

The old don faced him, fending with his sword. With a laugh Monastario knocked the weapon from his grip and rode on past to wheel his horse. “Run, pig!” he said.

Don Alejandro struggled to his feet. He would not run. He was too weak to run if he had been inclined to. “Dog, coward!” he muttered.

Monastario rode back for another run. Once more he was having cruel sport with the wounded old don, for all the commandante did when he charged his horse was to knock Alejandro to the ground with a side blow of the lance.

“If you can’t run, crawl!” Monastario wheeled back for another run, and this time the soldiers looked into his face and knew he was going to kill Don Alejandro.

Alejandro forced himself to his feet once more, gasping,



almost done, but still with courage to face his enemy.

The young soldier with the blunt lance looked away, ashamed to witness such a vile spectacle. His eyes widened. He was looking straight at a great black horse and a black-cloaked rider who came bursting from the trees.

So quickly was the stallion upon them that some of the soldiers had only time to look and turn their horses. Zorro snatched the lance from the young soldier. Leaf mould flew in chunks under the heels of the black horse as Zorro turned him.

“Monastario!” Zorro shouted.

The commandante whirled to meet the charge. They came at each other like jousting knights with their lances extended. Zorro’s lance struck the deadly weapon of his opponent and knocked Monastario’s aim off, but the same impact swept Zorro’s lance aside also, so that the blunt end of it merely ripped the sleeve of Monastario’s jacket.

The two horses ran past each other and the riders brought them around for another charge. This time Zorro made a high thrust against the commandante’s lance, brushing it aside so that the blunt point of Zorro’s weapon took Monastario in the shoulder.

The commandante was lifted from the saddle and was

sprawling through the air when Tornado crashed into his horse and knocked it to its haunches.

The young soldier and another one cheered, and then they covered their mouths and looked guiltily at the commandante. Another soldier muttered, "He said not to interfere in the pig sticking, so we will not."

Zorro hurled his lance at the fallen commandante and then he wheeled Tornado back to Alejandro. He bent low and lifted his father from the ground, sweeping him up into the saddle, and then he spurred away.

The cave was too close. He could not go there now or he would be followed. His only hope was on the road. As he raced downhill he heard Monastario shouting, though not as loudly as usual, "After him! Five hundred pesos to the man who kills him!"

Zorro plunged out onto the road. He had a good start because the lancers took their time about helping their commandante back into the saddle, but soon they could be heard coming.

Tornado was far from fresh, for he had been ridden hard the night before and never unsaddled. But he let loose his deep power and was gaining a little on the lancers when Zorro saw ahead of him on the road a carriage with a half

dozen or more lancers riding beside it.

With the wounded Don Alejandro tight against him, Zorro knew he had no chance if he rode into the open land on his right. The soldiers coming behind him and those ahead of him would spread out and run him down.

Steep gullies and dense trees made it impossible to ride into the hills at this point. If he tried it, he would have to dismount and go on foot, carrying his father.

He was in a trap.

He had slowed Tornado a little when he first saw the carriage and the lancers with it. Now he sent the black horse ahead at full tilt once more. There was a chance, not a good one, but still a chance that he could squeeze between the soldiers ahead and the hills and get to a point where he could turn into the hills.

Once more the big stallion gave its best. Zorro veered off the road and shot ahead. The carriage stopped and a man got out of it. An officer, Zorro thought. Soon the lancers would be driving to cut him off.

It was odd. The soldiers at the carriage did not charge. They watched the black horse flying past, but they made no effort to stop it.

The man who had stepped from the carriage shouted,

“Zorro! I want to talk to you. Wait!”

Zorro kept riding, but it struck him that there was a familiar sound to that voice. The man was waving and shouting again. He wore no uniform.

“Zorro! Wait! It is I, Don Nacho!”

Zorro slowed Tornado, staring hard. By the blessed saints, it *was* Don Nacho! With a glance behind him at the fast-approaching lancers of the commandante, Zorro rode on down to the carriage. The lancers there were not Monastario’s men.

“Zorro, I am glad—” Don Nacho saw the wounded Alejandro. “What has happened to him?” His face turned pale with anger as he looked at the oncoming lancers. He reached up to help Don Alejandro from the horse.

“Fight them, fight them all . . .” Alejandro mumbled.

“I will take care of him, *Señor* Zorro,” Don Nacho said. A lieutenant leaped down and helped Torres put Alejandro in the carriage. Over his shoulder Don Nacho called, “This is Lieutenant Espinosa, who acts directly under the orders of the governor at Monterey. He has guaranteed my safety.”

The lieutenant ran back and mounted his horse just before Monastario and his soldiers came plunging in. The commandante looked shaken up from the fall he had suffered

when Zorro had knocked him from his horse with a blunt lance, but the sight of three men that he wanted raised his spirits.

“Good work, lieutenant,” he said. “I will take charge of all three prisoners, and you and your soldiers will now be under my command.”

Zorro had drawn his sword and was facing Monastario. Lieutenant Espinosa rode in between them. The lieutenant was a young, tough-looking man, although there was gray hair at his temples. “No fighting,” he said sharply.

Monastario’s lancers looked at each other and grinned.

“*Señor* Torres is under the protection of the governor,” Espinosa said, “and he has been assured a fair trial. He has chosen to give safe conduct to the other gentleman in the carriage, and so it will be.”

“You, a mere lieutenant, defy my orders?” Monastario said hotly.

“My orders come only from the governor.” Lieutenant Espinosa sat straight in the saddle, facing Monastario with no fear.

“And does his excellency, the governor, protect all other traitors and outlaws, including this Zorro?” the commandante said sarcastically.

“My orders said nothing of Zorro,” Espinosa replied. He smiled. “But from what I have heard of him, he is able to protect himself.”

Zorro saluted the lieutenant with his sword, and then he sent Tornado away at breakneck speed, catching the commandante off guard.

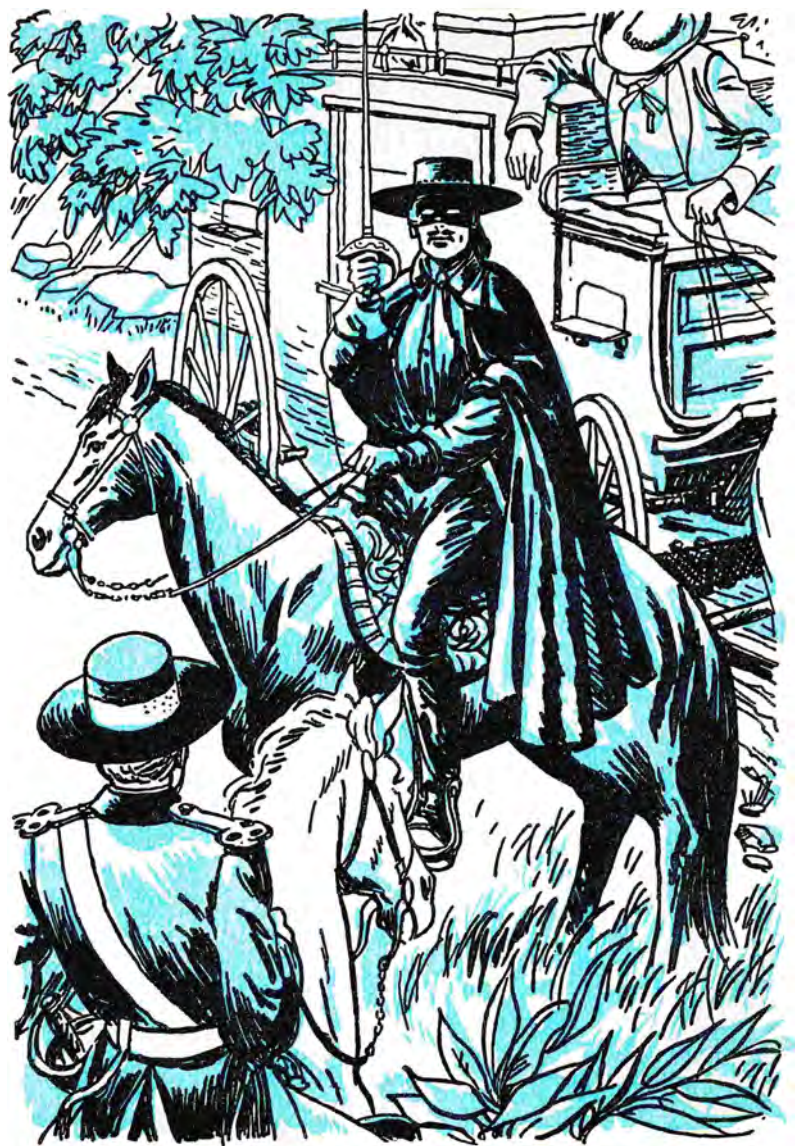
Monastario gave his old familiar shout, “After him, lancers!” But it was more of a croak this time, as if he knew that he was not going to catch the elusive rider on the black horse.

More likely, Zorro thought, the commandante would give chase for a short time, and then go back to the Rancho de la Vega to see if Diego was still there. Zorro knew that there had been times when Monastario had held his own suspicions about Diego.

Zorro lost his pursuers in the hills, and then he rode toward the cave.

Don Diego had to be at the rancho when Monastario went there.

It was almost a tie. Monastario’s weary men were dismounting at the gate when Diego came through the secret entrance. This time he made quite sure it was shut all the way. He took off his shirt. He tugged his boots off



quickly and put them in the closet.

Down in the living room the soldiers were singing.

Delgado's voice came thickly. "Let's have a toast to our noble commandante!"

Someone made a scornful sound with his lips. There was laughter. Glasses clinked. Garcia said:

"We toast him with champagne,  
Although he has no brain!  
He's strong as an ox,  
But he can't catch the fox."

The soldiers were bellowing with laughter as Diego, putting on his robe, sneaked along the balcony above them and started down the back stairs to the kitchen.

"More about him, Garcia!" Delgado shouted.

Garcia was willing to oblige.

"He'll never be a scholar,  
He'll never save a dollar.  
He doesn't need to think  
Because—"

And there the song ended as if someone had hit the fat Garcia with a club. There was a scraping of feet and



startled grunts, and an awful silence.

An instant later Monastario's voice, cold with anger, said, "I have been listening to your excellent toasts, you wine-soaked donkeys." His voice lifted to a roar. "So! You make up foul songs about me!"

"No, no, capitan!" Garcia quavered. "It was about another commandante, long ago, in Spain. I was saying—"

"Silence." Now the commandante's voice was really dangerous. "You were left to guard Don Diego. It was an order. If he is not here, I will have you hanged, Garcia."

"Oh, he is here, *mi* commandante!" Garcia said. "He—"  
"Where is he then?"

It was then that Diego stepped out of the kitchen with a basket of wine. "Now we will sing a song of a poor girl whose husband—" He stopped, blinking at the commandante. "You were not here a minute ago when I went for wine." Diego shook his head. He acted as if he, like the soldiers, had been drinking too much wine.

Monastario turned away from him in disgust. "To horse, you wine bags!" he growled at his soldiers.

Garcia had taken off his boots. He began to put them on, grunting and red in the face as he tugged away.

"Did you catch my father, commandante?" Diego asked.

“Or did you return to arrest me for— What was it you were going to arrest me for?”

“No, I did not catch your father,” Monastario said, “and as for you, I have other things to think about than a weakling who hides behind a bottle of wine when his own father, traitor though he is, is in danger.”

Monastario strode out.

“*Gracias*, Don Diego,” Garcia said. “You saved my life. Even though the capitan doesn’t want to arrest you now, he would have hanged me if you had wandered away somewhere.” He began to pull on his other boot.

Diego smiled. “One more toast then. Let’s drink to all the lives we can save from Monastario.”

Delgado peered out to see where the commandante was, and then they all raised their glasses.

“He’s as strong as an ox,  
But he can’t catch the fox . . . .”



## Chapter 13

## A Fair Trial

Padre Felipe frowned as he went to see Don Nacho and Don Alejandro in their cell. He loved all men but at the same time he knew that evil in the hearts of some, like Monastario, was hard to erase. The commandante had done everything possible for the welfare of his prisoners, even without the urging of Lieutenant Espinosa. Strange.

The *cuartel* gates were no longer closed. Anyone with reasonable business was allowed to see the prisoners. Their cell was clean and had been provided with comforts by Diego and *Doña* Luisa and Elena. The women had been released by the commandante as soon as Don Nacho and Don Alejandro were brought in. The women had been hostages, the capitan said.

Now every day there were visitors at the cell.

And Monastario smiled upon all this. It would be to

the glory of God if his heart really had changed like that; but Padre Felipe had known too many men to believe in sudden miracles where Monastario was involved.

Don Nacho and Don Alejandro were talking of the fine horses they raised and making plans for a race in the future, when Padre Felipe came to their cell.

"It is good to find you in such spirits," Padre Felipe said. "How is your body today, Don Alejandro?"

"Good!" Alejandro hopped up and down on the leg that had been injured. "Monastario has treated us well, surprising as that may be. The doctor almost lived here with us when I was recovering from my wound."

"Yes, it is surprising," the padre murmured, and then he hurried on to say, "How do you feel about the trial tomorrow?"

"Judge Vasca is an honorable man," Don Nacho said. "With him presiding, we both feel that the comandante's false charges will melt away. Has he arrived yet?"

"Not yet," Padre Felipe said. "I understand he will be here tomorrow." Judge Vasca was, as Don Nacho had said, an honorable man. A good churchman too. It should be that when everything was told to the judge, Monastario would find himself in difficulties. Yet, Padre Felipe was

still worried. The commandante was a bold and cunning man.

If Padre Felipe could have heard what was being said in the commandante's office, he would have had proof that there was reason to worry.

The lawyer Pina's face was all screwed up as he sat at a desk, looking like a scared squirrel. "Do you think we dare go through with this?" he asked the commandante.

"We don't dare *not* to do it," Monastario said. "Both of us will be in trouble if Judge Vasca presides."

"But the governor—"

"The law says that the chief magistrate will preside—*if he is in the area.*"

"I know, I know! But delaying him as you have proposed . . ." Pina shook his head. "And having to depend on that stupid Garcia . . ."

Monastario smiled. "Garcia is just stupid enough to do the job." He pointed his finger at Pina. "Both of us will be in trouble if Vasca hears the evidence. So he is not going to be here in time. You will be the judge and we'll have the trial, and when Vasca gets here, there will be two traitors hanging from that great tree outside the gates."

Pina licked his lips. He swallowed hard. "I don't like it,

but perhaps it is the only way.”

Coming to visit his father, Diego met Garcia in the plaza and observed that the sergeant was getting ready to take a patrol of lancers somewhere. “Off after Zorro again?” Diego asked pleasantly.

“Not this time, Don Diego. I go to escort Judge Vasca from San Fernando, where I will meet him late this afternoon.” Garcia looked around suddenly, as if he had said more than he was supposed to.

“Well, it is a pleasant ride, if one cares for riding,” Diego said, and went on with Bernardo toward the *cuartel*.

“To escort the judge,” Diego murmured. “Hmmm.”

Bernardo’s eyes were also narrow with hard thinking.

“Capitan Monastario is loud in his talk about a fair trial. Too loud.” Diego stopped as a cart went across his path. Under the cover of its noisy passage he said, “As soon as I visit my father a few moments, we will hurry back to the hacienda. I think perhaps Judge Vasca does need an escort, Bernardo.”

Bernardo smiled and made the sign of the Z.

Rain-soaked roads delayed Judge Vasca’s carriage, so that it had not yet arrived at the *Posada* of the High Goose

in San Fernando when Garcia and his six lancers reached the inn at dusk. Yellow lights were showing from the windows.

The horses of a few late travelers were waiting outside. Garcia clumped into the *posada* and looked over the guests. He was happy to see that there were no wealthy landowners here, but only a few hide buyers and another man who, by his clothes, was certainly no one of consequence.

"The inn is closed by order of Capitan Monastario!" Garcia announced. "Finish your suppers and be gone in ten minutes!"

Ramon Escobar, the innkeeper, began to protest excitedly. "You cannot do such things to me!"

"Silence, greasy one!" Garcia said. "You have been selected to do a service for the commandante."

Escobar howled louder. "Not that, please! No, no!"

Garcia dragged a pouch from his tunic. He shook it and coins clinked inside. He tossed it to Escobar, whose mouth closed quickly in the middle of another wail. He bowed. "It is an honor to do a service for the commandante."

"I thought so," Garcia grunted. He took Escobar over beside the high adobe stove. "Listen carefully, you howler, because I—" Garcia saw a chicken and rice stew close at

hand. He dipped his fingers into it and tasted. "More peppers, I think."

"Yes, lieutenant, anything you say."

"Lieutenant, my mother's blind pigs!" Garcia said. "You know I am a sergeant."

"And a good one!" Escobar said.

"Of course! Now listen carefully. Judge Vasca, who will be here soon, is noted for two things—his great appetite and his unbelievable honesty. We are concerned only with his appetite." Garcia tasted the stew again, and then he told Escobar what to do to prepare for the judge's visit.

To give Garcia credit, it must be said that he knew nothing of Monastario's evil plans. All Garcia had been told was that he should delay Judge Vasca for as long as possible in order that Monastario could prepare a welcome in Los Angeles pueblo worthy of the chief magistrate.

When Judge Vasca arrived at the inn, his carriage escorted by two soldiers, with a third one driving, Garcia opened the carriage door and bowed low. "Permit me, your gracious excellency, I am Sergeant Miguel Demetrio Lopez Velasquez Garcia, sent by Capitan Monastario to make pleasant your journey to Los Angeles."

"Splendid!" Judge Vasca wobbled and inched his way



from the carriage. He was an enormous man, with a broad, honest face. It was the size of his stomach that made Garcia stare in wonder.

“The horses will be changed by the time you have rested, excellency,” Garcia said.

“I do not intend to rest here. Tonight I must be in Los Angeles to attend to preparations for a trial I will hear there in the morning.”

“Some slight refreshment?” Garcia said. “This *posada* is noted for its excellent food.”

“Oh?” Judge Vasca eyed Garcia’s stomach in the lantern light. “Do you eat here, sergeant?”

“Whenever possible!”

“A small bite then,” the judge said. “Notify me when the horses have been changed.”

“By all means.” Garcia looked at his lancers, who had been instructed what to do.

Once inside, Judge Vasca sniffed the odors and nodded. “I must say it is not the hog pen that I expected.” Garcia helped him remove his cape and hat. One of Escobar’s pretty daughters came with a bowl of rose-scented water for the judge to wash his hands. Another smiled at him shyly and stood with a towel ready for his use.

“I do not wish to be delayed long,” Vasca said, but his words grew more uncertain near the end as he once more sniffed the cooking odors. “Just a few bites will be all I’ll need until I reach Los Angeles.”

Garcia escorted Vasca to a table. The girls came trotting with garnished chickens and flagons of wine and steaming bowls of rice and sauces. “Well, well!” Vasca said. “Please join me, sergeant.”

In the darkness behind the stables, Zorro and Bernardo waited. Garcia’s lancers drove the carriage to the front of the stable and unhitched the team, but they made no move to put fresh horses into harness. Presently they all wandered off toward the inn.

“They wouldn’t dare harm the judge,” Zorro said, puzzled. “But how do they intend to make him stay?” He went back into the shadow of some trees and took the plaited rope from Tornado’s saddle. A few minutes later he was climbing to the balcony of the inn.

He slipped through a window into an empty bedroom. The door was open and the only light in the hall outside was that which was coming from the dining room below.

From the dimly lit hallway, Zorro looked down on what

was happening. All the soldiers were inside now, eating and having wine. On the table before Vasca and Garcia were the bones of two chickens, some empty bowls and plates, and a flagon of wine that poured only a half glassful when Vasca tipped it.

“An excellent light supper,” the judge said. “It will last me until Los Angeles, I’m sure.” He started to rise.

“Let us have the rest,” Garcia said.

“There is more?” Vasca sat down again.

The girls and Escobar came hurrying with more chickens, and with a roast pig on a great platter. The judge rubbed his hands. “In all California there is no one who can eat like Sergeant Garcia,” one of the girls said.

“Perhaps southern California, my dear child,” Vasca said, “a very small part of this great colony.” He picked up his fork.

A half hour passed. Judge Vasca talked of law, and the difficulties of traveling by carriage, and all the while he ate steadily. Garcia was staying with him, but the sergeant was taking longer before each bite. He loosened his belt. “Oh, come now,” Vasca said, “for a champion eater of southern California, you disappoint me.” He put more food on Garcia’s plate.

Garcia ate. Even his face seemed to grow larger. "Remember, there is a large cake to be eaten too."

"Good!" the judge said. He looked toward Escobar. "Two more chickens for the sergeant and me."

Escobar spread his hands. "I am sorry, excellency, I have no more chickens cooked. Perhaps a roast, the roast I was saving for tomorrow?"

"Bring it!" Judge Vasca said.

Garcia was looking green. He tried to eat some of the roast, but it was Vasca who finished it. "And now the cake," Vasca said. "Be sure there is plenty of cream and fruit and sirup on it."

Garcia groaned. "Pardon, excellency, I will go see that the cake is properly fixed, just as you want it."

He lurched away like a man about ready to explode.

"No nibbling now, sergeant!" Vasca laughed. He began to gnaw on the bone from the roast.

In the kitchen, Garcia looked helplessly at Escobar. "I wished him to eat so much that he would not care to go on tonight." He held his stomach. "The commandante must prepare a proper welcome for him, and so he sent me—"

"He should have burst an hour ago," Escobar said. "You say the commandante wishes him to stay here tonight?"

Garcia nodded. "I thought that eating—"

"There is another way," Escobar said slyly. "I have a certain powder that when put into one's wine . . ." He put his hands together and laid his head against them.

Garcia's eyes lit up. "Ah!" Suddenly he belched.

"It will cost a little money, of course," Escobar said.

"Robber! Already I have given you a fortune!"

From the dining room Judge Vasca shouted, "Bring the cake, Garcia! I must be on my way as soon as we eat it."

"One moment, excellency!" Garcia answered. To Escobar he said, "This drug of yours—it will not harm him?"

"He will sleep peacefully and that is all—unless much cold water is poured on him." Escobar smiled. "Who would pour cold water on him while he is resting upstairs?"

"With one of my lancers at the door." Garcia grinned.

From his shadowy post in the hallway Zorro had watched all the tremendous eating. And now there was a cake. The judge attacked it eagerly and he insisted that Garcia have his share. Garcia was a beaten man. He mumbled something about getting more wine as he stumbled away from the cake.

It didn't matter to Judge Vasca. He finished off the cake

and rose. "Sergeant, is my carriage ready?"

Garcia came back with a mug of wine. "*Si*, your excellency—but before we go, one drink of Escobar's special wine to aid the digestion."

"My digestion is excellent. Drink it yourself, Garcia."

"I am too full." Garcia was almost in a panic, but the judge did not notice, since he was busy getting into his cloak.

"Then leave the wine," Vasca said. "Let's go."

Garcia poured a second mug, holding the first one toward the judge. "I am never too full to drink to the King."

"To the King then." Vasca picked up the mug. He raised it high and then he drank, smacking his lips. He finished it off. "Fair—for southern wine."

It seemed that nothing would affect him. Garcia shot a quick look at Escobar, who had said one sip of the drugged wine would instantly put the strongest man to sleep.

Vasca walked toward the door. "Come on, Garcia. We've had our bite to eat, so let's not waste time."

Near the door the judge paused, shaking his head. He sat down in a chair, which creaked dangerously. "On to Los Angeles!" he cried, and then the chair collapsed with him and he rolled to the floor in a stupor.



“We must put him to bed!” Garcia shouted. “He has had too much wine.”

“It was the weight of the food that did it,” a soldier said. “Let him sleep where he is. There aren’t enough of us here to carry him up the stairs.”

So great was Judge Vasca’s vitality that when Garcia and the lancers started to lift him, he recovered in part and could walk a little by resting on them. But even from his hiding place on the balcony, Zorro could see that the big man’s eyes were glassy.

They brought him up the steps and into the room by which Zorro had entered, forcing Zorro to retreat to the outside balcony.

“We are on our way to Los Angeles, sergeant?” the judge muttered sleepily.

“*Si, si!*” Garcia said. They put Judge Vasca on the bed. He gave a great sigh and began to snore.

Garcia told a lancer to stand guard outside the door.

When the door was closed, Zorro heard the soldiers tramping back downstairs to the dining room.

The rope on the balcony jerked a little. Zorro peered down and saw the dark form of Bernardo signaling from the ground. Zorro motioned for him to climb up, and



when the servant was on the balcony, Zorro whispered, "We've got to get him out of here some way. If we don't, Monastario will hold some kind of false trial and—"

Bernardo put his hand to his neck and pushed upward at the side of it just behind his jaw.

"Yes," Zorro said. "The commandante will hang my father and Don Nacho."

Bernardo pointed toward the judge's room. He made a cup of his hand and pretended to be sprinkling something into it, and then he gave the sleep sign.

"He was drugged with something in the wine? I thought so!"

Bernardo put his hands against his chest and shivered. Then he poured with his hands again. Zorro understood the part about being cold but he could not grasp the rest. "We've got to get him to Los Angeles tonight, Bernardo. Now here's what we'll try to do. . . ."

The guard posted to watch the judge's room had moved out to the railing above the inn dining room to watch the fun going on. The soldiers were so noisy down there that it was some time before the guard heard the groans coming from Vasca's room.

The judge was groaning in his sleep, that was all. After

deciding what it was, the guard paid no great attention to the noise. The groans grew louder. The soldier thought he had better have a look. He pushed the door open and peered in. Judge Vasca seemed to be snoring and groaning at the same time. It was astonishing what noises the great hulk on the bed was making.

The lancer stepped into the room to cross to the bed.

Something solid struck him just below the hard rim of his hat. Bernardo's strong arms came from the darkness and grabbed him to keep him from making a loud thud as he fell. Zorro rose from behind the bed as Bernardo closed the door softly on the noisy celebration of the soldiers.

"Hitch the team to the carriage," Zorro said, "and bring Tornado to where the rope is under the balcony. Then you'll have to come back to help me get the judge out to the balcony."

Judge Vasca let out a tremendous snore. He moved a little and the leather ropes of the bed strained.

*What if we drop him while trying to lower him from the balcony?* Zorro thought. It was a chance they had to take, if the prisoners were to get a fair trial.



## Chapter 14

## Monastario's Quick Shift

The road led almost to the porch of the *Posada* of the High Goose, and there was no way to avoid passing it. It was some distance to the stable, however, and the sounds of a carriage moving very slowly there did not arouse the soldiers in the *posada*.

What the soldiers did hear some time later was the sound of a carriage coming rapidly from the north. The inn was lighted and it was logical that the carriage would stop. When it swept on past, Garcia shouted at a lancer to go see who it was.

The soldier peered from the doorway and saw a carriage going down the road. There seemed to be a rider with it, or maybe two. In the darkness it was hard to tell. To be sure, it was not Judge Vasca's carriage, for it was sitting near the stable, the soldier thought, while this carriage

quite obviously had come from the north. It might be Don O'Donnojou's carriage, bearing him and his family to Los Angeles to hear the trial in the morning. What did it matter who it was?

The soldier went back to Garcia and reported that Don O'Donnojou had just gone by with four riders, and then the lancer resumed his efforts to get a kiss from Escobar's oldest daughter.

Bernardo, up on the driver's seat, let out a great sigh of relief when they were safely past the inn. This had been a difficult night. First, the terrible effort of lifting Judge Vasca from the bed. He weighed as much as a horse. A small horse, at least.

Then when they were lowering him from the balcony with a rope that ran over the rail and down to the saddle on Tornado—that had been the worst part. The balcony rail creaked, the saddle almost slipped on Tornado, and Bernardo's eyes had bugged out from strain while he and Zorro were holding the judge and Tornado was edging toward the door of the coach.

Except when the rope cut off some of the judge's breath, he had snored. He was probably snoring now as he rocked back and forth on the coach seat.

When they came to a stream, Bernardo would make Zorro understand what they must do to wake up the judge.

Gray light was coming when they reached a small stream. Bernardo stopped and made Zorro understand what was necessary. "The chief magistrate? We put him in the stream and throw water on him?" Zorro said.

Bernardo nodded and rolled his eyes. It was no worse than lowering him like an enormous sack of rice from a balcony that threatened to break every second.

Both Zorro and Bernardo were sweating by the time they got the judge into a shallow pool. They began to splash water all over him. All it did was give his snoring a bubbling quality.

They kept trying until they were as wet as the judge. They shivered in the chill morning. Judge Vasca muttered in his sleep, something about making the prisoner speak up clearly.

Faint in the dawn they heard the sound of riders coming from the direction of San Fernando. Bernardo began to splash for all he was worth. Judge Vasca began to wobble from side to side, trying to get his face away from the cold water.

The sound of the horses grew louder.

Zorro tried pouring water from his hands into the judge's mouth. Vasca choked and sputtered. One eye opened and then closed again.

Bernardo pointed. The riders could be seen now, coming over a hill.

Then the judge sat up, blinking, his eyes still foggy. "What's going on here, sergeant?" he demanded. He gasped and closed his eyes as water struck his face. "Stop that!" he ordered. He began to shiver. There was a lot of him to shake.

Zorro warned Bernardo not to let the judge see him any longer, for Vasca was now beginning to come fully awake. The servant untied his horse from behind the carriage and rode off to the side into the trees. The soldiers were only about a quarter of a mile away now.

"So!" Vasca said explosively. "You are Zorro, the outlaw I have heard about, and you've tried to kidnap me!"

"I have tried to get you to Los Angeles in time for the trial." It might be too late now, Zorro thought, for it was still a long, rough carriage ride to the pueblo.

He took one last long look at Vasca's eyes. The judge was all right now, aside from being sopping wet. He would give Garcia and the rest of them orders from now on, harsh

orders, too, no doubt, as he began to wonder more and more why that last glass of wine had knocked him out.

Vasca was getting up as Zorro ran to Tornado. The lancers were coming in fast. "I will save you, excellency!" Garcia shouted.

"You idiot!" Vasca shouted. "You will do well if you can save yourself from me!"

As Zorro and Bernardo rode away, keeping in the trees at first, they heard Judge Vasca shout angrily, "Come back here, Garcia! Never mind Zorro. I want to talk to you."

Although it was yet so early that some citizens had not had breakfast, Monastario was ready to have the trial begin. Chairs and tables in the *posada* had been set to face the kitchen doorway, which was covered with drapes to keep smoke and odors from drifting across the judge's "bench," a table directly in front of the drapes.

The flag of Spain stood beside the table, and on the table was a small statue of Justice. Puzzled by the early hour, citizens of Los Angeles nevertheless had arrived in numbers to fill the seats provided for them. Soldiers stood at the door and around the room.

Two lancers escorted Don Nacho and Don Alejandro

into the room and placed them at a small table in front of the judge's bench. "The prisoners are here, commandante."

Monastario had been waiting behind the curtain over the kitchen doorway, with Pina, who was dressed in black robes too large for him. As usual, the lawyer was nervous.

The commandante brushed through the curtain and stepped into the courtroom. He almost bumped the judge's table, so close was it to the curtain. Monastario looked around to be sure his soldiers were all in place.

"Stand up for Judge Pina!" the commandante said.

"Pina!" Don Alejandro cried. "He is no judge!"

The alcalde, or mayor, an old man with gray hair and thin, nervous hands, rose in protest at the back of the room. "The trial cannot begin until Judge Vasca arrives, Capitan Monastario."

Pina stepped out. Those who were still sitting were prodded to their feet by the soldiers.

"Judge Vasca being absent from the district, the records will show that Magistrate Pina presided in the case of the King against Ignacio Torres and Alejandro de la Vega. The charge is treason," Monastario said.

There was an angry murmur from the crowd because of the certain injustice they were going to witness.



Alejandro leaped up. "I will not be tried by this—this hired man of Monastario's!"

A soldier placed the point of his sword against Don Alejandro's back.

Pina cleared his throat nervously. "Should Judge Vasca, who was supposed to arrive yesterday, come at any time during the trial, I will step down and let him take my place. Until then, let the trial proceed." He looked at Don Nacho and Don Alejandro. "How do you plead?"

"Not guilty!" they both cried.

Monastario stepped in front of the judge's table. "Honored judge, as commandante of the pueblo and the surrounding area, I accuse these men of high treason, of plotting to overthrow the government of the King, of resisting the soldiers of the King . . ."

He went on with a long list of charges, detailing things that the two men had done, and many things that they had not done.

The unexpected earliness of the trial had caught Don Nacho and Don Alejandro unprepared. The dons who were to testify in their behalf were not here, since the trial was supposed to have been four hours from now. Even Padre Felipe was not here.

The commandante talked on, as an accuser, as prosecutor, and almost as judge too. It was clear to everyone in the room that Don Nacho and Don Alejandro were as good as hanged.

When the alcalde tried to speak in their defense, two soldiers took him from the room. When the two dons tried to defend themselves against the accusations, Pina cut them off short.

Once more Alejandro leaped up angrily. "I will not be tried by such a court! Everything here is a vile mockery of the King and justice!"

The sword was against his neck again. "More treason," Monastario said, "defying the King's court."

"Your court!" Don Nacho shouted.

A soldier jabbed him lightly with a sword.

"In the name of the King, I demand that these two men be put to death by hanging for their crimes of treason," the commandante said.

Pina looked scared but he cleared his throat and said, "Have the prisoners anything to say before sentence is passed?"

"Sentence!" Alejandro cried. "We are already guilty, is that it?"

"I am considering a verdict," Pina said hastily. "I—"

"This is an execution chamber, not a court," Alejandro cried. "What good would it do to say anything, when the verdict was already ordered for you by the sneering commandante who calls himself a servant of the King!"

Monastario's face darkened. "Don Alejandro has finished speaking?"

"Give me a sword and I will speak more!"

The commandante sat down. He looked at Pina and nodded. Pina pushed his chair back, as if he wished to be ready to jump and run. "There being no more statements from the accused, I will now consider the verdict." He cleared his throat. "Perhaps there should be a recess."

"No!" Monastario said. "Do your considering here."

A woman at the back of the room began to sob. The noise turned attention from Pina for a moment, and during that time something cold and needle-sharp came through the curtain that was against his back. He started and was about to cry out when a cold voice said, "You feel the sword of Justice in your spine, *Señor* Pina. It awaits your verdict."

Pina's mouth hung open. His yellowish features took on a horrified look, and then he knew that he must try to act natural, for if his appearance betrayed the man behind the

curtain, the sword would undoubtedly finish its deadly work.

“Remove that woman!” Monastario ordered. “She is disturbing this court.” A soldier stepped out from the wall to obey the command.

Once more Pina heard the deadly whisper of Zorro, and the sword point at his back moved forward a little as the lawyer tried to cringe away from it.

Monastario watched the soldier escorting the sobbing woman from the room, and then he looked at Pina. *Why, he’s afraid to speak*, Monastario thought. *Look at the cowardly little rabbit!* “Well?” the commandante said loudly.

“Considering all the evidence presented—” Pina’s voice was shaking, “I—I find the defendants, Don Nacho Torres and Don Alejandro de la Vega—not guilty.”

Monastario leaped up. “What!” he shouted.

Pina pointed over his shoulder, afraid to move although the sword was no longer at his back. Still, he thought it was there. His gestures were so strange and his fear so great that Monastario did not understand at once.

When the commandante did grasp what had happened, it was too late. Zorro had run across the kitchen and was safely away.

“The trial is not over! The prisoners are not free!” Monastario howled in fury.

Carriage wheels ground outside, and a few moments later Judge Vasca came heavily into the room, his clothes wet and plastered against his enormous body. His eyes were cold and his voice steady as he looked around the room and said, “Trial? What trial is going on here at this hour?”

Everyone in the room tried to speak at once, except Pina and Monastario, who looked sick.

“Order in this court!” Judge Pina bellowed.

There was order.

Monastario recovered quickly. He walked over to the judge and bowed. “Capitan Monastario at your orders, excellency. In your absence, thinking that you would be long delayed, we had a trial and a verdict was given.”

“So? And what was the verdict?”

“Not guilty,” Monastario said. “I pride myself on the justice dispensed under my command.”

Some of the citizens shook their heads in astonishment over the size of that lie so smoothly given.

“Hmm,” Judge Vasca said. “I will review the proceedings, of course.”

“There is no need, I assure you,” Monastario said.

“Everyone is pleased with the verdict.”

“None the less, I will go over the proceedings. Have three copies of the record properly written for me, to be available as soon as I have eaten breakfast.” Judge Vasca caught sight of Garcia coming through the door. “Ah, sergeant, let us have breakfast together!”

It was too much for Garcia, the thought of having to stuff himself once more, and the sight of the terrible anger on Monastario’s face. Garcia grinned weakly and stumbled outside, but he couldn’t get away from the commandante’s voice.

“Sergeant Garcia, you will have breakfast with Judge Vasca, and after that—I wish to speak to you,” Monastario said.

People were talking happily in the plaza when Don Diego came riding in a few minutes later on the horse that his mute servant sometimes rode. Diego caught sight of his father and asked, “When will the trial begin?”

“It is over!” Don Nacho shouted. “We are free, and it is a strange thing—Monastario’s own judge was the one who gave the verdict.”

“That is strange indeed,” Diego said. He wondered if Pina had discovered yet that there was a tiny Z in his back.



## Chapter 15

## Secret Mission

Roosters were still crowing when a sleepy, yawning soldier shuffled through the early morning to raise the flag on the pole inside the *cuartel*. He was tempted to stop and visit with the sentry at the gate, but he thought better of it. The commandante was an early riser. He might peer from the window of his quarters and begin snarling because the flag was not up.

The commandante had been in a very evil temper ever since the trial. Still yawning, the lancer waited for the sentry to open the gate.

Monastario was up, though not dressed. He was having a pot of hot chocolate and thinking bitterly of all the bad things Zorro had done to him. Every time Monastario made a clever plan, that accursed, black-cloaked rider popped up to ruin everything.

The trouble was, he was being protected by the people of the area. Without doubt there must be those who knew who Zorro was, but they looked upon him as a hero and would not give information to the commandante.

Consider how it was when the traitor stuck his sword in Pina's back at the trial. The innkeeper, a cook, and a pot washer had all been in the kitchen. They had seen Zorro, but had they given a warning? No! Did they remember anything about him afterward? No!

Monastario scowled. If he could place a spy among the people of the area, someone who would seem to be a poor, honest man. . . .

Some kind of uproar developed in the *cuartel*. Garcia was shouting. The commandante went to the window. He looked first to see if the flag was up. Something was at the top of the pole, stirring just a little in the early morning breeze.

"What kind of flag is that?" Monastario shouted from the window.

Garcia and the soldiers with him stared up at the commandante stupidly. The wind moved the cloth on the pole and Monastario saw what kind of flag it was.

A white cloth with the black letter Z on it!



Zorro again! It was incredible how he came and went as he pleased, and now he had hoisted his victory flag over the *cuartel*. "Get it down from there!" Monastario shouted. He began to dress.

When he got outside a few people had arrived, attracted by the shouting. Two peons who had come down from the hills to work for a day on the church were standing near the *cuartel* gate, grinning at the frantic efforts of a lancer to climb the flagpole. The rope had been cut at the top.

Each time the lancer tried, he slid back to the ground with a thump. Someone had smeared bear grease on the pole.

One of the peons said, "That pig of a commandante will be in a great rage when he sees Zorro's flag."

"Perhaps he can climb the pole himself."

The two peons laughed. They were still laughing when Monastario stepped up behind them and said, "You find it amusing, yes? Sentry, arrest these two men!"

That was done before the peons knew what was happening. "So you think that an insult to the King and the Flag of Spain is funny?"

The peons were named Blas and Pancho. "Oh, no, commandante," Blas said. "We were laughing only at the

lancer who could not climb the pole.”

“Garcia, come here,” Monastario said. The fat sergeant trotted over. “Give these two rogues thirty lashes each and lock them up for one month.”

The peons began to plead. “Our families, our children will go hungry!”

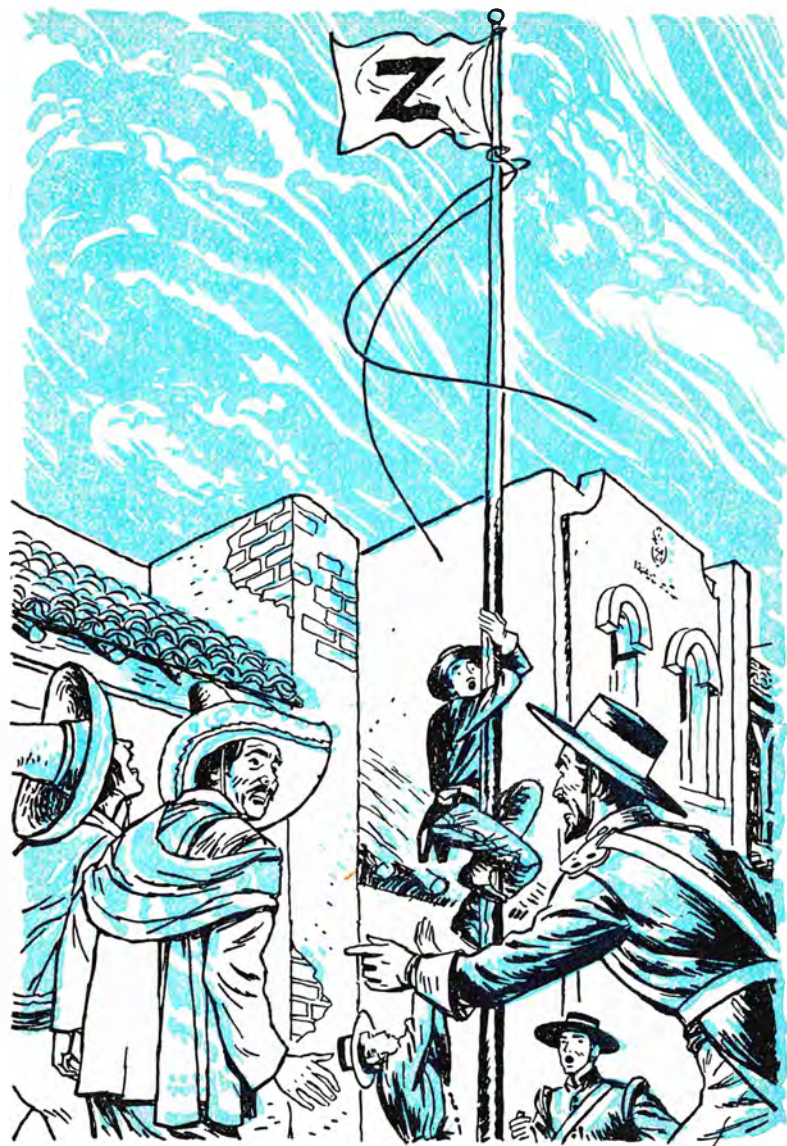
“You should have thought of that before you insulted the King,” Monastario said.

Garcia shuffled his boots. He felt sorry for the two men. “Pardon, capitan, but if they were made to do some task here, instead of being lashed and put in jail, where we will have to feed them—would it not be better?”

Monastario thought for a moment. “Ah, yes. Sometimes you think, Garcia. The stable roof, that will serve.” He looked at Blas and Pancho. “By sunset tomorrow, see that you have put thirty buckets of tar from the pits on the roof of the stable.”

“But it is impossible!” Pancho cried. “The pits are miles away and we have nothing to—You will give us a cart, yes?”

“A cart, no!” Monastario. “You will carry the tar in buckets. If you do not have thirty buckets of it spread on the stable roof when I said, you will receive sixty lashes



each and two months in jail.”

Garcia started to speak in protest, knowing that Blas and Pancho had been given an impossible task, and then he closed his mouth. Perhaps he would make it even worse for them if he tried to help again. Ever since the trial, the commandante had been more cruel and unreasonable than ever.

“Have that rag down within ten minutes, Garcia, or you will be put in jail yourself,” Monastario snapped.

“But it is fastened to the pole itself, and there is bear grease on the pole and—”

“Ten minutes!” the commandante said, walking away.

Garcia stared helplessly at the pole, and then his broad face brightened. “Get an ax! Bring me an ax, Ybarra!”

Monastario was back in his office when the crash of the flagpole against the building sent him leaping to the window again. Garcia and the soldiers tugged at the base of the pole and made the top roll, so that the pole came banging down on the jail roof and then on to the ground.

Garcia cut loose the Z flag. He held it up and shouted, “I have it, commandante!”

“Come up here,” Monastario ordered.

Garcia went slowly, thinking that he was to be punished,

but, surprisingly, Monastario said nothing about the flag, now that it was down. He paced his office with a frown. "Why have we not caught Zorro?" he demanded.

Garcia shrugged.

"One, because he outwits us. Two, because the people of the area protect him. They know who he is, never fear. Now, Garcia, if we had someone to mingle with the people, to be one of them, we could find out who Zorro is."

Garcia nodded. "You are very wise, capitán."

"You will be the man, Garcia. Today, for allowing the flag to be put on the pole, you will be thrown in jail, and then you will be brought to trial and dismissed from the King's service."

"I couldn't help it about the flag. No one could—"

"Idiot! There will be no records made of the court-martial. As a man dismissed from the service, angry at me, you should be able to find out about Zorro. Then when we catch him, who knows what your rank will be? Lieutenant, perhaps."

"Lieutenant Garcia, ah!"

Shortly after the public ceremony in which Garcia was stripped of all insignia of the Spanish army, Diego rode into Los Angeles on Raton. The fat horse had been found

by soldiers the week before, grazing peacefully near the giant tree just outside the pueblo gates.

As a matter of fact, Benito Avila, who had escaped on Raton, had returned the horse by night to Don Diego at the rancho, but rather than risk any questions about the mysterious return of the horse, Diego had sent Bernardo to leave Raton where the soldiers would find him.

As Diego came through the gates he met Blas and Pancho trotting away with buckets suspended from yokes on their shoulders. "You are working for Padre Juan today?"

"No, no," Blas said. He explained the task the commandante had set upon them.

"All the way to the tar pits and back—on foot!" Diego shook his head. "You can never do it in time."

"We must try," Pancho said. The two peons trotted away, barefooted, ragged, tired.

Because of the childish thing he had done in putting up the flag, the two peons were being made to suffer. "I must not allow that," Diego thought.

In the inn he saw Garcia, alone at a table, his uniform gone. Garcia looked most unhappy. Diego sat down with him. "What happened to you, Sergeant Garcia?"

"I am no longer a sergeant." Garcia told his sad tale.

"For something I could not help, this monster of a commandante has done this to me. Down with him, I say!"

"Not so loud," Diego cautioned. "Or you will be in greater trouble with the commandante."

"You do not like him, no?" Garcia asked.

Diego shrugged. "He is the commandante. I believe in law, and so he must be obeyed."

"Zorro would not say that," Garcia grumbled.

"But he is an outlaw, and I am not." Diego changed the subject. "What will you do now, Garcia?"

"I do not know. All I have ever been is a soldier."

When Pedro Gonzalez, the innkeeper, brought wine, Diego said, "Have you some work that my friend here could do?"

Gonzalez was not enthusiastic about Garcia, but Don Diego was a good customer and one did not offend the son of a wealthy landowner. "My business is not good lately," Gonzalez said. "It has been a year since the soldiers have been paid, and they all owe me a great sum of money."

"Here is a chance to get some of it paid," Diego said. "Garcia can work for you and you can take part of what you would pay him to apply against his debt."

"I could serve wine," Garcia said.

“No, no,” Gonzalez said hastily. “Not that.”

“Perhaps cook rare dishes in the kitchen?” Garcia asked.

Gonzalez held his head. “You would eat everything in sight! I have heard that you and Judge Vasca—”

“Let us not talk about that,” Garcia said quickly.

“Surely you must have some work for him,” Diego said.

“All right. He can wash pots, scrub the floors, carry wood, and do other things. I will feed him”—Gonzalez winced—“and give him a place to sleep, and one half of what he earns will be applied to his bill.”

“There you are,” Don Diego said, “a fine offer, Garcia.”

“I am grateful, Don Diego, to you at least.”

When Gonzalez had left, Garcia lowered his voice. “This will be only for a time, this work. As soon as possible I am going to join Zorro.”

“Oh?”

“Do you know who he is, Don Diego?”

“That outlaw Zorro? I do not, and I do not wish to know him either!”

Garcia went to work at the inn. Bernardo was there frequently, and so it was not unusual when he showed up soon after Don Diego left. That evening when Bernardo reported back to Diego, the servant took a great deal of



time illustrating what Garcia was doing.

Among other things, he was making many inquiries about Zorro. It appeared that Garcia was really very anxious to meet the masked rider.

Diego smiled. "He will get his chance this very evening, Bernardo."

It was late. The inn was closed for the night, and Gonzalez had retired to his room after giving Garcia last-minute orders about cleaning up the kitchen. Garcia managed to get two cups of wine from the barrel kept in the kitchen for cooking purposes, and he had just filled the cup for another drink when he heard the light step behind him.

He thought it was Gonzalez and so he quickly put the cup under his shirt, holding his hand on it to keep it from spilling.

It was Zorro who had come into the kitchen.

"*Señor Zorro*, I am no longer your enemy," Garcia said hastily. "I have been dismissed from the army."

"So I have heard."

"I see with different eyes now," Garcia said. "I am for justice, and I, too, wish to see Monastario punished for all the wrong he has done!"

"Splendid!" Zorro said. "I take it then that you approve

of my work and would like to aid me!”

“Anything, *Señor Zorro*! I am a fine horseman, an excellent swordsman—” Garcia blinked as he remembered to whom he was talking.

“Let me hear more.”

“I know many of the commandante’s secrets,” Garcia said. “I would be of great help to you in the fight against injustice.”

“Hmmm.” Zorro seemed to be impressed. “I will have to test you, of course.”

“Anything at all, *Señor Zorro*!”

“Then meet me at dawn tomorrow where the old forge used to be under the big tree on the road to San Diego.”

“I will be there!” Garcia said.

Zorro could hardly keep from smiling as he noticed how Garcia was balancing the cup of wine under his shirt. “Just one thing more, Garcia—do you have powerful hands?”

“*Si!*” Garcia cried. He held up both hands for Zorro to see, and then a sickly look appeared on his face as the cup of wine under his shirt rolled and sent its warm, sticky contents all over his chest and stomach.

“Until dawn,” Zorro said, and he went out grinning.

Holding his shirt away from his body, Garcia waddled

to the door to make sure that Zorro was gone. To be doubly sure, he waited a few minutes longer before he went trotting across the plaza to report to Monastario.

Monastario was not pleased to be awakened at such a late hour, but when he heard Garcia's report his anger faded. The wisest move would be to let Garcia meet Zorro and learn more about him, the commandante knew; yet he was doubtful of the sergeant's worth as a spy for very much longer.

Garcia had come up with results quickly. Too quickly. Perhaps Zorro had already smelled him out. The commandante paced the floor. Once more he decided that force would be the best weapon. He would have Garcia meet Zorro, but he would have the meeting place surrounded by soldiers.

When Diego reached home, Bernardo looked at him with a question. "Yes," Diego said, "he is a spy. I watched from the staging at the church. He went straight to the commandante's office."

Bernardo drew his hand across his throat.

Diego shook his head. "Not Garcia. I wouldn't kill him. He's not a bad man at heart."

Diego sat down to think out the problems he had brought

about with the silly business of placing the flag over the *cuartel*. It had been no more than a joke, something to mock Monastario and his harsh authority, but it was not much of a joke any longer.

Laughter was one thing that tyrants could not stand. Blas and Pancho had laughed. Diego felt to blame for the whole incident, so it was up to him to get Blas and Pancho out of their difficulties.

“It’s well that I can sleep all day if I wish,” he said to Bernardo, “because I’m going to be riding the rest of the night, I think.” He got up and went to the panel.

Dawn was still two hours away, but Monastario was preparing to leave the pueblo. He was anxious to get his soldiers in position around the spot where Garcia was to meet Zorro.

If he had known, the commandante would not have had to go far at all to find Zorro, for the masked man was on the roof of the barracks at that very moment, lying flat and listening to what went on.

The soldiers were ready. In front of the barracks Monastario said, “Corporal Ortega, you are in charge. You will find the orders of the day on my desk.”

“Yes, commandante.”

The lancers rode out. Two minutes later all discipline vanished. The sentry at the gate slumped down and went to sleep, and so did the guard at the *cuartel* gate. Corporal Ortega went back into the barracks, and Zorro knew that he also would go back to sleep.

Zorro let himself down to the roof of the jail. A few moments more and he was seated at the commandante's desk, writing by candlelight. It did not take long, and then he was gone.

By the tree where the old forge had been, Garcia shivered in the early morning. Being a spy was not pleasant work when it meant sitting under a tree half the night.

Dawn came but Zorro did not. Garcia waited, growing more and more uneasy. Suppose Zorro did not come at all? Then Monastario would blame Garcia for the failure.

Sometime later a voice said harshly, "We have been tricked!"

Garcia leaped up. There was Monastario coming from the trees, and all around in a circle lancers were closing in. "So, Garcia," Monastario said, "what is your story now?"

"He said he would be—" Garcia ducked as Monastario came striding up and suddenly put out his hand, but it was not the sergeant that the commandante was after. He

reached out to snatch from the tree a paper pinned there with a dagger. There was only one word on the paper.

*Garcia*, it said. Below the name was a picture of a tumble-down stone house with an anchor beside it.

"That is Vincente's cabin!" Garcia exclaimed. "On the road to the sea. Zorro wants me to meet him there."

Monastario frowned in thought. If the note had carried a written message, he would have distrusted it completely, since Zorro certainly knew that very few soldiers could read. The commandante pointed to the word. "What does that say, Garcia?"

"It is my name, of course. I know my name in writing!"

Monastario turned the note over. There was a bold Z on the back of it. The commandante made up his mind. "You will go first, Garcia, and slowly after you come over the last hill before the cabin. The rest of us will come in from behind the hills and surround the cabin."

It could be that Zorro had been fooled by Garcia after all, the commandante thought. If so, the outlaw would soon be a dead man.

Garcia crossed the last hill in front of Vincente's cabin and plodded down the road on the old mule he had borrowed from Gonzalez. The lancers had swung around to

the east and were coming in from behind the rolling hills.

Garcia could see nothing of Zorro. Perhaps he was at the ruined corral in the trees behind the cabin.

No, he was not there either. Garcia waited in fear of the commandante. After a time Monastario and the lancers rode in. "So, Garcia! And not even a note this time. Now what do you say?"

"I—I—" Garcia's eyes bugged out as he looked down the road toward the sea and saw Zorro riding toward them.

"Get the horses out of sight!" Monastario said. But it was too late. Zorro had seen them. He turned his black stallion and sped away.

"After him!" Monastario yelled.

The lancers gave full chase. There were times when it seemed that they were catching up with Zorro. It was open country, fine for fast riding. The soldiers would gain a little and then Zorro would draw away. Always he kept going south.

Then all at once Monastario raised his hand and stopped the lancers. He had been deceived again and he knew it. There wasn't a horse in his whole command that could stay even close to that accursed black stallion, if Zorro were really trying to get away.

All Zorro was interested in was leading the soldiers as far as they would follow from Los Angeles.

“Turn back!”

They met Garcia bumping along on his lop-eared mule, and Monastario stopped to speak roughly to him. “You have allowed Zorro to trick you, and to lead us all on a wild chase for nothing. I am going to punish you, Garcia, by putting you back in the army—starting this instant!”

When he had had a good sleep, Corporal Ortega rose and went to Monastario’s office to get the orders of the day. Since he could not read, he took the paper to Padre Juan. The padre read the orders with a puzzled look.

“‘Corporal Ortega: Proceed at once with four men and my carriage to the tar pits. Bring back the equivalent of sixty buckets of tar and spread it on the roof of the stable. Use the two men, Blas and Pancho, in the work. When the task is completed, release the two men into the custody of Padre Juan.’”

“That is what is written there?” Ortega asked.

“Written and signed by the commandante,” Padre Juan said. “I am pleased to know that his heart is changing. He came for confession this week, I am happy to say.”



“Thank you, padre.” Corporal Ortega was not so sure about a change in the commandante’s heart. They were strange orders, but they were still orders. He prepared to carry them out.

On the way to the pits near Rancho La Brea, the soldiers met Blas and Pancho bringing four more buckets of the gooey mixture. “You are lucky peons,” Ortega said. “We have orders to haul your tar in the carriage and to show you how to put it on the stable roof.”

It was not really tar; it was a thick, oily substance that came from the La Brea pits. The commandante’s carriage was streaked and stained with the oily stuff by the time the soldiers returned to the *cuartel* with the ordered amount.

They passed it up to the stable roof and the two peons spread it. The job was soon done. Corporal Ortega congratulated himself on carrying out orders so well. Perhaps he would be promoted to sergeant now, to take Garcia’s place.

It occurred to him that he should have the commandante’s carriage cleaned, but before he had a chance to get the work started, Monastario returned.

If there had been shouting that morning over the flag,

there was terrible shouting now when Monastario saw the inside of his carriage and heard what had been going on.

"But, capitan, the orders said—" Ortega took the paper from his coat and gave it to Monastario.

"That is not my signature!" the commandante said, but he was astonished to see how very much like his own writing the forgery was. Zorro! Of course it was Zorro who had done this, and then decoyed the soldiers on a wild chase far south of the pueblo.

"The two peons, commandante," Ortega said hesitantly, "I have turned them loose, as the paper said to do. If you wish, I will get them back from Padre Juan."

Monastario's anger was back on his favorite hate, Zorro. He had no interest in Blas and Pancho now. "Clean my carriage," he growled.

As he walked away he wondered with great anger why he had ever thought stupid Garcia could be a spy. Was there no protection at all against Zorro, no way he could lay his hands on the man?

When he reached his office, still fuming with rage, he saw a bright scratch beside papers on his desk, and when he lifted the papers he saw a large Z cut into the dark wood with the point of a sword.



## Chapter 16

## Duel to the Death

Her name was Rosita Fuentes. She was dancing in the *posada* this night, clicking her painted heels, swinging to the music of the guitars, and flirting with a man at every table as she danced. Even the commandante relaxed a little as she flicked him on the chin and smiled at him. The soldiers crowded into the inn clapped their hands and shouted, "*Ole! Ole!*"

She had danced in Monterey, and even the governor had gone to see her. It was said that Rivera Mendez had followed her all the way from Monterey, seeking her favor. If so, he had not done very well, for she scorned him now, not even casting a glance to where Mendez sat alone at a table.

He seemed to be a brooding sort of young man, tight of face, olive skinned, with a high, thin nose. He was well-

clothed, this stranger, though not in the fancy manner that some young men like Don Diego affected. Mendez's clothes were of a sober cut, and dark. Quietly he watched Rosita dance.

It was different with young Fernando Romero, who had come from San Diego with some of his friends to see the dancer. They were a gay group, laughing and clapping their hands, and shouting to Rosita, who smiled and paid more attention to Romero than to any other man in the room.

Faster and faster Rosita whirled as the music increased in tempo. Everyone was beating on the tables and shouting. With a last swirl of her red skirts Rosita ended the dance. She smiled and bowed to the deep applause.

Coins were tossed out on the floor. An old man who traveled with her—some said he was her uncle—came forward to pick them up. Garcia looked wistfully at the money. The innkeeper had just refused him more wine because his bill was already so high.

Rosita started toward the stairway to the rooms above the main floor. Young Romero, all smiles and bows, met her at the foot of the steps and asked, "Would you do me the honor of having a glass of wine at our table?"

"No, thank you," Rosita said, but she hesitated, smiling

back at Romero, and her eyes went sidewise in a quick look to see if Mendez was watching this little flirtation.

"You are the greatest dancer in the world!" Romero said. He was a young man who had never been out of southern California in all his life. "Please come and have a small glass of wine with us." He took the girl by the hand and tried to draw her toward his table.

"I really shouldn't. . . ." Rosita glanced upstairs to where her duenna, or chaperon, was watching with disapproval.

It was then that Mendez walked over, carrying his glass with him. "Take your hand off her, vaquero," he said.

"Vaquero!" Cowboy! It was a great insult to one who fancied himself a gentleman. "Who is this—this—fisherman, Rosita?" Romero asked.

The dancer's eyes were shining. "Please, no trouble!"

"There will be none," Mendez said lazily. He threw his glass of wine in Romero's face.

The two men stepped away from each other and drew their swords. From the first clash of steel, it was evident that Romero was no match for the dark-clothed Mendez.

Garcia went lumbering over to Monastario. "Shall I have them stopped, commandante? This Mendez is—"

“Calm yourself.” Monastario made a small gesture with his hand. “And stand aside so that I can see it, you fat baboon.”

Romero was fighting furiously but it was all effort with little skill. Mendez had a thin smile on his lips as he played with Romero, parrying his thrusts with an ease that made his opponent look like an excited child slashing about with a stick.

“An excellent swordsman,” Monastario murmured. His eyes came down to cruel points as he watched.

“The young Romero will be killed, surely,” Garcia said uneasily. “His father is one of the great land—”

“His father should have taught him to fence—or else to avoid causing duels over a woman.” Monastario smiled.

“But dueling, is it not forbidden, commandante?”

“This is an affair of honor. Be quiet, fat one!”

With a lucky stroke Romero managed to touch Mendez’s arm, but only enough to rip a small hole in the sleeve of his dark coat. It angered Mendez. He drove in quickly, forcing Romero back to the wall as men scrambled out of the way.

Romero backed up against the wall. He could go no farther, and there were heavy tables on both sides of him.



Garcia started forward. "Stay where you are!" Monastario rasped.

It was clear to even the least expert swordsman in the room that Mendez could disarm Romero if he chose, and then turn away from him, leaving him disgraced.

But Mendez parried the last clumsy, desperate strokes and then drove his blade through Romero's chest. Romero dropped his sword. He staggered sidewise to a table and tried to hold himself up. He fell before his friends could rush across the room to catch him.

"Now," Monastario said calmly, "we will arrest this valiant Mendez." He drew his sword as soon as he had risen. "Come, Garcia, don't stare so!"

Rosita, the cause of it all, had run upstairs to her duenna. Some of Romero's friends drew their swords and stepped toward Mendez.

"I am the commandante here!" Monastario roared. "Put your weapons away, or you will all be in the *cuartel*. Soldiers, arrest this Rivera Mendez!"

For a moment it seemed that Mendez would fight them all. He backed away to gain room. A lancer sitting at a table grabbed his sword arm. Other lancers closed in. Mendez struggled like a trapped lion but was overpowered.



"To the jail with him," the commandante said. "He has killed the son of one of the most loyal subjects of the King in all California. He will be punished according to the justice of the King!"

The commandante looked stern and very military, and there were many in the room who forgot that he had sat and allowed the duel to take place.

Mendez was still struggling as the lancers dragged him through the doorway.

It was two days later. Don Alejandro was stamping around his living room with a piece of paper in his hand. "Does a leopard change his spots?" he said angrily to Don Diego. "Does a bear that kills my fine colts come to me suddenly and apologize?"

He shook the paper at Diego. "Tonight at eight o'clock that dog of a commandante is having a dinner for all the leading citizens of the area. After everything he has done, he has the nerve to ask me to come. Me!"

"It is likely that all the other landowners will go, father," Diego said, "so perhaps it is wise that you—"

"Wise!" Don Alejandro exploded. "You mean cowardly! I will not go to his dinner!" He threw the invitation

on the floor and ground his boot on it. Diego picked it up.

At the bottom of the note there was a line that made Diego almost as angry as his father was. “. . . it is necessary that a representative of every important family be present. The commandante will look with great disfavor upon the absence of any family invited.”

“May Heaven strike the foul rogue!” Don Alejandro said. “He has some new plot in his head, but I will not go near the villain.”

“I will go, father,” Diego said.

“Yes! Go humble yourself before the monster!”

“Only to help keep peace will I do it.”

Don Alejandro glared at his son. Once more he did not say it: Diego was a spineless young man.

Bernardo returned from the pueblo a few minutes later. He signaled that he had something to say to Don Diego, and when they were alone in Diego's room, the servant began to act out his message. The hand talk between Diego and Bernardo had now developed until they actually could converse quickly in ordinary matters.

But what Bernardo had to tell this time was no ordinary matter. It became so complicated that Diego could not catch the details.

Some of it, of course, was easy. Bernardo had been at the inn, listening to talk. This he showed merely by cupping his hand at his ear.

Garcia had been there. Mustache and fat belly. Commandante had been there. Short chin beard and a fist clenched and upraised to show authority. Then eating, which was easy. After that a Z. Then Bernardo drew his fingers across his throat.

Garcia and the commandante were plotting at a dinner to kill Zorro; but the details Bernardo could not make clear, or perhaps he had not overheard them.

“Never mind,” Diego said. “Zorro will be at that dinner tonight to find out the rest.”

Garcia and two soldiers brought Mendez to Monastario’s office and then stepped outside to wait, closing the door behind them. Mendez faced the commandante coldly.

With a smile Monastario indicated a chair. “You must be very tired of jail by now, although it has been only a short time—so far.”

Mendez sat down. The commandante gave him a cigar. “What is the favor you spoke of last night?” Mendez asked. “The favor that will free me?”

“You have heard of the mysterious outlaw, Zorro?”

“The champion of the people, oh, yes.”

“In reality, it is I who am the friend of the people,” Monastario said. He considered that big lie for a moment without changing expression.

Mendez smiled thinly. “But they don’t realize it?”

“Precisely! Tonight I will have a dinner at the *posada*. Zorro will appear there and he will rob my guests, even the poor ones—the servants even. He will mistreat them, perhaps cut off an ear or two with his sword.

“He will be such a villain that the people will see him as he really is—not a friend of the poor, but a common robber who wishes to enrich himself.”

“All this is very interesting,” Mendez said. “I am to be Zorro.”

“You look somewhat like him. You are perhaps an even better swordsman. I have all the clothes necessary to make the appearance so real that no one will know the difference. Speak as little as possible.” Monastario was sure he had his man when he saw the way Mendez smiled.

“It sounds too simple,” Mendez said.

“Simple plans are the best. My guests will be unarmed. Garcia will be stationed at the door to make sure that you

are not disturbed from outside while carrying on your little performance.” Monastario was grinning.

“Suppose that one of your guests should object to being robbed?”

“I cannot be responsible for the acts of Zorro,” the commandante said. “If someone should resist foolishly while Zorro is robbing him, there could be serious injury. If it happened to be Don Alejandro de la Vega—he is a high-tempered man, whom I will tell you later how to know—he might even be killed.”

Mendez blew smoke from his cigar. “Yes, I can see that you are indeed a true friend of the people.”

“I don’t need your sarcasm, Mendez. You killed a man, the son of a most influential landowner. It is possible that you could be held in jail a year—even longer—before there was a trial. My guards tell me that you do not like my jail, *Señor Mendez*.”

Mendez’s dark eyes glittered dangerously, but he did not lose his temper. “For playing the part of this Zorro, I am to receive my freedom?”

“At once, as soon as the part is done. You will escape by a ladder from the upper floor of the *posada*. Your horse will be waiting.”

For a long time Mendez's cold eyes studied the commandante. Even though it was Monastario who held all the advantage, Mendez showed no fear. There was even a suggestion of contempt in his look.

"What is your answer, Mendez?"

"After I escape, there must be satisfactory explanations. 'How did he get out of jail?' 'Why, he must have escaped, surely.'" Mendez shook his head. "Then I am an escaped prisoner with charges still against me."

"Better that than to rot in jail," Monastario said roughly. "You at least will have your freedom."

"It is still better if I have a pardon from the commandante, and better yet if I have this pardon in writing on my person at the time I am playing the part of Zorro. As a pardoned man, I feel there is less chance that I will be shot down or stabbed from behind by some of your soldiers, 'while escaping.'"

Monastario turned white. "So you do not trust me! You, a common murderer confined in my jail, sit before me in my own office and insult me!"

With a small smile, completely undisturbed by the outburst, Mendez let the commandante rave, and then he said, "Not quite a common prisoner, Monastario. You wish me

to play the part of Zorro. You must hate this outlaw Zorro a great deal.”

The commandante glared for a while to show that he was still in charge. “What do you say?” he asked.

“Oh, I will do it, of course,” Mendez said.

“I thought so.”

“*After* I have your signed pardon in my pocket,” Mendez added.

“A month in jail might cool your insolence, Mendez. A year might even make you careful of your tongue.”

“A month, a year—all that time Zorro would continue to make a fool of you, commandante.”

“You are an insulting scoundrel!” Monastario snapped.

“But necessary to your plans. I can play the part of Zorro as no one else can. I can make him so hated that someone surely will come to you and tell you who he is.”

The commandante began to write the pardon.



## Chapter 17

## Double Zorros

The guests of the commandante had eaten well at his dinner in the *posada*, and since good eating generally softens the feeling of people toward their host, the rancheros and others should have been in a kindly mood.

This was not quite so.

The commandante rose and with a wave of his hand silenced the musicians who had played during the meal. Monastario was resplendent in his gaudiest uniform, with many medals on his chest. He made a fine figure.

But the rancheros knew him well. They looked sidewise at each other, or straight ahead, each one holding his private opinion of Capitan Monastario.

“Honored alcalde,” the commandante said to the mayor. “*Caballeros*,” he said to the other guests. “I am pleased to see so many of my friends present. Don Alejandro de la



Vega unfortunately was unable to be here, but he has sent his distinguished son in his place.”

Some of the dons smiled faintly at the last remark as they glanced toward Diego, who had been given one of the worst seats in the room. He was close to the kitchen doorway where it happened that the waiters hurrying through sometimes bumped against him and spilled bits of food on him.

“Some of you, I know, have felt at times that I have been harsh in my duties,” Monastario went on, “but I wish to assure you, with my hand on my heart, that I have done only what I considered my duty for the further glory of Spain.” The commandante held his handsome head high.

Don Alfredo O’Donnojou whispered to Don Alonso, “Too bad he wasn’t holding a sharp dagger when he struck his breast with such feeling.”

Don Alonso almost choked on his wine, which was well; otherwise he might have laughed outright.

“To be brief,” Monastario continued, “the purpose of this dinner is to promote a feeling of understanding and harmony among us, to help us all forget some of the regrettable mistakes that have occurred in our beautiful country.” He smiled benevolently.

"The mistakes were all his," Don Alfredo murmured.

"That is all I will say." The commandante raised his wine glass. "*Caballeros*, to the King!"

Everyone rose quickly to drink the toast. Monastario signaled the musicians, and they struck up a lively tune.

"I have better wine at home, and better food," Don Alfredo said, "and I would not have to listen to that scoundrel's lies." He shrugged. "Since I am here. . . ."

Interest among the dons, even the old ones, picked up quickly when Rosita came down the stairs. With fire in her movements, clicking castinets in her hands, she began to dance. As usual, she flirted as she passed each table.

Don Alfredo rolled his eyes. "Of course I do not have anything like that at home."

Everyone was watching Rosita, when in the middle of a graceful turn she stopped and put her hand to her mouth. A black-garbed figure was coming down the stairs, in one hand a pistol, in the other a sword.

"Zorro!" The word ran around the room.

"Everyone will sit quietly," the masked man said. "Put your hands on the table, and in them I want to see money and other valuable possessions. If there is any outcry or alarm, I will kill this man!" Suddenly he sheathed his

sword. All watched in stupefied amazement as he grabbed the old alcalde from his seat and placed the pistol at his back. "Come here, Gonzalez!"

The innkeeper came forward slowly, with fear in his eyes. He had never heard of Zorro acting like this.

"Yes, *Señor Zorro*?" Gonzalez said.

"Take that filthy apron from around you and use it to gather up the valuables from the tables!"

Gonzalez was slow in obeying. The masked man drew his sword and jabbed him viciously in the leg. With a howl of pain the innkeeper ripped his apron off and jumped to carry out orders. "Start with that ring you're wearing."

"But, *Señor Zorro*—" Gonzalez started to protest.

"Take it off!"

The masked man shoved the alcalde in front of him and followed Gonzalez as the innkeeper began to collect the valuables on the table. Rosita started to slip away toward the stairs. "One moment," the false Zorro said. He reached out and grabbed the thin gold chain she wore around her neck. He broke it with a hard tug and held up the cross on the end of the chain. "Gold. It will do."

Don Diego was one of the first few from whom Gonzalez collected. The innkeeper was trembling and apologizing

for what he had to do. "For the life of our good alcalde, señores. . . ."

Don Diego's hands shook as he dropped his leather purse, a sack with some coins inside, into the apron. He seemed about to collapse with fright.

"Now your ring!" the false Zorro said. "The next man I must tell to remove his ring will feel the point of this sword."

Diego fumbled and tugged to remove his ring which he slipped into the apron. Dons around the tables began to remove their rings also. When Gonzalez came to Don Alonso, the old man dropped some coins into the apron.

"Wait!" the false Zorro said, as Gonzalez started on. "Hold out your hands, old cheater." Don Alonso held out his hands. The pale mark on one finger showed where his ring had recently been.

The masked man jabbed Don Alonso in the shoulder with his blade. "Let that be a lesson to you all! I have protected and helped you miserable rancheros, and now you try to cheat me."

Don Alonso had to fumble his left hand across his body to reach the pocket where he had dropped his ring, because his right arm was momentarily useless from the sword jab.

Herding the alcalde close before him, the false Zorro went on with the robbery.

He stepped aside once to rip an earring from a scared servant standing near the wine barrels. "Trash!" the false Zorro said, and he cast the green stone away.

Monastario was well pleased with the performance. Mendez looked like Zorro himself, and the commandante could see how the rancheros' admiration for the outlaw was now turning to hatred and disgust.

Monastario contributed a few coins to the apron, and then he said, "For the love of God, let the alcalde go, you scoundrel. I will fight you myself."

It sounded good, but Don Alfredo was staring with a growing doubt at Monastario and Zorro. The don had heard Zorro's voice before, and while he could not be sure, he was wondering if this black-clothed man was the real Zorro.

During the time the false Zorro had been giving Don Alonso a cruel lesson, Don Diego had disappeared. If anyone had been watching him, it would have seemed that he had sunk down into his chair from terror, and then crawled away into the kitchen. But no one had been watching him.

The false Zorro completed his rounds of the table. He slashed a Z into the coat of one of the guests, and then

he backed toward the stairs, still using the alcalde as protection. His sword was in one hand and his pistol was back in his sash to free the other hand for carrying the loot. Suddenly he shoved the alcalde to the floor and ran up the steps.

The dons began to scramble to get their swords, which had been left on a table near the door. "He is mine!" Monastario shouted as he grabbed a sword. He ran up the stairs, making a brave show with his blade.

The false Zorro had disappeared into a room where a ladder reached to the ground, the same way by which he had entered. But the ladder was not there now. It had been moved along the wall to a room at the far end of the hall, and it was from that room that the real Zorro stepped out.

Monastario rushed at him, thinking he was Mendez. Their swords clashed and they began a furious engagement. "You idiot!" Monastario said in a low voice. "Get back into the room and escape!"

No one below was disposed to interfere or to aid the commandante, especially after Don Alfredo, still suspicious of everything that had taken place, shouted, "Let them fight! The commandante will settle the matter!"

The soldiers on guard outside the inn had been ordered

not to enter the inn, no matter what happened inside. Garcia peered through the doorway but came no farther.

Monastario was in trouble. Zorro's twinkling blade cut some of the medals from his chest. It ripped his arm. It sliced the decoration on his right shoulder. It drove him back to the head of the stairs.

Something was wrong. Mendez was trying to kill him, the commandante thought. "Garcia!" he bawled, but Garcia still hesitated at the doorway, afraid to disobey his original orders.

Mendez, the false Zorro, found himself in trouble too. The balcony outside the room where the ladder had been did not extend all the way to where the ladder now was. He dropped his pistol so that he could stuff the apron of loot under his sash. He swung over the balcony to climb down, but there were no footholds.

Then he knew he had to go back through the room and down the hall to reach the ladder. With sword in hand he stepped out of the room to make his escape.

Monastario's blade had just been sent flying. The commandante's foot slipped on the top step as he turned to run, and the next instant he was rolling down the stairs, yelling, "Garcia!" as he tumbled over and over.

Zorro turned to block the escape of the man who had posed as himself. He found himself engaged with the best swordsman he had met since leaving the *Queen of Castile*. Mendez, the false Zorro, was a master swordsman, and he knew tricks that were not used in duels between gentlemen.

He dropped almost to one knee and countered Zorro's defensive parry with a lightning upthrust. Zorro's blade swung in an arc and barely saved him from having his stomach pierced.

"Ah, an Italian Count!" Zorro said. That was the name that fencing students at Salamanca used to indicate an unprincipled fighter, one who knew all the slippery tricks of sword combat. Zorro's instructor had been a former hired soldier who had fought all over Europe, and he had taught his prize student, Zorro, defense against all manner of foul tactics, as well as a few sly tricks of his own.

Zorro chose not to use these tricks. He didn't need to, for a cold fury steadied his wrist as he parried two more upthrusts, and then he went after his opponent in deadly earnest. In a moment the false Zorro was on the defensive.

Zorro drove him to the head of the stairs, and then with a feint and a sliding press he knocked the sword from the man's hands. He feinted then as if to flick his blade across



Mendez's face. Mendez threw his hands up. Zorro stepped in and kicked him down the stairs.

Garcia had decided at last that Monastario's cries for help were genuine. He rushed into the room and was going up the stairs with his commandante when the false Zorro came crashing into them. All three men were borne in a tangle to the foot of the steps, and there the dons fell on Mendez and held him helpless.

Zorro ran down the hall and disappeared. Moments later he was stripping off his costume and giving it to Bernardo, who hurried away to where his horse was waiting.

The dons stripped the mask from the false Zorro.

"Ah! This is the stranger who killed Romero!" Gonzalez shouted.

"How did he get out of jail?" Don Alfredo wanted to know.

Monastario saw the suspicion of the dons directed at him. "He escaped, of course," the commandante said, "and I will punish the sleepy guards who allowed him to get away. Garcia, you are responsible! Put him back in jail at once, and then wait for me in my office!"

"But—but—" Garcia said, bewildered.

"You heard the order!" Monastario shouted.

Mendez had been dazed by a blow on the head when he was tumbling down the stairs, but he was not too groggy to give the commandante a long look as Garcia led him away. Something would have to be done about Mendez, and quickly, Monastario thought. "No one is to talk to him, Garcia," the commandante ordered.

Don Alonso was working his injured arm. Someone had taken the loot from Mendez and laid it on the table, and now with his good hand Don Alonso unfolded the apron. "Thanks to Zorro—the real Zorro—we have our possessions back." Don Alonso and Don Alfredo began to distribute the items to their owners.

Gonzalez suddenly recalled that he had put twenty gold coins into the apron, although no one else could remember that he had. Everyone laughed at that, and Gonzalez looked sheepish.

"Here is a purse that belongs to Don Pablo," Alfredo said. "This golden cross—ah, a beauty too!—was taken from Rosita. Here is Don Diego's ring with the de la Vega family crest— Where is Don Diego?"

Diego peered around the kitchen doorway, as if making sure that all danger was over before he entered the room again. He came in with a glass of wine in his hand, and

those close to him could see his hand trembling as he raised the glass to take a sip.

The dons looked at him with mingled amusement and contempt, but some of them remembered that they had not been so brave when the false Zorro was robbing them.

“Come and get your ring, Don Diego,” Alfredo said. “At least you saved your wine from that bandit. I spilled mine all over the table in my haste to follow his orders.”

The dons laughed. One of them with his back to the commandante raised a glass and said, “To Zorro!” in a quiet voice.

Don Diego got his possessions. He put on his cloak and hat and paid his respects to the commandante. “Thank you for an excellent dinner, Capitan Monastario. I think we should have more of them—without Zorro’s presence, of course.”

“It is a young evening yet,” Don Alfredo said. “Don’t rush away.”

“Forgive me, but I think I will go home. I haven’t been myself all evening,” Diego said. He smiled as he stepped outside.



## Chapter 18

## A Church Is Robbed

As usual, Bernardo had news when he returned from Los Angeles. A man believed to be deaf could learn much by merely listening.

The pose of deafness was not always easy. Bernardo had had close calls a few times because Monastario, always suspicious, had tested the servant's deafness with little tricks. Once the commandante had stepped up close behind Bernardo and fired a pistol.

From the corner of his eye Bernardo had seen what Monastario was going to do, and so he steeled himself not to move a muscle when the shot sounded right at his heels.

As things stood now, the commandante believed that Bernardo was deaf, and sometimes was careless in his remarks when the mute servant was around the *posada*.

Bernardo began to act out his latest news in Diego's room.

A man was dead. Something had struck him through the heart. Bernardo indicated Garcia, the mustache and the big belly. Garcia raised a musket and fired.

"Garcia shot someone," Diego said. "Who?"

Bernardo made two Z's with his finger in the air.

Diego grinned. "It wasn't me, I'm sure, so you must mean the false Zorro. Was it Mendez?"

Bernardo nodded. He marched across the room like a priest in a funeral procession. He lowered something, and then he began to shovel.

"Garcia shot Mendez, which means Mendez must have been escaping from jail, and now he is dead and buried," Diego said. "How did he get out of jail to be shot?"

Bernardo shook his head. The two men looked at each other grimly, understanding each other's thoughts. Twice Mendez had got out of jail, the first time to play the part of Zorro in an effort to make the masked rider appear to be a thief. That impersonation had failed.

There was no proof, but the commandante undoubtedly had been behind the whole thing; and now to keep Mendez from talking, the prisoner had been allowed to escape again, but this time he had been killed by Garcia. It was a convenient "Spanish escape" that undoubtedly saved the

commandante a good deal of trouble.

Bernardo had another bit of news to report. Monastario and Pina were going this evening to the old, deserted Soledad rancho. There was nothing they could harm there, Diego thought, so it was hardly worth Zorro's time to see why they wanted to visit a deserted rancho.

Diego would have thought differently if he had been at Soledad that evening. Trees and undergrowth were creeping over the crumbling ruins of the hacienda. Part of the roof had caved in, so that smoke from the fire on the hard dirt floor inside went up through the opening toward the star-sprinkled sky.

Three men were in the room: Pina, Monastario, and—Mendez.

"I don't like this Zorro disguise again," Mendez said. "The first time it was a miserable failure, and—"

"It won't fail this time," Monastario said. He brushed at a sticky cobweb on his shoulder. "You will have a great fortune in jewels and Zorro will be accused of committing an unpardonable sin."

"Zorro! Always you worry about this Zorro," Mendez growled. "I am no saint, commandante, but I have never



robbed a church, or even thought of doing so.”

“You’ve never been hanged by the neck either,” the commandante said coldly. “Which do you prefer?”

“Everyone thinks I am dead?”

“Yes.” It had been a clever ruse, Monastario thought. No one in the *cuartel* but Mendez and Garcia, who had been guarding the prisoner while he exercised a little. Then Mendez had tried to leap away and escape across the roof of the jail, as Zorro had done several times.

Of course Garcia had to shoot him. There the prisoner had lain, with blood all over his chest. Goat’s blood. The soldiers who had come running at the sound of the shot had seen him only for an instant, because Garcia had dragged him back into his cell and locked the door.

The next day Mendez had been buried. That is, a box with rocks in it had been buried. “Yes, everyone is sure you are dead,” Monastario said. “Zorro will be blamed for robbing the church.”

Pina looked around him uneasily. He hadn’t wanted to come. Hiding Mendez in his room the evening after the false shooting had been bad enough. “Wouldn’t it be enough, capitan, if we just allowed Mendez to go without risking any more plans to discredit Zorro?”



“He can’t get out of the country without my aid,” Monastario said. “Mendez knows that.”

Mendez did know it.

“After visiting the church,” Monastario said, “you will return here. Tomorrow night I will meet you again and give you safe-conduct papers so that on the following day you can go aboard the merchant ship now at San Pedro.”

Mendez studied the commandante. “And I get to keep the jewels?”

Monastario nodded.

After a time Mendez said, “I have no choice. I will do it.” He kept staring at the commandante.

“Don’t fear, I’ll see that you get away,” Monastario said. “I could have killed you in jail if I had wanted to.”

“True,” Mendez admitted. “But I had no crown of jewels in my possession then.”

“You fool!” the commandante said angrily. “I don’t want those jewels. If one of them ever showed up around Los Angeles, the people would tear apart the man who had it. Bear that in mind, Mendez. When you are on the ship, if someone cuts your throat for the jewels, then—”

“No one is going to cut my throat, here or anywhere else,” Mendez said coldly. “You bear that in mind yourself.”

The mission Indian Victorio had sneaked away from work in late afternoon to have a little nap in the bushes behind the cemetery at San Gabriel. The nap had become a good long sleep, and now it was night. Victorio was very hungry, and he was wondering what kind of story he could tell to Padre Felipe to explain his absence from the work of carrying baskets of fruit to the drying racks.

Of course, no matter how bad his story was, Padre Felipe would give him supper, and nothing worse than a gentle scolding. Victorio decided to tell the truth for once.

As he started to rise, a horse came into the trees not far away. Victorio heard the rider get down and walk quietly toward the church. Moments later the Indian was looking curiously at the horse. It was black.

Softly he trailed the rider toward the church. From a shadowy arch Victorio saw the masked man at the altar, where a few candles burned. It was Zorro! He took the crown of jewels from the Blessed Virgin.

He drew his sword and in three quick strokes slashed a Z in the altar, and then he started out, straight toward the doorway where Victorio was standing. The Indian knew that he should run and tell Padre Felipe.

But he did not run. Instead, he stepped out from the

doorway and cried, "No, no!" He pointed at the Virgin, indicating that Zorro should put the jewels back.

Zorro came straight at him with the sword. Victorio let out a loud cry of alarm. He turned to run but he was too late. The sword plunged through him and was quickly withdrawn.

Victorio managed one more strangled cry as he clutched the side of the arch and began to sink toward the floor.

Then Padre Felipe was bending over him. Victorio saw the motions and heard the words of the last rites but he did not want to believe that he was dying.

"Zorro," he whispered. "It was Zorro. He took the jewels from the Virgin." He rolled his head weakly to look toward the altar. The candles were growing dim.

Diego did not hear the news until late the next afternoon. His father had been gone all day, and Diego had been with Bernardo and Tornado in the secret pasture, training the stallion to hide in the rocks on signal.

It was Don Alejandro who brought word of the robbery and murder. He was in a rage when Diego returned to the house. "I do not believe it was Zorro!" the old don exclaimed. "The commandante himself was behind it."

“Not all the evil in the country is done by Monastario,” Diego said.

“The devil’s share of it is!” Don Alejandro growled. “It was a false Zorro who did this, just as it was an impostor who robbed us at the banquet. And if you ask me—”

“I know—Monastario was behind it all. Perhaps you are too ready to think evil of our commandante, father.”

Don Alejandro grunted like a bear. “You wouldn’t believe evil of the devil himself, Diego.”

Later in his room Diego was examining a handful of imitation jewels that he had used to play pranks with while at the university in Spain. Bernardo knocked softly and came in. His eyes bugged when he saw what Diego was doing.

Diego smiled. He bounced the pieces of glass in his hand. “They look real, Bernardo, real enough for you to think for an instant that I really robbed the church.”

Bernardo shook his head violently.

“You mean they don’t look real?” Diego teased.

Bernardo shook his head, confused about how to make a simple sign to answer the question.

“Oh, you mean I did rob the church?”

Bernardo’s No was clear enough that time.

“My father thinks Monastario has set up another false Zorro, since Mendez is dead. What do you think, Bernardo?”

Bernardo shrugged.

“What would happen if some of the jewels started to appear in Los Angeles?” Diego asked.

Bernardo rolled his eyes to indicate that there would be a fearful uproar.

“Yes,” Diego said, grinning at Bernardo’s expression, “and it just might scare someone—I will not say Monastario at the moment—into doing something that will give us an idea of who the real thief is.” He rose. “You and I are going to the pueblo this evening.”

Bernardo pointed at the secret panel.

“No. We will ride in on our horses like any innocent visitors, and toss a few jewels around—innocently.”

Diego juggled the fake gems again and then he dropped them into his pocket.



## Chapter 19

## Diego Under Suspicion

Bernardo found himself a position near the wine barrels in the *posada*, while Diego had the good fortune to discover Pina seated alone. He asked the lawyer's permission to join him.

"Of course, of course," Pina said. He cleared his throat. "I just dropped in for a moment."

*To watch Rosita dance*, Diego thought. She appeared in her first number not long afterward, and when she had finished, amidst wild applause, the old man who watched over her came out to pick up the coins from the floor. He frowned in surprise at something he took from the floor, and then he glanced around quickly at the applauding crowd as his hand went to his pocket.

*That one was a miss*, Diego thought. With his hand below the table where Pina could not see it he flipped

another imitation diamond out on the floor.

Once more the old man scooped it up so quickly that Diego doubted that anyone had seen it. Bernardo tried another method. With his hand at his side he flipped an imitation ruby at the skirt of a serving girl who was carrying wine to a table.

The girl felt it strike her dress. She reached down quickly when the fake ruby rolled across the floor.

“She’s picking up my coins!” Rosita cried.

There was an uproar at once. The waitress clenched her fist tightly and denied she had a coin. Both Rosita and the old man tried to force her hand open. Gonzalez came bustling into the argument. Rosita was yelling, the waitress was yelling, and the old man was grunting as he tried to pry open the waitress’s hand.

Gonzalez got whacked in the nose by someone’s elbow as he tried to intervene. “Peace, you barbarians!” he howled. “I am the power here!”

The waitress freed herself. “It is mine!” she cried. “I found it.” She opened her hand to show the red stone.

“A precious ruby!” Gonzalez gasped.

“It was thrown to Rosita!” the old man cried. “I know because I picked up other jewels.” His hand dived into

his pocket and he showed the two fake diamonds.

"Diamonds!" Gonzalez said.

The crowd surged out on the floor and began to look around, jostling each other. It was easy then for Diego and Bernardo to flip out enough false jewels to start a mad scramble. "They were meant for me!" Rosita howled. "Robbers! Thieves!"

"That's strange," Diego said to Pina. "Who would give jewels like that to a dancer, although she is a good one?"

Pina's face had a sickly cast. "Some men will throw anything to a dancer," he muttered.

"But who would have jewels?" Diego frowned. "Was it not said that a crown of jewels was stolen from a church last night?"

"Excuse me," Pina said. "I must report this to the commandante." He had to push his way through struggling men searching for more riches on the floor.

The commandante turned pale when he heard Pina's report. "Are you sure they were real?" he asked.

"As real as could be. All over the floor too. That dancer came here with Mendez following her. Do you suppose he gave her those jewels from the church and now she is trying to make it appear that they were thrown to her?"



"She took a ride in her carriage somewhere today," Monastario said. "Of course, she does that every day, but perhaps. . . ." Suddenly he shouted for Garcia and gave him orders to collect all the jewels that had been picked up in the *posada*. "Then search Rosita's room."

Excited shouting was still coming from the inn when Diego and Bernardo saw the commandante ride away. There was no time to send Bernardo back for the stallion and the Zorro costume.

Bright moonlight made it necessary for Diego and his servant to stay a long way behind Monastario as they trailed after him. Before long it became apparent that he must be heading for the old Soledad rancho.

They were right, but they were also some distance behind when Monastario reached the abandoned house. He left his horse under the trees and stole in on foot to the doorway of the house. A man was sleeping in the corner beyond the embers of a fire. Slowly and softly Monastario went toward him with drawn sword.

He drove the point down savagely and then he realized that he had been tricked. Mendez was not there, only a blanket spread over some pieces of wood. When Monastario hurried out of the house, a tall figure stepped from around

a corner and a mocking voice said, "So it is as I expected, commandante. You came to kill me in my sleep and take the jewels for yourself."

"You were a fool to give those jewels to a woman!" Monastario said. He pulled a pistol from his belt, but it had scarcely cleared when Mendez's sword whipped against his hand and made him drop the weapon. Monastario attacked viciously with his sword.

"I knew I would have to kill you," Mendez said. He swung out to the open ground in front of the house, giving way at first to Monastario's savage lunges. Then, enjoying himself, Mendez began to give the commandante a lesson in swordsmanship.

He was a determined and hard fighter, Monastario, but he overreached on a lunge, and while he was trying to recover, Mendez knocked the sword from his hand.

Monastario leaped back, then turned and ran toward the trees behind the house. Mendez's mocking laugh followed him. "You will be tired, brave commandante, if you run all the way to Los Angeles at that speed, because I am going to take your horse with me!"

As Mendez turned he saw Don Diego de la Vega coming toward him. This was startling, but he was even more

surprised when Diego drew his sword and struck an awkward pose, as if he intended to stop Mendez.

“Get out of my way or I will kill you with one thrust!” Mendez snarled.

“I demand that you surrender to the commandante!” Diego said. “You are an escaped prisoner.”

Mendez tried to do as he had said, to kill Diego with a quick lunge. Diego parried the thrust. It was an awkward movement, yet he managed to turn the blade aside.

“You are lucky once!” Mendez said. He attacked with a series of slashes and thrusts. Diego was the most inept swordsman he had ever faced, so it seemed, but still Mendez could not get in a telling attack.

Diego jumped about clumsily. He nearly stumbled once in his haste to retreat from a high thrust, but still he could not be touched. Mendez became infuriated. He used vicious tactics, as he had against Zorro.

Still stumbling and slashing away as if he were killing snakes, Diego managed to avoid injury. Once it seemed that his blade was stuck in the ground, but when Mendez drove in to take advantage of the situation, Diego’s sword came flying up as if he had got free just in time.

Mendez let out a shout of rage, so close did that lucky

stroke come to disarming him. "Surrender!" Diego cried, and he flourished his sword like a child playing at war.

Monastario had come out of the trees and quietly picked up his pistol. He was waiting now, watching the strange conflict with a tight expression.

Diego made a wild swing to parry a thrust, and this time his sword became entangled in a bush. Again he was able to free it just in time to parry what would have been a fatal thrust. Completely astonished for an instant, Mendez saw his own sword fly out of his hand.

"Surrender!" Diego cried dramatically, but Mendez turned to run. That was when Monastario brought the pistol up and shot Mendez in the back. The man was dead when he hit the ground.

"I could have captured him," Diego said.

"He was a dangerous criminal," Monastario replied. "I received word that he was hiding here."

Diego reached down and searched Mendez's pockets. He found the crown of jewels and stared at it as if amazed. "It was Mendez, not Zorro, who robbed the church!"

"I'll take that," Monastario said, reaching out for the jewels. "Padre Felipe will be most happy to see it returned."

"Yes, he will owe a great debt of gratitude to you." Diego

cleared his throat. "Of course you will explain that it was not Zorro who robbed the Virgin of her crown."

"I will take care of everything." Monastario looked steadily at Diego. "What were you doing near this place at this hour, Don Diego?"

"My servant and I were just riding past when we heard the sound of swords, commandante."

Monastario grunted.

"A question of my own, capitan—everyone thought *Señor* Mendez was already dead, killed while escaping from the *cuartel*."

"Garcia's report. He no doubt was bribed to let Mendez escape. Never fear, I will punish him."

"And also for burying something that was not Mendez, Garcia will be punished again?" Diego asked.

"It is a military matter and none of your business!"

Diego laughed. "Perhaps you are right."

"A question of my own," Monastario said heavily. "How is it that you, a most awkward swordsman, were able to defeat Mendez, one of the best I have ever seen?"

"I was lucky. Mendez himself said that I was lucky."

"So?" Monastario said, his voice dark with suspicion. He would let it go, but he knew it was not luck.



## Chapter 20

## Zorro Is Captured

It was on a day when people were still laughing about the false jewels that had caused such excitement in the *posada*. After much trouble Garcia had recovered a few pieces of glass, and when he had gone to search Rosita's room, he had been scratched and kicked by the angry dancer.

But today Garcia was sincerely worried about something more important. With four lancers backing him he escorted Don Diego de la Vega up the stairs to Monastario's office. Garcia ran his sleeve across his sweating face. "It is a mistake of some kind, Don Diego. It is a mistake, but the commandante said to arrest you and so I had to do it."

Diego smiled. "You must follow orders, Garcia."

The sergeant pushed open the door. He and Diego went into Monastario's office. The commandante was smiling.

"Of all the many times this man made a fool of you, Garcia. . . ." Monastario shook his head.

"I do not understand," Garcia said.

"I know you don't." The commandante tapped a paper on his desk. Diego sat down and yawned. "I have here a list of Zorro's offenses, Don Diego, and in each instance you were close at hand."

"It was most uncomfortable and even frightening at times," Diego said.

"Yet when Zorro actually appeared, you were not seen," the commandante went on. "Is that not interesting?"

Diego shrugged. He brushed some dust from his coat.

"In the name of the King you have been arrested," Monastario said impressively. "You are Zorro!"

Garcia's mouth fell open. He started to laugh and then with difficulty he kept his face straight.

Diego did laugh. "Are you serious, commandante?"

"I myself saw you defeat a great swordsman, and—"

"Luck," Diego said.

"It was not luck! And stop your stupid efforts to deceive me any longer!" Monastario shouted. "I know!"

"Tyrants generally know everything," Diego said, "or at least they think they do."

Monastario's face turned white. He leaped up from his chair. Before he could speak, someone pounded loudly on the door. "Go away!" the commandante said, but the knocking continued, until Monastario signaled angrily for Garcia to see who was outside.

It was a lancer, dusty from riding, panting from running up the stairs. "Our patrol on the San Fernando road stopped this carriage, capitan, and in it was the Viceroy, so I came in haste—"

"The Viceroy!" Monastario said. "Impossible! I knew he was with the governor in Monterey, but no message was sent to me about his coming here."

"He is coming," the lancer said. "From the King himself, he is coming. The royal seal was on the papers. I could not read them, but the royal seal—"

Monastario motioned the lancer away. Garcia closed the door. "It is my enemies spreading lies about my work here," the commandante said. "The King himself has heard their lies." He whirled on Diego suddenly. "Lock him up, Garcia! I will have a hanging for the Viceroy to see."

Garcia looked apologetically at Diego, who nodded. The young don made no resistance when he was escorted to the *cuartel* and put into a cell. Shortly afterward there was



a great bustle as every cell in the *cuartel*, except Diego's, was unlocked by soldiers.

"You are free," the soldiers told the prisoners. "It is the commandante's orders. There will be wine for all at the *posada*. Soon the Viceroy will be here, and then all you must do to show your gratitude to the commandante is to cheer when the Viceroy enters the pueblo."

Diego smiled as he heard this preparation to make the Viceroy think that Monastario's jail was seldom used, and that the people of Los Angeles were happy and free.

Later he heard the Viceroy arrive. Sure enough, there was some cheering. The wine had no doubt helped a great deal to bring that about, Diego thought.

Then there was silence, and the commandante could be heard making his guest welcome. "Your excellency, it is with a feeling of great humility that I welcome you and your beautiful daughter to our poor and humble pueblo. But we are a happy people here, as you have seen—"

"Thank you," the Viceroy said. "Thank you very much, Capitan Monastario. We have had a long trip, so if you would be kind enough to show us our quarters. . . ."

Diego sat down in his cell and laughed at the way the Viceroy had cut off Monastario's flowery speech.

His excellency the Viceroy, Don Esteban Salazar, was a portly man of middle age. His deep-set eyes were keen and sharply intelligent, and there lurked at the corners of them a bit of humor, which was showing itself now as the commandante escorted him and his daughter across the plaza to the *posada*.

Constancia was his youngest daughter, a beautiful girl whom the Viceroy could not deny when she begged to make this trip from Spain with him. Before her, Monastario was at his best, his chest stuck out, his manners most gracious.

“Our inn is poor but it is the best we have,” the commandante said. “I have had all the rooms emptied so that you will not be disturbed. If only I had been given notice of your coming, I could have prepared a proper reception for you.”

Constancia smiled at Monastario. “We were happily surprised at the reception.”

“Our people are poor, but most contented,” the commandante said.

“The reports that I have seen said little of contented people,” the Viceroy said. “They spoke of angry rancheros, of filled jails, of heavy taxes, and of crime.”

“Are these oppressed people?” Monastario swept his hand toward the curious crowd. “As for crime and a filled jail, may I ask your excellency to visit the *cuartel* with me? There is one prisoner in all the cells, and he is a most dangerous one whom I will tell you about later.”

“I’ll take your word about the empty cells,” the Viceroy said.

They entered the *posada*. Gonzalez was there in his filthy apron, bowing almost to the floor.

“Some of the reports spoke of trouble amounting to rebellion,” the Viceroy said. “And there were many references to this outlaw—what was his name? Oh, yes, Zorro, the fox.”

“That one has been as clever as the devil himself,” Monastario said grimly. “He even robbed a church just a few nights ago, although I managed to recover the crown of jewels he took from the Virgin.” The commandante smiled. “Later I will have a report on him, which I am sure will please you.”

“That will interest me, I’m sure,” the Viceroy said. He went upstairs with his daughter. On the balcony the Viceroy murmured to Constanca, “What do you think of our commandante?”

Constancia smiled. "A handsome man, of course."

"And is that all?"

"He is your problem, father, not mine."

The Viceroy smiled as he went to his room.

Monastario strutted across the plaza. The prisoners and citizens of the town who had accepted his offer of free wine were now celebrating in the small cantina near the barracks. There was much noise.

He found Garcia coming from the *cuartel*. "Is Zorro safely locked up?"

"Zorro? Oh, you mean Don Diego? *Si*, commandante, he is in his cell, but I think it is a mistake. I think—"

"Silence, you fat baboon! Place two guards at the door of the cell."

Garcia saluted and started to leave.

"Clear everyone out of the cantina and tell them to stay away from the plaza."

"But, commandante, you promised—"

"Do it as quietly as possible. I want no noise to disturb the Viceroy and his daughter. After they leave tomorrow, you will return every one of the released prisoners to jail."

Garcia shrugged helplessly. "Already some of them have run away. They did not trust such good luck."

“Those who did not run away will go back to jail. The others we will catch later.”

“*Si*, commandante.” Garcia stood shaking his head for several moments after Monastario left. .

The commandante went to his quarters to change clothes. Everything must be just right.

Tonight there would be a dinner. Of course the alcalde and a few others who thought they were of some importance would have to be invited, but they would have no complaints to make to the Viceroy because they knew what would happen to them after he left, if they let their tongues run loose.

The only one who might have spoiled things was Zorro, and he was taken care of now. As a crowning event after the dinner, Monastario would reveal Zorro's identity to the Viceroy. That would be something to remember!

The commandante admired himself in the mirror. He was both handsome and smart and he was sure that he had impressed Constanca. What a lovely woman she was! A marriage to her would make his promotion certain and quick.

Colonel Monastario. Perhaps General Monastario.



## Chapter 21

## Justice

Before he went to the dinner in the *posada*, Monastario walked to Diego's cell to be sure he was still confined. Corporal Ortega and another lancer were on duty. The commandante examined the lock. Everything was secure.

"Was the Viceroy impressed by your wonderful display?" Diego asked.

"He will be more impressed by your hanging at dawn tomorrow."

Diego laughed. "Wouldn't it be awful if Zorro showed up suddenly and ruined everything for you?"

"I have nothing to fear from Zorro any longer," said Monastario sharply. "Guards, keep your eyes on this prisoner every moment." He was humming a tune as he walked from the *cuartel* and across the plaza to the inn.

Gonzalez had strained himself to provide an excellent

meal. The music was good. Seated near Constanca, the commandante spoke modestly of the good work he had been doing as military leader of the pueblo. The alcalde and other leading citizens had little to say, but Pina, always nervous, talked in glowing terms of the justice and order of the community.

The Viceroy seemed to be impressed.

"It is to be regretted that you cannot stay with us longer, your excellency," Monastario told the Viceroy, "but we know you are anxious to continue your tour of inspection."

"I have a great deal of ground to cover, yes," the Viceroy said. "San Juan Capistrano and San Luis Rey to see the good work of the padres, and then on to San Diego, where we will spend some time."

"Perhaps I will have a chance to see you in San Diego," the commandante said. "For a long time I have been unable to leave this area because of the annoyance of the outlaw Zorro." He paused. "But now that I have captured him—"

"You have caught Zorro?" the alcalde cried.

Pina was stunned also, for it was news to him, but he recovered to say, "I always said you would catch him!"

"Excuse me." Monastario went to the door and talked to one of his lancers. Two of the soldiers who were escort-

ing the Viceroy were there on guard also, tall, tough-looking lancers with none of the sloppy appearance of Monastario's force.

When the commandante returned to the table, he said, "I have arranged a small surprise."

It was not long afterward that Garcia and two lancers arrived with a black-cloaked man, masked and dressed as Zorro. "As you can see, excellency, I have at last brought the fox to trap. Our reports have told you of the crimes of this man. Tomorrow at dawn he will be hanged." The commandante gestured dramatically. "And now I wish you to see Zorro!"

There was a dead silence in the room as Garcia began to untie the mask. It came free.

"Diego!" Constancia cried. "Diego de la Vega!"

The Viceroy frowned. "What kind of joke is this, Monastario?"

"You—you—know this man?" Monastario stammered.

"Why, certainly," the Viceroy said. "He and my son went to the university together in Spain, and long before that his father and I were friends."

Diego bowed to the Viceroy and his daughter.

"I am sorry, excellency," Monastario said, "but still he





is the outlaw Zorro and his crimes are many.”

“Don Alejandro de la Vega is one of the wealthiest land-owners in California,” the Viceroy said coldly. “Why would his son be an outlaw?”

“I do not believe it!” Constanca said. “The real Zorro—whoever he is—is he such an outlaw after all?”

“If fighting against the tyranny of the commandante makes him an outlaw, then he is one,” Diego said. “Zorro has my sympathy. If I had his skill and daring, perhaps I, too, would be that kind of outlaw.”

Once more Monastario’s cruel features were white with rage. “Put the mask back on him, Garcia!” When that was done, the commandante turned to the alcalde. “*Señor*, you have seen Zorro. Is this man not he?”

The alcalde shrugged. “In the costume he looks like Zorro . . . but I cannot say. . . .”

“Garcia! Is this man Zorro?” Monastario demanded.

“I said I thought it was a mistake, capitan. I—”

“Pina! You have seen Zorro at close range. Can you identify this prisoner?”

Pina licked his lips. “I am positive, yes. Without doubt this man is Zorro.”

“You see, excellency?” Monastario looked at the Viceroy.

The Viceroy nodded thoughtfully.

“Lock him up, Garcia!” the commandante said.

“Don Esteban,” Diego said, “may I have a favor? May I talk to you a moment with the commandante out of the room?”

Monastario started a quick protest, but the Viceroy cut him off. “He will not escape.”

The commandante went out. He stamped around in the plaza. He didn't like the looks of the soldiers the Viceroy had brought with him. Instead of being in the cantina drinking wine, they were standing in watchful attitude around the inn. Ten of them altogether. Well, tomorrow they would be gone, along with the Viceroy.

Garcia called from the doorway for the commandante to return to the inn. Zorro was standing where he had been before, still with the mask on.

“Capitan Monastario, there is no doubt in my mind as to your intentions,” the Viceroy said. “You wish to capture Zorro.”

“He *is* captured!”

“This costume which you have provided for Don Diego is the same as the one Zorro wears?”

“It is exactly the same, excellency!”

“Good.” The Viceroy nodded. “Now look closely at Don Diego and tell me honestly—could you not mistake him for someone else in that costume?”

“I am not mistaken! That is Zorro. I have seen him myself too many times to be mistaken!”

“You say Diego there is Zorro?”

“I do!”

“But any man wearing that mask and cloak and hat might be mistaken for Zorro,” the Viceroy said. It appeared that he was losing his argument.

Garcia rolled his eyes, but he said nothing. Pina was trying to attract Monastario’s attention, but the commandante was interested in no one but Diego and the Viceroy.

“It is possible that anyone could wear those clothes, yes,” Monastario agreed, “but Zorro has one height, one weight, one way of carrying his head and shoulders. I know him well.” He pointed his finger. “That is Zorro!”

At that moment Don Diego stepped from the kitchen in his shirt sleeves. “One could not ask for a more positive identification than that, Don Esteban.”

Monastario stared in bewildered fury. He stepped over to the masked man and knocked his hat off, then jerked the mask away. One of his own lancers stood before him.

“A foul trick!” Monastario yelled in astonishment and frustration.

“Just a matter of mistaken identity,” the Viceroy said.

“I *know* Don Diego is Zorro!” the commandante cried. “On my life, I know it!” He jerked Garcia’s sword from its scabbard and tossed it to Diego, who caught it without thinking. “I demand satisfaction, de la Vega!”

Monastario rushed to the attack.

Diego fell back. He defended himself only. He was clumsy, as he had been against Mendez, but still he was keeping from being killed. Monastario pressed him to the wall. The commandante made a hard thrust and Diego parried it awkwardly.

The hilts of the swords clanged together and the men were face to face at close range. “I will force you to reveal yourself or be killed!” Monastario said.

The commandante leaped back. Diego slid along the wall and got a table between them. Splinters flew from it as Monastario hacked and jabbed across the boards, his blade driven down by Diego’s flailing efforts.

Monastario rushed around the end of the table and Diego retreated again. No matter how the commandante tried he could not get a thrust into his opponent’s body, nor could

he force the younger man to show his true skill, for Diego continued to appear awkward—and lucky.

The commandante knew better; he had seen great swordsmanship before and he knew what skill was involved in what Diego was doing. But it had gone far enough.

“That is enough! Stop it!” the Viceroy called.

The two men lowered their swords. Diego started to lay his weapon on the table. An instant later it was knocked from his hand and then the point of Monastario’s weapon was at his throat.

“Now!” the commandante said. “Admit it, de la Vega! Admit before his excellency that you are truly Zorro, or your throat will never utter another sound!”

“Put that sword down,” the Viceroy commanded.

“No! I will give him one last chance to speak the truth!” Monastario pressed the point of his blade a bit harder against Diego’s neck.

Excited shouts came from outside. There was the sound of a galloping horse. Something thumped hard against the door of the inn. A voice shouted, “Zorro!”

Soldiers in the *posada* rushed to the door in time to see a great black stallion galloping through the gateway of the pueblo, and on him a rider whose black cloak streamed

behind him as the horse thundered into the night.

The cries were still coming. "Zorro!"

The Viceroy and Constanca were watching Monastario. For a moment it seemed that he would carry out his murderous intention, and then he lowered his sword and leaned on the table like a man completely beaten.

Garcia came trotting to the Viceroy with a note that had been tied to the rock which had struck the door. It read: "Invite me to the next dinner you have, commandante." It was signed, "Zorro."

"That may be quite difficult," the Viceroy said. He walked over to Monastario. "Your little demonstration tonight convinces me that all the evidence against you is correct."

"You would take the word of my enemies?" the commandante said.

"It seems that everyone in southern California is your enemy," the Viceroy said grimly. "I was simply giving you rope to hang yourself. You may find that you have done just that when you face your court-martial in Monterey."

The Viceroy called to his own guards outside the door. A sergeant and a corporal stepped in briskly. "I place Capitan Monastario and the lawyer Pina under arrest," the

Viceroy said. "Put them in jail until arrangements are made to transport them by sea to Monterey for trial."

Two more of the Viceroy's escort showed in the doorway. Pina was quivering like a scared mouse, and the commandante was staring at his feet in a stunned way as the soldiers took them out.

The Viceroy smiled at Diego. "It was my intention all the time to visit here several days, and now that the air is cleared somewhat, I will do just that. How is your father, Don Diego?"

"He growls as loudly as ever," Diego said, as he walked toward Constancia, "but I know how happy he will be to see you both."

The Viceroy turned to Garcia. "No matter what you were forced to do at times in carrying out orders, all reports on you, Sergeant Garcia, indicate that you are in sympathy with the people of this pueblo and the surrounding area."

Garcia saluted. "Yes, your excellency."

"Until a new commandante is appointed here, you will command this garrison."

Garcia's hand came down from salute as if it had lost all its strength. "You are in charge," the Viceroy said.

Garcia stumbled out. It occurred to him to give a lot of



orders, but all he could think of at the moment was to have the cantina reopened at once. But no, perhaps that was not the thing to do so soon after becoming a man of great importance.

As he started across the plaza, the lancer Ybarra stopped him. "They have put the commandante in jail. What happened in the *posada* tonight, fat one?"

"Fat one, is it?" Garcia murmured.

"Yes, you old wine belly, tell me what happened in the *posada*."

"Wine belly it is also," Garcia said. "A great many things happened. Among them, the Viceroy, who is a man of great wisdom, has appointed a new commandante of this miserable place where soldiers insult their superiors."

"Not so much talk. Do we know this new commandante?"

"You will wish you had never known him if you call him fat one and wine belly again!"

"You!" Ybarra gulped.

"Me, Miguel Demetrio Lopez Velasquez Garcia! Now get to your post!"

Ybarra had no post but he thought it a good idea to get somewhere quickly, which he did. Garcia strode on to the

barracks, very full of business. He could not quite decide what it was, but that would come later.

One thing he would not do and that was to make a fool of himself by trying to catch Zorro. Zorro harmed no one, and he had always been a friend of those who were being treated unjustly.

Out in the night on the road to the Rancho de la Vega a big black stallion was cantering along, ridden by the man who had charged into the plaza to throw a stone against the door of the *posada*.

Bernardo had never been as frightened in his life as he was when he did that. All those soldiers there! Why, they might have killed him. But he had done it and he had escaped with his life and now he felt wonderful, because when he had gone back to the plaza after taking off the Zorro costume, he had heard the people talking about the arrest of Monastario.

And they had been laughing about Monastario's effort to make it appear that Don Diego de la Vega was Zorro.

Things would be better now, no matter who the new commandante was—but just in case Zorro had to ride again, Bernardo would keep Tornado ready.



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