

Angelina  
by  
J Michael Parker

## Preface

Many years ago, my son's godfather and his beautiful fiancée, Angelina, were taken hostage by a crazed jilted suitor and held at gunpoint for several hours. It was a harrowing experience for them, but they came through it just fine and were married soon afterward. Some years later, I wrote a rather romanticized version of the story in a song titled "Angelina." My son has always loved the song, and I was fond of singing it for him at family gatherings. This story is a literary version of the song, which I hope will one day entertain his son.

### Dedication

This story is dedicated to the Luna, Contreras, and Murrieta families, and to Daniel Sisto Ybarra Luna, the greatest man and only father I have ever known.

*Angelina*

*A silent dip of darkened skies, moonbeams shadowed vision, echoed light of billion years flash upon the canyon. A hawk soars in the desert night casting his shadow below, catching two young lovers in desperate flight crossing the border from Mexico.*

*What have you done, Angelina? You know they'll come for his blood. His tender heart is your only freedom--you better run, girl, run.*

*Out across the Apache Nation, Arizona sun is on the rise; the painted desert's an inspiration to life and death in disguise. Forty caballeros saddle their horses called by Diablo to ride, the sorcerer summons his evil forces, Roberto Luna must die.*

*What have you done, Angelina? You know they'll come for his blood. His tender heart is your only freedom--you better run, girl, run.*

*They reach the Sky Mountains aware of the danger, in a place they call Cochise Stronghold. Pray Godspeed they reach the chapel hidden in the valley below. Among the tall oaks along the river sits the Lost Mission of the Sacred Heart. It is said that two who offer the vows of surrender, not even the devil can tear them apart.*

*What have you done, Angelina? You know they'll come for his blood. His tender heart is your only freedom--you better run, girl, run.*

## Prologue

The four Aztec priests hold down the flawless young mulatto who wears the headdress of Tez-cat-li-po-ca (Smoking Mirror, god of the sun) here at the festival the Aztecs call Tox-catl. The high priest takes the Tec-patl (sacred knife) fashioned after the brother and rival of Tezcatlipoca, Quet-zal-co-atl (Feathered Serpent, god of knowledge), and viciously carves out the frightened captive's heart with it. He stands and turns, holding up the still-beating muscle triumphantly for all the royals assembled here at the Hue-yi Teo-kalli (Templo Mayor, or main temple) in the Aztec capital city of Te-no-cht-it-lan (modern-day Mexico City) to see. It is the first time the sacrifice of the Ix-ip-tla (Tezcatlipoca impersonator) has been conducted in the Patio of the Gods. The Spanish soldiers, guarding this city under siege in Governor Hernan Cortés's absence, have refused to allow any of the Aztec monarchy or priests out of their sight. Hence, the abrupt alteration of the location of the ceremony to honor Tla-loc (god of rain).

The provisional governor, Pedro de Alvarado, has already seen enough of what he believes to be hedonistic debauchery and orders the guards to block all the Templo Mayor exits. As the male Aztec dancers conclude the "Dance of the Serpent" and the female dancers begin the "Dance of the Grilled Maize," Pedro de Alvarado signals the Spanish guard to close in. In so doing, his orders initiate what will forever be known as the infamous "Toxcatl Massacre" where over eight thousand of the most revered Aztec royalty are mercilessly slaughtered and desecrated, their bodies stripped of any precious gold, turquoise, and a meriad array of ornamental jewelry. Astonishingly, in the confusion of the blood lust, the high priest is able to pass the Serpent blade unnoticed to eleven-year-old Te-cu-ich-po-tzin, the daughter of the last true Aztec King, Mo-te-cuh-zo-ma Xo-co-yo-tzin (Moctezuma II). She races down the hidden steps behind the main altar with her maidservant and directs the young slave girl to take the Tecpatl and hide with it in the grain storage until she can be summoned. Tecuichpotzin returns

to the temple floor and lies down among the dead, covering herself with their blood and entrails, all the while praying silently, fearfully, for To-nan-tzin (Mother Earth) to spare her life.

Only the high priests know the dark mysteries behind the festival and the symbolic power of the Tecpatl, or the significance of the capital city's didactically apollyonic layout. Perplexing, since the outer walls of Tenochtitlan tell the story to anyone willing to uncover Quetzalcoatl's deception. The true story of the fallen spirits of the netherworld who masquerade among men as the sons of O-me-te-otl (Dual Cosmic Energy, creator of all things seen and unseen) is thinly veiled there in the Co-a-te-pant-li or Muro de Serpientes (serpent wall). Since before the days of the Tol-tec Empire, Quetzalcoatl has fooled the Mesoamericans into believing he is the god of knowledge, and equal to the god of creation, with surprising ease. Likewise, with little effort, he has deceived them into believing Hui-tzi-lo-pocht-li (Left-handed Hummingbird, god of war) is actually a true god himself and equal as well.

In fact, Huitzilopochtli is nothing more than the spirit of war and hate which through minor manipulation the Serpent has instilled in men's hearts in order to incite them into warfare and bloodshed. Nevertheless, the ancient deceiver had to applaud the Aztecs for turning his subtle suggestions into their own free for all of mayhem, carnal worship, and human sacrifice. Like the Mayans centuries earlier, the Aztecs had been duped by the Serpent into believing the gods demanded such anti-human acts. Moreover, just like the Mayans, the Serpent had successfully subverted yet another willing civilization into their own ultimate destruction by giving them a heart for war and not peace, by twisting the naturally good into manipulated evil, and by turning his insidious lies into falsely perceived truth.

In the first few centuries after the great flood, the nomadic peoples who traveled across the Bering Straits and settled in present day Mesoamerica did not care for war or violence. They lived in relatively harmonious existence with the earth and their fellow man for many thousands of years, that is, until the Serpent emerged like a pandemic over the entire western hemisphere, bringing death and destruction in his wake. From the time of the Feathered Serpent's first recorded appearance around 1600 BC, every culture in the western hemisphere who falsely believed the Serpent was a god to be worshiped came to a most horrible end, and their once mighty civilizations left in ruin.

The Serpent first appeared to the Ol-mec people in La Venta, near the present-day city of Tabasco sometime around the days of Moses, and there slowly infiltrated their consciousness. It was only a matter of time before he had established himself as a venerable deity worthy of worship. In the ancient multicultural city of Teotihuacan during the days of the Apostles, the first elaborate structure of homage called the Temple of the Feathered Serpent was constructed at the end of the Avenue of the Dead, where its ruins stand to this day. A few centuries later, The Feathered Serpent materialized for the first time as Quetzalcoatl to the Northern Mayan and Na-hu-a tribes who built the largest and most imposing temple pyramid in the city of Tu-la in his honor. About the same time, he revealed himself to the Yucatan Mayans as Ku-kul-kan, and they built the great pyramid, El Castillo, at Chichen Itza in order to worship

him in grand style. Soon afterward, the Q'iche Mayans erected the Temple of Q'uq'u-matz in the ancient Yucatan city of Q'u-mar-kaj as a tribute to the Feathered Serpent.

Very near this same time, down in South America, the Serpent made himself known first to the Ti-wan-a-ku as, Vir-a-co-cha, and then later to the Incans by the same name. In North America, the Feathered Serpent appeared to the Pueblo Indians, who called him A-wan-yu; to the Zuni, who called him Ko-low-is-i; to the Hopi Indians, who called him Pa-lu-lu-ka; and to the Al-gon-quin Indian tribes, who referred to him as Mis-hip-i-zheu. On the other hand, in stark contrast, he was perceived and depicted as a two-horned serpent by the vast majority of Northern American indigenous tribes. Unlike the tribes of Mesoamerican and South American, these tribes considered the Serpent to be an evil entity and they refused to subjugate themselves to the ancient deceiver and his destructive ideology. This was especially true among the Apache Indians, who resided in a land called los Montañas del Cielo (Sky Islands). The Chir-icahua Apache not only believed the Serpent to be an evil spirit, but they also considered all snakes to be unclean animals to be spurned, neither suitable for human consumption nor tribal ornamentation.

This is the story of one of those Chiricahua Apache from the Be-don-ko-he tribe, and his most cherished love, Angelina.

## Chapter One

Father Ramón Ortiz y Miera, a stout man with a tussle of graying hair, walks down the hall toward the chapel entrance here at the Mission de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in El Paso del Norte. Located in the northwest corner of Chihuahua, the mission has come a long way since its founding by Franciscan Friar Garcia de San Francisco, in 1659. Back then, it was nothing more than a tiny one-room church made of mud and stone. The year is 1880, and Father Ortiz is thankful for the past few months of relative peace and tranquility after the endless domestic turmoil of the last few decades.\*

The chapel is empty except for one of its most frequent visitors, young Roberto Luna. Father Ortiz smiles broadly to himself at the memory of Roberto's arrival at the mission some twenty-one years ago. A Mexican soldier by the name of Daniel Sisto Ybarra Luna rode into the mission late one cold rainy night in January--the padre had been awoken by the bells of the main gate, and after some confusion, entered the courtyard to find a cavalryman holding a bundled horse blanket in his arms.

"¿Padre, me puedes ayudar?"

The soldier told a story of how his regiment had come upon a band of Apache camped to the northwest, in a village the Chiricahua call Kas-ki-yeh. They had caught the Indians by surprise, and many were killed in the skirmish. He had discovered a baby in one of the Indian tents and was ordered by his captain to drown the child in the river, but he just couldn't bring himself to go through with it. The soldier said he rode all night to deliver his package to the mission, and he must ride back immediately so he would not be missed at morning muster. He mounted his horse and turned toward the gate, looking down at Father Ortiz.

"Se llama Roberto. Adios, padre."



Then, as quickly as he had arrived, the soldier, Daniel Sisto Ybarra Luna, rode off into the night, never to be heard from again. It seemed appropriate to Father Ortiz to baptize the child with the Christian name Roberto Antonio Luna, after the man who had spared his life. Roberto, a handsome young man standing nearly six feet tall, has grown up to be a superlative pupil and exceptionally inquisitive, very much like the padre had been at his age.

"Good morning, Padre."

"Good morning, Roberto, and a fine morning it is."

"Yes, Padre. It is a fine morning, a good day to search for hidden treasures."

"I see. King Solomon would be proud."

"Oh, sí. Gracias, Padre."

"So, where has your search taken you today, mi hijo?"

"Well, Padre, I have always appreciated the teachings of Saint Thomas. In the *Quinque Viae*, I am convinced we have the analytical *a priori* proof of our Lord's existence. Personally, I find great comfort in knowing my Lord set all things in motion, and that He is the pinnacle of perfection for which we all strive."

"Very good, Roberto. I too find solace in the guidance of Saint Thomas. Having experienced firsthand the very fleeting nature of our own existence and the things of this world, it is reassuring to know our Lord has always been. That being said, I'm curious as to what has you contemplating these things, mi hijo?"

"Certainly, Padre. I know God's Word teaches us of creation--and, of course, this is sufficient for me; however, I also enjoy the natural sciences and what they teach us about the world around us."

"Sí, *fides quaerens intellectum*. Go on."

"Well, Padre, when el profesor had us studying Darwin's work on the origins of life, I found natural selection to be compelling, and certainly no real threat to the teachings of the scriptures as he and so many others outside and inside the church would suggest."

"Interesting--continue."

"The fact that Genesis speaks in such broad generalities allows for interpretations such as these, and within Saint Thomas's argument from efficient causes or his argument from design, I believe some of Darwin's conclusions are allowably plausible."

"Perhaps. Proceed."

"Of course, Padre. El profesor's new lessons are on Immanuel Kant's book, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, as a follow-up to our study of his earlier text, *Critique of Pure Reason*."

"And this is where the problem lies?"

"I'm not really sure, Padre. Señor Kant contends metaphysical principles are *a priori* in

that they are not simply derived from external or internal experience but that they exist apart from man's sensory perception. Likewise, all collective metaphysical knowledge is philosophical cognition, which can come only from pure understanding and pure reason. Kant's conclusions seem to be in contradiction with Saint Thomas, in that the five ways are based on external experience as much as reason alone. Yet, at the same time, Kant's argument for metaphysical possibilities based on synthetic *a priori* reason are not without flaw, as Kant himself freely admits. So, I guess the problem is, as a naturalist, el profesor embraces Kant's implied refutation of Saint Thomas with great enthusiasm while at the same time proclaiming Kant 'no Hume' in his 'time-wasting' arguments for any possibility of a science of metaphysics. And, therein is my dilemma. I feel as though el profesor is only willing to admit those errors which fit into his own limited ideology."

"Yes, I see, my son. So, what is it you would have your professor do?"

"Ultimately, Father, I would that he come to the mass and be filled with the Spirit of the Lord so he would know for himself metaphysics is at once an internal and external experience which breaks down all barriers of rationality and empiricism, not just theoretical theological phenomenology based on some hypothetical noumena that can't possibly be understood--although, I doubt he would. However, in matters of knowledge, I expect el profesor to be more open to all the possibilities of understanding on the subject, not just his own."

"I understand completely. I have encountered this brand of contrary behavior in many such men. You see, Roberto, the chief problem of knowledge is one of clarity, which eludes a man when he concludes he has arrived at a place of understanding. Prejudiced by some perceived mastery, he forsakes seeking answers, assuming what he believes to be true concerning a particular matter must be so. Any additional information he receives on the matter serves only as proof to him he is correct, whether he truly is or not."

"Why is that, Padre?"

"Primarily, because pride forces him to reject any conflicting counsel. After all, who has greater awareness or keener insight of the facts than this man? How large the problem becomes for not only this unfortunate, but all those within his sphere of influence, depends severely on the level of power such an arrival affords him."

"I see, Padre."

"Understand, Roberto, whether it be matters of religion, or matters of science, be wary of any man who claims to be a learned scholar. Men such as these love to boast of their discoveries, and perhaps even more so, their disciples, who claim through one experiment or another they have proven beyond a doubt their seer is unmistakably correct. It is said Columbus discovered the Americas, and Galileo discovered gravity--what utter folly! I might as well boast this morning I awoke from my bed and discovered my toes, and then go ahead and have you scientifically verify that, in fact, my toes do exist so you can boast in my boasting. All hail the discovery of me and thee! Preposterous! Of what consequence are any of man's discoveries,

when all these things are presently divined by their creator? You see Roberto, there are no inconsistencies between God and science; any inconsistencies are due solely to man's misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations of both God and science."

Father Ortiz examines his young protégé as if to ascertain how his counsel has been received. He is well pleased to find a look of understanding in the ephebic Luna's eyes.

"Can anything be completely understood, Padre?" Roberto asks.

"Not in this life, my son."

Puzzled, Roberto inquires, "Then how do we know--whether we know anything?"

"This is the wisdom of the Proverb, my son. Mankind collectively cannot know anything with any surety, let alone one man. If we were to live for another million years, we would be no closer to the truth of any matter than we are today. Therefore, our search for knowledge must needs lead us to God, for He alone possesses any real knowledge, and He alone can dispense any true understanding."

"Then I shall seek the Lord with all my being, Padre."

"Very well, my son, and I shall pray His grace may guide you unto all wisdom."

Father Ortiz rises and bids Roberto follow. They walk down the nave, across the transept, up the chancel, through the apse, and out through the sacristy. Beyond the door of the sacristy lies the gardens which show all the signs of the impeccable care bestowed on them by the native residents of the mission. Besides a plentiful array of vegetables, the garden also hosts apple trees, orange trees, peach trees, and row upon row of grapevines. Beyond the gardens are the stables and livestock pens, and further still the grazing fields. Out in the courtyard, one of Don Luis Terrazas's caballeros rides in and dismounts from his horse.

"Buenos días, Padre."

"Buenos días, Señor Vasquez. What brings you to the mission?"

"I have come from the hacienda of Señor Don Luis Terrazas in the hopes you may be able to assist me."

"I will help any way I can. What is it you require?"

"Well, Padre, Señor Terrazas has committed many of his vaqueros in the service of Coronel Joaquin Terrazas, his cousin, for the purpose of hunting down the Apache, Victorio. The miscreant and his raiding party are camped out at Tres Castillos, and many men have volunteered from the hacienda to assist the regulars. I don't have to tell you the damage estos salvajes have caused here and throughout the rest of Chihuahua."

"No, no. Por favor, how can we be of assistance?"

"We are in need of anyone who can handle a horse and rope. With so many vaqueros gone, we are short-handed out on the rancho."

"I can handle a horse and rope," Roberto offers.

"I don't know--don't you have your studies to be concerned with?"

"Sí, Padre, but I could use a break from school, as you well know, and it is for a good cause."

Father Ortiz studies Roberto for a moment. "Well, Señor Vasquez, what do you think?"

"Like I said, we can use all the help we can get. I'll take him, if he's capable."

"Oh, he is more than capable."

"Well, then...."

"You heard him, mi hijo. Go get packed and I'll saddle a horse for you. When you're ready, meet us over at the stable."

"¡Enseguida Padre; gracias, Padre, gracias!"

\*See appendix A, section 1.

## Chapter Two

Father Ortiz's upbringing on his family's rancho in Sante Fe has afforded the padre extensive knowledge on the ways of the vaquero, and he has taught Roberto well. Roberto is astutely aware of Señor Vasquez watching him as he ties the fiodor knot onto the bosal of the jaquima. Although the veteran cowboy's poker face has given away nothing, Roberto knows Señor Vasquez's silence is worth its weight in gold. Father Ortiz has saddled his best Criollo for Roberto, and the stallion is holding his own alongside the caballero's fine caballo. The braided horsehair mecate feels good in his hand as they ride along the el Camino Real de Tierra Adentro.

The two riders stop at Ojo de Samalayuca to water their horses. Roberto's new el jefe dismounts and tells him he must talk with the proprietor of the livery. "Stay with the horses; I'll only be a moment."

"Sí, señor."

Roberto climbs down from his high treed saddle and takes the reins from Señor Vasquez. The wells at Samalayuca are drying up from several years of drought, but for the right price there is still water for those who can afford it. The attendant of the well recognizes the brand on Señor Vasquez's steed and fills the trough without a word. The distinctive brand of Don Luis Terrazas is elaborate by northern standards but much simpler than the family crest brands of the old Spanish haciendados. The brand is a large engraver's capital T with a connected lower case cursive h coming from the T stem; then the ending curl of the h is topped off with a falling tilde set at a descending forty-five degree angle. The tilde has become a common addition among the brands of Mexican ranchers in order to distinguish Mexican cattle from US cattle. The rustling of Mexican cattle along the border by US outlaws and Apache Indians is all too common, and even though these brands stand out, very few US cattlemen have had the

decency to turn away or return the stolen cattle coming out of Mexico.

After the horses have had their fill, Roberto leads them out to the field behind the livery so they can graze for a while. The landscape here in the northern desert country can be difficult even at its best, but during the dry years it is desperately unforgiving. Thank goodness for the creosote bushes, which grow everywhere throughout Chihuahua. The leaves are bitter, but the plant holds water and is used for everything from respiratory infections to religious ceremonies. The horses pick off the driest leaves and branches which are the least bitter, because the horses instinctively know the value of the creosote.

Roberto retrieves a couple carrots and a salt lick from his saddlebag and holds them out for the horses--not too much, but just enough to restore their energy. Across the street from the livery, two men, one in his mid-thirties and the other perhaps in his fifties, exit the Cantina de Cocina and walk toward Roberto. Not knowing their intentions, he gathers the horses and proceeds rapidly toward the front of the livery, but the two men intercept him before he can gain his objective.

"Hola. Perdoname."

"Sí."

"Mi tío and I are curious if you know of any work available on the ranchos of Señor Don Luis Terrazas. I noticed the brand on your caballo. We are able vaqueros in need of employment."

"Disculpeme, but aren't you Tomas Procopio Bustamante?"

"Sí, para el."

"I have read so much about you--you're famous! Oh my goodness, this is unbelievable."

Roberto is beside himself with excitement at this improbable development. He rubs his eyes as if he will open them and find it is all just a mirage. However, when he opens his eyes, Procopio is still right in front of him. He looks at the older man and blurts out, "And you must be Señor Joaquin Murrieta?"

"Sí, para el."

"The Robin Hood of Mexico! No, no, no--this can't be! You're dead, killed by the California Rangers--your head is on display in San Francisco!"

"I assure you, I am not dead, young man. Those California Rangers could never catch me, but I am sorry for whatever poor soul lost his head on my account."

"¡Ay, Dios mío! Esto es imposible."

Roberto is feeling dizzy and light-headed, and turns looking for a place to sit down before he falls down. Procopio steps in to steady him.

"Get a hold of yourself, hombre. You can believe your eyes, amigo--we are not apparitions. Sin embargo, we are trying to keep a low profile, so por favor, let's just keep this to ourselves. ¿Verdad?"

Roberto reaches out to shake Señor Bustamante and Señor Murrieta's hand.\*

"Sí, sí. Me llamo Roberto. ¡Mucho gusto, mucho gusto!"

"Mucho gusto, Roberto," Procopio responds.

"Mucho gusto, muchacho," Señor Murrieta adds. "Now, how about those jobs?"

"Sí, señor. I am riding with the caballero Señor Vasquez. He is in the livery, and we are on our way to the rancho of Don Luis Terrazas presently. I know he's looking for men who can ride and handle a rope. Why don't you wait for me in the cantina, and I'll speak to him when he returns."

"Gracias, amigo--we appreciate it."

The two men shake Roberto's hand and turn back toward the cantina.

Señor Vasquez walks out of the livery and heads over to the well, looking for Roberto. Upon seeing the caballero, Roberto takes the horses over to meet him.

"¡Señor!"

"There you are. Mount up; we have a long ride ahead of us."

"Sí, señor."

Roberto hands the reins of Señor Vasquez's horse over to him. "Señor, two men came from the cantina and asked me if there was any work on the ranchos of Señor Don Luis Terrazas. I told them I would speak with you concerning su pregunta."

"Did they appear to be vaqueros?"

"Sí, señor, they said they were."

"Good. I can use as many men as I can get right now. Where are they?"

"They are in the cantina, señor. I can retrieve them if you wish."

"Sí, Roberto--go get them, and hurry along. We need to be on our way."

"Sí, señor; pronto."

Roberto hands the reins of his Criollo to Señor Vasquez and runs over to the cantina, ascending the steps in one long stride. He swings open the doors and steps into the cantina looking for Procopio and his tío. Spotting them, he gestures for them to make haste. Roberto can't hide his exhilaration, feeling he has done something good for these men whom he considers heroes, and maybe for himself as well.

After some discussion, Señor Vasquez and the two infamous vaqueros settle on an agreeable wage, and then the four men head on down the trail toward the Royal Road.

"Oye, hombres, los Medanos are never easy to traverse even in the best of times. I want to arrive at the presidio in Carrizal by nightfall. It's already after high noon and there's still a considerable ride ahead. ¡Vámanos!"

The men ride on quietly out under the desert sun along the dry sandy byway as their shadows begin to form on the left. Roberto is grateful to have his sombrero protecting him from

the cruel conditions of el calor de Septiembre. Señor Vasquez is just as thankful there's no wind today; a wind of no more than fifteen miles an hour can carry enough sand across the dunes and over the road to make travel nearly impossible, and he has no desire to turn back now.

Although the northern and eastern sections are mostly desert, the State of Chihuahua contains an extensively diverse geological landscape. The climate within the state varies from sub-tropical highlands to hot dry desert and everything in between, primarily due to its considerable size. Chihuahua is the largest state in Mexico, covering almost an eighth of the country's total land mass. To the west lie the Sierra Madres, with Cerra Mohinora rising nearly eleven thousand feet in elevation, but this range's main feature is the Barranca del Cobre, a network of six connecting canyons larger and deeper than the Grand Canyon, and it is said they contain more gold and silver than all the rest of Mexico combined. Although, since the rest of the country has enormous deposits of gold, silver, and other precious minerals, few but the most robust prospectors are willing to brave the canyon's unrelenting terrain. The Barranca del Cobre is also home to the two highest waterfalls in the country, Piedra Volada, and Basaseachic Falls. To the south, descending away from the Sierra Madres, are the steppe plains of the Altiplanicie Mexicana, which extends eastward to the southeastern desert country. It is this plentiful and rich cattle land Don Luis Terrazas covets most.

The Royal Road is not nearly as dangerous as it has been in times past, due to extensive campaigns against the Apache by the Rurales in recent years. Equally effective has been the conscripting of many of the bandidos along the border into the ranks of the Rurales by President Díaz. Nevertheless, the men keep a wary eye on the surrounding dunes, staggering their horses in order to protect themselves from any outlaws or Indians who may be lying in wait. It is not uncommon for would-be robbers to hide under the sand, ready to spring up out of nowhere and attack unsuspecting travelers. Not possessing any type of firearms, Roberto wisely sticks close by Señor Vasquez for protection.

Roberto has never encountered any kind of life-threatening danger within the relatively safe confines of the mission; consequently, the present situation has him contemplating what exactly he'd do if they were to come upon any real conflict. Never being one to back down from a fight, Roberto would like to think he'd react bravely, especially considering the fact that he hasn't much of a flight response in the face of danger, and more than once he's proven his mettle in the schoolyard. Perhaps it's the courage Father Ortiz has instilled in him, or maybe it's his Apache blood, but then, more likely it's a burden which might get him in trouble one day. Roberto crosses himself--all reminiscence and imagination aside, he preferred to forego being tested, and prayed they just get through this trip without incident.

In a matter of a few hours, the outfit emerges from the dunes, and the flat-topped Lucero Peak to the west indicates they're nearing Ojo de Lucero. The village there offers the prospect of food and drink; however, Señor Vasquez isn't slowing his horse as they pass, reinforcing his commitment to make the presidio by nightfall. As they near the Lagunas de Los Patos, the horses' restlessness suggests the caballero's desire to continue on without water and



rest is not entirely unanimous. Nevertheless, with some horsemanship the vaqueros make it beyond the lake without getting bucked or resorting to their spurs.

The sun begins to set in the west, and as dusk arrives all becomes immersed in the dim hue of twilight. Roberto hopes they're close to el Presidio del Carrizal so the day's ride can finally come to an end. Weariness has gotten the better of him and like the horse beneath him, his body is crying out for rest. Just then, a broad-billed hummingbird appears out of nowhere and circles, first fluttering, then floating around the head of each rider in this small contingent as if inspecting them in order to ascertain just what if any nectar they might possess, or perhaps wondering why they too are out here in this godforsaken place. Roberto watches the visitor dart away to the south up and over the horizon, and at that moment, like an omen, the outskirts of the presidio come into view. He could burst into song if his lips weren't so parched.

The Militar Presidio de San Fernando de las Amarillas del Carrizal was first established in 1758 by the Spanish provisional governor of Nuevo Vizcaya in an attempt to provide enough prison space for the ever-increasing number of convicted criminals in the northern territories of New Spain. In 1773, when the city of El Paso del Norte grew large enough to handle its own police work, the Spanish governor moved the military forces from the Presidio de El Paso del Norte to Carrizal in an effort to get the upper hand in the fight against the Chiricahua Apache. By the time Mexico had won its independence from Spain, the war with the Apache and Comanche was reaching a fevered pitch, so the presidio remained the center of the new Mexican government's northern military operations. From 1820 to 1880, the presidio has engaged in over sixteen hundred separate military actions against the Indian tribes in the area.

The presidio is virtually deserted as Señor Vasquez and his new vaqueros ride into town. The war against Victorio and the Chihenne tribe of the Chiricahua Apache has drawn all the military personnel, Rurales, Indian scouts, and volunteer militia--mostly vaqueros from the haciendas, out of Carrizal. Roberto and his new compañeros follow the lead of Señor Vasquez as he makes his way through town and over to the wrought iron gates of the fort. The sentry approaches and wastes no time getting the gate opened while heartily greeting the presidio's new guests.

"Buenas noches, Señor Vasquez. Venga, por favor. El capitán que esta a la espera."

"Gracias, amigo. Please escort my men to the barracks and see to it they get some supper."

"Sí señor, inmediatamente."

Señor Vasquez turns to his men while shaking the sand from his sombrero. "We head out at dawn. I'll see you men in the morning."

The vaqueros respond in the affirmative and follow the sentry into the interior of the presidio. Roberto is very proud to be included as one of the "men" Señor Vasquez was referring to, even though he isn't quite sure whether he has fully arrived just yet. It's dawning on him this trip will be the test of his manhood he's certain would not have come his way had he stayed at

the mission. He feels a sense of accomplishment at having kept up smartly with these seasoned veterans of the trail. It's a good start, sure enough, but right now, he's hoping they eat soon before he passes out.

Their gear stowed away in the barracks and the horses secured in the stable, Roberto and his amigos sit down to a plate of carne asada, arroz frito español, charro beans con cilantro y tomatillos, and fresh corn tortillas. The talk is at a minimum as the men wolf down their chow; Roberto might be inclined to compliment the cook if he could slow down long enough to taste his food. It's more a race against time and fatigue than hunger at this point, and he surely doesn't want to fall asleep face-down in his dinner like he used to when he was a boy. Roberto suspects he's not likely to impress anyone with his manliness if that should happen. Thankfully, he finishes up his meal without any embarrassing antics, and excuses himself from the table.

"I'm gonna hit the hay." Then, turning to their host, he adds, "Thanks for the grub. I'll see you gentlemen in the morning."

"De nada, señor. Buenas noches."

"Buenas noches, Roberto, and thanks again," Procopio replies.

"Sí, mi hijo, gracias y buenas noches," adds Señor Murrieta.

"Es un placer. Buenas noches compadres, buenas noches."

The bunks in the presidio are considerably softer than Roberto's bed at the mission. *These soldiers have it pretty good*, he imagines.

Roberto makes quick work of his nightly prayers with an extra word or two of thanks to Saint Christopher for his assistance, and with another full day's ride ahead, the Patron will be hearing from him first thing in the morning as well.

\*See appendix A, section 2.

### Chapter Three

The gallo's crow pierces the veil of darkness and harkens the dawn. He stops momentarily, to inspect the roost, keeping any pecking-order squabbles to a minimum with diligent intervention, then returns to his territorial announcements. The reigning champion of the presidio, victorious in more than a hundred hard-fought battles and with the scars to prove it, he has earned his place atop the casa de los pollos roof. So dominant is this rooster, no other cock's crow can be heard within the presidio gates, and if there were, he would be the first to silence them. Again he heralds the coming day, and with the outburst he breaks into the subconscious thoughts and dreams of Señor Javier Miguel Vasquez.

Said to be a descendent of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, Señor Vasquez has worked on the Hacienda de Encinillas since he was thirteen. His first haciendado was Don Angel Trias, the famous general and governor of Chihuahua during the Mexican American war. When Trias died in 1867, it was Vasquez who kept the hacienda going until a group of investors led by Henry Muller and Don Luis Terrazas purchased the sprawling historical estate in 1869. The caballero has seen his fair share of combat during several battles with the French, in which he rode with both Trias and General Porfirio Díaz. Last night he had a long talk with his old friend Captain Alvarado concerning the possibility of Victorio and his raiders retreating west from Tres Castillos through the Encinillas rancho lands owned by Terrazas. The captain was also concerned the troops of Coronel Terrazas might need to appropriate a number of cattle to feed his hungry soldiers.

Vasquez remarked, "it isn't my place to speak for Señor Don Luis, but it's better the fighting men of Coronel Terrazas should have the cattle rather than have them stolen by the Apache."

Señor Vasquez rises and slips on his botas; the day's ride ahead is pressing on his mind. If Victorio does retreat west, he could just as easily be headed through Ojo de Gallegos where the Royal Road reaches its highest point between El Paso del Norte and Chihuahua City, and right across their path. Then again, it isn't near as likely as the probability of bandidos taking advantage of the fact the Rurales were off fighting Victorio by robbing and pillaging travelers out on the Royal Road. He decides there is no sense in fretting over it, but just in case, he will secure extra guns and ammunition from the armory before they set out on their day's journey. Right now, it's time for some breakfast.

As he opens the door of his stateroom, the proud rooster swoops down from his perch across the center courtyard and struts past Señor Vasquez's door.

"Gracias, Señor Gallo! You have eased my mind and assured me victory, whomever my foe."

Roberto, awakened by the sounds of his boss's jubilation, jumps out of bed with a start. Fearing he's late, he quickly slips on his boots and emerges from his room, still fumbling to tuck in his guayabera and slip on his vaquero vest.

"Hola, señor; buenos días."

"Buenos días, Roberto. ¡La hora de desayunar!"

Señor Vasquez gives Roberto a hearty slap on the back as they walk to the mess hall. Procopio and Señor Murrieta join them, and they all head in for the morning meal. The cooks of the presidio have put together a great breakfast of huevos rancheros y salsa on crisp corn tortillas, pappas con chorizo, and semola de hominy con miel. The hungry cowboys waste no time digging in.

Breakfast done, Señor Vasquez commands the men, "You men grab your gear and saddle up. Roberto, you prepare my horse and then meet me at the armory."

"Sí señor," they reply in unison, and without hesitation the vaqueros proceed to their task.

At the armory, Señor Vasquez divides the ammunition and carefully loads a portion into each horse's saddlebag. He then skillfully attaches an extra scabbard onto his own caballo and slides one of three new E. Remington and Sons M1871 rolling-block carbines into it, directing Procopio and Murrieta to do the same. The preferred rifle of the Guardia Rural of Mexico because it's less prone to jam from dirt or sand common to the territory, this particular model uses the new Union Metallic Cartridge Company's 11m Spanish centerfire bottleneck cartridge with the reliable Berdan primer.

"Oye, I want your heads on a swivel out there today. We'll stop briefly at Ojo Caliente before the long hard ride to the mines of Jesús Maria, and I mean for us to get through without any interference. Comprendes?"

The vaqueros all nod in agreement.

"If we make good time, we might reach Ojo de Gallegos by nightfall. Ahora--mount up, let's ride!"

Although dry, the Río del Carmen winds back and forth across the camino, and its arroyos present ample opportunity for cover by would be saboteurs. Each crossing evokes anxious moments for the company and Señor Vasquez in particular. Normally he relies upon his equine companion to tip him off, but at the pace they're moving, it's not as easy to recognize the horse's signals, and even more difficult to stop in time to do anything about it. They arrive safely at Ojo Caliente which Vasquez is thankful for, however, he knows the next two legs of their trip will be far more precarious. Moreover, he was hoping to encounter other travelers along the Royal Road, but the Rurales post at Ojo Caliente had no reports of anyone coming through since early morning yesterday.

The company wastes no time getting back in the saddle and out on the trail once the horses are watered, and for the first few miles or so, things remain fairly uneventful. Then, all of a sudden, off to the east where the Sierra de Los Vados range closes in on the camino, Vasquez catches sight of dust billowing up from one of the lower ravines. It could just be a dust devil or a few stray cattle, but the experienced caballero isn't taking any chances. He lets out a quick whistle to alert the men and gestures for them to be on the lookout before giving his horse the spurs. The other riders follow suit, picking up their pace to match his as the company reaches the mouth of the ravine.

Roberto's heart is racing, wondering what is going on and what will be his part in it. He didn't see what prompted Señor Vasquez's actions, but he knows they must have been for a good reason. Sure enough, as they cross the mouth of the ravine, a dozen heavily armed bandidos with bandoliers come riding hard down the basin. Vasquez knows they can't outrun their pursuers all the way to Jesús Maria on tired horses; their only hope is to make it to the arroyo southwest of their current position and seek cover there.

He veers his horse in that direction and calls out to his men, "¡A la derecha, vamonos!"

As they ride at full speed away from their attackers, Roberto is amazed to see Procopio and Murrieta pull their carbines and deftly fire on the bandidos behind them. Veterans of more than a few attempts to avoid the clutches of a posse hot on their tail, they know a thing or two about slowing down this pack of hungry wolves. The skillful riflemen's first shots find their mark, and the two lead bandits fly off their horses, hitting the ground in a sprawling heap of blood and bone. Another volley, and the horse of one of the desperadoes crumbles beneath him, sending him unmercifully into a patch of prickly-pear.

"Did you see that?" Murrieta calls out triumphantly. "¡Orale!"

"You still got it, tío!" Procopio responds. "¡Andale!"

They reach the arroyo and cross over, dismounting behind a ridge on the other side.

"Bustamante you take the left, Murrieta you take the right; I'll take the top of the ridge. I want to catch them as they cross the river bed."

The men move off quickly to take up their positions.

"What do you want me to do?" Roberto asks.

"You stay here and watch the horses."

Señor Vasquez removes the extra Remington from its scabbard, loads a few bullets into the chamber, and hands it to Roberto.

"What am I supposed to do with this?"

"¿Que?" Vasquez retorts indignantly. "Shoot anything that moves who isn't one of us!"

Vasquez scrambles up the ridge in a flash and out of sight, leaving Roberto alone with the horses. Within seconds, the air erupts with gunfire. Roberto sees stone and debris splintering off the top of the ridge above, he can hear the return fire from the rifles of his companions. As the battle rages on, Roberto realizes all the extra ammunition is in the saddlebags.

*What should I do?* he wonders. *If I stay put, they could run out of ammo and get killed; then again, if I leave here, I'll be going against Señor Vasquez's orders.*

*What if I get killed?* he argues with himself briefly, but in seconds his mind is made up. *To heck with it! I'm going, 'cause if they get killed, I'm as good as dead anyway.*

Roberto ties off the horses to a juniper tree behind the ridge and retrieves twelve boxes of cartridges from his saddlebag. He finds Procopio behind some acer bushes, trying to keep a pair of bandits from flanking their position on the left. Roberto does a good job of avoiding fire while alerting Procopio of his intentions. He can see one of the desperadoes lying dead in the arroyo and two more pinned down behind some larger rocks at a bend in the riverbed. Staying low, Roberto makes his move and covers the ground between them quickly, delivering four boxes of cartridges to Procopio.

"Gracias, amigo. I'm down to my last round."

"I can help you."

"No, no. Por favor, get to my tío--hurry!"

"Okay, I will; but I'll return soon."

Roberto turns back toward the ridge, and just as he leaps forward, he feels his leg immediately start to burn with pain--something has struck him on the outside of his right ankle, but the adrenaline pumping through his body drives him on.

Once behind the ridge, he catches sight of one of the bandits sneaking up around the horses. Without thinking, he raises his rifle, takes aim, and fires one shot, dropping the man to the ground. He's not sure how he feels about killing a man, but there isn't time to think about it now.

In the next few moments, as if time has slowed to a standstill, Roberto finds himself beside Señor Murrieta handing him four boxes of ammunition.

"Procopio is holding his own," he hears himself saying. "How are you making out over here?"

With a smile on his face, Murrieta says something which takes Roberto by surprise. "I haven't had this much fun in twenty years kid! I've gotten three of 'em so far, and this bandido out there is next."

Not knowing what else to say, Roberto responds, "Bueno, bueno."

Roberto didn't know why, but the viejo's comment made him feel better somehow. He rushes back behind the ridge and climbs up to Señor Vasquez's position, but before he can reach him, he realizes the firing has stopped. Looking out over the arroyo, he sees two of the bandits lighting out on their horses to the south. Señor Vasquez takes careful aim and lets one more bullet fly. In the distance, at perhaps two hundred and fifty yards or so, the lone bandido to get away watches as his last compadre falls from the saddle with a clean shot through the back of his head.

Señor Vasquez looks over as Roberto holds out the remaining boxes of cartridges for him. "I guess you won't be needing these, then."

"Not right at the moment--but in these parts you never know, mi hijo; no me fío estos mosquitas muertas. How are the horses?"

"They're fine. I tied them off," Roberto responds anxiously. "I didn't mean to disobey your orders, señor, but I was worried you would run short of ammunition and I..."

"Don't worry. It's okay; you were using your head, and that's not a bad thing." Señor Vasquez smiles. "But hey--don't let it happen again."

Roberto climbs down from the ridge and checks on the horses. To look at them, you would never know their saddle mates had just finished fighting for their lives. There they were, just combing over the junipers for tender saplings like some buena por nada vagabundos. *¿Pero por otro lado, what do horses care of the affairs of men?* he thinks.

The victors assemble to assess and take inventory.

"Is anyone hurt?" Señor Vasquez inquires. "Bustamante?"

"I'm good," Procopio says.

"Murrieta?"

"Sí, never better," Murrieta answers.

"Luna?"

"I don't know; my ankle is hurting a bit."

"Have a seat. Let's have a look at it," Señor Murrieta offers.

Roberto sits down on a ridge rock and looks down at his right boot. Sure enough, on the outside a bullet has ripped through the leather and sock beneath. Señor Murrieta crouches in front of Roberto and holds his leg up by the heel, quickly snatching off his boot and then his

bloodied sock. It hurts like Hades, but Roberto does his best to hide the pain.

"Ah, you'll be fine," Murrieta chides. "It's only a flesh wound."

The old vaquero takes a salve from his satchel and applies it to the wound, and then wraps it with a cotton swath. Roberto is amazed at how quickly the burning sensation subsides. He replaces his sock and boot and gets to his feet.

"Mount up," Señor Vasquez commands. "We need to inspect the bodies of the dead and try and figure out who they are."

As Señor Vasquez rises up in his saddle, he notices the dead man beyond the horses lying on his back with a hole right through his heart. He looks at Procopio and gestures as if to ask, "Did you?" Procopio shakes his head and then points his chin toward Roberto.

"Well, I'll be," Vasquez exclaims. "Goes to show, you can't judge a book by its cover."

The experienced soldier knows the first kill is usually the toughest, especially if there's a significant amount of time to mull it over. Señor Vasquez will be keeping a concerned eye on his ward--after all, he knows good and well the young man had only signed up for a few days of fun out on the range. He certainly couldn't have bargained for this, and even if he had, there's a big difference between imagination and reality when it comes to this sort of thing. He watches as Roberto observes Procopio going through the dead man's pockets and other possessions; all things aside, if he is bothered by all this nasty business, he sure isn't letting it show.

Propocio indicates he hasn't found anything to identify the deceased and casually pockets what coins he obtained from his search.

"Alright, you men inspect those on the other side of the camino, and we'll deal with this lot. Let's make haste; we've lost enough time as it is."

Señor Murrieta and his sobrino ride off while Señor Vasquez and Roberto tend to the fallen bandidos in the arroyo. At some point a shot rings out, followed by two quick rifle bursts. Roberto looks up at Señor Vasquez with some concern.

"Those last shots are a signal all is well," Señor Vasquez reassures him. "I'm sorry you had to witness all this, mi hijo. If I had known this was going to happen, I wouldn't have asked you to volunteer. Truth is, I actually expected to recruit enough men to deter this kind of confrontation. However, now you know what kind of vermin we're up against. The fact of the matter is, Roberto--out here, it's kill or be killed."

"I understand, señor. I just thank God we're all still alive."



## Chapter Four

Procopio and Murrieta return from the foothills of Serra de Los Vados and report one of the bandidos was still alive when they got to him. He was covered with needles from the patch of prickly-pear he'd fallen into, but he was able to tell them how they came to be here. The bandidos were members of an outlaw gang led by Heraclio Bernal. They had come up from Sinaloa in the hopes of capturing a load of silver they heard was being transferred from the mines of Jesús Maria to a bank in El Paso del Norte. Bernal himself was not among them and had warned them not to go into Chihuahua for fear of running into the Rurales, but the man's cousin reported the Rurales had gone off to fight Victorio, so they made their move.

"Did he say why they attacked us?" Señor Vasquez asked.

"To be honest, señor," Procopio explains, "that was when mi tío had heard enough talk."

Señor Vasquez just shakes his head and heads off down the trail.

The ride into the mining town of Jesús Maria is peaceful enough, and the winding road down into town is good and dry. During the rainy season, the road can be as treacherous as they come, but the drought has turned the path as hard as a rock. The company pulls up at the water trough and let their horses have their fill before heading over to the cantina for a quick bite. Fortunately, they arrive before siesta, so the cook is still in the kitchen. The cowboys' almuerzo is brief and taken with few words; it's clear Señor Vasquez wants to get back on the trail as soon as humanly possible. Normally when he came through, he liked to have a few shots and chat up the señoritas down at the saloon, but he has run dry of good humor and is feeling the effects of the day's somber events. After finishing his meal, he leaves the cantina and walks over to the post of the Rurales to make a report.

The Rurales' post is deserted, so Vasquez heads over to the general store to send a

telegram. He scribbles out a note for the clerk. "Por favor, send this to the presidio at Carrizal."

He tosses a ten-peso note on the counter and heads out into the street and back to the cantina. The company mounts up and rides out of town the way they rode in, not letting the dust settle under their feet.

Out on the Royal Road, the late-summer sun is beating down on Roberto like Jonah and his withered fig tree, but he couldn't be more thrilled to be alive; he had faced his first real test and come through without crumbling under pressure. Maybe it's awful, considering the circumstances, but he's proud of himself, as wrong as that might be, and there is no hiding it.

The vaqueros and their el jefe reach Ojo de Gallegos shortly after dark with nary a peep among them for miles. Señor Vasquez guides them to the livery and orders them to dismount. He heads in, and after a few moments, returns with a short, pudgy man holding a couple of bed rolls. The man hands them to Roberto and then directs Procopio and his tío to get theirs down from their horses before guiding the horses off toward the stable.

"We'll make camp here," the caballero announces. "Clear some ground behind the livery. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Señor Vasquez heads off down the small main street of this little village at the foothills of Serra de Los Gallegos while Roberto clears the ground and the other men gather firewood and kindling. Vasquez is not gone for long, however, returning shortly with a big old grin, a mess of carnitas and jerked beef, tortillas, and a bottle of Don Cenobio Sauza's, Tequila Extract, straight up from the State of Jalisco.

"Time for a little fiesta, no?"

"¡Sí señor, orale arriba!" Procopio exclaims.

"¡Hijole!" Señor Murrieta shouts.

"Have you had tequila before, mi hijo?" he asks Roberto.

"Claro que no. I have only had the wine of the Eucharist," Roberto offers sheepishly.

"What?" Procopio laughs. "El es un niño."

"Don't worry," Señor Vasquez consoles, holding up the bottle. "This will put some hair on your chest."

"Alright, let's get a fire going," Señor Murrieta says to the others.

In no time, the fire is blazing and the company is enjoying their fine evening meal with great camaraderie. Señor Vasquez pulls the cork from the bottle of tequila extract and takes a swig. "Oh--that hits the spot," he says, passing it along to Señor Murrieta.

"Gracias, señor."

Roberto watches the old man take a big snort off the bottle and then pass it on to Procopio, who does likewise. Procopio holds out the bottle for Roberto, but then snatches it away quickly.

"No, no," he chuckles, "let me get you some leche."

"Pasame la botella," Roberto insists, reaching for it. "I can handle it."

"No, no," Procopio chides, holding back the bottle. "We don't want you stumbling into the fire. Better to stick with the leche."

Señor Vasquez and Murrieta are laughing hardily at Procopio's antics, but soon he gives in to Roberto's insistence and hands him the bottle. Roberto takes a big gulp of the tequila extract, and his body shivers involuntarily as he swallows it down. His new compadres all belt out a big cheer.

"You're no longer a boy, mi hijo," Procopio declares. "¡Usted es un hombre ahora!"

"¡Salud!" the others shout. "¡Viva Roberto, viva Mexico!"

"It's a lot smoother than I expected," Roberto says with a crooked smile.

"Don't be nursing it, now," Señor Vasquez laughs. "Pasarlo."

The bottle goes around a few more times and soon the warmth of the agave elixir is freeing the company from the burdens of the day. It has been an experience none of them will soon forget. Outnumbered three to one, they fought like warriors and came through like heroes; no one could fault them for enjoying a little well-earned revelry. Roberto looks across at the men who have become his amigos, amazed at how these events could bond them together in such a short period of time. Why, there were boys at the mission he had known all his life he didn't feel this close to.

Señor Vasquez speaks up. "So, Señor Bustamante--or can I call you Procopio?"

Procopio looks at Roberto, who shakes his head to indicate he's said nothing to give away the other's identity.

"Oh, I know who you are," Señor Vasquez pronounces. "One of the most fearless and daring desperadoes that has ever figured in the criminal annals of California; I read the papers. Don't worry--your secret's safe with me. I am curious, though, what brings you to Chihuahua?"

"Trabajar, señor."

Vasquez eyes him suspiciously.

"I assure you, señor, we are only here to find work. The drought has forced many of the ranchos in Sonora to sell off their herds to the cattlemen across the border in the Arizona and New Mexico territories. Many of the vaqueros have gone to California to work on the haciendas there, but as you know, mi tío and I are not welcome over there anymore."

"Well, you sure showed your fearlessness today--as did you, Señor Joaquin Murrieta--and as far as I'm concerned, you're alright by me. I assure you, I can always use a pair of men with your skill set, so rest easy gentlemen."

"Gracias, señor; your words are kind," Procopio professes. "Although, I can tell you, not all the things written about mi tío and me by the gringos are true."

"Sí, there are always two sides to the story," Vasquez relents, "and history is written by the victors."

"Con permiso, señor, there are so many things I have always wanted to know," Roberto divulges. "I have read so much about both of you, and..."

"Mi hijo, please," Señor Vasquez interrupts. "They owe us no explanation."

"No, it's okay," Procopio intervenes. "I wish to clear the record. It's good for this young man to know of our fight and the struggles we have faced."

Procopio looks at his tío, and Señor Murrieta nods his head in agreement.

"Orale pues," Señor Vasquez requests, "cuéntenos la historia de principio a fin."

"Por donde empezar," Procopio begins. "Mi tío and I are from a little place in Sonora, north of Hermosillo in the land of Las Trincheras where the Río Altar and the Río Magdalena meet, called la Hacienda de San Rafael del Los Alamitos. Mi tío first moved to California con mi tía in 1850, and after mi padre was killed by the Yaqui in 1852, mi tío came and got mi madre y yo and brought us to his rancho in Contra Costa County, California when I was only diez años. The turmoil in California was no different than anywhere else in Estados Unidos; the attitude of most of la gente blanca allí is they are superior to all others, and these beliefs fuel their disrespect for anyone who is not like them, whether by race or nationality. As Mexicanos, we were treated the same by them as los Negros y los Chinos, o Indios, o cualquier otros foráneos. The problem is, like the Indians, it was our land they were stealing, we were fighting for our rights, and our freedom. The truth is, we were at war, a guerrilla war, and that kind of a war is an ugly business."

"Con permiso, señor," Roberto asks, "I am confused by the concept of race and nationality. You men are mestizos, a mix of Indian and Spanish, I'm guessing, and I am Apache, but we are all Mexicanos. ¿Verdad? So, were you fighting for race, or nationality?"

"That's a good question, mi hijo," Señor Murrieta answers. "In times past when our antepasadas married into the families of the Spaniards, they did so to preserve our race and heritage as indígenas. Pero, when we won our independence from Spain, we all became Mexicanos. No longer many tribes, but one nation. However, as it was in the days of our ancestors, the land is what is most important, it is the land, tierra firme, we hold sacred, entonces, it is the land for which we fight."

"I understand how you feel," Señor Vasquez interjects, "but it doesn't justify lawlessness. Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which gave the land to them. ¿A que llorar sobre la leche derramada?"

"Claro, tiene razón," Señor Murrieta concedes. "When I first went out to California, I had high hopes. I believed I would be able to make a new start under the articles of the treaty, until I was forced to realize they were nothing but vain words. The promises made to the Mexicanos by the government of Estados Unidos were no more genuine than their treaties with the pueblo

indígenas. Soon after I arrived there, los blancos took most of la tierra de la familia de mi esposa and freely stole their livestock without impunity. Time and again I saw these acts of despotism committed against the ranchos of los Californios, and worse. When los hermanos de mi esposa made the brave decision to fight back, I felt it was my duty to make their fight my own."

"You'll have to forgive me, Señor Murrieta," Vasquez intrudes, "but if your fight was with los gringos, then why all the reports of your outfit attacking Chinos and Mexicanos?"

"Well, señor," Bustamante speaks up, "let me ask you this. Do we aquí en Mexico infringe on the ranchos of los extranjeros here among us? Not even men like Porfirio Díaz or Don Luis Terrazas under the rules of the vacant land laws are bold enough to confiscate their property. No, señor, that is not our way. However, it is the way of los gringos, just as it is their way to wantonly murder those they deem inferior, such as los indios y los chinos y los mexicanos y los negros in their country."

"Sin lugar la duda," Señor Murrieta agrees, "los gringos were fond of blaming their crimes on mi compadres y yo; it is the propaganda of war. We would attack them, and then they would retaliate on innocent Mexicanos and claim it was us in order to spread fear and animosity against our causa. Before long, the gringo newspapers were implicating us for every murder or robbery in the territory. Te lo juro por Dios, I never intentionally killed anyone who did not deserve it, nor did I kill any Mexicanos, Californios, o Chinos that I know of."

"I can tell you," Procopio continues, "I have also been blamed for crimes I had nothing to do with. As Mexicanos, we could be lynched by los gringos if we were anywhere near an offense involving their kind. It has been said I killed a gringo ranchero named John Raines; nothing could be further from the truth. I was working as a vaquero on his rancho when one day his enemies came to kill him. They wanted to kill me too, but mi amigo convinced them I had just come to work for Señor Raines and had nothing to do with stealing their cattle. They let us go, but warned me to go home or the hemp committee would string me up. I arrived home, but by then the news had traveled ahead of me, so I received no welcome from mi padrastro.

"That's when I began running with a bandido named Narciso Bojoques. Now Narciso was mean enough to steal the coins off a dead man's eyes, so I don't put it past him; however, I was not present when he and Chano Ortega were said to have killed a rancher and his family in Coral Hollow. It was Quarte who rode with them that day. Nevertheless, I was represented in the local newspapers as a vicious murdering desperado when I was younger than Roberto here. If I were the kind of man they said I was, I would have killed the lawman Orlo Wood, but I only winged him so I could make good my escape. In fact, if I was anything like they say I was, I would have killed many men that day, because I had every opportunity to do so."

"Was that when you where sent to San Quentin?" Roberto asks. "I heard you took responsibility for the whole thing, and refused to testify against sus amigos."

"How do you know about that?" Procopio inquires.

"I read a lot."

"I'll bet you do," Procopio responds, "I'll bet you do. To answer your question, though, yes--I spent my first eight years in that hell hole for my transgressions. The prison was packed with Californios and Mexicanos, I can tell you, and many of them were there for nothing more than the mentiras de los gringos. When I got out of there in 1871, things had changed a lot, and not for the better. I returned to Alvarado and started riding with Tiburcio Vasquez, Juan Soto, Francisco Barcenas, and Bartolo Sepulveda. By then, it was apparent we had lost the war, and los blancos had taken over California for good. There was nothing left to do but cause as much trouble as we could, until they caught up with us. We did our fair share of mischief-making and carousing around. Funny thing is, I left that band of chivatos a good while before that old hound dog Harry Morse arrested me. The only charge they could pin on me was for cattle rustling, pinches gringos.

"I spent another five years in San Quentin, but while I was in, I heard news mi tío was alive and living down in Sonora. As soon as I got out, I started to make my way to Hermosillo, but everywhere I went, the law was on my heels, claiming I was the ringleader of every two-bit outlaw outfit from Fresno to Tucson. A posse tried to take me at Poso de Chane, but they only succeeded in shooting one of their own men. Naturally, they tried to pin his death on me, but if it were true, entonces why did I leave the lawman Ellis alive? I had him dead to rights and let him live. I'm telling you, Roberto, you can't believe everything you read."

"I don't believe everything I read," Roberto protests. "I certainly didn't believe everything written about Señor Murrieta in that book by John Ridge. After all, here he is, and alive to boot--that should tell you something about the reliability of the newspapers."

"Don't get me started on that tonto," Señor Murrieta says bitterly. "Do I look like a chileno to you?"

"I will concede, the invasion of our country by Estados Unidos was highly unjust," Señor Vasquez points out. "I think they proved to the whole world they're as hypocritical as they are untrustworthy. Why, when their own states tried to secede like Tejas did from Mexico, their government killed millions of their own people. Pero, enough of such talk. Tonight we celebrate! ¿Verdad?"

Señor Vasquez passes the bottle of tequila extract around for all the men to enjoy one last drink, and as each man takes a swig the company calls out in unison, "¡Salud! ¡Viva Mexico!"

"¡Salud! ¡Viva Mexico!"

"¡Salud! ¡Viva Mexico!"

"¡Salud! ¡Viva Mexico!"

Señor Vasquez addresses the proud amigos. "In the words of el Presidente, Benito Juárez, 'entre los individuos como entre los naciones, el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz.'"

## Chapter Five

The company is up before the dawn and back in the saddle. Roberto, who was a little groggy at first, has regained his head out on the Royal Road. Señor Vasquez is both relieved and a bit wary as they reach the summit of el Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, where las sierras close in to their narrowest point between El Paso del Norte and Chihuahua City. Personally, if he was going to attack someone on the camino, this is where he would make his move. Strays and small gatherings of cattle begin to dot the landscape as the road bends slightly to the southwest. The sight of Sierra de Los Carneros and Sierra de San Martin beyond give promise to Señor Vasquez la Laguna de Encillinas will soon be in view. He has been away from the hacienda for over a month now, and the thought of his home from earliest memories gives him a sense of easy nostalgia.

The Hacienda de San Juan Bautista de Encinillas starts about one hundred and fifty miles south of El Paso del Norte and extends approximately seventy miles north to south and fifty miles east to west. At a little over two hundred twenty thousand acres, it is the largest of Don Luis Terrazas's ever-expanding land holdings, quite astonishing for a man who started out as a lowly butcher in Chihuahua City just thirty years ago. The hacendado Don Luis Terrazas is a man who, despite his wealth, is said to be both humble and gracious. He is one of the largest employers in all of Mexico, with over five thousand persons in his employ. Though vilified by many as a caudillo of the old oligarchic colonial society, he is nothing of the sort. Don Luis Terrazas has been the beneficiary of the Lerdo and Juárez Laws in the exact fashion envisioned by the reformists when the laws were passed some twenty-five years ago, a self-made man who exemplifies Juárez's vision of a rising rural middle class, who would not be alienated from private enterprise and class advancement by la Gente Decente. Señor Terrazas earned his vast fortune by hard work, prudent investment, loyal devotion to his alliances, and most of all,

earnest commitment to God and country.

Señor Vasquez hopes these men can herd and tend cattle as well as they can fight, because there is much to be accomplished, and no telling how long his regular cowboys will be out chasing Victorio around the countryside. Top priority will be getting the calves branded and a proper herd count. The real difficulty is covering the miles with so few vaqueros and so much ground to cover. Fortunately for Señor Vasquez, haciendas the size of those owned by Don Luis do not have the concerns of the smaller ranchos--no fences to mend, breeding or feed cultivation to conduct, backgrounding and culling to manage. For an outfit this size, all these things were left up to nature out there on the range. However, at winter's end, that's when the vaqueros of Don Luis Terrazas earn their keep. The herding and driving of the hundreds of thousands of heads of cattle on the ranges of their haciendado to the cattle markets of Mexico and Estados Unidos is a monumental undertaking, and no one has delivered more pounds of beef to the stock yards and slaughterhouses than Señor Javier Miguel Vasquez and his vaqueros.

It's the better part of a half day's ride from the hacienda's northern boundary to the main house, where the company arrives shortly before dusk. Señor Vasquez guides the men to the stable and points out the bunk house. "There's extra hot rolls in the storage cabinet just inside the bunk house door. Any bunk without a bed roll is open. Dinner will be served at seven in the plaza, so get settled in, and I'll see you hombres at chow."

Roberto takes some time to secure his tack and brush down Father Ortiz's big Criollo; as fine a horse as he is, the steed has probably seen more miles in the last few days than the last year or so combined. Roberto thoroughly examines his equine partner from head to tail, spending extra time on the hocks, pasterns, and hooves, ensuring there are no signs of strangles, shoe boils, or laminitis. The shoes look good, all things considered, and Roberto rewards the able saddle horse with a couple carrots and a scoop of barley.

"We've got a big day tomorrow, viejo; let's show 'em what we got," Roberto says with a pat on the horse's neck. "You get your rest now."

Roberto grabs his new hemp reata and makes his way out of the livery and over to a sawhorse he noticed near some hay bales on the side of the bunk house. He props up the sawhorse so the back legs are up off the ground a few inches, then places a bale of hay about six or so feet back and to the left a bit, so as to simulate his approach on horseback behind the calf, or calf dummy in this case. He then slips the tail end of his lariat through the hondo and measures out the coils. Roberto slides out the lasso, measuring the spoke length with his left hand, before settling on top of the hay bale. After a few attempts in which he catches only the right leg, he begins to worry maybe he's spent too much time over the years practicing his head loops and not nearly enough time on heeling.

He keeps at it for a while longer, but after a dozen or so misses, his frustration has risen to a nice fettered steam. A few more misses followed by some poorly stifled huffs and puffs, and before he knows it, Roberto has drawn an audience for himself. In fact, Señor Murrieta and



Procopio have been watching from a distance for some time now, and both of them have made their own assessment of the young vaquero's errant technique. Roberto sets up again to take another shot when Señor Murrieta steps in.

"Un momento, mi hijo. May I see the lariat?"

Roberto holds the rope out for him.

"Two things," Señor Murrieta says as he begins to demonstrate. "First, your loop needs to be extended for a heel catch. Measure it out from just under your chin to your boot tops. Second, when you make your throw, it's not about speed, it's about delivery. Slow down your swing a bit, and when you let your lasso go, your hand should be flat and pointed at the ground in front of the calf's hind legs. Remember, you're not trying to hook the legs, you're trying to set the loop on the ground so the calf steps into it like a trap. Now you try it."

Señor Murrieta hands Roberto the lariat and takes a step back.

"Gracias, señor," Roberto manages humbly.

Roberto takes the rope and imitates the example the old man has demonstrated, and sure enough, he catches both legs on the first throw. Roberto gives out a blustering holler.

"There you go, mi hijo," Señor Murrieta encourages. "You see how you catch the legs when you snatch back the rope? The rest is all timing."

"Muy bien," Procopio adds, "muy bien."

Roberto takes a few more throws, all with the same result, and in no time his confidence is restored. The dinner bell rings, breaking up his practice session, but the young cowboy has gotten in plenty of good lassos and feels good about how things have progressed, not to mention working up a serious appetite.

Procopio throws an encouraging arm around Roberto's shoulder. "You're going to do fine, mi hijo. It's commendable that you're able to take instruction the way you did; it's not always an easy thing to do. I was far too hard-headed when I was your age, too full of my own pride. You know what they say--orgullo va antes de la caída."

"Gracias, señor," Roberto responds, "I still have a lot to learn, but I appreciate all the help I can get."

"Impressive, very impressive. Vamos a comer."

The main house of the Hacienda de Encinillas is stately in the old Spanish tradition, and maintained meticulously by the plethora of peones who work on the rancho. A small central fountain, potted agave, soaptree yucca, ocotillo, crimson hedgehog cactus, barrel and prickly pear cactus, and a variety of desert flowers in hanging pottery, all in bloom, adorn the beautiful courtyard. Tables have been set up all around the plaza, with the head table and banquet table placed at opposite ends. On the banquet table is an array of culinary delights in fine porcelain serving dishes spanning some thirty feet across. Fine white linen and fresh bouquets of bright orange, yellow, pink, and purple roses, tulips, gerbera and gloriosa daisies, and fresh orchids sit

atop each table. Fine china dinner service and sterling silver cutlery carefully dress each place setting. The family members of Don Luis and his caballeros are emerging from the rooms which encircle the plaza, and after salutations and some festive conversation, they take their seats. To Roberto, the affair has all the makings of an important fiesta or wedding feast, and he senses this is a celebration he is privileged to be a part of.

Once the guests are seated, Señor Don Luis and his amada esposa, Señora Carolina, enter the courtyard from the main entry and take their seats at the head table. At fifty-one, Señor Don José Luis Gonzaga Jesús Daniel Terrazas Fuentes is a thick man, who appears larger than his five-foot-eleven stature, with a full head of dark black hair, and a thick beard perhaps ten or so inches long. He has an air of aristocracy, without any of the pompousness common among the wealthy landowners of Mexico, mixed with a kind of rugged determinism which might be found in a military commander. Señora Doña Carolina Bustamante Culty de Terrazas is a tiny woman whose thirteen children are the center of her life, although the death of her third son Guillermo two years ago under mysterious circumstances is still weighing heavy on her heart, and noticeably seen in her countenance by those who are close to her.

The priest stands and offers a few words of praise and gratitude followed by the invocation. Roberto opens his eyes at the end of the padre's prayer to find a servant pouring champagne into the champagne flutes at his table. He looks around to see other servants performing the same task all around the plaza. Señor Don Luis rises and taps his glass, "Atención amigos y familiares. It brings me great joy to announce the engagement of my beautiful daughter Angela to Señor Enrique Creel. Por favor, stand with me and raise your glasses to Angela and Enrique."

Roberto stands up with everyone else and raises his glass with the others.

"Angela and Enrique, it gives me great honor and pride to know through your love, and marriage, we shall witness the coming together of the families of Terrazas and Creel. My hope is you will grow in health, happiness, and love. ¡Salud!"

A robust "salud" emanates from the crowd.

"Muchas gracias a todos for being here to share this moment with us. ¡Ahora que empiece la fiesta!"

In no time, the servants have the first course served, and Roberto needs no invitation; he's hungry enough to eat a frozen coyote. The first course is a salad made with romaine lettuce topped with garbanzo beans, wax beans, kidney beans, green beans, and ripened tomatillos with crumpled crisp corn tortillas, not that Roberto would know as fast as he's chowing down. Next up is albondigas soup with fresh cornbread with honey butter, followed by chicken mole enchiladas which are as delicious as anything he has ever tasted. Roberto looks up eagerly, to see the servant placing something on a large plate, only this time, a second servant is assisting him, and there she stands holding out a large serving dish of who knows what. Whatever it is, Roberto has stopped paying attention; he cannot take his eyes off her. She is as beautiful as

anything he has ever seen, and his heart leaps in his chest and starts pounding within his ribcage.

*Where has she come from?* he wonders.

Just as he begins to grow faint, the male servant speaks up. "Señor--señor. Perdoname, señor."

Through the fog which has filled Roberto's mind, he can hear a noise, but he can't quite make it out; his eyes are glazing over as he stares aimlessly in the direction of her. Then like the unwanted annoyance of a buzzing bee, the voice comes intruding in again, "Perdoname, señor."

*There it is again.* He tries to focus his eyes on the sound, but they just won't cooperate.

"¡Perdoname, señor!"

"There's no need to shout," Roberto finally mumbles. "Puedo oírte."

Only Roberto's ojos are still fixed on her, staring deeply into her magnificent twinkling eyes, they look like huge black star diopside crystals.

"Señor, would you care for some carne de res chimichangas."

"Oh--sí, sí."

The servant places the plate in front of Roberto and moves on to Señor Murrieta, but by now, both Señor Murrieta and Procopio are more delighted by the sight of the lovestruck Roberto. They laugh and cajole as he gazes wantonly at the object of his newfound affection, but Roberto is oblivious, seeing only her as through the wrong end of a kaleidoscope. The flowers in her long silky black hair are circling around and around until he is dizzy enough to fall, and he is falling. As the servants move around the table, Roberto watches her every movement, the way her simply embroidered cotton white china pablona dress flows in waves about her lovely form, and he is had.

*What am I doing?* he thinks. *I have no time for such imaginations--I have a job to perform and the good name of the mission to protect.* How could he let himself be swayed from his duties so easily by the sight of this peasant girl? This would never do; he had to regain his focus. *Señor Vasquez is counting on me, the other vaqueros are counting on me--I have to keep my head in the game.*

With great urgency and commitment, he pries his gaze away from her, but try as he might, each time she moves, his feeble eyes betray him.

Four additional courses were served at the fiesta plus dessert, but for the life of him, Roberto couldn't remember what they were; nor could he recall what was said at the table by any of the other guests. He was vaguely aware of Procopio and Señor Murrieta acting strangely, but he wasn't sure why. Perhaps they'd had too much wine. Nevertheless, Roberto did recollect Señor Vasquez telling the men they would be riding out early, so breakfast would be at five a.m. sharp. That certainly left no time for thinking about peasant girls, but maybe a cold shower, just to wash the dust off, might help.

Sleep comes quickly after the day Roberto has endured, not surprising considering he woke up with his first hangover sixteen hours ago some forty-plus miles away. Add the evening's full dance card, and it was all the sleep remedy he needed for a long night of sawing logs.

Thirty-two young women, ages sixteen to twenty, dance the Dance of the Grilled Maize. They are adorned with belts of turquoise and gold, carefully crafted necklaces of grilled maize, and elaborate feathered headdresses, but other than these, they are completely naked. They dance in a specifically seductive manner meant to entice their god to hold back his hand, the hand of drought, so the rains might come and nourish the corn fields. These are not slave girls; these dancers are the daughters of some of the most important members of the royal families. In the center, demonstrating she is not only the most beautiful of the dancers, but also the most practiced, is the peasant girl from the fiesta, only--she is no longer a peasant girl. She dances provocatively, all the while keeping her eyes locked on his. Roberto is hypnotized by her, powerless to turn away.

On Roberto's head is the headdress of Tezcatlipoca. *How can this be? What does it mean? I am no Aztec god--none of this is possible. Why am I here?*

Roberto looks at her helplessly, but she only smiles at him and continues to dance with lustful abandon; he can feel his heart racing with desire. If only he could tell her how much he loved her. *But why?* he chastises himself. *You have no future, you cannot be with her, your life is going to end only minutes from now when her dance is over. How do I know that?*

Roberto's hands are tied behind his back as he lies upon the altar of Huitzilopochtli awaiting the sacrifice, yet strangely, he feels no pain, thanks to the foul-tasting elixir the high priest had poured down his throat, stinging as it went down. *What was in that sickening potion?* he wonders.

"What?" comes another voice not his own. "What difference does it make? You're going to be dead in twenty minutes with your heart pumping in the high priest's hand. Worse yet, he's going to show it to everyone, and then they're going to cook and eat you, right after the high priest carves off your skin and wears it around like a trophy at the feast. That's right, they're going to be feasting on you!"

The peasant girl dances past him one last time, and he drinks her in like water from a snowy mountain stream, and then she's gone. The dancers have left the Patio of the Gods, and the high priest has begun the ceremony which will culminate in the death of the Ixiptla, the death of the imposter.

"You are not a god," says the voice, "you cannot save her. You are the impersonator, you will die for your insolence!"

The high priest raises the sacred knife of Quetzalcoatl the Feathered Serpent and thrusts it into Roberto's chest, sending a violent shock wave through his whole body, jerking him up from his bed, awake, and shaking in the dark from sheer terror and anguish. Sweat is pouring from his head and body.

“¡Fue solo una pesadilla!”

It had only been a nightmare, a terrible nightmare.

“What is it, mi hijo?” Señor Murrieta implores him.

“I felt it--the knife--it was so real,” Roberto cries out. “He tried to kill me.”

“Fue un mal espíritu,” Procopio proclaims, crossing himself. “I could sense it hovering over you.”

“Ay, Dios mío, it is a terrible thing, mi hijo. You must pray to Jesucristo y San Miguel,” Señor Murrieta counsels, “then you will be able to have peace and return to sleep.”

“Sí, sí--I will, gracias. Right away.”

Señor Murrieta and Procopio return to their bunks. Roberto kneels at his bedside in prayer promising to never miss weekly mass ever again, if only Jesucristo will please protect him. He continues to pray the rosary, but it will be some time before he can sleep again.

On the far side of the bunk house, by the galley doors, a shadowy figure slips through the crack and out into the night.

## Chapter Six

"You're doing a heck of job working the stock, Roberto," Procopio declares. "A real drover."

The first pen is now full, and the vaqueros have begun to draw the calves and yearlings out. The fire has been stoked to an efficient temperature, and the branding iron is glowing red. Roberto's practice last evening is paying off this morning. He picks out a small calf and deftly separates her from her mother. The Criollo is doing his part like the old pro that he is. The stallion's footwork is impeccable, prancing first to the left and then quickly to the right, anticipating the young heifer's every move. The tips he received from Señor Murrieta prove spot on as Roberto's first toss cleanly scoops up the little dogie's hind legs, and he pulls her out of the herd toward the branding pit.

Señor Vasquez draws out the four-foot-long iron from the fire, and carefully places his spurred boot on the calf's neck. He smiles up at Roberto, and then directs his attention to the location of the bovine's hind quarters where the brand will be placed. In eight seconds, the brand of Don Luis Terrazas has burned beyond the hair and seers into the hide. The scent of singed leather is a distinctive smell Roberto will become quite accustomed to by week's end. This calf shows her mettle, though, with nary a whimper through the process. Señor Vasquez releases his hold on her and she scampers back to her mother with a few kicks to the wind for good measure.

All day long the vaqueros repeat the same process, herding the cattle to the pens erected by the peones who have accompanied them, separating out the calves for branding, and then releasing the herd from their pen. Several additional vaqueros and caballeros have joined them, including los hijos y yernos of Don Luis Terrazas himself. Roberto has consistently

drawn out more of the calves than any of the others, and his efforts have not gone unnoticed by Señor Vasquez.

"Father Ortiz would be very proud of you, were he here, mi hijo," he tells Roberto. "You have done the work of three men este día. However, a word of caution... you must learn to pace yourself; there are many days of work ahead."

"Gracias, Señor. I'm very thankful to be here and I want to make the most of this opportunity."

"Well, you've made a fine start," Señor Vasquez replies. "Alright hombres, let's wrap it up!"

Several cheers rise up from the company; it's been a long first day. Almost one thousand five hundred calves were branded today, and at this rate Señor Vasquez surmises, it will take four months to finish. The only problem is, he has just shy of two months to get the job done before the weather becomes an issue, not to mention the thickening of the hides as winter approaches. He can only hope Coronel Terrazas and his fighting men will make short work of Victorio so he can get his vaqueros back in time to complete the task. The herding has been easy enough, considering the number of cattle that were surrounding the dwindling water holes on the rancho, but Señor Vasquez is more than a bit worried that if el invierno rains don't break the drought, there will be an ever-increasing loss of livestock before next year's round-up. He cannot remember ever seeing as many turkey vultures as he has seen today swarming over the already mounting number of fallen ganado.

Roberto dismounts and relinquishes the reins of his caballo to one of the peones, who serves as the company's wrangler in charge of tending the remuda. Roberto removes his bed roll and pats the big Criollo along his neck. "Good work out there today viejo," he says. "Sleep well. Make sure he gets some of the carrots stored in my saddlebag," Roberto directs the wrangler. "¿Como te llamas?"

"Me llamo Santiago, pero la mayoría de la gente me llama Chui."

"Bien, Chui. Mucho gusto. Me llamo Roberto, pero la mayoría de la gente me llama Roberto."

Roberto chuckles and Chui gives him a big smile in return.

"Mucho gusto, Señor Roberto, voy a darle un poco de zanahorias."

"Gracias, Señor Chui," Roberto smiles.

Chui has a good laugh and heads off with Roberto's horse toward the remuda.

Roberto watches as los peones take control of the campsite. They quickly clear a large area of any rocks and debris, and then cover the ground with juniper needles from large burlap sacks. Next, they build a rather large campfire out of stones and fill the pit with dried mesquite logs. Once the logs are hot, one of the peones lays out a large metal grate and trivet over the fire pit. He then hangs a large kettle from the trivet and begins filling it with all manner of beef

chunks and vegetables. Another one of the peones rolls out corn tortillas on a large board and carefully places them on the metal grate. Roberto is amazed at the prowess of these men, recognizing they must have done this hundreds of times to become so proficient at it. Some of the vaqueros are pitching horseshoes in a makeshift horseshoe pit, while others are resting on their bed rolls. Still others seem to have additional duties assigned to them by Señor Vasquez, but when the stew is ready and los peones ring the dinner bell, all of the vaqueros cease whatever their endeavor and hightail it to the chow line.

The hierarchy of the line is not lost on Roberto, as the men seem to be lined up by rank and seniority, with Señor Vasquez the first to be served. Next are the caballeros, followed by the vaqueros who had arrived with the sons and son-in-laws of Don Luis, and then the new hires. Oddly, the family of Terrazas were not among those in the camp, having all returned to the main house of the Hacienda de Encinillas. Neither were any of the dozens of peones; they would take their meal in another campsite near the remuda. Likewise, Roberto notices none of the other men so much as acknowledge the presence of the peones or offer them any of the courtesies he is accustomed to at the mission. Nevertheless, when his turn comes to be served, he heartily thanks each of the peones for what he considers a worthy contribution to his well-being.

After their meal, many of the vaqueros choose to imbibe, including Señor Murrieta and Procipio, but seeing Señor Vasquez is not one of them, Roberto decides it's best to pass when he's offered the opportunity.

"What's the matter, mi hijo?" Procopio asks. "Did you decide to return to your leche?"

Roberto smiles and replies, "Sí, creo que es mejor para mi cabeza."

"Perhaps you're right," Procopio responds, "entonces mas por me."

Señor Murrieta notices Roberto stretching and rubbing his shoulder. "If you keep roping as many calves as you did today, mi hijo, you'll make us all look bad. That pain in your shoulder is your punishment."

"I didn't know, señor," Roberto pleads. "I'm very sorry."

"I'm just pulling your leg," Señor Murrieta laughs. "You're doing great. We're all proud of you mi hijo. Now pull back your shirt; this linimento should do the trick."

Señor Murrieta smears some linimento on Roberto's shoulder and then presses his thumb deep into the muscle, holding it there while the brave young vaquero tries desperately not to scream. After what seems like an eternity to Roberto, the shaman releases his patient's anterior deltoid, and in seconds the pain is gone.

Dumbfounded yet thankful, Roberto asks, "How did you do that?"

"Ancient secrets, mi hijo, ancient secrets."

"Ancient secrets?"

"Mi abuela era un chaman Tohono O'odham," Procipio chimes in.

"¿Por que tienes que robar mi trueno?" Murrieta pouts.



"Anything to keep you from telling that witch doctor story again."

"You used to love that story."

"When I was ten."

"Well I'm very grateful," Roberto interrupts. "Gracias, señor."

Señor Murrieta lifts his chin to Procopio. "At least someone appreciates me."

"Ay, tío--go to sleep, viejo."

"Buenos noches, Roberto."

"Buenos noches, Señor Murrieta. Buenos noches, Señor Bustamante."

"Buenos noches, Roberto."

Roberto unrolls his bed roll and tucks his jacket under his head. A beautiful, not yet full moon, sits at three o'clock in the eastern sky, and to the west sparkles a myriad of stars, a coyote howls in the distance calling his love to beckon. Roberto hasn't thought of her at all throughout the grueling day, but now that he's alone with his thoughts, she magically dances her way to the center of his consciousness.

"Buenos noches, Roberto."

"Buenos noches, señorita."

"Would you care to dance with me?"

"Which dance would you prefer? We can baile el Jarabe Mexicano--I am quite proficient."

"As I would expect all los vaqueros are. Pero, can you waltz?"

"Sí, I can waltz. Would like to do the Victorian waltz?"

"I prefer the Viennese waltz."

"As you wish. My lady."

"My lord."

"The Vienna Waltz" by Johann Strauss, Jr. begins to play and Roberto gently takes her right hand with his left hand, and places his right hand on the small of her back, pulling her close to him. One, two, three, one, two, three, with their eyes locked in a lover's gaze they glide across the floor. Roberto can smell the orchid in her hair, she can feel the warmth of his breath along her neck, and one, two, three, one, two, three. He spins her to the inside and back again as the tempo increases, and one, two, three, one, two, three. Faster now, moving across the floor in graceful strides like two eagles embraced in a sky fall, and one, two, three, one, two, three. Now faster still, at a dizzying pace, one, two, three, one, two, three. Now soaring through the air. one, two, three, one, two, three. Now floating free, one, two, three, one, two, three...

"Roberto?"

"¿Lo que, mi amor?"

"Roberto?"

"¿Lo que, mi amor?"

"Roberto! Wake up!"

"What--what, what is it?"

"It's the breakfast bell, mi hijo," Procopio announces. "Wake up and smell the chorizo!"

"Oh--okay, I'm up."

"¿Lo que, mi amor?" Procopio laughs. "I didn't hear youuuu."

"You heard that?"

"The whole camp heard it, mi hijo. One, two, three, one, two, three, you gotta learn to quit talking in your sleep."

Roberto gets up, looking around sheepishly with more than a little embarrassment, and rolls up his bed roll. He moves hurriedly toward the chow line and collects his desayuno, making sure to thank the peones. He gulps down the chorizo and eggs as fast as he can without daring to look up; he doesn't want to encourage anyone who might want to poke fun at his early-morning soiree.

*Ay Dios ayudame*, he thinks to himself.

Roberto collects his bed roll and makes his way over to the remuda while doing his best to play it off. He arrives to find Chui saddling up El Viejo. "Buenos días, Chui."

"Buenos días, Señor Roberto."

"It's just Roberto--you don't have to call me señor."

"Con permiso, pero I must call you señor. It is required."

"Why is that?"

"Well, señor, you are a vaquero and I am a peone; we are of two different stations."

"Pero, I'm no different from you. We are both men doing our job."

"Sí señor, tiene usted razón. Pero, we must abide by the traditions of our master.

Besides, if any of the other peones were to hear me being informal with you, they would see it as a sign you may not be worthy of their respect. I cannot take the chance they will disrespect you on my account. Likewise, if another vaquero were to hear me being informal, he might hold me accountable for such disrespect and I could be punished."

"Lo siento--I didn't know it was so serious a matter. I guess I have a lot to learn about such things."

"Don't worry, señor; you have a good heart and that's what counts. Your caballo is ready."

Chui hands Roberto the mecate and he mounts up. "Gracias, Chui. Adios."

"De nada, señor. Buena suerte."

The second day of branding brings the company to the western foothills of Serra del Tascate, some ten miles south of the main house. The pyrrhuloxias call out from the tops of the mesquite trees which dot the slopes of Cerro de la Parrita, and her sister hill, Cerro de la Palmita. Most of the cattle can be found milling about around what is left of the Laguna Ojo del Diablo. Pupfish struggle to survive in the shrinking lake, making them easy pickings for the green herons who hardly have to resort to any of their unusual fishing skills. Hundreds of horned larks skip along the valley floor, feasting on the plethora of tasty insects which make their home among the ocean of empanadas de los vacas.

Roberto is doing his best to draw on the advice of Señor Vasquez by taking a more measured approach to his work. For him, it means keeping up with the best of the caballeros. It's taken some time for his arm to loosen up this morning, not unlike the time he pitched for the boys back at la universidad in this new American game called baseball that's sweeping the country right now. As he brings in another calf to the branding pit, Señor Vasquez swiftly rises and tips his hat to the men who have approached from the north on horseback. Roberto recognizes these are the men he saw among the guests of Don Luis Terrazas at the fiesta, and Don Luis himself is among them.

Señor Vasquez addresses them. "Buenos días, Señor Terrezas. Buenos días, Señor Creel."

"Buenos días, Miguel," they reply.

"¿Como están progresando las cosas por aquí?" Señor Terrazas requests.

"Muy bien--muy bien, señor," Vasquez reports. "We are making excellent headway. The replacement hires are doing very well."

Señor Vasquez gestures toward Señor Murrieta and Señor Procopio, then over to Roberto. "This young man is Roberto Luna."

"Roberto, ven aquí," Señor Vasquez calls out to him.

Roberto rides over, extending his reata out. "Sí señor."

"Señor Terrazas, te presento Roberto Luna."

"Mucho gusto, Roberto."

"Mucho gusto, Señor Terrazas. Es un honor reunirse con usted señor."

"The pleasures all mine, Roberto."

"Roberto comes to us from el Mission de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe," Señor Vasquez interjects.

"Oh sí. How is my old friend Father Ortiz?" Señor Terrazas asks.

"He is doing well and sends his greetings."

"Very good. We will talk more when you return to the hacienda."

"Sí, señor. Buenos días, señor."

"Buenos días, Roberto."

Roberto is pleasantly surprised to be so warmly welcomed by a man of such renown-- not that he has given it much thought, but it certainly isn't what he is accustomed to at the mission. Most Spaniards, as well as the Americans across the Río Grande, seem significantly put off by the appearance of an Apache, and even more so by an Apache with the kind of formal education Roberto has received at the mission. However, Roberto is beginning to realize his training in the ways of the vaquero from Father Ortiz is proving to be a real difference maker.

One of the other caballeros has taken over the branding duties for Señor Vasquez, allowing Roberto to return his attention to the bull calf at the end of his lariat. Meanwhile, Señor Vasquez, Señor Terrazas, and the other men with them engage in what appears to be a very serious discussion.

## Chapter Seven

Day two ends much the same way as day one, with the branding count up around three thousand head. After chow, Señor Vasquez speaks to the outfit about the possibility of Victorio and his raiders making their way south from Tres Castillos through the northern territory of the hacienda. Although he feels it's unlikely, he cautions the men to be ready to ride to the aid of the main house if it becomes necessary. After Roberto tucks into his bedroll, it isn't long before thoughts of her resurface; however, his desire to avoid repeating this morning's shenanigans are more than enough encouragement to resist her pervasive influence over his evening meditations.

Days three and four are very much the same as days one and two, but on day five things start out a bit different. Roberto reports to the remuda after the morning meal, the same as he had the previous days, but this time Chui has some disconcerting news about his Criollo. The stallion had developed some swelling around his right hock. Hopefully, it's not due to any long-term injury like a bone spavin, but the condition cannot be taken lightly. Chui has prepared a poultice of crushed creosote leaves and has both of the stallion's hind legs wrapped.

"I'm very sorry, señor, but El Viejo will not be able to assist you today--maybe not for some time."

"Will he be alright?"

"I believe so señor, but he will need considerable rest. I have prepared a very fine horse from the stables of Señor Terrazas that will do adequately. Abogado here will be your mount. Believe me señor, he is ready and itching to go."

Chui offers Roberto a conciliatory smile and presents him with a broad-shouldered stallion standing some sixteen hands, with white and gray patches about his head and neck.

Roberto climbs in the saddle and works the mecate in order to get a feel for the way his new companion moves.

"He'll do just fine," Roberto announces. "Gracias, mi amigo. Take care of my old man."

Roberto tips his hat to Chui and rides off to take up his position. The herding process is not unlike a search party. The trick is to form a grid and work the stock toward the location of the cattle pen. Each horseman in the company spreads out about five chains apart and rides forward some five furlongs in a zigzag pattern, thus covering a five-hundred-acre quadrant for each pen. The peones at the far end spread out and help ensure the outliers don't stray. The older cattle, who are no strangers to the round up, do the majority of the work by drawing the calves along with them to the location of the pen. Nevertheless, as any cowboy knows, it's the older bull calves and yearlings that pose the biggest test for a wrangler. Unlike the steers, their feistiness has not yet been curtailed, and if they knew what awaited them at the destination they're being driven to, they might fight even harder to avoid that distasteful bit of misfortune.

Today, the outfit is working the southwest corner of the rancho at the foothills of Serra de las Agujas, named for the juniper needles which blanket the floor of the mountains here. A young bull circles back around Roberto forcing him to drop a head loop on the stray in order to pull the yearling from the slope it has climbed up in an attempt to make good its escape. However, the big Criollo is having some difficulty keeping his hooves from sliding on the thick layer of juniper needles under foot. Roberto strives to maneuver to his right, but the stallion is unable to respond to his command, slipping sideways down the slope, causing his hind legs to buckle. At the same time, the yearling makes his move, pulling violently toward the top of the ridge, dislodging Roberto from his saddle. In an effort to compensate and regain his position, Roberto quickly snatches his lariat to the right, but the slope gives way and he is thrown to the ground with tremendous force. As he is going down, he releases the reata and works to get his hands out in front in order to protect himself, but the speed of his fall propels him past his outstretched arms. Roberto hits the ground, smashing his right hip and driving his head into a group of stones, knocking him unconscious. His body goes limp and flops haphazardly down the mountain side, coming to rest in heap at the bottom of the ravine below.

The big Criollo saunters into the camp and approaches the remuda. Seeing the stallion, Chui instantly recognizes something bad must have happened. He mounts up and lights out in the direction of the branding sight.

Señor Vasquez pulls the branding iron from the fire pit and places his boot on the neck of a young bull calf brought in by Procopio; however, Procopio is a little preoccupied with a feeling in his gut that something's not right. Roberto was not at the branding sight when he arrived, and that's certainly not like him; usually he's the first in and the first to draw out the calves, but now the third round of calves have been drawn and he still hasn't shown up.

"Señor Vasquez, yo creo hay un problema," Procopio confesses. "Roberto hasn't come in yet, and I'm thinking maybe we should go look for him."

"¿Que?" Señor Vasquez asks, "Roberto is missing?"

"I don't know, señor, but normally he's the first one in."

Seconds later, Chui rides up on Abogado.

"¡Señor Vasquez! ¡Señor Vasquez! Perdoname señor," Chui interrupts. "The mount of Señor Roberto came into the remuda without his rider. I'm concerned something muy mal has happened to him."

"Procopio, who were the men he was riding with in the grid?"

"That would be mi tío y yo, pero we didn't see or hear anything unusual."

"Okay, I want you and Murrieta to retrace your route and see if you can find him. Chui, you go along with them, report back to me as soon as you find him."

"Sí, señor," they both respond.

Procopio retrieves Murrieta, and they take off with Chui up the ravine into the foothills.

"Tío, you take the left, Chui, you take the right, I'll take the middle--signal if you see him."

The men do not have to search for long before Procopio finds Roberto in the ravine about two furlongs up from the pen. He is unconscious and there's a lot of blood around his head. Procopio fires two shots, and soon Murrieta and Chui arrive at Procopio's location.

"Be careful with his head," Murrieta cautions. "Chui, take my ax and make us two long poles from the branches there, and we'll need ten cross branches."

"Sí, señor."

Procopio hovers over Roberto, checking for signs of life.

"He's alive--I feel his breath," Procopio announces. "Help me turn him over."

The two men turn Roberto on his back, and Señor Murrieta begins to clean off his wounds. There is a large gash just below the hairline. He pulls some strange jelly like substance from his saddlebag and fills the laceration, then wraps Roberto's head with a long cotton swath. Procopio helps Chui tie off the poles, and then they secure a serape to the makeshift stretcher. The three men work together to hoist Roberto on to it.

"Carefully now," Murrieta calls out, "all together on my count. One, two, three..."

One, two, three, one, two, three, and he spins her again and again and again. They are floating in the air as if on a cloud, Roberto hopes this waltz will never end. Her long black hair swirls about her beautiful neckline, and he is taken with her dazzling allure. He wants to tell her of his feelings for her, how brave and manly he feels in her presence. One, two, three, one, two, three. Now soaring higher, close enough to touch the moon. One, two, three, one, two, three...

All of the company has gathered around their injured compadre. Señor Vasquez looks Roberto over, carefully considering what should be done with him. He decides they must get him to the hacienda, but he cannot spare any of the riders right now with so much work yet to

be done.

"Why is he smiling?" Señor Vasquez asks.

"Yo no se, señor," Murrieta responds. "When we lifted him on to the stretcher he just mumbled something, and then reached out his arms and began to smile like that."

"That's very odd, don't you think?"

"Sí, señor. No es normal."

"Okay, Chui, I want you to take him back to the hacienda. Have Paco take over your duties at the remuda."

"Sí, señor."

"And Chui--"Señor Vasquez looks Chui in the eye, holding his attention, "take your time. I don't want him to sustain any more injuries."

"Absolutamente, señor. Usted puede contar conmigo."

"Alright men, back to work."

The outfit somberly returns to the task at hand as Santiago Rivas rides out with the insensible Roberto in the direction of the main house. They are some twelve miles away and must cross over the Royal Road, but fortunately the going is fairly flat. Moreover, the camino is relatively safe as it passes through the range land of the Hacienda de Encinillas, so Chui expects to arrive at the main house before nightfall. He decides it will be best for Roberto if they head straight east to the Royal Road, then take it north to the Encinillas Road rather than traverse diagonally across the rancho. The route may take extra time, but it should be much smoother in the long run.

Chui breathes a sigh of relief at having completed the more difficult leg of the journey without a hitch. He stops short of the camino to ensure the ropes holding Roberto are secure and not creating undue pressure on him. He moistens Roberto's head and mouth before covering him up, in order to protect him from the desert sun. Chui takes a moment to pray to Saint Christopher for safe travel before proceeding north up the Royal Road. If an encounter with undesirables is going to take place, it's going to happen somewhere along the camino, and Chui figures it couldn't hurt to ask the patron saint of travelers for a bit of assistance.

The music ends, and Roberto takes her by the hand. They walk into the courtyard and out among the stars. The moonlight shines in her eyes and their brilliance pierces through the darkness of the night. He pulls his eyes away only long enough to look up at the stars twinkling in the night sky.

"Bésame, mi amor," he hears her say.

Roberto leans forward to kiss her, but she is no longer there. He can feel her behind him now.

"Dime que me amas," she whispers in his ear.



"I cannot help but love you," Roberto says as he turns to face her, but she is not behind him either.

"Why do you play with me?" Roberto asks.

"Me he vuelto como el viento," she replies. "and now I must go. You will see me blowing through the leaves of the trees--goodbye my love."

"Wait! There is so much yet to be said, so many things I want to ask you, at least tell me your name."

Roberto's words fall silent, she's already gone.

Chui sees dust rising up from the Royal Road ahead; it could be men from the hacienda, but he's not taking any chances. He moves carefully off the camino and heads east toward a small rock formation across the arroyo, ever so slowly so as to not cause a dust cloud of his own. Chui climbs up high enough to keep a lookout, and discovers some forty caballeros riding hard south. They look determined as if they're on a mission, but he had heard these men had gone to Tres Castillo to fight against Victorio. *What were they doing here?* he wondered. *They could be seeking reinforcements down in Chihuahua City, but then why were there so many of them? No, that couldn't be it. Perhaps the battle with Victorio and his raiders was over and they were returning to work? However, it's unlikely they would be in such a hurry to do so.*

Whatever their reason for being here, Chui decided he was in no hurry to explain to them what he was doing here.

Authoritatively, a pale older man, tall and thin, wearing a red sombrero, emerges from the pack raising his hand halting the others. Chui recognizes him as one of the caballeros who has been at the hacienda several times recently. He's the one they call El Hechicero.

One thing's for sure--Chui does not like this man, and he certainly doesn't like the way the man leers at his hermanita. Right now, though, he needs to stay focused. *What are these men up to?*

El Hechicero rides slowly to the point where Chui had left the road and dismounts from his horse. He kneels down on the ground, inspecting the tracks, and then rises, pointing in the direction of Chui and Roberto. Slowly, El Hechicero follows the tracks toward the ridge where they're hiding, and Chui's heart begins to race; there's nowhere to retreat from here without detection. As El Hechicero grows closer, Chui begins to pray for la Virgen Morena to please do something, anything.

The Aztec high priest of Huitzilopochtli sprinkles the temple floor with the feathers of hummingbirds in preparation for the sacrifice of the representative of Coyolxauhqui. He adorns her head and chest with more of the feathers. He raises the knife of the Feathered Serpent and begins to chant the incantations. Roberto strains to save her, but he can't get free; his arms and legs are bound, and he remains on the altar of the Templo Mayor.

"Why do you struggle, Ixiptla? You cannot save her. Her fate, like yours, is not in your

hands.”

“I am not this Ixiptla of whom you speak. My name is Roberto, and she is merely a servant girl. What is it you want with us?”

“It makes no difference who you were; the only thing that matters is who you have become. You wear the headdress of Tezcatlipoca. Therefore you are the impersonator and must be sacrificed.”

“What does the girl have to do with any of this? Let her go.”

“The Sacred Knife has been found, and Huitzilopochtli will have his revenge through her sacrifice as it is written in the Codex. Once he is free and you both are dismembered, Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent, shall rise again and the great feast will begin.”

Roberto begins to struggle against the ropes, desperately trying to free himself so that he might save her, but to no avail.

Chui suspects Roberto must be with fever the way he's stirring, and his moans are growing louder. He tries to hold him steady while covering his mouth. Frantically he prays to Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, but El Hechicero draws closer and closer.

“Ay, Dios mío--please, Señor Roberto, you must stay quiet.”

El Hechicero is now only fifty paces away when a shot from far off to the south rings out through the desert air. El Hechicero takes a couple more steps forward; looking intently at the rock formation, he sniffs the air and listens. Chui stands perfectly still, holding his breath, trying desperately not to make a sound.

After what seems like an eternity, El Hechicero turns and walks back to the camino, mounts his horse, and the caballeros ride on south down the Royal Road. Chui removes his hand from Roberto's mouth, crosses himself, and then takes out his bandana and wipes the sweat from his brow.

“Hijole, that was close. Gracias a Dios, I thought we were goners there, señor. Vamonos, antes de que vuelvan.”

Chui climbs in the saddle and presses north up the Royal Road; the last few miles are agonizing as he must constantly look over his shoulder for any signs of the caballeros' return. The late-summer sun is still beating down on Roberto, and Chui worries the fever might take him. *I mustn't lose hope.*

At last, just ahead, the Camino de Encinillas comes into view; it's only a few more miles to the main house. Chui can see two riders coming down the road toward him--it looks like Señor Terrazas and Señor Creel. He's so happy and relieved; he can't suppress his exhilaration. “¡Orale! Mire, Señor Roberto, I think we're going to make it! What is that you ask? Sí señor, we are going to make it. I, Santiago ‘Chui the Brave’ Rivas have saved you from the very clutches of Diablo and delivered you safely to your destination. Oh, de nada, señor, it was nothing.”

## Chapter Eight

The wind rustles through the oaks along the banks of the river as Roberto guides the big Criollo to the water's edge. The stallion's ears perk up and he tilts his head toward the sound. "Easy, old man, I know she's there. Quiet now; we don't want to seem anxious."

The attentive caballo seems to understand and relents. He bows his forelegs to take a drink, and she appears across the river. The moonlight streams past her and cascades in shimmering sparkles away from her shadow as it forms in the reflection of the water. A warmth fills Roberto's heart and radiates out from his smile like a campfire on the beach. Her lips part, calling him without a sound, and he knows to go to her. He nudges his companion forward and they ride into the river. The sound and feel of hooves along the soft, sandy bottom reverberate along with the ripples now reaching the opposite shore in a wave of motion and sound which call the nightingales to sing. Moonbeams explode off the water in every direction like pixies in a celestial dance. Whether it be trickery or bewitchment, the sensation is magically drawing him ever closer to her side.

They reach the opposite embankment and rise out of the water to come alongside her and her striking white mare. The Iberian turns with the Criollo, and the young lovers ride out onto the valley floor among the wildflowers where the heavenly satellites shine brightest. The horses stop to graze where the grass is lush and green. Roberto dismounts and quickly bounds to her side, lifting her up from the saddle and down to her feet. He draws his serape from the back of El Viejo and lays it out before her. "Sit with me, mi amor?"

"Gracias, señor."

"I have waited so long to have this moment alone with you."

"Did you not enjoy our dance together?"

"Oh sí, don't get me wrong, I've delighted in every second we've shared."

"Then what's wrong?"

"Nothing, mi amor--I assure you, being with you is sheer perfection, but--"

"There is someone else?"

"No, no. There is no one else, there could be no one else, there will never be anyone else."

"Then what is it?"

"Well, it's just--"

"Yes?"

"I have so many questions I want to ask you. I don't know anything about you."

"What do you want to know? I'll answer any question you ask."

"First of all, what is your name?"

"Me llamo Angelina."

"¿Que?"

"Me llamo Angelina."

"¿Que?"

"Her name is Angelina. Why do you keep asking?"

Roberto opens his eyes to see Chui standing over him, looking somewhat nervous and irritated. "Yo creo el es loco en la cabeza."

Angelina pushes Chui out of the way and scolds him. "No estas ayudando."

Roberto opens his eyes again and sees her smiling down at him. "My name is Angelina."

"What?"

"You kept asking me what my name is, and I was telling you my name is Angelina, Angelina Rosita Rivas."

"Oh sí. Mucho gusto, Angelina. Me llamo Roberto."

"Yo se, señor. My brother has told me all about you."

"You're Chui's hermana?"

"Sí, señor."

"Por favor, llama me Roberto."

"Muy bien, Roberto."

"Where am I?"

"You're at the Hacienda de Encinillas in the infirmary. Chui brought you in yesterday. He says you were thrown from your horse and hit your head."

"Sí, señor, and you owe me big time. I saved you from el Diablo."

"Silencio, baladrón. Go and fetch some more hot water. Don't worry about him, señor; he's always getting heroic delusions. He thinks he's Don Quixote."

"And never sufficiently extolled!" Chui adds as he heads out with the water bucket.

Roberto tries to laugh, but sharp pains burn through his head and chest. It feels as though he's broken some ribs, and his right hip is very tender. He winces in agony but does his best to reel it in, wanting to be as brave about things as he possibly can. Angelina moves in close to help him and gently guides him back down on the pillow. He can feel her close to him; her hair smells of lilac. She's even more heavenly than in his dreams.

"The doctor is on his way from Chihuahua City. He should be here this afternoon."

"I'm alright! I need to get back out on the range."

Roberto tries to get up, but the exertion causes his head to erupt in blinding shockwaves of pain. He falls back down on the bed, feeling very light-headed and on the verge of passing out.

"Please, señor, you must get your rest."

"Call me Roberto, mi amor."

Angelina looks at him with some surprise, thinking, *he must be delirious*. She feels his head. "You're burning up with fever, señor."

"Roberto."

She places a cold cloth on his forehead. "Sí, Roberto, now please try and sleep."

Roberto is very groggy and fading fast. It's true, he is babbling, and he would certainly be embarrassed to discover he's divulged his innermost feelings for her in such a nonchalant manner, but his lips are writing cheques his mind can't cash. Fortunately for him, he's far too out of it to know just how thoroughly humiliated he would otherwise be right now.

"Bésame, mi amor," Roberto mumbles.

"Don't be impertinent. You must sleep."

"Would you leave me as Marcela did Chrysostom, to die heartbroken and unrequited?"

"You're delirious. Sleep now."

Angelina watches Roberto as he drifts off to sleep. She smiles, sensing her cheeks have blossomed a rosy red. He is very handsome, this young vaquero, but surely he's just overcome with fever. Nevertheless, she looks about, and seeing no one is around, she bends down and kisses him gently on the cheek. "Duerme bien, mi amor."

The modest J. B. Husband and Company bench seat open carriage of Dr. Mariano Samaniego y Delgado proceeds up el Camino de Encinillas and comes to a stop in front of the main house. The good doctor has come to the hacienda by way of Chihuahua City, where he had recently been on urgent business concerning the military arrangements for the Apache mission currently underway. As the president of the Junta de Apache, he was responsible for

organizing the present campaign against Victorio. The doctor is also a fellow hacendado who owns the Hacienda de Samalayuca, but his ties to both Don Luis Terrazas and Roberto Luna go far deeper.

Dr. Samaniego is the nephew of Father Ortiz, and as such, was the padre's first protégé, and very much like an uncle to Roberto. An exceptional example of both professional and spiritual character, tío Don Mariano, as Roberto calls him, was nearly as instrumental in Roberto's education as a vaquero and biblical student as Father Ortiz himself. After gaining his religious education at the same Durango seminary as Father Ortiz, Don Mariano went on to earn his credentials as a surgical physician at the prestigious University of Paris, School of Medicine. He is the only doctor in El Paso del Norte, but he manages to serve the entire community and many more villages and towns throughout Chihuahua, Sonora, Texas, and New Mexico. Doctor Mariano Samaniego is considered the individual most responsible for stemming the tide of smallpox in the entire area, paying for nearly all of the vaccines he administers with his own money.

Today, however, the honorable doctor is here to discuss plans for the new Banco Minero of Chihuahua, which he, Don Luis Terrazas, and Enrique Creel are forming to serve the needs of the mines of Northern Chihuahua and the citizens of El Paso del Norte. Although Don Luis knows Dr. Samaniego will be arriving today, the doctor has no idea his skills as a physician will be needed for his sobrino Roberto.

Señor Don Luis and Señor Creel advance across the courtyard to meet Dr. Samaniego.

"Mariano my old friend, ¿como esta usted?"

"Bien, Luis, bien. ¿Y usted?"

"Bien, gracias."

"Buenas tardes, Señor Samaniego."

"Buenas tardes, Enrique. How was your trip to Paris?"

"Wonderful, thank you for asking."

"Oh, sí. I have not been back since my college days. What did you like most about Le Grande Ciudad?"

"The Champs-Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe of course, but also the Avenue de l'Opéra and Place de l'Opéra--they were lit with thousands of electric lights for the Exposition. It was reported the Exposition attracted over thirteen million visitors."

"You don't say? Tell me all about it."

"The Exposition took place on both sides of the Seine River, in the Champs de Mars and the heights of Trocadero near the Palais de Trocadero. Alexander Graham Bell was there displaying his telephone invention, and Thomas Edison as well. He presented his musical invention, the phonograph. Equally curious was an enormous metal head for a statue the French are presenting to los Estados Unidos. It is to be named the Statue of Liberty."

"Quite extraordinary, Enrique. It seems your time abroad was well spent."

"Sí, señor. It was a highly educational experience. I had occasion to meet an all together interesting fellow while I was there--a painter of the Impressionist style by the name of Pierre Auguste Renoir. We met at the Exposition and he invited Señor Edison and I back to his studio for a bottle of Château Lafite Rothschild 1869. I can tell you, Señor Edison was most impressed with the vintage; he up and left for Bordueax the very next day. But I digress--Señor Renoir shared with us several of his most exquisite paintings, all capturing the sublime essence of gay Paris. One in particular, which he called Bal du Moulin de la Galette, was a masterful work of a scene we had witnessed just days earlier at a Sunday evening dance out in the village of Montmarte."

"Ah sí. I know the place well. As a young man, the dance at le Moulin da la Galette was the very best place to meet le femmes--with slightly lowered morals, shall we say. Oh, but I'm sure you were not there for such reasons."

Enrique Creel looks sheepishly at Señor Don Luis, his future father-in-law. Fortunately for him, Señor Don Luis has drifted away from the conversation and fails to pick up on Dr. Samaniego's less-than-subtle inference.

"Excuse me, Mariano--I don't mean to interrupt, but there has been an accident here at the rancho, and one of our temporary vaqueros has received some injuries I'm hoping you can have a look at."

"Ciertamente. Vamos a echar un vistazo a lo."

"You may know him--he comes to us from the mission of your tío, Father Ortiz. Se llama Roberto Luna."

"Yes, I know him; he's like a nephew to me. Please send someone to fetch my bag."

Don Luis leads Dr. Samaniego to the infirmary, and the physician walks over to the bed where Roberto is resting. He's fast asleep, and the doctor notices he is smiling broadly. Angelina is by his bedside.

"Has he been given opiates or morphine?" the doctor asks.

"No, señor," Angelina responds.

"¿Lo que le sucedió?"

"It's believed he fell from his horse while roping a calf. He struck a rock and was brought in unconscious. He also appears to have some rib and hip injuries."

"Has he regained consciousness at all?"

"Sí, doctor, he awoke this morning, but he was with fever and somewhat disoriented."

Dr. Samaniego removes the swath from Roberto's head. The three-inch gash across his forehead is nearly sealed shut. The doctor is amazed by the fact no sutures or any other means of closing the wound is apparent. He opens Roberto's eyes one by one and examines how his pupils respond to the light. "Get him undressed. I want to examine his other injuries."

"Sí, señor."

Angelina pulls back the serape and sheets which cover Roberto. She props him up in a seated position with more pillows and then carefully begins to remove his vest and guayabera. She's surprised he has not stirred, but his smile seems to be growing larger, as if that were even possible. "He's ready, Doctor."

Dr. Samaniego looks up from his medical bag Chui retrieved from the able physician's carriage. He removes his stethoscope and what looks like a tuning fork, along with a bottle of chloroform. "And his trousers."

"¿Señor?"

"Sí, mujer. Is there a problem?"

"No, señor, no hay problema."

Angelina unbuttons Roberto's chaps and puts them on the stand. Her hands are beginning to shake a little. *Why are you so nervous, Angie?* she chastises herself. *It's not like you've never seen a boy naked before--you have seven brothers, para el bien del cielo.*

She removes his boots and then pulls off his jeans as rapidly as she possibly can, only to reveal Roberto is not wearing any undergarments. Angelina looks away as quickly as she can; however, there are some things a girl cannot unsee. She hopes she has not turned crimson red, but the warmth of her cheeks foretell of her involuntary self betrayal. "He's ready, Doctor," she croaks.

"Gracias. Please get me several cotton wraps for his wounds."

The physician carefully examines the young vaquero's ribs, stopping at the false ribs eight and nine. He can feel large contusions have formed under the skin, indicating the possibility of broken or fractured bones. He takes the tuning fork and bounces it off the upper rib and then holds it up to his ear, listening intently. When the vibration stops, he repeats the process on the lower rib, again listening with great interest. "Remove the pillows and slide him down so his head is flat. You'll need to stand at the head of the bed and hold his arms above his head."

"Sí, señor."

Angelina does as she is instructed, moving as swiftly as she can, trying not to notice the more delicately exposed parts. Once Roberto is in position, the doctor places one hand over the upper rib and laces his other hand on top of the first. "Now hold him tightly."

In one fluid and forceful motion, Dr. Samaniego presses down on the rib. The rib makes a sickening crunch and the impact causes Roberto to let out a miserable howl. Thankfully, he is not awake for long, as the chloroform takes over and he slips back into unconsciousness. The doctor performs the same procedure on the lower rib. The crunch is not as bad, nor is Roberto's reaction, much to Angelina's relief. It's all a bit much, even for someone of her constitution.

"Alright, then, I want you to clean the wounds on his head and his hip, and then apply



some of this on the affected area before wrapping them up with clean cotton swaths.”

The doctor hands Angelina a jar of iodine in an alcohol solution of his own design, a follower of the surgical practices of Dr. Joseph Lister in accordance with the findings of the brilliant new microbiologist, Louis Pasteur. Dr. Samaniego is one of the first Mexican physicians to employ modern antiseptic principles in his regular practice. He opens the door of the infirmary and steps out onto the walk.

“How is he, Mariano?” Don Luis inquires. “Is he hurt badly?”

“Oh, he'll be alright, Luis. He has a couple of broken ribs and a pretty bad laceration on his forehead, but other than that, there's nothing to worry about; he should heal up fine. He'll need to rest up for a few weeks and probably shouldn't travel until he's able.”

“Thank you, Doctor; we'll take good care of him. Please assure Father Ortiz he will have the best of care.”

“Gracias, Luis. I know he will, and I'll be sure and give mi tío your message. Now gentlemen, let's talk business, shall we?”

## Chapter Nine

Convalescing at the hacienda is not how Roberto hoped to spend his time, but all in all, he figures it's better than being back at school listening to el profesor drone on about his liaisons with the elite thinkers of Europe, like bumping into one of them while vacationing on the Thames is tantamount to philosophic collaboration. However, never in his wildest dreams could he have ever envisioned spending this much time in the company of his beautiful caregiver. The lovely Angelina moves about him with such a graceful presence and subtle poise, always offering him a ready smile, and when she speaks, the tone of her demure voice makes him feel like no one else is more important to her than he. Her exquisite form and comely features are more than enough to take any man's mind off his injuries.

"You are healing up nicely, Roberto, so I thought we could take lunch out in the garden today. Would you like that?"

"Sí, señorita; it would be my pleasure."

"Muy bien. I have prepared a picnic lunch for us. Let me help you up."

"I can make it."

Roberto strains to get up, trying his best not to show any weakness. Angelina gathers his boots and helps him put them on. She holds out his vaquero vest and he slides into it. He grabs his sombrero from the hat rack and opens the door for her.

"Gracias, señor."

"De nada."

The temperature has begun to drop with the coming of fall, making the day perfectly delightful for an intimate al fresco. The garden at the hacienda is lavishly cared for, exhibiting

every bloom of brightly colored petal and sepal in the region. Angelina lays out a large serape and bids Roberto take a seat. She removes several dishes from her basket. The first dish is a lime-bathed black bean, corn, and tomatillo salad con cilantro and cayenne pepper. The next dish contains pollo enchiladas con salsa verde, and for dessert, churros with a mango glaze.

"Did you make all this yourself?"

"Sí, who else?"

"It looks delicious."

Angelina prepares Roberto's plate first, and whether she knows it or not, her every movement is drenched in romantic symbolism, from the delicate way she serves each dish to the feminine enthusiasm sparkling behind her eyes. The atmosphere is palpable, and Roberto is mesmerized by her spell. To his credit, Roberto senses this time together may be as important to her as it is to him, so he pauses to enjoy each bite along with the intricate nuances of emotion, truly tickled by the moment. "Todo estaba muy sabroso."

"Gracias, señor."

"I want you to know how much I appreciate this--how much I appreciate everything you've done for me."

"I am only doing my duty."

"Is that all?"

"I don't want Señor Don Luis to think I didn't do my best for one of his trusted vaqueros."

"I wouldn't call myself trusted; on my first real round-up I let myself be thrown by a yearling."

"My brother tells me you are the best vaquero he has ever seen on the rancho. He says you were doing the work of two or three men and will be sorely missed."

"I don't know about that."

"Chui also told me you were very kind to him, and you treated all the peones with respect as equals."

Roberto reflects a moment on the unexpected benefits of having obeyed the Golden Rule. "Really? And what else did Chui tell you?"

"Nothing I don't already know."

"And what is that?"

Angelina bats her eyes precociously and coyly answers Roberto's question. "Que usted está enamorando."

"And what if I am?"

"Well, aren't you?"

"So you say."

"Are you telling me you're not in love?"

"No. Are you?"

Angelina's cheeks begin to heat up and she knows she's been caught in her little game to get Roberto to reveal his love for her, but she doesn't give up easily. "You are so young. What do you know of love?"

"I may not know much about love, but I know what I feel."

"Tell me."

Roberto chooses the words, with a few changes, from the libretto of Lorenzo da Ponte:

*"I don't know what I am any more, or what I am doing. Now I'm on fire, now I'm freezing. My love makes me change color. My love makes my heart flutter. Just the name of love, of delight consumes me, and makes my soul soar. I find myself talking of love from a need I can't explain. I talk of love when waking, I talk of love when dreaming, to the water, to the shadows, to the mountains, to the flowers, to the grass, to the fountains, to the echoes, to the air, to the winds and the sound of my useless words are carried away with them. If I don't have anyone to hear me, I talk of love to myself."*

"I didn't know you were a student of Señor Mozart?"

"What do you know of Mozart?"

"Why--do you think a peasant girl can't know of such things?"

"No, not at all. As a matter of fact, I'm very impressed."

"When I was a younger mi abuela took me to see a rendition of Mozart's opera, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, in Chihuahua City for my birthday."

"So what do you know of love?"

"I may not know much about love, but I know what I feel."

"Tell me."

Angelina takes her own page from the libretto of Señor Lorenzo da Ponte:

*"At last the moment approaches which I'll enjoy unhurried in my beloved's arms. Fearful doubts, out of my heart, don't come to disturb my delight. Oh, it seems that to my burning amor this place, the earth and the heavens respond, just as the night supports my ruses! Oh, come, don't delay, my beautiful joy, come where love calls you for enjoyment, while the moon still shines in the sky, while the air is still dark and the world still. Here the brook murmurs, here the winds play, what sweet murmurs whisper in my heart. Here the flowers laugh and the grass is fresh, all accords to the pleasures of love. Come, my love, among these hidden trees, I want to crown you with roses."*

Roberto thought he might have something witty to say, but the time for cracking wise has come and gone. Rightfully, he proceeds from the heart; embracing her, he kisses her, gently

at first, until he can feel her give in fully, and then as passionately as a gentleman's liberty will allow.

Angelina Rosita Rivas, like many other peasant girls born in Northern Mexico, is named after the famous Native American Indian explorer Angelina who helped the Spanish settle the abandoned French settlements in the Tejas territories in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Like her namesake, Angelina is inquisitive, adventurous, tenacious, and beautiful.

Well before she was school age, Angelina started working to earn her keep by performing chores and small tasks around the hacienda. It is not only customary, but essential every member of the family do whatever they can to help make ends meet. A family of the peones class in Chihuahua, Mexico is fortunate to earn two hundred dollars a year. Nevertheless, even though money is exceptionally tight, Angelina's father is fond of reminding his household they are blessed to have the privilege of working for the hacendado Don Luis Terrazas. He frequently points out Señor Don Luis pays wages well above average and prices at the hacienda store are the lowest in the state, perhaps the whole country, especially on beef and dairy products. Ignacio Rivas is a proud man who has always been able to say his children have shoes on their feet, a roof over their head, and more quality meat and cheese than they can eat. After coming of age, Angelina followed in her older brothers' footsteps by taking up permanent employment at the hacienda.

As is the case with so many of the children born into the peones class, Angelina and her brothers have had no schooling to speak of. However, despite her lack of formal education, Angelina's grandmother taught her to both read and write. In fact, she has always been exceptionally intelligent and excels at anything she puts her mind to. She taught herself to read English, Latin, and French by the time she was thirteen, and could easily hold her own against any of los caballeros' children in science or mathematics. Whenever she was working with her mother in the main house, Angelina would feverishly devour as many books as she could get her hands on, with a particular propensity for non-fiction.

Growing up, Angelina and Luis Terrazas Jr. were the same age, and she took up studying along with him each day while he did his homework. However, most days, he was far more interested in playing with his toys than attending to his assignments. Honestly, if it were not for Angelina's tutoring, Luis Jr. would not have made it out of primary school, nor progressed on to university for that matter.

Recently, Angelina has been inspired by a short text she found in the extensive library of Señor Don Luis on nursing written by Florence Nightingale, entitled "Notes on Nursing." Being moved by the opportunity to provide meaningful care for the inhabitants of the hacienda, she petitioned Señora Carolina to allow her to work in the infirmary. Usually, whenever someone took ill at the hacienda, they had to wait up to a week for the doctor to arrive from Chihuahua City. Some chose to bare their aches and pains until the semi-annual visits by the Sisters of Our

Lady of Guadalupe who offered a few rudimentary medical services and vaccines, but in most cases the peones preferred the more traditional remedies provided by the local native healers and curanderos. Not one to be held down by convention, Angelina was sure she could convince the peones of the benefits of modern medical treatment. When Roberto was brought into the infirmary just five days into her new vocation, she saw it as a definite sign she was making the right decision.

In all her endeavors, Angelina is consistently mindful of having her actions represent her family and community in a way that fosters pride and respect for her class. Like so many peasants before her, Angelina possesses innate qualities which will propel her far beyond the life she was born into, and she means to make the most of them.

All of these positive events and attributes aside, what Angelina is most concerned about recently is an issue she cannot get a handle on. No, it isn't her budding love for the young vaquero, but something far more disturbing. She doesn't know what to make of it and has no reasonable frame of reference in which to discuss it with anyone, not to mention how crazy it all sounds. The legends told of "El Coco" come to mind, but those are just fairy tales to scare little children. Angelina knows this is different. Nightmares are nothing new for her, but these are hardly your run-of-the-mill unpleasant dreams. As a child, Angelina had more than her fair share of frightful nightmares. She remembers how her mother would come to her bed side and comfort her with the old saying, "Sana sana colita de rana, sí no sana hoy sanará mañana." However, this is not like those kinds of nightmares at all--these are more like visions, and even more alarming is the imagery they contain.

In the beginning the visions entailed Angelina dressed in an outfit, if you could call it that, which left very little to the imagination and involved her and several other girls of similar age and dress dancing in front of a large gathering of Aztec royalty. As time went on, the nightmares progressed from the dance ceremony alone, to the addition of more horrific events consisting of the murder of a young man by the Aztec high priests, in what can only be described as ritualistic human sacrifice. The most recent night terrors are the most disconcerting of all, each one ending ultimately in the sacrifice of Angelina herself.

Angelina cannot be certain, but she believes her apparitions have something to do with a caballero who works for Don Luis Terrazas at el Rancho de San Diego in the foothills of the northern Sierra Madre, the man they call El Hechicero. She doesn't know too much about the man, but she knows she doesn't like how he appears to follow her around whenever he comes to the Hacienda de Encinillas, which is all too often of late. There is something far too sinister in the way he stares at her with those ojos of his which seem to pierce right through her flesh. Just thinking about it causes shivers to run down her spine, but none of that seems to matter to Angelina right now; her mind is miles away from any of those unpleasant thoughts.

The sheer electricity running through Angelina's body is beyond anything she has felt before, and she realizes what these feelings are asking of her--it's a petition she knows cannot

be answered now, but in time. Roberto's lips are far softer than she imagined, like the tender cheeks of an infant child, and she is lost in them. It's as if he is her Romeo and she is his Juliet, and Shakespeare himself has written a special sonnet just for them. Although this is not Angelina's first kiss, it certainly is the most meaningful. All of her youthful flirtation is slipping away in one defining moment, recasting her in the form of the woman she longs to become.

Roberto finally relinquishes his kiss and looks into Angelina's eyes, hoping to see what they might reveal, but they're presently closed. Fortunately for him, scanning her lovely face tells him everything he needs to know. He wants to kiss her again, but to his surprise, she knocks him over with a beautiful toe-curling kiss of her own. Little does he know, Angelina's mind is made up, and she wants to declare it to the world right here and now, this fine young vaquero is the one for her, and with this kiss, this spectacularly sensuous sugary wet kiss, she is staking her claim.

The euphoric love birds tear themselves apart long enough to finish their picnic lunch, spending the rest of the afternoon engaged in conversation about anything and everything, the wonderful whirling dance of head-over-heels infatuation. Roberto's mind is swirling with the random thoughts and concerns of any young man who finds himself dangling over the precipice of love. *I hope she feels the same way about me as I feel about her. I want to kiss her again. Why is she so incredibly beautiful? I'm going to kiss her again. Will she marry me? I'm definitely going to kiss her again. Marriage! Am I out of my mind! I'm too young to get married, but another kiss would be alright. What kind of a vaquero gets tied down with a woman? Maybe she'll kiss me again. Does my breath stink?*

Beyond the garden along the creek which flows down from Sierra de la Campaña, there is a path which leads from the main house to el chapilla de San Juan Bautista de Encinillas. To the east of the chapel lies a meadow full of wild flowers which look strangely familiar. Angelina and Roberto walk out to the middle of the field and Roberto lays out the serape with more than a little déjà vu. It's not long before the vaquero and his love begin showing their affection for one another with deep, slow kisses.

At the same time, on the far side of the chapel, El Hechicero stands watching.

## Chapter Ten

As quickly as it started, the massacre in the Main Temple is over, and the temple slaves are called in to clean up the slaughter. Chimalama searches frantically among the dead for her mistress, Tecuichpotzin, finding her under a gruesome pile of slain bodies. She is covered in blood and entrails, but thankfully she is still alive. Seeing Tecuichpotzin in such a pitiful mess, Chimalama does her best to clean off her mistress and revive her from what must be a terrible state of shock.

Once Tecuichpotzin has regained her senses, she and her servant girl make their way to the altar in search of the golden case used to store the Tecpatl of Quetzalcoatl the Feathered Serpent. They find it, intact, hidden beneath the fallen high priests. As rapidly as they can without drawing attention, Tecuichpotzin and Chimalama make their way down the steps behind the altar and through the tunnel which will lead them to the outer courtyard. Chimalama takes her mistress past the north gate and through the streets of Tenochtitlan to the grain storage facilities of King Moctezuma II. She recovers the sacred Tecpatl from where she had concealed it earlier and delivers it to Tecuichpotzin, who places it in the golden case.

Six years after the calamity of that fateful day in the Templo Mayor, the seventeen-year-old Tecuichpotzin found herself widowed for the fourth time, and renamed Dña Isabel Moctezuma by the Catholic priests who had been entrusted with her care after the execution of her family. She was then forced to become the ward and consort of the great Spanish conqueror Hernan Cortés, who not only impregnated her but then married her off to Pedro Gallego de Andrade while she was still with child, in order to avoid embarrassment. Four months later, her first daughter Leonor Cortés Moctezuma was born, followed by the birth of her first son Juan de Andrade Gallego Moctezuma some two years later. Juan de Andrade's father also died, leaving



Isabel a widow for the fifth time at the tender age of twenty-one. Shortly afterward, she was married again to Juan Cano de Savedra, her sixth and final husband, to whom she bore three additional sons and two daughters.

Isabel's eldest daughter Leonor would go on to marry Juan de Tolosa, the founder of Zacatecas, Mexico, and on their wedding day, Isabel gave her daughter a special gift in a golden case engraved with the image of the Feathered Serpent. Isabel's conversion to Catholicism had dramatically changed her view of the value of the knife, but at the same time she feared turning it over to the Spaniards because they were incapable of understanding the significant power the knife possessed. Isabel's instructions to Leonor were to ensure the secrecy of the dangerous relic's location should any of the descendants of the high priests come to reclaim it in an effort to resurrect the religious order of the Aztec gods. Soon, Leonor and Juan de Tolosa would have a daughter of their own, whom they named Isabel in honor of the child's grandmother.

In time, the day came for Leonor's daughter Dña Isabel de Tolosa Cortés de Moctezuma to wed the infamous conquistador Don Juan de Oñate, and like her mother before her, she passed on the ancient artifact to her daughter with the directive her mother had given her on her wedding day. What young Isabel did not know was that her new husband would soon be named Coronel Governor of Sante Fe de Nuevo Mexico province in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, and for the first time in its thousand-year history, the sacred knife of the Feathered Serpent would be moved from the land of its origin to the vast wilderness of the northern frontier.

In 1595, Don Juan de Oñate was given the commission by King Philip II of Spain to colonize the northern territory and establish new Roman Catholic missions throughout the northwest. When the time came for Oñate to leave on his first expedition, Isabel informed him she could not make the trip due to health concerns, but she reluctantly gave in to their nine-year-old son Cristobol's insistence on accompanying his father on the journey.

On the final day of preparations while combing the attic for suitable luggage, Cristobol discovers a golden case with an intricately carved design of what he thinks is an Aztec Indian dancing in a costume made of eagle feathers. Inside is a knife with a nine-inch blade, and a handle shaped like the character on the cover. He pulls the blade from the case and waves it around, making noises as it slices through the air, and concludes it will make a fine versatile weapon, perfect for the purposes he imagines.

Cristobol places the golden case inside his travel trunk covering it up with his school books, and then he carefully tucks his clothes in all around them. He tows the trunk out to the hall knowing the servants will place it on his father's personal coach wagon, and then he runs downstairs to the parlor. "Do you think we will encounter Indios, Papa?"

"Most assuredly, mi hijo, but don't you worry; we have many capable conquistadors in our guard, and your primos Juan and Vicente will be traveling with us. Are your things packed and ready to go?"

“Sí, papa,” Cristobol smiles, “my trunk is already loaded on the coach.”

“Very well, then. Say your goodbyes to your mother.”

Nine-year-old Cristobol de Naharriondo Oñate Perez y Cortés Moctezuma says goodbye to his mother, trying his best to be strong like his father, neither of them realizing Cristobol will be a nineteen-year old young man the next time they see each other, and the golden case containing the sacred knife of the Feathered Serpent will be long gone, presumably lost forever.

After decades of planning, litigation, and a number of false starts, the expedition finally deploys on January 26th, 1598 with great fanfare from the silver mining town of Zacatecas. However, even though the ten-year odyssey would extend el Camino Real de Tierra Adentro some six hundred miles north through what is now El Paso del Norte all the way to modern-day Sante Fe, New Mexico, and ultimately leave an indelible mark on the history of three great nations, the beginning of the trip would hold an ominous portent of things to come.

Don Juan de Oñate sent his nephew Vicente de Zaldívar ahead with sixteen men to find a way across the sand dunes in what is now los Medanos de Samalayuca in the northern desert of Chihuahua, Mexico. In two separate scouting parties which took the better part of three months and all but exhausted the expedition's water supplies, Zaldívar and his scouts eventually guided the company of soldiers and colonists to the Río Bravo, twenty miles east of present-day El Paso del Norte near San Elizario, arriving on April 20th, 1598. It was another fourteen days before the expedition finally crossed the Río Bravo del Norte; however, some of the more interesting events of their two-week stay along the southern shore occurred on April 28th, 1598. On that day, Don Juan de Oñate assembled the Spanish settlers for a feast and Thanksgiving Mass, signifying the first ever Thanksgiving celebration in what would become the United States, predating the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving by twenty-three years. After the feast, Oñate performed the La Toma ceremony, declaring the territory “Nuevo Mexico” for the Spanish crown. In addition, Oñate also renamed the river “Río Grande.”

Fording the Río Grande in those days was a monumental undertaking, in that there were no bridges or ferry boats to facilitate the crossing. The company was forced to unload and disassemble all of the eighty wagons and ten coaches in order to float them across the river.

Cristobol watches as two Indian servants load his trunk on to the canoe they are using to float the equipment and supplies from one side of the river to the other. “Be careful with that; my school books are in there,” Cristobol says.

“We will, young master Oñate.”

“Watch yourself, mi hijo--the current is very strong and can pull you away in a flash,” his father warns.

“Sí, papa.”

The canoe is halfway across when a rush of water flows down from up river and grabs hold of the canoe, ripping the tow lines out of the tender's hands. The contents of the canoe

spill into the river, and Cristobol's trunk is swept rapidly downstream. The Indians run along the riverbanks desperately trying to salvage what stores they can, but the young expeditionist's trunk is filling up with water and sinks below the waterline, eventually coming to rest on the river floor nearly two miles away.

The search party returns with most of what was lost, but to Cristobol's dismay, his trunk is not among the items recovered. He begins to cry and runs to his father for some comfort only to receive a stern rebuke from Señor Oñate. "Wipe those tears from your face--this is no country for wailing como un niño. I will not tolerate such behavior."

"But Papa, all my possessions are lost!"

"¡Silencio, mi hijo! There will be many more losses before this adventure is over, and I cannot have you blubbering over every drop of spilt milk. ¿Me entiendes?"

"Sí, papa, yo entiendo."

The trunk of Cristobol de Naharriondo Oñate Perez y Cortés Moctezuma would lie at the bottom of the Río Grande for almost three centuries, moving only a few hundred yards downstream during the floods of 1744 and 1829. During the flood of 1829, the Río Grande carved out a south fork which left the towns of San Elizario, Ysleta, and Socorro stranded on an island they called La Isla, but then in 1870 drought came to the region and began to dry up the river. In 1878, after several years with little or no rain, the north fork of the river had drawn low enough to cross on horseback or even wade through on foot.

#

"Half breed" was a label the young Taylor Brown has become accustomed to from an early age. Born to an Irish-American father and Tigua Indian mother, Taylor is used to all manner of racist insults from the mostly white settlers in the West Texas community he is from. That's probably why he likes to spend most of his time out at his maternal grandmother's house in San Elizario. He likes to swim and fish in the north fork of the Río Grande, and if the fish aren't biting, he can always ride on over to the south fork and try his luck over there, but mostly he likes being alone with his thoughts on the lazy river.

The town of San Elizario was shrinking in population due to losing the county seat after the terrible violence of the Salt Wars, and the subsequent plan to reroute the Southern Pacific railway by C.P. Huntington, it seemed to suit the mostly mestizo-blooded inhabitants of San Elizario just fine. The gringos who have been settling in and around their city for the last seventy years were considered nothing more than interlopers, whom the older residents like Taylor's grandmother were more than happy to see move across the river to the new West Texas town of El Paso.

Taylor casts out his line as far as he can and begins to reel it in. The line goes taut, and he realizes the homemade hook is caught on something. He tries to get the line free, but try as he might, it's good and stuck. "Oh, for cryin out loud! Will ya look at this."

Taylor wades out into the water, thrusting the pole to the left and then to the right, but he still can't free the line. He reaches the cork float and sees the hook has caught an old cottonwood log. *No problem*, he thinks. *I'll have it unsnagged in no time.*

The young angler steps forward, and his foot lands on something hard with a thump. Whatever his foot has landed on, it sure isn't a rock. Rocks don't give way when stepped on like this thing here. "Now what in the heck is this?" Taylor reaches down and feels around with his hand. "It's big whatever it is," he concludes.

After some time spent digging, he gets the idea it may be some kind of treasure chest. Excitedly, the fisherman gets a grip on the handles and pulls as hard as he can, but the chest won't budge. "Ooh wee! This thing must be full of gold!"

Taylor decides to take another tack, and quickly clears as much of the river bed from around his cache as he can. After some difficulty, he unlatches the lid and opens it up, only to find the top full of slimy, tattered old clothes--they're so deteriorated they just fall apart in his hands. He digs into the chest further and discovers some harder objects which feel promising in the murky water, but upon surfacing, they prove to be nothing more than rotting, putrid old books of some sort. Disappointment sets in as the naive treasure hunter gives in to the notion that his anticipated bounty is a bust.

The trunk is light enough now for Taylor to pull it free from the silty river bottom, so he drags it over to the shore, kicking the beat-up old trunk over on its side to drain out the rest of the turbid water. He wades back out to retrieve his fishing pole and frees the line, reeling it in as he makes his way back to the river bank. Once the line is clear, he casts out again and settles back for a long, languid day, with no real anticipation of any action after all the commotion he's raised. "Heck, musta chased 'em halfway down ta Big Bend by now," he figures. However, his peaceful rest doesn't last for long.

"Pinche Taylor. ¿Que pasa, ese?"

Taylor opens his eyes and looks up to see Hector Moreno, a no-good drunk and petty thief who hangs around the river during the day and the saloons on Main Street at night.

Moreno loves to boast of his part in dragging poor Charles Ellis through town during the worst days of the Salt Wars. Fact is, Ellis's killing had a lot more to do with the local Mexican Catholics taking issue with Charlie enforcing the District Judge's ban on using the old San Elizario Cemetery when he was town sheriff a few years back. Sadly, Padre Antonio Borrajo had as much to do with the whole ugly affair as anyone, being the first to defy the ban, an error in judgment that would haunt the padre until the day he died. Nonetheless, Taylor knew Hector was probably no more than a spectator at the horrid event, in that he was by all accounts, a yellow-bellied coward.

"Fishin. What's up with you?"

"Solo un poco de prepa."

Moreno takes a seat on a rock next to Taylor and pulls out a small bottle of whiskey. He pops the cork and pulls back a snort. "Ah, nectar of the gods!"

The old rummy takes another pull and holds out the bottle for Taylor. "Want some?"

"No thanks. I never touch the stuff."

"Suit yourself. ¿Por que echar perlas a los cerdos? What's in the trunk?"

"Nothin but a bunch a rotten old junk."

Moreno has another swig from his bottle of hooch and then walks over to the trunk to have a look inside. He turns the chest upright and pulls open the lid. What he sees next is beyond his comprehension at first, but he rubs his eyes and refocuses on the shining object at the bottom of the trunk. He cautiously reaches in as if it were a snake that might bite him, and pulls out a golden case, inspecting it like he can't believe what he's seeing. "Yo no lo creo, esto es oro. ¡Esto es oro!"

Taylor looks up to see what Moreno is carrying on about, and finds he has a case of some sort. He jumps up and rushes over to where the Mexican is standing. "What are you blabberin about? Let me see that."

Moreno pulls it away before Taylor can grab it out of his hands, "This whole case is made of pure gold, and it's old too, looks like some kind of Aztec symbol."

"Give it to me! It's mine!"

Moreno holds the case up, keeping it out of Taylor's reach. "No way, José--this thing is way too important an artifact for the likes of you, green bean."

"I said give it to me!"

Taylor punches Moreno in the gut, causing him to double over and drop the case, but when Taylor bends down to pick it up off the ground, Moreno brings the whiskey bottle crashing down on Taylor's head, driving him to the dirt and rendering him unconscious. Blood immediately starts to squirt out from the huge gash in the young man's skull. Moreno coldly drags Taylor's limp body into the river and pushes him down under the water, allowing the current to pull him downstream. He then scrambles out of the water, picks up the golden case, and heads off down the path toward town.

Moreno heads straight to the saloon and starts bragging about his treasure, but no one actually believes him, and it doesn't take long before he's created a big enough stir to get himself thrown into the San Elizario jail. Another Mexican by the name of Melquiades Seguro is in the cell next to Moreno, but he is in no mood for small talk, in that he is scheduled to be hanged in the morning. The jailers spend a considerable amount of time looking over the golden case and knife inside, but after a while they lose interest, and finally settle back in their chairs and drift off to sleep.

Suddenly, a knock comes at the jailhouse door, waking everyone inside. "¿Quién es el?"

"Rangers de Tejas! ¡Tenemos dos prisioneros americanos!"

One of the jailers opens the door to find William Henry Bonney pointing a .44 caliber Army revolver at his head. Bonney backs the jailer into the jailhouse and takes the keys off the wall.

"Y'all cooperate, and we shouldn't have any problems. ¿Comprendes?"

"Billy, is that you?" Seguro calls out.

"In the flesh, amigo!"

"Get me the hell outta here!"

"Whatta ya think I'm doin here, ya crazy Mexican."

Bonney takes the keys and opens Segura's cell, releasing him, and forces the jailers into it. He notices the golden case on the table and scoops it up on the way out the door.

"¡Vamonos!"

"Wait!" Moreno yells out. "That's my case! Let me out of here!"

Bonney stops at the jailhouse door and looks back at Moreno. He walks over to the cell and looks the old drunk up and down. He then holds up the case and asks, "This belongs to you?"

"Sí."

"What do ya want for it?"

"It's worth a king's ransom."

Bonney holds up the keys to the cell and shakes them in front of Moreno. "I'll tell ya what. I'll give ya these keys right here for it--take it or leave it."

"It's worth a lot more than that."

"Suit yourself. ¿Por que echar perlas a los cerdos?"

Bonney turns and throws the keys on the table and strides out the door. Moreno stands for a moment with his mouth open and then begins shaking the bars violently. "¡Pinche gringo!"

William H. Bonney and Melquiades Seguro ride south across the south fork of the Río Grande and into Mexico toward el Camino Real de Tierra Adentro.\*

#

Said to be the illegitimate son of José Maria Barquin, Javier Mateo Barquin is a Yaqui mestizo from a small village east of the old colonial mining town of Alamos in southern Sonora, not far from the Chihuahua border. He fought alongside José Maria Bonifacio Leiva Peres for Benito Juárez's Republican Government in the war against the French during the Maximilian Affair, but when Leiva returned to Guaymas and became the leader of the Yaqui Indians, and changed his name to Cajemé, Javier Barquin decided he'd had enough of the endless warfare of his people.

An educated man, particularly in the history of the Aztec civilization, Barquin has always hoped the Yaqui would rise above their status as nomadic hunter-gatherers and take their place

among the advanced indigenous civilizations of Mesoamerica. He saw independence from Spain as an opportunity to reestablish the cultural and religious traditions of Mexico's true heritage, which for him was the complete restoration of the Aztec dynasty. The key to Barquin's plan was the uniting of all Nahuatl-speaking tribes across the North American continent under one banner, and he was proceeding with that very strategy.

Barquin believed he could achieve his ends by first restoring the dignity of the god of war and patron deity of the Aztecs, Huitzilopochtli, and then resurrecting the ceremony of Toxcatl. His scheme, if carried out perfectly, would summon two very important gods out of their slumber, and revive the Aztec religion in the people's hearts. To accomplish this, he must offer up the Ixiptla of Coyolxauhqui as a human sacrifice, in order to rekindle the favor of Huitzilopochtli, followed by the sacrifice of the Ixiptla of Tezcatlipoca, not only to gain Tezcatlipoca's favor, but to also incite Quetzalcoatl to action in order to fully restore the balance of war and peace amongst the gods throughout the spirit world.

A very determined man and a charismatic leader, Barquin had no trouble recruiting an army of followers for his cult, and the best of the lot were los Brujos Mejores, ex-military warlocks trained in the black arts who act as Barquin's personal Inteligencia, responsible for maintaining order among the network of lesser shamans and curanderos. Together the disciples of el Azteca Culto have carefully reconstructed the layout of the Patio of the Gods in a secret location deep within the Barranca del Cobre in the Sierra Madres.\*\*

For the man who has become known as El Hechicero, only one piece of the puzzle remains, the recovery of the Tecpatl, the knife of the Feathered Serpent.

#

Bonney and Seguro reach the village of Casa Grande on their way to Sonora, Mexico. They've ridden throughout the night and are in desperate need of water for their horses and a meal for themselves. The pair tie up their horses at the water trough, and Bonney carries the golden case into the saloon. The saloon is fairly empty for a Saturday, with the exception of the bartender, and one table in the back where four men are playing a game of Mexican poker, a variant of five-card stud.

Bonney tosses a twenty-dollar gold Liberty Double Eagle up on the bar, promptly garnering the bartender's attention, "Whiskey, por favor," Bonney calls out with a boyish grin.

"Sí, señor. Juego?"

"Por que no. Envié a un muchacho algún tamales."

"Sí, señor, no problema."

The bartender pours two shots of whiskey and leaves the bottle. Bonney and Seguro take a seat at a table in the middle of the room. One of the men at the other table leaves out the back, and in no time he returns with several heavily armed men. Bonney slips his hands beneath his poncho and quietly slides his .44s out of their holster. A tall, pale, older Mexican

steps forward from among the men and approaches their table. He speaks in perfectly fluent English. "Good afternoon, gentlemen."

"I'm no gentleman, I'm an Irishman."

The mysterious man smiles. "Delightful. I like a man with a sense of humor."

"What can I do for ya?"

"I thought the two of us could talk business."

"Always ready ta talk business. Have a seat."

"Thank you--I will."

The thin man takes a seat across from Bonney, requiring Seguro to move over, and extends his hand out to Bonney. "My name is Javier Barquin."

Billy obliges. "William H. Bonney, pleasure."

"Believe me, young man, the pleasure is all mine. Interesting case you've got there."

"Is it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well, it's your lucky day, 'cause it just happens ta be for sale."

Barquin's eyes light up and begin to sparkle. Seguro feels an uneasiness in his gut. "Billy, can I talk to you for a minute?"

Bonney looks at his partner and shakes his head, a little annoyed, and then refocuses on his mark. Seguro tries again, with more persistence. "Billy, I need to have a word with you in private, if you don't mind."

Bonney finally picks up on his partner's tone and stands up. "Excuse us for a moment, won't you?"

"Certainly, take your time."

Seguro leads Bonney over to the far corner of the bar. "I don't think you should sell that case to this guy, amigo."

"Why not? We need horses, and maybe we can get enough to start a ranch back in Sante Fe."

"This case has got some bad mojo attached to it, brother, and these bandidos reek of it."

"That's a bunch a superstitious nonsense. You worry too much, compadre. I got this."

The pair returns to the table and take their seats. Bonney eyes Barquin seriously. "Now--what's it worth to ya?"

\*See appendix A, section 3.

\*\*See appendix A, section 4.



## Chapter Eleven

Angelina's hair falls back against the daffodils, and she gives in to her heart's delight, not caring about the day or her duties or anything but the bliss she is feeling right now at this very moment.

Who is this tall handsome stranger she has fallen so *a corps perdu* in love with? Why has he come to her in this way? Does it really matter how? Will it ever? All at once she arrives at the truth of it. It's his tender heart, a heart as big as the whole world beating just for her, and the rhythm of it is as soft as a purring kitten and yet as loud and steady as a locomotive, a heart of gold.

Roberto's kisses are increasingly passionate, and Angelina knows she would give into him right now no matter what he asked of her, but she feels--no, she knows--he will not. So full of love and respect for her is this rugged vaquero, so full of honor, he would die before bringing her any shame or harm to her reputation. This one just wants to love her and hold her and protect her, she imagines, but he will learn she needs no protection. She can stand on her own two feet and hold her own alongside any man. Yes, he will find that out in time--after all, she's the one who's been taking care of him these past twelve days.

"What are you thinking, mi amor?" Roberto asks.

"Oh, nothing really."

"You were so far away just then."

"Oh no, my love; I am right here, right here with you. There's nowhere I would rather be than here with you."

Angelina is with him, and she knows then she will always be, through thick and thin, as it were. Roberto is all the things she perceives in herself, but without any of the reservations one

in her position felt dutifully held back by--family or religious or cultural obligations, societal position, and other things of this nature. He has them, for sure, but for him they're developed and controlled by an honest yet humble sense of self, an inward devotion to who he is or wants to be, as an individual. It comes through in his speech, his mannerisms, and his personality. It's his way, like his life is a giant canvas and he's painting in bold strokes of primary colors which harmonize intrinsically with who he is as an artist. This one is not gray, yet neither is he all black and white; he is as refreshing as a rainbow, and all his colors burn brightly with faith and hope and love.

Angelina's mind dances with thoughts of him, who he is, and who they will be together, stopping only momentarily now and again to wonder if his mind is engaged in the same abstracted waltz.

Abruptly, Angelina's thoughts change, and she is struck by an invading quandary building up in her mind. *Life is full of trials and tribulations*, she reasons. *How will he respond to the setbacks which are sure to come? If he should stumble or fall, I am more than strong enough to lift him up, but would he allow it? Could one so sturdy and self-assured let me be his helpmate? Then again, she supposes, the answer is working itself out right now in this symbiotic encounter we find ourselves in, and I have only to patiently wait and see. The proof will be in the pudding, as they say.* Roberto leans forward and kisses her again, and just as spontaneously as they'd erupted, her thoughts of such things disappear in his big soft lips.

Unfledged love, so new so fresh so full of emotion, and so raw, exposing the inner art of oneself without time to think or plan or position it just so, each new feeling a work of art in and of itself, and they're creating it together. *How could something so overwhelming be so perfect?* Roberto thinks. *This experience is as beautiful as a sunset, but more than that with its hope of being ten thousand sunsets placed end to end in a lifetime of this spectacular color and light and warmth of feeling, and he is feeling so much more than he ever thought he could. Perhaps others know this feeling, like those who have a father and a mother, but he has neither of these and has never experienced what that's like. Oh sure, maybe when he was a baby, but he has no memory of those early days. Father Ortiz often spoke of love, love of the Creator, love of our Lord, Jesúcristo, and certainly about His love for us.*

Roberto spent many nights at the foot of his bed praying to the Lord in the constant struggle for understanding of this bond between them as Father and son. *Certainly, our Lord must have such an abiding love to put himself in our place on the cross*, he imagines. But what Roberto really wanted, what he felt he really needed, was to connect in the way earthly fathers connect with their earthly sons, although, he could never really know what that was like. Would he even recognized it if he were to encounter it? *Father Ortiz did his best to fill the void*, he supposes, *and I do love the padre like a father in a sense, but Father Ortiz loves every one of the members of his flock like any good shepherd.* Something has definitely been missing, even if Roberto can't explain it, but the emptiness, the utter longing, is being swept away in the torrent of love washing over him now. Like the many times he paddled down the rapids of the Río

Grande with all the same intensity, exhilaration, and joy, with a proper bit of fear mixed in. These are most assuredly waters he has never navigated before.

Roberto is instantly gripped by imposing thoughts and questions. *What would she say if I asked for her hand in marriage? What would her father say? Would her family accept me, an Apache? Marriage! Ay Dios mío, what am I thinking? I have no way of caring for her, no money, no job, no home, and what of the donatio propter nuptias? I have no money or family to pay the bride price.* Angelina leans in and kisses him, and before he knows it, his fears are slipping away. Whatever the cost, no matter what mountain he has to climb, or river he has to ford, or desert he has to cross, he will make her his bride.

Roberto and Angelina rise from the meadow, and Roberto sweeps up the basket and serape, not feeling any of the burdens of his injuries. They proceed lazily up the path toward the infirmary as carefree as the day. It seems all is alive around them, the leaves are somehow greener, and the trees whisper their love like señoritas gossiping at a church social. The sun is shining brighter, giving off a renewing energy and a glow they haven't felt before now, the birds are singing clearer, all in unison and in harmony like an orchestral arrangement penned by the Master himself, young love in all its majesty and glory.

Roberto and Angelina begin to speak at the same time. "I was thinking..."

"Do you ever wonder..."

"Por favor, you go ahead."

"No--please, you go ahead."

"Are you sure?"

"Sí, por favor."

"I've been thinking about how I was going along with my life, not sure how it would turn out or what was to become of it, and then the next thing I know, all of a sudden who I am and what I want to be has miraculously become crystal clear. It's as if I left the mission a youth, looking out over a vast canyon of endless uncertainty, and somehow, in just shy of three weeks, I've been transformed into a man whose whole life has unfolded before him, my destiny made sure by the anticipation of sharing a lifetime with someone whom I have only known for a short while. I know it sounds crazy..."

Roberto looks into Angelina's eyes for some kind of confirmation.

"It doesn't sound so crazy--it doesn't sound crazy at all," she reassures him.

Roberto is taken back by the way she effortlessly makes him feel understood, as if to do so is as simple as breathing for her. Many more thoughts want to rush out of his mouth like steam trying to escape from a boiling kettle, but he restrains himself, remembering his manners. "What were you going to ask me?"

"I was going to ask if you have ever wondered how you can be with someone you have only known for a short time and yet feel, somehow, you were always meant to be with that

person?" She looks up at him with her large ebony eyes. "I guess what I mean is--I feel the same way as you do."

When love starts out as a romantic play, it is wholly up to the actors themselves to write their own script. No one can say for sure what improvisational adaptation these two ardent paramours shall devise, but for Roberto and Angelina the spotlight has beckoned, and the stage is theirs.

Angelina sits with Roberto in the infirmary, talking about everything and nothing at all until late into the night. Each holds off Hypnos to the frustration of Morpheus, but tomorrow is another day and closer than they realize. Angelina bids Roberto good night, and they embrace. She kisses him gently and walks out into the darkness of the starry moonless night.

Roberto drifts off to sleep with a refreshingly rare absence of thought, and for the first time in a long time, he sleeps without dreaming of anything. Meanwhile, out in the black of night, a sinister villain lurks behind the stable, waiting upon his quarry.

Angelina reflects dreamily on the day's events, unable to recall one so perfect, and then suddenly, without warning, a black sack is violently thrust over her head. She attempts to scream, but a large, leather-gloved hand is forced down over her mouth, stifling her cry for help. Her arms are being bound by what feels like a bandana tied so tightly the skin on her wrists is now burning with searing pain. Her abductor manhandles her most inappropriately as he slams her over the back of a horse, binding her arms and legs beneath its belly.

Angelina can feel that the animal she is strapped to is as frightened as she is by the way it hopelessly strains against the tether of whatever madman is pulling on it. The sound of two horses at a slow walk quietly echoes up from the ground for what seems like a mile or so, but then with gut-wrenching force, the wild screech of a deranged psychopath calls the horses to a full gallop, jarring every bone and joint in Angelina's body. Each time the fore hooves strike the road, the wind is forced out of her chest, and the panic of suffocation overwhelms her. She does everything in her power to tighten the muscles against the blow so she can draw breath before the next stride, but as soon as she regains her wind, the horse's gait is disrupted by a boulder, and her timing is thrown off enough that she is caught between gasps, forcing the air back out of her lungs. Angelina's immediate struggle for survival is the only thing keeping her mind from dissolving under the sheer terror of her circumstances.

After what seems like an eternity, Angelina feels the horses slow and turn off the road. She hears other voices and the pounding hooves of many additional riders. Two voices begin to exchange words, but she can't make out what they're saying. She senses ominously that whoever has kidnapped her is passing her on to this new and perhaps more vile horde, and God only knows what they will do with her.

#

Roberto wakes from a long and restful sleep to the sounds of men talking loudly out on the Encinillas Road. The sunlight coming in from the window casts its shadow on the wall

opposite the infirmary, telling him the hour is far past the time of Angelina's usual arrival with his breakfast.

A tall, thin, pale man, perhaps fifty years of age, enters the infirmary with a large burly caballero following close behind. The men walk over to Roberto's bedside, and the pale man addresses him in a clear and commanding voice. "How are your injuries?"

"¿Señor?"

"Your injuries. Are you well enough to ride?"

"I suppose so."

"Good. You'll need to get dressed as quickly as you can and meet us outside."

"What is this all about? Where is Angelina?"

"I'll explain everything as soon as we're underway, but right now we must make haste--time is of the essence."

The two men exit and Roberto rises from his bed in a bit of a huff, wondering what could possibly be so important he has to ride anywhere with two broken ribs, and without breakfast no less. Something isn't quite right about all this, but Roberto can't put his finger on it. He especially doesn't like the idea of leaving without saying goodbye to Angelina. What on earth is this all about? Not one to be rude or shirk from his duty, Roberto resolves to quit fussing like old Sister Mary Margaret at the mission. The Mother Superior could get her habit in a bunch over a sunny spring day. After all, Angelina wouldn't want him behaving like a spoiled child.

Although he doesn't realize it now, Roberto is leaving the room which has paradoxically given him so much joy for the better part of the past two weeks, for the last time. He quickly scribbles out a note for Angelina:

*My darling Angelina, I am sorry I cannot say goodbye to you in person, but I have been called to ride with one of Señor Don Luis's caballeros. I do not know where we are going or when I shall return, but know I carry your heart with me always.  
Yours truly, Roberto.*

A company of caballeros is assembled outside with several of them surrounding the man who appears to be their el jefe. The strangely aristocratic caballero, reminiscent of the Confederate Major General John Bell Hood, breaks free from the men gathered around him and walks toward Roberto, extending his hand. "My name is Barquin, Javier Barquin."

"Roberto Luna. Mucho gusto, señor."

"Mucho gusto, Roberto."

"I have requested your assistance at el Rancho de San Diego from Señor Terrazas. All of his other vaqueros have been called to war against Victorio at Tres Castillos, and we must form the rear guard should the Apache try and escape west into Sonora."

"Oh--sí, señor, I'll help in any way I can."

"I'm pleased to hear that Roberto. One of my men has taken the liberty of preparing a mount for you. So, if you're ready, we must ride."

"Sí, señor. Let me get my bedroll."

"That won't be necessary; we have extras at the rancho."

Before he can respond, Señor Barquin dismisses Roberto, climbs aboard his Andalusian stallion, and calls out to his men, "Hombres, vamonos!"

The day is one of those days which foretell of a change in the weather, and whispers to the trees, summer is gone and it's time to shed their leaves. Clouds as large as half the sky, not black but not white, float by on a slow wind, lazy enough to lull a body to sleep, only a restless one, because by dusk the lightning and thunder will surely come. The darker purple clouds lie out across the far mountains, flattened out like pancake batter hitting a hot skillet, sprawling menacingly from north to south on the western horizon. The wind is much cooler now, not like the dusty dog-breath winds of summer, which can be so warm they give the neck a shiver even on a blazing hot afternoon. The tops of the junipers sway gently in a slow dance that reminds Roberto of the twilight lovers on the final Sunday night of the rodeo in El Paso del Norte. Roberto loathed this time of year without ever really knowing why; melancholy is the most likely reason he figures, but he has a case of it now which ached right down into his bones, leaving him with a clearer understanding of the word than he has ever felt before.

They reach el Camino Real de Tierra Adentro and turn north up the Royal Road, but Roberto's horse shakes his head violently to the south, not at all comfortable with the direction they're headed. Definitely not the kind of behavior Roberto would expect from an animal normally inclined to go along with the natural flow of the other horses, and right then and there the apprehension inside the beast leaps up and grabs hold of Roberto as well. It takes everything he has to keep from turning around and hightailing it back to the hacienda. *But how could you be so willing to do something that impetuous?* he demands of himself. *What's gotten into you? Settle down and focus. Boy, you've got the fever bad, one pathetic lovesick puppy. You better get your priorities in order, or you might as well put your tail between your legs and run on back to the mission, 'cause that's just exactly where you're headed if you blow this opportunity. Enough of this tonterias!*

## Chapter Twelve

The company skirts the eastern foothills around the northern half of the Sierra del Nidos mountain range, renowned for the ungodly number of rattlesnakes which live among the stone formations here. These spectacular array of eight thousand foot plus conifer topped peaks are also home to the southern most habitat of the North American Grizzly Bear. In total these majestic pillars of granite, limestone, and lava, form the western border of the vast Rancho de Encinillas. It was in the lower half of this range, just north of the surreal Cumbres del Majalca, where Roberto sustained his present injuries, which are causing him considerable discomfort at the moment.

Surprisingly, it's not Roberto's tightly wrapped ribs which are affecting him most, but rather his right hip, which is feeling every stride of the horse's hooves as they hit the drought ridden earth beneath him. Looking around at these range hardened caballeros, Roberto hazards a guess he's not likely to find much sympathy from this lot. Their solemn attitude is in stark contrast to the jovial atmosphere he enjoyed in the company of Señor Vasquez, at least when they weren't fighting off bandidos. He wonders for a moment how Señor Murrieta and Procopio are getting along against the Apache raiders to the east. Understandably, he hasn't thought much about his compadres while convalescing at the hacienda, but now that he's back out on the trail, he misses their good humor and agreeable disposition.

Roberto reminds himself, *Judge not lest ye be judged*, but he is still having a difficult time getting a fix on what's different about these men. Whatever it is prowling beneath their dark demeanor, its influence is deepening Roberto's dismal mood. Things only get worse when the contingent turns south after rounding the northern boundary of the Sierra del Nidos and proceeds southwest through the northern passage of the Sierra Las Tunas Mountains. Roberto

knows enough to know el Rancho de San Diego is well north of here, and there isn't any good reason he can think of for a detour of this distance. By the time they cross over the Las Tunas range and the seismic Sierra Grande Mountains come into view off to the west, Roberto can no longer dismiss his premonitions that things are not as they should be.

The questions are, *what's really going on here? What exactly are these men up to, and what's their ulterior motive?* Roberto strains against his daunting desire to flee in any direction away from these cold purveyors of deception, but deep down, he knows doing so will only show his hand--or maybe worse. After some deliberation, Roberto forces himself to keep cool and not let on he's aware that whoever these hombres are, they're most likely up to no good.

What isn't nearly as clear to Roberto is why they've involved him. How could he possibly figure into whatever shenanigans these desperadoes have planned? The more he racks his brain trying to come up with a plausible answer to his dilemma, the more his thoughts drift back to the crazy dreams he was having a couple of weeks ago. The obvious problem is, those dreams were not only as implausible as they were improbable, they were downright impossible. Nevertheless, he can't seem to get the images of those terrifying nightmares out of his head, or the disturbing rumination they may not be as insane as their abhorrent symbolism might suggest.

*Talk about shenanigans, Roberto chastises himself, you better quit fluttering off to loony town and come up with a legitimate plan. ¿Comprendes? Alright, get a hold of yourself; you just need to keep a level head and not let your imagination run away with you.*

The company reaches el Río Santa Maria, and Barquin commands the men to hold up and water their horses. He dismounts from his large Andalusian while one of his caballeros smartly tends to the animal in the fashion of a cavalryman. Roberto approaches Barquin with a measured limp, exposing a hitch in his getalong not previously exhibited at the hacienda. "How are you holding up, young man?" Barquin inquires.

"Lo siento, señor, I'm definitely not at my best."

"Do you need to rest?"

"No, no. That won't be necessary, señor. I'll be alright."

"Muy bien. Your courage is commendable."

As much as Roberto wants to press Barquin for answers, he knows he's not ready to show his hand just yet, but a little probing might give him an edge later on if he gets a chance to make his move. "Perdoname, señor, can you tell me when we'll be arriving at el Rancho de San Diego? We left in a bit of a hurry, and I didn't have the chance to eat anything today."

"I understand. I'll send one of my men over with some food for you."

*That doesn't tell me much, Roberto laments silently. Now what?*

Fortunately, Señor Barquin is not through talking. "It will be a couple of days before we report to the rancho, but first I must meet with the Yaqui leader, Cajemé, near la Barranca del



Cobre, his cooperation is essential to the success of our mission."

"Sí, señor, yo entiendo."

"It's nothing for you to be concerned with; just try your best to keep up, and if you need anything, let me or one of my men know." Barquin lingers for a moment, studying Roberto's reaction before turning abruptly and marching back to his horse.

One of Barquin's caballeros brings jerky and water for Roberto, glaring at him with his steely black eyes while muttering incoherently to himself. He can't make out what the man is trying to say, but his deathly stare gives Roberto a chilling case of the willies.

Out on the trail, the sun is just beginning to fade behind the Sierra Grande peaks to the west. The dark clouds, which had so ominously threatened with ferocious bellows of lightning and thunder, seem to have exhausted themselves on the mountaintops and now meekly disperse out over the basin floor.

Roberto is still stuck in contemplation over what, if anything, can be made of the words of Señor Barquin back at the river. No matter how convincing his excuse for traveling this far south might have been, Roberto is sure the old caballero is holding back the truth and can't be trusted. After all, even though it is true the Yaqui were used by the military as trackers and interpreters in the war against the Apache, why would either of them waste valuable time meeting several hundred miles south in some difficult, hard-to-reach location like la Barranca del Cobre?

As the party draws to the nearest point in the valley to las Sierra Grandes, something begins to spook the horses. All at once, several of the frightened beasts rear up, desperately trying to buck their riders and bolt. It could be they've caught wind of a bobcat or a black bear coming down to find water in the valley below, but the frightened animals surely want no part of whatever it is. Roberto tries everything he knows to calm the stallion writhing beneath him, but nothing is working. In all the commotion, he doesn't notice the ground underneath them has begun rolling back and forth, but then the earth starts shaking violently, and before Roberto can get his mind around the strange movement pulling him in every direction, his horse charges off to the south at full speed as if shot from a cannon--it's all Roberto can do to hang on for dear life.

After several miles of frantic, white-knuckle flight, the terrified animal to which Roberto clings desperately, finally tires and slows down. Somehow, in all the madness, Roberto's thoughts have remained calm enough for him to recognize his opportunity to make a run for it. He gives his horse the spurs, and in a flash, they're back up to full speed and racing away from Barquin and his henchmen. Roberto can hardly believe his good fortune, despite the fact he's just been through his first earthquake; no wonder the ancient native Mogollon Indians called this place el Valle de Trueno Rodante. The only problem is, Roberto has no idea where he and his runaway horse are headed.

Roberto sees what he thinks is the foothills of Sierra Las Manzanas Mountains coming up

just off to the southwest, and hopes he might find his way through Nayurachic Canyon. He's quite certain Ciudad Guerrero lies beyond the canyon to the south. If he can reach the old historic city, the parish priest is a close friend of Father Ortiz, and Roberto is confident he will find sanctuary there.

It takes only a few miles of riding into what turns out to be the La Raspadura ravine before Roberto realizes he has mistaken Sierra La Raspadura for the Sierra Las Manzanas Mountains. *What now?* Roberto wonders. The last bit of light is fading fast, and the landscape is far too unforgiving to continue on in the dark.

Roberto makes a mental note. *It's one thing to know your state geography in the classroom, but quite another to have a clue where you actually are when you're out here in it. Oh well, lesson learned.* Nevertheless, he can't waste time dwelling on it; he knows he must find high ground, and soon, if he's going to be able to keep a lookout over the valley floor.

#

One of her captors finally removes the black bag from around Angelina's head, and thrusts her down on a granite bench of some sort in what looks like a jail cell, only the walls are stone, except for the iron bars at the cell entrance. She has cried and screamed so much over the last twenty-four hours she is badly dehydrated and has lost her voice. "Water," she manages.

The large dark mestizo who has dragged her across five municipalities says nothing and locks her in without so much as a fine how do you do, but shortly afterward, he returns with two young Indian women even darker-complected than he is, who supply Angelina with water and begin to dress her wounds with an ointment unfamiliar to her. She tries to speak with them, hoping to find out where she is, but the women hold their hands to their mouths and nervously look back toward the guard, indicating to Angelina their silence is demanded.

Her attendants strip Angelina bare and begin to clean her from head to toe. They wash her hair with lilac-scented soap and then cover her whole body in perfumed oil. After the women dry and brush Angelina's hair, they adorn it with ornate bands of gold and turquoise. Two long white sheets of fine cotton are draped over each of her shoulders, reaching all the way to the floor. One woman overlaps the two sides in a crisscross pattern, while the other fastens a beautiful golden belt across Angelina's waist. For the final touch, they place an eagle-feathered headdress on top of her head, stepping back to admire their work. The women look her over and smile to one another and then to Angelina, as if she should be equally delighted. The material is nearly see-through and open on both sides, exposing a considerable amount of skin, but before she can object, the women gather up her shoes and clothing and scamper away, leaving her alone in the cell.

As if Angelina does not feel naked enough, the guard returns with two other men who look her up and down and speak among themselves in a language she believes is Nahuatl. She can feel both fear and anger building up inside her--or more correctly, her fear is making her

angry, and her anger is increasing as these strange men ogle after her with their evil charcoal-colored eyes. "Okay, get a good look, cochinos! Get a really good look, because when I get out of here I'm going to claw your lecherous ojos right out of your cabezas gordas!"

The three men look at each other and then very seriously at Angelina. She's not sure which is more unsettling--the ogling, or this. One of the men approaches the cell and bows his head before speaking, "You greatly misunderstand our joyful gaze, señorita. We are merely conveying our happiness at your exceptional beauty as it pertains to the ritual of our god. I can assure you no man here may look upon you with lust in his heart unless he is prepared to take on the gods themselves in battle for your honor."

*"¿Que?" This bobo is nuttier than a fruitcake, Angelina thinks. He's been eating laudanum and peyote stew...loco en la cabeza. What is he talking about? The ritual of our god--it's absolutely ridiculous. But that look. Where has she seen that look before? Yes, it's the same look she remembers on the face of the bizarre caballero El Hechicero back at the hacienda. That's it, El Hechicero, the sorcerer!*

Her strange dreams come flooding back to her memory, and the sickening notion that her nightmares were more than just bad dreams crashes down on her trampled psyche, turning her fear and anger into terror and panic.

#

Looking out over the capacious Rancho Colorado Valley, Roberto can see candle flames twinkling in the farmhouse windows of the farmers who tend the endless rows of apple orchards the valley is famous for. He hears voices rising up from beyond the next ridge, so quietly, he moves across the crest to have a look. It's Barquin and his men, camped not more than three hundred yards below him around a large fire. *Eating a fine supper, I'll bet*, Roberto imagines as his stomach growls long and loudly. He's not used to missing this many meals, but unless manna falls from heaven or he wanders back into the lion's den, he isn't likely to eat tonight.

The hour is late and Roberto is fading fast, but just when he's about to call it a night, down in the enemy camp Barquin begins to chant loudly and circle around the fire. The caballero has replaced his red sombrero with a tall feathered headdress and appears to be conducting some kind of ceremonial ritual. He tosses something into the fire, and a mysterious green and purple smoke rises from the flames and ascends high up into the night sky. Barquin looks just like the high priest in Roberto's nightmares, and suddenly those crazy dreams don't seem so crazy anymore.

Barquin continues to cry out into the night, creating ethereal effects by pitching different elements into the flames. Strangely, Roberto can feel himself growing more and more fatigued. He does his best to stay awake, but he feels himself slipping into torpidity, and no matter how hard he tries, he can't keep his eyes open. He slides down along the ground, no longer concerned with hunger, or Barquin, or the things that slither around in the night out in the wild,

and he falls fast asleep.

A Mexican redknee tarantula crawls cautiously by, at least twenty-one feet around the nest of rattlesnakes who can actually taste his heartbeat from a distance of twenty feet. He doesn't care for the way they stick their tongue out at him when he walks by. *Seriously, it's just rude.* Not that he understands the concept of rudeness per se, but it's been his experience that nothing good ever comes from it. Of course, if he understood the concept of rudeness, he probably wouldn't be crawling across Roberto's face right now.

Before Roberto opens his eyes, he can feel the early morning sun shining through his eyelids. He has the sensation that he's lost track of time, like he's overslept and is late for school. Perhaps more disturbing is the feeling something like furry little slippers are tiptoeing rapidly across his cheek and forehead. Normally Roberto would be up in a flash, but an unusual malaise has rendered him oddly lethargic this morning. He lazily swats away the furry creature tickling his ear and slowly peels himself up from the brush he's been lying in. Roberto is not sure why, but he has an overwhelming desire to find out where in la Barranca del Cobre Barquin and his men are headed.

Looking out over the ridge, Roberto can see the old conjurer and his minions raising a dust cloud some distance to the south. He scrambles up on his horse and gallops off in their direction without any clear understanding of why. It occurs to him that following these guys to who knows where isn't the most intelligent thing to do, but his ability to produce an alternative course of action is fuzzy right now, and he doesn't seem to care. The company moves into the Nayurachic Canyon pass, and Roberto does his best to stay out of sight without losing them. He reflects on the irony of being a full-blooded Apache with less than rudimentary tracking skills, but then again, these guys aren't exactly las chupacabras.

The terrain grows increasingly treacherous as the riders and their weary follower draw deeper and deeper into the Sierra Madres. Several times, Roberto's horse loses his footing, sending dirt and rocks cascading down the canyon wall. By the time they reach el Río Verde, both horse and rider are exhausted and parched beyond measure. Roberto's stallion dips his head to drink, and Roberto slides right down the Criollo's neck, and face first into the river. He gulps down as much water as he can inhale, not caring whether he drowns, washes downriver, or swallows a bug.

Feeling somewhat revived, Roberto crawls to the river's edge and begins to disrobe. He wrings out his things as best he can, then lays them out, counting on the afternoon sun to do the rest. His horse is busy grazing on the nut grass which grows in shady spots in the higher elevations, showing nothing but indifference to his butt-naked companion. All the same, Roberto slides back down in the water, keeping his skinny-dipping on the down low until his clothes dry off.

Not more than fifty yards away, hidden in the rocks above, two Raramuri Indians watch Roberto vigilantly with their bows at the ready. They've been tracking him from the moment he

entered the sacred valley and crossed into their territory. Many outsiders have traversed their land ever since Teporame and his brave warriors were captured by the Spaniards almost two hundred years ago, but they still keep a close watch on anyone who enters, leaving no one to travel the Sierra Tarahumara alone. What's fascinating to these Raramuri is that although this young fellow has the shaved hair and wears the typical outfit of the Mexican vaqueros and caballeros of Chihuahua, he is an Apache, traveling alone, and they're not sure what to make of him.

## Chapter Thirteen

One of earth's most sublime tectonically and volcanically sculptured geological wonders, la Barranca del Cobre, is a blanket title which encompasses the Cobre, Urique, Oteros, Chinipas, Candamena, and Sinforosa barrancas, six separate yet interconnected canyons that dominate the northeastern region of the Sierra Madre Occidental, locally known as Sierra Tarahumura. Part of the rich pine oak forest, the canyons are covered with pine, fir, oak, and juniper trees, as well as manzanita, mesquite, creosote, and acacia bushes. It is said one can find transcendence lying in the meadows among the waving yellow grass which adorn the upper plateaus here, and if that doesn't work, there's always the flesh of the elephant cacti endemic to these parts, which is believed to induce euphoric visions in those who are pure of heart--but as for the wicked, they will see their death.

The indigenous people, native to these more than a mile deep canyons, are some of the most impressive and reclusive inhabitants in all of Mexico. The two Raramuri warriors shadowing Roberto, like all Raramuri warriors, are superior bowmen who can easily pluck a sparrow in flight from the sky at up to two hundred feet. Moreover, they are capable of running up and down the nearly sheer cliffs of the Sierra Tarahumara all day long without need of rest. In fact, they can easily outrun even the most nimble horse and rider in this perilous mountain topography, and the only way anyone could or would ever see a Raramuri brave is if he wanted to be seen. Currently, they have decided they will let this Apache live, for now, just in case he is a member of the company of Yaqui and mestizo caballeros that came riding through this morning. It is not unusual to see Yaqui crossing the border from Sonora, and they certainly don't want to incite a war or disturb the fragile peace that exists between the Raramuri and their old enemy, who it so happens, greatly outnumber them. Nevertheless, they'll be keeping a wary eye on him, whoever he is, and wherever he's going.

Roberto puts on his slightly damp clothes and slides into his botas, but he's having difficulty figuring out why he still wants to pursue Barquin. He can't for the life of him understand why he's been following him in the first place, and as he rides along the narrow path, he becomes less and less interested in his present quest and more and more interested in finding food and shelter. Born and raised in the desert, Roberto feels out of his element in the forest, and his recent wrangling accident has only reinforced his reticence. *After all, it will be night soon, he broods, and how can I possibly catch up to them now, anyway? I'll probably just end up getting lost.*

Not normally one to ruminate between two decisions, Roberto inexplicably struggles to make up his mind, but not for long. It appears the decision will be made for him, as five of Barquin's caballeros descend upon him from the mountain ridge above, each with his weapon drawn, and an attitude indicative of bad intentions.

As the first rider gets within thirty feet, Roberto, thinking fast, shouts out, "There you guys are! I thought I'd never find you!"

The other riders close in and Roberto breaks out his best ham. "Do you know how long I've been looking for you fellas? Why didn't you wait for me? I don't know how you do things in your outfit, but leaving a fellow vaquero behind is no bueno where I come from, I can tell you that much. Hey, some earthquake, wasn't it? I've never been in an earthquake before, have you? My horse bolted off quicker than jalapeños through a Baptist missionary--ran for miles before I could stop him. I can't tell you how happy I am to see you hombres. I'm mighty hungry--you amigos got anything to eat? Because, I haven't had anything to eat sense yesterday, podía comer los labios de una rana, you know what I mean?"

"¡Silencio tonto!"

"Okay, take it easy, no need to get hostile..."

The blow to the back of Roberto's head is quick and effective; he slumps down off his horse, out cold before he can hit the ground.

#

The stone bench she is lying on is far too uncomfortable for Angelina to get any meaningful rest, and although she has cried for hours now, it has not slowed her trembling or assuaged her fears. She wishes Roberto were here; he would know what to do. Thinking about him seems to help a little, so she reflects on him more earnestly, and slowly her trembling starts to subside.

Looking around, Angelina notices for the first time the walls of the cave are glimmering. When she was brought in, she had a sack over her head and hadn't had time for her eyes to adjust before all the absurd events which followed, and from then until now she'd been crying so much she wasn't able to focus on anything except her tears. However, now that her eyes have adjusted and she's no longer crying, she can see nuggets of gold and silver both large and small embedded in the rock all around her. Angelina rubs her hand along the craggy wall behind

her, and tiny bits of gold and silver dust stick to her fingers like glitter. The longer she plays with the dust, the lighter her heart feels. She sweeps more and more dust from the rocks and rubs it all over her hands and up her arms, and soon finds the sparkling colors against her dark copper skin dazzling. Gleefully, she draws off as much of the dust as she can from the surrounding walls of her cell and rubs the precious metal flakes from the bottoms of her feet to the top of her head, even combing it through her hair, causing it to shine as brightly as the cave surface around her.

Transformed by her newly acquired radiance, Angelina begins to dance about her enclosure as if she were truly an Aztec goddess, pretending to graciously delight in the adulation of the people of the ancient cities who have come from all over primeval Mexico to celebrate the annual festival at the temple. As she frolics across the floor, her joy grows stronger and her laughter grows louder until the guard comes to see what all the commotion is about. Amazingly, when he sees her dancing in all her scintillating shimmering glory, he throws himself on the ground, prostrating himself before her in the belief she has been transformed by Tezcatlipoca into Xochiquetzal, the goddess of love.

Angelina continues to dance and sing with abandon, and before long, the other men and temple servants come in, one by one, to see what's going on, only to find the guard bowing low before Angelina's cell, and upon seeing her, one by one, they too come to believe she has been transfigured, and they prostrate themselves likewise until the floor is covered with people.

Finally, after an hour or more of dancing, Angelina, delirious and nearly mad, turns to those assembled before her and commands, "Let me out of this cage! This is no way to treat a goddess!"

Immediately, the guard, with head still bowed, takes out the keys and unlocks the cell door, releasing Angelina, but she does not run, as might be expected. Instead, she steps out of the cell and gestures for her worshipers to rise, which they promptly obey. She walks out among them, and they part like the Red Sea. The servant women fall in behind her, while the rest follow at a distance, all in a state of reverent awe.

Once she clears the passageway and steps out into the open area of the cave, Angelina is amazed at the enormous size of it. The distance of its width and length are larger than the main house and plaza of the Hacienda de Encinillas, and the ceiling is so high she can't make out its features in the shadowy light of the torches posted along the outer walls. She is certain she has seen this place before in a drawing or painting in one of the books in the library of Señor Don Luis, the Templo Mayor, or more like a scaled-down replica of it. Angelina feels like she has been here before, and it occurs to her this place is the location she's been seeing in her troubled dreams.

At the top of a large platform is a stone altar with gold, silver, and mother-of-pearl inlay, and all around are stone braziers, wooden and stone carvings of grotesque serpents, toads, and other Aztec god and goddess heads. Across the large hall are four rows of stands which



resemble seating areas of some sort, but not like chairs, more like raised Indian-style seating. In the back row, elevated above the other rows, is a more elaborate example of the same, but with two stone thronelike seats in the center--the royal box, obviously reserved for the king and queen. Angelina confidently strides over and proudly takes a seat.

She looks down at one of the servants and makes her demands known, "You there--bring me a meal fit for your queen." She claps her hands authoritatively, and the servant bows her head and runs off.

"That's more like it," Angelina announces. "Now, you there--go get me as many pillows as you can find so I can rest comfortably," and again, another servant runs off obediently.

Angelina looks out over the assembly and shouts, "Who among you plays an instrument?"

Several men raise their hands, and Angelina calls out to them, "Good, then we will have music."

The men look at each other as if confused, so Angelina shouts, "¡Musica, andale!"

The men quickly disperse, and in a few minutes they return with several instruments including two large skin drums, four wooden drums of various sizes, rattles, and simple wooden flutes similar to recorders, all carved with intricate designs and characters. The servant women return with the pillows and food Angelina requested, and she begins to eat while the men play. The food is good and the songs are pleasantly rhythmic; the singing is like the telling of a poem, and the singers sing in the language of Nahuatl. Angelina can't understand a word of it, but she hardly cares, no longer hungry or locked up, within a few moments she is fast asleep.

Barquin and his caballeros arrive with Roberto, and they enter the temple cave to find the musicians playing their instruments.

"What's going on here?" El Hechicero demands.

The guard speaks up. "Perdoname Tlamacazqui, the teotl, Xochiquetzal, requested we play for her. I thought it best to comply with her wishes until you returned to instruct us further as to what to do with her."

"¡Que! What are you babbling about?"

The guard points toward Angelina sleeping in the queen's box. "The goddess, Xochiquetzal señor."

Angelina rises, adjusts her headdress, and looks out over the temple, a little groggy. Even after sleeping for several hours in a heap, she still looks amazing, glowing in brilliance from a mix of individual beauty and outer adornment. El Hechicero beholds her, instantly comprehending how the guard could have been so bewitched by her. Those who'd been worshiping her earlier are now crowding into the temple, waiting to see how the Tlamacazqui will react.

The sorcerer's caballeros enter, two of them carrying Roberto. They tarry next to Barquin

awaiting instructions, but he can't stop staring at her, the anticipation of his audience grows. Angelina sees Roberto, and she strains not to show her exhilaration and alarm. One of the caballeros breaks the silence. "Tlamacazqui, what do you want us to do with the Ixiptla?"

Without taking his eyes off of Angelina, El Hechicero orders the caballeros, "Lock him up, and have the servants prepare him for the ceremony."

"Sí, Tlamacazqui."

The men carry Roberto to the corridor where the cell that held Angelina is located. Angelina steps down from the queen's box with her head held high, and marches with conviction toward them. Everyone except El Hechicero and his entourage drop to their knees and prostrate themselves before her. Her attendants fall in behind her, all to the bemused fascination of the sorcerer. As she passes, El Hechicero's men begin to bow before her, and he decides it is best to let this little drama play out, for now. Her eyes meet his; their beaming confidence and piercing intensity induce the old sorcerer to bow his head before her. She laughs.

Angelina and her attendants follow the caballeros carrying Roberto into the cell, and she commands them, "Be careful with him. Set him down on the bench, and leave us."

The men lay Roberto out on the stone seat, and then stand gawking at her as if they are both entranced and dumbfounded.

"Leave us at once!" Angelina insists.

The servant women let out fearful squeals in unison, and their fright seems to have a permeating effect on the caballeros, filling them with trepidation, and immediately they withdraw, leaving Angelina and the other women alone to tend to Roberto.

As soon as the men are gone, Angelina throws her arms around Roberto and begins to sob quietly. Her tears trickle down her cheeks and fall lightly on his face.

"Go get some water," she instructs the attendants, "and wash cloths--hurry now."

Two of the women bow and retreat from the cell, returning shortly with a basin of warm water and cotton swaths. Angelina dips a cloth in the water and softly dabs Roberto's forehead. He opens his eyes and tries to focus in on her, but he can't believe what he is seeing. "Are you an angel come to take me to Saint Peter's gate?"

"No, mi amor, it is I--Angelina."

"It can't be. Your countenance is that of a celestial being. I am seeing a figment of my reward for passing over, a good and faithful servant."

"Though it appears true I have been chosen by Our Lady as your guardian angel, I assure you I am your Angelina," she holds her hands out, "in the flesh."

"Can it be true--how did you get here--how long have I been here?"

"Steady now, we will figure these things out all in good time. For now, you must take it easy and let me take care of you."

Roberto's injuries are not serious; a little blood surrounds a small gash on the crown of his head. Angelina continues to wash him while one of the attendants puts ointment on his wounds. It's not long before his stomach reminds him of his great hunger. "Tengo mucho hambre."

"Oh, sí, mi amor. Mujer, por favor, bring him something to eat."

"Sí, señorita," the servant woman says, and immediately heads off. She returns after a while with a basket of tamales, and hands them to Roberto.

"Gracias, gracias."

"Now leave us," Angelina commands her attendants, and reverently they exist in unison leaving the two young lovers alone in the cell.

Angelina watches Roberto polish off the last of a dozen tamales and pretends to protest when he wipes his mouth with the back of his sleeve. He looks around for more, but forgets all about the tamales as soon as his eyes meet hers. The look of her all covered in silver and gold is otherworldly, and it's easy to see how he'd been deceived into thinking he was in heaven--she is truly breathtaking. But now there's something new and different about her, something courageous, something tempestuous, something intoxicating--and she is reveling in it. This earthly angel has become a fierce and fiery vixen, a force to be reckoned with, and he's inclined to think it far better to be on her side than against her.

Inside, Roberto is feeling more for Angelina than he could ever imagine, and a powerful surge of energy and emotion promising a flood of untold love and heroism is welling up from the depths of his being. Together they will find a way out of this, together they will overcome any obstacle, together they will be triumphant. But how?

"Come," Roberto invites her, "sit with me, mi amor."

Angelina moves over to the bench and nestles into Roberto's chest, and sighs deeply with contentment. Roberto puts his arm around her and squeezes her gently, and for some time they sit quietly, just being together.

"What do you make of all this?" Roberto eventually asks.

"I have an idea, but the more I go over it in my mind, the more I find myself wondering how it could even be possible, as if I am questioning my own sanity or lost in my own delusions."

"Believe me, my love, I fully understand. It started for me as a dream, or nightmare really, in which I was being held captive, tied down to an altar waiting to be sacrificed to some Aztec god. This voice kept telling me I was the imposter and must be put to death for my impudence."

"You've been having them too? I've had the same nightmares, only before I'm to be sacrificed I'm made to dance naked before the whole assembly of worshipers--what unholy business."

"I suppose," Roberto winks.

"¿Que?"

"It depends..."

"Depends on what?"

"Forgive me, mi amor, I jest, but I have seen you dancing in my dreams as well, and it is a vision I would happily give my life for."

"Stop, cochino." Angelina blushes. "What am I saying--I'm practically naked right now."

"I was wondering about that--why are you dressed like an Aztec queen?"

"They dressed me this way almost as soon as they brought me here."

"And the gold and silver all over you?"

"It's just gold dust, it's here on the walls all around us--look."

Angelina wipes some of the precious metal dust off the wall and rubs it on Roberto's arm. "I don't know why, I was feeling a little crazy I guess, but I put it all over me, and as soon as I did these people here began to bow down and treat me like I was one of their goddesses, the one they call Xochiquetzal. I don't pretend to know who she is, but as long as these people think I'm her, I plan to use it to our advantage."

## Chapter Fourteen

"Tell me, Ignacio," Barquin demands, "how did she get out of her cell?"

"She ordered me to open the door, señor."

"She ordered you?"

"Sí, señor."

"Had you lost of your mind?"

"I thought--we all thought the goddess, Xochiquetzal, had taken possession of her."

"¡Idiota! She is just a girl, the Ixiptla of Coyolxauhqui and nothing more! I don't know what has happened to you--I thought you were a man I could trust with responsibility. I can't even look at you. Go on, get out! Get out of my sight!"

The disgraced guard leaves the chamber with his head held low. Barquin, still fuming, looks around at los Brujos Mejores who are all standing around in fearful silence. Pedro Salazar, the bravest of the warlocks, speaks up. "Tlamacazqui, if the people believe she is the goddess, Xochiquetzal, they will not permit her to be sacrificed."

"It matters little to me what they think; if any of them try and stop us, we will slaughter them all! Make no mistake, both of the Ixiptlas must be sacrificed for the order of the gods to be restored, and nothing must stop that--not the republic, not gold dust, nor any other figment of the people's imagination! Do I make myself understood?"

The majority of los Brujos Mejores submit their agreements, but Salazar continues, "Excuse me, Tlamacazqui, but el Azteca Culto is dependent on these disciples. They're the ones who are financing our endeavors. Why, they're the ones who built this temple, and they are the ones who will grow the Aztec faith among the peasants and the Indios throughout all of Mexico

and beyond. I understand your frustration, but our predicament demands careful consideration; we must show caution in dealing with this situation.”

Barquin is steaming and feels his rising anger driving him to tear into the captain of his guard with all the fermenting retribution boiling up inside, but he wisely thinks better of it and does his best to calm himself. He knows all too well how often he has relied on the analytically astute mind of Piedro Salazar during their campaigns against the French, and how it saved him more than once from the destruction which might have befallen him as a result of his often rash and violent behavior.

“Alright then, Piedro, I am listening. What would you have me do?”

“I believe our ends can be accomplished by more subtle means, Tlamacazqui. In this circumstance, I recommend a bewitching spell; then we can procure the cooperation of both of the Ixiptlas without arousing the suspicion of the people. After all, if Xochiquetzal freely chooses to sacrifice herself--of her own volition, the disciples will fervently regard her as a matron goddess, and we will achieve the higher end in the bargain.”

“Yes, I see--your idea has merit, Piedro, and your counsel is wise. I will give the matter some thought. For now, we will let the girl think she has the upper hand, but I want the boy dressed as the Ixiptla of Tezcatlipoca without any further delay before this rabble gets out of hand.”

“Sí, señor.”

Salazar immediately dispatches two of the warlocks to attend to Roberto, and then disperses the men to their stations. As the captain of the guard turns to leave, Barquin pulls him aside to have a word in private. “When the time is right, you will administer the potion, and then the spell can be cast with little difficulty, and Piedro--keep your eye on Ignacio. We can no longer trust his judgment.”

“As you command, señor.”

Angelina's attendants bring lunch into the cell for her and Roberto, as well as cots and bedding. Two of the women make up the cots, while the others serve the weary couple their lunch, a carne and pinto bean stew with flat bread made from maize, served in wooden bowls. Ignacio, the guard, has repositioned himself outside their cell and insists on locking the door whenever the servants enter or exit. Angelina and Roberto eat in a kind of defeated silence, each wondering if this might be their last meal.

Some time after they've finished their lunch, the attendants return to collect the bowls, and insist Angelina come with them. “Señorita, por favor, venga con nosotros.”

“No, absolutely not! I'm not going anywhere. I want to stay here with Roberto.”

“It will only be for a little while so the men can prepare him for the festival. There is nothing to worry about, and we will bring you right back as soon as they are done.”

Angelina's eyes meet Roberto's, their usual sparkle now turned to anxious desperation.

In an effort to assuage her fears, Roberto grabs her and holds her close, giving her a big smile. "Oye--it's okay mi amor, go with them. There's no sense in making things worse than they have to be. I'll be fine--really."

Angelina looks at him as if trying to gauge his honesty. "Are you sure?"

"Sí, sí. What could happen?"

In a flash, Angelina's look turns to unfettered obstinance. "What could happen!" she cries out. "This could happen! Maybe my brother was right; maybe you are loco en la cabeza. What could happen? Ay, Dios mío."

"Now, now, there's no reason to get upset..."

"No reason to get upset! If this is not a good reason to be upset, then I would like to know what is?"

"Mi amor, por favor, take it easy..."

"Take it easy! Don't tell me to take it easy! We're about to be sacrificed in this bat-infested cave in God knows where, and you want me to take it easy! You take it easy."

Then just as suddenly, Angelina's eyes meet Roberto's again, and she sees the pitiful way he is looking at her, with the stare of puppy dog who doesn't know why it's being scolded. She rushes into his arms, bursting into tears. "Lo siento, mi amor, lo siento. I'm just so afraid of never seeing you again--I lost my head. Please forgive me."

Roberto strokes her hair and squeezes her gently. "I forgive you, mi amor. Can you forgive me? I know how hard this has been on you. I am as scared as you are, but we must stay strong for each other. It was you who showed me our confidence is all these madmen respect, and it is our only weapon against them. Por favor, be brave, mi amor; we'll find a way out of this."

"Do you really think so?"

"With the Lord's grace and mercy, I'm sure of it, but we have to keep our wits about us and not let them think for a minute they've gotten the better of us. Besides, I've got a plan, mi amor--don't you worry. Now, let's get you fixed up."

Roberto wipes away Angelina's tears and cleans up her face, carefully reapplying the gold dust under her eyes and her cheeks where she'd rubbed them against his chest. His big smile reappears and he bids her, "Alright then, off you go. Remember what I said--chin up now."

Roberto kisses Angelina softly, and she hides her reluctance as best she can. They reassure each other with a smile, and she leaves with her attendants.

After Angelina has gone, the men come in to dress out Roberto for the festival of Toxcatl, or Fiesta de Huitzilopochtli, as it is referred to by some. A large tub is brought in, and the menservants fill it with water. They bid Roberto to disrobe and get in, but he balks, dismayed somewhat by a natural sense of modesty. Not wanting to expose himself before the others, he insists they leave him. Unfortunately, his protests are met with harsh indifference. The warlock

in charge orders the menservants to remove his clothes by force, which they do most unceremoniously. Once they successfully wrestle him out of his caballero attire, they manually lift him up by his arms and legs and drop him into the tub with a splash.

Roberto slides down beneath the soap suds, trying to hide his embarrassment, but unmercifully, his sore pride is soon tested a second time when one of the servants begins roughly scouring his back and head with some type of animal-hair scrub brush. As he approaches Roberto's nether regions, Roberto, having had quite enough, snatches away the brush and yells out, "I'm not a child, you know--I can wash myself, for Pete's sake!"

Things get no better when Roberto finishes bathing and requests a towel to dry off; apparently this whole sordid affair is some kind of ritual he is not aware of, and he's not allowed to do anything for himself. The servants stand on each side of him with towels spread out at the ready to attend to the task, but ceremonial ritual or not, Roberto is having none of it. He sharply grabs a towel away from one of the servants, and starts drying himself off in a rather childish--albeit understandable--tiff.

Roberto's foul mood only gets worse when the servants start to dress him in what can hardly be described as clothing--nothing more than a short white linen skirt held on by a golden belt inlaid with silver and turquoise. On each arm, bands similar to the belt are affixed to his biceps. The boots they give him to wear appear to be made of goat skin lined with fleece, ornately dyed with stacked red and blue zigzagging lines of some unknown meaning. Last is the headdress, much like the one he'd seen on Angelina, only the eagle feathers on this one are arranged in a different, more upright pattern. What really curdles Roberto's blood, however, is how precisely he now appears as he had in his nightmares.

Roberto decides he will play along with El Hechicero's little charade for now, but what none of these lunatics understand is he's studied the history of the Aztec civilization at la universidad, and he's got a pretty good idea as to why many of them reacted to Angelina the way they did. Aztec legend holds that their god, Tezcatlipoca, the god of the smoking mirror, the god of deception, stole the wife of Tlaloc and made her his bride. Roberto also knows the Aztecs believed Hernan Cortés was a man endowed with teotl, the god force, and so they accept the notion of gods taking human form or taking physical possession of certain humans. Clearly, if they could believe Angelina has become the goddess, Xochiquetzal, then most certainly they could be persuaded to believe he, the Ixiptla of Tezcatlipoca, could be transformed into Tezcatlipoca himself.

The servants finish their task of preparing Roberto, and the warlocks look him over one last time, confirming among one another that he is appropriately adorned. Satisfied, the warlocks and the servants leave together while the guard, Ignacio, comes to lock the cell door. As he is placing the lock in the latch, Roberto addresses him, "Why do you lock up the Ixiptla of Tezcatlipoca?"

"Señor?"



"Is it not the custom of the Aztec people to allow the Ixiptla to freely roam about the city, dining with the people, enjoying the company of las señoritas, and making merriment with los niños?"

"Lo siento, Ixiptla--as you say, it is the proper way of the Aztecs, but I have my orders."

"Plainly, a man of your strength and stature can escort the Ixiptla in a manner befitting the gods and the spirit of the festival, without fear of losing a boy of my tender years."

"I suppose so."

"Believe me, I'm as eager to please Tezcatlipoca as you are, especially after he has seen fit to bring forth Xochiquetzal, in the flesh, for all his faithful adherents to celebrate."

"You speak the truth, but the Tlamacazqui has expressly indicated your cell must remain locked, and I have already received his rebuke this very day."

"You mean old El Hechicero?"

Ignacio snickers at Roberto's use of the less than respectful nickname of the Tlamacazqui. "We don't use that name here, Ixiptla; the Tlamacazqui doesn't care for it."

"I see, so--he is of the line of Moctezuma, then?"

"Oh--no, Ixiptla, he is a Yaqui mestizo from Sonora."

"¿Que? It can't be true."

"Sí, it's true alright; he is a military man who has assumed the position of high priest, the Tlamacazqui."

"¡Eso es imposible! The high priest can only be appointed by the Moctezuma! Well, was he ordained by the ruling members of the royal families?"

"Not that I know of."

"Wait--you're telling me El Hechicero is acting without the permission of the majority of the royal families?"

"There are no royal families here."

"I can't believe this! Do you mean to tell me a usurper has come among you and established himself as the Tlamacazqui without the approval of the Moctezuma, or his royal line, or the majority decision of the royal families?"

"Sí, Ixiptla, it is as you say."

"Ay, Dios mío. No wonder Tezcatlipoca has intervened and brought forth Xochiquetzal."

"I knew it! I knew the goddess had possessed the girl! That's why I let her out as she commanded and showed her great honor."

"You were wise to do so, mi amigo. I would not be surprised if Tezcatlipoca showed up here himself to reunite with his love, Xochiquetzal, now that she's here. For certain, he will reward you for the kindness you have showed his beautiful bride, but woe to those who have usurped their position and assume to be worthy of performing the ceremony of the sacred

sacrifice of the Ixiptla without the required authority. There is no doubt Tezcatlipoca will be most displeased--I'm thankful I'll already be dead--because Tezcatlipoca will surely bring vengeance and destruction upon all those gathered in the temple when his great and noble spirit fills the inner chamber."

The look on Ignacio's face turns to horror and his skin is now deathly pale; he can barely speak, and his voice shakes like an old widow woman's. "What can we do to quell Tezcatlipoca's anger and escape his wrath?"

"Mi amigo, there is only one thing that can be done. The Tlamacazqui must be ordained by the proper authority before the festival is allowed to commence, but until then, it would be prudent to avoid doing anything to anger Tezcatlipoca more than he already is."

"Yo creo que tiene razón, Ixiptla. Do not worry; when Xochiquetzal returns, I will make sure she has the best of everything. Leave it to me."

"I think that is most wise, Ignacio. I knew you were a man of great intelligence and wisdom. Bravo, señor, bravo. I'm sure you will restore Tezcatlipoca's faith in his disciples."

"Do you really think so?"

"Trust me, Ignacio; I know so."

Ignacio gives a big sigh of relief, and his countenance visibly changes for the better. By the time the color returns to his face, he is smiling broadly, thoroughly convinced of the Ixiptla's assessment.

Roberto has truly outdone himself; the first phase of his plan has gotten off to a tremendous start. Now it's time for phase two. "Pardoname, Ignacio, can you bring me something to drink?"

"Sí, Ixiptla. What would you like?"

"Water would be fine, thank you."

"No problema. I will be back with your water in no time."

"Gracias, señor, gracias."

"De nada, Ixiptla, de nada."

Ignacio races off, desperate to give substance to his desire to please the Ixiptla and avoid further insult to one of the Aztec's most esteemed gods. Meanwhile, Roberto wastes no time implementing his next move.

Roberto begins rubbing off the gold and silver dust from the stones in his cell and smearing it all over his body, taking time to get it on the back of his neck, in and behind his ears, and rather well up his skirt. He is just putting on the final touches when Angelina returns with her attendants. Roberto stands tall and puts on an heir of great importance. Angelina, for her part, tries not to show any reaction which might give him away. When the women servants see Roberto, they immediately drop to the floor in submission crying out to the glory of their god, "¡Tezcatlipoca!"

Ignacio returns to find the women servants prostrated on the ground and turns to see Roberto, glowing with the same brilliance he'd observed when he first discovered Angelina shining brightly with heavenly radiance. He stumbles forward with his mouth hanging open, the pitcher of water he is holding falls to the floor, but he pays it no mind, reverently lowering himself to the floor taking his place among the women. Roberto turns to Angelina and gives her a canary-eating grin befitting the Cheshire Cat.

## Chapter Fifteen

Angelina is quite proud of Roberto for his ingenuity, and hopeful his plan just might work. Nevertheless, she most certainly feels like they've fallen down the proverbial rabbit hole, and this character, El Hechicero, is the Aztec version of the queen of hearts. The only difference is, she loved reading Lewis Carroll's fanciful tale about a clever, self-assured young lady like herself, hardly understanding why the Church banned such a harmless fairy tale, but this madness is beyond anything she could have ever imagined happening to her. Moreover, she is sure she can charm El Hechicero, like Alice charmed the crazy old queen. Angelina has to admit, though, the way they're dressed, she and Roberto look every bit like the royal Aztec family right straight from the colorful mural walls of Mexico City.

"Would you care to go for a stroll, mi amor?" Roberto asks.

"I would love to."

Roberto leans in and whispers, "They think I'm their god, Tezcatlipoca."

"And I, your wife Xochiquetzal."

"Sí, mi amor. Follow my lead."

Roberto gives Angelina a wink and she gives him a coy smile, up for his game.

"Ignacio, rise and come be my guide--my bride and I wish to visit with our disciples. Take us out among the people so we may bestow upon them our blessing."

Ignacio rushes to Roberto's side. "It would be a great honor, Tezcatlipoca! I think you will enjoy the village, señor; everyone is preparing for the festival."

"Tell me, Ignacio, why is it El Hechicero has everyone preparing for Toxcatl, when clearly, we are in the season of Teotleco, the great festival of the harvest? Assuredly, the fact that my

wife and I are the first to arrive should be all that is needed to convince anyone with the slightest knowledge of the ancients the time of the festival of Teotleco is at hand. It makes me wonder about El Hechicero's competency to lead the people as the true Tlamacazqui."

"Yo no se, señor. It is difficult to know the mind of the Tlamacazqui; he is a man of few words."

"It appears he's also a man with little understanding of what pleases the gods. The people would do well to avoid insulting the gods in such a careless manner, especially at a time like this when the rest of the gods will all be arriving within the next few days."

Ignacio does not respond, but the serious expression on his face reflects the gravity with which he is considering all Tezcatlipoca has said.

The shaman, Ignacio "Tlacaoel" Azpilcueta is a Nahuatl speaker of ancient Indian ancestry. The traditional stories of his people suggest his ancestral tribe was made up of the same pueblo peoples who first settled in Chihuahua at Casas Grandes, then migrated to the Valley of Rolling Thunder, and eventually arrived in the area which is now Mexico City around 1200 CE. Although his personal ancestors stayed behind in the cliffs above Ciudad Madero in a place called, Huapoco, a large portion of his and other Mogollon and Nahua tribes migrated south and ultimately became the great Aztec Nation.

Ignacio has always been inspired by the legends of the Aztecs, and he takes great pleasure in studying any books or material he can get his hands on concerning the Aztec culture. When he found out from his cousins in la Barranca del Cobre there was a Yaqui mestizo taking measurements up near the old caves of their ancestors and asking around if they knew of anyone interested in Aztec history, he immediately traveled down from Namiquipa, where he was living with his family, to investigate the peculiar news. As it turned out, he had a great deal in common with the eccentric gentleman who introduced himself as Javier Barquin, chiefly, their shared interest in the restoration of the Aztec religion.

At first, the relationship between Ignacio and Barquin flourished due to their mutual desire to resurrect the Aztec civilization. However, the honeymoon proved short-lived when Barquin abruptly declared himself the Tlamacazqui and surrounded himself with the paramilitary group from Sonora, los Brujos Mejores.

Once los Brujos Mejores arrived, there was no longer any mutual dialog between Barquin and Ignacio--or any of the other members of el Azteca Culto, for that matter--only the strict regimentation and harshly meted out discipline of Barquin's new entourage. Those members and servants who faltered during the building of the temple or fell out of line somehow were subjected to severe punishment, and anyone outside of El Hechicero's inner circle who objected or dared confront him mysteriously disappeared.

"Ignacio, send out criers ahead of us to announce the change of the festival and the coming of Xochiquetzal and Tezcatlipoca, so they may have time to prepare the customary food offering."

"Right away, señor."

Ignacio passes the order on to Angelina's attendants, and they get to their feet, merrily jumping to the task. Roberto calls out to the rest of the disciples working in the chambers nearby, "Come, everyone, and take part in the celebration of Teotleco!"

The word spreads throughout the temple, drawing out the people therein to see what all the excitement is about. Their first reaction is to fall on the floor, as they'd done before when Angelina first appeared as Xochiquetzal, but Roberto bids them to rise and fill in around them as they reach the temple floor. By the time they arrive at the mouth of the giant cave, at least a hundred worshipers surround them, shouting out the name of Xochiquetzal and chanting:

*"Tezcatlipoca and his bride, Xochiquetzal, have arrived for the festival of Teotleco! Arise and be joyful, prepare the maize offering, and sing praises to the god of playful mischief, and the goddess of love!"*

Outside, the late-afternoon sun is buffered by a thin layer of cirrus clouds, but still the filtered sunlight requires Angelina and Roberto to shield their sensitive eyes after being locked away in the shadowy light of the cave. Once their eyes adjust, they can see that the temple cave has been dug from the face of an almost sheer cliff; the narrowest of paths winds all the way down the mountain to the canyon floor thousands of feet below. At the very bottom of the vast canyon is a river which cascades over many waterfalls of various heights, with acacia, oak, madrones, cottonwoods, and bullytrees growing along either bank, with an occasional fig tree mixed in. Lining the pathway are Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, junipers, manzanitas, and flowers of many colors. Higher up the trail, Angelina and Roberto are amazed by a mystifying array of cave dwellings of varying shapes and sizes, all beautifully decorated with flowers, cornucopias, and candles burning in all of the window like openings. Neither Angelina nor Roberto has ever seen anything like it, and the stories of such places in their history lessons don't do the place the justice this amazing wonderworld deserves--it is at the same time both unbelievably surreal and indescribably magnificent!

Children of all ages pour out of the dwellings onto the trail and run toward Angelina and Roberto, hugging the steep path like so many billy goats cheering and chanting as they go, and by now the worshipers' song can be heard throughout the entire village. One little girl, looking so lovely in her lily-white linen dress, jumps into Angelina's arms and the two of them break out in such a joyous laughter, Roberto finds himself chuckling along. He can see by the innocent faces of these children they have waited a long time in great anticipation for this day to come, and he can sense a heavy burden is being lifted off of their tiny shoulders. Roberto stands off to one side, allowing as many of the little ones as possible to have access to Angelina; he knows all too well how she can fill a burdened heart with overwhelming joy, and he is happy to share her healing affections with them now.

If there is a teotl spirit which can impart the celestial to one's being and cause one to transcend this physical body, Angelina's soul is its receptor. Her ability to capture the flowing

essence of love in the basin of her colossal heart, and pour it forth like one of the many waterfalls in the river below, is nothing short of divine. What these children are so attracted to is what all mankind is in such desperate need of--not human sacrifice, or the wanton bloodshed of war, but the simple purity of unconditional love.

Roberto felt he'd already seen too much of what evil men could do with their obsessive need for money, power, and control, what an incomprehensible waste of life when such things lead so many to an early grave, whether they be righteous or unrighteous. Those who do such things for righteousness' sake, out of a sense of perceived justice, are really no better--men like El Hechicero, who commit all the same atrocities as unrighteous men, in the name of their gods, as if it were a viable excuse. No, it's nothing more than the other side of the same tarnished coin; or more accurately, the other side of a two-edged sword used to sever the head from the body and mankind from the true meaning of their existence. If only those men could see Angelina now, here with these children, would it move them to cast down their swords? Roberto could only hope.

Angelina takes her time hugging and kissing the cheeks of each child from youngest to the oldest, listening to them as if their words were the most important words she'd ever heard, giving each praise and encouragement and a little bit of gold and silver dust in the exchange. The children believe it to be her *teotl* rubbing off on them, and their parents are overjoyed by the blessing. Roberto patiently waits until every child who came down the path has received an audience with Angelina before continuing on up the trail; the singing of their praises hasn't diminished one decibel. In fact, men with instruments like the ones present in the temple begin to play along as the people sing. Young women dressed in white linen much like Angelina come and dance to the music, waving small sheer cloth banners of every assorted color in rhythm to the drums. The festival of Teotleco is in full swing.

Angelina and Roberto approach the first of the pueblo structures and observe a small decorative wooden bowl of ground maize placed on an area of soft white sand near the front door. Roberto eats a small bit of the maize, sharing some with Angelina, after which he plants both his feet in the sand to signify to the residents that Tezcatlipoca has visited them upon his arrival for the festival. Angelina, seeing this, decides it can't hurt to add her own, so she places her footprints next to his.

As Angelina and Roberto enter the first home, the occupants, of which there are many, all prostrate themselves next to one another on the floor. Roberto calls out, "Rise and celebrate with us! ¡*Ma ixpantzinco!*"

An older man, who is perhaps the father or even the grandfather of the family, looks up at Angelina and Roberto as if he is not sure what to do exactly, but when Roberto insists, he meekly rises signaling his family to do the same. Again Roberto calls out, "¡*Ma ixpantzinco!*"

This time the whole family responds, "¡*Ma ixpantzinco!*"

The family returns Angelina and Roberto's friendly smiles, which Roberto takes as a good

sign, since he has just spoken the only Nahuatl greeting he knows; it is more of a toast, really, and loosely translates “cheers, good health.” Thankfully, it seems to be working, and it fits the occasion adequately, he figures.

The man of the house introduces his family with a great deal of pride in a language Angelina and Roberto don't understand, but they do their best to smile and nod their heads at the appropriate times. At one point in the conversation, Roberto gets the impression he's being asked a question, so he ushers in Ignacio to answer for them. “Ignacio, come forward and be our spokesman. I do not wish to be misinterpreted due to any differences between the language of the people and the language of the gods.”

“Absolutely, Tezcatlipoca, as you require.”

Angelina has been listening to Roberto, and she looks at him and rolls her eyes playfully. “You are full of surprises aren't you, Tezcatlipoca?”

Roberto smiles broadly. “I do what I can.”

It is well into the evening by the time Angelina and Roberto have visited every home, but the festival is only just getting started. Ignacio guides them to a long table out on the patio of the village center where many tables have been set up all around. Angelina and Roberto watch, as what they imagine to be every woman in the village hurriedly serving plates of freshly prepared delicacies to all the tables, and then all of the villagers take their seat.

Roberto stands and raises his glass. “¡*Ma ixpantzinco!*”

The villagers shout back in one voice. “¡*Ma ixpantzinco!*”

Angelina and Roberto take their seats and the people settle in, eating and drinking and generally making merry among themselves. Looking out over the assembly, Roberto can see the villagers are made up of a variety of Yaqui, Mayo, Raramuri, Tigua, and mestizos. Curiously, there do not seem to be any Aztec or other olden Mexica Indians among them, and he ponders why these folks have chosen to throw in their lot with the likes of El Hechicero. On the one hand, the Aztecs are a symbol of Mexico before the days of Spanish influence and dominance, but on the other hand, none of these people seem to truly understand the chaotic nature of warfare and human sacrifice which was the bedrock of the pre-Columbian Aztec civilization. This very celebration of Teotleco was traditionally characterized by the ritualistic slaughter of thousands of slaves by Aztec merchants and business owners in order to invoke the gods to bless their businesses. The sacrificed bodies were then dismembered and eaten by all the participants of the festival. Clearly, these people were not of such a mind set. Their present celebration has more of the feeling of the harmless Día de los Muertos fiestas which will be held throughout Mexico just two weeks from now. Although, even that seemingly innocuous holiday was originally the Aztec celebration of the goddess, Mictēcāhuatl, queen of the underworld, marked by human sacrifice and cannibalism. Truthfully, Roberto simply could not imagine such barbaric behavior catching on in modern-day Mexico.

After dinner, Angelina requests the children be allowed to come and talk with her, so



Roberto informs Ignacio of her wishes. Ignacio rises and begins tapping his glass to get the attention of the assembly, and as soon as they focus on him he announces, "Xochiquetzal wishes to visit with the children..."

Before Ignacio can finish, El Hechicero with los Brujos Mejores following right behind him, enter single file into the village square from the narrow mountain path below and fill in around the villagers. The sorcerer walks up threw the center aisle between the tables, and stops in front of Ignacio. He grabs Ignacio's glass of wine while locking his steely eyes on the soft-spoken shaman, and drinks it down. He smashes the glass on the ground and shifts his glare to Roberto and Angelina. "Is everyone having a good time?"

The villagers sit in stunned silence; some of the women with small children pull them in close. Turning to the crowd El Hechicero repeats himself sarcastically, "I said--is everyone having a good time!"

A few of the men let out half-hearted cheers, but the majority remain silent. Ignacio, realizing he bears the lion's share of responsibility for this perceived insurrection, speaks up on behalf of the villagers. "Tlamacazqui, I apologize for any misunderstanding, but while you were away, the Ixiptla was endowed with the teotl of Tezcatlipoca. After he possessed the boy, he commanded us to begin the festival of Teotleco."

"Let me get this straight, you people think this boy--the Ixiptla--has been transformed into Tezcatlipoca, and then you let him take over the village?"

"But, señor, Tezcatlipoca made it clear his arrival was a sign of the surety of the matter, inasmuch as all the people know he is the youngest of the gods and therefore always the first to arrive for the festival of the harvest."

"And you believed him?"

"Under the circumstances, I don't see that I had any choice, señor. After all, Tezcatlipoca is a god, and I am just a man."

El Hechicero turns to the villagers. "And you, discerning members of el Azteca Culto, tell me who here believes this boy," pointing to Roberto, "has been transformed into Tezcatlipoca?"

No one dares moves at first, but slowly a few of the men get their courage up and declare, "I believe it."

The bravery of these men inspires a few more men, and they stand up to join them. "I believe it."

Encouraged, even more men and some of the women rise up. "I believe it."

Finally, pushing past their fears, the rest of the villagers along with the children jump up and shout, "We believe it!"

Roberto and Angelina stand in unity, and the whole assembly cheers as one loudly singing out their praises.

*"Tezcatlipoca and his bride, Xochiquetzal, have arrived for the festival of Teotleco!"*

*Arise and be joyful, prepare the maize offering, and sing praises to the god of playful mischief, and the goddess of love!"*

In their excitement, the children pull away from their parents and run past El Hechicero, surrounding Angelina and Roberto, embracing them and cheering joyfully.

In a show of defiance and solidarity, all the adults leave their tables and fill in around the children singing and praising Tezcatlipoca and his bride, Xochiquetzal. El Hechicero's face grows as red as a baboon's bottom, but there's nothing he can do. He can see the people are ready to make martyrs of themselves if need be, to protect these imposters. As angry as he is, he is a military man and knows when to pick his battles, and this is not the time.

The sorcerer directs his fiery gaze at his would be victims and smolders, "Enjoy your temporary reprieve while you can. "Your time will come--and soon."

## Chapter Sixteen

Evidence of last night's festivities are still lying about the village square when Angelina and Roberto emerge from their evening's abode. Ignacio had seen to it they slept with the villagers just in case El Hechicero had any designs on locking them away. He knew all too well the old conjuror was a man prone to revenge, and he was not about to let him ruin the camaraderie they established during the events of last evening. For the first time in a long time, el Azteca Culto had the momentum Ignacio believed they will need if they are going to get this grand experiment off the ground and spread out across the country. To his way of thinking, Tezcatlipoca and his bride, Xochiquetzal, are the perfect representatives for the movement, the new Moctezumas.

Down the path, Ignacio can see two of El Hechicero's men walking up to the village. He thinks it best to confront them first, so he walks down to meet them. "Señors."

"The Tlamacazqui requests you and the Ixiptlas join him for breakfast. He wishes to discuss their plans now that the festivals have been changed."

"Is that all he wants?"

"As far as I know."

"I suppose I'll just have to take your word for it. I'll pass on the invitation to Tezcatlipoca and Xochiquetzal. Por favor, esperaré aquí."

The warlock bristles at Ignacio's newfound bravado but reluctantly submits to his entreaty. If he had his way, however, Ignacio would be dangling from the end of his sabre even now. The sheer insolence of the man galls him to no end, and he determines when the time comes, he will run the traitor through personally.

Ignacio returns to where Angelina and Roberto have stopped to say goodbye to those

villagers who have come out to see them off. "Perdoname, Tezcatlipoca, El Hechicero requests our company at breakfast this morning. His men say he wishes to discuss our plans now that the festivals have changed, but I fear it is a trap."

"It's okay, my friend--we must confront him sooner or later, and I am inclined to get it over with as soon as possible."

"As you wish, señor--as soon as you are ready."

"We're ready. Let me retrieve my bride."

Roberto does his best to guide Angelina away from the throngs of adoring villagers who are swarming around her like so many bees, but even as they walk away down the path, more and more admirers follow after her as they go. Roberto can only empathize with their desire to be near her; he has been under her spell for almost a month now. What he's marveling at this morning is how extraordinarily beautiful she looks in the morning sunlight, as fresh as the dew-covered cactus flowers along the canyon trail, without exhibiting any sign of having just awoken from a long night's slumber. Who knows, maybe she is a goddess after all; she certainly is a heavenly creature, he muses.

Angelina's--or rather, Xochiquetzal's worshipers are chanting her name and singing her praises as they reach the temple entrance. The volume of their revelry echoes loudly through the cavern, and there's no doubt El Hechicero and los Brujos Mejores can hear them--an advantage Ignacio is counting on to ensure this meeting remains on the up and up. He has little hope of convincing these hardened militants of his plan, but he means to have his voice heard. Roberto, on the other hand, is only concerned with bringing his own plan to fruition, getting Angelina out of here and away from these crazy Aztec zealots.

Los Brujos Mejores surround the entrance to the dining quarters of El Hechicero, and stand in the way of the villagers, allowing only Roberto, Angelina, and Ignacio to pass. Once the three of them have entered the chamber where the demonologist is sitting around a large table, covered with a banquet of Mexican breakfast dishes, the contingent of warlocks rudely force the crowd back out of the temple, up the canyon pass, and all the way back to the village square.

El Hechicero rises and gestures for his guests to take a seat. "Please, sit down. The ladies of the kitchen have prepared a fine breakfast for us this morning."

Ignacio strategically places himself directly across the table from Barquin, and has Angelina and Roberto sit to his right. On Ignacio's left are two of Barquin's lieutenants, and next to Barquin sits the captain of his guard, Pedro Salazar. One of the servants ladles out menudo soup into china bowls, while another pours fresh orange juice into crystal glasses. Still another serves breakfast on matching china plates. Ignacio wonders where all of this opulence came from and who's paying for it, because the rest of el Azteca Culto have been going without for over a year now, making great sacrifices for the cause.

As usual, Roberto needs no invitation and digs right in. Angelina, on the other hand,

picks at her food, uncomfortable with El Herchicero's lecherous stares and an overwhelming premonition things will not be turning out the way Roberto, God bless his heart, naively believes they will. She has spent her life surrounded by men filled with El Hechicero's brand of machismo, and she strongly doubts he would ever allow anyone to deter him from his ultimate goal.

Breakfast is nearly over and Ignacio, hoping to seize the diplomatic upper hand, is the first to break the silence. "Señor Barquin, do you remember when we first met?"

"Of course I do. Why?"

"Back then, you spoke of our cause with a fire in your eyes, a fire which gave me the assurance we could liberate the indigenous peoples of this once rich and plentiful land by resurrecting the ideals of the great Mexican Nation. Do you remember?"

Barquin nods his head in the affirmative, but it is clear his patience for Ignacio's line of questioning is wearing thin. "What's your point?"

"The point is I believed in you, we believed in you, and then you brought in these men, los Brujos Mejores, and changed everything. Instead of celebrating the coming of a benevolent future, we were subjected to the tyranny of Tlamacazqui rule. I remember how you and I stayed up for hours around the campfire discussing this very issue, and we were in agreement the practices of the ancient Tlamacazqui class, like every other Mesoamerican civilization before them, was the downfall of the Azteca."

Barquin stands up and angrily retorts, "So that's what this is all about, you object to me being declared the Tlamacazqui! And who would you have lead el Azteca Culto--you?"

Not willing to allow Barquin to establish dominance, Ignacio stands up to match his show of bravado. "This is not about who should lead, this is about repeating the mistakes of our ancestors. Human sacrifice is a barbaric practice which has gone the way of the dinosaur. It has no place in civilized society nor in the new Mexico we all envision--not if we're to win over the masses. The peasants have had it with the shackles of aristocracy no matter what form it takes, and we cannot start Azteca Nuevo with the same old chains which suffocate us even now under Díaz's rule."

"Los Brujos Mejores were brought in to handle insurrection. I cannot build an empire when every two-bit curandero is trying to take over. A military force was necessary to restore order."

"I am inclined to agree with the need for order, but I passionately disagree with your means of achieving that end--look at the damage it has done to our cause. The people are no longer behind us; they are more concerned with what will happen to them. They want to know what has happened to their family members--they deserve to know what happened to their family members!"

Pedro Salazar looks at Ignacio with outright contempt and venomously rebuts the

shaman. "You needn't worry about them; the dead take care of their own. Right now, you ought to be concerned for yourself."

Barquin steadies his captain with a wave of his hand and confronts Ignacio's remarks directly. "Discipline is the cornerstone of any revolutionary army, and make no mistake, this is a military operation and we are building a revolutionary force. Did you really think we were going to take over the country with a couple hundred medicine men and old midwives?"

"No, I expect us to start a revolution by presenting the peasants with the promise of real hope for true freedom and independence."

"How do you intend to accomplish that without an army?"

Ignacio points to Angelina and Roberto. "With them."

Barquin looks at Angelina and Roberto and scoffs, "With the Ixiptlas?"

Angelina and Roberto look at each other with equally surprised expressions, and then at Ignacio as if he might have lost his marbles.

"They aren't the Ixiptlas to the people--to the people they are Tezcatlipoca and his bride, Xochiquetzal, and if they are elevated to the level of the Moctezumas, I believe they can win over the peasants throughout Mexico much in the same way they won over the village."

"You're mad!"

"¿Porque? Why is it mad to think the events of last evening could be replicated in villages all across the country? Is it mad to entertain the idea that for the first time in this godforsaken bloodthirsty world, we may have the opportunity to pull off a peaceful peasant-led revolution?"

El Hechicero sits back down in his chair studying Ignacio, and then Angelina and Roberto reflectively for some time before addressing Ignacio, "It is difficult for a military man like myself to imagine such a mystical ideal as the one you propose, but it would be unforgivably cynical of us to turn a blind eye to your petition. The events of last evening are not lost on this old soldier, and although I believe we need to strike while the iron is hot, there is still time enough to discuss these notions of passive resistance further. We will need a strategic plan; can I count on you to draft such a proposal?"

"It would be an honor, señor!"

"Good. Very well then, it's settled."

Barquin picks up a bottle of red wine that's been sitting in the center of the table since before breakfast began. He pours a glass for all of those seated at the table and then for himself. He lifts his glass skyward. "A toast--to the Tlacaoel plan. ¡Salud!"

"¡Salud!" the others call out.

Perhaps it's out of a momentary delirium due to his euphoria at falsely believing he'd gained a most unlikely diplomatic victory, or perchance, it is out of the same overly trusting nature which led him to believe Angelina and Roberto had transformed into Tezcatlipoca and

Xochiquetzal, but for whatever incalculable reason, Ignacio tilts back his glass and drinks down every last drop, only discovering the foul elixir's cruel sedition in its sickly, bitter aftertaste. Conversely, the noxious liquid is all too familiar to Angelina and Roberto, if only from having encountered the same in their fateful dreams, but their amiability with Ignacio has played the fickle mistress in arresting their suspicions and inhibitions toward any of El Hechicero's deceptive overtures, and they too swallow the powerful hallucinogenic concoction.

Angelina and Roberto's heads are swirling into oblivion as they slump limply over the table while Ignacio tries helplessly to maintain any sense of focus, but to no avail; he is doomed to the darkness, crying out as he fades away, "¡Usted es el Diablo!"

"¡Verdad! Yo soy El Diablo, and you, my friend--are a fool. Lock him up, and prepare these two for the sacrifice."

"Perdon señor," Pedro interrupts, "but I thought the plan was to cast a spell on them so they would give themselves to be sacrificed?"

"That's no longer necessary--since there's no one to resist us, we can proceed without further delay."

"But what if the village gets wind of it? You know how they worship her; there could be serious consequences."

"Then see to it they don't get wind of it. Must I do everything?"

The preparations for the sacrifice of the Ixiptlas has Javier Barquin, the Tlamacazqui, trembling with anticipation. His hands are shaking, and he can hardly keep his mind on his task. He has killed before--men, women, and even children--but he has never held up the still-beating heart of any of his victims. He steadies himself with the realization this is not the end, but only the beginning. *Once the gods are behind us, he imagines, nothing can stop us. When we march into Mexico City, Porfirio Díaz and all of la Gente Decente shall bow down before me!*

Barquin is acting out his conquest fantasy when Pedro enters the chamber. "Tlamacazqui--the Ixiptlas are ready."

El Hechicero turns abruptly, somewhat embarrassed. "Doesn't anyone knock anymore?"

"Lo siento, señor, but the Ixiptlas are ready for the ceremony."

"Good, good. Let's get on with it then."

The temple proper is empty, except for those who were at breakfast earlier. Angelina lies prone across the altar; a golden basin inscribed with the image of Coatlicue, the mother of Coyolxauhqui, sits on the floor beside it. Roberto is on the right side of the altar in a chair cloaked by Barquin's lieutenants. The diabolist and his second, Pedro Salazar, both looking rather ridiculous in the traditional garb of the ancient Tlamacazquis, stop in front of the altar. El Hechicero takes the bag of hummingbird feathers he is holding and sprinkles some on the floor, some over the limp body of Angelina, and then the rest upon the altar. Salazar holds up the golden case, which houses the Tecpatl of the Feathered Serpent, and Barquin removes the

knife.

El Hechicero raises the Tecpatl in the air and begins to chant in the language of Nahuatl, which translates thusly:

*"We call upon you, Huitzilopochtli, great god of warfare, vindicator of she of the serpent skirt, Coatlicue the earth goddess. Receive as an offering the Ixiptla of Coyolxauhqui as a sign of our commitment to raise you up before the people. A symbol of our desire to make sacrifices unto you as you have made great sacrifices for us, your disciples. Your direction is south; lead us there, back to the land of our ancestors, back to the place you led us to in the beginning, the great island city of Tenochtitlan on the sacred waters of Texcoco."*

Grabbing the knife with both hands, Barquin the Tlamacazqui draws his hands down over Angelina's slowly beating heart...

Suddenly, the sound of rifle fire blasts throughout the temple cavern!

"Hold it right there, pendejos!"

Standing at the entrance of the cavern, with their E. Remington and Sons M1871 rolling-block carbines pointed straight at Barquin's head, are Joaquin Murrieta and Procopio Bustamante. "Drop the knife, berdache, or the next shot is going through your loco cabeza!"

El Hechicero attempts to proceed with the sacrifice as Salazar makes a move toward the door. Angelina and Roberto's rescuers fire two shots simultaneously; Murrieta's shot rips the Tecpatl out of the sorcerer's hand, sending it flying, while Procopio's shot tears through Salazar's headdress. "What part of hold it right there don't you nincompoops understand?"

Murrieta and Procopio advance into the temple and corral El Hechicero and his men. "You two, get over there! What in Hades is going on here, and why are they dressed like that?"

"You have no idea what you're doing," the bewildered theurgist shrieks. "My men will be here any minute, and when they arrive you'll wish you'd never been born."

"Look here, muttonhead, we're the ones holding the guns," Procopio retorts. "How about I plug ya right here?"

Procopio shoves his rifle into El Hechicero's gut. "Alright, Montezuma, move it!"

Murrieta and Procopio push the men through the temple and down the hall toward the cell Ignacio is in. Ignacio looks spaced out and is swatting at imaginary insects. "What's wrong with him?" Procopio asks of no one in particular. "This place is like an insane asylum."

Murrieta can see the keys hanging off the belt of one of Barquin's lieutenants. "You--get the door open, and hurry it up."

Procopio shoves the men inside the cell and locks the door behind them. "Andale, tío--we need to get outta here before the cavalry shows up!"

Back in the temple, Angelina and Roberto are standing in front of the altar staring at each other with strange looks on their faces. "Now what's wrong with them?" Procopio asks.



"I think they've been drugged."

Murrieta steps between the two of them. "Come on, you two--we really have to get out of here." He snaps his fingers, but there's no response. "It's hopeless; you grab lover boy, and I'll get the girl."

Procopio scoops up Roberto, and Murrieta follows with Angelina. They race through the temple and out the cave to the canyon pass. There's no time to waste, as El Hechicero's men are running toward them from the village above. They load Angelina and Roberto onto their horses as quickly as possible, and jump into the saddle. "Hiyah!"

Murrieta and Procopio light up down the trail with a hail of bullets flying past their heads. As they race down the mountainside at breakneck speed, Procopio yells out, "Hey, viejo--just like old times! ¿Verdad?"

## Chapter Seventeen

The warlock caballeros of los Brujos Mejores come pouring into the temple, and rush back to the cell chamber where Barquin and the others are hollering out, “¡Volvemos aquí!”

“¡Señor!”

“Did you stop them? Tell me you stopped them.”

“No, señor, they got away.”

“Idiots! Get me out of here!”

“Sí, Tlamacazqui. Pero, where is the key?”

“Those men who put us in here, the men you let get away, they must have taken it!”

“No problema, señor; we'll get you out of there. Por favor, hold on.”

El Hechicero's men go in search of a hammer to break the padlock, and in a few minutes they return with a sledge and begin pounding away at it. After a dozen or so attempts, the lock shatters and the cell door is open.

El Hechicero looks at Salazar and points to Ignacio. “Torture him until he tells us where they have taken them.”

“¿Que? He's completely incoherent, the potion we gave them won't wear off for several days, if at all.”

“Then you'll just have to sober him up!”

“With what? We don't have the necessary herbs for an antidote.”

El Hechicero's eyes turn bloodshot red and he stands seething and speechless for a moment, then angrily pushes his way out of the cell and storms back to his chambers. “Idiots! I'm surrounded by idiots!”

#

After descending halfway down the canyon at breakneck speed, Procopio and Murrieta cut back northwest up to the canyon rim, enabling them to see any riders coming up the trail from the southeast. Halfway up the crest, they come to a fast-moving creek and have to slow up. "Tío, we should try and get Roberto and his novia to drink some water while we have the chance."

"Oh, sí, good idea."

Procopio carefully guides Roberto to the edge of the water and dips his head down in the river, he appears to be drinking but having some difficulty. Before Procopio can steady him, he falls in and begins splashing around. Alarmed, Procopio wades in after him, but Roberto seems to think it's some sort of game and starts swimming off downstream. Meanwhile, Murrieta is trying to help Angelina to the water's edge, but once she sees Roberto swimming past, she starts laughing and stumbles in after him. Murrieta tries to get control of her, but to no avail; the two of them are floating off faster than Procopio and Murrieta can keep up.

Murrieta scrambles after the castaways, trying not to lose them, but soon recognizes things are getting out of hand. He does his best to keep his footing while dodging obstacles along the creek's undulating banks, and shouts back to Procopio, "Get the horses and catch up downriver!"

"Right! I'm on it, tío!"

Angelina and Roberto reach a small drop-off and go sailing head over heels into the splash pool below, laughing like hyenas all the way. What neither they nor their would-be saviors realize is this creek is the Arroyo de Basaseachi. The arroyo merges some fifty yards ahead with the Arroyo del Durazno, and just beyond, both creeks cascade over the canyon rim, falling eight hundred plus feet to the Río Candamena below.

Procopio makes it back to the horses and races around the bend toward the confluence of the two arroyos, but the landscape pulls away from the water and the ridge forces him to ride around to the east. Murrieta is rapidly losing ground as the oblivious Angelina and Roberto are being whisked away by the ever-increasing current. Procopio clears the ridge and desperately searches for any sign of them as he doubles back along the southern face. After several anxious moments, he spots them floating merrily around the bend, apparently having the time of their lives by the look of them.

Mercifully, the arroyos narrow considerably before the falls, giving Procopio the break he needs to pluck the frolicking lovebirds out of the stream before they plunge to their deaths. Murrieta, exhausted but relieved, makes his way through the brush in time to help get them up the bank. Angelina and Roberto have no idea of the danger they were in and struggle against their rescuers to get back into the arroyo. "Ay, Dios mío, what are we going to do with these two?"

"The way I see it, tío, we'll never make it back to the hacienda before they catch up to

us, not with the horses loaded down like this, and we need to find a remedy for whatever's making los jóvenes loco en la cabeza."

"Estoy de acuerdo, I'm thinking we should head west to Trincheras. Abuelita will know what to do, she always knows what to do. Besides, they'll never expect us to head into Sonora."

"Now you're thinking, tío--that's a plan that just might work, but first we've got to get these two some clothes before they get the consumption."

"Orale pues, vamonos."

#

El Hechicero is dressed in his customary attire once again, trying to steady himself after the defeating events of the last hour. He's determined not to let the Ixiptlas get away, and he is feverishly weighing the variables, to ascertain his next course of action. On the one hand, they would most likely be heading to the Hacienda de Encinillas, but on the other hand, they might head in a different direction, knowing they can't outrun his men with two delirious passengers slowing them down.

The sorcerer exits his chambers and walks down the corridor to the main temple, stopping in front of the fire pit located inside the open chamber behind the altar. Slowly, he begins to chant as he throws strange elements into the flames, each creating plumes of varying colors, shapes, and sizes. As the flames rise higher, the demonolater chants louder and louder until he reaches a fevered pitch; clouds of yellow and green and purple smoke seemingly dance around him. Finally, he casts in the last element and a thunderous burst of kinetic energy blasts across the cavern, and in an instant the flames are extinguished.

Contorted by the forces of evil he has summoned, El Hechicero's face is transformed into a grotesque and gruesome mask of its former self. He picks up the Tecpatl of Quetzalcoatl and places it in the golden case, and then marches across the temple floor and out of the cave, where forty of his finest caballeros are saddling their horses. The prestidigitator takes the reins of his horse from Pedro Salazar and mounts up. "I should not have to tell you men the importance of our mission, but let it be known, failure is not an option! Move out!"

#

The small village of Basaseachi is nearly deserted when Murrieta and Procopio ride into town, but what few Raramuri are left begin to gather around in the street to take in the strange and unusual sight of Angelina and Roberto dressed as ancient Aztecs. They're well aware of the peculiar activity going on in Candamena canyon; all of the Raramuri throughout Sierra Tarahumara are aware of it, but even after all the abnormal events they have witnessed over the last couple of years, this is still something quite bizarre. The odd company pulls up outside the only real structure on the main street and comes to a halt. "Stay here, tío--I'll see if I can bargain with these Indians."

Procopio dismounts and heads inside to find a family of considerable size seated on

wooden benches around what looks a lot like a picnic table one might see at the fair. Procopio tries to communicate with the occupants of the room, but no one seems to understand a word he's saying. An old Indian woman speaks to a small boy in what sounds like an Uto-Aztecan language, and the boy runs past him and out the front door.

After some time of head-nodding and polite gestures, followed by a brief spell of uncomfortable but bearable silence, the boy returns with a young man in his early twenties. "Mi primo tells me you have come from the village of el Azteca Culto."

"Sí, that's sure enough true. We need some clothes for our amigos outside."

"Lo siento, señor, pero we are a poor village. Clothes--or anything else for that matter, are hard to come by."

"Well, son, anything you can spare will do."

"It would be easier if you have something to trade."

"Like what?"

"Like those belts the Aztecas are wearing."

Procopio hasn't really paid much attention to the ornamentation which adorned Angelina and Roberto, but once they step outside he can see the belts are made of gold, turquoise and other precious metals. "I see what you mean, kid. So, you want these belts?"

"Sí, señor."

"Alright then, you bring me two sets of clothes and it's a deal."

Their appearance resembles an old peasant couple, and the fit isn't perfect, but at least Angelina and Roberto don't look like the Moctezumas anymore. The villagers all crowd in around the young Raramuri, who is beaming from ear to ear with the two Aztec belts and arm bands in his hands. He's most assuredly gotten the better end of this deal; nevertheless, Murrieta and Procopio are more than satisfied, knowing they won't be drawing any more unwanted attention than necessary.

Procopio and Murrieta tip their sombreros to the villagers, and they, along with their spaced out passengers, ride out of town headed for the Sonora border.

#

El Hechicero and los Brujos Mejores arrive at the Sonora border sometime after midnight. The tracks of their prey haven't been easy to follow, but it will take more than traveling through riverbeds and back tracking over rocky terrain to throw him off the scent. The question is, where are they headed? They could be taking the back route to el Rancho de San Diego or maybe they intend to travel the long way around to the mission in El Paso del Norte, either way, the thaumaturge decides it best to send a couple scouts up ahead to Guaymas to enlist the help of his old friend Cajemé. He quickly scribbles out a note, and calls for the captain of the guard. "Salazar, send two of your best men with this letter to Cajemé, they will find him in the village of El Guamuchli east of Potam."

"Sí, señor."

"And Pedro, make sure they do not fail me."

"Yo entiendo, señor."

#

In the heroes' camp, Procopio has had to tie up Angelina and Roberto to keep them from wandering off, and the absence of movement has them shivering from lack of warmth. It's now into the third week of October, and the night air is getting much colder up here in the Sierra Madres, but no matter how cold it is, Murrieta and his nephew know lighting a campfire will give away their location. The guardians wrap up their charges in the only blankets they have and place them together to conserve heat. Procopio pulls his coat around him and petitions his uncle, "Tío, I'll take the first watch, you get some sleep."

Murrieta needs little encouragement; it's been a long day, a long week, and an even longer month. "Okay, mi hijo, wake me up in three hours."

Procopio sits and watches his tío fall asleep. He had to admire the old man, the way he kept up with the young vaqueros on the rancho, and then showing those boys what genuine bravery is all about when he charged up the rocks at Tres Castillos and forced Victorio and his raiders out of hiding. Why, he had more courage than all those soldiers from the presidio combined. More importantly, he's really been there these past couple of years, like he was when Procopio was just a little shaver after his father was killed. What's more, he has a great sense of humor--boy, can he make people laugh. A character trait Procopio really appreciated after the hard, often unforgiving life he lived up until his reunion with his beloved tío.

Procopio gets up to stretch his legs, deciding to have a walk around the camp and get a feel for the lay of the land, when off to the east he hears a noise coming up from the trail. He hunkers down behind a large rock and catches sight of two riders approaching--scouts, most likely some of that crazy soothsayer's men. He has them in his sights as they ride by, but thinks better of killing them. The sound of rifle fire would unquestionably give away their position and draw more of them this way. Oddly, at the speed these riders are traveling, it's highly unlikely they're tracking anyone. No, these men are being sent out as a warning party, but who is it they're going to warn?

Back at camp, Procopio leans in to wake up Murrieta. "Tío."

"I know, two riders, moving fast down the trail from the east. They passed by a couple of minutes ago."

"How did you know?"

"I can feel it through the ground--en mis nalgas."

"You're a strange one, tío. They were wearing federal uniforms like the men who fired on us in the canyon, and they appear to be Yaqui, like the men in that weird temple cavern."

"That's them, alright--they've been sent ahead to alert others we're headed their way."

They'll probably try and get us in an ambush."

"What's our options?"

"There's more than one way to Trincheras, mi hijo. Try and sleep now; I'll take the watch."

The rest of the night passes uneventfully, and the party is up before the dawn and back out on the trail. Murrieta can see the hoofprints of last night's riders and muses over the reality of tracking the trackers who are tracking them.

The morning sky is ominous with dark clouds, and thunder can be heard far off in the distance to the west. By mid morning, the rain is coming down heavily, and the company crosses over el Río Mulatos just shy of the old town of San Ildefonso de Yecoro, but soon after, Murrieta calls for Procopio to hold up. "I've got a plan, mi hijo."

"What is it, tío?"

"I think we should double back and take the river north. The rain will wash away most of the tracks, and by the time they figure it out, we should be halfway to Hermosillo."

"I don't know, tío--with this rain, the river could get dangerous."

"Dangerous? More dangerous than a bunch of crazy Aztec lovin psychopaths chasin after us? Besides, the río is low right now and it flows north, so it's downstream all the way. How bad could it be?"

"Well, tío, I'm up for it if you are, lead the way."

Procopio follows Murrieta across a series of boulders until they reach the river and guide the horses into the water. The water level is no higher than three feet for the first couple of miles, but the rain continues coming down and the level is steadily rising. Loud cracking of overhanging tree limbs can be heard coming from upstream, and before they have time to react or escape the oncoming torrent, a wall of rushing water from the mountain passes to the southeast overtakes them. There's nothing left to do now but hold on.

Procopio whips his mecate around Roberto's back and loops it to the saddle horn in the blink of eye, and then clings to his Criollo's mane as tightly as humanly possible, hoping his tío has done the same. Horses instinctively comprehend how to keep their head above water, and Procopio knows their only hope is to not get separated from the caballo. He prays silently his tío and Angelina hold on.

It may be no consolation to Angelina and Roberto's liberators at the moment, considering their perilous situation, but the main objective of Murrieta's bold albeit reckless plan is working. El Hechicero and his henchmen assembled at the river's edge are hindered from crossing by the same conditions greatly afflicting their quarry; the circumstances have the diviner convinced they've proceeded on down the trail.

The downpour subsides, and the Río Mulatos settles. El Hechicero signals for his men to cross. On the other side of the river, no clear indication is left to allow the pursuers to gauge

who or how many riders have progressed down the trail, so they pick up the pace and press on down the path to San Ildefonso de Yecoro.

For now, the old outlaw has bought his charges some sorely needed time. Meanwhile, downstream, Procopio and his tío have no idea what has transpired back up on the trail; they've had their hands full just trying to stay alive.

The violently churning river pulls the big Criollo down under repeatedly, dragging Procopio and Roberto with it. Sheared-off tree limbs and other debris crash into them from all sides, but the worst of it is still to come. The río has only been semi-winding so far, but up ahead the river takes an abrupt turn to the west, and the far bank here is embedded with jagged stone, shattered tree trunks, and recently deposited flood wreckage. A swirling pool takes hold of them and spins them around, increasing the horse's panic, causing the frightened stallion to cry out in dreadful ear-piercing screeches. Procopio gets a glimpse of Murrieta and Angelina fifty or so yards behind, but there's no way for him to tell if they're alive or dead.

Tomas Procopio Bustamante hasn't had much practice at taking care of anyone but himself. Since the age of fifteen, when his mother remarried and his stepfather forced him to move on, he has been on his own. Believing he had no family to turn to, he's lived by the code of the outlaws--looking out for number one. He's seen his share of life-and-death predicaments, and most of the time he's been able to shoot his way out and hightail it down the trail. But now he finds himself in a situation where all of his self-preserving instincts are frantically pulling on him to do what he's always done, to do what comes naturally, but if he falls back into his old ways, these people he has become so close to, these people he has come to think of as family--will most certainly perish.



## Chapter Eighteen

In a rare moment of mercy or grace or both, the swirling eddy spits Procopio and Roberto's equine raft out into a reverse current, which propels them toward the near bank, and the mad beast pulls wildly toward it. After a half dozen powerful strides against the water, his feet find the river bed below, and the life-saving caballo fiercely pulls them all out of the river and onto the shore. Bustamante quickly removes the rope from around the pommel and then Roberto, climbing down while pulling off Roberto at the same time before the exhausted Criollo falls over. He grabs his reata and tries his best to toss it out to Murrieta as he and Angelina drift by, but his tío shows no sign of life, and the valiant attempt fails. Their horse reaches the edge of the whirlpool, but the counter current pushes them on and around it toward the onrushing far bank, and the writhing caballo slams into the rocks with a sickening thud.

Procopio watches helplessly as Murrieta and Angelina slip off their horse and back out into the water. The animal cries out in obvious pain but manages to find its footing and ascend up the rocks and trees to the small plateau above. Unfathomably, Angelina is able to dog paddle her way to a tiny stretch of shoreline at the point of the slight peninsula created by this small S-turn in the tributary. Procopio attempts to pull himself together after the horrendous events he has just witnessed and pulls his reata out of the river, tying it to a second rope from his saddle. He then ties one end around a tall oak and the other around himself, before diving back into the turbulent waters. He has never been a strong swimmer, and his arms are painfully weakened from the strain of clutching onto his horse's neck for so long. Nevertheless, he swims like Neptune with naught on his mind but saving his tío, and nothing, not the pain in his arms, not the pull of the current, not his lack of aquatic acumen, nor any other thing under the eyes of God is going to stop him.

The water is far too muddy and disturbed by silt to provide any visibility, so Bustamante must make his way by feel along the rocks and tree roots sticking up from the bottom of the río. He starts at the point where his tío went under, and works his way along driven by the flow of the current. As he goes, he hopes beyond hope it will carry him in the same direction it carried his mentor and hero. He sweeps each crook and hollow in the dirty sloping bank around the jetty until he has traversed from one side to the other, and then feels the current pulling him back out to the center of the river, so he goes with it. His sense of time tells him he hasn't got long before it will be too late to revive Murrieta, even if he does find him. Procopio hysterically hunts with his hands for anything, and then he touches something, something substantial, a body. Yes! It's his tío, and without thinking, he grabs him up and kicks wildly for the shore.

#

El Hechicero and los Brujos Mejores, less the two scouts, embark from San Ildefonso de Vecoro after a brief stop for food and supplies; their short-term objective is to reach Tecoripa by nightfall. If things go to plan, they should be able to rendezvous with Cajemé and his braves at that time. Even if the absconders flee north to Sahuaripa, it will take far longer for them to navigate the unforgiving mountain pass than the sorcerer and his warlocks should need to travel around and intercept them at the Río Yaqui near Batuc. And if they've played it safe and remain on the road to Guaymas--well then, they'll be overtaken before day's end.

Javier Barquin does not see himself as a bad man, and he would never describe himself as evil. He believes in what he's doing, and genuinely imagines the return of Aztec rule will liberate the peasant and indigenous peoples of Mexico from the bondage of Spanish rule. Not that the country of Spain holds power over Mexico any longer, but their ways are still the same ways the caudillos and oligarchic rulers in Mexico City use to enslave the masses. The people he has killed in the course of obtaining the greater good, as he sees it, are to him the unfortunate collateral damage which any just war must endure.

The delusion Barquin suffers from is the delusion every human who ever attempted to interpret the will of God, conclude they understand the will of God, and then actually have the audacity to dictate to others what the will of God is, have suffered from since the beginning of mankind. The results of this most ungodly behavior have always been disastrous. Worse yet, it allows the cover of righteousness to those who wish to hide their ulterior motives, when their true motives are nothing more than a lust for money, power, and control. Many of the former eventually deteriorate into the latter, and most of the latter eventually come to believe they are the former. Which one El Hechicero has become, only God knows for sure.

#

Exhausted, and nearly dead on his feet, Procopio pulls his uncle inch by inch out of the river and onto the shore. He falls back against the sand and rocks and dirt, with lungs and limbs searing, while trying to catch his breath. Dizzy with weariness, he collects himself and crawls around his tío to check for any signs of life. There's no movement from Murrieta's chest nor

flow of air from his mouth, but when his nephew puts his ear against his breast, he can hear a faint heartbeat. This slightest bit of hope is enough to revive Procopio for the moment, and he springs into action. With both hands firmly against the old outlaw's chest, he pumps for all he's worth. "Come on, tío! Come on, tío! You can make it--come on, viejo!"

Twenty compressions become thirty compressions, and then thirty become forty, and still nothing. "For the love of God, tío, give me something! Fight old man, fight!"

He didn't know when they started, but tears are rolling down his face in a steady stream, and his vision is obstructed and blurred. Yet, Bustamante continues beyond hope, pumping on his tío's chest, imploring, shouting, praying, no longer in coherent words, but begging, sobbing, blubbering cries of desperation, despair, and despondency. "Please, tío, please don't go. I need you, I can't do this without you. I'm not a hero like you, tío; I'm just a bueno por nada bandido. You're the Robin Hood of Mexico, El Patrio!"

Procopio wants to continue, but his hope is sapped. He's given it his all in heroic fashion, which he might appreciate when he's older, but--then suddenly the impossible happens. A little jolt of the chest at first, and then more violently, and finally water gurgles up from Murrieta's throat and out his mouth. Procopio wipes his eyes more in disbelief at this point, but then he sees the water coming out of his tío's mouth for himself. Adrenaline courses thru Bustamante's body and he pumps one last time--a spout of dirty river water shoots out of the old man's mouth like a dancing cherub fountain in an English garden, and Murrieta starts coughing--coughing and breathing.

Kneeling beside him, Bustamante scoops his uncle up in his arms, hugging and squeezing him while laughing and crying all at the same time. "I can't believe it, tío, you made it! You're alive! ¡Alaba a Dios! ¡Gloria a Jesucristo! ¡Alaba El Señor! You're alive!"

"Of course I'm alive, mi mijo--pull yourself together man--and turn off the waterworks. Do you know how much I paid for this outfit? You're gettin me all wet."

"Getting you all wet!" Procopio protests. "I got half a mind to throw you back in and let the fish have you."

"Okay, mi hijo, take it easy. I've had enough water for one day, thank you. It was a helluva ride though, wasn't it?"

It took the better part of the rest of the day, but Procopio and Murrieta have gotten Angelina and Murrieta's horse over to Roberto's side of the river. Angelina like Roberto were fast asleep when they got to them, and when they were awoken, neither was yet in their right mind, but fortunately they offered little resistance. Getting the tired Criollo back in the water and across the river was another matter entirely. The stallion had had enough of the río and wasn't the least bit cooperative--stubborn as a mule, as they say, but one could hardly blame him.

The decision to rest up and start again in the morning is an easy one to make. The pines and oak here provide adequate shelter if the rain picks up again, and the route over Cerro Llano

Redondo to the northern pass elevates considerably over the next few miles, an undertaking best started after a restful night's sleep. Their meager dinner consists of a can of beans and some jerky, but Angelina and Roberto eat very little as a result of the potion Pedro Salazar used to sedate them with, so there's plenty enough to go around.

As tired as they are, Procopio and his tío are equally restless, their minds racing with the events of today's near-death experience. Murrieta knows his nephew has questions, and he has a pretty good idea of what they are, but he's not sure he has any answers. What happened to him out on the river isn't within the normal realm of his understanding. He's had his bell rung before and knows what that's like--crazy dreams, falling sensations, and waking up from what seems like hours to find it's only been minutes--but this was nothing like that.

The first thing which stands out in Murrieta's mind, is his ability to remember the events which occurred to him while he was unconscious with perfect clarity, something he couldn't do any of the times he'd been knocked out previously. As a mesteñero and bronc buster, he'd endured his share of hard spills and horseshoes to the head which rendered him senseless, but try as he might, he couldn't recall a single one of the subsequent dreams from any of those hapless episodes for more than a few moments afterward.

"Hey, tío--you up?"

"Sure, mi hijo--what's on your mind?"

"Tired as I am, I can't get to sleep."

"I know what you mean; I'm having a little trouble myself."

There's a period of reflective silence between them.

"I really thought I'd lost you out there today."

"Sí, pero you did a good job following the current and pulling me out of there."

"How did you know that?"

"I was watching you the whole time."

"You were watching me?"

"Sí, mi hijo, I could see everything."

"¿Que?"

"I saw it all, from the air, like a bird. You tied your reata to the tree and dove in, following the currents until you reached me at the bottom of the río out in the middle there. You swam to the other side with me under your arm and dragged me up the bank to the shore. Afterward, you started pounding on my chest and screaming at me, and I've got to tell you something, mi hijo--don't sell yourself short; you're a helluva bandido."

"¡Increíble!"

Murrieta went on to tell of many more amazing things which transpired during his phenomenal metaphysical journey. He saw his wife Rosita, and Procopio's father there with her.

They were yelling something with great urgency, but they were too far off for him to hear what it was they were trying to say to him. He'd also been visited by her brothers Claudio and Reyes, but they were cloaked and their faces appeared like shadows. Disturbingly, they begged him to pray for them, with voices more like specters than human. The conversation went on for an hour or more, and both uncle and nephew spoke of philosophical revelations which would likely change their outlook on life and death forever. Thankfully, both found their discussion to be a pleasant remedy for their uneasiness, and within moments of ending their ruminations, a peaceful sleep came to them.

It probably wasn't the wisest choice not posting a watch, but after what they'd been through, the opinion that El Hechicero and his henchmen had fallen for their ruse and continued on down the road to Guaymas was easily accepted by both Murrieta and his nephew, for obvious reasons. All things being equal, neither possessed the confidence he could remain awake for the requisite first three-hour shift. To their credit, both were up, back in the saddle, and making their way over the mountains to the northern pass before the dawn. However, it was no easy chore getting Roberto and his novia up on the horses, and even harder keeping them there. Although they were breathing normally, none of the methods employed by their guardians succeeded in waking them. In the end, it was necessary to first tie them to the horses before mounting up themselves, and then securing their riding partners to their backs with the reatas, not unlike the way they had during yesterday's wild thrill ride down the río.

The ground, being so hard and dry from a long hot summer, barely shows any sign of the previous day's deluge other than a few puddles in the lower-lying areas along the ancient Indian pass. Procopio and Murrieta take the descent down the backside of Cerro Llano Redondo with appreciably more caution, considering the increased albeit unlikely probability of the los sabuesos locos pursuing them from this direction. *Las vale prevenir que lamentar*, Murrieta figures.

As they approach the road to Sahuaripa, they hold up behind the cover of a patch of junipers while Procopio advances on foot to ascertain whether any fresh tracks are perceptible. Thankfully, the old Spanish miner's road is clear, and he lets out a whistle to reassure Murrieta it's safe to come out with Angelina and Roberto. From here on out they increase their pace as expediently as possible, hoping to reach their immediate destination by dusk--a tall order, under the circumstances, but they've got to make up the time somehow, and the distance left to gain is formidable.

By noon, the company reaches the outskirts of the old Opatá village of Tarachi, where Murrieta has distant relatives, but he thinks better of stopping, not wanting to bring them more trouble than they would probably be able to handle. Besides, he hasn't seen any of this side of his family since he was a boy. So, they ride on to the small Jesuit mission town of Arivechi, a place where they can find food, and grain for their horses. No signs of the Opatá Indians remain, but some sixty years ago the Opatá fought a fierce battle here against the Spanish army. With a band of only three hundred men, the Opatá leader, Dorame, defeated a Spanish force of over

two thousand men. Unfortunately for the Opata, the decision to support the French during the Maximilian Affair was their undoing. After the defeat of the French by Republican forces, the Opata were wiped out and all their lands confiscated.

Angelina and Roberto have received enough jostling along the road to revive them from their heavy slumber, and they both seem to have recovered their appetites, as evidenced by the way they gobble down the carne asada and tortillas Procopio has brought them. However, they haven't regained their mental faculties, as evidenced by the way they are eating, more like a pack of savage beasts than well-mannered young people. The effects of their condition grow more troubling on the road to Sahuaripa, which widens and becomes increasingly more traveled after leaving Arivechi. The looks the company receives fluctuate from simple curiosity to outright suspicion, and Murrieta prays they don't run into any Rurales.

Zaguaripa, as it was first called by the Spanish explorer Francisco de Ibbara, means "yellow ant," and not only sits dead center in the Mexican state of Sonora, but also sits right in the middle of the sacred land which once held the largest tribe of Opata Indians, the Eudeve. The great Eudeve chief, Sisibotari, made world-famous in the book *Historia de Los Triunfos de Nuestra Sante Fe*, presided over seventy villages from this strategic location. At present, it is primarily a supply center for mining operations in the area, but by night it is a dangerous bevy of restless and ready miners, vaqueros, and bandidos all looking to blow off steam. Murrieta thinks it best to stick to the outskirts of town and look for a place to bunk down for the night--better to avoid any unwanted encounters if they can help it.

Thankfully, another watchful night passes without capture though not without trepidation, however, last night both Murrieta and Procopio watched with vigilance in their customary three-hour intervals, the elder insisting on taking the first shift. Breakfast was easily come by in the morning, what with the multitude of peasant women selling their specialties on the main street of the ciudad, tamales and ears of corn with chili powder being the *plats du jour*. Murrieta barterers for a dozen of each, and a bushel of carrots for the horses.

After they all have their fill, Murrieta and Procopio discuss which route to take over the western mountains and across the Yaqui river. Murrieta's propensity for a particular type of bootleg agave liquor, which can only be found in the Bacanora region along the southern pass, persuades him to select the road less traveled. Little does he know, by doing so he is again unwittingly extricating them from an unwanted confrontation with El Hechicero and his warlocks, who have already arrived in Batuc some twenty miles ahead on the northern route.

The geomancer, with the help of Cajamé and his braves, has men staked out all the way along the pass from Batuc to Tepache, rightfully believing if the escapees are going to make it back into Chihuahua, they'll have to come thru here--only they're not headed that way at all. Truth is, as welcome as their good fortune at sequestering a safe night's respite and tasty morning meal is, it pales in comparison to the colossal measure of good fortune Murrieta's taste for rare spirits auspiciously affords them on this occasion.

## Chapter Nineteen

Having secured a couple bottles of the rarest of all Mexico's liqueurs, Murrieta and the rest of this small company reach the Río Yaqui by midday and stop to replenish their water supplies. They'll need it out on the more barren stretches between the river and Hermosillo Road where temperatures can exceed a hundred degrees well into the late autumn months. They reach the village of Mazatan, an Opata word meaning "place of the deer," by late afternoon, stopping to eat and water their horses, and from here they begin the long climb north to las Trincheras. The hope is to spend the night in Ures at the Mission de San Miguel; a hot meal and warm bunk would be nice for a change.

Ures, an Opata word meaning "savage cat," is one of the oldest cities in all of Sonora, and was the capital of the state until just last year. The weary travelers cross the Plaza de Zaragoza, and reach the mission late in the evening. The effects of Catholic persecution as a result of the Juárez and Lerdo laws has considerably thinned the available number of clergy left in Sonora, forcing the mission's parish priest to go and serve some of the mission congregations to the north in the Magdalena Valley, but one of the attendants at the mission comes out and greets them formally. The attendant, who introduces himself as Pepé, is a small hunchbacked man who walks with a pronounced limp. He helps them settle in, and after seeing to their horses, serves them up a fine supper of carne seca con chile, tortillas de leche, cheese, and coffee.

After dinner, Pepé, a kind and gentle soul, helps put Angelina and Roberto to bed. Although they are docile and subdued, Murrieta is growing increasingly concerned for the sickly couple. Their behavior has slipped into a kind of malaise which reminds him of a story he once heard many years ago from a Cubano he'd known in the gold mines of California. The mulatto

told of a religion practiced in the Islands of the Caribbean known as Vaudoux, and the shamans there called, Bokor, used a powdered toxin extracted from the puffer fish to produce a condition he described as zonbi. Whatever they've been drugged with, Roberto and his novia have become increasingly cold and pale, and their eyes appear sunken and glazed over. Murrieta fears they'll only get worse if something isn't done soon, and he senses time is running out.

In the morning, Procopio does as his tío asks and negotiates for an ox cart to carry Angelina and Roberto the rest of the way across the Sonora Desert to las Trincheras. Murrieta figures keeping them lying down couldn't hurt. They harness up Murrieta's Criollo, and lay their hebetudinous passengers down on a bed of hay in the back of the cart. Procopio secures a canvas tarp over top to keep them shaded from the sun, and then they say their goodbyes to Pepé. "Gracias por todo su ayuda y hospitalidad."

"De nada, señor; vaya con Dios."

Crossing over the Río Sonora is easy enough with the help of a wood barge, which utilizes a rope and pulley system to carry people and cargo across the river, and by mid-morning the company reaches the town of San Miguel de Horcasitas. The same system is available at the Río San Miguel crossing, but unfortunately, the river is so low the barge is sitting on dry land.

After watering the horses, the decision is made to travel north until a suitable place to cross can be found. A mile or so upstream, Murrieta finds a flat, shallow stretch in the river, which looks promising. Procopio enters the water and rides on through to the other side, indicating to his uncle the river bottom should withstand the weight. Murrieta circles around and takes a running start at it, and fords the river with water splashing up from all sides.

The third river of the day, the Río San José de Zanjón, proves to be the most difficult--not that there is any water in it; it's dry as a bone, but the arroyo-like conditions make the crossing difficult, and the ox cart gets stuck in the sand. Procopio threads his reata through the head rail, and the force of both horses pulling is sufficient to do the trick. The El Pinto wash is equally taxing, but once across it, the company makes their way north reaching the old Opata village of Querobabi by mid afternoon. Most of the Opata are long gone and the village is inhabited primarily by Pima Indians these days; nevertheless, it's not a place where light-skinned mestizos like Murrieta and Procopio are likely to be taken in with open arms. Thankfully, they both possess a little Pima blood, and Murrieta is certain he has family here. Procopio hopes, for all their sakes, his tío is not mistaken.

As it turns out, the villagers pay them little mind and they are able to purchase food and water for the horses from the livery without any trouble. An elderly Pima woman moves purposefully across the village square and over to the ox cart, insisting on praying for "la realeza enfermizo," as she referred to Angelina and Roberto. Murrieta is struck by her words. How could she possibly have known what was in the cart or of the events which led to their arrival here? He waits for la vieja to finish before eagerly setting out on the last leg of their journey to la Hacienda de San Rafael del Los Alamitos, and as they head down the road away from her, she



calls after them, “Estar atento para Apaches!”

“Why did she have to say that?” Procopio complains. “I’ve seen enough Apache to last me a lifetime.”

“I’m with you there, mi hijo.”

The fugitives press on in a northwesterly course across the Sonora Desert and soon fall upon the Río El Carrizo. The river is as dry as the last two washes they struggled with earlier in the day, but this time they cross without incident. The short distance they have left to San Rafael del Los Alamos, the place of Murrieta's birth, has the cagey old vaquero rife with anticipation. A gibbous moon appears early in the night sky lighting their way. The saguaro leave strange shadows in the half light, emulating the comedians during the fiesta del Día de Los Muertos who dress up as the Grim Reaper and go walking around on stilts, frightening los niños. Coyotes howl in unison from the tops of the mesa, while sidewinders search for water under the cover of darkness, and before long, the outline of el Cerro de Trincheras comes into view.

El Cerro de Trincheras is an archeological wonder of ancient architectural planning, a mixture of tribal gathering spaces, family housing, and village agricultural landscaping all built within a terraced mountain-like fortress. Historians and archeologists from all over Europe have come to examine the curious structure but continually struggle to explain the Trincheras inhabitants' motivation for the ruins' unique engineering. Murrieta never regarded the matter as all that hard to comprehend, considering the fact the Río Magdalena, Río Concepción, and Río Altar all meet here in this valley. It was obviously built the way it was in order to keep the town from being washed away every time the rivers overflowed.

He had to laugh; the Americans who built the waterlogged capital of California in Sacramento, and perhaps the Spaniards who constructed El Paso del Norte, could have learned a thing or two about an ounce of prevention from these so-called primitive Indios. Of course, the height of the structure had other functions, such as providing the means for looking out over the valley below, and sending “*bui jehniktham*,” smoke signals to neighboring tribes and villages. However, figuring out the motives and intentions of any culture is rudimentary, in that the wants and needs of all mankind have changed very little over the expanse of human history.

La Hacienda de San Rafael del Los Alamos is small compared to the haciendas of Don Luis Terrazas, but well shaded and close to the river. Abuelita's two chihuahuas, Suave and El Bandido, herald the arrival of the weary travelers, their high-pitched sirens waking everyone for miles. Murrieta's tío, Salvador, comes out to the gate to see what's raising all the ruckus, and sees a sight with his eyes his mind cannot comprehend. He turns abruptly, and runs like a madman back to the house slamming the door shut behind him.

“¿Quien es?” Abuelita asks. “¿Que paso?”

“¡Son fantasmas!”

“¿Son fantasmas?”

“¡Sí!”

“¿Estás borracho?”

“¡No estoy borracho, vi a fantasmas!”

“¿Dónde?”

“A fuera de la puerta.”

“Pues bien, vaya e invítelos en.”

“¿Que?”

“Me oyó. ¡Andele!”

Salvador reluctantly gives in and returns to the gate with a good measure of reticence and trepidation. He's generally a happy-go-lucky fellow, and he's surely no coward, but two things he doesn't care too much for--ghosts and bees. “Invite them in, she says. Great. What next? Give them some milk and cookies.”

Salvador opens the gate and lets them in against his better judgment, but avoids looking into their eyes. *They're not taking my soul, pinches ghosts*, he thinks.

“Tío--it's good to see you,” Murrieta offers with a smile. “You remember mi sobrino, Procopio.”

“I remember he's dead,” he responds, “as are you. Have you come back to haunt us?”

“Don't be silly, tío, we're very much alive.”

“Sure you are, and I am the bloody King of England.”

“Very funny, tío. It's good to see you haven't lost your sense of humor.”

“It's good to see you haven't lost your head.”

Suave and El Bandido bark incessantly until Abuelita hollers at them, “¡Silencio! Despertara a los muertos.”

Murrieta jumps down from the buckboard like a spring chicken. “¡Abuelita!” he beams, “¿cómo esta usted?”

He gives his grandmother a big hug, and she draws him in just as she'd always done when he was a child, her old familiar scent sends waves of memories rushing through his head. “¡No has cambiado en lo más mínimo!”

Tears roll down Abuelita's cheeks. “Nunca pensé que te vería otra vez.”

After some time of reuniting with his family and introducing Procopio to his extended family, the emergency at hand resurfaces. Abuelita has Murrieta and Salvador bring Angelina and Roberto into the house and lay them at the altares under the laminas of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Abuelita is a shaman of great experience, practicing a mix of Catholic rites and ancient O'odham rituals. Rosary in hand, she crosses herself frequently as she prays over them, leaving them from time to time to retrieve herbs and other essentials from the kitchen. A remedy of Ranunculcea and other healing herbs are steeped into a tea, which she makes them

drink frequently for several hours; the remains are worked into a poultice she applies to specific areas of their bodies. Her incantations go on throughout the night and into the next day, accompanied by the lighting of religious candles, the burning of incense, and liberal amounts of holy water.

Murrieta inquires into the prognosis. "How are they doing?"

Abuelita looks up at him and says gravely, "No puedo decir, mi hijo; están muy enfermos. Ahora esta en manos de Dios."

#

Established in 1629 by the Jesuit missionary, Juan Mendoza, here on the eastern bank of the Yaqui river, the small town of Batuc sees all manner of unseemly characters crossing through due to the availability of the rare and highly banned Bacanora liqueur. Nevertheless, the presiding mayor, Juan Guizueta, finds these armed men parading around in republican uniforms and carrying on some kind of covert military operations out of the local cantina most unsettling. "And with a band of Yaqui Indians no less, Yaqui Indians!" he protests to no one in particular. As mayor, Juan Guizueta has had to use his discretion when applying the law, but he's not about to allow a rogue military outfit and a bunch of Indians take over his town. He peers out the second-floor window of his office above the general store one more time, and then decides it can wait til after his almuerzo.

El Hechicero is sitting with Cajemé at a table near the back of the cantina when Piedro Salazar strides in and approaches with an urgent communiqué. "Señor, one of the men has reported a miner from San Miguel traveling east through Moctezuma, stated seeing two men riding across the Plaza de Zaragoza in Ures with a young man and woman fitting the description of the Ixiptlas."

"How long ago?"

"He said it was two nights ago."

"They are taking the western route along the Sonora Road north to El Paso del Norte--we will head them off in Magdalena. ¡Vamonos!"

"Wait, señor--there is more."

"What is it, man? Time is of the essence."

"The miner said the men who took the Ixiptlas were Joaquin Murrieta and Procopio Bustamante."

"That's impossible--they're both dead!"

"I thought so too, señor, but the man was very adamant it was them. He said he worked in the gold mines of California with Murrieta and lived in the same town as his family for many years."

"So, what if they are alive? It makes no difference to me, they'll swing from my rope for what they've done."

Listening quietly until now, Cajemé speaks up. "You can count me out."

"What?"

"You heard me; you're on your own."

"What is the meaning of this? Explain yourself."

"Joaquin Murrieta is a friend of mine. When my family left Mexico with hundreds of others from Sonora for the gold mines of California, it was Joaquin Murrieta who led our wagon train. It was also the same Joaquin Murrieta who protected us from los gringos while we were there."

"What about our friendship? We fought together against the French. I had your back--you owe me!"

"I owe you nothing! If it wasn't for me, the Raramuri would've killed you and everyone of your cult members a long time ago. Did you really think you could set up an Aztec temple on their sacred land without the threat of a Yaqui invasion hanging over their heads? No, my friend; it's you who are indebted to me."

El Hechicero scowls at Cajemé with fire in his eyes. "Fine! You want to bail out like a coward, go ahead. I can take them without your help."

Cajemé steps up in El Hechicero's face, forcing him back. "I'd watch what you say if I were you!"

El Hechicero cowers slightly, and Cajemé gives him a wicked grin. "Take my advice, diabolist; go back to your cave in the wilderness and cut your losses. You're no match for a man like Joaquin Murrieta."

Cajemé barks out a command to his men, and the Yaquis mount up and ride out of town, leaving El Hechicero and his warlocks staring after them in disbelief.

#

Suave and El Bandido wiggle their way into the house and creep past the visitors who have come to see the men who brought the sick young couple now resting in the spare bedroom. Their curiosity has gotten the better of them, and after a full day of scheming, they've finally found a way in to see what all the fuss is about. Suave leaps up on the bed with El Bandido right behind him, and the two of them take turns sniffing the sleeping pair. Suave crawls up on the man and lies down on his chest, eyeballing him intently, while El Bandido paces back and forth, softly brushing his bushy tail in the man's face.

Roberto opens his eyes slowly to find a big set of brown eyes glaring back at him. He stirs just enough to frighten the skittish little dog, and both the tan short-haired Suave and El Bandido, a reddish long-hair, start barking frantically. Abuelita and Murrieta hurry over to the room to investigate and find Roberto sitting up in bed, trying to snatch up the nimble traviesos. Abuelita swiftly shews the boisterous perros from the room and out the front door.

"Well good morning there, sunshine," Murrieta says with a smile. "How ya feelin?"

Roberto stretches and yawns. "I feel like a team of mules just ran me over. Where are we?"

"You're at la Hacienda de San Rafael del Los Alamos. Bienvenido a casa de mis padres."

Roberto's head is swimming with questions, but then, slowly, Angelina starts to come around. Her face emerges from under the covers looking uncharacteristically pale and sullen, and an inkling of what perils they may have been through begins to formulate in Roberto's mind.

"Buenos días, mi amor."

## Chapter Twenty

Once Angelina and Roberto have bathed and eaten, they adjourn to the living room where a large painting of the patriarch of the family, Abuelita's husband, Don Juan José Murrieta, presides over all of the Murrieta family who are assembled here waiting to greet the fascinating couple. Besides Abuelita, those present in the room are Joaquin's tíos and tías, José Jesús, José David and his esposa Rosa, Salvador, Pedro, and Concepción, his primos, Antonio, Leanor and her esposo Fernando, Joaquin who they call "El Guero," Guadalupe, and Dolores, his primos segundos, Concepción and her esposo Ramón, Reyes, Crisanto, Francisco, Brijida and her esposo Luis, Ysabel, Cleta, and Rosa, his primos terceros, Margarita, José, Ramón, Diego, Luana, Maria Biviana, Maria Filomena, José, and Gabriel. Roberto is surprised at the size of Murrieta's family having always pictured him and Procopio as loner types, but Murrieta assures him this is just a fraction of his family on his father's side.

There's no way Angelina and Roberto can possibly remember everyone's name, but it's nice to be among pleasant company. Several of the second and third cousins take right away to the enchanting duo, especially Margarita Romero, Brijida and Luis's daughter, and Ramón Moreno, Concepción and Ramón's son. As it turns out, they're in love and think the adventures of Roberto and Angelina to be the most romantic story they've ever heard.

Of course, Murrieta and Procopio take the time to fully recount the events of their harrowing journey beginning as far back as their first meeting with Roberto and Señor Vasquez, everyone, including the storytellers themselves, are amazed only a month has passed since then. Roberto is especially curious to know how they'd discovered where to find he and Angelina. As it turned out, when they returned to the hacienda after the battle at Tres Castillos, news that a servant girl had gone missing was circulating around the bunkhouse. Later that day,

when they went to the infirmary to visit Roberto and see how he was getting along, they found the note he'd left. Murrieta and Procopio put two and two together, and after talking it over with Señor Vasquez, they decided to ride out after them. The tracks were a few days old, but with so many headed in the same direction, they weren't too hard to follow.

The valiant liberators' testimony goes on for some time, and both Angelina and Roberto are astounded at everything Murrieta and Procopio went through to rescue them. A fiesta has been arranged for tomorrow with a dance and everything to celebrate the return of the town's long-lost heroes.

It's well after dusk before Angelina and Roberto can get any time alone, but now that they're walking out among the cottonwoods down by the river. they stop to embrace, the kind of long, meaningful embrace which unburdens the heart and invites in the promise all things will be set right once again; a communion of two bruised and battered souls mending together under the healing power of grace and mercy and love.

"Is anything as fair as our love, mi amor?" Angelina asks with a sigh.

"No, my love, nor as strong. If it can endure this, it can endure anything."

"I wouldn't have made it without you."

"Nor I without you. It is a sign from above we shall always be together."

"Then you will never leave me?"

"As surely as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, I shall never leave you."

Angelina looks up into Roberto's eyes. "Where do we go from here?"

"Back to the hacienda, of course. Where else would we go?"

Angelina tenses and the look in her eyes changes to concern. "We can't go back to the hacienda; El Hechicero will be waiting for us there."

Roberto focuses on her more intently. "Don Luis and his vaqueros will protect us."

Angelina lets her arms fall to her sides and she withdraws from Roberto's arms. "Have you forgotten El Hechicero and his men are Señor Don Luis's vaqueros?"

"That may be true, but certainly when he hears of the witch doctor's treachery, Don Luis will have him and his men thrown into prison, or worse. I can't imagine anything else happening."

"I can! You forget I'm only a peasant girl, the daughter of a servant on the hacienda of Señor Don Luis, and nothing more than a servant myself. You have no concept of the importance of business relations and money to a man like Señor Terrazas, not to mention military relations. El Hechicero is an officer in the same Republican Army, as Señor Don Luis and all of the caballeros who work for him. You and I are of no more value to him than the heads of cattle he sends to the slaughterhouses each spring."

"I can't believe that..."

Angelina grabs Roberto's hands in hers and engages him with all seriousness. "Look, you don't know him like I do. You have to listen to me--we cannot go back there!"

Roberto tries to think of what to say to calm Angelina's fears, but he is at a loss. So for lack of any reasonable response, he pulls her in close and gazes deep into her eyes. "I don't care where I am or where I'm going, as long as I'm with you. If you don't want to go back there, then we don't have to; we can stay here for now until we figure it out."

"Do you really mean it, mi amor?"

"With all my heart, angel."

Angelina lifts her head and Roberto kisses her with all the passion he feels in his heart. Her lips are as soft and tender as the night. They walk back along the path to the house arm in arm, with Angelina's head resting on his shoulder. Roberto wants to remain in the moment, but his thoughts are quickly absorbed with a renewed burden to protect her. It would be nice to stay here among friends indefinitely, but although these men have the skills of their outlaw exploits, they're not soldiers. Besides, they've sacrificed enough already, and Roberto does not want to risk their safety any more than he already has. He entertains returning to the mission in El Paso del Norte, but this too would jeopardize Father Ortiz and those he loves. He resolves to pray on the matter and let the Lord guide their path.

#

The town square is bustling with the sights and sounds of the fiesta, its central park and gazebo crowded with smartly dressed people and all manner of food and entertainment. The Murrieta family is indeed as big as Joaquin purported, and they're all here to join in the jubilant celebration. The ladies of the hacienda pitched in and saw to it Angelina had the finest accoutrements, including a lovely crown of orchids for her hair--her appearance is breathtaking. Likewise, the men have seen to it Roberto is decked out in the best vaquero style, including a stunning black sombrero embroidered handsomely with fine silver stitching.

In the center of the square, a photographer is taking pictures and spots Angelina and Roberto. "What a beautiful couple; you must come and have your picture taken."

Roberto looks sheepishly down at Angelina and then back at the photographer. "Thank you, sir, but we have no money."

"Are you kidding me? I would be honored to take your picture for free. I only ask that I may keep a copy to display in my shop as a depiction of my work."

"No, I couldn't impose..."

"Por favor, señor, I insist."

"Well, if you insist, it's alright with me if mi novia doesn't object."

Angelina looks up at Roberto and smiles broadly. "I like hearing you call me your novia, and I would love to take a picture with mi novio."

The photographer directs the picturesque couple to stand just so; then he dips down



under the black drape of his large box camera on top of its gangly tripod and shouts out, "Hold still now, un momento."

Roberto does his best not to smile or blink as the flash bulb bursts in a small flame and puff of strange grayish smoke and powder; it is the first time he has ever been photographed. The photographer asks to take one more, and when he is done he advises them, "The photo will be ready in a day or two, so please, come by my shop on Monday and I'll have it ready for you then."

"Bien, bien. Gracias, señor."

Angelina and Roberto pick out seats near the main table across from their new friends Margarita and Ramón. Ramón is only a year younger than Roberto, and they both aspire to live the life of the vaquero. Angelina is a few years older than Margarita, but she finds her just adorable and both of them share a deep desire to be wed to their handsome boyfriends. The conversation turns to their desire to be married and the controversies they both face. "The problem is," Ramón admits, "we are third cousins and must have the Church's permission to marry. What's more, the padre at Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Altar says he will only discuss the matter with our parents."

"Sí, and he is afraid of asking my father," Margarita interjects.

"I'm not afraid; I'm just waiting for the right time."

"And when is that, I wonder? I'm not getting any younger."

"How old are you?" Angelina asks.

"I'm seventeen."

Angelina and Roberto both laugh. "You are still so young--what's your hurry?" Angelina reassures her.

"I had my quinceañera over two years ago," Margarita retorts, causing Angelina and Roberto to laugh even harder, much to the consternation of the anxious youngster.

Angelina, sensing Margarita's feelings may be a little ruffled, tries to console her. "Don't worry, the Church will certainly give their blessing. My mother and father are third cousins and the Church married them. Besides, look at Roberto and I--we are both in our twenties and we're not married yet. Why, my father has never even met Roberto."

Angelina's confession seems to do the trick, allowing Margarita and Ramón the opportunity to see their obstacles aren't so insurmountable after all, and after a bit more small talk they all go over to the buffet tables to try some of the incredible dishes on display. For the first time in days, both Angelina and Roberto have their appetites, and the cornucopia of delights are just the remedy they need to satisfy the hunger in their bellies.

As dusk arrives and evening falls, the band gets set up on the gazebo and begins to play. The first two songs are traditional melodies from the Sonora region, but then the band goes into a waltz, the "Vienna Waltz" by Johann Strauss II. The first notes touch Roberto's ears and

goosebumps run down his arms; the sense of déjà vu which has visited him so frequently these past two weeks is back. He turns to Angelina, and offers her his hand. "Would you care to dance, mi amor?"

On the dance floor, Roberto gently takes Angelina's right hand with his left hand and places his right hand on the small of her back, pulling her close to him; their feet move to the count of one, two, three, one, two, three. With their eyes locked in a lover's gaze, they glide across the floor. Roberto can smell the orchids in her hair; she can feel the warmth of his breath along her neck and one, two, three, one, two, three. He spins her to the inside and back again as the tempo increases and one, two, three, one, two, three. Faster now moving across the floor in graceful strides like two eagles embraced in a sky fall and one, two, three, one, two, three. Now faster still at a dizzying pace one, two, three, one, two, three. Now soaring as though they've taken flight one, two, three, one, two, three. Now floating free one, two, three, one, two, three, so enraptured are they the music no longer comes from without, but from within, one, two, three, one, two, three...

Angelina and Roberto continue to dance long after the song is over. The other couples on the dance floor move back toward the edges politely giving them room. The band leader, noticing them, supposes he should just begin the next song, but the way the radiant young lovers flow across the floor, never taking their gaze away from one another, reminds him of a wind-up music box he had once seen in San Francisco where two porcelain figurines danced a waltz across a mirrored floor under a dome of crystal glass, and he determines it best to leave them undisturbed. Before long, those seated around the square, and then those standing beyond, and in the end, even the children running and playing on the outskirts of the park, are all drawn like moths to the flame by the mesmerizing effects of the dancers' aesthetic grace and symmetry, yet even more so by the enchantment of their rapture.

After what feels like an eternity and at the same time the twinkling of an eye, Angelina and Roberto drift back down to earth, and at that moment, they realize the music is no longer playing and all eyes are locked on them--but before they can apprehend any real embarrassment, their delighted audience erupts in cheers and applause. Thankfully, their recent improvisational performance in la barrancas of the Sierra Madres provides the experience necessary to extricate themselves, and on cue, Roberto takes a bow while Angelina curtsies. They graciously return the applause of the other partygoers and the band before returning to their seats. Margarita gives Angelina a congratulatory hug and Ramón shakes Roberto's hand heartily. "How did you learn to dance like that?" Ramón asks.

Roberto thinks about it for a moment and then responds honestly, "I saw it in a dream."

#

Sunday morning comes early enough after last evening's festivities, but Angelina and Roberto are up early, eager to attend the mass at Iglesia Catolica, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Altar, a few miles to the north. Abuelita has been up since six in the morning and has menudo

prepared for Murrieta and Procopio, who really tied one on during last night's celebration.

Nevertheless, everyone is loaded up and headed down the road by nine o'clock for the little over two-hour ride in order to make the twelve o'clock mass.

At the relatively young age of forty-five, Padre Bartolome Suastegui has presided over the congregation at the Altar parish for almost twenty-five years now and conducted almost every birth, baptism, marriage, and funeral of the Murrieta family in that time, and he is especially fond of Abuelita.

After the mass, Father Suastegui approaches Abuelita and informs her he must speak with Angelina and Roberto about disturbing news which has come from Magdalena. The padre has them follow him to his office so he can discuss the matter in private, and Roberto requests Murrieta be aloud to join them. Once assembled, Father Suastegui doesn't mince words. "I have received communications from our sister parish in Magdalena that men have arrived there in search of a young woman and a young Apache vaquero. I've heard the soldiers were from the Republican Army and are in possession of official papers demanding the arrest and return of the fugitives."

It takes some time for Roberto to process the ramifications of this wholly negative information, and the realization El Hechicero has government connections, going who knows how deep, is ominously disconcerting. Murrieta is the first to break the silence. "If they have the money and power to bribe officials, it won't be long until they'll be able to close in on our location. Pero, I promise you this, if they have the ganas to come to Trincheras, they'll receive the fight of their lives!"

"I can't allow that," Roberto objects. "You've done more for us than we could ever repay, and we're eternally grateful, but there's no way I can accept the consequences of putting your family in such perilous danger."

"Oye, amigo--your fight is our fight; you let us worry about the consequences."

"I agree with Roberto on this," Angelina submits. "We can't ask you to jeopardize your family any more than we already have."

"What are you talking about? Where are you going to go? Do you think we don't have the fight in us?"

"No, no. That's not it...."

"If I may interject," Father Suastegui interrupts, "there is another way."

The padre waits until he has everyone's attention before continuing, then directs his focus on Angelina and Roberto. "Let me ask you a question. Is it your intention to marry?"

Roberto can't hide the fact Father Suastegui's question has caught him by surprise, and Angelina's expectant glare isn't helping any, but he quickly collects himself and replies, "Sí, sí Padre, that is our wish, but--"

"The reason I ask is because there is a way to resolve your dilemma, but it won't be

easy.”

“We're ready to hear anything you have to suggest,” Roberto implores. “Por favor, continue.”

“I don't want to frighten you, nor is it my intention, but I know this man Barquin who is after you--he is a very powerful occultist with resources which include not only major officials in the Díaz government, but also dominant forces in the realm of the spirit world. Make no mistake, if they have determined to use you as a sacrifice in order to create a portal to the underworld, El Hechicero will stop at nothing to achieve their ends.”

“I don't understand,” Angelina gasps. “You said you have a solution to our predicament?”

“If you'll give me a moment, I'll explain. There is a legend which tells of a church called the Lost Mission of the Sacred Heart, in a place they call Cochise Stronghold. It is said that two who offer the vows of surrender there, not even the Devil himself can tear them apart.”

“But that's across the border,” Murrieta protests, “right in the heart of the Apache territory!”

## Chapter Twenty-One

It's quiet in the camp with most of the braves in town trading with the locals. Alope, the daughter of Noposo, the Nedni chief, puts her baby in his tsoch, praying to Usen to protect and watch over him; the heat of the summer day has left him a little restless and irritable. The other children are with her in the tepee, playing a game not unlike pick-up sticks with a boy from another family here outside the Sonora village of Kaskiyeh. Alope is trying not to let the anxiety she often feels when they're camped in old Mexico and her husband is away with the other warriors get to her, but try as she might, an awful sense of foreboding has come over her. Only two months separate her from her tenth wedding anniversary, and she prays her man, Goyalé, will return home safe so they can celebrate together during the next feast of the hunt and tribal dance. She and her mother-in-law, Juana, occupy their time working on her herbal remedies with the hope she will be promoted to curandera at the next tribal council.

Suddenly, without warning, shots from rifle fire ring out all around the encampment; screams can be heard coming from the tepee right next to theirs. Not stopping to think, Alope unhooks the baby and places him under a mound of bear and mountain lion furs. Juana gathers up the other children, and Alope wraps her arms around them, praying for Usen to hide them in the netherworld.

Later that afternoon, the returning warriors are met by the fleeing women and children who escaped the carnage. The refugees describe how Mexican troops from another town attacked the camp, killed the warriors of the guard, captured the ponies, secured the arms, destroyed the supplies, and killed all the other women and children. Goyalé, the one the Mexicans call Geronimo, scans the women and children before him, desperately seeking a

glimpse of his wife and children, but none of his family are among them.\*

As is the custom of the Bedonkohe tribe of Chiricahua Apache, the survivors split up, concealing themselves as best they could until nightfall, reassembling at an appointed place of rendezvous in a thicket by the river.

Silently they stole in one by one, sentinels were placed, and when all were counted, it was confirmed Goyaalé's mother, beautiful young wife, and three small children were among the massacred.

That night no fires were permitted in the camp, so without being noticed, Goyaalé quietly slipped away and stood by the river alone with his thoughts. How long he stood there he could not recount, but when he saw the warriors arranging for a council, he returned and took his place among them. Distraught, he declined to give his vote for or against any measure; it was decided since there were only eighty warriors left, and they were surrounded by troops far inside Mexican territory without weapons or supplies, they could not hope to retaliate. With a heavy heart, chief Mangus-Colorado gave the order to leave the dead unburied and return immediately to their homes across the border in the Arizona territory.

Goyaalé stood until all the other tribal council left, hardly knowing what to do. He hadn't the weapons or the strength to fight; neither could he contemplate recovering the bodies of his loved ones, since it had been forbidden. He was emotionally unable to pray or resolve to do anything in particular--he'd lost all sense of purpose. Finally, in utter despair he followed the tribe silently, keeping just within hearing distance of the soft treading of the feet of his retreating comrades.

The next morning, a few of the tribal members killed game and stopped long enough to cook and eat it, and then the journey home continued. Goyaalé did not participate in the hunt and ate nothing. During the march, he spoke to no one and no one dared speak with him; in truth, there was nothing to say. For two days and three nights they trekked on, stopping only for meals, finally resting for a couple of days near the Mexican border. It was here he forced himself to take food and open up to others who lost loved ones in the massacre, but none of them lost as much as he had, for he had lost everything.

Within a few days the Bedonkohe arrived home, and Goyaalé went to the place where he lived with his family. There in the teepee he once shared with his family were the decorations Alope had made, and the toys of his little ones. Tears filled his eyes and ran down his rugged cheeks. In a torrent of rage and pain, he burned everything--his tepee, his mother's tepee, and anything else which could remind him of his crushing loss. Never again would he be contented with home life, or this place. True, he continued to visit his father's grave, but whenever he did, or whenever he experienced anything which reminded him of former happy days, it only served to renew his vow of vengeance on those who had wronged him; his heart ached for revenge against the Mexican soldiers who were responsible.

As soon as the Bedonkohe were able to collect enough arms and ammunition, Mangus-

Colorado called a council and petitioned the warriors to take up the warpath against their Mexican enemies. The council voted unanimously and appointed Goyaalé to solicit the aid of the other Apache tribes in their call to war. When he went to the Chokonen Apache, Cochise, their chief, called a council at early dawn. Silently, the warriors assembled at an open place in a mountain dell and took their seats on the ground, arranged in rows according to their ranks. In reverence to Usen they sat smoking, and at the signal from their chief, Goyaalé rose and presented his case as follows:

“Kinsman, you have heard what the Mexicans have recently done without cause. You are my relatives, uncles, cousins, brothers. We are men the same as the Mexicans are; we can do to them what they have done to us. Let us go forward and trail them. I will lead you to their city; we will attack them in their homes. I will fight in the front of the battle--I only ask you to follow me to avenge this wrong done by these Mexicans. Will you come? It is well, you will all come. Remember the rule in war, men may return or they may be killed. If any of these young men are killed, I want no blame from their kinsmen, for they themselves have chosen to go. If I am killed, no one need mourn for me. My people have all been killed in that country, and I too will die if need be.”

Goyaalé returned to his own settlement and reported his success to his chieftain, and immediately departed to the south, into the land of the Nedni Apache. Their chief, Whoa, heard the intense young brave without comment, but he immediately issued orders for a council, and when all were ready gave a sign that Goyaalé might speak. He addressed them as he had addressed the Chokonen tribe, and they also promised to take up the fight.

It was in the summer of 1859, almost a year from the date of the massacre at Kaskiyeh that these three tribes were assembled on the Mexican border to go on the warpath. Their faces were painted, the war bands fastened upon their brows, their long scalp-locks ready for the hand and knife of the warrior who would overcome them. Their families had been hidden away in a mountain rendezvous near the Mexican border. With these families a guard was posted, and a number of other rendezvous points were designated in case the camp should be disturbed.

When all were ready, the chieftains gave the command to go forward. For this mission where stealth was of utmost importance none of them were mounted and each warrior wore moccasins, also, a cloth wrapped about his loins. This cloth could be spread over him when he slept, and when on the march, would be ample protection as clothing. In battle, if the fight was hard, they did not want their clothes to get in the way. Each warrior carried three days' rations, but as they often killed game while on the march, they were seldom without food.

The warriors traveled in three divisions, the Bedonkohe Apache led by Mangus-Colorado, the Chokonen Apache led by Cochise, and the Nedni Apache led by Whoa; however, there was no regular order inside the separate tribes. They usually marched about fourteen hours per day, making three stops for meals, and traveled forty to forty-five miles a day. Goyaalé

acted as guide into Mexico, and they followed the river courses and mountain ranges in order to keep their movements concealed. They entered Sonora and went southward past Quitaro, Nacozari, and many smaller villages before stopping to camp at Arizpe. Eight men rode out from the city to parley with the Apache chiefs. These they captured, killed, and scalped. This was to draw the troops from the city, and the next day the Mexican soldiers came out. The skirmishes lasted all day without a general engagement, but just as night fell, the Apache captured a military supply train which provided plenty of provisions and more guns.

That night, the Indians posted sentinels and did not move their camp, but rested quietly all night, expecting heavier fighting the next day. Early the next morning, the warriors assembled to pray--not for help, but that they might have health and avoid any ambush or deceptions by their enemy. As they anticipated, about ten o'clock in the morning, the whole Mexican force took the battlefield. There were two companies of cavalry and two of infantry. Goyaalé recognized the cavalry as the soldiers who killed his people at Kaskiyeh. He communicated the intelligence to the chieftains, and after careful consideration, they ordered him to take command and direct the battle movements. He was no chief and never had been, but because he'd been more deeply wronged than the others, this honor was conferred upon him, and he resolved to prove worthy of their trust.

Goyaalé arranged the Indians in a hollow circle near the river, and the Mexicans drew their infantry up in two lines, with the cavalry in reserve. The warriors were in the timber, and they advanced until they were within four hundred yards; then the adversaries halted and opened fire. After sending a few volleys, Goyaalé led the charge against the Mexican forces, at the same time sending other braves to attack the rear. All through the battle, he thought of his murdered mother, wife, and babies, of his father's grave and his vow of vengeance, and he fought with great fury. Many fell by his hand--how many, he could not recall, and at all times he led the advance.

The battle lasted over two hours, and many braves were killed. At the last, four Indians were alone in the center of the field--Goyaalé and three other warriors. Their arrows were all gone, their spears broken off in the bodies of their dead enemies. They had nothing left but their hands and their knives, but all who had stood against them on the main field of battle were dead. Suddenly, two armed soldiers advanced on them from another field. They shot down two of the Indians to Goyaalé's flank, forcing them to retreat toward the warriors in the rear guard. His companion was struck down by a sabre, but Goyaalé reached the other warriors, seized a spear, and turned. The soldier who pursued him fired, but his aim was off, and the shot narrowly missed the indomitable Goyaalé's head; however, the warrior's spear was true.

With the fallen soldier's sabre in hand, Goyaalé met the trooper who had killed his companion. They grappled and fell, but with catlike reflexes, the Apache brave sliced into the belly of his foe with his knife and quickly rose over his body, brandishing his sabre, seeking other troopers to kill, but there were none. In that moment, over the bloody field covered with the bodies of soldiers, rang out the fierce Apache's war whoop.



Still covered with the blood of his enemies, still holding his conquering weapon, still hot with the joy of battle, victory, and vengeance, Goyaalé was soon surrounded by the remaining Apache braves, and there and then they made him war chief over all the Apache. His first order as their newly appointed chief was to take the scalps of the slain. He could not call back his loved ones, he could not bring back the dead Apache, but he could rejoice in his revenge. The Apache had avenged the massacre of Kaskiyeh.

The Apache were satisfied justice had been served after the battle to avenge Kaskiyeh and returned to peaceful pursuits, but Goyaalé's thirst for revenge had only just begun. Over the next two years he worked feverishly to persuade other warriors to take up the fight and go on the warpath against the Mexicans--but the results were, for the most part, disastrous. In one skirmish, he had his skull crushed in by a Mexican soldier which took him months to recover from, and on two other occasions he took bullets, once in his side, and another on the outside of his left eye. The worst part of his obsession was the attention it drew from the Mexican government, which sent scores of troops to pursue him back across the border. On more than one failed raid, he was trailed back to his tribe's settlement, resulting in the needless death of many of his people. At one point, his relationship with tribal members became so strained he was demoted, and Mangus-Colorado took complete control over the tribe once again. Nevertheless, none of these setbacks deterred Goyaalé or cooled his hatred for Mexico, and to his way of thinking, all of these early failures were only providing him with the knowledge and experience he needed to prevail.

In the summer of 1862, Goyaalé took eight men and invaded Mexican territory. They went south on the west side of the Sierra Madre Mountains for five days, then at night they crossed over to the southern part of the Sierra de Sahuaripa range and camped in a location where they could watch for pack trains to raid. About ten o'clock the next morning, four drivers came past their camp with a pack-mule train. As soon as the drivers saw the Apache, they rode for their lives, leaving behind their cargo. It was a long train packed with blankets, calico, saddles, tinware, and loaf sugar, and they raced home as fast as they could with the provisions. On their way back, while passing through a canyon in the Santa Catalina range of mountains in Arizona, they met a white man driving a mule pack train. When he saw the warriors coming, he hightailed it up out of the canyon, leaving his train of mules all loaded with cheese, so they were able to put them in with rest of their spoils and resume their journey.

In two days, they arrived home, and Mangus-Colorado assembled the tribe for a feast to celebrate, where they divided up the spoils and danced all night. Some of the pack mules were killed and eaten. This time, after their return, they kept scouts out on the perimeter of the camp so they would know if Mexican troops had followed them. After three days, their scouts came into camp and reported the Mexican cavalry was approaching the settlement. All the warriors were in camp, and Mangus-Colorado took command of one division while Goyaalé took the other. The hope was to get possession of their horses, and then surround the troops in the mountains and destroy the whole company. However, the cavalry had scouts of their own, and

the battle was on. After four hours of fierce combat, ten troopers had been killed for every one Apache warrior. The Mexican cavalry went into full retreat followed by thirty armed Apache who gave them no rest until they were far across the Mexican border. No more troops came that winter, and for a long time the tribe had plenty of provisions, plenty of blankets, plenty of clothing, plenty of sugar, and plenty of cheese.

The winter of 1863 should have been a happy time for the Bedonkohe, but perhaps the greatest wrong ever done to the Apache was the treatment they received from the United States troops in January of that year. The chief of the tribe, Mangus-Colorado, went to make a treaty of peace for his people with the white settlement at Apache Tejo, New Mexico. It had been reported to him the white men in this settlement were friendlier and more reliable than those in Arizona, and they would live up to their treaties and not wrong the Indians. Mangus-Colorado, with three other warriors, went to Apache Tejo and held a council with these citizens and soldiers. They told him if he would come with his tribe and live near them, the government would issue blankets, flour, provisions, beef, and all manner of supplies. So, the chief promised to return to Apache Tejo within two weeks. When he came back to the settlement, he assembled the whole tribe in council.

Goyaalé did not believe the people at Apache Tejo would do as they said, and therefore he opposed the plan, but it was decided part of the tribe attached to Mangus-Colorado should return to Apache Tejo and receive an issue of rations and supplies. If things were as represented, and if these white men would keep the treaty faithfully, the remainder of the tribe would join him, and they would make their permanent home at Apache Tejo. Goyaalé was to remain in charge of that portion of the tribe which stayed in Arizona. The remaining Bedonkohe gave almost all of their arms and ammunition to the party going to Apache Tejo, so that in case there should be treachery they would be prepared for any surprises. Mangus-Colorado and about half of the tribe went to New Mexico, happy they found white men who would be kind to them, and with whom they could live in peace and plenty. However, no word ever came back from them. Worse still, other sources informed them their kinsmen were treacherously captured and slain. In this dilemma, Goyaalé did not know what to do exactly, but fearing the troops who captured their relations would attack, he retreated with the remaining tribal members into the mountains near Apache Pass.

In the summer of 1863, Goyaalé selected three warriors and went on a raid into Mexico. They went south into Sonora, stopping in the Sierra de Sahuaripa Mountains after arriving some forty miles west of Casa Grande in a small village in the mountains, called by the Apache, Crassanas. They set up camp just outside the village, and concluded to make an attack. During reconnaissance they noticed at around midday no one in the village seemed to be stirring, so they planned to make their attack at the noon hour. The next day, they stole into the town at the agreed upon time armed with bows and arrows and their spears. When the war whoop was given to open the attack, the people fled in every direction, not one of them made any attempt to fight. They shot a few arrows at the retreating villagers, but killed only one of them.

When they discovered everyone was gone, they looked through their houses and saw many curious things. These Mexicans kept many more kinds of property than the Apache did. Many of the things they saw in the houses they couldn't understand, but in the stores, they saw many things they wanted. So, they drove in a herd of horses and mules and packed up as much provisions and supplies as they could, and then formed the animals into a pack train. They returned safely to Arizona, with no one trailing them.

When they arrived in camp, they called the tribe together and feasted all day. They gave out presents to everyone, and that night the dance did not cease until noon the next day. It was perhaps the most successful raid ever made by Goyaalé into Mexican territory. He didn't know the value of the booty, but it was very great, and they had supplies enough to last the whole tribe for more than a year.

In the fall of 1864, twenty warriors were willing to go with Goyaalé on another raid into Mexico. They were all chosen men, well armed and equipped for battle. As usual, the tribe provided for the safety of their families before starting on the raid. The whole tribe scattered and then reassembled at a camp about forty miles from their former encampment. In this way, it would be hard for the Mexicans to trail them, and the warriors would know where to find their families when they returned. Moreover, if any hostile Indians should see the large number of warriors leaving the range, they might attack the camp, but if they found no one at the usual place, their raid would fail. They went south through the Chokonen Apaches' range, entered Sonora, Mexico, at a point directly south of Tucson, Arizona, and went into hiding in the Sierra de Antunez Mountains.

The warriors attacked several settlements in the neighborhood and secured plenty of provisions and supplies. After about three days, they attacked and captured a mule pack train at a place the Indians called Pontoco, situated in the mountains due west about one day's journey from Arizpe. There were three drivers with the train; one was killed, and two escaped. The train was loaded with mescal, which was contained in bottles held in wicker baskets. As soon as they made camp, the Indians began to get drunk and fight among each other. Goyaalé drank enough mescal to feel the effect of it but didn't get drunk. He ordered the fighting stopped, but his orders were disobeyed, and before long, all of the drunken warriors were engaged in a mêlée. He tried to place a guard out around the camp, but everyone was drunk and refused to serve. Worried the Mexican troops could attack at any moment, Goyaalé knew that this was a serious matter. He was in command and would be held responsible for any bad luck befalling the expedition.

Finally, the camp became comparatively still because all the Indians were too drunk to fight or even walk, for that matter. So, while they were in a stupor, he poured out all the mescal, put out all the fires, and moved the pack mules a considerable distance from camp. Afterward, he returned to try and do something for the wounded, finding two in serious condition. From the leg of one he cut out an arrow head, and from the shoulder of another he withdrew a spear point. When all the wounded were cared for, he kept guard himself until morning. The next day,

they loaded the wounded on the pack mules and started for Arizona.

The next day, the warriors that could help capture some cattle from a herd and drove them home. However, it was a very difficult matter to drive cattle when they were on foot, caring for the wounded, and keeping the cattle from escaping made the journey tedious--but thankfully, they weren't trailed and arrived home safely with all their plunder. As was their custom, they gave a feast and dance and divided the spoils. After the dance, they killed all the cattle, dried the meat, dressed the hides, and then the dried meat was packed in between these hides and stored away. All that winter they had plenty of meat; it was the first cattle they had ever had. As usual, they killed and ate some of the mules; they had little use for mules, and if they couldn't trade them for anything of value, they harvested them for the meat and hides.

In the summer of 1865, with four warriors, Goyaalé went again into Mexico. Heretofore, they had gone on foot accustomed to fighting from the ground; besides, they could easily conceal themselves when dismounted, but this time they wanted more cattle, and it was hard to drive them when they were on foot. So, they entered Sonora on horseback at a point southwest of Tucson, Arizona, and followed the Antunez Mountains to their southern limit, then crossed the country as far south as the mouth of the Yaqui River. Here they saw a great lake extending beyond the limit of sight. Then they turned north, attacked several settlements, and secured plenty of supplies. When they had come back northwest of Arizpe, they secured about sixty head of cattle, and drove them home to Arizona. They didn't go directly home but camped in different valleys with the cattle. The raiders were not trailed, and when they arrived at camp the tribe was again assembled for feasting and dancing. Presents were given to everybody, and then the cattle were killed and the meat dried and packed.

In the fall of 1865, with nine other warriors, Goyaalé went into Mexico on foot. They attacked several settlements south of Casa Grande and collected many horses and mules. Then they made their way northward with the animals through the mountains. Near Arizpe, they made camp one evening, and thinking they were not being trailed, turned loose the whole herd, even those they had been riding. The herd was in a valley surrounded by steep mountains, and the Indians were camped at the south end of this valley so that the animals could not leave without coming through their camp. Unfortunately, just as they began to eat their supper, their scouts came in and announced that Mexican troops were coming toward the camp. They started for the horses, but other troops the scouts had not seen were on the cliffs above them, and opened fire. The warriors scattered in all directions, and the troops recovered all their plunder. In three days, they reassembled at an appointed place of rendezvous in the Sierra Madre Mountains in northern Sonora, and returned to Arizona without anything to show for all they had accomplished. It was the first failed raid in over three years, but again, Goyaalé was not dissuaded, anxious for another raid.

Early the next summer, in 1866, Goyaalé took thirty mounted warriors and invaded Mexican territory. They went south through Chihuahua as far as Santa Cruz, Sonora, then crossed over the Sierra Madre Mountains, following the river course at the south end of the

range. They kept on westward from the Sierra Madre Mountains to the Sierra de Sahuaripa Mountains, and followed the range northward. They collected all the horses, mules, and cattle they could, and drove them north through Sonora into Arizona. Mexicans saw them on several occasions, and in several places, but they didn't attack them at any time, nor did any troops attempt to follow them. When they arrived home, they gave presents to all, and the tribe feasted and danced. During this particular raid, the warriors killed over fifty Mexicans.

The next year, in 1867, another tribal chief led eight warriors on a raid into Mexico. Goyaalé went as a warrior because he was always glad to fight the Mexicans. They rode south from near San Pedro Valley, Arizona into Sonora, Mexico and attacked some vaqueros guarding a herd of cattle. After the fight in which two of their number were killed, they drove all their cattle northward. On the second day of driving the cattle northward, not far from Arizpe, Mexican troops rode up on them. The soldiers were well armed and well mounted, so the Indians had to leave the cattle and ride as hard as they could toward the mountains, but the troopers were rapidly gaining on them. The soldiers opened fire on them, but they could not return fire because the Mexicans were so far away from the Apache their arrows were unable to reach. Fortunately, they reached the timberline and were able to dismount and fight from cover. However, instead of pursuing them further back into the woods, the Mexicans stopped at the edge of the forest, collected their ponies, and rode away across the plains toward Arizpe, driving the cattle with them. Goyaalé and the other warriors stood and watched them until they disappeared in the distance with nothing left to do but return home on foot. They arrived home in five days' time with no victory to report, no spoils to divide, and not even the ponies which they had ridden into Mexico. This expedition was considered disgraceful.

The warriors who had gone with Goyaalé on the last expedition wanted to return to Mexico, anxious to redeem themselves, their dissatisfaction magnified by the taunts of the other warriors. Goyaalé took command, and they set out on foot directly toward Arizpe in Sonora, and made camp in the Sierra de Sahuaripa Mountains. There were only six warriors, but they raided several settlements, all under the cover of darkness, capturing many horses and mules loaded down with provisions, saddles, and blankets. They returned to Arizona, traveling only by night, and when they arrived at camp they sent out scouts to prevent any surprise attacks by the Mexicans. This time when the tribe was assembled, feasted, danced, and divided the spoils, those warriors who had scoffed at them did not receive anything, but Goyaalé and the other exonerated braves didn't care; for they had most definitely proved their courage to the rest of the tribe.

A year later, in 1868, Mexican troops rounded up all the horses and mules of the tribe not far from their settlement. No raids had been made into Mexico that year, and the Apache were not expecting any attacks. They were all in camp, having just returned from hunting. About two o'clock in the afternoon, two Mexican scouts were seen near the settlement. The Indians were able to kill the scouts, but the troopers got away with the herd of horses and mules before they even saw them. It appeared useless to try to overtake them on foot because the tribe was

left without any horses, but Goyaalé took twenty warriors and trailed them anyway. They found the stock at a cattle ranch in Sonora not far from Nacozari, and attacked the cowboys who were watching after them. They killed two men without losing any braves and drove the stock back to Arizona with all of the ranchers' stock as well.

The Apache were being trailed by nine cowboys, so Goyaalé sent the stock on ahead, and stayed behind with three warriors to intercept any attacking parties. The next night, very near the Arizona border, they observed the cowboys on their trail making camp for the night and picketing their horses. So, at midnight, they stole into their camp and silently led away all their horses, leaving the cowboys asleep. They rode hard and overtook their companions, who were traveling at night to avoid detection. They turned the horses in with the herd and fell back to again intercept anyone who might be trailing. What the nine cowboys did the next morning, Goyaalé couldn't say; he never heard any Mexicans say anything about it, but he knew that it was the end of their pursuit. When they arrived in camp back home, there was great rejoicing among all the members of the tribe. It was considered a great trick to get the Mexicans' horses and leave them asleep in the mountains.

It was several years before Goyaalé went back into Mexico, or had his tribe disturbed by the Mexicans--in part because his desire for revenge was finally beginning to wane, but also because the Civil War was over and the United States government had renewed their hostilities against all of the indigenous tribes not yet under their tyrannical rule. The fact that at one point more than five thousand soldiers were in pursuit of the Chiricahua Apache alone, was evidence enough to prove there was no group the United States wanted annihilated more than the Apache. However, in 1873, the Bedonkohe were once again attacked by Mexican troops in their settlement, but this time the Apache soundly defeated them. It was during this time the name Geronimo was made popular throughout Mexico and the United States, and even Goyaalé accepted being called the name by other Indian tribes.

Afterward, it was decided to renew raids into Mexico, but this time Geronimo moved the whole camp. They packed all their belongings on mules and horses, and traveled into Mexico making camp in the mountains near Nacori. They ranged in the mountains for over a year, raiding the Mexican settlements for supplies, frequently changing their place of rendezvous and deftly avoiding any engagements with Mexican troops. The next year they returned to their homeland in Arizona, but a year later, due to continued pressure by the Buffalo soldiers, they were forced to flee into Mexico once again, hiding in the Sierra Madre Mountains near Nacori.

Once in Mexico, Geronimo united with Whoa, the chief of the Nedni Apache, and together they organized bands of warriors for raiding the surrounding towns and villages. Returning back to camp after a successful raid, their scouts discovered Mexican troops coming toward the camp. The warriors quickly formed into two divisions, with Whoa commanding one division and Geronimo commanding the other. The warriors marched toward the troops and met them at a place about five miles from the Indians' camp. The Apache showed themselves to the soldiers and then quickly rode to the top of a hill and dismounted, placing their horses on

the outside for breastworks. It was a round hill, very steep and rocky, and there was no timber on its sides. There were two companies of Mexican cavalry, and about sixty warriors who now crept up the hill behind the rocks. The troopers kept up a constant fire, but the warriors were cautioned not to expose themselves to the soldiers' fire. Geronimo knew that the troopers would waste their ammunition, and soon they had killed all of the Mexicans' horses. The soldiers took positions lying down behind their dead horses and continued shooting from the ground. Many of the soldiers were killed before the Apache had lost a single man; however, it was impossible to get close to them, so Geronimo deemed it best to lead a charge against them.

The fight had been raging since about one o'clock, and by the middle of the afternoon, seeing they were making no further progress, Geronimo gave the signal to advance. The war whoop sounded, and the Indians leaped forward from every stone over the Mexicans' dead horses, fighting hand to hand. The attack was so sudden that the Mexicans, running first this way and then that, became so confused that in a few minutes the warriors had killed them all. As is the custom of the Apache, they scalped the slain, secured the arms, and carried away their dead. That night they moved the camp eastward through the Sierra Madre Mountains into Chihuahua, and soon after returned to Arizona.

For several years, the Bedonkohe lived part of the time in old Mexico. There were more and more white settlements in Arizona and game was no longer plentiful; besides, they liked to go down to old Mexico. It was the home of the Nedni Apache, their friends and kinsmen, and their lands extended far into Mexico. Their chief, Whoa, was like a brother to Geronimo, and the Bedonkohe spent much of their time in his territory.

In 1877, Geronimo arrived in New Mexico. Two companies of United States scouts were sent from San Carlos to Hot Springs, and they sent word for Geronimo and Victorio to come to town. The messengers did not say what they wanted with them, but they seemed friendly, so the tribal chiefs thought they wanted a council and rode in to meet with the officers. As soon as they arrived in town, the soldiers met them, disarmed them, and took them both to headquarters, where they were tried by court-martial. The US commanders only asked them a few questions and then Victorio was released, but Geronimo was sentenced to the guardhouse. Scouts conducted him to the guardhouse and put him in chains. When he asked why, they said it was because he had left Apache Pass. He stated he didn't think he ever belonged to those soldiers at Apache Pass, or that he should have asked them where he might go. The fact is, the different Apache tribes could no longer live in peace together, and so he had quietly withdrawn the Bedonkohe, expecting to live with Victorio's tribe in New Mexico where he thought they would not be molested. They also sentenced seven other Apache to chains in the guardhouse. Geronimo didn't know why this was done; these Indians had simply followed him from Apache Pass to Hot Springs. If it was wrong for his tribe to go to Hot Springs, though he didn't believe it was, he felt he alone was to blame. He asked the soldiers in charge why the others were imprisoned and in chains, but received no answer. Geronimo was kept a prisoner for four months, during which time he was transferred to San Carlos. Once he arrived there a kangaroo

court was convened and another trial was held, although Geronimo was not present. In fact, he didn't even know he'd had another trial, but was told he did after the fact. At any rate, he was released to the reservation there, where he stayed for a period of two years, but he was not satisfied with living there.

In 1880, Geronimo and his braves left San Carlos and made camp in the mountains south of Casa Grande. Within days after their arrival, a company of Mexican troops attacked them; there were twenty-four Mexican soldiers and about forty Indians. The Mexicans surprised them in camp and fired on them, killing two Indians in the first volley. He didn't know how they were able to find their camp unless they had excellent scouts and his guards were careless, but there they were shooting at the Indians before they even knew what was happening. The Apache were in the timber, and Geronimo gave the order to go forward and fight at close range. They kept behind the rocks and trees until they came within ten yards of the Mexican line, then stood right up and both sides shot at each other until all the Mexicans were killed. The Apache lost twelve warriors in this battle.

The Indians called the place Skolata and when they had buried their dead and secured what supplies the Mexicans had, they traveled northeast to a place near Nacori, which the Indians call Nokode. However, it wasn't long before the Mexican troops attacked again; there were about eighty warriors from both the Bedonkohe and Nedni tribes, and three companies of Mexican troops. The soldiers attacked the Apache in an open field, and they scattered out, firing on the run. The troopers tried to follow them, but they dispersed, and soon were free from the pursuit. The warriors reassembled in the Sierra Madre Mountains, and a council was held, where it was decided with the Mexican troops coming from many different presidios, it was better to disband for awhile.

Four months later, the warriors reassembled at Casa Grande to make a treaty of peace. The officials of the town of Casa Grande, and all the men of Casa Grande, made a treaty with the Indians. They shook hands and promised to be brothers, and then they began to trade. The Mexicans gave the Apache mescal, and soon nearly all the Indians were drunk. While they were drunk, two companies of Mexican troops from another town attacked them, killing twenty Indians and capturing many more, those who were left, including Geronimo, fled in all directions.

\*See appendix A, section 5.



## Chapter Twenty-two

The ride back from the church is much less invigorating than the ride there, and the bustling conversation on the way has turned to barren silence on the road back, no one is willing to breach the subject of Father Suastegui's recent revelations and subsequent recommendations. Surprisingly, Roberto's mood and disposition are vastly improved after making confession and receiving communion with a clear conscience, both for the first time since his last weekend at the mission in El Paso del Norte. There's something about the sacraments which give him the inner peace he needs to face the obstacles of life, and he was eager to rid himself of the burden in his heart accumulated during the questionable methods he employed in El Hechicero's lair. However, nothing has been pressing on him harder or crushing his spirit more than the events which transpired during the shootout at Sierra de Los Vados.

Angelina, on the other hand, is deeply troubled by the prospect of facing her wedding day without her family. There's her mother's wedding dress, her father walking her down the aisle, her best girlfriends not by her side, and what will they do for rings? After all, a woman's wedding day is perhaps the most important day of her life, and even though she's thought of almost nothing else since that day when Roberto was first brought into the infirmary, she never considered eloping would be their fate. Is there nothing else they can do? What she wouldn't give to talk to her father right now, and the longing to reunite with her family begins to overwhelm her.

Abuelita and the ladies of the hacienda prepare a fine lunch of enchiladas verdes de queso y chili rellenos con frijoles y arroz, and afterward, everyone pauses for siesta. The rest is just what the doctor ordered for Murrieta and Procopio, who still haven't quite recovered from last night's festivities, but when evening comes, Murrieta calls the family together to discuss the

predicament of Angelina and Roberto.

"I've called you all together tonight because mis amigos, Roberto y Angelina, need our help. Roberto was there for us when we needed him; knowing who we were and what kind of reputation we carried, he made no judgment against us. He unselfishly stuck his neck out for us by introducing us to el jefe of the Hacienda de Encillinas, and he did so without reservation. While riding with us, he put his life on the line for us and watched our backs in a way which surely saved our lives, and now it is time for us to repay his trust and goodwill."

Roberto doesn't want to sound objectionable, but he is quick to point out the obvious. "Perdoname señor, pero, it is we who owe our lives to you and your sobrino."

"What you say may be true, mi hijo, but together we have created a bond which cannot be broken; you've become family to us, and we take care of our own. This is our way, and the purpose of this gathering."

Murrieta continues on by explaining the present situation concerning El Hechicero and his men, and the solution proffered by the padre, as well as the pitfalls Roberto and Angelina will likely face carrying out this plan. "It's my belief if they are going to succeed in this objective, we're going to have to assemble a security detail to accompany them."

"Gracias, señor; it is a great honor to be considered among your esteemed familia, and we appreciate all you've done for us, but, as I said earlier back at the church, we can't allow you or your family to put yourselves in anymore danger on our account."

Murrieta can see the resolution on Roberto and Angelina's faces; he drops his head for a few seconds and then looks out among his family. "Por favor, perdoname--give us a moment." He approaches his friends. "Can I have a word with you outside?"

The three of them walk through the kitchen and out onto the back patio where Procopio joins them. "I understand your position, mi hijo, I really do, but you must understand the danger you face trying to make this journey on your own."

Roberto looks at Murrieta with all the conviction in his heart. "Señor, you have been like a father to me, the father I never had, but you must understand--now that I have a family and a father I can call my own, there is no way I could bear to lose you. I believe in the serendipity of our meeting that day at Oro de Samalayuca, the evidence of which is the bond we share today, but now it's the same hand of God which must guide our path from here on out. If this undertaking is to come to its most blessed fruition, then it is ordained by Him who holds us in such high regard as to lead us on this noble and glorious journey. Don't you see, Papa, we must go forward with faith, the faith that His grace and mercy are sufficient for us."

Procopio puts his hand on Murrieta's shoulder. "El hombre tiene razón, tío; it is time to let them continue on their own."

Murrieta wipes away the tears from his eyes, taking the time to allow his fearful concern to pass, and then pulls Roberto in close to him. "Alright then, let's get you two prepared for your

departure.”

Roberto and Angelina stay up well into the night. Angelina with the women, talking, cooking in the kitchen, getting prepared for the trip, and laughing. It feels good for Angelina to laugh. Roberto and the men spend most of their time planning what route to take, working out strategies for every possible situation and scenario, and of course, shots of the delicious Bacanora liqueur accompanied with the customary roar of “¡Salud!”

Early the next morning, everyone is up to see Angelina and Roberto off. Concepción, Brijida, and Margarita have collected all the things they will need for their wedding, including the most beautiful wedding dress Angelina has ever seen. Abuelita gives them a bag of herbs of all kinds, carefully explaining to Angelina what each one is for and how much to take. She has also packed enough of the tamales they prepared last night for a small army, but Roberto isn't complaining, with little imagination he can see himself eating every one of them. Murrieta has picked out the best Criollos from the stable, and dressed them out with saddles, saddlebags, bedrolls, and scabbards, the latter complete with the Remington rifles he and Procopio had received from Señor Vasquez at the presidio. Procopio steps up to Roberto and presents him with a pair of pearl handled Colt .44 revolvers and a gun belt. “I want you to have these, mi hijo; they were given to me by the notorious Californio, Tiburcio Vasquez, when I rode with him back in the good ole days, the glory days.”

“No, no, I couldn't...”

“Oye Mijo, I insist. You have greater need for them than I do. Besides, you've earned them.

“Gracias, señor; I will wear them with honor.”

“I'm sure you will, mi hijo; I'm sure will.”

After many hugs and hearty handshakes all around, Roberto lifts Angelina onto her saddle and mounts up--not that she needs his help; she can ride as well as any man, but she is grateful for his courtesy nonetheless. As they set out from the hacienda de San Rafael del Los Alamitos, the morning sun is on the rise and their aim is true, their destination, the Lost Mission of the Sacred Heart.

The direction of Angelina and Roberto's due course leads them through the southern Altar Valley between the Cibola and San Juan Mountain ranges to the town of Tubutama. Their first stop is the Mission San Pedro y San Pablo del Tubutama along the Rio Altar founded by the Jesuit missionary, Eusebio Francisco Kino in 1687. It was from here, Captain Juan Bautista de Anza of Tubac led an expedition of over three hundred settlers to San Francisco in 1775, in order to establish a Spanish settlement and presidio there. Roberto's hope is to find out any information he can about the location of the long-lost mission.

Outside of the mission, a group of people are gathered to see off His Excellency, the Most Reverend Jean Baptiste Salpointe, the Bishop of Tucson, who, along with Sister Monica of the Sacred Heart, and her young protégée, Sister Clara of the Blessed Sacrament, are wrapping

up a courtesy visit primarily undertaken for the purpose of discussing the feasibility of establishing a sister school to the Sister's Convent and Academy for Females which the Sisters of Saint Joseph recently instituted in Tuscon with the presiding priest and nuns of the Mission de San Pedro y San Pablo de Tubutama.

Angelina and Roberto dismount and approach the crowd. Angelina is instantly drawn to Sister Clara; although she is covered from head to toe in the traditional habit of her order, Angelina finds her face most beautiful, and so young. Without realizing it, Angelina walks blindly toward her, until one of the soldiers who is a part of the garrison accompanying the benevolent party on their journey stops her. The unanticipated hindrance to her forward momentum by the sentry startles Angelina more than one might expect under the circumstances, but so intense is her focus on Sister Clara that she is oblivious to anyone else's presence. As a result, she lets out a cry which inadvertently attracts the attention of Sister Monica, and subsequently Sister Clara, both of whom are equally taken by the beauty of this young señorita, while at the same time, reacting sympathetically to her jarring collision with one of their bodyguards. In empathy, Sister Monica calls out to the soldier to allow Angelina to proceed, and with a wave of her hand beckons the lovely albeit mesmerized admirer to come closer.

Roberto has been watching the whole chimeral event, not quite knowing what to make of it, but he shows the presence of mind to grab the reins of Angelina's Criollo from her hand before she approaches the sisters.

"What is your name, dear?" Sister Monica asks.

"Me llamo Angelina, sister."

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Angelina. I'm Sister Monica, and this is Sister Clara."

"Mucho gusto, Angelina," Sister Clara adds.

"Mucho gusto, Sister Monica. Mucho gusto, Sister Clara."

Misjudging Angelina's enthusiasm, Sister Monica asks her, "What brings you here today, child? Are you interested in joining the Sisters of Saint Joseph?"

"Oh, it would be an honor, Sister Monica, believe me, but no, I am already engaged to mi novio Roberto."

"Roberto, you say--are you referring to the handsome young vaquero over there?"

"Sí, Sister Monica, that's him there."

"Well then, please have him come over so we can meet this love of yours."

Angelina gestures for Roberto to come hither, and he obliges. Roberto greets the sisters with a tip of his sombrero, "Sisters--mucho gusto.

"Mucho gusto, Roberto," the sisters reply.

As the sisters pose questions to the young couple, Bishop Salpointe rides up to them on a tall gray stallion. Angelina and Roberto both kneel and bow low in unison, and then rise to kiss the sacred ring of the Most Reverend Bishop, first Roberto and then Angelina. Bishop Salpointe

smiles and looks at Sister Monica. "Who do we have here?"

"This is Angelina and her novio, Roberto, Your Excellency."

The bishop looks down at Angelina and Roberto. "Oh, sí. Bueno."

"Mucho gusto, Your Excellency," Angelina says meekly.

"Mucho gusto, señorita."

"Hola, Your Excellency," Roberto follows. "It's good to see you again."

"Have we met?" the bishop asks.

"Sí, Your Excellency. When I was an altar boy, you came to visit us at el Mission de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in El Paso del Norte."

"Ah yes, the parish of Father Ortiz. How's is my old friend?"

Roberto senses the bishop is merely being polite, or perhaps trenchant; he is well aware Bishop Salpointe was treated less than hospitably by the fiercely nationalistic missionary, who vehemently opposed the redistricting of his parish from the Archdiocese of Durango under the leadership of Father Ortiz's mentor, Archbishop Zubiria, to the new Santa Fe Archdiocese under the less than wholly supported control of Archbishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy. Like Bishop Salpointe, Archbishop Lamy is a Frenchman, which, after the Maximillian Affair, understandably only serves to exacerbates the animosity Father Ortiz and the other Mexican priests throughout the territory of the newly formed archdiocese feel toward the Vatican's seemingly politically motivated restructuring efforts.

"He's feisty as ever, Your Excellency."

"Bueno, bueno. Well, you're a long way from home, Roberto. What brings you here to Tubutama?"

"We're traveling to Arizona, Your excellency."

"Oh, really? Who is accompanying you?"

"No one. It's just us, Your Excellency."

"Just the two of you? Why, that's absurd! You must travel with us."

"Oh no, señor, we could not impose."

"Don't be ridiculous, young man--the road is far too treacherous to be on it alone. I insist, you must ride with us; I'll hear no more about it. Besides, I could use the conversation. You're a well-educated young scholar, as I recall."

"Well, I suppose so, Your Excellency, if we won't be any bother."

"Why, it's no bother at all--right, sisters?"

"I think it's absolutely delightful, Your Excellency." Sister Monica replies. "Do you hear that, Sister Clara? Angelina and Roberto will be joining us."

"Sí, Sister Monica, splendid."

The captain of the guard approaches to let His Excellency know that the garrison is ready, and the bishop acknowledges. Turning back to his entourage, which now includes Angelina and Roberto, he says, "We're off, then. Andele pues, as they say."

"Here we go, mi amor," Roberto says as he helps Angelina into the saddle. "Mount up."

His Excellency and the Sisters of Saint Joseph wave to all the parishioners and citizens of Tubutama who are lined up along the road until they are well out of sight of the mission. Roberto falls in beside the Bishop while Sister Monica, Sister Clara, and Angelina ride three abreast with Angelina in the middle. The garrison consists of the captain of the guard, Second Lieutenant William H. Carter of the 6th Cavalry, and twenty other heavily armed soldiers from Fort Lowell. The company heads due north along the Rio Altar with the purpose of visiting Señor Pedro Aguirre, Jr. in the new mining town of Arivaca near the Buenos Aryes Ranch in the Pajarita Mountain Range, where he recently started a school for the children of the miners living there. Aguirre runs the overland stage from Tuscon to Altar, and is a good friend of the Church. Most of the miners who live in the village and work for him are Mexican Catholics from Sonora, so Sister Monica wants to ensure that the new school's curriculum meets the standards of education established by the Church.

From there, they intend to pass over the mountains through Apache Canyon in order to deliver the nuns to their school at the Mission San Xavier del Bac, and then the garrison will advance on to Fort Lowell in the walled city of Tucson. Roberto is relieved they will be avoiding the eastern route through Magdalena de Kino to Nogales on the old Sonora Road--the less chance of encountering El Hechicero and his warlocks, the better. He is certain a showdown with the crazy old augur is inevitable, but Roberto would like it to be on his terms and in his good time. Right now, he is feeling most blessed and a sense of serenity at having relied on the Lord; he only hopes the word will get back to his amigos in Trincheras he and Angelina are safe, and there's no need for them to worry.

The company rides for some time before anyone breaches the quiet desert air, but soon His Excellency asks, "So Roberto, why is it you and your lovely fiancé are traveling to Tucson?"

## Chapter Twenty-three

The glorious transformation the Altar Valley takes on as it gains elevation throughout its northern trajectory is nothing less than extraordinary, from an almost barren wasteland at its southernmost boundary, to plush grasslands teeming with color and wildlife as it climbs north into the shadows of the Sky Islands. A landscape of patchy creosote and mesquite scrub interspersed among saguaro has given way to an ever-expanding paradise of two-to-three-foot-high grasslands, magnificently accessorized by fields of desert poppy and hyacinth, phacelia, lupin, larkspur, popcorn, wild cotton, carrot, startling paintbrush, and monkey flowers of every color imaginable. The occasional saguaro still rises above the waving wild grass, peppergrass, rattlesnake weed, desert poinsettias, gossamer fairy dusters, purple dogbane, and spokewheel verbena--but here they are surrounded by prickly pear and vastly outnumbered by the ocotillo and Pima pineapple cactus, which is rarely found outside this region.

Mesquite forests of deep rusty red branches erupting in billowing clouds of millions and millions of olive-green raindrop-sized leaves provide shade for the multitude of Sonora pronghorn, Mexican gray wolf, mule deer, javelina, boar, coyote, fox, jackrabbit, rattlesnake, desert tortoise, Gila monster, and kangaroo rat, while smaller, more crooked versions of the tree line the banks of the rivers and creeks. Towering sycamores provide the perfect viewing platform for the Mexican spotted owls, who keep one eye on the desert jaguars lounging on the lower branches and the other on the masked bobwhite quails nervously searching for insects on the valley floor below. Southwest willow flycatchers and western yellow-billed cuckoo sing songs of summer's end and southern journeys while earnestly watching the tadpoles of Chiricahua leopard frogs swimming in the Río Altar from atop their perches in the oak and cottonwood trees along the river's edge, while black-bellied whistling ducks, thick-billed king birds, and green kingfishers who don't mind getting their webbed feet wet skillfully hunt for

longfin and speckled dace, Sonora, razorback, and desert sucker, loach minnow, Gila chub, and Colorado squawfish.

Turkey vultures scour the valley menacingly from the skies above, looking for any sign of distress, while a golden eagle soars along the wind currents many hundreds of feet higher still. Bishop Salpointe listens intently to Roberto explain with complete candor the precarious circumstances which brought Angelina and himself into their present company, and the suggested remedy they'd received from Father Suastequi. Like the flora and fauna of the valley, Roberto's confessional recounting of their story gives him the same sense of renewal the Indian summer has afforded the wildlife surrounding them, and he basks in the radiant sunlight of this provisional pardon not unlike the temporary reprieve which ignited this biological canvas of unseasonable incandescence and inflorescence. Like the long winter's freeze, El Hechicero would have to bide his time irascibly, indifferently, or imperturbably--Roberto did not care which.

Angelina and the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet content themselves speaking of humanitarian efforts, and she delights in telling the sisters of all she has learned about nursing from the "Lady with the Lamp," Florence Nightingale's, "Notes on Nursing," and how the instructional work has prompted her to pursue a career in the healing arts. She finds the sisters' story of their missionary endeavors and Sister Monica's arduous journey from San Diego to Tucson most interesting, and she secretly internalizes the courage and unwavering spirit of service these women possess, determining that, married or not, she is committed to a life of altruistic and philanthropic enterprise. Angelina discovers Sister Clara is quite the botanist, as she repeatedly calls out the common names of all the flowers which come into view, as well as, their species, genus, family, and order. Some she knows all the way from their class to life biological classifications, impressive for any woman in a world which allows few of her gender into the realms of science. Sister Clara also expresses how very disappointed she is their schedule forced them to miss the visit by President Rutherford B. Hayes who came through Tucson yesterday on his way back from California, but the rest of the Sisters of Saint Joseph were delighted to present all two hundred and seventy-five students from both the San Xavier and Tucson schools for the American commander-in-chief.

Sister Monica, a widow whose husband and two small children died of diphtheria in 1853, is a Canadian by birth who was not raised Catholic, but converted when she married her husband in 1849. She speaks of her travels with the original sisters who journeyed from Missouri to San Diego in 1870, an exhausting trip of some thirty-six days which saw one hundred and twenty-five degree temperatures out on the sands of the Mojave Desert. Sister Monica also relates the events of Southern Pacific Railroad's completion of their Tucson connection in March of this year, and the subsequent development of Saint Mary's hospital which opened in April. She goes on to suggest a knowledgeable young lady such as Angelina might find gainful employment in the new twelve-bed facility if she so desired, further implying a small demonstration establishing her skills should be more than enough to garner a



recommendation from the Mother Superior.

The Vicariate Apostolic of Arizona gives Roberto's words a considerable amount of reflection before responding, taking the time to mentally work through the algorithmic matrix of truth such a conundrum as this demands. "Well, my son, normally I would dismiss outright the notion of this lost mission you speak of as superstitious nonsense. However, apprehending the gravity of your situation as a result of this El Hechicero character, and the very real historical significance of the missionary work done by those patriarchs of this region like Fray Kino, Fray de Niza, and Fray Padilla, I cannot in good conscience wholly reject the possibility of Father Suastegui's assertions, even though they defy conventional propriety and reason. Why, just this past summer a rumor was circulating around Tucson the Apache destroyed a lost mission in the Santa Catalina Mountains to the north."

"That's incredible, Your Excellency. So, there is a chance the mission exists?"

"I wouldn't rule it out, my son. What I can do is review the archives when we get to San Xavier. We have many old documents from most of the early missions, which may give us a clue as to the mission's location."

"Sí--gracias, Your Excellency. Gracias."

As the caravan begins to skirt the foothills of the Pajarito Mountains to the east and glimpses of the Baboquivari Mountains come into view up ahead to the west, the first shadows of dusk paint a comical picture of elongated riders on tiny ponies against the tall grass, like some kind of sideshow actors at the circus; Roberto muses what Chui's reaction would be to the Quixote-esk figures they cast. Mesquite trees run up along the slopes until the piñon and junipers take over on the tops of the ridges above; there's white-tailed deer, grizzly bear, mountain lion, skunk, and raccoon in the higher elevations, and on the glacier-carved pillars of mesozoic rock, birds of prey watch from unfathomable distances for their next kill. Somewhere among these rocks, Geronimo and six of his braves track the garrison, watching them, waiting for just the right moment to strike.

The small band of Apache have been trailing the soldiers and their oddly dressed charges for some time now, but there is something even more strange than the crimson-red robes on the very large blond-haired man or the women with those black and white things on their heads, more like sea birds than headdresses. No, it's the young vaquero who has Geronimo in a quandary; he's no Mexican, and he's obviously not French like his oddly attired companion. The old warrior has seen Frenchmen before, in Chihuahua some years ago, marching their armies toward Sonora to make war with the Mexicans on the shores of the great sea. The fact is, this cowboy is an Apache. What's more, he has the features of Geronimo himself, or perhaps more like his features as a young man thirty odd years ago.

On more than one occasion, the opportunity for the Indians to strike becomes available, but each time, their chief withholds the command to attack for one reason or another. Finally, Geronimo's brother, Porico, asks him, "Has Usen taken away your spirit for the fight?"

Geronimo does not answer him directly, but instead, gives orders to take the women and the Apache vaquero prisoner. When the first of the war party's arrows pierce through the heart of a cavalryman in the rear of the caravan, the panic-stricken trooper next to him yells out, "Apaches!"

Almost immediately, the rear guard presses in around the sisters and Bishop Salpointe, startling the horses and forcing Angelina and Roberto's Criollos to the side; in the confusion, their stallions bolt for the river. As the warriors close in, Second Lieutenant Carter commands the garrison to leave the provisions and charge toward the Buenos Aryes Ranch to the north. Two braves leap up and smash the soldiers who were driving the wagon to the ground as the troopers were attempting to unhitch their horses, and Geronimo quickly grabs up the reins of the frightened animals before they can get away.

Unbeknownst to the fleeing garrison, so starved are the Apache they make no attempt to chase after the escaping caravan. None of them have the strength to follow them for any length of time after their journey from the treachery at Casa Grande. Today, it's best to be satisfied with a wagonful of provisions, and the horses they've captured. Truthfully, Geronimo didn't have the ganas for the chase; news had come his blood brother, Victorio, has been killed at Tres Castillos in the Chihuahua Desert, and the old warrior's heart is full with sadness.

#

Angelina does her best to stay in the saddle as her mount goes barreling down the riverbank and plowing into the water, but once the panicked Criollo hits the río, he seems to calm down. Roberto, who is right beside her, reaches out and grabs hold of the bosal, steering the animal toward his own. The water level is low, and they make their way across in no time, rising up out of the river on the far bank. Roberto releases her Criollo's bosal while calling for Angelina to follow him, and together they ride hard north as fast as their horses can carry them.

How far Angelina and Roberto ride, they cannot say, but by nightfall they're well up the Altar Valley at the mouth of the Tinaja canyon. In the darkness, they've no way of knowing if the Apache raiders are right behind them or in the trees all around them or if they're following them at all, and they agonize over what's happened to the rest of their company. Angelina couldn't bear the thought of Sister Monica and Sister Clara lying dead or being scalped by bloodthirsty savages; she has to believe they've gotten away.

The moon is full, creating ample enough light for Roberto to navigate the canyon terrain. From out of his peripheral vision, he can see shooting stars burning out across the sky. A gray hawk soars above in the desert night casting his shadow on the valley floor, while the two young lovers, in desperate flight, cross over the border from Mexico into Arizona territory.

Roberto leads Angelina out of the canyon and up the ridge looking over the Buenos Aryes Ranch, as the great volcanically granitized wall of Baboquivari peak comes into view to the northwest on the far side of Altar Valley. Their objective is to locate the home of Pedro Aguirre and hopefully find the rest of their company safely waiting for them there.

#

El Hechicero awaits the arrival of the last of his scouts, who've been coming in to their Magdalena de Kino headquarters all evening from as far away as Altar to the west and Nacozari to the east. So far, they've been in Magdalena three days without any word of the location of the Ixiptlas, and the demonolater's patience is wearing thin.

The captain of the guard, Pedro Salazar, steps into the Magdalena offices of Ramon Corral, a member of the triumvirate of Sonoran government that includes Luis Torres and Rafael Izabal, all powerful men with great influence, and personal friends of Javier Barquin. Following closely behind Salazar are the scouts he's been waiting to hear from, and they advance to deliver their report. "Tlamacazqui, we have news from Altar."

"Yes, yes--what is it?"

"The military prefect of Altar spoke with a man who said he was at the mass on Sunday, and related seeing a young couple fitting the description of the Ixiptlas with the Murrieta family at the church there."

El Hechicero looks menacingly around the room at the men assembled. "Do you mean to tell me I have men combing the entire state of Sonora looking for these two, and they can go waltzing off to church without anyone finding them?"

No one dares to answer him as he scowls, "Where are they now?"

"We rode out to the Hacienda de San Rafael del Los Alamos, which we were told is owned by the Murrieta family, but after watching the house for some time, we saw no sign of the Ixiptlas."

"Did you kill them all and search the house?"

"No, señor. There were too many men, and they were heavily armed. However, we did talk with a photographer in Trincheras who showed us a photograph of the Ixiptlas and said they left on their own sometime this morning, but he couldn't say where they were going--only that they were headed north."

El Hechicero's ears have turned red, and a string of profanities bursts forth from his mouth before he composes himself. "Leave us!"

The men file out as quickly as they can, leaving only Salazar with El Hechicero. "If it is their intention to cross into Estados Unidos, I want men in every border town from Yuma to El Paso del Norte, comprendes!"

"Sí, señor. I will send them out first thing in the morning."

"I want them sent at once."

"Now? Pero, most of the men have not slept for days."

"Sleep! They can sleep when they're dead! I want them sent immediately, is that understood?"

“Sí, señor.”

Salazar turns and walks out the door, wondering why he ever signed up for this. Who the hell does he think he is?” he says to himself. “Maybe Azpilcueta was right; maybe the power of being named the Tlamacazqui has gone to his head. One thing's for sure--if he keeps talking to me like that, he won't be the Tlamacazqui for long.”

#

After what feels like forever, Roberto can finally see the lights of the main house off in the distance, and he feels a great sense of relief coming over him. Angelina has done very well under the circumstances, but he can see she is in need of rest, and they both could use a good meal. Just before they reach the main road leading to the Buenos Aryes Ranch, they cross under a grove of sycamore trees, and before they can clear them, without warning, a large male jaguar leaps from one of the lower branches and lands on the hindquarters of Roberto's Criollo. The wild cat takes a swipe at Roberto, ripping through his sombrero and stripping it from his head. Angelina's stallion startles violently and rears up, throwing her to the ground. Feeling razor-sharp claws sinking into his hide, Roberto's horse bucks frantically and kicks out wildly, striking the errant jaguar in the head, sending it flying into the grass.

Seeing Angelina's horse bolt past him, Roberto jumps off his stallion like a bronc buster at the rodeo and runs back to where his love lies motionless. “Oh, please Lord, no!”

Roberto kneels down and scoops the limp body of Angelina up into his arms. She's breathing, but she does not stir. Tears begin to drip down Roberto's cheeks as he gently lifts her into his arms. He turns to carry her back to his horse, but the frightened animal has run off, so he begins walking toward the road.

Angelina recovers after a few minutes and opens her eyes to find herself wrapped up in Roberto's arms. She's relieved to find him alive and relatively well, all things considered. The back of her head aches some and her bum feels a bit bruised, but all in all, her mental inventory of possible injuries is a short list, and she praises the Lord for protecting them both. Looking up into her novio's face under the light of the moon reveals the glistening film of the tracks of his drying tears, and her heart melts. She watches him with great admiration, resolving to protest until he puts her down, but before she can act on her thoughts, overwhelming fatigue brought on in part by the unresolved emotions of surviving not one but two life-threatening ordeals pulls her back down into unconsciousness, and she sleeps.

Roberto's steps come slower and slower, each one a labor of monumental undertaking, his mind refusing to give up, refusing to give in. His arms and shoulders and back are burning in agonizing pain. What pushes him on, what keeps him from falling down, what makes him deny the pain, is his insurmountable love for this rare flower, his Angelina. Every mile down the road feels like a hundred, and no matter how far he's progressed, when he looks up at the lights coming from the ranch house, they appear no closer.

After several hours and a dozen or more miles, Roberto thinks he might try and rest

awhile but questions whether once he stops and sets Angelina down, he will be able to lift her back up again. So he just keeps on going, praying for the strength to continue. When it seems he has nothing left and can go no further, somehow, one foot shuffles out in front of the other. How, he can only chalk up to grace. Nevertheless, fatigue has its limits, and the last of his energy ebbs away, he has no more left to give.

In the haze of his last few steps, he thinks he hears sounds coming from up ahead. At first, he imagines his mind is playing tricks on him believing the jaguar has returned to finish them off. However, the noise grows clearer pulling him out of his delirium and back to reality. It's a voice, a man's voice. "Who goes there?"

*Who goes there? Who indeed,* he wonders. *Oh yes, right, it's us, we go there,* but the words are only in his head, nothing is coming out of his mouth. His throat is too dry, his lips too parched, he can't gather the coherence to put the words together. Taking his last step, he slumps to the ground feebly with Angelina crumpling down on top of him. No longer able to support himself or his love, his eyes shut, and he gives in to the night.

## Chapter Twenty-four

Big billowy white clouds float through the sky over the mountaintops and Angelina is bouncing from one cloud to another, laughing with a joy she has not felt since she was a little girl, not a care in the world--until, suddenly, the jaguar attacks! She wakes with a terrible start, only to find herself in a plush warm bed covered by down comforters, her head resting on soft down pillows.

*This must be the Hacienda de Buenos Ayres, she imagines, but where's Roberto?*

She leaps out of bed, apparently no worse for wear after yesterday's escapades, and bounds out of the bedroom's double doors into what turns out to be a drawing room constructed of ornate walnut and cherry wood with rich English oak furnishings. The parlor leads to a music room on the right where a beautiful Steinway grand piano sits encircled by Louis XIV chairs, and on the far side is the entrance hall complete with a Perry & Company chandelier and a staircase rising up to the second floor with an intricately carved maple wood banister. Voices can be heard coming from the dining room where Angelina bursts forth to find several men, most of whom she does not recognize save First Lieutenant Carter, standing around a large dining table decked out with a buffet of breakfast dishes. Instantly, she becomes aware she's wearing nothing but a nightgown, and thoughts of how she got into it begin to compete with her desire to find Roberto and avoid further embarrassment, only what comes out of her mouth is, "¿Donde están mis ropas, y donde esta mi novio?"

A handsome middle-aged Spanish man steps forward. "Hola. You must be Angelina. I am Pedro Aguirre; bienvenido a mi casa. Roberto is resting comfortably in the bunk house, and I will have Maria bring you something suitable to wear. I'm afraid your clothes were soiled after your

terrible ordeal, so Maria took the liberty of washing them for you. Is there anything I can get for you, señorita?"

Angelina does her best to process what Señor Aguirre is saying, but the smell of food and her enormous hunger divide her attention. "Sí, gracias...."

She trails off drifting toward the table where she absently grabs a plate and piles on some scrambled eggs, a handful of bacon, a scoop of hash brown potatoes, and at last a few croissants while peering around the room as if she were a beggar thief, then hurriedly exits the room without a word and scurries back through the parlor to the bedroom all the while ravenously consuming the pastry in her fist in prodigious gulps.

It is nearly noon before Roberto stirs, and immediately his thoughts turn to the whereabouts of Angelina, with some concern over his own present location. There are twenty or so beds with tightly wrapped bedrolls--it must be the bunkhouse, but whose, he wonders. Hopefully it's the rancho of Pedro Aguirre, but with all he's seen and been through these last few weeks, it could be anyone's anywhere. He is still in his clothes, minus his boots, which after a quick check he confirms are on the floor beside his bunk, a good thing he supposes, so he sits and slides them on. "One down and three to go," he mutters, and then ambles out of the bunk house planting his head in the water trough just outside the door.

Roberto shakes off the excess water and rakes his fingers through his hair before taking stock of his surroundings. He takes a mouthful of water and swishes it around; a little one-finger brush, a second gargle and spit, and he's good to go. He proceeds over to the barn and promptly finds what he's looking for, his saddles are on the saddle rack with all the saddlebags and scabbards, the rifles, and his gun belt too. A quick check around the horse stalls affirms the Criollos are here and have been groomed and fed. His own stallion has been treated for his wounds, and both horses look fit and ready. "Two down and one to go."

After several knocks at the back door of what he decides is the main house, Roberto hears a woman from inside. "¡Vengo, sostener sus caballos!"

The door opens and a stocky little Mexican gal in a house servant's uniform stands looking him up and down. "¿Como le puedo ayudar?"

"Yo soy Roberto. I'm looking for Angelina."

The woman's countenance changes quickly, and she smiles broadly. "Oh sí, Angelina está aquí. Por favor entrado, entrado. Hola, yo soy Maria."

"Mucho gusto. Gracias, señora."

Maria starts to laugh. "No estoy casada."

"Lo siento, señorita."

Maria's laughter increases as she squeals with delight hearing herself be referred to as "señorita" by the handsome young vaquero, "Esta manera, Roberto. Ella está aquí."

As soon as Maria's clucking quiets down, Roberto can hear notes emanating from a

piano and the soft voice of an angel singing an old familiar song, "Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe" by Ignacio Jerusalem. Not wanting to disturb her, Roberto taps Maria on the shoulder and puts his finger up to his lips to quiet her, and waits at the kitchen door, listening. He is sure he has never heard anything more beautiful, and wonder fills his heart, mind, and soul. Maria watches him basking in his glory, and tears well up in her eyes.

The song ends and Roberto swiftly moves through the dining room and into the music room, applauding as he goes, and as soon as Angelina sees him, she jumps up and runs into his arms. The responses from the host and his guests, who have been enthralled and delighted by her company and accompaniment, are as varied as their proctors ranging from glorious reaffirmation to outright jealousy; the envy in the room is thick enough to cut with a knife.

Angelina releases her hold on Roberto and turns to the proprietor of the house. "Roberto, this is our host, Señor Pedro Aguirre."

Roberto offers his hand, and Señor Aguirre gives him a firm handshake. "Bienvenido, Roberto. Welcome to the Hacienda de Buenos Aryes."

"Gracias, señor. Mucho gusto."

Roberto greets the other guests in the room--Bishop Salpointe, Sister Monica, Sister Clara, and First Lieutenant Carter--before returning his attention to Señor Aguirre. "This is fine place you have here, señor."

"Muchas gracias, Roberto. Make yourself at home. We have been hearing all about your adventures from His Excellency and Angelina here, and I must tell you, it's quite a story."

"Yes, well--it wasn't what I thought was going to happen when I left the mission, but I wouldn't trade the experience for anything in the world, and to think, my classmates are barely getting through their midterms right now. I feel as if I've learned more in a month than I could have learned in ten years at la universidad."

"Life is the best teacher, as they say," Aguirre confesses.

Bishop Salpointe clears his throat, and the room goes silent. "I, for one, am so relieved to find the two of you alive after all of that nasty business. Not many people can say they were ambushed by Geronimo and live to tell the tale."

Listening quietly until now, First Lieutenant Carter, who is inwardly seething, would have preferred to stand and fight the Apache; however, he was under strict orders to preserve the lives of the Bishop and nuns at all costs. Being neither Catholic, nor predisposed to the French or Mexicans, he would have gladly sacrificed the lives of all of them for proper vindication of the deaths of his comrades. "Not everyone lived to tell the tale, as you so put it--I was wondering, Roberto, what tribe of Indian are you?"

Putting aside his own brother Epifanio's death at the hands of Apache raiders in 1870, Señor Aguirre bristles at the soldier's question--or more correctly, at its implied disrespect. "Sir, I would admonish you to mind your tongue; we are not at Fort Lowell here."



There was more to Lieutenant Carter's animosity toward Roberto, and the vaquero knew it. He saw how the soldier looked at Angelina, and it wasn't the first time he'd seen the look, nor would it be the last. He would fight and die for her honor, but it was her honor and the man who was going to love her for a lifetime would have to put away his pride and jealousy if he was going to keep her love for a lifetime, and he meant to do just that.

"No, it's alright," Roberto insists. "I understand Lieutenant Carter's frustration. If I may, however, can I ask you a question?"

Carter looks around the room and decides he will lose face if he doesn't acquiesce to the Indian's entreaty. "Go ahead--what's your question?"

"My question is, what is your ancestry, Lieutenant?"

"It's English."

"But of course you are an American, are you not?"

"I would think it obvious," Carter retorts, pointing to his uniform.

"Yet the English warred against America twice, and held sympathy if not outright support for the Confederacy."

"What are you driving at?"

"Simply this--we are not responsible for our ancestry, we are responsible only for ourselves. My ancestors are Apache, so I'm told, but I am a Mexicano, and if I choose to raise a family in the land of my ancestors, I will become an American just like you."

"Well put, young man," Bishop Salpointe interjects, deliberately taking over the conversation before the incensed Carter has the opportunity to escalate matters with a retort, "but now it's time we should be moving on to Arivaca to have a look at Señor Aguirre's new school."

As aggrieved as First Lieutenant Carter feels, his hands are tied, but there's more to his anger than meets the eye. He received word earlier Colonel Carr himself is riding to Sasabe with a regiment of men to recover the bodies of the fallen soldiers and track down their killers. Those men were his responsibility, and he felt he should be the one to avenge them, but orders were orders and he had his, babysitting schoolmarms and Bible-thumpers. He couldn't help thinking if Geronimo had not been involved, old man Carr would be sitting this one out.

On the ride to Arivaca, Señor Aguirre points out the lake he created by building an earthen dam to collect water from the arroyos and washes here, without which the land could not support the ranch and livestock of Buenos Ayres. The company turns east up Arivaca Creek trail into Alamito Canyon at the foothills of las Guijas Mountains to the north and San Luis Mountains to the south. Gold, silver, and copper are mined in these mountains by miners from across the globe, and Señor Aguirre and his brothers, Conrado and Yjinio, have made a fortune hauling the mines' freight through them.

Arivaca wasn't much more than a crossroads when the Aguirre brothers first started

mule-schlepping ore and supplies across this old Indian trail, but now it was a full-fledged mining town with a school, general store, and a post office, which opened just eighteen months ago. School's letting out when the caravan arrives, and the children are anxious to see the important visitors they've been eagerly anticipating all day, and as Roberto has become accustomed, Angelina steals the show.

Beauty is in and of itself an elixir which draws admirers unto itself--after all, one who is aesthetically pleasing is referred to as attractive--however, Angelina is far more than that. She is without pretense, conceit, or entitlement, giving of herself freely with no hidden agenda, and charity, compassion, and gentle kindness flow from her like a well of fresh spring water in the desert wilderness, and the children, without pretense themselves, flock to her like moths to a flame.

#

The sister's inspection complete and His Excellency's ring drowning in slobber, the ecclesiastical caravan parts company with Señor Aguirre and his outfit and heads southeast through Apache Canyon and Cerro Colorado past the Sierrita Mountains to the Mission San Xavier del Bac where they arrive well into the evening.

Bishop Salpointe is quite proud of the reestablishment and restoration of the Mission San Xavier del Bac under his direction. First established by Jesuit missionary Eusebio Kino in 1692, the present mission is the vision of architect Ignacio Gaona, who, between 1783 and 1797, built the Baroque-style structure out of low-fire clay brick, stone, and lime mortar, roofing it with masonry vaults, making it one of the more unique Spanish Colonial missions in the United States. The interior is elaborately spectacular, with some calling it the "Sistine Chapel of the New World"--not too far off, considering the same Italian artists who worked on the interior of the Sistine Chapel came to New Spain to work on San Xavier.

In 1866, when then Reverend Salpointe first came to Tucson, the mission was completely abandoned, as it had been for over forty years. Were it not for the fierce protection of the mission by the Tohono O'odham tribe in the region, the Apache would have destroyed it, as they attempted to do many times. In fact, when Bishop Salpointe began the mission's current overhaul, to his utter surprise and amazement, the Tohono O'odham came and unearthed the valuable art and sacred relics of the mission from where they'd buried them years early so they wouldn't be pillaged or destroyed.

Upon arrival, Angelina and Roberto immediately enter the mission church to offer up prayers of thanks for the protection they received on their arduous journey. After dipping their fingers in the stoup of holy water, they bless themselves, and then kneel and cross themselves as they enter the sanctuary, and again when they enter the pew. After some time of prayer, they conclude by purchasing and lighting two votive candles, placing them at the side altar before the statue of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, "Our Lady of Perpetual Help."

Dinner is solemn and quiet with all the new faces of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and the

mission staff, but afterward Angelina and Roberto walk along the grounds and talk of future hopes and dreams before retiring to their separate dormitories. "Dulces sueños, mi amor. I love you."

"Dulces sueños, my handsome man. I love you."

#

Come morning, Roberto is up bright and early, seeking out Bishop Salpointe to discuss the historical archives His Excellency spoke of. Unfortunately, the bishop has many other matters to attend to and is not able to sit down with him until well after lunch. Nevertheless, when they do meet in the library, Bishop Salpointe wholeheartedly gives himself over to the task of finding any information which might help them uncover the mysteries of the lost mission.

After several hours of checking references and cross references, the bishop stumbles upon a letter in Fray Kino's personal papers addressed to the Bishop of Mexico City, Fray Juan de Zumarraga, dated July, 17th, 1541. The letter is written in Latin and some of the words have faded away, but Bishop Salpointe, somewhat of a latin scholar, is able to translate the letter with ease, quickly writing it out and handing it to Roberto to read:

*"Your Excellency, Bishop Juan de Zumarraga; I, a most humble servant of our Lord, am writing you in the hope that together we may come to an understanding of the Lord's will for me concerning His continued missionary service to the indigenous tribes of the Quivira plains. It is my desire to take with me our beloved lay brothers, Luis de Escalona and Juan de la Cruz. I feel they will be of great help in this evangelistic endeavor. Their assistance with the Pueblo tribes has been indispensable, and I dare say our work here would be for naught without them. On a separate note, we were able to visit another Pueblo tribe some distance to the southwest in the mountain pass of Dragoon, who received us very well, and we were able to establish a small church there in a cave which sparkled of silver and gold. The Indians consider it a holy place and we were able to build an altar and a stand on which we placed a small statue of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mother, and a lamina of the Sacred Heart. In this way we were able to teach them the Holy Trinity and to pray the Rosary. All praise be to Our Heavenly Father. Reverently awaiting your reply, a fellow servant in Christ, Padre Juan de Padilla."*

There's no further indication of whether the Bishop of Mexico City ever received Fray Juan de Padilla's letter or how it came into the possession of Father Kino, but here it is, the definitive proof a mission, or church of some kind with a lamina of the Sacred Heart, was in fact established in the Dragoon Mountains. Roberto is ecstatic with anticipation over the discovery. "The legend has to be true, then--I can't wait to tell Angelina!"

"It goes against my better judgment, my son, but inside, my gut wants to believe it too.

Now let's pray it still exists and hasn't already been destroyed by the Apache."

Not being able to stand on decorum any longer, Roberto gives the bishop a big bear hug, and to tell the truth, Salpointe is equally delighted. It's been years since anyone has given him a proper show of affection, and together, they jump about the room like a pair of schoolboys.

"Thank you, Your Excellency, thank you!"

"Thank you, my son. I haven't felt this much joy in years! You know, I studied the classics at the College of Clermont while I was a lad of your age, and I have to say this is an adventure right out of Homer's *Odyssey*. I almost wish I were going with you. Why, in my day, I was handy with a rapier--I'll bet I could still show old El Hechicero a thing or two."

Bishop Salpointe plucks his walking stick from a bucket of them near the door and demonstrates a paré and thrust, and in the moment, Roberto joins in with enthusiasm. Both joust back and forth, until their laughter escapes out the door and echoes through the hall where Sister Clara and Sister Monica happen to be walking with Angelina.

"It sounds like children have gotten into the bishop's library," Sister Clara offers.

"Have they, indeed? Well, we'll see about that," Sister Monica exclaims.

The elder nun charges through the door, and the sight she sees is one she'll never forget. The bishop has vanquished the pseudo El Hechicero, who is lying on the ground in his death throes, Salpointe's wooden rapier stuck in the crevice of Roberto's arm with His Excellency's boot planted firmly on his chest. Moreover, just like schoolboys, they look up at Sister Monica with expressions of guilt which are nothing less than priceless. Then, as if right on cue, the wise sister shuts the door, turns to Sister Clara and Angelina and advises, "There's nothing to see here; carry on."

## Chapter Twenty-five

Dinner flew by for Roberto, and he could barely remember what was said or who said what, all he knew was he was ready to go and could think of nothing else. Angelina watched him with a knowing eye, equally eager to find out what had sparked his newfound exhilaration. After everyone finished the evening meal and it was apparent His Excellency had delivered his last anecdote, Angelina and Roberto politely excused themselves for a little alone time.

"I missed you today, mi amor."

"I missed you too, mi amor. What were you and Bishop Salpointe up to today?"

"His Excellency found a letter from a Spanish priest named, Fray Juan de Padilla, who wrote that he started a church in the Dragoon Mountains in 1542. The mission exists my love--there truly is a chance for us."

Angelina is quiet for a while, feeling the need to choose her words carefully. "It's very good news, my love, it is, but I think the most important thing is to not put all our eggs in one basket. What I'm trying to say is I don't see this lost mission as our only hope. We have love, and as long as we have that, I believe we have more than a chance no matter where the road takes us."

Now it's time for Roberto to select his reply thoughtfully, and he ponders how he might frame his response. "I agree with you, mi amor, our love is indomitable, and I'm as concerned as you about the very real dangers we're bound to face trying to pull this off, but I'm also convinced Father Suastequi is right. We don't know how far-reaching El Hechicero's influence is. I'm reminded of Saint Paul's admonition to the congregation at Ephesus to remember, 'We battle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places,' and our enemy is all of

these things.”

“Please don't get me wrong--I will follow you anywhere, my love, but I walk around this place with the sisters, and I wonder if we wouldn't be better off staying among these people. I feel the Spirit of the Lord in this place, and as you have reminded me, Saint Paul also advised the Ephesians to put on the whole armor of God. Truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, and faith--they're all here in this mission.”

“Again, my love, I agree with you; however, like Señor Murrieta and his family, I don't want any harm to come to anyone here on our account.”

Both Angelina and Roberto recognize they've come to an impasse, although neither of them wishes to offend the other. After a period of reflection, Roberto offers a compromise. “Bishop Salpointe suggested we might find additional clues at the mission in Tumacacori. I'll make a deal with you, if we don't find anything more or a sign from God which persuades us to continue on, I promise you, we can come right back here or any place else you want to go.”

Angelina doesn't answer right away, but deep down she understands many of the fears which have motivated them to follow their present course of action, agreeing in part with Roberto's desire to see things through to their logical conclusion, but, nearly everything about this whole adventure defies logic, and she is mentally exhausted from the stressful nature of it all. However, she's no ostrich wishing to bury her head in the sand, so, reluctantly she gives in and agrees to participate in Roberto's plan. “Okay, I'll go with you, but if we don't find anything, I'm holding you to your promise.”

Roberto pulls Angelina in close to him. “You can count on it, my angel.”

#

The morning comes too soon for Angelina, but not soon enough for Roberto. Either way, the horses are ready and their bags are packed, everyone is assembled to see them off. They look different in their new attire--good, but different, Americanized. His Excellency had insisted, “It's very important to blend in.”

Angelina wears a crinkled smile, trying not to let the discomfort of her new corset and bustle show, but failing miserably. She'd never worn anything like them before, and they certainly take some getting used to. Nevertheless, she and Roberto make a handsome pair. *And the dusters are a nice addition to keep everything clean and tidy*, she imagines.

Roberto, on the other hand, felt they could dress him up like Wild Bill Hickok and it wouldn't matter, he'd still be an “Injun” to most gringos. Maybe Angelina was right--maybe they should stay at the mission. The only life he's ever known is mission life. “Fact is, this whole sordid affair has been nothing but trouble,” he grumbles to himself, “and what if they did find a sign--then what? Besides, these people have been so nice to us, and you know how you hate goodbyes. Ay, Dios mío, now who's having second thoughts.”

He shakes his apprehension off quickly enough, chalking it up to the jitters anyone would

likely get right before an undertaking such as this. *But now is not the time for belly aching, now is the time to buckle down and get out on the trail*, he thinks.

Once out on the Sonora Road, Angelina and Roberto encounter a host of travelers, freighters hauling ore into Tucson and supplies back out to the mines, the stagecoach carrying passengers and mail to Altar and Guaymas beyond, ranchers herding their cattle and sometimes sheep, mule trains carrying goods and supplies to market, Mexican families relocating to new settlements, and even Indians, mostly Pima, moving from one field to the next gleaning the last of the fall harvest. The Río Santa Cruz remains on their left until they crossover an earth and stone bridge which allows water to pass through, and come to the village of Saurita where Sobaipuri women and children line the road selling hand-woven baskets, beads, arrowheads, and Mescal from the other side of the border. On the southern end of Saurita the road crosses back over the river and proceeds through the most farmable land in the drier parts of the Santa Cruz Valley, mainly because the river tends to pool up here during the monsoon season and is the last to dry up during times of drought. Further to the southeast, the Santa Rita Mountains rise up almost ninety-five hundred feet, and it's here, on their western foothills the old Spanish Presidio of Tubac is located, with Tumacacori just beyond.

Tubac was once a key Pimeria Alta center for Spaniards traveling the Camino Real from New Spain and all points south to California, and counted among its more famous residents the Spanish explorer Juan Baptista de Anza. Today, with the growth of Tucson to the north, and the region's propensity for Apache raids, Tubac is not much more than a watering hole for travelers passing through.

The ride into Tumacacori is rather scenic, with the Tumacacori Mountains to the west and southern Santa Ritas to the east. Angelina and Roberto crossover the Río Santa Cruz to the Mission San José de Tumacacori on the east side of the river. The first mission, Mission San Cayetano de Tumacacori, was built near here by Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, in 1691, but little remains of its original location on the west side of the river.

The newer eastern mission is also abandoned, as it has been for more than fifty years, and the story of the incomplete structure, those who strove to erect it, and those who came to dwell in it, is one of sorrow, heartache, and failed dreams. It is not the kind of portent which imbues one with hope and confidence; nevertheless, Roberto senses he'll find the clues he's looking for among these ruins.

Inside the sanctuary, there are signs it was used for shelter by vagabonds and drifters, and more than a few cattle have wandered through. The few remnants of the roof which remain indicate it was flat and made of wood, highly unusual, perhaps a sign money had run low during its construction, and the vaulting above the nave, the dome over the apse, and the bell tower pyre had all been scrapped to reduce costs, although, flat wooden roofs were common before the Romanesque and Gothic eras. Roberto finds an old shovel in what is left of the mission stable and begins piling up the debris while Angelina looks on; she has her doubts they'll find

anything of use under all this mess.

Several hours of clean-up and searching by Angelina and Roberto produce nothing, and dusk is not far off on the horizon, but just when they're about to call it a bust, a family of Tohono O'odham Indians arrive outside the mission. The man among them walks into the sanctuary and approaches the laboring couple. "Hello."

Angelina and Roberto look at each other, not sure what to make of the Indian's presence. "Hello," Roberto offers.

"I am Pausegak, Dry Coyote in English. Do you need help?"

"No, no. Just cleaning up. I'm Roberto, by the way, and this is mi novia, Angelina."

"Mucho gusto, Angelina y Roberto."

"Mucho gusto," Angelina replies.

Roberto and Pausegak shake hands, and the three of them step outside the sanctuary where two Indian women and young Indian girl are standing.

"Let me introduce you to my family," Pausegak says. "This is mi esposa, Juana, y mi cunada, Cheepah, y mi hija Geka."

Angelina, Roberto, and the women exchange greetings, but the little girl seems shy and hides behind her mother, peeking out from behind her skirt. Angelina begins a game of peekaboo with her, and Geka, unsure at first, starts to laugh.

"We've come from the Mission San Xavier to help you in your quest. Sister Clara sent us."

"Oh sí, bueno, bueno. Did Sister Clara tell you why we're here?"

"Not exactly, but she knew we lived here in Tumacacori before we were sent to the reservation. This is the land of my ancestors."

"Bueno. Well then, let me tell you a little about what we're looking for."

"Andele pues."

"We--that is, Angelina and I--were told of a lost mission located in the Dragoon Mountains, and we're hoping to find some information here about its exact location."

"Entiendo, I've heard of such a place, although I can't say where it might be, but we will go see Hokak, the aged one; he can tell us more. Come, he does not live far from here."

Perhaps they were being too trusting or naive, but Angelina and Roberto were getting nowhere on their own and these folks seemed like good honest people, so they agreed to go with them. Angelina asked Geka, whom she'd already made fast friends with, if she wanted to ride up with her on the big Criollo, which Geka agreed to most eagerly.

The Tohono O'odham lead them southeast around the Santa Ritas and across Sonoita Creek to the northern foothills of the Patagonia Mountains. Evening comes by the time they arrive at the small village of Patagonia, set in a beautiful region of high grasslands overlooking the San Rafael Valley to the east. The dwellings of the village are small round one-room adobes



made of wooden frames covered with dirt and brush called, "*wickiups*," but the Tohono O'odham call them, "*ki*," which in their language means home.

Hokak sits in front of his *ki* in a wooden chair poking a stick into a small stone fire pit moving around the embers, and then throws in a dry mesquite log. By the fire's light, Roberto can see the Indian's face is cragged with age lines and marked by the traditional tribal tattoos of his people, but his smile as the small company approaches, is broad and inviting. The village doesn't get many visitors since most of his tribe now lives on the reservation, but he's happy to see his old friend Pausegak. "*Shap aye masma?*"

"*Kegh, has i masma?*"

"Está bien para un hombre viejo," Hokak answers, and then turns his attention to Angelina and Roberto. "¿Como están ustedes esta noche?"

"Bien, gracias. ¿Y usted?" Roberto replies.

"Bien, gracias. ¿Que te trae amigos a mi pueblo?"

"We've come seeking knowledge of a lost mission in the Dragoon Mountains."

"Sí, usted habla del cueva de *Se He* hermano de *I'itoi*. Para encontrar esta lugar debe seguir el laberinto."

"¿El laberinto?" Roberto asks, confused.

"Sí, el laberinto," Hokak repeats, while pointing to a basket hanging from the outside wall of his *wickiup*. "El laberinto. Llevarlo a la cima de la montaña Dragoon y siga las indicaciones del laberinto."

Hokak gets up and takes the basket off the wall and hands it to Roberto. Roberto looks at it, not really understanding. Hokak traces out the maze design on the basket with his finger. "En la cima de la montaña Dragoon y siga las indicaciones del laberinto, en el centro se encuentra lo que busca."

Roberto helplessly looks around at Pausegak, and then to Angelina, as if searching their faces could help him gain any understanding. Not finding any, he turns back to Hokak. "Lo siento, pero yo no entiendo."

Before Hokak can respond, a young Indian runs up to them shouting, "*Od! Od!*"

"What is it?" Roberto asks.

"The enemy, he says," Pausegak explains. "It's the Apache. The scouts must have seen them coming this way. Quickly, we must find a place to hide."

Roberto runs to his horse and pulls the Remington from its scabbard and a box of cartridges from his saddlebag. Angelina is not far behind and does the same. "Go with the others and hide!" Roberto shouts.

"I'm going with you!"

"Don't be crazy--it's too dangerous. You must go with the others!"

"Not a chance. I can shoot as well as any man. I'm going with you!"

"Go, I said! I don't have time to argue with you!"

Before Angelina can retort, shots ring out and bullets hit the dirt in front of them. Roberto grabs Angelina by the arm and leads her behind one of the huts for cover, giving her the evil eye, and then hustles out to the front of the village where four of Hokak's braves have taken up positions. Angelina, not backing down, runs out after him and takes a position on the opposite side of the clearing from Roberto; all he can do is shake his head in dismay and worry.

The Apache war whoop goes up, and the platoon digs in, knowing what's coming. The first of the raiders emerge from the trees, rifles blazing, and are gunned down immediately by return fire, but ten more rise up to take their place. Roberto's side is overrun and he faces off with an axe-wielding warrior who bowls him over, and together they go tumbling to the ground. Roberto falls to his back, but he's able to kick his attacker off over the top while pulling out his .44 as the Indian rebounds and charges. Roberto fires into the Apache's midsection and the warrior goes sprawling on top of him. He pushes the dead man aside and rises quickly, but two more combatants force Roberto to back pedal up the hill, and he stumbles over a stone, causing him to fall back into the trees.

Angelina and the Tohono O'odham next to her are holding their own as she fires again, dropping her third kill, but another six raiders approach their flank and both of the braves beside her are mortally wounded. Angelina gets off two shots in rapid succession, both finding their target before she drops back behind one of the huts where Pausegak has taken up the rear guard. She didn't see what happened to Roberto, but her heart tells her something has gone wrong. Two more shots ring out from somewhere near where she last saw Roberto, and then everything goes quiet.

After several agonizing minutes, Angelina and Pausegak cautiously come out from their location and advance to the spot where the main battle took place. Three Tohono O'odham men lie dead and another badly injured, but mercifully all their scalps are intact. Eerily, there are no Apache wounded or dead to be found anywhere. Angelina's search for Roberto becomes increasingly frantic as she fails to locate him. She keeps scanning the battlefield anxiously, moving closer and closer to the treeline, but before she gets any further, Pausegak grabs her. "They may still be in the timber--it's too dangerous. They'll kill you before you can even see them."

Angelina tries to pull away, but the Tohono O'odham holds her firmly and will not let her go. "We'll track them down at first light, but I can't let you go out there."

Angelina struggles for a bit longer before giving in, but finally the reality of Pausegak's counsel sinks in. She buries her head in the Indian's chest and begins to sob uncontrollably.

#

Roberto fired his last two shots, dropping both of the Apache who forced him into the treeline, but before he could get his bearings, an Apache came out of nowhere from behind and

squeezed off his air supply. He tried to wrestle free, but his arms were pinned down; he was being dragged through the trees, and before he could get free, he felt a rope slip around his neck. Whoever was behind him kicked Roberto's legs out from under him, throwing him on his back. Instinctively, he got his hands up under the rope and tried desperately to loosen it. As he struggled to gain the slack he needed to breathe, he caught a glimpse of the man who'd done this to him. It was the same Apache who charged after them near Sasabe--it was Geronimo.

## Chapter Twenty-six

The last of the sorcerer's men have come in from as far as three hundred fifty miles away, and are now assembled in the border town of Nogales. Each man has been equipped with extra guns and ammunition. The Ixiptlas have been seen traveling south along the Río Santa Cruz, and Barquin intends to cross the border in pursuit of them. The plan is to head east along the border and cross into Estados Unidos through the San Rafael Valley, so as to not attract the suspicion of the United States government and hence the United States military.

Pedro Salazar calls the men to attention. "Los Brujos Mejores are ready, Tlamacazqui!"

El Hechicero rides along the line inspecting his troops before coming about and returning to the center of the guard. "I know you men have endured many hardships, but there will be no rest until our mission is complete. The Ixiptlas lie within our grasp, and we cannot let them slip through our fingers now. We will advance in four companies, ten men each, five leagues apart, at the double. If any signs of the fugitives are found, I want you to send up a signal by smoke and wait for instructions. If by any chance you come upon them, they're to be taken alive. The time to begin the advance is zero five hundred hours, which should allow enough time for everyone to be in position. Is that clear?"

The warlocks make their reply in the affirmative loud and in unison, and the captain of the guard commands the companies to move out. In less than two hours, El Hechicero and his caballeros are across the border, and the bloodhounds are on the trail.

#

Roberto lies half dead when the dust around him finally settles, coming to rest somewhere in the Huachuca Mountains, burrs and thorns, scrapes and bruises all over his body. He's been hauled from a rope by his throat for the better part of fifteen miles, sometimes

running when he could keep his feet, but mostly dragging along the ground behind Geronimo's mustang, and his hands are torn to shreds from hanging on to the rope in his panic to keep from choking to death. He lies motionless for some time before working the noose from around his neck. He wipes the mud and dirt from his eyes to get a look around and soon realizes he's in some kind of Apache settlement with deer, elk, and mule skin teepees all around him. His mouth and throat are so dry he can't swallow, but he hasn't got the energy to rise up to find water, and he passes out.

Sharp, terrible pains pull Roberto from his sleep and he's afraid to open his eyes because of what he might see, but the pains persist. Strangely, he hears the sound of children's laughter and he wonders if he hasn't gone insane. No longer able to withstand the pain, he tries to get up and crawl away from the horrible invasion, but try as he might, he can't get away from it. Finally, he opens his eyes to find children, twenty or more of them, taking turns smacking and stabbing him repeatedly with sharp sticks and arrows. All of them are laughing hysterically each time one of them pokes him, like he's their piñata and it's piñata Sunday.

#

Angelina is up well before the dawn, anxious to get out and track down the Apache who have taken off with her vaquero. By morning's light, Hokak, Pausegak, and four Tohono O'odham braves are studying the signs of the Apaches' trail leading to the east. Out across the San Rafael Valley, Angelina spots a cloud of dust coming from the south, but Hokak assures her those are not the Apache they're looking for. Nevertheless, he doesn't know who they are or why they're riding hard in their direction, so he commands them to move quickly. Roberto's boot marks running through the grass are easy enough to follow, and they reach the foothills of the Huachuca Mountains in no time. From behind the timberline, they can see there are perhaps two or three companies of riders moving swiftly down on the valley floor.

The riders get to the path Angelina and the others had followed and stop, appearing to study the Apache signs as well. Curiously, a few of the men make a fire and begin sending up smoke signals. Pausegak can see the other companies now moving in their direction. "They look like Mexico troops; it seems they're also on the trail of the Apache. I suggest we press on."

#

Once Roberto successfully chases away the last of the mischievous little traviesos, he walks cautiously over to a water trough near the Apaches' remuda and drinks his fill and then begins washing his wounds. He's not there long, however, before an Indian squaw starts shouting at him in a language he can't understand. He tries to signal her to please be quiet, but it only seems to enrage her further. Before long, several women are engaged in the tirade, and one old woman comes at him with a club, waving it menacingly at his head. He raises his arms up to protect himself, but just when she's about to strike him, she lets out a shrieking sound he can only describe as shock and disbelief. The old woman drops the club and runs away, yelling, "*Kiian Goyaalé nde! Kiian Goyaalé nde!*" The old woman scurries from teepee to teepee yelling

out the same words, and before long everyone in the village comes out to see what she is hollering about.

The man Roberto knows to be Geronimo is the last to emerge from his tent and approach the crowd. The old woman repeats what she's been telling everyone, and Geronimo tells her, "*Doo hwaa gonch'aa da isdan!*"

The old woman looks at him indignantly and repeats herself, "*Kiian Goyaalé nde!*"  
*"Dooda!"*

*"Aoo!"*

Geronimo walks through the crowd over to Roberto and grabs him by the jaw and harshly twists his face back and forth, looking it over carefully. Without releasing Roberto's face, he tells the old woman, "*Dooda.*"

The old woman shakes her finger at Geronimo, and as best Roberto can ascertain, begins berating him for some reason. When she's done she kicks dirt on him and storms off, stomping her feet all the way back to her teepee.

Geronimo releases Roberto's face and looks at him again, only this time he looks more serious and a bit puzzled. "The woman says you are my son, but she is old and her eyesight is not good. What is your tribe?"

"I don't know."

"I have seen you before."

"You attacked our caravan across the border near Sasabe."

"Yes, you are the cowboy. Why do you dress like a Mexican?"

"I am Apache, but I was raised in Mexico at the mission in El Paso del Norte."

Geronimo looks as if he is contemplating the truth of Roberto's words. "How many years have you?"

Roberto looks at him for a moment before correctly guessing what he means. "I'm twenty-two years old."

Geronimo turns to walk away while calling back to Roberto, "Come with me."

Geronimo leads Roberto to his teepee and indicates for him to enter. Once inside, the Apache chief asks him a series of questions concerning how he'd arrived at the village of the Tohono O'odham. Roberto tries to answer as best he can, but then Geronimo asks him the most important question of all; "Tell me how you came to be at the mission of the Mexicans."

"I was only a baby--I don't remember anything about how I came to be at the mission, but I've been told I was saved by a Mexican cavalryman named Daniel Luna when my people's village was attacked near Kaskiyeh. He's the man whose name I carry, because he's the man who saved my life."

"Near Kaskiyeh, you say?"

"That's what I've been told."

Geronimo sits silently for a while and then rises and walks out of the teepee, leaving Roberto alone. The walls of the teepee are covered with pelts from nearly every creature found in these mountains, wolves, elk, deer, boar, bear, beaver, raccoon, rabbit, jaguar, and mountain lion. On one wall, a piece of woven artwork with beads and turquoise hangs by a leather string, and on the dirt floor lie dozens of bear skin pelts, which Roberto assumes make up the Apache's bed.

Geronimo returns with a woman carrying a basket, and she follows him into the tent. The woman places her basket in front of Roberto and removes the lid. Inside are meat and cheese and some kind of corn biscuits.

"Eat," Geronimo says. "Eat, it is good food."

Roberto digs in and together, he and Geronimo share a meal. Roberto can hardly believe the bizarre turn of events which led up to this most unlikely encounter, but then again, it's not the strangest thing to happen to him since he left the mission. Looking across at the most-feared man in all of Chihuahua and Sonora, he sees facial features which could very well be those of his father, and he wonders if this is how he might look when he's older. The man's leather-worn face is covered with wrinkles and shows the scars of a lifetime of war, and Roberto ponders how someone so battle worn could remain alive for so long. Up close, he hardly looks like the fierce warrior who sprang from the trees and pounced with the speed of a mountain lion on the garrison at the Río Altar; he's certainly as old as Señor Don Luis. Roberto has always wanted to know who his father is and often reflected on all the questions he'd ask when that moment came, but now that he's sitting across from the Apache who is most likely that man, he can't recall a single one.

#

All four companies of los Brujos Mejores have closed in on the smoke signal, and after examining the tracks himself, El Hechicero makes the decision to follow the trail which leads into the Huachuca Mountains. He commands his men to advance in two groups a league apart, with orders to close in at his signal. The diviner can sense the Ixiptlas are here, and neither the Apache nor the Tohono O'odham are going to steal his prey. His blood begins to boil as he imagines the Indians torturing or killing the Ixiptlas, and in his anger over this hypothetical indignity, he bites down on the inside of his lip, savoring the taste of his own blood.

#

The braves of Hokak return to the rendezvous point and reveal that only two scouts protect the Apache settlement. The company determines they can breach the camp from the south. Once they're in position, they dismount and tie off the horses. Pausegak tries to persuade Angelina to wait with the horses, but she's having none of it. When they reach the edge of the camp behind the teepees, Angelina hears Roberto's voice coming from inside the tent right in front of her.

"What are you going to do with me?" Roberto asks.

"Your fate will be decided by the council. I'm still trying to understand the will of Usen and why he has played this trick on me. Our brothers from the Nedni tribe want your scalp for the death of their warriors at Patagonia, and by our law the relatives of the dead braves have the right to demand you fight them in open combat."

"In open combat? Look, I'm very sorry, but those men attacked us; we were only defending ourselves."

"I will do what I can, but our ways are sacred and cannot be altered without paying the sum requested by those who have been offended. I go to the council now; you will wait for me here."

Geronimo and the Indian woman leave Roberto, and the Apache chief heads to the location he's selected for the council meeting. Meanwhile, Roberto's anxiety begins to build knowing he possesses few hand-to-hand combat skills, and he's sure he stands little chance of defeating even one Apache, let alone several of them. "Now would be a good time to pray," he figures.

As he bows his head, a knife slices into the back wall of the teepee, and before he can think of how to react, Angelina's head pops through.

"Angelina, mi amor, what are you doing here?"

"I'm here to rescue you--come on, let's go!"

Roberto jumps up and emerges from Geronimo's teepee to find Hokak, Pausegak, and four Tohono O'odham braves waiting for him. They move as silently and rapidly as possible to the horses and mount up. Hokak gestures for the others to follow, and they head to the southeast through the heart of the Huachuca Mountains toward the Río San Pedro. Hokak leads them on a course just south of the James Carr ranch and down the canyon to the mountain's eastern foothills and out onto the San Pedro Valley beyond.

The company holds up at the river to water the horses, and Hokak calls Angelina and Roberto over. "Aquí es donde debemos separarnos. Quédese cerca de las estribaciones las montañas de la Mula y luego vaya al norte. Verá las montañas Dragoon delante. Entrado desde el este para evitar al proscrito banda los Cowboys."

"Sí señor, gracias por todo," Angelina replies.

Angelina and Roberto say their goodbyes with gratitude in their hearts, and when they're done, Hokak draws a basket from his saddlebag and hands it to Angelina. "Acuérdese de seguir el laberinto al centro. Vaya con Dios."

Crossing the Río San Pedro is easy enough, with little water currently in the north flowing river due to the drought and low snowfall last winter. Roberto is still reeling from the events of last night, and the realization the most feared and hated man in the North Americas just might be his father. Nevertheless, more pressing is the pain screaming out from the wounds on his



hands and the rest of his battered body, not to mention an overwhelming need for sleep, but their options for finding a safe place to rest are tenuous at best.

"Mi amor, I don't think I can make it if we go much farther."

"We can ride up into these mountains to the east, what did Hokak call them--the Mule Mountains?"

"Sí, I believe he did. I think it's the best idea; maybe we can find a place overlooking the valley so we can get a good look at where we're headed."

As Angelina and Roberto ride up the switchback trail, the manzanita, juniper, and lowland oak and pine give way to a lush, spectacular old-growth forest of Rocky Mountain Douglas fir which reach a hundred-plus feet into the Arizona sky. About halfway up, they come to a butte which affords a view looking back down the way they came. Along the río coming from the south, six or seven riders are moving with a purpose along the road. The company comes to a halt at the trail crossing Angelina and Roberto had taken to get to their present location. One of the riders removes his hat and looks up in their direction. Roberto thinks he recognizes the man from the red bandana around his neck. He's seen him before, in El Paso del Norte, a bandido they call "Johnny Ringo."

"What the heck we stoppin here fur?" James Johnson asks.

"There's two riders up on the Butte lookin at us. Ike, let me see your rifle."

"What's wrongs with yurs?" Ike Clanton protests.

"It ain't got the distance for this shot. Now dadgummit, give me your rifle."

Billy Clanton hands Johnny Ringo his rifle. "Here, take mine--it's better than Ike's anyway."

Ringo grabs the Sharps Model 1874 .50-70 caliber Buffalo Hunter and flips up the tang sight. Taking aim, he cocks the hammer and pulls the trigger. The echo from the shot rings out like an explosion through the valley and up the mountain slopes. "Give me another cartridge."

"You ain't never gonna hit dem from here," Phin Clanton points out. "dey must be a mile away. Heck, even a Sharps can't shoot dat far."

"Reckon not," Ringo admits. "Let's go after 'em."

"What da tarnation ya talkin 'bout, Johnny?" Tom McLaury bristles. "We need to bust out Curly Bill."

"That's right," Frank McLaury agrees, "'sides, Pete and Frank are waitin fur us at the Grand. Maybe we'll get us a piece a dem Earps ta night."

Johnny Ringo takes a good look back toward the butte and sees his targets are already hightailing it on up the switchbacks, so he gets back on his horse, and the cowboys ride off in the direction of Tombstone.\*

Angelina and Roberto fly up the trail as fast as they can, not looking back until they reach

the summit. Out on the flats above, Roberto can see their tormenters have moved on, and he lets out a sigh of relief. From this vantage point they can see all the way across the valley, with the town of Tombstone to the north, the Dragoon Mountains to the northeast, and little else except for the 4 Bar Ranch and two or three smaller homesteads further east. Most of the larger ranches like Henry Hooker's Sierra Bonita Ranch are further to the northeast in the Sulphur Springs Valley, not that Angelina and Roberto recognize any of these places. For them, they're nothing more than unfamiliar locations on the horizon.

Roberto dismounts and removes some of Murrieta's liniment from his saddlebag and rubs it into his aching hands. Angelina has him remove his tattered coat and shirt, and she applies the ointment and a mixture of Abuelita's herbs to the wounds on his chest and back. She kisses him gently and together they look for flat ground back among the trees to make camp. Once a suitable location is found, Roberto removes the saddles and ties off the horses, and then lays out the horse blankets on a bed of pine needles. He lies down and Angelina covers him with her serape, and before she can kiss him good night, Roberto falls fast asleep.

\*See appendix A, section 6.

## Chapter Twenty-seven

Roberto wakes to find his arms wrapped around Angelina who's crawled under the serape and cuddled up next to him. In order to stay warm, he supposes. Certain things in life gave him a sense of peace and an appreciation for living, the smell of a freshly cut hay field, a newborn foal, a sunset out on the desert horizon--this felt like all of those things put together. The realization that today, if everything goes according to plan, he and Angelina could be husband and wife fills him with anticipation, and he's convinced he would do anything she asked of him if he could only wake up every morning holding her like he is right now.

The day calls out in earnest, beckoning with its own importance and fraught with danger, but Roberto can't bring himself to infringe on this moment. Another few minutes won't make a difference, he figures. But sooner than he would've preferred, Angelina wakes and turns to face him. "Anoche soñé contigo y esta mañana no me quiero despertar," she says.

"Eres tan linda como una flor, y cada día te quiero más que ayer y menos que mañana," Roberto responds.

Angelina holds Roberto tightly and kisses him sweetly. "Estoy desesperadamente enamorado de ti," she whispers.

"Te ame desde el momento en que puse mis ojos en ti, and today we will marry. Truly, I am the most blessed man alive."

"You got that right, cowboy, and don't you forget it," Angelina chides.

"What were you saying?" Roberto laughs.

Angelina feigns indifference and pulls away coyly. Roberto pulls her back in close and kisses her playfully. "You must be starving," he says. "I'll start a fire."

"Well, I did have a couple of Abuelita's tamales last night, but I could eat."

Roberto collects kindling and firewood while Angelina retrieves the coffee and provisions the sisters had packed away in their saddlebags, and in no time the smell of coffee fills the air. Roberto never liked the taste of coffee, but he loves the smell. Breakfast consists of hard-boiled eggs, fritas, and salt pork which Angelina scrambles up and mixes with salsa, making a nice country breakfast.

It feels so right, just the two of them together, enjoying each other's company; the whole morning has the feel of a vacation in the country, although neither of them has ever been on a vacation before. Vacations were something rich folks like the Terrazas and Creels took, not orphans and peasants like Roberto and Angelina. Roberto thought he was going on a vacation of sorts when he volunteered to assist Señor Vasquez at the hacienda--a vacation from school anyway, and although he was hoping for a bit of adventure, what he got was the adventure of a life time and then some. The only problem is, their so-called adventure isn't over yet and Roberto's beginning to wonder if it will ever end.

"Let's just stay right here," Angelina muses.

"¿Que?"

"Sí. We can clear out this plateau and build a log cabin, raise a family of mountaineers."

"Live happily ever after, I suppose?"

"Why not?"

"You know very well why not."

"The pox on that old charlatan, El Hechicero. Who does he think he is anyway?"

"He thinks he's the Moctezuma."

"Oh Roberto, will we ever be free of that monster?"

"If what the legends say are true, we'll be free of him by sunset. Venga, mi amor--nuestra libertad espera."

Seeking to avoid contact with any undesirables, Angelina and Roberto find an old Apache trail and descend the northeast side of the Mule Mountains and across the more desolate northern region of the San Pedro Valley. Unchecked open-range cattle ranching and the subsequent drought it produces has laid waste to this once-rich grassland, and very little evidence of the wildlife which abounded here remains. By mid morning, they arrive at the foothills near the southern end of the Dragoon Mountains and skirt around the eastern edge of the foothills before beginning their ascent from March Pass Canyon up to Cochise Peak. Halfway up from the canyon floor, the landscape levels out for a bit and a natural spring affords them an opportunity to water the horses.

It's been five years since the US government reneged on yet another Indian treaty, removing the Chokonen tribe of the Chiricahua Apache from the Apache Pass reservation and their sacred homeland which included the Dragoon Mountains, and exiled them to the

Mescalero Apache reservation in Ruidoso, New Mexico. Nevertheless, the idea that remnants of the feared band of Apache, once led by the notorious Indian chief Cochise may still be lurking behind these incredible protrusions of spiraling granite, keeps Roberto's head on a swivel. When they reach the summit, they can see a higher peak to the north, but reaching it means retreating the way they'd come. They reach the next trail to the north about halfway down, and something in Roberto's gut tells him this could be the way. He isn't sure why; maybe he's being overly optimistic, but whatever the reason, he has a good feeling about the place.

A little more than a mile up this new trail, Angelina and Roberto come to a area thick with sycamore trees, where the rock formations provide the perfect natural cover for an ambush or defense against intruders. "This must be the Cochise Stronghold Father Suastegui was telling us about," Angelina whispers.

"Why are you whispering?"

"I don't know. It feels like a holy place, like we're in a church or something."

"I know what you mean. I feel it, too."

Roberto dismounts, climbs up to the top of one of the large stone pillars, and takes a look around, but to his dismay there are three peaks, each one approximately equidistant away, one to the southeast, another to the southwest, and the third to the northwest. Still further to the northwest is an even higher peak, but Roberto is certain this is the center of the maze. After an hour or more of searching without result, Angelina suggests a new tack. "I remember Hokak saying we need to start at the highest point."

"I'm not sure about that; it feels so right here."

"I agree, mi amor, but doesn't it seem if it were around here, the Apache would have discovered it before now and destroyed it as they did the lost mission in Santa Catalina?"

"You have a point there, mi amor. What do you suggest?"

"I think we should make our way to the northern peak and follow out the maze from there. If we don't find anything, we can return here."

Being at a loss, Roberto can't think of a better idea. "Alright then, off we go."

The climb down and back up to the northern Dragoons is proving much more difficult, and several times the explorers are forced to descend in order to advance any higher. This area of the Dragoons is much more thickly populated with oak and piñon, juniper and manzanita, as well as sycamore and even cottonwood trees. More than once, the warning rattle of a sidewinder or other variety of venomous serpent causes the horses to balk and attempt to bolt forcing Angelina and Roberto to steady them and alter their course, but their determination remains strong and undaunted. They arrive at the summit just about mid afternoon.

Roberto surveys the significant landmarks they can see from the summit and Angelina makes an observation. "If the peak we were on at first is at the opposite side of the maze, then the center of the maze could be at Cochise Stronghold after all."

"That makes sense. We'll use the distance from there to calculate the circumference and take it around."

On this line, Angelina and Roberto begin to traverse from the west to the east in a circular trajectory around the northern peak, up and over each ridge, searching from the left to the right. The north-facing slopes are extra difficult, having more trees and foliage than the south-facing slopes, and it only gets tougher as they progress back around to the north. Directly to the east, perhaps a mile or so from the northern peak, they come upon a spring, which provides a much-needed water break and a brief respite. Feeling an increase in urgency, Angelina offers up a few prayers for grace and guidance, and they continue on.

The terrain gets persistently more strenuous as the vegetation thickens, and the horses' footing descending the north slopes is often treacherous, but both Angelina and Roberto stay steadfast, encouraging one another. Unfortunately, they complete their present course without finding any sign of the lost mission, and Roberto can't hide his disappointment. "Well, we can start again in the morning on the south peak. For now, we should find a place to bed down for the night."

"Don't worry, mi amor. We'll find the mission; I'm sure of it," Angelina reassures him.

"I know, I was just hoping we'd be married by now, is all."

"What's one day matter? We have our whole lives together; nothing can change that."

"You're right, mi amor. When did you get so wise?"

"Me? I'm not wise."

"Yes, you are. Who was the one who thought to cover herself in gold and silver and make el Azteca Culto think she was one of their goddesses?"

"Are you kidding me? I was delirious; I didn't know what I was doing. I certainly didn't know it would have the effect it did."

"Well, what about the way you took care of me at the infirmary, or the way all the little children flock to you everywhere we go, or the way you're always making me feel like the most blessed man in the world?"

"What do those things have to do with wisdom?"

"I'll tell you what they have to do with wisdom. Your wisdom is like the wisdom of the Shulamite maiden in the Song of Songs. In fact, you're like her in many ways."

"I've always loved her story, and if you think I'm anything like she was, then maybe I am wise--wise enough to fall in love with you anyway."

"See what I mean? You've done it again, mi amor."

Roberto laughs and Angelina smiles. She really has done it again, though; Roberto was feeling better and his hope had been restored. They make their way back to the spring they found earlier and prepare camp, taking the time to wash up in the cool water. When night falls, the sky is full of stars, and Angelina takes the time to show Roberto where all the visible

constellations are. He knows some of them, but Angelina knows them all--Ursa Major and Minor, Draco, Cepheus, Cassiopeia, Camelopardalis, Leo Major and Minor, Links, Perseus, Andromeda, and Pegasus to the north, Hydra, Cancer, Gemini, Canis Minor, Auriga, Taurus, Aries, Triangulum, and Pisces across the center of the sky, Monoceros, Orion, Cetus, Pyxis, Canis Major, Puppis, Columbia, Lepus, Eridanus, and Fornax to the south. She even points out Jupiter and Mars, but the most fascinating for Roberto is the Milky Way Galaxy. The longer they lie there staring up at the sky, the more stars come into view--far too many to count, like the sands of the sea.

"Which one is the North Star?" Roberto asks.

"The North Star is Polaris—see, right there." She points to a lone bright star low in the northern sky. "Do you know why it's called the North Star?"

"Because it's in the north," he guesses.

Angelina smiles. "It is in the north, but really they call it the North Star because if we were at the North Pole and looked straight up, Polaris would be the star we'd see. There's a South Star too, but it's not as easy to find."

"You know what stars I love most?" Roberto asks, looking at Angelina intently.

"What stars are those?"

"The stars I love most are the stars I see shining in your eyes."

Angelina blushes, and Roberto kisses her softly. They embrace and kiss passionately, falling ever deeper and deeper in love.

The morning comes soon enough, and Roberto is awake before the dawn, holding on to Angelina for the better part of an hour before rising and getting a fire started. Their food supplies are running low, and Roberto is feeling the pressure to find the lost mission. After breakfast, they make their way to Cochise peak and begin measuring out the distance to the center of the maze. From here, the common theme in finding the eastern stronghold is once again in the same trajectory as they traverse around the apex. They renew their search in and around the stronghold but find nothing, and Roberto wonders what they're missing. Sensing Roberto's frustration, Angelina suggests they head down to the southern peak to see if they can find something there, but inwardly neither of them believes they will.

By mid-afternoon they're back where they started, no closer to finding even the faintest of clues. After watering the horses at the lower spring, they eat the last of their provisions and decide to return to the stronghold and have one more look around. Out of desperation, Roberto leads them up one of the Apache trails which heads off toward a lower peak to the west. When they reach the top of the ridge, they can see there are two large rock formations an equal distance to the west and east from their present location.

"I think we should search those rocks over there which look like a dome," Angelina suggests. "What do you think?"

"I don't know; flip a coin."

"Come on now, we've come too far to leave it up to chance. Which way will it be, my handsome man?"

"Alright, we can start over on the dome over there to the east, but if we don't find anything, we're going to have to hunt for food."

"Whether we find anything or not, where going over to that town over there and get a nice dinner and a room in their best hotel."

"Oh, really? How do you figure?"

"You just let me worry about that."

Roberto gives Angelina a cockeyed look; she never ceases to amaze him. They progress along the ridge and back down across the trail before making their way up the rocky slopes, which lead to a series of huge granite slabs. To Angelina, they look like a large loaf of old-fashioned bread separated into pieces; to Roberto, they remind him of a bunch of pigs trying to squeeze into a feeding trough.

As the weary couple gets closer, the stones grow larger and larger until they arrive on the western end to find the rocks are over three hundred feet long and thirty to fifty feet high. Nothing stands out from this side, and from the top there is little more to see than the blanched sedimentary surface of the dinosaur-like monoliths, but when they come around to the eastern side, they can see much larger openings between the granite slabs. Moving from the south edge to the north, the gaps between the huge sections of quartz and feldspar-infused granite slates becomes increasingly larger, and after an hour or so of scouring each crevice, they come to a wide plaza-like enclosure between three of the gigantic stone slabs, which are heavily lined with oak, cottonwood, and sycamore trees. The density of the trees is so thick Roberto has to hack away with his knife until his arms are spent, but finally, he breaks through to find an inner garden-like meadow which looks unnaturally well manicured.

The trees here have been trimmed up high, and even though no sunshine can penetrate the limbs and leaves above, the grounds underneath show all the signs of careful nurturing. Angelina and Roberto dismount and walk their horses for about forty or fifty paces until the sound of the horses' shoes against stone alerts them to a walkway underneath which winds through two stone columns carved by what must have been an expert sculptor. Beyond the pillars, a double wooden door of the old Spanish style is embedded in the enormous granite wall of the mountain side. On the right-side door is a large hanging brass door knocker, and on the left side, carved into the door, is a series of four lines written in Latin:

*"Ut omnibus, qui huc intrasti cave sinceri  
sola mundo corde potest sperare superesse  
reliqua voluntas expirant sub purgatorio igne  
succendent."*



"It's written in Latin," Roberto announces. "I knew I should have paid more attention in class. Can you read what it says?"

"It says something about all who enter must be sincere and only the pure of heart can enter, and then something about purgatory fire."

Angelina and Roberto look at each other, wondering what to do next. Roberto tries the doors, but they're locked. He clanks the knocker against the wood loudly, but no one comes to answer it. They look around for another entrance, and then Angelina catches sight of someone moving off to the right behind a rock in a brown hooded robe with a rope belt like the old Franciscan priests wear. She calls out to him, but as quickly as he had materialized, he's gone.

"Did you see that man?"

"What man?" Roberto asks.

"The man who went behind those rocks."

"I didn't see anyone."

Angelina points to the rock formations. "He was right there."

Suddenly, both Angelina and Roberto hear dozens of voices in Spanish yelling back and forth up above the trees, and the sound of a rifle shot echoing across the rock formations and down the mountain side.

## Chapter Twenty-eight

El Hechicero and his warlocks narrowly escaped a full-scale confrontation with Geronimo and his Apache in the Huachuca Mountains, killing both of their scouts, but wisely retreated when Pedro Salazar reported discovering a hundred warriors in a meadow north of their settlement. The unavoidable consequence, however, was the wizard and his men were forced to travel south back into Mexico and then east around the Mule Mountains before being able to continue north again through the Sulfur Springs Valley. It was only by sheer luck they were able to pick up the trail of the Ixiptlas at the northern end of the Mule Mountains which led them here to the Dragoon Mountains. Although once the tracks were found, it was easy enough following these two; the horseshoes of the Ixiptlas' Criollos were a dead give away. They probably weren't even aware of the fact that Mexicans and Americans don't shoe their horses the same way. What he can't figure out though, is why they've been traipsing around these mountains and rocks in circles--it doesn't make any sense. They have to know he's in pursuit of them, so why haven't they run back to the Hacienda de Encinillas? Whatever the reason, it won't matter a hill of beans after today because he's got them now, and he won't let them get away this time.

The warning shot draws all of El Hechicero's men to the outcropping of boulders where Angelina and Roberto are frantically trying to gain entrance into the Lost Mission of the Sacred Heart. Once assembled, the would-be Nuevo Azteca ruler sternly reminds los Brujos Mejores, "I want them taken alive!"

Meanwhile, Roberto and Angelina have combed every crevice and stone looking for a way into the mission to no avail. Roberto bangs on the door again and again, but no one answers.

"Why won't they let us in?" Angelina cries.

"Perhaps we needed to be more penitent and prayerful like we've come on a pilgrimage, but there's no time left--we're going to have to make a run for it."

"Make a run for it! Where are we going to run to?"

"To the town you've been talking about, we'll go around the first pass to the south and then head west. There's got to be a sheriff in town, someone who can help us."

"It's got to be ten miles from here at least, we'll never make it all the way there before they catch us. Besides, how do we know El Hechicero hasn't already bought them off?"

"Do you got a better idea?"

"Have a better idea."

"What?"

"It's do you have a better idea, you said, do you got a better idea."

"Are kidding me right now?"

"It's just proper English, that's all."

"Okay, do you have a better idea?"

"No."

"¡Ay Dios mío!"

Angelina starts to cry. "Lo siento, mi amor. I get a little crazy when I'm scared."

Roberto takes Angelina in his arms. "It's okay, angel. I'm scared too, but we're sitting ducks if we stay here. We've got to--we have to make a run for it."

They both smile, and Roberto kisses her tenderly. "Now let's mount up and give them a run for their money."

Angelina looks up into Roberto's soft brown eyes. "Will you pray with me before we go?" she asks.

"It would be my privilege, mi amor."

Angelina and Roberto kneel before the cross engraved on the stone path between the pillars and bow their heads in prayer. After two or three minutes, they rise and approach their horses, but just as they're about to mount up, they hear the creaking sound of wooden doors opening. As they turn to look back to where the sound came from, a small Spanish man in the traditional robes of the Franciscan missionary priests steps from around the stone pillars and beckons them to follow him. They start to run toward him, but he motions for them to stop.

"Traer sus caballos."

"Sí, señor," Roberto acknowledges.

Angelina and Roberto quickly retrieve their horses and return to follow the priest through the wooden doors which are now wide open and appear much larger than they did

from the outside, and into the interior of the Lost Mission of the Sacred Heart.

#

El Hechicero's men, with machetes in hand, hack and hack at the underlying growth and low-lying limbs of the trees which are keeping them from their objective, but no matter how many branches they chop away, they can't get any further than a few feet. Those who get beyond the first row of sycamores find themselves trapped and can neither go forward nor retreat the way they came, and the frightful petitions for help of those caught in the tangles of the miraculous growing vines fill the air and reverberate through the mountain pass. The captain of the guard reports to the old conjurer, "Tlamacazqui, we can't penetrate the wall of trees; there's some kind of spell prohibiting our advance."

"Take me to these impenetrable trees," El Hechicero hisses sarcastically. "I want to see them for myself."

When the sorcerer arrives at the forest blocking their way, his men are desperately trying to free their entombed comrades. "What seems to be the problem?"

"It's the limbs, Tlamacazqui; as soon as we cut back the branches, they immediately grow back."

El Hechicero grabs the machete out of the warlock's hand and begins slicing furiously at the enchanted brush, working his way deeper than any of the other men, but he fails to reach the meadow before his strength runs out. In a panic, he retreats, thrashing his way out with the last of his energy. Angrily, he stands for a moment catching his breath, but then abruptly turns to Pedro Salazar and demands, "Set the trees ablaze!"

"But Tlamacazqui, won't the Ixiptlas be consumed in the fire?"

"We don't even know if they're in there. If we couldn't make it through this mess, how could they?"

Salazar points to the trail of horse tracks leading through the forest. "I can assure you, señor, their tracks go this way, right through here."

El Hechicero scowls menacingly. "You heard me, burn it down!"

"Sí, Tlamacazqui, as you command."

Los Brujos Mejores recover the last of their imprisoned confederates while the free men collect piles of more flammable brush, and Salazar orders the men to light the fires. El Hechicero watches as bundle after bundle of brush is set aflame and cast into the forest without result, and no matter how large or hot the bonfire, not a blade of grass within the perimeter of the three granite slabs is even the least bit singed.

The defiant necromancer calls his men back and steps forward to stand in front of the forest, looking at it as if trying to truly understand the nature of it. "All of you men, gather as many flat rocks as you can find--andele!"

When the men return with the stones, El Hechicero carefully builds a hexagon-shaped

fire pit block by block, and then methodically places each log at precise angles before igniting the fire therein. He begins chanting at an ever-increasing volume, occasionally letting out blood-curdling shrieks not like any natural sound produced by man nor beast, and in a language equally foreign in nature. From his satchel, he removes a number of items of rare and ancient alchemy, casting each into the flames in a very specific order only he alone knows. His incantations grow louder still, until there rises a billow of smoke in a plume above his head in a hue not seen before during his previous invocations. A shadowy form takes shape within the hazy nebula, and the apparition begins to writhe back and forth in a manner which the thaumaturge tries to emulate.

The peculiar ceremony continues on well after the sun sets, and the conjuror's face undergoes many changes, which render him increasingly more grotesque and disfigured. The aberrations continue until El Hechicero is unrecognizable and his guttural cries and hypnotic movements reach a frenzied pitch, but then suddenly, a bright light flashes across the sky, slamming directly into the fire, causing the burning embers and unhallowed fire pit to explode, blowing the demonic specter out across the night sky, and a devastating mixture of molten ash and pulverized stone rains down on the fallen false priest.

Without thinking or attempting to evaluate what he has just witnessed, Salazar retrieves a horse blanket and races to his general's side, wrapping him up to extinguish his burning clothes. Charred chunks of wood chips are embedded in his skin, and his face and hands are red and blistered. "Bring me my canteen!" Salazar yells out.

The captain pours his canteen over the fallen wizard, putting out his smoldering flesh, and lifts his head to give him a drink. El Hechicero begins to take some water and stirs from his concussed state. "What happened?"

#

Inside the mission, Angelina and Roberto stand in reverent awe at the sight of the vast and spectacular nature of the interior. The entrance is domed above with large oak beams framing the intricate latices of mahogany between them. To the right is a long rectangular hallway leading off to other chambers, and to the left is a wall with a marble basin stoup and a cherub of the Angel Gabriel above it gently dispensing holy water from a marble urn. Directly in front is an ornately framed doorway which leads into the outer left-hand aisle of the sanctuary. Whether in a state of veneration or by habit, both Angelina and Roberto dip their fingers in the basin and cross themselves and administer the holy water to their foreheads in the customary fashion of their faith. Kneeling at the door, they cross themselves again before entering the sanctuary. At some point, they become aware the padre has proceeded down the hall to the right with their horses, but neither of them makes a move to follow him. Instead, they enter the sanctuary and advance through the nave, falling to their knees in the transept before the chancel steps while staring up adoringly through the apse at the life-sized image of the Beloved Savior nailed to the cross above a marble and gilded bronze altar. The crucifix is completely

carved from one single piece of rare teak wood, even the nails in the representative Christ's hands and feet.

Along the sanctuary walls, the same oak and mahogany design as the hallway creates the look of a wooden church, but the beautiful stained-glass windows depicting the stations of the cross reveal that beyond are the granite and quartz walls of the mountainside. On the opposite wall, stained-glass windows tell the story of the five principal events in the life of Jesus, the saving truths of Christianity, and moments in the life of the patron saint, Ignatius Loyola, and the Order he faithfully initiated. On either side of the transept, half domes like the apse before them enclose two side altars where a single votive candle burns in each candle stand. Appearing out of nowhere, the padre announces in answer to their unspoken question, "The one on the left burns as a prayer offering for the hopeless sinner, and the one on the right burns for you, Angelina Rivas and Roberto Luna..."

"Pero, how did you know who we are?" Angelina inquires.

"I have been waiting for the two of you for a long time."

With his hood drawn back now, they can see the padre is a very old man of indeterminable age; the lines and wrinkles on his face are as deep and formidable as the large slate rocks of the dome they find themselves in. His hands are likewise of the same consistency, and his fingernails are as thick and polished as the marble altar. From the look of him, he must be hundreds of years old, but his aura gives off a bright healthy continence which gives Angelina and Roberto the feeling they can trust him completely.

"Waiting for us?" Roberto stammers.

"Yes, my son, I have been patiently sequestered here for over three hundred years."

The mysterious padre watches as the long-awaited couple try and assimilate the information they have just received. "I am Fray Juan de Padilla. It was by the hand of God I established this mission in June of the year of the King, 1541."

"1541!" Angelina blurts out. "But it's 1880."

"Is it now? One tends to lose track of time when you're my age. But, of course, I always knew you would come, faithful to the end, as it were."

"You knew we would come, Angelina and I?"

"It is the whole reason I am here, but let us not spend any more time contemplating the mind of God and proceed with faith into the blessed communion for which we have been called here. If you will follow me, I will show you to your rooms."

Angelina and Roberto follow Fray Padilla across the nave and out of the sanctuary through a second passageway to the hall beyond. The candles along the walls, which only moments before were dark, now glow brightly, while the candles behind them go out, and as the hall they are in ends and another longer perpendicular hall begins, Fray Padilla points out two doors indicating these are the rooms of this ancient rectory he's been referring to. "You

have an hour before dinner, so please make yourselves comfortable. There is a bathing room at the end of the hall; the water is cold, but it is quite refreshing. I have taken the liberty of securing your personal effects. You will find them in your rooms, and if there is anything else you require, please do not hesitate to ask."

Angelina and Roberto manage to pull themselves together long enough to remember their manners, thanking the padre for everything, and then they excitedly enter their rooms. The room is simple, except for the oak doors and beams which have the same mahogany latticework displayed in the hallway. Against one wall, a small oak table with a porcelain chamber pot sits next to a single oak bed, and on the other wall is a matching mirrorless oak armoire. On the walls are two pictures, the "Madonna and Child with the Saints" by the Italian artist Piero di Cosimo, and the "Sacred Heart of Jesus" by Italian artist Pompeo Bartoni. On the inside of the door is a bronze crucifix. Angelina opens the door of the armoire to find her wedding dress hanging up inside; moreover, it is shining white with nary a wrinkle or any other sign of the dusty trail. There are soft cotton towels and washcloths in the top drawer, and she finds the rest of her belongings folded and placed neatly in the bottom drawer. She sits on the bed and looks around the room, wondering how any of this could possibly be real.

Roberto is in his room sitting on his bed thinking the very same thing as Angelina--he has always assumed he believed in miracles and the power of the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of those who are called according to His will, but this is the real thing. The overwhelming question for him now is why? He came here to marry the woman he has fallen head over heels in love with, and everything he has endured up to now has been a testament to that singular goal, but now that he's here, the realization his upcoming nuptials are merely the beginning leaves Roberto both graciously humbled and apprehensively perplexed.

Angelina takes the towel and washcloth out of the drawer and walks down the hall to the bathing room. A wall of rough stone lets a natural flow of fresh spring water wash down the rocks to be captured in a marble basin suspended eight feet above a large, shallow marble tub with a drain in the center. Angelina slides the wooden door latch and disrobes. It feels good to wash away all the dust and dirt she has collected on her person over the last four days, not to mention sleeping on the ground the past three nights. Angelina steps out of the tub and towels off; in this room, as in her bedroom, there are no mirrors, and she is reminded of the priestly admonition to not put stock in earthly treasures like beauty which fades with age, but in more heavenly treasures, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Roberto washes up after Angelina and the two of them return to their rooms, one after the other, to find their outfits cleaned, pressed, and waiting for them on their beds. Roberto's suit appears as new as it was when he first put it on back at the mission in San Xavier. After dressing, Roberto knocks on Angelina's door. "Good evening señorita. May I escort you to dinner?"

"Why thank you, señor. What a gentleman you are."

In the dining room, a single table sits against the back wall with a white linen tablecloth and two chairs. On the table sit two candles in sterling silver candle holders, and a small blue glass vase with one white and one red rose. On the walls are a variety of classic Ascension artworks by Giotto, Dossi, Tisi, Mantegna, Perugino, and Garafalo. Fray Padilla enters from a side door and bids Angelina and Roberto be seated.

"You will not be eating with us?" Angelina asks.

"No, no. I have not needed earthly sustenance for many years now; you will be dining alone this evening. This is a time for you to relax and enjoy each other's company. I apologize I cannot provide you with a little more ambiance, but I think you will find the cuisine most enjoyable. The first course is ready, so please sit--sit."

Roberto pulls out Angelina's chair for her. "Thank you, señor," she replies.

"De nada, mi amor."

Roberto sits down across from her and they look into each other's eyes, and both of their expressions reflect the wonderment of their circumstances. Fray Padilla enters with two plates of fresh garden salad greens, two wine glasses, and a bottle of red wine. He serves the salads and uncorks the wine bottle pouring out a half glass for each of them. The second course is a beef steak with steamed vegetables and hot bread rolls. Their host bids them "buen provecho" and then returns to the kitchen.

Roberto cuts into his steak and takes a bite. "It's very good."

Angelina does likewise. "Yes, delicious."

"What do you make of all this?"

"I'm not sure what to make of it, but I'm very thankful we're here and not trying to escape the clutches of a madman."

"You can say that again. It's funny, though; all that craziness seems so far away in this place. Like we're finally safe and nothing can harm us."

"I agree, I feel it too."

"Are you nervous?"

"About marrying?"

"Yes."

"A little, but I'm ready. I love you and I am looking forward to being your wife and spending the rest of my life with you."

"As am I willing and ready to be your husband, mi amor. I love you."

Roberto lifts his glass and Angelina responds in kind. "To our love and blessed union," Roberto toasts.

The smitten couple touch glasses. "Salud."

"Salud."



Fray Padilla enters with a dessert of flan topped by a delicate caramel sauce. "Salud. How is everything?"

"Everything is wonderful, muy sabroso," Angelina compliments.

"Sí, delicioso," Roberto adds.

"Well, I really think you're going to enjoy this. I'm a little rusty, but I had the recipe written down."

Fray Padilla stands there watching them, and they get the drift he wants them to try it while he waits, so they dig in. "Mmm, sí, very good," Roberto smiles.

"Yes, fantastic," Angelina offers.

"Wonderful, I'm glad you like it. Well, I will bid you a good night, and I will see you in the morning."

And with that, Fray Padilla exits the room without another word. Angelina and Roberto sit silently for a moment and then burst out laughing, the laughter of joyful surprise. "Can you believe this? It's so surreal."

"Beautifully surreal," Roberto answers.

Angelina and Roberto finish their dessert and sit for a while talking; then they walk down the hall to their rooms. Roberto kisses Angelina tenderly. "Good night, angel. I'll see you in the morning."

"I am counting the hours--until then, mi amor."

## Chapter Twenty-nine

Fray Padilla wakes Angelina and Roberto, and after breakfast he gives them a brief itinerary of the wedding mass and ceremony. The couple then return to their rooms to prepare. Roberto puts on his traditional vaquero outfit, the one he had worn at the fiesta in Trincheras, and then combs his hair one more time before leaving his room for the sanctuary. Angelina puts on the wedding gown she received from Margarita and pins her hair up with bows and ribbons.

Fray Padilla knocks on her door. "Are you ready, my dear?"

"As ready as I'll ever be," she smiles.

Together they walk to the sanctuary and down the nave toward Roberto, who is waiting in front of the chancel steps. Roberto can hardly believe how celestially beautiful Angelina looks. Fray Padilla sings "Gloria," with a voice like an angel's. "Gloria to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth."

Angelina and Roberto's eyes meet and they join in together singing, "We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory. Lord God, Heavenly King, O God, Almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father. You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us, you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer, you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us..."

Fray Padilla arrives with Angelina in the transept passage and he releases her arm so Roberto can take her hand, and together they proceed up the chancel steps to stand in front of the high altar and communion table. Fray Padilla turns to face Angelina and Roberto while they continue to sing the final stanza. "For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Fa--ther. A--

men.”

Together, Angelina and Roberto cross themselves and kneel on a red velvet hassock near the first step of the apse, bowing their heads while Fray Padilla prays, “O God, who in creating the human race willed that man and wife should be one, join, we pray, in a bond of inseparable love these your servants who are to be united in the covenant of Marriage, so as you make their love fruitful, they may become, by your grace, witnesses to charity itself. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. We ask you this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”

Fray Padilla motions for Angelina and Roberto to rise and then removes the Bible from the communion table and hands it to Roberto, out of which he reads the first of two scriptures. “A reading from the Old Testament book of Genesis: 'And the Lord God said, It is not good the man should be alone, I will make a helpmate for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helpmate for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, this is at last bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.' The Word of the Lord.”

To which they all respond, “Thanks be to God.”

Roberto hands the Bible to Angelina, and then Fray Padilla sings, “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.”

Angelina and Roberto respond, “I will bless the Lord at all times.”

“His praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the Lord, the lowly will hear me and be glad.”

“I will bless the Lord at all times.”

Angelina opens the Bible and begins to read. “A reading from the New Testament book of First Corinthians: 'Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you a more excellent way. If I speak with the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am but a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily

angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease, where there are tongues, they will be stilled, where there is knowledge, it will pass away.' The Word of the Lord."

To which they all respond, "Thanks be to God."

Angelina hands the Bible back to Fray Padilla and then he sings, "No one has ever seen God, if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us."

To which together they sing, "Alleluia, Alleluia, Allelu--ia."

Fray Padilla takes up the Bible and opens it. "Angelina and Roberto, my sister and brother, may the Lord be with you.

To which they respond, "And also with you."

"A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew,"

"Glory to you, O Lord."

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.' The Gospel of the Lord."

"Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ."

Angelina and Roberto kneel again on the hassock and Fray Padilla delivers the homily. "Angelina, fair and lovely as a moonlit night, Angelina, and Roberto, handsome and brave as the Angel Michael himself, Roberto, the Gospel speaks to you today of the blessings of the Lord, and with them come the inner peace of knowing in whose hands you rest. The world outside has delivered you here in a whirlwind of turmoil, but I want you to leave those events behind now so you can be here in this moment. Today is not like any other day before it, nor any other day yet to come, because today is the day you become one flesh, no longer two, but one, one mind, one body, one spirit, and one soul.

"Based on the miraculous circumstances which have brought you here, I can only imagine the blessed existence the Lord has planned for you upon this earth. The question you must resolve for yourselves Angelina and Roberto is, are you ready to stand together no matter what life throws at you? For, this is not a covenant to be entered into lightly; it is a sacred bond no other man nor the Devil himself can put asunder. Only you can break these holy bonds.

"Alas, God has given us all free will. How will you respond to this heavenly gift? Why do I ask these things? It is precisely this: to whom God has given much, much is required. You have been bought with a great price and now your lives are not your own, but the Lord's, in whose grace and mercy you now reside. Only you are no longer responsible just for the gifts He has given you as individuals; now you share the responsibility for the gifts He has given your beloved. Nevertheless, fear not, as if these things should only add to your burden--no, instead I say rejoice, rejoice and be glad because now there are two of you, and two can do anything they set their minds to. Why? Because where two or more are gathered in His name, there the Lord is also, and all things are possible for those who are called according to His purpose. Herein lies the key, Angelina and Roberto; be about the Father's business, for He has called you out from among all His people, and these miracles which brought you here will follow you all the days of your life. Stand with me now."

Angelina and Roberto rise up obediently, and Fray Padilla walks around them so he's now facing the apse, and then has them turn and face him, "Angelina and Roberto, you have come together in this church so the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the Church's minister. Christ abundantly blesses this love. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament so you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity. And so, in the presence of the Lord, I ask you to state your intentions. Angelina and Roberto, have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?"

Angelina and Roberto both answer separately, "I have."

"Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?"

To which they answer, "I will."

"Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?"

Again they respond, "I will."

Fray Padilla then says, "Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, face each other, join your right hands, and declare your consent before God and His Church."

"I, Roberto, take you, Angelina, to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life."

"I, Angelina, take you, Roberto, to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life."

"You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord in His goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings. What God has joined, men must not divide."

Angelina and Roberto respond, "Amen."

The part of the ceremony which has worried Roberto for some time now is upon them,

and he is not sure what to do or say, but just when he is about to confess, Fray Padilla reaches into the pocket of his robe and removes two rings. Angelina and Roberto cannot believe their eyes. The rings are gold with the bride's ring hosting an incredible diamond solitaire. "Lord, bless and consecrate Angelina and Roberto in their love for each other. May these rings be a symbol of true faith in each other, and always remind them of their love. Through Christ our Lord."

Angelina and Roberto respond, "Amen."

Fray Padilla hands them each the appropriate ring and Roberto joyfully places Angelina's ring on her ring finger. "Angelina, take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

When he is done, Angelina places Roberto's ring on his ring finger. "Roberto, take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Fray Padilla gives the prayer of the gifts. "Lord, hear our prayers and accept the gifts we offer for Angelina and Roberto. Today you have made them one in the sacrament of marriage. May the mystery of Christ's unselfish love, which we celebrate in this Eucharist, increase their love for you and for each other. We ask this through Christ our Lord."

Fray Padilla conducts the Liturgy of the Eucharist and Angelina and Roberto can hardly remember singing the Sanctus, their desire to have their first kiss as husband and wife is overwhelming. The padre breaks the bread as the newlyweds sing the Lamb of God, after which Fray Padilla shares the Eucharist bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ. The padre then concludes the wedding mass by giving the prayer of blessings. "May God the eternal Father keep you of one heart in love for one another, that the peace of Christ may dwell in you and abide always in your home."

Angelina and Roberto respond, "Amen."

"May you be blessed in your children, have solace in your friends, and enjoy true peace with everyone."

"Amen."

"May you be witnesses in the world to God's charity, so the afflicted and needy who have known your kindness may one day receive you thankfully into the eternal dwelling of God. We ask this in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Finally all together they respond, "Amen."

Fray Padilla smiles broadly. "By the power vested in me by Our Lord Jesus Christ, I now pronounce you man and wife. Roberto, you may kiss your bride."

Roberto looks deeply into Angelina's eyes and they kiss--a long meaningful kiss, their first as husband and wife. The padre announces, "Let us adjourn to the dining room. I have something special prepared for you."

"This has all been so special--and the rings, how did you know about the rings?" Roberto asks.

"You forget where we are. Besides, it was easy enough for me; all I had to do was reach into my pocket."

Angelina admires her ring with a twinkle in her eye. "It's magnificent," she gushes.

In the dining room, a small but beautiful white cake sits on the table where they had dinner last evening. Fray Padilla pops the cork on a bottle of champagne and pours a glass for each of them. "A toast! To Angelina and Roberto, be ye kind to one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Remember equal partnerships are not made in heaven, they are made on earth, one choice at a time, one conversation at a time, one threshold crossing at a time. Salud."

Angelina and Roberto raise their glasses. "Salud."

"Ah, to be young again--you have your whole lives ahead of you. Where will you go from here?"

"Perhaps we'll go back to the Mission San Xavier del Bac," Angelina submits. "The Sisters of Saint Joseph have opened a hospital in Tucson, and Sister Monica suggested their may be a job for me there."

"Ah yes, I am aware the Bishop Salpointe has considerable historical interest in me."

"Bishop Salpointe is a wonderful man," Roberto adds. "He was instrumental in helping us find the mission."

"Was he now?"

"Yes he was," Angelina answers, "and he is very fond of Roberto."

"Let's have some cake, shall we?" Fray Padilla presents Angelina with a sterling silver cake knife, and she and Roberto cut the cake hand in hand. They feed each other a piece, avoiding the temptation to smoosh it into each other's face, and then Angelina serves the padre a piece.

After they have finished their cake and talk for a while, Fray Padilla tells Angelina and Roberto the time has come to prepare for their journey back to the Mission San Xavier del Bac or wherever the road takes them. "I suggest you spend the night in the town of Tombstone. The Grand Hotel has recently opened, and you should be able to find a nice room there."

Angelina and Roberto retire to their rooms and change back into the clothes they received from the sisters at the mission. When they emerge from their rooms, Fray Padilla is waiting for them with their horses. They proceed down the hallway to the wooden doors they first entered the mission from, and the doors open wide without anyone touching them. Once outside, Angelina and Roberto mount up and turn to Fray Padilla. "I don't know how to repay you for all you have done for us," Roberto confesses.

"You can repay me by taking care of this one," Fray Padilla says, taking Angelina's hand in

his. "She is truly a blessed child of Our Lord."

"I will, Padre," Roberto assures him. "You can count on me."

"Thank you, Father," Angelina says with tears in her eyes. "We will never forget you."

Angelina and Roberto turn their horses out toward the forest, and when they turn their heads around to say their final goodbyes, they find the padre is gone and any sign of the mission as well. No longer are there gardens, or pillars, or wooden doors; everything has disappeared.\*

\*See appendix A, section 7.



## Chapter Thirty

Angelina and Roberto look at each other and then stare back in stunned silence at what, only seconds ago, was the Lost Mission of the Sacred Heart. They've seen many amazing things these last sixteen hours which defy logic, but none so disconcerting or perplexing as this. Somehow, the idea the mission and Fray Padilla were right here in case something should go wrong had provided the reinforcement for the courage they needed to carry on. Had any of it been real? Angelina looks down at her right hand, and there on her finger is her wedding ring, reminding her it was not a dream. Seeing what she is looking at, Roberto looks down at his own wedding ring, and in this moment they know they are going to have to step out in faith. The future will answer the question as to whether they truly believe or not.

"I don't know what just happened or why," Roberto confesses, "but I do know we've been called by God to this task, and we owe it to ourselves, and everyone He has sent in our path to help us, not to back down now. If El Hechicero is out there waiting for us, I trust the Lord will deliver us. Are you with me?"

"As sure as I sit here today, mi amor," Angelina replies, "I am with you. Let's ride!"

#

El Hechicero wakes from a very disturbed sleep to find himself and los Brujos Mejores camped in the eastern stronghold. The warlocks have worked feverishly through the night on their seers burns with all the herbs and ointments at their disposal like the experienced curanderos they are, but nevertheless, he looks like death warmed over. Pedro Salazar brings fresh water to him and bends down to help him drink, but the surly wizard bats the canteen away. "I'm not an invalid; help me to my feet."

"Pero señor..."

The wizard thrusts out his hand more vigorously than one might expect, all things considered. "No buts, Pedro. Just get me up, damn you!"

The captain of the guard pulls El Hechicero to his feet by his arm and helps him with his boots, coat, and hat. "The Ixiptlas did not come out of the enchanted forest, as far as we know. I had scouts posted throughout the night. There were a few travelers in the valley below, but none of them came near the mountains."

"Get my horse and have the men break camp. We're going back up there."

"But Tlamacazqui, you are in no condition to travel..."

"Don't tell me what condition I'm in! Get my horse, and get the men ready now!"

Salazar commands the men to break camp and prepare to mount up, and then retrieves his and El Hechicero's horses. "If the old fart wants to kill himself, fine. I've had enough of his mouth anyway," he grumbles.

Salazar is walking back with the horses when he sees the Ixiptlas tearing down the mountainside with his scouts in hot pursuit. Trying to compose himself, he races over to El Hechicero, who is standing there watching the same scene. "Mount up!" Salazar shouts out to the men while pointing to Angelina and Roberto. "After them!"

The badly burnt-up old satanist, his captain Pedro Salazar, and the rest of los Brujos Mejores jump into their saddles as the Ixiptlas race through the stronghold and down the trail to the canyon below. Several of El Hechicero's men cut the fleeing newlyweds off, forcing them to head east and out through Cochise Canyon. Roberto keeps an ever-present watch on Angelina, but she is right on his heels, more than holding her own. He can see El Hechicero's warlocks are splitting up into three groups trying to out flank them on the north and south. In a bold move, Roberto spurs his big Criollo and cuts sharply to the south.

"To the south!" he warns Angelina, and she follows right behind him. Thankfully, the move pays off, as they beat the dogged pursuers on their right flank to the valley floor, but when they reach the southern end of the Dragoon Mountains, they can't quite get around their tormenters to the west so they're forced to hold their southern course.

Out on the valley floor, Roberto tries desperately to change directions to the east through the foothill and arroyo passes and then back south, hoping to get a large enough lead to make a westerly move, but to no avail. The horses are starting to get flagged and their pace is steadily decreasing, allowing the pursuers on their left flank to catch up; it won't be long before they're overtaken. Their options race through Roberto's mind, and after deleting the crazy, impossible, and pointless, he's left with slim to none and slim just rode out of town. They've already passed the 4 Bar Ranch, so there's no going back there, and if they keep going this way they'll certainly be overtaken in the southern Sulfur Springs Valley between the Mule Mountains and the Chiricahua Mountains to the east. Their only hope is to the west in Tombstone, he relents, so he gives his horse the spurs one more time, trying to veer west as much as they can get away with in the infinitesimal chance they can pull off a long sweeping semi circle back up to

the north.

While looking behind them in an effort to keep account of los Brujos Mejores, Angelina and Roberto are not aware of the shadowy figures which sit atop their horses far off in the distance just below the foothills of the Mule Mountains. Moreover, Roberto's current maneuver is leading them directly into the path of these unknown riders. By the time they turn and are able to focus in on the mysterious horsemen or even come to grips with the reality of their situation, it's too late to do anything about it.

Roberto tries to wipe his watery wind-ravaged eyes in order to get a better look at who they might be, but all he can make out is their horses. Whoever they are, their horses are predominantly painted mustangs, and for an instant the hope Hokak and his Tohono O'odham braves have come to rescue them fills him with a momentary bit of hope, "Could it possibly be?

Angelina yells out to him, "There's riders up ahead!"

"I see them!"

"Who do you think they are?"

"I don't know, angel, but pray they're friendly."

That's it, then--their decision is in, and they ride toward the company of strangers hoping beyond hope it works out for the best. Angelina and Roberto's spirits rise as they get closer and it becomes increasingly obvious these are Indians; unfortunately, little do they yet know, these Indians are not Hokak or the Tohono O'odham. A few hundred more yards and the cat's out of the bag. Roberto can see clearly these are Geronimo's Apache, at least a hundred of them or more.

The trail of dust the Ixiptlas are kicking up greatly hinders the visibility of El Hechicero and los Brujos Mejores, and when Pedro Salazar finally gets sight of the Apache, they're no more than three hundred yards away. Doing his best to get his men's attention, he signals for them to hold up, but he can do very little to stop them until they're within fifty yards. Of course, by this time the rest of los Brujos Mejores have seen them as well, and they all come to a collective halt, creating a colossal cloud of dust.

Angelina and Roberto ride straight up to Geronimo, slowing some twenty paces in front of the Apache chief, and from there proceed at a walk to settle within a few feet. They say nothing at first, waiting to speak until spoken to. "Greetings, Roberto," Geronimo calls out. "It is good to see you again. You left in such a hurry last time, we didn't have an opportunity to say goodbye."

"Greetings, Goyaalé. It is good to see you," Roberto replies. "I'm sorry about my hasty retreat, but I had urgent business elsewhere."

"I see. And how did it work out for you?"

"Very well, great chief; I was married just this morning." Roberto turns and motions Angelina to come forward. "I would like you to meet my wife, Angelina."

Angelina bows her head and curtsies from atop her saddle. "It is an honor, señor."

Geronimo acknowledges Angelina with a nod, but does not speak to her directly, as is the custom of his people. "She is most beautiful, Roberto."

"Thank you, señor."

"I take it these men are not members of the wedding party?"

"No, señor. They have been pursuing us for many days now--all the way from Barranca del Cobre, in fact."

"Then these are the men we are pursuing as well. It seems they followed you to the edge of our settlement and killed two of my warriors, and now your enemies have become our enemies."

"You don't know how relieved we are to hear that, señor."

Geronimo leads his warriors out to face their enemy, and the two companies stand across from one another at fifty paces. El Hechicero rides out with Pedro Salazar and stops halfway between the two groups of combatants. Geronimo and his chiefs ride out to hear their terms of engagement.

"Our fight is not with you," El Hechicero proclaims. "Give us the Ixiptlas and we will go in peace."

"You mean my son and my daughter-in-law?" Geronimo retorts.

El Hechicero can't believe his ears. "That's impossible!"

"Is it? You had best know who you're dealing with when you torment the family members of Geronimo."

El Hechicero's face goes white--not easy to do, considering the red and blistered condition it's in--and Salazar nearly falls from his horse as fear grips his very soul. "Geronimo," he ekes out.

"Enough talk," Geronimo belts. "Prepare for battle."

Geronimo and his chiefs turn swiftly and race back to the line of warriors, yelling out the war whoop as they go. Roberto pulls his rifle and rides up along with the Apache, but Geronimo confronts him. "You must stay back and protect your wife."

"This is my fight, too."

"What you say may be true, but you have not earned the right to ride with the warriors."

Without waiting for Roberto to respond, Geronimo rides to the front of his men and together they send up a war whoop which strikes fear into the hearts of their foes. Geronimo's warriors ride hard toward El Hechicero and los Brujos Mejores, firing their rifles as they go. The first volley drops three of the warlocks, and the battle is on. The sorcerer tries to cast what spells he can, but the limited time results in little effect if any, and the return fire is only as potent as the men he has at his disposal. Los Brujos Mejores are all highly experienced war

veterans, however, and they maneuver swiftly into two ranks in an attempt to keep the Apache on the inside of the large hollow circle they've formed. The benefit of having small arms at the ready proves to their advantage, as many of Geronimo's warriors are killed at short range. Still outnumbered two to one, El Hechicero's men lose what little momentum they've gained once their adversaries close in and the fighting turns to hand-to-hand combat. Those warlocks who survive the onslaught make a run for it, retreating to the north, but Geronimo and sixty of his braves are right on their heels.

Angelina and Roberto ride out to the battlefield in an attempt to aid the wounded, and while Angelina applies bandages to one of the wounded Indians, Roberto tears off the shirt of one of the deceased in order to make more. Among the dead, Roberto recognizes Pedro Salazar, a tomahawk planted deep into his forehead. *At least he died quickly*, the young vaquero thinks to himself.

Looking out over the fallen, Roberto realizes there's no getting used to the sight of it. Why men have to fight and die is a tragedy he hopes will one day come to end, but while he's reflecting on the senselessness of it all, Angelina cries out!

El Hechicero has somehow survived, and now he has a knife to Angelina's throat--but not just any knife; it's the Tecpatl of Quetzalcoatl. Roberto draws his pearl handled .44 Colt revolver and slowly moves toward them. "Stop right there!" El Hechicero growls, "or she's dead!"

"Give it up, Barquin! You've lost."

"Not if I have her! I sacrifice her, and I've won!"

"How do you figure?"

"With her sacrifice, the Aztec gods will rise again, the Aztec Nation will rise again!"

Roberto inches closer with his revolver raised, and he looks into Angelina's eyes, getting her attention. "The Aztec Nation has been dead for centuries, let it go!"

"I don't expect a snot-nosed kid like you to understand. I don't care what you think, anyway!"

"Well, you should!"

"Yeah? And why is that?"

Roberto signals Angelina to make her move and she rakes down hard along El Hechicero's shin, driving her heeled boot onto his foot, allowing her the opportunity to pull away, and in the brief time it takes the hapless wizard to recover, Roberto fires, striking him cleanly right between the eyes. Roberto races over to Angelina and catches her up in his arms, then looks down at El Hechicero lying there dead and exclaims, "'Cause I'm no snot-nosed kid, and this is my wife you're messing with!"

#

The last of El Hechicero's Brujos Mejores lose their lives to Geronimo's warriors out on

the valley floor; unable to outrun the Apache's mustangs on their exhausted horses, they never reach Cochise Stronghold, a bitter end to an ill-conceived plan, but then theirs was an even more ill-conceived ideology. Human sacrifice, like slavery, is a product of man's barbaric past, and the majority of the civilized world would no longer sit idly by while such nefarious atrocities were being perpetrated by evil men. Regrettably, man still has a great deal more to learn about living peacefully with their fellow man, but the tide is turning.

Geronimo gallops back to the main battlefield with his braves whose horses display the scalps of the dead, and knowing what's about to occur, he immediately rides over to Angelina and Roberto and orders them to come along with him. Even from an old-world perspective like the Apache, he knows there are some things a woman should not see. The wise Bedonkohe chief draws them back to the foothills of the Mule Mountains to have a word with them there. "You are safe now."

"Thank you," Roberto offers gratefully. "I don't know what we would have done if you hadn't come to our rescue."

"It was indeed fortuitous; however, we did not come to rescue you, we came to avenge the murder of our brothers."

"Well, I'm sorry for your loss, but we appreciate it nonetheless."

"Consider it my gift to you and your lovely wife on your wedding day."

"It's our first gift--the best gift we could have ever received. Now we can enjoy our honeymoon peacefully without worry."

"Where will you go from here?"

"We're headed into the town of Tombstone for a while, but from there we're not really sure--maybe Tucson."

"There is much you could learn about the ways of the Apache. If you come to live with us, I can teach you to become a warrior."

"If it was my decision alone to make, I'd take you up on it, but I think Angelina has other ideas."

"Understood. Part of me thinks I should go with you. The white man is here to stay, and more of them are settling our homeland everyday. Cochise has gone to be with Usen and Victorio has been killed by the Mexicans. I am the last one of my kind left."

Roberto doesn't know what to say. He can see the sadness behind the weary Apache patriarch's eyes, and for the first time Roberto feels a kinship with the man who is most certainly his father. He can't fully comprehend what Geronimo has experienced, but he knows what it's like to be alienated. He's had to deal with the prejudice of the white man most of his life, and he knows there will be a great deal more of it in Tucson, if that's where Angelina is hoping to settle down. Right now, he just wants to put his arms around the old warrior and share with him the love of the Lord, but then again, Geronimo has his own faith and Roberto

has to respect that.

Angelina helps Geronimo tend to the wounded while Roberto piles up the dead bodies of his vanquished enemies. Not having the means to bury them properly, Roberto is forced to burn their bodies and cover the bones up with stones from the valley floor. Roberto prays for their souls with Angelina by his side, and then they return to where the Apache are securing their fallen braves, in order to say their final goodbyes.

Angelina and Roberto stand and watch as their unlikely saviors--Geronimo and his braves--head southwest toward the San Pedro River, which they will cross over on their way back to their settlement in the Huachuca Mountains. They ride on to Tombstone with mixed hearts and minds, but as the sun sets out on the western horizon, it's soothing peacefulness allows them to find the serenity they need to renew their spirits and shift their thoughts back to the glorious events which occurred earlier in the day.

They had made it through the fire. "Gloria a Dios."

## Chapter Thirty-one

Angelina and Roberto enter the town of Tombstone in the Arizona territory at about seven o'clock at night, and proceed down Allen Street past the red-light district where drunken cowboys spill out onto the street and scantily clad women beckon from the windowsills. They cross Sixth Street and the Oriental Saloon comes on the right before they cross Fifth Street and stop on the left in front of the Grand Hotel. They dismount and step onto the porch way where a tall, dark-haired man with a burly handlebar mustache and nicely tailored black three-piece suit approaches them. "Are you folks staying in the hotel?"

"We're hoping to," Roberto answers.

"Fine, fine. I'm Deputy County Sheriff Wyatt Earp, and I just want to let you know, we have a weapons ordinance which requires all citizens to check their firearms within town limits. Now, if you're staying in the hotel, you can check them in with the clerk."

"Thank you, Sheriff. I'm Roberto Luna, and this is my wife Angelina."

"It's nice to meet ya--ma'am," Sheriff Earp says with a tip of his hat. "Are ya new to Tombstone?"

"Yes sir, this is our first visit."

"Well then, welcome. Come on in and I'll introduce ya to the clerk."

Sheriff Earp holds the door for Angelina and Roberto and they enter what is Tombstone's finest accommodations. The Grand Hotel is decked out with plush velvet carpeting and all walnut furnishings. To the left is the reservation desk with a brass and etched glass bar behind, and to the right is a fine visiting area with a carpeted staircase and walnut banister against the wall beyond. Through this first room is the dining room with three quite elaborate pendant chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, and fifty or more walnut tables covered with cut glass,



china, silver castors, and the latest style of cutlery. A small bespectacled man of about forty walks up to them from the dining room dressed in a swallowtail evening coat. "Hello, Wyatt. What brings you to the Grand this evening?"

"Well, R. J., these fine folks are looking to find a room. Mr. and Mrs. Luna, may I introduce you to Mr. R. J. Pryke."

"Very nice to meet you--ma'am," Pryke says with a nod of the head and a smile.

"It is nice to meet you, sir," Roberto responds.

Angelina curtsies and adds, "It's our wedding day."

"Wonderful," Pryke gushes. "The wedding suite is available."

"Thank you, sir," Roberto manages, "but I don't know if we can afford..."

Angelina steps forward proudly, producing a nice embroidered purse. "That sounds lovely, we'll take it. We'll also require a table for dinner this evening."

Angelina takes a brand-new Liberty Double Eagle twenty-dollar gold piece out of her purse, as Roberto looks on with some amazement.

"Very well then," Mr. Pryke announces, "I'll have the porter get your bags and show you to your room."

"Send a boy to check their firearms," Sheriff Earp adds, "and see their horses get to the livery."

"I'll do that, Wyatt. Thank you."

"It was nice meeting you folks; I hope ya enjoy your stay," Sheriff Earp continues. "I might add, it's best if ya stay inside the hotel tonight. We've had some particular trouble recently and things may get dangerous out on the streets tonight."

"No chance of that, Sheriff." Roberto smiles broadly. "It's our wedding night."

Angelina blushes but manages a coy smile, and Sheriff Wyatt Earp tips his hat, turns, and strides out of the hotel and down the street toward the Oriental.

The porter leads Angelina and Roberto up the stairway to the second floor, which hosts sixteen rooms in total. The bridal chamber is to the right and is even more elegantly appointed than downstairs, with expensive oil paintings on the walls, a beautiful grand piano in the center of the room, and all walnut furnishings cushioned with the finest silks. Down the corridor to the left is their room, the honeymoon suite. The inside of the room is carpeted and the walnut furnishings are upholstered to match. The room also includes an enormous bed with the latest in spring mattresses, a European toilet stand, and three ornate windows looking out over the town. Angelina is in heaven.

Roberto tips the porter who closes the door behind him as he exits. For a moment, they stand in the center of the room just trying to take it all in, and then together, hand in hand, they let themselves fall back onto the bed and start laughing with the most jubilant of sounds.

After cleaning up and washing off the dust, Angelina and Roberto go down to dinner. Mr. Pryke escorts them into the dining room where he stops at the entrance and announces, "Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce to you the newlyweds, Mr. and Mrs. Roberto Luna."

The crowd of diners erupt in applause as Pryke seats them at their table. Once they sit down, the sound of glasses clinking demands a kiss from the demure couple. Roberto kisses Angelina gently to the onlookers' approval and another loud round of applause, followed by a flurry of elevated conversation. A very pretty woman of perhaps thirty, although she may be older than her comely features suggest, is the first to visit the table and congratulate the newlyweds. "Congratulations! I'm Ellen Cashman, but everyone calls me Nellie," she says with a faintly noticeable Irish accent.

"Thank you," Roberto and Angelina respond.

"Would you care to take a seat?" Angelina offers.

"Oh no, I couldn't impose, but I operate the Russ House around the corner on Toughnut and Fifth Street, I would like to invite you for tea tomorrow--let's say around four?"

"That sounds wonderful," Angelina smiles. "Thank you so much."

"We'll see you then. Congratulations again, and good night."

"Good night, Miss Cashman."

After dinner, Angelina and Roberto return to their room. "Roberto, mi amor, perhaps you could go down to the bar and have a night cap while I prepare for bed," Angelina suggests coyly.

It takes Roberto a few seconds to process what she's asking of him, but once he comprehends her meaning, he smiles. "Oh sí, sí. I think I'll go down and get a drink."

Roberto kisses Angelina passionately, and she walks him to the door. "Don't be too long now."

Roberto bellies up to the bar, where he recognizes some of the men seated there as members of the infamous "Cowboys" by the red sashes they're wearing. Fortunately, their minds and conversation are preoccupied by the events transpiring over at the jailhouse. "We're gonna have to bust him out, Johnny," Roberto overhears one of them saying.

"We ain't bustin nobody out, Ike; Curley Bill says Earp's gonna take him to Tucson after tomorrow's preliminary hearing. You heard what White said before he died; it was an accident. Curley Bill's gonna get off--no sense in makin him look guilty by bustin him out."

"But what if the townspeople try an lynch him?" Billy Clanton demands.

"The Earps ain't gonna let that happen; they're too ornery to let a buncha hayseeds get the best of 'em," Johnny Ringo asserts.

"I say we go over and kill all them Earps. There over at the Oriental right now."

"You and what army, Frank? You forget Doc Holiday's over there too."

"What'll it be?" the bartender, Johnny Behan, interrupts, snapping Roberto out of his

eavesdropping malaise.

"Oh ah--brandy," Roberto mumbles.

Behan pours Roberto a snifter of Hennessy cognac. "Charge it to my room. Thank you, bartender," Roberto says as he backs away from the bar and takes a seat across the room where several other guests are enjoying after-dinner *digestifs*.

Roberto sits and sips his brandy as if he had a long history of sampling such liqueurs, although he is not trying to attract any real attention, just enough to fit in. Some of those present remember him from dinner and congratulate him, which he accepts graciously. After he's done with his drink, he checks the clock above the bar. "Twenty minutes, that should be good," he hopes.

Roberto bids those about him a good night and retires to his room. He enters to find Angelina dressed in a revealing silk nightgown and he sees her as if he is looking at her for the very first time. She's extraordinarily beautiful and yet quite vulnerable, and he is overwhelmed by the realization she is his and what this night promises to be. He removes his coat and vest, and then takes her in his arms. "I love you, mi amor. You have made me the happiest man in the whole world."

Roberto kisses her gently and runs his fingers through her long black hair until his hand rests at the nape of her neck. She kisses him sweetly, and then once more. "I love you, mi amor, and I am so honored to be your wife."

The enraptured lovers kiss deeply in the full passion of their undying affection, and they fall back against the bed heeding the yearning in their hearts, giving themselves to one another...

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At just a few minutes before four o'clock, Angelina and Roberto take the short walk around the block to the right and then another right to arrive at the Russ House where Nellie Cashman awaits them. With her is the Reverend Father Antonio Jouvenceau, who has been recently assigned to the parish of Tombstone by Bishop Salpointe. "Welcome, please do come in," Nellie greets them. "Oh my, Angelina, don't you have a glow about you?"

Angelina blushes a bright red, but inwardly she is proud of her man for being so caring and passionate; truthfully, she can think of little else. "Thank you, Miss Cashman. Your home is delightful."

"Please call me Nellie. This is Father Jouvenceau. May I present Mr. and Mrs. Luna."

Angelina and Roberto exchange greetings and Nellie bids them to have a seat. "Would you care for some tea?"

Angelina and Roberto take a seat and answer her question in the affirmative. Polite conversation eventually turns to the new Catholic church they're building over on Safford and Sixth Street. It's only the church rectory at first, but the construction project is coming along

smartly. "It's the first religious building of any kind in Tombstone," Nellie says proudly.

"It would have never been possible without your help and fundraising, Angel of the Camp," Father Jouvenceau propounds.

"Angel of the Camp?" Angelina repeats curiously

"It's just a nickname I picked up out on the Klondike, and it kind of stuck with me."

Angelina finds out from Nellie she's a charity fundraiser for the Sisters of Saint Joseph, and Angelina tells Nellie of her own encounters with Sister Monica, and of Sister Clara and her wonderful gifts. "It's her gifts which are affording us this wonderful honeymoon; she is so giving and I'm so thankful to have met her."

Roberto and Father Jouvenceau talk of Bishop Salpointe and how they chanced to meet, and their discovery of Fray Padilla's letter among the archives of Fray Kino in the Mission San Xavier del Bac library. "So, you're the couple His Excellency has been speaking of so highly! Now I understand. Tell me, did you ever find the lost mission?"

"We did indeed, and we were married there yesterday morning."

"Married at the lost mission, and on All Saints Day no less. Who was the presiding minister?"

Roberto looks at Angelina, and then back at Father Jouvenceau. "Perhaps I should let Bishop Salpointe explain that one to you. Suffice it to say--he is someone you know."

"Such mystery, intrigue, and adventure, it certainly is everything His Excellency described."

The conversation goes well into the evening as Angelina and Roberto invite Nellie and Father Jouvenceau to dinner back at the Grand Hotel, and their relationships only grow from there. Shortly afterward, Angelina and Roberto move into the Russ House, and Roberto begins helping with the building of the church while Angelina takes up fundraising and taking care of the poor with Nellie. Nellie is so delighted to have a co-conspirator in all of her philanthropic endeavors, and the fact Angelina has studied and practiced nursing on her own the way she did, has Nellie considering her as a prime candidate for a nursing position at the new hospital they're fundraising for.

As the church nears its completion, the four fast friends are sitting at dinner one evening, when Father Jouvenceau broaches the subject of what they should name the church. Angelina knows right away there is only one name for it. "It should be named the Sacred Heart of Jesus?" she boldly proclaims.

"That's a perfect name," Nellie agrees.

"I'd have to say, I can't think of a better name myself," Father Jouvenceau expounds. "What do you think, Roberto?"

"I think it's as heavenly as the beauty who thought of it," he beams.

"It's settled, then; I'll submit the name Sacred Heart of Jesus to Bishop Salpointe for

approval in my next communique,” Father Jouvenceau concluded.

Angelina and Roberto's first Christmas together is a glorious one with all of the parishioners and their new friends together at the Russ House for the celebration of Christ's birth. Roberto saves enough to purchase a beautiful diamond brooch Angelina had her eye on, for which her gratitude was, in his mind, “legendary.”

The church building is finally complete and Bishop Salpointe, the Sisters of Saint Joseph, even Archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy of the Santa Fe Archdiocese are all coming to the dedication on January, 1st, 1881. When everyone arrives the night before the dedication, Bishop Salpointe and Roberto embrace like old friends, and of course, he wants to hear every detail of their adventure. His Excellency's attention is especially transfixed during the relating of their experience with Fray Juan de Padilla. Bishop Salpointe has always had an interest in his predecessors in the missionary service to the New World, but after hearing of the miraculous events of Angelina and Roberto's encounter with the mystical padre, his interest in Fray Padilla will go on to become somewhat of an obsession.

In February, 1881, Pima County broke into two separate counties, and Cochise County was born. Nellie Cashman and Angelina's fundraising efforts proved invaluable, and with the backing of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, they opened the Cochise County Hospital where they both went to work as nurses.

Sister Clara and Angelina's friendship grew to the point where each contrived all manner of worthy missions in order to spend as much time together as possible. Being birds of a feather, they had a kinship which bonded them as tight as any blood sisters could be.

Eventually, Angelina and Roberto save enough money to have a “proper” wedding mass, though they wouldn't consider their first wedding as anything less than proper, but they know how family can be. Everyone comes to Tombstone for the nuptials, including Chui and all of Angelina's family, Murrieta and Procopio, as well as many of the Murrieta family, Señor Vasquez, Señor Terrazas, Father Ortiz, Bishop Salpointe, all of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, and of course, Nellie Cashman and the friends they have made since coming to Tombstone. It is wonderful to get to see everyone who has played such an important role in their lives once again. There was some debate over who would administer the rites, Bishop Salpointe or Father Ortiz, but in the end, Angelina and Roberto select both of the old adversaries to share the duties. It works out for the best in the end, with the bishop and the old padre settling many of their grievances. After the mass is complete, Father Ortiz is walking out of the chapel when he sees a Mexican soldier near the back of the church who looks vaguely familiar, but for the life of him, he cannot recall where he has seen the veteran cavalryman before.

After the wedding, things settle into a routine for Angelina and Roberto. Roberto does his best to find work as a vaquero on the ranches in and around Tucson. Henry Hooker out at the Sierra Bonita Ranch considers him to be one of the best wranglers he's ever had, but the ranch is too far of a commute for steady work. Now that Angelina is doing so well here at the

hospital, they can't very well just up and move to the Sulphur Springs Valley. He's dismissed law enforcement, even though he and Wyatt have become good friends; however, he is concerned about the Earp brothers' safety, what with the McLaurys and Clantons constantly stirring up trouble and threatening to shoot the lawmen whenever they interfere with the Cowboys' shenanigans. Nevertheless, whatsoever Roberto puts his hand to do, he gives it his all, and he is getting a reputation as a go-to guy when anyone in town needs an extra hand, but he can feel himself getting restless. Maybe it's the fact he's been through an incredible odyssey and come through it without dying which makes him crave adventure, or the fact that he keeps hearing so many of the townspeople talking about the exploits of his father, Geronimo. But whatever it is, he can't shake the hankering to squeeze more excitement out of this here existence.

As time goes by, the words his father spoke to him out on the battlefield just before they parted company continue to play over and over in his head, even in his dreams at night: "There is much you could learn about the ways of the Apache, if you come to live with us, I can teach you to become a warrior."

One day, Roberto is sitting in the Russ House parlor when Father Jouvenceau bursts through the door with the news the government is sending five thousand more troops to track down Geronimo and his band of raiders, and it's in this very moment, Roberto realizes exactly what he has to do.

However, that's another story entirely...

## Appendix A

*Angelina* is a work of fiction set in the very real historical context of 1880s Chihuahua and Sonora, Mexico, as well as the American Southwest. The historical events and timeline leading up to and during this period in history are integral to the accuracy of the attitudes, actions, and reactions of the characters both real and fictional throughout *Angelina* and Roberto's adventure. It is the historical accuracy of the story which makes it plausible and even possible, if not probable, the hope being the story requires little or no suspension of disbelief by the reader.

Whereas, there are hundreds of true and accurate historical facts relating to the events and characters presented throughout this novel, the following entries concern those historical events where my creative license required further explanation, or where my research discovered information to be at odds with commonly accepted historical conclusions, opinions, and perhaps misguided beliefs..

(1) Father Ortiz was born in Sante Fe, Nuevo Mexico shortly before the beginning of Mexico's war for independence from Spain. At the age of eighteen he moved to Durango to study theology under Bishop José Antonio Laureano de Zubiria, where he progressed so expediently that, in 1836, at the youthful age of twenty-two, he was assigned as parish priest of el Mission de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in El Paso del Norte. His limited experience would be tested when the Tejas Province of Nuevo Mexico erupted in revolt.

An ardent nationalist, Father Ortiz took action by organizing the citizens of El Paso del Norte in armed resistance against the revolt. Later, he went on to serve as a military chaplain among the ranks of Santa Anna's forces during the Mexican-American War. Father Ortiz was captured by Colonel Alexander William Doniphan's US forces at the Battle of El Brazito on

Christmas Day, 1846. Interestingly, as the hostage of Colonel Doliphan, Father Ortiz was utilized as chaplain to the Irish Catholic soldiers in Doniphan's First Regiment of Missouri Mounted Volunteers. After administering to the casualties at the Battle of the Sacramento River, Father Ortiz was released by the colonel, at which time he returned home to the mission for a short while. However, soon afterward, Father Ortiz abruptly left the priesthood to serve as a congressman in Mexico City where he defiantly voted against ratifying the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

The next few years saw Father Ortiz appointed by President Santa Anna as the Commissioner of Repatriation. In this capacity, he created several new settlements in Chihuahua for the purpose of repatriating over four thousand Mexican families who were forced to leave their homes in the new Texas territory. After fulfilling his duties to his country, Father Ortiz again donned his robes and returned as parish priest of the mission. In the years to come, his patriotism and commitment to his country during those trying times would take on far greater importance than he could have ever realized back then--not only for himself and the faithful in El Paso del Norte, but for all of the Catholic churches in the state of Chihuahua.

After Mexico's failed war with America, Santa Anna's dictatorial control over the country garnered him increased animosity among the democratic reform-minded peasant and middle-class. The reformists Benito Juárez and Miquel Lerdo de Tejada, with the aid of rebel forces led by Generals Juan Alvarez and Ignacio Comonfort (the liberal party's first two Presidents), gained control of the Mexican government in 1855. One of Juárez and Tejada's first orders of business was to pass sweeping liberal reform legislation known as the "Ley Juárez," followed by the "Ley Lerdo" a year later. The Juárez Law declared that all citizens were equal before the law, while at the same time severely restricting the rights and privileges of the Catholic Church. As Free Masons, Juárez and Tejada's antipathy toward organized religion, and the Catholic Church in particular, led to massive expropriation of Church lands. The Lerdo Law literally stripped the clergy of their citizenship and possession of the land they used primarily for the care of the poorest of the poor. Regrettably, the new laws meant to create true democratic reform and social justice were far too radical for many progressives and most all moderates and conservatives. This resulted in years of governmental upheaval and the eventual overthrow of Mexico by the French. The Juárez government was exiled from Mexico City, taking up residence in El Paso del Norte. Understandably, Father Ortiz took umbrage at the new laws and relied heavily on his reputation in order to prevent the expulsion of his religious order within the state of Chihuahua. However, with the arrival of Juárez in El Paso del Norte, Father Ortiz was forced to establish alliances he had hoped to avoid. Namely, developing a relationship with the governor of Chihuahua and the man who was quickly becoming the richest man in all of Mexico, Don Luis Terrazas.

Fortunately for the Catholic Church and Father Ortiz, some of these problems were resolved rather serendipitously when General Porfirio Díaz, the hero of Mexico's war with France, took control of the Mexican government in 1876. Although a reformist of sorts and a



Free Mason like Juárez and Tejada, so far President Díaz's policy toward the Catholic Church had been one of indifference. Díaz chose not to interfere one way or the other with the affairs of any religious affiliation, leaving them to fend for themselves for the most part. On the other hand, the mission's concerns were now focused on the ever-increasing number of peasants and indigenous peoples being forced off their land. Díaz's hands-off policies and unique manipulation of the Constitution of 1857 effectively allowed rich landowners like Henry Muller and Don Luis Terrazas to levy control over local governing bodies or take over state governments entirely. Terrazas once again got himself re-elected governor of Chihuahua and wasted no time using his position to acquire as much land as the law would allow. It could be pointed out Terrazas benevolently provided the necessary food and clothing for the new inhabitants of the mission through his own contributions, but to the padre's way of thinking, it was the least he could do under the circumstances.

(2) Although it is held by many historians Joaquin Murrieta died in a shootout with California rangers in the Battle of Cantua, and his head was chopped off by Captain Harry Love and put on display in San Francisco, the truth of such assertions is highly debatable according to those who knew him best. Murrieta's sister, Concepción, saw the head and flatly denied it was the head of her brother Joaquin. His friends and neighbors in Las Juntas claimed the head on display belonged to an Indian named "Chappo" who was Joaquin Murrieta's hostler, and present at the Battle of Cantua. Furthermore, some of Murrieta's descendants contended he died of old age at his family ranch near Trincheras, in Sonora, Mexico.

Procopio Tomas Bustamante was reported to be residing throughout Sonora, Chihuahua, Arizona, and New Mexico at this time. Certain reports have him listed as a deputy sheriff in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico for a couple of years in 1878 and 1879, after he returned from California.

(3) Historical reports confirm that William Henry "Billy the Kid" Bonney did in fact ride close to six hours along the Río Grande, from somewhere in or around Las Cruces, New Mexico to the town of San Elizario in order to bust out his friend, Melquiades Segura, from the San Elizario jail. However, some questions arise as to the authenticity of the year of 1876, the year purported as the year of said events, being completely accurate. The first problem is Bonney was clearly residing in Fort Grant, Arizona during 1876. It is also known Bonney had not yet killed anyone until around August of 1877, a fact that puts any supposed 1876 date in suspicion considering the reputation Bonney and Segura had established in Chihuahua, Mexico which tell of their many exploits involving gambling and murder. Based on these known facts and eyewitness accounts, it is much more likely the jail break at San Elizario occurred in the late summer or early autumn of 1878 when Bonney and the other regulators were hiding out after the Lincoln County Wars, but before he went back to Lincoln to testify in March of 1879.

(4) The notion of resurrecting the Aztec Nation is nothing new to Mexico, nor is it any less prevalent today than in times past. Many powerful Aztec and pseudo Aztec brujos and curanderos have made their mark on Mexican society and history since the fall of the Aztec

Dynasty in 1520. The material used to develop the basis for, and actions of the characters: El Hechicero, los Brujos Mejores, and el Azteca Culto in this story are primarily derived from modern Aztec groups. Some sects even go to great lengths to justify human sacrifice, while several others teach the very rituals, ceremonies, and practices El Hechicero performs throughout the story.

(5) Chapter Twenty-one is approximately ninety-nine percent factual, if you believe the great Apache Indian chief Geronimo himself. This chapter and the stories therein were derived almost entirely from the autobiography of Geronimo, compiled in 1905 by S. M. Barrett of Lawton, Oklahoma. These collection of Geronimo's own experiences during this time in history were reassembled here with the intention of giving the reader the feeling they are hearing the story, albeit in the third person, right straight from Geronimo's mouth.

(6) The "Cowboys" were a notorious band of ranchers and outlaws who roamed southeastern Pima County creating havoc in the region, and the town of Tombstone in particular. On October 29th, 1880, the day Angelina and Roberto crossed the San Pedro River, the Cowboys rode north into Tombstone from the Clanton's hideout along the San Pedro River fifteen miles to the south. That very night several of the Cowboys tried unsuccessfully to bust out their partner William "Curly Bill" Brocius who, two nights earlier got loaded from a mixture of opium and liquor and commenced shooting up the town. In his drunken revelry, he accidentally shot and killed Tombstone Town Sheriff Fred White, who had tried to disarm the inebriated outlaw. Deputy County Sheriff Wyatt Earp, a witness to the killing, pistol-whipped Curly Bill and hauled him off to the Tombstone Jail. Wyatt thwarted the attempted breakout and eventually transported Curly Bill to Tucson in order to keep him from being lynched by the town's angry residents.

(7) Unless you've been the recipient of a miracle, it's very difficult to believe in them; it's even harder to convince a non believer. But in the case of the Franciscan priest, Juan de Padilla, metaphysical events attributed to the world of the supernatural followed him throughout history. Due to the writings about him by Bishop Salpointe, many priests and other religious pilgrims made trips to Isleta, New Mexico, where Fray Padilla was buried. On April, 25th, 1895, Father Antonin Docher, ordained by then Archbishop Salpointe, investigated the many reports of miracles involving the levitation of Fray Padilla's coffin. In the presence of many witnesses, Father Docher opened the grave of Fray Padilla. During the event, Docher's arm was mysteriously injured and an infection in the arm turned to gangrene, but when the doctors recommended the arm be amputated, he chose instead to follow the advice of the native inhabitants of Isleta who convinced him to petition Fray Padilla to intercede for him instead. When Father Docher went to the grave and prayed for healing, the wound miraculously disappeared. The large array of witnesses was so substantial that news of the miracle spread far and wide. Many people came to visit Isleta after that day including the King and Queen of Belgium, and many believers reported miracles as a result of their petitions for intercession from the incorruptible padre.

## Appendix B

Most times in novels involving historical fiction, the writer gives no indication of who is an actual historical character in their novels. Not being an historian myself, I was always left wondering. Of course, today, one can look up just about anyone on the internet, which I encourage you to do; however, I thought I would help out the reader by creating a list of those characters which are, in fact, real historical figures in order to help narrow down the search process.

The following is a list of the real historical characters in the order in which they appear in the story of Angelina and Roberto:

- (1) Hernan Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro, Spanish explorer, conquistador, and conqueror of Mexico; 1485-1547.
- (2) Pedro de Alvarado y Contreras, Spanish conquistador; 1485-1541.
- (3) Tecuichpotzin (Tecuichpo Ixcachitzin), renamed “Doña Isabel Moctezuma” by Spanish priests, daughter of Aztec King, Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin (Moctezuma II); 1509-1551.
- (4) Padre Ramón Ortiz y Miera, Roman Catholic priest, Mexican Congressman and Statesman, Mexican nationalist; 1814-1894.
- (5) Tomas Procopio Bustamante, Mexican nationalist, notorious outlaw, nephew of Joaquin Murrieta; 1841-?.
- (6) Joaquin Murrieta Carillo, Mexican nationalist, notorious outlaw, uncle of Tomas Procopio Bustamante; 1829-?.
- (7) Don José Luis Gonzaga Jesús Daniel Terrazas Fuentes, Governor of Chihuahua, Mexican general and hacendado, cattle rancher, multimillionaire businessman; 1829-1923.

- (8) Doña Carolina Culty Bustamante de Terrazas, wife of Don Luis Terrazas; 1833-1919.
- (9) Don Enrique Clay Creel Culty, Governor of Chihuahua, Mexican ambassador and statesman, multimillionaire businessman and hacendado, son-in-law of Don Luis Terrazas; 1854-1931.
- (10) Doña Angela Terrazas de Creel, daughter of Don Luis and Doña Carolina Terrazas, wife of Don Enrique Creel; 1859-?.
- (11) Mariano Samaniego y Delgado, Governor of Chihuahua, Mexican physician, multimillionaire businessman and hacendado, nephew of Father Ortiz; 1831-1905.
- (12) Dña Isabel de Tolosa Cortés de Moctezuma, wife of conquistador Don Juan de Oñate, grand daughter of Doña Isabel Moctezuma (Tecuichpotzin); 1568-1620.
- (13) Don Juan de Oñate, Spanish conquistador, Coronel Governor of Sante Fe de Nuevo Mexico province in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, husband of Dña Isabel de Tolosa Cortés de Moctezuma, father of Cristibol de Oñate; 1550-1626.
- (14) Cristobol Naharriondo Perez Oñate y Cortés Moctezuma, first elected Governor of Sante Fe de Nuevo Mexico province in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, son of Don Juan de Oñate and Dña Isabel de Tolosa Cortés de Moctezuma; 1589-1610.
- (15) Vicente de Zaldívar, Spanish explorer and soldier, silver baron, nephew of Don Juan de Oñate and cousin of Cristobol Oñate y Cortés; 1573-1649.
- (16) Melquiades Seguro, Mexican outlaw and friend of William H. Bonney; ?-?.
- (17) William Henry "Billy the Kid" Bonney, cowboy, infamous outlaw; 1859-1881.
- (18) Juan Guizeuta, Mayor of Batuc in 1880, Sonora Mexico; ?-?.
- (19) José Maria Bonifacio Leiva Peres, changed his name to "Cajemé," Mexican soldier, Yaqui Indian leader; 1835-1887.
- (20) The Murrieta family. Abuelita's full name is unknown, as are the dates of her birth and death, but the family patriarch Don Juan José Murrieta, born in 1772, was Abuelita's husband. He was a rancher who began the Hacienda de San Rafael del Los Alamos near Trincheras with his brother, Captain Jesús Maria Murrieta, who was a commander at the presidio in Altar. All of the Murrieta family represented in this story are the actual children, grandchildren, great-grand children, and great-great-grandchildren of Don Juan José and Abuelita Murrieta.
- (21) Padre Bartolome Suastegui, parish priest of el Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Catholic Church in Altar, Sonora, Mexico; 1834-1902.
- (22) Alope, wife of Goyaalé, daughter of Nedni Apache Indian chief Noposo; 1821-1858.
- (23) Juana, mother of Goyaalé, wife of Taklishim, daughter-in-law of Bedonkohe Chiricahua Apache Indian chief Mahko; ?-1858.
- (24) Goyaalé, also known as Geronimo, Bedonkohe Chiricahua Apache Indian chief, the most feared of all the Apache chiefs; 1829-1909.

- (25) Mangus-Colorado, Bedonkohe Chiricahua Apache Indian chief, father-in-law of Cochise; 1793-1863.
- (26) Cochise, Chokonen Chiricahua Apache Indian chief, son-in-law of Mangus-Colorado; 1805-1874.
- (27) Whoa, Nedni Chiricahua Apache Indian, brother-in-law of Geronimo; 1825-1883.
- (28) Father Jean Baptiste Salpointe, the Bishop of Tuscon, later the Archbishop of the Sante Fe, New Mexico Archdiocese, author, educator, missionary, founding member of Saint Joseph's hospital in Tucson, among others; 1825-1898.
- (29) Sister Monica Corrigan of the Sacred Heart (born Anna Jane Taggart), original member of the Community of the Sisters of Saint Joseph Tucson, author, educator, missionary, founding member of Saint Joseph's hospital Tucson among others; 1843-1929.
- (30) Sister Clara Otero of the Blessed Sacrament (born Gabriel Martinez Otero), member of the Community of the Sisters of Saint Joseph Tucson, nurse, educator, member of Arizona Women's Hall of Fame; 1850-1905.
- (31) William Giles Harding Carter, Second Lieutenant 6th Cavalry, Medal of Honor recipient for bravery during the Apache Wars (1881), retired Major-General served fifty years active service; 1851-1925.
- (32) Porico (White horse), brother of Geronimo; 1832-1912.
- (33) Pedro José Aguirre, Mexican-American cattleman, businessman and entrepreneur; 1835-1907.
- (34) Pausegak (Dry Coyote) and his family, Juana, Geka, and Cheepah; Tohono O'odham Indians, lived on the San Xavier reservation in 1880; ?-?.
- (35) Hokak (Aged One) actual name unknown, Tohono O'odham Indian chief; ?-?.
- (36) Johnny Ringo, cattle rustler and outlaw, or cattle rancher, depending on whom you believe, member of the Cowboys, shot through the head by unknown assailant or maybe by himself; 1850-1882.
- (37) James Johnson, cattle rustler and outlaw, or cattle rancher, depending on whom you believe, member of the Cowboys, accidentally shot himself; 1850-1881.
- (38) Ike Clanton, cattle rustler and outlaw, or cattle rancher, depending on whom you believe, member of the Cowboys, ran from the fighting at the O.K. Corral, shot to death in a shootout with lawman Jonas V. Brighton; 1847-1887.
- (39) William "Billy" Clanton, cattle rustler and outlaw, or cattle rancher, depending on whom you believe, member of the Cowboys, killed in the shootout at the O.K. Corral; 1862-1881.
- (40) Phineas Clanton, cattle rustler and outlaw, or cattle rancher, depending on whom you believe, member of the Cowboys, died from complications after a wagon accident; 1843-1906.
- (41) Tom McLaury, cattle rustler and outlaw, or cattle rancher, depending on whom you

believe, member of the Cowboys, killed in the shootout at the O.K. Corral; 1853-1881.

(42) Frank McLaury, cattle rustler and outlaw or cattle rancher, depending on whom you believe, member of the Cowboys, killed in the shootout at the O.K. Corral; 1848-1881.

(43) Fray Juan de Padilla, Franciscan missionary and explorer, considered the first martyr in the United States; 1500-1544.

(44) Wyatt Berry Stapp Earp, famous lawman and businessman, Deputy County Sheriff of Eastern Pima County in 1880; 1848-1929.

(45) R. J. Pryke, clerk of the Grand Hotel, later owner of the Cosmopolitan Saloon in Tombstone; ?-?.

(46) Ellen "Nellie" Cashman, "Angel of the Camp," Irish immigrant, philanthropist, nurse, and businesswoman, member of the Arizona Women's Hall of Fame; 1845-1925.

(47) John Harris "Johnny" Behan, bartender at the Grand Hotel, later Cochise County Sheriff, friend and supporter of the Cowboys, notorious womanizer who died of syphilis; 1844-1912.

(48) Father Antonio Jouvencaeu, Catholic priest and tireless missionary, founded the Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church among others; 1821-1909.

The names of many more real historical figures appear in this story, but are not listed here in that they don't have any dialogue per se, or do not appear as interactive characters. Nevertheless, the historical significance of many of them does make for interesting reading.

Five characters in the story are real people whose lives have been fictionalized. Roberto and Angelina Luna, my son's godparents; Daniel "Sisto" Luna, who is Roberto's real father; and Suave (Mellowman) and El Bandido, who are my Chihuahuas.