

*A man seeking answers to his past helps a fugitive Indian get back to his village, a secretive tribe hidden for centuries in the mountains of Arizona Territory.*

## **BLACK SUN**

By Paul Cox

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BLACK  
SUN

PAUL COX

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## CHAPTER ONE

It was just past sundown in Columbus, New Mexico, when I crossed the weather-beaten platform and boarded the eastbound El Paso and Southwestern train. Even though the car I entered was nearly vacant and all the windows down, the temperature inside was well over one hundred degrees. I had no desire to converse with any of the passengers so I took a seat in the back and slid over to a window.

As the train jerked and then sluggishly rumbled out of Columbus, I peered through the twilight at the sprawling military camp on the south side of town. Watching rows of canvas tents light up with the amber glow of kerosene lanterns, I could hardly believe that only a few hours earlier I had been sweating nervously in a court-martial hearing, a neophyte news reporter facing a charge of treason and possibly a firing squad. But thanks to the stunning testimony of some key witnesses and a bizarre twist of fate, General “Black Jack” Pershing had abruptly dismissed the charges. Even more difficult for me to absorb, however, was the fact that some of the uncanny discoveries made during the trial had proved instrumental in averting an all-out war with Mexico.

The circumstances surrounding the entire affair were as complicated as they were mystifying, and I was exhausted from trying to make sense of it all. As the hours passed and the air streaming through the windows began to cool, I started to relax and slowly unwind. My thoughts drifted pleasantly for several minutes but then abruptly snagged on a troublesome domestic issue that awaited me in New York City, a dilemma that was, in some respects, as grave as Pershing's court-martial had been.

To fully appreciate my situation, I must first explain that I am a Weston. That is to say, I am the son of a Carnegie Hill Weston. For centuries, our seafaring family has been in shipping, international shipping to be precise. And as a result, it would not be an exaggeration to confess that we are world-renowned shipping magnates and proverbial masters of the seas.

Be that as it may, a few days after graduating from Harvard I chose to ignore decades of cast-iron tradition and adamantly refused to take my place in the family business. With aspirations of following in the footsteps of William Randolph Hearst, I boldly proclaimed to Father and Mother that my intention was to someday own my own newspaper. Days later and much to the chagrin of my parents, I took an entrance level job as a lowly news reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*. There, without question, I naively accepted my first

assignment, which was to assist a veteran reporter and cover something called the Punitive Expedition. Later, I came to find out that expedition was not an exotic adventure into Egypt, China, or even Africa, but rather a military operation deployed to capture a Mexican I had never heard of, a revolutionary named Pancho Villa.

After Pancho Villa's murderous attack on Columbus, New Mexico, President Wilson had called on the army to cross into Mexico. Their mission was to apprehend the so-called general and bring him to justice. However, over the coming weeks, even though thousands of our soldiers marched hundreds of miles into Mexico, supported by scores of civilian drivers and a dozen newsmen, the glorified bandit was never even seen, much less caught and punished.

During the military campaign, I had not been able to get word to Father and Mother for various reasons. And during my arrest and court-martial, contacting them was out of the question. By the time of the trial, several weeks had passed since they had heard from me. I knew they would be dreadfully worried, but until the legal proceedings ended there had been no way to communicate with them.

Naturally, I was anxious to get word to my parents but that was the least of my worries. What kept my mind churning that night on the train was how to break

the news that my homecoming was only to be a short visit, and that I was determined to return to the Southwest as soon as possible.

As the train rhythmically clacked over the rails that night, I began piecing together bits of information I had gathered while listening to various soldiers and officers throughout the campaign. Eventually I was able to formulate what I felt was a plausible excuse for my return to the border, a story honest enough for Father and Mother to accept. In actuality, however, I could not have truthfully explained my decision to anyone, for I didn't fully understand it myself.

One thing I did know. As William Cabott Weston III, I had been raised as a pampered lapdog, but as Billy Cabott in Mexico, I had broken my leash and run with timber wolves. And since then, I have imagined many times, if not actually felt, the hot pirate blood of my grandfather's grandfathers pulsing through my veins. How, I wondered, could I explain *that* to Father and Mother without them thinking I had lost my mind?

Such unsettling thoughts kept me awake long past midnight and it seemed as though I had just fallen asleep when a sudden jolt disturbed me. I opened my eyes and discovered it was close to daybreak and the train was already pulling into the El Paso station.

While passengers loaded and unloaded, I exited the train and used the telephone in the depot to call home.

The sun was just rising over New York City when Mother picked up the receiver. When she heard my voice on the other end of the wire she was frantic. After calling for Father they eagerly shared the earpiece and, heads together, listened as I quickly assured them all was well. I then apologized profusely and sincerely for my prolonged lack of communication.

After my apology, though, I was forced to curb my sincerity. With lighthearted jests and short cavalier answers, I deflected their many questions regarding the exact nature of my long silence. As loathsome as that may seem, it was the only way I could think of to juggle an armload of fragile half-truths while attempting to avoid outright lies.

To begin with, I explained rather loosely that my silence was in part the result of a news blackout ordered by General Pershing. Being that news reporters had been allowed to accompany the expedition, a good portion of that particular excuse was true enough. I left out the tidbit about me eventually being arrested and then charged with treason against the United States. And I failed to mention anything regarding my trial and how General Pershing hoped to sentence Monte Segundo and me to death by firing squad. I did admit that Monte Segundo was indeed a newfound friend and that we had met in Columbus. And yet, it was only in passing that I mentioned Rosa, Rosa del Carmen



Fernandez Bustamonte. I thought it best to say nothing of her exquisite beauty or of the bloody battles she had participated in while fighting as a soldier in the Mexican Revolution.

As for Monte Segundo, I did eventually elaborate, at least to a degree. I told Father and Mother that Monte was in the Idaho National Guard and that he was a bull-of-the woods lumberjack that stood just under six feet and weighed two hundred pounds. I also revealed to them how Monte had once lived with the Kootenai Indians and could track as well as any Indian. Everything else I left out, including the Mexicans I had seen him kill and how his legendary feats had spread throughout Mexico, a phenomenon strategically employed by Pershing to prevent the invasion of the United States by Mexico.

It must be kept in mind that telling Father and Mother everything would have been pointless if not cruel. Father would have reacted one way and Mother another but the reality of what I had seen and done, both the barbaric and the wonderful, would have been far more than they could have absorbed.

When the telephone conversation ended I was greatly relieved. The ice had been broken and my plan to reveal my imminent, and possibly permanent, departure from New York City was on course.

The following afternoon our chauffeur, driving a spotless Packard limousine, picked me up in front of the Grand Central Terminal and drove me to my home on Carnegie Hill. There, to my surprise, I was met with an impromptu homecoming party that was attended by many of the finest families on the hill. A few eligible and attractive young women were also present but as I conversed with them I could not resist comparing them to Rosa Bustamonte. When I did so, though I covered it well, my interest in them waned considerably.

Had Father and Mother known that I had hardly slept a wink on the train they would never have invited guests for me to entertain. However, though I was tired, I soon discovered that the long days and hard rides endured in Mexico had toughened me more than I had imagined. It was nothing for me to be charming throughout the entire evening. I joked about my sun-darkened skin and calloused hands. I then amused everyone with tales of dusty wagon trains, airplanes in the skies, motor trucks stuck in the sand, and cavalry marches over the mountains. And for a finale, I thrilled them with a whitewashed version of the heroic battle of Ojos Azules, where not a single American soldier lost his life.

Afterwards, as the men gathered in the smoking room to light up their cigars and the women moved into the parlor to gossip, my stories grew more serious.

Recounting what I had learned from the officers during my time in camp Colonia Dublán, I confidently declared that despite what was being reported in the newspapers, there would be no war with Mexico. On the contrary, the powers that be had all but decided that the United States would enter the European war, likely before the year was out. It was at that point, standing next to Father, I remarked that the inevitable conflict in Europe was going to require vast amounts of copper. Then, glancing at Father through a haze of tobacco smoke, I added that the rush on copper would result in enormous profits for Phelps Dodge.

At the mention of copper, Father flushed red. Phelps Dodge was a New York-based import-export firm. The company, as I well knew, was a major competitor of ours but had recently expanded into copper mining in Arizona. Seeing the color in Father's cheeks gave me the courage to continue with my report and my plan.

I offered that in light of the upcoming war, I thought it best that I resign from the *Chicago Tribune* and use my recent experiences in Arizona and New Mexico to locate a number of rich zinc deposits. When an elderly man standing next to me asked "Why zinc?" I nonchalantly explained that Phelps Dodge controlled most of the copper in the southwest but not the zinc. And that it required copper *and* zinc to make brass,

brass that would be needed for millions of cartridge cases.

In unison, the men erupted with a blend of surprise and hearty approval. Several slapped Father on the back, congratulating him on raising such an astute son. Then “chip off the old block” reverberated through the entire room as Father, still a bit ruffled, nodded and grinned.

Very shortly, Father totally agreed with my proposal. I breathed a sigh of relief and yet felt a wave of guilt for zinc mining was, at best, very low on my priorities list.

From that moment, however, and for the remainder of the week, when Father and I conversed, the subject was always the same; zinc mines, brass casings, and the upcoming war. And after Father explained to Mother that in the event of a world war, those involved in the production of ammunition would likely be exempt from military service, she was ready to pack my bags.

After Father went to work in the mornings, I spent much of the day in the library researching zinc mining. I brought home several books that I often read late into the night. Most of the books I shared with Father and even some with Mother. However, the books that most intrigued me, the ones I did not share, were about Mexico.

While riding through that country I had been exposed to more poverty, corruption, and cruelty than I could have ever imagined. Since then, I had often wondered how a sister republic, a country blessed with as many natural resources as the United States, had gone so terribly wrong. I was keenly aware that Mexico possessed enormous potential and yet most of the people I encountered there were poverty-stricken peons, thousands of them fighting and dying in a barbaric civil war that few of them even remotely understood.

It was obvious to me that somewhere in the country's past, the nation had tragically veered off course. And eerily, Mexico was a nation with striking similarities to our own. For, just as we had won our independence from England, Mexico had won theirs from Spain. Then we had written a stellar constitution and a few years later Mexico had done the same. And now Mexico was involved in a civil war just as we had been not many years in our past.

In fact, General Pershing had been a small boy during our Civil War and when he graduated West Point, General William Tecumseh Sherman had handed him his diploma. And Major Dodd, who recently attacked Pancho Villa at Guerro, was a teenager at the war's end.

But our Civil War, for the most part, was fought with a sense of decency by both North and South. The Confederates, even in their darkest hour, never abandoned their code of honor. But what I witnessed in Mexico's conflict was nothing more than roaming hordes of undisciplined barbarians that murdered at will as they raped and ravaged across the countryside.

Deeply disturbed by all that I had witnessed in Mexico, and hoping to find answers to at least some of my questions, I read a dozen books on the history of Mexico. I started with Spain's conquest of the Aztec Empire and finished with a recent publication dedicated to the genius of Porfirio Díaz, president of Mexico for the last thirty years. And finally, I spent a few hours reading the latest newspaper articles on the revolution. But when I finished reading, instead of answers, I had more questions than when I started. All I had done was unearth grotesque pieces of a puzzle that plainly did not fit together. And too, I came to the chilling realization that the only thing separating the lawlessness of Mexico from the United States was a razor-thin line that had been scratched in the sand.

Having experienced the anarchy of Mexico and the dangers of the borderland, I managed to secretly procure a thirty-eight caliber Smith and Wesson, a small-framed pistol. I also purchased a snug shoulder-holster in which to conceal it. After smuggling those

items up to my room, and only when I was certain Father and Mother were fast asleep, I practiced drawing my weapon for an hour each night.

The thirty-eight was not as powerful as Monte's forty-five but it was an excellent fit for my hand. And after a week's worth practice, I felt confident and prepared for anything.

When it came time for me to leave, Mother did indeed pack my suitcase, but, unlike before when I left to become a news reporter, this time she tearfully gave me her blessing and wished me well. And at the front door, on the top of our marble steps, Father heartily shook my hand.

As our chauffeur loaded my suitcase into the trunk of the waiting Packard, Father implored, "Pease, keep in touch this time."

"I will do my best, Father," I said, and then kissed Mother on the cheek.

At the bottom of the steps I turned for one last look. I felt excited and sick in the same instant. "I will write as I am able," I said boldly. "There are very few telephones where I'm going."

With that, I slipped past the open door of the limousine and into the back seat. I waved as we drove away. I had not intended to look back but when I did I saw Mother weeping on Father's shoulder. Tears formed in my eyes but to keep them from falling I

forced myself to think of something else. The first thing that came to mind was the powerful and stoic figure of Monte Segundo.

Where was Monte? I wondered. Had he found the graves of his father and mother? Did Rosa let him search for them alone or had she gone with him? Had they become more intimate or were they still quarreling, each attempting to understand the feelings of the other?

Such questions kept me occupied until I reached the busy Grand Central Terminal where I was to board the train that would take me out of New York City. It was late afternoon and Father had insisted on sending me off in proper style, so when I arrived at the station I was directed to a Pullman Palace Car and informed that I would have the entire sleeper to myself.

I glanced around at the ornate interior and chuckled to myself. Knowing it would be my last taste of luxury for quite some time, I decided to thoroughly enjoy everything at hand. As the train began to roll I rang for the porter and ordered an early supper, a combination of seafood, steak, and prime rib. I also ordered an excellent bottle of red wine.

Easing back into the plush comfort of my window seat, I gazed out through the glass, hardly noticing the dingy bulk of concrete skyscrapers that impaled the New York skyline. Instead, I was envisioning the



limitless reaches of the western horizon and hearing the desert wind as it rushed over the barren sand, through the mesquite, and then hissed past the outstretched arms of the ancient saguaro.

Eventually, however, my thoughts drifted back to the train platform in Columbus. Had it only been a week since I stood there watching Monte and Rosa board the westbound train? Neither of them had voiced their feelings for the other but I had seen the attraction between them from the very beginning. Each had tried to deny it and at times to resist it but both had failed. Yet standing on that platform that afternoon, with the train ready to leave, I was deathly afraid they were about to go their separate ways.

Monte was not one to wear his feelings on his shirtsleeve, and that day when I saw him look at Rosa it was easy to see that he was struggling. I had never played the part of Cupid but the situation at that juncture was dire. I was about to intervene when Monte finally found the right words and asked Rosa to join him. To my relief, she agreed and then, ahead of Monte, had boarded the train. He had a few more things to say to Lieutenant Patton who had defended us in the court-martial. Then, Monte also stepped inside the passenger car and took a window seat. He gave me a quick nod and then the train took them away.

The porter knocked on my door, interrupting my thoughts. He brought in the wine I had ordered. I sampled it and then nodded my approval. He poured a bit more into my long-stemmed glass and then placed the bottle on my dining table.

After the porter had gone, I raised the glass and smiled, thinking of the toast I would someday make at Monte and Rosa's wedding. Oh yes, I had no doubts they were a perfect match. All they needed was time to smooth out a few dents and wrinkles. And after spending the last week together, I was certain that, by now, they would be strolling down the primrose path that led to marital bliss.

But I should have known better. Since the day the Apaches murdered his mother and father and left him to die, nothing in Monte Dell Segundo's life had come easily.

I later found out that when Monte first stepped into the passenger car he had paused, looking over the heads of two dozen passengers, trying to find Rosa. Then, before the train had even left the station, he spotted her sitting by a window toward the rear of the car but deep in conversation with another man.

The man was sitting next to Rosa and leaning toward her as he spoke. He was well-dressed, likely in his early thirties, and wore a grin that reminded Monte

of a snake oil salesman. He was speaking excitedly and gesticulating with both hands.

Rosa glanced up from the conversation. Seeing Monte staring at her, she quickly averted her eyes.

Monte felt something deep within begin to boil. It was a rising fury, the likes of which he had never experienced. With his gut twisting and his face flushing with heat, he worked his way down the narrow aisle. He took an empty seat opposite Rosa and glared out the window.

Monte had no idea what was happening to him. He wanted to grab something and rip it apart or better yet to take the interloper and pulverize him with his fists. But, intuitively, Monte knew there was absolutely nothing he could do, and for the first time in his life he felt weak, even helpless.

As the train pulled out, he could not help but hear what was being said across from him.

“But you never wrote,” Rosa said. “Not once.”

“No?” questioned the man. “It must have been the revolution. I wrote you many times.”

“What was I to think?” snipped Rosa. “It has been three years!”

“But Rosa, I was told you were killed at Agua Prieta. My heart was broken. And, of course, I wrote no more after that.”

That was enough for Monte. He took a deep breath, and as he had done so completely as a child, attempted to smother his emotions, to shove them down into the same black hole that had, for so many years, imprisoned his most painful memories. With grim determination to feel absolutely nothing, he turned his head and deliberately locked his eyes on Rosa. In seconds, their eyes met again but this time they held. Rosa expected Monte to show a bit of curiosity or perhaps a twinge of jealousy, but the emptiness she saw in his expression stunned her into silence.

The man next to her noticed Rosa's stare and twisted his neck to investigate. For the first time he saw Monte Segundo. However, all he noticed was a powerfully built man wearing a general issue military uniform.

"Sir," said the man, with only the faintest edge to his voice, "this is a *private* conversation."

Monte's dark eyes shifted to the speaker. He was slight in build. His hair was black and slicked down. And, he was handsome, almost too handsome. He reminded Monte of a painting of Jesus he had once seen. All except for the eyes. Those were black and reflected the sinister glint of a cat watching a mousehole.

“That is Monte Segundo,” offered Rosa. She desperately wanted to say more but the words would not come. “He is... he is...”

“National Guard,” Monte said flatly.

The man looked uncertainly from Monte to Rosa. “Do you two know each other?”

Rosa hesitated but did not take her eyes off Monte.

“I got discharged from the army,” said Monte. “She’s a revolutionary who got arrested. They took both of us to the train and kicked us out of Columbus.”

Monte paused. He gazed at Rosa, holding on to one last hope that she would in some small way reach out to him. But Rosa said nothing.

Rosa, on the other hand, had just met a former lover, a man she mistakenly thought had abandoned her years before. She could not deny her past feelings for him and yet Monte Segundo was unquestionably the man she loved. But there Monte sat, not the least bit jealous and offering no explanation of how he had invited her to join him on the train. No admission that they were supposed to be together. And to make matters worse, Monte was not showing the slightest interest in her. Nothing!

Monte clenched his jaws and turned his attention to the sinister-eyed intruder. “We know each other but that’s about all there is to it.”

Rosa's eyes flared with indignation but Monte had already looked away. Had he seen the anger in her eyes, things might have been different. But such is fate.

"Yes," Rosa huffed. "That is all there is to it."

"It seems like," Monte said to the man, "the two of you go way back."

The man seemed uncertain. "Way back?"

"I mean the two of you have known each other a long time."

"Oh, yes," the man said. "And now after so many years here we are together again!"

Monte could feel the muscles in his neck starting to knot. "I can see that."

The man sighed and glanced starry-eyed at Rosa. "A few minutes ago, when she first walked in, seeing her was... was like a miracle. I thought she was dead but here she is sitting next to me."

"It looks to me," Monte said dryly, "her getting on this train today turned out a lot better than she thought it would."

Rosa blinked. Rolling Monte's words over in her mind, she attempted to grasp the meaning of what he had said but she was too distressed to concentrate.

Satisfied that Monte was no threat, the man began to grin again. He leaned toward Monte and stretched out his hand. "I am Anthony Ortega. Tony to many on

this side of the border and Antonio to many more south of it.”

Taking an immediate dislike to Anthony Ortega, Monte shook his hand.

“Where are you bound for, Mr. Segundo?”

Monte pointed straight ahead. “West.”

Anthony Ortega glanced at the Colt single action and large hunting knife Monte was wearing. “I’m bound for Tucson, myself. There is lots of opportunity in and around Tucson. If you’re looking for work, come to Tucson and ask for Anthony Ortega. Among other business interests, I own a mercantile on Congress Street. I’m always looking for good men.”

“I might just do that,” Monte said, suddenly coming to his feet. “It’s too crowded in here for me. I’m going to get some air.”

With that, Monte took a few steps down the aisle and then ducked out the back door of the passenger car to stand on the deck. For Monte, anywhere was better than sitting across from Rosa Bustamonte and her long-lost lover, Anthony Ortega.

Ortega watched Monte go and for the first time noticed that he wore moccasins instead of army boots. Turning back to Rosa, Ortega thought for a moment and then asked, “So, why did they run him out of the army?”

Rosa was angry but with Monte's sudden departure she was also confused. "He tried to kill an Apache. One of the army scouts."

Ortega smirked. "That would do it. I read about the Apache scouts while I was in New York City. They are called 'Pershing's Pets,' are they not?"

Frowning, Rosa glared at Ortega. "You were in New York City? What was Antonio Ortega doing in New York? Is that where you got that ridiculous gringo suit you are wearing? And why are we speaking English? Where is your mustache and what happened to your hair?"

Rosa paused to take a breath. She glared at Ortega, taking in everything from his slicked-down hair to his shiny leather shoes. "What has happened to you, Antonio?"

Patting Rosa's hand, Ortega chuckled, "Questions, questions, so many questions. Where do I start?"

Rosa pulled her hand away. "Start with where you got the money to buy such an ugly suit."

Ortega laughed. "You have not changed, Rosa," he said lightly but then grew more serious. "But I have."

"The suit!" demanded Rosa. "Did you steal it?"

Ortega soberly shook his head. "I am making money, Rosa. More than I ever dreamed possible. Soon I may even own my own hacienda with thousands of acres."



“And how,” Rosa asked suspiciously, “do you make all this money you claim to have? Are you now a bandit?”

Leaning close to Rosa, Ortega lowered his voice. “It is the revolution, Rosa. There is money, much money, to be made if you know how to operate.”

“Operate?” questioned Rosa. “You do not fight in the revolution?”

“I did,” said Ortega. “In the beginning. You know I did. But then I was wounded. By the time I recovered I was all alone. I had to survive on my own. So I began to work, work hard.

“That was about the time I heard you had been killed. Oh Rosa, how sad I was. So, I worked even harder to heal my broken heart. I saved my money. When I had enough, I went to Tucson. And then I began to make real money... selling arms and ammunition to Villa and his men, to the revolution.

“So you see, I still fight but it is on this side of the border and in my own way. The supplies have to be smuggled very carefully across the border. I often risk my life doing it.”

Rosa thought for a moment and then frowned. “But you make money. Fighters make no money. In Mexico we can barely find enough to eat.”

Ortega shook his head. “You do not understand, Rosa. I must make enough to pay for the rifles and

bullets. The dealer in New York City is a German agent but he looks like an American. To avoid suspicion it is necessary that I look like a successful businessman from Tucson, a man that goes there to buy farm equipment. The United States government is watching everything closely but the Germans always outsmart them. It is the Germans that I deal with and appearances are very important to their operation.

“They sell me the guns and ammunition for very little. Yes, it is true that I make a small profit but I must make something. How else can I run my mercantile?”

“When we win the revolution I will make everything right. I have planned for that as well. You will see.”

Folding her arms, Rosa said stiffly, “You had plans to come back to me, too, but you never came back. What good are your plans?”

Rosa paused and thought of Monte. “I have my own plans now.”

Ortega smiled and leaned back in the seat. “Do your plans include living in a grand hacienda? Do they include fine horses and automobiles? Does your plan include more land than you ever dreamed of and servants to cook and do the laundry?”

“I never dream like that,” Rosa said. “What I want... what I wanted was *Villisimo*, all the things Villa promised.”

“Come with me to Tucson,” Ortega said, changing the subject. “You can do more for General Villa there than you ever could fighting in Mexico.”

“Come with you?” huffed Rosa. “After so many years you appear out of nowhere and ask such a thing? You remember a little girl. That little girl is the one who died in the revolution!”

Rosa craned her neck trying to get a glimpse of Monte. Only minutes before he too had asked her to come with him, but where was he now? Did he not care that another man was trying to take her from him? Would he give up so easily and walk away? Was such a ferocious fighter as Monte Segundo not willing to fight for her?

Ortega continued to talk but Rosa was only half-listening. When the train stopped in the small hamlet of Hermanas to pick up passengers, she thought Monte would surely return to his seat. When the train pulled out of the station and Monte was still nowhere in sight, Rosa grew agitated.

“I need to use the toilet,” said Rosa.

Ortega slid out of the seat, allowing Rosa to stand. He pointed to the rear of the car. “The ladies’ facility is back there.”

Rosa walked down the aisle but continued out the rear door. She crossed to the next car and looked it over. A porter noticed her and stepped forward to meet her.

“May I help you, señorita?”

Flustered, Rosa said, “I am looking for a man wearing an army uniform. A big man.”

“Was he wearing moccasins?”

“Yes.”

“He got off at the last stop. That was Hermanas. Not much there for an army man. Only about a hundred people. Farmers and ranchers mostly.”

Rosa felt her heart sink. But then she grew angry.

“Did he say anything before he got off?”

The porter shrugged unconvincingly. “Not to me. He seemed to be having a private conversation with himself.”

Rosa glared at the porter with fire in her eyes. Through clenched teeth she demanded. “What did he say?”

Scratching the back of his neck, the porter replied reluctantly, “He said, ‘To hell with her.’”

## CHAPTER TWO

Monte stood by the tracks and watched the train until it was out of sight. He had experienced the bitterness of betrayal before but never the smoldering rage of jealousy. On the train he had desperately tried to bury his emotions but soon realized that doing so was far more difficult than he had imagined. Sitting there, merely listening to Rosa and Anthony Ortega was more than he could stand. His only recourse, the only way he could think of to curb his anger and salvage his pride was to walk away from Rosa and never look back.

“From the start, you were nothing but trouble,” Monte muttered.

A voice to his left broke into Monte’s thoughts. “Are we expecting trouble, soldier?”

Monte turned to see an old man leaning on a cane. He had gray whiskers and wore a battered suit and hat.

“What do you mean?” Monte asked.

The old man pointed at Monte. “I heard you mention ‘trouble.’ Is the army coming here? I thought the military was only taking over Columbus.”

Looking to the east, Monte could clearly see the mountains that stood just outside of Columbus. At best they were ten miles away. Then for the first time, he glanced around Hermanas, seeing a few shacks, a

corral, and what passed for a train station and post office.

“Nobody’s coming. Just me.”

The old man studied Monte for a moment. “Not much here for a soldier. Not many folks either.”

“How far is it to the Arizona state line?” Monte asked.

The old man licked his lips to wet them. “It’s ninety miles, give or take. You thinking of walking the tracks?”

“How far apart are the train stops?”

“About every ten or twelve miles. The ones closest to the state line are Rodeo and Apache. Rodeo’s in New Mexico and Apache’s in Arizona.”

Monte swore softly and then nodded. He left Columbus to find the graves of his father and mother and that was what he intended to do. With that in mind, he started walking alongside the train tracks.

“You best watch out for bandits, soldier,” called out the old man. “The damn Mexicans and Yaquis are crawling all over this side of the border. Nobody’s safe, especially a man alone and afoot.”

Attempting to block Rosa from his thoughts, Monte repeatedly told himself that he was actually quite fortunate, in that, only a few hours earlier he had been in a military courtroom being tried for treason. Now, instead of facing a firing squad, he was miles from

General Pershing and, once again, free to do whatever he wanted. Everything, he assured himself, was back to normal.

But less than a mile down the tracks, Monte grudgingly admitted that things were anything but normal.

Just three months before, he had been a bull-of-the-woods lumberjack in North Idaho. His life was simple. He worked hard, played hard, and cared for nothing and absolutely no one. But that was before he left Idaho to join Pershing's army and before his suppressed childhood memories began to haunt him. And, too, it was before he met Rosa Bustamonte.

As Monte walked alongside the rails, he wrestled with the nagging sensation that because of what he experienced in Mexico and what he had learned during his court-martial trial, his life would never be the same. Eventually, he began to curse the day he left Idaho and wished he had never heard of General Pershing and his Apache scouts. Now, instead of living the good life in the mountains of Idaho, he was traipsing across a blazing desert plagued with a passel of loathsome thoughts he could not get out of his mind.

Too many times, he vividly recalled the horrible death of his father, and he remembered all too well the agonizing pain he had endured after the Apaches threw him into a cactus patch and left him to die. He also

could not stop thinking of the lonely graves of his mother and father. But, worst of all, each time he thought of his parents and the graves, he inevitably envisioned the train station at Columbus and then, infuriatingly, Rosa sitting with Anthony Ortega.

Over the next few hours, Monte's jealousy festered. Eventually crowding out the other sentiments, it grew so tumultuous that heat no longer affected him. Thirst and hunger did not register nor did time or distance. Fatigue, too, was erased by an unquenchable fire that burned inside him, a savage emotion completely foreign to Monte Segundo.

Engrossed as he was, it seemed to Monte that only an hour or so had passed since leaving Hermanas, but when he approached the train stop of Continental, he noticed the sun was already setting.

He drank his fill of water from a horse trough and only then did he realize how long he had walked without water. Searching around, he found a discarded whiskey bottle that still had a cork. After rinsing it, he filled the bottle with water and stuck it in his back pocket. At a small dry goods store, he spent half of the money he had left on a sleeping blanket, but the air had not yet begun to cool so he kept walking. A short distance past the next train stop of Hachita, he welcomed the realization that he was too tired to think any longer and decided to stop for the night.



He bedded down near the train tracks and had slept for only two hours when the rumbling of the eastbound El Paso and Southwestern jarred him awake. Unable to fall back asleep, Monte rolled out of his blanket and tramped farther west under the starlight.

Existing on nothing but jackrabbits and an occasional cottontail, Monte made it to Animas by late afternoon the following day. Finally completely worn out, he shuffled into the small Burns Hotel and paid one dollar for a room. He slept soundly through the entire night and the following morning used his last fifty-cent piece to buy a hotel breakfast and as much black coffee as he could drink.

Late that afternoon, he walked into the dusty train stop of Rodeo.

Still unable to keep his mind off of Rosa, and with only twenty-five cents to his name, Monte went to the only saloon in town.

Going through an open door, he glanced around the spacious room. Hot and sweaty, he made his way to the bar. A half-dozen tables with chairs were crowded together near the front window. A billiard table was set up in the rear and two electric fans spun lazily overhead. An elderly man stood behind the bar. Other than that, the saloon was empty.

“How much is a beer?” Monte asked.

The bartender's eyes swept over Monte, taking in his army uniform as well as the width of his shoulders. "Two bits."

Monte slapped two dimes and five pennies down on the polished wood. "That's all I got. Any work to be had around here? For a day, maybe?"

"You done with the army?"

"Let's just say they're done with me. And I'm National Guard, not army."

"May be some work down at the livery," said the bartender as he grabbed a glass mug and began filling it. "There's cowboys that'll come in directly. They'll leave their horses there till they get back on Sunday night. The hostler might could use a hand taking care of their stock."

Monte scratched the stubble on his jaw. "What day is today?"

Setting the cold beer down in front of Monte, the bartender's eyes narrowed as he took a closer look at Monte's disheveled appearance. "Today's Saturday, friend. Mind if I ask where you come from? I didn't see no horse out front and from the looks of you, you shore didn't come in on no train."

"I started out in Hermanas," said Monte and then emptied half the mug of beer in one swallow. "I walked from there."

“Long ways,” commented the bartender. “Where you headed?”

Monte wiped his lips with the back of his sleeve. Ordinarily he would have ignored such questions but he needed information and the bartender seemed talkative. “Right here is where I was headed. To start with anyway. I’m looking for somebody that’s been around this part of the country for a long time, all the way back to the Apache wars.”

The bartender put out his hand. “I’m Red. I’ve only been here since the century rolled over but Deek Coleman is the man you want. He’ll be in along with the cowboys. He rides fence for the Bar S outfit.”

Shaking hands, Monte said, “Segundo. Monte Segundo.”

Red let go of Monte’s hand. “Quite a grip you got there stranger. You a miner?”

“Idaho lumberjack.”

“Figured you was something of the sort,” Red said.

A faint rumbling sound funneled through the front door. As the sound grew louder, hoots and yells of men blended with the rumbling. In seconds a cluster of horses and boisterous riders thundered past the saloon, leaving behind a rolling cloud of dust.

“That’s the cowboys,” grinned Red. “They’ll be in here to get liquored up good before they get on the train.”

Unimpressed, Monte sipped his beer.

“There’s no whores here in town, you see,” offered Red. “So them cowboys take the train in to Globe. When they get to town they go all night long and then, on the way back here, they sober up before they go back to work. They got their timing figured out pretty good.”

“Does Deek Coleman go with them?”

“Not to drink. He used to bend an elbow but not too far back, it got to where the whiskey like to have killed him. He give up drinking the hard stuff about a year ago. Didn’t give up chasing women, though. Just drinking whiskey. He’ll take a beer or two but that’s it for Deek.”

Pounding leather heels and the jingling of spurs reverberated off the plank entrance as the blustering cowboys pushed and shoved each other through the door of the saloon.

Monte turned his head. Taking the cowboys in with a single glance, he saw that all of them were young. Each had a pistol belted around his waist as well as large noisy spurs strapped around the back of his high-heeled boots.

Monte went back to his beer. As far as he knew, he had never seen real cowboys but for some reason the fact that they wore their spurs into the bar irritated him. But Monte was tired, his stomach was empty, and he had been fuming for days.

Sipping the last of his beer, Monte found himself yearning for the cool serenity of the deep timber and the life he once lived. In the mountains of North Idaho, he simply enjoyed the good things life had to offer, destroyed the bad things, and ignored everything in between. There was no worry, no anxiety, and no regret.

But that was before Rosa del Carmen Fernandez Bustamonte started haunting every hour of his day.

Monte was at the end of the bar closest to the front door. The jostling cowboys lined up to his left. Almost immediately he was carelessly bumped with a sharp elbow. Making room, Monte slid a step toward the door but when the caterwauling of the cowboys intensified he left the bar and took a seat at one of the tables.

A short wiry cowboy with a light growth of chin whiskers noticed Monte's move. "Aren't we good enough for you?" said the cowboy, his tone jovial.

Monte smiled and the cowboy turned back to his friends. A moment later another man darkened the front entrance but, instead of walking in, he paused in the doorway and peered inside. He was average height but stooped at the shoulders and very thin. His hair and beard were gray and the bridge of his nose was flat, no doubt the result of having been broken years before.

A different cowboy leaned back from the bar but this one was thickset and well over six feet tall. He eyed

the newcomer and smirked. “Come on in, Deek,” bellowed the cowboy. “I’ll buy you a whiskey!”

“To hell with you, Turk,” Deek grumbled, but the noise of the cowboys almost drowned out his words.

Red filled a beer mug and then went to the empty space on the bar where Monte had been standing. Deek went to meet him. As the bartender handed Deek the beer, words were exchanged between the two men. Deek then turned and looked curiously at Monte.

Taking a moment to study Monte, Deek Coleman took a thoughtful sip of his beer. The old man’s eyes narrowed with curiosity and then he started for the table where Monte was sitting.

Turk took notice of Deek and then glanced at Monte. “Hey Deek, are you going to tell some of your whoppers to that soldier boy? Tell him a good one and he might buy you a whiskey or two just like the good old days.”

The old man ignored the heckling. Standing across the table from Monte, he asked, “Are you looking for me?”

“I am if you’re Deek Coleman and you know about some renegade Apaches and what they did to a man and woman that lived near here about thirty years ago.”

Sizing Monte up for a moment, Deek hesitated. When he was satisfied, he pulled out a chair and sat down. “I was here back in them days, alright. And I

fought the Apache many a time. What are you looking for exactly?"

"Graves. Two of them. My ma and my pa, both murdered by Apaches in eighty-six. I'm told it happened down near the state line and the Mexican border."

Nodding slowly, Deek raised his beer to his lips. He took a long, slow drink from his mug but did not take his eyes off Monte. When he was finished drinking, he drug his palm down over his mustache and beard. "Are you the kid? The one they found in the cactus?"

Monte stared at Deek for several seconds. "Yeah. I'm him."

"I'll be damned," Deek said gravely. "I thought you died. Lord only knows you came close to doin' just that. And what they done to your pa, I won't forget as long as I live."

"So, do you remember where it happened, remember good enough to show me?"

Deek thought for a moment. "I can draw you a good map. They's landmarks down that way you can't miss. You won't get lost. I'd show you myself but I'm on my way to Globe."

"Good enough," said Monte. "I got no money to pay you to guide me, anyway."

"Hell, boy!" Deek said, shaking his head. "What you went through! I wouldn't take your money even if

I was to ride down with you and show you the way. But like I said, I'm bound for Globe. I ain't had a woman in a month."

The tall cowboy was starting to feel the effects of his whiskey. He turned around and leaned back against the bar. Holding a half-empty shot glass in one hand, he pointed at Deek with the other. "Hey Deek, tell him about the time you captured old Geronimo. Or better yet, tell him how you single-handed saved Teddy Roosevelt in that Spanish American war.

"Damn it, Deek, come on and tell us one of your tales. We haven't heard a good lie since you climbed on the wagon."

The other cowboys began turning toward Monte and Deek.

The small cowboy laughed. "Hey soldier, if you offer to buy old Deek a whiskey he'll spin a yarn like you never heard. Why, to hear him tell it, he's a bigger hero than Daniel Boone and Wyatt Earp combined."

Monte stared appraisingly at Deek. The old man clearly had a reputation as a liar. Yet he had mentioned a boy thrown into cactus and Monte knew there was no way he could be lying about that.

Ignoring the cowboys, Monte asked, "How far is it to the graves... I mean to where the Apaches attacked?"

"You believe me, then?"

"I do."



Deek sat up a bit straighter. “It’s a good thirty miles. You got a horse?”

“No.”

Now finished with his whiskey, Turk sauntered over to the table. Standing between Monte and Deek, he leaned forward and rested both palms on the top of the table. “Deek, you old son of a bitch, what lies are you telling this fella?”

Monte had had enough, enough of walking, enough of Antonio Ortega, and enough of loudmouthed cowboys. “That’s none of your damned business.”

Turk blinked and then blinked again. He wasn’t looking for trouble but he had never backed away from any either. He raised up to his full height, filled his lungs, and defiantly expanded his chest. “It’s my business if I say it’s my business. Who the hell do you think you are?”

Startled by Turk’s sudden outburst, the saloon suddenly fell silent. All eyes darted back and forth from Monte to Turk. The cowboys were frowning but, behind the bar, Red wore a knowing smile.

Monte took off his hat and laid it on the table.

“I’d never seen a cowboy until today. Now that I have, I can’t for the life of me figure out why some folks think a *cow-boy* is something special. It seems to me that all you really do is hoist your skinny ass onto

the back of a horse. You sit there while the dumb brute does all the work and then you go and claim the credit.”

Turk was dumbfounded and, for the moment, stunned into immobility. In that instant, Monte stood up and smoothly stepped clear of the table.

With eyes full of reckless fury, Turk took a step forward and swung a right cross, intending it to land on the side of Monte’s jaw. Anticipating the move, Monte slapped Turk’s blow away with his left forearm. Cupping the back of the cowboy’s head with the palm of his right hand, Monte slammed Turk’s face down onto the table. Then, lifting Turk by the hair of his head, Monte spun him around to face the bar.

The whole maneuver was accomplished in seconds. Blood began to drip from Turk’s nose. His eyes rolled as he struggled to keep his balance.

Monte jerked Turk’s pistol from its holster and then took two steps back. “Guns on the bar, boys. Look at me sideways and I’ll put a bullet in your chest.”

None of the cowboys moved. Monte extended his arm, leveling the barrel of the pistol at the back of Turk’s head. “Now!”

Almost in unison the pistols thudded on polished wood.

“Red,” Monte said, calmly, “stow those guns down under the bar.”

As the bartender gathered up the pistols the short cowboy grew belligerent. “You sucker punched him!”

Monte snickered. “If I’d have done that, he wouldn’t be standing.”

“Big talk,” said the short cowboy, “with you holding a loaded pistol.”

Turk came to his senses and then sluggishly wiped the blood from his nose. He turned to see the barrel of a pistol inches from his face. “That was a dirty trick, damn you!”

Monte was mad at the world and he was ready to get even. His eyes darkened as he eased the hammer of the pistol down. “You think that was dirty, do you?”

Seeing the change in Monte’s eyes, Turk balked. “I got nothing against you, mister.”

“Shorty,” demanded Monte, “you come over here with your friend. You both want a clean fight. So to make it fair, I’m going to let you pitch in and help him out.”

Shorty took a step but then hesitated. “You still got Turk’s gun in your hand.”

Monte was feeling good now, his blood coming to a boil. “I’ll give it to Deek, here. But on second thought, Shorty, you pick out another cowboy to come along with you. I want to see how tough you are when you have to stand on your own two feet.”

Red spoke up, a dire warning in his tone. “Boys, you’re looking at an honest-to-goodness bull-of-the-woods lumberjack. And you best only take a good long look or you’re gonna get busted up real bad.”

“He’s more than that,” added Deek. “He survived what the Apaches done to ’im as a kid. He’s tougher’n any of you will ever be. If you want to stay clear of the hospital or maybe even out of the graveyard, I’d advise you all to eat a little crow and just walk away.”

Handing Turk’s pistol over to Deek, Monte took out his own pistol and laid it on the table. His eyes locked on Turk. “Make your move, you son of a bitch or I will.”

Turk glanced at the bar, his face pale. “Come on, boys. Let’s get to the train station. To hell with this.”

“What about our hardware?” protested Shorty.

“I’ll keep it safe ’til you boys get back,” offered Red.

Spinning on his boot heels, Turk stomped out of the saloon. After a moment of hesitation, Shorty and the rest of the crew filed out behind him. Still spoiling for a fight, Monte watched them go, but then went to the door and stood there until they were out of sight.

“Never thought I’d see the day,” Deek said.

“Me neither,” agreed Red. “Prettiest damn thing I ever saw.”

Monte went back to the table. He took a deep breath, let it out slowly, and then picked up his pistol and holstered it.

“We serve steak and beans here, too,” said Red. “If you want a plate full, it’s on me. That was worth a hell of a lot more than the six bits I charge.”

“I’ll take you up on it,” Monte said and then took a seat facing the door. “I’m tired of jackrabbit.”

“Serve me up a plate, too,” Deek said, “and two more beers.”

Monte nodded. “I could use another. And you don’t need to draw me a map. Just tell me about the trail. I can remember what you say.”

Deek shoved Turk’s pistol behind his belt. As he began giving Monte detailed directions, he used his bony finger and began tracing an imaginary map on the tabletop. By the time the steaks were brought out, Monte Segundo finally knew where his parents had been buried.

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With a full stomach and a good three hours remaining before sundown, Monte headed south, crossing over the desert at a fast walk. At dusk, he spotted a stand of willow trees in a shallow wash and then found the nearby spring just where Deek said it would be.

In the fading light, Monte knelt by the water and listened for a full minute before cupping his hand and drinking his fill. A few feet away, in a smooth patch of sand, he built a small fire. He had nothing to cook or any coffee to boil but to a man alone, the flames of a fire are often his only comfort. And for the first time in a long, long while, Monte realized he was experiencing loneliness.

He was close now, only a few miles from where he used to live, and yet none of the landmarks looked familiar. He had hoped that seeing a distant mountain or perhaps a rocky outcropping would resurrect a forgotten memory, but so far his mind remained a blank. All he knew for sure was that in a few hours he would be standing over the graves of those that had brought him into the world.

For most of his life, Monte assumed it was normal to have forgotten one's early years. Until recently, he had no idea that he had, in fact, blocked out all memory of his childhood. Now, however, gazing into the fire, he wondered about his father and mother, two people that he had somehow erased from his memory. Over and over, he asked himself, who they were and where they had come from. But no matter how hard he tried, he could not remember anything whatsoever about his mother and what little he could recall of his father, he wished he did not remember.

As the night wore on, Monte became increasingly frustrated with his faulty memory but then a memory he desperately wanted to forget wormed its way back into his thoughts. Once again, he could see Rosa together with Anthony Ortega. In the blackness beyond the fire he even imagined he heard Rosa laughing along with him.

Monte swore, cursing his inability to purge the pestilent visions of Rosa from his mind, or to at least prevent their constant intrusion. For the last two days he had tried but again and again he had failed. What he wanted to remember stubbornly remained a mystery and what he wanted to forget continued to plague him.

Watching the dancing flames, Monte swore under his breath and then said out loud, “Damn snake eyes. That’s what he has. How could she be such a fool? A blind man could see he was lying.”

Unrolling his blanket, Monte paused and then muttered regretfully, “No. It’s me that’s the fool... Damn you, Rosa... To hell with both of you.”

Wrapping his blanket around his shoulders, Monte stared into the flames. But all he saw until he fell asleep was Rosa, Rosa and Anthony Ortega.

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The predawn chill woke Monte and in minutes he had rolled his blanket and was again heading south. Deek’s

meticulous description of the terrain and landmarks allowed Monte to travel swiftly as he threaded his way around low-lying patches of cactus and then crossed a rolling plain dotted with thorny mesquite and smooth-barked palo verde. Shortly after sunup, when he started angling to the southwest, he knew he was getting close.

A few hours later, he abruptly stopped in the shade of a gnarled mesquite. His heart began to pound. The open ground in front of him fell away for miles in a gentle slope. Here and there a patch of prickly pear added a swath of green to an otherwise parched landscape. A few scattered cholla cactus, rigid and threatening, anchored themselves above scant tufts of brown grass. A half mile in the distance, however, he could make out a sagging frame of charred timber.

Monte gritted his teeth and shook his head to clear his mind. He started for the burned-out building but found himself growing more and more anxious with every step. Having long ago learned to trust his instincts, Monte slowed his pace and began scanning the horizon in every direction.

Was his uneasiness, he wondered, simply due to an overworked imagination? Was it perhaps whispers of forgotten memories that were now beginning to stir? Was it the thought of standing over the final resting place of his father and mother... or was it something entirely unrelated?



Halting for a moment, Monte listened. There was no wind, no sound but his own breathing. After several uneasy minutes, Monte started again. Feeling the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end, he eased his Colt in and out of the scabbard, making certain it was loose enough to draw quickly if the need arose.

When he was within one hundred paces of the burnt cabin he paused once more and studied everything in sight. He saw nothing unusual. Walking softly and slowly in his moccasins, he continued on to the side of the cabin and then stopped.

He stared at a dense thicket of cholla cactus a short distance to his left, and knew instantly it was where he had been thrown by the Apaches and left to die. That much he did remember. But he also remembered a corral where his father had been tied and tortured to death. That had been somewhere near the house but when he looked for it he could see nothing, not a single pole. However, there was a large palo verde shading a bare patch of sand off to his right. On a hunch, he headed toward it to investigate. When he rounded the twisted trunk of a dead mesquite, he jerked to a stop. Stacked a few feet in front of him, in the middle of the patch of sand, were two piles of brick-shaped stones.

The stones on the right were arranged in the shape of a grave but lay somewhat unevenly as one might expect they would after thirty years. But the grave next

to it looked entirely different. In fact, it appeared to have been recently tended. The stones on it were neatly arranged over fresh dirt as if the grave were new.

Monte inched his way forward and then paused to study the tended grave more closely. Then he saw something that jolted him. A human finger, covered in flesh, was sticking out from under a stone.

Completely bewildered, he was staring at the finger when he caught a flicker of movement from the corner of his eye. Glancing far to the south, he could make out five mounted horsemen riding at an easy gallop. The land in that stretch of the desert was wide open and the riders were at least five miles away, but Monte had a feeling they were headed straight for him.

He watched the riders veer to the west for a while and then to the east, but he quickly surmised that his hunch was right. The men were clearly following a trail or track of some sort that would soon bring them to the homestead and very likely to where he stood.

It appeared that the riders were trailing someone, but Monte assumed whoever that might have been was already dead. And that person had recently been buried using the gravestones from his parents' graves.

Monte walked to within one step of the newly occupied grave to take a closer look. Then, to his amazement, he saw the finger move. Bending down at the head of the grave and peering into the shadows cast

by the flat gravestones, Monte was astonished to see an eyeball staring out at him. And then it blinked.

Suddenly, Monte understood that someone was trying to hide from the riders and, in an act of pure desperation, had taken refuge under the gravestones. As the small posse grew nearer, Monte circled the grave looking for tracks. He spotted them easily enough but Monte Segundo had lived for years with the Kootenai Indians. Most men, unless they were expert trackers, would have missed the subtle marks left in the sand. Whoever was hiding under the dirt and stones was very good at covering tracks, as good as any Indian.

Circling the fresh grave as well as the old one, Monte deliberately obliterated every print the fugitive had left behind. Satisfied with his work, he stood close to the new grave and waited in the shade.

“I won’t turn you in,” he said softly as he watched the riders close the distance between them. Then noticing the men wore sombreros, Monte said, “*Soy amigo. No tengas miedo.*”

Two hundred yards out, the Mexicans slowed their horses to a walk. A moment later, they scattered. After meandering in several different directions they regrouped and then galloped straight for Monte. When they were a few feet away they slid their mounts to a

stop, blasting sand and gravel against Monte's moccasins.

Unimpressed with the horsemanship, Monte casually eyed the Mexicans. Even though they were covered in trail dust he could see that each wore the same type of jacket and sombrero. These were rurales.

The Mexicans, in turn, studied Monte, no doubt noticing his military uniform and the moccasins on his feet. Next, their eyes roamed suspiciously over the two graves.

*"Buenos días,"* Monte said.

One of the Mexicans, a lean, hard-eyed man who appeared to be in his forties, replied, "So, you speak our language," he said with no attempt to hide his arrogance. "I also speak yours."

Monte could size men up quickly and he took an immediate disliking to the Mexican.

"That's good," returned Monte. "Since you're north of the border, how about we stick to American?"

The Mexican sneered. "I am Sergeant Garcia. We are searching for an escaped murderer, a Yaqui Indian. We are in hot pursuit. If you know where he is, your country's neutrality law demands that you surrender him to us immediately."

Monte had never heard of the neutrality law but he had heard of rurales. They were dangerous men and used to getting what they wanted regardless of the law.

He also knew that rurales had no aversion to murdering those they had apprehended. Monte was pondering his next move when a thought seemingly came out of nowhere.

“I suppose the law says that,” Monte said. “But we’ve seen no Yaquis around here... guilty or innocent. All we’ve seen is the five of you on the wrong side of our border.”

Garcia flinched, his eyes darting to his left and right. “Who is ‘we’? You are alone and with no horse. Why is a soldier out here with no horse?”

“Alone?” Monte snickered. He looked back over his shoulder and then again faced Garcia. “Sure, that’s what it looks like, doesn’t it? We train our horses to lie down in the brush and then we find us a place to shoot from. You know. Sharpshooters with telescope sights. General Pershing’s idea. He’s deploying units all along the border. We’re National Guard from up north, Idaho to be exact. Up there, we shoot elk at five hundred yards like you do rabbits at fifty. That’s why Pershing recruited us from so far away.

“And since Mexico claims they’re going to invade us any day now, we’ve got orders to shoot anything that looks like an army, anything at all we see coming north. Carrancista or Villista doesn’t make any difference to the general.

“So, right this minute, there’s thirty-caliber Springfield rifles with crosshairs on all of your chests. If I give the word, all you’ll hear is a thud of the rifle slug blowing your heart out through your backbone. But you’ll be dead before the sound gets here.”

Garcia was no fool but he was wary. “Idaho National Guard?” sneered Garcia. “Next you will tell me that you are the great El Muerte!”

Monte smiled but his eyes held a threat. “We both know El Muerte is just make-believe. But I’m standing right here in front of you, real as the fires of hell.”

Spreading his arms out slightly, Monte’s black eyes bored into Garcia. “You want to find out if I’m bluffing? You damned greasers are trespassing. My men have itchy trigger fingers and every last one of them is chomping at the bit, wanting to bag their first Mexican.”

Garcia was a tough man but he knew a killer when he saw one. He gathered the reins of his horse. “There is a reward for the Indian. One thousand pesos. You will know him by the marks on the back of his hands. Black suns.”

Easing his horse around, Garcia ordered, “*Vámonos,*” and then led off in an easy walk. The rest of the rurales followed in single file, all heading back the way they had come.

When the Mexicans were mere specks in the distance Monte knelt beside the unmolested grave and started straightening the stones. Only then did he begin to realize that he was kneeling above his father and mother. Yet, with the distraction of the rurales and a fugitive concealed under the stones of the grave next to him, Monte was unable to apprehend what certainly would have been a bittersweet if not heartbreaking reunion. Once again, fate had robbed Monte Segundo of one of life's most precious moments.

"You can come out now," muttered Monte as he continued rearranging stones. "You should get away from here in case those rurales decide to come back."

There was no movement. Monte leaned over and looked under the rock where he had seen the eyeball. Now, the eye was nearly closed, almost lifeless.

Monte carefully lifted the stone that covered the fugitive's head. Brushing away a thin layer of sand, he discovered a strip of cloth that had been used to cover the fugitive's mouth and nose. Pulling the cloth away, Monte glared briefly at the gaunt face of a young man and then bent low and listened. The man was not dead but he was barely breathing.

"Oh, hell," growled Monte and then hurriedly jerked the rest of the stones off the man's body. Lifting him from the grave, Monte laid him down in the sand, making certain he was still shaded by the palo verde.

Looking the man over, Monte guessed him to be, perhaps, twenty years old. He was barefooted, grimy from head to toe, and dressed in filthy cotton rags. His hair was long and black. He was average height and Monte surmised that if he tipped the scales at one hundred pounds he would be lucky.

Believing the poor wretch was merely overheated from being under the rocks, Monte left the fugitive to recuperate and went back to tending the graves. When he was finished rearranging the stones, he noticed the man was still unconscious. A few seconds later his labored breathing turned into short raspy gasps.

Monte pulled the whiskey bottle from his back pocket. Seeing there was only a swallow left, he looked back toward the burned cabin. "There has to be some water somewhere," he said to himself. "We had to have water. There's got to be water somewhere."

Monte knelt and slowly trickled the last of his water past the man's cracked lips. As he corked the bottle, a faint memory of a large tree flashed through his mind.

He stood and immediately noticed the trunk of a charred cottonwood protruding from a ravine fifty yards east of the burned cabin. Going toward the ravine, he saw where a thicket of stubby willows had taken root. Sliding down the sandy bank of the ravine, Monte felt around the base of the willows. In a rocky



depression, he discovered a scant pool of water no larger than a frying pan, all that was left of their spring.

With no way to fill the whiskey bottle, Monte brought the man to the ravine and laid him alongside the willows. Tearing off the bottom of the Indian's shirttail, Monte sopped up the water and then wrung drops between the man's lips. His tongue, however, was black and swollen and he did not swallow.

Again and again Monte slowly dripped water into the fugitive's mouth. A half hour went by before he was able to swallow. Just past dusk, his eyes finally opened.

"It's about time," Monte sneered, as he squeezed a few more drops of water into his whiskey bottle.

The man rolled his eyes toward Monte but could not speak. In fact, he was too weak to move.

"I suppose I've got to feed you now," Monte said, corking the whiskey bottle and coming to his feet. "But we can't stay here. I got a feeling those rurales will come back tonight. We'll have to move out a few miles and find a good place to camp."

The man managed to shake his head. The movement was barely perceptible but Monte caught it. "Don't worry," said Monte, picking up his hapless charge and then hoisting him onto his back in a fireman's carry. "I've packed many a deer like this. Most of them were twice your size."

Trudging up the soft bank of the ravine, Monte started off in a brisk walk angling northeast. “The railroad is out there somewhere. We’ll come to it tomorrow sometime, but we’ll need to stop in a while. We both need to eat and get some sleep.”

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Monte walked for an hour before he found a deep ravine with a smooth sandy bottom and a good bit of brush along the edges. Sliding down a crusty bank into the bed of the arroyo, he then rolled the man off his back and onto the sand. After giving him a few swallows of water, Monte went hunting for something to eat. With a half-moon overhead, and his uncanny ability to see in low light, he had no trouble finding and shooting a cottontail rabbit.

When he returned to the bottom of the ravine, Monte was pleased to see the young man sitting up in the darkness. “Maybe you’ll live after all,” Monte said, but then the man wavered and fell backwards. “And then again, maybe you won’t.”

Tossing the rabbit on the sand, Monte gathered some nearby sticks that had been piled up by the last flash flood. In minutes, he was squatting by a fire with the rabbit skewered on a stick, broiling over a plume of dancing flames. As he rotated the rabbit, Monte starred

curiously at the stranger that he had been packing for so many miles.

A few minutes passed and then Monte jammed his cook-stick deep into the sand and went over to the unconscious man. Lifting one of his hands, he twisted it toward the firelight, but the back of the hand was too dirty to see anything. Unsatisfied, Monte spit on the hand and then rubbed. He saw nothing so he spit again and rubbed some more. Then he saw the tattoo, a sun the size of a silver dollar with flames extending out from the rim. The flames were yellow but the sun itself was solid black.

“Well, you’re sure enough the Yaqui Indian they were after,” Monte said, easing the hand down. “Now what the hell do I do with a murdering Indian?”

Monte went back and sat by the fire and turned the rabbit for the better part of an hour. Occasionally, he climbed out of the ravine to listen to the sounds of the night and scan the starlit desert. But most of the time he spent staring at the flames and the Yaqui.

The Indian, lying motionless in the sand, reminded Monte of a corpse, and he could not help but think of the two graves he had left behind. At times, macabre thoughts of what lay beneath the gravestones crossed his mind but those demons were quickly shoved aside. Instead, he concentrated on the fact that he had finally connected with a tangible remnant of his past. Now, at

least, he had a sense of belonging and a place he could call home.

The Indian suddenly stirred, breaking into Monte's thoughts. Leaning forward, Monte realized it was time to check the rabbit. As he peeled off a strip of steaming backstrap, he could not help but recall the *pitoreal* Rosa had once cooked under similar circumstances. He swore under his breath and tried to block that memory, but the face of Rosa Bustamonte highlighted by the soft glow of firelight was a vision impossible for him to suppress.

Monte took a bite of the rabbit. "Damn you, Rosa. I wish I'd never met you."

The Indian struggled up into a sitting position. His eyes strained to open. "*Gracias, señor,*" he managed in a weak, raspy voice. "Thank you... for saving my life."

Tearing off a back leg, Monte handed a piece of rabbit to the Indian. "Don't thank me yet. I don't know if I did you any favors or not. We'll see."

The Indian accepted the meat and took a small bite. "I am called Ahayaca."

"Ahayaca?" repeated Monte, pulling the other hind leg off the rabbit. "Sounds like a Yaqui name. Is that what you are, a Yaqui Indian?"

Ahayaca swallowed the dry meat with some difficulty. "I am not Yaqui. But it is to their village I must go."

Monte held the whiskey bottle out to Ahayaca but the Indian hesitated.

“It’s water. And by the way, you can call me Monte.”

Ahayaca nodded and then gratefully accepted the bottle.

“So where is this village?” Monte asked.

Knowing too much water would make him sick, Ahayaca took only a small sip of water. “It is near Tucson, Arizona. A few miles southwest of that town.”

Ripping off a chunk of meat with his teeth, Monte chewed as he eyed Ahayaca. “Those rurales back there said you murdered somebody. Did you?”

Ahayaca studied Monte from across the fire. “No. But if I could, I would have. But I did not get the chance.”

For several minutes no words were spoken as Monte and Ahayaca eyed each other and hungrily gnawed on the rabbit legs.

After stripping the meat off the bones, Ahayaca pointed at the rabbit. “Is there more?”

Pulling the rabbit off the stick, Monte twisted off a front leg and then handed the rest to Ahayaca. “Well, you don’t look like a killer. A starved man like yourself isn’t very good at killing or anything of the sort. It must have taken all you had just to get yourself under those rocks.”

After chewing on the back of the rabbit for several minutes, Ahayaca paused to take another sip from the whiskey bottle. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I saw you look down at me. And then I felt the horse's hooves pounding the earth. After that there was nothing but darkness... until I opened my eyes here by the fire."

Ahayaca squinted at Monte as if trying to see into his soul.

"What happened at the graves? Why did you not tell the rurales where I was?"

Monte shrugged. "That one Mexican, Garcia, tried to order me around. I don't take orders very well, especially not from Mexican rurales. And besides, I didn't like the looks of that bunch."

"Where are the rest of you?" Ahayaca asked, "Where are the other Americans and your horses?"

For a moment Monte was stumped. Then he realized Ahayaca was referring to his uniform. "There's only me. No horses either. I was there by myself."

Blinking several times, Ahayaca tried to focus his bloodshot eyes. He peered at Monte across the fire. "You *carried* me here?"

"Yeah."

"Where are we?"

“A few miles north of the graves where I found you.”

Ahayaca studied Monte for several seconds before asking another question. “The graves... are those of your ancestors?”

Monte thought for a moment, realizing that for the first time in thirty years the words he was about to speak now had meaning.

“My ma and pa.”

Ahayaca bent forward, placed his left palm flat on the sand, and bowed his head. “Your father and mother,” he said solemnly. He paused in that position and then brushed the sand from his palm and began eating again.

Monte glanced curiously at Ahayaca. Briefly, he wondered about the odd gesture the Indian had made but then dismissed it as some sort of tradition peculiar to his tribe.

“The rurales told me there was a big reward out on you,” Monte said. “What makes you so special?”

Ahayaca ignored the question. Instead he said, “They will not give up. This I have to tell you. They will come for me.”

Looking up into the star-filled sky, Monte said, “The moon has gone down. If they come, it’ll be first thing in the morning. They’ll circle around where they lost your trail and then they’ll cut my tracks. If they’re

any good at all at reading sign, they'll know I was carrying something heavy. I figure, they'll find us an hour or so after sunrise."

Still holding onto the rabbit with one hand, Ahayaca set the whiskey bottle in the sand and then attempted to get to his feet. He made it to his knees but could go no farther. "Then I must go. They will kill you for what you have done."

Monte finished nibbling the meat from his rabbit leg and then tossed the bones into the fire. When Ahayaca finished eating Monte came to his feet. Stepping around the dwindling flames, Monte pocketed the whiskey bottle and then knelt with his back to Ahayaca. "Climb on. Our only chance is to make it to the railroad and then follow the tracks to a station before they catch up."

"It is no use. You must leave me here."

"Fat chance," Monte said. "I started this and I'm going to finish it. Now get on. You've had some food and water. You'll feel better in a few hours. If you do, then you can walk some."

Ahayaca grabbed Monte's shoulders and held on as Monte stood and locked his arms around Ahayaca's legs.

"Anyhow," added Monte, "we're almost out of water and it'll be cooler walking at night. I doubt it's



more than ten or fifteen miles and we can make that by sunup.”

“You cannot carry me fifteen miles,” protested Ahayaca as Monte trudged out of the ravine heading north. “And, anyway, the rurales will come to the train station looking for me. There are five of them.”

Monte changed his direction slightly, angling a bit to the west. “I just spent some time down in Mexico and I came to notice a big difference between them and us. Americans might break the law from time to time but down in Mexico, the law is just plain ignored.

“Those rurales are used to their own lawless ways but up here they’ll find out soon enough that things are different. They can’t just cross the border and take you away without some sort of proper paperwork.”

“But,” protested Ahayaca, “what if there is no law at the railroad, no sheriff?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Monte said. “The whole border is a powder keg right now. There’s talk of a Mexican invasion and the Americans are sending thousands of soldiers down this way to stand guard all along the border. Those rurales will be on mighty thin ice just being in this country. They won’t start any trouble, sheriff or no sheriff. Not if they’re smart, anyway.”

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Monte had gone over a mile before he eased Ahayaca off his back. Ahayaca, however, could barely stand, much less walk, so after a few minutes rest they continued on as before. Working their way across the sprawling desert, they stopped at intervals to rest but as the night wore on, the rests became more and more frequent. Even so, by first light Monte was able to make out a straight line in the distance, a black thread that stretched across the entire horizon.

“There it is,” Monte said, allowing Ahayaca to slide off his back. “There’s the railroad.”

Holding onto Monte’s shirt, Ahayaca steadied his legs. “I do not see anything.”

“It’s there, alright. Closer than I thought. It veered southwest somewhere and now it’s headed for Globe.”

Ahayaca let go of Monte’s shirt. He rubbed the grit from his eyes and then looked back in the direction they had come. Straining his eyes, Ahayaca pointed. “What is that?”

Monte turned and saw a fuzzy gray speck, a speck that seemed to be moving. He could make out a rider. He was on their trail and closing fast.

“Looks like we’re not going to make it,” Monte said, and then tossed Ahayaca over his shoulder and trotted to a shallow arroyo. Dropping down behind a knee-high bank, Monte drew his pistol. “Stay low,” he ordered.

“I am sorry,” Ahayaca said. “I brought this on you.”

The rider was closing rapidly. Monte could now see the *rurale* was leading a second horse, but a horse with no rider. Monte drew his pistol. He searched left and right and then behind him looking for the other rurales who would be trying to surround him. Monte was confident he could hit a man-size target at one hundred yards with his pistol but against five rifles, he knew he had little chance to survive.

“You watch my back,” Monte said. “Let me know if you see anything, anything at all.”

“It is an honor to die with you,” Ahayaca said. “You are like the *jaguar*.”

“I only see...” Monte began and then stopped. “One rider. He’s leading a second horse. No one’s on it so the other rurales may already be circling behind us on foot.”

In moments, Monte could see the rider more clearly. He stared in disbelief but there was no doubt. Whoever was barreling toward them wore a hat but it was not a sombrero. And the second horse had no saddle.

“What the hell?” muttered Monte.

The rider was in range but Monte did not take aim. In seconds, the horseman rode past the arroyo where they were hiding. But then, after taking a few more strides, both horses abruptly slid to a stop.

“Monte Segundo,” the rider called out. “It’s Deek Coleman! Rurales are hot on my tail. We got to move and move quick!”

“I’ll be damned!” Monte said, as he stood in the growing light. “Over here, Deek.”

Deek trotted his horses over. He glanced at Monte and then settled his attention on Ahayaca. “So that’s it. I wondered what you was totin’.”

“He can’t walk,” Monte said.

Deek nodded. “Put him up behind me. You hop on my mare. We gotta hightail it, pronto.”

Lifting Ahayaca, Monte placed him behind Deek Coleman. Taking the lead rope from Deek, Monte grabbed a handful of mane and then swung up onto the bareback mare.

“I can see ’em,” Deek said, pointing. “Five of ’em. We’ll head for Bernadino.”

Spurring his mount into a full run and with Monte following close behind, Deek rode directly west. Dodging mesquite and bounding over cactus they raced across the desert, angling toward the railroad. Soon a small cluster of buildings could be seen alongside the tracks.

Deek’s horses were fresh and they crossed the desert with ground-eating strides. Just before sunup and well out in front of the rurales, Deek and Monte reined in their lathered horses on the outskirts of Bernadino.

The rurales were less than a quarter mile away when they began to slow and then finally come to a stop. One of them could be seen looking through a pair of binoculars.

“What do you think they’re up to?” Deek asked.

Monte took a good look at Deek. His scraggly hair had been cut short. All that was left of his beard was a well-trimmed mustache but, unlike two days before, Deek now wore a pistol.

“Most likely figuring out their next move,” Monte said.

“What’re they after, anyhow?” Deek asked.

“Me,” offered Ahayaca. “They won’t stop until they have me.”

Deek nodded toward the rurales. “One’s comin’. Reckon he wants to parley.”

A door was heard slamming somewhere in the town.

“Not many folks in Bernadino,” Deek said, looking back over his shoulder. “But they’re startin’ to stir.”

The *rurale* approached at a walk. With his reins in one hand, he held the other hand high in the air. It was Garcia.

The Mexican halted a few feet away. His eyes rested appraisingly on Monte. “You have much *machismo*, *señor*. It would be such a pity to have to kill you.”

“What do you want?” Monte asked.

Garcia’s eyes swept over Deek, taking in the pistol around his waist. “I will give you one thousand pesos for the Indian. Paid in Mexican silver.”

“A thousand pesos!” exclaimed Deek. “You’d pay that much for a skinny peon?”

“Sure,” smiled Garcia. “Why fight each other when we can all be friends?”

Monte frowned. His eyes were locked on Garcia, watching for him to make the slightest wrong move. “I don’t need any friends.”

“You got any papers?” asked Deek. “For a thousand dollars he must be one bad *hombre*.”

Garcia slowly reached inside his jacket. “From the state of Sonora,” he said.

Taking out a folded piece of battered paper, Garcia leaned forward and then handed it to Deek. “You are a sheriff?”

Deek unfolded the paper. “Used to be an Arizona Ranger. I was a Ranger a couple of times but not no more. But I know the law.”

“The law,” scoffed Garcia. “What good is the law along the border? If you were a Ranger you have heard of Kosterlitzky. He knew how to handle criminals without the law getting in the way.”

Studying the paper in his hand, Deek answered, “Sure, I knew the colonel. But I heard he quit the

rurales a couple of years ago. Retired on this side of the border... for his health you might say.”

Deek folded the paper and handed it back to Garcia. “The papers look right but there’s still the matter of extradition.”

Returning the paper to his jacket, Garcia’s eyes went cold. “Why waste time with such little details when you can have the money instead? I could give it to you today.”

“What’s extradition?” asked Monte.

Deek squirmed a bit, causing his saddle to creak. “Extradition is when we give a prisoner that we caught on this side of the border back to Mexico. There’s supposed to be a court hearing first, though, and if we figure the prisoner’s sure enough guilty we send ’im back to Mexico. Only when Colonel Kosterlitzky was running the rurales we mostly ignored that part of it. We turned them that we caught over to him, no questions asked. And he helped us the same way with all sorts of bad men. That saved everybody a lot of time and helped clean out a passel of gangs and cutthroats.

“So, if it was up to me, Sergeant, I’d hand ’im over. But the prisoner belongs to Monte, here. And I’m goin’ along with whatever he decides.”

Monte thought for a moment. Something didn’t add up. “So why’d you offer us a thousand pesos? Why didn’t you just ask for him like you used to?”

Garcia hesitated. “That is my business, amigo. The offer still stands, one thousand pesos of Mexican silver for one filthy, murdering Indian that is worth nothing to you.”

A taunting grin creased Monte’s lips. “Well my peon is plenty dirty and he’s kind of puny. If he was a fish I’d throw him back... but I think I’ll go ahead and keep him.”

“*Chingate*” blurted Garcia and then spun his horse around, viciously spurring it into a run.

Deek watched Garcia for a moment. “You got a way of makin’ trouble, don’t ya?”

“It’s a gift.”

“So,” sighed Deek, “who exactly is this fella I got sittin’ behind me? And how come he’s worth a thousand silver pesos?”

Keeping his eyes on the rurales, Monte answered, “That’s Ahayaca. And I have a hunch he’s not a murderer like they claim. But they want him mighty bad for something. That’s for damn sure.”

“I must get to the Yaqui village,” Ahayaca said. “Then I will answer your questions.”

Watching Garcia rejoin the rurales, Deek said, “The only way out of here now is the train. And there’s nothing sayin’ those rurales won’t get on the train right along with us.”



Monte took a long, hard look at Deek. “Not that I’m ungrateful, Deek, but what the hell are you doing out here?”

Deek chuckled. “Yeah. Mighty peculiar, ain’t it? Downright lucky I come along when I did.”

“Lucky for me and Ahayaca,” agreed Monte. “Maybe not for you.”

“Well, after what you done to Turk and the boys back yonder at the saloon, the boys turned sour on me. They figured I might have enjoyed watching all of ’em eat crow. And they was right. I could see the way the wind was blowin’ after that so I collected my wages and lit out. Naturally, I come down to see if you found them graves you was lookin’ for.

“I got to them graves about sundown yesterday and then read the sign. I could see where those horses come up on you and then rode back the way they come. And I could see your tracks got a whole lot deeper when you took off to the north. I knew you was carrying something heavy. I was thinkin’ maybe it was gold or silver.

“Anyhow, I rode off after you and kept a goin’ til it was close to dark. Then’s when I spotted the riders way back behind me and I knowed right off they was followin’ after you just the same as me.

“This mornin’ I took out soon as I could make out your trail, but those riders was behind me followin’

right along. When they got some closer, I seen they was wearing sombreros. I figured that meant trouble for you so I lit a shuck. That's when you saw me."

"What about the extra horse?" asked Monte.

"I bought that mare with some of my wages. I figured you might be tired of walkin'."

"You quit your job," Monte said skeptically, "bought a horse you didn't need, and then followed me all the way down here?"

Deek cleared his throat and stared down at his pommel. "Those boys at the saloon were pokin' fun at me but there was a good reason for it. I used to hit the bottle real hard. I'd run out of money and do almost anything to have me another drink. So, I got to tellin' stories... lies... to get a drink.

"I give up the whiskey months ago. I drink a beer from time to time but that's all. I been tryin' to straighten up, you might say. But it was hard listenin' to the boys talkin' 'bout my drinkin' days. They never let it go.

"But when you stood up to 'em, when you slammed ole Turk down on that table... you reminded me of what I used to be. Used to be, that is, before I was a drunk.

"It made me feel good, real good. It kind of set things right-side up all the sudden. So, I figured I owed you a favor like the one you done me. And like I said,

them boys was turning mean on me. It was just a matter of time before there was trouble, so here I am.”

Monte shook his head. “Out of the frying pan into the fire.”

“We have one advantage,” broke in Ahayaca.

Monte glanced over his shoulder. “What might that be?”

“They want me alive.”

“Why?”

“They believe... they and others believe that I know the location of the Tayopa.”

Deek craned his neck around. His eyes flashed with sudden excitement. “The lost Tayopa? The mine?”

“Yes.”

“Damn!” exclaimed Deek. “Do you? Do you know where it is?”

“They believe I do. They will torture me to find out.”

“What’s so special about this Tayopa?” Monte asked.

Looking wide-eyed at Monte, Deek said excitedly, “Why it was the richest silver deposit in all of Mexico. But way back in the sixteen-hundreds, the Indians killed all the Spaniards at the mine and then anybody that come lookin’ for it. After a while, the Spaniards forgot where it was exactly. And folks has been lookin’ for it ever since. It’s worth millions.

“Some say the Indians know where it is but they won’t tell nobody. Rich ore and silver bars show up from time to time and there ain’t no doubt it’s Tayopa silver. Why, everybody down this way, Mexicans and Americans, knows about the lost Tayopa.”

Keeping an eye on the rurales who remained clustered together, Monte shrugged indifferently. “At least we know the Mexicans won’t take a shot at us. They’d be afraid of killing Ahayaca and losing their treasure.”

“Then we’ll stick to ’im like white on rice,” agreed Deek and then refocused his attention from Ahayaca back to the rurales. “I wonder what they’re figurin’ now.”

Monte looked down the main street of Bernadino. He saw a lone flatbed truck parked in front of a false-fronted mercantile. Next to the mercantile was another large wooden building. A few small clapboard houses surrounded those two structures. Along with the train station and a single telephone line, that was all there was to the town of Bernadino. And the only vehicle in sight was the truck.

“I’ve got an idea,” Monte said. “But it’ll cost some money.”

Deek tapped his vest pocket. “I got thirty bucks left of my wages.”

“No,” Ahayaca said tugging on a greasy thong that was looped around his neck. From under his shirt he pulled out a leather pouch. Opening the pouch he fingered something from it and then tucked the small bag back under his shirt.

Reaching around Deek, Ahayaca held out his closed fist, palm down. “I give you this for your thirty dollars. At least, I can pay.”

Deek slid his open hand under Ahayaca’s and felt the weight of a coin land in his palm. He looked down expecting to see a silver peso but instead saw a tarnished gold coin the size of a silver dollar. It was an irregularly shaped coin that had been crudely stamped with a number of unrecognizable makings.

“Will that pay for the use of your dollars?” asked Ahayaca.

Staring at the coin, Deek turned it over. There were no markings on the opposite side. “Sure enough it will!”

As Deek pocketed the coin, he glanced at Monte for his reaction but Monte was deep in thought.

“What’s your plan?” Deek asked.

“We’ll go into town,” began Monte, “and get three train tickets going to Globe. The rurales will be sure and follow us to find out what we’re up to. Then they’ll buy tickets so they can follow us. The train has stock cars so we’ll load our horses before we get on and then

so will the Mexicans. But when the train starts to move we'll hop off."

"But the rurales will see us," protested Deek. "They won't let us out of their sight. They'll get off as soon as we do."

"I hope they do. Then we'll all be on foot."

"What good would that do?" Deek asked.

"That's the tricky part," Monte said, "but it's easier to think on a full stomach and Ahayaca is going to need his strength. Let's see if we can get some breakfast in town. While we eat, I'll fill you in on the details and you can tell me what you think."

Deek leered at the rurales and then swore to himself. "If this ain't Billy hell, I don't know what is."

"So," Monte said, reining his horse around and starting toward the only street in Bernadino, "we might as well eat."

Spinning his mount, Deek trotted up alongside Monte. "What do you think them Mexicans will do, now?"

Monte huffed. "I suppose they'll ride into town and see what we're up to. I don't think they'll try anything with us on our guard, especially on this side of the border."

The mercantile Monte had seen was not yet open but the building next to it was a saloon and restaurant and its door was open. Dismounting in front of the

restaurant, Monte helped Ahayaca to the ground as Deek stepped down and tied both horses. Supporting Ahayaca, Monte paused and glanced back. As he expected, the rurales were starting for town.

Inside the restaurant, Deek knowingly took a table that was next to a wall and away from the bar. All three men took a seat, Monte and Deek with their backs to the wall and Ahayaca with his back to the rear of the saloon.

No one was tending bar but soon a heavysset woman with her hair up in a bun exited a side door near the rear of the building.

“You men here for breakfast?” she asked, her voice deep and throaty.

“We are,” Deek answered. “What’ya got?”

“All you get here is eggs, bacon, biscuits, and gravy. Coffee to drink unless you want something stronger.”

“Serve it up, ma’am,” Deek said. “We’re as hungry as an orphaned calf.”

The woman nodded and then disappeared through the door she had come out of. The moment she left, the rurales walked into the restaurant, dragging their Spanish rowels across the rough wooden floor. A few feet past the front door the men stopped, their black eyes casually roaming around the room.

Monte glanced at the spurs, noticing the spiked rowels were twice the size of those he had seen in Rodeo. The jingling of the rowels sounded much the same as the Americans' in Rodeo but the men wearing these spurs were not cocky young cowboys. These were trail-hardened and dangerous men.

The woman came out again. Wiping her hands with a white towel, she nodded at the Mexicans. "*Desayuno?*"

The rurales took a table near the front door. "Only coffee," answered Garcia.

As soon as the woman left, the Mexicans began conversing with one another as if nothing was out of the ordinary. When they did, Monte leaned forward and, speaking softly, explained the rest of his plan.

When he was finished, Deek leaned back, a thoughtful look on his face. He glanced at Monte and then stood up. "By damned," he whispered, "I think that'll work." Going to the side door he stuck his head into the kitchen. "Where's your outhouse, ma'am?"

"Out the back door," came the answer.

The rurales seemed to pay no attention to Deek. As he stepped out the back door, the woman brought out a tray loaded with thick porcelain mugs and a pot of steaming coffee. She filled three cups at Monte's table and then served the rurales.



“Plenty of coffee, fellas,” she said, heading back to the kitchen. “Just holler if anybody wants more.”

Monte immediately took a sip of coffee but Ahayaca hesitated.

“Why do you do this, Monte Segundo? Why do you help me when it puts your life in danger?”

Monte held the mug close to his lips. He suddenly thought of Rosa and Anthony Ortega, something he had not done in several hours. “Hell if I know. Maybe Garcia rubbed me the wrong way or it could be I was just itching for a fight. Who knows?”

Several minutes passed. Monte had finished his mug of coffee and half of Deek’s when one of the Mexicans called out, “*Mas café, por favor.*”

Both tables were served coffee once again, but it was not until the breakfast plates were being brought out from the kitchen that Deek finally returned.

“Got ’er done,” he said, under his breath. “But that mercantile man turned out to be a damned Dutchy, a tight son of a bitch. I had to give up my gold piece to get him to use his truck and play along.”

“Did you get the board, too?”

“Yep, measured and cut.”

“What about the train?” Monte asked.

Taking out a pocket watch from his vest, Deek said, “Our luck is holdin’. Train’s due in at around nine this mornin’ and it’ll be headin’ west. It’ll go through a pass

in the Chiricahua Mountains and stop off at Cazador. Our horses will be unloaded and waitin' for us at the depot."

Ahayaca turned toward Deek. "You have done well."

Ahayaca's choice of words and his stately tone struck Monte as peculiar but his curiosity was instantly squelched by the thud of a full breakfast plate landing in front of him.

"Gravy's coming," announced the woman as she turned on her heels and hurried off.

Picking up a piece of bacon, Ahayaca asked, "What time is it now?"

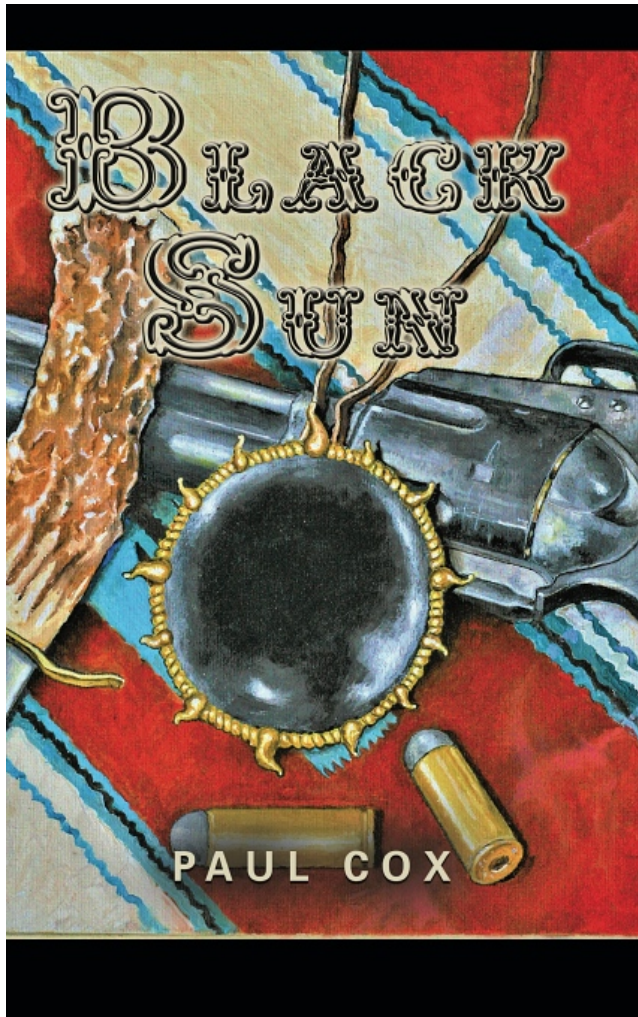
Deek took a gulp of coffee before answering, "Ten to eight."

Monte pointed to Ahayaca's breakfast. "Eat slow. If you start feeling sick you better stop. I once saw a starving man eat too fast and it killed him."

"I've heard of that," agreed Deek. "But we all better eat slow. The less time we spend waitin' at the train depot the better off we'll be."

## **About the Author**

Paul Cox was born in rural Arkansas. When he was ten years old, his family moved to California. There, he had a successful athletic career, culminating as an NCAA Division II All American in track and field at Cal State Fullerton. After graduating, Paul attended dental school in San Francisco and graduated in 1976. In 1994, he moved with his family to North Idaho. He is an avid outdoorsman and artist. Paul has ridden horses for thirty years and raises cattle on a small ranch outside of Sandpoint.



*A man seeking answers to his past helps a fugitive Indian get back to his village, a secretive tribe hidden for centuries in the mountains of Arizona Territory.*

## **BLACK SUN**

By Paul Cox

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