

*The saga of Monte Segundo, Rosa Bustamonte and Billy Cabott continues as they join a combined military-civilian search and rescue mission in a dangerous canyon that borders the U.S. and Mexico.*

## **GUADALUPE CANYON**

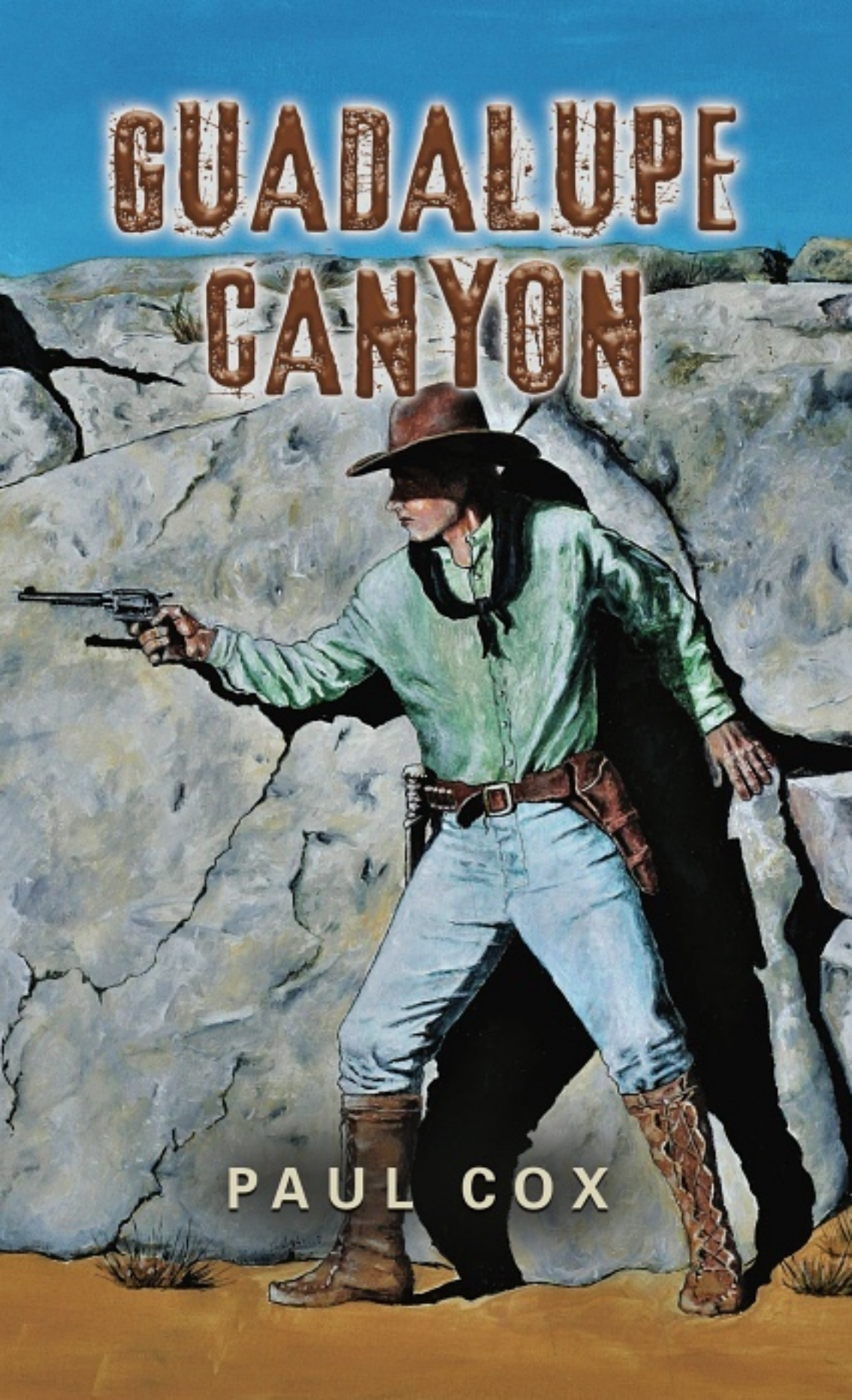
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# GUADALUPE CANYON



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## CHAPTER 1

For the last two months I had been working cows down along the Mexican border and in that rugged desert country, I was lucky to cover five miles in an hour on the back of a horse. Admittedly, I made much better time riding on the long, dusty road from Sasabe to Tucson, but by the time I got to town, I was looking forward to driving something that could eat up the miles and put wind in my face. At Richardson and Company, however, the only automobile available to me was a battered 1911 Oakland Roadster. Having no other choice, I left my horse at the livery and reluctantly rented the humble two-seater. The next day, still dressed in my range clothes, I sped out of town an hour before sunup, heading southeast toward Arizona's San Bernardino Valley.

Thinking like the greenhorn Easterner I was, I had telephoned the Slaughter ranch the evening I arrived in Tucson and told them I would easily make it to their ranch before supper. But at the time of the phone conversation, I was naïvely thinking of the streets in and around the city of Tucson. I hadn't counted on country roads that were little more than game trails, dubious routes winding through the brush that, all too

often, were peppered with potholes or scarred with deep wagon ruts.

When I approached the border town of Douglas, the sun was already setting. Trying to make up for the hours I lost on the bad roads, I had not stopped for lunch and all I had eaten since daybreak were a few sticks of jerky I found stuffed in my shirt pocket. So, knowing full well that I had missed supper at the Slaughters, I stopped in Douglas, pulling up in front of a grocery store on Tenth Street. There, I bought a cold bottle of Coca-Cola and then went next door to a restaurant that was just getting ready to close. After bribing the proprietor with an extra fifty cents, he hurriedly threw a ham and cheese sandwich together and wrapped it in brown paper. Then, with the soda wedged between my legs and eating as I drove, I headed out of town, pushing the roadster to an impressive fifty miles per hour. But in less than a mile, as the twilight dimmed into darkness, I ran out of good city road and once again found myself bouncing down a brush-lined dirt road.

The Oakland Roadster may have been an older model automobile but when I switched on the bulbous brass-encased headlamps, I was pleasantly surprised. Both lamps flashed instantly and cast a brilliant beam of light, illuminating the road ahead for at least one hundred yards. But then I soon discovered the headlamps left the potholes filled with black shadows,

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the jarring depths of which were impossible to estimate.

It was late September and yet the daytime temperatures in the Southwest often still reached ninety degrees. But, unlike Tucson, the land around Douglas was high desert and after sundown the air cooled quickly. I soon decided it was that sudden drop in temperature that somehow had affected the damned rabbits.

The first to lope across my lighted path was a gangly long-eared jackrabbit. Its sudden appearance startled me and I instinctively swerved, almost running off the narrow road. The second and third rabbits that darted out of the brush were chubby-looking cottontails. Both times I slammed my foot on the brakes, skidding to a stop amidst a rolling cloud of dust. But after a dozen more, close calls and realizing I still had thirty miles to go, my compassion for the diminutive and furry desert fauna began to dissipate. Bewildered and irritated by such an inexplicable phenomenon, I set my jaw and drove on through the night, doing my best to ignore the frequent flashes of white and the occasional dull thud.

As the death toll rose, I repeatedly asked myself why an animal, ordinarily in possession of superb survival instincts, would suddenly bolt from the security of the desert and run directly in front of a

monstrous, roaring machine. It made no sense to me then, nor has it ever, but the moment I caught a glimpse of light that was coming from the Slaughter ranch, an amusing, if not illuminating thought occurred to me.

It had only been six months since I graduated from Harvard University. I could have waltzed from my college dormitory straight into the family business and become an important member of Weston Shipping, a centuries-old company that commanded respect around the world. Instead, I had defied my parents' wishes and decided to become a news reporter. My grandiose plan was to acquire my own newspaper within five years, expand its circulation, and eventually rival the news empire of William Randolph Hearst. And to prove to my parents just how capable I was, I confidently informed them I would accomplish my lofty goal without requiring the least bit of assistance from anyone, friend or family.

To demonstrate my point, I decided to enter the world of business not using my real name of William Cabott Weston III, but adopting the moniker of Billy Cabott. Shortly after graduating, I landed a job with the *Chicago Tribune* and within days had eagerly accepted my first assignment, which was to travel to the city of Columbus, New Mexico. There, as a subordinate to a seasoned reporter named Floyd Gibbons, I was to cover

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General Pershing's Punitive Expedition, a military mission of which I knew absolutely nothing.

However, tutored by Gibbons on our long train ride from Chicago, I learned that, days earlier, a Mexican named Pancho Villa had crossed the border of New Mexico and attacked the small and isolated town of Columbus, killing eight soldiers and ten civilians. In response to that outrage, President Wilson was sending General "Black Jack" Pershing and virtually the entire United States Army after Villa.

The assignment sounded quite exciting but I had no sooner stepped off the train in Columbus than Gibbons snubbed me and partnered up with a former acquaintance, Robert Dunn, who was a reporter for the *New York Tribune*.

Standing dumbfounded on the busy train platform, Gibbons advised me to "keep an eye out for a good story" and then disappeared with Dunn. I glanced at the people around me, most of whom were soldiers, and then out past the crowded platform. Everywhere I looked I saw nothing but dust and chaos. South of town, a vast city of military tents was springing up, and all along the train tracks, there seemed to be nothing but mass confusion. The soldiers nearest me, in sweat-stained uniforms, were hurriedly unloading several autotrucks and even some automobiles. Farther down, men were unloading dozens of horses and covered



wagons. Among the wagons and parked autotrucks, in fact, wherever the men could find room, they were stacking bulky wooden crates of every conceivable shape and size. North of the tracks was the pocket-sized town of Columbus, at the center of which several buildings lay in ruins. Surrounding the rubble, a dozen or so structures stood unmolested; yet, to my dismay, I quickly surmised those few stores and scattered houses were all that constituted the village of Columbus, New Mexico. The half-dozen streets the town did have, though, were packed with bustling soldiers, heavily loaded hay wagons, and, here and there, a few civilian onlookers.

With Gibbons and Dunn off on their own, I wandered around Columbus and the burgeoning military camp for days on end in the sweltering heat. But in all that time not once did I see a gallant column of United States Cavalry galloping off to punish a foreign invader. What I witnessed, a story not worthy of reporting to the general public, was an army struggling just to establish a rudimentary semblance of order.

Eventually, though, Pershing did cross the border. He took four thousand troops with him and a few select news reporters, including Gibbons and Dunn. As time passed and conditions in Columbus did not improve, I became more and more disenchanted with my

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assignment and with the *Chicago Tribune*. And after enduring a twenty-four-hour dust storm, I was even ready to abandon my grandiose plans of becoming a newspaper tycoon.

Spoiled as I was, it had only taken two weeks of sweat and boredom to convince me that it was time to give up my cherished dreams, humbly go home to Father and Mother, and accept my anointed role as a proud member of Weston Shipping. So, the day after the storm I dejectedly packed my bags and plodded off to the train station. But it was there, on that sun-beaten platform, that I met Monte Segundo, a man destined to become a legend throughout Northern Mexico and, in time, my closest friend.

That fortuitous day, the El Paso and Southwestern train arrived from the west heading east. Waiting my turn to board, I was standing in a jostling throng of disembarking passengers when I first spotted Monte Segundo. At five-foot-ten inches and two hundred pounds, he appeared to me to be a walking brick. Like so many others, he was dressed in an army uniform but I noticed that on his left side, instead of the standard army issue automatic pistol, he wore an old-style six-shooter in a cross draw. On his right was a menacing-looking hunting knife sheathed in a beaded scabbard. And then I noticed the ominous expression in his eyes, eyes that were dark, unwavering, and deadly serious.

Out of everyone scurrying about on that crowded platform, I often wonder why, of all people, Monte walked up to me and asked where the camp's headquarters were located. He could have asked anyone but, as fate would have it, that was not to be.

That meeting changed my life forever. Some might say it was simply my dreary state of mind that caused me to do what I did that afternoon, but, looking back, I rather think my actions were directed more by providence than by blind chance. For instead of boarding the train for home that evening I imprudently and, quite impulsively, chose to accompany the reckless and totally unpredictable Monte Segundo across the Mexican border and then into the very bowels of the Mexican Revolution. A few weeks later, after narrowly escaping death at the hands of the Villistas, evading the Carrancistas, and then facing a United States military court-martial and possible firing squad, I still felt no compulsion whatsoever to return to the safety and comfort of my native New York City. On the contrary, both Monte and I eventually took a job as ranch hands in Sasabe, Arizona. There, instead of living at home enjoying the peaceful comforts of Carnegie Hill, Monte and I were soon embroiled in a running battle with murderous cattle thieves.

Chuckling as I neared the front of the sprawling Slaughter ranch house, I realized that I wasn't much

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different than the fool rabbits. They likely had no idea why they left the security and comfort of the desert to dart across the road in front of my automobile just as I had no idea why I had chosen to ride a horse, carry a gun, and become a cowboy. All I knew for certain was that the borderland, along with the wild and rugged expanse of the Southwest, contained the last remnants of our untamed West, and I instinctively, almost desperately, knew I wanted to be a part of it.

Seeing another automobile in front of the house, I pulled up alongside it, turned off my lights and then my engine. Expecting someone to exit the brightly lit ranch house, I sat and listened. A cool breeze brushed my cheek as my eyes drifted to the car next to me. To my surprise, even in the dim light I could see that it was a sleek, brand-spanking-new Cadillac touring car, a vehicle that could carry seven passengers.

No one, however, came out the front door of the ranch house and, oddly, I saw no movement through the many illuminated windows.

Even as green as I was, I had quickly learned that it was dangerous to go unarmed anywhere along the border. However, being only five-foot-six and slight of build, I preferred to carry a compact thirty-eight Smith and Wesson in a shoulder holster instead of hanging a big six-shooter on my hip. And, too, feeling a bit uneasy carrying a weapon of any sort, I habitually wore

a vest to conceal my pistol. Now, I adjusted my lapels, pulling the vest forward. Taking one last glance over my shoulder, I grabbed my hat and stepped out of the roadster.

Standing motionless, I listened for a moment, my eyes searching the shadows around me. Being cautious, especially at night, was something I had learned by observing Monte Segundo, and it was a lesson that had saved my life on more than one occasion in the previous six months.

Tugging on my hat, I glanced down and was astounded to see that I was standing not on packed desert sand but a lawn of freshly cut grass. I stooped down and rubbed my hand over the lawn. I could smell the sweetness of it. Then, in the darkness off to my right, I heard the deep croak of what sounded like a frog. In seconds, I heard another croak and then another. Soon, the unmistakable chorus of a dozen bullfrogs echoed through the night air.

I came to my feet and swore softly. “Water!” I muttered. “John Slaughter has water! Lots of it.”

The frogs abruptly went silent. I heard a laugh, the sound of which seemed to have come from behind the ranch house. I waited and then heard more laughter, the laughter of women. Seconds later, I heard the voice of a man.

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Feeling more at ease but not wishing to interrupt anyone, I went to the front door of the ranch house and knocked. There was no answer. I knocked more vigorously but still no one came to the door.

Left with no other choice, I started around the edge of the house toward the rear. As I cautiously rounded the first corner, I could see firelight flickering across the lawn and on the wall of what appeared to be a long, low-roofed bunkhouse a short distance off to the right of the ranch house. I heard more voices, now more distinct. The tone was cheerful if not jovial.

Before I rounded the second corner and stepped into the light, I paused in the shadows and raised my voice. "Excuse me. I'm sorry to intrude but no one came to the front door. I am Billy Cabott. I work for Señor Cruz over in Sasabe. I'm here to drive some breeding stock back to his ranch."

There was a moment of silence and then a man spoke. His words came slowly, lazily. "Come on back, Billy Cabott. I've been expecting you. Come out in the light so's we can get a good look at you."

I eased around the corner and into the amber light of a blazing campfire. In one sweeping glance I took in five people, four seated on wooden chairs that had been arranged around the fire and one kneeling next to the fire adding sticks of wood as sparks swirled upward into the black sky.

Two of those seated were women. Across from them, two soldiers sat erect with their campaign hats perched neatly on their laps. The man feeding the fire, dressed in range clothes, was an elderly-looking Negro. All eyes locked on my face for a moment but then, in unison, everyone but the Negro began looking me over from head to toe.

“Mistah John,” said the Negro, “was done called to away on sheriffing business, but he had the boys get your stock ready, nohow.”

“My apologies for interrupting,” I said.

I knew I was an unimpressive sight but the way the others were staring and sizing me up made me feel as if I were standing there in my underwear. “Am I the first to arrive? The first from Sasabe, I should say. Two of my friends, Monte and Rosa, are due any time.”

One of the women leaned to the other and whispered. Both of them giggled.

The women, one blond and one brunette, appeared to be in their thirties. They were well dressed in riding skirts, long-sleeved blouses, and lace-up boots. Both had their hair pulled back and tied with a ribbon. To me, except for a vague hardness around their eyes, both women were a few shades better than average looking, the blonde being slightly more attractive.

“So,” said the brunette seated on the left, “you are an honest-to-goodness cow-boy?”

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I noticed a hint of derision in her tone. I hadn't been working with cows for more than two months but I was wearing my range clothes. I knew that I looked like a cowboy, but still, I wondered if the woman could somehow sense something about me was out of place, something that told her I was nothing more than a city-born greenhorn.

"The cows seem to think I am," I said forcing a smile.

The Negro laughed and came to his feet. "Them cows ought to know, sure enough," he said and then hobbled over and shook my hand. "They call me Tin-Pan. That's on account I used to do all the cooking when me and Mistah John drove cattle and chased after Apaches. We still go after a bandit from time to time, and when we do I still do all the cooking. Mistah John is mighty good at keeping the law but he can't cook a lick.

"But Mistah John and Mrs. Viola was called off to Bisbee on business this morning. Important business, it was. He left me in charge but all the cows is ready for you to take. It's all set. Him and Señor Cruz got it all worked out. They talked yesterday over the telephone."

Tin-Pan turned toward the two women and pointed. "Let me do the introductions, Billy. That lady sitting yonder on the right is Miss Marzel Appleton. The one on the left is Miss Ada Thorndike. They been here a



couple of days visiting with the Slaughters. They're from back East."

Both women smiled flatly. I tipped my hat but, since I wasn't planning on staying, did not remove it.

Turning and pointing at the soldiers, Tin-Pan said, "That's Cap'n Miller over there and Lieutenant Jones. They's in charge of a garrison of soldiers that's camped up on the ridge above the pond. They's up there to watch out for Mes'cans that might cross the border like they been doing over Texas way and like that bandit Pancho Villa done last spring in Columbus."

Neither soldier stood to shake my hand so I merely nodded in their direction. "Pleased to meet all of you."

Feeling like the unwanted guest, I glanced at Tin-Pan. "Is there somewhere I can wait for my friends? They should arrive tonight but I have no idea when."

"Mr. Cabott," said Ada Thorndike, "I must say, you don't speak at all like a cow-boy."

Marzel Appleton snickered. "And I'm a bit disappointed. He looks nothing like William S. Hart or Tom Mix."

Both women possessed a very familiar aristocratic air about them and both had similar accents. My guess was that they were from Massachusetts. And the names Appleton and Thorndike were familiar to me, names well-known in the city of Boston as well as New York.

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I had grown up around blue-blooded women, and their sarcasm and condescending antics were routinely accepted and considered nothing more than harmless, frolicsome behavior. In that regard, these two women were nothing out of the ordinary, and yet I found myself taking an immediate dislike to them both.

“I must say,” offered Lieutenant Jones as he cast a flirtatious smile toward Miss Appleton, “that I too am a bit disillusioned with his appearance.”

“Sorry to disappoint you,” I said. “I don’t know a William or Tom. Do they work for Mr. Slaughter?”

Both women and the two soldiers burst into uproarious laughter. I looked at them for a moment and then glanced at Tin-Pan for some explanation. Tin-Pan, as perplexed as me, merely shrugged and shook his head.

When the guffaws began to subside, Lieutenant Jones wiped a tear from the corner of his eye. “Tom Mix and William S. Hart are stars of the cinema,” he said, then took a deep breath. After hesitating for several seconds, he blurted, “That could possibly be the reason you haven’t met them!”

More laughter exploded. Realizing I was being played for the fool, I felt my face flush with heat. I could excuse the women for such silliness but I suddenly wanted to pistol-whip the lieutenant. However, instead of trying to think of some clever

remark to make in my defense, I clenched my teeth and waited for the mirth to run its course.

Tin-Pan started for the ranch house. "I'll fetch you a chair, Billy Cabott. And I'll fetch that marshmallow cream while I'm at it. And like I said, folks, I got us all some willow switches, too."

Catching her breath, Ada Thorndike said, "Speaking of the cinema, I recently heard that the movie producers are moving out of New York and Chicago. The entire industry is relocating to a small rural community near Los Angeles, California."

"Yes, that is true," agreed Miss Appleton. "They say the weather is better in California for outdoor filming. I'm told that it hardly ever rains there. The town they chose, though, is hardly on the map. It is called Hollywood."

Lieutenant Jones nodded. "I heard that the film industry is growing by leaps and bounds. Not long ago I went to the cinema and saw Charlie Chaplin playing in *The Tramp*. He was quite the clown and very entertaining. I can see how it's catching on."

Miss Thorndike huffed, "That '*clown*' as you refer to him is now being paid ten thousand dollars a week by the Mutual Film Corporation! For merely acting in front of a camera. Can you imagine? Ten thousand dollars *a week!*"

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“Are you certain it is so much?” Captain Miller asked. “Surely not that much. Not a week.”

Marzel Appleton flashed a patronizing grin, “Oh yes, Captain. Let’s just say that Ada and I have that information on good authority. No doubt the stars of the cinema will soon become the nouveau riche, a prospect I find to be perfectly dreadful.”

“My word!” muttered Jones. “I can’t imagine that much money.”

“And you, Billy Cabott,” taunted Thorndike, “how does that strike a genuine cow-boy? Ten thousand dollars a week just for acting?”

This time I knew not to take the bait. I was a Weston, a member of one of the wealthiest families in the country and well-acquainted with incomes far greater than half a million dollars a year. I was also aware, thanks to my recent experiences, that by itself, money meant nothing. And, besides, Ada Thorndike and Marzel Appleton needed a good verbal kick in the buttocks.

“How does that strike me?” I repeated slowly. “It sounds good in a way.” I paused for effect and then gazed up at the stars. “But to me, all that really matters is what all the folks are going to say about you when they gather around your grave. That’s the test, right there, what they’re going to say. The way I see it, in the

end money's got nothing to do with what's really important."

I lowered my head and glanced over at the two women. For a moment they were speechless, each no doubt attempting to grasp a sentiment that, for them, was utterly incomprehensible.

"Well said," agreed Captain Miller. "Well said."

Tin-Pan stepped back into the firelight. He carried a wooden folding chair in one hand and a jar in the other. Under his left arm was bundle of straight branches four to five feet long.

Walking over to me, Tin-Pan handed me the chair. "Now I'll show you folks what I was talking about earlier this evening."

I unfolded the chair and set it back from the fire, opposite the women and across from the soldiers. Being in the presence of ladies, I took off my hat and then dropped it on the grass next to my feet as I took a seat.

Tin-Pan handed me a branch and then gave one each to the women and the soldiers. He kept one for himself. "Now this is how it's done, folks," he said, taking a butter knife from his shirt pocket and then unscrewing the lid from the jar of marshmallow. "You scoop up some cream with this here knife and then you wipe it onto the tip of your switch like this," he said,

dabbing a blob of thick white cream on one end of his branch.

Holding up his switch, Tin-Pan turned toward the fire and held the marshmallow over the flames. “You roast it and then eat it. It’s like candy only it’s hot and creamy smooth. Kind of sticky, though, so watch out so you don’t get burnt.”

Miss Thorndike held out her hand, “Oh, let me try. I love to try new things.”

Tin-Pan handed the jar and knife to Miss Thorndike but kept an eye on his marshmallow. “Don’t hold it too close to the flames or it’ll catch fire. If it does, just take it out and blow out the flame. It won’t hurt it none too much if it catches fire. I favor it being a little burnt, myself.”

I watched Ada Thorndike dab marshmallow on the end of her stick, but from the corner of my eye I saw the lieutenant glance at me several times. As she passed the jar and knife to Marzel Appleton, Jones broke his silence.

“Mr. Cabott, you look quite familiar to me. Were you ever in the military?”

A jolt of fear shot through my body. I don’t think I flinched, but in that instant, I realized the lieutenant had almost certainly been present at the military court-martial in Colonia Dublán. As yet, though, he wasn’t sure I was one of the two defendants who had been

accused of treason. I had only played a minor role in the trial and for the most part had kept my back to the onlookers. However, I had no doubts Jones would recognize Monte Segundo if he were to arrive before the officers left and then come anywhere near the fire. Even if Jones didn't recognize Monte, I knew he would instantly recognize Rosa Bustamonte. No soldier at the court-martial, or for that matter, any man who had ever seen Rosa Bustamonte, would be able to forget such a beautiful woman.

“No,” I answered easily. “Never been in the army. But I get that sort of question all the time. I just have one of those faces, I suppose.”

“Yes,” agreed Jones, seemingly satisfied. “That must be it.”

Rosa and Monte had left the ranch at Sasabe a few days ahead of me but they were on horseback heading east along the border. On their way to the Slaughter ranch, they had planned to stop first in the border town of Nogales and then Agua Prieta. In doing so, they hoped to locate Rosa's family, it being one of many that fled those cities when Pancho Villa attacked them the prior year. Rosa was looking forward to contacting her relatives so they could all be present for her upcoming marriage to Monte, a ceremony to be performed in a matter of weeks.

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Monte, having been orphaned at the age of six, had no family but Rosa had more than enough to fill the San Xavier Mission. It was in that old Spanish church, just south of Tucson, that Rosa wanted to have their wedding. And despite being terribly abused at the hands of some Carrancista soldiers, she desired a traditional Mexican wedding in which she would proudly wear a white dress. She wanted the whole affair to be a joyous celebration with family and friends, an occasion filled with music and dancing. And she had made it abundantly clear to all concerned that then, and only then, would she and Monte share the enchantment of a proper honeymoon.

Rosa had made up her mind about the wedding. She had her heart set on how it should be but to a man like Monte Segundo, it made no difference how, when, or where they were married. In fact, as far back as Monte could remember, he had never cared much about celebrations of any kind, much less dates or places. And, if the truth be known, until he met Rosa, Monte Segundo had never cared much about anything or anyone.

As the women tried their hands at roasting marshmallow cream, they ventured into a lively conversation with Miller and Jones regarding President Wilson and the merits of national women's suffrage. I had no interest in the matter and was pleased that no



one included me in the discussion or bothered to ask my opinion.

Watching the fire, I tried my best to think of all of the things that might go wrong if Monte arrived before the officers went back to their quarters. I wanted to anticipate any difficulties and hopefully avoid trouble. However, I was tired from my long drive and the dancing flames of the campfire proved hypnotic. In minutes my mind began to drift, my musings lazily skirting the more uncomfortable issues at hand.

I pictured Monte and Rosa standing in front of a priest, a thought that a month earlier had seemed wholly unnatural. However, over time, the more I thought of a man like Monte Segundo being wed to the fiery Rosa Bustamonte, a former officer in Villa's army, the more the idea started to grow on me.

Rosa was undoubtedly different from any of the women Monte had known but she had also arrived at a crucial point in his life, a time when fragments of his childhood memories were escaping from an emotional abyss where they had remained buried for thirty years. At that particular time, Monte was starting to remember bits and pieces of a day that he, as a tormented six-year-old child, had desperately tried to forget. And for the first time in thirty years, he was beginning to feel twinges of sadness and grief, emotions completely foreign to him. However, and more importantly, he was

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also experiencing vague sensations of longing and, at times, even loneliness. And that, perhaps by design, was when Rosa Bustamonte was abruptly thrust into his life.

I was there when that happened, sitting in the darkened corner of a cantina in Las Palomas, a village two miles from Columbus and just across the Mexican border. Less than an hour had passed since our initial encounter on the train platform, and yet, remarkably, there I was in a foreign country sitting with a man I knew nothing about and getting my first taste of tequila from a dirty shot glass. And make no mistake about it, I was having the time of my life.

Why Monte, a North Idaho lumberjack and dyed-in-the-wool loner, had adopted me as a companion remained a mystery to me, and yet from the moment we met at the train station, there seemed to be an unspoken understanding between us, an acceptance that we, as complete opposites, were in fact a natural fit.

It had only been a few months since that fateful day when the two of us walked into Las Palomas, but in that short span of time my life had been turned upside down and inside out. I was fresh out of college and well-traveled before I stepped off the train in Columbus, but I had never ridden a horse or even seen a dirt road. Nor

had I built a campfire, slept on the ground, or fired a weapon of any kind.

I learned later that it was on an impulse that Monte had left Idaho determined, for reasons he poorly understood, to join President Wilson's so-called Punitive Expedition. More specifically, as a member of Idaho's militia, Monte had traveled to Columbus in order to join the Apache scouts that had recently been recruited by General Pershing.

Joining the scouts made perfect sense to Monte, for as a young boy he had lived several years with the Kootenai Indians of Idaho and could track as well as any Indian. When he heard about Pershing calling up the Apaches to locate the elusive Pancho Villa, he was overcome by a sudden urge to volunteer for the expedition. His intention was to work alongside the Apaches and help track down the illusive Bandit General.

That was Monte's plan, but as fate would have it, his offer to volunteer and join the Apache scouts was rudely rejected. When Monte crossed the train platform and asked if I knew where headquarters was located, I offered to show him. I knew the headquarters tent was pitched only a short distance from the busy train depot, but I also wanted to know more about a soldier who carried a six-shooter in the twentieth century.

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When he stepped into the open-flapped tent, I was close enough to see and hear what happened.

Monte explained to the attending officer that he was a member of the Idaho militia, Company A, and ready to volunteer his services and join the Apache scouts. The lieutenant in charge of running Camp Furlong on that particular afternoon was apparently overworked, hot, and irritated. Instead of accepting Monte's offer, he proceeded to insult the militia as a whole and, as fate would have it, referred to Monte as one of the "damned weekend soldiers," soldiers that were, in his professional opinion, inferior even to the Boy Scouts.

Monte's fist sent the unwary officer ass over teakettle and landed him in the back of the tent sprawled out in a complete state of unconsciousness.

Then, turning as if nothing unusual had occurred and still determined to join the Apache scouts, Monte looked at me and asked if I knew how to get to Mexico. Even though the headquarters tent was surrounded by other tents and soldiers were scurrying about in every direction, inexplicably, no one but me seemed to have seen anything unusual.

And that's how it all began. At that instant, I knew without doubt I was standing in the presence of someone the likes of whom I had never encountered. Suddenly, Carnegie Hill was of no importance. Even my suitcase, which I had left on the train platform, was

forgotten. My dreams of becoming a reporter reignited and burst into white-hot flame. This man was like no other. He was going to make news and I was going to be the one reporting it to the world.

Enthralled with what I had witnessed and feeling a resurgence of enthusiasm, I offered to personally show Monte the road to Las Palomas. He accepted and off we went, the two of us strolling casually through the middle of Camp Furlong and then on across the border to Las Palomas. It was there we were to soon meet the one-of-a-kind Rosa del Carmen Fernandez Bustamonte.

I had just finished taking my first scalding sip of tequila when five drunken Carrancista soldiers entered the cantina. The men then pulled Rosa inside by jerking on a rope that was tied around her neck. That day, covered in dirt and with her hair a frightful mess, it was impossible to see her incredible beauty. In fact, she reminded me of a witch.

Monte took one look at the situation and casually got up from his chair. Before I knew what was happening, he had pummeled four of the Mexicans while the fifth ran out the door leaving Rosa behind. And that was how Monte met Rosa. It was as unlikely a beginning for the two of them as it was incredible.

It was also the beginning of a myth that spread like wildfire across Northern Mexico. Fueled by Monte's

lethal temperament along with his unusual abilities and a healthy dose of Mexican superstition, reports of Monte's vengeful exploits, when told and retold, quickly evolved into stories of *El Muerte*, a living legend.

Weeks later, after Monte, Rosa, and I had ventured hundreds of miles south of the border, Monte and I were arrested at Ojos Azules after a battle between the United States Cavalry and a ragged band of Villistas. In the coming days near the settlement of Colonia Dublán, we were accused of joining forces with Villa and then tried as traitors in a military court-martial. Very fortunately, however, during the court-martial General Pershing was convinced by an incredibly astute Catholic priest that releasing the captured *El Muerte* would, at the very least, diminish the escalating tensions between Mexico and the United States. According to Padre Marco, that single act of leniency, along with the effect it would have upon the Mexican population was, in essence, a strategic military maneuver, one that in all likelihood would prove instrumental in preventing an all-out war between the two countries.

As a result of Padre Marco's intervention, the charges against Monte and I were dropped. At the time, General Pershing's decision was an unpopular one. In fact, most of the officers at the court-martial preferred

that Monte and I face a firing squad. Instead, under armed guards, we were escorted back to Columbus and put on a train to parts unknown.

Sitting there by the fire, I recalled the afternoon Monte and I had been taken back to Columbus. We both thought our entanglements with the United States military were finally over, and since that time, with more urgent matters to attend to, both of us had put the entire affair out of our minds. But it appeared that Lieutenant Jones might be on the verge of resurrecting a contentious issue that was better left alone.

Jones leaned toward me, resting his palms on his knees. Breaking into my thoughts, he said, "I'm certain I have seen you somewhere, Mr. Cabott."

"Could be, you have," I answered. "I get around quite a bit."

Watching Miss Appleton place the marshmallow cream on the end of her stick, I tried to think. Trouble seemed to follow Monte Segundo wherever he went, and for that matter, Rosa Bustamonte's life had been no bed of roses, either. Calloused by lifetimes of toil and hardship, even under the best of circumstances neither of them suffered fools lightly. And I knew that by the time they arrived at the Slaughter ranch they would be tired and in no mood to deal with the likes of Lieutenant Jones. Before Monte returned, I needed to know for

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certain if the lieutenant had been present at the court-martial.

I glanced at Jones, hoping what I was about to say was the right thing. "I was in Columbus, New Mexico, a few months back. There were lots of soldiers there. Maybe we passed by each other."

Lieutenant Jones eyed me closely. "Maybe. What were you doing in Columbus?"

I thought for a moment. If he was at the trial, I wanted to discover just how much of the proceedings he remembered. "I was there to help a friend of mine. He had some legal matters to clear up."

Marzel Appleton stuck the knife in the jar and set it down beside her in the grass. She held up her stick. "What do we do now, Tin-Pan?"

Tin-Pan pointed at the tip of his stick that he held over the flames. "Just like this, Miss Appleton. Just roast it ever so slight for a minute or two. Just like I'm a doing, see."

I got up from my chair and picked up the jar of marshmallow. Scooping out a glob of cream, I wiped it onto the tip of my willow branch and then, taking a step in the opposite direction, handed the knife and jar to Jones, who had not taken his eyes off me.

As he accepted the jar his eyes flared with recognition. "It wasn't Columbus," he burst out. "It was in Mexico!" Pointing at me with the butter knife in



his hand he said, "It was Colonia Dublán, wasn't it? That's where I saw you."

I shrugged and then sat back down. "Could've been."

"You were the subject of the court-martial," continued Jones. "You and that hayseed from Idaho. The two of you were being tried for horse theft and treason! And your accomplice was also charged with murder and attempted murder."

Casually extending my stick, I passed the marshmallow through the flames and said nothing. As a matter of fact, I didn't know what to say.

Miss Thorndike glared at me with a raised eyebrow. "So, Billy Cabott, how does a cow-boy from Arizona end up being court-martialed for horse theft and treason in Mexico? Were you in the army?"

"Oh, do tell, Mr. Cabott," chided Miss Appleton. "We've heard all of Tin-Pan's campfire stories so now it's time for you to entertain us. And, please, don't leave out a single sordid detail."

Staring at the fire, I tried to think. "With all due respect, ladies, I'd rather not go into it," I said but then an urgent question crossed my mind. How much did the lieutenant actually *know*?

Casually, I muttered, "Maybe Lieutenant Jones can fill you in."

Captain Miller nodded. I could feel his eyes boring into me. “Yes, Lieutenant. I would like to hear more about it myself... now that I’ve actually met one of the traitors, one of the two Americans General Pershing allowed to walk away from a firing squad.”

Pershing’s decision to release Monte and me was a calculated risk designed to avert a war with Mexico. It was the right decision and, as a result, the Mexican armies that were poised to attack Pershing’s army had balked and then backed down. But that fact had apparently been kept from some, if not all, of the officers under Pershing’s command. Only now did I fully realize the negative impact his decision had on the officers present at the court-martial. And, judging from Captain Miller’s comments, news of the court-martial proceedings had spread to the soldiers stationed along the border.

“Now, folks, we don’t want no trouble,” said Tin-Pan easily. “You’s all invited guests here at the ranch. Ain’t nobody here that Mr. Slaughter ain’t invited. And we get all kinds. All kinds of folks come to visit. Mr. Slaughter ain’t one to judge a man just on hear-say.”

Anxious to hear what Jones had to say, I took my marshmallow out of the fire and inspected it. “There’ll be no trouble from my end,” I said and then swung my stick back into the flames. “I’ve got nothing to hide.”

Captain Miller shifted his weight, sitting more erect. "I'll have you know, Tin-Pan, that Lieutenant Jones and I are West Point graduates. I can assure you we are not troublemakers."

Miss Appleton wiggled back in her chair as if she were huddling into a warm blanket. "Please go on, Lieutenant. I dearly love a good story! And I must say that I am intrigued already."

Jones set down the marshmallow jar but held onto his willow branch. Flicking the branch in my direction as if he were a schoolmaster, he began with, "Until two weeks ago, I was with General Pershing in Colonia Dublán, which is about forty miles south of the border. However, I was in his cavalry column from the beginning, from the very first day we left Columbus and rode into Mexico searching for that murdering Mexican, Pancho Villa."

"Wait, wait," exclaimed Miss Thorndike. "Why did the army go into Mexico and who is Pancho Villa?"

"Oh, you know," said Miss Appleton. "Remember we were talking about this with Mother several weeks ago when we informed her of our plans to come here. Villa's army attacked a city somewhere, a dreary little border town as I understand it. President Wilson is up for reelection and, of course, like most men he only understands one way to respond to any crisis."

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Miss Appleton paused and with a smile announced, “No offense to you, Captain, or to you, Lieutenant, but that is why we must and will have national women’s suffrage, to put an end to men’s wars once and for all. Women, as everyone knows, are not prone to physical violence.”

The recollection of Rosa Bustamonte standing with a bandolier of bullets over her shoulder and a rifle in her hand flashed through my mind. If my predicament had not been so dire, I would have laughed out loud at the irony. But had Rosa been sitting next to me, I was quite confident that Ada Thorndike and Marzel Appleton would presently be the subjects of a blistering barrage of Spanish profanity.

Jones was clearly taken aback by the woman’s comment but quickly recovered. He responded with a cordial smile and a gentlemanly, “I take no offense, Miss Appleton. None whatsoever.”

“Nor do I,” said Miller. “I find a woman’s point of view very refreshing, especially out here in this desert.”

“Now I recall,” Thorndike said thoughtfully. “It was last March or April. We invaded Mexico because some bandits misbehaved. It was in a miserable little hamlet, wasn’t it? One with an Italian name?”

“Villa,” Jones responded politely, “attacked Columbus, New Mexico, with his army on March ninth. He killed eight soldiers and ten civilians, one a

woman with child. We crossed the border on March fifteenth.”

“But that was six months ago,” scowled Thorndike. “Didn’t we catch him?”

Jones squirmed a bit. “Not yet. But we pushed him so far south he won’t be any more trouble. And we considerably weakened his forces.”

“I see,” Miss Thorndike said and then shrugged indifferently. “Now that I am up on current events, please continue with the story.”

“As I was saying,” nodded Jones, “we entered Mexico in mid-March. We were proceeding according to plan but along the way we had many obstacles to overcome, not the least of which was the cooperation of the Mexican people. We had no decent maps to guide us and the villagers we approached constantly lied to us about the terrain of the country and the trails that coursed through it. And, even though they knew the whereabouts of Villa’s army, they lied about that also. After a while, General Pershing had had enough of such treachery and decided to send for two dozen Apaches that were already enlisted as army scouts. Some of those scouts had been with the Geronimo campaign years earlier and, as a consequence, knew the country we were in better than the Mexican peons themselves.”

Miss Thorndike’s eyes flashed with excitement. “You mean actual Indians? Real Apaches? You don’t

mean to tell me that we still have Indian scouts in the army?"

"Yes, we do," assured Captain Miller. "Even after Geronimo surrendered there were all sorts of renegades still on the loose. The bands were smaller and less organized but still very lethal. And as they say, 'It takes an Apache to catch an Apache.' So, in order to hunt down the renegades, the army decided to keep a couple dozen Apache scouts on hand even though Geronimo was long gone. And, from what I am told, they still hunt down an occasional criminal Indian, one that commits a crime and then jumps the reservation."

"I saw Geronimo several years ago," said Miss Appleton, almost swooning. "He was in Teddy Roosevelt's inaugural parade. On that cold and windy day, I was standing on Pennsylvania Avenue when the great Indian chief rode by on a magnificent dark horse. He rode so close to me that I could have reached out and touched him. As he passed, even though I was quite bundled up against the cold, I shuddered at the frightful sight of him. However, looking more closely, I saw that he had a well-shaped head which assured me that he was certainly not a bloodthirsty savage as some claimed, but a man of considerable intelligence. And in his steady black eyes I saw an abundance of wisdom, understanding, and boundless courage.

“As he passed by, people began to shout ‘Hooray for Geronimo’ and ‘Public hero number two.’ What a brave and noble Red Man he was. I’ll never forget that day.”

I glanced at Miss Appleton out of the corner of my eyes, marveling at the profound ignorance of the woman. I knew that among countless other killings, it was some of Geronimo’s band that had murdered Monte Segundo’s father and mother. Monte was only six years old when he saw his father tortured to death and then, after witnessing that atrocity, had been thrown into a patch of cactus and left to die a slow and agonizing death.

In fact, Monte’s experience was so horrid he had somehow succeeded in erasing most of that tragedy from his memory. For years, the only demon that had escaped from his gruesome past was one that stalked his nights in the form of a recurring nightmare. Only in the last few months had a few fragments of actual memory returned, and even those haunting remnants were oftentimes cloudy and distorted.

And, as far as the Apache soldiers were concerned, while in Mexico I had personally seen what some of Pershing’s scouts had done to two Mexican wire cutters, defenseless men they had captured and then tortured to death. I found nothing “noble” about pulling

a man's entrails out while he was still alive and then stretching them out in the sand in front of him to see.

Jones hesitated for a moment and then continued. "Well, yes, Geronimo may have been a noble Red Man but the army did have to subdue him in order to end the Apache wars. And we needed Apaches loyal to the United States to find Geronimo for us, which they did. That is how peace was restored to this area we are in now. The army's Apache scouts, you see, played a pivotal role in writing the last chapter in the Indian Wars.

"But as I was saying, twenty or so scouts were with us as we drove deeper and deeper into Mexico. Eventually, with the help of the scouts, Major Howze caught up with two hundred of Villa's men at a place called Ojos Azules. He defeated them handily with a brilliant cavalry charge and suffered virtually no casualties in his ranks. It was a wonderful victory. However, it was also there that a deserter from our own forces tried to kill one of our Apache scouts, an Indian named Norroso. And it was also at Ojos Azules that his partner in crime, Billy Cabott, was captured."

Jones paused. The only sound heard was the crackling of the fire. All eyes, including those of Tin-Pan, turned and locked onto me.



I brought my marshmallow close and took a bite of the melted cream. It was sweet and tasted like hot sugar. I chewed a bit and then swallowed.

“Go on,” I said easily. “I like a tall tale as much as the next person.”

Jones huffed disgustedly. “I’ll bet you do!”

“So they court-martialed the two of them?” questioned Miss Thorndike. “Is that it?”

Glancing back at the women, Jones answered, “Yes. The trial was held in camp Colonia Dublán, with all of the officers present. Two classmates of mine were involved in the legalities: Hugh Johnson for the prosecution and good ole Georgie Patton for the defense. Both of them are lieutenants. General Pershing, Major Howze, and Colonel Dodd were the presiding judges.

“After the initial formalities, George Patton, always the blowhard, pompously called his first witness, a woman, for the defense. But Hughie blew her out of the water with a single question. After that debacle Patton even got the deserter, a private named Segundo, to admit he tried to kill the scout, that he shot and wounded him. Thanks to Georgie, who was arguing *for* the defendants mind you, it was an open and shut case. Both were clearly guilty of treason.”

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“Wait now,” said Miss Appleton, holding up her hand. “You referred to the witness as ‘her.’ Who was she? Who was that witness?”

Jones cleared his throat. “Let’s just say she was an unmarried Mexican *companion* of Segundo’s, one who traveled with him wherever he went. And other than her obvious lack of virtue, she was also an admitted liar. So, her testimony was immediately dismissed as fabrication.” Jones paused to snicker, then continued. “Only someone like Patton would think she was going to make a good witness for the defense. What a fool.

“Mark my words, ladies, George Patton will never amount to anything!”

I took another bite of marshmallow. “That would be Rosa Bustamonte you’re talking about. She was a captain in Villa’s army.”

Captain Miller snorted derisively. “A captain? A woman?”

“So, she claimed at the trial,” said Jones. “We all just laughed at her when she said that.”

After sucking the last bite of marshmallow off the tip of my stick I asked, “Is that all that you remember about Rosa Bustamonte, Lieutenant? Are you saying that nothing else about her comes to mind? Nothing at all?”

Jones was too sure of himself and I wanted him to squirm a little. Rosa was a stunning beauty. When she

walked into the court, no doubt every man in the room felt his pulse skip a beat. I looked at Jones and smiled. “Was there anything... unusual... about her?”

The lieutenant knowingly glared back at me. “Nothing of importance. All that interested me was her testimony.”

Tin-Pan had been squatting by the fire calmly roasting his marshmallow. Satisfied that it was cooked to perfection, he took it out of the flames. Sitting back cross-legged he asked, “What all did that woman say, Lieutenant?”

Jones frowned. “She claimed that Segundo rescued her from some Carrancista soldiers, soldiers she said had been abusing her. This accusation, of all things, coming from a woman who traipsed around Mexico with a traitor the likes of Segundo.

“How naïve did she think we were? No doubt what really occurred was that she had been *entertaining* the local soldiers when Segundo happened along and offered her, shall we say, more incentive. Clearly, she found American dollars more persuasive than pesos and she simply rode off with Segundo and Billy Cabott. Perhaps there was a drunken bar fight in a cantina somewhere but there was no heroic rescue as she claimed.”

Having been present when Monte thrashed the Carrancistas, I had never given any thought to how

reports of such an event could be so grotesquely distorted. Despite my nearness to the fire, I felt my face flush with heat.

I wanted to say that I was there in the cantina that afternoon, that I knew exactly what had happened. I wanted to tell them how Rosa, a captured Villista, had been drug into the cantina with a rope around her neck, how she was treated worse than an animal. Most of all, I wanted to tell everyone how Monte had beaten the Mexicans with his fists and tossed them around as if they were rag dolls.

But I knew Jones would call me a liar. Then I would try to defend myself, an argument would ensue, and trouble would follow, not only for me but also for Monte and Rosa. If that happened everything would be ruined. Everything.

Taking a deep breath and swallowing my pride, I said evenly, "That's one way to look at it, I suppose. But you forgot a few details."

"What details?" snapped Jones.

"Like the fact that in the court-martial Monte Segundo was charged with killing one of the Carrancistas that day in the cantina, killing him in a fight with his bare hands."

"Killed a man?" gasped Miss Appleton. "My word!"

“You say with his bare hands,” said Tin-Pan. “How’d he do that?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know. Looking back on it, I think it was when he threw one of them into the wall. Must have broken his neck. Or maybe Monte just punched him too hard.”

Jones scoffed. “I don’t believe a word of it.”

“But,” asked Thorndike, “was there at least an actual fight between this Segundo and the Carrancistas?”

“Yes,” admitted Jones. “It happened in a cantina in a village called Las Palomas.”

“So, what were they fighting about?” asked Miss Thorndike.

Jones merely shrugged. “Maybe the soldiers didn’t like the fact the woman was changing her allegiance. Maybe the soldiers were jealous. Who cares what they fought over? Segundo supposedly killed a Mexican soldier, one of our allies. That was the charge. But like I said, I believe that charge was based solely on rumor or purposeful disinformation.”

The conversation stalled. Even the bullfrogs fell suddenly quiet.

I tried to maintain my composure but inwardly I was appalled with the way the night was going. Jones and Miller were portraying Monte Segundo as a criminal and the Misses Thorndike and Appleton were

making a saint out of Geronimo. And worst of all, I could say nothing about either issue. Presenting the truth, which would not be believed anyway, would very likely lead to an argument or worse. And, after all, my only purpose for being at the Slaughter ranch was to get cattle, breeding stock desperately needed back at the ranch in Sasabe.

Señor Cruz and his daughter, Angelina, had lost most of their stock to borderland rustlers and were in danger of losing the ranch. Since the ranch shared a border with Mexico, the banks in Tucson had refused to loan money to Señor Cruz until the revolution was over, and without that capital he had no way to restock his range and recover his losses. That's when he contacted John Slaughter and worked out a deal.

As difficult as it was, I held my tongue. I didn't want to disappoint Señor Cruz and I certainly didn't want to jeopardize my budding relationship with his daughter, Angelina. I had to be careful and say as little as possible.

Chewing some of his marshmallow, Tin-Pan broke the silence. "So, it sounds like this Segundo fella might have killed a man fighting in a saloon. I've heard of that sort of thing. It happens from time to time."

"Even if he did," conceded Jones, "he didn't do it with his fists. He might have clubbed one of the

Mexicans with a chair or hit him over the head with a tequila bottle.”

Addressing the women, Miller gloated, “The lieutenant knows a thing or two about fisticuffs. He was a champion pugilist at West Point. Those that saw him in the ring compared him favorably to the great John L. Sullivan.”

Ignoring his boastful smirk, I took a closer look at Jones. Even sitting down, the lieutenant appeared to be at least six feet tall and I could see he had a stout build. As I sized him up a sense of foreboding engulfed me. He was arrogant and overconfident. It was more than likely he would relish a chance to challenge Monte Segundo.

“I seen John L. fight once,” offered Tin-Pan. “He come to Tucson back in eighty-two or three. He had him a wicked right hook and he was mighty dangerous in the ring. But they’s a big difference ’tween a boxing match and a fistfight. A mighty big difference.”

“That’s true to a point,” agreed Jones, “but according to the tale spun at the court-martial by Rosa Bustamonte, Segundo fought all five men at once and, according to her, emerged unscathed. If he were in the ring with me for even one round, I guarantee you he would not escape unscathed. He would receive at least a few good blows, blows that I assure you would leave his face adorned with a goodly number of angry welts.”

## *Guadalupe Canyon*

Under the circumstances, I tried hard to keep a straight face but I couldn't help myself. I lowered my head, chuckled, and then began to laugh. It was all so absurd. The only one around the fire that seemed to have any sense at all was Tin-Pan. How, I marveled, could educated people be so pompous and arrogant when, in fact, they were such buffoons?

"You find that amusing, do you?" drilled Miller. "Perhaps we should arrange an exhibition match when your friend arrives. Lieutenant Jones could use the exercise and my men could use some entertainment."

Monte's fists were like sledgehammers. Thinking of what I had seen him do to a man's skull with a single blow, I began to sober up. "I saw what happened in the cantina, Captain. I was only a few feet away. Believe what you want, but there were five of them and it was over in a matter of seconds."

"Your bedtime stories," Jones said derisively, "are better suited for children. In case it has escaped your observation, we here are adults."

I glared at Jones, feeling the blood starting to pulsate through my veins. My eyes focused on his big, pompous chin. Envisioning what Monte's fist would do to such a vulnerable target, I said too much.

"When you were at West Point, Lieutenant, did you ever go toe-to-toe with a five-foot-ten-inch, two-hundred-pound bull-of-the-woods lumberjack? Did



you ever fight a man who had been orphaned since he was six years old, a man who had lived with the Kootenai Indians for years and had killed his first man when he was only fifteen years old? Did you ever square off with a man who could kill you with his fists, do it without breaking a sweat, and not think twice about it? In your military academy boxing matches, did you ever face anyone that even came close to a man like that?"

Before Jones or Miller could even think of a response, a horse whinnied from the darkness. It was answered by other horses in the Slaughter corral.

Indicating the horses, I said, "That's likely Monte Segundo and Rosa Bustamonte coming in. If it is, they'll be here in a few minutes. I will say this and say it only once. Neither of them puts up with foolishness."

Miller leaned forward. "That sounds a like a veiled threat, Mr. Cabott."

I shook my head. "No sir. With all due respect, it's not meant to be a threat. It's simply a warning. As we all agreed, none of us want any trouble."

Jones, seemingly lost in thought, glared into the campfire, saying nothing.

"My word," giggled Miss Appleton, "how wonderfully dramatic. This is better than the cinema, isn't it, Ada? Enter the antihero."

“But, Billy Cabott,” objected Miss Thorndike, “how is it that you and your friend were released from custody? How was it that you escaped the court-martial? You haven’t explained that part.”

I settled back in my chair, wishing I had kept my mouth shut and not stirred the pot. “I think it’s best to ask Lieutenant Jones that question.”

Jones looked up from the fire, his eyes focusing on the women. “What was that?”

Thorndike repeated her question. “How did Billy Cabott and Segundo avoid the firing squad? You never told us the reason.”

Clearing his throat, Jones said, “We were never told the reason. But it was the general consensus of the officers that it was to appease the Mexican peons. The idea being to win the approval of the people residing in Northern Mexico and perhaps make them more cooperative.

“You have to understand that the people resented us being in their country the entire time we were there. It didn’t matter if they were Villistas or Carrancistas, you could see the hatred in their eyes. To them we were invaders, plain and simple. We all assumed the general was playing politics.”

“And do you agree, Billy Cabott?” asked Miss Thorndike, her voice tainted with scorn. “Is that why,

instead of being shot as traitors, you were set free... for political reasons?"

I didn't like being referred to as "traitors," especially since Monte and I were nothing of the sort. At that moment, however, I clearly understood that General Pershing had not explained to any of the subordinate officers the strategic reasons behind his decision to release us. And now that lack of communication and the resentment that followed was starting to cause problems. I was suddenly worried that if the present tensions escalated, Captain Miller might even be tempted to interfere with what should have been a simple business deal, a purchase of cattle that was vitally important to the Cruz ranch.

Trying to think of a way to get out of the mess I had created, I answered with a feeble, "Not exactly."

"No?" badgered Miller. "Then why don't you enlighten us. What *was* the exact reason?"

I swore under my breath. Why hadn't I just walked away from the fire and waited in the automobile? Had it been necessary, I could have even slept in the driver's seat. Then, I wouldn't be sitting around a campfire with a foursome composed of hostile army officers and arrogant Eastern blue-bloods. Now I was in a tight spot. Feeling cornered, I felt my only hope to diffuse the situation was to offer a brief defense, an explanation of what actually occurred.

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“It is a long story but I will have to be brief.”

“Go on,” encouraged Miss Appleton. “This is so intriguing.”

I took a moment and gathered my thoughts. “Only a few miles from where we’re sitting tonight, Monte Segundo’s parents were murdered by Apaches. Monte was six years old at the time and saw what happened, yet for the next thirty years he had no real memory of it. But he did have a recurring nightmare, a dream he never understood. In that nightmare he was thrown into a fire by a man with a dark, unrecognizable face. But that face bore a distinct scar.

“A few months ago, not long after Monte saw a photograph of one of the Apache scouts in a newspaper, he was overcome with... with a... let’s call it a drive... to join up with the Apaches and hunt down Pancho Villa. That’s why he left North Idaho for Columbus and volunteered to join the scouts.

“But the officer involved in recruiting volunteers made the mistake of insulting Monte. So, Monte floored him with a single punch. He started walking toward Mexico, determined to find the scouts on his own. That’s when I joined up with him.”

“The two of you *walked* to Mexico?” questioned Appleton.

“Sure. Las Palomas is only two miles from Columbus. We were there before any of the soldiers knew what had happened.

“Anyway, it was there in a cantina that Monte freed Rosa. She was a Villista and ready to head south to rejoin Villa’s army. Since Monte wanted to find Pershing and the scouts, we all went south together. We protected Rosa from Carrancistas and, in turn, she guided us through the country on our way to find Pershing’s forces.

“On our way south, Monte made a name for himself by dispatching a number of bandits and vile Carrancistas. So many, in fact, that his fame spread throughout all of northern Mexico and he became known as *El Muerte*. The Mexicans, especially the peons, are very superstitious and some began to believe Monte was an angel, some thought he was a demon. But they all feared *El Muerte*. All, including the Villista and Carrancista soldiers.”

“*El Muerte?*” scoffed Miller. “What kind of a sobriquet is that?”

I wasn’t sure how far out from the ranch Monte was but I knew I had to hurry. “In Mexico, Villa is known as *El Jaguar*. One of his bloodthirsty officers is called *El Carnicero*. The jaguar and the butcher. They like names like that down there much like here in the West

we like names such as Billy the Kid, Wild Bill Hickok, or Three-Fingered Jack.”

“And, *El Muerte*?” asked Tin-Pan. “What does that mean?”

I hesitated and then said, “The death.”

I ignored Miller’s snorting scoff and continued. “As we went south, more and more of Monte’s buried memory came back. Finally, he could clearly see the face of the man in his nightmare. It was one of Pershing’s scouts, one of the older ones by the name of Norroso. Once he figured out who it was in his dream, Monte naturally assumed it was Norroso who had killed his parents. So, Monte understood why, after seeing Norroso’s picture in a newspaper, he had been so dead set on joining the Apache scouts. But after recognizing Norroso, he then set out to kill him. And word eventually got out to the Mexicans that *El Muerte* was in Mexico *hunting* Apaches.”

Tin-Pan chuckled. “Hellfire! That would have made them Mexicans stand up and listen!”

“Why would doing such a thing concern the Mexicans?” asked Miss Appleton.

“Because,” answered Tin-Pan, “the Apaches have been killing Mexicans for hundreds of years. The Mexicans is more afraid of an Apache than anything in this world or the next. Any man going hunting for

Apaches by his own self, would sure enough strike them Mexicans as being some kind of demon.”

I nodded. “That’s right. And, like I said, the Mexican people are very superstitious. Add that to the fact Monte killed some bandits that were attacking a village called San Miguel and you get the avenging angel part of his reputation. The stories grew as they do with the telling and retelling. By the time of the court-martial, *El Muerte* was legendary.”

“So, then,” said Miss Thorndike, “General Pershing let the two of you go because of an overrated reputation, a myth? He was attempting to appease the peasantry? That hardly seems appropriate.”

Ada Thorndike’s suspicions were quite correct, but if General Pershing had chosen to keep the rationale for Monte’s release a secret, I wasn’t about to divulge his reasoning now. “Well, Monte didn’t intend to kill that Carrancista in the cantina and we never fought with the Villistas. As for Monte attempting to kill the Apache scout, that turned out to be a matter of mistaken identity. So, we really weren’t guilty of treason at all.

“All things considered, releasing *El Muerte* was a good move by the general. You should have heard the people cheer when they got a look at Monte Segundo. There were thousands of them waiting outside the camp at Colonia Dublán that day. Who knows what would have happened otherwise?”

“We weren’t there to please peons,” snapped Jones. “As far as I’m concerned, the general violated army regulations. We should have gone by the book. Regulations and orders, spit and polish. That’s the army way. No exceptions. And let’s not forget he shot one of our scouts.”

Leaning forward on her elbows, Miss Appleton was mesmerized. “And what happened to the poor Indian who was shot. Was he badly injured?”

I waited for the lieutenant to answer, wondering if he knew the trap he had just fallen into. Jones appeared to be close to my age and just as cocky and self-assured as I was a few months earlier.

Jones’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully and his left knee began vibrating as he nervously pumped his heel up and down with the ball of his foot. “The wound was minor.”

“It was an earlobe,” I added dryly. “Monte Segundo shot it off.”

Miss Appleton cringed. “Oh, how awful!”

“So, Lieutenant,” I taunted, “what became of that poor wounded Apache scout? What was his rank? Wasn’t he enlisted as a private?”

Glaring at me with eyes full of contempt, Jones said nothing. I stared right back at him.

“Oh, that’s right,” I said. “He deserted, didn’t he? Right after the court-martial was adjourned he and two



other army scouts hightailed it. But as I recall, no one went after them.”

“Deserted?” stammered Miller as he turned toward Jones. “I didn’t hear about that. Why on earth would he desert?”

Watching Jones’s fidgeting knee, I let the captain’s question hang in the air for several seconds before answering. “Because when Monte finally tracked down Norroso it was at the battle of Ojos Azules. Monte found Norroso hiding behind an unarmed Mexican woman and holding a knife to her throat. That woman was Rosa Bustamonte.”

Miss Thorndike held up her hand. “Hold on. What was this Rosa woman doing at the battle of Ojos Azules?”

“As I mentioned before, Rosa was a soldier. By the time of that fight, she had left Monte and me and was back fighting with the Villistas. When the battle turned against them, dozens of the Villistas discarded their weapons and ran to the nearby mountains to hide.”

“They threw away their guns?” questioned Thorndike. “Why do that?”

“That’s because,” broke in Tin-Pan, “the Villistas don’t wear uniforms of no kind at all. Lots of ’em don’t even have shoes to wear. Without a gun they look just like any old peon, so if they get away and into a village, ain’t nobody can tell ’em from nobody else.”

*Guadalupe Canyon*

“That’s right,” I continued. “But the Apache scouts followed close behind those retreating peons, killing any they caught. Any man, that is. Monte caught up with Norroso in a ravine. Just the three of them were there.

“Monte shot at what little he could see of Norroso and then, to escape, Norroso stabbed Rosa in the back and sprang into the brush.

“Monte had a choice. He could go after Norroso or try and keep Rosa from bleeding to death. Monte stayed with Rosa and that’s how both of them were captured by the army.

“So, to answer your question, Captain, Private Norroso deserted because he knew Monte was going to be set free by General Pershing. And, for stabbing Rosa, he knew that Monte would kill him if he ever got the chance. Norroso figured he was better off in the rugged mountain ranges of Mexico than pigeonholed on an army base.

“If anyone doubts what I am saying, I’m sure you can ask Lieutenant Patton about what happened. He’ll back up every word.”

“How exhilarating!” squealed Miss Appleton. “Such a dramatic and exciting climax.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “Monte and I were freed and Private Norroso took to the hills. All’s well that ends well.”

Jones knew the point I was making. Norroso was a soldier in the United States Army. He had deserted and no one had so much as saddled a horse to go after him. For the Apache scout, the army had tossed its “spit and polish” regulations out the window.

Scowling at me, Jones grumbled. “He was an Indian.”

“By the book, Lieutenant,” I said evenly, “he should have been arrested and jailed, maybe even shot.”

The leg stopped bouncing. Jones leaned forward and rested both palms on his knees. His eyes, conveying a poorly veiled threat, locked on me. “I say he left to get back to his own people because he had his fill of the white man’s justice. Segundo tried to kill him and got away with it. As an Indian, Private Norroso saw that injustice as another betrayal of the trust his people had placed in the white man, just another version of a whole host of broken treaties.”

Miss Appleton sighed sympathetically, “The poor Red Man. How we’ve mistreated them. And all because of the injudicious pursuit of Manifest Destiny!”

“The poor Red Man?” I said but then glanced at Tin-Pan. Our eyes met and almost imperceptibly, he shook his head “No.”

Understanding I was to let the issue drop, I immediately thought of Pancho Villa. He was a cold-

blooded murderer, but to most Mexicans he was a hero of the revolution. But the few Mexicans who had witnessed him murder both men and women, and those that were directly affected by his brutality, all hated him. Their reports of his atrocities, however, were ignored, excused, or, worse, labeled as out-and-out lies by the majority of Villa supporters.

I realized that when it came to Apaches, the women, the lieutenant, and perhaps even the captain were not much different than the peons of Mexico. But the peons desperately needed a hero. Exalting Villa as a great general who was fighting to give them a better life was at least understandable. To me, the idea that renegade Apaches were worthy of sympathy was pure fantasy. It might have been a very fashionable notion in the East but in the Southwest the people knew all too well such a sentiment was complete and utter nonsense.

At times, killing was unavoidable. In times of conflict, it was an acceptable act of war. But the harsh reality was that even cold-blooded murder could not hold a candle to the horrors of Apache torture. And yet, like Pancho Villa and his henchmen, it appeared that Easterners, including the likes of Teddy Roosevelt, were well on their way to idolizing Geronimo and justifying the deeds of his ruthless band of renegades.

I nodded to Tin-Pan and changed the subject. “It was dark when I drove up. How close are we to the border?”

Tin-Pan thumbed over his shoulder. “Come morning, go out on the front porch. You’ll be looking south right into Mexico. It’s only a quarter mile away. But that land on the other side of the border belongs to the ranch here, the San Bernardino ranch. We got acres of corn planted out that way.”

“Corn?” I asked. “In the desert?”

Taking a bite of his smoldering marshmallow, Tin-Pan talked while he chewed. “There’s water down that way and ponds built to irrigate. That’s why old Pancho Villa come by last year when he was getting ready to attack Agua Prieta, the town right across from Douglas.

“Fact is, Agua Prieta and Douglas is really the same town. They even got one street that goes down the middle. South side of the street is Mexico and the north is us. Kind of funny when a body thinks on it.”

“Pancho Villa was here?” I asked.

“Yep. Him and his whole army. We all saw the dust cloud coming a long time before he got here. He holed up not a mile from here and started feeding his army on Mistah John’s beef and corn.

“Now, understand, Mistah John and Pancho knowed each other already. Mistah John saw they was after his cows and such and he says to me, ‘Saddle up

my horse, Tin-Pan. And saddle yours, too. We're going down there!'

"I was praying hard 'cause I knew Mistah John was serious and we was both about to die. But I got our horses and my pistol and he fetched his shotgun and we rode lickity-cut toward them thousands of starving Mexicans along with Pancho Villa hisself.

"Mistah John, he rides right up to ole Pancho and says to get off his land. Ole Pancho says 'I don't think I'm going to do that, Mistah Slaughter.' So, Mistah John looks that bandit straight in the eye and says, 'Then pay up for them beef you're killing and the corn you cut.'"

Tin-Pan, as it turned out, was a master storyteller. Increasing the suspense, he paused and took several bites of his marshmallow.

"What happened?" demanded Miss Thorndike.

"Well, Mistah John and me rode back to the ranch all peaceable-like. Nobody got shot and Mistah John had his saddlebags full of twenty-dollar gold pieces. Ole Pancho paid up."

Appleton huffed. "Pancho Villa sounds like an honorable man to me. Why would someone like that attack Columbus... unless we provoked him somehow?"

I have to admit that my pride had been bruised a bit with all that had been said so, to impress them and

perhaps regain some of my credibility, I spoke up. “He wasn’t provoked exactly, but to his way of thinking he was in the right.”

“You would say something like that,” sneered Jones.

“You’re defending Pancho Villa?” demanded Miller.

“Not at all. But you know, Captain, that when the revolution started President Wilson had a neutrality policy. We couldn’t favor or help either side.”

“That’s correct,” agreed Miller. “What’s your point?”

Studying the captain, I guessed he actually didn’t know the answer to his own question.

“Just before Villa attacked Agua Prieta, Wilson threw his support behind Carranza and then, unknown to Villa, allowed our railroads to ship hundreds of Carrancista reinforcements across American soil, through the back door of Douglas and secretly into Agua Prieta.

“Villa attacked at night but the Carrancistas *miraculously* had brilliant searchlights that lit up the battlefield and allowed Villa’s forces to be cut to pieces. The Villistas claim the lights and electricity came from the U.S. side of the border.

“Villa found out Wilson had double-crossed him and he was irate. You combine that with what the

Germans are up to and you get an idea why Villa hit Columbus, both the military camp and the town.”

Skepticism was imprinted on the faces of both Miller and Jones but neither of them had anything to say.

“What do them Germans have to do with anything?” asked Tin-Pan. “We hear stories that they’s all over Mexico. And some of them Japanese, too.”

I glanced at Miller and Jones and then turned to the women. They were clearly reevaluating their opinion of me. “Ladies?” I said. “Any ideas about the Germans and Pancho Villa?”

“You’re no cowboy,” snipped Miss Appleton. “Who are you?”

I shook my head. “I’m nobody special but I do read a lot. And I’ve been to Mexico and seen the revolution up close. That’s all.”

“Go on,” encouraged Miss Thorndike.

“As for the Germans,” I said, trying my best not to sound like a Weston, “they want us to go to war with Mexico so we’ll stay out of the fracas in Europe. They likely goaded Villa to attack Columbus, to get back at Wilson for the double cross. After what Wilson did, having the Germans whispering in his ear would be just enough to tip the balance of Villa’s judgment. And look what we’ve got as a result. Our entire army is in Mexico



and the National Guard is strung out all along our border.

“The way things are, we couldn’t join the fight in Europe even if we wanted to.”

The frogs suddenly fell silent. I heard an owl hoot in the direction of the pond and then seconds later I heard another round of hoots coming from behind me. “It sounds like we have company,” I said.

Everyone turned and peered expectantly into the blackness. Nothing moved. There was no sound but the fire popping.

“Your friends don’t take no chances, do they?” commented Tin-Pan. “Reminds me of the old days when me and the boys rode with Mistah John. A man couldn’t be too careful back then, no sir.”

“For heaven’s sake,” scoffed Miss Thorndike as she turned back and faced the fire. “This is the twentieth century. Your friends are being overly dramatic and I, for one, am not impressed in the slightest.”

Slowly, catching the faint rays of amber light, a ghostly figure appeared in the direction of the pond and began coming closer. It was Monte but, except for his campaign hat, he was dressed in range clothes. Since he was not wearing his Idaho militia uniform as he was in the court-martial, I assumed it would be several seconds before Jones recognized him.

Fifty feet from the fire, Monte stopped. "Everything alright, Billy?"

"It is."

Monte started walking again, his bulky features becoming more and more distinct as did the Colt forty-five and hunting knife buckled around his waist.

"That's him, isn't it?" Miss Appleton gasped. "That's Monte Segundo."

Jones came to his feet. "It is him, alright. I'm sure of it."

"Come on in, Mr. Segundo," invited Tin-Pan. "We been waiting for you. Come on in and make yourself at home."

Jones swore softly as Monte circled behind the chairs until he came to stand next to me.

Without taking my eyes off of Jones, I asked, "How long have you been here?"

"Long enough."

"So where is Rosa Bustamonte?" snipped Jones.

"She's holding a bead on the captain's head," Monte said flatly. "The house looked empty and we saw no ranch hands. Things didn't look right to us."

Miller uneasily turned back around in his chair. "You can see nothing is wrong here."

Monte looked from Miller to Miss Appleton and Miss Thorndike. Without saying a word to them he raised his hand and then signaled with a flick of his

wrist. The frogs began to croak again. In seconds Rosa stepped out of the shadows and stood beside him.

She was dressed as always, wearing a Mexican skirt, cotton blouse and jacket, a sombrero, and sandals. Her long black hair, woven into two braids, hung down in front of her shoulders. But this night she also had a bandolier of cartridges buckled around her waist and a Mauser rifle in her hand.

“Where is everybody?” asked Monte.

Tin-Pan got to his feet and shook hands with Monte. “All the hired hands is out on the range. We been losing a few head of stock lately and they’re out to see what’s the matter. Maybe some rustlers have showed up or a mountain lion. Maybe even a jaguar.

“Mistah John, he and his wife are off to Bisbee. It’s on account of some law business. With him still being a deputy sheriff of the county, he gets called in from time to time.”

“We were told,” said Monte, ignoring everyone but Tin-Pan, “there was a room for Rosa in the ranch house.”

“Sure enough is. Mistah John and Miz Viola said Miss Rosa was to stay in the guest room. It’s right across the hall to Miss Thorndike and Miss Appleton.”

Miss Appleton raised an eyebrow. “But our luggage is in that room.”

“I done stacked your bags real nice and neat in a corner. Miss Rosa can get around just fine.”

Batting her eyes and flashing a counterfeit smile in Rosa’s direction, Miss Thorndike said, “Well that is very thoughtful of you, Tin-Pan. We’ll just need to make certain our bags are locked up nice and tight. We wouldn’t want anything to spill out in the middle of the night. Would we, Marzel?”

Glancing down at Rosa’s sandal-clad feet, Miss Appleton replied innocently, “Oh, absolutely. My shoe bag is constantly overflowing and shoes get scattered everywhere. We wouldn’t want Rosa to sprain an ankle wandering around in the dark.”

I heard a disparaging huff come from Jones. I held my breath, hoping Monte and Rosa didn’t recognize the insults that were swirling around them.

“*Las mujeres,*” said Rosa as she looked impassively at the two women, “*son pendejas.*”

Tin-Pan choked a bit and then cleared his throat. “Are you folks taking the cows tomorrow or the next day?”

“Not tomorrow,” answered Monte, still paying no attention to anyone but Tin-Pan. “I’m riding farther east tomorrow but I’ll be back before dark. We’ll leave first thing the next day if that suits you.”

“Fine with me. You had supper?”

“We ate. We’re done for the day and ready to turn in.”

“Aren’t you going to introduce us, Tin-Pan?” Miller asked, with a taunting edge in his voice.

“No need for that,” Monte said flatly.

“*Mi cuarto, por favor*,” Rosa said as she shifted the heavy Mauser in her hands.

Tin-Pan seemed relieved. “Sure thing,” he said cheerfully as he extended his hand toward the rear door of the ranch house. “Follow me, *señorita*, and I’ll show you where you can bunk.”

Tin-Pan took a step and then turned back. “Breakfast for all the guests is right at sunup, that means six o’clock sharp. Monte and Billy, you two get the bunkhouse. That’s the building right behind you.”

Rosa followed Tin-Pan as they walked past Miss Thorndike and Miss Appleton and then disappeared in the darkness.

“Hardly a social butterfly, is she?” quipped Miss Appleton.

“She was up long before sunup and she’s very tired,” I said coming to my feet. “And so am I. I’ll be saying good night.”

Pointing off to his left, Monte glanced at me. “That the bunkhouse?”

“Yeah. You ready to turn in, too?”

*Guadalupe Canyon*

“Before you go,” announced Jones, “I’d like to meet you, Mr. Segundo.”

Monte’s eyes, void of expression, slowly shifted to Jones, who had puffed out his chest and already started toward Monte.

With a crooked smile, Jones said sarcastically, “It’s not every day that I get to meet a legend.”

When Jones was within reach, he extended his hand. “*El Muerte*, isn’t it? That’s what the humble peons call you?”

Monte grasped Jones hand but did not shake it. Instead, Monte’s grip closed like the steel jaws of a vice. Jones was helpless as Monte increased the pressure. The lieutenant’s mouth flew open and his legs began to fold.

“Billy’s not a liar,” Monte said softly. “You damned well better remember that.”

“Alright!” grunted Jones. “Alright!”

When Jones was halfway to the ground, Monte let go.

Jones staggered and then regained his balance.

Miller, his face a mask of uncertainty, slowly rose from his chair but stood where he was.

“My, my,” grinned Miss Appleton. “He *is* an ill-bred brute, isn’t he?”

Miss Thorndike giggled. “Can you just imagine a brawny rube like that strolling down the streets of Boston?”

Jones’s eyes blazed with instantaneous hatred as he opened and closed his right hand. “I wasn’t ready for that. But it won’t happen again. I’ll be ready next time.”

Completely unimpressed, Monte turned and headed for the bunkhouse. I started to follow but hesitated. “Lieutenant, remember the things I said. Please do yourself a favor, do all of us a favor, and make sure there is no ‘next time.’”

## CHAPTER 2

Six months earlier I could hardly get out of bed in time to make my first class at Harvard, but over the last few months I had learned, amongst other things, to wake up at first light. But I had yet to wake up before Monte Segundo.

I cracked my eyes open and, in the lantern light, saw Monte stretching as he sat on the edge of his bed. With the bunkhouse empty we could have had any bed we wanted, but Monte wanted one close to the door and I took the one next to his. There was a chill in the air because the night before, Monte had propped the door open. When he explained that he wanted to hear if the frogs stopped croaking, I took the hint and hung my pistol on the bedpost within easy reach.

The cool morning air began to stir. "I smell bacon," Monte said. "Tin-Pan's up and at it."

Being as tired as we were the previous night, Monte and I had turned in minutes after entering the bunkhouse and soon fell asleep, neither of us having said a word about the lieutenant, the captain, or the two women.

I yawned. "I can't wait to see this place in the daylight. John Slaughter's got water, lots of it. His San Bernardino ranch was built on an Arizona oasis."



Bending over, Monte shoved his foot into a boot. “Out where I used to live, I don’t remember anything but a spring, a small one. That must have been our only water.”

I knew Monte was referring to his childhood home, a place that had almost been erased from his memory. I was aware that he could recall a corral for it was there the Apaches had tied his father and then tortured him to death. But this was the first I had heard anything about a spring.

“I don’t recall you ever mentioning a spring. Do you remember anything else? Are more things starting to come back?”

Finished with his boots, Monte sat up. His brow wrinkled in thought. “No. That’s about it. But maybe when I get there... have some time... maybe then some things will come back to me.”

I threw off my blanket and sat up with my sock feet resting on the floor’s smooth-worn planks. “How far do you think it is from here?”

Shrugging, Monte came to his feet and belted on his Colt and hunting knife. “Half a day’s ride, I’m guessing, off to the northeast up near the base of the hills. Last time I was there, I came in from the north so the landmarks will look a little different from this direction. It may take a while but I’ll find it.”

## *Guadalupe Canyon*

It was during the court-martial, in a bizarre twist of fate, that Colonel Dodd divulged the approximate location where Monte's father and mother had been killed. The massacre, he said, had occurred very near the junction of the Arizona and New Mexico state lines and the Mexican border.

After the court-martial, Monte and I had split up for a while. Needing to take care of some family matters, I left Columbus on a train to New York and Monte had taken a train heading west toward the massacre site. There, he hoped to find answers to questions that had haunted him for thirty years.

When he arrived in the Arizona town of Rodeo, Monte met an old cowboy who remembered the Apache raid of 1886. He also recalled the exact location down near the border where a husband and wife had been murdered. Provided with detailed directions, Monte followed the western edge of the Peloncillo Mountain Range until he was within sight of the Mexican border. Then, next to a small arroyo, he found the charred remains of the abandoned homestead and the neglected graves of his murdered father and mother. But, once again, as fate or perhaps providence would have it, Monte Segundo's graveside reunion had been abruptly interrupted by circumstances beyond his control.

But now Monte was only a few hours away from his childhood home and this day promised to be different.

“Is Rosa going with you?” I asked. “Or would you rather go alone?”

Monte walked to the open door and looked out toward the ranch house. “She’s coming. And you can come, too, if you want.”

The invitation stunned me and for a moment, I was speechless.

Monte Segundo did not have what one might call “friends.” Enduring what he had as a child had all but cauterized his emotions and then growing up a mistreated orphan had hardened his very soul. As a result, he had never felt the need to have a “friend” and likely never would. I sensed that coldness about Monte when we first met in Columbus, and yet, he had at least accepted my company.

At first, Monte tolerated me like a man would a stray dog but over the weeks that followed, as we rode through Mexico together, I realized that I had gradually earned his respect. And for me, a complete neophyte, gaining that respect was a monumental achievement. But, now, being invited to accompany him on what could be the most important day of his life, I realized I had also earned his trust.

*Guadalupe Canyon*

“That sure beats staying here,” I said, suppressing any sign of being overwhelmed. “I don’t care much for those two women.”

Monte turned and glanced at me curiously. “Those two aren’t spring chickens but neither one of them is hard to look at. It seems strange they would be here without their husbands.”

“I don’t think they’re married, at least not Miss Appleton,” I said. “When I first got here, I could see right off that Lieutenant Jones was making eyes at her.”

“Must be widows,” Monte said.

I started putting on my boots. “So, how much did you hear last night?”

“Rosa and I got here just after dark. We went to the pond to wash up about the time the captain was comparing the lieutenant to John L. Sullivan.”

I felt my stomach roll with anxiety. “You heard all that?”

“We did. We heard it all. It’s rotten luck to run into the army like this. Too bad we didn’t know they were stationed here. If we had, maybe Señor Cruz could have found credit somewhere else.”

“Rotten luck and my big mouth,” I confessed. “I wish I would’ve just walked away from that fire. If I had, the lieutenant wouldn’t have recognized me. It turns out he was at the court-martial.”

Monte thought for a moment and then nodded slowly. “Bad luck, that’s for damn sure.”

“Once Jones recognized me, I didn’t know what to do. I tried not to say too much but one thing led to another.”

“He and the captain were after you, Billy. And then they went after me and Rosa. You did fine by us. It’s just the way it turned out. We’ll steer clear of the army today and get our cows tomorrow. Then we’ll get the hell out of here and that’ll be the end of it.”

Pulling on my shoulder holster and then my vest, I went to the door and stood next to Monte. Suddenly the crisp and peppy notes of a bugle cut the morning stillness.

“The garrison’s blowing reveille,” Monte said. “They’re just now rolling out of their blankets. I guess they’re not too awfully worried about Mexicans crossing the border.”

Shaking the sleep out of my head, I muttered, “I wish we would’ve known they were here. And so stinking close. Their outpost is only a couple of hundred yards east of here.”

“Less than a hundred,” countered Monte.

Out across the green lawn, the rays of the rising sun were just hitting the rooftops of the ranch house and several nearby outbuildings. Now, in the light of day, I could see that all of the adobe structures had been

covered with a neat layer of white plaster and the ranch house was lined with several varieties of flowers.

Tin-Pan stepped out the back door, rang a dinner bell, and then went back inside.

“I could eat a horse,” Monte said. Starting for the ranch house he added, “There’s a privy in back of the bunkhouse. There’s a two-seater behind one of those other outbuildings but I figure it’s for them that live in the house.”

I circled the bunkhouse, made a quick visit to the outhouse, and then went to the rear door of the ranch house. Opening a screen door, I stepped into a small room that had a door to my left. Next to the door was a table. On it was a washbasin, linen towel, and a folded copy of the *Daily Dispatch*. As I washed and dried my hands, I glanced at the newspaper. An article on the front page read, “Brits use Tanks in Battle of Somme.”

Hearing the voices of Monte, Rosa, and Tin-Pan, I stepped through the door and passed through another small room, its only piece of furniture being a sheet-metal bathtub. The tub had no plumbing and, without legs, it sat flat on the floor.

Exiting that room, I walked through the kitchen and then into a spacious dining area. To my left, Rosa and Monte were seated at one end of a table that was capable of seating twenty people. Near the table, a polished china cabinet had been built into the wall and

across from it on an adjacent wall there was a massive stone fireplace. Against the far wall I was surprised to see an ornate piano and a Victrola. Several feet from the dining table, in the center of the combination dining-living room, a comfortable-looking sofa and easy chair were nestled on top of a large rug.

Tin-Pan appeared near the Victrola, having come down a hallway that connected the bedrooms to the living area. "Them two women heard the bell, good enough," he said. "They's just taking their sweet time."

As Tin-Pan made his way back to the kitchen, I took a seat opposite Monte and Rosa. With my back to the china cabinet, I sat facing the open room and fireplace. Wincing a bit, I asked Rosa, "How did you sleep?"

Rosa huffed. "Probably better than the two *gringas*."

Tin-Pan came out of the kitchen with a stack of plates, three coffee cups, and a handful of forks. He set them down in front of us, and as he returned to the kitchen we each grabbed a plate, cup, and fork.

"You don't think the captain and lieutenant will show up, do you?" I asked.

Monte shook his head. "No. They'll be with their men."

"Good," I said, "Something tells me Jones could be looking for trouble. Maybe the captain is, too."

Next, Tin-Pan brought out a large bowl filled with scrambled eggs and a platter stacked with steaming biscuits and sizzling bacon. Setting the breakfast down in front of us, he said cheerily, "Coffee's a-coming."

When Monte reached for the eggs and Rosa for the bacon, my impulse was to suggest that we wait for the two women. But then, I realized there was no point. The food was hot, the women were late, and Monte Segundo and Rosa Bustamonte were not the least bit restrained by a punctilious list of sophisticated table manners. Most of their lives they had struggled to survive from one day to the next, which left little time to memorize Victorian rules of etiquette.

I, on the other hand, was not so unencumbered. However, my loyalty was to Monte and Rosa, not to Ada Thorndike and Marzel Appleton. So, taking a deep breath, I forked some bacon onto my plate and then gingerly picked up a biscuit with my fingers. Glancing at the fireplace, I caught sight of a clock on the mantel. It was four minutes past six o'clock.

Knowing at that moment there was no turning back, I crossed the Rubicon and took a bite of biscuit. Chewing the warm bread, I uneasily shifted my attention to the hallway where Miss Thorndike and Miss Appleton would soon make their predictable and fashionably late entrance. I was adrift in a cloud of anxiety and guilt when a question pierced the fog.



“Are you going today or staying?” asked Tin-Pan as he set a coffee cup in front of me and filled it with black coffee.

I shifted my attention to Tin-Pan. “Me?”

“Uh-uh.”

“I’m going with Monte and Rosa.”

“Alright. I’ll be packing five lunches, then,” Tin-Pan said. “And I’ll make a stew so you all can eat whenever you get back, early or late. I’ll be leaving it on the stove in the kitchen so it’ll stay hot.”

Suddenly curious and somewhat distracted, I asked, “Five lunches? Where are the women off to?”

“They’re riding over to Guadalupe Canyon to look for birds. I told ’em it was a ride of fifteen miles or so and I should go along but they told me, no. Said they didn’t need no man to show ’em the way, especially since there’s a wagon road that leads up to the canyon.

“That’s true enough about the road, I s’pose, and it’d be hard to get lost in the canyon since they’s lot of sand where they’ll be riding. I figure they can follow their tracks back out of the canyon or just let the horses have their head. Them horses they’ll be riding are Mistah John’s and they’ll know where home is.”

I glimpsed a flicker of movement and felt a stinging jolt of panic shoot down my legs. I looked up as Miss Thorndike and Miss Appleton entered the dining area

and found myself staring at two flushed and sneering faces.

“Good morning,” I said cheerily, feigning innocence the best I knew how. Dropping my eyes, I noticed Miss Thorndike was clutching what appeared to be a large book.

Miss Appleton flashed a malignant smile as the two women approached the table. “So good of you to start without us,” she said indignantly.

Tin-Pan took two plates from the stack on the table and started to place them next to me.

“Don’t bother,” Miss Thorndike said as she and Miss Appleton worked their way around the table and up to the china cabinet. “All we need is cold milk. Tin-Pan, would you be so good as to get us some from the icehouse?”

Appleton opened a glass door of the china cabinet and removed two bowls. She then opened a drawer, closed it, and then opened another. From the second drawer she removed two silver spoons. Then, an arm’s length from me, Miss Thorndike placed a cardboard box, which I had originally mistaken for a book, end up on the table. Miss Appleton put the bowls and spoons near the box and then both women smugly took their seats, deliberately leaving two vacant chairs between me and them.

“I’ll get your milk,” Tin-Pan said. “Want it for your coffee?”

“Hardly,” moaned Appleton. “We enjoyed the experience of your breakfast yesterday, Tin-Pan, and we’re certain that such sustenance is quite suitable for ranch hands and laborers but our delicate systems are not accustomed to... to such wonderful frontier cuisine.

“This morning Ada and I prefer to indulge in a much lighter breakfast, one with a bit less grease.”

Thorndike pointed to the box, which was about the size of a large dictionary. On it “Wax-tite” was printed in large blue letters. “We will be eating toasted corn flakes. They are newly marketed by a man named Kellogg. Very new, you understand. Fortunately for us, we brought a number of boxes with us from Boston.”

Tin-Pan eased the plates back down. “Flakes of corn?” he asked suspiciously. “I never heard of such a thing. Corn flakes sounds more like something you’d feed a horse or pig maybe.”

“Oh,” assured Miss Thorndike, “I’m certain that you are not alone, Tin-Pan. I doubt anyone in Arizona has even heard of Kellogg’s flakes. It’s a fanciful dish, you understand, one that only appeals to those with more refined tastes.”

I glanced at Tin-Pan as he strode back toward the kitchen and then at Monte and Rosa. The insult seemed to have slipped by Tin-Pan and, as far as I could tell,

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Monte and Rosa were busy eating and ignoring the women all together.

As Miss Thorndike peeled open the top of the cereal box, I said, “Tin-Pan said you two are going to look for birds today.”

“I don’t suppose,” sighed Miss Appleton, “that you are familiar with the works of Louis Agassiz Fuertes?”

I shrugged. “No. Is he a Mexican?”

Tearing a hole in the wax paper inside the box, Miss Thorndike huffed scornfully, “Hardly! He is America’s greatest bird painter. Marzel and I are students of his and we’re here to observe, for the first time, the brilliant red *Piranga rubra* or, to non-birders like yourself, a bird known as the summer tanager. And, since we have finished with our suffrage meetings in Tucson, we’re free to explore Guadalupe Canyon, which is said to be an excellent location for sighting the tanager in its native Sonoran habitat.”

“Back in the old days,” said Tin-Pan as he reentered the dining area with a pitcher in his hand, “Guadalupe Canyon was a mighty dangerous place. Apaches, bandits, rustlers. All using it to go back and forth from the territories into Mexico.”

Tin-Pan set the pitcher of milk down in front of the women. “Yep, I recollect the time Old Man Clanton got hisself killed in there by Mexican federales. He stole some Mexican cows and those Mexicans came across

the border after him and killed him and his gang right there in the canyon. And nine or ten years ago, the Apache Massai come through there on a raid. And he got killed not long after. That was over near San Marcial, New Mexico.”

Pouring corn flakes into her bowl, Miss Thorndike said, “Thank you, Tin-Pan, for reciting more of your quaint frontier stories. However, even if some of them were actually true, they all transpired years ago. We’ll be perfectly safe. After all, this *is* the twentieth century... even in Arizona.”

Tin-Pan shook his head. “The Apache Kid is still out there somewhere,” he grumbled. “They ain’t never caught him.” Turning back toward the kitchen, he added in a near whisper, “And the Kid ain’t the only one, either.”

“*Señor Tin-Pan,*” called Rosa, “*por favor, tiene pimientes, pimientes picantes?*”

“Yes’m. I’ll fetch you some.”

Miss Thorndike’s eyes flickered with a wicked light as she handed the box of corn flakes to Miss Appleton. “Mr. Segundo,” she began with a smirk. “I was told that you used to live near here. Do you, like dear old Tin-Pan, have any *hair-raising* stories about Guadalupe Canyon?”

Monte Segundo was nobody’s fool but he didn’t know what to make of Ada Thorndike and Marzel

## Guadalupe Canyon

Appleton. Throughout his life, the women he had come across were men's sweethearts, men's wives, or prostitutes, and he treated them all with the same respect. In fact, if any woman was ever harmed, he, like many western men, took it personally and acted accordingly. To Monte, women of every stripe were sacred, to be protected at all costs. But the women Monte knew lived on the edge of civilization and appreciated the respect men gave them. The Misses Thorndike and Appleton, on the other hand, were unlike any women he had ever encountered.

Monte chewed on a piece of bacon. Saying nothing, he studied Miss Thorndike as if she were a two-headed snake.

"Well," said Miss Thorndike, a bit unsettled by Monte's silence, "do you care to make a comment? Do you have anything to say about the dangers of Guadalupe Canyon?"

"I came here to get cattle," Monte replied flatly. "You came here to look at birds. It's best to let sleeping dogs lie."

Miss Thorndike's face went blank and then flushed red. After a moment, like a hungry lioness searching for easier prey, she shifted her attention to Rosa. "So, Rosa," she taunted with a sarcastic smile, "Do you herd cattle along with the men? Are you also a *cow-boy*?"

I saw Rosa's eyes harden when her name was mentioned but she continued to eat as if she had heard nothing.

Filling her bowl with corn flakes, Miss Appleton raised an eyebrow. "Now, don't be silly, Ada. You can see she is much too attractive to be a cow-boy. I should think she accompanies the men to do their cooking."

Gazing haughtily at Rosa, Miss Thorndike inquired, "I'm dying to know, Rosa. What, precisely, is your *occupation*?"

I felt like grabbing the pitcher of milk off the table and emptying it over the women's heads. Such impudence was outrageous and yet there I sat, unable to do or say anything. These were the kind of women that, as children, would have enjoyed pulling the wings off insects.

My only hope was that the thinly disguised insults had once again gone unnoticed. Nervously, I glanced at Rosa, expecting any second to see her reach across the table and rip out a handful of hair. Instead, I saw her smiling at Miss Thorndike and nodding agreeably.

Miss Appleton grinned slyly. "Ada, I don't think she understands a single word you are saying."

Returning Rosa's friendly smile, Miss Thorndike nodded, "Do they have Kellogg's flakes where you live, *Señorita*?"

Rosa nodded again. She smiled and then took a bite of her eggs. As she chewed, she glanced innocently from Miss Thorndike to Miss Appleton and back again. Smiling agreeably, she said, “*Estas mujeres son pendejas.*”

“Poor thing,” sighed Miss Appleton, “she doesn’t speak our language.”

I had no idea what Rosa had said in Spanish but when she didn’t object to Miss Appleton’s declaration, I knew trouble was on its way. Rosa could speak English almost as well as she spoke Spanish. Her only weakness came when she chose to swear. Then she reverted to Spanish and, with blistering speed, would flawlessly deliver an unbroken string of profanity that would rival any sailor on the high seas.

Hoping to head off a disaster, I attempted to steer the conversation in a different direction.

“Tin-Pan said the two of you were planning on using horses to get to the canyon,” I said, not caring which woman responded. “Have you been riding long?”

Miss Appleton huffed and then poured milk into her bowl. “I studied dressage in Austria and Ada attended an equally prestigious academy in Portugal. I assure you, we ride as well, if not better, than any run-of-the-mill cow-boys.”



“I got you ladies two fine horses,” said Tin-Pan as he rounded the table and set a bowl of red peppers in front of Rosa. “And I got three fresh mounts for you other folks and put your saddles on them this morning. All five are tied out front of the corrals.”

Tin-Pan grabbed a plate. He pulled out a chair across from me. When he took a seat, Miss Thorndike and Miss Appleton stiffened. Their lips puckered involuntarily as their cheeks flushed rosy pink.

“How *nice* of you to join us join us, Tin-Pan,” said Miss Appleton, her tone carrying only the faintest hint of contempt.

As Tin-Pan filled his plate, Rosa leaned toward Monte. “*Cuchillo, por favor,*” she said softly.

Monte casually reached down with his left hand and pulled out his hunting knife, a Bowie with a staghorn grip and twelve-inch blade. He handed it to Rosa.

Picking up a bright red pepper, Rosa began slicing pieces from it and allowing them to fall onto her eggs. When she was finished, she smiled at Miss Thorndike and Miss Appleton. “*Fruta,*” she explained. “*Muy buena fruta.*”

Recovering from the audacity exhibited by Tin-Pan when he dared sit at the table, the women started to eat their corn flakes. And for a moment there was an uneasy lull in the conversation. Moments later, however, Marzel Appleton was at it again.

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“One might divine,” she muttered, “that paring knives are unknown to Mexicans.”

“Speaking of Mexicans,” Tin-Pan said, “them rustlers that’s giving all the ranchers fits might be Mexicans crossing the border. Now if they was Americans you two ladies would have nothing to worry over. No white man would ever harm a woman. But Mexican bandits is different. Not as bad as Apaches of course, but bad ’nough.”

Miss Appleton took a dainty mouthful of corn flakes, chewed, and then swallowed. With a patronizing smile she said, “With the soldiers all along the border, Tin-Pan, I doubt we shall see any Mexicans. And as far as Apaches go, Ada and I share a modern, more enlightened view of their history and culture than many of you Westerners. In fact, we both made it a point to study the works of John Bourke before coming to the West.”

“Did you ever meet Captain Bourke, Tin-Pan?” asked Miss Thorndike. “He was with General Crook.”

Tin-Pan lifted a piece of bacon and bit into it. Chewing, he said, “Sure, I knew the captain just like Mistah John knowed him. When it came to dealing with the Apaches, Cap’n Bourke wasn’t worth much.”

Miss Appleton gasped. For a moment she was speechless. Catching her breath, she strained to control her anger, “Why, Captain Bourke was a recipient of the

Medal of Honor in the Civil War. He was a prolific writer and a respected ethnologist. He is recognized as having been a renowned authority on the Apaches and their customs.”

“Is that a fact?” sighed Tin-Pan. “What did the cap’n write about them Apaches?”

Clearly disgusted, Miss Appleton shook her head. “Let’s just say that if you people had not stolen the Apache’s land and broken your treaties there would have been no Apache reprisal, none of the so-called Apache wars.

“He said he trusted the honesty of an Apache more than he did white men. And he described them as intelligent, courageous, and good-natured. Physically, he said they had bones of iron, sinews of wire, and muscles like India rubber. But, once aroused, the Apaches were among the greatest fighters in history.”

To my surprise, Tin-Pan calmly reached for a biscuit and said, “Them old-time Apaches weren’t great fighters. Mostly they ambushed folks or killed people that was unarmed.

“Now, there ain’t no better trackers in the world though. They can see little things that most folks miss, a little thread or sometimes a few little hairs. Even a bent blade of grass and tracks of bugs. A good tracker sees all them things. I learned all I know from friendly Apaches.

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“And I’ll admit they were tough and could go without water and cover a lot of miles on foot if they had a mind to, but if they didn’t outnumber an enemy they always scattered like quail and run off to hide.

“This here desert’s like the ocean and back then the Apaches were nothing but sand pirates. Pirates don’t care about the seas any more than an Apache cares about the land. And, just like pirates, all the Apaches were after was plunder. Long before the Americans got here, the Apaches learned it was easier to steal corn than to grow it or to butcher somebody else’s cow than to raise one yourself.

“Ask the old Papagoes or the Zunis or Pimas about how the Apaches were always raiding them. Or ask the Mexicans south of the border. Them Mexicans care about the land and they work it to grow crops. The Apaches have been raiding Mexican and Indian villages for more than two hundred years and it don’t have a thing to do with whose land it is.”

“The Mexicans,” snapped Miss Thorndike, “invaded the Apache’s land just as the whites did. They’re nothing but a mongrel race of Spaniards encroaching on Apache land.”

“No, ma’am,” Tin-Pan replied easily. “Ya see, Mexicans *is* Indians. Only they’ve had the killing and stealing churched out of ’em. Why, they hardly got a drop of Spanish blood in ’em. Them Mexicans have a

right to their land as much as any Indian but the Apaches didn't care. Apaches live to raid. In fact, there's wild Apaches that are still raiding down in Mexico."

"That's ridiculous," scoffed Miss Appleton. "There are no wild Apaches left. We've imprisoned them all on our wretched reservations."

"Is that what Cap'n Bourke wrote down for you to read?" asked Tin-Pan.

"In essence," snipped Miss Appleton. "If one is *able* to read."

Tin-Pan forked a piece of bacon. "I s'pose one man's weeds is another man's flowers."

Miss Thorndike indignantly sucked wind up her nostrils but for the moment she held her tongue. Miss Appleton's eyes narrowed and her forehead flushed bright pink.

Fearful that Monte might be dragged into the disagreement, I did what I could to divert the conversation away from Apaches all together.

"How long a ride is it to Guadalupe Canyon?"

"Three hours, maybe," replied Tin-Pan, completely unmoved by the women's scornful stares and pursed lips. "And where you three are heading is called the Pickhandle Hills. It'll take you about the same amount of time to get to there as it does the ladies to get to the

canyon. Maybe a little longer 'cause there ain't no road where you're headed."

As the two women sulked, Monte picked up a pepper and took a bite. But Monte, like Tin-Pan, had been raised with the fiery fruit and ate them with as much relish as Rosa. To my surprise, however, Tin-Pan looked at Rosa and gave her a quick wink. He then innocently picked a pepper out of the bowl and forked it into his eggs.

Rosa mixed her sliced peppers into her eggs, laid the knife down, and then took several bites. Glancing once again at Miss Thorndike, Rosa pointed at the bowl. "*Fruta. Es muy buena, Señora.*"

"Is she saying 'fruit'?" asked Miss Appleton.

"Yes'm," answered Tin-Pan, his tone casual. "Fruta is fruit in Mes'can. She's saying it's very good. *Muy buena.*"

As I ate I studied Tin-Pan carefully. His face was poker-player blank, which meant he was an accessory to the unfolding scheme.

I began to eat faster. If what I suspected was about to happen, my breakfast was about to be interrupted and cut short. In between bites I took a gulp of coffee and, with my eyes peering over the rim of the cup, I glanced anxiously around the table.

Before I took the cup from my lips, the inevitable question was asked.

“May I try one?” Miss Appleton asked. “They look delicious.”

Chewing with his mouth full, Tin-Pan nodded and slid the bowl of peppers down the table.

Miss Appleton fingered a brilliant red pepper. Looking it over carefully she asked, “What do you think, Ada?”

Not to be outdone, Miss Thorndike selected a large yellow pepper and raised it high. “Damn the torpedoes,” she grinned. “Four bells!”

Simultaneously, both women bit off half a pepper and began to chew.

Monte and Rosa came to their feet. Instantly, I scrambled out of my chair and, nodding to Tin-Pan, I said hurriedly, “Thanks for breakfast.”

Without so much as a glance at the two women, Monte and Rosa started for the front door. I had only taken a step when I heard the first gasp for air. By the time the three of us were out the screen door, the hoarse pants and agonizing screams were coming in erratic bursts, no doubt voiced between futile gulps of cold milk.

We began tightening our cinches as if nothing had happened. Cutting through the cool morning air, we heard more raspy screeches and then the slamming of the back door. A moment later Tin-Pan sauntered out

the front screen door and over to the corrals where the horses were tied.

Picking his teeth with a toothpick, he suppressed a smile. "They run out to the icehouse."

"Serves them right," Rosa said, tying off her cinch.

Tin-Pan grinned, showing an even row of large white teeth. "I figured you could speak American but Mistah John told me I was to be hospitable. That meant for me not to speak my mind one way or t'other to the guests, so I didn't say nothing at the table. But between me and you folks, it seems them fine ladies know as much about this country as they do chili peppers."

Monte swung into his saddle. Peering through the leaves of the cottonwoods and into the rising sun, he said, "We should be back about sundown. We'll head out with the cattle tomorrow at first light."

Tin-Pan nodded as Rosa and I mounted. "I'll have breakfast ready," he said starting back to the ranch house. "Ain't nobody leaving John Slaughter's ranch on an empty stomach."

Throughout the night and most of the morning Monte's thoughts had been focused on visiting the graves of his father and mother but nothing in his life had come easily, and, as a consequence, anticipating trouble had become ingrained in his nature. Sitting in his saddle, Monte took a moment to consider what he knew of Captain Miller and Lieutenant Jones. He



accepted the fact that both officers believed he and I were traitors and he recognized Jones for the troublemaker he was. Whether it came from the captain or the lieutenant, Monte was convinced word of our presence would spread quickly to the other soldiers in the garrison. But more importantly, he was keenly aware the previous night he had kowtowed Jones in front of his commanding officer and the two women. At the very least, the lieutenant would want to save face. At the worst, he would try and get even.

Monte glanced at Rosa, then at me. “The sentries up on that mesa will be looking out toward Mexico. So, I figure we’ll head out of here to the northwest for a mile or so, circle around behind the garrison, and then angle back to the east. It’s best that we keep plenty of room between us and the army. I don’t want any problems. Not today.”

Side by side, the three of us rode away from the corrals with the warmth of the rising sun on our back. “This is the devil’s own luck,” I muttered. “Who’d have thought the Slaughter’s would have an army post a stone’s throw from their front door!”

“And those two women!” Rosa flared. “Is that what American women are like? Are they all so stupid?”

I grunted with disgust. “Only the rich ones.”

Monte merely frowned and then, spotting a likely looking trail, nudged his horse into the brush and took

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the lead. A half hour later, after making a wide arc around the outpost, Monte pointed east toward the Guadalupe Mountains, the peaks of which now paled in the hazy brilliance of the morning sun. Continuing to ride, he said, “See that saddle?”

Rosa and I shaded our eyes with the flats of our hands. Rosa saw it first and then, squinting against the glare, I caught sight of a distant hill that indeed resembled a western saddle.

“On this side of the saddle there’s a round-top knoll. A mile or so from the base of that knoll is where the ranch used to be.”

“Do you know this from your memories?” Rosa asked.

“No. I remember those landmarks from when I was here last June. That day I only had a few minutes to look around before I had to take off. But while I was there, I did seem to remember a cottonwood tree. Then, not far from the graves, I found what was left of an old cottonwood and, below it, what might have been our spring.

“I’m thinking this time, if I look around long enough more will come back to me.” Monte paused. “Maybe a few things anyway.”

Rosa reined in, allowing Monte to gain some distance between us. Understanding she might want to

talk, I nudged my horse and came up alongside her. “He’s got a lot to think about, doesn’t he?”

“*No se*,” Rosa said, then thoughtfully gazed at Monte. “All that matters to me is that he continues to think of me in a way that he has never before thought of a woman. And I know that is true. For now, that is enough for me. The rest, the love, will come in time.”

I glanced at Monte and then back at Rosa. At that moment, bathed in sunlight, she seemed serene, almost angelic. I envied her simple approach to life. And Monte’s, too, for that matter. Both took everything in stride. Good or bad, they faced life head-on with a mixture of courage, determination, and optimism that continued to baffle me. Even with all they had endured over the years, each appeared to be free of the gnawing insecurities and doubts that plagued me and so many others like me.

The word “grit” came to mind, a term I had recently added to my expanding western dialect. At first, I assumed “grit” had something to do with an intimate discomfort caused by invasive grains of sand, but once you’ve heard the term applied to someone like Rosa Bustamonte or Monte Segundo, the meaning of the word, though difficult to explain, becomes perfectly clear.

“When we get there,” I asked, “I mean when we actually get close to the graves, what should I do? I

think I should stay back and let him go on alone, don't you?"

Rosa nodded somberly. "Yes. Graves are best visited alone. Especially for someone like Monte. Even I must give him room. His whole life, all of it that he can remember anyway, he has been alone. It is all he knows. When he is ready for us, he will let us know."

We rode on in silence for several minutes, the only sound being the clopping of hooves and creak of saddle leather. Monte had not looked back in a long while, which, for him, was unusual. Perhaps that was why I took it upon myself to turn and check our back trail. Straining my eyes, I thought I detected a faint wisp of dust rising far behind us.

Believing the dust was of no importance, however, I turned back to Rosa and said, "It's only midmorning. Monte will have plenty of time to look around today, and I'd bet my last dollar he's going to start to remember things. I just know he will.

"Just like when he first saw you, Rosa. Remember how you reminded him of his mother and later how he recalled hearing her voice? And that pitoreal back in Mexico, that big woodpecker banging on the dead tree caused him to think of his father."

Rosa shrugged. "But those were bad memories, Billy, memories that were better forgotten and never remembered."

I thought for a moment. “But he said the graves helped him to remember a cottonwood tree. And then he remembered the spring they had. It’s like one memory triggers another. I think he’ll remember. Things will come back, good things. Maybe even his name or the names of some relatives. Then he would know who he is.”

“He knows who he is,” Rosa said confidently. “Nothing will change that.”

We rode on another mile or two, passing over wispy stands of dried grass and through patches of scattered creosote. But then Monte, who was now a good distance ahead, suddenly drew up. He peered over his shoulder and yet, oddly, not directly at Rosa and me. Then, wheeling his horse, he galloped back to us.

“Are we there?” I asked as Monte slid to a stop.

Monte pointed over of my shoulder but off to my left. “We’ve got company.”

Rosa and I turned our horses. The dust cloud I had ignored earlier was closer now and rising higher.

“Rustlers?” questioned Rosa, pulling her Mauser from her saddle scabbard.

“Maybe,” answered Monte. “But whoever it is, they’re following our tracks. I doubt rustlers would do that. Mexican bandits might, though.”

Glancing around, Rosa asked, “Is there any cover around, any rocks?”

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Looking back toward the nearby Pickhandle Hills, Monte sighed, “We could get to high ground in those hills but there’s no good cover that I know of. If we need to make a run for it, we’ll have to ride all the way to the mountains and then find a good place to fight.”

“Whoever they are,” observed Rosa, “they’re coming fast. Mexican bandits are not that foolish.”

“Then it must be someone from the Slaughter ranch,” I said. “Maybe it’s Tin-Pan. Maybe something happened with the cattle.”

The three of us watched the plume of dust until we could make out a single-file line of riders as they repeatedly appeared on the high ground and then disappeared into the desert swales.

“They’re soldiers,” Monte said. “The one riding in front is an officer.”

Squinting at the riders that were easily a half mile out, I asked, “How can you tell?”

“Because they’re wearing uniforms and the one in the lead rides like he’s got a broom handle stuck up his backside.”

A few seconds passed and then I too could make out the uniforms. I also noticed the erect, almost rigid, posture of the officer. “But what do they want with us?”

Rosa sneered. “Maybe the *gringas* want us arrested for giving them chili peppers.”

Monte squinted and then swore under his breath. “Nope. It’s that damned lieutenant from last night. He just can’t leave well enough alone.”

We waited where we were as the army patrol galloped to within twenty feet and then encircled us. Along with Jones, there were five privates and one corporal. When they came to a dusty halt, Jones was staring us in the face and sporting a triumphant smirk.

“You said you were going to drive cattle west,” chided Jones. “Fortunately, a patrol ran across your tracks and then discovered you were going north. And here you are now heading east with no cattle anywhere to be seen. So, in light of the fact that one of you is a Mexican and the other two are traitors, and since your tracks were headed in the wrong direction, Captain Miller sent me to investigate.”

“So?” returned Monte evenly. “Investigate.”

The smile on the lieutenant’s face faded. “What are you doing out here?” he demanded.

“That’s my business,” replied Monte, “and it doesn’t concern the army.”

Jones straightened his legs. Standing tall in the saddle, he looked to his left and then his right. “Very well. I see no suspicious activity. My investigation is complete.”

There was a moment of silence in which no one moved a muscle. Then Jones took off his campaign hat.

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Handing it to the corporal on his right, Jones announced, “The men understand that the rest of this is off the record.”

Stepping down onto a bed of packed sand, Jones unbuckled his cartridge belt and sidearm and handed it to the private on his left.

“Last night, Monte Segundo, there were ladies present,” Jones said casually, but then, with his eyes full of contempt, he glared up at Rosa. “But as anyone can see, there are none present today. And you, Billy Cabott, will soon observe that there is a decisive difference between fighting a trained pugilist and a few drunken Mexicans in a crowded cantina.”

My stomach turned. I knew this was not going to end well and if worse came to worst, we would soon be hunted by the army as well as the local sheriff. Jones had no chance against Monte and if Monte became enraged, Jones might not survive the next five minutes.

“You don’t want to do this, Lieutenant,” I said. “You’ve done what you came to do so why not go back and make your report? We don’t want any trouble with anyone.”

“It’s just like you said, Lieutenant,” said a soldier behind me. “Segundo’s a damned traitor *and* a coward.”



Several other soldiers noisily voiced similar sentiments. One called out, “Show him how it’s done, Lieutenant. Give him hell!”

As Jones started unbuttoning his shirt, I glanced at Monte. To my utter amazement, he appeared to be anything but agitated. In fact, he appeared to be somewhat amused.

“Ordinarily, Lieutenant,” Monte said easily, “I’d be more than happy to step down and knock the snot out of you, but today I have more important things on my mind.”

Untucking his army shirt, Jones slipped it off and draped it over his saddle. Covering his wiry but muscular torso was a sleeveless boxing jersey with “West Point Academy” printed on the front.

“More important things,” mocked Jones, as he began to punch the air with a series of swift jabs and hooks. “Like not getting whipped in front of your...”

Jones threw a few more warm-up punches, paused thoughtfully, and then said, “What is the word in Spanish... *puta*?”

“*Chinga su madre, cabron!*” spewed Rosa.

Monte turned to Rosa. “What does that mean? What is *puta*?”

Rosa knew better than to answer truthfully. “Nothing. He is loco. It means nothing.”

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The corporal laughed. “It means whore, you fool. *Putá* is Mexican for whore!”

Anger has a unique look as does rage. But what washed over Monte Segundo in such moments was neither. It is best described as a rising tide of thunderous wrath.

Monte eased out of his saddle and then gently backed his horse into the circle of army horses. Knowing there was nothing to do but watch, Rosa and I tightened our reins and backed our horses next to Monte’s.

“Hell is never full,” Monte said as he handed his hat and pistol belt to Rosa.

My heart was racing. I had seen what Monte’s fists could do, and for a split second all I could think about was the day Monte demolished the five Carrancista soldiers. It was the day he met Rosa, the day he had unintentionally killed a Carrancista soldier, an ally of the United States. For that, he was later charged with treason. That charge was dropped and yet, as if fate were not satisfied, here we were again. But these soldiers weren’t unsuspecting, intoxicated Mexicans. These were sober American soldiers and they were armed and itching for a fight.

When Monte turned to face Jones, I panicked. “Don’t kill him, Monte!” I blurted. “Remember what happened the last time!”

Apparently, the desperate tone in my voice had a ring of truth in it. All eyes of the soldiers, including those of Jones, shifted to me. Jones seemed startled but Monte, with his hands at his sides, was already moving toward the lieutenant, taking slow, even steps.

Someone yelled, "Get him, Lieutenant!"

Glancing back at Monte, Jones put up his guard and pranced to the center of the thirty-foot circle. He firmly planted his feet and then struck a classic boxing pose, a picture of athletic perfection.

The soldiers began to cheer. Monte took three more steps, then with his left arm he sent a sweeping backhand into Jones's guard. The blow came so quickly and with so much force that Jones's guard collapsed, his arms slamming into one another as he half spun to his right. Before Jones could react, Monte's right fist thudded squarely against the lieutenant's temple.

Jones's knees buckled. He staggered but he did not fall. Instead, he regained his balance and again threw up his guard. However, when he did so, he found himself facing the muzzle of a horse.

For a moment, Jones glared at the animal, then, in a daze, spun around and tottered forward a few steps. With his head wobbling, he tried to focus on Monte. Unsatisfied, he looked up at the soldiers as if he intended to ask a question. A few seconds later he fell

backwards, landing in a seated position with his legs outstretched.

The boisterous onlookers were stunned into silence.

Ignoring Jones, Monte took a quick step. Jerking the corporal out of his saddle, he flipped him in the air and then slammed him flat on his back, knocking the breath out of him.

“Apologize, damn you,” demanded Monte, “or I’ll break you in two!”

It took a few seconds for the downed soldier to get air into his lungs. He coughed and then coughed again. “Sorry, miss,” he managed between breaths. “Sorry. I apologize.”

Monte’s blood was hot and he was just getting started. He glared up at the soldiers. “Who’s next?”

No one moved. The welt that was closing Jones’s left eye was already turning glossy blue.

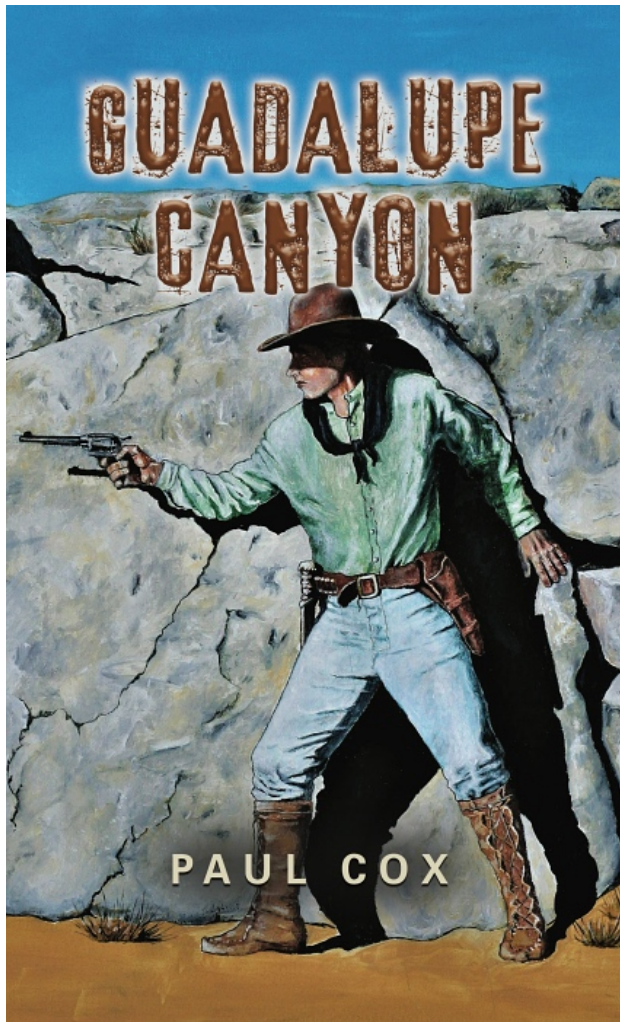
Keeping her rifle level across her saddle, Rosa tossed Monte his pistol belt. I eased my hand inside my vest. Time seemed to slow to a crawl. The soldiers glanced uncertainly from one to the other. None of them, except for the corporal, could have been much over twenty years old.

The corporal slowly got to his feet and then, keeping his distance from Monte, went to Jones and helped him stand up. “We’re going,” said the corporal. “You whipped him fair and square.”

My thoughts immediately went to Captain Miller and what he might do. Three months earlier Monte had assaulted an officer in Columbus and General Pershing had added that altercation to the long list of charges read at the court-martial. Now, with Monte having flattened Lieutenant Jones and manhandled the corporal, it was happening all over again.

“Jones will have a black eye,” I said. “If this is off the record, how will you explain that?”

Helping Jones get his left boot into a stirrup, the corporal grumbled, “We’ll think of something. This was ‘off the record.’ That means it never happened. Because if it did, the lieutenant would have hell to pay.”



*The saga of Monte Segundo, Rosa Bustamonte and Billy Cabott continues as they join a combined military-civilian search and rescue mission in a dangerous canyon that borders the U.S. and Mexico.*

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