

*Persephone's Underground is a novel by Rickey Pittman, the Bard of the South. The novel tells the story of Cora, who vanishes into the New Orleans underground. The novel blends the genres of crime, mystery, legend, and romance.*

## **Persephone's Underground**

By Rickey Pittman

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# PERSEPHONE'S UNDERGROUND

A thriller, a mystery, a legend.

RICKEY PITTMAN

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Print ISBN: 978-1-959623-93-9

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-072-6

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2025

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
Pittman, Rickey  
Persephone's Underground by Rickey Pittman  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2025911671

## PROLOGUE

By trade, Armand Guidry was a bail bondsman and a bounty hunter. Frequently, his job demanded he find those who skipped bail to avoid prosecution for crimes. Though a lucrative job, it could be dangerous, and he had more than enough scars and close calls to remind him of the risks he took. No matter how far away those who skip bail go, trouble always follows them, and so does Guidry. Occasionally, he was hired to find the missing, the disappeared, those who vanish, those who are here today but gone tomorrow. And there are more of those than most people realize.

Sometimes the disappeared have been kidnapped and held for ransom. This happens frequently in the Frontier of Northern Mexico, and increasingly now across the river in the Rio Grande Valley. These kidnappings are gang or cartel-directed. Armand does what he can to obtain their release, but he warns clients to never pay any ransom, even if they hear recordings or see videos of the kidnapped being tortured and begging for help. Ransom will not ensure their release, and the kidnappers will increase ransom demands until every account is emptied, every house and property sold and the family will be left with absolutely nothing. He warns families that the kidnapped almost always die and they should prepare for that certainty. Armand hoped the cartels would never make it to Louisiana. Attempting to rescue victims from a cartel can easily become a suicide mission. Any kidnapping is an emotional experience,

but a cartel kidnapping is much more complex and less likely to have a happy ending.

Most of his success in returning kidnapped children involved finding children taken by estranged parents, or children taken by troubled women who snatch babies from hospitals. It always gave him a good feeling when he could return a stolen child to a family.

Guidry is also hired by select individuals who want or need to disappear and never be found. This proved to be another very lucrative source of income for Armand. He shows these people how to walk away from their present life safely and live off the grid. These must abruptly leave family, friends (if they have any), house, all belongings, photos, keepsakes, and all identification. They can leave no notes explaining their absence. If they really mean to disappear and never be found, with his help they will never be heard from or seen again. If those who ask for his help are not willing to follow all of his directions, he does not take the job. Armand thinks anyone who needs it deserves a chance to start over, to reinvent themselves.

Why do people choose to disappear? Some leave because they've done something terrible that they or those they love cannot live with. Perhaps the shame is too great, and they can't face the pain of staying in their present circumstances. For example, Armand was hired by an ex-preacher who had committed some indiscretions and lost his church and then was taken to the cleaners in the courts by his ex-wife. Others leave because they have broken laws and will face certain serious punishment if they remain. Others have secret reasons for leaving they never share. After 09/11, disappearing became

more difficult, but Armand hadn't lost money on a client yet. He could find them or hide them, and he was just disillusioned enough with America and his own life that he didn't care which it was.

Disappearing is possible. More people have vanished and reinvented themselves than you may realize. Probably many of the people you meet, even the people you know, some of whom you may have known for years, are not who they say they are or who you think they are. As another in Armand's profession once said: "It's not who you are, but who you can prove you are that's important." Identity is formed in the minds of others. True, the essence of one's self doesn't change, but a new identity in society can be created, enjoyed, and developed.

Armand is very good at what he does.

Oh yeah—and what he does when he creates new identities for them is also highly illegal.

The government Big Brothers who often place people in witness protection and hide them are getting better at finding people. Federal marshals are often used to find fugitives. The media is often enlisted to recruit the public to provide clues as authorities search for notorious criminals and local or national celebrities whose behavior or crimes make the news. The talking heads of media can drag stories about such people out for weeks.

Yes, authorities can find some people who are missing after millions of dollars and manhours, especially since cameras are now everywhere. But really, the only ones they usually discover are the celebrities, the fools, the arrogant, those they should have and could have found long ago, people who made

no effort to avoid being found. And the government does not always show good judgment in whom they go after. For example, the government, using high-tech identification tools, made a list of everyone they suspected or knew of being involved in the January 6 Washington Insurrection and arrested them. Armand is sure that many of these when released will vanish in the underground.

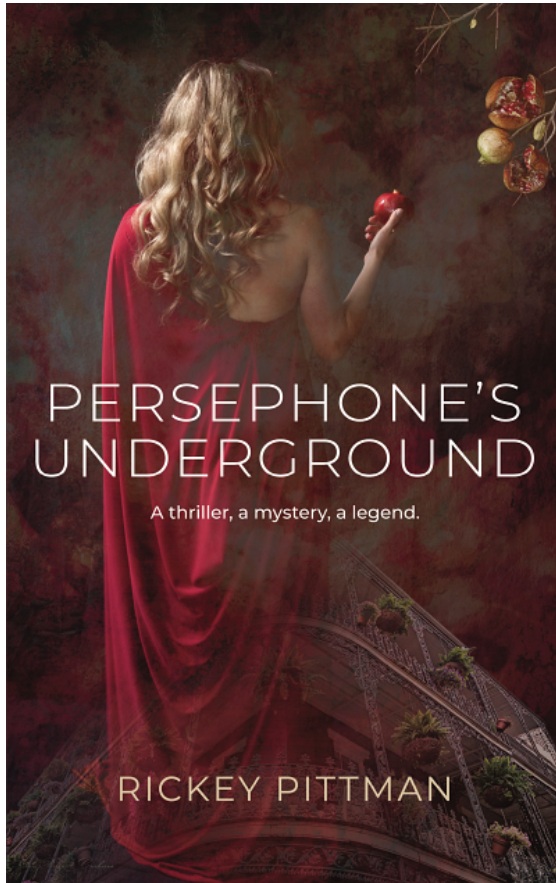
They will never find any of Armand's clients, because his clients don't make the mistakes that cause others to be caught. Armand learned what he knows from years in the bail-bond business—years spent finding skips, perps, debtors. Evading the law is harder than it used to be, but is possible if one is careful, if one can stay off the electronic and social media grid and be willing to give up everything in one's past. Due to the Defund Police Movement, the corruption in the FBI, the political insanity of our politicians, the huge and growing drug-addled homeless and nameless population, there's not much motivation to track down someone who just vanishes. Finding a specific vanished person requires much time, money, and work.

Armand's most recent client is Cora Vargas, (not her real name). She was a sweet, high school teacher who was forced to defend herself against a student who attacked her and against an abusive husband whom she shot. Rather than face the lawsuits and legal charges sure to be charged against her, she chose to vanish. Her father Robert, a Viet Nam vet and close friend, hired Armand to help her vanish completely and create a new identity.

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Armand agreed to help her vanish, so Cora became one of the disappeared, one of the vanished. But something happened that complicated the plan. Armand fell in love with Cora.





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