



RED takes the reader to seven countries as the three souls, Gabe, Restin, and Mary journey to faraway cultures, where they try to understand their complex feelings that result from their love triangle. They know one will suffer heartbreak.

RED

By W. Schildt

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RED

W.SCHILD



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Ojalá

Eastburn

Antigua

Konrath

Gabe

Chapter 1

Bullets were flying all over Santa María de Jesús. I pulled Aditi behind the table in her thatched house as we huddled together on the dirt floor. After what seemed like eternity, the popping of the rifles and the screaming of people and animals stopped.

“Aditi, don’t move,” I whispered. Then I looked into my sister’s face who looked back at me unseeing. Her face was half-gone, and I realized I was covered with blood. “Aditi!” I wailed.

Soon boots thudded on the dirt floor and a soldier grabbed me by my shirt and pulled me up. “Got one,” he yelled to other *federales*. Then he looked down at his clothes and cursed. He was covered with blood.

“Drag him out here and we’ll kill him with the rest.”

They pushed me onto three others, two sobbing children and a mother. I heard them raise their automatic weapons.

“Wait!” someone yelled. “Look at this. Since when does a filthy Indio wear steel-toe boots?”

“I recognize him. He’s that digger from Tikal. His face is always in the newspaper,” screamed another as he grabbed me and pulled me away from the mother and children. Then the soldiers raised their rifles and murdered the family.

They pushed me into a truck with five frightened teenage girls. “We can use the *chaquitas*, and maybe he knows where those ancients kept the gold.” The truck jerked us forward, and we sped down the dirt road toward Antigua and then veered onto another road that would take us into the jungle.

§

I sat tied to a hardback chair in the colonel’s office. One of his bodyguards had removed my clothes and held a soldering gun to my genitals. “Once again, Indio, where is the gold from the pyramids?”

I must have passed out because the next thing I knew, I awoke in a dirt pit with other prisoners.

Mary

Chapter 2

“Can you stand?”

The warm wind blew my hair into my face, as I awoke to the scent of limestone, a garden of flowers, and belching cars racing around the square. Now I remembered. I had taken my protest to the front of the pistachio-green government building in the capital, Guatemala City.

“Can you stand, Mary?”

I glanced at Mrs. Hastings whose kindly voice I knew. She had stayed with me overnight. She picked up my glasses lying on the sidewalk and put them into her pocket.

“Come, dear, let me help you stand. The boys will put fresh cardboard down so you will be more comfortable.”

She pulled me upright and had me lean against her. I was so tired and weak, but I wasn’t hungry.

“Your mother will be here soon with clean clothes.”

“Not the girls! They can’t come here! Don’t let them come,” I pleaded my voice hoarse.

“Mary, they have honored your agreement. They are waiting for you at home. Restin spent the night with the entourage from the Beran Foundation, and in an hour, they will be here along with Pennsylvania’s senator and photographers and reporters, but your time is running out.”

“I will not leave until I know.”

“Please, drink this.” She held a paper cup with a pinkish liquid that was fortified with vitamins and minerals.”

“I’m not hungry.” I pushed her hand and the cup away from my mouth.

“If you refuse to drink, Lola and Mia will come. You agreed to drink. That was part of the bargain.”

“Yes, now I remember.”

After friends of Gabe moved the stained cardboard and put clean cardboard on the cement sidewalk in front of the capitol building, they helped me lie down again. I drank the pink liquid when my mother came, and she helped me change my clothes while Mrs. Hastings held a blanket around me to protect my privacy.

I started to cry when I saw the anguish on my mother’s face. I could hear the marimba music in the square, and I remembered the song about true

love that Gabe and I had danced while we were in Tikal. Was he dancing now, an eternal dance? I smiled when I thought I saw him in his dirt-covered clothes as he bent down to kiss me. "Gabe."

"Red, wake up. Can you sit? You made the *New York Times*! Reporters are here today to take photos. You have captured the public's outrage with your protest. The Times wants to continue Gabe's and your story, 'Where is my husband?'"

"Restin?"

Two hands lifted me gently to a sitting position. Many curious people had gathered around us and a camera flashed, while my mother covered my dirty red hair with a scarf. The Guatemalan president stared at me with contempt. I recognized him from *La Prensa*, the newspaper.

"Señora, General Morales has given me news of Gabriel Choc." He continued to talk, but the only words that registered in my brain were, "His body was cremated in Volcán Pacaya with the rioters who burned down Santa María de Jesús."

"No!"

The lights were so bright, and I smelled the disinfectant. A man in a white coat took the cuff off my arm. "She is dehydrated, and her blood pressure is 180 over 90."

"She hasn't eaten in three weeks," cried my mother to the doctor. "Mary collapsed when that moron president Lucas Garcia told her what happened to Gabe. I think Mary knew he was gone, but she never gave up hope."

I wondered if I was hallucinating. Was my body in survival mode? I was weak and nauseous. After I retched, I cried, "Mama, is it true? Is he gone?"

My mother took my hand and whispered into my ear. "I'm so sorry."

I grabbed the sheet and sobbed and couldn't stop.

My mother held me and whispered, "We all loved Gabe."

Sometime later, after I regained my composure, Doctor Jimenez from the Beran Foundation said, "Señora, you need to hold still so you don't dislodge the IV."

"I want to go home."

He nodded as he patted my arm. "I can discharge you soon."

“Red, the foundation has hired a private plane to take us from this God-forsaken country. An ambulance will take us to the airport as soon as the doctors have you stabilized.” I found comfort for the moment in Restin’s voice.

“He’s gone,” I whispered to my friend. “I didn’t get to say goodbye.”

He gently lifted me up and put his arms around me as I began to sob again. “Red, oh Red. We all loved him,” wept Restin as he smoothed my red hair and patted my back.

After my mother entered the room, Restin laid me back on the sheet. “Lois,” he said as he held my mother and sobbed.

“For Mary’s sake, Restin, compose yourself.”

He nodded and left the room wiping his eyes with his hand.

“What can I do for you, sweetheart. Will you eat something?”

“Mom, I’m so cold.”

Soon a woman in a white uniform covered me with a blanket. “As soon as the methyldopa takes effect, you may leave the hospital.” The nurse looked around the room and whispered, “My family and I have followed you in *La Prensa*, Señora. You

are a brave woman to take on the government. We have been praying for you.”

My mother hugged the short, dark-haired Indigenous woman.

“My brother worked in the foundation’s clinic in Santa María de Jesús. He was one of the few who escaped alive. He said Professor Choc was fearless while trying to save his sister. The *federales* gunned down most of the *Indígenans* that day. Now everyone is gone.”

My mother started to cry. “I loved that boy. If only he had stayed safe in Tikal.”

The nurse took my mother’s hand. “He was so brave! We were all praying for him. The archaeological discoveries Dr. Choc was making at Tikal filled us with pride. He was one of our own! Why does the government not value our Mayan culture, but only those with Spanish blood?”

My mother shook her head. “I don’t understand all the racism and bigotry here. Gabe was the smartest, most dedicated man I have ever known.”

I smiled sadly at my mother and the nurse while tears ran down my cheeks. My husband was a wonderful man, and I knew I would never stop

loving him. “I didn’t get to say goodbye,” I whispered.

Another nurse entered my room with a glass. “Señora, are you thirsty? The doctor wants you to drink some fruit juice.” The nurse put the straw to my lips.

“I can’t,” I cried as I vomited onto the sheets.

She shook her head. “A side effect of methyldopa.”

§

We returned to Philadelphia, and after two weeks in the hospital, I returned to our apartment at the Beran Foundation in West Philly. My daughters and I cuddled on our blue flowered sofa. Lola and Mia had taken a leave of absence from school to keep me company and for comfort themselves. Lola, in her senior year in college, hoped to become a surgeon and had just been accepted to medical school. Mia, artistic and musically gifted, had been accepted to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia before she had finished high school.

I sat in the cramped living room we had always shared during the summer months when the dig at

Tikal was closed for the rainy season. My two daughters, with skin almost as dark as their father's, now had a shadow of sadness in their eyes. Evenings were the time each of us seemed to wallow in despair and melancholy. Gabe would have scolded us and reminded us that we would see him again in glory.

Mia cast an unpleasant grimace at our stereo. She had little interest in popular music and usually played anything by Johann Sebastian Bach at top volume. When Lola controlled the music, we knew the Beatles would fill our apartment with their wonderful harmony as they did now.

"Can you turn it down, Lola? We need to talk," I said.

"Mamá, would you like something to drink?" she asked with her hand on the volume control. "I can make you a milkshake. The doctor says you must eat all day long."

I pulled a blanket over me. I had lost almost twenty-five pounds during my hunger strike in Guatemala City, and I looked like a walking skeleton. "I just ate a banana. I will be fine, Lola, don't worry so."

“Mamá, did you use your inhaler today?” she asked.

“Yes, I feel fine.”

“Mamá, what do you want to talk about?” Mia asked.

“The archaeology department at the university wants to have a memorial service for your father.” I had to swallow and pressed my lips together. It still seemed impossible that Gabe wasn’t coming home.

“Mamá, are you up to that?” asked Lola.

“We should honor him, and you know what a strong belief system he had. He would want us to celebrate his life. If he could, he would tell us he is having the time of his eternal life.”

Mia, with an annoyed look on her face, said, “He may be having fun, but we aren’t.” She put her head down and started to cry again.

With tears in my eyes, I said, “I know Mia. We need to accept his passing and be glad that we will see him again.”

“Mamá, sometimes I don’t understand either you or Daddy. He’s gone. He can’t come back to us, and I want to get a gun and kill all those idiots that killed him. I hate the *federales!*”

“We are all struggling, but if we let hate fill us, we lose sight of the wonderful person your father was. He traveled to Santa María to save his sister, and we need to remember that.”

“Maybe we shouldn’t wear black dresses to his remembrance service, Mamá, but colorful, fancy dresses,” stated Lola thoughtfully. “Daddy would want us to remember him in bright clothes. Could we wear our *huipiles*?”

“That’s a wonderful idea, Lola. Maybe he can still see us, and nothing would please him more than our blouses embroidered with bright red and green quetzal birds.”



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