

JENNIFER BOHNHOFF



Where
DUTY CALLS

Rebels Along the Rio Grande Book 1

Rebels Along The Rio Grande

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By

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Content Notice:

This book describes scenes of war and battle that may be traumatic for some readers. The book also includes descriptions of harm against animals that may be traumatic for some readers.

This book is set in a period of U.S. history when modern values on human rights and racial equality did not exist. The book depicts the practices and concepts of slavery and of racial and social inequality. These practices are not right today, and they were not right at the time when this story is set. The material is presented for historical accuracy and the author and the publisher condemn these practices in all their forms, whether in history or today.

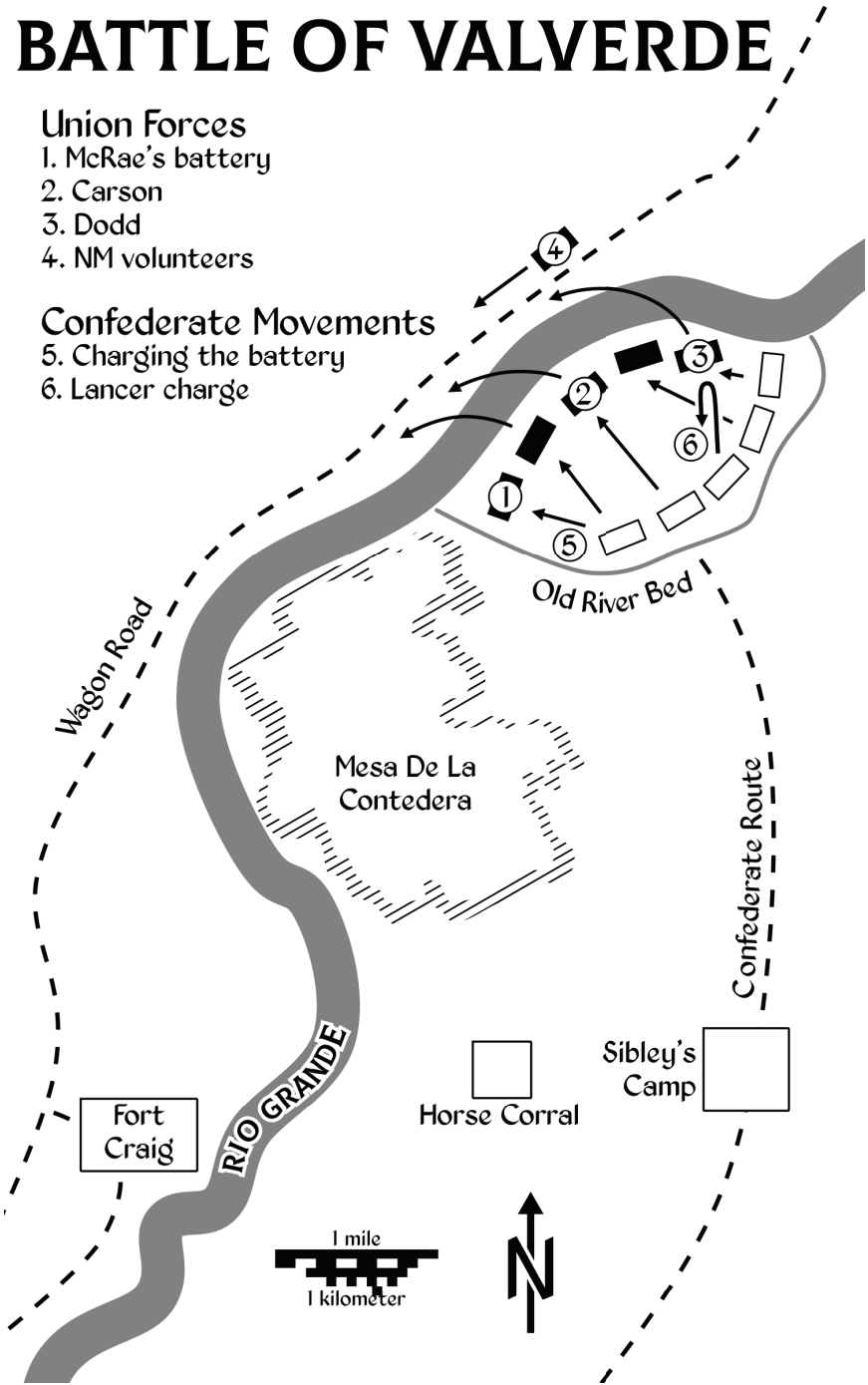
BATTLE OF VALVERDE

Union Forces

- 1. McRae's battery
- 2. Carson
- 3. Dodd
- 4. NM volunteers

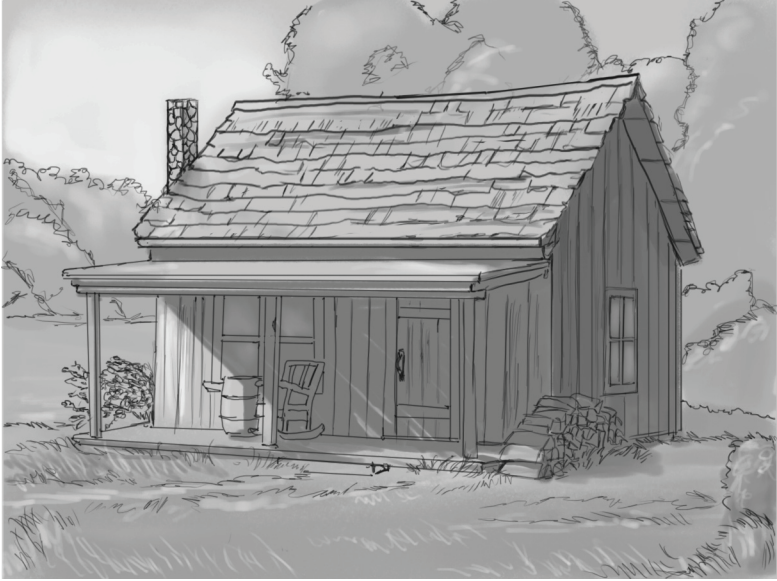
Confederate Movements

- 5. Charging the battery
- 6. Lancer charge



Contents

Chapter One: God's Country	1
Chapter Two: A <i>Fanega</i> of Trouble	11
Chapter Three: The Invasion	27
Chapter Four: Ditches and Disasters	49
Chapter Five: His Brother's Keeper	65
Chapter Six: Feliz Navidad	85
Chapter Seven: Ghosts	97
Chapter Eight: The Homespun Dress	111
Chapter Nine: Trapped	117
Chapter Ten: A Roundance on Yankeedom	125
Chapter Eleven: Spywork	133
Chapter Twelve: Graydon's Secret Mission	145
Chapter Thirteen: The Charge of the Lancers	153
Chapter Fourteen: Holding the Line	165
Chapter Fifteen: Charging the Battery	175
Chapter Sixteen: Looking Death in the Eye	183
Chapter Seventeen: The Celebration	189
Chapter Eighteen: Honor	195
Chapter Nineteen: A Pyrrhic Victory	201
Chapter Twenty: Eyes	207
Chapter Twenty-One: Healing Hands	215
Chapter Twenty-Two: Homecoming Horrors	229
Chapter Twenty-Three: Face to Face	239
Historical Notes	245
Further Reading	246
About the Author	247



Chapter One God's Country

**The Martin Farm, Two Miles Outside
San Antonio, Texas
Thursday, July 25, 1861**

Jemmy

Jemmy knew by the braying that Pa was drunk and whipping the mules again. They stood in their traces, ears back, refusing to budge. Mules will do that when faced with ornery behavior. Jemmy felt his lips press together in a thin, white line of disapproval that he didn't dare voice for fear of a whuping. Although he hated to see the mules suffer, he didn't want to suffer any more than he had to for their sake.

"Got trouble, Pa?"

Pa swung his head around and glared at Jemmy. His bloodshot eyes were full of fury, his face mottled, sure signs that he'd been drinking instead of gathering in the potatoes. A few spuds—perhaps from a plant or two—rattled around in the wagon bed. Not much to show for a couple of early morning hours in the field. Two pitchforks were stuck in the ground next to the potato bushes. At least Pa hadn't taken a pitchfork to the mules.

Jemmy looked around for Drew. Silently, Jemmy cursed his older brother for skedaddling off when he should have been keeping Pa working and off the bottle.

"Hot out here, ain't it, Pa? Sticky heat, too. I bet your skin's pricklin'." Jemmy grabbed his father's forearm to keep him from tumbling. He gently took the switch from Pa's hand.

"Ain't got time for balking mules. Show 'em who's boss, boy."

"I intend to. Soon's I get you set." Jemmy helped Pa clamber into the wagon bed and then stroked Griffith's velvet nose, soothing her with a string of nonsense syllables. "Biddy, biddy, biddy, biddy. What you say, girl? Ready for breakfast?" Griffith's ears came back up. Golfin, feeling jealous, nuzzled Jemmy's ear. They each took a step forward.

Jemmy brushed his hair out of his eyes before he began walking between Golfin and Griffith, an arm hooked under each head so he could pat their cheeks.

"Hey, Pa, where's Drew?"

"Damn fool went off to see the cavalry! Them idjit's is plannin' on invading New Mexico even though there ain't nothing there but desert and savages and lazy, lying Mexicans. What's the Confederacy want with that godforsaken land, anyway?" Pa's tone made Golfin and Griffith flatten their ears. Jemmy grabbed their manes and lifted his feet.

If they were going to bolt, he wasn't going to be trampled by them or run over by his own wagon.

"I dunno, Pa. Sorry I brought it up at all." Jemmy brushed his straw-colored thatch of hair out of his eyes and looked at the green hills rolling away from him in every direction. If God inhabited any part of the world, surely it must be the Texas Hill Country. Salado Creek glistened bright silver where it peeked out of the brush and trees on its bank. His eyes followed it downstream until he saw the glint of steel from the cavalry company encamped just a mile away, in a place his brother had called Camp Sibley. He frowned, wishing that the army would go away. He hated to see his Pa all riled up like this.

Ma came down the stairs from the log cabin and met Jemmy by the pump. Together they pulled Pa out of the wagon bed and dumped a bucket of water over his head to sober him up.

"Mules hurt?" Ma asked over Pa's shouts and spluttering.

"They's fine," Jemmy replied.

Ma nodded. "We couldn't get the harvest in if one of them mules pulled up lame. That'd be a fine how-de-do. Where's Drew?"

"Dunno. Wasn't in the field with Pa," Jemmy said, even though he knew it was a white lie. Ma would be worried if she knew that Drew had gone off to the encampment, and the last thing Ma needed was more to worry over. He needn't have tried to spare her.

"Left to his own devices, that boy'll do sum'tin dumb, like up and enlist. You best go lookin' fer him."

Jemmy frowned. If he had longer ears, they'd be back and flattened like the mules'. "Can't it wait 'til after breakfast? I'm hungry."

Ma leveled a sharp look at him. "Grab a hunk of corn-

bread and git.”

As Jemmy ran to Camp Sibley, he thought about what a durned inconvenience it was to miss breakfast just to look for his no-good brother. *Maybe*, he thought, *I should just let Drew up and enlist. I always end up doing all of Drew’s work anyway. If Drew were gone, I could eat Drew’s breakfast as well as my own, and it’d be one less body for Ma to fret over.* Jemmy brushed the thought away. If Ma wanted Drew found, Jemmy’d find him for her.

Jemmy scoured the camp for his brother. Men from all over Bexar County, maybe even from all Southwest Texas were forming up in companies, but Drew was not among them. He hurried toward San Antonio, wondering how he could find his brother in the biggest town in all of Texas. Over 8,000 people lived there, including several hundred slaves, Americans, Mexicans, and German immigrants. In fact, so many Germans had moved in that the town smelled of sausage, sauerkraut, and beer.

Last March, right before Texas left the Union, the local militia had forced the surrender of San Antonio’s Federal arsenal, making the town a major depot of confiscated Union materiel. There always seemed to be a fighting unit in town, forming up and arming themselves with Federal supplies. Jemmy hoped he’d find his brother among one of them.

The town was still sleepy and quiet when Jemmy walked in. Country folk had done morning chores, eaten breakfast, and were back to their work by now. The thought of breakfast made his stomach rumble. One piece of cornbread on the run just didn’t do it for a growing boy.

Near Menger’s Hotel, Jemmy found a soldier with a big, droopy mustache bossing a couple of younger soldiers who were assembling a platform. Two other soldiers struggled to bring a desk through a door that was obvi-

ously too narrow for it. Jemmy sat down on the edge of the wooden sidewalk and watched the men place the desk on the platform, then string up red, white, and blue bunting and signs around the edge of it while one brought out a chair and put it behind the desk.

A drummer boy, who could not have been more than eight or nine, wandered over and sat down next to Jemmy. He was small, with skin so pale that Jemmy could see the blue veins beneath its surface and hair so black that it had a blue sheen. His irises were as dark as the pupils were, so that his eyes almost appeared to have no color at all. It gave the boy a strange look, like an owl or other creature of the night. Jemmy shivered as he saw his own straw-colored hair and blue eyes mirrored in the darkness.

“What’re you setting up for?” Jemmy asked.

“Recruiting,” the boy said in a high, clear, flute-like voice. He had a strange accent unlike the broad twang of Texas. “You fixing on joining up?”

“Not me,” Jemmy said so quickly that he worried the boy would think him a coward. “I like it plenty enough on the farm. I’m looking fer my brother. You seen him?”

“How would I know?” the drummer boy said.

Jemmy shrugged. It was a fair enough question. He jerked his chin toward the stand. “What’s the banner say?”

The drummer boy’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully. “Can’t read?”

“Nope.”

“Neither can I.”

“Oh,” Jemmy said, adding after a long moment, “reckon it’s got something to do with recruiting?”

“Reckon so.”

They sat a while longer, Jemmy’s stomach making strange protest against its emptiness. The boy either didn’t notice or decided to ignore it.

“Name’s Jemmy,” he finally offered, more to break the silence than for anything else.

“Willie,” the boy answered, pointing to his chest.

“You from around here?”

“Nope.”

Jemmy waited for Willie to tell him where he was from. The boy fiddled with his drumsticks. The soldiers who’d erected the stage came back, this time followed by an older soldier who wore wire-rimmed spectacles and carried a sheaf of papers. Jemmy thought he recognized him. Hadn’t he been the clerk in the local bank? The men mounted the stage and the one with the glasses sat at the desk and began sorting through papers.

Jemmy heard the jingling of spurs and harness. A contingent of horsemen was trotting up the road. Never had he seen such fine horses, nor such noble-looking men. Their butternut and gray uniforms were immaculate and well-tailored, the gold braid on their collars and sleeves and their brass buttons and belt buckles glistened in the sun. Their swords and pistols commanded respect. These weren’t men: they were gods of power and authority.

At their center was a fine-looking man with silver hair that caught the morning sun like a halo. He had a great, bushy mustache and sideburns, and his eyes drooped as if he had survived all the sorrow the world had to offer. Jemmy felt as if he could follow the man anywhere.

“Who’s that?” Jemmy whispered.

“Major General Sibley. I come with him from Louisiana,” the boy said. The General’s party conferred a moment with the men on the platform, and then rode on down the street. Jemmy stared after them. Willie began playing his drum as he moved across to the platform. The drumming brought people onto their porches. Some wandered toward the platform. But none of them were Drew.

Jemmy turned to leave just as another group of young and dashing horsemen, even more handsomely built than the men surrounding the General, came down the street. Each carried a nine-foot-long lance topped with a sharp blade. A red banner with a single white star fluttered from each lance.

The proprietor of the mercantile where his Ma and Pa traded leaned in the doorway to his store, his thumbs hooked in his suspenders. "Who are they?" Jemmy asked him.

"Those fellers?" The man jutted his jaw toward the men with lances. "Captain Lang and his boys, the lancers of the 5th Regiment. Company B. I know, 'cuz they been buying their sundries from me ever since they formed up. See 'em pig stickers they got? Booty they took from the Mexican Army in the last war."

"They staying up at Camp Sibley?" Jemmy had seen many good-looking horses and soldiers there, but none had carried lances nor looked so fine as these men.

"Nope. Camp Sibley's where the 4th is quartered. These folks're up at Camp Manassas, a couple of miles farther on. Colonel Green is in charge of them."

Just then, Jemmy saw his brother.

Drew was barely two years older than Jemmy, but he had gone through what Ma called "his spurt," and was a good eight inches taller: taller, even, than Pa, who was one of the tallest men in Bexar County. Jemmy hoped that he'd have his spurt soon. He wanted to be as tall as his brother. He wanted people to look up at him when he walked down the street and say, "Now there goes a real man."

Jemmy was sure that's what people were saying now as they watched Drew walk toward the platform. Without thinking, Jemmy elbowed his way through the crowd and followed him.

“Sir?” he heard Drew ask.

The soldier with the bushy mustache snorted and pointed to the stack of three yellow, upside down Vs on his sleeve. “Don’t call me sir. These here chevrons say I’m a sergeant. I work for a living.” The younger soldiers guffawed, as if the sergeant’s words were the wittiest thing they’d ever heard. He glared at them, and they sobered and stiffened to attention.

“Yes sir, umm...Sergeant!” Drew shifted his weight nervously from foot to foot.

The sergeant snorted again and shook his head. “Well, son, what do you want?”

“To join up, sir, I mean sergeant. I want to be a lancer.”

“Probably no room for you in the lancers. Might have a place for you somewheres else in this unit. Get up there and give the man your vitals.”

“Vitals?”

“Your name. Age. Son, just get up there. The Corporal’ll ask you all he needs to know.”

Drew nodded and hopped onto the platform. The man with glasses studied him through lenses that had so much dust on them that Jemmy wondered if he could see at all. The man was balding, and his squint made a network of wrinkles that spread out from the corners of his eyes.

“Name?” he asked, looking down at his papers, his pen poised.

“Drew.”

The man looked up sharply. “Your folks baptized you Drew?”

“No, sir, umm, mister.”

“Corporal,” the man barked, pointing to the two inverted Vs on his own sleeve. The gathering crowd twittered. It was clear to Jemmy that they were enjoying

watching this country bumpkin being taken down a notch and that his brother's pride had been wounded.

"Corporal, my Christian name is Andrew," he said, drawing himself up.

"Andrew what?"

"Martin, Corporal."

The man looked up and frowned. Now Jemmy was sure he was the same man who had clerked behind the counter at the bank when his father had asked for a loan. "You William Martin's boy?"

Drew shifted from foot to foot. The sergeant cleared his throat.

"Yes," Drew said quietly.

"Your Ma Martha Custis?"

Drew nodded.

"How old are you, boy?"

Drew stared at his toes. "How old do I have to be?"

"Seventeen."

"Oh, good, 'cuz I just turned seventeen," Drew answered.

Jemmy's face burned at his brother's ready lie. Drew had just turned sixteen a couple of months back.

The clerk took off his glasses and wiped his eyes with a handkerchief. "Sergeant, send this rascal home. He's a liar and a bad one at that. He ain't seventeen. I danced at his Ma and Pa's wedding, and that weren't no seventeen years ago. Besides, his Pa's a mean son of a bitch. I wouldn't want to face him if'n I was the one who let his baby go off to war."

Jemmy felt his face grow hot as the crowd laughed. Obviously, this little entertainment pleased them. Why did people have to be so gol' durn mean to one another?

"Maybe the kid's a bastard," someone in the crowd shouted. "That'd make him old enough. Kid, did you dance

at your Ma and Pa's wedding, too?"

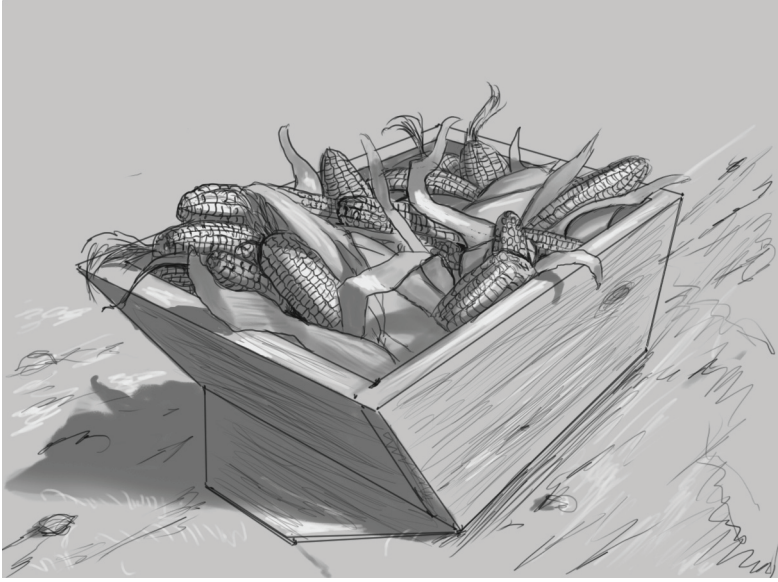
Jemmy stared hard at the ground, fighting back hot tears. A hand cupped his shoulder gently and he looked up to see the sergeant giving him a sympathetic look.

"You related to that boy, son? He your older brother? Must be hard to see him ribbed so. Take him home to your Pa. Tell him to come back when he's a little older. We need men in this army, not overgrown boys."

Drew turned and glared at Jemmy. He leaped off the platform and lit out for home with Jemmy on his heels. The laughter of the crowd pushed them on.

Pa was not kind to Drew's backside when they finally made it home. He took a strap to him, swearing that the boy wouldn't be able to sit for a week.

And although that was just about how long it took for the sting to wear off, Jemmy knew it wasn't enough to keep his big brother out of trouble and that he would be dragged along, right into the thick of things, whether he liked it or not.



Chapter Two

A Fanega of Trouble

**Pedro Baca's Grain Warehouse
Socorro, New Mexico
Monday, July 29, 1861**

Raul

Raul Atencio pushed his shovel into the mountain of dried corn kernels. He poured the shovelful into a *fanega*, filling the wooden measuring box to the top, and then nodded at the two Navajos, who picked up the *fanega*, and, grunting from the exertion, poured the corn into the last of the waiting wagons.

Raul wiped his forehead with his sleeve. Measuring out corn was hard work, especially for a thirteen-year-old boy who was just barely five feet tall. But Raul was

strong. He'd filled thousands of *fanegas* in the five years he'd worked for his uncle. He didn't complain. Like the Navajos, Raul knew his place.

It was just past noon, and Tio Pedro's storehouse felt as hot and dry as an oven. Corn chaff danced in the sunlight and coated Raul's skin. He picked up his *cantimplora* and took a long drink to clear the grit from his throat.

"*Sobrinito!* Stop stalling and fill that last wagon," Tio Pedro called.

Raul cringed, but he went back to work. He hated when his uncle called him *sobrinito*, little nephew. He worked like a man, not a boy. His whole family worked hard. Tio was Mama's brother, so when Tia Luisa had died, Raul's family had moved into Tio's house so that Mama could manage the household. She took care of her three children and Tio's two daughters while Raul and Papa did the hard work at the warehouse and Tio Pedro kept the ledgers and accounts. Raul thought his family deserved more than just occasional thanks. They would have gotten it, too, if Papa had come from the same class as Tio.

If Raul was going to be treated badly because he wasn't of the same class as Tio, he at least had the comfort of knowing he was better off than the Navajos. There was a hierarchy to New Mexican society that the new, American presence had not been able to erase. The *alcaldes* remained the ruling class. They had descended from the early *conquistadors*, who had been granted the best parcels of land by the King of Spain, and they still controlled the courts and government, at least on a local level. More common folk descended from early settlers. They owned smaller pieces of land and tended stores. Below them were the *peons*, who worked the land but owned little or no land of their own. But even the peons had roots that reached back to Spain, and were therefore higher up the

social ladder than *los Indios*.

Raul refilled the *fanega*, gave another nod, and watched the Navajos struggle to pour it into the back of the wagon. As the corn spilled in, Raul's gaze moved to the man sitting on the bench at the wagon's front. He was a U.S. soldier, dressed in a dark blue uniform and laughing with the other army drivers as if he didn't have a care in the world. He probably thought he was better than Raul, sitting there laughing while Raul sweated and labored. He was wrong. Like the Spanish and the Mexican Governments before them, the Americans would no doubt leave the land and Raul and his people would again be free to rule the land as they pleased.

If there was one thing Raul's father had taught him, it was to never trust an outsider. His ancestors, a hardy band of Spanish settlers, had come to this harsh and barren land 250 years ago. They had dragged their carts, goaded their oxen, and herded their sheep and cattle up the Camino Real, the dirt track that led from Mexico City to Santa Fe. They had sweated and labored and built a life for themselves, without the help of any government. Not the Spanish government, who'd taxed and regulated them from their fancy palaces back in Europe; not the Mexican Government, who'd been too busy fighting among its factions to send troops north to fight their enemies, the Navajo and Comanches. So, while New Mexico had been a part of the Spanish Empire and then the new country of Mexico, it had been up to New Mexicans, the descendants of those early settlers, to govern themselves.

Twenty years ago, in 1846, the Americans had ridden in and proclaimed that New Mexico was now theirs to rule. But proclamations proved nothing. In order to truly rule a land, its rulers needed the loyalty of the people. They needed the people's trust. Couldn't they see that

the New Mexicans trusted these new invaders even less than they'd trusted the Spanish or Mexican governments, who'd at least spoken the same language and belonged to the same religion? It would take more than proclamations to turn New Mexicans into Americans. New Mexicans didn't need any of these outsiders to rule them. They could take care of themselves. They had done exactly that for the last 250 years.

Raul poured another shovelful of corn into the *fanega* and wondered how these *Americanos* thought they could control New Mexico when they couldn't even control themselves. A war had split America into a northern Union and a Southern Confederacy. Both sides claimed New Mexico. But the war had nothing to do with him or his people. Surely these soldiers should return east and fight their southern rebels instead of trying to lord over his people.

Tio Pedro looked up from his tally sheet. "One more *fanega* each, Raul and Crescenio! Then time for *la comida!*"

Raul shoveled faster. He hadn't realized how hungry he was until Tio mentioned the mid-day meal. One more shovel full, one more curt nod, and then he buried the tip of the shovel deep in the corn and walked to his papa, Crescenio, who was already outside, stretching his aching back.

The two waited as Tio bolted the big door to the storehouse. Trailed by their Navajos, they took the dirt road past a few inns, the post office, and then crossed Socorro's central plaza. As they passed San Miguel church, Raul nodded respectfully at the graveyard where Governor Manuel Armijo—the man considered New Mexico's greatest hero because he had defeated the invading Texans—lay. Beyond the plaza, the road split into meander-

ing paths that ran along the irrigation ditches. Low *adobe* houses with pale tan walls and thick earth roofs ranged along these paths. Each house had its own kitchen garden and orchard and its own animal yard teeming with pigs, chickens, and goats.

Tio Pedro walked two steps ahead of Raul's papa, with the kind of swagger that made it clear that he was in control. He was short and rotund, with a barrel chest and the hooked nose and dark skin that, according to family lore, showed that his great, great, great grandmother was an Aztec princess. His eyes were almost black. Raul looked so much like him that people always assumed they were father and son.

Papa was different. Tall and lithe, Crescenio Atencio was more striking than handsome. His pale brown skin was the color of a coyote's coat. His light grey eyes were as sharp and piercing as wolf's eyes. He kept his curly brown hair, which turned red in the sun, clipped short. Raul walked two steps behind him out of deference. The Navajos followed.

"I don't know how you can sell to those *gringos*," Crescenio said, spitting for emphasis.

Pedro Baca snorted. "My contract is to deliver 400 tons of corn to Fort Craig, at nine dollars and fifty cents a ton, American dollars. *Sobrinito*, how much is my contract worth?"

Raul sucked in his lower lip as he tried to do the math. He and his uncle played this game often, and he was good at it. "Three thousand eight hundred dollars, Tio."

"*Si*. And how many *fanegas* of corn make up a ton?"

Raul's eyes narrowed as he thought. Converting between American measurements and Spanish measurements was not always easy. "Let's see. There are 140 pounds of corn in a *fanega*. Two thousand pounds in a ton.

Divide 2,000 by 140 and you get...fourteen?"

"Close. At least, close enough for work with the *Americanos*. Fourteen *fanegas* of corn equals 1,960 pounds, but they pay us for a ton. See how we make a little extra profit?" Pedro chuckled to himself. "These Americans! They get confused because they don't use *fanegas*. They use bushels. A *fanega* is worth 1.58 bushels. We round it up to 1.6. A little more profit."

"So, you cheat the devil," Crescenio said. "Still, he is here. I say we get him to leave."

"And how do you propose to do that, my brother-in-law?" Tio Pedro asked with a smile.

"By force, if necessary." Crescenio punched his fist into his open hand.

"You are a man of action," Tio said, "unused to negotiations or deals. You think with your fists. That is why you are the *peon* and I am the *alcalde*, Crescenio."

Raul winced. It hurt his pride when Tio reminded him that the Atencios were not from the same class as the Bacas. He was sure his father didn't like it, either, although Papa never complained. A *peon* did not complain to an *alcalde*, even if they were related by marriage.

Crescenio was a volatile man, with a quick and vicious temper that Raul didn't quite trust. He had been one of Tio's henchmen, bullying debtors into paying and settling scores with uncooperative townspeople. Then his dangerous good looks had attracted the eye of Tio's sister. She'd fallen in love and married him over her family's objections. It was quite an advancement for Crescenio, but once a *peon*, always a *peon*.

"So, tell me," Tio continued. "If you rid us of the Union Army, who will keep the *Texicans* away?" Again, Raul sucked in his lip and nodded thoughtfully. Tio did have a point. The *Americanos* were fighting with each other in

this war of theirs, and the *Texicans* were not on the same side as these blue-coated soldiers. That almost made them good.

Crescenio let out a low, guttural snarl. "We don't need these soldiers to protect us from the *Texicans*. We drove them out once. We can do it again."

Raul nodded again, this time more forcefully, sure that his father, *peon* or no *peon*, had won that argument.

They arrived at the Baca house, and a Navajo slave standing guard pushed open the small door that was set within a door big enough to allow carriages in. The place was part house and part fortress, built to withstand extreme cold, heat, or Indian attack. The walls formed a square around a central courtyard big enough to shelter the family's herds in times of trouble. All the windows faced into this courtyard, so that from the outside, the house looked like a solid, tan block of impenetrable adobe. In spite of the austere looks, the Baca house was always filled with friends and visitors, music and games. Mama saw to that.

Raul's mother looked up from where she was overseeing the cook at the little stove that sat in the courtyard now that the summer had come. Like her son and her brother, she was short and round, with a vivacity and energy that reminded Raul of a quail. She smiled, displaying a row of fine white teeth and a deep dimple in her round cheek, and put her fists on her hips. Crescenio tried to give her a kiss, but she playfully swatted him away.

"Look at you! So covered in chaff that you look more like straw dolls than men! Wash up! Children! The men are home! Get ready to eat," she called over her shoulder in that melodious voice that was likely to burst into peals of laughter at any minute. Raul's little brother, Arsenio, rushed out of the dark interior first, followed by his even

younger sister, Lupe. They threw themselves around Raul's knees, chatting happily about their day. Raul's two cousins, Maria and Lucinda, followed regally, their heads held high and straight to keep their curls from falling askew. They were older than Raul, and very conscious that they would make good matches for the sons of wealthy *alcaldes* when the time came.

Raul gave his cousins a polite nod. He planted a quick kiss on the top of his brother and sister's heads, and then he peeled them off and went to the washstand. Tio, Papa, and Raul stripped to the waist. They used lye soap to wash their hands and arms, then cleaned their faces and poured water over their heads until the water had so much chaff in it that it resembled porridge. A servant girl handed them each a drying cloth before carrying the washbowl away.

They pulled their shirts back on and went into the house to join the children and women at benches around a table. The thick adobe walls blocked the sun so effectively that the home's interior was cool. Mama set down a pitcher of cool water and a tray of clay tumblers, then supervised as the servants brought out a bowl of *frijoles* and another of *carne adovada*, spicy meat that had been soaked in chili, and a third bowl of *calabacitas*, a mixture of squash and milk. A basket of steaming hot tortillas wrapped in a clean cloth completed the meal.

Raul savored the scents. He may have been born a peon, but living in Tio's house, he ate like an *alcalde*. He licked his lips and smiled. Perhaps if he listened well and learned to think like Tio, who had no sons to carry on the family business, he would become an *alcalde* himself one day.

They bowed their heads, and Tio asked God to bless the meal. When he was finished, they swiftly touched

their foreheads, chests, and shoulders, making the sign of the cross on themselves before spooning food onto their plates.

Through the open door, Raul noticed the slaves standing or sitting on the *banco* that ran along the courtyard's shady wall. The two who had worked with him in the granary stared at him with tired, hungry eyes, their skin still covered with chaff. Raul felt a twinge of pity in his gut. Looking the other way, he swallowed it down. *No good, he thought, can come from coddling those who are below me in the social hierarchy. They are there for a reason.*

In some households, slaves were treated like members of the family. They sat at the family table, and their children played with the family's children. Not so in this house. After the family finished eating, his Mama would give the remaining food and tortillas to those who waited in the courtyard. Tio Pedro had his dignity and his prominence to think of. He found it difficult enough to associate with peons, let alone Navajos.

The Navajos who worked for his Uncle had all been taken from their families during raids, which were reprisals for times the Navajo had raided Hispanic settlements. They worked for no pay other than their room and board but, if they behaved and Tio felt magnanimous, they could be freed to become members of the community. *It was a good system, Raul told himself. I might ruin it if I begin treating the servants too kindly.*

"So, what did my men talk about on their walk home?" Mama asked when everyone had finally settled in and were scooping up food with their tortillas.

"*Texicans,*" Papa said dourly, "and why we should be thankful the *Americanos* keep them out of here."

Lupe shuddered. "They aren't coming to get me, are they?" Her eyes, black like her mother's, were wide with

fear. She was only eight and terrified of *Texicans*. Mothers throughout New Mexico warned children that if they weren't good, the *Texicans* would take them away.

"Not with these blue coats around," Tio said.

"Even without blue coats, you have nothing to fear, little one," Papa said, playfully pulling one of Lupe's braids. "We stopped them before; we can stop them again."

"Tell us about it, Tio! Tell us about the time the *Texicans* came. Tell us how stupid they were," Arsenio said, bouncing up and down on the bench. Raul rolled his eyes. How could his little brother be so excited by a story he had heard dozens of times? Arsenio was almost ten but still acted very young. Raul had already been working in the fields and the warehouses when he was ten, but Mama had never babied him as she did Arsenio.

"Ah! That's a good story." Tio pushed his plate toward the center of the table. He slapped his hands on his thighs, the sign that he was beginning a story. "Let me tell it to you. It all began back in '36. The *Texicans*, they decided to rule themselves. They started a Republic, and they were so full of themselves that they decreed that all the land east of the river known as the Rio Grande, from its source up in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, all the way down to its mouth in the Gulf of Mexico, belonged to them."

"Our house, too?" Arsenio asked. Raul rolled his eyes again. Arsenio knew the answer. He asked this question every time, and every time Tio Pedro answered the same way.

"Not our house, *Sobrinito*. Not any of Socorro. We are on the west side of the great river."

Arsenio collapsed back onto the bench as if greatly relieved.

"For five long years the Texans argued with us about who owned the land. Finally, in the summer of '41, they

decided to do something about it. Their President, a man named Mirabeau Bonaparte Lamar, organized a group he called ‘The Santa Fe Pioneers’.

“Lamar claimed the Pioneers were merchants sent to trade in Santa Fe. But, *Sobrinito*, what merchant train brings 270 soldiers and a cannon with them?”

“Liars who aren’t merchants! Invaders!” Arsenio shouted, right on cue.

“But this great army of *Texicans*, it got lost out on the plains. Then it broke into small groups that went searching for food. The Comanches and the Apache attacked them and stole their horses.”

“But that wasn’t the worst for them, was it Tio?” Arsenio asked, slamming his fist on the table for emphasis.

“No. The worst was when they had to face our Governor, the great hero Manuel Armijo. He raised a small army, then climbed up on his best mule and rode out onto the plains, and do you know what he did? He captured those *Texicans* and tied them together and marched them all the way to Mexico City for punishment.”

“And we treated them harshly!” Arsenio crowed. “We cut off their ears and—”

“Enough! We are eating,” Mama said. Arsenio deflated, his lower lip sticking out.

“We treated them no more harshly than they deserved,” Papa said. “We had to teach them a lesson they wouldn’t forget. They’ll think twice before they tangle with New Mexicans again.”

“Can’t be so sure,” Tio said, pulling his plate back from the center of the table. He scooped up his beans deliberately, chewing slowly, as if digesting his thoughts along with the beans.

Raul had been part of this discussion all of his life. Part of him believed that Papa was right, and that his peo-

ple should use force to protect their lands from all foreign invaders. Another part of him, the part that yearned to rise to become an *alcalde* like his Tio, believed that foreigners, especially Americans, needed to be encouraged, but also managed. Foreigners needed to be encouraged, Tio had said, because they brought money to the territory, and money was power. But Tio also said that foreigners needed to be managed, so that they gave up their money without gaining power over the local people. Whether Tio or Papa was right, Raul didn't know. But one thing he knew for certain: if the *Americanos* or *Texicans* came and tried to wrest power from him, they were in for a fight. He might only be a peon, but he was a proud peon with aspirations of becoming an *alcalde*—he would bend no knee to any outsider. He had a duty to his people and to his aspirations.

Raul asked, "Why would those *Texicans* dare to come back? They know we don't want them here."

Tio swallowed his beans and took a sip of water. "Not everyone hates the *Texicans*. Consider the Mesilla Conference."

Raul shuddered, remembering what had happened that past March. A group of businessmen, many of whom were Anglos who had migrated from Texas, had met in the southern town of Mesilla and declared that New Mexico territory below the 34th parallel should secede from the Union and become the Confederate Territory of Arizona.

"Bah!" Papa said with a snort. "Those *gringos* think they can grow cotton here, just like in Virginia and the Carolinas! They should know the climate's not right. Besides, we don't want to be a part of the Confederate States any more than we want to be a part of the United States.

"They *should* know that," Tio said, "but they don't."

"But the blue coats will stop them," Raul asserted.

"If they were strong enough," Papa said, "but they aren't."

"That's why I have to sell them my corn! We have to make sure they're strong enough!" Tio shouted. He was getting red in the face, angry that his brother-in-law wasn't agreeing with him.

Mama started collecting plates. "Enough, my men. Let us stop arguing and have some *natillas*." She handed the plates off to an Indian girl, who would wash them in the half barrel that served as a sink in the courtyard.

Before Mama could serve up the sweet custard, a man rushed in. Raul recognized him as one of the clerks in Tio Pedro's front office: a man who sorted through mail and helped keep the ledgers and account books. He was red in the face, and his hair looked as if he'd run through a windstorm. His little round glasses were so fogged up that he had to tilt his head back and look under them. He bowed low, first to father and then to Tio, and finally, as if she were an afterthought, to Mama.

"*Señores y Señora*, I come with bad news," he said, his words coming out in spurts as he gasped for breath.

Mama frowned. "Then we'd better hear it outside. Children, lay down. It is time for your *siesta*."

"But I want to—" Arsenio began. A quick scowl from Mama shut his mouth and sent him and Lupe scuttling into a back room. Raul and his two cousins shooed the servants out of the courtyard, then sat on the shady banco. In front of them, Tio Pedro and Mama sat on chairs that two servants had carried out for them. They looked like a king and queen holding court. Papa stood behind Tio, his arms crossed over his chest as he scowled at the clerk. "Well?" Papa asked.

The clerk had regained his breath and composure, gave a quick bow. "The town of Mesilla is in enemy hands."

Papa snorted. "This is not news. Mesilla declared itself part of the Confederacy in March."

"Yes," the clerk said, "but what is declared and what is real, *Señor*, are sometimes two different things. Until now, these Union Troops have held the southern half of the territory as well as the north. But now, *Señor*, they are routed."

"Routed? By whom?" Papa roared.

The clerk seemed to shrink down within his shirt, but he continued. "By a Confederate Lieutenant Colonel Baylor, *Señor*. He has 400 mounted rangers. They took Mesilla with hardly a fight."

"But the troops at Fort Fillmore, they will take back the town, no?" Tio stated.

"No, *Señor*," the clerk answered. "The Commander at Fort Fillmore, he abandoned the fort. His men marched east hoping to pass through the Organ Mountains, but they only made it to the spring in San Augustin Pass before they were captured."

Papa threw his hands up in a gesture of exasperation. "Captured? Without a fight? Treachery! Cowardice!"

"They say the men were drunk. They had filled their canteens with whiskey," the clerk said in a barely audible whisper.

Raul's cousins flipped open their fans and began whispering to each other. When Tio glared at them, Mama herded them away into the dark, cool interior of the house.

"So," Papa said in a menacing voice, "the *Texicans* have again invaded our land. They claim the southern half and occupy our second largest town. And all your brave *Americanos* can do is get drunk and give themselves up."

"A third of the territory, not half," the clerk said.

Papa shot him a withering look and continued. "There are Southern sympathizers here. There are some

as far north as Santa Fe. They will encourage the *Texicans* to continue north.”

“What are we to do?” Raul asked. He suddenly felt very vulnerable.

“What we do is sell more supplies to the *Americanos*,” Tio said. “If they abandon us like they abandoned Fort Fillmore, we sell to the Confederates. We are businessmen first, New Mexicans second, and Americans, or Confederates, or Mexicans, or Spanish, or whatever else a very distant third.”

He shook a finger at Raul. “You listen to me, nephew: it doesn’t matter who thinks they are in control of this land. We control them. They need our corn and our wheat. Think about this during siesta: that sly old trader Ceran St. Vrain undermined me and got the contract for selling flour to Fort Craig. They’re paying him 14 cents a pound! I want that contract back, especially if the Confederates are in Mesilla. With the enemy so close, the Union is going to have to reinforce their positions, and that means more mouths to feed and more sales to make. I want you to think about how low we can go so we can undercut him and still make a good profit.”

They went into the interior of the house and lay down on their mattresses to rest during the hottest part of the day. Raul put his hands behind his head and stared up at the ceiling, thinking about what his uncle had said. The idea that money was power appealed to him.

Power, Raul knew, was everything. The man with power controlled the land, the people, and the future. The Navajos had once been powerful. Then the Spanish came with guns, steel, and horses. Now the Navajos were nothing but slaves and wanderers, eking out an existence by raiding on the outskirts of the wilderness.

Raul scowled, determined that the Americans would

never subject his people as they themselves had the Navajo. He may be a peon, but he was the nephew of an alcalde. He must find a way to stop these newcomers from taking away his land or changing his culture.

Raul's people didn't have the power to force the *Americanos* from New Mexican soil, as his father wanted. But perhaps Tio was right, and they could control these foreigners through trade. The New Mexicans, not the *Americanos*, would be the masters. Raul smiled and began considering what the Union Army needed that he could provide, and how he could use that to his advantage.