

## THE REVELATION

**H**enry Grace had a Jesus glow. His charisma radiated from him like the golden light around Jesus in medieval paintings. As a physician, his shy and respectful manner, gregarious stories and jokes, and prince-of-the-desert face with the kind eyes made him loved by women, enjoyed by men, and instant friends with children. He was admired and respected by the entire spectrum of El Paso and Las Cruces society, which included wealthy Latino patróns, Mexican laborers, businessmen, politicians, professional colleagues, ranchers, cowboys, and Mescalero Apaches. Men of all bents crossed the street to shake his hand and speak to him, sought his quiet joviality in bars and restaurants, and copied his style. Women saw the warmth in his eyes, knew the strength and gentleness of his hands, imagined they heard passionate intimacy in his voice and passed on the latest gossip about his affairs. His quiet manners bespoke an easy-going gentleman. It was well known, however, that in any dispute, he never backed down.

Exposed to the bright New Mexico sun for nearly sixty-four years, his warm, black marble eyes were etched at the corners by dry washes of crow's feet. Short salt-and-pepper hair and a brilliant white mustache framed his Latino or perhaps Indian face, which was the color of old tanned gun leather. A thin, long-healed, but evil-looking scar left a track from below his right eye to his chin. It passed through his mustache clearly dividing it into two pieces that his vanity hid with the clever use of a comb. Just missing his lips, it was the source of much speculation from dance partners or patients at his medical clinic. When they asked about the scar, he winked and said, "I got it playing cowboy when I was a kid." Henry was not a good liar. They didn't believe him for an instant, but they weren't foolish enough to push for more details. They saw a fire smoldering behind his eyes and the dry wash wrinkles deepening to form a hard, unyielding squint as he stared back at them unblinking.

In better physical condition than most men forty years younger, Henry ran seven or eight miles a day, five days a week, thirty years before jogging became a national obsession. With his smooth steady gait, his head appeared to be gyro-stabilized as it glided effortlessly in seven-minute miles above the creosote bushes and yuccas lining his running trails. Friends just marked it off as one of his eccentricities when they saw him running in the desert heat between Las Cruces and the Organ Mountains. Those same friends would have considered him far beyond eccentric had they known he made his runs with a mouthful of water he never swallowed until he crossed his finish line.

Henry was the bachelor married men envied. The gossips claimed nearly any unmarried woman in Doña Ana County was his for the taking, and he had taken quite a few. On Friday nights, cowboys and townies, eager to prove their manhood with the ladies, knew that at the Bar F Bar they had a true woman-pleasing model in Henry. Henry sat with them around bare wood tables covered with long-necked beer bottles, baskets of crunchy tortilla chips, and little bowls of flaming red tomato salsa. He slowly sipped Jack Daniel's bourbon straight-up from an octagonal lead crystal glass tumbler he kept stashed at the bar, smoked smooth dark-leaf Cuban cigars, told tales of the wild and wooly old days, and flirted with all the girls. Henry delighted in tilting his chair back, hooking a boot on the crosspiece, and watching young men work hard to wheedle women out of a trip home after closing time. Like birds in a mating dance, the women flitted from one prospect to the next, leaving first one supplicant then another disappointed.

Henry ruled the dance floor. Even when his partners were women less than half his age, he was a confident master envied by the younger men. Holding his lady at her waist, he effortlessly floated with her in a smooth western two-step as the band played "San Antonio Rose" or "Hey, Good Lookin'." During the three-four time of a slow waltz, he swung his partner in a close, dreamily intimate rhythm that kept their bodies in perfect harmony. After the band played the last song of the last set, Henry, receiving grins, light applause, and outright envy from his younger comrades, usually went home with the lady of his choice. Having known his virility, relaxed poise, and perfect manners in their bedrooms, those same ladies came back the next Friday hoping for another dance with Henry. Invariably, they preferred Henry's ancient trim body to that of the most muscular testosterone-filled cowboy or the most suave fraternity man or tweedy professor from New Mexico A&M.

## Hombrecito's War

On Saturday evenings, Henry closed his office early and headed to the Hacienda del Sol. Unlike the Bar F Bar, the atmosphere in the Hacienda, a restaurant and nightclub, was cool and calm. The ambiance was soft candlelight, a smooth murmur of quiet voices, the occasional tinkle of sparkling glasses, and quiet well-mannered Mexican waiters who instantly appeared at the first sign of a request. The Hacienda was filled with middle-aged men wearing two-hundred-dollar suits, Arrow shirts, straight neckties, and smoking Chesterfield cigarettes. Their women wore expensive perfumes and bright dresses with modest hemlines. These were the men and their wives who guided the university, owned the stores, ran the government, and fired the rockets at White Sands Proving Grounds. Although the crowd was much more dignified than the one at the Bar F Bar, it often pursued Henry to enliven its banal conversations with his unlimited supply of jokes and tales about the old days.

At the Hacienda, he played trumpet in an amateur swing band made up of local attorneys, physicians, and professors from New Mexico A&M. The band filled many evenings with arrangements from Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Les Brown. Henry had the lungpower of Louis Armstrong, even if he didn't have the lip. With his cheeks puffed out and the veins standing out at his temples, he could hold a note longer than any horn player in Las Cruces or El Paso. Often invited to play the opening horn at the bullfights in Ciudad Juarez, across the river from El Paso, he rarely turned down the invitation. The drama and action of a life-and-death struggle, in which the larger, stronger, deadlier animal was defeated by the smaller, faster, smarter one made his heart thump and race.

On Sundays Henry went to shooting matches in a large arroyo northeast of town. Every marksman in the southwest knew Henry Grace. He rarely lost in long-gun contests using targets at ranges exceeding three hundred yards. Men, young and old, stared in disbelief at the tight two-inch diameter circles full of half-inch holes he consistently put in targets with his thundering seventy-five-year old Model 1874 Sharps rifle. It shot .45-70 cartridges that were nearly two inches long and projected about an ounce of lead capable of passing through a half-ton buffalo at a thousand yards. The weapon had a thirty-two-inch barrel mounted on a fine-grained walnut stock waxed to high polish and trimmed in German silver. It had double set triggers that allowed Henry to set the firing trigger to such sensitivity that the cocked hammer fell when Henry just imagined he wanted the ten-pound weapon to fire. Holding cartridges between his long fingers for fast reloading,

Henry loaded and fired the old single-shot breechloader faster than most men could lever a Winchester. Even when telescopic sights were allowed, he often won five-hundred-yard matches using iron sights. Some speculated the competitors wouldn't even shoot against him if he had used a telescope on the old rifle.

Henry spent weekdays as a skilled general practitioner setting broken bones, delivering babies, identifying and fighting common diseases, easing elderly people into their last years, and counseling alcoholics. He refused to send his poor patients a bill when times were hard. Even in good times, when the chile and the vegetable crops were plentiful and the wages were good, Henry billed them only enough to salve their pride. Schoolteachers from every grade in every school knew that if they had a poor student in need - for anything - Henry never said no. There was an unspoken understanding that his clients never asked for more than they needed and he always gave more than they required.

The Mescalero Apache people living on their reservation at the foot of the majestic mountain, Sierra Blanca, eighty miles northeast of Las Cruces, knew Henry always came when they asked for his help. He was the only doctor they trusted and their needs often were a major drain on his time. When the calls came from Mescalero, appointments in his Las Cruces clinic were delayed and waiting rooms filled with patients were sent home. They were told to come back later, or to expect a visit at their homes when he got back. Henry never complained and neither did his patients. Friends of the tribe even claimed the Apaches loved him like a relative, but they had to confess they had no idea why. Others said it was probably because Father Braun, the Catholic priest who had lived with them nearly forty years, told Henry that purgatory wouldn't hold his womanizing and carousing against him if he helped the Apaches.

Therefore, Roberta Gonzales, Henry's nurse, receptionist, and bookkeeper for over twenty years, was not surprised to receive a telephone call one morning from Mescalero tribal headquarters. A smooth feminine voice said rhythmically in precise English with a Spanish cadence and accent, "I'm Maria Estrada? At tribal headquarters in Mescalero New Mexico? Is this Nurse Gonzales?"

"Yes?" Roberta answered in exasperation. The office was a beehive filled with patients. The adults were continually getting up to get a *Life* magazine from a big rack Henry kept under the front of her receptionist's desk. They sat down to flip through the pictures, then, just ten minutes later, would get up for another issue. Children were banging

wooden blocks and toys on the floor or yelling at each other and generally being ignored or undisciplined by their parents. And, she was trying to pry a medical history out of an old Mexican man who didn't speak good English and whose brain worked slowly, very slowly.

The voice floated out of the telephone: "I'm calling for John Burning Tree? John asked that I tell Dr. Grace his friend Yellow Boy is very sick? John thinks maybe Señor Yellow Boy is dying? He says Dr. Grace should come quick!"

Roberta quickly glanced about but couldn't find the notepad she usually used for telephone messages. It was buried under the papers strewn all over her reception desk. She grabbed a prescription pad and jotted down the note. Frowning in concern as she scribbled the note and tore it off the pad, she spoke into the heavy black receiver clamped between her shoulder and ear. "Okay! Muchas gracias, Señorita. He's with a patient right now. Please let John know that I'll give Dr. Grace the message just as soon as he's free."

"That will be fine," said the smooth rhythmic voice. "I'll tell John. Buenos dias, Señora Gonzales."

Within seconds after Roberta hung up, the clinic door burst open, a Mexican child in his father's arms. The boy was screaming and kicking a bloody foot up and down. As the man, almost black from years of work in the chili fields, walked self-consciously toward her desk, she jumped up to guide him to an examining room. Her quick start scattered her papers all over the floor. She motioned for him to follow her as she hurried down the softly lighted, surgical-green, hallway to an examining room. The waiting room behind them got very still. Patients sitting in their chrome and black leather chairs leaned forward and stared after the intruders disappearing down the hallway. Children stopped playing and scampered on all fours across the black-and-white checkerboard tile floor to sit between the feet of their parents. Cowed by the wailing of one of their own and the trail of blood drops he left in the hallway, they forgot about their blocks, toys, and arguments.

Roberta took the child from the father who winced as if struck in the face at his child's wails of pain. She said in her most professional soothing voice, "Let's just sit him on the edge of this table." The burden of concern showing in the man's eyes prompted her to comfort him too. "He'll be fine, *señor*. Don't worry, *por favor*. Wait here. I'll be right back with the doctor *pronto*."

She stepped across the hallway, knocked on Henry's office door, cracked it open, and quickly stuck her head around the edge. A very pregnant young woman was listening attentively as Henry explained what to

expect in her last trimester. Roberta didn't hesitate to butt in. "*Pardona me, señora*. Dr. Grace, we have an emergency with a child. He has a puncture wound, I think from a nail, in the ball of his left foot. Please come as soon as you can." Henry nodded and quickly finished the interview.

Roberta returned to the examining room and tried to soothe the youngster. Giving him a quick once-over, she saw the wound was deep but bled slowly. She filled a basin with warm water and began to tenderly wash his foot. The child's loud wails slowly turned to snuffles as she worked. They turned to wails again as she poured stinging alcohol on the puncture. Henry passed through the door and spoke calmly to the wide-eyed father, examined the wound, soothed the child back to snuffles, and gently felt for broken bones. He felt none, but he picked the child up, and, whispering comforting words in his ear, carried him two doors down the hallway to the x-ray machine just to be sure he had not missed any damage. X-rays soon verified the wound was a simple puncture and that no bones or major blood vessels were affected.

As Roberta dressed the wound, Henry put his hand on the father's shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "So *Chico* has a rough time at play, eh, *señor*? When I was a *muchacho* I hurt myself many times. *Que paso?*"

The sunburned field laborer would not look in Henry's eyes and stared at the floor. It was improper to look directly at the face of a *patrón*. When he answered, he spoke in a mixture of Spanish and English, common for bilingual Mexicans struggling to establish their place in the land of the Americans. "*Mi muchacho es en the yard*. He plays *con his hermanos* ... his brothers. They play *bueno* together *patrón*. I build a shed *en the yard por mi señora's pollos* ... her chickens, from scrap lumber I save from building a big tool shed *por Señor Montoya*. *Chico*, he steps on a long nail in a scrap of board I used on the shed. He knows not what bites him on the bottom of his foot. He thinks perhaps it is a snake. The sting, it scares him and he runs all over the yard on his heel to get away from it. He screams and cries. I am *muuy* scared, *patrón*. I run after him, and I finally catch him. I see the board and pull it from his foot. I drive him here in my truck *pronto!* He cries all the way here. There is much fear *en mi old Ford, patrón.*"

Henry nodded understandingly. "*Como se llamo, señor?*"

"*Me llamo, Jose Salazar, patrón.*"

Henry shook his head. "*Señor Salazar*, I am your doctor, not your *patrón.*" He pointed at his eyes with the index and forefinger of his right hand. "Look in *mi ojos, por favor*, when you speak with me, eh?" Lifting his head, Jose Salazar managed a smile of relief and nodded.

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After a tetanus shot to the hip that made the child whine and a clean gauze bandage to protect the wound, Henry rubbed the boy's back as Roberta tidied up from their work. "Stay off that wound and keep the bandage clean. Eh, *muchacho*?" The child snuffled back further tears and nodded. Jose, smiling with relief, swooped his boy up in his arms and carried him as if he weighed ten pounds, not sixty. Walking down the hall with Henry to the waiting room, he felt Henry slip some folded cash into his shirt pocket. Jose tried to give it back but Henry wouldn't take it.

"Señor Salazar, as a favor to me and my patients, buy the *muchacho* some shoes with strong soles. Make him wear them when the foot is well again in two or three weeks. *Por favor*, have your other sons pick up the old lumber scraps so they do not find a nail with their feet."

Jose Salazar's eyes lit up in gratitude, but he said, "Oh no, *patrón*...Uh, Dr. Grace. I'll buy the shoes *por mi muchacho*. I cannot pay you back for many months. I have no extra *dinero* until after the chilies are picked."

Henry shook his head and smiled. "No, it's okay if you wait many months, *señor*. Just pay me when you can, what you can. *Es importanté* to me that the *muchacho* have warm protected feet. *Comprendé*?"

Jose Salazar, his hands covered with calluses and scars, the father of nine children, respected by field bosses from El Paso to Albuquerque, and a king in his home, whispered with tears in his eyes, "*Gracias*, Dr. Grace, *gracias*."

The office soon returned to normal as Roberta reappeared at her desk, picked up the scattered papers, signed in new patients, and ushered an unending stream of them in to see the doctor.

It wasn't until the end of the day that she found the message from John Burning Tree, a corner of it peeping out from under the base of the big black telephone. When she saw it, her eyes grew wide. *Oh hell!* flashed in her mind. Fighting back tears, she grabbed the note and rushed from her desk down the hall to Henry's office. She practically ran through the open door, her smooth brown skin almost white with panic, despair filling her eyes.

"Oh! I'm such an idiot." In frustration she groaned, grit her teeth and stamped her foot. "I deserve to be fired. Please forgive me." She thrust the note toward him with a trembling hand, rubbing her throbbing temples with the other.

Henry sitting with his feet up on his desk, sipping a late-afternoon bourbon, the latest issue of *JAMA* on his lap, gazed calmly at her through the haze of smoke coming from an ancient briarwood pipe

clamped under his brilliant white mustache. “Why? What’s the matter? It can’t be as bad as all that. Settle down now Bertie and tell me what’s going on.”

He stretched across the desk with a low groan telegraphed from his stiff joints. He took the note from her trembling hand and read it through the glasses perched crookedly at the end of his nose. *Yellow Boy very ill. Come quick. John Burning Tree.*

Without a word, Henry swung his stocking-covered feet to the floor and reached for the telephone. He tapped his fingers waiting for the rotor to click through the numbers to the tribal center office in Mescalero. He motioned Roberta to sit down in the chair next to his desk with an open palm waving toward the floor for her to calm down. He said in an easy rumble, “It’s okay. It’s okay! Now just calm down. The world’s not going to stop turning because a telephone call is returned a few hours late. Nobody’s perfect. It’s gonna be all right. Just relax now.”

Soon he said with restrained urgency, “Hello! This is Dr. Henry Grace. Is John Burning Tree nearby? Yes! Thank you! I can wait. Okay. Hurry please.”

Henry put his hand over the mouthpiece to speak to Roberta while he held the receiver to his ear, “John’s been there all day. She’s gone to get him. It’ll be okay, don’t worry now.”

Roberta sat in a chair in front of his desk chewing her lip. Henry reached for his glass of bourbon with his free hand and threw down the remaining Jack Daniel’s in one gulp. He ran his fingers through his hair and squeezed the back of his neck to relieve the tension building in his shoulders.

They seemed to wait hours, but in five minutes John Burning Tree, breathless, spoke into the receiver at Mescalero. “Dr. Grace! Where are you, man?”

“I’m in Cruces, just got your message,” he nearly shouted into the receiver. Calming himself, he said in a low apologetic rumble, “It’s been real busy here today. I’m sorry I’m so late in calling. How’s Yellow Boy?”

“I don’t think he’s so good. He said he was okay earlier today, but, I saw him spit blood this morning while he was splitting firewood then sit down like he was dizzy. He said he was tired and wanted to nap after we ate breakfast. Usually he goes for his walk up the canyon. I could tell he wasn’t feeling so good. As soon as I got him in bed, I got Sara to come stay with him. I drove down here and had them call your office. Dr. Grace, he’s nearly ninety years old and hasn’t moved much since he went to bed. His breathing, it has bad wheezes and gurgles in it

and he coughs so hard sometimes he gags trying to get his wind. He hasn't sounded right all day. I'm no doctor, but I think he's real sick and maybe close to dying. Can...can...you come quick?" John said in a wavering voice that needed immediate emotional support.

"I'll be there in less than three hours. I'm leaving right now. Give him hot tea if he's awake or a little whiskey with honey if he'll take it. Check his sputum for blood when he coughs. If he's feverish, keep him lightly covered by the fire and give him lots of water so he can sweat it out. I'll be there as soon as I can. Don't worry now. We'll get him fixed up."

"Okay Dr. Grace. *Muchas gracias*. We'll see you in a little while. *Adios*."

Henry put down the telephone, swung around in his wooden low-backed banker's chair, and grabbed his shiny black boots. As he pulled them on, he said over his shoulder, "Yellow Boy sounds in bad shape. I've got to get up there right away."

Roberta, the sorrow of the world in her face and its weight on her shoulders, said with tears streaming from her eyes, "I'm so sorry. I just don't know how I forgot and overlooked that message."

Henry waved his hand as though swatting away a fly. "Hush now. Everybody makes mistakes! With all the commotion from that child this morning it's a wonder you ever remembered it. Yellow Boy is a tougher than whip leather. I'll get up there and he'll probably be sitting by the fire in that old slat-back chair of his, smoking a cigar. Call my patients for the next couple of days and reschedule. You go on home and get some rest. I should be back no later than day after tomorrow. If it looks like I might have to stay longer, I'll call you."

He stood up, thumped the floor as he stomped down on his boots, put on his Stetson with one hand and began buttoning his vest with the other. The Stetson was one of his prized possessions. It was black with a big flat brim. Like most cowboys, he wore his hat everywhere, even in his car, and sometimes at dinner. He pushed a big gold pocket watch into a vest pocket and its fob through a buttonhole. The watch chain held an exquisitely carved blue turquoise eagle mounted in silver descending with claws and wings extended. He was never without that eagle. He pulled on a heavily fringed buckskin jacket with fancy beadwork down the front. When the weather was chilly with calm winds in Las Cruces, as it was that day, it was often cold and windy at Mescalero. He checked his black bag, and after rummaging in the clinic refrigerator, threw in some vials of his most potent penicillin and some other bronchial infection medicines. Yellow Boy had been coughing for

nearly a month. Henry was fearful the old man was tottering on the edge of pneumonia. Even with all the medicine Henry had prescribed over the past three weeks, Yellow Boy was only a little better.

Roberta watched Henry rush around his office for a moment before she raced to the front closet in the waiting room. She began pulling on her long wool coat and pulling out the bobbie pins that held her nurse's hat in place. Yellow Boy had been Henry's close friend for many years. The idea that she might be the reason Yellow Boy died without his best friend there to tell him good-bye made her heartsick. Ready to travel, she came back to Henry's office, shaking her head. "No, sir! I won't let you go up there alone! I can get Juanita to call the patients. Please let me come with you. At least let me help make up for my negligence." She begged with her eyes floating on edge of tears and fists held tightly at her sides, "Please take me with you! Please?"

Henry smiled at his nurse of over twenty years. She was a very good one. Never married – too independent for local Mexican men – she was always on call anywhere, anytime Henry needed her. It didn't make any difference whether it was for patients or just for the comfort of intimate conversation. She had helped him at the reservation many times. The Apaches knew her by name and understood she was a significant part of Henry Grace's most potent medicine. They were always grateful for her help.

Roberta rarely made mistakes; Henry understood her compelling need for atonement. He wasn't at all reluctant for her to come with him if that's what she wanted. He would enjoy her company on the long drive to Mescalero and her medical support was always superb.

Henry grinned. "Okay, if that's what you want. Call Juanita while I get a couple more things, then let's get out of here!"

In five minutes, they were down the office steps and slamming the doors of his shiny, sky-blue Plymouth. It roared down the hard, washboard caliche road toward Route 70, bouncing them about in the front seat as it threw a rooster tail of dust into the still air and fading light. It was clear and getting colder in Las Cruces. With the sun fading behind the Florida Mountains on the horizon near Deming, the ground was rapidly giving up its heat and a diffuse patina of oranges, reds, and violets was glowing on the Organ Mountains above the shadow-filled desert. By the time they reached Route 70 and turned east toward San Augustin Pass, the car's heater had made it warm enough for Roberta to pull off her coat and help Henry off with his jacket.

Half an hour later, they stopped and filled up with gas at a Texaco station next to a brightly lighted restaurant in the little village of Organ,

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half way up the mountain to San Augustin Pass. Roberta took Henry's thermos to the restaurant filled with technicians and engineers from the Proving Grounds and had it filled with black, steaming coffee while he pumped gas. As she came out the restaurant door, she saw Henry standing by the car, one hand on the door handle. He appeared to be in a trance as he looked toward the glow of lights down in the Mesilla valley. Slowly turning his head, he stared for a long moment down the side of the dark mountains sweeping toward El Paso. As if awakening from a dream, he gave his head a quick little shake and turned to the gas pumps.

She hurried back to the car, practically running, desperate to arrive in Mescalero before Yellow Boy went to the grandfathers. Jerking open the door she practically jumped into her seat then slid the Aladdin Thermos under it for safekeeping. She knew how Henry drove when he was in a hurry.

A teenager with long greasy hair combed straight back and a face covered with pimples came out to pump gas. Henry, in a hurry, filled the car himself and then paid the boy who had stood shivering in the cold dark with his hands in his pockets. After hooking the hose back on the pump, Henry swung the Plymouth's door open and slid shivering under the steering wheel. Blowing on his hands, he glanced with a smile at Roberta as he asked, "Are you ready?"

She nodded and murmured, "Yes sir," as he cranked the engine and pulled the column-mounted gearshift into first gear. The Plymouth roared out of the service station with a vengeance up on to the steep, two-lane asphalt road leading to the Pass.

The car was warm and comfortable. As they topped the pass and saw range lights twinkling in the distance, Henry pulled his pipe and tobacco pouch from his vest pockets. Handing them to Roberta, he grinned. "Would you light my fire, Nurse Gonzalez?" It had taken her numerous trips across the Tularosa basin with Henry to see Apache patients in Mescalero before she learned to pack the bowl just right and light a good coal. She filled and tamped the fine, long-cut strands of Flying Dutchman into the ancient briar bowl, clamped it in her teeth, found matches in her purse, and lighted it for him. Tiny sparks fell from the bowl. She didn't own a nurse's uniform that close inspection wouldn't reveal tiny burn holes in the fabric across her lap. The smooth smoke scratched at the back of her throat as she puffed to make the pipe's bowl glow from a steadily growing, dull-red coal. Satisfied the tobacco was well lighted, she handed the pipe back to Henry, who took it smiling in gratitude.

She dug around in her purse, and found herself a smooth straight cigarette in a crushed pack of Lucky Strikes. Lighting up, she took a deep draw, and, blowing it out the whistling vent window on her side, began to relax. The drone of the engine made her drowsy; it would take at least three hours to reach Mescalero. She fidgeted around in her seat for a few minutes trying to stay awake, afraid she might doze off and let the old man go to sleep too. She searched her mind for some topic of conversation that might keep them occupied for the trip. As a moth drawn to a bright candle, her long-held curiosity about his origins with old Yellow Boy floated in through the smoke and the rush of whistling air.

“Do you want some hot coffee and a little conversation?”

Henry smiled. There was a knowing look in his eyes and questioning wrinkle on his brow. Roberta always started long early-morning conversations at the office with that line. They were always fun. She usually wanted his counsel on how to deal with a presumptuous boyfriend or an ornery family member.

“Sure. What’s on your mind?” He cracked his vent window wider to let in a little more fresh air and to vent out the accumulating smoke that made his eyes water.

Roberta reached under the seat, feeling for the smooth warm surface of the thermos. Henry kept a couple of cups in the glove box she found just as the Plymouth reached the pass ridgeline. After straining a few seconds to get the stopper loose from a tightening applied by an overly zealous waitress, Roberta carefully poured half a cup for Henry, then one for herself. They first blew then sipped boiling hot brew and stared off into the dark space at the end of the headlights.

From the top of the pass a velvety black universe stretched out before them. The gusting wind blowing through the Organs made Henry work to keep the car tacking in the right hand lane down the backside of the pass. Lights from late traffic leaving the proving grounds were a moving constellation along Route 70 stretching back toward Alamo-gordo. Proving Ground facility lights twinkled unmoving on the black desert floor below them. With stars appearing above them and the star-like range lights below them, Roberta imagined they were flying through the universe in one of the spaceships she heard the government tested on that very range.

As Henry took another sip of his coffee, she said, “You and Yellow Boy have been friends a long time. How did you come to know him?”

Henry swallowed a couple more noisy slurps. He took, she thought, an extra long time to answer a simple question. He pushed on the gas pedal a little harder, making the Plymouth go five miles an hour faster

as it hummed smoothly into the black night. Not speaking, he was, for all appearances, a thoughtful college professor contemplating a lecture question as he finished his coffee and handed his cup back to her.

Taking a long draw from the old briar pipe, he blew the smoke toward the vent window before he said, "Well, fact of the matter is I've known Yellow Boy since I was a small boy."

"Oh?" Arched eyebrows framed her growing curiosity. "You know, I've never heard you talk about your boyhood in the twenty years I've worked for you. Did you grow-up on a ranch near here or somewhere else?" Now that she thought about it, it was very curious that he never mentioned relatives or childhood memories. For most men, they were a favorite topic of conversation – next to women or baseball.

Henry sighed and snapped his teeth against the rush of the cool window air. There was a little argumentative shake of his head as he hunched his shoulders and cocked his ear to one side as though listening to some inner voice. He took a deep breath, started to say something, thought better of it, and just cleared his throat. For a while he stared straight ahead. Roberta watched him with narrowed eyes, a cat eager for a mouse of information about to scamper out of its hole. *It must be good*, she thought. She had never seen Henry hesitate to tell her anything.

Finally, he glanced at her, his eyes glittering in the light from the dashboard instruments, his hands locked in a white-knuckle death grip on the steering wheel. He said in a low voice she strained to hear, "Without getting into a long story, I'll tell you that Yellow Boy saved my life when I was a little boy. He helped me find justice when justice was missing, and he adopted me when I was almost alone in the world. I can never forget how much I owe him."

Suddenly, Roberta wasn't sleepy anymore. Her cat waiting for the little mouse of information to scamper out, tensed to pounce on a much bigger rat. "I never knew that! Tell me how it happened! Please? Come on now don't leave me twisting in the wind. You can tell me." She smiled coyly at him, knowing Henry liked to tell a good story, and he rarely turned down anything she asked.

Henry stared straight ahead, lost in his thoughts. A big tumbleweed, a six-foot ball of dry, brittle weeds and twigs appeared in the headlights startling him out of his reverie. He had no time to swerve as they passed through it with a crash of small sticks flying against the windshield and a large piece sailing over the car intact. "Damn!" he said in disgust. "I hate to hit those things. You never know if an animal or somebody might be behind them."

Roberta was not to be ignored. “Don’t ignore the question now. Come on. Let’s hear it. Tell me about you and Yellow Boy,” she coaxed, flirting and coquettish. “Surely he’s not called Yellow Boy because of some act of cowardice? Is he...”

Henry laughed and shook his head. “Oh no, not hardly. Yellow Boy is a true warrior. He’s no coward by any standard anywhere. He’s a real, honest-to-God, eye-for-an-eye Indian. He even scouted a while for General Crook when Crook was chasing Geronimo all over hell and half of Arizona.” He paused, stepping up to the edge of his revelation, and then backing away. “All right. I’ll tell you the story. You probably won’t believe it. It’s okay if you don’t. I won’t blame you if you don’t, but it’s true. If I tell you, you have to give me your solemn oath not to repeat it – ever. If you do, I’ll say you’re lying and swear I never told you any such thing. Promise?”

Roberta’s cat waiting for the mouse was now a tiger pacing up and down in a cage, wanting red meat. What could the beloved Dr. Henry Grace possibly have to hide? Everyone knew Dr. Grace; there were no secrets about Dr. Grace. This had be something extraordinary. *Maybe, she thought, he’s had an affair with a politician’s wife or murdered somebody and Yellow Boy got him out of it!* She knew she might have an ethical dilemma to keep from spreading the story, but she could and would keep quiet about it.

“Yes, sir, I promise.” She said with her most earnest and serious face. “You know I keep my promises. Unless you release me from my vow, your words will go no further than this Plymouth.”

Henry nodded, biting his lower lip. He gazed off into the darkness toward the low glow in the sky above Alamogordo and the inky blackness of the Sacramento Mountains just behind it. Roberta turned in the seat so she could watch the side of his face in the glow from the dashboard. She pulled her left foot up under her right leg so she was comfortable and modestly pulled her hemline down over her knees.

Roberta saw Henry’s jaw muscles ripple then stiffen as he forced himself to speak. “Well...the name I was born with...is not Henry Grace. It’s Henry Fountain. The same Henry Fountain presumed murdered for fifty-five years. I’m sure you know the Fountain murder story.”

She nodded slowly, her eyes wide, staring without blinking, her mouth forming an Oh! “Oh yes,” she said breathlessly. “I know it very well. My grandfather rode with the Fountain family and the sheriff to look for Henry and his father. My father nearly got in a fight one time with a man in a bar when the man said Albert Fountain only got what he deserved.”

She stopped and frowned at him. "Oh, stop it! You're not Henry Fountain!" she said as she folded her arms and arched her eyebrows wrinkling her normally smooth brow in disbelief. "You're just teasing! Why haven't you made yourself known if you are? Why haven't you told the law who murdered you...uh, your father and why weren't the murderers brought to justice? What are..."

Henry waved a flat horizontal palm at her as he smiled and said, "Easy now, *Señorita*. Patience. Please, just listen to my story. I'll answer all your questions. I promise. But, you have to promise never to repeat what I'm telling you."

Roberta gazed earnestly at his face, every strong feature etched in the light and shadows cast by the dash lights. She nodded rapidly and said, "I promise to keep my mouth shut. You know I can and I will. I'll die before I'll ever speak a word." She reached over and patted him on the shoulder. "I'm sorry, Dr. Grace, but I just can't believe you're Henry Fountain. Everyone knows that child's been dead over fifty years. But, please...please ignore my bad manners. Tell me your story. It's a great mystery that's haunted this country for years. I want to hear your version of it too."