

Chapter 1

HEADING WEST

It was the summer of 1865 and Union Sergeant Roy Stearns rode west, like so many disillusioned veterans from the Civil War, looking for a fresh start. He was tired of blood and gore, and people screaming in pain. He had been with Brigadier General George Armstrong Custer, the “Boy General,” on many of his swift, cavalry raids at Gettysburg, Yellow Tavern, Fisher’s Hill and Five Forks, and too many quick skirmishes to count. They had experienced victory, but the loss of life and good horseflesh was abominable. The General had asked some of the lads to stay on after Appomattox, and ride with him in protecting the trains and the settlers from outlaws and marauding Indians in Kansas and beyond.

General Custer and Roy had developed a special relationship after Roy had rescued him in the Battle of Yellow Tavern. Custer had been knocked from his horse by a Confederate rifle butt, and Roy rode to his side, and yanking him up onto the back of his horse, and pulled him to safety before the Confederates could capture or kill him. Custer never forgot Roy’s courage, and moved him to his personal protective staff.

Roy turned down Custer’s request to stay with the army, saying that he was going to cross the vast frontiers and explore the West, and maybe claim some open land for ranching or farming, or explore the goldfields. He was brave and unafraid. The General had told him to keep his claybank mount and his tack and army saddle. With his closing-out pay, he had enough jingle in his pocket to keep him going for a year. He also had some gold coins from the War tucked deep in his saddlebags. He was frugal and spent only on necessities, and often chopped wood or cleaned out barns for food and shelter along the way.

Roy was tall and wiry, and deeply tanned from being in the sun and rough weather constantly. He still had his .44 caliber revolver, and his Springfield rifle, and a supply of ammunition for self-protection, and for shooting game for his supper. The rifle was brand new and modern with a high power slide repeater action. He managed to shoot a few deer along the way, and jerked the meat. Game was plentiful and living off the land was becoming second nature. When he saw shallow streams, he would stop and spear fish with his improvised pole with his French-made folding knife tied on the end.

Some of his army buddies suggested that Roswell, New Mexico was a good place to get a start. The nearby gold mines had made instant millionaires out of a dozen men. There was large land boom going on there now, and supposedly the local marshal was needing gunslinger help to control a large band of outlaws. The scurrilous bastards had recently raided an outlying farm, and murdered the whole family. A mother and her fourteen year old daughter had been viciously raped and stabbed to death. After rounding up the livestock, they burned the barn to the ground. The latest rumors indicated that the outlaws had headed out to Mexico through the Guadalupe Mountains, raiding and raping as they went, and were planning to start their own ranch in Mexico.

Later reports said that the outlaws decided to stay put in the mountains, and make another raid into Texas before heading for Chihuahua down south. While they were resting up, about twenty of the band rode to Ciudad Juarez for more tequila and some laughs and good times with the *putas*. Diego Socorro, the Mexican leaders of the band, left ten of the outlaws to take care of the livestock and guard the camp until he returned. He promised to bring back six putas for the motley crew to enjoy. Diego has no intention of paying the ladies, but did intend on kidnapping them and taking them to his new

hideout for the men to enjoy in their bunk house. If they resisted, they had two choices; either submit and survive, or be fed to the coyotes along the trail.