

FATAL SAVING GRACE -- EXCERPTS FOR PCT TOUR 1
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When a man gets hit by a .45 ACP Flying Ashtray or three, by all that's ballistically holy, he ought to get dead and stay dead.

All manner of official paperwork swore he *was* dead. All of it based on a bogus death certificate filed by parties unknown in the Cuervo County Coroner's Office, with copies popping up like blowflies on a cow carcass. Even the *federales* had him playing poker with the Devil, his prison mugshot tucked away in ATF and DEA files, DECEASED stamped across his face in bold, black letters.

The con was slick and easy. Money changed hands, files were swapped or ditched, reports were shredded or faked. Somebody else's corpse became him. The relentless power of bureaucratic incompetence and inertia did the rest.

Yessir. According to all that yellowing, lawdog paper, he was nobody they had to worry about no more. *Finito*. A shade. A ghost who said *adios*. A good thug now that he was a dead thug. *Muerto*.

Not hardly.

That's what John Wayne said to all those *hombres* who thought he was dead in *Big Jake*. With a growl and a scowl.

Not hardly.

He liked that. Matter of fact, he just trotted out the Duke's line to a guy he used to be tight with. Caught up to him climbing the three cinder block steps to the front door of his desert double wide.

Tapped him on the shoulder, saw the wild-eyed fear when the dude turned and saw who the finger belonged to. Blurted out: "You're supposed to be dead!"

Not hardly. Said it with a growl but no scowl. Then grabbed him by a greasy hank of raven black hair, yanking his head back and cutting a crimson smile across his throat from ear to ear. With a bone-handled straight razor. His favorite.

Threw the guy into the sand at the side of the steps. Listened to the choking gurgle and death rattle. Then licked the blood off the blade.

Not hardly. He tilted his head back and laughed. Savored the kill. Alone and alive. An endless dome of stars glittering in the midnight sky above the rocky desert outback near Radium Springs, New Mexico. No moon. A dead man at his feet. Used to be a member of his crew. Frankie Sheridan.

Met him at Pelican Bay. An Alice Baker brother doing a long stretch for bank robbery. Had a shamrock tattooed on his chest with the initials AB in capital letters—Alice Baker, Aryan Brotherhood. Blood in, blood out. Ex-Army. Knew his way around diesels, alarm systems, and weapons.

Sent him a ticket to Texas when he got out. Made him a member of his crew, smuggling guns and drugs out of a ranch north of Faver, the Cuervo County seat, a bent outfit that ran cattle for cover and fleeced bitter and gullible white trash while promising them the return of the Republic of Texas for Caucasian Christians only, a New Zion based on God, guns, guts, and the Good Book. Niggers, Jews, Arabs, and Spics need not apply.

Bad move. Frankie was a ratfuck snitch. *Uno chivato*. Not to the lawdogs. Just as bad, though. Frankie sold him out to a rival outfit of gunrunners and drug smugglers. Kept them one step ahead of him as they chased a third outfit that held a cache of stolen military hardware everybody wanted.

Rockets, bloopers, mortars, and full-auto carbines and rifles. Bang-bangs that could tip the scales on both sides of the river. All in the hands of a crew fronted by a flashy woman in jeans, tall boots, a bolero

jacket, and a blonde wig. A wet dream for the *pendejos* she hustled.

La Güera. Just the thought of her caused his molars to grind. He wanted her dead. No, he *needed* her dead. She and her lover were the reason his life got flushed into the sewer, his crew dead, his stash of guns and drugs long gone. Had him climbing out of the shitter, clawing to the top of the dung heap. Again.

He caught the lover. Sliced off his manhood. Slit his throat. Then chopped off his head and butchered his body to stuff into a giant barbecue smoker. Tucked the man's jewels into his mouth as the crowning touch to a cannibal's mesquite-smoked delight.

Not the same. Didn't have her. She still needed to feel his blade, feel his eyes boring holes into hers as he gave her that crimson smile. He needed to lick *her* blood off that sharp stainless steel. Taste it. And grin. Only then would the circle be complete. He'd be whole again.

Well, not completely whole.

His right eye was gone, blown out by a glancing hit from one of those .45 ACP slugs that also shattered the orbital bones. Nothing extensive plastic surgery, bone implants and a new glass eye couldn't cure. Had to stack plenty of cash up front to repair damage that severe.

Gave that part of his face a waxy texture straight out of Madame Tussauds. But it sure beat wearing an eye patch and the lopsided face of a Dick Tracy cartoon villain.

His left knee was also shattered, replaced with a titanium joint that allowed him to walk with only a slight limp. Another five-figure hit to his stash of greenbacks.

The man who fired those rounds was also on his payback list. An ex-cop. Big-ass older fucker with a gray beard. Said to be a washed-up Dallas P. I..

Beg to differ, sir. Sumbitch sure kept him from getting to her during that clusterfuck in the West Texas desert. A real Wild West shootout between rival drug gangs wanting the blonde bitch's bang-bangs.

He was oh-so-close to grabbing her up, dodging bullets and bodies, closing the gap between him and Ol' Dude, who was carrying the bitch draped over his right shoulder. He screamed her name and leveled an M-16A1 at the both of them.

*"La Güeraaaaaaa! I got you, bitch! Got you now!
Gonna slice you wide open and watch you bleeeeeeed!"*

Ol' Dude spun on his heel and emptied a 1911 mag at him offhand. Yelled this: *"Not today, you cockbite motherfucker. Not in this lifetime or the next."* A lefty. On target without dropping the bitch. Only thing that kept him alive was a Kevlar vest that caught the Flying Ashtrays that would have shredded his chest.

Washed-up, my ass. The man wrecked me. His time was coming, though. Count on a reckoning. Soon. But not now. He was working his way up the ladder of a list he kept in his head. One body at a time.

Frankie was the bottom rung. *La Güera* was at the top with Ol' Dude second. Five other rungs between Frankie and them.

Time to get gone. And get busy.