



Later, when the necessity for accountability becomes unavoidable, a commission of sorts will be formed, and polished men will sit at polished benches and ask polished questions for reasons that have little to do with the pursuit of truth. It will emerge from these hearings, with much reluctance, that Emilio Sanchez was first observed in Brooks County at mid-morning on Tuesday, March 23rd, riding northward across the flat, dry scrubland, pack mule in tow.

It is a petroleum geologist named Dennison who sees him, a mile across the section he is charting, and he feels faintly unsettled at the interruption of his assumption of solitude. But the sight arouses enough curiosity that he pulls his field glasses from his saddlebag, and watches for a few moments as the distant figure moves across his field of vision, and then drops from sight into an arroyo.

Dennison puts his glasses away, finishes his readings, and by the

middle of the afternoon he has made the three-hour horseback ride north-east, back into Falfurrias, the Brooks County seat. He spends the rest of the afternoon in his small rented office, charting his findings for his next report to the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey. He thinks no more of the figure at all until dinner that evening at his boarding house where, during a lull in the conversation, he mentions casually to the others at the table what he has seen.

It surprises him when Chantry, a Brooks County deputy sheriff who has a room just down the hall, takes an active interest.

"Mexican?" Chantry asks. "How do you know?"

"Sombrero," Dennison answers. "Posture. I don't know. You just know."

"And you're sure there was only the one?"

Dennison considers his reply. The lawman has always seemed distant to him, even arrogant, but it seems that Chantry's interest is coupled with a vague approval of some sort.

"The one's all I saw for sure," Dennison says, but he hesitates for a moment, and then adds the five words that will make everything go so wrong: "There *could* have been more."

Chantry digests this for a spell, while the dinner conversation moves on to other things.

After dessert, Dennison moves to the parlor and settles in for his evening hour with the San Antonio newspaper, unaware, for now, that his desire to impress a man he does not like will result in the death of a man he does not know.

Chantry ponders his options for a few moments, and then walks three blocks to the County Sheriff's office, on the first floor of the brand-new County Courthouse. It is a brisk evening, and a chill is arriving with the night. He finds his boss, a taciturn man named Burgess, filling out the weekly meal requisitions for the county jail.

Chantry waits for Burgess to look up, but the only recognition he receives is a terse, "What?"

Burgess' gruffness makes Chantry suddenly unsure of his desire to raise this issue, but he is committed now and forges ahead. "Fellow at

dinner said he saw some greasers on horseback moving north.”

The sheriff's gaze rises from the forms. “When, and how many?”

“Couldn't say how many. More than one horse. Pack horses, too. This morning, down near Baluarte Creek.”

Burgess is quiet for a moment. “Probably nothing,” he says.

“The only reason I mention it is that it seems like they might be headed to San Diego.”

Chantry's statement of the obvious irritates Burgess, but he is damned if he will let Chantry see that. “All right,” he says, and he returns his attention to the requisitions. Chantry waits for a moment and then returns to his boarding house, unaware, for now, that his casual desire to impress a man he does not like will result in the death of a man he does not know. And so it goes.

Burgess completes the requisitions and puts them to one side and retrieves from his desk the communication from the Governor's office that has arrived by special courier the week before. He rereads it with careful attention. After a routine arrest in McAllen in early January, a “manifesto” had been found in the pocket of a Mexican national, calling for a general uprising against the Anglo population of south Texas, and the summary execution of all white males over the age of sixteen. This document was supposedly drafted in San Diego, the county seat of Duval County, less than fifty miles north of Falfurrias. Burgess never reckoned that there was anything to it; Archie Parr owns Duval County, and nothing like that would have gotten past him. It was most likely a bunch of drunken Mexicans leading each other on. The date for the uprising has passed without incident but people are nervous, and the governor is emphatic that the violence occurring south of the Rio Grande must not be allowed to spill northward into south Texas.

Burgess returns the paper to his desk drawer and leans back in his chair, lacing his fingers behind his neck, and deliberates. He has a dilemma. He knows that this is probably nothing, and he understands how much commotion there will be when he raises the alarm. But he has just won close reelection the previous November. If he ignores this and it turns out to be something consequential, his career will be over.

Burgess lifts the earpiece from the telephone on his desk, thinks for just a moment, and then replaces it in its cradle. Lydia, the night switchboard operator, will almost certainly eavesdrop on any conversation and it will be all over town within minutes. His instinct also tells him that this communication should be formally on the record.

After a moment he stands up and reaches for his hat and walks across the street to the telegraph office.

In the years to come, with the hindsight of known consequence, Burgess will often relive this moment, standing in the Western Union Office: the oversized clock on the back wall; the pad of blank sheets at the counter where he stands, pencil in hand, as he composes the text of the telegram; the darkness outside, unseen in the large reflective window; and the sleepy, indifferent look of the night operator, waiting patiently for the message to be torn off the pad and handed to him. Burgess will picture himself not leaving his office. He will picture himself apologizing to the clerk and turning around and leaving the office, telegram unwritten and unsent. He will picture himself sending the telegram and then almost immediately sending a second telegram canceling the meaning of the first one. He will relive every opportunity he had not to send a communication he felt to be spurious, and he will endure some regret for his part in the result for the rest of his days.

The telegram is sent to Henry Hutchings, the Texas State Adjutant General, who heads the Texas Rangers. Hutchings reads it and considers a prudent course of action. This is all but guaranteed to be of no importance, but he has only recently been appointed by Governor Ferguson, who has just won a close election the previous November. If he ignores this and it turns out to be something consequential, his career will be over. And so it goes.

Company A is headed by Captain Sanders in Del Rio, who cannot effectively coordinate anything from that distance. Captain Fox and his Company B, based in Valentine, is understaffed. Company C is here in Austin and is Captain Smith's one-man investigation unit. That leaves Captain Moates in Laredo, and his Company D. Moates has a man in Alice and a man in Hebbronville. Both are close to Falfurrias.

So he telegraphs Moates and asks him to have someone look into it. He knows Moates and does not fully trust him, so he frames the text of the telegram with great care.

It is now 9:45 on Tuesday night.



Render Moates is in his study at home when his wife informs him that there is a messenger asking for him. He walks down the wide hallway to the front vestibule, where he encounters an earnest young man with a telegram in his hand. Moates tips him and moves under the overhead light and unfolds the yellow page.

His wife watches him read it and sees the familiar, furtive pleasure pass over his face. It is a look that she has seen many times before. It is a look that troubles her thoughts. It is a look that disquiets her sleep. It is a look that she has come to loathe.

“What is it?” she asks.

“Nothing,” Moates says, and returns to his den, and shuts the door.

Moates makes a single telephone call, and an hour and twenty minutes later he is sitting with his company Sergeant, Horace Miller, in his mannered and leathered District Office, surrounded by walls covered with impressive maps, framed prints, and the elegantly mounted heads of elk and buffalo. A large pool table occupies one-third of the floor. It is a man’s room. Moates has devoted much time and personal expense to having it present a carefully-crafted impression of himself.

They both have a glass of whiskey in their hands, poured by Moates personally. For Miller, it is either way too early or way too late to be imbibing, but he says nothing and dutifully sips.

“I am sorry to call you in on short notice like this,” Moates is saying. He hands Miller the telegram and regards him as reads it. He watches Miller’s face change from curious to perplexed. Moates has the same questions in his mind that he expects Miller to raise, but Moates

also has something that Miller does not: the ability to recognize a political advantage when it lands in his lap.

“This is very vague,” Miller says.

“I think there’s something to it,” Moates responds. “If Hutchings thought it was vague, it would have never been sent.” Moates swivels in his chair and turns to a large map of Texas mounted on the wall behind his desk. There is a pool cue leaning against the wall under the map and Moates reaches for it. Miller cannot help but note that the cue is a prop, placed there before the curtain came up on this act of the drama. Everything Moates does is staged and calculated.

“Mexican nationals near Falfurrias, going north on horseback?” Moates taps the map with the pool cue. “This position makes no sense unless they are trying to avoid being seen.”

“How many are there?” Miller asks.

Moates shrugs. “You’ve read the telegram. It doesn’t say.”

“This is too vague,” Miller repeats, looking back down at the paper. “The direction they’re heading is ambiguous, at best.”

“The direction they’re heading is *north*, toward San Diego. I shouldn’t have to remind you what that might imply. Can you think of any good reason why a contingent of Mexicans would be moving on horseback, with pack horses, through that God-forsaken country?”

“Well, yes sir, I can,” Miller says. “Any number of perfectly legitimate reasons. Vaqueros looking for work. Going home from somewhere else. Good Lord, they could be *anybody*.”

“Sergeant Miller, we are not here to debate this. South Texas is a powder-keg. Laredo itself is eighty percent Mexican. These people are out to take everything we have. We cannot be too careful.” Moates’ irritation is palpable now, and Miller realizes that it is useless to **continue** to express this particular concern.

“What are you proposing we do?” Miller asks.

Moates leans back in his chair and regards Miller with an odd, detached intensity. “I am not *proposing* anything. I am *telling* you what we are going to do. You and your men will all be taking the 5:15 tomorrow morning to Corpus Christi. Parsons will have an extra stock car

coupled on for our use.” He rises to his feet and turns around again to the map and points to the hatched line designating the Texas-Mexican Railroad. “Leave Hardesty for coverage here. You and Asher and Teeter will meet Burnett and Anspach at Hebbbronville.”

“And then we do . . . what?” Miller is genuinely perplexed.

“Head due east to cover Duval County south of the rail line.” Moates taps the map. “Go as far as the Jim Wells County line, and then head back. You should intersect either these men or their tracks.”

“And if we do?”

“Assess the situation. If you don’t find anything, head to San Diego on Friday afternoon and return here.”

Miller pulls a watch from his vest pocket and then returns it. “It is 11:30,” he says. “The animals we can get ready. What about supplies?”

Moates is prepared. “Jackman will open up for an hour at 4:00. Put everything on account. You’ll need food and tack for three or four days. Make sure you have any necessary ordnance. Have the horses and gear and pack mules and all supplies ready on the siding at 4:45. Take horses for Burnett and Anspach. All they need to do is be in Hebbbronville at 9:00 tomorrow morning. I don’t want them to have any excuse not to be there. I will want to address the three of you before you pull out.” Moates stands up. “That’s all.”

“That’s *not* all, sir,” Miller says, as genially as he can. “I’d rather take Hardesty and leave Asher.”

“No.” Moates shakes his head, emphatically.

“I don’t understand your dislike of Asher.”

“I don’t dislike him. He’s just dead weight. It is time for him to either fish or cut bait.”

Miller is silent for a moment, which Moates interprets as a thoughtful reflection of the order. It is no such thing. Miller is angry, and he is holding himself in reserve until his emotions subside. He nods and tries another approach: “Hardesty would be better able to help us with this particular job.”

“That would be true no matter what the job was. I know that Asher is ailing, and I know that he has been a Ranger for a long time.”

Moates walks around the desk, and Miller reflexively rises from his chair. “But enough is enough. If this exercise is too strenuous for him, and it will be, I will have the justification I need to send him on his way. Really, Horace, it’s in everyone’s best interest, including his. The Rangers budget and roster is the lowest it has ever been. We need good, productive, dependable men. Asher is long past his prime.”

Miller finally surrenders on this issue and raises a second point of concern. “I would prefer not to use Burnett,” he says. “We have enough men without him.”

“No,” Moates says again, and now Miller can see that this request irritates Moates, where the first one did not.

“Teeter is brand-spanking new,” Miller says, just for the record. Teeter has just been sworn in less than two weeks ago and is untested.

“Let’s see what he’s made of,” Moates says.

And that is all. Miller returns home in the midnight cold to find Leona waiting for him, sitting at the dining table. She goes into the kitchen and returns with a cup of coffee.

“How long?” she asks.

“Three or four days. Complete and utter waste of time and resources. I don’t see why we can’t just have Burnett or Anspach do this.”

Miller telephones Anspach in Alice and asks him to get word to Burnett, who is in Hebbronville, that they both need to be at the Hebbronville depot at 9:00 the next morning. He then contacts Hardesty and informs him that he is being held in reserve to ensure that Webb County is competently covered while so many of its Laredo Rangers are away. Hardesty takes it stoically, and Miller asks him to inform Asher and Teeter to be ready to ride, and at Jackman’s Supply Store, by 4:00.



By 3:00, Hardesty is able to get Teeter on the telephone, but because Asher has no telephone, he sends Teeter over to rouse him from his room at the Sirocco Hotel.

So, at 3:30 on Wednesday morning, Teeter crosses Jarvis Plaza to the hotel and through the large front door to the long oak counter, where a portly old man reads a newspaper.

“Asher’s room,” Teeter says.

The clerk motions to a wide staircase to the right. “Top floor, 617.”

Teeter sees no elevator, so he moves to the stairway and begins the climb with a young man’s energy. The first three floors are beautifully carpeted and well-lit; these are the guest floors. Four and five are darker, and the carpeting is much more worn, and Teeter realizes that these are the residence floors. At six, the carpeting is all but gone, and there is a single dim bulb in the hallway, and Teeter knows from the sheet-covered furniture lining one wall of the corridor that this floor is used mostly for storage. Half of the rooms have no numbers, but at the end of the hallway, he finds Asher’s room and knocks gently.

From inside, he hears the faint sound of moving bedsprings, a momentary silence, and then the striking of a match. A soft light begins to glow beneath the door. The bedsprings quietly churn again, giving up some small weight, and quick, light footsteps approach the door, which then begins to open to the inside until stopped by the length of the latch chain.

A woman’s face, lit dimly by the lamp held in her raised left hand, fills the gap between the door and the frame, and Teeter recognizes her at once, even in the half-light. Despite his surprise, a memory surfaces, warm and pleasant, and an image comes to mind, unbidden but welcome, and sensual but not erotic. He remembers her brushing her long, graying hair as they exchange pre-embrace pleasantries.

Teeter sees no recognition in her face. “Yes?” she says.

“I have a message for Mister Asher. From Sergeant Miller. We’re being called into the field. He needs us at Jackman’s to get supplies in thirty minutes, and then to the depot. Train, then horseback. Three or four days, Miller says.”

As the woman quietly digests this, Teeter says, “We’ve met before.”

“No,” the woman says, too quickly.

“Yes. Odessa. Couple years ago.”

“No,” she says again and steps back. “Thank you.” And then the door is closed, and Teeter is alone in the dark hallway.

“Don’t that beat all?” he says quietly. He goes back downstairs. He needs to reassure Hardesty that Asher has been informed.

Inside the room, Beulah Asher steps over to the large table by the bay window overlooking the plaza, puts down the lamp, and leans on the table’s edge, elbows locked and head down, trying to regain her composure. She has been dreading this moment for a long while, and the suddenness of its arrival has left her drained. She could easily surrender to a flood of tears, but there is no time and no point.

She moves across the room to the bed and looks down on her husband. She does not want to rouse him. His sleep is narcotic-deep, head thrown back, raspy-rattle breathing with thick drool covering the pillow beneath his open mouth. Her gaze moves to the laudanum bottle on the table beside the bed, and she sees that he has had to take some during the night to sleep. She has begun to worry that he has started taking more than the pain truly requires.

Beulah readies herself, and then reaches out and touches his shoulder, gently at first, and then more firmly when there is no response.

“Thomas,” she says. “Thomas, you need to wake up.”

His unfocused eyes open and finally settle on hers as he climbs up from his sulfurous dreams. Beulah sees understanding come over his face and he slowly works his way into a sitting position on the side of the bed, with her arm around his shoulders for support. His own hands are down deep between his knees. He is trembling in the cold room.

“What time is it?” he asks.

“Half past three. Man was just here. Says Miller sent him. You’re being called up. Mounted. Three or four days.”

“What man?”

“Young. Just a kid. Maybe twenty-five.”

“Teeter,” Asher says. “He’s new.” He gets warily to his feet and reaches for his pants, draped over the end of the bed. But his bladder kicks in, and he moves unsteadily to the door and down the hallway to the bathroom. As he urinates, the pain begins in his lower back,

concurrent with that undefinable need for the laudanum. His awakening mind begins to sense the implications. He finishes and moves back down the corridor to his room and sits down at the table. Beulah is still sitting on the bed, facing the far wall, her hands in her lap.

"I don't know what to do," he says.

Beulah sits for a moment and then she stands and picks up the laudanum bottle from the side-table and walks over and hands it to him. She sits down across the table from him. Asher takes a sip and waits for the familiar glow to begin to take hold.

"There is no way you can sit a horse for three days," Beulah says.

Asher holds up the bottle of laudanum.

"That doesn't help a thing," Beulah says sharply. "It won't even begin to get you through this."

Asher shrugs. "I got nothing to lose by trying."

Beulah is quiet at this, and now Asher realizes that something else is happening here. "What's wrong?"

"He recognized me," Beulah says flatly. "From Odessa."

Asher digests this for a moment. "Do you remember *him*?"

Beulah is silent. If she says *yes*, it means that Teeter was memorable. If she says *no*, it will remind Asher that there were so many men. Either way will hurt Asher, and this is a notion that saddens her.

Asher tries to remember if this is how he imagined he'd feel when this moment came, and he is surprised to find that he is vexed and embarrassed. He is not angry with Beulah, but with having to deal with this. He had promised himself repeatedly that he wouldn't be. He had it in his mind that he was going to be the model of patient, forgiving rectitude. Now that the moment has arrived, he finds himself ill-equipped to know what to do or say, to Beulah or anyone else.

He changes the subject.

"Where do I go, and when?"

"Jackman's at four for supplies, depot at five with the horses."

"Did he say what it's about?"

"No."

Asher sits thinking, and there is no good option. "How much we

got saved?" he asks.

"Two-hundred and seventy dollars."

"Two-hundred and seventy dollars," Asher says. "If I do go, it will hurt, but maybe I can do it and stay on the payroll."

"I can't believe that Miller is asking you to do this," Beulah says. "He knows you hurt."

"It ain't Miller asking. It's Moates telling." Asher stands and moves to the bed and begins to put on his clothes, wincing all the while. "Hell with him. I can do this." This is false bravado, and Asher knows it, and he knows that Beulah knows it, but he cannot think of any other course to take.

He dresses and packs a change of clothes, and his laudanum, as well as the new, unopened reserve bottle, which he wraps carefully in a red rag. As he leaves, he hesitates at the door and turns to Beulah.

"It don't matter," Asher says.

