

California Rifles at Chattanooga

(the Major, the Marshal & la Mujer)

(draft for preview)

By Michael “Mig” Gallagher

Dear readers,

I’m posting this chapter from the draft of my second novel in response to your question—“What happened to the characters after *California Blood at Gettysburg*?”

I hope that this preview will partially answer your question. Please share with me any errors that you find or any recommendations that you might have. My intent is to preview a few chapters as I complete *California Rifles at Chattanooga* (working title).

Regarding the footnotes, I intend to clean them up before publishing the book, so you don’t need to attend to them.

Spoiler Alert: The contents of this chapter might reveal elements of *California Blood at Gettysburg*.

Thank you for your interest and time,
Semper Fi,

Mike “Mig” Gallagher

3 – Guaymas, Mexico, December 1863

Her eyes opened. It was morning. Today would be a long day, a hard day—a pivotal day. She stared at the adobe ceiling. She noticed a hairline crack. “How long have you been up there?”

Linda Imelda Cortes-Colón sat up in her bed. Her leg ached but not beyond toleration. She massaged the muscles for several minutes. Better. She stood. Good. She walked to the dressing table. She brushed her long, mahogany hair—one hundred strokes. Her face was youngish, but no longer youthful. “Maybe the Norteamericanos are right to call it a ‘vanity,’” she thought regarding the table and mirror.

Linda hurried down the stairs to cook breakfast for *la familia*, not her family, the one that paid her salary.

Each member of *la familia* was dressed in black. After breakfast she would exchange her white peasant dress for a black dress.

After serving *la familia* in the dining room. Linda filled a plate and placed it on a small

table in the kitchen. She sat in one of the two chairs. The other chair was empty. In the dining room, the patron told a story about a burro at a wedding. *La familia* laughed.

The lady of the house entered the kitchen. She glanced at Linda's plate, "tsk, tsk, tsk." She placed her hand on Linda's shoulder.

"Do you require assistance, my lady?" Linda asked in Spanish.

"No, mi vida. Would you like the girls to clear the table and clean the dishes," said the lady in Spanish.

"Gracias, señora, but that is not necessary."

Linda bused, washed, and stacked the dishes. She walked to her dormitory to change her clothes

Linda stared at the fine black, crepe dress and the golden, lace shawl lying on her bed. The dress belonged to her mother. The shawl had belonged to her grandmother. Linda had let out the seams and several darts in the dress to make it fit. The dress was still short and tight. Her knee boots would effectively cover her calves. The shawl would sufficiently veil her bosom. "Anyone that thinks that I'm dressed inappropriately," Linda whispered, "can go to hell."

Linda covered her shoulders with her grandmother's shawl. It was embroidered with gilt gold thread. "Once we could afford such a luxury," Linda mused.

Two carriages pulled in front of the mansion. The patrón motioned for Linda to sit with him in the barouche. The two horses were festooned with black plumes. *La familia* squeezed into the larger landau. The carriages moved slowly toward Guaymas' central plaza.

"Will you talk to the priest today?" asked the patrón.

"Yes."

"Will you leave Guaymas today?"

"I am prepared to do so."

"Talk to the young priest, not the monsignor."

"I understand."

"It will be a heavy burden."

"Claro," said Linda.

“You are brave like your father.” The patrón grasped Linda’s hands. The shawl slipped off one shoulder. “I will think of you often.” He handed her a drawstring pouch.

“Pray for me often, then,” said Linda.

“I am not a religious man.”

“Still, your prayers will be heard.”

“I shall have someone light a candle every month.”

The carriages stopped in front of the San Fernando Cathedral. The patrón helped Linda alight. He moved to the landau to help his family. Linda’s eyes were drawn up the cathedral’s twin belfries. She gazed into the heavens. She genuflected.

The patrón and the lady entered the cathedral. Their children followed. Linda entered.

The monsignor led *la familia* down the aisle. Linda followed. The monsignor motioned for them to sit in the first aisle. It was not out of kindness. The patrón rented the first pew, though he seldom used it.

Linda did not see the young priest. The monsignor stepped up to the sanctuary. From the pulpit, he greeted the patrón and the congregation.

The narthex emitted a haunting psalm. A lavish casket followed by several mourners crept down the aisle. The lady gasped and began to cry. The oldest daughter also wept. The patrón held them close.

“There,” observed Linda, “the young priest.” A boyish cleric led the procession. The casket was parked in front of the sanctuary. The mourners moved to benches behind the family. The young priest positioned himself beside the monsignor. The young priest opened a Bible.

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God,” read the monsignor. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins...”

“This is an odd passage,” thought Linda. “Is he speaking of Jerusalem or Mexico?”

“... He will gather the lambs in his arms, He will carry them in his bosom...”

The young priest turned the Bible page and glanced at Linda. Their eyes locked. She nodded.

The mass continued. Linda was distracted and oblivious to the words. When the

monsignor called the believers forward for Holy Communion, Linda sidestepped to the young priest's line. Their eyes locked. He nodded.

Linda slipped out the side door during the concluding rites. She found a sole chair facing a grave pit. She sat in the chair and stared into the pit.

Soon the mourners surrounded Linda. Many touched her shoulders. Some touched her head. A few held her hands. She did not lift her gaze from the hole. The casket was lowered into the pit and covered with dirt.

Linda stared at the mound. In small groups, the mourners departed the cemetery. Eventually the patrón stepped in front of Linda. "I will take my family home now."

"Esta bien," said Linda. She was alone.

The young priest carried a stool. He set it next to Linda and sat down.

"I was sorry to learn of your mother's passing," said the priest. "You must be in great pain."

"The Lord comforts me." Linda patted the priest's hand.

"Yes, yes of course," blurted the priest.

"If you are wondering if I am ready, I am ready. Please tell me of my calling."

The priest glanced over his shoulder. He surveyed the cemetery. They were alone.

"Do you speak French?" asked the priest in French.

"Oui." Linda responded in French, "The Jesuit priests were excellent teachers, monsieur." A fleeting smile crossed her face. "I speak French and English, and can read Latin."

"Perfect," the priest continued in French, while thinking, "what a beautiful smile." He asked, "Your father was an aristocrat?"

"He was an officer in the Lancers of Toluca. Many of my Cortes ancestors were officers in the army."

"Good." He handed her a slip of paper and said, "This note will guide you to your contact. Memorize it. Destroy it. May I walk you home?"

"I am fine, father," said Linda in Spanish.

"Vaya con dios."

Linda left the cemetery. Her leg was aching. It would be a long walk home. She arrived. It was dark. *La familia* was asleep. She tiptoed to her room. She spackled the crack in the ceiling.

“I must hurry,” whispered Linda. “The tide will be ebbing soon.” She clutched her bag and departed the home of *la familia*.