

# THE SURRENDER OF SANTA FE

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Royal Fireworks Press  
Unionville, New York

*To my friend and mentor:*

*Patsy Johnson*

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Royal Fireworks Press  
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Unionville, NY 10988-0399  
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website: [rfwp.com](http://rfwp.com)

ISBN: 978-0-89824-396-3

Printed and bound in the United States of America using vegetable-based inks on acid-free, recycled paper and environmentally-friendly cover coatings by the Royal Fireworks Printing Co. of Unionville, New York.

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# CHAPTER 1



*Summer 1680*

Juan could not explain the nagging worry boiling in the pit of his stomach but knew he could no longer ignore it. He pulled his spirited young horse to an abrupt stop and listened, for something on the trail ahead hissed a warning in his ear. Looking around at the sun-baked New Mexico landscape, the fifteen-year-old Spanish boy saw nothing more menacing than the silvery green growth of high desert shrubs and trees. How could he explain the sudden stop or this uneasy feeling to his impatient military father?

Juan and the captain had left Santa Fe when the sky was stained with golden glints of a breaking sunrise. Rising up and dipping down on rugged trails that twisted and turned over mountains and around deep, raw canyons, they had been moving at a steady pace.

As Juan squinted into the blinding white sunlight flooding the trail ahead, he felt his horse quiver beneath him. Did Dichoso also sense danger waiting where the trail disappeared into the shadows of a dense growth of cottonwood trees?



Stiff and erect in his saddle, Juan's father Diego Ortegon de León, a captain in the Spanish army, spun his dapple-gray stallion Sincero around. With streaming black mane and tail, the horse trotted back as the captain called in his deep voice, "What is wrong? Why do you stop?"

One word, one stormy look, one hint of disapproval from this serious man whom Juan still barely knew had the power to destroy his confidence. Maybe someday he would get over his constant hunger to please his father and the fear that he never would. He swept his shoulder-length hair from his face with one hand and struggled to keep his voice calm. "Something ahead is not right. I feel trouble."

Captain Ortegon turned his weather-hardened face toward the trees. "Tesuque is near. Indians from that pueblo could be hiding, watching us."

Juan glanced at the sword and heavy Spanish gun resting in scabbards on his father's saddle and felt reassured. His father, a veteran soldier and Indian fighter, was prepared for trouble if it came.

The captain turned to his son. "There was no need to stop. We are wasting time."

Sincero danced impatiently as the two moved on in single file. Even though his father's words had been curt and sharp-edged, there had been no anger in the captain's voice. His father seldom showed anger. Instead, when Juan did something foolish or asked too many questions, the captain scowled with disapproval. Juan had come to dread his dark frown.

"Stay alert!" Captain Ortegon turned in his saddle to face his son following close behind. "Be ready for anything!" he ordered.

Juan listened to the muffled clapping of their horses' hoofs, chirping birds, small animals scurrying through crusty





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## CHAPTER 2



### *Tesuque*

Captain Ortegon and Juan allowed their sure-footed horses to move at their own pace as they picked their way up a narrow, steep trail to reach the Indian village of Tesuque. Surrounded by fields of crops, the old pueblo with its thick walls of stones covered with dried mud and straw, called *adobe*, blended into the brown and gray landscape of the flat, sagebrush-covered mesa.

Tesuque was a small pueblo compared to many of the multi-storied villages that housed hundreds of people in rooms connected like beehives. Reached by ladders, the upper floors of the square buildings were set a few feet back from the floor below to form terraces. The small, dark rooms, entered through trap doors in the ceilings, had narrow openings in the walls to let in air and light.

For hundreds of years, the peaceful Pueblo Indians protected themselves from the raids of roaming Apaches and Navajos by pulling up their ladders, then shooting arrows and throwing stones down on their tormentors. Spanish weapons had overwhelmed this age-old primitive defense.



Juan and his father rode quietly into the dusty *plaza*, keeping their horses at a calm, slow pace. Small, naked children stopped playing and stared at the intruders with wide-eyed curiosity. Indian women grinding corn into meal on the pueblo's terraces straightened up from their stones. Bare-footed and dressed in knee-length loose cotton garments, they rushed down to gather the children and hurry them up the ladders and out of sight.

A group of boys leaning against an earth-colored wall stared defiantly at the two riders, who reined their horses to a stop. Omtua, the leader of these youths, had refused to allow his friends to run off and hide like cowards.

An old Indian man wearing a cotton shirt and a kilt with a bright sash appeared from the entrance of an underground room in the center of the *plaza*. With his shoulder-length white hair flying, he limped toward them with labored steps.

Before he dismounted, Captain Ortegon extended his right hand palm forward, then raised it to the level of his face as a sign of friendship.

"I bring greetings to the honored men of Tesuque from his Excellency the Governor of Santa Fe. It is good to see you again, Obi," the captain said, recognizing the *cacique*, religious leader, of the pueblo.

The captain appeared relaxed and unconcerned, but Juan knew that his father's eyes were searching every corner of the pueblo for signs of trouble.

The *cacique* returned the sign of friendship and spoke in broken Spanish. "The people of my village welcome you," he said, exposing a black gap where his teeth had once been. The pride in his wrinkled face and his commanding presence left no doubt that he held a respected place in this community.









When the Spanish officer and his son disappeared down the trail, Obi summoned the men of the War Council, who gathered their youths before them. The elders had warned their men and boys not to make trouble with the Spaniards.

The boys had been hunting rabbits when they sighted the two riders alone on the trail. They intended only to watch them, for they knew that the sting of the Metal Man's anger was great. An attack on a Spaniard brought harsh punishment: beatings, time in dark dungeons, even hangings.

It was Catua, always excited, always too eager, who jumped without warning onto the trail. His screams had surprised his friends as much as the Spaniards, but then like floodwaters raging through an *arroyo*, hatred boiled in their blood, and they abandoned all caution and fear.

"The attack you made on the Spaniards was full of danger for our people," Obi roared at the boys. "They would hang not only you but many of our men if you harmed a Metal Man."

"Grandfather," Omtua spoke for the youths, "we meant only to watch them, but our great hatred rose up, and we could not stop it."

The men of the War Council mumbled and nodded their heads.

"Listen, my sons, you must be patient," Obi spoke with less anger. "Storm clouds gather. The time draws near. Soon there will be no Spaniards in our midst to make us their slaves. We no longer will build their churches and bow down to their God.

"Soon, very soon, our warriors will join the men of other villages and rise up to kill every Spaniard in our land, but for now we must not make them suspicious. We must keep our plans secret. Be patient, for our time of revenge grows near."

## CHAPTER 3



### *Don Pedro's Rancho*

Relieved to be free of the nagging sense of danger, Juan felt almost light-hearted as he followed his father up the trail. He lagged behind to watch herds of deer graze, long-legged jackrabbits bounce through the tall grass, and coiled rattlesnakes sun themselves on jagged rocks.

The setting sun began to color the sky deep purple and throw its fading light across the trees. The last weak rays of sunlight glittered gold and orange on the back of the captain's steel helmet as Juan urged Dichoso to gallop and catch up with his father. With saddles creaking and horses blowing, the two riders veered from the main trail onto a narrow path that led to don Pedro's *rancho*.

Captain Orregon, lost in his own thoughts, had not spoken since their visit to Tesuque. Now with slow deliberation, he muttered, "There have been rumors of unrest in the pueblos, even of a mass Indian uprising. There are always rumors. I usually do not waste time listening to them, but I am beginning to feel concern that these latest rumors may be correct. The old man Obi's words were meant to quiet my fears, but instead they greatly trouble me."



Juan did not speak, for he knew his father was not interested in his opinion. He had also felt the angry hatred and seen it on the Indians' faces like boiling black storm clouds blotting out the sun.

They rode over the crest of a steep rise in the trail and saw a sight so beautiful it could have been a fine painting. Don Pedro's vast *rancho* surrounded by tall white walls lay sprawled out below on a wide, flat plain of river bottomland. The shimmering Rio Grande River meandered on one side of the *rancho*, and tan and peach foothills rose up on the other. Ahead, the trail intersected a parched brown road that stretched along the river valley and linked the isolated *haciendas*, farms, of the Spanish colonists.

Don Pedro's *rancho* took its water from a deep canal leading from the river. Small ditches flowed from the main mother ditch like silver veins, moving river water into the fields and orchards. Cattle and sheep were watched over by Indian herders. They looked like small black specks as they grazed in the foothills below the blue mountains that towered behind them.

From inside the walls of the *rancho*, they heard faint howls of dogs, and Captain Ortegon pressed Sincero to a faster pace, with Juan on Dichoso following close behind. The sound of barking dogs grew louder as the wind whipped and whined against Juan's ears.

Without warning, the large dapple-gray Sincero somersaulted and crashed to the ground, throwing Captain Ortegon like a limp rag doll into the air before he fell and disappeared in tall, dry grass. Terrified, Dichoso shied and reared, but Juan managed to stay mounted as a loud crack that sounded like a snapping whip whizzed near his head.

"Sincero!" Juan cried out to his father's fallen horse.





The faithful Sincero lay dead. Juan could not see what had happened to his father but knew that someone at the *rancho* was shooting at him. As if in a dream, he stared through the dim twilight at men on galloping horses as they poured through an open gate and pounded toward him.

Juan leaped from the prancing, agitated Dichoso and landed on the ground with such a jolt that white sparks flashed before his eyes. He felt the ground quake with the approaching riders as he dropped to his hands and knees and crawled through the high brown grass. He finally fumbled across his father lying face down and unmoving.

“*Papá!*” Juan called out. Kneeling by the captain, he looked up into the grim faces of men on horses who now surrounded him.

“It is a boy,” hollered one of the riders.

“A Spanish boy,” spoke a crisp, deep voice.

Rising to his feet, Juan shoved his hair from his eyes and faced the dignified man with a powerful voice. By the elegance of his clothes, he knew it must be don Pedro Villarreal de Mendoza, *patron* of the large *rancho*.

“I am Captain Ortegon’s son,” Juan said, his gray eyes dark with worry as he looked at the man. His unsteady legs shook, but he spoke calmly despite his roiling anguish. “We were on our way to your *rancho*, *señor*. My father’s horse has been shot and killed, and my father lies on the ground hidden by the grass and does not move. I do not know how badly he is hurt or even if he still lives.”

Alarm flashed across don Pedro’s dark, intelligent face as he swung from his horse to the ground and rushed to the captain’s side. Beginning to regain consciousness, Captain Ortegon sat up with the help of don Pedro and Juan. His helmet gone, he brushed his fingers through his hair, slowly shaking his head to clear it.



“Don Pedro...,” Captain Ortegon whispered with great effort.

“Captain, are you badly hurt?” don Pedro asked.

“I do not think so,” the captain answered, rising slowly to his feet. “I was stunned by my fall, but I am not wounded, and no bones seem broken.”

Captain Ortegon glanced at his horse lying unmoving on its side, then turned away.

“Diego, I deeply regret that this thing happened. We have a small band of Apaches who bedevil us with their constant raids. They are so bold that they ride up to the *rancho* any time of the day or night to take our animals. In this dim light, my men mistook you for the Apaches.”

Beginning to recover, Captain Ortegon retrieved his helmet from the grass.

“Alonso, the captain will ride your horse. You ride behind José,” don Pedro ordered. A young Indian stepped up to hand the reins of his horse to the captain.

“You will take care of my horse? Someone will bring my saddle and things?” asked the captain as he took the reins from the servant.

“Of course,” don Pedro assured him.

Yelping dogs milled around the returning men as they entered the gate of don Pedro’s walled fortress. After they had ridden through the massive wooden doors into the wide, covered passageway, servants closed the gates and secured them with huge iron locks.

The riders dismounted and handed the reins of their horses to waiting servants, who led the animals to a stable facing a work *plaza* cluttered with shops, sheds, and pens of squawking chickens.



The captain and Juan followed don Pedro to the *casa principal*, main house. With thick walls of *adobe* blocks, each room faced out onto a large courtyard shaded by tall trees. Its flat roof extended over the square *patio* to form a porch supported by wooden posts.

“You will be comfortable in this room,” don Pedro said with a sweeping gesture to the open door of one of the guest rooms. “A servant will soon come to fetch anything you need. Of course, you will join my family for our evening meal.”

After don Pedro left, Juan looked around the simple but elegant room with ceiling beams made of peeled tree poles and windows with small panes of transparent, colorless mica. The walls were smooth white plaster, and the packed earth floor, covered with a thin layer of black dirt mixed with sand and animal blood, had been hand-polished until it shone like ebony.

There was a corner fireplace with a flagstone hearth and a bed large enough for two. A crucifix of dark wood hung on the wall above a small crimson rug with Indian designs.

Sinking down onto the bed, Juan held his head in his hands, haunted by the sight of the fallen Sincero. He glanced at his father, but the captain stood stiff and motionless with his hands cupped together behind his back, staring out the window at the *patio*.

Juan sighed. Would he ever understand this man? Maybe he expected too much too soon. Maybe things between them would get better in time. He had only met his father five months ago after a miserable trip across the ocean. He had been pampered before that, living a life of privilege in Spain with his wealthy, doting grandmother.





He straightened his shoulders. His grandmother was dead. Nothing could change that. He had to make the best of this new life...as hard as it was proving to be.

Juan needed to talk, needed to share his fears and his grief for Sincero, but his father, with a cold, detached look on his face, had retreated into his own thoughts. Turning his eyes sadly to the crucifix, Juan said nothing.