
A
COUNTERFEIT
OF DEATH

MURIAL ROBERTSON 3

By Sarah Ickes

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A Historical Mystery Series

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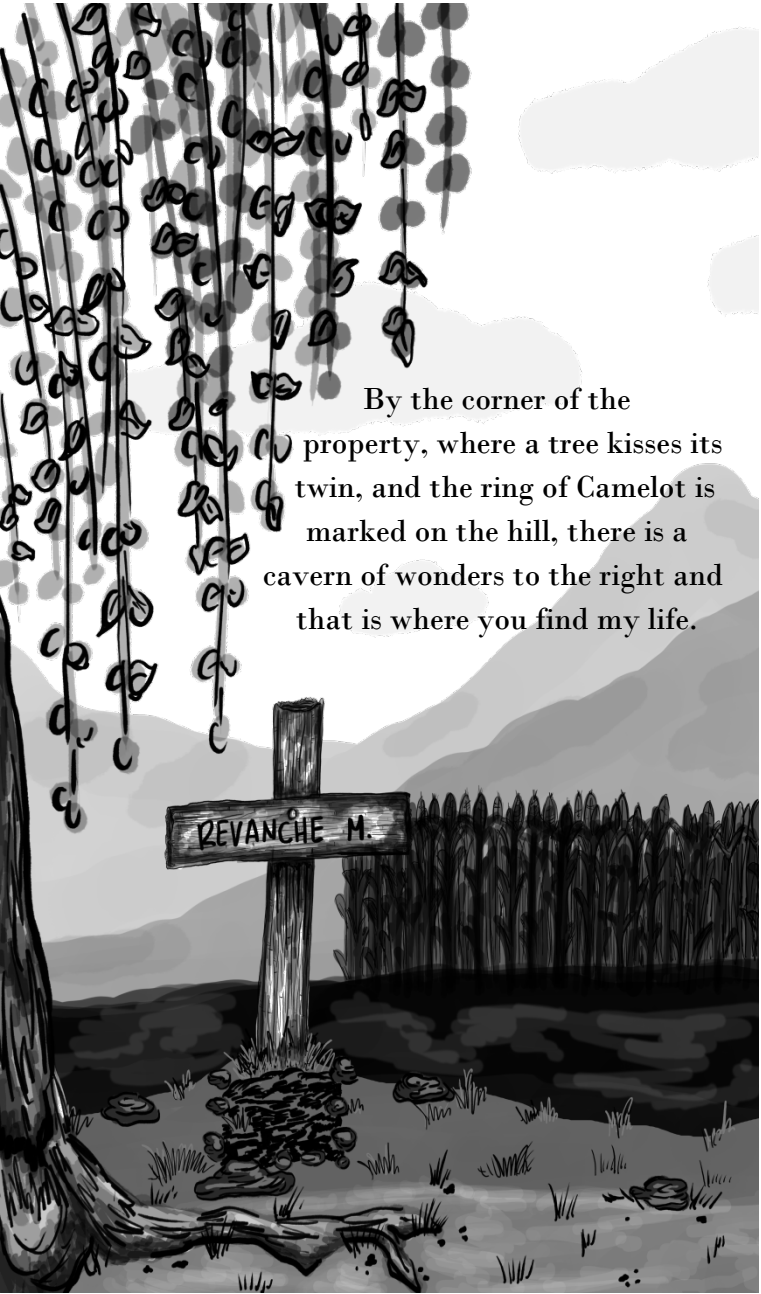
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By the corner of the
property, where a tree kisses its
twin, and the ring of Camelot is
marked on the hill, there is a
cavern of wonders to the right and
that is where you find my life.

Thank you to Carl C. and Sherry I. for
reading this before anyone else.

And yes, they really did use the word refrigerator.

JULY - OCTOBER 1887

Main Characters

Murial Robertson.....	main character, owns a farm
Walter Crancin.....	Murial's cousin, runs her farm, Jack's best friend
Jack Fulton.....	U.S. Deputy Marshal, son of Judge Lionel Fulton

Everyone Else

Katy.....	Murial's maid and cook
Shannon Drouther.....	Murial's older sister
Senator Drouther.....	Shannon's father-in-law and not friendly with Murial
Daniel Fulton.....	Jack's older brother, lawyer
Edgar Fulton.....	Jack's younger brother
Lionel Fulton.....	Jack's father, judge
Gretchen Fulton.....	Jack's mother
Dr. Faulkner.....	Fulton's family doctor
Dr. Tanner.....	Faulkner's son-in-law, doctor
Bridget Walsh.....	Murial's friend, works for Walter's parents
Fiadh Walsh.....	Bridget's mother, Crancin's cook
Cael Walsh.....	Bridget's father
Neil McGregor.....	Cael's non-blood brother

CHARACTERS CONTINUED...

Tyson McGrew.....	policeman in Waystown
Detective Andrew.....	Pinkerton Detective
Detective Hoss.....	Pinkerton Detective
Warrick.....	Farmer in Haverson
Daniel (Danny) Keller.....	runaway boy in Haverson
Chester.....	works for Sen. Drouther
Heather Brinkshaw.....	met Murial in Conestone, AZ
The Highwayman.....	a ghost
Otto Millerstone.....	Revanche's uncle
Caroline Millerstone.....	Revanche's aunt
Revanche.....	and I can't give the WHOLE book away!

Murial Robertson Series

The Serpent's Star
Angled for Revenge
A Counterfeit of Death

Vectra Tillerman Series

Written Wings

Vectra and Murial Cross-Over

The Nation's Grief

A Family's Masterpiece Series

A Family's Masterpiece

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Arizona – July 1887



This has to work. It is now or never. The man's eyes squinted against the blinding sun hanging high in the cloudless afternoon sky whilst trying to peer over the top of the ridge. Across the ravine, built into the shadowed side of the gorge below, three cave entrances had been blasted into the steep rock wall. Man-made ramps led up to the openings, wide enough for both animals and humans to walk up and down in a seemingly never-ending line. *All will be lost if this does not work. No pressure.* His hands grew increasingly hot leaned upon the large boulder he was using for cover. For their plan to succeed, it was imperative to remain undetected by the numerous guards posted all along the narrow gorge floor.

A piece of his dark brown hair fell across his face, taking out part of his vision as the sun baked him like a pie. Beads of sweat poured down his neck, soaking his filth-caked shirt under a dust-coated vest. Their original colors had been red and black respectively, although no one could tell that now by their ragged appearances. Beside his left leg, concealed near his boot by means of un-blooming beargrass, a canteen silently called out his name. He had triumphantly

ignored its lure for hours; however, the heat was beginning to weaken his resolve and he reached over to pick up the familiar container.

The feeling of the warm water stung his dry lips, but was welcomed by his parched throat. His finger gripped around the dried out leather covering he sewed on about a month before. Replacing the cap back onto the rounded canteen, the twenty seven year old man quietly shuffled his boots amidst the rocks. *My aching feet are about to go numb.* Grumbling under his breath, the man returned to observe scores of workers hauling empty bags into the caves, only to reappear with the same bags overfilled minutes later. Nearby carts were loaded as much as the mules could pull in order to reach the wagons patiently waiting at the south end of the ravine.

Like hawks on prey, well-armed guards stood as though they were statues flanking each cavern's mouth while also running alongside of the rhythmic transporting of goods. Grunts and groans sounded out from the unbroken pace of the laborers just as a whistle blew into the air. In an instant, pickaxes and shovels were cast to the ground and bags were plopped onto carts without any care. The time had come for lunch to be served, giving them an over-earned break from working their hands to the bone under the direct sun. As water was being passed around in various tin cups, to the delight of all of the working men there, an elongated line began to form by the chuck wagon with no sense of direction.

The man behind the boulder studied the pattern movements of the guards, trying to decipher their schedule of replacements and areas being watched. Since the wind was blowing towards him, the man decided to try sniffing the air out of curiosity as to what the cook had prepared. Much to

his displeasure, his nose picked up on a stench coming from behind him rather than from the beans and bread far below. Squinching up his face in revolt at the pungent body odor, he swiveled around to see his partner gingerly hopping over the enlarged limestone rocks to join him. Although he had tried to post himself downwind, the directionless gusts swirling about the top of the gorge was making that task rather difficult. *He smells worse than a pile of horse manure in the sun for two straight days.*

“You really should consider getting a bath before going through with this plan, Roger.”

“You are no sweet rose either. Besides, where do you suggest I go to acquire one?” Roger gestured his hands toward the Arizona desert landscape painted as far as the eye could see. Once he was satisfied that his point had been made, he wiped his sweating forehead with a half-smudged handkerchief. “So, what have you found out so far?”

“That we are going to be dead if this does not come out alright.” The man scratched at his cleft chin, feeling the annoying stubbles of hair growing through his irritated skin. *Well, that is what I get for trying to shave dry.* He knew that it would not end well, but it was a flaw of his. A clean-shaven face, except for a mustache disguising his upper lip, was what he had grown accustomed to. And after being out on the trails for two weeks, he decided that the risk was worth it. *And now, I am paying the price.*

“Do you still believe that tonight will be the best?”

“If we are going through with the current plan, then yes it will be. The moon should be nearly invisible and will provide us with a nice blanket of darkness for you to get down there undetected. I just...well...”

“What is it now?” Roger’s patience had been wearing thin with the man’s need for certainty before they were to

put their plan into action. His partner had already delayed the schedule for more than four whole days because he wished to study their enemy closer. He could understand the man's need for caution to some degree, however, the clock was ticking and the stakes were beyond all measure. "I had no issue waiting a little longer to be given extra coverage from an almost new moon, but we have to get this done. You know that as much as I do. Time is short."

"That may be true, but we cannot afford to run in there blindly; especially considering the bottom fact that we did not contact my supervisors before following that mule seller out here to who-knows-where."

"Wait a moment; I thought you said you lived out here for three years when you worked with my cousin." Roger raised three fingers in the air to prove that he could at least count correctly.

"And I did. But I never rode passed Newman's spread on the other side of that mountain range. There was no reason too. So I am not all that familiar with the terrain in this area." The man shook his head in frustration. *A boy is what I have strapped to my ankle. A boy with only vengeance in his mind and no other intelligence to counteract his stubbornness.*

"Well I think that you are just yellow-bellied and chicken." Roger stared down at a flowering Blackfoot Daisy plant forging its way up by his right foot. With one swift move, he stomped the white and yellow flowers underneath the heel of his dusty boot. "That is what you are. A Funk. A pigeon-livered..."

"How many times do I have to tell you to keep your trail as minimal as possible? You don't think someone can track us when you do that?"

"By the time they do, we will be long gone with the evi-

dence we need.”

“That is not the point.”

“I made sure to keep my foot prints reduced by sticking to the rocks, did I not?” Roger watched his partner roll his eyes with exhaustion at his impudent attitude. They had only known one another for three weeks and he was already experiencing the looks of irritation he normally received after knowing someone for seven. “Relax. Everything will work out in the end.”

“I still say we should have waited to send a message to Marshal Heathrow before following the mule seller and his mulada.”

“And if we would have gone back to Conestone to send the telegraph, then the trail would have died again. This will work, I tell you.”

“That is a fine sentiment; however, you were not the one who spent over a year trying to track down a singular lead to no avail. And do not forget the reason as to why we are here. Your cousin’s killer is amongst these men and will probably kill again, given the chance.” The man’s hand felt the bottom left exterior side of his vest. He could feel the photograph crinkle slightly against his shirt through the interior pocket and a small sigh escaped his lips with relief. *Whatever happens, I cannot allow them to get their hands on her photograph.*

“Why do you continue to pat the side of your stomach with your hand? Do you have an ache or...” Roger broke off his question as they both heard voices shouting from the bottom of the gorge. Inching their heads around the side of the boulder, to see what the cause of so much commotion was, Roger glanced over at his partner’s pocket in curiosity.

“HEY, STOP THAT!” One of the guards shouted the order at two mine workers starting a fight near the far

corner of an enormous tent. No sooner had the words spilled from the guard's teeth, did the workers merge into a sea of arms and legs fighting it out in a massive saloon-style brawl. "I SAID STOP IT!" The same burly guard pulled out a whip from a loop around his belt. His skilled hand snapped the long leather cord into the air with an earsplitting sound causing an immediate pause in the donnybrook. "ENOUGH! GET BACK TO WORK. BREAK IS OVER." His raised voice reverberated off of the gorge's walls with an even larger sound than what came out of his mouth.

"We might want to stay in the clear of that man." Roger removed his wide brimmed black hat to mop up the waterfall of sweat on the top of his head. Despite him always telling everyone he enjoyed hot weather, Roger did not care to be roasted alive. His plastered hair's vibrant red was dulled to almost a murky brown and his green eyes held no care for anything.

"There are six guards on the upper level, with eight more on the floor of the ravine and a guard standing on either side of the mine entrances." The man tried ignoring his partner's obvious statement. "It appears to have been the same set-up since we arrived, so the chances are fairly good that they will remain that way tonight."

"So, are we set?"

"I believe we are." The man glanced over at Roger's eager face. He hated to admit that the young man, only three years his junior, was better than some people he had teamed up with in the past. Regardless of his strong-headed ways and judgmental attitude, Roger's draw was fast, his aim fair, and his reflexes quick. "Roger, we may not make it out of this alive." Perhaps the man should not have been so forward in his words, but time was short and formalities were a waste in a situation such as theirs.

“I know that.” Roger’s answer remained too causal and weightless for the man’s liking.

“No, you need to hear me.” The man looked over at his partner. He understood the full gravity of their predicament and wanted to make it clear to Roger on how their future was looking. “There is only one way in and one way out. That is the beast’s lair you will be walking into down there.” His voice paused to make sure the message was reaching through to the blond-haired boy. “I can only do what I can to help you from up here. Because once I have fired my rifle, I will have given my position away.” *And also be dead.*

Roger stared directly back at the man, locking their stares into one. “I understand.” He placed his right hand on his partner’s shoulder. “Believe me, I do.”