

Back to Santa Fe

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Prologue and First Chapter Excerpt...

Prologue

1981, Northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico

A sudden gust of afternoon wind raked over the dark green water, sending a patch of ripples towards a rocky shoreline. It carried them right up and over the feet of a boy of ten or eleven, sitting on an old waterlogged stump, revealed when the dry season lowered the level of the reservoir. He laughed as the ripples tickled his legs and feet and began to swing them back and forth.

A woman's voice called down from over the top of the steep, bank, "Sullivan, get up here, Lunch is ready!"

"Okay, Ma," he shouted back. Sullivan reluctantly pulled his feet from the reservoir and shook the water off before pulling his muddy sneakers back on. As he stood, he turned back to the water to see how the snow-covered Las Truchas peaks were reflected in it, upside down. They winked like stars below the brown, Juniper-studded hills that ran into the shoreline.

"Here I come," he called as he struggled up the slope. "Where's Maggie? Have you got her?"

Chapter One

Fifteen years later...

"At least try to keep 'im quiet! Can you do that for me?" The desk sergeant, Ben Ortega, raised both hands in frustration and gave up on the booking form. There was barely enough desktop left uncovered to find a spot to write anyway. The morning had already been a disaster and now, here was Sullivan. Second time this month.

The arresting officers, Garcia and Sandoval, really had their hands full just keeping their arrest from charging the desk, let alone explaining the fine points of booking etiquette to him for the umpteenth time. The man they had cuffed a half an hour earlier towered over them both. Red faced, wild black hair flinging sweat, the man was a menace. Sergeant Ortega knew Garcia had pumped iron since a teenager in the barrio, but it wasn't doing him much good. He was slowly losing the struggle with Sullivan. Officer Sandoval was really no help at all. In a firm, control voice, Sandoval told the struggling man, "Sullivan, you've got to calm down. We're going to book you if it takes ten of us — it won't be pretty."

No change at all. Sullivan continued to struggle. Sandoval, nervously fingered his nightstick and looked

back at Garcia. Garcia, drew his own nightstick from the loop on his belt, and then attempted to put it across Sullivan's throat.

In a flash of surprising speed, Garcia found himself lying flat on the floor while the big guy, arms cuffed behind him, began to drag Sandoval over to the desk. Sandoval, forgetting his nightstick, leaned back with his full weight against the cuff chain. He heard his heels slipping across the freshly waxed floor.

Bellowing, "It's not right," Sullivan bellied up to the desk with a final lurch, rocking it back. It even rattled the ultra-cool sergeant, who found his arresting officers either picking themselves off the floor, or just standing there tugging weakly against the cuffs.

The sergeant looked calmly into a boiling red face, just inches from his own. He then unsnapped his MACE holster keeper and slid the aerosol can out so the label could be seen. Keeping it firmly in his grip, he laid his hand down on the desk and pushing out his chin said quietly, "Sullivan, if you don't shut up, I'll shut you up myself." It appeared to him that Sullivan's anger management classes last month had accomplished little. The big man bent down to look the sergeant in the eye. Sgt. Ben Ortega stood, rising to his full 5 foot seven inch height and put his forehead against the angry man's forehead. In the same quiet voice, Ortega said, "Come on, cousin... we've all got a job to do."

The six and a half foot tower named Sullivan Derrick Ortega, simply deflated... muttering. The two arresting officers quickly flanked him in seconds, wearing their best "in charge" faces. Sullivan looked down at the two on either side of his shoulders.

"No hard feelings, okay guys?"

"I guess not, Sully," said Garcia, watching Sgt. Ortega's eyes.

"Me neither," said Sandoval, letting the smallest trace of a smile find its way to his face.

"Sullivan... listen cousin, you're going to have to learn how to keep your temper under control. This is getting serious." Sgt. Ortega eased back into his chair.

As Sullivan began to protest, he simply cut it off by waving a finger in the air in his face. "What would your mother and sister — God rest them — think of all this?"

Sergeant Ortega waited for a response and when not a single grunt was forthcoming, he repeated it, "What?"

Sullivan, already shrunken back to his normal size, slumped more and muttered something, his head hanging, eyes focusing on the mess of paperwork on the desk.

"I didn't hear that, Vato," said Ortega.

Sullivan, glanced up sharply, repeating, "My guess is that they wouldn't like it much. Okay, Ben?"

Ortega looked over at Garcia. "Let's start over... why have you cuffed Sullivan and brought him here today?"

Garcia was all too happy to repeat the story, now adding emphasis whenever he used the words "out of control" and "public nuisance". As he spoke a few staffers rose from their desks and moved a bit closer to catch all the dirt.

"... the call came in from the security office of the State Capitol building. It was the whole statue thing again. Officer Jurado told the dispatcher they'd better get a couple of cars over right away, Sullivan Ortega was going to chop it down this time, he'd brought a chain saw. Six security officers tried to restrain him, including two State Troopers but they couldn't hold out long." Garcia told the Sergeant how their attempts to talk him down to reason resulted in his firing up the chainsaw, slinging chain oil across State Officer Baca's chest.

He continued, explaining that when Garcia and Sandoval arrived in their cruiser, they saw Sullivan standing in front of a huddled group backed right up against the sculpture's flanking wall. Sullivan was swinging his roaring chainsaw left and right, as it belched out blue smoke. All the noise bounced off the glass and laid stone while the press photographer from the New Mexican fired off shot after shot. Sullivan was

yelling, 'I can't let this go on any longer! It's him or me!' "At first, when Sullivan saw us approaching, I had my hand on my nightstick. Sullivan began to laugh, but at least he shut down the saw..." Garcia waited for a response, then added, "Oh, then Officer Baca scrambled out of the way shouting, 'You owe me, Sullivan! This was a brand new uniform, too!'... or something like that."

Sandoval sniggered a little over that memory and Garcia shot him a look. He continued, adding, "so, we get the whole crew up off the ground and Sullivan lays down the damn chain saw. I decided that we'd better cuff him — you know how he gets — but he didn't like the idea much."

Sergeant Ortega stopped Garcia's story and asked Sullivan, "Did you hurt anyone, Cousin?"

Sullivan shook his head slowly without looking up.

"So go on, officer." Ortega pressed Garcia who recounted the trouble getting him into the cruiser, getting him out of the cruiser, getting him to stop yelling, etc., etc. "...and we finally got him inside. You know the rest."

Ortega nodded, asking, "Who issued the complaint this time? The State Mounties?"

Garcia shook his head "It was only Castillo and Chavez. They were okay."

"How about the Capitol Security Chief?" Again, Garcia shook his head.

"He said it wasn't a big problem if you'd talk some sense into him. Sullivan didn't actually damage the statue."

Sandoval said, "We've got the chainsaw out in the trunk. Want me to go get it?"

The tired sergeant shook his head and replied, "Later." Ortega's eyes rose to the ceiling where one of the water stained acoustic tiles was still threatening to fall right on his head, asking, "so is anyone, or either of you two going to swear out a complaint?"

Sandoval was about to speak when Garcia cut him off, saying, "No sergeant, we're okay and he's cooled down."

"Okay... Garcia, take the cuffs off him."

Sullivan turned a baleful glance at the young cop as he stepped behind him. Garcia made sure he was well away from Sullivan's arms as he reached out and turned the key in its hole. With a click, the cuff fell away and he reached out to unlock the other one when Sullivan's hand closed over his like a steel machine vise.

"Ow! Come on, Sullivan. Let me unlock this" he said as Sullivan relaxed his grip. Garcia folded his cuffs into their belt holster, then asked, "By the way, Sullivan, you've got to show me that move you laid me out with, it's a good one!"

Sullivan nodded and replied with a growl, "You better hope you see me comin' first, Garcia." He brought his hands around and began rubbing his sore, bruised wrists. Garcia moved back to a safe distance.

"Go ahead you two, find some criminals!" Sergeant Ortega added, "... or at least write some speeding tickets!"

After the two left and the curious office staff had returned to their work, Ortega asked "Did you have a few, Sully?"

"No... not yet." With all the fight out of him, at least for the moment, his normal color returned: two shades lighter red, no bulging veins in his neck or forehead.

Ortega looked Sullivan up and down, staring hard into his red-rimmed, deep blue eyes "What are we going to do with you, Cousin? You're getting to be a handful!"

Sullivan nodded then looked down at a broken floor tile beneath his right foot. His dark hair hung in long, sweaty black clumps along his collar and his jacket was a mess, its right sleeve hanging by only a few remaining stitches.

"You wanna talk about it?" Ortega asked him.

"Not really, Ben. Besides, you know why I was there in the first place."

The sergeant replied, "that's true enough, but Sullivan ... you're not gonna win this one. Haven't you figured that out yet?"

The sergeant stepped out from behind the desk and around to the front, where Sullivan stood rubbing his wrists. He was almost a full head taller and maybe twice the width of the sergeant, but Ortega put his arm around him and said quietly, "This won't bring her back, Sullivan and it won't do you any good, either." He added, "You'll take care of Baca's uniform?"

Sullivan wrinkled up his face and nodded... slowly.

Ortega added "Say... Rosa just finished a tamalada with the neighbor ladies, why don't you come on over for a good meal tonight?"

Sullivan smiled and looked into his friend's face. His eyes shone as he replied. "You know me, Ben. I've never passed up a fresh tamal!"

"Then get your raggedy butt out of my sight 'til tonight! Come by around seven." He slapped Sullivan on his back and as he walked through the turnstile, back around behind the desk he remembered something, then called out, "I could use some Tecates!"

Sullivan nodded as he pushed the glass door open and without looking back called, "I'll trade 'em for my Stihlsaw!"

Sullivan's boots echoed back along the corridor, the sound jingling and rattling against framed photographs of the past four or five decades that hung there. At the end of the hall, the heavy, green glass doors opened silently. Sullivan blinked in the full light of the high-altitude sunshine, then he thought about Ben Ortega. Ben always called him, cousin. Sullivan knew they weren't related at all, not even a remote relation. But he also knew that it gave Ben some kind of reassurance or something, to call him that, so he just went along with it. He figured it probably began when Ben's son called him that in school, as a joke. He didn't mind, but he wondered if it might someday get Ben into some kind of trouble? With friends like him...

He knew he'd behaved like an idiot. A public nuisance. Probably worse, but he couldn't keep his anger at that asshole sculptor under wraps. *Somebody has to show them what he did to her*, he said to himself, *the asshole didn't even show at her funeral*. He felt like roaring up at the birds overhead, but stifled it. For the time being.

He pulled a silver cell phone out of his pocket. It almost disappeared in his palm. He punched the taxi numbers in from memory. Sitting down upon a sunny bench, near a bronze statue of some Pueblo Indian women with water jars, he waited for a reply. *Water*

jars, Sullivan thought, what a laugh! Should be poker chips, or rolls of quarters for the slots.

The sun was warm on his face, but he watched the traffic pass by with a scowl. *Tomorrow. Tomorrow.* Sullivan's mind raced ahead, leaving the day's battle behind as it prepared for the battle tomorrow. The cab pulled up and stopped. He climbed in, smiled at the driver, Ernie, and told him where he'd left his truck.

Their conversation started right in about the new Lobos coach and whether there was any chance for the rest of the season with Thompson out. This continued the conversation started the last time he'd left his truck somewhere other than where he was. Despite a decent attempt, they reached the parking lot off the Capitol Plaza quickly, and so were unable to solve the ongoing basketball crisis.

"Next time," Sullivan called to Ernie as the cab pulled away through the lot. He admired his ride, standing there in all its glory.

Sullivan pulled open the driver's door with a rusty groan that shook the whole truck. It was an F150 that had seen too few better days and a whole bunch of rough ones. It was fully jacked up, 4X4 V8, with wide, heavily lugged, mud tires. Over-sized black mud flaps were the only touch of luxury the truck could boast. Each flap featured a big, chrome Shamrock. The body had once been painted a nice dark green, but now, with

the bed and the front right fender in primer grey and the surface blasted by sand, sun and hail, it looked more like the color of a warship in battle camouflage.

He planted a boot on the bent nerf bar beneath the driver's side and swung up into his seat. It took a few moments adjusting his backside to find the comfortable spot and dodge the spring coming up through the vinyl. Wiping the condensation from his breath off the inside of the windshield with his hand, he turned the ignition key. There was a low growl. He turned it again. Once more, it growled, but this time, it also coughed and on the next turn, the engine roared to life — a deep, throaty rumble. He patted the dashboard, with its silly Leprechaun bobble-head jiggling and smiling like an idiot and said, "thanks, darlin', I promise I'll take a look at that alternator for ya."

Throwing the floor shifter forward, Sullivan eased out the clutch and the truck lurched forward out of its space. He turned out of the lot, down the alley, up the little street and onto Cerrillos Road, narrowly missing a startled family in a rented Lexus SUV with Texas plates. They were still rubbing the sting of his stinking blue exhaust cloud out of their eyes when he disappeared around the corner up ahead.

Two hours later, still stuck behind the desk, Sergeant Ben Ortega grumbled under his breath about that fool, Dixon, who never got his work finished before his shift was over. He stamped the last form and added it to the out pile, then got up and stretched. He wandered over to the coffee urn, but one sniff and he decided against it, grimacing. Cup in hand, he walked back to his seat behind the desk.

It was only another hour before Arbogast would relieve him, so he rechecked his own work. His face was still flushed from the drubbing the captain gave him regarding his lenience with Sullivan. The man was a handful, but Ben knew he hurt. Sullivan had been hurting since his sister's fatal accident, bringing him home from California to an empty house. Sullivan didn't deal with emotional pain very well, but at least he could always eat. Ben reached for the daybook on the desk. He ran his finger down the margin of the daybook, So far, so good.

Halfway through the list, he heard Sandoval's sniggering laugh and looked up to see the two approaching on either side of Sosimo Xavier Fuentes. Named after a famous 1800s lawman from down South near Belen; the ancient drunk hung like an empty, stank gunny sack between the two cops.

As the smell made it over the front of the desk, Ben called out, "that's close enough! You know where the tank is."

Garcia grinned, saying, "Here's your criminal Sarge! They caught this anejo peeing into the fountain in the Sena Plaza! You should have seen the turistas scatter!" Sandoval started giggling again, so the sergeant waved them both away with a gesture towards the lock up.

He began filling out the booking form. This was so routine it practically filled itself out and he wondered why the old man's bladder had such a predilection towards public art. And chubby tourist ladies from the Midwest, let's not forget them. Fuentes would sleep this one off and by next week, he'd be checking in again. No real harm done, though. Ben began to smile, thinking about those ladies in their stylish, new Santa Fe clothes and how Fuentes gave them something to remember about the "City Different."

Ben was still smiling as he walked out into the sunny parking lot, his jacket over his arm, and Sullivan's big greasy chainsaw in his other hand. He thought of what he'd say to Sullivan to bring him out a little more. Ben wanted to know why Sullivan hated that Keane so much. He figured it had something to do with Maggie Ortega's accident. Maybe Sullivan was

confused about it. At least Rosa's tamales would help settle him down.