

# *Juárez: Seeds in the Desert*

By Anthony LaRose

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any connection to real persons are purely coincidence.

Text copyright © 2015 Anthony LaRose. All rights reserved.

This book may not be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the author. He can be reached at [tonytronic2000@yahoo.com](mailto:tonytronic2000@yahoo.com).

Cover design by the author.

## **Prologue:**

Since the early 1990s, over 4000 women have gone missing in the metropolitan area of Juarez, Mexico.

U.S. factories line the border between Juarez and El Paso, TX. Some women are forced to walk several miles on barren, unlit roads to get to their jobs. Their pay is often less than \$4 per day.

Mexico's police are considered among the most corrupt in the world.

Each year, for decades, Mexico has received hundreds of millions of dollars from the United States to fight crime.

According to Amnesty International, the "violence against women and impunity in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua City" is "of complex nature involving many different forms of crimes and perpetrators, with widespread institutional failings to prevent and punish those really responsible."

Forensic pathologists from Argentina and the United States have assisted Mexican authorities with the investigation into the "women of Juarez."

The murders continue.

## Part I: Night Falls on Juárez

### The Gringo

Matt could sleep through the phone ringing, but he couldn't ignore the crying. He sat up in bed, and listened to his mother-in-law talk in a low voice while intermittently bursting into a loud wail. He looked over and saw that his wife Maria was not next to him. He sat up just as he heard her voice; she must have taken the phone. Normally, she spoke slowly so he could always understand her, but now she spoke at a rapid pace. He picked out several words, "*¿Cuándo?... ¿Dónde?... ¡Jesús!*"

The voices grew louder as the door creaked open. From the top of the stairs he could see his wife's eyes had welled with tears. There was only one phone in the house and Maria was holding the receiver with both hands as if somehow that might change what she was hearing. Her mom sat beside her, head buried in her hands, on an outdated 1970s era metal kitchen chair. Its vinyl seat had worn through years ago. She sobbed quietly, each breath punctuated with a low whimper. Maria's voice shook, "*Tío, dígame otra vez. ¿Dónde está mi hermana? ¿A qué hora se termina los peseros? ¿Y la policía?*" Matt listened to his wife question her uncle. Someone had not come home. When she realized he had come downstairs, she looked at him. "It's Daniela," Maria said between sighs, "she's missing."

Matt took the phone from his wife and listened to his Uncle Miguel. He was calling them in Oaxaca—long distance from Juarez, an expensive call. Maria's sister, Danni, should have been home at least two hours ago, and everyone was worried. Sometimes the buses ran late, but she had a cell phone and certainly she would have called by now.

An hour earlier, while Miguel pondered what to do, his wife had set the dinner table with the help of their children, Pedro, twelve and Consuela "Connie" eight. They were incredibly excited about tonight's dinner. Fresh bread always accompanied meals and since they were celebrating, a large bottle of Coca-Cola they would share with their cousin, and the children suspected, probably cake or ice cream to follow. On top of the round, rustic wooden table, they placed a clean white tablecloth sewn from maguey fibers. The design was the image of the Aztec calendar. The place settings were

arranged meticulously. The china was older, but well kept—something Alejandra prized. “You don’t know how many beautiful things you will get in life,” she had told them, “so take care of those that you do get.” The silverware was only stainless steel, but it all matched and was shined to its original luster. Like many in Mexico, they didn’t have many things, but they cared for what they had. The uncle told Matt how Danni’s cousins couldn’t wait for their special meal and some play time with her. “¿Dónde está Daniela?” They asked repeatedly. “¿Si no está aquí pronto, vamos a comer su comida!” They said playfully, threatening to eat their cousin’s dinner and dessert. Danni had only lived with them for a few months, but the younger children adored her. From the day she arrived they got along well. She shared a room with Connie who loved having an older cousin—a teenager no less!—she could look up to. She had even brought her old Harry Potter books with her which the children cherished like gold. They both could read on their own, but they loved how Daniela would make faces and change her voice with each character. When she thought it was a scary part, she would jump up, raise her hands over her head, lean toward the children and speak in the deepest voice she could muster. Then, the three of them would laugh and roll on the bed. They adored her. Daniela had returned these feelings ever since moving to Juarez. Having been the youngest child in Oaxaca, she loved having younger children around. Before being hired at the plant, she would meet them after school every day and walk them home. She wanted to be sure they were safe. Sometimes she would buy them *dulces*, small sweet candies, at one of the nearby corner markets. She could scarcely afford it, but she loved how it brightened their faces and she knew that once she found a new job she would be OK.

Daniela’s aunt and uncle had tried their best to carry-on as normal. Better not to alarm Pedro and Connie. “Go wash your hands for supper. God will not let you eat with dirty hands!” she warned the little one. They rushed to the kitchen to wash their hands, and avoid their mother’s dark stare. “Have some Coke and stay in the kitchen until we are ready,” she ordered them, and they knew to obey. She watched as her husband repeatedly dialed her niece’s cell phone number. He got only her voice mail.

“*Hola, no puedo tomar tu llamado...* leave a message and God Bless.” While Danni’s failure to answer was troublesome, it was not unusual. While she was always responsible to answer her phone, cell phone service in the area was notoriously unreliable, sometimes shutting

down for hours at a time. They hoped that was the case. Miguel could feel Alejandra's stare. "Don't worry," he told her, "she will be alright. I'm sure it is just the lousy phone company." It was no secret that MexCom had a monopoly on cell phone transmission in Mexico, and service had never been a priority. He and the entire family prayed that was the reason they couldn't reach her.

### *El Investigador*

Detective Fernandez felt the arid desert air against his face. He looked around; it was almost completely dark. He could make out a few boulders and some sage brush. He reached into his jacket pocket and took out his lighter. He searched his other pockets for cigarettes; they were empty. Damn. He held the lighter in front and struck it. It sparked but did not light. He tried again. Nothing. He felt like he was sweating; he wiped his brow. It was dry. He felt a chill as a warm, dry breeze struck the back of his neck and blew out the flame on his lighter. He also heard a voice and spun around. "What? Hello? Who's there?" His eyes strained in the pitched black. He struck his lighter again, just a spark. He jumped when something tugged at his pants and reached into the darkness. Nothing. Where the hell am I?

He clicked the cover of his lighter open and closed several times. "C'mon, c'mon," he whispered. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the small yellow flame. "Amén." He had barely said the word when he saw the face of a young girl. Her face was dirty and dark lines of dried blood streaked from her hair to her chin. She stared, unblinking, her eyelids cut off. "When?" He thought he heard her say, before the dry blood moistened and began to flow down her face and onto his lighter. He dropped it and started to run. Dozens of tiny hands tugged at his clothes. He sprinted through the darkness as fast as he could. Hands tore at caught his jacket; he let it fall off. Voices whispered behind him, "Berta. Julia. Sandra. Carmen. Blanca." He placed his hands over his ears and ran as fast as he could. After just a few steps he stumbled. "I don't understand," he shouted, "I don't understand!" He regained his footing and sprinted on, aluminum cans clanking under his every step. He thought he had pulled ahead of his tormentors when someone or something grabbed his tie, spinning him 180 degrees. The light blinded him. The desert was on fire and an orange and yellow tower of flame ignited the night sky. The voices got louder,

“Aida! Paulina! Laura! Claudia!” Hundreds of women and girls surrounded him. Some were naked, more wore only ripped clothes. Many were covered in blood; some held their own hearts in their hands. One girl held her hands crossed over her chest while blood dripped from where her breasts had been sliced off. Several tiny girls held his arms. They are just babies! They all looked up at him with unblinking eyes. He pulled against them, but couldn’t move. He tried to scream, but the dry air choked his words. From the fire came a dark shape. The hundreds of girls who had been shouting their names now stopped. Slowly they parted. The figure came closer and closer but the backlighting of the fire hid its face. The dark silhouette stopped just a few inches from his face. The little girls let go of his arms. He reached to touch the face in front of him. A hand quickly grabbed his wrist and forced something into his hand. It was his lighter. The figure raised his hand up between the two of them. He struck the lighter. It spouted a large flame that illuminated the visage in front of him.

“NOW!” she whispered.

Marcos shook as his cell phone vibrated across the kitchen counter. He blinked and looked around, glad no one had seen him and relieved something had woken him from his nightly torment. Another one. When will they go away? He rubbed his eyes and ran his hand down his face. He didn’t bother to look at his watch. He knew that in Juarez nothing good happens after 6pm. “Just forget it, Marcos,” his wife ordered. “It can wait,” she said even before he began to rise from the dinner table. It gave him pause. In truth, he’d love to ignore it. He ached for a fresh, home cooked meal and a quiet night in front of the television but he also had wanted to be the “*comandante de los detectives*” since joining the force almost 20 years ago. With the title came a better salary and a coveted gold badge, but, also the *pinche* pager. “Text messaging” his daughters always corrected him. He was on call 24/7, even on vacation he had been summoned back to Juárez. Still, he knew how much better it was than being on patrol and with his wife working as a teacher, he was able to own a modest home, and, more importantly, the kids could go to private school. They, he was determined, would not have to labor as underpaid, underappreciated public servants, or worse. How many young prostitutes have you arrested, Marcos? No, his daughters would be doctors or lawyers. With God’s help, maybe they would go to Spain after they graduated.

He was doing well by most standards in Mexico, especially Juárez. No, he could not ignore it. It was his job, for better or worse. He slid back his seat, a rustic pine dinner chair with leather covers, a wedding gift from his in-laws. Before he could rise, his wife handed him his cell phone, a distressed look on her face. She made a point not to read the message. He read the text: *una joven está desaparecida* [a young girl is missing] and lowered his head.

Another one. How many was that now, 6-7 this month? Wasn't it the second this week? A thousand since I became a cop? There were so many that he had lost count. The faces still invaded his mind regularly, but the names had started to blend together. He could remember some, Marta Gómez, thirteen years old, disappeared while walking home from school, middle of the day. Was it a classmate? Angelina Leal, missing after catching a taxi home from a movie. She chose not to ride the bus with her friends. Her parents had given her extra money for a taxi because they thought it would be safer. The boyfriend, he was still the prime suspect, wasn't he? Just a few weeks ago, her name was Carmen Sánchez, or was it Santos, Salinas? He stopped. He knew it would only drive him mad. He was tired, but it wasn't the normal fatigue of 12 hour days at the office. It was the strain and hopelessness of failing. For over 3 years he had led a task force to stop these abductions, without even identifying a suspect. Well, that wasn't completely true, was it? So damned tired.

Why not take a night off? Officer Tapia could handle it, couldn't he? What would he miss, after all? A grieving family he couldn't really help? Another six hours of paperwork? No, he had not been home for a nice family dinner in a week. Let Tapia take this one. Fernandez knew his assistant wasn't especially competent—he wouldn't even have his job without the influence of his brother-in-law, the People's Opportunity Party (POP) assistant director in Mexico City—but even a barely literate hack like Tapia could take a statement and tell the family, "we will do all we can." Yes, I will sit this one out.

His daughters, Nayely and Ada, scurried down the hallway and took their seats at the table. They were 10 and 8, and their father's pride and joy. He hated to keep them up so late, but it was the only way he ever got to see them.

"Vamos Papá," Nayely giggled.

"Don't be late to the table, Padre, mother will not like it," Ada chimed in.

He smiled at his babies, sighed and snapped his cell phone shut. He started putting on his jacket just as his wife set the pan of chicken covered in mole—a rich sauce made from chilies, chocolate, and a dozen other ingredients—on the table along with fresh tortillas and expertly sliced avocado. It was his favorite. Later, he would eat it cold from a plastic container.

“Amoor,” his wife whined, “please let one of your assistants handle it.”

But he knew he couldn’t. Someone—was it one person?—was raping, torturing and murdering the women and girls of Juárez. Women just like his wife, girls who were the same age as his daughters, some had been even younger. Those he knew he would never forget. If it were me, he questioned himself, wouldn’t I want the police’s best efforts, such as they are? He answered himself. It may not be enough, but I will do my best. He prayed that would stop the dreams.

Fernandez waited for the towering, iron gate to close before he backed completely out of his driveway and lit a cigarette. Maybe traffic will be light tonight, he thought, and I can be home before the girls go to bed. Ha, who am I kidding? He suspected tonight would be like most nights and his “time” with his niñas would mean watching them as they slept. Breakfast, maybe he could spend a little time with them then, maybe before they grew up. It felt like they were born yesterday and yet he had missed their entire childhood.

Fernandez passed through the security gate that controlled the flow of traffic into his neighborhood. The attendant waved. He nodded back. “Security,” he smiled as he said it aloud, “a 70 year-old man earning \$3.50 per day.” From whom could he protect us? Well, maybe he can at least keep the teenagers away. That was something, wasn’t it? But, if the police and the military could not stop the gangs and could be bought off, why not him? At least, the community residents provided his uniform and a radio. My men have to buy theirs. He beeped his horn as a thank you.

At the base of the hill he slowed for a red light. Traffic was, he was glad to see, a little light, so he rolled through and turned. Rolling through stop signs was not illegal in Mexico’s larger cities since bandits had starting using them as a means of robbing motorists paused at intersections. He shook his head. “How are the bad guys always one step ahead?” he asked the picture of Our Lady Guadalupe taped to his dashboard before making the signs of the cross. After a few blocks he changed lanes, tossed his cigarette out of the window,

and parked in front of a local taqueria. People ringed the tiny metal kiosk in order to snack on the inexpensive tacos, tortas (thin, sometimes fried sandwiches), and even hamburgers sold there. It was the Mexican version of McDonalds. He waited just a few moments for the owner to notice his unmarked car. Immediately he began preparing “the usual”, tacos al pastor—several corn tortillas filled with slices of slow roasted pork cutlets stacked three feet high with layers of onion and seasoning and rotated slowly in front of an open air flame. Leal trimmed several slices with the skill of a samurai and let them drop down onto the hand-made tortillas. He topped it with a piece of the roasted pineapple that dripped onto the meat, catching it on the flat side of his machete. He wrapped them, placed them in a bag, grabbed a cold soda and hurried to the lieutenant’s car.

“Buenas noches, Comandante” the vendor smiled a near toothless grin. They had known each other almost two decades, but he never called the policeman by his first name. He knew that in Mexico, titles and positions were valuable symbols of status and respect. “Working late again tonight?”

“Sí,” he said grimly, “another missing girl.”

“¡Ay dios mío!” The cook performed the signs of the cross. “When will it end?”

Marcos struggled for a response as he grabbed the bag from Señor Leal. He searched for something to say but could only stare straight ahead. “When will it end?” he said under his breath. A horn blast from a car behind him brought him back. He went through the motion of reaching for his wallet. The vendor gave his customary response, “No, no! Comandante. Mi placer.”

“Thank you. Please tell me if I can ever help you.”

“Gracias, Lieutenant, you are very generous.” The vendor stepped back from the car, smiled, and watched Fernandez drive away.

I have helped him, haven’t I? Just frequenting the kiosk sent a message to all other cops not to harass Leal. Even the gangs didn’t accost known police hangouts. Better a few free tacos once in a while, than paying protection money each week, right? At least, that’s what he told himself but it rarely made him feel any better.

### The Aristocrat

Pancho pulled into his parking space next his father’s Porsche Cayenne as a security guard sprinted up behind him. He turned off the motor and took a drink from a small silver flask as he waited for the man to open his door. My love of bourbon must come from my

American half, he thought. He took a small aspirin bottle from his center console and placed it in his jacket pocket.

"Buenas noches," the guard said as he snapped to attention and opened the door and enjoying the brief sensation of cool air as it flooded out of the expensive sedan. Pancho ignored his salute and stretched his arms into the air.

"Fuck, it is hot," Pancho said and stepped back, "a bad time to take a long walk in the desert."

"¿Señor?" the security guard shot him a confused look.

Pancho ignored him and walked hastily towards the executive entrance. He glanced back at his father's SUV. "When did my father get here?"

"He has been here all day, Señor."

"Is he normally here this late?"

"No, Señor," the pudgy guard said as he shuffled behind the young man, careful to remain slightly behind him, "maybe it has something to do with the new construction."

Pancho followed the direction of the man's gaze and noticed a large building at the far end of the compound. It had been partially blocked from the parking area by the main office but he was still surprised by the new construction. There were a half-dozen trucks being unloaded. That wasn't so unusual, but the large, black SUVs and the armed men were. Must be the new venture my father has been talking about. "Maybe that is the project he wanted me to supervise," he said aloud.

"Señor?"

"Nothing, I wasn't talking to you." He paused to survey the rush of new activity. His father had been angry when he showed no interest. "This could be your future," his father had told him. But, Pancho figured politics was his path. He sought the power his father failed to see. His father could use money to influence people, but Pancho wanted to control people. At time, even someone as wealthy as his father had to kowtow to politicians. Presidente Francisco Indalecio Madero Butler sounded better to him than any form of supervisor or director, or whatever title his father had offered him. No, I will go by "Panch", he thought to himself. I am a man of the people. He grinned. I will lead a new revolution. Maybe I will even unite both of my countries. Doesn't that make me an emperor? "Is Chocó here?" he asked the attendant.

"Sí, Señor."

Excellent, then maybe my gift is already waiting, but I have to be sure Negro didn't fuck up. His escort continued to scurry a few feet behind him.

"What is your name, Viejo?" Viejo was a term for "old man" that could be both polite and respectful, or derogatory. Pancho's tone made it clear that in this case, it was the latter.

"Officer Piño, Señor."

"Piño, do you have children?" He continued to inspect the activity around the warehouse as they walked.

"Sí, Señor, I have four boys, and two grandsons!" He said with pride. He couldn't help but stick out his chest slightly.

"Hmm, you are lucky." Not for having boys, Pancho said to himself, but for NOT having girls. Within a few feet of the entrance, Piño sprinted ahead and opened the door. He saluted. Pancho tossed his keys into the man's chest. "Have my car washed." He heard his keys jingle as they hit the hard desert ground. The icy air inside the building chilled the sweat beads on his forehead.

Pancho walked purposely to his office and inserted his key into the exterior door as quickly, and as quietly, as possible. The slight scrape of the key into the lock seemed to echo down the long hallway. He glanced towards his father's office. The light was on, but he didn't see anyone, not even his father's secretary. Maybe father let her go home, too. His own secretary had gone home hours ago. Did she even come in anymore? She rarely even called him, although she had left several voicemail messages over the past week. He had deleted them before even listening to them.

He opened the door and crept inside without turning on a light. Let me just talk to Chocó and get the hell out of here. He looked at his secretary's desk. Everything on it was arranged tidily. Her chair was pushed completely under the desk. He looked at the picture frame on the far corner. It was a photo of her, her husband, son, and daughter. God, she is a fucking gorda—and her daughter, too! Even the desert doesn't want fat whores like them. He reached across the desk and knocked the frame face down. It made a slight crash as the glass split into three pieces. Shit! He listened for any movement in the hall. Nothing. He shook his head at himself. Just talk to Chocó. Make sure that *maricón* did what he was told. Then, hmmm, I will get to my...appointment.

Once in his office, he checked for messages. There was nothing in his in or out box; there never was. The message light on his phone was dark. He closed the blinds and grabbed a bottle of Jose Cuervo

Private Reserve. It had never been opened. Well, he said to himself, I think this will be a night to celebrate. He uncorked the bottle and filled a large glass. Did she remember? Yes! A small plate of sliced limes as well as a jar of olives sat next to the numerous bottles of spirits. This is why I have a secretary. His first order to her when she was hired was to always keep his bar stocked. He sat in his high-backed leather chair and took a long drink. He smiled as the tequila warmed his throat and stomach. He bit the lime. He picked up the desk phone and dialed an extension. “Chocó, it’s me. Come to my office, but don’t let anyone see you, not even my father.” He hung up without waiting for a reply. He took another long drink and his glass was empty. He poured another.

## **La Azteca**

Pain engulfed Daniela’s head as she awoke in the darkness. She tried to reach to rub her head only to find that her hands had been bound. An attempt to move her legs revealed the same. She struggled to breathe through a gag and the hood placed over her head. She panted through her nose. *Con calma, Danni, con calma*, she told herself. Against the pain, she concentrated and gathered her thoughts. A sharp bump bounced her around and she felt the wind knocked out of her.

Struggling to catch her breath, she tried to remember what happened, every second a fight against the concussion. She could remember that today had started like any other day. She had gotten up early to have breakfast and prepare for work. She showered, dressed and even put on a little make-up. “You never know where Mr. Right will be,” she liked to say. After eating with her aunt and uncle, she had kissed the little ones goodbye before she walked to the main road to catch a *pesero*, a small privately owned bus, and like hundreds of others from her *barrio*, she began the long commute to the factories that lined the frontier. Then what?

A car horn broke her concentration and she heard man’s shout, “*Maricón!*” Her body rolled and slammed against the unsecured spare tire. Her head reeled with pain. Letting out a small moan, she rocked herself and told herself once again, *Think, Danni, think!* She listened closely to the sounds around her. There was some low chatter she could hear, but nothing she could make out. She tried her bindings once again. The skin on her wrists almost tore as she twisted to free her hands, and her legs felt like they had been wrapped like a

mummy. She focused on retracing her steps. She had walked with her uncle to the main route. She always enjoyed his company. He always encouraged her to work hard and pray to Jesus for His guidance. Even better, when she walked with him, not a single boy dared stare at her or make the rude, often sexually graphic, remarks. When they walked together, she stared at them, her stern gaze challenging them to make a comment. But they knew better, Uncle Miguel had lived there most of his life and everyone respected him. What a lovely man she thought, always a smile, never a mean word to say. A man devoted to God and family.

Stop it, Danni! No day dreaming now. She forced her eyes closed. After the walk, what? Normal. She waited a few minutes, a bus arrived, too full to get aboard. Several more passed by. Finally one stopped, she paid her three pesos (30¢) to the fat, sweaty feo behind the wheel. He was gruesomely ugly, and his body odor filled the bus. Whenever she rode his bus, he asked her if she had a boyfriend. Always, she said yes. “Why do I never see him?” he would ask. “He is at the university,” she would say. She knew not to let on that she was single. In most places that meant nothing more, only that a woman was single. In Mexico, however, men took that response as a sign that the woman wanted their attention, and they could be aggressive with very little urging. She climbed aboard. Packed tightly in the small bus with dozens of others, she held the support pole and hoped no one would accost her along the way. Freuterism had become a very common occurrence in Mexico’s increasingly crowded buses and subways, especially for a woman traveling alone. She knew that it would be an uncomfortable trip. She felt someone touch her.