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SANTA MONICA Review

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Arizona

At that time in Arizona executions were carried out by a team of three skilled marksmen armed with deer rifles.

By some ancient, unwritten tradition, one of the three bullets was a blank, so that one shooter was spared the burden of knowing he had killed a man in cold blood. And because nobody was to know which bullet was the blank, in theory each man could fire with a clear conscience.

Of course, any experienced marksman could tell a blank bullet by its weight. By a similar custom, then, the warden loaded the rifles for the shooters, and he did it as quickly as he could, without pausing to compare weights, and in this way, he had no knowledge to use for his own advantage, as some unscrupulous person might. Arizonans had a clear, unsentimental idea of human nature.

Warden Andrew Abraham Hutton had the delicate, dexterous movements you often see in a very fat person, and in this case he loaded the three deer rifles in a kind of blur of white fingers and flashes of copper, reminding more than one observer of a card shark dealing his cards.

He finished well before they brought the prisoner out. He came out from behind the slotted wooden wall that concealed the shooters' faces and he took up his position just to the left of the chair where the prisoner was to sit. This was thirty yards from the shooters' wall, in the central courtyard of the jail.

When the doors behind him swung open, Hutton had just pulled out his railroad watch, but he wheeled about without looking at it because the prisoner, just as Hutton had been warned, was screaming and struggling like a madman. Two

deputies, dressed in black like the warden, held him in a double bear hug and tried to frog walk him to the chair. But George Barnett went to his knees on the dirt and kicked the smaller one away, so that the preacher himself, a few steps behind Barnett, had to come forward and grip the man's shoulders and hoist.

Behind the shooter's wall Chantry found it hard to make out exactly what he was saying, until Barnett somehow came to his feet and looked straight in their direction and cried, like a strangled crow, "I DIDN'T DO IT!"

There was a post behind the chair. The struggle went on for another minute or two, but they finally shoved him into the chair and another deputy came out of the crowd and whipped three coils of rope around Barnett and the chair and the post. Even then Barnett kept screeching over and over, the same thing, "I DIDN'T DO IT!"

By now he wasn't looking at the shooters' wall, he was looking at the twenty or thirty spectators standing behind a rope to the front of him and on his right. Most were men, but Chantry could see in a back row a pair of women, which was unusual but not surprising. Barnett had killed a young dance hall girl, and those two must have been her friends or colleagues, come to see justice done.

Barnett was still screaming and thrashing in the ropes. The man on Chantry's right muttered something unintelligible and spat dry on the ground. The one on his left, whose name was Robert Utely, shifted his aim and squinted and said, "Get on with it."

The shooters were prone, so close together that their shoulders touched. Chantry hoped nobody would bump him when he fired. He looked down his barrel and thought I figured he would be stoic and quiet and take it like a man. I never thought he would be weeping and screaming and making things all the harder for everybody.

Chantry watched the warden pin a sheet of paper to Barnett's chest, where the heart was. The screaming had gotten so bad

that he said something to a deputy, and a bandana appeared in the deputy's hands and he gagged Barnett. But Barnett was slinging his head wildly back and forth, and the deputy came up with another short length of the thick Boston hemp rope they used in Arizona and wrapped it around Barnett's forehead and tied his head to the post, upright so Chantry could see the man's eyes, burning red, until another bandana came around as a blindfold.

The preacher finished talking and stood back. The warden went behind the rope too and looked at the shooters' barrier, then raised his left hand. Chantry thought that by now Barnett would be exhausted, beaten, ready to sit still and wait. But Barnett was not going to sit still. He was still wriggling and thrashing in the chair and even through the gag screaming the same thing, he didn't do it.

The warden had the reputation of being a kindly man. He kept his left hand high, evidently hoping the prisoner would finally calm down and let it happen. Some of the other spectators were studying the ground in dismay, but one or two had ugly, wolfish expressions, lips parted, teeth bare. They were clearly enjoying Barnett's suffering. The Yale-educated U.S. Attorney, standing beside the warden, shook his head, and later somebody told Chantry that he had just told the warden, "*Humani a me alienum puto*," which was Latin and meant nothing human is alien to me.

Finally the warden had had enough. He dropped his hand, and all three of the rifles went off at the same time, though Chantry, who had been chosen because he was extremely good shooter, thought Utley had pulled his trigger just an instant later.

It didn't matter. When the rifles fired Barnett was still twisting about on the chair and by some horrible mistiming he started to pitch sideways at that exact moment. The ropes had loosened during all his moving about. His feet kicked the chair legs and the bullets struck him, not on the paper target, but one

in his left lung, the other through the left side of his throat, tearing away flesh and part of the jawbone.

He wasn't dead. He was rolling back and forth on his side on the ground, screaming something now because the bandana had slipped off. Blood pumped up the way it does with a certain kind of lung shot. The legs kept swinging, the head kept bobbing.

The warden had looked away when he dropped his hand, and now he was bent over vomiting and didn't seem to see what had happened. One of the deputies put his hand on his holster, as if he were going to finish the thing off. But that wasn't his place, and after a second round of vomiting the warden hurried over and put his revolver against George Barnett's temple. Even then, Barnett kicked a little longer before he sagged back and turned his face to the sky.

In the warden's office, the shooter who had been on Chantry's left side waited impatiently for his money. "It was his own damn fault," he told Chantry.

The warden's secretary came back from the safe and counted them out each one hundred and thirty dollars. Arizona used federal money by then, so these were the paper notes with the green back that the Treasury had introduced during the war.

Chantry's fingers slid up and down the slick paper.

"I don't feel guilty about it," Utley said. "Not one bit."

Chantry was only twenty-six, but he had lived long enough to know that when somebody told you he *didn't* feel something, he was really telling you he *did*. Chantry didn't know what to say. He looked at the bills in his hands. "It's good money," he said.

The warden died three weeks later, of a heart attack, the doctor thought, because he had been such a fat man. A month after that another man was caught in the Yuma Traveler's Hotel with some of the dance hall girl's jewelry. He had her underwear hidden in his valise. He confessed to the crime then, and they executed him six months later at the old Army

Camp Grant, far away from publicity. The governor issued a posthumous pardon for George Barnett, but the notice was tucked deep in the official papers and almost nobody knew of it or thought about it. George Barnett had not been particularly well thought of or prominent.

Chantry knew about it, though. He had followed the second trial and kept track of the legal proceedings, and he thought a great deal about the last two or three moments of George Barnett's life. When he woke up sweating and shaking, his wife thought he had caught a fever up in the Sangre de Christo Mountains where he hunted. But that wasn't it.

As for the other two shooters, Utley, who hadn't seemed like a drinker, took to the bottle, and not very long after the warden died, he fell drunk off his mule and drowned in a puddle of water not three inches deep.

About then, the other one rode off toward the Mojave, saying he was going to Sacramento in California. He planned to go by himself across the desert, which was a reckless thing to do. The western Apaches had been mostly pacified or killed, but there were still bands in the hills up north, and anybody who took that route always went in a large, well-armed group. These particular Apaches were known to kill their victims by hanging them by their ankles from a tree and building a little fire just a hand's breadth under their heads, slowly roasting their brains.

There were many kinds of torture, Chantry thought.

To make extra money he went hunting more and more often. He was a thin person, somewhat pasty of complexion, even in the merciless Arizona sun. He didn't look much like a hunter, but he was a very fine shot, so fine that he began making a game out of it. He would go up into the mountains with only one bullet in his rifle and dare himself to come back with a deer. He did this a few times, and people gave him a good deal of respect for it. Twice he was asked to be an executioner again, but although the money would have been welcome, he said no.

When winter came he stopped hunting. But late in March the next year, as spring began to stir in the high country, he loaded his one bullet and went out north of Kaibab. Toward noon he was still climbing a trail when he stopped to look at a butterfly, a Ceraunus blue as he had been told, a delicate light blue gossamer thing he had often seen in the scrub. Today it seemed too high in altitude for that particular butterfly, but perhaps it was following him a little bit, following whatever instinct those creatures have. Some Apaches thought a butterfly was a human soul, reborn, fluttering around the people it had known before.

Chantry was still watching it when he turned a curve in the trail and came up in front of the grizzly. It was close, closer than thirty yards. And like all grizzlies it looked foul-tempered and brutishly strong. All kinds of thoughts go through a person's mind then. The hunter in Chantry wondered if the bear was alone, or if the bear had been waiting for him. He thought it was true that a bear smelled like nothing else in the world, such a stink of dirt and excrement and oils. He wondered if the butterfly had led him to the bear. If the Ceraunus blue was the soul of George Barnett come for revenge in the form of a paper-thin flicker of color.

He still had his deer rifle. He still had the one bullet in it. If he fired with perfect true aim at the bear's heart, he might kill it. Or he might not, he might just wound it and send it twisting and screaming for his throat.

In the seconds before the huge paw struck his skull, he closed his eyes and waited for the blessing of darkness.