

## Palatine

In 1540 the Coronado Expedition was trudging north beside a creek when in the distance they saw a cluster of palm trees, saguaro, and other exotic vegetation.

That night, Coronado's mapmaker wrote, "Oasis" on his chart. In the 1680's Jesuit priest Father Kino used Indian labor to build a beautiful, little adobe mission with a bell tower beside the oasis. Later, Franciscans used the mission for a number of years, then it was abandoned until it served as a Spanish presidio before being deserted again.

In the 1860's a young prospector was walking an arroyo near the abandoned mission when he found a ledge 12 inches thick carrying green hornsilver, the mineral form of silver chloride which when polished by desert wind and sand turns to the dull luster of a cow horn; hence hornsilver. He staked claims for himself and his friends and soon the rush was on and a mining camp shambled into place around the remains of the old mission.

The Hornsilver rush lasted a few years, then the mine ran into a badly faulted condition, the ore was lost, and the camp disappeared faster than it had begun. Thirty years later, a massive copper deposit was discovered and once again a community began to take shape around the oasis. After the first year, town officials designated the land surrounding the oasis and the mission as a city park and it became a beautiful and historic centerpiece to the town, a place for Sunday afternoon picnics, and moonlight rendezvous.

Palatine looks around to make sure no one can see them, then he kisses Minnie. She kisses him back for a few seconds then pushes him away. Palatine says, “If I win the Border to Hornsilver race will you tell your Daddy that we want to see each another?”

“Pal, I don’t know if my Daddy is ever going to accept you. He’s a preacher - you make whiskey. And, no. Why would he care if you win the race or not?”

Pressure from the Dries to end public intoxication led to the local temperance ladies writing a letter to the mayor with a petition signed by 47 people asking that the sale of alcohol not be allowed to continue within the city limits of Hornsilver, Arizona. The mayor ignored the request but a few months later the territory of Arizona became a state and the first thing the men of Arizona did was to grant suffrage to the women of Arizona, and the first thing the women did was to get prohibition passed.

The Border to Hornsilver Race is an annual holiday celebrated the first Sunday in May to commemorate the day when one of Hornsilver’s favorite sons, Jed Foley, was set upon by a band of 8 Apache down near the border. He was riding a grain fed Mustang that he had won races with, and he stayed just out of range of the Indian’s arrows until he got close to Hornsilver, and then he slowed down and looked back at the Indians. They sped up; they thought they had him. As he came into town, he spurred his mount and started firing his handgun in the air. The townspeople came out of the stores and houses to see what was going on and picked off the Indians as they raced by. Jed Foley was a hero after that, and the town named a street after him. Many of the other streets in town were named to honor local people who had been killed by the Apache.

Prohibition in Arizona means death from thirst to The Sons of Rest, an alliance of men in Hornsilver who are opposed to work in any form. This Thirst Brigade continues to hold forth in a saloon called the Crossed Pick and Shovel Miner's Outpost, although alcohol is no longer dispensed on the premises. However, the Crossed Pick and Shovel Miner's Outpost has a back door that opens onto the Alley of the Crippled Mexican Girl where an outhouse, trash cans, firewood, assorted flotsam, and castoffs provide secret nooks and crannies where mason jars and pretty colored bottles await in dark, tight recesses. At the end of the alley there is a corral where on Sunday afternoons Mexican boys sometimes put on bullfights.

Whiskey was meant-to-be in Hornsilver, because snow melt and rain seep into the mountains and form deep underground streams that merge and separate and merge again as they course unseen through beds of limestone and seams of coal down to the foothills where they bubble to the surface creating the oasis with water that is a perfect premise for the distillation arts. This delicious water tumbles over a little waterfall and becomes a creek that snakes its way through the foothills and down into the desert. The water needs one more thing to bring about its full potential.

Palatine grew up in eastern Kentucky and comes from a long line of coal miners and moonshiners. He is a moderately honest young man who came West for reasons never elaborated on and was working in the open pit copper mine when he got his first taste of oasis water and decided to cook up a batch just for himself and some friends.

Palatine is hard working and industrious and after a few months in the copper mine he buys 20 acres of land that borders the creek. His first day on the land a Black man comes walking up, takes his hat off, introduces himself as Johnny Blue, and tells Palatine that he has been living in a tent down by the creek for several months.

“I got hurt working in the mine and was laid up for a while. When I got better, I decided that I could live pretty good just by hunting, fishing and doin’ day labor on the little farms that are scattered up and down the creek here.”

Johnny Blue tells Palatine that he would like to work for him if he could continue to live on the place, whereupon Palatine tells him he’d be happy to have the help, and they shake on it. While getting to know one another, Johnny tells Palatine that he is from North Carolina, and that he’s one-quarter Cherokee. Johnny doesn’t say anything; he’s heard that claim many times before, but never from someone who is as black as night. Together, they build a one room adobe shelter and a pig pen, then they clear the land and dig acequia for irrigation. They plant mostly corn and experiment with small plots of barley, rye, and wheat.

On a clear day you can look from Pal’s farm toward the mountains and barely see the oasis, the ruins of the old mission, and the village of Hornsilver; in the foothills looking like a mirage. Between the farm and the oasis there are several more small farms like Pal’s; they’re called the Mexican Gardens because most of them are owned by Mexicans.

Johnny turns out to be a pretty good field hand and skilled in other areas. After about a year, Palatine is producing so much bourbon that he is having trouble finding enough containers for it all, but then Johnny brings him some nail kegs that he got from the hardware store. The kegs were flimsy, so Johnny rubbed waxy honeycomb still dripping with honey on the inside of the kegs to make them waterproof, or bourbon proof, and then tightened wire around the outside to stiffen them up. Then he drilled small holes near the bottom of the kegs and twisted taps into the holes.

Prohibition is in effect, but barely. The border with Mexico is close and isn't guarded, so anyone can go down there and buy Tequila, but it is pretty harsh stuff especially compared to *Your Pal's Honey Bourbon*.

After another year, Pal's farm has doubled in size, and the Sons of Rest consider him their savior. He offers them work on the farm but even if they have been sober all day, they are still too triffin' to work. Some of them are on family retainers and stay in Hornsilver to be close to the border in case the draft board comes looking for them. It's hard to imagine what good they are unless it is to make a pick pocket look respectable by comparison.

Palatine is the right person at the right time and place; Arizona outlawed alcohol and Palatine stepped in to fill a need. He is doing a rush business and making so much money off the brew and the pigs that he quits the mine and starts building a house in town. A house for Minnie. To him she is as pretty as a Sears Roebuck catalog model, and every day, Pal remembers the first time he saw her standing in the choir elaborating a white dress, singing like an angel while looking up at the ceiling. Since he met her the stars seem to shine brighter and sometimes, he can see her face in them. He read poetry in school, but he never felt it before now.

He is building a frame house with a hand pump on the back porch just off the kitchen. The shelter at the farm is built of fire-resistant adobe, but White people look down on adobes and call them mud houses.

Minnie's father, Reverend of the Methodist Church of Hornsilver, wears black suits and round, shell-rimmed glasses. When he hears that Palatine is building the house for Minnie, he is taken aback. All the Reverend knows about Palatine is that he never misses a Sunday in church, is very generous to the collection plate, and has several times come by the house and given the Reverend a ham. He has noticed

Palatine talking with Minnie a few times but didn't think anything of it. However, Minnie is his only child, she's just 17, and since his wife passed a couple of years ago, it's just been him and Minnie. But he has to admit, Palatine seems like a young man on the way up in the world.

However, the Reverend's positive opinion of Palatine changes when he overhears some men laughing about how, in an effort not to waste his grain mash, Pal always feeds it to his hogs who stagger around drunk, bumping into each other, falling down, and that last week, one of them wandered into the creek and drowned.

The Reverend is shocked to learn this about Palatine. When he gets over the shock, he wonders if that's why those hams are so good. Later that day he asks Minnie if she knew Palatine was a bootlegger, and she acts as if she can hardly believe it.

"Well young lady, as you know I don't approve of spirits, and what he is doing is against the law, so I hope I won't see you talking with him again. Understand?"

Minnie replies sweetly, "Yes, Daddy, I understand."

It is an affair extra almost past believing. The day of the Border to Hornsilver Race everyone within 30 miles comes to town to share in the grand jollification.

At noon a volunteer on the border looks at his pocket watch, fires a handgun in the air, and watches as over a dozen riders spurs their mounts and charge north across untrailed desert toward Hornsilver.

At the same time in Hornsilver, men are looking at their watches, and saying, "Well, they're on their way."

The Reverend and Minnie are standing on the plank sidewalk in front of the Copper Spoon Café making small talk with passersby while above them a canvas banner is stretched across Foley Street proclaiming, “Finish Line.”

It is a beautiful day, it rained last night and the air smells clean and fresh. When the Reverend sees Palatine in the flow of people coming toward him, he turns away and starts talking with a parishioner. Palatine pauses beside Minnie long enough to whisper, “You said if I won the race, you’d tell your father that we are going to see each another so...”

She stifles a laugh, “No, I didn’t, you are such a liar, I swear. Besides you’re not even in the race.”

Palatine leans closer and whispers, “Our house is almost finished, what color do you want me to paint our bedroom?”

She blushes, smiles, and pushes him away.

He goes across the street to the Crossed Pick and Shovel Miner’s Outpost where some of the boys are shooting pool, while others are playing cards, or making bets on who will win the race. When he walks in, everyone calls out his name, he waves, says hello and shakes a few hands as he continues through the room and out the back door where he has a horse tied. He walks his horse slowly down some back streets and out of town, then stops by the creek. Later he looks at his watch, says, “Let’s go boy” and spurs his horse to a hard run. When he comes storming back into town, he pulls his hat down low, fires his pistol in the air, leans forward against his horse’s neck so it’s hard to see him, and lets out a, “Yee-haw.” The crowd goes wild clapping and cheering for what they believe is the winning rider.

At the finish line he races under the banner, and peaks over at Minnie, she laughs into her hand, and he keeps racing down the street. When he doesn’t stop, the

crowd quits cheering and they all look at one another with puzzled expressions, “What the hell? “Where’s he going?” “Why didn’t he stop?”

After a moment of stunned silence, one of the Sons of Rest yells out, “That was Palatine” and a communal roar of laughter goes up; even the Reverend laughs.

It rains again that night and a lone bolt of lightning strikes the steeple and the church burns to the ground.

The next morning when the Reverend looks out to where his church used to be, he sees an unbelievable sight; Palatine has the Sons of Rest out there working! Some of them are cleaning up the smoldering remains where the church had been, two wagonloads of lumber are being unloaded, and some of the men are starting to hammer together wall frames. As the morning unfolds more men come to help, women bring food, and the festive atmosphere from the previous day continues.

A week later the first service in the new church takes place when the Reverend marries Palatine and Minnie.

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