

Field of Blood

A novel

by Wayne Allensworth

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This book is for my mother and father

But what if Juarez is not a failure? What if it is closer to the future that beckons all of us from our safe streets and Internet cocoons?

Charles Bowden, "Murder City"

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

Milan Kundera, "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting"

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Psalm 137

And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed...

Matthew 27:5

Prologue: A fire in the land...Connelly makes a stand...Rodriguez says goodbye...

In those days, there was a fire in the land and the people became dimly aware of a terrible judgment being visited upon them...

They had come for Connelly on a November afternoon, when the air had turned cool and calm and the sunlight slanted and softened itself as it hit and colored the Earth, bringing out the hues of fall that did not exist in summer.

Connelly lived just outside of what was called “Old Town,” near the main street that had once been the town’s center, but was now an array of mostly closed up antique shops and barbecue joints marked by the old water tower that read “Home of the Rangers” on one side and “Parmer” on the other. There was a faded depiction of a mustachioed Ranger with Stetson and badge facing the street.

Connelly had sent his wife and two children to Ft. Worth. He didn’t explain everything to his wife. He just sent them to his mother’s house. But she knew. They were coming for him and he knew he couldn’t get away. So he waited for them. He couldn’t think of any other way for it to be.

What if I killed them all? Could I get away then? Stop it. Thinking too much is bad for you. It gets in the way. It gets in the way of what you have to do.

And you can't kill them all.

Connelly had set himself up on a small ridge southeast of his house. He left his Jeep near an old barn and took his rifle, a 12 gauge pump shotgun, a .40 caliber Glock handgun, some ammunition in a shoulder bag, and some sandbags to the ridge. He set himself up there. He was prone, the .30-06 resting on the sandbags, the Glock in a holster at his belt. The shotgun was resting on the ground beside him. He pushed his sunglasses up on his forehead and adjusted the rifle's scope, looking at a spot just outside the gate and the cattle guard. Then he took off the glasses, set them on the ground, took a breath, and waited.

It was like in Iraq. You wait for hours and days until the boredom almost overcomes you and then it happens and there are those short bursts of adrenaline and your heart is pumping. He had never had time in those moments to think or to be afraid. And some part of him had liked it.

Connelly glanced over at his right forearm, the one that had had a tattoo of a swordfish on it. He'd had it removed. Natalie didn't want the boys seeing that thing, getting ideas, and he guessed it was ugly. He couldn't remember why he had chosen the swordfish. He had never seen one, not a live one, anyway. And he had lived most of his life near this ground. Lots of cattle. Horses. But no swordfish. He was drunk when he did it.

That's what they had called him over there: Swordfish. And that's what the men coming to kill him had called him, too: *Pez espada*. He liked that better than them calling him *sicario*. But today, that's what he would be, with any luck.

Connelly didn't drink any more.

He watched the gate and saw two crows fly out of some brush. Then he saw a turkey buzzard flapping up into his line of sight, herky jerky like they do. There was something dead out there. He tensed up, then took a breath and watched through the scope.

He heard the motor of the SUV before he saw it. The SUV came up over a hump in the dirt road not far from the gate and stopped. The doors opened and four men stepped out. Connelly watched them through the scope. Two of them had shotguns, the other two carried M-4 carbines. The driver gathered the men around him. They were talking and gesturing in the direction of the gate and Connelly's house.

They had not spotted him.

Connelly aimed at the man doing the talking. The man's back was turned toward him. Connelly shot him in the back, chest high, and watched him hit the ground on his knees. He chambered another round and shot the second man in the chest. Only the shotgun men were left and the one nearest him made the mistake of running toward the gate and Connelly shot him through the head.

It was a good shot.

Connelly couldn't see the last man. He'd be calling for help.

He reloaded the magazine of the .30-06 and squatted on his haunches and looked out over the scene in front of him. He looked through the scope at the road and saw nothing.

He wanted their weapons.

Connelly squatted on his haunches and waited.

He gingerly scooted around to look behind him and then to each side.

He didn't see anything.

Maybe they wouldn't come until dark. But maybe not. These shooters didn't think too much, either. Maybe he had killed a brother of one of them or a friend.

Now you are thinking again. Only think about setting up.

He needed another spot, one with his back protected. And he needed those weapons. But it was too soon to move that way. Connelly decided he would move to a spot with the barn at his back. He could set up in some mesquite down there.

He waited until near dusk. Connelly was preparing to move to the new spot he'd picked out when he thought of Natalie and the boys. At least he could see if they had made it to his mother's alright. He thought of where they might go from there. Swordfish decided to go to the house and try and call them before he made his way to his new spot. Then he might go down there and get those weapons.

When he walked through the screen door, it was near full dark and he could feel the cool snap in the air. He walked inside the white frame house that had belonged to his grandparents and it was dark inside and very still.

He propped the shotgun and the rifle against the wall and was making his way through the living room to the kitchen phone when a light snapped on and just to his left he saw a man in a khaki uniform sitting in an easy chair and pointing a pistol at him.

“Hello, *amigo*.”

The man was of medium height and stocky. He had a black mustache and hooded eyes. And he motioned for Connelly to sit on the couch across from him.

Rodriguez didn't say anything about the Glock. Connelly thought maybe he didn't see it.

But he did.

Rodriguez smiled. He had little pockmarks on his cheeks.

"Amigo. Just lift your hands up a bit. A little higher. That's enough. And sit down. You must be tired."

Connelly silently stared at Rodriguez.

Rodriguez sighed.

"Amigo, you will get your chance. Consider it a promise."

"I'll stand."

"Okay, stand. If you are thinking of making a move, just wait. But lift your hands up, they are slipping a little."

"You go to hell."

Rodriguez shot him through the left shoulder. Connelly grabbed at the shoulder and fell to one knee, his face a mask of pain. He sat on the floor and leaned against the wall. His breathing was in short, sharp gasps as if the oxygen was thin and he was stranded on a high mountaintop and not in an old house on the prairie facing a man with a gun.

Rodriguez had a quizzical look on his face. Connelly was wondering if he could get to the Glock.

“*Amigo*, you are thinking of two things. I know this. You are thinking of whether you can get to your gun. You’ll be killed, but at least you will make a stand. Like today. There is no way you can escape. And the best thing for your wife and children is if you die now. You know that. But you want to make a stand. Impossible odds, *amigo*. So it’s like the Alamo.”

Rodriguez paused. He grinned a little and cocked his head to the left as if he were studying a specimen in a jar.

“It seems that there are so few opportunities for a man to make a stand. And to die with his boots on, just like in the old movies.”

Rodriguez was grinning and watching Connelly closely.

“But times change, *amigo*. It’s like the frontier days now, all over. But wilder, no? Crazier?”

Rodriguez shrugged.

“A man can start over, make something of himself. You don’t have to be held back. Everything’s wide open. Wide open spaces, no? They say the country is in crisis, but in that crisis is opportunity. The land of opportunity.”

Rodriguez smiled. He was pleased with himself. He wanted to save this moment.

Connelly’s right arm inched down his chest. Let him talk. Let the crazy bastard talk. Connelly was bleeding badly. The pain was keeping him from seeing this clearly, he knew. What to do and when.

Connelly gasped and said, “What was the second thing?”

Rodriguez looked sad.

“You are wondering what you are guilty of. You are guilty of doubt. Guilty of being here at this moment. In this place.”

Rodriguez shook his head.

“You stopped taking the money.”

He looked intently at Connelly, like a man pondering a complex metaphysical problem. A problem of being and meaning. It was an existential issue.

“You didn’t take the money.”

“No.”

“Your share.”

“No.”

“Did you talk to the Rangers?”

“I haven’t told them anything.”

“What’s it like knowing you have to die?”

“Everything dies.”

Connelly’s right hand was almost at his waist.

“You broke the rules, *amigo*.” Rodriguez paused for effect. “You violated an ordinance.”

“You go to hell.”

“Hell is where you are at. I am hell.”

“Shut up.”

“You wish me to stop talking. Then you die. Like you say, everything dies. Some things sooner than others. But you need to know why. You broke the rules.”

Rodriguez paused for effect. It was important that Connelly understand. That was the Rodriguez ordinance.

“I’ve given you a chance, *amigo*. A small chance, but a chance. I’m going to shoot now. Do you go for it? Or do you want to shut your eyes?”

Connelly rolled to his left side and grabbed for the Glock. Rodriguez shot him in the head before he got it cleared from the holster. Swordfish slumped over on the floor.

Rodriguez turned out the light and stood up in the dark.

“I always liked you, Swordfish. Why did you do such a stupid thing?”

He walked over to the body, reached down, and patted the dead man on his shoulder.

“Goodbye, *amigo*.”

And he walked out into a cool, crisp night.