



The Legend of Pavla Blanca



Legends and stories abound in the Southwest, passed down from generation to generation. To the American Indians of central New Mexico, one of the most enduring accounts is that of Pavla Blanca, the ghost of the Great White Sands. Hidden behind the swirling eddies of the spectral white dunes, her tragic story is a fascinating tale.

Early in the year of 1540, a valiant young Spanish conquistador named Hernando de Luna made the decision to accompany the famed explorer, Francisco Coronado, on his conquering expedition into the Southwest. Leaving his lovely beloved, Manuela, behind in Mexico City, Hernando followed Coronado in his search for the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola and Gran Quivira, where the houses were said to be studded with gold and streets afire with pavement jewels.

Unfortunately for the explorers, the expedition was in vain. Searching the uncharted lands from what is now Arizona to Kansas to Texas, Coronado followed every clue and

lead, no matter how tenuous. But the only gold he found was in the sunsets over the Grand Canyon; the only jewels in the sparkle of the cascades in what today is southern Colorado.

The party's journey was abruptly ended when, on the edge of the Great White Sands, they were ambushed by fierce and proud Apache warriors. The expedition battled for its life, and many lives were lost. Survivors fled southward to Mexico City, exhausted and beaten. It was reported that Hernando de Luna was mortally wounded and had perished somewhere in the ever-shifting white sands. Upon hearing the news, the grieving Manuela set out to seek her betrothed somewhere north of what is now El Paso, Texas. She was never seen again.

It is said that the ghost of this beautiful Spanish maiden haunts the dunes of the Great White Sands. She comes nightly in her flowing white wedding gown to seek her love, lost and buried beneath the eternal dunes. Some say the ghostly figure appears just after sunset, as the evening

breezes sweep and dip over the stark white sands.

Modern people claim that Pavla Blanca is caused by a prevailing wind, sweeping over the hushed and lonely desert in the evening and whipping up wraith-like eddies of sand. But the American Indians say it is the ghost of Manuela, still eternally seeking her lost lover.

Fact or fiction, those with imagination, strolling in the silent, shimmering dunes after a fiery sunset, may be fortunate enough to witness and experience for themselves this unusual sight. Thus, this legend persists to this day.

