



A Lingering Love



The pristine, gypsum sand dunes of southern New Mexico have drawn many visitors from all over the world because of its unique geology and beauty. Generations of people have journeyed through this area, even before it was a monument. Today, we learn about the people who have lived or traveled across the Tularosa Basin through petroglyphs, artifacts they have left behind, some written accounts, but most interestingly through stories and legends. Part of the fascination that is imparted through legends is the mystery behind them.

The white dunefield itself is a mystical place. Yet, there is nothing more captivating than the thought of a broken-hearted maiden's ghost wandering through the white dunes in her wedding gown, looking for her lover. There are few written accounts of the famous legend, known by some as the Legend of Pavla Blanca. Published in *The New York Times* on June 22, 1941, George A. Grant gives one of the only written accounts of the legend in the article, "Here Manuela's Ghost Lingers."

Niza, and of course, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado.

According to the legend, the brave, young Spanish conquistador, Hernando de Luna, accompanied Coronado during his expedition. Some accounts indicate that his lover, Manuela, stayed near Mexico City, while others say that she went with de Luna to New Mexico. Not much is known about the young woman. Many suppose she was from Mexico City, others believe she may have been from Spain.



The legend begins in the 16th century. Driven by the hunger for riches, the Spanish voyaged through New Mexico, seeking gold and a path from Louisiana to Mexico City. They carried hopes of finding the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola, where the houses were dreamt to be studded with gold and streets afire with pavement jewels. Among those who dared scout the untamed land were Cabeza de Vaca, Friar Marcos de

Her heart would be broken after her lover, de Luna, set out with Coronado and a few other men to explore beyond the jagged peaks of the Organ Mountains. It is said that there, they were ambushed by a band of Apache warriors protecting their land. Some of the men were killed, Coronado and others escaped, and it is believed that in an effort to survive Hernando de Luna made his way to the heart of the great

White Sands where he vanished somewhere in the ever-shifting gypsum sand.

His beloved Manuela would never see him again, waiting for the unfulfilled promise Hernando had made to her, “When the padres have built a church in our city to the north, we will be the first to ask their blessing. And there we will take our nuptial vows.” Many people say that the maiden, full of sorrow, walked to the lonely white dunes, dressed in her wedding gown.

It is believed that the ghost of Manuela still haunts the dunes of the great White Sands, just

after sunset, in her flowing white wedding gown, to seek her love, lost and buried beneath the eternal dunes. Some people claim that her ghost is merely a gentle wind, whipping up wraithlike eddies of sand over the hushed and lonely desert.

Today, those who stroll the shimmering dunes after a fiery sunset may have the opportunity to witness this unusual sight. One thing is certain, as the Legend of Pavla Blanca lives on, people in New Mexico and travelers from across the world will continue to elaborate and make it real in imaginations for generations to come.

“In every outthrust headland, in every curving beach, in every grain of sand there is the story of the earth.”
— Rachel Carson



*Important Note: Some confusion has arisen as to why the legend is known as, “The Legend of Pavla Blanca.” According to Ray John de Aragón, in his book *Enchanted Legends and Lore of New Mexico* (2012), the legend’s name is also known as, “La Pavura Blanca.” This can be translated from Spanish as “the white dread,” or “the white terror.” The word “pabla” could simply be a mispronunciation or simplification of the word “pavura.” In *The New York Times* article, “Here Manuela’s Ghost Lingers,” (1941) George A. Grant refers to Manuela as “Pavlo Blanco.”

Sources:

George A. Grant, “Here Manuela’s Ghost Lingers,” *The New York Times*, June 22, 1941.

Ray John de Aragón, *Enchanted Legends and Lore of New Mexico* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012), 71-75.