

Dust Covered Dreams



Also by E. A. Graham

The Last Old Man (2005)

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The ten o'clock curfew passed as the tired woman waited patiently for her fifteen year old son, gently wringing her worn hands. She feared he would not survive the age, never accepting that misfortune haunted his crowd; brethren she knew would bring pain. Her pleas ignored this night again, she worried the fears of a mother. Her breath shallow, she watched the small clock hanging on the aging wall across the room, waiting for Gabriel, anguished.

It is a poor, bleeding town, Indio, where Gabriel lived. It is a town resting as the farthest border of a desert that is home to some of the most exclusive communities available to the rich and powerful. Minutes down the road from the dilapidated homes of his neighborhood, Gabriel could enter Palm Springs, the town of movie stars, or Palm Desert, the town of found wealth, or Rancho Mirage, the address of excess. The towns were a distant universe, each enclave surrounding itself with roving security and six-foot cinderblock

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walls. The two extremes, laborers from the fields who risked their lives to steal their way into the country and those who devour financial excess, meet in the blazing hot towns of the California desert. Gabriel, this night, had crossed the threshold, but not by invitation. He was a trespasser.

Gabriel sat in the front passenger seat of an old car, replete with primer spots on the fading green paint. He and his friend, Jose, were using the conspicuous transportation to crash a party Jose heard about at his new job. They were not directly invited, but coworkers let Jose know he would be welcome if he arrived. It was a new world for Jose, who was working in an office of a local nursery as assistant manager, no longer required to help in his father's gardening business. He was proud of the direction his life was heading, having put the six-months of prison behind. Jose was a good kid, coming from a disciplined family. His father slapped him repeatedly when he was arrested, accepting no excuse of ignorance, supporting him fully in becoming the adult expected when he returned home a year ago. He and his young friend were going to visit opportunity this evening — a world he was determined to use to broaden horizons and prospects. He was determined to leave the world of struggle that he saw draining his family of life.

Jose knew it was one of two houses. The thrashed car loudly entered the neighborhood of their first hope, but they saw nothing of a party stirring the large new homes. They found the house where they had hoped the celebration would be in full swing, but it was quiet, and a knock on the door was left without answer. Gabriel heard a distant, faint thumping beat of music he thought was whispering from the backyard,

so he quickly traversed the home's fence in hope of inclusion. Jose's eyes darted as he waited, afraid someone might have seen Gabriel jump the fence.

The well-manicured, large, open backyard was empty. The party rhythm came from another house, with sound echoing between the cookie cutter homes. Gabriel stood in silent awe, staring for a moment at the enormity of the yard and house. He turned and started to jog toward the street, but frightfully crashed against the house's sharp stucco, heart ablaze with pounding fear as he froze before he could reach the fence. A large dog in a neighbor's backyard had viciously charged the common fence and roared a hoarse bark, striking the motion from Gabriel's lean body. Resurrecting himself, assured the drooling, angry animal could not cross the property line or break the bending fence, he gathered strength, jumped the fence to the street and approached his laughing friend's soft smile.

Jose sat on the car hood and pointed out the damage the fall against the house had done. Gabriel looked at his torn shirt, cursed and spit back toward the house. The blood and torn flesh were only surface wounds. They looked at one another, smiled, laughed and shrugged, before taking their respective seats in the car. With a turn of a key, the car began to slowly rumble out of the neighborhood where its aged condition did not belong, unless it was that of a worker, gardener or laborer under the spotlight of the day's sun. Gabriel needed a new shirt, so a trip home appeared to be their current destination, but after not more than a quarter of a mile Jose saw trouble.

"Fuck, man, there's a cop behind me!" Jose cried,

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beginning to sweat, body stiff. He tried to remain composed, but he had experience.

“What’s wrong? You ain’t done shit! They can’t touch you.” Gabriel waved Jose’s fears off with the brave words of youth, while Jose reacted from experience, a silent terror he would not unveil.

Jose drove following the letter of the law he now knew too well, but this time, as times before, the actions of honest intent did not prevail. Red and blue lights began to flash in the black of the night sky, bouncing around inside their car. Jose’s heart began to accelerate violently. He reached up and pulled off the sunglasses he had been wearing in the dark of night and clutched them tight in his hand as he pulled over to the side of the quiet, exclusive road. Gabriel was unfazed, talking bravado of belief.

“Man, these fucks can’t do shit! This is bullshit, man, fuckin’ bullshit. We weren’t doin’ nothin’, man, nothin’!”

“Shut up, Gabe!” Jose wanted to put this encounter with the law quickly behind. He was nineteen, ending probation for receiving stolen property, which he did not know was stolen when he bought it from a neighbor. This stop was not an experience for reminiscing among his friends, but something real. His father let it be known that if he fucked up again, he would wish he were dead, and he knew his father meant more than he wanted to consider.

“Step out of the car!” they both heard screech from the police car’s loudspeaker. With the flashing colored lights on top of the police car and the blinding bright headlights and spotlight, neither Jose nor Gabriel could see what was going on around them. Jose desperately wished to comply.

Gabriel was not going to stand for the insult to his heritage, the reason for the stop he presumed to know. "Fuck you!" he shouted out of the window of the car permanently stuck half open, as they both prepared to step out into the hot summer night's hostility.

Jose hesitated in anger at Gabriel, giving a warning, a threat of his own. "Just shut up and do what they say, stupid punk"

"Fuck you, too!" Gabriel said quietly to his older friend. The two gently stepped out of the car, facing the blinding lights. Before them they could see only the outline of two police officers, guns drawn. Jose's heart was beating feverishly in fright, while Gabriel laughed at the officer's seriousness.

"Shoot 'em," Gabriel mused to the officers sarcastically, amused at their need to draw guns for a traffic stop. Before he could finish a chuckle at the two simple, sarcastic words, Gabriel heard the crack of a loud piercing sound at least eight times. The booming, flashing explosion of gunfire coming from the officers caused Gabriel to freeze in dread, while his friend wilted to the ground, having received fatal shots to the chest area, gift of Gabriel's sarcastic words, and the fact that he was holding an object the officers could not identify. When Jose's limp body slumped to the ground, the sunglasses fell from his hand, scratching the lenses on the jagged asphalt. Gabriel said nothing, frozen, heart stopped in a terror of fear and disbelief.

The police officers' guns were now turned toward Gabriel. The instant of silence bore an eternity as the officers waited for Gabriel to move, and he waited to live. No one

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moved in the eternal moment. The officers passed the moment of panic. One officer turned his head toward his shoulder and began to shout orders, request for an ambulance, notice of gunfire — a choreographed panic of taught steps. The other officer began to shout at Gabriel. “Down! On the ground! Down, now!!” The voice broke in command and fear. The officers continued to glance over at the limp body, concerned for their safety.

Gabriel fixated on the approaching officer’s fiery eyes. He looked above the blonde mustache and below the blonde hair and saw steel blue eyes of anger. He was afraid to move, holding the eyes as he followed the officer’s command. He wanted to cry, but was too frightened. “I’m getting down. Hands in the air. Hands in the air. I’m on my knees.” Gabriel’s voice was soft and pleading, as he took position on the hard asphalt, face down. The officer continued to approach, gun pointing directly at Gabriel’s paled light brown face.

“Shut up! Put your hands behind your back!” The officer’s shouts were now only for Gabriel’s ears.

The hard, coarse asphalt pressed against the young man’s fresh face. He felt pain, unexpectedly amplified as the officer shoved a knee into the suspect’s back. Gabriel’s face began to bleed, flesh slowly ripping as it was shoved into the asphalt. The hands were cuffed tightly in cold, polished steel. Pain was shooting from Gabriel’s wrists, from the torn flesh of his face, but nothing hurt as the fear continued. Gabriel knew only that he was alive, wishing to continue possession of the gift.

The officer stood and stepped back carefully, holstering his solid black pistol. Gabriel looked across under

the car and saw his friend. The body lay motionless, no one helping, attempting revival. Next to the body he could see the red and blue lights dance off shiny black boots standing over the limp, bleeding body. The boots took a step back as the puddle of dark blood grew and approached their tip. Gabriel tilted his bloodied face up toward his captor. "Please, help him. Come on. Please." The voice cracking, soft, genuine and pleading, but the officer lifted a large boot and brutally shoved Gabriel's head back onto the asphalt, imbedding gravel deep into the soft flesh.

"Don't move!" the officer shouted, twisting his foot. The officer's raspy smoker voice ordered again slowly as a promised threat, "Do not move!" Gabriel heard a slight chuckle, as he listened to the officer's muting words. "He's dead. Don't worry about him, son, you'd better watch your ass, 'cuz you're in big trouble. You're going up on murder, boy. You're toast." Gabriel heard a grin in the voice, and felt a pleasure in his body as the boot was lifted from his head, allowing the expanding facial tears to bleed clean.

A crowd was gathering. The sirens of ambulance and police could be heard quickly approaching. Voices and shrieks were all around, but to Gabriel it was sound unheard. He closed his eyes, hoping it was only a nightmare in dream, knowing he would have to wake again to reality. His eyes were closed, but the pain was real, growing, and it was no longer physical. A calm, warm puddle of blood grew under his face.

Thank you for taking the time to read a few pages of *Dust Covered Dreams*.

The book will keep your interest and events are not predictable. Please, take the time to read the entire book and let me know what you think.

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