



Measure of a Man Exam By Buttercup 'n Stinky

1. What is your first thought when you hear the title for this episode?
 - a. What exactly, I wonder, is being measured?
 - b. And who?
 - c. I hope this won't involve having to convert to the Metric System.
 - d. All of the above.
2. What is Turk's idea of 'having fun?'
 - a. Going fishing with Andy Griffith.
 - b. Hanging out in the men's room with The Fonz.
 - c. Getting a part where he gets to be a Problem Child.
 - d. Shooting a buggy horse with a sling shot.
3. Johnny says Catha should take back up the lines because it's just like gettin' thrown
 - a. out of a window or gettin' knocked down a flight of stairs.
 - b. out of a bar or gettin' knocked up.
 - c. off the Pine Tree Estates or gettin' knocked down by a real large man named Hoss.
 - d. off a bronc or gettin' knocked down in your first fight.
4. How do you know Murdoch is lying to Ben Cameron about his father?
 - a. Because Tombstone didn't exist until 1879.
 - b. Because Murdoch never had any friends.
 - c. Because Murdoch crosses his fingers.
 - d. Because, as House says, "EVERYONE lies."
5. What does Murdoch say about Ben Cameron's dad?
 - a. "Striding down the streets of Tombstone, one hand a stone fist, and the other holding a reading primer."
 - b. "Striding down the streets of Los Angeles, one hand with a Starbucks Mocha-double-shot-Frappaccino with caramel on top, light on the whip, but with extra toppings added and the other helping to hold it steady so that it doesn't spill, cuz we ALL know that would be a Mortal Sin.
 - c. "Striding down the streets of Chicago, one hand holding a Cubs t-shirt, and the other holding tickets to 'Wicked.'
 - d. "Striding down the Streets of San Francisco, one hand holding a police badge, and the other holding a pad of speeding tickets."
6. Where are Murdoch and Johnny on their way to?
 - a. Going to the Head Office to demand better scripts.
 - b. Going to the County Seat for a livestock show.
 - c. Going up to Tahoe to see one of Murdoch's Old Friends.
 - d. To Mayberry to track down Turk's Real Pa.
7. Finish Owen's line when he comes to Travis in the restaurant. "I've got bad news for you."
 - a. Looks like your kid's gonna be going to school after all."

- b. You're ugly."
 - c. I just finished reading the script, and we're about to do something really stupid."
 - d. The Commissary just ran out of donuts."
8. Finish this line. "A man who hides his face behind a mask is...
- a. probably in 'Phantom of the Opera.'"
 - b. usually doing something he's ashamed of."
 - c. generally not good looking."
 - d. usually at a Halloween Party."
9. What is Johnny's line to Travis' remark: "How'd you like to make me?"
- a. "How'd you like to make ME?????"
 - b. "How'd you like to be dead?"
 - c. "Oh, SNAP!"
 - d. "What? And have to clean my gun again?!"
10. Finish the Sheriff's line. "Most likely you'd wind up ...
- a. on just another television show."
 - b. better than ever!!!! That's right! Right here in this Valley we have the Best Masseuses worldwide! I mean, the BEST! Today, and Today only, we are having our annual Buy a Massage and get a Bikini Wax FREE! Hurry in now, or you'll miss out!!!!
 - c. with Lupus.
 - d. just another notch on his gun. I saw him gun down two of the best in Nogales once."
11. What does Turk have hidden in his hat?
- a. An afro.
 - b. Answers to that day's Pop Quiz they never got to. Moral of the story. Don't cheat unless it's actually going to be helpful.
 - c. Cooties.
 - d. A frog.
12. What does Johnny make for supper?
- a. A hare
 - b. Hamburgers and hotdogs....he is, after all, the Iron Chef when it comes to barbequing.
 - c. TV dinners.
 - d. Power Bars and Energy Drinks. (That's why he's soooo fast! Red Bull really DID give him wings!!!!)
13. What do you notice while Johnny's cooking?
- a. That he pours too much salt on the meat and then blows it off.
 - b. The way he licks his fingers.
 - c. The way his hair shines
 - d. Johnny was cooking? I was so friggin' hungry I didn't notice anything but that hot, juicy meal, so I had to get up and take a snack break.
14. Finish Johnny's line to Turk. "Let's see if you studied your reading as well as your _"
- a. algebra.
 - b. backshootin'.
 - c. Neurobiochemistry.
 - d. script.

15. Which is your favorite line in the show? Explain why.
- “How’d you like to make me?”
 - “Me, I’d be real embarrassed if I had to ask somebody if the words on a poster meant a man was running for office...or from the law.”
 - “Just goes to show you what can happen when man reacts on instinct instead of thinking things out.”
 - “I’ve never seen anybody so fast.”
16. What happens while the kids are having lunch?
- Johnny slips on a banana.
 - Turk asks his dad why he was given such a stupid name.
 - Johnny shoots a fake snake.
 - Johnny shoots an annoying kid.
17. What is the Indian saying that Johnny likes so well?
- “Today is the first day of the rest of our lives.”
 - “I believe in yesterday.”
 - He actually couldn’t remember because he actually didn’t understand the language. However, he grunted something that sounded vaguely intellectual, thus proving a point that Johnny doesn’t actually have to talk in order to have his fans watch his TV shows.
 - “I wish I were an Oscar Meyer weiner!”
18. “A man was asked how many sheep he has. He said if he had as many more, half as many more, and then two and a half more sheep, he’d have a hundred. How many did he have?”
- Who cares?
 - 39 Sheep.
 - Anyone who actually checked to see if they had the correct answer obviously has too much time on their hands.
 - You realize you really AREN’T smarter than even a 4th grader and thus need to stay as Far Away as possible from the show “Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader.”
19. Which is a better deal? Six for twenty cents or eight for a quarter?
- Okay no one told me I had to bring a calculator for this test.
 - Neither, you just saw ten for fifteen cents down at your local Walmart, cause they are always rolling back their prices.
 - Just do it, and NO CALCULATOR!!!!
20. Does anyone else burst out laughing when Murdoch has that thunderstruck look on his face and utters, “Johnny teaching school?”
21. Then do those same people jump up and yell, “Way to go, Old Man!” when he shows up to back Johnny up a couple of minutes later?
22. Why can’t Catha sleep?
- Sheesh! ‘Cuz Johnny’s in the house, for goodness sakes!
 - Indigestion from the hare she ate earlier.
 - She ran out of Nyquil.
 - There was a monster under her bed...oh, wait, no! That was her husband!!!

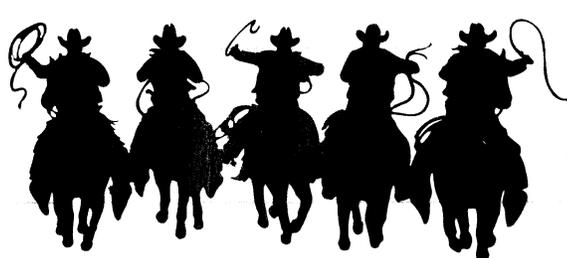
23. What is your real opinion of Ben Cameron? Explain.
24. What does Catha write on the blackboard after Johnny leaves?
- Catha Lancer
 - Johnny Lancer
 - Scott Lancer
 - That frickin' close and I didn't get to kiss him!
25. Fill in the missing words in the sentence that Ben Cameron says about Johnny. "A man without _____, therefore a man without _____."
26. What's Johnny doing in the Cameron's parlor when the scene opens?
- Going through the Cameron's liquor cabinet.
 - Button his cuff.
 - Polishing his boots.
 - Oiling his gun.
27. What does Catha say about her husband. "Like he says, it only hurts when _____"
- he bends over.
 - he sees the picture of Johnny I sleep with under my pillow.
 - I punch him in the face.
 - he breathes.
28. At the end of this episode, the children give Johnny an award. What is it?
- A trophy for "Fastest Gunfighter Against a Fake Snake in a Lunch Box"
 - A trophy for "Most Fish Caught Using Only One Round of Bullets"
 - A Gold Star which states: "Outstanding Teacher Johnny Lancer"
 - A Silver Star which states: "Outstanding Buns Johnny Lancer"

Extra Credit Essay Question

Write an in-depth essay on the stereotypes of this episode. Include the cycle of poverty that is fused by the way an individual is brought up. Point out three or more statements or actions to support your work. Extra extra credit will be given to anyone who can define the psycho-social aspects of the adverse affect. One lucky student will get the "Suck Up" of the year award if able to answer correctly and thoroughly what school systems of today could learn from Johnny as their teacher.

Extra, Extra Credit

Explain how come the writers really need to have the word "Anachronism" explained to them? At least two examples must be given. Full credit if you can name 5 instances.





Night of the Lancer Savage Land By Lorraine Mumaw

He felt like he'd been riding in the stagecoach for weeks, not days. 'I should be at the ranch working *today*,' Johnny thought sourly, '*not watching this dull landscape for hours on end*.' The desert was monotonously uniform. It was as if he had been passing the same rugged, sandy earth, various clumps of vegetation and the occasional rising hills of rocks in the distance, throughout the interminable journey.

Unfastening his bandana, he reached down to the water jug at their feet, wet the red fabric and wiped his brow before tying it around his neck again. Then he took a long drink. He had long since discarded his leather jacket in the rising late morning heat.

Working outside, no matter hot, fixing fences or rounding up stock was preferable to being cooped up in a stuffy, over heated, uncomfortable stagecoach in very close proximity with two equally uncomfortable, sweaty men, even if one of those men was your brother. The three, full mail sacks taking up the extra space only added to the discomfort. The much touted cushioned seats made no difference to Johnny's comfort level. He was sure he sported more bruises from this bumpy ride than from breaking in a new horse or catching a cow to be branded. What was he doing on a Southern Pacific Stagecoach, making the long journey to Tucson, Arizona from their home in southern California? '*I'm doing it for my family*,' he grumbled inwardly, answering his own question.

As if reading his mind, said brother Scott Lancer laughed softly. Johnny Lancer looked at his blond sibling and found amused understanding in the bright blue eyes that gazed at him.

"Something tells me you'd rather be back home rather than on your way to a business meeting."

"Whatever gave you that notion?"

Scott laughed, then sobered. "Murdoch seems to think the experience will be good for you. So do I. You have a mind for this sort of thing, whether you want to admit it or not. You're smarter than you think, little brother."

"Not smart enough," the other muttered.

"Think of it as a chance to see a new place. I know you've never visited this territory."

"It's just another desert. And a hot one at that."

"Ah, but beauty can be found in any place."

With those words, their here-to-for silent fellow passenger tipped up his hat and opened his eyes, startling the brothers. Since the stage had left Casa Grande, he had been seemingly asleep. Even when they had stopped to change horses at the last way station he had not stirred, a surprise to

Johnny who could not wait to stretch his legs. Of course, he hadn't said much even when awake, Johnny thought. After joining them in Phoenix, he'd greeted them and commented on the weather all in a slight southern drawl. Then he had lapsed into silence.

For now, though, only amusement danced in his intelligent eyes and face. "My great-aunt Maude always said, 'in every place, shall be found a unique beauty.' The deserts of Arizona contain unparalleled plant life that is a wonder to behold. May I," He gestured for the water.

Johnny handed it over with a smile. "Then let me behold them in the comfort of our Hacienda from illustrations in a book."

"Oh now, you have just left yourself wide open." Scott's burst of laughter lit up his face. "You, go out of your way to read a book?"

"You're not the only one who's had an education. Even if I didn't go to a fancy school back east."

"Gentlemen. From your lively banter, I understand you are brothers. Would you like this?" Scott took the jug with a nod. "Let me introduce myself. I am Artemus Gordon, salesman extraordinaire. I sell a unique collection of elixirs and tonics. A cure for every ailment." He pointed up to the grip rocking along with the luggage belonging to the Lancer's in the netting designed to hold small cases above their heads.

Too close to their heads, Johnny thought a little uneasily. There was little enough space in the cramped compartment for the three passengers. Briefly he studied their fellow traveler. The man was a good ten or fifteen years older than either sibling, but his form-fitting clothes displayed a very fit physique. His nimble fingers appeared ready to do more than display wares. And his eyes. . . ? Johnny's sixth sense shivered. He'd bet his third of the Lancer ranch that this was no hawker of flavored gin and rose-water.

"I'm Scott Lancer, Mr. Gordon," the blond brother put down the jug and shook the hand of the man next to him. "And this taciturn gentleman is my brother, Johnny Lancer."

"He's checking me out." Gordon said cheerfully. "I understand completely."

He gazed into Johnny's eyes and again the Lancer resisted the urge to shiver. Why was this man able to get under his skin? Forcing himself to smile, he gripped the outstretched hand evenly. "Very pleased to meet you."

"Likewise."

Johnny watched Scott's gaze shift between his brother and the stranger, his expression slightly puzzled. Behind that mild, polite facade, Johnny could sense his brother's own curiosity about their coach-mate and the younger man's reaction to him.

"We have a few more miles to travel before we arrive in Tucson," Gordon said amiably. "The end of my journey and, I assume, yours as well. We might as well be sociable. What brings you into the Arizona territory?"

“Our business,” Scott said firmly.

“Fair enough,” Gordon smiled. “We must find a safe topic. You spoke of an education back east. Would that be Harvard, Mr. Lancer?” He nodded at Scott.

“Yes, sir, an educated guess.”

“Not a guess. You still have a trace of your Bostonian accent. I graduated during the fifties.”

“I never graduated.”

Gordon grimaced. “My apologies for raising an unsafe topic.”

“No apology’s necessary.” Scott gazed out the window, his face inscrutable. Finally he sighed and shifted to face Gordon. “So you went to Harvard. What did you study, sir?”

“A little of that, and a little of this. The sciences, languages, history, even some medicine. I enjoyed dabbling. My advisor, Dr. Sibley despaired of me.”

“Professor Sibley? Old Dry Dribly. He was my tutor.” A wide grin lit up Scott’s face. Seeing it, Johnny felt a pang of jealousy. This stranger was able to make his brother smile. He was also able to get him to talk about school, a subject Scott rarely mentioned to his sibling.

“Well I see his appellation remained unchanged over the years.”

“I wager everything about him remained unchanged.”

“Did he still always appear to wear the same dusty, dark suit? Comb his hair straight down his forehead? When he ate, did he always order a boiled egg and dry toast no matter the hour?”

At every question Scott nodded emphatically, his grin unflinching. When Gordon paused, he interrupted eagerly. “In your day did he write meticulous notes on the chalk board taking up every free wall space, then proceed to lecture from them exactly?”

“All we had to do was copy his notes to pass. I never understood how anyone could receive low marks in his lectures.” Gordon said dryly.

“It was his lab work that failed them.”

“But his work was so fascinating. A true Renaissance man. Tell me, did he still carry that old grip that he never opened, no matter how many books and papers he had with him?”

Scott’s laughter faltered. “Yes.”

“What he’d carry in it?” Rank curiosity colored Johnny’s question and a real feeling of being forgotten.

Gordon glanced at him then back at Scott. "He always was a little mad."

"A little? He mixed his potions, always looking for a better explosive." Scott's voice rose in tone slightly, lost its emotion while gaining a heavy Bostonian accent. "'To end man's insane desire to fight by frightening them with the power of mass destruction.' I'm surprised the war office never recruited him. Then there was his obsession with finding connecting tunnels beneath the surface of the earth . . ." The blond hesitated, shaking his head. "He laughed at those who believed in the Hollow Earth theory. 'The earth looks out on a wondrous pallet we have yet to discover. Heavenly bodies and star stuff placed above us by the Great Architect for our amusement and education.' Nonetheless, a seed of the theory he believed, and never let his peers forget. He was mad!" Scott paused, his face growing pensive. When he continued, a trace of melancholy laced his voice. "However . . . for all of that, he was a brilliant madman."

"That he was." Gordon nodded and continued after a moment, "I heard the war office made an attempt to recruit him."

"Really. I'm sure he laughed in their collective faces."

"He did, Mr. Lancer. He surely did. Professor Sibley had a unique relationship with his students."

"He could."

A flicker of something flashed in Gordon's eyes. "I think I understand a little better now."

"Professor Sibley?"

"His students."

"Do you?" Scott said pointedly.

"So what was in the bag?" Johnny asked again. He could feel Scott's growing tension and his underlying sadness. With no idea of why, and what was a safe topic, his only recourse was to distract Scott somehow. "And what's this Hollow Earth Theory?"

"Well, to be accurate, several variations of the theory exist." Gordon said lightly, after a slight pause. "One holds that we, and the land we walk upon, truly rest inside the surface of the earth. Another that through openings, usually held to be at the poles, we would find advanced civilizations living happily inside. And some theories are as simple as believing one can travel through tunnels to any part of the surface."

"Where does the sunlight come from, if we're inside?" Johnny asked, aware as he accepted the older man's explanation that Gordon was deliberately shifting the topic.

"Ah, now that is an interesting discussion. The most popular variation holds that the interior is lit by its own sun. Another theory states that the stars are twinkling chunks of ice, suspended in the air, and the sun rotates, displaying dark and bright sides that alternately give us light and darkness. Or, another states, that the sunlight is reflected within holes by great mirrors which light the

interior.”

“I thought the stars and planets share the universe with us. People have seen ‘em, studied ‘em. Copernicus, Galileo, Sir Isaac Newton . . . Scott has a book about em.”

“So, Scott is not the only Lancer prodigy?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Whatever answer Gordon meant to make was lost in the sudden jerking of the stagecoach, followed immediately by a shift in direction and a sharp increase in speed. They heard the shouts of the driver and the shotgun rider. Johnny caught a brief glimpse of rocky outcropping before he felt the coach wheels catch on it. Several things happened at once. He heard a scream from one of the men up front and the passengers were thrown upward and around. At the same instant the netting broke, releasing the three suitcases. One smashed against Scott’s head. Moving with a grace and speed Johnny would not have thought possible, Gordon twisted his body, deflecting the other valise’s with a small grunt of pain. But the damage was done. Red stained the older Lancer’s blond hair.

Leaning forward awkwardly in the swaying coach, Johnny pushed and held his brother against his seat. He was only vaguely aware of Gordon shifting to also face the older Lancer.

“Scott! Scott!” Johnny smiled in relief when he saw recognition in his brother’s groggy eyes.

“What happened?”

Before he was able to respond the coach bumped upward again sharply, sending all three men and everything loose inside crashing against each other. Johnny heard another scream.

“That was the second man,” Gordon mumbled with a grimace of pain, absently rubbing his right arm. “Who’s driving?”

The coach was still moving at a breakneck pace. Shooting a worried glance at his brother, Johnny was horrified to see more blood on the semiconscious man. “I’ve got to stop this coach!” Leaning out the window and stretching forward, he could see the four horses galloping at full speed toward a distant range of mountains. “Nobody’s up there.” He shifted his gaze backward. “Can’t see ‘em.”

“Bucked off by the horses.” Gordon’s words were still mumbled. He shook his head and for the first time Johnny noticed dark stains on his hair. “It’s as if they’re running with a purpose. Like they ran us over those rocks deliberately.”

“That’s loco!”

“Is it? I’ve seen more fantastic things.”

“Somethin’ spooked the horses. I’ve gotta stop ‘em before they break apart this carriage. Gordon,” Johnny locked gazes with the older man. “Take care of my brother.” He shifted to face Scott,

worried that he might be seriously injured. “Gotta leave you, Boston. I’ll be back.”

“Johnny?” The voice was slurred and breathless. “Hold you to that.”

“Don’t try it.”

“Just take care of Scott, please.”

At Gordon’s reluctant nod, Johnny once more leaned out the window. He pulled off his hat, letting it hang down his back by its ties. Brushing his sweaty hands along his shirt to dry them, he smiled once at his brother before easing his body out, finding handholds first on the door, and then on the rim of the roof. He felt Gordon holding on to his legs until he was completely outside. Clinging to the shifting wood, Johnny glanced at the horses. Then he saw something he would never forget. The lead horse turned its head toward him, and then nodded at the team. Immediately they headed toward a low bank of rocks. With chilling certainty, he realized they intended to shake him off. “You’re right Gordon!”

Not knowing if the other man heard his shout or not, Johnny hurried his movements along the side and reached for the bar along the driver’s seat. At that moment he peripherally saw the wheels reach the rocks. His hands touched the bar as the coach shook and jerked once more. Desperately, he held on as he impacted with the wood. Losing his footing, he felt a terrible pull on his arm as all his weight went on it. Once more he thought he saw the lead horse look at him and snort. Suddenly they shifted right, then left, crashing into more rocks. Johnny’s sweat-soaked hand came loose and he felt himself fly through the air.

As if from far away, he heard Gordon’s shout. The ridiculous thought struck him that the other man had been waiting for trouble, as if he had expected it. Then Johnny felt the impact, and his world exploded into pain.

“Scott!” Mumbling the name he tasted blood. He saw nothing but the rocky soil a few inches from his face. “Scott!” His mind tried to follow the coach he could still hear faintly. Shifting slightly, anguish flared up and enveloped him. Darkness quickly followed.



“Now, was not that the sweetest fruit you have ever tasted? Was it not worth riding to Casa Grande?”

Two men rode side by side under the hot sun. The speaker was young with long dark hair. He wore a faded, yellow, spotted shirt and a short Mexican-styled jacket that matched his accent. He had a face that always seemed ready to smile. He was laughing now at his embarrassed older companion. The other man was dressed in dusty blacks, including a black leather jacket and had a craggy face more apt to be serious. But now he was blushing slightly. “Now Mano,” the strong American accent almost distorted the name. “Shouldn’t talk like that. ‘Course it was good, but them was ladies.”

“That I would never disagree with, Buck. Ah, but what ladies.”

“Gonna make us late. Big John’a be furious. The coach left hours before us.”

“We will be back in Tucson before John Cannon’s important banking meeting, Buck. Your brother allowed us to leave.”

“Don’t knowed if he realized how far we was going. Anyway, ya shouldn’t talk about the meeting.”

“Why? We are alone in the middle of the desert. The whole town gossips about it. Tomorrow, the major business leaders of Tucson will be joining forces with some of the leading money families of California forming a bank. Even my father, Don Sebastian Montoya, will be a partner.”

“An’ he expects his son, Manolito Montoya to be at the meetings.”

“Well, we shall arrive together. And face our duty.”

“Late! The stage’a be arriving in Tucson already with them two Lancer brothers from Morro Coyo. An’ a government man, with papers from the United States of America bank. Thought I saw them brothers last night in the saloon. Should’a said something to them. John told me about Scott Lancer. He was real impressed with him when he came lookin’ for stock last spring. Kinda sorry we was in Mexico at the time.”

“We will greet them in a few hours. Meanwhile, they will be met by Big John and wined and dined in the Grand Hotel. The same place we can clean up. The meetings do not start until tomorrow. We will arrive in plenty of time.”

“Yeah, plenty of time,” Buck sighed. Being involved in the business side of any endeavor was not in his nature. But the very fact that Big John wanted him included warmed the older man’s heart. So his big brother did think he was a real part of the High Chaparral.

His thoughts began to drift as the two men rode in companionable silence. Automatically his eyes searched the desert around them, an action both friends performed without thinking. The land was never safe, one always had to be on guard. He saw the circling buzzard in the distance at the same time as his best friend.

“Mano, look!”

“Sí. Let us check out what the buzzards have found.”



Pain. He felt only pain. Slowly, thoughts began to form. Scott! The stage. Gordon. A hand reaching futilely for him as he fell. Scott! Gordon acting unsurprised, as if he expected trouble. Scott, crumbled on the seat, unconscious with blood on his head and face. “Scott!”

He was not aware he had spoken aloud. All he knew was he had to reach his brother. It took all of his willpower to open his eyes. Blinding yellow met his gaze. The light, combining with the pain in his body, enveloped him once more. He cried out in frustration as darkness took him.



“His neck is broken.” Manolito crossed himself before standing up from the sprawled body he’d just examined. “From a fall.”

“He was thrown from the stage?”

“Sí. He has a patch from the Southern Pacific. The driver or the shogun rider, I think.”

Buck leaned over his horse, studying the ground. “Looks like the coach took off. Hit them rocks.”

“A snake perhaps, spooking the horses?”

“All four? And why not come back for the body?”

“I do not know the answers, my friend. But I would like to. Let us take this poor soul with us and find some answers.”

“Yeah.”

Tying the body over the rump of Manolito’s horse, the two followed the tracks left by stage. They had traveled nearly a half mile before finding a second body. “He died from the fall,” Manolito commented after studying the corpse. “He hit these rocks.”

“Where’s the stagecoach?” Once more Buck leaned over his horse. “Them tracks lead away from Tucson.”

“Where are our two brothers from California?”

“Could someone have took the coach?”

“Let us continue looking.” Pausing a moment to mumble a prayer and make the sign of the cross, Manolito stood up.

“What ‘bout him?” Buck pointed to the body.

“We will have to take him. We cannot leave him for the buzzards.”

“Yeah.”

After tying a rope around the second corpse, Buck attached it to his saddle.

It was another half mile before they saw more circling birds. Both men rode silently now with a grim purpose, watching the diminishing tracks. "Land's getting more rocky," Buck said, rubbing his hand against his sweaty brow.

"A stage will leave more than tracks when we find it."

"Ah don't like this. Was someone after them brothers? Or the government man?"

"Buck! Over there!"

The sharp words broke Cannon's rambling. He squinted in the direction Manolito was pointing. Near a set of rising foothills was another shape, dark against the lighter earth. "Dear God!"

He spurred his horse forward at the same instant as his friend. It was Manolito who reached the body first. Jumping from his saddle before his animal had a chance to stop, the Mexican bent down and gently touched the body. A low moan emanated from the crumpled form. "Dios mío! This one is alive. Buck, give me a canteen!"

Quickly Buck dismounted, handing the container to Manolito in almost the same movement. He watched as his friend poured a little fluid onto the man's flushed face and then coaxed the semiconscious man to drink some. He was young, with dark hair, dressed in a rose-colored print shirt. A holster, complete with its revolver, was belted around his waist and tied down to his leg. This was a man who knew how to use guns. Manolito gently began feeling the man's body, beginning with his arms. A low moan was the only response he received.

Even lined with pain, Buck could see the injured man's face would be very acceptable to the ladies of Casa Grande. The inane thought was interrupted when the man abruptly opened his eyes displaying deep blue orbs. Grabbing at Manolito's wrist, he mumbled, "Scott. Scott!"

"He is safe." Manolito said the first thing that came to mind. At the words, the young man whispered something and went suddenly limp. The Mexican glanced at Buck and the older man saw his resolve, knowing it was reflected in his own face. "This is one of the Lancer brothers, is it not?"

"Yeah. Guess he's Johnny Lancer." Buck hesitated a moment. "How is he?"

"He said in Spanish, 'Mother of God, please protect my brother.' What has happened to his Scott?"

"He was throwed from the stagecoach. Mano, do ya think he'll live?"

"Sí." Manolito shook his head. "Our young man has been very lucky. I do not feel any broken bones. His shoulder is dislocated perhaps. His worst wound is this," Manolito pointed to his bloody head. "I think he will mend. His body at least. Buck, we must get him back to Tucson."

"Ah know. Hate ta give up the trail, but we got no choice."

"We will find his brother. This I have sworn."

Buck nodded. "I know'd you did. I just know'd it."



The town of Tucson was a bustling warren of homes and businesses built side by side. Most were constructed out of adobe, many of them one-story with flat roofs and interior courtyards. Two structures had more than one story, the Grand Hotel and the Congress Hall Saloon next to it. But the two friends made their way past those and the smaller saloon where they usually drank to the only doctor in town. They had attracted a small crowd of followers when they had severed the rope pulling the two bodies by the undertaker's and Buck had tersely explained to the mortician whom they thought they were. But most continued to follow, curious as to the identity of the young man Manolito held so carefully in his arms.

Arriving at the doctor's door, Buck jumped off his horse and reached up for the unconscious man. By the time they were at the door an older man had already opened it. "What's all the ruckus? Who's this then, Buck?"

"We think he's one of them Lancer brothers due for the meeting. Did the stage arrive, Doc?"

"No. It's hours overdo. Bring this young man in and lay him on the bed in the back room. Better get the sheriff, then. There's a government man with him that's been chaffing at the bit to do something, I think."

"There will be no need." Manolito smiled grimly as he followed Buck and the doctor into the inner room. "I saw him come out of his office with Big John and another I do not know. They will be here momentarily."

"Hm." Dismissing all thought of anyone but his patient, the doctor asked, "Where'd you find him?"

"'Bout thirty miles from Tucson and several miles from the stage's regular run." Buck scratched at his head. "Don't rightly know how he got there," As he spoke, three more men entered the room. He glanced up to see his brother, the sheriff and a stranger.

"He's suffered a bad fall." The doctor was examining his patient as Manolito had done, but more thoroughly. The young man remained unconscious throughout it. "No broken bones, except, perhaps, his head. His left shoulder is bruised. Might be dislocated. His left wrist looks to be sprained. Lost some blood from the head wound. Has some bad scrapes that bled some. Mostly on his left side. His clothes protected him some. All in all, a very lucky young man."

"Has he said anything?" The question came from the stranger. Now this was one dangerous gringo, Buck thought to himself. He was dressed in a form-fitting, well-made blue outfit, complete with a vest and jacket. Around his waist was a holster with a gun Buck had no doubt he could use. And his eyes . . . they sent a shiver down his spine.

"He cried out his brother's name, Scott." Mano said. "He prayed to Santa Maria to save him. His Spanish is very good."

“Should be,” the stranger said. “He was raised in Mexico. He said nothing about the stage? About a Mr. Gordon?”

“No.” Buck answered this time. “He’s been trying ta stay alive.”

“Don’t get riled up Buck.” John Cannon said. The big, imposing man sighed. “There were three people on that stage, the two Lancers and this man’s partner, Artemus Gordon. He was carrying government paperwork for the new bank.”

“What happened to the stage?” This question came from the sheriff.

“We don’t rightly know.” Buck said. “Looks like something spooked the horses and they took off. Bucked off the drivers. Maybe this young fella tried to climb out and got bucked off, too.”

“But we saw no sign of the stage,” Mano said softly. “No sign of horses or wreckage. They did not stop . . .”

“We caught sight of buzzards.” Buck took up the story again. “Led us ta the first body. Followed the tracks ta the second body. The driver and shogun rider,” he said pointedly to the government man. “Followed the trail ‘til we found this young fella. Figured we had ta bring him in.”

“You did the right thing,” the doctor commented. “He would not have survived a night in the desert.”

“I have to talk to him,” the government man said firmly.

“In the morning,” the doctor said just as firmly. “Now I want all of you out of here. I need to treat this young man and he needs rest.”

“Johnny,” Manolito said. “His name must be Johnny.”

As if in response, the patient began to thrash and mumble. “Scott. Watch yourself Boston! What’s happening? Horses. Horses are smart. Gordon! Take care of my brother!”

The last sentence came out in a tormented shout. Convulsing upward, Johnny suddenly collapsed back onto the bed, deeply unconscious. The doctor bent over his patient a moment and sighed. “He’ll not be talking to anyone tonight. Now get out. Come back in the morning.”

The government man glared at him a moment, then nodded. “In the morning.”

All the men but the doctor and his charge filed out of the back room and into the main waiting area. There they paused while John shook his head. “Good thing you and Manolito were out there, Buck. Whatever you were doing,” he added dryly.

“On our way back from Casa Grande.”

“You left after the stage?”

Buck turned to the government man, and said pointedly, "After the stage left."

"Buck. This is Mr. James West," the sheriff said. "We've been ordered by the U.S. government to help him in every way possible."

"He came to meet his partner."

"This was supposed to be a simple courier job."

West's voice wavered ever so slightly. Buck abruptly realized that for all his reticence, he was as worried about his partner as Buck would be for one of his family. Or the sick man for his brother. "We can find the trail, Mano an me. Come morning."

"The young man might know something," the sheriff said. "Best to talk to him first."

"In the morning."

"We'll all be here," John Cannon said. "Let's get you a room, Mr. West. Something tells me we all are going to need our sleep tonight." With one last look at the door between him and the only person with any possible answers, the government man reluctantly left.



The nightmare continued. In a claustrophobic box that lurched so badly he could not gain his feet, his brother held him. Stark fear filled his deep blue eyes--fear for him? What was happening? His whole body ached. Gordon was in the box, the stranger that knew far more about him than he should. Suddenly his brother disappeared through a hole and he could not follow. He was pushed, prodded, his discomfort increasing. Abruptly his pain focused, centering on his head and shoulders. Then it eased, as he felt a familiar touch, gentle, caring. His growing peace was shattered by his brother's scream. Johnny. Johnny! Where was he? "Johnny!"

"Easy, easy Scott. Easy. Your brother will be fine. I pray that he is fine."

The last words came out in a soft murmur, which seemed an echo of his own thoughts. Who was talking? The voice was familiar. Gordon! Suddenly the dream was real and he remembered. The stage! Johnny! He had to get up. He had to find out what happened! With an enormous effort he opened his eyes.

An incongruous plush settee and an irregular stone wall lay in his immediate line of vision. Behind the settee was an accordion screen, illustrated with a desert sunset. A faint but disquieting scent tinged the air. He twisted his head, evoking a sharp stab of pain from his head.

"Easy, Lancer, easy. Try not to move."

"Gordon?" Now the familiar face swam into his line of sight. Deep concern marked the brown eyes. For him? The older man had discarded his jacket and had his shirt sleeves rolled up. Ignoring the

warning, Scott shifted around to see where he was. He lay on large, four-posted bed in a stone chamber furnished with furniture that would suit any elite Boston home. He saw a highboy, a side table, another round table with two chairs, the settee and a writing desk. On the desk was a covered platter along with a metal pitcher and two glass mugs. Light came from two lamps, one on the desk and one on the side table. To his blurred vision they seemed remarkably bright for oil lamps.

Where the cavern narrowed naturally into a tunnel, a wooden barrier had been constructed with a study door. No one else was in the room. Suddenly he had a flash of his dream and his brother disappearing through a hole. Where was he? "Johnny, where's Johnny?!"

In his agitation, he began to rise up, ignoring his pain. The surprisingly strong grip of Gordon kept him down. But his sad eyes told Scott what he needed to know. Swallowing, he asked again. "Where is my brother?"

"I don't know." Gordon's voice contained both admiration and sorrow. "When the driver and the shogun rider were bucked off we thought we were on a runaway stage. Your brother attempted to climb out and stop the horses. They bucked him off the same as the other men."

"The horses?"

"I swear they were unusually intelligent. It was as if they were following their own agenda. I've never seen anything like it." Gordon shook his head, mentally sighing at Scott's stricken expression. "I can offer only this by way of comfort. I saw your brother fall. As he descended, he rolled. I'm sure his maneuver was done unconsciously, considering his experience with horse wrangling. He landed on earth, not the rock. And I saw him move, before we pulled away too far. Your brother's a fighter, has been all his life. I wouldn't give up on him."

"You are acquainted with Johnny? He never said he had met you!" This time Scott sat up, forgetting his discomfort in his curiosity and growing irritation.

"We've never met." Gordon smiled grimly, "I confess, I do have some knowledge of his life before he came to live with you and your father. I know something of you, also."

"I am glad you appear so well versed in our family."

Gordon sighed. "I say again, from what I've learned about your Johnny, don't give up on him."

"Who are you to be telling me anything about my brother?" Scott said furiously while clinging to the hope that Gordon was right.

"No one, just a stranger who has touched your life."

"I'd say run smack into it." As quickly as it had grown, Scott felt his anger melt away, leaving only a sense of loss and sorrow. Once more he shifted topics to counter the image of Johnny in the desert. "Any idea where we are?"

“From the ambient temperature, which I estimate is about seventy degrees Fahrenheit, and the composition of our prison, limestone with calcite and gypsum, I would say in an underground cavern system. Apparently this is a dormant or dry cave, very interesting.”

“Tell me something I don’t know,” Scott said wearily, his grief, worry and fear for his brother shadowing his blue eyes.

“Indeed. Our stage continued for another twenty miles or so after your brother was thrown off. Must have damned near killed the horses. You were unconscious. I was,” he shrugged. “Not at my best.” Gordon made a tiny shrug that ended in a grimace.

For the first time Scott noted the condition of the older man. He had blood on his dark hair as well as red staining his once-white shirt. A bandage was wrapped around his shoulder smeared with dried blood. *‘No, you’re obviously not at your best.* This thought prompted Scott to feel his own body. He also sported a bandage around his head where the worst of his discomfort came from, and more bindings on his right shoulder and chest. Completing a quick self-examination, he came to the conclusion that none of his ribs were broken or cracked, just bruised. He was dizzy, his head hurt like the dickens, and he was nearly undressed under the covers. Had Gordon treated him? Well, first things first. “What happened then?” Scott prompted.

“We were met by an armed escort of miscreants, a mixed lot of whites, Indians and Mexicans. They had a buckboard. They very nicely invited me to join them.” A grim smile touched Gordon’s face. “After taking you and everything off the stage, they blindfolded me and we continued our journey. I wish I could say I listened to the animal sounds and felt the terrain enough to follow where we were going, but I fear that would be a lie. We were going roughly southeast and climbed upward. That is all I know.

“We stopped. I was manhandled off the buckboard and led down several sloping walkways and one ladder until I was put in this room with you. When they removed my blindfold, I asked them for medical supplies, food and water. All were provided without any comment. Which reminds me . . .” Picking up one of the glass mugs from the side table, Gordon filled it with liquid from a pitcher and held it toward Scott. “Drink, now!”

“I am thirsty.” Gratefully the young man took a sip. Pausing, he grimaced slightly. “Tastes of minerals. But it’s water.” He continued to drink. When he put down the flagon, he glanced around. “How long have we been here?”

“I would say it’s close to dawn in the outside world. You should eat, if you’re able. Who knows how long our hosts will continue to be so generous. They have come in twice now. And yes, the door is locked.” Standing up from the bed, Gordon walked over to the desk and picked up the covered dish. Lifting up the lid, Scott could see the plate was full of what looked like tamales. The older man smiled as he carried them over the few steps to the bed. “These are quite good, actually. The main ingredient is a kind of mushroom. It is very flavorful. Something that could be grown underground,” Gordon said thoughtfully.

“These are good,” Scott agreed, realizing he was also hungry. “And my stomach seems reasonably happy with the idea.” Chewing carefully, Scott watched Gordon restlessly pace the room. The

silence between the two men stretched out. The image of his brother, lost in the desert, slowly grew in Lancer's mind until all he could envision was his brother dying in the pitiless heat. Suddenly, his food began to sour in his stomach. Laying the plate next to him on the bed, he looked at Gordon. "You said we're locked in."

The older man turned to face Scott. "By a very sturdy door. Someone spent a great deal of time, effort and money on our prison. There is even a sort of water closet behind that decorative screen, complete with bath, sink and running water."

"Plumbing, underground?"

Gordon nodded. "Not your garden variety prison. Except for the guards. Who, by the way, are well trained, unresponsive and very thorough. Surprisingly thorough."

Scott's brow furrowed at Gordon's last remark, but he let it pass for the moment. Stretching cautiously, he carefully sat up on the side of the bed. Glancing at the bandages he sported he smiled at Artemus. "I should thank you for taking care of me. You've done a very professional job. You said you studied medicine?"

"I studied many things. Jack of all trades, master of only one."

"Fair enough. In your estimation, Mr. Gordon, were any of the men you saw capable of planning this?"

"Good question, my boy. In my estimation they are pure muscle." The older man smiled slightly. "No, this reeks of someone with real intelligence." He grimaced. "One might even assume, genius!"

"Who are you? You're no more a salesman than I'm a professor at Harvard."

"An interesting comparison." Gordon looked around and sighed. "No way of knowing if there are any listening devices. I have looked in any obvious places."

"Listening devices. You mean a mechanism allowing a person somewhere else to hear what we say in this room? How could that be?"

"I have seen such a device and attempted to duplicate it myself," Gordon grinned widely.

"Allow me to reintroduce myself. I am Artemus Gordon of the American Secret Service. Artie to my friends--and those I'm held captive with. I apologize for my deception, but I could not reveal who I really was to you and your brother. If affairs had gone as planned, I would have left Tucson with Jim and remained forever a chance encounter."

"Jim?"

"James West, my partner. Perhaps our best chance of getting out of here."

Scott shook his head. "Secret Service, I never would have guessed. But Johnny was suspicious of you from the start. And I must admit your knowledge of Sibley surprised me."

“He makes for interesting conversation,” Gordon grinned.

“You had papers,” Scott glanced around involuntarily. “For our business. Traveling with us. How ironic. Where?”

Gordon pointed to his valise, placed in a corner with the other two, almost hidden by a fold in the rock. “Our hosts were not particularly interested in them.” He gazed at Scott. “They must have other interests.”

“You, perhaps?”

“Perhaps. Or perhaps it could be you, Mr. Lancer, they were after.”

“What would anyone want with me? Unless they intended to hold Johnny and me for ransom. And by the way, I’m Scott, to my friends and those I’m held captive with.” He held out his hand with a lopsided grin. “Pleased to meet you, Artie.”

“Likewise, Scott,” Artemus said, shaking the offered hand. Releasing the appendage, his eyes grew thoughtful. “That’s a very real possibility. If so, our captors must be very irritated.” His voice drifted off as he gazed at the more and more uncomfortable younger man. He finally said, “I am honored to meet the prodigy of Harvard. Sibley’s golden young man”

This time Scott squirmed with embarrassment. “I don’t deserve that appellation. I was one of many.”

“No, you were one of a kind. You were, and remain, the youngest student ever to be enrolled in Harvard. You were a fine scholar who left with many others to fight for his country. You then returned after the war, regaining your standing as if you’d never left.” Artemus shrugged at Scott’s look of surprise. “I must confess I have followed Professor Sibley’s career for various reasons and therefore know something of his prominent students, even if I hadn’t been ordered by our government to research your history. I heard Sibley fancied you would carry on his work.”

“His work? His crazy work.” Scott shook his head. “He persuaded me to return. It was better than listening to my Grandfather. At first I attributed Sibley’s increasing eccentricity to age, but eccentric doesn’t even begin to describe the professor. He was brilliant.” Scott sighed. “He was mad. What he could have done to help our country, especially after the horrors of the war? In astronomy alone he could have changed the course of that discipline. I thought I could change his mind. But he went on with his experiments, building machines he only demonstrated to his students, making explosives, studying his caves. Burying himself until he finally did it for real! And Harvard let him. All those professors were so happy to be finally rid of him!”

Scott stopped abruptly. After a few moments, Gordon said. “And then you dropped out. Within only a few months of graduation.”

“I left. And I never looked back.”

“I was right. I do understand you.”

Scott glanced sharply at the older man, prepared to make a scathing retort. But the look of utter empathy on his face stopped him. “You never graduated, did you? Were you one of Sibley’s golden boys as well?”

“Not to your degree. He never opened his bag for me.”

“But you knew what was in it.”

“Yes. I knew. Though I can’t say I believed it would work.”

“It did. Or at least it appeared to work.”

“Oh yes. It works.” Both men jerked their head toward the door. Standing in the entranceway was a short man with brown hair. A very short man.

“As I live and breathe. Scott, meet Doctor Miguelito Loveless, our brilliant host,” Gordon said with a wide grin. “Why am I not surprised?”

“Get dressed, Mr. Lancer,” Loveless said almost gleefully. “Get cleaned up, Mr. Gordon.” He grimaced at the Secret Service man. “And we will talk about it.”



True to their word, the men of High Chaparral converged with Jim West just before dawn in the dining room. They ate a silent breakfast. When they were finished, John stood up. Tall, and imposing, his deep voice resonated throughout the room. “I’ve taken the liberty of rounding up supplies for you. Everyone else as well.”

Jim West slowly pulled his napkin from his shirt and laid it on the table. With equal deliberation he stood up. “I’m much obliged for the supplies, but I travel alone.”

“Not this time. I have most of my ranch hands out to help in the search.”

“I travel alone!”

Both men glared at each other.

“Sí.” Manolito’s cheerful voice cut in. “You travel alone. But Buck and I know where to begin the search. And I know the Indians,” Manolito’s voice lost its mirth. “I can help you if you run into them.”

“When we run into them,” Buck added, standing next to his friend. “I don’t think ya have much choice in this, friend. We are going with ya.”

“All right, two,” West said grimly. “But no more. I am grateful,” he looked at John with a smile that never reached his eyes.

“Why no more men?” Big John asked with genuine curiosity.

“I begin to understand, I think.” Manolito interrupted thoughtfully. “The stagecoach was taken for a reason. Either your partner or the Lancer brothers were the target. Someone wants them.”

“Someone who will surely see an army of men,” West said.

“But not three.”

“Four!”

Equally surprised, John, Buck, Manolito and West turned. Standing in the door of the dining room was the youth they had left in the doctor’s care last evening. White bandages were wrapped around his head, along with his left wrist. Anything else was hidden by his clothing. He must have borrowed a shirt, Manolito thought idly, since his other had been shredded in the fall. With measured steps he walked up to the men and, after casually pulling a chair from an empty table, sat down. Slowly the others followed suit.

“So, what’s a man to do around here to get some food?”

“Does Doctor Reynolds know you’re up?”

Johnny glanced at the older man. “He knows he can’t keep me. Are you John Cannon?”

“Yes. I’m sorry to meet you under these circumstances.”

“Same here. We can get to the reason why Scott and I came to your town after we get my brother back. And your partner, Mr. Gordon.” He turned to West. “The doc told me. I never believed he was a hawker of fake cures.”

“He must be losing his touch.” A hint of a smile graced West’s blue eyes.

“No. I’m just used to seeing what’s under a man. Course I think Scott noticed something different about him, but maybe that was because they both went to Harvard and knew the same professor.”

“What?” This came from Buck. “What’s ya talking about? And why are ya out of bed?”

“I can’t find my brother from a bed.” He glared at each man in turn. “And nothin’ and nobody will stop me from lookin’. I’ll follow alone if I must!”

“You’re hurt,” West said quietly. It was almost as if they were alone in the room. Two sets of blue eyes considered each other.

“I’ve been hurt worse. Ain’t nothin’ I can’t ignore.”

“I won’t slow down for you.”

“Good. Someone took my brother. He’s gonna pay for it. And I feel . . . he’s in trouble.” Johnny’s voice trailed off as he broke eye contact.

“We will find your brother, señor. And Mr. Gordon.” Mano said firmly. “I am Manolito Montoya, this is my friend, Buck Canon, brother of John, who is husband to my sister Victoria. And this taciturn fellow is James West, of the American Secret Service. We will make a fine team, will we not?”

Johnny Lancer smiled, the expression making him look even younger. “I don’t mind the company.”

“You’ll do,” West said, looking at Buck, Mano and Johnny. “You’ll do. Tell me what you know!”



Scott and Artemus were silent as they cleaned up, Scott choosing to don his bloodstained shirt rather than a clean one. Loveless had gone, but left behind two of his henchman, a tall Indian and a shorter Mexican with a small whip attached to his belt. Both men were wearing a braid of red cloth on their right shoulder. They watched the prisoners but never said a word. Under the uncomfortable scrutiny only a few minutes passed before Artie said to their guards, “Lead on MacDuff.”

The men’s only reaction was to grunt and motion for them to follow, not that Artie had expected any reaction. He was just grateful they were not blindfolded this time. They were led out through a tunnel extending some forty yards with several openings on either side until they reached a cross tunnel that stretched both ways as far as he could see.

“What’s the light source?” Scott had paused to stare at one of the many bright globes that were attached to wooden strips running the length of each tunnel.

“Incandescent lamps, my boy.”

“Incandescent lamps. Electricity?”

“Something you should know about. Our Miguelito is just ahead of the times.”

Scott frowned, then his eyes widened. “I remember one of Sibley’s projects. He corresponded with an Edison and Swan about it. We made prototypes.”

“I thought as much.”

“What power source is he using . . . I wonder, a steam engine?” Scott pointed to the right. “That faint noise could be an engine.”

“Powered by coal,” Artie agreed. “But it must be a very high grade.”

“Black diamond, anthracite.”

“I think you’re right, my boy. Does he mine it here?”

“There is coal in the Arizona territory.”

“Come! The patrón is waiting.”

Lancer and Gordon glanced at the angry speaker. “He is an impatient fellow.” Scott said, a smile playing at his mouth.

“Doesn’t he want us to admire the patrón?”

“Come.” The Indian accompanied his command with a sharp jab between Scott’s shoulders that pushed him toward the left. The brother grunted and hissed with pain but kept on going. Artemus glared at their guard but followed without any further comment.

After several yards the tunnel opened up into a smallish cavern. The old stalactites and stalagmites were very evident in this chamber. The floor had been leveled somewhat but the path was still treacherous. Several guards were in this room, some that Gordon recognized. They stopped when they reached a metal platform. Gesturing to the captives, their guard made it clear he wanted them to step onto the platform.

Gordon was unsurprised when one of the Indians pulled a lever and, with a grinding sound of metal, the platform began to move. Scott shot him a startled look but remained silent. They traveled downward, entering a new, irregularly-shaped chamber. This one was bigger, a little more than twenty thousand cubic feet. The walls sparkled in the artificial light, reflecting off the lush furnishings. In a raised area, fit into a large natural niche and reached by a short staircase, was a four-posted bed with curtains. Tapestries covered the natural stone behind it. Another corner was set up like an office with an ornate desk, side tables, shelves full of books and even a cushioned chair, all sized to fit the scale of the man who almost ran to meet them. A rubber tube ran along the walls, disappearing up the lift shaft. The end was sitting on a table, attached to a mouthpiece. A second raised area was filled with a huge bed. On the level ground in front of it was an equally large, cushioned chair. The only other occupant was a giant man who remained several steps back.

Gordon could see Scott studying the dwarf as the lift came to a stop and the Indian gestured them to step onto the plush, red carpet. “Loveless,” he said softly. “I remember that name.”

“I am so glad to finally meet you, Mr. Lancer.” Loveless beamed at the two men. “I have been waiting for this day far too long. This,” he pointed to the giant, “Is my associate, Voltaire. My Indian friend is called Santos and his companion is Roberto.”

“You appear to have the advantage,” Scott replied coldly. “I am not pleased to meet you.”

“Oh, because of your brother. Very annoying. I sent my men out to pick him up but they couldn’t find him.”

“Johnny, gone?” Scott’s eyes lit up. “Someone rescued him?”

“Probably, probably.” Loveless waved his hand dismissively. “Unfortunate. I wanted him here.”

“A simple kidnapping?” Artie shook his head. “Not up to your usual standards.”

“You. You,” Miguelito almost danced with irritation. “You should not be here! Why do you continue to interfere with my plans?”

“Someone has to do it.”

“Where is West? If you’re here, West can’t be far behind.”

“I imagine not,” Gordon said with a smile.

“Oo, you make me so mad! You and West, always poking your heads in where they’re not wanted.” Grumbling, he went to the tube and pulled out a metal piece that covered the end. Speaking into it, he ordered, “Don’t forget those extra sentries.”

“Yes sir,” a faint voice replied.

Miguelito replaced the covering and grinned up at the captives. “There is nothing simple about my plans. I trained that team of horses and gave them special injections that raised their intelligence. Why, they were probably smarter than you, Mr. Gordon. And they ran their hearts out for me! It was my planning that ensured they were the team put on at the right time. I was the one who had a different, lighter coach constructed and substituted for the original one in Casa Grande. I had my men ready to retrieve the stagecoach. And what I’ve done to make this place habitable?”

Suddenly the dwarf’s demeanor changed and he looked around proudly. “Do you like what I’ve done? I’ve created my own source of power for light, cooking, pumps for water, sewage and some other improvements. This cave has a seam of anthracite, a smokeless coal, less waste, less smell. I’ve had it mined.”

Scott listened to the little man’s tirade in dumbfounded silence. His comments about Johnny had given Lancer his first real spark of hope for his brother. But everything else he said just confused him. Obviously this Loveless had some history with Artemus. And he would bet his third of the Lancer ranch that whatever the dwarf was involved with, it wasn’t good. For reasons of his own, he had taken the stagecoach—probably killed innocent men. Scott’s own anger began to build. He wanted answers, now! “Are you making a ransom demand for me?”

“Ransom! Whatever gave you that plebeian idea? Oh, no, Mr. Lancer. I want your brain!”



“This is where we found you.” Manolito pointed to an outcropping of rocks several yards from the four riders.

Johnny looked around. “Nothing’s familiar. Can’t say I was paying too much attention to the

scenery after the horses took off.”

“Not surprising,” Buck commented. “The tracks lead in that direction.”

“We’re wasting time staying here,” West said. “Let’s go.”

Without further talk, the men left. Several hours had gone by, and the sun beat down mercilessly on all the riders. Johnny’s wide brimmed hat almost covered the white of the bandages on his head. He rode stiffly, carefully, but had made no complaints or comments other than that necessary for the search.

Buck could tell Manolito was as impressed with his courage, as he was. Whatever West thought he kept to himself. Buck sighed. It was going to be a long day. He hoped they were lucky. He feared they would not be. Gazing at the sky, he studied a grouping of storm clouds in the distance. Anything could happen to hinder their search - Apaches or the weather itself. Summer showers were common this time of year. One good rain would obliterate what trail they had. He felt eyes upon him and saw Mano looking at him. A glimpse of his face confirmed that his brother-in-law feared the same thing.

Buck glanced at Lancer, the young man’s face reflecting his ongoing battle with his injuries, and West, the government man as emotionless as ever, and mentally sighed. Yes, this was going to be a long day.



“My brain?” Lancer took an involuntary step back.

“I want your expertise,” Loveless elaborated gleefully. “You were Sibley’s student . . .”

“That’s where I know your name,” Scott interrupted. “Sibley corresponded with you for years. The Professor used to talk about his kindred spirit. He exchanged ideas with you, plans.”

“Yes. Yes. Sibley was forthcoming with me on most topics.”

“The great Miguelito Loveless needed help creating his toys,” Gordon smiled.

“Everything you and West have seen was mine! Mine!” Loveless nearly spat the words out.

“You are most irritating, Mr. Gordon. All Sibley provided was a little direction. He dreamed more than he attempted to create. His great fault.”

“I would agree with that,” Scott said softly. “How exactly can I help you?”

“Voltaire, bring over the device.” Loveless motioned to the giant.

Turning to a bureau, Voltaire opened the top drawer and removed a beautiful leather valise. Picking it up carefully, he brought it over. Putting it down on a short stool, he opened the bag and stepped

back. Almost reverently, Loveless reached down and pulled out a soccer-ball sized sphere from where it nestled in specially made padding. Constructed out of some dark blue, almost black metal, the surface of the sphere was covered in white etching that outlined the continents and islands of the earth and light blue lines showing the major rivers and lakes.

Gordon's eyes widened and he heard Scott gasp. "How did you get that?"

"When the good professor died, I made sure his most valuable possessions ended up in safe hands."

"You have no right to that," Scott said.

"Oh, I have every right. I am his spiritual successor, after all. A position you refused."

"I've never seen the-machine before," Gordon whispered. "Only heard about it."

"Do you know its complete history?" Loveless asked. "Well, I will enlighten you. Sibley read some very obscure texts in his youth. One of the entries guided him to this dry region. He explored this very cave system. Used Santos' father as a guide, in fact. He found signs of an advanced race who he assumed were people of Atlantis. Then he discovered the sphere. And do you know what it is? What it does?"

"Not really, but I'm sure you will tell me."

"You will not make me angry again, Mr. Gordon. Not when I am so close. Mr. Lancer knows what it does."

"What it is purported to do."

"With the proper activation it will display a tunnel system that would allow me to travel to any place, on any continent, without setting a foot on the surface. I will have underground access to every major city. I can gain entry to the banks and museums of the world, saving priceless artifacts from the destructive forces of modern man. I can destroy the cities, replacing them with my own cities. Create a world safe for children to live in. I can . . ."

"You're madder than he was!"

"That's our Miguelito," Artie said. "Never does anything by halves. And his plans always boil down to destroying this world so he can build a perfect world in his own image."

"Roberto!" Loveless' henchman quickly responded to his leader's order, striking Artemus across the mouth then driving his fist into Gordon's stomach. Before Scott could react, he struck the agent again, this time causing him to collapse. "You're making me angry again."

Scott gasped, kneeling quickly to cradle Gordon's face. "He can't hear you."

"He'll wake up. Voltaire, get Mr. Lancer on his feet."

Moving quickly, the giant stepped over. With very little effort, he grabbed Scott by his shoulders and lifted him up.

“Now, Mr. Lancer,” Miguelito almost purred. “I have waited long enough. You know how to activate the sphere, do so!”

“Being Sibley’s student does not mean I know all his secrets. Besides, the sphere was just a fantasy of his. You don’t really believe this is something from Atlantis? Atlantis is a myth, a story created by Plato.”

Peripherally, Scott was aware of Gordon stirring but all his attention was on Miguelito. The dwarf stomped once. “It is no myth! As well you know. Don’t play stupid with me. Sibley himself said in his letters you could activate it.”

“He exaggerated. I can’t. And even if I could, do you think I would help you? At least Sibley never hurt anyone but himself with his ideas.”

“Such an ingrate. After all I’ve done for you since you arrived. You will help me. You will!”

“Done for me? You kidnapped me, along with my brother and Mr. Gordon. Two employees of the Stage line and Johnny were injured and possibly killed because of what you planned. How can you expect me to help you in your murderous schemes? You are utterly mad!”

“Don’t call me that! I can see that Gordon’s presence has contaminated you. I will have your help!”

“Nothing on earth can compel me to help you!”

“Voltaire, Santos, Roberto,” Loveless danced in frustrated anger. “Take our guests to the engine, no to the mines. Make sure Mr. Lancer has a very uncomfortable trip this time. Put them to work, don’t let them rest or eat. Only give them enough water to keep them alive. Beat them, beat them! We’ll see how you feel later!”

Scott felt the Indian’s strong arms grab at him from behind. This time Roberto’s fist smashed into Lancer’s stomach. A burning pain radiated outward. Several more hits were made, aggravating the old pain from his bruised ribs. Without the Indian’s grip he would have fallen. Then he felt the Indian push him on the carpet. He heard the sound of the whip swish before he felt the first, stinging blow. The second blow caused a shock of anguish to run over him even through his shirt and bandages. He remembered this feeling, but it was not one he had ever expected to endure again.

“No. No. Not over my carpet. Take them down. Do it there. But not too much. He’s not to be permanently damaged. I want him to work. Then we’ll see how he feels.”

Miguelito’s words swam in Scott’s head as he felt arms grab him, pulling him on his feet. “Johnny. Johnny.” He mumbled the name of his beloved brother. Johnny would survive. He had to. *Johnny, I need help, little brother. Oh, God. I need help!*



Johnny rode behind the man called Jim West, stoically ignoring his painful body. Each hour in the saddle only served to increase the stiffness and muscle aches he had ignored when he had awoken in Doc Miller's back room. The doctor had been kind, explaining everything he knew about the stage incident along with all the ills and possible ills Johnny suffered. Lancer had listened politely then asked where his clothes were. Doctor Miller had treated enough patients to recognize the stubborn ones. He had retrieved the clothes, even replacing the shirt, offering no argument, just a fervent, "God be with you on your quest."

Johnny was more grateful than he could ever tell the Doc. If the man had put up any arguments, Lancer would probably never have made it out the door. Now he rode because of stubborn will and a growing fear of what was happening to his brother. And he welcomed the pain. It served to hone his purpose. Scott was out there somewhere. The image of his brother's bloodstained beloved face hovered before his mind's eye, a constant reminder of why he was here.

For a moment his gaze rested on West's blue-clad back. West also had a purpose. Johnny had read it in blue eyes that held the same hint of menace as his own. A kindred spirit. Behind him rode the man called Buck, and first in line was the Mexican, Manolito. They could not share West and Johnny's purpose, but Lancer was glad for their presence. Each in his own way had a good reason to be in this rocky, desolate land.

For one brief moment the desert scenery before his eyes waved, shattering Johnny's idle thoughts. He reeled in his saddle as a voice cried in his mind. *'Johnny, I need help, little brother. Oh, God. I need help!'*

"Hey, Lancer. Yo'all right?"

He almost missed Buck's concerned words, but not the steady arm that held him in his saddle.

"We must stop. Rest."

Johnny looked up as the anxious face of Manolito swam into his view. "No. I'm fine."

"Don't look fine ta me," Buck said in a conversational tone.

"I am. I thought . . ."

"What my friend." Manolito prodded.

"I thought I heard, thought I heard Scott. I'm not loco!" Johnny glared at his companions.

"No one thinks such a thing. One hears many things in the desert. We will find your brother."

"Speaking of which. Can we get on?" Of all of them, West hadn't moved his horse off the original path.

“Yeah.” Johnny’s face hardened. “Let’s move.” He urged his animal to continue.

“Wait. You must rest.”

Buck’s hand stayed his friend’s words. He shook his head. “They gotta go. They ain’t got no choice.”

Mano looked at Cannon’s stricken face and reluctantly nodded. “Sí. You are right. Let us follow before we are left behind.”

Spurring his horse forward, Manolito quickly reclaimed his place at the front of the line. Buck watched Lancer, then his gaze wandered toward the dark clouds that were visible in the otherwise clear sky. A dark mist hung below them. Fervently Buck prayed that the storm or flood waters engendered by the rain would not come near them.

For another mile the men rode in silence. They were actually traveling in an arc around Tucson, not that far from the town, Buck thought idly. The terrain changed as they came closer and closer to a range of mountains. The ground became increasingly rockier, the scraggy vegetation more plentiful, forcing the men to ride slower rather than risk a possible dangerous misstep by their horses.

Manolito’s body was bent down as he followed the progressively fainter trail left by the coach. So it was West’s sharp eyes that first saw the alien shapes within the shadows of the rocky foothills they rode between. “I think I see the stagecoach. Over there.”

The agent’s terse words garnered all the companions’ attention. Sure enough, under a rocky overhang some ten feet away, was what could be the wreck of the vehicle. Quickly spurring his horse forward, Buck reached the remains and jumped down. Cautiously, he entered the covered area.

“I will scout ahead.” As he spoke, Manolito urged his horse around the bluff, quickly disappearing. Johnny dismounted more carefully, walking up to the overhang but he hesitated, as if afraid of what he would find. West paused next to him. Buck reappeared after a few, tense minutes. “Nobody’s left. Coach is bare.”

“That is not exactly true.” Buck and the others turned as Manolito came into view again. The Mexican slid off his horse. “I would say the big pile of rocks on the other side of this outcropping is covering a horse, maybe two. Someone has worked very hard to bury them.”

“Okay, so they left the coach here.” Johnny’s voice was filled with urgency. “They must have brought something to transport Scott and Gordon. We’ll follow that trail.”

“Sí. You are right, my friend. Come Buck. We have another trail to find.”

The two men quickly fanned out. Instead of joining them, West looked at Johnny thoughtfully. “Whoever planned this wanted them alive.” His voice was pitched low.

Johnny gazed into the older eyes which hid a mind so like his and couldn’t resist a bitter jab. “Who

do they want, your partner or my brother?”

“I don’t know,” West replied honestly. “But Artie and I were between missions. We’ve had enemies, sure, but most of them are dead. Can you say the same?”

Johnny sucked in his breath. “I can’t say. Someone from my past, in this Territory? If it’s my fault Scott was taken . . .”

“It’s never your fault!” West’s words were quick and sharp. “Don’t ever think that! You can’t control what other people do.”

“No,” Johnny nodded, his eyes once more calm. “I just know what I gotta do.”

“We’re doing it.” West’s words were swallowed by a sudden, loud clap of thunder. Startled, both men glanced up. The threatening clump of clouds that had been moving ever closer was almost upon them.

“I thought this was a desert.” Johnny said almost peevishly.

“It does not rain in your deserts, back home?” Manolito said lightly, appearing suddenly from around a rocky outcropping a few steps away. Immediately his smile disappeared. “I was afraid of this. These summer rains come fast, with little warning. I had hoped it would stay far away.”

“And from the look of this un,” Buck commented as he walked around the same hill, “It’s gonna be a strong one. We gotta find shelter. This overhang where the stage was hid is like a small cave. Enough space for us. The horses can stay near the opening.”

“And the ground is high.” Manolito added. “We should not find ourselves flooded.”

“The trail,” West asked. “Did you find it?”

“Yeah, for what good it’ll do.” Buck said sadly. “The rain’ll most likely wash it away.”

“We gotta keep on going,” Johnny said frantically. “While we can follow it.”

Surprisingly it was West who stepped forward. Laying his hand gently on Johnny’s shoulder he shook his head. “It’s not safe to be riding in a thunderstorm, especially in this terrain. You know that. And we wouldn’t get far before the rain hit. I’ve been in these kinds of storms. It’s too dangerous with the lightning and we could get caught in a flash flood. Better to stay here until it passes.”

As if to emphasize the agent’s words, the day was suddenly made brighter by a sudden flash followed by a clap of thunder so loud it hurt the ears. The sound of nervous horses galvanized all the riders. The next few minutes were spent calming the animals and moving them into the area next to the carriage. It was just high enough and the coach provided a place to anchor them. Johnny busied himself making sure his horse was watered. A part of his mind recorded the fact that the others were also taking care of their mounts. Finally, his task was completed and all he could

manage was to climb upward, bending to avoid the lowering ceiling, and sink onto the gravelly floor of the cave to watch the coming rain. All the aches he'd been ignoring began to assail him. He couldn't stop a small grunt of pain from escaping his lips.

'Scott, Scott, where are you,' he thought to himself. 'Could all of this be my fault, Boston? Or were we both the target? I'll find you, Boston. I swear I'll find you!' As the discomfort of his injuries grew, his muddled thoughts swam in his mind. When the darkness came, he welcomed it.



His arms were stretched above him, his back burned. The bandages Gordon had so carefully wrapped around his shoulder were cut away. The sound of swishing leather caused Scott to brace his muscles in anticipation. A terrible, tearing misery flared. Lancer caught his breath, swallowing his cries. But when the next blow fell, his scream bubbled out. The anguish washed over him, immediately reducing his world to only the reality of his pain and the need to endure. He was sure there was a reason to endure.

Through the haze of his agony he heard a familiar voice. "Stop it. Stop it! You're killing him."

"Oh no, Señor," a strange voice spoke with a chilling chuckle. "This one is strong. Look at his back. He has had worse."

"Not with the injuries he sustained in the coach. Loveless wants him alive, he won't be if you keep this up!"

"Perhaps you are right. But I will keep my chicote handy."

Arms began to pull at him, a wave of vertigo swept over him causing bile to rise in his throat. He heard the familiar voice. "Give me water. Let me clean the blood off."

"No." The word was spoken with a quiet menace that was more chilling than the Mexican's responses. "I will say when you get water."

Lancer could almost hear the smile in the statement. He worked at opening his eyes, a seemingly impossible task. He was rewarded by the view of rocky corridor and the concerned face of Artemus Gordon. The man was disheveled and fresh blood stained his right arm sleeve and face.

"My boy. I'm glad to see you."

"I'm not sure I'm glad to see you." Scott's voice was raspy. "Hoped this was a dream and I was back at the Hacienda listening to Jelly's bad jokes." The words brought a wave of sorrow as he remembered all that had happened. "Johnny!"

"Remember? His body was gone," Artie spoke quietly. "Wouldn't be surprised if he's with Jim." Gordon grinned then grew serious again. "Be strong. I think we're going to need all the strength we possess while we wait for rescue."

“Where are we?” Scott glanced around carefully. The smell of methane was stronger, but surprisingly bearable. They were in a smaller cavern. To their right and left were tunnels. Both tunnels had railroad ties, the track meeting near a large pile of black, shiny rocks.

“In one of the patrón’s tunnels,” Roberto interrupted. “The coal that is mined must be cut into pieces the same size. It is very importante or they will not burn properly. You will break up the pieces.”

“You heard the man.” Artie stood up, reaching out his hand to help Lancer rise. Grimacing, Scott pushed himself up, only to fall back with a grunt of pain. Carefully, Gordon shifted until his arm encircled a portion of Scott’s untouched shoulder and lifted. This time Scott was able to stand. Immediately, the younger man reeled as he was hit by another bought of vertigo. At least the little that was in his stomach stayed put.

Breathing heavily, he gazed at the pitiless faces of the Indian and Mexican. Roberto rolled up his bloody whip and hooked it to his belt. With a smile, Santos held out a mallet. Somehow Lancer took the tool in one hand. Belatedly he realized he was wearing leg irons. The weight and feel of the chains were disturbingly familiar. Swallowing, he forced his hands to grip the handle of the mallet.

Glancing at Artie, he read the bitter truth in the older man’s brown eyes. He must endure. He must survive. He could not allow Loveless to gain the secrets of Sibley’s artifact. He could not let that madman have such power. Stoically he swung the mallet where his tormentors pointed. More pain radiated through his body at the impact of metal on minerals. He pulled back and struck again, ignoring the agony it engendered. He was aware of Artie plying his tool in the same area.

The world narrowed again to what he had to endure. Only the faint images of his family, Murdoch, Jelly, Teresa and his beloved brother Johnny existed within this hell. Soon even that solace was eclipsed by pain and the need to keep moving. Nothing else existed.



He was in a cool place but sweat dripped from his face, his body. His leaden arms burned with pain, a discomfort shared by all his being. A great thirst tortured him. In this underground prison, away from the light of the Great Architect, he would die. He only had one real regret. “Johnny. Johnny.” The whispered name drifted on the air currents before being picked up by the wind. “Johnny.”

With an abrupt start, Johnny Lancer opened his eyes. In almost the same instant he sat up, ignoring the soreness it elicited from stiffened muscles. “Easy. Easy, Johnny.” The voice was accompanied by hands that kept him from moving farther. “Yah gotta watch your head. Likely to bash it again on the low ceiling. Here, drink some water.”

Taking the canteen gratefully, Lancer drank, letting his thoughts sort themselves out. He’d been dreaming about Scott. That much he was sure of. And it wasn’t good. But the content eluded him, hovering almost in his consciousness.

Handing the canteen back to Buck, he looked around the cave. The smell of horses confirmed,

before he saw the animals, that they remained tied to the abandoned coach. But he and Cannon were the only men. "Where're the others?" He glanced outside. The sun was back but the shadows looked wrong. "How late is it?"

"Well, to answer the first question, outside. And the second, it's a little later than we intended. But ya needed to rest. And now we can't go."

"What's happened?" As he spoke, Lancer began scrabbling down the gravelly floor toward the entrance, ignoring the increased discomfort it brought to his body.

"Damn it, boy!" The curse was accompanied by Buck's not so agile form following as fast as he could manage. "Don't go out there!"

The admonition came moments too late as Johnny skidded out from the cave and into the open. He immediately froze, feeling Buck coming to a stop next to him. About two steps ahead of him was Jim West. Five steps in front of him was Manolito. The Mexican was talking and gesturing to a tall, dark Indian. Next to them a pretty bay picked at the sparse vegetation between the rocks. The hairs bristled on Lancer's skin. He knew without looking that other Indians stood on the rocks above. The man talking to Manolito was dressed in a print shirt with loose pants and a belt around his thin waist. He was armed with a rifle. Without being told, Johnny was sure they were Apache.

The Indian turned his head toward Johnny and said something. Manolito answered back. The man tilted his head, his cryptic expression unreadable. He stepped closer, looking at Johnny intently. Although his body screamed for some kind of action, Lancer returned the scrutiny calmly. Sometime into his search for his brother he had switched from Lancer to Madrid. The gunfighter persona he had embodied for so many years easily accepted the Apache's appraisal, and rendered it back in kind.

Finally the Apache grunted and turned back toward Manolito. They exchanged several more words. Pointing toward the mountain range they had been approaching, he nodded. Manolito nodded back with a smile. The Apache inclined his head and called out. Immediately the Indians on the rocks around them began slipping away. With a final nod at Montoya, he gracefully jumped up on his horse and rode away.

An uneasy silence followed the departure of the Indians. Lancer tensed when it was broken by Manolito's heartfelt, "Dios mío! That was very interesting." A wide grin wreathed the Mexican's face. "And not something I would like to do again."

"Mano, ya did it." Buck came over and slapped his friend's shoulder.

"It was not only me," Montoya wagged his finger at the agent. "Mr. West stood his ground quite nicely."

"You told him Artie was my brother, didn't you? Wasn't it dangerous lying to him?"

"Not a lie, Señor West. Brotherhood is not always defined by blood. And you Señor Lancer," Mano's grin broadened as he looked at Johnny. "Your appearance was most opportune. I was just

telling our friend about the other pair of brothers and you came. He was very impressed with you, I think.”

“Me? Who was he?”

“His name is Lochi. He is Chief Morales’ nephew.”

“Morales!” Buck exclaimed.

“Sí. It is a small world.”

“Who is this Morales?” West interrupted. “And what does he have to do with our search?”

“Well Morales is a chief of a local group of Apaches we had a run in with,” Buck said. “He took Blue Boy, that’s John’s grown son, captive. He wanted to stop some soldiers from attacking him.”

“Not very friendly,” Johnny commented. “Yet they seemed real friendly just now.”

“Looks can be deceiving with the Apache,” Mano replied. “But in this case, true. They were anxious not to be blamed for an assault on a group of soldiers escorting a supply wagon. We assisted Big John in proving them innocent. Chief Morales returned Billy Blue himself. A very honorable man.”

Johnny studied Buck’s face during the explanation. From the fluid expressions crossing his face, Lancer was sure the incident had been far from as simple as the explanation sounded.

“So they’re letting us continue,” West broke in. “Very friendly of them. Trouble is, we haven’t a trail to follow.”

“No!” Johnny’s shout echoed back from the rock walls around them. “No.” The crushing weight of despair closed around Johnny’s heart. He felt tears well underneath his closed eyelids. But as quickly as the despair surfaced, it was replaced by coldness. “I ain’t gonna stop ‘til I find Scott.”

“Sí, we will find him and Señor Gordon.” Johnny realized Manolito had come to stand next to him. “Lochi told me rumors of a white man who has come to stay in the Rincon mountains, those we are approaching. He has gathered a large force of men, including Indians, to help him.” Mano smiled grimly. “Lochi called the Indians who are rumored to help him outcasts and scum.”

“What is this man doing?” West asked.

“No one knows. These mountains have been sacred to Apache; they only come at special times. Now they stay away. But supplies have been arriving, food, clothing, tools, even furniture. All smuggled in from Mexico. And they say the mountain spouts smoke sometimes and strange smells that make them sick. The Indians have named this gringo who lives on the mountains, the Little Giant.”

“Little Giant?”

“Sí. They say he is like none other they have seen, short. From the description I think he is a dwarf. But he has the drive of a giant.”

“Loveless! Why would it have to be that madman?”

“Who is this Loveless, West?” Buck asked before Johnny could form the question.

“If it is him, and I know only one man who could possibly fit that description, his name is Dr. Miguelito Loveless. He’s a dwarf with the intellect of a genius and an ego to match. He’s tried to kill Artie and me more times than I care to admit. And every one of those times we’ve stopped some crazy plan of his to destroy civilization and rebuild it in his own, mad image.”

“Your enemy, not mine,” Johnny said with quiet anger.

“My enemy, one whose always managed to escape us. But,” West paused. “Artie was a last minute replacement. Neither of us was supposed to be here. Loveless couldn’t have known Artie would be on that stage. It’s got to be something in yours and Scott’s background that he’s interested in?”

“I’ve never heard of this Loveless. If Scott knew him, he never said.”

“We can figure out what Loveless wants after we find him,” Buck interposed heatedly. “Mano, did Lochi know where in those mountains Loveless was hiding?”

“No. Just the general region.”

“Underground.” The tortured voice drew everyone’s attention on Johnny. The former gunfighter’s dark blue eyes were wide and unfocused. He continued in almost a singsong tone.

“Underground, in a cavern--and a tunnel. Can’t see the sun. Pain--must endure. Gordon’s right. Can’t give the bastard what he wants. Scott, hold on. I’m comin’!”

Suddenly Lancer reeled, and would have fallen if Buck had not caught him. Easing the young man to the ground with a gentleness Manolito was very familiar with. He looked up. “Give me water.” Several canteens made their appearance. Buck took the nearest and splashed some water on Johnny’s face. Unconscious, he looked so young. Buck felt his heart twist at the pain this youth was suffering.

Just as quickly as he collapsed, Johnny opened his eyes. The impression of youth was heightened by the confusion in the dark blue eyes. He made to rise, but Mano laid his hand on his shoulder. “Drink first, mi amigo.”

Lancer accepted the canteen and took a long swallow. Handing it back he asked. “What happened?”

“You tell us.” West said dryly. “That was some show.”

“Show? I was remembering my dream, the one that woke me in the cave. It seemed so real.” Johnny

shook his head and shuddered. “They’re underground. I’d bet my life on it.”

“There are caverns in some of these mountains,” Manolito said, glancing around. “And rumors of big ones. It is quite possible.” He shared a long look with Buck. Neither man wanted to think about what might be happening to the lost brother.

“Let’s get ya up boy,” Cannon said quietly, placing his arm around Lancer. Reluctantly, Johnny accepted the help. All of his aches had returned with a vengeance. When he was on his feet, Buck turned to his friend. “Where do we start, Mano?”

“We start where Lochi suggested,” Manolito said grimly, “midway into the range, in the foothills on the North side. Where the Indians have smelled bad things. They must have a place for horses, an opening big enough to bring in supplies.”

“We’ll find it.” West said.

“Then what are we waitin’ for?” Johnny interposed, turning back to the cave, his momentary discomfiture replaced by cold determination

“Morning,” Buck said quietly.

“Qué locura! Why?”

“By the time we reach the mountains it will be dusk.” Mano said regretfully. “Here we have shelter. And we have less chance of running into any bandidos.”

“We’ll start before dawn,” Buck said. “Reach ‘em at first light. We ain’t got no choice.”

“Dios mi!”

“They’re right,” West agreed darkly. He turned away abruptly. His frustration evident in his very posture.

Johnny stared at the mountain range, so near yet so far away. Inwardly he shivered. He could not explain to these men why he was so sure his brother was being hurt. He couldn’t explain it to himself. The two of them had been strangers when they met, yet, almost from the beginning, they had felt a bond between them. That bond had strengthened over time. Now Johnny could not imagine living without Scott, and he knew Scott felt the same way about him.

“Boston, I’m coming for you!” Johnny whispered the words into the wind. ‘*Dear God, watch over Scott,*’ he prayed to himself. ‘*Let him know I’m on my way. Please let him know.*’



“How is your Greek?”

The whispered words startled Scott from his pain-filled stupor. He replied automatically, his voice raspy from lack of water. “Rusty.”

“No more than mine.” These last words were in broken Greek.

Scott responded in kind. “Sounds adequate.”

Both men fell silent again, the strain of working taking its toll. Scott grimly continued to ply his mallet knowing in his heart there was nothing else he could do.

“You can’t let Loveless have the secret.”

Scott momentarily paused, as his tired brain translated the words. “I know.”

“He’s a madman. He has no compunction against killing any number of innocents to get what he wants.”

“Figured that.” Scott shook his head. “Artie, I won’t tell him. I’ve endured worse than this.”

“I know. Lots of things happened at Salisbury.”

The last sentence came out in a soft whisper, which Scott was still translating when he heard the swish of leather.

“Quiet! No talking!” Roberto’s harsh voice coincided with the impact of the whip. Scott hissed when the leather strands hit his body, causing a new wave of pain. The agony wiped all other thoughts from his mind. He heard the swish and Gordon’s own grunt of pain. Then both men turned back to their work. They were too wrapped in their world to notice both Roberto and Santos slip away, replaced by other guards.



Loveless sat in his upholstered chair, staring at the sphere in his hands. His face was twisted by a frown of intense concentration. On the other side of the cavern, Voltaire rested on his own specially sized chair, intently watching his master. He stood up when he heard the sound of the lift, but Miguelito remained unmoving. It was not until the lift came to a halt, and Roberto and Santos stepped off the mechanism that Loveless finally looked up. “Well?” He spoke sharply.

“We can break him, perhaps.” Roberto said. “But it will take time.”

“We don’t have time.” Loveless said angrily. “West is probably already on his way. Have you set up enough extra guards to watch for him?”

“Sí, patrón. This gringo, he has endured much. We can tell from the scars. He knows pain well.”

“I don’t care what he experienced while he was a prisoner of the Confederacy, I want his

cooperation now!”

“I can break him faster.”

Both Roberto and Loveless turned to the Indian.

“Well?” Miguelito said impatiently.

“He has known the white man’s torture, but not the Apache.”

“Even that might not be enough,” Roberto said.

“Perhaps.”

“I don’t want you to kill him.” Loveless looked at the sphere in his hands and his face hardened.

“But he brought this on himself.” Loveless turned back to the Apache. “All he had to do was agree to help me. Yes, what ever it takes. Do it!”

The Indian nodded. “Let him work the night. At dawn I will take him outside.”

“Why?”

“The sun.” Roberto was smiling grimly, answering for his friend. “Between the sun and Santos’ skill, the gringo’s strength will be tested. He will break eventually.”

“See that he does!”

“We must prepare,” Santos said.

“Yes, yes. You may leave.” Loveless dismissed them with a wave, his attention already elsewhere.

The Indian and Mexican both nodded and turned, but Loveless was staring at the sphere.



Buck woke suddenly, his eyes searching the darkness of the cave automatically. His body registered the uncomfortable lumpy surface he lay on and the chill air, just as he realized why he no longer slept. It was time for his watch. As silently as he could, he sat up and stepped outside the cave. Two dark silhouettes stood out against the starry, chilly night. He was just about to ask why Manolito wasn’t going to his bedroll and why West was up at all, when Mano held up his hand to his mouth and motioned for Buck to walk away from the entrance of the cave.

Cannon waited until they had reached the other side of the bluff before turning to his friend for an explanation, but it was West who broke the silence. “Johnny Lancer is a liability.”

Buck answered in the same whisper. “He’s hurtin’, sure. But he has gumption, he won’t hold us

back.”

“I do not think that is what Señor West means.”

Buck gazed at West, attempting to read his face in the near darkness. Suddenly, he glimpsed his eyes and saw a hint of sadness and regret. “Ya not talking about his age, are ya. So what do ya mean?”

“If we are facing Miguelito Loveless, and from the description it can’t be anyone else, then he kidnapped Scott and attempted to kidnap Johnny for a reason.”

“An’ ya’s so sure it ain’t because of your friend?”

“I said before, Artie wasn’t supposed to be on the coach. We both should have been heading back East by now.”

“Why would this man want the Lancer brothers?” Manolito asked.

“I don’t think it has anything to do with Johnny directly. His mother died when he was young, and he grew up in Mexico, alone. He survived by learning how to use a gun. He’s very good. But I doubt somehow Miguelito would hire him as a gun hawk.”

“Go on.” Buck said conversationally.

“Scott grew up in Boston. He has a very rich grandfather on his maternal side. There could be some connection to this Garrett that Loveless is interested in.”

“For a man who was not supposed to be involved with the Lancers, mi amigo, you seem to have much knowledge of them.” Buck could see Mano’s tight grin even in the dark.

West sighed audibly. “When several major landowners from different parts of the country and Mexico request a new bank backed by the government, the government, naturally, wants all those involved researched. And they only trust their own. I was ordered to go to Mexico and check out Johnny’s history before he returned to the Lancer ranch, and also . . .”

“My father.”

“Yes, and you, Mr. Montoya.”

“Por favor, call me Manolito, or Mano. My father is Señor Montoya. And we who travel toward death together should not be so formal.”

West snorted. “Sure, Mano. Artie was already in Washington, so he went to Boston. He wired all the information to me because,” West smiled, “he knows I like to be kept informed. I did the same back. But it was an associate of ours, Jeremy Pike, who was delegated the job of bringing the paperwork to Tucson. Artie and I were given another assignment. Just as Jeremy was boarding the train he became very ill. Instead of giving him the paperwork, Artie took his ticket. I had no idea

what was happening until he was able to wire me from St. Louis. Even Loveless couldn't have found out any sooner than I did."

"Could he not have gotten hold of the messages?" Manolito asked.

"We use code." West said with finality.

"Hold on. So we think this Loveless feller is after the Lancers. Like Mano said, why?"

"I don't know. But Loveless is, for all his many faults, a genius. I've never met anyone as educated as him. I've also never known him to seek help for any of his projects, but there's always a first time."

"Money? Could he be wantin' them for ransom?" Buck asked.

"Not his style. What I figure is, Scott Lancer must know something or have something he wants. And that's the problem. If Lovelace wants it, then my job is to make sure he doesn't get it. I've read enough about Scott to be reasonably certain he'd figure that out, even if Artie wasn't with him."

West paused and Buck heard the unspoken words. If Gordon was still alive. He shared a glance with Mano.

The agent continued speaking in a voice that had grown even softer. "I'm also reasonably certain that if Scott refuses to give Loveless what he wants, my friend Miguelito will try more forceful methods. But Scott's had his share of experience with coercion while he was in the army. Unfortunately, there are other ways to break a man other than physical pain."

"Like through hurtin' his brother." Johnny silently appeared a few steps behind them. Spinning around, Buck's face reddened in chagrin. His unspoken question about Scott's war experience died in the face of Johnny Lancer's anger. "That's what you mean." Lancer's voice although quiet, crackled with emotion. "I'll be a liability because Scott will do anything to keep me alive if this Loveless catches me too."

West raised his brows at the admission of how long Lancer had been listening, but his comment was to paraphrase his first statement, without any inflection. "You will be a liability."

Johnny's face contorted. Watching the flow of emotions, Buck's heart twisted in sympathy.

"Why did you let me come at all? You had all this figured back in town."

"You would have come on your own."

"True enough, but not necessarily joined you."

"I'd rather know the odds before I start something. And frankly, I wanted to keep an eye on you. Anyway, I wasn't aware of Loveless' probable involvement until we got here."

"I'm coming with you."

The quiet menace in Johnny's voice sent a chill through Buck. Oh, yes, this youth was capable of killing.

West took a quick breath, and held it for a moment, before exhaling. But his face remained impassive.

"If this little giant is as smart as you say," Manolito's voice broke the pregnant silence. "I am thinking we will be unable to find his hideout without being discovered? But if we are able, another gun would be very handy. Especially one that has heart and skill behind it."

"This isn't about leaving Johnny behind. I couldn't do that to him."

Now it was Johnny's turn to catch his breath. "Then what is it about?" The menace in his voice was tinged with a hint of surprise.

"It's about telling these poor fools who insisted on coming with us the truth! I doubt very much we can sneak into Loveless' hideout. Most likely we will be seen. And that's what I'm hoping for. I can't stop Loveless until I know what he's up to. If that means walking into whatever trap he has waiting for us, I'll do it without hesitation! Will you?"

Buck hissed audibly at the same time as he realized the truth in the agent's comments. He shared another glance with Mano. Even in the dark he could read his friend well enough to know he'd come to the same conclusion.

"Kinda expected that." Johnny tilted his head. "Figured you wanted to get caught. Sounds like this Loveless likes talkin', especially to you."

"In our past encounters, he's been more than happy to boast about his plans. From the information, Artie and I have always found a way to stop him. Give him enough rope, it's worked in the past."

"Funny though, you said he's always escaped." Johnny said sarcastically.

"I did."

"That's why ya didn't want any help. Even now that we're so close to Tucson." Buck's comment was ignored by West and Lancer.

"Mighty nice of you to point out all my flaws when I don't know nothin' about you."

"I was raised with a gun like you; difference is I found gainful employment using my skills for the government. During the Civil War I was a Major. I became General Grant's aide. Even before the war was over he approached me to work for the Secret Service. I've killed more men in service to this country than you have during your life as Johnny Madrid."

"Madrid!"

Buck heard Mano's quiet words but he only had eyes for the drama before him.

“I’m driven, and I’m good at what I do. But, like any man I have . . . weaknesses.”

“This Loveless will use Gordon against you.”

“Most likely. He will try.”

“I knew we had a lot in common.” Johnny began to grin. It even reached his eyes. “You asked if I would walk into a trap to help my brother? I think I’ve already answered that. Oh, and about Scott, he’s strong enough.”

“Let’s hope you and I are right.”

“We have talked so long, it is nearly dawn. Time to continue our journey,” Mano said in a calculated light voice.

“Wasn’t sleeping too good anyway,” Johnny said lightly.

“Then are we ready to leave?” West circled to face all three men.

“Sure.” Buck said. “Nothin’ better than riding into a sure trap first thing in the mornin’.”



“Stop!”

Breathing heavily, Scott had no need of a second ordered shout to lower the mallet in his hands. His arms and shoulders burned and he was more thirsty than he had been for many years. But any budding hope that the nightmare was ending quickly disappeared as he turned to look at the Indian. The man’s face was impassive, but something in his eyes turned Scott’s insides cold. He was unsurprised when Roberto, a few steps behind, motioned for more of his henchman to grab Lancer.

“Where are you taking him?” Artie’s shout ended in a painful grunt. Scott could not see what was happening to Gordon as he was hustled away.

“You will know soon enough, gringo.” There was a sinister edge of laughter in Roberto’s voice. “And Señor Scott will know very soon. For now you stay, and continue working.”

Suddenly Scott’s world went dark as a black hood was pulled over his face. He was pushed, pulled and half carried upward, sometimes with smooth rock underfoot, sometimes a rocky, uneven surface and once directed to climb a ladder. His progress was slow with the enforced blindness and the impediment of leg irons.

It was after the ladder that he sensed the difference in temperature. They were getting close to the surface. Minutes later he felt cooler air. With a rough pull, the hood was removed. Scott blinked in the sudden light. It took a moment for his eyes to focus. What he saw made his blood run cold.

They were in a sort of canyon within a range of mountains. High rocky hills rose around them except to one side, where the rising sun was cutting a swatch of light across the desert.

Two crossbeams had been set up into a pocket of earth forming an x. Nails had been driven into the top beams, where they crossed, and at the bottoms. Ropes hung from the nails. A fire had been lit and various knives were lying in the red coals.

Without any orders given, Scott was pulled toward the crossbeams. “No!” Accompanying his shout with an elbow jab into the man holding him on the right, he broke free from his surprised handlers. But hampered as he was by his leg irons and his general weakness, his freedom was short-lived as more hands grabbed him, dragging him to the crossbeams where he was expertly tied to the crosspieces. Someone tore off his tattered shirt. He was left, breathing heavily, facing the pitiless rising sun.

Twisting his head, Lancer saw Roberto with his arms crossed, watching. Santos stepped closer and studied Scott intently. He walked around his victim slowly then he came to stand next to the fire. But it was Roberto who spoke.

“Will you help our patrón?”

“My answer has not changed!”

“Than, mi amigo, welcome to infierno.”



“How near is Tucson?”

The searchers had stopped to water their horses in the sparse shade provided by a ridge of rock above them. Taking off their hats, they poured water into them, allowing their mounts to drink from the headgear. Johnny’s question had been spoken in a voice pitched to reach only the ears of his companions.

“Very close, actually.” Manolito answered. “No more than twenty miles. We could reach it easily.”

“Why would this Loveless choose a hideout so close to a major town?” Johnny directed his question at the agent. The other two men turned, curious about the answer as well.

“Must be something here he wants,” West said. “Don’t be fooled. He’s concealed his activities in big cities, let alone a back water town like Tucson.”

Both Manolito and Buck raised their brows at his comment, but Mano chose to grin suddenly. “So, mi amigo, we ride into a certain trap. The little giant may want to keep you alive, but what of us?”

“I can’t answer that.”

“Sí. Buck and I, we walk into the trap with open eyes. But perhaps some plans could be made.”

“Wadda ya mean, Mano?”

Montoya continued to gaze at West, but the grin had left his face and eyes. “If capture is certain, one of us should try to escape. It will not be the brother,” Manolito favored Johnny with a glance, “nor you, Señor West. And my good amigo Buck, works much better in a direct fight.”

“You.” West said conversationally. “What makes you think it will even be possible?”

“We cannot see the future. If the opening comes, I will take it.”

“And do what?”

“Return to Tucson, Buck. Get Big John, Sam and the others. If God is willing, I will see the entrance and know where to bring help.”

“Chances are ya won’t have a horse. Walkin’ through the desert. Ya crazy Mano! ‘Sides, if they see us comin’ they’ll know how many of us there are.”

“I did not say it would be possible, only that if an opportunity arose, I will take it.”

“Sounds reasonable,” Johnny commented. “Let’s stop talkin’ and go!”

“My sentiments exactly,” West agreed. “But first, take off your jacket, Buck.”

“What?”

“I want you to have something. Should have done this before we left camp.” As he spoke, West was pulling off his jacket. He rolled up the sleeve of his sweat-soaked shirt to reveal a curious contraption. A small derringer was attached to a piece of leather that was laced around his right forearm. “It works like this.” West flexed his arm in a certain way and the gun came forward, neatly resting in his hand. “Goes back just as easy.” He demonstrated the necessary movements.

“Now that’s a sweet toy.” Johnny said.

“No toy. One of the many things Artie has designed for me. It’s saved our lives more times than I can remember. Unfortunately, Loveless knows about it. He knows about most of my gadgets. But he might not be looking for it on someone else. Tie it around your gun arm. Try not to shoot yourself with it.”

“Don’t rightly know ifin I want it.” Buck already had half removed his black jacket.

“Take it, Buck.” Manolito rested his hand lightly on his friend’s wrist. “We need any advantage we can get. Let me help you.” Smoothly he pulled the jacket off his friend before Cannon could protest. Laying the coat across his shoulder, Mano began rolling up Buck’s sleeve. Silently he took the gadget from West and laced it on securely. “Try it, mi amigo.”

Shaking his head, Buck turned away from his friends and copied the motion he had seen West make. Nothing happened. Buck glanced at West and the agent made the motion again. This time, when Cannon repeated the movement, the gun slid out. "Never seen anythin' like this before," Buck grinned. "Got cartridges?"

"Two barrels, two shots."

"What other toys ya got that this Loveless will know about?" Johnny said, as Cannon carefully practiced using the derringer.

"These." West removed a second, apparently decorative set of buttons off each arm of his jacket. "Explosives. Throw them at least eight feet away from you, hard. If they're used with Artie's fuses, they have a timed delay." He held out his hand with the four golden thumb-sized ovals.

"Manolito and Buck should take two each." Johnny said. "Like you," he grinned at Jim, "chances are I won't be part of any escape attempt."

The words, spoken in a light-hearted tone, settled like a pall on the other three men. No one spoke as they took the explosives. Once West's hands were free, he began removing his belt. "Manolito, we're close enough in size, take this."

"And what is so important about your belt?"

"Has a long, thin wire, here. See?" West pointed to a spot where the buckle met the leather. "You know what to do with it?"

"Sí, mi amigo." Manolito grinned. Swiftly he began removing his belt.

"Wait, James." Johnny held out his hand. "You should take mine, matches your fancy duds better. I'll wear Manolito's."

Again, no one disputed his statement. The clothing changes were made in record time. While Montoya was fingering the end of the wire, Lancer jumped on his horse. "Time to be going. I know my brother is close, and I know he's in pain. Can't say how I know, but I ain't stayin' here a minute longer."

The others nodded. Without any more words, they mounted their horses and the small party moved out with Manolito in the lead. Buck followed at the end. He looked up at the sun. It was about an hour after dawn. He shivered, even in the rising heat. He had heard Johnny toss and turn the night before, lost in his nightmares, calling out to his brother. Whatever he seemed to be seeing, Buck prayed it wasn't real. But somehow, Cannon wasn't sure.



Infierno. Scott had long since lost track of time. His body, stiff and raw from the stagecoach ride, the earlier beatings and the enforced work, was stretched out on the improvised rack. He hurt if he

moved, and God help him, he had twisted in a futile attempt to escape the Apache's knife. A rawhide thong had been doused with water and tied around his head. As it dried, it had become a tight noose around his head, adding to his general misery.

Sometime early on Roberto had stuffed a dirty rag into his mouth. They wanted him to talk, but not scream. Scott could oblige them with the screaming. Santos was good at his job and for all his apparent dispassion, enjoyed it. Scott's enforced education at his hands was indeed hell.

In the beginning, Santos picked a red-hot knife from the fire, using thick, leather gloves and an added strip of material around the hilt to protect his hands. He began waving it over Scott's skin, close enough for him to feel the heat, not close enough to burn. Once Santos was done with the chest, he traveled downward. Then, without warning, he slashed at Lancer's tattered pants. Within minutes, Scott was nude.

"God!" Scott bit off his cry. *'Santos wants me to feel exposed, helpless, 'he thought unhappily, 'and he's doing a great job. I thought my time at Salisbury had prepared me for anything. Guess I'm wrong again, little brother.'*

Santos continued slowly passing the knife over Scott's body, once switching blades when the other cooled more than he liked. Then, without a flicker of change on his face, he slashed at Scott's thigh, leaving a thin, shallow slit that stung more than hurt. Lancer hissed in surprise then again when Santos slashed the other thigh. He shifted back to the fire, taking time to look at the several knives he had been heating in the coals. Carefully, he placed the one he held on the edge of the fire and selected another. Straightening, he gazed into Scott's eyes. The Indian almost smiled then sliced across Scott's chest from nipple to nipple, with a slow, deliberate hand.

The burning pain was exquisite. Sweat glistened on Lancer's face, moisture he could ill afford to lose. A muffled scream tore out of his throat. More anguish lanced across his stomach. Scott closed his eyes and swallowed his second cry. He felt, rather than saw, the Indian circle him once more. Forcing himself to ignore his torturer, Scott took a deep breath waiting for what was coming. This time Santos let several long minutes go by before he slashed at Scott's right forearm. From the stinging anguish, and secondary smell of burnt flesh, Lancer knew the wound was cauterized as it was inflicted. *'Oh God, give me strength,'* he prayed mindlessly.

As the sun rose higher, its burning heat adding another exquisite pain to the whole, Santos repeated his actions again and again. He varied where he cut, until Scott felt hurt everywhere. The only alteration in his pattern was when he chose to use the whip instead of the knife.

Scott began to feel real despair. In this desolate place he would die. He couldn't give in, must not let Loveless gain control of the artifact. All he could do was endure, if he was able, until help arrived. If help arrived. "Johnny, Johnny," he mumbled his brother's name through the gag, between screams.

Then a new, terrifying thought bubbled up, momentarily masking the continued agony and he changed his plea. *'Johnny, don't come. Please God, don't come.'*



The three riders slowly picked their way through the foothills of the Rincon Mountains. The going was slow, what had begun as level ground had become progressively steeper. The plant life had also changed from different varieties of cactus and mesquite to small trees, piñon, juniper and oak.

It was now several hours into the morning with no sign of other humans. The men traveled on a narrow furrow of rock between a high cliff of rocky ground to their right and a less steep incline to their left. Although they no longer followed a trail, Manolito still led, with West second, then Johnny and last of all Buck. No one spoke, they continued on with the unspoken understanding they were getting closer to their destination.

They had just passed a scraggy oak tree, clinging to a layer of dirt between the ridged folds of rock rising parallel above them, when a stifled cry floated on the air. Immediately all four men stopped and scanned the area around them more closely. Johnny had a dark and dangerous look on his face. It was clear who the voice belonged to.

In tacit agreement, the searchers dismounted and looped the reigns of their horses on the branches of the tree affording the animals some shade. Each man slung a canteen over his shoulder. Continuing on foot, West took the lead with Johnny a step behind him. Manolito waved for Buck to walk in front of him while he brought up the rear.

Another muffled groan floated on the air. West's steps quickened with all matching him. The top of the bluff to their right rose to meet them as they climbed higher. To their left the ridged ground became steeper and steeper, until it was a sharp drop, cut through with wide seams. A strange smell Buck could not identify wafted on the almost imperceptible breeze. Suddenly an opening presented itself as the ridge of rock they followed ended. Glancing around the edge carefully, West abruptly jerked back and flattened himself against the stone, his countenance grim.

Leaning over him cautiously, Johnny froze for a moment, before sinking to his knees at West's feet. "Scott!" Buck had to strain to hear the heartsick words "Mi hermano! Mierda!"

James rested his hand lightly on Lancer's shoulder and glanced around again. Torn between his desire to look and the realization of what he would probably see, Buck settled for scanning the visible area. His skin crawling, he met Manolito's gaze.

"They're watchin' us," he whispered.

Mano nodded unhappily. "We just cannot see them."

Slowly Johnny rose to his feet. His movement so smooth West's hand was not dislodged. His face was a study of anguish. In a voice laced with anger and pain he said softly, "Felt them for a while." Buck watched mesmerized, as the seething emotions on Lancer's face blended into icy fury before disappearing completely. Only in his eyes could Buck see his true feelings, and then those, too, were hooded. His voice, when he spoke, was just as detached "Might as well join the . . . party." West's fingers tightened. Johnny continued. "Just find a way to stop the bastards! Don't matter about me. Just save Scott!"

Waiting until he saw West slowly nod, he turned his head toward Mano and Buck, repeating, "Save Scott." After silently mouthing the words again, he grinned suddenly, stepped around the jutting ridge and disappeared from sight. His next words echoed loudly from the rocks. "Can anyone join this party?"

As if the speech galvanized the group, West immediately slipped around the stone with Buck a step behind. Cannon was not surprised when he failed to feel his friend join him. The apparition that met his eyes as he reached the other side froze him in his tracks. He had seen men tortured before, had been himself, but the sight before him horrified him nevertheless.

The man he presumed was the missing Lancer was tied to an improvised rack next to a small fire, a gag in his mouth. His head hung low, his long blond hair limp around his face, his skin reddened from the sun. On one side of the victim was an Indian holding a knife that glowed crimson, and on the other a Mexican. Buck barely acknowledged the ten or so other men that stood with rifles pointed at them, although his mind oddly registered the orange and red braids on their right shoulders.

A multitude of marks crisscrossed Scott's nude form. Some of them oozed blood. Some were just angry lines of black and red. The strange smell Buck had noticed suddenly registered as burnt flesh. A rawhide thong was tied around Scott's head, already imbedded into the surrounding flesh.

Above them to the left, in a high rocky ridge, Buck saw a large opening partially hidden by a fold in the formation. More guards were stationed around the lip of the entrance and above it. A well maintained and wide path switch-backed up the side of the bluff.

Ignoring the guns pointed at him, Johnny slowly walked closer to the tableau. "Hey Boston," he spoke in a voice that held an undercurrent of pain, despite his control. "Can't stay outa trouble when I'm not around." Slowly the captive raised his head, his blue eyes focusing with difficulty. With a gasp of shocked denial, he shook his head.

Reaching over, the Mexican roughly removed the gag. He turned to Johnny and smiled. "Sí, join us. You must be Señor Johnny. The patrón will be pleased to see you."

"I'm sure he'll roll out the welcome wagon."

"Johnny." The voice, barely a whisper of sound, held joy and horror. "You're alive! Why come . . ." fear and happiness warred on the tortured man's face. "Trap. Can't fight . . . two battles."

"Scott!" With a strangled cry, Johnny stepped up to his brother. The cold fury that swelled within him threatened to overwhelm his thin veneer of control. Glancing briefly at the Indian and Mexican he marked both for death before speaking softly to them. "Reckon you'll let me play out this game." Facing Scott once more, he dismissed the rest of the world. Pulling out his knife, he carefully sawed at the rawhide strip around his brother's forehead, all the while whispering in his ear. "Hold on, Boston. Don't matter what happens to me. Don't let these bastards have whatever it is they want. Spit in Loveless's face. West and Gordon will get you out."

Scott turned his sweat and blood streaked face toward his brother and stared. "Crazy. Why come!" The last was a cry of anguish. His blue eyes, so full of pain, began to well over with tears.

"Because you're my brother." Feeling moisture filling his own eyes, Johnny, with a small sigh of relief, cut through the rawhide and carefully pulled it off Scott. Quickly he lifted his canteen and let his brother drink greedily. As if that was a signal he felt a hand roughly grab at him. Reacting with white-hot anger, Lancer released the canteen, whirled around and buried his knife into the belly of his attacker.

What followed was almost dreamlike. He saw West swing at the nearest goon, a hulking white man a full thirty pounds bigger than he, and bring him to his knees. Then Jim chopped at the back of his neck and the thug went down without a whimper. After that Johnny was too busy with his own problems as another Indian jumped him.

Buck, too, was almost as surprised by West's moves, not so much by how he brought down the man but that he was fighting at all. Then he realized what West was doing, providing a distraction. Pulling his gun out of his holster, Cannon shot one of the outlaws. Out of the corner of his eye, he observed James knocking out another attacker, this time by somehow twisting up and kicking him in the chest with his leg. Then Cannon momentarily froze. At the edge of the cliff, Manolito struggled with an Indian. The Indian brought up a knife and sliced at Mano's midriff. Buck saw how a line of red formed on Montoya's yellow shirt in the wake of the weapon. Then very deliberately, Mano met Buck's gaze and nodded. Pushing his assailant away from him, Manolito leaned back as if he were losing his balance and fell over the edge.

A cry boiled within Buck. Aiming his gun at the nearest target, the Indian who had knifed Mano, he began pulling his trigger when a cold, but oddly high voice shouted.

"Stop! Stop or I'll shoot the Lancer brothers myself!"

Buck halted and slowly turned. Some ways away, near the hole in the cliff was a dwarf dressed in a suit. He was almost hopping in his anger, but his gun was pointed steadily enough at the dark-haired Lancer. The Indian who had been standing closest to Scott held a red-hot knife against Johnny's throat. A black spot had already formed where the tip met flesh. Johnny had frozen, his face betrayed none of the pain he must be feeling.

"You won't shoot him." West's cool voice broke through the tension.

"You won't take that chance." Loveless' voice was cold.

"No, I suppose not." West pulled out the gun he hadn't even drawn and dropped it on the ground. With a silent sigh, Buck threw away his, although only the lackeys were paying any attention to him. All of the dwarf's consideration was directed at West.

"I knew you would follow Gordon. You are so predictable, West."

"Glad to oblige. How is Artie?"

“A little worse for wear, but alive. You will see him soon enough. Now I must deal with my other guests.” With quick, short steps he trotted down to where Scott was still tied to the wood. The blond’s head had fallen again. “Sunny out here. So, how are you Mr. Lancer? Had enough sun yet?”

Slowly Scott raised his head. He glanced over at his brother, his eyes taking in the knife still at Johnny’s throat, and turned back to Miguelito. He mumbled something.

“What?” Loveless stepped closer.

Deliberately Scott spit in the direction of the dwarf’s face, before his eyes rolled back in his head and closed. His body went limp. Jumping back in surprise, Miguelito screamed at the Mexican next to him. “Roberto, remove our guest from his bonds. Put him back into his room, get Gordon to treat him. Put the other Lancer in his place. Santos, he’s yours!”

“Good idea, Loveless, if all you want to do is kill him.” Once again West’s cool voice broke into Loveless’ tirade, his face as impassive as his tone. “Looks to me like you want something from Johnny’s brother. But your boys were a little too thorough. He won’t be coherent for hours, maybe days. Do the same thing now to Johnny, he’ll be dead before Scott has a say in the matter.”

“I want him to bleed! He killed one of my people. But . . .” Miguelito’s voice trailed off.
“Lancer must be well enough to watch. Fine. Put West and the other Lancer in the tunnels. We have time to wait now. Don’t forget to search West, remember what I told you about him.”

“What about that gringo?” Roberto pointed at Buck.

“Whose is he?”

“A tracker,” West interposed quickly. “I’m not familiar with the desert.”

“Put him with the others in the tunnels for now.”

“There was one more.” This came from another Indian. “He fell over the cliff.”

“Find his body, fool. Make sure it’s disposed of. Remove our guests. Take care of Lancer.”

Miguelito smiled at Johnny, held still by Santos with a now cooling knife at his throat. “Later, Santos, you will show this Lancer how hospitable we are.”



Manolito dropped over the edge, angling his body to fall into one of the chimney-like seams of rock. He could feel warm blood seeping from the injury where he had been sliced by his attacker. This might be the craziest thing he had ever done in his life, but in the certainty of what he had seen above, he had to try. The rough surface scraped at his body, he heard his shirt and pants rip. In an effort to protect his face from the rocky protrusions, he leaned it against his up-stretched arms.

Something slipped up, catching on the rock. Instinctively he stopped its movement, recognizing his canteen by its contours. He clutched at it, using the object to also protect his face.

After an interminable time, his body came to a stop. For several minutes he lay in the bottom of the fissure, unable to garner the effort to move. He seemed to hurt everywhere. Gradually a picture of the poor tortured man and the memory of Buck fighting filled his mind. *'I cannot let mi amigos down.'*

Taking a deep breath, he shifted his arms and legs. “Nothing broken. That is good.” With a grin he carefully crawled out of the crevice and slowly stood up, only to almost fall when a wave of dizziness hit him. Panting, he leaned against the face of the foothill he had descended so quickly. He felt rather than saw that he still had the canteen, and that it held fluid. “Gracias a Dios!”

Pushing himself determinedly from the rock, he looked around. It appeared he had fallen in a valley between foothills. The grass covered, uneven ground was anything but appealing. Glancing up he could see nothing but the undulating rock. No sounds came from above. He squinted at the sun, orienting himself. “They will look for me.” To his own ears his voice sounded raspy. “I must get out. Ah, to have a horse would be nice. But you don’t have one, Manolito, do you?”

Shaking his head, he opened his canteen and took a careful swallow. After closing it, he stumbled forward. Ignoring the general body aches he felt, the cuts and scrapes, some of them oozing blood and the burning discomfort of the wound around his middle, he began walking toward Tucson.



The dark cloth was roughly pulled off Johnny’s eyes, and he blinked in the dimly lit tunnel. He stood in a sort of crevice, above him the stone arched until it disappeared in the shadows. Absently he rubbed at the spot where the Indian, Santos had burned him. Glancing around, he saw his companions, all, like him, now wearing leg irons. He had felt them being attached after they had been blindfolded.

West’s hair, unlike Buck’s, appeared unruffled as if he hadn’t been blindfolded, although his jacket had been removed and his sleeves ripped. Even now he was unobtrusively studying their surroundings. Several goons were guarding them, including Santos.

“Where’s my brother?” Johnny directed the question at the Indian, not really expecting an answer.

In return he was jabbed in the small of his back by another guard. “Go! That way.”

“Sure, sure.” Johnny stepped into the smaller tunnel he was directed to enter, stumbling slightly with the unaccustomed irons. Small lit globes were attached at regular intervals to wooden planks forced into the stone. He could see thin lines of some sort of metal along the top lip. Turning his head, as he passed, he stared at the globes. So did Buck, but West seemed unfazed. “What’s that?” Johnny asked

“Incandescent bulbs, I believe.” West said. “Loveless loves his toys.”

“Yes, he does. James my boy, yes he does. What kept you?” Out of the shadowy depths of the cavern, another man appeared suddenly. West surged in front of Lancer, stopping scant feet from his friend. Artemus was dirty, sweaty, and dried blood stained his shirt, right side of his head and a bandage around his upper arm. He and Jim stood for a few seconds, studying each other. Waiting just behind them and slightly to one side, Johnny saw the flash of heartfelt relief and happiness that flashed ever so briefly in West’s eyes which was mirrored in Gordon’s face.

Shifting to face Lancer, Artemus sighed. “Can’t say I’m happy to see you, son, even if I expected it.” He tilted his head at Buck. “Hello, I’m Artemus, Artie to those I’m facing death with.” He held out his hand, “And you are?”

“Buck Cannon.” Buck took the offered hand. “Heard a lot about you.”

“Ah, John Cannon’s younger brother. Likewise.” Artie grinned. “Any others I should know about, Jim?”

West glanced back at the guards. “One more, Manolito Montoya. He dropped over the cliff. Looks like he was killed.”

Jim and Artie shared a long, thoughtful look. Finally Gordon nodded. “I shall miss not meeting him. He was a brave and resourceful man. Have you seen Scott?”

“They had him up top.” Johnny pointed at Santos, his voice rising in agitation. “Had him strung up on some sort of rack. What they were doing to him? Ain’t never seen nothin’ like it!” Lancer started rubbing his hands absently. “They took him someplace. He’s hurt real bad.”

“Then they’ll probably want me to treat him. Listen Jim, Johnny. I’m not sure how much they’ll let us talk. Loveless has an artifact that once belonged to Scott’s tutor at Harvard.”

“Sibley?”

“Yes, Johnny. With it he can find underground egress to the surface all over the world.”

“Don’t understand,” Buck said softly.

“Think if he could find tunnels that would lead him secretly under New York, San Francisco, Washington. Access to privy places, underground vaults.”

“Loveless can’t use it.”

“No, Jim.”

“But Scott can. Mierda!” Johnny hissed. “Remember, West. I don’t matter. Get Scott out of this. Don’t let him betray his honor.”

“It will be you who makes him betray. No more talk!” Santos smiled. “For now you work. Inside the cavern, pick up tools. You will find coal. It must be shaped into smaller pieces of the same size. The guards will show you. You,” Indian pointed at Gordon. “Come.”

Artie gazed at West. Once more a message seemed to pass between them, before he turned to Johnny. "I'll take care of Scott."

"Promise?" Lancer said softly.

"Promise." Artie walked past Santos and stopped. "Coming?"

Santos smiled. Motioning to all but one guard, he said, "Take them. Soon, Lancer, you will be under my knife. Soon." Santos twisted around and pushed at Artie, forcing him back the way they had come.

Glancing backward at them, Johnny whispered under his breath. "For your sake, you'd better kill me. I swear to God, if I live through this, I'll kill you with my bare hands for what you did to my brother."



The sun beat down upon his unprotected skin. Slowly he began to burn all over. A smell assaulted his nose - roasting flesh. Something flashed again and again leaving burning pain in its wake.

"Scott, Scott, it's over."

The voice was like a breath of cool air. In fact, he could feel a chill on his hot skin. He reached out to the coolness. Faces abruptly rose between him and the relief, horrifying images of an Indian and his flashing knives. Suddenly another face interposed itself, a well-loved one.

"Johnny. Johnny. You're alive! Johnny. Why did you come? Why couldn't you stay away?"

"Quiet, shush. Everything will be fine. Drink this." Artie held a mug to the injured man's mouth, grateful when Scott instinctively gulped at the fluid. Laying down the cup, Artemus Gordon, for the umpteenth time, replaced the cool compress on the young man's forehead, covering the bandage protecting the deep cut caused by the rawhide. Slowly Scott quieted, sinking back into a fitful sleep. "Thank God!" Gordon sighed. "I'm not a real doctor, son. You need someone qualified, not just a hack with a few medical classes under his belt and questionable field experience!"

Standing up, Gordon stretched his tired muscles before picking up one of the many wet linen rags with which he had covered Scott's body. The heat from the young man's skin dried them out far too quickly. Walking over to the table, he dipped material in a china basin he had filled from the spigot before laying the cloth once more over the overheated body. At least the ambient temperature of the cavern kept the water cool.

Lucky for Scott, Miguelito was something of a hypochondriac and kept a supply of all the latest medicines and carbolic. Gordon had given Scott a very small dose of laudanum. He was afraid to use more. Then he had cleaned out and bandaged the worst of the wounds as best he could, but there were so many. And they were not the only enemy Scott faced.

Too much sun killed, and the damage caused by it was not so easily addressed. Artie was aware of only one course of treatment for such damage: Rest, salty fluids and keeping the sufferer's body cool. Unfortunately, when combined with the severe injuries inflicted on Scott's person, the chances of him responding favorably were slim. Trauma like that could kill a man. The body shut down. Artemus had seen it happen.

"Fight this, Scott." Gordon whispered softly. "Fight this! I know how strong you are. Don't let that bastard Miguelito win! Besides, I promised your brother. And no one in their right mind would cross your brother." Lancer mumbled something before quieting again. Artie waited a moment then, with a tired sigh, he picked up another dry rag from the too warm skin of the young man and walked over to the basin.



Above him the sun blazed in the sky. His aching body complained with every step. Sweat mixed with blood from his wound. Sometime into his journey, Manolito had ripped a strip from his shirt and used it to bind the slowly seeping injury. Another strip of cloth became a makeshift head-covering replacing his lost hat.

Silently, Manolito sighed. He was not going in the right direction, he had to cut south, but the rising foothills seemingly blocked every attempt he made to turn that way. Between winding his way through the ridges of rock and avoiding the pursuit he could sense behind him, all he was able to manage was remaining parallel to Tucson and moving farther away from the part of the Rincon mountains that held his friends.

Once more, the image of Scott Lancer's tortured form rose in his mind. "Dios mió! That poor man." He whispered the words aloud. "I do not pray often, God. But please lend me speed to help Johnny's brother. Do not let that happen to Johnny, to Buck . . ." He grimaced. "Let me help them."

As if to mock his words, Manolito suddenly became aware of a wet patch on his shirt. Glancing down, he stared stupidly at his canteen before lifting it. Now he could see a tiny, ragged hole in the side that had been scraped by the rocks when he had fallen. "Dios! I should have known this would happen." Most of his precious water had leaked out the opening. "I am a fool." Pursing his lips and grimacing, he did the only thing he could. Once more he began walking.



For the hundredth time since they had been left in the hot, stuffy cavern, Johnny paused, his mallet in hand and glanced over at the guards. There were five men, two with orange braids and three with brown. He wondered what the different colors signified, and if one meant the wearers might be easier to fight.

"Don't try it." The soft words were voiced to carry only to the three captives pounding at the pieces of coal. "We're too far away to rush them and I'm sure they know how to use those guns they're pointing at us."

“I can’t stay here and do nothin’. I gotta know how Scott is.” Convulsively, Lancer took a step toward the guards. He was surprised when a hand snatched his mallet and a fist smashed into his face, sending him sprawling. Woozily he stared at West. The agent hadn’t even dropped his own tool.

“Sorry. You weren’t listening.” West held out his hand. With an angry snort, Johnny took the offered hand, intending to use it as leverage in his own attack. Instead he found himself swung around and held in an arm lock. Even in his anger he had to admit that West was certainly handy in a fight.

Lancer was aware of Buck anxiously splitting his attention between the sentries and his friends. But the older man kept silent. Instead it was West who hissed into his ear. “I thought you were smarter than this. We can’t do anything until we have more information.”

“I don’t give a damn about what you want! That’s my brother they were torturing. My brother they’re slowly killing!” His voice broke. “I gotta know how he is.”

“Rushing the guards is suicide, Johnny. I know how you feel about Scott, and I can’t offer you any hope. But getting yourself hurt, or one of us killed, won’t help him!”

“Bravo, Mr. West.”

All three prisoners shifted to face the voice, Johnny shaking himself from West’s suddenly lax hold. Loveless stood at the tunnel entrance, smiling. His private army had formed a wedge of humanity around him. To his left was the big giant, Voltaire.

“Loveless. Your little setup is interesting.” Folding his arms, Jim gazed impassively at his adversary.

Miguelito’s face reddened. “I know your game, West. It won’t work. I’m very proud of what I’ve done here. Do you know how long I’ve been planning this, working on this place?”

“Years, I expect.”

“Yes, years.” Miguelito glared at the agent. The two men might as well have been alone in the cavern. “But my plans are near fruition.” He glanced around. “I have some improvements to make, switch from this smelly coal to solar power. My steam engine can be converted. Just a matter of time. But, my dear West, you don’t even know what I’m doing here.”

“Something to do with finding underground access to the surface.” Jim’s voice sounded bored. “Then more of the same old, same old. First, domination of the U.S. by destroying seats of government from belowground, after stealing what art, gold and jewels you want from whatever vaults you can gain entrance too. Second, rebuilding everything in your own twisted ideal of perfection. Nothing new.”

“Nothing new! You are most infuriating, West! This time I have everything I need. This place has been equipped with all the comforts my workers and I require. We have power, underground

gardens, pens for animals, I've even equipped the area we use with plumbing, why my people enjoy amenities here they couldn't have imagined on the outside."

"Anthracite is excavated below your feet. The seam is small but adequate for my needs. I have hired the mining expertise necessary. I already know of one tunnel that leads west. If it goes where I hope, I can have the passage widened, lay more track, travel in my own train. Once I learn the location of other tunnels, I'll set up additional command centers at their entrances. Don't look so skeptical, Mr. West. You'd be surprised what I've already had shipped from Mexico. Gold buys many things."

"And your people?"

"That's the best part, Mr. West." Loveless grinned even wider. "Look at them. They are loyal to me. I pay them more than they would see in a lifetime of drudgery in the outside world. I offer them a chance to share in a new creation with none of the faults of the old. No oppression, no prejudice. I offer them utopia. Who would not be loyal to me!"

"And killing a few hundred thousand innocents along the way is just a natural byproduct of all this progress."

"Innocents always die in war, and this is certainly war. Look at your own Civil War. And the history of Europe is a history of the death of innocents."

"Seems to me you're building all your grandiose plans on a faulty premise." Although Johnny had spoken softly, his words echoed throughout the cavern. Lancer's bearing was as nonchalant as his tone, feet apart, one arm behind his back and one casually hanging at his side. But Buck could see the fingers of the hand out of the dwarf's sight undulating convulsively.

Miguelito whirled around and faced Lancer. "What do you know? You're just a hired gun, a nothing, a..."

"A half-breed, a mestizo? Careful, you're describing some of your own people, members of your planned utopia. I know what that word means. Scott and I, well that's none of your business. But it brings up the reason why nothin' will come of all your plans. You need my brother to work some gizmo. But being the sensible man he is, he won't do it. You let your man Santos nearly kill him and he didn't break." A thread of pride ran through Johnny's words. "Seems to me you're a long way from gettin' what you want."

Miguelito's face began turning red. Stamping his foot he took a step forward, away from his men. As he made another step, Buck saw Johnny's hand freeze. Abruptly Loveless stopped. He glanced around at his men and smiled. "Don't try to make a fool out of me, Lancer. West can tell you how inadvisable that is. What makes you think he won't give me what I want?"

"You couldn't torture it out of him." Lancer's face was tight. Buck could sense the frustrated anger emanating from the young man.

"I don't have to. I have you." Loveless began to laugh. He looked at the three captives. "And I hold

the only two men in this country who could possibly stop me.” Miguelito’s laugh deepened. “It’s just a matter of time. Well, I have things to do. Continue working. Until I have my solar power up and running I have need of this smelly stuff.”

“Scott.” The word was bitten off. Buck could see how much it cost Johnny to speak. “Let me see my brother, please.”

“Oh, you will. When he sees you on Santos’ lovely rack. You’ll see him.” Miguelito began to laugh again as he turned and reentered the tunnel, Voltaire at his side. His laughter continued until it was swallowed in distance.



Manolito forced one foot ahead of the other. His mouth was dry, his body a mass of pain. Exhaustion dogged every step. He had no water and he had no clear idea of where he was. Through sheer determination he kept moving. He was hardly aware of anything but the direction he had to keep going and a sense that someone still pursued him.

From nowhere a rock appeared near his feet. Even as he became aware of the obstruction, he went sprawling onto the ground. “Ay yi yi!. Dios!” Mano groaned. Breathing heavily, he rode out the pain that washed over him. “I must keep moving.” For all his intentions, he found he lacked the energy to get up. He remained lying on the rocky soil until a shape blotted out the sun above him.

Reacting with gut alone, Manolito twisted his body, rising in the same movement. He grabbed at the shape, reaching for the knife he could see in the hand.

“I come not to kill you!” First the voice spoke in stiff English then it repeated the words in Apache.

The second time Manolito heard the words reiterated in Apache, they finally began to sink into his awareness. He stopped struggling and stared stupidly at the figure. He was dressed in dusty brown pants and wore a tan shirt, with a colorful belt made of many strands of twisted twine. Incongruously, he had a red braid on his right shoulder. “You’re from the place that holds my . . . friends.” Mano responded in the same language.

“That is so. Yet I come not to kill you.”

With a soft chuckle Manolito leaned back against a tall rock, aware that he could scarcely stand, let alone hope to fight this Indian. “You surprise me, amigo. Why should . . . why should they . . . want me back. Loveless cannot . . . care about me.”

“The Little Giant thinks you are dead. It is I who wishes not to kill you.”

“I am very pleased . . . to hear that.” Mano laughed again. “To what . . . to what do I owe this . . . unexpected . . . turn of events?” He realized by the confused look on the Indian’s face that he had spoken in English. With an effort he translated into Apache.

“Your courage and the courage of your companions.”

Manolito blinked at the Indian. He was finding it harder to understand the man's speech. Sweat dripped into his eyes, his vision shifted. Even the solid rock at his back moved. Through a chronically dry mouth, he croaked, "Do I know you?"

"We know of you. The Cannons. And soon my people will know of the courage of those who were with you."

Raising his brows, Manolito's muddled brain translated the words. "Mi amigo . . . I do not understand." The inscrutable face before him wavered once more and then slowly faded away. He was unaware of falling.



"How is he?"

Gordon ignored the imperious voice. He had heard the door open, but he had eyes only for the man on the bed. Scott was twisting and turning, mumbling at nightmares only he could see.

"Well, Gordon! How is he?"

Finally Artemus shifted so he could face the door. Miguelito and Voltaire were just inside the entrance. He sighed. "How do you think he is? You allowed your man to practically kill him."

"He must recover!" Loveless ranted.

"Well, that is the general hope!" Artie snapped, his own fatigue and apprehension for his patient dragging at his soul.

"You are an irritating thorn, but you do have uses. During your war between the States you worked very diligently as a medic, especially after you were captured."

"Because I was trying to help people, not hurt them!" Rising, Gordon felt himself take a step toward Loveless, his anger growing with every word. "Seems to me you've destroyed your own dreams with your impatience. What Santos did would kill most men. I'd laugh but the truth hurts . . ." As quickly as his anger arose it washed away and Artemus sank back onto the edge of the bed. "Hurts,"

"You will save him! I have ordered it!"

The agent shook his head. "Only God can save him, and his own strength."

"You will save him, Gordon. Or I will have Santos do the same to you."

"Do you think I care what might happen to me? Get out of here!" Once more Artemus felt his anger rising. "This is a sickroom, Scott needs clean air!"

As the words left his mouth, Gordon realized he had crossed the line. Voltaire's fist caught his face, the force of it throwing his body against a column of stalagmites. Black specks filled Artemus' vision as sharp pain blossomed in his face and side. Fighting against sudden nausea, he felt a bubble of laughter float upward. *'James my boy, I think I'm getting too old for this.* 'On the heels of that thought was another. *'If I antagonize Loveless he might not let me stay with Scott!'*

As if to confirm his thoughts he heard Miguelito's voice. "Voltaire is medically trained. He watches over me. I might have him treat this man. Someone I trust implicitly--unlike you, Mr. Gordon."

Swallowing blood, Gordon blinked up at the towering figure of Voltaire and the red-faced dwarf. "I'm sorry." He managed to gasp out. "I'll do whatever is possible with Scott. Just allow me to continue treating him. Please."

Loveless rocked back on his heels and glanced at the figure on the bed. Scott hadn't moved. He looked at Artie once more. A wide grin broke out on his face. "I'm a reasonable man. See that you do."

"I need more supplies."

"Voltaire will have someone bring whatever you need. I want him awake, soon. Come Voltaire, we have work to do."

Without another word dwarf and giant swung around and left the room. For several minutes, Gordon lay where he was, allowing the pain to wash away. Finally he took a deep breath. "Can't stay on the ground all day." Grimacing, he turned, using the stalactites as a ladder to pull himself up. When he reached his feet, he rode out another wave of dizziness. With a final effort he stepped away from the stone, coming to a halt at the head of the bed.

Reaching out, Artie gripped the bedpost with his hand and leaned into it. He gazed at the injured man. Scott mumbled as he tossed and turned. His skin continued to have an unhealthy red glow, and fresh blood stained several of the bandages that covered the worst of his cuts and whip marks. Pain etched the youthful face, even in his deeply unconscious state.

Gordon fought his growing despair. "I'm not sure why your recovery has become so important to me. Maybe it's because of the golden boy you once were at Harvard, or what we shared at Salisbury. Maybe because I hate to have you touched by this dirty business. Or maybe, I'm just becoming a sentimental fool in my old age." Artie's voice roughened. "You've got to fight, Scott! I promised your brother. Fight this! God needs your help. And I do too!"

With a small sigh, Artie scrubbed at his face, willing the ache in his jaw away. He had work to do.



He was walking through an endless desert. A hot sun beat down on him. Somewhere in this wasteland he would find Buck. His good friend was in danger--terrible danger. He had to help him. And there were others with him. New friends. He had to find them! But the desert was so big.

“Drink!”

Slowly the word sank into Manolito’s awareness. Grasping at the link to the real world, the dream desert began to fade away. With an effort he opened up his eyes. A shape was leaning over him, blocking out the harsh glare. From it the voice came again.

“Drink.”

Gratefully, Manolito realized the figure had a canteen. The Mexican sucked at the warm liquid greedily. A voice of warning in his head, and the figure pulling back at the canteen, forced him to stop. He wished he could think clearly; between his terrible thirst, the pounding in his head and the burning discomfort around his lower chest the world made little sense. The figure before him wavered in and out of his sight. Mano blinked, trying to clear his vision. Swallowing, he whispered. “I would thank you properly, mi amigo, but I am not sure how many of you there are. Ahii, I wish for the room to stop spinning.”

Suddenly a wave of nausea took him and he felt the contents of his stomach rise up. The effort of retching brought the shadows back. Before the sickness completely passed he was unconscious again.



“Halt!”

Three grubby, sweaty and hot men froze, shovels in mid air, when they heard the order. Slowly they turned from the rail car they were loading toward the guards. None of them expected to see a man with a green braid on his right shoulder, push past the guards, carrying a large tray containing a covered platter, a jug and three mugs. He grinned, displaying dark teeth as he placed the tray near them. Stepping back, he said, “Food. You will be told when to continue.” He left, leaving four men behind.

Throwing down his mallet, Johnny slowly stretched. “Don’t have to tell me twice.” He smiled at the remaining guards before gracefully crossing his legs and sitting in one motion. Once down, however, he started at the platter, making no attempt to reach for the food or drink.

“Not smart, Johnny.” West sat down just as gracefully. Buck followed, swallowing several grunts as his body protested the unusual work. Picking up the lid that covered the plate, Jim studied the sauce-covered lumps. “Tamales I think. First rule of war. If food presents itself, eat it.”

Johnny raised his face and stared into the agent’s eyes. Finally he lowered his gaze. “You eat it.”

He spoke so softly that Buck almost missed the words. Behind the young man's cold facade was a world of hurt. His gut twisting in sympathy, he sighed. "Jim's right. I know this is hard for ya." Buck's voice faltered as he felt Johnny's gaze.

"Do you?" Cold steal edged the words.

Cannon grimaced. "Ya, I think I do. You listen ta me. I once had ta watch as my best friend was tortured by the Apache for something I started." When Johnny didn't respond, Buck leaned forward, jabbing him in the chest. He felt the younger man tense, but was too wound up to notice. "It was my fool notion of freeing a girl that had got us in a nest of Apache. They wanted ta test us. It should have been me that got whipped over and over again, hanging upside down on a cross in the hot sun after having nothin' ta eat or drink since the day before. It should have been me!"

Surprised by the rush of emotions that engulfed him, Buck felt tears built up behind his eyes. Bending his head, he saw only his memories. He had no idea how long he sat there, reliving one of the seminal events that defined his relationship with Manolito. When he finally looked up, it was to meet Johnny Lancer's concerned gaze. Buck swallowed and continued.

"Mano had to take it, not cry out. One grunt would have got us all killed. Ah watched him. Ah'll never doubt him again." He gazed again into space before whispering. "Wonder now sometimes, how I ever got along in this world without him."

Shifting uncomfortably, Buck finally realized how much he had said aloud. *'Might as well finish,'* he thought. "The point is, Mano was right. It ain't always blood that makes a relationship. It's deeper. And it causes hurts more often than not. But the last thing Mano would want was ta see me give up. He'd call me loco. I don't know Scott, but Big John was real impressed with him when he came on that buying trip. Ah think, from what I was told of him, Scott would think the same as Mano. We gotta hope. We gotta hope with our last breath!"

For long minutes Johnny stared at Buck. Within his eyes, Cannon could see the depths of his pain and concern for Scott. Finally Johnny glanced over at Jim before gazing at Buck again. Smiling a lopsided grin that actually reached his eyes, he said. "Real purty words. You should write 'em down." His grin widened. Reaching down, he picked up one of the lumps, bit off a piece, chewed it and swallowed. "Should try this as well. Somebody in this godforsaken place knows cooking."



He floated in darkness. It was pleasant here. Nothing could touch him. Yet . . . there was something he must do. Reluctantly, he broke away from the void. He felt the pain as he began to see light. With the discomfort came memories. He remembered his hunting companions, the taciturn West, guileless Buck and the driven Johnny. He saw the image of a man tortured cruelly. He had to help these men. He had to face whatever awaited him. He must open his eyes.

With all his willpower, he fought to accomplish that task. After what seemed like forever, he was rewarded with a sliver of light that hurt. Ignoring that pain as one discomfort in a sea of

discomfort, he opened his eyes wide. He saw a looming rock behind him. He could feel the rough sandy soil of the desert beneath him. Carefully he levered himself up on one wobbly elbow and looked around. He was still in the same foothills. In the shadow of the bluff he saw two Indian ponies waiting patiently.

A sound alerted him moments before a figure crouched next to him. Reaching forward, the man offered him a canteen. Gratefully, Manolito clutched at the container and drank the tepid water. Once more, the liquid tasted like the finest wine on his dry throat. But his stomach felt unsettled and remained that way after he reluctantly stopped. Making sure to stopper the canteen, he laid it on the ground. Looking up at his benefactor he managed to say in Apache, "I do not even . . . know your name."

For a long moment the Indian gazed at Mano, before finally speaking. "I am a younger son of chief Morales. I was sent to join the Little Giant and find out what he does."

"A son? Spying." Manolito shook his head, regretting the movement as soon as he made it.

Swallowing several times against the queasiness of his stomach, he forced himself to continue speaking. "He is very dangerous . . . this Little Giant, I have been told this by a man . . . I trust. Earlier we met with some of your people. I spoke to Lochi who told us of the Little Giant."

The Indian nodded. "So Lochi has told me."

As the Apache spoke, another Indian walked into view. Manolito squinted up at him. "Ah, you were not completely forthcoming. Which is . . . not unexpected.

"We watch this place." Lochi said matter-of-factly. "We watch all those that come."

"And I am grateful for your . . . vigilance." Manolito closed his eyes, wishing the pounding in his head and the burning along his side would lessen. He couldn't afford to let it affect his concentration. Finally he managed to continue. "Helping me is . . . dangerous."

The Indian shrugged. "It was time to leave. You were a means."

"I am . . . a stranger. Why help me?"

"You are wrong. Many Apache know you--Manolito Montoya who stands with the Cannons. A man who respects the Apache and our ways. You are a very brave. So are your companions. I do not think you were unaware of those watching you. Also, the young one, he guesses what Santos will do to him."

"I must go back." Manolito struggled to stand, using one hand to steady himself against the hillside. The Indians watched impassively. Swaying, Montoya wiped the sweat from his brow and drank again from the canteen. His body was damnably weak and he hurt everywhere, especially where he had been knifed. Ignoring it all he said, "My friend . . . Buck Cannon is in that monster's hands. And Johnny . . . brother to that poor man . . ." Mano's face twisted. "I do not know Scott Lancer, but what I saw in those mountains. "Dios!"

“The Little Giant wants something from him. Something he will not give. He is a very brave man. I do not like Santos, but he is very good at persuasion. He does it for joy. I do not like him.”

Manolito looked at the Indian and shuddered. “I must stop him.”

“If you go back, you will die. The Little Giant has soldiers watching the mountains and the valley. We knew you were coming as you entered the foothills.”

“Are there no . . . unguarded entrances?”

The Indian tilted his head. “You are one man.”

“I have . . . friends in Tucson. John Cannon and his men. Is there . . . a way in past the guards?”

“There is a way less guarded.” The Indian tilted his head again. “A few men could perhaps enter undetected.”

“With someone . . . who knows where he goes . . . our chances would be better.” Mano grinned.

“Perhaps.”

Manolito rubbed at his face. “I must reach . . . Tucson.” Grimacing slightly, he put all of his weight on his feet, grunting despite himself at his weakness and pain. “I must . . . leave now. Wait for me here, please.”

“You will never make it on foot.”

“Then lend me . . . a pony.” Manolito smiled cheekily. “I swear I will return it.”

For the first time the Indian smiled. “You are as others speak of you. Very well. I, Naiche, son of Chief Morales, will wait for the return of my pony at this place until tomorrow.”

“Thank you.” With the first hope he had felt since finding the bodies, Manolito laughed. “Thank you my friends. I will not break faith.”



He dreamed. Strange, twisted visions. He was in Boston, watching the workmen sweep great piles of gold, orange, yellow and green leaves. Rushing forward as he laughed, he jumped into the nearest pile and tripped on a loose cobblestone. Stretching his arms out to catch himself, he felt his right hand snag on something sharp. A burning pain filled his appendage, running up his arm, before he even had time to realize he'd fallen onto a nail and ripped the pad of his hand. The memory of that pain, on a long ago Boston afternoon, filled his awareness. But the pain wasn't confined to his hand. It seemed to shift and grow. Now it was everywhere, an agony that consumed him.

As a child he had been alone with his pain. It had been the nurse's day off. A harried butler had ordered the overworked first parlor maid to see to his wound. She had stopped the bleeding, bound his hand and had him change out of his bloody shirt, but then he was alone. Sitting in his playroom, nursing his throbbing hand, almost half asleep from the bitter potion she had made him drink, he had only his toy soldiers to keep him company.

He thought there should be someone with him, someone with sapphire eyes and an engaging grin. But he was alone. No one cared. He was alone as always. The little boy began to cry.

"Scott, wake up. Scott!"

Gordon stopped himself from shaking his patient. Whatever nightmare memory held the younger man, the emotional trauma was etched on his flushed face, a face streaked with rivulets of tears that ran from under tightly closed eyelids.

Artie felt so helpless. All he could do was wipe the young man's face clean and continue with the cool compresses. Scott had developed a fever. His body was truly burning now. And Gordon had played out all his bag of tricks. There was nothing more he could do for Scott but pray.



Manolito sighed. This was the longest fifteen miles he had ever ridden. His head pounded, and around him the desert seemed to wink and fade. Although the sun had nearly set, it still seemed to burn his skin. He must be close. He recognized the way. He had found one of the roads that led into Tucson. Usually there was activity this time of day, people coming and going into town. Even a late stage. Why did it seem like he was the only person in creation?

"Mano!"

At the sharp cry, Montoya shifted his head, surprised to see several men riding toward him. Where had they come from?

"Mano!" The shout was repeated.

Manolito squinted at the man who yelled at him. Tall, stocky, blond, it was Sam Butler, foreman of the High Chaparral. At his side rode Joe, his brother, and Pedro, another hand. Moving at a full gallop the ranch hands quickly reached their friend. Reining in the horses, they circled the Mexican, all the while shooting questions at him.

"What happened, Mano?"

"Where's Buck and those other fellers?"

"How badly are you hurt?"

“Where’d this injun pony come from?”

“So many questions.” Manolito grinned, his relief making him silly. “Which one to answer first?” Suddenly he felt the ground tilt. Along with the unwelcome dizziness and nausea an image arose, a tortured form begging his brother to not be there. “No, no. You must help them. Scott, what they did to Scott.” Mano grabbed at the closest ranch hand, Sam, and pulled him closer. “They will do the same to Johnny. Naiche will help us. Promised. Don’t understand why . . . Courage. I have never seen such courage.”

Sam’s face wavered, twisted, began to fade away. Once again Manolito was unaware of falling, or of the loyal foreman catching him.



Two captives sat on the dusty ground, leaning against a slightly smoother section of the irregular stone wall. They watched the third pace the confined area in the small cull-de-sac the guards had chosen as the prisoner’s sleeping area. The men were alert and watchful, but as long as the captives made no moves toward them, they were left alone.

Buck suppressed a groan, as he shifted slightly against the rock. He was bone-weary, but otherwise unhurt. In fact he was somewhat surprised at their treatment. After that first meal their guards had ordered them back to work. The companions had then labored for interminable backbreaking hours, but unexpectedly, the same man had reappeared with more food and orders that they be allowed to sleep. Not the treatment Buck expected at the hands of a man who could order such punishment inflicted on a fellow human.

They had even brought some rolls of cloth when Buck had complained of cutting himself. He had used the material to form a bandage around his right wrist. He’d noticed the leather mechanism for the gun sticking out of his sleeve while he worked. He breathed easier now, knowing it wasn’t visible. Now if only Johnny would stop pacing, maybe sleep might be possible.

“If you were walking on anything other than rock, you’d have worn a path,” West commented without looking up, his voice almost startling Buck. “You’re not helping your brother this way.”

“Helping Scott?” With an abrupt movement, Johnny bent down over the agent and reached out his hand. Whatever he might have planned became an awkward sprawl as West pulled him onto the floor. Sputtering in anger, Johnny shifted and punched Jim so hard the agent’s head smacked against the wall.

“Now wait!” Buck twisted, getting his body between the two men. He was surprised to see a grin on Jim’s face as he slowly massaged his jaw. Buck could sense the anger draining out of the younger Lancer hovering behind him.

Folding himself into a sitting position next to his fellow captives, Johnny sighed. “Sorry.”

“Feeling better?” West released his jaw and fingered the back of his head.

“A little.”

“Good, maybe we can get some sleep now.”

“I gotta know how Scott is!”

“He’s alive. And Artie is taking care of him.”

“How can you be so sure?” Johnny’s voice hissed with anger.

“Because we’re still alive.”

The soft, earnest words seemed to deflate the younger man. Slumping forward, he wrapped his arms around his head. After a few moments Johnny raised his head and looked at West. Shifting enough to angle his body close to the agent, he leaned against the irregular stone next to him. When he spoke, his voice was devoid of emotion. “Artie never said he was a doctor.”

“He’s not. He’s had . . . field experience. Now with this set up, I would have almost expected Loveless to have a doctor on hand. But it’s better for us if Artie’s with Scott.”

“Does he know what he’s doing?” Once again a thread of fear ran through Johnny’s words.

“Better than most doctors.” West turned to face Lancer. “He’s in good hands, trust me.”

“Yeah, what else can I do?” Johnny began to study the stone walls intently. With a nearly inaudible sigh, West looked away. “I’ve had so little time with him. I hardly know him.”

“From what I learned, you’ve made good use of the time you’ve had.” West was staring upward, as if mesmerized by some stalactites above them.

“It ain’t really been that long since I was offered money to see a father I thought I hated.” The singsong quality of Lancer’s voice twisted Buck’s heart. It was as if the younger man was speaking his thoughts aloud, oblivious of his audience. “Since I found, I had a brother. Can’t reckon the world any different now.” Swallowing a lump in his throat, Buck noisily shifted. He wanted to stop the young man from saying things he might regret later. Private thoughts were private thoughts. Johnny turned his head toward his fellow prisoners and grinned. “I know you’re here. Can’t forget it. My nose if nothin’ else reminds me.”

“An affliction we all share.” West dead panned.

“Yeah. Thought Loveless said somethin’ about plumbing, yet we don’t get a chance to wash up. Not very hospitable of him.”

“I suppose we could complain.” West glanced at the guards. The five men were watching the prisoners but made no move toward or away from them.

Johnny shook his head. “Not very hospitable.”

A silence fell. Exhaustion pulled at Buck. Even against the uncomfortable stone, he figured he'd have no trouble sleeping. He was almost in that state, when Johnny began to speak. The younger man's voice was so quiet, Buck had to concentrate to understand the singsong words.

"We've done some cave exploring together, but Scott, now Scott likes being under the sky. He even likes sleeping on the roof of the hacienda. We've laid out on blankets and he's told me about the stars. He's real smart, knows the stars and planets. Taught me some constellations. He said he was gonna try to get a telescope some day. Like he used at his college back east. Really show me the heavens. Don't know a lot about my brother, but I know he loves to watch the stars. Wish I could see the stars now with 'im."

Johnny's voice became progressively quieter, the words more disjointed, until they faded completely. It wasn't until Buck heard a soft snore that he realized Lancer had finally succumbed to his own exhaustion. Buck shifted slightly, so he could meet West's eyes. He was almost startled into wakefulness by the anguish in the agent's face. Buck turned away quickly, realizing West also shared his feelings. This young man had too much to live for. How could he end up fodder for a madman? How could his Scott? Buck closed his own eyes, as he felt wetness form under his lids. 'God! He thought despairingly. *'How can you let this happen?'*



Why was his head spinning? When had he drunk the tequila and why couldn't he remember? Who had put him to bed? Who had undressed him? With a soft gasp, Manolito jerked upward, clutching at the blanket that covered him. Immediately he groaned as the pain in his head once again made itself known.

"Manolo, you must not do that."

The gently scolding voice brought a smile to Manolito's face. He looked over to the door where his beautiful sister was standing with a lamp in one hand and folded clothes in the other. She was wearing a robe, but her thick, black hair crowned her head as always. "Victoria," his voice sounded raspy to his own ears. "When did . . . you arrive in Tucson? I am still in Tucson?"

"Yes, Manolito. I came just after you and Buck left. Vaquero brought me. And I'm glad I stayed." Laying the things she held onto the top of a dresser next to the door, she hurried over to the bed. "You must drink, Manolo." Next to the head of the bed was a small table that held a pitcher and one mug. Victoria poured water from the pitcher and pushed the cup toward her brother. "Drink!"

Smiling, Manolito took the glass in hands he realized with some surprise were shaking. He was grateful when Victoria unobtrusively steadied the cup while he drank. As the fluid ran down his dry throat, he realized how parched he truly was. His thirst began to diminish, but instead of feeling better, he felt the water rest uneasily on his stomach. The feeling merged with the ache in his head and the general pain of his body.

Glancing down at himself carefully, Manolito realized his knife wound had been treated, as well as his more serious scratches. With an expansive sigh, he swung his legs sideways ignoring how the movement encouraged his stomach and head to lurch uncomfortably.

“And what do you think you are doing my brother?”

“I am getting up, what does it . . . look like dear sister. Those are for me I hope.”

“Manolo!”

“I appreciate the concern . . . my sister. Normally I would welcome it. But we do not have . . . time. How long . . . have I been . . . asleep?”

“Hours. It is nearly dawn.”

“Dios mío! Where is Big John, Sam, Joe . . . and the others?”

“John is in the room next to this. The others are down the hall.”

“Give me my clothes, dear sister.” Manolito’s voice rose, as his anxiety gave him strength.

“And raise John and the others. We must . . . ride with all speed.”

“Is it Buck who is in danger?” Victoria asked with sisterly insight.

“Yes Buck. And West. And a poor soul who has had terrible things done to him. But mostly a young fool, who has walked into a monster’s hands with full knowledge of what will probably happen to him. A very . . . brave . . . young fool.”



“Hey, get moving!”

With a soft groan, Buck came awake. His first impression was how tired he still was, his second, was that he hurt more after trying to sleep with the rocky wall as a pillow, than before their short rest period. His third, and worst, was the introduction of a sharper, stronger pain, as he felt the sting of a leather whip, moments after it struck his shoulder.

“Hey, I’m coming.” Even as he spoke, he heard the same swish and a soft grunt from Johnny at his side. The younger man jumped up before Buck made it to his feet. West was also standing, anger flashing in his blue eyes as he dared the Indian holding the whip to use it again.

The Indian just smiled at them and gestured for the prisoners to leave the cull-de-sac. West led with Lancer leaving last. Apparently they were not moving fast enough, because Buck heard the whip connect once more with more force than before. This time he heard Johnny bite off an exclamation, but no other sound passed his lips. When they reached their work area, Buck saw a

fresh pile of coal waiting to be beaten into smaller pieces. He wondered briefly who usually did this backbreaking work. Probably the same man who plied the whip so freely, he thought darkly.

Turning to face the pile, Cannon saw that the second blow to Johnny had broken his skin. From shoulder to shoulder just below his neck, his tattered shirt was bloody. Seemingly ignoring the wound completely, Lancer reached down for a mallet. His deep blue eyes suddenly caught Buck's gaze.

To the older man's surprise, Johnny grinned. He then looked at West and shrugged. "Time to get back to work."

"Yeah." West finally spoke. "I guess they forgot breakfast."

"Looks like it."

Again, the whip swished, leaving another mark on Johnny. As the younger man stiffened, West turned and glared at the Indian. This time it was Lancer's soft, but urgent words that unfroze the agent. "Gotta let this play out."

Blue eyes locked with each other but it was Jim who lowered his gaze first. Picking up his mallet, he nodded. "I expect you're right."

Without any more words the three men began to work. Unfortunately, working hard was not enough. Whatever the rules had been the day before, this morning they had apparently changed. No one offered them water, let alone food. But the worst part was that the guards appeared to have new orders. If they were unhappy with Johnny's work, they beat him. If they were unhappy with the work of either Jim or Buck, they beat Johnny. If they were bored, they beat Johnny. Buck realized what was happening. He wasn't stupid. Loveless wanted Johnny softened up before the real torture began. Which must mean Scott was alive and recovering. Maybe that knowledge was what lent strength to Johnny. Maybe that was why a faint smile hovered on his face no matter what the guards did to him, even as the interminable hours continued.



"John, Sam, we must go."

"What?" Sam Butler stood in the hallway of the hotel in his long-johns, staring at his friend as if Manolito were insane. "You shouldn't be outta bed."

"How can I sleep? How can . . . any of us sleep?"

"Right now I don't think anybody in this hotel is sleeping." John Cannon frowned as he glanced around as several disgruntled hotel patrons opened their doors. "Let's go back to your room."

"I will not go back." Mano's voice was almost a shout. "We . . . must leave . . . now!"

“Don’t ya think you should put on your pants first?” This came from Joe, walking out of the room he shared with his brother.

Mano glanced down at himself, puzzled. He had donned his long-johns but nothing else. He shook his head, as a wave of dizziness washed over him. Suddenly he had no strength. Hands pushed him along. Victoria continued to talk in a fast string of Spanish. She was angry he realized. Why? The others were talking, but he was having trouble understanding the English. He was sitting up on something yielding and a cup was put in his hand. Someone told him to drink.

Why was his head pounding so? Why did he feel so flushed? He drank the slightly bitter water but, instead of welcoming the fluid, his stomach lurched uneasily. The uneasiness seemed to rise up in his throat. Suddenly nausea consumed him and he felt himself retch. What little had been in his stomach came up. A comforting female voice spoke reassuringly. He felt a wet rag wipe his flushed face.

He was pushed down. The softness was at his back now. He could sense a crowd of people hovered around him. Just behind them was a blackness that loomed invitingly. He wanted the absence from pain, from worry that the void would offer. He was ready to accept the happy oblivion until an image came to him. A horrifying tableau, one brother tortured, one brother ready to take his place and poor Buck, eager to stop the insanity, his anguished face all too aware he was powerless to affect anything.

For these men he must fight. He must bring help. Forcing his mouth to move, he spoke aloud. “No. I . . . cannot . . . sleep!”

“The doc says ya got too much sun.”

Mano searched for Sam’s face but saw Big John instead. “John . . . we must . . . go after them.”

John took a deep breath, his strong, determined face frowned. “You’re not going anywhere, Mano. You’ve lost a lot of blood. Your knife wound was bad enough Doctor Reynolds had to put some stitches in it. And if that weren’t enough, you’ve picked up an infection along with a bad fever. You can’t keep any water down and you can barely hold yourself up! Do I have to go on?”

“Where is . . . pony?” Mano said, ignoring Big John’s words.

“The Indian pony?” Sam asked. This time Manolito found the sturdy, dependable face of the High Chaparral foreman. At the Mexican’s nod Sam continued. “He’s at the livery stable. He’s been taken care of.”

“Naiche expecting me . . . return him. Cannot . . . keep him . . . waiting.” Swallowing determinedly, Manolito twisted and sat up. The room lurched around him and seemed to fade slightly. Despite his every intention of standing, Manolito felt the softness beneath him and found himself gazing at the roughly plastered ceiling instead. Dark shadows edged his vision.

“No! I . . . get back . . . Naiche. He and Lochi will leave. Must . . . might help. Santa Maria, I must help them!”

“Shush, mio hermano. Shush, Manolo.” At the soothing voice Manolito’s head stopped shifting.

“Waiting. Some twenty miles . . . north east.” The words were faint, but the despair in the voice was audible for all in the room to hear. “Will leave. Failed! Buck!”

John’s face blanched at the despairing cry. Swallowing, he rested his hand against the now unconscious man. “No Mano. You haven’t failed. We’ll get Buck back. We’ll get them all back.”



“Johnny! Johnny!” The name, although spoken in a faint, raspy voice, nevertheless galvanized the tired agent. With a fresh cloth he leaned over his patient. The young man shifted restlessly in bed. Gently Gordon wiped his sweat-streaked face while he used his other hand to push the damp strands of hair off his forehead. Scott continued to moan softly, most of his words unintelligible. But a few could be understood. Once he called for his mother, for Murdoch, once for Garrett, but most often it was the name of his brother, Johnny, that Artie made out.

When the younger man’s eyes finally opened Gordon almost missed it. The blue orbs were glazed with pain and fever. Taking advantage of the momentary near lucidity, Artemus grabbed a mug he had prepared and placed next to the bed and put it to the sick man’s lips. Positioning his hand so that he cupped the back of Lancer’s damp head, he lifted him against the lip of the mug.

“Drink this Scott.”

“Johnny? How can you leave me?” Lancer twisted, nearly spilling the liquid.

“Drink this, Scott, and he’ll come back to you.”

Whether he heard the desperate lie or because he had exhausted what little strength he had, Scott quieted and sipped some of the water. All too soon he closed his eyes and his body went slack.

“Not nearly enough. You need fluids, and I have no way of getting them into you.”

Gordon continued to stare at the young man, the mug forgotten in his hands. He heard the grating noise that heralded the opening of the prison door but ignored it.

“Well! Why isn’t he awake?” The hated voice spoke near the door. “You’ve been treating him for over a day now.”

“He’s sick.” Artemus spoke softly, his voice full of his own underlying exhaustion. “He’s has a fever now. I’ve treated his wounds but in this environment, well . . .” He turned to fully face Miguelito and Voltaire. “In this environment I’m not surprised his wounds have become infected. And he has no will to fight. What possible reason would Scott have to want to wake up in this place?”

“He must wake up.” Loveless bounced on his feet and jabbed his finger in Gordon’s face. “He must! What have you done to him?”

“Done! Me? Dear God protect me from egomaniacs. It was your precious Santos that nearly killed Scott!”

Once more Voltaire jerked forward, ready to hit Gordon, but this time Loveless motioned for him to stop. “Let Gordon alone. He’s only expressing his views.” Miguelito grinned suddenly. “After all, it’s not as if I don’t know how he thinks, and how his heart feels.”

“Do you?”

“Oh yes. And right now you want him to stay asleep. Probably gave him something just now to make him sleep.”

“You are crazy, Loveless. Scott’s wounded and sick. He needs fluids. I’m only treating him as best as I can.” Artie sighed and turned his gaze once more on the young man on the bed. Scott shifted slightly and began mumbling words too soft to understand. Gordon saw tears running down the flushed cheeks. “What he needs is hope.” Artie mumbled more to himself. “He might survive given hope. Seen it before . . . he needs . . . wait.” Gordon’s eyes lit up in sudden inspiration. Quickly, he turned back to the dwarf. “It just might work. Bring Johnny.”

“He’s staying in the mines.”

“If you want Scott Lancer to live, bring his brother. Scott’s done nothing but call out for him.” ‘*Not the whole truth,*’ he thought to himself, ‘*but close.*’ “If his body is to recover, his spirit must first. He thought Johnny was dead. In his delirium he still thinks that. Let them be together. If you expect anything from Scott listen to me!”

“You have an ulterior motive in this. I know it. You’re as devious as West. I won’t listen to you.” Loveless swung around to leave, then froze in place. “But wait. How sweet. Yes, let them be together, comfort one another. How much better when I give the new one to Santos. Unless Scott has learned his lesson.” Turning, Miguelito smiled at Gordon. “Yes, we will put them together. Give Scott hope, allow Johnny to see up close what will happen to him. Hope and despair. How sweet. Voltaire, see to it. Oh, and have food brought, some wine. These are our guests.” Chuckling, Loveless turned to leave.

Gordon watched the giant open the door allowing his master to exit before leaving himself and shutting the barrier. Glancing back at his patient still mumbling incoherently, Artie sighed.

“You’re wrong, Loveless. For once I had no grand design. I just wanted Scott better. But, God forgive me! I think I’ve made a terrible mistake. And when you find out, Scott, I fear you will never forgive me.”



“Has he woken up, yet?” The voice was deep, but unfamiliar.

“Not completely.” Another male, but with a slightly higher pitch. “He seems to wake up. Mumbles mostly nonsense, then falls asleep again.”

‘Who is speaking?’ Mano mused. He floated in a comfortable numbness.

“I’m not surprised, Blue. He’s going to be delirious. It’s one of the symptoms of too much sun. Not to mention his blood loss and fever.”

“Is he getting better, doc?”

“Yes. But I don’t expect him to be coherent for several hours yet.”

‘Is it me, they are speaking about?’ Mano attempted to speak. *‘Why don’t they hear me?’*

“He knows where Uncle Buck is. And the others. He keeps on mumbling about an Apache we think. Sounds like the Apache helped him. Only Manolito could get an Indian to help. Oh God, Doc. He’s gotta wake up!”

“He will. Give him time.”

“I hope Uncle Buck has time.”

‘He does not. Nor does Johnny! Help me!’

“Well, all we can do is wait. Now take a break while I examine my patient. I need to change his bandages.”

“I’ll be right outside.”

“I’ll call you when I’m done, young man.”

The voices stopped. But then pain began. With the pain came complete oblivion.



“You, come!”

Slowly, Johnny lowered the mallet he held and looked at the guard who had spoken. Glancing at West, he asked. “Is he talking to me?”

“Appears to be. I don’t suppose you want all of us.”

At the man’s sharp gestures, Johnny shrugged. “Naw, just me.”

Although Johnny's tone was light, matching West's, inside he was sick with worry. He still was ignorant of Scott's condition. He could only pray that Gordon was as capable as West thought. *'What they did to you, my brother,'* he thought? *'Dios, I must know how you are!'* Johnny's helpless anger ate at him.

In the hours since their rest break the three men had hardly spoken. Any unnecessary talk precipitated a beating. West and Buck had done the only thing they could do for him, work harder. Johnny knew as well as the others why he had suddenly become a target. Scott must be getting better. His shoulders and back ached with pain, but nothing like what Scott must have felt.

Once Buck had pointed surreptitiously at his arm, but West had shook his head and mouthed the words, not yet. He obviously expected some sort of better chance to come. Johnny wasn't sure of anything but the need to see his brother. Now Johnny looked at the beckoning guard and was suddenly apprehensive.

"If you see anything, remember it!" West's whispered words shook him out of his indecision. "They didn't blindfold me because Loveless wanted to show off this place. Maybe we'll be lucky again."

Solemnly Johnny nodded, but by the time he had turned to the guard, he was grinning. "Where am I going?"

"We are ordered to bring you to the other gringos."

"My brother?" Wild joy bubbled up within Lancer. "Bout time. What are we waitin' for?" He followed the man impatiently.

Whether they forgot or kept the blindfold off on purpose, Johnny was pleased when it wasn't produced. He felt he had a good sense of direction underground. By the time he was led to a wooden barrier in a stone tunnel he was reasonably certain he could retrace his steps. But when the door was opened and he was pushed through, only one person held any importance.

"Scott!" As fast as he could walk in his leg irons, he moved toward his brother. Scott was lying in a big bed, a blanket pulled up to his waist. His upper body was nude, although little of it could be seen under the multitude of cloths that covered it. Gordon held one in his hand as he turned to see Johnny. A curious mixture of relief and sadness filled his tired face.

"Your brother needs you."

Artemus stepped away from the bed and shuffled toward a writing desk that held a basin.

Without conscious thought, Johnny reached the bed. Hesitantly, he extended his hand to touch his brother's neck. Only when he felt the too slight pulse did he dare breathe. He could tell that the worst of Scott's wounds had been bandaged but little of his skin remained unmarked, and its unhealthy red glow scared him.

Scott's breathing was shallow and as Johnny watched he began to mumble and shift in the bed, dislodging some of the compresses. Leaning forward automatically, Johnny gathered his brother's hand. "Scott. Come back to me. Listen. I'm here."

Some of Scott's mumbling became audible. "Dead. Johnny don't fall! Can't be dead! Don't want to be alone. Can't come. Don't come, don't be dead. Please little brother."

Pain welled up within Lancer once more. "No hermano. I'm not dead. We'll get out of this together. Somehow. Look at me Scott! Feel my hand, my presence!" Johnny continued to talk, his words running together in an almost incoherent mix of Spanish and English. He sensed Artemus removing compresses and replacing them with fresh ones. Then he felt a coolness against his own back and flinched. "Let it alone. See to Scott."

"I am, and I will. But I'm not having you bleed all over your brother."

With a snort, Johnny ignored Gordon, allowing him to clean his wounds as long as the treatment wasn't interfering with holding Scott's hand. After a space he realized the appendage burned with heat. Fearing that his own body heat might hurt his brother, Johnny let go. But Scott had other ideas even unconscious. His hand moved restlessly as if searching until Lancer reclaimed it once more.

Time passed, but whether it was hours or minutes, Johnny could not have said. Finally the fretful body quieted. For an interminable time Johnny remained leaning half on the bed, holding his brother's hand.

"Here, drink this."

With a start, Johnny realized he'd almost forgotten Gordon. Straightening, he suddenly became aware of how sore he was, and how thirsty. Eyeing the mug of liquid he nevertheless faced his brother again. "How is he, really?"

Gordon sighed. "Not good. Too much sun, too much trauma. Johnny, drink this. You won't do Scott any good if you collapse on top of him."

"What?" Johnny began to protest, but a wave of dizziness hit him. With one hand, Gordon pushed him down on the edge of the bed and with the other forced the water on him. This time Johnny took it without protest. He was enough of a realist to know when he had to mind his own needs. After taking a long swallow he really looked around and couldn't help staring. Standing up, he slowly circled the room, noting the rich bed hangings, plush settee and other equally fine furniture. Coming to stand by the head of the bed again he looked at Artemus and actually smiled. "Well, the Apache said he was bringing in furniture. Guess Loveless' taste is as grand as his ego."

A short burst of laughter escaped Gordon's lips. "You must have been talking to Jim."

"He's said a few things. Plus I had a bellyful of Loveless' own boasting. He really is full of himself."

Nodding, Gordon abruptly grew serious again. "I know you're worried about Scott, but we should share as much information as we can while we can."

"Don't know why. Soon as Scott gets better, Santos is fixing to have a go at me." As Gordon's face clouded in predictable protest, Johnny raised his hand. "I know my part in this. I ain't got no other use in Loveless' mind." Sinking back to the bed, he gazed at his brother.

Artemus sighed. "I can't say that's not true. In fact, you being here now has as much to do with scaring you into submission as helping Scott recover. But it is Jim's and my job to see that you and your brother, along with Buck Cannon, escape. And for good measure, we have to stop Miguelito and destroy or recover the artifact he stole. Not to mention destroying this place so he can't use it again."

To Artie's surprise, Johnny burst out laughing. "Is that all? Well, I think I can help you in destroying this place. Lots of coal lying around and mining going on. Means explosives. Not to mention something Jim gave Buck and Mano."

Abruptly Artie held up his hand and shook his head. "Funny thing about old Miguelito. He likes gadgets. Has them everywhere. Why have gas when you can have electricity?"

"Why use coal when you can find another source of power, solar, I heard him say." Johnny interposed. "Whatever that is."

"Yes, well, that's a way of harnessing the sun's power. I've read about it. Like to know how he plans to do it. Maybe he'll tell me. If he's listening?" The last was said in a loud voice. At Johnny's puzzled look, Gordon continued. "He has this place wired so he can hear what we say. Or at least I think he does."

"Don't understand. But then I don't understand much around here. But that friend of yours, Loveless, sure likes to talk. He said lots to us down in the mines. Near talked our ears off." As he spoke Johnny mimed pointing at his forearm, the wrists of a jacket and at his belt, mouthing the names Buck and Manolito at the appropriate times. "And he likes to be organized, has all his people color-coded it seems."

Artie nodded. "Do tell. So what does our Miguelito have to say?"

For the next several minutes, Johnny recounted all that Loveless had explained in the tunnels. For good measure, he repeated everything that had been said by Jim and the Apache during their search. When he was finished he stood up carefully, walked over to the pitcher and poured himself more water. After he had drunk it all, he sighed. "I expect there's more where that came from."

"Plenty." Laying his hand on Johnny's shoulder Artie directed him to look behind the screen.

"Dios! What is that? Johnny pointed at the porcelain seat with what looked like a tank hanging above it.

“That is a water closet. Wonderful invention. Have them all over Europe. It’s part of the plumbing Loveless spoke of. Here, I’ll demonstrate.”

This time Artie mimed. “Oh.” Understanding flooded Johnny. “We need one of these at Lancer.” He smiled. “With all his book learning, do you think Scott knows how to make one?” The smile died on Johnny’s face, as he quickly returned to his brother. Sitting at the edge of the bed, Johnny once more took up Scott’s hand. “Artie, he’s cooler.” His face hopeful, Lancer used his other hand to feel his brother’s brow. “He is!”

Carefully Artie sat on the other side and laid his own hand on Scott’s forehead. “I think you’re right. Well, thank God for that! Best if I continue with the compresses though.”

“Artie.” At Johnny’s earnest tone Gordon paused. Deep blue eyes met brown. “What ever happens, it’s not your fault. You did what was best for Scott. That’s all that matters to me.”

“And what about what matters to Scott?”

“Worry about one Lancer at a time.” A lopsided smile appeared on Johnny’s face. “Besides, I’m awake and he’s not.”

At the light evoked in Johnny’s face by his cheeky grin, and the twinkle in his eyes, Artemus laughed. He had to admit that mirth transformed the younger man. *‘When you’re Johnny Madrid you truly are another person,’* Gordon thought. *‘I wish to God you could stay like this forever.’*

His musings were interrupted by the sound of the door opening. Both men approached the entrance as three guards entered, two carrying large covered trays, more cups and two bottles of wine. They put them on the table and, with hardly a glance at the prisoners, left.

“Loveless told his men to bring food.” Johnny said softly. “Guess this is it.”

“Then we should eat. Loveless can be very fickle. Besides,” Gordon looked at Johnny. “You need to keep up your strength.”

The younger man returned his gaze steadily, all traces of laughter gone. Gordon sighed silently. God wasn’t listening today, it seemed.



He was dreaming, he knew he was dreaming. A strange roaring noise filled the air. Distorted images formed around him - a boxlike structure, Johnny disappearing through a hole, the kindly face of Artemus Gordon, disturbingly familiar hands that relieved pain rather than created it, the impassive face of Santos, his hands that brought pain. Agony lanced through him. He cried out, twisting from the anguish. Suddenly Johnny appeared, his cocky grin and twinkling eyes a balm that kept the devils at bay.

Slowly Scott became aware of words. The sounds were familiar, comforting. The words became louder and louder, drowning out the other noise. They began to make sense. “Scott, mi hermano, you are safe. Listen to me. Come back to me. Por favor! Come back to me.”

The voice was so insistent, so full of sorrow and pain. Johnny. Why was he troubled? Determined, Scott opened his eyes. A face hovered over him. Familiar. Beloved. He whispered in a voice that caught in his throat. “Johnny.”

“Scott!” Wild joy filled the face above him, masking the fear and exhaustion but not hiding it completely. “That’s the best sound I’ve heard in days! But don’t try to talk until you drink some water.”

Scott felt himself being lifted and a cup put to his lips. He sipped at the liquid, gagging a little at the bitter flavor.

“I know it don’t taste so good, but we gotta get salt inside you.”

Obediently Scott drank again. As the water flowed into him he realized how thirsty he was, and gulped more down.

“Not so much at one time.”

This was a different voice. Shifting his head, he saw who must be supporting his head. “Artie?” Gordon grinned as wide as Johnny. “Good to have you back, son.”

“Where was . . . I?” Confusion colored the tired voice.

“Far away from us,” Gordon said seriously. “But you came back. How do you feel?”

Scott blinked. “Hurt all over but, the worst is my head. It’s pounding . . . something fierce. Feel hot. So tired. Room is spinning. And . . .” Suddenly Scott’s face twisted and he swallowed. “Can’t be sick.” Artie quickly fished under the bed with his free arm for a small china basin and held it under Scott’s mouth. For several minutes, Johnny and Artie watched the injured man take in great gulps of air as he fought the bout of nausea. Finally he quieted and opened his eyes. “Too much sun.” The words held a thread of sound. Gordon slowly put the bowl back on the ground.

“You could say that.” Johnny grinned, his concern hidden behind another mask. “But Artie is treating you just fine. You had us worried. Don’t think I’m gonna let you go anywhere without me. Look what happens when I leave you?”

Scott smiled at his brother’s banter, his mind wandering. What was he forgetting? Something black hovered at the edge of his awareness. Something horrible. Suddenly he remembered. Gasping, he shrank away from Johnny. “Why did you come? Dear God!” Swinging his head, Scott could see the familiar walls of the cavern, the bed he had laid in before. “No! Loveless will take you. I can’t help him use the artifact! He’ll kill hundreds and hundreds of people. He’s mad!”

“I know all about Loveless.” Johnny reached out, and gently began to remove the strands of damp hair from Scott’s face, massaging the forehead as he did so. “About what he plans for me. We figured it out before we even got here. Don’t matter. You are my brother. I had to come.”