

SHORT MONEY

A 'WHAT HAPPENED NEXT' AFTER 'THE KID'

BY EM



Murdoch Lancer sat at his desk and read for the third time the cattle contract to ensure it was advantageous for the ranch. He reached for his pipe and took several long puffs in order to get it burning just right and he savored the rich tobacco. The grandfather clock chimed two o'clock and he took one last puff and put the pipe in the ashtray.

As he tried to focus his eyes on the small print of the contract, he felt irritation rise as he thought, 'Scott should be here. I've grown accustomed to him looking over these contracts, then sitting down and discussing them. If Johnny hadn't taken off like that, Scott would be here now.' His anger began rising at being left alone by both his sons.

Johnny left over a week ago after that kid who took off on Johnny's horse, and they hadn't heard a word from him since. 'Typical of Johnny,' he thought. Just takes off during our busiest time of the year and doesn't even bother to send word. Then Scott had to leave to take a string of horses to Modesto that Johnny was supposed to take, and now he was alone running the ranch and trying to make heads or tails of these contracts.

With mounting frustration, he stood up and walked over to the sideboard and poured himself a small whisky. 'It's a bit early, I suppose,' but he'd been up since dawn, and besides, he'd earned it, he reasoned. As he turned toward the fireplace sipping the rich liquid, he heard a horse ride up, followed by a gruff call.

"Hello, the house."

Murdoch set his glass on the mantle and walked over to the French doors, opening them wide to see the sheriff of Spanish Wells tying his horse to the hitching rail.

"Gabe, what brings you out here?"

The sheriff straightened his black vest and took off his hat as he walked up to Murdoch who was waiting expectantly. "Got some news for you Murdoch."

Murdoch felt a tightening in his stomach as he often did when his son's were off the ranch. "What is it?" He dreaded the answer.

Gabe's dark mustache twitched as he saw the worry lines in the rancher's face. "We better go inside, Murdoch."

Murdoch led the way back in and turned and looked at the Sheriff with apprehension. He crossed his arms and waited for the news.



“A stranger came through town yesterday. He was in the saloon talking about a range war down ‘round McCall’s Crossing.”

Murdoch felt Gabe’s blue eyes staring intently into his as the man tried to read him. Murdoch could feel his features freeze at the name of the town.

“Ah...what else did he have to say?”

“Just that Johnny Madrid had hired on and was cutting a wide swath down there. He’s really making the ranchers squirm.”

Murdoch couldn’t breathe for a moment as he walked back to his glass of whisky, and with his back to the sheriff downed the contents in one gulp. “Drink sheriff?”

“No thanks Murdoch.” Gabe waited for any comment from Murdoch about his statement and when none was forthcoming he asked, “Where’s Johnny?”

Murdoch turned toward him with a full glass in his hand. “McCall’s Crossing. He left here over a week ago.”

“I wonder what trouble he found down there that made him hire out?” Gabe mused. When no answer was forthcoming from Murdoch, he placed his hat on his head and turned to leave. “If I hear anything more, I’ll let you know.”

“Thanks Gabe,” Murdoch said vaguely from his place on the couch where he’d sat when his legs couldn’t hold him anymore.



Murdoch had no idea how long he sat there on the couch lost in his dark thoughts. He’d even blocked out the sound of the grandfather clock chiming the long hours. The afternoon sun was beginning to make a last appearance as it set over the western hills and he could hear Maria in the kitchen preparing his supper.

Teresa was visiting a friend at a neighboring ranch for a few days and Jelly would be finishing up feeding the stock before settling into his own digs. He thought about inviting the older man to supper, but he wasn’t ready to talk about his fears and disappointment just yet.

He’d spent the last several hours trying to figure out why his son, who was working so hard to change his life, and leave behind the life of a gunfighter, would jump back into that world.

Surely Johnny knew that crossing that line, would make it that much harder for him to come back and settle in. He wondered in despair if Johnny would ever be able to be just Johnny Lancer or if the lure of Johnny Madrid was too strong.

He’d suspected that Johnny would take on his persona of Madrid when he left the ranch on

business trips, but he'd never questioned him and Johnny had never volunteered the information. Murdoch had assumed that his son needed the protection that his well fought reputation brought when he was a stranger in a strange town.

On the few occasions he traveled with Johnny, he'd seen the way men seemed to want to challenge him and Johnny never backed down. He would take it and spit it right back throwing out a challenge meant to rile the other man into drawing on him, or tucking tail and backing down.

He'd wanted to interfere and pull Johnny away, but he was afraid that in interfering, he might be the cause of his son's injury or death, so he'd always stepped back and let his son play out his hand. Most men backed down from that cold stare and calm arrogance, thank goodness.

When Johnny had left after that boy, his son had been angry. For the second time that boy had stolen Johnny's horse and none of the Lancer family had any doubts that was going to be one sorry boy when Johnny caught up to him.

They'd been a little surprised when Johnny didn't return in a day or so, but they knew Johnny well and figured he was taking the kid home to McCall's Crossing. Murdoch shook his head. Maybe they didn't know Johnny nearly as well as they thought they did, especially if he was foolish enough to get caught up in a range war down there. In a sudden flash, Murdoch was afraid nothing had gotten through to him here at Lancer.

At the sound of Maria calling him to supper, he took his dark thoughts and sat at the long table alone and mulled over his disappointment in his younger son.



Johnny stretched out beside the campfire and sipped the strong coffee. He leaned back against his saddle and listened to the two horses munching grass behind him. He'd briefly thought about leaving Dusty behind for the kid, but in looking at the tiny corral and scraggly crops, decided the horse might be a burden on the young brother and sister trying to scratch a living out of the land.

He set his cup on the ground beside him and stretched out to add more wood to the fire. The muscles in his back began protesting the long ride and he thought of home. He should have sent a telegram explaining his absence as he was gone a lot longer than he'd planned, but the telegraph wires were down to McCall's Crossing. He would have had to ride ten miles out of his way to send the wire.

Still and all, it might've made the old man a bit more happy if he'd done just that and he could of had a soft bed tonight instead of this hard ground. On the other hand, he reasoned, he'll get home tomorrow this way where if he'd stayed in Morgan Hill tonight, he would be gone another day.

His thoughts turned to the events in McCall's Crossing. He'd been lucky things turned out the way they did. It was never a sure thing. So many things could've gone wrong when playing that game. He'd seen so many things about himself in that boy and as he'd told Dorie, he'd grown up hatin' and spending all his time learning to using his gun. He'd been desperate for her to see the road

her brother was on.

Yesterday, out on that porch, his black kid skin glove on his left hand, his right ready to draw, he'd felt the sweat pop up on the back of his neck as he watched the two rancher's eyes for a sign they were going to draw on him.

To his relief they knew they didn't stand a chance against him and resigned themselves to their fate. When they told their side of the story about how Andy's father got killed, the boy wasn't going to accept it. He had too much hurt in his heart to just let it go and he was achin' for a killin'.

Johnny gambled and pushed the boy, prodded him to make a decision, and to everyone's relief the boy made the right one. He took a giant step toward manhood that day when he begged Johnny not to kill the ranchers. With a nod of his head, Johnny sent the two men on their way.

And here he was. A day's ride from home, and no closer to knowing exactly what he was going to tell his family as he was that night when he sat watching the sleeping, troubled kid, grieving for his father. He'd sat with his head bowed as he thought about what his decision would cost him. Resurrecting Johnny Madrid could only mean trouble for him and his family, but looking at the murmuring boy, he couldn't let him go home without the help he needed.

Johnny smiled briefly thinking, 'never hired out for \$27.56 before.' With a shake of his head, he got up to check the horses one last time before turning in for the night.



Jelly walked out of the barn. Glad that his chores were done for the day. He plucked a piece of straw out of his rough plaid shirt and started wearily toward his room. He was looking forward to a quiet night.

The Boss had been a bear all week. Bellowing at the men, storming around like a hound dog with a sore nose. 'Lordy, I hope one of them boys gets home soon or them tiles on the roof'll need replacin'.' Jelly thought with a glance at the hacienda.

He stopped at the water barrel, using the ladle, he quenched his thirst. As he replaced the wooden lid, he turned at the sound of hoof beats and couldn't help the wide grin that broke out on his face. "Wa'll now ain't you a sight for sore eyes. 'Bout time you decided to show up 'round here."

He walked over to where Johnny swung wearily out of the saddle. "Hey Jelly. Miss me?" Johnny said with that grin that usually got him out of trouble most of the time, though Jelly seriously doubted it was going to help where the Boss was concerned.

Jelly took hold of Dusty's reins and followed Johnny and Barranca into the barn. "Not a bit. Did you go somewhere?" Jelly teased.

The two men made quick work of unsaddling and grooming the horses. Once they were munching

hay in their stalls, Jelly worked up his courage to warn Johnny. “Your Pa’s not been too happy since you boys left.” He ventured.

Johnny raised an eyebrow, “Where’s Scott?”

“He took them horses to Modesto.” Jelly left out the silent, ‘like you were supposed to.’ But Johnny heard it anyway.

“Damn, I forgot about that. So how long has Scott been gone?”

“Three days. He should be back tomorrow or the next day.”

Johnny stood there for a moment, head bowed, biting his lip and scuffing the toe of his boot in the dirt. He finally looked up at Jelly, “Old man pretty mad, huh?”

“He ain’t been too happy. Now you just head on over there and get it over with.”

Johnny took a deep breath and shrugged his shoulders, “Yeah, easier said than done.”

Jelly slapped Johnny on the back as the two parted in the yard, “The boss’s bark is worse than his bite. You know that... and Johnny?”

Johnny stopped and looked back at the older man, “Yeah?” He was squinting a bit into the setting sun.

“Let him get it all out. It’s been festering for a couple days and he needs to let it go.”

With a nod, Johnny turned to meet his fate in the Lancer living room.



Johnny approached the house slowly, not yet ready for the confrontation with his father. He sighed in frustration as his mind turned over that word. ‘Confrontation.’ How had they settled into this pattern whenever they had a disagreement? It was like lighting a match to dynamite when the two of them got going at it.

Scott and Murdoch could talk through their disagreements; never a loud voice to be heard. He and Scott had learned to agree to disagree, but he and Murdoch went at it like two jealous bulls fighting over a lone cow.

As he reached out for the door handle, he heard Jelly’s voice in his head as sure as if he’d been standing behind him. ‘Let him get it all out.’ With new determination, Johnny turned the handle and steeled himself to take what ever the old man chose to give him.

After hanging his hat and gun belt on the stand just inside the front door, he made himself take the long walk into the great room that was his father’s domain.

Murdoch looked up from his desk at Johnny's slow approach. "You're back." His statement was flat and to Johnny, his father's eyes were like ice.

"Yeah, I'm back. Look.....ah...Murdoch. Sorry it took me so long. The...ah...telegraph was down in McCall's Crossin' so I couldn't let ya know." Johnny walked over to the fireplace keeping a safe distance from the old man. He always liked to be on his feet when Murdoch was on the prod.

Murdoch's voice was low and measured, "I see." He crossed his arms and stared at his son. Johnny felt nervous under his father's glare.

"Well?" Murdoch asked.

"Well what?" Johnny answered quickly, hating the sound of sharpness in his voice.

"Aren't you going to tell me what you were doing in McCall's Crossing?"

Johnny shrugged and began flipping the beads hanging from the lamp shade of one of the ornate lanterns on an end table. "I took the kid back. It's just him and his sister. They got 80 acres of farmland and they're havin' a tough time of it. I just helped them out a bit is all."

Johnny felt the anger radiating off Murdoch across the room as he stood and walked toward him. Every instinct screamed at him to run, but he firmly held his ground. Murdoch stopped about a foot in front of him and asked, "Exactly what kind of help did you give them."

Johnny dropped his head as he realized Murdoch knew. He had known from the moment he'd made his decision to help Andy that he was going to have to tell his family, but he'd hoped to be able to pick his time.

"You know what kind." He muttered.

"What the devil were you thinking?!" Murdoch roared and Johnny jumped even though he knew it was coming.

Johnny bit down hard on the words that tried to fly past his lips. Instead he counted to ten and swallowed the bitter words. "I....uh....the kid, Andy.... needed someone to help him get even for what he thought them ranchers did to his Pa. If I hadn't taken a hand, he woulda found someone else or tried to do it himself. Coulda gotten himself killed....or worse."

"Worse?"

Johnny's head was down and his voice was muffled. "Yeah....he coulda turned out like me."

"Johnny....what happened." Murdoch's voice had taken on a much gentler tone and Johnny glanced up to see that Murdoch no longer looked angry; there was another expression, one Johnny wasn't sure he recognized. 'Concern?' He wasn't sure, but whatever it was gave him the strength to answer.

“Andy’s Pa was dragged by a horse after he was confronted by some local ranchers. Kid blamed them for his Pa’s death. That’s what he was doin’ when he ran off from McCall’s Crossing. Lookin’ to hire a gun so he could pay them ranchers back for what they done to his Pa.” Johnny chanced a look at his father and could only see compassion on his face for what the boy had gone through.

“Murdoch, I know I didn’t handle it the way you would have, and I know it’ll probably cause some kind of trouble down the road, but I had no choice. I couldn’t let Andy carry the load alone. I”

“Son, was anyone killed?”

Johnny shook his head, “No. It didn’t come to that. Marvin and Jenks told their side of the story and the kid believed them. It was an accident and they felt real bad about it....especially after comin’ face to face with my gun.”

Johnny thought he’d pushed Murdoch too far with that last statement, but was surprised instead when Murdoch answered dryly. “I’ll bet.”

Johnny flashed him a little smile, “Look Murdoch, I regret that I had to go by Madrid down there in McCall’s Crossing, but Johnny Lancer just couldn’t get the job done. Andy needed help and....well.....I think he’s gonna be okay now. He’s got a chance anyway.”

Murdoch nodded, “I’m glad you could help him son.” Murdoch stepped closer and laid his large work worn hand on Johnny’s shoulder. Giving it a little squeeze, he added. “Just for the record, Andy is a lucky boy to have met you Johnny. A lot of people would have washed their hands of him after returning him to his sister. Some people would not have cared what happened to the boy....but you’re not some people....and I’m proud of you son.”

That lightening quick grin was the one Murdoch had missed all week as his earlier frustrations were washed away by understanding. “How about joining me for supper?”

Murdoch was rewarded by another grin, this one made his son’s eyes light up as he answered, “Best offer I’ve had all day. I’m starvin” Johnny started toward the dining table when he stopped suddenly and looked back at Murdoch. “Hey Murdoch. Thanks...thanks for understanding.”



AFTERNOON DELIGHT

BY LARAINÉ VAN ETTEN



The cool October wind whipped through Johnny Lancer's being as his beloved Barranca galloped gracefully across the beauty that was Lancer, en route to the white hacienda that he had finally come to call 'home.'

The anticipation inside him grew as he journeyed closer, knowing that once there, he would be sharing a very special moment with the young woman who had become an important part of his life.

When he and Teresa O'Brien learned that Murdoch Lancer and his oldest son, Scott, would be attending a Cattleman's Association Luncheon on this Thursday afternoon, and that Teresa would be alone in the mammoth ranch house, an automatic agreement was made between the youngest Lancer son and his father's ward. An agreement that on this day, they would share in what they secretly referred to as their "Afternoon Delight;" a happening that had occurred once before when they found themselves alone, and was anticipated with eagerness by both of the parties involved.

As Johnny brought Barranca to a gentle trot, he wondered where the 'delight' would take place this time. The first time it had occurred at the dining room table, and he frowned as his mind went back to the time Murdoch gently told him that is where Pardee's bullet was dug out of his back. Johnny cringed every time he ate there; a distant memory of pain and fear, of being held down so he couldn't move or breathe. Of gentle voices telling him he would be all right.

But that memory was overshadowed when a few weeks later, the other event happened there. One of joy and laughter. And for him, the beginning of a feeling of . . . belonging. Of love.

It was during his recovery from said bullet that the first 'delight' had occurred. Johnny was feeling stronger every day, but everyone, from that mean doctor, Sam Jenkins, to his newfound father and brother, forbid him to do anything strenuous. A short walk was about all he was allowed to do, and the fact he couldn't ride the golden horse that had recently become a part of him depressed the young gunfighter. Oh, he could go visit Barranca. Even brush him. But the gruff voice of his Old Man ordering him to 'not even think about riding that horse' kept Johnny Madrid's feet firmly on the ground.

And underfoot. Teresa's feet, to be exact. The young gunhawk was bored, and with his father and brother gone all day, riding the wide open range where he was forbidden to go, he had nothing to do. But talk to Teresa. In the kitchen. In the great room. In the barn. Anywhere she went, he would follow her, for conversation, for reassurance. And maybe . . . for knowledge. For Teresa knew things about life at Lancer, and about his mother, that he knew he would never hear from his Old Man.

Finally, out of desperation, he asked her if she had something, anything, he could do. "But nothing too strenuous," he sarcastically moaned.



“Why, yes I do have something for you. Follow me . . . to my room.” Johnny followed Teresa into her bedroom, and chuckled to himself. It was a girl’s room, all right. Very frilly, he mused.

“I’ve been wanting this shelf hung for about a year. My father was going to hang it for me . . . but he never got around to it. Murdoch said he would, but then, well, everything happened. Anyway, it’s been sitting here for the longest time.”

Johnny studied the wall, and the shelf. “You got any tools?”

“Yes, in the shed. Follow me.” He dutifully followed.

When they returned with the tools, Teresa sat on her bed and watched, amused, as Johnny measured. And drew lines. And measured again. “Does this look straight?” he asked.

“A little to the right, please,” she giggled her response.

“Do you know what you’re doing?” she teased.

“No, not really,” he replied flatly.

Finally, the shelf was hung and Teresa placed her little knick-knacks on it. “It looks good. Thank you, Johnny.”

“Any time, ma’am,” he smiled. “Anything else you need done?”

“Well, the potatoes need peeled . . .” she meekly responded.

So for the rest of that afternoon, Johnny Madrid, feared gunfighter, sat with Teresa. And peeled potatoes.

That night at dinner, Johnny commented to Teresa that he liked the brass tea set that sat on the hutch in the dining area. “I’ve never seen a brass one before,” he quietly said.

Murdoch chuckled, and Teresa sighed. “It’s not brass, Johnny. It’s . . . silver. It just hasn’t been cleaned in over a year. With everything going on neither Maria or I felt like polishing tea sets.”

So the next morning, after Murdoch and Scott had left, Johnny asked Teresa for the ‘cleanin’ stuff.’ “I’m gonna make your tea set pretty again,” he advised. And for the rest of the morning and a good part of the afternoon, Johnny Madrid dipped, rubbed, polished, and shined the tea set, carefully cleaning each groove, restoring it to its original, shining beauty. Teresa was so impressed, she gave Johnny the silver candelabras and the silverware to clean. Even Maria ran to her own little house, retrieving the silver tray Murdoch had given her and Cipriano on their 25th wedding anniversary. Johnny shined them all.

“I didn’t think . . . you . . . would know how to do things like that,” Teresa quietly commented. “Well, I’ve had lots of practice. I shine my Colt a lot,” he grinned, lovingly patting the gun that was forever at his right hip.

Teresa looked at him warily, but then couldn't help but smile. "Well thank you. Everything looks . . . wonderful."

"Anytime, Miss Teresa," he replied.

The next day, the bored gunhawk helped Teresa fold clothes. "It's awful quiet around here. Where is everybody?" he inquired.

"Well, today is Maria's day off, and Rosita and Anna went into town."

"Oh. So, we're here alone?"

"Yes." She paused, then added, "I used to like to be alone here. When my father and Murdoch were working, and Maria and everyone was gone, I used to pretend I was the lady of the house. I felt so . . . grown-up. But ever since my father . . . well, I don't like being alone here anymore. This house can get kind of . . . creepy . . . sometimes. . ."

Johnny smiled slightly at that statement.

Teresa quickly changed the subject. "Dr. Jenkins will be here tomorrow. I bet you're glad," she commented.

"I won't be glad 'til he gives me the all clear. I don't like him. . . he's mean to me," Johnny pouted.

"Oh, he's so mean to you, Johnny. He was so kind and gentle with you when you were sick. You just don't remember, that's all."

"Yeah, well, I don't care what he says, I'm gonna ride tomorrow. And no one will stop me." The dejected look on Johnny's face brought a feeling of sweet sorrow to Teresa. She had to do something to cheer him up.

"Follow me," Teresa ordered. And Johnny did. And he realized that for the past week, whenever this 5'3, 90-pound girl ordered him to follow, he did so, like a lost puppy. Hmmm, have to do something about that, he sighed.

He followed her to the dining room table. "Sit down," she commanded, pulling out the chair and pushing him into it. "Wait here, I'll be right back."

Teresa disappeared into the kitchen, and Johnny waited, with a feeling of puzzlement and amusement. What is she up to?

When Teresa came out of the kitchen, it was then that the two of them experienced their first 'Afternoon Delight.' It was totally unexpected, unplanned, and a deliciously wonderful experience for both of them. A great way for a man and woman to get to really know each other. Johnny's bond with Teresa had formed . . .

Johnny made his way to the barn, and in an unaccustomed action for him, gave Barranca to one of

the hands to care for. "I'll be back later, Amigo," he softly said to his beloved friend.

He wanted to clean up a bit before meeting Teresa, so he used the back stairs and made his way to his bedroom. He freshened up, putting on some of the 'sweet smellin' stuff' that six months ago he never would of thought of wearing. But Teresa had bought some for him and Scott as a little gift, shortly after their arrival home, and he had to admit to liking it. Just a little.

As he changed his shirt, he wondered what Teresa had planned. She said she had something new planned, but I don't know how anything could top the last time, he smiled as he remembered the feeling of satisfaction he gained from their last 'delight.'

He came down the stairs and Teresa stood, waiting for him at the dining room table. She looked lovely. Her hair was long and flowing, and she wore a simple blue dress that was perfect for the occasion.

"You sure we're alone?" he inquired.

"Yes," she softly replied.

Smiling, he asked, "It will be here? At the dining room table?"

"Yes. Come, sit."

Johnny made his way to the table and began to sit at his seat.

"No, here," Teresa said, motioning for him to sit in 'the' chair. Murdoch's chair. She gently pushed him into it. "What he doesn't know won't hurt him," she whispered wickedly in Johnny's ear. He felt the hairs on his neck stand on end, and a shiver ran through him.

Her warm breath sure feels good on my neck, he sighed.

"I'll be right back," Teresa advised, and at that, disappeared into the kitchen. The anticipation in Johnny Lancer rose. The excitement, the pure ecstasy, of what was about to happen overwhelmed him. If she didn't hurry up, he was sure he would explode with the energy he possessed.

Finally, the young woman emerged from the kitchen. Her smile lit up her beautiful face and her brown eyes sparkled as she walked toward Johnny. She placed the dish and glass in front of him, then handed him the fork.

"Enjoy . . ." was all she said.

He took the fork and took a bite of the rich, chocolate cake Teresa had placed in front of him. The sounds coming from the handsome ex-gunhawk were of pure joy.

"Mmm-mmm, Teresa . . . this is . . . God, this is . . . wonderful," the words came from a mouth full of the rich, chocolaty creation Teresa had made. Just for him.

“Here, wash it down with the milk. It’s nice and cold,” she advised.

Johnny drank the milk, and Teresa couldn’t help but laugh at the ‘milk moustache’ around his mouth.

“Join me, please,” he said, pulling the chair out for her to sit. She took a bite of the cake, and the same delightful sounds came from her.

“Mmmm . . . have to admit, this is pretty darn good . . .” came the mumbled words from the otherwise ladylike Teresa. When she was able to speak clearly, she advised, “I tried something new with the recipe. I used a little more cocoa and a little less milk, I read it would be richer that way.”

Johnny’s full mouth spit out words once again. “Well . . . this is . . . really rich. It’s great, Teresa. Didn’t . . . think anything could top the last time . . .”

Teresa and Johnny ate their cake and drank their milk. And talked, with mouths full, just like two kids. They laughed, too.

In other words, Brother and Sister enjoyed the company of one another.

As Johnny started on his second, smaller, piece of cake, he commented, “I’m surprised Murdoch don’t like chocolate cake. He has sort of a sweet tooth. . .”

“Oh, he likes cake. Just not this rich. And he prefers a small piece to the rather . . . large . . . pieces his son likes . . .”

“Yeah, and Scott and his apple pies . . .” Johnny laughed. “Hey, have you and Scott ever . . . you know . . . had a delight with pies?”

Teresa laughed, and eyed her brother wickedly. “No, Johnny. Seems like you and I are the only ones that share this ‘guilty pleasure.’”

“Yeah, kind a like it though. Kind a like our little secret . . . that no one else has the right to know about. It was when we did this the last time, you know, when I was still kind of . . . not all together . . . that I really got to know you. And, well, began to accept you as my sister . . .” he said, quietly and thoughtfully.

Johnny’s words brought a tear to Teresa’s eyes. “I know. That day, I found out just how sweet and kind you really are, Johnny Madrid Lancer . . .”

“Hey, don’t let that get out. Got my reputation to consider, you know . . .” Johnny laughed.

And for the rest of the afternoon, Johnny Lancer and Teresa O’Brien enjoyed their cake. And milk. And each other. And their special time together; their special secret. They enjoyed their . . .

“Afternoon Delight”

THE CHUCKWAGON : HARDTACK

CONTRIBUTED BY MAUREEN PREUSS



I don't remember what the original source was for this tale and recipe – as a LONGTIME western fan, I copied it out of something ages ago, pasted it to a 3 x 5 card, and have kept it in my own recipe box ever since. Here's the story, in the original format:

JAWBREAKER AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Every Western fan knows that outlaws, ranch hands and gunslingers always depend on hardtack. They carry it in their pockets, plunk it in their coffee, and stuff it in their saddlebags. They munch it when galloping down canyons and watching sunsets.

Suddenly, while reading Max Brand (America's most popular Western writer), I realized my gross ignorance. Exactly what is hardtack?

After a long search I located a recipe, trotted to the kitchen and gave hardtack a try. It turned out to be remarkably easy to make and excruciatingly difficult to chew. For those who want to eat some real Americana, here's the recipe:

Mix together one-cup flour, one-half teaspoon salt, and one teaspoon sugar. Add just enough water to moisten. Roll the dough until it is paper thin, cut with a biscuit cutter. Place on a greased cookie sheet. Bake about fifteen minutes at 400°F. Makes ten. Happy trails!



CONTRIBUTER'S NOTE: I trot this recipe out every couple of years or so, and have to rediscover how to make it correctly every time. Sometimes comes out right the first try . . . sometimes I have to fiddle with cooking temperature or time for a couple of batches. I gave up on cookie cutters long time ago – I usually just roll it out, then cut it in long strips, each an inch or two wide – they bake up kind of rustic looking this way.

We've taken batches of hardtack with us to covered dish parties along with a homemade black bean dip – and been the hit of the night! Something a little out of the ordinary from your typical corn chip . . . When it comes out right, it may be hard, but you somehow just can't stop eating it. And it is surprisingly flavorful for what little ingredients there are. Give it a go – and dream of cowboys with strong jaws while you chew . . . *MP*



LANCER WORD SEARCH

BY JANET BRAYDEN



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I	E	J	O	H	A	L	D	R	I	P	Q	U	I	W	L	E	E	A	D	I	R	F	L	E	E
L	L	A	D	D	R	A	W	L	J	R	A	W	L	D	C	R	W	Q	R	E	O	I	U	M	W
U	M	M	A	R	D	N	D	R	A	E	P	P	B	N	E	A	Y	D	S	S	T	G	E	R	D
J	O	E	D	O	N	B	A	K	E	R	L	B	A	C	Q	Z	J	E	R	C	U	H	X	Z	U
A	N	S	G	E	A	L	T	A	N	G	E	L	A	A	Y	I	A	Y	D	O	U	T	I	N	G
A	N	G	A	R	L	F	L	A	N	G	E	L	B	Q	L	U	M	X	M	T	P	E	N	E	G
G	O	R	G	A	T	E	T	E	T	I	D	N	A	Y	X	E	E	Q	U	S	O	R	D	E	A
R	U	E	L	J	O	H	N	Y	Y	I	V	I	D	A	B	A	S	L	A	M	R	A	C	N	N
A	E	G	A	B	C	Q	Z	R	R	S	F	J	L	M	E	S	S	O	M	A	D	O	I	I	A
S	T	O	B	L	S	E	F	D	G	M	N	G	A	L	E	O	T	P	L	N	W	A	N	R	I
S	U	R	A	U	S	Y	A	N	M	A	U	N	N	I	D	R	A	E	V	N	E	N	V	E	R
T	E	Y	R	E	T	M	R	A	A	R	G	E	D	G	M	R	C	K	D	N	D	R	E	H	O
N	Z	Y	G	R	Y	E	E	W	R	I	N	I	S	V	A	O	Y	E	I	O	M	E	R	T	C
O	H	A	Z	N	C	C	A	R	I	A	Q	R	M	A	U	D	E	R	R	N	E	E	N	A	Q
D	B	Y	N	N	H	O	P	J	S	E	S	B	A	L	D	O	M	R	E	U	S	T	E	C	R
E	L	H	A	B	D	E	A	T	C	C	H	O	A	C	Z	E	L	O	D	R	N	S	S	A	E
O	O	L	G	E	O	J	U	N	O	B	E	A	W	R	C	G	M	R	N	E	I	T	S	A	C
J	U	R	E	C	N	A	L	T	T	O	C	S	I	A	E	A	Z	E	U	V	K	O	Q	U	N
O	E	L	L	U	B	M	M	G	L	E	M	E	C	W	O	T	H	M	A	I	S	N	L	E	A
E	T	L	A	N	C	E	R	R	A	C	O	R	E	F	J	S	S	O	M	R	O	I	T	L	L
D	J	Y	A	D	L	E	G	N	A	O	R	E	R	O	O	M	I	D	E	N	H	M	I	T	H
O	G	D	N	G	E	S	A	E	T	Z	R	T	C	R	C	O	R	L	N	E	Y	O	S	T	C
N	I	N	C	V	B	T	B	T	R	Z	O	R	C	D	O	L	A	A	Y	E	L	L	T	A	O
D	F	O	E	Y	I	A	E	M	E	A	C	N	A	R	R	A	B	B	A	R	L	A	N	C	D
A	N	L	R	A	N	C	H	G	S	E	O	B	K	D	R	P	A	L	W	G	E	P	L	M	R
H	U	B	A	Q	U	Y	N	I	E	S	Y	D	E	R	O	A	I	M	N	R	J	A	P	E	U
C	G	N	N	B	L	O	N	F	D	E	O	J	A	M	E	S	G	R	E	G	O	R	Y	Y	M

Search for these words up, down and sideways! (Solution on page 177):

ANDREW DUGGAN	COW	JAMES GREGORY	PAUL
ANGEL DAY	DESERT	JAMES STACY	RANCH
BADLANDS	DEWDROP	JELLY HOSKINS	SCOT
BALDOMERO	DRAWL	JOE DON BAKER	SCOTT LANCER
BARRANCA	ELIZABETH BAUR	JOHNNY MADRID LANCER	SCOTLAND
BLOND	GABE	LANCER	SCOTSMAN
BLUE	GRASS	LAND PIRATES	SPANISH WELLS
BULL	GREEN RIVER	MARIA	STEER
CATHERINE	GUNFIGHTER	MORRO COYO	TERESA O'BRIEN
CATTLE	HARLAN GARRETT	MURDOCH LANCER	VAL CRAWFORD
CHAD	INVERNESS	PALOMINO	WAYNE MAUNDER



LANCER WORD SEARCH BY JANET BRADEN

BOSTON, 1870

BY SHARON COULTON



It had been the closest call yet.

He coolly eased his top hat onto his head, striving to seem unruffled by the narrow escape should there chance to be anyone gazing idly out of the neighboring mansion's lamp lit windows. The man up on the balcony closed the double doors, muffling the sounds of poor Barbara's tearful exchange with her father. Brazenly determined to appear innocent, or barring that, to avoid looking utterly guilty, Scott Lancer further distanced himself from the sounds of his lady friend's distress with a tuneless whistle.

A figure stepped out of the shadows.

"You're Scott Lancer?"

Startled and immediately concerned at being addressed by name while still standing practically beneath Barbara's bedroom window, Scott defensively pointed the tip of his walking stick towards the interrogator. At least the stranger didn't look sinister, despite being dressed in a suit and hat, regular daytime business attire, in decided contrast to the stylish evening clothes that Scott himself wore.

"And if I am?"

"The son of Murdoch Lancer?"

Scott hesitated for only a brief moment.

"So I'm told. Never met the gentleman myself."

"Lawby's the name, Pinkerton office. We find people."

Agent Lawby extended his card. Despite his well-practiced disinterest in anything related to his long absent father, Scott reflexively accepted the small rectangle.

"Well, I haven't lost any," he informed the agent dismissively. "So . . . much as I've enjoyed our little conversation ..."

He started to walk away, then paused without turning when Lawby spoke again.

"Your father wants to see you---- and he's willing to pay for it. All expenses to California and a thousand dollars for one hour of your time."



Still not sparing the agent a backward glance, Scott Lancer very deliberately shrugged his shoulders and then moved quickly along the paved walk.

“If you have any questions, I’ll be in the office to-mor- . . .”

The man’s words faded away, muffled by the sound of Scott’s own footsteps and by the pulse thumping in his ears.

His steps were determined, but his destination now uncertain. Home was quite some distance away, the red brick Federalist-style mansion he shared with his maternal grandfather and a very attentive staff of longtime employees. The evening air was damp and the flimsy affectation of his cape did little to ward off the chill, but Scott decided that the walk would do him good. The hasty descent from Barbara’s balcony, the unsettling encounter with the agent—he filled his lungs with the refreshing night air, hoping to clear his head.

It wasn’t the champagne causing his discomposure; Scott hadn’t had that much of it. The bubbly liquid was far from his libation of choice, although Barbara had certainly seemed to enjoy it. It had been a foolhardy risk, going to the girl’s own bedroom, but he’d succumbed to the pleas from her provocatively shaped lips, lured by the promise of the enticingly form fitting gown. The blonde debutante had been trying so very hard to be seductive, with, Scott had to admit, considerable success. He’d been reclining most comfortably in a cushioned chaise, enjoying her attentions, until they’d been interrupted. He’d barely tasted the champagne, let alone the delectable Barbara.

Well, scotch was what he needed now. It was easier to lose oneself in bourbon or gin, but scotch whiskey was soothing, scotch would give him time to think. And Scott knew that he would not be able to avoid thinking about the messenger . . . or his message.

How long had he been followed, he wondered. How long had the Pinkerton man been waiting there in the street, peering up at the Otises’ windows? <<Lawby>>, the name came immediately to mind, there was no need to check the small card that he still held in his left hand, a razor’s edge against his palm.

“We find people,” the agent had said.

<<And I haven’t lost anyone,>> Scott reminded himself, as his long strides carried him further and further away from the utterly unexpected confrontation. He was barely aware of the rough, uneven edges of the paving stones that could be felt through the thin soles of his evening shoes. The footgear was intended for riding in carriages, for dining at table, for dancing, not for escape.

Despite the brisk pace, despite the dark and the cool air, the words were still with him; he hadn’t succeeded in leaving them behind. The message seemed to cut into his thoughts in the same way that the agent’s card was slicing into his hand.

Despite his desire to remain unaffected, the words had their impact.

<<“Your father wants to see you.”>>

For months at a time, Scott could simply forget that he even had a father. Then someone would mention “California”, and he would remember. It was like recalling an irrelevant, useless fact one had learned long ago in school: that Berlin was the capital of Prussia, that Emperor Charlemagne was crowned on Christmas Day, that a man named Murdoch Lancer owned a ranch somewhere out West.

<<“Your father wants to see you.”>>

As a child, Scott had longed for precisely such a message, dreamed of it even. With the approach of each birthday or holiday or significant event in his young life, he would convince himself that this time, this time, his father would actually appear, or, at the very least, would send a card, a letter, a present.

He finally had a card, he realized grimly—but no letter, no personal communication at all. Just the stark announcement delivered by a stranger and accompanied by an offer of money. Payment for an hour of his time. That was . . . insulting. At least the amount was not.

<<“Your father wants to see you.”>>

<<He’s never “wanted to” before. >>

The bitter thoughts fueled his forward momentum and sooner than he might have expected, Scott had somehow navigated the maze of the shadowy streets lined with imposing dwellings. From a distance, he glimpsed his grandfather’s house. A welcoming light shone in the entry, but the main floor was otherwise dark, indicating that the servants had retired to their quarters for the night. Apparently Harlan Garrett had not yet returned from his dinner engagement. Scott had long since ceased to carry a timepiece in the evenings, but since this night had not exactly progressed as planned, he guessed that it might still be quite early yet.

He’d barely reached the leading edge of the wrought iron fence enclosing the Garrett estate when he heard a familiar voice impatiently calling his name.

“Scott!”

As he turned, Scott sensed that perhaps his angry thoughts had drowned out a few other bids for his attention. Searching back through the shadows, he found an easily recognized silhouette descending the steps in front of the stately home located catercorner to his grandfather’s property. Scott tucked the Pinkerton man’s card inside his jacket and, casting one last glance towards his own darkened home, he crossed the street, moving diagonally towards the light flowing from the Hayfords’ residence.

“Good evening, Will,” he called out.

“Good evening, yourself. And, strangely enough, it is still evening, not morning yet . . . You’re home early, Scott. Are you feeling unwell?”

Scott smiled at the too solicitous words of his childhood friend. "Well enough . . . though your concern is touching."

"I couldn't believe it when I saw you coming down the street---on foot—and in quite a hurry. Do you by chance have time to stop in?"

Instead of answering the sardonic question, Scott simply opened the heavy gate and stepped through it, closing it firmly before proceeding up the brick walkway.

Will Hayford remained on the top step but one, the massive door of the front entrance standing ajar behind him. Although the other man stood in the shadows, Scott could see that Will was also attired in evening clothes, albeit minus a cravat and with the top buttons of his shirt unfastened. Will's left arm stretched across his chest, his hand tucked beneath what remained of his right arm. The lower sleeve of the dress jacket was empty, the fabric pinned up to the shoulder.

"I take it things didn't go well with your current 'Lady of the Evening'?"

Scott removed his top hat and mounted the stairs. "Now Will," he admonished his friend. "That is no way to refer to a young woman from a socially prominent family like ---"

"The Otises?"

Scott halted on one of the lower steps. "Have you been following me too?"

"Hardly," was Will's dry response. "I saw you and Barbara leave together." He moved to go back inside, but turned to toss one more comment over his shoulder. "I also noticed Mr. Otis departing shortly after . . . Did you have a nice visit?"

"I just barely managed to avoid him."

Will laughed and led the way inside. Scott deposited his hat and walking stick on the seat of the elaborately carved mahogany hall tree and then proceeded to unfasten his cape. His friend disappeared briefly into the adjoining front room. By the time Scott had carefully hung his cape on the hook, Will had returned, carrying a cup and saucer in his hand. Eschewing the front parlor, the two young men proceeded along the hallway to the equally well-appointed, but more comfortable, Hayford sitting room.

"Coffee—or something stronger?"

In reply, Scott moved directly to the liquor table. Meanwhile, Will settled himself on one of the two sofas which faced each other, perpendicular to the fireplace.

There was one large lamp shining at the other end of the room, but the sofas were bathed only in the light from the logs burning on the hearth. The glow of the firelight illuminated Will Hayford's scarred face and the black patch that covered his damaged right eye.

As an infantry captain during the War, Will had lost most of one arm and half of his vision on the blood-soaked battlefield at Gettysburg. He had also lost his brother, John.

Captain John Hayford had been two years older than Will, who was two years older than Scott. Although George, the eldest Hayford, had distanced himself from them, the three younger boys had been constant childhood companions. Despite the straight blond hair that distinguished him from the brothers, each of whom sported brown curls, little “Scotty Lancer” had virtually become the “youngest Hayford”.

Will sipped his coffee as he contemplated his oldest friend, now pouring himself a generous glass of well-aged scotch from the bottle he’d selected. The black formal attire served to emphasize how thin Scott still was, five full years after returning from the War. No longer emaciated, but still, working with his grandfather all day and then staying out late so many nights . . .

“Your mother’s retired for the evening?” Scott inquired politely as he sipped at his drink.

“Yes, as soon as we got in. I have tomorrow free, so she has a full schedule planned.”

Scott nodded, then turned away to refill his glass, relieving Will of the need to mask his concerned scrutiny. There had been a time, not so long ago when they had each relied—too heavily—on alcohol to keep the demons at bay.

“You need it that badly?” Will asked softly.

Scott looked up then, with a faintly guilty expression. He raised his glass towards Will with a mildly defiant air. “My first of the evening. I never get drunk on champagne.”

“Well, don’t stay sober on my account.”

“You could join me.”

There was a hint of a challenge in Scott’s tone. Will wondered at that for a moment.

“This coffee’s strong enough,” he said finally.

They had shared a few drinks after dinner with Mr. Garrett, two evenings before. For some reason, Will had felt he’d had something to prove, and, in a studiedly casual tone, had requested brandy. He’d finished the first glass too quickly, and so had forced himself to savor the second. The sensations had been stronger even than he’d remembered. He would have accepted a third portion, but neither Scott nor his grandfather had offered one.

The next morning, he’d been glad of that. Having recently secured a position with a very prestigious law firm, Will had no desire to risk everything now by falling back into a bottle.

So he’d done his socializing this evening wholly unfortified—a challenge, but he’d survived. No need now to cloud his thinking, if Scott needed someone to talk to tonight.

Scott knew better than anyone exactly how far Will had fallen, the depths of his despair and self-pity. And anger. Will's anger had been directed at the Army, at the War, at his dead brother John who had abandoned him on the battlefield at Gettysburg. The hard lump of anger inside of him had been like a well-packed powder keg, just sitting there, useless, yet always ready to explode, if someone were to unwittingly strike a match. There had been more than enough loose powder to provide a dusting of resentment for anyone who had returned from the War unscathed. Initially, his chief target had been his brother George, who had taken over their late father's law office.

By the time that the War had ended, it had appeared that Will's anger had been all used up, that there wasn't anything left for Scott. But eventually Will had come to resent him as well, hate him even, for returning alive and whole, when he and John had not.

Other friends and acquaintances had already turned their backs on Will, weary of the maudlin, crippled, drunk he had become. When Scott had finally returned, Will had surprised himself by actually making an effort to resume the role of older and wiser brother. Of course it hadn't been long before that hastily donned mask had fallen away. But Scott, thankfully, had been too stubborn to leave him alone, bearing Will's anger in stoic fashion. In fact, for a time, Scott had almost seemed to welcome the invective he'd received in lieu of thanks for his efforts to "help". What had finally made the difference was when Will had come to the realization that Scott also needed some assistance, that the younger man had his own scars, carefully hidden ones.

Tonight it was all too easy to see that there was something more bothering his friend than lingering disappointment over the delightful Miss Otis. Will balanced the saucer on his knee, held the almost empty coffee cup in place, and waited.

Instead of throwing himself negligently against the back of the sofa, Scott sat forward, perched on the barest edge of the cushion, his elbows on his thighs as he contemplated the tumbler in his hands. Will kept his one eye fastened on the blond head.

Scott sipped at his drink, looked up and then quickly looked away. "So . . . tell me about . . . California."

<<*Finally*,>> Will thought. It had taken long enough.

"Come with me . . . see it for yourself. You know I'm leaving in about six weeks."

For the past several months, Will had been out West, traveling and interviewing with attorneys in San Francisco and Sacramento. He'd been asked to join the office of Wetherby and Franklin in the California capital, a firm with a reputation for rarely losing a case. He had returned to Boston for an extended visit with his family and friends, and to finalize things with his remaining clients, before returning to Sacramento for a fresh start.

Scott sat upright, loosening his cravat-- and then in one swift motion, drained his glass. Will sighed and looked away.

When Will glanced back, Scott had set his empty glass on the carpet at his feet and was holding something in one hand, a small card that he flipped across the space so that it landed on the

cushion of the sofa opposite. Will had to reach back and deposit his cup and saucer on the console table behind him before he could pick up the card and examine it.

“Pinkerton Agency?”

Scott nodded. “Yes. He was following me.”

“Mr. Otis?”

“No. My father.”

Will was stunned, and made no effort to hide it.

“Shall I get you a refill?” he asked lightly, after a considerable pause, and then made as if to push himself up from his seat.

With an impatient gesture, Scott waved him off, then finally leaned back against the cushions, his head resting on the back of the sofa, his face angled up to the ceiling.

“So. . . what did he say?”

“He said . . . ‘Your father wants to see you’.”

The fire on the hearth popped and crackled. The light and shadows moved in rhythm with the flames. Scott gazed at the ceiling, waiting.

“Why?”

Scott lifted his head up a bit to answer, very deliberately, in the driest of tones. “The agent didn’t say.”

“Well, but surely he gave you a letter-- or a note--- from your father?”

Scott pointed a finger at Will. “He gave me--- that card.”

Will leaned forward and flipped it back across the space, hitting Scott in the chest. The small grey rectangle lay partially buried in the white ruffles of his dress shirt.

“There must have been some message.”

Scott looked down at the card, picked it up and studied it. Then he turned it over and stared at the back, which Will knew was blank. Certain that there was something more, Will waited for Scott to look up and say it.

“Just that he’s willing to pay me.”

“Pay you?”

“For travel expenses to California, and . . . ,” Scott sighed as he rubbed his thumb along the edge of the card.

“And?”

“He’ll pay travel expenses--- and my father will also pay me . . . one thousand dollars for one hour of my time.”

“Damn,” was all Will could think of to say. He said it sympathetically.

Scott sat up and then turned to stare at the hearth. Will wouldn’t have been the least bit surprised if Scott had tossed the agent’s card into the flames--he’d surely memorized it by now, anyway—but Scott held on to it.

“And what else did the agent say?”

Scott pushed his bottom lip up, shrugged his shoulders. “Nothing.”

“You mean that you didn’t ask him anything.”

“No . . . I didn’t.”

The card followed Scott’s tie, disappearing into the pocket of his trousers.

Will reached his hand across his face and rubbed absently at the lower edge of his eye patch.

“Well, I asked a few questions, while I was in Sacramento,” he announced to Scott’s profile. A slight lift of the one visible eyebrow was the only response.

“The Lancer name is known. Apparently his ranch is quite sizeable.”

Scott nodded grimly. “Well, a thousand dollars is a lot of money.” He cocked a glance at Will. “Did anyone wonder why you were asking?”

Will smiled wryly. “I said that I had a friend who was a . . . distant relative.”

It was Scott’s own phrase, something he’d said once or twice in conversation when asked if he knew anyone living out West. If Scott recognized the echo now, he didn’t let on.

“Perhaps, once you’re settled, you might pay him a call,” Scott said as he stood up. His expression was unreadable, even to Will’s practiced eye.

“So you aren’t thinking of going?”

“No.”

The answer came too quickly, Will realized, as he followed his friend to the foyer. He knew exactly how much Scott had once longed to hear from his father. And because he'd been there, purchasing his share of the rounds, Will could easily recall the precise evening when Scott had decided that he no longer cared.

"Well, Scott, if you change your mind, feel free to tell people you're visiting me. There's no need for everyone to know your personal business."

Scott stopped at the hall tree to collect his belongings. "That won't work with my grandfather," he said, looking over his shoulder.

"I suppose not." Will wondered whether or not Scott would tell Mr. Garrett about the evening's encounter, but before he could address that topic, Scott settled his cape about his shoulders, then looked up as he fastened the ties.

"The man's given me no cause to travel so far."

Will nodded. If anything, Scott would view the offer of a one thousand dollar payment as some sort of a bribe ---and a reason not to go.

"Well . . . at least he sent the agent to find you."

Scott gathered up his gloves and walking stick, then carefully settled his top hat on his head.

"Find me? Will-- I haven't been lost."

Will Hayford could have argued the point, but he didn't. It was most unlikely that Scott's father knew about any of that. As Will watched Scott descend the front steps, he considered that Murdoch Lancer couldn't really know anything about his son at all-- for if he had, the man certainly would have sent a different sort of message entirely.



Scott moved restlessly about the darkened lower floor of the house. It was still too early to retire, and he would doubtless have more than the usual difficulty falling asleep this night. He'd wandered through the spacious dining room and on into the shadowy and silent kitchen before deciding that he wasn't hungry, and didn't need anything to eat.

Will's observation about 'needing' a drink had rankled a bit, so Scott was determined to avoid the sitting room where his grandfather's expensively stocked liquor cabinet was located. He tapped the fingers of one hand along the length of the smooth surface of the sideboard as he passed idly through the dining room once more.

<<"Your father wants to see you.">>

Why the hell wasn't he able to simply dismiss those words from his thoughts as easily as he'd dismissed that Pinkerton man?

With a small sigh, Scott started back down the corridor towards the front door. Upon entering, he'd deposited his hat, gloves, and walking stick on the table in the entryway, and then swiftly inspected the accumulation of calling cards. Seeing none with the distinctive Pinkerton logo, the eye embellished with the words "We Never Sleep," he'd pulled the now crumpled grey card from his pocket, drawing with it an equally crumpled white cravat, and added both to the collection of items littering the tabletop. Having no intention of leaving his belongings strewn about, he now moved to retrieve them, but as he pocketed the card, the moonlight streaming through the windows of the front parlor caught his eye.

Stepping through the doorway, he saw the soft light of the rising new moon spilling through the tall windows, sending cool beams across the imported Indian carpet. The jewel-like hues that glowed so brightly in the daylight were now chilled to shades of ebony and ice, ivory and ash. Finally divesting himself of his cape, Scott slowly entered the room, carelessly tossing the frivolous garment over the back of a large wing chair standing just inside. Needing to hear the wooden sound of his own footsteps, he avoided the soft carpet and trod the roundabout pathway of polished planks, until he reached the closest window.

The street was deserted, at least the portion visible through the panes of glass and the bars of the wrought iron fence. Not that he really expected to spy a lone figure standing in the shadows. His message delivered, Agent Lawby had likely returned home; his assignment completed, the fortunate man was perhaps even now deep in an untroubled asleep.

When Scott turned to check the time displayed on the golden face of the ornate mantel clock, his eyes were almost instantly drawn to the large painting hanging above the fireplace, dominating the formal sitting room. As with the richly toned pattern of the carpet, the night and the moonlight had drained the colors from the portrait, transforming the pastels to shades of white and grey.

Her hair was silvered; the bouquet of pink roses in her lap dove-colored, the grass beneath her feet ashen, even the lace dress she wore was ghostly pale rather than a bright white. Despite these alterations, Catherine remained unconcerned, smiling serenely at a distant corner of the room. As always.

Scott pensively studied the picture, even though he had long ago committed to memory each and every detail. Of the three paintings of Catherine that graced the walls of this house, this one had always been his favorite. It was both the largest and the last for which she had sat, having been painted shortly before her marriage. It was the one in which she seemed the most happy.

There were two other images, daguerreotypes, one in his grandfather's bedroom, the second on display in the elderly man's study. Devoid as they were of color even in full daylight, they were less comfortably viewed visages, with those grey eyes--- lifelike yet not-- gazing calmly back at him. A portion of his discomfort was no doubt a remnant of a little boy's guilt over tiptoeing into those forbidden spaces in order to steal a look at her.

One of the daguerreotypes and the other two paintings depicted Catherine as a little girl, one who once could have been a favorite playmate, and now would be a child whose head he might pat, whose hand he would be careful to take hold of when crossing a busy street.

Frozen as she was in time, Scott was older now than Catherine had ever been.

His grandfather's claim had easily been the stronger one, and when the elderly man spoke of her at all it was with great feeling. She was always "my daughter", or "dear precious Catherine", and much less often identified as "your mother." She didn't look like anyone's mother, at least not in any of the pictures Scott had seen.

She'd always been "Catherine" to him.

Sitting down on the small sofa in front of the hearth, Scott briefly considered touching a match to the logs arranged on the andirons. Too much effort, he decided, as he wearily removed his shoes and swung his legs up onto the cushions. The carved wooden armrest beneath his head was uncomfortable, so he tugged at one of the decorative pillows wedged between his hip and the back of the settee, and applied it to the problem. Stretching out to his full length, he rested his stockinged feet upon the farther end of the sofa. With his arms folded across his chest, Scott contemplated the young woman's three-quarter profile.

In this particular portrait, the oft remarked upon resemblance between mother and son was clearly visible. On canvas, Catherine's face was petite and soft and feminine, while Scott's own features were strong and sharp and masculine. But the likeness was there, nonetheless.

They'd never talked much about her. Questions about Catherine made Grandfather unhappy, and therefore it had seemed best to avoid them. So Scott had studied the images. He knew Catherine's face so well, that were she to step down from the painting and make her way about the city, he fancied he might recognize her, even from a distance, on a busy street, or amongst a crowd of people, at the theater or the symphony.

Murdoch Lancer, on the other hand, well, not only had Scott never seen a picture of his father, he'd never even heard a physical description of the man, at least none that he remembered. For all he knew, Agent Lawby himself could have been his father.

As a boy, Scott had taken to studying his own image in the mirror, not out of vanity--- that would come later, in adolescence--- but in an effort to see something in his features that was not "Catherine," that was not "Garrett," but "Lancer."

Although he hadn't found any clues in his face, he had found two, in his hands. Scott's eyes now fell upon his most likely legacy from Murdoch Lancer. Large, strong hands, with long fingers and oval nails. "Laborer's hands," his grandfather had termed them once, disparagingly, but their size had nonetheless condemned Scott to endless hours of piano lessons.

"You can always tell a gentleman by his hands, Scotty," Grandfather was fond of saying, admonishing him to be attentive to his manicure. As was often the case, Scott had his own reasons for following the older man's good advice.

He rubbed at his face with both hands now.

<<“Your father wants to see you.”>>

<<Well, I’m here, right where he left me.>>

It was not unheard of for a man to lose a wife to childbirth and subsequently reject the child; Murdoch Lancer would not be the first to have done so. Upon learning that he had been raised by his maternal grandfather, most people simply assumed that Scott was an orphan. Rarely was it necessary to disabuse them of that belief. But those who were apprised of his true situation had sometimes shared stories of “black sheep” uncles or other rogue relatives—comfortably distant ones—who had wantonly forsaken their families.

In Scott’s case, he was well aware that the life to which he had been “abandoned” in the care of his attentive and wealthy grandfather, was one that many would envy. He was certainly convinced that growing up in Boston was far preferable to the life he would have led on some dusty little ranch in far off California. But still he’d felt abandoned.

And angry. He’d hated Murdoch Lancer, at least as much as you could hate someone who was nothing more than a name. He’d proclaimed his hatred to Will and John, each time that a birthday came and went with no word from his father. He’d coldly announced it to Julie, in response to his fiancée’s curious questions.

<<Former fiancée>>, he reminded himself, with a pang of regret.

Julie had insisted that she intended to send a wedding announcement to his father, “to let him know what he was missing.” Despite a firm resolution to no longer care about such things, Scott had still tried to dissuade her. Of course he’d wondered if the notice might finally have elicited some communication from the man whose very existence had always been in question—until now.

<<“Your father wants to see you.”>>

<<Why?>>

Murdoch Lancer had finally deigned to acknowledge Scott, but with a coldly impersonal summons, clearly unconnected to any significant events in his son’s life. Did the man honestly expect a reply? Could he possibly think that Scott would just drop everything and hurry off to California?

There was really no reason to consider it. Even speaking to the agent would be more attention than Murdoch Lancer deserved, although Lawby at least had offered an invitation. Scott lifted himself up off of the sofa just enough to slip the card out of his pocket once more. Already it was worn, the edges dulled.

Absently fingering the small rectangle, Scott glanced up at the portrait. Catherine continued to smile serenely as she gazed off into the distance.

<<My father . . . wants to see me.>>

He examined the card again. There was a crease running through the center of the Pinkerton eye.

<<*Do I want to see him?*>>

As Scott closed his eyes and allowed his head to sink back against the pillow, the answer remained a cold and angry “No.”

When he woke up, sometime after midnight, he was still holding the damn card in his hand.



AUTHOR'S NOTE: Will Hayford is an original character created for “Betrayal” a Lancer mystery story written by the “ScottLand Queens”, Sammi and Sharon. “Betrayal” can be found at http://www.geocities.com/scott_land_queen/fanfic.html



STAGECOACH ENCOUNTER

BY FAY



Johnny leaned on the counter as the employee counted out the money laboriously. He dipped his head and pushed his hat back with his thumbs while still leaving his elbows on the marked and dented wooden bench top.

Johnny let out a sigh. Why he didn't know. For several reasons, he suspected. One that was paramount in his thoughts was the self control Johnny was asserting. Without that iron discipline, he would have snatched the money back in frustration and counted it out himself, slowly, deliberately, so this imbecile could keep track of the total. Another prime reason for his sigh was the pleasure in knowing that he had completed his assignment and could be on his way.

The correct total was finally arrived at by the cretin masquerading as a clerk. Johnny was duly issued with his ticket which symbolised his release from this mission. Taking it with a nod of his head, he placed it in his billfold which he carefully replaced in his inside coat pocket.

The warmth of the sun pulled Johnny outside. He stood on the boardwalk as the sun's rays washed over him in a welcoming embrace. His hands rested on the hitching rail as his eyes skimmed the street and the surrounding buildings and recesses. Old habits died hard. Rather the old habits than himself, he reasoned.

He would be glad to be gone. The pungent air was ripe with the manure of too many horses in too narrow a thoroughfare. He felt hemmed in and needed to be away from the confines of the town.

Increased pedestrian traffic drew his attention. A small portly man sweating in his heavy coat and vest, his string tie acting like a noose which he could not loosen no matter how often he pulled at his collar neck, left the office and sat on the bench to the right.

A younger man, in his thirties, advanced in rapidly thudding footfalls. He wore tired and slightly grubby clothes, as if he had come straight off the trail or from the range. He turned to the office, grasped the handle, but then abruptly stopped to look around. His eyes lingered on Johnny longer than was necessary. He swallowed when his eyes met Johnny's and beat a hasty retreat to the safety offered by the dark interior of the office behind him.

Light footsteps registered in Johnny's consciousness. He looked down the boardwalk to see a young woman in her early twenties approaching confidently. Slim, without being skinny, and curves where they should be, she caught his attention. Her blond hair was twisted into a serviceable, but becoming, chignon at the back of her head, held in place by pins and two mother of pearl combs. While her blue travelling dress was practical, it bowed to fashion with ribbon and lace threaded through the neckline. She was reasonably tall for a woman, but probably four inches less so than himself.

She did not seem to take in her surroundings, but focussed on the door into which she disappeared quite suddenly. A little too suddenly. Johnny had been enjoying the view and did not appreciate it being cut short.

A ruckus from down the street could be heard. It grew to a crescendo of thumping hooves on the packed earth, jangling of harnesses and commands shouted above the din. Dust rose and swirled around the newly arrived stage. The horses prolonged this effect by stamping impatiently in their traces. Johnny knew that they were tired and eager to be on their way to the comfort of the livery stable. Their resentment at being teased was obvious. Johnny commiserated with the beasts. He felt the same way when delayed from setting out for the open range or from calling it quits after a long day.

A motley assortment of six passengers descended the steps, all breathing obvious deep breaths, reflecting their pleasure at being released from the stage's confines. One couple was greeted by a young woman and child, no doubt their daughter and grandchild by the comments uttered. The driver hopped down and accepted the luggage passed down to him by the guard. Like a flock of vultures waiting for a feed, the passengers suddenly conglomerated, eager for their pickings. Just as quickly, they disbursed in all directions, glad to have their journey behind them.

The stage was equally swiftly gone. Johnny guessed that the team was being changed and it would be another 30 minutes or so before they could be on their way. He glanced around the street, considering options with which to while away the time. The saloon gave him pause, but it was the aroma from the 'Traveller's Eatery', which decided him.

He descended the steps from the boardwalk and ambled across the road. The door was painted a welcoming red, with panes of glass in the upper sections framed by red and white gingham curtains. He was about to open it when two departing patrons beat him to the door knob. He allowed them out first, before removing his hat and entering the cosy interior. Years of habit saw him scan the room, then relax as he felt no evident threat.

The café was doing a thriving trade. It was full, he thought at first, but then noticed a small table for two in the front corner, near a window. He realized that it had no doubt just been vacated by the two clients who had left prior to his arrival. He made his way over to it and took a seat. Almost immediately, a buxom woman waddled up to him, a smile of greeting welcoming him.

"Good morning, what can I do for you?" she asked straight to the point.

"I was just going to have a coffee, thanks. Strong, please."

"You look like you could do with a good feed. Why not have some bacon and eggs or we have homemade apple pie, with man sized portions," she suggested.

Having had breakfast not an hour before, Johnny was about to decline when he saw gigantic servings of the apple pie in question being consumed heartily by a family seated at the next table. He was swayed.

"That pie sounds mighty fine, Ma'am."

He graced her with his most charming smile. It did the trick. She beamed at him and the blush rose up along her neck to her cheeks. Her large bulk shuffled away, earnestly seeking to fulfil his order post haste.

Johnny leaned back, alternating between regarding the busy café and glancing through the window at the activity in the street. A blue blur caught his attention. It passed the window almost before he registered the fact, then it was gone. He leaned sideways to peer through the window, but the blue had disappeared.

He lost interest in the goings on outside as his attention was drawn to the entry area. The lady in the blue dress was there, glancing around, disappointment evident in the set of her shoulders. He watched the waitress approach her, then shake her head. A look of disappointed resignation was firmly stamped on the young woman's face. She had turned to leave when the waitress suddenly reached and took hold of her arm.

Before he knew it, the café employee was bearing down on him, dragging the young woman behind him by the arm. Smiling ingratiatingly, she broached what was on her mind. "Sir, I was wondering if you would do this little lady a favour. We have no spare seats, except this one at your table. Would you mind if the lady joined you? She's about to get on the stage and you know how far it is between refreshment stops."

This last sentence was pronounced with an upward intonation as she emphasized her request. "No, Ma'am, I don't mind at all," Johnny replied.

"I knew you would be a gentleman!" she gushed. "Miss...?" the waitress's voice petered out.

"Kinkade," she offered quietly.

"Sir, this is Miss Kinkade. And miss, you just stay here, while I see to things. I'm sure you'd like some of my apple pie to go with that tea you wanted." Arrangements organized to her satisfaction, she hustled her incredibly broad derrière back to the counter.

Johnny remembered his manners, so he pulled out her chair for her. "I'm Johnny," he introduced himself.

She smiled nervously and offered her thanks. "I'm sorry about this. I was going to leave, but the lady suggested I sit here. I hope you don't mind too much."

"No, I don't mind at all," Johnny reassured her.

There was a silence as the two strangers sat waiting for their orders. She was steadfastly avoided his eyes and sat fiddling with the napkin on the table. She had lovely hands, he noticed. Long fingers and smooth skin. But they were practical ones, he thought. Not so perfect that they looked like showcase specimens. Johnny noticed that she was breathing a little fast and a little frown puckered her brow.

Johnny decided to break the ice.

"You all right?" he enquired.

"Yes, thank you," was her vague and all encompassing reply.

"Going far?" he enquired.

"Well, as far as Green River," she explained.

"Why Green River?" Johnny pursued.

"I'm coming to help my aunt. She's not been well and I thought I could help her out," she explained.

Johnny wrinkled his forehead and tilted his head in concentration. "Your aunt? Who's that?"

"Does it matter? You probably don't know anyone in Green River, anyway."

"It so happens that I do. Who is your aunt?"

"That's of no importance. She has a store. I said I would give her a hand."

Johnny's brow smoothed over as he made an educated guess. In reality it was probably a stab in the dark, but he proceeded with it anyway. "I bet your aunt is Flo McCready!"

Her look of surprise was all he needed, but she seemed unwilling to admit to anything. His smile broke out as his competitive nature enjoyed his presumed success.

She looked at him suspiciously. "Why do you think that?"

"Well, Flo has had a few turns lately. I know because she's had to close the shop a few times and I heard Sam telling Teresa about it."

"Sam?"

Johnny paused, shaking his head grimly. "The town butcher."

"Oh!"

"And Teresa is ...?"

"My sister. Well sort of my sister. My father's ward."

"Oh, I see."

She said nothing more as her eyes turned to the view outside. He caught more of a glimpse of her profile as a result. Her nose was small. Perhaps cute, was a better word, he determined. It certainly was not on the proportions of several of the local girls. He swore he could house Barranca comfortably in some of the nasal cavities of a few of the neighbouring females.

Some freckles were spattered over her nose, he discerned. Not a lot, but enough to mean that she occasionally got sunburnt. Her skin was certainly not olive, like his. More like Scott's, but even then his brother had managed to attain a light, even tan, without the disruption of freckles marking his skin.

Her ears were small, too. Delicate. Definitely more feminine than some he had seen lately. And very much more alluring than the convoluted cabbages Gertie Ferguson called ears. Strange protrusions, he reminisced, with dangling wobbly bits which passed for ear lobes, but which took on a life of their own whenever she moved her head. He recalled being morbidly fascinated by their movements last time she had visited Teresa.

He smiled softly, corners of his mouth ascending. As if by osmosis, the laughter lines which had appeared seeped into his skin, multiplying and concentrating around his eyes. Eyes which remembered Gertie's enthusiasm for engaging the Lancer brothers in conversation. Both men had felt impaled by her ceaseless tongue. After finally making their escape, they had compared notes and drawn up both a disaster plan and a contingency plan should she ever arrive to spend a weekend again. The plan had been meticulously drawn up after he and Scott had bonded over a whisky bottle. It was in fact the drinking session with his brother, and accompanying witty repartee and plotting, which was invoking his amusement.

He brought himself back to the present. She was still gazing at life passing by outside.

"So?" Johnny prompted.

"So ... what?" was the reply.

"So, am I right?"

"About what?"

Johnny looked at her. Was she a simpleton? It would be a pity if this fine specimen of womanhood was a wasted effort, all looks and no substance.

"Am I right about your aunt?"

Her earnest eyes peered at him. She did not reply immediately. "My parents said that I shouldn't talk to strangers."

"I'm not a stranger. We've been introduced."

"The waitress dragged me over here. She didn't even know my name to introduce me. You introduced yourself."

"Well, wouldn't I have been rude not to introduce myself if you were sharing my table?"

She regarded him. A little perplexed wrinkle appeared above her brows. "Do you own this café?"

Johnny looked at her, surprised.

“No. Why do you think that?”

“I don’t, but you said that this is your table. If you don’t own the café, then it’s not your table.”

Johnny just sat. He didn’t reply. Disappointment weighed heavily, almost as heavily as the sigh he exhaled. Perhaps she was indeed mentally challenged. As thick as two short planks, a brick short of a load and not the sharpest axe on the woodpile, if she was going to take his words literally and follow her parents’ advice to the letter.

Finally he voiced an answer to her comment. He slowed his speech, enunciating clearly. “I was just calling it that because I was sitting here and I got here first.” *Just my luck to be saddled with a moron*, he silently added to himself, before cursing the Almighty who could tease a man with such an attractive package camouflaging such basic defects as normal brain function.

“Uh huh,” she murmured, nodding her head in apparent understanding. “Well, at least you won’t claim ownership to both these apple pies, then.”

Johnny turned his head and raised his eyes to the waitress, who materialized at his side and placed two massive servings of the pie in front of them. The two portions were heaped with cream and were a meal in themselves.

Both diners uttered their thanks before the waitress hastened off for their beverages. These arrived as Johnny and the girl were arranging their napkins and about to pick up their spoons.

He had ignored her last comment, not quite sure how to make her out. He had merely pushed her plate closer to her, so there could be no doubt over whose pie was whose.

They concentrated on their food. Johnny noticed that she ate it all, without any of the pretence women went in for. She did not leave part of it behind in a token ladylike gesture to indicate that she was unable to finish such a generous portion.

Once finished, she sipped her tea as Johnny blew on his coffee to cool it. He couldn’t work out what the delay was with the coach. His eyes constantly raked the street from his window vantage point. Taking a long sip, he glanced up to find her looking at him.

Gracing him with a small smile, she downed her cup and stood to leave.

“Thank you for the seat.”

“You’re welcome.”

Johnny gulped the last of his coffee and stood to leave as well. They both went up to the counter to pay. Each did separately, which did not go unnoticed by a man and woman who had just entered the café. As Johnny and his companion collected their change, the man’s comment to his wife was

deliberately audible. “Humph! What has the world come to? In my day any gentleman would die rather than let a woman pay for herself!”

Miss Kinkade and Johnny turned to leave, but Johnny did not immediately proceed through the door. He leant in close to the man, right hand resting lightly on his holster, and spoke in a low drawl. “Well, thank God I’m not a gentleman. Ain’t never heard of anything so stupid. No wonder that cemetery looked mighty full on the way into town!” Johnny held the man’s gaze a while longer and then withdrew his face abruptly. “Good day, Ma’am!” he uttered as he tipped his hat at the man’s companion and headed for the door.

He headed across the road to the stage office and found that he had unintentionally fallen into step with his dining partner. Something was different. She was shaking. Her head was down and her shoulders were in spasms. Reaching for her elbow, he stopped her to ask if she was all right. Tears were streaming down her face.

They stood in the middle of the road. Not the most sensible place to be, but he was perplexed by her behaviour.

She reached for her stomach with both of her hands.

“His face!” she gasped.

Johnny was now concerned. “What about his face?”

“I’ve never seen anything so funny! You removed his pompous smirk good and proper! He must have shrunk a good six inches, he was so frightened!”

She laughed out loud then. And Johnny liked the sound of it. It was a melodious giggle. The sort that lifted a man’s senses and made him soar like an eagle.

He smiled himself. A smile of amusement at her reaction and pleasure in her laugh.

The approaching racket of the stage interrupted her mirth. She quickly pulled herself together and he grabbed her elbow once again as they both bolted for the safety of the sidewalk.

Once safely on the boardwalk, she removed her arm with an embarrassed ‘thank you’ and turned away. He contemplated her back, hiding her face which in turn contemplated the coach.

The business of loading the stage took only a few minutes. Miss Kinkade mounted the steps first, to be followed by the other passengers he had noticed earlier. The small portly man sat next to her while the rather dusty man in his thirties folded his frame into the next to Johnny.

After initial nods of greeting, the trip ensued in silence. None were friendly, which suited Johnny just fine. He sat and let the horses devour the miles, each thumping of hooves bringing him closer to home.

The man next to him was shrouded in an invisible shield, proclaiming his unwillingness to communicate. He hugged his coat to himself and Johnny was intrigued to see him often reach inside it to reassure himself of the existence of something in the interior pocket. Just what the object was, Johnny could not discern, but it must have been extremely small as there were no telltale coat bulges.

His thoughts moved to their female travelling companion. He noticed Miss Kinkade shift a little uncomfortably, then a short while later repeat her movements as the little man next to her moved surreptitiously closer. Unnecessarily closer. Closer than the confines of the bench seat required. Close enough for his thigh to rub against hers each time there was a bump, which was constantly.

The man's mouth was set in a smug pose. Or it was until he happened to glance in Johnny's direction. Johnny's eyes locked on his. He stiffened noticeably, then paled under Johnny's scrutiny and the intensity of the ice blue onslaught. His body seemed to shrink back into the seat, but he made no move to slide over on the bench. It was only when Johnny's eyes dropped to the man's legs and back, did he suddenly react. Rustling material and the squeaking of leather announced his return to his own allotted portion of the seat.

He stared mesmerized at Johnny, as if waiting for approval. A slight nod of the head was given in recognition, allowing the man to relax his shoulders and begin breathing more regularly.

This interaction was not missed by the sharp eyed young woman. She, in turn, gave a nod of appreciation to Johnny.

The monotonous jolting of the coach was accompanied by the equally tedious countryside bouncing past. Several hours of this saw Johnny in danger of screaming, the enclosed interior of the coach shrinking in onto him. He needed the wide open spaces to feel at ease and being denied this made him feel like a turkey trussed up for Thanksgiving.

Four hours later, the coach stopped at a staging post. All passengers stepped out, none so grateful as Johnny. He breathed in the fresh air, not complaining at all that it was fouled by swirling trail dust and the odour of animal manure. At least he knew he was alive after the stifling constraints of his morning's travel.

Each passenger was an island unto himself ... or herself, as Johnny mentally corrected his thoughts. They trooped in to the ramshackle building, together, but apart. The odour of a stew pervaded the interior. A short and tubby man sporting a dirty apron moved forward to greet them.

"My, but I bet you're hungry! Grub's ready, so come an' git it!"

He bustled over to a pot-bellied stove, grabbed a plate and ladelled a healthy sized serving onto it. He offered it to Miss Kinkade and then saw to the men's meals. Johnny accepted it with a brief word of thanks. It was runny and fatty. Grease glistened on the top, reflecting rainbow colours. The antithesis of Maria's chunky and wholesome culinary feats. Johnny was mesmerized by the unpalatable slop sloshing around his plate.

He finally tore his eyes from it, however, searching for a place to eat. The men were inside, eating opposite each other on a rough hewn table. He caught a blur movement from Miss Kinkade, as she sat down near them. Eating with these two men was as uninspiring a thought as downing the stew. Escape seemed an attractive option.

Outside beckoned. No tables were evident. It was the porch steps or nothing.

The stew was no more appetising seated. He made patterns in the mixture with his fork, just willing the rest stop to be over so he could get back home.

Home. A four letter word he never thought he would ever use. A word that he never thought would feel right. A word that symbolised the security he felt with his family. A word synonymous for his brother Scott. A word that helped shut the door on his past.

And a word that conjured up the tempting, wholesome meals prepared so lovingly by Maria and Teresa.

A swishing sound permeated his thoughts, replacing the scraping of his fork on the metal plate.

The skirt, and the woman in it, hovered. The railing drew her. She half perched there, balancing her bottom on the narrow balustrade.

She looked up then. Looked up and then looked away. Then looked back in confusion before returning her gaze to her dinner.

“You don’t look very comfortable,” he commented.

“I’m fine,” she replied into her plate.

“Well if you want to get back into that coach with your rump even more numb than it is now, just stay there. If not, there’s room on this step.”

“I’ll manage.”

“I’m sure you will. But why not manage a bit more comfortably?”

She met his eyes for a brief second. Her rear end fidgeted on the rough wooden bar.

“Hope you won’t need any splinters removed,” Johnny commented. “Though I’m sure one of us men could be the surgeon if need be.”

Her face did not just pale. It blanched totally.

Johnny concentrated on the configuration of his stew on his plate. And on keeping his grin contained.

He was interrupted by the voluminous skirt folds encroaching on his outer vision.

She sat down, all cramped and closed in on herself, careful not to overlap on his personal space. His blue eyes locked on her spangled hazel ones for an instant before he scooted over, allowing her more room.

“How come you didn’t stay at the table? It’s more comfortable.” Johnny continued dragging his fork through the unidentifiable mass on his plate.

“We’ve been cooped up for long enough. I needed to be outside.

“Couldn’t agree more, but are you sure that’s the only reason you’re out here?”

Her vice gave a clipped “Yes.”

Johnny studied her for a second before deciding that she was not giving a true version of events.

“Good chow, huh?”

She looked at him then, a twitch at the corners of her mouth betraying her.

“Just dreadful.”

“Yup.”

She looked at her meal, lifted her fork up and watched the contents dribble through, some blobs falling with a plop, spattering her dress a little. A little snort of self condemnation at her own stupidity ensued. Placing the plate on the step next to her, she wiped at the stains with her hand.

“Looks like I’ll need the pump,” she commented idly.

Johnny loosened the kerchief he wore around his neck. “Here,” he offered.

She looked up at him in surprise. Mistaking it for non-comprehension, he explained. “Use it to draw out the marks. Just dampen it under the pump.”

“Thank you.” She hesitated a fraction, as if she had more to say, but then appeared to change her mind. She headed to the pump, and he watched her as she pumped the handle and soaked the kerchief in the water coursing out of the spout. She bent over, dabbing and rubbing at the spots. Seemingly satisfied, she rinsed out the kerchief and wrung it out, twisting it efficiently in her hands.

Returning, she smiled wryly. “It’s a bit soggy. I’ll just leave it here on the rail to dry for a bit. Thank you again.”

She sat again and picked up her plate. Staring at it, she seemed loath to continue her meal.

“It ain’t gonna get any better just by looking at it.”

Serious eyes met his. “Sadly, you’re not kidding.” She sighed a deep sigh at that point, but left the meal untouched.

She stood up and jerked her head towards the oak tree to the right of the stable. “That hound over there might appreciate it more.”

“I reckon so,” Johnny agreed.

Walking purposefully towards the dog, a mixture of indeterminate breed, she was brought to a stop. It had risen to its feet. Hackles stood up on the back of its neck and its teeth were bared. Johnny could hear the growling from where he sat. Springing to his feet in alarm, he halted when he witnessed the dog’s transformation.

The growling had ceased suddenly and it sat complacently. She reached down and let it sniff her open hand, then scratched it behind its ears. To Johnny’s surprise, it the dropped to the ground and rolled over, feet in the air.

Johnny ambled over, enthralled by this display of trust. The dog was in seventh heaven, straining its head back as she scratched it under its chin. She scratched its chest and Johnny could have sworn that the animal was grinning.

She was murmuring to it. After a moment, she scraped her plate into a bowl near the tree trunk. The dog devoured it hungrily and then sat at her feet, raising its paw appreciatively. Johnny shook his head from side to side in wonder. He, too, scraped his plate into the dog’s bowl. It disappeared rapidly. The dog wagged its tail in appreciation, then realizing that its banquet had ceased, it lowered itself with a satisfied sigh back to its patch of grass under the tree.

Noises from the stage coach drew their attention. The new horses were harnessed and the driver called them over.

Miss Kinkade picked up Johnny’s kerchief and examined it. “It’s not very dry,” she commented.

“Don’t matter.”

Johnny took the proffered article and whipped it in the air before tying it around his neck again.

The journey continued. Still monotonous, the passing scenery seemed to repeat itself over and over. Johnny nevertheless felt some pleasure that he was gradually nearing Lancer.

He watched his dining partner give the scenery a miss. She settled in comfortably in her seat and her head began to droop, but she was jolted back to consciousness by a particularly vicious bump. She elected to rest her head against the side of the coach, but soon gave that up as the unforgiving wood bounced her head relentlessly against its surface.

She sighed. It was a stoic sigh, accompanied by a prim folding of her hands in her lap.

Johnny leaned forward and worked his arms out of his jacket. Shaking it, he smoothed it and folded it over.

“Miss?” he queried, as he held it out to her.

She regarded it, puzzled. “Pardon?”

“I thought you could use this to cushion your head. That wood’s not very soft.”

Comprehension dawned. She smiled a hesitant, but grateful smile at him. “You won’t be cold?”

It was a warm day and even warmer in the restricted airspace of the stagecoach.

“I can’t see myself freezing to death today, Miss Kinkadee.”

“No, I don’t suppose you will. Thank you. That’s very kind of you.”

“You’re welcome.”

And so he watched her place it where the top of the backrest joined the side of the coach. She wiggled her behind over slightly and leaned her head gratefully into its welcoming softness. In repose, her face was less guarded, more natural. Surprisingly, her breaths soon deepened into the regular pattern of sleep.

He envied her. Sleep never came to him on coaches. He didn’t like being trapped with a group of strangers pressing in on him, so he never felt he could give in to the temptation of any drowsiness. He wished he could, though. It sure made the journey go a lot faster.

The man seated next to Miss Kinkadee left them at Hopeless Creek and no one boarded, so the occupants were able to make the most of the extra space. The young woman only briefly roused for the stopover, then settled back to her slumbers.

Johnny was restless to get home. He hated being crowded. For most of his life he had lived away from large cities, spending his time outside, away from the confines of four walls. As an adult, he had slept in the open as much as he had under a roof, he guessed. So he quietly and secretly was going stir crazy. He let his mind drift and latch on to anything to quell his growing frustration.

He contemplated the scenery, his companions, Lancer. He even contemplated stage coach design. Springs and suspension configurations, upholstery and the even more important thickness of padding underneath, seat width and leg room all met with his consideration. And all present designs were found wanting. His ponderings were suddenly interrupted, however. His sixth sense kicked in.

He felt the horses reduce their pace and for some reason this put him on the alert. There was no reason for the coach to slow yet. They were getting closer to Lancer and there were no scheduled stops.

Johnny peered out the window, his eyes raking any and every obstacle in an endeavour to discern anything unusual. He perceived nothing from his angle. Nothing until he heard the rifle fire.

Their world changed from sedate peace to a rocking surge which left the two male occupants flattened against the back of their seats and Miss Kinkade jolted from hers. She landed in an ungainly heap on top of Johnny's boots, grunting as her nose and mouth connected with his knee.

Johnny tried to help her up at the same time as he tried to scour the outside world for the cause of their disturbance. They were being rocked more violently and it was obvious that the drivers had lost all control.

Red caught Johnny's eyes. Returning his eyes to the interior of the coach, he noticed the blood dripping from the young woman's nose and down her mouth and chin. She wiped ineffectually at it, then finding her hands lacking absorbency, she resorted to her skirts. She sensibly pulled the hem up and wiped her face with one hand as she tried to hold on to her seat with the other.

It was the other passenger next to Johnny who was stiff with terror and in danger of panicking.

Leaving her to her own ministrations and their companion to his fright, Johnny again turned his attention to the outside.

He was able to discern the sound of hooves gaining on the coach. Above the din of the horses and the jangling harness, voices could be heard. Shouting. Cursing.

The jolting and bumping diminished almost imperceptibly at first and then more noticeably. They were slowing. Gradually the coach drew to a stop and just for a second there was a quiet. A calm before the storm.

Three sets of lungs worked overtime, obliterating the calm. Gasping breaths scraped the air while the snorting of horses punctuated the occupants' strangled sounds of fright. Their little capsule of terror was pierced when the door was violently thrust open.

A gun was visible, and beyond the arm that held it, Johnny saw a scruffy cowboy covered in dust. This was a man who had been on the trail for some time. The stubble on his chin gave further evidence of this. This was also a man who was in a hurry to get what he wanted.

"Out! And no funny business!" he ordered.

The man next to Johnny was frozen in abject fear. It was only the gun being aimed for his kneecap which prompted him to finally move. He gathered himself together and got out. Miss Kinkade followed and then Johnny.

"Hands up! And keep them that way!"

The passengers had handed their weapons to the driver for safe keeping at the start of the journey, but they were frisked anyway.

The other robber checked Miss Kinkade, making sure that he lingered over her legs as he felt for any weapon strapped to her person.

A resounding slap rent the air as she took exception to his manhandling.

Holding his face where she had stuck him and cursing profoundly he viciously raked the side of her face with the butt of his gun. Enraged, Johnny pounced on the man and landed a heavy blow to his jaw. It was as he aimed his second punch that his world erupted into a mass of searing pain, heat and stars. His vision clouded as he gasped and clutched his midriff. Haze and blurriness merged into a sort of nothingness. A dark void which sucked him under to the tune of a female's voice screaming in prolonged fury.



Fire burned through his abdomen. The flames engulfed him, melting flesh onto bone. He felt as though hell was alive within the brazier that was his own body. The very act of breathing scorched his throat and lungs.

Sounds filtered in through to his subconscious, hauling him forward to ever more pain. The temptation to once again succumb to the numbness of sleep-filled oblivion was great. But greater than that was the need to know what danger they were all in and if it was too late to do anything to help his travelling companions.

His eyes blinked open and sighted red. The faded red of his shirt covered in the bright red of his life's blood spilt all over his front. He lifted his head up slowly, desperately trying to focus on his surroundings.

He was in a cabin of some sort. In front of him, tied to a crossbeam at the base of the wall, sat Miss Kinkade. Her face was a bloody mess, but she was alert and staring hard at him. Terror filled eyes softened as his eyes locked on hers.

A growing smile seeped through the dried blood masking her face. White teeth gleamed in contrast to the crimson staining her skin.

And her smile was beautiful.

He answered her smile with a contorted affair intending to give reassurance. He wondered briefly whether it was more grotesque than genuinely warm. He did not dwell on it, though, as his attention was caught by the three men in the middle of the room.

Their two assailants were addressing the man who had been seated next to Johnny. One of the men held a gun to his head, while the other began waving a sheet of paper around.

“So you thought that you could keep it all for yourself! Well, you didn’t reckon on us! We ain’t about to be robbed of our share and you’re gonna lead us to it. And don’t think you’re gonna double cross us this time, cos you won’t get the chance! Got it?”

He nodded, his voice failing him and dwindling to a croak as he attempted to answer.

“You know where the money is. You had the map in your pocket and you were with Joe when the two of you buried it, so you’re gonna get us there. No fuss and none of your shenanigans.”

The robber with the gun traced the barrel across their victim’s forehead, down his neck and stopped at his chest. “Zach and me ain’t gonna leave your side, Pete. We’ll stick to you like cow shit to the soles of your boots! Understand?”

Pete nodded his head grimly. Sweat poured down his face and neck. His skin glistened with the perspiration which soaked his shirt as his body exuded fear.

“Come on, Abe, let’s go!” urged Zach. “There’s been enough time wasting.”

“What about them?” Abe queried.

Zach walked up to Johnny. He towered over him and kicked his leg. “He’s dead meat anyways, bein’ gut shot an’ all. Now her...”

He stopped, turned to Miss Kinkade, a leer infecting his face like a contagion. He squatted in front of her and reached out, his hand smothering one of her breasts, kneading it. “Whooee! When we get back to pick up the rest of our gear, you and me’s got a date sweetie and I won’t disappoint ya! I’m more man than you’re ever gonna have.”

He laughed, deliberately taunting her, as she struggled to get away from his grasp.

“You be real patient, honey. I won’t be long. Don’t want ya frettin’ none!”

They were gone suddenly. Then they heard the horses whinnying and hooves thumping the earth in a brisk cadence. After that, there was just the silence.

They looked at each other from their respective locations on opposite sides of the room.

Johnny could only think about Zach attacking her when he got back and there would be nothing he could do about it. His hands were tied behind him and tightly at that. And agony sapped his ability to focus and think of a plan.

“How are you doing?” she asked.

“I’ve been worse,” he grunted as he tried to find a more comfortable position which didn’t exacerbate the intense pain coursing through his midriff.

“I’m sorry to hear it. No one deserves to have suffered more than what you are going through now.”

Johnny had bowed his head. He lifted it at her words and blessed her with a crooked smile.

“Then again I wasn’t always hogtied at the time!”

She smiled back at his valiant attempt at humour.

“Can you work your bindings loose?” she enquired.

“Nope... been trying,” Johnny gasped as a spasm of agony took his breath away.

“Johnny! Stay still! You’ll bleed too much!”

Johnny was woozy and felt nauseous. “OK,” he breathed as he rested his head back against the wall.

“Wish we had something to cut the bonds with,” she lamented.

“Got ... a knife ... in my boot, but I can’t reach it,” Johnny offered.

His booted feet lay stretched out in front of him, a mere three feet from hers. But with their hands behind their backs, they might just as well have been a thousand miles away.

They both studied the room as best they could. It was a rather bare shack. Two cots stood in the two far corners. The rocky table hosted a rusty lamp and battered metal plate. One bentwood chair was sandwiched between the cots and another lay on its side missing a leg. Their options were not great.

“Hey!” Johnny called to get her attention. “There’s an empty whiskey bottle on the horizontal strut above your head. Don’t suppose you can reach that, can you?” That he was joking was obvious, but she gave it her consideration. Twisting her head to one side and back, she looked upwards to gauge the distance.

“Empty or full? I could do with a drink right now.”

Johnny closed his eyes, a smile ghosting his lips. *Dios! It hurts. It hurts so damned much!*

Rustlings and thumpings drew him out of his preoccupation with his realm of pain.

What he saw intrigued him. Miss Kinkade was hunched in a ball. She had slid down onto her shoulders and was attempting to kick off the ground. With grunts and groans and what sounded suspiciously like unladylike oaths, she succeeded in attaining a bizarre posture, something akin to a shoulder stand. Her dress followed gravity’s decree, however, and made life difficult as the skirts fell down to land over her face.

His mouth was agape. There she was upside down, her pantaloons in full view as her feet rested against the wall and tapped hesitantly in search of the whiskey bottle.

“To the right,” he instructed.

“You shouldn’t be looking,” she chastised him.

“Well, you sure can’t see a thing, so you can’t tell me you don’t need a set of eyes to help you out!”

A deep grunt reached his ears.

“No! Wrong way. My right, your left,” he corrected his directions.

Panting and emitting little strangled moans, she worked her feet over to the right spot.

Suddenly she felt it with her toes. Giving a flick, she pushed it until it fell to the floor with a satisfying crash. Glass shot out in all directions.

Johnny was suddenly aware that she was trying to right her body. As her legs descended from their precarious position, he called out anxiously. “Watch the glass!”

With a plop and a cry of pain, she landed in an ungainly heap of material and limbs.

“Are you all right?”

Her moans were stifled as she attempted to get some obvious pain under control. Panting heavily, she wiggled and squirmed back to her original sitting position. Leaning back heavily against the wall, she squeezed her eyes shut as she got her breathing under control.

“Yes, I’m fine,” she finally replied. “How are you managing?”

“Still here. Still breathing.” As he finished these words, his voice caught and he sucked in a lungful of air with a hiss.

He opened his eyes to see concern over her face as she solemnly regarded him.

At his weak smile, she turned her attention to the glass shards. Near her feet was the almost complete neck of the bottle. Using her boot clad feet as tongs, she endeavoured to pick the piece up. It took her several minutes to finally succeed in lifting it, drawing her legs in and dropping it in front of her.

Johnny was fascinated to see what she had in mind. He couldn’t work out how she was going to manage to cut her bonds with the glass in front of her and her hands tied behind.

She bent forwards then, and nosed the glass into a position where she could pick it up in her mouth.

Johnny held his breath as she risked gashing her face.

She succeeded. Swivelling her hips as far as she could and turning her head, she dropped the jagged bottle remnant behind her. Perspiration formed on her forehead and top lip as she concentrated hard. Johnny had no doubt that she was feeling for the glass with her hands.

A sigh escaped her and she grinned triumphantly at him. “Got it!” she announced proudly.

Her grin slipped as a frown of concentration encroached over her features. Johnny winced in sympathy whenever she slipped. He could tell. There was a pause and a controlled grimace which she attempted to hide from him.

Her breathing became more ragged as her frustration grew. Johnny was having blanks. His concentration on her efforts became disjointed and he felt himself drifting away.

A shout snapped his head back up, but he could only search groggily for its source.

“Johnny, I’m through!”

He blinked, and blinked again. She had turned and was sawing furiously at her one remaining bound wrist. He stared. He stared at the blood covering her hands and wrists where she had slipped numerous times. There seemed to be so much blood.

Next, she was beside him. She gently leaned him into the support of her shoulder and bent over his back to undo his bindings.

Freedom came suddenly and he slumped into her. Arms around him, she hugged him delicately, then lay him down.

“Here, let me look at you.”

Johnny left himself to her ministrations, not having the strength to argue. Sliding his eyes closed, he felt his shirt being pulled out of his pants and lifted up. Her sharp intake of breath drew his gaze back to her face.

“How bad?”

His succinct query jolted her. She looked into his vivid blue eyes.

“I don’t know. It’s in your side. Let me see if there is an exit wound. This might hurt a little,” she warned.

She rolled him gently onto his side and peered at his back.

“Well?” Johnny asked as she laid him back.

“There’s no exit wound.” A pause. She was figuring out something in her mind. “So that means the bullet is still there, doesn’t it?”

Johnny nodded.

“I’ll need to get it out, then.”

Johnny tried to sit and groaned loudly. All energy was sapped from his body. It had seeped into the red pool of blood on the ground where he had been tied up.

“Hush!” she soothed. “Don’t make any sudden moves. The bleeding has slowed. You’ll only start it again.”

“No time,” Johnny gasped. “There’s no time to get the bullet out . . . Get out of here . . . before they come back!”

“No!” she replied forcefully.

“Yes!” Johnny insisted. “Look, we don’t have time for niceties, Miss Kinkade! They will be back soon and when they do they’re gonna have their way with you and then they’ll kill you.”

“Maybe they won’t,” she declared with false conviction.

“Yes, they will. They don’t want no witnesses.”

“They wouldn’t kill just because we witnessed a robbery!”

“Don’t be too sure. Plus it’s murder, too. What do you think happened to the driver and the guard? Why do you think the horses took off uncontrolled? They were probably shot and the horses bolted at the rifle shots. There was no one alive to drive.”

Miss Kinkade stared as the truth dawned.

“You are right, they will need to kill us.”

“So, we don’t have time for surgery. Get going while you can.”

She sat back, glaring at him. “I’m not leaving you here!”

“Well, you can’t carry me lady! And I don’t think I’ll be walking too far! I’ll only slow you down.” Johnny moaned and clenched his eyes closed. “Please, go while you can. Get some distance between them and you.”

A steely ‘No!’ was her only response.

She hopped up and scoured the hut but did not see what she was looking for. Johnny was treated to a view of her pantalooned legs once more as she lifted her skirts and removed a voluminous petticoat. Using her teeth and quite some might, she tore the petticoat into strips. Folding it into a wad, she placed it over his wound and bound it on as tightly as she dared. She hesitated when he moaned in pain, but then completed her task.

“I’ll be back in a second,” she promised.

And she was gone. Johnny was alone, wondering what she was up to. He concentrated as best he could on noises outside, but he could discern no clue to cast light on her activities. His world wavered and he sank into the black embrace of unconsciousness.

He came to, to find his face being wiped over with a wet cloth. She was leaning over him. Come on, I need your help. I can't carry you."

"Go! Please go before they come back and hurt you!"

"No! You got shot because of me. I can't leave you. Now, hang on to me and try to get your feet under you."

"Your hands."

She looked at them pensively and gave wry smile. "Can't be helped."

"No, wait. Give me some of that leftover material. Let me bind them for you."

"No time, remember?"

"You'll get infected. Out here, you don't take cuts lightly."

He struggled to sit and instantly her arm was around his shoulder, offering support. With shaking hands he indicated some strips of material.

Her exasperated look did not stop his insistence. Reluctantly, she gave him the smallest scraps and held out her hands. He bound them as gently as he could, but he was concerned by several deep cuts. Infection was a real possibility if they were not cleaned and possibly stitched.

"We need to get back to Lancer and get Sam to stitch you up."

She looked at him. "The butcher? I don't think so!"

A smile grew over Johnny's face and despite his pain he couldn't miss cautioning her. "Just don't let him hear that I called him that, OK?"

"I don't guess that I will have the opportunity unless we get a move on out of here. What is Lancer, by the way?"

"Home."

The home he never thought he'd have. The home that was now everything to him because of his family who lived there.

"So, it's a town?"

"No, a ranch just outside of Morro Coyo. We're not that far from there."

She nodded, then was back to business.

"Up!"

He did what he could do to assist, but he leaned heavily on her. Excruciating agony invaded his being. Standing on wobbly legs, the very air he breathed scraped at his throat as he panted with the exertion of moving and overcoming the overwhelming pain of the wound.

With her firmly stuck to his side like glue and supporting most of his weight, he hobbled to the door, barely staying upright. Trying to get his torso anywhere near vertical was mind-numbingly impossible.

Once outside, he noticed a horse. A horse that looked suspiciously like one of the horses from the stage. He looked from it to her.

“They let the horses loose. They mustn’t have wanted anyone using the stage. This one was wandering around by himself,” she offered.

They made their way slowly to him. There was no saddle, but strangely, the horse was wearing a bridle.

“I found this bridle in that lean-to over there. I hope it’s not too brittle. We don’t want it snapping on us.” *The woman was a mind reader.*

She positioned Johnny near the mount. She obviously intended them to use this steed for transport. Not a viable option to Johnny’s way of thinking.

“Now, you might have a mighty slim physique, but I can’t lift a dead weight. See these blocks of wood? I’m going to help you onto them to make it easier for you to mount. OK?”

“No.”

“What do you mean, ‘No’?”

“You need to get away. I’ll slow you down. It’s too hard to stay on without a saddle when you’re wounded.”

“Personal experience?”

She had done it again. Read his mind.

Closing his eyes on tormented images from his past, he smiled wanly.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“I bet you didn’t quit then?”

Sharp as a tack and to the point, this woman.

He looked up to meet her eyes. “Nope.”

“Well, why start making lifestyle changes now? Grab the bridle, put your foot on there and get on with it. Time’s awasting.”

He attempted to smother the groans that erupted involuntarily, but was not entirely successful. He tried desperately to boost his body upwards. He felt her push on his rump. One last mighty shove from her did the trick, giving him the momentum needed to reach the haven of the horse’s back. He leaned forward over its mane, trying to catch his breath.

Next thing he knew, she was behind him, one arm wrapped securely, but in an oddly gentle way, around his middle. She kneed the horse on.

They followed the crest on which the hut was located. Johnny looked down to see the stage coach lying at the base of the scarp, a broken mass of wood, wheels, spokes and harness. Various items of broken baggage spewed their contents on the dusty earth.

“The coach!” he exclaimed. “Why is it down there?”

“I heard a crashing sound while you were unconscious. I think they pushed it over the edge. Guess they wanted to strand us good and proper.”

They sure didn’t reckon on this little lady, he pondered.

Each step of the horse jolted Johnny’s body and evoked lancing waves of sheer unadulterated pain. Dizziness spiralled in through the top of his head and seemed to corkscrew down and around throughout his body. Perspiring freely with the onset of fever and through his efforts to stay upright in the saddle, he began to feel clammy and bilious. He fought to stay conscious, unwilling to let his body sag back against hers and become too great a burden to support.

“Hey,” he croaked.

She reined in at the sound of his voice and reached into a bag she had slung over her shoulder. Uncorking a canteen, she gave him a sip.

Johnny was bemused. He had not seen any canteens lying around. “Where’d that come from?”

“The stage. I collected a few necessities before we left.”

“Thank you.” The water was bliss. It cooled his dry mouth and then his body as it slid down his throat.

“You need to head southeast. We are closer to Lancer than we are to Morro Coyo from here, only the stage takes the longer route on the road. If I lose consciousness, keep heading south east. OK?”

“I’ll do my best. You just hold on.”

The horse was once again called to do its duty. Johnny watched as landmarks became more familiar, but nonetheless a good day's ride away. He willed their progress just as he willed himself to stay awake, but his will could not overcome the effects of blood loss and shock.



He was no longer moving. He was certain that he was on solid ground. But the pain was worse. It welled up and swamped his body. Wave after wave. When he tried to move away from the pain, he only exacerbated the agony.

His face cooled. Fresh air fanned the water on his forehead, cheeks and chest. The pain was not less, but his mind refreshed itself. Bleary eyes worked open. He blinked, the bright light piercing his eyeballs and stabbing at his gut.

Moans escaped, breaking his pride and his composure. Immediately he heard soothing words and felt a feather light touch on his brow.

Her faced blurred and duplicated before once more coalescing into one. It was dappled dark and light, reflecting orange hues from the small fire flickering nearby. She was smiling, but he could detect the worry behind her eyes.

"Hey," she greeted him.

"Hey," was his like response.

Johnny needed to know what their situation was. He coughed lightly and groaned, before forming the question. "What's happening?"

"You started to slip off. I tried, but I couldn't maintain my grip on you, so we stopped before you fell totally out of my grasp. Plus, it's well and truly dark. I'm just hoping that they won't try to find us now that it's night."

"Uh huh," he acknowledged.

"I used the time to check your wound. The bullet's still there."

"You don't say!" A sarcastic edge cloaked this reply.

A look of hurt crossed her face and he felt sorry immediately.

"Sorry. I'm a cantankerous patient. Just ask Sam."

"Well, Sam the butcher is not here. That leaves me."

He was drifting and did not catch her intent at first. He felt a tug from his boot, then heard material ripping followed by the sound of splashing and dripping liquid.

He concentrated on his breathing, but felt compelled to open his eyes. And they met hers. That strange blue flecked brown. Most unusual. Quite different from anything he had seen before. He presumed that both were the same, as one remained virtually swollen shut. It looked sore. And he was missing what she was saying to him.

Her words floated around him, wafted intangibly and remained elusive. He focussed on her mouth to better hear her words. It was an M shaped mouth he decided, not a thin straight mouth or a big fat lipped mouth, but the sort that dipped in the middle to form a V shape in the centre. Or it would if it were still not so swollen.

“Johnny, are you ready?”

“Huh?” was all he managed.

“I need to get that bullet out and wrap you back up. Then we need to get going again.”

“Now?”

“Yes, now,” she confirmed.

“You done this before?”

“No, but I think I know what to do.”

“How?”

Even in his hazy state, he detected her discomfort.

“I read about this sort of emergency and what people do in the wild.”

“Where ... where did you read about this sort of stuff?”

She positively squirmed, he was sure. “My brother had some dime novels, so one day when I was tidying up, I took one and read it.”

“Why?”

He was dazzled by a grin from her. “If you must know, there was a dashing handsome cowboy on the cover. Or gunslinger, I suppose, really. I still remember the title, ‘Johnny Madrid’s Revenge’. Terribly dramatic happenings. All exaggerated, of course. So far-fetched. No one could possibly be that fast and that accurate. Come to think of it, nor that good looking. He was a bit too good to believe, you know?”

“Yeah, I can imagine.”

His weak smile was aimed at her and it was deadly accurate. She returned it as she stroked his brow.

“I need to try, Johnny. I have to get it out. I ...”

He reached for her hand and covered it with his. “I trust you. You can only do your best, and ... whatever happens, thank you.”

“For what?”

“For bringing me with you. For trying.” He grinned weakly at her, “For sharing my table while you ate your apple pie.”

Miss Kinkade looked away, anywhere but at Johnny. He squeezed her fingers.

“Hey, what’s the matter?”

“I’m sorry.”

“What about?”

“I’m sorry I was rude to you in the café. I was being deliberately aggravating and obtuse.”

“Why?”

A deep sigh escaped her lungs. Her jawline hardened and her nostrils flared.

“Because... Oh, it doesn’t make any sense!”

“Try me,” he encouraged.

Yet another deep sigh preceded what she divulged. “I saw you on the boardwalk. You looked just like Ramon Lopez, except for the blue eyes of course.”

Johnny was lost. “Should I know this Ramon Lopez?”

“No, but my sister did. She met him at a dance. He swept her off her feet. He was dashing and handsome like you. He had the same taste in flashy Mexican clothes. Wore his gun real low on the hip like you do. The Latin charm wooed her off her feet. So much charisma. So much ... lust for life.”

“I get the impression there’s more to it.”

“Yes, he was a worthless, no-good two timing swine. He coerced my sister into ... um ... doing what she wouldn’t normally do. She ... she ended up with child.”

Johnny winced as he moved uselessly to escape a shot of pain. “And?” he encouraged.

“She died in childbirth.”

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. Thoughts of Scott’s mother haunted him. “The baby?”

“It died, too. It was a little boy.”

Johnny squeezed his eyes closed. *It could have been Scott.*

“And Ramon?”

“Oh, he skedaddled faster than a wild stallion on the move once he heard about the baby. He wasn’t exactly husband material. He wasn’t going to stick around and make a decent woman of her.”

“I see.”

“No, I don’t think you do. Because after he left her, she tried to ... end the pregnancy herself. If he had stayed with her she might have survived. She might be alive today.”

His eyes met hers. He ached to take away some of the hurt, but could not.

“So, I wanted to annoy you. I wanted to show you that I didn’t like you and I never would want to waste my time with anyone looking like you. That I could never like anyone like you.”

He simply nodded.

“I don’t understand how I could be so cruel. You’re not like him.”

His eyes radiated sympathy for her. “Hey, we all develop ways to protect ourselves.”

Her hand was soft against his cheek. As her finger traced the outline of his facial features, he turned into her hand and lightly graced it with a kiss.

“I’m sorry.”

“No harm done.”

“And Flo is my aunt.”

Johnny tried to smile in triumph, but was not totally successful.

The silence between them stretched, only to be broken by a bossy and newly composed Miss Kinkade.

“If I’m going to be cutting into you, you’d better be calling me Lauren.”

“Lauren Kinkade.” He savoured it. “Pretty name.”

“Thank you. Now, I’m going to have to get started.” She paused and looked hard at him. “I’ll try my best, but I’m going to hurt you.”

“Don’t I know it! Just do it fast. Don’t be worried about my pain. Just dig if you have to and I’ll try to stay as still as possible.” His grin again lightened his face and erased the pain lines for a few seconds. “But I ain’t promising I’ll be a statue!”

She smiled in understanding. For some strange reason he felt himself relax as he entrusted his body to her.

A whiskey bottle appeared out of the bag she had slung over her shoulder.

“Where did you get that?”

“From the stage. Here, take a swig.”

He downed a hefty wallop. It felt good, that fire in the belly. Mellow, at least for a minute.

Lauren poured some of the alcohol over his wound. His body jerked in reaction as the whiskey viciously irritated the already festering wound. It wore off gradually and with a start he realized that he was clasping her hand. Crushing it, really.

“I’m sorry! I didn’t realize.”

“Don’t be. Ready?” So softly asked. He nodded.

No matter how many times this had happened to him, it never got any easier. It wasn’t like he could practise and become immune to it, more’s the pity. Resolutely, he prepared himself mentally and gratefully accepted the cloth wrapped stick she offered him. He bit down and waited.

And it came with a vengeance that put his body on fire. An agony that tortured every nerve ending. A relentlessness that shackled him to that patch of dirt and allowed no escape. His muffled scream made her jump, but she continued her gruesome task.

Johnny writhed uncontrollably.

“Hush! Be still!”

He opened his eyes to see her concerned face bending over him. Tears were streaming from her eyes and she swiped at them with her arm. He stilled. It wasn’t fair to her. Taking a deep breath, he nodded his approval for her to continue.

Madrid appeared and he gratefully hid behind this façade. He lay quieter, but the hurt increased as she dug and probed for the offending piece of lead.

And then there was the respite of nothingness which swirled him away.



She was leaning over him, tying the last of the bandages when he awoke.

“Hey, there! Have you decided to join me at last?”

He attempted a smile.

“Here, have some water.”

His mouth was dry, desert dry. The water was gratefully accepted. Somehow it helped ease the burning in his side just a fraction as well. His respite was short lived, however. His stomach rebelled at this liquid invasion. Noticing his distress, she helped him roll to one side and supported his shoulders as he heaved into the dust. As he heaved and created new torture for himself in his side.

Finally, spent, he was eased back into a reclining position. His face was bathed gently and her smooth tones soothed him.

His panting slowed. Once more he submitted to her care.

Some time later, many hours later, he was able to gather together the threads of reality.

He noticed the eerie dawn light was softening the stark black of night. He felt more calm and aware. Most of all he was aware of her presence by his side. Examining her face, he perceived the tear stains. She sniffed and dabbed gingerly at her sore nose. Her good eye was red and puffy, which did not improve her looks any in the accepted sense. But to him she was strikingly lovely.

“How bad is it?”

“I don’t know. It was in your side. I got it out, but I have nothing to sew you up with. I don’t think it hit anything vital, but I am no doctor ... as you are well aware, by now.”

She grimaced wryly. Johnny reached for her arm. “I’m sure you did a great job. Thank you.”

Her lips pressed into a thin line, knowing that he was placating her.

“Is your face paining you a lot?” he asked Lauren.

“Only when I laugh,” she responded. “Can you sit a horse?”

“Why don’t you make your way to Lancer? I’ll give you directions. If you leave me here, you could go faster.”

“No, it’s not open for discussion. Come on, up you get.”

She squatted next to him, assisting him to rise. He made it, but not under his own steam. He stood wavering in front of the horse she had brought over. Once again, she improvised, urging him onto a stump to use as a mounting block.

Then his vision sharpened and he could see clearly.

Her dress.

She stood in her bodice and pantaloons.

“What happened to your dress?”

She glanced down and grimaced. “I didn’t bring enough clothing with me from my raid on the stage. I thought I had enough. I didn’t realize how much ...”

Her voice trailed off miserably.

Blood. She was going to say ‘blood’.

His heart ached for what she had had to do.

“I had to clean you up and then I needed swabs, and a pad and bandages to bind you up. I didn’t have enough material. I’m sorry.”

“Hey, don’t be sorry. They’re mighty pretty pantaloons. They’ve just brightened my day.”

She blushed bright red in the glowing dawn, then laughed. She laughed at his sense of humour, the absurdity of her attire and his kindness in trying to take her mind off their ordeal.

“Come on.”

He tried to pull himself on the animal’s back. Lauren did what she could by pushing hard and hoisting him up.

“Let’s go.”

They set off in the direction that Johnny indicated. Slowly, inexorably they plodded on, every step a living hell for Johnny. Yet every step brought him closer to home. He tried valiantly to stay awake, to guide her and to provide company for her on their arduous trek.

The back of the horse beneath them provided a bony and slippery seat. More and more it was falling to this woman to keep Johnny mounted. Johnny knew that he must be drifting in and out of consciousness. The scenery they passed was becoming staccato as he felt he was jumping from location to location.

“There!” he suddenly gasped.

“Where?”

“That hill! We’re nearly there.”

She rearranged her arms around his midriff to support him better, then headed the horse in that direction. The horse was obviously weary, but he seemed to have picked up on Johnny’s new buoyant frame of mind. At last they crested the rise.

She stopped the horse there and gazed at the view below her.

“How beautiful! Just stunning!”

Johnny placed his hand over hers. “We’re home.”

“Looks like it. Come on, your family will be worried.”

The Lancer arch embraced them and soon they were in the yard just outside the porch. The door was flung open, to disgorge a mini stampede of anxious family members. Scott reached the horse just before Murdoch and Teresa, with Jelly bringing up the rear. Hands reached up to them. Willing and welcoming hands.

Lauren gratefully released her burden to his family. Putting his arm around Johnny and taking the brunt of his weight, Scott began to lead him inside.

“You got some explaining to do, brother. Can’t you even stay out of trouble on a stage coach?”

“Hi to you, too, Scott!”

Then Johnny stopped and made to turn. “Aren’t you hopping off, Lauren?”

“I seem to be stuck. I’m so stiff,” she lamented.

Murdoch raised his arms. “Just slide down,” he advised.

This she did. Murdoch placed her gently on the porch. The spectacle of her in her pantaloons raised questions in everyone’s mind. But no one dared ask.

“Hey, everyone. This is Lauren,” Johnny explained.

And then he collapsed against his brother.

Scott hefted him up and made to go inside, but Johnny’s words delayed him. “Look after her for me until I get better. Ain’t she beautiful, Scott?”

Scott turned and surveyed her bloody and swollen face, the cut on her cheek, her bandaged wrists and the enticing pantaloons.

“Yes, brother, she’s a true stunner!”

Johnny smiled in acknowledgement of his brother’s statement. Then he fainted. His unconscious body was taken inside, his smile lingering peacefully on his face.



THAT DAMNED DRIFTER

BY ROS



He was hungry. Actually, he was hungry, wet, tired and filthy, but he couldn't really remember a time when he hadn't been at least one of those things.

And he was alone.

There was nothing new in that either. He'd always been alone. There was no one to rely on but himself, although somewhere, in the dark crevices of his mind, he recalled a warm body he once had to lean on. There'd been kindness then, a soft loving touch, but it was just a shadow of a memory so he paid it no heed.

Instinct told him that he needed to find shelter or die. He was wet, and shivering now, as well as hungry. He didn't think there was much he could do about the hunger right now, but he could do something about getting warm.

From his hiding place in the brush, he spotted his shelter for the night. There were buildings down there, and he was sure he'd be able to find a warm place to hide in one of them. But he'd have to wait until it was dark. There were men everywhere around the buildings and he knew that he wouldn't be welcome.



Hours pass slowly when you're hungry and alone. He waited patiently for the dark so that he could sneak in and find a warm corner. He wished he could move in sooner, but there was no choice about that. If he was seen, they'd chase him off. It had happened plenty of times before in his young life.

When the sun finally set, and the moon still hadn't risen enough to make any difference to the night, he limped slowly out of the bushes and made his way to the buildings.

He was careful not to be seen, skulking behind walls and looking out cautiously to see if there was anyone around. Finally, convinced of his safety, he slid through the darkness and entered the big warm barn.

The horses nickered softly but paid little attention to him. Mostly, they were tired and grateful for the barn themselves.

So he made his way right to the back where he found an empty stall with some hay strewn lightly on the floor. He didn't even bother to scratch it all together to make a bed. He had no energy left for that.

He just curled up and fell asleep.



"Enrique, if you go near Barranca, it'll be your own fault if he bites you," Maddie called out sharply.

All of six years old, she was getting tall and gangling. She'd grown a head taller in the year she'd been at Lancer and no amount of food would keep meat on her growing bones.

She was dressed in her denim overalls and her lovely black hair was tied in pony tails on either side of her head. It was early in the morning, so she was still clean, though Teresa despaired of keeping her that way for more than an hour most days.

"He won't bite me," little Enrique Cipriano told her patronizingly. Enrique was six years old as well, though he was a month older than Maddie and he didn't like her trying to tell him what he could and couldn't do. Not only was he older, he was a BOY and she was just a girl.

Well, maybe not JUST a girl. She was a Lancer, and that made her someone special at the ranch her family owned. But he still didn't see that he should have to do everything she said.

"Well, Papa will be angry if you do get bit," she insisted. "An' it won't be with Barranca – he'll be mad at you!"

That stopped the little boy in his tracks and he thought seriously about that threat. He might only be six, but he knew enough not to get Senor Johnny upset. He'd heard the stories about him.

Enrique turned back to look at Maddie. She was standing with her hands on her hips and her feet apart, scowling at him. No, he wasn't going to let her tell him what he could do, not even if her Papa was Johnny Madrid Lancer. Senor Johnny would never shoot a kid!

He turned his back on the girl and walked towards the end stall, where Johnny's majestic palomino waited. He stopped a few feet away from the big golden horse and watched him adoringly. Barranca was a fine animal, everyone agreed about that, but he did tend to nip if you got close. Maddie was right about that.

While he made up his mind whether to go any closer, he heard a rustling sound behind him and spun around.

"Maddie, come see!" he called out in surprise.

The girl ran to his side and stared. "It's a dog!"

"Si," the boy replied, needlessly. "He looks kind of mangy though."

"Where did he come from?"

"I don't know. I've never seen him around here," the boy told her. He took a step closer to the dog, but stopped when it opened its eyes and lifted its lip to snarl at him.

"He looks sick," Maddie told Enrique.

"He's real thin," Enrique added.

Maddie took a step towards it, but the snarl turned to a low rumbling growl. He bared his teeth and she stopped.

"You better not go near him, Maddie. Looks mean enough to tear your hand right off your arm!"

"Do you think Ramon could make him better?" she asked Enrique. Ramon was his big brother and was good with animals. Everyone sent for him when one of the animals was sick, even though he was just fourteen years old.

"Maybe. Let's go get him."



When they got back to the barn, Jelly was there. He didn't like dogs much, especially when they looked like that one. He had a rifle in his hands and it was plain what he planned to do.

"Jelly, don't!" she screamed and ran over to grab his arm.

"Miss Maddie, you get on back, 'fore ya get hurt," Jelly told her angrily.

"No, you can't shoot him. Ramon is going to make him better." She turned to the tall skinny boy behind her. "Aren't you, Ramon? Please say you can help him."

The boy moved forward, but didn't get any closer to the animal than Maddie had, before Jelly took hold of his arm and yanked him back away from it.

"Now that's a durned fool thing to do, Ramon," he hissed at the boy. "You wanta get yerself eaten alive?"

Ramon looked at the dog. It was half starved and it had a couple of cuts that had bled out at some stage. They didn't look infected, but the animal probably hadn't been able to hunt much for the last week. Hunger and fear were probably what the dog felt right now, and it could be a dangerous combination.

He agreed that the children shouldn't go near it, but he did not agree that Jelly should shoot it.

"I think he's more scared and sick from hunger, Senor Jelly, than plain vicious," the boy told the old man. "You don't need to shoot him."

"I ain't havin' no wolf in my barn," he growled.

"He ain't no wolf, Jelly," Maddie insisted, with a petulant stamp of her foot.

"Madelena!" came a commanding voice from behind them. A voice she and everyone else recognized instantly.

They all turned at once, Maddie with a surprised look on her face.

"Yes, Papa," she said guiltily.

"You don't say 'ain't."

Her big brown eyes flashed defiantly. "You say it, Papa."

"Well you ain't me!" he told her firmly. "An' unless you wanta spend the rest o' the day in your room, thinkin' on why you sassed your ol' man..."

"Oh no, Papa. I'm sorry," she replied quickly.

Johnny managed to keep the grin from his face somehow, but, with a willful gleam in her eyes, his daughter added, "But he still isn't a wolf!"

"Who isn't?"

"The dog," she told him. "Jelly says he's a wolf."

Johnny looked past the children to the scrawny, filthy animal lying in the straw. "Don't look like a wolf to me, Jelly."

"Lot you'd know," Jelly huffed. "It's part wolf anyways. Look at its color. 'Sides, it's too far-gone to save. Better ta put it out of its mis'ry."

"No!" Maddie shouted in horror, and was joined by Enrique and Ramon in pleading with Johnny for the dog's life.

"Well, I ain't havin' no wolf in my barn, Missie," Jelly reiterated. "You shoulda seen it, Johnny, snappin' an' snarlin' like a wild thing. Them kids'll get hurt for sure."

"He's frightened, Jelly," Maddie pointed out.

"He's frightened?" the old man exclaimed. "Seems like we should be the ones frightened."

"Ramon, what do you think?" Johnny asked the boy.

The boy looked at the animal from where he stood. It might take them some time to get it to trust them enough to get close and clean it up.

"I think some food and some care would do it, Senor Johnny," he decided. "He does not look that sick."

"All right, but none o' you kids get close to it. Jelly, get some rope an' I'll tie it up."

"You ain't serious?"

Johnny frowned at him. "Get me some rope will ya, Jelly."

"Huh!" Jelly huffed and hitched up his pants angrily. He ambled away complaining of frightened stock and missing fingers until he was out of earshot.

Johnny turned back to his daughter. "Now, you mind me Maddie. Don't go gettin' close to that dog."

So the dog had stayed.



They left it in the barn where it had taken refuge and Ramon had stood just out of reach of it and used a broom handle to push a bowl of water towards it, and then a bowl of watered down stew for it to try.

The dog snarled and snapped at the strange objects. It obviously felt threatened by the broom handle and tried to bite at it, but then it sniffed at the food and ate some. It lapped up some of the water and eyed them all nervously.

But it accepted the food.

Ramon and the children came by regularly with food and water. Each time, the animal snarled, but it no longer snapped at them. Instead, it stood waiting for the meal they brought with them.

On the third day, it didn't even snarl. It stood watching them, apparently trying to decide whether to trust them or not.

Ramon wanted to get close enough to look after those cuts and to give him a good bath, but he was no fool. He bided his time and built up the trust instead.

Maddie was less patient and Ramon had to keep reminding her that the dog wasn't like the other dogs on the ranch. This one was scared and wild. She shouldn't trust him.

As it had fattened up, they realized that it really was a dog - a young sable German shepherd with a silvery color to his coat. He had the right color for a wolf, but Jelly was the only one who still persisted with the belief that it was part wolf. No one blamed him. He had good reason not to like dogs like that much, after the run in he had had with Sheriff Gannon and his wolf-dog. He still carried the scars on his arm from that experience.

Maddie and Ramon did get close to it though.

Johnny came in to saddle Barranca on the fourth morning and found his daughter sitting far too close to the dog for his comfort.

“Thought I said you weren’t to go near him,” Johnny said angrily. He stood his ground though, not making a quick move in case the animal took fright and attacked her.

“It’s all right, Papa,” she purred back at him. “See, he likes me now. Ramon lets me feed him sometimes.”

To show her confidence in the dog, she slowly put her little palm out for him to sniff. Johnny wanted to run over and pull her away, but he fought back the instinct and watched. Nevertheless, he kept his hand by his side, his gun hand ready for the first sign of danger.

Instead, the dog did actually sniff her hand and then licked it. He breathed a sigh of relief and watched his daughter in fascination. She edged her hand onto the dog’s nose and gently rubbed it, and then moved it slowly up to his ears and patted him.

“Madre de dios, Maddie!” he whispered. “You be careful.”

She smiled back at her father. “He’s a good dog, Papa. I don’t think he’s wild any more.”

“Yeah, well, I wouldn’t count on that,” Johnny told her.

“If Ramon and I can get him cleaned up, can he sleep in my room with me?”

Johnny smiled. “I’d like to see your grandpa agree to that!” he said with a grin. “Nope, he’ll just have to be like every other dog ‘round here an’ sleep in the barn.”



Johnny had been right. No amount of cajoling or pleading had gotten Murdoch to let her keep the dog in the house. What was even worse was that Teresa and Maria had sided with him.

Maria had heard Jelly’s insistence that the animal was a dangerous wild beast. Jelly would not give one inch on that. He was convinced that the dog was part wolf and kept a rifle at hand whenever he went into the barn, just in case.

When, finally, the time came that the animal was strong enough, and healthy enough, to be released, Murdoch had taken Maddie aside and explained what was likely to happen.

“He’s been wild for a long time, Maddie. Probably his whole life,” he told her. “Most likely, when he’s off that rope, he’s going to run off again. He doesn’t know what a home is.”

“No, he’ll stay, Grandpa,” she insisted confidently. “You wait, he won’t run away.”

“He’s a drifter, Maddie, just like those men who come here and work for us for a while and then move on. They don’t like being tied down to one place.”

But she shook her head, disbelieving.

Johnny untied the rope and waited for the dog to bolt to freedom. But, once again, his daughter had known the animal better than any of them. It stood its ground for a while and then, slowly moved forward to stand beside her and nuzzled her gently.

She grinned triumphantly. “I’m going to call him ‘Drifter’,” she told them all, and put her arm over the dog’s shoulders. Together, they walked out into the sunlight.



The two became inseparable. From the moment the dog was turned loose, it stuck to Maddie’s side like glue. Parents of her playmates eyed the animal suspiciously at first. Some refused their children permission to play with her while ‘el lobo’ was with her.

Maria was afraid of the dog. She’d heard what Jelly had to say and was still calling him ‘el lobo’. She was horrified when the animal took to sleeping outside the kitchen door. Every morning she had to ease past the dog to get into the house, and she didn’t like it one little bit. She complained bitterly to anyone who would listen.

But, slowly, the dog gained their trust. Everyone, Jelly being the one and only exception, watched the growing attachment between the little girl and the dog and realized that it was there to stay.

In time, Maddie found out that Maria had begun to slip little scraps of food to him when no one was looking.

“Él es demasiado flaco – todos los huesos!” she said in her own defence and Maddie nodded her agreement. He was still skinny and all bones, but Maria would soon fatten him up.

For his part, Johnny watched the two grow closer nervously. He couldn’t get the image of that snapping and snarling creature in the barn out of his mind. For days, he’d tried to keep her from getting so friendly with it, but Maddie had a stubborn streak that matched her father’s own.

She didn’t exactly ignore her father. If he told her to get back from Drifter, she did, but she went back to him just as soon as her father went away. He hadn’t said that she could NEVER go near the dog.

Eventually, he gave up. After two weeks of keeping a close eye on them, he accepted that the dog really had taken a liking to her.

But the days were getting shorter and cooler, and Maddie’s life took a change.

Maddie started school, and the schoolteacher – Mrs. Chalmers - had a very strict rule at her school – NO PETS.

On the first day, Johnny tied the dog up to keep it from following Maddie to school. The dog chewed through the rope and ran off after her. At recess, the children found it sitting patiently outside the schoolhouse door. Mrs. Chalmers was not impressed.

“Madelena,” she said dauntingly. “School is no place for animals.”

With a quiet, “Yes, ma’am,” Maddie sadly took Drifter downstairs. Johnny soon turned up to take him home, having found the frayed rope and guessed where the dog had gone.

Poor Johnny stood silently while Mrs. Chalmers explained, in cold hard detail, that she would not have dogs at school. She was a woman of forty-plus years with wire rimmed glasses sitting on the end of her nose and graying hair pulled into a severe bun at the back of her head.

He stood awkwardly in front of her, listening to her and feeling like some naughty schoolboy, then tied the dog to a length of rope and led it home.



Maddie pondered on how she could make Drifter understand that he had to stay at home. But how could she, when she didn't understand herself? It didn't seem fair, anyway. He wasn't hurting anyone.

Nevertheless, Johnny had to find another way to keep the dog from following her.

After some thought, Johnny locked him in the barn and then stood back to see his daughter and the other ranch children off to school with Ramon riding behind to keep an eye on them all.

Two hours later, Scott found his brother storming out of the barn, his face thunderous.

“What's the matter with you, brother?” he asked.

“That damned dog! He's dug a hole under the back wall of the barn and run off after Maddie again.”

Scott tried not to grin, but he didn't succeed.

“Well, you have to give him an ‘A’ for persistence.”

“I know what I'd like to give him,” Johnny snapped. “I'm the one who has to go fetch him back, and listen to that schoolmarm again.”

Scott laughed and watched him ride off on Barranca to face the woman and bring back the dog.

When they came back, he wasn't sure which of them looked the more downtrodden – the dog or his brother.

"I see you were right. He was at the school again," Scott commented.

"Yeah," Johnny answered shortly.

Scott grinned. "Did you see the teacher?" he asked roguishly.

"Yeah, an' you'd think I'd let the damned dog run off on purpose."

Scott couldn't help himself. He burst out laughing, but Johnny scowled darkly.

"She says the dog could be dangerous an' she won't risk the children's lives by having it there."

"Johnny, I know we don't know where that dog came from, but I don't think he's dangerous," Scott told him seriously.

"I know that. If I thought he was, I'd have shot him rather than let him near Maddie," Johnny replied.

"Well, he's outsmarted you twice," Scott told him mischievously. "Do you really think you can figure out how to keep him home?"

"It won't happen again," he declared. He glared down at the offender beside him. The dog sat looking at him, his tongue lolling out of the side of his mouth and his face almost seemed to be smiling. "Isn't that right, dog?"

Drifter dropped his head guiltily, and Scott suppressed another laugh.



On the third day, Johnny knew he had the dog beaten. There was no way that it could get away this time.

With his patience worn thin, Johnny closed it in the storage shed behind the barn. Pulling the door shut behind him, he turned back and glared at the dog.

"You try anything this time, dog, and I'm gonna shoot ya!" he threatened and closed the door, with the 'hangdog' look on his daughter's dog still in his mind.

Drifter whined and scratched desperately and Johnny left, with a grin on his face, thinking that he had finally beaten 'that dang dog'.

An hour later he found the door open. Scratch marks on the door and tooth marks on the doorknob told him that the dog had done it again. Somehow, that damned dog had managed to twist the knob enough to open the door and had run off.

So, once more, Johnny mounted Barranca and headed for the school. The thought of facing that dragon of a woman one more time was enough to set his nerves on edge. It was all he could do to hold his temper when she started in on him each time.

She'd be waiting for him, for sure.

Dismounting at the gate, he tied Barranca to the fence and took a deep breath before walking in.

He started up the path to the steps of the schoolhouse, but then he heard noises from the back. Walking around behind the school, he found the teacher on her knees, holding a little boy close to her protectively. The boy was crying, while other children were screaming or howling. In the middle of the little group, were Maddie and her dog.

She was sitting on the ground, her arms wrapped affectionately around the dog's neck and her head against his.

Johnny strode over to his daughter and stopped.

"All right, what happened?" he asked firmly, but not unkindly.

Maddie looked up at her father. Her eyes were full of tears and she sniffled.

"Mr. Lancer, wait," the teacher called out.

When Johnny turned around, she was on her feet and walking over to him with the little boy by her side, holding her hand.

"Please, wait," she pleaded and hurried to his side.

"What happened?" he asked. He couldn't believe that the dog had done anything to harm any of the children, but they sure looked scared.

"Maddie's dog," she said quickly, as she got close to him. Her hair was falling down over her face, most uncharacteristically. She looked anything but the unruffled dragon lady who had berated him twice in as many days. "He saved Cody. Look..."

She pointed towards the bushes. There, lying half hidden by a large rock, was a dead rattlesnake. It was about three feet long, and its neck was twisted brokenly. The flesh was torn and bloody from teeth marks.

"I wouldn't have believed it, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, Mr. Lancer," she told him. "The dog pushed him out of the way and went for the snake. He got it in his teeth and shook it until it was dead."

“He could have been killed, Papa,” Maddie cried.

“He was so brave, Mr. Lancer,” one of the older girls exclaimed.

Johnny squatted beside Maddie and looked the dog over. He couldn’t see any marks that might indicate that the dog had been bitten. It seemed that he’d come out of the fight unscathed.

“He’s okay, Maddie,” he told her, giving the dog’s ears a generous rub. He stood up and turned back to the teacher. “I’ll take him home, Mrs. Chalmers. I’ll find some way to keep him there this time.”

“Oh no, Mr. Lancer, no!” she exclaimed. “I won’t hear of it.”

“No, please, Mr. Lancer,” one of the boys cried out. “He’s a hero!”

“I’m sure I can make one exception to the rule – under the circumstances,” the teacher assured him. “Drifter can stay and be the school mascot.”

She looked down at Maddie. The little girl’s face was glowing with pleasure and relief. “But he has to stay outside,” she added.

So, the dog stayed.



It was a very pensive Johnny Madrid Lancer who rode home. It was just as well that Barranca knew the way because Johnny’s thoughts were a million miles away.

For years, he had protected his daughter with his absence. By staying away from her, he had been able to keep her existence a secret from the world – and his enemies.

But, since he had brought her home, he’d figured that he had to keep her close to protect her. The secret was out and he had to make sure that no one used her to get at him.

He couldn’t do that twenty-four hours a day. He had to face the fact that there were going to be more and more times when he couldn’t be with her. Maddie had to grow up, and she had an independent soul like her father had.

No, he couldn’t be with her all the time. That left her open to all kinds of perils; and not just from men who wanted to get at him through her. The thought that it could just as easily have been his daughter who had gotten close to that rattler, sent a shiver of fear through him that he was totally unused to.

When he rode into the yard at home, Scott was curious. He’d expected to see him come back with the dog on a rope once again, cursing it loudly for having outwitted him for a third time. Instead, a very thoughtful Johnny rode in, and without the dog.

Scott frowned as Johnny dismounted in front of the house. “Johnny? Where’s Drifter?”

“Back at the school,” he said distractedly.

“Back at the school? Why?”

Johnny stopped. He finally emerged from his reverie. “He killed a rattler. Pushed a boy out of the way and killed it. The dog’s the school hero. He’s allowed to stay any time he likes.”

Scott shook his head in surprise, then he grinned. “Well, you’re off the hook,” he said. “You don’t have to try to out-think him any more.” He laughed and added. “Just as well, Johnny. That dog had you beat.”

Scott expected his brother to bite at his jibe, but he didn’t. He just mumbled, ‘hm’ and walked into the house.

Following him into the house, Scott watched him curiously. Johnny wandered around the room, apparently aimlessly, and then disappeared upstairs.

Finally, Scott couldn’t stand it any longer and went up to see what his brother was doing. He found him in Maddie’s room folding an old Indian blanket and putting it on the floor near her bed.

“What are you doing?” he asked Johnny.

“Makin’ a bed for the dog,” Johnny answered.

“Murdoch will never go for it.”

“I’ll deal with Murdoch,” Johnny assured him. He finished and turned back to talk to his brother. “There’s all kinds of dangers out there, Scott,” he said, sitting on the edge of the bed. “I don’t just mean that she’s Johnny Madrid’s kid. I mean all the things that every kid faces. I realized today that I can’t be with her all the time to look out for her.”

He looked at Scott seriously. “But Drifter can.”

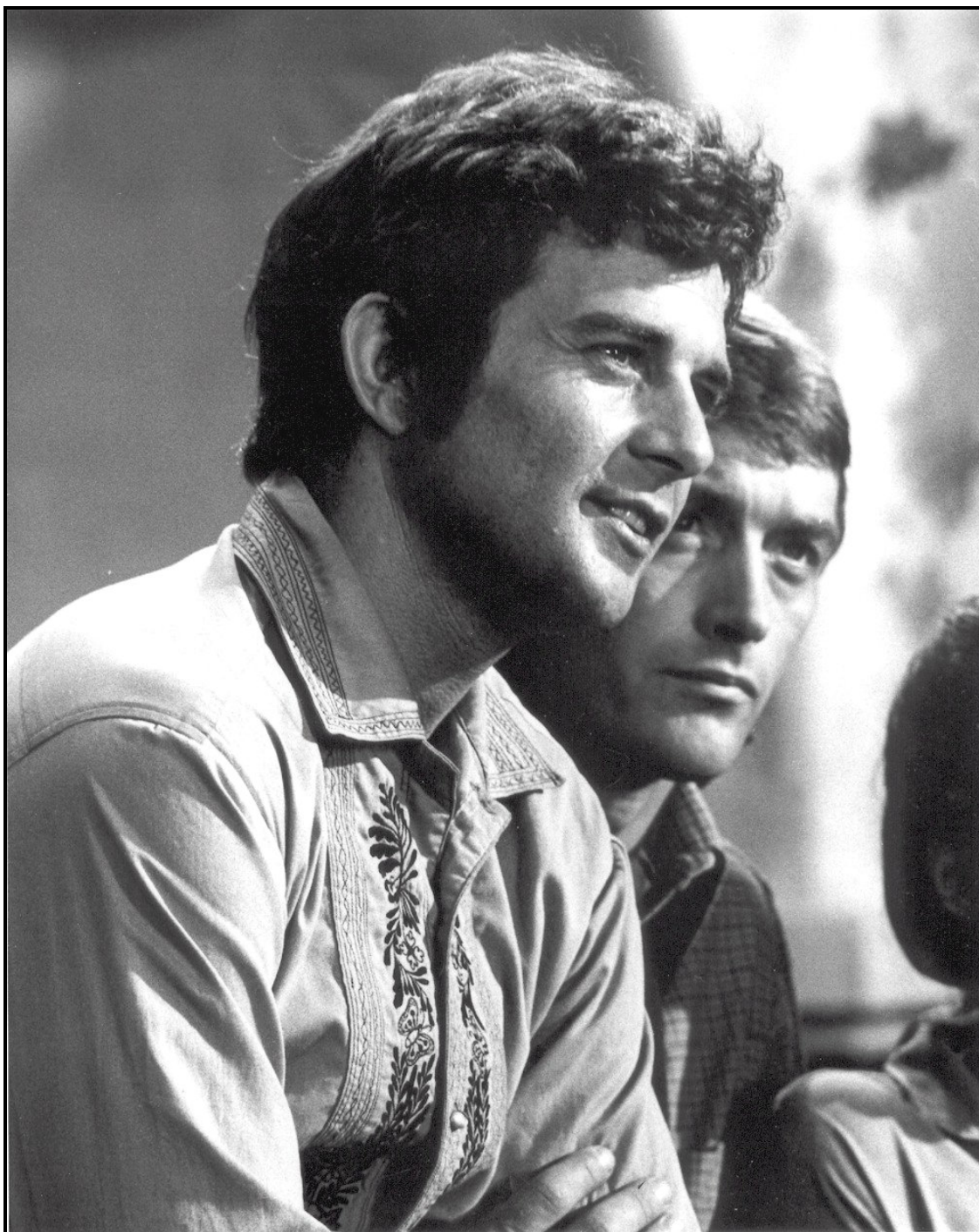
Johnny stood up and went downstairs to find Murdoch.

The dog stayed.



AUTHOR’S NOTE: Drifter is a silver sable German Shepherd – a dog that really does resemble a wolf. His antics are not so far fetched as you might think. He did nothing that my own shepherd, The Duke, wasn’t able to do. For ten wonderful years, he let himself off leashes and collars. Fences couldn’t stop him, and he COULD open doors. His Houdini tactics drove us to distraction, but we learnt to live with them.

He was tender with my children, played 'mother' to a litter of kittens, and greeted every baby that ever entered his yard with a lick on the cheek - but heaven help anyone who touched my kids. Twenty years after his passing, he is still a legend among my friends and relatives.



THAT DAMNED DRIFTER BY ROS

RETIREMENT

BY AMBY



The day was hot and the dust just couldn't get settled as the mid-day sun beat down upon the Lancer Ranch as the wind howled through the air and danger spoke through nature.

Theresa sighed.

Murdoch had left the night before for a week's business trip to settle some dispute with some very annoying ranch owner from--Theresa gave herself a mental shake--*what was the name of that ranch? Something to do with a tree--an evergreen, wasn't it?*

She'd been there once before, but all she could remember was that the man had had three sons and the youngest had caught her eye with his boyish charm.

But that was not what she sighed about. Murdoch would be fine, it was Johnny and Scott she was worried about... again.

They had left about the same time as Murdoch had, mumbling some vague reference to fixing fences or whatever guys find amusing to do. But the trouble was, they hadn't returned yet and it'd been over a day and a half.

And they always seemed to do this to her.

And now she was worried.

Again.

Like all those other times she worried about those two brothers. They never could keep out of trouble. She remembered back to the days when things were quieter... when they weren't around. Back then the only sound would be of Murdoch sulking around the house, consumed in his so-called-life.

Yet it had been so less stressful back then...

Her eyes glazed over in remembrance. When life was still simple... of days when quietness was the rule, not a rare occurrence, and the only worrying she had to do was if supper was going to be burnt or Murdoch was going to be late.

Hmmm... The good ol' days.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Jelly yelling for help.



RETIREMENT BY AMBY

So much for tranquility...

With a slap of her knee, and rolled eyes, she slowly stood up.

"I really need to get married and away from here."

She made her way to the door, but before opening it she stomped her foot in frustration. "God have mercy on me."

As she opened the door, she plastered a fake look of concern on her face.

"What is it now?" She snapped, her voice betraying her obvious irritation.

"Johnny and Scott are hurt! Really, really badly!" Jelly almost screamed in urgency, gesturing to where Johnny and Scott sat hunched over in their saddles.

Theresa smirked, "And this is so much different then last time how?"

"Wha...." Jelly stuttered.

"What I mean is, is this supposed to surprise me or come as any great shock?" She commented archly as she shook off the look of hurt the brothers cast her way. "Ah!" She held up her hand before either could comment. "Shut up and get off the horse... Johnny, when I said get off, I obviously didn't mean fall... Good Lord you're such a baby. Scott, go drag yourself and Johnny up to your bedrooms. Now."

She turned and left to get the supplies that she had set out the day before just knowing what would happen when they did return.

The boys, with much grumbling of abuse, and with Jelly's help, made their way up the staircase.

Theresa slammed the door.

"Jelly, go leave and play with your poop duck or whatever you do. Maybe send a telegram to Murdoch and tell him his wonderful sons decided to get all target practicey." She pivoted and shook a finger. "Oh, shut up Scott, I know what I'm talking about more than you do!"

Stunned, and mouth hanging open, Jelly left.

"Now for you two... What the hell have you been up to? Huh? Scott, you're suppose to be older and wiser! You neither act it nor even try! And Johnny, I thought you were so fast? Yeah, well a lot of good that does you!" She paused. "Let me take a stab at what happened. Hmm.... It all happened when one of Johnny's past 'friends'--and I say that loosely--caught up to you and shot Johnny in the stomach for some sort of dumb revenge, then shot at Scott, being an easy target he is, hitting him in the same shoulder he got hit in last week and the week before... But, of course, in the end, good prevailed and the haunted past is slowly being repented for... blah blah blah... You guys are so boring!"



She sighed in annoyance, "Johnny, would you stop your moaning. It's only a flesh wound. And Scott, could you stop bleeding all over the nice white bedding? Oh, so this isn't how it happened? Well then explain it to me... Some shadow came out... yeah... it didn't look human? What have I told you about unhuman shadows? Hmm... don't go after them, duh! Okay, continue. Johnny got shot by accident when the sheriff thought you were trespassers... yeah, well serves you right. If I've told you once I've told you a million times--*read the signs!* 'No Trespassing' is not written in Chinese! So, he got shot.... What about you Scott? You fell on your gun and it went off? Well, that was just plain stupidity! You guys never learn. How many times did I tell you the safety on your gun is there for a reason? Oh, quiet Johnny, I know you're bleeding, but that's your own fault now isn't it? So, what did we learn today? Yes Scott, that was a serious question and a report will be expected to be filled out. Guys, would you stop groaning and moaning, you act like you are in actual pain."

Theresa turned to get the bandaging. "You guys are so pathetic. After all this time, you think you'd have learned to duck or just simply walk away with all your limbs! Though it may have been a false rumor, I do believe it is the popular thing to do these days."

Another glare. "Johnny, stop coughing up blood, for crying out loud. Scott, you ain't dying, though it's starting to sound tempting. Why do I even try? I'm so tired of worrying about you guys and having you get all bloody and gross! Every week... The same old thing, blood, bullets, bruises, arguments and more blood! I quit! You're on your own! Maybe you'll learn not to get in trouble. No, I'm not being unfair, Scott. He's *your* brother--*you* help him, for goodness sake! I'm not even related to you two!!"

Theresa threw the gauze at Scott.

"I'm too tired for this. I'm taking a nap. You get yourselves cleaned up and stop whining, I like a *quiet* nap for a change. You act just like a couple of babies."

The door slammed...

And Theresa woke from her dream.

"Theresa! Scott and Johnny are back and they're hurt! We need your help... quickly!"

Theresa sighed.

I wonder if I shouldn't ask for a better retirement plan.

ABOUT JAMES STACY

'JOHNNY MADRID LANCER'

COMPILED BY AJ BURFIELD



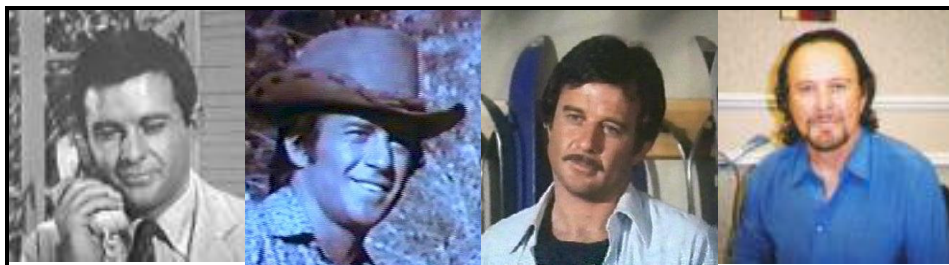
Born in Burbank, California on December 23, 1936 Maurice William Elias, James Stacy was in the right area to get into the entertainment business. His earliest roles in television were on a lot of the 'shows of the day' (The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, Have Gun, Will Travel, The Donna Reed Show, Cimarron Strip, Gunsmoke, Mr. Roberts, Combat!) as well as big screen roles (Sayonara, South Pacific).

In 1968 James was cast in the role of the conflicted younger brother and gunfighter-turned-rancher Johnny Lancer for the television show Lancer. Interestingly, of the series brothers, James was the older of the two in real life, playing a half-Mexican man at least ten years younger than his actual years. Fans latched on to his rakish onscreen persona, mysterious background and the chemistry that was woefully underplayed between the dynamically opposite brothers.

When the series was cancelled in 1970, James went on to guest star in several television shows (Gunsmoke, The Streets of San Francisco, Medical Center, Love, American Style) and movies (Flareup) before tragedy struck in 1977 when James and his girlfriend at the time were riding a motorcycle in Los Angeles and were struck by a drunk driver. His girlfriend died and James lost his left arm and leg as a result.

Amazingly resilient and upbeat, James returned to acting as a newspaperman in the movie Posse, and a Vietnam amputee in Just A Little Inconvenience, where he received an Emmy nod. Since then he's played realistic and dignified roles as an amputee both on the big and small screens, receiving another Emmy nomination for his guest spot in Cagney and Lacy.

James was married to Connie Stevens and later Kim Darby, with whom he has a daughter and grandson.



ABOUT THE LANCER STARS

ABOUT WAYNE MAUNDER

'SCOTT LANCER'

COMPILED BY AJ BURFIELD



Wayne Maunder was born in New Brunswick, Canada on December 19, 1938 and raised in Bangor, Maine. When his first aspiration to be a professional baseball player did not pan out he studied psychology while attending Compton Junior College in California and joined the Naval Reserves, among other things. While in California he gave drama classes a try and got hooked.

Moving to New York to study acting at Stella Adler's Drama Group, the 6 foot blue eyed blond waited on tables in Grand Central Station for two years as he studied and acted where he could in stock companies, The American Shakespeare Company among them.

When Wayne returned to California and took an on stage role in the production of The Knack, he was noticed by an agent who signed the 32 year old actor and got him the role of General Custer in the television series The Legend of Custer. The series aired 17 episodes.

After a few more television guest spots Wayne was picked in 1968 for the role of Scott Lancer, Bostonian gentleman and ex-cavalryman turned rancher, in the Lancer television series. Fans warmed to his composed style, lean good looks and the way he held his own in a new lifestyle out West. The easy banter between the screen brothers was highlighted by Scott's dry wit and deadpan deliveries.

After the cancellation of Lancer, Wayne appeared in the movie The Seven Minutes and in other guest roles on television before landing the role of Sgt. Sam McCray in the police series Chase. Unfortunately, it lasted only one season. He went on to appear in the movie Porky's before turning his interests to writing and other projects behind the camera.

Wayne has one grown son.



ABOUT THE LANCER STARS

ABOUT PAUL BRINEGAR

'JELLIFER B. HOSKINS'

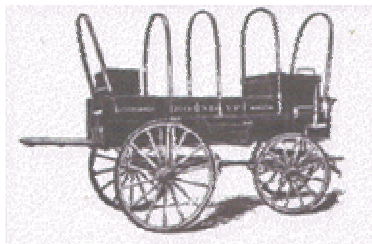
COMPILED BY AJ BURFIELD



Character actor Paul Brinegar was born on December 19, 1917, in Tucumcari, New Mexico, and passed away on March 27, 1995 from emphysema. In his lifetime he perfected the role of grizzly sidekick which earned him a Golden Boot Award in 1994. The Golden Boot Award honors Western films and Paul certainly made his mark in that arena.

Paul was on the small screen as early and 1954 in *The Lone Ranger* and as late as 1993 in *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.* He had reoccurring roles in *The Life and Times of Wyatt Earp*, *Rawhide*, *Lancer*, *Capitol* and *Matt Huston*. Other guest spots included *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Tales of Wells Fargo*, *Lawman*, *Bonanza*, *Daniel Boone*, *Lassie*, *The Guns of Will Sonnett*, *Cannon*, *Petrocelli*, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, *Trapper John*, *CHiPS*, *Knight Rider*, *The Famous Teddy Z* and the above mentioned *Brisco County, Jr.*

From serious to comedic, Paul was able to portray a range of characters. His role as ranch hand and *Lancer* friend Jellifer 'Jelly' Hoskins brought a new dimension to the series. During the span of his career, Paul has worked with actors James Stewart, William Powell, Katherine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Mel Gibson and Tony Curtis to name a few. Directors and writers he has worked with include Fritz Lang, Richard Donner, Ruth Gordon, William Goldman and Billy Wilder.



ABOUT THE LANCER STARS

ABOUT ANDREW DUGGAN

'MURDOCH LANCER'

COMPILED BY AJ BURFIELD



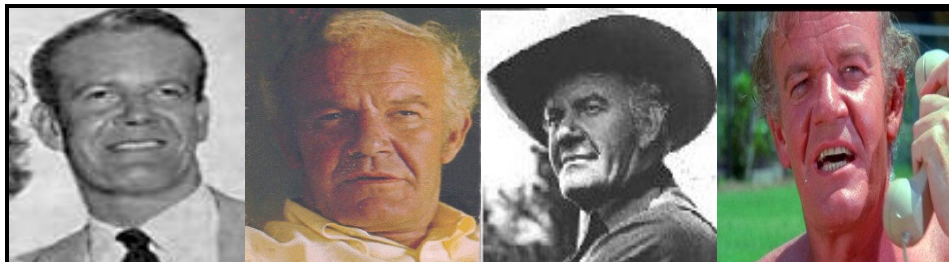
December 28, 1923 brought forth an actor from Franklin, Indiana, that would eventually rack up an impressive list of screen credits before his death from throat cancer on May 15, 1988. Andrew Maurice Duggan's startling height (6'5") and strong jaw often landed him in roles of command and leadership.

Andrew won a speech and drama scholarship to Indiana University. He won a Broadway role in his sophomore year, but was sidelined when he was drafted into the army. His resume started building after his discharge from the army in 1948 when he got a role in the stage play Dream Girl. From there, he was eventually cast in several Broadway productions. It was during this time that he married and had three children.

As the Lancer patriarch Murdoch Lancer, 'Andy's' ability to 'call the tune' on the series was undeniable due to his command presence and experienced attitude. Andrew easily shouldered the responsibility of the role and made it believable.

Andrew's screen credits started in 1959 and grew for the next 36 years, including starring roles in the television series Bourbon Street Beat, Room For One More, Twelve O'Clock High, Lancer and Faraday and Company. Guest spots include, but are not limited to, Lux Video Theatre, Kraft Television Theatre, Toast of the Town, Gunsmoke, Wagon Train, Have Gun, Will Travel, 77 Sunset Strip, Maverick, The Cheyenne Show, Hawaiian Eye, The Dakotas, Dr. Kildare, Bonanza, The Fugitive, The Big Valley, F Troop, The Virginian, The Invaders, The F.B.I., I Spy, Cimmaron Strip, Hawaii Five-O, Medical Center, Mission: Impossible, Cannon, Mannix, McMillan and Wife, The Waltons, The Streets of San Francisco, Kung Fu, Banacek, Barnaby Jones, Barbary Coast, Rich Man, Poor Man, The Bionic Woman, Vegas, Wonder Woman, Lou Grant, M*A*S*H, Charlie's Angels, Hart to Hart, Falcon Crest, Matt Houston, Highway to Heaven and Remington Steele.

Andrew's movie roles include The Winds of War, Backstairs at the White House, Jigsaw, Seven Days in May and Palm Springs Weekend. He has worked with actors Ava Gardner, Gregory Peck, Kirk and Michael Douglas, Paul Newman and Henry and Jane Fonda, to name a few.



ABOUT THE LANCER STARS

ABOUT ELIZABETH BAUR

'TERESA O'BRIEN'

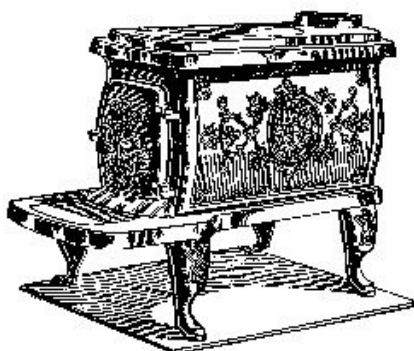
COMPILED BY AJ BURFIELD



Elizabeth Baur was born a fifth generation Californian on December 1, 1947 and into a family already entrenched in the entertainment industry. Her father, casting director Jack Baur, was not happy when 16-year old Elizabeth announced her desire to act. With acting lessons and a few commercials and small parts in Batman and the movie The Boston Strangler under her tiny belt, Elizabeth landed the role of patriarch Murdoch Lancer's ward, Teresa O'Brien, on Lancer.

On screen, the feisty brunette held her own with a predominately male cast. Excited about being cast in a Western series Elizabeth prepared by taking months of riding lesson. During the run of Lancer, she sat astride a horse in only two episodes.

When the series ended in 1970, Elizabeth moved on to the role of Officer Fran Belding in the popular series Ironside, starring Raymond Burr, which ran for five more seasons. From there, she had various guest spots on Police Woman, Fantasy Island and Remington Steele and has since dropped from the entertainment limelight and has directed her energies to family and causes important to her.



ABOUT THE LANCER STARS

LANCER BY SEASON

THANKS TO KAT PARSON'S EPISODE GUIDE



PILOT

TITLE	FILMED
The High Riders – black and white, uncut version	1967*

* Estimated according to the Alan Armor interview, *The Lancer Great Room Bookshelf, Vol. 1*

SEASON ONE

TITLE	AIR DATE
The High Riders (AKA: The Homecoming – edited color version)	September 23, 1968
Blood Rock	October 1, 1968
Chase a Wild Horse	October 8, 1968
Foley	October 15, 1968
The Lawman	October 22, 1968
Julie	October 29, 1968
The Prodigal	November 12, 1968
Jelly	November 19, 1968
Last Train for Charley Poe	November 26, 1968
Glory	December 10, 1968
The Heart of Pony Alice	December 17, 1968
The Escape	December 31, 1968
The Wedding	January 7, 1969
Death Bait	January 14, 1969
The Black McGloins	January 21, 1969
Yesterday's Vendetta	January 28, 1969
Warburton's Edge	February 4, 1969
The Fix-It Man	February 11, 1969
Angel Day and Her Sunshine Girls	February 25, 1969
The Great Humbug	March 4, 1969
Juniper's Camp	March 11, 1969
The Knot	March 18, 1969
The Man Without A Gun	March 25, 1969
Child of Rock and Sunlight (AKA Wolf Cub)	April 1, 1969
Measure of a Man	April 8, 1969
Devil's Blessing	April 22, 1969



SEASON TWO

Blind Man's Bluff	September 23, 1969
Zee	September 30, 1969
The Kid	October 7, 1969
The Black Angel	October 21, 1969
The Gifts	October 28, 1969
Cut the Wolf Loose	November 4, 1969
Jelly Hoskins' American Dream	November 11, 1969
Welcome to Genesis	November 18, 1969
A Person Unknown	November 25, 1969
Legacy	December 9, 1969
A Scarecrow at Hackett's	December 16, 1969
Little Darling of the Sierras	December 30, 1969
Shadow of a Dead Man	January 6, 1970
Blue Skies For Willie Sharpe	January 13, 1970
Chad	January 20, 1970
The Lorelei	January 27, 1970
The Lion and the Lamp	February 3, 1970
The Experiment	February 17, 1970
Splinter Group	March 3, 1970
Lamp in the Wilderness	March 10, 1970
The Buscaderos	March 17, 1970
To Dream of Falcons	April 7, 1970
Goodbye, Lizzie	April 28, 1970
Lifeline	May 19, 1970

UNFILMED SCRIPTS

Beef to Fort Bowie	Written for 3 rd season
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