

indymag

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INDIANA JONES

and the
Gold of El Dorado



Erasmus

Translated by
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indymag *publication*

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Cover design – Eugene Shin

Publisher's Cataloguing-in-Publication data:
Indiana Jones and the Gold of El Dorado



**INDIANA JONES
AND THE
GOLD OF EL
DORADO**

by Wolfgang Hohlbein

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CHAPTER 1

March 1943 Someplace in South America

It was as if the gates of hell had opened, but it wasn't a hell made of fire and embers. It was a hell of raging water, wind and ice. Invisible fists reached out and pummeled the little airplane. Hurricane gusts swirled to and fro. Water and ice pounded against the hull of the plane simultaneously. The compass was spinning crazily, and the electronic instruments had all malfunctioned. Behind them little arcs of lightning twitched. The tiny machine was descending so quickly Corda felt as if he were caught in a cage of blue-white glistening light.

In the confusion, he had already lost his orientation. He had no idea which way was north and south, or east and west. Not only had the hellstorm mixed up the instruments, but it had also mixed up his body so much that it was hard to tell which way was up or down. It wasn't his aeronautical ability any more than luck that had kept him from ramming the plane into the ground; he was holding the control column so tightly that some of his fingernails had broken off and the fingertips beneath were bleeding. His hands remained clenched on the yoke simply because he wanted to hold on to something tightly. The machine was completely at the mercy of the unleashed elements outside.

He groaned as the yoke jerked violently, painfully twisting his shoulders and back. It was as if the plane had become a meal to the wailing storm. It crunched at the plane in a frightening way,

and the airplane responded with a moan that sounded much like a living being in its death throes. Corda expected that it would be only minutes before the machine simply broke in two. He had stopped counting how often the plane had somersaulted, how often the hurricane gusts had skipped the plane through the air like a stone thrown across water, how often he had seen the blue sky through the boiling clouds above the storm or the rolling green-brown spots of jungle below.

It was within the last few minutes that Corda thought of his own mortality. He had often thought of death in the past. Talked about it. Even once he wrote a small essay about situations in which people had looked into the eye of death, however it was never published. Like a large majority of people, he had never really thought about his own death, till now; not worrying about it until it comes.

But perhaps that moment was upon him. Professor Stanley Corda was sure that he wouldn't survive the next few minutes. He had always thought of himself as a skilled airman, but in this storm no pilot in the world could stabilize this or any other aircraft built by man no matter how good they were. Sooner or later one of the enormous storm gusts would smash him into the ground or against one of the nearby mountains, or simply crush the machine in the air like the fist of a giant closing around a toy and mashing it.

And it would probably be sooner rather than later.

An enormous blow struck the small, two-seat sporting aircraft again, and this time Corda felt something at the back of the plane snap. The machine tumbled and tipped forward on the propeller, and for a moment seemed completely motionless in the air. Then it started to fall straight down, like a stone. One of the side windows shattered. Corda was immediately bombarded with rain water mixed with ice and splinters of glass. The shouting of the hurricane filled the cabin with noise like an attacking bomber in the night. Quite instinctively he yanked as the plane started to buck. His strength taxed, Corda tried to level the aircraft and control its longitudinal axis. However it continued its vertical descent toward the ground.

Corda thought that moment was upon him. All of his past mistakes came back to him in a flash. All of his earlier thoughts of death and dying were coming true. But he didn't have a trace of fear. Quite the opposite, actually. An almost cheerful calm spread over him as the aircraft rushed toward the ground, and suddenly a sadness fell over him as he thought of Marian. It wasn't because he would never see her again; it was because their last meeting had ended so ugly. There had been a time when she would have been right here next to him. He thought of all the ugly things that had happened over the last few years, and that this feeling inside him would have died, but that wasn't quite correct. A little was still hidden, deep inside him, covered up under memories of quarrels and unhappy discussions. He had been hurt, but the feeling was still there. He wished he could have one more chance to be with her, to be able to talk to her.

A terrible blow suddenly hit the airplane. The plane tumbled like a soccer ball that had been kicked out of the field, somersaulting and swirling dozens of times on all axes. The glass in front of Corda's face burst, tearing the cushions of the seats to pieces and cutting a deep bloody slice into his face. The storm hammered into the cabin so violently that he couldn't breathe any more. He saw one of the wings break off, and in a mocking movement the gray chaos of the hurricane disappeared. As the cloud cover broke for a fraction of a second, he realized he was staring at the ground. He felt like he was waking from a nightmare. A metallic yellow flashed at him. It was so fast that if his senses weren't so attuned to his surroundings at the moment, he probably wouldn't have seen it; the ground was like a gigantic mirror, not covered with silver, but with gold.

The cloud cover closed as fast as it had opened. And the gray chaos surrounded Corda and the airplane once again. Invisible fists pounded at the plane from all directions trying to break it in two. Corda threw himself back, yanking on the control column with all his force. But this time there was no resistance. He knew that not only had the aircraft lost its wing, it had also lost its tail. When the impact finally came, everything happened so fast that he didn't have time to be more frightened. Pointed gigantic spears jutted forth out of the rolling gray chaos and ripped at the

bottom of the plane under Corda. He heard the splintering of wood and his hearing was tortured by the screeching of metal being torn away from the structure of the aircraft. In a heartbeat the world in front of his eyes did a double or triple somersault, and then a renewed blow struck the bottom of the plane and crushed the cabin around him. Corda was thrown forward, and the whirring knife-blades of the propeller snapped free and sped back toward him. At the last moment he was thrown through the broken side glass and out of the way, just as the blades chopped through the seat where he had been sitting. For a second, he understood that he had been given a second chance. He was flung through the air. The plane disappeared through the trees and screeched invisibly in the distance before coming to a halt. He was airborne for only a fraction of a second before a dreadful force stopped him.

Then everything went silent.

But the impact didn't kill him. It had not even robbed him of his consciousness. He was unable to move, and his brain had shut off his feelings and thought process while it accessed the situation; furthermore, he was aware of everything that had happened with a supernatural clarity, but it registered without any understanding. Something had stopped his fall again; it filled him with pain, but he didn't respond. He just took note of it now. This time the resistance had not been quite so relentless. Then he fell further. His fall was broken by something a third time, landing on something that was hard in some places and soft in others. This further added to the numerous cuts and contusions on his body.

He approached unconsciousness – it was possible he had fallen to his death. But eventually the throbbing pains and the damp warmth of his own blood that ran over his face and hands faded. He thought he heard the sad voices of children, and the light seemed to get poorer and poorer, and then completely went out. The never-ending wailing of the storm, which earlier had seemed to have been tuned in a canon, was hardly more than a whisper.

Time passed, and he had no idea how long he had lay there. For a brief moment he felt something touch his rain-soaked face,

and then the blackness overtook him again. He felt the humidity, but not any cold. The minutes seemed like years, or did the years seem like minutes? It was as if Unconsciousness and Death, its bigger, darker brother, examined him but found him not worthy to enter their empire. Slowly Corda opened his eyes. He felt like he was lying on his back, but as he looked up there was no sky. Only a black, contour-less blanket. But at last the shadow of the dark and gloomy world he had momentarily touched also disappeared, and suddenly his vision returned and he saw shimmering blues and gold and black lava. He was aware that what he was seeing was silhouetted against the boiling clouds of the breaking storm overhead.

The first real feeling that came to him was relief. He was not only relieved to be alive, but also that he could still see. He was also relieved that he seemed not to be perilously hurt, and when he tried, he found he could even sit up. Of course, at first he fell back again. For a few minutes, nausea and dizziness overtook him. He moaned and closed his eyes again. He lay quietly for a few minutes before carefully opening his eyes a second time.

It was as if the storm had been sent to destroy him and his airplane. Now that its work was done it retired, and the blue sky was returning. A cloud still churned here and there, and he could smell the wetness of the rain. However, the sun had chased away the storm and the thunderclaps that had crashed over and over again were becoming a faint whisper. He carefully lifted his hand and ran it over his face. He felt his own blood and grazed skin on his fingers. He touched a small triangular splinter of glass that had missed his left eye by less than a centimeter and buried itself into his temple like an arrowhead. Corda gritted his teeth, seized it with pointed fingers, and attempted to carefully pluck it out of the meat of his face. Pain flooded through him, much more than anything he had suffered thus far, and pale red blood poured down his face and over his hand. It finally came free, and Corda moaned and buried his face in his hands. He sat there motionless for a long time, and then straightened up again. For a moment he looked at the tiny shard of glass which he kept between his thumb and forefinger. It was pale red from his blood. And he shuddered at the thought of how it had just missed his eye. A centimeter

further, he thought, and it would have drilled right through his eye into his brain and killed him. He thought about this for a moment, and then brushed it aside. The cut on his temple was nothing compared to all he had just been through. He laughed aloud, then raised his hand and flung the splinter of glass in a high arc in front of him.

The small fragment reflected a golden glimmer as it rebounded off some rocks and disappeared. Corda looked after it. The glimmer of light reminded him of something else he had seen just before the airplane had snapped in two and shook him up. He could not comprehend what he had seen, and he needed to find out more to understand it.

For the first time he really looked around attentively. He had landed between sharp burrs of lava and weathered granite. He saw that a crippled tree without any leaves whose pinched roots jutted in columns out of the jungle floor had broken his fall. Corda shuttered as he realized it had been a one-in-million chance that he had been stopped by the tree. As far as he could see was nothing but naked rock with razor-sharp edges; this tree was the last emissary of vegetation that penetrated this bald world of stone and rock. The tree line stopped short and turned into a vast expanse of cold, hard stone. If he had been flung a few feet more he would have missed the tree and his body shattered against the granite.

He took a closer look. The rocks against which his airplane had bumped were part of the edge of an enormous crater embankment. The embankment was circled by the green treetops of the Bolivian rainforest. Corda guessed that it would take hours to get down off the embankment; if he could get down at all. Slowly he turned around and looked in the opposite direction. He saw what appeared to be an extinct volcano. He tried to peer inside, but could not see through the gray haze and fog more than thirty or forty steps. The haze covered the crater in a layer. The splinter of glass was nowhere to be found, but he had seen a little flash of gold, just as he had out of the cabin of his plane earlier.

Logic told him that he should turn around and start the long and dangerous journey down. But another voice was stronger than all the others at this moment, and it had nothing to do with

logic. He simply felt that something was hiding behind this boiling curtain of fog and haze. Something great and mysterious. With gritted teeth, Corda limped to the tree whose branches had saved his life. Every step painfully reminded him of the difference between being uninjured and seriously injured; it felt like a white-hot arrow drilled through his knee from the inside out, then crept up his thigh into the rest of his body until there was not a single place on his body that did not either burn, snap or sting or ache in every conceivable (and also inconceivable) way. Trembling, he placed his hand on the tree trunk and immediately pulled it back, surprised.

The tree looked like a tree, but its bark seemed to be made of stone. Corda grasped it again, and then scratched it carefully with his fingernail. A thin layer of soot and ash which had built up over the centuries came loose. But no wood appeared. It was – gold underneath!

For a few seconds, Professor Stanley Corda simply stood there and stared, aghast, at the tiny hole he had made in the bark. Then he started to scratch, faster and faster, with both hands. He dug hectically at the bark. Finally he tore a piece of his ragged shirt away and used it to wipe off the centuries-old layer of deposits. He unsuccessfully tried to remove it all. But where he had wiped away the gunk, the same sight greeted him. It was obviously gold! Corda held too much of this precious metal in his hands as an archeologist (or, some would argue, a grave robber) to be mistaken. It was gold. He could tell by the characteristic texture and softness of the metal.

But this was impossible!

Perplexed, Corda turned and looked closely at the broken branches on the ground that had broken his fall. They were blackened by a centimeter thick layer of soot and ash. However, here and there he could see flecks of gold. He picked one of them up and snapped it into, and a pale yellow glimmer dazzled his eyes.

Still puzzled, Corda dropped the branch and turned back to the tree. He simply stood there and stared, going over, and then rejecting a dozen explanations for what he had found. Not one of them was convincing. Chance? A vein of gold

which had been washed out of the volcano during one of its eruptions?

Impossible. Even if the lava had contained gold, it would have been softer than the stone and washed away by erosion.

Could it have been a religious object? A millennium old work of art set up to honor the gods by the Indians who had once lived in this jungle. Just as impossible. The Incas and the Mayas had never penetrated this part of Bolivia, and Corda knew their works of art well enough. More than once he had held one of their objects in his hands and brought them to a museum. And more than one had inexplicably disappeared between where it had been found and the museum, considerably increasing Corda's bank account.

As fantastic as it sounded, there seemed to be only one explanation.

And this one was even harder to accept.

He tore his eyes away from the fantastic tree and looked down into the crater. He tried to see what the seething gray cloud hid. He noticed only now that there shouldn't be any fog at all; the storm was over. Even if there was a marsh below, would the fog have been able to replace itself so fast?

He looked frantically around and discovered that a few meters away there was a place where he could make his way down into the crater. He gritted his teeth and grabbed a study vine, then slowly lowered himself down, swaying on the way. He touched a small plateau, then turned and made his way down the steep incline.

It was easier than he first thought. But it was also a little strange. The fog shrouded over him, and the dampness filled his clothes and hair. They clung to him with a cold uncomfortable wetness, like damp cotton. The rock was slippery beneath his feet, and he had to watch where he stepped. The danger of slipping and cutting himself on the sharp edges of the lava burrs was still great. It was the strangest fog Corda had ever seen. It was so thick he thought he could almost reach out and grasp it. It had a weird smell, poignant and unpleasant but ever present and overpowering.

Not that he had any other impressions. In front of him was nothing but a gray haze, down into which he climbed. Sometimes he couldn't even see what was below his feet. Movement was slow, and he found it impossible to judge how far he had come. As he descended, he found himself looking for something familiar in his surroundings, but all he saw was the gray cloud below and the gray walls around him. Sometimes he could swear he heard noises; a weird, bizarre lute which the omnipresent fog muffled and somehow dampened.

He was no longer sure whether descending into the volcano had been such a good idea. He had been lucky more than once today, and maybe he had used up the loan destiny had given him. Corda admitted to himself that he had obviously gone astray, and his chances of finding his way back out of the fog had become slim to none.

He stopped, turned around in a complete circle once, and realized that he had lost his orientation a little. Hastily he turned back into the direction he was heading, made another unsafe step, and then stopped once again.

There was something in front of him. At first he thought it was another deceptive shadow that would flutter away as he reached for it just as it had numerous times already on his descent into the crater. But this time the shadow did not disappear. He leaned closer for a clearer view. Corda was sure something was in front of him, but he had no idea what it was.

His heart beat faster. He had never really been superstitious. Stories of ghosts and demons had always wrung only a tired smile from him. Perhaps it was because he was always searching for lost cultures or he was employed to find millennia old graves and tombs. But at this moment it would not have surprised him if the fog spat forth a frothing demon that had come to take vengeance on him for entering this forbidden place.

But the shadow didn't move. Corda strained to hear any sound that might come from the shadow, but all he heard was the sound of his own blood pounding through his veins and the weird, muffled lutes of the fog. And he was beginning to think that even that was a figment of his imagination.

Carefully he moved on. The shadow grew up before him quite slowly, yet still remained shapeless. The nearer Corda got he realized that it wasn't a black rock rising from the ground in front of him. What he saw was a shimmering yellow breaking through the fog, a metallic yellow.

It was as if he penetrated an invisible barrier. Corda quite suddenly recognized what stood in front of him.

With a piercing cry he jumped back. He lost his balance on the slippery rock and fell solidly to the ground. His cheek touched the cold hard ground, and he turned his head and yelled out again. He looked into the stone and saw his look of disgust reflected back at him.

And then his eyes widened with astonishment. The cry turned into a rapid pant.

A spider squatted directly next to his face. It was the biggest spider he had ever faced, its body the size of a man's two fists side to side. Its leg span must have been between forty and fifty centimeters, and its multitude of eyes were the size of polished thumbtacks. They stared at him with a cold rage.

But it wasn't the height or the indescribable ugliness of the spider that caused Corda to lie still and stare stiffly at it. It was the fact that the spider was not alive. And it was exact in detail, just like the tree had been on the crater's edge above.

It was made from solid gold.

Nevertheless, Corda felt an intense curiosity which finally caused him to straighten up and pick the artificial creature up and examine it. Except for its color, it had seemed almost real. It would not have surprised him if it had pounced on him when he fell. He could still see those big eyes staring coldly at him with rage. Its ugly, hairy legs copied in the finest detail so that every joint could be seen, along with the turned claws at the end of the legs. They seemed as if they could drag around its swollen body, which seemed to be made of some golden foam. Some unknown artist had created this creature perfectly.

But Corda was beginning to wonder whether the creature had actually been copied.

With difficulty he looked away from the gigantic creature and stared ahead at the bigger, gold shimmering shadow which had first caught his eyes.

He leaned forward, and he could see it much clearer now. It was no longer clouded in shadows. It was a sparkling giant, more than three meters in height and a length he could not determine because part of it disappeared into the fog. The giant skull was grotesque and triangular, and its mouth was filled with finger long teeth, as sharp as a shark's. They were copied down to the smallest detail! Corda could make out every single scaly detail of the creature. He saw the gigantic flaring nostrils, reptilian eyes as big as a man's fist which stared at him with the same blind rage as the spider had (or was it pain?). The enormous claws of the monster reminded him of human hands that were reaching out for something.

Shuddering, Corda straightened. He took another step closer toward the bizarre freak of nature, the stopped abruptly. He simply did not dare get any closer. He no longer attempted to understand what he was seeing. But he knew without a shadow of a doubt that this was not the work of some Incan or Mayan artist. Human hands could not have created this statue.

Corda was not a paleontologist; however he knew the early history of the earth well enough to know what stood before him was a life-size Allosaurus covered completely in gold! It was a smaller but hardly less dangerous version of the biggest beast of prey that had ever roamed this planet, the Tyrannosaurus Rex. Its ravenous appetite gave birth to the dragon legends of old, and it had died out over seventy million years ago.

Corda fought back his fear and approached a little more closely. He extended a trembling hand and felt the scales on the enormous body and marveled at its detail. The fog had dumped its cold wetness all over it, and he could not only feel the gold underneath but also the tiny cracks between the scales of the armor-clad lizard skin. Suddenly he stepped back and stared up into the fog. The feeling that came over him was surreal and hard to explain. It almost bordered on panic. He tried to imagine what other mysteries he would find shrouded in this weird fog. He would soon find out.



CHAPTER 2

June 12th, 1943 **New York**

It was very rare that Dr. Indiana Jones had anything in common with his students besides his enthusiasm for stories of lost cultures and secrets of prehistoric life. One other thing they shared was the longing for that shrilling of the bell that heralded the end of class. He didn't feel particularly well that day. The evening before, he had a drink with Marcus Brody, curator of the National Museum and headmaster of the university. He was an old friend, and as often happened, he hadn't stayed with just one glass. They had stated speaking about old times and the adventures they had shared. He had woken up on the wrong side of bed this morning with a terrible headache, and the day hadn't brought any rays of hope to him that his mood was going to change. His secretary had put the normal piping hot cup of coffee on his desk in the usual place. But, however, she had also placed a not so normal letter from Dr. Grisswald, new dean of the university, informing him to get in contact after his second lecture. The letter was written in Grisswald's scribbled handwriting, and abrupt and pointed, the tone unpleasant much

like the man who had written it. He and Indiana Jones didn't get along entirely, and were not friendly to each other.

Grisswald had come to the university some months ago, and he hadn't made any qualms about what he thought of the excursion and extra tours of his most prominent assistant professor. He had to listen to long lectures on how he was supposed to be a role model for the students, how he should teach them the noble sciences and offer his care and responsibility into molding them into good citizens. Furthermore, with a reproachful look from Grisswald, Indy had to listen on and on about how he should leave dangerous adventures in remote parts of the world, fights with bloodthirsty natives and the hardly less bloodthirsty Nazi, and expeditions of every conceivable bounds to people more suited for it – namely tabloids and brainless adventurers. Indiana had to hold his tongue to keep from telling him what he thought about Grisswald and his ideals, and it was usually with a helpful jab to the ribs from Marcus that kept him from expressing it. Besides, his answers would probably have led to his immediate removal from the faculty, and quite presumably the territories of the United States of America. From those memorable conversations, Indy surmised that Grisswald was quite possibly his exact opposite. It wasn't enough that he already felt sick. Just seeing the dean's name made him feel even more so. Grisswald's colleagues, as well as most of his students, were nevertheless accustomed to not saying anything to cross the dean in his presence.

Grisswald was physically only a couple of years older than Indy, but it was a fossilized old man who had forgotten to die three hundred year ago inside the body. He would constantly tell Indy to grow up, and unfortunately his attitude was slowly spreading through the rest of the university. It was only a matter of time before it followed suit with the same attitude. The only reason Indiana was still there was because he had a circle of influential friends and a polished reputation as a man who gets things done. Even someone like Grisswald would think twice before quarreling openly with him. But sooner or later, the crusty bastard would figure out a way to knock him off balance and get

over on him. Perhaps it would be today. The two sentences scribbled on the piece of paper promised nothing good.

Indiana forced himself to stop thinking about Grisswald, then meticulously organized the papers on his desk and shoved them into the leather briefcase he always carried around. Earlier he had so longingly waited for the hour to end, but now he wasn't in such a hurry to leave his classroom. He considered coming up with some excuse to avoid the meeting with Grisswald, but finally rejected the idea. However improbable, it was possible that the man would deliver some good news for a change – for example he might say he had fallen incurably ill with tuberculosis; or that he had been wrong all this time about professors fond of adventure, and now he would whole-heartedly support Indy's extra-curricular activities; or maybe he had a rich aunt in Europe who had died and left her entire fortune to him so he wouldn't have to work at this or any other university again.

Finally Indy dragged himself from the classroom, through the door and made the right turn to the stairwell which would lead to Grisswald's lair. He was so preoccupied with thoughts about what Grisswald might blame him for today that he almost collided with a slim female figure coming down the stairs. He stopped at the last moment, and his fair haired opposite bounced back, frightened. She would have lost her balance had Indy not dropped his briefcase and caught her, allowing her to regain her balance. Indy glanced back and saw that his briefcase had opened, spilling its contents all over the lower third of the staircase. He shook his head and glanced back at the woman, and it was only then that he recognized who she was.

"Marian!" Indy called, surprised. They both smiled pleasantly at each other, but her smile quickly faded. His died just as quickly when he saw the expression that had overcome Marian Corda's face. She looked back up and forced a grin. He could tell she was trying to hide her true feelings. It was almost like she was scared or something, and there was a hint of pain.

"What's wrong?" he asked sincerely.

"Nothing," Marian hastily answered, and she smiled again. But this time Indiana saw the tears shimmering at the corners of

her eyes. Before he could say anything, Marian quickly pulled away from him and looked guiltily at the mess of papers and pens strewn about the stairwell.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” she said. “Wait – I’ll help you pick it up.” She pushed by Indy and stooped to pick up the briefcase, but Indy grabbed her gently by the shoulders and pulled her back up. He had known Marian Corda for more than ten years, since the day her husband had arrived at the university with her. He had known Stanley Corda for the same amount of time. They were colleagues and taught many of the same subjects. However, one thing separated Stan and Marian Corda: Indy liked Marian, and did not care at all for her husband.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

Marian tried to push his hand away again. But he held it tight this time. “Nothing,” she said. “I was just thinking. I am so sorry...”

She wanted to wrest herself away from him again, and she felt he was using a little more pressure to hold on. Reluctantly, Indy released her and watched silently for a moment. He watched as she picked the sheets of paper up off the stairs and hastily placed them into his briefcase.

“Is it Stan?” Indy pressed.

Marian stopped in the middle of the task, holding a few sheets of paper and the briefcase in her hands. She did not look up at him, but Indy could see her shoulders begin tremble.

He cautiously glided down next to her and squatted. He took the briefcase from her and sat it on the floor next to them, then gently touched her shoulders. He looked at her face. Marian Corda was five years older than him, but she easily looked at least that much younger. She was a very beautiful woman. When Indy had first met her, he and many others had been a little envious of her husband. Because of Stan she had led a tough life, and he was sometimes bitter and cruel to her. However it had not destroyed her beauty. But she acted differently now. The problem, Indy thought, was that a woman like Marian deserved a better life, and a better man.

“Yes,” she said, finally turning to look at Indy. He could see she was fighting back tears.

“Is there anything I can do?” he asked.

“No”, she answered. “It’s no big deal. We just had a little fight.” She reached for his briefcase again. She stopped short, then stood up and made two fast steps past Indiana down the stairs. Suddenly she stopped and looked back. “Do you know where he is?”

“Stanley?” Indiana shook his head. “I haven’t seen him today.” He pulled out his watch and flipped open the lid. “Did you check his class room? He should be there. His lecture starts in ten minutes.”

Marian nodded. “Yes, I checked half an hour ago. He usually comes in very early to get prepared. Perhaps...” she shook her head. “I’d better go.”

“And you’re sure there isn’t anything I can do?” He was a little embarrassed by his question. Any of his colleagues say you should never get involved in other people’s marital affairs. They should be of no concern to him or anyone else except a man and his wife. They were guarded and private matters. But a deep friendship had formed between Marian and Indy since that first day they met, and he knew she wouldn’t mistake the intent of his question. For a moment she looked at him sadly. He almost expected that she would accept his offer and tell him everything that had happened. But then she shook her head and forced a sad smile.

“No. It was just the same old stuff.” With that answer, she turned around and ran quickly down the steps.

Indiana started to go after her, but stopped himself. He watched her disappear at the end of the corridor. The sight left him feeling a mixture of sadness and anger. It was easy to see that what had happened between Marian and Stan was more than a small quarrel. Marian seldom came to the university, and she had more seldom felt everything looked right between her and Stan. She thought it was her fault for things not being right between her and her husband. This was, Indy knew, complete nonsense. And this was one of the reasons Indy didn’t particularly like her husband. Corda was a man who would mercilessly prey on the weaknesses of those around him. And he didn’t make exceptions when it came to his own wife in that matter.

Indy sighed. He vowed that the next time he saw his colleague, he would have to sit down and have a long serious talk with him. He had told himself that at last a hundred times before over the course of the last ten years. He had never followed through, however. Not even a single time. And he probably wouldn't do it this time. He spent the next five minutes gathering up the rest of the contents of the briefcase off the stairs. After which, he continued on his way to Grisswald's office.

The conversation with Grisswald was turned out to be just as unproductive as Indy had predicted. It once again proved that the dean had only called to scorn him and blame the failures of the rest of the faculty on Indy's teaching methods.

"Just so this doesn't drag on, Dr. Jones," Grisswald said with arrogance, flipping a small golden pendant through his perfectly manicured fingers, then dragging it in a trail across the top of the barren and plain desk in front of him. "I have taken the liberty to pull your file and have a look at it."

Indy was standing next to a chair across from the dean. Grisswald had not invited him to have a seat, and to avoid any confrontation Indy had decided to respect the dean in that matter. He had once made the mistake of sitting without being asked and the dean proceeded to go on and on about respecting other people's property and rights. So this time he would stand until he was asked to sit down.

"So?" Indiana asked, lifting his left eyebrow. He could see where this conversation was heading.

"So," Grisswald continued, glaring up at Indy like a grade-school teacher scrutinizing the worst of his students or a parent to a misbehaving child. "So this doesn't drag on, Dr. Jones," he repeated scornfully, "it seems that within the last four years you have taken excessive leaves of absences, totaling about eight months. And most of this time has been taken during active semesters at this university."

"I was busy," Indy declared defensively. "I was helping the government on two expeditions and performed two more for your predecessor."

"And I have not hidden the fact that I believe it was a serious mistake on my predecessor's behalf to allow you to commit such

flagrant violations of university policy,” sighed Grisswald. Jones started to say something, but the dean feigned it off with a wave of his hand. “I know what you are about to say, Dr. Jones: that you have done very important things for our country here, that those expeditions shed a positive light on the university here, that you have a lot of admirers in the public who keep us employed here. You have drawn a crowd to this university, I admit, and you have expanded our knowledge of ancient cultures and contributed some of our most valuable artifacts.” He shook his head and let out a deep sigh. “Nevertheless, you must understand this. I have a sworn duty to this university and the business of education. An assistant professor who spends more time in South African rain forests than at the university disrupts it entirely.”

“South American,” Indy corrected with a murmur.

Grisswald blinked and let the gold pendant he had been playing with drop to the desktop. “What?”

“South American,” Indy repeated, a little more loudly. “There aren’t any rain forests in South Africa.”

“Grisswald’s eyebrows shot up in sharp angles, betraying his agitation. They were so pointed it almost looked like someone had drawn them on using a ruler. A moment slipped by before his anger subsided. “Naturally,” Grisswald responded, a bit flustered. “That’s what I meant. You must excuse my slip of the tongue.”

“Naturally,” Indy responded, trying unsuccessfully to hide his sarcasm.

Aggravation flashed in Grisswald’s eyes again, but he kept control of his emotions. “Look, Dr. Jones, this isn’t personal. It’s nothing against you. But you simply disrupt the order of this university. What am I supposed to tell the students who come to me and complain because their lecture with the prestigious Dr. Jones has been cancelled again?”

“You’ve had complaints about this?” Indy inquired seriously. The room felt uncomfortably silent, and for a moment Grisswald avoided looking into Indiana’s eyes. Finally he answered. “Well, not so far, no, I’d like to say.” He was stammering because he had been called on his deception. “In reality, I’d be at a loss for words if it happened. What would I say? Your teacher is digging

up the foundation of the Pyramid of Cheops.” He saw Jones nodding, and realized the man did not see anything wrong with that answer. He quickly diverted the focus away from that subject. “Look, like I said, this has nothing to do with you personally. I know we’ve had our misunderstandings and differences in the past. But that has nothing to do with this right now. If you were an old friend, I’d sit here and tell you exactly the same thing.”

Indiana doubted anyone would call Grisswald a friend, much less an old friend. He kept this objection to what Grisswald was saying to himself.

“What exactly do you have in mind?” Indy asked.

This time Grisswald hesitated before answering. What he was about to say was obviously difficult. “We must find a solution to this matter, Dr. Jones,” he said with finality. Indy looked at the dean, who looked away.

“Look, if you are going to fire me, then hurry up and get it over with,” Indy said.

Grisswald suddenly looked up, eyes wide. “Good heavens, no,” he stammered. “Your professional competences are undisputed. I cannot afford to dismiss a man of your qualification without reason. But we should behave like sensible men and find a solution that suits everyone, but more importantly, this university. You see, it’s not your inclinations that run off on these adventures of yours.”

“What is it, then?” Indiana demanded.

Grisswald seemed a little embarrassed. “Something isn’t right between us,” he responded. “I know we have our differences, and you know it as well. But it’s more than that. Everyone at this university can see the tension between us. Something like that poisons the atmosphere we’re trying to create here and...”

“And you can’t afford to let that happen,” Indy interrupted with disdain. “I know.”

Grisswald looked at him with admonishment. “I’ll make the following suggestion, Dr. Jones: start with a vacation next week. At your leisure, take that time to think about your role at this university. Think about your future here. Then we’ll sit down a

week before the new semester begins and talk civilly with each other.”

Outraged Indy turned toward the door. Then he spun back to face the dean. “Well, I’m not sure if I’ll be there or not,” he spurted. “If, however, you want to advise me to look for another job, then just say so, Grisswald. But you better be able to give good reasons for it!”

Grisswald leaned back in his chair and sighed. He feigned sadness. “Well,” he said. “I was hoping the outcome of his conversation would have been different. But if you insist, I am sure every university in this country will accept you with open arms.”

Indiana stared furiously at Grisswald for a few seconds, but remained silent. Then he turned back around and stomped toward the door. Just as he reached out for the handle, Grisswald called to him once again.

“Dr. Jones!”

For a fraction of a second, Indy was inclined to ignore him, go on through the door, and slam it shut behind him. He knew Grisswald was being sarcastic about other university’s accepting him with open arms. His aggressive pursuit of knowledge and ancient artifacts had left other prestigious colleagues behind, and some of them still harbored a little animosity at his success. Any of them had gone on to management at some of those universities, and Grisswald knew this. Reluctantly, he forced himself to stop and turn to face the man. “Yes?”

“There is one other thing,” Grisswald said, almost like he knew a secret he was revealing.

Indy stood where he was, looking at Grisswald. However, Grisswald simply stared curiously at the pendant he had picked back up off the desk. His refusal to elaborate brought Indy back to the front of the desk. Grisswald looked up and pushed the little golden piece of jewelry he had been fiddling with across to Indy. “Have you seen this before?”

Indy took it and turned it curiously in his fingers. What he had earlier thought was a golden pendant was actually something else entirely. It was a tiny beetle made of solid gold. It had no holes or links to attach it to another piece of jewelry like a pendant

should have. And it was, by far, the most perfect imitation of a living creature which Indy had ever seen.

Indy shook his head, confused at this sudden questioning. “No, not at all. Why? What is this?”

Grisswald studied Indiana’s face for several seconds before answering, like he was looking for a certain response or expression. Then he shrugged his shoulders. He leaned forward and took the beetle out of Indy’s hands. “I would also like to know the answers to those questions,” he said. “I had hoped to get them from you.”

“I still don’t get it. Why, and where did it come from?”

“I don’t know those answers either,” answered Grisswald. “You see, someone dropped by for a visit this morning. Very early, I might add. It was a very unpleasant visit.”

Indy looked patiently at Grisswald, waiting for an explanation.

“It was in regards to this piece of jewelry,” Grisswald continued after a long uncomfortable break. “Well, this piece and a few others. It seems they were stolen.”

“Stolen?”

Grisswald once again shrugged his shoulders. “Anyway, I accepted this piece so I could ascertain its origins. I wanted to explain this to the police, should they ask.”

Jones still did not comprehend. He rubbed his chin and paced over to the chair across from Grisswald, where he sat down. Then he leaned back absently on its two hind legs, waiting for Grisswald to finish.

First Grisswald stared at the chair, then looked back to Indy, who appeared not to notice the scornful stare from the dean. He looked at the leaning chair again, but Jones still did not seem to notice. He finally dismissed it as another display of Jones’s arrogance. He shook his head and continued. “Unfortunately, I have gotten nothing concrete from the officials. Only that several items such as this have appeared on the black market here in town within the last few weeks. Now why would the police pick out our university out of the rest for their inquiry?”

Indy shrugged honestly.

“Look,” Grisswald said, his voice rising a bit. “I know that it has to be a member of this faculty selling them. And you either cannot or will not tell me who that person is.”

“It’s not against the law to sell gold,” Indy said.

Grisswald apparently agreed with Indy for once. As long as it was sold through legal channels.

“But apparently that isn’t the case here, or the police would not be involved,” Grisswald explained angrily. “They would not have been so kind as to pay us a visit here at the university if this were a legal operation. I intend to find out which one of my employees would know the true value of these pieces and would be willing to profit from it.”

It took several seconds for Indy to realize what the dean was getting at. Then it finally dawned on him. Indy’s face darkened and he shot forward in the chair. “I see, now, dean,” he pressed. “Somebody here at the university is stealing or embezzling valuable artifacts...and you, of course, think it’s me!”

Grisswald was visibly shaken by the sudden anger in Indy’s voice. He did not respond.

“Hate to disappoint you, Grisswald,” Indy continued. “Since you’ve been here I admit I haven’t had very much fun. But I still earn enough to keep me from stealing.” His voice grew even sharper when Grisswald tried to interrupt. “Besides, if it were me, I’d be smart enough not to sell it here in town. I’m not that stupid. It’s a sure way to get caught.”

“That’s not what I meant, Dr. Jones,” Grisswald started. But Indiana wasn’t listening anymore. He stood up instantly, knocking the chair backwards until it fell over with a loud crash. It sounded like it had cracked, but Indy didn’t care. He turned and stormed out of the office. He could hear Grisswald pleading at him to listen when he slammed the door.

It slammed so intensely behind him that it had to have been heard three stories below.

Indiana left the campus ten minutes later, still boiling with anger. He strode across the street with lengthy steps. If it weren’t for such fond memories of his tenure and good friends here at the university, he not only would have slammed the door to

Grisswald's office but he would have grabbed his desk and knocked it over, then told the man what he really thought of him. He wondered which vindictive god he had angered over the course of his adventures that they would send a repulsive creep like Grisswald to ruin his life.

When he reached the other side of the street, he turned to his right, then immediately changed his mind and turned in the opposite direction. He couldn't go home now. He needed a coffee, or better yet a nice glass of whiskey to calm him down. So he steered toward a little café the students used as a meeting place. It was already busy at this early hour. Most of the tables were full and there were no more seats at the bar. But Dr. Jones was well-known here, and it didn't take long for a waiter to appear and lead him to a small table next to the window. He sat down and ordered a coffee and a bourbon. He averted the gaze of numerous snickering students when they heard what he had ordered.

A strange, almost melancholy, feeling overwhelmed him as he looked at the university on the other side of the street. He had been there so long he couldn't imagine teaching at any other town or university. The university was more than a time-honored building made of red bricks to him. It was a place of exciting adventures: in the university's dusty archives awaited millions of mysteries to solve and adventures to be had, thousands of books in endless rows of its library, lecture rooms full of enthusiastic students seeking knowledge of ancient cultures and civilizations. The thought that a whiner like Grisswald could take this all away from him made him furious. But Grisswald was sure to win in the end.

The Grisswald's of the world always managed to somehow get their way.

The waiter arrived with the coffee and bourbon. Indiana poured some of the bourbon in his coffee with a trained eye, and then stirred them together unenthusiastically. The whiskey burned his throat and left a warm trace as it made its way from his gullet to his stomach. But instead of the calming effect he had expected, it worked in the opposite. His hands trembled more strongly than before. His anger at Grisswald grew even more

intense. For a moment, he played with the idea of going back to Grisswald's office and finishing the conversation he had started with the dean, telling him exactly what he deserved.

It was at this instant when Marian Corda stepped out of the building and crossed the street without even bothering to look right or left before crossing. She was walking very fast, and even from this distance Indy could tell she bothered by something. Her movements were tense and unnatural, a stark contrast to her normal attitude. Apparently he wasn't the only one who was having a bad day.

When Marian reached the opposite side of the street, a car suddenly halted directly behind her. Marian looked back over her shoulder at the car and was visibly startled—she turned to the right at once and sped up her pace. At the same moment, two of the car doors opened and men in custom-made suits and bright hats stepped out and followed her. They didn't run, but they were walking a little too fast for normal. Indiana would have dismissed them had it not been for their unnatural haste. As Marian sped up, so did the two suits. Indiana looked a little more attentively. What was going on?

Indiana's somberness was suddenly gone, replaced by intense stress. He forgot Grisswald and the unpleasant conversation immediately, and jumped to his feet. He left the café quickly, without paying his tab; he knew he could pay it later. Marian had already reached the corner of the block and turned abruptly to the right. She was walking very fast, casting quick and anxious looks over her shoulder at the two men following her. She sped up again when she turned down an alley, and was almost running at this point. The two suits sped up as well.

When the suits turned the corner after Marian and could no longer see him, Indy started running. He had bridged the distance from Marian's pursuers drastically by the time he turned the corner to the alley. He dropped his speed back to normal.

"Mrs. Corda!" One of the suits called.

Marian turned towards her pursuers when she heard her name called by one of them. She was visibly frightened, and stumbled, almost falling. She grabbed the wall nearby and stabilized herself

at the last moment. But her stumble allowed the men to catch up to her.

“Mrs. Corda, wait!” the bigger of the two pursuers said. “Stop this nonsense. We only want to ask you a couple of questions.” Marian looked around like a poor cornered animal. There was no way for her to escape. One of her pursuers stood directly in front of her while the taller man positioned himself at the entranceway to the street and turned to watch his partner and Marian.

Indiana stopped at the window of a business at the end of the street near the alley and the second suit. He stared into the window as if shopping, but he was actually looking at the reflection to monitor the events behind him. He listened attentively at the conversation in the alleyway.

“Leave me alone!” Marian said. Her voice trembled with fear.

“I’ve already told you I don’t know anything.”

“Yes you have, but we would rather be sure,” the other suit continued. He reached for Marian’s elbow, but she quickly pulled her arm back and pressed herself against the wall behind her.

“You leave me alone!” she yelled once again.

Indiana turned and strolled leisurely toward the alley, putting his hands into his coat pockets. He slowly made his way behind the taller of the two men blocking the alleyway.

“You will come with us now,” continued the man next to Marian, “It is—“

“Apparently you didn’t understand what the lady said,” Indy interrupted.

The taller man spun around and looked at Indiana with a mixture of anger and surprise. His face was long and thin with a scar that ran down his left cheek. His cold eyes scanned Indiana with a quick look, and he quickly classified him as harmless. “Disappear!” he said roughly.

Indiana didn’t disappear. Instead he smiled at him for a second, and then scrutinized the other man near Marian – he was the exact opposite of the one next to Indiana. He was short, stocky and almost fat. His face was doughy and unhealthily colored and his hands were populated with short stubby fingers.

Indiana then said “I think it is better if you disappear. And take your friend here along, before I call the police.”

The man looked at his friend in astonishment. Before he could answer, the thick man spun and hurriedly came toward Indiana, nearly running into him. He was standing next to the tall man in a matter of seconds. “Last chance, friend. Leave, or —“

“Or --” Indiana said, letting the rest of the sentence hang thickly in the air as an unspoken threat. He smiled again, and pulled his hands slowly out of his jacket pockets. He took off his thin gold-rimmed glasses and dropped them into his breast pocket. In the same movement he loosened the knot of his tie and ran his fingers through his hair. As tiny as these changes were, they had an astonishing effect. Until this moment, the two men had assumed Indiana was a simple university employee. Now he had transformed into someone more dangerous. The shorter of the two seemed to sense this, as his eyes suddenly became thin and cautious, interfering with the condescending look on his face.

“Leave the lady alone,” Indiana said once again. His voice had changed just as his smile disappeared.

“Enough!” The thick man said. “Take off, or we break your legs!” The man put his hand under his jacket. But Indiana was not going to give him a chance to pull out whatever weapon he was reaching for. Without warning, Indy balled up his fist and struck the man squarely under the chin with a mighty blow.

The blow was so hard that he groaned with pain. The thick man’s eyes rolled back in his head and he fell to the ground like the proverbial wet bag. Meanwhile Indy spun with a flash and grabbed the other man’s custom-made suit jacket. He yanked the man’s upper body with a sudden hard jerk forward and down simultaneously. Indiana lifted his knee and sank it crunching into the ribs of the man. He could hear the air whistle at it escaped his lungs.

The tall man was not beaten, however. Although he could hardly breathe and was curled over in pain, he fired a punch toward Indiana’s face. He missed by a hair’s breadth. He drove back away from his opponent, swinging with his left hand and reaching into his jacket with his right. Just like before, it did not take a lot of imagination to guess what he was reaching for. Indiana, however, did not give him a chance to draw his weapon. He accepted one of the punches and jumped at the tall man,

hammering him with punches, three, then four times into the body at the specific place where his knee had met him. This pounding was even too much for the giant man to take. Moaning, he staggered backwards. Indiana shoved him at the same time, and the man fell. He spun at the same time and intercepted the fall with his extended arms at the wall, barely a yard from Marian. He was inclined at a grotesque angle, and Indiana couldn't resist. He kicked the man's legs out from under him and sent the goon crashing face first into the rough brick wall, scratching away the skin on his face as he sank to the ground. Indiana didn't wait to find out if they had given up the attack. Without a word he leaped over the man and grabbed Marian by the wrist, dragging her down the street behind him. She yelled out with fright and tried instinctively to tear herself away, but Indiana held her arm with an iron grip. She was coming along whether she wanted to or not.

They reached the next bend in the street, and Indiana turned to the right. Without slowing, they continued down the street until Indiana caught sight of something out of the corner of his eye. Lady Luck must be on their side, because there at the roadside was a taxi with its engine running. A passenger had just stepped out of the back and paid the driver.

Just as the passenger received his change, Indiana hastily opened up the back door and pushed Marian inside, then jumped in after her. He slammed the door and looked back in the direction they had come from. There was still no sign of their two pursuers. But it would not remain that way for long. Indiana knew men like these two well enough. It was pure chance he had been able to pull off what had just happened. Quite obviously the two men had underestimated the situation. They would not make the same mistake twice.

The man who had just exited the taxi stood there stiffly, his upper body still bent inside the vehicle with his hand still extended, holding his change. He alternated his amazed look between Indiana and Marian. The driver stared dumfounded at the two, and then anger darkened his face. "Hey! What's this? No more passengers. Shift's over!"

Once again Indiana looked back. He saw the two goons appear behind them, swaying next to each other and quickly moving toward them from the end of the street. "Drive!" he yelled.

The taxi driver shook his head stubbornly. "Can't you hear, man? It's quitting time. My shift is over!"

"I'm talking to you!" Indiana said. He looked back hastily and saw the two men were only twenty or thirty steps away at the most. And they were closing in very fast. The face of the tall sinister one changed dramatically when he saw them in the back of the taxi. He was holding his mouth and nose with his left hand and was waving a revolver at them in his right.

"For God's sake! Drive!" Indiana yelled a third time. He added inspiration by lying: "That man is her husband and his brother. Those two will kill us if they catch us!"

It worked. The driver stared at the two killers through the mirror for a second, then suddenly slammed his foot against the accelerator and drove off so abruptly that Indiana and Marian were flung back into the cushions. The previous passenger just barely tore his head and body out of the car. He yanked his hand free just in time, sending the change he was holding through the air and raining down in the passenger's seat and at the driver's feet.

Indiana pushed himself out of the cushion and looked back through the rear window. The two men had stopped in their tracks. The little stubby man stared furiously after the car, shaking his hand threateningly in the air. The other man followed after them for a few steps, waving his pistol after them. But he didn't dare shoot at the car. Not on an open street in broad daylight. This wasn't the Wild West, after all.

Some seconds later they reached the next intersection. The driver sped up, the car lurching from side to side and the tires squealing around the curves. Indiana was thrown awkwardly into Marian. He caught himself and smiled at her apologetically.

She didn't seem to have noticed. Her face was pale and ghostly, and her lips trembled with fear. Tears glittered in her eyes, and she seemed to be using her very last bit of strength to control herself.

“You don’t have to say anything.” Indiana said quietly. “It’s late.”

“Man!” the taxi driver said suddenly. “That was damned scary! Those two looked really dangerous!”

Indiana sat up and smoothed out his hair, then rummaged through his suit pocket for his glasses. “They are,” he answered after putting the glasses back on. He had quickly changed back into the inconspicuous university professor. “Believe me, they are very unpleasant people. I hate violence and people with violent tendencies. It is primitive and not worthy of a gentleman.”

The taxi driver cast a crooked look at him through the rear view mirror and remained silent.

“I tried talking to them like a civilized person,” Indiana continued. “But it was useless. After I introduced myself those two wanted to beat me senseless.”

“Which one?” the taxi driver said. He made a slight head movement toward Marian. “Her husband or her brother-in-law?” Indiana smiled embarrassingly. “Well, it’s not exactly her husband. More like a fiancé, if you will.” He grimaced. “The whole story is really unpleasant. We’re really thankful for your help,” he changed the subject quickly.

“Ah,” the taxi driver answered. “Where are we going?” Indiana gave his address.

“Do those two know where you live?” the taxi driver asked. “I know it’s none of my business, but you could be in a lot of trouble if they show up.” The mixed undertone from his voice had vanished, and he looked at Indiana almost with pity. It was very important for Indiana that this man thought of him as a poor sap being hunted by an angry husband than having some underworld killers on his heels.

“They have no idea,” Indiana said. “Plus, they wouldn’t dare break into my house. Some things are still sacred in this country.” The cab driver sighed and abstained from further comment.

Indiana paid him, then walked around the car and helped Marian get out; he did it in such a rigid and timid manner the cab driver tried to hold back his laughter as he watched the awkward, stilted manner. Marian played along perfectly, more from the fact that she was still shaken by the occurrences of the last few minutes

than anything else. She stared blankly like a weak-willed child who was still trying to grasp what had just happened to them. He led her through the unkept front yard of his house. He looked around all sides before stepping up to the door. The road was empty except for the taxi. The driver nodded and waved as he took off down the street, tires squealing.

After Indiana and Marian entered the house, he put the chain lock on the door, something he did not normally do. He led Marian into the living room. The room's appearance was what you would expect of a bachelor's living room: very disorganized and chaotic. The table near the couch was covered haphazardly with stuff: a quarter-filled bottle of whiskey, two glasses, a mountain of books, parchments, folders, photographs and drawings. Indiana was suddenly embarrassed by the mess. But in her current mood Marian was oblivious to the clutter.

Indy led her to the couch and gently pushed her to sit her down. She sat without resistance, but she was unable to hold back her tears any longer. She cried silently but intensely, and Indiana suddenly felt awkward like a school boy.

"Is everything all right?" he asked.

Marian didn't answer and Indiana realized that out of all the years of knowing her, this was probably the most stupid question he'd ever asked. He shrugged embarrassingly and looked at her silently for a moment, then turned and made his way into the kitchen where he started preparing coffee for the both of them.

He felt deeply confused by the events of the last several minutes, and at the same time he was furious with himself for not being able to do more for Marian. He put it to the back of his mind while he fished through the dishes in the sink for two clean cups and saucers, and looked for the coffee can. He felt a little guilty for leaving Marian in the living room alone and not comforting her, but an inner voice told him it was the right thing to do. He had known her for a long time and realized that she wanted to be alone right now.

After brewing for about ten minutes, Indiana brought the coffee out on a tray. Indiana went into the study and returned with a half of a package of salt crackers he had left there the night before. Marian sat upright and wiped the tears from her pale face.

She reached for the coffee with trembling fingers, and after a few sips seemed to calm a bit.

Indiana sat down in a chair across from her. He took a drink of the hot coffee from the cup he had made for himself. After several seconds of silence, he tried speaking to her again.

“What’s going on?” he asked.

Marian remained silent and tried to avoid his look.

He put the coffee down and looked at his ankle, which he had suddenly realized was hurting. It was swollen from the fight earlier, probably from kicking one of the men who was chasing them, or maybe he twisted it while they were running. Either way, he looked up at her with an almost melancholy smile. “They were definitely after something, and they weren’t looking for me,” he said.

“I don’t know who those two were,” Marian claimed. “And I have no idea what they wanted with me.”

Indiana sighed. “Look, I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what is going on.”

“Marian bit her lower lip and shook her head. “I don’t want to get you involved in this,” she said quietly.

“I think I’m already in the middle of it,” Indiana returned quietly. “Don’t think you’ve drug me into this. I accept it and whatever winds may blow because of it.”

Marian smiled against her will. But it disappeared quickly and the sadness returned to her eyes. “I’m very grateful for your help, but this is bad,” she said. “I should be going.”

She started to stand but Indiana leaned over and grabbed her arm and gently pushed her back down to the couch. “You’re not going anywhere until you tell me what is the matter,” he said to her.

A forced expression spread across Marian’s face. “Please, Indiana,” she said. “I’ve told you the truth. I have no idea who these men are. I spoke to one of them briefly on the phone this morning, but that is all. I have never seen them before. But I think they are dangerous, and I don’t want to put you in danger, too.”

“Look, I’m involved in this now,” he said, making a gesture when Marian wanted to say something. “And I don’t mind. You’re the one that is still in danger.”

Marian looked at him in silence.

“Listen to me,” he continued. “We’ve known each other for ten years, and we’ve been good friends. You should know me well enough to know that I won’t let down a friend. So tell me what’s the matter. Don’t keep it from me. It has to do with Stanley, doesn’t it?”

Marian winced, and Indiana knew instantly he had hit the bull’s eye.

“What’s he gotten himself into?” Indiana asked. “Did he cross someone? Dig into the wrong grave and take something valuable?”

Marian was visibly shaken. What he said had hit her hard.

Her eyes got big, and Indiana had trouble suppressing a bitter laugh.

“Look, for years I’ve known your husband, and he isn’t exactly a gem in our profession. He’s taken things for himself that should have been turned over to a museum, and he’s crossed a number of questionable people.”

“Why did you never say anything?” she asked.

Indiana shook his head. “Because that is Stan’s business, and he has to deal with that himself, and nobody else.”

“Nobody else?” Marian questioned sarcastically.

“I warned him,” Indiana continued. “Of course he denied it when I questioned him about his actions. But I thought he had taken what I said to heart. At least until half an hour ago.”

What he said was close to the truth. He warned about his unethical behavior on numerous occasions. But the reason he hadn’t spoken with the dean of the university or some other prosecutor wasn’t to keep Stan out of trouble. It was to protect the person sitting on the couch across from him, and her name was Marian, not Stan Corda. It had been his only consideration in sparing Stan Corda until now.

“I don’t know,” Marian said finally. “What goes around comes around, I guess.” She looked up into his eyes truthfully.

“Indy, Stan has changed.”

“I know,” he nodded. “He’s not the man he used to be. Not the man you married. But in a way, I don’t think he was ever truly the person you thought him to be.”

“I don’t mean that,” she responded. “This has nothing to do with us. I don’t know what is going on with him. Since he returned from his last journey, he stays locked in his study. He hardly talks to me and is constantly buried in his research. I haven’t been in for three months. He involved in something.”

“Involved in what?”

“I’m not exactly sure,” replied Marian. “But I’m worried about him, Indy. It must have something to do with his last journey. Whatever it was he found or discovered has changed him. He doesn’t make any sense when he talks about it. And he meets secretly with strange people. Weird people.”

“What do you mean?” Indiana asked with concern.

Marian shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. I’ve seen him meeting with them a couple of times, on accident. Stan was furious at me when he found out.”

“Men like those two earlier?”

Marian shook her head. “Not exactly. Shady types, and he gives them money. A lot of money.” She stopped for a moment, and then looked intently at Indiana. “I was at the bank this morning to withdraw some money. But our account is completely empty. Stanley has withdrawn everything, down to the last dollar. That’s why I was at the university earlier. I wanted to ask him about it.”

“And what did he say?” Indy asked with genuine concern in his voice.

“He wasn’t there,” Marian said. “I was told he never showed up for work. He left the house this morning like he always does. But he never made it to the university.”

“And you’re worried something has happened to him,” Indiana suspected. He thought for a moment. “You said you spoke to these men on the phone. What exactly did they want from you?”

Marian made a helpless gesture. “They asked a lot of questions. But I had no idea what they were talking about. They asked for something Stanley had, a card, and said they would take it by force if I didn’t hand it over. But I can’t give it to them because I don’t know where it is. I don’t even know what they are talking about.”

“Have you checked Stan’s study?”

“Marian shook her head. “It’s locked, and Stan has the only key.”

“You should go to the police,” Indiana said seriously. “I’d suggest you do it immediately. Those two that followed you didn’t look like two boys out for a little fun.”

“The police?” Marian’s voice almost got shrill.

“It would be the best thing to do right now,” Indiana said, trying to calm her down. “You shouldn’t play around with men who have no problem waving around pistols in public.”

“But what would I say to them?” asked Marian. “That my husband has changed? That he meets with shady people and offers to sell them cards? It’s not exactly against the law.”

“What matters is the shady people he is meeting and what kind of cards he’s selling,” Indiana answered, but he understood her dilemma and why she didn’t want to involve the police. Despite everything that happened, Stanley was still her husband. “What if I talk to your Stan?” Indiana asked. “If you want, I can escort you back to your house and see why he has locked himself in his study for the last three months.”

“But the door. It is locked.”

Indiana smiled briefly. “They haven’t designed the lock that can keep me out yet.”

“That’s very kind of you, Indy” Marian said. “But I don’t want to get you involved any more deeply than you already are. You have enough trouble because of me.”

Indy stared at her with a penetrating gaze. Up until now, he had believed everything Marian had told him was the truth. But suddenly, he had the strange feeling that she was still hiding something.

“Indiana, I am leaving now,” she suddenly said, as if she sensed his sudden uneasiness.

“The devil you will,” he answered immediately. “You’re not leaving this house without me. I will make sure to get you safely home first. Those two men that were chasing you don’t know where I live, but I’m pretty sure they know where you live. Would you like to meet them again?”

Marian went a little pale again. Then Indiana continued after letting his words sink in: “I don’t agree with you about the police. But that is your decision, and I will respect it. But you must accept my help whether you want it or not.”

Stan and Marian Corda’s house was almost at the opposite end of town. The area was filled with properties that ran three times higher than Indiana and the rest of the university’s faculty could afford, which attested to some of Stan’s less than honorable dealings. The house tried to appear modest, but did not do a very good job. The front lawn, unlike Indiana’s, was the size of a small park. The house was freshly painted, and much more lavish than the shack they resided in ten years ago. An old rusted Ford sat next to the double garage, which housed Stan’s German noble car and Marian’s Buick. There was definitely a difference in lifestyles between Stan Corda and myself, Indiana thought sarcastically as he approached the front door with Marian. It just doesn’t pay to be honest, he noticed, not for the first time. He wondered why nobody at the university had ever questioned how Corda could lead a life like this. Indiana Jones seemed to be the only one that knew how Stan had afforded to live this way. Maybe it was because Stan never talked about money issues with anyone at the university. He may be a thief, but he was definitely no blockhead. Perhaps that’s why he had never raised the suspicions of his peers. He designed his story well. When asked about the house, he had said it was from years of savings and from a healthy inheritance from a relative who had passed away. Indiana stopped on the steps to the front door and looked around attentively as Marian fumbled through her purse for the key to open the door. He saw no trace of the black Ford the two men had driven to the front of the university earlier. But those guys weren’t stupid. He was sure they would return here for Marian sooner or later.

“What’s the matter?” he asked Marian as her forehead wrinkled while she looked for the key. Her actions were becoming more hectic, frantic.

“Marian sighed aloud. “I left the key in the car! I’m such a dimwit!”

Indiana looked at her questioningly.

“The car is still on the street at the university.”

Realization crossed his face.

She smiled nervously. “It was just too much. I couldn’t think straight. I...”

She finished her sentence with a yelp as she leaned her shoulder against the door while she spoke with Indiana. She almost fell as the door swung open under her weight, catching her balance at the last second.

Indiana was about to say something sarcastic about her not locking up, but restrained when he saw that Marian had not simply forgotten to shut the door completely when she had left for the university. The doorframe had been busted apart with something, probably a crowbar.

Indiana put his fingers to his lips to quieten her when he saw Marian was about to say something. He moved quickly past her into the darkness of the living room, holding his breath so he could hear any sounds that might be coming from inside.

He heard nothing but Marian breathing heavily behind him. Although it was daytime outside, the curtains were closed, casting an unnatural gloom throughout the room. The furniture was nothing more than formless outlines in the dim light, and shadows danced from the breeze coming through the now-open doorway as the curtains fluttered. He felt pretty confident, however that this room was empty of other people.

“Stay here and don’t make a sound,” he turned to her and said quietly. “Unless you’re sure it’s me or Stan, go immediately to the police if anyone else shows up here or you hear anything suspicious.”

He didn’t wait for Marian’s answer. He carefully crept on his tip toes toward the adjacent room which was the kitchen.

Although no one else was inside, the room was completely devastated: somebody had torn through all the drawers and cabinets and dumped their contents onto the ground. The table and chairs had been overturned, and the cupboards swung open and tipped to the side, revealing the stone masonry behind. But there was nobody here.

After several minutes of searching, he realized there was no one else in the house. However all of the rooms had been ransacked. Every drawer and every cupboard had been dumped to the ground, every cabinet open and contents scattered all over the floor. Every chest had been thoroughly examined. The house had been picked through thoroughly and leisurely from the basement to the attic. To be more precise, it looked like it was done by a professional, someone who had picked the perfect time where he wouldn't have to rush hastily to finish. Whoever had caused all of the disorder was no longer anywhere in sight.

Marian had pulled back the curtains and saw the devastation. Every piece of pottery and porcelain they owned was now shattered all over the floor.

Indiana tried to lighten her somber mood. "And I was worried about bringing you to my place," he joked. "If I were you, I'd fire the maid."

"What happened here?" Marian breathed, aghast. "Who could have done this?"

"Probably the same goons who called you this morning," he replied seriously.

Marian looked up. Her eyes were wide with fear. "You think it's the same two from the university?" She asked.

Indiana didn't answer immediately. Whoever had done this had done so slowly and thoroughly. The two from the university probably wouldn't have had the time. He shrugged his shoulders and returned to the front door and pushed it closed. It swung back open immediately, however, since it had no lock to catch anymore.

"Stanley," Marian mumbled, realizing he was probably in danger. "I have to call Stan!" She rushed over to the table near the window where the phone usually rested... She picked the phone up from the floor next to the overturned table and dialed the first three numbers to the university. Then she dropped the receiver to the ground again, where it fell in a pot of flowers. "But I don't know where he is," she said, more to herself.

"Look. You should call the police," Indiana said.

"Marian shook her head in a frightened manner. "The men on the phone this morning said no police."

Indiana didn't argue with her. Whether her reasoning was sensible or not was unimportant. The most important thing to do at the moment was to calm her down. He could tell her strength was almost at an end. He stepped up behind her and placed his hands on her shoulders and gently squeezed, trying to comfort her. Marian trembled under his grasp. He saw tears shimmering in her eyes again, but she held them back.

"Okay," Indiana said softly. "Whatever you say. But if you won't call the police, then you have to let me help you. We'll go upstairs to Stan's study together and look around a little. Maybe whoever did this missed something."

Marian gave an almost imperceptible nod. It looked as though she wanted to say something, but no sound came from her trembling lips. She swallowed with difficulty a few times. The she gave a slight head movement toward the stairs.

Indiana didn't really expect to find anything important upstairs. If whatever the burglars had been searching for had been there, they had most assuredly found it and left a long time ago. But maybe they had left some notes or papers that would shed a little light on this mystery.

"At least Stan can't accuse of picking the lock," Indiana said jokingly as they approached the study. The door was opened and, like the front door, the lock smashed apart with a crowbar. The room was just as chaotic as the rest of the house. Hundreds, if not thousands of books, which had, until this morning, rested on the now overturned bookshelves that lined the walls of the study. Now they were scattered along the floor with the contents of Stanley's desk. Also scattered on the floor were countless sheets of paper written in Stan's almost illegible handwriting: notes, maps, pages, torn notebooks, etc. Containers with screw on lids lay scattered about, the contents of which had been searched thoroughly: small pieces of broken statues and pottery from Stanley's numerous expeditions to South America, a silver picture frame whose glass had been shattered and the photo inside torn out, as if someone had been looking for something behind it – and a small silver casket-like container whose lid was covered with silver and ruby fragments. Astonished, he reached down and picked it up. He opened the lid and was even more

confused when he saw that its contents were undisturbed. It contained the most beautiful pieces from Stanley's ancient coin collections. They were small but exquisite. The casket alone would bring a thousand dollars on the black market, and the coins inside were worth at least triple that. But the burglars had discarded it to the side without a thought.

"Well, at least we know they weren't looking for valuables," he said, placing the container and the coins back on Stan's desk. After a slight hesitation, he stood back up, immediately forgetting about the casket and its contents. Indiana looked back at Marian.

Marian saw him staring. "What is it?" She asked.

"I don't know," Indiana replied. He seized Marian by the arm and gazed at her with a penetrating stare. "Please, Marian. Think. Stan must have said something. A remark that seemed out of place: a clue, a hint. Anything."

She shook her head. "I told you! He hardly spoke to me!" She paused, and then looked away, avoiding his glare, as if something crept into her memory.

"What is it?" Indiana asked.

"He made a remark, once," she said after a short silence. "I didn't know what he was talking about. It didn't mean anything."

"What exactly did he say?"

"I don't remember, exactly," she replied. "He was reading a book, you know, and then he started laughing hysterically. I remember it wasn't a book that should have caused that type of reaction. He made the comment about what kind of fools the Spaniards were."

"Why would he say that?"

"I don't know. And I didn't ask him, either. He wouldn't have answered me anyway." The last sentence she pushed out with a sadness in her voice, and Indiana resisted the urge to pry further. He knew he couldn't make her remember any more if she didn't want to. Nonetheless, he had one more question for her.

"Do you remember which book it was?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, but he placed it in the bookcase next to the window, on the second or third shelf down." She pointed

at the now empty shelf where she had seen him put it. The bookcase's contents were now spread all over the floor.

Indiana sighed, disappointed. For a second he glanced at the giant heap of books on the floor in front of the empty shelf. He thought about rummaging through them, but he knew it would be useless. Stanley, like himself and most of his colleagues, had a very methodical way of organizing their books. It would be completely senseless to look for a specific book in this chaos. Besides, Marian probably would not recognize it if she held it in her own hands. The subject of the book would have been South American history before and after the arrival of the Conquistadors – it was Stanley Corda's specialty. But there were literally hundreds of books on that subject here in this mess.

“Why don't you go down to the kitchen and see if you can dig up two cups that will still be usable?” He said to Marian. “I could use some coffee now. I keep looking around here for a bit. Maybe I'll find something that will help.”

Marian turned around without saying a word. Indiana watched until she had disappeared down the stairs. The coffee was just an excuse. He knew that she probably should be alone for a few minutes. Seeing the mess in Stan's study had visibly upset her even more, and she needed to deal with it somehow. Seeing the room and its contents destroyed like this probably filled her with tormenting thoughts on what Stan had been doing these past few months, and what might have happened to him now. She needed to get away.

After all, there was a chance he would find something. He didn't fully expect for a piece of paper to jump out at him with all the answers, but maybe Stan had written down something from his last trip to Bolivia since his return: a clue as to what he was working on. It wouldn't hurt to keep looking anyway. He was a scientist like Corda, after all. They had similar habits, and it might help him discover something.

Indiana turned his attention back to the mess in the room. He pushed the door too and peered at what was behind it. There wasn't much there, so he turned back to the mess in the room a second time. This time he looked more thoroughly. He looked underneath the boards on the bookcases and shelves, checking to

see if there was anything attached or taped to the bottom of them. He felt underneath the top of the desk. He felt behind the drawers in the desk, then took them out and examined the bottom surface of each one. He searched every hidden space he could think of: after all he's had his run ins with shady types and has learned a thing or two about hiding important items. But he decided the men who had done this were professionals who would have thought of all these things, so he started picking up Stan's notes and papers off the floor. He made three messy stacks on Stan's desk. He sorted through them, and nothing caught his eye that seemed important to the situation at hand. He looked at them with a shrug. Glancing through them probably would not yield any results, and going through them one by one would take months. Plus he had no idea what he was looking for. After quickly sorting through the three stacks, he looked around and there was still an alarmingly massive amount scattered about.

He had just turned the chair upright and sat down to take a breather when he heard the rattling of porcelain from downstairs. At first he heard Marian give a soft startled yelp, and then he heard cups shatter to the ground. He heard a voice besides Marian's but couldn't make out what was being said. He heard Marian say that whoever had spoken had frightened her. He hastily jumped to his feet and turned toward the door, but stopped in his tracks as he heard a man's voice.

Although Indiana couldn't make out what was being said, the tone from the man sounded threatening. He crept toward the door on his toes, and stopped, placing his ear on the door to hear a little clearer. Although he couldn't understand what was being said, he tried to orient the sounds to get a clearer picture of where they were exactly; he also wanted to know if the man was alone or not.

Marian's voice and the man she was speaking to became excited. He heard a crash and what followed sounded like a short fight. Then he heard a surprised yell, yet another struggle, then crack of gunfire. There was a painful groan as Indiana heard a heavy body fall to the floor.

Indiana threw caution to the wind and stormed out of the room. He pounced into the stairwell, but stopped two or three steps from the top.

He had been tricked. It was apparent that the men downstairs had known he was there. There were two of them, and one had placed himself quietly at the bottom of the staircase. He stood there with a double-barreled shotgun pointing up the staircase. The one next to Marian was a true giant of a man, with black hair and a scar that stretched along his face. Indiana stiffened with respect as he saw the man's bare muscular arms. The man's face was bare with no emotion. The one at the bottom of the stairs, although smaller, was no pip squeak. He grinned as he pointed the shotgun directly at Indiana.

"Hello," Indiana said awkwardly.

The big one didn't say a word. The smaller one grinned again.

"Hello, idiot!" And he pulled the trigger.

Indiana's eyes never left the sight of the gun. He had been watching the man's finger on the trigger. The split second he saw the man's finger tense up around the trigger, he jumped back through the door to the study and rolled to the side, kicking the doorway closed at the same time.

The gunshot was deafening. He heard the buckshot whiz past him like a swarm of furious hornets. He felt the heat blast on his face as the buckshot narrowly missed him. It left a hole the size of a man's head in the doorway to Stan's study.

At the same time that the smaller man was hurriedly attempting to reload the shotgun, Indiana looked around and saw the window had been smashed by flying debris from the study's door. He heard a furious growl, then what sounded like a herd of elephants rushing up the stairs toward him. It didn't take much to figure out who was making the noise.

Indiana leapt to his feet and looked around for an escape route. There was no other exit from the room, and nothing suitable to use for a weapon. He could feel the whole house shake as the giant man climbed the stairs. He started to panic, trying to figure out how he was going to fight them off. He needed a weapon—something he could stop them with. And what could

he use against that big of a man. He couldn't fight him off empty-handed.

He peered through the door at the giant black-haired man pounding toward him. He had already made it up two-thirds of the way. He looked back over his shoulder at the door again. The hole in the door was about head-level, and was the size of a bowling ball. And the buckshot that created it had blown the upper hinge off. It was a miracle the door was still attached. This gave him an idea. It seemed completely crazy, but crazy situations required crazy ideas.

Indiana grabbed the door between the middle and lower hinge with both hands and yanked as hard as he could. Fear was causing adrenaline to pump through his body, and it seemed to give him extra strength. The door broke free from its hinges almost effortlessly. Indy turned back toward the stairs and the giant that was barreling toward him. The man was too close to stop. Indiana saw the expression of surprise register on the man's face. The clenched fists attached to the trains that were his arms quickly came up and covered his chest protectively. He expected to come up and catch his prey defenseless. Instead he saw the man standing before him wielding a door as a weapon. His brain tried to comprehend what he saw.

A half a second later the custom strong oak door's lower edge smashed into the giant's face, propelled by Indiana's weight. It knocked the giant backwards and down the steps, but not before his hands instinctively grabbed the door and tried pulled it from Indiana's grasp. It wasn't the brightest thing to do, as this action not only pulled the door but Indiana as well. They flew down the steps at the other man, who stood dumfounded with his shotgun open, trying to comprehend what was happening. They landed at the bottom of the steps. The giant was sandwiched between the hard wooden steps at the bottom and the door, with Dr. Indiana Jones on top.

When the second gangster finally understood that what he was seeing was actually happening and not the result of a long night of pub crawls, he reacted immediately, but completely wrong. With a cry he dropped the gun and turned to run away from the

stairs. Instead of simply leaping to the side out of the way, he ran in a straight line from the base of the stairs.

The second the feet of the giant muscled man stopped on the banister at the bottom at the last step, the door continued to go like a sled across his chest and face. The door, with Indiana still on top, propelled itself across the carpeted floor like a stone skipping across water. The distance between the door and the fleeing gangster melted away quickly.

The boy had reached the window and stopped, turning to see what was happening. He threw his hands up to protect his face when he saw the door with Indiana on top flying towards him. But it never reached him. The living room of the Corda's house was large, almost thirty feet across. That along with the thick carpet stopped the door's momentum barely two feet in front of the man. The younger gangster stood there, frozen in fear, as Indiana forced himself shakily to his feet.

"That was close, wasn't it?" Indiana asked.

The boy looked at Indiana with uncertainty. His arms fell to his sides when he realized the danger was over. The youngster grinned and breathed a sigh of relief, nodding sheepishly. At that same instant, Indiana curled his fist and swung with all of his might upward, connecting with the bottom of the youth's chin. The swift uppercut sent the young punk up and out through the window, which shattered around him as he landed in the garden outside.

"What's going on out there?" shouted an angry voice from the kitchen.

Indy twisted around sharply toward the voice and then froze on the spot. He was directly in the site of a large caliber shotgun staring at him from the kitchen. A third boy, tall and dark with a wiry physique, was holding the gun, and he seemed quite angry at the scene before him. Indiana understood almost immediately that he was facing the most dangerous of the group.

"Don't move!" the boy ordered. He did not even have to gesture threateningly with the gun.

Indiana saw that the hammer was cocked, and the boy's finger was poised on the trigger. He weighed his chances of successfully jumping to escape, but judging from the boy's

intensity he realized this was an option that he particularly disliked.

“Who are you?” asked the boy, cocking his head. “What are you doing here?”

“Nothing,” Indiana replied quickly. “I must have gotten the wrong house. Please excuse me, I’ll go.”

The boy was not amused. “I think you’ve had your fun,” he said coldly. He threatened with the gun, raising the barrel up from where it was pointed at Indiana’s stomach to aim directly between his eyes. “I’ll ask you again. Who are you and what are you doing here?”

Indiana was about to say something when a movement flickered behind the boy. Marian appeared into view, holding a glass milk container in her left hand and a cast-iron frying pan in the right. She was pale and trembling, and had a small laceration that was bleeding above the eye. She looked confused as to what she should do.

“Use the pan!” Indiana said, pointing behind the boy. “Use all your strength!”

A casual, contemptuous smile flirted across the boy’s face. “How stupid do you think I am?” he asked. “I’m not falling for that old trick.”

“Well, that’s good...” smirked Indiana, just as the pan struck with such force against the boy’s head that it sounded like a crack of lightning. The boy immediately collapsed to the floor with his finger still clutched tightly around the trigger. Panic swept across Indiana’s face as he jumped out of the shotgun’s aim and moved toward Marian in the kitchen.

Suddenly, a tremendous blast from the shotgun rocked the house to its foundations. The round from the shotgun struck and shattered the single picture hanging on the wall that the burglars had forgotten to take on the previous break-in.

During the blast, Marian fell backwards, either from force or weakness, Indiana did not know. He got to her just before she hit the floor and caught her in his arms. He quickly moved her to the sofa and examined her wounds. He was relieved to see that she was not seriously injured. He tried to speak to her, but she did not respond. She was probably just dazed and confused from shock.

Indiana went to the window to check on the boy he had knocked through the glass. The boy was still lying on the grass outside, unconscious like the other two. But he knew they would not stay this way for much longer. He and Marian had to leave, and they had to leave fast. Nevertheless, he took enough time to search the two gangsters, but without much success. Just as he suspected, they had no identification cards, papers, or anything with a clue to their identity or who they may be working for. The three were professionals. They may not have been the smartest crooks, but they were definitely not stupid enough to take their identification to a robbery.

Indiana heard a groan issue from Marian on the couch, and he turned and took two quick steps back to her side.

“What happened?” she murmured in bewilderment.

“Later,” Indiana interrupted. He stretched out his hand and helped her get to her feet. She was shocked when she saw the unconscious figures in front of her kitchen and next to the stairs, but Indiana didn’t give her time to say anything. “Can you run?” He asked quickly. He saw her nod, and then continued. “Good. Go to the car and wait for me there. I’ll be right out.”

“Where are you going?” Marian inquired.

“I’ve got to check something. But I’ll be quick,” he said. “Run to the car and lock the doors. If one of these guys comes out, don’t wait for me. Get the hell out of here as quickly as you can.”

Three or four hours passed before Marian had recovered her composure enough for Indiana to have a meaningful conversation with her. As they drove to his home, she sat trembling in the passenger seat beside him, pale and staring blankly into space. He had tried to speak to her several times, and each with the same result; silence as if she could not hear his words. At this house, he had tried on numerous occasions to get her to agree to call Marcus Brody for help. She finally broke her silence and consented to calling his old friend, who arrived about half an hour after their conversation. He listened intently, with increasing alarm as the story unfolded.

Marcus proposed immediately that they should contact the police, but Indiana consistently attempted to persuade him

otherwise. And at each mention of police involvement would bring Marian out of her paralysis to side vehemently with Indiana. She wanted desperately to protect her husband in case he was involved in anything illegal.

Although Marcus continued to attempt to convince them to contact the authorities, he agreed to wait at least long enough until they had examined Corda's records and try to shed some light onto the situation. But this was much easier said than done. Most of what Indiana had hastily grabbed from Stanley's office was completely useless. He had several notes which dealt with his work: drafts of lectures, cross-references to literature, whole pages of unintelligible abbreviations that were in some kind of private code Stanley had invented that even Marian could not decipher.

Occasionally Indiana came across a bit of information, a quote, a part of a sentence or a word here and there, a coordinate of a location that seemed anything except an encryption which hinted of a bigger picture, but he simply could not piece it all together in a coherent trail to follow. He and Marcus continued desperately trying to decode the work by studying and comparing the maps he had, and on several occasions they had the feeling they might be very close to cracking it. They would spend several minutes on a dozen or so pages grasping tiny links, but each time they seemed to hit a dead-end and had to start all over again. But at this stage, Indiana was far from willing to give up.

The sun had begun to slide over the horizon. Dusk had arrived. Marcus had temporarily given up on the task, and Indiana's head was buzzing from all of the seemingly unrelated and useless information he had collected trying to work out a pattern. His eyes burned from trying to understand Stanley's almost tiny, unreadable handwriting. It was so small that that it seemed the entire Old Testament could be easily fit on three sheets of paper!

Exhausted, Indiana sank back into his couch and took a sip of the cup of coffee he had retrieved from the table next to the masses of papers and books, only to find it had long since become cold. Marian had made it hours ago.

In its present state, Indiana's living room barely differed in appearance from that of the Corda's after the break-in: papers were piled on the table, the couch, the chairs, the mantelpiece, and dozens of books and periodicals accompanied them on the floor. The air was hazy from the long draws of the pipe Marcus was smoking from.

Exhaustion also filled Marcus's expressions: his eyes had become red with dark rings around them. His facial features varied between confusion and frustration, just like Indiana's. They both felt that somewhere in this apparent meaningless jumble of papers and books was something important that they were overlooking, something big and significant.

"Stanley must have been on to something," muttered a tired Indiana for probably the two-hundredth time since they had started.

"There was something different about him over the last couple of weeks," Marcus mused as he relit his pipe.

Indiana looked at him quizzically.

"I know you had your differences," Marcus continued.

"That's probably why you didn't notice so much. But I did."

"And?" Indiana responded.

Marcus shrugged. "It may be nothing. He always kept to himself. Tried to remain a closed book. But in the last couple of weeks, he had hardly spoken to anyone. Even his students complained that he wouldn't even answer the questions they had during lecture. He just droned on, as if he were trying to simply reach the end of the session."

Indiana looked at Marian inquiringly, but she avoided his gaze and stared into the flickering flames of the fireplace.

Marcus seemed lost in melancholy for a moment. "We should get some rest now," he said finally. "But first I think I should drive by Marian's house and take a look at things."

"Out of the question," Indiana retorted with finality. "There may be someone there other than Stanley."

"I'm not going in," Marcus protested, withdrawing the pipe from his mouth and rubbing his eyes with his thumb and index finger. "No one will suspect a thing by simply taking a pass by." He hesitated a moment, then turned to Marian. "You really

should call the police. I don't know what is going on here, but it's obvious that whoever these men are, they are not playing around."

Marian shook her head. "Maybe tomorrow. Perhaps by then we've found something that will help us find Stanley."

Indiana was struck by the faint hesitation in her words. Surprised and a little bit confused, he looked at Marian. "Find what? We've been searching all night. All we have are a bunch of papers and notes. Nothing anywhere near a trail that we can follow."

Again she avoided Indiana's gaze. "Tomorrow," she said and stood up. "Mr. Brody is right. It has been a tough day for all of us. I am going to go now..."

"Absolutely not," interrupted Indiana. "You're not going anywhere. Those boys may come back. I will not let you put yourself at risk," he continued, trying to say it with conviction. "We are safe here. If they knew who I was or where I lived, they would have come looking a long time ago."

Marian looked at him doubtfully, but did not argue. She resigned herself and took her seat again. But Indiana had a sudden sinking feeling that it was going to be anything but a quiet night.

The following morning, Dr. Henry Jones, Jr. arrived at the university for the first time in his tenure late for a lecture. His students welcomed him with a gleeful applause when he stumbled into the classroom untidily dressed, disheveled hair and a slightly dazed and confused look on his face. It was unfortunate for Indiana to have these kinds of students in the second half of the day, who took great delight in making it difficult for him to carry out his lecture.

Indiana had slept very badly the night before. After a half-hearted attempt to clean up his living room again, he and Marian had tried to get some sleep fairly early in the day, but neither of them achieved more than two or three hours. Indiana was conscious of every creak, every sound no matter how low or quiet. He could hear Marian in the room next door moving restlessly as she tried to sleep as well. On more than one occasion he found himself standing at the window trying to discern noises

in the street, usually only finding pedestrians taking a stroll in street and talking amongst themselves.

He couldn't understand why he was so nervous. It wasn't the first time his work outside of the university had found him in dangerous or even fatal situations. God knows it hadn't been the first time he had to use his fists to protect himself, and it definitely wasn't the first time someone had tried to kill him. But this time was different. So far, most of the dangerous situations he had found himself in were in worlds far away, and that was exciting for him. Usually it was him who had sought out the dangerous situation, but this time was the opposite. It was as if the world went topsy-turvy, and now someone else was taking the initiative. He liked to be the one who acted, not the one reacting, and it made him nervous.

Indiana was thankful when the lecture came to an end. He was relieved that he could leave the auditorium. But it turned out that his relief was premature. The day continued as it had begun – as he left the auditorium he heard someone calling out his name. He turned and saw his secretary trying to get his attention as several students swarmed around her, trying to get to him.

Indiana looked at her with despair for a few seconds, as something told him he wouldn't like the news she bore. Besides he didn't have time to talk studies with the students. But as was his fate, he went to meet her.

“Am I glad to see you, Dr. Jones,” she began breathlessly, holding back the wave of students. “Mr. Grisswald has been calling.”

Indiana rolled his eyes. “Tell him I'm not here,” he said and prepared to turn around. “Tell him I've gone to the South Pole to count penguins.” He started to walk away.

“I think you'd better go see him, Dr. Jones. He looked very angry,” replied the secretary.

Indiana stopped once again. The fact that Grisswald was angry was nothing new. But something in his secretary's voice told him that this was more than the usual spat between the two of them. So he decided, albeit reluctantly and after a few seconds of deliberation, to do the sensible thing and hopefully get this unpleasant part of the day over with as soon as possible.

Without knocking, he entered Grisswald's secretary's office. She looked up from the typewriter, clearly surprised at the aggressive way in which Indiana had entered the office. She didn't say a word, and only indicated with a slight nod, to the closed double doors of Grisswald's inner office. Indiana dropped his briefcase on her desk, made a half-hearted attempt to smooth up his suit and straighten his tie, and then opened the door and stepped into Grisswald's office.

Half a second later he actually wished he was in the South Pole counting penguins. Grisswald sat behind his desk with a demeanor that he was about to unleash the wrath of god. His eyes stared at Indiana with such coldness that he could have frozen the Pacific Ocean.

Grisswald was not alone. Behind him stood two gentlemen that reminded Indiana of Laurel and Hardy. The smaller of the two had his arms crossed over his chest with his legs spread slightly apart. He stood there like a wrestler that was weighing his opponent before making a grab at him. The larger of the two was not quite as stern as his hands were shaking a bit and his eyes flashed suppressed rage. In view of the damage on his face even Indiana could understand why. It wasn't that he was good-looking or anything of the sort, but his face was barely discernible under purplish-red bruises that covered it. Each twitch of his facial muscles must register excruciating pain.

"Dr. Jones," began Grisswald. "How nice of you to honor us with your presence." He made an imperious gesture. "Close the door."

Indiana obeyed. His thoughts began to move quickly as he slowly approached Grisswald's desk while the two individuals behind the old man watched his every step. He suddenly had a very bad feeling about the situation. He immediately recognized the men as the two goons who had accosted Marian outside the café the day before. This could not be good.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

Grisswald's face darkened further. "Keep your mouth shut, Jones," he said. "I always knew that trouble followed you around like a bad date, but I never dreamed you'd bring it here to me. And nothing of this kind of magnitude."

He pointed with a swing of his head to the two figures behind him. “Gentlemen, Dr. Indiana Jones.” He waved his hand passively toward Indiana as he introduced him to the two men. “I hear that you have all met. Dr. Jones, may I introduce Mr. Henley and Mr. Reuben. They would like to ask you some questions. And you’d better have some damned good answers.”

“Maybe you’d like to tell me what’s going on here first,” said Indiana, deliberately trying to match Grisswald’s gruff tone. He leaned forward, slamming his fists on the desk and glaring at the dean. “I know these two. In fact, at Marian Corda’s I...”

Indiana suddenly stopped. The larger of the two, Reuben, made the same gesture as he had done yesterday by slipping his hand into his jacket as if to draw a weapon. Indiana was almost ready to act, but instead he produced a thin black wallet, which he tossed onto the desk between Indiana’s fists. The wallet flipped open and revealed a printed identification card. Indiana was stunned as he read the card:

“F...B...I!” Indiana stuttered.

Reuben was visibly pleased with the reaction and snatched the wallet off the desk and placed it back into his jacket, nodding. “Special Agent Reuben,” he said, and then pointed to his companion. “This is Special Agent Henley.”

“Oh,” said Indiana sheepishly.

Reuben was not taken by Indiana’s response. In fact, it appeared to only make him angrier. “You have caused us a lot of trouble, Dr. Jones,” he said. “You can thank Mr. Grisswald that we have not arrested you on the spot and locked you away for the next twenty years.”

“But-,” began Indiana, but he was immediately interrupted by Reuben.

“Interfering in state matters, obstructing an FBI investigation, assault on a state official. Dr. Jones, I could list more, but that in itself is enough for at least fifteen years.”

“How the hell was I supposed to know who you were?” Indiana defended. “You could have identified yourself.”

“We tried,” said Henley.

“But you attacked us first, and without warning,” added Reuben.

Indiana remembered it a little differently, but he knew there was no benefit in arguing with the two, so he said nothing. He looked at Grisswald, then at Laurel and Hardy with narrowing eyes.

“Where is Mrs. Corda, Jones” asked Grisswald.

“How do I know?” Indiana shot back.

Reuben clenched his fists. “Don’t play us for a fool, Jones,” he spat. “After both of us finally regained our senses, she had disappeared with you and has not been seen since.”

“So, you were at her house?” Indiana said with a smile.

Reuben’s face remarkably turned even redder than it already was. He looked like it would explode at any moment. Indiana took the precaution of stepping back from the desk, out of his reach.

“Which brings us to the second question on our list, Dr. Jones,” he growled. “The house was taken apart from the attic to the basement. You wouldn’t happen to know by whom and why?”

“No,” Indiana replied calmly. “And I think it’s better if I don’t say anything more.” He turned to Grisswald. “Can I use your phone?”

“Why?” asked Grisswald.

“To call my lawyer,” replied Indiana calmly.

Reuben looked as if he were about to lash out, but Indiana moved even further away by stepping to the side, an action the FBI agent didn’t expect.

Grisswald tried to calm the situation by raising a soothing hand. “Dr. Jones, I don’t think that is necessary. You are not under indictment. These two men are just trying to get some information from you, that is all.”

He swiveled his chair and looked up at Reuben. “Believe me. Dr. Jones and I may have our differences, Mr. Reuben. But I would be happy to place my hand into the fire to vouch for his integrity.”

“Then it will burn,” Reuben murmured, but Grisswald continued unfazed.

“Dr. Jones may be unconventional in his methods. But he would never violate the law.” He turned around again and stood, then walked around the desk next to Indiana. “This is not about

you, Dr. Jones,” he started to explain. “This is about Professor Corda. He has been missing since yesterday morning. He disappeared after his last lecture. No one has seen him and these two men only wanted to ask his wife a few questions about the situation, that is all.”

“Could have fooled me,” muttered Indiana, but Grisswald ignored his objection to the case as it was stated.

“You must remember the amulet I showed you yesterday,” Grisswald continued.

Indiana nodded.

Grisswald then stepped back around his desk and withdrew the tiny gold beetle from a drawer, then placed it on the desk before him. “Please, please think again about this piece, Jones,” he said. “It’s important. With all of your knowledge and contacts, you must be able to recognize it. Where is it from?”

Indiana shook his head. “Nothing sticks out. What is this all about?”

Reuben appeared like he was going to intercede again, but Grisswald stopped him with a quick gesture.

“Well,” said Grisswald, “in the last few weeks a number of these and other similar artifacts have been showing up here in the city. Someone has sold an astonishing amount of this stuff. And at very reasonable prices I might add. They have pulled this off very skillfully, and have been able to keep their identity a secret.”

“You already told me this yesterday,” said Indiana. “But what does the FBI have to do with this? Even if it’s stolen works of art or cheap rip-offs...”

“That isn’t your concern,” broke in Henley. “We’ve known since yesterday morning that Professor Corda was the secret seller. The real question is where did he get them from?”

Indiana shot Grisswald a knowing glance, out of view of the FBI. Both suspected what kind of activities Corda was tangled up in. There were rumors that Corda had some ‘ambiguous’ relationship with a number of artifacts in their possession. It was out of professional courtesy that they tried to keep rumors from spreading. As far as Indiana knew, he was the only one who knew where Corda’s true wealth came from. It was possible Grisswald

knew as well, especially after this morning. But it was clear that the two FBI agents on the other side of the room didn't know. Indiana shook his head. "I don't know," he said finally.

"Strange," said Henley thoughtfully, and with a smile that was obviously forced. "Somehow, I do not believe you, Dr. Jones." Indiana just shrugged his shoulders.

"Where is Mrs. Corda?" Reuben started again. "She may be in a lot of trouble if you do not help us, Jones."

"I don't know," answered Indiana again, and at least for the moment it was the truth.

Although Indiana had left Marian at his house this morning, he was quite confident she had already left. Henley stared at him as if he could read his thoughts, but to Indiana's surprise he said nothing more about the matter. He just shook his head and sighed audibly.

"So we are at a standstill," said Reuben. "I am willing to believe that what happened yesterday was the result of a simple misunderstanding. I am willing to forget about it – if you work with us, Dr. Jones. It is in the best interest of Mrs. Corda."

"Why?" Indiana demanded.

"Because we believe she is in a great deal of danger," said Henley. "Just like her husband."

Henley pointed with a fluttering gesture to the golden beetle on the desk. "We need to know where this came from, Dr. Jones. Don't get me wrong – I am not interested in whether your colleague looted the tomb of a pharaoh. We do not care how he came into its possession."

India surmised he was telling the truth. "So, first you need to know where the stuff came from, but why..."

"They are dangerous, Jones," interrupted Grisswald. Reuben shot a frightened glance at the dean, like he'd given away too much. But with a shake of his head, Grisswald continued: "There's something very strange about these things. Some of the people who have come into possession of these items from Corda have become very ill. There have been at least two deaths."

"What?" Indiana asked in alarm.

Grisswald nodded and instinctively took a step back from the gold beetle before continuing. "I know it sounds silly," he said

with uncertainty, as if he barely believed it himself. “But it looks as if Professor Corda has been in business for awhile, and has an unlimited supply of gold. I won’t say whether he came about it legally or not. But something is not right with the gold itself. It is as if...”

“It was cursed,” muttered Indiana, completing the dean’s thought.

The Dean looked at him silently. He looked at Indiana with a smile. But it was a tortured smile, more like a grimace.

“It sounds crazy, I know,” he said after awhile. “But...well, when it comes to crazy things, you are the specialist, are you not?”

Reuben had reached his limit with patience. “That’s enough! I am going to ask you one last time, Dr. Jones. Where is Marian Corda?”

“I told you, I don’t know,” said Indiana. “You’re right. She was with me yesterday. I insisted she stay at my house.”

“Why?” said Henley.

“Why?” Indiana laughed disarmingly. “You’ve seen her house, right?”

“And you thought that we were responsible?” Added Henley, as if he had just realized it.

At first the remark surprised Indiana. Then he realized Henley was only saying this to gain his trust.

“Am I wrong?” Indiana said with a shrug.

“Has Mrs. Corda said anything about her husband?” asked Reuben with a huff. “You can’t tell me that her husband has found King Midas’s treasure and not said a word to her about it.”

“No,” said Indiana. “I...”

Something had clearly clicked in Indiana’s mind. He broke off mid-sentence and stared wide-eyed at Reuben. The things Marian had said last night came rushing back into his head, and a realization flashed. “It’s all true! The Spaniards were fools!” And then he knew. He and Marcus had the answer in their hands the entire time. It was all in Stan’s papers and research. It was so clear; all they had to do was open their eyes. He couldn’t understand why he hadn’t seen it before.

“What is it, Jones?” asked Grisswald. Indiana’s expression had gone unseen by the two FBI men.

“Probably nothing,” Indiana replied with uncertainty. He tried to smile, but his lip barely moved. “It’s just...something just occurred to me.”

“What?” interjected Reuben.

“It’s probably not important,” murmured Indiana evasively.

“That’s for us to decide,” said Henley, agitated.

“Well, when we were in Marian’s home yesterday, we noticed a man...”

“What man? What was he doing? What did he look like?”

“Just a man,” said Indiana. “He was across the street, and I had the feeling he was scoping out the house. He was very tall, and sturdy looking. Very muscular. A pretty ugly guy. But like I said – it could be nothing.”

Henley and Reuben exchanged knowing glance, and Indiana knew it meant something to them. The man he had described was no stranger to them.

“Is that all?” asked Reuben suspiciously.

Indiana nodded. “Yes. I’m sorry. I can’t help any further.”

“It would be better if you could,” said Reuben feeling his bruised, grazed face with his fingertips. “You know, the more I forget about you, the better off you’ll be.”

“If I think of anything, you’ll be the first to know,” promised Indiana. He turned to Grisswald. “Can I go now? I still have a lot to do?”

“Sure,” replied Grisswald. Indiana was about to leave, but Henley called after him. “One more thing, Dr. Jones.” It seemed almost as the question was an afterthought.

Indiana cocked his head slightly, not quite turning back to them. “Yes?”

“On another matter. Have you ever heard of something called ‘The Manhattan Project?’?”

Indiana thought for a moment, and then said no. “What’s that supposed to be?”

“Just curious if Professor Corda ever mentioned anything about it?” Henley persevered.

Indiana shook his head and said no again. “We didn’t speak that much.” He said honestly. After a brief pause, to his relief they gestured for him to go.

Indiana left Grisswald’s office. He walked past the secretary and calmly lifted his briefcase off her desk, and continued on with measured steps, trying to appear calm and composed until he reached the hallway. Once in the hallway, the measured steps quickly became brisk strides, and once he was a safe distance away he almost broke into a run. Indiana rushed through the long corridors of the university, garnering startled looks from colleagues and students alike as he brushed past them, but he was too focused to pay them any attention. He walked at such speed that it took him only a few minutes to bridge the distance between the West Wing of the university to the museum. Without knocking, he stormed into Marcus Brody’s office.

Brody’s office was crammed with books, large crates, and boxes of antiquities. Indiana navigated through the clutter until he reached the desk, behind which Marcus sat beneath a cloud of blue smoke. He was surprised by Indiana’s abrupt visit and was about to say something but stopped as Indiana gasped for breath. He gave Indiana a second to catch his breath. “What?” he asked as he drew the pipe from his mouth.

Indiana shook his head as he tried to control his breathing. It was twice as fast as normal. He sucked in a few deep breaths and tried to control his raging lungs before finally answering. “I think he has found El Dorado.”

Marcus and Indiana left the university in a rush and headed back towards Indiana’s house. They couldn’t believe the solution was so obvious. Now that they had the key to what they were looking for, Corda’s records would be an inexhaustible source of information. The idea seemed so fantastic. Stanley Corda was so convinced that the fabled El Dorado existed. And it seemed that he had possibly discovered it.

“It’s inconceivable,” Marcus muttered over and over again as they sat inside the house pouring over the documents. “Could he have really found it? We were all convinced it was only a legend.”

“The Spaniards felt that it existed,” said Indiana. After a few seconds of hesitation, he added. “It’s possible some of them found it...”

“But never returned to tell the tale,” Marcus completed.

“But if they didn’t tell about it,” Indiana surmised with a gentle rebuke. “No, no. There must be still be more.”

Indiana searched through the papers spread across the table in front of him with intense concentration. They were filled with many details of the legendary land of gold. The only detail that was missing was its actual location.

“Grisswald mentioned something...” Indiana added and thoughtfully continued, almost as if he were talking to himself. “Some of the items Corda sold. A few of the buyers became very ill. And two of them are already dead.”

Marcus’s face darkened. “Corda brings shame on us all,” he said. “For what he’s done, he should be in prison. He finds the legendary El Dorado, a momentous discovery, and all he can do is fill his pockets!”

“If only it were that simple, Marcus,” muttered Indiana. “There’s something wrong with this gold.”

Marcus looked back in shock for a second as he processed the implication. He tried to laugh, but failed when it came to him.

“You’re trying to tell me the gold is cursed!”

Indiana nodded seriously. “Exactly!”

Marcus scoffed. “There is no such thing as a deadly curse,” asserted Marcus with uncertainty. He really should know better.

“You’re probably right,” Indiana nodded. “But maybe there’s something natural, some kind of effect that amounts to the same thing.”

Indiana absently rubbed the scar on his chin with his index finger. “I wonder what the FBI agent meant when he said ‘Manhattan Project?’”

Indiana glanced over at Marcus and noticed he looked uncomfortable with the question.

“Do you know anything about it?” Indiana asked.

“No, nothing,” replied Marcus, a little too quickly for Indiana.

“You have heard of it,” noted Indiana. Marcus thought in silence for awhile, pondering the accusation.

“Well, yes, I’ve heard of it,” Marcus said. “Mostly rumors. It’s not really my place to tell you.”

“Then don’t,” advised Indiana. “Tell it to the fireplace. Or the grandfather clock. I’ll promise not to listen.”

Marcus made a face, then reached into his jacket pocket and withdrew his pipe and tobacco pouch as he pondered. Finally, he began. “As I said, only rumors. But I’ve heard the government is in the process of constructing a new weapon, somewhere in Nevada.”

“And,” Indiana baited with surprise.

“A nuclear fission weapon,” Marcus said.

Now it was Indiana who was startled and shocked by his friend’s statement. He looked in disbelief. “What?”

Brody sat his pipe down and took a deep breath. He coughed a few times before he answered. “Yes, a nuclear bomb. Washington has feared for a long time that the Germans were attempting to construct such a weapon. They have set in motion events to beat them to it. They’ve been tinkering on this thing for about a year. And the code name for the project...”

“Is ‘Manhattan’,” murmured Indiana.

Brody nodded and began nervously puffing on his pipe again.

The tobacco inside turned bright red.

“But what could this have to do with Stanley and El Dorado?” asked Indiana, confused.

Brody shrugged. “No idea,” he said.

Before they could continue talking, a loud knock came at the door. Indiana rose to his feet and motioned for Marcus to gather the papers and disappear. Then he walked slowly to the door. The knock repeated just as he reached the door, and this time it sounded fast and nervous.

Indiana quietly slipped the chain lock into its receptacle, and then knelt down to peer outside through the peep hole. Outside the house stood Marian with a harried expression on her face. Indiana stood back up quickly and released the chain lock and yanked open the door. He grabbed Marian and drug her in the house with lightning speed before closing the door again.

“Marian, where have you been? Have you found Stan?”

She shook her head vigorously and looked instinctively at the closed door behind her.

“Is someone chasing you?” Indiana added immediately.

“I’m not sure,” she answered hesitantly. Indiana steered Marian gently to the couch and motioned for Marcus to come out from the bedroom where he had hidden himself. “Tell her,” he said to his old friend. “Tell her everything.” Then he hurried back to the door, stepped to the small window next to it and pulled the curtains aside to form a small crack.

At first he saw nothing. The street outside was quiet and peaceful, as usual. And also, as usual, an infrequent pedestrian or single motor car passed by.

Indiana stared out of the window for five minutes while Marcus recounted everything to Marian. Indiana was keen to finish his surveillance and join them, but then he noticed a lone car pass by the house. It was the third time he has seen it. Indiana tried to peer into the cab and caught a glance of two men, but he could not identify them. Although he couldn’t be sure, they didn’t quite look like the two FBI agents he had met earlier. He watched the car disappear down the street. He closed the curtain and went back to Marcus and Marian.

“You were right,” he said to Marian. “Someone is following you.”

Marian was visibly startled, and Indiana tried to calm her by placing his hand on her shoulder.

“I don’t think they are coming here,” he said. “If they were, I think they would have already shown up.” I think they are just tailing you. They aren’t doing a very good job of hiding it.”

“The FBI?” asked Brody.

“No,” Indiana shook his head. “They seem to be amateurs. I wouldn’t worry too much about it.”

Indiana and Marian looked at each other for a second, and then she looked away. “Marian, we need your help. Try to remember something. Anything,” he said forcefully. “You said Stan was hanging out with strange people. Did he ever mention a name? Or an address? A meeting place? Anything at all...?”

Marian shook her head almost automatically, but then paused and thought for a moment. “I’m not sure,” she said finally. “But

someone called once. Stan was in the bath and he had forgotten to lock the door to his study. He became quite angry that I answered his phone.”

“Who called?” asked Indiana.

“I don’t remember exactly,” she said sadly. “A Mr. Rogers or Rutgers or something like that...” She shrugged her shoulders and looked almost embarrassed that she didn’t remember more.

“But he said he was an antiques dealer, if I remember correctly.”

“Antiques dealer?” Indiana furrowed his brow in doubt. He knew every antique shop in the city, both official and unofficial. He also knew most of the places that operated with some degree of legality. But he had never heard the name Marian mentioned. “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” replied Marian. “I think I remember the address he gave. 194th Kensington Drive.”

Indiana exchanged a surprised look with Marcus. It wasn’t the fact that Marian had remembered the address with some degree of certainty that surprised him. But Kensington Drive was one of the most notorious streets in the city. It was the kind of street that you avoided in the daylight. Only the foolish and naïve would travel there, as it was dominated by a number of dangerous street gangs and hoodlums.

“Are you sure?” quizzed Indiana.

Marian nodded. “I asked Stan what he was doing in such a dangerous part of the city. Was he lost? But he never responded.” Indiana got up. “Well, we should stay positive. I am sure he meant well. But it’s worth investigating.”

Marcus became a little pale and removed the pipe from his mouth. “You’re not seriously thinking of going there now, are you?”

Indiana shrugged. “Don’t know. If you have a better idea...” Marcus’s face lost even more color. “It’s too dangerous,” he said nervously.

“I know. But danger is my first and last name.” He smiled coyly.

“And what is your middle name? Levity?” he answered smartly at Indiana’s joke. “You must be crazy.”

“You’re telling me,” sighed Indiana.

Even in daylight, Indiana realized that Kensington Drive appeared just as sinister as it did at night. Although he had only been there after dark once when he suffered a flat tire as he was passing through, he remembered the shabbiness and squalor of the district, and the bright sunlight showed it no mercy. Surprisingly, this wasn't the poorest area in town. Most of the houses on either side of the street were just rundown from neglect. Large Puerto Rican women refused to close their windows, revealing not only the squalor outside but the disarray inside as well. Colored men wearing white linen pants and vests stood in several of the doorways eyeing each stranger with suspicion. Grubby children played noisily in the streets and ran behind cars yelling as they passed by. Shady characters with scarred faces hid behind ungroomed beards, looking around in panic as they hocked stolen or illegal goods or substances, and would disappear quickly behind closed doors with the first sign of a policeman.

Indiana was certainly no policeman, but all the residents could see was a stranger wearing a battered felt fedora as he drove his beat up old Ford into their territory. The street was lined with automobiles, pretentious and gleaming, that were probably more expensive than the derelict buildings outside of which they were parked. The avenue was the home to a host of dive bars, gambling houses, and small shops with expensive bootleg items in the windows.

Indiana started to slow the car as he approached 194th. Although he was trying to appear calm, like he fit in, he was aware that the residents could probably see through his façade. This was not good. Indiana Jones had enough experience to know that, like a good German shepherd, shady characters could sense if one was nervous or afraid. They were also very aggressive when they attacked. Indiana had prepared himself, but was beginning to wonder if he had done it well enough.

Indiana had placed a small derringer, on loan to him from Marian Corda, in his right pocket. While it was only effective at short distances, it had the advantage of being easily concealed. In the front passenger seat of the Ford was his coiled bullwhip, a

trusted aid that had, on more than one occasion, come to his rescue.

Back at the house he had left explicit instructions with Marcus to keep an eye out on the street outside. He also told him to expect him back in two hours. If Marcus saw anything suspicious or Indiana had not returned in the allotted time, Marcus was directed to contact the police immediately.

Indiana saw the house number just ahead. He drove the car next to the curb and cut the ignition. He attached his trusty bullwhip to his belt and did his best to hide it under his jacket. Then he stepped out of the car.

He was about to lock the car door, but stopped as he realized the simple door lock wouldn't keep anyone out of the vehicle for any longer than ten seconds at most. If they got into the car they could easily hotwire it. He weighed the risk and decided to leave it unlocked, just in case he needed that extra ten seconds for a quick getaway. As he crossed the street, he felt eyes following him. But no one accosted him as he approached the door to a dingy shop.

Two scary-looking characters with pointed faces stared at him as he crossed the street. Their eyes seem to penetrate every pocket, and he felt as if they had already guessed the contents of his every pocket. Anyway, they must have been satisfied that he posed them no threat, and then turned their attention to scrutinize his old Ford. Indiana was beginning to regret not locking the door. He hoped that they would leave the car alone because it was so old, and it was almost exclusively held together by the patches of rust and prayers from its owner.

Before he went through the door of the shop, he took a second to peer through the window to the darkened, dusty shop inside. The view was partially hindered by the window blinds, but he was able to make out a huge imitation gold-plated tray with nothing more than a four-piece imitation gold tea set that was missing its creamer jug, as well as some obviously fake costume jewelry.

Indiana pushed the handle latch and pushed open the door, setting off a small bell that was hanging overhead. Once inside

the cold shop, Indiana looked around for a better assessment. There was very little light, and shadows filled the room. The tiny store's air was heavy with humidity, with a moldy smell permeated his nostrils. He also detected a faint hint of disinfectant. After his eyes adjusted to the low light of the room, he noticed there were no other shelves or displays. At the back end of the room was an arched opening not much wider than the doorway that led to the shop proper. In this entrance room, there was only a counter top with a small window covered by a hinged piece of metal grating. A secondary reinforcement of bars ran the length of the window in front of the grate.

He finally understood where he was and why he could not remember an antique dealer named Rogers. He was in a pawnshop.

A small hinged flap opened in the iron grating above the counter, and a narrow pimply red face with eager eyes peered through.

"Huh? Mr. Rogers?" Indiana artificially cleared his throat and took a quick glance behind him to ensure no one had followed him inside.

"Yes. I am Rogers. What can I do for you?" replied Rogers from behind the bars. "If you're not buying something, go away."

"Not yet," said Indiana. Again he looked around, and he knew Rogers would see his anxiety. But this was intentional. "I'm not here as a customer. At least, not directly."

Rogers eyes him suspiciously and remained silent, as if waiting for a more thorough explanation.

Indiana decided to go all in with his bluff. "Professor Corda sent me," he said.

Although Rogers remained silent, Indiana knew from his facial expression that he had hit a mark.

"It's about the problem with last delivery," Indiana continued with the charade.

"What delivery? I don't have any idea what you are talking about. I have never heard of this man, Professor Corda," said Rogers.

"Really?" Indiana asked. "I must be mistaken. I'll tell Stanley he must have given me the wrong address. But if any more of

your customers come here complaining and causing you trouble, then remember, you've never heard of Stanley or me."

Indiana turned on his heels and walked quickly to the door, feigning agitation. As he reached for the handle he began to fear that perhaps he had exaggerated a little too much. But just as his hand touched the handle Rogers called him back.

"Wait!"

Indiana stopped, and then turned around slowly as Rogers stepped out from the protected cubicle and opened a small gated door in the counter. With laborious movements, he made his way next to Indiana. Indiana also noticed his red face was dripping with sweat. He dabbed at it with a small towel.

"What did you mean, trouble with my customers?"

Indiana shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing. I must have been mistaken. Sorry." He turned back to the door again, and Rogers grabbed him by the shoulder and attempted to spin him back around. Indiana stopped and slowly turned back towards the man, looking at Rogers hand on his shoulder like it had offended him. Keep laying it on thick, he reminded himself. It's working.

The little man with the pale, pimply face yanked his arm back quickly, fearing he might have overstepped his boundaries. "Sorry! Sorry!" he said. "But one must be careful, right? What's wrong with the last delivery?"

"Not sure...do you still have the items here?" Indiana probed.

Suspicion once again flooded Rogers's expression. "Why?" he asked quickly.

"Well," Indiana said nonchalantly. "I need to view them. One of the pieces may be wrong. And with your obvious high-class clientele," Indiana looked around the shop with sarcasm, "they may notice it immediately."

"Wrong! Corda..." Rogers's face darkened with anger.

"I said could be wrong," Indiana corrected him sharply.

"Is this a trick? Have you cheated me?" Rogers said warily.

His eyes were squinting nervously, as if anxiety was overtaking him.

"No," Indy calmed him. "I wouldn't be here if that was the intent. On the contrary, Stanley was very happy with the deals you two have made. And he may still have more for you."

“This sounds no different than the last time,” Rogers said. Indiana shrugged his shoulders. “A simple misunderstanding, that is all. And to prevent any more, he has hired me as insurance. Are the goods still here?”

Rogers hesitated, and Indiana was again beginning to think he had laid it on too thickly. But finally Rogers nodded, and the small man made an awkward motion to follow him as he shuffled through the small entrance foyer to another room behind. It was much larger, but crammed to the ceiling with shelves full of boxes atop boxes, radios, jewelry, watches, tools, weapons, musical instruments...the usual stuff that accumulates in a pawn shop. Indiana suspected that most of it was probably stolen. Rogers led him through a doorway secured with a huge lock which he hastily unlocked. They went into another adjoining room with a small desk, two chairs, and a large old but very solid-looking safe. It was surprisingly tidy, considering the general unpleasantness of the shop outside. Rogers went over to the safe and looked expectantly at Indiana. Indiana understood, and discretely looked away as the pawnbroker fumbled with the combination. He only looked back once he noticed the clicking of the lock had stopped, indicating it was open.

Indiana leaned across the desk and peered at the contents of the safe as Rogers brought it out in trays and laid it across the desk. Just as he had suspected, amid all the bundles of cash, securities, and velvet lined trays of watches and jewelry was more than two dozen of the little golden figurines like the one in Grisswald’s office. There were several different types: animals, leaves, flowers...a few simple lumps of gold of differing sizes, and some ornate and covered in art. And although they were all gold, Indiana had difficulty assigning a specific culture or era to the designs.

“What are they?” asked Rogers as he put the objects on the desk.

Indiana leaned over and examined them with curiosity. He started to reach out to touch one, but then immediately withdrew his hand as he remembered the conversation in Grisswald’s office about curses and illness. He decided it was best not to touch them.

“Is that all?” Indiana asked as he straightened up.

“Yes,” replied Rogers. “It-“

The awkward little man was interrupted by the sound of the tiny bell in the room outside. The sudden noise startled Indiana as he turned around. Outside he heard a woman’s voice, and she was calling his name in panic. Rogers looked alternatively at Indiana, then back to the opened safe. He quickly started placing the contents back inside. Indiana heard steps approaching, and then the door to the office flung rapidly open.

“Marian! What are you doing here?” Indiana asked with surprise.

“Who are you?” demanded Rogers, as he stopped what he was doing and spun around to see who had intruded. He still had several trays left to put away. He stared at Marian, then back to Indiana. “What does this mean? Who is this woman?”

“They’re after me,” she said breathlessly. “They attacked Marcus and-“

The rest of her words were drowned by the sounds of shattering glass and breaking wood in the shop outside. Marian took another step, then stumbled and fell into Indiana’s arms.

The commotion outside caused panic to flood Rogers’s face. He quickly tried to grab a few of the remaining trays, crying out as he accidentally dumped them onto the floor, both a result of his nervousness and his haste. Indiana registered that one of the golden ‘artifacts’ broke in half as it hit the hard floor. He wasted only a passing thought as to its importance, as he had his hands full trying to calm Marian. He released her from his grip and she blurted sentences in fast, choppy fragments that only she could understand.

“Marcus...FBI...men...” His brain processed the words, and, along with the sound of someone wrecking the shop outside, it took only a few seconds before he grasped what she was trying to tell him. Amidst the sound of splintering wood a gigantic figure appeared in the doorway to Rogers’s little sanctuary. Indiana recognized the figure immediately. It was one of the guys who had broken into the Corda residence previously: the one he had crashed the unhinged door into on the stairwell.

At the same time, the giant recognized Indiana. His eyes sparkled with anticipation as he took a wide step towards Indiana.

He swept Marian out of the way with an easy sweep of the arm, and reached with his other monstrous hand out towards Indiana's throat. At the last moment, Indiana managed to duck and grab the outstretched arm. His intent was to use his weight to bend the giant's arm back and possibly dislocate his shoulder or elbow. But the giant was too strong. He lifted Indiana off the ground with the single arm and slung him backwards over his shoulder, crashing him into the doorway behind. Indiana crumpled to floor with blurry vision. It was the last thing he remembered before blacking out.

* * *

Indiana awoke with such a headache that he seriously wished he was dead. He was handcuffed and lying on his side on a cold concrete or stone floor, with a pale grey glimmer of light circling above that barely penetrated the darkness. Even though the light was so weak he couldn't see around him, the glow sent sharp daggers of pain into his skull when he opened his eyes.

He squeezed his eyes tightly shut and clenched his teeth as he tried to fight back against the hammers pounding inside his head. With some success, he noted, as the pounding slowly began to subside to where it was now barely manageable instead of completely intolerable. He risked another look around, trying to perceive his surroundings.

He made out vague outlines in the dim light. He heard the moans of at least two others nearby. A voice whispered his name. He recognized the voice amidst the drumming inside his skull. "He's waking up," another voice, a woman's: Marian. "Thanks god, I was beginning to think the brute had killed him."

"Don't worry, miss," said the other voice, Marcus Brody's. "He has a very hard head. Literally and figuratively."

Groaning, Indiana closed his eyes again as he tried to sit up. As soon as he almost made it he slumped forward until his forehead hit the cold floor again. After a few seconds, he gave it another shot. He finally straightened up and turned his head in the direction he had heard Marcus and Marian.

“Marcus?” he asked, surprised. “Glad to see you. What are you doing here?”

“The same as you,” Marcus replied calmly. “Being tied up.” Even without the pounding pain in his head, Indiana was not in the mood for jokes. He bit back the angry response that was on his tongue. Instead, he pressed: “What happened?” trying to piece together the last events he remembered.

“I was foolish,” Marcus explained. “They showed up right after you left.”

“Gangsters?” replied Indiana.

“No, the FBI men you told me about. They showed up asking a lot of worthless questions...”

“And,” Indiana inquired for more. The guys in the pawnshop didn’t seem like FBI.

“Well,” continued Marcus. “I thought I had gotten rid of them. But barely a minute after they left, there was another knock at the door. I figured they had returned to ask a question they might have forgotten...”

“Oh,” said Indiana, understanding now. These men had lain in waiting until the feds had departed, then showed up to take advantage of Marcus’s confusion.

Marcus said no more, and Indiana fell silent. He could only imagine how Brody must be feeling. He was an honorable man, but not a man of action, and he never claimed to be one. Indiana couldn’t imagine that the old chap would even last a second or two with the giant that had pummeled him in the pawnshop.

Marian spoke up. “I’m sorry, Indiana,” she murmured. “They forced me to take them to you. They forced us into their car.”

“It’s okay,” said Indiana. “It doesn’t matter now.”

“It does,” Marcus growled. “If I hadn’t been so stupid and let them in the house. You told me not to open the door for anyone. But I was a fool...”

“Relax,” Indiana assured again. “You didn’t do anything wrong, Marcus. I probably would have done the same thing.”

Suddenly a chuckle came from somewhere in the darkness behind Marcus. Indiana tried to get to his knees and penetrate the black veil from where the laughter was coming from. A few seconds later, another laugh, and the veil became a shadowy

figure. It remained just out view, a slightly lighter shade of dark than the area behind.

“How noble, Dr. Jones,” said a rasping, unpleasant voice. “If I were in your shoes, I would be thinking about how I was going to punish Mr. Brody.”

“Who are you?” demanded Indiana.

The shadow laughed again, then took a few shuffling steps forward. Although he was still halfway clouded by the shadows, Indiana could recognize that the man was crippled. He moved slightly to the right, dragging the other leg a little. His shoulders were at different heights, and his right arm was cradled in an odd, unnatural angle.

“Who are you?” Indiana asked again.

Two shadows moved behind the man, and one of them was so imposing Indiana knew immediately that it was the giant. It was obvious who the boss was in this arrangement.

“My name is Ramos,” the cripple finally replied in an unpleasant voice.

“Interesting,” said Indiana. “Never heard of you.”

Ramos laughed and took another step toward him. “Fair enough, Dr. Jones,” he acknowledge. “Until now, we have never had the pleasure to meet. Glad to have finally made your acquaintance.”

Indiana shot him a dirty look. “Listen, stop with the nonsense and tell us what you want with us!” Indiana snapped.

Ramos cocked his head and looked down at Indiana. “This isn’t about you, Dr. Jones.” He turned and looked at the other prisoners. “This is about your adorable friend, Mrs. Corda.”

“I don’t know you,” Marian replied quickly.

“Yes that’s true,” Ramos sneered. “But your husband knows me. He and I had a business arrangement. I have honored my part of the deal – but unfortunately your husband has not.”

“Listen, Ramos,” Indiana interjected. “I don’t know what kind of crooked business Stanley has entered with you, and I really don’t care. But this is between you and Stanley. Take it up with him, not his woman. She doesn’t know anything about Stanley’s dealings.”

“I am very inclined to believe you, Dr. Jones,” agreed Ramos. “You see, Professor Corda and I have working together for quite some time, and I think I know him well. But what can I do? I’ve spent a lot of money and effort on this deal, and even I have obligations. My business partners expect that I honor my commitments. Professor Corda has something that belongs to me.”

“Then find him and get it from him,” Indiana said sarcastically, as if the answer was obvious. “I-“

“I..” interrupted Ramos, “have a principle that I live by: I get what I want. Always. Nobody robs from me. Do you understand that?”

Indiana felt an icy chill run down his back. He gently leaned back and tugged at his bonds to test their strength. As soon as he did, a sharp pain shot through his wrists: he wasn’t tied up with rope, but with wire. Any attempt to break the bonds would result in serious injury.

“Let’s be reasonable,” Indiana continued, realizing that attempting to break free was futile. Ramos stepped a little closer still, followed by the two bodyguards. Indiana finally got a good look at the man. His face was no longer covered with make-up, and he was no longer wearing the dark spectacles. He was ugly a disfigured, and his eyes were milky white balls without pupils. He was blind.

“I’m listening, Dr. Jones,” he said.

“Like I said,” Indiana explained. “I do not know what kind of business you have with Stanley Corda, and it really does not interest me. But I give you my word that Marian has nothing to with it or know about it.”

“Who says I don’t believe you?”

“Your men were in Corda’s house,” Indiana went on. “And no doubt, they performed a very thorough search. If they did not find what they were looking for, what purpose does holding us have.”

“Yes, I know,” Ramos said with a smile.

Indiana looked up, confused. “Then I don’t understand.”

“I think you understand very well, Dr. Jones,” said Ramos. “Like I told you earlier. I know Professor Corda very well. I don’t

think he would come to his wife's aid. Not even for what I want from him."

"Then why keep us?" Marcus inquired sincerely.

"A fair question, Mr. Brody. I'll be glad to answer," Ramos explained. "You see, I have made inquiries, not only about Professor Corda, but about you and Dr. Jones as well. What I want is simple: Professor Corda disappeared yesterday morning. In spite of all my efforts to find him, he is a rat and I have not yet located his whereabouts. But I believe someone among us can find him."

Marian shook her head. "I told you, I have no idea where he is," Marian pleaded, but Ramos simply smiled and shook his head.

"I am not speaking of you, my love." He turned, and if he could see pointed his creepy white eyes directly at Indiana.

Indiana laughed and shook his head. "Not likely." Ramos made absolutely no movement. He simply continued to 'stare' down at Indiana.

"What are you talking about?" Marcus demanded, exasperated.

Indiana looked up and saw the villain's piercing gaze, and his smile slowly faded as realization sunk in.

"He wants me to find Stanley," Indiana said finally. "And my guess is that you'll both be staying here until I get back."

Ramos laughed and clapped his hands mockingly. "Excellent, Dr. Jones. I was beginning to think you were stupid! I see I was not mistaken in choosing you for this task. I am sure that you will continue to not disappoint, especially since you have three days to find Professor Corda, at which point I will begin to, one by one, cut off the fingers and toes of your friends. One a day."

Marcus sucked in his breath sharply, and Marian gave a faint whimper. Indiana stared at the blind, piercing villain. Ramos was still smiling, but it was the coldest, wickedest smile that Indiana had ever seen. He often heard threats like this, perhaps worse. But he knew Ramos would stand by what he said.

"Three days isn't enough," Indiana pleaded. "I-"

"Three days," Ramos interrupted. "And the rest of today- I don't want to be petty. And if you are still not inspired, be advised

that as soon as I am done with your friend, Mr. Brody, I will start on Mrs. Corda. You do not want to know what happens when I run out of fingers and toes!”

“He’s bluffing,” Marcus said unconvincingly.

Indiana shook his head. “No. No he’s not,” he said quickly.

“Dr. Jones is right, Mr. Brody,” said Ramos seriously. “I assure you, I never bluff. But since I expected you’d say that, I will convince you.”

He half turned and gave the two men behind him a signal. “Bring him in.”

The two disappeared into the darkness for a moment, and when they returned they were dragging a squirming shadow between them. Indiana didn’t have to wait until they were visible before he realized that they were dragging the pawnbroker, Rogers. His hands and feet were restrained, just like theirs were. But Rogers wore a gag, so tightly that his labored breath was even harder. He struggled violently, his eyes large and wide with fear, and he was drenched in cold sweat. But his strength was no match for the two goons who held him.

Ramos turned in Marcus’s direction. “Let me show you that I do not bluff. Bring him closer.”

“No,” Indiana pleaded. “Don’t do this. Why?”

Rogers desperately tried even harder to get away when he heard Ramos’s statement to Marcus. But his struggle was futile. The giant grabbed him with both hands and lifted him off the ground as the smaller of the two stepped aside and withdrew a large switchblade knife from his pocket. He flicked open the blade, and nonchalantly buried it into Rogers’s heart. Rogers struggled for a few seconds more as his brain registered what had happened. He turned pale, and the features on his face went slack. He kicked for a moment after the giant dropped him to the ground. Then his body stopped moving.

Marian averted her eyes as the blade sank in, whimpering, while Marcus and Indiana stared with bewilderment.

“Why?” asked Marcus again, his voice soft and croaking. He looked down in dismay.

“What was the purpose? It was pointless,” Indiana said finally.

“Perhaps,” Ramos said coolly. “But it focuses you on your task, Dr. Jones. And trust me. He’s not worth your sorrow. He deserved death long ago.”

Indiana sat motionless, stunned. It was not the first time he had seen someone die, or even the first time he had witnessed a murder. However he had rarely seen a man killed in such a cold, ruthless and unnecessary show of force. There was no point or reason behind it.

Indiana heard Marcus breathing slowly and deeply, trying to bury his emotions. Marian was almost panting as she struggled to hold back her tears. But Indiana didn’t look at them. He simply stared up at Ramos. And even though the villain could only perceive darkness with his milky white eyes, he seemed to feel Indiana’s stare. After a few seconds, a wicked smile twisted his lips.

“I see we understand each other, Dr. Jones,” he said.

Indiana had always understood. Against his better judgment, he spoke up. “Listen, Ramos,” he insisted. “We don’t know where Stanley Corda is. But I give you my word; I will tell you if I find out. Please don’t hurt Marian or Marcus. I will find Corda, I promise you. Why don’t you let them go?”

Ramos laughed softly. “What kind of fool do you take me for, Dr. Jones?” he asked.

“I-” began Indiana. But he dropped what he was about to say as Ramos made a lightning-fast movement with his left hand and slapped Indiana with such force that it knocked him helplessly backwards onto the concrete floor. Stars danced across Indiana’s eyes, as the taste of his own blood filled his mouth.

“Remember, Dr. Jones. Three days starting tomorrow.” Ramos reiterated calmly.

Ramos turned and disappeared once again behind the veil of darkness. Indiana looked up just in time to see the giant smiling as he stepped forward...



CHAPTER 3

14 June 1943

For the second time Indiana Jones arose with the worst headache of his life. He opened his eyes and raised his head, trying to shake away the daggers caused by the bright sunlight that greeted his awakening moment. A dwarf was pounding his blacksmith's hammer inside the depths of his skull. Indiana guessed it was the same dwarf that had been there the day before as the song it sang while it struck the anvil was the same as the one that had sent him to the land of dreams before.

After all, he thought sarcastically, there's a good chance that it couldn't get worse. As long as he didn't run into Ramos's giant again, he should be able to save his neck. Cautiously, he tried to sit up. The pounding in his head was lessening, and he was beginning to register where he was. He was no longer in the cold room, possibly a warehouse he mused, where Ramos had kept him prisoner and was now holding Marian and Marcus. He was in his own devastated living room.

He groaned as he buried his face in his hands, waiting for the dull rhythmic rumble between his temples to subside. But it did not happen, and after a few more seconds he understood why. The hammering was no longer coming from his skull, but from outside. He fought through the raging pain and fought back the dizziness as he tried to stand. He was much too dazed to even try thinking who could be at his doorway pounding so frantically.

Staggering more than walking, he dragged himself to the door. It took two attempts to grab the handle and turn it enough to pull the door open a crack.

A split second passed before the door was forced completely open, knocking him backwards, as laurel and Hardy marched in. They ignored Indiana for the moment and looked around at the devastation with a mixture of distrust, and for a second Indiana thought he could see them smiling. Hardy, that is Reuben, beat Indy to shutting the door. He slammed it with a loud bang that made Indiana cringe.

“Good morning, Dr. Jones,” Reuben said, obviously trying to conceal his ill-disguised glee at Indiana’s misfortune.

“What’s good about it?” mumbled Indiana. He raised his hand and rubbed his eyes with his thumb and index finger to subdue the pain so he could continue.

“Must have been some party you had last night,” Henley jumped in sarcastically as he looked around. He turned back to Indiana with seriousness. “Or did you have guests?”

“You know, it’s the guests that interest us, Dr. Jones,” Reuben said to Indiana. He gave the two a dirty look before feeling his way to the kitchen. His hand trembled as he tried to light the gas stove so he could brew some coffee.

Reuben watched him struggle for a second, then pushed him aside and lit the stove for him with a little gold lighter that he removed from his pocket. Indiana knew it was a gesture of self-interest more than trying to help out. The man obviously didn’t want to be in the house when Indiana caused it to blow sky high. Indiana forced a grateful smile, and took a tin with ground coffee from the cupboard. He struggled with it as he tried to open the clasp with his trembling fingers. After trying unsuccessfully, he shot a glance at Reuben and gave another pleading smile. Reuben huffed and shook his head, but took the container from Indiana and took over the task of making the coffee.

“Why the sudden kindness?” Indiana asked, astonished.

“Just sit down, before you fall down,” Reuben ordered, ignoring the question. “Start from the beginning...”

Indiana decided to do what he was told, and stumbled back to the living room and fell into the couch. He closed his eyes and

tried to clear his mind, with some success. The devastation in the house was not the result of a fight. With the exception of the couch, on which he had awoken, every piece of furniture in the room was overturned and broken. Not a single book remained in the shelves, and every picture had been yanked from the wall. Obviously Ramos's men had free reign and plenty of time to thoroughly search for whatever they had been looking for.

"You don't look very well, Dr. Jones," Henley complimented.

"If I look how I feel, it must be awful," muttered Indiana.

"You do," acknowledged Henley. "Should I call a doctor?"

Indiana considered it for a moment, then resisted the temptation and shook his head. "No."

Henley drew his brows together and placed his hands in his pockets. He looked around again with a frown.

"Let me guess. Ramos." He said finally.

Indiana hesitated. There was no point in playing ignorant. These men obviously knew more than they had let on to earlier.

"What do you know of Ramos?"

"More than you, I am guessing," answered Reuben, stepping out of the kitchen balancing three cups of coffee in his hands. He put the clanking load onto the small table and to his credit barely spilled a drop. He glanced around for a place to sit down. Seeing that Indiana occupied the only seat left, he resigned himself to stand. "You could have saved yourself a lot of trouble – and headaches – if you had told us what you knew earlier."

"Perhaps," Indiana replied sheepishly. "I think it's time I apologized."

"Forget it," said Henley after a second. "It's not a problem. Actually we're quite accustomed to people being suspicious of us. Apparently this is the fate of all law enforcement. Not many people understand that we are on their side."

Indiana took the cup of coffee in his unsteady hand and took a heavy drink. He waited for the stimulating effect to take hold. His headache was likely to get worse, but his thoughts were coming a little easier now. At least he was lucid enough to admit that, to put it mildly, he had been a fool.

"Who is Ramos?"

Reuben took one of the cups of coffee in his own hands and took a sip. He followed it by making a grimacing face, and Indiana could not decide whether it was in response to the liquid in the cup or the thought that was in his mind when he heard Ramos's name.

"A pretty bad guy," he said, sitting the cup back down on the table. "We still don't know a lot about him – but what we do know..." his voice trailed off for a second. "Well, it's enough," he completed finally.

"If there is such a thing as 'King of the Underworld' here, then that would be close," Henley added. "He has his fingers in every crooked business within a hundred miles: you can get anything from him ranging from marijuana to a hired killer – if you have enough money to pay."

Reuben looked at Indiana intently. "You're lucky to be alive, Dr. Jones," he said, and for a second Indiana thought he could hear worry in his voice. "If what we know about Ramos is only half right, we can still tell human life doesn't matter much to him."

"I know," said Indiana.

The two FBI agents exchanged a puzzled look.

"So you've met him?" Henley asked. Indiana nodded.

"Then you know what he looks like," added Reuben. "We've never seen him."

"Oh, you aren't missing much," muttered Indiana as he took another sip from his cup before talking further.

"What does he want from you?" Henley continued with his questioning.

"The same as you," said Indy. "He wants to know where Professor Corda is."

"Have you told him?" inquired Reuben.

"I don't know," Indiana reinforced what he had already told them yesterday, irritated.

"And, of course," Reuben said mockingly, "you wouldn't tell him even if you did know."

Indiana stared at him. "That's where you're wrong," he replied.

Reuben's face darkened. "Why?"

“Because,” Indiana said, “he has Marian. And Marcus Brody.”

For a few seconds, the room was very quiet. Reuben thought carefully, while Henley honestly looked like he was concerned.

“Explain,” said Reuben, breaking the silence.

“Just like I said,” growled Indiana. “His men have kidnapped Marian Corda and Marcus Brody. He gave me three days to find Stanley Corda, or he will kill them both.”

“Kidnapped?” Reuben demanded again. Indiana was a little confused. The FBI agent looked almost as if the word pleased him.

“Yes,” confirmed Indiana. “Why do you ask?”

“It gives us something to act upon,” answered Reuben quickly. “Don’t forget, we are FBI agents. Normally, our powers are restricted. But with kidnapping, we can go to the local authorities.” He saw the concern in Indiana’s eyes. “Don’t worry. We are going to help your friend and Mrs. Corda. Where’s the phone?”

Indiana used his head and shoulders to gesture toward the desk behind him. “Somewhere back there,” he said.

Henley sifted through the stacks of books and papers that cluttered the desk where they had been haphazardly discarded, trying to uncover the telephone. Indiana watched him a moment before turning back to Reuben.

“What does a man like Stanley Corda have to do with a crook like Ramos?”

“That’s what we ask ourselves,” Reuben replied. “We...” he hesitated. After a few seconds, he looked at his colleague, and Indiana could not help but notice the silent communication that passed between the two men. Henley finally nodded almost imperceptibly before continuing.

“We’ll be very frank with you, Dr. Jones. At least as much as we can. This isn’t about a few stolen pieces of art, or gold plundered from a Pharaoh’s grave. We don’t even have all the details. But this is quite possibly a matter of national interest. It’s a serious matter and we have to ensure you don’t disclose any of it.”

“Why this sudden confidence?” asked Indiana, without directly agreeing.

The FBI agent seemed a little embarrassed. He cleared his throat. “After our last meeting, we made some inquiries. Jones,” he said. “We now know who you are. We know you’re an honest man.” He smiled. “I think we can trust you.”

Henley had finally dug the phone out of the mess that was on the desk. He started dialing as Reuben drank another awkward sip of coffee before going on. “Whatever Professor Corda found or discovered or stole must be big deal.”

“I kind of already had that impression,” Indiana responded, rubbing his hand over the back of his aching neck.

Reuben shook his head. “I don’t think you understand the magnitude,” he said. “Henley and I haven’t been sitting by idly for the last few days. Although we don’t know what role Ramos has in all of this, we do know what Professor Corda took from him.”

“And what was it?” Indiana prodded after Reuben had gone silent.

The FBI agent shrugged. “Equipment for an expedition we believe.”

Indiana looked at him quizzically.

“Tools, food tents, weapons...”

“And enough men to make up a small army,” added Henley.

“What?”

Reuben nodded. “At least a dozen of Ramos’s well-armed men,” he said. “Mercenaries to be exact. I assume you are familiar with the type –they’d do anything for the right amount of money.”

Indiana was silent, confused. It did not make any sense. Mercenaries? He found it hard to believe Reuben. Would Corda actually do this? What the FBI agent claimed sounded incredible. Stanley Corda might be a thief, but why would he gather an army? Some type of robbery? He would not forsake his own wife for it? Or would he? What Corda had discovered was not some tomb of a lost king, but quite possibly El Dorado, the fabled land of gold. If every man had his price, perhaps this was Corda’s. And it sounded like he was trying to cut Ramos out of the deal.

That explained the gangster's interest and role. Ramos had been financing Stanley's research. But when Corda finally came across concrete evidence, he went behind the villain's back and struck out to claim El Dorado's riches for himself. The only thing that didn't add up was the FBI's involvement. And they had mentioned the Manhattan Project back in Grisswald's office. There was still a lot that they weren't telling him.

Henley had dialed the number and started, in a silent but firm voice, with whoever was on the other end. Indiana could hear everything he said. He was discussing Marian and Brody's kidnapping with the local police.

"If you are following everything you've been told, then you know..." Henley started as he spoke to Indiana.

"That Stan willingly went," Indiana concluded.

"Yes," Henley agreed. "And it seems he's booked himself and his twelve companions and equipment on a ship to Sao Paulo. It leaves on the twenty-first."

"That's in a week," Indiana acknowledged.

"I know," Reuben responded slightly impatient. "But Corda's been missing for two days, along with all those men and equipment. And he has not dared to contact Ramos. My guess is that those travel arrangements were made to deceive Ramos about Corda's true intentions."

Indiana agreed. "But it's hard to make thirteen men and a truckload of equipment and weapons simply 'disappear'."

"Exactly, and Ramos knows this. That's why he's been out looking and making all those inquiries over the last few days. But it's almost as if Corda and the men simply vanished into thin air." Henley had finished his phone call and came back. "Good news," he said. "We've located where they are hiding Mrs. Corda and Mr. Brody. They discovered them about three hours ago. Don't worry."

The news shocked Indiana, but he was grateful. However, he tried to suppress his optimism. If he had learned anything from his first meeting with Ramos, it was that the man was very intelligent. And he was one hundred percent sure Ramos's men were watching the house at this very moment.

“They are safe,” Reuben added, sensing Indiana’s concern. He pulled the curtain aside a little to peer out the window. “Look,” he said absently. “These two must think they are invisible.”

Indiana brushed him aside and what he saw confirmed his fears. There were two goons sitting quietly inside an old auto, watching the house.

“Safe?” Indiana quizzed. “Aren’t you going to do something?”

Reuben smiled. “On the contrary, why should we? As long as they aren’t aware that we know where Mrs. Corda and Mr. Brody are, then they pose no threat to them.”

“Ah,” said Indiana, understanding the logic.

“Let them watch,” Henley added, looking at the clock. “You should be getting ready, Dr. Jones. You’re lectures begin in less than an hour. As long as Ramos is not aware that we are working together, everything will be okay. You have to behave quite normally.”

Reuben moved toward the door. “We are going to leave,” he said. “Better yet, you should throw us out. And make sure those two idiots over there see it.”

Henley nodded. “We can’t let our friend Ramos know that you are working with us,” he added. He smiled, but his eyes remained cold and glassy. Indiana saw an unspoken question in them. Could they make the two goons believe it?

He did not answer.

He threw them out of the house so flamboyantly that even a blind man like Ramos would have seen it. He tried convincingly to show that they were not his friends. Even Indiana wasn’t quite sure whether the anger in his voice and gestures was acted or real.

Indiana choked down another swallow of the horrible coffee Reuben had brewed. As he got ready he realized it was Saturday. There was no lecture he had to get to on time. But the idea of spending hours in the house doing nothing except waiting for the phone to ring or the FBI to come back was unbearable to him.

Plus he simply couldn't just sit back and rely on the FBI to save his friends.

Also, he simply was not sure whether Laurel and Hardy's methods would be Marian and Marcus's salvation or undoing. Although he did not doubt that the two were good FBI agents, he felt they didn't stand a chance with Ramos. The man was more than a criminal. He was crazy, a maniac with no shred of conscience. He was not only crippled physically, but mentally as well. He was also highly intelligent, which made him even more dangerous. Indiana could not even describe it with words. Even now, an icy shiver ran down his back when he thought of his encounter with the blind man.

It had never been his style to sit back with his hands in his pockets while others did all the work. He had to do something. But where should he start? Then it struck him. Perhaps Reuben and Henley were right in a way. Even though there was no lecture to attend to, the university might be the place to start.

He ran to the door indecisively and rather nervously. He pushed the curtain aside and peered out the window again. He spotted Ramos's men immediately. They were making no effort to hide, and they were still there as clumsy and obvious as before. It seemed strange to Indiana that Ramos would send fools to tail him. The two idiots in the car were being so obvious that another thought struck Indiana: perhaps he was meant to see them.

Once again his gaze attentively scoped the road. At first he saw nothing unusual. But then he noticed it: a third man, quite a distance down the street, leaning against a building and reading a newspaper. Had this man been there before? He wasn't sure. But if he was watching him his behavior was much more concealed than that of the two dolts in the car.

Indiana closed the curtain again. He scanned the total devastation in his living room, and was beginning to think this was more than a mere sign of petty vandalism. Ramos's men had thoroughly searched everything, and even busted up all the furniture. Its contents had been combed through numerous times during the search.

Why? What were they searching for?

It struck him almost immediately before the question had formed in his mind. He knew what they had previously overlooked. It was almost laughable.

As Indiana drove to the university his keepers followed so closely that he nearly expected them to run into his rear end. They two men weren't even bothering to be inconspicuous. As he pulled to a stop at a traffic light, he briefly considering getting out and inviting them to join him in his car for simplicity's sake. About half way to the university he saw the second follower. It was a gray van with a laundry sign on the side. It was a great distance behind, following almost unobtrusively. For a second he reconsidered. Maybe there wasn't a second tail after all. But he changed his mind at the next turn when he started making a deviation in his route that took him a round-about way to the university. The van continued along the same direction, and as they went through a traffic circle back to the main road he saw both cars in the rear view mirror.

He parked the car on the road outside the university. He resisted the temptation to wave to the two idiots in the first tail. He went through a gate marked "Authorized Access Only!" He walked across the meticulously manicured lawn, approaching the university building where many of the professors had their office. He figured that his followers would not have the audacity to follow him into the university. He looked back as he walked up the stairs of the side entrance and saw the gray van driving at a snail's pace down the road where he had parked. It then disappeared around the next bend.

Because this was the Saturday that immediately preceded summer vacation, there was a great deal of activity on campus. Students roamed the hallways in large and small groups, gossiping as they sought the library or reading rooms to turn in books that were probably long-past due. Indiana moved quickly among them, trying to avoid anyone he knew, whether student or colleague.

He almost got caught up twice: the first time as a colleague tried to draw him into a conversation he was having with another professor. The second was when he had to make a lightning-

quick detour into a deserted classroom as Grisswald stepped onto the top end of stairs he was about to use and was coming his way. He waited awkwardly, giving plenty of time for Grisswald to have passed, then exited the classroom and made his way to his destination: Stanley Corda's office. Luck was on his side, he thought, as he found the office vacant. The secretary had already tidied up and left for the summer, it appeared.

Indiana shot a glance back down the hallway before closing the door behind and slipping inside. He quickly but thoroughly searched Stanley Corda's desk, which faced the secretaries but was directly across the room. It took much longer than he wanted, as each of the desk drawers were crammed so full they were difficult to open and close. But his initial optimism slowly diminished, and a final sense of dread fell over him as he found nothing to help him in his quest to find Stanley's present whereabouts.

The contents he had emptied from the drawers were mostly official work for the university. Finally he gave up and began stuffing the items back into the drawers and tidying up as best as he could. He went back to the door and reached for the handle, but at the last second turned back towards the secretary's desk on the opposite wall from Corda's.

Maybe...

He leaned over the desk, his back to the door, and flipped through the items on the desk. Almost immediately he found what he was looking for: Stanley's appointment book. It was almost too easy. He flipped to the present date and saw Stanley had an appointment for today at 2:30 P.M. It also had the name of a doctor and a telephone number: Indy recognized the name: Dr. Benson. He lived fairly close to the campus.

Excited, Indiana almost tore the sheet out, but then quickly changed his mind. If someone came in after him they'd know he found something, so he simply grabbed a blank sheet of paper and scribbled down Benson's name and phone number.

Indiana remembered two things that helped his cause, both of which he paid little attention to before: namely Reuben's remark that several of Corda's customers had gotten sick, and also that Marian had barely registered a wince when Marcus told her of it.

Indiana was so lost in his own thoughts that he did not hear the sound of the door open up and someone enter the office behind him. The person was three feet away of him when he finally stood up and spun around.

“What are you doing, Dr. Jones?” Indiana drew back, startled, like he’d been bitten by a tarantula. He expected to be attacked. But when he looked back, it wasn’t Reuben or Henley, or Ramos’s goons. Nevertheless, a sinking feeling overcame him when he saw Grisswald.

Indiana crumpled the paper in his right hand.

“I’ll ask you one more time. What are you doing, Dr. Jones?”

“Nothing,” replied Indiana abruptly, like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

“Nothing?” Grisswald frowned deeper. Accusingly, he pointed to the crumpled paper Indiana was trying to hide in vain from the old dean. “It doesn’t look like nothing to me.” Indiana relaxed a little and grimaced slightly. “It’s a private matter,” he said.

“Private?” Grisswald’s anger ebbed and he made a supercilious smile. “Need I remind you, Dr. Jones, that here on the university’s campus nothing is private if I deem it so.” He held out his hand, demanding. “Please, give me the note.”

“I said it’s private,” Indiana insisted stubbornly.

“And I said-” Grisswald did not complete the sentence because the door suddenly opened behind him and two men entered, one of which was brandishing a sawed-off double-barreled shotgun.

If Grisswald had been able to see his own startled face, he might have found it as comical as Indiana did. The dean fell back in terror against Indiana and quickly shot his hands up palm-out to shoulder height.

“What...?” Croaked Grisswald.

“Shut up!” Interrupted one of the men with a poke from the barrels of the shotgun.

Indiana recognized the two goons that had followed him in the car. The man carrying the shotgun at first pointed it up at Grisswald’s face, and then brought it to bear on Indiana’s

stomach. “You’re going to give it to me, right?” he said, smirking.

His finger fumbled nervously on the triggers. Indiana tried to take a step back out of the line of fire but was already pressed against the desk. Grisswald crowded up against him, his heels digging into Indiana’s toes, the pain from which almost brought tears to his eyes.

“Who...who are you?” Croaked Grisswald. “Why are you-?” Grisswald seemed to be having trouble finishing sentences this day. The guy with the shotgun shook his head silently and with an almost casual movement slammed the butt of the gun into Grisswald’s stomach before he stammered out the last words.

“So?” Continued the gangster defiantly. “What do you have?”

“It means nothing to you,” said Indiana. “What is this? Robbery? I’ve given my word to Ramos-”

Obviously the goon liked interrupting people. He cut Indiana off. “What makes you think Mr. Ramos cares about your ‘word’?” He said grinning. “Give me the paper already!”

“So you can do whatever you like?” insisted Indiana.

“Maybe...” the two thugs suddenly turned around as they sensed something behind them. They were stunned to find the barrels of two large-caliber pistols pointed directly at their face. The hands that held the pistols protruded from dark blue sleeves and tailored suits. The owners were two strikingly large broad shouldered individuals.

One of the men shoved the two goons to the side of the room, while the other stayed near the doorway, making sure that Indiana and Grisswald were out of their line of fire. The man who had shoved the two gangsters aside took his place next to his partner at the doorway, and kept his pistol aimed at the forehead of the man with the shotgun (which, Indy noticed, was still aimed at his midsection). With his free hand, the man aiming at the shotgun wielder reached into his jacket and withdrew a small wallet, which he flipped open.

“FBI?” asked Indiana with mock surprise.

A fleeting smile crossed the face of the agent, but it disappeared as fast as it had appeared, and he quickly slipped the wallet back into the jacket where he had retrieved it from.

“Special Agent Reuben was of the opinion that we should look after you,” he said, never taking his eyes off the two gangsters on the other side of the room. “It looks like he was right.”

The gray van, Indiana thought. He had been wrong.

“What did you find, Dr. Jones?” said the other FBI agent.

“It could be nothing,” said Indiana. “I’m not even sure-“

Indiana stopped mid-word as a huge shadow stepped up behind the FBI agent. An equally huge arm snaked around the man’s neck and grabbed him tightly, brandishing a very long knife was in his other hand. Its tip dug into the agent’s throat.

“A single wrong move, buddy,” said a deep, gravelly voice. “And I put it to you.”

It was Ramos’s bodyguard, the giant with fists like cinder-blocks which Indy had already had the unpleasant acquaintance. For a half-second, everyone in the room froze. A single drip of blood trailed its way down the agent’s throat from where the tip of the knife rested. But his pistol remained firmly aimed at the forehead of the man wielding the shotgun. In turn, the gangster never took the barrels of the shotgun off Indy’s stomach. The agent’s partner kept his pistol aimed at the other goon. Both agents and both gangsters’ eyes were darting back and forth as they contemplated taking a risk and pouncing on one another.

“You’re men will get it if you do,” the agent with the knife to his throat said to the giant. His voice was raspy because of the pressure on his throat from the man’s knife blade. The giant grinned and scratched his head with the knife for a second. “Who cares!” he said, putting the knife back at the agent’s throat.

“Me!” announced another familiar voice. Reuben had tiptoed behind the giant. He raised the butt of his pistol and swung as hard as he could, striking the giant in the throat. The giant stumbled, pushing his prisoner forward and dropped the knife, but only after it made a long bloody incision in the agent’s throat. The injured agent’s pistol discharged with a deafening bang when his fingers instinctively curled around the trigger. The bullet missed the face of the shotgun-wielding goon by a fraction of an inch. He was so frightened he jumped at Grisswald, but the remaining agent and Reuben hit the trigger of their own guns.

Two bullets whizzed so close to Indiana that he felt the draft as they passed. The desk flipped backwards behind him, and in the chaos he tried to make a break for the door, pushing Grisswald ahead of him as he tried to get him out of danger. But the goon that had lunged for him grabbed Grisswald by the collar and yanked him back into the melee, trying to use him as a shield. Indiana's escape was immediately blocked by the giant, as he was not completely out of the fight. He was back on his knees wrestling silently with Reuben, both of whom were blocking the exit.

The gangster with the shotgun was on his knees as well. As he started to his feet, the dean's body went limp. The goon had trouble holding both the man and the shotgun, so he let Grisswald crumple down at his feet. The second agent had tackled the other unarmed goon and they were in a furious scuffle near the overturned desk. Indiana could not tell which of them had the upper hand as they rolled behind the desk and became partially hidden from by the cover.

Indiana could not tell which of them had the upper hand – he saw only a glimpse of a fist now and again, a leg, or some other body part pop up occasionally from behind the desk. But from the sounds it was a fierce struggle.

“Jones,” shrieked Grisswald. “Help me!” His voice was breaking in panic. Indiana was surprised when he saw the gangster that had tried to grab Grisswald now trying frantically to get away, but the dean had latched his arms tightly around the man's knees out of sheer desperation. He was pulling and struggling madly. Somehow in the action the goon had dropped the shotgun. The goon was pushing at the dean madly. Suddenly, with a hearty chomp, Grisswald bit into the man's calf. The goon howled in pain as he tried to knee Grisswald in the face. The goon lost his balance.

Just as he hit the floor, arms flailing, Indiana pounced over and grabbed him by the collar. He balled his fist and struck the man solidly in the jaw. The gangster's eyes rolled back and he fell heavily to the floor, unconscious.

Grisswald groaned as he opened his eyes and lifted his head. Indiana yanked him to his feet. Indiana saw blood streamed down

his face from a bloody nose. “Are you all right?” inquired Indiana anxiously.

Grisswald nodded, then his eyes widened in amazement when he finally saw the man he had grappled. “I gave him what was coming to him,” he muttered, stunned.

Indiana nodded, and then ducked suddenly as he caught another movement out of the corner of his eye. Something big flew violently over him, screaming in terror, and bouncing against Corda’s visitor’s chair, smashing it to pieces. It was the agent who had just been held at knifepoint. He had attacked the giant in his melee with Reuben, and the giant had quickly turned his wrath on the man and snatched him up, tossing him like a rag-doll across the room. He tried to get back to his feet after the landing, but the other gangster had wrestled free from the scuffle behind his desk and was able to bring him down quickly.

Indiana flanked the crook, realizing the other agent had been knocked unconscious behind the desk where they had been scuffling. Indiana grabbed him by the throat and punched the goon in the face, but at the same time the goon swept his feet between Indian’s legs, trying to trip him.

“Hey!” shouted Grisswald.

The gangster turned, startled and Grisswald struck the goon’s chin solidly with his fist. But the result was not what Indiana had hoped for. Grisswald jumped back, claspng his balled fist with his other hand and screamed in pain. But it was the fraction of a second Indiana needed. Indiana drove his knee into the man’s stomach, then did it again a second time.

The gangster fell back and landed directly at Grisswald’s feet. The dean, wide eyed, stared down at the goon then looked back at his swelling knuckles. “Take that!” he muttered, thinking it was his blow that had incapacitated the man.

“Look out!” cried Indiana.

Indiana threw himself into Grisswald and knocked him out of the way just as Henley hit the floor where the dean had been standing. At some point Reuben’s partner had arrived and joined the fight, but he had quickly been grabbed up by Ramos’s giant and flung across the room. Indiana and Grisswald clung tightly to each other as they hit the ground. Grisswald began to scream

and struggle intensely, so it took a moment for Indiana to release him. He didn't want to get caught up in the Dean's random swings.

He released him not a second too soon.

Indiana saw Reuben as he flanked the giant. Neither Reuben's blow with the pistol handle or Reuben and Henley's combined, sustained attack had been enough to take the giant out of action. Indiana saw that he was staggering a little, but he still had the strength of an ox – and now he was fighting like a wounded ox, which probably made him even more dangerous.

Henley was semi-conscious, moaning and roiling in the rubble of what was once a bookshelf. Reuben tried in vain to recover his gun from the ground where the giant had apparently disarmed him earlier. The grab for the gun was enough for the giant to gain the upper hand, and he caught Reuben with a series of blows that rained down with such force the FBI agent had become immobile, a sitting duck as he tried to protect his face. He tried to back away, but all he could do was continue to defend himself. And Indiana knew that he wouldn't last long against the giant's raging attack.

Indiana crouched, and then leapt at the giant with outstretched arms, hoping to knock him off his feet. The giant tottered from the impact but did not fall. He shook at Indiana, who was trying desperately to cling to his arms and legs and render them useless. At least the surprise in the attack gave Reuben the breathing space he needed to roll out of the giant's reach and recover his weapon.

“Don't move!” Reuben cried, disheveled and pummeled, but quickly regaining his composure. “Put your hands up!” For half a breath, the giant paused in his rampage. He stood for a second, and then effortlessly brought his hands up to his shoulders, surrendering. He didn't even seem to notice Indiana still clinging to his back.

“Get back!” ordered Reuben while he wiped the blood off his face, nose, and split lip with his free hand. “Don't make any sudden moves!”

The giant took another couple of steps backwards, then in the blink of an eye grabbed the heavy six-armed lamp off Corda's desk effortlessly and slung it at the FBI agent.

Reuben escaped the missile with a desperate move, but fell heavily to his hands and knees from the effort. The gun slipped out of his fingers and clattered across the floor. The giant leaped once again, with Indiana still clinging to his back with his arms and legs. He kicked clumsily at Reuben's face, but Indiana jerked with all his might and the giant missed his mark, burying his toe into Reuben's shoulder, a forceful enough blow to lift the FBI agent off the ground and possibly break a collarbone. But thankfully not caving in his skull and snapping his neck.

The giant flailed in rage as he tried to swat Indiana off him like a pesky bug. Indiana felt the giant's fingers graze his shoulders, but he was positioned just right to stay out of the hulking man's grip. Indiana doubles his effort, working his arms around the bulging muscles of the giant's neck and squeezing.

Reuben stood, gathered his wits, and then took a flying leap, feat first and drop-kicked the giant in the chest. For the second time the giant stumbled, and he began wobbling at his knees. The attack had finally robbed the giant of his balance, and he began to helplessly fall backwards like a stone.

Indiana had the feeling he was riding a collapsing skyscraper to the ground. And he was on the wrong side! Stars splattered across his brain as his back hit the floor with tremendous force. He could hear (and more painfully feel) his ribs crack and the air wheeze from his lungs. Indiana fought with all his strength to remain conscious. Although Indy's attempt to choke the giant had failed, feeling the bulging veins in his neck gave him an idea.

But the giant was only dazed for a second. He quickly began slamming his back to the floor, trying to crush Indiana beneath him. At the same time, Indiana pressed both his thumbs tightly against the man's carotid arteries.

The giant reared up again when he realized what Indiana had in mind. With an impossible effort, the giant struggled back to his feet and once again reached back, trying to dislodge Indiana off his back. But Indiana had once again slipped his thumbs into the arteries on the giant's neck and squeezed with great pressure.

He felt the giant grab tufts of his hair, but the monstrous hands simply could not get a grip.

With each effort and squeeze, Indiana felt the behemoth's movements getting noticeably slower than before. He had stopped trying to yank Indiana off him, and was waiving his hands rather aimlessly through the air. He staggered, made a cumbersome step forward, and then fell to one knee. Once more, the giant miraculously got to his feet, but Indiana continued applying the pressure until his thumbs felt like they were about to snap. He knew, however, that if he gave up now, it would be a death sentence for them all.

He felt Ramos's giant begin to tremble beneath him as the blood stopped flowing to his brain. Finally, the strength flowed out of the giant's limbs. His arms dropped to his side and his legs became rubbery. Once more the giant fell to his knees. But this time he slowly tilted forward.

Suddenly Grisswald appeared in front of the giant, and with a ridiculous sounding scream, landed a judo chop across the giant's neck with the rigid edge of his palm: or more precisely against Indiana's left thumb and jammed it into the muscles of the giant's neck.

Indiana yanked back his hand instinctively, but luckily the giant had already lost consciousness and fell face-first into the floor.

Indy dismounted the giant, feeling as if he'd just gone ten-seconds or longer with a bucking Bronco. His legs were jelly beneath him from their constant squeezing to hold him in place on the giant's back. He fumbled for the edge of Corda's desk to help him stay on his feet.

The room was spinning before his eyes, his bruised and possibly cracked ribs hurt like hell, and he could once again taste his own blood in his mouth. For a moment, his senses were muddled. He felt helpless, as he dropped to his knees next to the giant and leaned against him with his back gasping for breath.

As his senses cleared, the first thing he saw was Grisswald leaning over him anxiously. "Are you all right, Dr. Jones?" said the Dean. Indiana nodded as he tried to get to his feet. It wasn't until the third attempt that he finally managed to do so. The rum

was spinning wildly still, and his ribs screamed with every movement, making it hard for him to breathe.

“That was damned close,” said Grisswald. “Great God! That monster would have easily killed you if I hadn’t intervened!” Indiana wasn’t quite sure he understood what the man was saying, but he nodded anyway. He ran a hand across his face and felt the stickiness of his own blood. Painfully, he stumbled over to Reuben and settled next to him. A look of relief crossed his face when he saw the FBI agent stir. He looked beaten and dazed, but not mortally injured.

“Are you okay?” Indiana asked between breaths when Reuben tried to get to his feet but fell back down.

“I think so,” murmured the FBI agent. He lifted his hand and felt his face, gritting his teeth and hoping everything was still there and in the right place. “Did you catch the license of that steam roller?”

Indiana smiled briefly at the joke, but even that movement hurt like hell. His heart skipped a beat when he saw movement from the vicinity of the fallen giant. The beast appeared to be regaining his senses.

Hastily Indiana leaned forward and rummaged through Reuben’s jacket. “What are you looking for?” he asked quickly. “Something,” Indiana muttered, and then his hands fell across the handcuff holder on Reuben’s belt. He yanked them out triumphantly and held the cuffs up: “These!”

Reuben looked at him puzzled, and was about to issue a protest but Indiana had already crawled the short distance to the waking giant. On his hands and knees, he tried desperately to get the handcuffs around the wrists of the man before he came too, but they were too small. They were for normal sized men. The wrists of the colossus were simply too thick.

“What are you doing, Jones?” voiced Grisswald behind him. Indiana ignored him as he tried again, but with the same result. The giant was stirring now, and Indiana could tell strength was flowing back into those tree-trunk arms.

“I asked what you were doing?” resounded Grisswald. Even in this situation, he was still asserting his authority, as usual.

The giant raised his head and blinked at the groaning Indiana.

Indiana dropped the handcuffs and formed his hands into a single fist. He reached back and released a mighty blow across the giant's jaw. Then he proceeded to deliver a second ten finger shuffle from the other direction into the opposite jaw. He did this repeatedly, delivering salvo after salvo, until the hulk fell again into unconsciousness. Indiana fell backwards with a cry of pain, his throbbing hands pressed against his chest.

Grisswald sucked air through his gritted teeth. "I think that's enough!" he said, agitated. "Leave the man alone, Jones! Who do you think you are?"

Indiana continued to ignore him and looked around for something that might hold the giant's hands. Finally a thought struck him. He yanked the monster's leather belt out of the loops of his pants. After he tied the giant's hands with the unusually long belt, he waited for the giant to stir again. At the first sign of movement, he gave him another punch across the jaw with his right fist. With the throbbing pain in his hands, he knew it would take a week for his knuckles to heal enough for him to be able to write.

Grisswald gasped again, and acted as if he were on the verge of a heart attack. "I demand that you stop mistreating that man immediately!" he snarled. "I will not tolerate this senseless violence in my university!"

Indiana shot him a hateful look, and then quickly returned to Reuben's side. The FBI agent had propped himself up into a sitting position. Although he was still dazed a bit, he looked at Indiana.

"What the hell happened here?" Reuben murmured.

"I would like to know as well," Grisswald added. "I have a lot of questions for you, Dr. Jones." Accusingly he pointed an index finger at Reuben. "And you too!"

Indiana did not answer as he noticed the clock on the wall behind Corda's desk: 2:15 P.M. Just then, the giant on the ground started stirring again. A tortured moan rang out as the giant sat up. The leather belt that Indiana had tied his hands with began to creak audibly, and Reuben's eyes widened in disbelief as the muscles beneath the giant's jacket bulged. He was trying to break

free. And from the sound of the belt, he was quite possibly going to succeed.

“What do I do?” Reuben asked in panic.

“Just take the guy in,” said Indiana. “But you may want to call reinforcements. Maybe the National Guard.”

Indiana was on his feet and heading out the door. He wasn’t sure whether Reuben heard that last piece of advice or not, but he was already hopping painfully toward the stairs. He had to get to an appointment with Dr. Benson before 2:30!

It took him less than ten minutes to get to Dr. Benson’s practice, and Indiana was pounding on the door despite the message on the small brass plaque that read ‘Closed Weekends and Holidays’. He then went to the second address in the book, which was only a block or so away. He found himself in the driveway with two small cars. He had seen movement behind one of the windows when his old Ford squealed to a halt beside the house. Benson – or someone else – was definitely home.

The minutes seemed endless as Indiana waited for someone to answer his impatient knocking. He heard a chain rattling inside, and then the door opened a small crack. A thin, frail face wearing small-rimmed glasses peered out at him. “Yes?”

“Dr. Benson?” Indiana began. The question was superfluous – he recognized the gray-haired old man. He had seen him a few times at the university, and if he recalled correctly at least one or two of those times was in conversation with Stanley.

Benson nodded, but still looked a little frightened when he saw the shape Indiana was in: shirt untucked and covered with sweat and blood, wounds and bruises on his face and hands. Indiana knew he had to look like he just survived a train wreck (which is actually a pretty accurate description of what he had just left).

“Yes. What can I do for you? The practice is...”

“Closed, I know,” Indiana finished impatiently. He had to control his urge to continually check the road behind him. His behavior and appearance was already alarming enough.

“I know,” he said again, this time a little more softly. “But please, allow me to come in...it’s very important.”

Benson made no move to open the door further. He continued to eye him with suspicion.

“What is it?” Benson asked again. “Why...” At that instant recognition registered in the old man’s eyes. His face suddenly lit up. “Dr. Jones? Dr. Henry Jones?”

“Yes,” Indiana admitted, relieved that the old man had finally recognized him. This should make it easier. “It’s very important, and I would really appreciate it if we could talk inside, out of the street.”

Indiana picked his words with sincerity, but it did not seem to break Benson’s distrust. The old man spent about twenty seconds in internal deliberation, studying Indiana’s battered, disheveled appearance before he reluctantly decided to let Indiana into the house. He motioned for Indiana to wait as he closed the door to remove the chain.

Indiana took advantage of the tiny second it took to release the chain and shot a glance down both directions of the street. He was looking for any signs of being followed. Although he had retrieved the paper with Benson’s name and number from Stanley’s office, he still wasn’t sure it would produce any reliable leads. He also figured Ramos’s bodyguard would probably keep Reuben and the rest occupied for the time being, but if they were able to subdue him quickly it wouldn’t be long before they showed up hot on his heels.

When he had left the campus earlier it occurred to Indiana that he should have just taken the paper with the name and number instead of copying it off Stan’s secretary’s desk. Although Laurel and Hardy might not be particularly bright, he didn’t believe they would overlook a reference right in the Stan’s appointment book.

Finally Benson opened the door. Indiana struggled to control his anxiety. He wanted desperately to burst through the door and yank the doctor up and demand answers. Obviously the doctor recognized this struggle because he eyed Indy distrustfully. He took a long view of the road in both directions before he finally pushed open the door and motioned for Indy to enter the house.

“Let’s talk in my study, Dr. Jones,” Benson said.

“I’d rather talk here,” Indiana said sharply.

“Are you ill?” Benson inquired with astonishment.

“No,” Indiana smiled. “It does not concern me.”

“Then what is this about?” Benson inquired, smiling nervously.

“It’s about Professor Corda,” Indiana answered. “I believe you were treating him over the last few weeks?”

It was a shot in the dark, Indy knew. But Benson’s reaction proved his assumption was correct. However, it didn’t reveal as much as Indiana had hoped. Benson’s smile disappeared, and distrust and animosity filled his eyes.

“I must disappoint you, Dr. Jones,” he said. “As you know, I cannot discuss my patients.”

“I understand,” answered Indiana. “However it...” he hesitated. Something warned him he wouldn’t be able to deceive Benson. Even though the physician was old and jittery, his eyes were very attentive, and he was the kind of man who would be able to detect a lie right away.

“It’s a matter of life and death,” he finally said. “That’s the honest truth, Dr. Benson.”

“Nonetheless,” Benson persisted, “there is nothing I can tell you...”

“This isn’t about Stan,” interrupted Indiana.

Benson stared, trying to understand.

“Or his illness,” Indiana continued.

“Why are you here then?” Benson asked, confused. “I don’t know anything about Professor Corda.”

“Perhaps,” Indiana said. “But didn’t he have an appointment with you? One he didn’t show up for?”

“That’s right,” Benson removed his eyeglasses. “However...”

“Professor Corda disappeared without a trace. He has been missing for two days, Dr. Benson,” interrupted Indiana very seriously. “And I’m afraid he is in grave danger.”

For a second, Benson appeared frightened, and then he smiled. “You must be mistaken. Although I can’t tell you what his illness is, this much I can say: it is not life-threatening.”

“Why were you treating him?” Indiana responded. “And why didn’t he show up if he still isn’t cured? I wish I could tell you

more, but I can't. It's for your own safety. But you must believe me. It's vital that I find out."

"That may be," answered Benson in a tone of honest regret. "However, I cannot tell you. As you said, he had an appointment with me and he did not show up. As for his whereabouts, I don't know any more than you."

"What about prior to his disappearance? Do you know where he might have gone?" asked Indiana.

"That's no secret. Quite the contrary, actually. We talked for a while about his last journey. If I remember correctly, he said he was in Bolivia."

"Where exactly?"

"In..." Benson looked as if he were trying to remember. He thought quietly for a moment. "I noted it somewhere in his file. If you can wait, I will get it."

He shuffled off. Indiana resisted the urge to follow him. When Benson has left the hallway and was out of sight, Indy returned quickly to the door and opened it slightly for a look outside. The road was still empty, but he had to wonder how long it would stay that way.

A few minutes passed before Benson returned with a file in hand. He opened it up and removed the contents, flipping through the papers until he came to the sheet he was looking for: its upper half had a colored postcard attached to it. He noticed Indiana's interest and smiled uneasily, and then he took the sheet from the stack of documents and showed it to him. He placed the stack of other documents pertaining to Corda on the coffee table, ensuring they were covered to protect the doctor-patient confidentiality. "He was in La Paz. He sent me a postcard from there. He spent about four weeks in a hotel there, you know."

Indiana was disappointed. Although Bolivia was a small country, some small countries have the unpleasant attribute of being very large in terms of people. When it comes to finding one person, it can be extremely difficult. Still he reached for the sheet. There was nothing else on it except for the attached postcard and a hand-written greeting from Stan Corda to Dr. Benson. He studied the picture on the postcard: it was an exaggerated picture of a four-story hotel with nondescript color. He couldn't see the

inside, but the false marble décor front gave him hope he could find it. He handed the paper back to the doctor to put back into his file.

“Four weeks?”

“Give or take,” Benson confirmed. “He had a small accident in the jungle there, so he waited for it to heal.”

“Did you say in the jungle? Why was he in the jungle?”

Once again, distrust and uncertainty flashed in Benson’s eyes. “He is an archeologist like you, Dr. Jones.”

There was a loud screech of car tires outside. Indiana was up in a split-second, jumping like a tarantula on its prey. He tore open the door just as a car screeched to halt outside.

But when Indiana peered through the door it wasn’t Laurel and Hardy as he had halfway expected. He saw the brake lights light up on a dirty Oldsmobile, and he recognized it immediately as the car that had pursued him from his house to the university campus earlier – and sitting behind the wheel was the same thug he had seen driving it and his partner. Obviously something had gone wrong with Reuben’s arrest. Indiana held out a momentary hope that the two goons might continue driving, and not notice his old beat up Ford outside. But it was short-lived. The Oldsmobile’s tires screamed as the driver slammed on the brakes about a meter passed his car, and Indy could hear the screeching of gears as the driver slammed it into reverse.

“What is going on, Dr. Jones?” asked Benson, who had stepped up behind him. “Who are those people? Do you know them?”

“No,” Indiana answered quickly, and then added: “Not exactly. But they are definitely not friends of mine.” He thought aloud. The car came backing into the driveway at high speeds. Indy could see the man in the passenger seat was already going for his door handle. In a few seconds, they’d be at the front door. With a little luck, he could possibly get away from them a second time – but it didn’t take much imagination to know what they would do to Benson.

“What’s going on here, Dr. Jones?” Benson demanded a second time in a very serious tone. “I demand an explanation! Immediately!”

“There’s no time!” Indiana answered hastily. He tore open the door completely so the thugs outside could see, then turned and grabbed Benson up by the folds of his house coat and started shaking him so violently back and forth that the old man gasped in surprise.

“Protect yourself!” Indiana hissed. “For the sake of God, Benson, you have to fight me. Hit me!”

But Benson did not understand at all. Confusion flooded his ashen gray eyes and a look of terror fell across his face. He stared incredulously at Indiana, until he was pushed so roughly against the door frame that Indy could feel he was going to break the old man’s ribs. From the corner of his eyes Indy saw the Oldsmobile lurch from side to side as it rolled backwards up the drive. It came jerking to a sudden stop half way up the ramp, and the passenger door ripped open.

“For God’s sake, you have to defend yourself!” Indiana yelled desperately and forcefully took Benson by his house jacket again, shaking him back and forth. The physician made no effort to resist and tried to sit down, so Indy roughly pushed him up against the doorframe a second time – this time trying inconspicuously to shove the paper with Stanley’s name and the postcard into the empty file binder in the doctor’s hand. Benson groaned with pain and sank to his knees. He hoped the two goons behind him wouldn’t see through the deception. He grabbed Benson’s hand and shoved the postcard and binder of Stanley’s file into Benson’s jacket, hoping the goons hadn’t seen the movement. It nearly broke Indy’s heart to treat the old man in such a way; however he knew it was the only way he might be able to save the man’s life.

He leaned over Benson and yanked him up above his shoulders, then flung him to the ground again, but at the very last moment he tried to inconspicuously counter the move to avoid hurting him. “Now listen! Act like you’re unconscious! Don’t move no matter what happens. And if anyone comes asking for

Concord's file, tell them I took everything from you! Don't give it up to anyone. Your life might depend upon it!"

Benson rolled his eyes and moaned quietly. Indiana had no idea whether the old man had heard his words or not, let alone understood them. Indiana prayed he had, not only for Benson but for Marian and Marcus as well.

Indiana heard the steps behind him and quickly stood to his feet as one of the two thugs appeared on the steps with them. "What's going on here?" the larger thug asked. "Who is this old man?"

"No one," answered Indiana gruffly. He hoped his response would deter the rogues from further inquiries about Benson. He took a large step over the old man, who lay there moaning and half-unconscious. He bent over and snatched Stanley's almost-empty file out of Benson's hand, raising it triumphantly into the air.

"Take me to Ramos," he said. "I have what he is looking for."

"A postcard!" Ramos's fingertips glided over the glossy surface of the colored photo on the card and his empty eyes were turned toward the opened file on the table before them. It was almost as if he could see it, and was a very weird sight.

Indiana shrugged his shoulders, even though he knew Ramos could not see this gesture either. "This is all I could find," he answered. "Nothing else was in the file except for this."

"And of course, the doctor knew nothing else?" Ramos added with a smile, not really directed at anyone. Then he raised his head to 'look' in Indiana's direction. "Or, perhaps he kept his pledge of medical secrecy and you, being his scientific colleague, respected this oath and didn't probe any further, Dr. Jones?" Indiana could detect the mockery in his voice, as well as the threat behind his words.

"He really didn't know anything," Indiana said. Since Ramos would not see his facial expressions or gestures, he tried to sound convincing with his voice instead. He hoped that he had not achieved the opposite effect. "I got everything he knew out of him."

Ramos sat silently for a while. He continued to run his fingertips over the postcard and the piece of paper with Stanley's name on it. "Why can't I shake this feeling that you are not being completely honest with me, Dr. Jones?"

"I've told you the truth about Benson," insisted Indiana, hoping that Ramos wouldn't notice his skillful attempt at diverting the question. "Of course he refused to talk at first, but I finally convinced him."

"Yes, Peter has told me," Ramos said, indicating the man with his left hand; the same gangster who had approached him at Benson's house. Indiana had quickly realized it was also the same man who had taken him by surprise in Corda's office at the university. As of yet, Ramos's bodyguard hadn't come back. Indiana presumed Reuben, Henley and the other agent had been able to overwhelm him, but in the commotion he guessed the other two had managed to get away in the ensuing struggle. So much for honor among thieves, Indiana thought to himself.

"However, that is what bothers me, Dr. Jones," Ramos said as Indiana's continuous silence told him that he would not get an answer to his question. "This is exactly what troubles my thoughts."

"What? I did everything you asked. What more do you want?" "I have heard a lot about you, Dr. Jones," Ramos said steadfastly, still smiling and in a tone that seemed almost friendly, although Indiana knew it to be quite contrary. "Your reputation precedes you, and you are not the type to be particularly squeamish. But that Dr. Jones wouldn't hit a defenseless old man for information. It doesn't suit you. So now you understand why I am finding it hard to believe."

"I did not hit him," Indiana defended, attempting to feign indignation. "I took his file away, that is all. He didn't want to give it up, so I gave him a little shove which caused him to fall." "You shoved him for an empty file which contained nothing but a postcard?" Ramos's brows furrowed in doubt. "And you are sure he brought the entire file to you?"

"It has Corda's name stenciled in large letters on it," Indiana answered, annoyed. "Ask one of your whipping boys, they will confirm it – if they can read, that is."

“I do not doubt that, Dr. Jones,” answered Ramos. “I only ask myself whether there was more in this file than the postcard. Perhaps something you forgot to bring or tell me about.”

“Perhaps there is another file,” answered Indiana. “Or maybe he filed the papers incorrectly. I didn’t have much time to look around, you know. Those two idiots you sent behind me were about to alert half the city the way they were driving. It’s a miracle that I was able to get as much as I did!”

Ramos stared onward. It was an uncanny sight; the effect of which did not diminish but actually became stronger with each passing moment; Indiana looked for something else in the man’s eyes, eyes which had seen endless darkness. Nevertheless, Indiana felt like those eyes were analyzing him. It was a frightening thought, facing a man whose blind eyes seemed to peer into his soul and understand his secrets, just as easily as peering through a window. In order to break the awkward silence, Indiana stubbornly continued: “I have done what you asked, Ramos. Now keep your word and release Marcus and Marian.”

A cold, volatile smile fell over Ramos’s face. “Oh, I will keep my word, Dr. Jones. No fear,” he said. “I will, in fact, release your friends as soon as I determine if the information you brought to me is worth anything.”

“That’s what you mean by keeping your word?” Indiana asked sharply.

The man to Ramos’s left started to make a threatening move, but Ramos made a rapid hand gesture that settled the goon back down, for the moment. “A postcard and a scratched greeting aren’t exactly worth two lives,” Ramos said harshly.

“That is everything, I swear!” Indiana protested. “You already know more than anyone else about the situation.”

“Do I?” Ramos asked with a bitter smile.

Indiana wanted to stand up and take charge of the situation, but now was not the time. He surmised Ramos was toying with him, trying to get him to act out in passion or anger, hoping Indiana would make a mistake so he could find a hole in Indiana’s explanation. “Yes,” he answered calmly. “And I am sure you have figured this out. And I also know something as well. You did not kidnap Marian and Marcus to find out more

about Stan's character. You kidnapped them to find out where he was. He hid his tracks well. Damned well. Not even the FBI knows where he and his men have gone."

"And we know little more than they do," said Ramos. Indiana protested. "You're wrong." He pointed accusingly at the map before Ramos, but quickly remembered the man would not see the gesture. "A track is there," he persisted. "La Paz is a big place. But it's not that big. You make a few inquiries, beat a few brows. I'm sure you have experience in those areas," Indiana continued sarcastically. "A man like Stan, accompanying a dozen or so mercenaries, will stand out, even in a city like La Paz."

"There you may have a point," answered Ramos calmly. He stood up confidently, almost as if he had no problem seeing, and pushed the paper back into the file without looking at it, and then picked it up. "I will think about what you have told me, Dr. Jones," he said. "Until I come to a decision, you will remain our guest."

"Actually..." protested Indiana, stepping toward Ramos. But before he could say anything further, one of Ramos's men stepped quickly behind him and grabbed his arm, twisting his wrist so roughly that he gritted his teeth in pain.

"Take him to his friends," said Ramos. "So that he will be convinced they have been treated well and no harm has come to them."

At some point, the room he was taken to must have served as a storage place for a fuel yard or was very close to the exhaust of a large heating system. The air was sticky and the smell of oil and gasoline penetrated it so heavily that Indiana could hardly breathe. The dim light seemed to come from a single weak bulb that hung on a naked wire beneath its cover. The room was empty except for a couple of damp and moldy smelling straw-filled bags, on which Marian and Marcus had been thrown with their hands and feet tightly bound.

When Marcus had said they had been treated well and no harm had come to them, Indiana realized he had only kept half his word. He had been brought down here to be shown that Brody and Marian were still alive and, at least outwardly, uninjured. But

he had not been able to talk with them – the two were not only bound but had been gagged as well. One of the two men who had brought Indiana down here stopped at the side of the doorway to stand guard, and was determined not to move from that position. Indiana had been shoved into the corner of the room and forced to his knees, but he was not bound. The goon stood in the doorway and grinned at him, a Tommy Gun hanging in the crook of his arm, waiting for Indiana to make a wrong move.

Indiana tried to communicate with Marian and Marcus as best as he could, but had failed. Marian was more unconscious than awake on her straw bag. Although her eyes were open, she appeared to alternate between a gloominess and emptiness. Marcus had tried to say something despite his gag, but the guard quickly quieted him with a crude blow to his ribs with the butt of the gun.

So now, all they could do was wait. How long? Indiana did not know.

Some time had passed since he had been brought down to the room; surely half an hour if not longer, Indiana surmised. It was hard to determine how much time actually passed while being locked in a tiny chamber with no windows and very little artificial light, and nothing seemed to stir except the occasional uncomfortable movements of the prisoners.

However, Indiana used the long, quiet moments to think in peace for the first time about everything that had transpired – and to admit to himself how foolish he had been. Why had he believed Ramos would keep his word? He struggled to keep his thoughts straight. Why hadn't he listened to Reuben? If not him, why not his own internal voice. Was he feeling guilty because now, someone other than himself was in danger? Perhaps a life worth more than his own? What led him to believe that a man like Ramos possessed anything resembling honor? The cold-bloodedness with which Ramos had let the old shopkeeper be killed should have been a warning.

Indiana sat in that cold, dark room, staring in emptiness at his surroundings. He alternated between long bouts of silence, then curses at Ramos and the whole world. Quite a while passed before he once again heard steps outside the rusted but sturdy

door of the cellar in which he had been locked. The door creaked open. The sharp light from the corridor penetrated the darkness, and through squinting eyes Indiana recognized the crippled shade of Ramos and two other men behind him. They stepped inside, and Indiana made an attempt to rise, but a gesture from Ramos led to the second man rebuffing the attempt with the butt of his machine gun.

Indiana grunted as he fell back to the ground.

“You deceived me, Dr. Jones!” Ramos said. Although his voice was quiet, Indiana felt the menacing threat in the words.

“I don’t understand...” Indiana started, but Ramos cut him off instantly.

“You insult me still. You think I am stupid,” Ramos continued. “I don’t blame you for trying it before, but if you continue to treat me like a fool, I will become really annoyed!” Indiana didn’t understand. He alternated his confused stare between Ramos and the second man, the other thug from the university pursuit. He was about to protest when he heard a muffled bang through the open door. It took Indiana a fraction of a second to recognize the sound: it was the echo of a gunshot. An instant later there were more shots, and then he heard the cries and trampling sound of numerous footsteps.

“You are right, Dr. Jones,” said Ramos, almost as if he had read Indiana’s thoughts. “Your friends from the FBI have arrived to free you and your two friends. I must be honest; I did not expect them to get here so fast.”

“I don’t understand. I...” Indiana shook his head in honest astonishment. “I had no idea where your hideout was. They must have connected the dots. It wasn’t me.” Suddenly it occurred to him. “Your bodyguard! He must have told – “

Ramos interrupted him furiously. “Frank would never betray me!” His outburst was so sharp and aggressive that Indiana did not dare contradict him again. “It is you who betrayed me, Dr. Jones. Did we not have an agreement? You broke it – now you will pay the price for it!”

Indiana wanted to protest, but the two thugs yanked him roughly to his feet and slammed him into the wall with so much force his breath rushed out of his lungs. Indiana’s reflexes almost

made him grab at the man's head in resistance, but the thug stepped back and aimed his weapon at Marian. Indiana froze in his motion.

"Come along!" Ramos instructed.

The other man grabbed Marian and roughly yanked her to her feet, then grabbed Marcus and did the same. The first thug pushed Indiana out into the corridor where another of Ramos' men waited. Indiana looked around, searching for any possibility of escape. Although the lighting was dim, the corridor was long and narrow. There was no way they could get away without being shot.

One of the men produced a key and separated Marian and Marcus's foot shackles. However their wrists remained bound and the blindfolds were not removed.

"Where are you taking us?" Indiana demanded.

Ramos dismissed him with a gesture. "To a safe place, Dr. Jones," he answered. He narrowed his eyes and 'stared' at Indiana. Although they could not see, they could express hatred. "You deceived me. Did we not have an agreement? We – "

Indiana heard a gunshot again. This time it was much closer. Ramos broke off in the middle of his sentence and turned his head in the direction from which the shots were coming. The shots were accompanied by the sound of dozens of feet and slamming doors. Splintering wood followed, and the door at the end of the corridor broke open. The shadows of two or three men appeared in the dimly lit corridor, followed behind by the shapes of other men.

Indiana decided to bet everything on one card. Counting Ramos, there were four gangsters here, three of which were armed with machine guns. But they were also distracted for the moment. Indiana made a lightning-fast step to the right. He noticed movement out of the corner of his eye as one of the thugs caught on to his plan. He ducked at the same time the thug lurched for him. The hasty movement robbed him of his balance and he fell clumsily to the ground. His kicked his foot kicked out at the same time and struck one of the thugs in the stomach as he tried to aim his machine-pistol. Luckily, this makeshift attack threw second thug backwards into another gangster and they both

fell to the ground. The second man's finger accidentally tightened on the trigger, releasing a salvo of gunfire in the narrow hallway. It sounded like cannon-fire echoing in the narrow space, and Indiana instinctively ducked his head as sparks exploded throughout the corridor from the ricocheting bullets. Sparks exploded next to Marian's face as a bullet struck the stone corridor wall. The third thug, who just wanted to take on Indiana and was about to attack, suddenly grabbed his shoulder in pain and fell to his knees. But it appeared that Indiana's winning streak was about over. He rolled over and tried clumsily to get to his feet, but with his hands tied behind his back it proved more difficult than he expected – especially since Ramos had turned around and with amazing marksmanship for a blind man tried to kick Indiana in the face. He missed, but his foot slammed into Indiana's shoulder and knocked him down a second time. Shots rang out again, and the ricochets screamed off the back part of the corridor. One of the other thugs got to his feet and rushed forward, then with a gasping cry he fell back to the ground and lay still.

Indiana rolled quickly three or four steps to the side, trying to get out of Ramos' reach. Rage distorted his face and small, raspy screams issued from his mouth as he stamped wildly on the ground where he thought Indiana would be. Suddenly the hallway was full of hurrying and fighting, men were screaming and scurrying movements were everywhere; Ramos' men rushed in headlong flight down the corridor, followed by half a dozen figures. Indiana thought he even glimpsed Laurel and Hardy amongst the pursuers.

“The woman!” Ramos screamed. “Bring her!”

Two of the newly added gangsters pounced immediately on Marian, who fought back desperately. Indiana jumped to his feet and tried with all his might to break the bonds that tied his hands, but the thin leather straps simply dug painfully into the skin on his wrists. A punch hit him in the chest and threw him back against the wall. As he fell helplessly back to his knees, he saw another gangster grab Marcus and drag him roughly behind them as Ramos and his thugs headed down the corridor away from the melee.

The fear for his friend gave Indiana renewed strength. He jumped up and ran through one of the guys who had gotten in his way. He stomped unceremoniously after Ramos and the men who were dragging Marcus and Marian with them. Behind him, he heard someone shouting his name over two or three shots. A bullet bounced on the wall right next to him as he ran, howling as it ricocheted through the corridor, but he ignored all of these things and ran faster.

The passage ended in front of a locked metal door, which one of Ramos' companions was trying to unlock with flying fingers. Two other gangsters were holding Marian and Marcus, while another turned to Indiana and came at him with fists raised. Indiana simply ran right through him, bounced awkwardly, and stumbled against the thug who was holding Marian. The sheer force of the collision knocked the gangster to the ground. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending upon whose point of view) Indiana also fell. The impact of Indiana's weight caused the thug's head to bounce so harshly against the floor that he lost consciousness on the spot.

Ramos' companion was still working diligently at the lock on the door, which was still several steps down the corridor from Indiana. He finally managed to get it open. The door swung inward with a loud squeak and opened into a room of total darkness. Ramos shouted something Indiana didn't understand, but almost at the same moment two more gangsters appeared and pounced on him. While still on the ground, Indiana met the first with a sharp kick to the shin, which made the guy stagger back in pain. But the second guy grabbed him by his collar, pulled him up, and threw him with such force against the wall that for a moment all Indiana saw was stars and he crumpled to the ground, fighting back the dark shroud that threatened to envelop him.

He heard Marian screaming, and with panic in his voice Marcus shouted his name and something else he could not understand. He was suddenly grabbed and yanked into the air again. A ghostly face appeared before him. Indiana tensed in anticipation of another punch or kick. Instead, the driving mist cleared before his eyes, and he realized it wasn't one of the gangsters that had pulled him back to his feet, but one of

Reuben's men: his hair was sticky from sweat and his face flushed with exertion, but he wore the typical suit of a FBI official, and in his right hand was Smith & Wesson .38 caliber. He was shaking Indiana wildly with his left hand.

"Are you all right, Dr. Jones?" He asked.

Indiana made a motion that was a combination of a head shake and a nod, and when he freed himself from the grip of the FBI official he missed falling back to the ground again by a hair. "My wrists," he blurted. "Cut me loose. Quick!"

The FBI man threw one quick glance back down the hallway, then produced a knife from his pocket and began sawing at the leather straps of Indiana's bonds. Reuben's men had apparently driven most of Ramos' men away – all but one or two who still doggedly fought against the overwhelming armed federal agents. Most of the remaining stragglers stood with their hands up in the air or writhing on the ground.

Indiana sighed with relief as his hands snapped free. He wasted no time to massage his joints and move his fingers so that the feeling would return to his numb hands. Then he turned toward the now-closed door that Ramos and the men dragging Marian and Marcus had left through. Behind him Reuben cried his name, but he ignored it and ran even faster. He reached down and grabbed one of the machine guns Ramos' thugs had dropped and threw himself against the door.

The door burst inwards, crashing into the wall. Indiana stumbled for a few steps more, then stopped in complete darkness, trying to get a look around. His eyes needed to adjust. The echo of his steps revealed that he was in a very large room. The little bit of light that managed to creep in from the hallway behind ended just a few feet inside.

"Jones! What the hell-"

Reuben's voice trailed off, and as Indiana angrily turned around he saw the shadow of the FBI agent as a black silhouette looming in the doorway.

"Be quiet," he said. "They are in here somewhere."

Reuben did not answer, but he tilted his head as if it would help him listen. After a few moments, he thought he heard muffled

sounds somewhere in the room in front of them in the darkness. But he couldn't pinpoint the exact direction.

"A lamp," ordered Reuben to someone behind him. "Bring a lamp here! Quick!"

Indiana crept a few more steps forward, and Reuben lifted a frightened hand. "Stay where you are, Jones," he said.

Indiana did not remain in place, however. On the contrary, he fumbled forward with carefully outstretched arms, moving further into the darkness until his fingers encountered the cool, tough resistance of the wall. Behind him he heard Reuben cursing, yelling once more for a lamp. But he tried to ignore the commotion and focus on the faint scratching and tapping that was coming from somewhere in front of him. "Left." He was almost sure it was coming from the left.

Reuben continued to swear and roar "Jones" with increasing loudness. But Indiana continued on, feeling his way deeper and deeper into the darkness, until the stone beneath his fingers suddenly turned into the rusted metal of a door. He quickly fumbled for the handle, and pressed down on the catch. He registered relief that the door was not locked. When he gently pushed it open, he saw light. It was just a glimmer, a pale yellow stripe emerging from underneath a door at the far end of a corridor. But now the noise he had been hearing became louder. Indiana prayed that no one was lurking in the darkness before him. He moved the machine gun from his left hand to his right and stormed down the corridor. Behind him, the door he had just opened crashed loudly as it closed.

When he reached the end of the corridor, he paused for a second to take a deep breath – and slammed his shoulder powerfully into the door and blew it inward. Before him lay crates, bales, oil drums and all sorts of other junk cluttered the basement, rising almost to the ceiling. A single, bare bulb spread yellow light and even more shadows. Ramos, Marian, Marcus, and two of Ramos' gangsters were faced with another locked door at the other end of the room. Ramos' men strove in vain to open the door and escape from the fortress. As Indiana approached they turned, and he startled them with his raised machine pistol.

Indiana pushed on instinctively.

It was pure coincidence, but the machine pistol volley struck the wall, creating sparks next to one of the killers. The last bullet from the salvo struck the killer's gun, snatching it from his hand. The guy stumbled around clutching his wrist in pain, while the second turned his attention from the door and turned toward Indiana, where he started to raise his machine gun.

"You better not try it," said Indiana as he pointed his gun menacingly at the gangster.

The thug froze in id-motion. His eyes flickered as he alternately looked at the ruined gun, his companion whimpering in pain on the floor, and the gun in Indiana's hand.

"Shoot him!" Ramos said in a shrill voice. "Shoot him down!"

The thug hesitated, clearly torn between the fear of the weapon in Indiana's hand and Ramos standing in front of him. The fear of his master was stronger. Suddenly he jumped to the side and fired simultaneously with Indiana. Indiana had guessed the movement from the start, and managed to dodge away. The machine pistol volley smashed the door behind him. This thug was not as lucky as his friend. The bullets hit him squarely in the chest and shoulders, and flung him to the ground dead.

"Shoot him!" Ramos screamed again. "Bring him to me!"

Indiana slowly lowered his weapon. "Give up, Ramos," he said. "There is no one here to help you."

Ramos' already disfigured face contorted even more with rage. With agility Indiana would never have credited him with, he spun around and grabbed Marian. Indiana noticed for the first time that she had managed to get rid of her shackles at some point, because her hands were free. Still, she made no attempt to put up a fight. Ramos dragged her around and wrapped his arm around her neck from behind and groped for one of the many wooden boards scattered on the crates around them. "Not another step closer," he snarled as he brandished his makeshift club in the air.

Indiana was in the middle of raising his machine pistol to point it at Ramos, but he stopped and laid the weapon gently on the ground. Apart from the fact that he was not a marksman, the

machine pistol was not an accurate weapon. Besides, he was not going to kill Ramos.

“Give it up,” Indiana said. “It’s pointless now.”

Ramos appeared to disagree. While Indiana cautiously approached him, Ramos pushed Marian awkwardly ahead of him with bumps from the wooden club. As he approached, he started swinging the club angrily and violently in the air.

Indiana realized what Ramos was up to a second too late.

Ramos’ punches weren’t as aimless as they first appeared. Indiana was maybe four or five steps away from him and Marian when the club smashed against the light bulb and it shattered. The room plunged into darkness, from one end to the other, in a split-second.

Indiana swore, stormed forward, and threw himself with his arms outstretched in the direction where he suspected Ramos and Marian would be. He heard a scream as he hit a body, which he forced to the ground with himself. He realized at that moment that it wasn’t Ramos but Marian.

When he heaved himself up again, he heard a crazy giggling in the darkness, along with quiet, dragging steps, but he could not tell exactly where they were coming from.

“Well, Dr. Jones,” taunted Ramos. “Do you still think you have won?”

Indiana did not answer. He felt something coming toward him, then felt a terrible blow to his shoulder that threw him to the ground. He fell, rolled to his side, and instinctively attempted to cover his face with his arms – a fraction of a second before Ramos’ club would have smashed it.

The blow split open the skin on Indiana’s forearms. He gasped in pain and surprise, rolled over again, heading blindly into the direction in which he suspected Ramos, but found nothing.

Again he heard the rapid, uneven steps and the mad giggle of the gangster. “My compliments, Jones,” Ramos said gleefully. “You were almost there. Almost.”

Again Indiana sensed the strike coming, but his reaction was not quick enough. Ramos’ stick hit his right shoulder when he tried to sit up and threw him helplessly to the ground again. Indiana clenched his teeth, rolled over three, four, five steps to

the side and took another furious blow to his side as he scrambled to get to his feet. Quick as a flash he jumped, grabbed Ramos's stick and tried to hold him. But the blind man pulled it with such force that the only result was tiny wood splinters buried in Indiana's hands.

Cursing he jumped back, closed his eyes, and focused his listening on Ramos' footsteps and the sound of his breathing. The blind man moved close to him, but Indiana succeeded in avoiding him even though he couldn't make out exactly where he was. Ramos figured out where Indiana was and struck another blow to his ribs, which made him stagger as Ramos giggled like crazy. Indiana tried to ignore the pain, rushed forward and stretched out his arms simultaneously. He grabbed a hold of something. A sharp, angry cry rang out and he felt clothing under his fingertips. He tried holding on with all his strength, but Ramos slipped from his grasp with amazing strength and agility, and gave him another blow with his stick.

Indiana stumbled back and crashed into a pile of boxes. Ramos giggled shrilly, caught up with him and struck another blow. Indiana managed to escape the blow by moving instinctively, and the club whizzed so close to his face that he could feel the breeze. Automatically he struck back with his fists, but met nothing but emptiness, and Ramos' giggles rose to a nearly hysterical laughter. Indiana cursed as he freed himself from the mess of broken crates and planks, took a few more steps back into the darkness and crashed into another pile of junk. Ahead he heard grinding steps and the sound of a body moving with difficulty. In the silence and darkness, Indiana realized that it would be impossible to win this fight. The darkness was Ramos' element, in which he could move around safely as only a blind man could. At this moment, it was evident Ramos had the upper hand and could really hurt him.

This idea proved to be a bad omen. At that same moment Indiana felt a draft, and something struck his head with a terrible force. He fell to his knees, once again fighting back the black shroud of unconsciousness. He gasped in pain, and brought his arms protectively to his face again, taking two or three more blows before he managed to back away and get to his feet. He

threw an angry fist, but it was not altogether ineffective. Even though it only struck air, it drove Ramos back for a moment. Light. He need light. He...

His right hand went into his pocket and he withdrew the lucky lighter he always carried. His hands were numb from the blows, but he did his best to strike it. It took three attempts before the sparks set fire to the wick. The result was a miserable blue flame – but the weak glow was enough for him to recognize the crippled shadow moving close to him in the darkness. Ramos stopped in mid-step. He cocked his head to the side, listening. Maybe he heard the flames, or the striking of the light. Or he felt the warmth coming off the tiny flame. In any case, Ramos seemed to sense something was wrong, because his movements suddenly became nervous and hectic. His improvised mace went whizzing through the air, narrowly missing Indiana by less than a foot. But now that Indiana could see his opponent, it wasn't hard to doge the blows.

“What are you doing?” said Ramos. “I had you, Jones. You are dead. I will kill you! No one can stop me!” Again he swung the stick with amazing accuracy. It hissed through the air and would have hit Indiana if he had not dodged quickly. Ramos let out a frustrated cry. Indiana took another small step back, then made a quick movement to the side and ran to where Ramos' weapon had just struck the ground.. His foot hit the hand of the rippled man and knocked the plank out of his fingers. The hasty movement extinguished the lighter's flame, but Indiana immediately flicked the lighter again.

The blue and yellow light revealed Ramos' figure standing just one step in front of him – and a second slimmer but taller shadow approached the blind man silently from behind.

Indiana could make out Marian's face in the dim lighting, but he saw the blade of the knife in hands even clearer.

“No!” cried Indiana. “Don't do it!”

Ramos' head snapped around with a startled movement, and Indiana tried to grab him and save him from the abyss. He just managed to yank him away as the knife, which Marian held tightly in both hands, missed its mark on Ramos' back. The blind man pushed his wrinkled finger so forcefully into Indiana's face

that he cried out in pain. With his other hand he knocked the lighter out of Indy's fingers, which went out as it flew away. Total darkness again filled the room.

Ramos began to squirm out of Indiana's grip. He slapped at Indiana's face three-, four-, five times and slammed his knee into Indiana's thigh while he was trying to strike his testicles.

Indiana spun the blind man around with a curse and clasped his shoulders from behind. He squeezed him between his arms with such force that Ramos let out the air in his lungs, panting as he could hear cracking ribs.

"Stop fighting, you idiot," Indiana said, "before I get really angry!"

Ramos screamed with rage and began to kick his legs, and Indiana squeezed a little tighter. He finally felt the blind man's resistance fading.

"So," said Indiana. "Now we will—"

A terrible pain shot through his upper left arm and continued into his neck and back. Indiana roared as he let Ramos go. He stumbled back and grabbed with his right hand. He felt cold, cutting steel, which buried itself deeply like a glowing fire in his palm, then he felt the small hand holding the knife.

"Marian!" he shouted. "It's me! Indy!"

But Marian had not heard him, or she was out of her mind with fear. With a cry she tore herself away. The knife drew a second burning trail of pain over Indiana's upper arm. He staggered back, grabbed in the dark a second time for Marian's wrist and finally got it this time. With all his strength he squeezed until Marian loosened her grip with a scream, dropping the knife to the floor, clattering. However she still did not calm down. On the contrary, she was even more hysterical. She hit and clawed at his face so wildly that Indiana had to grab her other hand to restrain her.

It took a second for her to calm down, then he heard a grinding noise beside him. He turned his head – just at the right moment to get the board Ramos had torn loose from another crate directly in the face.

He probably wasn't unconscious for very long, because the next thing he noticed was the white light of a lamp coming through his closed eyelids, excited voices and the echoes of isolated gunshots and screams.

For a moment he almost wished he had remained unconscious. His face felt numb and swollen, and his left arm was throbbing with unbearable pain. He also felt someone caress his face gently with their fingertips. He finally lifted one of his eyelids, and the light from the flashlight shot like a blinding pain arrow into his brain.

Indiana groaned as he laboriously lifted his uninjured right arm to push the flashlight aside and realized a second too late that he was not so inviolate – Marian's knife-blade had left a painful gash in the palm of his right hand, which began to bleed immediately with the movement. Groaning, he lowered his hand again.

"Don't move, Dr. Jones," said a voice.

Indiana blinked, slowly moving his head and opening his eyes, as the glare from the flashlight had been moved and was no longer blinding him. Someone was next to him, trying to cradle him and wrap a torn strip of his own shirt around the bleeding wound on his arm. Reuben was on his knees on the opposite side, waving a flashlight and looking at him with a mixture of relief, reproach, and anger.

"Actually, this is probably a stupid question," Reuben said. "But how do you feel?"

"Fantastic," murmured Indiana sarcastically. "What happened? Where are Marian and Ramos?"

Reuben ignored his question. "I honestly don't know what impresses me more, Jones," he said, the wrath no longer in his voice, "your courage - or your stupidity."

"What happened?" asked Indiana again. He tried to sit up. He made it, but it hurt a lot. And the man who was bandaging his arm threw him a reproachful look.

"What the hell made you play hero?" asked Reuben angrily. "I hope you realize now that you could just as well be dead?"

Indiana took the precaution not to answer. Reuben stared piercingly at him for several seconds, before resigning the

argument. He continued a bit calmer, but still clearly annoyed. “We do not appreciate you interfering in FBI business, Dr. Henry Jones. We may have asked for your help, but that doesn’t mean you can run around like a cowboy at every opportunity. Why didn’t you tell us you found a clue?”

Indiana looked at him questioningly, and saw the somber expression on Reuben’s face.

“We talked with Dr. Benson, Jones. So there is very little point in denying anything.”

“Did I deny anything?”

“So what are you doing here?” Reuben made an expansive gesture. “You wanted to rush Ramos’ fortress all alone? Damn, I told you we would find Marian Corda and your friend.”

“How could I know?”

“You should just listen to me,” Reuben spat back angrily.

Indiana looked at him with growing confusion. Not only was he physically miserable, he had a growing feeling he had behaved very rashly.

“Why haven’t you asked how we got here so quickly?” said Reuben.

Indiana was silent.

“I know that the FBI is generally considered dumber than a speeding bullet,” continued Reuben. Indiana’s persistent silence was obviously making him more angry. “But we are not. It didn’t even take two hours to figure out where Ramos’ hideout was. If you had left the whole thing to us instead of playing hero, none of this would have happened.”

“What?” Indiana asked meekly.

“This whole damn mess!” said Reuben. “Two of my men are seriously injured, and two or three of Ramos’ men are dead. That’s what we wanted to prevent. But once you got yourself captured, we had no choice but to storm the hideout.”

Indiana lowered his eyes, but he could still feel Reuben staring at him, waiting for an answer. Finally, just to have something to say, he asked: “Where is Ramos?”

Reuben snorted. “You know, Jones. I have good news and bad news for you. What do you want to hear first?”

“Start with the bad,” said Indiana.

“The good,” Reuben said, unmoved, “is that Marian Corda is free and unharmed. She was a bit hysterical at first, but she has calmed down already.”

Indiana looked firmly into Reuben’s face. “And I guess the bad news is that Ramos got away,” he surmised.

Reuben nodded. “Yes, he and two of his henchmen. But that’s not the bad news.”

“What?” Indiana asked, alarmed.

“They’re gone,” said Reuben, “and they’ve taken your friend, Marcus Brody.”



CHAPTER 4

19 June 1943 **La Paz, Bolivia**

Even the light was brighter here and somehow clearer than in New York, and although this wasn't the first time Indiana Jones had set foot in South America, he could not recall having seen such a glaring sun. The air that stirred down the narrow, clean roads of La Paz seemed to boil, and it was unpleasantly warm and damp, making each breath a physical effort and each movement caused endless sweat. Marian had lowered the shutters of the hotel window, and a powerful ceiling fan hummed as it turned, but nothing seemed to help with the heat; it was quite the contrary. Sometimes Indiana had the feeling that the draft of air blowing from above was rather hotter still.

"Reuben's back," said Marian as she stood at the window peering down at the road through a gap in the shutter. "Maybe he's found something."

Indiana looked up briefly. The light that penetrated the shutters was so bright that it nearly drove him to tears, and it left Marian's shape a faded black shade. He squinted and noticed she had turned towards him. He sat on the edge of the bed with his shirt off and tried awkwardly to pull the two ends of a fresh sling together on his left upper arm. The wound was very deep, and

although six days had passed, it still bled at times. It was still excruciatingly painful.

“Wait. Let me help,” she said, taking three or four quick steps to the edge of the bed. She bent forward and drew the two pieces of the sling together with the skill of a nurse, then locked it together with a safety pin.

Indiana nodded gratefully as he tried to slip his shirt on over the wound, gritting his teeth in pain at his arm stung furiously, throbbing against the movement. Marian helped him get his shirt on as well, then stepped away from the bed and looked down on him with sympathy.

“I’m really sorry, Indiana,” she said. She sighed. “I can’t help but think how close you came to being killed.”

Indiana wanted to get up and assure her that everything was fine, but stopped at the last moment as he twitched his shoulder and it only brought more pain. He could not count how many times Marian had voiced almost the exact same words in the past six days.

“It’s nothing,” he replied, just as he had done each time before, but they both knew it was a lie. It had been blind luck that the attacker’s blade had hit his bicep and not his heart. He wished it had been Ramos who had been stuck and not him, but the thought didn’t make the violent pain he had been feeling for days disappear, and also the fact that he would not be able to use his arm properly for weeks possibly. He didn’t know what was more uncomfortable – the pain in his arm or the shame and guilt Marian continuously reminded him of.

Before Marian could say anything more, the door pulled open and Reuben and Henley entered the room without a knock. Reuben’s face remained unmoved, but Henley looked surprised and with a salacious grin lifted his eyebrows up as he saw Indiana sitting on the edge of the bed with his shirt open. Indiana looked up at him, then at Marian, and finally back to the man. Indy swallowed the annoying comment that was on the tip of his tongue. This cretin would think what he wanted no matter what anyway.

“Mrs. Corda,” began Reuben. “How nice that you are here, too. It saves me from telling this story twice.”

Henley's grin grew even wider, while Marian increasingly looked puzzled.

"What story?" Indiana asked rudely. "Have you found any trace of Stan?"

"At least indirectly, yes," answered Reuben, turning to look at Marian.

"Indirectly?" Indiana sat up straight, using his right hand to cradle his wounded arm in the sling.

"La Paz is a big city," said Reuben. "But even here, a dozen shady criminals that brought Corda with them can hardly go unnoticed. They were here as recently as three days ago."

"Three days ago," Indiana murmured, having trouble hiding his disappointment.

"It seems we just missed them," answered Reuben with a shrug. "But don't worry. We are pretty sure we know where they went. All the necessary preparations have been made. We can leave today."

"Was Stanley with them when they left?" asked Marian.

Reuben shrugged his shoulders again. "I am guessing so," he said. "But don't worry, Mrs. Corda. As soon as we have caught up with the men, we'll let you know how your husband is doing."

It took a moment for Marian to fully understand him. "As soon as you..." she began as realization sunk in. She breathed deeply, then changed her tone sharply as she continued: "Surely you don't think that I am going to stay here in the dark, not knowing whether you found him or not?"

Reuben suddenly looked very unhappy. "Dr. Jones will accompany us, Mrs. Corda," he said, gesturing to Indiana. "And in his condition, I'm not even sure that is a good idea."

"I'm coming along," Marian said defiantly.

Reuben shook his head. He looked to Indiana for assistance, but saw none. It was not the first time they had tried to dissuade Marian from coming along. Since they had left New York and began the journey to Bolivia and La Paz, Indiana and the two FBI agents had tried at least a dozen times to change Marian's mind, but to no avail.

“Please, be reasonable, Mrs. Corda,” pleaded Reuben. “The men we are chasing left this city to the east. That means they probably went into the jungle.”

“And you think it’s too dangerous for a delicate woman like me, don’t you?” Marian quipped.

Reuben remained serious. “Exactly,” he said. “It is difficult and dangerous.”

“I am coming,” insisted Marian.

Reuben sighed. “If you don’t believe me, Mrs. Corda, ask Dr. Jones,” he continued. “An expedition in the jungle is not a leisurely stroll in the park. And not to mention, we have no idea what to expect if we even catch up with the men...”

“So you are not even sure you’ll find them,” Marian said.

“Of course we will,” he answered hastily. “But the men that accompany your husband –“

“- are criminals of the worst kind,” Henley interjected. Marian looked at him with outrage, but it didn’t faze the FBI agent. He continued: “We have no idea why your husband is here, Mrs. Corda. But whatever the reason, it must be very dangerous. Otherwise he would not have brought a dozen criminals armed to the teeth with him. We simply can take responsibility for you.” He pointed at Indiana. “We can barely take responsibility for Dr. Jones. If it was up to me, I’d rather you both not be here. Not in this hotel, and not in this country.”

“Isn’t it true that you have no real jurisdiction here?” Marian said coolly. “The FBI has no power here, if I see things correctly. We are in Bolivia, not New York, Mr. Henley. You can’t tell me what I can and can’t do. I can go wherever I like.”

“Of course you can,” said Henley almost immediately.

“But-“

“How good of you to finally realize that,” interrupted Marian. “There is no reason to discuss this further. Now I’ll pack my things and wait for you in the hallway.” She gave the FBI officials a cool look, then turned and left rapidly for her room to get changed and packed.

Reuben looked at Indiana shaking his head. “You should talk to her, Jones. It can really be damned dangerous.”

“I know that better than you,” Indiana said. Reuben turned to look at him again. “But I also know Marian. Don’t be fooled by her appearance. Once she has an idea in her head, she does it. And she was right – we are in Bolivia, not the USA. You really can’t prevent anything at all. On the contrary, those guys we’re after could give us considerable difficulties if word gets out to the right people.”

Again Reuben was visibly put in his place. Indiana had made a point. The relations between Bolivia and the USA had never been good, and in reality, at this point in time, they were at a very low point. Reuben had let slip on the way to La Paz that not only were they there without approval, but also there without the knowledge of the Bolivian government. They had left their FBI-authority behind, and were now just private individuals just like him and Marian – and they had undertaken this journey for nothing more than private reasons. And Marian had made it perfectly clear that under no circumstances would she be deterred from searching for her husband. It was really questionable whether they would find Professor Corda’s trail anyway. The two FBI agents could not afford to waste energy trying to keep an eye on Marian Corda while they were gone anyway.

“Did you really find any trace of Corda?” Indiana made an appreciative movement to change the subject. “It seems to have disappeared rather quickly.”

Reuben sat down on one of the two chairs in the dingy hotel room. Henley moved to the window and lit a cigarette. “Too be honest, we didn’t. But Ramos...”

“Ramos?” Indiana said keenly.

Reuben made a calming gesture. “He arrived a few hours before us and left almost immediately. And before you ask – the description of one of his companions matched that of Mr. Brody.”

“Are you sure?” asked Indiana.

Reuben shrugged, but Henley responded from the window without turning. “He won’t do anything to him, Dr. Jones. Brody’s safe.”

“How do you know?” Indiana asked, doubtful.

Henley took a drag on his cigarette, then blew out the smoke – a gray-blue cloud encircled his head, emphasized by the light seeping in through the blinds from outside. “I know it.” He turned around this time and smiled at Indiana like a scoundrel as he leaned with his arms crossed on the wall next to the window. “I know Ramos’s type too well. Marcus Brody is much too valuable to him. He would never hurt him. Not as long as he believes he can use him as leverage against you.”

“I hope you are not mistaken,” said Indiana somberly. “Ramos is anything other than a fool.”

“Precisely,” said Henley with a smile. “You see, Dr. Jones, it is also a mistake to think this type of criminal is difficult for a detective to capture. It is easier to catch an intelligent criminal than it is an idiot.”

Indiana looked at him questioningly, and Henley continued in a tone like that of a teacher to his student: “You are completely right. Ramos is no fool. But the thoughts of an intelligent criminal can be reconstructed. On the other hand, an idiot who can barely write his name is difficult to read. Men such as Ramos may have a few surprises in store, but fools are erratic, undecipherable. That makes them more dangerous.”

Indiana was pretty sure he could find a half-dozen holes in this argument if he took the trouble to think for about it for a moment. But it seemed hardly worth the effort. He only hoped Henley was right.

He stood up. “Exactly when do we leave?”

Reuben shot his partner a quick, unenthusiastic glance before he answered. And when he did answer, he avoided the question. “I still do not think it is a good idea for you to accompany us, Dr. Jones. Please, think it over again. You know very well how dangerous a trip into the jungle can be. And with your injured arm, you will be severely handicapped.”

“I promise, you won’t have to carry my weight,” replied Indiana mockingly, but Reuben remained serious.

“I could force you.”

“Oh,” Indiana played along. “Could you really do that?” Reuben nodded. “Save it, and tell me again how we are not in the United States; that my FBI card doesn’t apply here. But believe

me, if I wanted, I could ensure that you do not leave this hotel for the next two weeks. But I would prefer it if you would decide this voluntarily.”

Indiana wanted to grab the man, but held himself back. He stared at Reuben very seriously for a few seconds before asking: “Why?”

“Because...” Reuben began.

“The real reason,” Indiana interrupted calmly, but his tone betrayed his seriousness. For a moment fright flickered in Reuben’s eyes, like Indiana was on to his secret. Henley stepped closer, almost imperceptibly. Indiana knew they were hiding something.

“What do you mean...?” asked Reuben evasively.

Indiana made an annoying twist of his good hand. “Just as I thought. Don’t play me for a fool, Reuben. I know you aren’t after Corda because of a couple of art treasures he stolen from some tomb. Why are you really after him?”

“It is better if you don’t know,” said Reuben.

“I could find out,” replied Indiana.

“Reuben nodded. “I believe you could. But it would be better for you and everyone else if you don’t. I give you my word. I will do everything in my power to ensure Mr. Brody returns safely and uninjured. But that is all I can promise you.”

“I thought we had a deal,” said Indiana.

Reuben nodded again as he stood up. “That we do. And I will keep it, Dr. Jones. But there are things that I will not tell you, even if I wanted to.”

“Such as the Manhattan Project?” Indiana asked off-handedly.

Henley winced visibly, and Reuben lost control of his facial expressions for a second as he looked with a mixture of horror and astonishment. He quickly recovered with an uncertain smile. “What do you mean?”

“The atom bomb you’re building,” said Indiana with the same casual tone in his voice. “What does Stan have to do with it?”

“I really have no idea what you are talking about,” said Reuben. “What is an atom bomb?”

“I think you know better than I do,” said Indiana. “But don’t worry – it really doesn’t interest me. I am an archeologist, not a soldier. But I can say this much, if it concerns Stanley Corda, you are on the wrong track. Stan might be a thief and a cheat, but he’s no spy.”

Reuben stared at Indiana for several seconds, his gaze penetrating. “That may be,” he said coolly. “The truth will come out. And believe me, Dr. Jones, I only hope you’re right.”



CHAPTER 5

21 June 1943 • Rio Mamore 120 miles northeast from Trinidad

Despite Reuben's optimism, it was a good two days before they encountered any concrete evidence that Ramos and his companions had passed. And it was very different from what any one of them could imagine. It had been two days since they had departed La Paz, and the two FBI agents had wrapped themselves in a mood of persistent silence despite Indiana's energetic questions about their destination or ultimate goal. All he knew was that they had taken a boat down one of the countless small rivers that cut its way through the Bolivian high country and driven eastward. By noon of the second day they had reached the Rio Mamore, and just before sunset Trinidad, the last considerable city before the Brazilian border. They had stayed overnight in a shabby hotel, then continued on the next morning. Indiana became increasingly convinced that Reuben and Henley had no more power or influence in this country than he or Marian had. They were becoming more uneasy since they were no longer alone: they had started the journey with only themselves and the captain of the small, flat-bottomed square boat called a punt, but were now transferring to an old but extremely robust steamboat which was manned with half a dozen shady characters that were armed to the teeth. To Indiana's surprise there were also two

Bolivian police officials on deck with them, and as Indiana and Marian boarded Henley was loudly engaged in an on-going conversation in perfect Spanish with them, gesturing wildly with his hands as he spoke. It was barely an hour after sunrise and they continued the journey northeast. Shortly after noon, the land and vegetation on the riverbank began to change – the grass and leafy trees of the highlands was green-brown and patchy, but it was slowly transforming into the sprawling verdant green of a tropical rainforest. The river had widened and branched in various places, and Indiana was no longer certain they were still on the Rio Mamore – perhaps they had already taken one of its countless branches, some of which were as wide as or wider than the Rio Mamore itself, but not marked on any map. It was one hour before sunset when they came upon the destroyed native village.

More accurately, it was the Indians who found them because the jungle on the right and left of the river had become so dense that it was an impenetrable green wall of vegetation as far as the eye could see. Indiana had given up on asking the two FBI agents further questions because he got no answers anyway, and had moved to the nose of the small steamboat. He stood there alone, staring into the distance, away from his companions and the men Reuben and Henley had hired. He recognized mercenaries when he saw them. And the eight dark-skinned, broad-shouldered men that had received them on-board that morning were definitely mercenaries if he'd ever seen any. He asked himself over and over, what in the world were two FBI agents expecting to find in the Bolivian rain forest.

Indiana shrank away from his deep thoughts when he heard footsteps coming up the deck behind him. He half-turned recognizing Henley, who was wrapped in a light tropical jacket and had the inevitable cigarette dangling from the corner of this mouth, leisurely strolling toward him. He turned back towards the front of the boat. The river wound its way around countless bends and turns, cutting through the jungle, and a warm wind was blowing in his face. Although the sun had already half-disappeared behind the vast canopy of treetops and its glow had turned red, it was still very hot.

Henley stepped up next to him and put his hands on the rusty railing, staring emptily ahead in silence for a minute. He then flicked his cigarette butt into the water, and then reached into his jacket pocket to withdraw another. "It is truly beautiful here," he said, snapping open his lighter and lighting the new one, blowing a cool blue cloud into the air.

Several seconds passed without Indiana answering. He turned and leaned back against the railing, pondering the FBI agent thoughtfully. "It would be even more beautiful," he said, "had you not brought that here." He pointed to the holstered pistol the man had dangling from his gun belt, which Henley had removed from his backpack.

The FBI official smiled mockingly. With the glowing tip of his cigarette, he motioned to Indiana's own belt, which not only had a curled bullwhip attached to it but a pistol as well. Since they had left the hotel in La Paz, Indiana had changed into the attire in which he felt most comfortable – a threadbare brown leather jacket, rough linen trousers and patched shirt, and brown fedora, and looked as if he had already travelled around the world three times.

"But you are also armed, Dr. Jones."

"A bad habit, I guess," confessed Indiana with a smile. More seriously, he added: "But I did not bring an army with me." Henley took a deep draw of his cigarette and shrugged his shoulders. "You never know what you're going to run into." He twitched his shoulders again. He looked at Indiana briefly, and then stared back out at the river. "If our information is correct, then Ramos has nearly a dozen men with him. Not to mention, your friend also accompanies them."

Indiana wanted to sharply reply that Stanley was not his friend, but he swallowed the words and forced himself to calmly respond. "What in the world are you scared of, Henley?" Several seconds passed as Henley stared thoughtfully at the reflections in the river waters, which the blunt nose of the steamship had split evenly for the past several hours. Then the man bent forwards, resting his forearms on the rusty railing and sighed deeply. Indiana didn't really expect an answer from Henley, so it surprised him when the man finally spoke.

“I don’t know, Dr. Jones,” he said. “And that, in fact, is the truth. No one knows what Professor Corda is here looking for.”

“Then why have you followed him to the ends of the earth?” drilled Indiana next.

Henley looked back at him very seriously. “What he has found could be of enormous importance.”

“And because of this, you and Reuben risk your lives – not to mention the diplomatic repercussions that could result?” Indiana asked, doubtfully.

Henley nodded. “If it is, in fact, what we suspect, then there are many more than two lives at stake in this game, Dr. Jones.”

“You don’t really believe Stanley is a traitor?” asked Indiana.

“No,” admitted Henley with amazing openness. “I…” he hesitated, and took a further draw from his cigarette in order to gain a little more time before continuing. He glanced around the deck to ensure no one else was present to listen in on their conversation. “No,” he said again. “You see, Dr. Jones, we know pretty much everything about Professor Corda. You are quite right – he is a thief and a fraud, but he is interested in politics and power about as much as I am interested in the fertility rituals of New Guinea.” He smiled fleetingly at his own joke. “But it is possible that he has found something here, and he doesn’t even know its importance. Something that is very, very valuable. And in the wrong hands it can be very dangerous.”

“This does have to do with the Manhattan Project,” suspected Indiana, and this time Henley nodded.

“I want you to know the truth, Dr. Jones. Reuben will have me drawn and quartered if he finds out I told you. But you have a right to know.” Again he hesitated, as if pondering whether he should go on. Indiana could feel how difficult it was for him to continue. “We already have told you that some of Corda’s customers became very ill after their dealings with him.”

Indiana nodded.

“It was not a mysterious tropical illness,” confirmed Henley.

“Or a curse, as the dean of your university seems to believe.”

“It wasn’t? What then?”

“The gold Professor Corda found,” Henley explained, “is radioactively contaminated.”

Indiana stared, absorbing the implications of what he had just been told with fright.

“Some of the pieces were so hot that the scaled of the Geiger counter were not sufficient to measure. Others were only weakly radioactive, but all of them were contaminated. What do you know about radioactivity, Dr. Jones?”

Indy shook his head slightly. “Not much,” he confessed.

“We have something in common, then” Henley said. “I only know what I’ve been told, and that isn’t much. But I do know that radioactivity in dangerous or lethal amounts does not occur naturally. But the pieces Corda brought back with him were contaminated. Whatever he has found, he doesn’t even realize it, is a phenomenon which we have no explanation.”

“And now you’re afraid that...”

“We are afraid of nothing,” interrupted Henley so sharply that at first Indiana did not understand. Then he realized that the FBI agent was afraid, plain and simple. “I do not know whether you are aware of it, Dr. Jones – but at this moment in history there is a race taking place between us and the Germans.”

“A Race?”

Henley nodded and stared into the river, foreshadowing further. “We are not the only ones with a ‘Manhattan Project’,” he said. “The Germans say otherwise, but they are just as intensively working on a nuclear weapon as we are. It’s only a matter of time before one of us is first. I believe that it will be us, but you can never be sure.”

“Stanley would never cooperate with the Nazis,” said Indiana with conviction.

“I know,” said Henley. “But you have to understand, Dr. Jones – the United States cannot afford even the tiniest risk.” He saw the fear and uncertainty in Indiana’s eyes and the slight shudder. “Do you understand what a nuclear weapon in the hands of the Nazis could mean?”

“No,” admitted Indiana fearfully.

“Neither do I,” said Henley. “No one really does. But I really don’t care to find out.”

It became quiet. For a long time, they simply stood side by side, staring down at the river, each immersed in his own

thoughts and his own concerns. Indiana was not certain he understood all of the consequences of what he had just been told by Henley. The idea that Stanley could be entangled in some kind of espionage was truly absurd. But it was possible that he had discovered something and, without knowing, alter the course of history.

It was only after more thought that it became clear to Indiana. If the gold, which Stanley had found, really brought death, then they were running right to their deaths. And not only were they journeying to their deaths, so were Ramos and his companions. And with them – Marcus.

He wanted to turn and voice his concern to Henley. But he noticed almost at the same time as Henley that something did not seem right. Henley was tense leaning out on the railing. His hands were wrapped so tightly around the rusty bars that they trembled.

“What is it?” Indy asked alarmed.

Henley didn’t answer immediately. He simply stared attentively out over the impenetrable green expanse of the vegetation on both sides of the river. “Do you hear that?” Indiana listened, straining to hear. He could only make out the monotonous hum of the steamship’s diesel motor and the noise of the water slapping against the vessel. “I don’t hear anything.” He said.

Henley nodded. “Exactly. It’s too quiet.”

Indiana noticed it immediately as Henley said it. The endless choir of birds and animal noises, the crackling and noise of the shrubs, the never-ending concert of jungle sounds which had accompanied them from the beginning of their journey down-river had grown silent.

Henley straightened up uneasily. “What does it mean?”

“I don’t know,” muttered Indiana. “I – look out!”

His warning would have been too late had he not thrown himself simultaneously to the side and into Henley, knocking them both to the iron deck of the steamer a fraction of a second before a hail of tiny feathered projectiles filled the deck where he and Henley had just stood.

Henley cursed and tried at the same time to jump to his feet and draw the pistol from his gun belt while getting rid of the cigarette whose glowing tip had fallen into his shirt collar when they crashed to the deck. Indiana pressed himself closely to the deck as he surveyed the eastern bank. For an instant he believed he saw shadowy scurrying of dark skinned bodies in the dense jungle foliage before everything fell completely still and silent. Henley finally managed to get the cigarette out of his shirt and was half way to his knees. He fought with the holster where the pistol had gotten caught from his nervousness.

“Don’t. Stay down you fool!” Indiana said.

Henley stared at him, bewildered. At the same moment, something small cut through the air with a hum, hardly a handbreadth from his face and clattered to the superstructure of the steamer behind him. Henley threw himself back to the deck with a renewed curse, landed flatly next to Indiana.

“What is it?” he gasped.

As if to answer his question, another salvo of the small, deadly projectiles struck the deck of the ship.

“Blowguns!” said Indiana, still trying in vain to penetrate the dark undergrowth on the shore and identify whatever it was protecting. “Someone doesn’t like us very much.” He maneuvered slowly backwards, his face and upper body pressed as tightly against the deck as was possible, as he worked his way back towards the rudder house. They were a good forty or fifty meters from the river bank; even for the nearly legendary Indians using the blowguns, it was too far for an accurate shot. Nevertheless he moved with extreme caution. He knew the tiny, pointed projectiles were covered with poison. A small scratch from one was enough to kill or cripple a man for the rest of his life.

Behind them, the door of the rudder house flew upward, and half of Henley’s mercenary troops spilled forth, storming the deck. Obviously the blowgun attack had not gone unnoticed.

“Get behind some cover!” Indiana cried. “Be careful!”

Three of the four men reacted immediately. Before Indiana had completed his warning, they ducked behind the various crates

and equipment on deck and directed their weapons toward the edge of the forest. The fourth, however, acted foolishly, trying to be a hero. He stood high and dug in his heels at the railing of the steamship. He pulled his automatic rifle to his shoulder and let off three shots in quick succession. Indiana could not tell if he hit anything other than leaves and branches of the thick vegetation – but before the echo of the last shot had faded the Bush let loose a whole salvo of tiny, feathered arrows – flying through the air like a sheet - which arched over the river and fell like rain into the river and onto the small boat. Three or four rattled harmlessly on the steel railing and the deck. But one met the upper arm of the mercenary and trembled in his bicep.

The man cried out in pain, recoiling in terror and dropping the rifle as he tore out the arrow with a quick movement. The tiny wound left behind produced very little blood. Nevertheless, the man survived the injury only a few seconds longer. In an instant he stood up rigidly, looking alternately at he wound and the tiny finger-long arrow in his hand, and then he took half a step back and began to stagger. His face distorted in pain. He tumbled forward to his knees, and then fell forward. He was dead before the rest of his body impacted the rusty deck.

The three surviving mercenaries furiously directed their fire at the edge of the forest, and at the rear deck a door flew upward and the remaining men of Henley’s private army surged forth. “What’s the matter?” roared Reuben, the last of the men to come out onto the deck. Henley’s response was lost in the hail of gunfire crackling thought he air, but another swarm of tiny poisoned darts flew forth from the jungle and fell like rain onto the deck, forcing Reuben and his companions to hastily duck and cover.

Indiana finally reached the rudder house and positioned himself where he could crouch to his knees and see the events unfolding as Reuben ducked nearby. Indiana had his gun drawn, but saw no use in using it. He could not hit what he could not see. The edge of the forest seemed as lifeless as ever. Whoever was attacking them, they were masters of disguise.

“Who is it?” Reuben asked in shock.

“Natives,” answered Indiana. “We are in their territory now!”

“Natives?” Reuben delivered an un-aimed shot at the riverbank. “I thought they were peaceful!”

“They usually are,” answered Indiana. “I don’t know what is going on. Where is Marian?”

Reuben made a head movement toward the open door behind him. “Below deck. Don’t worry. She is okay.” For a moment his attention was diverted towards movement on the riverbank. He looked more irritated than shocked. “I don’t understand. We were assured the natives in this area were peaceful.”

As if to answer, another torrent of small deadly projectiles pierced the deck nearby. They were better targeted than before, but there was no damage because all of the men had taken immediate cover.

They were no longer firing blindly into the bush, but were waiting to see their adversary before taking a purposeful shot; however they were never met with any visible success. Reuben stared at the shore, spellbound, for several seconds as he waited to get a glimpse of the attackers. He motioned for Indiana to stay put next to the rudder house. The man behind the wheel of the steamship had huddled down in fear, although the tiny projectiles did not have enough force to pierce the window panes.

Indiana observed as Reuben spoke excitedly to the man for a few seconds, gesturing frantically. The chug of the diesel motor softened noticeably as the boat’s speed slowed.

“What are you doing?” asked Indiana stunned, as Reuben slid down next to him. “Are you mad? Why are we stopping?”

“I have to find out what’s going on,” Reuben said seriously. “I don’t understand it.”

“I don’t care,” answered Indiana. “You want to kill us?” Reuben shook his head. “We were assured these natives were perfectly peaceful,” he said. “Although they are primitive, they are not stupid. They must know that they have no chance against us.”

At that very moment, another rain of tiny arrows fell down onto the boat. One of the tiny arrows missed the FBI agent by centimeters, and he turned visibly pale. Nevertheless he gestured to the helmsman and commanded him to continue slowing down the vessel.

“Stop firing!” he cried to his men. “Don’t fire unless you hear them shooting.”

The men looked confused, and stared disbelievingly at the FBI agent. However, one after the other they stopped firing, and no longer did they hear any salvo of arrows issuing from the shrubs. The boat slowed continually until it stopped, remaining motionless in its place.

Indy averted his gaze back to the forest edge. He made out some movement here: something stirring there, a shadow nothing more. He closely observed the green was, scanning back and forth. Slowly one, then two, then three and four, and finally more than a dozen: small slim bronze-skinned shapes slowly emerged from the forest. Most of them were naked except for a small loin cloth, and all of them were armed with blowguns longer than they were tall.

“Aymarά,” said Reuben. “It is the Aymarά. I recognize their feather decorations.”

Indiana watched with confusion. Either Reuben had prepared very well for this expedition, or he was more than the insignificant FBI agent he pretended to be.

Gradually more natives stepped from the forest. Most stared attentively at the steamer floating motionless in the river, but some pointed their blowguns threateningly in their direction, and a few even waded into the water as if they were going to swim towards them.

Reuben studied the silent army – it had increased to at least fifty or sixty men – and remained motionless for several seconds, then he put his pistol back into the holster on his belt and slowly stood up.

“What are you doing?” Indiana asked frightened. “Are you crazy?”

Reuben paid no attention to him. Ever careful, he raised his empty hands up and stretched them out in front of him. Then, standing fully, he slowly made his way toward the railing of the vessel. At least a dozen blowguns followed his movements, but Reuben ignored them and continued. He also ignored Henley’s frantic gestures and the frightened calls of the mercenaries.

Indiana watched with bated breath, staring in disbelief as Reuben approached the railing; both arms lifted up and empty palms facing the shore.

“Helmsman!” Reuben instructed. “To the bank!”

The man behind the rudder hesitated, until Henley finally rose from where he had been crouched and gave him a commanding gesture. The diesel engine roared to life again. A tremor ran through the steel hull of the steamer as it seemed to resist starting the trip again. It took a moment to align the nose toward the bank, and then the ship lurched forward.

“I hope you know what you’re doing, Reuben,” murmured Indiana.

Although he had spoken it softly, the FBI agent had understood his words because he nodded and replied without taking his eyes off the silent natives standing there on the riverbank. “I hope so also, Dr. Jones.” He let out a humorless laugh. “If not, I’ll be the first to know.”

The boat slowed as it approached the bank. The number of natives that had appeared from the undergrowth had increased still, and between the warriors Indiana now discovered that there were children and old persons, and even a few women. And they, too, were armed.

The sight confused him. The South American Indians – especially the tribes that still existed – were not necessarily his specialty, but he knew that the people of the Aymará were not particularly large. They were peaceful and known for their friendly nature. Indiana could only guess as to what could have provoked them enough to attack a passing ship and its crew without warning.

The ship grinded through the maze of overhanging branches and the tangled roots in the shallow water below until it at last came to a tangible halt with a tremble. Some of the natives stepped back, and in spite of the distance between them and the colorful dyes they had painted their faces with, Indiana could see their insecurity and mistrust clearly. Many of the blowguns were pointed directly at them, and he could feel the nervousness from Reuben’s mercenaries. He prayed to heaven that none of them would lose their calm and let off a shot. In spite of their superior

firepower, there was very little chance they would be able to defeat so many enemies.

But the danger passed without incident. Reuben remained motionless for a few moments with his hands raised at the railing, and then he very slowly lowered his arms and called a single word in a dialect Indiana had never heard before. At first, it seemed as if there would be no response, but then two or three Aymar  stepped aside in order to make room for an old, grizzled man wearing a coat of green and red feathers. He moved with the laborious, shuffling steps of a really old man as he slowly traversed the difficult vegetation, leaning heavily on one side with a twisted stick, and his left arm was supported in a sling made of vines and leaves. And now, Indiana noticed that the old man was not the only one injured – many carried heavy sticks to lean on or wore patches of vegetation and fiber to cover wounds, some of which were fresh and not yet healed. Some even had makeshift splints where their legs had been broken. Nevertheless they had all come to participate in the attack on the boat. What in the world had happened here? thought Indiana, frightened.

The door beside Indiana opened up, and Marian took a half a step onto the deck outside before she noticed the native army. She stopped mid-step. She looked up in fright, and clasped her hands over her mouth in order to suppress a scream.

“Stay where you are!” Indiana said hastily. Reuben also turned and threw Marian a frightened glance.

Restlessness overcame the natives on the shore. Still more weapons were directed at the small ship and its crew, and for a tiny moment Indiana felt the electricity in the air reach a dangerous point. But once again calmness prevailed in front of his very eyes – the natives maintained their calm and along with the mercenaries, everyone kept their nerves. The natives hesitantly lowered most of their weapons. Most of them. Not all of them.

Reuben turned with measured movements back toward the bank and looked at the old native again. From his clothing and the respect garnered by the other Aymar  natives, Indiana concluded the old man must have been their chieftain or a medicine man. Despite his apparent wounds and disabilities,

the old man maneuvered as close to the edge of the river as possible. The fever and pain in his flushed cheeks had receded, and he stood proudly in front of his people.

Indiana threw Marian an uncertain view, and then slowly stood up from behind the rudder house structure he had been using as cover. He was eyed suspiciously by the now fifty to a hundred men who had gathered near the shore, so he followed Reuben's example and made slow, deliberate and exaggerated movements for all to see. He had holstered his weapon and then made his way slowly to the railing next to Reuben. The FBI agent nodded almost imperceptibly at him to show his agreement, the movement noticed by the old native. The old Aymar  alternated his gaze from Reuben to Indiana. His perceptiveness stood in glaring contrast to his flushed and wrinkled face. Finally he said something to Reuben which Indiana did not understand, but it caused the FBI agent to let out a deep sigh of relief. Although concern still registered on the FBI agent's face, Indiana felt and invisible load had been taken off Reuben's shoulders.

"What did he say?" Indiana asked.

Reuben hastily shook his head from side to side, and then answered the old native in the same language. Indiana's respect for the FBI agent had risen throughout the ordeal. Obviously he had prepared extremely well for this journey. Or, whispered a quiet and stubborn voice in his head, Henley and Reuben had not told him the entire truth and they knew much more than they had let on.

Reuben spoke with the natives for several minutes in a strange-sounding throaty dialect that Indiana had never heard before. He then turned back towards the ship and with an arm movement announced: "Put away your weapons. All of them."

What immediately followed was not something Indiana had counted on. He was surprised when not only Henley but all of the remaining men he had so far suspected were mercenaries obeyed instantly. Quickly and quietly, with no opposition, all of their weapons were placed onto the ship's deck – not only the rifles but pistols and knives as well. Without a word, Reuben turned his attention immediately to Indiana, who was the only one left standing on deck that had not given up his weapons. Indiana

hastily unbuckled the gun belt with the pistol and held it out in front of him for a second before lowering it to the ground. He kept the bullwhip coiled in his hand. At first, Reuben regarded it disapprovingly but quickly came to the conclusion it was not worth saying something about.

“What happened?” asked Indiana. “Why did they attack us?”

“Later,” Reuben answered quietly. “Please say nothing more about it, Dr. Jones.”

He took another look at the natives on the shore, particularly at the old man, and then quickly swung himself over the railing in a fast but not surprising movement to the natives, jumping down into the river below. Even here, so near the bank, the water was deep – rising almost to Reuben’s chest. He spread his arms to balance as he slowly made his way to the bank and climbed ashore, using the branches and vines overhead to pull himself up to dry land with the natives. Although he came extremely close to some of them, none offered to help him onto the bank. However, none tried to attack him either.

Indiana heard Henley mumble something under his breath, obviously shocked by what he saw, that sounded like “is he nuts?” or something similar. Meanwhile, Marian and the mercenaries slowly moved forward toward the railing, stunned at Reuben’s actions as well.

Reuben spent a lot of time conversing with the old man. Those left behind on board the ship could not understand what the discussion was about as the two men raised and lowered their voices and gestured wildly – apparently the old man was very agitated and very suspicious of them, but Reuben seemed to speak with an angel’s tongue and was eventually able to calm him down. A couple of times during the conversation, Indiana was not sure of the extent of Reuben’s success as the warriors gathered protectively close to their leader, and more than one expressed his displeasure at the presence of the FBI agent. But finally the old man, in a tired gesture, waved the warriors back and appeared to relax again. Reuben turned back to the ship and cupped his mouth so those on the ship could hear and understand: “Dr. Jones! Mrs. Corda! You will come ashore!”

Indiana shot a surprised glance at first with Marian, then with Henley, but something in Reuben's voice made it clear that now was not the time to ask questions or even discuss the proceedings. With a quick movement he climbed over the railing, held the rusty rails with his left hand and uncoiled the whip in his right. With a single, skillful movement he snapped the whip at the shore, where it wrapped like a lasso around a thick overhanging branch. He then solicited Marian with a small head movement. "May I?"

Marian looked at him completely baffled, and the warriors on the shore stepped back a little in confusion. He could hear them starting to grumble threateningly. "Hurry up," said Indiana, forcing a smile. There was urgency in his voice. "Before you make them nervous."

Marian gave an un-approving jerk of the shoulders, then climbed on the outside of the railing and stared with fear at the native army below. Indiana did not give her time to reconsider as he shot his left arm tightly around her waist and pushed off the railing. The braiding of the leather whip protested loudly, but both the whip and the overhanging branch held under their weight as the two swung in an elegant arc down to the bank.

The natives observed Indiana's unorthodox method of departing the ship with amusement. Marian gave a slight surprised murmur as they loosed themselves from each other almost as soon as their feet touched the safety of solid ground. From the look Reuben shot their way, Indiana could tell he was clearly annoyed.

"Was that necessary?" he asked as Indiana and Marian stepped up next to him and the old man.

"No," Indiana answered with a smile. "But I really didn't want to get my feet wet."

"I believe you have been reading too many Tarzan novels, Dr. Jones," retorted Reuben, and then he made a silencing gesture when Indiana started to answer. "Enough now. We will follow them."

"Follow them where?" Indiana asked, doubting. Reuben pointed. "Their village. It lies about ten minutes from here. They promised not to attack the ship as long as we are with

them. For the moment, the chieftain believes we are not part of Ramos's gang."

Indiana looked around at the faces of the natives and could tell they regarded them with uncertainty. Something didn't feel right. He was particularly uncomfortable, and he made it no secret. "What happened here?"

"I don't know all the details," answered Reuben honestly. "I do not speak their language very well. But from what I gather, they were attacked three days ago by men who arrived on a ship like ours. They said they had a crippled man with them, whom could not see."

"Ramos?"

Reuben nodded quickly. "And they left a lot more dead and injured than we presently see."

"And at first they thought we were with him?"

Reuben shrugged his shoulders. "I am not sure what they believe, Dr. Jones. But whatever Ramos and his men did, it affected them so badly that they no longer trust any white man. Perhaps we can lessen that distrust by going with them. Or is it too dangerous for you?" he added bitingly.

"No," Indiana answered. "But I don't think it's a good idea for Mrs. Corda to accompany us."

"Neither do I," answered Reuben. "However, the chieftain insists on it."

"Why?"

"How the devil do I know?" Reuben answered sharply. "Ask him." He gestured toward the chieftain.

He calmed down almost immediately and forced a smile to hide his anger from the natives. "Wait here a moment," he said quickly. "I must give a few instructions to Henley."

Marian crowded near Indiana, obviously frightened, as Reuben stepped back toward the bank and the chieftain followed. The natives watched them restlessly, and Indiana tried to appear disinterested by looking left and right, but he was sure his pitiful attempt was not working. He was nervous and had every right to be. None of the Aymará warriors were taller than his shoulders, and most were slim and injured. But there were more than a hundred of them, and Indiana saw bloodlust in their faces. But

slowly that façade faded, and was replaced by a nearly childlike curiosity. At first they were hesitant, but slowly they came closer, ever closer, to Marian and him. Finally one of the natives stretched out his hand and groped at Marian's hair with his fingers. Marian twitched from the contact, but resisted the urge to say something and strike the warrior's hand aside.

Others soon followed the first curious fingers, and the natives' murmuring soon became very excited as the natives ran their fingers through Marian's hair, then groped her dress, and finally began feeling her face. Indiana could see her uneasiness building to a boil.

"Don't say a word," whispered Indiana. "Don't do anything rash."

He didn't know whether Marian had understood his words or not or if she had simply become rigid with fright; at least she remained motionless as she was caressed by the native crowd. And Indy felt the gestures of the natives were not hostile. They were just curious, like children, who had never seen or rarely seen a white woman before.

Nevertheless he breathed a sigh of relief as Reuben and the chieftain returned. The warriors retreated when the chieftain shot them a disapproving glance. The FBI agent was no longer alone, as he was accompanied by one of the mercenaries, now without a weapon like Reuben and himself, and he was visibly nervous. "Okay," said Reuben. "Let's go."

What Reuben had described as ten minutes proved to be a good half-hour walk through the dense jungle, and although Indiana had prepared himself for what was to come, what he saw at the native village came as a powerful blow.

The settlement was in a wide clearing in the middle of the bush, and consisted of at least a dozen large, straw-covered huts with a huge circular rotunda at its center. Or, more precisely, it had once consisted of them. Of what were twelve or fourteen straw hut structures, only three stood. What remained of the rest were charred, skeletal frameworks that the natives had already begun covering with sheets and animal hides. Also the large building at the village center was destroyed as well; its roof was

gone and a third of the building's walls were blackened from an out of control fire. Although it was apparent at least a day had passed, the penetrating smell of the fire still loomed heavily in the air. And there was yet another, worse smell, which Indiana tried to deny at first. But it was a smell he recognized: the stink of burnt flesh.

And then they saw it: at the edge of the forest, near where they had stepped into the clearing, were the corpses of ten to fifteen natives. Some appeared to be uninjured by fire but were riddled with bullet holes; however most of them were terribly burned. And many of them without exception were women, children, and the elderly and exhibited heavy burns. Apparently the warriors rushed the old chieftain to the riverbank to escape the massacre. Indiana exchanged a frightened glance with Reuben, and the FBI agent twitched his shoulders uncomfortably.

"Oh my god," whispered Marian as they stepped between the Aymará in front of them onto the village clearing. "What happened here?"

Indiana remained silent, but not because the frightening site had lumped the words in his throat – he believed he already knew the answer to the question. Whoever had attacked the village must have proceeded with inhumane brutality. And they had brought with them something more than pistols and rifles.

"This was done by a flamethrower," said Reuben suddenly. Indiana nodded silent, with no doubt. The FBI agent rubbed his brow and continued quietly with a dark expression on his face. "I know the trail this weapon leaves behind. But why would they do it?"

"Perhaps they didn't need a reason," Indiana murmured. Reuben looked doubtfully at him, but Indiana remembered the hate and blind insanity he has seen in Ramos's eyes.

If Indiana thought he had seen the limits of imaginable horrors mankind could conceive, he realized he was mistaken. Nothing could describe the horror he saw before him. The natives led the three to the rotunda at the village center, and motioned for them to follow through the charred door. As they stepped through, Marian clasped her hand over her mouth to muffle a frightened cry, and even Reuben and his tough companion paled visibly.

The Aymará had brought its severely wounded people into the burnt out shell of a building. There were at least twenty or twenty-five people – men, women, and children – with such terrible burns Indiana wondered how they could still be alive. A terrible smell hung in the air, and it was filled with the sounds of pain-filled moans.

The old native turned to Reuben with a question. Reuben surveyed the terrible seen in front of him for a second, and then looked at Marian.

“Can you help them?”

Marian shook her head intensely. “I’m not a doctor. I don’t know about these things.”

“Can you at least try?” Reuben pleaded. “I don’t know why, but he believes all white women are gifted with such things.” His voice trailed off, and he considered for a second, then turned to question the old man. In turn, the old man hesitated before answering, and averted his eyes in disappointment, then nodded. Reuben turned to the mercenary. “I need you to return to the ship and fetch Henley and two others. You are to bring along the first aid kit and whatever dressing material we have on board.”

The mercenary departed, obviously relieved to be dismissed and put the terrible scene behind him, at least for a little while. Marian gave Reuben another pleading view before stepping over to one of the injured children. Indiana saw her hands trembling as she bent down next to the child.

“Ask the old man what exactly happened?” Indiana whispered. “Why did they do this?”

Reuben complied, but it took a while to reestablish confidence with the old Aymará chieftain. Nevertheless, the conversation was difficult, and it took a very long time to make sense of the connection with the senseless brutality of the attack, but Indiana was gradually able to create a picture of what happened.

The story Indiana heard was both amazing and terrible. They were not the second, but the third ship of white men to pass through the river in the last two days and arrive in the Aymará territory. Stanley’s lead was not as big as they had assumed, and they were definitely on the right path. They had passed this way and continued for another three or four miles before unloading

their equipment in a small bay to the north, where about a dozen men loaded it all onto two cross-country trucks. The Aymará had welcomed the men as friendly companions, as was their nature. But then something occurred, which the old man did not want to speak. One of Corda's companions shot a warrior and had taken the chieftain's daughter as hostage in order to secure their departure. They released the girl, uninjured, when they realized they were a safe distance away. But the natives became even more distrustful when a second ship full of armed men came up the river and docked at the same place. An argument arose between the Aymará and these men. Once again, the chieftain would not disclose what had caused the argument. The old man was persistent in hiding the reasons for both disagreements. But his time, the men reacted differently. The first group had limited the conflict by doing only what was necessary to secure their safe departure. The second group, Ramos's group, had answered the conflict with machine-gun fire. Then they used a flamethrower on the natives and killed roughly a quarter of them before storming the village and burning it to the ground. They, like Corda's group, also took a hostage – the medicine man of the tribe and two younger warriors. These three were still missing, and the chieftain had sent a number of the tribe's best men to pursue Ramos and his murderous gang to free them. Indiana shook his head in confusion when Reuben's report had come to its conclusion. "Something about this story just isn't right," he murmured.

"I agree," answered Reuben. "However he swears it is the truth. Anyway, I believe him. The Aymará are a peaceful people. I cannot believe they would just attack us for no reason."

"I don't mean it isn't true," Indiana replied. "But I have the feeling he's hiding something from us." He made a hand gesture that swept the whole area. "Ramos is a monster. That I know. But even he wouldn't come in and do such a thing for no reason. Not to mention Corda. Please ask him, what was the dispute between the natives and the white men?"

"I have already," said Reuben. "He says its taboo and further questioning is forbidden." He smiled fleetingly, and not very convincingly. "Besides, he pretends not to understand me when

I ask him or mention it again. I don't want to insist and lose all of their cooperation. They believe us about not having anything to do with Corda and Ramos, but they are still distrustful and frightened, which I understand completely."

Indiana decided to save any further questions for later. Besides, he wasn't even sure Reuben was giving him the full story, if he knew the man at all. For a moment he was tempted to reveal what Henley had told him on the ship earlier. But he didn't want to put Reuben's colleague into a difficult situation – perhaps he would soon find out why they were really here.

Instead, he made his way next to Marian and helped her attend to the wounded. At least he tried. There was not much he could do. He understood very little about medicine and healing practices. He had spent half his life travelling to remote regions of the world, and knew just enough to survive the basics. But when he looked around, there wasn't a need to set a broken arm or dress a wound. These injuries were far more complicated. It was clear to both him and Marian that very few here would survive their injuries. The site of the twenty-something injured and the dozens more dead outside filled him with a cold rage, which frightened him. Ramos had done more than just kill a few people. The natives would overcome this, he was sure. But afterwards, they would never be the same. And Marian's face had changed as well. It had transformed from a mask of fear one moment to that of anger and hatred the next.

"I simply cannot understand why anyone would do this," she whispered.

"Me neither," Indiana said. "But I will find out. You have my word on it."

Marian regarded him with large, frightened eyes. "Is this truly Stan's fault?" she whispered.

"That's nonsense," said Indiana.

"It's his fault," persisted Marian. "This would not have happened if he hadn't come here. Or if he had simply given this criminal what he wanted in the first place. I should have made him do so."

“Nonsense!” Indiana contradicted again, this time more forcefully than before. “You have nothing to do with this, just like me.”

Marian shook her head. Her lips trembled and her face lost color. “Maybe I...I could have prevented it,” she murmured. “I could have talked to him. Perhaps...” she broke off. Her eyes fluttered, and for a tiny moment Indiana thought she was going to lose control. But then she calmed down again.

“Of course. You are right,” she muttered. “Sorry.”

“It’s nothing” said Indiana.

Marian smiled sadly. “I feel so helpless. If only I could help these people.”

“Reuben’s men are bringing medicine and supplies,” said Indiana. “Maybe we can at least help them with their pain.”

“I don’t think so,” answered Marian. “All of this should have never happened. I could have stopped Ramos.”

Indiana pointed at his arm with a tormented smile. Since his jump off the ship, his arm hurt hellishly. “You have already tried,” he said ironically. “I am very glad. Otherwise I might be dead now.”

Marian fought back a smile, but her eyes remained serious, and Indiana saw tears gleam in them. All of a sudden he felt as helpless as Marian, but for a different reason.



CHAPTER 6

22 June 1943 **In the village of Aymar**

It was late into the night before they had managed to provide a little help and comfort to the worst of the wounded. But it was just as Indiana had feared – there wasn't much they could do for these people. At least half of those who Indiana, Marian, and Henley (who had proved to be incredibly adept at such matters) had administered fresh dressing, ointments, and painkillers would die within a few days for sure. Indiana felt even more helpless and depressed than before, and his anger for Ramos and his men deepened to something that the thought had to border on hatred, a thought that frightened him. And at the same time, he tried to understand what would cause those men to do something as vile as this. He knew Ramos was crazy and completely without conscience, but even a madman usually needed a good reason to do something like this, even if it was just to feed his vanity. Perhaps that was what it was.

It was long after midnight when he emerged from the burned rotunda, exhausted, and leaned against the wall near the doorway to take in a long deep breath of the cool oxygen-rich night air. The smell of fire and ashes still clung to his nostrils, but at least the stench of death and pain wasn't so intense out there. He longed for a strong cup of coffee, or better yet, a shot of whiskey.

With tired, burning eyes he took a look around the clearing. The moon was a thin, pale crescent hanging in the sky, giving off almost no discernible light. But the natives had lit several fires in the village, and light glimmered inside the few huts that remained standing. It was obvious that no one was getting any sleep that night.

After a few minutes he realized that maybe that was an assumption as well. He noticed that most of the fires were lit at the opposite end of the village clearing. The shadows that moved across the trees at the edge of the village moved in what at first seemed a hectic and pointless manner. It wasn't until he noticed the faint sound of music that he realized there was actually a rhythmic quality to the movements. The music was a quiet atonal music made up of the soft pounding of drums and the plaintive notes of a flute, with the rise and fall of humming from native throats intermingled that seemed to come from a different song. Indiana hesitated. He was tired, and more exhausted than he could remember being in his entire life. And he was well aware that he was being watched by more than one pair of suspicious eyes even though he could not discern any natives near him. But the events at the far end of the clearing had captured his curiosity. And it was more than the scientist in him that wanted to see more. Something told him that the vent was important.

He looked around again, but found that he seemed to be alone despite the uneasy feeling of being watched. After the Aymará had overcome their distrust, they proved to be a friendly and helpful people, to be supportive to them. The chief had no objection to Reuben when he asked to bring his men and equipment off the ship to the village. Yet Indiana had noticed that two or three native warriors always remained close to each white man, nor did it elude him that this warrior was armed and ready at all times to use his weapons. It was not that he did not understand this behavior. He couldn't bring himself to disapprove it either. But it wasn't a pleasant feeling knowing that at any second he could find the poisoned end of an arrow in his back.

He banished the thought and walked across the clearing to the firelight and the dancing shadows. The pounding of the drums

grew louder. Indiana guessed the dancing shadows to be those of fifteen or twenty Aymará warriors painted with colorful tones, each with a magnificent headdress made of various colorful bird feathers danced around three evenly spaced fires to the beat of the drums. Although the flames were high, they did not put off much light. They also couldn't be radiating a lot of heat, because standing in the middle of the fire triangle stood the old chief. His lips moved to the music of the drums and flutes, but the rest of his body remained completely motionless, his arms and face turned up to the stars.

As he approached to about ten feet of the fire ceremony, a figure stepped out of the darkness nearby and lifted his arm. Indiana stopped as he saw Reuben. He wanted to say something, but the FBI agent hastily shook his head and motioned for him to remain quiet, then he walked toward the fire. Indiana followed him closer to the dancing natives and the ceremony unfolding. "What are they doing?" Indiana asked with a gesture to the Aymará.

Reuben shrugged. "I was hoping you could answer that question," he said.

Indiana again looked attentively at the fire. The natives moved frantically with twitching and choppy steps. Their arms were flailing wildly in all directions. Occasionally they uttered small, sharp cries, mingled with the eerie sound of the music that almost seemed dismal.

"It seems to be some kind of prayer," muttered Reuben. "Maybe they are begging their gods for help."

Indiana shook his head. "No, I don't think so," he murmured.

"This is something else..."

He had seen many native dances, both known and unknown. Some were forbidden and others were solely for the purpose of entertaining white researchers. But this was something different. The music and the song of the natives, which at first seemed independent of each other, had inaudible melodies that combined into what he could only describe as a menacing and aggressive sound. Yet at the same time he didn't think it was a war dance. "I don't know," he said again. "But I think it's better if we don't disturb it."

Reuben looked at him with uncertainty, but after he took another view of the ceremony it seemed to convince him Indiana was right. Maybe it was the sinister specter of the chief standing motionless between the flames that made them uneasy.

They went back, and Reuben led Indiana to one of the few still-standing large cabins. The Aymará had cleared it for Reuben's men and equipment. His companions had made their camp at the rear of the building, and the first third or so after entering the door had become a makeshift Goods Depot: obviously the ship's hatches had been stuffed full with cargo. Indiana looked at the stack of crates and closely tied bales for a moment, searching unsuccessfully for any label or writing that might hint at its contents. To his surprise, he discovered something else: along with Reuben's mercenaries there were two cops who had come along. One of them was stretched out asleep; snoring loudly like there was not going to be a tomorrow. But the other sat at a portable radio that had been set up on a small folding table. He occasionally pressed the telegraph key and listened from time to time, waiting on an answer to come through his headphones.

Indiana exchanged an alarming glance with Reuben. "What's he doing?"

"We're getting help from La Paz," said Reuben. "In an hour or two, seaplanes with some doctors and medication will be here."

Indiana was silent. Of course Reuben had made the right decision. There were not very many Aymará in the village who had escaped without injury. And they had neither the knowledge nor the resources themselves to give these people the necessary medical assistance they required. But he still did not like the idea. For some reason, he had a sinking feeling Reuben had arranged for more than simple medical assistance. But he kept his concerns to himself. He took one of the folded chairs and opened it, then took a seat at the table. Reuben sat down beside him.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

Indiana grimaced. After what he had seen in the rotunda over the last few hours, he figured he would never eat again. But his growling stomach quickly changed that notion. He nodded, and

Reuben got up. A few minutes later, Reuben returned with a piece of bread and two cans of sardines, which he fumbled with trying to open with a knife. Indiana watched him for a moment before taking the can and knife from him before he cut off a finger or stabbed himself in the eye.

“I want to know what the natives are doing there,” muttered Reuben, while Indiana began listlessly poking around in the fish box. “It’s kind of…” His voice trailed off as he searched for the words.

“Scary?” helped Indiana since Reuben did not finish the sentence.

“Right,” said the FBI agent. He smiled uncertainly. “I thought you were a specialist in these things.”

“What?” said Indiana as he broke off a piece from the bread loaf. “In weird things? Or native dances?”

Reuben smiled dutifully, but his eyes remained cold. “You know, Jones,” he said, “the worst part is to inform you that I am just not sure of you. I still don’t know on which side you stand. Are you here to rescue your friend and help us?”

“I’m here, right?” said Indiana.

Reuben glared at him, but decided against pursuing any further. He watched Indiana for quite a while in silence while he ate. Finally, he continued on a different subject. “I spoke with the chief again,” he said.

Indiana looked at him wordlessly.

“He sticks to his story,” continued Reuben. “Supposedly Ramos and his men opened fire for no reason. That’s all he would tell me. But Ramos won’t get away with it.”

“Why?”

Reuben jerked his head to the police officer, who was still sitting in front of the radio tapping out the Morse code key.

“We’re running around in circles here, Dr. Jones,” he said. “It’s gone beyond simply freeing Mr. Brody and putting Ramos behind bars. That is no longer the only question.”

“But?”

“I’m afraid you do not understand the seriousness of the situation,” explained Reuben. “Ramos is an American citizen.

And he attacked a native village and killed more than a dozen people.”

“And this is something the Bolivian government doesn’t want to see happen,” Indiana suggested sarcastically. “Even if it is *only* a few natives.”

Reuben remained serious. “Imagine if a Bolivian gangster came to Texas and invaded a small town. We wouldn’t even give them time to sit down. This situation complicates the entire matter.”

“Oh?”

“Until now, this was more or less a discrete operation. He smiled briefly when he saw Indiana throw a doubtful look at the police officers. “The police chief of Trinidad...let’s just say he owes me a favor,” he said. “But now he can no longer hide the fact that we are here. Presumably the aircraft coming will bring only a doctor and a few boxes of medication and drugs. But I’ll bet a boat from Trinidad will be right on its tail, probably getting here no later than tomorrow morning. A half-hour later, this place will be crawling with police and possibly military. We have to be gone by then.”

Indiana was not very surprised. On the contrary, what had surprised him was the fact that Reuben allowed them to stay this long to help the natives even though Ramos’ lead had grown by several hours. However, Indiana disagreed. “That’s impossible. The men are exhausted. You can’t demand a march through the jungle like that out of them now.”

“Says who?” Reuben disputed.

Indiana looked at him quizzically.

Reuben smiled, convinced. He took a quick glance to ensure the police officer still had the bulky headphones on, and then continued in a low voice, almost a whisper. “They are sending two planes, Dr. Jones. I suggest we...*borrow* one of them.”

“You mean *steal*,” suggested Indiana.

Reuben made a dismissive gesture. “Call it whatever you want. You know what this is about. I would steal the crown jewels of England if I had to. Can I count on your help?”

“With what? To steal the plane?”

This time Reuben's anger was apparent. "No," he answered sharply, and a little louder. "For something like that we have specialists." He made a motion across the room to the mercenaries. "But the plane is useless to us if we don't know where we are going. I ask you again to talk to the chief. Perhaps you can convince him that he must tell us the truth."

"You think he knows where Ramos and Corda have gone?"

"Maybe," said Reuben with a shrug. "To be honest, it's our only hope. If we don't find their trail soon, we might as well turn back."

"You mentioned before that Reuben brought a truck," recalled Indiana. "A vehicle like that leaves traces. Especially in the jungle."

Reuben nodded. "Theoretically, yes," he said. "But in practicality not so much. The soil here is so dense that not even a tank would leave much of a trail. The jungle is very dense, but not particularly wide. It's actually only a narrow strip off each side of the river. We know they headed north, but that's about it."

"I don't even speak their language," said Indiana, back to the subject of speaking with the chief.

"But he speaks ours," Reuben reminded him. Indiana looked up. Reuben smiled and leaned over and fished into Indiana's last can of sardines with the jack-knife's tip. "Like I said earlier – I spoke to him. He speaks very good English, but he preferred to pretend not to understand us at first. The man may be old, but he is not stupid."

"I can try," said Indiana. "But no promises."

"I'm not asking for any," Reuben said, chewing. Almost casually, he added: "Oh, yeah, there's something else, too." "What?"

"Marian Corda," said Reuben. "I think it's better if she stays here."

"I'm afraid that once again I disagree," said Indiana.

"I'm sure. But I can't take any chances." His voice was urgent. "Look around you, Jones. What happened here is just a taste of what awaits us. Ramos doesn't give a damn about a man – *or woman's* – life. You really want to expose her to such danger?"

“She won’t stay here,” sighed Indiana, knowing Reuben was right.

“The thing is, she won’t know. We’ll be gone before she realizes what happened.”

Reuben explained that Marian Corda’s motives were still not obvious. He felt as if she were hiding something. Indiana was about to answer when he heard a sharp cry, followed by a surprise yelp and the muted impact of a falling body. For half a second Indiana and Reuben looked at each other in surprise, then they both jumped to their feet at the same time and stormed out of the hut, followed by three or four mercenaries who grabbed their weapons as they ran out the doorway.

Indiana was right on top of Reuben’s heels, so close that he almost bumped into him as the FBI agent stopped suddenly and bent down to a figure crumpled on the ground near the door. In the dim glow of the three fires in the distance Indiana realized that it was Henley. He was bleeding from a nasty gash over his left eye, and he looked dazed, but was conscious. Painfully he raised his hand and gestured toward the edge of the forest. Reuben spurred forth, and Indiana and the mercenaries followed him, although Indiana had already secretly decided that it would be a fruitless search. In the prevailing darkness, they could get within a few feet of the man who had attacked Henley and not even see him. But suddenly one of Reuben’s mercenaries let out a sharp cry, pointed to the left, and ran around Indiana and the others because he thought he saw a shadow hastily retreat into the jungle.

“Hold it!” cried Reuben. The shadow moved even more hectic and disappeared into the blackness of the forest’s edge, while Reuben drew his pistol and still fired a warning shot.

The shot rang out in the dead of the night like cannon fire. The natives immediately stopped singing, and an unnatural silence momentarily spread over the village. Then came a chorus of screaming, excited by the calling of voices to each other. And suddenly people were hurrying from all directions toward them. Reuben ignored it once, but ran on. Indiana redoubled his efforts to avoid falling behind. The shadow was now completely gone,

but hey heard the breaking of branches and undergrowth emanating from the forest – then suddenly a little scream!

Indiana’s heart gave a startled jump as he recognized the voice.

“Marian,” he shouted. Fear gave him extra strength. He reached out quickly and sprinted past Reuben and his mercenaries. He was the first to reach the trees – to almost trip over a body curled up in the undergrowth. It was Marian. She was trembling as Indiana knelt beside her and faced her. Her skin was as pale as a corpse, her eyes large and dark with fear. At first she seemed to not even recognize Indiana as she jumped back, frightened by him. She buried her face into the palms of her hands, but then Indiana softly spoke her name. The fear raced from her eyes as she recognized him.

“Marian?” said Indiana. “What happened? What are you doing out here?”

Reuben and the others finally caught up. The FBI agent stopped, but the three mercenaries continued and broke splintering through the underbrush. Reuben slowly made his way next to them.

“What happened?” Indiana heard her frightened tone. He tried to reassure her. “I don’t know,” she murmured, bewildered. “I...I wanted to grab some fresh air. I just had to get and. And suddenly...I heard footsteps and people shouting. And then someone came up and knocked me down.”

“A man?” interjected Reuben. “What kind of man? A native? Or a white man?”

Marian shook her head unhappily. “I don’t know,” she admitted. “It all happened so terribly fast. I only saw a shadow.” Reuben started to ask another question, but Indiana cut him off. “I think she didn’t see anything,” he said. “We should ask Henley. He may have seen more.”

“Maybe not,” said a voice coming up behind them. Indiana and Reuben turned around at the same time and saw the second FBI agent had followed them into the underbrush. He was still pale. The gash over his eye was bleeding profusely, and it seemed serious, but his eyes were clear again. “I didn’t see anything. It

was just as she said. I thought I saw a shadow, then I was knocked to the ground.”

“Perhaps one of the natives,” Reuben said. “They are watching us.”

“I’m not so sure,” said Indiana. “They could have easily snuck into the huts in the darkness and attacked us.”

Reuben shot Indiana an uncertain glance, but before he could say anything more Aymará natives came running from the village, and many of them had re-armed themselves and had the same grim expression on their faces as they had when they arrived at the river earlier.

“This can’t be good,” Indiana mumbled.

Reuben turned to see what the commotion was, and when he saw the advancing native he made a soothing gesture with his hands. It wasn’t working. The natives kept coming closer, and the threatening tone in their grumbles was becoming more apparent. Just when it seemed like the natives were ready to attack, the old chief came out of the darkness and motioned for them to remain calm. The warriors stepped back a little to let the chief through, then encircled Reuben, Indiana, and the rest of the group.

Reuben gushed a few hasty words in the native dialect of the Aymará, and the old man replied back in the same language. The he paused as he looked back and forth between Indiana, Marian, and Henley, then thoughtfully moved seamlessly into a slow but almost unaccented English.

“Mr. Reuben, we will talk in your language so your friends know what we say. Why did you shoot?”

“That was just a warning shot,” explained Reuben. He looked and sounded nervous, and one look into the dark expressions on the Aymará confirmed that he had every reason to be. They were on thin ice, and Indiana felt like it was about to crack. Although they had just helped the natives, the distrust among the villagers could not be appeased for long. Perhaps it would never be again.

“A warning shot? Why?”

Reuben pointed to the bloodied left side of Henley’s face. “Someone has attacked and hurt my colleague here. And also Mrs. Corda. Someone was trying to listen in on us, and Henley

surprised them.” He hesitated for a brief moment, then bluntly asked: “Was it one of your warriors?”

For a second, the old man glared contemptuously at Reuben. “If we wanted you dead, white man, you would have never set foot in our village.”

“That’s not what I meant,” stammered Reuben nervously. “But it’s-“

“I am sure it wasn’t one of your warriors,” chimed in Indiana. “But maybe one of your people saw something or someone that doesn’t belong here.”

Indiana tried to discern the old man’s thoughts in the silence that followed, but only saw contempt in the old man’s eyes. Finally the old man turned slightly to one of the warriors who had positioned themselves behind Reuben and asked a question in his native language, to which the warrior responded with a head shake and a gesture Indiana surmised could only mean a violent resolution to the situation at hand.

“No one has seen anything,” said the chief. “I have ordered my village to treat you as guests. We do not listen in on what our guests say in the comfort of their quarters.” With an abrupt movement, he spun around to leave.

Chief!” Indiana called after him.

The Aymar stopped. He did not turn around to face Indiana, but he turned his head enough for Indiana to see his icy stare. It was enough that froze Indiana for a second before finally gathering the courage to approach the old man. He stopped as one of the warriors intervened quickly with a threatening gesture of his spear.

“Please, listen to me,” began Indiana. “You have to trust us. We are not your enemies. But the men who did this to your people,” he made a sweeping gesture around indicating the burnt-out huts and wounded villagers, “they are. And the one we have just chased probably belongs to them.” The reaction on the face of the chief proved that the old man’s deliberations had led him to the same conclusion. Amazingly he remained emotionless, registering no fear or fright at the prospect even though their first encounter with Ramos and his men had almost led to the destruction of his tribe. “I think they might come back. Whatever

it is they seek in the jungle, it is likely not to be found. In that case, Ramos and his men will return to find out what you know.” “The forest is large,” agreed the chief. “And it hides its secrets well.”

“So you know what they are looking for,” persisted Reuben. The chief did not answer immediately. He did not even look at Reuben. His eyes remained fixed on Indiana. “There are things people should not know,” he replied cryptically. “And there are things that people already know and are better to remember for all time.”

“Ramos will come again,” said Indiana seriously. “He will wipe out this entire tribe if you do not tell him what he wants to know.”

“If it is the will of the gods, then it will happen,” confirmed the Aymará chief. Indiana began to respond, but the old man quickly raised his hand and continued. “It is useless for you to talk further. We would see all white men dead before revealing the secrets of our people to them.”

The openness of the answer surprised Indiana. After the persistent silence from the Aymará all day, he now understood. The old man viewed all white men the same: thieves who come to steal their secrets away. This admission made Indiana realize that this was what the old man and his people thought of them as well. “I understand,” Indiana said. “And I ask you to believe me: I feel the same as you. No man has the right to interfere in the sacred rights of other nations.”

“Then why are you here?”

“Because not everyone thinks like us,” said Indiana. “The man who was here before, and those that followed him, are bad people. Criminals and murderers. They will not rest until they have found what they are looking for. Do you really want your people to endure more suffering?”

The old man smiled. “And you think that will not happen if I tell you what I would not tell them?”

“Maybe,” replied Indiana.

“Why?”

Indiana pointed to the two FBI agents, then with his thumb pointed to himself. "Because we might be able to stop them. And because it's not fortune and glory that we seek. We seek justice."

"Justice..." the old man smiled again, and this time it was a melancholy smile. "From your mouth, the words sound different than from your companion," he gestured to Reuben. "I believe you. I think you are a man of honor. But we vowed to keep the secret."

Reuben took a step next to Indiana. He wanted to approach the chief, but Indiana grabbed him by the shoulder and shook his head. "It's pointless to keep asking," he said. "Let him be. He will not answer."

Reuben missed the lightning from the stares coming his direction from the old man. He held back whatever was on the tip of his tongue. His lips formed into a thin, angry line. He turned to old man. "Thank you, chief," he said, holding back whatever had been on the tip of his tongue before. "I promise you, despite everything, we will find the men who did this to your people. And we will punish them."

Reuben turned back to Indiana. "Have you gone mad, Jones?" he said angrily as the old man and his companions disappeared back into the darkness. "How do you think we will find Ramos? Do you have any idea how big this forest is? The old man was our only chance. You should have asked him with a little more determination."

"Ramos' way?"

Reuben's face darkened by several degrees, and Indiana sensed the impending outburst so he hastily went on. "I think there is another way."

"And what way is that?"

Indiana paused for a moment. He wanted to ensure they were alone. He looked around and saw that the natives had left as quickly as they had appeared. His eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, so he looked around once more to be certain no one else was near. He still had the intense feeling of being watched. Instinctively, he lowered his voice as he answered. "Earlier, when we observed the native ceremony," he said. "Did you not notice?"

Reuben shook his head, not quite following.

“I think I know which direction to start looking,” continued Indiana.

Reuben looked at him attentively, waiting for a further explanation. But Indiana said nothing. He simply smiled fleetingly, then turned to Marian and escorted her back to the hut.

It was one of those lingering thoughts that wouldn't go away. Like there was something he was missing, but it was just out of reach. Also, it was no accident he had left Reuben without another word, fuming in anger. He had noticed something odd at the site where the natives had been dancing and conducting their ceremony; something odd especially in the way the chief had been acting, but he was not exactly sure what it was. Nevertheless, he was sure it was an important clue in finding the whereabouts of Ramos and his gang, and he was not going to waste any more time. His subconscious wanted to tell him something, to fill in that *something* he was missing. It was a familiar feeling. He had the talent of recognizing something of importance. It was just a matter of figuring out what it meant. For at least the next two hours the moment never came where the secret was revealed. They had gone back to the hut that acted as Reuben's temporary headquarters, and Indiana's conjecture proved correct – as long as they were in the vicinity of the two Bolivian police officers and the rest of the mercenaries, the FBI agents didn't bother to pursue the meaning of what he had said to Reuben. They simply pierced him with their angry stares. Indiana always returned the stares with the same acknowledgement, a friendly smile, until he decided to use the remaining time before the arrival of the aircraft to catch some shut-eye that he had been denying his body for far too long.

It was a little more than two hours later when the two flying machines Reuben had been expecting were heard overhead. The sound of the engines overhead generated a nervous excitement among the Aymará, causing them to noisily move about the village. Indiana re-awakened. Startled by the natives, he sat up. At first he thought Ramos and his gang had returned to finish the destruction they had started three days ago. But when he heard

the low hum of the aircraft engines over the river, he relaxed. It was a half-hour walk to where they would be anchoring in the river. Half-asleep, he remembered why the policemen had used the radio.

Still a little dazed, he turned to wake up Marian, who had lain down beside him on one of the makeshift cots.

She was not there.

Indiana blinked, then rubbed the sleep from his eyes with his knuckles. He looked again, this time much more attentive to the hut and his surroundings. With the exception of a single snoring mercenary, he was alone. Apparently everyone else had heard the airplanes and left the hut already. He jumped up and left the hut with a mixture of resignation and anger. It was still dark but getting lighter outside, and all the fires had been extinguished except for two. The whole tribe seemed to be on its feet, and in the distance he saw Reuben and Henley, who was clearly gesturing to the chief as he tried to explain what was causing the noise overhead. Automatically Indiana scanned the grounds for Marian, but he did not see her anywhere. He was worried, but accepted the fact that after last night's experience she had to be acting more cautiously now.

When Indiana reached the small group of men with Reuben. He walked straight to the chief, who raised his head proudly. Reuben looked at Indiana with a dark glare. Indiana asked him a question, but Reuben only responded with a rude head movement in the direction of the river.

"The planes are there," he said unnecessarily. "We should go and meet them. I am sure they could use some help unloading." Indiana looked quizzically at Reuben, who responded with an almost imploring glance. Indiana understood immediately. One of the two Bolivian police officers was in earshot of their conversation, as well as three or four of the mercenaries. Indiana realized Reuben was not giving up. Obviously he intended to keep his plan of seizing one of the planes – a plan which Indiana thought was a little crazy – secret. Indiana not only wondered where they were supposed to take the aircraft, but also who was going to fly it. Indiana struggled to control his desire to let Reuben know how crazy he thought the idea was. He held it in

until they had left the clearing, and to some degree had penetrated the forest.

Then he voiced his concern out loud. "This is crazy. Are you still going through with this crackpot plan?"

Reuben reacted like a kid who had been caught red-handed doing something wrong, and he hastily looked around in all directions even though it was so dark you could barely make out the proverbial hand in front of the face. "First of all, we have to get the hell out of here," he said after a considerable amount of silence. The tone in his voice made it clear that Indiana was lucky he answered at all. "If the Bolivian authorities take the lead on this operation, then we will lose all chances of getting Ramos. Not to mention finding Professor Corda." He threw a sideways glance at Indiana, then added in a lurking tone. "And what about Mr. Brody? Isn't his life worth a damn?"

Indiana knew Ramos was only too right. But it did not change the fact that Indiana was uncomfortable in his own skin for the part he had to play in the plan. A trek through the Bolivian rain forest for a bad man like Ramos and an armed gang with machine guns and flamethrowers was bad enough. But the idea that they were about to engage in a race with the Bolivian police, or even worse, the Bolivian military, drove a cold chill down his spine. But he kept all of these thoughts to himself, saying nothing else to Reuben about the matter. On one hand, the FBI-man was right. If Ramos felt the slightest hint that he was in danger, he would surely take it out on poor Marcus. Indiana knew that his old friend's life wasn't worth a penny to the madman. Indiana would, without hesitation, sacrifice his own life for that of his friend.

It took somewhat longer the darkness to make it back from the village to the river, and as artificial man-made light began to trickle through the brush as they approached the water, they could hear the noise from the aircraft engines penetrating the rainforest canopy. They veered somewhat off the straight path to the river, spreading out from their single file line and approached the two seaplanes in a wide arc.

There were two large, heavy looking machines moored in the water. They looked more like boats with wings than planes, Indiana thought. One of them had already started unloading: a

large number of men crowded around the cargo that had been piled upon the shore in the darkness. Indiana saw the occasional pass of a flashlight beam and heard Spanish word fragments as they got closer. Reuben gestured him and the others to remain quiet, and they retreated back into the jungle. The small group crouched in the brush, and Reuben crept back closer to the planes with Indiana following behind. He motioned for Indiana to wait for him, then he cleverly used the surroundings as cover until he disappeared. He was gone for barely a minute before returning. The expression on his face showed he was not only anxious but also concerned.

“Problems?” said Indiana without gloating.

Reuben shot him an angry look. “They are better organized and will be able to respond much quicker than I thought,” he admitted. “Some of them are cops. And I’m pretty sure I heard them mention a third plane is on the way here.”

He stared gloomily past Indiana into void, lost in thought. Then he gave himself a visible shake and turned to one of the men. “Where are the others?”

“In position.” The mercenary pointed down the river. “They are waiting for your signal.”

“Not yet,” said Reuben. “We have to wait. There are at least twenty men.”

“That’s no problem,” said the mercenary. “We have the element of surprise on our side, and -“

“Quiet!” Reuben interrupted him sharply. “I am not going to engage in a firefight with the Bolivian police, you fool! We wait. With any luck, they’ll head to the villager soon and leave behind only a guard or two.”

The man dropped his eyes and withdrew a few precautionary steps. Indiana worked his way a safe distance back into the forest, then leaned against a tree. After a while Reuben, who was now accompanied by Henley, joined him. Indiana jerked his head toward the seaplanes. “You want to grab that thing, then hope Ramos is nice enough to signal us with light so we know where he is?”

He could see Reuben’s angry glare, even in the darkness. “We’re not as dumb as you seem to think, Dr. Jones,” Reuben

replied, offended. "I admit that it would have been much easier if we had brought the chief to talk to them, but there are other options."

"Such as?"

Reuben did not answer but wrapped himself in offended silence. But his colleague, Henley, seemed more accessible. "We have a pretty good idea of the area where Corda and Ramos want to go," he said.

"And?" They had Indiana's attention. "How?"

"Well, for example, by the things they have taken," said Henley, ignoring Reuben's furious look. "Corda and his men have an off-road truck with them. Not necessarily the ideal vehicle to trek through the jungle with, right?"

"You have a point," said Indiana, and Henley smiled and shook his head as he lit a cigarette before speaking again. He took a quick drag, then shot a startled glance back towards the river as he threw the cigarette to the ground and stomped it out. "He also has a lot of mountain-climbing gear."

"Jungle, water, and rocks," countered Indiana. "There is plenty of each here," he indicated around him by raising his hands, palm upward, from his sides.

"But not all in close proximity," insisted Henley. "That narrows their choice of targets quite considerably." He hesitated a brief moment. Then he lowered his hands to a pack buckled to the belt on his waist. He opened it and revealed a big metal box that appeared to be quite heavy. Indiana saw a scale and several buttons on its front. It also had a wand-like device attached by a cable. "Maybe we can find him with this." It was a device used to detect radiation.

Reuben drew a sharp breath as he had realized what his partner had revealed, and looked as if he were about to reprimand Henley when Indiana jumped in.

"I know why you're here. I figured it out yesterday." Indiana jumped in.

Reuben's eyes narrowed. "How?"

"I am *also* not as dumb as *you* think," said Indiana. "I am quite capable of putting two and two together." Out of the corner of his

eye, he saw that Henley's initial surprise had clearly turned to relief. Reuben looked rather suspicious. And very upset.

"If you really know why we are here, Dr. Jones, then you must also know how important our mission is. There could be thousands of lives at stake. Maybe even millions."

"There are some problems with your math. Your life doesn't count, right?" Indiana asked with a gesture to the mercenaries. "Not to mention Marian's. And mine. Think about it."

"What?"

"At the right place and time, these men you brought along might kill you," explained Indiana. "I mean, they are mercenaries, right? Men who fight for money can also kill for money."

"Enough, Dr. Jones," Reuben said, laboriously controlling his voice. "I strongly advised you and Mrs. Corda to stay behind. You ignored me and came anyway. But if you understood what was going on, then you have no right to blame me now."

"You know, Ruben," Indiana replied calmly, in an almost friendly tone. "I haven't trusted anything you have said from the beginning. And I think I know why. You and your colleague are here because it's your job. You put yourself in mortal danger for God and country, and not necessarily in that order. I'm here because I still have unfinished business with Ramos, and I have a friend that needs to be freed. But these men," he swept his hand around indicating the mercenaries, "they are here only for the money. How do you know you paid them enough if they don't know exactly what you are doing or why you are here?"

"Why don't you go back there and tell them?" Reuben replied coldly. "I keep asking myself over and over. On which side do you stand, Dr. Jones?"

"On yours," Indiana replied with the same icy tone. "I'm just not sure if it is really the right one."

"Quiet!" Henley said suddenly. The urgency in his voice caused Indiana and Reuben to become silent on the spot. They turned around back toward the river. Henley was pointing upriver. Although the dim starlight was not sufficient to see in great detail, they spotted a shadow begin to move. It was a blurred, indistinct spot in the dark, but it moved very slowly.

After a few more seconds they heard a gentle lapping of water on the hull of a boat.

“Who’s that?” Indiana whispered.

Reuben shrugged and made a gesture to remain silent. The boat was still too far away to be more than a shadow in the night, but the shadow was far too large to be one of the canoes used by the Aymará villagers. It was also coming downstream, which was the opposite direction from the village.

“There is something wrong here,” muttered Reuben.

Even the men who unloaded the second plane had begun to notice the intruder now. They stopped carrying boxes and crates from the fuselage and stopped on the swaying gangplank that connected the fuselage to land. They had turned toward the approaching shadow, then directed the beam from a large flashlight quivering across the river to get a better look at the newcomer.

The light paused for only a second on the shadow before the rapt of gunfire tore through the night. Someone called out, then the flashlight turned over two or three times before splashing into the water below and disappearing.

“What?” Reuben sputtered, startled by the sudden gunfire. The rest of his words were lost as they heard the sound of something crashing into the aircraft fuselage. More screams rang out, and two of the shadowy forms on the gangplank between the bank and the aircraft collapsed and fell into the water.

“Ramos,” shouted Henley. “This has to be Ramos!”

As if to confirm his words, the front of the newly arrived boat began glowing with an unbearably bright orange-white light, followed by a terrible hissing. A sudden arc of flame leaped from the bow of the boat to the forward-most seaplane. At the same time, a machine gun began to pound away. In the flickering light of the flamethrower you could make out miniature geysers as the bullets moved over the water towards the bank of the river where the men who had been unloading the boat began to scatter. A choir of shrill screams of pain and fear filled the air as two or three more figures collapsed. The rest leaped overboard into the water in an attempt to swim to safety.

The airplane burst into flames from the barrage of the flamethrower, the surface of the water transforming into a fiery spectacle that burned so brightly Indiana had to close his eyes to protect them. The explosion created a torrential wave that crashed into the second plane, causing it to momentarily lisp drastically in the water. The gangway broke away from the second flying vessel, spilling some men into the water. Burning flammable gel from the flamethrower spewed forth and ignited, raining down on the second plane now and setting it on fire. The sounds of a second machine gun salvo burst across the water, hammering the body of the aircraft. Suddenly the escape door of the airplane blew open and men poured out of the opening into the water trying to save themselves. The flamethrower discharged again, engulfing the body of the airplane in its fiery lance. A few seconds later the flames penetrated through the hull and made it inside. An explosion followed tearing the plane into pieces. In the brightness of the explosion, Indiana noticed the boat with Ramos and his men approached within thirty to forty meters of their location. Nearly a dozen men from the airplanes tried to get onboard from the river waters, but Ramos, at the nose of the boat, mowed them down in a hail of blood and bullets.

“What are you waiting for Reuben?” Indiana asked. “Tell your men...”

“Not yet,” Reuben cut him off. “Hold your fire!”

They observed quietly as the boat came closer. The burning wreckage of the airplanes lipping in the river provided a scene almost as bright as daylight. The flight crews were nowhere to be seen, and they were uncertain if they had made it out of the melee alive. Survivors of the insidious assault had fled into the jungle’s embrace. Indiana was relieved that the crews had not stayed and attempted to resist Ramos’s onslaught. Even though they had been lightly armed, there was no way they would have survived against Ramos’s mercenaries.

“We have them!” Reuben whispered excitedly. “They are running right into our arms.”

“Hopefully our men will keep their nerves,” murmured Henley nervously. He looked upriver, where Indiana assumed the second half of his small troop was positioned. Obviously Reuben

had intended to ambush the airplanes from both sides, hijacking one of the planes and disabling the second so it could not follow. And Reuben's plan might have worked, had Ramos not been hiding nearby. He must have observed the aircraft as they landed. It's possible he had even been monitoring their radio communications and knew the schedules of their arrival. He might have even known that the aircraft carried armed troops as well as physicians and aides.

Suddenly Indiana's attention broke.

"Marian!" he said, suddenly remembering he had not seen her in all of the excitement. "Where is Marian?"

"Still in the village," Reuben replied, confused. "I thought you left her sleeping in the hut when we left."

"No," Indiana answered quickly. "I thought she was with you."

Reuben's lips moved in a silent curse. "I knew it was a mistake to bring her along," he said. "But there is nothing we can do about it now."

"She's better off in the village," Henley interjected quickly.

"She'll be safe there."

Ramos's boat slowly inched closer. With the motor off, the pilot gently steered it between the two burning airplanes. Two of Ramos' mercenaries jumped into the water and guided the boat slowly to the shore with some ropes. The rest of the mercenaries jumped ashore once the boat settled against the riverbank. They formed a loose semicircle, their weapons at the ready. Ramos was the last to leave, stretching out his hands and someone assisted him to the bank. Indiana tried to count how many were there. The flickering shadows made it difficult to tell, but he estimated eight to ten men on the shore and a couple of more behind in the boat. Almost as many men as they had with them, and twice as many as Reuben had estimated.

Indiana began to feel increasingly uneasy. Although he wasn't scared; he had known it would be dangerous as soon as he saw how ruthless Ramos could be in the burned village. But now it looked like he was getting caught up in the middle of a battle between two groups of mercenaries, and it wasn't exactly where he wanted to be.

Reuben seemed to be able to read his thoughts. He suddenly turned to Indiana. "You stay here, Jones. This doesn't concern you. We can handle this."

The temptation to agree with Reuben was strong. Nevertheless, Indiana shook his head. "I didn't come with you just to stand back and watch. I'm here to get Marcus."

Reuben made an annoyed gesture. "Don't you see? This lunatic probably has more men close by. And they can't be very far behind, or this first group wouldn't have made it here so fast. So you do as I say. You should have stayed behind and made sure Mrs. Corda was okay. Don't interfere."

Indiana wanted to disagree, but at the same instant he noticed a movement at the edge of the forest, a few steps away from Ramos's troops. Suddenly a slender figure emerged from the undergrowth. All of them sucked in a gasp of air.

Marian Corda stepped calmly out of the shrubs and looked around. When she saw the group of men in front of her, she turned and headed toward them. It was Ramos' men. In the darkness she must have thought it was Reuben and Indiana. Before Reuben or any of the other men could prevent it, Indiana stood to his feet and burst out of the underbrush. With a few words he shattered the silence. "Marian! No! That's Ramos!"

The outburst spun Ramos's men around. Marion recoiled in the middle of her step, realizing the grave error she had made. Despite the large distance Indiana recognized the fear in her eyes as she realized her mistake. But it was too late. She tried to take a quick step backwards, but two of the men had quickly cornered her, and four of the others had brought their weapons up to point directly at Indiana.

Indiana froze in his tracks when he saw the weapons pointed at him. Three of the goons had already fanned themselves out and began to run in his direction, being sure to keep their movements out of the field of fire of their comrades should they decide to shoot. Indiana admitted to himself that he might have made an error in judgment when he screamed out at Marian. But the insight was a little too late.

"Stop! Don't shoot!"

Ten seconds ago, his companions would have laughed had he said he wanted to hear Ramos's voice. But he drew a deep breath now, relieved that Ramos had intervened. Indiana remained rigid, not even daring to lift his hands in surrender. Three men surrounded him and roughly grabbed him at gunpoint, pulling him towards the river bank. As he was dragged past Marian he caught a glimpse of her wide, fright-filled eyes. He could tell she was confused at what was happening. She was surprised to find Ramos and his killers still here.

Indiana might as well have been the blind one, not Ramos, for not seeing what came next. One of the goons grabbed his arm and violently twisted it upwards and behind his back. He groaned with pain as the rotation forced him to double over, when the man cracked his knee into Indy's throat. Indiana fell helplessly to the ground, in pain and gasping for air.

"Not yet! Please treat our guest with respect, gentlemen." Ramos said. "He should feel welcomed here."

A riotous laughter from Ramos's men answered. A thin, sinister smile crossed Ramos's disfigured face. He approached Indiana and stretched out his hand, groping Indiana's face with his fingertips. "Actually, Dr. Jones, I am surprised to find you here. It is such a small world."

He stepped aside and made a quick instructing gesture to his men. "Release him!"

The man who had twisted Indiana's arm, hesitated and shot a disapproving glance at his boss. But a view from Ramos's uncanny blind eyes caused him to release Indiana and hastily withdraw a half a step. Indiana could still feel the man's presence nearby, and he could also sense at least three or four weapons still aimed directly at his back. He carefully stretched the kink out of his arm, then raised them above his head, palms outward, to show his hands were empty before he dared to slowly lower them back down. Someone stepped up from behind and roughly tore his whip from his belt and threw it to the ground.

Ramos tilted his head at the sound. "Your famous whip, I presume," he said, bizarrely interpreting the sound of the whip as it hit the ground. He smiled humorlessly. "Please excuse the rough behavior of my men, Dr. Jones. But I was told that you

know how to use this exotic weapon very well. And we wouldn't want anyone here to get hurt, would we?"

"What do you want?" Indiana asked coarsely.

"Me?" Ramos twisted his face feigning surprise. "Oh, I must be profoundly confused. I thought it was you who came to me?"

"I see it differently," grumbled Indiana. "But regardless, I would have come to you if you had not stopped me."

"May I ask why?" Ramos asked in a friendly tone.

"Have you forgotten our last meeting?" Indiana answered. "We had an agreement, remember? I provided you with certain information, and now I am waiting for you to return the favor."

"I remember," Ramos responded. "And yes, we did have such an agreement. But then you came with a whole army, which was not part of the deal."

Indiana was growing tired of the banter. "Where is Marcus?" he asked directly. "What have you done with him? And if something has happened to him, then I swear I will gladly kill you."

Ramos acted as if he were offended. "What have I done? I ask you, Dr. Jones. What kind of person do you think I am? I am trying to be maintain a civilized conversation with someone who is smart enough to hold a halfway decent conversation in this god-forsaken jungle. You need not worry – Mr. Brody is being well-cared for. I assure you he is okay."

"Where?" Indiana snapped. His thoughts drifted to Reuben. He was hoping Reuben's men were encircling them now, so he had to divert Ramos and his gang long enough for them to tighten the noose.

"As I said," Ramos replied, "Mr. Brody is okay. You will soon have the opportunity to talk with him yourself. But first, a question: where are your FBI friends who you and Mrs. Corda brought along?"

"You are well-informed," said Indiana.

"My occupation requires me to be informed," answered Ramos. "However, that is not the answer to the question I asked, Dr. Jones. For your sake – and Mrs. Corda's – I hope those fools are not planning to try and stop us with a show of force. As you

can see, we are quite large.” He swept out his hand indicating the large group of men around them.

“You’re not as safe as you think,” Indiana said, immediately dropping to his knees and falling forward. He rolled and kicked outward with his legs, slamming his feet into the nearest goon. An anguished cry rang out, and a short volley of machine pistol fire ripped into the ground next to his face as the goon inadvertently squeezed the trigger of his gun. Indiana pushed the man back with all the force he could muster, then immediately rolled again and grabbed Ramos’s ankles. Ramos gasped in surprise and flailed his arms, trying desperately to keep his balance, but Indiana tugged again at his legs and the force was too much. At the same time, three of his men rushed forward to Indiana and bombarded him with kicks and punches. Indiana let go as Ramos fell backwards. Ramos desperately grasped for anything to stop his fall. His hands settled on Marian, who was torn out of the goon’s arms who was holding her and she went to the ground with him.

Apparently this was the diversion Reuben and his companions had been waiting for. At the edge of the forest a volley of orange-red flames burst forth from a half-dozen locations. Ramos’s angry cry was drowned in the chaos of the shooting. The shots whipped up earth and mud-fountains around the bandits as they scrambled to comprehend the situation.

“Don’t move!” Rang out a commanding voice. “If you even twitch, you will be shot!”

The surprise was total. In the time Indiana had been speaking with Ramos, Reuben had been able to effectively distribute his small force in a semi-circle in the bushes near the shore behind Ramos’s goons. Ramos’s men, experts at murdering and killing, also seemed to comprehend their dire situation. It was futile to resist an enemy that you can’t even see. Only one of them was stupid enough to raise his weapon and make an untargeted salvo into the darkness of the vegetation and bushes. His resistance lasted less than a second before he was cut down by Reuben’s men.

Indiana pushed himself up from the ground through clenched teeth. His whole body ached from the blows and kicks he had to

suffer. Nevertheless he crawled hastily to Ramos, seized him by the shoulders and yanked him roughly to his feet. Ramos gasped and began to lash out. Indiana slapped the man's blind face with force, then yanked him around and put his arm around the blind man's neck from behind with such violence Ramos could barely breathe.

"Tell them to surrender!" Indiana demanded.

Ramos struggled painfully for air. He began to fight back it became difficult for Indiana to hold him. "You're crazy!" Ramos spat, gasping. "If you kill me, you die too!"

"That may be," Indiana said flatly. "But I swear, you're coming with me."

"Put down your weapons!" urged Reuben from the bushes. "You have five seconds before we open fire!"

Indiana pushed himself up even more and increased the pressure on Ramos's throat. The blind man wriggled in his grip and finally stopped resisting when he was on his last breath.

"Three seconds!" cried Reuben from the darkness. "I am serious!"

Another second ticked by, then another – and then the first of Ramos's men gently lowered his machine gun to the ground and stood back up, his hands above his head. One after another followed his example. Indiana loosened his grip a little to allow Ramos to breathe. Ramos did not try and fight. Once his lungs had finally filled, he gasped at Indiana. "You'll be sorry," he said between breaths. "I wanted to be fair with you. But you have tricked me again. No one cheats me twice in a row. No one!"

The darkness at the forest's edge suddenly teemed with life as Reuben's men stepped out from the cover of the vegetation. The two FBI agents followed a few steps behind; Henley with his gun hinged over his elbow while Reuben had not even bothered to draw his weapon.

Indiana looked around for Marian. She too had gotten back to her feet and stood a few steps away. The expression on her face was still full of confusion and fear as she looked around to comprehend the situation. But she appeared unharmed, and when she met Indiana's gaze she smiled laboriously. Then she looked in Ramos's face and a shadow flitted across her features.

Indiana was happy she did not have a knife or weapon with her. He backed a step away, pulling Ramos with him as a precaution, and after a second when nothing happened he turned to the two FBI officials. Reuben approached without haste. His expression when he looked at Ramos was neither anger nor triumph; it was more like a scientific curiosity.

“Let go of him, Dr. Jones,” he said.

Indiana obeyed, but remained close behind Ramos in case he tried anything. Ramos had proven that despite the fact he was completely blind, he was perfectly capable of defending himself; a fact Indiana was reminded of by the aches and pains he was experiencing.

“There are two more on the ship,” Indiana said.

“I know.” Reuben turned to Henley and jerked his head toward the small boat. “Take care of it.”

Henley took two men with him to where the boat was docked. Reuben glanced at Ramos’s face for a second before turning to Marian. “That was not very smart of you, Mrs. Corda,” he said with a sigh. “I asked you to stay in the village.”

“I...had heard the commotion,” she defended with uncertain words. “And shots. I wanted to see what had happened.”

“You almost spoiled the entire thing,” said Reuben. “That was the second time you endangered yourself. I cannot keep watching over you like you are a child.”

“I know,” Marian said sheepishly. “I’m sorry!”

“I believe you. But it will do no good if next time there is no one to keep you safe. It was a stupid thing to do – the same for you Dr. Jones,” he added, diverting his gaze to Indiana. Indy shrugged his shoulders defiantly. “Why? Someone had to distract Ramos and his gang, right?”

A mocking smile twisted Reuben’s lips. “You are right. But you rushed into the situation, and missed being shot by a hair.”

“It was a calculated risk,” Indiana said. “I was sure they would not kill me.” He lied.

Reuben seemed to want to argue, but saw that it would be futile. He turned his attention back to the blind man. “So you are Mr. Ramos,” he said. “I must confess, you are not what I... expected.”

Ramos defiantly pursed his lips. “Who are you?” He demanded.

“My name is Reuben. FBI. I could show you my ID card, but I see it would do no good. So you have to rely on my word.”

“FBI? You have no authority here. This is Bolivia, not America. You have no right to arrest me.”

“That’s true,” Reuben confessed quietly. “So we have a conundrum. Aside from that; we could leave you with the Aymará.”

Ramos did not answer.

“Although I am not so sure leaving you with them is a good idea. What do you think?”

Ramos remained silent, and Reuben stared at him angrily for a few seconds. Realizing the glare was lost on Ramos’s blind eyes, he continued. “I am not so sure the Bolivian authorities will treat you much better,” he continued. “As you said, Mr. Ramos, this is not America. The police in some of these South American countries employ shockingly primitive methods. I am sure you understand what I mean. I’m afraid that I will have to deliver you to them, however.”

Indiana watched Reuben, and was about to ask a question. The FBI agent made a rapid hand movement indicating for him to remain silent. Reuben continued after a short break with a slightly altered tone. “Why did you come back, Ramos? Why this second raid?”

“Why should I answer a single question from you?” Ramos replied defiantly.

“Well, there are several reasons,” Reuben continued. “One, for example, that I keep a gun in my hand aimed at you.” Ramos laughed without humor. “Then it’s simple: shoot me – if you have the courage.”

“No,” said Reuben. “That would be too easy. I am afraid I must take you in, Ramos. Either to the Aymará or the Bolivian authorities. Unless...”

“Unless what?” asked Ramos, but Reuben did not continue immediately. He let the sentence intentionally hang in the air for several seconds.

“Unless you answer a few of my questions,” said Reuben. “And it would be better if you did not lie to me. Where is

Professor Corda? Why are you looking for him, and what is he looking for here?"

Ramos remained silent.

"Think it over, Ramos." Reuben said urgently. "And do it quickly. The men from that village you invaded are on their way here now. And I am afraid I cannot protect you from them."

"You wouldn't even if you could," Ramos said. "But – are you telling me you will let me go after I answer your questions?"

"No," Reuben replied seriously. "Certainly not. But maybe you should put some serious thought into the difference between Bolivian and American prisons, Mr. Ramos. It is likely a huge difference for a blind man."

"No one puts me in jail," Ramos said confidently.

Reuben ignored his response. "So? What do you think?"

"Leave him to me," Marian said. Her voice trembled with anger. "I'll make him talk."

"Maybe that's not such a bad idea," Reuben mused, seeing he was getting nowhere with the man.

Ramos turned his face towards Marian's voice. "I've done nothing with your husband, my dear," he said. "And nothing to you. I have kept my word, right? You are free. And you, Dr. Jones – " he turned to Indiana. "You should really think about whether you will leave me with these FBI officials. I give you my word that Marcus Brody dies if I am not back in our warehouse by sunrise."

Indiana was about to reply, but Reuben interrupted him. "This will not help your situation, Ramos," he said angrily. "Dr. Jones understands that I cannot consider Mr. Brody's life. I'm afraid even you do not understand how big this is. It's bigger than you, Ramos!"

The door on the boat opened in the distance behind them. "There's no one," Henley called as she stepped outside. "They must have beat feet into the jungle."

Reuben frowned and said nothing, but threw a nervous glance over his shoulder into the brush. Indiana was not sure whether it was nerves or reality, but he thought he heard muffled voices of people sneaking closer.

“Decide Ramos,” said Reuben. “I do not promise your freedom. You will spend the rest of your life in prison – but it is up to you whether it will be an American prison or a Bolivian one. And think about your answer well. The people here do not particularly like Americans. And after what you’ve done here, I probably don’t need to tell you what they will do to you.”

“You...You’re not really going to make a deal with this...monster, are you?” asked Marian stunned.

“Are you listening, Mrs. Corda,” said Reuben. “I am just promising to keep him alive, nothing more. If we leave it to the natives and turn him over to them, we might not be able to find your husband.”

Indiana turned his head sharply. The voices and sounds from earlier were getting louder. He was no longer skeptical if they were real or not. Indiana recalled that only eight or ten men had fled into the jungle earlier, but whatever was moving through the undergrowth sounded more like an army. And it probably was.

“You should probably get reasonable very quick,” Reuben said to Ramos, hearing the sounds as well. He directed his attention over to Indiana. “You take them to the boat, and quickly!”

“What are you going to do?” Asked Indiana suspiciously.

“I am going to get away from here,” said Reuben, “before it’s teeming with crazy natives looking for revenge. He gestured with his head toward the boat. “Hurry up. I will try and stop them somehow. And keep an eye on Mrs. Corda. I need Ramos alive, and I fear she may have other plans for him.”

Indiana nodded, then hurried them all toward the boat. Indiana took the need to watch Ramos seriously, even though logic said that a blind man would be foolish to escape into the jungle alone. Nonetheless, his eyes remained on the man every second of the way to the boat. They scurried across the swaying gang plank to board the vessel, and Indiana made sure to remain in between Marian and Ramos every step of the way. They huddled into the wheelhouse, and Indiana worked fervently with Henley to get the boat started. Ramos’s men had been disarmed and tied up and were being guarded by the rest of Reuben’s men. They crowded into a room below deck. Just as the small auxiliary diesel motor

revved to life and began pushing them out into the river, the first Aymará emerged from the jungle. Reuben's attempt to stop the natives had apparently failed miserably, because he was running in giant leaps and it was clearly evident he was fleeing in front of them. The small ship began to shake and move clumsily backwards. At the last moment, Reuben bounded across the gangplank, reached the railing and yanked himself over a hasty movement. He kicked the gangplank away. The closest Aymará fell into the river as the gangplank fell away. Two or three others tried to reach the vessel with a leap, but fell into the river arms flailing. Another made the leap and managed to grab the railing and tried to pull himself up. Reuben gave him a blow to the fingers with the butt of his gun, and the native toppled backwards into the dark waters. They were finally far enough from shore to get sucked into the flow and drive faster out to midstream.



CHAPTER 7

An Hour Later Northwards: Up the River

It took the boiler a good half an hour to heat up enough to have enough power to fight the currents for an adequate ride. The small auxiliary diesel was by no means strong enough to effectively drive the iron boat, so it would be quite a considerable time before they made it to the site. Thankfully it was strong enough to keep them midstream in the river. Reuben had placed two powerful lights on the boat: one at the bow and one at the stern. He kept the beams pointed at the waters, and a few times had revealed the swimming forms of the Aymará that had tried, in spite of the flow, to reach the boat. Reuben fired off a few warning shots at them to deter them from coming closer, and they actually had turned around. But Indiana only breathed a sigh of relief after the ship had finally seemed to settle into its optimal performance, as best as they would get with the small engine, and began to leave Aymará territory. He did not give in to the illusion that they were safe by any means – if not the Indians, the Bolivian authorities would take up their chase. Because Ramos’s men had destroyed the two planes, they had a head start, but it wasn’t very much. Reuben had said himself that a third plane was en-route to them, and there was still a functioning radio back on the

inoperable planes as well as two policemen who had remained in the village. Their only protection was the surrounding darkness. A very worried expression covered Reuben's face as he closed the wheelhouse door behind him. He was rubbing his hands together, shivering. The night on the river was very cold. "That was close," he said.

"I'm afraid that it isn't over," Henley added, who had taken the helm, trying with great effort to keep the ship midstream in the almost complete darkness. Now and then he fired the headlights, letting them flare ahead from the bow. "I don't think they'll let us get away so easily. Not after what these criminals did to their people."

"They will not follow us," said Ramos. These were the first words he had spoken since Indiana had brought him onboard.

"Why are you so sure?" Asked Reuben, lurking.

"The river here is taboo for them," said Ramos. They would not come here even if the devil was behind them."

"No," murmured Henley, "but the devil isn't behind them, is he? They might pursue him here!"

Ramos acknowledged this comment with a grimace, but said nothing more. Reuben gave his colleague a reproachful look for silencing Ramos with his comment. Reuben shook his head without speaking, then looked back at Ramos inviting more conversation. It took another second for him to realize how futile that was in front of a blind man. He sighed. "Okay, Mr. Ramos," he began. "Go ahead and tell me. Why did you come back? Why the senseless attack? And where are Corda and the others?"

"I know as much as you do about the latter," Ramos said. "Do you really believe I would be here right now if I knew where he was? We lost his trail."

"You're lying!" Asserted Indiana. "I think you know very well where Corda is."

Ramos made a scornful face. "Then why am I here instead of on his trail?"

"I don't know," Indiana replied. "And I really don't care. I am here for Marcus. You DO know where he is!"

“I told you – he is safe. And he will remain so as long as nothing happens to me. And the same goes for you. If you are reasonable, then there is no reason anyone should get hurt.”

Reuben looked at the blind man for a moment, stunned. “I’m afraid you still do not understand your situation, Ramos,” he said with a painstakingly controlled voice. “You have lost. It’s over. You have no chips left. Your threats are useless, and you can make no demands.”

“Are you sure?” Asked Ramos, smiling.

“Completely,” Reuben replied angrily. “And if I haven’t made it clear enough for you, listen to me carefully Ramos: If we can’t find Corda’s track – with or without your help – then there is no reason for me to protect you. And I promise that I will surrender you to either the Aymará or the Bolivian authorities, whoever gets to us first. And I’m afraid the natives seem to have the head start.”

“That would be murder,” Ramos said. “And you’re not the type who commits murder.”

“Murder?” Reuben laughed spurious. “You’re wrong, Ramos. And I am betting my government would think otherwise. What happened an hour ago will provide a lot of excitement for them. They would be very happy to avoid international, diplomatic entanglements as a result of those actions unless there was a good reason for them.”

“Maybe there is a good reason you won’t let that happen, yes?” Ramos said. “I can imagine a few million good reasons.”

“What do you mean?” Asked Reuben, suspicious.

“What do you earn as an FBI agent?” Asked Ramos instead of answering. “Two thousand a year? Three?”

Reuben’s face darkened further. “I’m not going to bite, Ramos,” he said.

“Nonsense. Every man has his price. Even you.”

“Even if it were so,” Reuben said, masking his anger, “you certainly can’t offer enough.”

“You see, Mr. Reuben, that’s where you are wrong,” Ramos continued. “If we find Corda, then I can pay any price. Can you imagine what it means to be rich? I mean, really rich. Being able to afford anything your heart desires.”

“Save your breath,” said Reuben. “You can’t bribe me. And do you know why? Even if I were on sale – I do not trust you.”

“Oh, you think I would deceive you?” Ramos laughed, shaking his head. “I would not, my word is good. My principles are strong. I would much rather buy a person than kill them. And what Corda has found, it’s so valuable that your price doesn’t even matter.”

“You’re not really buying this nonsense, are you?” Asked Henley.

“Nonsense?” Ramos snorted. “It is not nonsense. I am firmly convinced Corda has discovered El Dorado. If you do not believe me, then ask Professor Jones. He will tell you.” “El Dorado?” Henley shot Indiana a questioning glance, but Indiana was reluctant to reply.

From his experience, he was not certain Ramos’s assumption was true. And even if it were true, El Dorado would more likely be something other than what the legends say about it.

“Well?” Asked Reuben, waiting for Indiana’s answer.

“I’m...not sure,” Indiana muttered evasively. “There is some evidence that he could be right.”

“But El Dorado is just a legend,” Henley said, confused. “I mean – a myth...” He groped for words.

“People thought Troy was a myth before someone dug it up in a field,” Indiana said with a smirk.

“Enough!” Interrupted Reuben impatiently. “As far as I am concerned, he could have found Santa Claus. I am not interested. What does interest me is the whereabouts of Professor Corda and his companions and what they are doing.” He took a step closer to Ramos. “And I am pretty sure you know the answer to both!”

“If that were so, do you think I would have come back to this place?” Ramos replied snidely.

“That brings us back to the issue,” Indiana intervened, “why did you come back?”

“I forgot something,” Ramos said evasively.

“What?”

“None of your business.”

Indiana wanted to move in and grab the man, but Reuben shot him an admonishing look, shaking his head and moving so close

to Ramos that the blind man could feel him. “For a man in your position, Ramos,” he said, “you are pretty brave. I can still give you to the natives.”

“Nonsense,” replied Ramos. “You need me Reuben. You need me more than I need you, because at this moment I am the only man who can lead you to Corda.”

“Oh, I have Dr. Jones for that,” replied Reuben. “Granted – it may take him a little longer, but I am willing to chance it.”

“You think?” Ramos laughed hideously. “Then I am curious: why put up with a criminal like me? You’re bluffing, Reuben. Dr. Jones is at his wit’s end, just like you. Corda has a three day head start. Do you know what three days means in a country like this? It might as well be three months. Or three years.” He laughed again. The look in his blind eyes wandered from Reuben to Henley to Indiana then back. It gave Indiana chills to look into his eyes, and he had the eerie feeling the man could see them in some sinister way. “I’ll tell you something Reuben. We are not that far from him. Less than fifty miles to be exact. But fifty miles might as well be 500 if you don’t know where you are going. You have no chance of finding him unless I tell you where he is.”

“Which you will not do, however,” Indiana suspected.

Ramos made a vague gesture. “Who knows? Maybe we can come to an agreement. I do not want much. Just a fair share.”

“Now you are asking for a ‘fair share’?” Reuben groaned.

“And why not? We are gentlemen, after all. You want something from me – and I want something from you – what could be better than that –“

“That’s enough!” Interrupted Reuben sharply. “I am not going to make deals with a murderer!”

“Haven’t you done so already?” Said Ramos calmly.

Reuben’s frustration was beginning to show, but Indiana calmed him with a soothing gesture. “Wait,” he said. “Maybe we already have what we need...” He looked contemptuously at Ramos. “And you are no gentleman!”

Both Reuben and Henley gave their attention to Indiana, and Ramos suddenly looked a little nervous. Indiana smiled, though Ramos could not see.

“Fifty miles, you say?”

Ramos did not respond, but Indiana turned with a gesture requesting Henley, who was leaning causally against the rudder and studying Indiana and his colleagues with interest. "I think I know everything we need to," he said. "Do you have a map of the area?"

Henley nodded and turned without a word to fish out the required map from the mess on the desk at the wheelhouse, while Reuben began to impatiently pace the small area.

"Remember the Aymar  dance we witnessed? I think I know what it means," Indiana answered the unspoken question of the FBI agents. "Although I can't be certain, but..." He turned back to Henley and waited until he handed him a crumpled piece of paper, the boat captain's graphical map of the area. Indiana hastily spread the map across the table at the back of the control room and smoothed it out as best he could. It was dimly lit in the control room, and details were difficult to see. But he quickly found what he was looking for.

"Here," Indiana pointed with his index finger outstretched in three roughly circular marks at the top of the map, which formed an irregular triangle.

Reuben leaned over his shoulder, studying the map curiously. After a moment he frowned, and looked completely confused. "And?"

"Don't you remember?" Asked Indiana. "Think back. The Aymar  dance. Three fireplaces, between which the chief had his vision."

"And?" repeated Reuben.

"This-" Indiana triumphantly tapped with his index and middle finger on the map, "are extinct volcanoes. I wasn't sure at first, but now I remember."

"And you believe what we are looking for -"

"Is in between the three volcanoes," Indiana led the sentence, "positioned exactly as the chief stood between the fire pits." He made sure Ramos had heard the discussion and saw the gangster was becoming frightened.

"But that's impossible," protested Henley. "If so, it would have been found long ago. This area-"

"- Is virtually unexplored," Indiana cut him off.

“But I’m not sure this map is reliable,” Indiana continued. “It was pieced together from a couple of aerial photographs and uses information that isn’t exactly reliable. We have to assume this map is as reliable as Ramos’ last tax return. It would not surprise me at all if no white man has ever set foot in the area.”

Reuben leaned forward again and looked through narrowed eyes at the spot at the top of the map where Indiana had pointed. Between the three groups indicated only green was seen where the cartographer guessed was jungle. “Fifty miles...” he muttered.

“If the chart is right, more likely eighty or a hundred miles,” Henley said. “And the river bends away from it. We will not get very close by boat.”

“And not by foot either,” said Ramos, intervening. He had overcome his fear and regained his old arrogance. A smile slowly crossed his disfigured face. “You know, Mr. Henley – on one point Dr. Jones is right. The chart is not particularly accurate. Between this river and the volcanoes, there are a few things the map does not depict. Which returns us to our agreement.” Reuben pierced Ramos with his eyes but said nothing.

“And there is still the issue of Mr. Brody,” Ramos added with a smile. “I must assume you are still interested in retrieving him alive and unharmed.”

“Just as you are interested in getting out of this country alive and unharmed,” Indiana said. The threat in his words was apparent, but Ramos just smiled wider.

“I see that we are capable of finding common ground,” Ramos said. “I suggest you release me and my people and I will tell you where Mr. Brody is.”

“Ha!” Reuben interjected.

It was left at that for the next few hours until the sun came up. Indiana tried to find a little sleep, but it eluded him. The boat was oppressively claustrophobic, and there was an irritated tension among the passengers, an atmosphere reminiscent of a volcano about to erupt. The boat was moving lazily down the river with its undersized engine, and the jungle was so dense around them it seemed to form an impenetrable wall on both sides of the river. Henley stood at helm, keeping the boat roughly midstream to

avoid any further attacks from the shore. On their map the river was little more than a blue line snaking through the country with numerous bends and turns. And despite their relative safety with the armed FBI agents in control, Indiana remained a bit nervous. He heard footsteps behind him and turned around. Reuben stood behind him, and he could tell by his expression that similar thoughts ran through the FBI agent's mind. He, too, looked nervous and tired, and something more than the physical fed the core of his exhaustion.

"It feels like we are walking into a trap," Reuben said after a few moments of contemplation.

Indiana smiled wearily. "I don't think so," he tried to assure him.

Reuben sighed. "I wish I had your optimism."

"It's not optimism," Indiana replied. "I have a pretty good sense of when I am walking into a trap."

Reuben's response consisted only of a frown and a deep, exhausted sigh as he leaned heavily on the railing and peered into the dark, swirling waters of the river. For a while they were both silent, then Reuben suddenly asked: "How did you know?"

Indiana looked at him questioningly.

"About the volcanoes," Reuben said, suddenly realizing the ambiguity of his original question. "Is South America your specialty?"

Indiana shook his head. "On the contrary. It was..." He hesitated imperceptibly, just smiled and confessed. "Actually it was pure coincidence. I came across them while going through some of the books in Stan's house. I came across a map that depicted them. And as I watched the chief and the ceremony last night, it came back to me. That is all."

Reuben smiled wearily. "You'd be amazed, Jones, if you knew how many great things have been decided by such trivialities," he said. He laughed softly, but not very humorously. "Being honest, random coincidences makes up at least half our work."

Indiana was about to make an irrelevant statement in agreement when something caught his attention. He suddenly

cocked his head and listened. At the same time, he looked ahead with trepidation.

Reuben looked too, noticing Indiana's sudden attention on the river ahead. "What is it?" he asked. Suddenly he no longer sounded tired, and he looked agitated.

Indiana shrugged. "I don't know," he murmured. "There...there's something."

From the corner of his eye he saw Reuben stiffen and reach for the gun on his belt. But Reuben's actions were useless, because in that moment he heard it, and understood that the danger ahead could not be handled with a gun.

Through the sounds of the jungle as it gradually awakened with the sunlight and the monotonous chug of the diesel engine came a dull, rumbling thunder; still very far away, but already clear enough to allow the two men to realize what was there: a waterfall or rapids.

Indiana frowned. "This must be one of the obstacles Ramos spoke of earlier," he said.

"But there was nothing on the map," Reuben said in a reproachful tone.

"I've already told you what I think of those charts," Indiana replied.

Reuben looked a moment longer, focusing on the sounds ahead, then he shrugged. "It doesn't matter anyway," he said. "We can simply go ashore now. Whether we do it now or a couple of miles later. It makes no difference."

They went back into the wheelhouse. Reuben quickly explained to Henley what they had discovered, and asked him to bring the ship closer to shore and look for a possible berth. Indiana excused himself and went below to wake Marian.

Reuben had assigned the captain's cabin to Marian since it was the only lockable room with a bed on board the boat. But when Indiana arrived, he found she was not there. The door was open and the bunk was untouched. Marian had so little sleep over the last few days, especially on the previous night, Indiana was surprised that he hadn't found her sound asleep. He was also confused as to where she could be. God knows the ship was not large enough to go wandering around without being seen. The

only other rooms on board were the cubicle which Reuben and Indiana shared, the engine room, and the storeroom where Ramos' men were being held!

He turned away from the captain's quarters and headed back to his own cubicle to gather up his few belongings, confused as to Marian's whereabouts. It was several minutes later before he stepped back out on deck.

The rumbling of the rapids had grown so loud that it nearly drowned out the sound of the ship's engine. Where the green wall of the jungle had previously hidden the river ahead, there was now a glittering churning of white foam and spray around sharp-edged wet stones that penetrated the river's surface. The flow had increased dramatically, so the ship had changed directions slightly and was heading for the shore. Reuben and Henley were no longer alone on in the wheelhouse. Ramos was standing up beside them, guarded by one of the mercenaries.

Indiana shot Ramos a brief glance, then turned to Reuben who was staring out the window.

"Where is Marian?"

"Mrs. Corda?" The FBI agent shrugged his shoulders.

"She isn't in her quarters?"

"I wouldn't be asking if she were," answered Indiana with irritation in his voice.

Reuben looked at him with momentary confusion, shrugged his shoulders again, and then focused his attention back to the shore as it gradually inched closer. Indiana remarked with a slight feeling of anxiety about how especially dense the jungle seemed to be at this point. But he relaxed quickly knowing that they were still quite a way off from the rapids. And even though the aging ship was small, its engines were quite adequate at this distance from the churning water.

"What are we going to do with him and his people?" Indiana asked with a nod toward Ramos.

Reuben pointed at the radio. "We will leave them here. It would be impractical to drag a dozen prisoners through the jungle with us, would it not? I'll send a radio message to the Bolivian authorities once we get to shore. They are probably close behind

us anyway.” After a brief but calculated pause, he turned directly to Ramos. “What happens then is entirely up to you, Ramos. And it doesn’t bother me at all. I’ll lock you in the cargo hold with your gang of murderers. And I can’t imagine what the Bolivians will do to you once they get here. Or you can accompany us on our journey. On our conditions.”

Ramos did not answer. And it was as if Reuben had not seriously expected an answer because he turned back around with a casual shrug and concentrated on the shore.

Indiana’s gaze wandered undecidedly back and forth from Reuben’s face to Ramos. He knew Reuben was only doing what was in his power, but that did not change the fact that when they left Ramos here for the Bolivians, it would seal Marcus’s fate. He felt more helpless than he ever had in his life. He knew he had to do something.

A movement at the rear of the ship suddenly caught Indiana’s attention. He turned around and saw Marian stooping as she came out of the low door of the aft superstructure. She looked around for a moment, then headed to the wheelhouse.

“Where were you?” asked Indiana as she opened the door and entered.

“Down below,” she said. “I made coffee for the men. They needed it. The night was...”

She broke off her sentence. Her face darkened when she saw Ramos, and Indiana saw how her whole body started to tremble. He could see some kind of emotion fluttering in her eyes.

He casually stepped in between Marian and Ramos and explained their situation. “We are going ashore soon. You should fetch whatever you have in your quarters.”

“Ashore?” Marian was briefly confused. “Oh, yes. The rapids.”

Reuben looked away from the shore momentarily and scrutinized Marian, perplexed. “How do you know about them?”

“It’s hard to ignore them,” Marian smiled. “And Stan briefly mentioned something about them once.” She took a step toward Indiana but her eyes remained steadfastly fixed on Ramos.

“No, Marian,” Indiana said gently, raising his arm and touching her lightly on the shoulder. “I know what you are feeling, but he isn’t worth it.”

Marian pursed her lips into a thin, bloodless line. Indiana could almost see her brain working behind her forehead. Then she turned around with a jerk and stood beside Reuben at the window. Her face was rigid and unmoving, but her hands were alternating from opening and closing, balled into fists.

For a moment Reuben looked at them worried, but he said nothing. He just raised his eyebrows, shook his head almost imperceptibly, and then turned around to face Ramos again.

“You’ve had long enough to reflect on the situation, Ramos,” he said. “So, for the last time, do you want to wait here for the arrival of the Bolivians, or do you prefer to cooperate with us?”

“Maybe there is a third possibility,” Ramos said quietly. Reuben cocked his head and looked at him suspiciously. At the same time Marian turned from the window, and with a swift movement yanked the gun from Reuben’s holster and retreated two rapid steps away from him to prevent him from taking the weapon back from her. Reuben froze when Marian cocked the trigger back and pointed the muzzle of the pistol at his head.

“Marian!” Indiana had also made a step toward her but stopped abruptly when she waved the revolver about threateningly.

“Step aside!” demanded Marian.

Indiana did not move.

“Get back!” she demanded again. And this time her voice was filled with a sharpness that made it clear to Indiana she was serious. For the duration of a heartbeat he looked at her imploringly, then obediently raised his hands in the air, but he did not step out of her line of site to Ramos.

“Don’t do this, Marian,” he said. “He isn’t worth it. And we need him.”

“So?”

“Think of Marcus,” said Indiana. “And Stanley. Without Ramos we may never see your husband again.”

“Please, Mrs. Corda. Be reasonable,” Reuben pleaded. “Put the gun away. It’s totally not worth it.”

Marian's eyes flickered. She looked at Reuben then Indiana, and finally at Henley, who stood at rapt attention at the helm, but the gun in her hand remained aimed steadfastly in Ramos's direction, which happened to be through Indiana's chest.

"Step aside, Indy," she whispered.

Indiana shook his head. "No," he said firmly. "I will not do it."

"Please, Indy," Marian said. "I don't want to hurt you." Her voice wavered, but sounded firm and resolute nonetheless.

Indiana decided to stop pleading. He realized Marian was not in her right frame of mind, and his words would not change her mind. In a flash he was estimating his chances to throw himself at her and snatch the weapon from her hands, but he immediately rejected this idea.

"Mrs. Corda, this does not make sense," Henley interjected, trying to calm her. "What do you expect will happen if you shoot him? I give you my word of honor that he will get his punishment. He will spend the rest of his life in prison, I swear."

"I don't think so," Ramos said quietly.

Despite his blindness, he stepped out from behind Indiana and walked toward Marian. He stopped one step beside her when he felt her presence. Indiana stared in disbelief, and Reuben and Henley's faces went from a stunned to horrified expression.

"What about the men?" Reuben asked her.

Marian smiled briefly without taking her eyes off Indiana and Reuben. "I told you I made them coffee. They will be sleeping for at least two or three hours."

"Marian..." murmured Indiana. "What..."

"I don't believe it," Reuben whispered. "You are not serious."

"You really shouldn't try and find out," she said quietly.

Reuben did not try. But Henley did. Quick as a flash, and without any warning, he jumped and struck Marian's arm. She backed away just in time, lowered the weapon and sent a bullet racing into his thigh. Henley screamed and staggered back against the rudder, collapsing with pain registering in his face. The weapon in Marian's hand quickly turned back around toward Reuben who had taken just one step toward her in the excitement.

“Don’t try,” she said again. “I don’t want to hurt anybody. But I will if you force me to.”

Reuben slowly raised his hands again and backed away. From the horror and amazement on his face, it was clear that he really could not believe what he was seeing.

Marian pointed to Henley, then spoke back at Reuben. “You help him.”

While Reuben stepped over slowly to help his wounded colleague, Indiana stared at Marian incredulously. She held his gaze for a moment, but then looked away without lowering the gun. Indiana was not sure she would shoot him. But he wasn’t sure she wouldn’t, either.

“Why?” he muttered.

“Why?” repeated Marian, without looking at him. She laughed, very quiet, very hard but also very sad.

“What has he promised you?” Indiana asked. “To bring you to Stan? He won’t do it. And even if he does, then he is going to kill you both.”

“Stan?” Marian looked up with a start and fixed her glare on Indiana now. Suddenly her eyes were filled with a hardness that frightened Indiana. “Stan?” she repeated. “I don’t care about Stanley, Indy. It doesn’t matter to me whether Ramos kills him or leaves him alive, or whether he shares the wealth they find or chases him into the jungle. What do you know?”

“I—“

“Nothing!” Interrupted Marian. “You certainly have no idea who Stan really is. None of you do! The last ten years with him have been hell! Oh, you think you know everything about us?” She laughed again. “You know nothing, no more than anyone else. I’ve noticed the looks they have thrown at me, and I’ve heard how they whisper behind my back when they thought I wouldn’t notice. But it was not as bad as you all thought. It was worse. He stole everything from me. My family. My freedom. My youth. I sacrificed the very best years of my life for him, and in gratitude he beat me and treated me worse than his dog.”

“And you think Ramos is any better?”

Marian made a disparaging noise. “Ramos doesn’t interest me. We are business partners, nothing more.”

“What about him and Stan?”

“Stan has betrayed him,” Marian answered so hard that it was almost a scream. “I would not cheat him. I keep my end of the bargain, and he will keep his part. It’s not much that I want. Not enough for it to be worthwhile to kill me for, anyway. But it is enough for me.”

“Please, Marian,” Indiana said, almost pleading. “Comer to your senses. You know what you are saying is nonsense.”

“Nonsense?” Because I want to have something to make up for the past decade? Because I don’t want to be hurt anymore?”

“And you think money could make up for what Stan did to you?”

“No,” Marian said. “But I can start a new life. A life without fear and humiliation.”

“With money that’s not yours? Then you are no better than Stanley.”

“Then I’m not better than him,” Marian replied defiantly. “Why should I be? After all, he has been successful. And you guys knew how he was all along. You knew where he was getting his wealth from. And you also knew how he treated me. But you have despised me, not him.”

“But that’s not true,” cried Indiana.

“Enough!” Ramos intervened. “You will have enough time later to talk to Mrs. Corda, Dr. Jones.”

“So,” Indiana said sarcastically. “Do you plan to bury us together?”

“You shouldn’t believe your friends, Dr. Jones,” Ramos mocked. “Have I really done you any harm before? And I won’t as long as you do not force me to. But you will join us.” He smiled. “Do you remember last night, Dr. Jones? They asked me why I came back. Well, now I will answer: I specifically came back to fetch Mrs. Corda. And you.”

“Me?”

“I need you, Jones,” Ramos said. “I confess, it’s quite reluctant. But I am afraid I’m at the point where I need your help.”

“You’re crazy,” said Indiana.

“Possibly,” Ramos replied calmly. “That has often been the rumor about me. But I’m still alive, while most of those who have boldly claimed this are no longer with us. That should give you pause. And before you waste more of my precious time by insisting you will not help me, please bear in mind Mr. Brody is still within my power. It does not matter what you think of me – I stand by my word. Help me, and I’ll let Mr. Brody go.”

“And Reuben and his men?”

Ramos shrugged. “Mr. Reuben has already said it aptly enough: it would be very inconvenient to march through the jungle with a dozen prisoners, is it not?”

“He’s going to kill us,” Reuben said quietly. He squatted next to Henley on his knees and pressed a folded handkerchief to the bleeding wound in the upper leg.

“I ask you, Mr. Reuben,” Ramos said. He sounded saddened by Reuben’s assertion. “I’ll give you the same opportunity that you were about to give me and my men. However, you will understand if I refrain from contacting the authorities and giving them your whereabouts. They are probably on their way here anyway. You will likely be burdened with imprisonment for only a few hours at most.” Ramos instructed his men to secure Reuben, Henley, and the remaining agents in the hold below, restraining them with cables and rope so they could not move and attempt to escape.

They were within half a mile of the rapids before they spotted a place on the shore adequate enough to moor the ship. The rumbling of the raging waters had become so loud it drowned out almost all other sounds, and the ship trembled and shook in the raging current so fiercely that Indiana had trouble staying on his feet. A thick cloud of water and spray hung heavily in the air over the river, and what had looked like tiny rocks piercing the surface of the water from the distance were now revealed to be monstrous razor-sharp stones that transformed the river ahead into a 2- or 3-mile passage of death. Although the ship’s motors were working at full capacity, they were straining from the effort of keeping the ship in its spot.

Indiana and Marian were with the last squad to depart the groaning vessel. Two steps behind him one of Ramos’s men

followed, pressing the barrel of his machine gun into Indiana's back to spur him forward. Despite Ramos's silence since the off-boarding began, the villain had left no doubt in that the man behind Indiana had permission to use the weapon if even the tiniest action was taken to resist or escape; no matter if Ramos needed him or not. And Indiana believed him.

Apart from that, Indiana didn't have the constitution to do anything anyway. He was still reeling from the shock of staring down the barrel of Reuben's gun after Marian had snatched it away and turned it on him, and that feeling had not subsided in the least. It was still hard for him to believe the past several minutes. He just did not understand it. It was not the first time that he had been used and lied to, but his knowledge of the human heart had never let him down more than it had in this instance. He still refused to accept it, especially with Marian.

With his arms raised, Indiana balanced himself unsteadily on the swaying plank that led from the deck of the ship to the shore. As he approached Ramos and his murderous henchmen, he hopped the last foot and a half of the plank, landing firmly next to the blind man and straightened himself cautiously as half a dozen rifles turned on him at once.

"What are you doing?" Ramos asked sharply.

Indiana jerked his hands higher into the air. "Nothing!" he answered hastily, feigning his best startled look. "I slipped..." he said sheepishly.

Ramos's dead eyes seemed to focus on him, as if he could actually see. But he said nothing further on the matter. He turned with a jerk back to his men and made an imperious gesture. "Take care of the ship."

Two of Ramos's men fastened the boat with mooring, which Indiana surmised that it was far too thin to withstand the torrential current. The others searched the equipment that was brought ashore from the ship. Although Reuben's squad was barely half the size of Ramos's mercenaries, they had brought enough supplies for a week-long march through the bush for all of them. And the mercenaries had taken everything to shore that wasn't nailed down. Nevertheless, Indiana noticed that they picked through the supplies and very carefully shoes what they

would bring along. When they were finished he also noticed that they were actually taking very few supplies with them. He suspected that they must not be far from their destination - or that Ramos had a second camp already built somewhere ahead to serve as a depot for the remainder of the journey.

He noticed Marian had positioned herself at the edge of the little clearing where they had come ashore, and he took a step in her direction. The lad who was guarding him followed faithfully, but did not attempt to hold him back. Indiana saw Marian's eyes fall on him, a look of grief and spite in her expression.

For several seconds Indiana just stared at her silently. He wanted to say something, but simply could not find the words. He figured this was not the time to bombard her with accusations, or even attempt to appeal to their past friendship. Whatever had happened to drive Marian this far had taken a long, very long time. And whatever few words he could muster was not going to change that.

"I'm sorry," he said at last.

"Me too, Indy," she replied. "Hopefully you will understand me when everything is over."

"What makes you think I don't understand now?" asked Indiana. Marian bit her bottom lip as if holding back her words. She avoided his gaze, looking nervously back and forth. She shuffled her feet unsteadily. Indiana felt Ramos step up behind him, grinding to a stop. A second later, when he heard Ramos's voice, he noticed Marian's breathing had stepped up visibly.

"It's time to move, Dr. Jones," said Ramos. "You will have plenty of time to talk to Mrs. Corda along our journey."

Ramos's men had finished plundering Reuben's equipment and supplies, and the remnants were scattered haphazardly along the shoreline. Indiana noticed that a large quantity of weapons and ammunition were among those things that were left behind. The sight of the abandoned firepower irritated and perplexed him. Either they were unusually reckless - or they simply did not expect to be persecuted at all for their past actions and barbarism. His gaze wandered back to the shore. The ship, which trembled in the current and strained against the two inadequate mooring straps, groaned in protest at the rapids nearby. Indiana was about

to make a remark about the mooring, but Ramos interrupted him furiously and gave the final sign to his men for departure. The man behind Indiana reinforced the gesture with a rough push of the machine gun barrel into Indiana's back.

The party of mercenaries wandered along the banks of the river for a good half an hour, but had traveled less than a mile from where they had moored the ship. From the boat, the jungle had looked like a dense wall of foliage and greenery, and that was exactly what it was: an almost impenetrable scrub of trees, undergrowth, fern, and broken remnants of giant fallen trees, from which the tangled roots of new trees had sprouted. All of this was set against the incessantly chopping machetes of the mercenaries and their tenacious resistance. They remained in close proximity of the river, which Ramos seemed to be using as a marker. Most of the time, Indiana could make out a glimmer of the blue and silver surface of the river to the left. Only once did they lose sight of the water and make their way in an arc through a dense jungle hill. One of the men, who had made his way to the top, called out a warning Indiana did not recognize, and the others charged hastily toward him.

Indiana surmised the river must be far below them now. Finally, the undergrowth thinned somewhat, and after another half an hour of sweating and chopping, the primeval forest gave way to a fifty-yard wide rocky strip of stone. He had guessed correctly: the river had cut a swath through the stone millions of years ago and was now several stories below them. The rocky shelf abruptly stopped at the edge of a smooth-cut rock face that fell downwards toward the river. Indiana wondered how Ramos intended to overcome this obstacle, posing the question aloud. Ramos responded with a laugh. "Have patience, Dr. Jones. We go down."

Progress along the rock face was slow and difficult. They had been able to move slowly but safely through the jungle behind. But here the ground was uneven, strewn with sharp-edged rocks and stone debris that made movement not only difficult but perilous. Frequently, one of Ramos's men had slipped to the ground and triggered a small rock avalanche showering those below. And Indiana himself had slipped more than a few times,

and more than once barely regained his balance to avoid a nasty spill into the rapids below.

Despite the nature of the climb down, Ramos moved with an uncanny security. Indiana had long-since given up trying to figure out how a blind man could navigate a country like this, let alone how he remained on his feet without help in this tangle of rocks and debris. He had heard that some blind men had an acute sense of hearing that enabled them to orient themselves on the basis of sounds alone, but if that were true Ramos had to have the ears and senses of a bat!

It took another half hour to reach the base of the rock face. Indiana noticed that he wasn't the only one fighting the exhaustion of the climb: Ramos's men were also dragging more and more as they continued onward. Marian had fallen several times, and with the last two she laboriously managed to get back on her feet. Indiana had wanted to help her, but his armed guard had prevented him from doing so. The only one who showed no trace of the fatigue that plagued them was Ramos. But he also raised no objection when his men sank down to take a break at the foot of the cliff.

Indiana dropped down onto the rocky ground and closed his eyes for a moment. The heat of the rainforest had become unbearable, especially with the laborious climb they just endured. The humidity was so thick he felt like he was breathing in liquid instead of air. His heart pounded within his chest as if it were about to explode at any moment. He gradually began to comprehend what Ramos had meant when he told Reuben that fifty miles in this country was equivalent to five hundred where Reuben had come from.

After a while he opened his eyelids and looked around, finally rested enough to take in his surroundings. He wondered how they would continue at all. To the right was an impenetrable and repellent black green wall of jungle. On the other side, the rapids gave way to a raging cloud of spray that spilled around a cube-shaped rock fifty or sixty yards high, reaching right out of the churning waters and stretching skyward.

Indiana felt a shadow fall over him, and when he looked up he saw Ramos's disordered face. It filled Indiana with an absurd

sense of satisfaction seeing the beads of sweat form on the blind man's brow.

"What do you want?" Indiana asked rudely, almost shouting so he could be heard over the roar of the rapids.

Indiana noticed that Ramos was not looking at him directly, but was staring a couple of feet from his face as he answered. The noise of the raging waters must be disorienting his usually uncanny sense of direction, Indiana surmised. He locked this observation away for a later time. Perhaps he could use it to his advantage.

"I want to talk to you, Jones."

"What is there to talk about?" Indiana retorted. "It looks like we're at the end of the line."

"Please, Dr. Jones," said Ramos. "We both know we are keeping things from each other, and we both know the situation we are in now. There is no time left for games!"

"So you've finally come to your senses," growled Indiana.

Indiana stood up. Ramos's blind eyes followed the movement, but only after a few seconds. Once again Indiana noticed that his gaze was not very precise.

"The road ahead is very difficult, Dr. Jones," Ramos explained. "Very difficult and very dangerous. I can see you are trying to come up with a plan to escape in that overworked brain of yours. So I want you to know: I have ordered my men to not only shoot you if you try, but to kill Mrs. Corda as well. And there is also Mr. Brody you must think about..."

Indiana stared at him angrily but remained silent.

"I see you understand what I have just said," Ramos continued after a moment. "And now they come." He made a directional gesture. Indiana's gaze followed the gesture, and he saw that Ramos's men had gathered at a point on the rocky edge five or ten yards from the edge of the river, just on the other side of the rapids. In the glittering light of the sun, he saw the anchors and braided line of a rope that trailed up and over the edge of the rock face next to them. As Indiana approached he peered over and saw that climbing hooks had been driven into the stone at regular intervals. A surprised sound parted his lips.

Indiana looked back to Ramos and saw the blind man's thin smile. "Professor Corda was kind enough to prepare the way for us," he explained, and Indiana realized he had known all along that the way forward was there. He just had a difficult time finding it in the disorienting noise of the rapids.

Indiana slipped his hand around the anchor and the rope, confused. "Does he have a truck waiting for us at the top, too?" He said mockingly.

"Of course not. But he's not far now, just beyond the jungle's edge. Didn't you see him?" Ramos laughed humorlessly. "I thought I was the only blind man here."

Indiana bit his tongue and saved his answer to that.

One after another the men began to ascend the rock shelf next to the river using the rope and hand holds. They positioned themselves at long intervals, so that only two men were on the rope at any given time, understanding it's carrying capacity was only designed to hold one person. Indiana hesitated as his turn came. Despite the fact that he was in good shape for a man in his mid-forties and that he was an experienced climber, the height to which they were to ascend combined with the sight of the sheer wet rock face made him shudder anyway.

"What are you waiting for, Jones?" snapped Ramos. Indiana hinted with a head movement towards Marian. "She'll never manage to make the climb."

"Oh, I think she will," Ramos replied. "She has no choice."

"Let us go together," asked Indiana. "I'll help her."

Ramos laughed. "Do you think I'm that stupid, Dr. Jones? But if it will make you feel better I'll get my best man to assist her in the climb. After you have arrived. Now please, our time is scarce."

Indiana stared at Ramos, but hastened to grab the rope before the man behind him decided to emphasize Ramos's words with another thrust of the gun barrel into his back.

The first few meters were easier than he had anticipated. The rope was rough and allowed sufficient grip to hold his weight. The footholds were placed evenly and allowed him to utilize them without too much effort. He was able to climb quickly but safely, and five or six steps up he paused to look around.

The forest and the river looked the same from his new vantage point. Once he was just about as high as the treetops, he was able to see that the jungle stretched to both sides of the river as far as the eyes could see, and the river itself-

Indiana froze. There was something moving on the river. A small, heavy handed and rust-covered iron boat that had apparently drifted out of control in the current and approached the deadly rock barrier at an increasing speed! Indiana recognized it immediately as the vessel they had abandoned just hours before.

“What are you waiting for, Jones?” cried Ramos from below. “Keep moving!”

Indiana grasped the rope with his left hand and pivoted, strongly gesturing with his right hand down the river. “The boat!” he shouted back, pointing. “It broke free and it’s heading for the rapids!”

The men beneath him turned around to look at what was causing Indiana to behave so oddly. Only Ramos continued to direct his sightless gaze at him. “Keep climbing, Dr. Jones!” he ordered.

“But they will be helpless in the rapids!” cried Indiana back. “The boat is guideless with the men all tied up! They will all die!”

“What a tragedy,” grinned Ramos mockingly. “But it is not your concern!”

Indiana stared at him full of wrath. “You did this on purpose!” he cried. “You wanted them to die all along!”

“You can’t save them anyway,” returned Ramos coldly. “So go on climbing or I’ll have Mrs. Corda drug up the cliff by her feet!”

Indiana didn’t budge. His mind raced. His gaze shifted between the raging rapids below back to the ship, which careening their direction, approaching more and more quickly as each second passed. The current was so strong that even if the engines were running and the crew was not locked away in the cargo hold, it probably wouldn’t survive the impact with the rocks. But he could not stand by and watch as more than half a dozen people drowned helplessly!

Ramos waited another ten seconds in vain for Indiana to continue climbing, then he stepped back and made a sinister gesture with his left hand. Two of his men set their rifle sites on Indiana, while a third slung his rifle over his shoulder and then grabbed the rope with both hands to climb up to him with swift agility.

The boat had come even closer. Indiana estimated it had roughly a minute or two before crashing against the first barrier of rapids. It would not survive.

Resolutely he grabbed the rope again with both hands in a firm grip, braced his feet against the sheer rock wall-and pushed away with all of his strength! The man under him cried with surprise as the lower anchor snapped free, clinging to the rope with both his arms and legs wrapped tightly around it in an effort to hang on. The rope swung outward toward the river just a little, then left and then back to the right, then crashed back toward the wall a second later. Indiana braced his feet and pushed out and sideways again, and it began to move wildly.

“Jones!” Ramos cried. “What do you think you are doing?”

Indiana wasted no energy on answering senseless questions, looking down as he bounced away from the wall again. Though the rope was now arcing back and forth like a pendulum, the man beneath him had managed to climb closer and closer to Indiana. He was less than six feet beneath him when a crack from a rifle rang out. Someone was shooting at him! The bullet struck the stone wall next to him and showered him with debris. Ramos immediately made a roaring order to continue firing. Indiana bounced off the wall again. The rope oscillated more and more and began to grind from the friction. His right shoulder repeatedly brushed the rock wall, which sent sharp lances of pain down his arm but he managed to maintain his grip and actually increase the swing of the rope from side to side.

Something touched his foot. He looked down and saw that Ramos’s man had almost reached him. Despite the life-threatening situation, the other man continued to inch upward reaching out for Indiana’s foot with one hand in an attempt to yank him from the rope and stop the maddening swing. Indiana locked his grip, pulled up his leg, then firmly planted the heel of

his boot right in the gloating grin of the man beneath him. A painful grimace covered his pursuer's face. But the guy seemed to have the strength and climbing prowess of an orangutan, because he didn't let go and was able to intercept Indiana's foot as it came down for a second smash.

Out of the corner of his eye Indiana glimpsed the boat. It was less than a hundred yards away and was moving haphazardly at a reckless speed. The undertow of the current was dragging it towards a gap between the rocks, perhaps fifteen or twenty meters from the shore. The water was so smooth there Indiana did not try to imagine what the undertow would be like.

The rope swung back again, and for a moment he lost sight of the river. He saw Ramos's men several feet beneath him trying to keep up with the rapid movement of the rope. Ramos was pointing wildly, apparently losing his orientation as he pointed and yelled at a point several meters from where Indiana and the rope now swung, while Marian stared in horror at him.

The rope had reached the pinnacle of its pendulum movement, then swung back. Indiana ran along the rock face, trying to help increase its speed. His shoulder once again dragged along the rock wall, this time leaving a bloody trail on the stone. Faster and faster, Indiana raced along the wall. He slammed his foot down again at the man below, this time at the hand that held onto the rope. He felt the man's hand below give away. A scream filled the air as the pressure on his leg vanished, and the man flew from the rope like a projectile, landing in the midst of Ramos's remaining men below, knocking three or four of them off their feet. The rope continued to swing upward, back and forth again until he only noticed the white foam-crowned water below. He prayed he had timed this right!

Indiana let go.

For a second he had the remarkable sensation of floating weightlessly in the air, but it was almost immediately replaced with the rush of falling. Seething water and razor-sharp rock edges raced upwards toward him. Before he could process what was happening, it was replaced with a large lifeless gray form. The impact on the iron deck of the ship was less harsh than he had anticipated. Although he landed feet first he absorbed the

impact with his knees and immediately proceeded into a duck and roll maneuver. The momentum of his movements brought him right back to his feet as his tumble slowed. He drove around lightning fast, took a step, then plunged back to his knee as the boat under him dropped several feet in the uneven surface of the river. It bucked like a horse as something beneath the water's surface groaned against the hull with a horrible sound. Indiana struggled as he fell to his knees again, catching himself with his hands as he made his way toward the wheelhouse. Through the raging spray he could see that some of Ramos's men had stormed to the shore and pointed wildly at the boat as it crashed by. The ones who had not lost their rifles in the mercenary's fall from moments ago pointed their weapons toward him, but no one shot. Or maybe the roar from the water was so loud it drowned out the sound of bullets being fired. Regardless, it took only seconds before the men were well out of range of effectively shooting him as the ship rushed wildly away from Ramos's position on the shore.

Again, something with unimaginable force struck the iron hull of the ship, and Indiana was hurled to the deck. Helpless, he skidded over the flooring and crashed painfully against a wall. He instinctively looked for a hand hold before he could be tossed like a rag doll again.

In his misfortune he found a bit of luck: he had landed very close to the door of the rowing house, and in spite of the wild up and down bucking of the ship, he was able to brace his feet and yank it open. He lurched into the room, bouncing against the rudder, and clung desperately to it as the ship lurched again. The wooden wheel spun uncontrollable in his hands like a wild beast, resisting his grip. In front of the window was nothing but a churning spray of water, flashing rough and deadly with great force. The ship tilted to its side, straightened up again, then struck another obstacle. This time Indiana could hear the metal hull below tearing and splintering away.

He tried desperately to keep the rudder straight with the wheel. He could barely see anything. The ship was still moving at remarkable speed even though it was incessantly crashing against the reefs and rocks. He glimpsed something ahead, a gap

between two large reefs, but he could not be sure - and he had no idea whether more razor-sharp stones hid just below the water's surface that would split the ship open like a can opener.

His gaze took in the control panel of the ship next to the wheel. He finally found the control that started the diesel engine. With a desperate force he pressed the button downwards. He heard the sputtering of the engine in the hull below as it tried to light. But it did not work. And even if it had, it was unlikely it could have helped get them out of the current.

Indiana gave up the futile effort to start the engine. Instead he concentrated his strength on the wheel in an attempt to steer the ship towards the gap in the rocks. The raging current bounced the ship back and forth, hurling it up and down deeply into the water. Something struck the right side of the rowing house and the round glass portals exploded into glass shards. Ice-cold water and glass splinters rained down on Indiana. He ignored it and focused the entirety of his effort on driving the ship into the gap between the rocks, which approached at breakneck speed. The boat drifted to the right, swung back to the left and turned almost completely on its side, before it reaffirmed itself upright. The rocks came nearer, jumping at the sides of the ship, and Indiana registered with full horror that the gap was much narrower than he had imagined. He could see the shadows of deadly reefs in the waters beneath.

Straining with every muscle in his body, the ship squeezed into the gap with a terrible blow. The hull rang like a giant bell, and something broke with a terrible sound. A second, even harder jolt followed almost immediately, and the momentum of the ship abruptly decreased with the sounds of tearing metal.

Suddenly the floor stopped trembling.

The roar of the water and the ice-cold spray that poured through the shattered windows persisted, but the ship rested from one second to another.

Indiana found himself on the floor again, thrown there from the impact of the ship's abrupt loss of momentum. His breathing was laborious and his vision was spinning wildly. He was dazed, and it took several seconds before he realized that the boat had become wedged in the gap between the rocks. Uncertain - at any

time a new blow to the hull could quickly end the reprieve, he got back to his feet. At once he noticed water was rapidly filling the wheelhouse, and he waded back to the helm.

The control cabin was in terrible disarray. Anything that had not been bolted or welded down was torn and smashed. The water was already ankle-deep, and with the exception of the windscreen every window was shattered. The door hung obliquely, half ripped out from its broken frame. The stern of the boat had disappeared into a frothing spray. He now felt that the ground was not quite as calm as it had been seconds ago. It trembled and vibrated all around him. Perhaps, he thought full of terror, the ship would once again tear itself away. He knew they would not survive if it did so.

With clenched teeth and like a man defiantly facing the coming storm, he leaned forward and made his way through the control house to the stern. It took him several minutes to navigate only a dozen or so steps – he slipped again and again falling backwards the way he came. Again and again ice-cold spray hit him with impossible force, threatening to send him overboard. He could feel the structure beneath gradually but almost certainly breaking away.

When Indiana reached the door of the hold, he was almost to the point of exhaustion. He crawled on his hands and knees down the iron staircase to the cargo bay and felt around blindly in the darkness until he found the door. His fingers groped the rusted wet metal latch. He yanked at it a few times before he noticed the heavy padlock holding it shut.

Indiana sighed with desperation. For a moment he yanked in vain at the lock, then began hammering the door with both fists. For a second there was no response. Was he too late? Had they been sucked out of the damaged hull already? Then he heard a faint series of muffled strokes. Finally Reuben's voice penetrated through the metal hatch. "Jones? Is that you?"

"The door is locked!" Indiana yelled back.

"Open up!" Reuben roared. "We will drown. Water is quickly filling the hold!"

"I can't get it open!" cried Indiana despairingly. "It has a padlock!"

Behind the door, panicked voices chimed in, demanding he let them out. Someone started banging against a wall, and for a moment Indiana's mind drew a blank. Then Reuben, his voice concerned but remarkably calm, reminded him. "There was a crowbar out there secured to the wall. It has to be somewhere. Look for it. And hurry!"

Indiana turned around on his knees and started to blindly grope around. His hands penetrated the ice-cold water, dragged the floor and walls, gliding around in a desperate search. He felt momentary rush as he gripped the railing, mistaking it for a crowbar or lever. But it was immovable.

In truth, it probably only took a few seconds for him to find the crowbar still hanging from the wall near the door, but it felt like an eternity. The water continued to beat the hull with dreadful force, and the gentle trembling from before had increasingly become more erratic. The swaying of the ship had become more and more violent as time progressed. Occasionally, a grinding or tearing sound penetrated the metal walls of the ship, and Indiana felt like the ship was coming apart around them. When he had finally positioned the crowbar and braced himself, the ship lurched loudly to its side. He was on his second attempt when he realized the absurd balancing act he was in, with one leg one the side wall and the other on the floor.

"Hurry!" Reuben cried. "For God's sake!"

Indiana regripped the crowbar and braced himself, pulling with all of his strength. In the first few seconds, nothing happened, and he began to fear that he simply did not have enough power to break them free. Then the padlock gave with a crunching sound and broke away. Indiana hurled the crowbar to the side, yanked the remainder of the lock away with frozen fingers, and tore the latch back.

At the same time force from the inside pushed the door away. Reuben, Henley, and two of the other men flung themselves through the now open doorway as they tried to exit the cargo bay. At the same time, an unimaginable blow struck the ship in the opposite direction. Indiana was torn from his feet, sailed helplessly through the air, and plunged against Reuben and the others back into the cargo hold. They crashed to the ground in a

bundle, while the ship lurched wildly as it broke free of the rocks it was wedged between.

The last thing Indiana perceived was one of Reuben's men flying at him like a living projectile across the storeroom and landing atop him. Darkness overcame him.

He imagined he was out for several minutes. Even after he came to his senses, he could see nothing. He was adrift in a pool of icy water that rose to his mid-section, surrounded by a semi-circle of men who spoke frantically. He could hear moans and groans of men who were dealing with pain or panic. Then he heard Reuben's voice, speaking with someone loudly. The ringing in his head kept him from understanding the conversation. Then a brief flicker of a lit match broke the darkness for a second, then extinguished immediately.

Indiana heard Reuben rustling for something: another match was struck, which flickered a moment longer than before, but extinguished again.

Reuben cursed a little louder.

Indiana cautiously moved his hands beneath the water. The ice-cold water absorbed almost every feeling, draining them from his limbs. But he could move them – he was extremely grateful he had not broken or fractured a bone or suffered any other major injury.

A third match was torn from a matchbook and lit, and this time the flame did not extinguish, but flared brightly and long enough to light the wick of the only kerosene lamp that didn't get destroyed in the maelstrom. "Be careful with this thing," Indiana heard Reuben announce. "It's the only one left."

Indiana blinked in the growing yellow light, and the darkness and shadows slowly retreated. His eyes eventually adjusted to the light, which danced along the surface of the water that now covered the floor. He realized they were still in the cargo hold of the little boat, but it had changed in a surreal way. It was completely devastated and partially submerged with icy water. Debris, wood, scraps, and torn packages spilled and floated in the water. But that was not the most startling: the floors and walls had swapped places. The ship had turned and was obviously listing on its side.

Reuben noticed that Indiana had come to his senses, so he waded toward him, his arms raised to avoid dragging them through the dirty, icy water. “Are you hurt?” he inquired anxiously. Before Indiana could even answer, he added: “You almost drowned when you were knocked out. One of the men managed to fish you out in the ruckus and get you leaned against a wall.”

Indiana raised his hand to his aching head and groaned. “I am not so sure I should thank him yet,” he murmured. Reuben smiled, but his gaze remained serious. When Indiana scrutinized his expression, he realized he was seeing a fear that he had not seen in the FBI official before. Reuben was doing his best to hide it behind a mask of security and authority.

“What happened?” Indiana asked, alarmed.

“Still not sure,” Reuben replied. “I don’t know how you managed to get upstairs. But it looks like we are capsized.”

“The rapids,” murmured Indiana. His memories were still fragmented. Although the blow to his head hadn’t caused him permanent memory loss, he was still dazed and had trouble organizing his thoughts. “The boat must have torn itself away. I told Ramos the mooring needed to be strengthened when we left.”

“Torn away,” Reuben laughed hard. “I guess you could call it that.”

Indiana looked up. “What do you mean?”

A grim expression filled Reuben’s face. “After you left, we heard someone return. We were pretty sure whoever it was had cut the mooring ropes. We didn’t see them, but we could hear them moving around on the boat.”

Indiana was not even surprised at the revelation. But he was deeply shaken at the cruelty of criminals he had faced in the course of his adventures. He had seen more people die (some at his own hands) than most normal men had seen their entire lives. But he had never met a man who acted so utterly without conscience than Ramos. For a moment he wondered if the man’s blindness had turned him cold, if his lack of ability to see gruesomeness and death had hardened his feelings.

He chased away the thought. Ramos was crazy, simple as that. Crazy, unpredictable, and dangerous. Which was why Indiana resolved to break his neck when they got out of there. If they got out of there!

He turned his thoughts back to the matter hand. “What about the door? Is it still open?”

“Jammed,” replied Reuben. Something heavy must have fallen when the ship overturned and it’s blocking the door from opening. We tried to force it, but it won’t budge. And now it’s underwater.”

“Is it rising?” Indiana asked.

“The water?” Reuben shrugged his shoulders and tilted his head in thought. “Not right now. The ship seems to have partially run aground. It looks like lady luck was with us after all. If the current had pulled us any further, we would have probably drowned a long time ago.”

Indiana looked at him with uncertainty. He had felt first-hand the terrible power of the water and the current. The ship was probably still wedged between some rocks, but how long would it stay that way?

“But it’s not the water I’m worried about at the moment,” Reuben continued grimly. “The cargo hold is still air-tight. Water is blocking any holes in hull. If we are lucky, we may have an hour’s worth of air left, at best.”

As if to confirm the hopelessness of their situation, a gentle tremble vibrated through the hull of the ship. Waves were crashing against the boat, causing some of the men to become restless. The situation was precarious: if the ship broke free it would almost certainly sink or break apart, drowning them all. Or they would simply run out of air and suffocate within an hour. Despite their situation, the men seemed remarkably disciplined. He took a closer look at the half a dozen faces in the hold. There was something different about these men: the mercenaries in Ramos’s employ lacked the attitude of these men. Those men were driven by money. These seemed to be driven by duty. Although he could see the fatigue in their bearded, over-tired faces, there was still a trace of calmness and discipline.

“These aren’t mercenaries,” he said softly to Reuben as it dawned on him.

Reuben looked at him and remained silent.

“They’re soldiers, aren’t they?” Indiana continued. Reuben still did not acknowledge the comment, and Indiana had not succeeded in making the accusation as reproachful as he actually intended. “You came here to a foreign country with a small army. This could be interpreted as an act of war! That’s why you didn’t hang around when the Bolivian authorities arrived earlier. You have dragged me into your private little war!”

Reuben tried to make an angry gesture toward Indiana, but apparently forgot he was almost to his chest in water. It splashed, surprising Reuben, who blinked as the cold liquid struck his face. He picked up the hand and instead of pointing accusingly at Indiana, he wiped the water out of his eyes. “It’s not a private war,” he said. “And I’d rather we talk about this when we get out of here – if we survive, I mean.”

Indiana swallowed the furious response that lay on his tongue. Instead, he stood up straight and walked towards the staircase that now ran at an odd angle from the wall and ceiling. He found his body uncontrollable trembling with the shivers. The cold was unbearable, and the icy water did its best to drain the last bit of heat from his body. Perhaps drowning and suffocation weren’t the only things threatening them with death: you can add shock and hypothermia to the reaper’s choices.

He reached the staircase, and searched his mind to piece together the cargo hold and the position of the door in its current orientation. It would be several feet below, so he took a deep breath-then dived beneath the surface of the frigid water. His hands groped aimlessly around until he felt the railing of the stairs. He gripped it tightly and pulled himself along, realizing that the door would be at the end. His heart raced. The coldness of the water had reduced his ability for air intake drastically, and his lungs began to burn for oxygen. He felt breathless before even reaching the door a few feet below. His fingers found the door, and he groped over its surface with his right hand while maintaining grip on the railing to keep him in position.

The door moved two or three inches before meeting something heavy that resisted any further opening. He repositioned and pressed his body against the door, trying to budge it while holding the railing with his left hand. He pushed with all of his strength. The metal trembled, and he felt it yield a few more centimeters. He tried again with all of his force, which knocked the remaining air from his burning lungs. It became unbearable. He popped to the surface, gasping for air, and clung to the first thing he could grab – Reuben’s shoulder.

“Any luck?” the FBI agent asked quietly when Indiana had halfway caught his breath.

Indiana shook his head. “It’s not opening.”

Reuben raised his eyebrow. “I would have been surprised if it had, Dr. Jones” Reuben explained. “Four of us have already tried.”

Indiana still shook his head. “I...I felt it move a little. I think...keep trying... a little bit more...”

“Yeah, that’s what we thought,” Reuben said. “There’s something big in front of it. A few strong shocks and it might move.” He shrugged his shoulders. “Unfortunately we can’t hold our breaths long enough to make any headway.”

“We need a tool,” murmured Indiana, as he turned his attention to what was left of his surroundings.

Reuben shrugged his shoulders again. “We’ve already looked. Ramos’s men took everything. At least everything useful.”

Indiana did not answer. He concentrated on the debris floating around. Reuben was probably right – although there was enough junk floating around to fill a small garbage dump, there was nothing floating around that would break the door free. Then something caught his eye floating in the corner –

There floating between some splinters of wood and one of Reuben’s men was a small circle of metal protruding from the water. A bucket, partially filled but still floating. Indiana waded to it and lifted it up, poured out its contents and held it up in the air. It was undamaged.

Without a word Indiana waded back over to Reuben, held the bucket up in front of the man and proudly displayed his find.

“Do you want to empty the water out of the boat with it?” Reuben asked incredulously.

Indiana did not even entertain Reuben with an answer. Instead he turned the bucket around in his hand, convincing himself once again that it was completely undamaged. Reuben looked at Indy with a furrowed brow and said nothing.

“Help me,” Indiana commanded. I need to keep it straight. As straight as possible.”

Reuben frowned again, obviously evaluating whether shock had finally taken hold over the scientist. Suddenly his face brightened as he finally realized what Indiana was up to – science! At the same time, two of Reuben’s men waded over, curious as to what was on Indiana’s mind.

Indiana positioned himself as close to the door beneath him as possible, then dropped to his knees in the water. Water rested at his bottom lip when he pulled the bucket as straight as possible down over his head like a knight’s helmet.

“You have to keep it straight,” he said. Reuben and his men placed their hands firmly on the bottom of the bucket, which was not facing upwards. It was much harder to keep it straight than expected. Seeing this two over men waded over to help. Indiana tried to submerge and found the bucket, filled with air, was much harder to pull down than he had anticipated. But he finally managed to pull it down slowly and in a fashion where, with the help of the men above, it stayed fairly straight. He cautiously forced his way to the bottom, praying that the men above would not stumble or trip over him. Even with the bucket of air, he knew he still had very little time – two or three minutes at the most. But two or three minutes – and a little luck – just might be all he needed!

He had lost at least half the time and air before he finally found the door again in the murky water. He had descended down the staircase while Reuben’s men remained positioned on the higher edge at each side of the railing. Keeping his movements in tune with the men helping proved to be the most difficult and time-consuming endeavor. But he eventually reached the door and his fingers groped through the opening.

He pushed with all his strength. The door trembled, and moved a few millimeters more. It groaned like a living creature, resisted, then stopped. But it had moved.

The air supply in the bucket was almost depleted when Indiana popped quickly back to the surface. He waited for his lungs to refill with oxygen, then looked at the faces of anticipation around him.

He nodded. "She's moving," he gasped. "I need a tool.

Anything to use as a lever."

All of the men together started to scan the room. They dove under the surface, dragged things around, tore up tattered parcels, and evaluated every piece of soaked wood floating around. Nothing. They even dragged at the beams of the walls and ceiling to see if anything had broken loose. But the only thing Indy held in his hands at the end was a splintered box-board that was completely swollen and saturated with water. But if that was all they had, he hoped he could make it work.

He took in another deep breath, then positioned his make-shift diver's helmet back on. Once again he dove under. He found the door a little faster this time. With clenched teeth he squeezed the board through the crack and leaned all of his weight into the soggy lever. It held only for a second, then snapped in half. He fell helplessly backwards as water rushed into his helmet and lungs.

Panting and gasping for air he broke to the surface. Reuben looked at him in silence, but this time he no longer had a look of anticipation. His eyes were now filled with fear and desperation, as were the others.

Indiana waited a few minutes for his gasping lungs to settle. "All right. We have to come up with a new plan."

He reached for the bucket. But Reuben hesitated giving it to him. "You're spent, Jones. Let one of the others try."

Indiana shook his head. "Next time," he answered. "I have an idea." He lifted his arms out and stretched them outward to the men. "Hold me tightly."

Two men grabbed and held his outstretched arms, while Reuben and three others held the bucket again. Indiana was gently sinking into a squatting position. He crawled-in a

grotesque half-tilted stance- on the door and sucked in his entire air supply from the bucket all at once. He forced himself to bounce with all his strength on the door, and despite those holding his arms from above almost lost his balance. His lungs cracked as the air was now completely drained from the bucket. Nevertheless, he did not give up. He attacked the door once more. It had opened enough for him to get his arm through the slit. He pushed his arm through, but pulled it back a split second later after he brushed against something...a giant clammy...hand?

The door slammed closed again. But this time something was pushing at it. It was not a piece of debris blocking the door. Something was scratching at it...fingernails or claws over the iron...

Indiana shot back to the surface, gasping in fright. He was dizzy and his head pounded from lack of oxygen. Had it made him imagine the fleshy claw? Was he hallucinating? He tried to put together a sentence, but he just stammered. He straightened immediately and almost fell.

“Something...” he stammered. In front of his eyes were colorful rings and flashes of light danced as he breathed in and out. Through the shimmering grey veil he saw Reuben take the bucket and motion his men to come assist him so one of them could take Indiana’s place at the door. Indiana tried to motion him to stand down, but the faint gesture and his inability to form a sentence produced only a gasp and a groan.

“You all right” Reuben asked anxiously. He was misunderstanding Indiana’s excitement as progress. The men continued their preparations, and one pulled the bucket over and proceeded to dive below.

Instead of a direct answer, Indiana moved by him and positioned himself to observe the trail of waves left behind by the diving man. After a few moments the shadow beneath the surface of the water ceased to move, and then two or three echoing strokes were heard as the man pounded against the door with all of his force.

Indiana breathed audibly. Reuben looked at him, confused, and Indiana uttered panting: “It’s all right. I just thought for a moment, I...”

The water beneath them immediately exploded. Panting and spitting water, the man resurfaced, threw himself back with a piercing scream and showered them all with icy water in his panic. “A monster!” he roared. “There’s a damn monster down there!”

A roaring blow resounded, as though the door were yanked from its hinges with terrible violence. The water surged and thrashed, and he felt as if something else had come in with them! A monstrous shadow appeared beneath the surface of the water and glided with fantastic speed at Reuben, who appeared to be paralyzed with fear and confusion gazing with wide eyes at the monstrous shadow below. Reuben staggered back from the impact of something below, and suddenly a scaly arm with monstrous claws locked onto his shoulder and dragged the FBI official beneath the water with unimaginable speed and force. Indiana finally snapped out of his shock and threw himself at the man, but he was too late. Foam and waves remained where Reuben had vanished. For a moment he could see the shadows of the two beings – man and monster, fighting in the waters beneath but when he grasped with his hands they came up empty.

The other men began to panic and shout.

They began to move frantically around, crashing into each other creating waves in the cargo hold. The light flickered.

“The lamp!” Indiana cried horrifically. “Watch out for the lamp!”

No one noticed his words. On the contrary, the panic grew worse. A second later Indiana had forgotten about the lamp as well. On the spot where Reuben had vanished, a new series of rings broke the surface of the water. A head appeared in the center of the tiny waves – a horrible scaly head broke the surface. Indiana was not sure if it was human. The face was distorted, and its eyes glared at him like a nightmare. The creature lacked a discernible nose, and its mouth had no lips, but was shaped like that of a fish. The skull was hairy on one side and covered with ulcers and warts on the other. At places it appeared as if the skin had peeled away to bare bone beneath. When the creature opened its mouth, Indiana was staring at a double row of needle-sharp teeth bent inward.

Again the water bubbled, and a second creature appeared next to the first. It was more appalling than the other, staring at him with huge, swollen eyes. It lifted a crippled arm out of the water and reached for Indiana with a mangled three-fingered hand. He screamed and threw himself back, but the reaction came too late. He couldn't move fast enough in the water. The hand grabbed him and yanked him around with terrible force. Indiana barely had time to gulp in some air before he was dragged underwater. Two or three other inhuman hands grabbed him. He fought back fervently, barely managing to get his head above water again. The last thing his brain registered was a violent wave in the cargo hold that knocked over and extinguished the lamp, then the sensation of the hold filling up with the creatures to overtake the remaining men as he was dragged back beneath the blackened waters through the now open doorway.

Although he did not really lose consciousness, but he felt as if he were being dragged underwater for an eternity. Finally the resistance of the creatures subsided, and he was able to break for the surface. His head breached the water and he gasped again for air. He felt like he was closer to death than he had ever been before. He was not sure how long he had been dragged about underwater, but he had surfaced near the shore. He struggled and made his way to where the water was only inches deep and collapsed, leaning against a rock. He perceived distorted shadows in the river around him, and heard unnatural sounds as if they were communicating somehow. He tried to block them from his eyes and ears.

He was unsuccessful in blocking either: mixed in with the roar of the rapids were what he made out to be words which he could not understand. They sounded like a completely alien language, and could not be made with human mouths. He clenched his eyes shut for several minutes as he tried desperately to recover his breathing. Something touched the edge of his face. At first he thought it was his imagination and he tried to force it away. But it lingered: it was cold and hard, almost like metal. Even though he held his eyes tightly closed, it was not difficult for him to visualize: a huge, scaly hand with three fingers that were tipped in long claws.

That's crazy, he thought. Pull yourself together! He had to be imagining all of this. The poor light and lack of oxygen had caused him to lose his senses for a moment. There are no monsters. Neither here nor anywhere else in the world. He kept pounding this into his mind as he forced himself to ignore his exhaustion, lift his head and open his eyes. There are no monsters!

It is a monster! As he opened his eyes, one of them was standing before him, a two-meter colossus with a tiny head that rested on an unnaturally thin, scaly frame with wide shoulders. Its arms and legs were too thin to be human. Its hands and feet had three appendages and long claws. Its skin was leathery and scaly, littered with countless ulcers and inflamed wounds. Even though it was still soaking wet, a piercing odor emanated from its ulcers. It smelled like sickness and death.

Indiana surmised it had been bent over his motionless frame for several minutes, examining him to see if he were alive. Once it had convinced itself that Indiana was indeed alive, a toothy grimace filled its face (only later did Indiana understand it was probably the way this creature smiled) and it turned away, wading and disappearing back into the icy water of the river.

He watched in terror as five or six of the gruesomely deformed figures brought Reuben's men out of the water and to the shore. Most were unconscious, or did not have the constitution left to struggle. Only Henley, who was last to be brought from the hold of the ship, raged like a madman. It took two of the monstrous creatures to drag him to the shore to be dropped between Reuben and the others. The hastily wrapped wound on his thigh had been agitated and was bleeding heavily again, but he did not seem to even notice it.

While Reuben looked after his injured colleague, Indiana inspected their eerie saviors a little more closely. In the bright daylight their form appeared a little more human than it had in the dimly lit hold of the ship. The scales were nothing more than chunks of flaking leathery skin which was covered in ulcers and warts, some of which were whitish and discolored. Now that the initial shock and excitement had died down, Indiana realized these were not monsters at all. They were people. They were

horribly disfigured, but they were people nonetheless. Most of them limped and actually moved quite slowly on the beach. They had unnaturally long arms and legs, crippled hands, disfigured and mangled faces, and horrible deformities.

“What in God’s sake are these things?” Reuben whispered, horrified that they might hear him. “These are not human beings, are they?” His voice was shrill, almost hysterical.

“I’m afraid they are,” answered Indiana quietly.

“But that’s impossible,” whispered Reuben. “So...I’ve never seen anything like them before. What are these men?”

Indiana did not answer. But it was not because he did not know the answer. On the contrary, he suddenly had a terrible premonition that they were very close to the incredible secret that Corda had discovered. The secret Ramos coveted. It was a secret that had brought so many before them. But none of those before them had come out alive. It was a secret that he was not quite sure they were ready for.



CHAPTER 8

24th or 25th June 1944 **Somewhere in the rainforest**

The large cave was moist and cold. A glowing orange-red light sprayed across the uneven walls from a dozen blackened torches, filling the chamber with dancing shadows and surreal movements that invaded the imagination.

Indiana did not know how long it had taken them to reach that shelter – none of them knew. They did not know where they were at all. Indiana could not tell how long they had been travelling. Had it been two days? Maybe three. Their sinister saviors had given them only a brief time to rest and regain their strength before urging them onwards. That brief rest was all that they had been granted.

They had marched, practically uninterrupted. First to the east, at a right angle from the river deeper and deeper into the verdant jungle. Then they had changed directions to a northern trajectory. The number of guardians had grown to nearly two dozen. Not all of them were as monstrous as those that had rescued them from their sinking ship. But all of them had some kind of severe deformation or malady. Apparently none of them understood or spoke English either, or Spanish or Portuguese for that matter. Their gestures and the presence of their weapons – along with their monstrous appearance- had deterred any of Reuben's men

from trying anything stupid or escaping. And as they continued from the river the jungle had become so dense they could scarcely see the sky above. When Indiana caught a glimpse of the sun through the thick vegetation he wasn't even sure in which direction they were travelling anymore.

His fatigued mind had given up, his memory invaded only by images of green and gray, and monotonous thoughts such as simply putting one foot in front of the other to march on. The guards gave them food and drink, but they never spoke. And they never allowed them even the tiniest break for rest. Henley, with his injured leg, finally collapsed when he couldn't move any further. Two of the most monstrous guardians built a stretcher of boughs and plant fibers as they marched while some of Reuben's exhausted soldiers assisted Henley in the march. The guardians even built the stretcher without slowing or taking a break.

As they continued, Indiana noticed the terrain was gradually getting rougher. The ground rose gently but persistently, and the grass and undergrowth gave way to more and more rocks and stones. Some time later it began to be dotted with large, sharp-edged boulders jutting from the ground between the giant jungle trees.

And finally they had reached this cave. The sudden gaping hole in the ground had been so perfectly camouflaged by natural formations that Indiana hadn't even seen it, even as their guards were directing them to it. As soon as they entered the large antechamber, like the rest of Reuben's men, Indiana collapsed to the floor and fell asleep on the spot where he had stopped. And like the rest, awoke to a bowl of fruit and fresh water, and some kind of delicious mash of vegetables. After eating and drinking, he slept again. He guessed they had rested a day or more, most of it in deep much needed sleep. The next time he awoke, the burnt torches that had been placed on the wall by their guardians had been replaced by new ones. And with the exception of Henley, who lay there in feverish dreams, all of the others were awake as well.

It had been a few hours since awakening. The men had spent most of the time discussing then discarding various theories about their mysterious lifesavers. Most of theories were either

ridiculous or dull. At one point Indiana had tried to leave the cavern, against Reuben's advice. He had not made it past the entrance, which was guarded by the same Indio-monster who had rescued him from the ship. Although its head was tiny compared to its frame, it had very attentive eyes. It had made a threatening gesture with the large stone axe it carried in its claws, so Indiana turned back into the cavern with the others. He had no desire to find out if the creature could use the menacing weapon it was brandishing.

"That was completely pointless," Reuben said when Indiana dropped down on the bare rock next to him, resigning to the fact they were stuck here until their 'hosts' decided to let them leave. "I've tried it too. Being nice to them doesn't work. And neither does the threat of violence." He shook his head. "That thing might be as deaf as these rocks!" He emphasized his ridiculous comment by picking up, then dropping a handful of stones off the floor. His attention was briefly diverted to Henley, who tossed his head back and groaned loudly in his sleep. Reuben looked anxiously over him, then turned back to Indiana when he realized there was little he could do to comfort his friend.

"Besides," Reuben continued as if the interruption had not occurred. "It would do no good escaping anyway. I don't even know where we are." He looked up at Indiana. "Do you?" Indiana shook his head. "No," he stated. "But I'm still alive. One of the reasons is because I can figure my way out of these types of situations."

Reuben shot him an irritated look, then shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah, that may be true in the normal world. But this is a world full of monsters."

"Do you really believe they are monsters?" asked Indiana.

"Well, they are not 'ordinary' people!" answered Reuben with agitation in his words. He realized how that made him sound, and that he probably should have directed his agitation elsewhere. He fought back his agitation and replaced it with an uncertain smile. "But the devil shall get me if I know what they are." The uncertainty in his face became clearer. "I have only seen the likes of this once before."

Indiana shot him an inquisitive look.

“At the carnival,” said Reuben, explaining. “At the time I was a child, maybe thirteen or fourteen years old. My father took me to one of those freakshow tents. You know, that place where you can get a glimpse of the bearded woman, or Siamese twins. Or stare at the man with snake skin. But these were...” he was frantically searching for words. “Freaks, cripples – regrettable people. But still they were people.”

“And you’re sure these are not people?”

A hidden accusation resonated within the question, and for a second Indiana felt sorry for posing it in such a way. But Reuben did not seem to mind. If he did he ignored it.

“Something like this does not exist in great numbers!” continued Reuben. “One in a hundred thousand people, perhaps.” His voice once again rose with passion. “They are the exception, Jones! So rare they are resolved to a sideshow act at the local fair. But here...there seems to be a whole tribe of freaks.”

“Maybe there is a reason it’s happening here,” said Indiana thoughtfully.

“And what is that?”

“I don’t know,” returned Indiana. “And I’m not certain I want to know. Maybe they are outcasts from local villages. There version of freaks exiled to live together. Or maybe there is something more...sinister at work here.”

Reuben was silent for several seconds, contemplating what Indiana had just said. “Do you know who these men remind me of, Jones?”

“No.”

“Really?” Reuben responded, surprised that Indiana didn’t connect his meaning. He laughed, humorlessly. “Have you forgotten the blind, crippled ‘monster’ that got us into this mess?”

“Ramos?” asked Indiana dubiously. “What makes you think that?”

“I don’t know,” murmured Reuben.

Indiana shook his head. “No. Ramos IS a monster. Even I wouldn’t insult these things by lumping him in with them.”

Reuben shrugged, accepting Indiana’s assertion. “Yeah. But I have a feeling that there is much more to this story than we

know.” He appeared as if he were going to keep talking, but suddenly closed his mouth and cocked his head slightly. He remained silent, listening. After a few seconds he spoke up quietly. “Someone’s coming now.”

When Indiana turned toward the entrance, he saw the misshapen shadows of two of the creatures. Another smaller shadow was in between them. When they reached the edge of the light, Indiana was astonished.

“Marcus!” he shouted with surprise. He was on his feet before he had even finished the name. He ran to Marcus Brody and grasped him tightly in his arms, lifting him off the ground by a few inches.

Marcus gasped with surprise. For a few moments there was silence as he evaluated Indiana’s sudden appearance in the cave before him. Indiana finally released his embrace and Marcus stepped gently back half a step.

“Marcus,” Indiana said again. “Thank God you’re alive! And you’re not hurt!”

“Of course I’m alive,” Marcus announced incredulously, as if Indiana had witnessed his funeral or something. “But what are you doing here? I thought you were a hundred miles away, chasing that scoundrel who kidnapped me and brought me here!” It took a moment for Marcus’s words to register in Indiana’s brain. “Ramos brought you here?”

“Well,” stammered Marcus. “Not directly. But not entirely voluntary either! And I’d like to stress that it was not necessarily his merit that I am alive and in good physical condition!” Marcus’s brow furrowed as he recounted his story. “That Ramos is a most inhospitable man, Indiana. His manners leave a lot to be desired. That is why I chose to remove myself from his company.”

“You escaped?” Reuben asked dubiously. “How?”

Marcus turned with a condescending look to the FBI agent, but his words seemed to be trapped in his throat. Or more aptly, in his thoughts. Finally Marcus smiled in embarrassment and shrugged. “Actually, it was pure luck,” he explained. “These...guardians...attacked Ramos’s camp and in the confusion I escaped.”

“What happened next?” Reuben asked.

Again Marcus seemed to be at a loss for words. He stammered, his embarrassment more evident. “I confess, perhaps I was a bit hasty to flee at the first opportunity that presented itself,” he murmured. “To be quite honest I realized my mistake almost immediately. I became lost in the jungle, thirsty and exhausted until the guardians found me. I am certain I would have perished had it not been for them.”

“The ‘guardians’?” It was the second time Marcus had used the expression.

“The men who rescued you and your friends from the sinking ship, Dr. Jones,” declared another voice from the shadows at the entrance. “In our language, they are called something different, but I believe the meaning of this word is close enough.”

Indiana tore his eyes away from Marcus to stare at the source of the voice. As he emerged from the shadows, Indiana recognized him immediately. It was the Aymará chief, from the village they had left a few days ago.

“You?” Indiana murmured with surprise. He could think of nothing else to say.

The old man smiled with a slight nod, then stepped nearer. Strange – maybe it was the lighting, maybe just his imagination – but the man seemed to move with more purpose and authority than before. There was an energetic gleam in his expressions that was not there before. He carried with him the aura of a ruler more than before, a man who was old but not frail, who was meek but not soft.

“You?” he asked again. “But why-“

The Aymará chief made a concise but commanding gesture. “I will explain everything to you, Dr. Jones,” he said. “But let us first gather your friends. I’d rather not tell everything twice.”

Indiana was sure he heard ridicule in the man’s voice as he spoke. And he noticed something else: the Aymará chief spoke perfect English, as if it were his mother tongue. But Indiana kept this to himself, making a mental note to add it to a very long list of questions he wanted to ask the old man when they got out of here. The old man looked at each of them after they had gathered closely, wordless and with an expression on his face that could

not be interpreted. He stared in each person's face, as if he could see the man beneath and make judgement on them. He stared at the feverish Henley the longest. He finally bent down and touched the man's sweat-covered forehead with his hand. The chief closed his eyes for a moment, and something unusual happened: Henley stopped stammering in his fever dreams, and a sudden look of comfort relaxed his face.

Indiana turned his stunned gaze from Henley and the chief back to Reuben. Both of them were trying to comprehend if it was magic they had just witnessed. Was it some kind of supernatural healing power?

The FBI agent held his gaze for a moment, then turned back to the Aymará chief. "What is it you want?" he asked, his feet shuffling restlessly where he was standing. There was a slight hint of trembling in his voice as he asked the question, and he could not bring himself to look directly into the old man's face. "Why do you keep us imprisoned here? We are not your enemies. We had nothing to do with what Ramos did to your village." "I believe that," replied the Aymará chief calmly. "But you have come for the same reason. And that is why I judge you as I have I judged him."

Reuben stiffened, defiantly stretching out his chin as if ready to fight the old man. But the chief just turned to him with a gentle smile, and Reuben suddenly dropped his gaze again. Even as he spoke, the defiance had left his voice. "You are mad," Reuben said. "You have no idea why we are really here. We are here for the man who did those terrible things to your people. He's a dangerous criminal. And I am here to bring him to justice."

"I understand that," the chief nodded. "But I also know that this is only part of the truth."

Reuben started to continue, but Indiana stopped him. "Drop it, Reuben," he said. "It is pointless to lie to him."

Reuben turned and stared defiantly at Indiana, but he remained silent, and the old chief smiled again. "You're right, Dr. Jones," the chief said. "You cannot lie to me in this sacred place. I also know why you really came. You seek the same thing that so many who have come before you sought. And you will find the same thing that they did if you do not abandon your

search. Death.”

“So there were others before us?” asked Indiana.

“You were not the first to find the way.” The old man acknowledged. “There have been many who came. But none have ever returned.”

“Then...it is true?” asked Reuben excitedly. “El Dorado...exists? It’s not just a legend?”

“El Dorado...” the old man repeated the word with peculiar emphasis. Then he nodded. “Oh. Yes, some have called it that. Others had different names, but it was always the same thing they truly searched for: gold and wealth.”

“El Dorado exists!” Reuben announced again. His fear had left him. There was a new glimmer in his eyes, and Indiana realized with fright that the other men had moved closer, and their gazes rested upon the lips of the old man as he told his story. He could see a familiar glimmer in their eyes, one that made him afraid. Maybe it was better of the old man did not keep talking. The Aymará chief looked at him for a moment, almost as if he were reading his thoughts. He smiled thinly, his eyes filled with a deep sadness. “This is indeed the place for which the white man dreams,” he said. “My people have never understood why the yellow metal is so valuable to you. But yes, it exists. But we have been chosen by the gods to watch over it. We have not always been successful in keeping its secret. We have been outnumbered. Some have made their way without violence. What no one sees is that the gold of El Dorado only holds death.”

“The gold of El Dorado?” Reuben laughed hysterically. “You mean...you and your...” he bit his lip as he looked around at the monsters behind the old man, then continued, “your men have killed those who sought it!”

“Not us,” contradicted the old man. “We are the guardians, and we bring the warning. We do not kill anyone who does no harm to us.” He raised his hand when he could sense Reuben was about to interrupt him again.

“I will tell you the story of my people, white man! We, too, were once like you. The greed for the yellow metal was not foreign to our ancestors. It was they who found the entrance to the Valley of the Gods. They took the yellow metal and carried

it out into the world, and they became rich and powerful.”

“The gold of the Incas,” murmured Indiana, recalling his South American studies. Reuben looked at him questioningly, and the old Aymará nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “This came from the country that the Spaniards came to call El Dorado. It made our ancestors rich. But it also brought them death. Many voices cried out to them, warning them that they were stealing the possession of the gods, but the warnings were lost with the wind. It is said that once, an infinitely long time ago when there were no people, the gods created the land of gold. But as people were created, they knew the greed that would overtake them. So they spoke a curse. Anyone who touched the gold should die. And those who sought it would die a terrible death. My people did not heed this warning. They sought this land, and when they found it they languished there where it was rich. But they paid a terrible price for its wealth. The men died, and the women bore children on which the curse of the gods lay.”

Indiana shuddered His gaze fell upon the deformed figures of the two who had accompanied the old man.

The old man continued. “Since that time it has been the duty of the Aymará to guard the way to El Dorado.”

“But the men and women in the village...” murmured Reuben, confused.

“They bring the children here,” said Indiana. He turned to the old man. “Your wives still give birth to the children on whom the curse of the gods lies, right?”

The old man nodded. “They are brought here. To this secret hiding place in the mountains where no one sees,” he said. “Perhaps one day the gods will pity us and take the curse from us. But until that time we will fulfill our task and guard the way.”

“That won’t do much good if Ramos shows up here with his thugs and murderers,” said Reuben. “You have seen what he has done to your village. They will kill you with no remorse.”

“We are many,” said the Aymará chief. But Reuben discarded his words with a single gesture. “Don’t underestimate this man, chief. I don’t deny that your ancestors might have fought and taken care of the Spanish conquistadors, or the adventurers and

grave robbers that followed. But Ramos and his men have modern weapons, and you've seen how ruthless they are. You have one choice to avoid that terrible bloodshed again: let us go and show us the way. We'll wait for Ramos and stop him there." "We are the guardians here," repeated the chief stubbornly. "The gods have given us the task of guarding the way into the land of yellow metal. And if we die in this, so this too is the will of the gods."

"The will of the gods!" spat Reuben. "You won't even get close to them. Ramos's flamethrowers will oppose you and your gods. You won't stand a chance. This man is crazy, don't you understand? He is crazy and completely ruthless. He does not care how many people he has to kill to get what he wants."

"And you?" asked the old man.

Reuben blinked. "What do you mean?"

"What would you do to learn the secret of El Dorado?" The chief hinted at the men who set themselves up in a semicircle behind Reuben. "Have you not risked the lives of all these men who follow you, just to reach your goal?"

"This is not the same," protested Reuben, but the old man stopped him immediately.

"I know you believe that," he said. "You really believe you have come for noble reasons. But that is not true. It may not be the gold you seek, but it is power. And what is gold besides a tool to gain power?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Reuben, but his voice contained a hint of uncertainty. "Even if this fabulous valley of gods really exists, what kind of power would I truly find there?"

"It drowns the pain of what you have lost in your quest," returned the old man.

"What...ludicrous nonsense," murmured Reuben, distraught. His gaze flickered. He looked at Indiana, almost pleading for help in his argument. "He has no idea what he is talking about," he said finally.

"But I..." stammered Indiana quietly.

The Aymará turned to him. "You are easy to see through," he said. "You have so much knowledge yet again you know so very little. At least about yourselves. Really, Dr. Jones, do you still

believe you came here to save your friend? Are you sure it wasn't the lure of the adventure? And the love of a woman you can't even admit? Or do you really not know how much you love her?" Indiana stood in silence, confused.

The Aymará turned back to Reuben. And this time his words were serious. He no longer spoke meekly, like a teacher to a child. "And you, Mr. Reuben – you believe that you must prevent your enemies from finding El Dorado. You are afraid they may find something that would endanger the empire of your people. But they will fail. You are mistaken. The man you persecute is not a traitor to his people. He came here for the same reason as the others before him: greed for gold and riches. And you, too, will succumb to the lure of that yellow metal when you see it. And if it's not you, it will be the men who follow you. So now do you understand why I cannot let you go?"

Reuben stared at the Aymará chief, his mouth slightly agape. "You cannot know that," he stammered. "It's impossible to know."

"Yet he has done it," Indiana said quietly.

The old man turned to Indiana in a strange way. Indiana moved closer and whispered in his ear. "You have read our thoughts, haven't you?"

"Yes," the chief nodded. "Yes, I have."



CHAPTER 9

The next morning One hour before sunrise

They had been talking to the chief for a long time. The realization that the old Aymará chief could read their thoughts as easily as reading a book had shaken Indiana to the core. He knew the old man had been telling the truth. The chief had known from the first moment when he met them what they had been seeking, just as he had known what Corda and Ramos's intentions had been. Indiana did not even attempt to find an explanation as to why the old man had this eerie power. He knew the old man had it, and that was enough. He did not consider questioning him further about this ability.

Reuben was also visibly shaken – but unlike Indiana, continued to try to get the old man to allow them to leave. For almost an hour he had continued in his attempt to persuade the old one in releasing them. He had begged, pleaded, and finally threatened him quite bluntly. But none of it worked. The old man remained persistent in his refusal to let them go, and continued with his assertion that the gold of El Dorado could protect itself. When he finally left, he told them goodbye and that he would meet with them again the next morning. It was then he would give his decision on their fate.

When Indiana awoke the next day, strange feeling tormented

him. There was a dull pressure between his temples, giving him a slight headache and making the ability to think difficult. In hindsight, their experience talking with the chieftain had been almost like a dream – and the memory of the conversation was like trying to recall a dream; the details were there but they did not quite feel real.

Dazed, he straightened himself up. He was not the only one who seemed to find it difficult waking up properly. All of the men were confused and groggy, except for Marcus, who was snoring like a sawmill, and Henley, who was in a deep restful sleep of one recovering from sickness. The rest looked just as dazed and confused as Indiana had been when he sat up. The men moved with grogginess and uncertainty. When he turned and looked into Reuben's face, he saw the same confusion and uncertainty, and a look as if Reuben was having trouble remembering where he was and why he was there.

And it didn't subside. The deformed Indians who they now knew as the guardians brought them food and fresh water, and shortly after eating the Aymar  chief appeared again. The weird sensation they had been feeling subsided only a little, and Indiana began to wonder if he were dreaming.

Then, just after sunrise, they heard the gunshots.

At first, Indiana thought he was imagining the noise. But the volley of gunfire quickly sounded closer, and not only increased in volume but in severity.

The opening salvo was a sporadic cracking gunfire, but it was soon joined by the hammering staccato of automatic weapons and screams, and then a terrible hissing and pattering, of which Indiana knew only too well: flamethrowers.

The men were in agitated panic and they all stormed to the exit of the cave, but the guard posted at the mouth still denied them exit; dumb, but persevering. In the thick forest ahead they could make out the red light reflections of flames over the rocks and vegetation, and the gunshots and cries revealed the battle to be occurring just a few yards from the cave entrance.

“Damn, what’s going on?” asked Reuben excitedly. “Ramos! It must be Ramos and his people!” He took a step further towards the guardian at the entrance, and the Aymar  raised his club

menacingly. Reuben stopped. But Indiana could see the thoughts going through Reuben's mind. Although they were unarmed, it was eight against one.

Indiana hastily moved in front of Reuben and confronted the guard, gesturing with his hands. "You must let us through," he said. "We are not your enemy! Call your chief! We...can help you!"

The guardian looked at him and grinned stupidly. He had apparently had not understood a word. Or he didn't want to understand.

Indiana's gaze wandered desperately to the exit. The MP fire had stopped for a moment, but the fight was not over yet – quite the opposite. The cries, and sounds of bustling steps, inched closer and closer, and suddenly the machine gun pounded so close to the cave entrance that even the Aymará became visibly shaken – but he did not budge from his position just inside the cave's mouth.

The firefight raged for a full quarter of an hour before the shots and cries slowly died down. It seemed like an eternity before the guard at the cavern entrance stepped aside to allow the chief passage through.

"What happened?" asked Indiana immediately upon seeing the old man. "That was Ramos, wasn't it?"

The Aymará looked at him sternly, making Indiana regret asking such a superfluous question. But it quickly dissolved to a deep resignation, like a disembodied pain. Without answering he turned his back to them and motioned them all to follow him with a quick hand movement.

It had become bright, but the day hadn't fully pushed the nighttime sky away. There was a persistent gray fog clouding the north, minimizing visibility to a meager twenty or thirty paces. But Indiana saw much more than he wanted to see within those twenty or thirty steps. Scattered between the rocks and vegetation were the dead and wounded bodies of many of the guardians. Flames still licked at the air here and there, and the smell of gasoline, hot stone, burnt vegetation, and charred meat lingered in the air. Sometimes a faint groan penetrated the fog. The Aymará had paid a heavy price for trying to stop Ramos's

mercenary army. And Indiana didn't have to ask the old man if the Aymará had succeeded.

Reuben, too, had become pale. Although Reuben's career had made him witness to many terrible things, nothing could quite prepare a person for the sight before them. Expressions of helplessness and anger were written across his face.

"I hope you're happy now, old man!" Reuben spat in a trembling voice. He furiously pointed at the dead around them. "This is all your fault! You didn't want to believe me, did you? I told you what would happen if you tried to stop Ramos alone, by force!"

"That's enough, Reuben," Indiana said wearily. "Please." Reuben glared at him, and for a moment Indiana thought the man might turn his wrath against him. But then the rage shrank from his face as quickly as it had appeared. Indiana realized that he probably had not truly been angry. His emotions had spiked and this was just his way of coping with the horror.

"Madness," he muttered, more to himself and Indiana. "Bows and arrows against flamethrowers and machine guns."

"Where are they now?" asked Indiana, referring to the mercenaries.

The Aymará made a slight gesture, pointing in the fog. "There. On the way to the summit. My men are following."

"But don't worry," he added quickly, sensing Indiana was about to protest. "They will no longer attack you."

"This should not have happened," Reuben said softly. "We would have helped you, you old fool. Together we could have stopped them."

The chief shook his head sadly. "To shed more blood? No. What has happened was meant to happen. It is the will of the gods, not the plans of people that will stop them. The murderers will not escape their punishment."

Indiana's gaze drifted in the direction the old man had indicated. But there was nothing but grey and an impenetrable fog. A gentle, stony-covered downward slope ran in the opposite direction, sparsely covered in vegetation. When the guardians had first brought them here, Indiana and the others were far too exhausted to take in their surroundings. Now he understood and

respected them. The cave entrance rested in the heart of the mountain, camouflaged by the rocks and vegetation, and clouded in a perpetual fog that Indiana surmised never lifted. The same everlasting fog that covered the summit. Indiana simply knew that the fog seldom, if ever lifted, and had probably been around since the mountain existed.

This was also part of that lingering, dream-like surreal-ness he had felt since awakening. It defied nature as he knew it. Nothing like this had ever been recorded. And he accepted it. With a mixture of fear and resignation, he turned to the Aymará chief. "What about us? What is going to happen to us now?" he asked.

"I have discussed this at length with my brethren," the Aymará chief explained. "We believe we can trust you. Your hearts are different from those others that have come, seeking only gold and power. You can leave. My warriors will lead you to the river. From there you can make your way back alone. It is not easy, but you can make it."

"And Henley?" asked Reuben.

"Your comrade can stay until he has healed enough to follow," answered the old man. "He will not be harmed and will be taken care of until that time."

"You will let us go. Just like that?" asked Indiana dubiously. The Aymará chief nodded. "As I said, you are not like the others who came before you," he repeated. "I trust you."

Indiana sensed the old man was not giving them the whole truth. When he looked into the eyes of the old chief, he knew they would be let go. There was no reason to kill them now. If the Aymará had wanted them dead he could have left them in the forest days ago. Or they would have never been rescued from the boat back at the river. But Indiana sensed that letting them go would not come without cost.

But before he could ask another question, something sinister happened.

It was suddenly impossible for Indiana to take his gaze from the old man's eyes. Those brown orbs seemed to pierce directly into his soul, and touched something inside. Any doubts he had of what the old man had said suddenly disappeared, and every

reason for Indiana's journey to this very moment fell away – from Corda, to Ramos, to Marian – it all drifted and became unimportant. It was still there, but it was suddenly as if it played no role at all, as if it had all been a realistic dream with no influence in the reason for them being there.

It seemed as if the Aymará chief stared and looked at him for a long, infinitely long, time before the chief turned and leveled his eerie gaze at Reuben. Indiana could see Reuben's experience with the old man's sinister gaze was similar to what he had felt. For a moment horrors were reflected on Reuben's face, then they passed quickly and were replaced by a deep serenity that could not be shaken.

One after the other, the Aymará went from man to man. Each man registered a similar eerie, but not frightening, incident. At a deeper level of his consciousness, Indiana understood very well that the uncanny power of this man was not limited to reading his thoughts, but also to influence them. It was a power he despised – the ability to control others free will, and he felt he should be angry about it. But it was a vain effort. There was no malice in the old man's intentions.

They were separated into small groups, and each group was visited by two of the Aymará guardians and the old chief, one at a time. No one spoke, resisted, or questioned the old man's instructions for them. Even Reuben nodded and when it was time followed the two Aymará companions wordlessly as they led them down the mountainside.

To Indiana's dismay, the fog did not dissipate as they marched. Instead it seemed to grow thicker, denser. It was a good hour that they had marched through the damp grey before the sun peeked through the dense canopy. And surprisingly every single step taken during this hour seemed to bring them more and more into their surreal, dream-like state. The real world and its events were being pushed further and further back into their subconscious. This thought filled Indiana with anger.

No, not anger. But rather a mixture of bitterness and grief. He found it unfair that the last couple of dream-like days were filled with fuzzy memories. It was like a part of his life was being erased. Or more like the pages of a book that had secrets scribbled

on them that were torn away and burned. Pieces occasionally slipped back to him, but they were incomplete.

Indiana found the sound of their steps were monotonous, like that of a machine set to stamp away at specific intervals. He moved between the others as they continued deeper into the jungle, leaving behind them the sky-billowing flanks that hid one of the last great mysteries of this world.

They arrived into a narrow clearing in the forest, when a sudden gust the fog above them churned and floated away. For a moment Indiana turned and looked back the way they had come. He glimpsed the summit of a mountain behind them. Even though it was still mostly hidden by the grey veil and would probably remain so forever, Indiana realized he was much higher than he had anticipated. He was looking at the rocky shape of a blunt cone with steep walls, probably the crater of an extinct volcano.

And halfway up the rocky wall, a chain of tiny human shapes was moving.

Indiana stopped and stared at the tiny procession, lined up like ants, until the gap in the fog closed again and obscured the view. He continued to stare into the mist for the next several seconds, trying to force another glimpse.

Marcus had also stopped, and after a few moments Reuben, who had continued, doubled back to him and stared in the direction of Indiana's Gaze. "What is it?" he asked. "His voice sounded thin and flat, as if he weren't really interested in his question anyway."

"Ramos," said Indiana. He pointed. "I think Ramos and his men are back there."

Mentioning Ramos's name seemed to awaken something in Reuben for a moment, but then it subsided quickly. The flickering had extinguished before it could light the flame, and disinterest once again took over Reuben's gaze.

"Come, Dr. Jones," said the Aymará chief, who had also stopped. "The path that lies before us is still far."

"But Indiana did not respond immediately. Instead he looked deeper into the nothingness in the fog where he had seen the progression of men. "That was Ramos and his mercenaries."

A shadow flitted over the chief's face. "I know."

"And you just going to let them continue? To El Dorado?"

"We could not stop them," replied the Aymará.

"You have seen it yourself. We were no match for them. Perhaps we could have stopped them, but it would have cost the lives of so many more of my brothers. The price would have been too high. They came because they were looking for gold. They will find gold. But the path to the Valley of the Gods leads only to one destination.

"I understand," murmured Indiana, realizing what the old man was saying. "You let them in. But not out again."

He read the affirmation in the old man's eyes. He said nothing more, and a feeling of grief overcame him. In spite of it all, Ramos and his men were still people. Yes, criminals and murderers. But still people. The thought of allowing a dozen men go to their deaths without intervening weighed heavily on him, no matter what they had done.

And suddenly he realized that it was not only Ramos and his men climbing the summit to their deaths.

Marian.

Marian was also with them.

The thought battered his conscience. Indiana was not able to say what hurt worse: the fear that she was following Ramos to her death at the mountaintop, or the pain of betrayal she had committed. They both stung him with pain, deep in his heart.

An expression of deep, honest compassion appeared in the old Aymará's eyes. "You are mistaken, Dr. Jones," the chief said. "She has not betrayed you. She is the only one who goes there that is not seeking gold. She had to do what she did, but she did not betray you. Not for a second."

Indiana stared at the old man, and suddenly the veil that had lain over his mind for the last several days was gone in an instant. It was like lightning, almost a physical awakening. For the first time he felt like he was again the master of his own thoughts and willpower.

"I must stop them! I must bring them back!" He said resolutely.

The Aymará shook his head. "No I cannot allow it," he said.

“Then you must kill me,” retorted Indiana defiantly. He made a head movement toward the summit of the volcanic crater. “There is certain death waiting up there. I am not going to watch her to run blindly into it.”

“It’s too late,” the old man said. “Their lead is too great. Even if I were to allow you pursuit, you would never catch them before they reach the summit.”

“But I’ve got to try!” protested Indiana.

The old man looked at him sadly. “I will let you go, Dr. Jones. Neither I nor any of my warriors will try to stop you. But you also will find death at the summit. The curse of El Dorado does not choose who is good or evil. No one has ever returned.”

“Nonsense!” contradicted Indiana fiercely. “Corda found his way back at least once. And one of the conquistadors must have survived hundreds of years ago. If not the Spanish would have never known of the legend of El Dorado.”

The old man did not answer. But he also made no attempt to stop Indiana, when, after a few minutes he defiantly positioned his fedora squarely on his brow and turned around with a jerk, then marched off to return in the direction from which they had come.

As Indiana trekked higher up the terrain, he patted himself to make sure he had all of his belongings: his trusty whip and revolver were at his side, along with the old gas mask pouch he used to hold small items. He pulled the worn leather jacket tightly, then continued. The fog never parted, so dense he could only see two or three steps at a time. Without a compass and visibility of his surroundings, it was difficult to navigate. He kept to the slope of the mountain, using it as a guide he was still heading upwards.

Indiana had no idea how long it would take him to reach the rim of the crater. The absence of sunlight made it impossible to tell what time of day it was – but he estimated it must have been mid-afternoon or evening. He probably had two to three hours of daylight left. He prayed it would be enough.

He found Ramos’s track, merely by coincidence, as he passed a tangle of rocks and roots, and abruptly gaping crevices and ravines. There was very little deviation from the winding path

steeply leading up the flank of the volcano. It seemed to be the only way up the edge of the crater at all. Although it was partly a natural path, Indiana noted some of it had been cleared and widened by man: many large rocks had been split or moved from the path to traverse more easily, and several times he had stumbled upon rough man-made steps in the steep climb. He guessed the ancestors of the Aymará had created the path to transport the gold from above; the gold that almost ruined their people.

And he could not forget that other people had gone along here before him. Ramos's men most recently. They were not very vigilante and were poor caretakers: Indiana had noticed cigarette butts, rags, empty supply canisters, and broken pieces of equipment scattered along the way. As far as they were concerned there were no repercussions to their actions: after all they presumed Indiana was dead, and had an obvious superiority complex regarding the Indians, who were no match with their spears and arrows to the military arsenal they carried. An arsenal they had demonstrated with the carnage in the village along the river and the encampment just below.

Just before he reached the rim of the crater, Indiana dropped down on a large stone to rest. As he recovered his strength and air, he saw something: a shadow approaching from behind.

He wasn't sure if the movement had actually occurred or if it was just a trick of the imagination in the swirling fog. Had he actually seen something moving? Regardless, his heart skipped a beat, and he dropped to a crouch and froze, holding his breath so as not to give away his presence. His gaze was drilling into the grey wall of unshaped mist in front of him. It was like trying to see through a grey wool blanket. He looked and listened attentively, but his eyes only perceived drifting, damp swaths of fog, and the only sound he heard was the hammering of his own heart.

He was almost certain he had not imagined the movement behind him. There was something there, and he was fairly sure it was not Ramos's men who might have been left behind to cover the back of the primary group.

Perhaps, he thought, the Aymará chief was as sure of the curse

of El Dorado as he wanted them all to believe. Perhaps he had sent someone to make sure that Indiana never made it to the top. After another moment of trying to discern any more movement, he shrugged then progressed onward along the path anyway, moving as quickly as he could.

He glimpsed the shadow at least two more times before cresting the summit. Once he had heard the clatter of a stone breaking loose under someone's – or something's – foot and pattering down the trail. Then he heard a dull sound, which he could not properly identify but which almost clearly came from a human throat.

But at last the ground beneath his feet had ceased to angle upwards. The fog seemed even more dense if that were possible. The ground beneath had turned to black sharp-edged stones, large chunks of lava and scree, which Indiana could tell was layered pretty deeply beneath.

Again he stopped to gather his bearings. He was on a blackened plain. His heart began to hammer, and his hands became moist with excitement as realization set in. El Dorado. He knew it was close. Whatever had been concealed from the modern world was about to be opened up to him. In a few moments he was certain he would see it. A jitteriness overcame him, an agitation he felt when he was close to a great discovery. It was that adrenaline that had made him what he was: that insatiable thirst for knowledge, the obsession of a real researcher. It had little to do with purely scientific curiosity, but it was rooted deeper in his soul. He had never truly understood it in his deeper consciousness. He craved the unknown, and the courage and daring of discovery. All of this had made him the man he was. When he stumbled upon something that peeked his interest, his curiosity, there was usually a point where it overtook him and he could not let it go even if he wanted. He had crossed this point long ago: not only was he here to save Marian, he simply had to know what was hiding behind this wall of lava and fog.

As he continued, Indiana suddenly heard a sound behind him again. This time he was certain it was someone following him. He turned and crept into the fog at a faint outline of a man he could see shimmering behind the veil.

A distorted shadow moved through the fog towards him. The shadow was huge and almost silent. He imagined a monstrous thing, crossing the boundaries of worlds, stepping from the land of gods to the land of men, through that shimmering, supernatural mist. Perhaps the old chief had deceived him. Maybe he was being punished for not taking the old man's warning seriously. Maybe the old man had sent a guardian to finish him off since he had ignored the chief and his stories of gods and curses. If it was one of the malformed guardians, he would soon find out if they were as strong as they looked!

The shadow approached quickly, arms reaching forward with grotesque, twitchy movements. Indiana dodged half a step, then twisted – and threw himself at the shambling figure with his arms spread out.

The figure registered his attack and tried to react to it, but the reaction came too late. It clumsily tried to dodge to the side and grab Indiana at the same time. It missed, and dropped to a crouch under a misshapen branch of one of the sparsely scattered bushes along the path. Indiana leapt again, and the sheer force of his impact tore the unknown being right off his feet.

A tormented scream parted the lips of the shadow as they tumbled in a heap to the ground, rolling across the sharp-edged lava rocks and debris. Indiana realized the creature was much frailer than he had anticipated, the fog must have exaggerated its size and ferocity. Indiana found himself on top of the being, braced himself with his left hand on the ground and raised his right high into the air to form a fist.

“Indiana! For God's sake—no!”

Indiana's raised fist froze in motion as he suddenly recognized Marcus Brody's pale, frightened face. Marcus's eyes seemed swollen with fatigue, and his face was as white as that of a dead man.

“Marcus?” murmured Indiana in confusion. “What in the world are you doing here?”

“I'll tell you that...when you get off me,” gasped Marcus. Indiana had nailed him to the ground with all his force, knocking all of the air out of his lungs and making it difficult to breathe, let alone talk.

Indiana jumped hastily to his feet, taking another look at his friend who lay disheveled on the ground gasping for air. Then he hastened to stretch his arms out and help him back to his feet. Marcus took his help, but as soon as he was back on his feet he let go and managed a quick step away out of arm's reach. With clenched teeth and face distorted in pain, Marcus quickly scanned over his body as if to convince himself that everything was still in the right spot and undamaged. His reproachful look shot to Indiana more than once during this process.

"What are you doing here?" repeated Indiana. "Why were you following me?"

"It wasn't to let you beat me up," answered Marcus. The accusation in his gaze deepened. "You sometimes treat your friends in a very strange way, Indiana."

Indiana wiped the words aside with an annoying hand movement. "Are you mad?" he asked. "Didn't you hear what the old chief said? They will not allow us to leave once we get there."

Brody grimaced. "I didn't want to run into the jungle alone with these uncivilized savages," he answered. "Besides, you'll need my help."

"Help?!" groaned Indiana. He made a helpless gesture with his arms. "Damn, I don't even know what's waiting down there. Leave, Marcus. Get as far away from here as you can. Maybe they will let you go."

"And you think I am going to let you walk right to your death with your eyes wide open?" returned Marcus. He shook his head fiercely. "I can't do that, my friend." Suddenly he grinned and tried to lighten the mood. "Besides, you think I'd let you get all the glory for finding El Dorado?"

"That's not funny," said Indiana earnestly. "I don't know if you've noticed, Marcus—but we are not alone. Some of those Indians are behind us somewhere—"

"I have counted three," said Marcus casually. "But there's probably more. Ramos and his cronies are in for a nasty surprise when they try to leave."

"Not just Ramos," said Indiana. "I'm begging you, Marcus!" Marcus Brody looked at Indiana, smiled, then shook his head

again. “It won’t work. We are in this together now,” he said. “I’ll accompany you. You know, Indiana – I’ve had a lot of time to think while we were with the guardians. I am sure I can be of help to you.”

“You know why I’m here, then?”

Marcus nodded. “It is for Marian Corda,” he answered. He sighed. “You could have saved yourself – and me – a lot of trouble if you’d just have listened to me. I noticed in New York she was working with Ramos.”

“And what do you suggest? Put my hands behind my back and just wait as they die, without regret or remorse?”

“Do you love her, Indiana?” asked Marcus suddenly.

Indiana did not answer immediately. “I really don’t know,” he finally answered. “In any case, I care for her enough that I don’t want anything bad to happen to her. And I think I can help her.”

“Then we shouldn’t be wasting time here. We should be catching up to them,” said Marcus. “And besides, I have a feeling no good will come of us staying in this place for much longer. So come on,” he added with much more seriousness.

Indiana knew it was futile to try and convince Marcus to turn back. Marcus spun around and quickly disappeared into the shroud of the fog, and Indiana had to hurriedly follow.



CHAPTER 10

El Dorado

Gold.

Among them lay a world of gold. El Dorado existed. It was not a legend. It existed, and it lay among them, close at hand. For the second time that day, Indiana had the feeling he was trapped in a crazy, surreal dream world. But this time it was not because some strange old man was influencing his thoughts. It was the image which stretched before him; a sight that was at the same time bizarrely frightening and fascinating; a sight that the logical part of Indiana's brain was simply refusing to accept.

They had walked for a good half an hour next to each other through the eerie fog, which had become so dense that he could not register Marcus's face despite the fact that he was less than a step away from him. And what they found at the end of that fog-laden path had been enough to cause Indiana to doubt his own mind. He should have been prepared. And yet when he and Marcus caught sight of the basin it was as if they had been struck by a heavy blow.

The valley itself was nothing other than the crater of an extinct volcano with a diameter of perhaps three or four miles. All of it consisted completely out of gold. And it was not just a collection of rocks and chunks of gold; there was a mighty rampant jungle,

a tiny but perfectly reconstructed section of the world that had been lost thousands or even millions of years ago, meticulous to the last detail formed from the yellow precious metal. There were bushes and shrubs, rocks and trees, grasses and ferns, all worked with sheer incredible precision. Even the ground on which they stood was made of gold.

While they had been stumbling through the fog, they had stopped a couple of times and fumbled around for one object or another, a sign that they were still in this world and hadn't crossed over into some fog-filled afterlife. Indiana had picked up a plant, a tiny animal, or just a stone that wasn't a stone. Every single golden object he or Marcus had gathered was meticulously represented in the same, inconceivably accurate way as the two pieces from Stanley Corda's possessions in New York.

No – he should not have been surprised by what they saw now. But he was, and it did not matter because what lay before them was impossible. No people of this world, no matter how sophisticated their culture was or the technology they possessed, could accomplish something like this. He suddenly thought of what the Aymará chieftain had told them, and now the old man's assertion that the gods themselves created this part of the world did not seem so far-fetched. Suddenly he was just scared of those implications. They had found El Dorado. And even though this was one of the greatest discoveries of mankind, he felt no triumph, no joy, no satisfaction. What he saw filled him with panic and fear. They should not be here. No man of this world should be here. No matter who created this fantastic landscape of gold, and no matter why they created it – there were no people here. And if he believed the stories of the Aymará chief, no man could live here.

Five, perhaps even ten minutes, he and Marcus simply stood motionless and stared at the image of a long-gone world, shimmering in all imaginable shades of gold. Finally, Indiana overcame his awe-induced paralysis and made a hesitant move. A warm breeze struck him, and he stopped again and raised his head. The sky itself was hardly less sinister than that of the volcanic crater. The fog remained behind them, and above, but was no thinner than it had been before. It simply hung in the sky

extending almost to the bottom of the valley. That, too, was impossible, Indiana knew as well. But apparently they had entered a part of the world in which the laws of physics and logic had been overridden. At this point it would have been no surprise to Indiana to find they had to cross a river that was pouting uphill.

“Fifty to sixty million,” said Marcus suddenly. His voice was thin and trembling, he breathed fiercely and hard, as if they had taken the last mile in full stride. At first Indiana did not understand what he meant. Questioningly he looked at him.

“That down there is at least fifty or sixty million years old,” Marcus continued with an explanatory gesture to the golden jungle. “Some of these plants have been extinct for that long. Do you remember the dinosaur?”

Of course Indiana remembered. A few miles back down the trail, the life-sized replica of the carnivorous giant lizard had so abruptly emerged from the fog in front of them that Indiana had almost cried out in terror. Paleontology was not necessarily his specialty - but he knew Marcus was quite right in his estimation - plus or minus a few million years. But what did it matter? Nevertheless he shook his head.

“Impossible,” he said, the uncertainty in his voice betraying his own confidence in the statement. “There were no people fifty million years ago.”

“What makes you think it was human beings who made this?” returned Marcus quietly.

Indiana looked at him, the panic in his eyes betraying his thoughts, but he rejected further discussion on the matter and turned around again to move on. He had to reinforce why they were here. And the closer they approached the bizarre prehistoric jungle, the warmer it became. The ground was cracked and uneven under his feet, and Indiana had received two painful cuts on his hands before the realization sunk in that these were not ordinary plants to be used to assist their decent. They only looked like plants, grasses, and ferns. Some of them had razor sharp edges that sliced like a knife.

Every step they took led them deeper into a fantastic world that had been devoured by time. Although everything in his scientific thoughts balked at the evidence, Indiana understood

very well how correct Marcus had been with his assertion. They came across plants and animals that no human eye had ever seen, and creatures no one even knew had existed. Once Marcus stumbled into a spider's web, which stretched in diameter 20 to 30 feet, whose threads cut into his skin like razor-sharp wire. Another time Indiana almost impaled himself on a branch that hung out in his way which he tried to bat away. He had to remind himself that none of this was alive.

They had penetrated a good hundred yards into the golden jungle when they found the dead.

The figure crouched on his knees on the trunk of an almost man-thick fern tree. At first it had startled Indiana, and he bounced back in fear when he recognized it was one of Ramos's men who had remained behind, probably to keep guard. But he quickly realized that the figure was not moving. Not breathing, in fact. It stared past Indiana and Marcus with its wide, extinct eyes into the void, its rifle haphazardly pointed at the ground. His face and the skin on his arms exposed out of the clothing showed terrible burns, and the skull under the partially fallen hat was almost bare with only a patch or two left of hair.

"My God..." whispered Indiana, horrified. "What...happened here?"

Marcus did not attempt an answer, but did something that completely surprised Indiana – while he himself had stopped a safe distance from the dead man in horror, Marcus went over to the corpse and dropped to his knees in front of the man, examining him more closely. He looked attentively at the dead man's devastated face, and finally even brushed his fingertips across its skull, cheek bones and neck.

"This is not one of Ramos's men," he said with finality after returning to Indiana's side. "I was with him and his cronies long enough. My guess is he was with Stanley. I'd say he's been dead for two or three days at least."

Indiana finally overcame his reluctance and approached the corpse. At this distance the sight was even more unpleasant, but he forced himself to look over the body just as closely as Marcus had done before. What he had at first guessed were terrible burns were now revealed to be...something else. It was like a burn, but

in a way Indiana had never seen before in his life. Nevertheless he suddenly had the feeling he knew what had happened here. The explanation was already somewhere present in his memory, but it still was not ready to reveal itself. He was still confused and uncertain, and couldn't piece together his thoughts clearly.

With a jerk he spun around and faced Marcus, looking at him in earnest. "Would you mind not playing the mysterious one any longer and tell me what the devil's name is going on here?"

"Honestly, I don't know," he answered. But a grim expression crossed his face, as if he were unsure of that assertion himself. "But perhaps I have a theory. You know I was stuck with the Aymar  longer than you and your friends. And I've been thinking about what the chief told me for a while. It's just a theory...but if I'm right, then we should leave this place as fast as we can. And you'd better not touch anything else here." In the same instance, Marcus bent down and did exactly what he had just told Indiana NOT to do: he broke off one of the golden twigs of a bush and snapped it in two pieces before Indiana's eyes without any apparent effort, staring at it intently the entire time. For a few seconds he stared with a gloomy face at the pieces of vegetation in his hands, then looked back at Indiana. "That fits my theory." Indiana looked curiously at the branch in Marcus's hands. It was not entirely made of gold. It was only covered in a thin layer of the yellow metal. Inside was a fibrous powdery material. It struck Indiana – fifty or sixty million years ago this may have actually been wood from a real bush.

"I think I know what happened here," Marcus continued. "A meteor."

"A-what?" Indiana asked incredulously.

Marcus nodded and dropped the pieces of gold-covered wood to the ground, then vigorously wiped his hands on his pants with hectic movements. "A meteor struck this place fifty or sixty million years ago," he explained. "It must have been large, and made of gold or something similar. It evaporated very close to the ground and covered this entire area in liquid from the immense heat of entering the earth's atmosphere. And it left behind this petrified jungle, preserved for millions of years."

"That...that's...ridiculous," murmured Indiana insecurely. "I

could give you a dozen reasons why that is impossible.”

“Rather two dozen,” remarked Marcus calmly. “And yet here we are. It is the only explanation that makes sense.” He was suddenly very excited. “All these plants and animals have been extinct for fifty million years or more, Indy. And you said it yourself, this would have been impossible for man to create.”

Indiana was visibly upset. The scientist in him protested every hysterical sentence of Marcus’s hair-raising theory. But he had learned more than once in the course of his life that not everything has an easy explanation. There was a scientific basis for Marcus’s theory – much more scientific than the ‘valley created by the gods’ story spouted by the old Aymar chief. Besides, whatever had created it, it was here in front of him – he could see and touch this gold. They stood in the midst of a primeval world that existed forty-nine million years before the birth of mankind.

Still shaken and unsure by Marcus’s far-fetched theory, he pointed at the dead man. “And what about this guy? What killed him?”

“The same thing that will kill us if we stay here too long,” answered Marcus earnestly. “The Curse of El Dorado. Remember what the old man told you. Everyone who touches this gold becomes sick and dies. Think of the things Corda brought back to New York. And what happened to those men he sold them to. Maybe it’s not gold. Maybe it’s just something that looks like gold, but is deadly.” He paused for a second. “And if it came from space – who knows. It might be radioactively contaminated.”

“Radio...” Indiana faltered in the middle of the word. An icy shiver ran down his spine, and suddenly it all became clear. The Curse of El Dorado. Stanley Corda’s mysterious disease. The hysteria from the top at the FBI that erupted when they examined Corda’s first souvenirs and found that they were highly irradiated. Indiana almost laughed when he realized how much Reuben and his superiors had been wrong. And how much more horrific the truth actually was.

With a mixture of fear and confusion, he looked down at the dead mercenary. He agreed with Marcus’s estimation that the

man had been dead about two days. But Corda himself only had a two day head start on them; maybe three with the unknown amount of time that passed while held by the Aymará guardians and Ramos's captivity. An extra day or two in this environment had caused this man to die in such a horrible fashion. Indiana tried to quickly estimate how long he and Marcus could safely stay in this valley. Certainly not more than another hour. Maybe even that was too long.

"We must find Marian," he said suddenly. "Fast...before it really is too late!"

Marcus wanted to disagree, but Indiana didn't give him the chance. Indiana turned and stormed onward. His over-excited imagination conjured visions of radioactive death and decay, a silent and invisible menace that permeated the very air everywhere in this valley. Had it become noticeably warmer? Or was his body already being affected by the radiation, burning and gnawing its way deep inside himself, the first sign of the deadly fire that would devour his body from the inside out?

He chased away the thought. If that were actually the case, it was already too late anyway.

They traveled another half-mile into the eerie jungle valley, their footsteps and breathing echoing, as if they were running through a metal corridor. Then they heard the first voices. Indiana stopped, hastily raising his hand just as Marcus was about to ask a question. Both fell silent and listened attentively. It was hard to tell in this bizarre environment which direction the sound was coming from. But after a few seconds he saw a shadow flicker and block the golden shimmer ahead of them. They crouched behind the golden cover of the bushes and crept onward.

The jungle continued a few dozen paces farther, then ceased. They found themselves at the edge of a circular clearance two or three hundred yards across, and in its midst a stone of pure gold rose into the air, easily the size of a small house. A scarce dozen figures moved in the clearing; most in the immediate vicinity of the giant pile of golden nuggets. Some were running haphazardly around, screaming and moaning. Others were moving in a very odd manner, almost shambling. One crouched down next to a large lump of gold on the ground, then doubled over as if he were

ill.

“I think you’re right,” Indiana whispered. “This may be your meteor!”

Marcus nodded. Although what lay before them was exactly what he had theorized to Indiana just a short time before, he stared in awe at the huge chunk of gold, stunned. “Unimaginable,” he whispered. “That...thing must weigh a hundred tons. It would be worth billions, Indy. Billions!”

Indiana’s thoughts immediately went back to the burnt face of the dead man on the trail behind them, and the generations of crippled Aymar who guarded this golden valley since the beginning of man. But he did not get a chance to be the voice of reason. The sound of shattered glass erupted behind them, and when he and Marcus spun around they found themselves looking into the barrels of two machine guns pointed at them, directly at their faces.

The weapons were in the hands of two mercenaries. Between the two was a third, smaller half-crippled figure.

“You are mistaken, Mr. Brody,” said Ramos. “It might be worth a trillion. There is probably more gold right in this valley than the rest of the world combined.” He smiled lightly. “But do not worry – I won’t take so much of it that the price of gold falls through the floor. After all, I don’t want to be the man who ruins the gold business.”

“You won’t take anything from it, you fool,” said Indiana quietly. “Have you still not grasped the fact that this gold brings death?”

Ramos laughed and stepped back, giving his men a wink. The two men abruptly grabbed Indiana and Marcus, yanking them up to their feet gruffly and dragged them over to Ramos. Indiana had not resisted. Marcus, on the other hand, tried to fight back which resulted in a cruel jab to the ribs with the butt of the gun. The blow doubled Marcus over in pain.

“I’m actually glad you found your way here, Dr. Jones,” said Ramos. “It was not very wise of you to flee. Although I was at a disadvantage and could not visibly admire your ingenuity, my men told me what you did. It was very brave. But also very stupid. You could have been harmed or killed with that stunt.”

"We'll all be killed," said Indiana, "and quite horribly, Ramos, if we don't get out of here immediately. This gold is contaminated. It kills anyone who touches it."

"Well, I still live," returned Ramos almost cheerfully. "And my men, too. And we have touched it."

"You damn fool!" said Indiana upset. "I know you are blind, but I didn't think you were stupid, Ramos. Have you forgotten what happened to people who bought Corda's gold?" He pointed angrily into the forest. "There's a dead man right up there who also believed the curse of El Dorado was only a legend. It's a pity you can't see him. But you should ask your men what happened to him. And if that's not enough for you, then go to the Aymará Indians and let them tell you what fate holds in store for you and your men."

"The curse of El Dorado?" repeated Ramos. He laughed, but suddenly sounded bitter. It was almost an outburst. "You're mistaken, Dr. Jones. I know it exists. And if I know, who else knew?"

"What are you talking about?" Indiana asked, confused. Suddenly Ramos became angry. With a violent gesture, he motioned to his own face and came with a hair of Indiana's face. "Look at me!" he demanded, agitated. "I'm a cripple. Oh, I know what people say about me behind my back. Even though I don't see them, I know what they are thinking. Have you never wondered why I am this way?"

"No."

"Is that so?" returned Ramos with a renewed, bitter laugh. "I will tell you, Dr. Jones. I know this gold is cursed, and I know what it has done to the Aymará, for it has done the same to me and my ancestors. And that's why it belongs to me. It was my ancestor who first found the way to El Dorado, the first conquistador who found this valley, and he returned alive. But ever since, the curse of El Dorado has been on my family. I am not the first cripple in my family's lineage. My father and his father both knew about El Dorado and what it really was."

"If that's true then you are even crazier than I believed," answered Indiana. "You knew, and you came here anyway."

"It belongs to me!" answered Ramos shrilly. "Ten generations

of my family have paid the price for this gold. The knowledge that El Dorado is more than a legend has been passed on from father to son in my family, and I am the one who inherits it. You call me crazy? Because I demand the reward owed to my family for four hundred years?"

"It will kill you, you fool!" cried Indiana. "Don't you understand? Do you really think you're immune? It will kill us all here. We may already be dead!"

"Shut up, Jones!" demanded Ramos.

"Why?" inquired Indiana quietly. "Are you afraid that your men might hear? Are you afraid they'll find out that this isn't wealth, it's certain death?" He turned to the man holding the rifle at him. "Has he not told you?"

The man was silent, but the uncertain flicker in his eyes revealed the truth. His comrade also began to jitter nervously, his glare alternating back and forth from Ramos to Indiana.

"Tell them, Ramos," demanded Indiana. "Tell them this gold is worth nothing. Tell them what Corda's men died of? Have they seen them? Tell them all the others who have come here have died."

"Keep your mouth shut!" cried Ramos, but Indiana continued, turning directly to the man next to him.

"This gold will kill you," he continued. "It kills everyone who touches it. You will not live long enough to enjoy your wealth."

"That's not true!" yelled Ramos. "Keep your mouth shut or I'll have you shot on the spot!"

"We are probably already dead anyway," retorted Indiana. "And you know that. You've known that all along, haven't you?" Ramos stared hatefully at him, but said nothing more. With this the two mercenaries became more and more restless, and finally the one guarding Marcus dropped his aim with a jerk and turned to Ramos. "Is this true?" he asked. "Is he telling the truth?"

"It's true," said Indiana in Ramos's place. "He didn't come here for the gold. I think he knew all along it was impossible to remove it. He never intended for it to leave this valley."

"You're lying," claimed the mercenary. His lips trembled, and fear had shadowed his eyes. "That's all rubbish. What...could possibly be dangerous about this gold? It's gold! Gold is not

poisonous.”

“This,” said Indiana with a gesture, pointing at the giant rock. He looked at the man attentively, into his face. Then looked at the man’s hands, then that of his comrades. “You touched it, didn’t you?”

“Touched what?”

“The big chunk,” Indiana motioned with his head in the direction he was pointing. “You touched it. Look at your hands.” The mercenary slowly lifted his arms to get a closer look at his hands – and became chalk white. His skin was reddened, like they had been burnt slightly.

“That’s not possible,” he stammered. “It’s just gold. And...” he stared at Ramos. “He touched it to. We all did! We will all die!”

“No,” said Indiana quietly. “He’s already dead. He just doesn’t care.”

“It belongs to me, “ whispered Ramos. He didn’t seem to understand what Indiana was saying. “it belongs to me. I paid for it. And now I am not giving I back.”

“You...you bastard!” stammered the mercenary. “You have killed us all!” he cried, yanking the rifle up and pointing it directly at Ramos.

Indiana pushed the man from the side, staggering him and throwing the aim off. The shot dissolved into the air next to Ramos and buried itself harmlessly into the ground some distance away.

The second mercenary immediately brought his rifle up to point at Indiana, but before even coming fully to bear he dropped his aim again. The expression on his face was a mixture of horror and disbelief.

“It...it’s mine! It belongs to me,” stammered Ramos, repeating it over and over again. “I have a right to it! I – “ and suddenly he cried out, rushed over the mercenary who had questioned him, and with lightning-like movements yanked the rifle from his hands.

It was all too fast for Indiana to believe, much less react in a way other than throwing his arms around Marcus and diving to the ground. Ramos whirled the gun around, yelling like a

madman, his finger holding the trigger back. A salvo of uncontrolled gunfire spat from the rifle, causing tiny gold geysers to explode from the ground, shattering the shimmering gold plants and terrain all around them. The two mercenaries were astonished as growing dark spots of blood erupted from all over them – and they were dead before they hit the ground.

Indiana rolled and tried to get up on his hands and knees – and froze suddenly when the barrel of Ramos’s gun pointed much closer to him. A terrible grimace had overtaken the face of the blind man. Saliva drooled from the corner of his mouth and down his chin, and a consuming fire burned in his eyes.

“It belongs to me!” he stammered. “No one will take it from me! The gold is mine.”

“Be reasonable, Ramos!” Indiana pleaded. He licked his lips nervously as he shifted his position slightly, and froze again as Ramos’s aim narrowed menacingly closer to his position. The blind man seemed to have heard his movements; or did he have a more sinister method of singling out Indiana’s position? Indiana evaluated the chances he had of jumping forward and wrestling the gun from Ramos’s hands without being cut in two. He didn’t like the conclusion his mind had settled on.

“No one wants to take it from you, Ramos,” Indiana said again. “But this gold will kill you. Don’t you understand that?”

“You lie!” exclaimed Ramos. “And even if you are right, it won’t be the gold that kills you. You will die right here. Right now.”

Indiana leapt forward with all of his strength, just as Ramos’s finger was tightening on the trigger again. And orange-red lance of fire spewed forth, rapidly getting closer to Indiana as he leapt, showering a swath of golden sparks inches behind Indiana’s current trajectory; exactly where he had just been crouching. Indiana suddenly realized he would not be able to get to Ramos fast enough.

But the deadly pain did not come. Unexpectedly the burst from Ramos’s gun cut off as the magazine emptied. And in the next instant Indiana was upon him, tearing the gun from his hands and throwing it off to the die. At the same time he hammered Ramos with all his strength; a mighty blow with his fist across

the blind man's chin.

Ramos didn't even react to the pain. But he also did not try to fight back. He could not. He was dead. His eyes were wide open and rigid, and between his brows a tiny bloody hole had appeared.

Indiana was completely shocked. What had just happened? He spun around, completely confused, and was stunned at what he saw.

"What?"

Marian stepped out of the golden jungle and stopped. She trembled. Her face was sweaty and pale, and her hands clenched the rifle she held so tightly that the skin stretched over her knuckles were white. Her gaze was empty with shock as well.

"It's you!" whispered Indiana once more. He stepped forward and stretched out his hand in Marian's direction – and froze again when she suddenly snapped out of her shock and snapped the weapon up toward him.

"Stand still, Indy," she said. "Please stay where you are. Don't come...too close to me."

"What...what are you saying?" murmured Indiana, distraught. He tried to laugh but it misfired. "It's me, Marian – Indiana!"

"Stand still," said Marian once more. "Don't come near me, Indiana!" The barrel of her rifle straightened at his face, and her finger touched the trigger again.

Indiana obeyed, but more out of confusion than fear. He did not understand what was happening. "Marian," he murmured.

"What...what are you doing?"

Marian's lips began to tremble. The rifle swayed in her hand for a second, lowered, then straightened up again at Indiana. Then it finally fell away.

"Come with me," she said quietly.

Guided by Marian, Indiana, Marcus, and Marian circled the clearing, keeping the deadly golden meteor – or whatever it was – respectfully at some distance away.

They passed even more of the dead – two, three, and finally five of Stanley's companions, who appeared to have died in the same horrific manner as the man they found on the trail some

distance back. These five were only a few steps away from the edge of the golden crater, as if they had crawled their with the last of their strength. Perhaps they had finally realized it was the huge chunk of gold at the center of the clearing that had brought them death, and had tried to flee as far away as possible. Finally they found a man who was still alive. But he was unconscious and was feverish, suffering from the same burns all over his exposed body as everyone else. Indiana knew that any attempt to help him would be pointless. They positioned him carefully on a level place in the golden edge of the crater, trying to make him as comfortable as possible. And Marcus shared a little water from his field bottle. Then they continued on.

And finally they found Stanley Corda.

It was Marcus who discovered him – in a small naturally-formed alcove of golden bushes on the edge of the clearing, exactly on the opposite side of the large golden lump in the center that had drawn Ramos and his men to their deaths. Upon seeing him, Marcus touched Indiana on the arm and pointed to the small clearing with the other hand. At first Indiana wasn't sure what Marcus was pointing at, but when he finally saw the disheveled man lying on the side of the gold-encrusted grass, Indiana rushed over to him without a word.

It was incredible – Corda was still alive. His eyes were open, and his chest lifted and lowered in fast, irregular strokes. He, too, was overtaken by the forces of death that were ready to claim him. His face was bloated and red, festering wounds covered his lips, and his hands were burned so terrible Indiana had trouble looking at them.

For several seconds, Indiana stood a short distance away, torn with horror and fear, motionless. He finally resolved himself and stepped next to the man and dropped down alongside him. “Stan?”

Corda groaned. He tried to move, but obviously did not have the power to, so Indiana changed his position so Corda could see him without having to lift his head.

“Can you understand me?” Indiana asked.

Corda's lips moved. He wanted to speak, but only an unarticulated groan escaped his mouth.

“Don’t say anything,” said Indiana. “I know.” He faltered. Why was it so difficult to find the right words when speaking to someone on the verge of death? “It...it will be all right,” he continued. “We’ll get Marian out of here. I promise you.” Corda winced, using all of his power to speak. “Flee...Indiana. You must leave...quickly...it is...contaminated!”

“I know,” said Indiana, unsure if Corda understood what he was saying.

Corda’s body shivered as he reared up. “Don’t touch anything...” he groaned. “Especially the big piece...” With an almost unbelievable effort he raised his hand and pointed to an object in the grass next to him that Indiana had not noticed. Indiana examined the object, and after a few seconds realized what it was: a Geiger counter. The model resembled the one Reuben had brought aboard the ship, but was considerably smaller and more compact.

“Switch...it on,” groaned Corda.

Indiana obeyed. On the front of the small box, a pointer began to bounce over a scale, and a penetrating chatter filled the air.

“You...” groaned Corda. “And Mar...cus.”

Indiana directed the device, first at him then at Marcus Brody. The needle struck out, but not very far.

“Where...is the needle?” whispered Stan.

“Three,” answered Indiana. “A little higher.”

“Then you have...a chance,” groaned Corda. “You must go...quickly. Two...hours...”

“He’s right, Indy,” said Marcus nervously. “Let’s get out of here. We’ve been here far too long already.”

Indiana nodded, but still did not move yet. He raised his head and looked up at Marcus, then over at Marian.

And when he looked into her face, he finally understood everything.

Marian’s eyes were veiled. She looked at him, but her gaze seemed to burn right through him, and her features were overcome with a surging pain, which Indiana would remember for the rest of his life. Tears boiled and ran down her face; she was crying without even realizing it. Her fingers stroked the gun incessantly, fondly caressing the barrel of the rifle in her hands. “I can’t do

it,” she whispered.

Indiana wanted to say something, but his throat had suddenly closed off the words. He realized now what the Aymará chief had meant when he said Marian had not betrayed him, not for a second.

“I cannot do it,” said Marian once more, with a thin broken voice. “I...I came here to kill him, Indy. But I can’t.”

Indiana was still wordless, not able to say anything. Without answering, he stood up, stepped next to Marian, and gently grabbed the rifle and took it from her hands. Her gaze followed the gun, and suddenly she smiled sadly and said for the third time, “I can’t do it Indy. I...I came here to kill him, and now I don’t have the strength to do it. Isn’t that ridiculous?”

Indiana gently played the rifle on the ground, glancing at the dying figure as he did so, then turned back and stretched his hand out to Marian. She shook her head. Indiana continued toward her, simply wanting to pull her to him, but she pushed his arm aside. “Leave me,” she said. “Go, Indiana. Maybe it’s not too late for you. Leave me here with him.”

“He’s not worth it, Marian,” said Indiana gently. “It’s not worth it for you to commit a murder, and certainly not worth it to die with him.” He understood why Marian was here, the feelings and emotions she must be feeling, tearing her up inside. He even understood her rationale to join up with Ramos to fin Stanley. But he had not understood she now insisted on staying.

“Come,” he said once more, this time a little more forceful. “We have to get out of here. This place is killing us.” He pointed to the large chunk of gold in the distance.

Marian’s gaze followed his finger, resting for a moment on the shimmering chunk of yellow metal, then returned to the figure of her dying husband. “I wanted to kill him, Indiana,” she whispered again, as if he hadn’t heard her before. “He stole my life. He beat me and humiliated me and forced me into a life I never wanted. And in the end, he killed me. I was going to kill him. I thought I’d come here and finish it. And now I can’t. And do you know why? Because, in spite of everything I still love him. Isn’t that crazy?”

Something she had just revealed alarmed Indiana. “What do

you mean, he killed you?" asked Indiana urgently.

Marian stared at him for a few seconds, then slowly lifted her hands and gently stroked her hair. When she withdrew her fingers he saw a clump of detached hair in them.

"I...I lied to you, Indy," she said. "I have known all along what he had found. He told me after he came back. And he brought me something. A piece of jewelry." She unbuttoned the top three buttons of her blouse.

"No," Indiana groaned as he saw the skin underneath.

Between her breasts were the outlines of an oak leaf, burnt red and inflamed into her skin. The ornament was no longer there, but it had left its mark: raw, inflamed flesh had emerged.

"My god, Marian!" whispered Indiana "I didn't know that...why didn't you say anything? Maybe...maybe we could have done something..." His voice faltered. A bitter lump sat in his throat, and he felt more helpless than he had ever felt before in his life.

"It was such a beautiful gift," murmured Marian. "I have never seen such a beautiful thing before. And he seemed so changed. He was a completely different person, Indiana. We had reconciled ourselves, really come together for the first time in our relationship. He wasn't just saying things like before. I felt he really meant it. That he was honest about wanting to be a new person. And he said he just had one more journey before we could start our new life." She smiled bitterly. "He promised me we'd live in a house of gold here."

But now it would be their tomb, thought Indiana. He fought back the tears that were forming in his eyes as he looked again at the dreadful mark on Marian's breast. He knew it was deadly. It was probably a miracle she had made it this long. But he pleaded again. "Come with us, Marian. We...will find a doctor. An expert in radiation poisoning. It's not too late yet."

Marian did not hear his words at all. Though tears were still running down her face, she suddenly smiled and turned around, bent over her unconscious husband and touched his shattered face gently with her fingertips, staring deeply into his hollow eyes.

After a moment, Indiana quietly stood, stepped two or three

steps back from Marian and Stanley, then turned silently and headed back toward the edge of the forest without a single word. Marcus, who had been impatiently waiting for the three of them to leave, resolved that they would be one short and quickly followed Indiana. They continued through the crater's golden forest in silence, finally making their way back to the fog-encased trail, plunging into its shadows and leaving it behind them. Finally, the golden terrain faded, slowly replaced by natural rocks and vegetation of the jungle trail. They stopped for a second and glanced back, seeing nothing but the devouring fog that had guarded the mystery of El Dorado for more than fifty million years like a faithful paladin of the gods. They prayed it would do so for another fifty million years. Maybe until the end of the humanity and the world.



Epilogue

Three days later

Indiana and Marcus reached river at the last light of the sun, and were overjoyed at the sight of the rapids, whose monotonous roar had guided them during the last hours. The hull of the capsized boat still towered out of the water like the back of a giant silver fish, and on the shore nearby Indiana saw a number of tiny figures crowded about a blazing fire; seven or eight, most of them wrapped in ragged green-brown camouflaged suits, but two of them in khaki-colored tropical uniforms that now looked oddly inappropriate to Indiana. To his surprise, he also recognized Henley moving among the group. He had obviously recovered from his ailments much quicker than expected; or the Aymar  had brought him here in a different manner than the rest to have gotten this far so quickly.

Indiana was exhausted. He barely remembered leaving the valley, and perhaps for the first time since they had known each other it had been Marcus who had to help him along, not the other way around. Two or three times the thick fog had revealed a shadow moving though it's gray infinity, and once they heard a bloodcurdling scream but saw nothing. They had seen no one else, either on the mountain or later in the jungle, during their journey, but he knew they hadn't been alone. One morning they had awoken and found a bowl of fresh water and fried fish next

to them, and they had always had the uneasy feeling of being watched since they had left the crater.

It had been the worst three days of his life. The pain of Marian's death had brought – to his astonishment – a deep, grieving regret, and caused him to explore his feelings for her which she would now never know or understand.

Stanley's curse had overcome them, and they were exhausted and feverish on the first night. Both of them had been hit with bouts of chills and nausea, and they feared the curse had gotten the best of them; that they might not be able to shake it. The next morning they had both been so drained and exhausted they felt as if they had travelled twenty miles through the jungle even though it could not have been more than a few.

But they soon became better. They had bathed in a small river near the jungle trail, and Indiana now hoped they had not been exposed to the deadly radiation long enough to sustain permanent sickness or health problems, and the bath in the river he hoped had gotten rid of whatever lingering radiation material they might have picked up. All in all, they had spent two hours in the forbidden valley – and they had not touched the huge chunk that had been the source of the radiation, as Ramos and his people had done. He wondered if any of Ramos's men were still alive. He presumed they were probably all dead by now.

Some of the figures at the fire looked up as they heard Indiana and Marcus's footsteps. They were greeted with surprised shouts, and when they had reached the edge of the riverbank Reuben rushed over to greet them. A moment later, Henley followed, limping and grimacing, but apparently almost in full possession of his strength again. The healing magic of the Aymará seemed to have done wonders.

“Jones! Brody!” Reuben called out in joyous surprise as he reached Indiana and Marcus. “Thanks God both of you are alive!” A puzzled expression spread across his face, and Indiana could see how tired and exhausted the FBI agent was. “Where did you come from?” He mumbled. “What...what about Ramos and his men? How did you escape them?” “Ramos is dead,” Marcus answered. “He and all of his men. And I would be too, if it hadn't been for Indiana.”

“And Mrs. Corda?”

Indiana shook his head. “No. We are the only ones who made it,” he said softly.

“I...I’m sorry,” Reuben said softly. The regret in his voice seemed sincere. “But tell me, Jones – What the hell happened? How did you get away from Ramos and his gang.”

Indiana hesitated. For a moment he stared in uncertainty at Reuben and Henley, then looked at the over turned boat in the river for a while, without answering.

Reuben followed his gaze and his expression darkened. “We were damned lucky, Jones,” he said, answering a question Indiana had not asked. “The boat broke lose and got sucked in by the current. I tell you – it was one helluva hell ride. It’s a miracle that none of us were killed.” He sighed. “But I’m afraid we won’t get very far with this ship.”

Indiana registered Marcus’s warning gaze at the last moment and swallowed the startled response that lay on his tongue. “Well, it’s a setback, but we don’t need it,” he said instead. He forced a smile. “The return journey will be hard on foot, but it’s doable.”

“Don’t need it?” Reuben frowned. “What do you mean? Its...” he paused. “You found El Dorado?” He asked, stunned. “It’s there?”

Indiana hesitated again. It was obvious Reuben’s memory of the last few days was sketchy from the trials they had endured, or possibly the mysterious power of the Aymará chief had affected them. And not just him, he could see the veil of confusion in Henley’s eyes as well, and assumed the rest had the same malady. He was unsure as to why the old man had allowed him and Marcus to keep theirs.

“Yes,” Indiana said finally. “We were there. It’s actually not very far from here.”

“Where is it?” Henley asked excitedly. “And what is it? Does El Dorado actually exist, Jones?”

Indiana shook his head. “No, I’m afraid it’s just a legend, Henley. No gold. Nothing that would be of any interest.” He said, then added with finality. “To anyone in the world.”

While Henley and Reuben looked at him in disappointment, Indiana turned back to look at the edge of the jungle behind him.

Again, he had the feeling of being watched, and this time it was too intense to dismiss it as imagination.

And for a second, he thought he saw a figure, maybe just the shadow of a figure, small and slim, and very old, who looked at him for a moment, then raised his hand in a parting gesture, acknowledging that they would probably never see each other again. Then the shadowy figure disappeared into the forest again.

“It’s just a legend,” he said, turning back to his companions. “Nothing more.”



Author
Wolfgang Hohlbein

Wolfgang Hohlbein, born in Weimar in 1953, started to write in 1980. Not only does he have a gigantic fan community, but he has also garnered massive recognition for his numerous novels with many literature awards, including the Phantastik literature award. Wolfgang Hohlbein lives with his wife and his children near Düsseldorf.

Translator
Byran Carter

Bryan Carter is a longtime Indiana Jones fan, an aeronautical engineer and part-time translator. Raised in Jackson, Tennessee - Spent some time at Memphis State University before quitting and enlisting in the United States Air Force at 19 yrs old. After Basic Training, he went to Barksdale AFB, LA where he worked as an Avionics Apprentice on B-52 Bombers and spent 3 yrs in Okinawa working Airborne Warning and Command Systems (AWACS) aircraft. He retired from the Air Force in 2013 and now lives in California with his wife, Sakae. He has 3 children: Sean, Michael, and Erica.

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Stan Corda, colleague of Indiana Jones, barely escapes death after his aircraft gets caught in a huge storm over the Bolivian rainforests. Just before making an emergency landing, he makes a sensational discovery: a basin in the forest below completely covered in gold.

To discover the true magnitude of this remarkable find, he enlists the aid of archeologist/adventurer Indiana Jones. Together the two archeologists investigate the mysterious basin, and soon come to the realization that they have found the legendary gold of El Dorado. But a curse lies on the gold ...

TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN



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