

Shades

Darkness. Ezra blinked again, but the view didn't change. The blackness was darker than anything he had ever experienced, a complete and utter nothingness. Ezra raised a hand, holding it in front of his face, where he should have been able to see it. But there was nothing there. Panic welled within him as he came to the conclusion that he was blind. Fumbling around desperately with his hands, Ezra tried to determine where he was. The last thing he remembered was meeting with Rudolfo Brunelli, the weapons dealer Team Seven was currently trying to take down.

Ezra walked into the empty office building, Vin following close behind him. Several weeks of gradually earning the confidence of Walter Mayfield, one of Brunelli's front men, had paid off, and tonight they were meeting with the head man himself.

Vin gazed around the large, dimly-lit space warily. "I'm not likin' this place, Ez," he said softly. "We should'a worn a wire."

"This is standard meeting procedure for Mr. Brunelli, from what I'm told," Ezra replied. "The risk is too great that he will have us searched at an introductory meeting such as this."

"I got a bad feelin'," Vin continued.

Ezra didn't reply, but he had to agree with his 'bodyguard'. Something wasn't right. The presence of the rest of the team, concealed in vans behind two nearby buildings, did nothing to alleviate his anxiety. They were too far away to be of much help if things went wrong, but there had been no closer places for them to conceal themselves.

Ezra couldn't explain it, but he had been feeling uneasy since they arrived at the isolated location on the outskirts of the city. Brunelli owned a

construction company – one of his many legitimate businesses – and the office building in which they were meeting was one of his projects. It was nearly finished, but not yet occupied, giving Brunelli a convenient and private place to conduct his illegal business. There were no dividing walls in the large open space, only support columns spaced evenly throughout. It was probably going to be a ‘cubicle farm’ eventually, with configurable partitions erected throughout. Ezra shivered, wondering at the source of the bad vibes he was receiving from the place.

“Here we go,” Vin said as a group of four men moved toward them. The man in the front of the group, Walter Mayfield, was thin and balding, walking with an awkward, slightly nervous gait. The man next to him was completely the opposite. He was tall and stocky with graying hair, and carried himself with confidence born of authority. Behind him stood two large and well-muscled men who exuded danger. Their faces were blank, save for their eyes, which focused upon the two agents warily, watching for any sign of threat.

Stifling a sigh, Ezra plastered a smile on his face and stepped forward to meet the awaiting men. “Gentlemen.”

“Mr. Sanders.” Walter Mayfield stepped forward to greet him, grasping his hand in a firm handshake. “May I introduce my employer, Mr. Brunelli.”

“Sir, it is indeed a pleasure,” Ezra said, reaching out to the gun dealer for a handshake. Brunelli took his hand in an almost crushing grip. Ezra didn’t bother introducing Vin, since bodyguards were essentially nameless to men like Brunelli, who viewed them simply as bodies that he paid to do his bidding. Money and power – and those who held them – were his only concerns.

Brunelli waved his two large bodyguards forward. “I hope you don’t mind, but I fear I must ask that you allow my associates to search you. Security, you know.”

“Of course,” Ezra replied smoothly, gesturing toward Vin as if to order him to comply. The men searched them thoroughly, removing the gun Ezra wore in a shoulder holster under his suit coat, as well as the smaller weapon at his ankle. Similarly, Vin was relieved of the two guns under his jacket and the third at the small of his back. The knife in his boot did not escape detection either, and he shrugged in response to the questioning looks given by Brunelli’s men.

“Mr. Taylor likes to be well-prepared to protect me in all circumstances,” Ezra offered, noting the concerned looks with which Brunelli was favoring Vin and his arsenal of weapons.

Brunelli nodded, accepting that explanation, much to Ezra’s relief. He smiled reassuringly at Vin, who was obviously unhappy with the situation. Ezra was not comfortable with the idea of being weaponless himself, but knew that it was necessary to gain the trust of the weapons merchant.

“Walter tells me you have quite a shopping list,” Brunelli began after the search was completed.

“Yes,” Ezra answered. “I have some special customers in need of substantial armament. They are willing to pay quite handsomely for it.”

“Might I ask their purpose for such weapons?” Brunelli asked.

Ezra smiled. “They have not enlightened me as to their intentions, but I believe they are planning to eliminate their competitors in the drug trade.” He shrugged. “Nasty business, but they are very good customers.”

Brunelli laughed. “That’s good business, in my book.” His cell phone chose that moment to ring with a shrill sound that echoed off of the walls in the cavernous space. “Pardon me for a moment.” Brunelli turned and walked away, speaking softly into his phone.

Ezra exchanged a concerned look with Vin, wondering what could be so important that Brunelli would choose to interrupt their meeting. His earlier uneasiness had given way to a gnawing anxiety and Ezra was beginning to consider that it might be prudent to make a rapid exit from this situation.

“Mr. Brunelli was very interested when I told him what you were looking for,” Mayfield said. “This could turn into quite a lucrative arrangement for all of us.”

“I sincerely hope so,” Ezra said with a smile.

“I’m afraid that is not an option,” Brunelli said in a steely voice as he turned around, gun in hand.

“Is there a problem?” Ezra inquired politely, the mild tone of his voice

hiding the apprehension he was feeling.

“Sir?” Mayfield asked, confused at the sudden change in plans.

“These two are ATF, you idiot,” Brunelli snarled.

“That’s impossible! They’re clean,” Mayfield stuttered. “I double-checked it myself.”

“He is correct, Mr. Brunelli,” Ezra said, in an effort to regain control of the situation. “We are not affiliated with law enforcement.”

“That’s not what my source tells me,” Brunelli said icily, “and he hasn’t failed me yet.” He turned to Mayfield. “I don’t blame you, Walter. They’re very good, for cops.” He switched his attention back to Ezra. “It’s a pity Mr. Sanders – though I doubt that’s your real name. I was rather looking forward to doing business with you.”

Sharing a grim look with Vin, Ezra whirled around and attempted to dive to the side, out of the line of fire. He saw one of the bodyguards looming behind his friend, but before he could warn him, something exploded in his head and blackness engulfed him.

That was all he remembered before waking up blind in this cold place, wherever it was. His shaking hands found a large bump on the back of his head, the likely source of the throbbing in his skull. Ezra grimaced and leaned back against the rough surface behind him. From what he could determine with his impaired faculties, he was in a cold, damp place surrounded by stone walls. The echo he heard when calling out told him he was inside, probably in a basement of some sort. The word ‘dungeon’ came uncomfortably to mind.

Ezra shivered, cursing Brunelli and his goons for taking his overcoat. It was early autumn, but the cold came quickly to the Denver area, and he tended to feel it more than the rest of his teammates. In an effort to stretch his stiff muscles, he stood and began feeling his way along the walls, careful to maintain contact with the rough surface, letting his fingertips brush along it as he moved. Without his sight, this light contact with the walls was his only guide.

There was no sound in this place except that of his feet scraping against the hard floor and his own breathing, making him feel even more isolated. Suppressing a shudder at the thought of being alone in this godforsaken place, he continued his explorations. He had been searching for a few minutes when his foot encountered an unseen rock and he

stumbled, falling to his hands and knees. He gasped aloud when his right hand landed on something yielding and warm. Ghosting his hands over the form, he sighed in relief when he encountered the long hair of his partner.

“Mr. Tanner,” he called, shaking Vin’s shoulder gently. “Wake up, Vin.” Ezra ran his hand carefully over the sharpshooter’s head, frowning when he encountered the large bump near the base of his skull, the area around it still tacky with what he assumed was blood. His actions were rewarded with a muffled groan, and Ezra sat alongside the unconscious man with a sigh and waited for his senses to return.

“Aw man,” Vin moaned. “Ez? Ez!” He sat up quickly in a panic, then immediately regretted it when his stomach threatened to empty itself.

“I’m right here, Mr. Tanner,” Ezra said, touching Vin’s shoulder.

“I can’t see you,” Vin said. “It’s dark.”

“Can you see anything at all?”

Vin waved a hand in front of his face, just as Ezra had done earlier. “Nothin’.”

Ezra groaned. “Then it appears our predicament is worse than I believed.”

“Huh?”

“I thought that I was blind, due to the blow that Mr. Brunelli’s associates were kind enough to bestow upon my head,” Ezra explained. “It appears, however, that we are located someplace where there is absolutely no light.”

“Shit.”

“Quite,” Ezra said. “It will make extricating ourselves a bit difficult.”

“No kidding,” Vin snorted. “I wonder who tipped Brunelli.”

“I, too, would be interested in the ‘source’ responsible for our presence in this wretched place,” Ezra added.

They contemplated the situation silently for a few minutes until Vin grew restless and started moving around. “So where do you think we are?”

“I have no idea,” Ezra replied. “All I have been able to determine is that the walls are comprised of rough stone.”

“Guess we better check it out, if we’re ever gonna get out of here,” Vin said, his voice carrying an unfamiliar edgy tone.

“That would be prudent,” Ezra agreed, easing himself to his feet while assisting Vin in doing the same. Keeping their arms linked, both for support and to keep from losing each other in the darkness, the undercover agent and the sharpshooter began to explore their prison.

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“I don’t like it,” Buck said. “They should be out of there by now.”

Chris looked at his watch and nodded. “This shouldn’t have taken more than thirty minutes. They’ve been in there nearly an hour.” He keyed the radio. “Any sign of them, Josiah?”

“Negative,” Josiah replied. “Nobody has gone in or come out.”

“Maybe we should call Ezra’s cell phone,” JD suggested. “We’ve done that before. He just pretends it’s a business call.”

Chris nodded, already reaching for his phone. “Good idea.” He punched the speed dial for Ezra’s phone and waited. After a few minutes, he tried Vin’s number with the same result. Finally, he switched it off, looking up at his men grimly. “No answer.”

Buck swore and slammed his hand on the steering wheel, while JD looked at him with worried eyes.

“Chris?” Josiah’s voice came over the speaker. “Something up?”

“Yeah, Josiah,” Chris replied. “Vin and Ez aren’t answering their phones.”

“We going in?”

“Yep,” Chris said. “Bring the van to the door.”

Buck had the van moving before Chris had finished speaking to Josiah. Moments later, the two vans pulled to a halt in front of the wide glass doors of the building’s entrance. The

five men leaped out of the van and hit the doors at a run, cursing when they found them to be locked. Peering through the glass, Chris could discern little in the shadowy interior.

Pushing him aside, JD quickly picked the lock, ignoring the surprised looks of his teammates. “Ez taught me,” he tersely explained as he threw the door open. The five men rushed inside only to stop dead in their tracks. The building was empty.

“Shit! Where the hell are they?” Buck shouted angrily.

Chris stood with his fists clenched at his sides, his eyes smoldering with fury. “I don’t know, but I’m sure the hell going to find out.”

“Chris,” Nathan called. “Look at this.”

Chris joined Nathan, who was illuminating something on the floor with his flashlight. “What is it?”

“Blood,” Nathan replied. “There isn’t much, but it’s fresh.”

With a sigh, Chris ran a hand through his hair and then reached for his cell phone. “I’m getting forensics in here. Nate, can you hang around and brief them?” At Nathan’s nod, he directed the rest of his men, “Let’s get back to the office and see if we can’t find out what went wrong.” Chris gave the empty building one last glance before he followed his team back to their vehicles.

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There was wood under his hand. Ezra stopped suddenly, surprised at discovering something other than stone along the walls.

“Ez?” Vin asked from his side.

“There is a wooden beam of some sort here,” Ezra explained. He felt for Vin’s hand and then guided it to the rough wooden surface.

Vin sighed. “I think I know where we might be.”

“Oh?”

“Can’t be sure, but I think it’s a mine,” he related flatly, a hint of shakiness in his voice.

“A mine?” Ezra repeated.

“Probably an old one. The mountains are full of them.”

“Lovely,” Ezra replied sourly. “It appears our Mr. Brunelli is a rather twisted individual.”

“He’s a sick bastard,” Vin said vehemently, pushing away from the wall and resuming his progress along the tunnel.

Ezra hurried to follow, struggling to maintain his grip on Vin’s arm. He frowned as he detected a sudden change in his friend’s breathing. “Mr. Tanner, are you all right?”

“Don’t like closed-in places, Ez,” Vin said tightly.

Ezra silently cursed himself for forgetting that Vin was claustrophobic. The sharpshooter had never admitted to the condition, but Ezra had recognized the subtle signs when they had been stuck in the elevator for a few minutes one day. The only thing he could do for him was keep him distracted enough not to worry about where he was. It was a difficult proposition, especially since he was feeling a bit claustrophobic himself at the knowledge that he was deep underground, where no light could reach.

Ezra shivered at that thought then determinedly pushed it away. A distraction could work both ways. “I must admit that I find our surroundings less than comfortable myself,” he began. “Though, I usually don’t mind small places. In fact, I used to search them out as a child.”

“What for?” Vin asked, puzzled at the thought of someone deliberately putting themselves into small spaces.

Ezra paused for a moment, trying to decide how much he should reveal. It was true that he usually didn’t mind being in close quarters; he found them comforting, in fact. But the reasons for that were not something he usually discussed with anyone. Still, if it would help Vin take his mind off of their dire circumstances...

He sighed. “I have always found small, dark spaces comforting. They are... safe.” He rubbed his hand over his face. “When I was a child, Maude would often deposit me with relatives and acquaintances while she enjoyed the social scene. In truth, I rarely ever spent more than two weeks at a time in her company before being dumped at the next convenient stop. Some of those people were rather reluctant hosts, and I found myself seeking out places to keep out of their way.” He smiled bitterly to himself. “Sometimes it is better not to be seen or heard.”

Vin listened with growing understanding. He, too, had often been less than welcome in some of the foster homes in which he stayed, and he heard the part that Ezra wasn't saying. It surprised him, since he had believed the dapper southerner's childhood to be one of luxury and privilege, the exact opposite to his own. It appeared, though, that their formative years were more similar than different. It also explained a lot about the aloof man beside him. He said knowingly, "I know what you mean. Some of the places I lived weren't too friendly neither. I usually took to the outdoors, though. Easy to get lost in the wilderness, y'know?"

"Some people should not be entrusted with the care of children," Ezra said quietly, remembering the abuse he had endured while he stayed with some of his 'caretakers'.

Vin snorted. "No kiddin'. Hell, some of them people treated their dogs better 'n their foster kids."

"I stayed with one such person," Ezra offered, feeling surprisingly comfortable talking of this with the sharpshooter. "He was some friend or acquaintance of Maude's. His cat slept on a giant pillow – in its very own room, mind you – while I slept on a bare floor in the attic."

"One family I lived with had three dogs," Vin said. "The dogs lived in the house with 'em, but they made me live in the garage. Said they were doin' their 'Christian duty' by takin' in an orphan, an' I should be happy to have a roof over my head." He said the last in a disgusted voice that conveyed what he thought of that.

"It does tend to strain one's faith in humanity, doesn't it," Ezra commiserated.

"Yep," Vin replied. "Shit like that is the main reason I started huntin' bounties. When I's livin' in Texas after the Rangers, my neighbor's boyfriend beat her into a coma and then jumped bail after he was arrested. She was a nice lady. Didn't deserve that. The boyfriend was a dirtbag, an' I was pissed that he was gonna get away with it, so I went after 'im. Caught 'im in less than a week. The bail bondsman said I was pretty good, 'n got me a license." He chuckled. "I was workin' in a gas station, so it weren't no great loss to quit. 'Sides, I figured I was doing some good by gettin' bastards like that off the streets."

"A noble endeavor," Ezra agreed.

"So, how'd you get into law enforcement?" Vin asked curiously, taking advantage of this sudden openness that his friend was exhibiting.

"It was something of an accident," Ezra said in an amused voice. "One night while I was

in college, I was having dinner by myself in a small Chinese restaurant, when I overheard some patrons discussing a murder they intended to commit. They were speaking German and did not expect that anyone nearby would understand them.”

Vin laughed. “Jesus, Ez, You sure know how to step in it.”

“The story of my life,” Ezra said with a smile. “It got more interesting when the FBI grabbed me as I walked back to my apartment. Apparently, they were conducting surveillance on the men I overheard and observed my location in the next booth. They were interested in what I might have heard and were quite surprised to discover that I not only spoke German, but that I remembered every word that had been said during the conversation. To make a long story short, they drafted me into unofficial temporary duty, since I was a regular at that restaurant and I spoke seven languages. I found that I enjoyed all of the intrigue and entered the FBI academy after I graduated.”

“You speak seven languages?”

“Yes. French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Dutch, and Japanese. I also studied Latin and managed to pick up bits of Greek, Arabic, and Mandarin Chinese over the years.”

“Damn!” Vin said appreciatively.

“It’s one of the few benefits of my travels with my mother.”

“I did a bit of traveling with the Army, but never stayed anywhere long enough to learn the language” Vin said. “Ain’t nothin’ I can tell you about, though.”

Ezra could hear the smile in his voice and was glad that the conversation he had initiated was providing a calming distraction. “I believe I will be in need of some vacation travels, once we are able to find our way out of here.”

“Ain’t as easy as it sounds,” Vin said. “There’s lots of winding tunnels, ‘specially in these old places.”

“How do you know so much about mines?” Ezra inquired, curiosity overriding his normal hesitancy to pry into anyone else’s past. “This is not the type of place I imagine you would visit for enjoyment.”

“A guy I worked with few times when I’s a bounty hunter used to like explorin’ caves and such,” Vin explained, his distaste for the activity evident in his voice. “Told me stories about it when we was on stakeouts.”

“Did he, perhaps, give you some idea as to how we might effect an exit from these dreary environs?”

“Nope. He just told me it weren’t a good idea to get yourself lost in ‘em.” Vin sighed defeatedly. “Guess he was right ‘bout that. Hell, we don’t even know which direction to try.”

Ezra blew out a breath. “You are correct, I suppose.” Ezra didn’t voice his suspicion that Brunelli would not leave such a thing to chance, anyway. “Do you have any suggestions?”

Vin chuckled nervously. “Might as well just pick a direction. Who knows, we might get lucky?”

“Why don’t you choose?”

“Nah, you’re luckier ’n me,” Vin said. “You pick.”

“Sir, I abhor gambling and, as such, leave nothing to chance,” Ezra said proudly.

“That mean you cheat?”

“When necessary,” Ezra said with a sly chuckle.

“Then cheat away,” Vin said.

“If you insist,” Ezra said. “Let us attempt this direction.” He urged Vin to his left and the two men proceeded, carefully making their way down the tunnel.

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Chris stirred his drink absently, staring into the amber liquid as if he could find the answers he sought in its swirling depths. His men had been missing for nearly thirty-six hours and there was no sign of them anywhere. The word on the street was that their cover had been blown and that Brunelli had ‘retired’ them. Permanently. But he wasn’t ready to believe that yet.

Looking around the table at his men, he recognized the same turbulent emotions that were probably visible on his own face. They were angry, worried, afraid, confused, and frustrated, with each emotion warring for dominance. They had uncovered very little new information, something that grated on all of them. Street sources knew nothing and their

files were barren. The only facts they had gleaned were that Brunelli and his men had left the building via tunnels in the basement, which connected the eight buildings in the office park, and that the blood they had found matched Vin's type. Chris knew that his men were blaming themselves for their lack of vigilance, but it was not something they could have foreseen, since the meeting location had not been specified until thirty minutes before it was scheduled to take place.

JD's forlorn sigh seemed to echo their mood perfectly. Chris had forced his men to come to the Saloon to eat. They had been working non-stop since Ezra and Vin's disappearance, and hadn't bothered with such trifles as food and sleep – not when two of their own were missing. He doubted he could get them to sleep for more than a few hours, but Chris insisted anyway. They would do no good if they overlooked something due to fatigue.

“Guys, we ought to go catch some sleep now,” Nathan suggested. “I don't know about you, but I'll be able to get more done after some rest.”

“Chris, why don't you stay at my place,” Josiah offered.

Chris shook his head. “I'm gonna crash on the sofa in my office.” He lifted a hand to stifle the protests that erupted. “Don't worry. I'm going to sleep, I promise.”

The rest of the men grumbled, but agreed. Slowly the men of Team Seven stood and headed for their cars, ignorant of the worried eyes of other ATF agents following their progress.

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Vin's stomach rumbled loudly in the stillness of their dark prison, and Ezra chuckled aloud. “I completely agree, Mr. Tanner.”

Vin sighed. “Ez, there ain't nobody within earshot, so y'think you could call me Vin?”

Ezra hesitated for a moment, then replied, “Certainly, Vin.”

“Ain't no need for formality in a shithole like this.”

Ezra laughed. “No, I suppose there isn't.”

Vin's stomach rumbled again and he growled, “Shut up down there. Y'ain't gettin' fed anytime soon.”

“It is too bad Brunelli took your jacket,” Ezra remarked. “I’m sure you had an ample supply of high-calorie sustenance in your pockets.”

Vin responded with a slap on his shoulder. “Least we found some water.”

Ezra shuddered, remembering the muddy trickles they had encountered during their search for an exit. “Don’t remind me.”

“Wonder how long we’ve been down here?”

“It’s hard to say,” Ezra said. “Those miscreants removed my watch as well as my coat, not that it would do any good in the dark.”

“Feels like years.”

“That it does.”

They were quiet for a few minutes, resting their weary feet as they sat side by side against the cold stone. Ezra eventually broke the silence. “Shall we continue our journey, Mr... Vin?”

“Yeah,” Vin said unenthusiastically. “Reckon I got nothin’ better to do.”

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The office was silent and the mood of its occupants somber. Their teammates had been missing for almost three days, and though they didn’t want to admit it to anyone, they were quickly despairing of ever finding them. Others had tried to console them, but they had held fast to the faint tendrils of hope and kept working to find their brothers. At least, they had until today.

That morning, A.D. Travis had quietly informed them that they had a new case and could no longer allow the search to monopolize their time. They had protested vehemently to no avail. Travis sympathized with them, but they still had a job to do. The search was now in the hands of the police, though the remaining men of Team Seven still intended to spend every spare minute on the search.

A sudden crash came from Chris’s office. The other four men looked at one another before hurrying to investigate. Buck reached the door first and anxiously threw it open to reveal his old friend sitting with his head in his hands. A lamp lay smashed against the wall and the floor was strewn with paper.

“Chris?” Buck asked tentatively.

“Yeah?” Chris didn’t look up.

“You okay?”

“No, Buck.” He looked up, glaring at the men crowded in his doorway. “I’m not okay.”

Buck opened his mouth to say something, but Chris cut him off.

“How can I be okay, knowing that Vin and Ez are probably dead in a landfill or at the bottom of a river somewhere?” Chris said plaintively, looking at them with angry, bloodshot eyes.

“Don’t say that!” JD shouted. “They’re not dead!” He looked pleadingly at the other men. “They’re not.” He turned away and ran down the hall.

“Shit,” Chris said, dragging his hand across his face, absently noting that he badly needed a shave.

“I’ll talk to him,” Buck said quietly, turning to follow his distraught friend.

“Take him home,” Chris said. “That goes for the rest of you, too. We’re all too beat to think straight.”

There were no protests this time, and the dejected group walked away quietly. Chris felt frustration welling again, but forced it back violently. He had not given up, despite the lack of success at locating their missing teammates, and he would keep looking until he saw concrete proof of their deaths. His men felt the same way and he knew they would continue investigating in their free time. Team Seven had beaten the odds before. Chris only hoped they could do it again.

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“Don’t think I can move anymore, Ez,” Vin said quietly. “I’m tired.”

“So am I,” Ezra replied. “I believe it is time to rest.”

The two men slumped wearily to the ground, huddling together for warmth, despite their usual aversion to close contact. The cold and lack of food was wearing them down, sapping the energy they needed to continue their search for an exit. They had hit many

dead ends, following a tunnel only to find it had been blocked by a cave-in. Ezra would not have been surprised to find that Brunelli had sealed them inside by destroying the entrance after he had left. It was just the sort of perversity he would expect from the ruthless man. Shifting uncomfortably on the hard ground, Ezra was on the verge of sleep when Vin spoke.

“We ain’t gettin’ out of here, are we?”

Ezra contemplated that silently for a moment before admitting, “It does not seem likely, no.”

“Ain’t fair,” Vin said. “We didn’t even get a last meal.”

Ezra chuckled softly. “That would have been welcome, I must say.”

“A nice thick steak, covered in mushrooms and onions, with baked potatoes and sour cream,” Vin said dreamily. “And chocolate cake with ice cream for dessert. That’s what I would have.”

“With asparagus and a nice Merlot to accompany it,” Ezra added. “And some fresh baked bread slathered in butter.”

“You can keep the ‘sparagus,” Vin said. “Peach pie would be good for dessert, too.”

“Chocolate mousse,” Ezra countered.

“Jelly doughnuts.”

“Baked Alaska.”

“Hot chocolate with whipped cream.”

“And coffee,” Ezra sighed. “Strong, hot coffee. With brandy.”

“Damn, that sounds good,” Vin said longingly.

“If we get out of here, Vin, we will go out to dinner and partake of all of those sumptuous delights,” Ezra promised.

“It’s a deal.”

“You neglected to mention pecan pie,” a new voice said. “What dinner would be complete without that particular delicacy?”

Ezra gasped and looked around wildly for the source of the voice. “Who’s there?”

“Ez?” Vin grasped the southerner’s arm in concern. “It’s me. Vin.”

“I know,” Ezra said, patting Vin’s hand. “I was asking him.”

“Ez, there ain’t no one else here.”

“Didn’t you hear the voice?” Ezra asked, confused.

“Only voices I hear are yours ‘n mine.”

“He is unable to hear me,” the voice continued. “Or see me.”

There was a bright flash and then a hazy form materialized in front of Ezra. His jaw dropped and he reached up to shade his eyes against the sudden flood of light. Astonished, Ezra took in the sight of the man dressed in a red jacket, brocade vest, and black hat, with a revolver slung low on his hip. The man’s face, though, was an even greater shock. It was like looking at the picture of himself dressed in Old West garb that sat on his nightstand. JD had coerced the Team into posing for the photo at a fair they had attended during the summer, and Ezra had chosen a red gambler’s jacket like the one being worn by the specter before him. He stared at the man incredulously, momentarily speechless.

Vin tugged at Ezra’s sleeve, starting to worry about the man’s sudden strange behavior.

“Ez? What’s wrong?”

“You don’t see him?” He turned, surprised that he could now see Vin in the light being cast by the apparition.

“He cannot see me yet, but he will once my companion arrives,” the gambler said, flashing him a smile.

“Your companion?” Ezra repeated.

“What’re you talking about, Ez?” Vin asked, starting to fear for his friend’s sanity.

The undercover agent closed his eyes and shook his head in disbelief. “I am hallucinating. That is the only explanation.”

The gambler laughed. “No, I am not a hallucination.”

“Ezra!” Vin grabbed Ezra’s face gently in his hands. “Tell me what’s goin’ on.”

Ezra sighed. “There is a... man standing in front of us. He resembles... me, dressed as I was in that photograph we took at the fair. He is speaking to me.”

“Ez,” Vin began, attempting to conceal the despair in his voice. “He ain’t real. You’re just imaginin’ it.”

“No, he ain’t,” came another voice.

Ezra watched in awe as a second form shimmered into existence beside the gambler. Somehow, it didn’t surprise him that the new entity looked like Vin dressed in buckskins. A startled gasp from beside him told him that Vin had just become aware of the entities.

“Oh shit!” Vin exclaimed.

“Do you see them?” Ezra asked.

“Yeah,” Vin replied. “I see ‘em. Not sure I believe it, though.”

“Mr. Tanner, your timing is impeccable, as always,” the gambler said, greeting his translucent associate.

“I didn’t want you t’have all the fun by yourself, Ez,” the buckskin-clad form replied with a grin.

“Er, might I ask to what type of ‘fun’ you are referring?” Ezra asked dubiously.

“Hell, he talks just like you, Ez,” Buckskin Vin said, elbowing the gambler.

“We are here to assist you in effecting your emancipation from these dismal tunnels... I think,” Gambler Ezra replied, looking around doubtfully.

“Who are you?” Vin asked.

“We are merely visitors,” the gambler replied, “from another plane of existence. A different time and place, if you will.”

The ghostly tracker sent him a dubious look. “You sure ‘bout that, pard?”

The red-coated apparition shrugged, grinning sheepishly. “Well, it’s the best explanation I can find for this... peculiar circumstance in which we find ourselves.”

“How did you come to arrive in this... *charming* locale?” Ezra inquired, still attempting to wrap his mind around what he was seeing.

“Don’t know,” Buckskin Vin said with a shrug. “But we’re here, so we might as well help.”

“I’m wiggin’ out,” Vin said with a sigh. “This is too weird.”

“We seem to be sharing this hallucination, so we are ‘wiggling out’ together,” Ezra said tiredly.

“You two gonna sit there, or are you gonna follow us out ‘a this hole?” the dusty tracker said, his glowing image flickering with impatience.

“Yes, we have some distance to cover yet, so let us be on our way,” Gambler Ezra agreed.

“What d’ya think, Ez?” Vin asked doubtfully.

Ezra studied the apparitions critically. “We have nothing lose, at this point. And they do seem to be providing some illumination in these miserable surroundings. I can even see you a bit now.”

“I’m game if you are,” Vin said.

“Then, by all means, let us be on our way.” The gambler adjusted his hat, brushed off the sleeve of his red jacket, and started off down the tunnel.

Ezra and Vin shared a look, then stood and began following their ethereal counterparts down the tunnel.

* * * * *

They were galloping across an open field. Seven men on horses, their guns drawn and ready. The leader of the group was all in black, his duster flapping in the breeze. The faceless man was followed by a motley assortment of men, ranging from a man in a fringed jacket and buckskins to a man in a tweed suit and bowler hat. He couldn’t make out their faces, but

they seemed strangely familiar. Two of their number, a brightly-attired man and the buckskinned man, separated from the group, heading toward the mountains, while the rest of the men continued on the same path. There was an odd, painful feeling in his chest, and then everything faded to blackness.

Chris woke with a start and sat up abruptly, running his hand through his sweaty hair. For a moment, he didn't recognize his surroundings, then he remembered he was in Josiah's spare bedroom. He glanced at the clock and winced. It was only four AM, but he was too shaken by the dream to go back to sleep. It still echoed clearly in his mind and Chris frowned as he reviewed the images. It had been an oddly vivid dream, rife with symbolism, and he couldn't help but wonder if his subconscious was trying to tell him something.

The welcome scent of coffee floated through the door and Chris smiled as he tossed back the covers and climbed out of bed. It seemed that Josiah was having as much trouble sleeping as he was. Stretching the kinks out of his back, Chris reached for his duffel bag and changed into the clothes he had brought before stepping out to join the older man.

"Mornin', Josiah," he said in a scratchy, just-woke-up voice.

"Good morning, Chris," Josiah said, pouring a second cup of coffee. "I see you can't sleep anymore, either."

"Nope," Chris agreed, eagerly accepting the coffee.

"I had a bit of a restless night myself," Josiah said sympathetically.

The two men sat quietly, enjoying their coffee, until Chris looked over at the older man inquisitively. "You know much about dreams, Josiah?"

Josiah stiffened slightly, then looked at his guest quizzically. "Some. Why do you ask?"

"I had a strange dream last night," Chris reluctantly admitted. "It's bothering me for some reason."

"What was it about?"

"There were seven men riding horses," Chris began. "They looked like they came straight out of the Old West. They had guns and cowboy hats, anyway." He shrugged and looked away, feeling slightly foolish about saying it out loud. "Two of the men riding pulled away from the rest and..."

“And headed for the mountains,” Josiah said in a awed voice.

Chris’s head snapped up and he stared at the older man, who was looking back at him with a wide-eyed, wondering expression. “How the hell...?”

“I believe I had the same dream, brother,” Josiah said, smiling faintly. “The two men who rode away... one was wearing a red jacket, and the other was wearing...”

“Buckskins and fringed jacket,” Chris finished. At Josiah’s nod, he sighed aloud. “What does this mean, Josiah? Do people often have the same dreams?”

“It’s rare, but it’s been known to happen,” Josiah said with a shrug.

“You think it means anything?”

“I don’t know. It could just be a reflection of our anxiety about our missing brothers.”

Chris nodded. That sounded plausible enough. The other alternatives were too strange to consider, anyway. “You want to head into the office?”

“Might as well,” Josiah said. “We can put in a little time on our search before we have to do our official work.”

“Let’s go,” Chris said, draining the last of his coffee. “We can grab some doughnuts on the way.”

* * * * *

“I can’t believe I’m doin’ this,” Vin said in a tired voice.

“I understand perfectly,” Ezra commiserated. “Placing our trust in a pair of... ghosts, is not something I would have considered as a means to finding an exit.”

“We ain’t ghosts, are we, Ez?” the buckskin-clad Vin asked his companion, a hint of nervousness in his voice. “That’d mean we was dead.”

“I don’t believe so,” Gambler Ezra replied thoughtfully. “I think we are just non-corporeal reflections of our real selves.”

“Huh?” Vin said, looking to Ezra for an explanation.

“Ghosts,” the undercover agent offered, grinning widely.

The gambler rolled his eyes. “Come along, it’s not much further now.”

Vin and Ezra, weak and unsteady from cold and hunger, leaned heavily on each other as they made their way along the tunnel. A half-hour later, Vin abruptly stopped, swiveling his head around in wonder.

“Vin?” Ezra asked. “Are you all right?”

“I think I can see somethin’,” he said, a hint of excitement in his voice.

Ezra looked around, squinting slightly, then lifting his eyebrows in surprise. “I do believe you are correct. It appears to be getting brighter.”

“The entrance is near,” the red-jacketed gambler assured them.

“We’re gonna make it, Ez,” Vin said happily.

“Yes, it appears we are.” Ezra tightened his grip on his friend and they continued on, anticipation quickening their steps. They couldn’t wait to be free of their intended tomb.

* * * * *

Chris and Josiah entered the office, stunned to find that Buck, JD, and Nathan had already arrived. “You boys are here early,” Chris remarked.

“Couldn’t sleep,” Buck said with a shrug.

“Me neither,” Nathan agreed.

“I kept having weird dreams,” JD said distractedly as he worked on his computer.

Chris looked at Josiah, who quirked an eyebrow in response. “What kind of dreams, JD?” Chris asked seriously.

JD looked up from his work and shrugged. “It’s not important.”

“Humor me,” Chris ordered.

JD colored faintly, then said, “Well, there were bunch of cowboys on horses...”

“Seven of them,” Buck interrupted in an odd voice.

“Two of them rode away in a different direction,” Nathan said, looking around at the stunned faces of his friends.

“Oh shit!” Buck exclaimed. “You guys had the same dream?”

Nathan and JD nodded, then turned to Chris and Josiah, who murmured their affirmatives.

“This is wild!” JD said excitedly. “You think it’s a vision or something?”

“Anything is possible, JD,” Josiah said. “But it appears someone is trying to tell us something.”

“So what do we do about it?” asked Nathan.

“We listen,” Josiah said with a serene smile.

* * * * *

Squinting against the sudden glare, Ezra and Vin stepped through the small opening in the boards that covered the entrance to the tunnel. They were free. It wasn’t full daylight yet, just the muted gray light of pre-dawn, but to eyes that had been without anything but faint light for nearly five days, it was as bright as noon.

“We made it!” Vin grinned and grabbed Ezra in an rare hug.

“Yes, we did.” Ezra returned the hug, his joy at being free greater than his usual discomfort with such gestures.

“Well, it is time for us to take our leave,” Gambler Ezra said, dusting off his sleeve.

“Yep, the boys are waitin’ for us,” Buckskin Vin said, gesturing to his right.

Vin and Ezra watched in amazement as five men on horseback suddenly appeared out of nowhere with two riderless horses beside them. Tipping his hat to them, the buckskin-clad tracker gracefully mounted one of the horses.

“Thank you,” Ezra said to the apparitions.

“Yeah, thanks,” Vin added. “We wouldn’t ‘a made it without your help.”

“I’m glad we could be of service,” the gambler said, mounting his horse with a satisfied smile.

“Let’s ride, boys,” the darkly-dressed leader, who looked suspiciously like Chris Larabee, directed.

The gambler tossed off a two-fingered salute and wheeled his horse around. The leader flashed them a grin and spurred his horse into a gallop. The seven men who so resembled themselves and their team gradually faded away as they rode off together.

Vin looked at Ezra and smiled sheepishly. “Ain’t no one gonna believe any of this.”

“Then who are we to tell them?” Ezra said. “We were simply fortunate enough to stumble upon an exit.”

“Works for me,” Vin said, sucking in a deep breath. “Feels damn good to be out in the fresh air.”

“Indeed,” Ezra said appreciatively. “Shall we depart?”

“After you,” Vin said, gesturing to the overgrown path that was all that remained of a dirt road through the woods.

* * * * *

“I can’t believe we’re doing this,” JD said, watching the passing scenery. “How’re we gonna explain it to Travis?”

“I think we’ll leave that to Chris,” Buck said. “I’m not so sure I believe it either.”

Behind them, in his own truck, Chris was thinking exactly the same thing. It was either insanity or just pure desperation. There was no other way to explain why they were driving along these winding mountain roads looking for their friends. After the discovery about their dreams, they had piled into Buck’s pickup and his Ram and headed for the mountains. They hadn’t even discussed which direction to take, they somehow knew just which way to go.

“This is crazy, you know,” Nathan said from his seat behind Chris. “Travis is gonna have a fit.”

“I know,” Chris replied with a sigh. “But we have to do this. I don’t know why, but we do.”

Josiah smiled. “Travis should be used to our eccentricities by now.”

“I sure as hell hope so,” Chris said, smiling faintly. “Otherwise, we’re all going to be visiting the unemployment line soon.”

They had been driving for almost four hours, and Buck was beginning to think that they were on a wild goose chase. He was about to pull over when JD suddenly straightened and pointed out the window.

“Buck, look!”

Buck looked in the direction he was pointing and saw two figures walking along the opposite side of the road. He accelerated until he could see them more clearly, then quickly pulled over and jumped out of his truck with JD close on his heels.

* * * * *

Vin and Ezra were leaning heavily on each other as they staggered along the narrow road. They had stumbled more than once, since the bright sunlight was blinding to their sensitive eyes, forcing to keep them closed much of the time. Ezra opened his eyes wider for a moment, hoping to see a vehicle of some sort on the road. He and Vin were going to be forced to stop soon, before they collapsed from exhaustion. They had been walking for hours and had not encountered a soul, save for a single truck that blew past them without a second glance.

“Brunelli would choose a remote location such as this to dispose of us,” Ezra said with a sigh. “This has to be the most unpopulated road in the state.”

“No kiddin’,” Vin replied. “I could really do with a ride, right about now.”

The faint sound of an approaching vehicle registered and Ezra grinned broadly. “I do believe your request is about to be fulfilled.”

Vin looked down the road, squinting at the source of the sound. He laughed aloud when he recognized Buck’s truck. “I don’t believe it! How the hell did they find us?”

“After what we have experienced, I’m almost afraid to ask,” Ezra said.

A minute later, they were nearly bowled over by Buck and JD, who wrapped them in tight hugs. Nathan, Josiah, and Chris joined them a minute later, eager to reassure themselves that their teammates were intact.

Buck stepped back, keeping his grip on Ezra's shoulders and studying him and Vin intently. He let out a low whistle. "Damn, you boys look like hell!"

Ezra squinted at him, then reached up to snatch Buck's sunglasses off of his head. Slipping them on, he sighed happily. "Much better."

Vin mimicked his actions with JD's glasses just as Nathan pushed forward. Snatching the glasses away, Nathan grabbed the sharpshooter's chin and scrutinized the watery eyes he was trying to squeeze shut. "What's wrong with your eyes?"

"We were incarcerated underground for the past..." Ezra paused and frowned. "What day is it?"

"It's Friday," Chris said, his forehead creasing in puzzlement at Ezra's stunned expression.

"That bastard Brunelli ditched us in an old mine up in the hills," Vin growled. "Took us all this time to find a way out."

"We were rather, um, fortunate to stumble upon an exit," Ezra offered, sharing an odd look with Vin.

"Yeah, 'specially since Brunelli sealed off the tunnel he used to put us in there," Vin continued, fury evident in his voice. "We passed by it on the way down the mountain."

"How'd your cover get blown?" JD asked.

"Brunelli received a call from a source while we were meeting with him," Ezra replied.

"Yeah," Vin added. "Whoever the source was, he knew we were ATF."

"Son of a bitch!" Buck hissed. "Brunelli has a serious ass-kicking comin' his way."

"He's going down," Chris agreed, his eyes hard with a look that promised retribution for the harm inflicted on his own.

"Come on, let's get you two to the hospital," Nathan said sternly.

“Don’t need no hospital,” Vin said stubbornly. “I’m just tired.”

“He is correct,” Ezra said. “We simply require sustenance and rest.”

“Sure,” Buck snorted. “That’s why you can barely stay on your feet.”

“You’re going,” Chris commanded when Ezra and Vin opened their mouths to protest.

Too tired to argue, Ezra and Vin allowed their teammates to hustle them into Chris’s Ram. The two weary agents were asleep within minutes, despite having Nathan fussing over them. Chris looked into his rearview mirror and smiled, feeling better than he had all week.

By six that evening, Ezra and Vin were safely ensconced in a room at the hospital, receiving intravenous fluids. Leaving Nathan to watch over his sleeping agents, Chris and the others returned to the federal building to begin searching for the mysterious source that had compromised his men. To say that Travis had been irate when they had called him was an understatement, but once they had given him the good news about Ezra and Vin, he had offered them his full cooperation. The dangerous glint they saw in the older man’s eyes when he met them at the office was all the proof they needed of his support. With Orrin Travis and Team Seven after him, Rudolfo Brunelli didn’t stand a chance.

* * * * *

“Hey Ez!” Vin whispered across the snoring form of Josiah to the man in the other bed. Ezra looked up and Vin jerked his head toward the door. A slow grin spread across Ezra’s face and he nodded eagerly. Quietly, the two men climbed out of their respective beds and made for the bag of clean clothes that their friends had so kindly provided. The nurse had removed their IV’s earlier and both men had been biding their time, waiting for Josiah to succumb to sleep so they could escape. Within minutes, they were dressed and making their way down the quiet corridor.

“Where to?” Ezra asked, squinting at the afternoon sun as they slipped out the side door of the hospital.

“Remember that dinner we were gonna eat if we got out of there?” Vin asked with a grin.

“How could I forget?” Ezra chuckled. It had been hard not to think about it, especially in the face of the bland hospital cuisine they had been forced to endure that afternoon.

“Do you know any places that might have what we wanted?” Vin asked.

“I certainly do,” Ezra said, already anticipating the meal they would soon be enjoying. “We can find a taxi over there.” He pointed toward the main hospital entrance. Grinning broadly, the two men jogged toward their destination.

* * * * *

Despite the fact that it was a Saturday, most of Team Seven was in the office. Josiah had taken over babysitting duty at the hospital, while the remaining four agents worked on locating the leak that had nearly gotten Ezra and Vin killed. Chris was staring at the computer screen when the phone rang. “Larabee,” he greeted the caller.

“It’s me, Chris,” Josiah said wearily.

“Josiah? What’s up?”

“They bolted on me.”

“Shit. How long ago?”

“About an hour. I dozed off sometime after lunch,” Josiah admitted sheepishly. “They took off before the dinner trays were delivered.”

Chris snorted. “Can’t say I blame them there.”

Josiah’s rich laughter came over the phone. “It is a bit of an incentive.”

“Still, we need to find them,” Chris sighed. “If Brunelli finds out they’re not dead...” He trailed off, knowing his meaning was understood.

“I’ll ask around here and see if anyone saw them leave,” Josiah said.

“We’ll take their apartments,” Chris said. “Let me know if you find out anything.”

“Likewise,” Josiah said as he clicked off the phone.

Chris hung up and rubbed a hand over his eyes. The stress and lack of sleep was catching up with him, and this latest development, while not unexpected, was only making things worse. Heaving a sigh, he stood and went into the bullpen.

“Ez and Vin went AWOL,” Chris announced, watching as his men took in the news.

“Aw hell,” Nathan said. “Should’a figured those fools wouldn’t stay there. Idiots don’t know what’s good for ‘em.”

JD shrugged. “I’m not surprised. They really hate hospitals.”

“Can’t say as I blame ‘em,” Buck said with a laugh. “I’m surprised it took ‘em this long.”

“Yeah, but Brunelli is still out there,” Chris reminded them. “I want those two where we can keep an eye on them.”

“Did you try their apartments?” Buck asked.

“Not yet,” Chris replied. “I figure it’d be better to check them out in person, in case they aren’t feeling sociable enough to answer the phone.”

“Good idea,” Nathan agreed.

“I’m going to head to Vin’s,” Chris continued. “Buck, you take Ezra’s place. Nate, you and JD check the Saloon and any other places they might be likely to show up.”

“Will do, boss man,” Buck said, tossing off a sloppy salute as he headed for the door. The rest of the men scattered to perform their assigned tasks.

* * * * *

“Damn, that was the best meal I ever ate!” Vin said, leaning back in his chair.

Ezra grinned as he surveyed the remains of their meal. “That wouldn’t be because of the number of desserts you’ve consumed, would it?”

“Part of it,” Vin said, smiling contentedly. “Hell, I’m surprised we were able to get all of that stuff in one place.”

“Jacques is a wonderful chef,” Ezra said. “I expected he would have most of what we desired.”

“You think the others are lookin’ for us yet?”

“Most likely.”

“We should give ‘em a call,” Vin said. “Fore Chris wears a hole in the rug from pacin’

around his office.”

Ezra chuckled at that picture of their boss, knowing that it was probably close to the truth. “I can’t see that it would hurt to alert them to our location, now that we have enjoyed our celebratory repast.”

Vin rolled his eyes at his verbose companion before pushing away from the table and heading for the pay phones near the entrance to the restaurant. Ezra ordered them both some coffee while he waited for Vin’s return.

“I called JD,” Vin said when he returned. “I figure he’s the least likely to pitch a fit.”

“Good idea.” Ezra leaned back and sipped his coffee, savoring the steaming beverage while they waited for their young teammate to arrive.

* * * * *

JD stepped into the restaurant and scanned the patrons slowly, looking for his two wayward friends. Vin spotted him first and waved him over to their table.

“Guess you guys were hungry,” JD said, eyeing the numerous plates covering their table. “Damn, did you eat every dessert in the place, or what?”

Vin laughed. “Me and Ez promised ourselves this meal if we ever got out ‘a that hellhole, so we had to have it.”

“Yes, the thought of another round of hospital cuisine was simply too unbearable to endure,” Ezra said with a shudder.

JD laughed. “Well, I have to get you out to the ranch before Chris has a cow.

Ezra sighed and Vin rolled his eyes, but both of them followed JD to the car – which happened to be Ezra’s Jaguar.

“I figured you wouldn’t mind having your Jag out at the ranch,” JD said in response to Ezra’s quizzical look. “Besides, you wouldn’t both fit on the back of my bike.”

* * * * *

Vin and Ezra sat on the porch, while Josiah cooked some steaks on the grill. JD and Buck were taking advantage of the rapidly diminishing daylight to toss a football around, while

Chris and Nathan sat on the steps enjoying their beer.

“Hey Chris,” Vin said, breaking the companionable silence. “There’s one thing that’s been buggin’ me. How did you guys know where to find us?”

“I have been wondering that myself,” Ezra added. “We were not in the most obvious location.”

There was a moment of silence where the five men looked at each other strangely. Ezra lifted a silent eyebrow in Vin’s direction. Vin shrugged in response, clueless to their friends’ odd behavior.

JD finally sighed and said, “We all had this strange dream. There were these cowboys riding their horses...” He trailed off, knowing how ridiculous it sounded.

“Really?” Vin said with a grin, sharing a look with Ezra.

“Don’t laugh,” Buck said. “It’s true.”

“How did this bring you to our location?” Ezra asked.

“Two of the cowboys headed for the mountains,” JD said. “So that’s where we went.”

“What did these two ‘cowboys’ look like?” Ezra asked.

Vin looked at him curiously, then realized why he was asking.

“One was wearing buckskins,” Nathan said. “And the other one...”

“He was wearin’ a red coat, right?” Vin said.

Five heads snapped in his direction.

“How’d you know that?” Chris demanded.

Vin looked at Ezra, who nodded. “We, uh, had a little help gettin’ out of the mine.”

“Help?” Josiah said.

“Ghosts,” Vin said with a shrug.

“Non-corporeal reflections of their real selves,” Ezra reminded him with a chuckle.

“Huh?” JD said.

Ezra shrugged. “That is how the gambler characterized himself and his buckskin-wearing companion.”

“They *talked* to you?” Buck said, his eyes wide with disbelief.

“Yep,” Vin confirmed. “They led us straight to the entrance.”

“Damn,” Chris said, running a hand through his hair. “This is all a little too weird for my tastes.”

“The Lord works in mysterious ways, brothers,” Josiah said.

“Indeed,” Ezra said quietly, lifting his beer in a toast to the flickering apparition that had appeared a few feet away. The gambler smiled, his gold tooth flashing before he disappeared again.

* * * * *

– 1875 –

Ezra made his way down the stairs, stifling a yawn. He was unsurprised to find Vin sitting at their usual table, sipping his coffee. “Good morning, Mr. Tanner,” Ezra greeted him, taking a seat across from the tracker.

“You’re up awful early,” Vin noted curiously.

“I’m afraid I didn’t sleep well last night,” Ezra said, pouring himself a cup of coffee from the pot on the table.

“Me neither,” Vin commiserated.

“I had the most unsettling dream,” Ezra said absently. “It was quite... odd.”

“I had a dream, too, Ez,” Vin said quietly. Ezra looked up and met Vin’s eyes, surprised at the strangely knowing look in them. He couldn’t possibly have had the same dream... could he?

“How strange,” Ezra mused, sipping his coffee and trying to ignore the memory of two men who looked just like himself and Vin. “It was just a dream,” he mumbled softly.

“If you say so,” Vin said, amusement shining in his blue eyes.

“Just a dream...”

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