

Riding down into the valley toward the *hacienda*, they hurriedly made their way to the barn and led the horses inside. Sarah paused at the barn door. "I hope we don't run into Mr. McFaddin or Roberto," she said, shooting a cautious gaze around the quiet ranch yard. "I don't see their Jeep."

"So do I," said John, clutching the bulging package inside his shirt. Peering into the faces of his sister and Ernesto, he said, "Let's make a run for it."

The three sprinted across the dark yard to the *hacienda*. "Mom! Dad!" yelled John.

"John, what's wrong?" asked Mr. Ryan running to the front door, followed by Mrs. Ryan and Mrs. Rodriguez. "Where have you been? We were all starting to get concerned that you were gone for so long."

All of the children spoke at once. "Calm down, now. One at a time. Let's all go into the kitchen," said Mr. Ryan.

"John, Sarah, are you okay?" Mrs. Ryan asked with a look of concern. Mrs. Rodriguez pulled Ernesto to her chest and hugged him tightly.

"We're fine, we're fine. But look at this," said John, taking the package out of his shirt and plopping it on the kitchen table.

Mr. Ryan examined the package and pulled back the torn wrapping. "Where did you get this, John?" he asked with narrowed eyes.

"What is it, David?" asked Mrs. Ryan, moving around Sarah to better see. "Oh my goodness!"

"We got it out of a cave," said Sarah rapidly. "We saw Mr. McFaddin and Roberto putting boxes of it into the cave."

"Are you sure that you saw Mr. McFaddin and Roberto?" asked Mr. Ryan.

"Dad, the Jeep's headlights were on them nearly the whole time. We're sure," said John.

"This is very serious. Did anyone see you take this package?" asked Mr. Ryan, peering intently at the three children.

"No, sir. We waited until they left," said John.

Mr. Ryan let out a deep sigh and said, "This explains a lot. Do you remember the missing file that I told you about, Alicia? I couldn't decipher what was on it. It was all in code. I called Bob about it. I also asked Scooter about it. The file disappeared sometime during our cattle drive. Now I suspect that it was probably some sort of record of drug deals."

Mrs. Rodriguez threw her hand over her mouth and gasped. "Roberto came into the house while you were gone," she whispered from behind her hand. "I thought nothing of it. Señor McFaddin sometimes has him do something with the computer."

“What do we do now, David?” questioned Mrs. Ryan. “We can’t stay here. Not with something like this going on.”

“You don’t do anything!” bellowed Mr. McFaddin, striding into the room with Roberto close on his heels. With a gun in his hand, he said, “You don’t do anything. You don’t go anywhere.”