CADERA

The Coyote Peak Ranch was swallowed up in a cold gray fog. A wind-swept drizzle slashed the darkened window panes, and the wind whined and moaned through every tiny crevice. A pitiful whimper sounded from beside Scott's bed and he reached down a gentle hand to touch the soft brown fur. At his touch, though, the puppy twitched with fear and tried to crawl away from the hand that might hurt her.

Scott's heart nearly broke and he quickly groped for the switch to his bedside lamp. When the room flooded with light he swung his long legs over the side of the bed, but the animal lowered her head and cringed, her eyes glazed with terror.

'Oh, Cadera,' he murmured softly, 'don't you know that I would never hurt you?'

He slipped out of bed and in the shivering cold knelt beside the frightened puppy. The dog immediately hid her face under one paw. Even when Scott laid a gentle arm around the shuddering animal, she did not grow calm but continued to shake uncontrollably.

The puppy was half German Shepherd

and half coyote. When Scott had gone with his father that morning to choose her, the man at the Humane Society had warned them that she had already been abused in her nine short months of life.

'You'll never be able to trust her,' the man had insisted. 'Frankly, it would be better to put her out of her misery. She won't cause her owner anything but trouble.'

Scott had pleaded to give the animal at least a chance. 'I'll take good care of her, Dad, only please let's take her back to the ranch and see how she works out. And just think,' he went on doggedly with a final plea, 'what a great watch dog she'll make.'

Mr Farmer had stood there lean and tall, his rugged weather-beaten face undecided. 'Son, she's half coyote. She may always have a wild streak.'

Scott's brown eyes had been pools of longing. 'We could *try*, Dad! If she doesn't work out we can always...' He did not finish and shrugged away the thought, for some inner part of him had fallen in love with this mysterious, terror-stricken animal.

So finally it was settled between father and son: they would give the shivering dog a chance, but only a chance.

Mr Farmer had paid the fee and was trying to get a collar on the resisting creature, while the man from the Humane Society argued that they should have her

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neutered before taking her home with them.

'I don't think spaying will be necessary for a while. This dog is much too frightened to put her through anything else and we can have her spayed later.'

'Don't say I didn't warn you,' was the other man's parting shot. 'That dog will cause you nothing but trouble.'

All this played over and over again in Scott's mind as he lay on the floor beside the dog. 'You're not going to be any trouble, Cadera,' he said softly. 'I just know you won't. You'll be all right when you find out no one is going to hurt you.'

Cadera whined pitifully and Scott didn't know what to do. Of course the wild weather outside wasn't helping her either.

'I'll tell you what, girl,' he told her gently, 'I'll let you sleep by me. Just for tonight. Okay? Just till you learn that you're safe here.'

He scooped up the puppy, slid back in bed and placed the animal beside him. At first Cadera struggled fiercely, but Scott kept his arm around her and kept speaking to her in a calm, soothing voice.

With his fingers curled into the soft deep fur, he talked to her for an hour, trying to reassure her. 'We have other animals on the ranch too, and you have to be sure you don't chase them.' He sighed, then went on doggedly. 'There's Snowball, the cat. She lives in the barn and kills mice. Then there's Hercules. He's the most beautiful rooster you'll ever see. All black, with red and yellow tail feathers. He prances around like he's king of the roost and makes the chickens behave.' Scott laughed softly. 'Course he thinks he's a parakeet. He rides on our shoulders sometimes. He's really kind of goofy.'

Was it his imagination or had Cadera just scooted a little closer to him? He thought her shivering was less too. Then a cold, wet nose poked against his neck and quickly moved away again. The rippling muscles were growing calmer.

'Then,' Scott went on quietly, 'there's Limpy. She's a chicken and she's crippled so you have to be especially nice to her. It's kind of sad, and she'll never lay eggs, but we all like her so she just sort of hangs around.'

A large, soft paw touched Scott's cheek but he pretended not to notice. Let Cadera make up on her own terms.

The Coyote Peak Ranch was in the White Mountains of North Eastern Arizona, close to the small town of Springerville. It was surrounded by a great sprawling forest, green meadows, and rolling hills that ascended to tall, craggy mountains. A mile from the house grew a wild tangle of berry vines and rabbit brush, and four miles from that was an old abandoned house. A growth

of manzanita was behind the house. It was a rare and beautiful red wood that usually grew down in the desert country.

Scott wanted to push the hair off his forehead but was afraid to move and risk frightening Cadera all over again. His yawn was wide and shuddering, but he kept talking until the puppy at his side was completely calm. 'There's my sister of course...' Yawn. 'Carolyn. You were too scared to meet her, but for a sister she's pretty much okay.' He yawned again. His eyes were droopy and he could feel sleep stealing over him. Cadera appeared to be listening to every word he spoke.

'And...' Yawn. 'We have horses, of course. And my cousin Ricky... coming to stay with us... while... parents have to go...' Where was it Rick's parents had to go? He was too sleepy to remember. 'Anyway, you have... nice...'

Scott was asleep before he finished the sentence. A deep sigh rocked his body and he relaxed.

Cadera, sensing that all danger was past for the moment, snuggled down and finally rested her head on Scott's shoulder. Just maybe there was one person in her ruthless, abusing world that she could trust.

Thankfully, neither boy nor dog had any idea of the terrifying events the future held for them both.