

THE GRANDMASTER OF ADVENTURE



# CLIVE CUSSLER

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration of a steam train chugging through a misty, industrial landscape. The train is dark with a prominent smokestack emitting a plume of white steam. In the foreground, a red steam-powered tractor or engine is shown from a low angle, moving towards the viewer. It has two large, glowing headlights and is pulling a large, cylindrical object. The ground is dusty and the overall atmosphere is one of a rugged, industrial setting.

THE CHASE

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The Chase  
by  
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**APRIL 15, 1950**  
**FLATHEAD LAKE, MONTANA**

**I**T ROSE FROM THE DEPTHS LIKE AN EVIL MONSTER in a Mesozoic sea. A coat of green slime covered the cab and boiler while gray-brown silt from the lake bottom slid and fell off the eighty-one-inch drive wheels and splashed into the cold waters of the lake. Ascending slowly above the surface, the old steam locomotive hung for a moment from the cables of a huge crane mounted on a wooden barge. Still visible under the dripping muck, beneath the open side window of its cab, was the number 3025.

Built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 3025 rolled out of the factory on April 10th of 1904. The “Pacific” class was a common large-sized, high-drive-wheeled steam engine that could pull ten steel passenger cars long distances at speeds up to ninety miles an hour. She was known as a 4-6-2 because of her four-wheeled truck in the front, just behind the cowcatcher, the six

massive drive wheels below the boiler, and the two small wheels mounted beneath the cab.

The crew on the barge watched in awe as the crane operator orchestrated his levers and gently lowered old 3025 onto the main deck, its weight settling the barge three inches deeper in the water. She sat there almost a minute before the six men overcame their wonderment and detached the cables.

“She’s in remarkably good shape for sitting underwater for almost fifty years,” murmured the salvage superintendent of the battered old barge that was nearly as ancient as the locomotive. Since the nineteen twenties, it had been used for dredging operations on the lake and surrounding tributaries.

Bob Kaufman was a big, friendly man, ready with a laugh at the slightest hint of something jovial. With a face ruddy from long hours spent in the sun, he had been working on the barge for twenty-seven years. Now seventy-five, he could have retired long ago, but as long as the dredging company kept him on he was going to keep working. Sitting at home and working jigsaw puzzles was not his idea of the good life. He studied the man standing beside him, who was, as close as he could figure, slightly older.

“What do you think?” Kaufman asked.

The man turned, tall and still lean in his late seventies, hair full and silver. His face was as weathered as buckskin. He stared at the locomotive thoughtfully through eyes yet to rely on glasses. They gleamed blue with a tinge of lavender. A large silver mustache covered his upper lip as if it had been planted there many years ago. It matched his eyebrows, which had become bushy with age. He lifted an expensive Panama hat off his head and dabbed at his forehead with a handkerchief.

He walked over to the salvaged locomotive, now sitting solidly

on the deck, and focused his attention on the cab. Water and muck poured down its ladders and spilled across the deck of the barge.

“Despite the grime,” he said finally, “she’s still aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Only a question of time before a railroad museum comes up with the funds to restore her for display.”

“Lucky a local fisherman lost his outboard engine and dragged the bottom to find it or the locomotive might have been down there another half century.”

“Yes, it was a stroke of luck,” the tall, silver-haired man said slowly.

Kaufman stepped over and ran a hand over one of the big drive wheels. A sentimental expression crossed his face. “My daddy was an engineer with the Union Pacific,” he said quietly. “He always said the Pacific-type locomotive was the finest he ever drove. He used to let me sit in the cab when he brought a train into the yard. The Pacific class was used mostly to haul passenger cars because it was so fast.”

A team of divers, wearing suits of canvas sandwiched between layers of rubber, stood on a platform as it was raised from beneath the surface of the cold water. They wore the Mark V brass hard hat, large weight belts around their chests, and diving boots with canvas tops, brass toes, and lead soles that weighed thirty-six pounds. Altogether, the divers wore one hundred fifty pounds of equipment. They tugged at their umbilical cords, leading to the surface-supplied diving air pump, as the platform was raised and swung down to the deck. They were no sooner aboard than another team climbed down ladders and stood on the platform as it descended into the waters of the lake, still icy from the long Montana winter.

The tall man watched silently, looking out of place among the barge’s crew in their grease-stained work clothes and overalls. He wore neatly pressed brown slacks with an expensive cashmere knit

sweater under a cashmere jacket. His shoes were highly polished and had amazingly kept their shine on the oil-soaked deck, amid the rusting cables.

He eyed the heavy layers of silt on the steps leading to the cab and turned to Kaufman. "Let's get a ladder over here so we can climb into the cab."

Kaufman gave an order to a nearby barge crewman and a ladder soon appeared and was propped against the lip of the cab's floor behind the engineer's seat. The superintendent went up first, followed by the elderly observer. Water dripped in sheets from the roof while dissolved coal merged with the silt flowing through the open door of the firebox onto the metal floor.

At first, it looked like the cab was empty. The maze of valves, pipes, and levers mounted over the boiler was coated with layers of ooze and the tentacles of green weed growing from it. The muck on the floor of the cab was ankle-deep, but the tall, quiet observer did not seem to notice it coming over the tops of his shoes. He knelt down and studied three humps that rose from the ooze like small hills.

"The engineer and fireman," he announced.

"You sure?"

He nodded. "I'm sure. The engineer was Leigh Hunt. He had a wife and two children, both grown now to middle age. The fireman was Robert Carr. He was going to be married after the run."

"Who was the third man?"

"Name was Abner Weed. A tough customer. He forced Hunt and Carr to operate the engine with a gun in their backs."

"They don't look pretty," Kaufman muttered, repelled by what he saw. "I'm surprised they didn't turn into skeletons."

"There would be nothing left of them if they died in salt water, but the cold, fresh water of Flathead Lake preserved them. What you see

is the adipose tissue in which fat is stored. It breaks down over time when immersed, giving the body a waxy, soapy look called saponification.”

“We’ll have to call the sheriff and get a coroner out here.”

“Will that delay the operation?” asked the stranger.

Kaufman shook his head. “No, it shouldn’t slow things down any. As soon as the team of relief divers attach the lift cables, we’ll bring up the coal tender.”

“It’s important that I see what’s in the attached car.”

“You will.” Kaufman looked at the man, trying in vain to read his thoughts. “Better we tackle the tender first to simplify matters. If we concentrate on the car before it has been uncoupled from the tender, it might prove disastrous. It may not be as heavy as the locomotive, but unless we’re very careful it might break into pieces. It’s a far trickier operation. Besides, the front end of the baggage car is half buried under the tender.”

“It’s not a baggage car. It’s a boxcar, or freight car.”

“How could you know that?”

The observer ignored the question. “Raise the coal tender first. You’re in charge.”

Kaufman stared down at the ugly lumps that had once been humans. “How did they get here? How could a train come to be lost in the middle of the lake all these years?”

The tall man gazed out over the calm blue lake. “Forty-four years ago, there was a ferry that carried railcars loaded with lumber back and forth across the lake.”

“It sure is strange,” said Kaufman slowly. “Newspapers and the Southern Pacific officials reported that the train was stolen. As I recall, the date was April 21, 1906.”

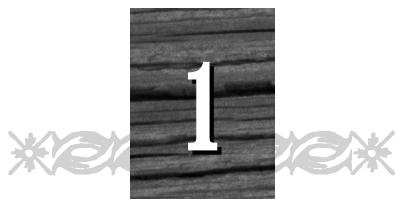
The old man smiled. “A cover-up by the company. The train wasn’t stolen. A railroad dispatcher was bribed to charter the engine.”

“Must have been something valuable in the freight car to kill for,” said Kaufman. “Like a shipment of gold.”

The old man nodded. “Rumors circulated that the train was carrying gold. If the truth be known, it was not gold but hard cash.”

“Forty-four years,” Kaufman said slowly. “A long time for a train to go missing. Maybe the money is still inside the car.”

“Perhaps,” said the tall man, looking toward the horizon at a vision only he could see. “Just perhaps we’ll find the answers when we get inside.”



# 1

**JANUARY 10, 1906**

**BISBEE, ARIZONA**

ANYONE SEEING AN OLD DERELICT SOT SLOWLY SWAYING down Moon Avenue in Bisbee that afternoon would have mistaken him for what he was not, a man who had grown old before his time working the mines that ran through the mineral-rich mountains under the town. His shirt was grubby and he smelled unwashed. One suspender held up torn and ragged pants that were stuffed into scuffed and worn boots that should been thrown in the trash gully behind the town long ago.

Snarled and greasy hair straggled to his shoulders and merged with an uncut beard that hung halfway down his protruding stomach. He looked through eyes so dark brown they were nearly black. There was no expression in them; they seemed cold and almost evil. A pair of work gloves covered the hands that had never held a shovel or a pick.

Under one arm, he carried an old gunnysack that appeared empty.

Almost whimsically, the dirty burlap had DOUGLAS FEED & GRAIN COMPANY, OMAHA, NEBRASKA stenciled on it.

The old man took a minute and parked on a bench at the corner of Moon Avenue and Tombstone Canyon Road. Behind him was a saloon, mostly empty because it was the middle of the day and its usual patrons were hard at work in the mines. The people walking and shopping in the little mining town paid him no more than a quick, disgusted glance. Whenever they passed, he pulled a whiskey bottle from a pant pocket and drank heavily before recapping it and putting it back. No one could have known it was not whiskey but tea.

It was warm for June; he guessed the temperature to be in the high nineties. He sat back and looked up and down the streets as a trolley car passed, pulled by an aging horse. Electric-motored trolleys had yet to come to Bisbee. Most of the vehicles on the streets were still horse-drawn wagons and buggies. The town had only a handful of automobiles and delivery trucks, and none were in evidence.

He knew enough about the town to know that it was founded in 1880 and named after Judge DeWitt Bisbee, one of the moneymen behind the Copper Queen Mine. A good-sized community, its population of twenty thousand made it the largest city between San Francisco and St. Louis. Despite the many miners' families that lived in modest little wooden buildings, the main economy was based around saloons and a small army of shady ladies.

The man's head nodded to his chest; he looked like a drunk who had dozed off. But it was an act. He was conscious of every movement around him. Occasionally, he glanced across the street at the Bisbee National Bank. He watched with interest, through half-closed eyes, as a truck with chain drive and solid-tired wheels rattled up to the bank. There was only one guard, who got out of the truck and carried a large bag of newly printed bills inside. A few minutes later,

he was helped by the bank's teller to lug a heavy chest through the door and onto the truck.

The man knew that it was a shipment of gold, a piece of the three million ounces that had been produced at the local mines. But gold was not what piqued his interest. It was too heavy and too risky for one man to dispose of. It was the cash that brought him to Bisbee, not the prized yellow metal.

He watched as the truck moved away and two men, whom he had identified as security guards at the giant Phelps Dodge Mining Company, walked out of the bank. They had delivered the cash to pay the mining company payroll the following day. He smiled to himself, knowing the assets of the Bisbee National Bank had risen to a new level.

He had watched the people who came and went from the bank for nearly two weeks until he could identify them by sight. He had also noted the time when they came and went. Satisfied now there was no one in the bank except one teller and the owner/manager, he looked at his watch and nodded to himself.

Leisurely, the old derelict rose, stretched, and ambled across the brick street and trolley tracks to the bank, carrying the large, empty gunnysack over one shoulder. Just as he was about to enter, a woman unexpectedly walked past. She gave him a look of loathing, stepped around him, and went inside. She was not in his plan, but he decided to deal with the matter rather than wait. He checked the street and followed her into the bank.

He closed the door. The teller was in the vault and the woman waited until he reappeared. The derelict removed a model 1902 Colt .38 caliber automatic from his boot, struck the woman on the nape of the neck with the barrel, watching with detachment as she slowly folded to the wooden floor. It happened so suddenly and

silently that the owner of the bank did not see or hear anything from his office.

Then the drunken miner suddenly turned bank robber leaped sprightly over the counter, entered the owner's office, and put the gun barrel to his head. "Resist and you'll be shot dead," he said in a low but forbidding tone. "Now, call the teller into your office."

The bald, fat, shocked bank owner looked at him with brown eyes widened with fright. Without argument, he called out, "Roy, come in here."

"Be right there, Mr. Castle," Roy called out from inside the vault.

"Tell him to leave the vault open," said the bank robber quietly, with a sharp edge to his voice.

"Roy, don't close the vault door," Castle complied as ordered, his eyes crossing as they focused on the gun pressing against his forehead.

Roy stepped from the vault, a ledger under one arm. He couldn't see the unconscious woman lying under the counter. Suspecting nothing, he entered Castle's office and abruptly stiffened when he saw the robber holding a gun to his boss's head. The robber pulled the gun barrel away from Castle's head and motioned with the muzzle toward the vault.

"Both of you," he said calmly, "into the vault."

There was no thought of resistance. Castle rose from his desk and led the way into the vault while the robber stepped quickly to the window to check the street for anyone heading for the bank. Except for a few women shopping and a passing beer wagon, the street was quiet.

The interior of the vault was well lit, with an Edison brass lamp hanging from the steel ceiling. Except for the chest containing the gold, stacks of bills, mostly the payroll for the mining companies, covered the shelves. The robber threw the gunnysack at the teller.

"Okay, Roy, fill it with all the greenbacks you have."

Roy did as he was told. With trembling hands, he began sweeping the piles of bills of various denominations into the sack. By the time he was finished, the sack was stretched to the limit of its burlap fibers and seemed to be the size of a well-filled laundry bag.

“Now, lay down on the floor,” ordered the robber.

Castle and Roy, believing the robber was now about to make his getaway, stretched out flat on the floor, with their hands stretched over their heads. The robber pulled a heavy woolen scarf from one of his pockets and wrapped it around the muzzle of his automatic. Then he systematically shot both men in the head. It sounded more like two loud thumps than the sharp crack of gunfire. Without another second’s hesitation, he heaved the sack over one shoulder and walked from the vault without looking back.

Unfortunately, he wasn’t finished. The woman under the counter moaned and tried to rise to her elbows. With utter indifference, he leaned down, lowered the gun, and shot her in the head like he had the bank owner and teller. There was no remorse, not the slightest hint of emotion. He didn’t care whether any of them left families behind. He had murdered three defenseless people in cold blood with as little interest as he might have shown stepping on a column of ants.

He paused to search for one of the shell casings he thought he’d heard fall to the floor from inside the scarf wrapped around the gun but could not find it. He gave up and walked casually from the bank, noting with satisfaction that no one had heard the muted gunshots.

With the gunnysack bulging with cash slung over his shoulder, the man walked through the alley running behind the bank. Stepping into a small alcove under a stairway where he would not be seen, he took off the grimy clothes, removed the gray wig and beard, and threw everything in a small valise. Now revealed in an expensively tailored suit, he perched a bowler hat at a jaunty angle on his head and its neatly brushed carpet of red hair. He slipped on a necktie and knot-

ted it before also tossing the scuffed boots in the valise. He was a short man, and the soles and heels of the boot had been raised nearly two inches. Next, he pulled on a pair of English-made leather shoes, with lifts in the heel to make him appear taller, before turning his attention to a large leather suitcase he had hidden under a canvas tarp along with a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Glancing up and down the alley every few seconds, he transferred the huge pile of cash from the gunnysack to the suitcase, which he strapped on a rack over the rear wheel of the motorcycle. The valise containing his disguise he tied on a front rack.

At that moment, the man heard shouting coming down the alley from Tombstone Canyon Road. Someone had discovered the bodies in the Bisbee National Bank. Unconcerned, he pushed the motorcycle forward and started the three-horsepower, twenty-five-cubic-inch one-cylinder engine. He threw one leg over the seat and rode deserted back alleys to the railroad yard. He moved unseen along a siding where a freight train had stopped to take on water.

His timing was perfect.

Another five minutes and the freight train would have moved back onto the main line and headed toward Tucson. Without being noticed by the engineer and the brakeman, as they pulled a big pipe down from the wooden tank into the tender for water to make steam, the man took a key from his vest pocket and opened the padlock to the door to a boxcar that was marked with a painted sign that read O'BRIAN FURNITURE COMPANY, DENVER. He slid the door open on its rollers. The presence of the boxcar in this time and place was no coincidence. Acting as a fictitious representative of the equally fictitious O'Brian Furniture Company, he had paid cash for it to be included in the freight train passing through Bisbee, en route from El Paso, Texas, to Tucson, Arizona.

He took a wide plank, attached by brackets to the side of the boxcar, and used it as a ramp to ride the Harley-Davidson aboard. Then

he quickly closed the rolling door and reached through a small hinged opening to replace the lock as the whistle on the engine tooted and the train began moving forward from the siding onto the main track.

From the outside, the boxcar looked like any other that had been in use for several years. The paint was faded, and the wooden sides were dented and chipped. But its appearance was deceptive. Even the lock on the door was fake, making it look like the car was buttoned up tight. It was the inside that was the most deceptive, however. Instead of an empty interior or one packed with furniture, it was luxurious, ornately constructed, and furnished as ostentatiously as any private railcar belonging to the president of a railroad. Mahogany paneling spread over the walls and ceiling. The floor was covered by a thick carpet. The décor and furniture were extravagantly magnificent. There was an opulent sitting room, a palatial bedroom, and an efficient kitchen with the latest innovations for preparing gourmet meals.

There were no servants, porters, or cooks.

The man worked alone, without accomplices who might reveal his true name and occupation. No one knew of his clandestine operations as a bank robber and mass murderer. Even the railroad car had been built and decorated in Canada before being secretly transported across the border into the United States.

The robber relaxed in a plush leather settee, uncorked a bottle of 1884 Château La Houringue Bordeaux, chilled in buckets, and poured himself a glass.

He knew the town sheriff would quickly form a posse. But they would be looking for an old mangy miner who murdered while in a drunken fit. The posse would fan out, searching the town, almost certain he was too poor to own a horse. None of the townspeople had ever seen him come and go on horseback or driving a buggy.

Immensely pleased with himself, he sipped the wine from a crys-

tal glass and studied the leather suitcase. Was this his fifteenth, or was it his sixteenth, successful robbery? he mused. The thirty-eight men and women and two children he had killed never entered his mind. He estimated the take of the mining payroll at \$325,000 to \$330,000. Most robbers wouldn't have come close to guessing the amount inside the case.

But it was easy for him, since he was a banker himself.

The sheriff, his deputies, and the posse would never find the murdering robber. It was as if he had disappeared into thin air. No one ever thought to connect him with the dapper man riding through town on a motorcycle.

The hideous crime would become one of Bisbee's most enduring mysteries.



# 2

**SEPTEMBER 15, 1906**  
**THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER BELOW**  
**HANNIBAL, MISSOURI**

SOON AFTER THE TWENTIETH CENTURY WAS BORN, steamboating on the Mississippi began to fade. Few passenger steamboats still reigned in style. The *Saint Peter* was one of the last grand passenger boats to have survived the onslaught of the railroads. Two hundred fifty feet long and seventy-five feet wide, she was a splendid example of palatial elegance, with side-curving stairways, plush passenger cabins, and a magnificent main dining room with the finest food to be found anywhere. Ostentatious salons were provided for the ladies while the men smoked their cigars and played cards in handsome rooms adorned with mirrors and paintings.

Card games on steamboats plying the river were notorious for their cardsharp gamblers. Many passengers left steamboats poorer than when they boarded. At one table in the gambling room of the *Saint*

*Peter*, in a quiet corner away from the main action, two men were enjoying a game of five-card stud.

At first glance, the scene looked like any other in the room, but a closer look revealed that no chips sat on the green felt table.

Joseph Van Dorn calmly studied his hand before laying down two cards. "A good thing we're not in this for the money," he said, smiling, "or I would owe you eight thousand dollars."

Colonel Henry Danzler, director of the United States government's Criminal Investigation Department, smiled in return. "If you cheated like I do, we'd be even."

Van Dorn was a congenial man in his early forties. His cheeks and chin were buried under a magnificent red burnside's beard that matched what remained of the hair that circled his bald dome. His face was dominated by a Roman nose, and his brown eyes looked sad and melancholy, but his looks and manner were deceiving.

Irish-born, he bore a name known and respected throughout the country for tenacity in tracking down murderers, robbers, and other desperados. The criminal underworld of the time knew he would chase them to the ends of the earth. Founder and chief of the renowned Van Dorn Detective Agency, he and his agents had prevented political assassinations, hunted down many of the West's most feared outlaws, and helped organize the country's first secret service agency.

"You'd still deal yourself more aces than me," he said affably.

Danzler was an enormous man, tall and mammoth in girth, weighing slightly over three hundred pounds, yet he could move as effortlessly as a tiger. His salt-and-pepper hair was immaculately trimmed and brushed, shining under the light that streamed in through the boat's big windows. His blue-green eyes had a soft glow to them, yet they seemed to analyze and record everything going on about him.

A veteran and hero of the Spanish American War, he had charged

up San Juan Hill with Captain John Pershing and his black “Buffalo Soldiers” of the Tenth Cavalry and had served with distinction in the Philippines against the Moros. When the government’s Criminal Investigation Department was authorized by Congress, President Roosevelt asked him to become its first director.

Danzler opened the lid of a large pocket watch and stared at the hands. “Your man is five minutes late.”

“Isaac Bell is my best agent. He always gets his man—and occasionally a woman, too. If he’s late, there’s a good reason.”

“You say he’s the one who apprehended the assassin Ramos Kelly before he could shoot President Roosevelt?”

Van Dorn nodded. “And he rounded up the Barton gang in Missouri. He shot and killed three of them before the other two surrendered to him.”

Danzler stared at the famous detective. “And you think he’s the man to stop our mass murderer and bank robber?”

“If anyone can stop the killer, Isaac can.”

“What is his family background?”

“Very wealthy,” answered Van Dorn. “His father and grandfather were bankers. You’ve heard of the American States Bank of Boston?”

Danzler nodded. “Indeed. I have an account there myself.”

“Isaac is very affluent. His grandfather left him five million dollars in his will, thinking Isaac would take his place as head of the bank one day. It never happened. Isaac preferred detective work to banking. I’m lucky to have him.”

Danzler caught a shadow on his arm. He looked up and found himself looking into soft blue eyes with a slight violet cast, eyes that had looked over horizons to see what was beyond. The effect was almost mesmerizing, as though they were searching deep into Danzler’s inner thoughts.

Danzler could size up a man as precisely as he could a horse. The

intruder was tall and lean, stood well over six feet, and weighed no more than one hundred seventy-five pounds. A large flaxen mustache that covered his entire upper lip conformed with the thick mass of neatly barbered blond hair. His hands and fingers were long and nimble and hung loosely, almost casually, at his sides. There was a nonsense look about him. The colonel judged that this was a man who dealt with substance and did not endure fools or insignificant and phony candor. He had a determined set to the chin and lips that were spread in a friendly smile. Danzler guessed his age at about thirty.

He was dressed immaculately in a white linen suit without a wrinkle. A heavy gold chain dipped from a left vest pocket that was attached to a large gold watch inside the right pocket. A low-crowned hat with a wide brim sat squarely on his head. Danzler might have pegged him as a dandy, but the look of elegance was betrayed by a pair of worn leather boots that had seen many hours in stirrups. Bell carried a thin valise and set it down beside the table.

“Colonel Danzler,” said Van Dorn, “this is the man I told you about, Isaac Bell.”

Danzler offered his hand but did not rise from his chair. “Joe here tells me that you always get your man.”

Bell grinned slightly. “I’m afraid Mr. Van Dorn has exaggerated. I was ten minutes too late when Butch Cassidy and Harry Longabaugh sailed for Argentina three years ago from New York. Their boat pulled away from the dock before I could apprehend them.”

“How many agents or law enforcement officers were with you?”

Bell shrugged. “I intended to handle the matter on my own.”

“Wasn’t Longabaugh the Sundance Kid?” asked Danzler.

Bell nodded. “He got the nickname when he tried to steal a horse in Sundance, Wyoming. He was caught and spent eighteen months in jail.”

“Surely you didn’t expect to subdue them without a fight.”

“I think it is safe to say that they would have resisted,” said Bell, without explaining how he would have single-handedly captured the former members of the infamous Wild Bunch.

Van Dorn sat back in his chair, made no comment, and gave the colonel a smug look.

“Why don’t you sit down, Mr. Bell, and join our little game?”

Bell looked at the empty table quizzically and then at Danzler. “You appear to have no chips.”

“Just a friendly little game,” said Van Dorn, shuffling the deck of cards and dealing out three hands. “So far, I owe the colonel eight thousand dollars.”

Bell sat down, the quizzical look altered to one of understanding. The game was a pretense. His chief and the colonel were sitting in the corner away from the other gamblers and playing as if they were in a serious game. He laid his hat in his lap, picked up his cards, and acted as if he were deep in thought.

“Are you familiar with the swarm of bank robberies and murders that have occurred around the western states in the past two years?” Danzler inquired.

“Only in conversation,” replied Bell. “Mr. Van Dorn has kept me busy on other cases.”

“What do you actually know about the crimes?”

“Only that the robber murders anyone in the bank during the act, escapes like a spirit, and leaves no evidence behind that might incriminate him.”

“Anything else?” Danzler probed.

“Whoever he is,” answered Bell, “he is very, very good. There have been no leads and no breaks in the investigation.” He paused and stared at Van Dorn. “Is that why I’ve been called here?”

Van Dorn nodded. "I want you to take over the case as chief investigator."

Bell threw down a card, picked up the card that Danzler dealt, and slipped it in the fan, which he held in his left hand.

"Are you a lefty, Mr. Bell?" asked Danzler out of curiosity.

"No. Actually, I'm right-handed."

Van Dorn laughed softly. "Isaac can draw the derringer he hides in his hat, cock it, and pull the trigger faster than you can blink."

Danzler's respect for Bell grew during the conversation. He drew back his coat and revealed a 1903 Colt .38 caliber hammerless automatic. "I'll take Joe's word for it, but it would be interesting to put it to the test—" Danzler had not finished the sentence when he found himself staring into the twin muzzles of a derringer.

"Age has slowed you, Henry," said Van Dorn. "Either that or your mind wandered."

"I have to admit, he is very fast," Danzler said, visibly impressed.

"What office will I work out of?" Bell asked Van Dorn as he slipped the derringer back in his hat, where it fit in a small pocket inside the crown.

"The crimes have occurred from Placerville, California, in the west, to Terlingua, Texas, to the east," replied Van Dorn. "And from Bisbee, Arizona, in the south, to Bozeman, Montana, in the north. I think it best if you operated in the center."

"That would be Denver."

Van Dorn nodded. "As you know, we have an office there with six experienced agents."

"I've worked with two of them three years ago," said Bell. "Curtis and Irvine are good men."

"Yes, I forgot," Van Dorn said, now recalling. "I might add, Colonel, that Isaac was responsible for the apprehension of Jack

Ketchum, who was later hung for two murders committed during a train robbery.” He paused and reached under the table and produced an identical valise to the one Bell had carried into the gambling salon. Bell then passed his empty valise to Van Dorn. “Inside, you will find the reports on all the crimes. Every lead so far has led up a blind alley.”

“When do I start?”

“At the next landing, which is Clarksville, you will depart and take the first train to Independence. From there, you will be given a ticket on the Union Pacific express to Denver. You can digest and study what little clues and evidence we’ve gathered. Once you arrive, you’ll take up the hunt for the murdering scum.” A look of anger and frustration clouded Van Dorn’s brown eyes. “Sorry, I didn’t give you a chance to pack when you left Chicago, but I wanted you to start as soon as possible.”

“Not to worry, sir,” Bell said with a faint smile. “Fortunately, I packed two suitcases for the duration.”

Van Dorn’s eyebrows raised. “You knew?”

“Let’s say I made an educated guess.”

“Keep us informed on your manhunt,” said Danzler. “If you need any help from the government, I’ll do all in my power to assist you.”

“Thank you, sir,” Bell acknowledged. “I’ll be in contact as soon as I get a firm grip on the situation.”

Van Dorn said, “I’ll be working in our Chicago office. Since transcontinental telephone service has yet to run from St. Louis across the prairie to Denver and beyond to California, you’ll have to telegraph me on your progress.”

“If any,” Danzler muttered sarcastically. “You’re up against the best criminal brain this country has ever known.”

“I promise I won’t rest until I capture the man responsible for these hideous crimes.”

“I wish you good luck,” Van Dorn said sincerely.

“Not to change the subject,” Danzler spoke with satisfaction as he laid his card hand on the green felt, “I have three queens.”

Van Dorn shrugged and threw his cards on the table. “Beats me.”

“And you, Mr. Bell?” said Danzler with a crafty grin.

Isaac Bell slowly laid his cards on the table one by one. “A straight flush,” he said matter-of-factly. Then, without another word, he rose and walked briskly from the salon.