



**CLIVE
CUSSLER**

AND JUSTIN SCOTT

The Wrecker

www.penguin.co.uk/tasters

The Wrecker
by
Clive Cussler and Justin Scott

Copyright © Sandecker, RLLLP, 2009

All rights reserved



Penguin Books Ltd

This is a limited extract from
The Wrecker

To find out more please visit www.penguin.co.uk

DECEMBER 12, 1934

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN

ABOVE THE SNOW LINE, THE GERMAN ALPS TORE AT THE SKY like the jaws of an ancient flesh eater. Storm clouds grazed the wind-swept peaks, and the jagged rock appeared to move, as if the beast were awakening. Two men, neither young, both strong, watched from the balcony of a ski hotel with quickening anticipation.

Hans Grandzau was a guide whose weathered face was as craggy as the mountaintops. He carried in his head sixty years of traversing the wintery slopes. Last night, he had promised that the wind would shift east. Bitter Siberian cold would whirl wet air from the Mediterranean into blinding snow.

The man to whom Hans had promised snow was a tall American whose blond hair and mustache were edged with silver. He wore a tweed Norfolk suit, a warm fedora on his head, and a Yale University scarf adorned with the shield of Branford College. His dress was typical of a well-to-do tourist who had come to the Alps for winter sport. But his eyes were fastened with a glacial-blue intensity on an isolated stone castle ten miles across the rugged valley.

The castle had dominated its remote glen for a thousand years. It was nearly buried by the winter snows and mostly hidden by the

shadow of the peaks that soared above it. Miles below the castle, too long and steep a climb to be undertaken lightly, was a village. The American watched a pillar of smoke creep toward it. He was too far away to see the locomotive venting it, but he knew that it marked the route of the railroad that crossed the border to Innsbruck. Full circle, he thought grimly. Twenty-seven years ago, the crime had started by a railroad in the mountains. Tonight it would end, one way or another, by a railroad in the mountains.

“Are you sure you are up to this?” asked the guide. “The ascents are steep. The wind will cut like a saber.”

“I’m fit as you are, old man.”

To assure Hans, he explained that he had prepared by bivouacking for a month with Norwegian ski troops, having arranged informal attachment to a United States Army unit dispatched to hone the skills of mountain warfare.

“I was not aware that American troops exercise in Norway,” the German said stiffly.

The American’s blue eyes turned slightly violet with the hint of a smile. “Just in case we have to come back over here to straighten out another war.”

Hans returned an opaque grin. The American knew he was a proud veteran of the Alpenkorps, Germany’s elite mountain division formed by Kaiser Wilhelm in the 1914–1918 World War. But he was no friend of the Nazis, who had recently seized control of the German government and threatened to plunge Europe into another war.

The American looked around to be sure they were alone. An elderly chambermaid in a black dress and white apron was rolling a carpet sweeper down the hall behind the balcony doors. He waited until she had moved away, then palmed a leather pouch of Swiss twenty-franc gold coins in his big hand and slipped it to the guide.

“Full payment in advance. The deal is, if I can’t keep up, leave me and take yourself home. You get the skis. I’ll meet you at the rope tow.”

He hurried to his luxurious wood-paneled room, where deep carpets and a crackling fire made the scene beyond the window look even colder. Quickly, he changed into water-repellent gabardine trousers, which he tucked into thick wool socks, laced boots, two light wool sweaters, a windproof leather vest, and a hip-length gabardine jacket, which he left unzipped.

Jeffrey Dennis knocked and entered. He was a smooth young operative from the Berlin office, wearing the Tyrolean hat that tourists bought. Jeffrey was bright, eager, and organized. But he was no outdoorsman.

“Still no snow?”

“Give everyone the go-ahead,” the older man told him. “In one hour, you won’t see your hand in front of your face.”

Dennis handed him a small knapsack. “Papers for you and your, uh, ‘luggage.’ The train will cross into Austria at midnight. You’ll be met at Innsbruck. This passport should be good until tomorrow.”

The older man looked out the window at the distant castle. “My wife?”

“Safe in Paris. At the George V.”

“What message?”

The young man offered an envelope.

“Read it.”

Dennis read in a monotone, “‘Thank you, my darling, for the best twenty-fifth anniversary imaginable.’”

The older man relaxed visibly. That was the code she had chosen with a wink the day before yesterday. She had provided cover, a romantic second honeymoon, in case anyone recognized him and asked whether he was here on business. Now she was safely away. The time for cover was over. The storm was building. He took the envelope and held it to the flames in the fireplace. He inspected the passport, visas, and border permits carefully.

“Sidearm?”

It was compact and light. Dennis said, "It's the new automatic the German cops carry undercover. But I can get you a service revolver if you would be more comfortable with an older gun."

The blue eyes, which had swept again to the castle across the bleak valley, pivoted back at the younger man. Without looking down at his hands, the tall American removed the magazine, checked that the chamber was empty, and proceeded to fieldstrip the Walther PPK by opening the trigger guard and removing the slide and return spring from the barrel. That took twelve seconds. Still looking the courier in the face, he reassembled the pistol in ten.

"This should do the job."

It began to sink into the younger man that he was in the presence of greatness. Before he could stop himself, he asked a boy's question. "How long do you have to practice to do that?"

A surprisingly warm smile creased the stern face, and he said, neither unkindly nor without humor, "Practice at night, Jeff, in the rain, when someone's shooting at you, and you'll pick it up quick enough."

SNOW WAS PELTING HARD when he got to the rope tow, and he could barely see the ridgeline that marked the top of the ski slope. The stony peaks that reared above it were invisible. The other skiers were excited, jostling to grab the moving rope for one more run before the impending storm forced the guides to close the mountain for safety's sake. Hans had brought new skis, the latest design, with steel edges riveted to the wood. "Wind is growing," he said, explaining the edges. "Ice on the tops."

They stepped into their flexible bindings, clamping them around their heels, put on their gloves and picked up their poles, and worked their way through the dwindling crowd to the rope, which was passing around a drum turned by a noisy tractor engine. They grabbed hold of

the rope. It jerked their arms, and up the two men glided, providing a typical sight in the posh resort, a wealthy American seeking adventure in late middle age and his private instructor, old enough and wise enough to return him safely to the hotel in time to dress for dinner.

The wind was strong atop the ridge, and shifty. Gusts swirled the snow thick and thin. One moment, there was little to see beyond a clutch of skiers waiting their turns to start down the slope. The next moment, the view opened to reveal the hotel, small as a dollhouse at the bottom of the slope, the high peaks soaring above it. The American and Hans poled along the ridge away from the crowd. And suddenly, when no one saw them, they wheeled off the ridge and plunged down its back side.

Their skis carved fresh tracks through unmarked powder.

Instantly, the calls of the skiers and the drone of the rope-tow engine ceased. The snow fell silently on wool clothing. It was so quiet that they could hear the hiss of the metal-edged wood cutting the powdery surface, their own breath, and their heartbeats. Hans led the way down the slope for a mile, and they swept into a shelter formed by an outcropping of rock. From within it, he pulled out a lightweight improvised sled.

It had been fashioned out of a Robertson stretcher, a litter made of ash and beech and canvas designed to wrap tightly around a wounded sailor to immobilize him so he could be carried through a ship's steep and narrow companionways. The stretcher was lashed to a pair of skis, and Hans pulled it with a rope tied around his waist. That rope was twined around a long ski pole he used as a brake on descent. He led the way another mile across a shallower slope. At the foot of a steep rise, they attached sealskins to their skis. The nap of the fur facing backward gave them traction to climb.

The snow came on thick now. Here was where Hans earned his gold francs. The American could follow a compass as well as the next man. But no compass could guarantee he wouldn't drift off course,

pummeled by the wind, disoriented by a crazy hodgepodge of steep angles. But Hans Grandzau, who had skied these mountains since he was a boy, could pinpoint his location by the slant of a particular slope and how that slant shaped the bite of the wind.

They climbed for miles and skied downhill again, and climbed again. Often, they had to stop to rest or clear the sealskins of ice. It was nearly dark when the snow parted suddenly at the top of a ridge. Across one last valley, the American saw a single lighted window in the castle. "Give me the sled," he said. "I'll take it from here."

The German guide heard the steel in his voice. There was no arguing. Hans passed him the sled rope, shook his hand, wished him luck, and cut a curving track into the dark, heading for the village somewhere far below.

The American headed for the light.



SEPTEMBER 21, 1907

CASCADE RANGE, OREGON

THE RAILROAD DICK WATCHING THE NIGHT SHIFT TROOP INTO the jagged mouth of the tunnel wondered how much work the Southern Pacific Company would get out of a one-eyed, hard-rock miner limping on a stiff leg. His bib overalls and flannel shirt were threadbare, his boots worn thin as paper. The brim of his battered felt slouch hat drooped low as a circus clown's, and the poor jigger's steel hammer trailed from his glove as if it was too heavy to lift. Something was fishy.

The rail cop was a drinking man, his face so bloated by rotgut that his eyes appeared lost in his cheeks. But they were sharp eyes, miraculously alive with hope and laughter—considering that he had fallen so low he was working for the most despised police force in the country—and still alert. He stepped forward, on the verge of investigating. But just then a powerful young fellow, a fresh-faced galoot straight off the farm, took the old miner's hammer and carried it for him. That act of kindness conspired with the limp and the eye patch to make the first man appear much older than he was, and harmless. Which he was not.

Ahead were two holes in the side of the mountain, the main rail

tunnel and, nearby, a smaller “pioneer” tunnel “holed through” first to explore the route, draw fresh air, and drain water. Both were rimmed with timberwork rock sheds to keep the mountainside from falling down on the men and dump cars trundling in and out.

The day shift was staggering out, exhausted men heading for the work train that would take them back to the cookhouse in the camp. A locomotive puffed alongside, hauling cars heaped with crossties. There were freight wagons drawn by ten-mule teams, handcars scuttling along light track, and clouds and clouds of dust. The site was remote, two days of rough, roundabout train travel from San Francisco. But it was not isolated.

Telegraph lines advancing on rickety poles connected Wall Street to the very mouth of the tunnel. They carried grim reports of the financial panic shaking New York three thousand miles away. Eastern bankers, the railroad’s paymasters, were frightened. The old man knew that the wires crackled with conflicting demands. Speed up construction of the Cascades Cutoff, a vital express line between San Francisco and the north. Or shut it down.

Just outside the tunnel mouth, the old man stopped to look up at the mountain with his good eye. The ramparts of the Cascade Range glowed red in the setting sun. He gazed at them as if he wanted to remember what the world looked like before the dark tunnel swallowed him deep into the stone. Jostled by the men behind, he rubbed his eye patch, as if uneasily recalling the moment of searing loss. His touch opened a pinhole for his second eye, which was even sharper than the first. The railway detective, who looked a cut above the ordinary slow-witted cinder dick, was still watching him mistrustfully.

The miner was a man with immense reserves of cold nerve. He had the guts to stand his ground, the bloodless effrontery to throw off suspicion by acting unafraid. Ignoring the workmen shoving past him, he peered about as if suddenly spellbound by the rousing spectacle of a new railroad pushing through the mountains.

He did, in fact, marvel at the endeavor. The entire enterprise, which synchronized the labor of thousands, rested on a simple structure at his feet. Two steel rails were spiked four feet eight and a half inches apart to wooden crossties. The ties were firmly fixed in a bed of crushed-stone ballast. The combination formed a strong cradle that could support hundred-ton locomotives thundering along at a mile a minute. Repeated every mile—twenty-seven hundred ties, three hundred fifty-two lengths of rail, sixty kegs of spikes—it made a smooth, near-frictionless road, a steel highway that could run forever. The rails soared over the rugged land, clinging to narrow cuts etched into the sheer sides of near-vertical slopes, jumping ravines on bristling trestles, tunneling in and out of cliffs.

But this miracle of modern engineering and painstaking management was still dwarfed, even mocked, by the mountains. And no one knew better than he how fragile it all was.

He glanced at the cop, who had turned his attention elsewhere.

The night-shift crew vanished into the rough-hewn bore. Water gurgled at their feet as they tramped through endless archways of timber shoring. The limping man held back, accompanied by the big fellow carrying his hammer. They stopped at a side tunnel a hundred yards in and doused their acetylene lamps. Alone in the dark, they watched the others' lamps flicker away into the distance. Then they felt their own way through the side tunnel, through twenty feet of stone, into the parallel pioneer tunnel. It was narrow, cut rougher than the main bore, the ceiling dropping low here and there. They crouched and pressed ahead, deeper into the mountain, relighting their lamps once no one could see.

The old man limped more quickly now, playing his light on the side wall. Suddenly, he stopped and passed his hand over a jagged seam in the stone. The young man watched him and wondered, not for the first time, what kept him fighting for the cause when most men as crippled as he would spend their time in a rocking chair. But

a man could get hurt asking too many questions in the hobo jungles, so he kept his wonderings to himself.

“Drill here.”

The old man revealed only enough to inspire the confidence of the volunteers he recruited. The farm boy carrying the hammer thought he was helping a shingle weaver down from Puget Sound, where the union had called a general strike that completely tied up the cedar-shingle industry until the bloodsucking manufacturers beat them with scab labor. Just the answer a budding anarchist longed to hear.

His previous recruit had believed he was from Idaho, on the run from the Coeur d’Alene mine wars. To the next he would have fought the good fight organizing for the Wobblies in Chicago. How had he lost an eye? Same place he got the limp, slugging it out with strikebreakers in Colorado City, or bodyguarding for “Big Bill” Haywood of the Western Federation of Miners, or shot when the Governor called up the National Guard. Gilt-edged credentials to those who hungered to make a better world and had the guts to fight for it.

The big fellow produced a three-foot steel chisel and held it in place while the man with the eye patch tapped it until the point was firmly seated in the granite. Then he handed the hammer back.

“Here you go, Kevin. Quickly, now.”

“Are you certain smashing this tunnel won’t hurt the boys working the main bore?”

“I’d stake my life on it. There are twenty feet of solid granite between us.”

Kevin’s was a common story in the West. Born to be a farmer before his family lost their land to the bank, he had toiled in the silver mines, until he got fired for speaking up in favor of the union. Riding around the country on freight trains looking for work, he had been beaten by railway police. Rallying for higher wages, he’d been attacked by strikebreakers with ax handles. There were days his

head hurt so bad he couldn't think straight. Worst were the nights he despaired of ever finding a steady job, or even a regular place to sleep, much less meeting a girl and raising a family. On one of those nights, he had been seduced by the anarchists' dream.

Dynamite, "the proletariat's artillery," would make a better world.

Kevin swung the heavy sledge with both hands. He pounded the chisel a foot in. He stopped to catch his breath and complained about the tool. "I can't abide these steel hammers. They bounce too much. Give me old-fashioned cast iron."

"Use the bounce." Surprisingly lithe, the cripple with the eye patch took the hammer and swung it easily, using his powerful wrists to whip the steel up on the bounce, flick it back in a one fluid motion, and bring it hard down on the chisel again. "Make it work for you. Here, you finish . . . Good. Very good."

They chiseled a hole three feet into the stone.

"Dynamite," said the old man, who had let Kevin carry everything incriminating in case the railway police searched them. Kevin removed three dull-red sticks from under his shirt. Printed on each in black ink was the manufacturer's brand, VULCAN. The cripple stuffed them one after another into the hole.

"Detonator."

"You absolutely certain it won't hurt any workingmen?"

"Guaranteed."

"I guess I wouldn't mind blowing the bosses to hell, but those men in there, they're on our side."

"Even if they don't know it yet," the old cripple said cynically. He attached the detonator, which would explode forcefully enough to make the dynamite itself blow.

"Fuse."

Kevin carefully uncoiled the slow fuse he had hidden in his hat. A yard of the hemp yarn impregnated with pulverized gunpowder would burn in ninety seconds—a foot in half a minute. To gain five

minutes to retreat to a safe place, the old man laid eleven feet of fuse. The extra foot was to take into account variations in consistency and dampness.

“Would you like to fire the blast?” he asked casually.

Kevin’s eyes were burning like a little boy’s on Christmas morning. “Could I?”

“I’ll check the coast is clear. Just remember, you’ve only got five minutes to get out. Don’t dawdle. Light it and go—*Wait!* What’s that?” Pretending that he had heard someone coming, he whipped around and half drew a blade from his boot.

Kevin fell for the ruse. He cupped his hand to his ear. But all he heard was the distant rumble of the drills in the main bore and the whine of the blowers pulling foul air out of the pioneer tunnel and drawing in fresh. “What? What did you hear?”

“Run down there! See who’s coming.”

Kevin ran, shadows leaping as his light bounced on the rough walls.

The old man ripped the gunpowder fuse from the detonator and threw it into the darkness. He replaced it with an identical-looking string of hemp yarn soaked in melted trinitrotoluene, which was used to detonate multiple charges simultaneously because it burned so fast.

He was quick and dexterous. By the time he heard Kevin returning from his fool’s errand, the treachery was done. But when he looked up, he was stunned to see Kevin holding both hands in the air. Behind him was the railroad dick, the cop who had watched him enter the tunnel. Suspicion had transformed his whiskey-sodden face into a mask of cold vigilance. He was pointing a revolver in a rock-steady grip.

“Elevate!” he commanded. “Hands up!”

Swift eyes took in the fuse and detonator and understood at once.

He tucked his weapon close to his body, clearly a fighting man who knew how to use it.

The old man moved very slowly. But instead of obeying the order to raise his hands, he reached down to his boot and drew his long knife.

The cinder dick smiled. His voice had a musical lilt, and he spoke his words with the self-taught reader's love of the English language.

"Beware, old man. Even though you have brought, in error, a knife to a gunfight, I will be obliged to shoot you dead if it does not fall from your hand in a heartbeat."

The old man flicked his wrist. His knife telescoped open, tripling its length into a rapier-thin sword. Already lunging with fluid grace, he buried the blade in the cop's throat. The cop reached one hand to his throat and tried to aim his gun. The old man thrust deeper, twisting his blade, severing the man's spinal cord as he drove the sword completely through his neck and out the back. The revolver clattered on the tunnel floor. And as the old man withdrew his sword, the cop unfolded onto the stone beside his fallen gun.

Kevin made a gurgling noise in his own throat. His eyes were round with shock and fear, darting from the dead man to the sword that had appeared from nowhere and then back to the dead man. "How—what?"

He touched the spring release and the sword retracted into the blade, which he returned to his boot. "Same principle as the theatrical prop," he explained. "Slightly modified. Got your matches?"

Kevin plunged trembling hands into his pockets, fished blindly, and finally pulled out a padded bottle.

"I'll check the tunnel mouth is clear," the old man told him. "Wait for my signal. Remember, five minutes. Make damned sure it's lit, burning proper, then run like hell! Five minutes."

Five minutes to retreat to a safe place. But not if fast-burning

trinitrotoluene, which would leap ten feet in the blink of an eye, had been substituted for slow-burning, pulverized gunpowder.

The old man stepped over the cop's body and hurried to the mouth of the pioneer tunnel. When he saw no one nearby, he tapped loudly with the chisel, two times. Three taps echoed back. The coast was clear.

The old man took out an official Waltham railroad watch, which no hard-rock miner could afford. Every conductor, dispatcher, and locomotive engineer was required by law to carry the seventeen-jewel, lever-set pocket timepiece. It was guaranteed to be accurate within half a minute per week, whether jouncing along in a hot locomotive cab or freezing on the snow-swept platform of a train-order station atop the High Sierra. The white face with Arabic numerals was just visible in the dusk. He watched the interior dial hand sweep seconds instead of the minutes Kevin believed that the slow-burning pulverized gunpowder gave him to hightail it to safety.

Five *seconds* for Kevin to uncork his sulfur matches, remove one, recork the padded bottle, kneel beside the fuse. Three *seconds* for nervous fingers to scrape a sulfur match on the steel sledge. One *second* while it flared full and bright. Touch the flame to the trinitrotoluene fuse.

A puff of air, almost gentle, fanned the old man's face.

Then a burst of wind rushed from the portal, propelled by the hollow thud of the dynamite exploding deep in the rock. An ominous rumble and another burst of wind signaled that the pioneer tunnel had caved in.

The main bore was next.

He hid among the timbers shoring the portal and waited. It was true that there was twenty feet of granite between the pioneer bore and the men digging the main tunnel. But at the point he had set the dynamite, the mountain was far from solid, being riddled with seams of fractured stone.

The ground shook, rolling like an earthquake.

The old man allowed himself a grim smile. That tremor beneath his boots told him more than the frightened yells of the terrorized hard-rock miners and powder men who came pouring out of the main tunnel. More than the frenzied shouts of those converging on the smoke-belching tunnels to see what had happened.

Hundreds of feet under the mountain, the tunnel's ceiling had collapsed. He had timed it to bury the dump train, crushing twenty cars, the locomotive, and its tender. It did not trouble him that men would be crushed, too. They were as unimportant as the railway cop he had just murdered. Nor did he feel sympathy for the injured men trapped in the darkness behind a wall of broken stone. The greater the death, destruction, and confusion, the slower the cleanup, the longer the delay.

He whipped off his eye patch, shoved it in his pocket. Then he removed his drooping slouch hat, folded the brims inside out, and shoved it back on his head in the shape of a miner's flat cap. Quickly untying the scarf under his trousers that immobilized his knee to make him limp, he strode out of the dark on two strong legs, slipped into the scramble of frightened men, and ran with them, stumbling as they did on the cross-ties, tripping on the rails, fighting to get away. Eventually, the fleeing men slowed, turned by scores of the curious running toward the disaster.

The man notorious as the Wrecker kept going, dropping to the ditch beside the tracks, easily eluding rescue crews and railway police on a well-rehearsed escape route. He skirted a siding where a privately owned special passenger train stretched behind a gleaming black locomotive. The behemoth hissed softly, keeping steam up for electricity and heat. Rows of curtained windows glowed golden in the night. Music drifted on the cold air, and he could see liveried servants setting a table for dinner. Trudging past it to the tunnel bore earlier, young Kevin had railed against the "favored few" who traveled in splendor while hard-rock miners were paid two dollars a day.

The Wrecker smiled. It was the railroad president's personal train. All hell was about to break loose inside the luxurious cars when he learned that the mountain had fallen into his tunnel, and it was a safe bet Kevin's "favored few" would not feel quite so favored tonight.

A mile down the newly laid track, harsh electric light marked the sprawling construction yard of workmen's bunkhouses, materials stores, machine shops, dynamo, scores of sidings thick with materials trains, and a roundhouse for turning and repairing their locomotives. Below that staging area, deep in a hollow, could be seen the oil lamps of an end-of-the-tracks camp, a temporary city of tents and abandoned freight cars housing the makeshift dance halls, saloons, and brothels that followed the ever-moving construction yard.

It would be moving a lot more slowly now.

To clear the rockfall from the tunnel would take days. A week at least to shore the weakened rock and repair the damage before work could resume. He had sabotaged the railroad quite thoroughly this time, his best effort yet. And if they managed to identify what was left of Kevin, the only witness who could connect him to the crime, the young man would prove to be an angry hothead heard spouting radical talk in the hobo jungle before he accidentally blew himself to kingdom come.