



**DIMIES  
TO DOLLAR \$**

**QUICKREADS**

TERI THOMAS



**A**nna Torres and Toni Boucher sat in the observation deck of the *California Zephyr*. The clickity-clack of the train's wheels was music to their ears. At last they were on the first leg of their long-awaited camping trip.

The two 20-year-olds were best friends. After high school, they'd trained to become CNAs, or certified nursing assistants. Then they'd gotten jobs at the same convalescent hospital. Helping people fight their way back from serious injury or illness was rewarding work.

The fun-loving girls were popular with both the staff and the patients—especially the elderly. Because Toni and Anna were always willing to listen, many old people had shared their fascinating stories with them.



**A**nna and Toni had been planning this trip for more than a year. Toni couldn't wait to climb mountains and camp out under the stars. Since Anna was crazy about animals, she wanted to see plenty of wildlife. After hours of discussion, they'd chosen Colorado as the perfect destination.

Their adventure had finally begun the day before. After departing from Sacramento, California, their hometown, the train had slowly climbed the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Then it sped across the high-desert plains of the Great Nevada Basin. Despite their excitement, the girls had fallen asleep around 11:00 P.M., shortly after passing through Elko, Nevada. They were jolted awake early the next morning as the train pulled out of Provo, Utah. After having a leisurely breakfast in the dining car, they took seats in the observation deck. The huge, panoramic windows there offered spectacular views of the Rocky Mountains.



**T**oni dug into her backpack and pulled out the train schedule. “We crossed the state line about an hour ago,” she said. “We should be getting to Silver Springs in a couple more hours. Then let the adventure begin!”

“Look, Toni! There’s a bald eagle!” Anna cried out excitedly. “And there’s another one!”

Toni gazed at the sight in wonder. “I see them,” she said.

Anna brushed her long, dark hair aside to adjust her binoculars. Now the train was passing through a narrow canyon. “There must be an aerie around here someplace,” she said as she leaned forward to get a closer look.

Toni’s intense green eyes flickered with interest. “An aerie? I’ve never heard that word before. What’s that?” she asked.

“It’s an eagle’s nest,” Anna explained. “Bald eagles use sticks and branches to build their aeries at the tops of tall trees or in the cracks of cliffs. That way, predators can’t

get to the eggs. The eagles come back to the same spot year after year, making their aerie bigger each time. Old aeries are sometimes 20 feet wide and can weigh as much as 4,000 pounds!”

“You sure do know your animals, don’t you?” Toni said with admiration.

Anna was pleased with Toni’s compliment. “And you also have an eagle eye for spotting eagles!” Toni added with a giggle.

Anna laughed at her friend’s silly play on words. “I really do find eagles fascinating,” she said. “Did you know they mate for life, and that the male and female take turns watching the nest? I love to watch them swoop through the air, so alive and free.”

“Oh, yeah. Those two surely were a spectacular sight,” Toni agreed.

“There aren’t all that many bald eagles left in the lower 48 states,” Anna continued. “That’s why it’s so exciting to see a pair so soon after we arrived in Colorado.”

“It’s sad that they’ve become so rare,” Toni sighed. “Wouldn’t it be awful if the proud

symbol of our country became extinct?”

Anna nodded. “It sure would,” she said. “But bald eagles have been making a strong comeback lately. In fact, they were just recently taken off the threatened species list for the lower 48 states. There are still lots of eagles up in Alaska and Canada, though. Most of the bald eagles living in the wild today can be found up there.”



**T**oni dug in her backpack for maps. “Come on, Anna,” she said. “It’s time to do some planning.”

The girls spread the maps out as best they could and started chattering.

Suddenly, a voice interrupted them. “You girls on a vacation trip, or are you here looking for treasure?”

Anna and Toni looked up. An old man with a long, reddish-white beard was sitting across the aisle from them. “We’re on vacation,” Toni said brightly. “We’re going to camp out near Silver Springs for a few days and do some

mountain climbing. I'm Toni Boucher, by the way, and this is my friend Anna Torres."

"Smithson Jeffers here," the old man said with a friendly, toothless grin. "But you can call me Smitty like everyone else does. Sounds like you've got a mighty fine plan."

Toni was curious. "What did you mean about treasure hunting?" she asked.

Smitty smiled. "There's an awful lot of interesting history around these parts," he explained. "Did you know the famous outlaw, Doc Holliday, is buried in Glenwood Springs? That's just up the road a bit from Silver Springs. Heck, this was the wild, wild West only about a hundred years ago! Back then a lot of newcomers were trying to strike it rich in the mines. It was a pretty rough place back in those days."

Anna smiled. "You sound like you remember it personally," she teased.

"Well, now, I'm not quite *that* old!" Smitty laughed good-naturedly. "I just happen to like the old stories. And this area has produced some great ones!"

“And some of that history has to do with treasure?” Toni prodded.

“You bet it does!” Smitty grinned. “Have either of you two girls ever heard about the famous stagecoach robbery that happened here? That story goes back more than a hundred years.”

Both girls shook their heads.

“Well, then, let me tell you all about it,” Smitty chuckled.



**S**mitty settled back in his seat and began his story.

“Seems a stagecoach loaded with silver dimes was robbed back in March of 1898. The stagecoach was going through Silver Springs Canyon—right where we’re heading now. The shiny new dimes were fresh from the Denver Mint. That’s where new coins are made, you know.

“Anyway, all those dimes were supposed to be delivered to Salt Lake City—but they never made it. A bandit by the name of Cole



Drake and four of his henchmen saw to that. They robbed the stagecoach at gunpoint. Then they took a load of dimes and headed up the canyon on horseback.

“It wasn’t long before the sheriff was hot on their trail,” Smitty went on. “The posse caught up with them at the end of the canyon. But Drake and his men didn’t give up without a fight. After a fierce shootout, all the bandits were dead. But the dimes were nowhere to be found. The sheriff figured the bad guys must have stashed them somewhere along the way.”

“So you’re saying that the dimes were never recovered?” Toni asked.

“That’s right—they never were,” the oldtimer said. “Not that a whole lot of folks haven’t given it a try over the years. I’ve even hunted for the dimes myself a time or two. But that posse covered a lot of ground. They chased those darn robbers the full length of the canyon! Drake and his men could have squirreled away those dimes almost anywhere.”

“That’s a great story,” Anna said. “But how could some sacks of dimes add up to a *real* treasure?”

“Well,” Smitty replied, “there were a whole lot of dimes—about \$35,000 worth, as a matter of fact.”

“About thirty-five thousand dollars, huh?” Anna pondered. “With inflation, those dimes would be worth well over half a million dollars today. Probably closer to a million, I’d bet.”

“That’s right,” Smitty agreed. “And dimes were nearly pure silver in those days. The U.S. government stopped minting silver dimes in the 1960s. Nowadays they’re made from nickel and copper instead. So silver dimes are valuable to coin collectors. And these dimes would be even *more* valuable because of their history. After all, they’re booty from a famous robbery!”

“Hmmm,” Anna mused. “Maybe we could look around for the dimes while we’re camping in the canyon.”

“Good idea, Anna. Let’s do it!” Toni said