

At dusk, the train stopped at a water stop near the Kansas-Nebraska border, Grison and Charlie hopped off the train to grab some food at a tiny roadhouse. Grison, as he always did, sat in a corner so he could keep an eye on the room's entrances and the people coming and going through them. A difficult task today as the roadhouse was packed. Every seat was filled except for the two other chairs at the table where they now sat, Charlie's saddle bag resting on the empty seat next to him. Charlie did his best to cut through the leather tough pice of beef he and Grison were splitting. Grison looked in his direction, seeing the displeasure on his companion's face.

"Food will be better in Yankton." The older man drawled between bites. Charlie looked up and smiled.

"It's fine. Better than nothin'" Charlie replied. He popped the piece of meat he'd managed to cut into his mouth and chewed. His jaw popping with each gnashing of his teeth, doing their best to soften the meat. As he chewed he scooped up a spoonful of the ice cold beans they'd been served and glanced around the room. When he was sure no one was looking he doled them out on the wooden seat next to him. The saddlebag at his side began to shift and two fuzzy arms slipped out and began scooping in the beans.

Grisom leaned to his side to watch the beans disappear, then looked up at Charlie. "How's she doing?"

"Seems to be doing fine. The train put her right out."

"I reckon the train put us all right out." Grison replied, taking a sip off his coffee. "Now once we get to Yankton we'll—"

"Pardon me, sirs!" said a short, pear shaped man with large handlebar mustache who was now hovering above the other empty seat. "There's no where else to sit." He glanced down at the empty chair. "May I join you?"

"We'd be obliged." Grison replied and gestured towards the chair. As the man noisily sat, clanking his plate and cup on the table, Charlie made a clicking noise with his tongue. The creature in the saddlebag quickly drew itself to the back and made sure to keep out of sight.

"Thank you." The man said once seated. "Terrance Brandle is the name."

"Name's Grison. The kid here is Charlie."

“Pleasure to make both of your acquaintances.” The man said, scooping a large spoonful of beans into his mouth. He talked sloppily with his mouth open. “Lots of folks on their way to Yankton it would seem.”

“It would appear that way.” Grison replied. He hated small talk.

“I suppose from the looks of many of them, their final destination is the gold in the Black Hills.”

“That your destination Mr. Brandle?” Grison asked, not looking up at the man who he, after a few seconds of watching his sloppy eating, found disgusting

“Me? Heavens no.” Mr. Brandle chuckled. “My travels take me to Yankton. I’m a courier for the bank there.”

“Courier?”

Mr. Brandle wiped his chin with the back of his hand. “Ah, yes.” He shifted nervously thinking he may have said too much. He always seemed to do that.

Grisom saw the flash of panic cross the man’s face and to ease the man’s suddenly uneasy mind, he changed he subject.

“Foods decent?” Grison asked sarcastically, watching how Brandle put it away.

“Mmm hmm,” the man replied between chomping mouthfuls. He swallowed, “So Mr. Grison, Charlie what brings you two to the Dakota territories?”

“We are...couriers as well,” said Grison with a smile over to Charlie. The man stopped chewing and stared at Grison wide-eyed. “We are bringing some items to a friend in Yankton.”

Brandle leaned in excited, wiping his fingers on his vest, “What kind of items? If I may ask.”

“You may ask,” Grison answered. “But we ain’t gonna tell you.”

Brandle’s face dropped. Just then the train’s whistle sounded indicating that it was time to roll out. Brandle thanked Grison and Charlie and scurried off through the throng of people. Charlie watched Grison watch Brandle walk away.

Grisom indicated towards Brandle’s direction, “There’s something else on the train besides our trunk. Gold, maybe bank notes.”

Charlie stood, gingerly picking up the saddlebag as he rose. “Think so?”

“Yep. Notice how he clammed up the moment he mentioned the bank. He was worried he said too much and that we may take an unusual interest in what he was bringing to Yankton.” Grisom stood, putting on his hat. “Well, let’s get back on the train.”

Charlie stood, pushing in his chair and hoisting the saddlebag’s strap up over his shoulder. The bag was now the same height as the table and if anyone had been looking, which they weren’t, they would have seen a fuzzy, gray arm, slink out of the bag and snag the rest of Charlie’s uneaten steak and then quickly retreat into the bag. Charlie had seen the theft and patted the side of the bag as he and Grisom followed the throng out of the roadhouse and back aboard the train.