

WAGONS WEST ★ TWENTY-SECOND IN A SERIES



THE MOST EXCITING AMERICAN ADVENTURE
EXPLODES WITH DANGER AS INTREPID MEN AND
WOMEN FIGHT TO TAME A LAWLESS WEST

NEW MEXICO!

DANA FULLER ROSS



WAGONS WEST ★ TWENTY-SECOND IN A SERIES

NEW MEXICO!

江苏工业学院图书馆

DANA FULLER ROSS

藏书章



BANTAM BOOKS

TORONTO • NEW YORK • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

NEW MEXICO!
A Bantam Book / published by arrangement with
Book Creations, Inc.
Bantam edition / September 1988

*Produced by Book Creations, Inc.
Lyle Kenyon Engel, Founder*

*All rights reserved.
Copyright © 1988 by Book Creations, Inc.
Cover art copyright © 1988 by Bob Larkin.
This book may not be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,
including photocopying, recording, or by any information
storage and retrieval system, without permission in
writing from the publisher.
For information address: Bantam Books.*

ISBN 0-553-27458-9

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

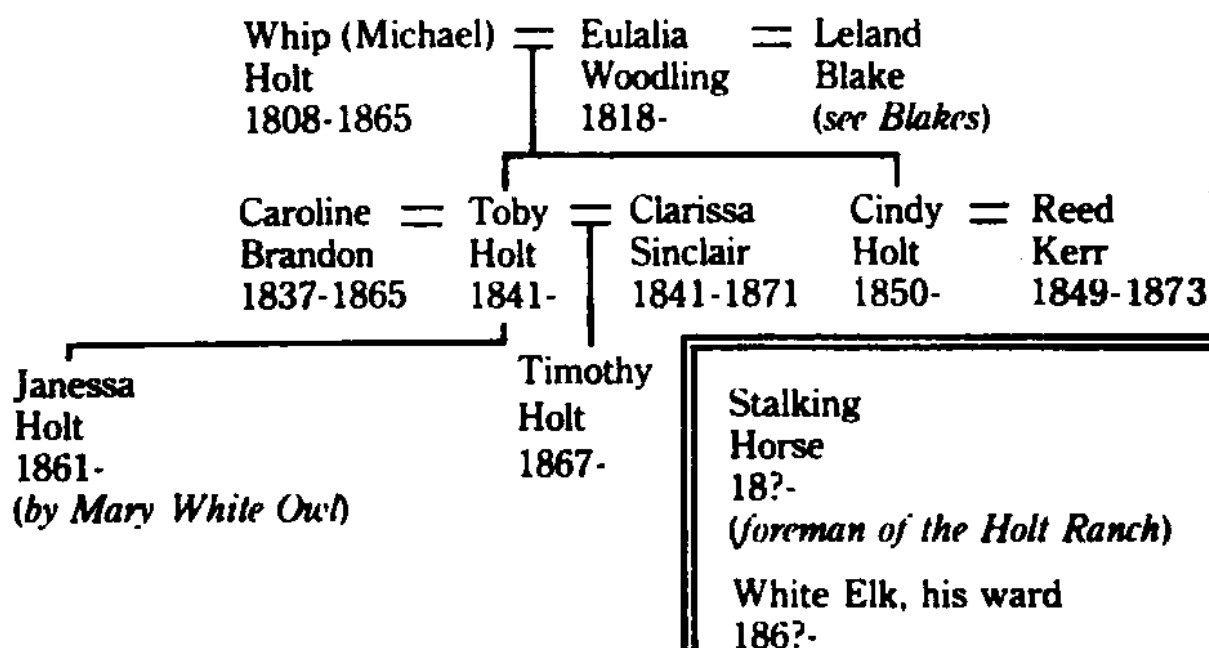
Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a rooster, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10103.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

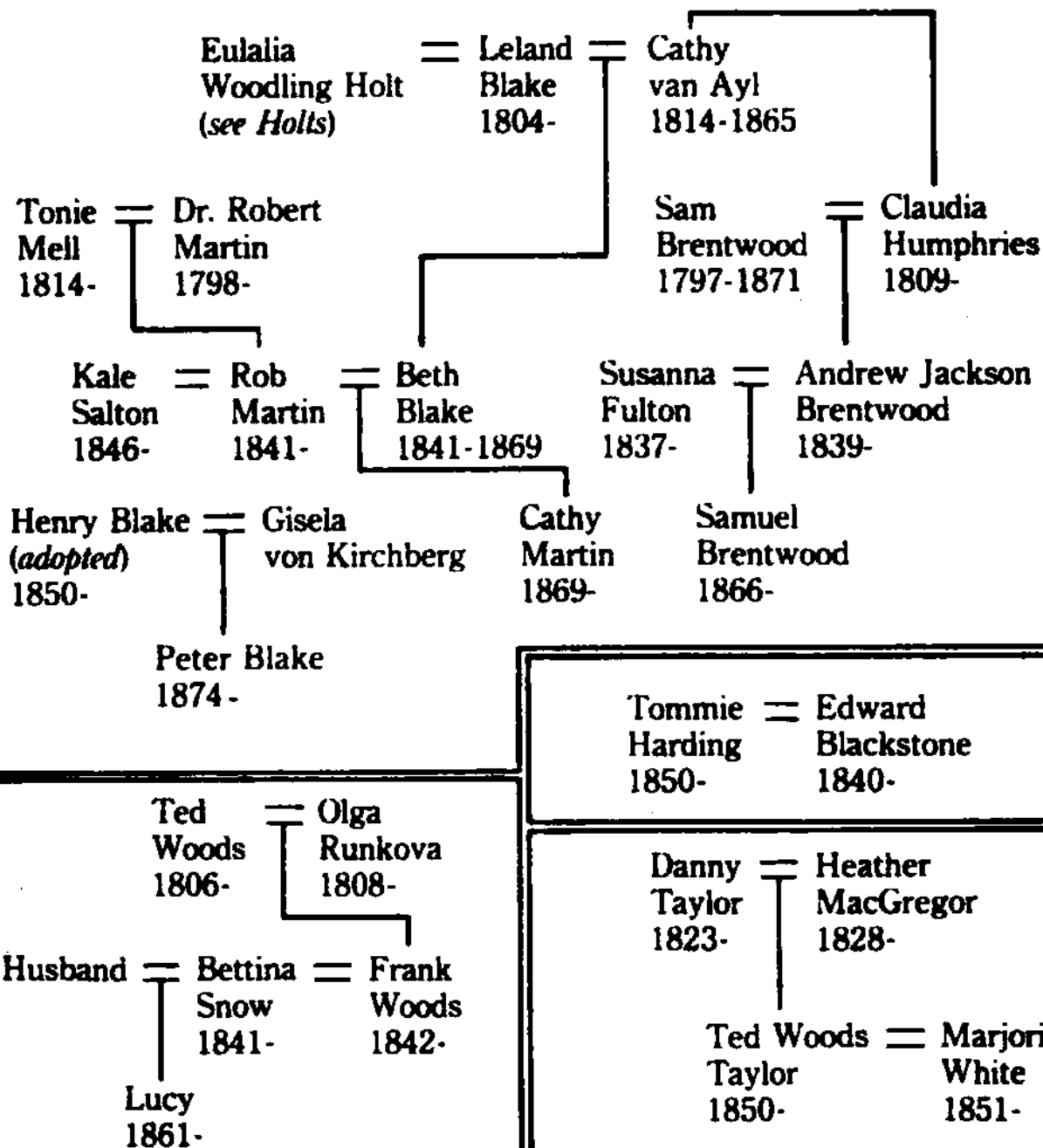
O 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This is a work of fiction. While the general outlines of history have been faithfully followed, certain details involving setting, characters, and events may have been simplified.

★ THE HOLTS ★



★ THE BLAKES, MARTINS, AND BRENTWOODS ★



I

When he saw smoke rising from the mountains ahead, Alvin Mosely knew he had found the right place. At Encima, a village nestled in a valley, buildings were burning. A moment later, Mosely heard gunfire. It was the sporadic sound of shots meant to mock and to terrorize, not the steady volleys of a battle. He was positive he had found the right place.

Early spring had brought warm days to the Chihuahuan desert of Mexico, but a shiver passed over Mosely as he rode toward the mountains. He was on his way to see the leader of a band of comancheros that had been raiding across the border and ravaging the New Mexico Territory during the past months. Now, to while away the time, they had left their secluded hideout and taken over Encima.

A motley collection of Mexicans, Indians, and bandits from north of the border, the comancheros were more savage than the fiercest Indians. And the band now in Encima was the most feared of all the comancheros because it was led by a man who was as cunning as he was brutal. He was known as Calusa Jim.

Mosely turned his horse and pack mule onto a narrow road leading into the mountains. On the mule were two large cases filled with assortments of thread, needles, lace, and other notions. Mosely was a peddler, which was not an extremely lucrative occupation, but of late he had handsomely supplemented his income by searching out targets for the comancheros, recruiting drifters to join their ranks, and delivering the products of their raids to markets in Mexico City. Although he worked with the

outlaws, Mosely still feared them. Most of all he feared Calusa Jim.

That day, especially, he had even more reason to be afraid, for something had gone amiss on the trip from which he was returning. These days, much of the money the comancheros made from their raids came from the sale of captured women. Mosely took them to a dealer in Nogales, who drugged them, beat them when necessary, and in turn sold them to an exclusive bordello in Mexico City, where foreign women were in great demand. Mosely also drugged the women, to make them easier to transport, but this time one of them had died en route to Nogales.

The narrow, rutted road led back into a high mountain valley that contrasted sharply with its arid surroundings. Watered by springs, it was lush with vegetation in shades of bright green that stood out dramatically against the dull brown of the mountains. The town of Encima, comprising some fifty adobe buildings surrounded by crop fields and pastures, sat in the middle of the valley.

Mosely could see fires in the distant town square; pigs and fowl were being roasted to feed the comancheros. Smoke also rose from the ashes of houses burned as a punishment for their inhabitants—because of attempts to hide young, pretty wives or daughters, Mosely guessed, or because some other form of resistance had been offered.

The Mexican Army posed little danger to the comancheros, but Calusa Jim took no chances, and a half-dozen men were posted as guards on the road ahead. Mosely recognized the one in charge, a half-breed named Camargo. Large and muscular, with knife scars on his hawkish, unshaven face, he was walleyed and always seemed to be looking in two directions at once.

No one, not even Camargo, argued with Calusa Jim's orders, but the six men were obviously disgruntled over being placed on guard while the others enjoyed themselves in the town below. Like all comancheros, they were grimy and dressed in tattered, mismatched clothing that had been looted from houses during raids, but they were heavily armed with the best of weapons.

Mosely grinned anxiously as he rode up to them. "Howdy, Camargo," he said, with feigned confidence. "Has anything important happened while I was gone?"

The man jerked a thumb toward the town. "Are you *un idiota* or only blind? You can see what we are doing. We don't have anything better to amuse ourselves with, because you haven't found us any good places to raid."

"I had to go to Nogales," Mosely protested uneasily. "I can't do two things at once."

"You can't do even one thing at once," Camargo retorted. He casually took a knife from his belt sheath and traced an imaginary line over his own forehead. "If you don't find us some good places to raid, you had better have a wig to wear the next time I see you."

The other five men—three of whom were Indians—chortled appreciatively, but Camargo continued glowering. Mosely laughed nervously, trying to pass it off as a joke. "Where is Calusa Jim?"

"In the cantina," Camargo spat in the dirt and resheathed his knife. "Go on, get out of here, Mosely."

Needing no further urging, Mosely spurred his horse on. His uneasiness, however, only increased as he neared the town, for the few townspeople in evidence avoided his gaze and wore terrified expressions. Old women and men stood cooking in the square for the comancheros. Tears of despair streamed down their cheeks, and two of the men, to keep the fires blazing, were breaking up furniture that had been thrown out of houses.

In a building across the square from the cantina, women screamed and wailed as comancheros laughed raucously. A few comancheros sat around the plaza, eating and drinking, while others strolled about aimlessly, as if looking for some hapless target for their amusement. Avoiding them, Mosely dismounted in front of the cantina and went inside.

The owner, pale and trembling in fright, stood behind the bar. All the tables had been thrown into the street except one, where Calusa Jim was sitting. A girl of about sixteen, her pretty face stained with tears, sat rigidly beside him. Against the wall nearby was a bed that had been dragged in from another room.

Calusa Jim eyed Mosely briefly, then ignored him. Big, heavysset, and meticulously neat compared to his men, the comanchero leader looked to be about forty. Because he spoke both Spanish and English with a heavy French accent and always wore a French officer's tunic, Calusa Jim was rumored to be a deserter from the French forces that had been sent to Mexico a few years before to prop up the short-lived regime of the Emperor Maximilian. Calusa Jim's attitude discouraged personal questions, and Mosely was wise enough not to ask him any, although the peddler was intensely curious about the gleaming steel hook that the fiendishly cruel outlaw leader had in place of a right hand.

"Howdy, Calusa Jim," Mosely quavered, approaching the table warily. "It's mighty good to see you again."

Calusa Jim gestured Mosely to come closer. "Where is the money?" he demanded.

Mosely quickly opened his shirt and removed the money belt beneath it. "Calusa Jim," he blurted, "one of the women died. She was acting up a lot, and maybe I gave her too much opium. But for some reason she just up and died on me."

With a swipe of his hook, Calusa Jim snatched the money belt before Mosely could even flinch. The belt dangled from the shiny, sharpened tip as the man glared at Mosely. "Perhaps one did not die," he suggested in a soft, dangerous tone that made his French accent more distinct. "Perhaps you have kept part of the money."

"No, I'd never do that! I'd never try to cheat you! Call your men in to search me right now."

"I am not as stupid as you are," the outlaw leader sneered. "If you have kept part of the money, it would be hidden somewhere."

Mosely shook his head rapidly, his terror mounting. "Honest, I haven't, Calusa Jim. I know better than to try to cheat you."

An eternity seemed to pass before Calusa Jim answered. "Do not let it happen again, Mosely," was all he said.

"No, I won't, I promise," Mosely assured him, weak

with relief. "From now on I'll be real careful with that opium."

A glass and a tequila bottle with its neck broken off were on the table, and with a sudden swipe of his hook Calusa Jim sent them crashing to the floor. "More tequila and glasses!" he shouted.

The cantina owner rushed to the table with a bottle and two glasses, and Mosely sat in the one empty chair. The owner started to open the tequila, but Calusa Jim jerked the bottle away with his good hand, and with a slash of his hook he shattered the neck, causing the girl beside him to jump in fright as glass scattered over the table. Calusa Jim splashed tequila into the glasses, and the cantina owner retreated to the bar.

After draining half his glass, the outlaw leader opened the pockets on the money belt. "Did you mail that package?"

"Yes, just like you said," Mosely replied between gulps, grateful for the tequila. "But it seems to me we're already having plenty of trouble from the army without riling them further. That Colonel Hamilton will be like a mad bull when he opens that package."

Calusa Jim gazed somberly at his hook for a moment. "I want them to feel the same anger I do," he said quietly.

The remark suggested that the man blamed the army for the loss of his hand. Calusa Jim counted the money, then pushed Mosely's share and the belt across the table. "I want you to find good places."

Pocketing the money, Mosely nodded. "I'll do my best. But you know how things are in New Mexico now. Everyone is on guard because of your last raids, and there're no easy pickings. What about crossing the river into Texas? You haven't raided there, and they won't be expecting—"

"No!" the bandit leader interrupted angrily. "I have not raided in Texas because the Texas Rangers would follow me back into Mexico—but the federal cavalry will not. I do not need advice from you, Mosely. All I want you to do is find some good places to raid."

"Then that's what I'll do," Mosely agreed quickly. He took a swallow of tequila.

Calusa Jim refilled the peddler's glass. "Find me a place where we can capture many women. We need cattle, too, for provisions at the hideout. And fodder for the horses."

"I heard that some ranchers are settling on the Rio Hondo," Mosely remarked. "I can look around there, and on my way I could stop at the Indian reservations to see if I can recruit a few more men."

Calusa Jim seemed satisfied with the idea. "All right—but I also need something for them to do. Go to Rio Hondo, and also look around west of the Rio Grande, in the vicinity of Acoma."

"Right, Acoma. Whatever you say, Jim." With tequila in his belly, money in his pockets, and his worries about the dead woman now behind him, Mosely enjoyed a sense of well-being. "I'll rest up and leave first thing tomorrow morning—"

The gleaming hook darted out, snagging Mosely's coat lapel, and the little peddler's contentment changed to raw fear as Calusa Jim dragged him across the table. "You'll leave now!" the man hissed in Mosely's face. "Find me some ranches to raid, and they had better be good ones!"

"All right, Jim, all right!" Mosely stammered. "Whatever you say! I'll leave now."

Calusa Jim disengaged the hook, and as Mosely hurried toward the door, the bandit leader stood up, yanked the girl to her feet, and shoved her toward the bed. She began sobbing, and the cantina owner turned his pale, trembling face away from them. Mosely hurried outside.

It occurred to him as he mounted his horse that both the girl and the cantina owner had heard the conversation between him and Calusa Jim. But neither of them probably understood English, and in any case, Calusa Jim never took unnecessary risks. By the time the comancheros tired of the pleasures that Encima had to offer and left to return to their hideout, the girl and the cantina owner would be dead.

In Santa Fe, the capital of the New Mexico Territory, Colonel Wayne Hamilton stepped out of his quarters and

strode angrily toward the town plaza. In his hand was a package he had received in that day's mail.

The commander of the United States Army units stationed in the territory, Hamilton was a tall, graying professional soldier who had spent most of his career in the West. He had been in countless battles and skirmishes in the Civil War and with renegade Indians, and he was not a man easily moved to rash action, but the contents of the package in his hand had sickened and infuriated him.

On any other day, Hamilton would have enjoyed his walk down the narrow, stone-paved streets to the plaza, for Santa Fe was one of the pleasantest places he had ever been stationed. The crisp, clear air had a tangy scent from the piñon trees dotting the high, rolling desert plateau, and to the north the snowcapped peaks of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains sparkled in the bright early spring sunlight.

As Hamilton neared his destination, the tile-roofed adobe buildings lining the street gave way to a wide flagstone plaza where local Indians were selling baskets and earthenware goods. It was a market day, yet the activity in the plaza remained at its usual sedate, timeless pace. Indeed, back in the early 1600s, when Virginia's Jamestown colony had still been a raw frontier settlement struggling for survival, Santa Fe had been a thriving, well-established town.

Colonel Hamilton crossed the square to the Palace of the Governors, a simple adobe structure that had an unimposing façade but which dated from 1610 and was said to be the oldest public building on the North American continent. The palace now housed the territorial administration, and Colonel Hamilton went straight to the office of the governor, a dedicated public servant of forty-five named Patrick Mills. Hamilton knew Mills well and liked him, but on this occasion, instead of returning the man's polite greeting, Hamilton dropped the opened package on the governor's desk. Mills took one look at its contents, and his face turned pale.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, standing up. "Where on earth did you get this, Wayne?"

"It came this morning in the mail," Hamilton replied grimly. "They had the gall to use the United States mail! You'll notice that the hair is brown, with some gray in it. One of the men killed in the last raid near Las Cruces, a storekeeper named Jones, had hair just like that. The scalp is undoubtedly his."

The governor sighed heavily and picked up a paper from his desk. "This arrived from the State Department this morning. It's a reply to the messages I've been sending them about the comancheros."

"I hope it's good news," Hamilton said, his mouth set in anger.

"I'm afraid it isn't." Mills tossed the paper back down. "Our ambassador in Mexico City has once again obtained assurances that the authorities will look into the matter, but his private sources indicate they intend to do nothing. Their garrison in Chihuahua is poorly manned, and the last thing they want is more trouble with the comancheros. That's the way it stands, with no promise of changing."

Shaking his head in disgust, Hamilton stepped to the window and gazed out at the plaza. The muscles in the sides of his lean, tanned face were tense as he clenched his jaw. "Then it's up to us, Patrick. Give me authority to take a cavalry troop across the border, and I promise you an end to this trouble."

"I only wish I could," Mills said wistfully. "But that's outside my jurisdiction as territorial governor. I agree entirely with your feelings, Wayne, but we can't settle the problem that way."

"That's the only way to settle it!" Hamilton snapped, turning around. "And jurisdiction be hanged! Why do you think they aren't raiding in Texas? It's because they would have a company of Texas Rangers on their heels all the way to Mexico City, if necessary!"

"Texas is a state," the governor pointed out, "with considerably less federal control over it than a territory. If you took the cavalry into Mexico, our prospects for attaining statehood would be set back for years. This is a serious problem, but attaining statehood is more important to the long-range interests of our citizens."

Hamilton stabbed a finger toward the package on the desk. "Is statehood more important than that? People are dying, Patrick!"

"I'm simply trying to be as good a territorial governor as you are a soldier," Mills said calmly. "We each have our responsibilities. I realize your men are being stretched very thin in patrolling the border. How is their morale?"

Hamilton shrugged. "Good enough, considering. The heavy patrols are wearing them down, and I suspect that the comancheros have informants on this side of the border—they always manage to evade us. I intend to alter the patrol routes some, so we may get lucky and catch them. But it's a long shot."

"Let's hope you do," Mills said. "And we still might get some help from Washington. As soon as I received this message from the State Department, I sent back an urgent appeal to the Secretary of the Interior. I explained that the situation has become intolerable and requested that he give the problem his personal attention."

Hamilton smirked skeptically. "I wouldn't hold my breath. In any event, what can he do?"

"I'm not sure." Mills, disheartened, stared at the package on his desk. "From our standpoint, it appears that all the possibilities have been exhausted. Mr. Caldwell is a member of the President's cabinet, however, and a department secretary. Perhaps he can come up with some new ideas or pressure someone into doing something."

In fact, the urgent message from Patrick Mills had already resulted in a conference in Secretary Caldwell's office at the Department of the Interior in Washington. The meeting was attended by Caldwell's key subordinates, together with representatives from two other departments.

Speaking for the State Department was a nervous, intense undersecretary by the name of Peter Holman, who seemed the complete opposite of the representative from the War Department, Colonel Frank Bolton. A reserved, stolid soldier, Bolton had an impressive display of decorations on his uniform, and his presence in Washington rather than in the field was mutely explained by his left sleeve, which was empty and pinned up.

The men had been arguing for some time, and the air in the room was thick with tobacco smoke. Secretary Caldwell used all his diplomatic talents to soothe fraying tempers while prodding those present for a solution. The message from Santa Fe had struck a personal note with him, for his own family was from the West, and he knew the hardships of life on a half-civilized frontier.

The inaction by the Mexican government was mentioned several times, and the discussion turned to that subject again. "It seems an unavoidable conclusion to me," one of Caldwell's subordinates volunteered, "that the problem must be dealt with by Mexico City. There must be some way we can pressure them to take action."

Undersecretary Holman, squirming in his chair as the man spoke, shook his head. "We've done everything we can. We're constrained by the need to maintain harmonious relations. No, the solution lies with the War Department. More soldiers are needed in New Mexico."

"Find me the funds," Colonel Bolton rejoined calmly, "and I'll put a soldier every ten feet along the border. But you know Congress won't give us the money for that, and in my opinion we already have more than enough troops stationed there."

Everyone looked at him in surprise. Holman voiced what they all were thinking: "If more than enough soldiers are there, why can't they stop the raids?"

"Because they're not being allowed to do their job," Bolton replied. "I could order Colonel Hamilton to send a company to track those comancheros down, and that would be the end of it."

"Invade Mexico with a military force?" Holman reddened. "That isn't a solution, it's an act of war against a friendly nation. It—"

"I'm sure," Caldwell interjected, "that the colonel was speaking theoretically. You say a single company could attend to those commancheros, Colonel?"

"Yes, sir." Bolton's tone was confident. "The bandits number fewer than a hundred men, and they would be no match for trained cavalry in a pitched battle. But even fifty companies wouldn't be enough to wage a *defensive* campaign in that remote, rugged region."

"That rules out a military solution," Caldwell concluded. "We've also ruled out bringing pressure to bear on Mexico City. There must be another answer."

After a momentary silence, one of Caldwell's subordinates spoke up. "Perhaps we could ask the governor of Texas for his assistance. Texas Rangers aren't military forces, but a company of them could probably do the job."

"That's out of the question!" Holman erupted. "There's no difference between that and sending soldiers into Mexico."

"I must agree with Mr. Holman," Caldwell said. He looked across the room at one of his aides who was trying to draw his attention. "Did you have something to add, Mr. Bailey?"

Bailey, a gangling, meek-looking man, cleared his throat. "Yes, sir. I was thinking of an incident that happened last year, when I was in the Treasury Department. An assassination attempt against the President was discovered and squelched. The man who took care of that might be able to help with this."

Holman was running his fingers through his hair nervously. "You mean turn it over to the Secret Service? That's out of the question."

"Well, actually this man is a civilian," Bailey continued. "There was some concern about who might have been involved in the plot, so the investigation was turned over to an outsider. He tracked down the guilty parties and handled everything very capably."

"A plot against the President?" Caldwell shook his head. "This is the first I've heard of it."

"It was kept very quiet, sir," Bailey explained. "I was friends with several Secret Service men, but even they knew very little about it. I did find out the name of the man, however. It was Toby Holt."

"Toby Holt?" Bolton pondered. "I've heard that name."

Bailey smiled thinly. "That's quite likely. Mr. Holt was governor of the Idaho Territory, and he's served the government in other capacities. He might be able to help with this. A man working alone can accomplish things that are impossible for a regiment of soldiers."

"I'm not in favor of giving official sanction to a civilian to stir up trouble in another nation," Holman remarked. "It's completely contrary to acceptable diplomacy."

"Some civilians from Mexico are giving us no end of trouble," Caldwell pointed out frostily. "There's a fine line between proper caution and negativism, Mr. Holman. Now, do you have a specific objection to offer against Mr. Bailey's suggestion?"

Holman hesitated, then reluctantly shook his head. "No, I don't have a specific objection, sir."

Colonel Bolton spoke up. "Mr. Bailey is correct in saying that a man working alone can do things that are impossible for a regiment of soldiers. In fact, Calusa Jim appears to have a very good network of informers, while we know next to nothing about him. A man working alone could correct that. But he would have to be the right man. This would be an extremely dangerous undertaking."

Caldwell stood. "You're absolutely right. So before we go any further with this, we should contact Mr. Holt and get his reaction. Could I ask you to do that, Colonel?"

"It would be my pleasure, sir. Do you know where he lives, Mr. Bailey?"

Bailey shook his head. "Not exactly. I understand he has business interests in Chicago, but I'm not sure he lives there. He has friends in the Secret Service, though, and they'll probably know. I'll introduce you to them."

"Good." Bolton stood. "Now we're getting somewhere."

In the office of the North Chicago Lumber Company, one of two businesses he owned in the city, Toby Holt sat at a desk, scanning papers and signing them. Only minutes before, he had arrived on a steam launch from his logging camp up Lake Michigan, and his business manager, taking advantage of Toby's presence, had urged him to sign a backlog of contracts.

When he had finished, Toby replaced the pen in the inkwell. "What else do you have, Dieter?"

Dieter Schumann, a big-boned, red-haired man in his late forties, who had done a superb job of looking after Toby's business interests for the past year and a half,