

# CLIVE CUSSLER

## THE GRAY GHOST

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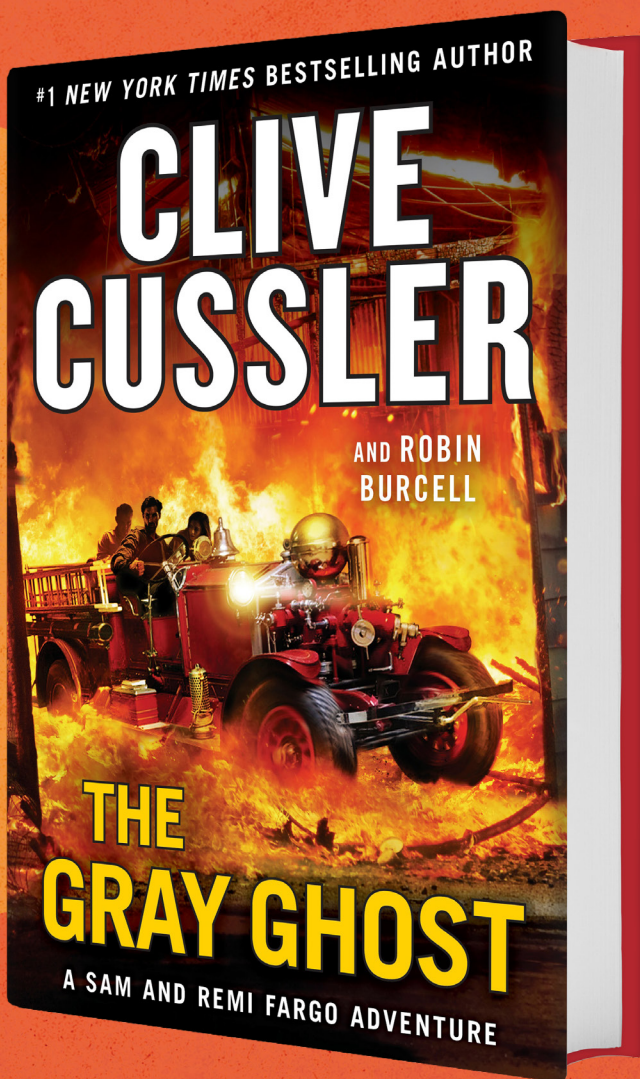
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# THE GRAY GHOST



# THE GRAY GHOST

*A Sam and Remi Fargo Adventure*

**CLIVE CUSSLER**  
AND ROBIN BURCELL

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
NEW YORK

PUTNAM

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*Reginald “Reggie” Oren*—a cousin of Jonathon Payton  
*Charles Rolls and Henry Royce*—owners, Rolls-Royce  
Limited

*Jonathon Payton*, 5th Viscount Wellswick

*Elizabeth Oren*—Reginald’s wife

### THE PAYTON HOME FOR ORPHANS

*Toby Edwards*—an orphan

*Chip Edwards*—an orphan

*Will Sutton*—a private detective from Manchester hired by Rolls-  
Royce Limited

*Isaac Bell*—an American private detective, the Van Dorn Detective  
Agency

*Miss Lydia Atwater*—a schoolteacher at the Payton Home for  
Orphans

*Byron, Lord Ryderton*—Jonathon Payton’s friend

*Mac*—a car thief

*Eddie*—a car thief

*Finlay*—a car thief

*Barclay Keene*—owner, Barclay Keene Electric Motor Works

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### THE PRESENT DAY

*Sam Fargo*

*Remi Fargo*

*Eunice “Libby” Fargo*—Sam’s mother

*Albert Payton*, 7th Viscount Wellswick

*Oliver Payton*—Albert’s nephew

*Kimberley*—concierge, the Inn at Spanish Bay

*Selma Wondrash*—the Fargos’ head researcher

*Zoltán*—the Fargos’ German shepherd

*Professor Lazlo Kemp*—a Fargo researcher and cryptologist

*Pete Jeffcoat and Wendy Corden*—Selma’s assistants

*Geoffrey Russell*—the Fargos’ personal banker

### IN MANCHESTER

*Arthur Oren*—a very distant cousin of the Paytons

*Colton Devereux*—ex—Special Forces, works for Oren

*Frank*—works for Oren

*Bruno*—works for Oren

*Mrs. Beckett*—housekeeper, Payton Manor

*Allegra Payton Northcott*—Oliver’s sister

*Trevor Payton Northcott*—Allegra’s son

*Dex Northcott*—Allegra’s ex-husband

*David Cooke*—Alonzo Payton’s solicitor

*Bill Snyder*—a private detective working for Cooke

*Chad Williams*—mechanic, the Gray Ghost

### IN ITALY

*John and Georgia Bockoven*—photographers for *Sports Car Market*,  
owners of a vineyard and B and B

*Paolo Magnanimiti*—owner, Hostaria Antica Roma

*Luca*—an acquaintance of Lorenzo Rossi

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*Lorenzo Rossi*—a broker of stolen goods

*Marco Verzino*—the owner of the Trevi Fountain apartment

## IN FRANCE

*Monsieur Marchand*—the manager of Lorenzo Rossi's Paris office

*Suzette*—Marchand's secretary



# PROLOGUE

MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

*March 1906*

Late for work, Reginald Oren raced across the street, the cobblestones slick from the night's rain. Dodging a horse and carriage, he jumped over a puddle, then ran toward a brick building that took up half a city block. He shrugged out of his overcoat, hung it on a hook just inside the door, and quietly entered a large workroom filled with a half dozen young men sitting at their desks, their attention focused on the office on the far side of the room. No one noticed that Reginald was late, and he took his seat, glancing toward the office's open door, where Charles Rolls and Henry Royce, both dressed in dark suits, were talking to a policeman.

"That looks ominous," Reginald said, glancing over at his cousin, Jonathon Payton, who sat at the desk next to his. "What did I miss?"

"It's gone."

"What's gone?"

"The forty-fifty prototype."

"When?"

"Last night. They went there this morning to finish up the coachwork, and it was gone."

Reginald leaned back in his chair as he looked around the room,

then focused on the men in the office, imagining what this would do to the company. Rolls-Royce Limited had put all their money, and that of their investors, into this improved six-cylinder engine. Every last penny had gone into the design of that, as well as a chassis meant to withstand the harsh country roads. When the world seemed to laugh at them, saying it couldn't be done, they'd persevered. And now, when they were on the verge of accomplishing the impossible . . .

Jonathon leaned toward him, lowering his voice. "Was Elizabeth pleased?"

"Pleased?" he said, unable to draw his gaze from the office. Reginald's wife, Elizabeth, had taken their newborn son to visit her mother, but, for the life of him, he couldn't figure out why Jonathon would bring her up at a time like this. "About what?"

"About the pianoforte."

A shame he couldn't hear what they were discussing in there, and he finally turned toward his cousin, belatedly recalling last night's conversation, when he'd solicited Jonathon's assistance. "Undoubtedly, she will be. Meant to thank you for helping my friends and me move it, but you'd disappeared. One minute you were next to me, the next you were gone."

"I guess I had a bit much. Not sure what happened." He was quiet a moment, then whispered, "You won't mention that to my father, will you?"

"Of course not." Jonathon's father, Viscount Wellswick, had raised both boys after Reginald's parents died, though Reginald always suspected he'd have ended up in an orphanage if not for the intervention of Jonathon's mother. Ironic, considering that she was the reason their fathers had been the bitterest of enemies. Reginald's father had been in love with her, but her fortune was needed to restore the viscountcy, so she was wedded to Jonathon's father instead.

He often wondered if she regretted the marriage. Her husband, the Viscount, was frugal beyond belief, as well as a strict disciplinarian. He certainly wouldn't have approved of either of them spending a night at one of the local taverns, drinking ale with the neighborhood residents. The Viscount was all about propriety. How it would look to his friends if his son and nephew stepped out of line. Appearances were everything, which was why Reginald and Jonathon were expected to oversee the running of the orphanage that bore the Viscount's name. Jonathon, in line to be the next viscount and heir to the Payton estate, was expected to be there six days a week, usually stopping in after work. In Reginald's mind, that was the one advantage of being the poor relation living under his uncle's roof. He was only expected to volunteer his time at the orphanage twice a week. Of course, that was in addition to the six days a week both men spent working for Rolls-Royce.

There were no free rides in the Payton home, the old man thinking that working at a job each day built character. Had the Viscount discovered Reginald had led Payton astray, he'd likely toss Reginald, his wife, and their son out on the street. "Not to worry," Reginald said, turning his attention back to the office. "Your secret of drunken debauchery is safe with me."

Reginald watched the men talking in the office, the faces of the two owners, Rolls and Royce, looking drawn, the loss weighing on them. The stolen car, named the Gray Ghost for the color of the body and the quietness of the forty-fifty engine, had been kept a secret from all but their investors for fear that someone might try to steal their ideas. Apparently, it had never occurred to them that someone might steal the entire car. Payton's father, the Viscount, had offered the family warehouse to store the car while they were fitting it with its custom coachwork, hoping to enter it into the Olympia Motor Show in just a few months. Reginald and Jonathon had discussed the



idea that the vehicle would be more secure there, less likely to fall prey to anyone skulking around the factory, stealing plans. Jonathon, however, was the one who'd presented it. "Tough break, this happening on your watch, don't you think?" Reginald said.

"Quite. I expect they'll sack me for it."

"Have they said anything to you?"

"No," Payton whispered, his face paling as Mr. Rolls shook the officer's hand, then escorted him out the door.

Mr. Royce stepped out after them, looked right at Jonathon. "Do you have a moment?"

"Right away, sir." Jonathon Payton rose, not looking at his cousin as he walked toward the office.

"Close the door."

"Yes, sir." He shut the door behind him.

Reginald, eyeing the journals on top of a cabinet against the office's wall, casually walked over, picked up the topmost one, and pretended to read it. The wall was thin enough to hear what was being said.

"You've no doubt heard what happened?" Mr. Royce asked Jonathon.

"I have."

"You realize what dire straits we're in?"

Reginald leaned in closer. In charge of the books, he knew every penny the company spent and what would happen to their investors if they didn't recover that car and start turning a profit. They'd go bankrupt, his uncle, the Viscount—who'd invested everything—right along with them. Jonathon's response, though, was covered by the return of Mr. Rolls, who nearly ran into Reginald as he came back from seeing the officer out.

"Pardon," Mr. Rolls said, stepping past him. He started to open the door, paused, looking over at Reginald, and at the other young men, sitting at their desks, their attention focused on what was happening in the office. "I daresay, we're all frightfully worried over this

setback. But we'll get past it. In the meantime, let's all get back to our tasks, shall we?"

The young men nodded, as did Reginald, and their employer gave a worried smile, then entered the office. "This is disastrous," he said, pushing the door closed. It didn't latch tight. "We have to find that engine."

"Why would anyone bother?" Mr. Royce asked. "The blasted coachwork wasn't even finished."

"Why do you think?" Rolls replied. "Sending spies sniffing around, trying to best us. Whoever it was, they stole it because they couldn't build anything close to what we have."

"Problem is, it's still in the prototype stage. If they get it out there before we do, we lose it all. Every investor we have will pull out."

"Good point. What if we lose the patent?" Rolls said. "We have to get that car back before the Olympia Motor Show."

"The policeman suggested we hire a detective."

Mr. Rolls made a scoffing noise. "Not sure we want that to get out to our investors. Can't even keep track of our own products before they find their way into the hands of our competitors."

Jonathon Payton started to speak, his voice cracking. He cleared his throat and started again, saying, "What about those parts we sent out to be machined? If we could get them back in time, we might have a chance to finish that other forty-fifty."

"Brilliant idea," Royce said. "They've got to be ready by now. Give them a ring, Payton. If they're ready, see if they can't get them on the next train. We might just save this company after all."

*One week later . . .*

Just before sunrise, ten-year-old Toby Edwards and his nine-year-old brother, Chip, picked their way down the street, avoiding the low

spots where the rain flowed down from the previous day's storm. They stopped at the entrance to the alley. "Wait here," Toby said, moving his brother into the shadows. "I'll be back soon."

"Why can't I go? I'll be quiet as a mouse."

"Just wait. If anything happens, run back."

The boy nodded, and Toby moved off. The last time he'd stolen something from the bakery, he'd nearly gotten caught after stepping in a deep puddle. The water had soaked through the worn soles of his boots, squeaking with every step he took. A customer was the one who'd heard, calling out to the baker that a thief had broken in, then chasing after him.

He wasn't about to make that mistake again.

Worried the baker might catch him again, he'd stayed away for several days, until hunger drove him out once more. This time when he reached the back of the shop, he wiggled his toes, grateful that they were dry. He glanced back, could just make out his brother in the dark. Satisfied he was waiting as he should, Toby moved in.

The waiting was the hardest part. He breathed in the scent of fresh-baked bread drifting into the alley. Every morning, the baker opened the back door a crack, just enough to let his gray tabby in and out. The door was locked tight, and Toby wondered, after nearly getting caught, if the man had realized it left him ripe for theft. Every minute that slipped by, Toby despaired. About to turn away, he heard the door open. The cat slipped out, its tiny paws silent on the wet cobblestones as it walked toward him, then rubbed its whiskered face against Toby's patched trousers.

When the cat meowed loudly, Toby crouched beside it, petting the feline's head, feeling it purr against his fingertips. "Hush, you," he whispered, watching the door.

Finally, he heard the faint tinkle from the bell that hung on the shop's front door, followed by the baker's deep voice greeting



whoever it was that had walked in. Usually it was the servants from the big manor houses that ventured out this early, those who didn't bake their own bread.

Toby edged over, listening, before slipping through the door. He was immediately enveloped in heat, wishing he could find a spot under the table to spend the night where he wouldn't be seen. To be that warm while he slept . . .

Right now, food was more important. Suddenly he stopped, his heart sinking. The basket the baker had always left on the table with the burned and broken loaves wasn't there.

The table was empty.

His eyes flew to the door that led to the front of the shop, just able to make out the perfect loaves stacked in baskets on the counter.

For a moment, he wondered how hard it would be to race out there, grab one, and keep running.

He could never do that. It was one thing to take what was going to be tossed out, quite another to brazenly steal something the baker made a living from.

Stomach rumbling, he backed from the room, his foot hitting a wooden crate near the door. He froze, grateful when no one came racing into the kitchen. When he turned to leave, he saw what was in the crate. Nearly a dozen rolls, the tops a bit too brown, the bottoms black as coal.

Unable to believe his luck, he stuffed several rolls into his pockets, resisting the temptation to take every last one of them.

Slipping out the door, he raced down the alley, pausing to grab his brother's arm. The two boys darted around the puddles, then out to the street, where massive brick warehouses lined the railroad tracks. Toby and Chip lived in the orphanage on the other side. After a quick look behind them to make sure no one was following, Toby guided his brother that direction. When they reached the corner, he

saw a man astride a black mare champing at the bit. The horseman, struggling to keep his mount under control, looked their direction.

Toby grasped Chip's hand, holding tight. Instinct told him to continue on past, as though that had been their intention the entire time.

As soon as they were out of sight, they broke into a run. Up ahead, Toby saw an alcove and pulled Chip into it, hiding his brother behind him.

A few seconds later, he heard the staccato clip of the horse's hooves on the cobblestones. Toby peered out, caught a glimpse of the man, and pressed back against the wall, praying the shadows would hide them.

"Who's that?" Chip asked.

"Quiet."

"I'm hungry," Chip whispered. "And cold."

There was a familiarity about the man when he'd looked over at Toby.

As though he'd seen him before.

And this was what bothered Toby. Something told him that if he didn't find out who the man was, his brother and sisters wouldn't be safe.

After their father, a coal miner, died of black lung disease, their mother had moved them all to Manchester, working in one of the textile mills. But then she'd taken ill, too, and could no longer care for them. They'd lived the last year at the Payton Home for Orphans. Had it not been for Toby's trips to the bakery, he and his siblings would have starved.

He had to get back to his sisters, but the only way to the orphanage was across the railroad tracks. Seconds ticked by, and the low rumble of an approaching train grew louder. Suddenly the horseman turned and galloped back toward the tracks.

"Wait here," Toby said, tucking his brother safely in the shadows.

THREE DAYS AGO, if someone had told Toby that he'd be brave enough to follow a horseman in the dark to see what the man was about, he might have laughed. He was the least brave person he knew. But his mother had made him promise to look after his sisters and brother, and that's exactly what he intended to do.

He'd gone no more than a few feet when Chip appeared at his side. Toby backtracked, taking his brother's hand. "I told you to wait."

"I don't want to stay by myself."

Toby considered taking him, until he remembered that feeling of terror when he'd almost been caught stealing from the bakery. "Hold these for me," he said, pulling three of the four rolls from his pocket and helping his brother put them in his. When he pulled out the fourth roll, he held it up. "If you stay here until I come back for you, I'll let you have the extra one."

Chip's eyes went wide as he stared at the burnt bread. But then he shook his head. "If I have that, what'll you have?"

"Ate one in the kitchen before I got out," he said, hoping the rumble of his stomach wouldn't give him away. "So hungry, I couldn't wait. But you want that extra one, you have to stay here."

"Why?"

"You don't want Lizzie or Abigail to see you eating it. You think you can do that?"

"Yes."

When Toby gave him the last roll, he gripped it in both hands, holding it up to his nose.

"Don't leave here until I come get you," Toby said, gently guiding his brother back to the alcove. As soon as Chip was safely tucked away, Toby started the other direction, keeping to the shadows.

As he neared the tracks, he saw a wagon stopped just on the other side, a stack of lumber strewn across the rails. Stars faded from the



predawn sky, still too early for anyone to be out to help the driver who'd spilled the load. The man seemed unconcerned about moving the wood, instead just sitting there, holding the reins of his team, as the train approached.

Why would someone be moving lumber at this hour . . . ?

His eyes flew back to the horseman in time to see him lifting a mask over his face. In the distance, on the other side of the tracks, he saw two other horsemen, both masked.

"Blimey . . ."

The train squealed to a stop, sparks flying up from the rails. He looked at the men, saw the pistols they held. Fear coursed through his veins. He pivoted, about to run off, when someone grabbed him from behind, clamped a hand over his mouth, and dragged him beneath the wooden staircase near the corner building.

Toby clawed at the hands, trying to squirm free.

"Quiet!" The man pulled Toby back, his hand so tight Toby could barely breathe. "You want them to hear you?"

Several terror-filled seconds passed before he realized the man wasn't there to hurt him. He whispered in Toby's ear again. "I'm going to let go. Not a word, lad. Understand?"

Heart thudding, Toby nodded. The man lowered his hand, and Toby sucked in air, stealing a glance at his captor. He was tall, in his late twenties, and dressed all in black, a bowler covering his brown hair. "Who are you?"

"Will Sutton," he said. "Been following this gang since last week. Thought they were just after engine parts. Turns out, they had something bigger in mind." His blue eyes were focused on the horsemen racing toward the stopped train.

Toby peered between the splintered stairs as the engineer stepped out from the locomotive, the first horseman pointing a gun at him. The engineer lifted his hands, backing up. The brakeman appeared behind him, his hands going up as well. The other two horsemen

rode past, stopping three cars down, boarding. They climbed to the top of the car, opened a trap door, and disappeared below.

“Interesting,” Will said. “I’d think it would’ve been locked.”

Toby had no idea what he was talking about. His attention was on the first horseman. “I know him.”

“What?”

“That man with the gun. Seen him in the orphanage, I have.”

“You’re sure?”

Toby nodded. “That’s why I followed him.”

Will kneeled in front of Toby, holding him by the shoulders, his eyes boring into him. “Did he see you? Out there in the street?”

“I—Maybe.” He thought about it. Surely the man had been too far away? “I don’t think so.”

“If he comes back to the orphanage, make sure he doesn’t see you.”

“Why?”

The rattle of wagon wheels caught their attention. The driver shook the reins, the team of horses pulling the wagon around to the freight car, next to the two waiting horses. The freight door opened, and the two men started tossing heavy wooden crates into the wagon bed, each landing with a thud. They followed with large canvas bags, which landed with a metallic ring.

When they’d emptied the car, the two men jumped down and mounted their horses. The wagon driver cracked his whip. The team of horses took off down the street, followed by the two horsemen.

The third horseman, the one Toby recognized, watched his men, then turned back to the engineer and brakeman. “On the ground. Now!”

They kneeled, both lying facedown near the tracks. The horseman circled the two men, his gun pointed toward their heads. He fired twice. The gunshots cracked, the sharp report echoing off the bricks of the warehouse.

Unable to look away, Toby's knees buckled and he sank to the ground. A soft whimper grew louder.

"Quiet, lad," Will cautioned.

But Toby wasn't the one whimpering.

His brother, the half-eaten burnt roll in hand, stood in the middle of the street, crying. "T—Toby . . . ?"

The horseman pulled at the reins, whirled his steed about, his eyes landing on the boy. He lifted his gun, aiming.

Will swore, darted out. The first shot missed. He grabbed Chip, swinging him around, practically throwing him at Toby, as another shot rang out. He stumbled forward, falling to his knees, just a few feet from Toby, as the horseman fired again. When he fell forward, he looked right at Toby, mouthing something he couldn't hear.

Trapped beneath the staircase, tears welled in Toby's eyes as he gripped his brother's hand, unable to move, transfixed by the dark stain growing on Will's back, only vaguely aware of the horseman breaking open the pistol, reloading.

"Boy . . ." Will said, his voice a soft rasp.

Holding tight to his brother, Toby took a step forward, not sure what to do.

*"Run!"*

# 1

PEBBLE BEACH, CALIFORNIA

CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE

*The present day, August*

A salt-tinged breeze swept in from the water, rippling the white canvas tents where spectators stood, drinking champagne. Beyond the tents, sunlight glinted off the hoods of the classic cars parked on the newly mowed emerald green grass. Two young children ran between a blue and white 1932 Auburn V-12 Boattail and a white 1936 Auburn Speedster, laughing as their parents raced after them, catching their hands, then drawing them back away from the cars.

Sam Fargo guided his wife, Remi, out of the parents' and children's path, her attention fixed on the auction book she held. "Anything of interest?" he asked.

"Besides very rare cars?" Remi cleared her throat. "It says there's a 1929 Bentley, owned by Lord Albert Payton, Viscount Wellswick. Please tell me your mother's *not* expecting us to bid on that?"

"Of course not."

She looked over at him, her green eyes hidden behind dark sunglasses, her auburn hair tucked beneath a wide-brimmed straw hat. "You have *no* idea why we're here to talk to him, do you?"

"I know it has something to do with cars."

"That narrows it down," she said, focusing on the program, turning the page. "Viscount Wellswick has three cars listed for auction. Why on earth would he bring them all the way over here when he lives in Great Britain?"

"The cars aren't here, he is."

She closed the book, taking a look around. "I'm beginning to think he's very rare. Your mother did say he was meeting us at ten?"

Sam checked his watch. It was nearly eleven. "Maybe I got the time wrong." He slipped his phone from his pocket, calling his mother. "Hi, Mom—"

"Did you talk to Albert?" she asked, before he had a chance to comment.

"That's why I'm calling. We were wondering if you'd heard from him."

"No, but I'm sure he'll be there. I'm at the dock or otherwise I'd get you the name and number of the motel he's staying at." He heard the sound of a boat engine in the background. His mother, Eunice "Libby" Fargo, ran a charter boat in Key West for snorkelers and deep-sea fishing. What had been a hobby for her when his father had been alive was now her passion. It wasn't all that long ago that she'd spent more days on land than on sea. Now in her seventies, the reverse was true, and she wasn't willing to drop anchor anytime soon. "It's possible I got the time mixed up," she said.

"Any chance you know more about what he's looking for?"

"Just what I told you the other night—Have to go. Taking a group out now. Call me back if you don't hear from him soon."

She disconnected.

"Well?" Remi asked.

"Still a mystery."

The only thing he really knew was that according to his mother, Albert Payton, the 7th Viscount Wellswick, was a distant relative of

his. “He’s family, and he’s in financial trouble” was what she’d told him when she’d called a couple of nights ago, asking if he and Remi could meet with him when they were in Pebble Beach for the Concours d’Elegance.

Sam wasn’t the type to walk into anything unprepared, but when he’d tried asking her what sort of trouble, she said it had something to do with a car and finances.

It was the reference to finances that had bothered him, not that he was about to mention this to his mother. He and Remi were self-made multimillionaires, partly due to Sam’s inventions, including an argon laser scanner, a device that could detect and identify mixed metals and alloys at a distance. These days, he and Remi tended to focus most of their energy working for the charitable foundation they’d set up. Amazing, though, how every time an article that mentioned their fortune appeared in some magazine or on the internet, there was no shortage of friends and relatives who suddenly remembered vague connections to Sam and Remi, looking for funds to invest or hoping for a handout.

As much as Sam wanted to believe that someone wouldn’t try to get to him through his mother, he knew better. Up until two days ago when his mother had called, he’d never even heard of Viscount Wellswick. “Probably not even a real viscount,” Sam said, dropping his phone into his pocket. “What sort of British royalty stays at a motel?”

Remi held up the program. “The sort that’s forced to sell off cars at auction.”

“Since he’s not here now, it’s a moot point. Let’s just enjoy the day.”

They strolled across the grass, taking their time to appreciate the vehicles on display. Remi stopped to admire a row of classic sports cars, in every hue of the rainbow. “It just goes to show that museums aren’t the only places that house fine art.”

"These just happen to be on wheels," Sam said. "Look at that motor. Now that's a work of art . . . 630-liter engine—"

"Designed by Dr. Ferdinand Porsche," Remi continued.

"Stop stealing my thunder."

Sam was stepping aside for a photographer, who was trying to set up a shot of the vehicle with the Pacific Ocean in the background, when Remi tapped him on the shoulder. "Isn't that Clive Cussler's car? The one he finished restoring in 2010?"

"Sure looks like it." They walked over to the sea foam green car, and Sam read the placard aloud. "1948 Delahaye Type 135 Cabriolet . . . I definitely like the color change. And the saddle brown leather interior works perfectly. The details . . ." He circled the car. "The Art Deco detail. That is Art Deco detail, isn't it?"

"Okay, Sam, you can stop salivating. You're like a kid in a candy shop."

"Who wouldn't be? Every year we come, there's always something new."

"I have to admit, it wouldn't be August without a trip to Pebble Beach."

Sam looked at his wife, about to comment on how fortunate they were that Clive always had guest passes waiting for them, when someone near the champagne and refreshment tent caught his eye. A dark-haired man about Sam's age, mid-thirties—far too young to be the missing Viscount—watching every move the two of them made.

Considering how many people were around, Sam found the man's interest odd. "How about a quick glass of champagne?" he asked.

"Before lunch? A bit of an early start to our day."

"Yes, well, in this case," he said, taking her arm in his, "we'll need a prop to find out why we seem to be so interesting."

"Intrigue. How fun. Who're we interested in?"

"There's a man wearing a yellow shirt with a green sweater tied around his shoulders at the far left corner of the champagne tent."



“Yellow? Green?” She gave a casual glance in that direction. “Really. If you’re going to spy, why would anyone want to wear a color combination like that?”

Sam pretended interest in the 1937 Delahaye on their left as they strolled toward the tent. “Maybe he’s trying not to look the part of a spy. Or,” he said, leaning down close to her, “he’s simply entranced by your beauty and can’t take his eyes off you.”

“Hmm. Highly unlikely. The latter, in case you’re wondering. Too many far more striking women around here for me to be the center of attention, don’t you think?”

“Not in the least,” he said, glancing over at his wife. Remi had chosen a Dolce & Gabbana late-summer afternoon dress, in navy blue with white polka dots, with an off-the-shoulder neckline, and gathered sleeves that dropped to her elbows. The three-tiered gathered skirt was mid-calf, and the slightest breeze moved the delicate cotton voile. Perfectly polished red toenails peeked from her white Valentino sandals. Her straw hat matched a shoulder bag just big enough to hold the essentials: lipstick, comb, driver’s license, credit card, cell phone, a 9mm Sig Sauer micro-compact handgun, and a concealed-carry permit. “You’re a knockout, Remi. Always were, always will be.”

“Very wise answer, Fargo.” She gave him a dazzling smile, then turned her attention to the champagne tent. “We know he can’t be a *spy* spy.”

“A what?”

“Government intrigue and world conspiracy. More international jewel thief, dressed like that, wouldn’t you say?”

No doubt she was thinking about their last escapade, which sent them to South America searching for the lost Romanov jewels. “Unless he’s interested in your wedding ring, he’s going to be sadly disappointed.”

The way the man was watching them from behind one of the

corners of the tent told Sam that he was definitely interested in something about them. He and Remi approached the table where a young woman in a crisp white shirt and black vest was pouring champagne into flutes. Sam picked up two, handing one to Remi. "You take the left, I'll take the right."

She lifted her glass and took a sip. "See you on the other side."

Sam watched as his wife expertly weaved her way through the guests, waiting until she was halfway across the tent before making his way in the opposite direction, toward the man, who suddenly found his attention divided between them. When Remi raised her glass in a toast, Sam did the same, and the two closed in.

Their target, apparently, hadn't realized they were zeroing in on him until they was just a few feet away. Sam walked up, clapped him on the back. "Wow. Didn't expect to see you here. Did you, Remi?"

"Not in the least. The people we run into at Pebble Beach, it just amazes me at times."

The man's blue eyes widened as he looked from Sam to Remi in disbelief. "It's you!"

Considering that Sam expected him to deny, to at least pretend, he hadn't been watching them, his statement came as a surprise. "How do you know us?"

"Of course, I don't know you," he said, with a strong British accent. "Not personally. You really do look just like your photographs. What luck to run into you straightaway."

"Lucky, indeed," Sam said, wondering what sort of game this guy was playing. "Didn't quite catch your name."

"Forgive me. I'm Oliver Payton. But you'll be wanting to talk to my uncle, Albert. Please wait while I fetch him?"

"Right here," Sam said.

He and Remi watched the man walk off, Remi saying, "Our missing Viscount's nephew?"

"Apparently. Assuming the man really is a viscount."

“Your mother seems to think so.”

“She’s not nearly as jaded as I am. Besides, how is it I’ve never heard about him until now?”

Remi gave him a sidelong glance. “Lack of interest in your extended family tree?”

“Only because the branches seem to multiply every time we turn around.”

“Do I detect the slightest bit of cynicism? Don’t answer that.” She nodded to Sam’s left, where Oliver was helping a white-haired man down the slope of rough grass onto a cart path. “Our Viscount and his nephew are back.”

When they reached the champagne tent, the Viscount brushed Oliver’s hand from his arm. “I’m old, not an invalid.”

Oliver gave a hesitant smile, clearing his throat. “My uncle, Albert Payton, Viscount Wellswick. This is Sam Fargo and his wife, Remi. They’re here about the car.”

The old man grumbled something under his breath about the car being his, turning an accusing glare in Sam’s direction. Suddenly his expression softened. “You look just like Eunice.”

The last person Sam had ever heard calling his mother by that name was a clerk at the DMV when she’d let her driver’s license expire. She’d always hated the name, instead going by Libby, a diminutive of Elizabeth, her middle name. “She mentioned you were here about a car?”

Albert nodded. “I—Yes. That you might be interested in the prototype of the Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost. I—I don’t have a lot of money. I’m not sure the show’s the best place for it. But I have a few good ideas on where someone might hide a classic car. I know they’re far-fetched, but if you’d only hear me out . . . “

Sam and Remi exchanged glances. No doubt a swindle about to happen, and not a very good one. When it came to cons, Sam liked to let them think they had the upper hand—the better to keep them

off guard. "You have a card? I'll look into the matter and get back to you."

The man's face fell as he patted his pockets. Either he was an extremely good actor or he'd pinned a lot of hope on that odd speech he'd just given. "No."

"I have a mobile," Oliver said. "Will that do?"

"Of course. Remi?"

She handed Sam her flute, then took her cell phone out, entering the number that Oliver recited to her.

"We'll be in touch," Sam said, placing both glasses on a nearby table.

He and Remi walked off, Remi asking, "What do you suppose his game was?"

"I'm not sure that he even knows." Sam checked the program Remi still held, something about it spurring his memory. "Didn't we read a recent article in *Sports Car Market* about a viscount selling off a number of classic cars?"

"The same man: Albert Payton," Remi said. While Sam's memory was sharp, his wife had near-photographic memory for anything she read. It amazed him how she was able to recall the tiniest details. "Downsizing in an attempt to save the family estate. But I don't recall reading that they were selling a prototype Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost. You don't think he was talking about the one that was stolen back in 1906? Of the first ever forty-fifty?"

They both stopped in their tracks.

Sam looked at Remi. "We need to find that man."

But when they turned back toward the champagne tent, he and his nephew were gone.

# CLIVE CUSSLER

## THE GRAY GHOST

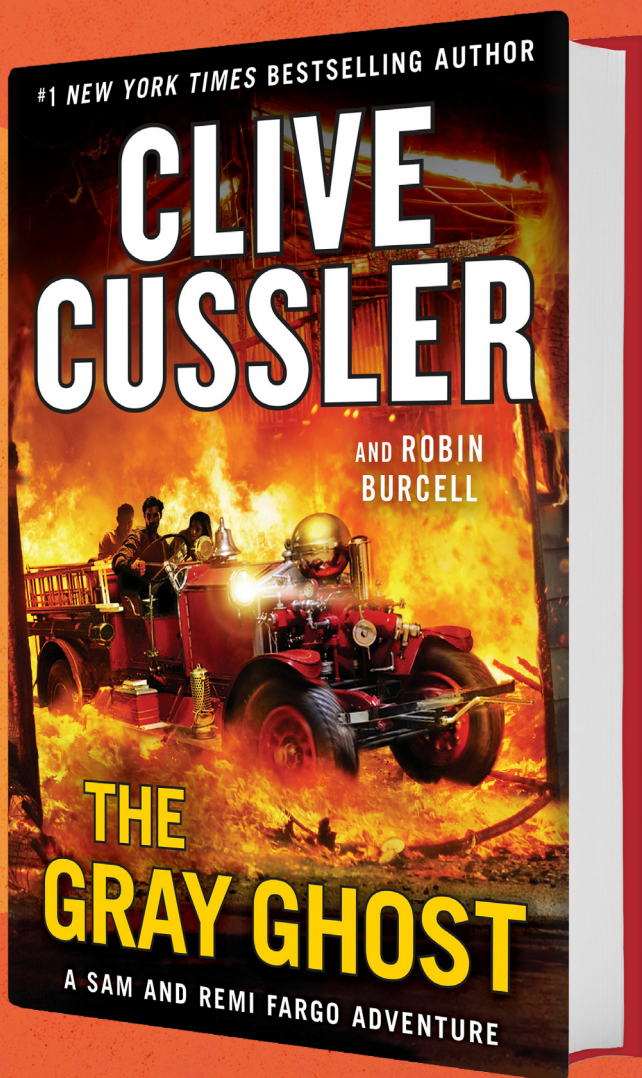
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