The background of the cover features a train moving rapidly on a dark road at night. The train is on the left side, moving towards the center, with its lights blurred. The road has yellow dashed lines. In the dark sky above, a crescent moon is visible. The overall mood is mysterious and suspenseful.

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DEALS A
HAND***

***A CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR
MYSTERY***

JANET DAWSON

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Death Rides the Zephyr

Death Deals a Hand

— *Death Deals* —
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A California Zephyr Mystery

JANET DAWSON

2016

PERSEVERANCE PRESS / JOHN DANIEL AND COMPANY
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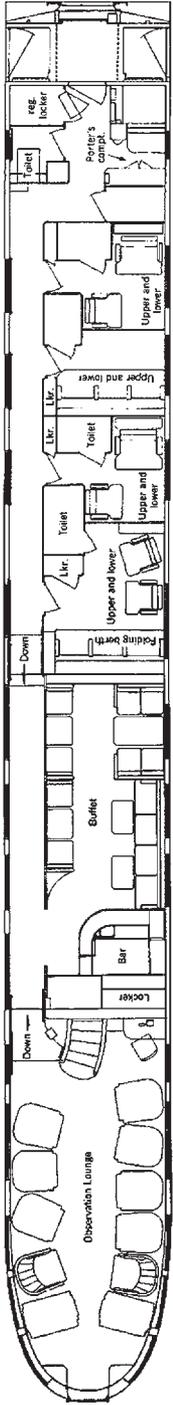
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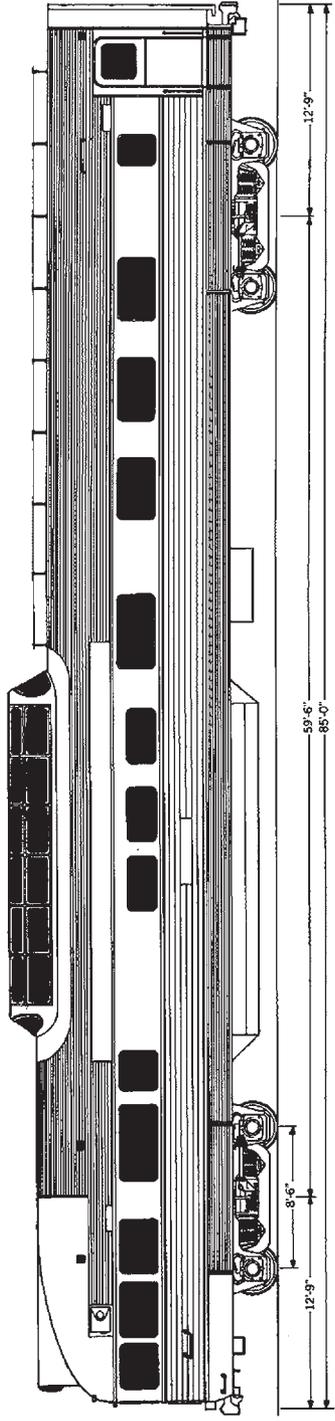
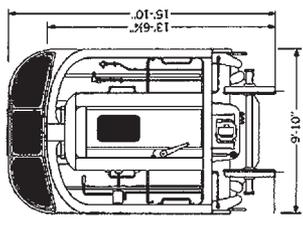
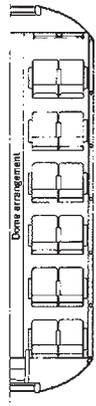
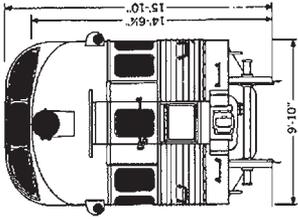
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To Mom, as always



California Zephyr Dome-Observation

Plans not to scale



Death Deals a Hand _____

Chapter One

THE WESTBOUND *CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR* sped across the high plains of eastern Colorado, the train's headlamps piercing the early morning darkness. In the cab of the first diesel engine, the engineer blew a warning signal as the train approached a crossing—two long blasts on the horn, followed by one short, then one long.

Jill McLeod had just entered the Silver Banquet, the dining car. She paused in the corridor that ran alongside the train's kitchen and turned toward the nearest window, her face reflected in the glass. Then, outside the train, twin headlights glowed. Silhouetted in the lights from a nearby building was a pickup truck, stopped at the crossing. Then the lights, building and vehicle disappeared as the train passed.

Breakfast service aboard the *California Zephyr* started at six o'clock in the morning, and it was a quarter after the hour. Jill walked down the corridor past the kitchen to the main part of the Silver Banquet. This early in the morning, few of the tables were occupied. Jill nodded to several early risers. Some of them she recognized as passengers who'd boarded the train the previous afternoon and evening, in Chicago and at other stations across Illinois and Iowa. At one table were two people Jill hadn't seen before, a mother and her young son. They must have boarded the train late last night, after Jill had gone to bed.

Near the center of the car, the steward, Mr. Taylor, stood behind a curved counter, its base decorated with a mural of carved linoleum. Behind the steward, a doorway led back to the kitchen,

a hub of activity this morning, as cooks in white uniforms, aprons and caps moved between the shiny stainless steel counters, opening cabinets and reaching up to remove pots, pans and serving pieces from shelves.

The dining car crew consisted of the steward, a chef and three cooks, as well as six waiters. The *California Zephyr* was the joint operation of three railroads—the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; the Denver & Rio Grande Western; and the Western Pacific—and each railroad operated a segment of the run. The dining car was staffed for the entire trip by a crew made up of employees from one of these railroads. For this westbound run, the dining car crew was from the CB&Q.

Before the train left the rail yard and moved to the platform at Chicago's Union Station, the kitchen and pantry had been loaded with supplies from the commissary. The train—also known as the CZ—carried enough food and beverages to feed the passengers and crew during the two-and-a-half-day westbound run. The pantry also carried supplies—crockery, glassware, silver service and kitchen equipment, and the linens used to cover the tables.

Jill greeted the steward, who smiled and waved a hand at the tables. "Good morning, Miss McLeod. Sit anywhere you like."

She took the window seat at a table for four, facing toward the train's engine. The table was covered with a crisp white cloth with matching napkins and set with heavy silverware. It was set with china bearing a pattern of violets and daisies. Each table held a full water bottle, a bud vase containing a fresh carnation, and a heavy silver stand holding the breakfast menu and meal checks on which passengers marked their menu choices. Jill didn't need to look at the menu. She marked her meal check, choosing a favorite breakfast.

There were six waiters in the dining car, all of them wearing white jackets. She knew many of the waiters by name, having traveled with them before. Jill was the Zephyrette, the only female member of the train's onboard crew.

A waiter approached her table, carrying a silver coffeepot. "Good morning, Mr. Gaylord," Jill said. From the conductor on

down, the crew were expected to keep their communications with their fellow crew members on a “Mister and Miss” basis.

“Good morning, Miss McLeod. Coffee?”

“Yes, please.”

He smiled as he poured a steaming cup of black coffee and took her meal check, though he didn’t have to give it more than a glance. The waiters aboard the train were adept at reading the passengers’ tastes, the better to serve frequent travelers. After many trips on the CZ, they knew what the crew members liked to eat as well. “I’m guessing you want your favorite. French toast and bacon, crisp but not burned.”

Jill smiled. “That would be a good guess.”

“Coming right up.” Mr. Gaylord moved away from the table, heading for the kitchen.

Jill reached for the heavy silver pitcher and poured cream into her cup. Then she raised it to her lips. Ah, the coffee tasted good. And the caffeine jolt was most welcome.

She usually slept well on the train, but she’d had a restless night. Yesterday, Jill had reported for duty an hour before the *California Zephyr*, designated train number 17, was due to leave Chicago’s Union Station. She’d been in the Windy City for two nights, a layover following her eastbound run from Oakland to Chicago on train number 18. Now she was returning home, to California.

When Jill arrived at Union Station, she stowed her suitcase and first-aid kit in her compartment at the end of the Silver Chalet, the buffet-lounge car. Then she began her pre-departure routine. She walked through the train from beginning to end, checking the washrooms for cleanliness. Each car had a card holder, and in these, she inserted cards identifying her as the Zephyrette.

The train’s consist—the rail cars that made up the train—began with three diesel locomotives owned by the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. Following the engines were cars built by Pennsylvania’s Budd Company, a mix of equipment from all three roads. The legend CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR decorated the sides of each car and the gleaming stainless steel cars all had “Silver”

in their names. This was why the *California Zephyr* was known as the Silver Lady.

For this trip, the baggage car was the Silver Buffalo. Behind this were three chair cars—the Silver Scout, Silver Mustang, and Silver Ranch. Each of these cars had seating for sixty coach passengers, as well as an upper-level Vista-Dome, a glass compartment with seating for twenty-four coach passengers. The Dome rose out of the car's roof, accessed by stairs in the middle of the car. Underneath the Dome, two steps on either side led down to the depressed floor, which contained the men's and women's restrooms.

In the middle of the train were the Silver Chalet, the buffet-lounge car, and the Silver Banquet, the dining car. Following these were the sleeper cars, the Silver Quail, the Silver Falls, the Silver Maple, and the Silver Rapids. At the end of the train was the dome-observation car, the Silver Crescent. Both the Silver Chalet and the Silver Crescent had depressed floors and Vista-Domes, for the use of the sleeper car passengers.

Before the train's 3:30 P.M. departure from Union Station, Jill and the Pullman conductor, Mr. Winston, stood at the check-in tables inside the station, greeting passengers and directing them to their cars. Jill also made dinner reservations for people traveling in the sleeper cars. These she charted on a diagram which she later turned over to the dining car steward. Once the train left the station, Jill went to the public address system in the dining car, where she'd made the first of several announcements she would make during the westbound journey. After that, she'd walked forward through the train to the three coach cars, where she began making dinner reservations for those passengers.

She'd made another announcement as the train crossed the Mississippi River at 6:30 P.M. and headed into Iowa. After the dining car closed later that evening, Jill made her last announcement of the day on the train's PA system, which was located just opposite the steward's counter.

"May I have your attention, please. Before retiring this evening, you may wish to move your watches back one hour, as we will enter the Mountain Time Zone at McCook, Nebraska at about four A.M. Good night."

AFTERWORD

A FEW YEARS AGO I was in the lobby of the Hotel Colorado in Glenwood Springs, looking at photographs of notables who had stayed there, including President Theodore Roosevelt—and Al Capone. Yes, Al used to vacation in the Colorado Rockies, along with a lot of other gangsters. And most people who grew up in the Denver area, as I did, have heard of Colorado's own crime family, the Smaldones. The three brothers—Eugene (“Checkers”), Clyde (“Flip Flop”) and Clarence (“Chauncey”)—dominated organized crime in the Mile High City for years, starting in the 1930s. There was also organized crime in southern Colorado, in the Front Range city of Pueblo, and farther south in Walsenburg and Trinidad. Italian immigrants who came to work in the coal fields brought with them the Mafia and the Black Hand.

Both the books in the *California Zephyr* series required research, not only into organized crime in Colorado, but trains as well. When writing about a historical period or a particular subject, I strive to be accurate in conveying information. I may have tweaked facts from time to time for the sake of plot, characters, and a good story. Any errors are my own.

Many thanks to two of the Zephyrettes who worked aboard the historical streamliner known as the *California Zephyr*. Cathy Moran Von Ibsch was a Zephyrette in the late 1960s and rode the Silver Lady on her last run. Rodna Walls Taylor, who died recently, rode the rails as a Zephyrette in the early 1950s, the time period of the book. I greatly appreciate their generosity in answering my many questions. I couldn't have written this book without them.

We are fortunate to have railroad museums to preserve the remaining artifacts of this country's rail era, particularly the streamliners like the *California Zephyr*. Both the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento and the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden have excellent research libraries as well as rail cars and locomotives. The Western Pacific Railroad Museum in Portola, California, is a treasure house of rolling stock.

I recommend the *California Zephyr* Virtual Museum, at: <http://calzephyr.railfan.net>. Here I found old timetables, menus, and brochures, as well as information on the Zephyrettes.

The Amtrak version of the *California Zephyr* is not the same as the sleek Silver Lady of days gone by. But it's great to ride a train through most of the same route, getting an up-close look at this marvelous part of the country. The journey may take longer, but the scenery is spectacular and the relaxation factor is 110 percent.

The *California Zephyr* story, and that of railroading in America, is told in books and films. Some of them are listed below, along with other sources I used in writing the *California Zephyr* series. Many of these books are full of photographs and first-hand accounts of working on and aboard the trains.

PUBLICATIONS ABOUT THE *CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR*, RAILS, AND RAIL TRAVEL IN THE UNITED STATES

Portrait of a Silver Lady: The Train They Called the California Zephyr, Bruce A. McGregor and Ted Benson, Pruett Publishing Company, Boulder, CO, 1977. Full of beautiful photographs, lots of history and technical information, and firsthand accounts of what it was like to work on this train.

CZ: The Story of the California Zephyr, Karl R. Zimmerman, Quadrant Press, Inc., 1972. Excellent overview of the train's history, with lots of old photographs.

Zephyr: Tracking a Dream Across America, Henry Kisor, Adams Media Corporation, 1994. An account of Kisor's journey westward on the Amtrak *California Zephyr*.

Waiting on a Train: The Embattled Future of Passenger Rail Ser-

vice, James McCommons, Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2009. A thought-provoking account of the author's travels on various Amtrak routes and his interviews with passengers, employees, rail advocates, and people in the railroad business, with discussions about the future of passenger rail in the United States.

A Guidebook to Amtrak's California Zephyr, Eva J. Hoffman, Flashing Yellow Guidebooks, Evergreen, CO, 2003, 2008. There are three volumes: Chicago to Denver, Denver to Salt Lake City, Salt Lake City to San Francisco. I discovered these courtesy of a railfan while riding the Amtrak CZ. A detailed milepost-by-milepost guide to what's outside the train window, with history and anecdotes thrown in. A useful resource for finding out how far it is from one place to another and how long it takes to get there.

Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class, Larry Tye, Henry Holt & Company, 2004. There is also a PBS video. The book discusses the history of the Pullman Company, African Americans working on the railroad, and their legacy.

The Pullman Porters and West Oakland, Thomas and Wilma Tramble, Arcadia Publishing, 2007. A look at the lives of porters in Oakland, CA. Full of wonderful photographs.

PUBLICATIONS ABOUT ORGANIZED CRIME IN COLORADO, AL CAPONE AND PROHIBITION

Mountain Mafia: Organized Crime in the Rockies, Betty L. Alt and Sandra K. Wells, Dog Ear Publishing, 2008. A look at the Black Hand and the Mafia in Colorado, including the Smaldones and their predecessors and rivals, through the twentieth century, and the Colorado crime syndicates' links to organized crime in other areas of the United States.

Smaldone: The Untold Story of an American Crime Family, Dick Kreck, Fulcrum Publishing Company, 2009. A history of Denver's own crime syndicate, active from the 1930s to the later twentieth century.

Get Capone: The Secret Plot that Captured America's Most Wanted Gangster, Jonathan Eig, Simon & Schuster, 2010. The rise and fall

of Capone, America's most notorious gangster, with a look at his vast illegal operations in Chicago.

Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition, Daniel Okrent, Scribner, 2010. A detailed overview of Prohibition, the reasons for its enactment, the crime that rose from it, and the aftermath.

Information on the 10th Mountain Division can be found at:
http://www.drum.army.mil/AboutFortDrum/Pages/hist_10thMountainHistory_lv3.aspx

Much of the information about World War II rationing and crime that arose from it comes from various sources on the Internet.

FILMS

The California Zephyr: The Story of America's Most Talked About Train, Copper Media, 1999

The California Zephyr: Silver Thread Through The West, Travel-VideoStore, 2007.

The California Zephyr: The Ultimate Fan Trip, Emery Gulash, Green Frog Productions, Ltd., 2007.

American Experience: Streamliners: America's Lost Trains, PBS Video, 2006

Promotional films from the CZ and other trains are viewable on YouTube.

The original *California Zephyr* appeared on film in the 1954 movie *Cinerama Holiday*, as well as the 1952 noir *Sudden Fear*, starring Joan Crawford and Jack Palance. During the train portion of that movie, a Zephyrette comes to Joan Crawford's bedroom to tell her it's time for her dinner reservation. That Zephyrette is Rodna Walls, whom I interviewed for this book.

I hope you enjoy *Death Deals a Hand*. Now go ride a train!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janet Dawson is the author of the Jeri Howard PI series, which includes *Kindred Crimes*, winner of the St. Martin's Press/Private Eye Writers of America contest for Best Private Eye Novel, and *Bit Player*, which was nominated for a Golden Nugget award for Best California Mystery. The most recent series entry is *Cold Trail*. Two of Dawson's short stories were nominated for a Shamus and another won a Macavity.

In addition to a suspense novel, *What You Wish For*, she has written *Death Rides the Zephyr*, the predecessor to this book. A past president of NorCal MWA, Dawson lives in the East Bay region. She welcomes visitors at www.janetdawson.com and at her blog, www.getitwriteblog.wordpress.com.



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