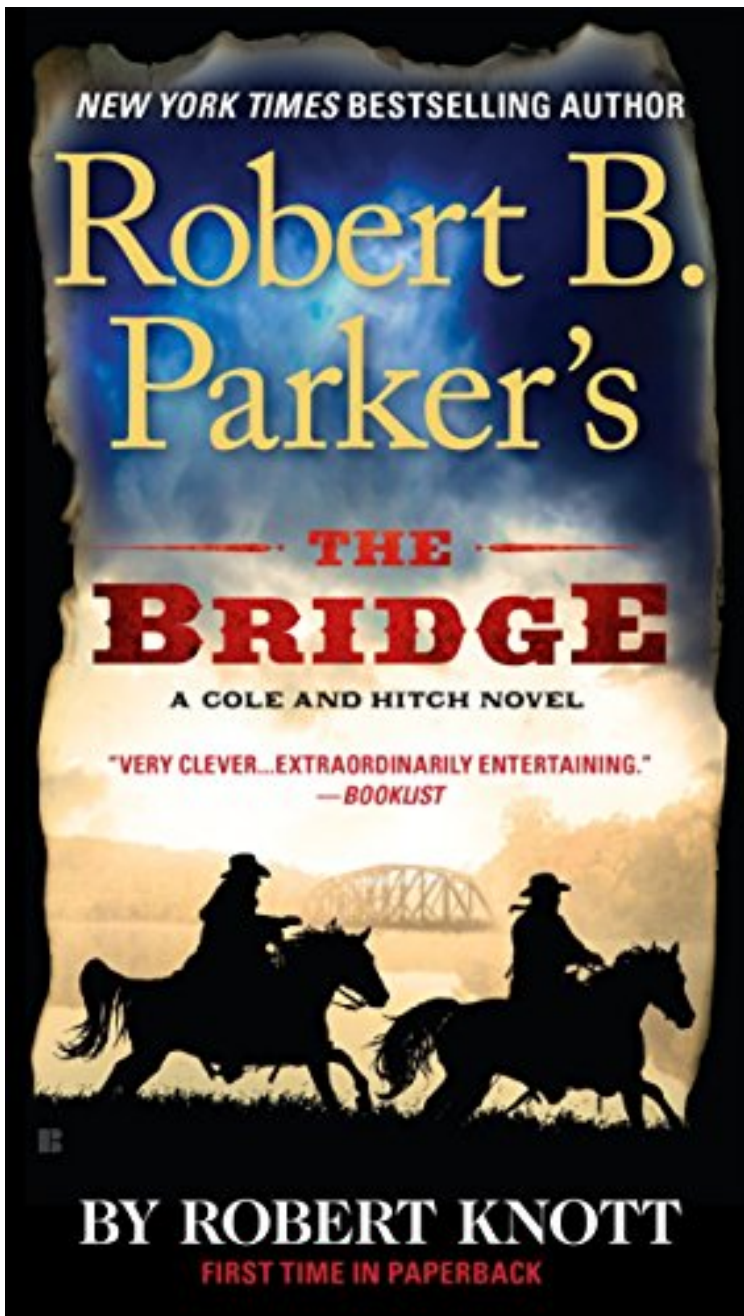


(Read now) File size: 68.Mb

## Robert B. Parker's The Bridge



*Par Robert Knott*  
*ePub | \*DOC | audiobook | ebooks |*  
*Download PDF*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #401015 dans eBooksPubli le: 2014-12-30Sorti le: 2014-12-30Format: Ebook Kindle

(Read now) Robert B. Parker's The Bridge

**Par Robert Knott : Robert B. Parker's The Bridge** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Robert B. Parker's The Bridge:

 [Download](#)

 [Read Online](#)

### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe next gritty, gun-slinging entry in theNew York Timesbestselling series, featuring itinerant lawmen Virgil Cole and Everett Hitch.Territorial Marshals Virgil Cole and Everett Hitch are back in Appaloosa, where their work enforcing the law has been exceptionally quiet. All that is about to change. An ominous storm rolls in, and along with it a band of night riders with a devious scheme, who show up at

the Rio Blanco camp, where a three-hundred-foot bridge is under construction. Appaloosas Sheriff Sledge Driskill and his deputies are the first to respond, but as the storm grows more threatening, news of troubles at the bridge escalate and the Sheriff and his deputies go missing. Virgil and Everett saddle up to sort things out but before they do the hard drinking, Beauregard Beauchamp arrives in Appaloosa with his Theatrical Extravaganza troupe and the promise of the best in lively entertainment west of the Mississippi. With the troupe comes a lovely and mysterious fortune-teller who is set on saving Everett from imminent but indefinable danger. The trouble at the bridge, the missing lawmen, the new arrivals, and Everetts shoot-out in front of Hals Caf arent the only things on Cole and Hitches plate as a gang of unsavory soldiers ease into town with a shady alibi, shadier intentions, and a soon-to-be-discovered wake of destruction. As clouds over Appaloosa continue to gather, things get much worse for Cole and Hitch.

Extrait Prologue

The dense mass of stars was unusually ominous and threatening, as if the whole tangle of constellations was up to no damn good. The wide night sky pushed down hard on the four weary horsemen, appraising them, like a powerful and intolerant observer. With their tilted brims and slouching shoulders, the mounted men rode single file and without word, as their horses carried them toward their destination. They were all fairly young. One was a hefty fellow with a large gut; the second was gangly with a narrow face and shoulders; the third was also skinny but was dark-skinned, maybe a half-breed; and the fourth was small and wiry. Hard to know what the hell these night riders were thinking. What was going on in their heads? They would have had to feel the overhead pressure, the challenging and unforgiving weight. The stars loomed close enough to reach out and touch; a twisted twinkling expanse. The four horsemen rode slowly, deliberately up the eastern rim of the Rio Blanco River. The only sound was the occasional clink of a bit, the footfalls of their horses, and the soft rumble of the white-water river in the canyon far below. The dropping moon provided enough light for them to see their dogged and hell-bent way, and just ahead, where he was supposed to be, they saw the big man waiting for them. They had met him only once before. They knew from the brief encounter he was not someone to cross. Not ever. He was different, above average in every respect. He could smile and show his nice white teeth, but he was menacing and ill-tempered to his very core. There was something even more dangerous about him: it was as if he were from another place in time. One of the riders told the others that the big sonofabitch reminded him of what the warrior Achilles might have been like. He was handsome and rawboned. He had a warrior swagger to him as if hed single-handedly just wiped out an army and was looking forward to his next victim. His movements were swift and specific. He had thick, broad shoulders and his hands and forearms were sinewy with muscle. His neck was wide and corded. He had a full head of shiny, coarse hair and his eyes were deep-set and dark blue. The night riders were also fearful of the two brothers who would accompany them later, but they were in this, all of them. They would not turn back and they could not turn back, not now, not tonight. They were all committed to what they rode out on this night to do. The big Achilles man got to his feet in the buckboard. He stood looking at them as they neared and then jumped down from the wagon as they came to a stop. Youre late, he said. He threw back a canvas uncovering the wagons freight. What about the telegraph lines, he asked, before they could defend their belated arrival. Theyre cut, the dark-skinned man said, as he dismounted. You see anybody? We did not, the hefty man said. Anybody see you? No, nobody. You sure? We are, the hefty man replied. All right, he said. Lets get a move on it. How far from here? the small, wiry man said. Quarter-mile, he said. From here we go in on foot. Each one hauls a load. Where we gonna meet em? the hefty man said. Just carry your load and follow me, he said. Got one hour before sunup. The riders didnt waste any time. They tied their horses under a stand of small sycamores and went about the task at hand. One by one, each of the men removed the supplies from the buckboard and followed the big warrior man, the Achilles man. They walked along a narrow deer path through thickets, high above the river. As they neared their destination, they could hear someone up ahead of them. Far enough, a mans voice said. The voice was raspy, with a distinct southern drawl. They knew it was one of the brothers, and then they saw them both. The two men stepped out from a cluster of briars near a tree-covered wash that folded off down toward the river some two hundred feet below. The brothers were stout men, with full, bristly beards and tangled, unruly hair. Two of the riders had known the brothers in earlier days and were not any more comfortable with them than they were with the warrior man. Both brothers were intelligent men, but they were mercurial and quick-tempered. They presented themselves as polite and forthright, but a strange, disconnected quality lurked within. They both were quiet and though their eyes were kind, there was a constant callous and mistrusting element about their demeanor. Dont ever turn your back on them, the dark-skinned man said to the others. This night, however, what these men were focused on was the brothers shrewd scheme. They recruited the warrior man and the four riders, and if

everything went as planned, they all would make a lot of money. More money than any of them would have made in a lifetime. Before tonight, they had done a mock run of the plan. Each man knew his job. When the taller brother said, Lets go, they moved out. It did not take long for them to plant the dynamite. One of the men, the heavysset man, knew everything about how and where it should be placed. He had been the one who showed the others what to do. His extensive knowledge of explosives was the very reason for his recruitment in the first place. Daybreak was upon them and the first rays of sun began to appear as the heavysset man instructed the younger brother how to terminate the last connection. I remember, the younger brother said. The heavysset man nodded. He started off walking toward the trail that led back to the buckboard. The others were ahead of him and he followed them as he unspooled the wire. After the younger brother made the final connection and was headed back toward the deer path he came face-to-face with Percy OMalley. Hey, Percy said. Good morning. The brother was startled to see the old man. Morning, Percy, the brother said. What are you doing out here so early? Percy said. The brother looked around the old man to see if there was anyone behind him. Ill show you, the brother said, as he walked to the edge. The old man followed him. The brother pointed to the river, two hundred feet below. Look, the brother said. When Percy leaned over to look, the brother pulled his long knife from its sheath, cupped his hand around the old mans mouth, and slit his throat. He shoved the man off the side and watched as his body tumbled into the river. If he had stopped to look, he would have seen the body swept up by the current, leaving a murky red trail dispatched behind it. By the time he made it back to where the other men were, the heavysset man had the wires connected on the terminals of the detonator. They had a good vantage point from their location. Who wants to do the honors? the heavysset man said. Me, the warrior man said without hesitation. He got down on his knees and the others closed in behind him. On three, the warrior man said. One... two... He lowered the plunger handle on the detonator and the men watched the three-hundred-foot iron bridge that crossed over the Rio Blanco River explode in a monstrous blast, earth-quaking and sulfurous as if it came from deep down in hell, delivered by the Evil Red Devil himself. 1 Weather. Is, Virgil said. Dont look good, I said. No, Virgil said. It dont. Virgil and I were watching a faraway line of darkness coming toward us from the north. Got this place shingled just in time, I said. Virgil glanced up, looking at the underside of the porch overhang we were sitting under. Know soon enough if we got any leaks, I said. Spect we will. Thisll be the first sign of weather since weve been back here in Appaloosa, I said. It is, Virgil said, looking back to the clouds. Aint it? Been warm and dry, I said. Hot, even. Has, Virgil said. Virgil put the heels of his boots on the porch rail and tipped his chair back a little. We sat quiet for a long moment as we watched the dark weather moving slowly in our direction. What is it, Virgil said, tilting his head a little. Where are we, Everett? November, Virgil. Second day of. Virgil shook his head a little. What the hell happened to October? You had those two German carpenters you hired working my backside off on this place, thats what happened, I said. Good goings for you things have been quiet in the outlaw racket. Temperate times, he said. Virgil rocked his chair a little as he looked at the clouds. Hope its not the calm before the storm, I said. Never know, Virgil said. No reason to think about outlawing thats not yet happened, I said. Or be downright superstitious. No, Virgil said. No reason. We sat quiet a moment, watching the faraway storm. Bad weather does make folks desperate, I said. People get out of sorts. Been our experience, Virgil said, people get cold, desperate, and hungry. I leaned back in my chair and looked through the open doorway into the house. Speaking of it, I said. What do you think shes cooking up in there? Dont know, Virgil said. Allie said she was making something special. That dont sound good. Virgil smiled a little. Shes trying, he said. Maybe you ought to get her a cookbook, I said. With recipes. Where she learns how to measure stuff out and how long to cook it and what goes with what and so on. I offered, Virgil said. She told me all good chefs cook by the seat of their pants. We both thought about that for a moment. You got some of that Kentucky? I do, Virgil said. Might as well have ourselves a nudge or two, I said. No reason not to, Virgil said. Virgil removed his boots from the porch railing and lowered the front legs of the chair hed been tilting back in. He got to his feet just as three men on horseback wearing oilcloth slickers rounded Second Street, riding directly toward us at a steady pace. It was Sheriff Sledge Driskill with two of his deputies, Chip Childers and Karl Worley. Got some intention, I said. They do, Virgil said. 2 Might be the end of those temperate times we were talking about. Might, Virgil said. Sledge and his deputies slowed as they neared and came to a stop just in front of the porch. Virgil, Sledge said. Everett. Afternoon, I said. Virgil eased up to the porch steps. Sledge, Virgil said with a nod. Boys. Sledge was a big man with thick black eyebrows and a full dark beard streaked with silver. Karl was a skinny Canadian fella, an ex-cowhand who was never without sheep chaps. Chip was a chubby overgrown kid with a large wad of tobacco crammed in his cheek. What brings you here? Virgil said. Wanted to let yall know, Sledge said, got some

business away. And the town will be scarce of us for a bit. Only deputies left on duty will be Skinny Jack and Book. Chastain is sick in bed with a stomach bug. Where you headed, Virgil said. Were headed up to the bridge camp. Now? I said. Yep, Sledge said, tipping his head to the dark clouds on the northern horizon.

Storms a comin. That it is, I said. Need to beat it best we can, Sledge said. Why the bridge camp? Virgil said. Know Lonnie Carman? Virgil shook his head, then looked at me. Know who he is, I said. Little fella with the tattoos, did some time, works at the Boston House? Thats him, Sledge said. He dont work there anymore.

Hes been working on the bridge crew. What about him? Virgil said. Well, Sledge said. His new wife, Winifred, believes something has happened to him. What? Virgil said. He didnt return from his bridge shift when he was supposed to, Sledge said. Bridge camp was a construction site a days ride south of Appaloosa. The bridge had been a major undertaking for the territory. It spanned a wide chasm across the Rio Blanco, where rotating crews of workers had been constructing the massive timber-and-steel truss crossing for the better part of two years. Why does she think something has happened to him? I said. Sledge shrugged a bit. Says its unlike him. Says hes punctual. She came to see me yesterday. Said Lonnie was supposed to be back home by now. Said she sent two wires to the way station near the bridge where they correspond bridge business, materials and what have you, but got no response back. I told her, give it a little time, maybe he was just busy bridge building. Shes been back three times since, Karl said. Sledge nodded. Each time shes been more riled. She put her nose in my face, Sledge said, shaking his head a little, said if I didnt go and find her husband she was gonna come roust the two marshals in town to do the lookin and, well, I dont want that. Having her coming over here pestering yall. She hollered in his face last time, Chip said, then spit a stream of tobacco juice in the dirt. Eyes damn near popped out of her skull. Hollered, hell, Karl said. She screamed like a cut calf. I didnt have the heart to tell her maybe he run off, Sledge said. I know I damn sure would, Chip said. Cant imagine marrying a lady like that. Hell, no, Karl said with a nod in agreement. Me for sure, neither. No matter, Sledge said. Wanted to spare you two of the misery of her coming over here. Were gonna ride up, see if we can find the poor sonofabitch. Virgil nodded some. Well be here, he said. Sledge gave a sharp nod, then backed up his big bay a bit. The lawmen turned their horses and rode off south. We watched them as they galloped off and disappeared behind the mercantile at the end of the street. Winifred? Virgil said. That the fearsome lady churns butter at the grocer? It is, I said. Virgil nodded a bit, then walked into the house to get the Kentucky whiskey. 3 Virgil and I had been working our job as territorial marshals for close to a year before we returned to Appaloosa. We spent the last part of the summer and near the whole of the fall helping the two German carpenters Virgil hired to rebuild Virgil and Allies house. It was a bigger house than the one Allie had burned to the ground during a cooking mishap while Virgil and I were over in the Indian territories. The new house was a two-story with a three-sided porch. I told Virgil, and Allie, I was happy to help build it but had no interest in painting it. So, with the exception of the place being unpainted, the house was complete. Shes barefoot, covered in flour from head to toe, Virgil said when he came back out with the Kentucky and two glasses. Virgil poured us a nudge, put the bottle between us, and sat back in the chair. To the house, I said, raising my glass. By God, Virgil said, raising his. And to not being bossed around by those goddamn German boys no more, I said. Virgil offered a sharp nod. Theyre particular, Virgil said. You could call em that. We started to tip the whiskey back when Virgil stopped and looked toward the darkness in the far distance. You hear that? Virgil said. Thunder? Virgil shook his head. No, he said. I listened. Hell, I said.

Music. Virgil nodded and then we saw coming over the rise in front of the darkness to the north a tall colorfully painted wagon with musicians sitting on top, playing a lively tune. Virgil shook his head a little. Dont that beat hell? I said. Does, Virgil said. Leading the wagon was a single rider on a tall horse. Behind the wagon with the musicians playing music on top were other wagons trailing behind, six wagons in all. Thats that troupe was up in Yaqui, no doubt. What troupe? Virgil said. Beauchamp Brothers Theatrical Extravaganza, they call it. A traveling group from New Orleans, I said. They go town to town doing dramatic shows, dancing, magic, got em a sharpshooter and clairvoyant fortune-teller, that sort of thing. Allies been talking about it for weeks. Said its been all the talk at the ladies social. She never said nothing to me, Virgil said. First I heard of it. She talks to me, Virgil. Talks to me, too. I listen to her. Well, hell, Everett, I listen to her. Not when shes just going on you dont. Well, sometimes she talks just to listen to herself speak, Everett, Virgil said. More than sometimes. You know that. I do. I got out of my chair and called into the house, Allie. What? That Beauchamp Brothers bunch is coming into Appaloosa. What! Allie exclaimed.

Really? My goodness. She came running out of the front door, taking off her apron. She rolled it up and threw it in Virgils lap. A puff of flour dust exploded up in Virgils face as Allie leaned over on the porch rail and looked in the direction of the music. They werent supposed to be here until next week, Allie said. Oh my

goodness, my goodness, my goodness. Isn't this exciting, Everett? Is, Allie. Help me up, Everett? I held on to Allie's hand so she could step up on the rail for a better view. Even though Allie was no longer a spring chicken, she still had a youthful beauty about her. Her agile body was firm, her eyes sparkled, and her skin glowed like that of someone half her age. Careful there, Allie, you don't slip and hurt yourself, Virgil said, as he bullwhipped the apron, freeing it of flour. Oh, Virgil. Folks started to gather in the street, looking in the direction of the Beauchamp Brothers Theatrical Extravaganza as they entered town. Now that they were closer, we could clearly see musicians playing banjo, trumpet, trombone, and tuba as a set of cymbals clanged together. The single horseman leading the way held up his hand like he was a chief quartermaster halting his cavalry. The musicians climbed down from the painted wagon and formed a line behind the horseman, never missing a beat. That must be him, Allie said. That must be Beauregard Beauchamp leading the way. Everett said this extravaganza is the Beauchamp Brothers, Virgil said. Might well be the other brother. Oh, no, Allie said. Boudreaux was killed a few years ago by a tiger. Boudreaux? Virgil said, looking at me. A tiger? I said. Yes, Allie said. Isn't that the awfulest thing? He was the tamer, and the tiger got mad or hungry or something and attacked him, chewed him up. Allie focused on the lead horseman and smiled. That must be Beauregard, Allie said, as she worked pieces of her hair back into place. At that moment somebody scurried from one of the wagons and handed the rider a long megaphone. He moved his horse on into town.

The band followed, playing as they marched behind him. He called out into the megaphone. Hello, Appaloosa. My name is Beauregard Beauchamp. You were right, Allie, Virgil said. We are the Beauchamp Brothers Theatrical Extravaganza and we will be in your fair city of Appaloosa for a full week. Offering you nightly entertainment. A new and exciting show every night. The whole family is invited, young and old alike will find something that will make them laugh, warm their hearts, and tickle their innards. Beauregard's mount was a spirited white horse with black socks, mane, and tail. Beauregard himself was handsome. He sat upright in his shiny black saddle, wearing a sharp blue striped suit, gray shirt, red tie, and a wide-brim white hat that turned skyward at its edges. He sported a full black mustache and long, shiny hair. More people came out to see the theatrical parade as it made its way into town. Oh, my, Allie said. Oh, my, oh, my. A few young children scurried out to walk along with the members of the troupe as Beauregard carried on with his ballyhoo. Aaappaloosa, he shouted, as the group continued into town. We are pleased to announce we will be bringing you the finest entertainment this side of the Mississippi to your splendid township. We have a large tent we will pitch, and starting tomorrow evening, there will be a seat inside that tent for everyone to enjoy the Beauchamp Brothers Theatrical Extravaganza. So come one, come all. We have special prices for our opening night tomorrow night, so don't miss out. He rode directly by our front porch and smiled at us, tipping his hat. Allie turned, looking to Virgil and me, and beamed like a little girl. Isn't he just the most glorious? Allie said, as she looked back to Beauregard riding by. Just glorious. Virgil looked at me and nodded a little. He sure is, Allie, Virgil said. Glorious, I said. The band members followed Beauregard as they moved through town. We watched as each of the brightly colored wood-topped wagon trailers passed by. Painted across the side of each trailer, colorful lettering boasted the variety of acts: Exciting Dramatic Plays! The Darndest Dancing! Heavenly Singing! Sharpshooting! Majestic Music! Dr. Longfellow's Magic Show! (The doctor will gladly cut you in half!) A few of the shows' players waved from the wagon windows as they passed by. Only thing missing in this outfit is one of those Indian flute-blowing snake charmers, Virgil said. Last in line came a red-painted trailer with fancy gold lettering:

Peek-a-Boo Madame Leroux ~ Fortune-Teller. (Futures Told Your Legendary Afterlife Adventures Revealed!) I noticed a very attractive lady with ivory skin and black hair looking out from a window. Her gaze was off in the distance, but suddenly her focus shifted directly toward me. She didn't smile or wave, but I was certain she was looking at me. There was something mysterious and haunting about her gaze. Must be Madame Leroux, I thought. She remained looking at me and I looked at her until her trailer passed. Beauregard ought to put his brother to rest, Virgil said. Change the troupe's name. Change the troupe's name? Allie said. Virgil nodded. Beauchamp's Theatrical Extravaganza, Virgil said. Less of a mouthful. Oh, Virgil, don't be silly, Allie said. Clearly you don't know the first thing about showmanship and advertising. You don't go and spoil a name brand just because a brother got gobbled up by a tiger, for land's sake. There's a business to advertising. Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup, for instance... Oh Mrs. Winslow's been dead and gone forever and a day, and it's a good thing they haven't changed the name to... to deceased and six-feet-under Mrs. Winslow's Syrup. They wouldn't sell nothing. Allie uncocked her scorn as quickly as she'd cocked it, then turned her attention back on the passing troupe as if Virgil had said nothing. Virgil looked at me and smiled a little, then glanced up to the dark clouds in the far distance that were slowly rolling in behind the

Beauchamp Brothers Theatrical Extravaganza, headed for Appaloosa. Regardless of what its called, Virgil said, I dont suspect the weathers gonna be too favorable for opening night. 5 Allie said the dinner we ate was just like the food they make overseas in Europe. Virgil told her it tasted more like the food they make south of the border in Mexico. That incited a minor disagreement between the two of them that was working its way toward an argument when I interrupted. Something burning? I said. Oh, Allie said. My pie. Allie got up from the dinner table and hurried into the kitchen. She opened the oven and waved at the escaping heat with a towel. Thank goodness, its fine, Allie said. Perfectly fine. The filling under the pecans just oozed out is all.

Itll be delicious. Oh, hell, Allie, Virgil said. I dont think I could eat another bite. Me, neither, I said. Oh, nonsense, Allie said, as she placed the pie on the trivet between Virgil and me. Doesnt that look good and crispy? Allie fanned it a little with her towel. It does, Allie, I said. You got a good scald on it, Virgil said. Ill give you that. Oh, Allie said, returning to the kitchen. I churned up some cream to go with it. She returned with the bowl of cream. She whipped the substance with a wooden spoon before putting the bowl on the table. Im sorry, it was fluffier before, Allie said. Itll be good, though, just spoon a little across the top. Smells good, I said. Allie left the dining room and walked off down the hall. I cut a piece of pie, put some cream on top, and slid the bowl over to Virgil. Virgil cut a piece and put it on his plate when Allie returned to the dining room, putting on a silk bonnet. Would you be so kind as to clean up for me, Virgil? Allie said, as she tied the bonnet under her chin. Where you going? Virgil said. Well, Im off to gather the ladies of our social and pay Mr. Beauchamp and company a proper welcoming visit. Virgil looked to me, then to Allie. You think thats necessary? I do, Allie said. Its not every day Appaloosa has someone as renowned as Beauregard Beauchamp visit us. And, as the new spokesperson of the ladies social, I thought it would be kind to make certain we do not let this occasion of ceremony slip by like its just any ol day like yesterday or the day before. Everett can help you with the dishes. Cant you, Everett? Sure, I said. Wonderful, thank you, Allie said, and then leaned down, kissing Virgil on top of his head. Maybe we can play some cards when I get back. Sure, I said. Might want to take your umbrella, Virgil said. After Allie left, Virgil pulled a cigar from his pocket and I took a bite of the pecan pie. Tell you what, I said. Thats good. Virgil looked me, then looked to the pie. Is, I said. Virgil slid the cigar back in his pocket and took a bite. He nodded and took another bite. Damn sure is. After we finished a second piece of pie, Virgil and I cleaned up the kitchen and went back out on the front porch with the bottle of Kentucky. It was almost dark out now when we settled in with the whiskey. The storm clouds we had been watching previously were close to being upon us and a light cool breeze preceded the looming darkness. It was quiet out and not many people were about. We could hear the evening train on the other side of town. It let out one long blast of its whistle as it neared the station. Beauregard Beauchamp, Virgil said, as he pulled the cigar from his pocket. I looked to Virgil but didnt say anything. He look familiar to you? Virgil said. No, I said. Look familiar to you? Something about him seemed kind of familiar. Always something about everybody, isnt there? Spect there is, Everett, Virgil said, then bit the cigar tip and spit it over the porch rail. Spect there is. He fished a match from his pocket, dragged the tip across the grain on the porch post, and lit the cigar. He puffed on the cigar and got it going good. Allie sure seems to think hes special, Virgil said. Does. Thinks hes talented, Virgil said. And renowned, I said. Virgil looked at me and discharged a sliver of tobacco from his lips with a spit. And glorious, he said. That, too, I said. 6 I played some lengthy games of Dark Lady with Allie and Virgil, and the three of us drank more of the Kentucky than we should have. Allie went on and on about Beauregard and how special he was. She said he held court in the town hall that night and how wonderful it was for her and the ladies social to welcome him and the troupe to Appaloosa. Allie told us Beauregard introduced some of the Beauchamp players and his wife of three years. She was a blond actress, the leading lady, named Nell from San Francisco. Allie went on and on about how smart and beautiful she was and how in love they were and what a splendid couple they made. I left Virgil and Allies place at about half past midnight. There was a light rain falling over Appaloosa and the temperature had dropped significantly. I crossed Main Street by the Boston House Hotel saloon and saw Fat Wallis McDonough through the open saloon doors. He was closing up, putting chairs on the tables. When I stepped onto the boardwalk, Wallis looked up and saw me. He stood upright and put his large hands out wide like a welcoming kinfolk. Well, Everett Hitch, he said warmly. Evening, Wallis. How goes it? Wallis said. Goes and goes. Whiskey? he said. Looks like youre closing up. Always open for you, Everett, Wallis said. Always open for you. He removed two upside-down chairs from a table and set them upright on the floor. Sit yourself down, Wallis said. All right, I said. Just a smidgen, though. Wallis moved his big body behind the bar. He didnt glide as swift and easy as he used to when Virgil and I first met him. I got some special stuff, Wallis said. Wallis was the time-honored chief barman at the

Boston House Hotel saloon. Virgil and I had plenty of history with the Boston House, some good and some not so good. I looked about the room. It hadn't changed too much. I walked between the tables. I looked through the doors into the lobby and thought about the day Virgil and I first arrived in Appaloosa and signed up as peacekeepers on the landing by the front windows. I turned back, remembering how within minutes of assuming our roles we had walked into this room and Virgil shot two of Randall Bragg's hands right where I was standing. Bragg, I thought. That sonofabitch. I hadn't thought about Randall Bragg in a long while. I turned and looked to the piano in the corner. I walked over to it and pressed a key. Bragg. I slapped him down right here, called him out after the no-good sonofabitch lured Allie and had his way with her. Good riddance. I gave the sonofabitch a chance. I gave him a gun, told him to come out and face me or I'd come back in there and kill him. I gave the sonofabitch an opening. At least that's how I summed it up, anyway, how I tallied it, how I put it together. For whatever reason the Boston House Hotel saloon seemed to have a dark cloud hanging over it. Not seen much of you since you and Virgil have been back in town, Wallis said, carrying a tray with two glasses and a bottle of whiskey with a fancy label. Where you been keeping yourself? Virgil's had me busy working on his new house. I've not seen him in here since you been back this time. He's had his hands full. I'll leave it at that, Wallis said. I saw the house. It's looking good. It is, I said. I took a seat. Wallis set the two glasses on the table and poured us each a few fingers and took a seat next to me. Lot of building going on everywhere these days, Wallis said. That train keeps a-comin and more people keep getting off of it, and as far as I can tell nobody's getting on. Towns getting bigger every goddamn day. Damn sure is, I said. Hell, in the last few years you and Virgil have been away doing your territory marshaling, this place has grown from a small chickenshit town to a burgeoning goddamn city. Little too big for my liking, Wallis, I said. I kind of liked it the way it was. Wallis nodded. Business is good, though, he said. Hell, it's tripled with all the mining expansion north of town and the upstart of cow-calf outfits. Place is six square blocks now, can you believe that? I don't have a choice, I said. Street lamps, boardinghouses, support businesses on every damn street, Wallis said. Mining, construction, cattle. Means employment, though. City's now chock-full of goddamn cowboys, miners, and migrants from every damn where seeking goddamn promise. Damn near two thousand people now, two thousand. Can you believe that? Silently, almost ghostlike, a lovely woman appeared in the doorway. Excuse me, she said. Her accent was foreign. French, maybe. Wallis looked at me, then back to the woman. Yes? Wallis said. She was strikingly beautiful. I knew this must be Madame Leroux, the woman with the ivory complexion I saw looking out the window of the fortune-tellers trailer when the troupe rode into town. She stood still with her shoulders relaxed and her chin held high. She glanced around, looking at the room some. She took a sure step forward. Her movement was graceful and self-assured, like that of a poised dancer. She was willowy and her eyes were bright blue. Her dark hair was wavy, parted in the middle and so long it likely had never been cut. She wore bohemian jewelry and clothing. Long strands of colorful beads and shells draped around her slender neck and large gold hoops dangled from her ears. Her dress was black velvet with lace, and hanging on the edge of her sharp bare shoulders was a long tasseled shawl that glimmered in the dim saloon light. I need something strong, she said. Wallis looked to me, then back to her. I'm sorry? Wallis said. Something intoxicating? she said. Wallis glanced at me with a slight frown, then got his heavy body up from the chair and moved to her. He looked out the door past her to the boardwalk as if he were looking for someone else. Are you by yourself, ma'am? Wallis said. She followed his look behind her. As is everyone. I don't think Wallis understood her philosophy, and if he did he didn't particularly appreciate it. Well, it's late and women moving around this time of night by themselves ain't normal. Well, I don't suppose I am particularly normal, she said coyly as she took a step forward past Wallis and looked about the saloon. At least as is what has been divulged to me on occasion. She had not looked at me, not directly. I watched her and she knew I watched her. She was an assured performer, doing what she did best, and she was good. Aside from the fact she was eccentric and beautiful there was something else arresting about her presence. She possessed a strong self-sureness unseen in most women. History, she said, glancing back to Wallis. What? Wallis said. Your saloon, she said, has history. Yes, well, Wallis said, the saloon is kind of closed up here at the moment. I see. Am I interrupting? Just having a nightcap with my old pal, Wallis said, nodding to me. She turned her head slowly and leveled her dancing blue eyes on me for the first time. Her look was penetrating. She was looking into me as if she was seeing inside me three long blocks and to the left. Bon ami du soir, she said. Give the lady a drink, Wallis, I said. Oh, Wallis said. Certainly. What can I get for you? Would you have anything perhaps curative or therapeutic? Wallis put his big fists on his hips. Therapeutic? Wallis said. Well, I don't have anything to cure what ails ya and I got no absinthe, if that's what you're looking for. I've got rum, rye,

whiskey, beer, brandy, and Brandy, she said. Wallis looked at me. He nodded and moved off to the bar. I removed a chair from atop the table and placed it upright. Here ya go. Merci, she said. I caught a drift of her sweet scent as I held out her chair. She sat and I sat next to her. She remained looking in my eyes. Her dark eyelashes were thick and long and her eyes were penetrating. They were lively, mysterious, haunting, and extremely curious. You're with the troupe, I said. No. I saw you. I saw you, too, she said. Her eyes stayed aimed directly at me like she was trying to shoot her thoughts through me. She placed her hands shoulder length apart on the table. I'm not with them, she said. You're new? She nodded, smiling wryly. I'm temporary, she said. Seems like the wrong time of year to be traipsing around putting on a show. She didn't say anything. I just looked at her. She was staring at me. I stared back at her and I think she smiled. Deputy Marshal Everett Hitch, I said. Oui, she said. I know who you are, Deputy Marshal. You do? We've met. I shook my head. We've not met, I said. On the contrary, she said. Don't believe so. Now that I'm seeing you close and clearly, I'm certain, she said. It was a long time ago. Where, a long time ago? Bien, she said with a shrug. Perhaps I am mistaken. Madame Leroux? I said. You must have read that somewhere, she said with a smile. Hard to miss, I said. She smiled, nodding slightly. Futures told, I said. Legendary afterlife adventures revealed. Not all are so lucky, she said. I'm afraid. Hocus-pocus, I said. Ah, she said. A naysayer? Just my perspective, I said. Oui, she said. Something everyone is entitled to. Wallis came back from the bar with the brandy. On the house, he said. She tossed one side of her long hair behind her shoulder. Merci, she said to Wallis, but remained looking directly at me. Wallis looked back and forth between us, and like the amenable barkeep he was, he excused himself. I'm going to just finish up with a few things, Wallis said. He rapped his knuckles on the table. Enjoy, he said. She watched Wallis as he walked off into the back room, then looked at me. I needed to speak to you, Deputy. Everett, I said. Oui, Everett. Why didn't you say so? I said. *Revue de presse* Rapid-fire dialogue and quick-paced action must read. Historical Novels Knott's third shot at re-creating the Cole-Hitch partnership is by far the best—the two reflects the dry humor that helps bond them. There is also a very clever mystery mixed in, and the Seraphine subplot adds a Twilight Zone finish to an extraordinarily entertaining novel." *Booklist* For fans of the late Parker, this book is a refreshing reunion with these cowboy characters who choose their words and situations most carefully much to enjoy. *Deseret News* Fans of the late Robert B. Parkers best-selling novels about territorial marshals Virgil Cole and Everett Hitch will be delighted to discover a new adventure written by famed author Robert Knott, who also penned the earlier series entry *Ironhorse*. In *The Bridge*, the duo investigates a strange disappearance and gets some unlikely help from a fortune teller. *Cowboys and Indians Magazine* Praise for Robert Knott Clever detective work and considerable shooting it reads lightning fast suspenseful. *Booklist*, on Robert B. Parkers *Bull River* Robert Knott has penned the next great saga featuring Everett Hitch and Virgil Cole. It reads just like vintage Parker, and the story line crackles with excitement and humor. Parker fans are going to love it! Ed Harris, Academy Award-nominated actor