

One

In early summer of 1863, two riders -- two Confederate horsemen, the one in the lead dressed in a Yankee cavalry officer's uniform, the one following in a dark broadcloth suit and derby hat -- made their way down the steep slope of a valley in enemy territory in Western Pennsylvania. Afternoon sunlight cracked through the branches overhead. The hills were thick with trees, white oak and maple and hickory, a hundred shades of green, softening the contours of the valley. Even in the shade, the day was hot and dry. The two men were covered with dust, their clothes prickly, small insects circled them like auras. Because of the trees, the two riders were hidden from view of the town across the river; but the trees also prevented the riders from getting a good look at the town.

"I don't know where you think you're taking us this time," Reid said, following behind. "The town's right over there. We already passed it once. Now you want to circle around and come at it from another direction. I say we're here, let's get on with it."

I say if you don't shut up and let me do my job I'm going to pop you one, Judson Walker thought to himself. But he didn't say anything. He guided his horse between two red maples, skirting a small dropoff ahead that the animal couldn't see, and continued to lead the way down across the face of the valley wall.

The left sleeve of his Yankee uniform hung limp; Walker's arm inside the jacket was pressed tight against his body, his left hand with the reins resting on his belt buckle.

A bullet had grazed his side under his arm when they ran into a Yankee patrol near Wheeling the day before. It didn't seem serious, the bleeding had stopped finally, but it was starting to hurt more and his left side was tightening up again. He wanted to take a look at the wound, but he didn't have anything else to dress it with; he decided he'd have to wait until they got into the town that evening. The run-in with the Yankee patrol was another thing; he had listened to Reid once too often, they had taken a chance and crossed the Ohio in daylight, at a ford his better judgment told him would be guarded. Then when they encountered the Yankees, instead of letting Walker bluff their way out of the situation, Reid had turned tail and run, leaving Walker no choice but to fight them off. They were lucky that the patrol was made up of militiamen who were more surprised than they were, otherwise they never would have got away. Walker wasn't going to be foolish on account of Reid again.

Something rustled in the underbrush ahead of them, skittered away through the dry grass. Smart move, whoever you are, thought Walker. He patted, rubbed his horse's neck. "It's okay, girl, you're okay. Steady on." The roan flipped its head, moved forward again, hunkered down, sliding at times down the steep sections of the slope. Walker gave over the reins, deciding the horse knew more about what to do than he did.

Walker was a captain of cavalry, all right; the difference was that, despite the Yankee jacket he stole outside of Cincinnati, he belonged to the Second Kentucky Cavalry, Confederate States of America. One of Morgan's raiders. He was a tall angular man, with a long face, deep-set eyes, and a full, black mustache; he was in his late

thirties, a little old perhaps for this sort of mission, though he was a natural rider and naturally athletic. At the moment he was looking for a vantage point; he seemed to remember some sandstone bluffs on the hillside, some place where the trees wouldn't obscure his view of the town across the river.

Did Morgan know that Walker was from this part of the country originally, that he was familiar with the town of Furnass from when he was a boy? Was that why Morgan chose him for this mission? It made sense if that was Morgan's reasoning. But Walker was puzzled how Morgan could possibly know that he had once lived in this area; Walker was sure he had never said anything about it, he was ashamed to have ever been a Yankee. It seemed too much of a coincidence otherwise, but he couldn't think of any other reason -- or allow himself to consider any other reason -- why Morgan chose him to escort the young engineer to this particular valley. Regardless, he wasn't going to trust his safety, or Reid's either, on some thirty-year-old memories. He wanted a good look at the place before they chanced going into it.

From behind him came the sound of Reid's horse crashing through the brush, along with a groan. Walker turned in the saddle; the young man with the red hair and beard was hanging onto the pommel with both hands, his eyes wide. The big gray gelding slid to a stop beside Walker.

"Christ, Walker, you're going to get us both killed!"

"Just you, from the looks of it," Walker said. Turning around had pulled his side and he didn't smile. "We can see the town from those rocks."

Walker dismounted slowly. He was weak from loss of blood, his legs gave under his weight, but he pulled himself upright, he didn't want Reid to see him falter. Taking his field glasses from their case, he led the way to the outcropping of rocks among the trees. The rocks formed a ledge like an open platform overlooking the town across the river. Crouching down, braced on his good arm, he hobbled out to the edge of the rocks. Beyond the shade of the trees he felt exposed, caught in the glare of the sunlight. The sandstone radiated heat against his face as he lay down. Beyond the edge, the panorama of the valley, the lush green hills, the town in the bend of the river, spread before him.

The river made a long slow S-curve as it wound through the valley. Downstream beyond the town, the valley opened to the wider valley of the Ohio River, ten miles or so below Pittsburgh. The main street of the town cut across the face of the hillside; the rest of the town was scattered about the lower half of the slope, collections of buildings here and there, as if the townspeople couldn't decide where to build and hoped to fill in the blank spaces later. (He thought of the names they had for Northerners back in Kentucky: *pasty-faced mechanics, crop-eared Puritans*.) The town was larger than he remembered, it had grown considerably in thirty years. His family had come here to get supplies once in a while from their farm farther up the valley; he remembered an old iron furnace at the north end of town, a few cabins tucked away among the trees, a main street with only a half dozen buildings. He must have been six or seven. He remembered a grist mill, the slap of the paddle wheel and the splashing of the falls in the river, the specks of wheat dust falling forever in the shafts of sunlight inside the mill, and he remembered playing

with a tabby kitten on the loading platform; he wanted to take the kitten home but his father said the animal had to stay where it was, that it had a job to do there at the mill taking care of the mice, that it would be unfair to the mill owner to take the cat away. Walker remembered riding home in the back of the wagon, watching the town bump away from him, repeating to himself what his father had said, and unable to understand why he still felt empty inside, why the words didn't satisfy the longing. A boy, that was all, a child. He remembered when he went back the next time he looked forward to playing with the kitten, but it wasn't there, the miller said it had been killed in the gears of the mill..

In place of the grist mill now were the large brick buildings of the Buchanan Iron Works; blast furnaces, a rolling mill, foundries, and a host of other shops were stretched out for nearly a mile along the bank of the river. Thick black smoke plumed from a dozen smokestacks including one close to a hundred feet tall; along the river steam billowed from slag or hot coals being dumped down the bank; the air was tinged with the smell of sulphur and burning ash and hot metal. The trees had blocked the noise of the ironworks, but here in the open came the sound of the machinery, a constant rumbling and throbbing accented by the ring of metal against metal.

"It's beautiful," Reid said, the younger man rising up beside him.

"Keep down, for Christ's sake!" Walker pulled him down again. "That looks like a patrol over there."

"They can't see us from there."

Reid was probably right, but Walker wasn't going to risk it. All it would take was for one person to happen to see a figure climbing around these rocks to raise suspicions. Walker focused the field glasses on the group coming down the hill near the railroad tracks but the men appeared to be only a work gang.

"I would think you'd be happy. We made it, we're here," Reid said.

"We're not in there yet. And we don't know what might be waiting for us. After our little show at Wheeling, someone could have wired ahead to spread the word that some of Morgan's men might be headed this way."

Walker made a sweep of the town with the field glasses, block by block, building by building, to see if he could spot anything out of the ordinary. Everything seemed calm and peaceful, a typical little town on a Friday afternoon, women shopping along the main street, men at work at the mills, children playing in the yards and open fields. (In a back yard a pregnant woman hung clothes on a line; he thought of Mattie, wondered if she was all right and if she had had the baby yet, but quickly put such thoughts away.) "I can't get over the size of it," Reid said. "It's almost as large as the Tredegar Works in Richmond, and this is only supposed to be one of their medium-sized mills. I hope I can get a look at it on the inside."

Walker focused on a smaller collection of buildings a little farther downriver; a sign on the roof read: Keystone Steam Works. "There's the place you're after," he said, handing the glasses to Reid.

Reid took the glasses hungrily, studying first the ironworks and then the

steamworks.

"And up there on the hill above the town must be where Lyle lives. Sycamore House."

Reid looked briefly in the direction where Walker was pointing, then swung the field glasses back to the steamworks again. "If we get going we can still catch him at his office."

Walker took the glasses and focused on the house above the town again. "I say we wait to see him at his home tonight."

"And I say we should see him as soon as possible. If we see him at his office we can check out the engines right away...."

Walker pushed himself back from the edge, then got painfully to his feet and ducked back to the shade of the trees again. His shoulder hurt more than ever; the wound pulled at his side as if the flesh under his arm were gripped by a fist. After he put the glasses away, he rested against the flank of his horse as Reid came back from the rocks.

"We'll see Lyle at his house tonight," Walker said wearily. "I want as few people around as possible the first time we talk to him. We don't know who else has talked to him, or what else is going on. We might be stepping into something that we don't want any part of. And if he gets wind of who we really are, he may not take it too kindly. Some people get funny ideas when they're asked to become traitors to their country."

"Well, I guess if we see him at the house he'll be more likely to invite us to stay there."

Walker shook his head. "After we talk to him, we'll go to a hotel, some place where we won't call too much attention to ourselves. I want to give him time to think it over a bit."

"Now see here, Walker...."

"None of this is open for discussion. I'm in charge, and I'll tell you how it's going to be. It's my job to get you here safely and to keep you safe while you're here, and I'm going to do it the best way I see fit."

"And what do you suggest we do until nightfall, if I might ask?"

"We'll go on down to the river past the falls and find some place to clean up a bit. We're in no shape the way we are to go calling on anybody."

"Think of that, something we agree upon," Reid said, his blue eyes glaring at him.

Don't fight me, son, Walker said to himself. *Ain't nobody going to win that way.* He checked the cinch on his saddle, then patted the roan's neck. "At least you're on my side, aren't you girl." With his good arm he pulled himself up heavily into the saddle, grimacing with the pain.

"What?" Reid said as he mounted up too.

Walker shook his head to signify it was nothing. Farther down the hillside a crow called raucously from a treetop, swaying up and down on a branch that was too thin for its weight. Walker checked to make sure that their path would still be hidden from view of the town. Satisfied, he readjusted the Union cavalry hat to shade his eyes and nudged the horse forward, down through the trees.

Jonathan Reid watched as Walker continued down the steep slope, the man's horse picking its way slowly, the animal at times appearing to sit down and slide on its rump. What was this wild man going to get them into next? They had been together for nearly three weeks, first on the long ride from Tennessee with Walker's men, and then the two of them alone from Cincinnati. Thank heaven it was almost over. *Yes, Captain Walker. You're in charge. For now.* For now Reid had no choice, he was dependent upon the other man, and he couldn't afford to waste any more time trying to set things straight. Walker was right about one thing: there was no telling who might have talked to Lyle already, who might have come up with an idea similar to Reid's and got to Lyle first. Reid flicked the reins, made clicking noises with his mouth, dug in his heels and jerked his legs -- and felt his heart rise in his throat as the horse plunged down the hill.

Reid was in his late twenties; he was slight in comparison to someone the height of Walker, and his close-cropped red hair and goatee might have made him seem pixieish except for the coldness of his blue eyes and his tight-set mouth. He didn't trust Walker -- not his loyalty necessarily, but his intelligence, his rationality. It was like Walker to be overly cautious now after they had pushed so hard to get here; at other times during their journey he had acted reckless, even crazy. When they crossed the Ohio below Wheeling

and happened upon a patrol in the midst of eating lunch, Reid had fled, as any sane man would do, but Walker flew at the dismounted troopers, chasing the militiamen into the woods and scattering their horses -- and in the process getting himself wounded. Such mindless heroics almost cost them the mission. Walker typified everything Reid hated and wanted to change about the South -- the backwoods mentality, the backwater view of the world. Rustics could be little better than animals; it made them brave certainly -- it could even send them screaming like banshees across battlefields such as Manassas and Shiloh to win short-lived glories -- but it also made them foolish. Such homespun thinking would keep the South from assuming its rightful place among the other civilized nations of the world. Reid was very much aware that, if the Confederacy had any long-term hope of survival, it required men of quality and intelligence who understood all the changes that made up the modern world. Men like Jonathan Reid.

At the bottom of the slope they followed an old Indian trail close to the river. Willows and sycamores lined the bank; through the branches the massive brick buildings of the Buchanan Iron Works rose up across the river. *We're so close, so close.* Reid could barely contain his excitement. From here he could pick out the sounds of the various machines, the pounding of the steam hammers, the clunk of the rollers in the rolling mill. Then they were past the mill and the town. The shelf of a plateau across the river narrowed the valley; the green walls rose above them on either side, closing them in. When they were beyond the bend in the river, Walker stopped and climbed down from his horse.

"This looks as good a place as any. Give me a hand with these boots."

Walker sat down on a rock. When Reid was slow to catch his meaning, Walker lifted his outstretched leg in Reid's direction.

"Oh, yes. Right." Reid climbed down and went over and pulled off the boots. They hadn't been off for over a week, the smell turned Reid's stomach.

"Sorry, but you're no sweet-smelling rose yourself about now."

Walker's voice was tired and he grimaced with pain, but at the moment Reid had trouble feeling much sympathy for him. The willows slanted out over the water, their low-lying branches hiding the edge of the river against the bank. Walker stripped to his drawers and socks, not touching the bandage he had improvised from strips of his shirt. Holding his arm tucked against the wound, he plopped himself down, sitting unceremoniously in a foot of water.

"Might as well wash these drawers while I'm at it. How about you? You getting undressed, or are you going to dunk your suit?"

Reid was embarrassed, he never liked to undress in front of other men. From his saddle valise he took a change of drawers and a clean shirt and his other suit. Then he moved down the bank out of sight of Walker and took off his clothes, draping them carefully from tree branches. He was not only dirty, his skin was covered with horsehair and carried the smell of the horse's sweat and the leather saddle. With his bar of soap in hand, he eased himself down into the clear water. It took a while for him to relax. His legs were quivery, muscles ached in every part of his body. He didn't like to ride, and he

had never ridden before for days at a time; if it had been up to him they would have taken the train, but Walker wouldn't hear of it. Gradually, he could feel some of the tension begin to leave his body. He worked his legs in the cool water, sending up little clouds of mud from the bottom; he felt like a boy sitting in a washtub, ready for his Saturday night bath. Taking a deep breath, he lay back quickly to get it over with, immersing his head, the water lapping over his face. *I baptize thee.*

When he was done he climbed back up the bank again, his arms wrapped about himself even though it was warm here in the shade. Upstream, Walker was either resting or dead, his long pale body stretched slug-like along the branch of a low-hanging willow. Reid supposed his own body was just as ugly, dotted with freckles, haloed with orangeish-blond hair. He rolled in some grass to dry himself as quickly as possible and dressed again in the clean clothes. From his saddlebags he took some of the dreaded hardtack and jerked beef they had been living on since Cincinnati, Walker denying them campfires that might give them away. Then he settled himself on a willow slanted out over the river, his shoes dangling inches above the water, to wait.

From beyond the bend he could still hear the rumbling of machinery at the mill; clouds of smoke and steam lifted like genies above the trees. As he watched, a locomotive appeared around the bend, a train of empty coal cars heading up the valley, its whistle piping joyously. Thirty years earlier, even twenty, such marvels were generally unknown -- locomotives, great iron and steel works, machines of every kind -- today they were facts of everyday life. Now there was Howe's sewing machine, Gordon McKay's

machine for stitching boot soles to uppers, ironclad steamships -- he hoped his own efforts would soon be included among this select company. Tonight he would meet one of the great men of this new age, a man whom Reid thought could help make his own ideas a reality. He thought about how to handle Walker once they got to Lyle's house, they couldn't just barge in there, it was critical to make a good impression from the onset. Walker might consider himself in charge out here in the woods, but now they were entering Reid's territory. He felt as if he were about to enter a new age for himself, the fruition of everything he had worked for; he felt on the threshold of fame and recognition for his own abilities and accomplishments. He had to make sure that nothing had the chance to go wrong, nothing.

Dusk came early to the valley. The sun went beyond the hills, leaving only a strip of bright green along the top of the far side of the valley; the sky remained an intense blue, there was the sense that beyond the ridge it was still light and sunny, but here in the valley the day was in afterglow. Just as quickly, it began to cool off a little, and the sky deepened to a darker blue. Reid was about to go find out what happened to Walker, when the other emerged from the trees, fully dressed, leading the horses.

"You about ready?" Walker said.

"I've been ready."

Walker looked at him. Then he mounted up and pulled his revolver from its holster. For a brief instant Reid wondered if Walker was going to shoot him and be done with it. Instead, Walker checked to make sure all the chambers were loaded, checked his carbine

in the saddle scabbard. The rest had apparently helped him, he seemed stronger and some of the color had returned to his long, horsey face. Reid wasn't sure it was a good thing or not; it would be harder to keep him under control this way.

"Just so we both know what we're doing," Walker said as Reid hoisted himself up into the saddle. "If anyone asks any questions or says anything to us on the way going in, I do all the talking. They'd spot your Southern accent a mile off."

"Yes sir," Reid said. *We'll see about that.*

"And if there's any trouble, you get the hell out of there as fast as you can, don't wait around for me. Do just what you did at Wheeling; this time it's appropriate. We'll meet back here. If I'm not here within a day, it means you're on your own."

"I'm sure I'll manage."

Walker cocked his head as if he wasn't so sure. "You know, don't you, that if you get caught, they'll hang you as a spy. Same as me."

"I'm not a spy. I'm an engineer."

"Somehow subtleties like that are usually lost on hangmen. Let's go."

The river was shallow at this time of year, only a couple feet deep, even backed up here behind the falls. Walker led the way across the river, then along the railroad tracks until they came to a trail the horses could manage up the steep bluffs. When they came out on the main road, they appeared like two ordinary travelers coming down the valley from the north. A few miles from town the forest gave way to hardscrabble farms, a house now and then among apple and cherry orchards. Then the shelf of land ended and

the valley widened with the sweep of the river. It was almost dark as they rode down a long hill into the town.

The lamps were lit along the streets, lamplight glowed in the windows of the houses. There were families sitting on their front porches, strollers along the wooden sidewalks, but no one seemed to pay any attention to the two riders. Reid was thrilled with the adventure of it; here they were, right under the noses of the enemy, and the Yankees were too dumb to know it. Down the hill along the river, the ironworks burned with the light of the blast furnaces and the rows of coke ovens. Even though the main shifts were done for the day, the activity at the mills, the sounds of heavy machinery, carried up the slope to the main street.

There was a commotion at the corner ahead of them, the cry of a horse and somebody yelling; behind them men came running from between the buildings, rushing toward them in the dusk. Walker reached for his revolver but his horse reared before he could fire; the men ran past them, on down the street. There had been an accident on the hill, men were struggling to untangle a couple wagons and free a drover from under a load of iron. Walker still had the gun in his hand.

"Put that away, Walker," Reid said. "Your anxiousness to shoot somebody just about got us found out."

"It's up there," Walker said brusquely and pushed by him on his horse up the hill.

On the hillside above the town, the streets turned to roads and then to little more than double-tracked paths, crisscrossing the face of the slope between the clusters of

houses. Sycamore House sat isolated on a stretch of ground halfway up the hill. It was a large imposing house with a number of peaked roofs and a long veranda across the front; the house appeared to be a jumble of additions and mismatched styles, Gothic Revival, Norman, and Romanesque, though the details of the structure were obscured by the ivy that completely covered the front and sides. There were no lights in the windows, and in the darkness, the closer they got, the more the ivy-covered house seemed to blend into the dark trees in the back yard, the dark woods on the hillside.

"I told you we should have come earlier," Reid said.

"I doubt if they're asleep already," Walker said. "And if there's nobody home now, there was probably nobody home earlier."

He dismounted and tied his horse to the picket fence. Reid hurried to catch up as Walker went through the gate and started across the gentle slope of the lawn. When they reached the front steps of the house, a figure appeared from the shadows of the porch.

"Can I help you, Captain?"

Walker stopped, blocking Reid from going any farther. "We're looking for a Mr. Lyle. Colin Lyle."

"And what would a representative of the Army of the Republic want with him? Especially at his home, and at this hour of the night?"

"Allow me to introduce myself," Reid said, taking a step forward. "My name is Jonathan Reid. This is Captain Walker. We're here on some very important business." He added, "Government business."

"I don't know what we have to talk about. I don't have any government contracts right now."

Reid was overjoyed to hear it, but was careful not to let it show. "We're hoping to rectify that situation. We have a proposal to make to you that I think you'll find most interesting."

In the darkness and the shadows of the porch, all Reid could make out was the dim figure of a man in a waistcoat, the sleeves of his white shirt ghostly as if a pair of disembodied arms. Lyle seemed to find something amusing.

"Well, you must think it's important to come all the way up here in the dark."

"I assure you it's very important," Walker said.

Reid wanted Walker to stay out of it; Walker wouldn't know how to talk to a man of this caliber. "I think you'll be very interested in what we want to talk to you about. It involves a new way to use steam engines, a way they've never been used before. It will introduce a whole new era, it will change the way people think about machines. You're the only man I know of with the intelligence and foresight to understand a project of this magnitude."

Lyle laughed. "I hope your offer has more substance to it than your attempts at flattery. But now that you're here I might as well listen to what you have to say.

Welcome, gentlemen."

Lyle extended his hand; Reid made sure that he was first up the steps to take it. Something stirred in the dark along the porch. There was a flash, and something caught

fire: the glow of a lamp. In the circle of light, a woman in a black dress replaced the chimney of the lamp, got up from where she was sitting, and carried the lamp toward them. In her other hand was a Colt revolver but it wasn't pointed at them.

"My wife, Elizabeth," Lyle said. "As you can see, she's the cautious type."

"We saw you coming up the hill," the woman said, nodding to Walker and Reid in turn. "You can't be too careful these days, what with all the talk of spies and invasion."

"That's a good way to get yourself hurt, ma'am," Walker said. "If you're not sure how to use a gun like that."

"Thank you for your professional advice, Captain. But I know perfectly well how to use it. A woman is just as capable of pulling a trigger as a man."

"Libby can aim well too, Captain, as you just witnessed," Lyle said, bemused. "Let's go inside."

Lyle took the lamp from his wife and led the way, through the vestibule and the front hall to his study. As they waited for Lyle to light a couple more lamps, Reid felt awkward; he stood in the center of the room, nervously touching his fingertips to his mouth, spreading his fingers repeatedly to smooth the hairs of his mustache along his lip. He didn't know quite what he expected of Lyle, but he felt somewhat disappointed now that they were actually here. Lyle was a tall man in his early fifties, bald except for a tonsure of hair, with full sideburns that swept down his cheeks and arced up under his nose. The room was comfortably furnished, not lavish -- overstuffed chairs, gilt-framed paintings and shelves of books, Oriental carpets overlapping on the floor. Maybe that was

part of Reid's uneasiness, somehow it seemed too comfortable, too ordinary. Somehow it didn't fit the image of a man of genius that Reid carried in his mind.

"Captain, you've been wounded," Libby said. "There's blood on your jacket."

Walker was embarrassed. "It's not serious. I just need to take a look at it, if I could..."

"My apologies, Captain Walker," Lyle said. "I assumed your arm was the result of an old injury."

"How did it happen?" Libby said.

Walker and Reid looked at each other. Reid was at a loss, his mind gone blank.

"We ran into some trouble yesterday," Walker said. "Bushwhackers. Probably Rebel scouts."

"It doesn't surprise me," Lyle said. "The papers are full of Lee's invasion in the eastern part of the state. And there's talk that Morgan is headed for Ohio."

Reid wanted to ask for more information, but Walker spoke up quickly. "I think these men were just lost. We happened on them and took them by surprise."

"That doesn't change the fact that you're wounded and you need looked after." Lyle said.

"I don't want to be any trouble...."

"Captain Walker, you need to realize that for my wife you're the answer to a prayer. She's felt terribly left out of the war and the other great events of our day. She's just not the type to be content with knitting socks and tearing up old clothes for bandages with the other good ladies of our town. You're giving her the chance to have a real-live soldier to nurse, all for her very own. It's her dream come true."

"Come along, Captain Walker," Libby said, taking hold of the empty sleeve of his jacket. "As you can tell, Mr. Lyle takes great delight in mocking me. It's the only way he's found to deal with me. I've found the only way to deal with him is to ignore him. Which I'll continue to do." She towed Walker from the room by the dangling sleeve as if he were on a lead.

Lyle watched them fade into the shadows of the room and away down the dark hall; he picked absently at a spot on his bald head and become suddenly withdrawn. Reid couldn't contain himself any longer.

"Mr. Lyle, I've come to talk to you about the machine you call the road engine."

It took Lyle a moment to return from his thoughts. Then he smiled ironically and sat down in one of the horsehair-covered chairs, waiting for Reid to go on.

Yes. Now is my chance. Now.