

PROLOGUE

A lone figure hurried across the Navy Yard Bridge. It was hardly noticeable in the deep gloom of the coming storm and the very early hour of the pre-dawn. Even the bridge-keeper did not stir from his shack; it was the smallest hours of the night and he did not expect anyone to be about, and the figure, though hurrying, was taking special care at silence. The clouds that had borne down on Washington and Alexandria, and even Baltimore, these last two weeks, kept the light of the half-moon from lighting the figure's way across the long bridge spanning the Anacostia between the Maryland shore and Washington City in the District. It was a wooden bridge, of the simplest design - truly little more than a plank road on piers, with no sides or roof, only railing. It was in constant need of repair, and on this dark night, it was easy to imagine the planks below one's feet simply giving way into the deep, turbulent waters below. And so the figure hurried to reach the land at the other end of the bridge, leading into Washington City.

Days and days of rain finally gave way, on Pentecost Sunday, to sunshine and pleasant weather. The churches that celebrated this Feast Day could not help but feel that divine intervention had broken the weather, if only – as it turned out – for the day, in Washington City. Pentecost, fifty days after that first Easter, when a mighty rushing wind blew in the tongues of fire that enabled the disciples to speak in all the different languages – in an intelligible babble – and thus spread the Good News. On this Pentecost, June 5, 1870, some mighty wind had blown away the weeks of bad weather and brought to Washington a respite from the rain, and the talk was of other good news, on the horizon.

Washington City was, above all, a secular and political city, and what was on the mind of most of Washington on this rare, rainless Sunday was the election to be held tomorrow, to decide the city's next mayor. Aldermen and councilmen of the lower boards were also to be decided, but it was the contest between two Republicans for the office of mayor that had completely captured the attention of the city; the Democrats had not even bothered to nominate a candidate. Both candidates claimed to represent the Republican Party, but incumbent Sayles Bowen was said to represent the Radicals within the Republican Party and challenger Matthew Emery's men proclaimed themselves to be Reform Republicans. The election promised to be a hot contest, and pockets of pre-election violence were already being reported, almost exclusively instigated by Bowenite roughs popping up in one ward or another, attempting to intimidate Emery men from voting the reform ticket. Police were out in force, at least since Friday, intending to stop, at the first instance of violence, a repeat of last election's bloody events. Major Richards, of the Metropolitan Police, had reinforced his mounted troops with an equal number, and more, of deputized policemen, just for the occasion, and they all carried heavy Colt's revolvers. More than this, a battalion of marines, stationed at the barracks near the river, were being held in ready reserve, in the case sustained and widespread violence should break out as had happened in the past.

There were a few instances of overzealous campaigning on Monday afternoon, after (oddly enough) the contest had largely been settled. Only an official count was wanting to announce that Emery had won (a clean sweep of every ward) and would usher in a new and better era for Washington City. During the Bowen administration, the city had fallen heavily into debt and could not meet its financial obligations (despite the collection of exorbitant taxes), remained in shambles after the war, and was riddled with scandal. The national capital was, in short, something of a disgrace. Repairs were needed all around and improvements had been wanting from the very beginning. Hogs and goats and geese roamed freely, leaving behind them the natural effluvia of such animals. And after weeks of rain and heavy clouds, the streets were in a hopelessly sloppy and foul condition. Soon the summer heat would come in and with it the summer miasmas that sent the sufficiently wealthy to higher, drier, cooler ground until the heat broke, sometime in September. If the stinking, muddy, foul streets of the city did not sicken one, the stinking, foul Washington canal – little more than an open sewer – would. But sometimes, the only way to escape Washington is by water.

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Her plan had been to work her way up Pennsylvania Avenue, to the Capitol, and from there find her way to the Baltimore & Ohio Rail Road station that she knew was near there, on New Jersey Avenue. But the rain must have kept the lamp-lighters indoors, for Washington had been eerily dark and every time she looked up at a lamppost to read a name, she was blinded by the pouring rain, and she was soon lost.

It had been hours since she crossed the bridge, and now she was lost, her plan in ruins. She would be caught, then sent back to the asylum on the hill, across the river. She was panicked, and the crowds everywhere surprised and frightened her. It was hard to tell, with all the rain and the black skies, but she didn't think it was much past five, yet there were crowds of men everywhere, some streets lined with them. Men had

been standing in lines and in groups for hours – all night, it seemed – for as long as she had been in the city. Some part of her mind, working below the desperation and fear, registered the curious fact that there were at least as many colored men as white, something she had never seen before. Avoiding the crowds had been what had hopelessly disoriented her. She had often changed directions, darting down side streets and even alleys, hoping to loop around the crowds of men, but always they were there, blocking her path to freedom.

The streets themselves presented a danger to her. Very few of them were graded, much less paved, and none of them were completely so, only sections closest to the Capitol could be called travel-worthy. Mary had fallen several times, when the street she was walking had simply given way to a deep gully. One such trench was so deep and wide, she feared she had fallen into a pond, but she had been able to pull herself out – herself and what felt like fifty pounds of mud as well; only the continued rain had helped to wash some of it away, but she was still caked in it, the slick, earthen placenta encasing to her, so that she presented a golem-like effigy of herself.

The clouds had burst open and rain had poured forth in great torrents some time ago and it had not yet let up. She was soaked and miserable and could barely see to make her way, in stealth, through these unexpectedly busy streets. Though she herself did not have one, the ubiquitous umbrellas kept all these men from peering too closely at her, wearing male attire herself. There had been women on the streets, occasionally, appearing with mugs of coffee and trays of sandwiches for the men, to fortify them as they waited in rough lines in the streets, but Mary had not seen any since the rain began. Without a fresh supply of coffee, many men were fortifying themselves with a nip or two from bottles surreptitiously removed from coats, then shared with the other men huddled together under the umbrellas.

It had taken her an unforgivably long time to escape her room at St. Elizabeth's. She only vaguely remembered a ride in a carriage one night, but she had thought it a dream – she had never been in a carriage before; always her family had walked or ridden a horse or used a wagon for long distances. She had simply woken one morning at a different place. She had opened her bedroom door and looked out into a large hall full of other bedroom doors and full, too, of other women, most of them obviously estranged in their minds. She had retreated to her room, queasy and headachy. Mary could hardly think, for the realization of where she was, of what type of hospital she now inhabited, where she had been somehow transported and left, without a word. Dr. Nichols had visited that night, to interview her. She had instantly disliked him, with his soothing voice and firm directives. He told her that she had been placed at this institution at the request of President Grant. She heard little else after that, she felt little else after that, but a burning desire to escape, a desire that was fueled by her fear of eternal imprisonment. From that moment onward, she had kept watch and listened for any scrap of something useful to aid her in escaping.

Dr. Nichols had called on Mary again the next morning, to apologize that the position for the private attendant that President Grant had requested had not yet been filled, but he had hopes that a suitable person could be found very soon. In the meantime, however, Dr. Nichols urged her to join the other women in the day and common areas; he did not think it useful for her to remain in her room. He was concerned about a settled melancholia that staff at Providence had noted in their reports. The reports had indicated this melancholia had lifted and was replaced with an entrenched reserve, but Dr. Nichols had his own thoughts about the different manifestations of melancholia, and Miss Warner, he was convinced, was not free of this malady. Dr. Nichols was concerned, as well, about reports of disturbing events prior to her admittance to that hospital. She was to take this opportunity to rid herself of any unpleasant thoughts, to rearrange her mind towards that of a useful and moral life.

Mary had said nothing during this, or the prior evening's interview, and this seemed to unsettle the doctor. He had been sitting in the one chair in the room, and now he rose and informed her that she would find life at this hospital, at St. Elizabeth's, different from that of Providence. The name of the place where she now found herself sent lightning pricks across her scalp. First and foremost, Dr. Nichols had continued, he did not believe in medications for the mind, and few medications for the body, or as an aid to sleep, when the occasion called for it. (Dr. Nichols, in fact, had been concerned at the extent to which Miss Warner had been dosed for her transfer to St. Elizabeth's. He understood the need sometimes to calm a patient with drugs, but Miss Warner had needed considerable help last night merely walking.) He believed, he told her, in the benefits of useful occupation and the calming presence of nature. He had looked out her window and

remarked that it was a shame the inclement weather had continued so long – he would like to take her on a tour of the gardens and other green spaces, but that would have to wait.

The inclement weather may have given Dr. Nichols pause, but not some of the patients that Mary observed from her window. Female patients were only allowed outside when in the company of an escort, but since there were few of those available – there were only seventeen female attendants for the entire female patient population – the women were rarely able to avail themselves of outdoor privileges. Such was not the case for the male patients, and Mary stood at her window for hours watching the men strolling the grounds – even in the rain – or coming and going from the several useful and moral occupations the hospital provided on its immense campus. Whenever the weather allowed, she opened her window, even if only a small crack, to air out her room and to listen to what both the male patients and the male attendants had to say. On her second day there, she had chanced to hear a patient rail against President Grant, making the strongest threats against the President’s person. Leaning out her window, she had softly called to the man, and the two had commiserated against Grant. Mr. Terrence had been sent to the asylum at Grant’s request as well, and Mr. Terrence’s anger and resentment knew little restraint.

The next day, Dr. Nichols was gone, across the river in Washington, where he was attending to business with the Levy Court. Mary had requested a walk in the gardens behind the great Center Building and assured the matron that Dr. Nichols had not only suggested such a walk but had practically prescribed it. There was nothing to be done for it, however – there was no one available to escort her outside – and so Mary had returned to her room to stand at her window and go over and over again the plans in her head. An hour or two later, however, brought a knock at her door. A man stood there with his hat in his hand, asking if Miss Warner still desired an escort for a walk outside. The man was not one of the attendants, but rather a patient himself, one who had been given a great deal of privilege as well as responsibility. He had been pulled from the men’s ward and given the honor to escort her, if she so desired. Mary did her best to slow the beating of her heart and to keep her face calm. She would be very grateful for such an escort. And so, for the next three days, even if it rained, she and her escort walked the gardens and pathways behind the hospital. And each day, when she saw Mr. Terrence, she sent her escort on some trifling errand – to fetch an umbrella or a book or a handkerchief to wipe the seat of a bench – and surely Mr. Terrence could keep her company while her escort attended to these things? And in the absence of the kindly old patient, Mary and Mr. Terrence hatched their plot.

Mr. Terrence, of course, expected that, in exchange for his help in escaping, Mary would assassinate President Grant, as Mr. Terrence himself had threatened to do two or three months ago. Mr. Terrence could have no peace until President Grant was dead – the President often came to him at night, gliding through the keyhole of his bedroom door, causing great terror. Mary had indulged Mr. Terrence with the promise that she intended to confront Grant about all his transgressions. That Mr. Terrence himself wanted to escape was evident, but even he agreed that Mary had the far greater chance of success – as a private patient, she was under far less scrutiny than he, especially since he himself had already attempted escape twice. But he had made the mistake of attempting escape during the day – he had once gotten to within a few blocks of the Capitol when he had been apprehended and returned to the asylum. The goal was to get all the way out of Washington before one’s absence was noticed – the erection last year of the telegraph lines connecting the asylum with police headquarters in Washington City had made escape more difficult: within minutes of St. Elizabeth’s knowing of an escape, the police knew of it, too. Even if Mary were to make it outside the reach of Washington police, Mr. Terrence warned her that she would have to be sensitive to private detectives tracking her. Dr. Nichols did not take the escape of one of his patients lightly and would spare no expense in retrieving the escapee. It was decided then, that Mary should escape at night, giving herself a full night’s head-start on any police chase, giving her enough time to assassinate President Grant – a knife attack would be best, quieter than a gun, but she must be careful not to make a failed butcher job of it, as was done to poor Mr. Seward; she would be hanged for that; no, it must be a quiet slitting of the throat – then she could wend her way out of Washington to whatever destination fancied her. Mr. Terrence would know when Miss Warner had succeeded – it would be the night he would finally sleep without interference from the President. She had left that night, last night.

She had been wandering, dazed, for hours now. She could not be certain, but she thought she had just crossed Rock Creek into Georgetown. The rain had let up, which was easier on her person but made staying hidden while traveling all the more difficult. Remaining hidden was paramount now. The words of a marshal, overheard at the ticket office at the train station, had sent her reeling west through the city. She would not be traveling east on the train to Relay and then west to the Ohio River and ultimately home to Kentucky; the railroad was blocked to her. So she now found herself, she thought, in Georgetown, wet and terrified and undecided in how she should proceed.

Georgetown, or this part of it, did not seem to be very organized, despite the very regular platting of the city she had seen on her father's maps. But this was to her advantage – she was able to duck down odd little alleys or between buildings or into other such little cuddly holes that kept her concealed. She moved from one hiding place to another, never staying in one place long, either because a person approached, or she simply felt like she had chanced her safety too long in one spot. She was just about to move out from a narrow alley that had a gate across it, left unlocked, when she heard shouting and someone blowing a whistle. Her heart stopped, then pounded against her chest and in her ears. There had been more than a few police at the railroad station, but she was certain none had noticed her or given pursuit. How had they found her? She had been so careful. But the sound of running, coming in her direction, was unmistakable, and shouts of “Stop! Stop there!” and a policeman's whistle told her she was all but caught.

A young boy skittered past her alley, followed a minute or two later by a man, alternately shouting and whistling. Without warning, the boy was behind her, in the alley with her, having somehow doubled back and gained the alley from some unknown entrance. One of the reasons Mary had chosen this narrow little alley was its diminutive size and that it was blocked at one end, leaving her only one entrance to watch. There was also a notch in one of the walls, where an ancient padlocked door was inset, in which she could press herself and remain unseen, even if the sun had been out in full – the positioning of the buildings and the narrow space between them insured constant deep shadows. The day had warmed but her clothes were still wet; she shivered as she registered the boy behind her.

The young boy seemed as surprised as Mary to find his alley, which he evidently knew intimately, already occupied. The shouting and thundering footsteps returned, slowing suspiciously in the area of the alley, but some woman shouted at the man, “Get on out of here. That boy's long gone, over the bridge. Stop all that hollering and blowing and disturbing an honest person's peace.”

They heard the man trudge off, but not towards the bridge, where the woman had said the boy had gone. The boy turned to Mary and indicated that she remain quiet. They stood together, in the alley, for what seemed like an hour. Mary, wedged up against the locked door, never offered to share her shelter with the boy and he didn't seem bothered by the lack of cooperation among fellow outlaws. Finally, the woman behind the plank wall at the other end of the alley said, quite casually, “All clear.” Mary was then astonished to see a hand reach over the wall with a small bundle. “Here, take it.” The boy sprinted to the back of the alley and grabbed at the bundle but his jump to reach it wasn't quite high enough. The hand hanging over the top of the wall dropped the bundle, then was gone.

Neither Mary nor the boy had spoken, but now the boy approached her, undoing the bundle as he came near. At the door where Mary still stood, the boy held out to her a piece of combread. She was a good deal taller than the boy and standing on the ledge that held the door off the ground made her appear taller still. An observer would have thought the young boy was making an offering to some god of the alley. Mary accepted it gratefully, but still she did not speak. Here, in the deep shadows, she knew she easily passed for a man and she was not about to reveal otherwise. The boy did not seem to mind his companion's rudeness, but, instead, took it upon himself to carry the conversation for them both.

Licking the crumbs from his hand, then wiping it on his trousers, he held it out. “Paul. What's your name?”

Mary took his hand in what she hoped was a hearty handshake but did not answer. Paul didn't mind.

“Dumb? Or are ye deaf? No matter. I knew fellows like you at the Industrial Home. Stay well clear of that place, or they'll have you making cardboard boxes from morning to night. Just came from there myself. Want to join up?”

Mary nodded, but not with much conviction. This could go either way for her. It would be an advantage to have someone who could run errands for her – purchase tickets or food with what little money she had on her, money that was to have bought a blade, money given her by Mr. Terrence. On the other hand, the boy may find her an irresistible path to instant wealth, if he were to find out about the reward for her return, ugly money that the marshal had mentioned. She could not risk speaking to him; she prayed he knew how to read.

“So you’re not deaf. Can you write?”

Thank the heavens. Mary nodded, more emphatically this time. The boy gave her a stick and she scratched in the ground the first word that came to her, a word that had, in fact, been buzzing in her head since early this morning. Marshal. A dangerous word, but one she had to remember, to keep before her, a word to spur her to move but also to remind her to stay hidden, stay silent. Every time Paul would speak this name, it would remind her of what was waiting for her in Washington, a crouching threat that inched towards her, that she knew was prowling all along the line of the B&O Railroad. The marshal had said ‘capture’ and ‘reward,’ among other things, unspeakable things.

“Come on then, Marshal. I know Herring Hill like the back of my hand. We won’t get caught. I know where we can get some pie, too.”

Like Mary had done, Paul led her from one place of concealment to another, but with far more assurance and knowledge than Mary had. He did, indeed, know where to get pie, but Mary was fairly certain that he had not paid for it. She ate it ravenously, as did Paul, scooping out the delicious goods with her hands, like a cat might do with its paw. They had scrambled over a garden wall to take up temporary quarters in a ramshackle shed, stuffed with odd items of all kinds. This was apparently one of Paul’s frequently visited refuges, for he was quite comfortable here, knowing exactly which crates he could move without causing a cascade of objects that would make telltale noises. He arranged a couple of crates and he and Mary sat in companionable and full-stomached silence for some minutes after the last of the pie was licked clean from the pan – Paul had offered Mary, as a gracious host would, first licks, but Mary declined, like any lady would. Then Paul motioned that they should both rest while they could – Mr. Dreyfuss, whose shed they were trespassing, was a junk dealer; he left his house early and returned late. They could travel more freely after dark, but they would have to watch out for the night patrol.

Mary did not think it was possible, but she dozed off, and found herself being poked awake by Paul just as the last of the light was leaving the sky. She did not know where Herring Hill was, but she knew they had left it when Paul adopted a more cautious attitude as they worked their way through the streets of Georgetown. She did not know where Paul was taking them until they came to a bridge that crossed a canal. If they were still in Georgetown, then this was the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. She could smell the nearby Potomac long before they reached the bridge. She did not know what Paul intended; she may need to part ways with him soon.

After the bridge, they continued along the street until they were at the riverfront, a familiar sight of chaotic wharves and warehouses. The smell, however, was new to Mary. She had been to Louisville’s riverfront many times, with her father and, once or twice on her own (to her regret when her father’s wrath had swelled and broken over her). She was familiar with river smells, the smells of muddy water and fish and unwashed men and various merchandise, but this was noxious, at times rivaling that of an outhouse. In fact, they narrowly missed being seen by one of the night soil collectors, pushing his odious cart down the riverfront to some depository. Soon after the cart passed them, Paul stopped and pointed across the river to a dark mass barely perceptible in the deep gloom. “Mason’s Island, then Virginia. We can borrow a skiff and get to the island in no time. There’s been enough rain that we won’t have to worry about the flats.” Paul looked to her for commitment, but Mary was not certain if Virginia was where she wanted to go. And she was not certain she wanted to be on unfamiliar water at night. She considered Paul – a skinny boy, hardly five feet tall. She wondered how old he was, if he was strong enough to help keep a boat on course against the natural pull of the Potomac toward Chesapeake Bay.

Sensing her doubt, Paul assured her, “We can do it. Then we can get jobs – real jobs – in Virginia. I’ll do the talking; I’ll make sure you’re treated right.”

Mary was about to nod her assent, when a man called, challenging them, “Who goes there?”

Without thinking, Mary grabbed Paul by the wrist and pulled him after her into the maze of crated merchandise squatting on the wharves. Thankfully, the street and wharf lights had not yet been lit, though it occurred to Mary that they should have been – a weak sun had set some time ago and what little twilight was left had been eclipsed by thickening clouds, heralding perhaps more rain. They crouched together between two large crates and behind a tangle of boat tackle. Mary had never let go of Paul's wrist. She didn't realize this until Paul tried to pull away; she held on all the tighter.

"Let go. I'll go see what it's all about. I'll find a skiff for us, then I'll come back for you."

Mary squeezed his arm hard, then let go, and Paul disappeared around the front of a crate. Mary prayed that he would not be caught, but if he was, she prayed even harder that he would not lead the police back to her.

"*Marshal.*"

Mary nearly jumped at the sound of the word. She had been crouching so long, her legs were stiff, and they did not obey her impulse to jump up.

"*Marshal.*" Paul was whispering her name; Marshal was her name now, she must think of herself as Marshal, think of herself as a man. "*Marshal, where are you?*"

Marshal stepped cautiously from the shadows. He could see Paul peering into other nooks and crannies among the chaos of the wharves.

"*Here.*"

Paul turned at the voice, then joined him. "So you're not dumb."

Marshal nearly cursed. "*No, but no one can know that. Please.*"

In the nearly complete blackness, Marshal could just make out that Paul shrugged. "*All the same to me.*"

Marshal prompted Paul, "*Who were the police after?*"

"*There's some battle going on about who owns the G street wharf, down the way. Some men brought down a derrick the other night and sank it in the river. The policemen are guarding the wharf, in case the men come back to tear down the new derrick. They heard us talking, thought we were those men come back. I wish I could've seen them tear down the derrick. It must have been great fun, at night.*"

Marshal breathed out his relief. Paul was curious. "*Who are you running from?*"

Marshal considered his answer. He had unwittingly, unnecessarily tested Paul's loyalty by feigning muteness; he needed to regain whatever natural trust had been lost. Paul had run away from the Industrial Home. "*A Home, in Maryland. I hated it.*" In a rush of inspiration, Marshal added, "*I pretended to be dumb there, so they would not pay me too much mind; made it easier to escape. I just kept it up when we met. I'm sorry.*"

As he had done in the alley, Paul simply put out his hand, and with a simple handshake all was forgiven. "*It's a good dodge; wish I had thought of that.*" Then with true contrition of his own, he added, "*I couldn't get a skiff, not with all the guards around.*"

They spent the better part of an hour quietly working their way along the waterfront – away from the G Street Wharf and the men guarding the derrick there – until they found a spot where they could rest and plan their next move in relative peace. Paul left their little nest just as light began to push the dark westward, instructing Marshal to stay low; he had adopted a curious protective, almost proprietary, attitude towards Marshal. Marshal insisted Paul accept a little of her money, to buy breakfast for them both – Marshal would not risk Paul being apprehended for the theft of something so small as a biscuit or apple or two. Paul returned very soon afterwards with both breakfast and news – not only had he found a way out of Georgetown, but a way to earn some money as well.

Paul ate with a voracity that startled Marshal, but perhaps it was because Paul was trying to eat and explain their next venture and to do so as quickly as possible, as they would need to report to their jobs immediately, or risk losing the opportunity. Paul was somewhat circumspect in just what was this work. He repeated several times that Marshal was not to worry, that Paul would teach Marshal as they went along. When Marshal pressed for details of the work, Paul replied with a question.

"Can you handle a mule?"

"Of course I can."

Paul looked dubious. "Have you done any work before?"

Marshal was insulted. "Why do you ask that?"

Paul nodded at Marshal's hands, then held out one of his own, dry and cracked from his work among the cardboard boxes at the Institutional Home. Marshal looked down at his own hands and was surprised to find them without stain or crack. During the spring and summer and fall, his hands were always stained with dirt that no amount of scrubbing could completely wash away. During the winter, his hands were cleaner, but were often painfully cracked and chapped from the cold, and sometimes even bled. How long had he been at that hospital before the asylum?

"I can do the work. I have worked with mules and horses before; I know how to handle them."

Paul accepted Marshal's word, crammed the last of his breakfast into his mouth, then stood. "Let's go then."

Paul led Marshal through the seeming disorder and confusion of the wharves that notched the Potomac riverfront like broken and gapped teeth. The view of the Potomac was almost completely blocked by the forest of masts of the boats that crowded the shore up and down the river as far as could be seen. But the river was not Paul's destination. Soon he was leading Marshal away from the river. At the Fish Market they turned left and stopped before a boat on the canal, the boat itself heading west, heading up the canal, though it was hard to tell, given the boat's squared off bow, not much different from its stern. It was an ugly boat, and dirty - uglier and dirtier even than all the other ugly and dirty boats that were lined up in the canal. On the side of the boat was painted in fading black letters *No Bridge Too Low*. Marshal did not know it, but this was a pointless boast, as faded as the lettering. Within the last few years, the last of the Georgetown bridges over the canal had been raised to accommodate the newer canal boats which sat, when empty, higher in the water than the older boats.

Paul said *Wait here* in a manner that both amused and angered Marshal, then he disappeared into the boat. In the early morning light Marshal could better see the canal; already the boats were in motion, the day's work well underway. Marshal heard a man bellowing his anger at Paul, and more than a few people nearby heard him as well, as movement paused for a second or two as men and women on and near other boats paused to shake their heads in wearied disapproval. One woman looked at Marshal with something like pity before stepping onto her own boat, carrying a basket of purchases from the market just down the street.

Paul emerged from the boat, behind the man who had, presumably, been bellowing only a moment before. He was as ugly and dirty as the boat, his boat, as Marshal was informed. The man was of a height with Marshal, but he was at least twice as wide, and with a thundering forehead that somehow managed, in its upheaval as the man spoke, to lift his hair. Paul introduced the man as Captain Riordan to which the captain reacted violently.

"You will address me as Commodore Riordan!"

This eruption did not seem to affect Paul in the least, except to inform the Commodore, "Marshal is dumb, can't speak." Left hanging in the air was the logical conclusion that Marshal could address Riordan as neither Captain nor Commodore.

"Well, he can hear, can't he? You will *think* of me as Commodore Riordan! Is that understood?" Marshal nodded his understanding, but the Commodore was not finished. No one had looked up at this latest outburst from the boat where Marshal was standing, but a keen observer could note a sudden resigned sagging in the shoulders of those within hearing of the Commodore's coming lecture, a lecture well-known to everyone along the entire length of the canal. "I have as much right, and more, to be called Commodore than that arse *Van-der-bilt* who rides railcars and not boats, and probably never did an honest day's work in his life." Everyone on the canal agreed with the sentiment regarding the railcars, that is to say, the railroads, which had taken a huge chunk out of canal business. If it weren't for coal coming out of Cumberland, canal business would all but dry up. But everyone doubted whether Commodore Riordan had himself ever done an honest day's work in his own life. Commodore Riordan made his money on the sweat and blood of his poor mules and the last ounce of energy and joy from his drivers. Men of a dark humor wagered that these new drivers would not make it to Riley's Lock. The mute boy was tall but looked somewhat delicate; not the stuff of stamina. There were no takers; such bets were no bets at all.

President Grant stood at the window with his brother-in-law, General Dent, as well as General Porter and other dignitaries. Standing was perhaps not quite accurate. They were all jockeying for the best position to watch the strange parade that was just entering the grounds east of the Executive Mansion. News – hilarious news – had come from the Treasury Department of a disturbance in the street, the spectacle of which had hopelessly captured the attention of the entire working staff, the female employéés shouting themselves hoarse in a most unladylike fashion and the men stomping and bellowing until the Avenue fairly trembled. General Spinner himself – Treasurer Spinner – was swept up in the excitement and had mounted the colonnade rail of his political barony and waved his hat in one hand and his red bandanna in the other, all while balancing on one leg. His deep bass voice was heard over and above those of his Treasury employéés and was said to be heard down Pennsylvania Avenue as far as the Capitol.

The news was not only of General Spinner’s wild abandon of decorum but of the procession itself. It seems an ardent Bowenite, one Major Morse, had been so certain of his man’s re-election two days ago that he had sworn he would crawl on his belly, the three miles from Washington’s City Hall to Georgetown, if Bowen lost. And lose Bowen did – spectacularly. Morse, an honest gentleman, despite his political affiliations, intended to make payment, even though friends (and even the man with whom he had made the bet) assured him that no one expected him to make good on such a promise – political promises were almost never kept and political bets were the least expected to be paid. But at eight o’clock this morning, Morse had reported to City Hall, stripped to the waist, and had begun the epic crawl down Four-and-a-Half Street before striking Pennsylvania Avenue. Morse had taken the precaution of wearing cavalry breeches, backwards, so that the reinforced seat of the pants protected his belly (a wardrobe maneuver that only someone of Morse’s build – as flat and frugal in back as he was in front – could accomplish). The event drew quite a gathering, beginning at City Hall, so much so that police were required to control the growing crowd. The affair had the air of a campaign rally, having orators and vocalists and a parade marshal of sorts – all disappointed Bowen men – and all preceded by the Marine Band. The streets were still muddy from the terrific rains of Election Day, two days ago, and were still a rocky and uneven ordeal, despite promises of previous Washington City mayors to properly grade and pave the streets. The strain of crawling, therefore, was such that fifteen minutes after Morse began, it was decided he should fortify himself at the Woodbine tavern, a short block from City Hall. So the procession had gone, gathering more and more spectators, and stopping every so often at a pub or tavern, for the fortification of Major Morse and all his supporters. The Major was making a mile every two hours or so, as good as any mud turtle would do. Along the way, Morse was repeatedly rubbed down with whiskey and fortified with the same. At Harvey’s Oyster House, Eleventh and Pennsylvania Avenue, the Major was greeted with loud encouragement by the editorial staffs of the nearby *Evening Star* and *National Republican*, and Mott Harvey himself waved the Grand Old Flag as Morse wriggled past. But it was the ladies of the Treasury that gave Morse the greatest encouragement and he redoubled his efforts as he passed that Department.

It was a pleasant diversion – a needed diversion – given the heavy demands of his office, much of which he placed on his staff and advisors, some of them here in this room with him. Let them laugh and enjoy themselves; Grant intended to laugh himself. The day promised to be busy – he was meeting with Spotted Tail and Red Cloud and others in the Indian delegation later today; there was a new threat to his Santo Domingo project, ready to loom in the Senate today (surprisingly, sources did not indicate Sumner in the ploy), and there was always agitation about Cuba’s bid for independence from Spain that was sometimes coupled with the idea of annexation to the United States (Grant was doing his very best just to ignore Cuba altogether); he needed to send his nominees for various postmasters to the Senate for confirmation; and there was that ghastly rumor about the massacre of Jews in Romania – he needed to send Colfax with what information they had, to inform the Senate. That was the business of today, the business he was aware of so far, for today. He was glad to be leaving Washington tomorrow on a well-earned fishing trip with Senator Cameron. But for now, for these few moments while Major Morse belly-crawled his way across the view from the President’s House, Grant was content to have a good laugh.

But, President or not, Grant found himself constantly working to maintain his place at one of the windows, straining to watch every second of this unusual procession as it worked its way west towards Georgetown. As the President lost a step to General Dent, he chanced to notice, out of the corner of his eye, one of the servants standing half-concealed behind a curtain that served on occasion as a door at an entrance to the room. As casually as possible, Grant made his way over to the curtain, where the woman handed him a note.

“It’s about Lally, sir.”

“Thank you, Ceil.”

If Grant thought that was a dismissal, the young colored woman did not, and remained at her post. Grant asked, as an afterthought, “How does Mrs. Hughes?”

“Better, sir. She is ready to help.”

Grant nodded, then read the note before leaving Ceil at the curtain for a small table near the door on the other side of the room. There was a loud burst of laughter as Major Morse evidently made some spectacular maneuver on the grounds below. Grant scribbled some reply, then returned to hand Ceil his own note.

“See that is sent right away.” Ceil turned to leave but turned once again as Grant called to her. Handing her the note she had brought to him, Grant added, “Burn that.”

Grant returned to the party at the window, but it was remarked later that he had seemed preoccupied afterward.