

Bonnie
Blue
Murder

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A Civil War Murder Mystery

H. A. Covington

Dedication

In a small park in Charleston, South Carolina there stands a monument to Major Henry Timrod, C.S.A., (1829-1867), sometimes called the Poet Laureate of the Confederacy. These words are engraved thereon:

*Sleep sweetly in your humble grave.
Sleep, martyrs of a fallen Cause,
Though yet no marble column crave
The pilgrim here to pause.*

*In seeds of laurel in the earth
The blossom of your fame is blown,
And somewhere, waiting for its birth,
The shaft is in the stone.*

*Stoop, angels, hither from the skies.
There is no holier spot of ground
Than where defeated valor lies
By mourning beauty crowned.*

This book is humbly dedicated to the heroic citizens and defenders of the city of Charleston, 1861 through 1865.

Author's Note

Charleston pronunciation and terminology can seem a bit eccentric to an outsider. Briefly, the term “downstreet” indicates any general southeasterly direction towards the Battery, while “upstreet” means northeasterly towards the narrow belt of the Charleston peninsula known as The Neck. In the nineteenth century, as today, The Neck was not exactly the most salubrious part of town, and just as in the present day, the closer a resident lived to the Battery the higher the social standing. I have been unable to determine whether or not the term “SOB” (South of Broad) was in use in 1861, indicating the privileged élite residing in the luxurious homes between Broad Street and the Battery, but the traditional demarcation line was very definitely understood and accepted then.

In the late seventeenth century, some of Charleston's earliest settlers were French Huguenots who left their mark and their names on the city, such as Manigault (“Mann-i-go”), Huger (“Ew-gee”), Pettigru, and of course, Legare. The name of our detective in *Bonnie Blue Murder* is pronounced Hugo *Le-gree*.

I

Early on the morning of Friday, April 12th, 1861, I stood behind a cannon mounted on a floating battery anchored in the landward shallows off Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, South Carolina. It was a great raft, moored to the sandbank by stout pilings, the artillery pieces shielded by thick cotton bales stacked high. Our gun muzzles poked menacingly through embrasures, pointed at the block-like outline of Fort Sumter visible in the starlit distance of Charleston harbor.

I wore the uniform of an officer in the Palmetto Volunteers, one of the many militia units which had sprung into being after the South Carolina Convention had adopted the Ordinance of Secession on December 20th, 1860. We had recently been mustered into the newly formed Confederate States Army. I had joined without hesitation. I was newly married to the beautiful Miss Christine Tilley of Belfort Plantation, my wife was an ardent Southern patriot, and all of our friends were donning the gray. Although Irish by birth, at that time I had no intention of ever returning to Ireland, and it was natural for me to help my adopted homeland in her fight for freedom. Nor have I ever regretted that choice. The South has attracted critics and praise-singers aplenty both before and since the war. I write now to tell of a murder and its consequences, not to revive an ancient conflict better left buried in the ashes, and so I will simply say this and be done. Those four years

were the most terrible I have ever endured, but despite everything, the proudest time in my life was when I wore the tattered, heroic gray of the Southern Confederacy. The verdict of history was rendered at Appomattox. *Requiescat in pace*, my beloved country.

On that cool, still morning in April, most of us still hoped against hope that somehow we might step back from the brink. Yet by now that seemed impossible. The Federal commander of Fort Sumter, Major Robert Anderson, had refused General Beauregard's ultimatum to surrender, and our guns were loaded and primed and aimed at the fort, awaiting the signal to open fire. The ultimatum was set to expire at four o'clock that morning. I glanced at my watch. "One minute past four," I told my adjutant, a young senior classman from the South Carolina Military Academy at the Citadel.

"Do we fire now, Lord Balbriggan?" asked the youth eagerly.

"I'm plain Captain Redmond now, Landers," I told the boy with a smile he could not see in the darkness. "The Confederate States are a democracy, and titles of nobility don't hold. We wait until General Beauregard gives the order to fire. The first shot will come either from Fort Johnson or from Morris Island. When it does, then we open up."

The minutes ticked by, and no shot came. I cannot convey the unbearable tension and agony of that long wait for a bloody and terrible war to begin, as the waters gently lapped against our gunwales and the surf rumbled on the seaward side of the island. Some of us were certain it would be over in a matter of weeks. I wasn't so sure. I had asked my friend, Major Hugo Legare, what he thought the future held. "Spend as much time as you can with your new bride, Redmond," he had told me grimly. "You won't be seeing much of one another for quite some time."

I looked at my watch again. "Four thirty," I told Landers.

"Perhaps Beauregard has extended the deadline?" the youth suggested, half in hope and half in disappointment. In the town the bells of St. Michael's church sounded, ringing the half-hour. Even out here on

the floating battery, we could hear the bells over the wind and the surf and the cries of the sea birds.

There was a flash and a low thud from Fort Johnson, in the distance past Sumter. A shell screamed through the darkness and slammed into the masonry walls of the fort. A flare rocket arose from Morris Island, bursting high and white, and in Charleston harbor our target was illuminated grim and dark against the waters. "That's it!" I exclaimed. I jumped onto a cotton bale and shouted to my gunners, "*Now! Rip 'em!*"

My company let out a wild cheer and then our Columbiads and twelve-pounders roared, shaking the wooden floor of the raft and causing us to plunge up and down in the shallows. I was fortunate enough to have as my NCOs crew sergeants who were all experienced veterans, two U.S. Army artillerymen who had returned to their native South, one Englishman, and a Prussian who had served as a mercenary at Magenta and Solferino. They deftly compensated for the rocking and pitching of their firing platform, re-laying the guns with skill and speed after every shot, and we began to rain a steady storm of shells on Sumter. Anderson's gun crews, commanded by the young Lieutenant Abner Doubleday, began returning our fire, and the Union roundshot slammed into our cotton ramparts and bounced high, plowing into the sand on the beach behind us and exploding great geysers of water all around. All around the harbor there were flashes and roars and thuds of bombardment. From Fort Johnson, from our own floating battery, from Fort Moultrie behind us, from Castle Pinckney and Point Cummings and Morris Island and the sea wall of the Charleston Battery, the shells arched and screeched towards Fort Sumter. By first light we could see our hits knocking away huge chunks of masonry from the parapets and casemates. Anderson and his men could never hold out.

It has been recorded by historians that the bombardment of Fort Sumter and its subsequent capitulation to the Confederate forces occurred without loss of life, other than one of Anderson's gunners who

was killed in an accident during the surrender ceremonies. But a Confederate soldier was indeed killed by gunfire during the bombardment, although his death could not precisely be termed a battle casualty. The episode has by now been forgotten except by those few who were directly involved.

When the guns opened up at a little past four thirty in the morning, the din was indescribable. Every man, woman, and child in Charleston who could possibly clamber up to rooftop vantage points had done so, looking out to sea to observe what they could of Fort Sumter and the shelling. People even attempted to climb into the belfry of St. Michael's church steeple at the corner of Meeting Street and Broad Street, but were turned out by the Reverend Paul Trapier Keith and some policemen who were patrolling the streets to keep order. The prominent spire of the church was too likely to become a target for the Federal artillery in Sumter. It is hardly surprising that in the earth-shaking thunder of the heavy guns no one heard a single pistol shot in St. Michael's churchyard a minute or so after four thirty, or that amid all the excitement no one found the murdered body of an officer wearing Confederate gray, lying stretched across a tombstone, until well after dawn.

II

For me, the Mendoza case began on the morning of Monday, April 15th. Major Robert Anderson and his gallant little garrison had surrendered the previous day, after sustaining a bombardment of thirty-four hours, and they were now on their way to New York by steam packet. The Bonnie Blue Flag, the South Carolina secession banner bearing a single white star in a blue field, now flew over Fort Sumter. Abraham Lincoln had issued a call for seventy-five thousand volunteers to crush the South, a feat “Honest Abe” arrogantly presumed could be accomplished in a mere ninety days. The war had begun.

My company of Palmetto Volunteers was billeted in tents out along the Goose Creek road, past the Citadel, but rank hath its privileges, and I myself spent every night in the George Street town house of my wife’s family. It was common knowledge that the Confederate forces would soon be moving northwards to face the Federal onslaught, as soon as North Carolina and Virginia formalized their inevitable decision to cast their lots with their sister states of the South. I fully intended to spend every night I could in the arms of my beloved Christine, before duty separated us for who knew how long? I was at the breakfast table re-telling the story of the bombardment for the hundredth time to my insatiably demanding in-laws when a young adjutant arrived with a message for me. I spoke with him in the hallway, and then I returned to

the breakfast room. "I have been ordered to report immediately to General Beauregard's headquarters," I told them.

"I'll wager you are to have a medal, James!" said my proud and excited wife.

"Hardly, my dear," I replied with a laugh. "I assure you that no one in my company performed any unusual feat of arms. All we did was send a few chunks of Fort Sumter flying out to sea, and as much was done by every other battery in the harbor. I doubt we are all to have medals."

"Ah, but no other battery was commanded by a member of the Irish aristocracy!" remarked my canny father-in-law. "The South's image in Great Britain is vital to our war effort, and decorating a young nobleman would be a politic step."

"I really am trying to lay all that aside, sir," I replied in a wry voice. "It doesn't seem as if Southern society is inclined to let me forget my birth."

"We planter folk fancy ourselves as aristocrats in spite of the fact that we are fighting a war for democracy," laughed the old gentleman.

"Some of your Southern plantations are larger than a good many of the landed estates of Ireland," I commented. "Nor am I too displeased to hear Christie referred to as Lady Balbriggan, truth to tell. Someday she'll be the only Confederate countess, unless my father digs up some obscure relation of ours from the peat bogs of Sligo and breaks the entail on our earldom."

"I don't want to be known as a Lady or a countess, James," said Christie softly. "Just as your wife. If you were to lose your title it wouldn't bother me a jot."

"You may well get your wish, Chris," I laughed. "I am afraid that joining in a rebellion against a foreign government is hardly the best way to worm my way back into my old governor's good books."

I had never fully discussed with Christie the circumstances of my arrival some years before in America, and I was thankful she had never asked. With her alert and demanding father I had been compelled to be more forthcoming. It was fortunate that my friend Inspector Hugo

Legare and I had just saved his daughter's life from a homicidal maniac, else lord or not he might well have forbade my subsequent courtship. Not to put too fine a point on it, I had become what was known as a "remittance man". For almost ten years my own father, the Earl of Westmeath, paid me an admittedly generous quarterly allowance on the condition that I place at least one large body of water between myself and the ancestral hearthside. All young aristocrats drink, carouse, gamble, and debauch themselves with unsuitable female companionship, but in my younger days I quite tore the ring out of it. The affair of the impromptu steeplechase in the undergraduates' refectory at Oxford might have been written off as youthful high spirits, especially since none of the horses and only one competitor broke a leg. The ugly incident in the opium den in Shadwell would have been more frowned upon, but the only witnesses who actually saw anything spoke only Chinese. The paying of my assorted lawful and unlawful debts was an annoyance to the old gentleman, no doubt, but the appearance of my name in assorted newspapers and legal documents in connection with some of them added insult to injury.

Then there was Bridget, our upstairs maid, lively and flame-haired and blue-eyed and most adventurous. Thanks to our combined efforts, the Irish Redmonds now sport that quaintly medieval appurtenance, a cadet branch in the person of a young lad who is entitled to bear our coat of arms with the addition of the heraldic device known as the bar sinister. That was bad enough, but when our daughter arrived a year later my parents felt I was overdoing things a bit. A neighboring squire happened to pass some uncouth remarks on the subject of Bridget in the bar of the Shelburne Hotel in Dublin, and I called him out. We met in the foggy dawn of Phoenix Park and I passed a pistol ball gentle and artistic through his cheek and shot off half his tongue, which rendered his subsequent apology sincere but unintelligible. The result was that I spent several weeks as a guest of Her Majesty in Kilmainham Gaol, and

it exhausted a large part of my father's financial and political resources to get me out.

Things came to a head during a most painful interview with the governor in his study after my release from chokey. "I demand to know, sir, just *what you mean* by your infamous conduct!" he shouted in an apoplectic rage. "Do you intend to drive your mother into an early grave with worry and me with mortification? What devil possesses you that you continually drag our family name through the mud with your drunken escapades, your staggering debts, your vile consorting with the lowest of company, your fornications and now your violence against our neighbors! I'd ship you off to the Army, but I don't think my old regiment would have you! You are a gangrenous limb on this family, sir, and I will amputate you!" I was offered the choice of India, Australia, or America. I chose America because I was then able to smuggle Bridget and our children onto the same ship. I left her in New York after having bought her a small cottage and arranged for our family's American banking agent to pay half of my quarterly remittance to her. The last I heard before communication was cut off with the North was that she was married to a prosperous manufacturer of stoves in Connecticut. I always thanked God that the war ended before my son was old enough to join the Union army.

At that time I was riding a fine black gelding named Corsair, and I told the stable boy to saddle him for me. The elegant Alston mansion on King Street, which served as Beauregard's headquarters, was within walking distance of George Street, but I presumed that I was about to be sent on some errand or other to the camps or the fortified sea islands and would need to ride. Instead I was shown into a tastefully furnished drawing room with fine bay windows, and to my pleasure I found Hugo Legare waiting for me.

How and where I first met Legare is a story that must regretfully wait for another time and place to be told. I was associated with Legare in a number of his cases when he was a detective on the Charleston city

police force, and by the spring of 1861 I was so firmly linked with him in the official mind, and in his own, that I was detached from my regiment to assist him in the Mendoza case. For that, it turned out, was the cause of my summons. Legare was sitting in a chair going over some papers from a leather portfolio on his lap, but he rose and greeted me warmly. Mindful now of the difference in our military rank I stood to and saluted him smartly; he returned the salute and then gripped my hand. "No need for all the spit and polish, Redmond," he said. "I'm glad your regiment could spare you. I'm going to need your inestimable services."

"I'm detached?" I asked in disappointment. "Surely I won't be left behind when we move north against Washington?"

"No, I'm hopeful this wretched affair will be cleared up by then. It had damned well better be."

"What affair?" I asked.

"The murder of Captain Xavier Tremaine Calhoun, an officer in your own regiment, but assigned to staff duties here at headquarters about a month ago," Legare told me.

"Murdered, you say?" I exclaimed. "I hadn't heard, but I can't say I'm surprised. Some jealous husband, no doubt?"

"What makes you say that?" asked Legare keenly. "You knew him?"

"Only slightly," I said. "Didn't impress me at all, and I wasn't the only one who was glad when the colonel kicked him upstairs to staff. He's a bad lot. Was a bad lot, I should say, though 'tis sorry I am to be speaking so ill of the dead. The jealous husband idea was the first thing that occurred to me. He was that kind of man."

"It's much more serious than that," said Legare grimly. "It looks like espionage and assassination. The police have a suspect in custody, but I'm not at all happy with him. I suppose you have no objection to helping me track down Union spies instead of counting musket balls with your supply sergeant or inspecting your men's bunions?"

"No objection at all, at all!" I laughed.

In 1861, Hugo Legare was a slim, compactly built man of medium height, about forty years of age. His lean face sported a reddish-brown Imperial beard and moustache, of the kind made fashionable in those days by the French emperor Napoleon the Third. His eyes were blue and clear and calm, and his hair was beginning to recede somewhat, which gave him a cerebral and intellectual appearance. Today he wore military uniform, but as a police inspector he had dressed neatly in subdued conservative garb, so he looked like an accountant or a modestly successful man of business, except for the fact that his suits were specially tailored with an in-sewn holster for his heavy short-barreled revolver. To those who didn't know him, Legare seemed a mild-mannered nonentity. Appearances were deceptive. Hugo Legare had a mind like a steel trap. He never forgot a face, a name, a fact, or the smallest scrap of information relating to crime and its detection. Underworld jargon, the modus operandi of a burglary gang, the medical effects of every known poison, statute and common law, the family scandals and pécadillos of three generations of Charleston society, sailing schedules and railroad timetables for every port and major town south of the Mason-Dixon line, the current black market value of every kind of stolen property, firearms and explosives, the description, criminal record, and habits of every professional thief and hoodlum from New York to New Orleans, all of these filled his truly mighty mind like some great filing cabinet. From arcane tomes on Anglo-Saxon legal precedent to scurrilous society gossip, he soaked up information like a sponge.

Hugo Legare had fallen out with his own prominent Charleston family over issues different from mine, which form no part of this story. In his case, however, the threat to cut him off without a penny was implemented, and so far as I know was never rescinded. Denied a living from the Legare family cotton plantations and real estate and shipping business, Hugo astounded and enraged his whole family with his novel choice of a career by which to earn his living. In 1842, he joined the Charleston police. He rose rapidly through the ranks, in part because of

the aristocratic name he bore, but also because of his incredible ability to get himself inside the criminal mind and second-guess the quarry he hunted. Legare ended by carving himself a special niche in the legal establishment of Charleston. He became a “society detective.”

Not all of Charleston’s crimes had their genesis in the taverns, the sporting houses and shacks of Good-bye Alley or the Neck, nor in the unlit muddy streets of the poor white and free negro shacks along Goose Creek Road and the Savannah highway. More often than not crime bloomed in the stately Low Country plantation homes and the elegant town houses south of Broad Street. Such crimes demanded despatch, diplomacy, and above all discretion. A Charleston Legare was the ideal man to provide all of these and yet still command respect and cooperation from the high-toned planter upper crust. Nor, truth to tell, did it impede his investigations to have a bona fide Irish nobleman as his companion, thus giving him double entrée into the most select drawing rooms and clubs. “What happened to Calhoun?” I asked.

“*What* happened is easy enough to tell,” replied Legare. “He was shot in the back of the head, and he was dead before he hit the ground. Calhoun’s body was discovered about seven o’clock on Friday morning in the churchyard of St. Michael’s, lying face down on the grave of the Revolutionary patriot John Rutledge, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. In view of our own recent declaration of independence from the Union, for all I know there may be some kind of sardonic political significance in the location of the body. Captain Calhoun’s horse was later found back at the stable of the Captain’s lodgings in Tradd Street, where it had wandered home alone. Either the killer released the horse, or the dead man never tethered it. No saddlery or anything of value was missing from the mount, the saddlebags, or the body. The dead man’s purse contained thirty dollars in bank notes and a five-dollar gold piece, so robbery as a motive is out. What *was* missing,” Legare went on grimly, “Was a leather despatch case, serial number four,

containing eight coded signals and the latest Confederate Army cipher book for military telegraphic communications.”

I gave a low whistle. “How did Calhoun come to be carrying those?” I asked.

“At approximately five minutes past four on the morning of April 12th, General Beauregard spoke with Calhoun in this very room, along with a number of other couriers whom he was sending out to the various artillery emplacements with orders to launch the bombardment. Calhoun’s errand was different. General Beauregard personally handed him despatch pouch number four, with orders to take them to the telegraph office in the Exchange Building at the corner of Broad Street and East Bay Street. A five-minute ride through gas-lit streets on a morning when all of Charleston was awake and out of doors. Yet he never made it to the telegraph office. Someone waylaid him, lured or forced him into the churchyard of St. Michael’s, murdered him, and stole the despatches.”

“Was the telegraph office open at four o’clock in the morning?” I asked curiously.

“Yes, it was. We have been keeping it open twenty-four hours a day, with a military telegrapher and an orderly on duty. Captain Calhoun was to go there, deliver the despatches, then wait while they were encoded from the cipher book. They were then to be transmitted to the provisional Confederate States government in Montgomery, Alabama, for the personal attention of President Davis and the Secretary of War. Calhoun was to wait for an acknowledgement that the wires had been received, collect any incoming signals, and then report back to Beauregard.”

“What were the contents of the despatches, if you can tell me without violating military secrecy?” I asked. “Were they important?”

“Vital. I don’t mind telling you in a general way, Redmond, since you will be helping me look for the damned things. There was the last official communication of Major Anderson from Fort Sumter, which is now of course irrelevant. But they also contained a complete update on all the troops and artillery now concentrated in the Charleston area, as

well as a planned scenario for a general movement north of all Confederate military forces to counter the anticipated Union offensive from the Washington area. In addition, there was an inventory of ships and marine stores now available to the Confederacy in Charleston, Savannah, and Pensacola harbors for the formation of a Confederate Navy. There was a list of South Carolina and Georgia residents put together by myself, men whose loyalties to the South are in my view open to question. Conversely, there was also a list of contacts in the Border states of Kentucky and Missouri compiled by Governor Pickens and myself through our respective sources, including a number of public officials and legislators, whom we believe to be sympathetic to the Confederate cause and who may be approachable. There was a roster of potential overseas suppliers of armaments and other war materiel which was put together by a special committee of merchants and men of business. You will understand why it is vital that this information not fall into enemy hands.”

“Indeed,” I agreed with a scowl. “But you said that Calhoun’s assassin had been taken?”

“I said a suspect had been arrested, but I wasn’t happy with him. He doesn’t feel right. Young chap named Simon Mendoza, aged twenty-one, rather a dandy, comes from an old Charleston family.”

“The evidence against him?” I inquired.

“He had a strong personal grudge against Captain Calhoun. The police found physical evidence in his home linking him with the crime. Witnesses have placed him at the scene, and he refuses to account for his whereabouts when the guns opened fire on Sumter at four thirty on Friday morning. Doctor Jeffries examined the body at about eight o’clock and gave his opinion that Calhoun had been dead for only a few hours, and that plus the fact that he left here at ten past four yet never arrived at his destination leads me to believe that he was killed very soon after we opened up on the fort. No one would be able to hear a pocket-pistol shot in all that mass detonation.”

“A pocket-pistol?”

“That would appear to be the murder weapon. Jeffries removed a light slug of about ninety grains, .41-caliber, and an Eley .41 with a fired paper cartridge tube still in the breech was found in Mendoza’s possession.”

“A small, concealable handgun, just the thing for a spy.”

“Or a woman,” Legare added.

“You neglected to mention that St. Michael’s church is right across Meeting Street from the central police station!” I remarked with a chuckle.

“I assure you, Redmond, that fact did not escape me,” said Legare with a twinkle in his eye. “We’re dealing with a very cool hand here, iron nerve and ice water in the veins. That’s one reason I can’t quite see Simon Mendoza as the killer. I have spoken to him since he was arrested, and he is an excitable, conventionally minded and not overly bright young fellow. By now you know that this line of work involves at least some degree of instinct, and to my instinct Simon Mendoza doesn’t ring true. His reaction has been vehemently to deny all knowledge of anything to do with the case, but if he is innocent, someone has gone to an immense amount of trouble to make it look as if he is guilty. He would make an ideal scapegoat. He fought publicly with Calhoun over a period of months and was known to hate the man bitterly.”

“Why?”

“Captain Calhoun was alleged to have made unwelcome and improper advances to Mendoza’s sister, Naomi,” said Legare.

“I’ve seen her around town a few times,” I remarked. “She’s quite a beauty. From what I recall of Calhoun, he’d make improper advances to a one-eyed nanny goat when he had a few drinks in him. Great, brutish block of a man he was, handsome enough in a coarse kind of way, old planter family, distantly related to John C. Calhoun and never let anyone forget it. But he had a mouth as foul as a muleteer’s, no respect for ladies or real gentility in him, drank his whiskey straight, gambled like a madman, abused his blacks.”

“I know the type,” said Legare with a nod.

“Had a lot of squireens like that in Ireland many years ago,” I went on. “We used to call them bucks, half-mounted gentry.”

“The quarrel dates back to last fall, before onset of the present crisis, when the decedent was still plain Mr. Calhoun of Carberry Hall plantation,” Legare said. “Simon Mendoza called him out and sent seconds to his lodgings in Tradd Street, but Calhoun laughed at them and refused an encounter on grounds of Mendoza’s allegedly inferior social status not entitling him to a gentleman’s privilege.”

“Inferior?” I said. “Hmm. Wait, it just hit me. Simon must be the son of Moses Mendoza of Continental Mercantile!”

“The very one,” confirmed Legare. “Heir to the throne, interestingly enough”

“One of the most extensive business empires in the South, if memory serves,” I added.

“Correct. The Mendozas are one of the oldest families in Charleston and probably the wealthiest. Moses Mendoza owns two banks and is on the board of directors of every other one in the state of South Carolina. He owns major shares in every railroad below the Mason-Dixon line, plus his own fleet of cargo vessels with wharfage and warehouses in Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Galveston, Havana, and throughout the Caribbean. These vessels export two thirds of the Low Country’s cotton crop, a good half of the tobacco, and almost all of the rice and indigo that leaves these shores. Mendoza’s boot factory in Port Royal puts shoes on almost all the black labor in South Carolina and half of the poor whites. Continental Mercantile imports everything from farm machinery and industrial plant to Swiss cuckoo clocks and Dresden china. Society women come from as far as Montgomery and Raleigh to shop in the Mendoza establishment.”

“My father-in-law furnished Belfort and the George Street house from top to bottom through the Mendoza store, and Christie does all her shopping there,” I said. “Inferior social status indeed! The Mendozas

were treading these cobbled streets when Calhoun's forebears were still digging turf in Skibbereen!"

"The Mendoza family are also Jews," said Legare. "That is unfortunate. It would appear that to espionage, treason and murder we are going to have to add the distasteful complication of bigotry. At any rate, Calhoun refused the challenge and Mendoza subsequently posted him as a coward in the *Gazette* and at all Calhoun's clubs. In December of last year Simon ran into Calhoun at a private gambling hell in Society Street. You remember Polly Roper's place?"

"That den where it took the two of us, Lieutenant Halliburton, and a very large constable to arrest Big Jim McCoy? It's hard to forget a cracked rib and an ear swollen to the size of a cabbage leaf!"

"That is indeed the genteel establishment to which I refer," said Legare with a reminiscent chuckle. "Words were exchanged, and Calhoun proceeded to indulge himself in that charming old custom of Southern aristocracy, horsewhipping an upstart. You'll recall that Calhoun was a large and burly man, while Simon Mendoza is of slender build and medium height. Gunpowder makes all men tall, as Carlyle once remarked, and on a dueling field with pistols the size differential would not have mattered other than making Calhoun a bigger target. But hand to hand it wasn't much of a contest, and Simon was brutally beaten and humiliated. Calhoun whipped him down the steps with a riding crop and kicked him down the street, laughing him to scorn all the while."

"Charming fellow," I said.

"The full extent of his charm is yet to be made manifest," said Legare. "Both men applied for commissions in the Palmetto Volunteers, which as you are aware is very much the smart regiment for all of our Charleston bluebloods."

"Indeed, our Colonel never stops bragging in the mess that one of his company commanders is a member of the Irish peerage," said I with a sigh. "Blast and damn, Legare, if you people over here are not far more

impressed with my title than those at home. Half-mounted gentry, bog-squireens and remittance men from decayed old Irish families are three for a shilling in any club in London or Sydney or Bombay.”

“At any rate, Calhoun pulled some strings and caused Simon to be refused a commission in the Confederate Army. Can’t have grubby Christ-killing Jews fighting alongside the flower of Southern chivalry, all that rot.”

“Shocking!” I cried in disgust.

“As if a bullet would know the difference, or care. The boy had to enlist as a private. Ah, here is the general.” We rose to our feet and saluted, as the then commanding officer of the entire Confederate Army entered the room.

Photographs of General P.G.T. Beauregard do not do him full justice. They capture our old commander’s high, noble forehead and the neat Imperial beard, but they cannot convey the courteous and manly carriage, the slight accent of cultivated Louisiana French, the Beauregard who was the paradigm of the Southern gentleman to his fingertips. The general opened the double doors to his inner office, and as we stood to attention he ushered out several distinguished-looking gentlemen in civilian clothes, one of whom I recognized from a past levée as Governor Zebulon Vance of North Carolina. “I apologize for keeping you waiting, gentlemen,” said Beauregard. “Please step inside and take a seat. I won’t be a moment.” He escorted his visitors outside, bade farewell to them on the landing to the stairs, and returned, closing the doors behind him. He handed us a humidor and offered us cigars, as well as a refreshing brandy peg from the decanter on the sideboard. “If I am not in error, sir, you are Lord Balbriggan,” said Beauregard with a bow as he handed me my glass. “I regret not having been able to make your acquaintance before today, but I have been rather busy of late. I would like to say, sir, how encouraging it is to find a member of the British nobility committing himself to the cause of Southern freedom. Let us hope that your example stirs your countrymen to a like commitment.”

“I consider myself to be merely Captain Redmond of the Confederate States Army now, general,” I told him. “But I shall certainly do everything within my power to help present the case for the South to the government and the people of Great Britain and Ireland. I appreciate your allowing me to assist Major Legare in this matter of Captain Calhoun’s untimely demise.”

“A mission of the most vital importance, gentlemen,” said Beauregard grimly. “There is a nest of spies and assassins in Charleston. They have murdered one of my officers and stolen top secret documents that may change the course of the war. Vipers in our bosom, gentlemen! They must be rooted out!” He offered each of us a lit match for our cigars. “What have you learned, Major Legare?”

“As yet I have only been able to organize what is already known, General,” replied Hugo. “There is little doubt that Simon Mendoza is somehow involved in the affair. When his room was searched on Saturday morning, Lieutenant Halliburton found the empty despatch case number four, a recently fired pocket pistol, and a peculiar book of an obscene nature in the locked drawer of Mendoza’s bureau. Constable Evers and the bell-ringer at St. Michael’s, a free negro named Caiphaz Turner, have identified Mendoza as being in the vicinity of the church at about four thirty Friday morning, wearing his Army uniform and carrying a black valise of the kind the British call a Gladstone bag, although whether the Liberal leader Mr. William Gladstone carries such a bag I haven’t a clue. We have no way of identifying the murder weapon for certain, but Dr. Jeffries tells me that the .41-caliber Eley found in Mendoza’s possession is as likely a candidate as any. If one takes into account its proximity to the empty despatch case, I think we can proceed on the theory that it’s the gun that killed Calhoun. Mendoza does not deny bearing a grudge against the murdered man or having quarreled with him in public, but he denies killing Calhoun and claims that he has no idea how the incriminating objects ended up locked in his bureau.”

“Sounds pretty thin,” I remarked. “I’d say things look rather black for young Mendoza.”

“His father, Mr. Moses Mendoza, was very vociferous in his protests when his home was searched by the police,” continued Legare. “I must say that Halliburton was a bit tactless to conduct the search on Saturday, the morning of the Jewish sabbath. The Mendoza family attended divine service at the Philip Street synagogue, walking there as their faith requires, despite the fact that Mr. Mendoza has been ill recently. They returned to find the police going through the house, and Simon was immediately arrested.”

“What does Mr. Moses Mendoza say about the business?” asked Beauregard.

“He asserts that it is all an anti-Semitic plot by persons unknown who killed Calhoun, stole the papers, and planted the incriminating items in his home in order falsely to implicate Simon and discredit Southern Jews as spies and traitors.” Legare told him.

“Is that possible?” asked Beauregard bluntly.

“At this point I should think it unlikely, sir,” replied Legare carefully. “Simon Mendoza was victimized by Captain Calhoun in an outrageous manner because of his religion and his ancestry, and this case will undoubtedly stir up some very unpleasant mud from the bottom of society due to the fact that accused man is a Jew. Funny thing about mud, general. It obscures the waters, making it very difficult to perceive what lies hidden in the murk. I cannot escape the suspicion that someone wants the truth obscured here, and has latched onto the Jewish angle as the way to do it. Simon Mendoza has a motive for murder, granted, but does he have a motive for treason?”

“In past times men have committed treason as well as murder, out of motives of personal vengeance or offended pride,” I pointed out.

“True, and Mendoza has been mistreated during his brief stint of Confederate service, enough to instill a grudge against us all in a

sensitive nature. But I am not yet convinced that he has committed either treason or murder. The whole thing seems very contrived.”

“In what way?” asked Beauregard keenly.

“We need to reconstruct exactly what happened in St. Michael’s churchyard,” said Legare, ruminating as he stared out the window, idly observing the crowded street below through a white haze of cigar smoke. “How did Simon Mendoza know that Xavier Calhoun would be riding despatch to the telegraph office at four in the morning, of all the ungodly hours? Was it a random meeting? Yet he had months to stew on his wrongs and settle his score with Calhoun with a gun, if he was so inclined. We must either postulate a purely coincidental run-in between the two antagonists right in that one brief window of time when Calhoun was carrying documents vital to the Confederacy, or else we must assume that someone was following Calhoun and clocking his movements. That suggests Union intelligence to me, not a hot-headed young man out the avenge a long-standing insult to his sister.”

“I repeat, why cannot Mendoza be both a vengeful killer and a spy as well?” I demanded.

“If he is, he has proceeded with a strange mixture of careful planning and cool execution, followed by thoughtless stupidity,” replied Legare. “Let’s hypothesize that Mendoza somehow learns that Calhoun is riding despatch. He sets up some kind of trap, gets Calhoun into the cemetery, kills him, then takes the despatches and either passes them along to a third party, or else hides them so well that no one can find them. But despite a twenty-four hour grace period, he fails to get rid of the murder weapon, nor does he dispose of the empty despatch case that connects him irrevocably with the crime. In fact, he leaves these lethally incriminating things lying around in his own room, in the first place where any police search will look. He does not attempt to escape, despite the fact that he knows he will be suspected, and he arranges not one scrap of alibi for himself to cover his whereabouts during the crucial period of time. Really, Redmond, it just won’t do!”

“It sounds almost like two separate persons might be involved,” suggested Beauregard.

“An idea which had occurred to me, general, and one which you may be assured I shall pursue. But who would assist Simon Mendoza in such an affair? I need to know more about the Mendoza family, more about the dead man, and more facts about the crime itself.”

Beauregard rose and began to pace, agitated. “Those despatches *must be found*, Major! We are watching all trains out of Charleston for suspicious characters, but we can hardly search every piece of luggage and go through every passenger’s pockets. They can’t transmit the despatches by telegraph because we control the wires, and every item of mail addressed north of the Mason-Dixon line is being opened by military censors, but there are a dozen ways someone could slip out of town with that packet of papers. They may not even be still in Charleston. The information in those despatches could not only be fatal to thousands of Southern soldiers and supporters, but fatal to the cause of Southern independence itself. I assume that you gentlemen are aware that Lincoln has already suspended *habeas corpus* in the Border states, and that prominent men in Missouri and Kentucky and Maryland are being arrested and imprisoned without trial on the mere suspicion of Southern sympathies. The Union could use that list of potential allies to break the back of Confederate endeavors in those states. Were the contents of the list of possible overseas suppliers to become known, it might permanently wreck our chances of obtaining the vital supplies we need from Europe and Canada. But there is something else at stake here, gentlemen, which transcends even these urgently important considerations.”

“Yes, general?” prompted Legare. Beauregard turned, sat down again behind his desk, and paused before continuing.

“Please do not misunderstand what I am about to say, either of you,” he began slowly. “You have hinted to me, Major, that you are not wholly convinced of Simon Mendoza’s guilt. Good. I want you to give free rein to your instincts along that line, and if there is any tenable solution to

this mystery of Calhoun's death and the theft of the despatches which is consistent with Simon Mendoza's innocence, I want you to pursue that possibility.

"There are those who, upon hearing me say those words, would accuse me of having been bought by Jewish money and influence. That is rubbish. But it is an undeniable fact that Moses Mendoza is the head of a vast commercial empire that can be of immense benefit to our new nation. His word alone could make the difference as to whether or not we are allowed to purchase manufactured goods from abroad on credit or in direct exchange for Southern cotton and tobacco. His word alone could swing to our side important men of commerce and finance in Europe, South America, and the British colonies in the Caribbean we will need for transshipment. He is influential with the Rothschilds, the Esterhazy Bank, and the shipping magnates of London's Baltic Exchange. The word of Moses Mendoza could open to us the resources of the mills of Lancashire and Birmingham, so that our cotton would come back to us in the form of uniforms, bandages, cordage, and sail-cloth. Moses Mendoza owns ships which we must have, port facilities in the West Indies to use as operational bases for blockade running, money and markets which the South must gain access to!"

"A valuable citizen," observed Legare neutrally.

"But as much as Moses Mendoza has, his co-religionists have even more," continued Beauregard quietly. "Gentlemen, I am not being anti-Semitic when I allude to the immense wealth and power of the world's Jewish communities, a wealth and power out of all proportion to their numbers. Jews own controlling interests in banks, shipping, and newspapers that mold informed opinion in every civilized nation. They control the world's trade in diamonds, they strongly influence every stock exchange, in the aggregate they have at their command investment funds beyond assessment."

“Wealth and power which will be denied to the Confederate States of America if we acquire a reputation as an anti-Semitic régime,” stated Legare flatly.

“You have it exactly,” said Beauregard. “Support and influence which will in that event be placed at the disposal of the Union, once world Jewry becomes convinced that the Confederacy persecutes their people. The Mendozas are one of the most renowned and respected families of the Hebrew faith in North America. If the son and heir of this family is perceived to have been falsely accused and executed by brutal, ignorant Christian bigots, for a murder which Jewish opinion holds was committed by some Gentile or other, then our task of making secession good will become a hundredfold more difficult. Perhaps impossible.”

“But what if Simon Mendoza is guilty, general?” I could not help asking.

“General Beauregard, you need to understand something from the outset,” Legare told him, calmly but firmly. “If I undertake this investigation, then I mean to find out the truth and nothing more nor less than the truth, nor will I conceal or cover up anyone’s guilt where the crime of murder is concerned.”

“Nor would I ever ask you to do otherwise, Major,” said Beauregard with a sigh. “The Confederacy is a sublime and sacred cause, gentlemen. If in the end it must be buried, then let it be buried with honor. We will not begin this war by betraying that honor. If Simon Mendoza murdered Xavier Calhoun, an officer in his own regiment, then he shall hang by the neck until he is dead, no matter who his father is nor how much others of his race might offer us to spare him from punishment. There will be no cash value placed on Southern justice, gentlemen. We’d be as bad as the Yankees then. But if what is going on here is an attempt to frame an innocent man in order to perpetrate an anti-Semitic hoax, thereby angering and alienating the South’s influential Jewish community, then that must be stopped at all costs. Your task, gentlemen, is not just to find Calhoun’s killer and recover those despatches, as vital as that part of your mission certainly is. Beyond that, you must demonstrate

for all to see that in the Confederate States of America a Jew will receive justice, whether that justice consists of vindication or the noose. We'll hang Simon Mendoza if we have to, but let's make damned good and sure we're hanging the right man!"

"Understood, general," said Legare.

General Beauregard took several sheets of paper out of his desk and handed them to Legare. They were inscribed and sealed. "This is a warrant signed by Governor Pickens under power of the present state of emergency in South Carolina. It authorizes you to conduct searches anywhere you deem necessary, compel testimony under penalty of law, and command the services and facilities of any and all civil authority you may require. The second is my own special order in my capacity as Confederate Department Commander, authorizing you to use any and all military facilities, supplies, transport, or manpower you may need in order to accomplish your mission, recover the despatches, and apprehend the murderer or murderers of Captain Calhoun. Track this thing down, gentlemen! Find those despatches before the Yankees do!"

III

*“Hurrah! Hurrah! For Southern rights, hurrah!
Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag
That bears the single star!”*

Old Charleston!

It was a world and a way of life which have vanished as completely as that of ancient Rome or the days of knights in armor. The events of which I write took place only thirty-four years ago, and yet when I speak of seeing the Bonnie Blue Flag flying over Fort Sumter and men in butternut gray, it is almost as if I am recalling an oration by Cicero in the Forum, or telling how I drew a longbow at Agincourt. As Hugo Legare and I rode through the cobbled streets of Charleston that morning, I think that somehow I knew that whether the future held victory or defeat, I was seeing the old city and the old way of life for the last time. The shells that had rained on Sumter had changed the world utterly, and Charleston would never be the same.

It was a world of gallant gentlemen in beaver hats and silken cravats who walked abroad flourishing sword canes, who came in from their slave-tilled fields in the evening to sit on a cool veranda with a whiskey peg and a copy of John Donne or Tacitus in the original Latin. It was a world of beautiful women who wore spotless white crinolines and carried

parasols, who attended the Dock Street Theater, a riverside picnic, or a cockfight with equal pleasure; women who sometimes poisoned suspiciously light-skinned babies born in the slave quarters or sold their husbands' slave mistresses into brothels while the master was away. Society folk strolled along Broad Street or the Battery in the cool of the evening, or rode to fancy balls and receptions in open landaus driven through the warm nights by liveried black coachmen. Palms and palmettos shaded the streets and benches of Battery Park and the old town south of Broad. Steamships and sailing vessels crowded the anchorages along the Cooper River wharves and down along the inlets of the sea islands, loading rice and tobacco and indigo, timber and resin and pitch from the Carolina pines, hard yellow corn to make gruel for famine-pinched western Ireland or feed West Indian sugar cane cutters, alligator hides and beaver pelts. Above all, they loaded King Cotton himself for the long voyage to the hungry mills of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Manchester, Leeds, and Lyons.

I am perfectly well aware that I lived in the airy, brightly-lit upper chambers of that structure built on slavery, and so I saw only the gentility and the courteous refinement while I could disregard the cruelty and the misery of the system that supported my world. There was a high spirit of adventure abroad during those first days in April of '61, as Hugo Legare and I hunted a murderer and a packet of papers through the streets of Charleston. Yet in the privacy of our own thoughts, I think we both knew that the city we loved was doomed.

"We'll go to my place first," Legare told me. "I need to speak to Balthazar. I want him to do some digging for me."

"Still in Henrietta Street?" I asked.

"Yes. By the way, I've redone my will and left the house to Balthazar, in case I don't return. He's the only one I'd trust to take care of my collection, other than yourself, of course, but somehow I can't see Miss Christie finding a prominent place at Belfort for my Apocalypse." Legare lived in a small house on Henrietta Street, in the upper wards of the city

across from the Citadel parade ground. He let the bottom floor to an apothecary and made do with the upstairs, living with only a single servant, which by Charleston standards was Spartan. He filled his comfortable bachelor apartment with all manner of interesting objects and curios. Some of these items were souvenirs of his most memorable cases up to that time, mementos which each carried a bloody tale behind them. There was the sword cane of the infamous Count Vitalius, and the logbook of the pirate ship *Lord Gordon*. There was the devilish black box of the wretched Maitland, and a voodoo necklace from the horrible Emory Plantation affair. Other items of bric-a-brac simply appealed to Legare's taste for the bizarre and outré, such as a South Sea Islander's feathered war club, a reliquary which allegedly contained the big toe of St. Joseph of Cupertino, as well as the aforementioned series of all twelve woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer's "Apocalypse". Legare had them hanging three to a wall in his bedroom; I never even attempted to fathom how he slept at night with those monstrous depictions all around him.

We tethered our horses at the rear of Legare's house. At that time Legare was riding a fine roan gelding called Tenbrooks, and he cared for the animal himself, grooming and feeding and bedding the mount down for the night. "I won't offsaddle," he said. "I'll have a word with Balthazar and then we'll toddle off to the jail to see our prime suspect." He pumped some water into the trough for Tenbrooks and Corsair and gave them both a feedbag of oats. We mounted to Legare's chambers by an iron outside staircase. Upon entering his sitting room we found his man Balthazar, dressed in a blue jacket, white cravat, and white knee stockings with silver-buckled shoes, the customary livery for a gentleman's servant. He was sitting in an armchair reading the latest *Charleston Courier*, but rose when we entered the room. "Good morning, sir," he said in his mellifluous voice. "Good morning, Lord Balbriggan. It is pleasant to see you again."

In any other household, for a black servant to sit in his master's armchair reading a newspaper would have been unheard of, an intolerable

familiarity which would have gained the offender a flogging. But Balthazar was unique in his relationship with Hugo Legare. Unlike most of his race who worked in the town houses he was not confined to a narrow shack in the back yard, but had his own room in the back of the apartment, which Legare never entered without permission. Balthazar was not a slave, nor had he ever been. He served Hugo Legare for wages so generous that he was reputed to be the most highly paid free negro in the state, wages which, I once learned, he invested in Bank of England bonds and gilt securities. Balthazar was born in Jamaica, and at the time of the war's opening he was aged somewhere in his early fifties. His smooth black features were impassive and unlined, although the fringe of hair around his bald skull showed flecks of white. Over the years he had self-educated himself to a higher standard than many college men of my acquaintance. He could read, write, and speak not only English but French and Spanish and some Dutch as well. Whenever he conversed with me or with others of Legare's small circle of intimate colleagues, his speech was that of a cultivated Englishman. Yet when necessary, he could speak the quasi-African Gullah dialect of the Low Country blacks and dress the part to such perfection that no one, white or black, would think him anything but some ignorant blue-gum "geechee" right out of the cypress swamp.

"I have a problem assigned," Legare told him now.

"The unfortunate death of Captain Calhoun, sir?" responded the black man. "I rather thought you might be called in. I was just reading about it in the newspaper."

"And what does the brilliant and incisive editor of the *Courier* think about it all?" asked Legare.

"His opinion is that Mr. Simon Mendoza is the guilty party," said Balthazar. "The theory seems to be that Mr. Mendoza's Hebrew religious persuasion in some manner predisposes him to shoot a Christian gentleman such as the captain in the back, rather than in an honorable duel."

“Rubbish!” snapped Legare. “But I suspect it’s an attitude we are going to run into more than once during the course of this investigation. Balthazar, I want you to check out Calhoun and also the Mendoza family for servants, tradespeople, gossip on the street or in the quarters, bring me back anything you can. I am especially interested in Calhoun’s associations with women. You recall your first reaction to the news of Calhoun’s death, Redmond? The remark about the jealous husband? You may have hit the mark without being aware of it.” These instructions were usual when Legare began any case, for Balthazar was more than a personal servant. He was a valued colleague and a fellow criminal investigator, who performed an utterly vital service without which Legare would have been stymied, without which no lawman in Charleston could function. Balthazar was Hugo Legare’s ear, his eye, and sometimes his voice in the African community.

In 1861 the population of Charleston consisted of twenty-nine thousand whites and thirty-seven thousand blacks. Blacks labored primarily in the fields of the plantations, but in fact they were everywhere. Africans worked in the railroad yards and as porters on trains, on the docks, and in the factories and mills. They drove wagons and fancy coaches and hansom cabs, swept and repaired the streets, labored as masons and ironworkers and carpenters, hauled merchandise in the warehouses and served as night watchmen in shops and offices. Black women worked in untold kitchens and nurseries and laundries, sewed for tailors and clothing manufacturers, and worked in dye houses. Light-skinned mulatto women provided at least half the courtesans in Charleston’s sporting houses, the lighter their complexions the higher the prices they could command from their clients. Collectively, no secret of white Charleston was unknown to the black community. This was a wellspring of information that Hugo Legare had to tap, and he could never do so on his own, nor could any white man. Balthazar mined the lode for him. The valet took raw data in the form of rumor, speculation, gossip, and disconnected bits and pieces of information,

then sifted it for the nuggets of truth which, more often than not, would crack a case wide open. Very shortly Legare would have at his command every bit of gossip, scandal, or trivia which the slaves and servants of Xavier Calhoun and the Mendoza family might know. "Shouldn't we be concentrating on finding the missing despatches?" I asked

"I haven't forgotten them, don't worry," said Legare with a grim smile. "Unfortunately, I haven't the faintest idea where they might be, and the only way we are going to find them is to get at the truth of what happened in St. Michael's churchyard last Friday morning. The crux of the issue is this, Redmond: are we searching for a spy or a murderer? By that I mean, was this done by someone who killed Calhoun out of personal motivations and then took the despatches, either as a diversion or as an afterthought to give or sell them to the Union? Or are we dealing with a spy who committed murder in the line of business? I have a pretty good idea as to who in this town entertains Unionist or abolitionist sentiments, and the Mendoza family have never been among them. I do have one lead I want to follow, a Yankee clerk named Winthrop who works for the Mendoza concern and who has been overheard to voice anti-slavery opinions. If Simon did take the despatches and pass them on to a Northern agent, this chap is a likely candidate."

"Had we best not apprehend him at once, then, if there is any chance he may have the despatches?" I asked

"We do not as yet know that Winthrop has done anything to be apprehended for. I do find his behavior a bit odd, since he has had a few run-ins with our fire-eaters and been roughed up, yet he still stays on here in Charleston despite the increasingly hostile climate. We definitely need to have a word with him, but he's not going anywhere. I've had a man on him around the clock since Friday. First let's have another chat with Simon Mendoza, and I want you to meet him and see what you think. It's time he came clean on a few things."

"I shall start immediately as well, sir, with your permission," said Balthazar, departing for his room where he would doubtless assume one of his many disguises

Technically speaking, Simon Mendoza was a military prisoner charged with a military offense under the articles of war, the murder of a superior officer. However, the army had not yet had time to erect a stockade, and so he was being held in the city jail in Magazine Street. He stood up as we entered his cell, a slender young man with a pale face, refined features, and a fine shock of black hair with an Imperial beard of sorts, a feeble imitation of the luxurious growth which graced the chins of Legare and Beauregard and other older men. The prisoner was wearing his Confederate uniform, the one in which he allegedly entered St. Michael's churchyard in order to murder Captain Calhoun. He stood to attention and saluted us nervously

"You already know me, Mendoza," said Legare. "This is Captain James Redmond, Lord Balbriggan, who has been assigned with me to investigate the death of Xavier Calhoun and recover the missing military documents. You may be aware that in the past we have handled a number of criminal matters for the Charleston police. We have just come from a meeting with General Beauregard, where we have been given special powers to bring this business to a conclusion. Sit down." It was an order, not a request, and Mendoza seated himself warily on the edge of his straw-filled mattress while Legare appropriated the single chair, leaving me perforce to lean against the door.

"I've already told you everything I know," said Mendoza in an uncertain voice.

"You have done nothing of the kind," said Legare. "You have simply denied the charges against you, which is by no means the same thing. I haven't spoken with you at length up until now, because I wanted to ascertain the known facts and check them out for myself." Legare leaned forward and pointed a finger at the young man. "Listen to me very carefully, Mendoza," he said in a level voice. "You are deep in Queer Street, and only I and this gentleman here stand between you and death on the gallows. Either you are lying to me, and you killed Captain Calhoun and took those despatches, or someone else has gone to an immense

amount of trouble to make it look as though you did. Whichever is the case, I intend to find out. I am going to ask you some questions, and I don't want any lies or half-truths or evasions. We are your only hope, Mendoza. Play fast and loose with us, and it's the rope. Do you clearly understand everything that I have just told you? You'd better."

"I comprehend better than you know, major," said the young man bitterly. "This is the modern variation of the ancient accusation, the blood libel against the Jew."

"I think not. I think it is a case of espionage. Presuming for the moment that you are innocent as you claim, then you have been made a scapegoat not because you are a Jew but because you are the handy and obvious choice. You had a running public altercation with Xavier Calhoun that on one occasion led to violence, and you have a credible motive for wanting to murder him. You would serve your own interest far better, Mendoza, by doing your damndest to convince me that you did not kill him, rather than by hollering persecution."

"I did not kill Calhoun, nor did I steal those despatches!" asserted the young man in a determined voice. "I am not a traitor, Major Legare!"

"For your sake, I hope you are telling me the truth," Legare returned. "Now, we will start at the beginning, and you will tell us everything, holding back nothing. What was the original cause of the quarrel between yourself and Xavier Calhoun?"

"He made foul and brutish advances of an indecent nature to my sister Naomi!" replied the prisoner angrily.

Legare pulled out a notebook and a pencil and began to take notes. "When was this, exactly?"

"On the twenty-second day of October of last year."

"In other words, before the present secession crisis, when the decedent was still a civilian?"

"Yes. He had been paying his addresses to Naomi for a time, very much against the wishes of Father and myself."

“Why? What were your family’s objections to Mr. Calhoun as a suitor for your sister’s hand?” asked Legare.

“To begin with, because Calhoun wasn’t Jewish,” replied Mendoza with a sigh. “Our family are *frummer Yidden*, major, that is to say religiously observant Jews. Naomi and I are of a more liberal turn of mind. We do not reject Christian society completely, however much they may reject us, but we draw the line at intermarriage. Father and I both have encouraged Naomi to receive the addresses of a junior associate in our business, a gentleman of our own faith named Mendel Cohen, but she has a will of her own. It was more than religious scruples, though, even before that horrible incident last October. Calhoun was a *shlumpf*, an uncouth boor, always a sneer on his face and whiskey on his breath.”

“I remember him,” I put in, feeling some sympathy for the young man despite my effort to remain a detached observer.

“And then last October, your sister informed you that Mr. Calhoun’s attentions had exceeded the bounds of propriety?”

“I saw it with my own eyes!” cried Mendoza, quivering with rage. “I came home early from the office that day in order to retrieve some papers from my father’s safe, and I found him in my sister’s room! Her—her garments were disarranged, and she was too terrified to cry out for help! God alone knows what would have happened had I not come along just in time!”

“Where were your servants?” asked Legare.

“Aunt Rhody was at the market and Naomi had given Uncle Tobias permission to go fishing,” said Simon. “They are both quite elderly, and they have been with us for many years ever since before Naomi and I were born, as much part of our family as any Gentiles could ever become. We indulge them.”

“Cook? Footman? Coachman? Gardener?”

“Naomi does all the cooking for our family ever since our mother died. As I have said, we are Torah-observant Jews. We keep a kosher kitchen and only a Jewish woman may cook or handle either sets of

dishes or tableware. Whenever the whole family needs a coach we rent one from a livery stable and Toby drives. We don't go out as a family very much any more, except when we walk to the synagogue on *shabbos*. Father has been ill for many months and other than going to and from the office he seldom goes out. He used to go to the synagogue three or four nights a week to study Torah, but since he has been sick Rabbi Klass brings him the *seforim*, the holy books he needs, from the House of Study. We have no plantation or country home, so we have no need of a large staff. We do own a number of seamstresses and laborers who work for Continental Mercantile, but they are part of our business assets, not personal servants."

"Rhody and Tobias are slaves?"

"Yes. They will be manumitted on my father's death, under the terms of his will."

"Very well, returning to this day in October when you discovered Calhoun in the act of assaulting your sister, what happened when you confronted him?"

"I ordered him to unhand her at once, of course. He laughed at me and made a very coarse and insulting remark which I had rather not repeat, a foul aspersion on my sister's chastity, sir! I ran to my room to get my pistol, but by then he had left the house, which was fortunate for him! Major Legare, I did not kill Calhoun Friday morning in St. Michael's yard, but by God, sir, I most certainly would have killed him that day if I could have come upon him with my gun!"

"Was that the same pocket pistol which was found in your bureau by Lieutenant Halliburton on Saturday morning?" asked Legare.

"No, sir, I have a Walker Colt. I also own a pair of rifled Turkish dueling pistols, with one of which I hoped to bring down that bully Calhoun on the field of honor. I never saw that little gun before in my life, or that despatch case with the number four on it, or that...that damned filthy book! Someone put those things in my bureau to implicate me in all of this!"

“You subsequently challenged Calhoun to an encounter, which he refused?”

“Refused rudely and arrogantly, sir!” replied Mendoza with a scowl. “He made insulting references to my religion and further revolting insinuations about Naomi, going around the clubs and hotel bars claiming he had compromising letters written by her. It was intolerable, I tell you! I posted him as a coward, of course, but then in December, when we met by chance in Polly Roper’s rooms...”

“Yes, I am aware of that incident,” interrupted Legare. “It was a matter of some public remark at the time. After that there arose the matter of your application for a commission in the Palmetto Volunteers?”

Mendoza leaped to his feet and paced the cell, agitated and distraught. “Those swine treated me in a disgraceful manner, sir, disgraceful! My family have lived in Charleston for a century and a half! We have never shown anything but good citizenship and civic responsibility! My great-grandfather bought a man-o’-war for the Continental Navy and fitted the vessel out with his own funds, and when the British came in 1780 he and all his sons fought on the siege lines! We have entertained men like John Rutledge and Henry Clay and the Marquis de Lafayette in our home! After every fire, every hurricane in the past century, the Mendoza purse has always been the first to open and the deepest to donate in order to repair and rebuild Charleston. For generations we have supplied the people of this town with everything they wanted, and yet now we are told that I am not good enough to wear the same uniform as the sons of our customers. They wouldn’t even entrust me with a private’s rifle! You tell me that is not persecution, Major?”

“I do not deny that Captain Calhoun used you abominably,” replied Legare in some exasperation. “I make no excuses for his outrageous behavior, but I remind you that he is not charged with murder, Mendoza, you are! I again put it to you that your best defense is to prove that you didn’t do it. By harping on Calhoun’s cruel and bigoted conduct towards you and the insult he offered to your sister, can you not see that

you are only reinforcing the case against you by strengthening your motive?"

"I didn't kill him, I tell you!" cried the young man miserably. "I would have done, if I could have killed him in the right way, the honourable way for a Southern gentleman, on the dueling field. But I didn't shoot him in the back, and I didn't take those papers or pass them on to Union spies. It would make no sense, Major Legare! Everything my family is or has been, everything we will be, everything we possess is bound up inextricably with this city and with South Carolina. We have risen with the South for generations, and now we have no choice but to rise or fall with the Confederacy. I would never betray my state or my heritage, Major, never!" It was obvious that the youth was far more disturbed by the accusation of treason than the murder charge.

"For what it may be worth, Mendoza, I knew nothing of your application for a commission, nor had I heard of your being refused," I put in. "Calhoun was in with a clique of my brother officers, he had cronies on staff as well, and I can see how he could have put in a word here and there and blocked your appointment. But had I heard of such disgraceful conduct I would have gone to the colonel personally, and then we would have seen just how much weight my elevated Irish title of nobility does in fact carry with these social-climbing planter aristocrats. We are not all bigots."

"Thank you, my lord, but that does me little good now," said Mendoza dejectedly.

"Do you still deny entering the churchyard of St. Michael's by the Meeting Street gate at around twenty minutes past four o'clock on the morning of Friday, April the twelfth?" asked Legare, relentlessly returning to the subject at hand.

"I do deny it."

"Then comes it that Caiphas Turner, the sexton and bell ringer, claims that he saw you enter the premises at that time and come into the vestibule of the church? He knows you by sight."

“Yes, I know Caiphas well.”

“He asserts that you turned and left, that you pushed right by him without saying a word.”

“I don’t understand how he can say that. It wasn’t me.” Mendoza appeared to be genuinely puzzled by the bell ringer’s statement.

“How is it that you were recognized by Constable William Evers walking up Broad Street towards your home at about twenty minutes until five that morning, carrying a black Gladstone bag?” Legare pressed him.

“I don’t know Evers, at least not by name, although possibly I’d know his face. All I can tell you is that it wasn’t me, it must have been someone disguised to look like me!” insisted Mendoza.

“As part of an elaborate plot to implicate you in Calhoun’s murder? Who would do such a thing?” asked Legare.

“I don’t know, damn it!” cried the harassed young man. “Pardon me, major, my lord, I mean no disrespect, but don’t you think I’ve been wracking my brains trying to figure out the answer to that very question?”

“Now we get to the nub of the matter, Mendoza,” said Legare in a level voice. “Your story is paper-thin and no officer on your court-martial is going to believe a single word of it. I presume you are sufficiently intelligent to realize that. Your only faint hope of acquittal is to prove that you were somewhere else at the time Calhoun was being killed. *Where were you?* At home in bed?”

“Good Lord, no!” exclaimed Simon. “With Beauregard’s ultimatum set to expire at four o’clock? No one in Charleston was asleep that morning!”

“I daresay you’re right. Then where were you? Specifically, Private Mendoza, why were you not with your unit taking part in the attack on Fort Sumter, even without a rifle?”

“I—I have no unit. I was never assigned to a company, just used as a servant and an errand-boy. I was never really part of the regiment, even as a private. No one cared whether I showed up for drill or not, and when I did they bullyragged me and made me drill with a broom instead of a weapon. They made me a waiter at officers’ picnics, a stable

boy, a latrine orderly. But that night I still put on my uniform and went down to the Battery, hoping to get put on one of the gun crews, packing gun-cotton into charging sacks or stacking cannon balls or hauling water for the horses on the caissons, anything so that someday I would be able to tell my children that I was part of it all, that I was there the day South Carolina struck for her freedom.” Mendoza’s voice was a low monotone, his face haggard and drawn from the memory of an unbearable humiliation. “Calhoun was there. He pointed me out to the other soldiers and some people who were standing by, saying ‘Look at the little Jewboy, all dressed up like a soldier!’ Things like that. He swaggered over and threatened to use the flat of his saber on me, beat me again in front of that leering crowd of jackanapes *goyim*. I couldn’t have lived with that. I left. I went home and took off my uniform, ashamed to be seen wearing it in the streets if I wasn’t fighting. Then I put on my civilian clothes and just wandered the streets. About three o’clock I ended up at a house in Wentworth Street.”

“What house was that?” asked Legare, his pencil scratching notes on his pad.

“The woman who lives there is named Montez. Her house is, er, well, it’s rather a...”

“I am familiar with the establishment of Regina Montez,” interrupted Legare. “How long did you stay there?”

“Until dawn,” said Mendoza. “All of the, ah, all of the other ladies of the house were down on the Battery or up on the roof watching the harbor, waiting for the firing to begin, so Regina, uh, she entertained me personally, so to speak. That’s where I was, Major Legare. That’s where I was when the first cannon roared in the great war for Southern independence. I was lying in the arms of a high-yellow whore, and to complete my utter disgrace and abject debasement, when I heard the guns open fire I broke down and wept.”

“If it is any consolation to you, Mendoza, I can make you this one promise,” said Legare, his voice not unkind. “If you can win clear on

these charges and regain your freedom, and if you still desire to see war, then I assure you that you will get your wish. You will see war until you have had a bellyful of it, and there will be more than enough to go around for Jews and Gentiles alike." He closed his notebook with a sigh. "Is there anything at all you can think of which might prove your innocence?"

"I was with Regina Montez when Calhoun was killed. Ask her."

"I intend to. Have you your headgear? That's it on the shelf behind you?"

"My forage cap?" asked Mendoza. "Yes sir." He took it down and showed it to Legare, a regulation gray kepi with gold piping.

"Stand up and put it on, please," ordered Legare. Mendoza shook out the white neck cloth and placed the kepi on his head, puzzled. The white linen neck cloth covered the back of his neck and flowed down below the collar of his uniform tunic, in a manner similar to the headgear worn by the French *Chasseurs d'Afrique* or our own Indian regiments when they do duty on the Northwest Frontier. "Button your jacket," directed Legare. Mendoza did so, tucking the neck cloth inside his collar as he buttoned his jacket. Legare examined him carefully, then turned him around and examined him from the rear. "Yes, it's possible," he conceded. "Your neck cloth conceals your features completely from the rear, of course, and in a weak light you would resemble almost any young man with a beard and a moustache. Any nighttime identification could never be completely certain."

"It couldn't have been me, major," insisted Mendoza. "I've told you where I was. Believe me, I wish I'd been somewhere else."

"Do you own a black grip or carpet bag of the kind the English call a Gladstone bag?"

"Yes. The police took it."

"I know. I just wanted to confirm that it was your property. When you changed into your civilian suit, did you carry it with you when you left the house?"

“No, of course not,” responded Mendoza. “Why should I? I wasn’t going on a journey.”

“Yet both Turner and Evers claim that when they saw you or whoever it was, the person was carrying a black Gladstone bag.”

“Whoever was pretending to be me must have carried the stolen despatches in the bag!” exclaimed Mendoza excitedly.

“Quite probably, as well as something else of importance. One last question. Were you aware that Captain Calhoun had been assigned to staff duties at General Beauregard’s headquarters?”

“I am a private, sir, as Calhoun and others have never ceased to remind me,” said Mendoza bitterly. “I am not *au fait* with the comings and goings of officers at staff level. Calhoun and his friends made sure that I never had reason to be.”

Hugo arose to go. “We will do what we can to clear this up, Mendoza. If you are lying to me, then I assure you that in the short time you have left, you will wish you had never been born. For the moment I am inclined to give you the benefit of the doubt. Is there anything we can do for you? Do you need books, newspapers, tobacco? I can get such things for you.”

“You are very kind, sir. Would it be possible to allow my sister to send in meals for me from home?” asked Simon. “Most of the jail food contains pork or is fried in fatback. If I am going to die for being Jewish then at least let me practice my faith and keep the dietary laws.”

“I’ll have a word with the head jailer,” said Legare, ignoring Mendoza’s latter remarks. “Whatever Miss Naomi sends in will have to be inspected before you receive it, of course.”

“A file in the gefilte fish?” asked Simon with a wry yet engagingly boyish smile. “Not to worry, Major. My father would never allow it. Not kosher.”

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On leaving the jail, we rode downstreet for the police station. "I want to show you the items which were found in Mendoza's room, and I also want you to go over the murder site," said Legare. "The Mendoza home is also nearby, on the corner of King Street and Broad. A very Charleston murder, this. The entire affair took place within a radius of only a few city blocks."

"You know, Legare, as grateful as I am for the experiences you have provided me, I still don't understand why you drag me along on your investigations," I said ruefully as we rode along. "I'm nowhere near as quick and keen as you are, and when presented with the same set of facts as you I always guess wrong."

"As I've told you often enough before, Redmond, you shouldn't be *guessing* at all," replied Hugo with a chuckle. "You should be deducing, inferring, analyzing, ratiocinating. But to answer your question, you provide me with several inestimable services. If you'll forgive me for stating the most petty one first, you may recall that in the past a lot of these high-nosed planters and society matriarchs have been so fascinated by a genuine Irish baron that they failed to pay sufficient attention to what I, the mere policeman, was doing or the questions I was asking."

"Especially the society matriarchs with unmarried daughters," I sighed. "Before I married Christie I had to fight them off with a shillelagh! At least I don't have to worry about that any more."

"No, you don't," agreed Legare. "The rules of the game have changed. Now you have to worry about the married ladies themselves. Men have hunting, gambling, and horse racing, but ladies must find other amusements. I imagine there is already an informal competition among certain female cliques as to who among them will first be able to lure you into an adulterous intrigue. To continue, there is also the fact that you've also saved my hide on more than one case, such as the time you intercepted that whiskey bottle Big Jim McCoy was about to wrap around my skull, not to mention getting me out of that trap at Emory Plantation. Don't sell yourself short, James, you're quite a

resourceful chap and handy to have around in a pinch. But finally, you often do me the priceless service of bringing me down to earth with a bump. I have a tendency to become wrapped up in a case so deeply that I overcomplicate it and start seeing things that aren't there. I've been so deeply involved with the most complex and depraved twists and turns of the human mind that it sometimes has a morbid effect on my deductive faculties. I once wasted a whole month investigating what I thought was the most subtle and elaborate murder plots I had ever come across, only to discover in the end that it was just a petty swindle gone wrong. The swindler ran into a drunken sailor who clubbed him on the head and robbed him. You are the tether who keeps my overinflated theories moored to earth. There is the Mendoza home."

As we turned left into Broad Street, our horses picking their way through the rumbling wagons and cabs and milling pedestrians, I looked the place over. It was a tall, white "Charleston single" house of simple elegance, with bright green shutterwork and an ornate iron fence around a middle-sized lot. "A modest residence for Charleston's wealthiest citizen," I remarked.

"The Mendozas have always preferred the substance of wealth rather than the outward ostentation," said Legare. "That's probably one of the reasons why they have held on to so much of it. It's just on the north side of Broad Street, which I suppose is symbolic, given young Simon's evident desire to get south of Broad. We are riding on Charleston's social dividing line, Redmond. As far as society here is concerned, this street is as wide as the Atlantic. You see that window on the ground floor, on the Broad Street side?"

"I see it," I said.

"Unless I have been misinformed, that is Simon Mendoza's window. You notice the interesting feature about it?"

"The house comes right up to the sidewalk," I observed. "The window is accessible to passers-by. If it were unlatched someone could quite

easily open it and climb inside in just a few seconds. It would be risky, though. Anyone on the street could see them gaining entry.”

“No sign that the window was forced, but that means nothing,” said Legare. “There are a hundred different ways one can gain entry to a private home in Charleston and plant evidence or remove something, or take a wax impression so an unscrupulous locksmith could manufacture a duplicate key. Balthazar and I have both conducted our own unofficial inspections of suspect premises in the past. Charleston is a peaceful city, outside the poor quarters our incidence of street crime is low, and we haven’t had any slave trouble since 1822, thanks be to God. No one locks their doors in Charleston.”

“Do I take it that you believe someone planted incriminating evidence in Simon Mendoza’s room? That you believe Simon Mendoza?” I asked skeptically.

“I wouldn’t say that I believe him, Redmond, so much as I would say that I’m inclined to seek more evidence before disbelieving him. I can’t shake this feeling that there is something artificial here.” We tethered our horses at the trough in front of the police station at the corner of Broad and Meeting. In the squad room within we found both Constable William Evers, the second witness against Simon Mendoza, and Lieutenant George Halliburton of the detective force. Halliburton was a muscular, heavy-set man with the thick side whiskers we called “weepers” in those days, a dusty brown corduroy suit, a battered bowler hat, and a perpetual well-chewed cigar sticking out of the side of his mouth. He was a competent and bulldog-brave officer whose single fault was a lack of imagination. Evers was a tall young man in a blue police uniform with the standard high stovepipe hat.

“Good to see you again, Lord B.,” said Halliburton, pumping my hand. “Although I reckon I ought to call you Cap’n now, just like Inspector Legare here is a Major. Takes a bit of getting used to.”

“I want to show Redmond those things you collected from Simon Mendoza’s bureau drawer,” Legare told him. “The military is taking over

the investigation. Here is my authorization from General Beauregard.” He displayed the document we had been given. “All the physical evidence will remain here in the central station, under lock and key. I may want some of the uniforms, and I will probably need Tuscarora.”

“Fred’s out today. He’s joining up,” said Halliburton.

“Damn!” swore Legare. “Well, I suppose the best of the boys will.”

“I’m joining the colors next week myself, sir,” said Evers.

“Make sure you leave a fully sworn deposition, then,” instructed Legare. “We may have to get you back here for any trial or court-martial proceedings which result. Who knows, maybe you’ll be back here testifying instead of standing around someplace in Virginia when a Yankee bullet comes your way.”

Halliburton handed back the papers from the general and the governor. “This is an espionage thing for certain then, Inspector?” he asked grimly.

“It looks that way. I can’t afford to believe that the disappearance of vital Confederate military despatches is merely incidental to a spur-of-the-moment grudge killing.”

“Hellfire!” swore Halliburton. “I don’t know what was in them papers Mendoza took, Mr. Legare, but I take it they could get a lot of Southern boys killed?”

“That is an understatement, Halliburton. They could lose us the war.” Halliburton turned and began opening the large locked cabinet where police evidence was kept, and Legare turned to the constable. “Evers, Simon Mendoza flatly denies that it was he you saw out front on Friday morning. Are you a hundred per cent on your identification?”

“If he denies it, then he’s lying, sir,” said Evers confidently. “I’ve seen Simon and Miss Naomi walking up and down Broad Street almost every day for the three years I’ve been on the force. It was him, all right.”

“You’re certain despite the poor light?” pressed Legare.

“There was gaslight enough from the street lamps, sir, and there was light from the flare rockets in the harbor. I passed within four feet of

him, on the north side of Broad Street. He was walking towards his house carrying that black Gladstone bag we took from his closet.”

“Did you speak to him?” asked Legare.

“Didn’t bother, sir,” replied the policeman. “The noise of all that artillery down in the harbor was so stupendous that even this far upstreet you had to shout to make yourself heard. I wondered what he was doing away from his unit at a time like that, but then I figured maybe he was on some kind of military errand, seeing as he was carrying the bag.”

“Did you see anyone else in the vicinity of St. Michael’s?” Legare inquired.

“Not at that time, no, sir. Everyone was down at the Battery or up on the housetops. A couple of hours earlier we did have to move a bunch of folks out of the area and chase them out of the steeple, because we were worried the Yanks might open up on the town itself and the church spire would be an open target from Sumter. But Major Anderson never fired towards Charleston, although he could have killed a lot of people and really torn up the rich section of town.”

“Major Anderson is a Southerner himself, a planter from Kentucky,” I reminded the young patrolman.

“That figures,” said Halliburton. “If it had been some Boston abolitionist bastard in command he would have leveled the town.” The lieutenant plunked a canvas bag down on the squadroom desk, and from within he drew a small pistol the size of my palm, a bound leather volume with no title on either the cover or the spine, and a leather pouch labeled “C.S.A.” with the numeral “4” on the flap in white lacquer.

“Any idea which gun dealer in town might have sold this?” asked Legare, holding the pistol up for my inspection.

“It’s an Eley, all right, a British make,” I confirmed. “I believe it is called the Banker’s Pal model, since it is allegedly intended for bank managers and couriers who carry money.”

“More likely ladies of the evening who need to ward off non-paying drunks,” sniffed Halliburton. “A pimp’s gun.”

“Most of the British weapons imported into this country are long arms,” I commented. “Enfield rifles, Purdey shotguns and the like. You Americans are the world *aficionados* of the pistol, and you make very good ones, so you’ve no need to import them. I doubt there are many of these for sale over the counter in Charleston.”

“It could have come from anywhere,” said Halliburton. “A sailor might have sold it in a tavern for a bottle of white lightning. Some gambler might have pawned it.”

“You also confiscated a black bag?” asked Legare.

“Here it is, Inspector, I mean Major.” Halliburton produced the bag from the cabinet. Legare went over it carefully, with a magnifying glass he pulled from his sleeve pocket. “No secret compartments or false linings,” said Halliburton, shaking his head mournfully. “I thought of that, sir. We probed the lining with needles and we’d have torn the bag apart if it weren’t needed for evidence in court. The despatches aren’t hidden in there.”

“I know,” said Legare. “I didn’t expect to find them. I was hoping there might be a thread or two left inside it, but there’s nothing.”

“A thread or two of what, sir?” asked the police lieutenant.

“Of the murderer’s change of clothing, which I hypothesize that he carried with him in this bag so he could get out of his Confederate uniform as soon as possible and back into civilian clothes or some other disguise. This may not have been the actual bag used, of course, since it’s a common type. It would have been sufficient for the killer to be aware of the fact that Simon Mendoza owned one. Just as it would not have been necessary for the killer to wear Simon Mendoza’s actual uniform. In fact, there could have been no way he could have known that Mendoza went home and changed clothes, leaving his uniform hanging in his closet. In a town swept by military fervor it would have been easy to buy a Palmetto Volunteer’s ensemble in any outfitters.”

“That is, if you believe Simon and Moses Mendoza’s taradiddle about some anti-Jewish plot to get him!” snorted Halliburton.

“If Simon Mendoza wanted to ambush Xavier Calhoun and steal the despatches, why did he venture out to commit the crime lugging this great grip?” asked Legare. “He could have tucked the pouch under his arm and departed the scene. Anyone observing him would have taken him for a soldier on military business. Or better yet, he could have removed the papers from the despatch case at the scene, and stuffed them into his boot top or his vest pocket. There was something bulky which was necessary to the commission of the crime, something that was placed in this bag or another like it. What but a change of clothing? Now tell me, Redmond, what do you make of this interesting item?”

It was a heavy volume bound in handsome hand-tooled red leather. I opened it, and was startled to see a large colour plate, well executed, of a completely naked man and woman engaged in the act of sexual congress. I turned the pages and saw that every one was the same, an illustration devoid of text. “I have never understood how any man would get pleasure out of this kind of thing,” I mused aloud. “To admire a beautiful girl, to desire her is normal. To attempt to seduce her is male instinct. But to look at pictures argues some kind of grave deficiency—pah!—Holy Mother of God, what filth!” I had now come near the end of the book, and there I found graphic pictures of men and women performing deviate sexual acts with partners of the same sex, and even with animals. I handed the foul thing back to Legare. “Revolting! Depraved! I mean, I’m a man of the world and all that, Legare, but this is monstrous. In Britain, men like that shoot themselves! And as for women...”

“It’s called a pillow book, Lord B.,” said Halliburton genially. “They come from France or the Argentine, mostly, although we’ve confiscated some from as far away as the Lebanon. A lot of sporting houses use them as visual aids, so to speak. A big market for them in private libraries of certain gentlemen with exotic literary tastes. You’d be surprised if I was

to tell you some names. Quite illegal, of course, but we never arrest anybody. Discretion in the name of social decorum and all that.”

“Simon Mendoza must be mentally ill,” I said, shaking my head. “He didn’t strike me as a degenerate.”

“Mendoza denies all knowledge of that book, if you will recall,” Legare reminded me. “It certainly is an odd thing to find scattered around among evidence of murder and treason and espionage, eh? Almost smacks of overkill, as if someone weren’t content with getting Simon Mendoza hanged, but felt compelled to blacken his character beyond redemption as well. There is some heavy hate here.”

Halliburton guffawed. “Oh, come on, Mr. Legare! Surely you haven’t fallen for that ‘poor poisecuted liddle sheeny-man’ tune, have you? Mendoza is guilty as sin! He hated Cap’n Calhoun for taking him down a peg or two at Polly Roper’s and not letting him sign up as a Palmetto officer like as if he was a real gent. Calhoun wouldn’t lower himself to fight a duel with a jumped-up pushcart peddler, and so the little coward snuck up behind him and shot him in the back, and on top of that he stole secret despatches which he’s hidden somewhere, and which he meant to sell to the Yankees as soon as they coughed up his price! A Jew will sell his own grandmother into a whorehouse for a dollar!”

“I am not saying that he is either innocent or guilty!” snapped Legare in exasperation. “I should prefer, though, to have something more concrete in the way of tangible evidence than folk wisdom about Jews selling their grandmothers into bordellos!” We left the police station and crossed Meeting Street into St. Michael’s churchyard, where the crime had taken place. “I didn’t take Halliburton for such a fool,” complained Legare, fuming. “Normally he is a level-headed and efficient officer. Yet it would appear that when it comes to the Jewish people he has the same imbecile blindness as any Russian Cossack riding on a pogrom. I wonder if that may not be what our friend the spy is counting on, this kind of blind bigotry leading us into false inferences and obscuring the whole affair in anti-Semitic smoke?”

“Then you do believe Simon Mendoza is innocent?” I said. “On what evidence, Legare? I’m blessed if I can see anything at all which indicates why we should believe his story.”

“There are simply too many oddities that don’t make sense,” said Legare, pausing beneath a small tree whose boughs were heavy with Spanish moss. “I’ll give you an example. Why did we find the despatch pouch but not the despatches?”

“Because Simon Mendoza removed them and either hid them or passed them on to a Union agent, possibly that Yankee clerk you mentioned earlier.”

“If Mendoza was going to do either of those things, then why did he not hide or pass on the entire pouch? Why did he remove the papers and leave the empty scrip in the first place any police search would examine, along with the probable murder weapon, like a red flag pointing to himself? That pouch is the only piece of hard evidence that connects Simon Mendoza to the events that took place here in this churchyard at four thirty Friday morning. Either Simon is a blithering idiot, a possibility I haven’t yet dismissed, or else someone wanted to make that connection in the eyes of the law. They sacrificed the pouch and risked having the murder weapon traced in order to establish that link. Here is where Calhoun fell.” We were at the grave of the Founding Father, John Rutledge, where the body was found. I noted with a thrill of excitement that there were still dark, grim stains on the granite slab of the great Revolutionary patriot. Then we went into the church and found the Reverend James Elliot, the assistant minister, at work in his study.

“Good morning, Major Legare,” said the reverend gentleman in greeting. “How may I be of service? Caiphas is asleep in his room at the back. Do you wish to speak with him again?” Elliot was a youngish, modish minister with pale, refined features and a somewhat owlish look, a bookish type with something of a precious air. I could imagine finding a murdered corpse on his doorstep had considerably ruffled him.

“That won’t be necessary,” said Legare. “He was positive in his identification before. No, I’d just like to ask you a few general questions by way of background, sir. This is Captain James Redmond, Lord Balbriggan, who is assisting me in this investigation.”

“Lord Balbriggan is known to me,” said Reverend Elliot with a brief bow. “He and his lovely wife Lady Balbriggan have done us the honor of attending services at St. Michael’s when they have been in town.”

“I just wanted to obtain your general impressions of the Mendoza family,” said Legare as we seated ourselves. “I realize that they are not of our faith, but after all, they do live just up the street from here. Surely you must have some acquaintance with them?”

“I know Simon Mendoza and his lovely sister, yes,” replied Reverend Elliot judiciously. “Moses Mendoza and I have occasionally exchanged civilities on the street, and he is a courtly enough old gentleman, but he has been ill in recent months and doesn’t get about much these days. Miss Naomi is of a musical proclivity, and sometimes comes here during the week to play our organ, a courtesy we are happy to extend her for the pleasure of listening to her, for she is very accomplished. They do not have such an instrument in the St. Philip Street synagogue, and Mr. Moses Mendoza refuses her permission to go and play the one at the Beth Elohim tabernacle on Hasell Street. Beth Elohim are Reform, you know, and Mr. Mendoza apparently considers his daughter’s spiritual welfare to be less at risk in a Christian church than a Reform synagogue. An odd view on the face of it, but then the Jews are an odd people. She is usually chaperoned by one of the family servants on the occasions when she comes to play, Aunt Rhody or Uncle Tobias, but sometimes by her brother. We generally stop what we are doing and treat ourselves to an impromptu concert when she visits us. She really is quite good.”

“Does she play hymns?” I asked curiously.

“Oh no, that would upset her father no end, but she is superb with Bach, Handel and Hayden’s secular pieces, all the Baroque masters. Simon always struck me as a courteous and debonair gentleman. I do

hope that he is not guilty of this terrible crime of which he stands accused. Miss Mendoza will soon become a welcome addition to our congregation, and I should hate for the shadow of undeserved scandal to fall over her.”

“Become part of your congregation, minister?” asked Legare sharply. “What do you mean?”

“I really should not have said so much, sir,” replied Reverend Elliot, flushing and shaking his head. “Counsel in spiritual matters should be kept closely confidential.”

“I agree wholeheartedly, Reverend,” replied Lee smoothly. “Under normal circumstances I would never dream of asking you to break such a confidence, especially where a lady is involved. But I hardly need remind you that Lord Balbriggan and I are involved in a vitally important investigation which involves murder done right here on the consecrated ground of this church, as well as the loss of secret government documents which may cause the loss of thousands of Southern lives. I must ask you to be more explicit. Rest assured, sir, that anything you impart will remain in the strictest confidence.”

“Since you put it like that, it would appear that I have a duty to speak,” sighed Elliot ruefully. “In any case, the matter is virtually public knowledge. For some time now, Miss Mendoza has been walking out with Captain Randolph C. Breckinridge, an officer in the First South Carolina Cavalry and the master of Spring Lake Plantation, just outside Beaufort.”

“One of the largest and most prosperous holdings in the Low Country, is it not?” I put in.

“So I believe, my lord. Captain Breckinridge has a town home just off the Battery, on Limehouse Street, and when he is in Charleston he is a communicant of our congregation. He gives me to understand that Miss Mendoza has received his courtship with favor, and he has even questioned me about the necessary rites and instruction to receive his intended into Christian baptism. You understand, Major Legare, that for

the moment this information must not go any further. Naomi and Captain Breckinridge have been noted together around town, but that things have gotten this far is not generally known. Her father is a devoutly Orthodox Jew, and he is in very poor health. God knows the poor old man has tribulation enough with his only son and heir accused of murder. The knowledge that his daughter is leaving the faith in order to marry a Christian would cause terrible trouble in the Mendoza household at the worst possible time. I hope that this can be left to the two people involved, who will arrange matters in their own way.”

“She intends to convert to the Anglican faith?” asked Legare. “Captain Breckinridge does not intend to convert to Judaism?”

“Certainly not!” exclaimed the minister, horrified at the suggestion.

“Nor will they simply allow the bride to retain her own religious affiliation while the husband does likewise?” persisted Legare. “Such things are done nowadays in the nineteenth century, you know.”

“Very likely they are, although I cannot say that I approve,” sniffed the Reverend Elliot. “What of the children of such marriages? But that is not the case here. In fact, I understand from Captain Breckinridge that Naomi Mendoza’s conversion was originally her own suggestion.”

“Indeed?” said Legare, stroking his beard thoughtfully. “Thank you for your assistance, minister. You have been most enlightening.”

“Now where?” I asked as we left the church and stepped into the warm and bustling street.

“Now we pay a call on the Mendoza household,” said Legare.

We crossed the intersection, dodging vehicles and gray-clad military riders, and walked down the north side of Broad Street to the Mendoza home. Before we went in, we carefully studied the house from the outside. It was a superb example of the “Charleston single” architectural style, dating back possibly sixty or seventy years. It was a long, tall, narrow house like a book set on its spine, the frontage facing King Street with the narrow end on Broad. The house was one spacious room deep, three stories high, with the rooms on each floor opening onto a long and

airy porch or piazza, with awning-like eaves to catch the sea breezes from the harbor and somewhat alleviate the terrific heat which prevailed in the Low Country five months out of the year. The front yard was just a strip, well tended with bright flowerbeds, but there was a deep garden in the back, which held a neat little bungalow for the servants and some fine shade trees. At the north rear of the house was a staircase running from the third floor to a brick outbuilding flush with the service alley, where smoke curled up from a clay pipe chimney.

“That will be Miss Naomi’s kosher kitchen,” said Legare. “We have the front door, this gate here behind the house which opens into Broad Street, and another gate you can see there behind the servant’s quarters which leads into the service alley. This house is as open as a railway station. Anyone with a mind to could gain access.”

“But to do so and not be seen?” I asked.

“Moses Mendoza is ill and probably confined to bed much of the time. The servants are old and probably hard of hearing, and they sleep in their own separate quarters at night. It would require familiarity with the layout and careful movement, but yes, I’d say someone could come and go here and not be seen, especially since Simon Mendoza’s room is at the bottom of the house on the street side.”

An elderly, dignified black man in butler’s livery showed us upstairs into the second floor library of Moses Mendoza, ascending a central staircase of fine oak which led up from the front vestibule. It was a spacious room with a high ceiling and fine parquet floor, and high clear windows open to the beautiful spring day. The walls were lined with tasteful paintings and heavy bookcases of mahogany and walnut, and the furnishings were luxurious. Moses Mendoza greeted us sitting bolt upright on a long divan. He wore a dressing gown and a Jewish skullcap, the kipa. Long sidelocks adorned his head, and phylacteries were wrapped around his left arm. He was old and grizzled, probably in his early sixties, yet he looked much older. His beard was snow white, and his seamed face and gnarled hands gripping the top of his gold-headed

cane were almost as pale. His breath was heavy and loud, and within his beard his lips showed a blue tinge. I am no doctor, but I saw at once that this man was in the grip of some deadly disease. He resembled a theatrical version of William Shakespeare's Shylock, and yet there hung about him a massive and powerful dignity that made him anything but a comical or a contemptible figure. Looking at him, one could well believe that he held the economic future of the South and possibly our independence itself in his quavering hands.

Legare and I bowed and introduced ourselves, and Legare handed him our warrants from General Beauregard and Governor Pickens. In silence the old man drew forth from a pocket of his dressing gown an ancient pair of octagonal spectacles. He put them on and read over both documents carefully, then handed them back, putting away his spectacles and glaring at us with heavy-lidded eyes. Legare came right to the point. "I have heard that you are in poor health, Mr. Mendoza, and so we shall trouble you as little as possible. We are here on behalf of the Confederate States government to investigate charges that have been brought against your son Simon, and to recover certain top-secret military documents that are missing. Do you have anything to say which might prove your son's innocence?"

"Almighty God in His infinite wisdom and mercy knows that my son is innocent," rasped Mendoza bitterly. "This is the false blood libel of old cast in a new form, the work of vile Jew-haters. In times past the *goyim* accused us of sacrificing their children at Purim, to mix blood with the matzoh. Now they call us spies and saboteurs, and with this lie they seek to kill my son. Enemies of Israel!"

"Have you any particular enemies of Israel in mind, sir?" asked Legare politely. "Is there anyone in specific whom you suspect of doing this? Can you give me their names, and your reasons for suspecting them?"

"Rutting blond beasts!" snapped the old man.

"I beg your pardon?" said Legare, nonplussed.

“They want my daughter! They lust after her! Calhoun tried to ravish Naomi here in this very house, but my noble Simon drove him away! Then Calhoun beat him, beat him in public, sir, *chillul haShem!* He laid hands upon the apple of God’s eye, but he paid the price of presumption and blasphemy when the avenging arm of God struck him down! Now another blond beast, this Breckinridge, he seeks to steal Naomi from her people and her soul from God! *Yemach sh’mo!* You seek a killer, sir? I curse my infirmity, barely able to walk to *shul*, or I would arise like the godly patriarchs of old and strike them all down myself, that I might be numbered among the righteous, the *godel hadorim!*” Legare and I glanced at one another in pity. The poor old gentleman was obviously almost out of his mind with pain from his illness and anguished horror over his son’s impending fate. It was also obvious that Reverend Elliot’s injunctions to secrecy were futile, for Mr. Mendoza clearly suspected an understanding between his daughter and Captain Breckinridge.

“I don’t believe we need take up any more of your time, sir,” said Legare in a kindly voice. “I am afraid it will be necessary for me to speak briefly with Miss Naomi. Is she at home?”

“Of course she is at home!” snapped the old man irritably. “Where else would she be? With me so ill, now that you have dragged her brother to prison she has no chaperone. Toby!” he called out. “Toby!” The black butler appeared in the doorway. “Take these men to the Missy. Where is she?”

Uncle Tobias replied with some hesitation. “Marse Mose, Miss Naomi she in de garden wib Cap’n Breckinridge. I done tole him dat you fobid him de house, sah, but Miss Naomi she say never mine dat, and she brung him in anyways.”

The old man arose to his feet with an effort. Without a word, he tottered to the stairs and began stumping down, leaning on his cane. Legare and I watched him disappear below. “We’ll follow at a discreet distance,” said Hugo. “I dislike eavesdropping on family scenes, but we may well learn

something pertinent. By the by, how much of your Hebrew do you recall from your classical education at Oxford?"

"Not much," I admitted. "I spent my time pretty much bottled in those days."

"Not to mention your predilection for indoor horse racing. Did you catch the interesting term he used in the course of his tirade? *Godel hador*? It means an avenging angel of the Hebrew race, a mighty warrior like Samson who strikes down the enemies of Jehovah."

"You think the old man killed Calhoun?" I whispered. "He certainly has the motive, and even a sick man can pull a trigger."

"If he killed Calhoun, which I will grant is not *prima facie* unlikely, why did he then steal the despatches and frame his own son for the crime? And who was the man so resembling Simon Mendoza who was seen by two witnesses?" returned Legare as we descended the stairs. "Why did he not kill Calhoun when the attempted rape of his daughter occurred, or the beating of his son? No, Moses Mendoza is not our killer, at least not in person. But he is a very wealthy man, and whenever a great deal of wealth is involved in a murder interesting possibilities will usually present themselves in time."

We followed Mendoza out into the rear garden. Seated on a bench beneath a blossoming dogwood was a Confederate captain of horse in full butternut gray uniform, with golden sash and sabretache and high spurred riding boots, his wide-brimmed hat of spotless white in his hand. He was a blond giant, blue-eyed and square-jawed, who rose apprehensively as the old man shuffled painfully into the garden.

The girl beside him on the bench jumped to her feet as well. I will never forget my first close up view of Naomi Mendoza. I have seen beauties the world over, from princesses who dazzled the Viceroy's ball in Dublin Castle to maidens in the turf huts of western Ireland who should have been born princesses. Nor should it be forgotten that I won the heart and hand of one of the reigning belles of the Old South, Miss Christie of Belfort. But in honest truth I have to say that for sheer stunning beauty, I

have never before or since seen the like of the Mendoza girl. Her hair was as black as the raven's wing, if you will pardon me such an overworked poetic simile, and it tumbled down over her shoulders in a wild, natural sheening foam, rippling like an ebon river to below her waist. Her face was pale and oval, with a barely perceptible powdering of freckles. Her eyes were of the brightest green, yet withal they had a slant to them that reminded me that the Sephardic Jews were originally an Asiatic people. She wore spotless white muslin that hung soft and light on a lithe, magnificent body. The two of them made a fascinating contrast, the manly Nordic giant and the slender, vibrant dark young woman. No more well matched pair could be seen strolling through Battery Park or taking a turn in an open landau on their way to a governor's levée.

Breckinridge tried to speak, but old Mendoza cut him off. "Yellow-haired dog!" he shouted, waving his cane aloft. "Enemy of God! Did you not hear that I forbid you this house? That I forbid you to come near my daughter? She is a maiden of the Holy House of Israel, she is not for you to cast your lustful eyes upon! You are as evil as that foul beast of the wild waste, Calhoun, that son of Ishmael!" He pointed at Legare and myself. "These men I must receive in my home, answer their questions, for they bring with them papers signed and sealed by the *goyishe* law, forcing me to obey them! But not you! These accursed spawn of Esau have taken my son, and soon they shall drink his blood, but you, sir, you shall never have my daughter! *Get out! Get out!*" Screaming in fury, beside himself with mindless hate, the old man staggered toward Breckinridge and began clubbing him feebly with his cane.

"*Father! Stop!*" cried the girl in horror. Legare stepped forward and deftly snatched the stick from Mendoza's quivering hand, while the black butler glided forward and gently but firmly took his master's arm.

"Now, you jes' settle down heah, Marse Mose," said Toby softly. "All dis heah excitement ain't no good fo' you at all. You come on back upstairs now and set a spell. Leeb dese gennulmen heah to speak with the Missy like they ast to."

“Please control yourself, Mr. Mendoza,” Legare admonished him quietly. “I am reluctant to reprove a sick man in his own home, but I must point out that your behavior is uncalled for and unjust. I have every confidence that Captain Breckinridge’s intentions towards your daughter are strictly honourable and proper.”

“I thank you, Major,” said Breckinridge in a deep voice with a formal bow. His face was suffused with red, but he had kept his temper well under control despite the old man’s abuse. “I will withdraw now, for although I had hoped to offer some support to Miss Naomi and her family in this time of crisis I have no wish to occasion further pain, either to her or to you, sir,” he concluded with a curt nod towards Moses.

“Pain? Pain?” snarled the old man. “What do you know of pain?” Abruptly he snatched his cane out of Tobias’ hand, who had retrieved it, and the he turned his back on us all and walked slowly back to the house, leaning on Toby’s shoulder as he shuffled away.

“If you would remain, Captain Breckinridge, you would save us some trouble,” said my companion. “I am Major Hugo Legare of army counterintelligence, and this is Captain James Redmond, Lord Balbriggan. We are assigned by General Beauregard to investigate the death of Captain Xavier Tremaine Calhoun and the disappearance of important military documents in Calhoun’s possession when he was killed.”

“Randolph C. Breckinridge, First South Carolina Cavalry, at your service, sir,” returned the officer. “Thank you again, major. I fear I might have lost my temper just now.”

Naomi Mendoza stepped forward, her eyes filled with tears of mortification, and she took Legare’s hand in both of hers. “Major, I implore that you and your colleague will forgive my father for that disgraceful outburst! He is terribly ill of a painful wasting disease, and he is in such agony that he has no idea of what he is doing. I promise you that at heart he is a kind and courteous gentleman, but his physical pain and on top of that, this terrible business with Simon, have almost unseated his reason.”

“We were already aware of your father’s medical condition, ma’am,” Legare assured her in a kindly voice. “If it is not too personal a topic, might I inquire as to the exact nature of his illness?”

“It came on last autumn, but apparently it is something which has been in his body a long time, many years. It is an internal consumption of his blood and bodily organs, something little understood by modern medical science. Doctor Levinson and Doctor Silverman refer to it as a cancer. They have admitted to Simon and me that there is very little they can do about it, other than prescribe laudanum so he can sleep. He has entered a terminal state, and he will continue to grow worse until he dies. It is a heavy burden to bear, and then this terrible business with Simon...dear God, Major Legare, my brother is not guilty! He cannot be guilty!”

“My mission is to discover the truth, madam,” said Legare. “I hope for your sake and for your father’s that I may prove him innocent. Unfortunately, as part of my investigation I must ask you some questions of a personal nature, which you will find distasteful and which will cause you distress.”

“I understand what you are referring to, Major Legare,” she replied calmly. “I will tell you anything you need to know in order to locate these despatches and prove Simon innocent of murder.” She daintily re-seated herself on the bench. Breckinridge did likewise, obviously a man very deeply in love.

“To begin with, Miss Mendoza, I am informed that the original quarrel between your brother Captain Calhoun, Mr. Calhoun as he was then, originated when the deceased made unwelcome and improper advances towards yourself. I have no wish to be indelicate, ma’am, but I’m sure you will understand that in a matter of such importance, my information must be complete.”

“Most unwelcome and improper advances indeed, Major Legare,” said Naomi, coloring prettily and raising her fingers to her throat in a gesture of embarrassment.

“I have in fact heard it bluntly stated, by your brother and by your father, that Calhoun attempted to ravish you,” pressed Legare gently. “Is that correct?”

“He was certainly, ah, persistent and in a very impassioned state,” said Naomi reluctantly. “He—he laid hands upon me and disarranged my apparel. I like to believe that at the last moment, Mr. Calhoun would have recovered some sense of shame, yet had not my brother intervened when he did, then I very much fear that my modesty and perhaps even my body would have been violated.”

“The swine!” grated Breckinridge in fury. “I assure you, Major, that Calhoun was a very fortunate man in that I only learned of his monstrous conduct towards Miss Mendoza after he and I were both wearing the uniform of our country. As you know, military regulations strictly forbid dueling between officers on active duty, but I promise you that otherwise I would have called him out, and he would not have been able to refuse a challenge from me with the same impunity as when he brushed off and assaulted Simon! One of us would have ended stretched lifeless on the field of honor, sir!”

“No doubt,” said Legare. “From everything we have learned thus far the man was atrocious and a disgrace to the uniform. Unfortunately, though, Calhoun did not die on a dueling ground. He was murdered and his secret despatches were stolen. Miss Mendoza, I am a little unclear as to the situation wherein these unfortunate events took place. How did Captain Calhoun come to be in your home at all? Was he a regular visitor?”

“I regret to admit that he was,” said Naomi. “We met at a charity picnic given by the Hebrew Orphans’ Society. Although of course Captain Calhoun not of the Mosaic persuasion himself, he and some friends bought tickets for themselves and some, ah, young ladies of their acquaintance, by way of an outing. We struck up a friendship on that occasion, and I must confess that at first he seemed to me to be very much the gentleman, but it appears that he completely deceived me as

to his character. He made himself out to be a wealthy planter, but my father was able to determine that his plantation, Carberry Hall on the Stono River, was mortgaged to the hilt. He learned that Mr. Calhoun was in fact a ruined gambler whose style of life was profligate, while his associations were of a kind to render him unfit for polite society. It took some time to discover this, though, and by then Mr. Calhoun had conceived a tumultuous passion for me.”

“As indeed might any man of red blood, ma’am,” put in Legare gallantly.

“You are kind, sir. But he would not be dissuaded and when he came to the house that day I very foolishly allowed him admittance in spite of the fact that I was all alone here. I thought it only fair that I attempt to persuade him to abandon so ill advised and impossible a hope. I ask that you allow me to cover with a veil of modesty the exact sequence of subsequent events, gentlemen, but I must repeat that my brother’s intervention was timely indeed.”

“I understand perfectly, and we need not go into painful details,” said Legare. “There is one more question I should like to put to you, Miss Mendoza. Where were you at about four thirty on the morning of Friday, April the twelfth?”

“That is an outrageous remark, sir!” snapped Breckinridge, leaping to his feet. “What are you insinuating?”

“I am insinuating nothing, Captain,” replied Legare soothingly. “I am attempting to accumulate as much factual data as I can upon which to pursue an investigation into murder and treason against the Confederate States. Please sit down, sir.”

“I suppose next you will be asking *me* where I was when Calhoun was killed?” spluttered Breckinridge.

“Yes, sir, as a matter of fact I will. But I asked Miss Mendoza first.”

“He has to ask, Randolph,” said Naomi patiently. “It is his duty to ask, and it is yours and mine to answer. I don’t mind, really I don’t.” Breckinridge resumed his seat, fuming. “I was on the roof of this house,

Major Legare, watching Charleston harbor, hoping against hope that I would not see what I saw, the bombardment of Fort Sumter and the beginning of a frightful war. I climbed up with the aid of a ladder, probably the first woman in my family ever to get up onto the roof of the house where we have lived and died for generations. Not very lady-like, I admit, but then you will recall that quite a few Charleston ladies were on the rooftops that morning, in fear for their menfolk on the batteries and praying that our state would be spared from war.”

“Are you satisfied, Major?” demanded Breckinridge.

“Perfectly satisfied, Captain. While we are on the subject, I believe you were going to mention your own whereabouts at the opening of the bombardment?”

“We are a cavalry unit, sir, so we took no active part in the bombardment of the fort, but we stood to dismounted arms on the Citadel parade ground in case we were called upon to maintain order in the town or suppress any slave disturbances in the countryside around. I was at the head of my troop, and there are several hundred witnesses who can attest to that fact.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Legare. He turned back to Miss Mendoza. “You must have had quite a view from up there on the roof,” he commented, leaning back to look up at it. “You could probably see all the way out to Sumter.”

“I could see even better, sir, because I borrowed a pair of field glasses from the inventory of our family’s store. I could see the firing from the floating battery off Sullivan’s Island, and the fortifications on Castle Pinckney.”

Legare dropped his bombshell. “Then you could well have seen what went on in St. Michael’s churchyard, not three hundred yards from your home, especially with binoculars?”

Miss Mendoza was taken aback, and stammered, “Why, I suppose I could have done, had I thought to turn the glasses onto the churchyard. But I didn’t. Why should I? The action was out in Charleston harbor.”

“Someone’s action was in St. Michael’s, I fear,” said Legare quietly. “Ah, well, you couldn’t have known. A pity, though. You are certain you saw nothing at all which might have some bearing on the murder? You didn’t see Captain Calhoun riding down King Street, possibly recognize him as he passed under a street lamp? You saw no one going into the churchyard just before the bombardment began?”

“No, sir, I didn’t see Captain Calhoun, or my brother, or anyone else whom I knew,” asserted Miss Mendoza.

“Then we needn’t trouble you further,” said Legare. “We will take our leave, and we hope that your father recovers and that this matter can be resolved without inflicting any further suffering on innocent parties.”

Outside the garden we crossed over Broad Street, on our way back to the police station to recover our horses. Legare turned and eyed the Mendoza home sourly. “Damnation!” he sighed, shaking his head. “I hate it when people lie to me!”

IV

We took luncheon at a small coffeehouse in Queen Street. While I munched on my gammon steak and yams and sipped thick black coffee full of chicory, Legare toyed with his food and stroked his bearded chin, an habitual mannerism of his when he was lost in thought. “Where do we go next?” I asked. “The Mendoza mercantile emporium? You said we would question this Northern chap, Winthrop.”

“Later this afternoon we will,” said Legare. “But first, I have an urge to go over Captain Xavier Calhoun’s lodgings in Tradd Street. The police searched them, of course, but I want to go over the place myself and get a feel for the man. The best way to understand a murder case, Redmond, is to understand the victim.”

“Lodgings?” I asked in surprise. “Calhoun didn’t own a town house like most planters?”

“I suspect he couldn’t afford it,” replied Legare. “From what we have heard, he was in very low water financially, due to his gambling and profligate mode of life. I’ll need to have a chat with Polly Roper and see what his losses were like, who he lost to, and how quickly he paid up. Gambling debts and the pressing need to pay them have been the source of all manner of skulduggery.”

“You don’t think Calhoun might have been a traitor who sold the despatches to a Federal agent?” I asked, aghast at the thought.

“Whereupon the agent then shot Calhoun, removing a witness and saving himself some money?” replied Legare grimly. “It is a possibility which has occurred to me, Redmond, and one which I intend to explore. I hope not, because that would mean that the Union has the despatches for certain, and the spy has had seventy-two hours in which to make his escape or pass them on to a courier who will take them north.”

In Tradd Street, we found the house where the late Captain Calhoun had stayed while he was in town. The landlady wasn’t in, but we learned something from the housekeeper, a heavy-set black woman named Eliza. Calhoun would arrive from the country with no servants and only a single portmanteau, paying the housekeeper a small fee to keep his room swept and his linen changed, sending his laundry out to a washerwoman. The master of Carberry Hall indeed appeared to have been impoverished. “How did Captain Calhoun spend his time when he was in town, Aunt Eliza?” asked Legare.

The Gullah woman shook her jowly, handkerchief-wrapped head, implying both a reluctance to speak and disapproval of her lodger’s activities. “Ah sholy do not know nothin’ about dat, Mister Major, sah,” sh’e said. “I ain’t no ways dat man’s mammy, no sah! Dem polices was heah, dey ast me de same, ah tole ‘em same.” She could not read our warrants, but she understood the meaning of an official seal and she surrendered the keys to Calhoun’s room with a scowl. We went upstairs.

“I’ll wager Balthazar gets a lot more out of her than we were able to,” remarked Legare as we entered. The rooms were clearly those of a bachelor of limited means, with threadbare sticks of furniture, hunting prints, and a rather tasteless French nude that hung on the wall over the mantel. There were half-empty bottles of whiskey and brandy undecanted on the sideboard, and a smell of stale tobacco in the air. “Surely the police weren’t this sloppy?” mused Legare, looking about him. Someone had quite clearly searched the room, because drawers were

pulled out and papers were strewn all across the floor. "I'd say we have been preceded." Legare stepped into the hallway and called down to the housekeeper. "Aunt Eliza, could you come up here for a minute, please?" When she had shuffled up the stairs he asked her, "When were Lieutenant Halliburton and his constable here?"

"Dey heah Sattidy afternoon," said the woman carefully, not certain what Legare wanted to hear or whether we meant trouble for her.

"Surely you've cleaned it since then?"

"Yessah, I tidy up after dey go. Ah know de Cap'n his fambly be comin' fo his things."

"And have any of Captain Calhoun's relatives come?" asked Legare.

"No sah, dey ain't. Mebbe dey cain't come from all dis excitement and ruction and shootin' ob cannons goin' on up de town."

"Then who did this?" Legare opened the door to the sitting room wide open and showed Eliza the chaotic state of the chamber.

"Lawd a'mighty, who done dat?" exclaimed Eliza angrily, ignoring the fact that Legare had just asked the same question. "Mister Major, sah, I most sholy did *not* leeb dis heah room in dis kind ob state! No, sah! Somebody done come in heah and to' dis room *all* up!"

"When was the last time you checked this room?" asked Legare.

"Early dis moanin', sah, when I lef' fo' de market, and I knows it woin't like dis! Ain't nobody been heah since, 'cept a ole Geechee tinker man just befo' you gennulmen come. He lookin' to fix ole pots and pans, and I give him a ole stew pot de hook done come off, and we had a set and a cup o' chicory while he was fixin' it, but I sholy would hab hoid if somebody come up heah while I'ze in de house. Somebody must hab come in dis moanin', while I was downstreet."

"Well, it doesn't matter, Aunt Eliza," said Legare with a smile. "Here is twenty-five cents for your trouble in speaking with us and in cleaning up again after we leave." After the woman had stumped back downstairs muttering darkly about all dese here goins'-on, Legare turned to me. "I presume the tinker was Balthazar. If anyone came in or was hanging

about the area, he will have noticed it. But how did they get in? Did they have a key?" Legare glanced around the room and then went over to the window which opened onto the second floor porch. "Ah! You see? This pane of glass was cut out, and the window latch lifted from outside. Our man turned the place over and then left by the same route, sliding the window down carefully so as not to dislodge the pane. Any footprints?" Legare leaned out of the window and examined the plank floor of the breezeway. "No, Aunt Eliza is too careful a housekeeper. She sweeps every day. Not enough dust out here to take a print. But this tells us something very important about our man, Redmond. It tells us that he is a fool."

"How can you say that?" I asked.

"He took elaborate precautions to conceal his means of entry and egress, and yet he left this tumbled-about mess. Why didn't he just hang up a sign saying, 'Mr. X. has been here'? Either he found what he was looking for and left in a triumphant hurry, or else he didn't find it and he was so furious in his disappointment that he didn't bother to tidy up in order to disguise the traces of his visit. We are dealing with disorganized thinking here, Redmond, and I find that eminently encouraging. Let's see if he missed anything."

For the next twenty minutes we went over the sitting room, the bedroom and the closets. We found odds and ends, cigar butts, stained shirt collars, lottery tickets and racing forms, dunning notices from tradesmen and the Bank of Charleston telling Calhoun he was overdrawn, and other detritus of a disorderly and downwardly mobile life. Legare assembled all the papers on a writing table and went over them quickly and thoroughly, sorting them into small stacks. "Here's an interesting thing, Redmond," he said after a while. "Captain Calhoun received stern notices from the Bank of Charleston every month informing him that he was overdrawn, up until a few months ago. Then on January 10th, 1861 he has a receipted deposit in the amount of five hundred dollars. There's another deposit for the same amount on January 30th. Similar

deposits in five hundred-dollar increments occur to a total of three thousand dollars. The last deposit was paid in on the tenth day of April.”

“Last Wednesday,” I pointed out. “Two days before Calhoun was murdered.”

“Indeed. Bad, Redmond, very bad.”

“Treason for money?” I growled in disgust. “Beauregard had a spy right on his staff?”

“It certainly needs to be looked into,” said Legare, folding the bank statements and letters and putting them into his belt pouch. “There is an off chance that Calhoun might have had a winning streak in gambling, and if so Polly Roper should be able to clue us in, but these deposits are too regular and too even for my liking. Somebody was paying Calhoun large sums on a regular basis. Who, and for what? Planters generally settle their bills twice a year, once in the spring when they obtain their annual advance from the bank, and again in the autumn when they harvest and the factors buy up their cotton or tobacco or rice. What do you make of this?”

Legare handed me a small brass button, bearing a peculiar rosette design. “An ordinary button, I should say,” I remarked, turning it over in my fingers. “Not a uniform button, because there is either a palmetto or the letters S.C. on ours.”

“By its size and the place where I found it, I should say that it is a cuff button,” said Legare.

“Where did you find it?”

“Under the mattress when I was searching the bedroom. Someone was feeling all up in there, under the frame, and in the process his cuff button caught on a protruding nail and was torn off. I went through the closet and examined Captain Calhoun’s rather threadbare wardrobe of civilian suits, and the button did not come off any of them. The captain was wearing his uniform when he was killed. I think it’s a better than even bet that our curious friend who preceded us here is now walking

about Charleston with a missing cuff button, unless of course he has noticed his loss and changed clothes.”

“But where do we look for him?”

“Let us try the Mendoza trading establishment,” said Legare, rising. “I understand that they have a very large selection of buttons in stock. Perhaps we can find the mates to this one. But before we go, I want to nip back to the police station and see if Tuscarora is available yet.” Legare referred to a small, lithe young Charleston city police constable who had proven himself especially adept at undercover work in several previous cases of ours, notably the bizarre adventure of the Devil’s Coachman, which I may find occasion to include in some future account of Hugo Legare’s career. “I am going to have this house watched for a couple of days,” Legare told me as we left, dropping off the key with Eliza. “I may come up empty-handed, but then again I may catch a not-so-clever bird. It depends on whether or not he found what he was looking for. If not, he may return. I am more hopeful that I may catch someone else who is interested in the same thing, and who may decide to come poking around.”

“And what is it they seek?” I demanded. Legare had an irritating habit of keeping things to himself during an investigation.

“Presumably something Calhoun had and which they want,” my friend replied abstractedly.

“Thank you for clearing that up for me, Legare,” I retorted in some exasperation.

“Hmm? Sorry to be so obscure, Redmond, but although I am beginning to develop a theory about the crime, it could well turn out to be spun from cobwebs that blow away at the first breeze of close examination. This case is developing some strange mutations, and they bother me.”

“Have you considered the possibility that this may not be an act of espionage at all?” I asked as we re-traced our way back down King Street, riding past the Mendoza house again. “Calhoun had a lot of enemies

who hated him passionately. One of them may have taken the despatches to throw dust in the eyes of investigators.”

“Oh, yes, Redmond, I have considered that possibility often and long,” Legare told me moodily. “But it’s not just the killing of Calhoun, it’s not just the disappearance of the despatches, but the extreme length that someone went to in order to implicate Simon Mendoza. We not only have to figure out who would benefit from the theft of the papers and the death of Calhoun, but who would benefit from the false conviction of Simon Mendoza.”

“If Mendoza is innocent,” I reminded him.

“If Mendoza is guilty, we have still established that there is at least one other person involved. Simon didn’t break into that room and conduct that sloppy search. He has been in jail since Saturday morning. Damnation!” swore Legare. “Time, Redmond, time! Those despatches might even now be on their way North as fast as steam can carry them!”

We were lucky enough to find Halliburton and Tuscarora at the station. Tuscarora’s real name was Frederick Little, but Constable Little preferred his nickname because of the unfortunate coincidence between his name and the fact that he was only a pinch or so over five feet tall. Yet he had passed muster for the military, because we found him in the squad room proudly wearing his new Confederate uniform and saying goodbye to his friends and colleagues on the force, prior to his departure for training camp at Walterboro. Legare prevailed upon him to divest himself of his newly acquired gray garb for a bit, and to don civilian clothes again for another surveillance assignment, this time to help unmask a Union spy ring. “If anyone enters Calhoun’s lodgings on Tradd Street, get a message to me at my house in Henrietta Street or through the station here. I’d like to catch any intruders on the premises, but if I can’t get there in time, then follow them when they leave and stay on them until they go to earth and you can report back. Above all, don’t be seen! I don’t want these people to know we’ve rumbled them. If

they know they are being followed they might bolt or do something which would make the despatches harder to recover.”

“I understand, sir,” replied Tuscarora keenly.

“And Fred, after this business is over I will have a word with your commanding officer about getting you transferred to my counterintelligence unit,” Legare told him. “Your talents are far too valuable for you to end up splattered across some Virginia corn field by a Yankee Minie ball.”

By now it was afternoon. We rode to the great Mendoza clothing and dry goods store up on the far end of East Bay Street. The store was bustling and full of customers, for already there were rumours of an impending Union blockade, and consequently there was a great deal of panic buying among the housewives and residents of Charleston. We made our way through the crowds of shoppers of all races and both sexes, served by clerks both black and white, towards the rear offices of the store. A man came forward to greet us. He was a rotund, oily-looking fellow with a balding gray head and prominent jug ears. “Gentlemen, gentlemen, we are honored to receive the patronage of the officers of our new republic!” he gushed in an unctuous voice, seizing our hands and pumping them in turn. “And if I am not mistaken, sir, we are doubly honored by the patronage of a member of the British nobility! Lord Balbriggan, is it not?” The man gave me a bow. “I am Hyman Berlin, acting manager of Continental Mercantile owing to the temporary indisposition of our esteemed proprietor Mr. Moses Mendoza. A privilege, sirs, a rare privilege! What can I show you gentlemen? Boots? Spurs? We have the finest in tailor-made uniforms for every branch of the services, including the first available officers’ dress for the Confederate Navy, created from patterns brought to us by special messenger from Montgomery. Or perhaps a set of field glasses? Or a sidearm from our wide selection of British, Belgian, and German revolvers? Or a dress sword from Wilkinson Brothers of London, an establishment with which I am sure you will be familiar, your lordship?”

I have never shared the common prejudice against Jews. To me, unthinking derision and denigration without facts have always appeared to be attributes of a weak mind. I have travelled enough to know full well that every race and nation on earth produces every kind of individual good, bad, and mediocre, in approximately the same proportion everywhere. Nor, thank God, have I ever been a religious bigot, that ugly and distasteful trait which disfigures so much of Ireland's history and national character. Yet I found Hyman Berlin repulsive. Had anyone asked me to explain to them why people of the Hebrew faith have been so despised throughout history in every nation without exception where they have for any length of time resided, I would have pointed to Hyman Berlin as a living example. The man was almost a caricature in human flesh of the very image of every anti-Semitic stereotype, from his physical appearance to his transparently insincere, fawning mannerism. Moses Mendoza carried himself with an impressive and powerful dignity even in the extremity of his illness and distress. Hyman Berlin was a ridiculous figure. He wore a faded blue suit of patched and stained broadcloth, and dusty shoes with thin soles and bulbous toes. He eschewed Mendoza's patriarchal beard and was clean-shaven, and yet the blue stubble did nothing for his round face, heavy with jowls of fat. He had tiny little eyes and the prominent, six-shaped nose so often associated by tradition with his people, and his veal-coloured lips stretched into a grotesque smile over yellow teeth.

"I have heard of you, Mr. Berlin," said Legare. "We are not here to buy, thank you." He drew forth our warrants and displayed them to the store manager, who turned pale at the sight of the official seals. "We have been assigned by the high command to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of Captain Xavier Tremaine Calhoun, and the disappearance of certain important military documents. I am Major Hugo Legare, and apparently you recognize my associate, who prefers to be known as Captain Redmond. You will be aware that Simon Mendoza has been charged with killing Calhoun."

“Yes, yes, wretched youth,” said Berlin, wringing his hands. “An appalling crime, gentlemen, utterly appalling! I cannot imagine what possessed Simon to do such a thing!”

“Might we speak in private, sir?” asked Legare. “I have some questions which I must ask you, and also your senior members of staff.”

“Oh, certainly, certain, yes, yes,” babbled Berlin, ushering us into the rear of the store. His original welcoming effusiveness was now an almost palpable wary, nervous caution. “I really can’t imagine what any of us might be able to help you with,” he twittered on. The office we entered was a large and airy one, reflecting the same expansive good taste and culture as the library of Mr. Mendoza. There was a fine mahogany desk and plush upholstered chairs, a velvet couch, and glassed-in bookcases that held a collection of volumes in English, Hebrew, Spanish, and German. The books had mostly to do with manufacturing, agriculture, banking and finances, and maritime law. In addition there were pamphlets and periodicals, inventory books and ledgers, and other appurtenances of a thriving business enterprise. “This is a well-appointed office,” remarked Legare. “Yours, Mr. Berlin?”

“Actually, it is my brother-in-law Mr. Mendoza’s office,” said Berlin. “My own is down the hall and is somewhat smaller, of course, but I am using this one so long as I am acting manager of the firm. Mr. Mendoza has been ill of late, and he only stops by now and again to look in on things. I hope he will recover soon and be able to occupy this room once more on a full time basis.”

“So do we all, Mr. Berlin,” said Legare gravely. “The Confederate States have great need of Mr. Mendoza’s influence and economic expertise. You say he is your brother-in-law?”

“Yes, sir. My late wife was Mr. Mendoza’s sister.”

“Mr. Mendoza is a man of taste and refinement, I see. That looks like a genuine Persian rug. Mr. Berlin, may I assume from the remark which you made just now that you believe Simon Mendoza to be guilty of the murder?”

“Why, as reluctant as I am to so believe, I must accept the overwhelming evidence which the police uncovered,” said Berlin dolorously.

“No one else in the family accepts it,” pointed out Legare. “They believe it is a conspiracy by anti-Semites to discredit Southern Jewry.”

“Stuff and nonsense, sir!” cried Berlin. “This is the nineteenth century, and society has outgrown such absurd prejudices. Charleston is a city of business and common sense, sir, not some godforsaken village in Poland. There is no anti-Semitism here!”

“I am glad to hear it,” said Legare in a dry tone. “Mr. Berlin, you have two senior clerks here, a Mr. Hezekiah Winthrop and a Mr. Mendel Cohen. I should like a word with each of them in turn, if you don’t mind. Would you send them in, please, one at a time? Your own attendance will not be necessary, thank you.”

“Certainly, certainly sir,” said Berlin nervously.

“And one more thing, Mr. Berlin. Could you bring me a list of all the handguns that your firm has imported from Great Britain over the past two years? I am especially interested in tracing a small Eley’s .41-caliber pocket pistol, of the model commonly known as the Banker’s Pal. I’m sure you will be aware of why it is so important that I locate the source of this weapon.”

“Of course, of course, I understand perfectly,” burred Berlin as he waddled hurriedly out of the room.

“Now there’s a suspicious character for you!” I said, nodding after him. “Did you count your fingers after you shook hands with him? Imagine, the old man isn’t even dead yet, and already this beauty has commandeered his office!”

“Indeed, I wonder what Mr. Mendoza thinks of that proceeding, or if he knows at all? And I wonder if the Mendoza inventory will by any chance turn up short an Eley’s .41? An interesting character, Mr. Berlin, but unless I miss my guess here comes another.” We turned as a tall, gangling man of about thirty came in the doorway. His hair was a carrot red and his face was flushed, either from natural coloration or some

overpowering emotional turmoil. He wore pince-nez spectacles and had huge hands at the end of frayed, ink-stained cuffs that he clasped nervously. He reminded me of no one so much as Washington Irving's absurd character, Ichabod Crane. "You would be Mr. Hezekiah Winthrop?" asked Legare.

"I am," the man replied in a nasal New England twang. "I suppose you gentlemen have come to arrest me?"

"Have we cause to arrest you?" inquired Legare.

"Of course!" replied Winthrop irritably. "My Northern birth condemns me! Boston born and bred, sir, and not ashamed of it!"

"Nor should you be, Mr. Winthrop. I've been there. It is a fine and impressively cultured city, however obnoxious a good many of its' citizens have become. In point of fact, your Northern birth is not the subject which Captain Redmond and I wanted to discuss with you, but now that you have yourself brought up the subject, possibly you might satisfy my curiosity about something." Hugo Legare helped himself to one of the armchairs and I did likewise, Legare pausing to light up a cigar while Winthrop remained standing, staring back and forth at us warily. "Why is it that you remain in Charleston, Mr. Winthrop? In view of recent events, the past few months cannot have been pleasant ones for you."

"Indeed they have not been pleasant, sir," said Winthrop angrily. "I have been insulted and abused more often than I care to recall, and twice I have been set upon by secessionist mobs in the street. I have in the past made so bold as to offer some criticism of your 'peculiar institution', as you call the abominable practice of buying and selling other human beings, and my opinions on the subject have not been forgotten during this outbreak of madness which has culminated in an act of armed insurrection against the United States. Who was it who said that South Carolina is too small for a republic but too large for an insane asylum?"

"Senator Charles Sumner, I believe, of your own state of Massachusetts," replied Legare.

“So it was,” agreed Winthrop. “The same Charles Sumner who dared to criticize pro-slavery atrocities in Kansas several years ago in ‘56, for which he was brutally clubbed within an inch of his life, right on the floor of the Senate chamber, by that drunken villain Preston Brooks. A Congressman from this state of yours, Major!”

Legare sighed. “That particular incident has now entered the realm of abolitionist mythology, so it is probably pointless for me to try to confuse you with facts, sir,” he said in resigned weariness. “But for the record, the late Congressman Brooks from Edgefield did not take his cane to Senator Sumner’s noggin because he had either criticized slavery or insulted South Carolina. If Southern legislators whipped up on every Yankee windbag in Congress who said such things, then each Southerner would have a broken cane and every Northerner a broken head. Preston Brooks beat Charles Sumner because the previous day Sumner delivered a lengthy speech which included one of the most disgraceful and viciously cruel personal attacks ever publicly launched by one member of the United States Senate against another, specifically against Senator Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina. Senator Butler had recently suffered a stroke. Yet despite the fact that he was unwell and not fully recovered, the previous day Butler rose to defend the right of the Kansas settlers to a referendum on the question of whether they should be admitted to the Union as a slave state or what you would term a ‘free’ one. Senator Charles Sumner apparently found Butler’s impaired and slurred speech, the result of his recent stroke, to be a source of amusement. To disagree with another Senator was Sumner’s right. But Andrew Pickens Butler was also a bona fide gentleman who believed in conducting political discourse with a degree of mutual respect and civility which your Northern Radical Republicans and abolitionists have apparently decided is to be dispensed with whenever race is involved. Among other malicious and uncalled-for attacks on Andrew Butler, during his own Kansas address Sumner made fun of Butler’s speech impediment, and falsely charged that Butler had been drunk on the

Senate floor when he spoke the day before. It was an utterly inexcusable performance.”

“So Senator Sumner deserved to be beaten bloody by an arrogant Southern blockhead like Brooks?” demanded Winthrop.

“I must confess that I shed very few tears when the event occurred,” admitted Legare. “Few who knew the facts did. Congressman Brooks took the view that since the North quite obviously no longer desired any kind of genuine dialogue on slavery or states’ rights or Constitutional issues, he saw no reason why morally denatured political gangsters like Sumner who made their careers out of abusing any of their fellow citizens who disagreed with them should be shielded from personal responsibility for their outrageous behavior. As I recall, after the incident in question Brooks was sent a number of new canes by his many admirers. Yet none of this answers my question, Mr. Winthrop. If you hold these views, why do you stay here in a society that you find so distasteful? You wouldn’t perhaps be a spy for the Federal government, would you?”

“What?” gasped the Northerner, his florid face breaking out in a sweat, caught off guard by the direct accusation. “Good God!”

“Surely you were not so foolish as to believe that the thought would not occur to us?” asked Legare patiently. “Surely you must have understood the growing danger you were placing yourself in by staying? You have remained in this city despite growing hostility and danger. Come, sir, no evasions! Why are you still here?”

Winthrop collapsed onto the divan and buried his head in his hands, a forlorn and almost comical figure, yet somehow pitiable. Finally he muttered a single word. “Naomi.”

“What’s that? Speak up!”

“Naomi Mendoza,” sighed Winthrop in despair. “I am in love with her, major, hopelessly and utterly possessed by her. You need not tell me that I am an idiot, sir, for I know it full well. But I have to be near her for as long as I can, before this insane war separates us forever. You are right. I should have left Charleston months ago, but I kept putting it off

and putting it off. I just couldn't bear to leave the place where she dwells, even though I do not believe that she has addressed more than a dozen consecutive words to me in the ten years that I have been here. I came to Continental Mercantile when I was twenty-one years old, Major, and during all that time I have never once been invited into the Mendoza home. A Gentile must be of very elevated status indeed to merit that distinction, a Henry Clay or a Marquis de Lafayette. But I see her when she comes to the store, and sometimes in the street where I tip my hat to her. For ten years I have watched her grow from a child like some magical elf into a maiden, and then a woman, and at some point I realized that I was blessed and cursed for life with total love for her. I am not of her faith or of her race, and that would be fatal enough in itself, but beyond that I have no huge plantation with hundreds of black slaves to offer her. Not like some!" he concluded bitterly.

"You refer to Captain Randolph C. Breckinridge?" asked Legare.

"I merely vent my anger against a hopeless situation, sir. She is barely aware of the fact that I even exist, and that is the way it will remain. You came here looking to find a spy, gentlemen. You have not found one, you have only found a muddle-headed jackass. Or should I say that you have found a billy goat who has not the sense to cease butting his head against a stone wall."

"We are also seeking a killer, Mr. Winthrop," said Legare. "The killer of Xavier Tremaine Calhoun and the person or persons who stole secret government documents."

"So I guessed," said Winthrop. "Calhoun was a beast. Do you know what he did, or tried to do to Naomi?"

"We have heard of that shocking incident, yes, sir."

"I only heard of it after Simon's arrest, when it came out that he had been trying to get Calhoun to fight a duel with him. Another savage and infantile custom you have retained here in the South, dueling. But I can't say that I am unhappy that Calhoun is dead. And before you ask, I did not kill him. Had I known about his attack on Naomi I might have done, but I didn't know and I didn't kill him."

“We are not certain just why Captain Calhoun was killed, Winthrop,” said Legare. “Simon Mendoza denies his guilt in the matter.”

“I hope he is telling the truth and you can exonerate him,” said Winthrop. “He is a young gentleman of excellent character and he has always shown me courtesy and friendliness. Had his father been of the same liberal turn of mind with regards to social contact with Christians then perhaps...no, no, nothing would have been different.”

“Where were you on Friday morning at four thirty, about the time the harbor guns opened fire on Fort Sumter?”

“Down along the Battery wall, watching that final act of lunacy as this state and this whole society of Southern slavemasters and whiskey-guzzling planter maniacs staggered like a blind ox towards the shambles for slaughter,” replied Winthrop.

“Did anyone see there at the time? Can anyone verify your whereabouts?”

“No, I spoke to no one. It was not a time for a Boston accent to be heard, Major.”

“No, it was not. Very well, then, Mr. Winthrop. I must ask you to remain in Charleston until this matter is resolved. Then if you are wise, you will take my advice and get back North while you still can. I respect your right to hold whatever opinions you choose, Mr. Winthrop, however little your people may wish to accord us the same right. But there are times, as Shakespeare said, when the better part of valor is discretion. And if you will forgive my offering you advice on so personal a matter, try to forget Naomi Mendoza as best you can. In this time and in this place, she can never be for you.”

“I know it well enough,” said Winthrop, rising to his feet. “However, I will not be returning North.” He drew a piece of paper from his vest pocket. “My enlistment. Within the week I shall be in Walterboro, enrolled as a private in the Confederate Army.”

“Why on earth did you go and do a damned fool thing like that?” asked Legare in astonishment.

Winthrop regarded us steadily. "It is all I can offer her," he said. He turned and shambled awkwardly out, his lanky form filling the doorway as he departed.

"Now there is the stuff of romance!" I laughed. "Joining the army to lay his sword and his blood-stained shirt at the feet of his lady-love."

"The fool will be dead within the year," snorted Legare. There was a tap on the door, and a slim and studious looking young man with dark hair and sensitive, clean-shaven features entered. He wore a Jewish skullcap, and he was dressed in a sober dark business suit with a frock coat. "Please come in and close the door," said Legare. "You are Mr. Mendel Cohen?"

"Yes, Major Legare. I am the senior import clerk for Continental Mercantile, while Mr. Winthrop who just left is senior export clerk. I understand that you gentlemen are conducting an investigation into the shooting of Captain Calhoun in St. Michael's grounds on Friday morning?"

"That is correct, sir," said Legare. Cohen's speech was precise and well modulated, and he carried himself with poise and self-assurance in contrast to the gawky Bostonian. Without waiting to be asked, he seated himself on the divan as if he were in a private club conversing with friends or business associates. "I shall be happy to assist you in any way I can, Major," he said. "I am certain that Simon Mendoza is innocent."

"And upon what do you base that belief, Mr. Cohen?" asked Legare.

"Upon my knowledge of his character, sir," replied Cohen smoothly. "Simon is a Jew who is very uncomfortable with his heritage. To put it into the vernacular, he wants to have his cake and eat it, too. He wants to be a Jew, and yet he wants to be one of you as well, if you can understand the generic way I use the term. By *you* I mean he desires entrée into not just Charleston society, but the whole Southern world of commerce, culture, political and intellectual life."

"I understood what you meant," said Legare, stroking his beard and eyeing Cohen contemplatively.

“He does not realize that his Jewish heritage makes it utterly impossible for him ever to be completely accepted, by Southern society or any Christian society. He then becomes frustrated and angry when he is constantly rejected by a world which he genuinely admires and desires to promote.”

“That is a very interesting observation, Mr. Cohen,” said Legare. “Could you cite a specific example of such a thwarted desire for acceptance on Simon’s part?”

“Easily. The Jews have always been a mercantile people, Major Legare, not agrarian. This is because ever since the Diaspora of eighteen centuries ago, Jews have almost never been allowed any land tenure in any country where they have lived. Yet Simon was constantly urging his father, Mr. Mendoza, to purchase a plantation. Mr. Mendoza rejected this idea as frivolous, unprofitable, and very un-Jewish.”

“There have been Southern planters of the Mosaic persuasion,” I felt constrained to point out. “Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana, for example. I am told that his plantation at Bellechasse is one of the most beautiful and prosperous in the South.”

“Mr. Judah P. Benjamin is an extraordinary man in every way,” agreed young Cohen. “I believe that in fact Simon cited that very example to bolster his argument at the time, but I fear that it was not well advised. Mr. Mendoza’s opinion of Judah P. Benjamin is not high. He questions Mr. Benjamin’s orthodoxy. Then there were also Simon’s persistent and, in my view, extremely foolhardy attempts to incite Mr. Calhoun to a duel. There are any number of ways in which the reprehensible assault on Miss Mendoza might have been handled, but physical violence is not the forté of the Jewish people, Major Legare. If it was, we would still be in Jerusalem.”

“You seem to imply that violence is *our* forté, Mr. Cohen?” asked Legare with a twitch of a smile.

“You do seem to indulge in quite a lot of it, don’t you, Major?” returned Cohen with gentle irony. “Calhoun was a violent man, and like

most men of his class he was a crack pistol shot and had already distinguished himself in a number of unfortunate encounters. David may have triumphed over Goliath in Biblical times, but I should not have cared to hazard Simon's life on the chance that history might repeat itself."

"And how would you have dealt with the insult to Simon's sister had it been up to you, Mr. Cohen?" asked Legare.

"I would have ruined him," replied Cohen seriously. "From what I understand it would have taken little enough effort, since he was already halfway to bankruptcy through his improvident and debauched manner of living. In point of fact, though, Major Legare, to some extent it is up to me. Naomi Mendoza and I are going to be married." He made the last statement with calm assurance, and he caught the skepticism in Legare's uplifted eyebrow. "I know you may have received the impression that there is some kind of understanding between Naomi and a Gentile cavalry officer named Breckinridge, but that is nothing more than a passing fancy of hers, and it will not mature once Breckinridge leaves for the front. I will still be here. In my faith, families are much more strict about such things as marriage than are most Christian denominations. Although we are not yet officially betrothed, the matter has been taken in hand by her father and by Rabbi Klass of our temple. I assure you that when it comes to the point, Naomi will not go against her heritage and her father's wishes in so important a matter. To do so would be to cut herself off completely from the Torah and the holy House of Israel, and she will not do that. It would be unthinkable."

This smug young man is in for a shock, I thought to myself, and by the way Legare pursed his lips in silent amusement I could see that he agreed. But he continued. "You still have not explained why all of this indicates Simon Mendoza's innocence, Mr. Cohen."

"As I have said, Simon wants desperately to be a Southern gentleman, a member of the planter elite, one of *you*, if you will again pardon my use of that generic term. He wants to be one of your brother officers during this upcoming war. He doesn't want all this badly enough to

leave the faith and cut himself off from Judaism, for in his own way Simon is almost as devout and firm in his observance as his father. Simon has this obsession that he can be a Jew and still enjoy acceptance by the *goyische*, pardon me, by the Gentile world. Simon would not have shot Captain Calhoun in the back, as I am informed was done on Friday morning. Simon believes himself to be a Southern gentleman, and that is not the gentlemanly way to go about these things. Hence Simon's frantic efforts to inveigle Calhoun into a formal duel where proper, genteel murder might be done with social acceptability. Neither would Simon have stolen secret military despatches, nor would he sell or transmit information detrimental to the Confederacy to the Federal authorities in Washington. Treason is a *gaucherie* not done in polite planter society. Major Legare, Simon did not do these things because it would have been out of character, a violation of his self-image," concluded Cohen. "I know very well that this isn't the kind of concrete evidence you need, but nonetheless, I urge you to try to find that evidence. It must be there somewhere. I know Simon is innocent."

"You are very frank and informative, Mr. Cohen, and I appreciate your candor," said Legare. "One more question if you please. Where were you at four thirty Friday morning?"

Cohen smiled. "Down on the Battery watching a war begin, Major Legare. Such an opportunity offers but once in a lifetime. I did not intend to miss it."

"Did anyone observe you there who can vouch for your whereabouts?"

"Possibly, although I can't think of anyone offhand. I didn't expect to have to account for my movements, sir, and so I didn't keep a minute-by-minute itinerary."

"Of course not," said Legare. "By the by, you may or may not be aware that your senior export clerk, Mr. Winthrop, has most gallantly volunteered his services to the South in our struggle for freedom, despite his own Northern birth, and that he will be leaving soon for the army. Had you heard?"

“Yes, I heard,” replied Cohen. “I think it’s a foolish gesture, probably a fatal one, and I am at a loss to understand it. I didn’t think he liked it here.”

“You are a fit young man yourself. You have no intention of joining the colors?”

“None, major. This war does not concern the Jews. If we took sides and fought in every war that our host countries have engaged in over the past eighteen hundred years we would have been decimated long ago. In times like these we try to remain neutral, Major, supplying both sides with our talents and services. We never choose one side over the other, because what if the side we choose is defeated? Then we would pay the price of defeat along with our Gentile rulers, and there are not enough of us to pay such a price more than a few times before we would be wiped out. The Jewish people are the carpenters of history, gentlemen.”

“Carpenters?” I asked, puzzled.

“We build trap doors. We always keep an escape route open, and more often than not we have needed it. If the South loses this war, then I will call upon my relations in New York and Barbados, and the Mendoza family will call upon their kindred in New York and Antwerp and Havana, to help us rebuild. If the North loses then the New York Mendozas and Cohens will call upon us for assistance, which we will render without stint or hesitation. Needless to say, whichever side loses will blame us for their defeat and probably expel us from the country after killing a few of us in a pogrom or two.”

“Since we seem to have entered into a philosophical digression, Mr. Cohen, I am of course aware of the intense persecution that the Jewish people have suffered through the centuries,” said Legare. “Yet can you not realize that the very attitude which you have just displayed of itself creates anti-Semitism? Do you wonder that your Gentile neighbors never completely trust you?”

“We have no need of their trust or their good will,” replied Cohen. “Normally I would not say such things, but you desire candor and you shall have it. The Jews are a *chosen* people, Major Legare. Our business is

with God, not with the Gentile. It is essentially because of this that we are so brutally persecuted and hated. To put it as simply as possible, the Gentile is jealous of our special relationship with God, and so like a bully jealous of a favored sibling the Gentile torments and punishes us. Esau ate the mess of pottage, but has never accepted the loss of his birthright. Over the centuries, the Jewish people have necessarily developed a certain outlook on life and certain defensive behavior patterns; these self-defense mechanisms have become ingrained into our culture and have become almost an inherited trait. It is true that up until now we have never faced any serious harassment in this country, Major, but we are a very old and suspicious nation.”

“I am a policeman. I can tell you that when a man sees a policeman and starts running, the officer naturally assumes that the running man has something to hide, and so he pursues. The attitudes that you have mentioned bolster the idea among ordinary folk that the Jews are a cosmopolitan, rootless people with no loyalty to the country where they reside, a people who cannot be trusted when the chips are down.”

“We *are* a cosmopolitan and rootless people, Major,” replied Cohen. “We have no choice in the matter. We do what we must to survive. Kings and governments and nations may come and go, but *am Yisroel chai*. Israel lives. I make no apology for that.”

“None needed, Mr. Cohen,” Legare assured him. “On your way out, could you ask Mr. Berlin to step in again?” After Cohen had left, Legare turned to me. “Have you spotted our common denominator yet?” he asked.

“Eh?” I asked, confused. “You mean Jews?”

“No, no! Winthrop is not a Jew. Neither is Captain Breckinridge, and neither was the deceased. I refer to Miss Naomi Mendoza. Every man in this case seems to be completely under her spell. Simon Mendoza was ready to fight a duel for her, that romantic ass Winthrop is willing to die for her and probably will, Cohen would ruin men financially for her, Xavier Calhoun was willing to risk a rape charge to possess her, old man

Mendoza assaulted a guest over her, and from what I observed Randolph Breckinridge is so besotted with her that he would turn pirate on the high seas if she asked him to.”

“You are a hopeless misogynist,” I laughed. “The French have a word for it, *femme fatale*. Yet crusty old bachelor that you are, I seem to recall that even you cut her a compliment when we spoke in her garden this morning.”

“One can admire a blood horse without riding it,” replied Legare in a rare moment of crudity. Before I could respond to this uncouth metaphor Hyman Berlin came trotting in on his bandy legs, his double chin and pendulous chaps quivering in his blue-stubbled face. He held a ledger, and he opened it and pointed to an entry.

“A brilliant deduction on your part, Major Legare, brilliant, sir!” said Berlin gushingly. “We received five of the Eley’s .41-caliber Banker’s Pal model weapons in a shipment from the Manchester Small Arms works last November, and in our latest inventory we show but one left, with sales receipts for only three. Such a weapon is indeed missing from our stock. Poor foolish Simon must have stolen it and killed Calhoun with it!”

“I rather anticipated you would confirm my hypothesis, Mr. Berlin,” said Legare, his ambiguous irony totally lost on the store manager. “I am glad to have the source of the murder weapon. By the by, Mr. Berlin, could you tell me where you were at about four thirty on Friday morning, when the guns in the harbor began firing on Fort Sumter? Purely a formality, of course.”

Berlin’s brow beaded with sweat. “Why, I was down on the Battery, Major Legare, watching events unfold. Good God, everyone in Charleston was there!”

“Yes, so it would seem. How convenient for the killer or killers, eh? Especially if one of them needed an alibi? In that crush of milling people and all that excitement, the guns firing, the shells crashing and airbursts over the harbor, it would be almost impossible to track the movements of any one individual. Well, we have taken up enough of your valuable

time, Mr. Berlin. I have some Yankee spies to unmask. By the by, I found this just now." Legare held out the button we had found under Calhoun's mattress in the dead man's Tradd Street lodgings. "It was over there by the desk, on the floor. It seems to have come off a gentleman's cuff, and I notice that you are missing a cuff button." Berlin glanced down at his right wrist, and sure enough there was a frayed thread where the button had come off. "I also notice your buttons have a design on them matching this one, so I rather fancy it is yours."

"Why yes, I believe it is mine," said Berlin, smiling and accepting the proffered button. "Thank you, Major. I'll have one of our seamstresses sew it back on. Mustn't present a disheveled appearance to our esteemed customers!"

"Indeed not," replied Legare with a smile.

* * *

Our next stop was the Bank of Charleston, on the corner of Broad Street and East Bay. The president of the bank himself, Mr. Jacob Sass, greeted us warmly and took us into his office. "I'll certainly cooperate with the army in every way, Major Legare, but especially with yourself and Lord Balbriggan on the case," he said. "I haven't forgotten the assistance both of you gentlemen rendered the bank in the business of our late cashier Demmings. You saved us from disaster."

Legare explained what we needed, and the president himself fetched the appropriate ledgers. "I am familiar with Captain Calhoun's account," he told us as he flipped through the pages. "A difficult man to deal with. Carberry Hall is heavily mortgaged and not a very profitable estate in any case. Poor management. To be frank, I suspect that had the war not intervened, we would have been forced to foreclose. Of course, we would never have been so crass and unpatriotic as to foreclose on an officer serving the Confederacy."

"I suspect the war has thus supplied relief to a number of planters in low water," said Legare. "What is this I see here, sir? Yes, it confirms what I have already learned from other sources. Three thousand dollars, deposited to Calhoun's account over a period of four months, in regular increments of five hundred dollars each. And in the off months for planting, no less. What can you tell me about these deposits, Mr. Sass? Did Calhoun ever offer any explanation of this sudden and unseasonable affluence?"

"We were curious, of course, but he was not a communicative man where money was concerned," said Mr. Sass. "We were mostly relieved that he was able to pay off some overdraft."

"Quite. Gentlemen are often reticent on such matters as personal finance. Do you happen to recall how the deposits were made? Gold or silver specie, drafts on other banks, possibly out of state banks?"

"You mean Northern banks?" asked Sass keenly. "So that's the way the wind is blowing, is it? As I recall the deposits were made mostly in our own Bank of Charleston notes, but I can check that."

"Large denomination notes?"

"Twenties and fifties, but as I said, I'll check with my cashier and his log to make sure."

"Please do so, Mr. Sass. Also, if it is possible, I'd like to find out who the larger notes were issued to originally. I believe you record the serial numbers?"

"On notes of fifty dollars and larger, yes. Is that important?"

"It might be, sir," replied Legare. "I need to know who was supplying Captain Calhoun with large amounts of local currency, and why."

"Treason, eh?" The president's white eyebrows arched. "Well, *nil nisi de mortuis bonum* and all that, but just between us, gentlemen, I wouldn't be surprised. The man was a blackguard. But I'll get a couple of my clerks working on it, those who haven't run off and joined the army. It may take a while, but I'll get my results to you. Are you still in Henrietta Street?"

"For the time being," said Legare.

"I'll send anything I dig up there, and if you're not home I'll leave it with that most unusual man of yours."

"Along with Balthazar's quarterly interest statement?" I asked facetiously. Sass gave me a strange look; Balthazar had a larger investment portfolio than most planters, and the bank president probably found it unnerving. As we left the bank I turned to Legare. "Are you going to tell me why Hyman Berlin was in Captain Calhoun's lodgings?" I demanded.

"When I know for certain myself, yes," he replied. "If I told you what I suspected now it wouldn't quite be guessing, which I despise, but it would be very tenuous deduction. I am still not sure I'm on the right track. Let me find one link in the chain and I might be willing to hazard a preliminary assessment."

"What kind of link?"

"Such as finding out that the fifty dollar bank notes Calhoun deposited to his account passed at one stage through the coffers of Continental Mercantile," said Legare. "I'd almost chance my arm on it, but I want documentary proof if it can be had. Wasn't Uncle Hyman eager to put a noose around his nephew Simon's neck a while ago, eh? He practically pranced in with that ledger and those sales receipts on the missing Eley's .41."

"An unsavory character," I said.

"One does run across them from time to time in criminal practice," said Legare with a dry chuckle. "We will now call on the Wentworth Street pleasure palace, proprietress Regina Montez. It's late enough in the afternoon so we shan't be disturbing her beauty rest."

"Is Miss Montez a newcomer to the trade?" I asked him. "I've never heard of her. Of course, I wouldn't nowadays."

"No, with Miss Christie of Belfort waiting at home, I imagine you have quite lost track of Charleston's demimonde. Regina is a light-skinned mulatto, quite attractive but not quite light enough to pass. That puts her in the second rank of her profession, but she's definitely top of the second rank. She's about thirty years old, and she's been in Charleston for six

years or so. She took her name from Lola Montez, one of the *grande horizontales* of Europe whom she especially admires. I hear Regina is trying to raise the capital to establish a practice in Paris.”

The sun was beginning to sink below the rooftops as we rode through a quiet residential section of the town. “Regina started out in Lizzie Baker’s house on the Savannah Highway, and she quickly became one of Lizzie’s top earners,” Legare continued. “Eventually she saved up enough to open up her own place, and she took some of Lizzie’s best girls with her. There was a bit of a row over that, a spot of razor work and acid-throwing, but Regina handled it masterfully. She employed the best muscle money could buy and very quickly got on top of the rough stuff, then she made Lizzie a generous cash settlement that smoothed her ruffled feathers. Since then all has been pleasant and everyone has been making money. Regina has no protector, very much her own woman. Her house is clean, well ordered, and genteel. She has a couple of bruiseboys on hand to handle any rowdy customers, but they are kept out of sight unless required. My latest information is that she’s now working fourteen girls, six white, five yellow, two black, and one Chinese for those with a taste for the exotic Orient. She herself commands fifty dollars per client, and Simon Mendoza appears to have been one of her favored few.”

“Not exactly the kind of testimonial one would want to produce in court, though,” I chuckled sardonically.

“No doubt, but still a recommendation of a sort,” said Legare. “Women like Regina are good judges of male character. They have to be. They don’t like having dangerous or violent men around.”

The house appeared to be deserted. It was set in a yard of live oaks hung with Spanish moss and surrounded by a wall covered with honeysuckle vines. It was freshly painted a spotless white, with green trim on the shutters and a fine ironwork fence. Three stories high with an Ionic columned portico, it looked like the gracious town home of a wealthy planter or merchant, and probably had been in its day. I wondered what

the neighbors thought of the present occupants. We tethered our horses at a trough and walked through the gate and up to the door. Before we could even knock, an elegant black butler in livery opened it. "I'm sorry, gentlemen," he intoned richly, "But we are not open to receive callers at this time. The ladies are just rising and preparing their toilette. We open our doors at seven o'clock. If you would care to return at that time...?"

"This is official army business, Samuel," said Legare. "We need to see Regina."

"Of course, Major Legare," said the butler with a bow. "Would you step into the parlor, please, gentlemen? I will inform Miss Montez that you are here."

The parlor of the bordello turned out to be a huge room occupying most of the ground floor, with a high scrollwork ceiling and an ornate carven mantelpiece. There were large comfortable chairs and divans, a pianoforté on which the "ladies" no doubt played charmingly for their customers before taking them upstairs, and a small bar in the corner gleaming with brass and reflected liquor bottles in a wide mirror. Over the mantelpiece hung a superb reproduction of a classical painting, some tasteful nude work. I believe it was "The Judgment of Paris", although the name of the artist escapes me now after all these years. It was an appropriate theme for such an establishment, where similar judgments were doubtless arrived at on a nightly basis. There was a small elevated platform behind a screen of potted palms and ferns with chairs and music stands, where a trio or quartet could sit and provide background music. I had to admit that it was a first-rate house, although I hasten to add that I had not seen the inside of such a place since my marriage. Then the madam entered. She was wrapped in a dressing gown of the purest sheen silk, lime green trimmed with yellow. Long, straight black hair cascaded down her back, and her face was devoid of any obvious negroid features. Only the smooth caramel color of her skin and the telltale whiteness of her palms and slender inside fingers betrayed her racial ancestry. She was a handsome and voluptuous

woman, and one glance at her sultry and heavy-lidded eyes convinced me that she would readily slit any man's throat for a dollar. But then saints do not flourish among the belles of the world's oldest profession.

Legare turned from his contemplation of Paris' delectable dilemma. "Good afternoon, Regina. Sorry to get you up so early, but we need a word with you about this Calhoun business. I don't believe you've met Captain Redmond?"

"Actually, it's Lord Balbriggan, is it not?" she replied, turning a slow and seductive smile on me. "I have often heard of your association with Hugo in his work, your lordship, but I have never had the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"A regrettable omission, ma'am," I returned gallantly, making a mental note to make sure she never did.

"How can I help, Hugo?" she asked, seating herself gracefully on a settee. With true courtesan's art, she managed to remain fully inside the gown and yet give the impression of being disrobed. We seated ourselves across from her. "I suppose you want to ask me about Simon Mendoza? He was here that night."

Legare ignored her insinuating use of his Christian name, either because he refused to be sidetracked or because the woman was perfectly entitled to use it due to past acquaintance. "Calhoun was shot at about four thirty in the morning, as nearly as we can determine at the very moment the guns opened fire on Fort Sumter," he told her. "Simon Mendoza says he was with you when the bombardment began. Is that correct?"

"Yes," she replied. "He was here from about three o'clock until dawn, and he was within my sight at all times. Some of the girls saw him come in, and so did Samuel. What with all the trouble about to explode in the harbor that night we had no custom, so I let the girls go down to the Battery or get up onto the roof to watch. Most of them have a favored client or two in the army, and Major Anderson and Lieutenant Doubleday were regular visitors as well before the problems arose. The

military are always good customers, and we hate to see them go to war and start slaughtering one another. Dead men don't spend their money on us."

"Touching sentimentality, ma'am," said Legare. "But there is one problem. We have two witnesses who claim that they saw Simon Mendoza in St. Michael's churchyard and walking down Broad Street between about twenty-five minutes past four and about twenty to five. How do you explain that?"

"I have no intention of trying to explain it, sir," said Regina with a low laugh. "No doubt these witnesses of yours are a tad more reputable than me?"

"One of them is a free man of color, the other is a police constable. They both know Simon Mendoza by sight and swear that it was he, in full uniform. They have no reason to lie."

"And I do?" she asked archly. "Why would I lie to you, Hugo? The death of Captain Calhoun has not gone unremarked in the town, and the birdies tell me it's not just murder, it's espionage. You know perfectly well that I will do almost anything for money if the price is right, but I've got better sense than to get involved in a political homicide, especially a spy case. The skin of my neck is very delicate, and sensitive to rope. Simon Mendoza was here that morning at four thirty when the cannon opened fire, Hugo, and he most assuredly was not in full uniform. You now have the truth. What use you make of it is up to you."

"Did Simon do anything unusual when the guns opened up?" asked Legare.

"He began to weep like a child," said the madam. "He told me what that pig Calhoun did to him down on the Battery earlier than night. I can understand why he was upset, although why on earth he wants to be part of this insane war is beyond me. There is enough pain and tragedy in the world without seeking it out voluntarily."

"You like him?" asked Legare.

“Insofar as I allow myself to like any of my customers, yes, I suppose I do,” she said with a pretty shrug. “He’s a free spender, he never gets drunk or causes a scene, his bedroom requirements in are simple and uncomplicated. He treats us with common courtesy, which is rare. We like that in a man, as much as we like a generous gratuity. Well, almost as much.”

“Is he capable of killing?”

“You know as well as I do, Hugo, that any man is capable of killing given the proper circumstances. Or any woman. Sometimes people kill for the oddest, most petty reasons. I’ve seen girls shoot one another or cut each other up over a client, generally a rich man they hope will get them out of the house and set them up on their own as a kept woman, but the worst cutting I ever saw in any house was over a stolen hair pin. Once a girl poisoned another and then drank poison herself, because she was in love with her victim but the object of her Sapphic affection preferred men. No one suspected any of this until it happened, least of all the woman who was poisoned first. She died without knowing who was killing her, or why. If the murderess hadn’t left me a note before she committed suicide, we’d never have been any the wiser. Murder is in every human heart somewhere.”

“I agree,” said Legare with a nod. “Let me rephrase the question. From your knowledge of his character, would Simon Mendoza be capable of committing this particular killing?”

“Mmmm, you’re asking me for an opinion?” said Regina with a low chuckle. “Well, let me put it this way. I’d be very surprised if Simon killed Calhoun in this particular way, through what appears to me to be a very elaborate scheme. He might have shot Calhoun down in the street in a rage, but somehow I just can’t think of him as a subtle assassin or a spy. He’s a very conventional person, really, not complicated at all.”

“You say several of your girls saw him, and Samuel as well?”

“That’s right.”

“Is Samuel slave or free?” asked Legare. “We might need his testimony in court.”

“You needn’t worry,” she said sourly. “Samuel is free and legally able to testify. Do you think I’d keep a slave, man?”

“Many free persons of color do so,” I pointed out

“Not this free person of color, as you put it, sir,” she said, turning on me with a scowl. I had very tactlessly touched a raw nerve. “It will hardly surprise you to learn that I was a slave myself, once. My father was a planter in the Georgia sea islands,” she told me bitterly. “When I was born I was an embarrassment, so he sold my mother and me down into Florida. When I was twelve years old my master took me into the house and into his bed, much to the displeasure of his wife. Whenever the master was away from home, she’d have the overseer strip me and string me up to the whipping post on some excuse or other. My body still bears a few scars, which is actually something of an advantage in my work, because there are men who find it erotic to take a woman from behind when they can see the marks of the lash on her back. When I was eighteen the master died and the mistress was at last able to take revenge on me in full measure. She sent me back into the fields by day, and gave me to the blue-gum bucks in the quarters by night. I think, milord, you will have been in this country long enough to understand how the black field hands feel about the master’s high-yellow concubine up in the big house? I will leave to your imagination what I went through during that time of living hell.”

“I was going to say I can well imagine, but that would have been fatuous,” I told her, sincerely apologetic. “I can’t.”

“No, milord, you can’t,” she said with a sigh. “I have to take white men, Lord Redmond, because white men have the money I need. You can never get enough money! But as God is my witness, I will never let another nigger touch me again, not for a thousand dollars! Finally the mistress had her fill of vengeance. Once last time I was strung up and flogged, the cat-o’ nine-tails this time, flogged until the blood ran over

my heels, until between my screams of agony I begged her to kill me and have done with it. I screamed again like an animal, when the overseer washed and cauterized the bloody mess with whiskey and seawater. Then she sold me to a Savannah whorehouse for ten dollars. The price was a final insult. Even in my condition she could have gotten at least a couple of hundred for me. It wasn't a good house, either. They were on the waterfront and got mostly sailors. I finally had a couple of strokes of luck. First, I was able to get my back healed up almost good as new with the help of an old root doctor from the sea islands, and then a rich client took a fancy to me.

"He was a sea captain who'd sold out all his shares and wanted a live-in, sleep-in housekeeper for his retirement. Well, Abel Larkins was a smuggler and probably a pirate in his day, but the one thing he'd never been was a slaver. The day he bought me he took the papers to the courthouse and set me free. I stayed with him for two years until he got married, but I was his whore, not his slave, and I was able to save some money, plus Abel gave me a good-sized bonus when we cut our cables, as he put it. I'm sure Hugo has filled you in on my subsequent career here in Charleston, but there is one thing that you can bank on, gentlemen, and that is that there are no slaves here, nor will there ever be. Every man or woman who works for me in this house does so for wages, good wages, and they can walk out that door and head for Texas tomorrow morning if they want to. I apologize for subjecting you to a tirade, milord..."

"No apology is necessary, ma'am," I said. "I wasn't thinking."

"I know both of you are decent men. You helped me out more than once, Hugo. You saved one of my girls from the gallows when it would have been the easiest thing in the world to walk away. She was only a whore, no one cared that she was innocent. You did. Yet you sit there wearing those gray uniforms which tell the world that you are willing to kill other men and to die yourselves in order to defend that woman's right to hang me up naked and beat me senseless."

Legare took out a cigar. "May I?" he asked politely.

“Certainly, if you give me one,” she said with a smile. “I like those rolled Havanas of yours.”

“I might as well join you,” I laughed, and in a moment all three of us were indulging in “the gentle weed”.

“I didn’t come here to talk politics, Regina,” said Legare thoughtfully, “But you of all people are entitled to make the point you have just made, and I feel I owe you an answer. I’ll try to give you the best one I can.” Legare took a deep puff on his cigar, then spoke. “Along with many other thoughtful and serious men who have donned this uniform, I am very disturbed that we are perceived by the world as defending slavery, and that whether we win or lose we will almost certainly be seen by history as having fought and died to defend slavery. Of course, some of us are in the Confederate Army in order to keep the black man in servitude. It would be stupid of me to deny that.” I was fascinated, for I had never heard Legare discourse at such length on such a weighty topic. “It may surprise you to learn, Regina, that along with a number of educated and influential men in the South I agree that slavery is a moral abomination, as well as a potentially lethal error of policy which may yet destroy our world. Had we been properly approached on the subject a generation ago, with calm and respect and reasonable persuasion, by a North that understood and accepted that this was a Southern problem which must be resolved through a Southern solution, by a government willing to work with us and not against us, then there is little doubt that eventual emancipation could have been achieved, peacefully and without the hideous torrent of blood which is about to engulf us all.

“But the real issue goes far deeper,” Legare continued earnestly. “Try to understand, Regina, that *this war hasn’t got a damned thing to do with slavery!* Not really. Slavery is simply the emotional issue, the issue both sides have used to demonize their opponents and get rifles into the hands of young men. The real agenda is *economic*, as it is in every war ever fought by humankind. It’s not about poor persecuted blacks or whipping posts or the vendue block in the slave market, it’s about cotton

and tobacco and timber and coal, about foreign trade and tariffs, about who will build railroads and factories here in the South and who will reap the profits. The Northern industrialists and stock-jobbers and bankers who are really behind this war couldn't give two hoots in hell about the black man's condition of life. What they object to is that Southern planters are gaining the benefits of the black man's labor, not themselves. They object to Southern cotton being shipped to British mills in Lancashire, Southern tobacco going to cigar-rolling shops in Cuba and Germany, and Southern corn feeding Irish peasants in County Kerry instead of hogs and cattle in the Chicago stockyards. They object to bargaining for the South's raw materials with a small group of educated planters who are capable and ready to defend their own interests and force a fair deal from Northern business. They want to break up the plantation system and then use factors to buy piecemeal from tens of thousands of smallholders, manipulating prices and markets as they see fit. You think that if and when those bluebellies march into Charleston they will come as liberators, madam? God forbid! If you had ever seen the inside of a Connecticut textile mill, where spindly children of ten or eleven work fifteen hours a day and never see the sun, then you would understand what emancipation means for the blacks and the poor whites as well."

"I read newspapers and political tracts, and I have heard that argument before, Hugo," said Regina. "I know those factories are atrocious. Many of the white girls I've worked with in sporting houses came South to get away from the factories, and not one would go back despite the shame some of them feel at working in our craft. But two wrongs don't make a right, sir. Just because Yankee factories are bad doesn't mean slavery is preferable."

"I wonder if millions of liberated Africans will agree, if and when it comes to that?" mused Legare. "Instead of working the land as slaves they will work it as sharecroppers, lacking even the basic rights and protections which our paternalistic system affords them. True, they shall

have wages, although those wages won't be enough to keep a dog alive, and they will be free to take their labor elsewhere in response to the demands of the market. And if there is no demand in the market for their labor, they will starve or turn to stealing to survive. They will no doubt be comforted by the fact that they will at long last have achieved a form of equality with the poor white man. They and the whites will be equally miserable, in a world of poverty, hardship, and insecurity run by utterly corrupt politicians devoid of any of the fine principles upon which this nation was founded, nothing more than lackeys for fat men who sit in boardrooms and New York City offices, looting America like vultures."

"Thank you," she said. "Taking me seriously enough to address a political discussion to me is the rarest of all compliments, gentlemen, and I treasure it. But after all that, I am still colored, and you are still white."

"Yes," concurred Legare. "That is what makes racial conflict the worst of all. Opinions can be altered, language and religion can be changed or imposed, dynasties and governments may be overthrown, economic redistributions can be effected. Almost any other kind of war can be ended when the *casus belli* is removed, even if it is removed by force. But skin color can't be changed by any argument no matter how logical or forceful, not even at the point of a bayonet. We are born in our racial uniform and we cannot take it off."

"Returning to the object of your visit, Hugo, what are you going to do about Simon Mendoza?" she asked. "I was telling the truth, you know. He was here when you tell me Calhoun was killed. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, unfortunately, I do," Legare replied, tugging his beard abstractedly. "I almost wish I didn't. It would surely have made things a lot easier if I could believe him guilty, but I guess we won't have that way out. There was one more thing I wanted to question you about. Are you missing a pillow book, a very good one with professional binding, about a hundred pages, color plates, of French manufacture, judging from the leather tooling? Did you sell such a book to one of your customers recently?"

“No, not that I recall,” said Regina after some thought. “We have a few here, of course, since some of our older gentlemen require them in order to build up the necessary, ah, interest in their lady of choice. But Simon doesn’t like to look at pictures. He prefers the genuine article.”

“Who is the main supplier of such items in Charleston now? Still Tony Gomez?”

“One of his many lines of merchandise, yes.”

“Well, we needn’t take up any more of your time,” said Legare, rising to go. Upstairs we could hear giggles and footsteps; the ladies of the evening were apparently awake and getting ready for an arduous if not ardent shift of duty. “One last question. Was Captain Xavier Calhoun ever a patron of this house?”

“Only once,” said Regina coldly. “We accept new clients only on recommendation, as you are doubtless aware, but after Mr. Calhoun’s first visit I barred him permanently. He damaged the merchandise. Do you want the details?”

“I think not,” said Legare. “Who recommended Calhoun on that occasion? One of your regular clients?”

“Yes, a gentleman we haven’t seen around much lately. His name is Hyman Berlin.”

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“Well, now we know for certain that Hyman Berlin and Captain Calhoun were partners in dissipation,” said Legare with satisfaction as we rode away, headed back to his Henrietta Street rooms. “I wonder what else they were partners in?”

“Do you believe her?” I asked.

“I do. She made one telling point which impressed me, and that is that shielding a spy and murderer would be bad for business and counter-survival. Women like Regina are good businesswomen and strong survivors. In order for her to become involved in something like

this, she would have to be offered monetary inducements of truly major proportions, and I see no signs as yet that any really big money is involved. The three thousand Calhoun was paid for whatever services he rendered was a substantial sum, but I don't think Regina Montez would risk a hemp necklace in the yard of the Charleston jail for three thousand."

"You heard her admit that she would do anything for money!" I objected.

"Then who is paying her, and for what?" inquired Legare. "Simon Mendoza? His father? If they wanted to buy Simon an alibi for the time of the killing they wouldn't turn to a high-yellow whore whose word had to be bought and would be virtually worthless in a court of law. They could fabricate a much better and more convincing story from among a dozen well-respected citizens of their own community, and they needn't pay for it."

"Perhaps with her anti-slavery sentiments she is in the pay of the Federals herself?" I suggested.

"Such places are ideal for espionage, since tongues tend to loosen when one is surrounded by beautiful and accommodating women, and in a high-toned house like that the clientèle would probably have something useful to impart. Nor does she have any love for the South. My God, can you blame her? But for that very reason, I have ears in every sporting house in Charleston. In Wentworth Street it's a little French girl with black hair, who specializes in pleasuring her clients with the world-renowned lovemaking technique of her countrywomen. *Faire une pipe*, I believe is the term."

"Really, Legare!" I exclaimed.

"I seem to recall that before Miss Christie of Belfort ensnared your affections you were not so prudish, Redmond. Don't tell me marriage has turned you into a bluenose? At any rate, when little Yvette's tongue is not otherwise occupied she uses it to report to one of my operatives, and so far as we know Regina's place is clean in the political as well as

the medical sense. I think she was telling the truth, about Simon and also about the fact that she has better sense than to get involved in something which could get her hanged.”

“If you haven’t heard of it, it’s not happening in Charleston,” I agreed.

“Don’t flatter me, Redmond. These aren’t just run of the mill hoodlums I’m going to be dealing with. Even ordinary criminals have beaten me before, and I’m going up against some skilled and experienced opposition now. Allan Pinkerton is an especially dangerous opponent. He is worming his way into Lincoln’s confidence, feeding his suspicion and mistrust with imaginary rebel plots against his life. He is becoming Lincoln’s right-hand man for intelligence and counterespionage. He and I are going to have some tough tussles. I just hope to the devil he isn’t involved in this Calhoun murder. Damn those witnesses! If it wasn’t Simon Mendoza they saw, who was it?”

“See here, Legare, as stubbornly obvious as it sounds, I still don’t understand what’s wrong with taking this whole affair at face value,” I demanded. “Simon Mendoza saw Calhoun riding down the street, got the first pistol he could lay hands on, lured Calhoun into St. Michael’s churchyard on some pretext, killed his enemy, took the despatches as a blind, then panicked when he realized what they were and threw them away. He kept the pouch because he wanted to plant it somewhere else in order to divert suspicion, but he couldn’t decide where. He bribed Regina Montez to lie for him because she was the only person he knew who would commit perjury for pay. He’s just a clumsy murderer who got caught up in the toils of his own passions.”

“I have a number of difficulties with that scenario,” said Legare as we dismounted in the stable behind his Henrietta Street house. He continued speaking while he offsaddled his bay gelding, Tenbrooks. I tethered Corsair while he worked, giving his horse a quick curry and rubdown, and scooping oats into his feedbag. “My first question is the one I have stated before. Why did Simon Mendoza choose the one moment when Xavier Calhoun was carrying vital despatches to carry out his revenge

killings? Presumably after brooding for months and months, with many prior opportunities to commit assassination? A spontaneous meeting? Coincidence, Redmond? I despise coincidence in a case, I exorcise it like a demon, I root it out wherever it rears its' ugly head!

"Secondly, I repeat that young Mendoza could have worked up a far better alibi. Had he gone to his father and confessed what he had done, the old man has such a hatred of Gentiles in general and Calhoun in particular that he probably would have embraced his son as a righteous avenger of his sister's honor and moved heaven and earth to save him. With Mendoza's money he could have gotten Simon out of town and beyond the reach of the law in a matter of hours, or he could have arranged for a dozen respectable witnesses both Jewish and Gentile to step forward and swear Simon was elsewhere at four thirty. Instead, Simon makes no attempt to escape. He hangs around town for a full day, with incriminating evidence lying in his bureau drawer, waiting to be found in the first place any police search will look. No, no, Redmond, it just won't do! Question number three..." Legare paused to pump water into Tenbrooks' trough

"Question number three?" I prompted.

"You say Simon lured Calhoun into the churchyard on some pretext or other. That's not good enough, Redmond. Why would Calhoun interrupt a vital mission given to him personally by the General Officer Commanding of the Confederate States Army, only a few blocks from his destination, dismount, step into a darkened and isolated cemetery behind a concealing wall, with an enemy whom he knew full well had every reason to hate him and to desire his death? Then at some point conveniently turn his back on that enemy, allowing Simon to blow his head off? The whole idea argues an insane carelessness. We have evidence to suggest that Calhoun was a rake, a gambler, an abuser of women, a vicious bully, and a bigot. We have none which suggests that the man was a complete fool." Legare finished with his horse and we climbed the iron stairs to his quarters. "Finally, who paid Calhoun three

thousand dollars, and why? What was Calhoun involved in which led Hyman Berlin to break into his rooms and search them?"

"He must have been looking for papers or documents of some kind," I speculated. "He and Calhoun must have been involved in something scandalous or illegal together, and Hyman Berlin wanted to make sure there was no paper trail leading back to himself."

"Ah, so you have been paying attention as you've been tagging along with me over the years!" said Legare, beaming approval. "Good, Redmond, very good. I concur. And until we learn a bit more about the Berlin-Calhoun connection, I am withholding judgment on Simon Mendoza's guilt or innocence." Legare pulled off his uniform tunic and donned his smoking jacket. "Have a seat and pour yourself a whiskey," he invited. "I've some of your Irish in the decanter and some of our Kentucky bourbon in the stone jug. Hello, Balthazar," he said as the black man entered the room, pulling on his livery jacket. "How did you make out?"

"Good evening, sir. Some interesting gossip, but not much else, I'm afraid. Will you be staying for dinner, Lord Balbriggan? I just got back, but I've an excellent gumbo which has been simmering in the coals since this morning."

"As much as I enjoy your collations, Balthazar, I believe I must decline tonight," I told him. "I'm expected home in George Street. That is if you've no further need for me, Legare?"

"No, not tonight, James. Let's hear what Balthazar has been able to glean for us, and then you're off to Christine and your own fireside. God knows when you may have the opportunity again, after the army moves northward. Did you get Eliza's stewpot mended, Balthazar?"

"I did indeed, sir, an easy enough job. She was kind enough to give me ten cents for my endeavors. I also managed to get a look into Captain Calhoun's chambers through the window on the second floor breezeway, although I had no time to gain entry myself. The room had been rather clumsily rifled by a person who entered through the window."

“Yes, a man named Hyman Berlin, brother-in-law to Moses Mendoza and Simon’s uncle.”

“Indeed, sir? That is most interesting, because it would appear that Mr. Berlin was not unknown to Captain Calhoun. Eliza mentioned several visits by Mr. Berlin to the Tradd Street lodging house, and it would appear that Mr. Berlin and the late Captain habituated certain establishments of a disreputable nature together for purposes of gambling and debauchery.”

“My interest in Hyman Berlin grows apace. What did the Mendoza servants have to say about him?”

“A good deal, sir. I spent several hours in their rear cottage and sold Aunt Rhody ten yards of prime calico, for which I received the sum of two dollars and an excellent meal of Hopping John and fatback. I also made a tentative arrangement with Uncle Tobias to go crab gigging some night soon, which I can do if you need further information as the case develops. It would appear that about a year ago, Hyman Berlin was involved in some unsavory proceedings. Young Simon Mendoza discovered substantial sums of money missing from the business accounts, money that Mr. Berlin had embezzled. There was a full-blown row over it one night in the Mendoza home between Mr. Berlin on the one hand and Simon Mendoza, Mr. Moses Mendoza, and Mr. Mendel Cohen on the other.”

“Was Hezekiah Winthrop involved?” asked Legare keenly.

“Apparently not, sir. Mr. Winthrop is a Gentile, and I gather the family felt the matter was best handled within the Jewish community.”

“I don’t recall any legal charges being brought,” said Legare.

“The affair was kept out of court, at least the civil courts. What the Mendozas did was compel Mr. Berlin to appear before a Beth Din, a Judaic ecclesiastical tribunal. Three learned rabbis sat in judgement on the case, and the outcome was humiliating in the extreme for Mr. Berlin. He was barred from any share in the profits of the business for a period of years, and condemned to work for his brother-in-law for the sum of twelve dollars a week, the wages of a basic clerk. From this wage

he has to pay a certain sum each Sabbath into the synagogue as a sort of symbolic fine. After having displayed a lengthy period of honesty, sobriety, industry, and contrition, it lies within the discretion of the rabbinical court to rehabilitate Mr. Berlin and restore him to his former position within the firm, so long as he manifests sufficient humility and good character. This has not yet taken place.”

“Were you able to learn why was Berlin stealing?” asked Legare. “Gambling, women, drinking, just plain greed?”

“Apparently all of those, sir,” said Balthazar. “Tobias and Rhody do not have a high opinion of Mr. Berlin.”

“I imagine his sporting life has been curtailed on twelve dollars a week!” I laughed. “No more visits to Regina’s place on that kind of emolument!”

“I should imagine not,” agreed Hugo. “What else did you learn about the Mendozas?”

“Rhody and Tobias handle the household duties between them,” reported the black man, “Except for the cooking, which is done by Miss Naomi for religious reasons having to do with the Jewish dietary laws. The household maintains a special kosher kitchen with two stoves, two larders, two sets of dishes for meat and milk products, so forth and so on. Rhody has been with the Mendozas for thirty years, and she still considers this arrangement to be some kind of insult against her own not inconsiderable culinary skills. They are helped in the garden and with the laundry by Rhody’s daughter and Tobias’s son, who are also owned by Mr. Mendoza but who work at the store most of the time and sleep there, so Rhody and Tobias are the only live-in servants. They hold Marse Mose in great awe and respect, since they believe the Jews of today to be the original people of the Bible, and Mr. Mendoza has a certain Old Testament air about him. They apparently accept him as some relation to the Moses of burning bush and Ten Commandments fame. Simon Mendoza they hold in great esteem and affection, and they are

adamant that he did not kill Captain Calhoun, or if he did then Calhoun was in any event an evil man who deserved to die.”

“What is their attitude towards the girl?” asked Legare.

“A bit more complex and ambiguous, sir,” said Balthazar. “As nearly as I can gather, they do not approve of Miss Naomi’s recent conduct, especially with regards to Captain Randolph Breckinridge. They feel that she is causing unwanted trouble and dissension in the home at a time when Mr. Mendoza is ill and the family is in crisis. They favor the suit of Mr. Mendel Cohen. As often happens, the servants of color have taken on some of the prejudices and snobberies of the white masters.”

“Getting back to Calhoun himself, what can you tell me about him?”

“Little good, I fear,” said Balthazar with disapproval. “Very little to be said for him, really. A violent man, a crude bully. He flogged his field hands and raped his slave women. A spendthrift who gambled away his inheritance and neglected his plantation. Women of his own class he seduced with a certain coarse charm, women of the demimonde he simply used, paid, and threw out. When he was short on his rent in Tradd Street he pleased the landlady, a middle-aged widow of Swiss extraction.”

“Berlin is looking an ever more likely candidate,” I remarked. “A liar and an embezzler, a debauchee who knew the deceased well enough to recommend him to a high-class knocking shop. A dishonest man desperate for money, humiliated by Simon Mendoza and no doubt filled with hatred for the young man who exposed him. There’s your motive for framing Simon, Legare. In my book any man who will steal from his own family is low enough not to stick at murder or treason, if it would get him money and revenge at the same time. What’s next? Do we go back and confront Hyman Berlin with what we have learned?”

“If this were murder only, yes, that’s what I’d do,” said Legare thoughtfully, stroking his beard. “But our primary aim is to recover those despatches which could cause death and destruction far beyond the death of one debauched man. I agree that Hyman Berlin is now front runner in our suspect stakes, but I still get the impression we’re

missing some pieces of the puzzle. There is another hand at work here, a hand more subtle than the one which knocked out that window pane and left a mess strewn all over Calhoun's sitting room. I want the man behind that hand, because I'm certain he's got the despatches or knows where we can lay hands on them. We'll give Berlin some more rope. I'm going out later tonight to have a chat with Polly Roper and to check on a few alibis. I'll put some of my counterintelligence lads on Berlin from tonight. They'll shadow him very discreetly and see what he gets up to. I also want to track down Tony Gomez and rattle his cage."

"Gomez?" inquired Balthazar in distaste, his eyebrows raised. "This investigation does not lead us into very fashionable purlieus, sir."

"Hardly our usual level of gentility, is it? Can you meet me here about noon, Redmond? I won't need you until then, and I will detain you from Christie's company no longer."

"Why not put Tuscarora right on Berlin direct, rather than anchoring him at the Tradd Street lodgings?" I suggested. "That way he can keep an eye on the man all the time, instead of waiting to see if he goes back to Tradd Street."

"It isn't Hyman Berlin I'm waiting for," said Legare. "Good evening, Redmond."

V

I spent the next morning engaged in my military duties, preparing my company for the beginning of our march northward, where we meant to meet and defeat Mr. Lincoln's much-vaunted army of seventy-five thousand ninety-day volunteers. When I arrived at Legare's lodgings in Henrietta Street he was out, and I accepted a coffee from Balthazar and settled down with one of Legare's many peculiar volumes dealing with the outré and the bizarre. I was halfway through an English translation of a German broadsheet from the year 1590, describing the horrific crimes of a so-called werewolf, one Peter Stubbe or Stumpf, when Legare returned. "Do you really believe that this creature transformed himself into a wolf with the aid of a magical belt given to him by the devil, so he could rend and devour the flesh of young girls?" I asked him.

"A bit before my time," said Legare. "However, I keep an open mind on any subject which has to do with human depravity. My experience has been that it is infinite in scope and depth. You've been with me on some strange enough cases, Redmond. Perhaps some day I'll tell you about some of the files I keep in my locked box in Mr. Sass's vault."

"Mmmm, would that be wise, sir?" put in Balthazar, clearing his throat gently.

“Possibly not. Think you could stand to hear about anything worse than Emory Plantation, James?”

“I could, but I’d rather not,” I said with a shudder of remembrance. “What about the case we’re on now?”

“You haven’t missed anything of importance,” he told me. “I’ve been doing some fruitless digging. I went to headquarters and interviewed everyone I could find who was present on the morning of the twelfth, to try and ascertain if there was any way anyone could have known in advance that Calhoun was on his way to the Exchange Building with the despatches. Maybe, maybe not. Calhoun often rode despatch, but that morning General Beauregard just grabbed the first handy staff officer for the run. Things were understandably a bit tense in the headquarters as the ultimatum ran out, and no one was really paying attention. God, I hope Federal intelligence doesn’t have a man on Beauregard’s staff! Polly Roper had little to tell me, except that Calhoun had been flush in recent months and paid off his debts, which we already knew. Mr. Sass informs me that several of the fifty-dollar bank notes paid into Captain Calhoun’s account were originally issued to Continental Mercantile over a prior period of some months. The notes were drawn by Simon Mendoza or Mendel Cohen, since for reasons we know of they didn’t trust Hyman Berlin to do the banking or handle any money.”

“What does that prove, though?” I asked. “Those notes could have changed hands a dozen times before Calhoun received them.”

“True. I have asked Halliburton to see if he can find where Tony Gomez is hanging out his odoriferous shingle these days, but nobody’s seen him around for a while. A day of dead ends, thus far.”

“Legare, I don’t like to sound discouraging, but suppose the despatches have already gotten to Washington?” I asked.

“If that is the case, then by the end of the week we should begin to hear of mass arrests in the Border states and police raids on certain financial and mercantile institutions in the North,” replied Legare grimly. “Until we do receive that kind of confirmation, we must

presume that the despatches can still be recovered. I have ascertained the present whereabouts of every man and woman in Charleston whom I even remotely suspect of disloyalty to the Confederacy, Redmond. As nearly as I have been able to determine all of them are where they should be, none of them has left town in a hurry, and none of them appear to be involved in this. That is starting to bother me. Damn it all, if there is a Union spy ring capable of carrying out the assassination of a Confederate staff officer operating in this city I should have gotten some whiff of it before now, but I haven't. Either I am an incompetent idiot, or else we are dealing with a purely personal murder case."

"You are hardly incompetent," I protested.

"I hope not, because more is riding on this case in the way of potential death and destruction than anything I have ever handled before. We need enlightenment, Redmond. Let's go."

"And where are we going to be enlightened?"

"To the synagogue in St. Philip Street, where we will seek a holy man." As we rode through the bustling, noisy streets Legare treated me to a lecture on one of those obscure aspects of Charleston history of which he was a master. "You may wonder why we are going to the small, so-called Polish synagogue on St. Philip Street instead of the larger Congregation Beth Elohim in Hasell Street. As you will have gathered, Moses Mendoza is extremely orthodox in his religious observance. Some years ago, in 1824 to be precise, Congregation Beth Elohim converted to a new movement within the Hebrew faith known as Reform Judaism. This caused many years of conflict, and in the 1840s a number of the more rigidly orthodox adherents broke off to form their own denomination called Shearith Israel, meaning 'The Remnant of Israel', a poke at the Reformed lot on Hasell Street. The immediate cause of the break was not any profound theological cleavage, although such differences definitely were there, but the organ to which the Reverend Elliot made reference. To men like Moses Mendoza it was the last straw. Music in the temple? A heathen innovation, creeping Episcopalianism!"

We tethered our horses to a tree outside the small wooden building. “You’d think they’d provide a hitching rail and a trough,” I remarked.

“What for? Orthodox Jews are required to walk to *shul*, and who else would come to an Orthodox synagogue?” Inside was a long hall with a low ceiling. At the rear was a wall containing *seforim*, Hebrew holy books on shelves, and a table where several elderly men with white beards, skullcaps, and prayer shawls sat whispering among themselves as they pored over the books and argued points of Mosaic law. At the other end of the synagogue was a raised dais, the actual *shul* itself, and the Ark containing the Torah, the Scrolls of the Law. The rabbi’s study was at the rear of the building, the door was open, and he was seated at his desk. Legare knocked on the doorframe. “Rabbi Klass? Benyamin Avrohom Klass? I am Major Hugo Legare, and this is Captain James Redmond, Lord Balbriggan. Might we have a moment of your time?”

The rabbi was a small, dignified man of about fifty-five years, with a heavy black beard showing streaks of gray, and long sidelocks. Instead of the more common skullcap, he wore an incongruous fur hat, more suitable for the cold and damp of a Polish ghetto than the humid heat of the South Carolina Low Country. His English was excellent, but tinged with an accent. “Come in, gentlemen,” he said courteously. “I am of course aware of your business. News travels fast in a small community such as ours, especially bad news. So sit, sit. How may I help you to clear Simon Mendoza from this false accusation?”

“I should prefer to tell you how you can help us arrive at the truth, rabbi, for that is our objective,” said Legare. “I would like to ask you a few questions.”

“A question, rabbi, a question!” said Klass with a smile. “That is what the yeshiva boy says when he is under instruction and he wants his *rebbe* to explain some point of the Torah or the Talmud. But I’m sure you have not come here to discuss Torah, Major.”

“Actually, rabbi, in a manner of speaking that is indeed why I have come,” Legare told him. Klass arched his eyebrows in polite surprise.

“My questions are of a general rather than a specific nature. I want to understand this case and the people who are involved in it better, so that I have more chance of arriving at correct conclusions.

“A surprisingly intelligent approach for a policeman,” said Klass approvingly. “The Tsar’s gendarmes in Galicia, this smart they don’t come.”

“I’m not that kind of policeman, rabbi. My first question is this: under what circumstances is a Jew allowed to violate his religious obligations under the law of the Torah?”

“Such as committing murder?” demanded the rabbi bluntly. “So you believe that Simon Mendoza is guilty?”

“I did not say so. There are other commandments. Bearing false witness, for example. Concealing knowledge of a crime. Profiting from a crime committed by others. I have reason to believe that someone of your faith has not lived up to the high standards of personal conduct which Judaism demands, and I want to understand this person’s possible motivation.”

Klass leaned back in his chair, tugging his beard in a manner very similar to Legare’s own habitual gesture. “A Jew is allowed to violate the Law only in two circumstances, Major. The first is what we call *pikuach nefesh*, the preservation of life, either his own or the lives of other Jews. The classic example is that of the Jew who is shipwrecked on a desert island where the only food available is the flesh of wild pigs. He may eat the *treifa*, the forbidden non-kosher food, in order to maintain his life. A Jew is essentially someone who is bound by the yoke of divine obligation, the Torah. The preservation of his life takes precedence over the prohibition against eating unclean food, because a dead Jew cannot serve God. His violation of this one mitzvah, this religious obligation, must be counterbalanced against all the future *mitzvot* he will perform when he is rescued.”

“I believe there are negative applications as well?” remarked Legare.

“Certainly. A Jew may not endanger the lives of other Jews, even if this means not performing a mitzvah, even one of the strongest. The

prohibition against worshiping graven images and false gods is probably the strongest commandment of all, and yet on more than one occasion throughout history individuals, families, even whole Jewish communities have been forced to accept Christian baptism and adore graven images of the Virgin Mary in infidel churches, because to honor the One God and to have no other before Him would have meant instant slaughter at the hands of the Crusaders or the Inquisition or the Cossacks or whomever our persecutors of the time were.”

“The *converso* Jews of Spain?” asked Legare.

“The *marranos*, yes,” agreed Klass.

“I prefer the term official Catholic term *converso* myself,” said Legare mildly. “The word *marrano* was a contemporary Hebrew slang word meaning ‘pig’. It was applied to the forcible converts not by Christians, but by their fellow Jews who did not convert and suffered expulsion from Spain as a result. Unfortunately, as so often happens, it is the derogatory term that has stuck. I dislike using racially abusive terms for any group of people.”

“An admirable trait, sir,” said Klass with a smile. “Yes, that’s what *marrano* means, and I have to admit that our ancestors were rather unfair, because a good many of those families who saved their lives and property in Spain at the price of outward conversion actually maintained and passed on their Jewish faith in secret, over many generations. I might add that the Mendoza family were among those who were expelled from Spain by the Inquisition in 1492, when they fled to Holland. It may be because of this heritage that the Mendozas have always been such a strongly Orthodox line.”

“You mentioned a second condition where deviation from the Law is permissible, rabbi?”

“A bit more of a gray area,” said the rabbi carefully. “The fulfillment of a religious obligation, as I have said, is called a *mitzvah*, but not all *mitzvot* are of equal worth in the eyes of God. You understand that Jews are not only bound by the Ten Commandments and the laws of the

Pentateuch, but by all of the laws and obligations laid down in the Talmud by the *gaonim*, the sages and holy rabbis of antiquity. Much Talmudic commentary is devoted to discussion of the very question you have asked, Major Legare. When a Jew is faced with two holy commandments, but cannot fulfill one without violating the other, which takes precedence? Sometimes it is necessary to ignore a lesser mitzvah or even to violate it outright, in order to fulfill a greater one.”

“Such as when?” asked Legare.

“The Bible is replete with examples. Jacob swindled his own brother and lied to his aged and senile father in order to ensure that the divine birthright of God passed to the Jewish people rather than the Gentile. Joseph took advantage of Pharaoh’s superstition and robbed the Egyptians blind in order to provide for the Jewish people. Joshua slaughtered whole populations in order to seize the land of Canaan for Israel. Queen Esther violated one of the gravest of all prohibitions, the ban on sexual congress with Gentiles, in order to save Mordecai and the captive Hebrews from the anti-Semite Haman.”

“Yes, I understand the Judaic proscription against intermarriage is especially strong,” said Legare casually. The small man shook an admonishing finger at him.

“Sneak up on a rabbi in a discussion, this you shouldn’t try,” he said merrily. “I do this for a living, you know. I see now what you’ve been fishing for, Major. You want to know about Naomi Mendoza, *nu?*”

“There seems to be an understanding between Miss Mendoza and Captain Breckinridge,” said Legare. “How do you view that?”

“*Es gefelt mir nit,*” said the rabbi with a sigh. “Not good. I said just now that a Jew is essentially a servant of God’s will. Unfortunately, God sometimes has trouble getting good help. This country has been better to us than any other, Major Legare, but that in itself holds dangers for our survival. In America the grass really is greener on the other side of the fence, and many Jews are starting to jump the fence. Some only compromise, like those Reform schmucks on Hasell Street. Some hit the

ground running on the other side of the fence and we lose them forever. God loses them forever. I very much fear we are going to lose Naomi.”

“Mr. Mendel Cohen seems to feel that when it comes down to the point, Miss Mendoza will give up Captain Breckinridge rather than leave the faith of her ancestors and the community wherein she was born and raised.”

“Mendy is a man in love, and I believe he is overly optimistic.” said the rabbi with a shake of his head.

“Perhaps I’m overly romantic myself,” I put in, “But if this couple genuinely love one another, why on earth should they not marry?”

“Love, Captain, is a greater enemy to the Jewish people than all the hatred we have ever faced,” said the rabbi gravely. “Israel has survived not only the usual run of plagues and famines and natural disasters which have afflicted the world, but we have survived the systematic efforts of a dozen empires and a hundred tyrants to exterminate us completely from the face of the earth. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Romans, the Persians, the Crusaders, the Inquisition, Khmelnitski’s Cossacks, the Tsar of Russia *yemach sh’mo*, all of these and more have tried to destroy Jewry. No doubt other tyrannies as yet unknown will try again in the future. These threats are part and parcel of being a Jew. We accept them. I accept them, because I know that if an anti-Semite comes up to me tomorrow and slays me with a sword or a pistol, the Jewish people will live on. The sword and the pistol and the fire we can survive, Lord Redmond,” continued Klass, leaning forward earnestly. “But the love of your handsome captain for our daughter, this we cannot survive. You ask why Naomi should not marry a Gentile even though she loves him. It is because Naomi Mendoza was born a Jew, and with that birth she inherited the divine obligation, the Yoke of God. During this coming war, I have no doubt that both of you gentlemen will do things that you don’t want to do, deeds that you will detest, acts which go against every moral teaching in which you believe. Yet you will do these things because it is your duty. Naomi Mendoza has a duty not

to betray her people and rob them of the Jewish home and the Jewish children that only the Jewish woman can bring into being. She was born with that duty, and she has no right to shirk it, no matter how her heart cries out for a love which is forbidden.”

“That is a cruel creed,” I told him.

“It is made necessary by a cruel past, sir,” said the rabbi.

“I will put this to you bluntly, rabbi,” said Legare. “We still do not know for certain why Captain Xavier Tremaine Calhoun was killed. It was most probably espionage, since as you are doubtless aware, important secret military documents were stolen from the dead man. But we have not overlooked the possibility of a personal grudge killing, either by Simon Mendoza or someone else. I presume you are also aware of a disgraceful incident involving Calhoun and Miss Mendoza. It is possible that Calhoun was killed by a Jew who considered himself a *godel hador*, a divine avenger.”

“Thus implying that Captain Breckinridge may be in danger as well from some self-appointed Zealot?” returned the rabbi. “Oy, I hope not! This we need like a hole in the head. All it would take is for the South to lose a few battles, and people will start looking for scapegoats like they always do. We don’t need anything adding to the irritation factor.”

“Is it possible?” insisted Legare.

“The Jewish people as a rule have avoided acts of violent revenge,” said Klass. “We’ve always been a tiny minority wherever we have gone, and any attempt to resist persecution by force would simply invite massive and overwhelming retaliation against all of us. Beyond that, we believe ourselves to be a people apart and genuinely above violence. But we are men, Major, and men are subject to the same temptations in every land and every culture. The rabbis have a word for the evil inclination, the *yetzer hara*, the evil spirit within that the Jew must wrestle with and overcome. At Mount Sinai God gave His commandment against murder to the Jewish people before any other, Major Legare. He must have felt that we were in need of it.”

“A most enlightening discourse, Rabbi Klass,” said Legare. “By the by, I understand that here in the synagogue you keep duplicate family records of all births, deaths, marriages, divorces, wills and so forth which occur among your congregation?”

“We do, Major. Such documents belong not only to the individual and his family, they belong to the congregation and beyond that they belong to the Jewish people as a whole down through the ages. Each generation adds a new page to the incredible saga of our existence. We have papers on the Mendoza family going back to the year 1736, when Avigdor Mendoza arrived in Charleston from Amsterdam.”

“Do you keep records as well of all the decisions of the rabbinical court, the Beth Din I believe it is called?”

“Of course we do, and again you try with the sneaking up on me?” laughed Klass. “The decision of every Beth Din and the Talmudic verdict of the *rabbonim* are especially important documents, for they contain *halacha*, religious law, as well as community history. And before you should ask, I won’t discuss the Beth Din on Hyman Berlin. I don’t mind talking Torah with you, but I will not help you arrest or punish any specific Jew.”

“*Pikuach nefesh?*”

“Precisely,” agreed the rabbi. “I have my duty, Major Legare, as do you.”

“As do I, Rabbi Klass. Good day to you, sir.”

“What on earth was that all about?” I demanded of him as we were riding back to Henrietta Street. “It all seemed perfectly pointless to me.”

“Not at all. I learned what I wanted to learn. Hyman Berlin was indeed embezzling, and there does exist a written record of the fact even though the case never came before the criminal courts. As for the rest, I stirred the waters to see what would rise to the surface.”

“See here, Legare, do you really have any idea who killed Calhoun, or are you just fishing, as the rabbi said?”

“I am reasonably certain I know who killed Calhoun, yes, but I am blessed if I know how I am going to prove it, and at the moment I am

more concerned with recovering the despatches. But what the devil...? Hello, Jimmy!" A young boy of about ten or eleven ran up to us and tugged at Legare's bridle

"Mister Legare, Mister Legare, Fred says come to Tradd Street right now!" the child cried.

"This is Jimmy, Tuscarora's younger brother," said Legare. "You didn't meet him during that coachman business, but I remember him."

"Fred tuck me with him to watch that house and come gitcha when somebody went upstairs!" said the boy, jumping up and down insistently. "I seen you and His Nibs here at the police station, so I knows you're you! Come on!" The lad turned and ran off, and we followed him to Tradd Street. When we got there, Tuscarora was leaning on a corner lamppost, dressed as a seedy loafer with a straw in his mouth. "Still there?" asked Legare.

"Yes, sir," reported the undercover officer. "Came in a cab, which is parked around the corner in King Street. Gave the landlady some song and dance, probably claimed to be a relative. You'll never guess who it is."

"I never guess at all, Fred, I know who it is. Come on, Redmond. Fred, you and Jimmy head home and get some rest, then report to Halliburton about six o'clock tonight. I've got a bird I want shadowed and you can help my man do it. You've done well." We tied our horses and strode by the protesting Swiss landlady and up the stairs to Calhoun's rooms. I drew my pistol, thinking we were about to close in on a desperate murderer, but Legare smiled and shook his head, indicating that the weapon wasn't necessary, so I holstered it. He stepped to the door and opened it, and we went in. To my amazement, the person who whirled around from the drawer she was rifling and stared at us in shock was Naomi Mendoza.

"Good afternoon, ma'am," said Legare with a courteous tip of his hat. "Have you found the letters yet?"

The girl turned pale and drew in her breath, but recovered her poise quickly. She looked at Legare strangely for an instant, and then she

relaxed and accepted the inevitable. “No, Major Legare, I’m afraid I haven’t found the letters. Do you know where they are?”

“I know where they are not, and they are not anywhere in these rooms. Captain Redmond and I turned the place over ourselves yesterday. I believe we need to have a talk, Miss Mendoza. Might I prevail upon you to take a seat?” She seated herself gracefully on Calhoun’s settee. Today she wore a summer frock of light powder blue, trimmed with gossamer lace. She had taken off her sunbonnet and her raven hair roiled freely down her back. She sat straight on the settee, her hands folded in her lap in proper finishing school style, regarding us warily. “This is the first opportunity you have had to get out alone?” opened Legare conversationally as we sat down ourselves in Calhoun’s threadbare armchairs. “It would be. I imagine your father keeps an eagle eye on you, in view of Captain Breckinridge’s attentions.”

“You are a very perceptive man, Major Legare,” said the lady ruefully. “Father insisted on going to the office today and Tobias went with him. I let Aunt Rhody go visiting. Gentlemen, may I have your word of honor that what I tell you here in this room will remain absolutely confidential? I have heard that you are both men of discretion.”

“Captain Calhoun’s killer must be apprehended, and the missing documents must be recovered and returned to the Confederate authorities, if that is still possible,” said Legare. “Beyond that, I have no desire to cause anyone any unnecessary distress. You must content yourself with that assurance and take your chances, ma’am. This is after all a murder investigation. You were not entirely frank with us when you spoke with us yesterday, were you?”

“No. No, sir, I was not,” she sighed.

“I can understand your reticence with Captain Breckinridge present, ma’am, but he is not here now. I believe it is in everyone’s interest that from this point on, you tell us the truth. You were in love with Xavier Calhoun, were you not?”

“I thought I was. I was a fool.”

“And you wrote him letters, six of them all told?” continued Legare.

“Yes, six! How on earth did you know that?” asked Naomi, surprised.

“Your brother told me that Calhoun boasted around town in the clubs and the hotel bars that he had letters from you of an indiscreet nature.”

The girl pressed her fists to her mouth with a shudder. “Boasting about them in his clubs and in bars? Dear God!”

“How indiscreet were they, ma’am?” asked Legare.

“Enough to destroy me in society, Major,” the girl moaned. “Women in love do stupid things. I was very much in love and very, very stupid.”

“What was the gist of the contents?”

“Please, Major, bear with me while I explain this in my own way,” said Naomi, taking several deep breaths and looking up at us. “I am a woman raised in a community and a religious tradition completely dominated by men, even more so than Christian society. The only excuse I can offer for my infatuation with Xavier Calhoun was that he offered me a way out, a whole new life, or for a time so it seemed. My father is anxious for me to marry a young man of our own faith, a senior clerk at the store named Mendel Cohen. Have you met him?”

“Yes, ma’am. He seems to be an intelligent and able young man.”

“Oh, he is, and very devout. He would be the ideal Jewish husband for me. Respectful yet firm, affectionate yet patriarchal, and always ensuring in his own quiet and efficient way that our lives followed the path laid down for our people hundreds of years ago by holy rabbis whose names I could never pronounce. I was never taught Hebrew, you see. No need. Women can’t read from the Scrolls of the Law in synagogue and they don’t need to learn Torah, because they have men to teach them right from wrong. My life with Mendy would be a routine of kitchen, nursery, and the women’s section of the temple. The average slave here in Charleston has more freedom.”

“Pardoning me for sounding skeptical, ma’am,” interjected Legare, “But do you really believe changing your religion and marriage to a Christian planter will be an improvement?”

“It is a matter of degree,” she replied. “Comparatively speaking, yes, it will be an improvement. Randolph is the lesser of two evils, if you will please forgive me for speaking so flippantly of a man whom I know loves me very deeply and whom I am really very fond of myself. My options are very circumscribed, but as mistress of Spring Lake they will broaden considerably. The philosopher Heine once referred to his baptismal certificate as his admission ticket into European culture. My baptism will be my admission into South Carolina society. Planter’s wives can do all kinds of things that proper Jewish matrons cannot. They can go riding, for example. I’ve never had a horse of my own. They can sit with their husbands and family in church. They can sing and play music in public. Planter’s wives can eat anything they want, and they can have cooks prepare their meals. They can travel with their husbands, to New Orleans or Baltimore or even to Europe. And above all, planter’s wives are allowed to share responsibility with their husbands for the operation of the plantation. Indeed, during this coming war many of us will be forced to manage alone, with our menfolk in the army. After Randolph and I are married I am going to have to run Spring Lake economically and profitably under wartime conditions. Most women would find that a daunting task. I am looking forward to the challenge. No doubt you gentlemen think me cold and calculating, throwing away a tradition of life thousands of years old for mere personal advantage?”

“I think Captain Breckinridge is a very fortunate man,” said Legare. “He will be very lucky to have a wife of your determination and strength behind at home.”

“That presumes that the marriage will take place, Major Legare,” replied Naomi earnestly. “If those letters ever come to light, my entire life is ruined! I blame no one but myself, of course, but in the light of

what has happened since then, especially that terrible incident last October, a damning and yet completely false construction might be placed on those letters. I know now that I was wrong about Xavier Calhoun, terribly wrong, that he was a fortune hunter who wanted me only for my family's money and who tried to take me by force in order to compel me to marry him. My love for him turned to contempt after that. But if Randolph were ever to read those letters he would be shocked, shattered! He would never marry me then, for he could never be sure that I was worthy of his trust. I could not condemn him for that, but I must do what I can to prevent it from happening."

"I understand perfectly," Legare assured her.

"In addition, I regret to say that the letters contain references to my willingness to leave the Mosaic faith for Calhoun, and some bitter and angry comments I made about Judaism as a whole, which I now realize I never should have committed to paper no matter what my private feelings. If my father were to read those lines it would probably kill him, and despite the anguish which my marriage to Randolph will cause him I have no wish to bring any more pain and grief into his life than I can possibly avoid. Major Legare, Lord Balbriggan, I am throwing myself on your mercy and asking you to save me from my own foolishness! Help me find the letters, and if you find them yourselves please return them to me without reading them. I appeal to you as Southern gentlemen to preserve my honor, please!" By now she was pleading openly, tears swelling in her eyes, her hands clasped before her in supplication.

"Have you told us everything?" demanded Legare.

"Yes, everything!"

"Miss Mendoza, you have not," said Legare, shaking his head in disappointment. "You have not told us how it came about that Captain Calhoun was blackmailing you, to the amount of three thousand dollars."

"What?" gasped Naomi. "Sir, I swear to you that you are mistaken! I know nothing of this, and in any case, where on earth would I get three thousand dollars?"

Hugo Legare studied her for about twenty seconds, in a manner reminiscent of a scientist studying a new specimen of plant or insect. It was a calm yet penetrating scrutiny that he often used to discern whether or not he was being told the truth. It is difficult for me accurately to portray this technique of his; privately I always dubbed it “the All-Seeing Eye”. I have seen guilty criminals break down and confess after wilting under that eye. Legare had within him a natural instinct for the detection of falsehood that I have never seen equaled, even in the famous Mr. Holmes of Baker Street whom we met in later years. Occasionally this instinct of his led him to take pure shots in the dark, and he seldom missed. Yet when he did miss, as he apparently had done just now with Naomi Mendoza, he was always willing to admit his error and change his approach. “You assure me that you did not pay Xavier Tremaine Calhoun three thousand dollars to recover the letters you wrote to him?”

“My heavens, no!”

“The money was paid in six increments of five hundred dollars each, beginning in January of this year. To answer your earlier question, that was how I deduced that there were six letters. In addition to ourselves, the police and one other individual known to us have searched these rooms thoroughly. The letters are not here. It is possible Calhoun had some secret hiding place or repository where he kept the letters, and we may yet find them, but at this point I would say that in all likelihood the person who paid Calhoun that money now has the letters in his possession. Two days after Calhoun received the last payment he was murdered.”

“Dear God!” whispered the girl in horror. She seemed to collapse on her seat, shuddering.

“I should not be surprised if your yourself were to be approached very shortly with a blackmail attempt,” Legare went on grimly. “I will be very interested to see what the blackmailer demands of you. If this occurs, Miss Mendoza, I ask that you contact me immediately. Captain Redmond and I will deal with the individual in question.”

“I am ruined,” she said dully.

“Possibly not. We will do what we can.”

“Thank you, Major Legare,” she said with a long, drawn-out breath, recovering herself. “Thank you both. This person who searched this room, the person you believe may have bought my letters from Xavier, will you not tell me who he is?”

“I decline to state, madam. We have no proof. We are not yet certain whether or not Xavier Calhoun was killed by a Union agent or over some of his personal affairs, or perhaps a bit of both. He seems to have had all manner of undesirable associations which still need clarification. He also seems to have had a number of enemies. Your brother Simon certainly had motive enough to kill him.”

“Oh, no, Major Legare, he couldn’t have!” she cried.

“Or Randolph Breckinridge, if he expected you were about to be compromised,” Legare went on. “Or Mendel Cohen, out of affection for you and to punish Calhoun for his assault on you. Or your father, who could have committed the act despite his infirmity and would seem to have little to lose.”

“It *can’t* be any of them!” she wailed desolately. “Why must it be someone I care about? It must be a stranger, some Yankee spy!”

“Or it could have been you yourself,” said Legare casually. “Did you kill Captain Calhoun, ma’am?”

Naomi stared at him for a moment, dumbfounded, and then her tension seemed to burst and she broke out in a peal of honest, genuinely amused laughter. “Major Legare, really! I ought to be thoroughly offended by that remark, but do you know, in a strange kind of way I’m actually flattered that you think me such an Amazon! My Judith to Xavier Calhoun’s Holofernes? No, sir, I didn’t kill Xavier, but I can understand how you might suspect me. You’re right, I did have the strongest of motives. I also had the opportunity. My father was in bed and Tobias was down on the Battery watching the bombardment, and Rhody was in her cottage worrying herself into a fit of prayer and hymn-singing because she thought the Yankees were going to level the

town with their cannon and kill us all. No one would have noticed if, say, I had recognized Xavier riding down King Street with my field glasses, then disguised myself in Simon's Palmetto uniform and gone out to waylay him."

"And how were you able suddenly to grow a beard to match your brother's, ma'am?" I could not resist inquiring.

"Our company imports theatrical supplies for every major dramatic troupe in the country, from the Dock Street Theater here in Charleston to Ford's Theater in Washington, Captain," she said, smiling. "Including false beards which may be pasted on the face with spirit gum. In the poor light I might well have passed for Simon to a casual observer. I also could have gotten that small pistol from our store inventory, I could have lured Xavier into the churchyard and killed him, then stolen the despatches and planted the gun and the pouch in my brother's bureau drawer to incriminate him. But I did none of those things, Major Legare. Do you know why not?"

"I very much hope that you will tell me why not, Miss Mendoza," said Legare gravely.

"A reason which I doubt you will accept, but which is nonetheless true." Naomi had stopped smiling. "I did not kill Xavier Calhoun because it would be wrong. I did not kill him because God forbids it; that much Judaism I do retain. He was a drunkard, a wretched fortune hunter, and a man who brutally tried to rape me, but I did love him once, and the injuries he did to me I would not repay with murder. Beyond that, I would never do something like that to my father and to my brother. I am planning on leaving the Jewish community. When I marry Randolph they will sing the *Kadish* and sit *shiva* for me as if I were dead, and they will suffer just as much as if I had died, if not more because of what they view as my shame in giving myself to a man with yellow hair. I am willing to inflict that pain on my family in order to gain a life I can live with at least some freedom and dignity, but I would never disgrace them and the Jews of Charleston by committing murder.

And if I had, if I had shot or stabbed him in my own defense or in some moment of passion, for me then to try and blame my crime on my own brother, and remain silent while he was convicted and executed? That is an impossibility. That would be evil, sir, and I am not an evil woman. Foolish, thoughtless, careless, self-centered, disobedient and disrespectful of my father, yes, I am all of those. But I'm not so vile as to do a thing like that, Major."

Legare rose silently and bowed to her, holding open the door for her, and she got up and put on her bonnet and took up her parasol. "I wouldn't want you to think that I have forgotten my brother's trouble in the midst of my own, gentlemen. Help me if you can do so without compromising your duty. I do not believe I am completely unworthy of it. But above all, help Simon. My honor is precious to me, but his life is more so." She left the room, and we heard her descending lightly down the stairs.

I jumped up in excitement. "Now I understand what you have been driving at all day, Legare!" I exclaimed. "Of course, it's as clear as day! Hyman Berlin is our man for sure!"

"Oh?" asked Legare with interest, leaning back in his armchair and lighting up a cigar. "How do you make that out?"

"It all fits! Hyman Berlin has motive, financial and personal. He hates the Mendoza family, Simon in particular because it was Simon who exposed him as an embezzler and reduced him to a pittance of twelve dollars a week. Berlin also wants to remove Simon Mendoza so that he can regain control of the business when Moses Mendoza passes on, which by the look of him won't be too long. Berlin gained access to the Mendoza house on some business or family pretext, and he took a wax impression of the lock on Simon's bureau drawer. He had access to the Mendoza stock and extracted the Eley's pistol. He obtained the obscene book from Regina Montez or some supplier like Tony Gomez, no doubt originally for his own perverted enjoyment, but then he decided to use it to discredit Simon's character. The young man who was so upright

and honest that he exposed his own uncle as a thief was to be revealed to the world as a sexual degenerate as well as a murderer and a traitor. God, how Berlin must hate Simon!”

“Go on,” said Legare encouragingly.

“We know that Calhoun was a companion in debauchery to Hyman Berlin back in his free-spending, embezzling days. It all must have started one night when Calhoun makes a drunken boast about having compromising letters in his possession from Naomi Mendoza. Berlin is delighted, for he recognizes his opportunity to get back at the entire Mendoza family. If he can obtain those letters he can blackmail Moses Mendoza into restoring him to his position in the firm! Berlin buys the letters from Calhoun one by one, just as you suggested,” I went on, pacing back and forth, carried away by my theory. “He got the money by embezzling yet again, which is why he can only raise five hundred dollars at a time. How does all this sound so far?”

“So-so,” said Legare with a smile. “The murder? The despatches?”

“Once he got hold of the last letter, Berlin decided to eliminate Calhoun as a potential witness against him. I admit I haven’t yet figured out how Hyman Berlin lured Calhoun into St. Michael’s churchyard and killed him, but he did so. He took Calhoun’s pouch to plant in Simon’s drawer to incriminate him, but on examining the contents he recognized that the despatches have immense resale value to the Union, and he decided to sell them to Federal agents. All he really needed to make the connection and frame Simon Mendoza was the pouch itself. The swine is now shopping around Charleston for a buyer, if he hasn’t already found one. I’ll go further and speculate that Berlin’s asking price for the despatches is three thousand dollars, enough to cover his speculation at Continental Mercantile before it is discovered. No doubt he hopes to earn his main profit by blackmailing the Mendoza family. What do you think, Legare? Have I hit on it?”

“Probably not, but I’ll give you high marks for imagination and effort, and I’ll even give you half right on several key points,” said Legare

with a chuckle. I must have looked crestfallen, for he handed me one of his excellent rolled Havanas by way of conciliation and offered me a lit match. "I agree that Hyman Berlin was probably the purchaser of the letters and that if so, he raised the money to buy them through further theft from his employer. He certainly didn't raise three thousand on a salary of twelve dollars a week. Berlin was *probably* the purchaser, but we have no *proof* that he was. Mendel Cohen or Hezekiah Winthrop might have bought them out of love for Naomi to save her reputation, or old Moses himself might have done so to halt a scandal in his family which would rebound on Charleston's Jewish community.

"Secondly, while I admit it is likely that Berlin hated Simon Mendoza and wanted him out of the way, why go to the length of arranging a complex fabricated murder charge complicated by espionage to arrange Simon's removal? The wretched boy was removing himself with his wild passion to be a soldier of the Confederacy. Either as a Palmetto or more likely as an officer in another regiment when he finally got tired of being bullyragged by the Palmettos, Simon was headed for the front. Berlin may be dishonest and greedy but he strikes me as the cautious and cowardly type. Why would he not wait and see if a Federal bullet or camp fever would do his dirty work for him? In any case, Moses Mendoza is dying and Simon would be gone a long time, time enough for plenty of embezzling and skulduggery of Berlin's part. Getting Simon arrested and convicted of murder would be a high-risk gamble, and an unnecessary one. As to Berlin's blackmailing Moses Mendoza in order to get his snout back into the trough at Continental Mercantile, I think you may well be right as far as that goes. But such a matter is best handled delicately, with an eye to avoiding scandal rather than creating it. Would Moses Mendoza reward Berlin with a restored partnership in the business if he suspected that his brother-in-law had arranged for his only son to be falsely accused and hanged?"

"He would give in to save his daughter's reputation," I insisted.

“Like her brother, Miss Naomi seems hellbent on making her own way in Gentile society in despite of her father’s wishes. Remember she intends to marry Randolph Breckinridge, and to Moses Mendoza Breckinridge is just another blond beast as bad as Calhoun. Love letters from Naomi to one Gentile would lose a lot of their potential blackmail power so long as Naomi continues publicly to consort with another, while after her marriage they would in any case be worthless. Once married to Breckinridge, old man Mendoza would consider his daughter a disgraced harlot, religiously dead to him and to her family. Damnation, there must be something else here, something I’m missing! Even money the letters will be used to blackmail Naomi Mendoza herself.”

“I certainly hope not!” I exclaimed fervently. “I can’t stand the thought of a lovely lady like that being besmirched by a blackmailer.”

Legare stared at me for a moment, and then burst into hearty laughter. “Great jumping Jehosophat, Redmond, that’s what I like about you!” he gasped when his merriment had subsided. “You’re such a fine and honorable chap, never willing to believe the worst about people despite the fact that the worst is generally what we find. You have no idea how refreshing I find that!”

“What on earth are you raving about, Legare?” I asked in puzzlement.

“Wasn’t that a pretty performance she gave us?” chuckled Legare reminiscently. “Oh please, pretty please, suh, on yo’ honor as a Southron gentleman, save me from mah foolish li’l female self and return those bad ole letters to me without reading ‘em!” he mimicked. “Hah! I imagine that Miss Naomi wants those letters back very badly indeed, so she can consign them to the nearest cookstove fire. I hope we do find them, Redmond, for I suspect they will prove very spicy reading indeed.”

“Really, Legare, you wouldn’t be such a cad!” I spluttered indignantly.

“When it comes to murder, I am no gentleman,” said Legare. “Not that I don’t already know what is in the letters, of course, but I’ll have to read them to make sure.”

“And what is in them?” I demanded irritably.

Legare smiled and shook his head, clearly regarding me as a hopeless naif. “If and when those letters turn up, Redmond, they will indicate something a bit beyond girlish infatuation. They will almost certainly prove that Naomi Mendoza and Xavier Calhoun were lovers in every sense of the word including the carnal. Calhoun even told that gallant young ass Simon as much, when he caught the two of them *in flagrante delicto* in Naomi’s boudoir. You may recall his outraged remark that Calhoun had cast aspersions on his sister’s chastity during the famous bedroom scene? But the boy refused to believe the evidence of his own eyes, and for understandable reasons Naomi chose to play the role of Potiphar’s wife.”

“But he saw his sister’s dress torn!” I argued, not wanting to believe this.

“He did not say torn, Redmond, he said ‘disarranged’, if you will recall. When he came home early he stumbled onto his sister and her lover snatching a moment of illicit passion in the comfort of her own bed instead of these seedy lodgings or whatever backstairs rendezvous they generally used. No mean feat, to conduct an amour under so watchful an eye as that of Moses Mendoza, and I imagine they both welcomed the opportunity. You’ll recall that both the servants were suspiciously absent. That was Miss Mendoza’s doing, no doubt. I’m sure Captain Calhoun did indeed disarrange her apparel, with her enthusiastic consent and assistance. In a way it’s fortunate for everyone concerned that Simon Mendoza walked in on them during the preliminary stages, so that he could plausibly believe Naomi’s attempted rape story and maintain his illusions intact.”

“I suppose you’re right, putting at all like that,” I said with a sigh. “But how disappointing.”

“We have a very narrow and unrealistic view of women these days, Redmond,” Legare went on philosophically, puffing on his cigar and savoring the aroma. “Especially here in the South, where our planter gentlefolk tend to take their cue from your sovereign lady Queen

Victoria. The French have a much more pragmatic approach to these things. Do you know that there are households in America where the bare legs of tables and pianos are covered with silly little pantaloons to avoid offending decency? Such hypocrisy! Simon Mendoza regularly avails himself of the voluptuous if costly charms of Regina Montez and her bevy of beauties with price tags attached. Yet he finds it inconceivable that his sister might be a sensual woman who enjoys the strong embrace of a handsome and domineering man like Calhoun. He won't believe it, even when proof is literally thrust in his face, and he is willing to risk death in a duel rather than admit the truth to himself."

"In a sense I can understand Naomi's urgency in seeking to recover the letters," I said sympathetically. "Orthodox Jews are even more strait-laced in matters of sex than most Christians. If Moses Mendoza found out that his daughter had slept with a man before she was married, and a Gentile fortune-hunter at that, then he might well have a seizure which would finish him off."

"And had Simon walked in on the pair of them a few minutes later than he did on that day back in October, when they were making the beast of two backs and he couldn't fail to understand, he might have gone berserk and gotten to his revolver before Calhoun could pull his trousers on and we would have had an ordinary *crime passionnel* with no mystery at all attached," added Legare.

"It's all very sordid," I muttered, possessed of a sinking feeling that, as usual, Hugo Legare was right in his low estimation of human character. "See here, though, if Calhoun was so vicious an anti-Semite, why did he seduce a Jewish girl?"

"Ah, you've picked up on that, have you?" said Legare as he took a long draw on his cigar. "Yes, our picture of the deceased does seem to be changing a bit, doesn't it? Calhoun was a bully who persecuted, baited, and viciously beat Simon Mendoza. He hated Simon's guts for queering his pitch with Naomi, and Jewboy was a handy and powerful club to belabor Simon with. Yet Calhoun was evidently tight enough with

another Jew, Hyman Berlin, in the lowlife fraternity of the racetrack, the bordello and the whiskey bottle. Calhoun's distaste for persons of the Mosaic faith did not appear to extend to beautiful young Jewesses, nor to Jewish money. I think Calhoun was entirely sincere in his wish to win Naomi not only for her magnificent person but for her family's wealth, which would have done wonders in fixing up Carberry Hall, and in order to gain his objectives Calhoun had no objection to marrying into a Jewish family. The religious objections were on the Mendoza side. But after they got caught in October of last year, and Naomi had to concoct that rape story in order to protect herself, any chance of an ecumenical wedding was gone. You see why I am always so reluctant to name a suspect early on in an investigation, Redmond? Perceptions of people and motives can change. We know now that while Calhoun was a bully and a lecher, he was not a rapist or an anti-Semite, at least no worse of one than most of our high society folk. And we now have a completely new suspect."

"Who is that?" I asked.

"Captain Randolph C. Breckinridge, First South Carolina Cavalry. Breckinridge is head over heels in love with Naomi Mendoza, the woman he hopes to make mistress of Spring Lake plantation and a jewel in the coronet of Low Country society. Yet his jewel would be tarnished if her letters to Calhoun and the true nature of their relationship came out. A formal duel would be out of the question, not only because military regulations forbid it but because a public confrontation of that kind would inevitably reveal the cause of the dispute, inciting the very gossip that Breckinridge would want silenced. Under such conditions, Breckinridge might opt for a bullet in the back in a darkened cemetery, and steal the despatches as a diversion to obscure the real motive for the crime. There's just one difficulty," he concluded sourly.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Breckinridge has an air-tight alibi," Legare sighed in disgust. "He was standing dismounted at the head of his troop on the Citadel parade

ground from assembly at four A.M. on the 12th until midday, when it became apparent the cavalry would be unneeded and Beauregard dismissed them. He has hundreds of witnesses.”

“And what about our two witnesses who still swear they saw Simon Mendoza or someone who looked like Simon...bejusus, Legare! We may have just let the killer walk out the door!” I cried in sudden realization. “If Naomi Mendoza is really the wanton trollop you claim she is, then why couldn’t she also be a murderess? She admitted herself that she would have every motive to kill Calhoun that Breckinridge or Simon might have, doubly so! That scenario she laid out about putting on Simon’s uniform and a false beard sounded bizarre, but the so are many murder plots, and it might have worked. There is enough resemblance between their height and facial features to deceive both witnesses in bad light, if she hid her hair under that military kepi and neckcloth and corseted up her, ah, indubitably feminine charms a bit.”

“If that was the way it happened, wasn’t she a cool hand to sit there bold as brass and tell me all about it?” commented Legare with a grin, his cigar jutting from beneath his teeth. At such moments he looked rather like Mr. Punch. “In fact I don’t think she did it, although not for the moral and metaphysical reasons she ascribed. There are certain practical objections to Miss Naomi’s candidacy for this one.”

“And those are?”

“First off, I doubt she could see Calhoun coming that far down King Street from the roof of her house, even with field glasses. There are trees and houses and the bulk of the police station in the way. The idea of a rooftop observation post is an interesting one, though, one I’ll have to keep in mind. To continue, presuming she recognized him as he drew up to the corner of King and Broad, that hardly gives her time to climb down off the roof, run downstairs, put on Simon’s uniform and glue on a false beard, then grab a pistol and a Gladstone bag and run downstreet to catch Calhoun at St. Michael’s gate. I could see something like that if Calhoun had been waylaid on the way *back* from the telegraph office,

but he was killed on his way *going* there. Secondly, why would Naomi Mendoza kill Calhoun before she recovered the letters that would destroy her reputation? She quite correctly described the social consequences of the letters becoming public. They would be disastrous. I could see her killing Calhoun to silence him, but only after she got the letters back. Finally, why incriminate her brother?”

“He is the obvious scapegoat. He quarreled with Calhoun,” I suggested.

“Her own brother, Redmond? Despite her pretty disclaimers, Miss Naomi Mendoza is a highly intelligent and purposeful young woman who knows what she wants and intends to get it. Having any member of her family convicted of murder and treason against the Confederate States would finish her socially in Charleston or anywhere in the South, and she knows it.”

“Then again, there is the far-fetched possibility that she might just have some family feeling for the boy and her father,” I pointed out ironically.

“I am always ready to entertain far-fetched possibilities,” said Legare. Then his grin vanished. “Seriously, we are now looking for two sets of documents, not just one. The despatches and Naomi Mendoza’s letters to Calhoun. Damnation, this case is getting complicated!”

“Wanton or not, Naomi is a lovely lass altogether and I confess I’d like to see her come out of this unscathed if possible,” I said. “Why are these letters of hers really that important, if you already know what they contain?”

“I think they might be crucial,” said Legare quietly. “I think it is possible they may contain the key element which I sense has been missing in this case since the beginning.”

“What is that?”

“*Motive*, Redmond. I don’t think we’ve got it yet. It’s not hatred, not money, not the despatches. Somewhere in those letters of Naomi Mendoza’s, we may find the real reason why Xavier Calhoun was murdered.”

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I arrived at Henrietta Street promptly at seven o'clock the next morning. Legare greeted me cheerily. "Not much sleep for me last night, Redmond, but good news all around. The big item is that Hyman Berlin is in custody."

"Did you find the despatches?" I asked eagerly.

"No, worse luck. We gripped Berlin about two hours ago, when he tried to leave town on the early morning train to Columbia. I told Tuscarora and Bill Evers to stay on him all night and arrest him if he tried to flee. They stepped up behind him at the ticket window and slapped the cuffs on. They tell me he squawked like a plucked chicken. Berlin made a short visit to the Mendoza home last night at nine o'clock. He was in the house less than ten minutes. When he was arrested this morning he was in possession of no less than five thousand dollars in Bank of New York securities and a thousand dollars in gold. The ticket clerk says he asked for a fare to Louisville, Kentucky."

"From where he could cross over into Indiana and head north," I pointed out. "Any sign of Miss Mendoza's letters?"

"Not yet, but we've got the blackmail angle nailed down, I think. The only person who might have given Hyman Berlin that kind of money is old man Moses himself, unless Miss Naomi has six grand in pin money stuck in her reticule, and the only conceivable reason for Moses Mendoza to give his thieving brother-in-law such a big stake with which to skip town is blackmail. I don't believe Berlin has the stamina to hold up for long, especially if we dangle a noose in front of him as a conversation piece. He will be the thread on which we pull to unravel this whole knot. But I think we owe Mr. Mendoza first shot at explaining himself. We will go and see him now, and lean on him as gently and courteously as we can manage. He is no fool, and when he realizes that we know about Naomi's peccadillos I suspect he will find it wiser to cooperate with us and tell us just what the devil has been going on."

"You sound optimistic," I said.

“We’re getting close, Redmond, close enough to where I am getting the first whiff of truth! An intoxicating scent in any investigation! By heaven, we may even be able to wind this up by tonight!”

“I am afraid there has been a complication, sir,” said Balthazar gravely from the doorway. “I fear that Mr. Moses Mendoza will be unable to respond to any questions.”

“Eh?” exclaimed Legare.

“A police officer is outside, sir. Mr. Moses Mendoza was found murdered in his bed this morning, brutally stabbed and beaten. Lieutenant Halliburton is at the scene now, and he asks that you and Lord Balbriggan join him at your earliest convenience.”

Seldom have I seen Hugo Legare taken so aback. He stared at his imperturbable servant and then muttered, “Impossible! Absurd! The killer would have no reason in the world to murder the old man... unless...*Christ in Heaven, I’m an idiot!*”

“Actually, sir, the police have already detained a suspect pending your arrival,” Balthazar told him. “It would seem to be an open and shut case against her.”

“Her?” exclaimed Legare.

“It is Miss Naomi Mendoza, sir.”

VI

Legare stood silently for a moment, his lips pursed tightly. One could almost hear the gears in his mind whirring like some kind of calculating machine, re-arranging his ideas and his conceptions, analyzing and discarding new theories, speculating, extrapolating. “Could it be?” he whispered to himself in wonder. “Could I really have been so deceived? Surely not! Surely, no one would dare?”

“What do you think?” I asked.

“I think that I have been taken in, as deftly and adroitly as anyone has ever taken me in,” said Legare grimly. “Now a man has paid with his life because I missed one simple, single clue that should have told me right away what the story was. May God forgive me. Let’s go.”

When we arrived at the Mendoza home we had to force our way through the milling crowds of gawkers black and white who had gathered in King Street as word of the tragedy had gone flying through the streets. Halliburton’s constables recognized us, and they managed to clear us a path. We met Halliburton himself in the library where we had spoken with the paterfamilias. “Where is Naomi Mendoza now?” was Legare’s first question.

“In the downstairs parlor,” replied Halliburton, chewing on his cigar even more than usual. “I haven’t actually arrested her yet, although I’ve summoned Mrs. McFee, the jail matron from Magazine Street, to keep

her company. I'm going to have to charge her with the murder of her father, though, unless you can give me a good reason not to."

"You are reluctant to do so? Why?" asked Legare.

"Mr. Legare, I have to admit that at first I thought Simon Mendoza had you buffaloed with all his blubbering about how he was being persecuted and framed in the Calhoun murder," said Halliburton, slowly and heavily. "The evidence seemed clear in that case, and it seems clear in this case. But it just don't *feel* right! Why would a young lady of quality get up at the crack of dawn, cut her father's throat and beat him until his skull is crushed, wrap up the murder weapon and her bloodstained gown nice and neat into a bundle, put the bundle on her closet floor right next to a pair of bloodstained shoes, and then go back to bed?"

"No, it doesn't sound very logical, does it?" agreed Hugo.

"No, sir, it does not! I mean, any ole drunk nigger down the Neck who'd just cut up his woman would of done a better job of cleaning things up and trying to get away. I'm starting to believe that you may be right, Mr. Legare, and maybe somebody's got it in for the Mendoza family in a really nasty way. This sure does resemble what happened with brother Simon, I'll admit that."

"Give me the facts, from the beginning," commanded Legare, pulling out his notebook and a stub of pencil.

"At six thirty this morning the butler, Tobias, went into the master bedroom to awaken Mr. Mendoza as he does every day. He found Mr. Mendoza murdered and hollered the place down. We're right across the street and I was just coming on duty, so I got here no more than three minutes later. I've allowed the coroner, Doc Jeffries, to approach the body in order to confirm death, not but what it needs anything more than a glance to confirm. Other than that I left everything as it was found in the dead man's room. I knew you'd want to see it like that."

"Good man," said Legare approvingly.

"Moses Mendoza was violently assaulted with a knife and beaten with a brass candlestick. His throat was cut, he was stabbed and slashed

repeatedly, and he was battered extensively about the head,” Halliburton continued. “A mantelpiece clock was broken in the process of the struggle between the deceased and his assailant, and it indicates that the attack took place at three minutes past six o’clock this morning. The two servants, Rhody and Tobias, sleep in their own cottage in the back garden. With Simon in jail, the only other occupant of the house was Miss Naomi, who sleeps in the room next to her father. She claims that she heard nothing. I find it very difficult to believe that a struggle like that could take place with her in the very next room, and yet she wasn’t awakened. It’s a heavy point against her, Mr. Legare. Yet she says that she went to bed about eleven and didn’t wake up until she heard Toby hollering in her father’s room.”

“What about this incriminating material you found in her room?” asked Legare.

“When we arrived, the first thing we noticed was a short trail of bloody footprints leading from Moses Mendoza’s bedroom onto the third floor breezeway, and from there into his daughter’s room,” said Halliburton. “The wooden floor of the porch took the tracks pretty well.”

“What kind of footprints? Bare feet or a lady’s slippers?” interjected Legare.

“Neither, sir. A man’s patent leather dress shoe, size ten.”

“Eh?”

“Yes, sir, that was the first odd thing that struck me,” continued Halliburton. “We knocked on Miss Mendoza’s door and demanded entry, she didn’t answer, and so we went inside. The first thing we observed was Miss Mendoza standing in a connecting doorway between her father’s room and her own. She was leaning against a doorjamb in her nightdress, looking at her father’s dead body. She appeared to be overcome, as well she might be. I followed the footprints, which showed as smudges in the carpet, to Miss Mendoza’s wardrobe. Inside I found the bloody shoes I have just described in a corner of the closet, and also a sheet showing bloodstains, in which was bundled another nightdress soaked in blood

and this long, single-edged knife, very sharp, with this here funny writing like squiggles on the handle. We assume it was one of the murder weapons. The killer also beat Mr. Mendoza with a brass candlestick which is still in the room.” Halliburton indicated the bundle on the table, the bloodstained sheet and garment. Legare picked up the knife.

“The writing is Hebrew, Halliburton,” he said, examining it. “This is a *shechita* knife, for kosher slaughter, which I suspect you will find comes from Miss Naomi’s kitchen downstairs. She uses it to kill chickens and ducks and other small game according to Jewish ritual law, and to perform certain cleaning and gutting rituals with.”

“And you suggest that Naomi Mendoza slaughtered her father kosher style, like a beast!” cried an angry voice from the library doorway. Rabbi Benyamin Klass stood in the door, clad in a frock coat and his fur hat, his face filled with horror. “Blasphemy, I say! *Chillul haShem!* Now the daughter was well as the son faces the blood libel!”

“Who the hell are you, and how did you get in here?” demanded Halliburton in irritation. “And where did you get that hat?”

“This is the family rabbi, Benyamin Klass from the St. Philip Street synagogue,” said Legare.

“I came as soon as I heard that maiden of the holy House of Israel stands in danger from the sons of Haman!” snapped Klass.

“This is Lieutenant Halliburton of the Charleston city police force, rabbi, and if I recall correctly his father’s name was Wilbur, not Haman,” said Legare. “I understand your pastoral concern, sir, and I will allow you to stay and observe events here and give Miss Mendoza the benefit of your support, which I can well imagine she will need. But I must insist that you keep quiet and stay out of our way. This is a murder investigation and we are the law here.” He turned back to Halliburton. “What did Miss Mendoza say when you confronted her with these objects?”

“She just sort of stuttered and looked wild, swearing it wasn’t her who killed her father and she’d never seen this stuff before. She also

begged me to send for you, sir, which I would of done anyway, of course. We left the scene for you to view.”

“Good, let’s go up and have a look. You may come with us, rabbi, but please do not enter the room. I must warn you, this will be a gruesome sight.”

“A troop of Cossacks came through my village when I was twelve years old,” said Klass grimly. “I know what murder looks like.”

We ascended to the third floor of the house, to the bedchamber where Moses Mendoza lay slain. A constable awaited us at the door, and with him was Doctor Jeffries, the city coroner. The doctor was a tall, spare man with gray sidewhiskers, well known to Legare and myself through a number of prior cases, and he greeted us with his usual glum demeanor. “Anything disturbed?” Legare asked him.

“I made a quick examination *in situ*, but I left the body where it lies,” replied Jeffries. The room we entered was a chamber of horror. Blood soaked the bedclothes and the carpet and spattered the walls. The body of Moses Mendoza lay on the floor beside his bed, twisted and smashed, his gnarled face wrenched in the rictus of death. His white beard was matted with clotted brown blood, and his white nightshirt was rent with gaping stab wounds. His head had been fearfully battered. A heavy brass candlestick lay near the body. A nightstand by the bed was overturned, while a broken candle and a gold watch lay on the floor. Across the room a square clock lay on the grate where it appeared to have been knocked off the mantelpiece. “The way I read it, someone came in while he was asleep and cut the old gentleman’s throat,” said Jeffries. “From ear to ear, as the saying goes.”

“In a single stroke?” asked Legare. I saw Klass start violently and begin to speak before Legare silenced him with a gesture.

“Only one that I can see,” replied Jeffries, leaning over the body. “But they wouldn’t have had time to get in another. Severed the jugular vein and the carotid artery both, which was fatal of course, but not instantaneous. Common misconception. The old feller leaped up and thrashed

around, spurting like a fountain, got twisted up in the bedclothes. The killer panicked and started hacking at him, not realizing he was already good as dead. At least a dozen stab wounds in the torso and defensive cuts in the forearms. Then the killer picked up that candlestick and battered him with it, repeatedly. Literally beat his victim's head in. You can see some brain matter on the base, there."

"Could a woman have inflicted these injuries?" asked Legare.

"You mean could Miss Naomi have done it? Yep. From what I saw of her a little while ago she's a strong, healthy young filly. In the heat of anger or fear women have surges of great strength just like men do."

"Whoever did it would be soaked in blood?" asked Halliburton.

"Oh, drenched," confirmed the doctor.

"After Mrs. McFee got here from the jail, I let Miss Mendoza change out of her nightdress," said Halliburton. "Can't let her be questioned in an indecent state and all. On my orders Mrs. McFee examined the inside of the nightgown the girl was wearing and also the girl herself. No sign of any bloodstains on her body or in her hair."

"When was Mendoza last seen alive?" Legare wanted to know.

"About ten o'clock last night, when Miss Naomi put him to bed," replied Halliburton. "She brought him a pot of camomile tea before retiring. That's it." He pointed to a tray on a side table, containing a silver teapot and a single elegant bone china cup and saucer full of liquid. Legare dabbed a bit on his finger and tasted it. "I still haven't been able to sort it all out, but it appears that Mr. Mendoza didn't eat hardly anything at dinner, which I gather is pretty much the usual case with him because he's been poorly. He went to the library afterwards, and during the evening he had several visitors, including one from that feller you and me know about, and also I'm told from the Reverend here." Halliburton nodded towards Klass.

"I called on Mr. Mendoza at about seven o'clock and stayed with him for perhaps three quarters of an hour," volunteered Klass without hesitation. "It was a normal visit, at least as normal as could be involving as

it did a sick member of my congregation who was undergoing serious difficulty with his health and trouble in his family, his son falsely accused of murder and treason. I brought him several *seforim*, Hebrew holy books. There they are, in the bookcase. We discussed politics, mostly this coming war and the tragedy it will bring, and also family matters that are not germane to your investigation and wherein I must invoke pastoral privilege. I left at about quarter to eight and went straight to my house. You want I should give you a list of people who saw me, *nu?*”

“That won’t be necessary as yet, rabbi,” said Legare imperturbably. “I shall ask for that information later if I feel it would be helpful.”

“Something odd here, Legare,” I said. I had been studying the room carefully. “You see this watch? It was broken during the struggle and says three minutes after six. Just like the dial of that mantelpiece clock on the floor by the hearth there reads three minutes past six. Two timepieces, both broken at exactly the same time, and then left out in plain view? That’s a mighty clumsy killer.”

“Indeed, Redmond, I can see no reason for that clock to be broken at all,” said Legare. “It stood on the mantel a good ten feet from the bedside where the struggle took place. I’d say someone was very anxious to have us believe that Moses Mendoza died at three minutes past six o’clock this morning.”

“Impossible!” stated Jeffries flatly. “This man has been dead for at least eight hours, possibly longer. Rigor mortis, post-mortem lividity, blood coagulation, body temperature, all indicate he was killed around midnight, possibly as early eleven or so, but no later than twelve at the outside. Not six A.M. Absolutely not!”

“I wonder what we were supposed to assign as the motive for Naomi Mendoza to kill her father?” mused Legare.

“Moses Mendoza opposed her planned marriage to Captain Breckinridge?” I suggested.

“So she goes berserk in the light of dawn and hacks her father to death in the manner of a Mohawk warrior?” returned Legare skeptically. “With her brother already in prison on treason and murder charges, this is hardly the way to avoid scandal and smooth her way into acceptance by the Charleston *haute monde*.” We followed the bloody footprints out the door and along the porch to Naomi Mendoza’s room. “Redmond, did you notice that connecting door between the two rooms?” inquired Legare. “It doesn’t even have a lock on it.”

“So why would a murderer go all the way out onto the breezeway and use the outer door to Naomi’s room to reach her closet, risking observation and leaving tracks?” I wondered.

“Because leaving tracks was the intention, I think,” replied Legare. We entered Naomi’s room, a soft and airy chamber, light and feminine as its occupant, with lace curtains and mahogany furnishings, and a heavy four poster bed covered with an intricately embroidered eider-down. The brownish tracks on the floral carpet led to a huge wardrobe in one corner, where the incriminating material had been found on the floor. In the far left hand corner was another door, which led out onto a wooden staircase that ran down all three stories on the north side of the house. “I believe that second floor landing enters into the library,” said Legare, pointing down as we looked over the banister. “That’s the detached kitchen at the bottom of the stairs. From the garden one can go out the Broad Street gate, or nip into the service alley and from there turn left into King Street, or right into Meeting Street. Anyone could come and go.”

“The Mendozas never locked their doors,” said Halliburton. “Why should they? Nobody in Charleston does. No slave trouble since ‘22 and we make sure the roughneck element stays down to Goodbye Alley and the Neck and the Cooper River waterfront.”

“But an intruder who came in through the back garden would risk being seen or by the servants in their cottage,” I pointed out.

“Perhaps not, if he were quiet and careful,” said Legare. “Rhody and Tobias are elderly and probably a bit deaf and prone to sleep deeply.”

“Why didn’t these folks keep a watchdog?” wondered Halliburton aloud.

“Orthodox Judaism forbids the keeping of pets,” murmured Legare, leaning over the stair rail, stroking his beard and thinking.

“But Miss Mendoza was here all night, or so she says,” stated Halliburton. “Presumably she would have been awakened by some murderer coming in off the street, coming through her room and helping himself to one of her nightdresses, going in and butchering her father, and then clumping back along the breezeway to stash all his gear in her garderobe before taking his leave right past her bedside out the rear door and down the stairway.”

“I believe that difficulty can be resolved,” said Legare.

Rabbi Klass spoke up, no longer able to contain himself. “Major Legare, telling you your business, this I shouldn’t do, but surely you can see that this whole *shtick* doesn’t make sense! It’s as crude as the Middle Ages, when fanatics would plant a dead child’s body in a Jewish graveyard or dump the corpse on the doorstep of the synagogue at Easter to incite a pogrom. Naomi was heading for serious trouble with her father over your friend the captain, that I grant you, but this is out of all proportion to that family conflict. Hokay, let’s be cynical and say that Naomi came to hate her father and wanted him dead. His doctors will tell you that in a few months’ time the poor man would have been dead anyway. All she had to do was wait. Why on earth would she do something like this? Detecting I know from nothing, but I do know the human heart, Major. I tell you that what was done to Moses Mendoza in that room was a crime of passion.”

“A crime of passion?” asked Halliburton skeptically.

“Yes, Lieutenant. The passion was hate. Someone slashed and beat and cut that helpless old man’s throat in a frenzy of hatred, either because he was a Jew, or because he was a wealthy and powerful man of

the kind who invariably makes enemies, or because of some reason we don't yet understand. I'm not just standing up for one of my own people when I tell you that this whole thing reeks of fabrication."

"Let's go back to the library," said Legare. "Down these stairs, please." We descended the exterior staircase slowly, while Legare carefully examined the steps and the white-painted woodwork. "I see one or two small bloodstains," he said, pointing out the minute splashes of brown. "There, and there, and again there, see?" We reached the landing outside the library door. "A bit on the door handle." He opened the door and we followed him into the library. "One or two more on the floor," he said, following the trail inside. "Wait here." Legare went outside and descended to the ground. He was gone for several minutes before returning. "More stains downstairs in the kitchen. There is a pump down there. It looks like someone did some washing and cleaning. There is a gutter for draining the blood of kosher-slaughtered poultry, so some of it may be chicken or turkey blood. The murderer definitely used these stairs to leave the premises, though. It's logical that he would have stopped in the kitchen to clean up before venturing out onto the street, even at night."

"That still doesn't exonerate Naomi," I warned.

"Would she have killed her father, then gone downstairs to the pump and washed herself clean, while leaving the bloodstained shoes and nightdress and the murder weapon upstairs in her closet, where she would have to handle them again to dispose of them?" demanded Legare. "What with that and the breakage of not one but two timepieces during the struggle, she's a right clumsy parricide." Legare stepped over to the table and examined the items found in the girl's room again. "What does Miss Naomi say about these?"

"The knife is hers, she admits," said Halliburton. "Says she never saw the nightdress or the shoes before."

"Continental Mercantile's factory in Port Royal is the largest manufacturer of finished footwear in the South," said Legare. "I think we can

safely assume that both the shoes and the nightgown came from there. Rather an odd choice for a lady to go a-murdering in. eh? I'd say Miss Mendoza's dainty little feet are about a size six."

"The killer might have been a man who couldn't possibly fit into a size six woman's shoe, so he had to make do with this clumsy device," I suggested. I admit quite frankly that I did not want this young beauty to be guilty.

"Perhaps the autopsy will provide some more information," said Legare. "Doctor Jeffries, you may remove the remains now."

"Autopsy?" gasped Benjamin Klass. "But that is forbidden by the Talmud!"

"And it is mandated by the General Statutes of South Carolina in all cases of homicide, sir," said the doctor irritably. "I'll get my boys in and we'll get on with it, Major Legare. Purely *pro forma*, though. No doubt the man was murdered and little doubt about the method, only question is whether he bled to death or died from the beating."

"It is mutilation of the dead!" cried the little rabbi.

"I repeat, sir, it is the law. Yes, Major Legare?" Hugo had scribbled something in his notebook, torn out the page, and handed it to the medical examiner. Jeffries looked at it and his eyebrows. "Seems a bit pointless to me," he said.

"Nonetheless, humor me, would you, Jack?" asked Legare.

"As you wish. Rabbi, I have no wish to cause offense, but I am afraid this is not open to discussion," said the doctor as Klass expostulated with him further. Legare picked up the bloodstained silk nightdress.

"She says she never saw this before, Halliburton?" he commented. "It's quite fine material, Lyons silk no less, something a tasteful young lady like Miss Naomi would admire. A French maker's tag inside. Few but the most elegant of our Southern belles can afford to have such intimate garments ready-made abroad."

"She says there are some like it in her family store, but that one isn't hers," said the police lieutenant.

“It is not mine,” said Naomi Mendoza from the doorway.

She entered the room slowly, her face ghastly pale and dewed with perspiration, her white hands clasped and trembling. She wore a simple unadorned morning dress of russet brown Bedford cord, with white trim at the neck and the sleeves. Her hair was put up in a high bun. “They retail for thirty dollars. We have several in stock, but all my own nightdresses are made by Rhody or her daughter, our store seamstress.” Behind her, like a black bird of ill omen, glided the stolid figure of Mrs. McFee, the matron from the jail, her broad features expressionless and yet watchful. It was all the girl could do to avoid wrenching her head around to stare at the apparition following her, like Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner who, having once looked around,

*“...walks on, and turns no more his head,
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.”*

“I couldn’t stand the waiting any more,” she said. “In heaven’s name, let’s get on with this.” She turned to Klass. “Thank you for coming, rabbi. No one would have blamed you had you kept away.”

“You are not lost to God yet,” said Klass, stepping forward to peer into her face. “Daughter of Israel, upon your very soul, you must tell me the truth. Did you do this terrible thing?”

“I did not!” she cried, shaking her head in frantic denial. “Before God, I did not! I loved my father, I wouldn’t, I couldn’t have done, done...*that!* Did you see him, rabbi? Did you see what they did to him? I would have died myself to save him if I could have!” She looked at Legare beseechingly. “Help me! Help me, I beg of you!” *Surely Legare can see that this time there is no question of a performance on her part*, I thought. The poor girl was clearly frightened out of her wits.

“My first question is a simple one, Miss Mendoza,” said Legare. “Where is your father’s safe?”

“Set into the floor below that bookshelf,” she replied, pointing. “Under the carpet, and a parquet. Yes, that one, lift it up.” Legare thus exposed an iron safe countersunk into the floor, about eighteen inches square.

“You never told us about a safe when we searched the house before!” exclaimed Halliburton angrily.

“You could hardly have expected us to help you frame a false accusation against my brother, sir!” she returned with spirit.

“How did you know about it, Mr. Legare?” asked Halliburton.

“Simon Mendoza let it slip when I spoke with him at the jail on Monday,” said Legare. “He was describing the afternoon last October when he came home unexpectedly, in order to retrieve some papers from this safe. I see this is not a combination lock, but a triple-plated Swiss lock that requires a key. Who has that key, madam?”

“Only my father and my brother have keys to the safe,” she said

“Not yourself? Not Mendel Cohen or your uncle, Hyman Berlin?”

“No, sir. Mendy has no need for one and Uncle Hyman was involved in a problem situation at the store a while back, and...”

“Embezzlement. Yes, I know.”

Miss Mendoza flushed. “You seem to know a lot about the skeletons in our family’s closet, Major Legare.”

“More than you realize, ma’am,” said Legare, and he was rewarded with yet another startled and wary look from Naomi, like the one she had given him in Tradd Street the day before. “Halliburton, have you found Moses Mendoza’s key ring?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the lieutenant. “We found it down here on the library table.”

“That’s odd,” said Naomi. “Father always takes his key ring with him wherever he goes. He never leaves it in the library when he retires for the night.”

“I cannot seem to find the appropriate key,” said Legare, rattling through the ring Halliburton handed him. “Do you see it, Miss Mendoza?”

“Why, no, the safe key is gone!”

“Halliburton, would you send a constable across the way to the police property cabinet and have him fetch us Simon Mendoza’s key ring?” Halliburton went to the door, summoned an officer, and gave him the instructions. “Thank you. Now, Lord Balbriggan and I would like a word with Miss Mendoza in private. That includes you, rabbi. You and Doctor Jeffries may occupy your time disputing the relative authority of the Rambam and the South Carolina state legislature on the subject of post-mortem examinations, but outside, if you please. Mrs. McFee, would you wait outside as well, please? We guarantee that this young lady will not leave the premises. Thank you.” I herded them out, the rabbi still protesting over the autopsy, and closed the double doors to the library. Naomi stood facing Legare, her body tense. “Now, madam, it is time for the truth,” said Legare firmly. “All of it.”

“The truth is that I didn’t kill my father,” she said. “Can you not believe me?”

“What I believe does not matter. It is what a jury will believe which will determine whether or not you will find yourself one morning soon standing on a platform with a bag over your head and a rope around your neck waiting for the floor to open up beneath your feet.” The girl blanched white.

“You don’t have to scare me, sir,” she said, her lips trembling. “I assure you I’m terrified enough already.”

“I hope so, madam, replied Legare. “Doctor Samuel Johnson once remarked that the prospect of hanging concentrates the mind. You’d better concentrate yours very quickly, girl, and make up your mind to tell me the truth, all of it. Now, *where were you last night?*”

“I...I can’t, Major Legare,” she said miserably. “It is not my secret alone.”

“Oh, ye gods!” raved Legare in the air, “Do you think I care if you were off somewhere swiving Randolph Breckinridge? I’m trying to save your life, you little ninny! Your father was killed between eleven and

midnight last night, in such a manner that you could not possibly have missed hearing it if you had been in your own bedroom where you were supposed to be. If you insult a jury's intelligence by claiming that you slept through a murderous struggle that would have shaken the whole house, you're buying yourself a length of rope! We will worry about your reputation later!" The girl turned even paler still, if that were possible, in the face of this onslaught. Then she wilted and collapsed.

"We were at his town house. Limehouse Street," she whispered.

"Did anyone see you go in or out? Did anyone see you there?"

"Randolph, of course. Randolph's man, Flavius."

"Slave or free?" demanded Legare.

"Slave."

"Then he can't testify in court. Anyone else?"

"There was a colored cab driver who picked us up in a hansom in Meeting Street," said Naomi. "I wore a cloaked hood, though, so I doubt if he recognized me."

"No, I doubt if you wanted to be recognized," said Legare. "Were you in Limehouse Street all night?"

"From about eleven o'clock until six this morning. Randolph drove me back in his buggy. I had just gotten in and changed into my night-dress when I heard Tobias shout, and I went to the door into my father's room and I saw...I saw...may God have mercy!"

"You left last night by the back way as well?"

"Yes. Randolph met me in alley, and he already had the cab waiting around the corner."

"How long has this liaison been going on?" asked Legare.

"Not long. Just since it became obvious that Randolph was going into battle soon, and we might not get another chance."

"And was Xavier Calhoun headed for battle back in 1860 when you were sleeping with him?" asked Legare.

"My letters!" she cried. "You found them! You promised me you wouldn't read them!"

"I made no such promise, Miss Mendoza. I simply assured you that I had no desire to cause any unnecessary scandal, which is rather a moot point now. But no, your letters have not been found. I deduced the nature of their contents from the evidence available."

"You are a devil!" she cried passionately.

"No, ma'am, I am a policeman. Were Rhody and Tobias aware of your liaison with either or both of these gentlemen? They'd pretty well have to be, wouldn't they?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"They did not inform their master of the situation?"

"I...I promised them they'd be free, that I would persuade Father to manumit them in his will."

"Simon told me that there is already a provision in Moses Mendoza's will to that effect," said Legare.

"There is, but they don't know that."

"That was very cruel and shameful of you so to deceive them, madam!" said Legare sharply. "Far worse than your sexual indiscretions, I must say! Those two elderly colored folk raised you from infancy, and you lied to them like that?"

"All right, yes, it was wrong!" hissed Naomi through clenched teeth, pounding her fists against her knees. "Very well, I'm a liar and a slut and apostate and a greedy social climber and whatever else you want to call me! Spit on me if it pleases you! But I don't deserve to die for any of that! I didn't murder my father!"

"My apologies, madam," sighed Legare. "That was most unprofessional of me. I'm not your judge. Unfortunately, I must pursue this matter with some indelicacy. How have you avoided the, ah, possible consequences of your mode of life?"

"Rhody gave me herbs and potions she got from a root doctor down in the sea islands," Naomi told him. "They have worked thus far. And Major Legare, I didn't enjoy lying to them. Try to understand if you can, sir, how utterly trapped I have felt here in this house, ever since I was old

enough to really begin thinking about things. I seem to have walked from one trap into another. All I can hope for now is for Simon and me to come out of this alive.” Her voice was weary and dejected.

At that moment the double doors to the library crashed open, and Randolph Breckinridge stood there, hatless, his hair disheveled, his face a mask of horror. His hands clawed the air like windmills, incoherent and aimless. “He wouldn’t stay out,” said Halliburton from behind him.

“That’s quite all right,” said Legare. “Captain Breckinridge is just the man we wanted to see at this point. Come in please, sir. Has Simon Mendoza’s key ring arrived yet?”

“Any minute now, Mr. Legare,” said Halliburton.

“Let me know when we have the keys in hand. James, could you close the doors please? Have a seat, Captain, you look done in.”

“Good God!” wailed Breckinridge. “It can’t be true! You cannot suspect this pure flower of Southern womanhood of such a foul crime!”

“I’m afraid the flower is no longer quite so pure, Randy,” said Naomi, her voice quavering with an unavoidable iota of wry amusement. “I have told them about last night. It’s terribly sweet of you to maintain the pretense, but I had to tell them. It was the only way. Someone came in last night and murdered Father, and then put bloody things and a knife in my room, just like they did to Simon. I didn’t want to drag you into this, dear heart, but the Major already knew anyway.”

“No, no, you were right to speak, my love,” said Breckinridge, collapsing into a chair. “You were quite right to tell them, despite the dishonor it brings on both of us.”

Legare spoke up. “You confirm, then, Captain Breckinridge, that Miss Mendoza was at your home last night, that you picked her up in a hansom cab in the rear alley here at eleven o’clock and returned her home in your buggy at about six this morning?”

“Yes, sir, that is the truth. Good God, Major, it is a plot! A monstrous plot against this unhappy family!”

“Was Miss Mendoza with you all night?” pressed Legare, ignoring his expostulations.

“Yes, sir. All night. I realize that my conduct in taking advantage of Miss Mendoza’s affections was infamous, sir, infamous, and I am deeply ashamed of it.”

“Don’t be foolish, Randy,” said Naomi with a tired smile. “You know very well that it was as much my idea as yours. There is no excuse for either of us, at least none that Charleston society will accept. Not to mention the fact that my brother and I are now both suspected of murder. Whoever is responsible for all this has done his work well. Even if we can get free of these accusations, our family is now irrevocably tainted in the public mind. I’m damaged goods now, Randy, and if you marry me you’ll only bring ruin on yourself.”

“Good lord, Naomi, if I hadn’t every intention of marrying you as soon as we could bring your father around, do you think I’d have ever allowed us to...?”

“That was when I was a wealthy heiress, which may not be too much longer,” explained Naomi patiently. “That was when I wasn’t branded as a Levantine harlot down in the depths between Delilah and Jezebel, which will be the public opinion of me in Charleston within the next twenty-four hours. The conditions under which you made your promise to me no longer pertain, and I release you from it.”

“Surely you know me well enough to understand that I would never desert you now, when you need me most,” returned Breckinridge with quiet dignity. “I don’t need your family’s money, Naomi. I have enough of my own. Soon as we whip the Yanks you’ll be my wife and society can go to hell, for all I care! If it gets too bad, there’s always Texas.” Naomi bowed her head, silent tears welling in her eyes. Legare cleared his throat

“I think that in the shadow of this coming conflict many proprieties are being stretched and broken,” he said. “You two are probably nowhere nearly as unique as you may believe. Captain Breckinridge, will you step outside, please? I have a few more questions I would like to

put to Miss Mendoza in private.” Breckinridge took Naomi’s hand, squeezed it, and left the room. I closed the doors behind him

Naomi looked Legare directly in the eye. “Are you going to tell him about Xavier Calhoun and me?”

“I can see no reason for doing so which would be germane to the situation,” he replied.

“Thank you,” she sighed. “What do you want to know? I’ll tell you everything.”

“Was this the first time you met Breckinridge like this?”

“No. There have been several previous occasions over the past month. We always follow the same routine.”

“Were you with him in the early hours of last Friday morning?” asked Legare.

“No, sir. I told you the truth about that. Randolph had to be with his regiment at the Citadel, since the fighting was about to start, and I was up on the roof watching the harbor.”

“Did your father suspect nothing?”

“He may have suspected, but he never said as much. He considered me a disobedient daughter and barely one cut above a harlot. Now for the rest of my life I must live with the knowledge that he died hurt and angry with me.”

“What if he had awakened during the night and found you gone from your room?” asked Legare

“He never woke up.”

“Because of the laudanum you put in his nightly pot of camomile tea?” queried Legare.

“Yes, sir, because of the laudanum,” said the girl. “That is quite above board, Major. His doctors prescribed it for him, a heavy dose before retiring, or else he would never sleep at all in his pain. I always measure it out myself, very carefully, and I give it to him before bedtime. Last night I made sure he drank it down and then I waited until almost

eleven, before I changed into street dress and then went down to meet Randolph in the back alley.”

“When you came back here in the morning, you saw nothing unusual?”

“No. sir. It was still first light when I got up to my room. I changed quickly, without lighting a candle or opening the blinds. I might have seen those things in my wardrobe had the light been better, but I didn’t. I mussed up the bed as if I had been sleeping in it, and I was about to lie down for a bit when I heard Tobias.”

“On a different but important subject, Miss Mendoza, are you familiar with the contents of your father’s safe?”

“Uh, business papers of various kinds, securities on a number of banks here in Charleston and in the North to the amount of several thousand dollars, an emergency reserve of about a thousand dollars in gold, private family papers and legal documents such as his will. Why?”

I looked at Legare with a significant nod, but he shook his head, which I took to be an injunction that I was not to mention Hyman Berlin’s arrest or the contents of his bag. “What visitors did your father have last night? Other than Rabbi Klass, whom we know about already?”

“Mendel Cohen came at about six thirty in the evening,” she recalled. “He comes every night to update my father on what has gone on at the store that day.”

“But yesterday you told us that your father had gone to the store himself, despite his enfeebled health,” Legare reminded her.

“Yes, sir, he did. But I suppose he must not have seen Mendy there, because Mendy arrived as usual last night. After talking with my father for about half an hour he came to the sitting room downstairs and spoke with me for a while, as he always does.”

“What did you and Mr. Cohen discuss last night?”

“What do you think we discussed, Mr. Legare? I told you that Mendy wants me to marry him. Father wanted it as well. I had to put him off yet again.”

“Have you told Mr. Cohen straight out that you intend to marry Captain Breckinridge and receive Christian baptism?” asked Legare.

“Not in so many words. I didn’t want to bring on yet another crisis. The times have been even less opportune than usual for me to make such an announcement. Mendy reproached me last night, and he certainly had every reason to, but I do so long to avoid trouble, major. I kept putting it off in the hope that somehow Father would become reconciled to it, but then the war began and Simon was arrested. I don’t suppose any of it matters any more. I am far, far luckier than I deserve in that Randolph is still willing to have me. No one would blame him if he fled from me like the plague. If I can somehow get off this hook I’m on, we’ll just go ahead and do it. I can be baptized and the Reverend Elliot can marry us before the army moves north.” Naomi screwed her face up in puzzlement. “Major Legare, I don’t understand *why* all this is happening to us. I can see why someone would try and blame Simon for killing Xavier, since Simon fought with him in public and could serve as a handy scapegoat. I never really thought it was because we’re Jewish. But now I’m not so sure. Why in God’s name was Father murdered? Can someone really hate Jews that badly? But there are others Jews in Charleston. Does someone hate our family in particular? But why? What have we ever done to anyone to deserve such persecution?”

“Madam, I have suspected since the beginning of this case that the true motive for it all has been our missing element,” said Legare. “Returning to my first question, who else came to see your father last night in addition to Mendel Cohen? We have already spoken with Rabbi Klass, who says he brought your father some Hebrew volumes for religious study.”

“Yes, Rabbi Klass came at about seven, and he chatted a bit with Mendy and me in the sitting room. Mendy left and the rabbi went up and joined my father in the library. I myself went up to my room and laid out some laundry for Rhody, then I returned to the sitting room and read a book until it was time for me to put Father to bed. Oh, Uncle

Hyman also came by, about nine o'clock. He didn't stay long, only about ten minutes. Tobias went to bed about nine thirty as he always does, and I put Father to bed about ten o'clock."

"Did your father seem unusually upset or preoccupied about anything when he went to bed?" asked Legare.

"Well, perhaps a little preoccupied, yes, but he was so ill it was hard to tell, and he was getting worse. Major Legare, I know this is going to sound like a terrible thing for me to say, but if I had wanted Father dead in order to marry Randolph, I would only have had to wait for a few months and let nature take its course. Don't you see? Whoever killed him couldn't wait, they wanted him dead *now*. That's what is so puzzling to me."

"There are those who might say, Miss Mendoza, that you wanted him dead before he disinherited you over your marriage to a Gentile," Legare reminded her. "You stand to inherit a substantial sum under his will, do you not?"

"That is perfectly correct, sir," she said calmly. "He would have disinherited me, just as he and the entire Jewish community would have sung the *Kadish* and sat *shiva* for me, as if I were dead. Do you think I had not thought of that before accepting Randolph's proposal? I accepted it as the price I had to pay for my freedom, or at least for the comparatively greater degree of freedom I would have as a Christian wife to a wealthy planter." She sighed and slumped a bit in her chair. "That looks bad for me, I admit. It gives me a motive, and since I'm Jewish, in the mind of popular prejudice I am supposed to love money above all else. The nature of my alibi won't help my case much, either. Levantine adventuress seduces gallant Christian captain so she can get hold of his plantation while he's off fighting for the South, maybe hoping he'll be killed so I can be mistress of Spring Lake."

"Surely that's an unduly pessimistic way of looking at it," I put in, wanting to cheer her up a bit if it were possible.

“Is it, milord?” she asked. “A Christian girl of the propertied class in a similar situation would have a tough enough time getting around a bloody nightdress and the murder knife in her closet. But if she was pretty and had a sufficiently well turned ankle in the dock she could probably count on our famous Southern chivalry for a jury of Southern men to give her the benefit of the doubt. I’m a Jew. Not like the rest of you. However much wealth my family has or however long we have served this city, no matter how beautiful men find me, no jury will ever forget that I am of a different race which they regard as inferior to themselves and inherently dishonest and vicious to boot.” She buried her face in her hands. “Dear God, it’s just really sinking in, they’re going to kill me! And my brother as well!” She looked up. “All my life I have heard stories in the synagogue and around our people’s dinner tables about persecution, about Jews enslaved in Egypt and Babylon, Jews burned at the stake or murdered by mobs of Crusaders, Jews hanged in batches from trees by rampaging Cossacks. But I never thought I’d have to face it myself, that my own father would be murdered and that my brother and I would have to die because we are Jews.”

“Madam, I have never entirely accepted the hypothesis that these crimes are motivated by religious bigotry,” said Legare. “There is still the espionage angle, and I repeat that I sense a hidden motive here which we have yet to uncover. But permit me purely a curiosity question. If you feel that you are being persecuted for your Jewishness, does this in any way alter your resolution to marry out of the faith and convert yourself?”

“No,” she said, shaking her head. “Randolph is a good man and if he’ll stick with me through this when a hundred others would drop me, I’d best grab him quick. As for the religious question, I suppose I’m letting the anti-Semites win, giving them what they want by ceasing to be Jewish. So be it. They can have their victory.” She looked up at us steady. “Rabbi Klass will say that is a disgraceful attitude. This is a two thousand-year-old war, a much longer and more bloody conflict than

the one you gentlemen and Randolph are riding to fight. You volunteered for your war. I never volunteered for this one, it was thrust on me at birth, and I'm deserting. You probably find that contemptible, and I won't say I don't deserve your contempt. But I don't deserve to die for a crime I didn't commit, nor does my brother Simon. Save us from that, Major Legare, and I'll do whatever I can to repay you by keeping Spring Lake going, by helping the South win the war, and helping to rebuild after it's over. That's all I can promise you."

Before Legare could reply there was a knock on the door, and Lieutenant Halliburton stuck his head in. "We've got that Swiss key for the safe off Simon Mendoza's key ring, sir," he said. "Also, a Mr. Mendel Cohen and some loud-mouthed Yankee named Winthrop are outside wanting to see Miss Naomi. The Yank is cutting up rough. He keeps trying to confess, saying he killed Cap'n Calhoun and old man Mendoza both. Did he?"

"No, poor imbecile," sighed Legare. "He's entirely too honest and forthright to be a spy, nowhere near sufficiently devious, and even if he did kill Calhoun to avenge the insult to Miss Mendoza, why would he then proceed falsely to implicate her brother and murder her father? Hardly the way to a lady's heart. And take a look at his feet, will you? We know Mendoza's killer wore these size ten patent leather shoes; Winthrop is a thirteen if he's an inch."

"Mr. Winthrop?" asked Naomi, puzzled. "Why on earth would he falsely confess to killing two people? He's a little odd, but he never struck me as being queer in the head."

"Because he is in love with you, madam," said Legare. "Madly, totally, to the point where what little reason he possesses has been deranged. Evidently you have never noticed. He is even joining the Confederate Army for your sake, imagining that in some way he can attract your favorable attention by getting his clumsy body mangled with metal in the service of a cause and a country he detests."

Naomi was stunned. "Heavens above! I never heard of such a thing or suspected it! I never did anything to encourage so ill-advised an affection in the poor man!"

"Then might you see if you can talk him out of it, ma'am?" suggested Legare. "If the man has a yen to get himself slaughtered in this upcoming bacchanalia of butchery, at least let him do it wearing a blue uniform. Give me that key, Halliburton, and bring the whole lot of them in."

A small group now gathered around the exposed face of Moses Mendoza's safe in the floor of the library. Captain Breckinridge and Halliburton were frankly curious. Mendel Cohen was wearing what was apparently his customary dark garb and skullcap, and he seemed totally relaxed and at ease, as if his employer and prospective father-in-law were not lying butchered in the chamber upstairs. Hezekiah Winthrop had a constable at his side who eyed him warily. The Northerner seemed to be in a daze, flushed to his more than usually rubicund coloring, his huge hands twitching, his clothes hanging on him like a scarecrow. He kept glancing over at Naomi, and it was utterly pitiable to observe the calf-like worship in his eyes. Rabbi Benyamin Klass watched us all with an inscrutable expression, and somehow I understood that he was mentally recording everything in his mind for insertion as a footnote into the millennia-long history of his people. Behind Naomi the black-clad, stolid figure of Mrs. McFee the jail matron hovered, silently awaiting her orders to swoop down like a raptor and carry her female prey off to her doom. Naomi stood calmly, avoiding eye contact with any of the group, watching Legare.

It was a fine spring morning, with the sunshine pouring in through the tall library windows, and a breath of sea air wafting in. For some reason, it is this vignette of old Charleston which has remained in my mind's eye for many years, more clearly imbedded in my memory than many of the experiences I subsequently underwent during four years of war. In certain murder cases one gets these flashes of insight, burned on the soul. This was a tableau of death, and in some inconceivable place in

the far-flung universe it is frozen forever in time like some cosmic photograph. Pardon my digression; I grow metaphysical in my old age.

Legare knelt down and fitted the key into the lock, and it opened easily. He reached in and drew forth a handful of papers, which he riffled through and laid out on a table. "Copies of contracts with various European and Caribbean export firms," he noted. "Letters from various agents and company directors in London, New York, New Orleans, and Nassau. The deed to this lot, granted to Avigdor Mendoza by His Majesty King George the Second in 1745. A letter to David and Isaac Mendoza thanking them for a Continental war loan, dated 1783, signed by George Washington. Shipping manifests for the last three Mendoza vessels to arrive in port. Miss Mendoza, I do not see either your father's will or the bank securities you mentioned, nor do I find a thousand dollars in gold."

"I can't imagine what happened to them," she said, puzzled.

"Did your father have a fire in his hearth last night?" asked Legare.

"Why, no. It was a warm evening, and the windows were open. There was no need."

"Yet it would appear some papers were burned here," said Legare, pointing to a small blackened heap of ashes in the fireplace.

"Why on earth would Father burn perfectly good securities?" asked Naomi

"I rather think it was the will that was burned," said Legare. "We found the Bank of New York securities in Hyman Berlin's travel bag, along with the thousand dollars in gold, when we arrested him at the railroad station this morning. I suspected they had come from this safe, but I had to make sure."

"*What?*" gasped Naomi, stunned.

Winthrop gave a yelp of incomprehension as well. "You have arrested Hyman?" the Yankee clerk demanded. "What on earth for?"

“He was trying to flee to the North,” said Legare. “He is now in police custody, and I will interview him shortly, at which time I am confident that I can persuade him to impart to me all the relevant details.”

“Uncle Hyman in jail, as a spy?” cried Naomi.

Mendel Cohen spoke up. “Major Legare, please understand that I would no more tell you how to be a policeman than I hope you would tell me how to sell shoes and ship cotton,” he said in his precise and well modulated voice. “But I have to tell you that I think you are making a mistake. Hyman Berlin is a liar and a debauchee and a thief, which I presume you already know, but he is completely non-political in his thinking, and frankly he is too much of a coward to get mixed up in something as dangerous as espionage.”

“I have not suggested that he was, Mr. Cohen,” said Legare. “Berlin was attempting to flee the country carrying a large amount of money, within hours after Moses Mendoza was murdered. Mr. Mendoza’s key to this safe is missing, and Mr. Berlin is in possession of property that most certainly came from this safe. I intend to find out how he came by that property, and why Moses Mendoza’s last will and testament was burned, and by whom.”

“The idea of Hymie Berlin as a spy is ridiculous,” sniffed Winthrop. “If he’d had any sympathy with the Union I am sure he would have confided in me.”

“An odd statement to come from an erstwhile Confederate soldier, Mr. Winthrop,” said Legare. “But there is definitely an espionage connection here.”

“Oh?” inquired Mendel Cohen with polite skepticism. “Moses Mendoza is an even less likely candidate for a Union spy, Major.”

“Indeed, Mr. Cohen?” remarked Legare mildly. He knelt down and reached into the safe, and pulled out a final packet of papers. “Then may I ask how you explain *these*?” He held them up. There were eight sheets of folded paper together with a small paper code book, bound with red ribbon and bearing a crudely inked seal from a freshly cut stamp, showing a

mounted man on horseback holding aloft a saber, rampant, and bearing the proud motto of a new nation: *Deo Vindice*. It was the official seal of the Confederate States of America.

“Beauregard’s missing despatches!” I cried aloud.

* * *

There was a moment of shocked silence, and then everyone broke into excited speech. “Bravo, Mr. Legare!” shouted Halliburton. “Hot damn, sir, that’s a load off my mind! You saved a lot of Southern boys’ lives today!”

“Major Legare, there must be some mistake here,” insisted Cohen urged. “Moses Mendoza was not, could not have been a spy! Leaving aside reasons of attachment and loyalty to that state which has been his family’s home for five generations, a Union victory and the destruction of the Southern economy would surely mean his financial ruin! It simply doesn’t make sense for Moses to betray the South!”

“Playing both ends against the middle!” snapped Halliburton. “Probably figured he’d keep in with both sides and turn a profit selling information and supplies to both, just like your damned Rothschilds did in Europe during the wars of Napoleon!”

“Normally, I would disregard that remark as I ignore other such effusions of your people’s limited intellect,” replied Cohen coldly. “But you are insulting a patriarch of Israel whose vision and philosophy were as far above you as it would have been above a Barbary ape, a creature whom you greatly resemble!”

“Yeah?” growled Halliburton, his face turning purple. “Well, I just reckon this ape is gonna flatten your snout for you, Jewboy!” The lieutenant knotted up one huge hamlike fist and stepped toward Cohen with every intention of stretching him on the floor, but Legare and Breckinridge both grabbed him.

“Really, Halliburton!” snapped Legare in exasperation.

“May I remind you, sir, that there is a lady present?” intoned Breckinridge in outrage.

“Mr. Cohen, if you will pardon the observation of my limited Gentile intellect, I think we have more important tasks at hand than trading insults,” said Legare. “I’ve no doubt you are much more clever and witty than Lieutenant Halliburton here, but I suggest to you that this is not the time and place to demonstrate the fact. The ancient tradition of which you are so justly proud should tell you that it is unwise to antagonize a man who has three inches and thirty pounds on you, and who is also a senior police officer. However rude and boorish his behavior,” he concluded, shooting a glance at Halliburton.

“But these papers?” asked Winthrop. “How did they get into Mr. Mendoza’s safe if he didn’t put them there?”

“They complete the fabricated chain of evidence which was to destroy the entire Mendoza family,” replied Legare. “I presume that somehow or other, Moses Mendoza learned or guessed that Hyman Berlin killed Captain Xavier Calhoun over a matter of blackmail gone wrong.”

“Blackmail?” demanded Mendel Cohen. “That I can believe of Hyman, to be sure, but who was he blackmailing and how?”

“Mr. Cohen, I am afraid that there is going to be very little in the way of happy endings in this matter for anyone, yourself included. You will learn everything soon enough. Miss Mendoza will tell you.” He looked right at the girl.

“Yes, Major Legare,” she replied, drawing a deep breath. “I will tell him. It is past time.”

“To continue,” said Legare, fending off more interruption, “Berlin met Mr. Mendoza yesterday afternoon at Continental Mercantile, and I believe was dismissed from his employment at that time. Miss Mendoza mentioned to us that Moses went to the store, and yet he did not confer with you on business, Mr. Cohen?”

“That’s true,” said Cohen. “He just spoke with me briefly yesterday, then spent several hours in his office with Hyman, with the door closed.

To be completely frank, Mr. Legare, I have begun noticing some discrepancies in the accounts of late, and I suspected that Hyman was stealing again. But I said nothing to Moishe because I wasn't sure. I suspected that might have been what the meeting yesterday was about, but I decided not to broach the subject with Mr. Mendoza until he did, or until I had definite proof."

"What do you mean, Hyman was stealing again?" asked Winthrop, surprised

"It was a family matter, nothing that concerns you, Hezekiah," said Cohen.

"You will find the sum of three thousand dollars missing from your business, Mr. Cohen," said Legare. "I know what Berlin did with that money, and you yourself will find out soon enough. Another family matter. To return to the subject, Berlin came here last night and no doubt asked Mr. Mendoza to reconsider, and was turned down. He later crept back here past eleven o'clock, when he knew that Moses Mendoza would be lying in a drugged sleep, and the daughter of the house would be absent."

"What do you mean, the daughter was absent?" interjected Cohen. "Naomi, what on earth is he talking about?"

"Later, Mendy, please!" she begged him. "Go on, Major Legare."

"Berlin murdered Moses Mendoza, rigged up a crude attempt to frame Naomi for the crime, stole Mr. Mendoza's key ring, and opened the safe. He extracted everything of value to assist in his flight, then he planted the despatches he had stolen from the body of his first victim. It is likely he has been trying to sell them to the Union for three thousand dollars in order to recoup his additional peculations at the store, but has been unable to find a buyer, since Yankee spies hardly advertise in the *Courier*, so he decided he'd best get rid of them before he was caught with them. For some reason as yet undetermined, Hyman Berlin then burned Moses Mendoza's will. Possibly it contained some reference to his past embezzlement which would arouse suspicion against him. He

then tried to flee the city by rail, but he was fortuitously arrested while buying his ticket by some police officers who became suspicious at his behavior.”

“The swine!” grated Breckinridge, infuriated. “The swine!”

Halliburton’s face had grown more and more puzzled as Legare spoke. “Ah, Mr. Legare, I don’t think...” he started to say, but I kicked him surreptitiously on the shin as a sign to be quiet. I could see that Legare was rigging some kind of trap. Fortunately Halliburton had worked with Legare’s somewhat circuitous methods before, so he caught on and said nothing further.

“Then Naomi is innocent!” whooped Winthrop in pure joy.

“Yes,” said Legare. “I think we can dispense with Mrs. McFee’s services now, Halliburton.” The police lieutenant nodded and the jail matron arose and glided from the room. With her departure the atmosphere seemed to lighten and brighten perceptibly.

“But I don’t understand,” said Cohen plaintively. “How could Hyman come in and do all of this without your knowledge, Naomi? Where were you?”

Legare stepped forward and put his hand on her shoulder. “Madam, we now enter a stretch of country where I can be of no further assistance to you. You and Captain Breckinridge are going to have to decide what to do. I suggest that you proceed as you mentioned a while ago. It is time for truth, in every aspect of your life. Nor will it perhaps be as bad as your fear. With the war looming every family in the South is undergoing its own private agonies, and yours will likely become lost in the welter of general chaos and greater tragedy, if that is any help.”

“You have saved my life and that of my brother, Major Legare,” she said, with tears of relief and joy in her eyes. “It is only because of you that I have any future at all. Yes, this is going to be very bad, but it’s time we got on with it. I have hurt many people, some of them unknowingly,” she said, turning a glance at the downcast Winthrop, who was beginning to understand. “I will make every amend I can, starting with

you, Hezekiah. Major Legare tells me that you are planning to do something very foolish and very unnecessary. I'd like to speak with you about it, if I may."

"Halliburton, these people have matters to discuss which do not require our presence," said Legare. "You will all be glad to know that our first order of business on leaving here will be to liberate Simon Mendoza, so he should be joining you soon."

"Thank God for that, at least," said Klass. "Naomi, in God's name, are you truly decided, truly lost?"

"I am not lost, rabbi, and believe me that I deeply regret the pain I have caused and will always cause over this, especially to you, Mendy, but yes, I am decided."

"Then I have no place here," said Klass woodenly, and he turned and left the room. We followed. Halliburton's men were still trying to clear away the thinning crowd outside the house, with some success. We lost sight of Klass as he plodded up King Street back to the synagogue.

"Good Lord, Mr. Legare, what are you doing?" Halliburton exploded as we hit the street. "You know damned well Hyman Berlin didn't kill Moses Mendoza! He couldn't have! Tuscarora and Bill Evers between 'em were on him like flypaper from seven o'clock yesterday evening! He got here at four minutes past nine and left at thirteen past! He went straight to Regina Montez's place, for a last fling I guess, and then he went to his rooms in Washington Street and stayed there until early morning when he left for the railway station."

"I am well aware that he was under surveillance, lieutenant," said Legare. "I assigned the men, remember? The real murderer was standing there in the room with us, and had to be deceived into thinking that we believed Berlin to be guilty."

"I don't suppose that your honor would care to let us mere mortals in on the secret?" asked Halliburton.

"Let me get one more final, clinching piece of evidence, my friend," laughed Legare. "Hyman Berlin will cough it up quick enough

when he understands what he has to do in order to save himself from a hempen collar.”

“What evidence is that?” I asked

“The *motive*, Redmond. The real reason that Xavier Calhoun was killed. The reason a prudent and honorable man like Moses Mendoza was willing to pay a thief and a blackmailer every penny he could lay hands on at short notice.” said Legare. “The real reason behind this whole foul business.”

But Hyman Berlin never gave us that one vital clue. We found him lying on his cot in the holding cells in the basement of the police station, where he had been taken for interrogation prior to being transferred to the Magazine Street jail. He lay on his pallet with his collar wrenched open, his blue-lipped face turned to the ceiling, his bulging dead eyes and twisted face a mask of agony. One arm dangled off the edge of the cot, and by his fingers on the stone floor lay a gentleman’s boiled leather pocket flask. Legare picked it up and delicately took a slight whiff from the mouth of the flask.

“Bitter almonds,” he growled angrily. “Cyanide! Damn! *Damn! Damn!*”

VII

Hugo Legare's profane expostulation was nothing compared to the language that Lieutenant Halliburton heaped onto the unfortunate jailer who had charge of the police holding cells. The turnkey came running at Halliburton's bellow, a lank man with greasy hair wearing an unbuttoned shirt and suspenders. He stood quailing before the blast of official rage. "Why was this prisoner allowed to retain this flask?" Halliburton concluded. "This is a police station, Moffat, not a damned hotel bar or a railway smoker!"

"Hell, sir, the old feller was cutting up real rough when Evers and Tuscaror' brought him in," replied Moffat. "Yelling and screaming because we tuck away his bag, with all the loot in it. Can't say as I blame him. Hell, I'd of been hoppin' mad iffen somebody tuck six grand offen me. Then he started in about how we was persnickering him."

"Persecuting him?" put in Legare.

"Yes, sir, that's what he said. I tole him I was only the jailer and it was the district attorney who was gonna persecute him, but he started ranting and raving in some furrin tongue. Somebody said 'twas Yiddle-ish. Anyway, he was working himself up into such a state I figgered I was gonna have to go into the cell and go upside his head, but I didn't figger you'd like that, Mr. Legare, seeing Tuscaror' said you wanted to talk to

him, so instead I give him that hip flask from his grip. I was kinder hopin' he'd offer me a swig, but he didn't. Guess I'm a lucky man."

"I wouldn't say that, Moffat," intoned Halliburton dangerously. "I wouldn't say that at all. I'll deal with you later, and then we'll see how your luck holds! Now get back to your day room!" After the chastened turnkey left, Halliburton turned to us and spread his hands helplessly. "Jehosophat, Mr. Legare, what can we do? I suppose that idiot meant it kindly when he gave Berlin the flask. How was he to know it was full of cyanide toddy? Berlin must have kept it handy for a situation like this, to commit suicide when he knew the law was closing in on him."

"Hyman Berlin did not commit suicide, anymore that Xavier Calhoun or Moses Mendoza did," said Legare heavily. "Men like Berlin cling to life like a drowning rat clings to a splinter of driftwood. They don't voluntarily surrender it. No, our killer's score now stands at three."

"Will you please tell me just what in the Sam Hell is going on here?" demanded Halliburton. "Three murders within a week, all within a block of this station house and one of 'em right here in the holding cells!" The agitated policeman bit through his cigar in frustration.

"Yes, this part of town is beginning rather to resemble the last act of Hamlet, is it not?" replied Legare with bitter humor.

"Come on now, Mr. Legare, *give!*" said Halliburton. "Who's doing this?"

"Very well," said Hugo Legare. Then he named the killer.

"Eh?" I asked in surprise. "Are you sure, Legare? How can that be? Because if what Miss Mendoza told us was true, and if we interpreted what we saw in the house correctly...?"

"Oh, yes, that's the brilliant part of it," said Legare. "It's all true. Moses Mendoza was killed many hours before dawn and the murder scene we saw was utterly counterfeit, intended to implicate Naomi Mendoza in the killing. She and Captain Breckinridge did indeed spend the night with one another in throes of doubtlessly delirious passion. We haven't alibied Cohen and Winthrop yet, but I have no doubt they'll check out. Misdirection, Redmond. Better than any stage magician."

“I’ve worked with you long enough to know you never name names until you know for sure, Inspector, but I wouldn’t want to chance an arrest,” said Halliburton, shaking his head. “Not on what we’ve got.”

“You’re right,” agreed Hugo. “As our case stands, a good defense attorney could shred it in ten minutes of cross-examination. I had hoped to speak with Hyman Berlin and strengthen our case. But there exists concrete evidence which can tell us what Berlin would have told us. I know where it is and I mean to have it. You and I will go get it now, Redmond. Halliburton, pull every man you can off post and comb every slum and dive in Charleston, from Good-Bye Alley to the Neck, and *find Tony Gomez!* I will bet a month’s pay that Gomez sold that obscene pillow book and that he can identify the purchaser. Damned fool that I am, I was so busy chasing despatches that I completely forgot about the anomaly posed by that pornographic picture book! If I’d had sense enough to track that down on Monday Mendoza and Berlin might still be alive! That and one other thing which practically drew me a blueprint, if I’d had the wit to see it!”

“I still don’t follow all this, Legare,” I admitted. “Why was Moses Mendoza’s will burned? And why put a dirty book, of all things, in with material meant to frame Simon Mendoza for serious crimes?”

“I have a theory about the burning of the will. I think it was mostly a red herring to buy time, and we shall see if that theory is born out. The book was purely and solely to blacken Simon’s character still further,” said Legare. “Rabbi Klass hit the nail on the head, Redmond. All three of these murders involve personal gain and self-protection, to be sure, but they are first and foremost crimes of passion, and as the rabbi so perceptively observed, the passion is hate. Come on, let’s go. Oh, and Halliburton...release Simon Mendoza. He is innocent, after all. But do *not* tell him Hyman Berlin is dead! The boy could ruin everything by blurting it out to the wrong person at the wrong moment.”

We recovered our horses from where an obliging constable had earlier on tethered them in front of the police station. "Where are we going to retrieve this conclusive evidence you speak of?" I asked.

"The synagogue on St. Philip Street," replied Legare glumly. The streets were beginning to empty as we rode along, as people sought shelter in coffee houses and repose in midday naps, customary in the summer heat of Charleston which was already beginning to manifest itself even in the spring month of April. "You know, Redmond, in a few weeks' time the lives of thousands of men and possibly the fate of the South may depend on my ability to observe, reason, and deduce correctly from the available information," he said. "This has not been an auspicious beginning. I almost bungled the whole thing. One and possibly two men are dead who needn't have died if I'd picked up on one essential clue, right at the beginning of this investigation. If I make a mistake like that in military intelligence work, a regiment may perish! Not criminals, just ordinary men with wives and children and homes which will be shattered forever if I blunder. Dear God, I hate this responsibility!"

"You'll blunder," I told him frankly. "You're not some all-seeing avenging angel, Hugo. You expect too much of yourself. You always have. But you will blunder far less often and recover far more quickly than any other man the South could find for the job. If we lose, it won't be because you have failed in your duty. Trust me. I know you."

The sun was high and beginning to become hot as we tethered our horses and entered the synagogue, walking quietly past the old men who studied and whispered Torah disputations over their ancient books. We knocked on the closed door of the rabbi's study, and he opened it. "I think you knew that we would come," said Legare.

"Yes, I knew," agreed Klass.

"Rabbi, there are two ways we can do this," Legare said. "We can do it the hard way, if you choose. I can send my friend here downstreet with a message, while I keep you in sight to ensure that you do not conceal or

tamper with vital evidence in a criminal investigation. He will return with policemen and soldiers, and then I will turn over this house of worship as if I were raiding an illegal gambling hell or a den of thieves, until I find what I am looking for. I ask you not to make me do that, rabbi. I am not an enemy of your people, and it would cause me pain and distress to be compelled to act like one. I don't want to find myself in the company of the Spanish Inquisition and the Cossacks and their like. Please don't do that to me."

"So we do it the easy way," sighed Klass. "I'm lucky I have a choice, I suppose. Such a choice we don't often get. Come in, then." We entered his study. "What, specifically, do you want from me?" he asked us.

"First, I want to look at two documents which you keep here in the archives of your congregation," said Legare. "I want to see the copy you have here of the last will and testament of Moses Mendoza, and I want to see the birth certificate of Simon Mendoza."

"You hint at something irregular in Simon's birth?" asked Klass, evidently in genuine surprise. "I never heard of anything unusual, but you may certainly see for yourself if you wish." He went to a large walk-in closet to the left of his desk, lit a whale-oil lamp, and opened the door. Inside we saw shelves and stacks of books, ledgers, and boxes. Klass had some peculiar kabalistic filing system of his own, for he went straight to a certain volume buried under three or four similar tomes, and a certain tin document box, from which he withdrew a scroll of paper. He brought the book and the scroll into the room and laid them on his desk, took the ribbon off the will and opened the book to the appropriate page. "The birth registration entry is here, your Christian year 1839, our year 5599. This is the will. By the way, Major Legare, I must apologize for one small inconvenience," he added in gentle exultation. "I am afraid that both documents are written in Hebrew."

"I read Hebrew quite well, thank you," said Legare without a flicker of an eyebrow. He drew forth his magnifying glass, unrolled the will, and read it over rapidly, his finger following each line of Hebraic characters

from right to left. Klass stared at him in amazement, then looked at me, his eyebrows arched in an unspoken question.

“I wondered when he was going to spring that little surprise on you,” I whispered to him, smiling. “King’s College, Oxford. Hugo took his degree the year before I went down from Trinity in Dublin. I just missed him. I often wish I had met him back then.”

“Nothing unusual here,” said Hugo, rolling the will back up and banding it with the ribbon again. “Simon Mendoza gets a controlling interest in the business, Mendel Cohen gets the rest with an admonition to Simon that if Cohen marries Naomi he is to become an equal partner. Naomi herself gets an annuity from securities and a trust fund and a generous dowry, all of which she loses if she marries outside the faith. Simon also loses his whole kit and kaboodle if he marries a Christian girl himself.”

“A standard clause in almost every Jewish will, Major,” said Klass.

“So I believe.” Legare took up the volume of records and studied Simon Mendoza’s birth entry for a minute. “Redmond, although I appreciate your kind words just now, I must reiterate that I am the biggest fool south of the Mason-Dixon line. It was staring me in the face all the time.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” asked Klass, mystified.

“I am talking about misdirection, rabbi, as neatly as I have ever seen it done. Now there is one more set of documents I require from you, rabbi.”

“The Beth Din against Hyman Berlin?” sighed Klass. “Why, for heaven’s sake? Surely you already know what it contains, and if you seek to charge Berlin with that old embezzlement business I can assure you that neither Mendy Cohen nor Simon Mendoza will cooperate with you. They will never testify against a fellow Jew. But, if such is your wish...” Klass started back to his file closet, but Legare stopped him.

“There will be no charges brought against Hyman Berlin, Rabbi Klass,” he said quietly, but with a grim precision that made the little man look up.

“Why not? Back at the Mendoza house you told all of us that...”

“A ruse to distract the real murderer, sir, as you know full well. Hyman Berlin is dead.”

“Dead?” gasped the rabbi, his face turning the color of chalk and going slack. He sank heavily into a chair. “*Heilige... Was sie gesprochen... Berlin ist todt? Gevalt!* Hyman Berlin is dead? How dead?”

“Poisoned in his jail cell. It was cyanide, rabbi, slipped into his brandy flask by the same hand that took the lives of Xavier Calhoun and Moses Mendoza. A death in agony, swift but by no means painless.”

“*Mein lieber Gott!*” muttered the rabbi. “Another, another dead? Is there no end?”

“It is often so,” said Legare. “Murder feeds on itself, sir. A second crime becomes necessary to cover up the first, then another to cover up the second, and then so on and on until, like MacBeth, the hands of the guilty are so far imbrued in blood that...”

“I am familiar with the quotation, Major Legare,” interrupted Klass.

“It has to stop. You know what I want from you, Benjamin Klass. I want the letters which Naomi Mendoza wrote to Xavier Calhoun, the letters which Moses Mendoza gave you last night when you came to his home, that the story of his daughter’s shame might be preserved forever in the archives of the Jewish community here.”

“Moses Mendoza gave me nothing last night,” said Klass, burying his face in his hands.

“He gave them to you because he was a truly devout Jew who placed his religious duty ahead of his family,” continued Legare, ignoring the rabbi’s disclaimer. “Moses Mendoza understood that the great strength of the Jewish people lies in their continuity, an unbroken history longer than any other in the Occidental world, a chain of life and experience which extends from Abraham at Ur down to the present day. Moses Mendoza understood that this continuity demanded that everything that befalls the Jewish people be recorded, both good and evil. I can well

imagine how terribly he wanted to cast those letters into the fire, eradicate them from the earth. But he did not do so.”

“I burned them myself,” said Klass, staring at the wall. “They were vile, a foulness unfit to remain in existence.”

“You did nothing of the kind, Benyamin Klass, and we both know it,” Legare returned. “They were not yours to burn, any more than they were Moses Mendoza’s to burn. They are an integral part of the history of the Jewish community of South Carolina, and beyond that of the entire Jewish people. Besides, they would be required as evidence for the Beth Din, the rabbinical court that would be convened in order to excommunicate Naomi Mendoza.”

“She is leaving the faith anyway,” snapped Klass. “No *rabbonim* need excommunicate her. She has cut herself off from Judaism.”

“It looks better on the record if she is cast out as an apostate and a harlot, rather than if she is allowed to leave voluntarily to marry a Gentile husband whom she loves in despite of Judaic teaching,” said Legare. “It has to do with keeping up appearances.”

“You are a cynical man, Major Legare,” said Klass.

“No, sir, I am a *skeptical* man, as I must be in my job. There is a difference.”

“So why must you have these letters which expose a Jewish woman’s shame to the world?” demanded Klass. I noticed he no longer denied that he had them in his possession

“You know quite well why I must have them,” replied Legare. “We are not talking merely about apostasy and a little casual fornication here, rabbi. We are dealing with murder and with the ultimate betrayal. That must be punished. By our laws, not yours.”

“It is none of your affair!” shouted Klass. “It is crime against man and sin against God, yes, but it is a Jewish matter! We will deal with it in our own way!”

“And how would that be?” queried Legare. “This is the nineteenth century and you can’t stone murderers to death without trial, as little

personal objection as I would have to such a Biblical conclusion. The law of South Carolina demands obedience from everyone who lives in this land, and it also extends its protection to everyone. Three people have been murdered, rabbi, two of them Jews, in case you need to be reminded.”

“I do not need to be reminded!” grated Klass.

“Then give me the letters!”

“You know what they contain?” asked Klass

“To a virtual certainty I know, yes, but I still need the letters themselves as proof,” Legare told him.

“Then you understand that you are asking me to hand you a sword with which to slay a Jew!” cried the rabbi. “You seem to know more about us than any Gentile I have ever met, sir. Surely you understand that what you demand of me I cannot do? Whatever my personal feelings in the matter, for one Jew to help the Gentile law take the life of another is forbidden by God, the God to whom I must one day answer for my stewardship of His Chosen People! As I must answer to my fellow Jews and to my own conscience, to a history going back to the creation of the world. I know that I cannot keep the letters from you, Major. You will bring your soldiers and your policemen, you will search, and you will find them. But if I simply hand them over to you, then I become your accomplice!” The little man was shaking, and I saw that he was undergoing utter spiritual torment.

“And if you withhold the letters from me, even though I call in *force majeure* and find them myself, then you are the moral accomplice of a heartless murderer,” Legare said flatly. “You have a choice, rabbi, a cruel choice I would have spared you if I could. You can take the side of imperfect Gentile officers of an imperfect law, laid forth by an imperfect state imperfectly based on the Christian faith, which is rooted in Judaism. Or you can follow the letter of your own law and become the moral abettor of someone who may have been born a Jew, but who

willfully rejected God and good long ago, who is by this time beyond all redemption.”

“*No one is beyond redemption!*” cried Klass in agony.

“That, sir, is a very profound and noble sentiment,” said Legare softly. “Our faith has it too. Unfortunately, I am afraid it isn’t true. Evil exists, rabbi, and some people purposefully invite and embrace it. There are some souls so twisted, so damaged, so deformed and putrefied by their own bile, that they are beyond salvage. You ought to know this, since many of the men who have persecuted and slaughtered your own race down through the centuries have been lost souls of that kind. What you cannot bring yourself to face, rabbi, is that a Jew may be capable of this descent into the abyss just like a Gentile. Your religion teaches you that God chose the Jewish people for His very own, and you cannot accept any evidence that God molded you out of the same clay as the rest of us. Normally I would never insult your faith or your integrity by demanding that you confront this unpalatable reality, but we are not dealing with a theological abstraction here. We are dealing with three acts of homicide committed in the city of Charleston. The rest of us live here too, and we have a right to protection and a right to justice. Shelter this corrupt and rotting limb among your community, Benyamin Klass, and you will at last have earned the contempt of your Christian neighbors, which up until now you have never deserved.”

“So I must give you the life of a Jew as a sacrifice to appease Gentile hatred?” asked Klass dully.

“No, rabbi,” replied Hugo Legare. “You must give over a murderer into my hands because I represent the law, because it is the right thing to do, and to prevent more murder. Do you realize that if I had gotten full cooperation from you at the beginning, two Jews might still be alive? How many more must die before you rejoin the rest of the human race, sir? Give me the letters!”

Klass walked like an automaton to his desk and opened a small drawer with a key on his watch chain. He took out a packet of letters,

bound with red ribbon. There were six of them, and I could see the top one was addressed to Xavier Calhoun at Carberry Hall plantation, in a strong yet feminine hand. "Thank you," said Legare, placing the letters in his pouch. "I understand how hard this has been for you to do."

"When will you do it?" asked Klass in a weary, defeated voice.

"In about two hours," said Legare. "We have one witness still to locate, a petty criminal named Gomez who played a minor role in this mess, but now that I have these letters we don't need him to make our move."

"Give me time to go there," requested Klass. "I have done this thing, and I must bear witness to it."

"You must say nothing," warned Legare. "If you try to interfere then there will almost certainly be more killing."

"That is what I want to prevent," the little man said. "In the name of God, no more death, except for the one who must die! Please be careful and quick when you take him, Major. He carries a gun and he'll shoot if you give him the chance."

"Yes, I know," said Legare. "Randolph Breckinridge is a very dangerous man."

VIII

When we arrived back at Henrietta Street, Balthazar made coffee over a spirit lamp while Legare settled into a corner armchair where he carefully read over each of the six letters. The third letter was quite long, consisting of many closely written pages. His breath hissed inwards as he read the sixth and the last, but otherwise his expression remained unchanged. Then he proffered them to me. "Thank you, I prefer not," I said somewhat stiffly. "The whole thing still seems rather squalid."

"Suit yourself," he said with a shrug.

"Dammit all, Legare, it's not gentlemanly!" I said in exasperation.

"Murder seldom is, James," said Legare. Just then Balthazar showed the coroner, Doctor Jeffries, into the sitting room. Jeffries handed Legare a paper.

"That's my report," he said. "I'm damned if you weren't right, Inspector Legare. How did you know?"

"None of the motives we had were working out, not really," said Legare. "I knew there had to be a missing element somewhere. Come on, Redmond. Let's go put an end to this."

"Me, I'm going to lunch," said Jeffries. "Damn, Legare, I wouldn't have your job for any consideration in the world!"

“Somebody’s got to do it,” said Legare. “Balthazar, hail us a cab, if you would. We’re going to the police station. After we make the arrest I trust Halliburton can provide the needed conveyance to Magazine Street. And come along with us yourself, please. When we go into the Mendoza house I want you to stick close by Tobias and Rhody until it’s over.”

“You anticipate they might be at risk, sir?” inquired Balthazar.

“Just a hunch. They are loose ends, and this killer has a habit of tying up loose ends. There’s the additional possibility that I may need you to reason with Tony Gomez, although I hate to ask it of you. He has some information I need.”

We rode to the police station, Balthazar standing outside on the cab’s step. Halliburton met us in the squad room. “We picked up Tony Gomez in a dive out on Goose Creek Road,” the lieutenant told us. “He’s talking through his nose. I was about to work him over just fer shits and giggles, but I didn’t know if you’d want him to testify. Glad to see you brought your boy along, Mr. Legare. Ole Balzy will get that rat’s tongue nice and limber, I’ll bet! Pity they don’t have nigger policemen, Balthazar, ‘cause we’d hire you just to rattle Tony’s cage!”

“I am always gratified to be of service to the myrmidions of the law, Lieutenant,” said Balthazar with a grave bow. The gentle irony of it was completely lost on the police officer.

“Halliburton, bring me the pillow book,” said Legare. “Where’s Gomez?” We entered an interrogation room, all bare plaster and creaking, sagging floor. At a single table sat a skinny, rat-faced man with a drooping moustache and almost no chin, a greasy complexion, and a pointed nose. His suit was stained and seedy, his bowler hat battered and shapeless, his teeth were rotting out of his head. I never saw Tony Gomez without an overwhelming urge to step on him like a cockroach, to club him just to hear him squeal.

“Hey there, Mr. Legare!” said Gomez brightly. “See here, what’s all this about? Ole Beelzebub there with the chawed-off ceegar been askin’ me about a pillow book. I don’t do dirty books no more, Mr. Legare,

honest!” Legare took the pillow book from Halliburton’s hand and plunked it down on the table in front of the prisoner.

“I want a name, Tony,” he said in a quiet, dangerous voice. “I’m going to get that name, the right name, and I’m going to have it now. Who did you sell this book to?”

Gomez made a show of picking up the book and leafing through it. “Hot damn, that’s a corker!” he chuckled. “Never seen it before, Mr. Legare. Wish I had, hell, I could’ve got fifty dollars for a book this good. Got women doin’ it to each other and all!”

“Balthazar!” called Legare. The black man stepped into the room, his face inscrutable. “You know the information I need. Get it. We’ll be in the squad room.” Then he turned to go.

“Hey!” cried Gomez, starting up from his seat. “Jesus, Mr. Legare, you ain’t leaving me here alone with him? Gawd Almighty, don’t do that!”

I need to explain here that some time before this, Legare had been involved in another case, which I may perhaps one day write up under the title, “The Adventure of the Vanishing Tavern”. Mr. Gomez figured peripherally in this episode, and during the course of it some uncouth hoodlum types locked him and Balthazar up in a coal cellar together. I never learned precisely what transpired, but forever afterward Tony Gomez walked in mortal fear of Balthazar, and the idea that he might once more be shut up in a room alone with Legare’s servant terrified him now.

For his part, Balthazar once told me, “Lord Balbriggan, early in life I came to understand the futility of hating white men, because whether I like it or not this is a white man’s world, and if I gave in to frustration and anger all I would accomplish would be to destroy myself. Over the years I have concluded that in any case, hatred is an emotion which I do not care to harbor. But I have made one exception to both rules, and that is Tony Gomez.”

Now Gomez was screaming. “All right, Mr. Legare, come on back, I’ll tell you!”

“Well?” said Legare, turning back to him with a scowl.

“Sold it to a nigger. Like I said, I got fifty dollars for it.”

“I’ve no doubt a servant acted as go-between and collected the book, but whose? You know every black in Charleston and who they work for. Who was the real buyer?”

“Now you know me, Mr. Legare,” fawned Tony. “Discretion is my watchword. Plain brown wrapper, no questions asked.”

“If you don’t answer me, Balthazar will be asking the questions!” snapped Legare.

“Jesus, Mr. Legare, ain’t I just about to tell you?” whined Tony.

A few minutes later we stepped into the street, headed for the Mendoza house. “It helps to be sure,” said Legare. “We’ll go in the front door King Street side. Balthazar, you walk down the north side of Broad Street and go in by the garden. Try not to be seen, but keep Rhody and Toby out of harm’s way. Are you packing, Halliburton?”

“Never go out without my little life-saver,” said Halliburton, drawing out a multi-barreled “pepper box” type pocket pistol. “I’ve got a Black Maria coming from Magazine Street. I told the driver to pull into the service alley, that way we can secure our prisoner and leave without attracting another mob like this morning.”

“Good,” said Legare. “I hope they’re still there, all of them,” said Legare. “When we get in, keep your eye on Breckinridge, and follow my lead. When I move on him get your weapons out and don’t let him draw. He’ll be desperate. I don’t want a bloody shootout in a crowded room full of people.”

“And what about Mister Antonio Gomez, Esquire, purveyor of exotic pharmaceuticals and imported literature?” asked Halliburton.

“Kick him out the door and tell him to get the hell out of town, or else I’ll send Balthazar after him some dark night,” said Legare. “I’m tired of finding Tony Gomez at the bottom of this town’s sewage barrels. Let’s go.”

We could hear voices coming from within the Mendoza library, and Legare stopped us with a raised hand to listen outside the double doors. Then we opened the doors and marched in. They were all there, Naomi, Breckinridge, Cohen, Winthrop, Rabbi Klass, and a wan-looking, newly liberated Simon Mendoza. Cohen and Winthrop looked subdued and unhappy. The rabbi sat in a corner like a stone idol. Simon leaped to his feet. "Good God, Major Legare, this is terrible!" he cried in a shocked voice. "Father murdered in his bedroom, and now Uncle Hyman arrested for the murder! I know I have you to thank, though, for freeing me from a false charge, but I still can't believe that Hyman would murder my father, or kill Calhoun!"

"He didn't," said Legare, and something in his voice stilled the room like death. "Hyman Berlin is dead. He lies in his prison cell, poisoned with cyanide by the same hand which killed Captain Calhoun and Moses Mendoza."

"But they told me you said Hyman had done it!" expostulated Simon, confused.

"I knew the real murderer when I said that, but I had no wish to tip my hand," said Legare. "I had no proof. Now I have it, thanks to Rabbi Klass, who found it in his heart to place righteousness over religion." They were all on their feet now.

"If you know who killed my father, Major Legare, then please don't toy with us any longer!" cried Naomi, upset.

"I oblige, madam," said Legare. Gently he took Naomi's arm and led her a few steps to one side, away from Breckinridge. The blond giant's face was flushed and scowling as he eyed the circle surrounding him. Halliburton and I quietly drew our pistols, his "pepper-box" and my own .44-caliber Navy Colt. We stepped up on either side of Breckinridge, and he read the message in our eyes. "Captain, I must insist that you hand over your sidearm to me," said Legare. "Draw the weapon from the holster slowly, please, and give it to me butt first." Breckinridge's face swelled in rage and agitation, and for a moment I thought he was going

to go for it. Then he bowed stiffly. "You seem to have the advantage of me, gentlemen," he rumbled, and he carefully drew out and handed over his pistol. Legare opened the breech and deftly flicked all the percussion caps off the firing nipples with his thumb. Then he put the weapon into a drawer. Halliburton put his pistol away into his expansive waistband, and I holstered my own gun. "Thank you, Captain," said Legare. "I am glad that you have seen wisdom. I agree entirely with something Rabbi Klass said earlier today, and that is that there has been enough killing. I must now formally arrest..."

"*All right!*" screamed Breckinridge, his face scarlet and his huge fists waving in the air like a man demented. "Yes, damn you, I killed them! I killed them all! I'm not sorry! Filthy Jews, their hands dripping with gold and dripping with the blood of Christ Jesus as well!"

"Ah, the oldest blood libel of all, that canard that we killed your God," said Mendel Cohen. His voice was soft, yet in it I could hear the sound of hope restored. All he saw in the degradation and destruction of this big man was a renewed chance at Naomi. I could have throttled him.

"And Captain Calhoun?" asked Legare. "His hands were dripping neither with gold nor with the blood of Christ. Precisely why did you kill him, Captain Breckinridge?"

"Because he was a disgrace to the South, sir, a blackguard who should never have been allowed to wear this noble gray uniform of our Confederacy! Dirtying himself in the arms of this lascivious Jewess, this *whore!*"

"*Randy!*" cried Naomi, amazed and paralyzed with shock. With a mindless bellow, Hezekiah Winthrop hurled himself on Breckinridge, pummeling him wildly and spitting out epithets I was unaware that proper Bostonians knew. Breckinridge swatted him off like an annoying gnat, and Halliburton and I grabbed him and held him.

Breckinridge ignored him and rambled on disjointedly. "They pollute everything they touch, can't you see? A cancer, sir, a cancer in the body of the South. They profane our sacred cause, flaw our sacred steel. Leeches,

sir, blood-sucking leeches draining the lifeblood of the South. I had to kill them, can't you see? It was my patriotic duty. I disguised myself as Simon Mendoza and I killed that traitor who preferred to drink and gamble and rut with Jews instead of the company of his own race and class, and I left the evidence where I knew Simon would be blamed. Then last night I crept into this house and I killed Moses Mendoza, and as for Berlin, I...I..." He looked at Legare blankly, as if silently begging for help. Legare stepped forward and gripped his big hand.

"Enough, sir, you have said more than enough," he said to Breckinridge. "The South is nobly served in you, and it is a privilege for me to wear the same uniform with you in our common service."

"What do you mean?" demanded Winthrop angrily. "This slavemaster cur has just confessed to three heartless and bigoted murders!"

"So he has, Mr. Winthrop," concurred Legare. "Murders which he could not possibly have committed. He confessed in order to shield someone who certainly deserves little enough consideration from him. This is that famous Southern chivalry which you Northerners mock and find so amusing. If you have any sense, Mr. Winthrop, you will go North and fight for your own state and your own cause. But remember this day whenever you look across some field and see your enemies in gray." Legare turned back to Breckinridge. "It was a good try, my friend, not a bad extempore performance at all, considering the fact that you knew none of the details of the crimes you were claiming as your own, and considering your innocence of the sickly dialectic of anti-Semitism. But disguising yourself as Simon Mendoza? No, captain. You are six feet six if you're an inch, and built like Goliath of Gath, if Rabbi Klass will pardon me an inappropriate Scriptural simile. The idea that anyone could confuse you with Simon even on a dark street is patently ludicrous. Nor could you fit into a size ten shoe. Nor was it you who put cyanide into Hyman Berlin's brandy flask."

Legare turned to face the killer. “Nor was it you, sir, who for the past six months has been slowly poisoning Moses Mendoza to death with arsenic.”

Naomi Mendoza stood like a statue, her eyes boring into Legare’s. For a moment I had a strange notion that I was looking at some monstrous reptile that had assumed the shape a human woman. Her eyes were flat, unblinking and unreadable, and there suddenly seemed to be nothing inside them, no pupil or iris, just two pools of purest obsidian black in her face. A trick of the light, no doubt. “Only one person could be responsible for that slow poisoning,” Legare went on mercilessly. “The woman who did all the cooking in an orthodox Jewish household.” He drew forth the packet of envelopes and displayed them to Naomi. “The words you wrote to Xavier Calhoun in these letters will condemn you out of your own mouth, madam. The times you and he met in carnality, and your rapturous recounting of each embrace, in such meticulous detail. And that final, fatal letter, your sixth and last epistle to your lover, wherein you told him what you meant to do in order to remove the obstacle your father presented to your marriage.

“I have here as well the report of Doctor Jeffries, the police medical examiner. He performed an autopsy over Rabbi Klass’s protests. At my request he applied the latest chemical science from Professor Reisch, of the University of Heidelberg in Germany, and by burning some samples on a small grid of copper wire he detected the arsenic which had accumulated in Moses Mendoza’s hair and fingernails. You counted on Jewish religious law to avoid an autopsy, but you didn’t know South Carolina law mandated one in murder cases, did you, ma’am? We have the statement of a worm named Gomez, from whom you purchased a certain book, no doubt originally for your own instruction and edification, but which you planted in your brother’s bureau in order to get it out of the way in case your own chamber was searched, and also further to blacken his character. Gomez knew that Rhody worked for you and that the fifty dollars came from you. Men like that make it their business

to know with whom they are dealing. We can't prove beyond doubt that you killed Calhoun, since I have no doubt that the false beard you put on your face has long since vanished up the chimney and all of the other evidence was found in Simon's possession where you placed it. But as to your father, you have obligingly provided us with every piece of evidence we need, the murder weapon, the garment and the shoes you wore when you killed him, the time of death when you had the sole opportunity, the arsenic in the body. And of course, your written confession in letter number six to Calhoun."

"How did you guess?" she asked steadily.

"I never guess, madam," said Legare. "It was the tea that clinched it, the pot of camomile tea with laudanum in it which we found in your father's bedroom this morning. The cup had been poured out and the laudanum added, right enough, but the cup was still full. You told me you had watched your father drink it down. Could you not get him to drink it? Or were you so pressed for time you couldn't wait? You had to kill him and get cleaned up and prettied up to meet your latest lover in the alley at eleven. I suspected the truth this morning when I heard that your father had been murdered. I knew that Hyman Berlin hadn't done it, because he was shadowed all night by my police operatives, and the man I had previously pegged for the Calhoun killing would have had no conceivable motive to kill Moses Mendoza and every reason to refrain from doing so. By the by, Mr. Cohen, I owe you an apology for that."

"You seriously suspected *me*?" gasped Cohen, appalled. "In God's name, why?"

"Process of elimination. Once I had accepted Simon Mendoza's innocence, I knew I was seeking someone who looked enough like him to fool witnesses on a gaslit street. You were the only one involved in the case who fit that description. I forgot there was one other even more suited to impersonate her *twin* brother." He turned back to Naomi. "I checked the registration book at the synagogue. Your birth, madam, was recorded right next to your brother's. Now I have a question of my own.

This morning, you yourself pointed out that Moses Mendoza was killed by someone who wanted him dead *now*, who couldn't wait for the slow death he was already dying. He found out about the arsenic, didn't he? When he read your letters to Calhoun, after Hyman Berlin handed them over to him?"

"Yes," she said calmly. "Father read the letters."

"But how did you know that he had found you out?" asked Legare.

"He stopped eating," she said in a detached monotone. "At first I thought it was because he was too sick, but yesterday morning I caught him wolfing down a plate of Hopping John and fatback he had taken out of Rhody's cooking pot. He didn't see me, but I saw him."

"And you knew that there is only one circumstance where a highly religious Jew is allowed to eat non-kosher food," said Legare with a nod. "*Pikuach nefesh*, the saving of life. So you had to rush things. I assume you slipped the cyanide into your uncle's flask last night when he came here to collect his blackmail money from Moses Mendoza. By now you probably expected him to be dead on a train two states away, rolling towards the Ohio River." There was a low knock on the door, and Legare opened it. "Ah, Mrs. McFee, you got my message. Thank you for coming so promptly. Halliburton, will you and the matron escort Miss Mendoza to the conveyance?" The black-clad raptor glided into the room, and this time there would be no reprieve for her prey.

Breckinridge started to gibber faintly. Naomi looked around at the circle of stunned faces, and she knew Legare was believed, and that it was over, that we all now saw her as she was. She sighed, and surrendered. From then on, all was mere formality. She walked quietly to the door, followed by Halliburton and the wardress. Then she turned back to face the people in the room. First she spoke to Breckinridge. "Randolph, I will never forget what you tried to do for me. Thank you." She looked at Legare. "I will hate you forever," she said. Then she was gone.

We all looked at one another, stunned. Then to my amazement, Balthazar appeared in the doorway. In his hand he held a coffeepot, of

all things. "Pardon me, sir," he said in his mellifluous voice. "You are through in here? I saw the police descending the stairs with Miss Mendoza, so I took the liberty of stepping up for a word. This coffeepot was on the hook over the fireplace in the servants' cottage, sir. There seems to be a distinct smell of bitter almonds within it. Rhody and Tobias normally drink a pot for their dinner, but what with all the excitement they had not yet gotten around to it. I surmise that Miss Mendoza was planning to remove the last two living witnesses who were aware of her double life."

"You asked me earlier today about the burning of Moses Mendoza's will, Redmond," said Legare. "I was right; it was a device to buy time. You recall, Simon, that you told us Rhody and Tobias were to be set free under the provisions of that will. Free negroes can testify in court. Slaves cannot, nor can the death of a slave be investigated by the authorities without the master's permission. Naomi needed time to arrange an accident for her old family retainers. I told you she liked to tie up loose ends. Lovely lady, eh?"

There was a strange chorus of sound. Randolph Breckinridge collapsed on the divan and began weeping like a child, crying vehemently as though his heart would break, his sobs wracking his gigantic frame. Hezekiah Winthrop screamed like a maniac and charged out of the house; we could hear his shrieks of agony as he pelted down the street into the distance. Rabbi Benyamin Klass rocked back and forth and began to mutter a sing-song chant in Hebrew, and after a moment he was joined by Mendel Cohen and finally by a tearful Simon Mendoza. In a flash of memory from my Oxford education I recognized the *kadish*, the Jewish ritual death song. For Moses Mendoza? Then I realized it was for Naomi. For these three men a loved sister, a desired bride, and a daughter of Israel had died as soon as she left the room, and she was now as dead as if she lay in her grave.

The sheer horror of it all overwhelmed me; the huge sobbing man on the couch, Balthazar standing imperturbably in the doorway with a

poisoned coffee pot in his hand, the buzzing chant of the three Jewish men, Legare calmly lighting a cigar like some kind of presiding devil in the antechamber of Hell, his beard jutting out like a devilish Punch. I left the room and went downstairs, out into the garden. I found a quiet corner where no one could see me, and there I vomited.

IX

Late the next evening, we were ushered into the office of General P. G. T. Beauregard. The general stood as we entered. “Come in, gentlemen, come in! There’s whiskey and brandy on the sideboard, so help yourselves, and take a cigar as well. You deserve it for a job well done!”

“Not quite the solution we had projected, general, but at least we know that military security was never compromised,” said Legare. “Luckily we were able to disarm Breckinridge before we arrested Naomi. I was worried there. No question but what he would have defended her with his life and slain as many of her accusers as he could, had we given him the chance.”

“The result was unexpected,” agreed Beauregard. “An incredible story, gentlemen, incredible! I understand she’s a real beauty as well. This just arrived. I’m sure you will want to read it over.” He handed Legare a sheaf of papers as we seated ourselves with our whiskey pegs. “Her confession. I haven’t had time to read it myself, but I imagine it is no less astounding was what I read in these letters of hers to Captain Calhoun.” Beauregard held up the packet of letters. “I never saw or heard the like in the worst New Orleans cathouse! Still, I suppose people of her persuasion have different standards in these matters than our own.”

“Actually, general, Orthodox Jews are for more strict in sexual mores than even our so-called polite society,” said Legare. “Naomi Mendoza

was an aberration. You will recall the passage in letter number three where she enumerates a list of her past lovers in order to make Calhoun jealous? An amazing cross-section of Charleston society, from stable hands to octogenarian planters to one of my former colleagues on the police force. That poor numbskull Hezekiah Winthrop probably could have gotten some if he hadn't been too bashful to manifest an interest. The only group Miss Mendoza appears to have excluded from her catholic tastes, if you'll pardon the expression, were the negroes."

"Thank God for that, at least!" I exclaimed.

"Some of our Charleston ladies are not so fastidious," said Legare with a wry smile. "What is even more interesting is Naomi's roll-call in that encyclopedic third letter of a number of other women she apparently seduced. Those elegant ladies' fans will be hiding some deep blushes indeed at the next governor's ball. By the by, she remarked in passing that one of her goals in life was to lure Miss Christie of Belfort into bed before a man got her there, but the opportunity never arose." I could only splutter in confused shock.

Legare perused the document before him as he spoke. "It appears that Naomi has been seducing both men and women since she was thirteen years old, beginning with a young rabbinical student. Pardon me, two young rabbinical students. Tony Gomez told me that he had indeed sold the pillow book to the Mendozas' servant, Rhody, back in 1856, when Naomi was seventeen years old. Yet in all my years of keeping my ear to the ground for Charleston gossip, I never heard one whisper of her activities. Without being conceited, that is a very difficult thing to do. This town is a goldfish bowl. Yet she pulled it off successfully."

"Surely someone must have known?" asked Beauregard.

"You never met her, sir. She is one of those women with the power to enslave men's souls. I imagine her father did have some idea, though. He was no fool, was old man Mendoza."

"Yet he did not speak out, even when he knew that she was poisoning him?" I asked incredulously.

“He would never turn any Jew over to the Gentile law, Redmond, especially not his own flesh and blood. But that was the topic of discussion when he spoke with Rabbi Klass on the last night of his life. That was the ‘family matter’ the rabbi referred to yesterday morning. He gave Klass the letters in order to prepare for a Beth Din, a court of rabbis who would condemn Naomi and give him religious sanction to cast her out and drive her from his home forever, and declare her officially dead to Judaism. He had known about the arsenic poisoning for over a week, ever since Hyman Berlin handed over his final payment of five hundred dollars to Calhoun and received that sixth, final letter wherein Naomi wrote of her plans to remove her father from life. The first thing Berlin did when he got the complete set into his possession was to run as fast as his bandy little legs could carry him to the old man and demand immediate reinstatement into the firm as a partner, or else he would spill the beans. Whether he and Mendoza reached any agreement we don’t know, but when the first murder occurred and Simon was arrested, that changed things dramatically. For Moses Mendoza it was henceforth an issue of Jew versus Gentile, and any chance he would risk Naomi being exposed ended. That decision killed him.”

“I recall the comment the old man made in the garden, on that one occasion when we met,” I said slowly. “He shouted at Breckinridge. ‘Pain?’ he said, ‘What do you know of pain?’”

“I remember,” agreed Hugo. “I think we can excuse his outburst. The man was nearly demented with the agony in his poisoned body and the worse agony in his soul.”

“Start at the beginning, Major,” urged Beauregard. “How did this whole situation come about? Why did she kill Captain Calhoun?”

“The letters speak for themselves, general. A cold and self-centered seducer, she allowed herself to be seduced. She and Calhoun were of the same kidney, despite their different backgrounds, and when they came together it must have been like a full-blown gale on the high seas. A pity we have none of his letters to her. She probably would have run off and

married Calhoun out of passion, but then Simon Mendoza walked in on them in bed and queered the pitch, to use one of your British expressions, Redmond. Calhoun was willing to cut his losses and move on to fresh pastures. Naomi wasn't. She was still tumultuously in love with Calhoun and would do anything to get him back. Furthermore, she was driven by mindless demons to let him know that she would do anything, hence the incredibly stupid mistake of committing to paper her plans to poison her father. That seems to have had the opposite of the intended effect. Calhoun decided he'd best sever his connection with any lady who was so handy with the little brown bottle."

'And he didn't warn Moses Mendoza?" I asked disgustedly.

"No, because he realized that he could parlay those letters into money. He had the perfect buyer in his old sporting crony Hyman Berlin, who wanted revenge against the Mendozas and a return to the freewheeling, free-spending days of yore. Berlin embezzled as much and as quickly as he could get away with safely, but he could only raise five hundred dollar increments. Calhoun sold him the letters one by one, holding out that fatal sixth letter until last, to make sure he got his entire three grand. It developed into a sort of macabre race against time. Would Naomi be able to dose her father with enough arsenic to kill him, yet do it slowly enough to maintain the pretense of natural wasting away through consumption? Or would Berlin be able to embezzle enough without getting caught to purchase the complete set of Naomi's letters and present them to Moses Mendoza in time to save his life?"

"Good God Almighty!" cried Beauregard, aghast. "You mean they each *knew* what the other was doing?"

"Grotesque, isn't it?" said Legare with a chuckle, the delight of a true connoisseur of human evil. "I imagine Calhoun found it all vastly amusing. From what I can understand, he was that type of man. Needless to say, relations between him and his former paramour grew a trifle strained. Naomi desperately needed to get back into his good books. There ensued another series of clandestine meetings between the

two.” Legare studied the papers before him. “Some of these occurred in St. Michael’s churchyard during the small hours of the morning, when Naomi’s father lay at home in a laudanum-drugged sleep.”

“You mean they made love on the tombstones, at night?” I asked, picturing with a thrill the ghoulis scene.

“Actually, she appears to have utilized the French technique during the graveyard rendezvous,” said Legare, turning a page in the confession. “It makes sense. Quicker, fewer items of clothing to pull off and put back on in the event of interruption.”

“*Nom de Dieu!*” muttered General Beauregard, his face slack with astonishment.

“No, sir, *faire une pipe*. That explains how she was able to lure Calhoun into the churchyard on the morning of the twelfth.”

“Wait, Legare, you’re losing me,” I said. “Why, exactly, did she kill Calhoun?”

“Remember that by this time, Randolph Breckinridge was on the scene. Like every other man who met her he was totally besotted with her, but unlike the others he could give her everything she wanted. Honorable marriage, coronation as reigning mistress of Spring Lake which South Carolina society could never ignore despite her Jewish birth, the clothes, the balls, the fine riding stables and blood stock, the gossip and salon intrigues, the trips to New York and New Orleans and Europe, a love-besotted doting husband she could wrap around her little finger. Then there was the challenge of the business world awaiting her as well, an opportunity unheard-of for any woman Jewish or Gentile, since once Moses Mendoza was dead and Simon had marched off to war, she would be the effective president of Continental Mercantile. Mendel Cohen would have run the day to day affairs of the company, but as the only family member on the ground Naomi would more or less decide policy. Yes, the world was about to become Miss Naomi’s oyster. It was all there, tantalizing, dangling in front of her eyes. But those pesky letters! They were a sword of Damocles hanging over

her head, and the thread could snap at any moment. Something had to be done, and quickly." Legare read some more of the confession. "She knew time was running out. There was only one way she could keep that last incriminating letter out of Berlin's hands, and she took it."

"Why did she kill Calhoun first, and not Berlin, in view of what Berlin was doing?" asked Beauregard.

"She knew that Calhoun would catch on to what cooked if Hyman Berlin met with an accident. Miss Mendoza had a little death list drawn up, and all three of her victims were on it. She is a bold and determined young woman and she realized that once she embarked on murder as a solution to her problems, she had to go all the way. She took out Calhoun first because by now it was plain that he had no intention of coming back to her. She thought he still had the last couple of letters in his possession and in her desperation she decided it was better if she tried to find fatal number six herself rather than let it fall into her uncle's hands. She didn't know that Berlin had won the race only days before she struck, that Calhoun had collected his last five hundred and handed over the last letter. At least, she didn't know until the final meeting that Friday morning in St. Michael's. Calhoun apparently took great relish treating himself to one final helping of greens, and then informing her of the situation. He suggested that she leave home and go to work for Regina Montez. Naomi's utter rage and terror of what now awaited her can better be imagined than described. Then as they heard the artillery open fire in the harbour Calhoun belatedly recalled his duty to his country and made the mistake of turning his back on her to leave, whereupon she blew his brains out. Rather seriously underestimated the lady in question, I'd say, but having made the same mistake myself I can't very well fault him."

"But how, exactly, did she go about killing Calhoun and framing Simon?" I asked.

"Don't you remember, Redmond?" asked Legare. "She *told* us how she did it, Tuesday afternoon when we caught her in Tradd Street. The

audacity of it leaves me giddy! One of the stumbling blocks that threw me off during the first part of the case was the question of how the killer knew Calhoun would be riding despatch four o'clock in the morning. I couldn't accept a chance meeting, nor could I accept guesswork. It turns out that it was about half pre-planned and half an educated guess on Naomi's part. I underestimated her again. Women aren't supposed to know anything about military affairs, and yet Naomi was intelligent enough to extrapolate a last-minute despatch run to the telegraph office just before the ultimatum expired, and she knew that Calhoun often made such trips. She decided that the culmination of the crisis and the beginning of open war would provide sufficient turmoil and confusion to cover her crime, and so she came to St. Michael's that morning prepared to make her first kill. Luck was with her.

"She planned at first on going to the churchyard dressed in one of Simon's civilian suits, with her hair tucked up under a hat, then hiding and lying in wait in case Calhoun rode by, but when she found Simon's Confederate uniform in the closet it provided an inspiration, an even better disguise to make two short trips through streets filled with soldiers. She already had the false beard, and into the Gladstone bag she put a dress and the opera glasses she mentioned to us Monday morning. She went to the church and climbed up to the belfry about quarter past four, still uniformed, to watch for Calhoun. She didn't have to go running about like I thought; she was already in place lying in wait for her target. I wasn't sure she could have recognized Calhoun from the roof of her own home, where she said she was, but from the bell tower with her opera glasses she had a clear view straight down both Broad and Meeting Streets. The steeple had already been cleared of gawkers by then and the area was quiet; everyone was down on the Battery. If Caiphas or one of the ministers had found her there, she would have gruffed up her voice and said she was there as an observer. If she had been recognized, she fully intended to give whoever it was a shove over the railing, but fortunately that contingency never arose.

“She turned the glasses down Broad Street. She recognized Calhoun as he turned his horse into the street, and she rushed downstairs. Caiphaz saw her in the church itself, but as she was going *out*, not coming in. In the darkness he thought she was Simon Mendoza. She shoved past him and ran to a dark corner of the churchyard where she quickly removed the theatrical beard, took off her kepi and let her hair down, took off the boots, rolled up her trousers legs and slipped the dress over her head. Time was tight, but she’d practiced the drill beforehand and she had it down well. When Calhoun rode by two minutes later she stood at the Broad Street gate, beckoning to him like some deadly siren in white. Despite the imminent opening of hostilities Calhoun couldn’t resist the opportunity to stop off for a quick one on his way to the telegraph office.”

“A young lady dressed in a man’s uniform, climbing bell towers? Outrageous!” said Beauregard, ruffled.

“Exactly the sentiments she counted on to see her through, general,” said Legare. “She banked heavily on the likelihood that Southern gentlemen would not consider a genteel young girl of good family to be capable of acts such as these, shooting her lover and hacking her father to death like a dacoit. But a jury would have thought long and hard about that acceptably feminine arsenic, the traditional woman’s way to murder. So after the usual proceedings, from which I suspect she drew her own secret ghoulish amusement in view of what she intended, she shot Calhoun, took the despatches, removed her female garb and got back into uniform and beard with the help of a hand mirror and the light of the flare rockets above her, as well as a small jar of spirit gum, packed her kit in the bag and returned home. On the way she was seen by Constable Evers. The uniform went back in the closet, the despatch case and the gun and the pillow book went into Simon’s bureau for which, as lady of the house, she had a duplicate key. The false beard went into the cookstove fire. The despatches she placed in an oilcloth pouch and hid in her bedroom chamber pot, where she was certain no

chivalrous Southern police officer would presume to look. She knows us well, general. Without this confession we would never have proven a damned thing against her on the Calhoun killing.”

“It was the second murder which tripped her up,” I said.

“Yes. She was rushed on that one. She planned to take out Hyman Berlin next, to silence him and prevent the letters which she now knew for certain he had in his possession from being turned over to her father. She was going to approach him herself and try to buy back the letters, even offer him a sexual dalliance if necessary, anything to stall him and buy time until she figured out a way to kill him and get the letters into her hands.”

“*Pardieu!*” hissed Beauregard. “She is a Gorgon, a monster!”

“Totally devoid of a single scruple,” concurred Legare. “Her soul is blacker than her hair, but I have to concede her a certain ironic sense of humor. You remember her pretty little protestation to us that she was not an evil woman, Redmond?”

“Hang about!” I put in. “If Naomi knew that Berlin had the letters, why did she take the risk of going to Calhoun’s lodgings and searching them?”

“The same reason Berlin did so,” Legare explained. “She had to make sure Calhoun had kept no copies, or private diaries, or any other documentation which might connect her with him. Likewise Berlin. To continue, with Simon’s arrest and the subsequent events, with Breckinridge constantly hovering in the background, she found it difficult to arrange a private meeting with her uncle. She still hadn’t been able to set it up when she saw her father eating Hopping John and fatback from the slaves’ ration on Tuesday morning, in a Jewish household proof positive that her father was aware that eating her cooking endangered his life.

“Her uncle had beaten her to the punch, but she didn’t lose her head. She now assumed that her father had the letters in his safe, so she would kill him, get the key, and burn the bloody things. She knew quite well

that her society ambitions would be shot to hell, but now it was a matter of survival. Her resolve was strengthened that night when she went upstairs during the visit of Rabbi Klass, ostensibly to lay out laundry but in actual practice to creep down the outside stairs and listen at the library door. It was a warm spring evening, the windows were open, and she was able to hear every word of the conversation. She cared not one whit for any rabbinical excommunication, but when she heard her father hand over her letters to Klass she knew that she was as safe from them as if they had been burned, for no Jewish rabbi would ever hand over a woman of his own faith to Gentile law for punishment. Or so she thought.”

“She didn’t count on Rabbi Klass having enough of a conscience, enough pure integrity to violate the rigid principles of his religion,” I said. “From now on, whenever I hear anyone speaking ill of the Jewish people I will remember that act of decency in the face of what was to him an overwhelming moral dilemma.”

“When did she poison Hyman Berlin?” asked Beauregard curiously.

“Berlin came by that night to collect his blackmail money,” said Legare, consulting the confession. “Naomi slipped down the stairs and overheard that as well. The details of the transaction were hammered out at the meeting that afternoon between Moses Mendoza and Berlin at the store. Berlin had his grip with him, since he needed something to carry the securities and the gold in, and he was wearing an overcoat. The gist of the conversation between her father and her uncle told Naomi that Berlin was leaving town as his end of the bargain. She was familiar with his habit of traveling with a brandy flask, and she shot downstairs quickly and quietly, took the flask from her uncle’s overcoat pocket, and popped a couple of cyanide pills into it.”

“Wait, how did she just happen to have such a thing as cyanide tablets on hand?” I asked.

“She got them from the same place she obtained everything else, Redmond, from her family’s importing business. A fortunate murderess

she, with a veritable Aladdin's cave at her disposal. Pistol and ammunition, opera glasses, false beard and spirit gum, nightgown and shoes, flypaper from which she boiled out arsenic, and finally cyanide for fixing photographic plates. According to her statement here, Naomi helped herself to four tablets from a consignment of chemicals just before it was shipped to the photographic studio of a Mr. Matthew Brady in Washington, D.C."

"Shipped to Washington?" Beauregard interrupted.

"This was some months ago before the war broke out," said Legare. "She has been planning this for a long time, general, and she wanted something on hand to give her father a quick *coup de grace* if required. But she had to use two of the cyanides on Berlin and save the other two for Rhody and Tobias, so that left only the cruder methods to dispose of her father, methods she did not scruple to employ."

"How could she?" I asked, remembering that scene of slaughter with a shudder.

"Well, at least she tried to drug her father to sleep with laudanum before she butchered him, but he refused the cup. That was the big tip-off, when I found the cup full that morning. It indicated that Moses Mendoza must have been killed when Naomi was still present in the house. She writes here that she and her father 'had words' before she pulled the slaughter knife out from under the napkin on the tea tray. I rather imagine so."

"God, what a ghoulish scene it must have been!" I exclaimed, conjuring up a vision of the candlelight, the sick man on the bed hurling his Biblical anathemas at the beautiful woman who was daughter, harlot, and murderess, then the sudden appearance of the knife.

"After it was done she broke the watch and the clock, having first set them both at three minutes past six. Then she walked down the piazza in her bare feet, got the shoes from her garderobe, walked back to her father's room backwards, stepping in the same bloody tracks she had made, put the shoes on and got their soles soaked in the blood of her

victim, then returned a third time down the breezeway covering over her previous tracks with shoe prints.”

“What if someone had seen her from the street?” I interposed. “She was taking a tremendous risk. Why didn’t she just use the connecting door between the bedrooms?”

“The carpet wouldn’t take actual footprints, just smudges, and she wanted those size ten prints clear and visible. Berlin wears a size ten, by the way; I noticed it when we found him dead in his cell. As little time as she had to plan, she thought of every little detail. She laid the sheet out on the floor, removed nightgown and shoes, wrapped up the items in the sheet, then slipped down to her kitchen where she had concealed a dress and a cloak and a mirror. On the way she went into the library and opened the safe with her father’s key. She planted the despatches, extracted her father’s will from the safe and burned it in the fireplace leaving an obvious mound of ashes, then left the key ring on the table as well as a few blood spatters so we couldn’t miss the fact that the killer had been there and gotten into the safe. In her kitchen she washed herself thoroughly and combed out her hair, got dressed, and met Breckinridge in the alley at eleven. Before doing so she threw Moses Mendoza’s safe key down the well and set out a coffeepot laced with cyanide for her two servants. A damned clever plan, and if it hadn’t been for Rabbi Klass’s courageous decision to cooperate with the law, she might have gotten away with it.”

“Unless you had arrested her on the evidence she rigged against herself,” I pointed out.

“Very shaky without the letters, conviction in court unlikely. I still can’t get over the incredible steely *nerve* of it all, though. Suppose Halliburton and I had been having a bad day and hadn’t picked up on all the telltale signs we were supposed to catch? She had her alibi with Breckinridge, of course, which was a master stroke, since Naomi understood that one of the first rules of intrigue is when suspected of a crime, always try to make the evidence point to a lesser offense. Human nature

being what it is, you've more chance of being believed. Even with Breckinridge's testimony, though, she was still within the possible time frame for Moses Mendoza's death, and she knew it. She counted on us Southern gentlemen refusing to pin the blame on a beautiful young woman who was on the verge of honorable marriage to a planter and Anglican salvation, when we had on hand a far more palatable suspect, a big-nosed Jewish embezzler."

"Think of what you are saying, man!" cried Beauregard in horror. "She not only killed three men, two of them her blood relations, but she was willing to send her own brother to unjust execution, thus branding her family and the entire Southern Jewish community with the taint of treason! *Why*, in God's name?"

"Mendel Cohen told us that Simon Mendoza longs to be part of Southern society," said Legare. "He put it that Simon still wishes to maintain his Jewish faith, but at the same time to be one of us, if you catch his meaning. Naomi had the same longing, but in her it was twisted and intensified until it broke the bounds of madness. She wanted the Jewish community and the whole Jewish religion discredited, the religion that kept her and all women of her faith locked forever in the world of home and kosher kitchen, the mind-numbing ritual observance that shunted her to one side in the synagogue and did not even allow her to approach God save through men. Moses Mendoza was right, General. These crimes were the work of an anti-Semite of the very worst kind. A Jewish anti-Semite."

"See here, Legare," I said. "You said yesterday morning that you missed one important clue right at the beginning. What was it?"

"Oh, that? Not evidence as such, but something that should have put me on the right track if I hadn't had my brain full of Pinkerton men. You remember when we spoke to Naomi in her garden on Monday? I was sure she was lying about the true nature of her relationship with Xavier Calhoun even then, having heard Simon's description of the October incident and read between the lines. You'll recall I asked her if

she had seen anything in St. Michael's churchyard from her vantage point on the roof, with her binoculars?"

"She denied having seen anything," I said.

"Exactly. Now, think about that. Here is a young girl whose brother has just been arrested and charged with murder on dangerously strong evidence. She lies to protect *herself* readily enough, but she won't make up a lie to protect *him*. When I asked that question I was half expecting some wild tale of cloaked villains in stovepipe hats lurking among the tombstones, or a hackney coach full of moustachioed ruffians with abolitionist tracts peeping out of their pockets, and I was prepared to disregard it. Yet she didn't avail herself of the opportunity and instead did her pretty, feminine best to send her brother to the gallows. I was too damned busy looking for Yankee spies under every bush to notice."

"How is young Simon Mendoza taking all this?" asked Beauregard.

"Badly. He left town today. He will seek a Confederate commission in another state. For some reason the boy still wants to fight for the South, even after the way he has been treated."

"May he be worthy of that service, and we of him," said Beauregard. "We begin the movement north next week, gentlemen. Thanks to you, we can do so without fearing any enemy countermeasures. Will you stay for a bite of supper?"

"No thank you, general," said Legare. "We have one more visit to make before this case is closed."

* * *

We could see her dimly through the bars of the cell, by the light of a single candle in a sconce outside in the corridor. At the end of the hallway Mrs. McFee sat beneath an oil lamp, stolidly knitting. Naomi was wearing a simple dark gown, and her magnificent hair was bound behind her back. "What do you want?" she asked in a toneless voice.

“A favor which you may not be disposed to grant, ma’am,” said Legare. “You said yesterday that you would hate me forever. I am here to ask you not to do that.”

“Why should you care?” she asked.

“For one thing, it’s wrong. I don’t deserve it. You put yourself here, ma’am, not me. But there is another reason, hard to put into words. I’m not a religious man, and you are obviously not a religious woman, but I do believe in God and I believe that it is important to make one’s peace with Him, and to enter into His presence in some kind of state of spiritual preparation, if that is possible. I have done my job and made sure that you will answer to the laws of men for what you have done, but I don’t hate you, and please believe that I don’t want you to suffer any more than is inherent in this process. To die with hate in your heart is a terrible kind of suffering, I believe. Everything you sought is now gone forever beyond your grasp, ma’am. It’s all over. Give it up, girl. Let it go.”

“I understand what you’re saying, and I don’t know if I can do what you ask,” she replied. “But it’s good advice, and I’ll try.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

“In return I have a favor to ask of you, sir,” she said, coming closer to the grille.

“Anything within my power,” said Legare.

“I’m not afraid of dying,” she said. “I understand that the formalities are going to take several months, and the long wait is going to be annoying, rather like looking forward to a particularly unpleasant trip to the dentist. I hope the actual hanging part of it doesn’t hurt too much, but I can bear up. What bothers me is something else. You know more about our people than any Gentile I’ve ever met. Have you ever heard what the Orthodox do after death to a Jew who murders another Jew?”

“A rather unusual interment procedure, I believe,” said Legare.

“No Jew, however wicked, is ever denied burial in the Jewish cemetery. But the murderer is given only a smooth, blank, unlettered grave marker. No name, no date of death so the *yahrtzeit* may be celebrated, no details

of the person at all. Eventually the only thing that the congregation remembers is that there lies a murderer. I don't want that to happen to me. I want my name written somewhere in stone, not just in newsprint or trial records or an execution warrant, on paper which will someday crumble or burn. I want to escape the Jews in the end, even if it is only in death. Don't let them inflict that final indignity on me, Major. Now, I know the Episcopalians won't have me any more. St. Michael's is a fashionable congregation and parricides are very unfashionable. But I think the Roman Catholics might take me, and give me a grave with my name on it. Could you ask them to send me a priest?"

X

On a steamy hot Sunday afternoon in July, we met Lincoln's ninety-day mercenaries in the green Virginia countryside. A small creek ran through the woods and meadowlands surrounding our chosen place of agony, and before the day was out it ran red with American blood. We called it Manassas Creek. The Yanks called it Bull Run.

We went into action late in the morning, and within the hour we had seen all the combat we ever wanted to see. Men and boys wearing blue and gray lay on the ground like scattered heaps of dirty laundry, or rolled screaming on the ground clutching mangled limbs and slit bellies, begging for water. The thousands of rifles and detonating artillery were deafening, and we could hardly hear one another over the din. The smoke lay over everything like a pall, choking us, blackening our faces and filling our lungs. The confusion was total. We had no idea whether we were winning or losing, but we knew that we were dying.

By two o'clock our once-proud regiment of aristocratic plantation scions and men-about-town was shredded, weak with terror and exhaustion, low on ammunition, and on the verge of panic. We hunkered down behind the remnants of a rail fence along the crest of the Henry House hill, our Bonnie Blue Flag hanging limply from the staff in Landers' hands, ripped and torn with bullet holes. It was the original South

Carolina secession standard, the single white star in the blue field adopted back in the first heady days of South Carolina's independence, when we had stood alone. Most of the other regiments now carried the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy, although it was difficult to distinguish in the smoke from the Union's Stars and Stripes. *We must get ourselves a different flag, one that doesn't look like the Union flag in the smoke*, I thought to myself distractedly. We were tired, dispirited, taking advantage of a temporary lull to pass the few remaining canteens back and forth, lapping the precious water into our smoke-burned throats. It was a welcome rest, but it gave us time to count the missing faces in our ranks. Our colonel was dead, and to my horror I found that I was the senior surviving officer and in command of the regiment.

Then suddenly there came a low drumbeat from the front, down the sloping hill towards the woods, and through the smoke we saw a dark mass. The oncoming darkness resolved itself into individual soldiers, dressed in red and gold and green with flapping pantaloons. They were the New York Fire Zouaves, recruited by the late Elmer Ellsworth from among that city's fire brigades. They were the best-drilled and most renowned regiment in Lincoln's army. The Stars and Stripes streamed boldly over their serried ranks, and their bayonets were fixed beneath smoke-blackened faces. Minie bullets began to patter among us like deadly raindrops. It was as if they had seen the South Carolina standard and were making right for it, to avenge Fort Sumter and punish us for starting the war. Off to our left, a rolling thunder of riflery began to roar. A hatless Confederate officer on a horse galloped by, waving his saber. I recognized him as General Bernard Bee, blood dripping from wounds in his head and his leg. Seeing that we were wavering, he gestured towards the gunfire on our left. *"There's Jackson, standing like a stone wall!"* he shouted. *"Rally behind the Virginians!"* Thus did I hear the South's mightiest warrior gain his immortal name.

"Come on, lads, come on!" I began to urge my men. "Up, boys, we'll move over behind the Virginia brigade!" The Palmetto Volunteers, what

was left of them, climbed wearily to their feet. There was a wild yell, and not three hundred yards away the Zouaves broke into a charge. We would be overrun in moments, as we struggled to ram charges down the muzzles of our rifles and fix bayonets. A bullet caught Landers and sent him spinning to the ground, the Bonnie Blue Flag with him. A groan arose from our battered ranks, and a few men started edging towards the rear. We were about to break.

Then two things happened. First off, from somewhere to the rear a Southern fife and drum corps struck up "The Bonnie Blue Flag." Secondly, a gray-clad figure ran out of the smoke from the Virginia regiments on our left, wearing the cap and epaulettes of a lieutenant. The young officer snatched up the fallen South Carolina standard from the dead fingers of Landers and flourished it aloft. "*Come on, Palmettos!*" he cried, audible over the din. "*Follow me! Follow the flag!*"

I drew my sword to shout encouragement, but it wasn't necessary. Courage is a strange thing, and for the first time I witnessed what men will do for a piece of cloth. All of a sudden none of us were tired or afraid any more. The Zouaves outnumbered us at least three to one, but in the smoke all we saw was that azure standard for which we were sworn to live and die, bounding and flying towards enemies who sought to defile it and take our country from our hands. We were over that fence like a greyhound after a jackrabbit. From our throats came a strange wild sound, half scream of hatred and half a cry to the pagan gods of battle in Asgard, utterly savage. It came to be called the Rebel Yell.

We were on them in seconds, and we cut them down like cornstalks, each of us with the strength of ten men. We shot them, we bayoneted and stabbed them, we clubbed them down with rifle butts, we smashed their faces and battered their skulls with rocks, we throttled them with our bare hands. The New Yorkers must have thought the bowels of the earth had opened and they were beset by devils. Our gray tunics were soaked with their blood. I will leave off trying to describe it. I can't, not

really, except to agree wholeheartedly with something that our greatest enemy in that conflict said. War is hell.

I followed the blue banner until I almost caught up with the young Virginia lieutenant, who had carried it right into the heart of the opposing regiment, which was now rapidly breaking up as the Union soldiers threw down their weapons and ran for the woods. But not all of them dropped their rifles, and occasionally one of them turned back to fire a last shot. A bullet hit the flag bearer. He sank slowly to his knees, the flag still upright in his hands and held high, and then he began to topple forward. I snatched the flagstaff from his hands and kept the sacred fabric from touching the ground. A shattered wagon stood upturned in splinters nearby, and I chunked the staff down into the spoke of a wheel. The breeze billowed the folds of blue and the single white star. Then I ran to the fallen Virginian, who had charged at our head and led us to triumph with the flag flying high. I turned him over and recognized his dead face.

Simon Mendoza.

For some reason, I looked at my watch. It was five minutes past two o'clock on the afternoon of July 21st, 1861.

At the very moment when Simon Mendoza had snatched up the flag of South Carolina and carried it forward, officers of the state of South Carolina led Naomi Mendoza into the yard of the Charleston jail and hanged her. Legare later wrote me a sardonic account of the scene. "The yard was packed with spectators," he wrote. "Stories were rife about her letters and the lengthy list of her lovers they contained, and rumor had it that during her last speech from the scaffold she was going to name names. In the drawing rooms and smokers throughout the state she was being compared to Jezebel and Messalina, although Clytemnestra and Lucretia Borgia would have been more to the point.

"I'll give her this: her iron nerve never wavered. When we came to her cell and told her it was time she rose and said simply, 'I am ready. Thank you for coming, Major Legare.' She calmly walked past her own coffin to the gallows, the hangman leading the way and the sheriff and myself on

either side of her, and she mounted the steps without assistance. She held a rosary and a psaltery in her hands, followed by a priest of her new religion reading the burial service for the dead. She was wearing a simple black mourning dress and her hair was done up in a bun, all very demure and penitent. She listened calmly while the sheriff read the death warrant aloud. The poor man was unnerved at having to hang a beautiful young woman and was far more flustered than she was. He stuttered through the warrant and then said by rote, 'Ma'am, at this time it is my intention to carry out the sentence of the court. Do you have anything you wish to say?'

"Naomi looked at me and said, 'That was good advice you gave me, sir. I thank you for it.' Then she said to the sheriff. 'It's hot out here in the sun, and I want to be away from this place. Let's get this done, please.' She handed the priest her religious items and stepped forward to the waiting rope. As a last defiant gesture of *savoir faire* she delicately fitted the noose around her own neck and drew it snug under her left jaw, then she asked the hangman, 'Is that right?'. Whereupon that august public functionary replied, 'Perfectly satisfactory, madam. I couldn't have done better myself.' A very civil proceeding altogether. Then he manacled her hands behind her back, bent down and strapped her ankles together, stood up again and slipped a white hood over her face and stepped back. I think I heard a single soft sob of mortal agony come from under the hood, but I'm not sure, and she stood motionless and erect, waiting to die. The sheriff nodded, the hangman pulled the lever, and she dropped and swung. By my watch the trap door fell at one minute past two. Like the rest of her, her lovely neck was a lot tougher than it looked, and she strangled to death. It was several long minutes before she stopped moving, which she presumably used for whatever unimaginable reflection the mind is capable of at such a time, but I doubt she suffered as much as her father and her uncle did.

"Much to the relief of the male population of Charleston, she left no memoirs behind, which is a pity, for they would have made fascinating

reading. There was such a long line outside the jail to file past the gallows for a gawk that they left her on the rope for many hours. It was long after sunset before they finally cut her down by torchlight. Already the coloreds are whispering to one another that the shadow of her hanging body can still be seen on the wall of the courtyard where the gallows stood, and that her ghostly figure is visible in St. Michael's churchyard and in the windows of the now deserted Mendoza house on King Street during the hours of darkness. In a year or two Charleston will have another supernatural folk legend to add to the many we already lay claim to. *Panem et circenses.*"

Simon and Naomi Mendoza entered the world at almost the same moment, and they died within a minute of one another. In a sense, both got what they wanted. Naomi's life and death became a permanent part of the memory of her city. She lies in the graveyard of the church of St. John the Baptist on the north side of Broad Street; even in death, she never crossed the few short paces south of Charleston's dividing line, and I have always thought that symbolic and fitting. In exchange for her soul so heavy with sin, the Roman Catholic church gave her a name for her headstone. Simon Mendoza did make it. He lies in a mass grave on the field at Bull Run, where South Carolina buried her glorious dead on the day after the battle. He was lowered into his final resting place wearing the uniform of a Confederate officer which he had so longed for, and wrapped in the bullet-riddled Bonnie Blue Flag of the world which had rejected him, yet which he still laid down his life to preserve. As the dirt shoveled down on him and the mortal remains of his fallen brothers, I drew my sword and brought the guard of honor to present arms, bayonets fixed, the sword hilt touched to my lips in salute. A lone bugler sounded "The Last Post".

He was one of us at last.

Epilogue

On a crisp day in October of 1865, my beloved wife Christine and I stood on the deck of a trans-Atlantic steamer berthed in the Cooper River. I wore a faded civilian suit of patched broadcloth, and my wife's dress showed extensive wear and repair. Her face was still beautiful, and to me would remain so forever, but it was now thin and lined with care. I myself was still in intermittent pain from a Federal bayonet thrust I had taken at the Wilderness. Everything we had ever possessed was gone. My wife's mother had died of typhoid in 1863, and Union scavengers had murdered her father when Belfort was burned to the ground. But we were alive, and unlike most we had someplace to go, for we were on our way to Ireland.

For the first time in almost fifteen years, I had received a letter from my father, the aged Earl of Westmeath. It was dated at our old family seat of Castlehill House, in County Kildare, and the sight of the old crest has struck me like a hammer blow when I opened it.

“Although I cannot say that I wholly approve of the cause in which you have staked your life and your sacred honour,” he wrote, “I must tell you that my heart has swelled with pride over these last four years when I have read in the foreign news accounts, and in the letters of your wonderful wife, of your gallantry and your heroic dedication to your adopted country and your fellow soldiers, even in the throes of defeat. You have magnificently upheld our family tradition of arms. No father lives who would not

be proud of such a son, or who could not find it in his heart to forgive that which is long past and buried. Come home, James, and bring Christine with you. She will be welcomed into our house as a daughter, and insofar as it will ever be truly possible to do so, we will strive to be the family she has lost. It's been such a long time, and the quarrels of the past are no longer important. Your mother and I want to come to know you both, before we depart this life. Cead mile failte, my children. Come home to Ireland."

Now we stood on the deck, waiting for the tide. "Do you think he will come?" asked Christie anxiously. "It's almost time."

"I did my best to convince him," I told her.

"Oh, it would mean so much to have another familiar face in a strange land!" she said.

"I think we shall have," I said. Hugo Legare was ascending the gangplank onto the deck. He wore a shabby gray suit, a battered bowler hat, and carried a small valise. Behind him came Balthazar, pushing a small steamer trunk on a cart.

"I decided to accept your offer, Redmond," he said. "Balthazar has been kind enough to lend me the money for my passage." My wife rushed to embrace him, and I pumped his hand gladly.

"Thank you, Hugo, thank you!" she cried. "And you as well, Balthazar?"

"I am afraid not, madam," replied Balthazar in a kind and affectionate voice. "My life with Colonel Legare has been a rich and fascinating story, but as with the greatest of literature, one must eventually close the volume and retire for the night. This is as good a stopping point as any. I will wind up Colonel Legare's few remaining affairs here, and then I will be sailing for Jamaica." The subsequent parting I will not describe in detail. Hugo and Christie and I were losing one more good friend to add to all the others departed in the last four years. Balthazar was black and we were white, and that is not a gap that can be bridged. Not often, but sometimes.

As we sailed past Fort Sumter headed for the open sea and the green land of my birth, we saw the Union flag flying proudly over the ruined shell of the fort, the same one which we had compelled Anderson to haul down four and a half years before. Recalling that glorious day naturally brought us around to the Mendoza case. "I heard Breckinridge was killed at Gettysburg," I told Legare.

"Yes. One of Pinkerton's agents shot Tuscarora in a back alley in Baltimore. I killed the Pinkerton man a few days later. Hezekiah Winthrop did surprisingly well. He made it to captain in the Union army, caught a bullet at Chancellorsville which invalidated him out, and now he's a member of the Massachusetts state legislature. Mendel Cohen took over Continental Mercantile. They went bankrupt under the blockade, but he has started over. The Mendoza house was destroyed during the Union bombardment in '63. Cohen bought the site for unpaid taxes, and he's going to build a new store there."

"They all loved her," I said. "When they found out what she was it must have been as bad as it was for the men she murdered. Have you ever been in love, Legare?"

"Yes, once," he said with a sigh, leaning over the rail and puffing on a wretched cigar of green home-wrapped tobacco, all that was available in Charleston in those Reconstruction days. "It was a terrible experience."

"Indeed?" I asked. "You never told me. Who was she?"

"She was one of your countrywomen, oddly enough," he replied with a smile. "She was an Irish girl."

"Ah, then sure it must have been terrible," I laughed. I already seemed to be recovering my accent as we began our journey towards our new, green home across the sea.

"Who knows?" said Legare softly, staring out over the ocean towards the green land to come. "Who knows? Maybe she... Well, perhaps I'll tell you about it some day," said Legare, and eventually he did. But that is a story for another time.

About the Author

H. A. Covington lives in Texas and is the author of seven novels.

