

Rebel Nation

CHRISTOPHER STIRES

“Was that a good enough show, Alexander?” the judge asked.

McKenna rose slowly to her feet.

“Pardon?”

“You heard me.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Your Honor.”

The judge’s face turned pale and tight.

“I find that extremely hard to believe,” he said. “There is no Shield Law under Confederate statute as there is in the North. If you withhold information from the proper authorities you go to jail. The Madame Attorney General had enough evidence for a conviction, as I am sure she did in the other cases.”

“Then why didn’t you convict me?”

“You have a guardian angel. Or should I say devil? I had a visitor—a very unpleasant man, to say the least—at my home the other night, as I am sure the judges in your previous cases did. I was informed that an incident in my past would come to light if I convicted and deported you. I considered adding blackmail to your charges.”

“I didn’t have anything to do with it,” replied McKenna.

The judge ignored her.

“I had to balance your conviction against what else I could accomplish as a judge. I had to consider my family and the effect it would have on them. You heard my decision. But if you ever appear before me again, Alexander, on so much as a littering charge, I will throw myself and my family to the dogs and see you in hell with me. Am I clear on this?”

McKenna stared, unbelieving, at the judge.

Blood seeped from the man’s nose.

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REBEL NATION



Christopher Stires

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REBEL NATION

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For Annie

“more”

Prologue

The Wilderness
May 1864

*F*OLLOW ME, SIR. I'll show you the way."

Major Stephen Talbridge spurred his Appaloosa pony forward and trailed after the seventeen-year-old sergeant. As they rode along the creek bottom, Talbridge slumped, bone-weary, in the saddle. All he wanted was one hour's sleep and a hot cup of coffee. Even that God-awful chicory-and-grain coffee would do this morning. Not too much to ask for, he thought. Not much at all.

But neither was to be. Not today. He knew that. A few miles northwest of their encampment near the Rapidan River, if the scouting reports were accurate, was Grant, and with him the 115,000-strong Army of the Potomac.

The Appaloosa whimpered, and Talbridge gently stroked the pony's neck. Faint dawn light filtered down like broken fingers through the thick Virginia trees and bushes around them. The heavy fog stood rooftop-high. He wished that the darkness and fog would remain. They had patrolled the area yesterday in daylight – the landscape was unnerving.

A year ago, they had fought the Union Army for four days on this very same patch of ground; the winter rains had unearthed the shallow graves of the Confederate and Union dead. Pale skulls, moss-cloaked shoes filled with bones and twisted skeletons littered the ground among the leaves. How soon, he wondered, would someone be treading over his bones?

As they continued along the creek bottom, he studied their surroundings. The fog was not yet lifting. A Yankee patrol could be within spitting distance, and they wouldn't see one another.

Good Lord, why was he here? Why was he risking his life again? He'd never owned a slave, never considered owning one. Before the war, he had been a gunsmith, and all the work he did himself with his own two hands. His shop in Charleston had been frequented by august gentlemen from the South and the North. He had been told that Napoleon III of France and Leopold of Belgium had Talbridge pistols in their royal collections. He was an artist and craftsman, not a soldier. He hated no one.

So why *was* he risking his life again?

The answer was simple. He was here because the Yankees were down here. He would protect his state and home and family from any invaders, even fellow Americans.

"Ain't much further, sir," the sergeant said quietly.

"You haven't lost me yet, Reilly," he answered.

"Wouldn't do that to you, sir."

He knew that. The sergeant and he had both joined the Fifth South Carolina Cavaliers shortly after the war began in the spring of '61. He had been a lieutenant then, and Reilly a drummer. The Fifth, led by the Preacher General LaFontaine, was considered a charmed command among Marse Robert's corps. They had fought at First and Second Manassas, Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville with only minor casualties.

Then they followed Marse Robert to Gettysburg. On the third day of battle, the Fifth, personally selected by Marse Robert himself, joined Pickett's Virginians and marched up Cemetery Ridge toward the center of the Union lines.

"Satan is behind the wall on that the hill, gentlemen," the Preacher General had said. "Mr. Lee has asked us to smite him, and we shall not fail."

The Preacher General was shot to rags within fifty yards of the wall, along with three-quarters of the command.

Then, suddenly, as they started to fall back, Stonewall Jackson and his boys, who had decimated Buford's and Rey-

nolds's troops on the first day, attacked from the rear, surprising the Yankees. The Fifth surged forward into the Union line. Reilly had his right arm, from the elbow down, sheared off by a Yankee bayonet. Talbridge was shot through the side and the hip. They, along with eleven others, were the only members of the Fifth to survive.

Still, the Charge—Pickett's glorious Charge—succeeded, and the Union Army was severed in half. The next day, the Yankees were driven, skedaddling with their blue tails between their legs, from the Pennsylvania farmlands. The Confederacy had captured the day. They had beaten the Yankees on their own soil. God bless Marse Robert.

Reilly headed his mule across the shallow creek. Up ahead, barely visible in the fog, several shadows moved stiffly. Talbridge touched his pony's flank with his spur and followed. After a half-day's rest, Marse Robert had ordered a forced march south. The command was disheartened. Why were they retreating? They didn't understand.

Then word spread through the ranks; Jubal Early's troops were riding, hellbent-for-leather, north through the Shenandoah Valley to join them. In between Marse Robert and Jubal Early was the city of Washington.

The pitched battle lasted two days, and when it was over, the Confederate colors flew over the city. The remaining members of the Yankee Congress met in Philadelphia. Abe Lincoln was forced to resign as president. The Senate and House of Representatives were in chaos as their leaders maneuvered for authority positions. No one, thus far, had risen to oversee all.

But still the North refused to allow the Southern states to leave the Union. One man, one hard son of a bitch, maintained his resolve in the matter.

Ulysses S. Grant.

The former store clerk from Ohio was unstoppable. His command had won victory after victory in Tennessee and along the Mississippi River, including the capture of Vicksburg. Now, he was advancing on Richmond and today—tomorrow at the latest, Talbridge knew—the Yankee store clerk and Marse

Robert would collide, and the fate of their nations would be decided for all time.

Reilly's mule trotted up into the clearing, and the sergeant hopped down. Talbridge stopped beside him and dismounted. A root-thin, barefoot corporal took the reins of his pony.

"Over here, sir," Reilly said, walking toward a knotted pine.

Talbridge saw three Confederate soldiers, their Fayetteville rifles cocked and aimed, standing in a semicircle around the tree. Two more men sat on the ground at the base. They were Union officers.

Talbridge shook his head, amazed. Reilly had not exaggerated. The patrol had captured a Yankee general and captain. The general clutched a bloody bandage around his left arm.

"Sergeant," said Talbridge, "why didn't you bring them into camp?"

Reilly massaged the stub of his arm, embarrassed.

"I was afeared we might lose 'em in the fog, sir. I was afeared to leave 'em, too, 'cause I figgered some more Yanks might come lookin' for 'em. Didn't know what to do. So I came and got you."

Talbridge nodded and stepped in front of the officers.

"I'm Major Stephen Talbridge of the Fifth South Carolina Cavaliers," he said. "Currently I am assigned to General Lee's command. You are our prisoners, gentlemen. You will be fairly treated."

The captain covered his face with his hands and wept.

The general glared at him.

"Your name, sir?" Talbridge asked.

The general tightened the bloody kerchief wrapped around his wound.

"It would be a kindness, major, if you finished the task your men started."

"What appellation shall we carve on the headstone?"

"William Tecumseh Sherman, Union Army."

Talbridge stood motionless. *My God. Think.*

More Yankees would surely be along searching for the general — Reilly had been right about that. They had to move

out, and quickly. They had to get the prisoners back to camp, back to Marse Robert.

"Major," Reilly said, "there's one more."

"What?" Talbridge turned toward the sergeant. "What did you say, Reilly?"

"There's one more." He motioned with his stub at a still form a few yards from the tree. "We kinda stumbled upon each other in the fog. The po' dunk captain there panicked when he seen us, and when he yanked out his pistol, he accident'ly shot his own general. Wasn't one of us, dammit. This other fella's horse bolted, and he got pitched off. Landed on his head and busted his neck. Dead, sir."

Talbridge walked over to the body. A private. He shook his head. The man's boots and pistol had been removed—the war had turned them into robbers of the dead. Shoes should not be a luxury. He turned back toward the Yankee officers then stopped.

Something was wrong. He looked at the private again, at the man's bare feet and empty holster. Why was a private carrying a sidearm?

"Mother of God," sobbed the Union captain.

Talbridge squatted beside the private. He was definitely dead, his thick neck snapped like dry kindling. A shattered bottle of bourbon whiskey stained the man's shirt and trousers. Broken in the fall, Talbridge noted as he pulled a letter from the private's inside jacket pocket. The letter was from the man's wife.

"What do we do, Major?" asked Reilly, moving behind him.

"The war is almost over," Talbridge whispered to himself. "We will have our own country."

"I cain't hear you, Major," said Reilly.

Talbridge slipped the letter back into the man's jacket pocket.

"I want his boots and pistol returned, and I want it done immediately."

"Yes, sir." Reilly motioned harshly to a soldier standing near the Appaloosa.

Talbridge stood.

"I want a messenger sent ahead to General Lee."

"I'll go myself, sir."

"Take my horse. He's faster and in better condition than your mule."

"Yes, sir."

"Report to General Lee personally and to no one else."

"Marse Robert hisself, sir?"

"No one else, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir." Reilly glanced at the other Confederate soldiers, confused; then he snapped to attention. "What is the message to General Lee, sir?"

"Report to him..." Talbridge hesitated, looking at the dead Yankee then over at the two officers. "Report to him that we are close behind with William Tecumseh Sherman as prisoner. Further inform the general that we also have with us the mortal remains of Ulysses Grant."

Part One

The Beginning

I

*Thirty Years Ago
Northeast of Natchez*

As HE HAD for the past four hours, Jardine sat in the dog-eared pickup truck and listened to the rain sluicing off the roof and hood. His hammer-toed left foot tingled inside his shoe. He wiggled his leg then kneaded the thigh, attempting to keep the entire limb from going numb.

He couldn't move much, though; his massive body filled the driver's side of the cab, his balding head grazed the ceiling and, while the seat was all the way back, the bottom half of the steering wheel speared his gut. There'd be a thin, fingernail-shaped bruise around his navel tomorrow.

He felt invisible. The pickup, with borrowed license plates, was parked near a turnabout in the one-lane road and sheltered by a thick ring of magnolia trees and weeping willows. The moon was hidden behind the storm clouds, and no light reflected off the pickup's dull primer. Since he'd arrived, a solitary Ford coupe had chugged down the mud road; and an hour later, three skinny Negro boys had raced through the woods. He had not been seen either time. The pickup had become part of the landscape.

From this position, however, even without his camera's zoom lens, he could plainly see the old church.

The church was called the Blood of the Natchez Lamb Baptist Congress. The name was bigger than the one-room building. Jardine had walked the church earlier from front door to

pulpit and back. Then he scouted the cemetery abutting it, and the shotgun shack out back.

The church had been built for the local coloreds in 1882, a year after the Confederacy abolished slavery. The building had no electricity and only a pot-bellied stove for heat. The steeple had no bell. The cemetery was well maintained and held six dozen grave markers; half had the same last name. The shack was used by migrant farm laborers passing through the area.

The latest occupants, however, were neither planters nor pickers.

Jardine knew the four visitors from police reports and newspaper stories. Three were Confederate-born, the other a Yankee. All had done jail time. All were considered dangerous to the state and the nation. They were almost as well known as Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers and Simon Adam Quade. They called themselves civil rights activists, but they weren't. They were agitators and militants, stirring up the Negro populace with false promises of equality.

They were idiots. If the laws were changed this instant in all thirteen states, minorities would still not be equal. That was the way it was, and the way it would always be. All a body had to do was look at Oklahoma. The Indians there had supported the Confederacy during the War of Secession and had been able to vote and hold public office since. Their lives had not been improved. Most, anyway.

Jardine watched as lightning splintered between the clouds. For nearly a week now, the December storm had whip-hammered southwestern Mississippi from Greenville to the Louisiana border, from Vicksburg to the Bienville Forest. The news said the Big Black and Pearl would crest their banks tomorrow but that the real worry was the Big Muddy. If the Mississippi River flooded, it would affect the economy of the entire region. On the plus side, Jardine decided, the state needed a good warsh.

Wash, not *warsh*. Jardine tapped his gloved fist against the dashboard. After all the private diction lessons, after all the

classes and books, he still occasionally added Rs and esses to some words and dropped Gs from others. He had eliminated *ain't* from his vocabulary but *sumbitch* continued to pop out when he wasn't careful.

Never again, he swore, would he sound like some white trash, peckerwood sharecropper. Never again would some superior listen to him then ask for a translation. He had been embarrassed by his speech in the army and humiliated by it in college. He would not allow that to happen again. He was, after five years, a top investigator for the state bombing unit; and he would dress, act and talk in a manner appropriate for the position.

Wash, wash, wash.

His captain at the state capital had been surprised, and a little curious, when he'd asked for some vacation time. In all the years with the unit, Jardine had not missed a single day. He was on the job every day, including his scheduled days off and holidays.

He'd felt obliged to tell the captain he was feeling a bit fatigued and spent. The ball-busting Gulfport trial was finally over, and the others in the unit could handle the Chewalla Lake investigation without him. He was thinking, he said, about visiting his family up near Tupelo and, maybe, going to see an old army buddy who was making a minor name for himself on the stock-car racing circuit.

The captain smiled his good ol' boy grin and added that maybe there was a lady Jardine could spend some vacation time with. He had stood in front of the captain's desk, blushing with intent, and said nothing. The captain chuckled and said as long as he was back for the Carthage trial he could take however much time he needed. He had earned it and then some.

Jardine had no intention of visiting his sharecropping relations back in Tupelo, and he had no friends from his old army demolition team. He had no time for lazy, ignorant idiots with no more ambition than acquiring an extra six-pack of beer and a twenty-five-inch color TV.

There *was* a lady. She wasn't an acquaintance like his captain had obscenely suggested, though. He had no lady friends. Never would. Sex organs were the body parts that urine came from, and the dual purpose of those specific organs, he felt, explained a lot about the human race.

The lady he'd accidentally been seen with, and the one who had started the rumors around the office, was not a lady friend. She was the honorable Mrs. Amanda Talbridge-Davis, heir to the Talbridge Firearms fortune, and this field trip was a personal favor for her. Jardine had been as honored to do it as he was on the occasions he had done favors for her mother.

A station wagon topped the hill on the other side of the church. Jardine raised his camera as the car turned into the parking lot. He clicked off three quick shots. Two men jumped from the car and dashed up the porch steps out of the rain. The others wouldn't be far behind.

The two who had just arrived were the Yankee law student from Boston and the Negro carpenter whose uncle was the pastor of the church. A wandering light—the lantern Jardine had seen earlier—flared on inside the building.

Jardine wasn't interested in these two, because Mrs. Talbridge-Davis was not. It was the other two, the lady's husband, Peyton Davis, and the woman Frannie Shepherd he was hunting.

The whole situation was half-witted. Davis, a rich white boy from Atlanta, should have been home with his wife and babies. Shepherd, the self-schooled activist from Birmingham, should have been with her fiancé, Simon Adam Quade. Instead, they, along with the other two, were canvassing the states planning protests and marches.

Half-witted idiots. One and all.

When Jardine met with Mrs. Talbridge-Davis, he could see she was deeply distressed. There had been persistent rumors, she explained, about her husband and this civil rights agitator. She had to know the truth, and once she did, she would know the appropriate course of action.

Jardine knew one thing immediately—Mrs. Talbridge-Davis was in no condition to be traveling. But still she had traveled

all the way to Mississippi to meet with him. She was pale and weak and having a difficult time controlling the five-year-old boy scampering around the hotel suite. He later learned that she had another child, a month-old boy, who was under twenty-four-hour doctor's care.

No, this delicate lady should not be out chasing after some adulterous dog of a husband.

Jardine glanced at his watch. Davis and Shepherd had to be here soon, and he would be done with this. He had found them three days ago at a march in Savannah and followed them to Natchez, then to here. They were planning a rally in Mobile for the weekend. The four were leaving for there in the morning.

A second car, its left headlight burned out, coursed down the hill and into the church lot. Jardine focused his camera. It was them.

Davis climbed out of the car and zipped up his leather jacket against the rain. Shepherd stepped out of the passenger side. The woman was pregnant. About eight or nine months along, Jardine guessed from the doctor's report he'd acquired two days ago. She concealed her condition well—only a handful of people knew.

Jardine adjusted the camera lens and finished the roll of film. Sumbitch. If a body didn't know Shepherd was Negro, she could have passed for white without any trouble.

Davis and Shepherd walked, hand-in-hand, into the church.

Jardine started the pickup engine. In less than two hours, he'd be in Natchez. The pickup would soon be at a junkyard and headed for its new life as soda cans or trailer siding. He would be seated inside a warm cafe sipping Irish coffee and eating ribeye steak and crawfish, pecan wild rice, red beans and cherry cobbler. Then he'd go to sleep in a king-sized bed with clean sheets and soft pillows. The day after tomorrow, early, he would be back at work.

Thunder rumbled in the distance. Giant raindrops peppered the ground. Jardine reloaded the camera quickly and set the lens to take in most of the church. Looked good.

A tall shadow moved near a side window. He set the timer on the camera and placed it perfectly on the dashboard. Then he picked up a small generator box lying on the passenger seat. Thick black wiring ran from the box out the wing of the passenger window and toward the church.

Laughter came from inside the building. As the camera began to automatically click off pictures, he twisted the generator handle.

The old church fireballed outward, its ancient walls evaporating in huge orange-black flames. The steeple with no bell quivered suspended in mid-air for a full second then crashed into the burning rubble below.

Jardine hoped he'd caught the moment on film.

Book Two

Today

2

McKENNA ALEXANDER WATCHED—stunned, powerless—as the CS marshal hustled her handcuffed attorney from the judge’s chamber.

“Damnation,” the judge growled. He pressed a handful of yellow tissues to his bleeding nose and tilted his head back. “Give me a moment, people.”

As McKenna sat with the others in the office, she counted the crimson periods dotting the judge’s crisp white shirt. Four. No, five. Blood had also dripped onto the judge’s striped bow tie. Oh, God. She had been confident the charges against her would be dismissed, convinced of her vindication. Had been. Until one minute ago. Now, however, the only question left unanswered was how much jail time would she receive before she was run out of the country.

“Excuse me,” the judge said, rising awkwardly from his black leather chair. He edged his head farther back and pinched the nostrils harder. Then he walked into the office bathroom. The dark walnut door remained open.

From the hall corridor, a second marshal stepped inside.

All in the chamber were quiet.

McKenna twisted the delicate gold chain on her wrist. She should have accepted the NBC anchor job. Landry had offered the network position twice. He had flattered her unmercifully with the proposals each time. Not only, he’d said in his coarse Texas drawl, would she be the first female anchor on any of the television networks in the South but, at thirty-four, she would also be the youngest.

The ratings for the network evening news were up, and even the suits in New York credited her with the increase. The

latest viewer surveys showed that people liked and, more important, trusted her. Plus, she had proven herself time and time again with the hard news stories and interviews she delivered.

She'd noted that Landry had tactfully avoided mention of the disasters she had been involved with. He also didn't mention all the mail the network had received when he first brought her to Richmond four years ago. It was bad enough, most of the letters and e-mail said, that the network was owned by Yankees. They could live with that, since they had to. But they definitely didn't want some blond Yankee bitch telling them the news each night. If it hadn't been for Cullen's encouragement, she didn't know whether or not she would have survived the first year.

She'd said no to the anchor position. Both times. She told Landry she loved Richmond—she had made her home here, after all. The city on the James River was the Confederate nation's capitol, and this was where national policy and agenda were decided. But Richmond was not the entire Confederacy, and she enjoyed living out of a duffel bag and not knowing in which of the thirteen states she would be each week. On Monday she could be in Tennessee and by Friday in the Carolinas and the following Tuesday in New Mexico. She would have missed the road and the adventure. And she hated the idea of being locked behind a desk introducing other reporters who would be doing the assignments she wanted.

This morning that decision was moot.

The Confederate Attorney General had decided she did not want McKenna covering any news stories. Even events like the cotton harvest in the Texas Panhandle and fishing conditions in the Louisiana Bayou were too much for her. She wanted McKenna a vague memory.

But McKenna would not go gently. Not for the Attorney General, not for anyone.

The ticking of the judge's wall clock echoed through the silent room. She glanced at the others.

Billy Dean Poe, the forty-two-year-old deputy prosecutor for the Attorney General, sat perched in a narrow chair beside

her. He white-knuckled the case folder on top of the briefcase in his lap and chewed on his already-raw lower lip. Orange and purple crayon streaks rainbowed across his briefcase surface. McKenna smiled. His three-year-old daughter had decorated Daddy's case. Just as obvious was that Daddy hadn't had time to clean it off before the hearing.

She had known Poe since she first arrived in the CS. She'd had several dinners with him and his wife at their home near Cold Harbor. He had, on more than one occasion, given her information—off the record, of course—about stories she was investigating.

Today, however, he hadn't looked at her once.

In the corner, McKenna noted, the judge's court reporter meticulously adjusted the video camera recording the hearing. The replacement marshal stood at attention next to the locked hall door. Stainless handcuffs dangled from the belt hook behind his holstered .45. McKenna glanced down at her wrists.

"I lead, and you follow," the judge said, his voice muffled behind a wad of tissues as he emerged from the bathroom. "Freedom of speech exists outside my courtroom and chambers. Do not assume what I want, and do not jump ahead on me. Do not attack this court and these proceedings. Do not speak at all unless I direct a question to you."

McKenna had never met the judge before today, but she had heard of him. He was Walter W. Beauchamp, Justice of the Sixth District CS Court. He pronounced his name *Bo-champ*. Around Greater Richmond, however, by friends and foes alike, he was called "Bloody Walt." The courthouse story was that, when provoked, the judge's face would turn the color of pale granite, and blood would leak from his nostrils. Immediate retribution from the bench would then be forthcoming.

Convicted defendants received the maximum in this court. Attorneys were not spared, either—McKenna knew one who had antagonized the judge and earned more jail time than his convicted client. It was also well known that, even more than attorneys, the Appalachian-born judge despised reporters and Yankees.

She had cautioned her attorney about the judge's reputation. The man, supplied to her by the network, flown in on the corporate jet from New York, told her not to worry. His name was listed at the top of his law firm's marquee. He had defended journalists in the US, Canada and Mexico as well as the Confederate States. He had established three precedents in US law. He had written two best-selling books. He had a network mini-series beginning production. After most trials, he'd added, judges and the opposition team asked for his autograph.

He went on the offensive immediately. He attacked the CS Attorney General's case, the A.G.'s motivation and the A.G.'s womanhood. He swiftly rammed home point after point. His US colleagues would have been proud. Billy Dean Poe was shocked.

As the judge listened, the tight smile etching his lips vanished with the color in his cheeks; then blood seeped from his nose. Seven minutes after the attorney entered the judge's chambers, the judge ordered him arrested for contempt and taken to jail. McKenna wondered if the seven minutes was a record.

The judge sat down behind his desk.

"People, you are guests in my domain, and be assured that this *is* my domain. You will act properly at all times in my presence or suffer the consequences, as one member of our little gathering has already discovered. Any question or debate on this?"

"No, sir," answered Poe.

McKenna shook her head and twisted another loop in her gold chain. Somehow, some way, she would have to get word out that she wouldn't make the meeting tonight in Norfolk. The urgent news there would have to wait. Maybe for a long, long time. And Landry would have to send someone else to Oklahoma City to interview the governor tomorrow. God, she hated losing that story. The outspoken governor had promised her an exclusive announcement regarding his position on the Civil Rights Amendment vote.

The judge examined his crimson-spotted tissue before dropping it into the wastebasket. He selected a fresh one from the box on his desk and folded it into a neat square.

"My alma mater is playing Alabama this weekend," he said. "It is my hope to attend the game. To do so, I must clear a few cases from my docket. I called this pretrial hearing because I believe we can avoid a court trial, but I am prepared to begin formal proceedings within the hour.

"People, if I miss the game, I will be unhappy. If I am unhappy, everyone around me will be miserable." He patted his nose with the square. "Any decisions I reach today will be binding on all parties. Any questions on this?"

"None, sir," replied Poe.

The chain snapped on McKenna's wrist and fell, puddling onto her dark skirt. Cullen had given her the chain. Engagement present. Long time ago.

The judge gazed at her.

"Miss Alexander, you are without counsel at the moment. If you wish to contact someone, I will grant a two-hour recess. During that time, however, I will prepare the court to go to trial."

McKenna slipped the chain into her breast pocket.

"I can speak for myself, Your Honor."

"I know. I have seen your work."

"Thank you."

"I did not intend that as a compliment."

"I didn't take it as one."

The judge dabbed at his nose with the tissue.

"You are a very forthright woman, Miss Alexander," he said. "I do not tolerate forthright women. However, if you have any questions during these proceedings, or comments, please raise your hand, and I will recognize you."

"Yes, sir."

The judge tapped the open file folder in front of him.

"While reading this, Miss Alexander, I noticed that when you were married you did not take the opportunity to become a Confederate citizen."

"I didn't ask him to become a US citizen, and he didn't ask me to become a CS citizen."

"Do you dislike the Confederacy?"

"No, sir. I love this country. This is where Coca-Cola was invented."

The judge leaned forward on his elbows, dried blood rimming his nostrils.

"Do you honestly feel that is the Confederacy's main contribution to the world?"

"Honestly? No," she replied. "It's a tie between jazz and the Gatling gun."

"You are walking the edge of the abyss, Miss Alexander. Do not jump in after your attorney."

McKenna raised her hand.

"Yes?"

"Your Honor, do you know what they're serving for dinner at the jail?"

"Are you pleading guilty, or are you implying that you cannot receive a fair hearing in my court?"

"Your Honor, this is the third time in seventeen months that the A.G. has tried to jail then deport me. I find it telling that the first charges were filed the day after my divorce was granted. This time, the A.G. has been bragging that, with you as presiding magistrate, it's a done deal. I've decided that if I'm taking the fall, I might as well speak my mind."

The judge turned toward Poe.

"Billy Dean, is this the third set of charges filed against Miss Alexander?"

"Uh...yes, sir," said Poe.

"Why is that not mentioned in your brief?"

"The previous cases are not relevant to this matter, sir."

"I will decide what is relevant in my court, not you, Billy Dean, and most certainly not the Madame Attorney General."

"Yes, sir."

"Miss Alexander," the judge said, "what were the previous sets of charges and the exact verdicts?"

McKenna glanced at Poe. He had rolled his case folder into a crumpled tube. *Back down a little*, she told herself. *Beauchamp*

is as irritated with the A.G.'s office as he is with you. There still might be a chance to walk away from this.

"Miss Alexander?" the judge repeated.

McKenna nodded and brush-flipped her blond hair back over her shoulder.

"The first time I was charged with obstruction and aiding a fugitive. I interviewed the dissident Elijah Machine—"

"Terrorist," interrupted Poe.

The judge snapped his fingers at the deputy prosecutor.

"You know my rules, Billy Dean, and you have been in my court enough times to understand them. That will cost you two hundred and fifty dollars. Do not interrupt again unless it is in the proper manner."

"Sorry, sir."

"Continue, Miss Alexander."

McKenna cleared her throat. *Keep to the facts. No more smart-ass comments. Play by the rules.*

"I interviewed Elijah Machine at one of the Nat Turner safe houses in Georgia," she said. "The Confederate Bureau of Investigation demanded I tell them how I was contacted, who else was at the interview, how I was taken there. They didn't like my answers. At trial, I was found guilty. The presiding judge sentenced me to pay a one-dollar fine, and I was banished from the Confederate States for twenty-four hours. The case was appealed, and I won. Never did get the dollar back, though."

"I recall seeing that interview on television," the judge remarked. "It was very informative and compelling. Elijah Machine is still a wanted fugitive."

"Some see him as a freedom fighter."

"Some can nominate him for sainthood, for all I care. He is still the leader of an unlawful organization and a wanted fugitive. What was the second case?"

McKenna tapped her foot nervously.

"I was charged with inciting a riot."

The judge cocked his head to one side, thinking.

"The Angel Baby executions?"

“Yes,” McKenna replied.

The State of Florida, as did several Confederate states, televised live all executions. While the Angel Baby murderers – two brothers – were being escorted to the execution chamber and the doctors waiting with lethal IV bags, McKenna had been outside the prison gate interviewing the boys’ grandmother and grandfather. A fistfight erupted between the relatives of the four victims and those of the killers. The capital punishment groups, pro and anti, joined in the melee.

The police arrested forty-two people; six were rushed to intensive care. The CS Attorney General claimed jurisdiction over McKenna because she was broadcasting over state and national borders. The case was dismissed.

“I read a review transcript of that case,” the judge said. “Those brothers were white trailer-trash scum.”

“They were also eleven and thirteen years old.”

“An individual, regardless of age, social circumstance or mental capacity, is responsible for his or her own actions.”

“That is debated even among your peers, Your Honor.”

“As it should be – among my peers,” the judge said, turning several pages inside the file. “Thank you for the information, Miss Alexander. I now feel better prepared to review this case.” He tapped a large stack of papers. “This court has received letters from several prominent Confederate citizens offering to testify as character witnesses on your behalf. Among those letters are ones from your superior and colleagues at NBC News, your former brother-in-law, an eminent Richmond restaurateur and several government and military personnel. It is a very impressive list. It is also noted here that you and the restaurateur are living together.”

“You make it sound like we’re doing it wrong.”

“You are.”

“Not on most nights.”

The judge plucked a fresh tissue from his box.

“We have also received a number of letters from individuals willing to testify for the prosecution. Among that group are three senators, two well-respected corporate attorneys and

a former Secretary of State. You seem to spur equal amounts of loyalty and hatred."

"I do my job well, Your Honor."

"I am not talking about professional ability, Miss Alexander. I am talking about your personal character."

"My job reflects my character."

"Very true. Among all these letters, however, I noted that one is conspicuously absent from either group. That is one from your former husband, Mr. Cullen Davis."

McKenna frowned. "You would have to ask him why that is."

"I have considered it."

"I'm sure if you contacted the president's staff at Capitol House they could tell you what drunk tank or whorehouse he's sleeping in today."

"Tread lightly, young woman. Slander of a distinguished Confederate son is not accepted casually by this court."

"I have never said anything but the facts about Cullen."

"The facts do not always reveal the truth."

"Yes, Your Honor."

"I usually find that a person's choice of spouse is a reflection of their own character."

"Sometimes an accident is just an accident and nothing more."

The judge turned toward the deputy prosecutor.

"Billy Dean, you have seventy-three pages of single-spaced legalese here. Give me the Average Joe synopsis of the charges."

Poe sat up stiffly in his chair.

"Ms. Alexander alleged in a series of newscasts that several ranking members of the Postmaster General's staff had accepted bribes in the awarding of transportation contracts in Mississippi and South Arkansas. She had in her possession documents and records that could have only been obtained by someone within the department itself. Ms. Alexander refuses to divulge the name of the person or persons who gave her the information, and that is severely hampering the CBI investigation."

"She could have stolen the documents herself."

Poe shook his head.

"Another possibility, sir, but I personally find that scenario highly unlikely."

The judge nodded. "The last paragraph on page seventy-three asks that Miss Alexander be deported. I expected to read 'undesirable alien' or 'threat to national security' or some such, but instead I read that Miss Alexander should be deported for her own safety."

"Yes, sir. There have been threats and one attempt on her person. Shots were fired. The CBI is investigating the situation."

McKenna smiled. "My mailbox was cherry-bombed last Halloween. Don't forget to check that, too."

The judge pointed at her.

"If you wish to comment, raise your hand. Then wait until I recognize you. That improper interruption will cost you two hundred and fifty dollars."

"Yes, Your Honor," she replied.

"Continue, Billy Dean."

"Yes, sir," said the deputy prosecutor. "The government can no longer ensure Ms. Alexander's personal safety, and it is in her own best interests to return to the United States."

The judge chuckled. "Your boss is not this creative, Billy Dean. Did you come up with this?"

Poe nibbled on his lower lip.

"Yes, sir."

"Very imaginative. Tell the Madame Attorney General you deserve a bonus."

"Yes, sir."

The judge touched his nose tenderly.

"One chance, Miss Alexander. Tell me the name of the person who supplied you with the documents."

"Don't have any names, Your Honor," answered McKenna.

"These documents suddenly appeared out of a blue sky?"

"No. They were given to me, but names weren't exchanged, and I never saw any faces."

"Man or woman?"

"Don't know."

"Short, tall? Fat, slender?"

"Don't know, Your Honor."

"Uh-huh. How did you verify that the documents were not fake?"

"I took copies to an executive administrator in the Postmaster General's office. His name was mentioned in the documents. When he got the shaky sweats while reading them, I knew they were real."

"Where are the originals?"

"With the CBI. I gave the documents to them when they asked."

The judge nodded. "Do you have any final comments to add to this proceeding, Miss Alexander?"

"Yes, Your Honor," McKenna replied. "Earlier you asked me if I disliked the Confederacy, and my answer was a smart-ass one. I apologize for that. The stereotyped view of a Southerner is of an ignorant, redneck cracker with a jug of moonshine whiskey in one hand and a shotgun in the other. Nothing could be further from the truth.

"The people of the South are warm, hardworking and decent. I don't agree with all Confederate policies and laws, but I wouldn't be here if I disliked this country. I wouldn't fight so hard to stay if I disliked it."

The judge inhaled deeply.

"I find your attitude, Miss Alexander, as I do with most Yankees in the media, to be insulting. You could live here for a hundred years, and you still would not understand the Confederacy and her people."

"What?"

"I have heard more than enough."

"Sir—" began Poe.

"I have heard enough, Billy Dean," he repeated. "I am prepared at this time to render my decision. All parties will receive written confirmation next week. I believe I will be able to attend my game."

McKenna studied the judge's features. He was expressionless. She should have taken the anchor job. Would there be time to go home and pack? Would they politely point at the

border or toss her across a checkpoint like throwing out a bag of garbage?

The judge closed the file folder.

"The criminal charges are dismissed. There is no evidence of illegal intent by Miss Alexander. As to the deportation order, it is also dismissed. Miss Alexander, by legal definition, is an adult and can decide for herself if her safety is in danger. Billy Dean, tell the Madame Attorney General that if she ever brings horse shit like this before me again she will personally be touring the jail facilities in the Territory of Cuba."

"Yes, sir," replied the deputy prosecutor.

"And that goes for you, too, Billy Dean. This is beneath you."

"I understand, sir."

"I hope you do."

McKenna shook her head. Incredible. Utterly incredible.

"Case concluded. End taping," the judge said. "Everyone leave."

Poe shoved his ravaged file folder into his briefcase.

"McKenna, there was nothing personal in this. I was ordered —"

"Miss Alexander," the judge interrupted. "I need a moment more of your time, if you please."

"Of course, Your Honor," she replied.

The judge motioned to Poe as the deputy prosecutor moved toward the hall door.

"Do not forget to pay your fine before leaving the building. Personal check is acceptable under the circumstances."

"I will, sir."

McKenna watched as the others left the room. Poe, confused, glanced back at her. The marshal closed the chamber door.

"Was that a good enough show, Alexander?" the judge asked.

McKenna rose slowly to her feet.

"Pardon?"

"You heard me."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Your Honor."

The judge's face turned pale and tight.

"I find that extremely hard to believe," he said. "There is no Shield Law under Confederate statute as there is in the North. If you withhold information from the proper authorities you go to jail. The Madame Attorney General had enough evidence for a conviction, as I am sure she did in the other cases."

"Then why didn't you convict me?"

"You have a guardian angel. Or should I say devil? I had a visitor—a very unpleasant man, to say the least—at my home the other night, as I am sure the judges in your previous cases did. I was informed that an incident in my past would come to light if I convicted and deported you. I considered adding blackmail to your charges."

"I didn't have anything to do with it," replied McKenna.

The judge ignored her.

"I had to balance your conviction against what else I could accomplish as a judge. I had to consider my family, and the effect it would have on them. You heard my decision. But if you ever appear before me again, Alexander, on so much as a littering charge, I will throw myself and my family to the dogs and see you in hell with me. Am I clear on this?"

McKenna stared, unbelieving, at the judge.

Blood seeped from the man's nose.

3

McKENNA STEPPED SILENTLY into the dark salvage yard. As she surveyed the acre of ravaged boats, allowing the lockpicked gate to ease shut behind her, listening intently for the sudden approach of a junkyard dog, her heart thundered against her rib cage.

She quick-tapped the 9mm Talbridge pistol holstered under her windbreaker then moved forward toward a thirty-foot sailing sloop, carefully staying in the embracing shadows.

Shadows.

When McKenna was seven, shortly after her mother had remarried, her new stepsister, a year younger than her, would crawl trembling into her bed at night.

“Monsters,” her stepsister would say, “there are monsters in the shadows, McKenna.”

And McKenna, playing big sister for the first time, trying to do the job right, would hug her and explain, always reassuring and without doubt, that there weren’t any. She’d known then, as she did now, that she was wrong. There were monsters in the shadows.

At the opposite end of the salvage yard, inside the dock shack, a CD stereo played. She recognized the music – it was Odyssey Hawk. Sixteen years ago, when they’d both attended Huntington Beach High in California, Southern bluegrass rock was the only music D.B. Gifford allowed in his car. It appeared he was here as he had said he would be. She wondered if his sun-blond hair still hung past his shoulders, and if his body was still in tight, mint condition.

Something, either a small rat or a large insect, scurried across her running shoe. She trailed the creature to the middle aisle of the yard. What was she doing here? In the morning, at five a.m., she was catching a flight to Oklahoma City for an exclusive interview with the governor. She should have been packing her clothes and re-evaluating her questions.

She should have been checking for a lead on who had blackmailed Walter W. Beauchamp.

Instead, after receiving a message from an old high school boyfriend, she had driven from Richmond to the docks of Norfolk. Landry would have her butt for an office decoration if she missed the interview tomorrow.

As she moved closer to the lighted shack, past gutted schooners and powerboats, a cool ocean breeze caressed her skin. Goose pimples danced along her arms.

She turned.

From the shadows, a woman and man stepped into the half-light. The woman was the shorter of the two, with a broad equine-shaped face and wearing a sleeveless plaid shirt. She held a Remington twelve-gauge shotgun in her thick hands. The man wore a grease-crusteD Dr. Pepper ball cap and nervously jiggled an Uzi machine pistol.

McKenna raised her hands, palms open.

"D.B. called me."

"Mr. Gifford," the woman corrected; then she twisted toward her partner. "Listen up, ass-wipe, next time you leave a gate open after I tell you to check 'em, I'm gonna take you out into the middle of the bay and dump you head first."

"I can't swim," the man responded dully.

"You're as dumb as dirt, and it's gonna get us killed one day. The cops down here don't need search warrants. Shitfire, how many times do I have to tell you? Go check outside then triple-lock all the gates."

The man, muttering "okay," jogged down the aisle toward the front gates.

"Yankee relatives." The woman rested the barrel of the shotgun on her shoulder then turned back toward McKenna. "I think I know you."

McKenna hesitated. Telling this woman she was a network reporter would not be a good idea.

"I'm an old high school friend of D.B.'s."

"I got it," said the woman, her head bobbing up and down. "You're the broad in the picture over Mr. Gifford's desk. He cut it outta some magazine."

"Can I put my hands down?"

"Sure. Mr. Gifford didn't tell me the broad in his picture was coming, he just said a broad. You're a little earlier than he expected but that's okay."

"Where is he?"

"Follow the tunes."

McKenna walked toward the music and light on the dock. The flesh between her shoulder blades twitched. Was the woman aiming the shotgun at her? God, this was insane. What had she gotten herself into this time?

She hadn't seen or talked to D.B. since high school. Back then, they had been one of the cool class couples. Voted most likable. She had been a cheerleader and editor-in-chief of the school newspaper; he was the star shortstop of the baseball team. After graduation, she went to UCLA then on to reporting at a small television station in Phoenix then another in St. Louis. She heard from her stepsister, still living in Huntington Beach, that D.B.'s baseball scholarship never materialized and that, five years after high school, he was busted for armed robbery and did three years at Folsom.

She stopped outside the dock shack. Several metal fireproof cases were stacked beside the door. She scanned the stenciled label on the crate nearest her. *Sabre-Isaac Bible*.

C'mon, D.B., she thought, you're not stealing from churches and temples, are you?

The container on top of the Bible was marked *Capitol House Diaries/Journals*. Next to that was *Original Manuscripts (Faulkner, Hellman, Lee, Wolfe)*.

Slowly, McKenna reread the labels. Last week in Dallas, a burglary at the H. L. Hunt Memorial Library had netted the thieves an estimated twenty million dollars in rare books and papers. Among the first editions and original manuscripts re-

ported stolen was the first known Bible printed in the South. The testament was noted for its elegant, handcrafted artwork, and that the printer had deleted The Song of Solomon from the text. Too suggestive for impressionable minds.

Also missing were the daily journals of CS Presidents Wilson, Harcourt and Johnson and the infamous “enemies ledger” of President Long. The ledger was stained with Long’s blood – the Depression-Era president had been carrying it when he was assassinated in the lobby corridor of the National Legislature building.

McKenna stepped into the shack doorway. In front of her, encircled in a halo of bright light, was D.B. Gifford. He was surrounded by a bank of security monitors and two computer terminals, and he had a tiny cell phone clipped to his left ear. His blond hair was trimmed short, and reading glasses perched on the end of his straight nose.

Other than that, he looked as if he hadn’t aged a day since graduation. Damn. People were supposed to get older, put on weight and lose hair. They weren’t supposed to stay the same.

“The shipment will arrive in Los Angeles on the thirtieth,” he said into the phone as he typed one-handed on his computer keyboard. “You will be happy with the quality of the merchandise. Pleasure doing business with you as always.” He switched lines on the cell. “I’m only going to tell you this once – if that package isn’t in Corpus Christi by the third then we’re done working together. I gave my word because you gave me yours. No excuses, no explanations.” He hung up the phone and pivoted around in his chair. “Long time, McKenna.”

“You’re looking good,” she responded.

“The Devil takes care of his own.” He stood and rounded the desk, grinning.

She hugged him. Near the desk, taped to the wall between a quarterly calendar and a map of North America, was a photograph of her from *People*. It had been taken on her wedding day. The marriage had been a minor news event. The divorce had been, too.

D.B., still grinning, appraised her from head to toe.

This is awkward, she thought. What do you say to an old boyfriend turned thief? Did you meet your partners in lock-up? What is the dollar value of a hot stereo? Do you have any interesting prison tattoos?

"Well," she said.

"Uh-huh," he replied, slipping his reading glasses off and tucking them into his shirt pocket. "Did you really think you needed to bring a gun?"

McKenna touched the windbreaker covering the pistol. The switchblade knife duct-taped to her calf tugged on her skin.

"Didn't know what I was walking into, D.B. Once, I knew the boy. I don't know the man."

"True enough. I don't have to ask if you know how to use it."

"That was a while ago."

"That story got you your break with the network, didn't it?"

"Yeah."

"I knew a couple of the people you profiled in that exposé. Real bad-asses. Half the illegal blacks living in Chicago and Detroit must have been smuggled through that St. Louis operation."

"Somebody had to do something."

"You risked your life, and it didn't change anything. New faces just replaced the old ones who went to jail."

"Still had to try."

"I heard you dropped the joker they sent after you with one shot."

"Let's change the subject, okay?" She pointed at the tiny box attached to the cell phone in his ear. "Scrambler?"

"Yeah," he answered. "Business requirement when you're dealing with awbos."

"Awbos? What's that?"

"Acquisitions without bill of sale."

"Cute."

D.B. waved at the chair beside the desk.

"Have a seat," he said. "I saw you can still pick locks."

"Saw that, huh?" she said, sitting down.

"I saw and heard you from the moment you walked up to the side gate." He tapped a security monitor as he walked behind the desk.

"Yeah, I can still pick locks. An old boyfriend taught me because I had trouble remembering my locker combination. I thought it was a neat trick. It appears he considered it a career prerequisite."

D.B. eased into his chair.

"I read the other day the CS Attorney General has started proceedings to have you deported."

"Been there, done that, got the T-shirt. Until the next time, anyway."

"I also saw your interview with Frannie Shepherd a few months ago. You're very good. I can understand how you would make some people nervous."

"Only those with something to hide." She shifted toward him. "How long have you been stealing?"

"Since I was eleven."

"What? You were stealing while we were dating in high school?"

"Never when you were with me."

"That's nice to know." She hesitated for a long moment, listening to the ocean waves slap against the dock pilings. "What's it like, sneaking into someone's home uninvited?"

"I don't get a sexual rush out of it, if that's what you're asking. It's a mental and physical challenge and that's all. It's also something I do fairly well."

"Fairly well," McKenna repeated. "You're wanted in eight US states and four other countries, including the Confederate States. You have buyers for your merchandise in every major city in the world. My guess is that everything in this salvage yard, even the cobwebs, will be gone by the end of the week, and so will you."

"Reporters. You never get all your facts straight. I'm wanted in *ten* US states and *six* other countries. What else do you have wrong?"

McKenna tugged on her earlobe.

"You've only been convicted and sent to jail once. The charge was armed robbery, but it was bullshit. You never carry weapons. Never. You got nailed back when you were still doing most jobs yourself. The cops were waiting when you came out of a house in Oakland. Among your loot was a Roman trident, so they said you were armed. You did three full at Folsom."

He shook his head. "The entire situation was embarrassing. The trident even turned out to be a reproduction."

"You're also the leading suspect in the Delta Airline robbery two years ago, the Salinger Shipping theft and the King Ranch hijacking."

"I had nothing to do with the King Ranch job. Swear to God, McKenna. If I'd been there, no one would have gotten hurt."

She jerked her thumb at the doorway behind them.

"What about the Hunt Library burglary last week?"

He smiled.

"I've been reading the journals of Jude Harcourt—the woman is incredible. The Confederate people elect Huey Long, the most corrupt politician in this country's history, then, after he's assassinated, they elect Harcourt. Talk about a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn. The amendment of one six-year term for each President was even overturned so Harcourt could finish leading the Confederacy through World War Two. Amazing stuff. You would love her comments about Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. And there's pages of observations about the Talbridge family."

"You're gushing."

He chuckled.

"D.B., we're old friends," McKenna said, "but if you hadn't telephoned my sister then me and mentioned the name of Cullen Davis, I wouldn't have come."

"Would you like a drink?"

"What do you want?"

"Cut to the fine print, right?"

"Or I'm back on the highway."

D.B. nodded. "I just came up from New Orleans. While I was there I became privilage to some information that is front-

page, and it involves Cullen Davis. I thought of you and figured you might be interested."

"I'm here."

"I want something first."

McKenna frowned. They *all* wanted something first. Even old friends like D.B.

"I've never had many close friends," he continued. "Not in school, not after. I still consider you one of my closest."

"I've always liked you, too."

"I want to trade, McKenna. I give you my information and you give me your RSVP."

"RSVP for what?"

"My funeral."

McKenna eyed him closely. He sat in his chair, poker-faced and motionless. What con was he running? What was the angle? It had to be a theft he was masterminding or an end-run around the police. He thought he could use her somehow. He was wrong.

"All I want is one person who is truly a friend at my funeral." He picked up a file folder and set it near her. "My complete medical records are in here. Run a check. That should eliminate any doubts that you have."

McKenna shifted uneasily in her seat.

"What will I find?"

D.B. rubbed his forehead. The makeup smeared off, and underneath, an ugly lesion appeared on his flesh.

"While at Folsom, I contracted AIDS."

She traced her fingers over the file.

"Did you get a second opin – sorry, stupid thing to say."

"It's okay. I got fifth and sixth opinions."

"What the hell are you doing in the Confederate States? If they find out you have AIDS, without a trial, even being a foreigner, they'll stick you into one of their so-called medical sanctuaries."

"I know all about the colonies. No pardons, no reprieves. Will you come to my funeral, McKenna?"

She squeezed his hand.

"I'll be there."

"I should have been better to you when we were together."

"We were eighteen."

D.B. shrugged.

"Down in New Orleans," he said, "there's a man named Levi Croft. He's a supplier — weapons, explosives, personnel. I've known him for a few years. He operates out of a nightclub along the river. He's ex-Confederate Special Forces, and he is as mean and ruthless as they come."

McKenna nodded, noting the name.

"The word on the back street is that he accepted a contract. I don't know if he's dealing directly with the contractor or with a go-between. Certain questions you don't ask. He's recruiting personnel for a takedown. The target is Frannie Shepherd."

"Shepherd," McKenna repeated.

"The word is she's dead and just doesn't know enough to lie down."

"Frannie Shepherd's been receiving death threats for over thirty years. When I interviewed her in prison before her release they divided her mail into three categories: fan, hate and I'm going to kill you. The Confederate Bureau of Investigation goes after every letter writer and checks out every rumor. That's by presidential order."

"All I know is what I've heard, McKenna. Someone or some group has put a five-million-dollar bounty on Shepherd's head."

"Five million dollars!"

"In the currency of your choice. I would think that a piece of five million dollars will buy someone. Someone who knows what they're doing. I would take the threat seriously."

McKenna nodded, thinking.

"Cullen Davis. How does he fit into this?"

"I'm not sure. He's involved in it somehow, though. His name keeps popping up when the contract is mentioned. One source speculated that Davis was the contractor."

"Cullen Davis is a special advisor to the Confederate President. He's been campaigning for civil rights in the CS, and he helped get Shepherd pardoned. He wouldn't do what you've heard."

“I don’t know your ex-husband, you do. But who has a better reason to want her dead? After all, Frannie Shepherd murdered his father.”

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