

REBEL FEVER

A CIVIL WAR NOVEL



DAVID HEALEY

*Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
Where they lie on the ground after the battle
brought in,
Where their priceless blood reddens the grass the
ground.*
—Walt Whitman, “The Wound-Dresser”

*fever ... 1b: any of various diseases of which fever is
a prominent symptom ... 2a: a state of
heightened or intense emotion or activity b: a
contagious usually transient enthusiasm:*
CRAZE
—Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary

CHAPTER 1



SHARPSBURG, MD. • SEPTEMBER 1862

Captain William Caldwell's eyes felt so gritty that he might have been walking through a sandstorm of exhaustion.

He opened his eyes again with difficulty. God in heaven, but he was tired. For the past thirty hours he had been sawing bones and sewing up flesh, stopping only to gulp from a mug of whiskey-laced coffee.

His surgeon's apron was crimson with blood; even his boots were soaked with it so that it squished between his toes every time he took a step. Caldwell knew he ought to be horrified, but he was too tired to give it a second thought.

And still the wounded kept coming. They carpeted the ground all around the barn that now served as the regimental field hospital. Here and there, a few gray uniforms were mixed among the moaning blue heaps of wounded. Many of the wounded suffered in silence, but the humid September evening was filled with sobs and cries for water. Many had died before Caldwell or the other surgeons could treat them. Hospital orderlies moved among the wounded, kicking at the bodies to make certain they were dead. Those

no longer among the living were carried away and laid in a trench. There were too many dead to dig individual graves.

The barnyard was a perfect scene from hell, all the result of two huge armies clawing and smashing at each other for two days. Forces under Union General George B. McClellan and Confederate General Robert E. Lee had fought bitterly in the woods and cornfields around the Maryland town of Sharpsburg. Already, the newspapers in New York and Washington City and Richmond were saying that 27,000 men had been killed or wounded.

It was an astonishing number of casualties. Whole companies, even entire regiments, had been wiped out and the bodies now lay like rows of cornstalks felled by a scythe, waiting for the burial details. Surgeons like Caldwell had been left to deal with the men who had been lucky — or unlucky enough — to survive.

Caldwell looked around him and thought, not for the first time in his life, that God had left the world.

Men lay on blankets, staring up at the roughhewn beams overhead, bloody bandages swathing the stumps that had once been their arms and legs. A Catholic priest bent over a dying Irishman, muttering some holy gibberish in Latin as the man slowly bled to death from the wound in his belly. A dying boy kept pleading “Mama, mama, mama” and nobody had the courage to tell him to be quiet.

Another man stared with glassy eyes as an orderly tried to stuff the man’s blue entrails back into his abdominal cavity. Caldwell saw it and growled at the orderly to let the soldier die in peace. Everywhere was a smell of unwashed bodies and excrement.

“Captain?” said a voice at his elbow. The corporal sounded distant, like a voice heard in a dream. It took Caldwell a moment to register that his orderly was speaking to him, and he wondered if he had fallen asleep on his feet. He

realized his eyes were shut, and he seemed to be swaying as if buffeted by some invisible gale as he stood amid the ghastly human wreckage of the field hospital.

“Can I get you some coffee, sir?” the corporal asked, tugging Caldwell’s sleep-starved mind back to the living nightmare inside the barn.

“Yes,” Caldwell said, not wanting to open his eyes but knowing he must, praying that this might all be a bad dream. But even with his eyes closed, he could smell the blood with its coppery stink, like a wet penny. The hard-packed dirt floor of the barn was slippery with it.

“They’re bringing more wounded in!” someone called.

Caldwell opened his eyes.

He reeled with exhaustion. To keep his balance, he gripped the three oak planks set between two barrels that served as his operating table, red from the last operation. The blood was already turning gummy, like grease in a cooling skillet.

“Wash down this table,” he snapped.

“Yes, sir.”

A bucket of creek water was produced, and his assistant sloshed it across the boards. For a blessed instant, the blood was gone, the gore sloshing off the boards to create a slick, pink-tinged mud under their boots.

“Next!” Caldwell shouted.

CHAPTER 2



WASHINGTON CITY

It was a good thing the men sent to kill him were so clumsy. As he hurried toward the tavern to meet the smuggler, Pierre Verville was lost in thought and wouldn't have noticed the assassin if it hadn't been for the flash of the knife as it reflected the light of a gas lamp.

Somewhere at the back of his mind, it registered that this was no ordinary thief in the night. It was after dark, and most gentlemen who knew better stayed clear of the wharves at the end of Sixth and Seventh streets once the sun went down. But Verville had business to attend to with the Russian sea captain, Vladimir Khobotov.

The gaslights were sparse here and every alley swarmed with thieves and derelicts. No one had bothered Verville, however. He was a tall, well-built man — made all the taller by his top hat — and he strode purposefully through the streets, swinging a cane topped with a decorative silver boar's head. His long, dark hair fell in oiled ringlets to his shoulders. He wore a black great coat to protect against the damp air, black trousers, and finely made boots so polished that they gleamed in the faint light. Verville wore an old-

fashioned cravat that gave him an aristocratic, vaguely European appearance, like one of those French counts who was always fighting duels and running people through with swords.

His fine clothes might have made him appear foppish, an easy mark, but one glance at his face made him seem altogether more formidable. Verville had fierce, penetrating eyes that were coal black yet danced with a light all their own, daring someone to stop him. There was a spark of madness in those eyes as well, hinting at something hostile and unpredictable that was waiting to be unleashed. The thieves looked him over, then decided on easier pickings.

Still, he had heard the footsteps trailing him.

He turned abruptly and was rewarded with a glimpse of a man ducking into the shadows of a doorway. Verville stood and stared, his bright eyes practically boring holes through the darkness, but the man in the doorway didn't stir. Verville walked on. He had an utter lack of fear that was common to the righteous — he had a nation to save, so why should a lurker in the night be a worry.

Truth be told, he had expected as much from Richmond, but the thought that someone had been sent to spy on him—or even to stop him—outraged Verville. How dare they! Didn't the fools see that this was the only way?

Until recently, Verville had been an agent of the Confederate Secret Service. He had a medical background — he had been a surgeon in the United States army before the war — and most of Verville's service to the Confederacy had to do with the smuggling of medical supplies through the Union blockade.

Verville, however, was not satisfied with that role. He believed the Confederacy was not doing enough to win the war, and even the Secret Service was too often fettered by bureaucracy and an unfortunate desire to deal with the

enemy on gentlemanly terms. Verville had no such reservations. Many wealthy people in Richmond felt the same way, and it had been easy enough to find a few staunch friends of the Cause to bankroll an undertaking that would cripple Washington City and bring the North to its knees.

He rounded a corner and had the Potomac Inn in sight when the assassin lunged at him out of the shadows.

Verville twisted away and the blade swept past. His attacker had put all his weight behind the killing thrust and Verville's sudden dodge threw the man off balance. The man stumbled and Verville shoved at the cloaked back, sending his attacker sprawling in the muddy street.

Verville didn't have time to reach for the derringer in his coat pocket, so he instinctively swung his cane. The man was trying to get up when the heavy silver boar's head crashed down on his cranium. He cried out, lost his grip on the knife, and Verville kicked him in the belly.

"Bastard," the man hissed. "Traitor."

"Norris sent you?" Verville demanded.

"You must not act on your own," the attacker said. He was bleeding badly from a gash to his head. Verville could see the man's blood flowing even in the dusky light.

"There will be victory," Verville said. "I do what I must."

"So do I," the man said, and struggled to his feet.

The blow to the head had made his attacker sluggish. The assassin's knife had fallen a few feet away, but the man made no effort to retrieve it. Instead, he reached into his pocket and began to draw a pistol. *Fool*, Verville thought. *If you had used that in the first place I would be dead.* He supposed the assassin hadn't wanted to attract attention with the sound of a pistol shot.

Verville did not wait to be shot, but swung the cane again, knocking the man down. His attacker, such a deadly force only moments before, was now on his hands and knees. The

pistol had fallen in the mud, the barrel stopped up with muck, useless. The man's eyes rolled up at Verville, watching for the next blow, the killing one.

Some might have found it strange that a doctor could kill so readily, but if anything, Verville's medical knowledge made him a more accomplished killer. He grasped the cane in both hands like an ax handle and struck with all his might.

He could have sworn he heard the man's skull crack. Verville hit the man once more, then turned and hurried away, leaving him to die on the dark street.



VERVILLE STOPPED outside the tavern door to straighten his clothes, which had become disheveled in the attack. His heart still pounded and he took a few deep breaths to calm himself. He took note of the sign — “Potomac Inn” — above the doorway. He thought it was a rather grand name for such a small and derelict place. The greasy panes of glass in the windows were too grimy for him to get a good look inside, but he could hear some sailors singing drinking songs, slapping the tables to keep the rhythm. Judging by the general lack of prosperity that seemed to hang about the tavern, he guessed the Russian sea captain who had assisted him with previous smuggling operations would be no more greedy than usual.

He put his hand on the latch, yet hesitated. Once he struck this deal with the Russian, he knew, there would be no going back. The hounds of hell itself would be set loose.

Verville opened the door and ducked inside. The tavern was more pleasant than he had expected, with a fire roaring in the hearth and the air thick with tobacco smoke and the delicious smell of meat roasting on a spit. He saw at once the man he was looking for — there was no mistaking the huge,

splendidly dressed and bearded Russian officer who presided over a large table near the fire. The leavings of a meal were on the table, some kind of meat dish, and all that remained were the bare bones, stripped of the last scrap of gristle so that they shone white as if a bear had gnawed them.

“Ah, Doctor, it is good to see you,” roared Captain Khobotov in heavily accented English.

“And you, too, Captain,” Verville said, nodding at the massive Russian who lumbered to his feet on the other side of the table. Khobotov wore the red uniform of a Russian naval officer, and the lantern light gleamed on the gold braid at his shoulders and the well-shined brass buttons. It was a splendid uniform, much more ornate than those worn by American navy men.

A younger officer who had been dining at the table stood up and excused himself with a quick bow in Verville’s direction.

“That is Nikolay Sergeyevna,” Khobotov said as the officer walked away. “A serious young man, but a good officer. He is my first mate.”

Verville said nothing, but that didn’t seem to bother Khobotov, who turned to a woman at the table. “Doctor, allow me to introduce my good friend,” Khobotov said, winking at Verville. “This is Sally.”

The woman was a waterfront whore, dressed in threadbare silk, and Verville felt his belly clench in disgust at the sight of her.

“We have business to discuss, Captain,” Verville said coldly. He spoke with an elegant Virginia accent. “Send your whore away.”

Khobotov appeared surprised, even offended. Then he laughed and turned to the woman. “We are talking business, the doctor and I. So, yes, leave us — for now.”

The Russian smiled appreciatively at the girl as she eased

her way to the bar. A sailor quickly encircled her waist with a tattooed arm, and Khobotov frowned.

“At least get yourself a clean woman, Captain,” Verville said, distaste plain in his voice. “You’re likely to contract syphilis from a creature like that.”

Khobotov tore his eyes from the disappearing form of the girl and squarely met Verville’s gaze. There was nothing pleasant in the captain’s look. “You should mind your own business, Doctor,” the captain said in a brittle voice that held all the chill of a Russian winter. “That is the problem with you Americans. You think you are superior to everyone else. I believe it’s a result of your form of government. *Democracy*.” He spat out the word. Then Khobotov smiled. “Oh, I’ve forgotten. Your nation is at war with itself. So much for the noble experiment your nation undertook in seventeen seventy-six.”

Verville shrugged, removed his top hat, and sat down. “Revolution is sometimes necessary, Captain. The citizens of a Democracy should always be free to govern themselves.”

“I should think your slaves might agree with that.” Khobotov roared with laughter, as if he had told an extremely humorous joke. Several of his officers were watching nervously by now, knowing that their captain, unpredictable at the best of times, was in a dangerous mood. The first mate, Nikolay Sergeevna, wore a frown of disapproval.

“Another glass!” Khobotov called in a booming voice that cut through the din of the tavern — it was obviously a voice well-suited to giving orders on the deck of his warship. The barkeep came running.

“Whiskey,” Khobotov explained apologetically after the man had poured Verville a glass. “Not nearly as good as vodka, but if you drink enough of it, it has the same effect.”

“I don’t drink,” Verville said, well aware that Khobotov

knew this.

“No?” the captain feigned surprise. “I had forgotten. Perhaps some of this would do instead?”

Khobotov reached inside his uniform coat and retrieved a small box, which he tossed on the table. Verville guessed at once what it must be. Chinese opium. Knowing Khobotov’s sources, it was bound to be some of the purest available. He knew he was showing his weakness and should have refused the gift, but could not bring himself to do it. He craved the drug the way some men needed whiskey or food or women. It was an undeniable urge. His hand shook slightly as he reached for the box.

“Thank you for the ... medical supplies.”

“You see, Dr. Verville, we all have our whores, don’t we?” The Russian grinned. “Now, down to business, yes?”

“Yes,” Verville said. The box, now safely inside his own coat pocket, seemed to radiate heat. Verville found it hard to concentrate on the matter at hand.

“Now what, Doctor, may I do for you?”

It was not the first time Khobotov and his ship had served Verville and the Confederacy. As a foreign warship, Khobotov’s vessel was not liable to search and could pass freely through the Union naval blockade. The Russian navy was allowed by treaty to use certain United States harbors as winter ports. Russian harbors froze so solid for so long that the Czar’s navy would have been iced in for most of the year unless it wintered elsewhere. Washington was glad to host the Russians, who were the only Europeans who had come down staunchly on the side of the Union. However, that fact did not prevent Khobotov from lining his own pockets by smuggling various goods for the Confederacy.

Khobotov’s voyages frequently took him as far as China, where the Czar had established a firm foothold on territory once held by the weak Manchu dynasty. A series of defeats in

wars with the British, French and Russians had left China's seaports, and the lucrative opium trade, firmly in the hands of European powers. Consequently, Khobotov had often brought badly needed raw opium to Verville in Washington. The Confederate doctor then oversaw the smuggling of the opium into Virginia, where it would be refined into medicines such as laudanum. It was an arrangement which had been very profitable for Khobotov, and his eyes, so hostile a moment before, now glittered in anticipation of making more money. An American naval officer would have been court-martialed for making a similar business arrangement, but the Czar's navy was notoriously corrupt, and Russia was very far away.

"You are sailing again in a few weeks for China?" Verville asked, even though he was already certain of the answer.

"Yes," Khobotov answered cheerfully, refilling his glass from the bottle of whiskey at the table. Verville had not touched his drink.

"We will need more opium, of course," Verville said. The raw opium was processed into laudanum and morphine, two medicines that were always in desperately short supply in the South. Without it, wounded soldiers sometimes had to depend on whiskey to dull the pain of an amputation, and the liquor was a poor substitute.

"That is easily arranged," Khobotov said. He had filled his hold with opium before.

"There is something else," Verville added.

"Whatever you wish," Khobotov said pleasantly.

"There is a special cargo."

"What might that be?" Khobotov was curious. What besides opium could this American want from China?

"There will be three crates waiting for you in the port city of Shanghai," Verville said. "My agent there will be expecting your ship."

“This is rather mysterious, Doctor.” Khobotov was amused, but Verville’s face was serious as ever.

“Also, there will be a Chinaman to transport. He will stay in the hold to look after the cargo.”

“A guard? You don’t trust me?”

Verville ignored the captain’s remark. “I will pay you the usual amount for the opium. For this special cargo you will receive one thousand dollars, provided it is delivered safely.”

Khobotov stared at Verville as if he thought the doctor had gone out of his mind. “Let me understand, Doctor. You’re asking me to take aboard a cargo I know nothing about, and carry a passenger, too, for a mere thousand dollars.”

“All right, then.” Verville had known Captain Khobotov would be greedy. “I’ll pay you fifteen hundred dollars.”

“Well.” Khobotov stroked his beard thoughtfully. His eyes narrowed as a cunning look played across his face. “And a share of the cargo,” he said.

Now it was Verville who smiled. It was an unsettling expression, Khobotov thought; he was reminded of how a wolf might look upon the sheep asking to be let into its den. But what harm could there be in sharing the cargo?

“Fifteen hundred dollars,” Verville said. “Plus a third of the cargo after it arrives safely.”

Khobotov’s broad face broke into a grin. “I will take half the money now. In gold coins, if you please, Doctor — not Confederate currency.”

“As you wish, Captain.”

“We will return in December,” Khobotov said. He shrugged as if a sea voyage to the other side of the world meant nothing to him. “Can you wait that long for this cargo?”

“I see no other choice.”

Verville took a heavy leather purse from a pocket inside

his coat and pushed it across the table to Khobotov. The bag clinked. "That is half of your money there, Captain. A down-payment on the opium and cargo. You'll receive the rest upon delivery. One more thing, Captain; it would be better if you did not open the crates."

Khobotov laughed. "Come now, Doctor. Unless your crates hold Chinese virgins, my men and I have little interest in what's inside."

Verville stood. With their deal concluded, he bowed slightly to the Russian captain. Khobotov had noticed that Southerners had more elegant manners than other Americans; they were more like Europeans than their Yankee counterparts. Verville left the tavern without so much as another word.

Khobotov watched the Confederate agent leave, then laid a huge paw of a hand upon the purse filled with gold coins. He was glad the Americans were at war. It was making the rest of the world rich.

These Americans are no better than the rest of us, he thought, slipping the heavy purse inside his uniform coat. He didn't care who won this war between the United States and the upstart Confederacy. It was a war of politicians, as all wars were, but it was the soldiers and sailors who would pay the price with their blood. In the meantime, he would be happy to take all the money he could off Verville.

Though he knew better than to ask too many questions, Khobotov was curious. If not opium, what else could the Confederate agent want with a cargo from China? The captain shrugged. Sometimes, it was best not to know too much. He reached across the table and drained Verville's untouched glass, then waved to Sally, who was waiting at the bar. He licked his thick lips in anticipation of what the night would bring as the plump American girl made her way toward him, swaying her ripe hips.

CHAPTER 3



General Orders No. 142
War Department
Washington
November 18, 1862

*Effective December 1, 1862, and dating therefrom,
Captain William T. Caldwell, currently
regimental surgeon to the 116th Pennsylvania
Infantry, 2nd Corps, is promoted to the rank of
Major. Major Caldwell will henceforward
assume all duties of chief surgeon to the
2nd Corps.*

*By order of Alfred Foster
William Stanton Adjutant
Secretary of War*



General Orders No. 76

***Headquarters
Department of the Army
Washington***

Major William T. Caldwell, currently assigned as regimental surgeon of the 116th Pennsylvania Infantry, 2nd Corps, will assume duty immediately as director of Armory Square Hospital, Washington. He will report to the office of the Army medical director upon his arrival in Washington to accept such post and receive further orders.

*By order of Jonathan Letterman
James Claiborne
Army medical director
Lt & A.A.*

CHAPTER 4



RICHMOND, VA.

Ten dollars on the dog!” shouted a soldier in a threadbare gray uniform, thrusting money at a fat man in shirtsleeves who was taking wagers.

“Twenty!” someone else shouted, shoving a handful of Confederate paper bills at the man. He was nearly being overwhelmed by the excited men who had come to bet on the rat fight.

Gambling was illegal in the Confederate capital, but no one would have guessed that from the scene at the old tobacco warehouse on the banks of the James River. The warehouse itself belonged to Big Jim, one of Richmond’s leading black market tycoons, but he had left the running of that night’s event to the fat man — named Carothers. The large man who stood at Carothers’s elbow was hoping to make a few dollars on the betting, although he worked for a competing black market boss. The big fellow was named Tom Flynn.

Sweating, swearing men crowded into the open room, all their excitement focused on a ring in the center of the ware-

house floor that had been crudely constructed of cotton bales. Rats swarmed inside the ring — not just any rats, but the large, riverfront variety that fed well on the leavings from a nearby rendering plant. The organizers of the event paid good money to boys and negroes who brought in sacks of the biggest rats in Richmond — some were nearly the size of cats.

The fat man was being pressed upon from all sides. He could barely move his arms.

“Give him room!” Flynn roared. His voice held the ghost of an Irish brogue and his features were what was called “black Irish” — thick black hair and piercing blue eyes and a hooked nose. He stretched out his powerful arms and pushed. The crowd pressed back.

“Take it easy, Paddy!” snarled a man in a bowler hat and Flynn — who hated being called Paddy or Mic — shoved the palm of his hand into the man’s chest and sent him sprawling.

“Shut up, lad, or I’ll throw your sorry ass in the rat pit,” Flynn said. The fellow in the bowler hat cursed and disappeared into the crowd.

“That’s almost all of them, Flynn,” Carothers wheezed. A few more men waved paper bills at him, and then the betting was declared closed.

“Keep an eye on the door,” Flynn said. “I’ve got a bad feeling about this. I posted lookouts, but that won’t give us much time if the damned home guard shows up.”

“Let’s hurry it up, then,” Carothers said. He shouted toward a corner of the warehouse. “Bring out the dog!”

A roar went up from the crowd.

Hardly another body could be squeezed into the warehouse. The noise of the crowd was deafening as men shouted at each other to be heard over the din, and the air itself was

dense with the smell of cheap liquor, tobacco smoke, and the shouts of men eager to see blood. The most excited bettors pressed up close to the pit, pointing out the largest of the rats to each other with nothing short of glee.

Several soldiers were mixed into the crowd, even a few lower-ranking officers in disheveled uniforms, although most of the men were Richmond's rougher crowd of rowdies or else those who earned their living in hardscrabble ways: street vendors, small-time black marketeers. A good many were drunk. At the edges of the room, a few small boys, bare-foot and wearing the rags of street urchins, stood on bales of cotton to get a better look. There were black men, too, but they stayed well back, sensing that they wouldn't be welcome in the crowd of whites around the rat pit.

Flynn looked toward the far corners of the warehouse for any trouble. There was no telling when some of the city's provost guard or home guard — a sort of makeshift police force made up of old men and wounded veterans — would swoop down on the warehouse. His sharp eyes fell upon a young officer in an immaculate, tailored uniform.

Trouble, he thought, knowing it was unlikely the officer had come to watch the rat fight.

There was no time, however, to worry about one stray officer. The dog was brought out and the animal strained to be released into the pit. A howl of approval went up from the men at seeing the dog's eagerness.

Flynn muscled his way to the edge of the rat pit and took out an expensive pocket watch. He held it high overhead and his voice boomed: "Ready!"

The dog's owner lifted the animal toward the ring. The rat dog was straining toward the pit.

"Now!" Flynn shouted, and clicked the watch as the dog was released.

The dog had one minute to kill the thirty rats in the ring.

At first, it appeared the rats would be no match at all as the terrier exploded in their midst with all the force of an artillery shell. The dog snatched the first rat in its teeth and broke its back with a quick, savage shake before launching itself after the next.

Taken by surprise, the rats scattered, trying to climb the sides of the cotton bales. The spectators took off their hats and used them to swat any rats that climbed too high, driving them back into the ring.

“Come on, you bastards,” Flynn muttered under his breath. He had a lot of money on the rats. Although the dog looked to be a sure winner, it was his belief that you should never underestimate the abilities of a rat, especially a rat in a desperate situation.

He was soon proved right. The rats, discovering that escape was impossible, turned to fight. They attacked the dog as a pack, and even the quick, snapping jaws of the terrier could not get them all. An especially large rat got the dog by the throat, and no matter how hard the dog shook, the rat hung up with its sharp teeth buried deep in the terrier’s throat. Another rat found the dog’s belly, and yet another latched onto a hind leg. Blood soon began to fleck the faces of the men leaning over the fighting pit, but they were so caught up in the struggle that they didn’t notice. Their savage faces were made all the more fierce by the blood.

It was the terrier’s turn to be taken by surprise. These rats were large and very angry — another rat bit deep into the dog’s face near the eyes and the animal yelped in pain.

“C’mon you bitch!” several men screamed — for the dog was indeed a bitch, and now one in a great deal of agony as the rats swarmed around her. Some of the men who had bet on the dog looked as if they might dive into the pit themselves to take on the rats.

“Fight, you bitch, fight!”

The dog had killed five or six rats at the outset, which made all the difference. Another five or six rats might have gotten the better of the dog. But the terrier was bred to fight, and fight she did. Cleverly, she used her paws to pin the rat at her throat and pull him free. She promptly bit off his head. The men watching screamed with joy and bloodlust. She caught another rat in her jaws and the creature was shaken into a torn, bloody rag.

“Kill ’em, you bitch! Kill ’em.”

In the end, the rats were no match for the dog, although they fought viciously to the end. The terrier was left quivering in the middle of the ring, blood slicking her fur, and the mangled remains of thirty rats scattered around her.

Flynn kept the time. “Ten minutes,” he shouted, looking at his watch. Well over the limit. This particular terrier was supposed to be very good, and a lot of men had lost money on her. The fact that they had lost was eased somewhat by the fact that this had been a satisfyingly bloody fight between rats and dog.

Flynn had bet on the rats. He had just finished stuffing his pockets with his winnings when one of the blacks who had been at the back of the warehouse appeared at his side.

“Mr. Flynn, a man wants you.”

“What man?” Flynn thought he already knew what man, and knew what he wanted.

“That officer,” the messenger said, pointing to the far edge of the crowd, where the well-dressed officer Flynn had seen earlier was standing.

“Tell him to go to hell.”

No sooner had Flynn spoken, then he saw the soldiers swarming through the warehouse door.

“Provost guard!” Flynn shouted.

Instantly, there was panic. Rats fights were illegal, and any of the men caught up by the provost guard would be

arrested and fined. Some of the spectators were wanted by the authorities for more serious crimes, such as desertion, and being snatched up in the warehouse could mean a hanging rope for them.

Just as the rats had scattered when the terrier first hit the ring, the men now scampered for the doors and windows. Only the fastest ones escaped. There were too many men for them all to squeeze out the back door and windows, however, and the soldiers began arresting the ones at the back of the crowd. Outside, more of the provost guard would be waiting to arrest any man who did make it out.

Flynn saw at once that his own escape was hopeless. But he had a plan.

“Give me the money,” he said to Carothers. The fat man was nearly in a panic, watching the soldiers swarm in.

“What?”

“These provost guard boys will take it right off you,” Flynn pointed out. “I’m getting out of this. Give me the money and you won’t lose any of it.”

The fat man hesitated, but one look at the pandemonium in the warehouse seemed to convince him. “All right. But you know damn well what will happen if Big Jim doesn’t get his money.”

Flynn laughed. “Jim won’t be too happy with us, will he? Come on, Carothers, you know I’d just as soon stay on this side of the grave.”

Carothers, seeing no other choice, slapped a huge roll of paper money into Flynn’s outstretched palm.

“Come see me when you get out of this mess,” Flynn said. “I’ll have Big Jim’s money.”

Flynn headed confidently toward the warehouse entrance. One of the provost guard soldiers put a hand on Flynn’s left arm to stop him. “All right, you —”

Flynn decked him with a quick punch, leaving the man

crumpled on the wooden floor. Flynn walked up to the thin, well-dressed officer who had come into the warehouse minutes before the raid.

“Put me under arrest, Lieutenant.”

The young officer looked puzzled. “Are you Flynn? I —”

“Damn you, lad, grab hold of my arm and let’s walk out of here.”

The lieutenant did as he was told. It looked somewhat ridiculous, the reed-thin officer with his hand on Flynn’s arm, almost like one of the rats had looked beside the terrier. However, the officer appeared so official that no one thought to stop them.

“That’s better,” Flynn said once they were a safe distance from the warehouse. Behind them, pandemonium ruled. Men were shouting and several fistfights and scuffles had broken out between the provost guard soldiers and the men they had come to arrest. A pistol shot cracked. “You can let go now.”

“I —” the lieutenant stammered.

“Where’s your carriage?”

Amazed that the feared and intimidating Confederate Secret Service agent was coming along quietly, all the lieutenant could do was point to a small carriage in the street. A driver waited patiently on the box, and two burly guards from Secret Service headquarters stood nearby.

Flynn climbed aboard, and the dumbfounded lieutenant tumbled in after him.

“Well now, lad,” Flynn said. “Let’s go see Colonel Norris.”



THE FIRST THING Colonel William Norris did was take away Flynn’s money.

“All of it,” Norris commanded, holding out his hand.

“It’s not mine to give, Colonel,” Flynn protested. “It belongs to Big Jim.”

“You’ll just have to take that up with him.”

Norris knew full well that Big Jim was the kind of man who didn’t think twice about putting a bullet into anyone who double-crossed him. Flynn thought about putting up a fight and running off with the money, but knew that was pointless. There was no hiding from a man like Norris in Richmond. If Big Jim was the rock, then Colonel Norris was the hard place.

Cursing, Flynn emptied his pockets. “Big Jim will kill me for losing his money.”

“Then you should’t have lost it,” Norris said, taking the rolls of Confederate bills and putting them in his desk. “Now, if you’ll help me out, I’ll square things for you with Big Jim. And pay you amply, besides.”

“All right,” Flynn said, not happy with the fact that his feet were being held to the fire. Of course, Norris was always quick to seize the advantage over another man. Flynn had done work for Norris before, but whatever the colonel had in mind this time must be especially difficult if he thought he needed some additional leverage over Flynn.

“I have a problem, Flynn,” said Colonel Norris. “The Confederacy has a problem.”

“Why is it that your problems always become mine, sir?” Flynn asked. The colonel was one of the few people in the world whom Flynn called “sir.”

Norris laughed, then paused to light a cigar. He offered one to Flynn, and he accepted. Flynn noticed the colonel did not offer a cigar to the skinny lieutenant who had fetched him from the warehouse, even though the youthful officer stood at attention near the door.

“Leave us, Randall,” Norris said, and the lieutenant saluted smartly and left the room.

Flynn was left alone with the chief spymaster of the Confederate States of America. Not that anything about Norris’s outward appearance hinted at the power he wielded. Norris wore a simple gray uniform without so much as a colonel’s insignia. Although he was a West Point graduate and had been a career army man for the United States before siding with his native Virginia, Norris resembled a stern schoolmaster rather than a spy.

Officially, the Confederate Secret Service did not even exist. Norris was ostensibly head of the Confederate Signal Bureau, which was responsible for training soldiers to use the semaphore system he had developed while at West Point.

In spite of appearances, Flynn knew better than to underestimate the man calmly smoking a cigar behind the desk. On Norris’ orders, more than one body had turned up in the James River or in the wastelands around Richmond’s Tredegar Iron Works. Flynn knew because he had put them there. As an employee of one of the city’s largest black market barons, Flynn was sometimes loaned out to perform nasty chores on Norris’ behalf. In return, Norris made sure the Confederate authorities looked the other way about certain black market activities.

Flynn sat quietly and waited.

“As I said, Flynn, we have a problem. A rogue agent.”

“Yes, sir.” Now this was almost as interesting as a rat fight, Flynn thought.

“His name is Pierre Verville.”

“I don’t believe I know him.”

“You probably wouldn’t, Flynn.” Norris smiled, although there was something about his grin that made Flynn’s flesh crawl. “Verville is not the sort of man you would come across

in your usual line of work. He's a doctor. A surgeon, in fact. He was career army before the war."

"And now he serves the Confederacy?" Flynn asked. He was a little annoyed with Norris, not just over the money, but because the spymaster had a habit of taking his time explaining things.

"Yes," Norris said. "Unfortunately, Verville likes to dabble at playing spy. He enjoys intrigue."

"I see," Flynn said, thinking he understood now. "He's a double agent."

"If only it were as easy as that," Norris said. "A bullet in the back of the head and to hell with him, right Flynn?"

Flynn stirred uneasily in his chair, praying Norris never doubted his own loyalty to the Cause.

"Yes, sir."

"The problem is that Verville has become overzealous. He's taking matters into his own hands, Flynn. He would do anything to help the South win the war."

"Is there anything wrong with that, sir?"

Norris's hard, black eyes settled on Flynn and did not move. In spite of himself, Flynn found he could only hold the intense gaze for a moment or two before he had to look away.

"Sometimes a man can go too far," Norris said.

Whatever this Dr. Verville was up to must be truly sinister for Norris to condemn it, Flynn decided. He listened as Norris continued to speak. "The war is not progressing quickly enough for Verville, so he has taken matters into his own hands. Whatever he is planning cannot be condoned or allowed, Flynn. It could forever tarnish the honor of the Confederacy to have a rogue agent do something drastic."

"In other words, make us look bad to the European powers."

“Yes, Flynn. That about sums it up. We need to show we have control over our own forces, that we’re not undisciplined.”

“Well, Colonel sir, if Verville is in Richmond —”

“He’s not,” Norris said. “Verville is in Washington City.”

Flynn nodded. *The Union capital*. There would be ample opportunity there to cause no end of trouble. “Is he planning an assassination?” Flynn asked, since that seemed most likely, although he wondered what sort of assassin a doctor would make. He fought back a chuckle. “Is he going to shoot Mrs. Lincoln?”

“We don’t know, Flynn.” Norris released a cloud of cigar smoke toward the ceiling. “Whatever it is, he’s planning it on a grand scale. He must be stopped. We can’t have a rogue agent operating on our behalf.”

“Washington is a big city when all you have is a man’s name.”

Norris puffed on his cigar. “I should tell you, Flynn, that I know Verville fairly well. He was old army before the war, United States Army, just like me. Verville is a highly intelligent man. In fact, he’d be the first to tell you.” Norris smiled slightly as his own joke. “He is not a fool or a buffoon, however. Verville is dangerous. He has already killed one of our agents. Beat him to death.”

“A doctor who beats people to death?” Flynn didn’t like the sound of that at all.

Norris nodded, sucked at his cigar. “There is a man in Washington who can help you. His name is William Caldwell. He’s a doctor in the Yankee army, and he also served in the regular army with Verville.”

“A *Yankee* doctor is going to help me?” Flynn couldn’t quite believe it.

“He doesn’t know it yet,” Norris admitted. “You’ll have to

explain everything to him. But he hates Verville, Flynn. For good reason. Ask him about it.”

“If I can find him.”

“When you get to Washington City, go to the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 16th Street —”

“Near the Willard Hotel?”

“Ah, you know exactly where I mean,” Norris said. “Wait there, and a man will help you find Doctor Caldwell. If he has any information about Verville, he’ll give it to you then.”

“That would be helpful.” Flynn didn’t know what good finding this Doctor Caldwell would be; worse, he had serious doubts that a Yankee doctor was going to help a Confederate agent.

“You’ll need some money,” the colonel said. He took a packet of Union greenbacks from his desk and handed them to Flynn. It looked to be about one hundred dollars, well short of the amount Norris had confiscated from the rat fight. “This should be enough.”

“You could just give me what you took off me.”

“Do this job for me, Flynn, and I’ll settle up with Big Jim. And pay you handsomely, besides. You know that.”

“That’s all well and good, Colonel, but I’d feel better knowing I wasn’t going to get me head cracked open by Big Jim on the way home.”

“Mmm.” Norris sat quietly for a long time, smoking his cigar. He appeared to be done with Flynn, but hadn’t dismissed him yet. Obviously, any problems Flynn had with Big Jim were none of his concern.

“Is that all, Colonel?”

Norris settled those jet black eyes on him once again. “Find Verville, Flynn. Kill him. Otherwise he’ll only try it again.”

Flynn knew his orders couldn’t be more clear. “I’ll leave for Washington City in the morning,” he said.

“No,” Norris said. “You leave tonight.”

End of Sample.

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