



The Southern Cross

Craig Wise

V1: Sullivant's Hill and
The Southern Cross

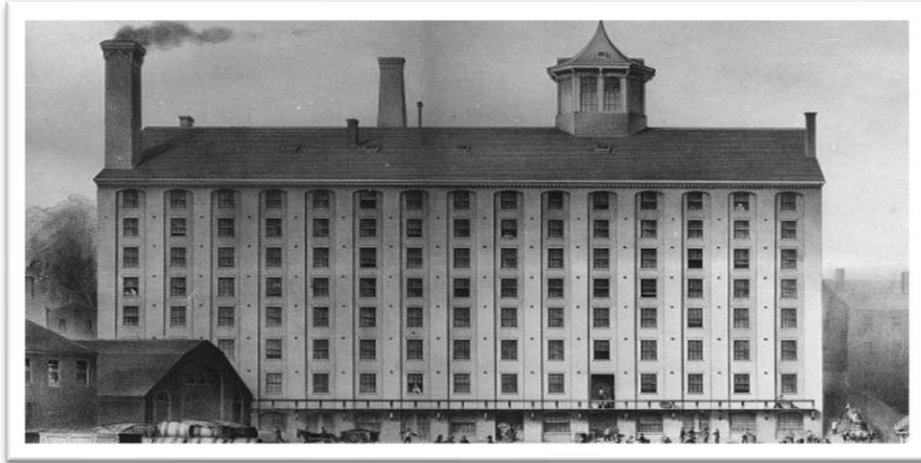
BETA DRAFT NOVEL

©2021 Craig Wise and or Upper Columbus, LLC

uppercolumbus.com

1. The Light Cannon

April 16, 1861, 8:30 PM St. Albans, Vermont



It was strange to see a pair of lovely racehorses pulling a rotten wagon.

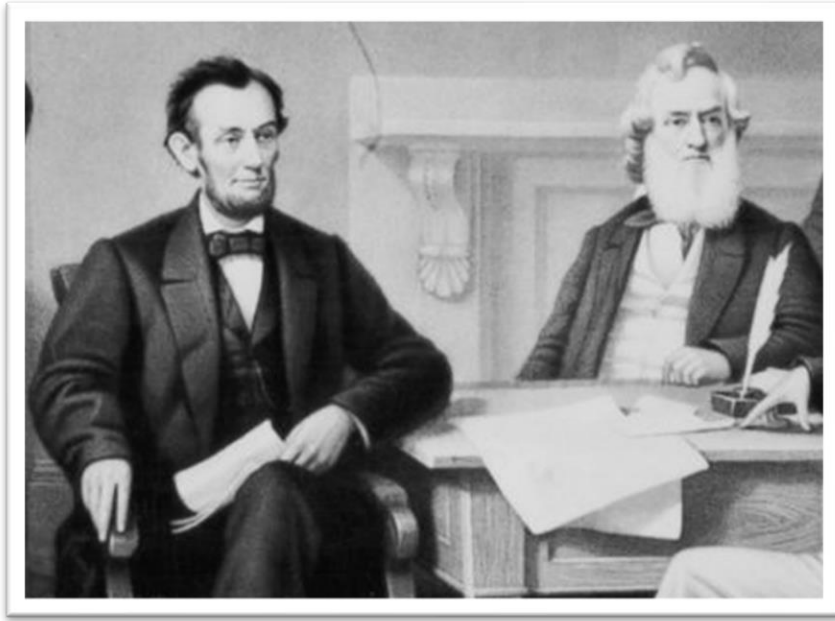
Yet, under the crescent moon, only one man saw it stop beside Vermont's Union Munitions Plant.

As the night riders unhitched and mounted those stallions, the factory's night watchman yelled at them through a window above.

"Hey, you can't park that here! Move it now!"

"Yes, sir! It will be gone in a flash," the long, tall one answered as he lit the fuse.

The Oval Office, April 17, 1861, 8:02 AM,



“Mr. President?” asked John Nicolay, one of Lincoln’s assistants.

“Yes, John.”

“Secretary (of war) Stanton is waiting to see you.”

“Send him in.”

“Good morning, Edwin, have a seat.”

“I wish it were, Abraham,” Stanton replied.

“What’s happened?”

“Last night, Confederate spies destroyed four of our weapon factories. Two in Philadelphia, one in Syracuse, and a munitions plant in Vermont.”

“Damn. This war is not even twenty-four hours old yet. How many Casualties?” Lincoln asked.

“Only one so far; they may find more bodies in the ashes. There could have been hundreds had they attacked during daylight.”

“War only makes truly good news by ending. Did we capture or kill any enemies?”

“No. They were long gone before help arrived.”

“How did they attack?”

“They parked dynamite-loaded wagons against their outside walls; as they rode off on their horses, the buildings exploded.”

“Our factories are so exposed children could have pulled this off.”

“A witness heard one holler “White Knights Forever!” as he fled.”

“White Knights?”

“Yes, White Knights.”

“With such success, we must presume that these White Knights will attack again before they think we can respond. Most likely tonight!” Lincoln predicted.

“Yes, that’s clear. Most of our factories were built before dynamite.”

“They were built when our worst enemies had to cross an ocean to mess with us. Now they live here, so our factories have become sitting ducks,” Lincoln responded.

Several years earlier, Alfred Nobel (the Nobel Peace Prize guy) naively began selling his invention (dynamite) to mining companies.

Nitroglycerin was already available, but it could explode by gently shaking it, so militaries avoided it. However, dynamite was stable; it used a fuse, so armies and militias bought all they could.

“Order defensive brigades to stop and search all vehicles approaching our weapon factories and depots for dynamite.”

“I issued that order before I arrived here. Our communications officers are currently wiring (sending telegrams) to all division commanders.”

“That won’t stop them; they’ll simply switch to softer targets like foundries, railroad bridges, warehouses, and food plants.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“We need invisible facilities that are fortified against dynamite.”

“I will speak with General Sherman and his engineers as soon as I leave here. I will report back here tomorrow morning, Abraham.”

“Try to bring better bad news tomorrow.”

“I’ll try.”

24 Years Later - March 6, 1885, 4:02 PM Columbus, Ohio



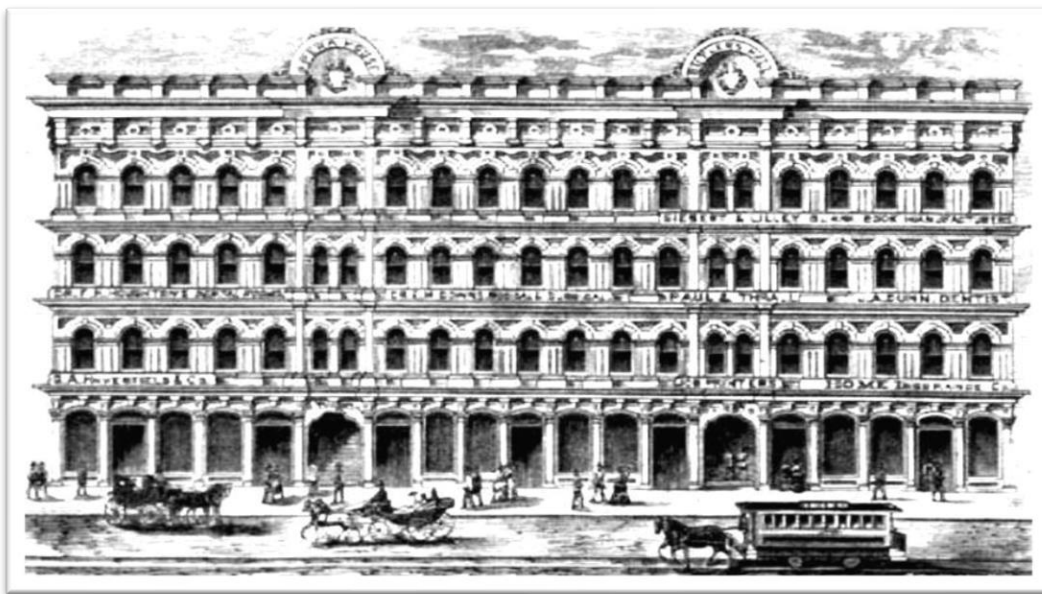
Thomas Edison was as excited as a spoiled child on Christmas eve.

He and his Manhattan-based engineers had been rolling in and out of Ohio's capital for three years to open the world's first fully electrified music hall.

Finally, the grand opening of Columbus's new Metropolitan Opera House was just four and a half hours away.

Although Edison's promotion called this a "new" music hall, only its name, paint, curtains, upholstery, and his direct-current electrical lighting system were 'actually' new.

Not that it matters, but twenty-four years earlier, it was "The Cotton Block and Comstock's Opera House" at its first grand opening.



Columbus's opera house sat at 127 North High Street; until a fire destroyed it in 1892.

At a New York press conference four months earlier, Edison boasted, “This event will be far more than just electrifying a music hall. I will introduce two new products that will forever enlighten our world!”

In the nineteenth century, Americans and Europeans worshiped the great inventors like we do great athletes today. In the 1880s, Thomas Edison was the most admired man (living) in the Western World.

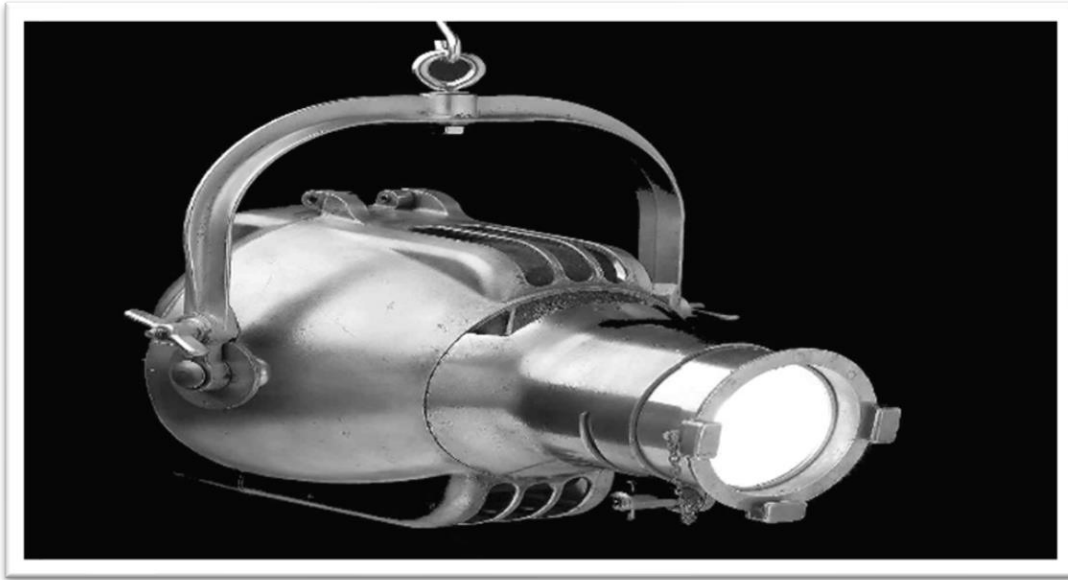
Articles about him increased newspaper sales so dramatically that six hundred reporters from eight nations had rail-rolled into town for this historic event. Even before revealing these new products, he drew the second-largest crowd in Columbus's 72-year history.

Weeks earlier, Edison supplied railroad and show tickets, paid hotel rooms, and whiskey vouchers to sixty-three VIPs. Sixty-one attended.

His guests included ex-presidents Hayes and Grant, author Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), composer John Philip Sousa, inventors Alexander Graham Bell, George Eastman, Harvey Firestone, Skyler Wheeler, Elisha Gray, and his favorite, Joseph Gayetty (toilet paper).

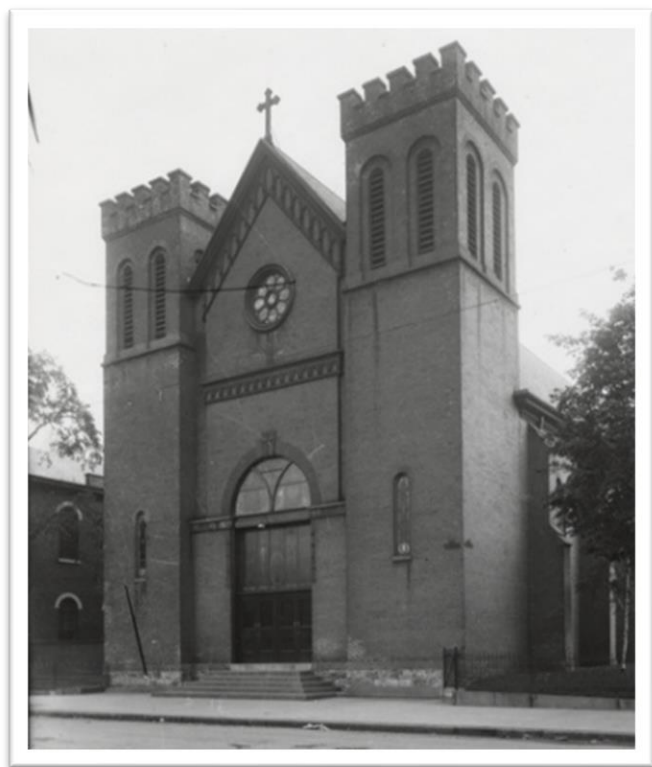
As with the opera house, one of these ‘new’ products was not that new.

After seeing Edison's first prototype in 1881, lame-duck President Hayes ordered the first one thousand for the US Navy. Edison agreed to produce them secretly until this month (March 1885). Edison named these “Light Cannons”; however, the press dubbed them “Spotlights,” which stuck.



A week before Edison's big reveal, Columbus's three hotels were over-booked, leaving no rooms for hundreds of reporters. In response, Ohio's Governor Hoadly ordered a battalion from the Columbus Arsenal (now Fort Hayes) to erect twenty troop tents on the statehouse grounds, several blocks south of the Opera House.





Columbus's St. Patrick's Church (Built 1851)

Anxiety replaced Edison's childish excitement about two hours before 'The Maids of Armando' would become the world's first spotlighted musical.

He worried that one tiny malfunction could become a headline disaster.

So, he slipped and skidded over six icy blocks to Saint Patrick's Church to make a \$100 donation, a significant contribution for 1885.

As Reverend John Furlong's thick, powerful hands clamped around the five gold pieces, Edison asked him to pray that this show runs "glitch-free."

After dropping the coins into the collection box, Father John took Edison's hands. Then in his rich Irish accent, he recited a beauty. Amen!

"Damn, I should have asked him to get spring sprouting already," Edison thought as he slipped and skidded back to the theater.

In hindsight, Edison should have asked Father John to protect the entire evening.

Five minutes before showtime (8:25 PM), under the flickering glow of the theater's original gaslights, Governor Hoadly opened the show by thanking the dignitaries and reporters before introducing Edison.

After America's first Elon Musk stood on the 'X' he had painted on the stage floor, he showed off his most extraordinary talent, marketing:

"Ladies, gentlemen, oh and you reporters," cracked up everyone not holding a pencil.

"The Annals of Time will remember this evening as one of the most significant nights in human history! Tonight, we forever leave the darkness behind!"

His adoring crowd laughed at everything he said until "LET THERE BE LIGHT!" And everyone gasped instead.

Edison suddenly glowed so intensely that everyone watching had to cover their eyes momentarily. They all expected the world's first fully electrically illuminated musical, but nothing this bright.

His lightbulbs were not bright enough to power his Light Cannons. So, he used "Voltage Arcing," the first electric lighting method patented.

That patent was issued in 1804, forty-five years before Edison was born.

Then he said, "Let the Show Begin!"



"The Buckeye Beauties" would soon be spotlighted under Edison's horrifying headlines.

Why would Edison hold this reveal in this small town when his company was based in Manhattan? New York City had dozens of opera houses and newspapers; Columbus had only one of each.

Although Edison was born and raised in Ohio, he would have never chosen this music hall. Former President Hayes selected it as a cover story.

Upon leaving office in 1881, Hayes's replacement, President Garfield, secretly appointed him commander of the country's first 'actually' secret agency.

President Andrew Johnson set up the Secret Service six years earlier after President Lincoln's assassination.

However, Secret Service agents carried Secret Service badges and worked from their town's Secret Service office, which ain't exactly "secret." This needed to be a very boring government service that just happens to move rapidly.

Secret Commander Hayes's first quandary; explains why Edison and his's engineers would be rolling in and out of Columbus for the next few years.

Hayes's brilliant, 6'9" secretary/bodyguard, the former child slave Lemont Freeman, suggested having Edison also electrify the old opera house to explain his presence.



"That's perfect," Hayes instantly responded.

Edison and his men were secretly in Columbus to convert an invisible Civil War weapons factory into the nation's secret headquarters for covert projects, programs, and espionage.

This vast (for 1885) facility sat seven miles west of the music hall, 30 feet beneath the crest of "Sullivant's Hill" (today's "Hilltop"). Columbus sat dead center of the nation's railroad network (mathematically).

Because trains were humanity's swiftest form of transportation, Sullivant's Hill offered the quickest private access to the entire country.

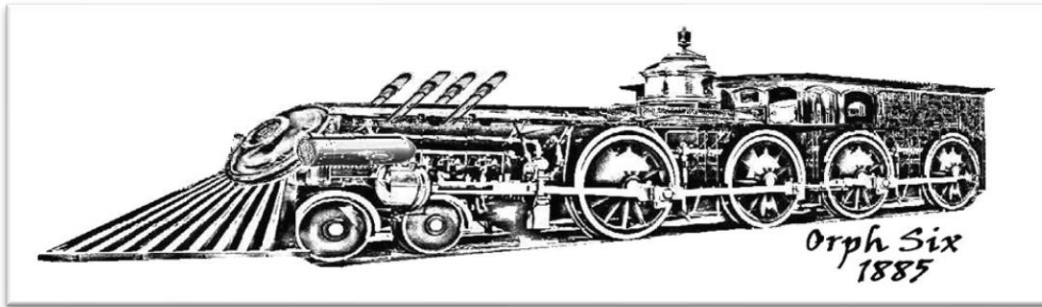
To explain the short trains racing in and out of the shabby barn above the underground complex, Lemont also suggested a federal program that rushed emergency medical aid to America's rural orphan children.

FYI: European nations began dumping 1.7 million orphan children into America's open arms after the Civil War. Most were scattered around the country's farms.

Publicly, President Garfield appointed ex-president Hayes, Director of The National Orphan Relief Agency, or "NORA" for short. Internally they called the country's first genuinely secret agency "ORPHAN."

On March 4, three days before Edison's big event, his latest D/C generator increased the underground facility's electric power from 16 to 1240 amps.

By now, NORA has already ran five 'Orphan Ambulance trains' with another constantly under construction. ORPHAN agents affectionately called these low-slung, hidden-weapon-packed rail rockets "ORPHIS."

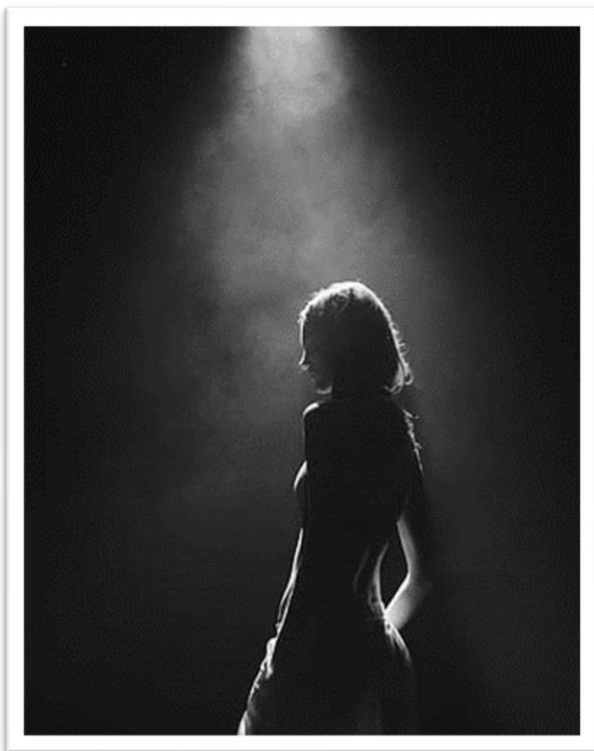


While still in dark primer, ORPH Six was about to be rushed into service.

Painted white with big red crosses and flashing red light bulbs, ORPHS hid in plain sight as they zoomed across the nation's rails. Their secret features and stats, like their world-record speed and concealed weapons, were drastically understated or sever mentioned.

NORA built ORPHS one at a time, so each became the next generation, offering new features, slicker weapons, and improved performance.

Ten feet north of the Orphan Ambulance barn, NORA built a house-sized hospital for orphan children to complete the cover story. This tiny clinic occasionally treated an injured orphan child.



Initially (during the Civil War), the barn pretended to be a wheel replacement facility for railroad cars. It hid the entrances to the underground factory, originally called "Plant One." This was where box cars were loaded with munitions.

Once the show (The Maids of Armando) began, Edison's audience gasped each time another Buckeye Beauty was spotlighted.

Sara Kilbourne, their gorgeous leader, was born and raised in a small upscale settlement called Worthington, which was only seven miles north of Columbus.

Sara's five companions (Armando's other maids tonight) were also from

Ohio and closer than most sisters.

Sara and Elizabeth were natural redheads, auburn, and copper, respectively, as Dolly, Daisy, Dotty, and Dorothy were natural blondes (so they claimed).

The show's producers, Peter D. Legend and Edison, planned a lavish after-party three blocks south of the opera house in the Neil house's ballroom.



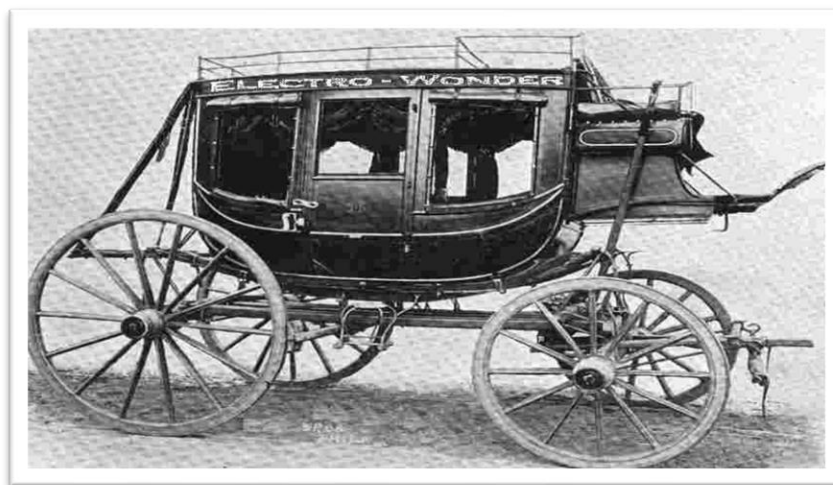
The Columbus Neil House (1885) sat across from Ohio's Statehouse on South High St.

Edison wanted his VIPs to stay within the three blocks to the after-party through thousands of fans, so he turned that issue into tonight's second product reveal.

These celebrities would ride inside the most advanced vehicle to ever roll over America's horse-crap-covered roads, Edison's "Electro Wonder Coach!"

Along with teams of Clydesdales (gigantic horses), he shipped in the first twenty built from his New York facility (by rail).

He proudly called their most significant advancement: "The Dome Light!"



Although light bulbs glowing on a stagecoach's ceiling sent drool dribbling down the chins of nineteenth-century nerds, this was not their only revolutionary feature.

These were also the world's first coaches with a removable table in between their two (facing) bench seats.

Very advanced stuff, but these tables still needed cup holders.

The battery under the forward bench seat was powerful enough to keep the dome light glowing past midnight.

Six months earlier, the musical "Ladies Come First" (written by Sara and John Phillip Sousa) was the last show before the opera house closed for its electrical rebirth.

So, Peter naturally reserved the first Electro Wonder Coach lined up in the alley, beside the stage door, for the Buckeye Beauties.

Anxiously he checked his glowing radium (radioactive) pocket watch before telling them, "Damn, the VIP parade was supposed to start in one minute!" (11 PM).

As he closed their coach's door after seating them, he shook his head and mumbled, "They (the VIPs) are all in the lobby, sucking up to reporters."

As Peter stepped back from the coach, its enormous 'whip man' (driver) suddenly cracked his tool. His dinosaur-sized ponies launched onto North High Street and swung a hard left at full speed.

The six beauties screamed as the wonder coach skidded around that icy corner on two wheels before racing off to the north. Unfortunately, this was only one of their problems; that after-party was three blocks to their south.

"STOP! YOU'RE GOING THE WRONG WAY!" Peter uselessly yelled as his arms flopped around like bird wings.

The VIPs, journalists, and fans remained unaware as they partied in the lobby near the theater's south side. Only Peter and the second coach's whipman saw that giant hijacker fling his Edison-provided top hat like a Frisbee.

A dark cover draped around the speeding coach as that hat sailed away. It spread over its windows and doors before tightening, preventing the girls from escaping or seeing anything outside.

Peter dove into the second coach, shouting, "Go after them! That lunatic doesn't know where he's going!"

The driver launched his team faster than ever before. However, that extra speed had nothing to do with giant horses wanting to save pretty ladies.

Somehow, right in front of that driver's eyes, someone had replaced the iron pin connecting the team's rigging to the coach with a toothpick. With nothing to pull, his giant beasts launched faster than ever.

However, he had grasped his reins so quickly that they wrapped around his wrist, flinging him face-first onto the brick pavement below.

Fortunately, a massive pile of warm, steaming Clydesdale dung prevented physical injury.

Before that crap-coated driver could pick himself up, Peter dove into what had been the third coach waiting in line, shouting, "Go after them!"

"Go after who?" the whipman replied.

"The coach that just stole the Buckeye Beauties!"

"Where did it go?" he asked.

"It went that way! North! Go now!" Peter yelled and pointed out the coach's opened door.

"GO, GO!" the whip-man yelled as he cracked his whip while maneuvering his team around the horseless coach in front.

His beasts obeyed as they shot around it, then turned north in hot pursuit.

"What the hell!" that third whip-man yelled as the reins tore loose from his left hand. Somehow someone had also replaced his coach's pin with a toothpick as he sat right above it.

This team sideswiped that second whipman as he staggered to his feet, then they also turned north around the corner. Who says lightning doesn't strike twice? That driver was again fortunate to land on another massive horse patty.

Peter was not about to be fooled three times, so he ran south toward the music hall's lobby, screaming for help!"



This photo, taken after the 1892 fire, shows the alley where the Buckeye Beauties were hijacked.

The opera house's lobby was near its downtown (south) side. In front of that entrance, screaming fans packed the sidewalk. So, no one heard Peter's squeals until he reached them.

Two equestrian constables (Columbus police officers on horses) kept the crowd out of the road. Once Peter explained enough to send them off in hot pursuit, the only visible thing moving up North High Street was that third team of Clydesdales.

The Buckeye Beauties were gone!

Hearing a commotion out front, Colin McLaughlin, Sara's man-friend, squirmed his way through the crowded lobby to see what was happening.

Colin was a former prizefighter and Columbus constable turned local bandleader (among many other things). He was also the second most popular entertainer in Columbus. Sara was number one.

Almost no one knew that Colin and Lemont Freeman also became Orphan's first two secret agents in 1881. His girlfriend, the suddenly abducted Sara, had no clue about Colin and Lemont's covert lives.

Peter yelled, "Colin, they just snatched Sara and the girls!"

"WHO DID!?"

"I don't know! Their coach took off like a bat out of hell!"

"They went that way!" Peter said as he again pointed north.

"Those Turds!" Colin yelled as he ripped his boots off. Then like a momma cheetah out to get her baby's back, he sprinted barefoot up that icy brick road toward that third team of Clydesdales. They were now meandering as if waiting for him.

He leaped like that mad momma kitty onto the team, snatching the loose reins as he belly-flopped over the rigging. He instantly bounced to his feet, straddling the rear horses.

After a mighty tug, the gigantic team blasted off.

Colin extracted all the speed they could muster as he stood above them, resembling a water skier.

A minute later, he reached the mounted constables. They were stopped by trains parked across High Street in front of Columbus's Union Train Station, a half-mile north of the opera house.

They explained that tonight's event had created a glut of parked trains, blocking every north or eastern route a coach could take.

Naghten Road, also called "the Irish Broadway," was the only eastbound route left. However, it was blocked by police as firefighters doused a burning home. No escape roads were heading west, as the Scioto River was in the way.

North High Street did have a streetcar tunnel running under the tracks. However, it was flooded due to high water in the Scioto River, which reversed the tunnel's drainage system.

"That coach is either in or hidden behind these (eleven) railroad buildings!"

The other constable responded, "Unless it boarded a train."

"Coaches are too tall to fit into boxcars. They ship them on flatbed cars, which would not hide them," McLaughlin said while pointing at the ten flatbeds that brought all twenty Electro Wonder Rides from New York.

As they split up to search the railroad complex, Colin surfed his team around all eleven buildings, yelling, "SARA!" repeatedly.



Columbus's Union Train Station in 1885

The cops were right; that hijacked coach had turned into Union Station's industrial park. Then just before it slammed into the massive door of the station's locomotive maintenance building, that steel door shot open.

It slammed closed an instant after the coach entered.

Like 99.9% of buildings in 1885, Union Station's locomotive garage did not have electricity.

However, tonight it did have temporary electric lighting. To the left, just inside the door, a 25-watt lightbulb was connected to a suitcase-sized battery with adhesive tape.

Adhesive tape was another invention that Washington had tagged “secret.” A Google search claims this stuff was not invented until around 1920.

A second after that door slammed, the huge hijacker leaped from the coach's bench while four darkly dressed men shoved wooden lever jacks under the coach like an Indy pit crew.

The coach's leaf springs, axles, wheels, and those jacks were stowed away in less than three minutes. Its body now sat on four dollies that looked like modern skateboards. This lowered the coach enough to fit inside the first of the two boxcars the hijackers had waiting.

Ironically, Colin leaped off his Clydesdales, only six feet away from that locomotive-sized door. Then from pure frustration, the barefoot agent hammered it with his fists raised high above his head.

The hijack team froze; their gigantic leader waved for them to keep working as he moved to the door.

Colin was pounding from frustration, not to enter. He did not suspect that Sara was only thirty feet away.

Also taped to the top of that suitcase-sized battery was a small box with two wires; one hung loose, and the other was attached to the battery's negative ground.

That giant leader picked up the dangling wire and touched it to the positive post.

An earth-shaking **KABOOM** suddenly rocked Columbus. Its blazing mushroom cloud set the sky on fire about 1500 feet west of the train station, down by the river.

McLaughlin and the constables feared the worst. Naturally, they, and now hundreds of reporters, raced toward the flames.

Besides doubled length (60 feet), the two boxcars looked typical while rolling outside. However, this was different inside this building; the car's customized ends fully opened above them, creating a large enough entrance for a team of six enormous beasts.

When closed, these end walls had walk-through doors, like typical passenger cars, allowing car-to-car access while rail-rolling.

Beneath these end walls were thick steel sheets that folded out to form a bridge between two cars or a ramp to the ground. Both methods were in use here.

Next, their huge master escorted the Clydesdales (still attached to the coach) up the ramp into the first custom boxcar. Once in place, he pulled the iron pin and led the horses into the next car. His men then retracted the platforms and bolted down those end-wall doors.

They attached the lowered coach to hooks, hidden beneath something unexpected for a boxcar, removable tiles, from its exquisitely tiled floor.

Besides being extended to double standard length, that second boxcar, now filled with horses, suspension, and wheels, was designed to transport animals.

Typical stable cars had vented sidewalls. However, this one only had vents along the center of its roof. These resembled the hood scoops from muscle cars, still eighty years away.

Five minutes after the big man remotely dynamited a derelict riverboat, his phantom boxcars began rolling east on track #9. They were now the eighty-fourth and eighty-fifth units on an eighty-three-car haul.

This professional hijacking took less time than just buying a train ticket here on a busy day, 22 minutes.

About six minutes later, railroad controllers switched the train to a northeast track, headed for Cleveland, its next scheduled destination.

Four miles north of Columbus, a warning torch was burning on the track in front of the train. Typically, this meant something blocked the rails 2500 feet past the torch. So, the engineer brought the train to a complete stop.

This cargo hauler had four workers, two engineers (drivers), and two boilermen (hard workers) aboard. Once stopped, the boilermen walked a half-mile forward but found nothing. The train's alternating engineer remained deeply asleep inside the caboose.

Besides the hijackers, no one saw those two custom boxcars being pushed onto the switch track between the north and southbound rails.

As they reconnected the northbound caboose, another flair suddenly warned a southbound train of a blockage. This private nine-car cargo hauler stopped far enough past the northbound train that only their cabooses remained side-by-side (with the two custom cars in-between on the switch track).

Seconds after that private southbound stopped, it did something strange. Its caboose self-detached, then rolled itself far enough back for the hijackers to push those extra-long cars onto the southbound track.

As his men shoved, their sprawling leader, also displaying cat-like agility, slipped inside that northbound caboose.

He then plucked a tiny yellow dart from the napping engineer's neck.

For the next 30 seconds, he gazed into the man's unconscious face from six inches away. Then he straightened the man's collar.

Suddenly he yelled, "Damn Yankee!" splattering spit across those snoozing cheeks before his vast left hand slapped them.

Simultaneously, that southbound caboose rolled back, automatically locking all three cars to the phantom southbound train.

He slipped out, tossed that dart into the woods, and rejoined his men as they boarded their double-length caboose. You would have never noticed from the outside that this was likely the most luxurious caboose in the country.

Inside was a five-star kitchen and two highly accomplished French chefs.

They were baking crocks of sweet onion soup, topped with cheese imported from Switzerland and Colorado's most delicate Prime Rib—an ideal midnight meal.

Just as the hijackers closed their caboose's door, the boilermen returned to the locomotive (still nearly a half-mile away from the car switch).

"Nothing is blocking the track," they reported to the conductor engineer.

Seconds later, both trains began rolling.

This evening (now 11:58 PM) went exactly as planned. Well, that is for whoever controlled that private southbound train.

So far, this covert operation took fifty-eight of its sixty allotted minutes.

Two and a half hours later, the train crossed the Ohio River into Louisville, Kentucky, from Indiana.

It was then switched to an eastbound rail running along the southern bank of this, the nation's second-largest river.

Invisible Factory - April 17, 1863

(two years into the Civil War)

After months of lime lighting system delays, a five-car train with “Consolidated Canned Foods” painted on its three boxcars arrived at the “Train Car Wheel Replacement Barn” on Sullivan’s Hill. This shabby-looking structure hid the entrance to ‘Plant One,” thirty feet below.

Before lightbulbs, Lime lighting was a labor-intensive method of illuminating underground mines and several New York theaters.

Unlike Columbus’s new Cotton Block and Comstock’s Opera House, seven miles away, Sullivan’s Hill did not have natural gas for lighting. So, lime lighting was selected for Plant One.

The biggest problem with this lighting system was that it took twenty-four men working 12-hour shifts to keep the underground factory illuminated without blowing it up.

That Consolidated Canned Food train secretly brought General Rutherford B. Hayes, in plainclothes, to the wheel replacement barn.

Hayes and Engineering General John Newton planned and managed the secret factory’s construction for nearly two years. Most of the army’s engineers had been conscripted (drafted) from the railroad industry.

Within a thousand feet of Plant One, generals and almost everyone wore civilian clothing. However, dozens of uniformed army guards constantly surrounded Plant One's 88-acre site from a distance. You see, its only neighbor on this 12-square-mile Hill was Camp Chase.

Camp Chase was one of the Union Army's most extensive training centers and prisoner-of-war camps. It detained seven thousand Confederates, so no one wondered why so much security surrounded Sullivan's Hill.

Standing under this new (old appearing) wheel replacement barn's entrance (above the secret factory), Hayes congratulated General William Tecumseh Sherman for finally starting production.

Unless you saw the secret platform inside, hoisting boxcars to and from the munitions factory thirty feet below, you would never guess that this shabby structure would become vital to the war effort.

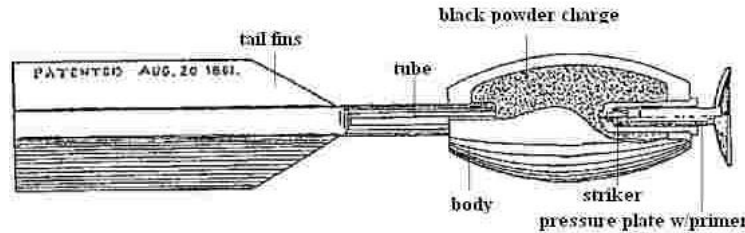


This 1863 image shows the (fake) train wheel replacement barn above Plant One during the Civil War. The 12' walls around Camp Chase sat about a thousand feet beyond those background trees.

As General Sherman pointed out four cargo cars parked beside the barn, he explained, "Three are packed to their ceilings with 'Minnie Balls' (the most common bullet of the Civil War).



Minnie balls were muzzleloading bullets pre-loaded with gunpowder. This cut the time to reload existing muzzleloaders by more than half.



The fourth car was packed with ten thousand Ketchum Hand Grenades, which used a flint striker to explode on impact.

“We produced all of this today?!” Hayes excitedly asked.

“The engineers finally had the lime-lighting working safely at noon yesterday. I had over a thousand convicts working by 7:00 last night.”

Even though seven thousand Confederate war prisoners were imprisoned a half mile away, they knew nothing about Plant One.

Imprisoned criminals were not accepted into the Union Army. However, the army could commandeer those already serving hard labor. So, General Hayes borrowed 1500 offenders from the Ohio State Penitentiary, seven miles away.

Railroad line 51 ran past this fake wheel replacement barn and the state prison. To ensure no one saw the convicts coming and going, they were stuffed into cargo cars inside a new prison terminal. Then they were unloaded inside the fake wheel replacement barn.

After Hayes complemented Sherman for this rapid efficiency, he recommended parking the explosive-loaded boxcars at least a hundred yards away.

“Rud (Hayes’s nickname), what do you think about boxing?” General Sherman asked.

“I’m sure I would do well, but I’m too busy to start practicing a new sport right now. You may recall that I won Ohio’s Leapfrog championship.”

“Oh no, I meant watching a boxing match.”

“Sure, doesn’t every real man?”

“Well, naturally.”

“The Camp’s Toughest Man championship bout for our Negro recruits; starts in an hour.”

FYI: Although the North would win this war to free Black people, the US army would keep segregation for another eighty-two years.

“Now that sounds relaxing.”

“This year, they have a humungous boy who knocks out every challenger in seconds. Usually after one punch.”

“Sounds like a man to me.”

“I am staying at the camp for four days anyway, so let's go.”

“I can't go tonight, Rud; too many loose details are still flopping around here. But that huge fighter is worth seeing. It's only a ten-minute walk.”

“I've walked it a dozen times. But I need to bring my lap desk and bags along. Do you have a horse and wagon I can borrow?”

“I'll have a security officer drive you over.”

“That will work.”

After glancing around, Sherman mumbled, “excellent,” before yelling, “McLaughlin, come over here!”

Seconds later, that strapping young man stood between the plain-clothed generals. Colin McLaughlin recognized General Hayes from earlier visits.

“Sorry, sir, orders are “no saluting” while undercover.”

“I know; I issued that order, son. I even selected this location.”

“I should know that. I grew up around Columbus,” McLaughlin said.

Hayes responded, “I was born and raised about 20 miles north of here.”

Sherman added, “I was born and raised 20 miles south of here.”

“That's because most great generals come from Ohio,” Colin patronized.

“Rud, this is Lieutenant Colin McLaughlin. He has proven to be our most capable security officer.”

“Nice to meet you, son,” Hayes said as he shook his hand.

“The pleasure is all mine, sir.”

“You look incredibly young to be a Lieutenant. How old are you?”

“I'll turn eighteen in a couple of days.”

“Rud, did you hear about the assassination attempt on General Grant down in Columbus,” Sherman asked.

“Ulysses mentioned it, but we were meeting with Lincoln in the Oval Office, so he did not go into detail.”

“Lieutenant McLaughlin disarmed that assassin about one second before he would have blown Ulysses’ head off!”

“Sorry, sirs, that story’s been exaggerated. It was two loaded assassins and two more guarding their escape route. About three seconds before the two shooters would have turned Grant into Swiss cheese, I single-handily knocked both out! Then I ran down and hog-tied the other two!” Colin proudly corrected before adding, “General Grant is also from Ohio.”

“Well, I’m obviously in capable hands,” Hayes said to Sherman while patting McLaughlin’s back.

“I think I’ve heard your name somewhere before, Lieutenant.”

“It must have been one of me many accomplishments, sir. I’ve caught nine Confederate agents over the last year.”

“You are a true hero; thank you for your service!”

“Aye, sir. There’s no telling how many souls I’ve saved!”

“I’ll fetch a wagon and be back in five minutes.”

“Excellent.”

As Colin walked away, Hayes told Sherman, “He’s certainly confident.”

“He seems full of himself, but he backs his words. He obeys orders and has a sharp mind that spots spies in a crowd. He can also run like the wind and is a deadeye marksman.”

Six minutes later, Colin parked a freshly dumped manure wagon inside the barn’s railroad entry.

“Double sorry, sir,” he told Hayes as he bounced out, “this is the only wagon still here this evening. The others must be at the camp for the fight tonight. I dumped its load first. Good thing it tizz windy tonight.”

Before loading the General's things into the dung-soaked bed, Colin spread a filthy canvas over it.

“I’ve ridden in worse,” Hayes remarked as he boarded.

As they began this short ride in this one-horse crap wagon, Hayes asked, “How did a Columbus boy get that Irish accent?”

“I thought it was gone by now. My parents came from Belfast. Then Father John and the nuns who finished raising me came from Dublin. Their accents rubbed off on me.”

“What happened to your parents?”

“Cholera took them when I was eight.”

“It was rough, but everything has worked well, sir.”

“Does Father John happen to be Reverend John Furlong?”

“Aye, you know him?”

“He is an old friend. He must have mentioned your name to me before.”

“What did he say?”

“Oh, hmmm, I can’t remember, but it must have been something extraordinary,”
Hayes lied since he suddenly remembered this message:

My Dear friend Rud,

*15-year-old twins Colin and Lucas McLaughlin are like sons to
me. I raised them after their parents died.*

*However, the day the war began, they rushed to enlist without
first discussing this with me.*

*These clever lads are incredible athletes and gifted hunters with
sharp minds to match. Both are also fine musicians and great
protectors of our Lord’s other orphans and His church.*

*Their abilities, mines, and high morality make them ideal for
protecting America’s leaders and secrets. They will excel.*

*Help our Lord and America by appointing them directly into
security after basic training at Camp Chase.*

*Let’s keep this between you and me so they never learn I
intervened.*

I always keep you and Lucy in my daily prayers.

John

“Lieutenant, have you ever seen this big black fellow fight?” Hayes asked to change the subject.

“Aye, from point-blank range. I’ve known Freeman for a couple of years. Being world-class athletes, we understand each other.”

“General Sherman told me that Freeman knocks out every opponent in seconds.”

“Well, not everyone.”

“Is that so?”

“Aye. A couple of months before the war, no one would fight him. So, I took him on at Reggie's Boxing Tavern. It took me five rounds, but I won the 25-dollar purse.”

“I’m impressed,” Hayes replied.

“I like Freeman; he is as intelligent as he is big. He knows something about almost everything. He’s the second smartest teen on this Hill tonight.”

Hayes thought, “I’m not going to ask who’s first,” so he responded, “The guy sounds multi-talented. Is he educated?”

“Well, sort of. When Freeman was a little squat, I mean ‘young child,’ his mother could borrow books. So, she taught him to read, then made damn sure he read every book she borrowed.”

“He learned because he had no choice.”

“Smart momma. How do you know all this?”

“He told me. After winning that prize money, we went to the Florentine Restaurant next door for a late dinner.”

“That was the first time I ever ate in a restaurant, well, almost.”

“Almost?”

“They would only serve us, I mean him, in a little room behind the kitchen.”

“Oh yes, of course.”

“After dinner, we drank fine wine for a few hours and got to know each other. We are both highly competitive.”

“Sure, two top fighters would naturally respect each other.”

“That’s right, sir.”

“I also won this tournament when I was in basic training.”

“You won the negro boxing contest?”

“Oh no, the army ain’t ready for that. But I surely abused the white recruits.”

“Now, if gambling money is to be made, Reggie would have green folks fight orange people in his tavern. When I was a squat, his saloon was a pig barn. I remember seeing its hogs float away after a storm.”

Colin continued, “Reggie turned it into that saloon at the bottom of this hill.”

“I’ve seen the place.”

“He put a budget bordello upstairs. Even young boys can afford it.”

FYI: Before 1880, Ohioans had to be at least ten years old to drink, gamble, and XXXX in saloons.

Before Colin offered further detail, Hayes changed the subject: “What do you think about serving so close to home?”

“I was devastated at first. But after saving General Grant and single-handily bagging most of a dozen Confederate spies, I knew I was meant to be right here.”

“That was divine intervention,” Hayes responded.

“Aye, I mean, yes, indeed. The Good Lord now has me doing wondrous work two or three times a day.”

“Like what?” Hayes asked a millisecond before realizing he shouldn’t have.

“This war has left seven ladies for every man down in Columbus. Most of those men are too old, hindered, or disinterested to comfort hundreds of young local ladies. Young, great-looking, overly fertile men like me are almost nonexistent around town. So, I donate my free time to comfort as many ladies as possible.”

“Jesus must have given me his Greek God looks to please females. This is just another way he helps me do my patriotic duty.”

“You needn’t explain any farther, Lieutenant,” Hayes tried again to change the subject. But this time, it didn’t work.

“By cheering up two or three ladies daily, he has me nibbling away at this sad imbalance as efficiently as possible.”

“I guess that’s one way of seeing things.”

“You know the Lord’s work can also be satisfying and relaxing,” the nearly 18-year-old orphan testified.

“What does Father John say about all your, ah, good work?”

“He was beaming like a proud daddy when the governor made me an officer after saving General Grant’s life.”

“But I do not tell him everything; he would only want me to herd all those lonely ladies to church like some shepherd.”

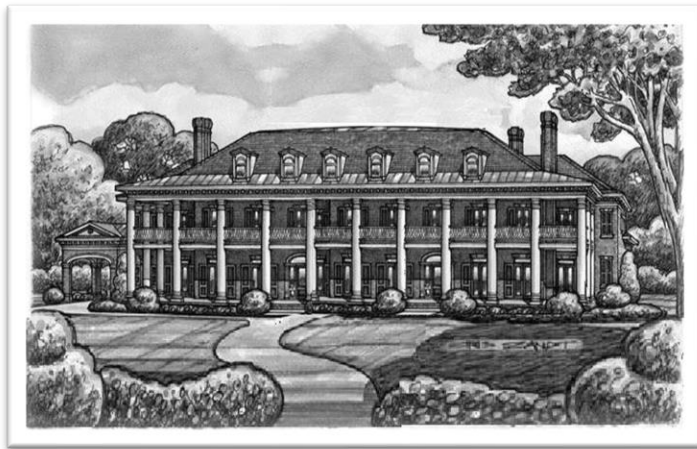
“I don’t need to drive them to God’s house; most go on their own a day or two after I cheer them up. I’ve increased donations, and I won’t tell Father John about that either.”

“Oh, I see,” Hayes said while feeling relieved they were approaching Camp Chase’s “Westgate.”

“You know, sir, when you get down to it, I keep doing my patriotic duty day and night.”

McLaughlin carried Hayes’s bags into one of the visitor's shacks used by officers. It was one room with four visitors already using it. As Hayes quickly changed into his uniform, Colin relieved himself between the shacks, then waited for the General.

As they walked two hundred feet to the camp’s packed arena (mess hall), Hayes mentioned, “I wish we would have started building the visitor house last year.”



This Confederate prisoner-built, Southern-style mansion was going up one mile east of the camp, where Sullivant’s Hill overlooks Columbus and Ohio’s new white limestone statehouse.

“They finally started the foundation yesterday, sir.”

“I will check on it tomorrow.”

They took the last two seats left in the back row seconds later.

The massive fighter, and his opponent, a muscle-bound fellow larger than McLaughlin, were already seated in their corners. The seething mad challenger just stared while Lemont stretched and yawned as if bored.

Seconds later, a boy hauling a burlap sack entered the crowded arena, then squeezed up to Lemont’s corner.

“Jemima,” (Lemont’s mother), “say they ain’t feed’n you enough meat!” The boy explained as he handed the bag to the colossal boxer.

Jemima often claimed, “The reason Lemont grew so big, I raised him on mountains of rich white folk’s leftovers.”

Jemima had become famous among wealthy Columbus families and inns. She prepared one meal a week for six well-to-do families, including Sara Kilbourne’s folks. She would work one day a week for each, but Sundays were only for church.

She would tell them, “If I worked for you more than one day a week, you would not appreciate me as much.”

When Jemima was eight, her kitchen skills became so clear that her master’s wife taught her to read. But then she only gave her cookbooks.

Seven years earlier, Jemima used her food, wisdom, and charm to buy freedom for her family. She immediately set out for a home “100 miles north of slavery, cause things can change down here!”

She ended up in Franklinton, the small, often flooded settlement between Columbus and Sullivant’s Hill. She managed to rent a two-story shack for \$1 a month, but she had to pay a full year upfront.

Since she had no surname, she chose “Freeman” to celebrate her family’s freedom.

“Thanks, Lil’ Willie,” Lemont replied as he slipped his right glove off. He stood up, pulled a twenty-inch lamb leg from the bag, and took an enormous bite.

“Ding!” About one second later, the bell rang; the fight had begun.

As his pissed opponent ran across the ring to take full advantage, Colin warned Hayes, “Don’t blink, sir.”

As Lemont turned to protect his snack behind his back, his left hand launched an insane backhanded uppercut into his challenger’s chin. The instantly unconscious fighter cleared the ropes before landing on the crowd.

Lemont did not celebrate (Colin danced around the ring two years earlier); instead, he sat down and took another bite.

“Let’s go congratulate him,” Hayes suggested to McLaughlin.

“Sorry, I’d love to, sir, but I’ve been off duty for nine minutes,” Colin responded while nodding at the wall clock and sliding a little appointment book out of his jacket pocket.

“If I don’t leave now, I’ll get stuck riding that dung dragger down to Columbus.”

“I never interfere with the Lord’s work, Lieutenant, so you best be on your way.”

“It has been great speaking with you, General,” Colin’s voice faded as he joined the crowd walking out of the oil lamp-lit mess hall.

While Freeman picked his lamb leg clean, Hayes coughed on a nasty cigar and gagged on some New Jersey whiskey, reminding him of camel spit. Since the quality versions of both products came from Southern states, they had become as rare as hen’s teeth in Ohio.

After Lemont poured a canteen of water over his head and toweled off, Hayes stood and walked towards the ring.

“BURP!” Lemont erupted just before noticing General Hayes approaching. Acting as if he did not see him, he grabbed the ropes, then flung himself out of the ring like a gymnast, one-third his size. He considered doing a double flip but did not care to look like a showoff.

Hayes felt the building shake as Lemont nailed the landing. “Damn,” He mumbled.

Still acting like he did not see Hayes; Freeman grabbed his enormous uniform jacket and flung it over his almost naked body.

In these early decades of boxing, like wrestling, it was a nude male-only sport. Thankfully, the army required all Black boxers to wear loincloths.

“Amazing punch, son,” Hayes said as he reached Lemont from behind.

Lemont spun around, then acted surprised as he jumped to attention. “Yes, sir, thank you, sir.”

“At ease, soldier,” Hayes said while returning the salute, “I just wanted to say how impressed I am with you.”

“Thank you again, sir,” the six-foot-nine muscle repeated while standing at attention.

“Relax, son, have a seat; let’s talk. A friend of yours told me some interesting things about you.”

“May I ask who, sir?”

“Lieutenant Colin McLaughlin. He just left. He watched you win this tournament, but he had pressing business in town.”

“I was unaware that Colin had become an officer. I knew he would rapidly rise; he is almost as impressive as he believes.”

“He certainly leaves an impression.”

“The last time I saw him was two years, one month, and eleven days ago, when we were both in line to enlist.”

“Why are you still in basic training?”

“The governor made me wait for two years.”

“Why?”

“When I was eleven, my mother got me a job at a slaughterhouse near our shack, loading beef sides into ice cars” (boxcars half-loaded with ice from Canada).

“After a year, I was loading four times more meat than the next strongest worker could manage.”

“When this war started, most of the workers enlisted. Since the army needed even more meat, the slaughterhouse owner asked the governor to deny my enlistment. But he only blocked it for two years. So here I am.”

“Better late than never.”

“My mother is a fine chef. She prepares dinner for the governor and his family on Saturdays. She complained that his decision had prevented me from earning a far larger soldier’s wage. So, he ordered the slaughterhouse to pay me sixty-five cents a day.”

“That’s a sergeant’s wage, son.”

“I know; they deserved it. They paid me one penny a day when I first started at age 13.”

“That’s quite a raise.”

“I was making more than the General Manager, which pissed him and a few older white workers off.”

“Screw them!”

“I thought it was ironically funny. I did more work than those three together. They finally paid me what I deserved.”

“McLaughlin said you were a professional boxer before the war.”

“True, sir. I fought at Reggie’s Tavern on Friday and Saturday nights while my mother was helping rich folks throw parties.”

“I did not tell her at first because she would have beat me with her broomstick.”

“After I saved \$150 in prize money, I bought the house she rented with it. Then I gave it to her and explained how boxing paid for it.”

“Once I showed her that no one has come close to beating me, She was ok with it.”

“That must have been before you lost a fight with McLaughlin.”

“I never lost to McLaughlin! I’ve never lost to anyone!”

“Is that what he told you?”

“He said it took him five rounds to win the prize money.”

The building shook again as Lemont broke up, “Ha, Ha, Ha! Colin Mclaughlin can run faster backward than most fighters can run forward! He won that money for standing after five rounds with me!”

“Odd incentive.”

“Reggie, the tavern owner, could not get anyone to fight me, so he put up \$25 for anyone that could last five rounds against me.”

“Mclaughlin ran away from me for five rounds; he never threw a punch, so not to anger me.”

“But he kept me laughing with jokes, frightened faces, and slick escapes, so I let him live.”

“Actually, he never said he won that fight, just the prize money.”

“That’s how deviously honest people fib without lying, sir.”

“He said you love to read.”

“Yes, reading brings me the world.”

“What do you read?”

“Well, I’ve read every history, geography, and science book my mother could borrow. She taught me to read using the Bible when I was four.”

“That’s a tough book for a beginner.”

“Since the war started, I’ve only read newspapers and novels. I just finished reading War and Peace by Liev Tolstoy.”

“Sure, The Great Russian author.” Hayes guessed based on his name.

“Then you recall the day after Napoleon sold Louisiana to the United States; he invaded Europe?”

“Of course,” Hayes thought he recalled this history.

“Louisiana was far larger when France sold it in 1812; it nearly reached Canada.”

“You know that was a decade before I was born, son.”

Lemont pushed Hayes’s intellect to its limits for another hour. If the word “nerd” existed in 1863, Hayes would have added it to the big boxer’s lengthy list of abilities and qualities.

A week later, at the basic trainee completion ceremony, each recruit was given a package holding their first assignment.

Lemont’s package was much larger than anyone else’s. All the others came from W S Rosecrans, the General in charge of Camp Chase; however, Lemont’s came from Ohio Governor William Dennison.

Inside, a little gold bar was glued to the letter congratulating him for being promoted to First Lieutenant (a step above Second Lieutenant Colin McLaughlin). This officer rank paid a whopping \$3 a day.

It also held an assignment letter ordering him to report to General Rutherford B. Hayes (for clerical duties) in two weeks.

Hayes figured that Lemont would be the world’s largest secretary.

Jemima was delighted that her extra-large, well-behaved boy was not about to become the most prominent target on a Civil War battlefield.

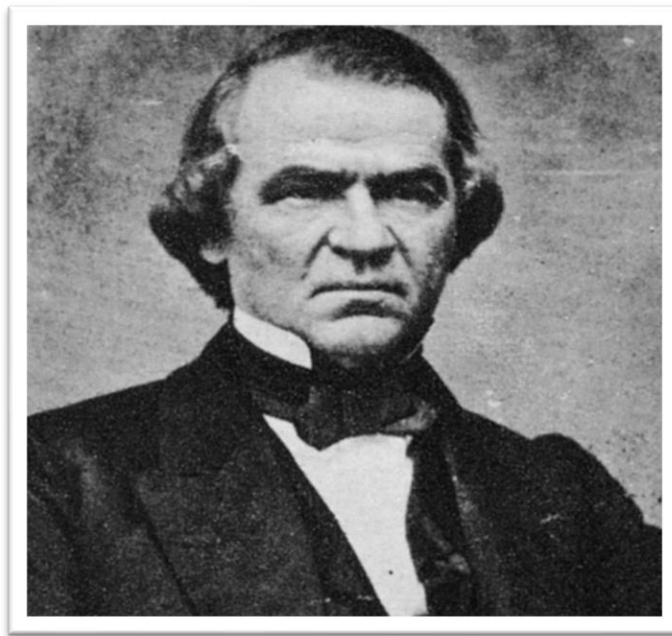
April 9, 1865

Two years after Lemont enjoyed that lamb leg, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia, ending the Civil War.

Five days later, Republican President Lincoln was assassinated inside Ford's Theater. His Vice President, Andrew Johnson, a Southern Democrat, was sworn in as the seventeenth US president.

Loyalty to the US constitution was vastly more important than political party devotion in those days.

The Whitehouse Friday, April 28th, 1865



“Hello, heroes!” President Andrew Johnson said to Union Generals Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, and James A. Garfield as they entered his Oval Office. After a few minutes of congratulatory talk, President Johnson looked down at his notes, “This says you want to discuss keeping a prisoner of war camp open in Ohio.”

Grant responded, “Yes, sir, that camp is more important than you have been informed.”

“You know I am about to pardon all confederates who swear loyalty to the US Constitution,” Johnson responded.

“Of course, sir. However, we/” General Hayes said before the President interrupted: “We no longer need prisoner-of-war camps; we are no longer at war. Any remaining die-hards will be placed in chain gangs that help rebuild southern cities.”

Garfield explained, “Because we only discuss military secrets on a need-to-know basis, you were never briefed on the secret operations of Camp Chase.”

“What secret operations?”

“I know you have not seen Camp Chase, but it covers eight square miles, not just the 135 walled-in acres the world has been led to believe.

“I have been through Columbus numerous times.”

“Camp Chase is seven miles west of Columbus on a hill called Sullivan’s. Because of a natural obstacle, Sullivan’s Hill stays highly secluded.”

“Columbus is flatland. What natural obstacle?” The president asked.

Grant grunted, “It would look like flatland to someone from South Carolina” (President Johnson’s home state).

“Between Sullivan’s Hill and Columbus is a valley that becomes a lake after strong storms and heavy winter thaws. This problem keeps the city from expanding towards Sullivan’s Hill.”

“Hmm.”

Grant continued, “this natural seclusion has allowed us to operate dozens of weapon development and warehousing programs and a huge underground munitions factory.” “Because Sullivan’s Hill is so close to Columbus, it shares the city’s greatest advantage.”

“What advantage?”

Hayes responded. “Columbus is the mathematical center of our nation’s railroad network. By running our ahh, peacekeeping efforts from Sullivan’s Hill, the average time to reach the rest of the nation is swifter than from any other location.”

“Look, fellows, I know that y’all are Ohio’s greatest warriors, but you no longer have a war to fight. The USA no longer wants or needs secret weapon programs or prisoner-of-war camps.”

“I will use our remaining resources to rebuild our cities instead of squandering them on more new ways to destroy them!”

“Sir, America has powerful enemies who are constantly plotting against us!” Hayes inserted.

The President continued, “That is nonsense, and so is your story of holding war prisoners to explain the Union Army guarding that hill. That deception could only work for one, maybe two years before everyone starts asking, “What is Washington hiding on that hill?”

“I respectfully disagree, Mr. President,” declared Garfield.

“Agree or not, y’all should be more concerned about reentering civilian life.”

“There is good news if you don’t find new jobs; I just approved small pensions for former Union Generals.”

Grant reacted, “Mr. President, this is far more important than the men in this room. This is about our nation’s future. This planet is packed with narcissistic kings, dictators, and despots who would relinquish their nuts to take us out.”

“America no longer wants warriors; she now wants peacemakers. Ironically, the reward for you winning soldiers is your obsolescence.”

“By expanding upon our already advanced military technologies, we can become the world’s peacekeeper,” Garfield took another shot.

Johnson rebuked, “Enforcing world peace is not part of the US Constitution, nor should it be our business.”

“It is our business to keep our enemies from becoming threats to us,” Grant snarled back.

Glancing at the grandfather clock, President Johnson concluded, “Sorry to rush y’all off, but I have several important meetings this afternoon. Mr. Moore” (Johnson’s assistant}, “please show these distinguished gentlemen out of my office.”

“What an asshole,” the generals agreed as they left the Whitehouse.

Lieutenant Lemont Freeman told his boss (General Hayes) several days later, “With a few political adjustments, this could secure Sullivant’s Hill for a hundred years.” He then handed Hayes a copy of the Daily Statesman newspaper.”

The article was about Dr. William Awl, Ohio's Commissioner of Lunatic and Imbecil asylums. He often introduced himself as Dr. Cure Awl.

Dr. Awl had asked the state legislature to replace the Ohio State Lunatic Asylum on Columbus's east side with a new facility, about fifteen times larger. This building would be larger than every building in downtown Columbus combined.

The article reported that Dr. Awl could not prove the need for a massive new facility, so his request was overwhelmingly dismissed.



The drawing from that Daily Statesman newspaper article

"I'm not sure what you are seeing here, son," Hayes responded after reviewing the report. "It says that Dr. Awl had proposed this new lunatic asylum to replace the state's current asylum, and he was laughingly rejected.

Lemont responded, "A lunatic asylum this big could operate a security force as large as an army battalion without ever raising suspicions."

"I did not suggest this would be easy; you will need some serious political clout to approve and move this over to Sullivan's Hill."

Hayes responded, "Another great idea, son. Those state guards could tell intruders that murder-crazed lunatics escaped! Get away from here as fast as you can!"

"Can you imagine how frightening this thing would look sitting on top of a Sullivan's Hill, overlooking the city?" Lemont added.

"Indeed, that could scare off citizens and developers from miles away!"

"You would still have to find funding, Boss."

"That may be the easiest part."

“Do you know something that I don’t know?”

“That seems hard to believe, but yes, I do know some things you don’t know.

“However, we need to take President Johnson’s advice for now.”

“What advice?”

“Find new jobs.”

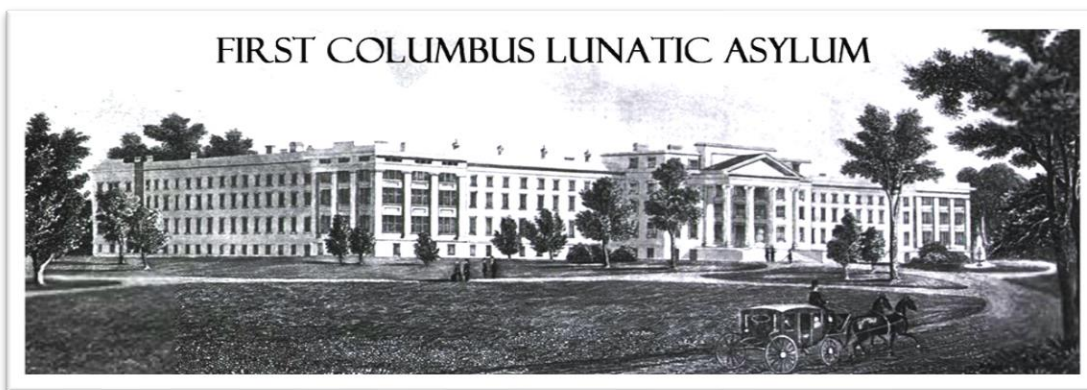
Six months later, during midterm elections, General Garfield became Ohio’s Congressman from the 19th District (Central Ohio, including Sullivan’s Hill).

During the first postwar presidential election (two years later), General Grant beat out President Johnson to become the 18th US president, and General Hayes defeated Allen G. Thurman to become Ohio’s 32nd governor.

On January 13, 1869, Governor Hayes took office. President Grant was inaugurated two months later (March 14) in Washington, DC.

On November 18, 1868, just days after Hayes and Grant were elected, Ohio’s first Lunatic Asylum (on Columbus’s east side), burned to the ground. Luckily the fire occurred during the only two hours per week that the lunatics were permitted to gather in the buildings front hall for “social time.”

The fire started in the rear of the building, behind the small lady’s ward. So almost everyone escaped unscathed. However, the asylum’s seven female inmates perished. They chose to remain locked up in their ward over being molested and raped by three hundred crazy males, during social time.



While the fire was still smoldering, local officials were claiming that it was caused by a faulty fireplace flue, in the lady’s ward.

After one of the Daily Statesman articles (from the next day) mentioned that the inmate wards were heated by steam pipes (lunatics and fireplaces don't mix well), not another article was written, and the local and state officials stuck with this being an accident.

Also, during that November 1868 election, George W. Meeker, a wealthy real estate attorney became Columbus's new mayor. He took office in January 1869, just days before Governor Hayes was sworn in. He did not even live in Columbus.

His first official act was to close the Columbus Police department and fire every member. He then appointed his best childhood buddy, Charles Engelke, who had no experience in law enforcement, to build a new Columbus Police department.

Speculation is that the Columbus police department declared the Lunatic Asylum fire a mass murder and arson, so Meeker closed the entire department. Soon after Engelke's new police department opened (about eight months later) Meeker walked away from his mayor gig to reopen his real-estate office. He barely served one year of this four-year term.

Also, after three years without the army securing Sullivant Hill, its seclusion had diminished. The often-flooded settlement of Franklinton was no longer blocking Columbus residents from expanding up Sullivant's Hill, and this was Hayes's fault.

Eleven wealthy Columbus businessmen had built or were building mansions along the hill's eastern ridge for its panoramic view of Columbus and Ohio's white limestone statehouse. Well, that was what several of these rich guys told their wives.

They quietly wanted to be neighbors with that Southern-style visitor's mansion that Hayes used Confederate prisoners to build. It was now an exclusive gentlemen's club.

When President Johnson ordered Camp Chase "liquidated" right after the war, he included that all-but-finished visitor's inn. Five months later, Reggie (that boxing tavern owner) made the first and only offer.

He bought that mansion for two cents on the dollar (based on building costs in Columbus). He rapidly turned it into the most beautiful bordello-inn east of Washington, DC.

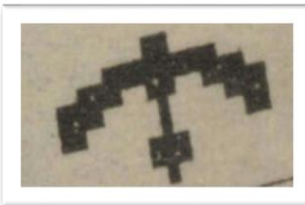
Because it overlooked Ohio's statehouse, Reggie kept it (and his lovely working girls) packed with county representatives, VIP visitors, and those wealthy neighbors. He even tricked the disappearing Union Army into delivering sixteen complete rooms of ultra-luxury furnishings, plus Persian rugs, and Turkish draperies, that General Hayes had ordered two years earlier.

The day after Hayes became governor, Ohio's treasury was infused with enough gold to build (by far) the most expensive project in the state's history.

This treasure came from several undeclared tons of gold that Confederate President Jefferson Davis tried to keep for himself after the war, which Grant and Secretary of War Stanton had secretly tucked away.

Hayes forced Eminent Domain on Reggie and those wealthy homeowners to sell their mansions to the state. To prevent complaining, he massively overpaid them. He had all twelve mansions demolished before President Grant even took office.

Washington seemed uninvolved by involving only state, county, and city governments to build the largest and most intentionally frightening building in America's history.



Ohio's Lunatic Asylum overlooked Columbus from the eastern ridge of Sullivant's Hill. After seven years of construction, it opened in 1877 with over 5 million square feet; it would remain the largest building in America until the Pentagon slipped past it in 1942. It took another seven years to demolish in the 1990s. The left image shows its flying bat shape from above.

Lunatic asylums were already the most frightening buildings in America, and this one was the architectural version of a vampire bat overlooking the city.

Two weeks after construction began, ground broke for the Columbus Imbecil Asylum across the street (Rt 40). This, the largest imbecile asylum ever was issued every inch of that ridge overlooking Columbus that had not already been reserved for the lunatics.

Climbing up Sullivant's Hill was like passing between the gates of hell. These two frightening structures and their security forces would keep about ten square miles behind them secluded for another fifty years when aircraft started leaving trains in their dust.

Also, Hayes helped Mayor Meeker annex this ridge several days before construction began. Meeker instantly renamed Sullivant's Hill to the second most generic name Lemont Freeman could imagine, "The Hilltop." His first suggestion was "The Hill."

This name change prevented former soldiers, state convicts who built it, and anyone else with knowledge of the secrets of Sullivant's Hill from being reminded of them.

On Saturday, March 30, 1879, at 1:00 AM (a year and a half after the lunatic asylum opened), arsonists soaked all public records and maps of those demolished mansions and Sullivant's Hill in coil oil, then incinerated them inside the Franklin County courthouse's vault.

The arsonists were thoughtful enough to relock that vault and the courthouse building as they left.

What about that phantom train?

2. Happy Hostages

March 7, 1885, 12:20 AM

That high-tech dome light could no longer outshine a firefly. The coach's cabin, still wrapped in that dark cover, only allowed the six sobbing beauties to hear the droning of railroad tracks.

At 12:30 AM, light suddenly poured through the coach's windows. That dark cover had vanished as quickly as it appeared, allowing all twelve beautiful eyes to start seeing again.

They saw no one in this rolling room, but the aroma of gourmet food made them salivate. As they climbed out, they found themselves in a long luxurious room.

Six light bulbs shone inside the stained-glass fixtures on this boxcar's copper-gilded ceiling. Six gold sconces (wall lamps) from Venice illuminated the room's birds-eye maple walls. Beneath them, blue cashmere rugs rested on the room's bright white tile floor.

One of the boxcar's sixty-foot-long walls had a fifteen-foot-long table with six Hepplewhite dining chairs lined up against it. Each backrest displayed the shields or crests of a powerful royal family.

The silk tablecloth matched the blue cashmere rugs. Five lead-weight cut-glass vases with stunning orange jasmine flowers separated each dinner setting.

Servings of prime rib, lobster bisque, alligator sausage, and smoked salmon on "flow-blue" China.

A secured wheel cart offered bottles of fine French champagne and Italian Sauvignon. Another held cut-glass pitchers of hot chocolate, tea, whole cream, or water. The last cart only displayed one silver platter holding six tiny desserts that looked like artwork.



Although upset, the girls were starving.

Several weeks earlier, Edison told them, "A friend with the first camera prototype that can shoot sharp pictures of moving bodies will also debut at this show."

"The world should see you all dancing under my headlines."

They had only fantasized about big, delicious meals ever since, so they dug in.

George Eastman with his high-speed Kodak film Prototype

A small note was neatly taped onto the wall above the feast.

Its message:

Dear Sara, Dolly, Daisy, Dotty, Dorothy, and Elizabeth, please, forgive me for this sudden intrusion into your lives. Unfortunately, sometimes, I must work secretly.

Your Columbus Dispatch Newspaper has been notified that you are safe and well cared for. That you will return after a fun tropical vacation.

We need you to perform "Big Daddy" from your musical, "Lady's Come First," for presidents, emperors, kings and princes, and other world leaders at a warm and sunny location. For this, you will all be richly compensated far beyond your dreams.

Please do not be upset with me. I could not risk telling you or anyone about this to protect so many world leaders in one place. You will be treated like the goddesses you are, effective at once!

For relief and hand washing before dinner, look behind the blue curtains.

Since you could not pack for this warm vacation, I provided Paris and Rome's most celebrated designers with your measurements, favorite colors, and tastes.

They created seven lightweight warm-weather dresses and seven flowing gowns for each of you.

Each wardrobe also holds seven pairs of the best Italian shoes and seven sets of the highest quality French undergarments and hosiery. Your little assistants will provide you with almost anything you wish.

Your wardrobes are inside your travel closets on the other side of this room. Your name is engraved on your travel closet's door.

Sorry for these limited accommodations aboard my train; they are not worthy of goddesses! For this morning, suffer through this meager meal. It only improves from here.

However, I recommend avoiding overeating to ensure your new wardrobes fit correctly.

Your Admiring President

Combined with this delicious food, generously seasoned with herbal flowers (tranquilizers) and the new wardrobes, that letter turned their terror into almost playful excitement.

These modern refrigerator-sized travel closets were mostly walnut with cedar lining. Only their golden side handles (likely from caskets) exposed their portability.

The girls gasped as they opened theirs. Then five more times as they peeked inside the others. Each was packed with some of the most beautiful lightweight dresses, outfits, and the silkiest undergarments they had ever seen.

On top of each closet sat several boxes of Georgia Peach brand bonnets.

Beside their travel closets sat a twelve-foot-long walnut vanity with a white marble top and six more (royal) crested chairs. The first mirror they had ever seen, surrounded by light bulbs, was on the wall above the vanity.

That mirror was exciting and frightening for them for the same reason; it showed everything.

Inside the vanity's drawers were the most exquisite makeup, perfumes, lotions, beauty tools, and hairbrushes that Europe and Asia offered.

Just past the vanity were two rest areas behind blue curtains. Each held a flushing toilet with toilet paper (huge new things in the 1880s), a hot and cold running water sink, and a soap dispenser.

After feasting, all six beauties felt wonderfully relaxed (quite stoned).

Suddenly at 1:20 AM, a tiny Asian girl (or lady), about as cute as a baby panda, entered their car through the standard train-car door (built into one of those fully opening end walls).

She greeted them with a cheerful "Ewoo wadies!" (Hello ladies).

All six beauties started questioning her.

She replied, "nee no sneaka Angish" (I do not speak English).

But her “follow me” hand motion communicated universally. So, now more excited than frightened, they followed her into the next car.

The outside area between these railroad cars was also enclosed, using the same dark material that sealed their coach.

When the door to that next brightly lit car opened, the first visible feature was the shadow outlines of two more little Asian girls (or ladies?) welcoming them.

All three happy little assistants wore white silk robes and white wicker slippers, and they gave each Buckeye Beauty the most comforting hug as they entered this car.

These now intoxicated beauties could not help but hug these adorable females back.

“Can you tell them apart?” Dorothy asked Dotty.

“No, they look like three twins,” Dotty answered.

“That’s called ‘triplets,’ Dotty,” Dorothy said before she pointed and named herself and her five companions. Then she pointed at each joyful assistant, and they understood.

The first one pointed at herself, “Pee,” then her doubles, “Wee, Mee.”

Then Elizabeth asked Sara, “How old are they?”

Looking at their perky softball-shaped breasts beneath one thin layer of white silk and flawless skin, Sara replied, “Certainly past puberty.” Then she laughed, “Somewhere between fourteen and sixty-five.”

“I’d bet you’re right,” Elizabeth giggled back.

“As usual.”

No one would have imagined this plain-looking extra-long cargo car looked like a Roman emperor's marble bathhouse inside.

A fire was crackling inside a small marble fireplace. Down the center sat a narrow marble tub full of steamy water under a layer of bubbles. It was large enough for ten beautiful ladies to sit side by side.

The marble wall beside the fireplace held six white 'Afghan' cashmere robes (the softest woven material known in 1885). They were embroidered with colorful Asian landscapes.

Beneath their robes, on this rolling room's marble floor, sat several white fur rugs (baby polar bear pelts). Sitting on them were six pairs of white cashmere slippers embroidered with the girl's name; they were custom-made to fit.

Aided by sedated food and wine, they giggled when their adorable little assistants undressed them. Pee, Mee, and Wee carefully hung their clammy dresses and folded their undergarment; all six beauties stood quite amused."

As Sara complained, "Colin just throws my things on the floor!" the other five giggled.

The tiny assistants then led their happily intoxicated beauties up several steps, then down several more into the hot bubbly water.

As the girls splashed the bubbles, Pee, Mee, and Wee used gentle warm water hoses to wash their hair and remove their tear-smudged makeup (from behind them, standing outside the tub).

After rinsing exotic oils through their hair, their little assistants masterfully crowned each head with a soft Egyptian cotton towel.

Next, Pee, Mee, and Wee hung up their white silk robes and slipped off their slippers. Wearing only white cashmere gloves, they joined the giggly dancers in the bubbly tub.

They arranged their happily intoxicated victims into three groups so one assistant could sit between each pair.

They coated their gloves with the most delicate French soap. They then lathered the dancers in the most delightful ways.

By 3 AM, these now happy hostages were exhausted, so their assistants carefully guided them out of the water. Before they slid them into their fabulous new cashmere robes, they smeared their still-wet bodies with an Avocado, Lavender, Coconut, and Tea oil mixture.

Dolly Stern yelled, "This robe must have come from heaven!"

As these pampered victims of beauty snuggled up to their magnificent robes, Pee, Wee, and Mee slipped their thin silk robes back on.

Next, they led the yawning beauties into the next car, a sleeping car. It had also started life as a double-length cargo car, then customized by its builder, Cross Railroads Incorporated (CRI).

This sleeping car was divided into six 7-foot by 6-foot sleeping compartments along one side, with one tiny restroom at each end.

Each compartment's door held a plaque with the first name of the Beauty assigned to it.

Instead of windows, these sleeping cars had ship-like portholes painted on their outside wall. Under electric lighting, these sailboat and island scenes looked as realistic as if painted by Michelangelo.

However, this early morning flow of gifts continued. On the table beside each bed, six small pieces of milk chocolate sat on a small sandalwood chest. Each box had the name of its lovely hostage inlaid in gold. Inside were hundreds of sparkling rare gems set into dozens of gold and platinum rings, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets.

It can be challenging to give your girl gifts she will adore. However, a wide variety of Tiffany's finest jewelry offers a solid chance of success.

Chinchilla sheets, cashmere pillows, baby alpaca down comforters, designer wardrobes, world-class food, fine wines, herbal happy dust, and chests of fine jewelry launched their nightmare with a pleasant dream.

3. ORPHAN UNDERGROUND

Friday, March 7, 1885, 2:54 AM



Secret Lobby – ORPHAN’S secret Headquarters, thirty feet beneath Sullivant’s Hill

Thirty feet below the crest of Sullivant’s Hill, inside what Hayes called the “war-room,” agent Colin McLaughlin was distraught.

“Mr. President, I’ll kill those Turds if they harm her! They probably have her in chains!”

Hayes had never seen McLaughlin so upset.

Even though Colin and Sara had been remarkably close for a decade, she had no clue that he was (still) a secret federal agent. She had (often) heard about 16-year-old Colin knocking out those two Confederate spies just before they would have wasted Grant. But she was only seven back then.

Band leader Colin was now the official spokesperson for NORA, donating all the bands’ tour ticket sales to each town’s Orphanages. So, no one, even Sara, questioned why NORA provided “The Irish Orphans” (Colin’s band) with an Orphan Ambulance (Orph) to use like a modern tour bus.

Fundraising for each city's orphanages gave 'Celebrity Colin' the perfect cover and excuse to ask crime tyrants for donations. They often made large (heavily publicized) donations before cluelessly showing Colin around their operations.

"Colin, they have no intentions of harming Sara," Hayes assured.

"How do you know?"

"They spent a fortune on this hijacking, likely over a thousand dollars" (when a thousand dollars was more like a hundred thousand). "This was a complex mission, executed with military precision, so they feel the girls are extremely valuable."

"Hell yeah, they are! I'm gonna toast those Turds!" Colin growled.

"Anger will cause mistakes. Pull yourself together, or I will have to put Agent Manly on this."

Before Hayes left the opera house, he sent Lemont to Orphan Underground to call a 5 AM meeting, using another recent invention, the telephone. Orphan Control had the first telephone switchboard in Central Ohio, west of the Scioto River.

When Hayes arrived at Union Station (around an hour after the hijacking), Columbus police, federal marshals, and reporters had entered all eleven railroad buildings and found nothing.

At 1:10 AM, ORPH #3 picked Hayes up at the station, then whisked him to Orphan Underground, eight miles away, in eight minutes.

"Do you think they're squeezing Montgomery (Sara's father) for ransom?" Colin asked.

"No, for several reasons."

"One, they nabbed six girls, not just Sara."

"The Kilbourne's are better off than most families, but they are not big money. At least a dozen of America's wealthiest men was also at that show last night. If this were about ransom, they would not have considered these girls."

"That makes sense, Mr. President," Colin replied.

"Colin, I stopped being president four years ago. Start calling me Rud already," Hayes said, trying to lighten Colin's mood.

"I'll try, Mr. President."

By 3:20 AM, four Orphan and six Secret Service agents were seated in the war room, and nearly a dozen more were coming.

"Gentleman," Hayes said, "here is what we know so far. Hopefully, much more in minutes."

"Since the coach could not have escaped to the east, north, or west, the only road it could have used to escape was High Street heading south, right in front of thousands of people looking for it."

"That means they are still here or left by rail," Hayes proclaimed.

"Six horses, a stagecoach, and six screaming ladies would be impossible to hide there this long. They had to have left by train," Lemont proclaimed. He had just arrived back (again) from the train station.

"Station records show that between 11:11 last night and 3:00 this morning, nine trains stopped long enough to transfer passengers or cargo."

"Five trains hauled passengers. These trains only stopped for five minutes, in plain view." Natural gas lamps illuminated the concourse, and the longest passenger train only pulled eleven cars, packed with potential witnesses."

"The four cargo trains pulled 84 to 121 cars, with only several workers aboard. These were also loaded or unloaded beside or inside other buildings, where Union workers and travelers would not have seen them."

Hayes responded, "I have planned hundreds of clandestine missions since sixty-one. Squeezing that mission through a four-minute window in front of countless witnesses is a recipe for failure. So, let's cut passenger trains for now."

Secret Service Commander Lancelot Stone (another former Union Army General) walked into the war room.

"No time for hellos, fellows," Stone added before reporting:

"Because of a fire, parked trains, and a flooded tunnel, all stagecoach traffic heading north, east, or west from the city center was blocked between 5:00 yesterday evening until just minutes ago."

"The only possibility is that entered one of the buildings in the railroad complex."

"It could still be here. However, it is most likely that your ladies, their captors, left by rail."

Colin rolled his eyes at Lemont, communicating, "Tell us something we don't know."

Stone continued: "So far, 16 federal agents, at least a hundred local constables, and bounty hunter Willy Wags' bloodhounds have searched all eleven buildings and found almost nothing."

"Almost nothing?" Hayes asked.

"The dogs became excited inside the station's locomotive service building. But the only unusual thing they found was this piece of sticky cloth," Stone said as he handed it to Hayes.

"That's a piece of adhesive tape, Boss," Lemont said.

"It surely is."

"What is adhesive tape?" Stone asked.

Lemont replied, "A strip of sticky paper or cloth binds things together,"
Lemont replied.

"It's a classified material; no one is supposed to know it exists," Hayes replied as he passed that scrap around the room.

"We have a crate of it in development," Lemont told Stone.

Holding the scrap up to the bowling-ball-sized light bulb in the ceiling, Colin added, "Yep, another secret out of the bag."

"All the evidence indicates that stagecoach, the hijackers, the horses, and your ladies, left town on one of two cargo trains."

"The first one left at 11:11 last night, the other at 1:21 this morning."

"Most likely, it was the 1:21."

"Why?" Hayes asked.

"The 11:11 left just 12 minutes after the hijacking. Stagecoaches are too large to squeeze into boxcars, and neither cargo train left town pulling flatbed cars."

"Since they must have used boxcars, they had to dismantle the coach before they could load it."

"Plan this entire operation for a window that leaves in twelve minutes seems almost impossible."

"Could elite mercenaries pull this off?" Hayes asked.

"Possibly, which is why the 11:11 has not been eliminated. But a one-minute delay could end in disaster."

"What if they controlled departure time enough that they could leave the moment they were ready?" Lemont asked.

"That was considered. However, because both trains left precisely on their pre-scheduled times, insider help does not seem likely."

Hayes asked Stone, "If you planned this, would you leave as fast as possible or hang around for a couple of hours?"

"I would want to leave with the 11:11, but that is too close for comfort, so I would likely plan for the 1:51," he replied.

"Stone, if they waited, we would have caught them. Police, agents, and the press were already swarming the place when I arrived at midnight. If I planned this, I would have left with the 11:11," Hayes explained.

"To make that 11:11 train, this must be one of the finest strike teams on the planet. So, these dancers must have something of extreme value."

"I'd bet you have never seen them, Commander," Lemont responded.

"No, I never have. I just arrived at Union Station about 90 minutes ago."

"But within minutes, I had wired ahead of both trains. By 2:20, local marshals had already inspected every car."

"They found no trace of your ladies, the coach, the horses, or the hijackers."

"These girls are hot enough to leave burns," Lemont uselessly inserted.

"Both trains are being searched again, so we may still find something," Stone added.

Hayes responded, "even Houdini (the first one) can't hide six giant horses, six ladies, a stagecoach, and a gang of criminals inside a cargo car. We would have found them by now if they were still aboard one of these trains."

"Are you suggesting they removed the girls, horses, and stagecoach from a moving train without anyone noticing?" Stone asked Hayes.

"I know that sounds insane, but so does everything else about this."

Stone responded, "I discussed this with federal marshals a half hour ago."
"Releasing a boxcar from a rolling train would not be that difficult, provided it was the last car on the train. However, Union Station track directors claim a caboose was the last car on both trains."

"Both cabooses are also still attached."

"Releasing cars that weren't the last ones would be nearly impossible without stopping."

"Also, both trains still have the same number of cars, as stated in their records."

"Does Union Station count the cars as they depart?" Hayes asked.

"I don't know. We compared unit numbers to the station's departure reports, and everything matched. I do not know if they physically count every car when a train leaves," Stone responded.

"We did not count them when I was taking tickets undercover for you, Mr. President," Colin added.

"General (Stone), did you ask if either train made an unscheduled stop before the marshals blocked them off?" Lemont asked.

"No, we did not discuss that, but we stopped both trains before reaching their first destination."

"We need that answered immediately!" The former president declared.

Stone then sent his assistant to ORPHAN's communications room to find out.

"Have there been similar abductions?" Lemont asked Stone.

"Nothing this brazen."

"They must have wanted headlines. They could have quietly nabbed those ladies after their next show."

“So, this was planned to happen in front of hundreds of reporters, local police, and at least six federal agents.”

“They have nuts like cannonballs,” Secret Service agent Thomas Zimmerman added.

Stone continued, “Extreme confidence, to say the least, they were showing off.”

“You know there are 66 other unsolved kidnappings with similarities.”

“How so?”

“Over the last two years, not counting last night, 66 attractive ladies have vanished without a trace.”

“What other common denominators?” Hayes asked.

“Well, besides Vermont, these disappearances happened in every state above the Mason Dixon line, yet not one south of it.”

“That means something. Do we have suspects?” Hayes asked.

“Only one circumstantial longshot,” Stone replied while looking through his briefcase.

“However, it could explain why only Northern ladies have been nabbed.”

“Enlighten us.”

“There is an unholy alliance between some Southern social clubs, with one called the “White Knights.”

“How long have they been operating?” Hayes asked.

“Several years before the war. They began by intimidating the Northern publishers, editors, and journalists, who were demanding a nationwide end to slavery.”

“Once the war started, they began attacking our weapon factories, armories, and railroad infrastructures with dynamite.”

“You know this underground complex was originally installed to avoid those attacks. But we just called them Confederate spies, not White Knights,” Hayes said.

“I was around for Plant One.”

“More often than not, intimidation, extortion, and blackmail go unreported, so the White Knights are likely far more prevalent than we know,” Stone replied.

“What do we know about them?” Hayes asked.

“Each team runs independently, as if not affiliated with any other, so even torture can’t expose who and what they do not know. Besides these White Knights, we have not seen crimes executed with such high precision. That is another common denominator about last night.”

“I hate to say this, but I don’t think we (the Secret Service) could have pulled this off so efficiently,” Stone added.

“How many witnesses are there?” Hayes asked Stone.

“Still just two. The show’s producer and a coach's whipman.”

“Mr. Legend, that producer, said the hijacker is enormous but not portly.”

“They both saw someone moving on top of the coach as it rolled away.”

“They told me the same thing,” Hayes added.

“What else have you connected to those White Knights?” Hayes asked.

“These pinpoints suspected White Knight abductions,” Stone said as he pulled a map from his case, then spread it over the table.

"I thought you said all the kidnappings happened in Northern states. This shows far more in the deep south than up here." Hayes questioned.

"None of those southern disappearances are white girls. They are Black men, big powerful fellows, many born into slavery," Stone explained while pointing at the map.

"Looks like White Knights leave those Southern Bells alone," Hayes muttered.

"As you can see, most of them (the big Black dudes) vanished from Southern Louisiana."

"Numbers like this provide an obvious clue!"

"It is far easiest to nab victims close to where you want them," Hayes mumbled aloud.

"Southern Louisiana must be at least their operational headquarters since most vanished from there. They probably assume that no one would map these disappearances," Hayes said as he looked back at Stone.

"I agree, Rud. Yet, the actual number of missing men could be several times larger. Moreover, most do not trust local authorities, so they have no desire to speak with them."

"That could get them killed."

"That's a fact," Lemont injected.

"The White Knights maybe trying some crazy experiment, like breeding big black fellows with pretty white girls?" Colin suggested.

"That's ridiculous, Colin!" Lemont snapped at his partner.

"They have no reason to kidnap hundreds of big black studs when most would eagerly volunteer."

"Secondly, they would only need five or six to take care of sixty-six ladies."

"Just a thought, Big Boy," Colin retracted.

Commander Stone resumed control, "We did not suspect the White Knights of those southern abductions until just days ago."

"We thought these big fellows disappeared on their own or some Southern hate club had been killing them off."

Hayes replied, "If these were hate crimes, mutilated bodies would be hanging from trees. They have vastly different motives."

"Like enslaving them to do something those White Knights are too cowardly to do," Lemont remarked.

"That would mean they could all still be alive," Hayes added, then asked Stone, "How did we connect the White Nights to those disappearances?"

"Ten, no eleven days ago, two former slaves appeared at the New Orleans Navy base."

"They told the guards that they had been drugged as they walked home from repairing brick roads."

"They woke up shackled inside an ancient prison with twelve more big Black victims."

"Still shackled, they were loaded into an old cargo boat. A day and a half later, they arrived at what they called a huge industrial complex, hidden behind some hills, on an island in the Gulf."

"They said they saw hundreds of Confederate soldiers walking around."

"Confederate Soldiers?"

"Well, they wore Confederate uniforms."

"Damn!" Hayes said.

Stone continued, "The guards took the two men to their command center for Admiral Forti to question them."

"They told him they were shackled inside the hold of an old single-masted cargo ship just before sunrise."

“They slushed around for nearly two days before reaching that hidden bay.”

“What else?”

“When they were dragged aboard, the boat was flying old glory, but when they were brought back on the deck, it was flying a blue flag with a white cross. Not the holy cross, but the tilted one, like the Confederate flag. They said it only had one star, a blue one in the center of a white cross.”

“Who flies that flag?” Hayes asked.

“We have never seen it before,” Stone replied.

“Without that star, that’s the flag of Scotland. And that cross is called the Saint Andrews cross,” Lemont explained.

“He might be right; that is like the confederate flag,” Stone told Hayes.

“I might be right!” Lemont fumed, saying, “That is nothing like the official Confederate flag, which had no crosses. General Lee thought the real Confederate flag looked too much like our stars and stripes, so he flew one with the Saint Andrew’s Cross over his divisions!”

Hayes put the meeting back on track, “I see no reason for those men to make up that story. They likely hated even reporting it. They were quite brave.”

“President Cleveland said those same words after hearing these details just a few days ago,” Stone said before continuing.

“Before they reached that base, one of these men twisted his shackles, and they shattered; he helped his buddy break up his.”

“He told the admiral, “The things were badly corroded.”

“Damn right, they broke!” Lemont (also known for crushing rocks with his dinner plate-sized hands) snarled.

Stone continued, "They held their chains in place, hoping for a chance to escape."

"When they were brought back onto the deck, they saw eight young white ladies led up a gangway onto a much larger ship docked right beside them. They were tied together."

"Damn."

"They said that ship flew a solid blood-red flag."

"Morocco's flag," Lemont blurted.

Stone continued, "As the sailors and Confederates gawked at these poor girls, those two fellows slid down a rope behind the boat, unseen."

"Soon alarms went off, and search parties began hunting for them, but no one looked in the water right behind the boat."

"After sunset, they climbed back aboard, then hid under a pile of sails on the top deck, hoping that boat would soon head back to New Orleans."

"Just before sunrise, three sailors came aboard and set sail."

"Two days later, they recognized the muddy Mississippi River Delta."

"Once they were approaching New Orleans, they threw the three sailors overboard."

"They managed to pilot the boat for a few miles before beaching beside the Algiers district, where they lived."

"They did not trust the local authorities, so they told the navy the following morning."

"Damn!" Hayes added, "They could not have made up seeing beautiful captive ladies because they would not have known about them."

"Admiral Forti was leery until an arriving captain reported an ancient cargo hauler beached beside Algiers."

"How were they drugged?" Hayes asked.

“Being hit by little yellow darts as they walked home from work was the last thing they remembered.”

“They repair brick roads for a living.”

“Knock out darts?”

“Evidently, Commander.”

“I’d bet those darts are tipped with Doctor Awl’s Vampire Bat Spit!” Hayes said as he looked at Colin.

“That Turd knocked me out in seconds with that bat crap! I could use a case or two of those darts, Mr. President,” Colin added.

“I should have let the good doctor complete your lobotomy,” Lemont jabbed.

Ignoring them, Hayes asked Stone, “Did they determine which island?”

“Admiral Forti thinks they were taken to Cuba’s South-Central Coast.”

“Unfortunately, international agreements have kept Cuba’s coast off-limits to our ships for ninety years. We have no maps showing a hidden bay along that coast.”

“Although his daddy abolished slavery at home, Spain’s King Alfonzo still has a half-million African slaves being whipped in Cuba,” Hayes added.

Lemont added, “During the war, the king’s daddy planned to provide the Confederacy with two thousand cannons while claiming neutrality. He intended to have those guns formed from an Indian (from India) cannon mold.”

“British agents reported Alfonso’s plan to King Edward, who informed our embassy, who told President Lincoln.”

“Lincoln sent King Alfonso a question asking why he secretly plans to put Indian cannons into production.”

“King Alfonzo denied everything as he canceled that order.”

“We could have lost the war if the Confederacy received 2000 cannons,” Stone said before offering his next piece of strange evidence.

“I know,” Hayes replied.

Stone continued. “After the break-in at Nicola Tesla’s home in 82, we found another odd connection to these White Knights.”

“Nicola never mentioned that to me,” Hayes popped.

“Well, he reported it, and we (the service) investigated.”

“The burglars left a tiny gold coin, stamped with the only emblem we had ever connected to the White Knights.”

“Tesla had never seen it before, yet it was the only thing remaining on his desktop after the break-in.”

“We believe the White Knights use it, or once used this symbol to verify members from other branches, like a secret handshake.”

“On one side was that ah, Saint Andrew’s Cross with that six-sided star in its center. Then, on the other side, just the initials, WN.”

Orphan Agent Markus Manley, who was once a Columbus Constable with Colin right after the war, suddenly burst into the war room.

As he handed the still barefoot agent (Colin) the boots he left on High Street, he announced, “We found their trail!”

“Are you sure, Markus?” Hayes asked.

“No doubt about it.”

“Where? How?”

“Last night at 11:11, a northbound cargo train left Union Station for Cleveland’s Central Depot.”

“About ten minutes later, a flair warned the engineer that something was blocking the tracks ahead.”

“He brought the train to a full stop, then had his boilermen walk ahead to clear the blockage. But after a half-mile, they found nothing.”

Hayes, “Nothing means something. Sorry, Markus, keep going.”

“As the boilermen searched ahead, an unreported southbound train, pulling eight to ten cars, also stopped, nearly beside it.”

“One or more northbound boxcars seemed to have been switched to that unreported southbound while the boilermen were away.”

“They found nothing blocking the tracks, so their engineer slowly rolled away a few miles before returning to speed.”

“Did the alternating conductor see anything?”

“No, sir, he slept through the entire event in the caboose.”

“That southbound is a phantom; it shouldn’t have been there. It was not registered. We don’t know where it came from or who owns it.”

“Boss, it is not unusual for private trains to be unaccounted for. This is because they often neglect to report.”

“Proof of the switch, Markus?”

“This train was falsely stopped on the only quarter-mile stretch, out of 180 miles, which could switch boxcars is ah.../.”

“/Beyond coincidence,” Hayes completed Manley’s sentence.

“The odds are seven hundred and twenty to one,” Lemont tacked on.

Manley resumed, “A well-prepared team could have moved four or five cargo cars from a stopped northbound to a parked southbound in ten minutes.”

“Good work, Markus.”

“There is more; over the last five years, eight cargo cars, all carrying precious cargo, vanished along this route. That includes the three hundred of those Light Cannons when they were still confidential.”

“Anything else?”

“No, not right now, sir.”

“Our ladies were long gone by the time we stopped those trains. I’d bet my ranch they are heading for Southern Louisiana!” Hayes said as he looked around the room.

“We should be able to rescue them even before they reach the deep south,” Hayes said as he began calculating on paper.

“They have been rolling for four hours,” Hayes mumbled.

“Train’s average forty miles an hour. So that puts them, um....”

“Around 170 miles away by now, Boss. So, they are likely somewhere between the Ohio River and Central Kentucky right now,” Lemont explained.

Hayes looked up from his map and told Agent Manley, “Go call the federal marshal in New Orleans.”

“Find out everything he knows about Northern ladies, big Black men disappearing, and the White Knights.”

“Also, ask him to list all privately-owned forts along the Mississippi River within 25 miles of New Orleans.”

“Is that all, sir?” Manley asked.

“For now. But run back down here as soon as you finish.

“Yes, sir.”

Lemont added, “It is likely an ancient French fort, Markus.”

Using the compound's intercom (a telephone), Hayes called his secretary Ivonta Mann. She was already at her desk in the little hospital's lobby, thirty feet above Hayes's war room.

Three years earlier, when Hayes hired her, he gave her an apartment inside the hospital to be instantly available during emergencies.

When she ran the new Columbus Lunatic Asylum, Doctor Awl gave her a penthouse on top of one of that vampire-bat-based monstrosity's fourteen towers.

After Doctor Awl left to open his Vampire venom business, the doctor who replaced him demanded that she "stop boinking the inmates."

So, when she heard that Ex-President Hayes was building the National Hospital for Orphan Children (behind the asylum), she contacted him for a job.

"Ivonta, I need you to call Tesla; at Westinghouse's Development Center" (Central Station New York City).

"Tell him to get here with ORPH Six at once. Tell him this is a class A emergency" (speed authorization).

"But tell him to be very careful."

"Is that all, Rud?"

"At this moment."

After Hayes closed this meeting, he sent Colin and Lemont to the communications room.

"Contact Colonel Sanders in Kentucky and Captain Crockett in Memphis. Call Sanders first. He needs to hurry; it might be too late for his men to stop that phantom train, but it is worth a shot. Tell them 'Code A,' they have permission to stop any cargo train heading south."

"Make damn sure; they know who and what to look for."

Hayes only made one mistake. He assumed that slick, unseen switch north of Columbus was the final trick of their escape plan; it was not.

After that train crossed the 14th Street Bridge into Louisville, Kentucky (from Clarksville, Indiana), it switched to an eastbound track along the Ohio River's Southern Shore.

In Huntington, West Virginia, it switched to a southeast rail through the Allegheny mountains. It would eventually enter Southeast Louisiana, just twenty-five miles north of the Gulf.

Entering Louisiana from the east Instead of the north kept the phantom train from being searched.

4. February 1882 - Young Genius

(Three years earlier, before the Buckeye Beauties were hijacked)

Several months after Edison began setting up ORPHAN's electrical system, he told NORA Commander Hayes about a young genius he was bringing in from Eastern Europe.

"This kid invented an efficient electric motor; it only has one moving part!"

"The thing is so advanced; Dean Wellington of the Federal College of Electrical Engineering told me that men from Mars must have given it to him."

"Rud, this kid's mind sees prototypes three to five generations out."

"Impressive!"

"I am bringing him to the states to refine my citywide Direct Current (D/C) components. However, I can't ignore that he would be ideal for designing some of the equipment you want."

"Al, we are infants at espionage. Some kingdoms have used spy networks for a thousand years. We must use our advanced technology to compensate for our lack of experience."

"Since you secretly funded me when you were president, I am willing to share him."

"Do you think a foreigner can be trusted with national security?"

"He loves Croatia, his homeland, but it is occupied by Hungary, whose king is so scared of him, he keeps guards posted in his home laboratory, watching his every move."

"They only want him working on the king's projects. He has no desire to provide them with anything."

"He sees America as an island of intellectual freedom."

Hayes responded, "Dictators fear that an independent innovator will invent their demise. But it does concern me to tell an outsider state secrets that most senators don't know."

"That is not necessarily a high standard," Edison replied.

"True, my friend, but since you say this kid is the real deal, he must be."

"No doubt about that, Rud, he is."

"I want to meet him. We have virtually unlimited development funding."

"Does he speak English?"

"Indeed, perfectly," Edison laughed.

"He speaks and writes in eight languages and understands dozens more. He has even created a written language that the Hungarians don't understand."

"Reminds me of Ivonta Mann," Hayes muttered.

"Ivonta Mann?"

"Just thinking aloud."

"Who is Ivonta Mann?"

"My lascivious administrator in the Orphan Hospital."

"You mean the scary girl with the big bazooms?"

"That's her."

"Seems appropriately named."

"Mann is her married name. She's a widow several times over."

"A needle-sharp pitchfork had impaled Mr. Mann."

"Marshall Dillon said he flung himself onto it."

"Hell of a way to go."

"Especially by choice."

"Her family name was Blade."

"Ivonta Blade?"

"Yeah."

"Bloody."

"For six years, she ran the Columbus Lunatic Asylum for the bloodiest, mass-murdering lunatic this state has ever seen."

"She ran that nuthouse for an inmate?"

"No, for the surgeon in charge of the asylum, Doctor William Awl. He calls himself Doctor Cure-Awl. He has nearly a full year of medical school."

"Well, he sounds highly qualified. As you know, Rud, I only had three months of school before my teacher expelled me for being retarded. He told my mother I should be able to do farm work."

"Well, you showed off his stupid ass."

"While you were perfecting Direct Currents, Doctor Cure-Awl conducted deadly experiments on his patients no one would ever miss."

"He sounds like a fun fellow," Edison sarcastically responded.

"Yea, he's even more fun today. A few years ago, he quit the asylum to start breeding enormous vampire bats, real bloodsuckers."

"Enormous vampire bats!?"

“Big as turkeys!”

“Where did he get them?”

“He has them shipped up here from the Amazon River in South America.”

“Why would anyone want to breed those monsters?” Edison asked.

“He sells their spittle to surgeons. The stuff paralyzes people long enough for surgery.”

“I suppose that’s noble work.”

“Yea, but Ivonta told me he hugs and kisses them as rich bitches do to their French Poodles.”

“Oh my!” Edison shivered.

“Anyhow, Ivonta also invented a written language.”

“A secret code?” Edison asked.

“It certainly is, but that was not her intention. She produced it for swift notation. She writes two hundred words a minute using it.”

“What does it look like?”

“Scribble.”

“How accurate?”

“I read a law book as fast as I could for five minutes. She wrote every word that I pronounced correctly. She can also do this in English while listening to German, French, or Spanish.”

“Very Impressive!” Edison said as he pondered her invention’s marketability.

“Even though she lives in a constant state of arousal, she does not let it interfere with work. Her skills have repeatedly proven to be extremely valuable.”

“She sounds like a great find, Rud.”

“She is irreplaceable!”

“Anyways, ORPHAN needs a small fleet of trains that can safely move faster than anything else.”

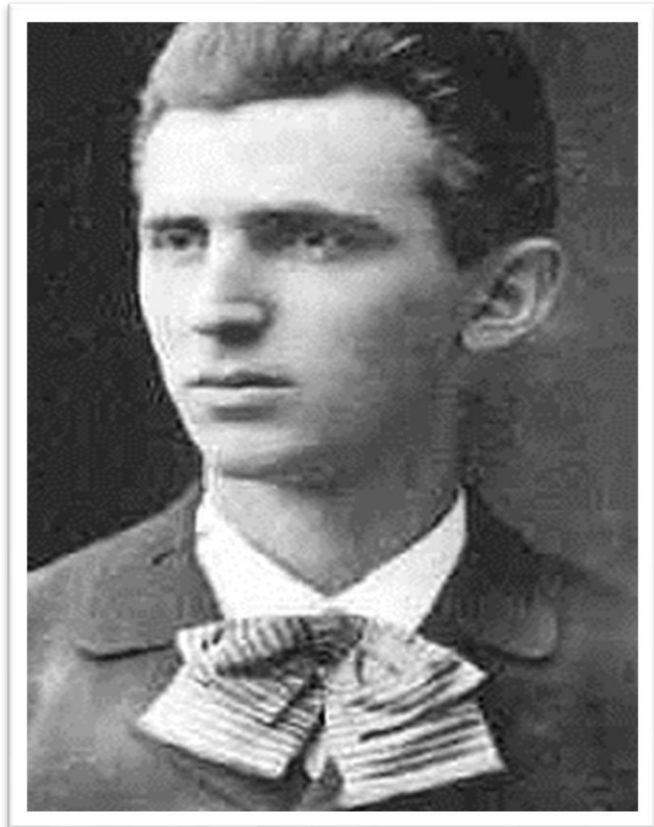
“Is this something you would put this kid on?”

Edison replied, “Absolutely! Try not to make any major railroad decisions until I get you two together.”

“When will he arrive?”

“In about six weeks.”

“What is his name?”



“Tesla, Nicola Tesla.”

5. April 1882

Three months after Edison told Commander Hayes about Nicola Tesla, Hayes stopped by Edison's New York headquarters to meet the young genius.



After a few minutes of hearing about Croatia, Edison rushed off to deal with a fistfight between engineers, leaving Hayes and Tesla alone in his office.

"This is such a wonderful country; I will become a citizen," Nicola told Hayes.

"That's a great move, son!"

“In Croatia, an American can only be an American, but a Croatian can also be an American in America!”

“So true, son. Most American families came from the rest of the world. My great grandfather came from Scotland.”

“I have been there; Scotland is a beautiful nation. Its coastline reminds me of my homeland. But sadly, the Croatian people have been bled dry by the Hungarian king.”

“Kings and dictators worry that abused citizens will invent their demise. American citizens elect our presidents (just men in 1885) every four years. So, inventive citizens are a bonus for us instead of a problem.”

“Democracy is obviously why this nation is so rapidly modernizing,” Tesla added.

“Yes, Nicola. Do you know that 70% of modern technologies come from the USA, with only 3% of the planet's population?”

“I have never read those percentages, but that seems correct.”

“Nicola, because our leaders work for the people, we care for all Americans, rich or poor, with equal respect instead of the other way around.”

“Even the poorest orphan child is as important as congressman, senators or presidents,” Hayes exaggerated.

“It’s wonderful!”

“Before he was assassinated, my great friend President Garfield, God rest his soul, put me in charge of the nation’s orphan assistance program.”

“Orphan assistance program?”

“Last Year, he opened *The National Orphan Relief Agency* (NORA) to send our poor orphan babies’ emergency medical aid.”

“For the last 20 years, Europe dumped their orphan children into our open arms.”

“These children are now Americans, so we must take care of them.”

“I have never heard of such compassion,” Tesla responded.

“We are currently building the National Hospital for Orphan Children.”

“Here in New York?”

“No, a few miles outside of Columbus, Ohio.”

“Why such a small town?”

“Most poor orphans go to farm families, spread out over rural America. So, we needed a central location to rush medical aid to these innocent babies, most efficiently.”

“That is efficiency.”

“Indeed. Columbus sits in the center of America’s railroad network, so it was the ideal location.”

“We also reimburse doctors and hospitals in New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, Boston, Atlanta, and San Francisco, for rescuing local orphans,” Hayes explained. However, he did not mention those were the same six cities with Secret Service offices.

“What a wonderful nation this is!”

“Private companies have installed more rails in the USA than the rest of the world combined,” Hayes added.

“Traveling at these tremendous speeds (40-45MPH) is so exciting; I read everything on rail technology,” Tesla replied.

FYI: Until 1903, the official world speed record was 82.5 miles per hour, set by a locomotive.

“We will open the hospital in about six months.”

“You should tell the world about this,” Tesla replied.

“Here in America, we lead by example. We would rather show them what we do than boast about it. That brings me to an issue. Al (Edison) thought you might enjoy helping us.”

“How.”

“The faster we can reach these poor injured babies, the more lives we can save.”

“Of course.”

“We were planning to use public passenger trains. However, they stop at most depots along their routes, which significantly slows them down, which would cost far more innocent lives.”

“So, we decided that NORA must operate a small fleet of non-stop trains.”

“We need the quickest trains to maximize the number of poor, critically injured babies we save.”

“How much faster, sir?”

“All the speed we can safely squeeze from them.”

“But son, feel free to call me Rud.”

“I’ll try, but that would be like calling King Charles Chuck.”

“My term as president ended; that is how this country works. So now I am just Rud, the director of NORA, America’s orphan aid program.”

“Anyways, before I start spending our taxpayer’s dollars on NORA’s trains, Al insisted that I ask you for ideas about our ‘Orphan Rail Ambulances.’”

“How many cars will they haul?”

“Likely five, four if the coal bin is part of the locomotive.”

Tesla answered, “May I study this for a few days before you decide? I have already read the specifications of every mass-produced locomotive. They are produced in five European countries, Pakistan, India, China, Nippon, and the USA.”

“We can only use American-built trains,” Hayes responded.

“Of course, sir.”

“Maximum speed has never been the primary design goal for locomotives.”

“Think of them like plow horses, perfect for pulling great loads across great distances. But unloaded, plow horses could not stay up with racehorses, half their size.”

“Certainly,” Hayes agreed.

“Available components are not designed for speed, so virtually all components must be re-designed if your goal is to maximize speed on existing rails.”

“This is a very complicated, time-consuming, and expensive process.”

“I have directed the development of many technologies since the war. That is the cost of progress, and we are all about progress,” Hayes answered.

“What war?”

“Oh, pardon me, you were still a baby on the other side of the world.”

“In the sixties, we fought a terrible civil war between our states to abolish slavery. It cost nearly a million lives.”

“How sad.”

“It was a high price, but freedom never comes cheap.”

“Sir, I need direction. Should I design from existing components or start with a clean sheet of paper?”

“We need all the speed that is safely possible on existing rails. This is about saving innocent babies’ lives, not money. We will undoubtedly have many other uses for high-speed trains, so constant innovation is necessary.”

“However, we need at least several Orphan Ambulances as soon as possible. So, you should use existing components at first, then upgrade the weakest ones for each new unit.”

“That's direction. How many Orphan Ambulances will your new hospital need?”

“Eight to twelve, eventually.”

“I am overwhelmed, sir!”

“However, my days are already committed to Mr. Edison. I can only work on this project at night.”

“AI has already cleared you for all the time NORA needs.”

“Excellent, this project is far more exciting than finetuning Mr. Edison’s old Direct Currant transmission components.”

“Great!”

“Have you heard of George Westinghouse?”

“He is the genius that invented air brakes for trains,” Tesla responded.

“Yes, George is brilliant. He has invented dozens of important locomotive components. He is also a close friend, and I have spoken to him about you.”

“You have!”

“He is also a huge fan of yours.

He was so impressed by your dynamos that he prototypes hydraulic pumps based on them.”

“He also owns facilities where our orphan ambulances can be built, and he would love to help you develop them.”

“It feels amazing to join a nation where its leaders care so deeply about the lowliest orphan,” Tesla responded with tears streaming down his cheeks.

The sobbing genius then stood and saluted the former president. “I can’t imagine ever leaving this country! I love it! The USA is the hope for all humanity!”

Still saluting, his head bowed down, “I hope I can reach your level of human decency!”

“I will begin penciling the swiftest locomotive this planet has ever seen when I arrive home this evening.”



Hayes could no longer look Tesla in the eye, suddenly feeling like a jerk for over-selling his poor-orphan cover. So, holding his belly, he rose from his seat, saying, "Sorry to run, son. I need a commode!"

As Hayes ran out of Edison's office, he yelled, "I can't wait to see your first sketches. I will return in a few days!"

"It's on your right, sir!" Tesla yelled back.

The next day, Tesla showed his Boss (Edison) his first sketches for NORA's Orphan Ambulance.

His slick-looking little train instantly excited Edison's innovative mind, like car guys when seeing a great modern design.

While looking it over, Edison asked Nicola, "Where did you hide the cannons, flamethrowers, and Gatling gun?"

"The whats?!" Tesla responded.

As Edison studied the sketch, he added, "They need instant release functions and continuous mechanical or maybe even electrical reloading." "All three weapons systems must be controlled, aimed, and fired by a single agent inside a dedicated weapons control car."

"Why would NORA want a child's ambulance fitted with weapons of war?"

Suddenly Edison realized that Hayes had only asked Tesla to design a super-fast railroad ambulance. "Ha, ha, I was just pulling your leg, Nicola," Edison responded.

"Pulling my leg? You did not touch me."

"That means I was just joking around with you, Nicola."

It only took another second for Tesla to realize the facts. Yet, he was not upset with Hayes for lying; he was used to this, as most European leaders already had.

Instead, he fantasized about defending America's freedoms in weapon-packed rail rockets.

Before returning to Ohio, Hayes returned several days later to see Tesla's first sketches. Before Edison called Nicola back to his office, he apologized to Hayes:

"Sorry, old buddy, I assumed you told him Orphan's actual intentions for these trains, so I opened my mouth. He now knows their real use."

"It's all right, Al. He needs to know anyway."

When Tesla walked into Edison's office, Hayes apologized. "Nicola, forgive me for not telling you about the entire need for our Orphan Ambulances." "Although it seems like I lied to you, I just did not explain everything."

"No problem, sir."

"These Orphan Ambulances will rescue gravely injured orphan children. They will also protect our country's security, protecting these orphans and all Americans."

"No problem, Sir. I understand."

"NORA has already provided \$50,000 to America's orphanages."

"No problem, Sir. I'm thrilled to be involved."

Tesla had spent two days picturing himself as a secret agent, taking these super speed machines on covert missions.

Edison added, “Nicola, NORA is reimbursing me to set you up with a private laboratory so you can work full time on these special trains.”

This move was a stress reliever for the lightbulb wizard. Tesla was not working out as Edison envisioned; to refine his Direct Current components for a city-wide electric distribution system.

On his first day working for Edison, Tesla told him, “These components are too inefficient for city-wide electrical networks. They will lose far more power than they can deliver.”

He added, “Furthermore, this planet does not produce enough copper to electrify Manhattan using his system.”

“I developed a system called “Alternating Current.”

“With my system, comparatively tiny components can deliver a hundred times more electricity over far greater distances, using 90% less copper.”

This was far easier for Tesla to say than for his boss to accept. Edison had burned through millions of dollars (billions today) that JP Morgan and others had invested in his Direct-Current distribution equipment.

Edison would not tell his investors, “The planet does not provide enough copper for my system to work.”

Their A/C-D/C conflict was not the only problem between Edison and Tesla. Edison had agreed to Tesla’s request to take two 40-minute naps and an hour for lunch each workday.

Tesla’s deal inspired Edison’s other engineers to request hour-long lunches and nap times. So, temporarily moving Nicola to an isolated laboratory to work alone offered Edison some relief.

However, this arrangement only lasted another month after Hayes introduced Tesla to George Westinghouse. These two rapidly found inventive compatibility, so Tesla resigned.

Weeks later (late 1882), Nicola and George started building NORA's first ORPH at Westinghouse's rail foundry, next to New York's Grand Central Station.

About 90% of the first ORPH used existing components to provide NORA with one rapidly.

6. March 7, 1885, Westinghouse's New York facility

When Ivonta called at 6 AM, Nicola was busy running final tests on the newest Orph. This sixth-generation marvel was the first with mostly (over 80%) new components.

Tesla lived and worked inside its “surgical car” parked inside Westinghouse’s facility for the previous five weeks.

Twenty-five minutes later, he launched for Sullivant’s Hill alone.

Piloting any earlier ORPH (or any other train) across the country alone in 1885 would have been impossible. ORPH Six’s locomotive was the first that did not need boilermen to shovel coal into the firebox.

Instead, it burned oil delivered to the boiler through a rubber hose and an electric pump. The 1000-gallon oil tank occupied less than half of the space earlier ORPHS needed for coal storage. ORPH Six also ran on almost any oil if it passed Tesla’s burn test.

The space saved by using oil instead of coal also allowed ORPH Six’s locomotive to carry 1500 gallons of water, instead of five hundred, like the first five. While making this change, Tesla added a few extra features.

He designed this water tank, so agents could bathe or exercise in it while traveling. He invented a small pump to circulate water around the boiler and engine, so this tub/pool combo stays warm year-round. The roof above the tank could also open, allowing the sun or stars to shine in.

Tesla installed dynamos (motor/generators) inside each wheel of the cars pulled by ORPH Six. These more than matched the power from its steam engine (when activated). Together they supply insane amounts of speed for standard rails.

Tesla installed a lever on the driver's console to control these dynamos. Pushing it forward supplemented its steam engine with electric power, like a hybrid car a century later.

Pulling that lever back reversed the system's polarity, turning those dynamos into powerful brakes. This feature cut ORPH Six's stopping distance to one-third of ORPH Five.

Tesla added another 'secret' performance feature called "Magnetic Glue." It used 'centrifugal force switches' to activate electromagnets along the inside rail of curved tracks. This, along with ORPH Six's far lower stance (height), gave it more speed around curves than any other train in 1885.

The fuel oil was pumped mechanically to the boiler's burner instead of men shoveling coal, making this ORPH the first train capable of traveling cross-country with only one person aboard (if necessary).

Tesla was the only person in New York who could run every system, so he drove it to Columbus alone. He would average ninety-six miles per hour between New York and Orphan Control under Sullivant's Hill (155kph). But on a flat stretch between Zanesville and Columbus, he pushed it to 149.5 MPH, nearly doubling the official world speed record of 82.5 MPH.

Tesla could have also become famous for being the fastest man on earth. However, ORPH statistics were US classified secrets, so the official world record would not be (officially) broken until a motorcycle broke it in 1903.

When reporters asked Hayes, "How fast are Orphan Ambulances?"

"Oh, they are crazy-fast! The newest one hit seventy miles an hour during testing," he explained.

7. Orphan Control, 6:14 am, March 7, 1885

After contacting Captain Crocket and Colonel Sanders, Mclaughlin and Freeman rushed back to the war room.

In 1885, only a few dozen telephones were running in Ohio. However, just before they returned to Hayes's war-room, they used several to call the Orphan Ambulance garage to have ORPH #3 ready for launch.

The war room was now dark, so Lemont pulled the string that turned on a basketball-sized 100-watt bulb in the ceiling.

Commander Hayes was still there, slumped over the table, napping. "He's asleep," Colin whispered to Lemont.

"I'm awake,' Hayes said as he sat up.

"Mr. President?"

"Yes, Colin."

"We need to leave for New Orleans right now. ORPH three will be ready for launch in fifteen minutes."

"You are not going anywhere yet."

"If they are not found by 3:00, you two will go down there with science agent Nicola Tesla."

Colin shrugged, "Mr. President; this may be our most dangerous mission yet. We can't risk carrying that dorky bookworm along; the guy is a Lab Rat, not an operator."

"Yeah, Boss, he's right. There are too many unknowns. This is not a suitable time for babysitting a new field agent," Lemont added.

"He can't keep up with us athletes! He'll bog us down," Colin added.

“He won’t be in your way, boys.”

Lemont added, “Boss, I’ll bet he has never thrown a punch or shot a gun! Croatians are not even allowed to have guns. Their Hungarian occupiers are afraid of being shot.”

“Mr. President, isn’t Tesla in New York? We will lose another day just waiting for him to get here,” Colin pointed out.

“Wrong; currently, he is racing through Pennsylvania with the fastest ORPH yet. He’ll be here in a few hours,” Hayes replied (and hoped).

“Both of you greatly underestimated him, just as I did.”

“Tesla passed the Secret Service’s applicant tests with the highest total score ever recorded.”

“Your bookworm is superhuman.”

“Yeah, because he came from Mars,” Colin popped.

Has his head shook that “no motion,” Hayes added, “Trainer Butkus said Tesla is incredibly fit, ripped to the bone. He works out his muscles and stamina in pools for a few minutes daily.”

“Maybe you boys can pick up some great new fitness tricks from him.”

“Yeah, right,” Colin remarked as he flexed his arms like a bodybuilder, popping up his rather impressive biceps. “Obviously, I already know how to stay powerfully fit.”

“Put them puny petty things away before you embarrass yourself!” Enormous Lemont, with arms like tree trunks, advised.

Hayes added, “Nicola does not walk around holding himself all flexed up, like you two muscle heads.”

“No one would notice through his lab coats and bulging pockets.”

“Why did he even go through agent training?” Colin asked.

"He constantly asked to go on missions. He wants action."

"So, I told him that all agents had to pass the Service's training before I could send them into the field."

"Like you boys, I also assumed he was a dorky fellow who could never pass our physical requirements."

"But he called me on it."

"I need him to be happy. Since I assumed he could never run five miles in under forty minutes, I signed him up."

"Your bookworm can fly; he ran five miles in under thirty minutes!"

"Only two other agents have ever broken thirty minutes."

"I did!" Colin reminded them.

"We know, Colin."

"Boss, this was the four hundred and the eleventh time he reminded us."

"Oh, Mr. President."

"I seem to have forgotten something. Do you happen to remember Lemont's time?" Colin asked while pointing at his gigantic partner.

"Shut up, Colin! I finished under 40 minutes!" Lemont growled.

"Oh, yeah, that's right, I remember now; you had a full second to spare."

"I timed it that way! I don't waste my energy like you! That's why I was undefeated," as a pro boxer.

"Boss," (looking at Hayes while pointing at Colin), "he used to be a nice, humble guy."

"The music business turned him into this insecure prima-donna."

While flexing his arms, Colin replied, "Does this look like some lady?"

"Yes, a wimpy one," Jemima's enormous son responded.

“Boys, it was not just running; Tesla made marksman on every weapon system.”

“He scored highest with long guns (rifles) in three years.”

“The young man has an uncanny control over mechanical devices.”

“Hum.”

“He scored one hundred on the Service’s written test. I recall you only scoring a ninety-eight,” Hayes said while glancing at Lemont.

“That test had two wrong answers, not mine,” Lemont replied.

Colin added, “they say our brains will explode at one hundred miles an hour; I already hit ninety in (ORPH) Four. So, we won’t be able to get there much faster.”

“Boss, he learned science from drunks at Flanagan’s.”

“This new ORPH should reach New Orleans five hours faster, so you will still arrive around the same time as you left right now in ORPH Three.”

“ORPH Six is the fastest vehicle on earth!” Hayes explained.

The agents looked at each other, hoping the other could say something to win this argument.

Colin finally suggested, “We should send him back in Number Three to install these new things in it while we zip down to New Orleans in Six.”

“That will work,” Lemont agreed.

“Okay, I’ll go along if you boys tell me how to operate Magnetic Glue,” Hayes said.

“Magnetic Glue, what is that?” Colin asked.

“The complicated stuff he invented to double this ORPH’S speed.”

The two agents just looked at each other.

"I worked with the nation's greatest inventors for over 20 years. Nicola is the craftiest one. He makes Al (Edison) look more like a salesperson."

"I assure you will find him far beyond useful."

"If we must."

"I need you to ensure that nothing bad happens to him; Nicola is already a national treasure."

Their mouths hung open as they looked at each other.

"Well, someone needs to stay with the ORPH when we rescue the girls," Colin added.

"Right now, he is moving faster than anyone ever has," Hayes hoped. "Boys, Tesla has monstrous balls!"

Seconds later, both agents simultaneously demanded (in harmony), "I WANT TO DRIVE!"

McLaughlin and Freeman were America's first full-time secret agents. So, their covert professionalism was considerably less developed than their advanced physical abilities, courage, and trustworthiness.

"It's 800 miles to New Orleans, so you boys should get time piloting."

"Set that up with Yeager. He and Cochran will be conducting."

"I have Nicola bringing ORPH Six alone; no one else in New York knows how."

"Where are Yeager and Cochran?"

"They are sleeping; Ivonta put them to bed upstairs," Hayes said. "I need well-rested agents using my valuable assets."

“Since Nicola is still four to five hours out, I’ll have her put you two up” (in hospital beds).

“Boss, tell her I need two beds together lengthwise.”

“Same as before; she already knows.”

8. March 7th, Northern Georgia

10:00 AM. All six hijacked beauties were still pleasantly dreaming when the deep male voice began singing (in the hall outside their doors):

“♪ Yoo-Hoo girls, it’s time to rise♪.”
“♪ Don’t be shy, don’t ask why, ♪
♪it’s all for fun, under our electric sun. ♪”

Cameroon sang as he flipped the light switches (beside each door) while frolicking through this sleeping car’s hallway.

All six were so thrilled that their Tiffany dreams were real that being hostages had not even entered their still (and continually) sedated minds.

♪ Just because it’s too early for beer. ♪”
♪ Coffee, juice, milk, and tea are out here♪

Several minutes later, all six beauties were gawking at each other’s shiny new bling in the car’s electrically illuminated hallway.

They had all spent some time in New York City, seeing things that would cause an epidemic of heart attacks in bible-thumping Ohio. But, even with that experience, they had never seen such a muscular man in lady’s bloomers.

And these were not your average run-of-the-mill bloomers either. They started six inches above his knees, which would have been shocking on ladies in 1885.

They were also ‘LOOK AT ME COLORFUL.’ One leg was green, the other red, while the glossy gold material tightly wrapped his hips and butt matched his eight-inch stiletto boots.

If not for the silver-dollar-sized holes freeing his nipples, his red, gold, and green top, shaped like a modern sports bra.

His two-inch fake-looking fingernails were carefully polished like rainbows. Shimmering ceramic cherries dangled from his ear lobes.

Only the ship anchor tattoo on his right forearm seemed out of place.

You would think six kidnapping victims would pounce on the first person speaking their language for answers. But these fine ladies, with towels still crowning their heads, were far more into each other's new jewels than his.

Not fully realizing what he was competing against (treasure), Cameroon stood dejected, arms crossed with his right foot, impatiently tapping.

After being ignored for almost five minutes, he clapped his hands and said, "Okay, girls! I have a wonderful day planned for you!"

He then pulled six one-piece silk outfits out of one little bag. He passed them out as he sang:

“♪Now you need to put these on♪
♪So we can start having fun. ♪”

They were the same vibrant blue as the rugs, tablecloths, and silk sheets. They looked like modern one-piece bathing suits. The silk material was about a hair thicker than see-through.

Instead of demanding, "What the hell is going on here!" Elizabeth asked, "Where is the rest of these?"

Cameroon answered, "It will be hotter than an Ohio July in a few hours. Yawl will be far more comfortable in these than twelve sweaty layers of cotton."

"You can't possibly expect us to parade around in these?" Sara said.

"What is wrong with them? You girls will look astonishing. These are all the rage in the South of France, Monaco, and Sicily."

"Yeah, so is being naked."

"No worries, other than your masseur, manicurists, dentist, and little assistants, only us girls will even see you."

Dotty flashed a wondrous expression at Dorothy as she whispered, "Did he say, masseur and manicurists?"

"I heard that."

As Dotty began fantasizing about a massage, Sara asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm Cameroon Gayetty."

"President Cross wants me to train you, girls, for the next two weeks."

"These charming outfits allow me to see where your flawless bodies can be improved without forcing me to see things I'd rather not."

Cameroon held one outfit against his body. "When you sing for the leaders of great nations, President Cross needs me to make sure they know you are the world's most beautiful dancers."

"Are you saying Ty Cross, the President of Tyberia!" Sara asked him.

"I thought you knew; he is such a fine man; everyone adores him!"

"Girls, you remember Ty Cross?" Sara asked.

"Oh my god!" Dorothy responded, "He is the most handsome man I have ever seen! I could not even speak to him after that show."

Although Ty Cross was the president of Tyberia (36 Islands in the Eastern Caribbean), he was born in Corpus Christi, Texas.

In 1856 he inherited the world's largest shipping company, Cross Shipping International (CSI), plus hundreds of international enterprises from his father.

Three years later, once war seemed inevitable, Ty paid France two and a half million dollars (US) for thirty-six of their Eastern Caribbean islands.

He declared them 'The Republic of Tyberia' and himself president, then transferred the registrations for CSI's 731 cargo ships from the US to his new nation.

Then once the Civil War began, Ty announced "Tyberian Neutrality." International law prevented the US Navy from sinking or arresting neutral ships outside embargoed (Southern) Ports.

If they stayed registered in the Southern states, the Northern navy could seize or sink them in neutral waters.

However, Cross spent most of his time at Crosswinds, Southern Europe, or on his yacht, The Maximus V, the world's largest and swiftest pleasure craft. Most people consider it the most beautiful ship on earth.

Ty appointed Maximus Cross (Max), his oldest son, Prime Minister. Max spent most of his time at Tyberia's capital island, Sainte Marguerite, running the country and the Tyberian Technological Research Center.

Sometimes things are just not fair; many ladies considered Ty as gorgeous as a man can be. Besides not yet sporting Ty's gray temples, Max could pass as his daddy's twin.

Eight months before Ty Cross had some White Knights grab the Buckeye Beauties, he spent several nights in the Neil House Hotel's presidential suite. He was in Columbus for Cross Railroad Systems, Inc. (CRS) annual shareholder's meeting.

CRS was an Ohio-based corporation that customized trains. Cross was its founder and majority stockholder.

On his last evening in Columbus, he walked to the Opera House three blocks to see a local musical, *Lady's Come First*, written and performed by The Buckeye Beauties.

Under the dim glow of the place's natural gaslighting, he was mesmerized when hearing Sara sing "Big Daddy."

He could not recall seeing a more beautiful woman. After the show, being the President of Tyberia and the wealthiest man alive, he was escorted to meet the Beauties backstage.

The girls could do little more than quiver, giggle, and blush beneath their make-up; they nearly melted as he gazed into their eyes and kissed their hands.

He only stayed with them for several minutes, physically anyway. Do you know how a song can keep playing in your mind? Sara's sweet voice never stopped singing inside Ty's.

Weeks later, just before the Opera House closed for its electrical rebirth), Ty had CRS engineers record Sara, singing "Big Daddy" on a couple of Edison phonographs. Today, few people know that Edison's hand-cranked record players could also record music.

Because they recorded music on soft wax tubes, Ty wore both recordings out within a month, which only strengthened his feelings for Sara. Ty had finally fallen for someone besides himself for the first time in his pampered life.

Even though he had six ‘obvious’ children and a dozen “maybes,” he had never considered marriage. He felt that Sara was his perfect match.

Sara was from Worthington, a small upper-class settlement just north of Columbus, founded by Governor Thomas Worthington for his Central Ohio home.

She was an adorable, pampered deva from the day she was born (July 4th, 1857). She touched a broom for the first time while rehearsing for *The Maids of Armando*.

Sara had never made a bed, cooked a meal, or emptied her chamber pot as servants oversaw her crap. Even Lemont’s mother, Jemima, was well compensated for preparing her family’s meals one day a week.

However, unlike typical devas, Sara never acted like she was better than her servants; everyone had vital work to do in her mind. Instead, she treated them like friends, so they loved serving her.

At age six, Sara could sing and dance as adorably as she looked. She practiced every day as if that was what pretty little girls did for fun.

By age twelve, Sara was Worthington’s finest singer and dancer. Her private school hired her to teach music and dance to other privileged children six hours a week. She never told anyone that she gave her thirty cents weekly salary to her chambermaids.

At fourteen, producer Peter D. Legend (from the *Cotton Block and Cornstalk Opera House*) offered her a bit-part, and she stole the show.

He gave her a significant role in his next musical. Even though the show was not particularly good, she still packed the place on weekdays. She soon became the city’s hottest entertainer.

In Sara’s eyes, ty Cross also looked like an incredible catch.

She knew that he owned dozens of international companies. However, she was unaware that Ty owned three hundred thousand slaves (in other nations) or that the slave trade was still CSI's most profitable venture.

This handsome, charming, and charismatic tyrant was a perfect example of why most men, just like books, should not be judged by their cover.

All six lovely jaws fell open when Elizabeth asked Cameroon, "Is President Cross aboard this train?"

"Oh my god!' Their hair was wrapped in towels, and their adorable little bathing assistants had washed off all their makeup. They could not fathom having him see them in this condition.

To great relief, Cameroon replied, "Oh no, the president is not aboard, but he will be most excited to see you after we arrive."

Being hostages did not even enter their thoughts.

"Arrive? Where?"

"Near beautiful New Orleans, my home."

"We are going to your house?"

"Oh, no way! I have a one-room flat in Centertown. So, we would all have to sleep in the same bed!" He replied with a horrified look on his face.

"You will be the President's guests at Crosswinds, the country's most beautiful plantation."

"Is that where we will be performing?" Dorothy asked.

"I don't think so, I know it will be in a warm sunny location, but he won't say where to protect these leaders from their enemies."

"Do you know when?"

"Likely in two weeks when my work here is finished."

"Put on your practice suits before your servants serve your breakfast."

"It is still cold through these hills, so wear your robes over them."

"You do not need to be modest around me; I would give anything to look like any of you, but you are not my type."

As he again held one of those silky blue suits up against his torso, Cameroon sang:

"♪I have one that fits me too.
I will wear it ♪
If you all are com-fort-able. ♪"

"Oh, I would get you confused with my girls," Sara responded as the others giggled.

With a sad sigh, he sang:

"♪Oh, how I wish! ♪"

Then he twirled his way out of their bedroom car, singing:

"♪Okay, Girls, what the hell,
When you're ready for fun, just ring this bell. ♪"

After another hour of inspecting each other's new wardrobes and jewels, they concluded that this gorgeous president must be in love with them.

"What a great guy," They thought of their abductor.

About noon, they rang their bell. Mee, Wee, and Pee came through the door so quickly; they must have been waiting on the other side. The little assistants then waved the beauties into that next car.

This car had two rooms. The first was a small dining car with windows on both sides, allowing them to see the beautiful Allegheny Mountains.

The table held a variety of tropical fruits, milk, six small biscuits with country gravy, and three thinly sliced smoked fish. It also had coffee, hot cocoa, and tea pitchers, all spiked with the natural tranquilizer, Lemon Balm.

Everything tasted as if prepared for dieting princesses.

As soon as they finished, their tiny attendants led them into the next car room, which could have passed as a private beauty salon inside Caesar's Palace.

"Harr-do-afer-pool," Pee, Wee, or possibly Mee said as they led the six beauties into this car's other room.

This marble paneled room featured a crystal (transparent glass) exercise tub made in Venice. Imagine a 5ft by 5ft-by-5ft square crystal jar with a turquoise base. It had brass plumbing that also served as the pool's entrance ladder.

This room's floor was turquoise tile. Its upper walls and ceiling looked like blue skies with fluffy white clouds (glowing over electric lighting).

Because it would remain closed for this trip, these six pale-faced Buckeyes would never learn that roof above was fully retractable.

Inside this see-through pool/tub, Cameroon was wearing what would be called a speedo today, a gleaming gold one.

As he modeled his ripped but hairy body at them, only Dolly stared. The other five either looked away or covered their eyes.

"I wanted to dress like you girls, but you said, "NOOOOO!"
"So, this is what you get."

Still staring, Dolly asked, "Aren't you a little overdressed?"

"Shut up," Sara whispered to her. It was too late.

Cameroon then began flexing his muscles. "Water is how Ty Cross stays in fine shape. He wants me to teach this to you."

"This tub is meant for one at a time. There are several big pools at Crosswinds that we can all use together."

"But if any of you want to start today, I'll squeeze you in."

They chose to wait.

Again, feeling rejected, Cameroon climbed up then down this pool's ladder, pointed his nose at the ceiling, then strolled out of the room.

The triplets then escorted them into the next double-length car. This one was also divided into two rooms.

The first room was a luxury lounge. It had big cozy chairs, stools, game tables, and another restroom. A complete set of Edison's music tubes and his fanciest phonograph sat on (and in) a walnut cart latched to the wall.

As soon as the ladies looked comfortable, Mee Wee and Pee brought in some more deliciously spiked beverages.

Suddenly a tall, hairless man, resembling Rob Gronkowski (Gronk), minus personality and eyebrows, appeared in their room. He wore black dress pants, a white dress shirt, and a black bowtie.

If Mee, Wee, or Pee, seemed alarmed, the girls might have freaked out, but their tiny helpers ignored the big man as they continued pampering them, so they relaxed.

With a voice several octaves beneath Cameroon's, he said, "I am Animus, your masseur."

“Animus?”

“Yes.”

“Is that your name or how you feel?” Sara joshed, causing a light five-girl giggle.

Without expression, he slid one of his colossal index fingers over his lips and then made that “shush up” sound.

He gently took Sara’s hand, then smoothly led her into that car’s next room.

It had burlled walnut walls under another copper gilded ceiling. This 10-foot-long room only held a cabinet holding another music machine, bottles of olive oil, and a massage table.

Still silent, he tapped one of his dinner plate-sized paws on the massage table, and she climbed aboard.

She then received a skilled massage.

Each time she started talking, she heard him “shush” again.

“Not much on personality; nothing like Cameroon,” She thought.

She had no idea that Animus had many skills. They ranged from being the first Thai Kwan Do master from Mississippi to hijacking coaches and trains without being seen.

After her body-melting massage, Animus gave her a few minutes to recover before leading her back into the lounge. Then he repeated his ‘follow me’ gesture to Dotty.

“He’s no conversationalist,’ Sara told Dotty. Yet he nearly smiled when she added, “But he has magical hands!”

Next, Mee (Wee or Pee) led Sara back to that beauty salon.

One began massaging fragrant conditioners into Sara’s thick auburn hair while another removed her new rings and bracelets.

She placed them on the vanity right in front of Sara to watch them sparkle during her manicure. The fantastic glitter polish they applied to her nails changed color depending on the angle of light.

“Wow! Beautiful! I love it!” Sara said while rotating her hand.

All six beauties got a massage and manicure before returning to that lounge for more intoxicating beverages and some entertainment.

Cameroon returned wearing a see-through net robe over his golden speedo. He intended to play songs for them on the hand-cranked Edison phonograph.

However, Liz intervened, “We can manage that; we used phonographs for three years. We are close friends of Edison.”

Pouting, Cameroon left the rolling lounge. He just wanted to be one of the girls.

“I did not mean to hurt his feelings,” She added as he left.

They would spend most of the remaining day singing along with the recordings that Ty stocked inside that rolling cabinet.

They would only see one more person before reaching New Orleans. A small bent-over fellow, nearly as old as Methuselah.

Unlike Animus, he knocked on their door before entering. “Hello, girls. I am Dr. Levi. Your dentist.”

"I will fix, clean, and whiten your teeth before arriving in New Orleans."

One by one, he led them into the first room in the next car, which was set up as a single-chair dentist's office. Dr. Levi carefully cleaned their teeth and filled their cavities.

Then he held up a spool of silk thread and said, "I invented this stuff sixty years ago. It's why I still have these beautiful choppers at ninety-four."

"My floss removes that crap stuck between teeth, which rots them out and stinks up our breath."

"This will add many years to your teeth if you floss them daily."

As soon as he finished, he offered each beautiful Buckeye this same suggestion:

"Hey, Sweetie, want to have some fun? We can slip into my private room. It is just on the other side of that door!"

"Don't let this wedding ring fool you; I'm a widower," he lied.

Each beauty seemed to consider his offer before reluctantly declining.

Around sunset, Cameroon returned for "♪Announcements. ♪"

"♪We will arrive with the morning sun, ♪ at Crosswinds Plantation, for some real fun♪."

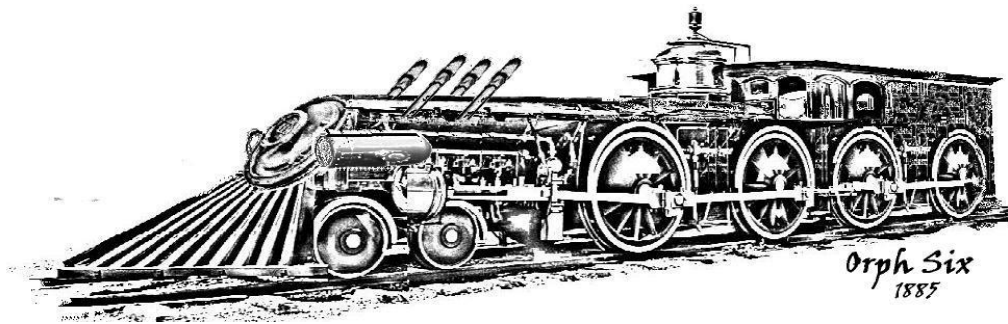
"♪Then Ty Cross, that lovely man, ♪will be sailing in, around ten ♪

♪ Since he is your biggest fan, he will look as fine as a man, can ♪

♪To ensure you look your best, ♪ get to bed soon for your beauty rest♪."

"That was his worst one yet," Elizabeth complained.

9. March 7th, 1:40 PM, Sullivant's Hill



As old Doc Levi inspected far more than just Sara's teeth, Tesla rolled through Columbus. Several minutes later, his new ORPH entered the thousand-foot rail entrance into the Orphan Ambulance Garage, next door to the far smaller orphan hospital.

As the first five ORPHs sounded like typical trains, ORPH Six growled like an angry animal; just hearing it approach had the mechanics overly excited.

Because Hayes rushed Number Six into service, Westinghouse's artists had not yet painted it white with red crosses, only dark primer to prevent rust. This color gave it a menacing appearance that perfectly matched its belligerent growl.

After showing the drooling mechanics where to refill depleted fluids, Tesla entered a small room against the garage's western wall. Inside he faced a ten-foot-tall oak cabinet. He twisted, then pushed in on the pull handle on its center drawer.

The cabinet began rumbling. After about thirty shaky seconds, the cabinet opened like a clamshell, revealing another recent invention, an Otis Elevator. Tesla entered, then pulled a two-foot lever to its 'down' position. The elevator slowly shook and rattled as it descended thirty feet to Orphan Control.

Besides several engineers in a small development laboratory and Hayes's war room, ORPHAN Underground was big and empty. The Orphan Ambulance Garage and Hospital had been running for several years.

However, most of the old 1150-foot concrete compound below had only been electrified for five days, so its actual usefulness had just begun.



In 2010, four months before the Hollywood Casino broke ground on Orphan's old site, Washington's secret keepers exhumed the underground facility and contents before the casino builders stumbled into it. At that time, an FDA satellite snapped this image.

Hayes used the hospital's attic with dormers (windows) as his office for NORA. Even with the windows closed, he heard ORPH Six rumble over Sullivant's Hill, early enough to watch it arrive.

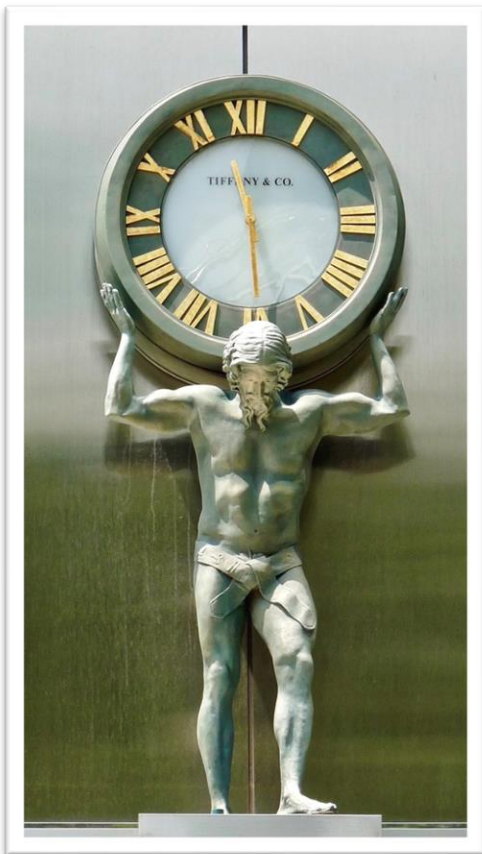
Near the empty war room, Tesla asked J Packard, one of Orphan's engineers, "where is Commander Hayes?"

"He is in his hospital office, above."

Nicola boarded the compound's second elevator with two levers hidden in its ornate trim. One lever sent it down to the secret base; the other sent it to Hayes's attic office. The elevator's visible lever only had two destinations, the hospital's first and second levels.

Spending time in Orphan's underground complex gave Hayes a new appreciation of windows. On top of Sullivant's Hill, his NORA office had a fine view of Ohio's statehouse, seven miles away. However, that view was now framed by those two enormous new asylums on this hill's eastern ridge.

Although this office was now his shrine, displaying a lifetime of his accomplishments and awards, it only had enough room to seat eight people.



As Tesla waited for that other elevator to arrive, Hayes's newest award rang.

It was a wall clock also created by Tiffany and Company. It was one of one hundred presented to America's Greatest leaders, chosen by the Boston Daily newspaper.

"Perfect timing," Hayes thought as he called Ivonta's desk.

"Tesla has arrived. He is here somewhere. Send Mclaughlin, Freeman, Yeager, and Conrad up here."

Freeman and Mclaughlin walked in first. "We have not found the girls yet,

so New Orleans is a go."

"I just heard Nicola arrive. Six should be ready to go in a half-hour," he said as Yeager and Conrad walked in.

Hayes handed his test pilots a list of military bases ready to refuel ORPH Six.

He told Lemont, "Call me from each stop. I'll be right here."

After several minutes, the elevator finally arrived for Tesla.

One of Hayes's six desk phones began ringing just as Tesla reached the attic office. Hayes answered each one, trying to figure out which was ringing. He complained, "These damn bells need different tones!"

"Hayes here."

"X, here."

"Rud, we found your hijacked stagecoach and horses."

"I just sent several dozen men to find your ladies."

"Where?"

"In Alexandria just across the river" (from Washington, DC).

"Who was with it?"

"No one; the horses were wandering around."

"They are clean as if they only traveled a couple of miles."

"All we found inside the coach was a red and gray scarf."

"Are you sure this is that coach?"

"It says Electro-Wonder over its doors; it has a six Clydesdale team and a dead light bulb in its ceiling."

"X, this does not make sense!"

"How did you find it?"

"The horses wandered into Arlington's city center."

"Stay on the line, X; I'm briefing agents right now; I be back in a moment."

Hayes put the ear cup down, "The coach and horses were just found in Arlington, Virginia, alone."

"It appears the girls are in or near DC."

"This is a diversion, Boss."

"Why?"

"The coach had to be quickly reassembled to abandon it where we would rapidly find it."

"If they wanted to dump it, they would have just thrown its parts off a bridge along their route."

"They are playing us like fools. They assume we did not know they dismantled it."

"You're right, Son!" Hayes agreed.

"Like always," Lemont added.

Hayes picked up the earpiece, "X, this is a diversion."

"A diversion?"

"They assume we have no clue that they dismantled that coach to ship it by rail. It would still be in Ohio if it wandered east."

"Call your men off; this is a ploy," Hayes told him."

"No, do not call them off, Boss," Lemont warned.

"They must be watching. If we start turning over every rock around DC, they will assume they fooled us and let their guard down."

"X don't call them off; send every agent you can spare. Let's make the White Knights believe that their diversion worked."

"Indeed."

“Boss, tell him to send undercover agents to every building with rail entries within two miles of Arlington. Also, have agents follow the largest pony-pies.”

“Did you get that, X?”

“Every word, anything else?”

“I’ll call you back in an hour.”

“On it, Rud, X out,” click.

“Boys, I mean men, let’s get to New Orleans.”

Hayes then placed a wooden box on his desk. He then removed five pistols and five 2-pound boxes of ammunition.

“These six-shooters prototypes from Webley are the most precise pistols we have ever evaluated. It is a shame they are made in England instead of here,” Hayes said as he passed them out.



As he handed one to Colin, he explained, “These are only on loan to us.”
“Webley calls these prototypes,” priceless,” and they want them back.”
“So, please don’t lose this one, Colin!”

“Have one crappy pistol, shot out of my hand by a counterfeiter, who I then chased down and hog-tied, but all he remembers is that gun,” Colin muttered.

Hayes then pulled two leather belts from the crate and handed them to Colin and Lemont.

“Put this on securely, so you won’t lose it,” Hayes told Colin.

After buckling them up, Hayes told them, “Twist the latch.”

As they did, part of the buckle’s frame popped into their hands, straightening itself into a brass tube.

“Wow, what is it?” Lemont asked.

“It is a blowgun, preloaded with a tiny dart, which will knock men out in seconds.”

“Just make sure you only blow in the same direction as its arrow points.”

“Make sure you don’t suck instead; that could be very bad.”

“I never suck, Boss.”

“20 more darts are hidden inside each belt,” Hayes said as he showed them how to access them.

“You already had these darts!” Colin blurted as he popped his little peashooter on and off the buckle.

“Engineer Packard built these buckles while you boys slept.”

“Today?”

“Yes. This morning, I asked him about those little darts Stone mentioned.”

"He whipped out his Sears Roebuck catalog. These knock-out darts are on page 447."

"Sears sells everything," Colin inserted.

"They have all kinds of darts."

"I was also right; they are even called 'Awls,'" Hayes added.

"Awls?" Colin asked.

"Their tips are molded from or covered with vampire bat spit from your old buddy, Doctor Awl's company."

"After that turd injected me with that crap, he tried to drill a hole through my head!" Colin responded.

Lemont blurted, "Boss, he never thanked me for saving his ass."

"I even missed a gourmet buffet with Senator Armstrong to rescue him."

"It is obvious that Lemont has never missed a meal!" Colin replied.

While shaking his head, "no," Hayes explained, "I called my old buddy Dick Sears. He had his man Roebuck take all the Awls and shooters they had in stock to their rail depot."

"I had (agents) Morton and Pluck, who were already in Chicago with ORPH Five, rush them down here."

"Dick only sells these grass reed blowguns," Hayes said as he pulled a bundle of them from the box.

"Grass reeds are too fragile and awkward for agents to hide, so I had Packard make these buckles while Stanley made the belts."

Hayes thought he read, "Where's mine?" expression on Tesla's face.

"They barely had time to finish these today. I'll have one for you when you return. Nicola."

"I doubt that I will need them, sir."

“Fine, but since this will be your first field mission, stay behind these two master agents. It is most helpful to follow seasoned pros at first.”

As the words “seasoned pros” echoed around the office, Colin’s preloaded dart nailed Hayes’s painting of General Grant between the eyes.



“Man, these things are accurate!” Colin remarked as he admired his shot.

“You killed Grant!” Lemont responded.

“Oh, no! I saved him from Confederate assassins!”

“Lucky punches. Blind squirrels find nuts occasionally,” Lemont commented.

“Pure aptitude! No luck needed.”

“Boss, this was the three hundred and sixty-fourth time he mentioned saving Grant without crediting the backhand I taught him.”

“That was the thousandth time Lemont brought up his backhand,” Colin responded.

“Things of great beauty deserve attention!” Lemont replied.

Hayes’s head shook that “no” motion again, “This is not playtime, boys.”

Still admiring the dart between Grant’s eyes, Tesla answered, “Yes, sir, I feel fortunate to have such professional mentors.”

“Nicola, you can take these reed shooters and a darts case right now if that makes you happy,” Hayes offered.

“No, sir; I’m already packing enough baggage. Just coming here today was the most fun I ever had alone,” Tesla, with his lab coat pockets bulging.

“Great, son.”

“Because of my latest ORPH improvements, I reached Columbus from New York twice as fast as anyone ever had.”

“Rather proud of himself,” Colin whispered to Lemont.

Then their eyes rolled as Hayes added, “Nicola, we would not have a way to chase them without you.”

Hayes then told them to meet at ORPH Six in 20 minutes. However, he kept Tesla for a few minutes to quickly brief him.

After a three-minute briefing, Hayes asked Tesla about those prototypes and notebooks stolen from his Manhattan home several years earlier.”

“Yes, what a mess.”

“You should have told me about this right away.”

“I ran to the New York (Secret Service) Office, four blocks from my house. You were six hundred miles away, and telephone lines did not reach Columbus yet.”

“Well, you did the right thing, son. But in the future, make sure I know about things like this.”

“Fine, sir.”

“Could any of those notes or prototypes be used against us?”

“Like a weapon?”

“Um, possibly, sir.”

“Possibly?”

“They took 17 notebooks packed with my designs.”

“Please elaborate.”

“Several devices can be controlled from a distance without wires.”

“From far away?”

“Potentially around the world. I’ve only operated prototypes within twenty miles so far, sir.”

“Could they ignite bombs from miles away?”

“Yes, if wired for that.”

“Wonderful.”

“What about the prototypes they stole?”

“That could be a problem.”

“Wonderful, again.”

“They took some dynamo-powered prototypes, which would be easier to duplicate than building from my notes.”

“Al (Edison) is already selling ventilation fans with your dynamos. So is George inside air pumps; everyone knows about your dynamos.”

“It’s not the dynamos. It’s the machines they power.”

“Machines, what machines?”

“Well, my boat.”

“They stole your boat?”

“It looked like a child’s toy since it was only two feet long.”

“What is special about it?”

“It can be operated from shore, or another boat, without wires.”

“What do you mean by “operated?”

“Piloted as if someone is aboard.”

“Precisely?”

“Very, in still water.”

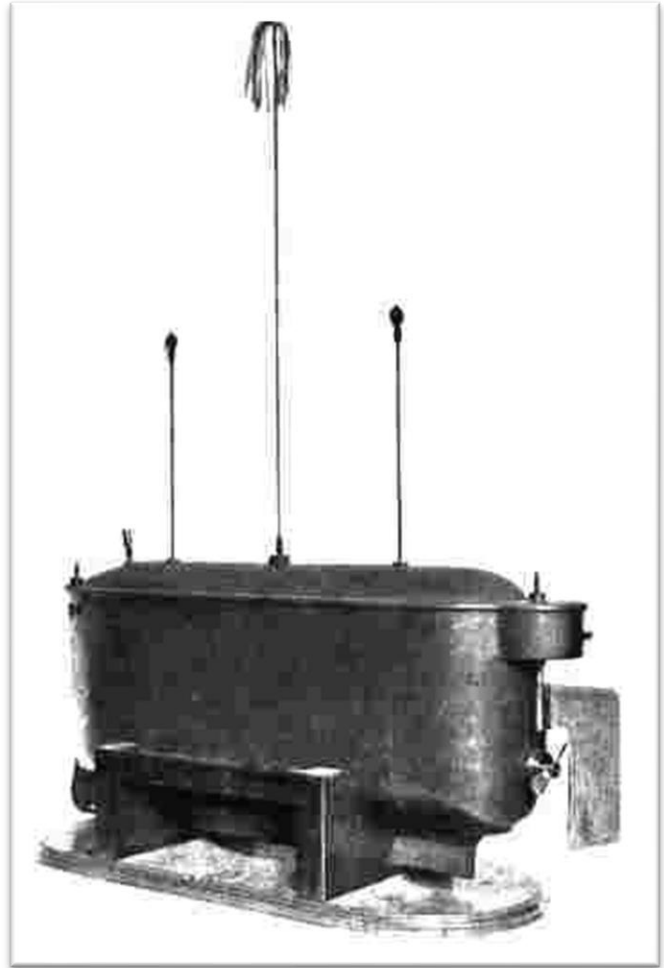
“From how far away?”

“Well, you need to be close enough to see it, to guide it.”

“How far is that?”

“With sharp eyes and a flag flying above in daylight, over a mile, maybe two.”

“Could the enemies of freedom put a bomb in it, then remotely blow-up ships?”



“Possibly, but there is not much room inside that prototype for more than a couple sticks of dynamite.”

“Could they build larger ones to carry more dynamite?”

“Sure.”

“Could they control a full-sized boat without a crew aboard?”

“Yes, with an immense amount of engineering, but hopefully, they haven’t figured out my notes.”

“I hope they have not because they won’t need boats larger than that prototype.”

“Why is that?”

“One book has an explosive formula; I call Scalar Ignitro.”

“I calculated that one pound will release the energy of 163 pounds of dynamite.”

“Good God.”

“I’ve never assessed it. I’ve never even produced a sample; I did not want the Hungarians to have it. It is only a design formula. It might not even work.”

“How often do your designs fail?”

“They sometimes need adjustments, but I don’t recall any total failures.”

“How good is your memory?”

“Like everything else.”

“Lovely.”

“Hopefully, they can’t break my code.”

“Your code?”

“I write my notes in code. Well, more confusion than code.”

“My sentences use words from eight languages, written backward.”

“Written Backwards?”

“Most people would have to read their reflections in a mirror to try reading them.”

“Your Clever ideas never end.”

“The mirror idea was Leonardo Da Vinci’s; I just added multiple languages.”

“I was not trying to fool everyone, just the Hungarian guards looking over my shoulders.”

“Are any more designs in those books that could be used against us?”

“Perhaps.”

“Perhaps?”

“One explains how to use modulation frequencies to shake down buildings, bridges, or worse.”

“Or Worse!?”

“Cause earthquakes.”

“Big earthquakes!?”

“Perhaps.”

“Mother of God!”

“Is that all?”

“Mostly.”

“Nicola, it looks like that White Knight Crime Syndicate I just briefed you on also stole your things.”

“These are white supremacists. They naturally hate America’s equality, freedom, and our constitution.”

“That’s not good, sir.”

“These hate mongers are technically savvy and overly funded.”

“We need to develop countermeasures to everything in those notebooks rapidly. Do you remember everything in them?”

“I do, but I also made copies before arriving here.”

“I copied them in Germany with a great engineering friend; he kept them for me.”

“After that break-in, he sent them to me, and I copied them again.”

“I put full sets in security boxes at two banks, one in Manhattan, the other in Pittsburgh.”

“Did you bring those keys with you?”

“I have almost everything with me. I’ve lived in this ORPH for four months, parked inside George’s (Westinghouse) New York facility.”

“I have not spent one night at my house in months.”

“You should leave those keys here with me. I will lock them in our safe. I will only use them if something happens to you.”

“If I can’t trust you, I can’t trust anyone.”

Tesla unzipped the little leather bag attached to his belt, extracted those keys, then gave them to Hayes. He then wrote a note with each bank's name and box number for the former US president.

Because Elias Howe already patented the zipper in 1851, Tesla never patented his little belt container. Today only a few hardcore nerds know that Nicola Tesla also invented the fanny pack.

“Nicola, Mclaughlin, and Freeman have profound respect for you. But they are intimidated by having you come along. So, forgive them if they act distant or aloof.”

“Thanks for the warning.”

“They met as kids fighting each other to win \$25.”

“They have never stopped trying to one-up each other ever since. They don’t seem to like each other, but they are closer than most brothers.

“Who won the cash?”

“Well, Lemont won the fight, but Colin won the money.”

“Must be another wild and crazy American thing,” Tesla thought.

“Now, help them find our girls, but stay behind them this time.”

“Yes, sir.”

11. April 27, 1883, Ancona, Italy



The Maximus V/Lady Sara

Almost two years before he snagged the Buckeye Beauties, Ty (and Max) Cross showed up at the Ancona Shipyard on Italy's east coast. They were there to pick up Ty's newest (fifth) yacht, the 300-foot Maximus V.

It was considered "earth's most beautiful ship," designed to be the swiftest ever. As a result, it could blow past the world's quickest warships.

It was the fifth 'five-masted tall ship' with a steel hull. But unlike its four predecessors, this ocean rocket used dual power sources, not just wind.

Beneath its four teakwood decks sat the largest coal-burning steam engine on the sea. Its two center masts were robust steel vent stacks soaring eighty-six feet above its upper deck. They only looked like wood.

Under perfect conditions, the combination of sails and a 2500 horsepower steam engine allowed this beauty to keep twenty-three knots (28 miles) per hour. This made her the fastest large ship on earth (when built).

All steel ships are painted to slow rust. The first four tall steel ships were painted dark gray, far too dull for Ty Cross. So, he had them paint this one white with a thick blue stripe.

After seeing its vast white sails filled during its first sea test, its builders called it “La Angelo Bianco,” the White Angel.

It was also the world’s first fully electrified ship. Every room had electric lighting. At night, its masts lit up like Christmas trees. Because it had no rival, it mesmerized everyone fortunate enough to see it, day or night.

Even Italy’s King Umberto’s private yacht, the second of these five steel-hauled tall ships, looked more like a cargo hauler by comparison. Its pampering level of luxury was also over the top.

It was to be ready for delivery on May 1, 1883, so Ty and Max arrived a week early to go shopping in Venice.

However, the same day they arrived at the shipyard (April 27th), a steam manifold exploded during a full pressure test. It had to be replaced.

It would take nearly two weeks to forge a more robust manifold and then rush it to the Italian Shipyard from Cross’s foundry in Holland.

Cross Shipping has had hundreds of ships built at this shipyard since 1780. So, King Umberto invited Ty and his son to sail to a private sporting event with him.

The Reale Ludi Munus was held every Mayday (May 1st) for 18-20 royal families inside Syracuse’s Nero Theatrum, a Roman amphitheater built during the time of Jesus.

“Will Alfonso (Spain’s King) be there?” Ty asked King Umberto.

“I have not discussed this year’s event with him. However, his gladiators have won three of the last five years. He sailed home with nearly three tons of gold, so I would be surprised by his absence.”

“Good.”

“So, what do you need to discuss with him, my friend?”

“He is planning a price increase for Cuban tobacco and sugar, which I would have to pass on. I need to keep prices stable for at least my best customers like Italy,” Ty lied.

“Good for you!”

“By the way, I heard that ort Alcona will start building Alfonso’s next personal ship after your Maximus V departs.”

“His personal vessel?”

“I do not have any details,” the Italian king lied.

Since they had to wait for that manifold, Ty decided to go sporting with Umberto.

Twelve hours later, they set sail for the Port of Syracuse in the King’s private vessel, the Bella Enchantadora. This ship was the first of those five steel-hauled tall ships. But it was that ugly dark gray.

Ty was pleased King Alfonso’s ship was already docked when they reached Syracuse.

The Cross family and Spain’s kings shared many things beyond tobacco and sugar.

Ty inherited two secluded ports and a hidden bay in Cuba. That bay (and surrounding land) was deeded to Ty's great grandfather, Captain Adrian Maximus Christofis, by King Charles III of Spain, in 1767.

However, the British would dub Christofis "The Last Caribbean Pirate."

In 1766, Captain Christofis was commissioned to haul a shipment of cocoa beans to the King of Portugal's (his boss) warehouse after dropping off a load of enslaved Africans in Brazil.

As they loaded his ship, the slaves continually complained, "these beans are heavy as rocks!"

After finishing, he noticed his ship was drafting a half foot low. So, after verifying it was water-tight, he checked those crates.

Each of those eight hundred crates had a false bottom jammed with golden Incan treasure.

Sea captains were paid 2%-10% of their cargo's total value upon delivery. Thus, his commission should have been enough to buy a fleet of ships.

Feeling cheated, Christofis and his trusted mates transferred the treasure to an old rotten ship he bought as scrap. He sunk his fine Portuguese ship several hours after they set sail. He reported that it had become too heavy to manage a sudden storm, so all the king's cocoa beans were lost.

Christofis had an old friend show up just in time (in that scrap ship) to rescue him and his clueless crew.

Several months later, he and his trusted mates docked the old ship in Havana, Cuba. Though Cuba's governor, he offered Spain's king two of the four treasure chests he stole from Portugal's king. Christofis had filled forty chests with treasure.

Before approaching Cuba, he had slaves bury thirty-six chests on thirty-six separate Eastern Caribbean islands (one per island). A century later, these same thirty-six islands had become his great-grandson, Ty Cross's Republic of Tyberia.

Christofis cleverly put pinholes in his star map. When this map was placed directly over Portugal's official map of the Caribbean, those holes pinpointed the location of each chest. He and his six mates then sank the rotten old boat, with the slaves still chained inside. Now only he and his trusted mates knew anything about the thirty-six treasure chests.

Christofis asked to have Spain's King deed him the land around an unnamed lake hidden behind a row of hills along Cuba's south-central coast in exchange for the two chests.

Twelve years earlier, Christofis was the First Mate on a Spanish ship. After a storm did sink that one, he washed up alone on the beach beneath these hills.

He soon noticed a creek flowing into the sea between several jungle-covered hills. It flowed from that inland lake to the sea. About a half-mile inland, the coastal jungle turned into desert.

Spain's King saw no use for this remote site. So, he sent a message to his governor to send him both chests and issue the deed.

Christofis was fascinated by Dutch engineering because it had turned hundreds of square miles of the Atlantic Ocean into usable land.

Then he had more slaves build two small cofferdams (mounds of rock and soil), one at each end of this short creek. He had them enlarge the stream into a canal that could allow large ships to enter the hidden lake, creating the perfect place to hide them. He called it "Campa La Jagua."

Christofis knew that Kings could not be trusted, so he set out to become so valuable to Spain that its king would never turn on him.

Several months earlier, Lloyds of London (earth's first insurance company) began underwriting new British ships against damage and loss.

This gave Christofis the plan to become the king's hero.

Under unrelated company names, they began buying one new English galleon a year. Each ship was supposedly lost at sea while carrying extremely valuable (also insured) cargo. Suspicion was avoided because each vessel seemed to be owned by a different owner.

These new English ships were sailed into that hidden bay, then altered to look like Spanish galleons. Christofis then sold these nearly new Spanish imposters in Nassau.

The Spanish King and Christofis shared the insurance reimbursements and their precious cargo. They pulled this scam off six years in a row, through 1775.

That year, Lloyds began offering insurance for used ships built in any country if they first passed stringent inspections.

While inspecting a nearly new Spanish galleon, Lloyd's inspectors realized it was an English ship that had already been covered as a total loss.

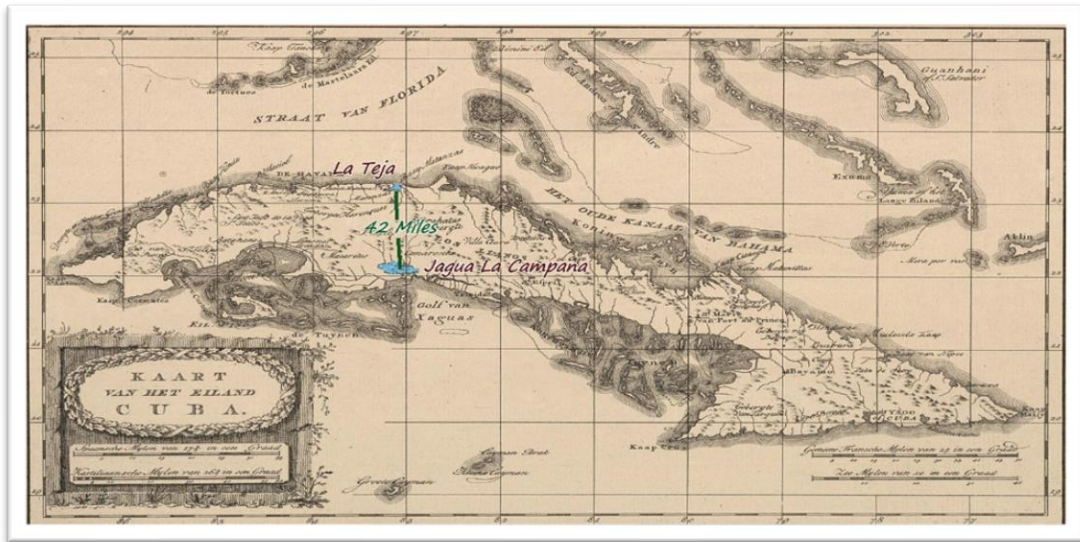
Its new owner was arrested, but his paperwork proved that he had legally bought it in Nassau. Nassau's British governor and its earlier owner, Captain Adrian Christofis, had signed over a faked Spanish title.

Unaware of Christofis's hidden bay, King George III sent a dozen British warships to hunt him down. But, after six months of searching, the American colonies suddenly declared independence from England, forcing King George to divert these ships to fight his new war.

Christofis took this opportunity to move his family to Corpus Christi, Mexico (not yet Texas), where he changed their surname to Cross.

Thirty-seven years later (1813), his son (Ty's grandfather), Claudius Maximus Cross, turned La Teja, his second base in North Central Cuba, into one of Earth's most beautiful tobacco plantations.

La Teja was over seven hundred miles away from Campa La Jagua by sea. However, these Cuban bases were only separated by forty-two easy miles by land.



Claudius also opened Cross Shipping International, bringing millions of enslaved Africans to the New World Under horrendous conditions.

He turned CSI into the largest privately held shipping company on earth. Although CSI shipped almost everything anywhere, slaves stayed its most profitable product, even after the Civil War.

In 1856, Ty inherited thousands of ships and boats, hundreds of companies, a quarter-million slaves, Cuban bays, several dozen plantations, and his Great Grandfather's treasure maps.

His Cuban bays were so close by land Ty figured out how to smuggle two thousand Spanish cannons (copies of India-made) to the Confederacy during the Civil war.

This would have been a significant advance for the Confederacy because the Union Navy used Cuba's 1300-mile length as part of its embargo line.

Cross could smuggle those cannons across Cuba and then use small fishing boats to deliver them to the confederacy.

However, English spies exposed Spain's plan to disguise their cannons for the Confederacy. King Edward VII informed Lincoln, who then asked the Spanish king about this. King Alfonso denied everything as he chickened out, canceling the plan.

12. Orphan Control March 7th, 1885, 3:00 pm

Yeager had already logged over 5500 miles test piloting ORPH Six, so he knew what it could do.

The rails from Columbus through Indiana were the flattest until Mississippi. Since it was still daytime, Yeager told Conrad to “Take a nap (in the caboose) while I let the agents play co-pilot for a couple of hours.”

As Mclaughlin and Freeman began elbowing each other for the co-pilot seat. Yeager’s head shook that same “no” motion that had greatly strengthened Hayes’s neck.

When the big boy elbow match escalated to slapping, Yeager punched all three drive systems at once.

Everything other than Orphan’s first two secret agents took off. They seemed to freeze in space as the ORPH kept moving. But that experience only lasted a moment, then the steel wall (in front of the oil tank and water tub) slammed into them.

Lemont’s jacket snagged an iron coat hook as they slid down, which slowed his three hundred and thirty pounds enough that he landed on top of Colin.

Colin’s grunt drowned out this ORPH’s angry roar for a moment.

Yeager reversed his power stick as the agents staggered to their feet. This turned Tesla’s electrical drive system into magnetic brakes, flinging them airborne again.

While soaring forward, Lemont grabbed a handrail as Colin’s tonsils hard kissed the steel wall behind the two pilot compartments.

Like that coat hook, that handrail held for a moment before breaking loose. This delay lasted long enough for Colin to cushion Lemont's massive impact again.

When Colin's orphaned lungs re-inflated, his giant partner had already stuffed himself into the co-pilot's seat.

Unlike Tesla, test pilot Yeager was no daredevil. He had no interest in finding this ORPH's top speed. In his mind breaking Tesla's 149MPH on rails designed for 40MPH was beyond stupid.

However, before they crossed the Ohio River from Indiana, the rails were straight and smooth. So, he allowed both agents to break 100 MPH to shut them up. Lemont reached 103.

After 45 minutes, it was Colin's turn.

As Colin reached one hundred, he pleaded, "Nicola hit 149 just a hours ago; we need to hit 150 at least and be the fastest men on earth! Let's Go!"

"Tesla might be the smartest guy, but that does not mean he is intelligent, just a lot less stupid than many of us," Yeager said as he glanced straight at Colin.

With his eyes back on the tracks, Yeager added, "We have already traveled faster than any group of men ever has."

"Even though we can't tell anyone, we are breaking the world's land speed record right now, as a team!" They were traveling at 105 MPH.

"Come on, man, it has much more, so let's crank her up!"

"Kill yourself when I'm not around. This is not some circus ride, and I don't need clowns distracting me."

Yeager then rotated Tesla's microphone dial to "CABOOSE," then pressed it.

"Hey, Conrad."

"Yeah," his bell-shaped brass speaker replied.

"We are approaching the hills; we need a stable co-pilot."

"What a killjoy," Collin thought.

ORPH Six was likely the first vehicle with an electric intercom, which was most helpful. Without this, occupants would have to climb a catwalk above the water tub and oil reserves just to speak with the pilots.

As Colin entered the surgical car (Tesla's mobile laboratory), Nicola worked on several tiny stones as Lemont attentively watched.

Still used to having Hungarian agents watch his every move, over his shoulder, Nicola ignored them.

Colin and Lemont soon began competing for a better view. Once Tesla heard their breath, he began explaining what he was creating.

He pointed at several pearl-sized stones wired together. "When I pass an electrical current through this crystal, that identical one will pulsate."

"What does that mean?" Lemont asked.

"It will vibrate without being wired up."

Tesla then held up a wooden block, about the size of a deck of cards. It had a spring button switch and a round gauge that resembled a pocket compass. It also had two wires leading to a battery about twice its size.

"This is a locator. It has an identical crystal inside. This needle will point at it when a tiny current energizes its twin."

“From how far away?” Lemont asked.

“In good conditions, I’ve reached about 20 miles.”

“Wow!” Lemont responded.

“Watch what happens when I put that crystal set (the two different little stones wired together) in my mouth.”

The needle suddenly pointed straight at him.

Lemont asked, “If Sara had one when they nabbed her, would it point her out?”

“If we were close enough.”

“How far is its range?”

“Again, up to about twenty miles, so far. It won’t work as well in a dry mouth. Water and salt help carry electricity through our bodies.”

The two agents looked at each other in amazement.

“If we planted one in the mouth of those big, abducted men, could we follow them to that hidden Island base?” Lemont asked.

“Again, if we are close enough. Are you volunteering, Mr. Freeman? You certainly fit the description.”

“No, well, I have not considered this.”

“You could maybe help us find them,” Tesla suggested.

“If I were a big brownie, I’d volunteer,” Colin added.

“That’s easy for someone as white as a cracker to say.”

“You’re a big boy. All I must do is fix you up with some brown shoe polish.”

“Sure, I’m pretty, but why fake being black when we got the real thing?”

“You know it’s better to die a young hero than as a wimpy old turd.”

“I’ll see what Hayes has to say about it,” Lemont decided.

Upfront, Yeager told Conrad, “It will be dark at 18:40 Central. If we stop at Nashville, we will lose daylight. We have enough oil to reach Memphis.”

“Next stop, Memphis.”

ORPH Six’s three weapon systems were run from another dual-seat console inside this ORPH’s weapon car. This message was posted on its exterior door:

WARNING:

Deadly Disease Confinement!

Do not enter!

The weapons car’s walls, floor, roof, doors, and hatches were forged from a still top-secret carbon-steel mixture (stainless steel).

Four inches of that secret alloy divided this car into two rooms. The small room was for control; the large one held and deployed the weapons.

Electric dynamos drove mechanical arms that extended the weapons above this car.

The control console used a pair of semi-secret aiming devices, called “periscopes,” which also extended above the car.

The flamethrower was a defensive system spraying (and igniting) oil from the ORPH’s 1000-gallon tank. It was mounted on a rotating arm to spread a fire ring around the Orph.

The fifty-caliber Gatling gun also used a rotating turret for defensive or offensive action. While activated, water (for the steam engine) was pumped around its barrels, keeping them cool enough to fire fifty-five thousand bullets.

The third weapon system was purely offensive. Its howitzer (cannon) could slam targets up to six miles away with 12-pound shells. This was also the first cannon that mechanically reloaded itself. It could fire three times a minute because Tesla’s water-cooled design kept it from overheating.

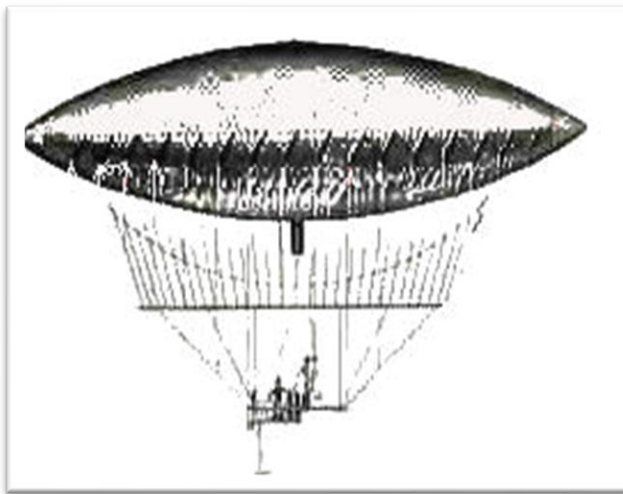
The following car was for storage. Half of it was a vapor-compression refrigerator, which could keep food, beverages, and a pile of dead bodies fresh.

Besides the locomotive, only the last two cars had windows. The fourth was a low-profile passenger car that could haul forty agents, troops, or prisoners.

The fifth car (today) was a low-slung caboose. It had a kitchen, dining booth, and six sleeping compartments designed for extra-large men, as was the case for almost every Orphan agent; even Tesla was 6’4”.

This ORPH also had seven toilets, basically holes hidden under its built-in seats. But, unlike Ty Cross’s phantom train, no plumbing was involved; they just dumped onto the tracks.

Both dual-console seats (pilot and weapon) had these holes under their fold-up butt cushions. Tesla also honored Joseph Gayetty by installing toilet paper dispensers beside each converting chair.



Thanks to Orphan's massive secret budget, Hayes did not know that Nicola and George had also built a new car for ORPH Six, "The Flight Car."

The Flight-Car concealed a folding dirigible that could quickly inflate and launch through its roof by opening

a pressurized hydrogen tank.

It could carry a thousand pounds of agents and or cargo.

Tesla's motivation was to provide Orphan agents with a bird's eye view during reconnaissance.

A Hydrogen balloon would have been far simpler to use. However, Tesla decided on dirigibles because they could be directed while balloons just flow with the wind.

Other than its dynamos, Tesla did not create this airship. Instead, his French engineering body, Jules Henri Giffard (inventor of dirigibles), built this unique folding version in France. Then a Cross Shipping company delivered it to Westinghouse's New York facility.

13. Memphis base 7:14 pm March 7th, 1885

As Naval engineers excitedly replenished ORPH Six's liquids, someone informed Lemont, "you are the first negro to use the Admiral's telephone."

"We have not found that train yet," Hayes told him.

"Everything happened so rapidly, we (I) assumed they were also rushing to New Orleans. However, there are at least eight routes by rail; they must have taken a less direct path."

"That makes sense, Boss. Casually walking away attracts far less attention than running."

"The New Orleans evidence keeps piling up. But to keep those White Knights assuming we are spinning in confusion, I stopped searching all south bounds and started searching trains near DC."

"As long as they think they fooled us, the more they will drop their guard, Boss."

"That's the plan."

"Anything else, Boss?"

"Something so strange it has to be true."

"Yeah."

"Two weeks ago, a federal marshal in New Orleans questioned a Jamaican beautician about \$200 the local police found on her. She claimed a masked man gave it to her to do up several pretty northern ladies inside an old jail or fort."

"She was ordered to act like she could not speak English, so she did not learn their story."

"She said she was taken in a windowless wagon, so she did say where the old jail is."

"The ride took less than an hour, so they were in or near New Orleans."

"The next day, her home and salon were empty, and she was long gone."

"Wow."

"Lemont, a story about pretty kidnaped Yankee ladies, is not something someone would just make up; it has to be based on fact."

"It's like those hijacked men also seeing hot white ladies in ropes. These might even be the same ladies."

"This sighting twice is no coincidence."

"Just more verifying New Orleans."

"You knew it, Boss."

"We'll see. I have your morning schedule."

"Go ahead."

"At 8:00 AM your time, that federal marshal..., ah," Hayes said as he looked through his notes.

"Marshal Clyde Dupree will meet you at the New Orleans Navy base. He will fill you in on this lady and help you move around town."

"Dupree suspects that this beautician met these ladies inside an ancient French fort beside the Mississippi River. You will roll past it several minutes before reaching the naval shipyard."

"You want us to stop and check the place out?"

"Yes, but just from a distance. It is a Moroccan consulate; we can't even get a search warrant for it. It would be an act of war to force our way in, which could expose Orphan's so far, perfect cover."

"Isn't it an act of war for a nation to kidnap another's citizens?"

"That's for judges to decide, not you or Colin."

"Boss, they would remove any evidence before allowing us in."

"That's the way it works. But since you roll right past it, have Yeager stop long enough to look around."

"Got it, Boss."

"Like usual, you are a famous music band hunting for a member's missing girlfriend."

"If those White Knights suspect federal agents, they could expose Orphan's existence to the world."

"We just make music, Boss."

Then Lemont explained Tesla's tracking device and possibly going deep undercover to find those big brown men.

"Find our ladies first while I ponder this," Hayes said before asking, "Is Nicola Tesla with you?"

"I can see him outside. He has a swarm of navy engineers crowded around him."

"Break him loose; I need to talk to him."

"Hold on."

Lemont stepped outside and yelled, "Nicola, Hayes wants you."

"Tesla here."

“Nicola, are you sure your tracking gismo can point out Lemont from 20 miles away?”

“If nothing interferes.”

“I’d prefer ten miles.”

“Do you know this technology well enough to trust it?”

“I have been evaluating it for years. Dozens of my inventions use this; it’s proven exceptionally dependable to me.”

“If I heard of a device like this from anyone else, I would not even consider this. Hell, I probably would not even believe it.”

“It’s actual simple science, sir.”

“Simple for you, maybe. But if you say it works, I know it does.”

“Can you put Lemont back on the line?”

“Give me a minute.”

“Yea, Boss.”

“Are you up for something this risky?”

“It’s my job to stop organized crime under disguise. What these big men are being used for could be a huge problem for our country.”

“Certainly.”

“I am the only big Black American secret agent; it’s me or no one.”

“I’m just not going to send you off halfcocked.”

“Never been accused of that before.”

“Right.”

“How’s Colin? Is he thinking straight?”

“He’s normal, not straight; he has been punched many times.”

“I know how he feels; this is just as personal to me.”

“How so?”

“You must know that Elizabeth and I have been close for years. But we keep that behind locked doors, for obvious reasons.”

“Sure, I know.”

“Colin seems less disturbed about Sara than I am about Liz. He is as overconfident as ever and just as distracted by personal pleasure.”

“I’m fine.”

“Well, adapt your standard cover.”

Lemont plays the Irish Orphan’s Road manager on planned missions (with shows). Since the band donates ticket revenue to each area’s orphanages, this gives NORA the excuse for supplying them with an ORPH to use as a modern tour bus.

While touring (planned shows) in an ORPH, NORA also sends a doctor (medical agent) to help local orphanages.

“Call me as soon as you arrive at the New Orleans Navy base. I live here until we can get a telephone line to my house.”

“Yes, Boss.

“Now find them, very quietly. Hayes out.”

14. 9:42 PM, Saturday, March 7th, 1885

Every off-duty mechanic, engineer, and nerd at the Memphis Naval base had joined those on duty to check out Orphan's amazing new 'railroad ambulance' and meet Nicola Tesla.

They had seen a few ORPHS before, but that was like comparing a white Subaru to the only black Corvette.

As he put down his navigation abacus, Conrad told Yeager, "40 miles an hour should have us beside the old fort by zero-five hundred" (5 AM).

Before pressing it, Yeager spun Tesla's intercom dial to its "ALL CARS" position.

"Mr. Tesla," Yeager announced as if Nicola was the other man aboard, "HOLD ON TIGHT! Let's make all your new friends happy."

Yeager slammed all three drive systems to maximum, solely for all those mechanical fans' amusement.

ORPH Six was also the world's fastest drag-racer, even though that word existed. Yeager could not hear or see those navy engineers jumping and cheering as his rail rocket blasted off, but he knew they were.

"God, that's so fun!" He told his co-pilot.

Yeager had locked Lemont and Colin out of the locomotive, so they sat in the surgical car to watch Tesla invent.

"It's nearly ready to evaluate," Tesla said several minutes later.

He had set two pearl-sized crystals inside a pinky finger-sized chunk of clay. The thin copper wire that connected the crystals extended beyond both ends of the clump.

That second crystal only allowed the electrical current to flow in one direction, which kept the “signal crystal” energized.

He told Lemont, “Before we harden it, you need to shape it. Press it down behind your bottom lip and gum until it feels comfortable.”

As soon as it entered his mouth, that needle on the locator began pointing at Lemont.

“It’s working.”

Tesla then walked around the car to verify that the needle would continue pointing at him. “Excellent!” Tesla excitedly proclaimed.

Maybe 30 seconds later, Tesla accidentally pulled the wire loose from the battery in his pocket.

The instant he reconnected it, “Lemont blurted, “Ouch! The thing just shocked me.”

“Did that minuscule voltage hurt you?” Tesla asked.

“No, no, it surprised me, like a bug.”

Tesla then reconnected it again, “Did you feel it?”

“Plain as day.”

“This is fascinating!” Tesla remarked.

“Let’s try counting how many times I complete this circuit.”

The inventor tapped the connection six times with his back turned to Lemont.

“I got six.”

“Excellent!”

“This is like a bonus from God!”

“A bonus from God?” Lemont asked as he shared the same confused expression as Colin.

“I’ll explain after we can verify a short distance,” the excited inventor replied.

“Take out your watch,” he told Lemont.

“Wait exactly two minutes for me to reach the caboose.”

“Then, just during the third minute, count how bugs you feel.”

“Fine.”

“Start now,” Tesla said while checking his pocket watch.

Nicola opened that circuit twenty-three times from the caboose, then returned to the surgical car.

“I got 23 plain as day,” Lemont told Tesla as he opened the door.

“Excellent!”

“Are the sensations only quick snaps?” he asked.

“Yes, just little pops.”

“Do you realize what we just invented?”

“The agents just looked at each other.”

“With the right code, I could send you messages without wires!”

“This is a discovery of unimaginable importance!”

“Both agents suddenly realized the value.”

Tesla then mumbled, “We need a code of just dots.”

“Morse Code needs dots and dashes, so we need a different code.”

Colin, the world-famous musician (in Columbus), suggested, “Maybe not.”
“What If you send dots at a steady tempo, then skip for dashes? Then used double blanks for the spaces between words. That could use only dots to send Morse Code.”

“You got an inventor hiding in you, Agent Mclaughlin,” Tesla complimented.

“Normally, he just reinvents turds,” Lemont added.

Tesla then asked Lemont, “Do you know Morse Code?”

“Like the back of my hand. I have been sending Hayes’s messages since the war.”

“Give me a few minutes,” Tesla said.

He then ran the battery wire through a rubber-coated clip so that the circuit only connected when squeezed.

Colin interrupted just as Tesla was about to send the first words. “Hey Nicola, I also mastered Morse code and have musical timing, so how about letting me send the first wireless words?”

“Fine. I also know Morse Code but have rarely used it,” Tesla said as he handed Colin that squeeze switch.

“Okay, ready big boy?”

“Fire away!”

“Read it and weep, - -- .- - ..- .-. -..”

“I-a.m.-a-T.u.r.d” slowly rolled off Lemont’s lips.

“And you smell like one, too,” Colin announced.

However, this hour’s load of inventing was not quite over yet.

That protruding copper wire began jabbing Lemont’s lip, so he picked up one of Tesla’s tiny screwdrivers to manipulate it.

Tesla saw his locator’s needle jump as the tool touched the device.

“Do that again.”

“Do what again?”

“What you just did with that screwdriver.”

The needle jumped again.

“Try that with a nail,” Tesla said as he handed him one.

It worked again.

“You know what this means?”

“What?” Lemont asked.

“Two-way communications, over miles, like telegraphs without poles and wires! What a wonderful day this has been,” Tesla glowed.

A few minutes later, the slightly less impressed agents retired to the caboose for some sleep.

Tesla spent the rest of the night charging batteries, hardening Lemont’s mouthpiece, and proving more possibilities.

New Orleans Saturday, March 8th, 5 AM



Although the phantom train and its happy hostages were less than three miles away from ORPH Six, they might as well have been four hundred miles it.

The quickest route from Columbus ran south along the Mississippi River's west bank. However, Crosswinds was east of the river. Louisiana would not have a bridge over this half-mile-wide river until 1935. The nearest bridge was about two hundred miles away in Mississippi, so the Buckeye Beauties were over four hundred miles away by rail.

However, that 200-year-old French fort was along the river's west bank. In 1812 Morocco's Sultan Slimane bought it to warehouse his nation's greatest export, African slaves. This fort saw little use after slavery was abolished in the USA.

However, because Moroccan, not USA, laws governed this fort, owning and abusing slaves was still perfectly legal inside its walls.

The 20-foot wall around the fort had two ornate wrought iron gates. Its Eastgate faced its Mississippi River dock. Morocco installed this inland side gate when this railroad came through.

That curtain track did not reach the fort. It ran beside these southbound rails about 1200 feet west of its western wall.

“Until now, I thought it was good to replace boilermen with an oil pump,” Conrad told himself. It took all his strength to free the rusted switch curtain track lever.

As soon as Yeager parked the ORPH on that sidetrack, he called Colin and Lemont on the intercom.

Colin then told Lemont, “You stay here. I’ll do this alone. If someone sees you, that could blow your big brownie cover. You are six sizes beyond forgettable, and you know, only I run like the wind.”

“Just don’t cause an incident.”

“Who me? I’ll go for a nice stroll around the place, then come back,’ Colin said while slipping into his dark overalls.

The wall surrounding the old fort was 1200 feet long. The prominent building inside the wall covered a quarter acre.

This wall supported eight watchtowers, rising another fifteen feet above the 20-foot wall. There was one tower at each corner of the square complex and two more beside each gate. However, the towers and the fort looked unoccupied.

The inland side gate was chain locked. Like a drunk stumbling after a long night, he walked to the original entrance overlooking the river.

The front gate was also chain locked. But the place was not completely abandoned; some light was flickering inside a small wooden guard shack about 20 feet inside the locked entrance.

Colin saw one uniformed man, but he looked too old to defend anything.

He grabbed the gate, then began yelling, "Help, sir, I need your help!"

He came out, then walked up to the chained gate, unarmed.

"Sir, my hound dog, Clementine, just chased a rabbit under your back gate. So now he's lost in there somewhere. I need to get in there to rescue him."

"This is Moroccan Republic land; You will need Prince Charles or Ambassador Johnson's written permission."

"I cannot allow anyone in. But if I see a hound, I will tie it to this gate for you. Come back about an hour after daybreak."

"Well, Clementine will not come up to strangers. Why don't you just let me come in and find her?"

"I am not here to harm you; you can even hold my gun," Colin said as he gently pulled the revolver out of his belt, then let it dangle from two fingers.

"Without correct written permission, no one enters."

"Come on, man," Colin yelled as the watchman turned back towards his shack.

"I won't tell anyone you helped me find him."

"I will even give you fifty dollars if you let me in."

He turned and said, "I'll take your money when it is attached to written permission from Ambassador Johnson."

"Where is he?"

"He is in Washington, DC," the watchman said as he turned back towards his shack."

The former cop in Colin told him, "This place was hiding the truth," so he decided to get inside one way or another.

A thick braid of barbed wire capped the fort's 20-foot wall as the iron gates were topped with rusty blades and spears. Going through instead of over the wall made more sense to Colin.

He slowly walked beyond the guard's view, then hit full speed as he sprinted to the ORPH's Weapons Car. As he sat, he pulled the lever that Tesla labeled "Boom."

One of the car's roof hatches opened, then a 12-inch howitzer rose through the opening.

Using the control panel's periscope marked "Boom," Colin spun the cranks which aimed the cannon. He then pushed the red "Boom Button" that protruded from the lever's handle.

About one second later, a 12-inch bomb slammed into the western gate.

Unlike steel, wrought iron is far too brittle to bend, so this gate shattered like glass. A couple of seconds later, shrapnel had spread over a half-mile; some even pelted this brand new Orph.

Lemont reached the weapon car just as Colin was rushing out.

"What the hell are you doing!?"

"I'm going to get her!" Colin yelled as he ran off.

About a minute later, he entered the old fort, where it once had a rear gate.

Tesla and Lemont grabbed their handguns and torches before cautiously heading out. As they crept around ORPH Six, they noticed an iron spear protruding from one of its brass spotlights (headlights).

“Damn! We did not even paint it yet!” Tesla complained.

As Lemont told him, “No problem, Bob can fix it right when we return.”

Colin had already found twelve jail cells, but no one was present.

Even the watchman had left. After the blast, he trotted off towards a nearby donut emporium to find a local deputy marshal.

Tesla and Lemont entered the old fort several minutes later.

Lemont found a wooden crate of corroded iron shackles in one of the cells. He twisted one with his large pizza-sized hands, and it shattered.

“Even you could break these things,” Lemont said as he handed one to Colin.

As he picked his torch back up, Lemont told Tesla, “We should tell Edison to make a battery-powered light cannon that we can carry.”

“I make a far better electric light than he ever has. No one mentions that his light bulbs waste 90% of the electricity they burn; mine don’t!”

“He is jealous of Edison,” Lemont incorrectly assumed.

Colin then yelled, “Come here, look at this!”

“What is a beauty salon doing inside an old, abandoned jail!?” Colin asked Lemont and Nicola as they entered that cell.

They could tell that the salon was still active. It was the only clean, nearly dust-free cell, and none of its body oils were rancid.

As dawn was breaking, at about 6:20 AM, mounted police finally arrived at the old French fort. However, ORPH Six and this crew were already inside the naval base, several miles away.

It was clear that the missing ladies and big brown men came through this fort. However, they found no trace of Sara and her Buckeye Beauties.

15. Crosswinds Plantation, 7:00 AM, March 8th, 1885



Although The Phantom train arrived at 5:00 AM, Cameroon did not wake the sleeping beauties until 7:30.

“♪I let you rest past the rising sun, so now it's time for real fun.”

“♪Don't clean up here; your new suites have lit-up mirrors. ♪”

“♪Your new wardrobes are already there. ♪”

♪” And so are Jamaican beauticians to do your hair♪.”

It was 80 degrees (Fahrenheit) when they disembarked onto a stunning flower garden. They trudged through four inches of new snow to reach rehearsal five days earlier. By comparison, entering this tropical paradise seemed magical.

Because locomotives still belched thick black smoke, Ty had Crosswind's private train depot erected 1200 feet downwind (east) of the mansion. A small topless electric rail car supplied transportation to and from the estate house.

They rolled past billions of flowers, five waterfalls, three fountains, dozens of ancient Roman and Egyptian statues, four pavilions, and three

swimming pools. The plantation looked like a private nineteenth-century Water park designed by Walt Disney.

Crosswinds also featured the only white sand beach in the states. However, this beach was unnatural; Ty had this sand shipped here from the Bahamas. However, several signs warned:

Warning-Deadly Danger!
Do not swim in the lake, use pools!

Lake Pontchartrain is the home of many deadly creatures, including sharks, alligators, amoebas, and a selfish tyrant. It is the only large lake with both fresh and saltwater.

Six eighty-foot blue ship sails supplied much of the shade over Crosswinds beach area. Groundskeepers would continuously adjust these sails to prevent the pasty-white Ohio sweeties from getting burned.

A glowing twelve-foot stone wall, made of Alabama marble (the world's whitest), enclosed this 1.5 square mile plantation along its three dry sides.

Twelve feet beyond its western wall was a half-mile-long canal that Ty's father built so his ships to reach Crosswinds from the Mississippi River.

Ty Cross was obsessed with beauty and technology. He had architects continually designing and redesigning his opulent homes. His Tyberian Technical Center's engineers (at Sainte Marguerite) ensured that all his estates offered the latest technologies.

The suites inside the mansion were all inspired by royal palaces.

When the girls entered their private suites, one of their new lightweight dresses (and matching attire) was already selected for this day. However, gorgeous (yet creepy) mannequins were wearing these dresses. Each dummy was a copy of the Buckeye Beauty assigned to its suite.

These new silk dresses weighed less than one pound. They wore ten-pound dresses during hot Ohio Augusts, so they were initially reluctant.

However, they became show-off excited after their electric lit mirrors exposed how gorgeous their dancing bodies looked in them.

At 9:50, Black butlers in white tuxedos led the girls into the lake-facing garden for Ty's arrival on the Maximus V.

In the large gazebo beside Crosswind's main pool, a band played a fresh style of music called "Ragtime." Their happy new grooves were invented by a teenager named Scott Joplin, who happened to be this band's youngest member.

Flying on an 85-foot pole above that gazebo were seven flags. The top flag featured a white background with that blue Saint Andrew's Cross and a white six-sided star where the blue lines intersect.

The other flags had the first name of each Buckeye Beauty in their favorite color.

Cameroon never mentioned the Maximus V, but he told them that Ty would be arriving by boat. As the ship suddenly turned into view from only about five hundred yards away, they were stunned by its beauty and size.

"I had no idea ships could be so beautiful!" said Sara, who had spent almost her entire life inland.

As the ship parked on its double-decker dock, the Chief of Staff led a parade of chefs, beauticians, maids, acrobats, jugglers (juggling), and butlers outside to welcome Ty.

As soon as it lowered its gangway, the band began playing "Big Daddy" from Sara's musical, "The Ladies Come First."

However, Two Ty Crosses seemed to be looking down at them from the ship's bow.

"Oh, my Goodness!" Dorothy yelled, "Ty has a twin!"

"That's Ty and his eldest son Max" Cameroon explained.

"Which one is Ty?" Sara asked. is

"The immaculately dressed guy, waving at me."

"The one yawning is Max."

"Since his thirteenth birthday, Max has been Prime Minister of Tyberia."

"They elected a thirteen-Year-old?" Sara responded.

"The rest of the world does not vote for its leaders; that's an American tradition."

"Ty owns all thirty-six islands of Tyberia. His opinion is all that matters."

"Max normally stays at his Tyberian Palace in Sainte Marguerite."

"He runs the country while his daddy runs hundreds of companies from his home or ship."

"Oh my."

Since there were suddenly two hot Cross men, the ladies looked at each other with even more excitement. Max was also their age.

They already realized that Ty Cross felt something special for Sara. She was always first on the train; her jewelry box held a platinum ring with a diamond twice as large as any other. Her suite was Crosswinds' royal suite, and her flag was twice as big as the others.

However, having a wife had never crossed Max's mind. Since his first trouser disruption (at age twelve), Ty supplied a steady stream of gold diggers and pretty slave girls for his relief, just as his granddaddy did for Ty.

However, Sara was the first woman to melt Ty's heart. After that, hardly an hour passed she did not enter his thoughts. He even nabbed the girls in the grandest way possible so that the entire world would hear about Sara.

Max scolded his father as they overlooked several hundred people from his ship's bow. "You have lost your mind and control at the worst possible time."

"You spent far more nabbing them than we can sell them for after your infatuation."

"They are not merchandise! All great men deserve love; it completes them."

"You are incapable of loving anyone other than yourself. I still must tell you my mother's name."

"You spent ten minutes with her, then spent eight months planning this during the most important endeavor of our lives."

"You are wrong!"

"You are going to destroy America's liberation over this!"

"It is already complete, and we are right on schedule. So, this will have zero effect."

"My boy, she will make me better at everything."

"Not so!"

"She is a massive distraction when you need focus."

"You probably don't even know I'm older than she."

"Really?"

"By a full day. You did not even try her out. She might not even like men."

"She has already taken control of you and doesn't even know that yet."

"You are overreacting," Ty replied.

"If I knew you had ordered the Knights to pull off this crap in front of the world's press, I would have locked you up in the brig until Liberation Day!"

"Relax, son; loosen up. Drink some Lemon Balm tea."

"If Washington finds out you brought them to our fucking Embassy, we will be tagged as the power behind the Liberation."

"We worked my entire life to keep Morocco taking our heat!"

Ty responded, never taking his eyes off Sara, "I had to make my move for her now. If I waited, it could take years for another chance."

"In two months, she will despise you, as will all Yankees."

"Do you seriously believe she won't?"

"Just look at her," Ty said from The Maximus V's bow, about sixty feet away and thirty feet above. "Isn't she the most beautiful creature you have ever seen!"

"I don't see one standing out. I know you have this thing for redheads, so she must be one of those two."

"Sara is auburn, not copper."

Max pointed at Dorothy, "Actually that blond is prettiest."

"You are lying, just to argue. You don't understand true love, son."

"I know true love is not a commodity that your gifts and money can buy."

"Love means you can't do as you please; she gets an equal say, or the love can't last."

"If she is shallow enough, your money might keep her happy enough to fake some orgasms."

“You just don’t understand, son.”

“I understand that love and lust are the same things in your mind. Once you decide that something is most beautiful, you must have it.”

“That’s a lie!”

“You are lying to yourself. You are having the Maximus VI built simply because someone said Alfonso’s new ship is even more beautiful.”

“It’s just a copy of this one. Alfonzo even used the blueprints that I paid for!”

With his eyes glued on Sara, Ty responded, “You are a hypocrite; you are just like me.”

“Don’t compare me to the soft gelatin you have become! I’m like the man you once were.”

“She will be deeply in love with me after two days.”

“Oh, she will melt into your arms today. But she will loathe you in a month, no matter how much you give her.”

“You are mistaken; she will be my forever loving queen.”

“Ha-ha, forever!”

“I will give you till Mayday (May 1st). If she is not your forever-loving queen, then agree to sell them in Morocco, just like the others!”

“She will be!”

“Then you have no problem agreeing!”

“Agreed! Now be cordial to them.”

"I'm always cordial."

"Don't embarrass me in front of them."

"I'm the one being embarrassed."

After the gangplank latched, Ty and Max walked down to greet their lovely guest hostages.

Ty ignored everyone but his excited captives. His first words were, "Please forgive the crude way we came together!"

All six looked excited, happy, and forgiving as they stood side by side. Dorothy stood first to their right, while Sara stood last to their left, so Ty introduced Dorothy first.

After kissing her hand, "Hello Dorothy Schmidt, please allow me to introduce my eldest son Max. He is the Prime Minister of Tyberia."

Looking disinterested, he said, "Pleased to meet you."

"Her father owns a German Sausage company in Columbus."

"Yummy," Max mumbled.

Ty then kissed the back of Dotty's hand.

"Dotty Nordstrom, I am pleased to introduce you to my son Max."

Max yawned again before saying, "Nice to meet you."

"Dotty's father owns three General Stores in Cleveland, Ohio."

"Wonderful"

Ty then kissed Elizabeth's hand.

"This is Elizabeth Hyde. Her family runs a large farm east of Columbus."

“Sadly, her father was killed in the Civil War.”

“Sorry about your father. That war should have never occurred,” Max, who was ten when the war started, expressed.

Next, Ty kissed Dolly’s hand. “Dolly Cavendish, allow me to introduce Max Cross.”

“Her father, rest his soul, was a fine surgeon,” he told his son.

Max almost smiled, “Nice to meet you.”

“Now, this gorgeous creature is Daisy Wolf. Her daddy founded Columbus’s daily newspaper in seventy-one.”

“Well, you must be well informed,” Max replied.

Finally, he kissed Sara’s hand, “This is their leader, Sara Kilbourne.”

“I have heard everything about you, even things he does not know.”

“Oh, like what?” she asked Max.

“That you and I were born one day apart,” Max answered as he motioned toward his father.

“Who is younger?” She asked.

“That would be You. I was born on the third.” Sara was born on July 4th.

“Excuse me,” Max told them before walking to their enormous masseur, Animus.

Max whispered a few words to the hairless giant. Then they walked to the mansion as if they had pressing business (or bladders).

Ty had not let go of Sara’s hand since he reached her.

He led her a few steps away, far enough for the other beauties to act like they were not trying to hear.

"You have not left my thoughts since last September," he revealed.

"I still hear your voice singing, even after I wore out your wax records" (Edison's phonograph tubes).

"I have fallen for you. Now I intend for you to reciprocate."

Not knowing how to respond, Sara changed the subject. "What a beautiful ship; I never imagined that one could be so lovely."

"Well, very few ships are, my dear."

"This happens to be the most beautiful ship on earth. It has the finest of everything. Like you, my dear; she is beautiful inside and out."

"You have many beautiful things, Ty."

"Great wealth has beautiful privileges; this is also the most expensive ship ever built."

"However, it is no longer mine; you are already its legally registered owner. It is today's gift for you," Ty said as if he intended daily presents.

"No, I can't accept your ship; you have already given us far too much!" Sara responded loudly enough for her lovely companions to hear.

"Oh, I can't stop what has already happened; I do not have a time machine; she already belongs to you, legally."

Sara assumed that Cross was joking.

"She is much like you; her outer beauty is merely the result of her inner beauty. Allow me to show you around, my dear."

Still holding her hand, he led her out the dock, then up the gangway into the planet's most wondrous ship in 1885.

He then informed Captain Funk, "Pull the gangway and set her sails. We will be taking the Lady Sara for an afternoon excursion."

"Yes, sir," Funk responded, flashing his biggest smile toward Sara.

When Ty said, "The Lady Sara," Sara assumed he was referring to her, not the ship.

Mr. Cross, she said, "I need to run back down there to tell my girls where I am going and when I will return. We are like sisters."

"Of course, my dear. It will take ten or so minutes before we can leave."

"But please call me Ty."

"Okay."

"Tell them that we will return in three hours."

"I will be right here waiting for you, my dear."

With the grace of a world-class dancer, Sara jogged back ashore.

"Ty is smitten with me," she told the girls.

"He wants to take me on a three-hour cruise, so you all enjoy this place until I return."

"I told you he is in love with her," Elizabeth told the others as Sara jogged back aboard.

"I'd bet he brought us here to be her bridesmaids!" Dotty excitedly declared.

16. March 8th, 8 AM, North Orleans Naval Base

Several hours before Ty and his happy hostages hooked up, Marshal Clyde Dupree had spent six minutes pounding ORPH Six's caboose. "Hey Yawl, get up! It's 8:06; the whole plumb day is wastin' away!"

Before Colin and Lemont responded, Tesla met the Marshal outside.

"Marshal Dupree?"

"Yes'um, last time I checked."

"Who might you be, fine sir?"

"Last time I checked Nicola Tesla."

"You don't look that girly."

"Mind if I call you Nicky?"

"Yes, I do," Tesla replied, which somehow Clyde took as, "Fine, call me Nicky."

"Goody-goody. I enjoy gettin' off to a fine start."

"Police work gets bloody round here, which ain't always fun."

"And that-there sun gets toasty. You'll know in a couple of hours."

Clyde then stepped back and gazed down the side of ORPH Six.

"Dang, beat the Dutch!"

"Did dem Federal big shots build yaw des fancy ride?"

"Well, they own it, but I built it."

"You designed this, Nicky?"

"Over 90% of it."

"It's slicker than a greased piglet!"

“Why is it so low?”

“To move faster around curves without tipping over.”

Still staring at it, Clyde said, “Dang Nicky, you’re one smart feller.”

“Like my mama, Tilly.”

“She invents stuff all the time.”

Tesla replied, “My mother, Duka, also invents things.”

“What did Tilly invent?”

“Ah, mostly new vittles.”

“Vittles?” Nicky had never heard that word before.

“Her upside-down lemon cake is world-famous.”

“Oh, how clever, Marshall.”

“Yes, sir, Nicky, my maw is the real deal! She even invented that cake by accident! What did your mama invent?”

“Mostly appliances.”

“Appliances?” Clyde, who had never heard that word before, asked.

“Cooking tools,” Nicola answered.

“Cooking tools? Like what, Nicky?”

“Have you seen a hand-cranked batter-beater?”

“Dang! Small world! Mama uses dem doohickies!”

“Anywho, why do you need a train that moves so fast?”

“You know that traveling over sixty miles in an hour causes shingles.”

"No, I did not know that."

"I designed these trains to rush injured orphan children to a hospital. But because they are the fastest vehicles on earth, Washington sometimes lets federal agents use them."

"Dang, they only gave me a rotten wagon and an old mule."

"We call them ORPHS. Washington had me innovate many unique features, giving these ORPHS multiple uses, much like an upside-down cake," Tesla sarcastically replied.

"Special features?"

"Yes, marshal, it packs enough hidden weaponry to wipe out a regiment."

"Why do day want little children shoot'n powerful weapons?"

"Not sure, Marshal Clyde; I will keep that in mind."

Clyde whipped out his pencil and notebook.

"Does ya spell Tester, t-e-s-t-e-r?"

"Close enough."

"You any relation to dem, Tester glue people?"

"If you go back far enough."

"Dey make glue out of dead racehorses. I spose their meat is too tough for dog food."

"Oh, I 'spose' that's better than making glue out of dead people," Tesla sarcastically played.

"Hum, human Glue? You got something there, Nicky."

“Why?”

“Can’t bury dead round here. The ground’s too wet. Dem stiffs just float back up to the surface.”

“I must learn something every day; now I can go back to bed,” Tesla responded.

“You’re funny, Nicky.”

“Wait till you meet the other agents.”

“Okie-Dokie.”

“You’re not from around here, are you?” Tesla asked.

“How could ya tell?”

“A guess, I ‘spose,” Tesla answered as his eyes rolled.

“I was born and raised in Mountain City, Tennessee, bout ten miles south of Damascus,” Clyde answered as if everyone knew about Damascus, Tennessee.

“Done ben here since 67.”

“I’m the first former Confederate to become a US Marshal.”

“Good for you.”

“On that tell-e-call doohickey, your Commander said yawl coming down to Norleans to find some hot women.”

“That’s one way of putting it.”

“Ha-ha-ha,” Clyde chuckled.

“Dem Bama boys been hunting Norleans, fer hot girls since George chopped his pawl’s cherry tree down. They’d beat dem Bama boys with bibles back in Mountain City.”

“These girls we seek are not here by choice.”

“I know dey was nabbed; just pulling your leg, Nicky.”

The caboose door pooped open then Colin and Lemont stumbled out.

“Double Damn Dang! You must be Mr. Freeman.”

“Yes, I’m Lieutenant Commander Lemont Freeman.”

“Ohhhh, Hayes said yous a biggin’!”

“I’d bet you are dangling a monster.”

“What?”

“Cuse me, jest thunk’n out loud.”

“I’m Federal Marshal Dupree of the Norleans Office.”

Then he turned to Colin. “Howdy, who might you be?”

“McLaughlin, Colin McLaughlin,” said while Lemont whispered to Nicola,

“That is not the Norleans accent.”

“You a manly feller too. You one of dem vagitarians?” Dupree asked Colin.

“I eat meat.”

“Dat's what I said! Hey-he-he-ha-ha!”

“Mind if I call you Cole?”

“No!” (Meaning yes, I mind).

“Goody, I know yawl here vestogatin’ snatched ladies.”

"If they are here, I know who knows where."

"Well, let's go ask him!" Lemont replied.

"It's more of a she, but making her talk is harder den milking a bull."

"A She?"

"Yes'um. She is a Voodoo priestess. She's had her fingers in bout every unsavory activity tween here and Jamaicer."

"Why has she not been put away?"

"No one will accuse her. Dey frets she will put a vile curse on them."

"Magic spells?" Tesla asked.

"Oh, yes'um."

"How is she connected to these kidnappings?"

"That witch woman sent a hair-doer lady to spruce up some Yankee ladies at dat old fort you fellers blasted this morning. But Dat was two weeks ago, so dey ain't likely da same woman you seek."

"A fine deduction," Lemont replied.

"We did not blast anything; we just arrived an hour ago," Colin blurted.

"Alrighty, if you say so."

"Anywho, your Commander Hayes says they're connected."

"Hey, is he any relation to President Hayes?"

"He could be," Lemont answered.

“Just tell us how you know this,” Colin prodded.

“Bout two weeks back, the 8th precinct cops picked up dat Jamaican hair-doer lady on suspicion of mug’n an old bitty in the Frenchy.”

“A what, in what?”

“Oh, a grandmother in da French Quarter, a local ward.”

“The old woman was head clunked from behind, so nobody saw the culprit. But when dem local boys (cops) arrived, dat hair lady was da only one person around.”

“So, they searched her, looking for da old lady’s ring and da \$1.44 she said was stolen.”

“She had no ring, but she did have \$200 in cash.”

“Dat’s a year pay for dem-kind round here. Dem local boys smelled a foul beyond city limits, so they called me in. My office is right next door.”

Da old lady was out cold, but dey told the hair dew lady dat she died for the \$200 she had. Dat if she cain’t explains the money, she’d hang.”

“She said a masked man gave her dat money to do up four ladies. And that she must act like she cain’t speak English.”

“Like you,” Lemont thought.

“She said he locked her in a windowless coach, so she could not see where he took her. He released her inside an old jail bout an hour later, so she did not know where she was.”

“She said da old jail had a beauty salon inside a cell. Dey wez four white ladies, three was yeller, one rusty, and da were Yanks.”

“I got the Yanks part,” Lemont said.

Tesla translated, “I think he meant three bonds and a redhead.”

“Dat’s what I said.”

“Den, after she did um, the masked feller loaded her up and took her back home.

“Dem local cops did not believe her, but dey could not charge her with, since da knew she was not da mugger. But since dem Yankee girls likely crossed state lines, dey called to see if I wanted to question her.”

“Instead, I had dem order her to stay in town while they investigate so dat I could tail her.”

“Tailing is my specialty.”

“Anywho, I followed her straight to dat witch’s house.”

“The next day, I went by her hair booth and apartment; dey was empty and already up fer rent.”

“Guess who dat owner is?”

“The witch,” Nicola responded.

“Yes’um, Lady Azacca.”

“Magic tricks only work when people believe they are real,” Tesla added.

Lemont responded, “I lived here for a few years as a little boy; there were priestesses casting spells back then, so there's something to it.”

“Anywho, when yawl’s commander Hayes said pretty northern ladies, I made this connection.”

“Dat hair-doer told em half-truths to keep da witch out of da discussion.”

“I’d bet my wife dat Lady Azacca knows where yawl’s girls are.”

Lemont looked at Colin and said, “This is more than coincidence.”

“Getting info-motion from Lady Azacca is harder den milking gators.”

“You can’t milk gators. They are not mammals,” Tesla remarked.

“Dats, why it's so hard.”

“Dem cops fear her; she curses and casts spells at em. They say she can turn men into lizards.”

“Just tricks,” Tesla repeated.

“Ain’t heard bout no tricks. If yawl’s ladies are here, she knows where.”

“I just hope yawl bought enough Yankee magic to make her talk.”

“Our tricks came from Croatia,” popped Colin.

“Where?”

“A magical kingdom in the old world.”

“Oh, alrighty, Cole, hope dey work.”

Tesla asked Clyde, “Why did you not rename Lemont?”

“Lemont is already a manly name; nothin’ bout it needs fiddling with.”

“What’s wrong with my name?” Colin asked Lemont.

“Calm down there, Cole,” Lemont whispered to him.

“If you were named Clyde, you would want to take it out on somebody.”

“Dang! Mr. Lemont,” Clyde said as Lemont stretched and yawned.

“You’re big enough to be a circus attraction!”

“The Freak Show,” Colin whispered.

“You could probably carry Old Tinker,” Clyde said as he pointed at his mule.

“Good thing we ain’t in Mountain City. He could only go downhill pulling us.”

“Good thing.”

"Tinker should be fine fer today; he's only going bout a mile because of ferries."

"I reckon Norleans has more ferries den any town in America."

"Ferries?" Colin asked.

"Ferry boats take people and wagons across the river," Tesla explained.

"Oh, ferry boats."

"Azacca's house is less than a block away from da dock. If the ferries ain't backed up, we'll be there in 45 minutes."

"Me and da Tinkster are ready to go."

"I need some breakfast," Lemont demanded as he and Colin took leaks beside their low-slung caboose.

"Don't piss on those electrified wheels! That could blow up your Tallywackers!" Tesla warned.

A moment later, Lemont and Colin were back inside the caboose.

"I can't believe you did not have food service load the ORPH. That's not like you at all!" Colin told his partner.

"I never tell them to stock ORPHS; that's their job; they do it automatically."

"This ORPH is not listed for service yet; food service knew nothing about it."

"Here is a case of canned fish; it must be Nicola's," Colin said as he grabbed a can.

"I love red salmon from the can; what kind is it," Lemont asked.

"They just say, 'Fish,'" Colin answered as he removed a couple.

Lemont gagged as one of Duka Tesla's can openers then penetrated the lid.

"How can he tolerate this stinking stuff?" Lemont asked as he gagged.

"That smells delicious to me; it smells just like the Scioto River carp; I grew up on it," Colin replied.

"Horse crap smells better."

"Not everyone was lucky enough to be the son of Aunt Jemima."

"That's your problem."

"Not today."

"Eat up, my man. Carp is good for you; it causes woodies," Colin said as he took a big bite, which caused Lemont to dry heave some more.

"Yum-yum, this will also make you grow big and strong, just like me."

"I think you mean smelly and shriveled, just like you."

"Look here, Nicky also left a can of crackers on the floor," Colin said as he handed Lemont the gallon-sized can.

"You know I don't care for crackers," Lemont added.

"Complain, complain. I bet crackers don't like you either."

"Just hold your nose and pretend this fish is your mama's flapjacks drenched in butter and maple syrup!" Colin fantasized.

"Your breath reeks."

About three minutes later, Yeager entered the caboose. “God, this car stinks. You need to air it out!”

“All we have is fish and crackers, help yourself,” Colin told Yeager.

“Oh, hell no, Tesla doesn't eat that crap; he feeds it to his cats.”

“Too bad you boys got to run.”

“Why?”

“Admiral Forti invited us to his Saturday morning officer's brunch.”

“It is loaded with waffles, pork chops, beef steaks, omelets, sausage, country gravy, biscuits, shrimp, crawfish, and pastries.”

“Well, let's eat before we leave. I function far better that way,” Lemont decided.

“Well, when will you return? The buffet does not open until 10:30,” Yeager asked.

“When is it over?” Lemont asked.

“It runs for an hour.”

Lemont opened the door and yelled to Clyde, “How long will this take?”

“Oh, I spose 3 to 4 hours, any-who.”

Lemont then dumped Tesla's crackers out of the big can and handed it to Yeager.

“Fill this with biscuits, sausages, and steak, covered with gravy, so we can eat when we return.”

"I'm not your maid. You boys are big enough to manage your meals. I got you invited to this brunch; it's not my fault if you don't show up," Yeager responded.

Clyde added, from the doorway, "Don't worry, Norleans has great restaurants."

"In our rush to leave yesterday, I left my wallet in my locker," Lemont commented.

Colin added, "I never seen you so forgetful. Don't worry; I keep a crisp one-hundred-dollar bill in my boot."

"We'll get the finest lunch in town after overseeing that witch."

"I'll pay you back."

"Don't worry about it, my treat."

As he squeezed his nostrils to down an entire can, Lemont said.

"If Michigan and Kentucky were the cookies on mama's cookie-witches, Ohio would be the tasty cream filling in between."

"Now that's how you do it!" Colin responded.

As Clyde, Cole, Nicky, and Lemont climbed aboard Old Tinker's wagon, Colin asked, "Are you sure this is a federal issue? It's worn out."

"The wagon or Tinker?"

"Both!" all three agents answered simultaneously.

Looking back at their Orph, then down at his wagon, Clyde added, "Dang, well, your rail ride looks angry. Does it bite?"

"Only if agitated," Tesla replied.

“Dem Washington boys are still pissy bout the war they started. You Yanks get sweet rides while I get an old mule.”

“I ain’t griping, but I’d bet they even pay yawl more than \$30 a month.”

“Well, they adjust for Ohio’s inflated cost of living,” Lemont offered.

Once seated, Clyde asked, “Hey, yawl want to take the scenic or plain route?”

“What on the scenic route?”

“Yesterday, a parade of naked ladies protesting.”

“Protesting what?”

“Don’t know, I wasn’t checking out dar signs, He, He, Ha, Ha.” Clyde joked.

Since this was Nicky and Cole’s first time in ‘Norleans,’ they agreed it was best to take that scenic route.

Clyde was pulling their legs; there was only one direct route to Lady Azacca’s home. So, about fifteen minutes later, Tinker pulled them aboard a ferry boat.

As they cruised, “Hey, Nicky?”

“Yes, Marshal.”

“You been round the world, right?”

“Well, I’d say halfway.”

“You been to France?”

“Yes, I’ve spent some time there.”

"I heard dey got feller down-dare, can fart at will, all day long."

As Freeman and Mclaughlin cracked up, an unamused Tesla responded.

"You must mean Le Pétomane."

"Lee Peterman?"

"Close enough, he invented the 'Anus Flute.'"

"You say Angus Flute?"

"No anus, like a butthole: he is the only man able to play it."

"Well, for more than a few seconds, I suppose."

"Valuable information, Nicky," Lemont sarcastically injected.

"Don't be so negative, Big Boy; I bet you could play one," Colin responded."

"I was fortunate enough to catch Le Pétomane perform his *Colonic Concerto* at the theater of Hôtel de Bourgogne's," Tesla added.

"It was a tightly packed house."

"I'd like tove seen dat."

"He was the most popular entertainer in Paris."

Anyways, Lady Azacca's French Quarter home was close enough to see the river from its balcony. This large square house also featured ornate wrought iron inside and out.

Because local and federal marshals have never been able to get information from her. They decided to use the cover of some Ohio musician trying to find his missing lady.

Lady Azacca could recognize Clyde, so he and Tinker parked beside the river (a half block away) as the three agents walked to her home.

Clyde then used his open bible to cover his face to nap while waiting.

After minutes of pounding on Lady Azacca's iron security door, they finally heard, "Go Away!"

"Lady Azacca, if you help me find my kidnapped girlfriend, I will pay you!"

"Go away!" She repeated.

"Look, here is a one-hundred-dollar bill for information," Colin offered, causing a look of concern to spread across Lemont's face.

No reply.

He offered it again.

"Is it real?"

"As real as the sun."

"Hold it against the window."

About 10 seconds later, she opened her solid oak inner door to face them through the bars of her iron security door.

"Slide the money through the bars," she said, "then I will tell you what you need to know."

"Tell me where first, then I will slide it through."

"I'm no fool; you would never pay. So, pay first for the information!"

Colin, who earns \$500 a month (a massive income for 1885) from Orphan (and even more from his shows), slid his crisp \$100 bill through the bars.

“With the bill firmly grasped, she looked Colin up and down, “Even fools come in pretty packages!” The heavy oak inner door slammed and then bolted.

Colin looked at Lemont, “That Turd took my money!”

“She took my lunch!”

He looked at Lemont, “Your turn, Hercules.”

“Stand back, Nicola,” the giant agent warned.

His cigar-sized fingers wrapped around the iron bars (molded into snakes with snapping jaws). He then turned that security door into a pile of scrap iron.

As one blow from his left shoulder flattened the inner oak door. Nicola stuck a broken-off iron snakehead into his pocket.

The three agents then entered with their guns drawn, with Tesla behind.

Lady Azacca seemed alone in her main room, seated on a throne, looking like she was in a trance, mumbling words that Colin and Lemont could not recognize.

Then she looked through them and yelled, “Cops! Leave now or die!”

“No police; we are musicians with the ah... Circus, " Colin blew.

“You lie!”

“Look, lady, we are just trying to find his kidnapped girlfriend. We mean you no harm. We’re not cops; our music raises money for poor orphan children,” Lemont claimed.

“Lies! I can smell cops from miles away.”

“No, that is canned carp” Colin pitched.

“Leave now or die!”

She reached into a shelf beside her thrown, then pulled open a drawer packed with little cloth dolls. She grabbed the biggest one, then ranted something in French.

The doll was a thick dark fellow wearing deep brown pants and a beige shirt, just like Lemont (and thousands of other men) wore.

She held it out for Lemont to see as she yelled (in English), “This proves I knew you cops were coming!”

Then, she removed a long sharp needle from the drawer. “Now, die!” she yelled as she stabbed it in the back.

A crushingly intense back spasm suddenly bent Lemont over. “Get me out of here!” he yelled to Colin.

He helped Lemont reach that front porch. As Tesla helped him straighten up, Colin went back to try again.

“Look, lady, we did not come here to harm you; I just need to find my kidnapped girlfriend.”

“You said you would give me the information I need for money, but you did not.”

“I told you that you are a fool!” She said as she shuffled for a doll that resembled Colin. Get out, or I will stab you all the way through!”

“Come on, be reasonable.”

She held her big needle up like a dagger, “LEAVE NOW OR DIE!”

“All right, all right! Calm down, lady! Don’t do anything rash!”

“Give me a few seconds.”

“If you are still here in five, you die! One, two, three....” Colin ran back out to the porch.

“She is not going to talk,” Colin complained.

Tesla, who had watched everything from the front door, asked the upset agents, “Would you mind if I make talk?”

Lemont, who could stand upright again, looked at Colin, then Tesla, “Sure, professor, knock yourself out.”

“I know you’re hungry; I’ll work fast,” he told Lemont as he walked inside, then right up to her as if he feared nothing.

He stared into her eyes and smiled for about 30 seconds as she cursed at him. Then, his happy expression turned into an angry scowl as he growled, “Vous etes un–Faux Mambo!” (You are the fake Priestess!).

“Si tu étais vrai, tu saurais qui je suis!” (If you were true, you would know who I am!)”

She became silent as she stared. But nothing registered.

He then slowly raised his hands above his head.

Both former prizefighters, now cowering in the doorway, lost a bit of pee as the lightning bolts thundered from Tesla's fingers into the iron crown molding above her head.

About a second later, the queen of Cajun crime was on the floor, kissing Nicola’s shoes while begging, “Zula Merveilleux, pardonne mi!” (Wonderful Zula, please forgive me).

He turned and pointed at Colin: "The truth brings you forgiveness. A lie makes today your last!"

"Now tell that strange musician where his lady is being held!"

"She is at the Crosswinds Plantation on Lake Pontchartrain!"

"The truth brings you forgiveness. A lie means you die!" Tesla said as he held that iron snakehead (from her security door) out like a microphone, then dropped it before turning and leaving.

She cried back, "The Truth is Told!"

"She is at a plantation called Crosswinds, on a lake called Pontchartrain."

"We heard."

"Where is that?" Colin asked.

"That huge lake is just a couple miles from here."

"You had to see it on the map; if you looked," Lemont, who lived in New Orleans for several years as a child slave, recalled.

"Oh yeah, that big lake," Colin bluffed.

Colin said, "Damn, Nicola, you should have told her to give my money back."

"Okay, since you have a tough time dealing with that 90-pound lady, I can go back and handle that for you," Tesla offered.

"Never mind, we got a hot trail to follow. We need to go."

"What did you say to her?" Lemont asked Tesla as they walked away.

"I called her an imposter because she did not know who I am."

"Then I drained a battery to make her believe I'm the god that can shoot lightning bolts from my fingers."

“Damn, wild man.”

“It’s a spin on an old trick.”

“They worshiped the first guy with a match. I just moved that to the next level to trick a trickster.”

“How did you fire lightning bolts?”

“They are sparks like you hear when you take off a wool sweater, amplified a couple of thousand times.”

“Where did you learn how to do that?”

“I taught myself to frighten bullies when I was seven years old.”

“Did it work?”

“Perfectly, instead of getting wedges, I soiled their trousers.”

“How does he know this stuff?” Collin asked Lemont.

Lemont tossed up his hands, then said, “I don’t know, ask him.”

“It was no big deal. I just instantly drained the battery. Now I need to recharge it.”

“He is brilliant!” Lemont told his partner.

“We need to get to that plantation now!”

“We contact Hayes first,” the hungry giant instructed.

“We don’t even have space in Tinker’s wagon to retrieve them. We need a small swift boat. I’m sure they one back at the navy base.”

“All right, Fine.”

“Hayes will not be happy about blasting that fort this morning. He does not even want us to show our pistols without his approval.”

“Not if we are attacked, first.”

“No one attacked us; you just blew up some of Morocco’s property.”

“I opened one little gate with no one around.”

“No one was hurt, and we verified the place was involved.”

“Hayes won’t even know about this until we tell him.”

Lemont said, “Don’t be so sure. Clyde knew an hour later.”

“That was just a lucky guess.”

At 10:22, they returned to Tinker’s wagon and woke Clyde up.

Tinker and the ferry had them back at 11:40 AM, ten minutes after the Officer’s brunch ended.

18. March 8th, 1885, 11:15 am Orphan Control Columbus

“YOU BOMBED A FOREIGN CONSULATE! WHAT THE HELL DID YOU THINK YOU WERE DOING!” Were Hayes’s first words after answering Lemont’s call.

“There was no one near, Boss. But we verified that big men and attractive ladies were there.”

“We could not have proven that without entering the place.”

“Did your Service Trainers forget your lesson on lock picking!?”

“Boss, that old fort has a fully stocked and recently used beauty salon.”

“We found a box of old shackles that even Colin could break.”

“That connects some dots.”

“The only person at the fort was a security guard at a different gate. So, Colin invented a cover story to get in. But the man did not care; he only allows entry with authorization.”

“What Cover?”

“He said his hound dog slipped under the gate. So, he had to enter to find him.”

“How lame. The guy would not have let him in even if he believed that crap.”

“Well, he had a better shot saying “dog” than “beautiful ladies.” Anyways, we got in and out and proved you were right.”

“Since the Moroccans are involved, I doubt that they will do much complaining.”

“You have anything else to report?”

"Yes."

"Go ahead."

"You know the pun, so close yet far away?"

"Sure, what do you mean?"

"I believe we, well Nicky, figured out where the girls are."

"The Buckeye Beauties?"

"Yes."

"Who the hell is Nicky?"

"Marshal Dupree's new name for Nicola."

"Where are they?"

"A plantation called Crosswinds; it's on Lake Pontchartrain."

"It is about three miles from here. The place even has a private train depot. That's so close."

"What is so far away?"

"By rail, they are 436 miles away. Crosswinds is on the river's east side. The closest bridge across the Mississippi, is over two hundred miles north of here."

"You are at a navy base, on the water!"

"Right."

"Admiral Forti will get you across the river. Your screaming new ORPH could not sneak up on a deaf asylum anyway."

"You said a plantation called Crosswinds?"

"Yes."

"I know that place!"

"It is Tyberian property. It is one of Ty Cross's homes."

"President Cross of Tyberia?"

"Yes. When I was President, I approved that plantation becoming Tyberia property. It is their US embassy; they only keep a one-man office in DC."

"Ty Cross is one of the world's wealthiest men. He inherited dozens of companies, including earth's largest shipping company."

"Before the war he bought thirty-six Eastern Caribbean islands from France, then named them after himself (Tyberia) and appointed himself king. He just calls himself president."

"I've read his dossier, Boss."

"There is a legend that his great grandfather was a pirate who buried 36 treasure chests on those 36 Tyberian islands."

"The report says that he also likely owns dozens of companies under false names."

"Here in Ohio, he is the CEO of Midwestern Railroad Car Corporation," Hayes inserted.

"But we cannot blast onto a foreign consulate. That is an act of war."

"If another nation kidnaps our citizens inside our country, is not that an act of war?"

"That is for judges to determine."

"We must prove things in America first."

"I'd bet you didn't even know about Collin blasting that fort until you heard it explode."

"What makes you think so, Boss?"

"You would have called me first; Colin is not himself; I probably should have kept him here."

"He went alone, so no one could recognize me if I do end up going undercover. I was not with him when he blasted that gate."

"Well, Admiral Forti will supply all the water transportation you need. And that Marshal Claude Doofus will supply local street transportation."

"You mean Marshal Clyde Dupree?"

"That's what I said."

"He has a rotten old wagon with a mule to match."

"Great, glad you already got wheels!"

"I need reconnaissance of Crosswinds before we plan any rescue."

"Certainly, Boss."

"I'm at Ivonta's desk; I don't have a map right here."

"But I recall Crosswinds has a ship dock along the river."

"Dupree says it has three ship docks. But on a lake, not the river. There is a canal from the lake to the river."

"Do they fish that lake?"

"They did when I lived here."

"We need a good look at that Crosswinds from the water."

"As soon as I get upstairs, I'll call the Admiral."

"I'll have him set you up with a small civilian fishing boat and a capable sailor who knows the area."

“Before Colin even thinks of blasting his way in, I want a reconnaissance report.”

“I need undeniable evidence before I’d consider a raid.”

“Hopefully, Admiral Forti can immediately provide that civilian boat.”

“I need an update by 7:00 tonight.”

“Fine, I better run!”

“I’ll call Admiral Forti as soon as I get to my office.”

“Hayes out.”

19. 11:20 AM, March 8th, Crosswinds

As Sara was off sailing with Ty, Cameroon suggested to the five other Buckeye Beauties, “The band is warmed up, let’s rehearse, Big Daddy.”

“We can’t; Sara sings the lead,” Dotty remarked.

“Oh, I will sing her part. I learned it months ago.”

“Okay,” they agreed.

“It’s going to be hot as hell in another hour.”

“Let’s all change into our practice outfits, then let’s meet back here in twenty minutes.”

“No need to feel modest; you are the only guests at Crosswinds. The job of your tiny assistants, butlers, chefs, and everyone else on the property is to pamper you girls.”

As they walked past the band, they agreed, “What a great sound! We could dance to that all night long!”

Cameroon pointed at one of the members, “That kid invented this style.”

“President Cross wants to have them compose music for your shows.”

They began rehearsing Big Daddy under a vast blue shade sail, halfway between the beach and the band's gazebo a half-hour later.

20. 11:25 am March 8th New Orleans Navy Base

Admiral Forti hooked the Agents up with a small steam-powered civilian water taxi at a moment's notice. His Chief Engineer (and avid local fisherman), Captain Fredric Wouda, owned and ran it.



"With its windows open, it becomes a decent fishing boat," Wouda told the agents as they boarded. "As long as we have fishing poles hanging out, no one pays any attention."

"Anything to eat aboard?"

"No. There are a couple of rusted fish cans in that crate under my seat. The rust is only on the outside of the cans."

"What kind of fish?"

"Just says fish."

“Never mind,” Lemont responded.

“Where you fellows from?”

“I lived near here as a small child, then mostly Ohio ever since,” Lemont replied.

“He was never a small child,” Colin added.

“I grew up in Ohio. But Nicky,” pointing at Tesla, “came from Croatia, a country on Mars.”

“Wow! I have spent a year in Split, Pula, and Mahaska. Croatia has some of the most beautiful coastlines on earth,” Wouda said before exclaiming, “Holy mackerel! I know who you are! Nicola Tesla, the greatest inventor!”

Acting humble, “Well, if they were still alive, Leonardo DaVinci and Ben Franklin would argue with that.”

Wouda jumped to his feet to shake Nicola’s hand, “I am your biggest fan! You are like a god to us navel engineers!”

“Oh, you are too kind. I am just another man.”

Colin added, “Lady Azacca also thinks he is God.”

“Who is Lady Azacca?” Wouda asked.

“The queen of crime around this city. She thinks Nicky is he is the God of Lightning and Thunder.”

Wouda turned to Tesla, “Admiral Forti talked Washington into giving me two of your dynamos. Four-kilowatt monsters, their power is phenomenal.”

“That's great, my friend!”

“Your inventions are a hundred years ahead of everyone else’s. I cannot believe you are right here with me!”

Instantly missing his drunk fans telling him, “You’re great,” Colin realized he had already missed two shows (at Flanagan’s Pub).

“How did you get Washington to give you those dynamos; each one costs more than thirty new coaches?” Tesla asked.

“I told the Admiral, ‘If we could get one of your most powerful dynamos, I could build an ultra-fast, smoke-free, quiet drive that would not need to be warmed up.’”

“I had engineered many systems to help tame this wide river, so he pulled some strings. President Arthur sent me two.”

“How far along are your prototypes?”

Wouda then pointed at a wooden hatch on the floor, “One is already installed below. But unfortunately, I have an issue keeping power, so we can only use steam power today.”

“What’s the issue?” Tesla asked.

“It only supplies full power for two to three seconds, then nothing. It must be something hindering the current. These batteries should supply at least 5 minutes of full power.”

“How does it propel?” Tesla asked.

“The dynamo spins a robust version of Tyler Wheeler’s fan blades. They push water the same way they push air. I call them propellers.”

“That’s brilliant!” Tesla replied.

“Beyond weight, water and air share many properties; your system will be revolutionary.”

“I think so.”

“I worked with Wheeler at Edison. I should have thought his fan could propel boats. I am happy that at least you noticed!”

“I would love to show you, but I have a problem keeping amperage. It launches like a cannonball, but seconds later nothing, Mr. Tesla.”

“I have developed multiple ways to deliver electricity. I will be happy to help you fix the issue when we return. And please, call me Nicola.”

“We call him “Nicky,” Colin inserted.

“This is one of the best days ever!” the navel engineer replied.

“Maybe we should leave them alone,” Colin whispered to Lemont.

A moment later, Wouda turned the wheel over to Lemont.

After cruising a few more minutes, Wouda told the giant agent, “The canal to Lake Pontchartrain is coming up on the port (left) side.” Then “Oh great, we get to see a special treat first.”

“I tasty treat?” Lemont hoped.

“No, The Maximus Five, Ty Cross’s yacht, is about to appear in front of us.” Wouda noticed its 86-foot masts gliding over (from behind) the warehouses on the east side of the canal.

Including the ship, those masts tower 120 feet above the water.

The agent’s jaws dropped as the enormous vessel (for 1885) entered the Mississippi River a quarter mile in front of them.

As the 300-foot piece of floating artwork turned their direction, Wouda explained: “Many people say it is the most beautiful ship on earth. But I see it as one of the most technical marvels ever built.”

“It was the fifth steel-hulled tall ship built, but it is the first with dual propulsion systems. They work separately or together.”

“Your dynamos and that ship’s dual drives inspired what I am doing to this little boat,” he told Nicola.

“It has an electrically controlled steam drive system to supplement its sails.”

“Under perfect conditions, it likely is the quickest ship on the seven seas.”

“It is beautiful,” Lemont responded.

“Are you sure that’s the Maximus V?” Tesla asked.

“Yes. What makes you ask?”

“It says ‘*The Lady Sara*’ across its haul.”

“I have admired it for two years; Captain Funk has given me a personal tour. That is the Maximus V.”

“Ty Cross must have changed its name,” Wouda theorized.

Then Wouda yelled, “Oh shit! Funk is launching full steam!”

“So, what does that mean!” Colin asked.

“It means HOLD ON!”

About two seconds after the colossal vessel plowed past their starboard side, a ten-foot wake slammed into the little taxi, nearly causing it to capsize.

“You Turd!” Colin hollered with one hand holding on and the other waving his fist.

"I'd be thrown in jail for leaving a wake like that on this river," Wouda snarled.

"Around here, the rules don't apply to people with money to burn," he explained as the little boat bounced like a bobber on a rough sea.

"That's pretty much the same everywhere," Lemont said.

A minute later, Wouda pointed at a horizontal flag sticking out of the 50-foot brick tower at the canal's entrance. "We need to wait until they switch that red flag for a green one," which happened several seconds later.

"Oh, I forgot, this is a toll channel. Does anyone have a dime?" Wouda asked.

"That Voodoo Witch stole all the cash I had on me," Colin reminded.

"Do they offer credit?" Lemont asked as a dime seemed to appear in Nicola's hand magically.

The toll collector extended a small wicker basket attached to a bamboo pole. After Tesla tossed his dime into the basket, the liftgate opened.

While pointing at the white Marble wall just beyond the service road on the canal's east side, Wouda said, "That wall surrounds Crosswinds on its dry sides."

It extended into the lake on both sides of Crosswinds but not along the lake. Ty had the white sand along the beachside shipped from the Bahamas. Between his glowing beach and the canal were the plantation's three double-level boat docks.

Once they reached the lake, Wouda cut the power and had Lemont free float for a half-hour while hanging four fishing poles out of the taxi's windows.

Lemont used Wouda's telescope to get a better look from about one-third of a mile away. "That guy knows how to live! He is out cruising, yet he still has a band playing and dancers dancing!"

"How many dancers?" Colin asked.

"The view is partially blocked. I see two, three, no four, so there could be many more."

"Let me see."

Lemont looked for a few more seconds before handing the telescope to Colin.

"That's Dolly and Elizabeth!"

"We found them!"

"They are only about 50 feet from the water."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive! There is no one in-between them and us."

"How many guards?"

"None."

"There is a large weird-looking lady dancing with them."

"That band is in a gazebo. Seven musicians, all brownies."

"Colin has a way with words," Lemont informed the two nerdy engineers.

"They sure ain't White Knights," Colin added.

"There is a guard shack. It is behind the center dock. I see one guard there."

"You would think they would be heavily guarded."

"They are not chained or shackled; they could just leave on one of those rowboats."

"Are you sure it's them?" Lemont asked.

"I can make out Daisy and Dotty! We can just grab them and go."

"Calm down! We are only doing surveillance here. Hayes does not want us touching another foreign property before his approval."

"He could not imagine them being so close and unguarded!" Colin replied.

"We may never get another simple shot at them again. Cross might take them to Cuba or one of his Islands before we return."

"We need to grab them now."

"We need to follow the rules," Lemont responded."

"Hayes trusts your judgment. If you report that you could have grabbed them this easily, he'll be furious that we did not take advantage."

"Gummi that," Lemont said as he snatched the telescope back.

"Yeah, that's Liz."

"I see five of them. Sara is behind that fountain."

"Woo!"

"Woo, what?" Colin asked.

"A loaded buffet table beside the pool."

"All right, Cole, let's do it. I'll blame you."

"Like usual."

"Like they say, if the shoe fits, wear it."

"Fine, I'll take credit."

"How do we quietly take out that guard?" Lemont asked.

“Dart him.”

“You need to be close, within 20 feet, so we would have to dock first, without giving him enough time to sound the alarm.”

“I can swim most of the way underwater, then sneak up.”

“If the darts get wet, will they still work?” Lemont asked Colin.

“Hayes did not mention anything about that.”

“What do you think?” Lemont asked Tesla.

“I know nothing about bat spit. So, I would assume it does wash off to be safe.”

Wouda, who was also from Ohio, interrupted. “This is not Lake Erie. This is one of the most dangerous lakes; it has both fresh and saltwater.”

“Why does that matter?”

“Because it is home to millions of deadly sharks and alligators.”
It also has tiny bugs that enter your ears then eat your brain.”

“Maybe Nicola can walk on water,” Colin responded.

Tesla asked his new buddy, ignoring Colin, “Do you have 12 feet of quarter-inch vulcanized rubber tubing onboard?”

“Sure do.”

“How about some 12-gauge copper tubing?”

“I have it in brass.”

“That will work.”

“It’s all down there” (in the engine room).

“Colin, give me your belt; I need your darts.”

“All of them?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you share Lemont’s darts?”

“He is too stingy.”

“That’s your problem; I need your darts now!”

“Fine,” as he slipped it off and handed it to Tesla.”

Tesla and Wouda slipped down into the cramped engine room below.

“My pants are falling off. Take the darts, just give me my belt back,” Colin yelled below.

“Hold on, Colin, we are moving as fast as possible,” Tesla replied.

“Colin, start fishing, so we don’t look suspicious,” Wouda suggested.

“You usually wear tight pants, Cole,” Lemont joked as he handed Colin a fishing pole.

“I only wear those to excite ladies at my shows. These are three sizes too large. I need my belt back.”

“Fred, I can smell your power loss,” Tesla asserted. “You are using groove-cell batteries, which can’t maintain full output, so full power dies in seconds.”

"This much dynamo needs a hundred pounds of Nitro-muriatic batteries to hold full power for hours."

"Admiral Forti also asked Washington to send us some. But they have gone to some top-secret project."

"Yeah, that is my ORPH project."

"I will send you two hundred pounds when I return to New York."

"That should give this boat ten to twelve hours at full power."

"Wonderful, thank you, Nicola!"

"What is an Orph?"

"The insanely swift trains I build for NORA."

"Electric Trains?"

"Partially, they use electric dynamos to supplement steam engines, creating a hybrid drive, much like you have done with this boat."

"My newest ORPH is parked at your base."

"Wow! Mind if I check it out?"

"I'll give you a tour when we return."

They connected one end of that rubber hose to that brass pipe and the other onto the boiler's safety release valve. This was all it took to invent the world's first steam-powered dart shooter.

Suddenly Colin caught something big.

His pants fell to his ankles as he stood for better leverage, yet he kept fighting his catch.

"Man, I know you can afford drawers," Lemont remarked. "At least cover that little thing."

“You need glasses, big boy.”

“I think you meant that I need a magnifying glass.”

“Nicola, Colin needs his belt!” Lemont yelled down to the geniuses as Colin continued fighting his catch.

Tesla stopped, then tossed the now emptied belt up through the hatch.

“Stay away from me!” Lemont barked while moving away without releasing the wheel.

“What’s going on up there!?”

“Oh, Colin is free balling again.”

“Well, so sorry if I embarrass you,” Colin told his enormous partner. He reinstalled his belt with one hand as the other continued fighting his catch.

Just as Colin got his pants secured, Tesla slid one dart down the open end of the brass tube; then, he shook it to ensure the dart slid far enough down.

The old wooden chunk on Colin’s line broke free, causing it to float to the surface.

“Perfect, a test target,” Tesla said as he aimed his steaming dart gun from around thirty feet away. “Fred, fire!”

“Swish,” as Fred kicked the hot steam valve lever.
With bullet velocity, the dart drilled the wooden chunk.

“Nicky, just killed your dinner, big boy!” Colin responded.

“Fred cut the steam! It's burning me!” Tesla yelled as he dropped his high-power pea shooter.

Fred closed the valve, then tossed a pair of asbestos gloves up through the hatch.

As Tesla slid them on, he told Lemont, “Just crawl toward the end of the center dock. Let’s bring him out to us.”

“When he drops, we must dock as rapidly as possible.”

“Fred, build full steam; we’ll fire in around 90 seconds.”

“Just tell me when!”

“Got it!”

“Hey, Colin, why don’t you slide your line back into the water? We look suspicious again.”

“Why don’t you go fishing while I shoot the thing? They certified me, sharpshooter, during service training,” Colin suggested.

“So was I,” Tesla responded.

As they slowly approached that center dock, Nicola slid Colin’s 19 darts into his steaming blowgun one by one. He then sat down behind a coal hopper, waiting for his shot.

They passed a warning sign sticking up through the water about one hundred feet out.

**PROPERTY OF TYBERIA
TRESPASSERS MAY BE SHOT**

Just as a bunk bed is two beds in one, each of those three docks was like two docks in one. The bottom decks held little boats, while the upper levels could dock up to six ships at once.

The guard came out of his shack, then jogged out the center dock, waving his rifle and yelling, "These are private docks! Move away now!"

Colin yelled, "What? I can't hear you!" as they continued their slow approach.

"This is private property! Turn away now!" The guard yelled as he lifted his Winchester into firing position.

"WHAT!?" Colin yelled from about forty-five feet away as Tesla told Fred, "Fire on one. Five, four, three, two, one!"

"SWISH, SWISH, SWISH, SWISH, SWISH.....!"

"Sorry!" Colin yelled at the guard as eighteen Awhs rained down on and around him.

Two seconds later, the guard started wobbling; then, he began napping with half of his body hanging off the dock.

"Alligators must understand gravity," Tesla noted as several began staring at the guard, dangling twelve feet above.

Cameroon and the musicians remained mesmerized by the five sexy dancers in their skin-tight body socks. So, no one else even noticed the men take out that guard.

That tall dock allowed the team to reach the beach undetected.

After Nicola Colin and Lemont stepped onto the lower level, Wouda swung the water taxi around to make a swift departure.

"You hear that?" Colin asked Lemont as they began creeping toward shore on the lower dock platform.

"Hear what?"

“They are playing ‘*Big Daddy*,’ from Sara’s show” (*Ladies come first*).

They climbed up the stairs to the upper platform and crawled undetected to that guard’s booth, about sixty feet behind their dancing beauties.

“You boys ready to go?” Lemont whispered.

They both nodded.

Still assuming that all six beauties were present, Lemont asked Nicola, “Can you carry two ladies at once?”

“They don’t look heavy,” He replied.”

“Let’s get ‘em,” Colin whispered, then all three sprinted toward the dancers.

The girls were facing away from the beach and docks, towards the band; only that big hairy muscle-covered lady noticed them coming.

“Oh my, big brutes!” Cameroon mumbled to himself. Instead of sounding the alarm, he batted his fake eyelashes, twirled his long curly hair, and smiled.

Dolly, Daisy, Dotty, Dorothy, and Elizabeth had no clue Colin and Lemont had come to save them before being carried away.

Amazed, the band stopped playing, but like Cameroon, they just watched, as Lemont grabbed Elizabeth and Dolly, Colin’s arms latched around Dotty and Dorothy.

Realizing that the lead singer was no lady, Tesla flung Daisy over his shoulder. The men from Orphan then carried all five girls down those dock stairs to Wouda’s waiting water taxi.

This rescue would have worked flawlessly had not all five dancers continually yelled, “PUT ME DOWN!” as they pounded their saviors with clenched fists.

“Quit hitting me; it’s Colin. I’m rescuing you!”

“PUT ME DOWN, COLIN!” Before they reached Wouda’s water taxi.

“What the hell are you doing here!?” Elizabeth yelled at Lemont.

“Saving you!” He responded.

Daisy screamed, “You broke my nail!” then she punched Tesla’s jaw.

“We don’t need rescuing!” Dorothy yelled as all five silk-wrapped beauties turned and jogged back toward the beach.

“These Turds kidnaped you!” Colin yelled as he followed them back.

“We are free to leave. We are no one’s hostages; we are rehearsing to do a private show for kings, queens, princes, and presidents,” Dorothy responded.

“Stay away from me; you stink like rotten fish,” Elizabeth yelled as she briefly turned to face her former (secret) lover, Lemont.

Still following them, Colin yelled, “Where is Sara!?”

Elizabeth turned to Colin for a second, “She is sailing on her new ship with her fiancé, Ty Cross, the hottest man on earth.”

“What!”

“She already forgot your name!” Elizabeth said while running backward for a moment.

“You are under the spell of evil slave-driving Turds!” Colin yelled as he continued behind them.

Elizabeth turned back just long enough to say, “Tell everyone we will return after one show and Sara’s wedding.”

“She was not happy to see me,” Lemont whimpered as he and Colin watched the girls run back.

Tesla yelled while tugging on their shirts, “We must go! They are not coming with us!”

Tesla had to pull them back to Wouda’s boat.

“Get us out of here, Fred.”

As Wouda launched the taxi, he asked, “What happened?”

“They don’t want to be rescued!”

“Obviously.”

“Oh Crap, we’re losing steam pressure through the blowgun; take over, Lemont; I have to get below.”

Animus and five security men ran out of the mansion several seconds later.

“What just happened!?” Animus asked the pasty white girls.

“Sara’s old boyfriend just came to take us home on that dinky thing,” Dorothy answered while pointing at the water taxi, slowly puttering away.

“We told him to leave, that Sara is no longer interested in him.”

“Who is he?”

“His name is Colin McLaughlin.”

“What does Colin McLaughlin do?”

“He is a musician with the Irish Orphans Band back in Columbus.”

Staring at the retreating water taxi, he mumbled, “Colin McLaughlin has balls of steel and amazing tracking power. He nearly beat us to Crosswinds.”

“Do you think he’ll return?” he asked the girls.

“No, he thought we were your prisoners; now he knows better,” Elizabeth replied.

Animus glanced at the retreating boat and said, “There is more to this man than just making music.”

He then demanded that they “Stay in the shade!”

Next, he walked out that center dock to retrieve the unconscious guard, seriously disappointing a half dozen gators below.

As he flung the unconscious guard over his shoulder, he noticed some little yellow darts scattered about.

He glanced back at McLaughlin’s little boat slowly steaming towards the canal; then, he ran towards the mansion with the guard draped over his shoulder.

As he shot past his men, he demanded, “Don’t let those bitches out of your sight!”

While passing the main pool, Animus dumped his unconscious baggage into a wicker chair. Then, like a hairless mad momma polar bear out to save her cubs, he charged towards that white marble wall beside the canal.

He ran up that 20-foot wall, grabbed its capstone, then flipped himself over. He landed on the service road, about forty feet behind the still slow-moving water taxi, still pushing full speed.

“What the hell is that!” Colin said as he and Nicola saw the man-beast flip over the wall and rapidly close on them.

As Colin drew his new Webley pistol, Tesla yelled, “Fred! Punch the electric drive NOW!”

“It only works for a couple of seconds!” Fred yelled back from below.

“HIT IT NOW!” Tesla again yelled as Animus shot up a four-foot loading ramp about twenty feet away and leaped at them. Fortunately, the water taxi suddenly popped a water wheelie, shooting it forward as Animus became airborne.

Two of his enormous fingers latched onto the stern (rear) plate. However, he needed another finger or two to hold on, so he fell into the canal.

Seconds later, a giant fist rose above the water as he yelled, “Damn Yankees!”

“Was that an alligator?” Lemont, who was up-front at the wheel, asked.

“I think it was a half-human, nearly your size!” Colin yelled back.

“Nice work, Nicola!” Lemont acknowledged.

“Fred deserves the credit.”

“Hey guys, I was about to blast it until you made the boat jump!” Colin yelled.

“I bet that would have really pissed it off,” Tesla said as he and Colin watched Animus climb onto the service road. He then waved that up-your motion at them.

“Did it think it could take us all out by hand?” Lemont asked.

“Evidently,” Tesla replied.

Colin did not mention that when the wheelie popped, his hand slammed an open windowsill, which knocked his top-secret Webley prototype into the canal.

“Hey Nicky, do you have another dime?”

21. 2:40 pm March 8th, 1885

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN THEY DON’T WANT TO BE RESCUED!?”

Hayes yelled at Lemont through Admiral Forti’s telephone.

“We carried them to our boat, but they ran back to the plantation.”

“Why?”

“I chased Liz; she said they will come home after performing some private show for kings.”

“What kings, where?”

“She did not say.”

“Were they drunk?”

“They seemed lucid, even happy, before we dropped in.”

“They beat the crap out of us while we carried them to the boat; they hit harder than most men!”

“Well, they are true athletes.”

“The mission was to find them, so it was an astounding success. You almost beat them to New Orleans. At least they seem happy and well cared for.”

“Could this be a publicity stunt, Boss?”

“You said Liz said this is a private event, which would not want publicity.”

“I know Lester and Holly Kilbourn (Sara’s parents) very well. Sara would never do anything to worry them like this.”

“She even sends me cards on my birthday and at Christmas.”

“She sends them to momma and me also.”

“Well, so do I.”

“Momma gets your cards, but I have never received one from you, Boss.”

“Hum, there must be a problem with the post office; it can’t be Ivonta; nothing gets by her.”

“Why would anyone prefer to remain a hostage, son?”

“Maybe because Ty Cross is showering them with gifts. Liz said that he gave his huge ship to Sara.”

“I heard. Stone just verified that Cross transferred Maximus V's ownership to Sara. They say it is the most beautiful ship on earth.”

“Yeah, it’s beautiful. We saw it so close we nearly capsized. It's now named ‘The Lady Sara.’”

“What a strange turn of events.”

“Crazy, Boss.”

“How is Colin handling this?”

“He is a little hurt and angry but still ready for action. He misses his drunk fans more than Sara.”

“You can’t force them to return. This mission was to find the girls, which you did, so the mission is over. It’s not your fault that they refused to leave.”

“There are still two key issues that need our attention.”

“Your assessment?”

"We are on the trail of those other missing ladies and those big men. We know that most of them went through that Moroccan fort."

"These people are running something far more sinister than putting on a show for kings. I would bet that island base holds the answers."

"What were they wearing?"

"Who?"

"The girls."

"Blue body-hugging outfits that left little to imagine. They were also wearing a load of jewelry. They brought no luggage; Cross must have bought them a jewelry store."

"That's just petty cash for him."

"Anyways, how is Nicola doing?"

"He solves problems no one else sees."

"You should have seen him manage that witch; now she believes he is a god. It was something to behold! Colin nearly wet himself."

"I'd like to have seen that!"

"Colin wetting himself?"

"No, Nicola, the God. Ha, ha, ha!" Hayes cracked up.

"Don't let anything happen to that boy; America needs him!"

"We need him to protect us," Lemont thought.

"Well, anyway, Stone connected all 72 missing ladies."

"What?"

“Not a single brunette among them; they are all blondes or redheads. What do you make of that?”

“Cross has dark hair. Maybe he wants to fill his Islands with blondes and redheads.”

“That does not make sense, son. He could just pay blonds and redheads to come live on his tropical islands.”

“Every time we answer a question about him, it creates many more,” Hayes said.

“Boss, the way I see it, we only have two main questions to answer.”

“Where are the other victims? And what in the hell are they doing?”

“The magic questions, son.”

“You know Ty Cross is not giving ships, jewels, and royal buffets to those big black fellows. Too bad we did not come this far without trying to rescue them.”

“Well, we are already here, Boss; I think we should continue.”

“Let me think about it. Is Nicola around? I need to talk to him.”

“He is at the ORPH, being worshipped by every navy engineer down here.”

“Tell God to call me as soon as he can. Tell him I’m sitting here waiting for his call.”

“Give me a few minutes, Boss.”

“Hayes out.....”

About ten minutes later, Tesla called Hayes.

"Your dancers have no desire to come home. They treated us like marauders trying to spoil their party."

"I heard."

"This is my fault." I should have known this rescue would not work," Tesla reported.

"No, it's not your fault!"

"Oh yes, it is."

"How?"

"They were not being guarded or watched; they could have easily left in rowboats docked just a few feet away."

"I think I was too excited to ask myself why, which I normally do."

"I should have known they would refuse to leave."

"Nicola, I could not be prouder of you; you did incredible work!"

"You gathered a wealth of information, and we found the girls because of your great work! You made this mission a success."

"I suppose so."

"So, don't beat yourself up, son."

"Because of you, we verified they are safe and happy, at least for now! So, it is not your fault they refused to leave."

"Oh no, Sir, I'm not blaming myself for a mission failure; I'm in so serious physical pain. My back and ass are black and blue from the beating one of your little dancers gave me as I carried her away."

"I can't even sit down. I wish I had brought some Turmeric."

"Oh, Ha-ha, those gals are athletes."

"I feel them!"

"Try keeping your buns moving to hold down the swelling."

"I will soak them in this ORPH's hot water tub after this call."

"ORPH Six has a hot water tub?"

"Oh yeah."

"I converted its water tank (for its boiler) into a water tub. I heat it by circulating the water through the steam engine's block."

"When agents use it, a mechanical arm removes its lid, then stores it out of the way behind the locomotive."

"When it is not used, the arm replaces the lid."

"Orphan agents can use it to relax, bathe or exercise while rolling through the country."

"That's fascinating, Nicola!"

"Maybe someday all locomotives will have your hot water tubs."

"Ah, I doubt it."

"Anyways, Lemont says you can fire lightning bolts from your fingertips."

"It just looks like that; it's a trick."

"A trick?"

"You know those snappy sparks you hear when putting on a wool sweater?"

"Sure."

"I use a battery to amplify them a couple of thousand times."

"The bolts shoot from wires I have sown into my sleeves."

“Could you shoot destructive lightning bolts at targets over great distances?”

“You mean weapons?”

“Yes.”

“I haven’t yet. But it is possible. It depends on how much electricity I can instantly discharge at limited targets.”

“Limited targets?”

“They must either have enough grounded metal or a strong negative charge.”

“We need to get all of your ideas prototyped right away.”

“I need a staff, sir.”

“We are putting that together.”

“Great!”

“Those other missing ladies did not go through Crosswinds. They and those big men stopped at that old French jail, then shipped out in boats, likely out of the country.”

“We already suspected that.”

“Well, it's a fact. Would you like me to explain now?”

“Not at the moment; if you are certain, so am I.”

“It is a fact, sir.”

“What I need to know right now is if you can track Lemont to an island in the Gulf without being seen?”

“Ty Cross has fast boats. If I know their destination, I can find him after they arrive. Admiral Forti is 90% certain those two men escaped from along Cuba’s southern coast.”

“How far away can you track him?”

“I consistently reach twenty miles using crystals at these frequencies. But I would prefer ten if possible.”

“That’s remarkable, son! Ten miles is still far enough for a small steamboat to hide over the horizon.”

“What do you need?”

“A small, fast civilian boat.”

“Do you want me to ask the Admiral what he has available?”

“I already have access to everything here.”

“His chief engineer owns the most ideal boat down here. He just supplemented its steam engine with a dynamo-drive system that he developed. It's quite impressive.”

“With your dynamos?”

“Of course.”

“Using both steam and electric drive systems should help his boat stay close with anything. But I need your authorization to make that happen.”

“For what?”

“His boat needs a couple of hundred pounds of our nitro-muriatic batteries. Right now, it only has full power for several seconds; our batteries should give it 8 to 10 hours of full power per full charge.”

“Nicola, you should still have twelve hundred pounds at Westinghouse.”

"I could have an ORPH bring the batteries. But that would take three days. We don't have any ORPHS east of Ohio today."

"I have a much faster idea. ORPH Six has four hundred pounds of muriatic batteries. We could borrow two hundred, then replace them when we return."

"Will Six be operation with 200 missing pounds?"

"It won't have full power, but it will still be faster than anything else. Its magnetic brakes should also work; they generate more electricity than they use."

"It's weapon systems and light cannons will not operate."

"These lights should work while the brakes are being applied."

"That's fine; go ahead and borrow them."

"How long will it take you to install them into that boat?"

"No time at all. I can have navy engineers switch them tonight when I connect a dynamo to the steam engine."

"Why?"

"So, we can use steam power to charge the batteries."

"Do what it takes."

"I'll commit five days to see if they take Lemont. Don't let anything bad happen to him."

"I'll give all I have!"

"I know you will."

"I would rather not take those batteries back; they need them."

"I could send Yeager and Cochran to New York in Six. George can replace the missing batteries in an hour, and Orph Six could be back here in three days."

"Fine, I'll call George now so you can get to work."

"I'll have to keep the surgical car here; it's my laboratory."

"Of course, Nicola."

"If it is ready, tell George to attach the Flight car."

"What is the Flight-car?"

"We wanted it working before we told you about it."

"What does it do?"

"It releases a folding dirigible on a 10,000-foot tether."

"It will give agents and cameras a bird's eye view of an area, or town, then a dynamo reels it back into the car."

"That's incredible!"

"It will do far more than just recon. It could deliver one thousand pounds of cargo to an otherwise unreachable location, like a mountain top, or inside a forest without trails."

"It does not have to be tethered either; in mild weather, a trained pilot could fly missions several 100 miles away and then return it to the Flight car."

"I can't wait to see it fly!"

"I knew you would like it."

"I believe the biggest problem is finding agents willing to learn how to fly it."

“Anything else, son?”

“I will make another oral tracker for Colin’s mouth tonight, just in case we get separated.”

“Could using two of those confuse tracking.”

“Not at all. I cut the crystals at different frequencies.”

“Different what?”

“Frequencies.”

“What are frequencies?”

“It refers to how many times a crystal vibrates per second. Only crystals at the same frequencies can communicate with each other. If I give each pair a different frequency, thousands of communications can coexist without interfering.”

“Wow!”

“Every federal agent could receive wireless messages from their commander.”

“It is possible that something about Lemont only lets him feel incoming codes. I will know if Colin also can tonight.”

“My fingers are crossed.”

“Even if he can’t, this should still be able to point out his location.”

“Fill me in on Colin’s test before meeting with the Marshal tomorrow morning.”

“If they take Lemont, Nicola, you and Colin must bring him back safely!”

"I'll give that everything I have, sir."

"I hope that's enough, son."

"Sure, ah, dad."

"Is Lemont still there?"

"He is just outside with Wouda eating a mountain of big red bugs."

"No, those are not bugs; those are Crawdads."

"They look like bugs to me."

"Get him back on the telephone."

"Yeah, Boss."

"Are you up for this?"

"As much as I will ever be."

"Anyways, it's unlikely they will abduct you. But I'm committing to five days to bate them."

"Fine."

"Do you think Cross and his men believe federal agents tried to rescue the girls?"

"I doubt it, Boss."

"The girls don't know we're federal agents. They would honestly say that Sara's old boyfriend came for them."

"Cross must be pounding his head to figure out how some Yankee musician found them so rapidly."

"I'm sure of that, Boss."

"Even that Voodoo Witch would say a boyfriend came to rescue them."

"Evaluate the crap out of Nicola's communication thing tonight."

"We can't afford it to fail."

"We have been assessing it; he sends me messages a couple of times an hour."

"What a great invention. I could not consider adding to this mission without it."

"Me neither."

"Tomorrow morning, that Marshall Doohickey will escort you and Colin around Algiers. He said he has a fruit cart for you to push around each evening."

"Fruit is a huge deal down here."

"Don't eat it all. We might need that cart for five nights."

"Marshal Dupree's wagon is open; I leave a large impression where I'd rather not be seen."

"Yea, you are a sight."

"He said he will rent a funeral coach to keep you hidden inside."

"I wired him \$175 to rent one."

"That should cost \$10, \$15 tops, Boss."

"He could buy a new coach for \$175."

“It’s fine. After hearing about that rotten wagon and Old Tinker, I felt sorry for him.”

“They could use upgrading.”

“Call me when you return from your Algiers reconnaissance.”

“I got to go right now, son, CLICK.”

The old commander honestly had to go.

22. Noon March 8th, The Lady Sara's bow

"The night we met; I knew you were my perfect queen. You forever changed me."

"Oh, my," Sara responded.

"I've never considered marriage until I saw you."

"Oh my, my" she blushed as she thought, "He gets to the point."

As he gazed into her beautiful eyes from less than six inches away, "I assumed it was infatuation."

"But your angelic voice never stopped playing through my mind."

"Your graceful motions never stopped stimulating my body."

"And just being this close makes my heart pound."

"Oh, my,"

"These feelings have grown stronger since I first laid eyes on you. Now I can't get you out of my mind; even when I sleep, you fill my dreams."

"I don't know how to respond, Ty."

"No need not say a thing."

"I must now become worthy of your love in return, or I will go to my grave a loveless man."

"My heart also pounds," Sara said as she placed his hand on her upper chest, well above her pair of perfect assets.

"My heart pounds even harder," he said as he slipped off his tie, then placed her hand on his upper chest.

"Oh my, it feels like a drum."

"My heart pounds only for you, Sara Kilbourne."

"I could see you whisking me away."

"But Ty, we have not even spent an entire hour together yet; I could never allow myself to make life-changing decisions so spontaneously."

"I also plan for every detail, my dear."

"Please understand, my mind has been occupied creating music and moves since we first met; I just need a little time to absorb what this means."

"I knew you would respond that way; I would have found you shallow had you simply accepted my proposal."

"I'm happy you understand, Ty."

"I love your reluctance; it stimulates me. Most women often throw themselves at me, which confirms they want my money more than my love."

"I don't need your money. I make three times more than they pay President Cleveland. I already have almost everything I have ever wanted."

"However, I find your body, face, and words extremely stimulating."

"I misspoke. I adore your success, my darling!"

"I do not want you to need me; I need you to want me!"

"That's so sweet, Ty."

"Let's have a lovely cruise today to get to know each other better," Sara said. However, "I hope Colin does not hate me" ran through her thoughts.

Then Ty kissed her, and she kissed back. They did not use any more words for nearly an hour.

“Ty, you are amazing!”

“Well, I had many great teachers. But only you ignite my absolute passion.”

“I was trained how to kiss by a very handsome actor when I was thirteen, but that was for stage practice.”

“I’m sure he thought more of it than you. How old was this handsome actor?”

“Around forty.”

“Anyways, I can’t believe how wonderful it feels to be your captive.”

“You are not my prisoner; I am yours!”

“You and your friends are free to leave at any time. I will supply first-class transportation as quickly as possible,” he almost believed.

From habit, as they locked lips again, his right hand slipped down onto her athletically firm, perfectly shaped booty.

She gently returned his hand up to safe territory without unlocking her lips.

“Your incident reluctance is like a breath of fresh air, my dear.”

Then gazing toward the rapidly approaching Gulf of Mexico, she said, “If I had unlimited wealth, I know exactly what I would do with it.”

“What would that be, my dear?”

“I would help millions of poor, repressed, and underprivileged people improve their lives.”

Ty, who had never felt a similar desire, responded, “As my queen, you can buy your dreams!”

That launched another round of kissing-only on the bow of the world’s most beautiful ship.

As they separated to catch their next breath, Ty slipped an envelope from his inner tuxedo pocket and handed it to her.

Inside was the legal document transferring full ownership of the Ship originally christened, The Maximus V, to Sara Kilbourne of Worthington, Ohio. A federal judge in New Orleans completed this transaction.

“I was not flippant when I said you own this vessel.”

“No way! I cannot accept this! You are crazy, Ty!”

“Crazy? Yes!”

“I am crazy, crazy for you, my darling.”

“No, Ty, I can’t accept this!”

“You already have.”

“There is nothing I can do about it.”

“You are already its legal owner.”

“Even if you choose not to be my queen, this ship still belongs to you.”

“Please accept this gift, for it verifies my love for you!” Ty said as he wrapped her fingers back around the document.

With a lovely, shocked expression, she could not find the words.

“My dear, your yacht is not only the most beautiful ship on earth but also the swiftest craft on the seven seas. I will show you after we reach the Gulf.”

“What is the Gulf?” Geography was not one of Sara’s strong suits.

“The Gulf of Mexico is the sea we will soon enter.”

“I can’t take the world’s greatest ship from you; you deserve it far more,” she said, “I have no use for an enormous ship; I live in Ohio.”

“Oh, don’t worry, I won’t be roughing it, darling. Even the world’s wealthiest man is incapable of sailing aboard two yachts simultaneously. My Maximus VI is already under construction in Italy.”

“It will be even more beautiful, larger, and faster, so giving my old ship to you is ideal.”

Sara’s new ship was nearly two years old.

As Ty turned his gaze to the horizon, he added, “The Maximus VI will be to all vessels, as I am to all men, the finest example!”

“Ooookay,” Sara replied.

As Ty’s eyes returned to Sara’s, he asked, “Captain Kilbourne. May I lease your lovely ship until my Maximus VI is ready next spring?”

She said, “Certainly, I don’t have a place to keep it.”

“Ha, ha, ha. I will pay you the full lease value and keep her in pristine condition.”

“Ty, this is too much for a simple girl from Ohio to absorb this fast.”

“I feel like I’m daydreaming inside a fairytale.”

“Ah, but this is reality, my dear.”

Then looking beautifully innocent, she added, “Just gazing onto your beautiful face feels like a dream.”

“Oh, Darling, this reminds me. There are many paintings of me at Crosswinds, created by the world’s finest artists.”

“I’ve noticed.”

“Have your assistants move your favorite ones in your suite.”

“It already has quite a few of you hanging in there.”

“One of Italy’s greatest artists is already waiting at Crosswinds to paint one of you and several of us together. What magnificent works they’ll be!”

“Ty, I need to catch my breath.”

“I know you need some time, so I planned our wedding for May inside the Vatican.”

“My close friend, Pope Leo, will tie our knot.”

“Can the Pope do that!?”

“Popes can do whatever is righteous.”

“Oh.”

“Your companions will make stunning bridesmaids.”

“This sounds like a fairy tale, but I still need time to soak all this in.

“No doubt, I expected this response from you. All I ask is that you accept my proposal by April tenth.”

“This April?”

“Ha, ha, of course, darling, that gives you a month.”

“Okay. So, where and when are we to perform for kings and princes?”

“Also, overseas, on the first of May.”

“That may be too long to keep my girls away from home.”

“They can leave anytime they want; I will supply first-class transportation. A month is only four weeks. If they stay, I will personally take them shopping in Paris, Rome, and Venice and buy everything they want.”

“I’m more than overwhelmed. Let’s get to know each other first; you might change your mind about me.”

“That is not possible.”

“Anyways, nothing could please me more than spending time with you.”

“Thank you, Ty.”

“You are welcome. Smooch, smooch.”

“Darling, the sun is breaking through the clouds.”

“Down here, the sun will destroy lovely white skin like yours.”

“It will make you look like my servant instead of my queen, so you must always stay in the shade.”

“I am hot and steamy, but I think it’s from your embrace.”

After one quick peck, “Allow me to show you around inside.”

“Oh, that would be nice.”

23. Crosswinds, 3:13 PM

When the Maximus V, I mean The Lady Sara, returned to Crosswinds, Max and Animus were impatiently waiting at the dock.

As the almost engaged couple stepped off the gangway, Max quietly growled into Ty's ear, "We need to speak, right now, alone!"

"Can't you see that I'm busy, boy?!" He replied.

"This can't wait, Daddy!"

"Pardon me, dear. I have either an idiot son or pressing business to contend with."

"Ask my staff for anything you desire, and they will provide it."

"Just stay in the shade."

Max quietly erupted once the men were beyond earshot, "While you were out trying to sow old man oats, her real man came for her!"

"What are you talking about!"

"Your cascade of love blunders has connected Tyberia and my White Knights! You should have never brought those bitches here, as he found them here."

"Who are you talking about? Her lame ex-boyfriend, an Irish McSomething, is just a washed-up musician."

"His name is Mclaughlin, Colin Mclaughlin. He is so lame that he tracked her down like a hound dog for eight hundred miles, as Washington's stupid clueless Service overturns every rock in DC, looking for them."

"Max, he did not follow my train; I had it tailed just to be certain. No one else followed it."

“Her washed-up lame musician did.”

“No way! One of your men opened his mouth. No one followed them,” Ty replied.

“Bullshit, father!”

“This happened because you brought them here, then left them in full view for the world to see.”

“McLaughlin and two others came from the lake. They tried to carry your bitches to their boat,” Max said as he pointed back at them.

“But they refused to leave because they did not have all the shiny shit you gave them with them.”

“That’s great. Their refusal to leave proves that we did not kidnap them. Therefore, crimes were not committed,” Ty responded.

“If just one of these bitches left with him, we would be flooded by federal marshals and agents.”

“Max, this is Tyberian land; they can only enter if we invite them.”

“McLaughlin had no invitation, and this was not his only raid today!”

“What do you mean?”

“Before those bitches even arrived, he bombed the back gate at the holding facility, which is Moroccan property, so he cares nothing about diplomacy. He probably doesn’t know what that word means.”

“You just proved he did not follow them. He had to come by rail to arrive this rapidly. That fort is hundreds of miles from here by rail, so he took a different route. So, your men told him where they are!”

“We had no operations there for weeks. If you had not kept your bitches in plain sight, he would not have entered the property; they were on the beach. So, don’t accuse my men.”

"My plan was perfectly executed!"

"Since you suddenly decided you need a wife, you lost your mind!"

"McLaughlin is smarter than you; he knew better than marrying her!"

"Your newfound stupidity is starting to unravel everything we spent my entire life planning!"

"Like all my plans, it is perfect! It's already running as smooth as silk!"

"It was perfect until you used White Knights to nap them!"

"You need to take them away immediately!"

"When US agents show up here, I will give them full access."

"Fine, we need to be in Jagua Tuesday; we'll take them along."

"Then, I'll take them to our palace (in Sainte Marguerite, the Tyberian capital), in the Lady Sara."

"No! Not on Tyberian soil, keep them far away!"

"And what the hell is The Lady Sara?"

"I renamed her weeks ago; you never noticed the name change on her haul. So, I gave it to her."

"The name or the ship?"

"Ownership of the ship."

"You gave her our flagship?"

"Do you need me to repeat my words?"

"You are insane; you've lost your mind!"

"That's not the first time someone called me Crazy today; losers call all great men crazy."

“It needs to be the last!”

“It’s just words. I’m keeping V until VI is ready.”

“Send those bitches back home now!”

“Load them down with more happy presents, make some fat donations to their hometown charities and churches, then apologize to the newspapers for all the problems you caused!”

“I have nothing to apologize for, Sara and I will be husband and wife by May.”

“That’s why you keep making stupid blunders. You learn nothing from your mistakes. You think you are some god, incapable of mistakes!”

“I made mistakes, like raising you. I should have left you with your mother.”

“Tell their newspapers that you were so enamored with Charlotte that you lost your mind! Try telling the truth for once in your life!”

“Her name is Sara!”

“Buy your way out of this before Tyberia gets sucked in!”

“It’s my nation, not yours. I bought and paid for it!”

“My plans are well polished and uninvolved.”

“No one knows that our” (undersea telegraph) “line even exists.”

“But to appease you, after the Avenger demo at Jagua, I will take them to beautiful La Teja for a week before heading to Europe.”

“I hope they love scorpions.”

“Everything is fine. You are overreacting. On Tuesday, we will prove to (King) Alfonzo’s Admirals just how effective Avengers are. Then the countdown will begin.”

As Ty, Max, and Animus walked toward the mansion, the Buckeye Beauties swarmed their leader.

Guess who just popped in here!” Liz asked first.

“Who?”

“Colin, Lemont, and some skinny guy.”

“You’re kidding?”

“No! They came to take us home.”

“What did they say?”

“Nothing much; they just tried to carry us to their boat.”

“What did you tell them?”

“That we are no one’s prisoners. After we do a show for kings, princes, and ah, marry Ty, we will come home.”

“Oh, I bet that went over well!”

“I did not accept Ty’s proposal.”

“You turned down Ty Cross?!”

“Well, no. I need some time to think this over.”

“It’s not like I wanted to change the perfect life I already love.”

“Where did Colin go?”

“They sailed off in a little boat.”

"That is so sweet; Colin came to rescue me!"

"I'll bet Colin was Max's urgent business."

"No doubt. This place has been going nuts since they popped in. Look at all the armed guards now standing around."

"I see."

"Well, I want to hear everything about your big boat cruise with President Ty!" the usually quiet Daisy demanded.

"Well, I would describe it as 'wonderfully overwhelming.'"

"Wonderfully Overwhelming?"

"He gave me that ship; it already legally belongs to me. He thinks that expensive gifts prove he loves me."

"What is wrong with that?"

"I need that ship as much as I need a third leg," Sara said as she pointed at her huge new yacht.

"That would prove he loves me!" Dotty inserted.

"He gave you legal ownership?" Liz asked.

"I have the signed and sealed documents right here."

She then pointed down its haul and added, "Look, he even named it after me, *"The Lady Sara."*

"WOW! He gets to the point!" Dorothy said.

"It seems he goes full steam after whatever he wants."

"Oh, so did you do it on the water!" Dolly asked.

"Do what?"

"You know, boink."

"No, of course not!"

"But he is a wonderful kisser."

"Girl, always ride a stallion before you it. Not only for comfort but to make sure it can also plow," Dorothy explained.

"The harder it is for a man to get what he wants, the more he appreciates it when he finally does."

"Besides taking one little shot at me, Ty was a perfect gentleman."

"One shot?" Dorothy asked.

"Yeah, the old wandering hand."

"I'm glad he only tried once."

"Girls, let me tell you, sailing on a warm sea with a gorgeous, fine-smelling man kissing your neck is unbelievably arousing."

"I mean, I'm soaked!"

"You're going to marry him, aren't you?"

"I'd be crazy not to."

"How many girls get a proposal from one of the world's richest guys, who also looks hotter than gold?"

"A fairytale!" Dotty responded.

"I could help thousands of poor people if I married him."

"Is that yes?"

“So far, most likely.”

“Does he want kids?”

“Oh, God, I hope not; he already has some, I think quite a few, besides Max.”

“Ty said he had never been married before and had never even considered it until he met me.”

“Woo!” like excited schoolgirls, all five beauties responded.

24. Orphan Underground 3:30 PM, March 8th

After Hayes figured out which one of the six telephones was ringing, he lifted its mouthpiece, “Hayes here.”

“It’s Stone,” the former Union General, now Secret Service Commander Lance Stone, replied.

“What do you got, Lance?”

“Every Mayday, members from twenty royal families, including Ty Cross’s, gather at an ancient Roman amphitheater in Sicily for a private sporting contest, a very deadly one.”

“What sport?”

“A bloody gladiator tournament.”

“Standard royal affair.”

“The public kept away from this ancient Roman arena on May 1st.

“Each king brings three gladiators who place one hundred and fifty pounds of gold into a kitty.”

“The king who brought the last gladiator standing sails home with a ton of gold, minus 5%, to the Italian King for hosting the event.”

“Tyberia entered contestants last year for the first time. Ty Cross and his son Max attended as Italy’s guests two years ago.”

“Are there any other royal gatherings in May?”

“None we know off.”

“Well, no others in Europe.”

“Where else?”

“On the first Wednesday of May, despots, sultans, and warlords from Africa, Arabia, and Asia hold another ugly event in Morocco.”

“What is it?”

“A white slavery auction. Mainly attractive white females.

“How sick,” Hayes replied.

“Most of them have blond or red hair.”

“The girls native to their lands have dark hair, so these slimy despots pay big money to buy these colorful status symbols.”

“British intel claims some girls sell for 100,000 US dollars!”

“Nothing new, General, I mean commander.”

“Blond European kings used to buy African girls for their playthings.”

“In the early (18) thirties, King William the Fourth” (of England) “started publicizing, shaming, and sanctioning other European Kings for this.”

“Rud, between 1833 to 1856, Ty’s daddy Adrian spent a million dollars fighting against slavery abolishment in the USA. After he died in fifty-six, Ty kept his father’s fight going until Lincoln shoved it up to his ass.”

“It’s ironic that the only nation officially claiming, ‘All men are created equal,’ traded slaves for nearly another century,” Hayes replied.

“All governments are hypocrisies.”

“Most of the men that wrote our constitution owned slaves. Yet, in 1803, congress abolished the slave trade everywhere in the United States?”

“I did not know that.”

“Anyways, I just read our dossier Tyberius Maximus Cross. His family imported more slaves after congress outlawed the trade than before.”

"I've seen no hard evidence that CSI has been selling kidnapped white girls there. However, one of his ships was in Morocco during last year's auction."

"But since CIS has over 1000 ships, you can find them docked at most major ports."

"So, which event is it, Rud?"

"They both have recent connections to Cross, but the tournament seems most likely when you consider his money trail."

"Money doesn't lie?"

"Italian sources claim that Ty Cross plans to wed a beautiful American 'Starlet' in Rome in May. They say Pope Leo plans to tie their knot at the Vatican."

"Her name and the exact date were not mentioned."

"How old is the report?"

"It was written on January 14th, a couple of months ago."

"The wedding date and Sara's name would have been excluded before she knew this."

"I agree. Rud"

"She was seeing Mclaughlin up until last Thursday. That is not the way a fiancée would act, especially Sara. We need to figure out how Ty Cross even knew her."

"We verified that she has never received a telegraph from him. We found no other connections either. So far, it appears that they did not know each other before the hijacking."

“Well, he could have attended one of their plays last fall. Neil House management told agent Manley that Cross comes to Columbus to meet with his railroad company’s investors each fall.”

“That could be the connection. I need to ask Peter Legend and his stagehands if they recall Ty Cross meeting the Beauties last fall. He and Sara Kilbourne may have been secretly planning this for months.”

“General, I have known Sara since she was thirteen. She is as kind, fine, and considerate as she can be. But she never does housework, according to Mclaughlin.”

“Tyberius relentlessly seeks his desires. He must have the finest, of the finest, of everything. If he wants Sara, he must have her.”

“His senselessness makes sense.”

“What else did your boys in Italy find?”

“Well, on the 20th of last month, Cross legally transferred ownership of his huge yacht, The Maximus V, to Sara Kilbourne, from Worthington, Ohio.”

“I already heard this roomer from my agents in New Orleans.”

“Cross spent over three million dollars building that ship; that makes it likely the most expensive ship ever built. If Sara disappears before they wed, her family will inherit it.”

“It’s so strange that he did not wait until after they wed; to give it to her.”

“That feels like an insecure decision.”

“But we found his money trail.”

“He has a perfect 45-carat diamond rock going into an engagement ring in Venice. He paid a half-million dollars for it!”

“Damn.”

“His wedding to an unnamed American beauty has been a big deal in Paris since January when he ordered a wedding and bridesmaid's gowns.”

“How could he have known their measurements?”

“I don’t know. But we should question the people creating their costumes if anyone has asked for their measurements.”

“Good idea; they would have their measurements on file.”

“Rud, I doubt that Cross intends to sell the girls in Morocco; he could not come close to recovering the money he has already spent on them.”

“That is comforting. Clever work: your agents need commending!”

“Well, one of our DC secretaries noticed this while using the commode we just installed for ladies inside a storage closet. After running out of toilet paper, she read through a stack of European newspapers we were using instead.”

“Well, she should be praised. We still use Sears and Roebuck pages when we run out. They are much softer than newspapers.”

“What other intelligence do you have so far?”

“Nothing now; I have a pile of files on him we have not yet reviewed.”

“I’ll keep you posted.”

“Likewise.”

“Stone out,” click.

“Hayes out,” click.

9:00 AM, March 9th, New Orleans Navy Base

To give these ORPHAN agents a hidden tour of Algiers, Marshall Dupree arrived with an elaborate stagecoach pulled by six beautiful horses.

However, instead of a funeral coach's formality, its ponies wore fuzzy tutus, blue ones on the stallions, and pink for the fillies.

Most of the coach's exterior was pink, with gold-leaf images of flowers snuggling bananas. Its wooden wheels were white, with gold-plated center hubs and spokes. Its white padded alligator skin top wrapped down the coach's waistline.

The name "JIGGILLIC COZY-COACH" appeared on the gold-plated kick plates beneath its two doors.

Both doors displayed these words in gold leaf:

Trixie's

Pair-A-Dice

The words 'pair' and 'dice' resembled perky boobs. I'll leave the shape of the oversized "A" stuffed in between them to your imagination. Pricing was on the side windows:

Cash Only - Pay then Play - No Refunds

Monday-Thursday (Ten minutes)

Daylight: Single Trick - 70¢ (If available) Double Dippers - \$1.20

Nighttime: Single Trick - \$1.00 (If available) Double Dippers - \$1.70

Each minute over Ten, 15¢ Singles, 25¢ Double Dippers

Friday-Sunday ADD 35%

Virgins Girls Pricing Doubles ADD 100%

Outside, beside each door, were small (red glass) oil lamps. Trixie would light them when no one was sitting on the waiting bench. However, Clyde assumed the red lights were to enhance the JIGGILLIC's elegant styling. So, he fired them up.

A heavy velvet curtain separated that waiting space from the “fun room.”

“The fun room had two small round (dinner-plate-sized) windows, one per side. Several candle lamps set in those little windows set the mood at night.

The carpet, curtains, and upholstery were red velvet, and the wood trim was stained pink. The rear ‘love seat’ also folds down into a bed.

Marshal Clyde Dupree found his perfect disguise under the “waiting” bench. The red velvet cowboy hat perfectly matched the black suit's lining. The Purple Prince wore a nearly identical suit a century later. If you care to see it, YouTube ‘Prince, While My Guitar, Gently Sings.’

Clyde added one of those Mardi Gras Masks (in silver) to hide his well-known law-enforcing face.

Through the caboose’s windows, the agents watched the JIGGILLIC park beside their ORPH. As Lemont and Nicola's jaws dropped in disgust, Colin yelled, “Sweeeeeeet!” with the excitement of a boy getting a tacky new toy.

“Hey there, Cole, Nicky, and Lemont,” Clyde said as the agents stepped out of the caboose.

“Thanks to yawl’s Commander Hayes, Old Tinker gets the day off.”

“That's a shame,” Lemont responded as he focused on the ridiculous ride.

“Dis JIGGILLIC is a supreme reconnaissance machine.”

“Yawl ever saw one before?”

“A bordello on wheels; what a great invention!” Colin answered as he opened a door and climbed right in.

“You’re sick,” Lemont said.

"We ain't got noten like dis back in Mountain City either, but dey common in Norleans. Folks round call' um "Snackin' Wagons."

"Dey's perfect for clandestine penetrations, yuk-yuk," Clyde giggled.

Pointing inside, he explained, "It got a nifty sofer back there."

"How did you find this ridiculous thing?" Tesla asked.

"Oh, I got lucky! Ha-ha, yuk-yuk."

"No more details," Lemont interjected.

"Oh no, big feller, not that kinda luck!"

"Ha-ha, he, he, Da wife would geld me."

"I was on my way to rent a funeral coach. Then I saw this fine rolling artwork just a sit'n at da city" (police) "station."

"So, I inquired bout it. City Marshal Justus said.

He's a hold'n its owner, a Mr. Silky Smooth."

"What did Mr. Silky do?" Colin asked.

"He is accused of offering a white girl to a negro man."

"Oh, no offense there, Mr. Lemont."

"Yeah, right."

"But Trixie says Silky did not break the law cause she is one of dem real light-skinned, ah, darkies."

"That's the law down here?" Colin asked.

"Oh, yes'um, folks down here believe in law and order."

"Apparently."

“Anywho, da was fix’n to let Trixie and Silky go when walked in.”

“So, I gave da Marshal Justus \$5 to get her origin verified first.”

“Since dat would keep’ em locked up fer another day or two, I agreed to feed and water dese horses, den return them tomorrow.”

“So, luck brought us de most ideal surveillance machine!”

“Attracting attention is not normally an attribute of reconnaissance,” Tesla replied.

“Ain’t got none of that, Nicky.”

Pointing at ORPH Six, he added, “Since yawl used to fine luxury, yawl should feel right at home.”

“At home?” Lemont said as he looked at Colin with a puzzled expression.

Colin responded, “He just wants to be comfortable.”

“When dat curtain’s shut, it too dark to see in through dem dinky round winders. But yawl can see out, um, plain as day.”

“Yeah!” At least Colin saw the potential.

“Dat sofer also has advanced technology,” Clyde pointed out as he directed Colin and Lemont to sit on “the Love Seat” behind the heavy red curtain.

“What does it do?” Tesla (already seated on the waiting bench) asked.

“Just pull dat lever, and it flops into a bed!”

“I just folded it up so you fellers can sit instead of lying down there.”

“You cain’t see out through dem winders when lay’n down.”

“How perceptive,” Lemont complimented as he sat down on the left side of Trixie’s love seat.

“Yes’um, perceptibility made me the finest Federal Marshal in this town.”

"How many Federal Marshals are in New Orleans?"

"Shucks, fer now, just me."

With a perfect poker face, Tesla offered, "I will stay up here, out of 'Yawl's' way, so you experienced agents can be alone for that clear view."

"Hey, fellers, lay down the seat to see yourself in the mirrored ceiling," Clyde pointed out.

"Eu, Yuck! It's sticky!" Colin complained as he sat down on the sofa-bed's right side.

"Don't come near me! You stay over there!" Lemont demanded.

"This whole seat is wet and slimy! You have a towel, Clyde?" Colin asked.

"A red one fell to da floor when I folded dat seat up. Look down."

"Hand me that towel, brother," it sat in front of Lemont.

Lemont flung it onto Colin's lap, only flicking one of his size eighteen boots.

"Eck!" Colin yelled as he threw it back to the floor, "It's all wet."

"Stay over there!" Lemont growled at his partner.

As Colin wiped off on the velvet curtain, his elbow hit the release lever, plunging the sofa back into a bed as Lemont rode along.

"You must have a death wish!" Lemont growled as he gazed into the ceiling mirror.

"No problem, just an accident," Colin replied while folding the bed back into a sofa.

Clyde climbed onto the driver's bench (outside), then got the JIGGILLIC rolling.

At the first intersection that required stopping (traffic laws did exist long before automobiles), some guy tried to enter the locked doors, to no avail. So, he pressed his face against the little round window on Colin's side.

"Trixie," he beckoned, "Please, come back tomorrow! I'll have three whole dollars for you! I swear I will this time!"

Before they reached Algiers, eight men and two ladies became upset that Trixie's door would not open."

"Once there, the ninth guy yelled, "Trixie, don't shine your love lights if you don't want to let me in!"

Clyde could speak with his passengers through the brass pipe that Mr. Smooth used to keep an ear on Trixie.

"Clyde, shut off those red lamps. They mean Trixie has immediate openings!" Tesla yelled into the brass bell on the end of the pipe.

"Well, slap my head and call me silly!" Clyde replied.

"You fellers need to turn dem knobs beside dem doors."

"This is disgusting," Lemont repeated.

Ten quiet minutes later, Clyde reported, "Dis is Montgomery Street, 15 to 20 of dem big neg-ah/fellers was nabbed round here."

"No gaslighting here; when da sun shuts off at night, it gets mighty dark.

"Marshal?"

"Yes'um, Nicky."

"The sun does not shut off. The earth is a spinning ball. We get daylight when our side faces the sun."

"I heard dat crap before."

Suddenly, Colin popped out from behind the velvet curtain, snatched a pencil from Tesla's pocket, then began writing something down.

"What is it? Colin," Tesla asked.

"Oh, it's nothing, Nicky."

From behind the curtain, Lemont responded, "Nicola. He does this all the time. He thinks he is jogging down the next great song. But he ain't even wrote a good one yet."

"That's not what all my fans say."

"You know that the word Fan is short for fanatic," Lemont responded.

"let's hear your lyrics, Colin," Tesla asked.

"These are not worth repeating until I arrange them, my brainy buddy," Colin said as he slipped behind the curtain.

Lemont snatched Colin's note and then slipped it to Tesla, which he read aloud:

*"If everyone was naked,
What a wonderful world.
We'd have nothing to hide.
Yet plenty to twirl!"*

"I need that back; if I don't write them immediately, I forget them."

While ‘twirling’ his eyes, Lemont responded, “Oh Cole, that’s a masterpiece! Certainly, your best!”

After 30 more minutes of rolling up and down Algiers' brick and dirt roads, Lemont yelled into the love-compartment’s brass bell, “Marshal, please take us back to the base. This looks the same as it did twenty years ago.”

“Okie-Dokie, Mr. Lemont.”

“Clyde?” Colin asked through the brass bell.

“Yes’um, Cole.”

“Lemont was never a little kid.”

25. 7:00 PM Monday, March 9th, Algiers District

About an hour before someone switched the sun off, Lemont strolled away from behind the Algiers Police station, pushing a fully stocked fruit cart.

As he peddled a few bananas, Tesla checked Lemont's location from the JIGGILLIC parked behind the police station. Shirtless, Colin took a more traditional approach; he took old Tinker for a ride bareback.

Colin borrowed a bottle of cheap whiskey from the JIGGILLIC bar to play the role of a drunken fool. Knowing that Tesla had Lemont wired, he came no closer than several hundred yards to him as he sang this Tommy Makem classic:

*♪ I was born ten thousand years ago ♪
♪ In Bellmullet in the County of Mayo ♪
♪ It was I who chased the vermin. ♪
♪ While St. Patrick preached a sermon ♪
♪ And I'll whoop any man saying that ain't so ♪
Burp!"*

Within minutes Lemont rolled past a house with a sign, "Bubba's Buddies." This was one of many social clubs that the White Knights helped organize after the Civil War.

When Grand Master Bubba Bumpus noticed the massive fruit peddler wearing a huge banana hat, he called Animus at Crosswinds. His clubhouse had the first private telephone in the Algiers district.

"Animus, a dark giant, is strolling down the road. He looks bigger than you. This guy could do the work of three or four slaves."

"What is he doing?"

“Selling fruit from a cart.”

“We stopped collections after several escaped; this might be a setup.”

“He’s a damn neg...! Even Yankees ain’t going that far.”

“Don’t bet on it.”

“This one is huge with arms like tree trunks.”

“Have you seen any cops hanging around?”

” Na, he’s alone.”

“Have you seen anything else unusual tonight?”

“Maybe an hour ago, I saw a drunken fool fall off a mule, but that ain’t that unusual.”

“Are your boys around?”

“Yeah, a few.”

“Have them tail him. Tell them to stay a block away. Call me back if they confirm he is alone.”

Bubba called again an hour later, “He is not being watched.”

“Where is he now?”

“On Elm Street” (the next road over).”

“Keep their eyes on him; I’ll be there in 30 minutes.”

“Around 8:30, several darts nailed Lemont’s thick neck. He pulled one out and used it to tap his mouthpiece, “Dart hit m..,” then nothing.

Animus and several of Bubba's Buddies loaded Lemont into a wagon.

Since The Lady Sara was leaving for Jagua La Campa, Cuba, in the morning, Animus locked Lemont up in its brig. Then, while the giant agent was still unconscious, Animus stripped him and locked him in a new set of full-body shackles that King Kong could not break.

Clyde dropped Nicola and Colin off at the naval base about an hour later.

As Colin Yeager and Conrad removed the surgical car from the ORPH, Tesla stared at Lemont's locator.

The two test pilots then launched for New York City, so George Westinghouse could replace its missing batteries.

Moments later, Tesla announced, "He has stopped moving. It is pointing at Crosswinds."

"We need to roll as soon as he moves again; if they are 15-20 miles away from us, we could lose him."

Maximum speed happens when both the steam and electric drives are fully engaged. Tesla estimated that the little boat could cover forty miles an hour. Wouda instantly converted that to thirty-five knots.

"35 knots would make this the fastest boat on earth," Wouda told Tesla as they installed the batteries.

"How long do you think it can maintain those speeds?" Wouda asked.

"Fully charged, they hold forty kilowatts, which should supply five to six hours of full power. Then about eight hours to recharge the batteries. Recharging will take around twelve hours while also using the steam drive."

“Well, pray for calm water,” Wouda replied. “Rough seas could bog us down. Fortunately, early spring is normally calm.”

At 10:30 PM, Tesla called Hayes.

“They grabbed Lemont, sir.”

“His signal is strong and stationary.”

“Where is he?”

“I can only determine direction accurately; it's pointing straight at Crosswinds.”

“Are you ready to cruise if he moves?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I just finished adding a buzzer to warn me if he moves, so I can work instead of staring at the gauge. I also set my chime to ring twice an hour to double-check the buzzer.”

“Have you communicated with him yet?”

“We’ve sent him messages, but he has not responded.”

“His last message was “dart,” then nothing. So, could still be unconscious.”

“Those two escaped men said they were chained and shackled; he may be unable to reach his mouthpiece.”

“I am making a no-hands version for Colin right now. It should work by just teeth chattering our new Morse Code version.”

“Great.”

“Captain Wouda must come along to navigate. He knows the Gulf like the back of his hands.”

“Colin and I have no experience operating steamboats, and we have never been here before. I know Lemont drives your little steamboat, but he is unavailable.”

“Damn. I did not think of that.”

“This happens when we plan missions on the move.”

“Wouda has a full security clearance and is a brilliant engineer.”

“Can he physically manage this mission?”

“He is a beast. He swims back and forth across this half-mile-wide river three times a week.”

“That is impressive!”

“Yes, sir. He was inspired by Benjamin Franklin, who swam every day he could.”

“Make sure he knows to stay quiet about our new wireless communications.”

“Communicating without wires is a huge advantage; we don’t want anyone else to know about this for as long as possible.”

“He knows, sir.”

“Good thing you found him.”

“Nicola, when you return, we need to get telephones operating aboard rolling ORPHS.”

“Already working on it, sir.”

“Nicola, I know this communications invention is worth a king's ransom.”

“No doubt, sir.”

"I will ask our new President (Grover Cleveland) to reward you accordingly. I am supposed to meet him on the 26th."

"That will be most appreciated, sir."

"God, I hope we are not overlooking anything."

"Have Admiral Forti call me when you rush off."

"Yes, sir."

"Hayes out."

26. March 10th, New Orleans Navy Base 5:30 AM

Around daybreak, Lady Sara left Crosswinds, and Tesla's buzzer worked as he intended.

"He's moving!" Nicola repeatedly yelled at Colin, which did not wake him. So, Tesla had to shake him up.

"My head is pounding!"

"I feel like I had too much whisky to fake being drunk."

"I should have known not to drink much. It tasted like rotgut."

"I need a Bloody Mary!"

"No, you need water; alcohol dehydrated your brain."

"Hurry up; Lemont is moving!"

They both had a doctor's bag packed for a rapid departure. Tesla's bag held his new Webley six-shooter, batteries, and an assortment of his new communication devices, several invented as Colin slept.

Colin's bag held four batteries, a receiver on Lemont's frequency, and ammunition: however, no gun. He did not mention losing his new Webley pistol when the water taxi popped that water wheelie.

Realizing that Lemont is always hungry, Colin tossed several more fish cans into his little leather bag.

After Tesla got a quart of water down Colin's throat, he ran to the boat, woke Wouda, and fired up the boiler. Colin joined them several minutes later.

Wouda ordered a sailor to inform Admiral Forti, "The chase is on."

Admiral Forti called Ohio minutes later. He told Hayes that he ordered the USS Puritan (warship) to be anchored twenty miles south of Cuba's western point if they needed help.

As Colin heaved and hurled through one of the water taxi's windows, its boiler still needed about 15 minutes before it could supply much thrust. So, they launched on battery power.

After Colin recovered, he tried contacting Lemont again. But still no reply.

About ten minutes later, they spotted Sara's huge ship about two miles ahead, slowly moving toward the Gulf.

"She's smokeless; only wind," Wouda pointed out.

Wouda switched to low steam power, allowing the batteries to recharge.

Soon he cut the steam more to put a few more miles in-between. Once south of New Orleans, holding twelve knots, kept them perfectly spaced for several hours until they reached the Gulf.

As the mighty ship entered it, thick plumes rose from the top of its two center masts.

"They just added steam; it's full speed ahead!"

America's fastest warship could not keep up with The Lady Sara. So, to prevent vessels from tailing her, full speed was her standard procedure every time she entered the sea.

To stay within range, Wouda switched the electric drive back on.

The Cross family (with Spain's help) kept their industrial base and port at Jagua La Campa hidden from US Navy intelligence for over one hundred years.

International maritime law kept US ships at least twenty miles away from Cuba's coastline. But even from a quarter mile away, Jagua appeared only

to be a row of flat-top hills. These flat overlapping hills rose just high enough to hide the tallest ships from the sea.

Unfortunately, the water taxi could not quite match the big ship's speed, even with steam and dynamos propelling. "We could stay with her on calm water, but these swells are slowing us down."

Tesla and Wouda had spent countless hours riding ocean swells. However, Colin had never sailed over water rougher than Ohio's lame canals. But, after blowing a few more chunks, he adjusted.

After an hour on the open sea, Lady Sara had gained about ten miles on them. Wouda knew this distance because only the flags atop its masts were still visible on the horizon.

It still took several more hours before they lost Lemont's signal.

"Damn!" Tesla yelled.

However, Wouda's experience with these waters took over. He was not concerned that the Lady Sara was on a southwest heading, not the southeast one for Cuba.

"Don't worry, we are not losing him," Wouda responded.

"How do you know?" Colin asked.

"There are no ports that can dock a 300-foot ship on these headings; she is heading towards 3000 miles of Yucatan jungle, only swarming with spiders, snakes, and mosquitoes."

"Captain Funk is using an ancient tactic for the swiftest vessels."

"What is it?" Tesla asked.

“Depart on a false heading at full speed. Then hold this deception until their captain knows the trailing boats have lost sight of them. Then he changes to the intended course.”

“Indeed,” Tesla replied.

“Captain Funk has taken this to the next level by making course changes every half hour.”

“How are you so sure?”

“He’s also been zigzagging at full speed. That proves he is not rushing to arrive but speeding to deceive.”

“Since none of his zigs or zags indicate Cuba, that’s surely his heading.”

“So, what do we do?” Tesla asked.

“We set sail for Southern Cuba, then let her catch us.”

“That sounds like a big risk,” the now concerned Colin said.

“There is no other choice; we have already lost them, but they are heading nowhere. We will enter the Cayman Current, which moves east towards Cuba any minute now. It is about fifty miles wide.”

“Captain Funk will take it to save fuel. The current is strongest near its center, which is what the captain of a large ship would use.”

“As soon we feel pressure pushing our starboard, I will change course, then let Captain Funk catch us.”

“I hope you are right.”

“I am.”

A moment later, Colin asked Wouda, “What are Cuban ladies like?”

“Barely dressed and steaming hot.”

"I like hot and sweaty."

"Ah, did you feel that?"

"Feel what?"

"The Cayman Current just began pushing us towards Cuba," Wouda answered as he flipped off the electric drive, then made a 90-degree turn to the port side. Two nerve-racking hours later, one of Tesla's buzzers sounded, giving Colin great relief. The needle was pointing behind them.

"They are heading west!" Colin yelled.

"No, they are heading east from our west," Tesla explained.

They watched the mighty ship pass them forty minutes later, about two miles to their south. "Great, no smoke; she's all current and wind."

Again, Colin tried to reach Lemont, but still no response.

The ship disappeared over the horizon about an hour later, so Wouda added enough electricity to keep Lemont's signal.

Twenty-one hours later, Wouda pointed north at another Island.

"That's Cuba."

"Great!" Colin erupted.

"Don't get excited. It's 1250 miles long. At this speed, it would take two days to pass it."

They spent the next 11 hours taking turns at the wheel, shoveling coal, and napping.

27. March 11th, Cuba's Southern Coast

"His signal is stationary and strong; we must be within several miles of him; the ship should be in plain sight, but it is not," Tesla mumbled at about 2 PM.

Several minutes later, he told Wouda, "It's pointing slightly inland. So, the ship is behind these hills."

"Damn!" Wouda said as he looked ahead through his telescope.

"Damn what?" Colin asked.

"Two Spanish warships with stowed sails, six miles ahead, anchored about three miles off the coastline."

"Look for yourself," he handed the telescope to Colin.

"Do you think we found the base!" Colin inserted.

"It seems so."

"We need to look like Cuban anglers, floating free," Wouda said as he cut all power and grabbed the fishing poles. The Cayman current was still strong enough to move them eastward slowly.

Colin removed his shirt, climbed out on the bow, and cast his line. They had seen many more fishing boats along that coast than Wouda expected, which helped them blend in better.

Nicola often had wires running through his garments. It took minutes to disconnect all the cables running through his lab coat. He removed his shirt, grabbed another pole, then joined Colin on the bow.

"Damn, boy!" Colin, who also owns Columbus's only boxing gym, said once he saw Tesla's seriously ripped body.

"How the hell did you do that?" Colin asked.

“Do what?”

“Build that body, man!”

“I built machines that directly work my muscles while bypassing my joints and spine. They let me overwork all large muscles and stamina in 10 minutes, so I do this daily. I call it non-Kinetic exercise.”

“Uh-huh,” Colin said with a yawn.

“I also designed versions for pools when I’m not near my machines.”

“I used to swim under the Scioto River daily. So, I know all about water.”

“By only working my heart and body muscles deeply, these sessions are so addictive I should stay strong until I’m a hundred years old.”

“Well, good for you,” Colin said while rolling his eyes.

“I set up the water tank in ORPH Six, so agents can do my wet workouts while traveling. I’ll show you how when we head back to Ohio.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Colin said as he flexed his arms.

“I’m an expert at building powerful bodies. You know I was a pro boxer; I now train young boxers at my club.”

“Oh, I did not know that. I did notice you beating sandbags at the navy station yesterday. I thought you were angry because your girlfriend ran off with a very handsome rich man.”

“You first met me in front of my boxing club three years ago. You were inside Hayes’s huge battlewagon.”

“I remember spending a day in that thing, but I don’t recall meeting anyone else,” Tesla lied for self-amusement.

Before Colin replied, Wouda yelled, "There is an inland waterway about one mile ahead!"

"How can you see it?" Colin asked.

"I don't. I see small boats moving toward or away from the shore."

"We are close enough; time to avoid becoming a target," Wouda said. He then swung the water taxi around to a westerly heading.

"This sea is Cuba's moat, so military defenses face the sea."

"We need to reach that base from land. First, we need to hide our boat."

"How do we hide it?" Tesla asked.

"Give me a minute, and I'll show you," Wouda answered as he headed toward a wide drainage rut; they had just passed. This natural crack ran to the jungle beyond the beach.

As they reached the flooded crack, Wouda pulled a lever that lifted his propellers above the water, which allowed him to beach the little taxi without damage.

"We'll hide her in the jungle," Wouda said as he timed his turn into the rut with an approaching wave.

That wave shoved them about sixty feet up the rut. However, it left them stuck in the sand about ten feet short of the jungle.

"Before we push, remove your boots, or they will fill with wet sand."

Seconds later, all three barefoot men tried to shove the water taxi the remaining distance. However, it did not budge; they were stuck in plain sight.

Tesla climbed back aboard, then tossed a rope to Fred. "Tie it around that tree," he said while pointing at it.

Tesla attached the other end to the dynamo's shaft, allowing his dynamo to wench the boat into the jungle.

"In a couple of hours, high tide will let us float out of here," Wouda said as all three put their shirts and boots back on.

"Fred, how do we walk down this beach without attracting attention?" Colin asked.

"We don't," he replied as he retrieved a machete from the boat. We'll cut a path through the jungle after hiding this boat."

Like a machine, Colin chopped their path through the hilly jungle.

It took about an hour to reach a rusty barbed-wire fence on top of a flat hill, about 130 feet above sea level.

Colin popped a steel saw/file blade from his boot. Thirty seconds later, he had cut through it.

Several feet beyond the fence supplied a bird's eye view of an immense industrial compound, wrapping around the southern half of a surprisingly large bay. The complex was far more extensive than anything they expected. Tesla whipped out a pencil and paper and sketched a quick map.

The hidden compound was behind those flat-top hills along the shoreline.

That access canal was about seventy feet wide. It ran for about 800 feet inland before doglegging about 25 degrees to the east. It continued four hundred more feet before reaching the hidden bay.

Just inside the canal's dogleg, far enough to stay unseen from the sea, sat a 120-foot-tall iron crane. It had three massive legs, one extending from the water.

The monster crane served several purposes. First, when the agents arrived, it was hauling a 20-person “sky-car” back and forth across the canal. Its second use was lifting extreme cargo, weighing up to 40 tons.

Six brick factories lined up along the bay's far side, about a mile and a half to their east. In-between the buildings stood the compound's strangest-looking structure.

Both engineers knew it was a steam-driven power plant, delivering kinetic force to each factory. Protruding from it were three giant shafts, each spinning two massive pulleys. Each pulley drove a gigantic, rubberized belt that turned another pulley in front of each factory. Likely for cooling and delivering coal, a small water channel ran under the powerplant.

Standing for several miles along the bay’s eastern shore, North of the factories, were dozens of flimsy shacks.

A hillside amphitheater sat about 500 feet past that crane, less than a half-mile from the agents (along the bay’s southern shore). Its bench seats ran up the side of the first hill east of the entrance canal. The stage sat on top of a small boat dock.

A dozen 24-foot, steam-powered fishing boats were also moving around the secret bay.

The first structure below them (on their side), directly across the massive crane, was a guard shack smaller than a one-car garage. Beside it was the landing for that crane-powered sky-car.

About fifty feet north of the guard shack sat ten rows of barracks.

A fine stone building with a green copper roof sat north of the barracks, almost directly below them. Since it was the only building flying flags, it appeared to be the base’s command center.

One flag was blue with that white 'X' cross, and the other was Spain's flag. The agents did not know Spain's flag only flew here on special occasions. Today it was flying to wave at several visiting Spanish admirals.

The following structures (north of that command center) were three large docks. Each dock accommodates two enormous (300-foot) ships. The Lady Sara was the only ship currently docked.

Beyond those three piers sat an unusual building with umbrellas and tables on its roof. It looked like a tropical cantina (saloon). A large marina with three "L" shaped docks holding about five hundred small fishing boats sat just beyond the tavern.

"Holy Ship!" Wouda said when he noticed an old, rusted derelict anchored in the bay about 2000-thousand feet east-northeast of them. "That's Virginia!"

"The Confederate Ironclad ship!"

"At the war's end, they sunk it off the Mississippi coast to keep it away from our navy."

"It ain't sunk no more," Colin remarked while trying to imitate the marshal's voice.

"It has to be the only ship scuttled and recovered twice!"

"It was originally the USS Merrimack. The north scuddled it in 1861 when the Confederates seized the Norfolk Naval Base."

"The Confederacy raised it, then added its iron sides and renamed it "The Virginia," Wouda explained.

"They say, "The third time is the charm," Colin remarked.

A micro-second later?" Thunderous cannon blasts echoed around the valley.

As the echoes reverberated, a voice loudly announced, "No se permite la pesca ¡ Vete inmediatamente o muere!"

“Those thieves stole my electric sound amplifier!” (From his notebooks), Tesla snarled.

“What did they say?” Colin asked.

“No fishing here; leave or die,” Wouda replied.

They could see several small fishing boats near the canal entrance.

“Good thing we walked,” Colin added.

As they pondered their next move, Colin pushed, “We used Lemont to find this place; let’s get him, then leave this place for the navy.”

However, Tesla and Wouda felt that reporting what was happening here was more critical than rescuing Lemont. As they discussed their next move from that hilltop, another beautiful ship, which looked nearly identical to The Lady Sara, arrived.

“That is her sister ship!” Wouda explained.

“It was not finished or named when I read about it.”

“It was built for the king of Spain.”

“King Alfonzo might be down there to meet with Cross,” Tesla suggested.

“That would explain the Spanish warships anchored a couple of miles out,” Wouda replied.

Minutes later, they watched the King’s ship back into the other side of the large dock holding The Lady Sara (almost below them). The name “La Cielo” was painted on it.

“What is La Cielo mean?” Colin asked.

“The Heavens,” Tesla answered.

They also noticed that most of the base workers were wearing Confederate uniforms. They did not realize this had more to do with money than politics. After the Civil War, Cross Shipping had 21,000 confederate uniforms in a Florida warehouse.

It was now past 4:00, and the tide began rising. "We only have about three hours of daylight left," Wouda announced.

"I think it is too risky to attempt any rescue before ensuring that the navy learns what we found, Colin."

"We could be killed trying to rescue him before the navy knows about this place."

"I have years of covert experience, and my teeth can tell you what I find while you two stay safe at sea."

"After dark, I'll figure out what is happening here, then slip Lemont out of that ship."

"How are you going to fit in?" Wouda asked.

"I'll just become one of them. "In the morning, pick us up on the beach, where the boat is now."

Both Wouda and Tesla thought his plan was ambitious. However, it covered both goals, so they agreed.

In 1862 British intelligence informed President Lincoln that Spain was planning to secretly supply 2000-cannons to the Confederacy. Spain had begun building copies of a cannon from India, then smuggled to the Confederacy through Cuba.

President Lincoln sent King Alfonso (this one's daddy) this message:

"Good day, Your Highness! I just wanted to tell you that I'll sink Cuba if copies of Indian cannons show up in North America."

King Alfonso canceled this not-so-secret, secret project while denying everything.

Twenty years later, Washington was still looking for the ideal opportunity, or lie, to kick Spain out of Cuba.

The high tide floated the water taxi, supplying a rapid departure for Nicola and Fredrick.

A few minutes later, inside the throne room, aboard the La Cielo, King Alfonso told Max Cross, "I don't need to board your daddy's boat again; I've toured it already. Instead, he should come aboard my new and improved version for a meeting."

"He's surprised and excited to see you arrive."

"Don't play with me, Max. You know this ship makes your daddy heave."
"Love or hate sparks his passions."

"You know him well, you're Majesty. He had no clue that you would show up for the test today. However, he spent most of this morning setting up a presentation for your admirals on his Maximus V." (Max would never call it "The Lady Sara.")

"He will come aboard for your banquet tonight," Max said while admiring the turquoise inlays on the gold-gilded ceiling above the king's throne.
"You two played as babies. You know your new ship is driving him crazy."

"Ah, Ha, Ha, Ha, yes, indeed. I had the Italians add six inches to your daddy's blueprints to screw with him. Mine is bigger!"

"This will be fun to watch."

"Yes, let's have some fun."

“Tell him I shared this with you after I leave tomorrow,” Alfonso said as he opened a copy of the Maximus VI blueprints.

“Tell him my the La Cielo Grandiose will begin construction the day after he picks up VI.”

“No one can play with him better. He ordered these VI blueprints when he heard you were building this Ship.”

“A new and improved copy! Ty can’t tolerate being second, making him so much fun to screw with.”

“I was home (in Tyberia) when he heard you were duplicating V, but we both know he threw a tantrum.”

“He spent a couple hundred thousand dollars just having number V designed, then you picked up a copy for the cost of paper.”

“Ha, ha, ha! So true.”

A couple of weeks ago, I traded one box of my finest Cuban cigars for a copy of number VI. Ha-ha-ha. Ha-ha-ha.”

“I love your daddy.”

“All right, you convinced me. After the weapon test, I’ll drop by for a few minutes for your presentation before my banquet tonight.”

“Excellent, Your Majesty!”

“Your daddy will try to get revenge when he picks up VI.”

“You know it! Seville (Spain) will be his first stop so that he can dock right beside this beautiful new slice of heaven, just to show you up.”

“Ha, ha, ha! No doubt about it!”

“Anyways, Your Majesty, his presentation will only take ten minutes.”

“I would not do this for anyone else.”

“He loves you too.”

“Of course.”

Before leaving the water taxi, Colin put a canteen, two communicators, four batteries, and two fish cans into a burlap bag. The hard Doctor’s case was too small and awkward to drag along.

Before they nabbed Lemont, Colin talked him out of five (of his 21) darts by telling him, “They’ll likely take your belt away.”

Colin had not mentioned that he lost that fine Webley six-shooter Hayes gave. So, he only had his blowgun, a blade, a saw, and two quick fists.

“Chatter my teeth after you are back on the water.”

Colin sat on the hilltop as the two geniuses headed back to the boat, formulating a plan he would never use.

Colin reloaded one dart into the buckle (shooter) and slid the other four into the belt’s secret compartment.

Colin’s teeth received “We r at sea” several hours before sunset.

About ten minutes later, another announcement boomed through Tesla’s hijacked loudspeakers. This time in English: “All Gladiators, Knights, Sharks, and Crews come forth. The demonstration starts at 5:30; all boats docked by 5:20.”

While waiting for nightfall, Colin watched dozens of small boats (and that sky bus) move well over a thousand men from his side of the canal to the amphitheater on the other side.

Not all wore Confederate uniforms; The Lady Sara's crew wore white shirts, blue bell-bottom pants, and hats that matched the ship. The La Cielo's staff wore the colorful formal dress uniform of the Spanish navy.

Colin watched lifeboats from both ships transport their officers to that small pier under the amphitheater's stage, a couple of thousand feet away from Colin.

Anchored about a half-mile to his northeast, the rusted ironclad (The Virginia).

Since almost everyone, including both ship crews, had just moved to the other side of the canal, Colin dumped the plan. "Screw the darkness; I may never get a better shot at saving Lemont than now!"

Fortunately, his side of the hill had just become shaded. So, he angled downhill in a southerly direction to arrive behind that guard shack and the skycar landing. He reached it undetected.

He snuck up under the shack's rear window, then peeked inside. It did not have glass windows, just wide-open storm shutters.

The napping guard's feet were on his table as if his superiors had all gone away. After Colin heard him snore, he popped the blowgun from his buckle. Then with only one of his five darts, he kept that guard in dreamland.

He then slid through the window and borrowed the guard's uniform. He used the guard's belt to tie his hands behind his back.

The guy was nearly a foot shorter than Colin yet a few inches wider around the waist. On Colin, these trousers looked more like Confederate knickers.

He saw a confederate duffle bag hanging in the shack. Because it had a thick shoulder strap, he could keep his hands free. He dumped it out, then placed the contents of his burlap sack and his pants into it.

Colin preferred Colt 45s (the brew and gun). Before shoving it under his belt, he checked the napping guard's Colt was loaded.

He then used the filthy shirt he had been wearing to gag the guard if he prematurely woke. He then dragged him up to the hilltop, behind the shack, and tied him against a barbed wire fence post using his old pants.

Sitting down for a moment, Colin pulled out Lemont's receiver and tried contacting him again.

Still no reply. However, the needle continued pointing at The Lady Sara.

He sent Lemont the message that he was coming for him, hoping he would receive it.

Moments later, Tesla tapped in, "Spain patrols coming – must leave range – return around sunrise."

Now dressed as a Confederate clown, Colin tossed the Colt into his bag, then he slid back down the hill. Next, he casually strolled toward the beautiful ships like a tired worker after a long day.

Three guards were in front of The Lady Sara's gangway halfway down this dock. Six Spanish sentries stood guard about 20 feet directly across the pier on Le Ciel's entry.

As casually as possible, he slowly walked down the dock, right between both sets of guards, as if he did this every day. He offered a tired smile and soft nod as he strolled past, apparently on his way to the end of the pier.

About thirty feet beyond, just as Colin thought he had made it, one of Lady Sara's guards poked him from behind with his bayonet.

"Where do you think you are going?" he asked.

Slowing his words to sound southern and sleepy, "Cuse me. I got off too late to get over to the theater. This dock has an unobstructed view. I did not think anyone would care."

The guard looked at Colin's half-length sleeves and legs, then down the dock.

"As you were," he said as he turned away and returned to the gangway.

"What's he doing?" His lieutenant asked.

"He just wants to watch another ship get blown up."

"He's new," the lieutenant replied as they watched Colin slowly walk out the dock. "Supply must finally be running out of these old uniforms."

As Colin reached the end of the dock, he looked out over the bay like a tired guy expecting to watch some fireworks.

After several minutes, he faked tightening his bootstrings to glance back between his legs to see if they were still watching him.

Apparently, they found something more interesting.

About five minutes later, Ty Cross opened the show with some kind words about his guests, five Spanish Admirals, and their nation's twelfth King, Alfonso.

Ty's voice boomed over Tesla's stolen loudspeaker invention. However, Colin needed his musically trained ears to separate his words from the echoes bouncing around the hills.

Ty directed attention to the only boat still moving in the bay. It was about a mile north of that iron-sided rust relic (about a mile and a half north of the stage).

While pointing at that distant boat, saying, “Avengers are so simple to operate; my son Max will demonstrate one by himself.”

“You can’t see it yet, but an Avenger’s wake streaking toward that unsinkable ironclad will be visible in several seconds! There it is!”

The audience (and Colin) cheered as Max remotely guided that breadbox-sized Avenger in circles around the old iron ship.

Mas then brought it to a complete stop on the amphitheater side of Virginia. It slowly turned, then charged straight at its iron haul.

KABOOM! KABOOM! KABOOM! KABOOM! KABOOM! KABOOM!

Echoed around the bay as a JIGGILLIC-sized hole appeared in Old Ironside.

Seconds later, a violent 10-foot wave slammed the docked ships.

Colin held the rope that secured The Lady Sara’s stern (rear) to the dock. As almost everyone aboard both ships picked themselves back up, Colin shimmied up the rope about thirty feet. He climbed just high enough to peek over the top deck.

Five sailors were standing only several feet away. However, before he decided what to do with them, they turned and walked forward. He realized that they had also just watched the demonstration. Now they were returning to their stations.

After they walked about fifty feet away, Colin slithered over the safety rail, then hid behind an enclosed stairway several few feet away.

Before he opened the door, something entirely unexpected came over the loudspeakers. He heard the Buckeye Beauties performing ‘Big Daddy’ from ‘Ladies Come First.’

He glanced back at the stage; all six beauties were dancing on it.

“She sure sounds happy.”

“I need to thank her for keeping those horny turds over there!” Colin thought as he slipped into the stairwell.

Several hours earlier, when Ty discovered the king had popped in, he asked Sara, “Would you mind doing today’s rehearsal on stage?”

“Spain’s king, some of his admirals, and a couple of thousand men will be there.”

“When?”

“An hour before sunset, right after a quick weapons test.”

“Weapons test!?” The suddenly concerned Sara responded.

“It’s nothing, my dear. All world leaders hold weapons tests for respect; the stronger they look, the more peace they keep.”

“What kind of weapons?”

“We are just going to blow up an old rusty boat. We do things like this all the time around here.”

“He (the king) is not putting anyone aboard, is he?”

“Of course not. This is just a party.”

“Since the planet’s finest entertainers just happen to be here, already rehearsing, I had to ask you.”

“But this is entirely up to you, my dear.”

“Audiences are far more fun than rehearsals. I doubt the girls will complain; we are all dying to show off our new dresses.”

Once in the stairwell, Colin tried contacting Lemont again, but still no response.

The needle showed the ship's bow (straight forward), then he tipped the locator sideways. He noticed that caused it to point somewhat down.
"Ah, I'll bet he is in a brig, on the bottom of the ship."

He glanced through the round window on the first level down and noticed a set of very ornate double doors into the room across the back (stern) of the ship, just a few feet away.

"That must be Ty Cross's office!" He realized.

Realizing he may never get a better shot; he darted in for a quick look.

Sitting alone on a table beside the desk, he saw a folder titled "Liberation Day." As he reached for it, he heard voices at the door.

About a quarter-second before Max and several servants entered, he dove under Ty's desk.

"I've already seen and heard far too much of those bitches," Max thought after sinking Old Ironsides.

So, instead of returning the little steamboat to the small boat docks, he tied it against the ship's tender landing. Then he rushed in to have royal refreshments ready for Alfonso's stopover."

Typically, modern ships have two docks called tender-landings, one on each side.

However, Ty thought they hurt this ship's lines when he reviewed its blueprints. So, he had his nautical architects place only one, across the stern, several levels below this office.

Colin heard Max tell the servants, "They will be here in ten minutes, so have everything ready in nine."

After a couple more minutes, Colin was relieved to see Max and the servants rush away to retrieve things. He threw that binder into his bag as he slipped out to grab Lemont, but the workers had just cleared the table for refreshments.

"That Turd took the folder with him," Colin incorrectly assumed. One of the servants had moved it to a bookcase.

He knew he only had seconds to leave, so he dashed for those double doors. But just as he reached for them, he heard men laughing on the other side.

He ducked into a closet beside those double doors just as Ty, Max, King Alfonzo, and five Spanish Admirals walked in and sat down.

The closet was full of supplies. In addition, all the doors on this ship were spring-loaded to keep them closed on rough seas. This combination made it nearly impossible for Colin to listen.

He cracked it open for about half an inch, then held it in place with his boot. But unfortunately, they were mostly speaking Spanish. Lemont had taught him a few Spanish words, but no one mentioned tacos, burritos, or enchiladas.

Finally, in English, he heard, "I never imagined a toy boat could sink a warship! This will change everything."

"Alfonso, my great friend," Ty proudly said.

"It was sunk by what looked like a piece of driftwood."

“By the time they figure out what sunk their fleet, they will have bigger issues to contend with, and our problems will be solved.”

He then heard, “Show me phase two.”

“Well, that is the cannons we spent a decade smuggling in.”

“Combined with our wireless technology, we will destroy their inland defenses before they even know what hit them.”

“The Knights have hidden devices under every vital railroad bridge. With the push of a button, their rails will become useless from twenty miles away.”

“If losing their ships and trains is not enough, Phase three is the final nail in their coffin.”

“Tell me?”

“100 wireless bombs are already hanging on the walls of their....”

Suddenly loudspeakers drowned Ty’s words, screaming “intruder Alert” repeatedly.

“It’s probably a false alarm,” Ty told the suddenly alarmed King.

“Does this happen here often?”

“Rarely; it was probably triggered by that blast,” Ty responded.

Colin heard enough to know they were planning to attack some nation. So, he clicked his teeth to tell Tesla, “They plan to sink warships using remote-controlled toy boats packed with explosives; they call them, “Avengers.” But unfortunately, Tesla was still beyond range.

As the alarms continued, Animus walked into the office. “We’ve been penetrated; a guard was just found stripped and bound.”

Before Ty could respond, Spanish guards rushed in and escorted the King and his admirals back into the La Ciel.

While the king traveled, his personal steamships were always warm (ready to launch) when docked or anchored. This allowed Alfonso to make rapid departures without waiting, if necessary.

His private ships were always backed in for rapid departures.

Animus told Ty, "You should also return to the sea until I find the intruders."

"Are you sure that guard was not stripped and tied by some of our boys playing around?"

"We found this on the guardhouse floor," Animus said as he dropped a little yellow dart on Ty's desk.

Ty turned to his Secretary, Ronald Dump, "Tell Funk to get us out of here!"

"What heading?"

"I don't care; tell him La Teja."

As Dump ran off, Ty asked Animus, "Are these the same darts that Mclaughlin used on guard at Crosswinds?"

"Same darts."

"Do you think he followed us here?"

"He could not have followed us. No other vessel could keep up."

"Maybe Mclaughlin snuck aboard in New Orleans, and we brought him."

“I chased him away. When this ship returned, I had maximum security on the docks; he could not have snuck aboard.”

Colin heard Ty order Captain Funk “set sail for La Teja “immediately!”

“I got to get out of here! Every turd on this base is looking for me, and this ship is about to leave. Sorry old buddy, I’ll have to pick you up at La Teja, wherever that is.”

Thankfully seconds later, Ty, Max, and Animus left the office to watch the situation from the control room.

Colin slipped out of the closet; then, just as he reached those double doors, they swung open.

“Oh Shit,” Ty had returned for something.

They peered into each other's eyes for a moment. Then the former prize fighter blasted the billionaire with a devastating right.

Out cold, Ty landed spread eagle on the hallway floor.

Colin stood over his unconscious foe; he pulled the Colt from his bag and shoved it under his belt.

“I wish you were still awake, you bucket of slime,” he growled before planting his right boot into Ty’s unconscious nuts.

“That's for Sara,” he said before returning to the stairwell.

He reached the top deck just as Clyde’s sun turned off. Five Light Cannons were scouring the compound (from the oceanside hills) as “Intruder Alert” continued blasting from those loudspeakers.

He could still see hundreds of men returning to his canal side and dozens of guards scampering around for intruders.

The rope he used to climb aboard no had sailors waiting to untie the ship. The dock was also swarming with returning men, so his escape route was no longer practical.

As he pondered his getaway, the always hot (ready to go) La Ciel slowly left the dock.

The only exit left was swimming towards those small boat docks, then slipping into the jungle behind them.

He did not want to attract attention by making a splash. So instead of diving forty feet into the dark water behind the ship. So, he tied a rope from the rear mast to the safety rail, then dropped the other end down to the water below.

He slid his boots and newly borrowed Colt 45 into his Confederate bag. He then put its strap around his neck and left shoulder, so he could tow his things as he swam.

However, Colin would never reach by sliding down the rope. Instead, he landed inside the hot fishing boat Max had left tied to the tender landing. "Good thing I chose not to dive!" he realized.

Fresh off his first steamboat practice (one day earlier), Colin leisurely set off for that canal. If he could get away, he would sink the boat, then hide in the jungle until he could plan his next move with Tesla and Wouda.

The La Cielo was still crawling toward the canal right in front of him. His little steamboat could zip around it, but that might attract unwanted attention, so he lined up behind the ship as if waiting for his turn.

While waiting, Colin noticed that two Avengers were still tied to this boat's water-level platform. Both floating bombs had shoebox-sized remote controls taped into them. Unlike Tesla's remote controls, these were much larger because they also held batteries.

The light from the five light cannons, moon, and stars allowed Colin to see an arrow and message painted on the Avengers.

The arrow pointed at a post protruding from their bows. The words warned:

“DO NOT BUMP, TOUCH, OR DROP – AVENGER WILL EXPLODE.”

“They detonate on contact,” Colin realized.

As the sitting-duck hero waited in line, he pulled one of these Avenger controllers off. Then, he hit the “on” switch, causing its dual propellers to spin.

Its other switch was the first toggle type Colin had ever seen, but fortunately, it was marked “Forward, Right, Left, and Stop.”

He stayed patient as he finally entered the canal, about fifty feet behind the La Ceil. Then, as he thought he might make it out, he heard someone yell, “There they are!”

Seconds later, six bullets slammed into his boat.

He dove down on the rear deck beside the Avengers, hoping the little boat would stay on course to the sea. Then several dozen bullets slammed around him, nearly hitting an Avenger.

Assuming he would become fish food if a bullet hits one, he pulled the knife from his boot (in the bag), cut the Avengers loose, and then shoved them into the canal.

Still laying as low as possible, bullets continued smashing around him. He grabbed that controller, then began guiding its Avenger towards the only target he could see while lying on the platform.

The front leg of that towering crane (the one with the underwater foundation) was about thirty feet away from that still running Avenger.

The nine nerve-racking seconds it took to guide it into that massive iron leg felt like an eternity.

KABOOM!

A millisecond later, a massive shock wave slammed his boat, nearly flipping lengthwise.

Colin yelled, "Damn! That thing is "still standing!"

Then, the Gatling gun on the hill beside the canal (and above the amphitheater) opened fire. The cannon beside that gun fired a shell that slammed into the little boat's steam boiler several seconds later.

Colin's boat instantly became several thousand pieces of burning shrapnel, some soaring above the 130-foot hilltops.

Less than five minutes later, just seconds after Animus slapped Ty Cross back into consciousness, he muttered, "It's Colin McLaughlin!"

"Get that bastard; bring him to me alive."

"I'm going to run him through the meat grinder slowly!"

"How do you know it was McLaughlin? You've never even seen him."

"It was he!"

"You're too late; he's become fish food. We blasted him into a million bits as he tried to escape."

"Was he alone?"

"We saw no one else."

“We must have brought him here.”

As Animus helped him to the infirmary, Ty told him, “Don’t mention his name. Sara must never know about this.”

As fifty-caliber bullets began shredding the boat (an instant before that cannon finished it), Colin rolled into the water with his duffel bag strap wrapped around his neck.

He dove deep enough to avoid the firestorm but violently tossed when the boat exploded.

Before Colin and his twin brother became orphans, they often competed to see who could swim the farthest beneath the muddy Scioto River with only one breath.

Colin’s muscle memory kicked in as he swam the length of a football field, eight to ten feet deep, towing his bag.

No one saw him roll off that platform just before his boat disintegrated. So, they assumed he had become fish food.

About 30 seconds, as he surfaced for air, he heard a loud metallic sound screaming behind him. He glanced back just in time to watch that massive iron crane twist and shake.

Then he watched that massive tower crash across the canal behind him.

Still packed with men returning from the show, the skycar crashed into that guardhouse.

Because that massive crane was suddenly lying across the exit canal, the La Ceil was the last vessel to leave in one piece. Since The Lady Sara was not ready for a rapid departure, it was not going anywhere.

As Colin surfaced again, debris had covered the canal, which hid him long enough to grab eight deep breaths. He only needed to swim about fifty more yards to reach the sea.

Luckily, the now high tide began to recede, causing the canal to flow toward the sea, so he reached the ocean with only one more dive.

After gulping enough air to continue, he swam west along the beach for about a hundred yards.

As he thought he had escaped, more bullets began raining around him. One of the gunners on a Cuban patrol boat, watching the beach, had opened fire.

After about two seconds, another massive blast tossed Colin again; however, the bullets stopped.

Remember that second Avenger that Colin shoved into the canal?

Well, that tide dragged it into the Gulf right behind Colin. Before that gunner could deliver the fatal shot, his patrol boat bumped the detonator.

“Kaboom!”

“Better them than me!” Colin said as he looked back at that boat’s burning carcass.

After swimming west for several minutes, he noticed another wet drainage rut to the jungle. He crawled up this water-filled crack to avoid leaving footprints.

Once in the jungle, he retrieved his boots from the bag. He poured the water out of them before putting them back on. He preferred running barefoot, but not through this snake and scorpion-infested jungle.

He then ran further west down the same path he had cut hours earlier.

Once he reached where they hid the water taxi. He tried to contact Tesla again. Still no response. He decided to move inland, thinking Ty's men would soon search the beach.

"I wish I had Wouda's machete," he thought as he popped the 9-inch blade from a boot to cut through the vegetation.

To his delight, that thick jungle became a sandy desert after only a couple hundred feet, allowing him to run farther north.

A half-mile inland, he reached a shabby old shack and barn. Exhausted, he slipped into the barn to grab some sleep. He slid into a straw-filled wagon, displacing the goat already there. He curled up and fell into a deep sleep.

His wonderfully refreshing nap came to a painfully abrupt end five and a half hours later.

28. March 12th, the old barn near Jagua (5:42 AM)

Fortunately for Colin, the older woman's musket only slightly cracked his sleeping skull.

Butt cracked by this 1820s muzzleloader was far better than its owner's original intent. When she pulled her trigger, it was aimed at his head.

High morning humanity had dampened its powder, preventing it from firing, so she flipped it around to butt-wallop him instead.

Colin's lightning-fast reflexes caught her second swing with less than one inch to spare. The old lady wanted to kill him.

"Bastardo Confederado, Te Mataré!" she screamed as he ripped the old rifle from her hands.

If he understood Spanish, he would have heard, "I'll kill you, Confederate Bastard!" However, he did understand the "Confederado Bastardo" part.

He jumped off the wagon, tore off that confederate shirt, threw it on the floor, then stomped on it while pointing at himself, "Me Yankee, Yankee Bastardo! No, No, Confederado Bastardo!"

Her gimpy nephew Carlos entered the barn after hearing her screams. Fortunately, he knew enough English to communicate.

After a tense moment, Colin explained, "Last night, I tried to rescue my beautiful girl and best friend from those Confederado Bastardos."

The abused locals saw the fires and heard the blasts.

"Ese eras tu!" Carlos yelled ("That was you!").

He then hugged the filthy Yankee while crying, "Camila!" (Translated from Spanish), "This man attacked them last night! They are his enemy, so he is our friend!"

“Por favor perdoname!” (Please forgive me!) she yelled as she hugged the bleeding agent.

She ran back to her shack for some cloth to bandage his head. After wrapping his wound, she returned to her house to cook breakfast.

Ten minutes later, she brought him a plate of eggs scrambled with peppers, tomatoes, beans, a piece of flatbread, and a wine bottle filled with nearly clear water.

Compared to Tesla’s cans of ‘FISH,’ this meal was delicious. “Lemont would love this,” he thought as he scarfed it down.

Once the morning sun supplied enough light, she showed Colin a black and white photograph of a beautiful young woman.

Excitedly, Camila said, “Esta es Sophia, mi nieta! Los Confederat vinnieron aqui y se la llevaron. Por favor senor, siendo su casa!” Then she fell to her knees, crying.

He just looked at Carlos.

“Sophia, her granddaughter, was also kidnaped by those Confederate Bastards. She was one of ten beautiful local chicas used for their pleasures.”

“Camila begs you to rescue Sophia!”

While looking at the photo, he said, “She is beautiful, much like my Sara!”
“I’ll see what I can do when I return today.”

After Carlos translated, Camila hugged Colin’s legs, “Gracias! Gracias! Tu debus ser Jesus!”

He again looked toward Carlos for the translation.

"She can't thank you enough; she says, "you are Jesus."

"Oh no, not me. God is out on my boat."

Carlos's expression said, "I don't understand."

"Never mind," Colin said as he realized this was no joking matter.

Carlos explained, "Our marionette (puppet) Governor, Richardo Ricardo, runs that cantina. His criminales force our chicas to pleasure the Confedero Monstrous by threatening to kill their families."

"That's why she was not happy with me," Colin mumbled as he rubbed his bandage.

"I am returning this morning to rescue my friends."

"Uno hombre (1 man) against El army! You have Iron Pelotis (balls)."

"What can you tell me about that base?" Colin asked Carlos.

"Follow me."

Although Carlos walked with a cane, he led Colin to the top of another flattop hill. This one was about 800 feet farther inland (north) than the first hill he reached. That barbed wire was already cut; it just appeared intact.

The view was similar but now 130 feet above and behind the fishing boat marina.

They also heard a study drumbeat.

As Colin looked for its source, he noticed around 150 big Black men pulling ropes tied to that enormous fallen crane. Thirty Confederate pricks, about half holding whips, supplied motivation. The other half had riffles.

A modified 60-foot fireship (floating fire engine) was anchored inside the clogged canal. This boat had four thick black hoses linked to four huge rubber bags beneath the wreckage.

The hoses inflated these bags, which lifted the crane enough for the big men to move it about a quarter inch per beat.

Thousands of ships had been lost in shallow water from Bermuda to the Mexican coast. So, in 1872, Ty had his engineers develop this airbag system to raise these boats.

Cross bought nineteen fireboats from their Chicago builder, one for each of his water complexes worldwide. He then installed the air pumps in the five units he kept in the Gulf, including one at Cuban compounds.



Cross's engineers were not the first to raise boats with air bladders. This system was initially patented by the state wrestling champion of Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, in 1849.

Colin guessed the big men had already cleared about eight of the canal's seventy-foot width.

Colin considered blasting a few holes into those airbags to ensure Sara's ship could not leave. But that would set off the alarm again, hindering his chances of quietly extracting Lemont.

Suddenly a loud whistle blew. A minute or so later, hordes of men began pouring out of those barracks. They walked to the small boat docks below Colin, then boarded the fishing boats.

Just as the big slaves had cleared enough room for small boats to leave, steam began rising from 367 of them.

Each boat had three sailors, now dressed like fishermen. However, Colin was thrilled because around eighty wore The Lady Sara's blue uniforms. "Yea! Much of the crew are leaving!"

He then focused on those little boats.

"Damn!" he yelled when he noticed that each craft had three Avengers. "God, they could sink an entire fleet of warships, he mumbled."

He again tried to contact Tesla to warn the US navy.

This time Tesla responded, but the signal was so broken that neither could complete a full sentence. At least Colin heard enough to know they were returning.

He retrieved the other transmitter locator tuned to Lemont's frequency and then tried contacting his tremendous partner again.

Lemont responded this time.

"I'm in a ship's brig," he tooth-tapped back using the saw file from his boot.

"Nude, shackled till minutes ago."

"Told big hairless monster, 'I must scare you shitless to keep me shackled!'"

"It unlocked cell, removed shackles, returned my clothing."

"Close enough to kiss me, said, 'Now screw yourself, neg...'"

Bars suddenly locked; big creep gone."

"Damn!" Calin responded.

"Read you b 4; could not reach my mouth."

"Seen only him."

"He poured beans on the floor."

"I ate like a dog."

"U no where you are?"

"Cuba?" Lemont asked.

"Yes, in Sara's boat. I'm coming 4 u."

"About time! How?"

"Top-secret," since Colin still had no idea.

"When?"

"Soon, very soon."

"I came aboard 4 u last night. Alarms went off."

"Almost died 10 times, escaping."

"Most fun since last summer."

"Big bangs, yours?"

"Not the first one," Colin tapped back.

"Sounded like war."

Colin tapped back. "Ugly but so satisfying."

"U was better off in brig."

"Right."

"I dropped giant crane across ship exit, so you could not leave."

"Now I C, 150 big brownies being whipped to clear it out."

"You found them!?"

"At least some."

"U C Sara?"

"No, I'm in a brig."

"She does not know u r aboard."

"Were t and w?"

"A few miles out at C."

"You have n all the fun."

"A real blast."

"I punched Ty last night."

"Knock out?"

"Cold. Maybe still."

"Stay there until I arrive."

"Hurry, I smell beef brisket."

"He returned my boots."

"Belt?"

“Y, still loaded.”

“Good, can’t rescue pants-less giant.”

“Would scare all men.”

“C U soon, stay put.”

“I’m locked up in a cage!”

Colin and Carlos sat in the weeds on the hilltop until all 367 hot fishing boats had squeezed out to sea.

Only one guard watched the over two hundred fishing boats left behind. Over a thousand of Cross’s men were sailing away, and King Alfonzo’s armada was long gone.

Besides the 150 or so enslaved men, the whip crackers flogging them, the fireboat team, the still turning gears on the powerplant, and the skeleton crew on the Lady Sara, the whole base looked deserted.

Earlier that morning, Max told Ty: “You brought Mclaughlin here; he came aboard before we left.”

“Impossible! Anyway, he could not have exposed us before he became fish food unless he sent a message in a bottle.”

“We must assume he did expose Jagua,” Max declared.

“This is all your fault, daddy! If you had left those bitches alone, Mclaughlin would have never come around!”

“No, this is all your fault! Your men sent him to Crosswinds!”

“You have become a fool!”

“You deserve more than black eyes and a cracked tooth!” Max snarled.

So, eight days ahead of schedule, Ty ordered all Avenger-armed boats to scatter at sea as soon as 150 big slaves moved enough wreckage.

Nearly four hundred White Knights, already trained on Avengers, had not yet arrived at Jagua bay. So, Ty reassigned half of the ship's sailors to those little boats, yet that was still not enough.

Colin noted that thirty-three of the ninety-four remaining boats had Avengers.

“🎵 My man Saint Patrick is with me today.
Everyone Ty could spare just sailed away! 🎵”

Carlos first pointed out to Colin, “They keep Sophia inside that cantina.”

Sara's ship appeared to be the only other occupied area, so strolling aboard like last night would not likely work again. That tender landing offered the best chance of extracting Lemont silently.

Colin was an excellent swimmer. However, Lemont never learned to swim; he needed another small boat waiting at the Ship's tender landing.

Assuming the bat spit had washed off his darts, Colin chose another way to quietly take out that one guard watching the remaining fishing boats. “Give my best to Camila,” he told Carlos as he slid down this steep hillside.

Carlos yelled, “I'll be here, praying for you.”

The still shirtless agent slid slightly south to land behind that three-level (four levels counting its rooftop patio) cantina.

Its architecture was nautical mixed with Spanish; instead of regular windows, each level had two rows of 10-inch portholes.

Colin glanced through an opened one on its shaded back wall. Six attractive young ladies were sitting around one of a dozen tables. A huge ugly man, likely as wide as tall, sat in front of the building's only ground-level entry.

"No fire codes in Cuba," he thought as he saw two more pistol-packing wide-bodies walk down the stairs.

He could hear the girls talking. "Damn, they are fine; maybe I should learn some Spanish," he thought.

He recognized Sofia from the photograph; he realized, "they are not going anywhere. I need to free Lemont first; then, we can come back for some lunch."

He casually strolled to the marina with his bag hanging across his shirtless back. He saw no one else besides that one guard.

This guard was also sitting down, with his feet propped up, as if no one above his pay grade could see him.

"This feels familiar," Colin thought as he sneaked up behind him. But instead of a dart, he used the sleeper hold Service trainers taught him.

Colin tossed the guard into the closest fishing boat and then joined him.

"Hope you don't mind lending me your shirt." He thought as he also noticed that boat also had three Avengers.

Now dressed as a guard, he strolled around, noting which boats had Avengers.

He boarded the furthest one from the shore, then fired up its boiler.

It needed at least 15-smoke-belching minutes before it could launch. So, Colin decided to force any remaining guards to focus elsewhere.

Across the bay, over a mile away, those enormous pullies protruding from that huge power plant were still churning. He remembered seeing a water channel running underneath that structure. So, he ripped the remote controller from one of the Avengers, then cut it loose. He flipped its power on, then shoved it off the platform.

He then guided it toward the powerplant, slow enough to avoid making a noticeable wake. Four minutes later, the next massive blast rocked Jagua bay.

Flames engulfed the powerplant within seconds, and the intruder alarm began screaming again.

"Are you sure that bastard is dead!?" Max yelled at Animus as they watched the fire spread from Ty's office in the lady Sara.

"You saw it. No one could have survived that blast," Animus replied.

"All hands to firefighting," came over the loudspeakers.

However, the spare hands had just sailed away. Most of the remaining men were busy pumping air into those bags under the wreckage or motivating those big men with whips and guns.

The firefighters tied off the air bladders, which should last an hour. That fireboat was spraying water at the power plant five minutes later. However, after hours of pumping up those airbags, it ran out of coal.

"Send the slaves to firefighting!" suddenly came over the loudspeakers.

"Screw the building; we need to get this ship out of here," Max said as he sent a stooge to the control building to cancel that order.

Ty Cross had already escaped on a fishing boat, leaving Max, Animus, Lemont, and the Buckeye Beauties behind. Captain Funk was to pick Ty

up, one mile offshore, five miles east after the canal reopened enough for ships.

As the powerplant's belts continued rolling, they caught fire, which delivered flames to all six factories.

Max ordered twenty of those thirty guards and whip crackers (over the loudspeakers) to run over, to cut down those burning belts.

This order left only ten racists to maltreat nearly one-hundred and fifty big furious Black men who were not shackled.

Meanwhile, thirty local people had joined Carlos on the hilltop, watching and loving every second of Colin's single-handed assault.

As the power plant and factories became engulfed, they watched Colin casually cruise to that tender landing. Like Max the night before, he left the boiler running after tying it in.

The crowd above began cheering for him as he slipped that duffel bag strap back around his neck and shoulder, then he stepped onto the landing and vanished from their view.

He entered the lady Sara through the same door Max used last night.

It hurt that Sara was aboard somewhere. But she had forgotten his name the last he heard, so extracting Lemont was his only focus.

He slid down the stairs to the lowest level. He looked over an enormous engine room through round windows on the stairwell door.

He was surprised only to see one worker inside, a boilerman. He watched him dump a wheelbarrow of coal into the massive firebox, which was burning. The captain must have been ready to leave.

He could not tell why it was so noisy in that room, but that allowed him to sneak up behind this big guy and use that sleeper hold again.

“I should use it more often,” he told himself as the boilerman started napping.

No one aboard this ship wore Confederate uniforms. So, Colin tossed his shirt and nickers into the firebox; then, he borrowed the boilerman’s coal-stained white shirt and blue pants.

Like Colin, the guy was also a free-balling commando type.

“You don’t need clothes down here; it’s too hot already,” Colin told the unconscious boilerman.

As he headed through the engine room, he grabbed a dusty blue hat from a rack of fire coats and then used it to cover his bandaged head. He smeared some coal dust over his face before he continued forward.

There were double doors in the middle of the engine room’s forward wall, with round windows, revealing a hundred-foot-long hallway lined with quarters for the servants and slaves.

Now pretending to be a filthy boilerman taking a break, he smiled at the two Asians scrubbing the floor. One smiled back, and the other nodded, but neither one slowed down.

After 12 rows of crew-quarters doors, the next one had a large square window with the word “Infermeria” (Italian for hospital) etched into it. Colin waved and winked at the nurse and doctor working on someone inside as if he waved at them daily.

The nurse smiled and waved back; the doctor ignored him.

As Colin approached a set of two-way swinging doors, the aroma of roasting beef began filling the hallway.

He looked through one of the round windows on the galley (kitchen) doors. Inside five men in chef's hats were doing their thing.

"Cross couldn't spare his cooks," Colin thought.

Across the hall from the galley's doors was an Otis elevator. After passing twelve more crew-quarter doors, the corridor began narrowing.

The final door was directly in front of Colin. "Sicurezza" (Italian for Security) was acid etched into its window glass.

He saw nobody inside. The door so he entered its tiny office. On its forward wall was another door. This one was thick oak with iron bars instead of a window.

The entire ship had electric lighting, but this room was dark. Colin could only make out a few more bars inside.

"Lemont, you in there?"

"No, it's Captain Hook taking a break," his giant partner responded.

"Time to go, Captain."

"It will take a couple of minutes to cut through those bars."

"Don't bother. I got that."

"Just reach through the bars on your left side to flip on the light switch."

"First-class accommodations," Colin responded as the brig lit up.

Colin could see that Lemont's cage had a complicated lock. "We need to cut through those bars. Do you still have your saw?"

Lemont responded, "It's already managed."

Colin acted unimpressed as he watched Lemont bend four steel bars up and out of the way, one at a time, from outside that first door.

This feat of strength was not quite as extraordinary as it appeared.

After Animus returned his clothes, Lemont popped out his saw. When Colin reached the brig, he had just finished cutting through these bars along the floor.

After Lemont squeezed through, he told Colin, "Stand way back!" Then With the same bullish strength that smashed Lady Azacca's front entry, he blasted this door off its hinges.

"Nice work, but I was about to use these keys hanging here."

"Too boring."

"We got to get; follow me."

Instead of thanking his long-time buddy for showing up, Lemont trumpeted enough gas to make King Kong proud. It reminded Colin of an old horn at his orphanage.

"I'm starving! He only fed me beans on the floor."

"I was in shackles; I had to eat like a dog," Lemont complained.

While holding that filthy shirt over his nose, Colin responded, "I brought a couple of cans of fish for you. Follow me."

Lemont stayed close behind until he reached the galley doors. As Colin unknowingly continued, Lemont ducked in to grab a snack.

Just inside the doors was a cart loaded with warm baked goods.

Lemont grabbed a loaf of Brioche bread, then carefully tore it open like a giant hotdog bun.

His hungry expression was easily confused with rage as he glanced around at the five stunned chefs. He focused on the man slicing beef briskets.

Oblivious to his razor-sharp carving knife, Lemont extended his loaf toward him and demanded, "Fill it, now!"

His blade fell to the floor as he grabbed a tong (Duka Tesla's design). Then, he began carefully placing one slice at a time brisket into Lemont's 18-inch loaf.

"Fill it, fast!" he growled.

He dropped the tong, then started filling it by hand.

"That's how you do it; keep it coming!"

As his sandwich grew, Lemont heard a commotion in the corridor.

He turned just in time to watch Colin fly past those windows. Then Animus walked past them.

The hairless beast had returned to take Lemont to the canal to help the other big Black dudes clear it. Animus might have been the only man on earth, confident enough to manage Lemont alone.

"Damn, if it is not one thing, it's another," Lemont muttered as he carefully placed his sandwich on the bakery cart. He calmly loaded three darts into his secret blowgun, then stepped out into the hallway behind the action.

Just as Animus dropped a pile-driver on Colin's head, four darts (3 plus the one already installed) whizzed toward the white giant's back.

Two darts nailed his head, and another caught his neck. The fourth dart stuck into Colin's hat, about one hair short of his scalp.

As Lemont snapped his peashooter back into his belt buckle, Animus turned around and charged. Lemont put up his cannon-ball-sized fists, ready to trade a few epic blows.

The vampire bat spit took over just as Animus reached him. His lashless eyes rolled back into his head as his big white paws latched onto Lemont's enormous shoulder.

The hairless white giant slid down the dark giant and started napping on the hallway floor.

"Why'd you shoot him? I had him!" Colin yelled as he picked himself up.

"Yeah, right!" Lemont responded while ducking back into the galley to retrieve his snack.

Instead of grabbing it and running, he looked down at that still shivering Chef. He again shoved his massive sandwich toward him. "Au Jus! Now!" (Beef drippings).

Lemont snarled at the other chefs as this one added the juice.

He took a bite, chewed it for a few seconds, then complimented the chefs, "Very Nice! But it could use a bit of sage."

Colin then crashed through those swinging doors and grabbed Lemont's shirtsleeve, "Come on, man, we got to go!"

Cradling his sandwich like a mother protecting her newborn, Lemont stomped on the napping Animus as he followed Colin down the corridor.

After clearing the engine room, they climbed one flight to the tender landing, then to the still-waiting boat.

As Colin reappeared, the crowd on Carlos's hill cheered wildly.

“What the Hell!?” Lemont said as he boarded seconds later.

Colin explained, “just my newest fans! People love me everywhere!”

While taking a full-size, hat-in-hand bow, Lemont asked, “What the hell is wrong with you?!”

“I’ve missed three damn shows at home so far.”

Lemont shook his head “no,” like Hayes constantly does around Colin.

Colin then pointed at the ship’s windows, about twenty-five feet above their heads.

“I forgot something; I’ll be right back.”

“Fine,” Lemont said before taking his next bite.

Just as Colin stepped onto the tender landing, he stopped for a second. He then leaned back and waved to his fans again.

As their cheers came again, he reentered that tender door. He slipped into the stairwell, then ran up toward Ty’s office.

He saw no one in the hallway (through the window on the stairwell door), so he entered. Then just as he put his ear against Ty’s office door, it swung open.

Colin wondered how Ty looked unblemished after last night’s knockout punch. Then he realized he was face to face with Max.

Colin then knocked Max out with the same punch.

Colin decided against another bonus boot to the nuts, as that was his special engagement gift for Ty.”

Fortunately, Max was alone in the office. Ty had cowardly run away with the fishing boats.

Colin then ransacked Ty's office, looking for that folder marked "Liberation Day." He found it on the bookshelf.

He thought as he peered into one of Ty's many mirrors. "God, I am a mess, yet still so manly. This (blue) hat highlights my eyes." Then he asked himself (while stuffing a piece of bandage under it), "does this hat make me look better, or do I make it look better?"

He found the folder in the bookcase behind Ty's desk, shoved it under his belt, then uselessly tried to knock the bolted-down bookcase over. He waved goodbye to himself (in another mirror), then stepped over Ty's sleeping son on his way out.

He returned to the tender landing as Lemont licked the last drops of brisket juice from his fingertips. His reappearance caused the local folks above, now well over fifty, to cheer wildly.

Colin started to untie the boat from the landing but then stopped to ponder their next move. As he burned a few brain cells, Lemont pointed at the seven fire-engulfed buildings across the bay, "That your work?"

"Hell Yeah! Ain't it beautiful?"

"Yeah, it reminds me of marshmallows," Lemont replied.

"Wait till you see the giant crane I knocked down last night!"

Lemont then took the wheel and asked: "Where too?"

"Hum. Give me a minute."

Meanwhile, the Tyberia Secretary of Peace, Ronald Dump, found and revived his boss Max. “That bastard McLaughlin is still alive! He must be aboard, under our noses!” Max incorrectly assumed.

“We saw him blow up last night; no one could have survived.”

“That bitch’s real man has more lives than a cat!” Max responded.

“Let’s get you to the Infirmary; your face is black and blue.”

As Colin pondered their next move, parked right behind The Lady Sara, the water under them began churning. Sara’s yacht had started backing out. Apparently, the big slaves had opened the canal wide enough for the big ship to leave.

Colin pointed back at the small boat docks “lay down as I move over there.”

They docked beside the remaining small boats in time to watch that massive power station collapse. Its fall released a vast black mushroom cloud into the sky. Seconds later, that mushroom erupted into an enormous fireball, causing Colin’s rapidly growing Cuban fanbase to cheer wildly.

Colin stood up with those fires reflecting off the water behind him, faced his fans, and took another bow with his filthy hat in hand.

They erupted again!

As Lemont pulled him down, Colin said, “I did not even have to sing for them.”

“You’re attracting unneeded attention!”

“Just my fans! Almost everyone at this base just floated away an hour ago, on around four hundred little fishing boats.”

“Interesting.”

As Colin pointed at their boat’s three Avengers, he said, “All these boats have three floating bombs guided by those controllers. Each one can blast a giant hole in a steel ship.”

“I took out all seven buildings with just one of them that I launched from right here.”

“I bet they stole the technology from Nicky’s notebooks,” Lemont replied.

Colin's fans began cheering again after watching the fire for a few seconds. Colin waved back, tipped his hat, and took another bow, “you can never grow tired of applause.

“Since you got in the music business, you lost your mind.”

“No, it's just pure fun, man. Try it sometime.”

The Lady Sara suddenly stopped at the entrance to the canal. Captain Funk did not see enough space to squeeze through; he wanted around five more feet first.

“Should I use one of those Avengers to stop them?” Colin asked Lemont.

“Why?”

“To keep Sara and Liz here.”

“Do you think they are ready to be rescued now?”

“Probably not; they sounded happy last night as they sang and danced for the King of Spain,” Colin replied.

“Well, I’ll bet those big men want to leave,” Lemont said while looking at them.”

Suddenly, a message from Tesla came. “You read me yet?”

“Clearly,” Colin’s teeth chattered back.

“Five miles out. Spain left, many fish n boats.”

“Don’t mess with them; they can sink ships,” Colin warned.

“That smoke yours?”

“Yes, I lit Cuban Cigar. I have Lemont.”

“Meet at the same place?”

“Not yet. One hundred fifty big brownies to free.”

“Are you talking to Nicola?” Lemont asked, seeing Colin not poking his teeth with anything.

“He made an improved version for me. Now, I just chatter the code with my teeth. I don’t need my hands.”

“He is on a roll!”

Colin’s teeth clicked, “What gun is in Wouda’s case?”

Tesla asked Fredric. “Sharps 1874.”

“Nickola has a Sharps 1874!” Colin told Lemont.

“The most accurate rifle, but it's just a single shooter,” Lemont added.

“Got ammo?” Colin’s teeth clicked.

Tesla asked Wouda.”

“Yes, full box,” Tesla answered.

“U R sharpshooter, right.”

“Best scores ever,” Tesla replied.

“Prove it!”

“What target?”

“Whip cracking slave drivers.”

“Sounds noble.”

“How long till u beach 100 feet east of the canal?”

He asked Wouda, then replied, “45 min. Is it clear?”

“Most left with fish n boats. Buzz me five min before u arrive. I distract those still here 4 u.”

“Got it.”

As The Lady Sara entered the canal exit, Captain Funk ordered, “Full stop!”

“We still need at least three more feet to squeeze through.”

The exit was now opening about one inch per tug. So, Captain Funk dropped an anchor to wait.

Forty minutes later, Tesla contacted Colin’s gums, “5 mins out. Instruct.”

“First hilltop past entrance has two turrets. 1 Gatling, one cannon.”

"No one is home. Clime to top with Sharps."

"What target?"

"10-armed white bigots are forcing 150 brownies to move wreckage from the canal, right below that hill. Blast several; the others will run."

"How u bring 150 men home?"

"Fishing boats around. I am in 1."

"That's the plan?"

"Yes."

"To cover u, ignore blast. Call back when you beach."

Lemont calculated, "We could squeeze about ten men into one of these boats for a few minutes."

"Five for a voyage, so we must take 30 boats."

"I hope 30 of them can drive boats."

"How do you propose getting them on board?"

"We bring thirty men back here to take enough boats," Lemont suggested.

"You know how to fire up steam engines, right?" Colin asked Lemont.

"This looks simple enough," Lemont answered.

Then Colin pointed at the three closest boats, "Go warm those up; while I hit that tavern."

He pulled that Colt 45 from his bag, then stuffed it under his belt.

Noticing the Colt 45, Lemont asked, "Did you lose your Webley?"

As Colin jumped onto the dock, he replied, “No, I know exactly where it is” (in the canal beside Crosswinds).

“You need a drink right now!?”

“I promised my fans I’d check out some hot girls,” Colin said as he pointed up at them, causing another cheerful eruption.

“What!”

“Just warm these boats; I will be right back.”

As he rushed toward the cantina, his fans went berserk.

He busted through its swinging doors like a wild west gunslinger.

The big fat man sat several feet inside the bar’s only entrance. No one else was on the first floor.

That plump pimp asked the filthy boilerman (Colin), “What do you want today, sailor?”

“My ship just left without me.”

Then pointing out the swinging doors at the fires across the bay. “I want to take Sophia over to roast some marshmallows.”

“She only dates sailors upstairs, señor.”

“Well, my overly fat friend, the rules have changed. This base has closed due to a giant rat infestation. These vermin weigh hundreds of pounds.”

“Sin Excepciones!” (No Exceptions!) the now irritated pimp demanded.

“I’m nearly Ty Cross’s brother-in-law.”

“I don’t work for that pretty boy; I work for Governor Ricky Ricardo!”

"Well, in that case," Colin said before drilling the pimp's jaw.

He just sat there, so Colin drilled him again.

The overly stuffed chair tipped backward, then broke, dumping the unconscious pig on the floor.

Hearing the commotion below, the two other fat slobbs came running down the stairs with their pistols cocked.

Colin pulled out his Colt.

Both pigs hard-stopped halfway down to shoot, boom-boom!

Although blazing fast with a Colt, Colin did not return fire because two adorable chicas had run down the stairs behind the slobbs. Luckily for Colin, the girls collided with the pimps as they fired, sending their bullets astray and their massive bodies crashing to the floor.

Now Colin used his gun to crack the fat head, still moving. Then he kicked their weapons out of reach.

"I just closed this base, so all señoritas must go home," he told the two Cuban Cuties.

¡Prisa! ¡Nuestro salvador ha llegado!" (Hurry! Our savior has come) they screamed as they ran upstairs to tell the others.

Colin and ten sweet señoritas popped out through those swinging doors less than a minute later. They tackled Colin, then smothered him with kisses.

About sixty locals slid down that steep grassy hill to retrieve their hijacked wives, sisters, and daughters.

“This is how all beautiful ladies should behave!” Colin announced.

From that photograph, he recognized Sophia.

“Sophia?” he asked her.

“Si, hombre guapo!” She responded as she hugged him.

“Thank Camila for my breakfast this morning; I would, but I still have more trash to burn.”

Sophia replied, “Si, Si!” as her neighbors tossed torches into the cantina.

“My fans decided to have a pig roast,” Colin yelled to Lemont as he returned to the remaining fishing boats.

“I do the dirty work while you play! I thought you were my friend!” Lemont said as his head swung again that sad ‘no’ motion.

“While you were on your pleasure cruise, I worked my buns off!” Colin answered while pointing at the wreckage, smoke, and flames wrapping around the Bay,

Next, they tied three warmed boats behind Lemont’s in a line like a four-vessel floating train. Colin jumped back into the still warm craft he used to rescue Lemont as they waited for Tesla's call.

Colin tore the controller off an Avenger, then cut that floating bomb loose. He flipped it on and shoved it off the platform.

He aimed it at that dock under the amphitheater stage, about five hundred feet east of the canal entrance.

He shut its power off about twenty feet away, so it would be ready when Nicola arrived.

Alone he raced to the other side of the large ship docks. He tied in beside the shore, in front of that fancy stone command center building, to the southernmost ship dock and waited for Tesla's arrival.

About a minute later, Tesla confirmed he was climbing up the hill east of the canal.

"Have Sharps?" Colin's teeth chattered.

"Ready to go."

"Amo?"

"A Pocket full."

"Go 2 top, target Whip-Crackers below, then fire on my cue.

"Cue?"

"Big bang below."

About two minutes later, Tesla waved the Sharps while standing beside that Gatling gun turret.

"KABOOM!" was that stage's final performance.

As debris rained across the bay, Captain Funk feared that his (Sara's) ship would be the next target. So, he pulled a massive lever that engaged the ship's steam drive to ram it out through the remaining wreckage.

Imagine the sound of fingernails scratching a chalkboard. Now amplify it a few thousand times as the 55-foot-wide ship squeezed through a 54-foot opening.

Braced against the Gatling turret, Tesla put a bullet through a whip-cracking hand.

That whip went flying as its cracker screamed. Tesla rapidly reloaded, then put another bullet through a whip-cracking wrist.

The three-remaining whip-crackers dropped everything as the five holding rifles started returning fire. Tesla dove into the turret and then used the Gatling gun to take out all five.

The whip-crackers ran east along that concrete wall, past the engulfed stage, toward the powerplant's smoldering stays.

Tesla then click-asked Colin, "Waste them too?"

"No, let those they whipped have some fun" Colin's teeth clicked back as around fifty furious big Black men ran them down.

"Go back to the Taxi. Meet our boat, near where we hid the taxi yesterday in one hour."

"Will do."

Colin then tied a rope to the steel loop on one of this boat's two remaining Avengers. Then he ran the other end up the beach, around the flag poles in front of the fancy stone control building, then back to his boat. He tied that other end to his boat's stern.

He cut that Avenger lose. Then he applied full steam as he headed back to Lemont's boat train.

The rope tightened then the Avenger shot off its platform. It skidded over the water, up the beach, then flung around that first flagpole. It slammed into the command building's fancy facade a split second later.

Kaboom!

Colin did not look back as the building erupted; the sound alone was satisfying enough. He then pulled up beside Lemont in his lead boat.

Moments later, Nicola reached the water taxi, then sent Colin another message, “Big ship on east horizon. W says Spanish.”

“Warship?”

“Yes. Old Isabel Class. No steam, wind only.”

“How far out?”

“40 minutes.”

“An old Spanish warship is 40 minutes out,” Colin yelled over Lemont.

As Lemont drove his boat train toward the big, now liberated men, Colin sped off in his boat, yelling, “I’ll be back in two minutes!”

Just as the deeply scraped Lady Sara reached the sea, Lemont swung all four boats against that concrete dock wall as if he did this daily.

He stood up, “TIME TO GO!” he yelled as they rushed to the wall beside the four little boats.

He pointed back at the marina. “I need 30 of you who can drive a steamboat!” hoping 30 could.

Nearly half volunteered.

Lemont loaded thirty men into the three boats behind his, then delivered them to the marina to help them fire up 27 more, all equipped with Avengers.

As the boats warmed, Lemont asked one, “Where is everyone? Around a thousand men are missing.”

“They split us into two groups before bringing us here. This smaller group built these damn floating bombs. The others went somewhere else to dig a tunnel.”

“Everyone in this group can read and write. We even have a couple of doctors.”

“Damn!” Lemont remarked. “Where is that tunnel?”

“I don’t know. We overheard words about needing more men for a tunnel project.”

“We just finished installing these Avengers into 400-fishing boats yesterday. We were supposed to ship out this morning, likely to dig that tunnel.”

“But then someone blew up that crane, and they needed us to move it.”

“Did you do this?” He asked Lemont while pointing at the fire ring spreading around the bay.”

“Yes, we did,” Lemont proudly responded. Ten minutes later, 30-fishing boats were boarding extra-large passengers.

After building a few thousand Avengers, these big guys knew more about them than any White Knight. So soon, everything Colin missed (left standing) became a target.

Those three large ship piers were the next to erupt. Then the fishing boat marina, still holding fifty small boats, exploded.

The firefighting boat was the last prime target on the water. Because it was nearly a mile away, it survived several more minutes before exploding.

Colin reached the sea as the excitement continued, preparing to lead the thirty other fishing boats east. That Spanish warship was about a half-mile out, so Colin launched the last of his boat’s three Avengers at it.

One of the ship’s two Gatling guns opened fire on the Avenger, sinking it.

“Damn, Turds!” Colin yelled.

Seconds later, he beached his boat about forty feet west of the canal, jumped out, then ran up the same hillside Tesla had just used. About three seconds later, that warship’s cannons turned his beached boat into a pile of smoking rubble.

Seconds later, Colin reached that hilltop cannon. He rapidly packed it with powder, then slid a 22-pound shell down its throat (barrel). He spun the torrent’s aiming wheels toward the warship, then fired.

His shell passed over its haul, but it slammed into its rear mast knocking it into the water behind the vessel.

Simultaneously, a returning shell passed so close over Colin’s head that he felt its wind. It exploded as it hit the bay about a half-mile inland.

When he saw the next cannon flash, he dove inland, then tumbled down the bayside of the hill. After violently flopping downhill for nearly fifty feet, he bounced up into a double flip, then nailed a landing like an Olympic medalist. His few remaining hilltop fans jumped and screamed with joy.

But then the shockwave from that cannon turret exploding behind him sent him brutally tumbling down another eighty feet.

He abruptly stopped after slamming into the concrete wall about five yards away from Lemont’s boat.

“Quit wasting time, man! We gotta go!” Lemont yelled.

Colin seemed dead for several seconds before popping up and jumping into the boat. His fans went wild again.

As Spanish sailors worked to cut the ropes dragging that mast behind the warship, its captain managed to turn it around for an eastward retreat along the beach.

Simultaneously, several fishing boats loaded with liberated Avenger builders reached the sea several hundred yards to its east.

Seconds later, several more Avengers were closing on the warship's stern.

That wind-powered battleship had a design issue. It had two Gatling guns, one mounted on each side, midship. Neither gun could fire forward or rearward because the ship was in the way.

Several sailors fired handguns at the rapidly approaching Avengers, which ended as the old wooden warship's stern vaporized.

Almost instantly, the ship flooded and sank; it came to rest on the seafloor less than one minute later.

However, most of its crew would live to watch their ship burn up.

The sea was only twelve-feet deep where the warship sank. It drafted eight feet, so it only fell four more feet before hitting the seafloor.

Several minutes later, these Avenger-packed fishing boats reached the water taxi. Colin and Lemont joined Tesla and Wouda to lead the thirty blast-happy crews homeward.

"Did you pick up some food?" Lemont asked.

Wouda answered, "We did some excellent stuff! Nicola caught three big Hardheads while you two were playing around. Hardheads are some of the tastiest fish in this ocean!"

"Great!" Lemont replied.

“They are still swimming around that water tank,” Wouda pointed out.
“You can gut and clean them here,” Wouda said as he pulled a lever on the starboard wall.

Suddenly a tiny kitchen began mechanically unfolding.

A cutting surface with running water (that drained overboard) appeared first. Beneath it, a soft white rubber sink appeared.

Next, a stack of flat iron plates slid up and folded into a small stove with a grill on top. Then three racks of cooking utensils, silverware, and spices slid up its left side.

Colin Lemont and Nicola displayed the same amazed expression for only the second time.

“Did you build that from scratch?” Tesla asked.

“Mostly, I did buy some of your mother’s utensils.”

“Why didn’t you show this to us on our way down here,” Colin asked.

“You did not catch anything, well, anything edible.”

“Broiled Hardhead is a delicacy; I haven’t had it since I was a child.”
Lemont’s mouth watered as he headed toward Wouda’s tank to pluck several out.

“Ah, well, what do you think of sushi,” Wouda asked Lemont.

“Sushi?”

We won’t have enough coal to reach New Orleans if we hit some more rough seas. We just can’t spare any coal for cooking right now.”

“What’s sushi?” Colin asked.

“Raw fish!” Lemont responded.

“Why the hell would they even give that a name?” Colin responded.

“I like my sushi well done,” Lemont complained.

“What else do we have?”

“Well, Colin brought some of my canned fish, but I would not eat it. I bought it to feed the cats in Westinghouse’s New York facility.”

“I believe they cook that crap right inside the can,” Wouda mentioned.

“No, it is carp, not crap!” Colin corrected.

As Lemont pondered his dilemma, Tesla asked Colin.

“Where is The Lady Sara?”

“It sailed east to someplace called La Teja.”

“Well, tell the navy this mission is over; let’s go home,” Lemont added.

It wasn’t Orphan’s fault that the Buckeye Beauties refused to come home. The agents neutralized a massive weapons complex while rescuing 150 kidnaped Americans. They also uncovered this frightening technology before it was misused against anyone. Overall, this was a remarkably successful mission.

As 30-small boats trailed Wouda’s Water Taxi around Cuba’s southwestern corner, Colin pulled that “Liberation Day” folder from his Confederate duffle bag.

Several minutes later, he yelled, “Holy Mother of Christ!”

“What?” Tesla asked.

“It's a Confederate plan to win the Civil War, twenty years after losing it!”

Just past noon on March 14, when they arrived back at the New Orleans Naval base, the team was surprised to find Commander Hayes waiting for them with Admiral Forti.

Hayes had Yeager and Conrad swing by Sullivant's hill to pick him up in ORPH Six on their way back to New Orleans.

After Lemont destroyed a buffet, Hayes debriefed his bruised and sun-cooked agents.

After Hayes reviewed that Liberation Day folder, he telegraphed this message to the newly inaugurated President, Grover Cleveland, whom he had not yet met:

“President Cleveland.”

“Our agents have confirmed that Tyberian President Tyberius Cross, with assistance from Spain and Morocco, are planning to attack our nation's defenses and leaders with futuristic technology.”

“He intends to replace our constitution with a revised version of Confederate fascism while restoring slavery nationwide.”

“On March 12th, we uncovered his massive weapons complex in Cuba. We destroyed it and its production capability, which has undoubtedly forced changes to Cross's plan.

“A complete copy of his plan that our agents recovered from his office is on its way to you. However, Cross owns many other factories, homes, and authorities worldwide.”

“I recommend we immediately occupy the Tyberian Islands and take Tiberius Cross into custody to overtake a second Civil War.”

An hour later, Hayes read President Cleveland's responding telegram to his agents:

"It is not necessary to occupy Tyberia. Things beyond your control have already transformed this situation. Now read this telegram I just received from Tyberia's new president, Maximus Cross, this morning:

"Dear President Cleveland."

"Congratulations on your election."

"I must warn you that our former president, Tiberius Cross, without the knowledge of Tyberian Council, or myself, has been planning attacks on ships in the Atlantic and the Gulf."

"Our Tyberian council has issued warrants for his capture and has appointed me president, which I humbly accepted."

"We have already seized his ship, The Maximus V, near Nassau. But unfortunately, Tyberius and his accomplices have eluded capture."

"Mr. President, your help in apprehending him will be greatly appreciated. He still commands thousands of vessels and dozens of companies worldwide."

"We believe that he and his entourage are held up at one of his compounds. These are in the USA, Canada, Cuba, Brazil, Central Africa, Southern or Northern Europe, Palestine, Egypt, Singapore, Nippon, Siam, and Hong Kong."

"I will inform you of any developments; I would appreciate receiving any intelligence you obtain."

"Since you and I have both just become neighboring leaders, let's develop a strong, fruitful relationship based on mutual trust."

Sincerely,

"President Maximus Cross, Tyberia."

"WHAT A SACK OF CRAP!" Colin responded. "Max Cross is just as involved as his dirty daddy!"

"This is a ploy to keep us from attacking Tyberia! That is not even his daddy's ship; it belongs to Sara legally," Lemont added.

“Ty is likely basking on a warm Tyberian beach right now!” Colin added.

“This is a bad sign; President Cleveland believes Max Cross over his own intelligence people. Cuba is not part of Tyberia,” Hayes complained.

“I watched Max destroy Old Ironsides to amuse King Alfonzo. At least I fed Max a knuckle sandwich,” Colin added.

“That’s the twelfth time he mentioned punching Max today, Lemont added. “You want to bet that number doubles before midnight, Boss?”

“After 48 years of marriage, the wise man learns to ignore the noise,” Hayes responded.

“Officially, we know nothing about that Cuban base. Let’s keep the Crosses believing that some lame, washed-up singer, enraged that his girl ran off with a much better-looking man, went crazy.”

“Wow, he is growing sharper with age. He just complimented you four times in one sentence!” Lemont whispered to his partner.

“Shut up!”

“He’ll give you at least four more when he asks for your Webley prototype,” Lemont muttered.

“Yeah, well, boys, this mission is over, but you opened a dozen more.”

Get some rest as we ride home; we’ll start over tomorrow without informing our new president.

“But before you turn in, your report says you left with 90 Avengers, yet we only have one to study. Where are the rest of them?”

“Thanks to me, we have one. I saw it floating dead, then dove to retrieve it. I scared the crap out of Wouda.”

“Look at it this way, Boss. The men we rescued did not leave a single vessel flying a Cuban, Spanish, or Moroccan flag afloat between here and Jagua bay. Yet we still brought one home.”

“And Mr. President, They got no one to blame but themselves!”

“Oh, by the way, boys, Dean Longfellow at the (Secret Service) Academy sent me a message that we were sent priceless Webley prototypes by mistake.”

“They were sent here for evaluations in the Academy’s range and gallery. Webley wants them back at once.”

Simultaneously, Max Cross told Animus (at the Tyberian Palace of San Margarita), “Now that daddy and his bimbos are out of our way, the plans have changed.”

He walked over to his enormous floor globe, then gently spun it, adding, “He was about to waste our technology on one country; when we can use it to take them all!”

Maniacal laughter ensued.

- What happened to Sara, Ty, and the Buckeye Beauties?
- What about that wedding?
- What about the sixty-six other missing beauties?
- Where the hell is that tunnel going in?
- Did Max steal enough from Tesla’s notebooks to take over everything?
- What about Colin’s fans, Tesla’s inventions, and Lemont’s next meal?
- What about that dirigible? Is Colin going to use it or lose it?

Find out in an upcoming Orphan novel from beneath Sullivant’s Hill:

The Double Cross

Check UpperColumbus.com for release info.

Questions? Contact build@uppercolumbus.com