

The Spies from Sullivant's Hill

Episode 2

ORPHAN UNDERGROUND

1:01 AM, March 6th, 1885



ORPHAN'S Command Center, 30 feet under NORA's Orphan clinic on Sullivant's Hill

One hour and ten minutes after the beauties were snatched, NORA head Rutherford B. Hayes confirmed that the massive explosion was a diversion. "That ancient riverboat had been rotting there for twenty years. It was obviously not a getaway vehicle."

As the search continued, Hayes, Lemont, Colin, and several Secret Service agents boarded ORPH Three, which had just arrived at Columbus Union Station rail dock 13, to pick them up.

Seven minutes later, they entered the Orphan Ambulance Garage seven miles away. In 1885, 60 miles per hour was just 22 miles an hour slower than the quickest speed humans had ever reached.

After debarking inside the ambulance garage, they walked up to what looked like a giant wooden tool cabinet. Lemont twisted one of its handles, causing a rumbling sound that vibrated the floor. Seconds later, that cabinet split open like a clamshell, revealing an elevator.

A half minute later, the elevator door reopened inside ORPHAN's underground headquarters.

They walked through its lobby to enter the war room, where everyone sat at a large table; Colin McLaughlin broke the silence.

“I’ll kill those turds if they harm her! They probably have her in chains!”

Although Colin and Sara had been close for years, she had no clue that he was still a secret federal agent. She had (often) heard him brag about stopping four assassins just before they would have killed General Grant when he was 16 (and she was only seven).

As the leader of *The Irish Orphans*, Columbus’s most popular tavern band, agent Colin McLaughlin had the ideal cover.

By appointing Colin as NORA’s goodwill spokesperson, Hayes had the perfect reason to have The Irish Orphans tour in an ORPH, much like modern bands use a tour bus.

However, tour buses are typically not bullet-proof or jam-packed with hidden weapon systems.

NORA heavily promoted their shows in every town, causing their citizens to assume that Colin McLaughlin was a world-famous entertainer.

This status gave McLaughlin access to each town’s big-money crime bosses, asking them for a fat donation to help their local orphanage.

Expecting some good publicity from their famous new friend, these mobsters gave up large donations. Then, they would cluelessly give Colin a tour of their illegitimate operations.

“They have no intention of harming Sara,” Hayes assured Colin.

“How do you know that?”

“They spent a fortune on this complex mission, so those girls are extremely valuable to them.”

“Hell yeah! I’m going to waste those turds!” Colin growled.

“Anger causes mistakes. Pull yourself together.”

Hayes then sent Colin and Lemont to the communications room to set up a 5 AM meeting using another recent invention: the telephone. ORPHAN’s complex had the first switchboard in Central Ohio, west of the Scioto River.

When Hayes arrived at the train station an hour earlier, Columbus police, federal marshals, and a swarm of reporters had already entered all eleven buildings in the railyard.

They found almost no trace of the girls or their abductors.

However, in front of the locomotive service building’s main entrance, they found fresh tracks of giant horses, topped off with several more enormous, still-steaming piles of Clydesdale dung.

Inside, all they found were two strange strips of cloth; one side of this cloth was very sticky.

Concurrently - The Phanom Train

By 20 minutes after midnight, the Electro Wonder Coach’s high-tech dome light could no longer outshine a firefly.

The coach, still wrapped in that dark cover, only allowed the six sobbing beauties to hear the droning sound of steel wheels rolling down railroad tracks.

Suddenly, artificial light flooded through the coach's windows. That dark cover had vanished as quickly as it appeared, allowing all twelve lovely eyes to see again.

The scent of delicious food also became overwhelming.

After exiting the Wonder Coach, they were alone in a beautiful rolling room.

Most lights came from six stained-glass fixtures on this car’s gold-gilded ceiling. The room’s birds-eye maple walls were lined with gold

sconces (wall lamps) from Venice. Blue cashmere rugs rested on the boxcar's glowing white tile floor.

One of the boxcar's fifty-foot-long walls had a fifteen-by-two-foot table mounted to it. Six Hepplewhite chairs sporting the crests of six royal families completed the table.

The table held flow-blue China displaying prime rib slices, lobster tails, killer southern gumbo, and croissants.

A secured ice cart held bottles of Frances' finest champagne and Italy's premier Sauvignon. Another cart held cut-glass pitchers of hot chocolate, tea, cream, and water. The third cart displayed a golden platter holding six desserts that looked like artwork.

Although upset, they were starving.

About a week earlier, Edison told them that his friend George Eastman would be at this show, photographing them with a High-Speed camera.

His new film was exposed instantly, allowing him to take sharp images of dancers dancing for the first time.

Prior films required a motionless image for at least 30 seconds, so dancing bodies would look like a smear.



Now you know why people never smiled in early photographs; they couldn't hold a genuine grin that long.

Being the first dancers to be photographed in action was thrilling, so they had been starving themselves to minimize their waistlines. They had talked all week about pigging out at the after-party. This aroma was beyond mouth-watering, so they took seats and loaded their plates.

As Dorthy sat down, she noticed this message taped to the wall in front of her, so she read it to the others:

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

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

I need you to perform your song "Big Daddy" for a secret gathering of presidents, kings, and princes at an enchanting location.

For this, you will be compensated far beyond your wildest dreams.

I could not risk telling you about this to protect many important leaders in one place.

Starting this instant, you will be treated as the goddesses you are!

For relief and washing before dinner, go 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 contains seven pairs of the finest Italian shoes and seven sets of the highest-quality French undergarments.

Your new wardrobes are inside your travel closets on the other side of this room. Your name is engraved on your personal closet.

Your assistants will provide you with almost anything you desire.

I apologize for these crude accommodations on one of my older trains.

If you are hungry, enjoy this snack. I recommend not overeating to ensure the perfect fit with your new summer wardrobes.

Your Most Admiring President

This grand buffet was seasoned with happy herbs (tranquilizers), adding giggly excitement.

After feasting, these wonderfully wasted beauties checked out their new wardrobes.

They gasped as they opened Sara's travel closet first, then five more times as they opened the other five. Each was packed with the loveliest lightweight dresses and the silkiest undergarments they had ever felt.

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

Inside their drawers were the finest cosmetics, perfumes, lotions, and beauty tools from Europe and Asia.

Just beyond the vanity were two rest areas behind blue curtains. Each held a flushing toilet, toilet paper, and a sink with hot and cold running water (almost no American homes had all of these futuristic features yet).

At 1:20 AM, someone started knocking on an end wall door hard enough for the girls to hear over the constant beat of the railroad.

The Buckeye Beauties froze.

After 24 knocks, the door gently opened, and an adorable little Asian girl (or lady), as cute as a baby panda, stepped in.

"Ewoo wadies!" (Hello ladies)," she cheerfully said as she waved at them with both hands.

They all started questioning, but she replied, "Nee no sneaka Angish" (I don't speak English).

But that "follow me" hand motion is universal, so the buzzed beauties happily followed her into the next car.

On this train, the ordinarily open space between cars was enclosed, using what looked like the dark cloth that had wrapped their Wonder Coach several hours earlier.

As they entered this car, two more assistants, who could have been clones of the first girl, warmly greeted them.

The plastered beauties found them highly amusing. “Can you tell them apart?” Dorothy asked Dotty.

“They are three twins,” Dotty answered.

“That’s triplets,’ Dotty,” Dorothy said before she pointed at herself and her companions, stating each one’s name. She then pointed at each joyful assistant, who understood.

One at a time, they introduced themselves as “Me Pee,” “Me Wee,” and then “Me Mee.”

Elizabeth asked the others, “How old are they?”

Looking at their flawless skin, then their perky softball-shaped breasts, Dolly replied, “Certainly past puberty.”

Sara laughed, “I’d bet somewhere between thirteen and sixty-five.”

“You may be right,’ Elizabeth giggled back.

“As usual.”

No one would have imagined that this plain-looking cargo car looked like a Roman bathhouse inside.

A fire was crackling in a small marble fireplace. Along one side of this beautiful rolling room sat a long, narrow marble tub full of steamy water under a thick layer of bubbles. It was large enough to seat everyone there side by side.

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

Beneath the robes, on this rolling room's marble floor, sat several white fur rugs (baby polar bear pelts). On them sat six pairs of white cashmere slippers embroidered with the name they would perfectly fit.

It tickled as their cute assistants gently removed the dancer's heavy winter dresses and undergarments before folding them into laundry bags.

Sara giggled, "Colin just throws my things on the floor!"

Pee, Mee, and Wee then led the beauties up several marble steps, then down into the hot, bubbly water.

As the stoned beauties splashed each other, their assistants, standing on the floor behind them, massaged exotic oils into their hair. After shampooing, they wrapped each gorgeous head in an Egyptian towel.

The assistants then removed their white silk wraps and slippers. Now wearing only white cashmere gloves, they joined the giggly dancers in the bubbly water.

They arranged the intoxicated beauties into three pairs, with one assistant sitting between each pair. They lathered up their cashmere gloves with the most delicate soap, then cleaned their happy captives in the most delightfully stimulating way.

Around 3:00 AM, they guided the girls out of the tub. While still dripping wet, they rubbed a mixture of olive, lavender, and grape seed oils into their bodies.

As they slipped fabulous cashmere robes onto each beauty, Dolly squealed, "This was made in heaven!"

Pee, Wee, and Mee slipped their white silk wraps back on as the pampered victims of beauty snuggled their new robes.

They then led the yawning beauties into the next car, a sleeping car. It was divided into six 7-foot by 6-foot compartments along one side, with two restrooms, one at each end.

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

These sleeping cars had ship-like portholes painted on their walls instead of windows. Under electric lighting, these tropical island scenes looked so realistic that Michelangelo could have painted them.

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.

They were packed with rare sparkling gems set into dozens of gold and platinum rings, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets.

Giving your girl a gift that she will adore can be challenging. However, a box stuffed with Tiffany's finest offerings has a reasonable 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 ended the first day of their nightmare with the most pleasant dreams.

5:00 AM meeting, ORPHAN Underground

By 5:00 AM, four ORPHAN and six Secret Service agents were seated in Hayes's war room, and several more were still commuting.

"Do you think they're squeezing Montgomery (Sara's father) for ransom?" Secret Service Midwestern Superior Lanty Longfellow asked Commander Hayes.

"No, the Kilbourne's are well off, but they are not big money."

"Two dozen of America's wealthiest men were there last night. They would have never considered these dancers if this were about raising ransom money."

"That makes sense," Longfellow replied.

"Gentleman," Hayes said, "here is what I know so far. Hopefully, far more shortly."

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

"Since that did not happen, the only remaining possibilities are that they left by rail or are still in town, hiding." Hayes proclaimed.

"Six horses, a stagecoach, and six screaming ladies would be nearly impossible to keep hidden at the train station complex; they had to have left," Lemont added.

Around 1:30 AM, after setting up the 5:00 AM meeting, Lemont zoomed back to the train station inside ORPH Three to copy their arrival and departure records.

He continued, "Between 11:11 last night and 3:22 this morning, nine trains came through Union Station. They either handled passengers in the main concourse or cargo in or beside one of the station's warehouses."

“Five trains stopped in the gas lamp-lit concourse to transfer travelers. For five minutes, these trains remained in plain view in front of dozens of passengers, baggage handlers, and ticket takers. No one saw anything unusual.”

“The longest of these passenger trains contained eleven cars.”

Lemont continued, “Over those same hours, four trains moved cargo at the station’s warehouse buildings. These four trains pulled from 84 to 121 boxcars. All four cargo trains had four workers onboard.”

“None of these trains pulled flatbed cars needed to transport stagecoaches.”

Hayes responded, “Loading a coach, six horses, six dancers, and that hijack team into passenger cars in under five minutes in front of witnesses is not plausible. We need to concentrate on the cargo trains.”

“Does anyone see this differently?”

At that moment, Secret Service Commander Lance Stone (another former Union Army General) arrived.

“No time for hellos, fellows,” Stone added before reporting: “They likely escaped in a cargo train.”

Colin rolled his eyes at Lemont, communicating, “Tell us something we don’t already know.”

Stone, who had just left the train station, 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?” Hayes asked.

“The dogs became excited at the locomotive service garage. We found Clydesdale tracks leading into it.”

“The only thing we found inside are these strange pieces of sticky cloth,” Stone said as he handed them to Hayes.

“That is adhesive tape, Commander,” Lemont said.

“It surely is,” Hayes confirmed.

“What is adhesive tape?” Stone asked.

“A strip of sticky paper or cloth used to bind things together,” Lemont replied.”

“It’s a classified material; no one is supposed to know of it,” Hayes added as he passed that scrap around the room.

Holding it up to the bowling-ball-sized light bulb hanging from the ceiling, Colin added, “Yeah, another classified secret out of the bag.”

“We have a crate of this in engineering; it has a thousand uses,” Lemont told Stone.

Stone continued, “The evidence indicates that the coach, the hijackers, the horses, and your dancing dames left town on one of two cargo trains,” Stone reported.

“The first departed at 11:11 last night; the other at 1:21 this morning.”

“I strongly suspect the 1:21.”

“Why?” Hayes asked.

“11:11 left just 12 minutes after the hijacking. Stagecoaches are too tall to fit in boxcars, yet neither train pulled flatbed cars used to haul stagecoaches.”

“Before they could load a coach into a boxcar, its wheels and suspension would have to be removed. This normally takes at least an hour, not a few minutes.”

“Therefore, the 1:21 is most likely train,” Stone theorized.

“Could elite mercenaries pull this off in twelve minutes?” Hayes asked him.

“Possibly, if the finest strike team had been preparing for months, which makes no sense. Without hundreds of reporters watching, they could quietly seize those girls after any other performance.”

“Could they have held up that 11:11 departure time long to leave the moment they were ready?” Hayes asked Stone.

Lemont answered, “That did not happen, Boss. The 11:11 train was pre-scheduled; it left precisely on time.”

Hayes asked Stone, “If you planned this, would you leave town as fast as possible or hang around for a couple of hours while hundreds of reporters, cops, and federal investigators searched for you?”

“I would have wanted that 11:11 departure, but it seems too risky,” Stone replied.

“I disagree. It was too risky to wait until 1:21. Columbus Police, federal agents, and reporters were already swarming the railyard when I arrived a little after midnight.”

“If I planned this, I would have been gone by twelve minutes after eleven. They blew that boat up eight minutes after eleven, ensuring everyone searching would not be at Union Station when the 11:11 departure left.

“To make that 11:11, this had to be the most proficient strike team I’ve ever seen, and those dancers must have something of extreme value beyond talent,” Stone responded.

“Commander Stone, have you never seen the Buckeye Beauties?” Lemont asked.

“I was unaware of them until several hours ago. I arrived at Union Station around 12:30.”

“These girls are hot enough to leave burns,” Colin rapidly inserted.

“I did not ignore the 11:11. I wired ahead of both trains. By 2:20, local marshals had stopped it. It was not yet searched, so we should know more very soon,” Stone added.

Hayes responded, “I’d bet they unloaded the girls, horses, and stagecoach before the 11:11 was stopped.” Hayes added.

“The boxcar they used could have been removed before the marshals stopped it.”

“Releasing a boxcar from a moving train would not be difficult, provided it was the last car on the train. However, Union Station track directors claim that the last car on both trains is a caboose. The caboose is still attached.”

“Removing a boxcar from inside a moving train without being noticed seems impossible without stopping, and this train had no scheduled stops before Cleveland.”

“It still has the same number of cars it left with.”

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

“I don’t know. We have the unit numbers from the station’s reports.” Stone responded.

“When I took tickets undercover, we never counted them,” Colin recalled.

“Commander (Stone), did we ask if either train made an unscheduled stop before the marshals blocked them off?” Lemont asked.

“I’ve heard nothing.”

“We need that answered!” Former president Hayes declared.

Stone then sent his assistant to ORPHAN’s communications room to find out by telegraph.

“Have there been similar abductions?” Lemont asked Stone.

“Nothing so intentionally intricate.”

“They wanted headlines.” Lemont inserted.

“Why do you say that?” Stone asked Lemont.

“They could have quietly seized the ladies after any normal show. This was the only one with hundreds of newsmen reporting.”

“They have nuts like cannonballs,” Colin inserted.

Stone continued, “Extreme confidence, but this feels like a small piece of something massive.”

Three Years earlier

February 1882 Edison’s HQ, Manhattan, NY,

Several months after Edison began setting up ORPHAN’s electrical system, Hayes stopped by to see him at his New York headquarters.

Edison told Commander Hayes about a young engineering genius he was bringing in from Eastern Europe.

“This kid invented an electric dynamo so efficiently; it only has one moving part!”

“It is so advanced that Dean Wellington of the American College of Engineering claimed that Martians must have given him its design.”

“Rud, this kid’s mind sees prototypes three to five generations out.”

“Impressive!”

“I am bringing him to the States to help improve the efficiency of my citywide Direct Current (D/C) components.”

“Sounds like a great move.”

“I am conflicted. This kid can mechanically visualize all the unique equipment you want for ORPHAN.”

“Since you funded me when you were president, and I am a grateful American, I am willing to share him with you.”

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

“He loves his homeland, but it is occupied by Hungary, whose king is so scared of him that guards are posted in his home and laboratory, watching his every move.”

“Damn!”

“They only want him to develop weapons for the king, so he fled to France. He sees the United States as the world’s island of intellectual freedom.”

Hayes responded, “Definitely a smart kid. Authoritarians fear independent innovators as much as their enemies; some nobody could invent their demise.”

“From our correspondence, he dreams of becoming an American inventor.”

“As you know, most senators and congressmen don’t even know ORPHAN exists. So, I must be cautious.”

“He sees the United States as inventor’s utopia, the place where ordinary people can get powerful patents without having to suck on unpleasant things.”

“I want to meet him. I have unlimited funding.”

“Does he speak English?”

“Perfectly,” Edison laughed. “He speaks and writes at least eight languages.”

“He created a written language that the Hungarians can’t read.”

“Sounds like Ivonta Mann,” Hayes muttered.

“Ivonta Mann?”

“Just thinking aloud.”

“Who is Ivonta Mann?”

“My lustful administrator in the Orphan Clinic.”

“That spooky lady with the big bazooms?”

“She certainly keeps them popping.”

“She seems appropriately named.”

“Mann is her married name. She’s a widow several times over.

“Herman Mann, her husband, impaled himself on a razor-sharp pitchfork.”

“Marshall Dillon said he flung himself out an upstairs window 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’s office for the vilest, mass-murdering lunatic I ever seen, Doctor William Awl.”

“Oh, the place where your people conduct experiments on lunatics?”

“Yes. Doctor Awl calls himself ‘Doctor Cure-Awl.’”

“I remember setting up his human voltage tests. He seemed like a nice fellow,” Edison’s sarcasm responded.

“Yeah, he’s even more fun today. A few years ago, he left the asylum to open a farm.”

“What is he growing?”

“Vampire bats, real bloodsuckers.”

“Vampire bats!?”

“As big as Christmas turkeys!”

FYI: Thanksgiving was not an American holiday until 1941.

“Where does he get them?”

“From Amazon River animal traders.”

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

“He does not sell them; he extracts their spittle for surgeons. The stuff paralyzes people long enough for surgery.”

“I suppose that’s noble work.”

“Yea, but ah, Ivonta said he cuddles and kisses those revolting things like uppity bitches do to their Poodles.”

“Disgusting!” Edison shivered.

“Anyhow, Ivonta also invented a written language.”

“A secret code?” Edison asked.

“A real masterpiece, but so far, she is the only one that can read it; a secret code was not her intention. It’s for writing words at speaking speed.”

“Very Impressive. What does it look like?”

“Scribble.”

“How accurate is it?”

“I read a law book as fast as I could for five minutes. She nailed every word I pronounced correctly.”

“She can also use it while listening to German, French, or Spanish.”

“She sounds amazing!” Edison said as he briefly pondered her invention’s marketability.”

“Even though she acts constantly aroused, she does not let it interfere with work.”

“She sounds like a great find, Rud.”

“She is irreplaceable!”

“Anyways, ORPHAN needs a small fleet of rail ambulances equipped for everything. Being ambulances, no one will wonder why they move as fast as rails allow.”

“Is this something you would put him on?”

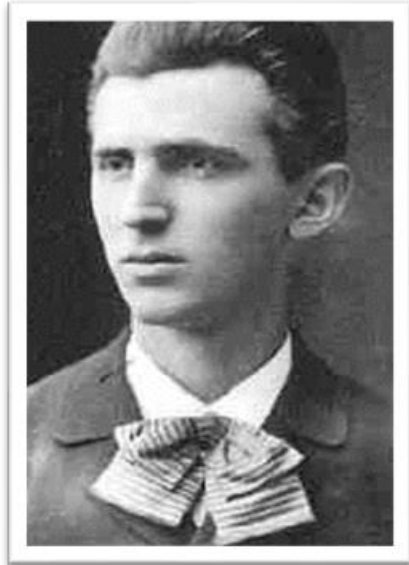
Edison replied, “Yes, he is the one. That is why I’m willing to share him with ORPHAN.”

“When will he arrive?”

“In three weeks.”

“What’s his name?”

“Tesla, Nicola Tesla.”



March 7, 1885, 5:42 AM – Meeting Conclusion

“Have any similar abductions happened recently?” Hayes asked Commander Stone.

“Nothing so public or as complicated, but there are 66 other unsolved kidnappings with glaring similarities.”

“Glaring similarities?” Hayes asked.

“Over the last two years, sixty-six notably attractive ladies have vanished. Almost half were models or entertainers.”

“Any other commonalities?”

“Yes, besides Vermont, all of these abductions happened in every state above the Mason-Dixon line, not one from a Confederate state.”

“That’s telling. Do you have a suspect?” Hayes asked.

“There are almost no independents from our country capable of pulling off what happened here last night.”

“Almost?”

“There is one frightening possibility,” Stone replied while opening his lap desk (a functional briefcase).

“Enlighten me.”

“There is an unholy alliance between several Southern social clubs and a highly organized group of diehard confederates who call themselves The White Knights.”

“How long have these White Knights been operating?” Hayes asked.

“They first appeared several years before the war. They started by intimidating or killing publishers, editors, and journalists, who were pushing for the end of Southern slavery.”

“Once the war started, they became more violent. They started blowing up northern factories, armories, and railroad infrastructures with dynamite.”

“This fortress we are in was a secret weapons factory, built during the war to prevent those attacks,” Hayes added as he pointed around the room.

“But we just called them Confederate spies and marauders.”

“Most often, intimidation, extortion, and blackmail go unreported, so these White Knights are certainly more active than we know,” Stone replied.

“Who is in charge of these White Knights?”

“We don’t know.”

“What do we know?” Hayes asked.

“Each strike team runs independently, as if not affiliated with any other fraction or leader.”

Thinking out loud, he said, “I think they have been swamped recently.”

“Busy?”

“Yes, very,” Stone said, pulling a map from his case and spreading it over the table. “These marks are all suspected White Knight abductions over the last twenty-four months.”

“I thought you said all these kidnappings happened in Northern states. There are far more marks down south,” Hayes pointed out.

“Those are not attractive white girls; most are big, powerful Black men,” Stone explained while pointing at the map.

“Looks like the White Knights might leave their Southern Bells alone,” Hayes muttered.

“The war didn’t end at Appomattox; it just went undercover; they will never give up,” Lemont added.

Stone pointed at the map, “Most of these fellows vanished from Southern Louisiana.”

“It’s more efficient to operate near home,” Hayes muttered.

“Makes sense.”

“I would wager my finest stallion that these White Nights are based in or near New Orleans.”

“They assume that no one has thought to map out their abductions like this, Commander,” Hayes said as he looked around the room.

“There are likely many more southern abductions, as many southern blacks do not trust Southern authorities,” Lemont injected.

“Have the White Knights ever asked for ransom?” Hayes asked Stone.

“Not that I am aware of.”

Colin then suggested. “The White knights may be trying some crazy experiment, like breeding hot white girls with big black studs?”

“You’re ignorant!” Lemont explained, “No need to abduct them; the White Knights could ask for big black volunteers.”

“Just a thought, Big Boy,” Colin replied.

“Most South American and Caribbean nations still have slaves. The White Knights might be selling these big Black men into South American slavery,” Hayes suggested.

“Age has only sharpened you, Rud.”

“Do you think they are selling all those pretty girls into slavery?”

“I hope not, but it would mean they are still alive.”

“This New Orleans Naval Base report seems to agree.”

“I received this report last Friday,” Stone said as he pulled the one-page report from his case and handed it to Hayes.

Hayes read some of it aloud:

“On February twenty-first, two large negro men approached the New Orleans Navy base.”

“They told the guards three days earlier that they were knocked out by something unseen as they walked home after repairing brick pavement for the city.”

“They woke up wearing shackles inside an ancient jail, along with twelve other large Black men.”

“Around daybreak, they were chain herded into an old boat, then confined inside the ship’s cargo hold. The ship then set sail.”

“About a day and a half later, they arrived at a huge industrial complex on an island in the Gulf.”

“They could not see the ocean or coastline from where that boat docked. They saw a huge industrial-looking complex set around a lake, which they say is about a half mile wide and a few miles wide.”

“They believe the ocean was just on the other side of several hills.”

“They claim that the complex was swarming with soldiers wearing Confederate Uniforms.”

“Damn!” Hayes said, interrupting himself.

He continued, “The guards turned the two men over to Admiral Forti, who questioned them further.”

“They told him that when they were brought aboard, the boat was flying the stars and stripes, but when they were brought back up on deck, after docking, it flew a blue flag with a white cross and a star in its center.”

“Who flies that flag?” Hayes asked Stone.

“I’ll have to look it up, Rud.”

“Without that star, Scotland. That tilted cross is called the Saint Andrews cross,” Lemont informed.

“He might be right; that is just like the Confederate flag,’ Stone told Hayes.

“I might be right!” Lemont fumed to himself and calmly said, “That was not the Confederate flag. General Lee thought their official flag looked like the Stars and Stripes, so he flew that angry Saint Andrews cross flag over his troops. We call it the confederate flag.”

Hayes put the meeting back on track: “I do not see how those men could have made up that story. They likely hated even reporting it. They were pretty brave for reporting it.”

“Our new President said those same words after reading this report,” Stone added.

FYI: President Grover Cleveland was inaugurated three days earlier.

Hayes continued reading, “Before they reached that base, one of the men twisted his shackles. He said it shattered, like pottery; then he helped his companion break his set.”

“Damn right, they shattered,” Snarled Lemont, who, as a teen, was known for crushing rocks with his dinner plate-sized hands.

Hayes continued, “They held their chains as if the shackles were still in place, hoping for a chance to escape.”

“When they were brought back onto the main deck, all of the soldiers guarding the area were staring at six to eight young white girls being led taken off another boat they say was docked right beside them.”

“They noted that the ladies were bound together with ropes, and their ship flew a blood-red flag.”

“Morocco,” Lemont blurted.

Hayes continued reading, “As everyone gawked at those girls, these two men slid down a rope into the water behind their boat.”

“A few minutes later, alarms sounded. Search parties began hunting the complex, but no one looked in the water behind that boat.”

“After sunset, they climbed back aboard, then hid under a pile of old sails on the upper deck.”

“They prayed the boat would soon return to New Orleans.”

“Just before sunrise, three sailors came aboard, hoisted sails, and their boat departed.”

“The next afternoon, they recognized the Mississippi Delta.”

“Once they were close to New Orleans, they suddenly appeared and threw the three sailors overboard.”

“They managed to pilot the vessel for several miles until they reached Algiers, their home district. Then they beached the boat and returned home.”

“Damn!” Hayes added, “If this story were made up, they would not have included beautiful girls in ropes.”

“Read the last sentence, Rud.”

“Admiral Forti was uncertain until he verified that an old cargo hauler had beached at Algiers.”

“I also have a report on how they were abducted,” Stone told Hayes.

“One day later, one recalled being stuck by a tiny dart just before passing out.”

“Knock out darts?”

“Evidently, Rud.”

“I know what those likely are!” Hayes said as he looked at Colin. “Darts tipped with Doctor Awl’s Vampire Bat Spit.”

“Your old pal!” Lemont remarked.

“That crap knocked me out faster than a fist,” Colin recalled. “We need a couple of cases of those darts. Mr. President.”

“I should have let the good doctor finish your lobotomy,” Lemont told Colin, but that is from another story.

Ignoring them, Hayes asked Stone, “Did they know what island?”

“Admiral Forti says they could have reached half of Cuba in a day and a half. Unfortunately, international law has kept Cuba’s coast off-limits to us for nearly 100 years.”

“We have no maps that show a hidden bay or lake along Cuba’s coastline,” Lemont added.

“Although Spain abolished slavery long before we did, King Alfonzo is still having a half-million slaves whipped in Cuba.”

Hayes added, “During the war, his daddy, another King Alfonzo, tried to slip two thousand cannons to the Confederacy while claiming Spain’s neutrality.”

“He was having these cannon barrels molded from an ornate Pakistani mold so they would seem connected to Spain.”

“British spies reported his plan to King Edward, who shared the plot with Lincoln.”

“He sent a friendly letter to the king, asking why he would put Pakistani cannons into Spanish production.”

“King Alfonzo denied this as he canceled the order.”

“We could have lost the war if the South received those cannons,” Hayes said before Stone showed his next piece of strange evidence.

“No doubt.”

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

“Nicola never said anything to me about that!” Hayes popped.

“Well, he reported it to the New York office near his house.”

“The intruders left a tiny gold coin stamped with the only emblem we connected to the White Knights, a Saint Andrew’s Cross with that six-sided star center.”

“Interesting.”

“We think the White Knights use this coin like a passkey to verify members from other branches.”

“The other side of the coin just has the initials WN.”

Orphan Agent Markus Manley then entered the war room, holding the boots that Colin McLaughin left on North High Street.

After handing them to the still barefoot agent, Markus looked at Hayes and announced, “We found their trail!”

“Are you sure?” Hayes asked.

“No doubt.”

“Where? How?”

“Last night at eleven minutes after eleven, a cargo hauler departed Union Station for Cleveland’s Central Depot.”

“About ten minutes north of town, a flair warned its engineer of a rail blockage.”

“He brought the train to a full stop, then sent his boilermen walking ahead to clear the blockage.”

“As they walked away, a short southbound train passed them. It stopped just after passing their half-mile-long train.”

“It appears that one or more boxcars were switched over to that southbound while the boilermen were most of a mile away. We then realized a boxcar transfer system had been installed on that spot.”

“Proof this happened?”

“That is the only track between here and Cleveland with a turntable track switch.”

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

Manley resumed, “A prepared team could have transferred several train cars in ten minutes.”

“Good work, Markus.”

“Did the alternate conductor see anything?”

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

“That southbound is a phantom. We know nothing about it.”

“However, over the last five years, seven cargo cars, all carrying precious cargo, vanished along this same route. This is likely the same spot where 300 Light Cannons vanished two years ago.”

“Anything else?”

“No, not right now, sir.”

Hayes projected as he looked around the room. “The girls were long gone when we pulled that train over. They are heading for Southern Louisiana!”

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

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

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

“They are likely somewhere in Central Kentucky by now,” Lemont explained.

Hayes looked up from his map and told Agent Manley, “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 old forts along the Mississippi River within 25 miles of New Orleans.”

“Is that all, sir?” Manley asked.

“For now. But get back here as soon as you finish.

“Yes, sir.”

Lemont added, “Markus, look for an ancient French fort.”

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

"Ivonta, I need you to call Tesla at Westinghouse," which was near Central Station in New York City.

"Tell him to bring ORPH Six here immediately. Tell him this is a class A emergency" (speed authorization)."

"Is that all, Rud?"

"For the moment. Oh, tell him to be careful."

Hayes then sent Colin and Lemont to communications to wire Colonel Sanders in Lexington and Captain Crockett in Memphis. Have them search for any phantom southbound train.

"We'll wire Sanders first," Colin said as he and Lemont rose to action.

"Yes," Hayes replied. Then, just as they were walking out. Hayes yelled, "Wait a second."

"We may solve many unasked questions by tracing that train instead of stopping it. Let's see where they go; we can rescue them and blow open this entire scheme."

"Just tell Crockett and Sanders to report any southbound phantom trains to me. Ensure they know not to intercept them; report the time and location."

"On it, Boss:"

Hayes was sharp as ever, but he made one incorrect assumption. He thought that the boxcar switch just north of Columbus was their final diversion; it was not.

After it cleared the 14th Street Bridge into Louisville, Kentucky (from Clarksville, Indiana), instead of continuing south, it switched to the eastbound track along the Ohio River.

At Huntington, West Virginia, it switched to a southeast rail that ran through the Allegheny mountains.

Hayes assumed that any train headed to New Orleans from Columbus would naturally take the much shorter Mississippi River valley route.

The phantom would eventually reach Southern Louisiana, but from the east, about twenty-five miles north of the Gulf.

Captain Crocket, Colonel Sanders, and their teams wasted the entire day.