

PAPA'S GOLD

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CHAPTER 1

THE CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS

Summer 1861

“Keep your head down,” Sarah whispered to her twin brother. She didn’t need to whisper because all the noise and commotion from the angry farmers inside the building drowned out her words.

When George didn’t move, she grabbed his shirt and pulled him back from the meeting house window where they were crouched.

Just as his head ducked below the window sill, a bullet fired from inside splattered the glass. Suddenly, the room full of men was quiet. The tinkling of the shards of glass falling on the rocky ground beneath the window of the log building was the only sound. His eyes wide open in surprise and fear, George looked at the jagged hole in the window pane right beside where his head was a second ago.

“The soldier must’ve seen you,” Sarah whispered.

Trembling and ready to run, George nodded. He removed his hat and ran his hand over his unruly mop of blond hair as if amazed his head was still on his shoulders.

“Now that I’ve got your attention . . .” a deep voice from inside bellowed.

“Wait,” Sarah said. She grabbed George’s hand. “He didn’t see you. He wasn’t shooting at you.”

The voice inside continued, “. . . I am seizing this meeting house in the name of the Confederate States of America and

the great state of Tennessee.”

When the voice paused, George raised enough to look over the window sill. A heavy man in a crumpled gray officer's uniform stood in the aisle, half way to the front of the room. Armed soldiers were scattered about the meeting house and pointed their rifles toward the two dozen farmers seated on the rows of benches made of split logs. As the startled men started to rise, the officer and his soldiers fanned their guns over the group, pausing a second as they aimed at each man's head.

“Sit down all of you,” the officer shouted. The local men all sat. “Don't you move.”

Several men held out their hands to show they had no weapons. A few looked helplessly around the one-room building as if searching for a way to escape.

“All you men are now conscripted into the Confederate Army,” the officer said.

Before the soldiers had crashed in, the Patterson twins had been listening to the disorderly meeting of local farmers. The men had been debating whether they should join the other southern states in this War of Secession and pull out of the United States. Most of them were in favor of it. “We are Southern born and bred,” one had yelled.

“Yeah,” another shouted, “We must join the other men of Tennessee to fight for our way of life.”

“But to fight against our relatives in the North? I can't do that!” another voice had blared out.

In the midst of the heated discussion, the soldiers had entered the door at the back. Facing the front, the arguing farmers hadn't noticed the intruders, who watched for a few seconds before the officer announced his presence by shooting through the window.

His gun pointed at an angry farmer, the officer continued,

"I said you are all conscripted into the Confederate Army. All men loyal to Tennessee come to the corporal here and take the oath." The heavy-set officer indicated a young soldier beside him who held writing materials.

Several men who had argued for joining the Southern states approached the officer readily, shaking his hand and patting him on the back. "We're with you, Captain," one farmer said.

"Lieutenant," the officer corrected him.

"Yes, sir, Lieutenant."

Six farmers held back, their faces red with anger.

"I ain't taking no oath," one of them yelled. George recognized the voice of their neighbor, Jake Helms.

"Me neither," another said. "I'm a citizen of the United States of America. I didn't come to America to fight agin it."

"I'll tell you this, feller," the lieutenant yelled above the general clamor that erupted again, "you take the oath for the Confederate States of America or I just might shoot you right here."

To demonstrate, he pointed his pistol at each of the six reluctant men in turn, then swung it to his left and shot out another window. In the sudden quiet, George heard the glass of this second window clattering to the rocky ground.

"Let's get out of here," George whispered, pulling Sarah with him.

Sarah nodded vigorously. Hunched over, the twins raced toward the cover of trees surrounding the clearing.

"Wait a minute," Sarah said when they were each hidden behind a big oak tree. "Let's watch them to see what they do."

The soldiers and local men spilled outside to the front of the meeting house.

"Go get your gear and do what you have to do at home," the lieutenant said to the men who took the oath. "Then meet

us in camp down in Bear Holler first thing in the morning.” The men mounted their horses and, spurring them, galloped away.

The lieutenant looked at the six farmers who refused to take the oath. The angry men were pushed together against the outside wall of the building. Two soldiers trained their rifles on them.

“Corporal,” the lieutenant next ordered, “bind these other men and tie them on their horses. We’ll take them with us.”

“You can’t do that,” Jake Helms shouted. “I’ve got —”

“I’ll say what I can do, and you’ll do as I say.” The lieutenant fired his revolver. His bullet struck the ground inches from Jake’s foot. “You will take the oath or I’ll shoot you right now.” He turned to his corporal. “You heard the order, Corporal.” He fondled the pistol, as if pondering whether to use it again. “I’d shoot all six of them dead and leave them for the vultures, but we need all the men we can get. When they see all the vile things the Yankees do, they’ll come around to our way of thinking.”

“Yes, sir,” the corporal said.

“Is everyone in the neighborhood accounted for?”

The corporal studied his list. “No, sir. Sterling Patterson ain’t here. Or his father.”

George gasped. “Papa!” he whispered.

Sarah put her finger to her lips.

“His father is too old,” the lieutenant said. “But Sterling’s not. And I hear he’s an expert shot. A good mountain man. We could use him. Go get him.”

“Yes, sir, as soon as we can after taking these prisoners to camp.” The corporal ordered the six farmers to be put on their horses with their hands tied behind them. Leading five other soldiers, he trotted toward camp. Each soldier held the

reins of a prisoner's horse.

The twins left the trees that were hiding them and started up the narrow path across the valley to warn their father.

"Hey, there, boy," the lieutenant bellowed. "Stop right this minute, boy!"

Remembering the bullets that just missed his head by the window, George stopped short and turned around.

The lieutenant galloped his horse across the clearing to the timber. "What do you think you're doing here, boy?"

Sarah grabbed George's arm and pulled him behind a bush. She pointed to a gully close by. Stooping low, the twins scrambled over a fallen log and slid down into a ditch. George's homemade trousers and tan shirt and Sarah's home-spun brown dress blended with the dried leaves, making them almost invisible. Sarah's golden pigtails hanging below her faded sunbonnet and George's fair, freckled face under his straw hat looked like streaks of sunlight in the bushes.

Sarah held on to her brother. George picked up a rock and drew back his arm, ready to throw. Sarah whispered, "Better not." Still holding the rock, George dropped his arm.

The lieutenant's horse snorted and stopped. Even with repeated spurring, it refused to go through the vines and other thick growth around the gully.

"Boy, come back here," the lieutenant yelled. "Where'd you go?"

"No use hunting for that boy," a new recruit called from the meeting house. "That's the Patterson boy. He knows these woods like his own front yard. He's long gone."

"Well, I'll soon see to his father." The lieutenant reined his horse back to the waiting group, mumbling, "Just a bunch of ignorant hillbillies. Wouldn't fool with them, but

they sure can shoot.”

George heard nothing more as the twins raced up the mountain to their clearing. Nor did they say anything to each other. No need. George knew what they had to do. Find their father and tell him what they saw and heard.

They found him in the barn, milking the cow.

“They’re here!” George gasped as he and Sarah ran in. His tousled blond hair was matted with sweat. “The soldiers are here!” He leaned over to ease the pain in his side.

“We saw them down the mountain at the meeting house,” Sarah said, panting.

“And they took . . .” George had to pause to get his breath.

“ . . . all the men,” Sarah finished for him.

Mama and nine-year-old Lillie ran to the barn. When five-year-old Harry caught up with them, he grabbed his mother’s full skirt. Pushing her long brown hair back into her bun at the base of her neck, she pulled the boy to her.

“All of them?” she said.

“Yes,” Sarah said, “all the neighbor men were there.”

“I counted twenty-two men,” George added. “Then a Confederate soldier shot out a window at the meeting house.”

“Two windows.”

Ignoring Sarah, George continued, “Some of the men joined up right off. They were glad to see the Rebs. Six of them wouldn’t take the oath and got tied on their horses.” He could talk better now that he wasn’t panting so much.

“And the Rebs took off with them,” Sarah said, “with their hands tied behind them. The lieutenant wanted to shoot them, but he said he needed them to fight for the Confederacy.”

“The other fellers, the ones who took the oath,” George

said, "he told them to go home, get their gear, and meet him tomorrow morning first thing at his camp."

Mama and Papa exchanged worried looks. "You were right, Aldeah, in urging me to stay home," Papa said. "It's a good thing that I didn't go to the meeting, or I would have been" He didn't finish his sentence. Instead he picked up his full bucket of milk and released the cow from the stanchion. George pushed her out into the barnyard. "Here, Lillie, take this to the house."

"You would have been what, Papa?" Lillie asked. She struggled to lift the bucket of foaming milk. Part of it splashed on her bare leg.

Papa and Mama glanced at each other. "Sorry," Mama finished Papa's sentence. "He would have been sorry he went."

"He'd a been shot," George said, "that's what would have happened, 'cause Mama wouldn't have let the soldiers get him."

Lillie set the bucket down and ran to her father. Bawling loudly, Harry joined her.

"It's all right, Lillie," Papa said, frowning at George. "I wasn't there, so nothing happened to me. Now take the milk to the house. Harry, you help your sister."

With the bucket of milk between them, Lillie and Harry held the handle as they walked slowly toward the house. They kept looking back. Mama waved them on.

When the children were out of hearing range, Papa turned to the twins. "How do you know all this?"

Sarah said, "We hid under the window and listened in on the meeting. George almost got sh — "

George punched her to leave that part out.

"You know you weren't allowed to go there," Mama said frowning.

“What did the group decide?” Papa asked.

“They talked a lot about whether to join the Rebels or stay in the Union. Everyone was talking and yelling.”

“Then before they voted, the soldiers came in with their rifles,” George said. He glanced at Sarah, his eyebrows lowered to warn her not tell about him almost getting shot and almost getting caught.

“How many soldiers?” Papa asked.

“About a dozen.”

“And they all headed back toward town?” Papa asked.

“Yes,” George said, “they started, but, Papa, the one soldier with a list said that you and Grandpa weren’t there.”

“And he’s going to come after you as soon as he gets the other neighbors to their camp,” Sarah said. “Papa, he called them prisoners.”

“What’ll you do?” George asked, struggling to keep his tears back. Sarah wasn’t crying, so he certainly wouldn’t cry like baby Harry.

Papa glanced quickly at Mama.

“We must leave right away,” Mama said, looking over her shoulder as if expecting soldiers to appear at any moment.

“That’s what we’ll do. All of us. We’ll leave.”

“Yes,” Papa agreed. “I don’t think the soldiers will have time to come up the mountain for me tonight. But tomorrow” He looked around at his house, barn, and other farm buildings. “Tomorrow, early in the morning, we must leave.” He straightened up to his six feet height. He took off his hat, ran his hand through his brown hair and put his hat back on. Then he smiled at the twins. “Don’t look so glum. You did a good thing. You’re good detectives and you may have saved us.”

Mama hugged each child. “Yes, even though you shouldn’t have gone to the meeting. This time, we’ll forgive

you. But from now on, always let us know where you're going."

"Yes, ma'am," the children chorused.

Lillie and Harry, having taken the milk to the house, were back listening.

"Twins," Papa said, "we've got to start now. You two go down the mountain and tell Grandpa and Grandma we'll meet them at the fork there a couple of hours before day-break. You both know that we've been preparing for this."

The twins nodded.

Papa continued, "After you tell them and until dark tonight, go keep watch on our trail for any soldiers coming this way. If you see anyone at all, signal."

"Yeah, we know," George said. "We'll give the bob white call for soldiers coming." He gave a convincing imitation of the call that sounded like, "Bob, bob white," with a twist on the "white."

As the twins ran down the mountain trail, George said, "Papa called us detectives."

"He sure did!" Sarah said, smiling for the first time since the lieutenant crashed the meeting.

George also smiled, knowing that as usual Sarah was thinking like him. Papa was counting on them to keep watch for the family. To keep him out of the grasp of the Confederate Army.

George and Sarah knew what to do. Four months ago in April when the Confederate forces fired upon Fort Sumter in South Carolina and started this War Between the States, their father had told them they could no longer stay in their eastern Tennessee mountains. "We don't believe in fighting," he had said, "and I won't help tear our country apart." The family had made plans and preparations for when they'd have to leave.

Now in the summer of 1861, it was the time to go. The twins' job was to keep watch so they could leave secretly and join Papa's brother in the Missouri Ozarks.