

The Shades  
of the Wilderness  
A Story of Lee's Great Stand  
*Book 7*

by Joseph A. Altsheler



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## Principal Characters in *The Shades of the Wilderness*

Harry Kenton, A Lad Who Fights on the Southern Side.

Colonel George Kenton, Father of Harry Kenton.

Colonel Leonidas Talbot, Commander of the Invincibles, a Southern Regiment.

Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire, Second in Command of the Invincibles.

Philip Sherburne, A Southern Cavalry Leader.

William J. Shepard, A Northern Spy.

Arthur St. Clair, A Native of Charleston, Friend of Harry Kenton.

Tom Langdon, Friend of Harry Kenton.

George Dalton, Friend of Harry Kenton.

Julien DeLangeais, A Musician and Soldier from Louisiana.

William Curtis, A Southern Merchant and Blockade Runner.

Mrs. Curtis, Wife of William Curtis.

Henrietta Carden, A Seamstress in Richmond.

## Historical Characters in *The Shades of the Wilderness*

Jefferson Davis, President of the Southern Confederacy.

Judah P. Benjamin, Member of the Confederate Cabinet.

Robert E. Lee, Southern Commander.

J. E. B. Stuart, Southern Cavalry Leader.

Richard S. Ewell, Southern General.

Jubal Early, Southern General.

George J. Meade, Northern General.

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## Chapter 1

# The Southern Retreat

A train of wagons and men wound slowly over the hills in the darkness and rain toward the South. In the wagons lay fourteen or fifteen thousand wounded soldiers, but they made little noise, as the wheels sank suddenly in the mud or bumped over stones. Although the vast majority of them were young, boys or not much more, they had learned to be masters of themselves, and they suffered in silence, save when someone, lost in fever, uttered a groan.

But the chief sound was a blended note made by the turning of wheels and the hoofs of horses sinking in the soft earth. The officers gave but few orders, and the cavalrymen who rode on either flank looked solicitously<sup>1</sup> into the wagons now and then to see how their wounded friends fared, though they seldom spoke. The darkness they did not mind, because they were used to it, and the rain and the coolness were a relief after three days of the fiercest battle the American continent had ever known, fought in the hottest days that the troops could recall.

Thus Lee's army drew its long length from the fatal field of Gettysburg, although his valiant brigades did not yet know that the clump of trees upon Cemetery Hill had marked the high tide of the Confederacy. All that memorable Fourth of July following the close of the battle, they had lain, facing Meade and challenging him to come on, confident that, while the invasion of the North was over, they could beat back once more

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1 Anxiously

the invasion of the South.

They had no word of complaint against their great commander, Lee. The faith in him, which was so high, remained unbroken, as it was destined to remain so to the last. But men began to whisper to one another and say if only Jackson had been there. They mourned anew that terrible evening in the Wilderness when Lee had lost his mighty lieutenant, his striking arm, the invincible Stonewall. If the man in the old slouch hat had only been with Lee on Seminary Ridge, it would now be the army of Meade retreating farther into the North, and they would be pursuing. That belief was destined to sink deep in the soul of the South and remain there long after the Confederacy was but a name.

The same thought was often in the mind of Harry Kenton, as he rode near the rear of the column, whence he had been sent by Lee to observe and then to report. It was far after midnight now, and the last of the Southern army could not leave Seminary Ridge before morning. But Harry could detect no sign of pursuit. Now and then, a distant gun boomed, and the thunder muttered on the horizon as if in answer. But there was nothing to indicate that the Army of the Potomac was moving from Gettysburg in pursuit, although the President in Washington, his heart filled with bitterness, was vainly asking why his army would not reap the fruits of a victory won so hardily. Fifty thousand men had fallen on the hills and in the valleys about Gettysburg, and it seemed, for the time, that nothing would come of such a slaughter. But the Northern army had suffered immense losses, and Lee and his men were ready to fight again if attacked. Perhaps it was wiser to remain content upon the field with their sanguinary success. At least, Meade and his generals thought so.

Harry, toward morning, came upon St. Clair and Langdon riding together. Both had been wounded slightly, but their hurts

had not kept them from the saddle, and they were in cheerful mood.

“You’ve been further back than we, Harry,” said St. Clair. “Is Meade hot upon our track? We hear the throb of a cannon now and then.”

“It doesn’t mean anything. Meade hasn’t moved. While we didn’t win, we struck the Yankees such a mighty blow that they’ll have to rest and breathe a while before they follow.”

“And I guess we need a little resting and breathing ourselves,” said Langdon frankly. “There were times when I thought the whole world had just turned itself into a volcano of fire.”

“But we’ll come back again,” said St. Clair. “We’ll make these Pennsylvania Dutchmen take notice of us a second time.”

“That’s the right spirit,” said Langdon. “Arthur had nearly all of his fine uniform shot off him, but he’s managed to fasten the pieces together and ride on, just as if it were brand new.”

But Harry was silent. The prescient<sup>2</sup> spirit of his famous great grandfather, Henry Ware, had descended upon his valiant great grandson. Hope had not gone from him, but it did not enter his mind that they should invade Pennsylvania again.

“I’m glad to leave Gettysburg,” he said. “More good men of ours have fallen there than anywhere else.”

“That’s true,” said St. Clair, “but Marse Bob will win for us, anyhow. You don’t think any of these Union generals here in the East can whip our Lee, do you?”

“Of course not!” said Happy Tom. “Besides, Lee has me to help him.”

“How are Colonel Talbot and Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire?” asked Harry.

“Sound asleep, both of ’em,” replied St. Clair. “And it’s a strange thing, too. They were sitting in a wagon, having resumed that game of chess which they began in the Valley of Virginia,

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2 Foreknowing

but they were so exhausted that both fell sound asleep while playing. They are sitting upright, as they sleep, and Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hillarie's thumb and forefinger rest upon a white pawn that he intended to move."

"I hope they won't be jarred out of their rest and that they'll sleep on," said Harry. "Nobody deserves it more."

He waved a hand to his friends and continued his ride toward the rear. The column passed slowly on in silence. Now and then gusts of rain lashed across his face, but he liked the feeling. It was a fillip<sup>3</sup> to his blood, and his nerves began to recover from the tremendous strain and excitement of the last four days.

Obedying his orders, he rode almost directly back toward the field of Gettysburg from which the Southern forces were still marching. A friendly voice from a little wood hailed him, and he recognized it at once as that of Sherburne, who sat his horse alone among the trees.

"Come here, Harry," he said.

"Glad to find you alive, Sherburne. Where's your troop?"

"What's left of it is on ahead. I'll join the men in a few minutes. But look back there!"

Harry, from the knoll which was higher than he had thought, gazed upon a vast and dusky panorama. Once more the field of Gettysburg swam before him, not now in fire and smoke but in vapors and misty rain. When he shut his eyes, he saw again the great armies charging on the slopes, the blazing fire from hundreds of cannons, and a hundred thousand rifles. There, too, went Pickett's brigades, devoted to death but never flinching. A sob burst from his throat, and he opened his eyes again.

"You feel about it as I do," said Sherburne. "We'll never come back into the North."

"It isn't merely a feeling within me. I know it."

“So do I, but we can still hold Virginia.”

“I think so, too. Come, we’d better turn. There goes the field of Gettysburg. The rain and mist have blotted it out.”

The panorama, the most terrible upon which Harry had ever looked, vanished in the darkness. The two rode slowly from the knoll and into the road.

“It will be daylight in an hour,” said Sherburne, “and by that time the last of our men will be gone.”

“And I must hasten to our commander-in-chief,” said Harry.

“How is he?” asked Sherburne. “Does he seem downcast?”

“No, he holds his head as high as ever and cheers the men. They say that Pickett’s charge was a glorious mistake, but he takes all the blame for it, if there is any. He doesn’t criticize any of his generals.”

“Only a man of the greatest moral grandeur could act like that. It’s because of such things that our people, boys, officers, and all will follow him to the death.”

“Good-bye, Sherburne,” said Harry. “Hope I’ll see you again soon.”

He urged his horse into a faster gait, anxious to overtake Lee and report that all was well with the rear guard. He noticed once more, and with the greatest care, that long line of the wounded and the unwounded, winding sixteen miles across the hills from Gettysburg to Chambersburg, and his mind was full of grave thoughts. More than two years in the very thick of the greatest war, then known, were sufficient to make a boy a man, at least in intellect and responsibility.

Harry saw very clearly, as he rode beside the retreating but valiant army that had failed in its great attempt, that their role would be the defensive. For a little while he was sunk in deep depression. Then invincible youth conquered anew, and hope sprang up again. The night was at the darkest, but dawn was not far away. Fugitive gusts of wind drenched him once more, but he

did not mind it, nor did he pay any attention to the occasional growl of a distant gun. He was strong in the belief that Meade would not pursue – at least not yet. A general who had just lost nearly one-third of his own army was not in much condition to follow his enemy.

He urged his horse to increased speed, and pressed on toward the head of the column. The rain ceased, and cool puffs of wind came out of the east. Then the blackness there turned to gray, which soon deepened into silver. Through the silver veil shot a bolt of red fire, and the sun came over the hills.

Although the green world had been touched with brown by the hot sun of July, it looked fresh and beautiful to Harry. The brown in the morning sunlight was a rosy red, and the winds of dawn were charged with life. His horse, too, felt the change, and it was easy now to force him into a gallop toward a fire on a low hill, which Harry felt sure had been built to cook breakfast for their great commander.

As he approached, he saw Lee and his generals standing before the blaze, some eating and others drinking. An orderly, nearby, held the commander's famous horse, Traveller, and two or three horses belonging to the other generals were trying to find a little grass between the stony outcrops of the hills. Harry felt an overwhelming curiosity, but he kept it in restraint, dismounting at a little distance and approaching on foot.

He could not observe much change in the general's appearance. His handsome gray suit was as neat as ever, and the three stars, the only marks of his rank that he wore, shone untarnished upon his collar. The dignified and cheerful manner that marked him before Gettysburg marked him also afterward. To Harry, so young and so thoroughly charged with the emotions of his time and section, he was a figure to be approached with veneration<sup>4</sup>.

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4 Awe or reverence

He saw the stalwart and bearded Longstreet and other generals whom he knew, among them the brilliant Stuart in his brilliant plumage but rather quiet and subdued in manner now, since he had not come to Gettysburg as soon as he was needed. Harry hung back a little, fearing lest he might be regarded as thrusting himself into a company so much his superior in rank, but Lee saw him and beckoned to him.

“I sent you back toward Gettysburg to report on our withdrawal, Lieutenant Kenton,” he said.

“Yes, sir. I returned all the way to the field. The last of our troops should be leaving there just about now. The Northern army had made no preparation for immediate pursuit.”

“Your report agrees with all the others that I have received. How long have you been without sleep?”

“I don’t know, sir,” he said at last. “I can’t remember. Maybe it has been two or three days.”

Stuart, who held a cup of coffee in his hand, laughed.

“The times have been such that there are generals as well as lieutenants,” he said, “who can’t remember when they’ve slept.”

“You’re exhausted, my lad,” said Lee gravely and kindly, “and there’s nothing more you can do for us just now. Take some breakfast with us, and then you must sleep in one of the wagons. An orderly will look after your horse.”

Lee handed him a cup of coffee with his own hand, and Harry, thanking him, withdrew to the outer fringe of the little group, where he took his breakfast, amazed to find how hungry he was, although he had not thought of food before. Then without a word, as he saw that the generals were engrossed in a conference, he withdrew.

“You’ll find Lieutenant Dalton of the staff in the covered wagon over there,” said the orderly who had taken his horse. “The general sent him to it more’n two hours ago.”

“Then I’ll be inside it in less than two minutes,” said

Harry.

But with rest in sight, he collapsed suddenly. His head fell forward of its own weight. His feet became lead. Everything swam before his eyes. He felt that he must sleep or die. But he managed to drag himself to the wagon and climb inside. Dalton lay in the center of it so sound asleep that he was like one dead. Harry rolled him to one side, making room for himself, and lay down beside him. Then his eyes closed, and he, too, slept so soundly that he also looked like one dead.

He was awakened by Dalton pulling at him. The young Virginian was sitting up and looking at Harry with curiosity. He clapped his hands when the Kentuckian opened his eyes.

“Now I know that you’re not dead,” he said. “When I woke up and found you lying beside me, I thought they had just put your body in here for safekeeping. As that’s not the case, kindly explain to me and at once what you’re doing in my wagon.”

“I’m waking up just at present, but for an hour or two before that I was sleeping.”

“Hour or two? Hour or two? Hear him! An orderly who I know is no liar told me that you got in here just after dawn. Now kindly lift that canvas flap, look out and tell me what you see.”

Harry did as he was told and was amazed. The same rolling landscape still met his eyes, and the sun was just about as high in the sky as it was when he had climbed into the wagon. But it was in the west now instead of the east.

“See and know, young man!” said Dalton, paternally. “The entire day has elapsed, and here you have lain in ignorant slumber, careless of everything, reckless of what might happen to the army. For twelve hours, General Lee has been without your advice, and how, lacking it, he has got this far, Heaven alone knows.”

“It seems that he’s pulled through, and, since I’m now awake,

you can hurry to him and tell him I'm ready to furnish the right plans to stop the forthcoming Yankee invasion."

"They'll keep another day, but we've certainly had a good sleep, Harry."

"Yes, a provision or ammunition wagon isn't a bad place for a worn-out soldier. I remember I slept in another such as this in the Valley of Virginia, when we were with Jackson."

He stopped suddenly and choked. He could not mention the name of Jackson until long afterward, without something rising in his throat.

The driver obscured a good deal of the front view, but he suddenly turned a rubicund<sup>5</sup> and smiling face upon them.

"Waked up, hev ye?" he exclaimed. "Wa'al it's about time. I've looked back from time to time an' I wuzn't at all shore whether you two gen'rals wuz alive or dead. Sometimes when the wagon slanted a lot, you would roll over each other, but it didn't seem to make no diffunce. Pow'ful good sleepers you are."

"Yes," said Harry. "We're two of the original Seven Sleepers."

"I don't doubt that you are two, but they wuz more'n seven."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause at least seven thousand in this train have been sleepin' as hard as you wuz. I guess you mean the 'rig'nal Seventy Thousand Sleepers."

Harry's spirits had returned after his long sleep. He was a lad again. The weight of Gettysburg no longer rested upon him. The Army of Northern Virginia had merely made a single failure. It would strike again and again, as hard as ever.

"It's true that we've been slumbering," he said, "but we're as wide awake now as ever, Mr. Driver."

"My name ain't Driver," said the man.

"Then what is it?"

"Jones, Dick Jones, which I hold to be a right proper name."

“Not romantic, but short, simple, and satisfying.”

“I reckon so. Leastways, I’ve never wanted to change it. I’m from No’th Calliny, an’ I’ve been followin’ Bobby Lee a pow’ful long distance from home. Fine country up here in Pennsylvania, but I’d ruther be back in them No’th Calliny mountains. You two young gen’rals may think it’s an easy an’ safe job drivin’ a wagon loaded with ammunition. But s’pose you have to drive it right under fire, as you most often have to do, an’ then if a shell or somethin’ like it hits your wagon, the whole thing goes off kerplunk, an’ whar are you?”

“It’s a sudden an’ easy death,” said Dalton, philosophically.

“Too sudden an’ too easy. I don’t mind tellin’ you that seein’ men killed an’ wounded is a spo’t that’s beginnin’ to pall on me. Reckon I’ve had enough of it to last me for the next thousand years. I’ve forgot, if I ever knowed, what this war wuz started about. Say, young fellers, I’ve got a wife back thar, a highsteppin’, finelookin’ gal not more’n twenty years old – I’m just twentyfive myself, an’ we’ve got a year old baby the cutest that wuz ever born. Now, when I wuz lookin’ at that charge of Pickett’s men, an’ the whole world wuz blazin’ with fire, an’ all the skies wuz rainin’ steel and lead, an’ whar grass growed before, nothin’ but bayonets wuz growin’ then, do you know what I seed sometimes?”

“What was it?” asked Harry.

“Fur a secon’ all that hell of fire an’ smoke an’ killin’ would float away, an’ I seed our mountain, with the cove, an’ the trees, an’ the green grass growin’ in it, an’ the branch, with the water so clear you could see your face in it, runnin’ down the center, an’ thar at the head of the cove my cabin, not much uv a buildin’ to look at, no towerin’ mansion, but just a stout two room log cabin that the snows an’ hails of winter can’t break into, an’ in the door wuz standin’ Mary with the hair flyin’ about her face, an’ her eyes shinin’, with the little feller in her arms, lookin’ at

me 'way off as I come walkin' fast down the cove toward 'em, returnin' from the big war."

There was a moment's silence, and Dalton said gruffly to hide his feelings:

"Dick Jones, by the time this war is over and you go walking down the cove toward your home, a man with mustache and side whiskers will come forward to meet you, and he'll be that son of yours."

But Dick Jones cheerfully shook his head.

"The war ain't goin' to last that long," he said confidently, "an' I ain't goin' to git killed. What I saw will come true, 'cause I feel it so strong."

"There ought to be a general law forbidding a man with a young wife and baby to go to a war," said Harry.

"But they ain't no sich law," said Dick Jones, in his optimistic tone, "an' so we needn't worry 'bout it. But if you two gen'als should happen along through the mountains uv western No'th Calliny after the war, I'd like fur you to come to my cabin, an' see Mary an' the baby an' me. Our cove is named Jones' Cove, after my father, an' the branch that runs through it runs into Jones' Creek, an' Jones' Creek runs into the Yadkin River an' our county is Yadkin. Oh, you could find it plumb easy, if two sich great gen'als as you wuzn't ashamed to eat sweet pertaters an' ham an' turkey an' co'n pone with a wagon driver like me."

Harry saw, despite his playful method of calling them generals, that he was thoroughly in earnest, and he was more moved than he would have been willing to confess.

"Too proud!" he said. "Why, we'd be glad!"

"Mebbe your road will lead that way," said Jones. "An' ef you do, jest remember that the skillet's on the fire, an' the latch string is hangin' outside the do'."

The allusion to the mountains made Harry's mind travel far

back, over an almost interminable<sup>6</sup> space of time now, it seemed, when he was yet a novice<sup>7</sup> in war, to the home of Sam Jarvis, deep in the Kentucky mountains, and the old, old woman who had said to him as he left, "You will come again, and you will be thin and pale, and in rags, and you will fall at the door. I see you coming with these two eyes of mine."

A little shiver passed over him. He knew that no one could penetrate the future, but he shivered nevertheless, and he found himself saying mechanically, "It's likely that I'll return through the mountains, and if so, I'll look you up at that home in the cove on the brook that runs into Jones' Creek."

"That bein' settled," said Jones, "what do you gen'ral's reckon to do jest now, after havin' finished your big sleep?"

"Your wagon is about to lose the first two passengers it has ever carried," replied Harry. "Orderlies have our horses somewhere. We belong on the staff of General Lee."

"An' you see him an' hear him talk every day? Some people are pow'ful lucky. I guess you'll say a lot about it when you're old men."

"We're going to say a lot about it while we're young men. Good-bye, Mr. Jones. We've been in some good hotels, but we never slept better in any of them than we have in this moving one of yours."

"Good-bye, you're always welcome to it. I think Marse Bob is on ahead."

The two left the wagon and took to a path beside the road, which was muddy and rutted deeply by innumerable hoofs and wheels. But grass and foliage were now dry after the heavy rains that followed the Battle of Gettysburg, and the sun was shining in late splendor. The army, taking the lack of pursuit and attack as proof that the enemy had suffered as much as they if not more,

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6 Unending

7 Beginner

was in good spirits, and many of the men sang their marching songs. A band ahead of them suddenly began to play mellow music, "Partant Pour La Syrie" and other old French songs. The airs became gay, festive, uplifting to the soul, and they tickled the feet of the young men.

"The Cajun band!" exclaimed Harry. "It never occurred to me that they weren't all dead, and here they are, playing us into happiness!"

"And the Invincibles, or what's left of them, won't be far away," said Dalton.

They walked on a little more briskly, and beside them the vast length of the unsuccessful army still trailed its slow way back into the South. The sun was setting in uncommon magnificence, clothing everything in a shower of gold through which the lilting notes of the music came to Harry and Dalton's ears. Presently the two saw them, the short, dark men from far Louisiana, not so many as they had been, but playing with all the fervor of old, putting their Latin souls into their music.

"And there are the Invincibles just ahead of them!" exclaimed Dalton. "The two colonels have left the wagon and are riding with their men. See, how erect they sit."

"I do see them, and they're a good sight to see," said Harry. "I hope they'll live to finish that chess game."

"And fifty years afterward, too."

A shout of joy burst from the road, and a tall, young man, slender, dark, and handsome, rushed out and, seizing the hands of first one and then the other, shook them eagerly, his dark eyes glittering with happy surprise.

"Kenton! Dalton!" he exclaimed. "Both alive! Both well!"

It was young Julien de Langeais, the kinsman of Lieutenant-Colonel Hector St. Hilaire, and he too was unhurt. The lads returned his grasp warmly. They could not have kept from liking him had they tried, and they certainly did not wish to try.

“You don’t know how it rejoices me to see you,” said Julien, speaking very fast. “I was sad! very sad! Some of my best friends have perished back there in those inhospitable Pennsylvania hills, and while the band was playing, it made me think of the homes they will never see any more! Don’t think I’m effusive<sup>8</sup> and that I show grief too much, but my heart has been very heavy! Alas, for the brave lads!”

“Come, come, de Langeais,” said Harry, putting his hand on his shoulder. “You’ve no need to apologize for sorrow. God knows we all have enough of it, but a lot of us are still alive, and here’s an army ready to fight again, whenever the enemy says the word.”

“True! True!” exclaimed de Langeais, changing at once from shadow to sunshine. “And when we’re back in Virginia we’ll turn our faces once more to our foe!”

He took a step or two on the grass in time to the music which was now that of a dance, and the brilliant beams of the setting sun showed a face without a care. Invincible youth and the invincible gaiety of the part of the South that was French were supreme again. Dalton, looking at him, shook his Presbyterian head. Yet his eyes expressed admiration.

“I know your feelings,” said Harry to the Virginian.

“Well, what are they?”

“You don’t approve of de Langeais’ lightness, which in your stern code you would call levity<sup>9</sup>, and yet you envy his possession of it. You don’t think it’s right to be joyous, without a care, and yet you know it would be mighty pleasant. You criticize de Langeais a little, but you feel it would be a gorgeous thing to have that joyous spirit of his.”

Dalton laughed.

“You’re pretty near the truth,” he said. “I haven’t known de

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8 Unduly demonstrative

9 Lack of appropriate seriousness

Langeais so very long, but if he were to get killed, I'd feel that I had lost a younger brother."

"So would I."

Two immaculate<sup>10</sup> youths, riding excellent horses, approached them and favored them with a long and supercilious<sup>11</sup> stare.

"Can the large fair person be Lieutenant Kenton of the staff of the commander-in-chief?" asked St. Clair.

"It can be and it is, although we did not think to see him again so soon," replied Happy Tom Langdon, "and the other – I do not allude to de Langeais – is that spruce<sup>12</sup> and devout young man, Lieutenant George Dalton, also of the staff of the commander-in-chief."

"Why do we find them in such humble plight<sup>13</sup>, walking on weary feet in a path beside the road?"

"For the most excellent reason in the world, Arthur."

"And what may that reason be, Tom?"

"Because at last they have come down to their proper station in life, just as surely as water finds its level."

"But we'll not treat them too sternly. We must remember that they also serve who walk and wait."

But St. Clair and Langdon, their chaff<sup>14</sup> over, gave them happy greeting and told them that the two colonels would be rejoiced to see them again, if they could spare a few minutes before rejoining their commander.

"And here is an orderly with both your horses," said St. Clair, "so, under the circumstances, we'll sink our pride and let you ride with us."

De Langeais, with a cheerful farewell until the next day,

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10 Spotlessly clean

11 Haughtily contemptuous

12 Well-dressed, neat, trim

13 Condition

14 Jesting talk

returned to his command, and Harry and Dalton, mounting, were in a few minutes beside the Invincibles. Colonel Leonidas Talbot and Lieutenant Colonel Hector St. Hilaire turned their horses from the road into the path and saluted them with warmth.

“We caught a glimpse of you just after our departure, Harry,” said Colonel Talbot, “but we did not know what had happened since. There is always a certain amount of risk attending the removal of a great army.”

“I am glad, Leonidas, that you used the word ‘removal’ to describe our operations after our great victory at Gettysburg,” said Lieutenant-Colonel St. Hilaire. “I have been feeling about for the right word or phrase myself, but you have found it first.”

“Do you think it was a victory, sir?” asked Harry.

“Undoubtedly. We have won several vast and brilliant triumphs, but this is the greatest of them all. We have gone far into the enemy’s country, where we have struck him a terrible blow, and now, of our own choice – understand it is of our own choice – we withdraw and challenge him to come and repeat on our own soil our exploit, if he can. It is like a skilled and daring prize fighter who leaps back and laughingly bids his foe come on. Am I not right, Leonidas?”

“Neither Aristotle nor Plato was ever more right, Hector, old friend. Usually there is more to a grave affair than appears upon the surface. We could have gone on, after the battle, to Philadelphia, had we chosen, but it was not alone a question of military might that General Lee had to decide. He was bound to give weight to some very subtle considerations. You boys remember your Roman history, do you not?”

“Fragments of it, sir,” replied Harry.

“Then you will recall that Hannibal<sup>15</sup>, a fine general, to be named worthily with our great Lee so far as military movements

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15 Carthaginian general in the 2nd Punic War

are concerned, after famous victories over greatly superior numbers of Romans, went into camp at Capua, crowded with beauty, wine, and games, and the soldiers became enervated<sup>16</sup>. Their fiber was weakened, and their bodies softened. They were quicker to heed the call to a banquet than the call to arms.”

“Unless it was the arms of beauty, Leonidas.”

“Well spoken, Hector. The correction is most important, and I accept it. But to take up again the main thread of my discourse. General Lee undoubtedly had the example of the Carthaginian<sup>17</sup> army and Capua in mind when he left Gettysburg and returned toward the South. Philadelphia is a great city, far larger and richer than any in our section. It is filled with magnificent houses, beautiful women, luxury of every description, ease, and softness. Our brave lads, crowned with mighty exploits and arriving there as conquerors, would have been received with immense admiration, although we are official enemies. And the head of youth is easily turned. The Army of Northern Virginia, emerging from Philadelphia to achieve the conquest of New York and Boston, would not be the army that it is today. It would lack some of that fire and dash, some of the extraordinary courage and tenacity which have enabled it to surpass the deeds of the veterans of Hannibal and Napoleon.”

“But, sir, I’ve heard that the people of Philadelphia are mostly Quakers<sup>18</sup>, very sober in dress and manner.”

“Harry, my lad, when you’ve lived as long as I have, you will know that a merry heart may beat beneath a plain brown dress, and that an ugly hood cannot wholly hide a sweet and saucy face. The girls – God bless ’em – have been the same in all lands since the world began and will continue so to the end. While this war is on, you boys cannot go a’courting, either in the North

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16 Without strength

17 Ancient Phoenician city-state in North Africa near Tunis

18 Member of the Religious Society of Friends

or South. Am I not right, Hector, old friend?"

"Right, as always, Leonidas. I perceive, though, that the sun is about to set. It's not a new thing, I admit, but we must not delay our young friends, when the general perhaps needs them."

"Well spoken again, Hector. You are an unfailing fount of wisdom. Good night, my brave lads. Not many of the Invincibles are left, but every one of them is a true friend of you both."

As they rode across the darkening fields, Harry and Dalton knew that the colonel spoke the truth about the Invincibles.

"I like a faith such as theirs," said Dalton.

"Yes, it can often turn defeat into real victory."

They quickly found the general's headquarters, and as usual, whenever the weather permitted, he had made arrangements to sleep in the open air, his blankets spread upon soft boughs. Harry and Dalton, having slept all day, would be on night duty, and after supper they sat at a little distance, awaiting orders.

Coolness had come with the dark. A good moon and swarms of bright stars rode in the heavens, turning the skies to misty silver and softening the scars of the army, which now lay encamped over a great space. Lee was talking with Stuart, who evidently had just arrived from a swift ride, as an orderly nearby was holding his horse, covered with foam. The famous cavalryman was clothed in his gorgeous best. His hat was heavy with gold braid, and the broad sash about his waist was heavy with gold, also. Dandy he was but brilliant cavalry man and great soldier too! Both friend and foe had said so.

Harry, sitting on the grass with his back against a tree, watched the two generals as they talked long and earnestly. Now and then Stuart nervously switched the tops of his own high riding boots with the little whip that he carried, but the face of Lee, revealed clearly in the near twilight, remained grave and impassive<sup>19</sup>.

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19 Calm

After a long while, Stuart mounted and rode away, and Sherburne, who had been sitting among the trees on the far side of the fire, came over and joined Harry and Dalton. He too was very grave.

“Do you know what has happened?” he said in a low tone to the two lads.

“Yes, there was a big battle at Gettysburg, and, as we failed to win it, we’re now retreating,” replied Harry.

“That’s true as far as it goes, but it’s not all. We’ve heard – and the news is correct beyond a doubt – that Grant has taken Vicksburg and Pemberton’s army with it.”

“Goodness, Sherburne, it can’t be so!”

“It shouldn’t be so, but it is! Oh, why did Pemberton let himself be trapped in such a way! A whole army of ours lost and our greatest fortress in the West taken! Why, the Yankee men-of-war can steam up the Mississippi untouched, all the way from the Gulf to Minnesota.”

Harry and Dalton were appalled and, for a little while, were silent.

“I knew that man Grant would do something terrible to us,” Harry said at last. “I’ve heard from my people in Kentucky what sort of a general he is. My father was at Shiloh, where we had a great victory on, but Grant wouldn’t admit it and held on, until another Union army came up and turned our victory into defeat. My cousin, Dick Mason, has been with Grant a lot, and I used to get a letter from him now and then, even if he is in the Yankee army. He says that when Grant takes hold of a thing, he never lets go, and that he’ll win the war for his side.”

“Your cousin may be right about Grant’s hanging on,” said Dalton with sudden angry emphasis, “but neither he nor anybody else will win this war for the Yankees. We’ve lost Vicksburg and an army with it, and we’ve retreated from Gettysburg with enough men fallen there to make another

army, but they'll never break through the iron front of Lee and his veterans."

"Hope you're right," said Sherburne, "but I'm off now. I'm in the saddle all night with my troop. We've got to watch the Yankee cavalry. Custer, and Pleasanton, and the rest of them have learned to ride in a way that won't let Jeb Stuart himself do any nodding."

He cantered off, and the lads sat under the trees, ready for possible orders. They saw the fire die. They heard the murmur of the camp sink. Lee lay down on his bed of boughs, other generals withdrew to similar beds or to tents, and the two boys still sat under the trees, waiting, and watching, and never knowing at what moment they would be needed.