

## PROLOGUE

Mid-Atlantic Ocean  
December 28, 1853

Cigar smoke swirled through the after cabin of the clipper packet *Caroline*. It was two o'clock in the morning. A gale was blowing outside, sending all but the hardiest of stomachs to their bunks. Two men remained.

A. Jackson O'Rourke squinted across the table at his opponent. The game had started with a table of seven some four hours before, and Jack had played it straight thus far, content with the dealer's fifty-six-percent advantage inherent in the card game Ace-Deuce-Jack. Then the other players drifted away to their staterooms, and it became apparent this naive but tenacious fellow would be an easy mark. Too easy to pass up.

He was a soft-faced, round-bellied Englishman making his first crossing to the Americas. A recently widowed earl of something or other, he had all the trappings of aristocracy: Savile Row cutaways, four-in-hand silk cravats, a gold watch and looping fob, the requisite monocle and walking stick, and a healthy dose of arrogance. Not to mention seemingly endless supplies of English pounds, many of which were already piled on Jack's side of the table.

The fellow was growing restless, his color fast fading with each roll of the ship. It was almost time...

Jack shuffled the deck and offered it for him to cut. Took it back and said, "Place your bet."

The Englishman slid a five-pound note into the center of the table. Jack matched it, then turned over the top three cards one by one: a queen, a ten and a seven. His opponent grunted his satisfaction and reached for his winnings, saying in his clipped, precise accent,

"This seems an opportune time for me to bow out. You have had the best of me tonight, old chap. The colonies win again, what?"

He scooped up his remaining cash and started to rise.

"I regret any distress I might have caused such a distinguished visitor to my country," said Jack. "So much so I am moved to offer amends. What do you say we each put our entire stake on the table? One hand. Winner takes all."

The earl sat back down, as much from a violent lurch of the ship as his own volition. He eyed his remaining bankroll, still several hundred pounds strong but much reduced from what he had brought to the table hours before. His gaze shifted to Jack's much larger pile.

"Mm-m. Tempting, but—"

"My dear fellow, you have taken the last two hands. You will have all the cards except my three. Who could ask for better odds than that?"

A lie given the deuce Jack had palmed earlier.

"I do not think—"

But Jack was already reshuffling the deck. He pushed his stake into the middle of the table. Handed the deck across to be cut and waited to see whether the fish would bite. The pudgy white hand fidgeted, then reached for the deck.

Jack made a show of squaring the cards and placing them precisely in front of him. He stretched his fingers as if to loosen them, in the process bringing the card in his sleeve down to the base of his wrist. He slid the first card from the top of the deck. Turned it over. An eight.

A little sigh escaped the Englishman's lips. His eyes remained riveted on the deck as Jack slipped the second card off the top and flipped it over. A three. The earl bounced in his chair, tension and excitement tinting his face pink. Jack reached for the deck, index finger extended while his little finger stretched backward to retrieve the winning card. In a fluid motion honed over many hours of practice, he pulled it forward.

He had executed this move dozens of times without the gull being any the wiser. This time the ship shuddered and pitched, tilting his arm enough to expose the descending card. The Englishman jumped up and shouted,

"You are a cad and a cheat, sir!"

Jack inwardly cursed the vagaries of nature that had caused this difficulty. He checked the cabin's five stateroom doors in case some curious passenger had heard the commotion and decided to investigate. All remained as before, the only sound that of the rain lashing the skylight overhead.

He spread his hands and put on his most disarming grin. "Zounds, my lord, you have caught me out. Surely you cannot blame an enterprising Yank from trying." He pushed the pile of cash across the table. "The pot is yours. Take it, and we shan't speak of this again."

"Bloody hell I will! You have breached the code of honor by which I live and breathe. I shall meet you on the hurricane deck at dawn. Pistols at ten paces. Until then, I bid you goodnight!"

He spun away, staggering sideways on the rolling deck. Jack was around the table and in his path before he could regain his footing.

"You are making much ado about nothing, to quote your revered Mr. Shakespeare. I apologize for offending your sensibilities. Take the money, and let us be done with this."

"I do not accept your apology, sir. You may care nothing for your honor, but in my country it is everything. There is but one way to settle this!"

"To duel over a small indiscretion is ridiculous."

"Nonetheless, nothing else will satisfy me. The hurricane deck at dawn."

Jack had honed his instinct for survival under a variety of situations spanning his thirty-one years. A public duel on an exposed deck on the high seas? He did not like the odds. Worse, news of what had happened this night would gush like floodwater from captain to crew to all the passengers. He had left New York City under a cloud two years before and gone into self-imposed exile in England. Although he had managed to escape scandal there, his recently sagging fortunes had prompted him to return to a new life in the American West. Now his future was threatened with disruption once again.

He saw in an instant how he could extricate himself from this impasse. Hardly a sure thing, but he was, after all, a gambling man.

"Why wait for dawn?" he said as he reached into his breast coat pocket and withdrew the short-barreled muff pistol he had purchased in London and always carried with him. It was a single-shot weapon designed primarily for defensive purposes. Which was the exact circumstance in which he now found himself.

The Englishman saw the gun and froze, eyes bulging. "What the devil...?"

Jack did not hesitate. He pressed the muzzle into the earl's soft aristocratic midsection and pulled the trigger.

## **PART ONE—BUCKING THE TIGER**

## CHAPTER ONE

Charleston, South Carolina  
February 3, 1854

Salvation came in the person of Andrew Jackson O'Rourke. Or so it seemed to Lizzie Hamilton. The past fifteen months had seen a plague of Biblical proportion descend on her life. She had begun the month of October, 1852 as she had every other in her nineteen years of living as the pampered youngest daughter of a prominent South Carolina planter family. A much-sought-after belle whose heart had been captured by a handsome and dashing young gentleman from a nearby plantation. With her future thus secure, she had been in no hurry to shed the excitement of the single life for that of matron.

Then catastrophe struck.

Lizzie would never forget the raw, stormy late-November day when the telegram arrived. She and her mother were already on edge due to the prolonged absence of Lizzie's older brother Nathaniel, who had assumed control of the ancestral plantation Rocklands after his father's death ten years before. His wife, a beautiful Northerner whom he had married against all reason a year and a half before, had betrayed them all by running away with two fugitive slaves. Instead of divorcing her, he had chased off after her, leaving his family virtually defenseless against what was to happen.

Within days of his leaving, they discovered the escape had been orchestrated by none other than one of their own, who unbeknownst to them all had been spiriting local slaves north to Canada via the abominable Underground Railroad. How a seemingly true son of the South could have hidden his treacherous abolitionist tendencies from his entire acquaintance was beyond knowing. Yet even this horror paled before the realization that all the while Lizzie was being courted, her beau had been nurturing an illicit alliance with Nathaniel's faithless wife. Shock and shame had so inflamed Lizzie that she thought herself beyond the reach of any further calamity. How wrong she was!

On that fateful November day, she and her mother were sitting in the family sitting room when a telegram arrived. It was addressed to Nathaniel, but as acting head of Rocklands, her mother hesitated only a moment before opening it. Her face paled. In a near swoon, she allowed it to slip from her hand. Lizzie snatched it up and read the contents for herself.

*Creditor's patience exhausted STOP Rocklands in immediate foreclosure STOP Hire manager currently en route STOP Meanwhile all assets frozen STOP Family may remain pending arrangements.* The sender was one Benjamin Hanley of the Merchants Bank, New York City.

Creditor, foreclosure, assets—the words meant nothing to Lizzie, who had no head for business, but her mother's reaction left little doubt something dire had happened.

"What does it mean?" she cried.

Each one of her mother's forty-nine years sat heavily on her face. "It means we are ruined."

Lizzie gaped. "Ruined? What—"

"Silly girl, is it not obvious? Nathaniel has squandered his birthright and left us bereft of home and livelihood. We are destitute!"

Lizzie was unsure which shocked her more, her mother's harsh tone or the incomprehensible idea her words conveyed.

She shook her head. "Impossible. Nathaniel knows his duty. He would never jeopardize our well-being in such a way."

Her mother seemed not to have heard. She rose, hands clenched together. "We must go to Roland. He will know what to do. We shall leave on tomorrow's train. Go and see to your packing."

Roland Townsend, a successful lawyer in Charleston some eighty miles southeast of Rocklands, was Lizzie's older sister Sarah's husband. Mention of his name brought Lizzie immediate relief. Yes, Roland would consult with his many contacts in the business and political realm and find a way to make this terrible situation disappear. Her spirits restored, she went in search of her lady's maid so the packing could commence. On reflection, she even welcomed the opportunity to escape the confines of the estate for the bustle and excitement of Charleston. Life had become unbearably boring of late. No parties. No gatherings among the young people of the neighborhood. Only humiliation and isolation. In the social whirl of Charleston, she would prove she cared not a fig about her former beau's perfidy. Confident of her charms and her ability to attract new suitors, she hummed beneath her breath as she chose which gowns she would take with her.

This fantasy lasted only long enough for the train to reach Charleston and Roland to read the telegram. His grim features told the tale. He would telegraph Nathaniel and urge him to return posthaste. Which, as it happened, was not to be. Within days, word arrived that Nathaniel had been killed in a duel. Lizzie's mother collapsed under this news, and her poor heart never recovered. Two weeks later, she was dead.

All semblance of normal life vanished. Lizzie was forced to move in with Sarah and Roland, not even being allowed to bring her maid since that personage now belonged to the new owner of Rocklands. Dependent on her only remaining relatives, she was disgraced, unmarriageable, and bereft of even the slimmest chance of happiness.

She had never paid much attention to the celestial Being. Oh, she had participated in the required trappings of religion as any good southern lady would do, attending church every Sunday, suffering through family devotions before breakfast every morning, reciting her prayers every night. It was something one did, like dressing properly and observing the edicts of etiquette. Beyond that, she had simply assumed she occupied a position of favor in God's eyes. It had never occurred to her to question her own worthiness. Or to worry that He might one day have the temerity to withdraw His favor. Now her anger over His betrayal knew no bounds.

Nevertheless, she still clung to the illusion that sometime, somewhere He would send a knight in shining armor to rescue her from her fate. It was in such a frame of mind that she entered the parlor one early-February evening to discover Roland had brought a guest home for dinner, a client whom he was currently defending before the bar.

He was handsome. Dark like her former beau but slighter of stature, impeccably dressed, and sporting a neat moustache. Lizzie was immediately struck by his eyes. Deep brown, almost black in color, they fixed her with an intense gaze that seemed to cut through to her very soul while projecting an air of supreme confidence. He was a man to be reckoned with, and his obvious approval upon being introduced to Lizzie resonated throughout her body.

She could hardly remember the last time she had been openly admired by a member of the opposite gender. Now she saw herself through this stranger's eyes. Lush reddish-brown hair. Piquant face with lively green eyes, delicate features and a milky complexion broken by a light

spray of freckles across a pert nose. A slim form with a pleasingly full bosom. That he took it all in with interest rather than the pity to which she had lately grown accustomed came like a blast of warm air on the coldest winter day. She returned his greeting with a candid smile and lingering glance that found its mark in a slightly raised eyebrow. She ignored her sister Sarah's disapproving look and accepted the arm he offered by way of escort into the dining room.

He seated her at the table and took his place directly across from her. She sat tall and straight as the soup course was served, absorbing the gentleman's approving glances and forgetting her desperate circumstances for the first time in months. Then he spoke, and the bubble of self-delusion burst.

"Allow me to express my condolences over your recent difficulties, Miss Hamilton. Your brother-in-law has told me of the deaths of your brother and mother, as well as the calumny of your..." A delicate pause. "... *friend's* betrayal. How such behavior could have been directed against such a charming young lady is beyond comprehension."

Lizzie's face flamed. How dare Roland reveal their dirty secrets to a total stranger! She tossed her head and said, "I assure you I am quite recovered. The young man was little more than an amusing diversion to me, and I have all but forgotten him. I only regret he is not facing justice for his crimes. Unlike you, although I can only assume you are innocent given Mr. Townsend's decision to bring you into our midst. Of what are you accused, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

She was rather pleased with herself for turning the tables on him, but her sister Sarah was not amused. She scowled fiercely from her seat at the foot of the table. Lizzie kept her eyes locked on the unbowed Mr. O'Rourke, who smiled with dancing eyes and said,

"I admire a bold lady, Miss Hamilton. Therefore, I am happy to oblige your request, although it may not make for the most delicate of dinner-table conversation. As it happens, I am charged with murder."

Lizzie's jaw dropped. It was not unusual for Roland to bring a client with whom he felt a particular affinity home for dinner. Their cases usually involved some civil issue such as a property dispute or inheritance matter. But murder? This was a first.

Sarah was sitting wide-eyed with her hand covering her mouth.

"There is no cause for alarm, my dear," said Roland. "Mr. O'Rourke merely defended himself against a disgruntled passenger who meant him bodily harm. Once the facts are out, he will be duly acquitted of any wrongdoing."

"But such a serious charge. How is it that he is not... not..."

"In jail?" offered Jack O'Rourke. "I most assuredly would be languishing there this very moment were it not for your husband's eloquent plea on my behalf."

"We must credit your ability to post bail over any eloquence on my part," said Roland. "Nonetheless, in this instance, justice was served. It would have been a travesty for an innocent gentleman such as yourself to be confined in that foul place."

Sarah sent her husband a fond smile. "As you have so often said, our legal system is the bulwark of the innocent. And you are a most valiant gatekeeper."

"I could not agree more, Mrs. Townsend," said Mr. O'Rourke, turning the full force of his charm in her direction. "My fate is quite assured as long as it rests in your husband's most capable hands. That he has found me worthy to share this meal in the company of his delightful family humbles me more than I can say."

Sarah blushed and murmured, "Our home is always open to those in duress through no fault of their own."

Lizzie studied her sister. Once every bit as beautiful as Lizzie herself, marriage and the bearing of three children with yet another on the way had added inches to her waist, lines to her face, and mundane cares to her spirit. These very changes were the reason Lizzie had been content to delay her entrance into matrimonial bliss for as long as possible. That, of course, was in the days when she had had her pick of available suitors. Now that her family's disgrace had diminished her prospects, she found herself envying Sarah's secure position and wondering whether she could ever hope to emulate it. Several of her former friends had aging maiden aunts living in their households, and the possibility she might be reduced to such a permanent situation sent chills through her soul. Was the instrument of her rescue sitting across from her this very moment?

She smiled and said, "I admit my curiosity is piqued, sir. How did an innocent man come to be in such a perilous circumstance as yours?"

"A fair question. Count boredom as the primary culprit. A transatlantic crossing provides little in the way of entertainment. Certain gentlemen were in the habit of engaging in a little friendly gamesmanship of an evening. An Englishman and I were the only ones remaining one night when my extraordinary luck led my opponent to accuse me of cheating. I tried to reason with him. Even offered to give him the entire pot, but he was not to be mollified. He pulled a gun, we tussled, and the gun went off. The unfortunate fellow fell dead at my feet."

"Horrible! But surely a regrettable accident."

"Exactly. However, there were no other witnesses. And he happened to be a member of the British aristocracy. An earl, I believe. The British embassy has made a stink, giving your local authorities no choice but to pursue the matter." He shrugged. "As Mr. Townsend has already said, I shall be vindicated at trial. Until then, I am in his keeping, so to speak."

"But what of your family? Your name tells me you are of Irish ancestry, but I hear no brogue in your voice and therefore assume your home is here in America."

"Indeed. I emigrated to this country by way of Canada when I was but four years old."

"Canada?" She said the word with distaste, that country being the magnet that had set their family troubles in motion that fateful October.

"I did not have the privilege of being born into a wealthy old family such as yours, Miss Hamilton. My parents, being of peasant stock, did not have the four-pound fare required to reach New York City. Canada, however, offered a subsidized fare of fourteen shillings, which we were just able to afford. My father died during the crossing, and my mother and I walked across the border. We made our way to Boston, where my mother found work as a scullery maid in the household of a prominent Bostonian. I rose from those humble beginnings to become a self-made man. An attribute, I am told, much admired by America's colonial forefathers."

Lizzie looked him over with new eyes. Given his stylish but expensive attire and courtly manners, she had imagined him to be the scion of a successful northern industrial family. She laid the image aside and replaced it with the sad, squalid little tale he had just told. Despite her disappointment, she could not deny his point that much value was made of American individualism. He did appear to be prosperous, and for someone in her position, that counted for much.

"And your mother?" she asked.

"She died of a brain fever when I was fifteen, God rest her soul, leaving me to make my own way in the world. Which, as you can see, I have managed to do rather well." A grin.

"Excepting, of course, my present circumstances, which I have no doubt will soon be resolved to my credit."

Such crass boasting about his financial situation was the first sign she had seen of his crude beginnings. Before her ingrained training could stop her, she said, “And what exactly do you do to earn your livelihood?”

She knew the question made her equally culpable of employing bad manners, but she disregarded her sister’s frown and waited for his answer.

“I shan’t bore you with the particulars. I shall simply say I am a man of business whose ventures have brought him across the Atlantic to his adopted homeland. And very glad I am to be here.”

Lizzie detected her sister’s and brother-in-law’s discomfort over the turn of conversation as well as their relief over the timely arrival of the main course: fricasseed chicken, rice, and boiled pumpkin along with their cook Bessie’s best biscuits. She retreated into her meal, anticipation tickling her senses. She had no rational reason to believe anything had changed as far as her future prospects were concerned. Nonetheless it was there, a strong feeling that something had shifted in her favor. She smiled to herself. It was about time.



## CHAPTER TWO

Lizzie saw no more of Mr. O'Rourke in the week that followed, although she thought of little else. She had hoped he would call again and perhaps request her company for a stroll along the Battery, but he remained secluded in his room at the fashionable Charleston Hotel. She understood how a gentleman's sensibilities would keep him distant from a lady as long as he was under such an ugly shadow of suspicion. That knowledge did not dampen her impatience. She made subtle inquiries of Roland, but her brother-in-law remained tight-lipped, no doubt due to the notoriety of the case. She read the newspaper accounts and listened to rank gossip and speculation when she was out and about. Otherwise, she kept her aspirations to herself.

The case was scheduled to be tried on Monday, the thirteenth. Lizzie mentioned her desire to attend at dinner the day before. Sarah was nearly apoplectic in her refusal to even consider it. Roland agreed it was not suitable for her to be seen amongst the newsmen, curiosity-seekers, and general ruffraff that would fill the courtroom. Their objections, far from dissuading her, merely stiffened her determination.

After Sarah retired for her afternoon nap on the day in question, Lizzie dressed in the mourning clothes she had been required to wear for a year following her brother's and mother's deaths and pulled the veil down to her chin. She passed Bessie in the downstairs hall. The cook, a heavyset woman whose yellow turban and snow-white apron were a stark contrast to her coal-black skin, stared at her in astonishment, no doubt remembering her oft-stated relief when she was finally able to lay aside the drab black clothes. She ignored the look, swept past, and went out into a gray gloomy day.

She crossed the piazza that stretched across the lower facade of the Townsend's red-brick, two-story house and descended to the front path. She had always thought it a rather grand residence until she saw the palatial home her Cousin Charlotte now occupied as the wife of the prosperous Captain Arthur S. Riddleston. Roland's house was located on Friend Street a block south of Broad Street amongst the homes of other professionals and men of commerce, whereas the captain's was at the very apex of the Charleston peninsula and looked out across East Battery Street to the harbor—a distinction that placed the families in two entirely different strata of society.

Not that it mattered to Lizzie. Her fate had been sealed by her brother's flagrant mismanagement of the family fortunes, and nothing would change that unless she took things into her own hands. She opened her parasol against a light drizzle and set out toward Broad Street.

The courthouse was a three-story Neoclassical building on the corner of Broad and Meeting Streets. Roland's prediction of the chaos that would attend the trial proved to be accurate. Access to the courtroom's lower floor was impossible, but Lizzie climbed the stairs and sidled her way through the crowd surrounding the balcony doors, nose wrinkling at the rank odor of so many warm bodies crammed into such a small space. Her mourning clothes bought her a modicum of deference, allowing her to finally claim a spot against the rear wall where she could look down on the proceedings.

The judge, a solid gray-haired personage in a flowing black robe, sat behind a mahogany bench on a balustraded dias beneath a large American flag. The clerk and his assistant occupied a desk beneath the bench, the county solicitor a table opposite. The twelve jurors were seated along the right-hand wall, their attention riveted on the small pale figure now occupying the witness box.

He could not have been more than fifteen or sixteen, a callow youth with protruding teeth and an unkempt tangle of black hair. Roland Townsend paced in front of him. He was a medium-sized man with light-brown hair and an expanding belly who wore spectacles and a frown of concentration as he said,

“Tell me, Robert, in the course of your duties as cabin boy aboard the *Caroline*, did you have occasion to enter the defendant’s stateroom?”

Noticing the boy’s confusion, he added, “The defendant being Mr. O’Rourke, whom you see sitting over there.” He pointed to where A. Jackson O’Rourke sat looking suave and handsome in his impeccable gentleman’s attire.

In a high, squeaky voice, “Yes, sir, your excellency. I ’uz in there lots of times.”

A condescending smile. “Sir’ will suffice when you address me, young man. Now, when you say you were in the cabin ‘lots of times,’ how many do you mean?”

“Don’t know exactly, sir. Ever’ day we was at sea.”

“Every day without fail?”

A vigorous nod.

“You need to answer me out loud, Robert.”

“Oh. Yes, sir. Every day, sir.”

“And what was your purpose in going into that particular cabin every day?”

“Just doing my job. Straightening up, emptying the chamber pot.” He shrugged. “The usual things.”

“And during all those forays into Mr. O’Rourke’s cabin, did you ever have occasion to see... ” He strode over to the solicitor’s table and picked up a small, brown, blunt-nosed pistol. “... this gun among his effects.”

“No, sir. Never, sir.”

“But the gun is not completely foreign to you, is it?”

An open-mouthed frown.

With controlled patience, “I am asking if you have ever seen the gun before today.”

“Oh. Oh, yes, sir. I seen it in Cabin Number Four.”

A rumble of surprise rolled through the courtroom. The judge banged his gavel until silence was restored, then nodded at Roland, inviting him to continue.

“And who occupied that particular cabin?”

Grinning, “That there highfalutin’ duke from England. That gun was his, for sure.”

Roland turned to the jurors. “As previous testimony has already established, the passenger who occupied Cabin Four was none other than the deceased, Alfred Harley, Sixth Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer.” Back to the boy, “Is he the gentleman to whom you refer?”

“He is, sir.”

“Thank you, Robert. I have no further questions.”

The Charleston District Solicitor rose for cross examination, but despite his imperious demeanor and aggressive verbiage, he was unable to shake the boy’s story.

When the youth had stepped down, the judge leaned forward and said, “Do you have any further witnesses to call, Mr. Townsend?”

“I do, Your Honor. The defense calls Mr. Andrew Jackson O’Rourke.”

Another murmur rippled through the room as the defendant walked to the witness box, swore to the truth of his testimony, and took his seat. Lizzie’s legs were tired from standing, and she was sweating in the heat of such close quarters, but she would not have left the courtroom if her life had depended on it.

Roland stood to one side so the jury would have an unobstructed view of his client and said, "You understand the gravity of the charges against you, do you not, Mr. O'Rourke?"

"I most certainly do."

"Murder in the first degree, sir. You understand the severe penalty to which you would be subject should you be found guilty?"

"I do."

"Given that fact, would you not agree that any man in your position would enter a plea of not guilty?"

"Absent a particular desire to face his Maker, he would indeed."

"And was that motive paramount in your mind when you entered your plea?"

In a voice that rang throughout the room, "No, sir. I pleaded not guilty because I am, in fact, not guilty of this crime."

Roland surveyed the jury with a look of mock surprise. "Not guilty, you say. Did you not shoot to death one Alfred Harley, Sixth Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer, on the twenty-eighth day of last December?"

"I did."

More muted reaction quickly silenced by the smack of the judge's gavel.

Roland spread his hands in a gesture of incomprehension. "Then how do you claim to be not guilty of murder?"

"Because I shot the poor soul in self-defense. Had I not done so, he would be the one facing this jury today while I rotted in my grave." A rueful smile. "An unattractive prospect from my perspective, as you might imagine."

A few chuckles quickly suppressed by a frown from the judge.

Roland continued, "Before we get to the particulars of that fateful incident, allow us to learn a bit about who you are and why this jury should believe your version of what transpired."

At this, the solicitor rose and said in a tired voice, "I object to this proposed line of questioning, Your Honor. We are not interested in this man's character. Only in his actions on the night in question."

The judge pursed his lips and looked at Roland, who said, "To the contrary, Your Honor, character has everything to do with this case. There were no witnesses to the shooting in question. My client's testimony is the only account we shall have from someone who was actually present in the ship's after cabin that night. The jury must decide whether or not he is telling the truth. To do so, they must know enough about him to assess the sincerity of his words and demeanor."

The judge nodded. "I shall allow it. Please proceed."

Triumph flitted across Roland's face before he continued, "Now, then, Mr. O'Rourke, your surname is one often associated with Ireland, the fabled Emerald Isle. Was that the country of your birth?"

"It was."

"You are not, then, a natural-born citizen of these United States?"

"No. I was naturalized at the same time as my mother, God rest her soul, when I was nine years old."

"I am curious to know how a gentleman of Irish birth and heritage came by the decidedly American first and middle names of Andrew Jackson. Can you explain that anomaly to the court?"

An engaging grin. “Most happily. I was christened Aindreas James. When we arrived here, my sainted mother, who held a fierce love for her adopted country, anglicized my given name to Andrew and changed my middle name to Jackson in honor of the then President of the United States, whom she greatly admired.”

A murmur of approval told Lizzie Roland’s tactic was working. Many Southerners were deeply suspicious of foreigners, especially Irish Catholics, but Roland had effectively cast an aura of respectability over his client by invoking the name of the slave-owning, states-rights advocate, Andrew Jackson.

Sensing this, the solicitor rose and said, “All very interesting, Your Honor, but I fail to see what the defendant’s mother’s political views have to do with this case. My opposing counsel seems to be accomplishing little besides wasting the court’s time.”

The judge nodded his head. “I tend to agree with you. Let us move along, shall we, Mr. Townsend?”

Roland bowed and said, “Very well, Your Honor.” To his client, “Bearing in mind the court’s interest in expediency, tell us about your family. You are your mother’s only child?”

“I am. My father died before our ship ever reached these shores, leaving the two of us bereft and defenseless. We settled in Boston, and my mother found employment in the home of the great philanthropist, Mr. John Amory Lowell.” A fond smile. “He was a kind and gracious man who encouraged my studies and made a place for me in his employ as well.”

He gave a heavy sigh. “Alas, it was not to last. Mother passed from a brain fever when I was a youth, and I decided to go out into the world on my own rather than remain in menial toil. I was fortunate enough to catch the attention of a good man who schooled me in the ways of business. I prospered in a modest way until I received word two years past that my maternal great-uncle on my father’s side, a man with whom the family had lost contact, wished me to come to London and keep him company during the final years of his life. He was a man of considerable fortune, which he left to me when he passed into the Lord’s arms. Having no reason to remain in England, I decided to come home to the country I love.”

“Which is how you happened to be onboard the *Caroline* on the night in question?”

“Indeed.”

“Now, sir, perhaps you would give us your account of events as they happened. Events that led to an unfortunate loss of a life.”

“I am most eager to do so, Mr. Townsend. The evening began as many others had with a group of congenial gentlemen engaging in a little friendly wagering. All but myself and the aforementioned earl eventually drifted off to their bunks, leaving us two to continue on. The cards had been favoring me all evening, and the earl had wagered more than was perhaps prudent. Out of frustration, he finally suggested we each risk our entire earnings on one final hand. I demurred, but he insisted I give him this chance to win back what he had lost. The cards were played, and I was once again the winner. This final loss drove him beyond the edge of reason. He accused me of cheating and drew his pistol.”

He pulled a face of deep sadness. “I tried to calm him, but he became more intransigent with every word. Just as he seemed bent on pulling the trigger, a fortuitous shifting of the deck caused him to lose his balance, giving me the opportunity to spring at him and attempt to disarm him. The weapon discharged as we struggled, and he fell at my feet. I was horrified, as you might imagine. I attempted to revive him, but it was no use. The shot must have taken him straight in the heart. He was quite irretrievably dead.”

Roland paused to allow the room's stentorian silence to impress itself on the jury. Then he said, "Let us be perfectly clear, Mr. O'Rourke. Did you at any time bear malice of any degree toward this gentleman?"

"Most certainly not! We had spent many hours conversing about these fair United States. He was most eager to experience its wonders for himself, and I am deeply saddened he will never have that opportunity."

"Very well. I have no further questions." He bowed and returned to his seat.

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Jack lifted his eyes to the gallery as the solicitor rose from his seat and lumbered around the table toward him. The lady in black leaned against the back wall, her shifting stance evidence of her discomfort from standing for so long. A mourning veil covered her face, but he had seen enough when she raised it to pat at the perspiration on her brow to know it was the Hamilton girl. He smiled up at her, and she started in surprise. It pleased him she had come, proving what he had already surmised about her. She was desperate enough to be unconventional. To take risks. And beautiful in the bargain. Just what he needed.

He shifted his attention to the solicitor, who had stopped to scowl at him from three feet away.

"How much did you pay the boy for his testimony?"

Jack lifted his eyebrows. "I beg your pardon?"

"The police questioned the lad Robert three times in the days after the *Caroline* docked, and he said nothing about seeing the murder weapon in the earl's stateroom."

Roland Townsend shot up from his seat. "I object to this characterization of the pistol in question, Your Honor. There has been no finding of murder in this case."

The judge nodded. "The objection is sustained."

The solicitor sent Roland a less-than-friendly glare and said, "Regardless of how this weapon is characterized, the boy did not report seeing it in that or any other cabin on the ship. To what do you attribute his sudden recall some six-and-a-half weeks later?"

"The mental acuity of youth?" A shrug accompanied by a charming smile. "It is a mystery beyond explaining."

"Oh, it can be explained, all right. You have claimed to be a man of considerable means. Again I ask, how much did you pay him to commit perjury before this court?"

Roland started to rise, but Jack's indignant response beat him by seconds. "Your accusation is an insult to my integrity as a gentleman!"

"Be that as it may, I require an answer. Bearing in mind that you are under oath, I ask again. Did you bribe the lad Robert to assure his testimony?"

"No, sir, I did not. And I defy you to prove otherwise."

The solicitor turned to the jury and held out both hands as if to say, *What can one do with a liar such as this?* He whirled back and took a step closer.

"Is it not true you are a professional gambler?"

"A professional... I do not take your meaning, sir."

"It is a straightforward designation. Do you earn your livelihood at the gaming tables?"

He shrugged. "I have already told the court I enjoy a stimulating hand of cards. As do most of the other gentlemen present in this courtroom, I would wager."

"Wagering seems to be what you do best, Mr. O'Rourke. You heard the earlier testimony of two of your fellow passengers onboard the *Caroline*. They made clear their suspicion over your extraordinary luck at cards during the voyage. How do you explain your success?"

“I cannot, except to say that luck is fickle. Here today, gone tomorrow. I certainly did not cheat to obtain such results, if that is what you are suggesting.”

“That is, in fact, what I am suggesting. You did not answer my earlier question. Are you a professional gambler?”

“I am not.”

“This great-uncle in England whom you claim left you his fortune. What was his name?”

“William Brougham.”

“And he lived where?”

“No. 50, Grosvenor Square, London, England,” smiling as the significance of the address sank in.

The solicitor clenched his jaw, frustration burning hot on his face as he plowed forward.

“This fortune of which you speak. Where does it reside?”

“In one of the safest places there is, the vaults of Barclay, Bevan, Barclay and Tritton’s of London.”

“And if we were to contact that prestigious institution, would they confirm that you are, in fact, a customer with extensive financial assets?”

“Of course. In fact, I urge you to do so.”

A contemptuous sneer. “Easy for you to say given that any answer to our inquiry would not arrive until well after this trial is concluded. I have no further questions for this witness.”