

"Next week, sir."

Cousin William laughed. "Well, call it the week after that!" He sat by the couch in the winged chair. The firelight played through the room, lit the two women sitting by the hearth, and the two or three old pictures on the walls. Outside the snow fell slowly, in large, quiet flakes. "Have you had any letters?" asked Cousin William.

Unity answered. "One from Fauquier yesterday. None from Edward for some days. The last was just a line from Columbia written before the troops left the place and Sherman came and burned it. We can't but feel very anxious."

But Cousin William could not endure to see Greenwood downcast. "I think you may be certain they are safe. — What did Fauquier say?"

"Just that since Hatcher's Run there had been comparative inaction. He said that the misery in the trenches was very great, and that day by day the army was dwindling. He said we must be prepared now for the worst."

Cousin William flushed, leaned forward, and became violently optimistic. "You tell Fauquier — or I'll write to him and tell him myself — that that is no way to talk! It is no way for his father's son to talk, or his grandfather's grandson to talk! I am sure, Richard, that you don't feel that way!"

"Yes, sir, I do feel that way. We are at the end."

"At the end!" ejaculated Cousin William. "Absurd! We have held Grant eight months at Petersburg! — Well, say that General Lee eventually determines to withdraw from Petersburg! What will follow? Lee in Virginia and Johnston in Carolina have the inner lines. Lee will march south, Johnston will march north, they will join armies, first crush Sherman, then turn and destroy Grant! Richmond? Well, say that Richmond is given up, temporarily, sir — temporarily! We will take it again when we want it, and if they burn it we will rebuild it! Nothing can keep it from being our capital. The President and the Cabinet and offices can remove for a time. Who knows but what it may be very well to be free and foot-loose of defended cities? Play the guerilla if need be! Make our capital at mountain hamlet after mountain hamlet, go from court-house to court-house — A capital! The Confederacy has a