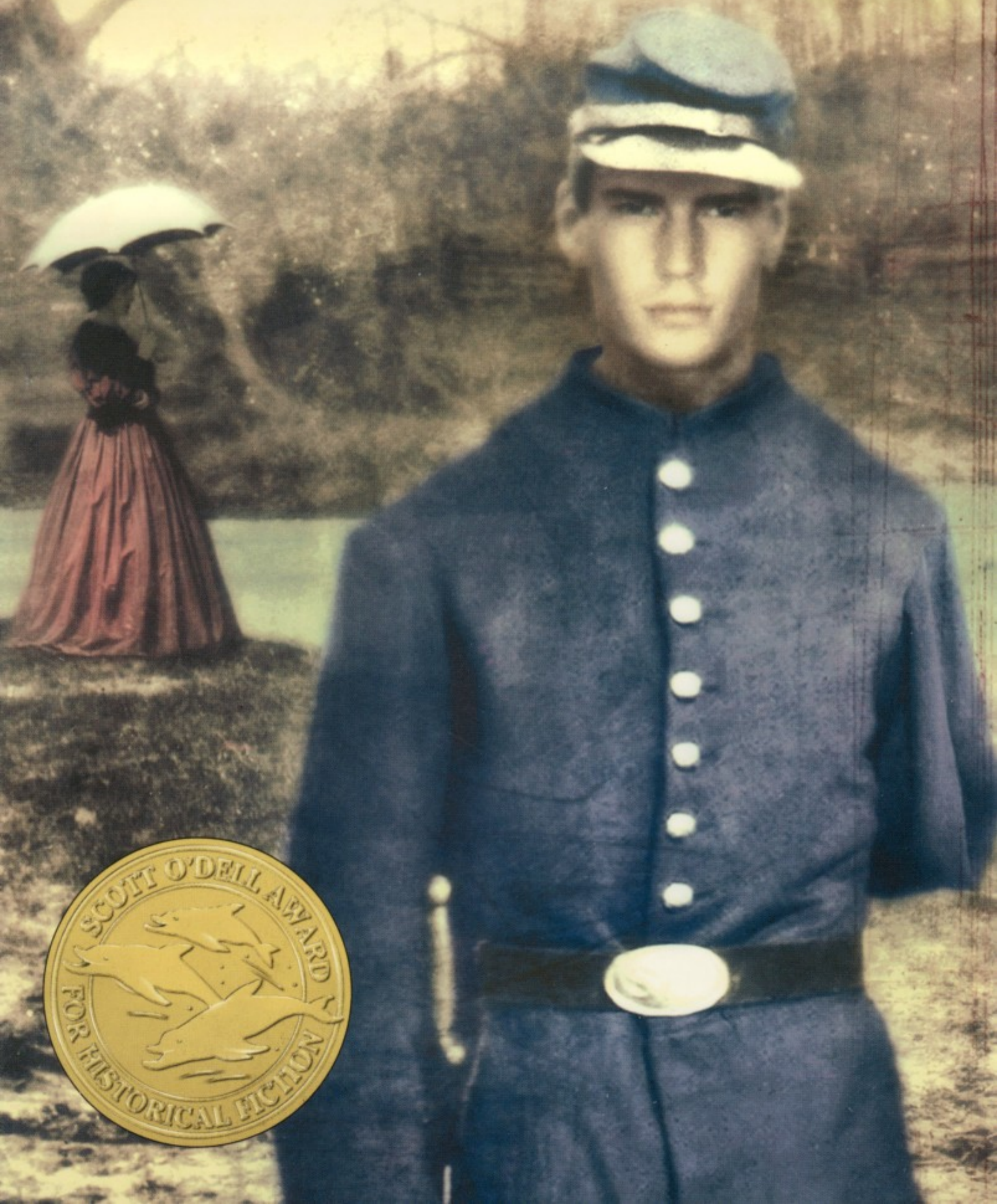


RICHARD PECK

THE RIVER BETWEEN US

National Book Award Finalist



Chapter One

To me, the best part was that we'd make the trip by car. When I say car, I mean a Ford, of course, a Model T touring car, and they don't make them like that anymore. In those days it was a big thing to drive a car out of town, let alone a hundred miles each way of Southern Illinois dirt road. I thought the journey itself was going to be the adventure.

My dad made house calls in the Ford. He was a very well-thought-of doctor in the St. Louis of that time. A tall man with black curly hair parted in the middle and steel-rimmed spectacles gripping the bridge of his nose. He wore high celluloid collars, and I never saw him without a necktie.

I thought he carried all the wisdom of the world in the black bag that traveled to house calls with him on the front seat of the Ford. With the same silent skill that he used to set a bone, he could patch a tire.

Apparently, my dad had been young once, but I couldn't picture it. Even at the age of fifteen I knew but little about who he was and where he'd come from. And so I knew but little about myself.

My dad was what they called a self-made man. Though he'd succeeded in St. Louis, he'd come from a little town called Grand Tower on the other side of the Mississippi River down low in Illinois.

All I knew of Dad's people was that they'd lived through the Civil War. Imagine an age when there were still people around who'd seen U. S. Grant with their own eyes, and men who'd voted for Lincoln. People you could reach out and touch.

My dad's father, the first Dr. William Hutchings, had been a doctor in the Union Army. My grandmother and grandfather Hutchings still lived in what Dad called the homeplace, down in Grand Tower, that wide spot in the road.

I couldn't remember visiting them before. My mother was very standoffish about my dad's side of the family. She was a St. Louis girl, and we boys were named for her side of the family. I was Howard Leland Hutchings. My little brothers, twins, were Raymond and Earl. At the age of five, they were

too young to figure much in this story, but they came along on the trip too.

Dad worked a six-and-a-half-day week. It was a great occasion when he found an afternoon to take me to a Browns game. That was before the Browns forsook St. Louis to be the Baltimore Orioles.

But now he had announced that we were going to visit his folks—motoring there and back in the Ford. It was the summer of 1916, and war was raging across Europe, the Great War. Dad said it was just a question of time before America got in it. In wartime there'd be restrictions on travel, and so it was now or never.

The next thing I remember is the morning we left, like the dawn of creation. It was a July day breathless with St. Louis heat and the thrill of the open road unwinding before us. Our preparations had taken days. We'd been through the toolbox time and again. We'd filled as many cans of gasoline as we could strap to the running boards. Dad had personally filed down the points on the spark plugs. I hadn't slept a wink in two nights, and now the moment of leaving was upon us.

Mother wasn't going and didn't want us to go. And I didn't know why. I remember her up on the porch and the Ford there in the middle of Maryland Avenue. Dad and I wore dusters and caps with goggles. One of the extra features of our Ford was a windshield. But it was always laid

THE YEAR IS 1861, AND TILLY PRUITT'S LIFE IS ABOUT TO CHANGE.

Civil war is imminent and her brother, Noah, is eager to go and fight on the side of the North. With her father long gone, Tilly, her sister, and their mother struggle to make ends meet and hold the dwindling Pruitt family together.

Then one night a mysterious girl arrives on a steamboat bound for St. Louis. Delphine is elegant and beautiful and outspoken...and unlike anyone the small river town of Grand Tower has ever seen. Mrs. Pruitt agrees to take Delphine and her dark, silent traveling companion in as boarders. No one in town knows what to make of the two strangers, and so the rumors fly. Is Delphine's companion a slave? Could they be spies for the South? Are the Pruitts traitors?

Within a masterful tale of mystery and war, Richard Peck has spun a breathtaking portrait of the lifelong impact one person can have on another.

★“Peck’s spare writing has never been more eloquent than in this powerful mystery...”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review


“Boosts Peck’s credentials as America’s best living author for young adults.”
—*The Washington Post*

A National Book Award Finalist

Winner of the Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction

An ALA Notable Book

An ALA Best Book for Young Adults

 PUFFIN

ISBN 0-14-240310-5

9 780142 403105

50699>

EAN

U.S.A. \$6.99 / CAN. \$9.99

AGES 10 up

VISIT US AT www.penguin.com/youngreaders

Cover art copyright
© Kamil Vojnar, 2004