

TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD. My servant David, who calls himself David Walton, had permission to visit his wife, belonging to Arthur West, Esq. near the Wood Yard; since then he has been absent, and I have every reason to believe he has made for Pennsylvania.

Chapter 1



GIDEON STOLTZ, THE COLERAIN COUNTY SHERIFF, LOOKED OUT over the crowded church pews. He spotted his deputy across the sanctuary doing the same.

The speaker that evening was a young white man clad in a suit whose sleeves and pant legs were too short for his gangling limbs. Brown hair hung in ringlets to his shoulders, and a reddish-brown beard came halfway down his chest.

His voice, deeper and more powerful than his reedy body suggested, filled the church:

“I have sworn to God! I have sworn to THE GREAT GOD ALMIGHTY that I will not cut one lock of my hair, nor a strand of my beard, until the ABOMINATION THAT IS SLAVERY has ended!”

As if to emphasize the point, he gave his hirsute head a shake.

He aimed a finger at his audience. “TWO MILLION SEVEN HUNDRED THOUSAND SLAVES IN THE LAND!” He strode from one side of the platform to the other, then spun about to face his audience again. “YOU! AND I! Here in the North, ALL OF US benefit from slavery as much as do the slaveholders in the South! Our banks loan their lucre to investors in the South. Those same banks accept slaves—ENSLAVED HUMAN BEINGS!—as collateral for loans. We sell our goods and products in the South, letting slaveholders expand their wicked empire westward, planting more cotton and

rice and cane—all worked by slaves toiling under an overseer's lash. We eat rice from the South! We sweeten our coffee with sugar from the South! Our mills weave THEIR COTTON, SOUTHERN COTTON, into cloth!"

"Adamant has no cotton mill!" someone shouted from the audience.

"Just as we enjoy the fruits of slavery, so will their bitterness choke us! Slavery is a sin foul as the crater pool of hell. It must end, I tell you. And if we do not end it, SLAVERY WILL TEAR THIS NATION APART!"

Earlier Gideon had been hurriedly introduced to the speaker, one Charles C. Burleigh, of Brooklyn, Connecticut, on a lecture tour of Pennsylvania towns. Burleigh had identified himself as one of "the Seventy," a cadre of young men dispatched across the country by the famed abolitionist orator Theodore Dwight Weld. Gideon had read about Weld in the newspaper: the man had spoken out against slavery so often and so vociferously that he had ruined his vocal cords.

Burleigh might be on the way to losing his voice, too, Gideon thought.

"They say the negroes are HAPPY in the South, HAPPY in their enslavement!" Burleigh thundered. "That they are CONTENT! I ask you, then, WHY DO SO MANY OF THEM RUN? Do you read the fugitive notices? Do you consider the brutality they convey? 'MUCH SCARRED WITH THE WHIP!' 'LEFT EAR CROPPED!' 'BRANDED ON THE RIGHT BREAST!'"

Another cry from the audience: "There are no slaves in Adamant!"

"Do you read the notices? Or do you look away? YOU CANNOT LOOK AWAY! THERE CAN BE NO LOOKING AWAY! There can be no neutrality toward slavery, no indifference! Each and every one of us is guilty—GUILTY!—if we fail to demand its immediate abolition!"

A man in the audience stood and called out: "Why do you come here and agitate?" Gideon recognized him as the owner of one of the

town's banks: his belly like a stuffed grain sack, a red face with pouchy cheeks and a habitual frown. "You're nothing but a reckless fool!"

Another man rose, pulled back his arm, and whipped it forward. Something sailed through the air and hit Burleigh in the chest. A corncob.

Burleigh smiled and raised his hands.

More men in the audience jumped up. Corncobs flew, some finding their mark. A din of shouted objections. Women hissed—whether at the throwers or the abolitionist, Gideon couldn't tell.

When a rotten apple struck Burleigh in the shoulder, splattering his coat and making him stagger backward, Gideon strode to the platform. His deputy, Alonzo Bell, joined him.

"Enough!" Gideon shouted. "That's enough." He and Alonzo stood flanking the abolitionist. A man from the audience came down the aisle and joined them: tall lanky Hack Latimer, a member of the Colerain County Anti-Slavery Society, the group that had invited Burleigh to speak. Two sturdy black men also came forward: Melchior Dorfman, who owned a tin shop in town, and a young wagoner who drove freight.

Men in the audience hesitated, then lowered their arms. The banker sat down; others remained standing. A general grumbling, but no more missiles flew.

Burleigh resumed his speech: "We claim that we live in an honorable country. But THERE CAN BE NO HONOR in a republic founded on slavery! BUILT ON SLAVERY! No honor in a nation determined to perpetuate this MONSTROSITY, this disease that is ROTTING THE HEART AND SOUL OF THESE UNITED STATES!"

Gideon reckoned that well over a hundred people had packed the Episcopal church, Adamant's finest house of worship. The pews were full, and listeners stood along the sides and in back. Gideon saw men and women from his own church, Methodist, smaller and humbler, a low log building. He spotted his brother-in-law Jesse

Burns, whose face wore the smirk that was Jesse's version of a smile. He saw his friend Horatio Foote, the white-haired headmaster of the Adamant Academy. Phineas Potter, publisher of the *Adamant Argus*, scribbled in a notebook; Hosea Belknap, who owned the competing *Colerain Democrat*, did the same. Gideon recognized shopkeepers, craftsmen, the man who ran the hotel. Several dozen women were present: he glimpsed his own wife True standing in back. Most of Adamant's adult black residents were in attendance, around thirty men.

"Slavery must be abolished!" Burleigh exclaimed. "NOT NEXT YEAR! NOT NEXT WEEK! NOT TOMORROW! NOW!"

Gideon's eyes settled on two strangers seated beside each other near the back of the church. One looked to be about fifty. He was bull-necked and bald-headed. The other was younger, in his thirties, with a pale moustache and a chin beard. Over the last few days, Gideon had seen the two around town. He had noted the good leather boots they wore and the weathered slouch hats. Now, bare-headed in the church, they sat silently as the abolitionist tried to continue while members of the audience shouted him down.

"Humanity cries out against this FOUL STAIN!"

"You horse's ass!"

"Prating fool!"

"In the sight of God, SLAVERY IS A GROTESQUE SIN—"

"Wake up, you dough-faced dreamer!"

"We'll cut your hair for you, and that beard, too!"

And, piercing Gideon's awareness, a slur that perhaps came from his brother-in-law Jesse and was surely directed at himself: "You god-damned Dutch blockhead!"

An egg whizzed past Gideon's head and went *crump* behind him.

Then a fresh barrage of corncobs, apples, and small rocks.

Gideon grabbed Burleigh by the arm and hustled him out a side door, Alonzo following. "Where are you staying?" Gideon asked. The abolitionist told him. "See that he gets there," Gideon ordered his

deputy. Off they went, Burleigh protesting that he must finish his speech while Alonzo hurried him along in the darkness.

Gideon went back inside. Hoots and guffaws, although the hubbub was lessening. Jesse, his brother-in-law, had vanished. Others filed out through the narthex, taking their laughter with them. Gideon didn't see the two strangers who'd been seated in back.

Adamant's black citizens stood in small knots at the front of the church, talking among themselves. All except Mel Dorfman, the tinner, who was caught up in an argument with the newspaperman Phineas Potter. Dorfman jutted his dark face close to Potter's pale one. He held Potter's lapel with one hand and jabbed him in the chest with the fingers of his other hand. Potter recoiled, blinking. Gideon moved to separate them, but before he could get there, Dorfman let go. Potter brushed himself off and walked away.

"What was that about?" Gideon asked.

"Nothing worth mentioning," Dorfman growled. He was a barrel-chested man in his middle years with a bit of a paunch, gray frosting the black hair at his temples. He turned and stalked off.

True strolled toward home in the dirt street. She glanced up at the stars, floating in a hazy sky. Late April, a warm breeze from the south. Whip-poor-wills chanted from the brushy hills. Toads trilled in the mill ponds strung out along Spring Creek, the stream that gushed forth from the Big Spring, around which the town of Adamant had grown.

She heard someone coming up from behind. She turned and saw her husband.

Gideon put out his arm.

True hesitated, then linked her arm through his.

She was trying. Trying to be a good wife. To embrace life. A year and a half had passed since they'd lost their baby boy, David. True still

grieved for her son, but the ache had lessened, sunk deep like an old burn.

She was trying to overcome the melancholia that had visited her off and on for as long as she could remember. Her grandmother, Arabella Burns, was also subject to bouts of depression, which the old woman called “the black wolf.” Gram Burns had shown True how to use certain plants, rattleweed and skullcap and bee balm, to push back the despair. True had also inherited from her grandmother an uncanny sense that the old woman called the “second sight”: like her gram, True sometimes had visions and prescient dreams. She’d had one before her baby had died.

“Things got pretty tense in that church,” Gideon said.

“I’m glad you and Alonzo were there,” True replied. “Otherwise they might have cut that fellow’s hair, or tarred and feathered him.”

“People don’t like talking about slavery.”

“Or thinking about it.”

“At the jail we get plenty of advertisements for runaways.”

Her husband’s Pennsylvania Dutch accent made True smile. She wasn’t Dutch, nor were many others in Colerain County, inhabited mainly by Scotch-Irish.

“Do you and Alonzo watch out for fugitives?” she asked.

“Not really. We’re eighty miles from the Maryland line. But I suppose some of them could pass through here on their way north.”

“What would you do if a person caught one and brought him to the jail?”

Gideon hesitated. “I’m not sure. I should look into the law, or ask the state’s attorney, just in case.”

True gave his arm a squeeze. “I hope you would do the right thing.”

“What if the right thing—whatever it is—and what the law requires turn out to be two different things?” Gideon said.

True stopped and turned her face upward. “Listen.”

From far above came a faint twittering, like old voices whispering secrets: birds calling to one another as their flocks streamed north through the night.

At the house they were greeted with barks and tail-wagging by Old Dick, the red setter who was Gideon's hunting dog and True's companion and friend. The dog was on a chain in their yard. True ran her hands through the setter's fur. She went inside and brought out scraps from the evening meal. Old Dick wolfed them down.

It was early for bedtime when she went back inside, but True easily read the look on Gideon's face. She slipped out of her clothes and lay down with him in their bed.

After David's death, they had drifted apart. True had not let him touch her for almost a year.

Now, under the quilt, she let her husband enfold her. He kissed her eyes and cheeks and lips, her neck and shoulders and breasts. And, at last, gently entered her. True liked having Gideon hold her close. She was willing to give him pleasure. But she stayed in a part of her mind separate from this joining. She was not ready to conceive another child, even though Gideon wanted one. Too much to lose, tying up so much love in a new soul that could flit away as quickly as a bird on the wing.

Thanks to Gram Burns, True knew how to keep that from happening.