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Jed Cartwright and the Desperate Slave

A novel
by Ed Dunlop

(Book Five in the Jed Cartwright adventure series)

The Desperate Slave

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Chapter 1 – WILD RIDE

The big chestnut mare snorted and stamped a hoof nervously on the cobblestones of the narrow St. Louis street. Wide-eyed with fear, she strained against the harness that tethered her to the back of the farm wagon. She lurched to one side, slamming her flank hard against the tailgate, and the crowd of boys around her scattered like flies.

“Don’t try it, Jed,” Nathan whispered, his brilliant blue eyes clouded with worry. “She’s too wild. She’ll kill you!”

Twelve-year-old Jed Cartwright laughed at his adopted brother’s words. “I’ll take it easy,” he promised. “But I can ride her! I know I can! She’s wearing a saddle, isn’t she?”

The horse lunged forward against the wagon and then jerked backwards against the harness that held her captive. The vehicle rocked with the force of the big animal’s movements.

Merle Watkins laid a hand on Jed’s arm. “Nathan’s right, Jed,” he said softly. “She’s not broken, and maybe never will be. A horse that wild could kill you easily.”

Jed frowned, studying the mare thoughtfully. “She’s not that bad,” he replied. “And they were able to get a saddle and bridle on her.”

“Hey, Cartwright,” one of the other boys called, “What’s it gonna be? You said you could ride her; let’s see you do it!”

“He’s gonna chicken out,” another boy taunted.

Jed let out his breath slowly. “I’m not afraid to ride her,” he retorted. “But she belongs to Mr. Adams, and I shouldn’t ride her without his permission.” *That was an easy out*, he thought gratefully.

“You’re a coward, Cartwright,” Lem Ponder jeered.

“Then you ride her, Lem,” Jed replied evenly.

The other boy turned red. “Never said I could,” he retorted. “But you’re the one blowing all the steam. Let’s see you ride her.”

Jed shook his head. “Not without asking Mr. Adams. She’s his horse.”

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The door of the mercantile slammed shut with a bang and the boys glanced in that direction. “Here comes Joey Adams,” Lem said. “We’ll ask him.”

“Hey, Joey,” Lem called out as the boy approached the wagon, “give Jed the go ahead to ride yore Pa’s mare. He says he can do it, but he won’t without yore Pa’s say so. We think he’s yella.”

Joey shook his head and looked at Jed. “I wouldn’t try it if I were you, Jed. She’s thrown Pa twice, and she’s thrown three of our best hands. Chester Sanders got his leg broke. She’s a mean ‘un.”

Jed shrugged. “So how’d you get a saddle on her?”

“Pa’s been able to get the saddle and bridle on her every day for the last three weeks,” the other boy replied. “But let a man try to get in the saddle and she goes wild. Pa says he’s either gonna sell her today or shoot her.”

“I still think I could ride her,” Jed countered.

Joey shook his head. “I wouldn’t try it,” he advised. “She could hurt you bad.”

“Did yore Pa tell you not to let anyone ride her?” Lem asked Joey.

“No, but—”

“Then he wouldn’t mind if Jed tries, would he?” the taller boy pressed. “Give Jed yore say so, and let’s see if he’s man enough to take a ride.”

“Pa wouldn’t like it,” Joey replied.

“But he didn’t say not to,” Lem retorted. “Come on, Joey! It’s yore Pa’s horse, so in a way, it’s yourn, too. Tell Cartwright he can ride her.”

Joey frowned. “Well, if he really wants to—” he began.

Lem turned on Jed. “You heard him, Cartwright. Now—you gonna ride or are you just blowin’ steam?”

Jed peeled off his heavy jacket, wincing against the bitter January cold, and then handed the garment to Nathan. “Hold this.”

“Jed, don’t!” Nathan protested. “Please don’t try it!”

Jed scrambled into the back of the wagon. “You guys try to spook her over close to the wagon,” he said. “I’ll get on her from here. Joey, you throw off the lead rope once I’m on her. But be quick!”

Joey climbed up after him and loosened the knot on the lead rope. “Be careful, Jed!”

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“Yee-haw!” Several of the boys jumped toward the horse, yelling and waving their arms. The mare responded by lurching sideways against the tailgate of the wagon. “Now, Cartwright, now!” Lem Ponder shouted.

Jed dropped into the saddle, gripping the saddle horn with one hand and the reins with the other. His feet found the stirrups in an instant. “Untie her, Joey!” he called. “Untie her!” But Joey had already freed the lead rope.

The mare leaped viciously to the left, spun hard to the right, and then raced straight down the narrow street with a sudden burst of speed that took Jed by surprise. Jed’s heart pounded with fear as he suddenly realized the danger he was in. The other boys dashed after the horse and rider in a futile attempt to keep up.

“Look at ‘em go!”

“Ride her, Jed, ride her!”

“Jed! Watch out!”

The wild mare lurched hard to the right, and then spun furiously to the left. The sudden move caught Jed off guard and pitched him from the saddle. But his right boot caught in the stirrup, trapping him beneath the angry, bucking horse! In

desperation, Jed twisted upward in a frantic lunge, and the fingers of his right hand caught the pommel of the saddle. He gripped it desperately, realizing that if he lost his hold his head and upper body would be slammed against the ground and he would undoubtedly be trampled beneath the plunging hooves of the furious horse. “Lord, help me!” he cried out.

The mare gave a mighty leap straight into the air, spun around twice, and then dashed down the street again. Jed held on desperately. A lamppost flashed past just inches from him. He tried to bring his left shoulder up high enough to get a grip on the saddle with his left hand, but the pounding stride of the mare kept him from doing so.

The fingers on his right hand felt as if they were made of lead, and he realized that his grip on the saddle was slipping. Within seconds, it would all be over.

A tall, lanky black man in his early twenties sat in the buckboard seat of the heavily loaded wagon, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his ragged coat. “I wish Massa Bentley would hurry,” he said aloud. “It sure is cold.” He glanced toward

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the door of the saloon. “Come on, Massa Bentley, I’m afreezin’. Please hurry!”

Hearing frenzied shouts, he turned and looked behind the wagon. A big chestnut horse was galloping toward him with a group of noisy boys chasing her down the street. His heart skipped a beat. Hanging from the side of the saddle, just inches from the pounding hooves, was a human figure!

The black man sprang into action. Snatching the whip from the seat of the wagon, he leaped atop the sacks of feed piled high in the wagon bed and then dropped to a crouch. He gripped the handle of the whip with his right hand and then wrapped the other end quickly around his left. The galloping horse would pass the wagon in less than two seconds and Calvin knew that he would only have one chance.

He took a deep breath, flung his arms wide, and leaped. The open loop of the whip passed over the head of the running horse. Calvin felt a burning pain as the skin was jerked from the palms of his hands, and then his chest was slammed against the shoulder of the animal with such force that his breath gushed out in a grunt. But the brave man held on gamely, doing his best to pull his feet up out of the way of the horse’s pounding hooves.

The mare staggered against the sudden weight of the man and then stumbled and went down on her left knee. Calvin released his grip on the whip and seized Jed’s stirrup. “Let go, boy!” he shouted. “If she rolls over, she’ll crush you!”

He twisted the stirrup free of Jed’s boot and then grabbed Jed under the arms and dragged him free of the mare.

The mare struggled to her feet, but two riders suddenly appeared and in no time had their lariats around her neck. She gave two or three wild lunges and then grew quiet. One of the riders turned to Calvin. “Good work, man. You just saved this lad’s life. We never could have gotten to him in time.”

Calvin nodded modestly and retrieved the whip from the middle of the street. He looked at Jed, who was doubled over with his hands clutched against his chest. “You all right, Massa?”

Jed tried to draw in a lungful of air but his body refused to respond. His chest felt as if a giant was squeezing him, and he found that he couldn’t breathe. A sobbing grunt was all that he could manage.

“He’s had the wind knocked out of him,” one of the riders said, “but I think he’ll be all right.”

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Jed finally caught his breath and sucked in huge lungfuls of the precious air. “Thank you,” he gasped to Calvin. “You saved my life! Thank you! I thought I was finished for sure!”

Nathan came running up with Jed’s coat. “Here, Jed, get this on,” he urged. “I can’t believe that you weren’t killed.”

The two riders led the now docile mare back down the street, followed by the gang of boys, as Jed slipped into the coat. He turned to the black man. “Thank you, Mister, for saving my life.”

Calvin opened his mouth to speak, and then a look of raw terror passed over his dark features. Jed spun around to see a short but powerfully built man striding angrily toward them. His teeth were clenched, and his red face was contorted with rage. “Calvin!” he barked. “What are you doing away from the wagon?”

The black man backed away fearfully. “Massa Bentley!” he exclaimed in surprise and fear. To Jed’s amazement, the man’s hands began to shake uncontrollably. His lips trembled, and his voice choked off in a strangled moan. He seemed totally overcome by fear of the other man.

Mr. Bentley’s eyes glittered with fury. “What are you doing away from the wagon?” he demanded again.

Calvin struggled to speak. “I—I wasn’t d-disobeyin’ you, M-Massa Bentley. Honest, I wasn’t. But I—I had to l-leave the wagon to s-stop a r-runaway horse.” His eyes were wide with terror and he held his hands up toward the other man in a beseeching gesture.

“I told you to stay with the wagon! What if someone had stolen our feed?”

Jed stepped forward boldly. “He’s telling the truth, sir. He stopped a runaway horse and saved my life! Please, don’t be angry with him. He only did it to save me.”

Mr. Bentley regarded him with cold eyes. “Stay out of this, boy,” he snarled. “This ain’t none of your affair.” He turned back to the black man. “So you think you can disobey me and get away with it, do you, Calvin? Well, we’ll just have to change that attitude right now!”

He jerked the whip from the black man’s hands, stepped back, and then lashed out with such force that he grunted with the effort. Jed winced as the end of the whip caught Calvin on

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the side of the neck, opening a small gash. The black man fell to his knees with his hands raised in front of his face.

Jed leaped forward. "Please, sir," he begged, "don't whip him for saving my life. He didn't mean to disobey you."

The man angrily shoved Jed to one side. "Out of my way, boy!" he shrilled. "Nobody's gonna stop me from teaching my own darkie to obey! Nobody!"

He raised the whip again, but at that instant a huge hand reached out and caught his wrist in a bone-crushing grip. Startled, Jed spun around to look up into the stern face of Pa Cartwright.

Chapter 2 – CONFRONTATION

Mr. Bentley glared up at the huge figure of Mr. Cartwright. "Let go of me, Mister!" he snarled.

But Pa maintained his grip on the man's arm. "What's going on here?" he demanded.

"This ain't none of yore business, big man," the angry man retorted. "Now let go of me. I'll have you arrested for assault!"

Pa snatched the whip from the other man's hand and then released his arm. "Is this man your slave?" he asked.

"What business is that of yours?"

"Looks to me like you were abusing him," Pa answered evenly. "What's he done to deserve this kind of treatment?"

"This darkie is my property," Mr. Bentley snarled defiantly. "How I treat my slaves is my own business!"

"Pa, this man saved my life," Jed said. "And now his owner is gonna whip him for it. He saved my life!"

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Pa turned to face the angry slave owner. “Is that true? Would you treat a man that way?”

The other man refused to return his gaze. “He disobeyed me, he did, and I’m gonna teach him a lesson. Now give me the whip and get out of my way.”

“Not with this whip, you’re not,” Pa answered. “And not while I’m here. I’ll have one of my men return the whip to your place when you’ve had some time to cool down.”

“You can’t stop me from disciplining my own slaves.”

“Maybe not,” Pa answered slowly. “But be reasonable, sir. This man of yours saved a boy’s life. How can any civilized gentleman reward that with a beating?”

Mr. Bentley’s face grew redder. “This is none of your affair, big man. So step out. You have my whip, and I ain’t about to try to take it from you. But I can promise you this— when I get this darkie home, I’ll whip him within an inch of his life. And there’s nothing you can do to stop me!”

A look of pity passed across Pa’s face as he slowly shook his head. “Think it over, friend,” he begged. “Take some time to cool down before you do anything rash.”

“Cool down?” the other man shouted. “I am cooled down! And I intend to cool this worthless, disobedient black animal down.” He turned on Calvin. “Take off your coat,” he ordered.

The black man obeyed fearfully.

“Now throw it in the gutter.”

Calvin dropped the ragged garment behind him. “You’ll ride home without it, Calvin,” Mr. Bentley growled. He turned triumphantly to Mr. Cartwright. “Keep the whip with my compliments. There’s more than one way to punish a disobedient darkie. Come along, Calvin.”

Pa, Nathan, and Jed sadly watched as the pair walked back to the Bentley wagon. Calvin shivered with cold, clutching his arms against his chest in a futile attempt to retain some warmth.

“Bentley!” Pa spat out the name as if it were distasteful. “I’ve never seen a man so filled with cruelty and hatred. My heart goes out to that poor Calvin.”

The surrey whisked along toward the Cartwright mansion while Jed and Nathan told the story of Jed’s attempt to ride the

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wild mare and Calvin's bravery in stopping the horse and saving Jed's life. Pa's face was somber when they finished.

He rode in silence for several minutes, and then turned to Jed. "Don't ever try such a foolish stunt again, son. You could have been killed."

Jed shrugged.

"Don't act like you don't care," Pa said. "You do care, and don't ever act as if you don't. Your life is a precious gift from God."

He fell silent for several minutes. When he spoke again, his voice was low, almost sad. "When we adopted you a few months ago, Jed, you took the Cartwright name. It's a good name, and carrying it is an awesome responsibility."

He laid a huge hand on Jed's shoulder. "You'll never look like me, but you're my son, and always will be. Nathan and I have blonde hair and blue eyes while you have dark hair and dark eyes, but you're a Cartwright just the same. Carry the name proudly, and make sure you always do right by it."

Pa drew on the reins to slow the horse to a walk. "I saw Mr. Gunderson a few minutes ago. He tells me that your grades are

down. He says you have the mind for good grades, but he doesn't think you're applying yourself. Is that true?"

Jed hung his head. "Maybe so, sir."

"What's the problem?"

"I get bored in school, Pa. We drill the same old ciphering tables every day, review the same old spelling words, and practice the same old writing exercises. I get tired of it."

"But are you doing your best?"

"I guess not. But why is it so important, if I already know the stuff?"

"Our Lord always deserves our best, Jed, whether it's school work, or work around the house, or whatever. But there's also another matter to consider. You have a good name to protect."

Jed looked puzzled.

"Proverbs 22:1 tells us that 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold.' Jed, you're known around town as the son of Jake Cartwright, and also as a Christian. People are watching you. You need to be very careful to protect the name of Cartwright, and especially, the name of Christ. Keep a good testimony."

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“But you always told us that it’s not important what other people think of us,” Jed protested.

Pa smiled. “It’s not important to try to impress them,” he answered. “That’s why you tried to ride that cantankerous mare, right? You were trying to impress those boys.”

Jed grinned sheepishly.

Pa laughed. “I’m talking about something different. Most of the people in St. Louis know who I am. How do you think they view me?”

Nathan spoke up. “They know you as the biggest, strongest man in town. Nobody else in St. Louis can bend a horseshoe with his bare hands.”

Pa shook his head. “Perhaps, but that’s not what’s important. I want them to know that Jake Cartwright is a man who loves his God and his family, a man who keeps his word, and a man who always gives his best. Most of all, I want them to know that I’m a Christian. I’ve spent the last eleven years of my life trying to build that kind of a name. That’s what the name Cartwright stands for.”

The surrey turned into the driveway of Meadow Green. “Well, boys, we’re home. I guess this is the end of this little

conversation. But always remember what Proverbs says about the importance of a good name. And Jed, no more reports about not giving your best at school, hear?”

A huge gray dog came bounding up as Jed climbed from the surrey, and the boy grabbed him in a huge hug. “How you doing, Wolf?” He scratched the dog’s ears affectionately. Jed’s father had given him the puppy less than a year before he and Jed’s mother had died with the fever. Jed and his sister Mandy had been sent to an orphanage, then run away when they learned that the director was planning to adopt Jed out, but not Mandy. Upon reaching St. Louis, they had been adopted by the wealthy Jake and Deborah Cartwright, who had soon led Jed to accept Jesus as Savior.

The wind howled around the eaves of the mansion as the Cartwright family sat down to dinner. Jed helped Sarah into her high chair, then slipped behind Mandy and playfully pulled one of her braids as he passed her chair. “It sure is bitterly cold outside,” Mrs. Cartwright observed as Mr. Cartwright helped her with her chair. “This is the coldest January I can remember.”

Pa nodded. “I’m afraid 1861 will long be remembered as the year of the cold winter. Thank the Lord for a warm house.”

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When everyone was seated around the elegant table, Pa bowed his head. “Thank you, Lord, for your many blessings on us,” he prayed. “Thank you for a warm house. Thank you for this food, and thank you most of all for dying for our sins so that we can be forgiven. Help us always to give you our best in return. Lord, help Jed to remember the lessons of today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Mabel and the other servants had just started to serve dinner when there was an urgent knock at the front door. Silas hurried to answer it and then returned to the dining room moments later, followed by an elderly black man.

“Beggin’ yore pardon, sir,” the stranger addressed Pa, “but it’s Calvin. Massa Bentley’s killin’ him!”

Chapter 3 – THE RESCUE

Pa rose from the table and hurried toward the foyer. “Come with me.” The elderly black man followed him from the room.

Jed looked up from the table. “Pa?”

Pa turned and motioned toward the foyer. “Yes, come along.”

Once they had reached the spacious, marble-floored foyer, Pa turned to the black man. “Tell me quickly. What is Bentley doing? How can we help Calvin?”

“My name is Ezekiel,” the Negro began. “I’ve been a slave to Massa Bentley for nearly fifteen years. I’m on an errand right now, or I dasn’t have dared leave the property.”

“What’s happening to Calvin?” Mr. Cartwright prompted.

“Massa Bentley whipped him until he passed out,” the slave replied, rolling his eyes with a shudder. “Then he had some of the other slaves chain him by the hands between two trees. He’s

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gonna leave him there all night, but all Calvin's got on is his shirt and his britches. He'll freeze to death, Massa Cartwright! And none of us dast help Calvin, cuz Massa Bentley says he'll shoot anyone who dares!"

Pa leaned forward. "Where is Calvin chained?"

"At the edge of the woods, just beyond our walnut groves. It's at the very edge of the plantation."

"Which side of the property? East? West? North? South?"

The man thought for a moment. "It's on the sun up side."

"The east side."

"Yassuh."

Pa let out his breath slowly. "Thank you for telling me, Ezekiel. Better finish your errand and hurry home. We'll try to help Calvin."

The man looked relieved. "Thank you, suh."

"Ezekiel."

"Yas, suh?"

"Don't tell a soul that you've been here, or that you've told us about Mr. Bentley and Calvin. Understand? If Mr. Bentley finds out that you've been here, you'll be in as much trouble as Calvin."

The black man rolled his eyes again. "Oh, I dasn't tell anyone, suh. Not a soul." As he opened the front door, a blast of frigid air made Jed shiver.

"Silas!"

The butler hurried into the foyer. "Yes, sir?"

"Silas, we have an emergency. Get about a dozen of the old red bricks from behind the tool shed and put them in the fireplace to heat them. Then get several yards of flannel to wrap them in, and three or four gunnysacks to carry them. As soon as that's finished, saddle three horses for you, Jed, and myself. Meet us in the kitchen as soon as you're finished. Make sure that you're dressed warmly."

"Yes, sir." Silas hurried from the room.

"Jed, tell Mabel to heat about three quarts of the leftover soup from lunch. I want it just as hot as she can make it, but make sure she understands that we need it in a hurry. Then dash upstairs and dress in the warmest clothes you have. Be sure to wear a hat and gloves. We'll ride out in less than ten minutes."

"But what about supper?"

"A man's life is in danger, son. We'll think about ourselves later."

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Ten minutes later, Jed, Pa, and Silas rode out into the bitter cold of the night. Jed carried a huge pile of blankets across the front of Midnight's saddle. Pa balanced a steaming kettle of soup wrapped in a blanket, while Silas carried the heated bricks inside several thicknesses of gunnysacks.

"We have about a ten-minute ride," Pa told the others. "But when we get close to Bentley's place, we need to keep a low profile. Let's hope he has his dogs in the barn tonight." He glanced at the sky. "Thank the Lord for a full moon. We don't dare use lanterns."

Jed shifted the pile of blankets. "Pa, how can any white man treat a black man with such cruelty? Mr. Bentley treats Calvin like he's an animal. You wouldn't send a dog outside on a night like this."

"Slavery is not just a white man's problem," Pa answered. "It was black men for the most part that caught the slaves to send them here. And there are black slave owners, some of whom treat their slaves worse than the white folks do."

He reined in closer to Jed. "And then there are slave owners who treat their slaves with dignity and respect. Mr. Bentley is a mighty poor representation of the white race. He's the kind of

slave owner that gives the abolitionists fuel for their arguments against the South."

Jed frowned. "Abolitionists?"

"Those who would like to see slavery abolished in our country."

"You treat your slaves with kindness and respect, don't you, Pa?"

"Yes, Jed, I believe I do."

Silas spoke up. "Indeed you do, sir. There ain't a man in St. Louis what treats his slaves better than you do."

"Jed, when I buy a slave, they work for me for four years and then I give them their manumission papers."

"Manumission papers? What's that?"

"It's a paper that declares him a free man. Or woman, as the case may be."

"But what about Silas?" Jed questioned. "You said one time that he's worked for you for twelve years."

Silas laughed. "Only 'cause I chose to stay, Jed. Mr. Cartwright gave me my papers years ago, but I chose to stay and work for him. He treats me like a friend, and he pays me wages. I don't want to go nowhere else."

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The wind picked up in fury, howling and shrieking like a wounded animal, and Jed winced at the bitter cold. Mr. Cartwright urged his horse to a faster trot. “We’d better hurry. Calvin could be dead by now.”

“What are we planning to do, Pa?”

“We can’t do an outright rescue and just take Calvin,” the huge man replied, “or Mr. Bentley can charge us with stealing his property. I’m hoping to keep Calvin alive until I can buy him from Mr. Bentley, or at least talk some sense into the man’s head. Calvin deserves better than what he’s getting right now.”

Minutes later Pa reined to a stop and slipped from his horse. “This is the edge of the Bentley estate,” he said in a low voice. “We’ll go on foot from here. Silas, stay about ten yards to my left, and Jed, you stay about ten yards to my right. Move quietly. If you find Calvin, let me know, but don’t call out. Let’s hurry. With the night as cold as it is, Calvin may very well be dead by now.”

Leading their horses, the trio quietly slipped from the road and melted into the woods surrounding the plantation. Jed clenched his teeth against the cold of the night. In spite of the warmth of his thick clothing, the wind seemed to cut right

through him. He thought of Calvin. The poor slave must be nearly frozen in weather like this. *And he’s the one who saved my life*, Jed thought sadly.

He glanced to the left to make sure that Pa was still in sight and then tried to peer through the darkness of the woods, scanning the shadows for any sign of Calvin. He stopped, certain that he had heard a low moan, and then realized that it was only the wind. *We have to hurry*, he told himself, pulling his fur collar closer to his face with his free hand. *We’ve got to save Calvin. We’ve got to!*

Moments later, he heard Pa whisper. “Jed! Silas! Over here!”

Jed’s heart was pounding as he led Midnight to where Pa stood. He let out a gasp as his eyes took in the scene before him.

Two logging chains hung between two white oaks. Hanging from the chains with his knees nearly touching the ground was the inert body of a man. His head was down, but Jed knew immediately that it was Calvin. Tears welled up in his eyes as he looked at the man who had saved his life.

“Is he dead, Pa?”

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Pa hurried forward, lifting Calvin's body to relieve the pressure on his wrists where the manacles dug into the flesh. "Silas, bring the blankets! Jed, get the hat and gloves from my saddlebags and get them on him. Then bring the bricks. We must hurry!"

Working frantically, the three rescuers wrapped the still form in blankets, hat, and gloves, and then placed the hot bricks beneath the blankets in a pile at his feet. Pa wrapped individual bricks in pieces of flannel and placed them at various points inside the blankets.

Silas hurried into the woods and returned with a large stump of wood, which he rolled into position between the chains. He and Pa lifted the still form onto the stump. "That will take his weight off his arms," Silas whispered with satisfaction.

Jed had the soup ready. "Here, Pa, let's see if he can take some soup." He handed a warm mug to Pa.

Calvin moaned softly as Silas gently tipped his head back, and Jed's heart leaped. "He's still alive, Pa," he whispered.

"Yes, but I'm afraid he's more dead than alive." Pa slowly poured a bit of the warm soup into the man's mouth, then

stroked his throat to get him to swallow. "Come on, Calvin, take it," he urged. "It'll put some warmth into you."

When the man swallowed, Jed felt like shouting. "He took it, Pa," he whispered excitedly.

Pa patiently continued to feed Calvin the soup until the mug was empty, but the man's eyes still didn't open. Pa handed the mug to Jed. "Get me a refill, and then support his head and shoulders so Silas can build us a fire."

Jed refilled the mug, handed it to Pa, and then stepped around behind the unconscious man to relieve Silas.

"Silas, tether the horses and then build a small fire in the hollow we passed through just a hundred yards from here. Keep it out of sight of the house. We have to keep these bricks hot, and we'll need to reheat the soup from time to time. Put half the bricks on the fire, and then take the horses back to the barn for the night. Tell Benjamin where we are, and have him bring three new horses just after sunrise. Jed and I will carry on until you get back."

It was a long, cold vigil. Silas returned with another servant, and together the four agents of mercy kept Calvin alive through the bitter cold of the night with a combination of blankets, warm

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soup, heated bricks, and prayer. The abused black man regained consciousness just before dawn.

“Violet,” he mumbled. “Violet.”

Jed was replacing the warm bricks with hot ones when it happened, and he hurried down to the fire to find Pa. “I think he’s waking up, Pa,” he said excitedly. “Come quick!”

“Violet,” Calvin mumbled as Pa and Jed came hurrying up. “Where are ya, sugah?”

“Calvin, can you hear me?” Pa said softly. “This is Jake Cartwright.”

The man’s eyes blinked open. “Who’s theh? Wher is we?”

Pa took off his gloves and rubbed Calvin’s face with his warm hands. “I’m Jake Cartwright, and my son Jed is here with me, along with Silas and Timothy. You’re in the woods at the edge of Mr. Bentley’s property.”

“How did I get heah?”

“Mr. Bentley brought you here.”

“I remembers now.” Calvin closed his eyes and mumbled something the others couldn’t understand, and then suddenly leaned forward intently. “Where’s Violet? Did Massa Bentley hurt her, too?”

“We don’t know, Calvin,” Pa said gently. “We’ve been here with you all night, trying to keep you alive, but we don’t know if anything was done to Violet.”

Calvin closed his eyes for a few seconds, and then opened them and looked intently at Mr. Cartwright. “I appreciate what you’s done for me tonight, suh. I really does.”

Pa nodded. “We were glad to do it, Calvin. And I appreciate your bravery in saving my son Jed’s life. But tell me something: does Mr. Bentley treat all his slaves like he treats you?”

Calvin let out his breath in a long sigh. “He treats us all bad, suh, he really does. Workin’ us till we’re ready to drop, then beatin’ us and starvin’ us. But he treats me worse than the others. Much worse.”

“But why?” Pa asked. “Why does he have such a hatred for you?”

Calvin sighed again. “I stopped his son Harvey from killin’ one of the other slaves one day last summer,” he answered. “Massa Bentley says that I was gettin’ mighty uppity, and don’t know my proper place as a slave. I told him I was just tryin’ to get him to treat them slaves like human beings. He’s made my life mighty hard ever since, but I’d do it again if I had to.”

The Desperate Slave

Pa nodded. "I understand, Calvin. I just wish there was something I could do to make life easier for you, and for Violet."

The sun finally began to peek over the trees to the east, and daylight came quickly. Jed was relieved. The long night was nearly over. He took another mug of hot soup and gulped it down eagerly.

Pa pointed. "I'm afraid we're in for trouble," he whispered.

Jed turned, and to his dismay saw Mr. Bentley striding through the walnut grove toward them, accompanied by a younger, taller man. Both men carried rifles. "That must be Harvey Bentley," Pa whispered.

"What's going on here?" the older Bentley raged, cocking his rifle and pointing it at Mr. Cartwright. "What are you doing on my property?" He glanced at the blanket-swathed form of Calvin, realized that he was still alive, and became even angrier.

Mr. Cartwright tried to calm the man. "Calvin was nearly dead when we found him, Mr. Bentley. A dead slave is worth nothing. We kept him alive for you."

Mr. Bentley jerked the rifle in a gesture of exasperation. "Big man," he snarled, "get the blankets off that worthless

darkie, then get off my property! You've got exactly ten seconds!"

Chapter 4 – NEW MASTER

Jed let out his breath slowly. Cold fingers of fear squeezed his chest tight as he watched the angry man with the rifle. He glanced at Calvin and saw that the black man was trembling with fear. But Pa seemed unafraid.

“I can’t let you kill this man,” Pa said boldly. “He’s done nothing deserving this kind of treatment.”

“That ain’t for you to decide,” Mr. Bentley snarled. “Now get off my property!” His finger tightened on the trigger, and Jed winced.

But Pa stood his ground. “Think about what you’re doing, sir. Why kill this man? He’s done—”

“Get off!” the other man screamed. “Now! You’re not gonna stop me from keeping my darkies in line. I want you off my property, and I want you off now!”

Pa shook his head. “We’re not leaving until I know that Calvin will not come to harm. He saved my son’s life, and I’m not about to allow you to mistreat him in this way.”

Mr. Bentley suddenly swung the rifle in Jed’s direction. “Either get off my property, or I shoot the boy,” he threatened. “Now, big man, what will it be?”

Pa sprang with the speed of a panther, snatching the rifle from Mr. Bentley’s grasp and then swinging it like a club to knock the other rifle from Harvey Bentley’s hands. He stepped forward and planted one big foot firmly on Harvey’s gun to keep him from picking it up and then hurled the other weapon into the brush behind him. One giant hand shot out to grasp Mr. Bentley by the collar, nearly lifting him off his feet.

“Don’t ever threaten my son, Bentley,” Pa growled. “Ever again.”

Jed stared. He had never seen Pa so angry.

“I wasn’t gonna do it,” the other man whined, his usually red face paling with fear. “I didn’t mean him no harm.”

Pa released his hold on Bentley. “And what do you intend to do with Calvin?” The words struck like bullets.

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“He’s gotta be punished,” Mr. Bentley insisted. “Once a darkie learns that he can get away with disobeying his master, there’s no stopping him. If I let him go this time, he’ll push matters even further next time.”

“Sell him to me.”

Mr. Bentley looked at Pa quizzically. “What do you want with this black devil?”

“If he belongs to me then he’s no longer your concern,” Pa answered. “Sell him to me.”

The other man shook his head. “He ain’t for sale.”

“Twelve hundred dollars,” Pa said. “I’ll have the cash money to you in half an hour.”

Bentley laughed. “I can get twelve hundred for him easily at the auction,” he replied. “So why should I sell him to you for that?”

“Not in the shape he’s in now,” Pa pointed out. “Right now he wouldn’t draw half that. He’s more dead than alive. Why not save yourself the trouble and sell him to me?”

“He’s not for sale, Cartwright. Now get off my property.”

Pa took a deep breath. “Fifteen hundred.”

Bentley laughed. “You really want him, don’t you? I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Cartwright. The man is not for sale, but I will consider taking eighteen hundred for him.”

Pa shook his head. “No deal. Fifteen hundred is my final offer. He’s not worth that to you, and we both know it. Now, is it a deal or not?”

Bentley smiled a toothy grin. “Done. Harvey, have Dexter and Elsworth cut Calvin down and take him back to the mansion until Mr. Cartwright shows up with the cash money.”

Pa shook his head. “We take him with us.”

Bentley snorted. “I ain’t seen your money, Cartwright.”

“He goes with us,” Pa insisted. “We’ll have the money to your place in thirty or thirty-five minutes. Once we give you the cash, you give us his papers.”

Mr. Bentley shrugged. “Have it your way.” He turned to his son. “Get the boys to cut him down, then get his papers ready. Looks like we’re shut of this darkie.”

Harvey nodded, picked up his rifle, and headed for the Bentley mansion.

Silas had been supporting Calvin, and now he called to Mr. Cartwright. “I think he’s trying to tell you something.”

The Desperate Slave

Pa hurried over. “What is it, Calvin?”

The black man opened his eyes and tried to speak. “Violet,” he whispered hoarsely. “Buy Violet, too.” His eyes fell closed.

Pa turned to Mr. Bentley. “We’ll buy Violet, too. Name your price.”

Bentley grinned evilly. “No deal, Cartwright. I ain’t about to sell.”

“It’s not right to separate a husband and wife,” Pa argued. “They’re a family. What’s Violet worth? Eight hundred? I’ll give you an even thousand.”

Mr. Bentley shook his head. “She’s not for sale.”

Calvin stirred and opened his eyes. “I ain’t leavin’ without Violet.”

Silas leaned forward and whispered to him, “Don’t push him, Calvin. Let’s get you safely out of here first. Mr. Cartwright will see to it that we get Violet later. Trust him. He’ll work it out.”

“A thousand dollars,” Mr. Cartwright repeated. “That’s twenty-five hundred for both of them— far more than you could ever sell them for.”

Mr. Bentley shook his head. “She’s not for sale. Don’t push me, Cartwright, or I’ll change my mind about selling Calvin.”

With a self-satisfied grin, he stepped close to the injured slave. “You’re going to have a new owner, boy. But don’t get to enjoying it too much. Remember this— Violet is still mine. I can do anything I want with her. Anything! I can give her to another husband, or sell her so far away that you’ll never know where she is. You’ll never see your little Violet again, boy.”

Jed gritted his teeth in frustration and anger. Hatred for Mr. Bentley raged through every ounce of his being.

The group of riders reined to a stop at the side door of the Cartwright mansion. Silas and Pa dismounted and lifted Calvin down from Jed’s saddle. Jed swung to the ground after them. “Let’s get him into the room beside the library,” Pa instructed. “Benjamin, you ride for Doc Barker.”

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Calvin's recovery was slow but steady. With plenty of bed rest, daily visits from Doc Barker, and large doses of Mabel's cooking, the abused slave regained his strength day by day.

The first Sunday after Calvin came to the Cartwright mansion, Jed hurried into his room after church. He found Calvin sitting up in bed. "How you feeling?" Jed greeted him. The handsome black man flashed him a wide grin. "Jus' fine, Massa Jed," he replied. "I'm feelin' better every day."

Wolf followed Jed into the room just then, and Calvin drew back in terror. "Help me, Massa Jed!" he cried, his eyes rolling in fear. "Get that beast outta heah!"

Jed laughed. "That's just Wolf," he told Calvin. "He's friendly. Here, I'll show you." He called Wolf over to the bed, and as the dog came close, Calvin began to make little moaning noises.

"He won't bite," Jed reassured him. "Hold out your hand to him."

"No, Massa Jed," the man quavered. "I want to keep it!"

"He won't hurt you," Jed replied. "Let him sniff your hand so he can make friends with you."

"I don' want to be friends," Calvin whimpered. "But with an animal that size, I shore don' want him for an enemy!" Timidly, he held out one hand and then recoiled in fright when Wolf licked it. Within a few minutes he was relaxed and petting the dog's huge head. Wolf scooted closer to the bed.

Pa stepped into the room just then. "How's our patient?"

Jed looked up. "Pa, did you hear the men talking after church today? They were talking about South Carolina voting last month to secede from the Union, and whether or not Missouri would secede, too."

"Several states are getting ready to pull out," Pa answered. "And the entire nation is watching Missouri to see what we're going to do. Basically, it comes down to the issue of slavery. Does one man have a right to own another man? The Northern abolitionists are saying no, and many of the Southerners are ready to leave the Union just to protect what they feel is their right to own slaves."

"If all slave owners was like you, Massa Cartwright, the world would be a better place," Calvin told him. "I worry about my little Violet. What if Massa Bentley is ill- treatin' her, jus' like he did me? I worry and worry and worry about her all day

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long, and I jus' can't get her off my mind. Can't you do somethin'?"

"I've tried twice more to buy her," Pa told him gently. "But Bentley has refused me both times. I'm afraid he's keeping her just to spite you."

Calvin nodded. "That's jus' like him," he said. "He's got the heart of a devil!"

Pa laid a big hand on the man's shoulder. "Mrs. Cartwright and I have been praying about it," he said. "We're praying for God's protection for Violet, and we're praying that Mr. Bentley will change his mind and decide to sell her to us."

The black man shook his head. "I'm afraid that will never happen," he declared. "When Massa Bentley makes up his mind, it's done made up."

Pa smiled. "But God can change his mind," he said. "And that's what we're asking for."

He glanced at Jed and then looked back to Calvin. "But we do have some good news for you, Calvin. I've asked Judge Farley to draw up your manumission papers. You're going to be a free man!"

Astonishment was written across Calvin's dark face. "Why would you do that, suh? I cost you a fortune. I heard what you paid Massa Bentley for me, I did, and that's a passel of money. So why would you jus' up and set me free?"

Pa shrugged. "You've been through a lot, Calvin. We decided it would be best if you were free. You can stay and work for us and draw wages, or go wherever you like. You're your own man as soon as we get the papers from the judge."

Calvin's eyes glowed with excitement. "I'm free!" he exclaimed. "I do wish Violet could hear that!"

"If we can ever buy Violet, we intend to do the same for her," Pa promised.

That evening after dinner, Jed, Mandy, and Mrs. Cartwright were in the sitting room in the west wing of the mansion when there came a knock at the side door. "Get that, would you, Silas?" Mrs. Cartwright called.

Silas returned to the room moments later, followed by Mr. Bentley's servant, Ezekiel. "May I speak with Massa Cartwright,

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ma'am?" he asked quietly, looking about the sitting room in awe. "It's an emergency."

"Certainly," Mrs. Cartwright replied. "Silas?" The butler hurried from the room.

Mr. Cartwright entered the sitting room just moments later. "Ezekiel! What's wrong?"

"I have bad, bad news," the elderly servant said quietly, looking from Silas to Mr. Cartwright. "I overheard Massa Bentley talking to Massa Harvey. They's plannin' to sell Miss Violet! They's gonna send her to some big plantation somewhere east of heah. Isn't there somethin' we can do?"

Chapter 5 – MANUMISSION PAPERS

"Just sign right here, Mr. Cartwright, and it's official," Judge Farley said. "Once your signature is on these documents, Calvin is free forever."

Pa took the quill pen that the judge offered and placed his signature at the bottom of the last page in the sheaf of papers. "Done!" he exclaimed. "Calvin, you are now a free man."

White teeth flashed in a huge grin, contrasting against Calvin's handsome dark features. He was clearly delighted. "And I thanks yo', suh, I does, from the bottom of my heart. This is the best day of my life! Nobody has never done nuthin' like this for Calvin before. No suh, nobody. I thanks yo', suh."

Jed smiled, pleased at Calvin's happiness. "I guess this is Pa's way of paying you back for saving my life," he said. "Now we're even."

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Pa thanked Judge Farley and then handed the sheaf of papers to Calvin. "Here, Calvin, they're all yours. We'll keep them in a safe place at home for you, of course, but I thought you might want to be the one to carry them home."

Calvin's grin widened. "Indeed I do! Thank yo', suh." He looked up at Judge Farley. "And I wish to thank yo', too, suh. It's a pure delight to be a free man. This is the best day of my life!"

The judge laughed. "I was glad to do it, Calvin. You are one fortunate man to have a friend like Jake Cartwright. I wish you well."

As Pa, Jed, and Calvin hurried down the courthouse steps, they ran right into Mr. Bentley. Calvin's face paled, but then he squared his shoulders, threw out his chest, and spoke to his former master. "I'm a free man, Massa Bentley. Massa Cartwright gave me my papers."

Mr. Bentley's face registered his astonishment. He turned to Pa. "Cartwright, you didn't. Tell me you didn't!"

Pa nodded. "Calvin is a free man."

Mr. Bentley let out his breath in a whistle through his teeth. He swore. "I wouldn't believe this if I didn't hear it coming from

your own mouth, Cartwright. Whatever made you decide to do a crazy thing like that? No one buys a darkie just to set him free."

Pa shrugged. "No one will ever treat Calvin like he's been treated at your hands, Mr. Bentley. After seeing what he's been through, I felt that he deserved his freedom."

The other man shook his head. "You're a fool, Cartwright. A hopeless, African loving fool. You do the Yankee abolitionists proud."

Pa looked thoughtful. "I wish you'd sell me Violet."

Bentley laughed derisively. "So that you can set her free? I won't consider it."

"My offer of a thousand dollars still holds. The bank is just down the street. I can have the cash in your hands in five minutes. Why not sell her to me?"

Calvin's former master shook his head. "No deal, Cartwright. I made a mistake selling this darkie to you."

"She's not worth a thousand on the market, Bentley, and we both know it. Be reasonable, and sell her to me."

But Mr. Bentley shook his head forcefully. "No go, Mister."

He stepped close to Calvin and thumped his chest with a stubby forefinger. "Don't get too happy with your freedom,

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black boy. Remember, I still have your little Violet, and I can do anything I want with her.” A slow grin settled over his red face.

“I’ve been noticing the last couple of weeks that she’s been looking mighty lonely. I think I’ll get her a new husband.”

Calvin’s head snapped back as if he had just been slapped in the face. “Please don’t, suh.”

Mr. Bentley’s evil grin spread. “Why not, Calvin? You don’t want her lonely, now, do you? Now that you’re gone, she needs a husband, and I think I’ll get her one. Let’s see now... Samuel would make her a good one.”

Jed glanced at Calvin. The black man seemed to wilt at Mr. Bentley’s words.

“What’s the point of all this foolishness?” Pa cut in sharply. “Sell the girl to me. You’d make a handsome profit off her, and Calvin would be happy. You’d both come out ahead.”

Bentley snorted. “Make Calvin happy? Now why would I want that?”

“That’s beside the point, Mr. Bentley. But if you take my thousand for her, you come out ahead.”

The other man laughed. “You’re wasting your time, big man.”

Pa frowned. “Eleven hundred.”

Bentley laughed again.

“Twelve hundred,” Pa pressed. “Cash money. And that’s my final offer.”

Mr. Bentley paused thoughtfully. “Twelve hundred, huh? How fast can you get the cash money to me?”

“Three minutes,” Pa answered. “The bank’s just down the street.”

Mr. Bentley pulled a watch from the pocket of his vest, snapped it open, and studied it thoughtfully. “I’m late for an appointment, but I’ll wait exactly three minutes. Place the money in my hands in three minutes, and she’s yours.”

Pa turned to Silas. “Go. Ask Mr. Peabody for the twelve hundred, and make sure he understands that we need it immediately. I’ll drop by in a few minutes to sign the draft for it.”

Silas dashed down the street toward the bank.

Mr. Bentley smiled scornfully. “I suppose the banker is just going to hand over a large sum of cash to a darkie.”

Pa shrugged. “Mr. Peabody knows Silas. He conducts my business on a regular basis.”

The Desperate Slave

The other man snorted. “Big man, I’ve met darkie lovers before, but you’re the biggest fool of any of them!”

Silas came dashing back in less than two minutes with a thick roll of bank notes. He handed them to Mr. Cartwright. “Here you are, sir. Twelve hundred even.”

Pa counted the bills and then handed them to Mr. Bentley. “Exactly as you said, sir. Twelve hundred dollars, in less than three minutes.”

Mr. Bentley glanced up and down the street and then tucked the money into a pocket without bothering to count it. “Very well, Cartwright. Stop by my place this evening at sunset, and I’ll turn the girl over to you.” He grinned suddenly. “Gotta get one last day of work out of her, you know.”

Pa shrugged. “Very well. But I’ll need a receipt.”

Bentley glanced at his watch again and then snapped it shut and slipped it into his pocket. “Can’t right now,” he answered. “I’m late as it is. But I’ll have all the papers drawn up proper when you come for the girl.”

He turned to Calvin with an air of mock surrender. “Guess you’re happy now, Calvin? Oh well, I can’t win them all.”

He turned back to Pa. “Gotta run. We’ll finish this little business transaction tonight. Good day, sir.” He strode quickly down the street.

Jed looked happily from Calvin to Pa. “We did it!” he exulted. “Mr. Bentley sold Violet!” He thumped Calvin happily on the shoulder. “You’ll have her back tonight, Calvin.”

But the black man remained silent.

Pa noticed it. “What’s wrong, Calvin?”

Calvin looked troubled. “I’m not sure, suh, but this whole thing don’ feel right. You don’t know Massa Bentley like I do, and this ain’t the way he deals. He don’t give up that easy.”

Pa shrugged. “Maybe not, but the deal is done. He has my money, and tonight we’ll pick up Violet. Come on, let’s head over to the bank.”

Calvin fell into step beside Jed. “I wish we could go get my Violet right now,” he said softly. “Mr. Bentley’s gonna do somethin’ to her; I jus’ know it.” He let out a troubled sigh. “He jus’ gave in too easy.”

Chapter 6 – MR. BENTLEY’S PLANTATION

Pa called Jed into the library. “I want you to go with Calvin to pick up Violet,” he said. “Wait another hour or so and then head out to Bentley’s place.”

Jed looked up at Pa in surprise. “Aren’t you going?”

Pa shook his head. “I can’t. I forgot that I have a meeting this evening with the planning committee in Manchester. I have to leave in ten minutes. We’re trying to start a Gospel preaching church in the town.”

“I thought Manchester already had a church,” Jed said.

“They do,” Pa replied, “but it teaches salvation through the church, rather than faith in Jesus Christ, as the Bible teaches. We want to start a church that will preach the true Gospel.”

“When will you get back?”

“Early tomorrow morning,” Pa answered. “I’ll stay with one of the families tonight.”

He handed Jed three ten-dollar gold pieces. “Here’s thirty dollars. On your way to Bentley’s, stop by Ledbetter’s and pay him for the new saddle.”

Jed pocketed the coins carefully. “Pa.”

“Yes, son?”

“Calvin’s been worrying all afternoon that Mr. Bentley will try to hurt Violet. He still says that Mr. Bentley gave up too easily.”

“I don’t think so, Jed,” Pa answered thoughtfully. “Violet is now my property, and I don’t think Mr. Bentley would dare try anything. Calvin has been through a lot and he’s still a mighty fearful man. He’s still terrified of his old master, and I think his imagination is working overtime. Once he has Violet back, I think he’ll lose some of his fears.”

Pa walked Jed to the door of the library. “And, of course, if Calvin receives Jesus as Savior, his fears can be replaced with the peace of God.”

Jed nodded. “I’ll be praying that he and Violet both get saved, if they’re not.”

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Mrs. Cartwright slipped past Jed and approached her husband, who slipped an arm around her. “See you tomorrow, son,” Pa said. “Don’t forget to stop at Ledbetter’s.”

Jed tightened the girth on Midnight’s saddle, slipped his boot into the stirrup, and then swung into the saddle. He turned to Calvin, who sat astride Thunderbolt. “Ready?”

The black man grinned broadly. “Ready and eager! This is the best moment of my life!” He opened his coat to reveal a sheaf of papers. “I can’t wait to show my little darlin’ my manumission papers,” he exclaimed. “Won’t she be surprised!”

Jed glanced at the sky as they rode down the circular driveway of the Cartwright mansion. “We’ll be a little early,” he observed, “but that’s better than being late.”

Calvin nodded. “But Mr. Bentley won’t like it.”

Fifteen minutes later Jed and Calvin stood on the porch of the Bentley mansion, facing a cross Mr. Bentley. “So where’s your Pa?” the man demanded of Jed. “I made a bargain with him, not with you.”

Jed felt intimidated by the man. “H-he couldn’t come,” he faltered. “But he sent me in his place.”

Mr. Bentley snorted. “I don’t do business with kids,” he replied. “Tell your Pa to come in person if he wants the girl.”

“But you promised Violet to us now,” Jed retorted. “And Pa sent me to get her.”

“I don’t do business with kids,” the man repeated. “So why couldn’t your Pa come?”

“He’s out of town tonight for a meeting,” Jed replied. “He’ll be back tomorrow morning. But we need Violet tonight.”

Mr. Bentley smiled sneeringly. “Can’t do it. Your Pa has to come in person.”

“Massa Bentley, you can’t go back on your word,” Calvin said hotly. “You promised us she could come tonight!”

Mr. Bentley seemed amused by Calvin’s outburst. “I can’t, can I?” he replied. “And just what do you intend to do about it, black boy?” He took a menacing step forward.

Calvin stepped back quickly. “Nuthin’, suh,” he said timidly. “But it ain’t right! You gave Massa Cartwright yo’ word.”

The Desperate Slave

“My deal was with Mr. Cartwright, and I’ll deal only with him,” Mr. Bentley answered. “I don’t conduct business transactions with kids, or with darkies.” He turned to Jed. “Tell your Pa if he wants Violet, he has to come in person. I’ll deal only with him.” The massive door of the mansion closed behind him.

Jed turned apologetically to Calvin. “I don’t know what to do now,” he whispered. “I guess we go home and wait for Pa.”

Tears formed in Calvin’s eyes. “I knew it,” he said softly through clenched teeth. “I knew it! Massa Bentley is a wicked man, and I knew he wouldn’t let Violet go. I knew it!”

“Pa will know what to do,” Jed said softly. “Let’s go home.”

“But I don’t want Violet to have to spend one more night in this dreadful place!” Calvin whispered fiercely. “I want her home with me, where she’ll be safe.”

Jed nodded as he mounted Midnight. “Maybe we can get word to Pa tonight.”

Jed’s heart was heavy as he and Calvin rode toward the huge wrought iron gate at the entrance to the Bentley estate. He glanced over at Calvin. The black man slumped despondently in

the saddle and tears flowed freely down his face. Jed felt a keen sympathy for him.

As they passed through the gate, a figure in a tattered coat materialized out of the shadows of the high stone wall. “Wait!” he called in a low, urgent voice. “Wait!”

Jed reined to a stop and the figure scurried forward, clutching a large bundle of firewood. As the man approached Midnight, Jed suddenly recognized the wizened face of Ezekiel.

“Stop yo’ horse in the shadow of that elm theh,” the old man said, pointing. “I’ll be theh in jus’ a moment.” He immediately melted back into the shadows.

Jed’s heart pounded with anxiety as he and Calvin reined to a stop under the big elm beside the roadway. *What does Ezekiel want? He’s obviously terrified of being seen talking to us, yet he risked it. What does he want?*

The elderly slave approached the horses. “They took Miss Violet!” he whispered anxiously, glancing fearfully toward the gate as he spoke.

Jed was off his horse in an instant. He grabbed Ezekiel by the arms. “Who took her?” he asked. “Where did they take her?”

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“Massa Bentley sold her to some white folks named Tanner,” the old man answered sadly. “They’s taking her to a plantation called Briarwood Manor. It’s in Looeyville.” He looked apologetically at Calvin, who now stood beside him. “I’m so sorry, Calvin. You’ll never see her again!”

“When did they take her?” Jed demanded. “Did you see them?”

The old Negro nodded. “They was in a big, fancy green-and-gold coach,” he replied. “Two men and a woman, they was. With a black man driving. He was wearing a red coat that would knock yo’ eyes out.”

“When?” Jed demanded. “When did they take her?”

“You jus’ missed them,” Ezekiel replied. “They left less than a half hour ago.”

Chapter 7 – RESCUE ATTEMPT

Jed stared in dismay as Ezekiel disappeared into the gathering shadows at the perimeter of the Bentley estate. The elderly slave’s message left an empty hollow in the pit of his stomach and he knew that the news was a stunning blow to Calvin. *Dear God, help us*, he prayed silently. *What can we do?*

“Massa Jed, we has to go after them,” Calvin pleaded. “They took my Violet, and she don’t belong to them. She belong to Massa Cartwright, and to me!”

Jed thought quickly. “Pa’s gone till tomorrow,” he said aloud. “He’d know what to do, but by the time we fetch him, we’d never catch up with them.”

“Let’s go after them,” Calvin repeated. “We’ll tell them that Violet already belongs to Massa Cartwright, so’s they can’t have her.”

The Desperate Slave

Jed shook his head. “It won’t be that simple,” he argued. “If they paid good money for her, they won’t give her up that easily.”

“We’ll tell them that Massa Cartwright will buy her,” Calvin said hopefully. “Massa Bentley didn’t get no twelve hundred dollar for her, so Massa Cartwright’s price will be a profit for them. Then Massa Cartwright can get his money back from Massa Bentley.”

Jed swung into the saddle. “It’s worth a try. Let’s go! Maybe we can catch them at the river. They only have a half-hour head start!”

The last rays of daylight faded rapidly as Midnight and Thunderbolt raced down the dusty road. The temperature was dropping, and the charcoal skies began to spit occasional gusts of sleet. Midnight stumbled and nearly went down, and Jed quickly slowed him to a canter.

“We can’t travel fast in this darkness,” he called to Calvin. “If we hit a rut or a hole, one of the horses could break a leg!”

“But we has to hurry, Massa Jed,” Calvin pleaded. “We has to catch them! They has my Violet!”

“We’ll catch up with them,” Jed answered, shouting to be heard above the wail of the wind. “But we have to be careful. If we break a leg we’ll never catch them.”

Within minutes the night was so dark they could barely see the road. Jed slowed Midnight to a walk, and Calvin did likewise. Jed shivered with the cold and drew his elbows tight against his sides in an attempt to stay warm. “It’s not looking good, Calvin,” he called. “If we get caught in a storm we could freeze to death.”

“We has to keep going,” Calvin pleaded. “We gotta catch them tonight!”

Jed prayed silently. *Father, we don’t know what to do. Please guide us. Help us to find Violet and know how to get her back. Please help us, God.*

Within half an hour they came to the banks of the Mississippi River. Jed reined Midnight to a halt and sat silently, trying to decide what to do.

A tiny yellow light winked on and off as it bobbed and weaved in their direction like a confused firefly. When the light came closer, Jed saw a stocky man leaning into the wind and attempting to shield a storm lantern with the flap of his great

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coat as he climbed the riverbank . The man started in surprise as he topped the bank and spotted Jed and Calvin astride their horses.

“Can I help you with something?” he shouted above the wind as he hurried toward them.

“We’re following a green-and-gold stage coach,” Jed shouted, leaning down from the saddle. “Did it pass this way?”

“Ferried it across the river half an hour ago,” the man shouted. “Just made it back now.”

Jed’s heart leaped. “Can you take us across?” he asked. “It’s urgent that we catch that coach! It’s a matter of life and death!”

The man stepped closer to Midnight, holding the lantern higher as he studied Jed’s face. “We’d never make it in this wind, lad,” he hollered. “I was lucky to make it back alive. I wouldn’t attempt another crossing on a night like this for a hundred dollars.”

Jed’s heart sank. *So what do we do now?*

The ferryman seemed to sense Jed’s predicament. “I can put you up for the night,” he offered. “If this wind dies down I can take you across in the morning. Provided you have the fare, of course. The folks in the coach were planning to stay at the Brass

Lantern Inn just across the river. If we leave at first light you just might catch them before they set out.”

He turned toward the road. “Come with me. Gotta get you outta this wind.”

Jed and Calvin rode along following the bobbing lantern for several hundred yards. At last their guide paused before the entrance to a small barn. “Let’s get your animals into the barn,” he said, “and then I’ll show you to a room.”

As Jed and Calvin dismounted, their host suddenly realized that Calvin was a Negro. He turned to Jed. “You can sleep in the house,” he said, “but the black will have to sleep in the barn.” He swung the barn door open wide.

Jed led Midnight inside. “Then I’ll just stay in the barn, too,” he told the ferryman. “We’re together.”

“Suit yourself.” The man handed Jed two worn horse blankets. “Here. You can bed down in the hay and these will help keep you warm. Put your horses in the two center stalls to the left.”

He waited wordlessly at the door, lantern in hand, as Jed and Calvin hurriedly cared for the horses and then made a sleeping

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spot in the hay. When they were finished, he closed the barn door and disappeared into the storm.

The barn was dark and the night was cold. Jed huddled in the hay, pulling the old horse blanket tightly about him and listening to Calvin's heavy breathing. *Should we turn back and get Pa?* he wondered. *We really need him to get Violet back. But we can't find him in Manchester tonight, and if we wait until he gets home tomorrow, it will be nearly noon before we get back here. And if the stage is just across the river as we were told, we can catch up as soon as he ferries us across. It's a good thing I forgot to stop at Ledbetter's, or I wouldn't have the money to pay for the ferry.*

Still thinking it over, he fell asleep.

The ferry owner tossed the hawser around a mooring just as the boat bumped against the pier. "You were lucky that the wind died down during the night," he told Jed, "or we never would have attempted crossing this early." He helped them lead the horses ashore and then held out his hand. "One dollar, please. I'm not charging you for the horses' feed."

Jed handed him a ten-dollar gold piece, and the man stared at it. "Lad, I don't have change for this!"

Jed grimaced. "It's all I have. What should I do?"

"Run into town and get it changed. The black can stay here until you get back."

"But we have to hurry!" Jed protested. "We'll miss that stage!"

"Then leave the ten-piecer with me until you get back," the man suggested. "You'll have to cross again, anyway."

Jed thought quickly. "My name is Jed Cartwright," he told the man. "My Pa is Jake Cartwright. Can't you just trust me for the dollar until we get back?"

The ferryman's eyes widened in surprise. "You're Jake Cartwright's boy?" He handed the ten-dollar gold piece back to Jed. "If you're kin to Cartwright, I can take your word for it."

He pointed northeast. "Quarter mile from here you'll find the Brass Lantern Inn. That's where they was fixin' to stay last night. I think you'll catch them if you hurry. Good luck."

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Moments later, at the Brass Lantern Inn, Jed stared at the innkeeper in dismay. “Are you sure?” he asked. “Couldn’t you just check for us?”

“It’s the stage you described, lad,” the man answered impatiently. “Big fancy green-and-gold rig. Black driver in a bright red coat. And like I told you, they’ve already left out.”

“How long ago?” Jed asked with a sinking heart.

The innkeeper proudly pulled a huge gold pocket watch from his vest and studied it. “Twenty minutes, maybe. Thirty at most.”

“Thank you, sir.” Jed dashed out and leaped into the saddle. “They’ve already left,” he shouted to Calvin as he urged Midnight to a gallop. “But they only have a twenty minute lead on us. I think we can still catch them!”

They rode hard all morning, pushing the horses as fast as they dared, but the stagecoach continued to elude them. On several occasions as they passed other travelers, Jed slowed to shout an inquiry about the coach, and the answer was always the

same. The green-and-gold coach with the red-coated driver had passed that way just minutes earlier.

“How can they keep up this pace?” Calvin worried as they stopped beside a small stream to rest the horses. “We’ve pushed as hard as we can, and yet they’s still ahead of us.”

“I don’t know,” Jed replied, “but I do know this. I’m about to starve to death. Calvin, we’ve got to get something to eat. We can’t afford the time, and yet, we can’t go on without some food in our bellies. And the horses are going to need something, too.”

Calvin nodded. “You’re right, Massa Jed. How’s about we stop for a moment at the next town we come to?”

They reached the next town late that afternoon. Calvin waited with the horses as Jed hurried into a mercantile to purchase feed for the horses, blankets, matches, and a small supply of food. “Five-sixty, please,” said the clerk as he totaled Jed’s purchases.

Jed placed a ten-dollar gold piece on the counter. “Did you see a fancy coach pass through town?” he asked. “Green-and-gold, it was, with a driver in a red coat.”

“Funny you should ask,” the clerk replied, plunking four silver dollars and some change on the counter. “They stopped

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here not more than fifteen or twenty minutes ago. One of the women folk was sick, and I sold them a bottle of medicine.”

“What road did they take?” Jed asked.

“Ain’t but one road heads east out of here, lad,” the man replied. “You trying to meet up with them or something?”

Jed nodded. “One of my friends is on the coach, and we have to find her. It’s an emergency.”

The man shrugged. “Best place to catch up with them is in the town of Elise. It’s about an hour east of here. They’ll be spending the night there, I reckon.”

“Why do you say that?”

The man shrugged. “Elise is the only stop for the next fifty miles or so. It’ll be dark in less than two hours.”

“How would I find them?”

“There’s only one inn in town, lad. It’s right beside the highway. You can’t miss it.” He handed the box of matches to Jed. “Good luck. I’d hate to be traveling in this weather.”

Jed pulled his collar up around his throat. “Thanks.”

Calvin used a large rock to break through the ice on a small creek, and then led the horses to it. Jed attempted to open the bag of oats while the horses drank. He poured the contents of the bag into two piles on the downwind side of a giant oak.

“Let’s take the time to build a fire,” he told Calvin. “I’m so cold I can’t go much further. We can warm up while we eat.”

Calvin tethered the horses by the oak. “I agree, Massa Jed. A good fire would put some warmth in our bones, and that would feel mighty good.”

Within minutes, the welcome heat from a roaring fire was slowly seeping into their chilled bodies. Jed held one of the blankets in a wide spread behind him in an attempt to capture more of the life-giving warmth. Calvin broke a huge chunk from the end of a loaf of hard bread and bit into it hungrily. “I’m mighty thankful we has the fire and the food, Massa Jed.”

Jed nodded absently. “You know, Calvin, I’ve been thinking. They’re not just gonna turn Violet over to us, you know. We’re too far from St. Louis now for them to agree to come back to check our story. So how are we gonna get her away from them?”

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Calvin dragged a chunk of deadwood up to the edge of the fire and sat upon it. A worried look spread over his countenance. "I don't know, Massa Jed. Can't we tell the constable, or somethin'?"

Jed shook his head. "We don't have any proof. The constable wouldn't take our word over theirs."

"We could sneak into theh rooms and get her out," Calvin suggested.

Jed shook his head. "We wouldn't know which rooms were theirs without asking at the desk. And that would give the whole thing away. There has to be another way."

Both fell silent as they devoured the bread, cheese, meat and fruit that Jed had purchased.

Calvin suddenly slapped his thigh. "I have an idea!"

Jed looked at him. "I'm listening."

"We can wait outside the inn in the morning," the black man said eagerly. "We'll take her with us when she goes out to the outhouse."

Jed thought it over. "It might work," he agreed. "We'll get a room for the night at the inn. I have the money I was supposed to

pay Mr. Ledbetter. There's only one other woman traveling with them. If she goes out with Violet, she couldn't stop us. "

"But she could get the others," Calvin worried.

"True," Jed agreed, "but by the time she sounds the alarm, we'll be gone. Now if Violet goes out alone, it'll be even better. There wouldn't be anyone to sound the alarm."

"They wouldn't send her out alone, would they?"

Jed shook his head. "I doubt it very much."

Calvin was silent for a moment. "That's it then!" he decided. "We'll ride to the inn tonight and be ready to snatch Violet in the morning. Then we has to find some way to get away without them catching up to us!"

Midnight suddenly whinnied nervously, and Calvin looked up in alarm. "Someone's coming!"

"Don't be so skittish," Jed laughed. "We're not running from anybody. At least not yet."

Both horses tossed their heads and pawed the ground. An uneasy feeling stole over Jed, and he sensed that he and Calvin were being watched. Heart pounding with fear, he stared into the woods about him, but could see nothing. A cold chill swept over him, and the suspenseful foreboding of danger persisted. Finally,

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unable to finish eating, he tossed the last chunk of bread into the underbrush.

A branch broke with a crack like a rifle shot, and Jed and Calvin looked up to see two men step into the circle of fire light. The first man was tall, with a muscular build. He was wearing an expensive great coat and a warm beaver skin hat sat atop a thick shock of bright yellow hair. The second stranger was tall and thin, and not as well dressed. His crooked grin revealed several missing teeth.

“What have we here, Sheriff?” the thin man said. “Looks like a pair of runaways to me!”

“I do believe you’re right, Matthew,” the big man said. “We’ve captured ourselves a couple of runaways!” Jed was alarmed as the man drew a long revolver from his coat and pointed it in their direction. “Keep yore hands in sight, boys! You got some questions to answer.”

“I’m no runaway, Massa Sheriff!” Calvin cried out fearfully. “I’m a free man! And I got my papers what says so!”

“He’s telling the truth, Mister!” Jed blurted. “He is a free man, and he has his papers with him.”

The revolver moved in Calvin’s direction. “Then let’s see the papers, boy, but move real slow like.”

With trembling fingers, Calvin slowly withdrew the precious papers from inside his coat and handed them to the sheriff. “Take a look, suh. They’s all legal like.”

The sheriff shook open the sheaf of papers and scanned them by the firelight. A leering grin slowly spread across his face. “Well, well, Matthew, looks like you were right. We done caught us a runaway! And the white boy’s gonna be in trouble for helping him!”

Jed was incredulous. “What are you talking about, sir? Calvin has his papers!”

The revolver swung in Jed’s direction. “Not any more he don’t, boy. And in my book, any darkie without papers is a runaway. This black boy is worth a thousand dollars to me.” Jed stared in horror as the man slowly extended his hand and dropped Calvin’s manumission papers into the fire to be consumed by the hungry flames.

Chapter 8 – TROUBLE

Jed leaped to his feet to confront the man. “Hey!” he shouted indignantly, “you can’t do that!”

A heavy metallic click echoed across the little clearing as the big man cocked the revolver. “Sit down, boy,” he ordered. “And shut your mouth. We’re taking this runaway in, and we’re not gonna have any trouble outta you.”

“Calvin is a free man!” Jed retorted hotly. “And you’re not taking him anywhere. We’ll call the law on you.”

“I am the law,” the man replied, flipping open the lapel of his coat to display a shiny badge. “Now sit down before I lose my temper.”

Jed was trembling with rage as he resumed his seat on the log. An overwhelming feeling of hopelessness and fear settled over him as he suddenly realized that the two men represented

serious trouble. Even though the big man was a sheriff, Jed knew instinctively that he was not on the right side of the law.

The sheriff turned to his companion. “Tie the darkie up and put him on his horse,” he ordered, “while I think on what to do with the boy.”

Jed watched helplessly as Calvin’s hands were tightly bound and he was led to his horse. With a little difficulty, he was able to mount. “Tether the other horse to that one,” the sheriff ordered. “We’ll leave the boy here.”

“No!” Jed shouted, leaping to his feet. “You can’t take my horse! You can’t leave me here! You can’t take Calvin—” A huge fist lashed out, striking Jed at the base of the chin. Jed felt a flash of searing pain, and then everything went dark.

Jed struggled to regain consciousness. His head throbbed with a dull pain, and he felt dizzy and nauseous. He forced his eyes open to find himself lying beside the dying fire. The horses were gone, the strangers were gone, and Calvin was gone. A sob escaped his lips. Midnight! They had taken Midnight!

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When he tried to stand to his feet, he discovered that his hands and feet were bound, and that he was partially covered by one of the blankets. At least the men had shown him a tiny bit of mercy. He struggled with the ropes and found that he was not bound tightly. Apparently the ropes were intended to merely slow him down for a few minutes.

“They don’t think that I can follow them,” he muttered to himself. “Well, I’ll show them.”

When the ropes were off he set about rebuilding the fire, and soon had it blazing brightly. He felt reassured and cheered by the light and warmth. He retrieved a burning pine knot from the fire to use as a torch, and, wrapping the blanket about his shoulders, set off down the road in the direction he figured the men had taken. “Guide me, Lord,” he prayed fervently. “I must get Calvin back.”

Just a few yards from the clearing he found fresh tracks and knelt to examine them. Four horses. Good. He was on the right track, after all. He found himself back on the main road that he and Calvin had been following. Apparently the men were taking Calvin toward Elise. So far, so good, but if they turned off the

main road, he knew he would probably miss their tracks in the dark.

Jed hurried on, grateful that the pounding in his head had subsided. He walked with the torch close to the ground, keeping an eye out for more tracks, and within a minute found some. Elated, he walked even faster. But the torch sputtered out seconds later.

“So much for that,” he said aloud, striking the charred end of the torch against the ground to be certain that it was fully extinguished and then dropping it in the roadway. “But at least it gave me enough light to make sure that this was the way they came. Thank you, Lord.”

He stumbled along through the darkness for nearly an hour. A dog suddenly began to bark, alerting him that he was near a dwelling, and he realized that he had reached the town of Elise. He crept through the silent, dark main street of the town, trying to decide on a course of action. How would he ever find where they had taken Calvin? Exhausted and cold, he finally crawled into a haystack near the road, pulled the blanket tightly about him, and fell into a troubled, fitful sleep.

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The crowing of a rooster woke Jed at first light. He crawled from the haystack, shook the loose bits of hay from his blanket, and then walked cautiously through the little town. He scanned both sides of the street as he walked, keeping a sharp eye out for the sheriff or his accomplice. Very few people were out and about at this hour, but still, he couldn't be too careful.

He had gone less than two blocks when he spotted a small building with barred windows. *The jail*, he thought. *Hopefully, we won't end up there.* He hurried past.

He glanced back at the jail, and his heart leaped. A clean, white handkerchief was fluttering from a branch of a tree behind the building, just outside one of the windows. *Odd*, he thought, *it's as if someone is trying to signal.* He caught his breath.

Calvin! Pa had given him a handkerchief just like that!

After checking up and down the street to be certain that he was not being watched, Jed crept toward the window. The corner of the handkerchief was monogrammed with a blue "J C" and Jed smiled exultantly. This was Pa's handkerchief, all right!

A slight humming snore told Jed that the cell was indeed occupied. He rose up on tiptoe. "Calvin!" he called softly. "Is that you?"

The soft snoring was replaced by a grunt, then a low mumbling. "Calvin," Jed called again, "wake up!"

A dark hand appeared at the window and then disappeared. "It's me," came the soft, pleasant voice of Calvin. "That you, Jed?"

"It's me," Jed whispered. "Now how are we going to get you out of there?"

"It don't look good, Jed," the black man answered glumly. "That sheriff is planning to take me to an auction tomorra and sell me. I tries and tries to tell him that I'm a free man, what can't be sold, but I don't think the man was even listenin'. It don' look good, Jed."

"Is the sheriff in there now?"

"No," came the reply, "he jus' left me heah las' night. They's jus' a darkie on guard."

For some unexplained reason, Jed felt a sudden surge of hope. "I'll be back in a minute," he told Calvin. "You can take your handkerchief in. That was a good idea."

He folded the blanket neatly, set it to one side of the door, and then boldly walked inside. A heavysset black man looked up

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as he entered, then yawned and stretched. “Yo’re up mighty early, lad.”

Jed smiled. “Good morning. I came to see you about one of the prisoners— a man that was wrongly arrested.”

The man stood to his feet looking puzzled. “Arrested?”

“Yes,” Jed insisted, “the sheriff brought him here last night.”

“The sheriff?” The black man suddenly chuckled. “He ain’t no sheriff, that one. That’s Johnny Yeager. He’s jus’ a bounty hunter.”

“Bounty hunter?” Jed echoed.

“He collects a bounty for hunting down runaway slaves, outlaws, you name it. If they’s a price on a man’s head, Johnny’s interested. In my opinion, they’s been more than once that he’s killed an innocent man.”

“Well, he brought in an innocent man last night,” Jed declared. “Calvin is a free man; my father gave him his manumission papers. But this Johnny Yeager man burned his papers and took him away. And he stole our horses, too.”

The Negro nodded. “Sounds like Johnny.”

“So can you let him go?” Jed asked. “Since Johnny Yeager isn’t a sheriff or anything.”

The man shook his head. “Johnny would kill me.”

“Does this town have a constable? Couldn’t we tell him?”

“Son, the constable is seventy-two years old. He’s more afraid of Johnny than I am.”

“But you can’t hold an innocent man!” Jed protested. “He’s a free man, but your Johnny Yeager is planning to sell him as a slave tomorrow! Doesn’t that even matter?”

The jailer shrugged. “There’s more to it than that, son. Johnny’s paying me a dollar to keep him heah till tomorra.”

Jed reached into his pocket and then plunked three silver dollars on the desk beside the jailer. The man’s eyes grew wide. “Whar’d you get these?”

“My Pa gave the money to me,” Jed answered, “and it’s yours if you let my friend go. He’s a free man, and you have no right to hold him.”

“What will I tell Johnny?”

“Just tell him that Calvin’s rightful owner came by, and you had to release him. My Pa bought Calvin just over two weeks ago, so that’s the truth.”

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The man thought it over, eyeing the silver coins longingly. Jed held his breath.

At last, the man pocketed the money and reached for a set of keys on the wall. “All right. But you two clear out as fast as you can, heah? If Johnny catches up with ya, we’re both in trouble.”

“How will we get our horses?”

“If I was you, boy, I’d forget about the horses. Yo’re lucky to be gittin’ out with your life. Johnny wouldn’t hesitate to kill a lad like you if he thought it would keep him out of trouble.”

Within a minute, Calvin was following Jed out the front door of the little jail. “Why’d he let me go?” he whispered to Jed.

“I’ll tell you later,” Jed whispered back. “Right now the important thing is to get out of here.”

He glanced up the street, and his blood seemed to freeze in his veins. “Johnny Yeager!” he gulped. “Heading this way! And I think he’s seen us!”

Chapter 9 – HIDE AND SEEK

Johnny Yeager and Matthew Mackall were still sixty yards from the jail, sauntering casually down the street, when Johnny spotted Jed and Calvin. He nudged Matthew and pointed toward them, and Jed knew instantly that they had been seen. “Run!” he called to Calvin. “This way!”

Jed dashed around behind the jailhouse with Calvin right on his heels. As he turned the corner he caught a glimpse of the two men racing down the street toward them and the sight panicked him. He and Calvin crossed behind the jailhouse and found themselves at the back porch of a little farmhouse. Johnny Yeager suddenly appeared at the back corner of the house and his accomplice Matthew appeared at the other. Jed and Calvin were trapped.

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“This way!” Calvin called. He bolted up on the tiny porch and threw open the door. Jed followed him through the door and then quickly bolted it behind him.

They found themselves in a small kitchen. An elderly farmer and his wife sat at the breakfast table staring in alarm as the two fugitives entered. “Excuse us,” Jed blurted as he darted around the table and followed Calvin to the front door.

Calvin hesitated on the front porch, and Jed pointed. “That way!”

Across the road sat a huge, red barn, its open door beckoning invitingly. Heart pounding with fear, Jed dashed inside with Calvin half a step behind him. He paused in the shadows of the barn, hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath.

Calvin grabbed his arm. “We dasn’t stop heah! Up theh!” He pointed to the hayloft.

Jed scrambled up the rough wooden ladder right behind Calvin. The black man dived into the hay in the corner of the loft and Jed flopped down beside him, his heart racing madly. They both lay still, trying desperately to catch their breath, hands held

over their mouths in an attempt to muffle the noise of their heavy breathing.

“They’re in here!” Johnny Yeager’s voice boomed up from the open door of the barn, and Jed winced.

He glanced at Calvin. The black man’s eyes were wide with fright, and his entire body quivered. “They’s gonna find us, Massa Jed!” he quavered. Jed held one finger to his lips as a signal for quiet.

The two fugitives huddled in terrified silence as the men below silently scanned the barn. “The loft!” Johnny called. “They have to be up there.” Jed’s heart tightened with fear.

He looked about desperately, seeking a way of escape. A large pulley hung just above the open window of the loft with a hemp rope snaking over it and back down to the ground. A definite possibility, but the men would be just seconds behind them. And if one man stayed on the ground, they would simply slide into his hands. There had to be a way to get both men into the loft.

He glanced across the loft. His eye fell upon a small stack of fence posts, and a wild idea suddenly occurred to him. He leaned close to Calvin. “Get ready to go out the window,” he whispered

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as softly as he could. “We’ll slide down the ropes, but be sure to grip both at the same time. Get ready, but wait until I say go.”

Calvin was so overcome by fear that Jed was not even sure the man had heard, or that his words had registered.

“You check out the loft,” Johnny Yeager said. “I’ll stay down here.”

As Matthew started up the narrow ladder, Jed raced across the loft and seized one of the fence posts. He ran over to the ladder and slammed the fence post into one of the ladder uprights just below the place where it was nailed into the crossbeam.

The upright quivered, and the wood separated from the crossbeam just a fraction of an inch. Jed hit it again with all his might, and the gap widened. The nail was pulling loose. Matthew looked up. “Hey! Don’t do that!”

Jed swung again, and the one side of the ladder came loose as the nail pulled free. Matthew climbed faster, swearing as he came.

Jed grunted as he swung the fence post with every ounce of energy that he possessed, striking the other upright squarely. The whole ladder trembled with the force of the blow. Matthew

suddenly decided to reverse direction and scampered back down the ladder.

Two more frantic swings of the fence post, and the ladder came free. Placing the end of the fence post against one of the rungs, Jed gave the ladder a tremendous push. Both men leaped to one side as it fell.

Johnny Yeager swore, and then laughed derisively. “Clever move, lad, but it ain’t gonna help you none. We’ll still get you. Come on, Matthew.”

The two men began to climb the rough-hewn walls of the barn, utilizing the cracks between the logs as handholds and footholds. It would take longer, but they would still gain access to the loft. Johnny Yeager grinned triumphantly.

But the two men were doing exactly what Jed wanted. He dashed over to Calvin. “Get ready to slide down the rope,” he whispered. “But wait until I say go.”

“Massa Jed, I can’t!” Calvin quavered. “It’s more than twenty feet to the ground!”

“Calvin, you have to!” Jed hissed. “They’ll be up here in less than a minute. It’s our only way! Do you want to be sold as a slave again?”

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Calvin shook his head.

“Then do it! We have to!”

Without waiting for a reply he darted to the edge of the loft and looked down. Johnny and Matthew were nearly halfway. He waited until the men were about three-quarters of the way up the barn wall and then dashed across to the window.

“Now!” he told Calvin. “We have to do it!”

Jed leaned out the loft window and gripped the ropes with both hands. Wrapping his legs around the rope, he slid quickly to the ground. The rope burned his palms, but he landed safely.

“Now!” he called to Calvin. “Don’t look down! Just do it!”

Calvin hesitated, and Jed sighed deeply. *Hurry, Calvin!* he urged silently.

The black man slid down with his eyes shut. When he hit the ground he just stood still, gripping the rope tightly. Jed grabbed his arm and shook him. “You made it! Come on, Calvin! Run!”

The two sprinted down the street for all they were worth. Jed ran until his lungs burned and his side hurt, but he dared not slow down. Several hundred yards down the street he turned and glanced over his shoulder just in time to see Johnny Yeager

come running from behind the barn. The sight urged him to even greater speed. He followed Calvin around a corner and down a side street.

“In theh!” Calvin gasped.

A large building loomed just ahead. The sign over the wide, wide door read “Elise Carriage Works”.

Jed followed Calvin inside to find a large work area filled with buggies, surreys, and landaus in various stages of completion. A man sat with his back to the door, head down, diligently sanding the spokes on an unfinished carriage wheel. To Jed’s surprise, the man didn’t even turn as they entered.

“Find a place, quick!” he called to Calvin. “Johnny Yeager is just a moment behind us!”

They dashed between the unfinished vehicles. Jed spotted an English-style Victoria with a luggage boot beneath the coach. He lifted the leather covering. “Calvin! In here!”

Calvin came dashing over. Jed held the lid while Calvin scrambled into the narrow space, and then crawled in beside him. As he dropped the lid into place, Jed caught sight of the workman still sanding away as if nothing had happened.

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“It’s the best place I could find,” Jed whispered to Calvin, “but if they open the boot, we’ve had it.”

Moments later, he heard running footsteps and knew that their pursuers had arrived. “Hey, Mister,” Johnny Yeager’s voice called, “did anyone come in here? We’re looking for a boy and a black man.”

There was no reply, and the man tried again. “You, sir. I’m talking to you. Did you see two runaways? We think they came in here. Now, answer me!”

“Sammy’s deaf,” Matthew told him. “He didn’t hear a word you said. He doesn’t even know we’re here.”

Inside the luggage boot, Jed let out a slow sigh. At least the man wouldn’t give away their hiding place.

They heard the men walking between the carriages as they searched. Jed held his breath. *Lord, don’t let them find us!* he prayed fervently.

“Are you sure they came in here?” Matthew asked.

“No, I’m not sure,” came Johnny’s exasperated reply. “But where else could they have gone? And anyway, you should never have let them get away when we had them in the barn!”

“Let them get away?” Matthew whined. “The kid just about knocked me off the ladder!” Jed grinned in the darkness of his hiding place.

After several more minutes of searching, Johnny Yeager and Matthew Mackall headed for the open door. “Let’s ask around,” Johnny said. “Someone’s sure to have seen them.”

When the workshop was quiet, Jed leaned closer to Calvin. “I say we stay still for at least half an hour,” he whispered softly. “Wait until they give up looking for us.”

“I’m with you, Massa Jed,” came the quiet reply.

An hour later Jed and Calvin had made it safely out of town and were hiking north along the main road. “I hates to have to walk the whole way,” Calvin remarked, “but I’m sure glad we’s safe from them bounty hunters.”

Jed nodded. “I just wish there was some way to get Midnight back,” he sighed. “But there’s no one we can ask for help, and we have to get on and find Violet.”

“That was a special horse, wasn’t he, Massa Jed?”

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Jed sighed again. “The best horse in the world, Calvin. I’ll never have another one like him. It would take a miracle, but maybe God can get him back for me.”

The black man turned to him with a serious expression. “Do God answer prayer?” he asked. “Maybe you should pray for God to bring that horse back.”

“I have been praying,” Jed replied. He shifted the folded blanket to his other shoulder. “God could somehow give Midnight back, if I ask Him.” He looked at Calvin. “Do you ever pray?”

Calvin shook his head. “I guess the good Lord don’ listen to black folks,” he sighed.

Jed looked at him in surprise. “Sure He does!” he exclaimed. “Pa says that God hears the prayers of anyone who is a child of God.”

Calvin shook his head. “I don’ think He hears the black folk.”

“Jesus died for black folk,” Jed replied.

Calvin frowned. “How you know that?”

“The Bible says so!” Jed insisted. “It says that He died for all.”

“Do that mean the black folk, too?”

“I’m sure it does,” Jed replied. “All means all.”

“I don’ unnerstand why Jesus died, anyway,” Calvin mused. “The way I heered it, He never done nuthin’ bad.”

“He didn’t. But He died for us, to pay for our sins, because we have done bad things. He died in our place and came back to life three days later. And if we ask Him to forgive us and save us, He will!”

Calvin looked skeptical. “Even black folk?”

Jed nodded. “He died for all.”

Calvin smiled. “I’m gonna have to think about that one for a while.”

They looked up to see a lone rider approaching from the east. The man waved as he came close, and Jed saw a friendly face. “How far to the next town, sir?”

The rider reined to a stop. “Quite a piece, boy. Twenty, maybe twenty-five mile. You aimin’ to walk the whole way?”

Jed nodded.

“Well, if you don’t let any grass grow under your feet you’ll make it afore nightfall,” the man said, “but don’t get caught out

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here after dark. You wouldn't live through the night in this weather!"

The man suddenly held up one hand. "Wait. There's a short cut." He turned and pointed.

"Less than a mile from here you'll see an old logging road that cuts off to the right. It cuts right through the hills, while the main road skirts around them. It'll be steep, but it's about five mile shorter. But I warn you, it'll be a bit of a climb."

"Would it save time?" Jed asked.

"On foot, yes," the rider replied. "But remember, the road is a lot rougher and steeper." He shook the reins and rode away. "Good luck, lads!"

Jed paused to rest at the crest of a ridge overlooking a peaceful valley. Far below, a silvery white ribbon of ice marked the course of a now silent river. "He wasn't spoofing us, was he? This way is steep!"

Calvin caught up a moment later and leaned against a tree to catch his breath. "How much farther, Massa Jed? I'm tired, and

hungry, and cold. My face and my hands and my feet feels like they's made of wood, 'stead of flesh."

Jed nodded. "I know," he replied. "But we have to make the next town by nightfall, or we're in real trouble. Like the man said, we wouldn't survive a night out in this weather!"

Calvin suddenly brightened. "Maybe we could stop theh, Massa Jed. At least long enough to get out of this wind and warm up jus' a tad." He pointed to a tiny cabin perched on the side of the hill several hundred yards below.

Jed stepped forward. "Let's check it out," he replied. "There's no smoke coming from the chimney, so I don't think that anyone's there."

Moments later they knocked on the door of the little shanty, but there was no answer. "It's locked up," Jed said. "Look, the latch string isn't out." He circled around the little building and then rejoined Calvin. "There's only one window, and it's shuttered tight."

Calvin shrugged wearily. "I guess we keep walkin', then, don' we?"

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The road snaked down to the edge of the frozen river. Moments later Calvin hesitated at the edge. “The ice don’ look safe.”

“Sure it is!” Jed laughed. “Watch!” He took a flying leap and landed on the ice, but lost his footing on the slick surface and fell flat. Calvin laughed in spite of the cold and fatigue.

Jed gingerly got to his feet. “Come on. It’s safe. This ice would support a horse.”

Still fearful, Calvin inched his way carefully onto the ice and started across. Jed made a show of pretending to skate and slid across the ice in long, gliding motions. For a moment he forgot the fatigue, the anxiety, the uncertainty of the mission, and simply enjoyed the fun on the ice. He was traveling so fast when he reached the opposite bank of the river that he couldn’t stop and tumbled into the frozen reeds along the water’s edge. He got to his feet laughing.

“Massa Jed!” Calvin suddenly called out. “The ice is breaking!”

Jed whirled around to see Calvin standing rigid on the ice about fifteen or twenty feet from the bank, his eyes wide with fear. As Jed watched, the ice cracked with a report like a rifle

shot. “Move back, Calvin!” he called. “It looks like you hit an air pocket. But move slowly!”

But Calvin leaped backward with all his might. His feet shot out from under him and he landed flat on the ice. Several more large cracks appeared when he hit.

“Crawl to your right!” Jed shouted. “Move downstream! The ice is thicker!”

As Calvin attempted to struggle to his feet, the ice cracked again with a loud report, and the section on which he was standing tipped, dumping him into the frigid waters! Jed watched helplessly. Calvin came up choking and coughing, and then cried out in fear and pain. “Help, me, Massa Jed! The water’s burning cold!”

Jed ran forward. He paused about ten feet from the edge of the hole and lay flat on the ice to distribute his weight. Gripping one end of his blanket, he flung the other end to Calvin. “Grab on!” he called. “I’ll try to pull you out!”

With Calvin hanging on desperately, Jed slowly inched toward the bank. The ice broke again as the black man attempted to pull himself up on it. Jed pulled him forward, and he again tried to get on top of the ice, which broke again.

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“You’re not that far out!” Jed cried to the panicking man. “Keep hold of the blanket, but break your way through the ice to the bank. When you get close enough, I’ll help pull you out!”

Two minutes later Calvin huddled on the river bank, his clothing completely soaked. “I’m f-freezin’, M-Massa Jed,” he moaned, shivering so hard he could barely get the words out. “I’ll d-die like t-this!”

Jed thought quickly. “Let’s cross back over and get you to the trapper’s shack we passed,” he decided. “There’s got to be a way to get you inside! You’ll die out here!”

Calvin grabbed Jed’s arms fearfully. “I c-can’t, Massa Jed! I d-dasn’t cross t-that r-river again!” His teeth chattered with the cold, and his body trembled uncontrollably.

“Cross where I did,” Jed said urgently. “The ice is thicker. You were too far upstream.” He wrapped his blanket around the helpless figure. “Come on! We have to hurry!”

They made it safely back across the frozen river with Jed coaxing and encouraging. Calvin’s lips were blue and his face an ashen gray by the time they reached the little cabin.

Jed knew that his friend was in serious danger.

He let Calvin sag to the ground, leaning against the wall beside the door, and then threw his shoulder against the door. It didn’t yield. He backed up and tried again, striking the door so hard it felt as if he had broken his shoulder, but the door was unmovable. He rubbed his shoulder gingerly. “Help us, Lord,” he prayed aloud.

Jed glanced at Calvin, and was alarmed to see that the man’s eyes had closed. In panic, he knelt and slapped his face. “Wake up, Calvin!” he cried. “You can’t go to sleep or you’ll die. You have to stay awake until I get you inside. You have to!”

Jed ran to the opposite side of the little shanty and beat against the rough wooden shutters, but they seemed as sturdy as the door. Frustrated and anxious, he dashed around to the door. *The latch string. There has to be a way to get the latchstring out through the hole.*

A dried cluster of goldenrod at the corner of the cabin caught his eye. He snapped one of the brittle stalks and peeled off the tiny side branches, then thrust the slender stalk through the hole in the door in an attempt to snag the latchstring. His hands trembled with cold.

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But his efforts were futile. He couldn't seem to catch the latchstring. Withdrawing the goldenrod stick, he knelt and peered through the narrow hole. A thin rawhide thong was visible, and Jed was sure it had to be the latchstring.

He inserted the goldenrod stick again. Pushing it in and out, twisting and jerking it, he attempted once again to catch the elusive latchstring. But each time he pulled, the stick slid free without snagging the thong.

"Help me, God!" he cried out desperately. "Calvin will die unless we can get inside!"

Jed glanced at the still figure of his friend and was horrified to see that Calvin was unconscious. Unless he could catch the latchstring, there would be no way into the little cabin. And Calvin would die.

Chapter 10 – NO MATCHES

Jed clapped his hands together in a frantic attempt to keep the blood circulating. Desperately, he glanced around the front of little trapper's cabin. *What can I use to retrieve the latchstring through the tiny hole and open the door? I have to get Calvin inside. I have to! Help me, Lord!*

He snapped a twig from a young maple that grew beside the door. It slid easily through the hole. But again, his repeated attempts to snag the rawhide thong proved futile. "What can I do, Lord?" he cried in desperation.

He tried breaking the twig, bending it gently until it snapped without breaking all the way through. He bent the broken piece back against the side of the twig, and then released it. The broken piece now formed an acute angle to the rest of the twig. *Good! Maybe this will catch it!* He poked the angled twig through the hole and fished for the thong.

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But the rawhide still refused to be caught. Each time he pulled on the twig, it simply slid free.

“Help me, dear God!” he cried in desperation, looking heavenward with tears streaming down his face. “Calvin is dying, and I just don’t know what to do!”

In frustration, he jerked the end of the twig free. The end of the twig split apart for a fraction of an inch. Jed stared at it, and an idea formed in his mind. He pulled the two sides of the twig apart carefully, widening the split.

The end of the twig was now split apart for nearly two inches, and Jed had to hold the pieces together just to insert the end into the hole. Perfect! The ends will separate again on the other side of the hole. *Lord, please let this work!*

Barehanded now, he pushed the twig through the hole carefully, gently, until he thought he could feel resistance from the rawhide thong. Holding his breath, he twisted the stick until it became so tight he couldn’t turn it any more. *Good! I’ve got the latchstring! Now, if I can just get it back out through the hole.*

Carefully, Jed began to draw the stick back out. It came out an inch or two, then grew snug and refused to move. The thong

was too thick to be doubled and drawn through the hole with the stick in place.

Jed groaned in disappointment. He tried to push the stick back in, but it refused to move. The whole thing was now jammed.

Thoroughly frustrated, Jed jerked violently on the stick. To his delight, the cabin door swung open! The thong had moved enough to release the latch. “Thank you, Lord!” he shouted.

Dropping his gloves on the threshold to block the door from possibly swinging shut, he ran over to Calvin and grabbed him under the arms. He dragged the inert form of his friend into the little cabin and gently laid him on the floor. Hurriedly he wrapped the blanket around him and then closed the door.

The cabin was dark. Jed groped his way to the window, unlatched the shutters, and then opened them a crack to admit some light. He hurried back to Calvin.

The cabin was tiny, with a hard-packed earth floor and log walls carefully chinked with mud and grass. A neat stone fireplace nearly filled one wall. One four-foot log had been split lengthwise and fastened to the wall to form a crude table and a short log on end served as a chair. There was no bed, but a neat

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pile of moss and hemlock needles helped soften the hardness of the bare earth. Jed remembered seeing a large stack of firewood outside the cabin, and now he was grateful to notice a neat pile of kindling stacked beside the fireplace.

“I have to get a fire going,” he said aloud. “We’re out of the wind, but it’s as cold inside the cabin as outside.”

He rushed over to the narrow stone mantel above the fireplace. A coal oil lantern and a tin cup sat covered with dust beside a small, carved box. Jed slid the box open to find a small pile of dry, powdery tinder. But there were no matches.

He glanced at the rusty old flintlock rifle standing in the corner. *If I just had some gunpowder, I could use that*, he thought. But when he lifted the ancient weapon, he found that it was totally useless. The spring on the firing mechanism was rusted away, and the flintlock was rusted tight. Disgusted, he returned the rifle to the corner.

He turned his attention to Calvin. In spite of his dark skin, the man was blue-gray with cold. Jed leaned over and placed his ear close to Calvin’s mouth, and found that he was still breathing, but barely. He jerked the blanket down and peeled off most of his friend’s clothing, now stiff with ice, then removed

his own coat, hat and gloves to place them on Calvin. Worried, he replaced the blanket.

“What should I do, Lord?” he prayed desperately as he began to shiver against the cold. “We must have a fire! How do I start one? Calvin will die unless I get a fire going! What should I do?”

He lifted the old flintlock rifle again. As he did, he accidentally struck the iron barrel of the rifle against the stones of the mantel. In the dim light of the little cabin, he thought he saw a small spark. “That’s it!” he exulted. “That’s it!”

Heart pounding with anticipation, he struck the rifle repeatedly against the fireplace until he succeeded in knocking the remaining piece of flint from the lock of the firing mechanism. He picked it up and scraped it firmly against the iron of the barrel. Sparks flew. “Thank you, Lord,” he breathed.

Working feverishly, he built a wigwam of wood in the fireplace and then arranged several smaller pieces of kindling around a tiny pile of tinder on the hearth. He placed the muzzle of the rifle on the hearth beside the little mound. Holding his breath, he struck the flint in a downward motion toward the tinder.

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Sparks flew, but nothing happened. “Come on, come on!” he whispered. “Light!” He tried again. More sparks, but still the tinder didn’t catch.

A third try, and still no results. He glanced at the body of Calvin. “Lord, please!” he whispered.

He scraped the flint time after time down the barrel in rapid motions. Finally, a spark fell into the tinder, and a small wisp of orange flame appeared. Jed dropped the rifle in an instant and gingerly held a tiny splinter of kindling to the baby fire. It caught, and began to burn with a tiny flame. Jed blew on it gently and then held it under the edge of the pile of kindling. Two minutes later, a cheerful fire was blazing in the fireplace, crackling and snapping in its eagerness to warm the little cabin.

Calvin regained consciousness for the first time the following morning. He raised his head and gazed around the little cabin with interest. “Wher is we, Massa Jed?”

Jed glanced up from the carving he had been working on. “We’re in the trapper’s cabin just above the river,” he answered.

“You fell through the ice yesterday afternoon. You’ve been asleep until now.”

Calvin sat up and yawned. “I feel so tired.”

Jed nodded. “I suppose you would. I think you were pretty close to death.” He folded the blade of his knife and stuck it in his pocket. “The Lord helped me get a fire started, and I dragged you over by it. I was able to get you to swallow some heated water, just to get some warmth into you. And I prayed a lot. I guess the Lord did the rest.”

Calvin sniffed the air appreciatively. “Somethin’ smells good. What is it?”

“Rabbit,” Jed answered. “I made a snare last night, and found this morning that we had caught one.” He stepped close to the fireplace and rotated the homemade spit a half-turn. “It should be just about done any minute now.”

Calvin gave him an admiring glance. “How come you know so much, Massa Jed? Most rich folk—”

Jed laughed. “I haven’t been a rich kid very long,” he replied. “I’ve been poor most of my life, but my Pa taught me how to make do with what we had.”

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Minutes later, Jed and Calvin agreed that the rabbit was the most delicious meal they had ever eaten.

They stayed for two days while Calvin slowly recovered from his ordeal in the river. Jed was unable to trap any more rabbits with the snare, but he did surprise a sleeping grouse, which provided a small meal. On the evening of the second day, he brought up the subject of traveling.

“We don’t have any food,” he pointed out to Calvin, “and our prospects for getting any are rather poor. I know you’re still weak, but we have to push on. The next town can’t be more than ten miles away. I still have over twelve dollars, and we can get food and shelter while you rest up. I say we leave out first thing in the morning.”

Calvin nodded weakly. “You’re right, Massa Jed. But we don’t need to stop and rest on account of me. We has to get to Violet.”

The next morning Jed carefully pulled the latchstring back through the hole in the door. “Other than using some firewood, we’re leaving the place just as we found it,” he told Calvin. “I’m mighty thankful this little shanty was here when we needed it.”

He draped the folded blanket over his shoulder. “Ready? I guess we’re off.” He lifted the latch and swung the door open, then stared in amazement. “Hey! It snowed last night!”

Ten inches of new, white snow blanketed the hillside, reflecting the morning sun in a dazzling display that blinded the eyes.

Chapter 11 – BLIZZARD!

The two travelers pulled the brims of their hats low over their eyes to block out some of the snow glare. The snow was dry and powdery, and a light wind whipped it around in never ending swirls that stung the face and made it difficult to see. The temperature had risen slightly, but the day was still cold and blustery.

Jed and Calvin trudged on through the blowing snow, stopping every half-hour to allow Calvin a brief rest period. The logging road twisted its way down out of the hills in a gradual descent and then rejoined the main road less than five miles from the trapper's cabin. Jed felt a bit of relief just to be back on a well-traveled road. Two miles later, they found themselves approaching town.

"We need to find a place to buy food," Jed told Calvin, "then get a place to spend the night."

Calvin shook his head emphatically. "We has to keep goin'! It's not yet noon."

"You're not yet in traveling shape," Jed shot back. "If we push too hard, you're liable to come down with consumption or something."

"I'm all right," Calvin insisted. "And we has to get to Violet. Come on, Massa Jed! I'll make it. When my feet get tired, I reminds 'em we're going to see Violet."

"Well, we can at least stop for some food and directions," Jed answered, "then we'll decide what to do. But if you push yourself too far, you're gonna collapse. And we don't need that."

"You're not much more than a hundred miles from Louisville," the clerk in the general store told them as he arranged their purchases in a sack. "Bedford is twelve miles from here, and you can catch a stage east to Louisville from there. Stage runs every two days." He scratched his head thoughtfully. "That's tomorra. Stage runs through about noon, I reckon."

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“Thanks,” Jed said, laying a ten-dollar gold piece on the counter. “Say, I need two packets of sulfur matches. And half a dozen candles, too.” He turned to Calvin as the clerk reached for the items. “I never could get the lamp in the cabin to light. The only light we had was from the fire.”

He pocketed one package of matches and handed the other to Calvin with a grin. “Here. If one of us should fall in another river, the other will still have dry matches.”

After paying for their purchases, Jed and Calvin sat close to a pot-bellied stove at the back of the store to eat lunch. “I still say that we should press on today,” Calvin said, biting hungrily into a huge wedge of corn pone. “That man says that the next town is only twelve mile. We could sleep theh tonight, then catch that stage tomorra. I’m feeling mighty fine.”

Jed studied Calvin’s face. The man looked tired and terribly worn, but Jed knew that his friend was determined to get to his wife as quickly as possible. He prayed silently for wisdom as they ate.

Calvin took a long drink of buttermilk. “Sure is good to be eatin’ again!” he said, wiping his mouth on the back of his sleeve.

Jed laughed and nodded. “And the Franklin stove is mighty welcome, too. I hate to even think of going outside again.” He took a long drink from his own mug and then studied Calvin.

“Are you sure you can travel this afternoon?”

The black man nodded. “I’m gonna do all right. I don’ think I could rest this afternoon, anyhow, what for thinkin’ ‘bout Violet.”

Jed nodded. “I’ve been praying that God will keep her safe. He knows where she is.”

Calvin paused with a piece of smoked jerky halfway to his mouth. “I been tryin’ to pray, too, Massa Jed, but I don’ think He’s ahearin’ me.”

Jed took a bite of corn pone, praying for guidance before he spoke. “But are you His child, Calvin? God only promises to hear the prayers of His children. You have to receive Jesus as your Savior to be a child of God. Have you done that?”

The former slave shook his head. “I wants to, Massa Jed, I really wants to. But what do I say to Him?”

“What you say is not really that important,” Jed replied. “You must believe, turn from your sin, and ask God to save you.”

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“But what do I do?”

“Well,” Jed answered slowly, “I guess the first thing is to admit to God that you’re a sinner, that you’ve done bad things.”

Calvin interrupted. “He knows that already, ‘cuz I shore done my share of bad things.”

Jed nodded. “Pa showed me a verse in the Bible that says, ‘For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.’ The first part of being saved is knowing that you have done wrong, and that you are a sinner.”

Calvin nodded soberly. “That I am.”

“Then,” Jed said eagerly, “believe that Jesus died on the cross for you, and that He rose from the grave the third day. He did that because He loves us.”

“Even the black folk?” Calvin said cautiously, as though he was almost afraid to believe it.

Jed nodded. “He died for everyone, Calvin. There’s a verse in the Bible that says that God loves us even though we’re sinners. I don’t remember the whole verse, but I do remember the last four words: ‘Christ died for us’. And the Bible also says that He rose again the third day. Calvin, do you believe that Jesus died for you?”

Calvin smiled broadly. “If the Good Book say it, then it’s true! Yassuh, Massa Jed, I do believe it. I believes it right now!”

“Then why not ask God to save you, right now?” Jed asked eagerly. “The first verse Pa taught me was Romans 10:13. It says, ‘For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ Pa says that’s God’s promise to us.”

The black man carefully set his mug of buttermilk on the floor beside the wood stove, folded his hands, and then raised his eyes toward heaven. “Massa Jesus,” he said softly, “I do believe that you died for me, suh, to save me from my sins. I’m done a heap of bad things, Massa Jesus, but I’m askin’ you to forgive me. The Good Book says that whoever calls on you to save ‘em will be saved. I’m callin’, Jesus, for you to save me.”

He lowered his eyes to look at Jed. “Should I say amen?”

Jed smiled. “That’d be fine.”

Calvin raised his eyes again. “Amen. I thank you, Massa Jesus.”

Jed felt a thrill of joy at this first experience of leading someone else to Christ. He jumped to his feet in his excitement, and then thumped Calvin on the shoulder. “Did He save you, Calvin? Did He?”

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Calvin grinned broadly. “Now I’m a child of God.” He stood to his feet and then suddenly grew sober. “Violet needs Jesus, too, don’ she?”

Several minutes later the young soulwinner and his first convert wrapped up their food supplies and prepared to venture out into the cold. The clerk looked at them with amusement as they passed the counter. “Got religion back there, did you, darkie?” he mocked.

Calvin shook his head. “I don’ know, suh. But I got Jesus!”

The wind howled as they opened the door, and they stepped quickly outside. Jed threw the gunnysack of provisions over his shoulder and pulled his collar up tighter with his free hand. “It feels like it’s gotten colder!”

Calvin leaned into the wind, clutching the blankets against his chest. “I hates to leave that warm store,” he said, “but I’ll never forget that this is wher Jesus saved me!”

Heads down against the wind, Jed and Calvin trudged through the drifting snow. The sky had become a dark gray color, giving some relief from the sun’s glare, but the wind had

increased in fury and the temperature was dropping. Less than two hours after they left the town behind, snow began to fall.

Jed shivered with the cold, beating his free hand against his upper body in an attempt to warm himself. “It doesn’t look good, Calvin,” he shouted above the noise of the wind. “I think we’re in for a storm. We need to find a place to hole up for the night.”

“Let’s keep going!” Calvin argued. “It’s several mo’ hours till dark. We can make it!”

The storm increased in fury, with the snow falling so fast that their tracks were filling in almost as fast as they made them. The wind gusted and howled from the northeast, driving sleet and snow into their faces with stinging ferocity. The cold seemed to pass right through their heavy coats and draw the warmth from their tired bodies. They paused long enough to wrap the blankets about themselves, and then trudged on. Visibility was less than twenty feet.

“I need to rest,” Calvin finally gasped, dropping to a seat on an outcropping of granite beside the roadway. “I’m so cold I think my blood is freezin’ in my veins, and I’m so tired I’m about to drop in my tracks!”

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Jed huddled miserably beside him. “We can’t go on, Calvin!” he shouted above the screech of the wind. “We need to find shelter.”

“They’s not a farmhouse for miles,” Calvin yelled back. “What should we do?”

“Rest for a minute or two,” Jed replied, “then we need to start searching. We’ve got to find shelter. If we stay here we’ll freeze to death.”

Huddling together for warmth, they sat for another moment or two, and then rose wearily to their feet. Jed slipped and fell, dropping his pack in the deep snow. Calvin helped him to his feet and then retrieved the gunnysack from the snow. “I’ll carry this for a while.”

Jed tried to take it from him. “I’ll carry it. You’re the one who was sick.”

But Calvin held the gunnysack out of reach. “No, Massa Jed,” he said softly. “I’ll carry it and give you a rest. You don’t look like you’re doing any better than me.”

Jed was too tired and cold to argue. Warily, he turned and trudged through the gathering storm. The wind screamed and shrieked like a wildcat, angrily spitting snow and sleet into the

faces of these two travelers who dared to defy her. Snow fell in huge white clumps, filling the air like feathers from a giant feather pillow.

Suddenly, the falling snow became so thick that Jed could scarcely see. The roadway, now covered in nearly eighteen inches of snow, was lost in a blur of swirling white. Jed turned around, and then turned forward, not sure which way to go. He groped forward desperately, hands in front of him as if to ward off the storm. His gloved fingers touched something hard, unyielding, and he grasped it frantically. A tree. He had left the roadway!

He turned and stumbled back the way he thought he had come, trying desperately to retrace his steps, only to run into another tree. His mind raced in panic. Which way was the road?

“I’m afraid I’ve lost the road,” he called to Calvin. “The snow’s falling so fast I can’t see a thing! We’ll have to stop under a tree until the storm dies down a bit!”

He turned around. “Calvin?” There was no answer.

“Calvin!” Jed screamed the name as loud as he could. “Calvin! Where are you? Calvin!” He held his breath and

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listened, but the only sound he heard was the mournful howl of the wind. Calvin was gone.

Chapter 12 – THE CHURCH

Jed turned around and staggered blindly back in the way he thought he had come. His boot caught on a fallen log buried in the snow and he fell face first. As he struggled to his feet, the wind caught his blanket and whipped it away. Fortunately, it caught on a tree just a yard or two away, held against the bare branches by the force of the wind. Jed fought his way through a four-foot drift to reach it.

Shaking now with cold and thoroughly disoriented, he fought the wind for possession of the blanket as he struggled to wrap the fabric around him. He knelt in the snow, head down, trying to get out of the icy blast of the wind. “Help me, God!” he prayed aloud. “And help Calvin! Dear God, we need you!” The wind seemed to snatch the words from his numb lips and fling them into the void of the storm.

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It's so cold, he thought. *Maybe I should just lie down out of the wind. It might be warmer that way.* But an inner voice seemed to tell him to keep on moving, and so he obeyed.

Suddenly he paused, listening intently, thinking he had heard a human voice above the wail of the storm. He shook his head. He was imagining things.

"Massa Jed! Where are you?"

Jed stopped again. Was that a voice, or was the wind simply playing cruel tricks on him? "Calvin!" he screamed. "Calvin! Can you hear me?" He listened hopefully, but all he heard was the violence of the storm.

Crack! A large branch broke from the tree over his head, striking him in the shoulder and knocking him into the snow. He took a deep breath and then dug his way from beneath the branch. "Lord, help me!" he prayed.

"Jed! Massa Jed!"

There was the voice again. Jed stopped in his tracks. That was not the wind! It had to be Calvin!

He took a deep breath and screamed with all the force he could muster. "Calvin! Calvin!"

"Jed Cartwright!" The answer came ringing through the swirling, driving white of the storm. "Massa Jed!"

Jed's heart leaped. "Calvin! Where are you?"

"Over heah." The voice sounded distant and far away.

"Massa Jed, come wheh I am."

"Calvin," Jed yelled, "I can't find you! You come to me!"

"No, Massa Jed," came the reply. "I's found a shelter! Iffen I leaves it, we's both lost. Come to me."

"I can't see you," Jed shouted. "Keep calling so I can find you!"

"Over heah!" came the reply. "I'm standin' at the side of the hill."

Jed cocked his head, listening intently. Calvin's voice seemed to come from one direction one moment and then an entirely different direction the next. It was as if the man were jumping from one point of the compass to the next. Jed paused, confused. "Where are you?" he called again.

"Right heah!" The answering shout seemed to come from several directions all at once. "I'm by the hill."

"Keep shouting till I find you!" Jed yelled at the top of his voice. "I can't see you!"

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Calvin kept shouting Jed's name and Jed tried to follow the sound. He stumbled blindly through the swirling snow, not at all certain that he was going in the right direction. "Lord, help us!" he cried aloud.

"Jed! Stop!" Jed stopped in his tracks. "I thinks I sees you!" Calvin yelled. "Turn to your left!" Jed did so. "Now come straight towards me."

A large, dark shape loomed ahead in the confusion of white, and Jed realized that he had reached the side of the hill. Finally he made out the figure of Calvin. "You did it, Massa Jed!" the black man exulted. He grabbed Jed by the arm and pulled him close to the hillside.

"They's a cave heah," Calvin told Jed. "We can get out of the storm." He led Jed a few yards to the right.

A dead tree lay at a crazy angle against the rocky face of the hill. Calvin dropped to his knees and Jed spotted a dark void below the branches. Calvin crawled through the opening, dragging the gunnysack after him, and Jed followed him. "It's dark and spooky," Calvin said, his voice echoing through the cavern, "but at least we's out of the wind."

Jed let out his breath slowly, thankful to be out of the violence of the storm. "Get the candles," he said. "They're in the sack."

Two candles cast a warm glow throughout the narrow cavern, casting huge, eerie shadows on the rock walls. Calvin held his candle high and glanced about fearfully. "They's no bears in heah, is they?"

Jed laughed. "I don't see any signs of them, Calvin."

Calvin turned around. "It's mighty spooky in heah, but we's out of the wind, and it's dry. And it's a mite warmer."

"It's a good deal warmer," Jed agreed, "and if we go deeper, it'll get warmer yet. But we really need a fire."

He let the blanket slide to the floor. "I'll try to break some branches from that dead tree."

Calvin shook his head. "It's probably wet, and you'll never get it started. We don' have no kindlin' or tinder."

"We'll get your handkerchief burning," Jed suggested, "then use it to start some splinters and twigs."

Jed crawled back through the cave opening. The wind snarled and growled angrily as he emerged and stood to his feet. He reached up and grabbed a dead branch with both hands and

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then pulled down with all his might. The branch broke with a snap and came down on top of him. Jed poked the end into the mouth of the cave and the branch seemed to slide in of its own accord as an unseen Calvin pulled it in. Jed reached for more.

Several minutes later, Calvin's white handkerchief lay crumpled beneath a small pile of twigs, splinters and shavings that Jed had sliced off with his knife. Calvin knelt, carefully holding a blazing match to the edge of the cloth. "Let's hope this works."

Jed was busily breaking small branches into shorter lengths. "It'll work," he assured his friend. "It has to!"

The roaring fire soon put the two candles to shame.

The next morning, rested and refreshed, Jed and Calvin dug out through the drift of snow that blocked the cave entrance. They poked their heads out to find a bright sun shining on a sparkling, dazzling world of white. The storm was over.

Calvin lifted the gunnysack over his shoulder and waded through the drift. "We's off!"

Jed hurried through the waist-deep snow to push in front of him. "How about if I break trail for a while," he suggested, "since you have the pack? Later we can switch places and I'll carry the pack." The snow glittered and sparkled like millions of fiery diamonds, and he squinted against the harsh, white glare. He pulled his hat lower over his eyes. "We'll be snow-blind before long."

They reached Bedford late that afternoon, completely exhausted from wading through the waist-deep snow. In some places they had fought their way through drifts higher than their heads. Their eyes ached from the constant glare.

"We done missed the stage," Calvin said sadly.

Jed shrugged. "I'm quite sure it didn't run today," he answered. "Come on, let's find a place to stay."

They found a room at a little inn called The Golden Goose. Jed paid for their lodging, and then he and Calvin hurried to the dining tavern in the adjoining building. They found seats at a table by a huge fireplace.

The dining room was crowded and the room reverberated with the sounds of conversation and laughter, while an old man sat in the corner energetically playing an ancient fiddle. Lanterns

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along the walls cast warm circles of light to dispel the darkness of the coming night. The place had a cheery, friendly atmosphere.

A heavysset hostess with a tired face brought them steaming mugs of cider from a large kettle on the hearth. Jed noticed that she glanced uneasily at Calvin as she set the mug in front of him. She turned to Jed. "Dinner tonight is beef stew and corn fritters. Two orders?"

Jed nodded.

"I need to see yore money." Jed placed a silver dollar on the table. The woman nodded and hurried off to the kitchen.

Jed lifted the mug of cider to his lips and then set it down immediately. "It's hot!" he exclaimed to Calvin. "Be careful. It's hot enough to burn your lips off."

The woman was back in moments with two large bowls of hearty stew and a basket of warm fritters. Jed led Calvin in a prayer of thanks, and then they both started in hungrily.

Moments later Calvin leaned forward. "Don' look now," he warned in a whisper, "but they's some men watchin' us. I don' like the way they's lookin' at us, Massa Jed."

Jed resisted the urge to turn around and stare. "Who are they?" He tried to whisper without moving his lips. An uneasy feeling came over him.

"I don' know," Calvin answered softly. "But they's watching us like a Cooper's hawk circling over a chicken yard! They's three of them."

Jed stood to his feet and stepped closer to the fire, holding his hands to the flames as if to warm them. He let his gaze wander casually over the crowded room and then sucked in his breath sharply. Calvin was right. At one table, three rough-looking men in well-worn buckskins stared at them intently. The man whose back was to them was actually turned halfway around on his bench to watch them.

Jed tried not to let his face reveal his emotions as he took his seat, but his hand trembled as he picked up his spoon again. "Try to ignore them," he said softly to Calvin. "It's probably not us they're interested in." He reached for another corn fritter.

Someone appeared at his elbow and he turned, expecting to see the ample figure of the hostess. But he looked up to find one of the three men looming over him. The man was dressed in ragged, dirty buckskin, and a thick, disheveled beard hung to the

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middle of his chest. His eyes glittered with an intensity that made Jed nervous. The man was standing so close that Jed caught a whiff of body odor mixed with the smell of wood smoke. “Whar ya from, boy?” The words came out not as a question, but more as a challenge, a demand for an answer.

Jed cleared his throat nervously. “St. Louis.”

“Whar ya headin’?”

Jed’s mind raced, seeking an appropriate answer. It wouldn’t do to reveal their destination to this overly curious stranger. “Just—just looking for a friend,” he finally faltered.

“This yore darkie?”

The question hit Jed like a blow to the stomach. What was this man after? Fear tied his stomach in knots as he struggled for an appropriate answer. What should he say? “Y-Yes,” he stammered. “No! No, he’s a free man!”

“I see,” the stranger said thoughtfully. His eyes shifted to a point behind Jed, then darted back. Jed turned and followed his gaze in time to see the man’s two companions making their way toward the table. His heart sank. These men meant trouble!

“We’re taking these boys with us,” the man said as his companions reached the table. “The darkie don’t belong to

nobody, and I reckon we can easy find us a buyer. The kid ain’t old enough to make no trouble.” He reached for Jed’s sleeve.

“Come along, boy.”

“No!” The word exploded from Jed’s lips with such force that several nearby diners looked over to see what was going on. “We’re not going anywhere with you! Calvin is a free man, and nobody’s gonna sell him!”

The other diners suddenly looked away and Jed realized with a sinking feeling that he and Calvin were on their own. They would get no help here. No one was willing to get involved to help two strangers.

Calvin stood fearfully to his feet with his coat in his hand. “Now wait jus’ a minute, suh,” he said. “I am a free man, what can’t be sold. We ain’t goin’ with you all!”

A clawlike hand gripped Jed by the elbow. “You and the darkie get your coats on,” the first man said. “Yo’re comin’ with us. And there ain’t no use in puttin’ up a fight. So just do as yo’re told.”

At that moment the hostess pushed her way into the narrow aisle between Calvin and the men. She held a steaming teakettle. “More cider, gents?”

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Jed saw the opportunity. “Calvin, run!” he urged. “For the door!” He leaped to his feet and jerked his arm from the man’s grasp and then snatched up his coat. Planting one foot on the bench, he vaulted atop the table. Three pairs of hands reached for him, but he was much too agile. He leaped across to the next table, scattering dishes and silver service everywhere, then leaped to the floor and bolted for the door.

He flung open the door and found that Calvin was right on his heels. As he stepped to one side to let Calvin pass he glanced back to the table where he had been sitting. The three men were trying to squeeze past the hostess, but her bulk completely blocked the narrow aisle. One man leaped atop the table in an attempt to follow the route that Jed had taken and his right foot landed in Jed’s stew bowl. The man tumbled headfirst to land on the back of the startled diner at the next table.

Jed had seen enough. He slammed the door behind him and then dashed after Calvin. The street was already dark but Jed realized with a helpless feeling that the men would have no difficulty in following their tracks in the moonlight. And deep as the snow was, they wouldn’t be moving very fast, anyway.

In moments, he had overtaken Calvin as he frantically dashed down the path that had been shoveled to the street. Calvin turned to the right, so Jed followed him. They fought their way through the drifts, passing one dark house after another. Unbroken drifts blocked their access to the front of the dwellings. Jed heard the door of the inn slam and he knew that their pursuers were not far behind.

“Over theh!” Calvin called softly. He bulled his way through a deep drift to reach the front door of a little stone church. As he threw the huge door open, Jed dashed through ahead of him. Calvin slammed the door and then fumbled with the latch. “They’s no lock!”

“Come on!” Jed called, racing down the center aisle of the church sanctuary. Moonlight reflecting from the snow outside spilled through the stained glass windows on each side to create colorful patterns on the pews and floor and providing enough light to see the way. As Jed reached the front of the church and passed through a dark doorway, something soft smacked him right in the face.

He grabbed it. The bell rope. They were directly below the belfry. It might provide a hiding place!

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In the darkness he found the winding stairs and then raced up them with Calvin right behind him. As he scrambled up the tiny ladder to the trap door he heard the front door open and knew that their pursuers were in the church building. He scrambled through the trap door, let Calvin pass through, and gently let the trap door fall into place.

“Stand on it,” came Calvin’s whisper right in his ear. “They can’t open it if we both stand on it. They’s only room for one man at a time at the top of that little ladder.” Jed stepped over to join Calvin on top of the little trap door.

They found themselves in a little belfry, barely four feet across, with an arched opening on each of the four sides. The inch-thick bell rope entered the belfry through a fist-sized hole in the floor and then disappeared into the darkness over their heads. Jed could make out the dim shape of a huge bronze bell. Silver moonlight spilled in through the arched windows to create a bright pool of light at their feet. The little belfry was bitterly cold.

The door beneath their feet suddenly moved slightly as one of their pursuers attempted to push it open. Jed and Calvin heard

a man curse. The door heaved again as the man below slammed his shoulder into it. There came another curse.

“They’re standing on it,” the disembodied voice explained to someone below. “I can’t budge it!”

“Let me help,” another voice offered.

“It’s no use,” the first voice replied. “There’s only room for one of us at a time. And if they’re standing on it, we’re never gonna get it open.” Jed grinned triumphantly at Calvin, giving him the thumbs up signal, and Calvin’s teeth flashed white as he returned the grin.

“You ain’t gonna escape us,” the angry voice snarled through the trap door. “It’s more than fifty feet to the ground. There’s only one way down, and when you come down, we’ll be waiting for you.”

The man laughed. “We can wait all night, if we have to. But if you stay up there very long, you’ll freeze to death. When you get good and ready, let us know. We’ll be waiting for you.”

Jed leaned out one of the stone arches in the top of the belfry and looked down. The man was right. It was more than fifty feet to the snowy ground below.

Chapter 13 – TRAPPED IN THE BELFRY

Jed and Calvin sat huddled in the church belfry as they considered their predicament and the possibility of escape. “The man’s right,” Calvin whispered. “We’s away up in the air, and the only way down is past them. So what do we do now? If we wait too long, we’s gonna freeze.”

Jed leaned out one of the arches for another look and then sat down despondently on the trap door of the little belfry. “I don’t really know,” he sighed. “The only thing we can do is pray.”

Calvin immediately looked heavenward. “Massa Jesus,” he said in a whisper, “this is Calvin. I’m one of yore chillun now. Massa Jed and me need yore help, suh.”

While Jed listened in amazement, Calvin simply laid the whole situation before the Lord, talking to God as if he were a

son asking his father for help. *He’s only been saved a few hours, Jed told himself, and he already knows how to pray like this.*

Calvin told God about the whole situation with Mr. Bentley, about the trip to rescue Violet, and about the three men who were pursuing them. “So we don’ know what to do, Massa Jesus, unless you helps us,” Calvin prayed humbly. “And we’s askin’ you to do jus’ that. But please hurry, Massa Jesus, ‘cuz it’s mighty cold up here. And Lord, please take care of my Violet. Amen.”

As Calvin finished, Jed began to pray, again asking for God’s guidance and protection. He asked for wisdom in the difficult situation they now faced, and for guidance in finding Violet. A calm reassurance swept over him as he concluded the prayer.

Jed leaned out from one of the belfry arches, studying the stone work on the side of the tower. “Maybe we could climb down,” he suggested in a whisper. “There’s enough gaps in the stone work to allow us handholds and footholds.”

“No suh, Massa Jed,” Calvin whispered back fiercely. “We ain’t gonna try that! No, suh! Jus’ one little icy spot and we’s dead men. Fifty feet is a long way to fall!”

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“I’m not gonna try it,” Jed whispered back. “I was just trying to think of a way out of here. If only we had a rope.”

He sat beside Calvin on the trap door. *What can we do?* he thought desperately. *There must be a way to get out of the belfry, and yet evade our pursuers. There’s gotta be another way out of here.* His eyes fell upon the bell rope, and he studied it thoughtfully.

Calvin noticed his interest in the rope and at once became apprehensive. “No, Massa Jed,” he whispered. “I don’ know what you is thinkin’, but if you is thinkin’ what I’m thinkin’ you is thinkin’, then I wish you wouldn’t think it!”

Jed stepped over to the bell rope and lifted it gently. He quietly lay down on his belly and peered through the hole, then rose to his knees and turned to Calvin excitedly.

“Here’s the way out,” he whispered. “The bell rope! If I remember correctly, it hangs to within four feet of the ground floor. If we pull it up and hang it out one of these windows, the end would be within six feet of the ground. We’ll wrap it around one of the arches for security, which will cost us about three more feet, and if we tie knots every two feet or so, we’ll lose

another four or five feet. The end will be within fourteen feet of the ground.”

“I ain’t gonna try it,” Calvin moaned. “That’s too far to fall!”

“Calvin, you’re over six feet tall,” Jed whispered urgently. “If you’re hanging from the rope with your hands over your head, your feet will be less than seven feet from the ground. And besides, you’re gonna land in a snow drift.”

Calvin’s eyes were wide with fright. “I can’t do it, Massa Jed,” he pleaded. “I’m afraid of high places. I dasn’t even think about it.”

“Don’t you think God knows where we are?”

“I’m shore He does.”

“Then why can’t you trust Him to keep you safe?” Jed whispered insistently. “He’s able to keep you from falling. The parson quotes that verse every Sunday in his benediction.”

Jed knelt and tapped gently on the trap door. “Hello?” he said softly. “Are you there? Are you willing to make a deal?” There was no answer, and Jed turned to Calvin triumphantly. “That’s what I thought. They’ve gone down below to wait where it’s warmer.”

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He knelt at the hole in the floor and began to gently pull the bell rope hand over hand, laying it in a large coil on the belfry floor. After two or three minutes, he had the end of the rope in his hands. "I'm gonna knot it every two feet or so," he told Calvin. "That'll keep us from sliding down too fast."

It took nearly twenty minutes to tie all the knots in the rope, far longer than Jed had anticipated. When the knots were finished, he passed the rope out one arched opening, brought the end back in at the next, then dropped the end back out the first and lowered it hand over hand until he was out of rope. He leaned out and took a look. "We're not too far from the ground," he reported happily to Calvin, who still sat atop the trap door.

Suddenly the trap door heaved upward, and Jed hurriedly stepped on it to add his weight to Calvin's. A curse rang out from the darkness below, then laughter. "Are you ready to come down, yet?" a gruff voice asked. "I'm sure it's getting mighty cold up there."

"You'll never get us," Jed answered defiantly.

"Suit yourself," the voice answered. "We aren't going anywhere." Moments later, the echo of footsteps told Jed that the man had gone back downstairs.

Jed turned to Calvin. "It's ready," he said eagerly. "Trust the Lord. He'll help you get down." Calvin nodded reluctantly.

Jed climbed into the opening facing the woods behind the church and then gripped the rope in both hands. "When it's your turn," he whispered to Calvin, "walk your feet down the side of the wall. That'll be much easier than hanging straight down. And whatever you do, don't look down!"

Grasping the rope above the first knot, Jed groped below the window for a foothold. He slid from the window to brace both feet against the stonework. "Once I'm down I can't come back up," he whispered to Calvin. "Promise me you're gonna do it!"

Calvin gulped and nodded. "I'm gonna do it," he promised.

"Here goes." Hand over hand, Jed worked his way down the rope as he walked down the side of the belfry tower. It turned out to be easier than he expected and in less than a minute he found himself dropping safely into a snowdrift.

Calvin hesitated only for a moment and then swung out on the rope. Moments later he landed beside Jed. "That wasn't that bad," he said as he emerged from the drift. "I'd shore like to see the faces of them men when they finds out that we's not in the belfry!"

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Jed smiled. “We need to get out of here fast,” he whispered. “Let’s get to the street so we can mix our tracks up with everybody else’s, and then we need to find a hiding place.”

“Let’s go to our room,” Calvin suggested. “Dose men don’ know that we’s staying in the inn. Besides, they think we’s still in the tower. We can leave at daybreak.”

Jed thought it over. “I think you’re right,” he told Calvin. “And it would sure beat trying to sleep out in the cold somewhere.”

The man at the stage coach office laughed. “There’s been a blizzard, lad,” he said. “Where have you been? The stage won’t be running for several days.”

“But we have to get there,” Jed protested. “What can we do?”

“Wait till the snow melts off a bit,” the man told him. “We’ll be up and running in a few days. The snow won’t last forever.”

“But we can’t wait!” Jed objected. “We have to get there as soon as possible. It’s important.”

“I’m sure it is, lad,” the man replied with a chuckle. “But the stage doesn’t run with this much snow on the ground.”

“Then what can we do?”

“Walk,” the man replied. “Fly! Swim! I don’t care. But I’m telling you that the stage isn’t running today. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m gonna tidy the place a bit and then head home to a warm fire. Good day.” As he spoke, he dropped the window and turned away.

Chapter 14 – DR. LOCKHART

Calvin and Jed left the stagecoach office in low spirits. Both knew that they could not afford a delay of several days. “There’s only one thing to do,” Jed told Calvin. “Walk it.”

Keeping a sharp watch for the three men from the night before, they headed to the mercantile to stock up on food supplies and then set out down the road. “We’ll need to find shelter well before dark,” Calvin said. “We don’t want to take a chance on being caught out in the cold again.”

Jed began to push his way through a deep snowdrift nearly as high as his head. “It’s gonna be a long hundred miles,” he said despondently. “I don’t know how we’re gonna make it.”

Calvin held the sack of supplies over his head to make it easier to pass through the trail that Jed was creating. A frown crossed his usually cheerful face. “I jus’ wonder how Violet is

doin’,” he mused. “She’s all alone, and she don’t even know that we’s comin’.”

A short while later Calvin suddenly stopped and held up a gloved hand. “Listen! Hear that?”

Jed turned around to face him. “Hear what?”

“I don’t hear it now, but I was shore I heard bells.”

“Bells?” Jed snorted. “Out here?”

Calvin shrugged. “I jus’ thought I heard ‘em, that’s all.”

Moments later he paused again. “Listen, Massa Jed. I hears ‘em again! It’s the bells.”

Jed turned. “I don’t hear anything, Calvin. Maybe you’re just getting tired already. We’ll stop for a rest as soon as we find a good place.”

Calvin held up one hand. “Listen! Now tell me you don’t hear that!”

Jed listened, and to his amazement, suddenly heard the sound, too. The musical tinkle of small bells came ringing across the snow, bright and cheerful in the frigid air. Jed scanned the horizon in all directions.

Calvin pointed. “Look!”

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Nearly half a mile back, a bright red and blue object came into view as it topped a gentle rise in the road. Jed stared. “What in the world?”

Moments later he recognized the approaching contraption. “It’s a sleigh,” he told Calvin. “A bright red sleigh, pulled by a blue horse.”

Calvin frowned. “What?”

Jed laughed. “Well, actually, I think it’s a horse wearing a blue blanket. Looks like he’s traveling the same direction we are.”

Three minutes later the bells ceased their jingling as the sleigh driver reined the horse to a stop. “Whoa, Mindy, Whoa!”

The passenger gave Calvin and Jed a friendly wave of the hand. “Good morning, gents. We didn’t expect to have company out here.” He was a small, thin man, with a ruddy face and a huge black mustache. His brown eyes seemed too small for his face, but they were quick and lively, and sparkled with warmth and friendliness. Well-tailored clothes and a silk top hat revealed that he was a man of means.

Jed approached the sleigh. “We’re trying to get to Louisville,” he told the men. “Would you mind if we rode for a while? It looks like you have plenty of room in the sleigh.”

“Certainly!” the cheerful passenger replied with such enthusiasm that Jed immediately felt welcome. “We’ll be glad to have you. But I must warn you— there’s a bit of work ahead. We’ll have to help Mindy out by shoveling a way through the deeper drifts.”

As Jed and Calvin gratefully climbed aboard, the man extended his hand to Jed, and then, to Jed’s surprise, to Calvin as well. “I’m Dr. Richard Lockhart,” he told them as he shook their hands. “And this is Theodore.”

With a tinkle of bells, the sleigh started forward. “I’ve been visiting relatives in Bedford and intended to take the stage home today. I’m afraid that nasty little blizzard changed my plans somewhat. Fortunately, I was able to borrow this little beauty of a sleigh. I tell you, this little Mindy has the heart of a champion! Excellent horse!”

He turned toward them and gestured toward the floor of the sleigh. “You’ll find a lap robe down there somewhere. Feel free to use it. I’ve never seen such weather.”

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Jed unfolded the thick buffalo hide lap robe and handed one end to Calvin, then began to tuck it around himself. “So why didn’t you stay on in Bedford?” he asked. “At least until you could have taken the stage?”

Dr. Lockhart shook his head. “I couldn’t,” he replied. “Mrs. Wimbley needs me.” He paused to remove the top hat and exchange it for a warmer one made of fur. “She’s ninety-five years old,” he explained, “but she thinks she’s twenty-five! Her heart’s giving out on her, but she won’t slow down for a minute. Always has to be doing something to help somebody. She does chores for folks that are twenty years younger than she is. You’ve never seen such a woman.”

His cheerful face suddenly took on a sad look. “I check in on her twice a week now. I’m not sure how much more time she’s got, and I’d hate to be away if something happens to her.”

He paused long enough to look them over. “So where are you gentlemen from?”

“St. Louis,” Jed answered.

“St. Louis!” Dr. Lockhart exclaimed. “I’ve got friends there. But I have to admit I haven’t been there for three or four years. Did you grow up there?”

Jed shook his head. “I just moved there a few months ago. But it’s home now.”

The doctor looked at Calvin. “How about you?”

“I’m been there a few years, suh, but I don’ recollect jus’ how long.”

“Either of you ever hear of my good friend, Jake Cartwright? One of the finest men in St. Louis, and the best Christian I ever met.”

Jed was astonished. “That’s my Pa!” he said excitedly.

“You’re Jake Cartwright’s boy?” It was the doctor’s turn to be surprised. “Then you must be Nathan.”

Jed shook his head. “Nathan’s my brother.”

Dr. Lockhart’s face showed his bewilderment. “Jake and Deborah Cartwright only have one son.”

Jed smiled. “They adopted me. Just last fall.”

The doctor nodded. “So that explains it. That sounds just like the Jake and Deborah I know.” He looked from Jed to Calvin. “Do you gentlemen know the Lord?”

Jed nodded happily. “I got saved just a few months ago, right after I came to live with Ma and Pa.”

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“And I got saved jus’ yesterday,” Calvin exclaimed proudly. “Jed told me that Jesus saves black folk, and I asked Him to save me.”

The doctor seemed pleased. “It’s good to know the Lord, isn’t it? I’ve been saved since I was a lad of ten. I don’t know what I’d do without Jesus as my Savior.”

He suddenly looked perplexed. “So you’re heading for Louisville, are you? What’s the situation? Why are you out in such dreadful weather?”

“We’re trying to rescue Calvin’s wife, Violet,” Jed answered. “Pa bought her from Mr. Bentley cause he was abusing her and Calvin, but then Mr. Bentley sold her again to another owner. She’s at a place called Briarwood Manor. It’s right outside of Louisville.”

“Lucas Tanner’s plantation,” the doctor said.

Jed looked up in surprise. “You know the place?”

Dr. Lockhart nodded. “I’m from Louisville; that’s where I’m heading now. And I also know Lucas Tanner. He won’t treat— what’s her name, Violet?— any better than that Bentley fellow did. If anything, it’ll be worse for her now.” He looked at Calvin. “So do you also belong to this Mr. Bentley?”

“Oh no, suh,” Calvin said quickly. “I’m a free man! Massa Cartwright bought me from Massa Bentley and gave me my manumission papers.”

Together, Jed and Calvin told Dr. Lockhart the whole story. “I see,” he said when they finished. “So this Bentley fellow sold Violet to your Pa, but didn’t give him a receipt. Is that it?” Jed nodded. “And then he sold her to Tanner, and you’re going to attempt to get her back.”

Jed and Calvin both nodded.

“What’s your plan of action?” the doctor asked quietly. “How do you intend to get her back?”

“We don’t really know yet,” Jed answered soberly. “We’re just trying to find her first. Calvin was afraid her new owner would marry her to some other slave.”

Dr. Lockhart nodded. “That’s a very real possibility.” He suddenly frowned. “So where’s your Pa?” he asked Jed. “Why isn’t he along?”

“He was in Manchester when we found out that Mr. Bentley had sold Violet again,” Jed replied, “and there wasn’t time to get him. We thought we could catch Mr. Tanner’s coach the very first night.”

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“So does your Pa know you’re on this trip?”

Jed shook his head.

“How long have you been gone?”

Jed thought for a moment. “Four days.”

“Then don’t you think he and your Ma are worried sick by now?” the doctor asked gently. “Have you even sent a telegram?”

Jed shook his head again. “I didn’t even know we could,” he said. “I thought telegrams were just for important people.”

“Anyone can send a telegram,” Dr. Lockhart replied, “as long as you have the money to pay for it.”

He pulled a gold watch from his pocket and glanced at it. “There’s a telegraph office in Louisville,” he told Jed. “It’s going to take us three days to reach Louisville, but the first thing we’re gonna do is send your Ma and Pa a wire and let them know that you’re all right. As for getting Violet back from Tanner— well, that’s another story. I’ll have to think on that for a while.”

The sleigh had come to some deep drifts, and Mindy was struggling to push her way through. Theodore reined her to a stop. “Whoa, Mindy. Take it easy, girl! We’ll give you a hand.”

Dr. Lockhart stepped from the sleigh, fought his way through the snow toward the rear, and then picked up two wooden snow shovels. “Here,” he said, handing one to Theodore, “let’s take the first crack at it, shall we? Jed and Calvin can spell us when we get winded.”

In spite of the ease of riding in the sleigh, the trip was long and hard that day. Time after time the sleigh came upon deep drifts across the road and the occupants had to climb out and use the snow shovels to break trail for Mindy.

The sun was low on the western horizon as the sleigh approached a little settlement on the banks of a shallow creek. “We’ve done less than twenty-five miles today,” Dr. Lockhart remarked as they crossed the ice and entered the tiny town. “But as you noticed, the snow has not been nearly as deep the last few miles. Apparently, the blizzard hit the region around Bedford the hardest. We’ll make much better time tomorrow.”

They found a room in a little boarding house run by an elderly couple. Calvin and Theodore took Mindy to the barn to care for her while Jed helped the doctor carry his bags up to the

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rooms. As he followed the doctor and their hostess through the front door, he had to step around a large, gray cat curled contentedly on the rug. Three more cats lounged contentedly by the fire in the front room, and as they started up the stairs, they came upon two more.

“Madam,” said Dr. Lockhart, “you certainly have a lot of cats.”

“Oh, yes,” chirped Mrs. Abbot happily, “right now there are twelve. Amos and I certainly enjoy our cats.”

Minutes later the four travelers gratefully sat down to a hot meal of pork, black beans and corn bread. They were joined by the Abbots and two other guests. Mr. Abbot led in prayer and then began to pass the serving dishes around. The food was gone in no time.

“How about writing out a telegram to your Pa?” Dr. Lockhart suggested as Mrs. Abbot served gingerbread for dessert. “We’ll send it as soon as we hit Louisville.”

He acquired a quill and ink from Mrs. Abbot and then produced a sheet of paper from his ledger. “Just write your message out on this,” he suggested. “But keep it brief.”

Jed worked on the telegram in between bites of gingerbread. Finally, he laid down the quill and handed the paper to Dr. Lockhart.

The doctor stared at the message and then gave a chuckle. “How about if I edit this a bit, Jed? This would cost a fortune to send! The telegraph office charges you by the word.”

Jed had written:

Dear Pa,

When Calvin and I got to Mr. Bentley’s, he refused to turn her over to us, even though you had already paid for her. Ezekiel told us that she had been sold to Mr. Tanner and was being taken to his plantation, a place called Briarwood Manor, near Louisville. Calvin and I followed his stage, but couldn’t catch up with it. We’ve had a lot of trouble, and two men stole Midnight and Thunderbolt.

By the time you get this telegram, we’ll be in Louisville, at the Briarwood Manor plantation. Please come. A man we met, Dr. Lockhart, told us that Mr. Tanner will probably be worse than Mr. Bentley, and you know what he’s like.

Please come and help us get Violet back. Calvin and I are all right, and I’m sorry we had to leave without telling you. I didn’t mean to worry you and Ma.

By the way, Calvin got saved!

Your son,
Jed

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Dr. Lockhart thought for a moment and then began to write. A moment later he handed the sheet back to Jed. “Tell me what you think of this.”

Jed read:

Violet sold to Lucas Tanner, Briarwood Manor plantation, Louisville. Jed and Calvin here. Please come at once. Dr. Richard Lockhart

“It says what it needs to say,” the doctor pointed out, “but leaves out the unnecessary words. We’ll send it as soon as we reach Louisville.”

Early the next morning Mindy stepped out smartly, pulling the sleigh at a brisk pace toward Louisville. The sun was bright, driving the bitter chill from the air, and the temperature continued to rise throughout the day. Winter was far from over, but the warmer weather brought a welcome relief from the treacherous cold of the last few days. Late in the afternoon of the third day, the sleigh approached Louisville.

“My place is just a couple miles ahead,” Dr. Lockhart said as the sleigh glided silently past a small farm. “Two-story yellow house in the middle of a hickory grove. A wooden fence with a fresh coat of white wash surrounds the entire property. My name is on the gate. If I can ever be of assistance, you’ll know where to find me.”

The sleigh started down a gentle incline. Dr. Lockhart pointed out a high stone wall bordering the edge of the road. “Briarwood Manor,” he said simply. “This is Lucas Tanner’s place. If he’s the one who bought Violet, this is where she’ll be.”

Theodore drew back on the reins, bringing the sleigh to a stop across from the massive wrought iron gates at the entrance to the property. Jed hopped from the sleigh and hurried over to peer between the black vertical bars.

Tall oaks stood like silent sentries on each side of the snow-covered driveway, their leafless branches meeting overhead to form a canopy over the entrance. Several hundred yards from the gate, a huge white mansion sat partially obscured from view by deep drifts of snow. Behind the mansion, Jed could see one corner of a large, red barn, and beyond, a cluster of slave shacks.

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Briarwood Manor! A chill went down his spine and a cold feeling of apprehension and dread settled over him as he viewed the plantation.

Chapter 15 – BRIARWOOD MANOR

“I’ve been thinking it over,” Dr. Lockhart said as Theodore gave a light flick of the reins and the sleigh started forward.

“Lucas Tanner has legal title to Violet if this Bentley fellow sold her to him. From what you told me, your Pa has no receipt or bill of sale, and therefore no legal proof that he had purchased her. If you attempt to rescue her from Briarwood, you’re actually breaking the law.”

“But she’s my wife!” Calvin protested. “And she belongs to Massa Cartwright, ‘cuz he bought her first!”

The doctor nodded. “I understand, Calvin. I’m not saying that what you’re about to do is wrong. If Jake Cartwright purchased her first, she belongs to him, and Bentley had no right to sell her again. But in a court of law, a judge might not view it that way. As I said, Jake has no legal documents to offer as proof.”

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“But Calvin and I are witnesses,” Jed interrupted. “We were there, too.”

Dr. Lockhart nodded. “I know, son. But Calvin would not be allowed to testify in court, being a Negro, and you are still a minor, so your testimony would carry very little weight. Basically, it would just be your Pa’s word against Mr. Bentley’s. And without any receipt or bill of sale, I’m afraid the decision would go in favor of Mr. Bentley.”

He motioned to Theodore, who drew the sleigh to a stop at the side of the road. “Here’s what I’m trying to say. I believe you’re doing the right thing, and I wish you well. But if you are caught, you can be charged with trespassing and stealing another man’s property. I have a vital medical practice in this city and cannot afford to jeopardize it by involving myself in your attempt.”

“So what you’re saying,” Jed replied, “is that we’re on our own.”

The doctor nodded. “I’m afraid so. You’re welcome to stay at my place tonight, but after that I’m afraid it could be considered assisting in a criminal activity.”

“We can’t stay tonight,” Calvin declared, glancing at Jed for support. “We have to get to Violet tonight.”

Dr. Lockhart smiled. “I understand, and I hope you’re successful. May God go with you. I’ll get the telegram off to Jake before I go home.”

He turned to Theodore. “Give them the lap robes. They may come in useful.”

Jed waved as the sleigh disappeared down the road and then turned to Calvin. “Well, here we are. Let’s slip into the woods so we’re out of sight, and then have a time of prayer. To be honest with you, I’m afraid.”

The setting sun dropped out of sight behind a hill and darkness was settling over the plantation as they hurried into the woods. They knelt together in the snow. “Father, we ask in Jesus’ name that you would guide us,” Jed prayed. “Lead us to Violet, and help us to know what to do to get her out. We’re totally helpless, and we need your guidance.”

“Massa Jesus,” Calvin prayed, “please watch over my Violet. Help us find her, and help us to get her free. That’s all we’s askin’, Jesus.”

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Jed and Calvin hiked along the edge of the wall in the gathering twilight. “How do we get inside?” Calvin asked. “That wall must be eight feet tall.”

“There.” Jed pointed to a tree growing close to the wall with its spreading branches hanging down into the Tanner plantation. “We can climb that tree and drop down into the property. Let’s just hope we can find a similar one to get us out.”

Once inside the plantation, they crouched in a thicket and looked the property over. The yard was bathed in silver moonlight that made the snowdrifts glitter and sparkle. The windows of the mansion glowed golden yellow against the silver-blue backdrop of the snow, and the plumes of smoke from chimneys appeared as silver sculptures in a star-studded black velvet sky. But the plantation was quiet.

“How do we find her?” Calvin whispered. “She could be anywhere. And we can’t jus’ walk up to somebody and say, ‘Pardon me, but have you seen my wife?’”

“I don’t really know,” Jed answered. “Let’s get closer.”

Keeping a low profile, Jed and Calvin crept through the snow until they reached the side of the mansion and then found cover under a nearby wagon. Jed silently scanned the buildings

and grounds for several minutes as Calvin crouched beside him. “I really don’t know where to start hunting,” Jed whispered, rising up for a better look. “They could have her anywhere.”

A beam of yellow light splashed across the snow as the door to the mansion opened, and Calvin grabbed the back of Jed’s coat. “Get down!” he hissed. “Someone’s comin’!”

Bundled against the cold, a figure in a great coat and beaver skin hat crunched his way through the snow directly toward their hiding place. As Calvin and Jed huddled down, the man passed within a few feet of the wagon and disappeared inside the barn.

“Thanks for warning me,” Jed whispered. “I was so intent on looking for Violet that I didn’t even hear him.”

Calvin suddenly raised his head up to get a better view. “Look!”

Jed turned to see a young black woman in ragged clothing slip furtively from one of the slave shacks, glance cautiously around, then shuffle her way through the snow toward one of the out buildings. She crouched low as she hurried across the yard, pausing every few seconds to scan the area to make sure that she was not being observed.

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“She’s carrying somethin’ under her coat,” Calvin whispered. “Look how she holds her elbow against her side.”

As they watched, the woman disappeared around the side of a small building and then reappeared again seconds later. Jed was surprised to notice that she used a pine bough to brush out her tracks in the snow. She glanced about continuously as she made her way back to the slave quarters. “Whatever she had under her coat is done gone,” Calvin whispered. “She ain’t holdin’ her arm against her side now.”

The secretive figure slipped into the slave shack, closing the door quietly behind her. Jed turned to Calvin. “What do you think she was up to?” he asked. “It was almost like—”

“She was taking sumthin’ to somebody.” Calvin interrupted. “And she didn’t want to be seen.”

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Jed asked.

Calvin grinned. “Violet! Maybe she was takin’ food to Violet!”

Jed slipped out from under the wagon, glancing cautiously about to make sure the coast was clear. “It could be,” he replied. “Let’s check it out. But don’t get your hopes up too high.”

Hearts pounding with fear and excitement, Jed and Calvin crept silently through the snow, dropping into the drifts for concealment at every little sound. Finally, they safely reached the shadows of the little building, which turned out to be a smokehouse. Calvin held up one finger. “Listen,” he said in a barely audible whisper.

Jed listened intently. The sound of someone weeping came from within the darkness of the little building.

Calvin rose up on one knee. Cupping his hands to his lips, he placed his mouth close to a crack between the planks in the wall. “Violet!” he called softly. “Violet!”

The crying stopped, and a trembling voice called out, “Who is that? Who’s there?”

“Violet, is that you? It’s Calvin!”

“Who?”

“Calvin! It’s me, sweetheart!”

The voice from within the smokehouse was timid, yet hard and edged with a note of determination. “Leave me alone! I don’t want nuthin’ to do with you!”

Jed could see Calvin’s face in the dim light. The black man’s mouth fell open at Violet’s reply, and his face registered

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his confusion and hurt. His shoulders sagged, and he seemed to wilt at her words. Jed hurt inside for him.

“Violet, it’s me! Calvin!”

“Go away! I want nuthin’ to do with you! Not now, not tomorra, and not ever! So jus’ leave me alone!”

“Violet, I love you!” Calvin pleaded with a tear glistening on his cheek. “Massa Jed and I went to Massa Bentley’s to get you, but he wouldn’t let us have you. Then we found out from Ezekiel that you’d been sold! It took us a while, but we’s finally found you, and we’s come to take you home.”

There was a profound silence for the space of several seconds, and then from within the smokehouse, the soft tinkle of a chain being moved. Violet’s voice came from just inside the wall—low, hesitant, and fearful. “Calvin? Calvin, is that really you?”

“It’s me, sweetheart,” Calvin said softly. “And Massa Jed’s right here, too.”

Sobs choked off Violet’s next words. Calvin and Jed crouched beside the wall, waiting, as Violet tried to regain her composure. “Oh, Calvin,” she wept softly, “I thought I’d never see you again! I’ve been so afraid!”

“I’m here now,” he assured her. “Everything’s gonna be all right.”

Jed blinked back the tears as the young couple exchanged words of love and tenderness. Violet’s slender fingers slipped through the cracks between the planks, and Calvin stroked them tenderly. “Everything’s gonna be all right now, love,” he assured her.

“But it isn’t,” she insisted. “They’s plannin’ the weddin’ for tomorra.”

“Weddin’?” Calvin echoed. He didn’t seem to understand at first, but the meaning of Violet’s words hit Jed like a blow to the stomach.

“They’s tryin’ to make me marry one of the other slaves,” Violet sobbed. “A man named Thomas.”

“They can’t do that!” Calvin exploded. “You’s already married. You belongs to me!”

Jed grabbed his arm. “Keep your voice down, Calvin,” he whispered urgently. “They’ll hear you.”

“I know that,” Violet replied to Calvin. “And I’ve been tellin’ them and tellin’ them. But Massa Tanner say no mo’ waitin’. Tomorra he’s gonna make me marry Thomas.”

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“Well, we’s gonna get you out, Sweetheart,” Calvin vowed. “They ain’t gonna be no weddin’.”

“I love you, Calvin,” Violet said softly.

“And I love you, my little Violet.”

“How did you find me?” Violet whispered. “When you first came up, I thought you was Thomas.”

“We saw a slave slip over here and we followed her,” Jed replied. “We thought maybe she was bringing you food.”

“They been starvin’ me,” came the reply, “to try to make me marry this Thomas man. But Elsie been slippin’ me food on the sly.”

Calvin slipped around to the door of the building. In seconds he was back. “They’s a big lock on the door,” he said.

“And a shackle on my ankle,” came Violet’s reply. “I’m chained to the pillar what supports the roof. Oh Calvin, what are we goin’ to do?”

“We need a file to cut the chain,” Jed decided. “And the only place to get one is from Doc Lockhart, if he’ll help. I’ll go to his place.”

He rose to a half-crouch. “You stay with Violet,” he whispered to Calvin. “I’ll go for the file.” He handed the blanket

and lap robes to his friend. “Use these. I imagine I’ll be gone over an hour. See if you can slip one through the crack to Violet.”

Calvin took the blankets and laid a hand on Jed’s arm. “Be careful, Massa Jed.”

Jed nodded. “I will.”

Crouching low, Jed turned and retreated to the shelter of a nearby thicket. He knelt in its shadow and removed his gloves to retie his boot. At that moment, a light suddenly appeared at the corner of the smokehouse as two men stepped into view. The yellow light from the lantern reflected off the cold steel of a gun barrel.

“What have we here?” said a gruff voice. “You were right Mr. Tanner— you did hear voices. Looks like our little Miss Violet has company.”

A sharp metallic click echoed in the stillness of the night as the man cocked a revolver. “On your feet, darkie! This little visit is over!”

Twelve feet away in the shadows of the thicket, Jed’s heart pounded frantically as he slowly flattened himself in the snow.

Chapter 16 – ESCAPE ATTEMPT

Footsteps crunched in the snow as the men led Calvin away. Jed lay in the thicket trying to quiet his heavy breathing. He waited a few seconds and then rose up cautiously to peer over the edge of the crusted snow. The men were leading Calvin toward the Tanner mansion.

When the door closed behind them, Jed silently scanned the moonlit grounds for several minutes before slipping close to the smokehouse wall. Violet was weeping.

He glanced cautiously around and then leaned close to the wall. “Violet,” he whispered, cupping his hands to his mouth. “Violet! It’s me, Jed. It’s going to be all right! I’ll go for help.”

“They’s nuthin’ you can do,” Violet sobbed. “They’s nobody what can get Calvin and me free. And they’s goin’ to make me marry Thomas tomorra!”

“No they’re not!” Jed whispered fiercely. He glanced toward the mansion, and then turned back to the smokehouse wall. “I’ll go for help. And I’ll be praying every step of the way.”

He looked toward the mansion again and quickly scanned the yard. “Don’t give up hope,” he whispered. “We’ll get you out of this.”

Crouching low, Jed scooted to the safety of the thicket, checked the yard, and then dashed for the wall surrounding Briarwood Manor. He scrambled up into the icy branches of a pine, stepped atop the wall and dropped lightly to the snow on the other side.

Half an hour later Jed was standing at the darkened door of the Lockhart residence. As he raised his hand to knock he heard a low growl behind him. He spun around. A large collie crept toward him, teeth bared, with a warning growl still rumbling from its throat. Jed backed closer to the door. “I wish Wolf was here to take care of you,” he muttered.

Slowly moving his hand behind his back, he knocked on the door. The dog crept closer. “Hey, dog, leave me alone,” he said

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in a soft voice, trying not to let his fear show. “Good dog, nice dog. Now leave me alone.”

He knocked again, louder this time. The collie paused on the top step of the porch, started forward, and then hesitated again. It was as if he was having a hard time making up his mind whether or not he should bite.

Jed knocked again, and to his relief, the door suddenly swung open. Light from a lantern spilled across the porch.

“Down, girl!” came the authoritative voice of Dr. Lockhart.

“Down!” The collie slunk from the porch.

Jed turned to face the door. “Jed!” the doctor exclaimed.

“What are you doing here?”

“We found Violet,” Jed blurted, “and they have her chained. We need a file to cut the chain.”

The doctor raised his eyebrows. “You found her already? That was mighty fast.”

“They’re going to force her to marry another slave tomorrow,” Jed explained. “So we have to free her tonight. Do you have a file that we can borrow?”

Dr. Lockhart summoned a servant to the door. “Get this young man a file from the workshop,” he instructed. “It is a gift

and is not to be returned. I don’t want it back on my property. Understand?”

Jed nodded. “Thank you, sir.”

“I sent the telegram to your Pa. Don’t worry about the cost; I paid for it.”

“Thank you, sir. Calvin and I appreciate your help.”

Within minutes, Jed had the file in hand and was racing back to the Tanner plantation. Upon reaching the estate he quickly scaled the wall, dropped down into the yard, and then sat quietly for two or three minutes. There was no sign of life, so he crept quietly through the snow to the side of the smokehouse.

“I’m back,” he whispered through the wall. “I have a file to cut you free. Then we’ll find Calvin.”

“All right, Massa Jed,” came the quiet reply.

Using the file as a crow bar, Jed pried the two bottom planks from the wall. He passed the lap robes and blanket through the opening and then dropped to his stomach and wriggled through. The smokehouse was dark.

He could make out the dim form of Violet crouched against the wall and he went over to her. Jed was surprised to find a slender girl, apparently in her late teens. She grabbed him. “Oh,

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Massa Jed, I'm glad you's come. But if they catch you in here, you's in big trouble!"

Jed pulled free and handed her the blankets. "They're not going to catch me," he declared. "Here, wrap yourself in these."

He knelt beside her and felt around in the darkness until his fingers found the iron shackle on her ankle. An eight-foot logging chain of medium weight led from the shackle to the wooden pillar in the center of the smokehouse. Jed studied the situation for several minutes and then decided on a plan of action.

"I'm gonna try to cut the chain with the file," he whispered to Violet. "I'll cut the link closest to your shackle. But I'm afraid it's gonna make some noise." He picked up one of the blankets. "Drape these over your leg to muffle the noise. Try to get as many thicknesses as you can. I'll get to work."

Jed placed the edge of the file carefully against the chain and drew it slowly toward himself. The resulting metallic screech made him jump. "I'll wait until you have the blankets ready," he whispered.

When the blanket and lap robes were arranged to his satisfaction, he ducked underneath them and set to work with the

file. Twenty minutes later he had succeeded in cutting through one side of the iron link. "The other side will go faster," he assured Violet as he came up for a breath of air. "Once I have it cut part way, I can twist it open. How's the noise?"

"Not too bad," she whispered. "I can hear it, but the blankets shush up most of the sound."

Ten minutes later Jed gently laid the chain on the dirt floor. "You're free!" he whispered. "Let's get out of here and find Calvin."

He pushed the two lap robes through the opening in the bottom of the wall, wriggled through himself, and then waited for Violet. She crawled through the opening and stood to her feet, then threw her arms around him in a hug. "Thank you, Massa Jed, for what you and your Pa have done for Calvin and me," she whispered. "We didn't know that white folks could be so kind."

Jed picked up the lap robes. "Follow me," he whispered. "We have to find Calvin."

He turned toward the mansion and his breath caught in his throat. Fear stabbed at his heart. Silhouetted against the white of

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the snow was the dark figure of a man standing less than twenty feet away!

“Run!” he whispered to Violet. But she stood rooted to the spot, her eyes wide with fear.

Jed grabbed her. “Run!” he whispered fiercely. “I’ll try to slow him down so you can make it to the wall. Run!”

He turned to find that the man was less than ten feet away. “Massa Jed,” came an urgent whisper. “It’s me! Calvin!”

Jed stared in disbelief. He let out his breath in a long sigh. “Calvin! You scared us out of our wits. How did you get away?”

“They took me to a room upstairs in the mansion,” Calvin whispered, “and chains me to the leg of a bed. After they leave I jus’ lifts the bed and takes off the chain. Then I opens a winder and climbs down the trellis. And here I is!” As he moved his right hand, Jed heard the rattle of a chain and realized that the other end was attached to Calvin’s ankle.

Jed grinned as Violet threw her arms around her husband. “No time for hugging now,” he whispered. “We have to get outta here!”

Just as they reached the wall, two lanterns bobbed around the corner of the mansion and headed across the yard. The three

fugitives froze in terrified silence. When the lanterns disappeared behind the smokehouse, Jed turned to Calvin and Violet. “Hurry!” he urged. “They’ll be coming our way in just a few seconds!”

Jed scrambled up into the tree and crouched atop the wall. Grabbing hold of a sturdy branch, he reached down to help Violet. Calvin lifted her into the tree and watched anxiously as she climbed toward Jed. Moments later she sat astraddle the top of the wall, staring down at the snowy ground below.

“Jump,” Jed urged.

“I can’t,” she whimpered.

“You have to! They’re coming!”

“There they are!” an angry voice shouted. “They’re going over the wall!”

Violet jumped, landing face down in the snow. Jed landed beside her. “Hurry, Calvin!”

The branches shook violently as Calvin hoisted himself to the top of the wall. Two shots suddenly rang out, and Calvin tumbled from the wall to land on his back in the snow.

“Massa Jed!” he cried out. “I’m hit!”

Chapter 17 – FLIGHT

Jed stood in the snow, staring in horror at his injured friend. His mind was numb with shock. Calvin had been shot!

A shouted command echoed from the other side of the wall, followed by a commotion of confused voices. “It’s the new slave girl and that other darkie we caught,” a voice called out.

“They’ve escaped!”

“Those black devils won’t get away,” another voice called. “I think I blasted one of ‘em!”

Jed scrambled to Calvin’s side. “Where are you hit?” he asked.

“It hurts,” the man moaned. “Oh, it hurts so bad.”

“Where are you hit?” Jed asked again.

“My left arm,” Calvin answered. “It feels like it’s on fire!”

Jed knelt and lifted Calvin to a sitting position, and the man immediately grabbed his upper left arm with a grimace of pain.

“We have to run for it!” Jed whispered urgently. “They’re right behind us!”

He stepped behind Calvin and helped him to his feet.

“Quick! Into the woods!”

Jed, Calvin and Violet hurried into the forest and dashed between the trees. Jed looked back to see a lantern appear at the top of the wall, to be followed seconds later by an angry face. He ran faster, zigzagging between the trees.

The trio ran until their breath came in ragged gasps and their sides ached. “I has to stop!” Calvin called out. “I’m bleedin’ bad!”

Jed turned back and helped Calvin to a seat on a fallen log. Violet stood beside her husband with her arms around his neck. Her eyes were wide with fright. “We can’t stop long,” Jed panted. “They’ll be right behind us!”

“We can’t get away from them,” Calvin moaned. “All they has to do is follow our tracks. And I’m leavin’ a trail of blood in the snow!”

Jed nodded. “I’m afraid you’re right, unless we can do something to confuse them and throw them off.” He stood up. “Come on, we’d better go.” He retrieved the end of Calvin’s

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chain from the snow and handed it to him. “Hold it as you run,” he suggested. “That’ll keep it from snagging on something.”

At that moment they heard voices and spun around. Several lanterns bobbed toward them. “Follow me!” Jed ordered, and then, crouching low, began to veer to the left in a giant arc.

Moments later the trio came to a wide track of trampled snow, having doubled back on their own path. Jed paused, listening intently. Their pursuers were to the left, so he turned right, following the tracks back toward the plantation.

“Massa Jed! We’s going the wrong way!”

“I’m trying to mix our tracks with theirs to confuse them,” Jed replied. “Stay right with me.”

After running thirty or forty yards toward the Tanner property, he turned from the path and led Violet and Calvin in a giant loop that rejoined the path twenty yards further on. Once back on the well-trampled path, he turned away from the plantation wall and hurried in the direction their pursuers had taken.

“Massa Jed!” Calvin called. “What is you doin’?”

“Trust me,” Jed replied. “We can’t outrun them, so we’ll have to outsmart them.”

He crossed and recrossed the main tracks several more times with Calvin and Violet hard on his heels. Finally, he stopped and turned to them. “Stay right behind me and try to step right in my footprints. Calvin, you come right behind me, and Violet, you bring up the rear.”

Three or four lanterns came bobbing through the trees just then and Jed held up one hand. “Stay still,” he whispered softly.

The men with the lanterns paused and studied the tracks for a moment, then turned and headed in the direction of the plantation. Jed let out a sigh of relief. “Let’s go,” he whispered.

They hurried single file through the snowy forest, grateful for the moonlight that glimmered in silvery patches through the dark branches of the trees. Jed turned to be certain that Calvin and Violet were being careful to step in his tracks, and then hurried on. He paused at the edge of a small, frozen creek.

“Perfect! This will help conceal our tracks. The wind has blown most of the snow from the ice.”

He stepped out onto the ice. “Stay in the middle,” he told the others. “If we step in the snow along the edge, we’ll leave tracks.”

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After several minutes on the ice, the trio left the creek and made their way into the woods for a hundred yards, then returned to the creek. "I'm trying to leave as many false trails as we can," Jed explained, "to make it as hard as possible to follow us."

"Massa Jed, I got to stop and rest," Calvin said. "I'm gettin' weak and dizzy."

They sank to the ground in a deep drift behind a fallen log. Calvin leaned back against the log with his eyes closed. Violet knelt beside him and pulled him over to cradle his head against her shoulder. Jed watched Calvin with alarm.

"We need to get you to Doc Lockhart," he said finally, "and let him take care of that arm."

"What if he won't help us?" Calvin questioned, his eyes still closed. "He said we's on our own. And mos' doctors won't work on a black man, even if he is free."

"I think he'll help," Jed replied. "He's our only hope."

Violet suddenly held up one hand. "Listen," she breathed.

The steady crunch, crunch, crunch of heavy boots in the snow paralyzed the trio with fear. Eyes wide, they ducked down lower in their snowy hideaway. A lantern floated into view, then

paused right on the other side of the fallen log! Moments later, another lantern approached from the opposite direction.

"Wagner?" a voice called. "Is that you?"

"Right here," came the reply. "Find anything?"

"Not a thing," answered the first voice. "The tracks seem to go round in circles, then just disappear into thin air! We finally decided just to fan out and walk a search pattern through the woods."

"Tanner wants 'em stopped at any cost," Wagner declared. "He told us to shoot to kill."

"What about the girl?"

"I dunno," Wagner replied. "I guess we shoot her, too."

Less than eight feet away, Calvin's eyes were wide with fright. Violet was trembling. *Help us, Lord*, Jed prayed silently.

"Why don't you head more to the north?" Wagner said. "I'll work straight out to the road. They gotta be in here somewhere."

Jed waited until the lanterns bobbed through the woods in two different directions and then stood up slowly. "We'd better get going," he said, helping Calvin to his feet. "These woods will be swarming with Tanner's men. And you heard what they said. They're planning to shoot to kill."

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Calvin retrieved the end of the chain from the snow with his good hand, passed it across to his left, and then tried to support the wounded arm with his right hand. "I'm ready, Massa Jed."

Moments later the three fugitives came to another creek, considerably larger than the first. Jed was elated. "I think this is the one that crosses the road just below Doc Lockhart's place," he told his two companions. "We can follow it almost all the way, and it won't show our tracks."

He slid down the steep bank and stepped out on the ice. "It's solid," he told the others. "This ice is thick enough to support a horse."

"That's what you said last time," Calvin observed dryly, "and it was the coldest swim I ever took in all my born days."

"Careful, Calvin," Violet called softly as her husband walked gingerly to the edge of the bank. "You's gonna hurt yo'self."

Calvin braced himself and then stepped over the edge and slid down the icy slope. As he reached the creek, his feet shot from beneath him and he landed heavily on his wounded arm. "Aargh!" An exclamation of pain escaped his lips.

Violet sat down and slid down the slope. Together she and Jed helped Calvin to his feet. "You gonna be all right, Sweetheart?" she asked with concern written across her face.

Calvin gritted his teeth. "I'm gonna make it," he replied, "but that tumble didn't help this arm none."

Jed retrieved the chain and handed him the end. "I'm glad you weren't seriously hurt. We'd better get moving."

He looked up in dismay to see the yellow glow of a lantern above the creek bank. The circle of light illuminated a grinning face and the cold steel of a rifle barrel. "Hands in the air, darkies!" a mocking voice called. "You too, white boy!"

The man with the gun made his way carefully down the bank to stand upon the ice, keeping the rifle trained on the three terrified fugitives. "Ain't Mr. Tanner gonna be happy to see you three," he said with a laugh. "And there's a five-dollar reward in it for me!"

Chapter 18 – THE BARGAIN

Jed's heart sank as the man with the rifle advanced across the ice toward them. "Ain't I the lucky one?" he said with a chuckle. "Twenty men searching the woods fer ya, and ya walk right into my hands!"

He gestured toward Calvin with the rifle. "Of course, I never would have found ya if I hadn't heard ya yell," he said. "I thank ya."

"Mister, please," Jed begged. "These two don't belong to Mr. Tanner! My Pa bought them, but the former owner sold Violet to Tanner, even though she was no longer his."

The man shrugged nonchalantly. "What's that to me?"

"They're husband and wife," Jed pleaded. "It isn't right to separate them!"

The man laughed. "Now ain't that a shame?" he mocked. "What's it to you anyway, boy? They're just a couple of black devils."

"They're friends of mine!" Jed said hotly. "And they belong together."

"Sorry, lad, but I got a job to do," the man said. "Mr. Tanner's offering five dollars to the man who brings 'em in or kills 'em." He gestured toward the bank with the muzzle of his rifle. "Now get movin'. And remember, it don't make no never mind whether I bring you in dead or alive."

"Wait," Jed said. "What if you could get ten dollars for them?"

A look of interest crossed the man's face. "From who?"

"From me," Jed replied. "I'll pay you ten dollars to let us go free."

"Where you gonna get ten dollars?" the man sneered.

"Would you do it for ten?" Jed asked eagerly.

"Ten dollars is ten dollars," the man answered, "and Tanner's only payin' five."

"Would you do it, then?"

The man shrugged. "If you had it."

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Jed dug into his pocket, moving slowly because the rifle was still pointed in his direction. “Here,” he said, offering the last gold piece, “ten dollars. But not a word to Tanner.”

The man stared in disbelief at the money and then snatched it from Jed’s hand. “You got a deal, boy!” He lowered the rifle. “Git out of here. And I ain’t never seen ya.”

Jed let out his breath. “Thanks, mister. Come on, Calvin, Violet.”

Jed walked back up the creek, intentionally heading away from the road. To his relief, Calvin and his wife followed along without comment. Jed glanced casually over his shoulder in time to see the man pick up his lantern and scramble up the creek bank.

“Why is we headin’ this way, Massa Jed?” Calvin whispered a moment later. “I thought Doc Lockhart’s place was the other direction.”

“I wanted him to see us heading in this direction,” Jed replied, “just in case he changes his mind and decides to come after us, or decides to tell Tanner.” He stepped to the edge of the ice, deliberately leaving a couple of footprints in the snow along the bank.

A moment later he turned to face them. “Quick,” he said, “back down the creek! We have to hurry, just in case our friend decides to come back.”

Twenty minutes later the trio stood safely on the porch of Dr. Lockhart’s house.

The doctor stood in the doorway, gazing sleepily at the fugitives. “Jed Cartwright,” he said sternly, “how’s a man to get any sleep if you come knocking on his door every other hour of the night? And didn’t I tell you that I’m not getting involved in this?”

Jed swallowed hard, knowing very well that Dr. Lockhart was their only hope. “But we need you,” he insisted. “Calvin’s been shot, and Tanner’s men could catch up with us at any minute! Please, Doc, you’ve gotta help us. You’ve just got to!”

Dr. Lockhart grinned suddenly. “Of course I’ll help, son. Forgive me for teasing you at a time like this.” He swung the door wide. “Come on in and we’ll see what we can do.”

He led the frightened trio into the kitchen and helped Calvin to a seat. “We’ll just take a look at that arm,” he said, peeling off

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the black man's jacket. He turned to a servant who stood blinking in the doorway. "Get some tools, Henry, and get Hanson to help you. We need to get these shackles off these folks."

Calvin gritted his teeth as Dr. Lockhart gently probed the bullet wound. "This is better than I had hoped at first," he reported, much to Violet's relief. "You have an exit wound as well as an entrance wound, so the bullet's not still in you. That's good. And there's more good news as well. The shot doesn't seem to have hit any bones or arteries, so there's no major damage. You won't be able to use this arm for a good while, but I think if we bandage you up properly you'll heal up just fine."

Violet's eyes brimmed with tears. "Thank you, Doctor," she whispered.

Dr. Lockhart spent the next twenty minutes cleaning and bandaging the wound. While he worked on Calvin, Henry and Hanson struggled to cut the shackle from Violet's ankle. When they were through, they cut the chain from Calvin.

"Theodore is planning to take the sleigh back to Bedford tomorrow," Dr. Lockhart said. "That might be your ticket out of here."

He stepped over to the wash basin and held out his hands as Henry picked up the pitcher and began to pour water over them. "We'll load the sleigh with blankets and clothing," he decided. "That will give you a hiding place in case Tanner's men should stop you on the road. I'll have Theodore leave at first light. But right now we need to get some pallets down and let you get some sleep."

"Jed, wake up."

Jed stirred and opened his eyes to find Dr. Lockhart bending over him. "It's almost light, son," the doctor said. "Calvin and his little wife are already in the kitchen having a bit of breakfast, and you'd better hurry and join them. I checked Calvin's wound, and things look fine."

He handed Jed five silver dollars and two five-dollar gold pieces. "Here's some money for the trip. You'll need it for the inns. Theodore will take you as far as Bedford, and you can take the stage from there. I think the snow's melting off fast enough that the stage should be running." He turned toward the dining room. "Let's go eat, shall we?"

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Mindy snorted and pawed the snow nervously, anxious to get started on the trip. The floor of the sleigh was covered with piles of clothing and blankets. Jed, Violet, and Calvin lay hidden among the piles.

“Have them stay hidden the first ten miles or so,” Dr. Lockhart instructed Theodore. “Once you cross Davidson’s Creek, I believe most of the danger will past. I don’t think they’ll be searching beyond that distance. If Tanner’s men should stop you, simply tell them that you are taking a load of blankets and clothing for the children of Bedford.”

Theodore nodded.

“Trust the Lord, and He’ll take you through safely. If you are stopped and Tanner’s men start asking questions, you may be tempted to lie to protect your passengers. Don’t say any more than you have to, but simply tell the truth, and trust the rest to God. Are you with me?”

Theodore nodded nervously. “Do you think they’s in much danger?”

“I doubt if you’ll even see Tanner or his men, but I want you to be prepared, just in case.” He shook hands with Theodore. “I’ll be praying for your safety.”

He stepped to the side of the sleigh. “Jed, lad, it was good to meet you. Say ‘hello’ to your Ma and Pa for me. Calvin, Violet, remember that I’m praying for your safety. God will go with you.”

Theodore shook the reins and Mindy leaped forward with a tinkle of bells. The sleigh sped into the roadway. “Whoa, girl,” Theodore called, drawing back gently on the reins. “We ain’t in that much of a hurry.”

Five minutes later he called softly over his shoulder, “Two riders ahead! Everyone stay down, and don’ move. This don’ look good.”

Jed’s heart pounded. *Be with us, Lord*, he prayed silently. *Don’t let them find Violet and Calvin*. He heard a shout and then felt the sleigh slowing to a stop.

“Where ya headin’, darkie?” a stern voiced called out. A shadow fell across the pile of clothing and Jed realized that one of the riders had reined to a stop right beside the sleigh. He

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could almost feel the man's eyes upon him as he imagined the rider studying the load in the sleigh.

"Bedford," Theodore answered meekly. "Just returning this sleigh for Doc Lockhart."

"What's in the sleigh?"

"Clothing and blankets for the children of Bedford."

"Anything else?"

Jed caught his breath. Doc Lockhart had specifically instructed Theodore not to lie. But if the man told the truth, Jed and his friends would be discovered! *God help us*, he prayed fervently.

"Anything else?" the man repeated.

"Just clothing and blankets, like I told you," Theodore replied. "And three specimens of *Homo sapiens*."

"Three what?"

"*Homo sapiens*," Theodore answered. "Dr. Lockhart is sending them to Bedford. Would you care to see them?"

"Uh, no," the man replied quickly. "We don't have time. Let's ride, Mark."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Tanner," the man beside the sleigh answered. The sound of retreating hooves told Jed the men were riding

away. He let out his breath in a long sigh of relief. *Thank you, Lord*. The sleigh started forward.

Moments later, Theodore called out, "They're gone now. You can breathe easy."

Jed poked his head out of the pile of clothing. "That was scary!"

Theodore turned to glance at him. "Better stay hidden, Jed, just in case we run into any more of Tanner's men."

"I will," Jed assured him. "But first, I have a question. What did you tell Mr. Tanner that you had in the sleigh? It was a funny word, and you said you were taking three of them to Bedford."

Theodore laughed. "*Homo sapiens*," he repeated. "It's a term Dr. Lockhart uses. It jus' means human beings. I think it's Latin or sumthin'."

Jed laughed. "That was clever," he said. "You told them the truth, but they didn't understand you." He ducked back under the clothing.

Much of the snow had melted by the time they reached Bedford late in the morning of the third day. "You can take the

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stage from heah,” Theodore told them as he dropped them off in front of the depot. “The snow’s melted off enough for them to be runnin’ now.”

Jed shook hands with him. “Thank you, Theodore,” he said gratefully, “for all you’ve done for us. We appreciate you.”

Theodore smiled. “It’s been an interesting trip, I must admit. But you’re welcome.”

The clerk looked up as Jed, Calvin, and Violet entered. “Help you with sumthin’?”

“We’re hoping to catch the stage to St. Louis,” Jed told him. “Are we in time?”

The clerk shook his head. “Stage to St. Louis don’t run till tomorrow.”

Jed sighed. “It’s important that we leave now. How much to hire a private coach?”

The man laughed. “More money than you’d have, son,” he replied. “Ten dollars.”

“Ten dollars!” Jed exclaimed. “Why so much?”

The man seemed annoyed. “Look, I don’t set the fares, boy. I guess you’ll just have to wait till tomorrow.”

“We’ll take it,” Jed said, plunking the two gold pieces on the counter.

The man’s eyes widened in surprise. “It’ll take an hour or two to find a driver and get the coach ready,” he said, scooping the coins from the counter. “But I’ll issue your tickets now.”

An hour after leaving Bedford, the stage rolled through the streets of Elise. Jed leaned out the window. “Driver! How about if we make a lunch stop?”

The driver shrugged. “Fine with me.”

Jed, Calvin and Violet sloshed through the dirty brown slush of leftover snow as they headed for the mercantile. Calvin stopped suddenly and Jed bumped into him. “Calvin, what’s wrong?”

“Look, Massa Jed,” Calvin said, pointing. “Don’ that look like Midnight?”

Jed glanced across the street, and to his astonishment, saw his horse tied to a hitching post. He dashed over with Calvin right on his heels. As he stepped close, the horse whinnied in recognition. “It *is* Midnight,” Jed breathed. “It really is!”

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He stroked Midnight's neck tenderly. "I never expected to see you again, old boy," he said softly. "I thought you were gone for good!"

Jed glanced up and down the street and then quickly untied the reins. "We're going home, Midnight!" he said happily.

A door slammed behind him and a deep voice boomed out, "What are you doin' with that horse, boy?" Jed jumped. He spun around to look up into the hard face of Johnny Yeager.

Chapter 19 – REUNION

Jed Cartwright and Johnny Yeager recognized each other in the same instant. The man leaped forward to seize Jed by the arm. "Gotcha!" he cried triumphantly, gripping Jed so tightly that the boy cringed in pain. "So we meet again."

Calvin drew back his fist but was grabbed from behind by Matthew Mackall. "Don't fight, darkie," Matthew said grimly, "or we'll have to hurt the boy." Calvin dropped his hands with a look of helpless resignation on his face.

"Let's take them behind the blacksmith shop," Johnny told his partner, "while we decide how to get them out of here."

"No!" Jed screamed, struggling against the man's iron grip. "You can't do this!" He twisted around and kicked Johnny as hard as he could in the shin, and the man responded by clouting him in the head with a huge fist. Jed quit struggling.

"Run, Calvin! Run, Violet!" he called. "Run and get help!"

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“Who’s gonna listen to a darkie?” Johnny said, with a laugh. “Calvin, you and Violet stay here, or we hurt the boy. Ain’t nobody gonna help, so there ain’t no use in runnin’ off.”

“Run, Calvin!” Jed yelled again. “It’s you they want! Run for it!” Johnny Yeager clouted Jed again, harder this time, and for an instant Jed went limp in his hands.

Unseen by Jed, the door of a passing stagecoach was suddenly flung open, and a huge, powerfully-built man leaped out. Reaching the boardwalk in three giant strides, he drew back a huge fist and struck Johnny Yeager squarely on the jaw.

Johnny Yeager staggered backwards, releasing his hold on Jed. “Hold it, Mister!” he called, doubling up his fists in a fighting stance. “What’s your quarrel with me?”

But the giant didn’t hesitate. With one more punch he dropped Johnny Yeager cold on the boardwalk. A huge hand shot out to seize a terrified Matthew Mackall and hurl him on top of the prostrate form on the boardwalk. “Make one move,” the big man roared, “and you’ll wish you hadn’t!”

Jed stared in astonishment. “Pa!” he cried. “Where did you come from?”

Pa wrapped his huge arms around Jed. “I would say that we were just passing by, son,” he answered, “but we both know better than that. This was the Lord’s timing.”

“We got Doc Lockhart’s telegram,” he explained, “and were coming to meet you in Louisville. I happened to glance out the coach window just now and saw what was going on. Imagine my surprise when I saw it was you and Calvin!”

A crowd had gathered, and Pa addressed them. “Someone get the constable,” he ordered. “I want these men arrested on assault charges.”

Jed tugged at his sleeve. “These are the men that stole Thunderbolt and Midnight,” he said. “We have Midnight here, but I don’t know what they did with Thunderbolt. And they took Calvin and were going to sell him, but I helped him get free.”

Pa nodded grimly.

Minutes later an older man with a shiny badge made his way through the crowd. “Constable, I want these two arrested,” Pa boomed, “on charges of assaulting a minor. You might also charge them with kidnapping and horse stealing for good measure.”

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The constable hesitated, obviously afraid of Johnny and Matthew.

“I plan to testify, and I’ll have my lawyers check back with you to see that you follow through, sir,” Pa threatened. “If you’re not going to do the job, let someone else wear the badge.”

The lawman snapped a pair of handcuffs on Matthew Mackall. “Then I’ll need your help gettin’ ‘em to the jail,” he declared.

“Glad to help,” Pa responded. He stooped, picked up the unconscious form of Johnny Yeager, and slung him over his shoulder. A murmur of astonishment swept through the crowd.

“Johnny must weigh over two-fifty!” an incredulous voice stated. “This guy picked him up like a twenty-pound sack of corn meal!” Pa grinned and winked at Jed.

The news of Johnny Yeager’s arrest had traveled quickly through the tiny town and a noisy crowd had gathered by the time Pa’s coach rolled out of town. Jed waved proudly from the coach window and then leaned out to be sure that Midnight was still tethered to the back of the rig.

Pa looked across the coach at Calvin and Violet, who sat with their arms around each other. “So this is Violet,” he said. “Calvin, you sure picked a beauty!”

Calvin grinned. “Thank you, Massa Cartwright.” He turned to his wife. “Massa Jake Cartwright is one of the kindest men I’ve ever met. You’ll like him, once you knows him.”

“I hated to send the coach back to Bedford,” Jed lamented. “We wasted ten dollars of Doc’s money.”

Pa laid a huge hand on Jed’s knee. “Don’t worry about it,” he replied. “I’ll pay Doc back, if he’ll take it. The important thing is that you’re all safe and sound. And I’m thankful that you got Midnight back.”

He looked sternly at Jed. “Do you know how hard your Ma has taken all this, with you running off and all? Jed, we had no idea where you were.”

Jed hung his head. “I’m sorry, Pa,” he said. “Calvin and I thought we could catch Mr. Tanner’s coach the first night.”

Pa nodded. “I know you were trying to do the right thing,” he replied, “but next time, how about getting your parents involved instead of just running off on your own?”

Jed nodded sheepishly.

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Silas touched Pa on the arm. “Mr. Cartwright, don’t be so hard on Jed. He and Calvin have been through a lot.”

“I know,” Pa responded, “but I want him to learn to think.”

Jed leaned forward. “One good thing came out of it, Pa,” he said eagerly. “Calvin got saved.”

Pa was thrilled. “Did you, now,” he beamed. “Calvin, that’s great.”

“Massa Jed helped me,” Calvin said happily. “He told me that Jesus died for black folk as well as white.”

Pa smiled. “I’m glad you’re saved now, Calvin. Why don’t you and Jed tell us about your trip?”

“So that’s what happened,” Jed concluded nearly an hour later. “I’m thankful it’s over. Now Violet can come and live with Calvin at our place.”

Pa shook his head. “I wish it were that simple,” he said. “But this whole episode isn’t over yet.”

Jed was puzzled. “What do you mean?”

“Once Mr. Bentley finds out that Violet is back with us, I’m sure he’ll bring legal action to try to get Violet back. He might

even charge you and Calvin with theft. I’m sure we’re facing a court situation.”

“But you bought Violet!” Jed protested. “She belongs to you!”

“We both know that, and Mr. Bentley knows that,” Pa replied. “But Mr. Bentley obviously is not an ethical man, and we have no legal proof that the transaction ever took place. Judge Farley could send Violet back to Briarwood Manor.”

“We won’t let anyone know that she’s with us,” Jed suggested.

“And have her live in exile?” Pa questioned. “Always living in fear of the day that Bentley discovers where she is? No, it’s better to bring it out in the open, and just be completely honest about it.”

“But what if they send her back to Mr. Tanner?” Jed argued. “She belongs to you, and she’s Calvin’s wife.”

“I know,” Pa said softly. “But we have to do everything legally.” A look of concern crossed his handsome face. “I just don’t know if we stand any chance at all in court.”

Violet’s eyes brimmed with tears. “I’ll never go back,” she vowed. “Never.” Calvin took her hand, and she looked up at him

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tenderly. “I jus’ can’t live without you,” she sobbed. “And I’ll never go back! I’ll die first!”

Calvin’s eyes were filling with tears. “Honey, don’ talk that way,” he pleaded. “Please don’ talk that way.”

Watching them, Jed had a hard time fighting back his own tears.

Chapter 20 – THE HEARING

Jed crossed his legs, trying to somehow get comfortable on the hard wooden bench. He glanced at the clock on the courtroom wall. Three minutes till nine. *Lord, be with us today,* he prayed silently. *Please, don’t let them take Violet back to Briarwood Manor!*

His gaze wandered over to the other side of the courtroom where Harvey and Elias Bentley sat side-by-side, neatly groomed and wearing their Sunday-go-to-meeting best. *The tall man beside Mr. Bentley must be that high-priced lawyer they brought in from Boston,* he thought. *And the stern-faced older man with the red vest and shiny gold spectacles must be Lucas Tanner.* He shuddered, imagining gentle, quiet Violet being returned to him. The man looked vicious.

Sensing his nervousness, Mandy reached over and squeezed his hand. “We’re all praying, Jed,” she whispered.

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He managed a feeble grin. “Thanks, sis.”

He glanced over at Ma, and she gave him a reassuring smile. “Don’t worry,” she whispered gently. “This is in God’s hands. We just have to tell the truth, and then leave the rest to Him.”

Jed nodded nervously.

He looked beyond Pa and Nathan to where Calvin and Violet sat with their arms around each other, and he could tell that they were even more nervous and fearful than he was. So much was at stake today for both of them!

He glanced back over at Mr. Bentley to find the man glaring at him fiercely. He tried to return Mr. Bentley’s gaze, but found that he could not. He dropped his eyes. The plantation owner made him nervous.

Jed looked over at Pa, and found that Pa was looking hard at Mr. Bentley. The two men locked eyes for a few seconds, and Mr. Bentley tried to intimidate Pa in the same way that he had Jed. But he couldn’t hold up under Pa’s steady, unwavering gaze, and before long he averted his eyes and looked away. Jed felt a small victory, and his fears abated just a bit.

The door at the front of the courtroom opened suddenly and Bailiff Tomberlin stepped into the room. “All rise, please,” he

called. “Court is now in session. The Honorable Judge William Farley presiding.”

The few spectators at the back of the gallery stood along with the participants in the case as Judge Farley entered the courtroom. The judge advanced to the high, polished desk at the center of the room, adjusted his robes, and sat down. “Be seated, please,” he said flatly.

Tension mounted as Judge Farley silently studied a sheaf of papers on his desk. The morning sunlight streamed in through the windows on the east side of the room to reflect off the rims of his spectacles and the top of his bald head. Finally, he looked up.

He studied Mr. Tanner, the Bentleys, and their lawyer without saying a word. Then he turned and looked across the Cartwrights to observe Calvin and Violet. After what seemed to Jed like an eternity, he spoke.

“This is not a trial,” Judge Farley said, “and there will be no jury. This is simply a hearing. Today we are trying to determine the legal ownership of a female slave by the name of Violet.

“I will allow both parties in this case to present whatever evidence they deem fit, and introduce any witnesses pertinent to

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the situation. Then I will permit each side to cross-examine any witnesses or challenge any of the evidence. At that point, I will render my decision and the court-determined legal owner will take custody of the woman. Are there any questions?”

He paused for several seconds, but there was no response. The judge then looked over at Mr. Tanner and the Bentleys. “Mr. Bentley, you are represented by...?”

The tall man stood up. “Attorney James Daggett, Your Honor, of the legal firm of Wilson and Daggett, Boston.”

The judge acknowledged the lawyer with a slight nod of the head and then turned to Pa Cartwright. “And Mr. Cartwright, who represents you?”

Pa stood respectfully. “We chose not to engage an attorney, Your Honor. I’ll be representing our case.”

Judge Farley raised an eyebrow. “You have no legal counsel?”

Pa nodded. “That’s right, Your Honor.”

The magistrate seemed surprised. “Shall I appoint legal counsel for you? If finances are the issue...”

Laughter rocked the courtroom.

Pa smiled. “Thank you, Your Honor, but that will not be necessary. We simply decided that this was the best route.”

The judge shook his head. “I just hope you know what you’re doing.”

He began the hearing by calling Pa to the witness stand and having him place his hand on a Bible to affirm that he would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Then he asked Pa to tell what had occurred on the day that he purchased Violet. Pa gave a detailed account of the entire morning, beginning with the visit to the judge’s chambers to obtain Calvin’s manumission papers and concluding with Mr. Bentley’s refusal to surrender Violet to Jed and Calvin that evening.

After Pa’s testimony, the judge called Mr. Bentley to the stand. After swearing on the Bible, the plantation owner told his side of the story. He told of seeing Pa, Calvin, and Jed in town, and of Pa’s offer to buy Violet, but denied that he had ever agreed to the transaction or received any money. He contradicted nearly everything that Pa had said and pointed out that Pa had no legal record of the deal.

Jed stared at the man as he gave his testimony. How could Mr. Bentley swear on a Bible to tell the truth and then sit there

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and deliberately lie? But after he finished telling his story, the man calmly took his seat.

“Free to cross-examine,” Judge Farley said.

The tall lawyer stood to his feet. “Your Honor, I call Mr. Jake Cartwright to the stand.”

“Now, Mr. Cartwright,” Mr. Daggett stated after Pa had taken his seat on the witness stand, “I understand that you purchased Violet’s husband, a slave named Calvin, from Mr. Bentley some weeks ago. Is that correct, sir?”

Pa nodded. “Yes, sir, it is.”

“Would you have documents verifying that transaction?”

Pa reached into the inner pocket of his vest. “Yes, sir, I do.” He withdrew folded papers and held them out to the lawyer. “I have a bill of sale signed by Mr. Bentley as well as a signed receipt for the amount of the purchase.”

The lawyer refused to take the papers. “Show them to the court, if you would, please.” Pa stood and placed the papers on Judge Farley’s desk and then took his seat again.

“Now, Mr. Cartwright, would you be so kind as to allow the court to see your documents on the purchase of the female known as Violet?”

Pa cleared his throat. “There aren’t any.”

The attorney feigned surprise. “What? You claim to have completed a legal transaction with my client, Mr. Elias Bentley, and yet you have no legal record of the purchase?”

Pa looked uncomfortable. “No, sir.”

“No certificate of legal ownership?”

“No, sir.”

“No bill of sale?”

“No, sir.”

“Not even a signed receipt?”

“No, sir.”

Attorney Daggett turned and addressed Judge Farley. “Your Honor, I find it highly unusual that a businessman such as Mr. Cartwright would have all the legal documents pertaining to the sale of the male slave and yet have absolutely nothing on the female! The evidence upholds the claim of Mr. Bentley: namely, that the transaction never took place!”

He spun around to address Pa again. “Mr. Cartwright, would you kindly explain to the court’s satisfaction why you would conduct a business transaction in the alleged amount of one thousand, two hundred dollars, and not even request a receipt?”

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“As I told you,” Pa replied nervously, “Mr. Bentley claimed that he was late for an appointment and had no time to issue a receipt just then.”

“Mr. Cartwright,” the lawyer said slowly, deliberately, “a hand-written receipt would have taken twenty or thirty seconds! Do you expect the court to believe that you made a purchase of this magnitude, yet did not press for such a small effort on the part of Mr. Bentley?”

“Mr. Daggett,” Pa replied evenly, “it used to be that a man’s word was his bond. A handshake was as good as a contract. I’m simply accustomed to dealing with honest people.”

The lawyer stiffened and turned red. “That’s all, Mr. Cartwright. Your Honor, I’d like to call Jed Cartwright as the next witness.”

Jed’s heart pounded furiously as he took the stand and placed his hand on the Bible that the bailiff held before him. The smooth-talking lawyer had Jed tell his version of the story, and then proceeded to cross-examine him. He asked confusing questions, contradicted Jed’s answers, and twisted his account so skillfully as to make Jed appear to be lying. As the cross-examination continued, Jed became more and more frustrated.

Help me, Lord, he prayed desperately. I’m telling the truth, but this man makes it sound like I’m lying.

“If it please the court,” Mr. Daggett said, “It is my opinion that this young man has been well-coached, but that he was not a witness to the alleged transaction.”

Pa jumped to his feet. “Objection, Your Honor! This attorney is bullying the witness!”

“Objection sustained,” Judge Farley intoned. “Mr. Daggett, please limit your cross-examination to simple, straight-forward questions.”

After another five minutes of questioning, Jed was allowed to take his seat. In spite of the chilly courtroom, he was drenched in perspiration.

“No further questions, Your Honor.”

Judge Farley looked at Pa. “Would you care to cross-examine any of the witnesses, Mr. Cartwright?”

Pa shook his head. “Not at this time, Your Honor.”

“Then I’d like to do some cross-examining of my own,” the judge said. “I call Jed Cartwright back to the stand.”

Jed looked up in alarm. The ordeal was about to be repeated all over again!

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“Just tell the truth and you’ll have nothing to worry about, son,” Judge Farley said kindly. “I won’t ask any trick questions.”

He looked at the bailiff. “Before I question young Mr. Cartwright, please have Calvin and Mr. Cartwright exit the room. Take them to the jury room and ascertain that they cannot hear the proceedings.”

The two men followed the bailiff from the courtroom.

“Now, Jed,” Judge Farley asked, “were you with your Pa on the day that he says he purchased Violet?”

“Yes, sir!” Jed exclaimed. “Uh, yes, Your Honor. That was the morning that Pa and I came with Calvin to get his manumission papers from you.”

The judge consulted his notes. “Monday, January 28.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Where did you first see Mr. Bentley that morning?”

“Calvin actually bumped into him as we came down the steps of the courthouse.”

“Which direction was he heading?”

Jed thought for just a few seconds. “I guess that would be east, Your Honor.”

“What was he wearing?”

“I’m not sure, sir. But I do know that he had on a top hat, and his clothes were covered with a dark-colored great coat.”

“Was anyone else with him, or was he alone?”

“He was alone, Your Honor.”

The judge continued with the detailed questions, writing down every one of Jed’s answers. After questioning Jed, he brought Calvin in and asked him the very same questions, then did the same with Pa. When the interrogation was finished, he addressed the court.

“The three accounts agree perfectly,” he said, “in every detail. As you noticed, there were no inconsistencies whatever. This is a good indication that—”

“Objection!” Mr. Daggett exclaimed, jumping to his feet. “Your Honor, if the three had given conflicting stories it would be irrefutable proof that they were lying. But the fact that their stories agree does not indicate that they are telling the truth. It merely suggests that their stories were very well-rehearsed.”

Judge Farley nodded by way of concession. “Your point is well taken, counselor. Objection sustained.”

He looked from one side of the courtroom to the other. “Are there any closing arguments before we make a consideration?”

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Mr. Daggett stood to his feet. “Your Honor, allow me to simply make reference to the fact that Mr. Cartwright has not the slightest shred of evidence to corroborate his claims. The fact that his account of the day in question dovetails with that of his son and that of Mr. Bentley’s former slave merely indicates that a good amount of coaching took place.

“But one fact remains: Mr. Cartwright cannot produce one single document verifying his purchase of the girl. Therefore I submit that the female slave known as Violet was still the legal property of Mr. Elias Bentley at the time he sold her to Mr. Lucas Tanner.”

There was a tense, uncomfortable silence as the attorney sat down.

Pa stood slowly to his feet. “Your Honor,” he began, “I purchased Calvin simply as an act of compassion for a fellow human being. Mr. Bentley had abused him, and his wife, the entire time that he had owned them. We actually saved Calvin’s life; Mr. Bentley intended to let him die of exposure. It was the very same situation with Violet— cruelty and abuse.

“It’s true that we have no documents to offer as evidence. No certificates, receipts, or bills of sale. I’m simply asking you

to take my word, as well as the word of Violet’s husband, and also my son.”

He looked around the courtroom. “I’m afraid that’s all we have to offer.” He bowed his head as he took his seat.

Jed groaned inwardly, disappointed that his father had not offered a stronger closing argument. What would Judge Farley decide now?

Silence reigned in the courtroom for several minutes. At last, Judge Farley spoke. “Mr. Cartwright, the court appreciates your concern for your fellow man, but any abuse or neglect on the part of Mr. Bentley cannot enter into our considerations today. We are attempting to make one determination and one alone: did Elias Bentley sell Violet to you before he sold her to Lucas Tanner? If he did, Violet is yours. If he did not, the girl will be returned to the custody of Mr. Tanner.

“As a magistrate of the court of the state of Missouri, my responsibility is to weigh empirical evidence, something which has not been presented in my hearing. Basically, the case today comes down to your word against that of Elias Bentley.”

He rapped the gavel on the desk. “This hearing is adjourned for two hours. When we reconvene, I will render a decision.”

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Violet began to weep softly.

It was a somber group that filed in and then sat watching the courtroom clock. Two hours had come and gone. Where was Judge Farley?

The door to the judge's chambers flew open and Judge Farley came hurrying in. "Court is now in session," he said as he hurried to his desk. He sat down, drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket, and placed them on the desk.

For several long, tense moments he studied them without speaking. The suspense made Jed feel uneasy and nauseous.

"I decided to submit this case to a jury of your peers," the judge said, addressing Mr. Bentley and Mr. Cartwright. Several pairs of eyes darted to the door, but the judge chuckled. "No, they won't be coming in here," he said. "They've already passed judgment and rendered a decision." He cleared his throat.

Say it! Jed pleaded silently. *Just say it and get it over with!* But Judge Farley was in no hurry.

"I used this two-hour recess to interview some of the citizens of St. Louis who had done business with either Mr.

Bentley or Mr. Cartwright. Twelve of them, to be exact. Both of these men are prominent citizens, so it was relatively easy to find persons who had had dealings with one or the other. Five of the persons I talked with had had direct dealings with you, Mr. Bentley, and the other seven had dealt with Mr. Cartwright.

"The five citizens who had dealt with Mr. Bentley all stated that he was dishonest and underhanded in his business dealings. Four stated that they had been cheated by you, sir, while the fifth claimed that you would have cheated him had he given you half a chance."

He looked at Pa. "You'll be interested to know, Jake Cartwright, that the seven citizens of this township who had done business with you assured me that you were a man of honesty and integrity. Each of them stated that you could be trusted implicitly. Jake, you're known around St. Louis as a man of integrity, a man to be trusted, and a man who would never lie. In short, sir, you have an outstanding testimony among the citizens of this community.

"The twelve citizens of this frontier town who served today on this rather unusual jury ruled in your favor. Mr. Cartwright,

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this court also rules in your favor, and awards you custody and ownership of the female slave known as Violet.”

He looked at Mr. Bentley. “The court orders you, sir, to refund to Mr. Tanner the full price paid you by him for this young woman, whatever that price may be.”

Mr. Bentley’s attorney jumped to his feet. “This is outrageous! We plan to appeal!”

Judge Farley never wavered. “That’s your prerogative, sir, but I would not advise it. If you do choose to appeal, I personally will follow this case to appeals court and serve as counsel to Mr. Cartwright. Mr. Bentley, an appeal could be quite expensive for you. Now, what is your pleasure?”

Mr. Bentley tugged at the attorney’s sleeve. “Sit down!” he hissed fiercely. “You’ve cost me enough already!” Mr. Daggett dropped to a seat with a look of irritation on his thin face.

Judge Farley picked up the Bible that the bailiff had used to swear in the witnesses. “Before this hearing convenes, let me share the basis for my decision. This morning before leaving the house I happened to read Proverbs 22. Verse one states that a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. Jake

Cartwright has maintained that good name in our community, and it was on that basis that this court renders its decision.”

The gavel came down again. “Court adjourned.”

Calvin and Violet stood hugging each other with tears of joy streaming down their faces. Jed started toward them and then paused as he passed Pa.

“I learned my lesson, Pa,” he said softly, “about the importance of having a good name. Today I saw first-hand why we need to keep a good testimony. I think I’ll start working on building my good name by memorizing Proverbs 22:1.”

Read *The Quest for Thunder Mountain* by Ed Dunlop.

www.TalesOfCastles.com

