

The Silence of Sorrowful Hours

April Kutger

A Blue Monday Publication

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Library of Congress
ISBN 978-0-557-71738-5

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From

“The Blue and the Gray”

by

Francis Miles Finch

BY the flow of the inland river,
Whence the fleets of iron have fled,
Where the blades of the grave-grass quiver,
Asleep are the ranks of the dead.

• • •

From the silence of sorrowful hours
The desolate mourners go,
Lovingly laden with flowers
Alike for the friend and the foe.

• • •

So, when the summer calleth,
On forest and field of grain,
With an equal murmur falleth
The cooling drip of the rain.

Since he stepped off the train from Harrisburg, very little, besides the mustard yellow depot building itself, looked familiar to Ethan. The town, once known for its central business district and educational institutions, had become a bustling tourist attraction. Hotels and souvenir shops surrounded the square. Entire families in their Sunday best strolled along the street, some dragging whining four- and five-year-olds behind them. Several establishments offered park guides and buggies for hire. Men in black suits and bowlers stood by their horses, ready to hand up ladies and lift their children. Young boys scooped up the horse droppings and shoveled it into covered buckets. When Ethan tried to hire a buggy to take him five miles east on the Hanover Pike, he was directed to a black smith shop down a side street.

An hour later, in his rental, Ethan took note of new buildings and new roads, more fences and fewer trees. They passed several carriages and wagons going in the opposite direction, a singular event in years past. Less than a mile after the churches and shops of Bonaughtown, they made their way onto a narrow road framed by two sturdy oaks just beginning to shed their acorns. Ethan knew he had arrived.

The smaller Engle place off to the right and the farmhouse and barns fifty yards beyond were situated as before. But what had been fields of oats and soybeans were grassy pastures for mares and tawny foals almost as big as their mothers. The dirt path – dust in the summer, mud in the spring – was now a wide, graveled lane lined with elms. Judging by their size, Ethan figured they must have been planted soon after he left.

Angelise was distracted. The wilting September heat was oppressive and the sound of sluggish flies bzzzz-ing in ever-widening circles was like listening to dripping water from the bathroom tap in the middle of the night. The smells of ripe apples, horse droppings, and lime from the garbage dump were dragged on the limping breeze. She was trying to keep her wits about her, when she caught the scent of wheat chaff in the air – an exquisite aspect of autumn. September. Years of Septembers. Osborne had gone to war in September. As she pushed up the loose strands of damp hair that had fallen out of their combs, the sound of an unruly horse and the grating wheels of a buggy took her attention.

Chapter 1

When Ethan stepped down from the buggy on that September day in 1900, Angelise Lindstrom's first thought was, *He's an old man*. She caught herself and smiled; she was almost as old as he. Her second thought was, *He's dressed like an undertaker*.

As she rose from her rocker, she pushed a wisp of her mostly white hair behind her ear. "Ethan, I would know you anywhere! Come up here." She held out her arms as he reached the porch stairs. "I'll get Annie to bring us some tea with chipped ice."

Ethan was still tall and thin, but his shoulders were rounded and his step was slower. His hairline had receded and his close-cropped, wooly hair was as white as snow. He wore a sober black suit and polished black boots. Angelise called through the screen door for the tea.

"Miss Angelise, it's been a long time," Ethan said, using the handrail to steady him.

"Just Angelise," she scolded.

"Sorry," he laughed, slightly embarrassed. "I shoulda known that would get you riled."

She laughed along with him as she thought back to the first time he called her "Miss Angelise." It was more than forty years since they had first met in her fishing cabin along Plum Run. Another hot September day. Three years before the Confederacy fired on Fort Sumter. Five years before Gettysburg.



The runaway slave with nettles in his matted hair and thorny scratches on his face and hands had been on the road for five days. A recent scar welted across his left eyebrow. He was tired, hungry, and scared, and a pungent odor emanated from his unwashed clothes. Osborne Hoffmann pulled him from the cattails and brought him to the cabin on the creek at the eastern edge of his farm.

Inside the door, the sweat-soaked man stared at the floor and tried to diminish his size in the small room dominated by a bed with no mattress. Osborne nudged him forward and introduced him to Angelise. Ethan kept his eyes down as he stammered, "Pa... pa... pa-pleased... pleased ta... ta... ta meet ya, ma... ma'am."

“My name is Angelise,” she reiterated, smiling.

He shook his head and, like a reprimanded child, said, “Mi... Mi... Miss Angelise.”

“Just Angelise.”

Ethan lifted his eyes enough to see something more than the girl’s bare feet. He glimpsed her tanned and freckled face as she blew a wisp of her curly, butter-yellow hair out of her eyes; it promptly fell forward again. She was almost as tall as he was and slim as a boy. Ethan figured she was about sixteen. Her arctic blue eyes zeroed in on his frightened ones, black as coals. She had a kind smile.



Susanne elbowed her way onto the porch balancing two glasses of tea and a plate of butter cookies on a large Toleware tray. The screen door slammed behind her.

“Scuse me,” said the young girl with bouncy hair and vivid, cobalt blue eyes.

“I wish you could find a way to not do that, Annie.”

“Sorry, Mémé,” Susanne said as she performed a small, playful curtsy.

“Annie, this is Mr. McElhannon.”

“It’s Freeman now,” said Ethan softly.

Angelise nodded and said, “It suits you.”

She returned her attention to Susanne and continued, “This is Mr. Freeman. I told you about him.”

Susanne’s eyes widened, but she did what was expected; she curtsied and smiled as she momentarily bowed her head at the aged man with a barely perceptible scar across his eye. “Ethan, Susanne is Marabella’s granddaughter.”

Ethan stood and clasped the girl’s proffered hand saying, “Oh, my Lord. Mari’s child.”

“Grandchild,” Angelise corrected.

“How time does pass us by,” said Ethan, a bit embarrassed, as he sank back into his chair. “I can hardly believe I’m seein’ Marabella’s grandchild.”

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He stared at the girl's face and said, "You remind me of the man who used to own this farm, Miss Susanne. Your hair," he said, patting the side of his own head. Susanne's long, wavy hair had a rich, mink brown color. "Your smile."

"I hate my teeth," Susanne said. For a moment, she held her hand in front of her mouth, which revealed even, perfectly normal-sized teeth.

"But your smile is pleasing and so like..." Ethan stopped. He looked at Angelise and almost whispered, "Doesn't it remind you of him?"

Angelise didn't reply, but instead reprimanded the girl. "Please, Annie, don't say 'hate'."

"Yes, Mémé," Susanne replied. She made another small curtsy as she turned to go.

"Don't let it slam," Angelise said as the door slammed. "That child!"

"But you love her?" said Ethan, almost as a plea.

"With all my heart."

He exhaled a sigh of relief and said, "My, my, my."

They were on the porch of the farmhouse where treachery and mourning had taken place so long ago. And Angelise's bright blue rocking chair put Ethan in mind of the one she kept on the porch of her little cabin by the creek. She looked quite the same, though her hair was paler and she had a bit more flesh on her bones. Her eyes were still as surprising as the blue winter sky after nothing but gray for days.

He noted that the three-story, dormered house hadn't changed much either. There was no sign of disrepair – no chipped paint, no worn boards, no cracking mortar between the stones. Spic and span, top to bottom. It had withstood generations and the storms of many seasons.

"What about you, Ethan?" Angelise said, bringing him back to the present. "Do you have grandchildren?"

"Plenty of grandchildren," he said, smiling broadly. "Fifteen."

"Goodness gracious, man, you must be as proud as a rooster on a one-rooster chicken farm." She paused and, in a sober voice, said, "I'm sorry about your wife."

"She had a good long life." Ethan worked to control the quivering of his chin. "She got to play with most of the little ones. Some not so little now."

"I wish I had known her."

“The New Mexico air agreed with her. And she loved that Rio Grandy.”

“And you? Are you still working?”

“No. Colonel Anthony gave me a small pension last year. And the carriage house for as long as I live.”

“Do any of the children live with you?”

“Our youngest, Nathaniel and his wife. He took over my work.” Ethan’s face beamed with pride. “But he’s fixin’ to have a baby, so...”

It seemed Angelise wasn’t paying attention. Ethan was surprised when she spoke again – her tone was formal and distant.

She pushed a loose curl behind her ear and said, “We have so much to catch up on. Why don’t you let me show you to your room? Maybe you’d like to freshen up or take a nap before supper.”

“Don’t mind if I do, Miss Angelise – I mean Angelise. I’ve been on that train since early this mornin’ – and others for much longer.”

Angelise pushed the screen door open and ushered Ethan into the cool dark house. He shook off a cold phantom as he passed under the threshold – the walls seemed to whisper the secrets spoken there. Angelise didn’t notice. At the top of the stairs, she held out her arm at the first room on the left.

“I hope you’ll be comfortable here. There’s fresh water in the pitcher and there’s a hand towel here.” She fingered the embroidered flannel folded on the marble-topped washstand and then laid it down again, smoothing the corner. “I can bring you anything you need ... I ...”

“This was Nelson’s room,” Ethan said as he scanned the room and stroked one of the bedposts. “And this bed looks like one I’ve slept in before.”

“It very likely is,” Angelise said. “It has new feathers, of course.”

“Thank the good Lord for that.”

Angelise’s head snapped up, but when she saw Ethan’s grin, she smiled. “I forgot how mocking you could be.”

“I meant no disrespect.”

“None taken, sir.”

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Angelise moved toward the door. “I’ll leave you now. The water closet’s at the end of the hall and there’s a new bathroom next to it. If you want a bath, I’ll start the fire.”

“I’m sure I can light the stove, ma’am.”

Angelise grated at the “ma’am”. “The water’s pumped in now and the toilet flushes.”

“Good to know you’re keepin’ up with the times.”

Angelise caught his jest that time. She hadn’t talked with a true friend for many years.

Before she could close the door, Ethan said, “Angelise, I need to know, if you don’t mind. Is Mari still alive?”

“No. I’m sorry.” Angelise closed the door behind her.

Ethan’s heart stumbled; he put his hand on it to steady its flow.

“He’s a very old man, Mémé,” Susanne said when Angelise entered the kitchen.

“Not much older than I, Chérie.”

“He looks as old as time.”

“He’s had a hard life,” Angelise said with reproof in her voice.

“Sorry, Mémé.”

“When you told me about him, you didn’t say he was a Colored man.”

As she stared out the window over the sink, a blank look on her face, Angelise murmured, “I guess I forgot.” She focused again and said, “Now, don’t disturb me for at least two hours.”

“Yes, Mémé.”

“Don’t slam the door, if you go out.”

“Yes, Mémé.”

“Set the table and...”

“Mémé...” Susanne whined.

“Set the table.”

“Yes, Mémé.”

Ethan hung his new suit jacket over the back of a wooden chair by the window and placed his new hat on the shelf inside the wardrobe. It was a small-brimmed, black felt he had bought in Harrisburg before boarding the train to Gettysburg. He thought it added a certain flare to his look, a change from the old Western one he had worn since he left New Mexico.

That one, along with his muleskinner boots and thick leather belt, had brought stares from his fellow passengers the farther east he traveled. *Ain't you never seen a cowboy 'cept in dime novels*, he thought, *or didn't you 'spect to see a Colored cowboy?* He had left the broad, brown hat with high, peaked crown with the haberdasher.

The salesman held Ethan's hat as if it were a dead skunk. He said, "I can't use this for anything."

"Then toss it," Ethan responded. "I won't wear it again."

He thought he had seen a surprised look on Angelise's face as she watched him step down from the buggy in a suit and bowler. In the old days she had never seen him out of work clothes, and the only hat he wore was a gray field hat Osborne had given him. That hat almost flew off his head on the hard ride back from Maryland after Angelise, George and he cut the telegraph wires on the Baltimore & Ohio line. It was the last time he had tried to get his wife and daughters – a secondary reason for the mission, but the part he had pinned his hopes on.

Ethan removed his shirt collar and then his new white shirt. The inside of the collar was stained, but he didn't think it would show when he wore it again. He took a hanger from the wardrobe and hung his shirt on the latch of the open window, hoping it would dry before dinner – it was soaked through from the heat and his nerves. He sat on the slipcovered chair by the west-facing window and struggled to pull off his boots without properly untying them. "Dammit!" he muttered, tears in his eyes.

Chapter 2

Ethan stood up and pushed the reeds to either side of him. He had walked along the creek for an hour. He crossed the wide part where there was a small island in the middle, just north of a small town. The current wasn't dangerous in the late summer so he had made it without much effort. He wasn't a good swimmer and didn't look forward to dying from drowning after all he'd been through. He had miles to go before he would find the fork in the creek and then the small cabin. He had seen the axe mark on a tree twenty-five yards back, but he heard voices and ducked into the reeds.

He crept toward the cabin, then stopped. He whistled the multiple-toned sound of a wood thrush. A man and a woman were sitting on the floor of the porch, leaning against the rails, laughing. The man must have seen him. He held the woman's arm and gave her a small nod so she would keep still. He got up and swung himself over the rail. Ethan ducked down.

"It's all right," the man said. "You're at the right place." The tall, slim farmer walked toward the reeds with the friendly but formal bearing of the Quakers Ethan had met in Philadelphia. He put his big hand out. His strength, when he pulled Ethan forward, made Ethan think twice about taking advantage of his pleasant nature.

"I'm Osborne Hoffmann," the lanky man said. His smile revealed dimples that creased his cheeks. He had a high forehead, and when he pushed back his sun-lightened hair, he revealed a widow's peak.

Ethan kept his eyes lowered as he mumbled his name.

"Come here, brother." Osborne motioned for Ethan to follow him.

When he opened the front door of the cabin, Angelise was standing on the threshold with open arms. Ethan didn't know what to do, but Angelise grabbed his hands, pulled him to her, and gave him a warm embrace. She almost gagged and stepped back when she caught the rancid odor emanating from his unwashed clothes.

"Welcome to my little home," she said as she swallowed to mitigate her reaction to his smell. "It is your home until you're on your way again." She reached her hand to Osborne; he squeezed it lightly, and then let it drop.

When Ethan was still in the cabin a week later, Osborne brought it up to Angelise. "Why is he staying longer than the others we've seen through?"

"He wants to get his wife."

“Yes. But it’s unlikely. And we could get entangled with the law. If we keep a Negro here, people might...”

“He doesn’t want to go. He wants to stay here and try to get her. Maybe send someone else for her. Maybe me.”

“Angelise, you can’t be...”

“Just let him stay a little while longer...”

“Very well. For a little while.”



Angelise was tired. She was used to taking afternoon naps, but she was exceptionally tired this afternoon. Perhaps it was the days of expectation and, in some ways, the dread she had felt since she received Ethan’s letter.

At the opposite end of the hall from where she had installed Ethan, she laid on top of a light cotton bed cover. Her mind drifted back to when the Hoffmann farm had become a stop on the ‘Underground Railroad, which eventually brought Ethan to them.



It was a steaming day; it felt like the weight of water pushed against every movement. A soundless breeze from the west bode a cooler evening and, perhaps, a break in the heat wave. She rushed into Osborne’s office. She was out of breath and could barely get the words out. “I was out riding the old trail south of the creek, and I found an injured Negro wishing to go to Canada. He needs our help.”

“Show me where he is,” Osborne said without hesitation.

They rode together to the place where the trembling youth was propped up against a broad tree stump. He cradled his useless left arm in his right. It was obvious it was broken; the forearm was bent in the middle.

“What happened, young man?” Osborne asked.

“Broke it. Cain’t feel ma fingahs,” the slim boy said, trying to hold back his tears. His amber color, wavy russet hair and hazel eyes put Osborne in mind of Angelise. She noticed it, too, and was more aware than ever that she could easily be taken for a mulatto if she lived in the South.

“What’s your name?” The boy winced when Osborne ripped the sleeve of his shirt. “And how did you get yourself in this predicament?”

“Name’s Joseph, but dey calls me Joby. Jumped from ovah dere.” He pointed to a rock that jutted out from a slight rise in the earth.

“Trying to have some fun, were you?”

“No, Suh,” Joby said sheepishly. He gritted his teeth at Osborne’s probing fingers. Angelise wanted to ease his pain, but didn’t know how.

“I think both bones are broken. It will have to be set.”

“Cain’t let no slave catchuh find me,” Joby said. “I’se in big trouble.”

“We don’t want that either,” Angelise said. Curly wisps of her hair had pulled free from the ribbon that held it at the back of her neck. She removed the ribbon and, after smoothing all the loose pieces, retied it. A curl promptly fell forward over her left ear.

“Suh, please lee me be. Ah rathuh be free den have two good ahms.”

“My manager has set animal bones. Could we bring him out to take a look?”

Joby looked at Angelise with fearful, questioning eyes. “You can trust us,” she said.

“Where did you come from, Joby?” Osborne asked.

“I’se not sayin’.”

“Very well.” Osborne turned and spoke quietly to Angelise. “You stay here. I’ll go for Mr. Engle.”

“Make sure he’s agreeable,” she said with a firm look.

“I will. I’ll talk to him. See how he feels in general.”

After Osborne left, Angelise asked Joby if he wanted some water, though she didn’t want to leave him. He shook his head and grimaced in pain. He continued to hold back embarrassing tears. “How do you plan to get all the way to Canada?” she asked.

“Ah knows how ta get ta da nex’ stop and dey tell me how ta make it from dere.”

“It sounds dangerous,” she whispered. “Where did you come from?”

“Cain’t say, ma’am.”

“Very well. I understand. But we’re abolitionists. My mother met Sojourner Truth.”

“Still cain’t say, ma’am.”

“If I knew, I would offer to help them. I’d offer to let other runaways stay here.”

“Please don’ press me, ma’am,” Joby said. “I’se not sho yo man dun gone ta get da law.”

“He would never do that.” She frowned at the boy and sputtered, “You’ll see.”

Some months after they saw Joby on his way with a splint and sling fashioned by Mr. Engle and prayers that the break would heal properly, Osborne and Angelise sat at the kitchen table. Nelson had been put to bed and the house was quiet.

Osborne said, “I met a Negro farmer, Ed Mathews from Pine Hill, when I went to the college library last week. He’s working with a Mennonite community to help runaways hide and move on.”

“Where’s Pine Hill?”

“About five miles north out of Gettysburg. The Dobbins’ send men and women and whole families on to him.”

“I’d like to meet him. Could we invite him out here?”

“I don’t know... He’s very busy... and it would be a long way for him to come. The thing is...”

“Maybe I could meet him in Gettysburg like you did,” Angelise said with an edge in her voice. Was he afraid to invite a Black man to dinner? Anyway, she hated that Osborne could go places and do things that she was excluded from because of her sex or her age, although she would soon be nineteen.

“Angelise, listen to me.”

“Sorry.”

“Mr. Mathews asked me if we could help him and Basil Biggs.” He stopped and looked into her eyes. He held his breath, trying to discern how she was taking it.

It was dangerous to hide runaways. If they were found, the escapees would be hauled off and taken back to their owners, and, according to the Fugitive Slave Act, the people who hid them would be prosecuted.

“What would we have to do?”

“Let runaways stay here, usually one or two at a time – for a few days at a time. Feed them and tell them where to go next. Give them provisions for the road.”

“I’d do it,” Angelise said. “But what if people find out? What could happen to you? What about the farm? What about Nelson?”

“There are some things people must do, Angelise,” Osborne said.

That was the end of their discussion. But a week later, Angelise had a proposition for Osborne.

Angelise used a long-handled hook to pull the iron arm of the kettle crane from the fire. She tasted the stew from a wooden spoon.

“Ouch,” she said, blowing on her tongue.

She set out plates and spoons on the table. Then she added a loaf of bread and a ball of butter. It was late because Osborne had been gone all day. She had given Nelson his supper at five o’clock and he was asleep in the wing back chair by the fireplace. The fire was dying, but the lingering warmth was welcomed. Despite the warm spring days, the evenings were still cool and damp.

“You know the old cabin on Plum Run about a mile southeast of here?” Angelise asked.

“That old fishing hut? Is it still standing?”

Osborne worked his mashed potatoes into a cone shape in the middle of his plate.

“My grandfather built that, but I think it was to get away from my grandmother and their wild children,” Osborne chuckled.

“I can’t imagine Uncle Jonathan was ever a wild child...”

“Oh, yes. Or so my mother told me. It was a story my father...”

“I thought I could fix it up for myself.”

“Is it worth it?”

“It’s not completely derelict. I’ve been inside.” Angelise diverted her eyes and fingered a loose strand of hair.

“I’m sure it’s dangerous...”

“It’s not! The floorboards held me. I stepped around the broken glass. There’s an old lamp in there that still has oil in it.”

“It sounds like you’ve done more than test the floorboards,” Osborne said with his strict father expression.

“It’s fun to have a place to hide.”

“Angelise, you’re too old for playhouses. And you’ve never complained about sitting on a rock to fish.”

“I remember when we used to do that together,” she said with reproach in her voice. In a more plaintive tone, she went on. “I don’t want it for fishing. ... I mean, I could fish right from the porch in a comfortable chair, but I wanted to fix it up as a little house only for me.”

“Why? I don’t understand what you’re getting at.”

“I don’t know. Maybe nothing. A place to go to be by myself.”

“You can be alone whenever you want.”

“No, I can’t, not in a way. ... I want a place I can make my own. Fix it the way I want. Have only my things in it. Sleep there, if I want.” She paused. “In the summer.”

“I see.”

“I want to fix it up. It needs new window glass, some repair to the pilings, new floorboards, paint...”

“Hold on, Miss Lindstrom. That sounds like building a new house. It probably needs a new roof, too...”

“It does.” Angelise started to giggle. Then she said, “Stop. Don’t make me laugh. We’ll wake Nelson.”

“You could do it,” he said after some thought. “It would take a while...”

“I don’t want anyone to know.”

As if she hadn’t spoken, Osborne went on, “I’d have to get lumber cut to order. That would take some time ... and the glass. Paint. But I could get most of what I need in Bonaughtown or Gettysburg.”

“This is for me, Osborne, not you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re saying, ‘I will do this. I can get that...’

“It’s because I’m going to fix it up for you.”

With wide eyes, she smiled and said, “I hoped it could be finished by summer.”

“Two months? I don’t know. We’re still sowing seed.”

“I would move the bee crates to be closer to the cabin, too, and have my own garden. ... I’d grow strawberries and...”

“It sounds like you want to set up your own little household over there.”

“I want my own place. Mrs. Engle’s been running your house since long before I came here. Romy follows her around like a puppy...”

“This will give you a way to run away from your life.”

“That’s what I *do* want! Osborne, this is not my life. In your house. On your farm. In the middle of nowhere!”

“Do you think this is my life?” he growled. “Sometimes I...”

“This is your life! Everything here is yours!”

“You know it’s not what I wanted. It’s not what you wanted, but we...”

“Stop it!” Angelise put her hands on her hips and stomped her foot.

“Don’t lose your composure...”

“I will! You want me to be like everyone else. Like Mrs. Engle, for heaven’s sake! I know you do!”

“Please, Angelise, we’re talking about the cabin...”

“You have no idea what it’s like for me.” Her face was red and it looked like she was about to cry. Her hair was falling out of her cap.

“We’ve talked about his too many times. Be quiet and listen to me.”

“You see? You’re telling me what to do again. ‘Be quiet and listen.’ Mrs. Engle tells me. Mr. Engle does. ‘You didn’t get the clod out of Nancy’s left rear hoof.’ Just this morning! It was the size of a pea!”

Osborne nodded toward Nelson readjusting himself in the chair and whispered, “Let’s go over there tomorrow. See what’s needed.” He walked to the fireplace, picked up a small dish, and fingered the coins in it.

Angelise said, “We could use the cabin to hide runaways.”

“Oh, now I see...”

“No, Osborne, that’s not the reason...”

“I think it’s a grand scheme. It would be safer for everyone. Them and us.”

“And my bees might be an additional hindrance to anyone snooping around,” Angelise laughed. Osborne didn’t exactly smile, but he stopped frowning. Nelson

made a noise and sat up straight in his chair. Angelise whispered, “You’d better take him to his bed.”

As Osborne climbed the stairs with Nelson in his arms, she said, “Take off his dirty clothes before you put him in bed.”

Angelise knew Osborne’s proposal to help runaways was the right thing to do, particularly after getting the terrified Joby’s arm set and sending him on his way. But every plan put off her dream to return to St. Pierre. At least this one could be a great adventure.

At the beginning, Ethan was the only runaway who stayed with the Hoffmanns for more than a day or two. The farm was too close to the border with Maryland, and slave catchers could easily reach it, if they imagined they had reason to. Not all of the Hoffmanns’ neighbors opposed the practice of slavery and might tell a slave catcher where to look – for a price.

A free Black farmer and his wife, Benjamin and Candace Watson, were grabbed from their own land a year before and were only rescued after several local men cut the slave catchers off before they reached the border. Mr. Smucker told Osborne about the hard riding they had done and the fear that remained in the Watsons’ eyes for weeks afterwards.

Chapter 3

Ethan unpacked what few clothes he had brought with him. He put his brown trousers and red checked shirt in the middle drawer of the bureau. In the top drawer he placed his handkerchiefs, drawers, socks, and suspenders; his toiletry items were spread out on the washstand. The mattress may have been new, but unexpectedly, when he lay down, he rolled into a depression in the middle. As soon as he closed his eyes, his mind drifted back to his days as a slave on the McElhannon farm. His thoughts went from mindful to a drifting dream state and back again.



It was a hot July day when Ethan emerged from the cabin he shared with five other men and boys. The sun was blazing, and the sky was a robin's egg-blue so bright he had to shade his eyes. He was twelve years old and it was his first day on the McElhannon farm in north central Maryland. He wasn't sure where it was near, if there were any streams or rivers nearby, any mountains in either direction, but he had noticed a forest to the east as they drove into the farm in the middle of the night.

Ethan's grandmother, Sukey, was brought to America from West Africa in 1781. She had a black earth complexion and round features, and the auctioneer described her as "good-looking enough" and an "ordinary size". She had high-riding hips that could support a bundle or carry a grown child, but when she arrived in Savannah, she was thirty pounds lighter than when she left her home. Sukey never regained the weight she lost, and she never recovered from the grief she breathed in when she was sold from the auction block along with kegs of brandy, bales of cotton, and furniture.

She went with Master James Cartwell, the owner of a peanut farm a hundred miles from the sea. As they rode away from the ocean, she felt sadder than she ever had; the smell of the ocean had been in her nostrils all her life. She didn't mind the plantation except for the summer heat with no ocean breeze to give relief.

Sukey didn't mind picking cotton; it wasn't the worst way a person could spend her time. She was outdoors, she wasn't chained, she wasn't branded, and some of the folks she worked with spoke a dialect close to hers.

In her second year on the farm – she was about twenty that year – a man named Titus was brought to the slave quarters. He was six feet tall and had a

four-inch scar running from the corner of his mouth to his ear. He had been born a slave in a Georgia State Representative's attic on Lafayette Square in Savannah. Although Sukey had few English words, she showed an independent and aggressive nature that Titus felt well suited to. He was kind of beat down by then, but Sukey took a shine to him and soon she was pregnant. Master Cartwell encouraged his slaves to form attachments and bear children. It kept the men from trying to run. And the more babies born, the more new slaves to use on the plantation or sell at market.

Sukey and Titus had many years together and Sukey bore him seven fine sons. She would be at work in the fields, drop a baby, and be back at work with the baby in a sling before the end of the day. If she were forced to, she would leave the babe in her cabin with bread or a little mush on a rag tied to his finger. Then she would sneak to nurse him in the morning and afternoon.

Sukey gained a reputation as a healer, using sassafras and snakeroot and other plants known to her. She could have become a house slave – she had the comportment and intelligence for it – but she didn't want to speak English and she didn't want to work close to White people. She preferred the outdoor life with people like herself. Even in the inclement seasons, Sukey would rather be outdoors under the camphor tree than in a cabin or barn. People would leave her alone when she sat under that tree; its seeds were poisonous and most people had a reaction to it.

Ethan's father Cole was Sukey and Titus' sixth son. He and his younger brother Marcus were sold to a slave trader in 1822. Sukey did not cry when two of her beloved boys were taken from her. By then, her heart had been crushed too many times, and she had been hit about the head too often. Marcus went to Tennessee, and Cole ended up in Virginia with the Blairs where he made a family with a six-foot tall half-breed from the Cree nation. He never saw any of his brothers again.

Ethan was born in 1828, the youngest of Cole and Tanis' four children. His mother and two sisters and the other slave women spoiled him, but his father was determined that he should grow up strong, righteous and clear-headed. Tanis was able to keep him out of the fields until he was eight by getting him work in Mistress' garden with an old Negro woman.

Ethan and the other children considered all the older slaves their aunts and uncles and all the elders looked after them. They would sneak them an extra piece of molasses taffy, tell them stories, and teach them essential skills such as whittling, making a fire with flint and stone, plaiting hair, sewing and darning, and fishing on Sunday afternoon. All the slaves knew by instinct that they had to depend on each other to survive and had to find love and comfort with each other – no one else could be trusted.

The McElhannon house wasn't a grand plantation house like the Blair's, but it had columns and a wide porch just the same. The front door opened into a wide hall running the length of the first floor. At the end of the hall was a circular stair to the second floor. A chandelier hung from the ceiling. On one side of the front door were two chairs and a marble topped-table, on the other side, a mirrored hallstand. Ethan saw his reflection for the first time in that looking glass. He stood straighter, lifted his head and patted down his nappy hair.

The public rooms off the hall included two parlors, a dining room, and a music room. Ethan had a chance to look into them from the hallway, but he never entered. The first parlor was where Mrs. McElhannon tried for civilizing influences on her husband and sons. The furniture was made of walnut and rosewood and covered with brocade fabrics purchased in Baltimore. There was a settee, a wing chair for Mr. McElhannon, and two small cushioned chairs. An elaborately patterned Brussels carpet covered the floor and similar wallpaper covered the walls. In the center of the room was a round table which displayed the family Bible, porcelain shepherdesses, and a carved box inlaid with mother of pearl.

The smaller second parlor was designed for Mrs. McElhannon to entertain lady guests who might come for card games and gossip. The room was decorated with dark polished wood furniture covered in deep red velvet. Lace panels and red silk draperies hung from brass rods above the windows and etched glass oil lamps lit the room. Mrs. McElhannon had no inclination to socialize with the wives of the men who owned the land near their farm, and she chided her husband that the room looked like a house of ill repute. In a sharp voice, he answered, "How would ye know, Mrs. McElhannon?"

In contrast to the master's house, the slave quarters were like a small village made up of several one-room cabins, a smoke house, a smithing barn, and a stable for five mules and two workhorses. The slaves, farm hands, and farm manager rose at 3:00 a.m. to feed, water, and harness the horses, milk the cows, and feed the pigs and poultry. Then they hauled wood for the stoves. Breakfast was at seven – beefsteak or pork, eggs, fried potatoes, fruit pie, hominy cakes, fritters, and coffee.

Planting and harvesting went on from April to October. The spring started with plowing, rolling, pulling up stumps, and burning refuse. They prepared the fields for sowing and spread manure over the plantings. Besides field work there were fence posts and rails to be fitted, gates to be maintained, stalls to be mucked, grain to be threshed, and apples to be dried or mashed to cider.

In July, hay and wheat were harvested using a mowing machine and reaper or cutting it down with scythes. The cut grains were raked together and taken to the barn where the wheat was shucked and sorted. Barley and rye were mowed by hand. September and October were the months to bring in the potatoes, corn, and beans. Oats were threshed and corn was husked. Then the fields were plowed up and the next season's wheat crop was planted.

Chapter 4

Angelise didn't know her thoughts paralleled Ethan's so closely, as she sought sleep, but she knew if she didn't have a good rest, she wouldn't be pleasing company at dinner.

Like Ethan, Angelise had a history that included slave ancestors who had been brought from Africa, but she had been born free on a beautiful, fair-weather island. Like Ethan, she had been made to live in other people's homes and without a mother to love and guide her. Like Ethan's grandmother Sukey, she mourned her oceanside home and the uniquely scented breeze that filled her nostrils since her first breath.

As she dozed, not quite sleeping, Angelise had visions of the crashing white waves and turquoise water that had been part of her life until she was ten years old, part of a place she still dreamed of returning to on occasional cruel winter nights. It probably wasn't as idyllic as she remembered, but her distant memories of pink houses, cobblestone streets, schooners and fishing yawls, yellow fields and a cool stream with a deep pool made her remember that time as the freest and happiest of her life.



Fort de France was a major port in the Caribbean because Martinique was the first stop for ships following the trade winds from Europe. Nels Lindstrom's first journey to Martinique was in 1812 during the British occupation. He had risen to the rank of captain of a merchant ship out of Amsterdam. Nels had few friends beyond the first officer and boatswain on his ship, and he had no ties to any land or country. After an anchor crushed his leg in 1830, he decided to make his home on Martinique, in St. Pierre.

Nels used two canes to manage the uneven cobblestones as he wandered the port. On one clear, warm day, he stopped to watch the ships loading and unloading. He was excited when he spied a captain he knew from his sailing days coming down the gangplank of the "India".

"Captain Vandenheuvel," Nels called out. "What has you in port today?"

Vandenheuvel strode to the side of his old shipmate. "We arrived on Monday, up from Brasil, out of Africa," he said. The two men shook hands and Vandenheuvel squeezed Nels' shoulder with the affection of a long-known friend.

"How was the crossing?"

“Hell. Pure hell. Doldrums about a thousand miles west of Cape Verde. We sat out there for five bloody days. If the wind didn’t come up, the men might have lost their heads.”

While they talked about ships and sailing, Nels attention turned to a lively young woman out of the corner of his eye.

Susanne Simone du Parquet was a fifteen-year-old mulatto beauty – French blood mixed with African and Carib. Sassie, as she was called, was the daughter of a fishmonger working out of the port, and she had the eye of every man who passed through the port.

“Do you know that young firecracker?” Vandenheuvel asked.

“No. I’m not sure I’ve seen her before.”

“She spurns all the sailors and officers alike, so don’t get your hopes up.”

“I’m well past the days of having hopes about young women.”

Sassie was waiting for a man who wouldn’t be at sea most of the year. When Nels tipped his hat to her, she was impressed by his height and beguiled by his straw-like hair and the palest blue eyes she’d ever seen. Despite his canes, he carried himself with authority. She didn’t think he could walk the rolling decks of a ship with those canes.

Despite his age and disability, Nels made it his business to find out more about the young beauty who rebuffed all prospective suitors. He bought fish from her stall everyday. He spoke to her in a friendly way and tried to earn her trust.

After his persistent attentions for more than three weeks, she Sassie let Nels begin to court her. He hired a buggy to drive her into the hills or along the coastal road. He gave her small presents – a wide-brimmed straw hat with a pink ribbon and an enameled bracelet from China. He invited her to go to dinner with friends where several loosely defined couples created a convivial atmosphere. All these attentions made Sassie grow to confide in him and open up to his expressions of affection. It wasn’t long before she accepted his invitation to share his house.

Sassie’s parents had been slaves, called “marrons” by the French, working in the sugar cane fields. When the slaves were freed the first time in 1815, her parents struck out on their own. Benoit took his last name from Jacques du Parquet, the first governor of the island. He and Desireé started a business with a small fishing boat and a table from which Desireé sold Benoit’s catch. By the time Sassie was born, Benoit had a 40-foot sailboat with a crew of three, and

Desiree had a canvas-covered stall where she could keep the baby in a basket and later on a length of rope.

“*Poisson frais*,” Desiree would call in songs she made up on the spot. “On a blue sky day, monsieur, I have *crevette grise* for you.” Before she was five, Sassie was singing the songs, too. The smell of fish was always on her parents, and she seemed to have been born with it. That smell meant life – life and freedom. It was a smell Nels Lindstrom came to love, too.

Angelise was born in 1834 and grew up running the streets of the town with other children from the port market. Riding bareback on her black filly, her two friends sitting behind her, she went into the fragrant meadows and hills of the countryside and to the wide, white beaches up the coast. The three runaways swam in the ocean and the pools in the creek. They played blind man’s bluff, sang nursery rhymes, and drank water from the spring.

Sassie never made Angelise work. “Twelve will be soon enough,” she said. “I started working a stall when I was a baby. I want my daughter to have a free childhood.” Nels agreed. He didn’t even want Sassie to work, but she insisted – to honor her parents, she told him.

In 1842, typhoid spread through St. Pierre and killed one hundred people. Susanne Simone du Parquet was one of them. After her body was removed for the Funeral Mass, Nels Lindstrom never stepped foot in his house again.

Mère Saffron took the Captain and his daughter into her little house on the beach. She had been a tall woman once, but a dowager’s hump had stunted her so she had to lift her head to look forward. The old lady’s face was carved with the lines of age and a hard life. Her hands were as tough as any fisherman’s, and her thighs were like ham hocks.

After they were settled into a room by the kitchen, Mère Saffron sent her grandson Guillaume to collect the Captain’s possessions from the ghost-filled house. He said, No; he didn’t want anything.

Privately, Mère Saffron told Guillaume, “Bring Sassie’s trousseau trunk for Angelise.”

The passing of his wife took the life out of Nels Lindstrom. He had no love to give, even to his young daughter, neither pain nor joy to feel, and no imaginable future. For days on end, he sat and stared out the window or walked to the end of the sea wall where he watched the sun rise or set and wept.

Her father did not tell Angelise stories about her mother. The girl’s only vision of her mother’s beauty was in the smudged charcoal drawing her father

kept between two sheets of heavy paper in the drawer with his handkerchiefs, pocket watch and Bible. But to Angelise, it was as if she were seeing her mother through a curtain of lace. She was afraid she would forget what made her mother laugh or how her voice sounded.

Sometimes Angelise was sure she felt her mother's ghost in the fish market. Mère Saffron said, "It's possible, Chérie. Angels roam the earth. I'm sure your sweet maman is here to look after you and protect you from harm."

As she grew older, when she closed her eyes and concentrated, Angelise imagined she could feel her mother's hands made rough from handling fish all day, could see her curly hair falling out of her bonnet, hear the swish of layers of bright-colored skirts. She remembered how her mother's bloodstained aprons reflected fish scales in the sun. She wished she had known to hold onto everything her mother said, everything they did together – even simple things, like when her mother braided her hair before sending her to bed – so she would have it forever.

Like her father, Angelise spoke stilted English with a Swedish accent, but she learned French Creole from her mother. After they left Martinique, little by little, without her noticing, all but a few words of her French vanished. Each lost word, sense, memory, made her feel she was a disloyal daughter.

Her father told her, "You cannot be. Your mother lives in you. I see her in how you are growing – your beautiful face, your curly hair, the way you frown when you're concentrating."

As he spoke he stroked her hair and checked back his tears. "Don't be afraid of losing her, Angelise. She will always be with you."

Angelise was ten years old when she and her father sailed to the United States. Nels had accepted an offer to be harbormaster in Philadelphia. They left Mère Saffron and St. Pierre with one satchel each and Sassie's trousseau trunk. Though Angelise forgot many things from her childhood, she never forgot the warm, blue-green water and white foam of the sea, the smell of the fish market, the dark clouds shuttling across the sky before a storm, or the black skies when the cane fields were burning.

When she arrived in America, Angelise was taller than most women and thin as a reed. Her face promised beauty, but her silver blue eyes were startling against her biscuit-colored skin. Her honey-blond hair with lemon yellow streaks fell to her waist and fine little curls hugged her hairline.

Chapter 5

A soft breeze floated across Angelise's face, cooling her skin where it was damp from the remaining heat of the day. Without leaving her dream, she hoped the evening would bring relief.

While Angelise drifted in and out of sleep, her mind jumping from one memory to another, Ethan's sleep was disturbed by dreams. He tossed and turned, never completely waking, but not finding true rest either.



Ethan was twelve years old when he fell in love with a copper-colored girl whose silky black hair hung down her back in a long, thick braid. Dinah was a small girl who never grew past five feet. She had a heart-shaped face with a few freckles across her nose and cheeks, and her eyes were the color of amber. As she matured, she developed small breasts and a high round backside, strong thighs and tough hands. By the time Ethan was fifteen he was courting her like a big sick bumblebee lured to the brightest flower in the garden.

Ethan was a fine-looking young man, the color of red clay dirt with wooly black hair he parted on the side. His large, almond-shaped eyes were so dark the pupils were almost indistinguishable, and they could transform his face from friendly to menacing in a flash. He was smart and amiable, but strong enough to put off any man who had a thought of challenging him.

Master McElhannon made Ethan an apprentice to Uncle Shadrach and Ethan learned the smithing trade quickly. He had an affinity for working with horses and a natural hand at shaping strong tools. He gained a reputation in the area and the Master let him keep the tips the neighbors paid him for his handiwork. Ethan saved every penny with the thought of earning enough to buy his freedom. And smithing was an important trade that could provide him work when he was a free man, should that day ever come.

"Hey, li'l gal, come on ovah heah," Ethan said when Dinah took a step into the blacksmith barn on a hot summer day. He was sweating from the heat of the fire and his shirt was open to the waist; its sleeves had been ripped off at the shoulders. He put aside a newly fashioned horseshoe.

"No, y'all come on ova heah," she said stubbornly. "It's frightful hawt in dere." She wore a blue checked muslin dress made from one of Mrs.

McElhannon's castoffs. It had no collar, and her collarbone was visible above the bodice. Her little slippers were the color of the summer's silky dust earth.

"What you want, gal?" Ethan said as he put down his tongs and moved to where she stood with her hands on her hips.

"You need uh do some-fin' 'bout yo moonin' ovah me," she said with a sly smile.

"An' what should dat be, li'l sistah?"

"Fo' one thang, I ain't yo sistah!" They both laughed. "And fo' uh 'nuddah thang," she continued, "I thank you should gone head an' marry me an' stop all dis fussin' an' hidin' an' chasin'."

Ethan's mouth gaped open and his eyes bugged out. "Whoo-wee," he whistled.

"Ya jus' gonna stand dere, boy?" she said, grinning.

He took her hand and led her to the back of the barn. They sat close to each other on an old wood bench set against the wall. The afternoon smelled of burnt wood, peaches, sweat, and strawberries – the peaches were her mouth and the strawberries the back of her neck under her long black braid. For a few moments they grinned at each other. Then Ethan said, "I cain't sit too long. When da fire's goin' I gotta work. Anyone come by, dey wanna know where I be."

"What I want won't keep ya. You should know if ya want me fo' yo wife."

"Ain't dat simple..."

She jumped up, held her arms out and pulled him to his feet. She stood on the bench to reach his height and wrapped her arms around his neck. It felt like he was being enveloped in the branches of a flowering tree. The peach and briny smell of her skin overwhelmed him; it was so strong he felt slightly dizzy. The scent of her stirred him up. He closed his eyes as she held him tightly and whispered in his ear: "Ya bettah figgah dat out. I'se ready ta make yo home and has yo babies."

Ethan pulled back from her. With a raspy voice, he said, "Ya do know how ta make uh man feel like uh man, gal."

She kissed him on his sweaty forehead, then wiped her lips and laughed.

"Bye," she said, as she trotted off in the direction of the big house. She was meant to be killing chickens for the family's dinner.



Ethan pushed himself up and leaned back against the headboard. He could see himself in the glass next to the wardrobe. The reflection surprised him. It revealed an old man with deep grooves in his forehead. The dreams, the farm, the bed had fooled him into thinking he was young again. He turned and looked out the window instead.

Some thirty minutes later, Angelise knocked on his door and invited him to join her on the porch for a drink. His mind jumped back to the days they shared spirits behind the barn so Osborne wouldn't catch them. *Somehow*, he thought to himself, *I have imagined she stayed the same even knowing how much I've changed.*

Ethan had changed dramatically over the years, on the inside as well as in appearance. The changes came from feeling safe and loved and free in his heart, from knowing he was brave and honorable. He had been through things Angelise would never suspect. Perhaps it was the same for her. He knew he would not withhold his story from her, if she asked him to tell it. That, at least, had changed: he had no need to keep secrets.

The porch screen moaned in a drawn out whine when Ethan pushed it open. Angelise tskd, but didn't say anything. She had changed her dress to a gauzy peach linen ensemble – and it appeared she was wearing a corset. He was relieved he had decided to wear his still damp white shirt and suit jacket.

“I'm drinking rum. Would you like some? Or would you prefer lemonade or iced tea?”

“How about rum in the lemonade?” Ethan smiled.

Angelise blew a loose hair out of her eye and said, “I first sipped rum when I was a girl on Martinique.” She half-filled a cut-crystal glass from the decanter on the table and added lemonade to top it off.

“And don't you mind if I lose my head,” she said. “I don't restrain myself in my old age. If I die from falling down after imbibing too much, so be it.” She laughed, but the twinkle in her eye let him know she wasn't serious, at least about the dying.

“Martinique” he said with a faraway look in his eyes. “When you first told me about that place, I couldn't believe it was real. Pink and yellow and blue houses. Pirates. A hundred ways to fry a hundred kinds of sea creatures.”

“Sauté,” corrected Angelise. With a plaintive look, she said, “I have forgotten St. Pierre almost entirely. But in rare moments, I can smell the sea, the fish stalls. I

can hear the musical sound of people speaking Creole.” She looked him in the eye and whispered, “I feel as if I’m being carried through the air, back to my *petite maison*, and ... when I arrive, nothing has changed.”

Ethan sipped his drink and felt the biting heat of the rum as it went down. “Aaaah.”

“It’s good, isn’t it? It’s from the islands.”

“I’m not sure I tasted the lemonade,” he sputtered. “It’s been a while since I drank...” He coughed, “...with you. I’m not sure I can keep up. But this does make me feel like a young man again.”

“You’re an old man,” said Angelise, gently poking him in the arm. “You can’t escape it.” He remembered the few times she had touched him the first few weeks of his stay on the Hoffmann farm. He always flinched, so she made herself stop.

“I already felt like an old man when I met you all those years ago,” Ethan said soberly.

“You did look the worse for wear,” she said. “I forget. How long had you been traveling?”

“It was six days ’fore I got to the Chesapeake Bay and five more ’til I got to Philadelphia. I worked there for a year, savin’ money and collectin’ charity to try to get Dinah. Then another five days findin’ my way across to here. And I didn’t think I’d be stoppin’ here more’n a day or two.”

“If we didn’t have the cabin, we might not have been able to keep you longer than that.”

“Do you still use it as your escape from people ... and your chores?” he said smiling.

“I’m not sure it’s still standing.” Angelise had given up the cabin to Ethan after the summer of ‘63. She used it again after the War ended, but it was never the same.

“Osborne finally restored that ramshackle fishing cabin after I told him staying in the house felt like being in jail. Always someone in and out. Mrs. Engle, Romy, him.” She laughed.

“What did he say?”

“Of course, I didn’t leave it at that. ‘Farmhands, neighbors. ... Pastor Bartels.’ Do you remember him?” Ethan nodded. “Professor Schmidt. It was always ‘Be on your best behavior. Be a lady.’” Her eyebrows went up. “I told him, ‘I can’t abide it!’” She stomped her foot, but not with the impact she had used that day.

“You always did have a way with the word,” Ethan laughed.

“Yes,” she said with a wink. “Osborne told me, ‘Don’t exaggerate, Angelise. You’re looking for a way to avoid your chores.’”

After sipping her rum silently for a moment, Angelise said, “Ed Mathews died some time ago and there’s hardly a trace of him anywhere.”

“How could that be?”

“His orchards are still there; someone else owns them now. As far as I know, his house is still standing, but you never could see it from the road.” Angelise sipped her rum and rocked. When events took place, one at a time, over the years, they were discrete, but when you told the story of how things happened, it could seem too great for the heart to hold. “His church was burned down and the cemetery was desecrated.” A tear threatened to spill. “His children went off in different directions. ... They don’t call it Pine Hill anymore.”

Ethan took it all in. He knew it was part of a bigger story. But all he said was, “What do they call it now?”

“Yellow Hill ... It just started being called that. No one knows who started it or when, but only the old folks still call it Pine Hill.”

“Yellow Hill? How’d they come up with that?”

“You know how light-skinned Mr. Mathews was – and his children, too... Some people say...”

“Aaaah.” Ethan rocked in time with Angelise and together they looked off toward the sunset. The buttermilk clouds had turned to gold.

After several minutes, Ethan broke the silence. “That was a pretty little cabin...”

“It was in a perfect position to keep runaways on their journey North.”

“I’d been walkin’ along some creek or another – and close along the border – for miles before I found it. Didn’t know how much farther I’d have to go.”

“It’s a good thing we were there when you showed up or you might have kept going.” She smiled and squeezed his hand. Another familiar gesture. Maybe the rum had gone to her head.

“I saw the mark on the tree a half-mile down stream. I hid in the cattails for a good while before Osborne saw me and told me to come out.”

That was the day they painted the table for the porch. Bright pink. Two cleaned and repaired ladder-back chairs from the attic were painted red. Osborne warned that they would attract bees and hummingbirds. When they were finished, they sat on the floorboards and rested their backs against the new porch rail. Osborne joked with her about her “doll house” and she accused him of having no sense of adventure. More tit for tat led to fits of laughter, and the more they said, the more they laughed. That was what Ethan had seen.



The cabin was made of pine, grayed from time and weather. Angelise wanted to paint the porch, but Osborne convinced her that colorful paint would make it stand out when they wanted it to blend in with the woods around it.

“I don’t understand why you want to use these colors. The merchant in Gettysburg is baffled,” Osborne said. “You never sew or embroider for the family and now you’ve created all these fine linens for your bed,” he said. “No one uses silk and satin for pillow covers and table cloths,” he said. “I won’t buy a brass bed,” he said. “The one in the attic will suit you fine,” he said.



“Before you came along, a half-breed stayed with us for a month. He was seriously ill when he arrived and it took him a while to get on his feet again.”

“I remember Nelson talking about him.”

“Yes, King Virgil got Nelson in a few jams before he went on his way.” Angelise smiled as she remembered those lyric days when Nelson was turning from boy to young man. “Then, after you, George came along. Then Gideon. He’d been moving around for years.”

“I remember. Kentucky to Ohio to Michigan and all those other places. When he stopped ridin’ with John Brown, he needed to find a safe place to stay. But I didn’t understand how he ended up here. Not until I found out about Major Henderson.”

“When he found his way to us, war was sure. He wanted to fight.”

“Why here, then?” Ethan smiled. “You all bein’ pacifists.”

“I guess he made a mistake,” Angelise laughed.

“He sure never was a pacifist, was he?”

The Silence of Sorrowful Hours

“No,” she laughed. “If Osborne had known half the things he did, he would have sent him on his way.”

“He used that bum arm to fool a lot of folk.”

“Including Osborne, you know. After he came, it seemed like he was more in charge than Osborne – at least about the things he wanted to be in charge of.”

“He was like that. Kept his own counsel. Did what he needed to do.”

“And remember how he would never stay in the cabin? A bunch of frou- frou, he called it.”

Chapter 6

"I think we should send Nelson to boarding school," Osborne suggested one evening after the boy had gone to bed and Romy had finished washing up. It was warm and the air was still; Angelise had kicked off her slippers and was fanning her legs with her skirt.

"What?" She had never thought of not having Nelson with them. She hadn't thought about living alone with Osborne.

"It's hard for us to give him the attention or the education he needs."

"He's seven years old!" Angelise protested.

"I want to send him to the Friends School in Harrisburg. It will give him the best preparation for his future."

"What future? How can a little boy think about his future?"

"He'll come home on all the holidays and in the summer"

"He's too young!"

"They take boys as young as six. Nelson is almost eight."

"No, Osborne, Nelson is seven years old. He's an orphan. We only moved here two years ago. How can you send him away?"

"Are you defending Nelson or yourself?"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"You spend very little time with him. Why should you care if he's here or not?"

"Osborne, don't say that!" Angelise began to cry.

"You're thinking about yourself, being uprooted from your home after your mother died..."

"No!"

"It's nothing like that for Nelson."

"Stop it!" she screamed. "I was ten. He's only seven. There was no choice for me. But Nelson has us. He doesn't have to go."

"Angelise, I work all day and so do you. Whenever you have a chance you run off to your cabin."

"That's unfair! Are you blaming me? Are you making me the reason you want to send him away?" She buried her head in her arms.

Osborne reached across to pat her head. "I'm sorry. I didn't meant to..."

Angelise twisted away. "Leave me alone," she cried.

Osborne spoke more tenderly. "Nelson needs to be educated. He needs to be around other boys. He needs discipline. We aren't giving him those things."

"I taught him to read!"

"Angelise, I am a trained educator, but I can either teach Nelson or I can work the farm. And you don't have the time or temperament to devote to him." She tried to protest. "You know I'm right," he said with finality.

"What about Mr. Duggan? Or Mr. Wendell? He tutors the Kerchner children."

"The school in Harrisburg will be better for many reasons."

"What about the public school?"

"You know I don't agree with that form of education," Osborne said, irritated again. "Nelson is alone most of the day. He doesn't have anyone to play with. It's not a good life for him. And we could be putting him in danger. ... Ethan ... the others."

"Oh, Osborne, I can't bear to think of it. It's our own little family. He's our own little boy." She knew this was the wrong way to say it. Osborne was always quick to correct anyone who thought Angelise and he were Nelson's parents.

"We aren't giving him a proper life, Angelise. He has no religious instruction. He doesn't have manners except what Mrs. Engle teaches him. He doesn't wear shoes if he can get away from it. He's growing up like a wild Indian."

"I can."

"You don't wear shoes either," Osborne said as he pointed to her bare feet resting on the chair next to her. Her feet were long and narrow, the toes straight, the ankles slim; the bone on the outside of her ankle was sharp. He noticed all these things.

Angelise dropped her feet to the floor and let her dress fall around her ankles. Osborne sat down on the chair where her feet had just rested and said, "I promised my mother I would raise him as if I were his father." He didn't like to use this leverage on her, but he felt he had to. "He needs to go to boarding school."

There was nothing more to be said. Angelise slipped her feet into her slippers and stood up. "I'm going," she said sullenly, her face set against him.

Osborne put his arm on hers. "Not now, Angelise. It's too late. It's too cold."

She pulled away from him. "I know my way in the dark."

"I know," he said softly, "but I don't want you to go." She turned back to him, her eyes wide, her head tilted. Then he said, "I'm not your father, I know, but..."

The spell was broken. But she did as he asked. She removed her slippers again and climbed the back stairs slowly, like a pouting child.

Osborne took the White Hall road to the Lutheran Church parsonage where Pastor Bartels lived. He visited the pastor now and then for a game of chess and the philosophical conversations they enjoyed together. The pastor was active in the community and kept Osborne up-to-date about his neighbors. He also taught a class at the seminary in Gettysburg once a week and told Osborne about his experiences with the faculty and students.

Martin Bartels was from one of the oldest families in the area. After he completed his education at the Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg, he founded his little church. While he was completely inflexible in his Christian beliefs about sin and grace, he was eager to discuss the great minds of the day and the faiths and beliefs of others peoples around the world. He was strict in his teaching and preaching, but obviously a tender and indulgent husband and father. His plump pink face, baldpate, and broad smile supported Osborne's opinion of him as a naïve soul in the guise of a scholarly and austere preacher.

Mrs. Bartels let Osborne in and showed him to the pastor's study. Bookcases lined the walls; old books in German, Latin, Greek and English filled the shelves. The smell of old leather and musty paper had settled into the room. A table with an in-progress chess game was set up under a window. At the other end of the room an upholstered chair sat behind a large, ornately carved desk with leather inlay. Osborne waited by the chair on the opposite side.

"Herr Hoffmann," Martin Bartels said as he entered the room. He was dressed as he always was, in a black suit with stadelmaier and clerical collar.

"Pastor Bartels, *Vielen Dank, das Sie für mich zu sehen.* I've brought back the dictionary you lent me."

"It's my pleasure." He took the book from Osborne's extended hand. "Thank you. I haven't seen you often enough this summer."

"It's been a hard summer. No rain and then ruinous storms."

"I hear the same complaints every day."

"Forgive me..."

The pastor waved his hand dismissively, went behind his desk and sat down. He motioned for Osborne to do the same. "How are you managing? And how are your brother and sister?" Osborne felt the heat rise in his cheeks.

"We're getting by. We will at least break even this year, I'm sure. The railroad has made a big difference. I'm considering if I should clear more land."

"Do you have enough help?"

"Enough for now. I don't know how things will be in the next year. I may need to hire some steady workers." Osborne wanted to get to the reason he had come, and he knew the pastor did, too. But the preliminary conversation was necessary for politeness' sake. "I will send Nelson to school in Harrisburg in September."

"That's a good decision," the pastor said nodding. "*Der junge* needs discipline..." He blushed and said, "I'm sorry. I have..."

"It's true. I agree. My sister doesn't want him to go, but..."

Before Osborne could go on, Mrs. Bartels rapped on the door.

"*Komme herein, meine liebe,*" her husband said.

Curtsying, she directed her comments to Osborne. "Mr. Hoffmann, may I inquire as to the well-being of your lovely sister and young Nelson?" She was completely sincere in her description of Angelise. Osborne suspected she didn't have a spiteful bone in her body.

Hildegarde Bartels was a stout woman with gray hair parted in the middle and held back into a bun so tight it pulled at the corners of her eyes. Today she covered it with a white cap trimmed with cutout embroidery. She had a chubby face, unlined by age, and bright blue eyes, clear and kind. A model of propriety, she had small vanities, which she displayed in her clothing. Over her black dress, she wore a red and white checked apron, and the white collar of her dress was embroidered with red flowers and green leaves. Osborne had never seen her in a dress of any color other than black, but she always found a way to make it pretty.

"They are both very well, thank you," Osborne said. "I will tell them you asked after them." Osborne could never help but smile at Mrs. Bartels. She smiled back with affectionate warmth.

In a sweet, chirpy voice Mrs. Bartels said, "*Möchte Kaffee, liebe?*"

"*Ja, Hildy, wenn du bitte*" her husband replied.

Osborne nodded. "Coffee, please."

"*Möchte einige Backwaren, liebe?*" she asked.

“*Ja, liebe.*” To the distracted Osborne, he said, “Sweet rolls, Mr. Hoffmann?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Mrs. Bartels left the room saying, “*Ich werde wieder.*”

“Mr. Hoffmann, what brought you today?” The pastor smiled broadly, but his gray eyes were inquisitive. “I know it’s not for spiritual advice.” Osborne kept his relationship with God to himself, trying to demonstrate it by his words and actions.

Osborne smiled modestly and said, “I’ve come to talk to you about runaways.”

Pastor Bartels let out a long sigh, but gave no other reaction to Osborne’s words.

“I met Ed Mathews in Gettysburg last week.” Pastor Bartels nodded, his fingers forming a tent below his chin. “I told him I want to help. He said I should arrange it with you and Basil Biggs.”

They set everything up that afternoon. From the Kerchner farm three miles to the east, the runaways would work their way west to the creek, follow the Indian trail through the woods, cross at the fallen tree a little bit past the waterfall, look for the birch tree with the hatchet mark, then the bee crates, then the cabin.

Romy was picking mushrooms in early October, a month after Ethan had arrived. No one knew he was staying in the cabin. Angelise hadn’t change her habits, but stayed in the house at night. Romy crept along the creek bank with her basket, moving farther south than she usually ventured. As she went, she hummed a child’s nursery rhyme.

When she heard voices, Romy was startled. She looked up and, in the distance, she saw Angelise open the door of an old shack and let a Negro go in before her. Romy stifled a cry. Who was the man? Was Angelise in danger? Should she go for help? Less than a minute passed when Osborne rode up and entered the shack, too. Without understanding, Romy returned along the bank and made her way to the farmhouse.

The next day, the girl couldn’t hold the secret more than half an hour before she blurted out what she’d seen to Mrs. Engle. “I guess he was someone Mr. Hoffmann knows.”

“He must have been,” said Mrs. Engle. Cagily, she peppered Romy with questions.

“What did he look like?”

“Just like a Negro.”

“You must have seen. Was he tall or short? Dark or light?”

“He was tall, as tall as Mr. Hoffmann. As dark as a Negro.”

“Were they talking?”

“I suppose so. I couldn’t hear what they said, but they were cordial. There was no assault.”

“I’m sure we would have heard if anything untoward had happened.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Romy said.



Angelise sat without speaking for several minutes. She poured more rum in each of their glasses and rocked as she looked out towards the yew trees far across the field.

“Do you still keep bees,” Ethan asked.

“Oh, yes, but not down at the creek. They’re in the woods out behind the barns. I have many more flats than back then. I sell my honey.”

“I’d like to taste it again. I remember that honey. And the comb. I think it sustained me on some of my travels for Gideon.”

“I still make the candles, too. Annie helps me.”

“It’s good that you teach her all the skills, Angelise,” Ethan said, nodding his head.

“I know. Children today don’t want to learn how to care for a farm or a house.” She took another sip of her rum and waved her hand in front of her flushed cheeks. “I want Annie to go to college, but she should still know how to cook and sew and tend a garden.”

“Youngsters are like that. Think they know enough and more than you ever will. But I seem to recall that you were the same when I met you.”

“Annie’s fourteen, but she knows more about the world than I did when I was twenty-five.” She paused for a moment. “Well, that’s not true.” She thought back to her life in Martinique and then Philadelphia, on the farm, the War, her life with Marabella in Boston. “You and I know more than most, don’t we? And we have our secrets, too.” Another faraway look passed across her face.

The screen door squeaked open and Susanne poked her head out. “I may not know much, but I know that I made a good dinner for you and it’s on the table.”

“Oh, dear,” Angelise whispered to Ethan. Then to Susanne, she said, “Thank you, Chérie.” She got up and moved to the door. “You know I’m a dithering old woman, and you shouldn’t pay attention to me.”

“If I didn’t, you’d take a switch to me!” Susanne laughed.

“You know I never would. Now get in there.” Angelise patted Susanne’s backside and pushed her along. “We’re coming.”

Ethan rose a little slower than he had sat down. The train journey, the conversation, the memories, the rum made him unsteady. Angelise offered him her hand. “I ain’t that old yet, Miss Angelise. ... I mean, Angelise.” He grinned and said, “I guess my years with Colonel Anthony got me in a rut.”

A simple dinner was laid on the table. Pork chops, sliced tomatoes, corn, green beans, and biscuits. A pitcher of iced water and a decanter of chilled white wine sat on a silver tray. Angelise served the chops as Susanne left the room silently.

“One, will do me fine,” Ethan said. The piece she had placed on his plate from the end of an uncooperative fork was as thick as two. “My appetite isn’t as big as it used to be.” He smiled and added, “And I don’t work it off so easy anymore.”

“I don’t either,” Angelise replied. Still standing, she served portions of the rest of the food to both Ethan and herself. It was much more than either of them would be able to finish. “Sometimes I wish I had to work more just to keep occupied through the days. They go slowly when you aren’t busy.”

“I’m sure Annie keeps you busy.”

“During the school year, she’s gone all day. The long days of winter seem to pass at a snail’s pace. When it gets dark at four o’clock, I feel closed in – in my thoughts and my body.” She paused and took a bite of her meat. It took a few moments to chew and swallow, but Ethan suspected she wasn’t finished with her thought. When she spoke again, she said, “It’s funny how a day can stretch out, a winter can seem interminable, but at other times, I can hardly believe that a year has passed.”

“I know. When we’re young and waitin’ for the next excitin’ thing to happen – or the next possibility of capture or death – the days and weeks can take forever. The years seem hard to get through. But when we get older and we wish we could hold back the years, they seem to hurtle past us before we know it.”

“Remember when we built the false wall in the attic? That was a time we were all afraid and just waiting for someone to give us away and send a slave catcher to rustle you back to Maryland.”

“I hated that wall. It made me feel like less than a man when I had to hide in there.”

“It was better than getting caught. And Osborne could have been prosecuted for harboring you.”

“I know. When I looked at my choices, the wall was the better bet.” They shared a smile filled with fretful memories.

“I’m still convinced it was Mrs. Engle who told Will Bachman we were hiding runaways. She didn’t see the first of them, but I think she knew. Maybe Mr. Engle told her about Joby or someone else he saw when he was fishing. I felt sure she believed you were a free man – you and Gideon – but to some of those slave catchers, it didn’t matter.”

“She turned out not to be the God-fearin’ Christian lady she pretended to be.” Ethan simpered and used his hand to fan his face, exactly like Mrs. Engle used to do. Angelise laughed and almost choked on her food.

Mrs. Engle had been plump and pink and wore wire-rimmed spectacles. She parted her crinkly gray hair in the middle and wound it up tightly on either side of her face. Her nose was broad and turned up at the end. Angelise thought it looked like a pig’s snout. She used to mock her by pushing up the end of her nose and making a snorting sound.

“Mari let me know that right off. Mrs. Engle thought Mari was her special friend, so charming and beautiful. But she revealed her true colors.”

“It was because Mrs. Engle admired her so much that Mari could take clothes from her mendin’ basket and food from under her nose when there was someone stayin’ in the cabin.”

“Mari told me Mrs. Engle was a better actress than she could ever be.” Angelise pursed her lips and looked down her nose. “She was high-handed with me, then whined like a spoiled child to her husband. She whispered her gossip like a rat sniffing out its food. She conspired with Nelson – the two of them against the world. She dismissed the day workers with a sneer and then stooped to lick Osborne’s boots!”

Ethan hooted with laughter at the pictures Angelise painted. “Lordy me, you got the woman pat,” he sputtered.

Susanne pushed through the swinging door from the kitchen. “Is everything satisfactory, Mémé?”

“Of course, Chérie,” Angelise said, still coughing. She took a large gulp of her wine.

“You should drink water, Mémé.”

“Wine goes down better at this time of the evening,” said Angelise as another coughing fit began. When she could speak again, she said, “Have you been eavesdropping?”

Susanne flushed, but denied the accusation. “I heard you coughing,” she declared.

“You better not press your ear against that door, you little scamp. It’s impolite. Our conversation is personal and for adults.”

Ethan could see that Susanne was embarrassed by Angelise’s scolding. “No harm done,” he said. “It wouldn’t hurt for the girl to hear some of our old stories.”

Angelise took the admonishment to heart and said, “You’re right. But I don’t think tonight’s the night for that. And I don’t think she should try to hear them by listening behind the door.”

“I wasn’t...” Susanne tried to protest.

“Off you go, Chérie,” Angelise said in a kinder tone. “I believe you. But wait until you’re invited to hear the old stories, *ma bonbon*.”

“Yes, Mémé,” Susanne said, chastened. “But I wasn’t listening.”

Angelise turned back to Ethan and said, “Mari and I told each other our secrets from the very beginning.”

“You were like sisters.”

“We were not alike in most ways, but I suppose we were like sisters. We came from foreign lands. We were orphans. We spent our lives hiding who we were.”

“You needed each other.”

“She was the only person who understood me.” Angelise was teary-eyed again. She wiped her face and said, “Maybe it’s the rum or the wine. I’m almost worn out from waiting to see you. I’ve been jumpy all week.”

“I’ve been uneasy, too,” Ethan replied. “But I feel better now. This old house, as much as you’ve fixed it up, gives a comfort to me.”

“And having you here, does the same for me. You were a blessing to all of us.”

“I couldn’t have been more a blessing to you than you were to.” He remembered the money she had given him when he left the farm for good.

Angelise poured herself another glass of wine and topped Ethan’s off. “It calms me down,” she explained. She clinked her glass against his, which he had not lifted from the table, and said, “*Santé*.”

They sat in silence for a while, each with their own memories. Then, as if their conversation had not been interrupted, Angelise said, “That time Will Bachmann – I’m sure it was him – sent those men. . . . If Osborne hadn’t walked in, I believe they would have thrown me aside without a second thought. But I was determined to hold my ground.”

“And there I was hidin’ upstairs. We hadn’t built the wall yet. Remember?”

“I’d never seen Osborne so heroic as he was that day.”