

Railroad of Souls

Senior project/Honors thesis

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Artist Statement

The idea for my senior project has been long in my mind, and I've been writing bits and pieces of it since high school, not fully forming the plot until this last fall. My inspiration for this project came largely from the *Dear America* series, a collection of fictional diaries "written by" girls aged thirteen to sixteen, during historically noteworthy events, such as the sinking of the *Titanic*, traveling the Oregon Trail, the Gold Rush, and the Salem witch trials. Two of the thirty-six books are from the perspective of females slaves living on plantations in the South during the nineteenth century. It was these two books that I would return to again and again when I didn't have a good book to read.

My other inspiration for this project was Katherin Ayres's *North by Night*, also a historical and fictional diary set in nineteenth century America. The book follows a young woman from Atwater (only 30 miles south of Lake Erie) who must pretend to care for an old widow—who fakes the mumps—in order to help her hide nine fugitive slaves who cannot move to the next station on the underground railroad because one is pregnant. This has also been a book I like to revisit, even as recently as two years ago. But after reading and rereading these three books, I couldn't find any others on the same topic, diary format or otherwise. I didn't want the stories to stop, so I started writing one.

Research for my project, coincidentally, began with *North by Night*, in which the author had included a map of underground railroad routes. I randomly picked a small town near the

social class.

I attained specific information on the underground railroad from websites of authentic former stations, such as the Levi Coffin House and the John Rankin House, and historic societies. Further details about routes, stations, false-bottom wagons, and myths about quilts were all available on the official Freedom Center website. Some of these websites included pictures of secret rooms and false-bottom wagons, which I used to help me accurately describe such things in my project.

In addition to researching specifics, I realized that politics was an issue, and to actually read pamphlets that were circulated at the time would be beneficial, not just to know perspectives on the issue of slavery, but also to make my characters have knowledge of them—which they would have. I found original text copies of over one hundred anti-slavery pamphlets online through the University of Massachusetts, including *Walker's Appeal*, *Letters on American Slavery*, *Justice and Expediency pamphlet*, *the Declaration of Sentiments and Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society*. But pamphlets were not the only way to express anti-slavery opinions in the nineteenth century, so I also researched poetry. I already owned *Voices of Freedom* by John Greenleaf Whittier (an original 1860 copy), but I also found work by William Cowper and Charlotte Elizabeth, among others.

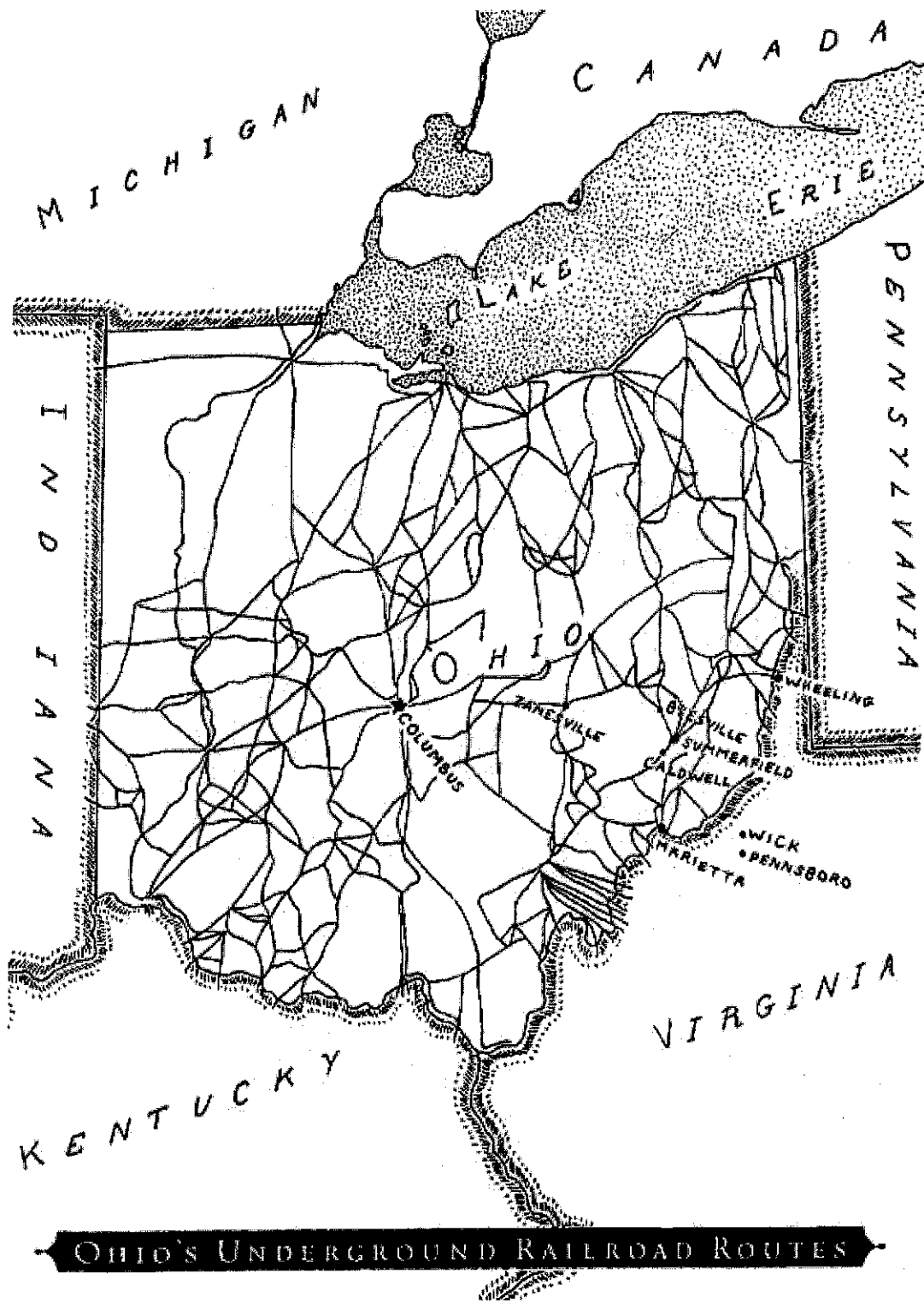
Another aspect I wanted to include in my project was religion, not only to authenticate the time period, but also to show the different interpretations at the time. I researched Bible verses that both supported and denounced slavery, as well as well-known verses a person could quote, either in prayer or in an argument. My project includes many of these, and although the contrast of interpretations of the Bible does not yet appear in my novel (part two will occur on

interpreted as Clare's inability to understand Simon's experiences as a slave. Although not all of my images are intended to act as symbolism, it seems to sprout from the precise connotation of my diction. Frequently I am pleasantly surprised at the symbolism I accidentally create with an image, and I began to do this intentionally while writing my senior project.

The issue I struggled with most during this project was whether or not young adult fiction can be considered literary. From my study at BSU, I have come the understanding that literary writing consists of big ideas and philosophical concepts— things that really make the reader stop and think, and possibly stay with them years after they've read the book. Popular fiction, on the other hand, is written mainly for entertainment. Although readers may also remember this kind of writing, it is typically due to plot or an interesting character. In my project, the age of my audience deterred me from expanding very far into philosophical ideas. I was afraid that if I delved too deeply I would not only talk over my reader, but they would lose interest and set the book down. However, I was then reminded that *Huckleberry Finn* was written for children, and my concept of what is appropriate for young adult fiction was challenged. My adviser also noted that the young adults who would be reading my work wouldn't be the average person, but a person who is *interested* in reading, and most likely had already encountered some form of literary work. Furthermore, just because a book is categorized as young adult does not mean that adults will not read it (i.e. *Harry Potter*).

With the new understanding that young adult fiction *can* be literary, I then considered whether or not this project could be considered literary or popular fiction.

If I were to compare my project to authentic slave narratives, I would definitely say that my work is nowhere near literary. However, since there is a difference between fiction and



Chapter 1

I AWOKE to the faint barking of dogs and shouting men. At first I thought I was still dreaming, but when I saw a distant light out my window I knew I was mistaken. Throwing back my many quilts, I fitted my feet into shoes. Blindly, I moved around the room, finding my heavy overcoat folded over the back of the rocking chair. I crept through the darkness as I stuffed my arms through the sleeves. Pausing just inside the doorway of Samuel's room, I spoke in a whisper. "Samuel?"

"I'm awake. Turn around, will you?"

I heard the rustle of clothing as my brother pulled his trousers on under his nightshirt. I waited quietly, playing with a strand of my hair, trying to ignore the rapid beating beneath my bosom. Two soft clunks told me Samuel had his shoes on, so I turned back around.

care not to touch anything until after you wash your hands. Get rid of the water and get back into bed.”

“Yes, Pa.” We knew the routine by heart, why was he running through it again? We were wasting valuable time.

Pa paused and listened; we all did. The barking was louder now. Pa's brow furrowed a little and I bit my lip.

“All right,” Pa said, breaking the silence. “God speed.”

He opened the door and motioned for Samuel to follow. I closed the door behind them, shivering from a gust of spring air. I watched them through the window for a few moments, grateful as a cloud crept over the moon. The darkness would help hide them.

I took off my overcoat, since it would get in the way, and squatted in front of the fireplace. The log had burnt out, but the hearth was still slightly warm. I removed the remains of wood and cleared the ash with a short-handled broom. Moving my fingers around the hearth's surface I found a groove filled with ash. Digging my fingers into the groove I scraped at the crusted ash until it was clear. Then I stuck my fingers in deep and pried up the hearth—revealing a secret room. Resting the false-bottom against the back of the fireplace, I carefully stepped into the hole.

Walking down backwards, I put my hands on the steps I had just walked on. The scent of earth and stale air rose around me. At the bottom of the stairs I stooped, because the ceiling was low, and peered through the darkness. Striking a match, I quickly found a candle on the floor and lit the wick. Candle in hand, I tidied up the small dirt room. Three straw pallets lay on the floor. I covered each one with two blankets, and then spread a large quilt with the Star of Bethlehem

mingled among the fierce barks. In a few moments, the sound became one—a chorus for death. It sent chills up my spine.

They had found their prey.

I took a deep breath and said a silent prayer. The light now passed the Mason farm and headed on toward the Thompson farm. The snap of a twig startled me and I turned my gaze to the immediate space in front of our house. I saw a figure moving closer in the dark.

“Who comes calling this late of night?” I called out, trying to conceal my apprehension.

“Pa, Clare. Open the door, please.”

I opened the door and stepped back out of the way. As Pa came forward I saw the glimmer of moonlit sweat on a face black as the night itself. Pa staggered under the weight of the friend as they climbed the three steps to the veranda. As soon as they got inside, I shut and locked the door. Pa helped the friend down the stairs to the hidden room. I stood at the top of the hole, waiting for instructions.

“Clare?”

“I’m right here, Pa.”

“Could you get a towel and a bowl of water? And some bandages,” he added.

I did as I was told, hoping the ash on my hands wouldn’t transfer onto the requested items. I set them on the top step. “Here you are,” I said.

Pa came up to get them, poking his head out. The solemn look on his face told me that the friend was in bad shape. “His leg is all torn up, but he won’t tell me what happened. Maybe he had a run in with one of the dogs. Maybe he got it caught in a trap. I don’t know. Either way, I

My hands flew to my mouth as I gasped. "Samuel!" I hissed. "What possessed you to do that?"

Samuel shrugged with a smile and turned to go back to his room. "I'll see you when they do," was all he said.

"Wait," I said. "Do you have pepper on your hands?"

"Naw," he said. "I rubbed on some dirt and hay and, well, let's just say if they smell anything, it won't be pepper." He cracked another smile and retreated to his bedroom.

"Make sure you don't have any leaves in your hair," I whisper-called after him. Any little thing could give away that he had been outside. I shook my head. I admired my brother, but it was times like these that I worried about him.

"Clare?"

I returned to the fireplace. "Yes, Pa?" I could tell he was speaking through clenched teeth and it worried me.

"Please keep watch and tell me if those," he paused, "*monsters* are coming."

Monster! Never has Pa called another man a monster. What had he found that justified such anger? I immediately imagined a back lined with a crosshatch of whip marks, festering wounds, and a branded R for runaway on his shoulder—punishments other friends had worn when they arrived. I stood at the window and diligently scrutinized the world outside. The light was positioned just north of the Thompson farm now, probably near the river, or the thicket.

I shuddered. I was thankful that I didn't have to run for freedom in the middle of the night, that I didn't have men and dogs chasing me, that I would never experience chains and labor and slavery. I was also thankful that I had the opportunity to help those who were not as

Once the false-bottom was in place, I pushed ash back into the groove, packing it hard, so it could not be distinguished from the rest of the hearth. I spread the ashes and bits of burnt wood back over the hearth, and placed a partially burnt log on top and stepped back.

It looked normal. No one would guess there was a secret entrance. Pa had planned it that way. When he built the house he was already involved in helping friends of the night. Several times when I was just a child he caught me trying to go into the hidden room. I wanted it to be my play house. He gave me a thorough talking to and then extra chores. Only now when I look back do I realize how I could have jeopardized my family. Had someone come along and seen the opening and the room, they would have come to the only logical reason for as having such a place.

I looked out the window again. The light was bobbing its way toward the Mason farm. Apparently the Thompson household didn't seem suspicious. That and their home was small and easily searched.

Before I washed my hands I got a pinch of pepper and sprinkled it among the ashes in the fireplace, just in case the dogs were brought inside. Washing my hands in a bowl of water, I was careful to remove any smudge of ash. Details were very important. Anything we overlooked could give us away.

Pa came out, now in his nightclothes, holding a rifle. The first time Pa let me help with late night visitors I had been startled by the weapon. But now, having participated for a couple years, I know that the rifle was merely precaution. It was only used when opening the door late at night.

He nodded towards the window. "They're searching the Mason farm now."

I heard Pa's footsteps pause as he checked on Samuel, who was already snoring. I listened intently. The men were now approaching our house, the dogs were still barking. After what seemed like hours there came four knocks at our door. Then four more, louder this time.

I heard the scrape of a match and then the clunk of Pa's shoes as he slipped them on. I rolled over to see the front door, which was visible through my bedroom's open doorway. I saw Pa's back as he went to the door, rifle in hand. He wore his overcoat now and opened the door a crack.

"Who comes calling this late of night?" he asked in the proper manner.

"Richard Clary, good sir. And my men."

"Evening folks. Anything I can help you with?" Pa's voice was as smooth as fresh cream. I tried to catch a glance of the men, but Pa was blocking the way, probably on purpose.

"As a matter of fact, you can," said the man named Richard Clary. "Two of my negroes ran off and we nearly caught up to them until we lost the trail around here. You haven't seen anything, have you?"

"No, I've been in bed since shortly after sundown."

"You sure about that?" Richard Clary asked suspiciously.

"Quite," Pa said, expertly keeping the anger from his voice.

"Well then, you won't mind if we have a look around, will you?"

"Not at all." Pa always let in slave catchers, because they might get suspicious if he said no. He stepped back and swung his arm wide to welcome them. Five men tramped into our clean kitchen, undoubtedly leaving muddy foot prints everywhere. Now I knew what I'd be doing tomorrow. I rolled over again, my back to the doorway.

hollow spots. Richard Clary was looking around the room, taking in his surroundings. His eyes darted here and there, looking for seams in the woodwork. How his eyes would bulge if he saw the entrance to our hidden room!

Pa and Samuel entered the kitchen, so Ma and I followed. Richard Clary glanced at Samuel, but his eyes lingered on my face, my lips, my eyes. I felt suddenly warmer and turned to busy myself with the kettle.

"Would you gentlemen like some tea?" I asked.

"Yes indeed, I would," Richard Clary answered.

I glanced at them as I coaxed a fire to life. Pa's hands were clenched at his sides, and his face had become subtly harder. He had seen the way Richard Clary looked at me.

"Well then, men, let us have a look." Richard Clary flashed a smile towards me and I turned back around.

Pa and Samuel followed the men, making sure they didn't pocket any of our belongings. Richard Clary said he would search the kitchen, which he only half did. As he tapped the walls and stomped on the floors he seemed not to listen, and instead sneak glances in my direction. After several minutes, the small kettle in the fireplace came to boil. As I lifted it off the hook, the log sparked and I jumped backwards, bumping into Richard Clary. He steadied me and backed up. I apologized profusely, but I could see Ma was not happy with the incident.

"It's quite all right. I was too close to your elbow," said

Richard Clary. He moved out of my way and then stood by the fire. Suddenly he yelled out,

"What is that?"

My heart flew to my throat and I spun around to face him. He was looking at the

well. I tried not to notice. "Well, she must be something dear to have so many men come calling already. Not even sixteen." He shook his head, whistled, and flashed me another smile.

I tried to calm the beating in my chest. A handsome man like him was interested in *me*? Despite his use of slavery, I was excited by the idea that I was desirable. I presented Richard Clary with tea and pie and he sat down right at our table and began eating, rather properly too; he held his fork in a polite manner and ate small bites, and even extended his pinky finger when he drank the tea. He was so well-mannered that it was hard to believe he could be a slave owner.

When his men finished searching the house and barn they joined him at the table and ate—rather disgustingly. Richard Clary was the only one with manners. The other men bolted their food faster than starving dogs. Only one of them touched their tea, the man with the scar, and he promptly

declared it was awful. After they had their fill, I cleared the table and stood beside Samuel, who was more asleep than awake.

"Well, Mr. Gauge," Richard Clary began, "thank you for your hospitality. My apologies for bothering you at this time of night. Do you have any suggestions for a place us men could spend the night?"

"There is an inn a couple miles west at Summerfield," Pa said.

"Well, then we best be on our way. Send word to that inn if you spot one of my negroes."

Pa nodded. "Will do." He opened the door and Richard Clary and his company filed through it. Shutting the door, Pa joined Ma, Samuel, and me at the window. The men mounted their horses and set off. Richard Clary flashed one more smile and waved before he shaking the reins of his own horse. We watched as their light bobbed off and eventually disappeared over a

Chapter 11

THE FOLLOWING DAY was the Sabbath, and I was hustled off to church without being allowed to see our visiting friend. Pa stayed home to take care of him. He told Ma to tell the church ladies that he wasn't feeling well. I pleaded to remain at the house as well, but Ma said it would draw suspicion.

So I helped Samuel hitch our two draft horses, Naomi and Ruth, to the wagon and climbed in the back. Today it was just like any normal wagon, but when friends of the night needed to be transported, Pa placed a false floor a foot higher than the real floor, creating a place for escaped slaves to hide while traveling. It was cramped—I had tried it before—but nearly beyond detection. We could fit two people side by side, lying on their

family. As I sat down, Becca scooted closer and leaned in to whisper in my ear. Her hair ribbons tickled my neck and I tried to pay attention to her words.

"Did you see the gentleman in the seventh row as you passed? He is the most handsome man! And well dressed too. Not one speck of dirt on his boots. And even a kerchief in his pocket!" Becca's eyes glowed.

"No," I said, excitedly. "Who is he?"

"I don't know. Some handsome stranger."

We both giggled and received a stern look from Becca's mother, which silenced us for a few moments.

Becca's mother leaned over us and asked Ma where Pa was.

"His back is troubling him again," Ma replied. "It always does when the seasons change."

"That's awful, Martha. My Dunstan makes a poultice for his knee when it bothers him. He could bring Charles one after the sermon," Becca's mother offered.

"Adelaide, you gracious soul, that's very kind of you, but I already made him one. I will surely tell Charles that you offered though."

Becca's mother smiled, as if she were all the more saintly for offering to help.

As Reverend Wersting began his sermon I turned to Becca and asked where the handsome stranger sat. She pretended to scratch her shoulder as she pointed behind us and to the side.

I turned, searching for an unfamiliar, yet charming face. Instead, my eyes found a face with a slender nose that was slightly upturned. His pale eyes were focused on Reverend

"Amen," I heard echo around me. As the congregation began to get up, I looked at Ma with pleading eyes. She nodded. I took Becca's hand and we traipsed out into the churchyard.

"Did you see him again as we passed by?" Becca said excitedly.

I nodded. "Now that I've had a better look, I think he might be the man who came to our farm last night looking for a fugitive slave."

"You *think*? How could you not remember a face like that? Come on, let's watch for him over by that tree," Becca said pointing, and pulled me after her to the far side of the churchyard. She watched the door anxiously for her handsome stranger. I was relieved when I saw Jacob exit, peer around, and then bee-line for us. At least I would have an excuse not to talk to Richard Clary now.

"Hello," said Jacob. His eyes looked more awake than earlier.

"Hello Jacob," I said and Becca echoed.

"What are you doing all the way over here for?" he asked.

"Waiting for a handsome stranger," said Becca excitedly, before I could answer.

I rolled my eyes. Jacob seemed to take solace in the action. "She spotted him before your uncle started up," I explained.

"Ah," was all he said. He scraped at the ground with his foot. "I heard some men from Virginia were searching for a couple runaways around here last night."

That was fast. The sermon was hardly over. Mrs. Langley must have gossiped faster than usual today. "They came to our farm in the middle of the night. That man," I pointed at Richard Clary, "was with them. Gave us quite a fright too. We're not used to late-night visitors."

Jacob didn't seem to like that the topic had once again settled on Richard Clary, and he

talking and maybe dancing.”

Over Jacob's shoulder I saw Becca talking with Richard Clary. She pointed at me and his eyes found mine. A smile formed and he began walking in our direction.

“Uh, yeah, I suppose if Ma and Pa decided to,” I said absently to Jacob.

“Really? Because, I was hoping that maybe, uh, you and I could, uh—”

“Well Miss Gauge,” interrupted Richard Clary brightly, “it's a pleasure to see you again. I wanted to thank you again for that nice piece of pie you fixed me up last night.”

“It was nothing,” I said, hoping it would be the only reference to last night's events. Unlike Ma and Pa, my wit wasn't quick to think of alternatives to the truth. “Mister Clary, this is my friend Jacob. And you've met Becca.”

“Nice meeting you, Mister Clary,” said Jacob stiffly, extending his hand.

Richard Clary shook it quickly. “Pleasure. You don't mind if I steal Miss Gauge away for a minute,” he asked without asking and placed his hand on the back of my upper arm, steering me away. I glanced backwards at my friends, pleading with my eyes to not leave me alone with him. Becca seemed torn between astonishment and jealousy.

But as we walked side by side, only looking forward, I found myself enjoying the warm, soft hand on my arm. It felt gentle and kind. And I'm afraid I blushed at the sensation. When he stopped under a white elm I had to urge myself to step away from him. His hand slipped from my arm as I turned to face him.

“I wanted to thank you again, Miss Gauge,” he said, “for your family's hospitality last night. Thought you might be happy to know we caught one of them negroes. She was bleeding and moaning in a thicket couple miles past your farm. No sign of the boy though.”

I opened my mouth, not sure what words would come out, but someone shouted his name. We turned and saw Murray standing halfway between us and the wagon, waving his arms.

"I do apologize," said Richard Clary. "But it appears I must take my leave. Farewell." He tapped his hat and jogged over to Murray.

I stood there under the white elm, arms crossed and lips pressed tightly together. I wished I had been able to speak up sooner. To refute any sort of idea he might have had about my attraction towards him. He could throw my family in jail if he discovered that we worked on the underground. He could take away our freedom, just as he had taken away many others'. He could own, beat, and even murder human beings and it would all be sanctioned by the law because coloreds were seen as inferior. But I knew that in the eyes of God, all are equal.

A budding leaf from a low branch tickled my neck and my body slowly relaxed. He would be gone, and that's all that mattered. I walked back towards the people gathered in the churchyard, feeling the comfort of familiar chatter. But as I stood among the congregation, I watched Richard Clary mount his horse and lean down toward the dark figure in the wagon, as if whispering. The girl hunched away from him, her crossed arms hanging over her knees.

As I watched, the girl's eyes shifted over her surroundings, and then abruptly focused on mine. Her deep brown eyes were those of an old woman, having bore a lifetime of sorrow, though she looked even younger than me. They were barren, as if a relentless river had washed away the last grain of hope. The girl opened her mouth a fraction, but I was too far away to hear a sound.

"Let's get a move on," Richard Clary called to his men, startling me.

I looked back at the girl, but she had lowered her head to her knees. The man in front

Chapter III

ONCE AT HOME, Pa asked me to milk Buttercup and Annabelle, since he was busy changing the friend's bandages. So I went to the barn and sat myself down on the stool Samuel made so proudly when he was eleven, which wobbled back and forth due to a short third leg. Annabelle's teats felt warm and leathery against my fingers, easily releasing her milk. She mooed happily, grateful for the relief in pressure. When I was younger I would listen to Pa sing hymns as he milked the cows. He always let me have the first sip, and I remember how sweet that milk tasted, as if some goodness from the hymns had seeped into it.

When I finished, I let the milk settle and then skimmed the cream off the top and transferred it into a butter churn and inserted the pole into the lid. The wooden handle was worn

him best: thou shalt not oppress him.' Deuteronomy 23:15-16. Don't you see, dear, the Lord says we shouldn't return a slave to his master. He should be free and live where ever he chooses."

Ma pressed her lips together, as if forcing herself to remain silent.

"Come on, Ma," prompted Samuel. "You remember the sermon Reverend Wersting gave last week: 'With God, all things are possible.'"

She sighed and I watched as her fingers fidgeted with themselves. I was too young at the time to know that what I said next would make all the difference. She didn't listen to Pa, or Samuel. She didn't listen to the word of God or his sermons through Reverend Wersting. Instead, she listened to the confusion of a child, whose comprehension of right and wrong was based on strict opposites, not shaded degrees of morality and immorality.

"Ma?" I said in my still child-like voice. "Will we still be good people if we don't help the friends?"

Her eyes shimmered with tears. Ma rose from her chair and hugged me to her chest, kissing the top of my head. "We *will* still be good people, Clare," she said, speaking into my brown curls, "because we're going to keep helping them."

I looked down and saw that the cream had turned to butter. My forearms ached from the incessant motion they had endured for nearly an hour. As I scraped the butter off the pole using the side of the churn, I heard footsteps approach, and then Samuel appeared in the barn doorway.

"Any news?" I asked, glancing at the dirt road leading to our farm, checking for signs of travel—an unexpected visitor to overhear.

her.

I wanted to say, "It's not your fault" or "At least we saved one runaway," but I didn't think it would sound genuine. As I tried to think of something to comfort him, he strode past me to Naomi, who was already saddled, and then rode around the edge of the barn toward the eastern border of our land.

With nothing else left to do, I retrieved a large bowl from the house and scraped the butter into it. Then I scrubbed the wooden churn clean, so it wouldn't attract animals, and carried the bowl inside. The house smelled like fresh biscuits.

"Thank you, Clare," said Ma, noticing the butter. "It's just in time for dinner. Can you call Samuel inside?"

"He took Naomi out a little while ago."

"I'll go fetch him," said Pa, emerging from the fireplace. "In the meantime, could you take some down to our friend, Clare? He's sleeping, but it's all right to wake him."

"Yes Pa," I said, anxious to meet the runaway hiding beneath our house.

Ma placed two biscuits, fresh butter, canned meat and canned green beans on a plate and handed it to me. I gathered my dress with my left hand and carefully held the plate with the right hand, walking down through the fireplace backwards and steadying myself with my right elbow. Pa had left a candle burning, and in the meager light I could see the form of a body huddled beneath the quilts.

"Hello," I said softly.

The form didn't move.

"Hello," I repeated, a little louder.

"I-I'm sorry," I said quickly, biting my nail. "I just—" I stopped myself, knowing that talking about his nose was impolite. "Let me begin again. My name is Clare. The nice white man who bandaged you—the one with the beard—is my pa."

His muscles seemed to relax. I waited, trying not to stare into his eyes, but I was drawn to them. There was something familiar in the deep brown. It wasn't the fear, or the exhaustion, or even the pain. It was something else. Something I had seen before, only.... in a girl's eyes.

"The girl," I said, realizing out loud. "Is the girl your sister?"

"Eb'ny? You seen 'er?" the boy said suddenly, hope pouring forth from his eyes.

"Ebony?" I repeated. "Yes, yes, I saw her."

"Then she made it? Where is she?" His voice sounded like he had cold. I wondered if it had to do with flesh missing from his nose.

I didn't know how to tell him she was recaptured. My mouth opened and closed silently several times, and he interpreted it correctly.

"Master Clary got her?" Fierce tears began to run down his cheeks. "I should've stayed with her! I should've never have led them dogs away. I'm her only family. We supposed to be together, no matter what." He dug his fists into his eyes.

Neither of us spoke for minutes. I waited until he stifled his tears and sniffs. I felt like I was intruding, but I didn't know how to leave. But there was also a part of me that just wanted to hug him and hug him, and tell him everything was going to be all right. We could find his sister, and help her escape. I knew this wasn't true. We only provided shelter for runaways on the long journey to Canada. We didn't go on quests to rescue them from plantations. We didn't even know where most of our night friends came from, other than South.

Chapter IV

OVER THE NEXT several days as Simon slowly recovered, I visited him whenever I was allowed, which was mostly at meal times. Ma made Samuel go with me as a chaperone, since I wasn't allowed to be with men alone due to my age. We found out that Simon's leg had gotten hurt when he triggered a fox trap, about ten miles south of Summerfield. He was lucky, and instead of stepping on the trap, which would have clamped him around the ankle, he had sat down next to it, so the teeth sunk into his calf from the side.

He also revealed that he had tried to run away many times, when he lived at a different plantation than Ebony. Their master, Mr. Carson, had sold Ebony to Richard Clary at the same time he sold their mother someone in southern Virginia. Simon would run to Ebony, so he could

Simon said they had tried to run again two months later, but his aversion of the subject prompted me to change the topic. I knew enough manners to know when something was private. Instead, Samuel and I showed him all the anti-slavery pamphlets and poetry we had amassed secretly through the Underground and kept in our secret room, including *Walker's Appeal*, the *Justice and Expediency pamphlet*, the *Declaration of Sentiments and Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, and collections of poetry by John Greenleaf Whittier, William Cowper, and Charlotte Elizabeth, among others.

He was most interested in *Walker's Appeal* because I told him it was written by a colored man. Although Pa didn't agree with the entire pamphlet, he had read portions of it out loud to us occasionally, to remind us how coloreds were affected.

Samuel explained to Simon that the pamphlet was a call to action for colored men to revolt against white masters and take back their humanity, instead of waiting for a gradual solution. Walker argued that white Christianity had become corrupt, and true Christian principals supported his cause. He even went as far as to say that colored men should kill their masters.

"They want us for their slaves, and think nothing of murdering us," I read aloud from the pamphlet because Simon could not read. "Therefore, if there is an *attempt* made by us, kill or be killed, and believe this, that it is no more harm for you to kill a man who is trying to kill you, than it is for you to take a drink of water when thirsty."

"You don't know how nice it is hearin' someone like me saying things like that," said Simon. "When we is told all our lives that we is below white men, but this man says we is the equal. He knows. He understands. He says what we is all afraid to say, to even think, for fear of bein' sold down river or lynched."

"Ma?" I asked, lifting my head from the bucket. "Why haven't we ever visited Grandma and Grandpa in Maryland?"

Ma wrung my hair and began toweling it dry. "I suppose it has to do with your pa," she said ambiguously.

"Pa? What's wrong with Pa?" I had always assumed that we didn't visit Ma's parents because it was too far to travel. Thurmont was nearly three hundred miles away.

"Honey," she said, taking my face in her hands and leaning in close. "Nothing. Nothing at all. They just don't see eye to eye is all." And with that she ended the conversation. We remained in comfortable silence as she finished drying my hair. Then she left the room so I could wash the rest of my body.

Only last year had I become conscious of my changing body, and felt immediate embarrassment. I had then insisted on washing myself from then on. Ma had obliged, knowing that I was growing into a woman. But as I looked down I had wondered how this could be my body. The curve of hips was something new to me, and the growth of my chest felt strange and out of place. Even now, at nearly sixteen, I had not grown accustomed to it.

It was late afternoon by the time I had finished washing and dressing. Ma was gathering quilting supplies—because she and Mrs. Mason and the other ladies would sew and gossip the evening away—and Samuel was hitching up the horses. When Pa strode in from the second milking of Annabelle and Buttercup, he placed a large calloused hand on my cheek and told me that I looked just like Ma in her youth. He made sure she heard it too.

"Who'd you get all clean for?" asked Samuel as he came in from outside.

"No one."

"Oh Adelaide, you bring us such beautiful patterns," I heard a woman's voice exclaim.

"Dotty dear, it's nothing. Really," responded Becca's ma. I joined the circle to see that she was displaying a jagged black and white quilt pattern.

"Is that the Goose Creek?" Ma asked.

"Why yes, Martha. And I already prepared the batting. Shall we get started?"

There was the mutual chiming of female voices and a whirl of fabrics, thread, and needles as they readied their supplies for the group project. Once the movement settled, I spotted Becca on the opposite side, beside Mrs. Mason and an empty spot, and hastened around the edge of the circle to sit beside her.

"Clare!" she whispered. "Thank goodness you're here. I was beginning to think you weren't coming. I didn't come to quilt and be stuck with all these—"

Mrs. Mason turned to listen.

"Interesting and pleasant ladies," Becca improvised.

Mrs. Mason smiled with thin lips and patted Becca's hand. "You're shuch a nische young lady," she said thickly, with few teeth remaining in her old age.

Becca smiled back and waited for Mrs. Mason to get that hazy look in her eye that all people above a certain age got.

"But really," Becca turned back to me, "I've been here for ages. I see you spent your extra time indulging in vanity."

My hand automatically went up to the blue ribbon in my hair. "It just happened to be my wash day," I protested.

Becca smiled knowingly. "It's all right. I'm sure the Lord doesn't mind the seven sins."

"Don't you poke yourself all the time?" asked Jacob with a smirk.

"I'll have you know I'm a very skilled seamstress," said Becca. Jacob and I exchanged a glance.

"So, you were saying Poppy as the name for Mabel's calf?" I added, "She's in labor," for Jacob's benefit.

"Ugh. Can you get any girlier?" He made a face. "Why not something more majestic, like Maximillian or Augustus."

"Bleh," said Becca. "Those aren't cow names."

"What do you mean they aren't cow names? How do you distinguish between cow and people names? They're just names."

As the pair bickered, I noticed a late-comer arriving. It was too dark to see, but as the form dismounted and approached the fire, the flames revealed the heavy steps and scarred jaw of the slave catcher Murray.

"Why is *he* here." I couldn't help myself. The man was repulsive. His face was unwashed, his greasy hair was tangled and I swore I saw him pick something out of it.

"Oh yeah," said Jacob. "I saw him down at the post office the other day. He hung up a poster for that runaway negro that Clary fellow lost." It seemed so callous the way he said it.

"A poster?" I prompted.

"Yeah. It said that he'd pay anyone with information or the whereabouts of a slave named Simon. There was a description and all, but I didn't bother reading it. It's not like it's hard to spot a darky."

"So he's staying around until he finds him?"

gathered around the fire to dance. When we finished eating, the three of us joined in the dance, which was formed in a large circle around the fire, men and women staggered in an every-other pattern. The women rotated their circle, and the men rotated in the opposite direction. As I grabbed forearm after forearm, skip-dancing with each passing man, I saw Murray join in the circle. I'm sure I made a face, because Mr. Thompson asked if he had hurt my arm. But I knew the song, and it was about to end. The distance between Murray and me diminished, and as the song reached the final strain, I was caught by the wrist by the slave catcher.

"Hello there, Clare," he said, his smile pulling on his scar. He smelled of sour milk and whiskey. "Do come with me."

As he lead me away from the dance, his rough hand still clutching my forearm, I turned, trying to spot Pa, or Jacob, anybody. I felt the cold of night envelope me as we moved away from the fire, and the next song began, masking any conversation we had, or any scream.

"Seems she's really caught his eye," he said, weighing the letter in his hand.

Pa's eyes narrowed. "And you thought the best place for her to read a letter was away from the fire?" He quickly closed the distance between him and Murray and took the letter. His eyes squinted as he read whatever was scrawled on the front and then tucked it in his pocket.

"Next time you have a message for my daughter," Pa said, "you'll kindly do it in my presence." It was not a question. Then Pa put his hand on my shoulder and together we walked back to the welcoming warmth of the fire.

"I don't ever want you alone with that man," Pa said.

I nodded, not knowing how to express my thanks.

"And this," he said, touching his pocket where the letter was tucked. "I don't like this. You're growing into a woman, and there are going to be a lot of things I don't agree with. But this, this is something different." He lowered his voice, leaning in. "This is a slave owner, Clare. He is everything we oppose. Everything we work against. The thought of him writing you fond letters is, is—" He stopped, unable to find the word. "As your father, I am inclined throw this in the fire where his words, and his soul, belong."

My heart dropped. I understood, but I still wanted to at least read the words Richard Clary wrote to me. I hadn't ever received a letter of this sort before. Boys around here didn't write fond letters, especially not Jacob. Instead they just pulled your hair or threw pebbles at you. Richard Clary seemed like an educated man, who would know how to write a proper letter to a lady. And all I wanted to know was what sweet things Richard Clary wrote about me. Just because I read the letter didn't mean I had to write him back. Did he like my eyes? My smile? The way I laughed?

Instead, I told Simon of the gathering at the Thompson farm. I described the quilt, the hog, the dancing, and told him about Becca's cow. He was particularly interested in the dancing.

"We used to dance on Sundays, after Master read from the gospel. After workin' so hard for six days, I don't know how we had the strength or the spirit to dance, but we did. I would swing Eb'ny round and round and suddenly she'd be laughin' and smilin', and I ain't never seen my sister smile 'cept for Sundays. Seemed like those was the only days she was alive." Simon grew quiet and his eyes distant.

"You miss her."

A sad smile lifted on the right side of his mouth. He nodded, blinking rapidly to keep the mist in the eyes off his cheeks. I felt guilty for reminding him.

"I wish I could understand," I said, "but I don't think I can." All Simon had left was his sister, and here I had my whole family to see whenever I pleased. I couldn't even imagine if it were just Samuel and I. Sure we were brother and sister, but I'd never had to depend on him like Ebony did Simon.

"It's enough that you try. I just, I just feel so—I mean, I'm her brother! I'm all she's got. And I let him get her. I let him take her back. Back to—I, I should never have left her." Tears were streaming down his cheeks. "I was tryin' to protect her, I was tryin' to lead them away from her. Just give her enough time to get to the water, and then we'd have been free and together and I wouldn't never have to see her hide her face or shrink into a shadow when a white man came around or tremble when Master Clary looked at her. We was gonna be free and safe and together. And all we had to do was get to that water. And now, and now she's back there, and I ain't nowhere near to take care of her, and it's—it's all my fault!"

"Simon?" I asked, once the song was over.

"Hmm?" He seemed sleepy, his head still resting on my shoulder. I could feel the heat from his slow breaths and the roughness of his scab as his nose touched my neck.

"It's not," I said, my voice cracking. "It's not your fault. You did everything and more. I would be proud to have a brother like you, who risked himself to save my freedom. You did what you could. You gave her hope, and now she knows it can be done. Look at yourself—you're not a slave anymore. You're nearly *free*."

"It just don't mean nothin' if she ain't here with me."

Something overcame me just then, and without pausing to think how, I blurted out, "Then I'm going to make sure Ebony gets free." Silence stung the small dirt room. "I-I don't know how," I faltered, "but you deserve to be together, and I'm going to make sure that happens."

Simon lifted his head, his brown eyes deep with hope and gratitude. He reached his arms around me and held me tight, pressing forehead into my neck. "That means everything."

That afternoon Pa asked if I wanted to ride into town while he purchased some more medical supplies for Simon's leg, which was healing nicely. During those few miles, I thought about all the women we had helped escape on the underground. No matter their age, most of them had been so frightened of Pa that Ma had to be the one to bring them meals and tell them how to get to the next safe house. I had always thought they were afraid of white men because they were the ones who gave beatings. But then when I was thirteen, I met a runaway who was

pattern would be best for a new dress, but the nearly bare shelves explained their absence.

"What are you looking for today, Charles?" asked Mr. Tucket, the store clerk. "A small pair of spectacles perched on the end of his nose, threatening to slip off. As I watched, he pulled out a handkerchief, cleaned the spectacles, wiped his sweaty forehead and nose, and placed the eyeware at the bridge of his nose.

"Afternoon, Amos. I'm looking for some salve for Naomi," Pa lied. "She scraped up her leg while Samuel was riding her down by the creek."

"Ah, that thicket?" he asked over his shoulder as he scanned the labels of a meager shelf of bottles. "Seems like it's giving a lot of people trouble lately."

"Is that so?"

"Yes indeed. Seems that one of those negroes got caught up in there the other night, when that gentleman from Virginia was up here. You know the one." Mr. Tucket's glasses slid to the end of his nose again.

"Yes, I remember him," said Pa.

"Well, the girl was all scratched up from them thorns. I offered to sell him this here ointment for her wounds," he held up the bottle, "but he said she needed to learn a lesson. I suppose he's right. Can't have your property up and running off. Speaking of, he left that Murray fellow here to catch the other darky, the girl's brother. Some brother, leaving her to the dogs. But that's how them negroes are— no better than them savages."

At the mention of Simon I remembered that last night Jacob had mentioned that Murray hung a poster in the post office, offering a reward for information, and a description. I looked at Pa, trying to gain his attention so I could go across the street, but he didn't notice.

night. She said I ought to send Jacob over with something for him, but I surely couldn't send anything without knowing his pains."

As Mr. Tucket began listing off symptoms and the best remedy for each I motioned to the door with my eyes, asking Pa if I could visit the post office. He nodded and I slipped out the door, giggling as Mr. Tucket insisted that the broth of a boiled blackberry root could cure diarrhea.

The main street in Summerfield, if I could call it that since there were only two streets, was a dirt road, pitted here and there where rainwater would pool after a summer thunderstorm. Next to the general store was Peter Mayhue's small carpenter shop, and beyond that, nestled between two budding, but not yet pink, dogwoods, was Gertrude Bland's inn. Across the street from both establishments was Bill Conner's blacksmith, which typically made the post office next to it warmer than the other buildings. On the other side of the post office lay Doctor Harmon's home and office, and beyond that the one-room schoolhouse that Pa had helped paint last spring. Across the street and next to the general store stood Mr. Tucket's home, which supplied the school with four students. His home stood on the corner of both streets in town, and down the other one, behind his house, was the churchyard, chapel, parsonage, and cemetery.

As I crossed from the general store to the post office I noticed a speckled Appaloosa and Jacob's unmistakable cherry-brown Hackney named Esther tied up out front. A small brass bell jingled above my head as I entered the post office. No one was behind the counter. I scanned the wall of posters and announcements, looking for the one about Simon. Overlapping several other notices was a poster with the runaway slave symbol—a colored man carrying a bindle stick. As I stepped closer to read it I heard the scuff of boots on floorboards.

one of which was ripped and looked like it was about to give way, and gazed out the window at the horse. "I tell you, Clare, at this point I'm here more than he is. This kind of job is for a young man, and Mr. Hensen, well, he's just not fit to travel much anymore. I 'spect in a few years he'll pass this place on to me." He seemed so proud, so satisfied with remaining a postboy for the rest of his life.

"That'd really be something, Jacob," I said, pretending I wasn't disappointed in his aspirations.

Just then the brass bell tinkled and Murray stepped inside. "Miss Clare. Jacob." He actually tapped his hat, like a gentleman.

"Hello Mr. Murray," said Jacob. "How can I help you? Got another letter for Mr. Clary?"

"That I do," he said holding up a small envelope. "And maybe I'm not the only one sending him a letter. Ain't that right, Miss Clare?" He looked at me with a sly smile.

Jacob's face fell in a look of realized naivety and betrayal.

"I-I don't. I don't have a letter for him," I protested, shaking my head. "I-I haven't, um, gotten around to, uh, reading it yet." I glanced sideways at Jacob. He wouldn't meet my eyes.

"That's a shame. From the looks of it he had an awful lot to say too," said Murray, seeming to enjoy his affect on both me and Jacob. "But, I still do have one, so if you don't mind..." He looked at Jacob pointedly.

"Uh, yes sir. Right over here," Jacob gestured at the counter.

As they dealt with payment and day of delivery, I stepped up to the wall of notices again. I pretended to read one about J.E. Liggett's tobacco, but out of the corner of my eye I read the wanted poster for Simon and hummed softly to myself.

Simon had never told me where he was from within Virginia, and I had never asked. I had just assumed he was near the border, because any further distance I doubted Richard Clary, as a landowner, would have personally followed him into Ohio. But Pennsboro? That was a good 50 miles south of Summerfield. And the poster said April third, which meant Simon had been on the run for thirteen days now.

I heard the clunk of boots and quickly fixed my eyes on an advertisement for Dr. Carter's miracle elixer, continuing to hum. I heard the boots pause behind me, and I turned, my teeth clenched, but smiling with my lips at Murray.

He was studying me, brows knit together as if trying to recall something. After a few moments a look of recognition appeared in his eyes and the corner of his mouth lifted and spread, baring his teeth and revealing the most terrible and triumphant grin I had ever seen. He tapped his hat and exited the post office.

I watched him walk back to the inn through the window, confused. What was that look? That harrowing grin? What had he seen?

"That's a pretty tune," said Jacob, joining me at the window. "What's it called?"

It was then I realized that I had been humming Simon's song—a *slave* song. There was only one way I could have known such a song, and Murray knew that.

"When?" was all he uttered, still staring forward.

"Only a few minutes ago," I said. I had kept my eyes on the inn ever since Murray entered it, making sure he didn't try to beat us back to the farm.

"We may still have time," Pa said, unfreezing. He looked at the inn, then at the wagon, and finally his eyes rested on me. "We need to get home. *Now!*" Pa practically threw me into the wagon, and stepped in after, shaking the reins and yelling at Ruth, who seemed startled, and began at a trot. The wagon shook violently, the wheels bumping in and out of ruts and pits. It felt like the wagon was falling apart, like everything else.

We were going to jail: Pa, Ma, Samuel, me. How many years would we be locked away? Could Pa hang for what we had done? How many slaves had we helped along to Canada? Forty? Fifty? Could it be even sixty? Pa and Ma had been working on the underground for years, since I was a toddler or not much older. Surely there must be a harsher penalty for aiding so many fugitive slaves. Samuel would never inherit the farm, be married, and have so many children that they would have to add a room to the schoolhouse. Ma wouldn't ever see her parents in Maryland again. Pa would lose the farm, his reputation, and freedom, which he had fought so hard for others to attain. And I? I would never feel the gentle lips of a man, the intimate touch of his hands, the warmth of his body. I would never bear children or raise a daughter or—

How was I so selfish? What about Simon? His fate was worse than jail. He would be returned to Richard Clary, who would beat him ruthlessly for running away, for making him waste so much time and money. He might cut his nose again, or another part of his body. Or he might sell Simon to someone who lived far away, so he would never see Ebony again. I had heard plenty times of slave owners who sold frequent runaways to the sugar plantations in the

"He's not fully healed yet, Clare. Simon's in no condition to travel. And even if he were —" Pa fell silent and cocked his head. Beneath the afternoon chirps of sandpipers and sparrows came the rolling thunder of approaching horse hooves. My heart dropped to my knees, and by his expression, so did Pa's. We both turned to look over our shoulders where a small dust cloud rose in the distance. And at the forefront of the cloud rode the unmistakable form of Murray. We were but a quarter mile from our land, and on horseback instead of wagon, Murray would reach our farm before we did.

As his form grew closer Pa muttered not to look at Murray as he passed. He said that if there was any hope that we would fool Murray, we must look the part at all times. So, I stared blankly at Ruth's ears as the rumble of hooves grew louder and louder until I felt as if we were under attack. And then a blur of brown passed us on the left, and my eyes couldn't help but follow it. And there was Murray, grinning that same horrible grin of victory. My stomach reeled and I breathed deeply to regain control of it.

Only a hundred yards ahead of us, the horse and rider turned off the simple road and cut across the field to our right, as if he had only ridden the road to see the look on our faces.

"Dear Lord, please let Martha have something on the fire," whispered Pa.

We rode the last quarter mile in silence. There was nothing to be said.

When we arrived, Pa jumped from the wagon and ran to the house. As we entered I heard Ma say, "I don't know how things work in Virginia, Mr. Murray, but here in Ohio we don't tear apart houses without an explanation!"

Murray was pounding on the walls in the kitchen, listening for a hollow spot. The kitchen table was on its side and the firewood that had been stacked beside the fireplace was scattered

know that Maryland remains a slave state despite quite some discussion. While we were in Thurmont, we also visited a few friends whom, like many others in the area, own tobacco plantations."

"And you expect me to believe you traveled all the way to Maryland in the winter?" scoffed Murray.

"With the new tracks laid to Wheeling, it was simple," retorted Ma. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had been expanding west ever since I was born, and just in January had finished laying track to Wheeling, Virginia, only forty or fifty miles east of Summerfield.

"So don't *you* tell *me* who oughtn't be doing what," said Ma, her face flushed with anger. "*You* oughtn't be making allegations without proof."

Ma was such a quick thinker. Everything she had said was true, except for the part about us riding the train to Maryland. But all the facts were there. The railroad, Ma's parents, the slave presence. It was plausible and there was no way Murray could disprove her.

Murray seemed to realize this as well. His eyes flitted around, as if he suddenly realized he was surrounded. They came to rest on the window, through which he saw the wagon. Turning on Pa, he said, "Then do you mind telling me why you left town in such a hurry, Mr. Gauge? An innocent man don't have no reason to drive a wagon at a gallop."

"We were rushing home for supper," lied Pa, although Ma's stew *was* heating over the fire. "Took longer in town than I expected."

"You really expect me to believe that?" scoffed Murray. "I ain't no idiot. Is there even soup in this pot?" He lifted the lid to smell the stew, but let out a noise and dropped the lid, which was hot from being in the fire. "Fine then, it is." He stooped to pick up the lid, which had

I gulped and looked at Pa. He nodded. So I slipped out the front door and retrieved a length of rope from the barn. Murray told me tie Pa's wrists together. As I approached him, tears began to build in my eyes. "Pa," I pleaded.

"Clare," he said, placing a hand on my cheek and wiping a tear away with his thumb. "You'll be fine. No matter what happens, you're much too young to go to jail. So is Samuel. And Ma, well, they aren't concerned with her. I'm the only one the authorities will be interested in, all right? And God will watch over me. He always does."

"Pa," I whimpered. I felt his other hand touch my shoulder and I slipped into a hug.

"I *said* tie his hands," ordered Murray.

I swallowed hard and pulled away from Pa, my throat feeling stretched, strained, and sore. As I looped the rope around Pa's wrists I heard Ma sniffle and whisper 'Charles.' When I finished, Murray checked my knots and then grabbed Pa roughly by the upper arm and opened the door. He turned and pointed the pistol back and forth at Ma and me.

"If either of you try something, I'll have you locked up with him." Then he stepped outside and closed the door.

I was sitting at the kitchen table. It had grown dark and Ma had lit a lantern, whose flame now flickered and made restless shadows on the wall. I felt numb. My tears had run out and all that remained was an unrelenting dread that was pushing and pressing me from all sides.

Pa was gone. Samuel was standing across the room, hands clenched into fists. Over and over again he told me how he would have stopped Murray from taking Pa. How he would've

it won't take Murray long to see that he never left our house, and when he figures that out, he'll come back with dogs to search the house. If we don't move Simon before Murray comes back, he'll be caught, and Pa will be—”

Silence filled the room. Ma busied herself with chopping potatoes, but I heard a snuffle come from her turned back.

Samuel cleared his throat awkwardly. “What I'm saying is, *we* have to move Simon, as in, with the wagon. Murray won't think to track a wagon. He'll be looking for footprints and, well, whatever else trackers look for. Plus, Simon's not well enough to get far on foot anyway.”

“Don't you think he'll be suspicious,” I said, “if he comes back and we're not here, and neither is the wagon? In the middle of the night?”

Samuel pressed his lips together and he stared out the window as he thought. “What we need is someone else to drive Simon.”

“Don't be silly, Samuel. We don't know who we can trust. You've heard people in town talk; none of them think the way we do. And the next closest safe house is too far away. We don't have enough time to take him there and get back before Murray returns.”

“Well then let's hear *your* idea,” snapped Samuel. His tone stung.

“Samuel,” Ma scolded softly. “We aren't going to accomplish anything like that.” She put her hand on his back and ushered him to the table, and the pair sat down with me. “Now, let's think about this. Really think about it.”

Samuel took a deep breath and nodded.

“All right,” said Ma. “Now, your Pa said that Simon's leg still isn't fully healed, so him

"Samuel, no!" I said. "What if Jacob gets caught? He'll be jailed, or worse." It was one thing to risk our own lives, but to risk someone else's unwillingly, that just didn't feel right. And poor Jacob, he didn't deserve something like this.

"If he gets caught, Clare, they'll know it was us because it's our wagon. You don't think a pack of slave catchers wouldn't scare him into telling exactly who he got the wagon from?" He stopped for emphasis. I suppose he was right.

"This is our best idea right now," he continued. "Whether you agree with me or not, I'm leaving to break those wheels. If you think of something better before I finish saddling Ruth, I'm willing to change my mind." He stood, put on a jacket, and left for the barn.

After a few moments of silence, Ma reached across the table for my hand. "I know you have feelings for Jacob," she began, "but I think you need to look beyond your personal desires right now and do what is best for everyone."

"It's not that, Ma. It's just, he's so innocent. He's not involved in this. And if we were to get him involved and then he were discovered, I don't know if I could forgive myself if he shares in the blame."

Ma patted my hand. "If this were any other situation, I would tell you to talk to Jacob, but we cannot risk that. There are so few people we can trust. You cannot simply hope that the person you open up to will share our beliefs."

I disliked understanding. I disliked maturing. I wished I were a child still, and concepts such as greater good were no concern of mine. I missed the days of trivial problems. I missed the days without care for anything beyond my little world I play acted in. When Pa said there would be things he would dislike about me growing into a young woman, I knew he hadn't been talking

fear in his voice. By the size of his hand, it looked like he was standing in the farthest corner from the entrance.

"That slave catcher Murray took Pa. He thinks you ran again, but it won't be long before he figures out otherwise." I

felt on the floor for a candle and found one. "Here, light this," I said, handing it out to him.

I watched as a second hand appeared next to the first, and the candle wick gathered the flame. Simon's face and body appeared before me, as did the pallets and the close walls.

"Samuel and Ma say we need to move you," I said, unable to hide the urgency in my voice.

"To where?"

"That's what I came to talk about. Samuel wants to smuggle you to Byesville—that's about fifteen miles north—in our false-bottom wagon."

Simon nodded. "All right."

"Clare?" I heard from the fireplace. I looked up and saw Samuel's head poking down through the entrance. "Clare, I'm taking Ruth to the post office now."

I nodded, although I wasn't sure if he could see it, so I said, "All right."

"What is he talking about?" asked Simon.

"Well, Murray will be taking Pa to the marshal in Caldwell, but Samuel's sure he'll come back here with dogs. He needs proof to charge Pa, plus he fancies that hundred-fifty dollar reward for you."

"We'd take you to the next safe house," I continued, "but we wouldn't be able to get back in time before Murray returns. So Samuel's breaking the wheels on the post wagon and fooling

Chapter VII

IT WAS DAWN. I had slept very little. Even after Samuel returned from breaking two of the post wagon's wheels, and there was nothing left to do until the sun rose, I could not sleep. As morning crept closer, I kept expecting Murray to throw open the door. But the night passed like any other one. The moon and sun didn't care about our troubles.

But it was time. I could see the long shadow of our house stretching westward through the front window. Before this hazy hour turned to full light we had to move Simon to the wagon.

"Hurry, Ma," I called over my shoulder, my eyes not leaving the golden landscape.

"Just finishing up," her voice floated up through the fireplace. Ma was re-bandaging Simon's leg for the long wagon ride. I could hear the murmur of Ma's voice as she spoke with

stand. Samuel opened the door and watched the fields and the road as Ma, Simon, and I descended the steps to the wagon. As Ma placed the handkerchief of food in the false-bottom and arranged a blanket, I turned to Simon.

"Have someone write us when you reach Canada. Don't use a real name or say anything important. Just draw something in the bottom right corner and I'll know it's from you—so I know you're all right."

Simon climbed into the small space at the bottom of the wagon and lay on his back. He tilted his head back at me and his eyes found mine. "I'll draw the Gospel train." And he began to sing the very song that had alerted Murray to his whereabouts.

Samuel lifted the back of the wagon into place, hiding Simon away until he reached Byesville. "I been thinking Clare," he said, turning to me. "I think you ought to come with me to town."

"What? Why?" I asked. The last thing I wanted was to make another mistake and give away everything. What if I bumped the wagon and the back fell down, revealing Simon? What if I accidentally said something to Jacob about the underground? What if he questioned why I was driving into town at dawn?

"Jacob *likes* you, Clare."

"This is not the time."

"No, I'm serious. I'm not poking fun," insisted Samuel. "Jacob likes you. I think we have a better chance of him borrowing our wagon if you're there to help convince him."

"Your brother has a point," said Ma. "I'll be all right here without you. Go, go. We're losing time."

work.

But despite my newfound confidence, my hands turned clammy as we pulled into town. The main street felt desolate; there weren't even any birds pecking at the ground. The only movement was the twitching tail of Jacob's horse in front of the post office. Samuel called out for Ruth to stop as we approached Doctor Harmon's office.

"Good thinking," I said.

"Now you go talk to Jacob next door while I pretend to talk with Doctor Harmon. I'll join you in a few minutes."

I nodded and swallowed hard. I could feel heat rising on my face in a nervous flush. I clutched my skirts as I walked, trying to dry the sweat that had broken out on them. Stopping in front of the door I tried to slow my breathing and settle my heart, which was bouncing in the back of my throat.

As I pushed the door open the same cheerful brass bell tinkled. Jacob looked up from behind the counter. He looked even more disheveled than usual; his shirt wasn't tucked and his hair stood up on one end. His eyes swiftly changed from sleepy and red to bright and wide.

"Clare!" he exclaimed with a smile. He quickly put on his flat cap. "Well ain't you a sight for sore eyes. I've had just about the worst day possible day, if you can believe that." He motioned at the sun, as if to suggest that the day had barely begun. Then he did a double-take. "Wait. What are you doing here so early, anyway?"

"Well, Ma woke with more stomach pains, worse than ever, so Pa sent me and Samuel to fetch Doctor Harmon. While Samuel's over there, I thought I'd stop in since I saw Esther outside."

"Well... Samuel and I rode a wagon into town. If Ma's going to be sick for a while, I'll be staying with her," I said, pretending like I was thinking out loud. "That means only Pa and Samuel will riding anywhere, and they can take Naomi and Ruth."

Jacob's eyes lit up. "You serious? No, that's too much to ask of you."

"No really, I don't think we'll be using the wagon in the next few days."

"Well, I don't know..." Jacob still didn't seem convinced.

I remembered what Samuel had said about Jacob liking me, and I leaned forward on the counter. I gave him a sweet smile and batted my eyes. "I insist."

Jacob's face turned pink by a hue or two and he grinned. "Well, let's at least ask Samuel, since your pa ain't here."

As if on cue, Samuel pushed open the door. "The doc just rode off. He said we can take our time riding home," he announced. "Mornin' Jacob."

"Samuel," Jacob said, tipping his head.

"Jacob here was just telling me about how he won't be able to take the post wagon to Byesville," I explained. Jacob retold Samuel his theory about Murray and the situation with Mr. Tucket's supplies.

"Sounds to me like you need another wagon," said Samuel.

"That's what Clare said too," exclaimed Jacob. "She offered for me to borrow yours, but I couldn't do that."

"And why not?" asked Samuel. "We ain't gonna be using it for a couple days."

"You sure? Won't your pa want to be the one to decide?"

"Nonsense! You know Pa. He's always willing to help a friend in need—and you happen

"That's fine," said Samuel.

I shot Samuel a look as Jacob fumbled with a strap. How was getting rid of the hay fine? Samuel put his hand out, as if patting something. Then he pointed at Jacob, at me, and then back towards the post office. He wanted me to take Jacob back into the post office? I raised an eyebrow. Samuel nodded. I shrugged.

"Jacob," I said, "surely you aren't riding all the way to Byesville without a jacket."

"Oh. Thanks. Almost left without it." He climbed down and I accompanied him back to the post office. Just before I entered I glanced back over my shoulder, and saw Samuel at the back of the wagon, unhooking the back panel.

Jacob retrieved his jacket quickly and shrugged it on. As he headed back outside I slipped between him and the door. Whatever Samuel was saying to Simon, there was no way he had secured the back panel again so quickly.

"What?" Jacob asked.

"I...uh..." Really, what was a good thing to say? What would keep Jacob from going outside? "I hope you have a good trip," I said lamely.

"Me too," he said and side stepped around me.

"I mean," I said louder, making him turn. "I hope the wagon is all right. That, uh, that Esther can handle it fine. It's... it's an awful long way for just her when she used to having another horse pull with her."

"She'll be all right," said Jacob. "It'll just be a little slower. But staying in here isn't getting me to Byesville any faster." He opened the door and stepped out. Over his shoulder I could see Samuel still crouched at the back end of the wagon. My heart nearly leapt out of my

Byesville safe.

"What was that about the hay? What did you say to Simon?" I asked Samuel once the wagon was beyond hearing distance.

"I told him to remove the false bottom when he got out of the wagon."

"Clever," I said. "I wouldn't have thought of that."

"Yeah, well, be glad you didn't. Pa ain't gonna to be happy with it. But we didn't have any other choice; Jacob would've found it easy. I suppose I'll be the one to build a new one."

I laughed and punched Samuel's arm. He punched me back.

"And what was *that*?" he asked, jerking a thumb towards the post office. "That was *some* sort of kiss! Whew!" He took off his hat and began fanning his face with it. "I didn't know what else to do!" I protested. "You were still talking with Simon. I had to stop him somehow."

"Uh huh. Suuure. You've been wanting to lock lips with that fella for a long time now. Use whatever excuse you want to, but I know what you're up to."

I stuck my tongue out. "It worked, didn't it?"

Samuel cackled. "Come on. We gotta beat Murray home." He helped me up onto Ruth and then climbed up after me, sitting behind the saddle. He patted Ruth and said, "Don't worry girl. We aren't going far."

After staying up all night, my body finally demanded that I get some sleep. So as soon as Samuel and I returned home I crawled under my quilts and closed my burning eyes. Every once in a while I woke up and asked Ma if there had been any sign of Murray, and every time she said

In a flurry of desire, I sifted through my Bible until I found his letter. I couldn't stand it anymore. I had to know what he thought of me. I had to make the feeling of that kiss last. I untied the lavender ribbon and ripped open the envelope, then unfolded the letter and began to read.

April 13, 1853

Dearest Clare,

It has been but a few days since I have seen your lovely face, but I cannot keep myself from longing to see it again. Although I find myself thinking of those pretty lips, fair cheeks, and bright eyes, thoughts are but a poor replacement for the true thing. It took all my strength that day in the churchyard to refrain from reaching out and wrapping one of those brown curls around my finger. If the Lord were to show me just one kindness this year, I would have it be that I should see you again.

I wish we had met under better circumstances, but the Lord has a funny way of giving the good with the bad. I again apologize for the intrusion on your family. I shall make no excuses. Just know that should we have a second meeting I shan't be distracted with any business other than you.

But as you read this I suppose you question why I am writing. We hardly know one another, and I wonder if perhaps I have been too forward with this letter. So I shall take this opportunity to remove us from the title of strangers.

I live on a tobacco plantation with my mother near Pennsboro, Virginia. Father joined

corresponded further.

I anxiously await your reply and shall keep one eye on watch for a messenger as I continue my duties.

With admiration,

Richard Clary

He spoke of slaves with such passing crassness, as if they were merely cattle or some trifle possession! But they weren't just animals or objects; they were real people with real feelings and real souls. How couldn't he see that? It only took a few minutes for me to gather Simon's dedication to his sister and his intelligence (despite his inability to read) when I first met him. His capabilities were the same as any man's at his age. And Richard Clary simply referenced him as a "negro boy," whose sole value was hard labor. And he spoke of Ebony as if he were exhibiting a particularly well-crafted quilt: 'Look at the stitchery. See the expert execution.' But she was a human being! Her lone purpose in life was not to cook for him day in and out; to fuel his gluttony.

And he was inviting me to try it! To sanction slavery by partaking in the food a slave girl cooked and watch the labor of slave men and women. I wouldn't set foot on his plantation if the Ohio River ran dry! Richard Clary held the hands of Lucifer and together the pair created a ring in which to catch and control those deemed inferior to them. It was everything I abhorred and more.

And yet. My fingers brushed Richard's kind words and I felt my face grow warm. He thought I was lovely. *Me!* Not only that. He had thought about my "pretty lips." I had all but

Chapter VIII

IT WAS THE SABBATH and still no sign of Murray, or word of Pa. After Reverend Wersting's sermon I walked among the ladies in the churchyard, listening to their gossip. Several of them were discussing Murray's theft of Mr. Hensen's Appaloosa, but none of them knew where he had gone, or that he had taken Pa with him. Surely if Murray had taken Pa to the marshal in Caldwell, word would have reached Summerfield by now. It made me nervous.

Samuel too spoke with the men after sermon. On our ride home—we had ridden Ruth and Naomi and pretended Pa farther north for Simon. Or worse: had Murray come across hadn't heard anything either. There were many theories, the most popular being Murray riding back south to sell the Appaloosa to fund his whiskey habit. The general consensus seemed to be

"Time to scrub?" I asked, holding it up.

"Yes, I think so." She moved the pot off the fire and placed it on the floor. I pulled up two chairs on either side of it. "I'll scrub as you rinse," she directed, motioning towards the metal tub we used for bathing, which was already full of hot water.

Ma was usually the one to scrub. She didn't want my hands touching the lye, since it sometimes left red raw sores on skin for days. I watched her scrub the dress I had worn to the Thompson farm the other night. Once she was satisfied she passed it to me, and I dipped it in the tub to my right. The rinse water wasn't as hot as the lye water and I was glad for it. After swishing the dress around in circles, I wrung it out and set it in a basket, later to be hung on the clothes line.

I heard a funny noise come from Ma and looked over at her. I saw her scrubbing furiously at a pair of Pa's trousers.

"Ma?"

She tried to hide her face from me. "It's nothing," she sniffed. "Just the fumes."

After several moments of silence I managed to say, "Ma, it's all right to miss Pa. I miss him too."

Ma's shoulders slumped and she bent over the washboard. "It's just... what if he doesn't come back, Clare?" She looked up at me with wet eyes. "What if... what if this is it? I-I haven't been away from your pa for longer than a day since we married eighteen years ago. I don't know what to do without him. I can't just live my life as a widowed woman. He's... he's my everything."

"We just need to wait and be patient."

Samuel went outside to milk Annabelle and Buttercup. Ma passed me the trousers and I steeped them in the rinse water, swirling them until they wrapped all the way up around my hand. Then I swirled them the opposite direction and watched them unfurl and curl the other way.

Suddenly the door slammed open and I looked up.

"It's Pa!" yelled Samuel, and ran back outside.

Ma stood up so fast that the washboard toppled over. But neither of us cared. We dashed to the front steps and saw a figure slowly walking towards the house. It looked like Pa despite the distance. Ma ran down the stairs and towards him faster than I'd ever seen her move. Samuel and I jogged after her. She met Pa a hundred yards from the house and I watched as he scooped her up Ma in a one fluid motion despite his exhaustion.

"Charles!" I heard Ma exclaim, shortly followed by a "Martha dear!" from Pa. As Samuel and I reached them, Pa let go of Ma and hugged us each in one arm at once. "Clare! Samuel!"

"Pa!" we said in unison. "What happened?" I asked.

"Let me sit down first, Clare," Pa chuckled. "I'm all the way from Caldwell."

Once inside, and once Pa had some apple pie in front of him, he began to recount his story.

"Murray took me to town, but once he realized—despite me telling him—that we don't have a marshal in Summerfield, he took Mr. Hensen's Appaloosa for me to ride, tying our horses together so I couldn't try to escape. I told him the nearest marshal was in Caldwell, but, between

"Lord lead him on his way," said Pa. Then looking at Samuel, he added, "I expect you to help Jacob replace the wagon wheels. And we need to find a way to pay for the ones you broke." After a little more conversation, Pa excused himself to lie down to recover from his ordeal.

Ma and I continued with spring cleaning and wash, and by the time the sun set the space between our house and barn looked like flags beckoning in the wind. Inside, it smelled of cornbread, which Ma had made for supper since it was one of Pa's favorites. After waking Pa, we all sat down to enjoy our first family meal in two days. We joined hands and bowed our heads as Pa led us in prayer.

"Bless you, oh Lord, for your loving provision in body and soul. May our hands be open to share the abundance you have given us. May Simon find refuge with kind hearts on his long journey north, and may Murray find salvation in your loving arms. Amen."

"Amen," we echoed.

As Ma cut up the cornbread and served us, Samuel turned to Pa. "What happened to Mr. Hensen's horse? Did you bring it back?"

"I rode it back and let it go a couple miles north of here. Couldn't return it. People would have asked questions about how I got the horse back."

As the supper conversation continued, I couldn't help but feel smug. Everything was going to be fine. Pa wasn't going to jail, Simon was on his way north, and Murray wouldn't bother us anymore. Our lives were going back to normal. We would be tilling the fields soon and planting corn. Ma and I would sew new shirts for Pa and Samuel and new dresses for ourselves. Pa and Samuel would tend the fields, and Pa might even hire on a few hands if the crop did well enough. We would find a stud for Annabelle and Buttercup, probably from Becca's pa, and

back down at the table.

"Been a long time, Lucas," said Pa.

"Since your weddin'," answered the man. He removed his hat, revealing scared, but kind looking eyes. I wondered how I could have mistaken them for Murray's.

"It's all right," Pa called to Ma. "He's a *friend*." He emphasized the last word, signifying that he meant in regards to the underground railroad.

Ma and I came forth.

"Martha, you remember Lucas, my cousin Irving's boy."

"Oh. Yes, I think I do," said Ma. "Pleasure to see you again." She offered him some cornbread, which he politely refused. Pa let him sit in his chair, standing while the rest of us sat back down at the table.

"I'm sorry for frightening you," said the man, seeming more so than I had been. "I just, I had to check to make sure no one else was here."

"What's the matter?" asked Ma. "Why are you in such a fit?"

"It's awful. I came as soon as I could. Been riding nonstop to every place on the underground between here and Pennsboro. Had to let everyone know. Had to get him farther north."

"Him?" asked Pa.

"Richard Clary's boy Simon. Been asking each stop where they sent him and following the trail. Gotta get him to Canada as soon as possible."

"Why? What's happened?" asked Ma.

"I was driving down from Wick to a safe house near Pennsboro. I was supposed to

them said she heard her son and daughter had run for Canada, so she decided to do the same and try to find them up there. After a bit of talk, he found out her children had been Richard Clary's slaves, none other than Simon and his sister. When my friend told me this I knew it was the two slaves my uncle had helped a couple weeks ago."

"So their mother is... dead?" I asked, knowing the answer.

Lucas nodded solemnly. "Poor boy. Mother dead and sister recaptured."

There was a long moment of silence.

"We sent him on not two days past," said Ma softly.

"Can I ask where?"

"Byesville. It's northwest of here, about sixteen miles or so," said Pa.

"You don't mind if I get a move on then? I've got a lot of ground to cover if I'm going to get there before he moves on. Luckily the station before yours traded horses with me."

"Yes, of course," said Pa. He pulled Lucas aside, I assumed to tell him where in Byesville he would find Simon. Then Lucas thanked us for our help and put on his hat.

As he opened the door, I asked him a final question.

"What about the other runaways? The ones at your friend's farm?"

"Don't know. There ain't no place to take them with the underground down for while. But they gotta move fast, 'cause Richard Clary is likely to find them if they stay put." Then he tipped his hat and faded away into the night air.

I thought of Richard's letter to me. How could I have been so vain? I let myself to become prideful of that man's affections. I was so infatuated with the idea of a suitor, a man who thought I was worth pursuing, that I allowed an important piece of information slip through

"No, Clare," said Pa firmly, understanding what I was about to say.

"Why not? He wouldn't suspect a thing. I could take Samuel with me and he could go get the runaways at night while we're all sleeping. And then we can bring them back up here when we return—hidden in the wagon."

"Clare, I'll not allow it. It's much too risky. There no need for you to be in harm's way."

"No need? No need, Pa? Don't you see? It's all my fault. I'm the one who hummed that song and let Murray know we were hiding Simon. I'm the one who nearly got you thrown in jail. I'm the one who didn't warn anyone what Richard wrote about the house. I'm the reason it was burned down! I-I *can't* be the one to let those runaways get caught, or worse. I just, I can't." I was crying now. All of the guilt and shame that I had been holding in was finally out in the open.

"Clare," said Pa, pulling me into a hug. "Clare, Clare." He hushed me and rubbed his cheek against my head. "We don't blame you. It was an accident. And an oversight. You don't need to prove anything."

"But I do Pa," I insisted. "And I owe it to Simon too. I told him I'd try to help Ebony. If I were at the plantation, I could at least talk to her; I'd know by then if he's safe. That'd give her some hope."

Pa wasn't convinced. "It's not worth it, Clare. If you got caught, you'd be hanged. The laws are different down there. It isn't Ohio."

"But Pa," I said, realizing that I could appeal to his faith. "What if this is what God wants me to do? What if the letter and the house and the runaways are all a sign?"

I could see that Pa was considering it. The scale seemed to be tipping, so I continued. "If this is what God wants me to do, who are we to deny him?" Then I quoted one of Reverend

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