

THE LAST SLAVE 1

Chapter 1



The War Between the States was over and life on the plantation had changed. The troops from the northern army were everywhere. They told the owners that their slaves were now free. They told them that keeping slaves on their farms was now against the law.

The plantation owners were confused and angry. Now they had no one to work for them.

The slaves were confused as well. They had nowhere to go. The only life they had known was on the plantation. They couldn't read, they couldn't write, they didn't have any skills except how to work on the farm.

After the war, the farmers began to learn how to raise their crops using machines instead of people. Because of this, many of the slaves were forced to move to the cities to look for work.

Many of the slaves ran away, knowing that the owners of the farms could no longer capture them and bring them back. A few stayed on the farms and did small jobs. The older workers had nowhere to go so they stayed and worked for their former owners. They did not know the difference between free or slave.

One such former slave was named Jeremiah. Jeremiah was born on the farm. His father had been sold when he was very young. His mother was a kind woman. She worked in the main house as a cook and laundry woman.

Jeremiah grew up playing with the children of the plantation owner. The family was kind and took good care of the farm and their workers. They were kinder than most.

After the war, it took a long time to rebuild the farm. The soldiers had taken most of the valuable things from the house and had destroyed the crops. However, the family was strong and vowed to remain on the land and to begin again.

Jeremiah's owner, Mr. Garnes, died when Jeremiah was twenty-five years old. His son John inherited the land and he had the same vision as his father. He wanted the plantation to be prosperous and grand.

Jeremiah stayed on the farm with the son. Everyone respected him. Jeremiah and John had played together as children, so they were good friends.

Although he was young, Jeremiah became a big part of the rebuilding of the plantation. He worked hard every day. He never complained and helped everyone he could.

He did not have much of an education, but he was very good with money. When he went to town to buy things, some of the merchants would try to cheat him, but he knew better, and he made them give him the right price.

Jeremiah had never married. He had a girl he loved and was ready to marry, but she died during the war. It was a very difficult time for everyone.

Over time, many of the people in the town thought it was wrong for Jeremiah to be trusted with so many responsibilities. After all, he was just the son of a slave, and an ex-slave himself.

This did not matter to Jeremiah or to John. They were working together to build a better life.

The house and the old slave shacks were in bad repair. It would take a long time to rebuild them. Jeremiah had learned many skills as a boy. The skill he learned the best was carpentry. He was excellent at building things. Day after day Jeremiah could be seen cutting wood, climbing ladders and using a hammer to nail the boards

into place. If he was not doing that, he was painting, farming or cleaning. He was always busy.

Jeremiah loved to whistle. He would whistle the old spiritual songs he learned in church. People loved it when he was around because the old songs were so comforting. His whistling sounded as good as a church organ. People always knew he was coming just by listening to his whistle.

When he walked to town, he would whistle and sing. He would dance and spin and do things that showed how much he loved his life. He was such a happy person.

As time went by, the people of the town grew more and more angry. The soldiers from the north were unkind. They would demand food and housing. The people began to blame the ex-slaves for their problems. So life for the ex-slaves who had remained on the plantation became very difficult.

One day, as Jeremiah was walking to town, some young boys began to tease him. They called him bad names and began to throw stones at him. Jeremiah just ignored them and continued on his way to the store.

When he got to the store, there was a new sign hanging in the window. Jeremiah did not know how to read very well so he walked in.

The owner of the store yelled at him to get out.

“Your kind is not welcome here anymore! Get out!” the owner yelled at Jeremiah.

‘Your kind’, what did the owner mean by ‘Your kind’?

The storeowner just told him to leave.

He left the store very confused. What happened? Why was he not welcome anymore?

Jeremiah went to the stable to check on a horse he had taken there a few days before to get new horseshoes. When he walked into the stable, the blacksmith told him to leave.

He said. "Your kind is not welcome here."

Jeremiah left and returned to the farm. The boys he had seen earlier followed him and yelled things at him. Jeremiah had no idea what was going on.

When he got back to the farm, he saw something terrible. Someone had painted words on the house in red paint. The white house had looked so beautiful when he had finished painting it only a month ago.

He went into the house. Everyone was upset. John called Jeremiah into his office.

"Sit down Jeremiah. I have something I need to talk to you about," he said.

"Times have changed around here. People are angry and they are pointing their fingers at the ex-slaves saying that if we had not lost the war all of you would still be working for us. Because of this, it is now hard to make money.

"I'm afraid for you Jeremiah. I'm not sure what to do. I'm afraid that you might get hurt. I want to send you away. Tell me where you want to go and I'll provide the money to get you there," Jeremiah's friend and boss explained to him.

Jeremiah did not know what to say. He did not want to leave the farm. It was the only home he had ever known.

"I'll have to think about it and let you know later," Jeremiah answered.

That night Jeremiah did not sleep well. He could not understand why the people in the town were so mean to him. They had always been so nice to him before.

The next day as he was preparing to go to town, John approached him.

"I don't think it is a good idea for you to go to town today. There's a big meeting and it'll be very dangerous for you. Stay here. I'll go to town and I'll tell you what I find out when I get back," he told Jeremiah.

Jeremiah stayed at the house all day. He climbed the ladder and started to paint over the red words that were on the house. It was a hot day and the sun was high in the sky. Jeremiah liked days like this. He felt like he was really doing a

day's work when the sweat was running down his brow.

He ran out of paint so he had to go down the ladder to get more. Just as he got to the bottom of the ladder, several men on horses rode up to the house.

“Jeremiah, you need to come with us,” one of the men said.

Another man reached down and pulled Jeremiah onto his horse behind him.

“Hold on Jeremiah, we've got to get out of here fast!” he said as he dug his heels into the horse's ribs and sent the horse running across the grass out toward the road.

As they came to the road, another group of men was approaching from the town. The horse Jeremiah was sharing turned up the road and away from the crowd.

The horses ran until they were too tired to run anymore. The men stopped and got off their horses.

“Jeremiah, those men we saw back there were coming to get you. Mr. Garnes gave us money to give to you so you can get away. You need to go fast, they're not far behind,” the man who had picked him up warned him.

“But where will I go? I don't know anyone. What am I to do?” Jeremiah was completely confused.

“Just get now. We don't have all day to stand here and talk with you. Those men are not happy with us either. Now go!” the leader of the group ordered Jeremiah.

Jeremiah ran into the woods. All he had with him was what he was wearing and the money the men had given him.

He ran until he could run no more. He stopped along a small creek and drank some water. He poured some over his head to cool himself off. He looked around. All he could see were trees. He had no idea where he was going.

It was getting dark so he found a log he could lean against and fell asleep.

In the morning, he found some berries and caught some crawdads in the creek, which he ate.

He walked toward the sun as its rays came through the tall trees. He walked for several hours and then came to a road.

He threw a stick into the air to decide which way to go. It pointed to the left. He decided to go that way.

While he was walking, he began to whistle. He was enjoying the warmth of the sun. Even though he did not know where he was going, he still had a good attitude.

He walked for several days, eating whatever he could find along the way. A few people passed him, but they just ignored him.

Just a few days later, he heard the sound of a wagon behind him. He turned around and saw a father with his son sitting on the front seat talking to each other. The horse was old and walked slowly.

When the wagon caught up with Jeremiah the man in the wagon greeted him.

“Howdy, how are you today?” the man asked.

“I’ve been better,” Jeremiah answered.

“I sure like the way you whistle. It’s real pretty,” the man said.

“Thank you. I like to whistle the songs I learned as a boy in church,” Jeremiah responded.

“Would you like a ride somewhere?” the man asked.

“I would if I knew where I was going,” Jeremiah replied.

“I’m going up to Franksville. I’ll give you a ride to there if you like,” the nice man offered.

“Alright, I would be obliged if you’d give me a ride,” Jeremiah replied, and then he climbed into the back of the wagon.

“So, what’s your name?” the man asked.

“I’m Jeremiah, Jeremiah Garnes, sir,” he answered.

“Well, I’m Josh Bailey and this is my son Noah,” Josh introduced himself and his son.

“Nice to meet you both,” Jeremiah said, as he shook the hand of the stranger.

The ride to town took a couple of hours. The horse was slow but steady. Jeremiah fell asleep in the back of the wagon.

When they got to the town, Jeremiah jumped out and thanked Josh for the ride.

“Anytime,” Josh said and shook Jeremiah’s hand. “Where are you going from here?”

“I don’t really know. I guess I’ll look for work here, if anyone will have me,” Jeremiah stated.

“I have some work I need to have done on my place. Do you know carpentry? I’ve got some fences and a barn that need fixing up. I can’t pay much, but you can stay in the barn up in the loft, and my wife will fix some food for you,” Josh offered.

“I don’t have any other offers, so I guess I accept,” Jeremiah replied.

“Wait here by the wagon. My son and I have to get some supplies. We’ll be right back,” Josh told Jeremiah.

Jeremiah waited as he was told. As he looked around it seemed like a nice town.

It was not long before Josh and Noah came out of the store. Jeremiah helped load the supplies into the wagon, and then he jumped in for the ride to the farm.

The trip to the farm was very peaceful. Since it was early summer, the birds were singing and the flowers were in full bloom. It was a wonderful day, except for the fact that Jeremiah was far from his home. He was lonesome for his family and friends, but he knew it would be dangerous to go back.

VOCABULARY: (*Match the word to its definition*)

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. plantation _____ | a. protest, grumble |
| 2. confusion _____ | b. person who works with wood |
| 3. skills _____ | c. require, insist |
| 4. complain _____ | d. disorder, uncertainty |
| 5. cheat _____ | e. abilities, talents |
| 6. demand _____ | f. fresh water lobster |
| 7. dangerous _____ | g. grateful, pleased, thankful |
| 8. crawdad _____ | h. unsafe, perilous |
| 9. obliged _____ | i. large farm |
| 10. carpenter _____ | j. deceive, trick |

TRUE / FALSE:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. The war was over. | T / F |
| 2. The slaves were educated on the plantations. | T / F |
| 3. The soldiers from the south came and destroyed the crops. | T / F |
| 4. The slave's name was Jeremiah. | T / F |
| 5. Jeremiah was a blacksmith. | T / F |
| 6. Mr. Garnes owned the plantation. | T / F |
| 7. The people loved to hear Jeremiah sing and whistle. | T / F |
| 8. The children loved Jeremiah and walked with him. | T / F |
| 9. The storeowner said, "Welcome Jeremiah". | T / F |
| 10. Jeremiah caught fish to eat. | T / F |

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

1. What was name of the owner of the plantation? ____
 - a) Jon Garnes
 - b) Jeremiah Garnes
 - c) Josh Bailey
 - d) Jordan Sparks

2. What town did Jeremiah go to? ____
 - a) Franksville
 - b) Garnesville
 - c) New York
 - d) Turksburg

3. What did Jeremiah do when he walked? ____
 - a) whistled
 - b) danced and spun
 - c) sang
 - d) all of the above

4. What was Jeremiah's best skill? ____
 - a) traveling
 - b) carpentry
 - c) painting
 - d) farming

COMPREHENSION: *(Write a complete sentence to answer the question.)*

1. What war had just ended?

2. Where did Jeremiah's mother work?

3. Why wasn't Jeremiah married?

4. What did Jeremiah do when he walked to town?

5. What did the boys along the road do to Jeremiah?

6. What did the shopkeeper say to Jeremiah?

7. What did Jeremiah eat in the forest?

8. Who stopped to give Jeremiah a ride in his wagon?

9. What was the name of the son of Josh Bailey?

10. What kind of work was Jeremiah good at?
