

THE LAST SLAVE

CHAPTER 2



Jeremiah was happy to be in a safe place. He was far from the people who were chasing him.

When the wagon arrived at the farm, they unloaded it. While they were doing this, Josh's wife came out to greet them.

"Jeremiah, this is my wife Susan," Josh introduced his wife.

Then speaking to his wife, he said, "And this is Jeremiah. He's going to stay with us for a while and help us fix up the farm."

Susan greeted Jeremiah and then informed them that she had supper ready. She invited Jeremiah to join them at the table.

Everyone washed up and then went into the house. The evening meal smelled delicious, and it tasted just as good.

After the meal, Jeremiah told the story of what had happened to him. The family was amazed. They had heard stories of things like that happening, but they did not understand how people could be so mean.

Jeremiah stayed on with the family and worked hard. Josh was impressed with the work he did, but soon there was not much left to do. Josh was sorry that Jeremiah had to leave. They had become very good friends.

Jeremiah decided to go to the town to find work. People knew how hard he worked and many wanted to hire him, but they were afraid. People had come from his old town looking for him. The townspeople told him it would be best if he left and found work

elsewhere.

Jeremiah was not happy about this, but he understood. He said goodbye and walked out of the town with a few dollars in his pocket and no place to go.

He walked for many days and then came to a city. He had never been in a place like this. It scared him. He saw many people and when he greeted them, they turned away. No one was friendly there.

He asked where he might stay and finally someone was kind and took him to an old building in the center of the town. The man there told him he would give him a room in exchange for work. Jeremiah agreed. The man showed him his room. It was only big enough for a blanket on the floor. There were holes in the walls and the window was very small.

Jeremiah became settled into his room. The first thing he did was look for a place to put his money to keep it safe. He found a loose board in the floor that turned out to be the perfect place to hide it.

He then went to see the owner to get his jobs. He was given a list of duties, but since he could not read, he had to ask the owner to tell him what to do.

He did repairs, washed windows, swept the floors, and cleaned the rooms when people left. That was the bad part of the job. People would leave their rooms in such a mess, but Jeremiah did not care. He was working and he had a place to sleep.

One day, one of the people in the rooming house observed Jeremiah and how hard he was working. He invited Jeremiah to go with him to his place of work. Jeremiah agreed and the next day he went with him.

Jeremiah was hired to do labor work in a large factory. The work was hard and the days were long, but Jeremiah was earning more money. Every payday he would hide his money in the floor of his room. When he was not at the factory, he would work for the owner of the boardinghouse.

The owner of the factory noticed how hard Jeremiah worked. He offered him a new position where he would be working with seven other men. The owner told him that

if he wanted to be promoted to a better position, he would have to learn how to read.

Jeremiah asked many people how he could learn to read. One day a young lady, who worked in the office, agreed to help him. They met after work in the cafeteria at the factory every night.

He was a fast learner. His teacher, Miss Rebecca, taught him from the Bible. He had heard many of the stories in his youth at church, but now he could read them for himself. The language was funny, but he was learning to read.

The owner of the factory observed Jeremiah and his progress. Soon he offered him a better position with better pay.

With more money and a better job, Jeremiah thought about moving to a better place to live, but he decided to save his money instead. He continued to work for the owner of the boardinghouse and saved his money under the floorboards in his room.

Month after month, it was the same. He worked at the factory, studied reading, and worked for the owner of the inn.

As he was studying reading, he began to have feelings for Miss Rebecca. One day he asked if she would have dinner with him. She accepted. They began to date each other and soon they decided to get married.

After that, Jeremiah realized that he needed to improve his living arrangements. He could not bring Miss Rebecca to his room.

After noticing that Jeremiah was not having much luck finding a new place to live, she suggested that they live with her parents until they were able to find a new home. Her parents agreed and after the wedding Jeremiah moved into her parent's house with her.

Jeremiah continued to save his money. He worked hard at the factory and he found other work when he could. He put the money in a hole in the wall of their room behind a picture frame.

One day, Miss Rebecca found the money that Jeremiah had been saving.

“What are you going to do with all of this money?” she asked him.

“I’m not sure. I just don’t want to be poor again,” he responded.

The next day Miss Rebecca gave Jeremiah a newspaper.

“Look on page two. There’s something there that might be of interest to you,” she said with a smile, as she handed him the paper.

Jeremiah read the paper. There was an advertisement that a construction company was for sale.

“Why did you show this to me?” he asked.

“I think you should buy it,” she answered.

“Do I have enough money for that?” he inquired.

“You have more than enough. Why don’t you and my dad go and ask about buying that business. You’re a good builder. You can do a good job with this,” she encouraged him.

The next day Jeremiah and his father-in-law went to the company and asked about the advertisement. To everyone’s surprise, when Jeremiah came home, he was the new owner of the business.

Over the next several years, the business grew and Jeremiah became well known and respected in the city. His work was the finest anyone had ever seen and his prices were fair.

He hired mostly ex-slaves, like himself, to work for him. He gave them an education and trained them with the skills he had learned as a boy.

He had two sons and a daughter. They all joined the business. Miss Rebecca became the head bookkeeper and made sure that all of the bills were paid on time.

Over the years, the business expanded into other cities. His sons took over those companies and they were very successful.

As Jeremiah got older, he began to slow down. Miss Rebecca noticed that he did not have the energy he once had. She told him to let the boys do the work and for him to rest.

Jeremiah did not want to stop working, but he knew his wife was right. He spent his time reading and walking in the park.

One day Jeremiah called his family to the house. He had something he wanted to tell them.

“We’re going on a trip. We’re going to visit my birthplace. I want you to see where I grew up,” Jeremiah surprised the family.

As far as anyone could remember, Jeremiah had never taken a vacation. The family was excited. They would take a train to his hometown.

The day came for the trip. The family was packed and ready to go. They hired a coach to carry their bags to the train station.

It was exciting waiting for the train to come. Jeremiah’s grandchildren were running back and forth playing tag. They had on their nicest clothes for the journey. Their mothers were telling them to stop or their clothes might be ruined.

When the train arrived, the family members gave their tickets to the conductor and took their seats.

The train would take a couple of days to arrive in Jeremiah’s hometown. The family enjoyed singing and sharing. The food in the dining car was very good.

It was evening when the train arrived at the station. The family got off the train and asked about a hotel. They were told they would have to go to the hotel on the far side of the town. The other hotels did not allow people of their kind to stay there.

The town had not changed much since he left. The general store and the stable were still there. A few more houses and other stores he did not recognize had been built along the road toward the old hotel.

Jeremiah thought to himself, “Things have not changed much since I left.”

The carriage took them to the hotel. The building was not pretty. It needed paint, but once inside it was nice. The clerk at the desk was a kind young man and he helped them get their luggage to the rooms. Each family had their own room next to each other.

After putting their things in their hotel rooms and changing their clothes, they met in the dining hall for dinner. They all sat around a big table in the corner. The restaurant was nice and the food was delicious, but there were not many people there. The cook

made the kind of food Jeremiah remembered from when he was a boy. His family enjoyed the meal as well.

Jeremiah had not talked much about his past. The family began to question him about what it was like in this town as a boy.

He told them about being a slave and of how he grew up with his mother in the big house. He went on to tell them about the soldiers and of how they came and told all of the farmers that the slaves were now free. He spoke of how the farmers were angry about that.

He shared how he stayed after all of his family had left. He had remained at the house and had helped the son of his former owner to repair the old house. He went on to tell them how he helped to make the farm work again. He explained how the people of the town became angry and because of that, he had to leave.

He had hoped the people in the town had changed since he left, but he was afraid things were the same. He was sorry his hometown was not like where they lived now.

The next day the family went for a walk. As they walked through the town there were many people staring at them. They had never seen such fine clothes, especially on their kind.

Jeremiah whistled as they walked through the town and then out to the farm. He remembered this road. He had walked to and from town a thousand times.

He remembered the boys throwing rocks at him and the men coming to take him away. He was lucky. He had heard about others who had been punished or even killed by people like that.

When they got to the entrance of the farm, Jeremiah was very sad. The house was in bad repair. The grass and the flowers were dead. It looked like no one lived there anymore.

Jeremiah told the family to wait. He would go to the door to see if anyone was there. He walked up the road to the house. He climbed the steps of the porch and then knocked on the door. There was silence.

Just as he turned to walk away, the door opened. An older man answered the door.

“Hello, May I help you?” the man asked.

Jeremiah turned around.

The man looked like he had not changed his clothes in some time. His hair was long and unkempt. His beard was gray and thin. His eyes were dim.

“Is Mr. Garnes at home?” he asked.

“I’m Mr. Garnes, who may I ask are you?” the old man inquired.

“I’m Jeremiah. I have come home to visit,” Jeremiah replied.

“JEREMIAH!” the old man’s face lit up like a Christmas tree. “I cannot believe it. Come in!” he said with excitement.

Jeremiah waved at his family to come to the house. They went inside and Jeremiah showed them the old house where he had grown up. He sat for a long time talking to John and sharing how his life had gone.

John had fallen on hard times after Jeremiah left. He was unable to take care of the farm alone. He had sold much of his property in order to survive. He was now trying to sell the last of his land.

Jeremiah offered to buy the land and the house. John agreed to sell, with one condition. He could stay in the house until he died.

Soon after, Jeremiah brought one of his construction crews to the house and restored it to its original beauty. The house and property around it became a place for people to visit. It became a museum where people from far and wide could come to see life as it was before the war in the south.

Jeremiah had come home. He helped the people who had helped him. Jeremiah spent his last days in that house and he was buried alongside his mother in the family burial plot along the edge of the forest.

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

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. chase _____ | a. date, go-out, before marriage |
| 2. fix up _____ | b. repair, restore |
| 3. supper _____ | c. ticket taker |
| 4. impressed _____ | d. disorder, uncertainty |
| 5. delicious _____ | e. dinner, evening meal |
| 6. earn _____ | f. fancy wagon, coach |
| 7. court (v) _____ | g. pursue, follow |
| 8. bookkeeper _____ | h. payment, make |
| 9. conductor _____ | i. one who keeps records |
| 10. carriage _____ | j. tasty, tastes very good |

TRUE / FALSE:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Jeremiah worked for Josh Bailey. | T / F |
| 2. He moved to another country. | T / F |
| 3. He never learned to read. | T / F |
| 4. He got married and had children. | T / F |
| 5. He bought a hardware store. | T / F |
| 6. He lived in an old boarding house. | T / F |
| 7. He lost all of his money. | T / F |
| 8. He family went by carriage to his hometown. | T / F |
| 9. His old town was much bigger and newer than when he left. | T / F |
| 10. Jeremiah was buried next to his mother. | T / F |

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

1. What was the name of Jeremiah's wife? _____
 - a) Miss Molly
 - b) Miss Rhonda
 - c) Miss Caroline
 - d) Miss Rebecca

2. Who went with Jeremiah to buy the construction business? _____
 - a) his father
 - b) his wife
 - c) his brother
 - d) his father-in-law

3. Where did Jeremiah hide his money? _____
 - a) in the wall
 - b) under his bed
 - c) in the floorboards of his room
 - d) all of the above

4. Where did Jeremiah die? _____
 - a) on the plantation
 - b) in the city
 - c) on the train
 - d) in his house

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

1. Who did Jeremiah work for in Franksville?

2. What were his duties at the boarding house?

3. Who taught him how to read?

4. Who did Jeremiah marry?

5. Who showed Jeremiah the advertisement for the construction company?

6. What did Jeremiah do with the money he saved?

7. Where did Jeremiah and his family go?

8. Where did they stay when they arrived in his hometown?

9. Who met Jeremiah at the door?

10. What did Jeremiah offer to do for John Garnes?
