

Two courageous men, one black and one white, and the women they love, settle in early Texas to help build a young nation. To win their land, they must fight the Mexican army for independence, and the Comanches for survival.

Legacy of Dreams

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Legacy of Dreams

Dan Vanderburg

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ISBN 978-1-60910-116-9

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Printed in the United States of America.

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2010

PROLOGUE

SUMMER, 1879, VIRGINIA POINT, TEXAS

Along the Brazos River

Will Bowman's eyes flew open to the crash of thunder. The lightning flickering beyond the windows illuminated puddles of water beginning to form on the window sill as the rain blew in between the flapping, white lace curtains. He quietly pulled himself from bed so as not to disturb his sleeping wife and groped his way across the room. His wrinkled but still strong features flickered on the glass from the almost constant lightning as he pulled the curtains aside and closed the window.

Just how bad is this going to be? he thought, squinting out into the night. *Is there a tornado out there? Should I take them to the cellar?*

Bending closer to the window, barefoot and in his nightshirt, the seventy-one year old man strained to see beyond the rivulets of water flowing down the glass. He squinted at the silhouettes of live oak trees dotting the prairie beyond the yard as the lightning flashed. *How many times have I viewed this scene in all kinds of weather? Hundreds? Maybe thousands?*

A shiver went through him as he remembered the times years earlier when he and Jeff had survived nights much like this in their old surveying tent. They'd spent many cold, wet, and sometimes freezing nights trying to find a warm spot under the blankets. *We just waited out the night... but... the good days and nights far outnumbered the bad.*

Still leaning on the window frame and gazing at the storm, he listened to the rhythm of raindrops on the roof, against the window,

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and in the puddles in the yard. The sounds brought more memories. *Has it really been fifty years?* He shook his head. *Fifty years since that day in Virginia when I told Papa I was going to Texas... so much has happened... so much hardship and sacrifice... A slight smile curled his lip. So much satisfaction.*

A flash of lightning in the trees a mile north of the house jolted the old man back to the present. The massive white glow was soon followed by a shattering boom that rattled the windows.

A strange, uncontrollable shudder trembled its way through Will. He grabbed the window frame to steady himself. *What the...?*

He didn't see the details of the lightning striking the ancient oak tree. He didn't see the thick trunk shatter and fall away or the gnarled branches explode from the pressure as the sap instantaneously boiled off... Nor did he see the long-held secret that was finally revealed by the storm's fury that night.

Chapter 1

Spring, 1829, Western Virginia Fifty Years Earlier

The two men led their horses as they walked along the edge of the cotton field. The older man watched the Negro workers, scattered among the furrows, hoeing weeds from the Virginia dirt between the young cotton plants. The older man occasionally glanced at his son walking beside him who looked to be in deep thought. Henry Bowman was worried about his youngest son. It was against Will's nature to be as quiet and serious as he had been lately.

“Working on a problem, Son?”

“What?” Will looked up from the dirt.

“I asked if you had a problem. You’ve been awful preoccupied lately. Women problems?”

“No, Papa. Nothing like that.”

Will Bowman did have something on his mind. He had been thinking it over for a month, ever since he’d gotten the letter. It was time to share his decision with his family and act on his plan.

Henry was pleased when Will suggested they ride out together and check the crops that sunny, spring morning. Henry had spent little time with his youngest son in the last several years. Will had been away at school most of the time. And since he’d graduated from the academy, he was frequently away in other parts of Virginia working on surveying projects.

The old man continued to steal sideways glances at Will while they walked. He’d come to realize how much Will had matured in the last few years.

Now twenty-one and slender, but with a strong build, at six-foot two Will was taller than his father. It wouldn't have surprised Henry if his good-looking, blue eyed son *was* brooding because he was in love. Several young women had glanced approvingly at Will

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when he, Will and Taylor, one of his older sons, had gone to Roanoke for supplies a few weeks earlier. Henry reflected, *Come to think of it, that's about how long Will's been acting a little preoccupied.*

Will broke the silence. "Papa, why did you decide to put your roots down here?"

"What do you mean, Son?"

"What made you decide to settle way out here in western Virginia when you did? Wasn't it still wild out here then?"

Henry stopped walking and looked at Will. The horses grazed on the fresh grass at the end of the cotton rows. "Why did I settle out here?" He took off his hat off and scratched his head as he thought back. "Several reasons, I guess." He smiled as he remembered. "I was determined to build a good life for the family I hoped to have some day. I knew it wouldn't be easy, but I was young, strong, and full of ambition. Wanted to have a place where I'd have room to spread out and be my own man. Besides, the price was right." He winked at Will and his smile widened, wrinkling his cheek. "I was lucky enough to find a good woman that would have me. Your mother wanted this kind of life too. Didn't start out with any help, either. Wasn't able to get any help for several years. A strong team of mules is all we had in the beginning. When your brothers started coming along and your mother couldn't help in the fields, it was just me and the mules 'til I could afford some help. Anyway, why Son? What's on your mind?"

"I'm... I'm just thinking about a lot of things right now."

"What kind of things?"

"Well... remember when we were in Roanoke a couple of weeks ago?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I picked up a letter from a fellow named Austin. He's been commissioned by the government of Mexico to develop colonization in Texas. He's the son of the man Uncle John told us about when he was visiting here that winter, six or seven years ago. A lot of settlers are moving out there now, taking advantage of the free Mexican land grants." Will removed his hat and fingered the brim for a moment before looking at his father again. "Fact is... well... he wants me to come to Texas too... claim my land and do surveying for

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the other immigrants moving in.”

Henry stared at his son, the smile gone from his face. He knew people were moving to Texas and had a good idea what it was like there. He remembered the visit from his wife's brother, John Bell, one of the first American settlers in Texas, and he'd received several letters over the years from John describing that part of the country and their way of life.

Henry had expected Will to eventually assume his place on the family plantation like his brothers. Now his youngest son was talking about leaving family and home and moving across the continent to a wilderness filled with uncertainty and possible danger. As much as Henry wanted to discourage him, raising Will and his brothers had taught him to be patient.

Will continued. “The Mexican government is offering land grants of over a thousand acres for a single man and over forty-five hundred acres to men with families. With all the immigration and settlement that's going on, there's a tremendous amount of work for surveyors and not near enough certified people to do it. I'll not only have an opportunity to select my own land, but I can make a good living with my surveying.”

Henry looked at the ground and shook his head, then looked back up at Will. “Son, I don't doubt there's plenty of opportunity, but from what I understand, there's also plenty of chances for things to go sour. What about the Mexican government? How stable is it? What about the Indians? We've both heard what those murdering savages can do. And there's no militia out there. Why, that country's so big from what I hear, you might travel for weeks without seeing another human being. Not a civilized one, anyway.”

Henry put his hands on Will's shoulders. “Son, I've worked my entire life to provide a better way for my children so you'd be spared some of the difficulty I had when I was young. I expanded this place over the years so you all could have a reasonable share. I've tried to give you a good foundation. I've taught you, and I've sent you away for schooling to become an educated man with military training. I've raised you to be a Southern gentleman. Now you want to turn your back on all of it and travel a thousand miles into the wilderness

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and start from scratch?" Henry released Will and his arms sagged to his sides. He gazed at the ground, sucked air between his teeth and sighed. He looked at Will again and slowly shook his head. "I just don't know, Will..."

"It's not that I want to turn my back on everything you've done, Papa. I just want to earn my own. If anybody can understand that, you can. Yes Sir... you taught me to stand on my own two feet... to stand up for what I believe." Will hesitated, then looked his father in the eyes. "I *believe* in this, Papa. I believe this new country will provide an opportunity for me that I could never realize here." He looked across the fields for a moment, then back at his dad. "I don't know exactly what I have to offer Texas except my surveying skills, but I have the determination, ambition, and desire to contribute whatever I can to help it develop from a colony into whatever it will become. You prepared me well, Papa. I'm not afraid to face the unknown. I'm young, like you were when you started out here. I've got a vision of what I want for my family one of these days. And like you, I'm willing to take a risk and work hard for it."

Will paused again, glancing across the fields, then met his father's gaze with an earnest look. "Papa, I really appreciate what you've done for me, and I love you for it, but this is what I have to do. I want someday to have the same pride and satisfaction that you have now. I want to know that whatever level of success I may achieve, I accomplished it on my own, by my own wits and ability. I've set my course... but I really do want your blessing."

Henry returned Will's gaze with a look of both pride and sorrow on his lined face. He saw so much of himself in his son's blue eyes. He hesitated a moment, then nodded. "I do understand how you feel, Son. Give me some time to think on it." Henry reached for his saddle horn and pulled himself up into his saddle. "Let's sleep on it tonight and see how it looks in the morning."

They rode quietly back to the big house for lunch. Both were too caught up in their own thoughts for further conversation.

Breaking the news to his father relieved Will of a burden he had carried since he'd first started thinking about venturing out on his own. He had known for some time that he wanted to define his own

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destiny. He just hadn't known which direction to follow until he'd received the letter from Austin.

He loved his family and felt an obligation to follow his father's plan, but a stronger sense urged him to follow his heart. He knew if he fulfilled his family's expectations by settling on his father's farm, he would miss what he considered the opportunity and adventure of a lifetime. He wanted a home and family some day, but there was much he needed to accomplish first. The invitation to Texas was just what he'd been looking for.

Many experiences in Will's life had prepared him for this decision. His father had seen to it that all of his sons knew how to live off the land. Will had been trained to hunt and shoot as soon as he could hold his father's rifle. He could distinguish useful plants from those that were harmful, and could find water where there appeared to be none. He knew how to prepare animals for the table and how to use their hides.

Will was also a good farmer. He knew how to get the most from the land and felt a deep satisfaction from seeing the seeds of his labor come to fruition at harvest time. He had experienced exhausting labor first hand and considered himself the better for it. Now he was ready to take those skills to Texas.

Will remembered as a young teenager sitting by the fireside during his uncle's visit, listening to stories of Texas. Uncle John spoke of a land so vast it seemed endless. Most of it still was unexplored by white men. He talked of black land so rich that cotton produced a yield over twice what a good farmer could expect in Virginia. He said there was wildlife in abundance: scattered herds of wild horses and cattle; herds of buffalo numbering in the thousands that had roamed the grasslands for hundreds of years; deer, turkey, and wild pigs so plentiful there would always be meat for the table.

He also spoke of the dangers of everyday living in that part of the country. The Indian conflict was not so threatening in the southern and eastern part of the territory but the Comanches to the north and west were hostile and occasionally raided the scattered Mexican settlements. Uncle John had painted an exciting picture of the new frontier and planted a seed of adventure in young Will's mind.

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Will did his homework after receiving Austin's letter. He made several trips to Roanoke to research newspaper articles regarding the current state of affairs in Texas. He learned that there had been many changes in Mexico since John's visit. After winning its independence from Spain, Mexico was limited in what a struggling, sometimes politically unstable new country could accomplish. It was short on cash but long on millions of acres of unclaimed, untamed land.

He also learned that after Moses Austin's death, Stephen Austin had successfully continued his father's work by obtaining permission to develop colonies in northeastern Mexico, which included Texas. Several land grants had been issued by the Mexican government to commissioners—or impresarios, as they were called—including Austin, who agreed to attract large numbers of families into their grant for settlement in exchange for huge grants of land for themselves. The newspaper articles also said there were already almost twenty thousand new settlers.

Will felt well informed and secure with his decision. He just hoped his father and the rest of his family would share his enthusiasm.

Chapter 2

Jessie, the house keeper, sent the two girls outside just before noon to wait for the men to come home for lunch. Fourteen year old Mary, the youngest of the Bowman household, had played all morning with Anna Thompson. Anna was staying with the Bowman family while her mother and father were away in Richmond. Mary loved to have girlfriends her own age stay with her for several days at a time. Henry encouraged the guests as they gave Mary her only chance, aside from school, to have female companionship besides Jessie, the house slave.

Mary and Anna were as opposite in appearance as they were alike in behavior. Mary was fair, blond, and freckled, and Anna had a slightly darker complexion and dark, wavy hair. Mary, at an awkward stage, seemed to be all arms and legs. Anna, older than Mary and just shy of her fifteenth birthday, had started to mature. Both girls had blue eyes, but Anna's, framed by long, dark lashes were a strikingly beautiful blue-gray. It was obvious that both girls would be beauties soon, but neither was concerned with her looks that morning. They were more interested in making mischief for Will Bowman.

Will was Mary's favorite brother because he was the closest to her in age. Though seven years older, he frequently took time to indulge his sister and interact with her friends.

The men usually dismounted in the shade of the large apple tree at the side of the plantation house where Jefferson met them to take the horses to the barn. The girls decided to climb the tree and wait for the men. Their initial intention was to simply hide from the men when they rode into the yard. However, the small, green apples in the tree inspired more mischief. They began gathering apples in their long, full skirts until each had collected a half-bushel arsenal.

Soon Henry and Will turned their horses under the tree as expected and called for Jefferson. The girls waited eagerly for just the right moment. As Will strode under the tree, they released their

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ammunition. Will's hat and shoulders took most of the barrage. It wasn't hard to detect the culprits from the giggling in the tree. Mary had to grab Anna to keep her from falling off her perch, she was laughing so hard. Will took the joke well, as he always did. He and Henry joined in the laughter, but he warned the girls as he laughed, "You two had better watch out; you might get paid back when you least expect it."

Anna had other reasons for visiting the Bowman place that she wouldn't even admit to Mary. She had been attracted to Will Bowman far as long as she could remember. Recently, since he had returned from the military academy so mature and self-assured, her feelings toward him had intensified with her developing young womanhood. Now, as he encircled her waist with his hands and easily lifted her from the low-hanging tree limb, she peered at him through her long, dark lashes and felt her cheeks burn.

Although she was becoming a young woman, she was still a child in Will's eyes. He swatted at both of them with his hat as they ran away. He called after them, "You girls shouldn't be deviling men going about their business."

Their merriment was interrupted by Jessie ringing the dinner bell on the side porch to summon the Bowman family to their noonday meal. Jessie had prepared lunch for the Bowmans as she had every day for the last fourteen years since Mrs. Bowman had died giving birth to Mary. Henry had bought Jessie, Amos, and their son Jefferson after he'd lost his wife. A neighbor who farmed a spread just north of the Bowman plantation was moving west to the Missouri territory and needed to raise cash for his new land. He sold his household slaves to Bowman to raise the cash.

Will was just seven years old when the new slaves arrived. Jessie tended to the baby, cleaned the house, took care of everyone's clothes and kept the family well fed. Amos and Jefferson provided food for the Bowman plantation and cultivated the vegetable gardens and orchards. The quality and taste of their fruits and vegetables gave testimony to the care they spent working the crops. They were also responsible for the livestock that supplied the table. The beefsteaks, roasts, ribs and chops were always juicy and flavorful. Amos' sausage

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and ham were almost as legendary as Jessie's fried chicken.

As Jefferson grew, he was trained to be a blacksmith. He was also responsible for taking care of the saddle horses, mules, and oxen. Amos and Jessie had always taken pride in their work and taught Jefferson the enjoyment and satisfaction of good workmanship.

The Bowmans had always treated their people well, but Jessie, Amos, and Jefferson felt a special relationship with their masters. Those feelings were reflected in the quality of their work, their positive attitude, and their loyalty to the family.

Jefferson was the same age as Will, so it was natural for Will and Jeff, as Will called him, to be childhood playmates. When Jefferson wasn't working with his father or training under the instruction of Will's brothers, he and Will explored the valleys and creeks around the plantation together. It wasn't unusual for them to bring home fish for supper after an afternoon at the fishing hole.

As teenagers, Will often took Jefferson hunting with him after chores were done. Although it was frowned upon, if not forbidden, to allow a slave to handle firearms, Will ignored common practice and taught Jefferson to use the Tennessee long rifle. After some practice, Jeff became as adept a marksman as Will.

Like Will, Jefferson grew to become a tall man but was more muscular than Will with handsome, broad features and a bright smile. He had his own place in the cabin with his parents, a little alcove that was divided from the rest of the cabin by a curtain, with a comfortable feather bed in the corner. He had plenty of good food that Jessie brought from the big house every night.

Jefferson felt content with his way of life. He'd been born into slavery, so it was all he knew, but occasionally he wondered what freedom would be like. He learned things quickly and wanted so much to be able to learn more. He enjoyed using his mind to design tools to be made with his forge and anvil and to repair the farm equipment, but he knew he'd never learn to read and write. He thought there must be a law somewhere that said black folks couldn't be taught to read and write. He didn't know whether it was written, but he understood that white people didn't want their slaves to get training for anything other than what they could do with their hands.

Chapter 3

Henry didn't sleep much the night after Will outlined his plan. He lay awake thinking of Will's dream to help open the Texas frontier. Certainly, the opportunity for success and even wealth existed, but Henry couldn't help but feel protective toward his youngest boy. Will had always been his favorite son because he had been the baby for so many years before Mary came along.

Finally, before dawn, he made his decision and developed a plan for setting it in motion. He was up and dressed as Jessie was brewing coffee. He had a quick, early breakfast and looked at Jessie. "Jessie, tell Jefferson to saddle my horse while I'm having my coffee. And another thing—I want you to plan a big supper tonight. I'm going to have the whole family in. Fix up one of your extra-special suppers... roast beef and fried chicken with all your extras."

"Yes Sir, but what—"

"I'll tell you later. Just fix it up special for the family."

"Yes Sir."

Henry met Jefferson in the barn yard, waiting with the saddled gelding. He swung into the saddle. "Jefferson, tell all my sons that I want them and their wives to have dinner at the big house tonight."

"Yes Sir."

"Oh, yeah, there's one other thing. I want you, Amos, and Jessie in the parlor at five o'clock this afternoon. There's something I need to discuss with you."

"Yes Sir." A look of confusion crowded Jefferson's face as he watched the master ride out of the barn lot and down the trail toward the road to Roanoke. *Now why would Mister Henry want to meet with us this evening?*

It was rare that the entire family came together at the same time except for holiday dinners unless there was a family crisis. Will's brothers discussed the purpose of the get-together during the day but

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couldn't determine a reason for the unexpected "mystery" dinner. The market conditions for cotton continued to look good with the European mills. The government was stable. The farm was in good shape. The weather had cooperated so far this season. If it held, they would reap a good crop and turn a nice profit. They had a well-rounded field crew with a total of fourteen slaves, including children. No one could understand the reason for the special occasion. No one except Will.

Will knew what the meeting was about, but he didn't know what turn his father would take. *Is he calling the dinner to announce his support of my immigration to Texas or to announce the restructuring of the family business to include me in the day-to-day operation?*

Just talking about his plans had made Will more resolute. He didn't want to have a scene with his father in front of his whole family, but his decision had been made.

The house was abuzz with activity in preparation for the special family gathering. Jessie enlisted the girls' help with the housework. They dusted and aired the house while Amos and Jefferson scrubbed the floors.

Mary and Anna set the table in the spacious dining room with Mary's mother's fine china and the silver Henry had bought for his wife on their fifteenth wedding anniversary. Mary liked to set a fancy table, even when it was just for herself and her father. Mary's mother's things were now hers and she enjoyed the role of mistress of the house.

Henry returned from town by early afternoon. After a short nap, he freshened up, dressed for dinner and was in the parlor at 5 o'clock. When Amos, Jessie and Jefferson approached the door, he was standing with his hands clasped behind his back, looking out the window at the meadow beyond the wide front porch. He turned to face the family in the center of the room. "Come in and close the door." Amos and Jefferson stood uncomfortably with their hats in their hands, Jefferson turning his nervously. Jessie clasped her hands at her ample bosom and wrinkled worry lines formed across her brow.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush about why I called you

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in,” Henry said. “This has to do with Will, but it also has to do with Jefferson.”

Jefferson lifted his gaze from the polished floor to follow every word more carefully.

“Will has decided to go to Texas and seek his fortune there. Lots of people are moving there to take advantage of land grants, and there's a great need for trained surveyors. He also plans to get his own land and start a farm, but he can't go it alone. He needs a good man to help him. When I went to town today, I transferred ownership of Jefferson to Will. He and Jefferson will be going to Texas together.”

After worrying all day about the meeting, now that the news was out Jessie was doing all she could to stifle tears and hold back the sobs that were welling in her throat. Amos and Jefferson were too shocked to respond.

“Now Jessie, you and Amos both know I've never separated children from their parents and never will. But Jefferson is a man now... has been for some time. It's time he moved out from his mama and papa anyway.” He looked at Jefferson. “Jefferson, I want Will to have the best man anybody could ask for. That's why I want you to go with him. With you two looking out for each other, I'll feel more comfortable for both of you.” He returned his glance to the parents. “Amos, you and Jessie have raised a fine boy. You've taught him well and you should be proud of him. I'm proud of him and confident to send my son off into the wilderness with him.”

Henry walked over to Jefferson, clasped his thick shoulder, and looked him in the eyes. “Take care of each other, Jefferson. I know you'll do well together.”

Jefferson didn't know how to respond. Everything was happening so suddenly. He was thrilled at the thought of being part of the adventure that Henry had just described, but he was saddened at the thought of leaving his family. He cleared the lump in his throat and stammered, “Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir. I'll do my best.”

Henry started back toward his chair, then turned with an afterthought. “Oh yeah... I called the family together tonight to tell them about Will's plans. No one knows about you going with him yet, not even Will. Let's keep it that way until I tell them.”

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“Yes Sir,” they mumbled in unison as they turned to leave.

Jessie turned back before reaching the door, “Mr. Bowman?”

“Yes?” he responded before sitting down.

“How long do I have my boy before he go away?”

“It probably won't be for a couple of weeks. There are things to prepare. Besides, I want to have a party for Will before he goes.”

“I'll try to get in a partyin' mood, but it sho gonna be hard.”

“I know it will, Jessie, but you'll do fine. You always have. I know you probably don't feel much like working or partying after what I've told you, but you've got dinner to serve in a little while. There will be time enough for fretting later.”

After they left Henry in the parlor and returned to the kitchen, Amos said, “Now, y'all straighten' up an' act right. Y'all hear what Mr. Bowman say. Don't let on about dis. Dey all learn soon enough.”

Mary and Anna greeted the three sons and their wives as they arrived for dinner at six-thirty. Each was dressed in nice suits or gaily colored party dresses with wide skirts for Henry's dinner. Henry and Will soon joined them in conversation regarding children and crops. It wasn't long before Jessie announced that dinner was ready.

They assembled in the spacious dining room, gathering around the table set with crystal, china, and silver. Everyone joined hands and Henry offered thanks for the food before them. The conversation during dinner was subdued except for the girls telling of the prank they pulled on Will from the apple tree.

After dessert was served, Henry explained why he had called the family together. He discussed in detail Will's plan to immigrate to Texas and take advantage of the land grants there. “I've decided to support Will's plan and give him my blessing, even though I do have some misgivings as to the safety of this venture. However, Will is a grown man, well educated, and capable of making his own decisions. That new country needs men like him.”

Will was embarrassed as the family applauded, some patting his back, others reaching to shake his hand, all showing their approval of his mission.

Henry continued. “Will's goal, though admirable in concept, is not something he can do alone. A surveyor must have a helper, and

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a gentleman must have a servant to assist in his day-to-day needs. I have transferred ownership of Jefferson to Will. I have already talked to Jefferson, Amos and Jessie, and they are aware of this plan. I want Will to have a good man he can depend on.

“Also, due to many circumstances, Will hasn't yet become a full business partner in this plantation like the rest of you boys have, nor has he shared in the profits as you have. But he has earned his way and done his part through his years, growing up without cash payment. I want him to have one-thousand dollars in cash to take with him, and there's an account in his name at the Bank of New Orleans with an additional three thousand dollars. He has earned at least that much from his work over the years on the plantation.” He turned to Will, handing him the envelope. “I hope this will get you started and give you a little nest egg to fall back on if times get hard.”

Will was overwhelmed. He hadn't dreamed his father would be so generous. It took a few moments before he could speak. He cleared his throat several times, then rose and faced his father. “Thank you, Sir, for your generosity. It was totally unexpected but will be put to good use, I assure you. As for the gift of Jefferson, thanks again. I couldn't have asked for a better traveling companion and assistant. I'll take good care of him.” Will glanced around the table. “And to the rest of you, thanks for your support. Please keep me in your prayers. I think I'll need all the help I can get.”

Again there was an ovation. Henry stood at the end of the table and raised his glass. “To Will... may you find the success you seek as you help open the new frontier of Texas!”

Will raised his glass, accepted the toast and thanked everyone around the table. His gaze shifted to Anna. She sat across the table from him, quietly looking into his happy face. Her sad eyes met his, and she lifted her glass and forced a smile as a tear spilled onto her cheek.

Later, after the dinner party, Will paid a visit to Jefferson at Amos and Jessie's cabin. Amos opened the door after Will's quiet knock.

“Why, Mr. William, come in!”

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Will stepped into the small cabin and saw Jefferson sitting at the rough table across the room. As their eyes met, their faces lit with wide grins of acknowledgment, acceptance, and friendship. Will strode across the cabin in a few steps as Jefferson stood. Will took Jefferson's hand and pumped it as they broke into explosive laughter.

“Going with me to Texas, huh?”

“That's what Mr. Henry said.”

“Jeff, I couldn't hope for any better.”

“Thank you, Sir. I'll be proud to go with you and do my best.”

“You always have.”

Jessie couldn't stay quiet any longer. “Mr. Will, I know what's done is done but I don't want my baby to go away. Or you neither. You been my baby, too.”

Will chuckled and turned to Jessie. “Why, you can't quite call either of us babies anymore. Just look at Jeff. Big and strong as an ox.”

“I know dat. But he always be my baby. You too. I raised both of you.”

Will gently wrapped his arms around Jessie and pulled her close, then held her at arm's length. “I know you did, and I love you for it, but we have a chance to do something that really matters. Important things are happening in Texas. Someday that country will develop into something great, and we'll be a part of making it happen. Jeff and I are going to survey much of the new frontier and open it up for settlement, and some of those settlements may grow into towns, maybe even cities, some even as big as Richmond or bigger. Why, people will come from all over the world to settle, build and grow on the land your boys will survey.”

Jessie was wide eyed. “My boys're gonna do dat?”

“We sure are. And who knows, maybe even more... *lots* more!”

“Lawzee!” exclaimed Jessie.

Will chuckled and started for the door. “Jeff, tomorrow I'll make arrangements for you to start showing one of the other boys how to take care of the stock. You and I have some planning to do.”

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He reached for the door, then turned back, lifted Jessie from the floor and spun her around, then kissed her on the cheek before setting her down. Once out the door, he set all the dogs to barking when he jumped as high as he could, threw his hands high in the air and yelled, “We're going to Texas! Yeehaa!”

Two courageous men, one black and one white, and the women they love, settle in early Texas to help build a young nation. To win their land, they must fight the Mexican army for independence, and the Comanches for survival.

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