

CHAPTER ONE

March 1878

Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania

Caroline Trewartha walked with care so the guards couldn't guess at the hardware she carried into the courthouse under her dress. Edging around the crowd of reporters and onlookers she entered the side door. In the echoing marble hall, a sign informed her that seats for spectators were filled on the main floor. She would have to climb to the balcony.

"Tarnation," she muttered. Steeling herself, Caroline grabbed the polished maple rail and lifted the front gathers of her traveling dress. She forced her splinted left leg to rise.

"Don't look up," she told herself. "Just go." Concentrating, she took each stair one motion at a time. The foot-worn risers seemed determined to make her high-buttoned boots slip. Pain from her broken ribs made her breath catch. To take her mind off the shocking stabs, she pretended to climb a mountain in search of ore – a vein of iron, or copper.

At last she arrived at the upper level. Caroline adjusted the metal body brace under her dark blouse. She pushed open the paneled oak door and stood a dizzying height above the courtroom floor.

The trial had not yet begun. On the main floor, people jockeyed for the best view. She recognized three mine owners sitting together near the jury box as if to intimidate the jurymen.

Last December, one mine owner, Mr. Rodden, had argued violently with her father over the unsafe shoring timbers in Rodden's huge mines. She knew that the other two owners,

Jeb Horner and Lot Beinem, were equally careless of safety on their properties.

She suspected these three were the real cause of the January attack that had killed two friends and almost taken her father's life. These three skinflints would be delighted if a union organizer like Gryf Williams became the scapegoat for their attempts to wipe out a pesky safety-conscious engineer.

Behind the mine owners, a blue-suited phalanx of bodyguards and enforcers sprawled over one whole spectator's bench. One of these men reared his head back and glared briefly at the man in the balcony's front row.

Her father calmly sat near the balcony rail. His coat lay on the chair next to him. Reacting not to the man below, but to the squeaky hinge on the heavy door, he turned to see who had entered the balcony. His lined face frowned, then scowled, but he jumped up and came to her.

"Carrie, what are you doing out of the hospital?"

"I had to see the accused, if only for your sake." She did not tell him part of her leg bracing included a gun, brought in case anyone attacked him after the trial. She would be keeping an eye on those who celebrated the inevitable outcome. Someone had tried to kill her father and herself. She hoped that person would give himself away in that moment of triumph.

Her father had tried to keep the truth from her, but she knew he'd received several threats since the night of the murder attempt. When he thought her asleep at the hospital, she had found notes, written in a scrawled and probably disguised hand. They'd been wadded and hidden in his jacket pocket. One read: "Witness for Williams and next time your daughter dies with you."

Thus, she had to be at this trial. Defy the bully and protect Papa.

Her father offered his arm, which she accepted gratefully. No rail graced the high balcony steps. He guided her into the seat where his long wool coat still rested on the chair back. Caroline sat on that warm fabric, stiff and prim – the only pose possible given the temporary metal stiffening she wore since the mine accident that had nearly killed her.

She watched the prisoner enter the courtroom – Gryffyth Williams, union organizer, miner and doomed man. He held his head proudly. His long body moved with a grace she did not often see in stoop-shouldered and overworked miners. When he arrived at the defendants' dock, he shook hands with his lawyer.

Caroline believed his lawyer must be a brave man, or perhaps crazy. Since the fear and the hangings of last year, no lawyer in his right mind willingly defended a miner and union man in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania.

The dark-haired prisoner glanced at a short man in the first row behind the rail – a man her father had described as Gryf Williams' brother. The brothers raised their chins, as if signaling each other to keep strong.

Their gesture might appear the same, but all resemblance ended there. Mr. Williams' long limbs, dark coloring, and dark eyes, seemed almost elegant, except that his curling hair already escaping its morning wash and combing. His shorter brother was barrel-chested, with stick-straight hair that thick pomade couldn't keep plastered down.

Her eyes took in the crowd: big men, sturdy women, several youngsters with coal-blackened nails and slicked back hair – whole mining families dressed in their Sunday clothes.

"Papa, who are all those people?" she whispered.

"His friends. His family. Being here, they risk never again working in these mines."

Gryffyth Williams' own gaze drew her attention further back in the courtroom. There stood a more polished man.

Under his finely woven suit coat, the man wore a weskit of brocade silk. His wavy blond hair shone in the light from the nearby window. He had the long-legged ease of a man who has always fit his clothes and always known his high place in society. The man raised his right palm in greeting to Mr. Williams, who nodded and then sat next to his lawyer.

Caroline leaned toward her father. “Who is the man toward the back?”

“That’s Alexander Kemp, an Englishman, but a friend of the Williams brothers from early days in Wales. He has sold his horse farm to pay Mr. Williams’ defense.”

Caroline glanced at him again. A friend indeed, to put so much at risk for a condemned man.

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The jury would condemn him. Gryf Williams saw it in their grim faces as they filed into the courtroom. Twenty-seven good years to end on the gallows – exactly as his brutal father had often predicted. Gryf stood rigid, unable to hear anything for the pounding in his ears. He knew the beating of his blood signaled fear – the fear his friend James Roarity had talked about last year.

Since last June, many nights had brought Gryf nightmares about the last moments of James Roarity, hanged in the Pottsville prison yard for belonging to the Molly Maguires, a secret miners’ organization. The trials of Roarity and thirteen other men had left Pennsylvania communities fearful of all union activity. And because of Pennsylvania’s fear, Gryf, and those who stood with him, were in danger.

Gryf’s attention riveted on the slow march of the jurors to their places in the box. Resigned to the sentence he would receive, Gryf thought of everything he must tell his brother, Samuel. He prayed there would be one chance to talk to Samuel in the few days before the law took his life. Samuel and their friend, Alex, must listen to him at last.

As soon as Gryf had found the bodies in the alley near the bordello, he'd known that being first on the scene would be used against him. After making certain Carl Trewartha had been safely taken to the hospital, Gryf had tried to get Sam and Alex to leave town.

Yet, even when he'd been arrested, his foolish older brother refused to abandon him. And Alex had spent all he owned in Gryf's defense.

But the smell of conspiracy tainted this trial – two lying witnesses, including the bawd who'd followed him out of the brothel and then pretended to faint at the sight of murdered men. Throughout the trial, only one honest man came forth – Carl John Trewartha. Trewartha's courageous testimony had probably been made at the cost of his career as a geologist and mining engineer.

The jurymen did not look at him, but Gryf stared at the foreman, determined to force one person to acknowledge the truth. Sweat ran down the foreman's face and into his starched collar. He glanced at Gryf, and then his gaze held for a moment.

Gryf raised his chin to show the foreman he condemned an honest man of a heinous crime.

The judge entered the courtroom. All rose to their feet. At the bailiff's command, everyone in the courtroom sat. The judge asked for the jury's verdict. The foreman's gaze dropped from Gryf's. He lifted a piece of paper and read in a halting voice.