

CAROLYN REEDER

SHADES OF GRAY



O'BRIEN

**WINNER
— OF THE —
SCOTT O'DELL
AWARD**

ONE

Will sighed and tipped his hat so the brim shaded his eyes from the late afternoon sun. Now, if only he could block out the monotonous creaking of the buggy wheels.

Doc Martin pointed to a small cluster of buildings on the right and said, "Shouldn't be much farther now. They live just a couple of miles beyond the store and the mill."

Will looked at the motionless waterwheel and frowned. The mill wasn't grinding, so food must be as scarce in the Virginia Piedmont as it was in the Shenandoah Valley. Another reason his aunt's family would probably be as sorry to see him as he would be to see them. He scrunched lower in his seat.

The doctor took a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his florid face. "I know how you feel about coming here, Will," he said, "but it's what your mother wanted. Her instructions were quite clear—if anything happened to her and your father, you children were to go to her sister."

At the mention of his family, Will felt the familiar burning behind his eyes. He clenched his jaw and waited until he could speak without his voice trembling. Then he said stiffly, "She wrote out those instructions a long time ago. That letter you showed me was dated before the war. She'd never have wanted us—wanted me—to live with traitors."

Doc Martin sighed heavily. "We've been through all this before, Will. You know this is the way it has to be, so you might as well make the best of it."

Will gritted his teeth. He hated to be preached at. And there was more to come.

"I don't want to hear any more about traitors, either. Your uncle wasn't a traitor. He didn't help the Yankees, he just didn't fight them. I don't approve of that any more than you do, Will, but the war's over. It's time to forget the bitterness."

Forget? Will swallowed hard. It was fine for Doc Martin to talk. The war hadn't ruined *his* life. *His* father and brother hadn't been killed by the Yankees. *His* little sisters hadn't died in one of the epidemics that had spread from the encampments into the city. And *his* mother hadn't turned her face to the wall and slowly died of her grief.

Will pushed back his hat and glared at Doc Martin. "You don't have as much to feel bitter about as I do," he said.

Doc Martin's gray eyes looked sad behind his spectacles. "You don't think four years of seeing young men die is enough to make a doctor bitter?"

Will's anger drained away. "I—I'm sorry, Doc. I guess I wasn't thinking," he muttered. They rode on in silence, and Will felt an empty sadness. This might be the last time he'd ever see Doc Martin. Why had he spoiled their time together?

Finally he asked, "Shouldn't we be there by now? It seems like we've gone at least two miles since the mill."

"We should be getting there," agreed Doc Martin. Reining in the horse, he brought the buggy to a stop beside a girl who was walking along the edge of the road, gathering something into a basket. "Could you tell me if Jed and Ella Jones live near here, miss?"

The girl looked up, her blue eyes wide. Brushing a loose strand of light brown hair off her face with one hand, she

nodded, staring from Doc Martin to Will and then letting her eyes linger on Chauncy, the stout Morgan that pulled the buggy. "It's on the left a little way beyond the creek," she said finally, pointing down the road.

Will glanced down at the girl. She looked about ten, two years younger than he. He caught his breath and took a closer look, thinking how much she resembled his sister Betsy. Their eyes met, and Will looked away, embarrassed that the barefoot country girl with a smudge of dirt on her cheek had caught him staring.

"Thank you, miss," said Doc Martin, clucking to his horse.

At the shallow creek, the horse stopped to drink, and Will looked back. The girl was standing in the road, watching them.

They forded the stream easily and turned in at the grassy lane that left the road by a large chestnut tree. Will looked ahead at the house that would be his new home. It was a small house built of squared logs, with a porch across the front and a stone chimney at one end. Nearby stood a still smaller building—he guessed it was the summer kitchen. There was a hen-house with an empty yard, a small barn that obviously had been unoccupied for some time, and several other small, weathered buildings. Beyond the house he could see a garden patch enclosed by a stone fence, but the fields on both sides of the lane lay fallow. As they neared the house, a woman came out onto the porch.

Will had never met his Aunt Ella, but he knew her at once. Her clothes were worn and faded and her hair was graying, but the way she stood and the proud way she held her head reminded him so much of his mother that his chest ached.

COURAGE WEARS MANY FACES

The Civil War may be over, but for twelve-year-old Will Page, the pain and bitterness haven't ended. How could they have, when the Yankees were responsible for the deaths of everyone in his entire immediate family?

And now Will has to leave his comfortable home in the Shenandoah Valley and live with relatives he has never met, people struggling to eke out a living on their farm in the war-torn Virginia Piedmont. But the worst of it is that Will's uncle Jed had refused to fight for the Confederacy.

At first, Will regards his uncle as a traitor—or at least a coward. But as they work side by side, Will begins to respect the man. And when he sees his uncle stand up for what he believes in, Will realizes that he must rethink his definition of honor and courage.

**Winner of the Scott O'Dell Award
— An ALA Notable Book —**

“Deserves a place among the very best young adult fiction written about the Civil War.”—VOYA

“The author's unforced, naturalistic prose style will engage middle-grade readers as will the novel's well-developed, amiable characters and its solid moral grounding.”—THE HORN BOOK

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