

PAULA FOX

One-Eyed Cat



By the
author of
The Slave Dancer

I

Sunday

NED WALLIS WAS THE MINISTER'S ONLY CHILD. THE Congregational Church where the Reverend James Wallis preached stood on a low hill above a country lane a mile beyond the village of Tyler, New York. Close by the parsonage, a hundred yards or so from the church, was a small cemetery of weathered tombstones. Some had fallen over and moss and ivy covered them. When Ned first learned to walk, the cemetery was his favorite place to practice. There, his father would come to get him after the members of the congregation had gone home to their Sunday dinners. There, too, his mother often sat on a tumbled stone and watched over him while his father stood at the great church door speaking to each and every person who had attended service that day. That was long ago, before his mother had become ill.

Just past the church was a low, dark, musty-smelling barn where people had stabled their horses in the days before there were automobiles. In bad weather, it was still used by ancient Mr. Deems, who drove his rattling buckboard and skinny chestnut mare all the way from his farm in the valley to the church and into the barn. And when Ned grew older, he and a few of the children from the early Sunday school class played there, hiding and shouting and scaring each other but keeping their distance from Mr. Deems's mare, who was known to be cross tempered. On warm days the voices of the choir—especially the high tremulous voices of the oldest singers—would float into the darkness of the barn like the thin, sweet aroma of meadow flowers. The children would pause in their play and listen until old Mrs. Brewster, who held the last note of a hymn till her breath ran out and she tottered into her seat, fell silent.

The Wallis family didn't live in the parsonage, although they could have and it would not have cost them a penny. Their house was fifteen miles from Tyler. It had been built by Ned's grandfather in 1846, nearly eighty years before Ned was born. Like the church, it stood on a hill. From its windows there was a view of the Hudson River. This view was one of the reasons the Reverend Wallis did not want to move.

Sunday

It was a big, ailing old house. When too many things went wrong with it—the furnace cut off when it wasn't supposed to, the cistern overflowed, the roof leaked—or when Ned's mother's illness grew worse so that Reverend Wallis could hardly bear to leave her to take care of his many pastoral duties, then he would cry out that they would have to go and live in the parsonage, such a mean, small house, so far from the heart-lifting sight of the great river. Ned knew that his father loved the house that was such a trouble to take care of, too far from his church, too costly for a country minister's salary.

When Ned followed his father into the church on Sundays, he was always startled by the vast airy openness above the aisles and rows of pews, and by the immense height of the windows which flowed with light, and by the many dark gold-colored pipes of the organ which rose behind the pulpit. No matter how often he counted them, he always ended up with a different number. He knew every part of the church, from the cellar where the huge furnace glowed in cold weather like a steam locomotive, to the basement where the Sunday school classes and meetings and study clubs were held, and on special occasions, where church suppers were spread out on long tables, all the way up the curving narrow steps to the gallery above the choir. Perhaps he was always sur-

A Single Shot

Ned fired the forbidden rifle just once, at a flickering shadow in the autumn moonlight. But someone—a face, fleetingly seen staring at him from an attic window—was watching.

And when a one-eyed cat turns up at an elderly neighbor's woodshed, Ned is caught in a web of guilt, fear, and shame that he cannot escape—until another moonlit night, come spring, brings redemption and surprising revelations.

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