



# The Haunted Poplar

Aline A. Newman

**C**HILDREN in Dover, Delaware, hurry past the old tulip poplar after dark. They shudder if they catch a glimpse of the rusty iron hook still stuck in its trunk. And even those who don't believe in ghosts head for the hills if they hear a muffled *clinkety-clank, clinkety-clank*.

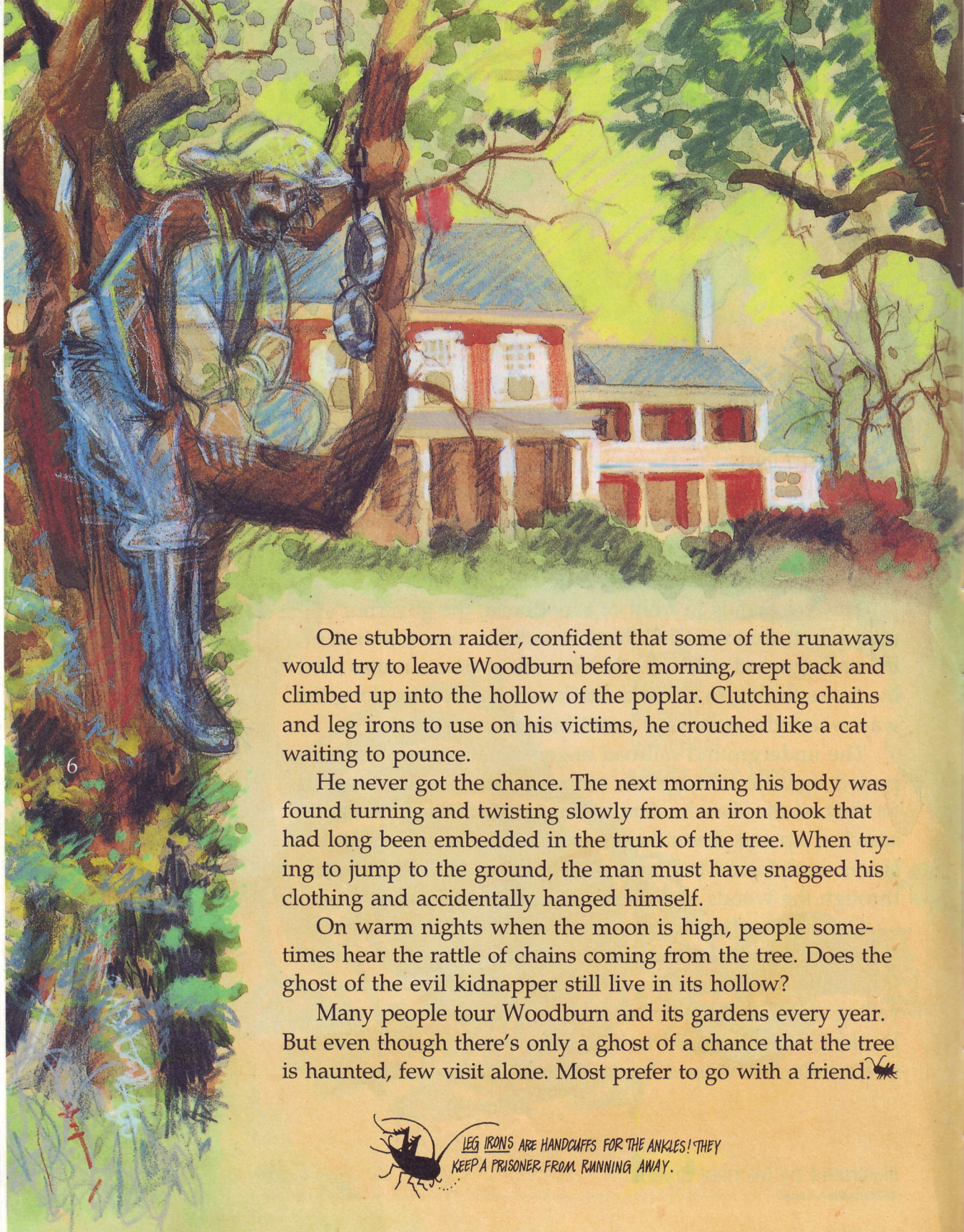
The tree stands in front of Woodburn, the governor's mansion. Before the Civil War, Woodburn was a station on the underground railroad—the network of escape routes used by slaves fleeing to Canada. Stations were houses along the way where the runaways could hide and get food.

The underground railroad angered slave owners, who posted signs describing their runaways and offering rewards for their return. Slave hunters, willing to do anything for money, searched up and down the roadways on horseback. Runaway slaves were forced to play a deadly game of hide-and-seek through the woods and swamps in order to survive.

One night a band of slave hunters raided Woodburn. As their dogs tore round and round the house, leaping and barking, the raiders pounded on the door. Waving rifles and yelling, they demanded custody of any runaways. The owner, Daniel Cowgill, refused to betray the brave fugitives hiding in his cellar. He chased the kidnappers off his land.

Illustrated by Michael Bryant

© 1993 by Aline A. Newman




6

One stubborn raider, confident that some of the runaways would try to leave Woodburn before morning, crept back and climbed up into the hollow of the poplar. Clutching chains and leg irons to use on his victims, he crouched like a cat waiting to pounce.

He never got the chance. The next morning his body was found turning and twisting slowly from an iron hook that had long been embedded in the trunk of the tree. When trying to jump to the ground, the man must have snagged his clothing and accidentally hanged himself.

On warm nights when the moon is high, people sometimes hear the rattle of chains coming from the tree. Does the ghost of the evil kidnapper still live in its hollow?

Many people tour Woodburn and its gardens every year. But even though there's only a ghost of a chance that the tree is haunted, few visit alone. Most prefer to go with a friend. 



LEG IRONS ARE HANDCUFFS FOR THE ANKLES! THEY KEEP A PRISONER FROM RUNNING AWAY.

How



Elaine

© 1993 by Elaine L. L...