

*Storm Clouds  
Rolling In*

1860

*Book # 1 in The Bregdan  
Chronicles*

*Ginny Dye*

## Storm Clouds Rolling In

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*For my grandfather,  
Wallace Lorrimer Gaffney  
1893-1976  
“Dandy”*

*Thank you for encouraging me  
to follow my dreams  
no matter what the cost.  
My gift of writing  
is yours - the Bregdan Chronicles  
are for you.*

*A Note from the Author*

There are times in the writing of history when we must use words we personally abhor. The use of the word “nigger” in *Storm Clouds Rolling In* is one of those times. Though I hate the word, its use is necessary to reveal and to challenge the prejudices of the time in order to bring change and healing. Stay with me until the end – I think you will agree.

My great hope is that *Storm Clouds Rolling In* will both entertain and challenge you. I hope you will learn as much as I did during the months of research it took to write this book. Though I now live in the Pacific Northwest, I grew up in the South and lived for 11 years in Richmond, VA. I spent countless hours exploring the plantations that still line the banks of the James River and became fascinated by the history.

But, you know, it’s not the events that fascinate me so much – it’s the people. That’s all history is, you know. History is the story of people’s lives. History reflects the consequences of their choice and actions – both good and bad. History is what has given you the world you live in today – both good and bad.

This truth is why I named this series *The Bregdan Chronicles*. Bregdan is a Gaelic term for weaving. Braiding. Every life that has been lived until today is a part of the woven braid of life. It takes every person’s story to create history. Your life will help determine the course of history. You may think you don’t have much of an impact. You do. Every action you take will reflect in someone else’s life. Someone else’s decisions. Someone else’s future. Both good and bad. That is the ***Bregdan Principle...***

**Every life that has been lived until today is a  
part of the woven braid of life.  
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the course of history.  
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You do.  
Every action you take will reflect in someone  
else's life.  
Someone else's decisions.  
Someone else's future.  
Both good and bad.**

My great hope as you read this book, and all that will follow, is that you will acknowledge the power you have, every day, to change the world around you by your decisions and actions. Then I will know the research & writing were all worthwhile.

Oh, and I hope you enjoy every moment of it, and learn to love the characters as much as I do!

I'm already being asked how many books will be in this series. I guess that depends on how long I live! My intention is to release two books a year, each covering one year of history – continuing to weave the lives of my characters into the times they lived. I hate to end a good book as much as anyone – always feeling so sad that I have to leave the characters. You shouldn't have to be sad for a long time!

Four books are already written and will all be released in Spring 2010. If you like what you read, you'll want to make sure you're on our mailing list at [www.BregdanChronicles.com](http://www.BregdanChronicles.com). I'll let you know each time a new one comes out!

Sincerely,  
Ginny Dye

*Storm Clouds Rolling In*  
*Prologue*

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1850

Moses had come to watch his daddy die.

Slinking back into the sheltering brush, he struggled to evade the probing fingers of light groping for him from the blazing fire. The two men coaxing the fire into a roaring mountain of flame had not heard him creep to where he could see into the clearing. His ebony skin and rough, dark clothes merged into the darkness. The only evidence of his presence was the glowing white of his eyes. He would take his chances. Nothing would keep him from this last glimpse of his daddy.

He knew his mama would thrash him good when she found out he had come. He could well imagine her fear when she discovered he was gone, but he'd had no choice. He had to. At eleven years of age he was now the man of the house. He couldn't live with himself if he didn't do this. He had to say goodbye to his daddy.

"Bring him on, boys!" A hoarse shout exploded into the still night.

Moses slunk back further into the darkness, every muscle tense with fear. They were coming!

"The rope's ready. There's soon to be one less nigger to bother us."

Moses shuddered at the hatred oozing from the unknown, and as yet unseen, man's voice. He knew if they found him they wouldn't hesitate to kill him as well. Killing was in the air tonight. He could feel it as surely as he could feel the velvety leaves brushing against him.

It had started the night before when the slaves on the Martin plantation revolted. Before the night was over they had killed Master Martin and set fire to his barns. Over fifty slaves had disappeared into the inky Virginia night. News had spread fast to the other

plantations. Over two hundred slaves had made their break for freedom. Moses' daddy, Sam, had been one of them. Most of them had not gotten far.

The slave owners and overseers had banded together and called their hunting dogs into service. Sam, along with a large group of slaves unfamiliar with the low-lying swampland northwest of Richmond, had gotten bogged down. Lost and confused, he had been easy prey for the diligent hounds. Word of mass captures had filtered back to the plantations. Everyone knew the one they called the "giant black" could only be Sam. Moses' mama, in from a long day in the fields, had slapped her hand over her mouth, screamed, and fainted dead away.

Moses was the only one who had overheard the overseer talking on the porch when he delivered some wood to the big house. Crouched behind a thick bush, risking a beating if he were caught, Moses had heard him say they were going to kill the giant black to teach the others a lesson. He had grabbed his chance, slipping away in the ruckus that followed word of the capture of at least a dozen slaves from their plantation.

"Daddy!" Moses slapped his hand over his mouth and looked around wildly. The excited voices of men surging into the clearing covered his mistake. Though Moses couldn't slink into the lush growth any further, he could feel his slender body almost pulling into itself. Fear knotted his stomach and made his teeth chatter in the stifling July heat.

Sam was at the head of the line of six slave men being led into the clearing. The towering oaks formed a mighty tunnel for the procession. The trees, like the air embracing them, were still and somber, reflecting back the light from the roaring flames. They seemed to know only sorrow would come from this night. Moses hardly recognized his own daddy. The chains holding the six together were a mockery. Their bashed and broken bodies could not have afforded them another escape attempt. His daddy was the worst. Moses figured that was because Sam had been a leader. It was the only way he could explain the open, bleeding cuts, the face

swollen almost beyond recognition, the useless, broken dangle of both arms.

He wanted to call out and run to him. Fear kept him silent. Fear... and the understanding he would have to take care of his mama and three sisters now. They needed him. He feared what awaited him back at the plantation, but he feared what was playing out before his eyes even more.

Time seemed to stand still as the drama unfolded. The trees, the brush, even the air seemed to be holding its breath.

“Get the head nigger over here. It’s time to even the score!”

Moses stared at the overseer from his own plantation. Joe Adams was a large man, with coarse features and a vicious temper. More than once he had seen it turned on his fellow slaves. He had felt the lash himself. Now the big man was after his father. His trembling deepened to shuddering spasms as he fought to control the moans wanting to explode from his body.

Sam was prodded with vicious pitchforks like an animal, until he was below the waiting noose. Slowly it was lowered to where he quietly waited. At that moment, Moses felt a surge of pride for his daddy. The man who had taught him from childhood to always be proud of who he was might be broken and battered, but he was not beaten. The glow of pride still burned in his eyes. In spite of the pain racking his body, he held his head high and stared defiantly at his killers. It seemed to enrage them more. They wanted this slave — the one they considered less than human — to cower before them.

“This one seems to think he’s something more than the animal he is! I think he needs a little more education.” One man, clothed immaculately in gentlemen’s clothing, strode forward from the pack. “I’ll consider it an honor to provide that education.”

Moses felt sick at the hatred pulsing through the clearing. What else were they going to do to his daddy? He watched as the noose was pulled tight around his glistening neck and Sam was prodded up onto the wooden platform assembled in the clearing. He leaned

in a little closer as the fancy-dressed man approached with an evil sneer on his lips and then gasped as a flash of light reflected off the huge knife the man pulled from his tunic. Moses' eyes flew back to his daddy. He couldn't take his eyes off him one more time. He had come to watch him die. Watch him he would.

"Think you're too good to be a slave, don't you, boy?"

Silence filled the night.

Moses finally recognized the voice. It belonged to Master Borden, who owned the plantation two miles down the road. He had lost close to thirty slaves and two of his barns had been burned. Master Borden wasn't a large man, but his bearing spoke of authority as firelight glistened off his silver hair. His bronze face was set in harsh lines.

"I spoke to you, boy!" His deceptively gentle tone had sharpened with the obvious anger surging through his body. "Answer!"

Moses' eyes were glued to his daddy. He saw Sam's eyes glitter with hatred, but no words came. His shoulders squared a little more and his ebony eyes fixed on his attacker. Moses saw something else. He saw the lines of Sam's mouth tighten. He saw the brows come together. He knew that look. It meant his daddy was getting ready to do something important, but what? The rope, pulled snug around his neck, was holding him upright. Leaning forward against the protecting darkness, he held his breath.

Turning his back on Sam, Master Borden held the knife high in the flickering light and yelled to the other five slaves watching from the side. "Let this be a lesson. For you and for whoever might be watching!" His evil laugh filled the night air as he waved his knife at the darkness pressing in around him.

Moses gasped and shrank back even further into the stifling night, ignoring the blackberry thorns tearing at his skin. Did they know he was there? Were they coming after him next? It seemed to the boy that even the giant oaks pulled back from the venom in Master Borden's voice. It was almost as if he could feel the brush draw him a little closer into its protective embrace.

"This creature standing before me is no more than an animal. His Master was good to him, and what did he do? He repaid him by running away. By setting fire to his barns!"

Moses barely kept from crying out. He knew his daddy hadn't done any fire setting. He had just wanted to be free. He had wanted to go north and make enough money to buy freedom for his family. He had overheard his daddy and mammy talking just days before the revolt. Daddy talked about the freedom available in the North, where a man could take care of his own family. There had been no mistaking the longing in his voice. He'd heard something else too. Hope. Hope that things might someday be better.

"He doesn't just deserve to die. I think maybe we should carve on him a little, so his body will be easier to bury!" Master Borden gave an evil smile as he shouted into the night. The madness of the night, the killing in the air, was reflected in his wild eyes. He waved the knife in the direction of the other plantation owners. "Loosen that rope a little. I don't want him to have an easy way out. He's going to get what's due him!" Waiting until his orders had been obeyed, he laughed triumphantly and moved forward, knife raised.

Moses couldn't stifle the groan that rose from his gut. For the first time he questioned the wisdom of his coming. Could he watch while these men cut his daddy? It was all he could do to not bolt and run. He had to know. He had to see. Afterwards he was never sure if the words he whispered were audible or if they only echoed in the empty fear of his heart. "Goodbye, Daddy..."

The men in the clearing, however, had made a mistake. They had assumed Sam's broken arms were useless and had not tied them behind his back. Moses watched as his daddy shifted his weight and tightened his face in concentration.

Sam made his move. Master Borden was holding the knife high in the air, waving it as he yelled wildly. Sam lunged and with a cry of pain managed to grab the knife with the hand of his broken right arm. The knife was pointing down when, no longer held by the rope

and knocked off balance by the momentum of his lunge, he fell from the platform. All two hundred fifty muscular pounds of him came crashing down on the unsuspecting Master Borden.

Wild yelling and cries filled the clearing. When quiet reigned again, Master Borden lay dead, stabbed through the heart by his own knife.

Sam swung quietly from the end of the coarse rope.

Blinded by tears, Moses stumbled through the dark woods, running to escape the scent of death. He would never forget what he had seen that night.

He would never forget.

## Chapter One

*April 14, 1860*

“Miss Carrie, if you don’t sit still I’m never going to get this braid right! How do you expect me to get it straight with you bouncing around like a rabbit?” Rose, her black eyes flashing, stood back and laughed helplessly.

“I hate having braids! I wish I could just get my hair cut short and be done with it. It takes way too much time to have to fiddle with it!” Carrie Cromwell’s brilliant green eyes snapped as she gazed with disgust at her long ebony hair. She knew people thought her wavy hair was one of her best features, but right now it was getting in her way. She laughed merrily. She could just imagine her mother’s horror if she were to do such a thing. Not to mention the rest of her proper southern Virginia neighbors. They already shook their heads when they talked of her to one another. “Couldn’t you just see Mother? She would give up all hopes of ever raising a proper daughter.” A feeling of mirth replaced the impatience she felt with her hair.

“What are you in such a hurry for anyway?” Rose teased, her hands flashing faster.

Carrie flashed her slave a look of exasperation. “Do you really need to ask? Look outside!” she demanded. “It’s a day as perfect as a newborn baby. Spring is bursting out all over this land. Granite is waiting for me.”

Rose nodded her head knowingly. “Now I understand.” Her hands continued to flash. “You may not care how you look, but Missus Cromwell would skin me alive if I let you out of here without every hair in place.”

Rose and Carrie had been friends from the time they were old enough to toddle around. Master Cromwell,

the owner of Cromwell Plantation, had encouraged the friendship between his daughter and the slave child born just two weeks earlier. At the time, it had suited both of them just fine. Neither had thought to question the arrangement. It was simply the way things were. The two had spent countless hours wandering the plantation until Rose, at age ten, had become old enough to fill her role as Carrie's personal maid. At least they could continue to be together. Eight years later, they were both still satisfied, but beginning to question the restless stirrings they felt sometimes.

Giving a final tug, Rose secured the braid and then quickly twisted it into a bun. "There. Now get out of here. I think you have a horse waiting."

"Thanks Rose. You're wonderful." As Carrie leaped from her bench in front of the dressing mirror, she stopped long enough to give Rose an impulsive hug. "Carrie!"

Carrie halted in her flight and turned impatiently. "What now?"

"Dinner is in two hours. That doesn't give you much time."

Carrie waved her hand. "Dinner is dinner. As long as I get there on time everything will be fine." She knew that wasn't really true. Her mother expected her to appear for each meal looking like the wealthy plantation owner's daughter she was.

"There is company coming tonight," Rose reminded her.

"Oh, bother!" Carrie groaned. "You're right. I had totally forgotten." Her face clouded for just a moment and then cleared. "I'll be back in time," she declared defiantly. "I've got to get out of here." The last words were thrown over her shoulder as she disappeared through the open door.

Drawing deep breaths of the fragrant spring air, Carrie strode to the stables. She knew her mother would disapprove of her hurried pace, but she couldn't be bothered with her mother's opinions right now. She didn't have much time. Then, just as she reached the stable corridor, she saw Granite being led out.

"You have him ready!" Carrie's voice was filled with childish delight as she gazed lovingly at her towering, gray Thoroughbred gelding. Granite had been a gift from her father when she turned fourteen. They had been inseparable since then.

"Of course, Miss Carrie. You expected less?"

Carrie flashed a smile at the pretend hurt in Miles' voice. Miles had been in charge of her father's stables since before she was born. She had heard her father comment several times that Miles was one of his most valuable slaves. He managed Master Cromwell's stable of twenty horses with a skill unmatched by any in the area. Carrie knew her father had received several excellent offers to buy him but had turned down each one. "Of course not, Miles, but I know you have a mare in there about to foal. You don't ever get too far from them. Thank you for having Granite ready for me." She took hold of the reins and walked to the mounting block where she could gain access to the towering heights. Usually she enjoyed spending time talking with her friend. He had taught her many secrets about horses—and people, too. Not today, though.

"I ain't never lost a baby for yo' daddy yet, Miss Carrie."

Carrie smiled at the pride in his voice and leaned down just long enough to whisper confidingly to Miles. "Someday I'm going to ride like a man. This silly sidesaddle business is for the birds. No one is meant to ride a horse like this."

Miles nodded. "I believe you, Miss Carrie. You done always wanted to do things a better way. You be a round peg."

"A round peg?" Curiosity kept Carrie from dashing off. "What do you mean, a round peg?"

"People been making you square holes all yo' life. Can't put a round peg in a square hole, Miss Carrie. You still be tryin' to find where you fit."

Carrie stared into his open face for a long moment. How had he gotten inside her head? Then, straightening, she waved gaily and headed Granite for the open gate.



From her place by the bedroom window, Rose watched Carrie go. She shook her head with amusement and then turned to straighten the dressing table. She paused to gaze at her appearance in the ornate mirror gracing the cream-colored wall and examined her face critically. People told her she was beautiful. She didn't know if she was or not. Not that it made any difference. She was just a slave. Perfect caramel-colored skin set off with exquisite features did her no good because she was never going to fall in love and get married. Marriage meant nothing but pain. She had seen too many couples separated—one sold while the other stayed. Her own father had been sold right after she was born. It was hard to watch her mother's pain all those years.

A noise down the hall startled Rose from her reverie. She couldn't be found staring into Carrie's mirror when there was so much work to be done. She didn't know who was coming to dinner tonight, but it must be somebody important. Mistress Cromwell had called all the house slaves together that morning and instructed them to have the place shining before nightfall. Company was common around the Cromwell Plantation, as it was on all Virginia plantations, but not all of it warranted special instructions. Who could be coming? Rose shook her head at her questioning. There would be no answers until the carriage arrived at the door. Usually Carrie filled her in on what was going on. This time even she didn't know. Rose didn't know if it was because it was a big secret, or because Carrie just didn't care and thus hadn't taken the time to find out. She suspected it was the latter.

Rose's first job was Carrie's room. She had already made the spacious, four-poster canopy bed with its exquisite rose-bordered, white coverlet. The bed had been a gift from Carrie's doting father after his last trip to London for business. Moving easily about the room,

which was as familiar as her own, she straightened the floor-length, rose-colored drapes and readjusted the bows on the tiebacks. She grabbed the broom and made quick work of the gleaming hardwood floor, rearranging the white and rose rugs scattered about. Finally, she reached into the closet and pulled out the dress Carrie would wear that evening. Rose always selected Carrie's clothes. She had a natural eye for what would look best on her young mistress and what would be most appropriate for any occasion. Carrie simply didn't care. Her young mistress didn't consider herself beautiful, but those who saw her when she was excited about something couldn't take their eyes from her. She exuded a life that drew people to her—strangers and friends alike.

Rose allowed her hand to travel longingly down the gleaming, yellow satin gown. Then she shook her head firmly and snatched her hand back. Dreams were useless. She would never wear anything like this. Dreaming would only make her unhappy. She grabbed the water pitcher and washbowl and headed for the kitchen. She had work to do.



Carrie laughed as the cool, soft air enveloped her. She leaned forward and spoke softly into Granite's ear. He immediately burst into a smooth, ground-eating canter. She needed her place today. Even if it meant being late for dinner and incurring her mother's disapproval, she needed her place. No one else knew about it. It was Carrie and Granite's secret. Not even Rose knew where she went when her heart was burdened and she needed to figure out life.

As she rode, she gazed out over the twenty-five hundred acres that comprised Cromwell Plantation. She loved the land passionately. Carrie knew all its moods—all of its secrets and hidden places. When she was just eleven, in spite of her mother's protests, her

father had set her free. She could still remember the conversation.

“Daddy, I want to ride alone.” Even then, Carrie was determined when going after something she wanted.

“Alone?” Her father’s expression was one of amused patience.

“Yes, alone! I don’t want Miles to ride with me. I don’t need him. I want to explore on my own. I want to find secret places. I can ride as good as him any day,” she boasted.

Her mother, seated at the other end of the table, watched the interchange with a horrified expression. It deepened as silence stretched in the room. “Thomas! You aren’t considering giving in to this latest crazy request are you? I simply won’t hear of it. My daughter running around the countryside on her own? Preposterous,” she snorted.

Carrie remained silent. She knew from long experience that saying anything would not further her cause. Pitting her mother and father against each other only thwarted her plans. She was hopeful however. Her father’s extended silence meant he was thinking about it.

Her mother jumped in again. “Thomas, please tell me you’re not considering this. Carrie is getting to the age where she should be spending more time around the house. It’s bad enough that she spends hours on that crazy horse with Miles. Carrie is getting older. She needs to learn how to run the plantation. She needs to spend more time on her studies, more time practicing the piano. Heaven only knows how much practice she needs with her sewing.”

It was all Carrie could do to control her groan. She forced herself to remain quiet with her eyes glued to her father. He turned to look at her. His eyes challenged and gave her confidence at the same time. She knew her father believed in her. She returned his gaze with a confident one of her own.

Thomas Cromwell looked down the table at her mother. “Her studies are fine, Abigail, and there is still plenty of time for her to learn to run the plantation.

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