

Chapter 1

The last stirring notes of the patriotic anthem *Columbia* still shared the crisp winter air with the snowflakes that began to fall at the close of the concert in front of City Hall. Thousands of jubilant New Yorkers braved the weather for the chance to hear a free concert by the great P.S. Gilmore with his unrivaled band to celebrate the New Year 1892. A few years ago Gilmore had begun the tradition of performing in downtown New York at midnight, and enormous crowds have come to count down to the beginning of the New Year.

“Happy New Year, Mr. Gilmore!” hailed young Saul Watson, lately employed as a reporter by Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*. “Your *Columbia* still touches me deeply whenever I hear it.”

“Of course, of course, thank you, Watson. Kind of you to say,” replied the great bandleader as he turned to find his family and go home. “We had a nice crowd tonight. I was told about eighty thousand came out.” The snow fell more urgently, and he was glad he had his carriage waiting to take him home.

“Promises to be another splendid year for the incomparable Gilmore’s Band,” pressed the eager newsman. It was Saul Watson’s good fortune to have met P.S. Gilmore almost three years earlier when he wrote about the coast-to-coast tour of Gilmore’s Band, which celebrated the 20th anniversary of the National Peace Jubilee. “The whole country will be celebrating Mr. Columbus’ good work and I see that you’re planning another big tour. Commemorating your World Peace Jubilee this time? Is that right? You’ve been touring for many years now. Do you think that you

may be pushing yourself too much with such an ambitious itinerary? Especially with all the competition.”

The genial legend, who at sixty-two was sufficiently fit to look respectable in his impressive dark blue with scarlet trim uniform, took a moment to digest this barrage of questions. His hair was mostly brown with ever-increasing gray in his moustache and at his temples, his hairline neatly covered by a modest cap. “You surprise me, Watson. Do you honestly think that my band has any real competition? Haven’t I proven time and again, that my hundred-piece band has no equal? We’ve gone head to head with Theodore Thomas’ orchestra and shown that we’re its peer. The same was true with Offenbach’s and other orchestras. Among bands, well, what can I add to what you and your paper have oft said regarding my band’s prominent stature? Of course, my comments here are between us and not for your paper, Saul. I don’t need to cause any disharmony with my fellow bandleaders.”

