

John Brown Sparked the Civil War in Kansas

by Napoleon Crews,

Published: 2004



Table of Contents

Chapter 1 ... thru ... Chapter 40



Chapter 1

June 1855

North Elba, New York

John Brown's thin, gnarled fingers gripped the letter from John Jr. as he read. The communication from Kansas Territory ignited a yearning in the pit of his stomach. His little grandson Austin had died of the cholera on the trip out to Kansas. His son John Brown Jr. now requested a shipment of guns for the purpose of defending the Kansas Browns against marauding pro-slavers and Missouri ruffians.

What the letter didn't tell John is what disturbed him most. From between the written lines, he gleaned that pro-slavers recruited from all areas of the South and Missouri ruffians had the Free-State Kansas supporters on their knees in a fight to the death over the slavery question.

In spite of abundant timber, the pro-slavers had prevented the Kansas Browns from building suitable cabins, forcing them to live in tents. Defending their settlement against the pro-slavers did not leave time for bringing in their crops and they were starving. The money that had been set aside to sustain them in lean times was gone. Rampant sickness and depression had taken its toll. The final insult came when pro-slavers threatened to drive the Kansas Browns from their settlement and kill them.

John Jr. had recently migrated to Kansas with his wife Wealthy, John's other sons Frederick, Salmon, Owen, Jason, and Jason's wife Ellen. His boys had tried to persuade him to come to Kansas with them before they left, but the migration did not excite John like it might have when he was younger. However, the circumstances had changed now that the pro-slavers had put his sons' lives at stake.

He gazed across the room at the Sharps Rifle resting on hooks above the fireplace mantle. The candle's glow cast an eerie shadow over the weapon's walnut stock and blue-steel barrel. It troubled him that John Jr. and his other sons might be forced into the position of taking a human life to defend their own. It disturbed him even more that he lacked the financial means to provide the requested armaments.

John got up from the rocker and walked to the open door. He was a tall, thin man, with close-cropped hair and a dignified bearing. He looked out across the yard and into the far-off fields. He had just moved his wife Mary and their young daughters back to North Elba and had not been there long enough to plant a seed.

He read the letter again.

John hated to think of leaving Mary and the girls behind, but John Jr.'s letter exuded a sense of urgency that he could not ignore.

"Supper is ready, John."

Mary stood in the kitchen door, wiping her hands on the apron that draped around her waist. She was thirty-eight years of age compared to his fifty-five, sturdily built, wide-jawed, and wore her black hair cut short.

He turned and walked into the kitchen, taking his place at the table. He set John Jr.'s letter down next to his plate.

Mary and his married daughter Ruth dished up food for the younger girls and then served themselves. Ruth's husband Henry Thompson had taken a job in Hudson, Ohio, due to a lack of suitable work for him in North Elba.

They bowed their heads and John blessed the food.

He ladled beef and potato stew into his bowl, then tore off a hunk of bread and dipped it into the rich, steaming broth. Eating in silence, he gathered his varied thoughts around John Jr.'s urgent request for help. Mary and Ruth had read the letter before he came in from the fields and knew full-well its contents.

"I've spent a goodly portion of my life away from my family," John said after a while. "I truly believed returning to North Elba would provide an opportunity for me to make up for lost time. It plagues me to think of leaving you again without having planted a crop or secured our future."

"The boys are in danger," Mary said. "You have to go."

"How will you get the guns they need?" Ruth asked.

John shook his head.

"I don't know," he responded.

"Do you think one of your banker friends might take a chance on us?" Mary asked.

"We are bankrupt," John answered.

It hurt John even to say the word. He had been a farmer, tanner, surveyor, sheep herder, wool merchant, postmaster, and land speculator, and had not experienced lasting success in any of these fields.

"Surely Gerrit Smith will help us if he knows it's for the boys," Mary said.

"He has invested and lost a lot of money with me over the years," John said. "We live here in this house because he owns the land and made it possible. I do not wish to burden him further. The Lord will make a way."

Chapter 2

After several days of deliberation, John decided to attend the convention of political abolitionists being held at Syracuse, New York, in the home of George and Rebecca Barnes. His friend and confidant Gerrit Smith was the appointed leader of this particular group and John anticipated a somewhat friendly reception. He would make a plea for money and for the arms that his sons sorely needed. He felt his shirt pocket for John Jr.'s letter and pressed it reassuringly, hopeful that his son's descriptions and frank accounts would be enough to win the hearts and pocketbooks of the convention members.

The Barnes' spacious home was a three storied Italianate villa located on a hill. George Barnes was an English born lawyer, and his wife Rebecca, the daughter of the president of the Syracuse and Utica Railroad.

When John entered the Barnes home, he located Gerrit Smith and pulled him aside to request permission to address the convention members. Gerrit welcomed John and agreed to let him make a plea for aid. John's old friend, Frederick Douglas, former slave and now vocal abolitionist, was also attending the convention.

Douglas greeted John warmly.

John and Douglas met while John lived in Springfield. The ensuing friendship resulted in Douglas visiting John's home on more than one occasion. John was an avid reader of the abolitionist weeklies, of which Douglas published the *Frederick Douglas' Paper*, formerly named the *North Star*.

"I have received a most distressing communication from the Kansas," John said to Douglas. "It has provided me with all the more reason for attending this convention."

"I recognize that fire in your eyes, my friend," Douglas said. "I've never met a white man whose heart burned so hotly against slavery, as yours."

"Slavery is a disease that contaminates us all," John said. "But I seek aid and arms to help my sons fight off pro-slavers and Missouri ruffians."

Douglas thought a moment.

"It occurs to me that your plea would meet with greater success if you made it for all of Kansas, rather than a few," Douglas said.

"Perhaps you are right," John said.

John was not a man to lie. Douglas' suggestion to make a plea for all of Kansas sat heavy on his mind in the minutes before he addressed the convention.

George Barnes and Gerrit Smith finally entered the library and the room quieted.

"I have the pleasure of introducing a very close friend and associate of mine," Gerrit said, "Mr. John Brown."

John stood and walked to the front of the group.

He delivered an appeal for arms and money for all of Kansas and there was iron in his words. He spoke of the proslavery problems outlined in John Jr.'s letter, and then he attacked the institution of slavery as an abomination.

When John concluded his plea, he received a standing ovation. He passed John Jr.'s letter around and realized that in the course of addressing this esteemed gathering, he had become fully committed to the cause of Kansas.

He left the Syracuse convention, having collected one hundred and sixty dollars in donations for the Kansas Free-State cause.

Chapter 3

When John arrived back in North Elba, the idea of going to Kansas to help defend his sons against the pro-slavers and Missouri ruffians consumed him. He

reasoned that by resisting the pro-slavers in Kansas, he would also be striking a blow against slavery in America.

His adulthood had been spent praying for and trying to discern God's will for his life. Continued business failures and financial troubles had humbled his fierce pride and left him deeply depressed. Through it all, he had continued to pray and had never lost faith in God. Thoughts about what could be accomplished in Kansas seemed to lighten his spirits in a way that he had not experienced since his youth.

"I am now convinced that Providence has placed upon me the burden of striking the telling blow against slavery in Kansas," John said at dinner that night. "If I am capable of collecting one hundred and sixty dollars at the convention in Syracuse, just think how great the response would be of a city like Akron, Ohio."

"I can't say that I'm happy to see you go," Mary said. "I'll pray for your safe return and for the boys' protection."

"When will you be leaving us?" Ruth asked.

"I have calculated that it will take a number of weeks to finish this house," John said. "I must also lay in supplies for the winter that I imagine you, your mother, and the girls will face. Then I will make preparations for the trip to Kansas."

The weeks passed quickly as John worked day and night to finish the house, store up firewood, and haul in supplies of flour, beans, corn, and turnips. John did not fear that Mary and the girls would go without meat because son Watson was staying behind to manage the farm.

Before John knew it, early August was upon him and the need to get to Kansas was too strong to put off any longer. Ruth's husband, Henry, had expressed an abiding interest in accompanying John to Kansas, and after careful consideration, John relented and agreed to collect Henry when John passed through Hudson.

Sixteen year old Oliver, the youngest of Brown's sons, also got wind of the trip to Kansas. Oliver had gone to work on a farm in Rock Island, Illinois, in an exercise of manly independence. After several letters of supplication, John gave his consent for Oliver to accompany Henry and him to Kansas.

On the morning of his departure, John lingered in the living room with Mary, Ruth, and the girls.

"After I meet up with Henry in Hudson," John said, "We will go directly to Akron, where I plan to meet with my old friends and solicit money and arms for the Kansas cause."

"What about Owen?" Mary said. "You remember he's staying in Munroe, seven miles from Akron."

"Yes," John said. "I intend to spend an evening with father before I move on to Kansas. Now, as my last bit of homely contentment before I depart, I wish to hear you sing *Blow ye the trumpet, blow.*"

Ruth started everyone off with the following words to John's favorite song.

*Sweet is Thy work, my God, my King.
I'll praise my Maker with my breath.
O, happy is the man who hears.
Why should we start, and fear to die.
With songs and honors sounding loud.*

Ah, lovely appearance of death.

When the singing stopped, John, Mary, and the girls wept together.

“The sadness I feel at this moment is very great,” John said. “Please take heart, for God willing, I shall see you all again.”

John walked from the doorway and mounted the bay mare. His saddlebags contained three shirts, two hard-boiled collars, an extra pair of trousers, and various other personal items. He wore his ever-present, black, frock coat. A crate containing surveying instruments had previously been shipped to Detroit and he would collect it in route.

Chapter 4

August 1855

The bay mare was spirited, game, and the only significant asset that had survived John’s bankruptcy. The ride to Hudson, Ohio, took ten days. Henry had written that he would meet John behind the Hudson River School. When John arrived at the school, which was not in session, he found Henry camped out in back near the outhouse.

“Hello, John.”

Henry sat on a bench whittling, and wood shavings covered the ground around his feet.

“I observe that you have been waiting for some time,” John said.

“Just a day and a half,” Henry said. “I didn’t want you to have to come hunting me.”

“There’s more than enough daylight to make the thirteen miles to Akron,” John said. “Are you ready to travel?”

“More than ready,” Henry said.

John had many old friends in Akron, and he was confident that money and arms could be wrangled from those for whom he had previously done many a favor. When he arrived in Akron, he went to the home of former Mayor Lucius V. Bierce, a close friend from the past.

John knocked, and Lucius himself answered.

“Well hello, John.” Lucius pumped John’s extended hand vigorously.

“Lucius,” John said. “This is Henry Thompson, my son in law.”

“Come in—come in,” Lucius said.

The former town mayor escorted them to a small den just off of the foyer of the modest two-story Victorian home. The den reeked of cigar smoke and whiskey.

“Can I offer you a drink?” Lucius asked.

“No, thank you,” John answered.

“That’s right,” Lucius said. “I forgot that you do not imbibe.”

“I am most eager to hear whether you were successful in arranging the meeting,” John said.

“Quite successful,” Lucius said.

Lucius poured a drink of whiskey, and then picked up the cigar that lay smoldering in the ash tray.

“We’ll meet at Samuel Lane’s at 10:00 A.M.,” Lucius said. “You can spend the night here in my home, and then we’ll ride over in the morning.”

“Thank you,” John said.

“I’ll have Martha prepare something to eat,” Lucius said. “I’m sure you two must be famished.”

“I must visit my father who lives in Munroe Falls,” John said. “I will probably eat a late supper with him.”

“How is Owen?” Lucius asked.

“By all accounts,” John said. “I am led to believe that his health is holding.”

Chapter 5

Owen Brown lived alone, in a small white house on the south side of the Cuyahoga River. The front yard grass and shrubberies were overgrown. Two towering oaks, on either side of the path leading to the front door, spread their branches over the house like protecting arms.

John tied the bay mare to the hitching rail out front and walked up the path toward the porch. It wasn’t until he stepped onto the porch that he saw the dim glow of light shining through the door, which was slightly ajar. He slowly pushed the door open enough to see inside. A single candle burned on the table next to the chair, where his father sat, erect. A blanket had been thrown over the chair for comfort. The old man was still, and John could not tell whether his eyes were open or closed.

“Father,” John called out.

“Come in, John,” Owen said. “I recognized your step as you came up the walk.”

John moved around into the light of the candle and then sat in the chair across from his father.

Neatly dressed in a dark jacket, white collar, and black cravat, Owen was a man of great dignity and respected by all with whom he had dealings. Rarely was the old man seen without his collar, cravat, and jacket.

“How is your health, father?” John asked.

“Middling good,” Owen said.

“Is there anything that you need?” John asked.

“No,” Owen said. “Henry has come by often enough to make sure I have provisions. I thought that he might have come with you.”

“I left him with Lucius Bierce,” John said. “The meeting is planned for tomorrow. I will ask for money and arms to aid the Free-State cause in Kansas.”

Owen gazed upon John for a long moment.

“I trust the weapons will be used only for defense,” Owen said.

John sighed.

“It is quite confusing, father,” John said. “I will kill with a clear conscience to protect my sons from the pro-slavers and Missouri ruffians. God has placed it on my heart to strike a blow against slavery. Should not my conscience also be clear, however that blow is struck?”

“The path of your duty is to submit yourself totally and cheerfully to God believing that He will do right,” Owen said, “He alone will remove your confusion and guide your hand.”

“Why has God placed such a rage in my heart for the plight of those in bondage?” John asked.

“I have told you the story of Spartacus from the time of your youth,” Owen said. “Maybe it is your calling to play a similar role in history.”

“But Spartacus died on a cross in the streets of Rome,” John said. “Having never tasted the freedom for which he slaughtered many.”

“True,” Owen said, “And do you not recall that the blow struck by Spartacus sparked the end of slavery in the whole of the Roman Empire?”

John pondered Owen’s words.

“Father,” John continued. “You have taught that we are to give of all we have to God—to sacrifice everything for His purpose for the salvation of our souls.”

“Yes,” Owen said. “I have preached such words. Meaning, that to God be the glory.”

“Does that teaching also require the defense of my sons to come second to the duty that God has placed upon my heart?” John asked.

Owen thought, deeply and then nodded.

“That is the same conclusion to which I have come,” Owen said.

The weight pressing on John’s heart grew heavier under his father’s confirming words.

Chapter 6

When John stepped through the door into the home of Samuel Lane, heard the excited chatter and saw the friendly faces of old acquaintances and cohorts, his enthusiasm for the Kansas Free-State cause peaked again, as did his confidence. They greeted him warmly, as though his past business failures and shortcomings had all been forgotten.

John’s appeal on behalf of the Kansas cause was vibrant and heartfelt. The normally tight-fisted bankers opened their coffers, and the merchants promised him arms, supplies, and provisions. The response was so great that John carried his appeal into the streets of Akron.

In addition to what the bankers and merchants had already committed to the cause, Akron’s citizens generously donated anything that might be of value to the success of John’s efforts. It excited him most to receive the cases of guns and the broadswords.

Henry was astounded by the amount of donated supplies, guns, and the three-hundred and eighty-seven dollars in cash.

"It is truly a blessing," Henry said.

"Now that God has smiled upon us and the Free-Staters of Kansas," John said. "We must aid Providence by getting these arms and supplies to Kansas without delay."

John and Henry, with the help of a number of Akron citizens, boxed the supplies and delivered them to the train depot for shipment to Chicago. The plan was to ship the goods in stages, all the way into Kansas.

Lucius came to the train station as the goods were being loaded onto the train.

"I provide you and your boys with a word of caution, John," Lucius said. "Reports have surfaced that all along the Missouri border, gangs of pro-slavery men are accosting anyone suspected of being an abolitionist. Men and women are being ill-treated on the riverboats and the trains and their firearms and belongings are being confiscated."

"What is the law doing about the miscreants?" John asked.

Lucius chuckled.

"There is no law in Missouri," Lucius said.

John and Henry left Akron early the next morning, eagerly beginning the three hundred and sixty mile ride to Chicago, where the shipped goods would await them.

Chapter 7

Flat, pristine prairies of blue stem and Indian grasses flanked both sides of the road that wound John and Henry through Illinois. Soon, crops of corn and oats became more prevalent, and forests of old oak and hickory began to stretch across the landscape.

John and Henry made Chicago by early September. Oliver had come over from Rock Island a few days before, and had taken a job washing dishes at the Richmond Hotel until their arrival. They sent word to Oliver, and the next day, he met them in front of Mustill's Groceries and Provisions. John was glad to see his youngest son, and as they shook hands, John's quick discerning eyes told him that Oliver had fared well in his first quest to find manhood.

"Hello, father," Oliver said.

"Oliver," John responded.

"How are my mother and sisters?" Oliver asked.

"I left them in God's hands," John said.

Oliver turned to Henry. "It's good to see you, brother-in-law."

"Likewise," Henry responded.

Oliver turned quickly back to John, unable to hide the excitement beaming from his wide, bright eyes.

"And what of our trip to Kansas, father?" Oliver asked.

"I have made a change in plans," John said. "It was brought to my attention that difficulties may arise in getting our goods into Kansas, especially by train and riverboat. I have, this very morning, purchased a freight wagon and strong horse

to pull it. We shall collect the freight from the train depot and depart for Kansas early tomorrow morning.”

Oliver looked from one hitching rail to the other.

“Did you not bring the bay mare?” Oliver asked.

“I sold her to a man who appreciates good horse flesh,” John said. “Henry also sold his mount.”

Oliver’s mouth dropped in surprise.

“It looks like there will be much walking in store for me,” Oliver said.

“I am determined to go to Kansas with every dollar I can muster,” John said, “The mare was far too fine bred to pull a freight wagon.”

“How far is Kansas?” Oliver asked.

“Five hundred miles more or less,” John said. “With one horse and such a heavy load, there will be a fair amount of walking for each of us.”

The three travelers led the horse to the freight depot and loaded the boxes of weapons and supplies onto the wagon. John then proceeded to attach his surveying instruments around the outside of the wagon bed, making Oliver and Henry exchange questioning glances.

“I hope to give us the appearance of being government surveyors,” John said. These instruments should provide safe passage through proslavery territory and may well discourage anyone who should want to inspect the contents of our wagon.”

Once final preparations had been made to the fully-loaded freight wagon, John and his sons pitched their bedrolls under it and settled in for nights rest.

Early the next morning, John, Henry, and Oliver moved off down the dusty road bound for Kansas. John, lean, pensive, and straight-backed, walked alone to the right of the wagon. Henry, with optimism invigorating his step, walked in front of the horse, leading the animal by the reins. Oliver, exuding a youthful sense of adventure, settled into a long stride twenty yards in front of the procession.

John lapsed into deep thought. Great confusion continued to trouble his mind regarding what he had perceived as his mission for God. He had grown to attribute his life’s failures to a misreading of God’s will, and he didn’t want to be making that same mistake again.

A few miles out of Mississippi, a light rain began to fall. The trio decided to stop for the night and so pitched a tent in a grove of oak trees near a stream. As Oliver and Henry went about preparing the evening meal, John inspected the wagon and tended to the horse.

The sturdily built wagon held up well through the beginning leg of the journey. The horse, thirteen-hands tall and well-muscled, pulled the heavy wagon willingly and without difficulty. It somewhat worried John that the animal was doing the work of two. The horse was the best of the pen from which John had to choose. Rather than buy two average horses, he sought to save a few dollars and purchase the one.

As the days passed and they moved on into Missouri, the horse began to strain under the wagon’s weight. John’s concern heightened that he might lose the willing animal. At first he thought the stifling Missouri weather was the cause, but when the horse began to cough and developed a thick, yellow discharge from its nostrils, he knew that it had contracted the strangles. Oliver kept the horse’s

nostrils wiped clean of dust and snot and made sure that it had plenty of fresh water, as they had no medicine or other treatment for the unfortunate animal.

Progress slowed.

Henry and Oliver had worn out their old boots and John provided them with new ones from the supplies that had been donated at Akron. John's boots could have been replaced as well, but he preferred to get the very last mile out of them.

The number of travelers that they encountered increased considerably, as did the gangs of ruffians, who toted guns and led fine horses and mules, presumed stolen. Fortunately, no one took too great an interest in the freight wagon. One group of ruffians tried to sell John a horse to replace the sick one, but John declined purchase. The men bragged about wresting several horses and other items of bounty from some Kansas farmer, and John wanted no part in their crime.

Chapter 8

October 1855

Near the Missouri Kansas Border

John leaned toward the firelight and for what seemed like the hundredth time, read the letter from John Jr. He wondered if he would find his son alive.

He carefully refolded the letter and tucked it back inside his jacket pocket.

Slight movement near a thick clump of oak brush arrested his attention. His eyes strained to focus through the fire's glare into the brush about twenty yards distant.

Henry and Oliver sensed that he was on the alert.

"What do you see, father?" Oliver asked.

John rose slowly from the fire.

"Keep a sharp lookout," John said.

He walked slowly toward the tangle of oak brush, stopping yards from it.

"You can come out," John said. "My name is John Brown and I will not harm you. The men at fire are my sons."

John turned and walked to the wagon.

He opened the box containing their provisions, shook out a clean bandanna and laid it on top of another box. The leftover prairie chicken, half a dozen boiled eggs, and some hardtack were placed in the center of the cloth. He folded up the corners, sack-like, and then carried it back to the oak brush.

"Here is some food," he said. "If it is not enough, we have more."

John returned to the fire.

"Who's hiding out there?" Oliver asked.

"Runaways," John said. "Don't pay any attention to the food I set down out there and they may come out."

John picked up a stick and poked at the wood smoldering in the fire to bring up the flames. When the glare of the fire spread out toward the brush, he looked up and the bandanna was gone.

After about twenty minutes time, a young Negro man and woman walked hesitantly from the brush. Mulatto in skin color and facial features, and near twenty years of age, they stood ready to turn and flee like two deer. The man wore only trousers, the woman's tattered dress had been ripped to shreds by the bushes. Both were barefoot and the nights had been chilly.

"I assure you that we are your friends," John said. "We also have shoes and clothing."

The couple came slowly forward into the full glow of the fire. The woman's high cheekbones indicated that a fair amount of Indian blood also flowed in her veins.

"Like I said before, my name is John Brown. These are my sons Oliver and Henry."

"Lewis Sheridan Leary," the Negro man said. "This here is my wife Mary."

The Negro man's response engaged John's full attention.

"You speak like an educated man," John said.

"Yes," Lewis said, "We lived free in Oberlin until the slave catchers caught up with us. Escaped them two days ago, but they're still hot on our trail."

"Where are you headed?" John asked.

"Heard Kansas is going to be a free state," Lewis said. "We're bound for there."

"You have almost made it," John said. "The ferry crossing over the Missouri River into Kansas is about five miles from this spot."

"The ferry crossing is closely watched by the slave catchers," Lewis said. "We've got to find another way across the river."

The pounding of hooves made Lewis and Mary wheel in their tracks and dart for the brush.

"No!" John said. "Hide in the wagon!"

Lewis and Mary rushed to the wagon and climbed into the back, disappearing among the boxes. Henry and Oliver threw canvas over them. John picked up the Sharps Rifle that lay near his bedroll and stood with the fire at his back.

Six riders approached, bristling with guns and Bowie Knives. Oliver, with a pistol stuck inside his belt, moved in beside John. Henry stood near the wagon with a pistol protruding from his trouser pocket.

The riders reined their horses into the light of the fire and formed a semi-circle before John. They were covered in road dust and a few appeared the worse for drink. They gazed wide-eyed at the canvas covered wagon.

"Seen two runaway niggers?" the burly slave-catcher at the center of the group asked.

"No," John said. "The only Negroes we've encountered have been free."

"You sound like one of them damned abolitionists," the slave-catcher said.

"What's in the wagon?" Another man asked. "Looks to be loaded heavy."

"Tools and supplies," John said.

"Be a good place for an abolitionist to hide runaways," the man said. "We're bound to have a look."

John slowly lifted the Sharps Rifle and rested the barrel in the bend of his left arm. Oliver placed his hand on the butt of the pistol in his belt. Henry slid the pistol out of his pocket and held it by his side.

“You are bound to try,” John said.

“We’ve got you outnumbered,” the burly slave catcher said.

John levered a cartridge into the Sharp’s firing chamber.

“Maybe so,” John said. “But I do believe that we have Providence on our side.”

The burly slave-catcher chuckled and then jerked his horse’s head up out of the grass.

“Let’s ride boys,” the burly man said. “There’s no need to roust these men tonight.”

The slave-catchers galloped away.

“Would we really have shot those men to keep them from finding the Negroes?” Oliver asked.

“Yes, son,” John said. “Have you ever seen what that kind does to the Negroes they capture?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, I have,” John said. “Their kind is a plague on any man, but especially the Negro.”

The canvas covering the wagon bed rustled.

“Are they gone?” Lewis whispered.

“They are,” John confirmed.

Lewis and Mary climbed out from under the canvas and jumped to the ground.

“We are thankful for what you’ve done,” Mary said.

“Yes,” Lewis said. “We had best be on our way before they return with more men.”

“I have something I want to give you,” John said.

He walked to the wagon, opened several of the boxes and sorted through the items inside.

After a few moments, he walked to Lewis and handed him shoes, new trousers, and a shirt. He then placed shoes and a new dress in Mary’s waiting hands.

“We are also headed to Kansas,” John said. “Five of my sons have settled there, two with wives. Those items were meant for them, but you two need them more.”

“If there is any way,” Lewis said. “We will repay this kindness.”

“No need,” John said. “My reward will come from God in due time.”

Lewis and Mary turned and hurried toward the oak brush.

“Wait,” John said. “I think I can get you across the river right under the slave catchers’ noses.”

Chapter 9

John Brown’s pulse quickened as the ferry crossing came into view. At least two dozen Missouri ruffians roamed the dock. It was too late for them to turn back now.

He glanced up at Oliver, who sat on the wagon seat reining the horse toward what might be sure doom. Henry walked on the other side of the wagon next to the horse. Lewis and Mary Leary hid amongst the boxes in the back of the wagon, concealed under a large canvas blanket.

Oliver and Henry gazed at him, and he read uncertainty in their steeled eyes.

“Do not lose heart,” John said. “God will deliver us from this peril.”

The Missouri ruffians had stopped a freighter waiting to be ferried over to the Kansas side. The driver stood by helplessly as the men plundered the wagon.

Fifty yards from the ferry crossing, two of the ruffian’s noticed them and yelled out to the others. The men turned and watched the approach of John’s wagon with great interest.

When they reached the docking point with the freight wagon, the ferry operator walked over.

“It’s goin’ cost you two dollars,” the ferry operator said. “But if you’re carryin’ explosives it will cost you double.”

The Missouri ruffians lost interest in the other freighter’s goods and crowded around their wagon. A big-bellied man wearing a dingy white shirt and a red bandanna tied around his neck, approached the rear of the wagon.

John stepped forward and blocked the man’s path.

“We’re surveyors.” John set down his Sharps rifle, shoved the canvas up a bit, opened the box nearest the tailgate, and lifted out a piece of equipment.

He glanced around at the ruffians’ peering eyes and open mouths.

“This is called a transit,” John explained. “We use it to measure distance.”

“You government surveyors?” a thin man riding a fine, black stud-horse asked as his eyes gazed at the other equipment that John had tied around the wagon bed for show.

John glanced at his sons as he set the transit back inside the box.

“There is plenty more equipment and supplies in these other boxes,” John said. “But I am not inclined to open each one just to prove a point to you men.”

“Well you may not have no choice in the matter.” The big-bellied man stepped closer to the wagon tailgate.

John picked up his rifle and casually pointed it in the direction of the big-bellied man.

“This Sharps rifle gives me a choice,” John said. “In fact, it gives me four or five choices if I can jerk the lever fast enough.”

The big-bellied ruffian gazed up at the man riding the stud-horse.

“I know government surveyors when I see ‘em,” the man on the stud-horse said. “We’d bring all kinds of hell down on us if we roused these men.”

“Move it forward, Oliver,” John said to his son.

Oliver lightly slapped the reins against the horse’s rump and the animal moved off. The Missouri ruffians parted as the wagon rolled through their midst onto the waiting ferry boat.

“That nag looks a might puny for government issue,” the big-bellied ruffian said.

John turned, and then stepped off of the ferry boat back onto the dock. His eyes settled on the big-bellied ruffian.

“Sir,” John said. “This horse has given us its all, while suffering through the strangles, colic, and lameness. As much as I desire to ferry across this river at the

moment, I will delay long enough to exact a personal apology from you for our horse.”

Not a word was spoken as the Missouri ruffians processed the meaning of John’s words.

Suddenly, the big-bellied ruffian pushed his way through the crowd and strode toward John with his hand on his pistol.

Hurried footsteps thudded off of the ferry boat and soon Henry and Oliver stood by John’s side.

“Hold on there, Macon,” the thin man riding the fine, black stud-horse said to the big bellied man. “You should know better than to disrespect a man’s horse. Some of us think very highly of our animals.”

“Maybe so,” the big-bellied man said. “But I ain’t ‘pologizing to no damned horse.”

“I would were I you,” the thin man said.

“Nope,” the big-bellied man insisted.

“Apologize!” the thin man said.

The big-bellied man shot a worried look at the thin man.

“Sorry,” the big-bellied man said.

The thin man on the fine, black stud-horse chuckled.

“I am Senator Atchison,” the thin man said. “That name may not mean as much to you now as it will in the future.”

“John Brown,” John said. “I believe that name will mean much to a great many men in the time to come.”

The senator chuckled again.

“I could use a man with your courage to champion our cause,” the senator said. “Slavery is ordained by God and I am to see that His will be done in Kansas.”

“You might want to read Psalm 18:28,” John said. “For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.”

The smile slowly melted from Senator Atchison’s face.

Chapter 10

John became convinced that Kansas was the land of perpetual rain, grumbling thunder, and the grayest of skies. Squinting through pouring rain and straining through sucking mud became the daily regimen. Sunshine and dry ground were only fleeting occurrences.

One evening in mid-October, they finally reached California Road. From there, they traveled northwest and continued until reaching a series of ravines and the line of trees that John Jr.’s letter described as being the beginning of Middle Creek. Brown’s Station, the family settlement that his eldest son had planned to build on Middle Creek, was at their feet.

John stopped the wagon and motioned Oliver and Henry to come to him.

“It is getting near dark,” John said, “I’m of the mind that you boys should go on into Brown’s Station. I’ll keep the wagon and stay the night here.”

"If you say so, father," Oliver said.

John was grateful that neither Oliver nor Henry probed the reasons for his reluctance to enter Brown's Station right at this moment. He was afraid of what he might find in terms of the conditions under which his sons and their wives had been living, and he was even more afraid of his reaction.

He had taught the boys to be independent in fashioning their lives apart from his own, as long as they respected God's laws and provided for their families. The tone of the letters he had read over the months from John Jr., Owen, Salmon, Frederick, and Jason portended of hard times and great depression, and he had arrived with very little money left to salve their pain and worry.

John required time alone with God.

He spent most of the night in prayer, wrestling with God to send a miracle that would enable his sons to prosper in peace and without the interference or danger posed by the Missouri ruffians and pro-slavers. The wagonload of Sharps Rifles, pistols, and broadswords suddenly seemed insignificant under the crush of Missouri ruffians and pro-slavers that he had now seemed to encounter at every turn.

When daylight broke over the Kansas horizon, the sun soon followed. John knew that the Lord was at work because they had not seen the sun in days.

He looked toward Brown's Station, hoping to see the smoke of cooking fires and the stir of life. He saw neither. The dirty, white canvas tents, the living quarters of which John Jr. wrote, rose up out of the damp ground, looking cold and miserable.

The creak of the wagon bed and the groan of its wheels failed to raise a soul as he pulled into the settlement. He looked toward the fields. The planted crops had not been harvested. The pens that had once held animals stood empty.

John stopped the wagon nearest the largest tent and walked to the entrance. Even before he parted the tent flap, the rank odor of sickness met him. Inside, his sons lay about the tent on mattresses of moldy hay and in various stages of the ague. Wealthy and Ellen were folding piles of clothing and wiping out dirty dishes, attempting to bring some order to the inside of the tent. He could tell by the girls' rosy complexions and tired eyes that they were also fighting the fever of the ague.

The depth of his children's misery startled John and filled his eyes with tears. He gazed about the tent and could see no signs of food.

"The wagon contains pork, beans, cornmeal and such," John said to them all. "We shall require a large breakfast because there are cabins to build, crops to gather, and stock to locate."

John hurried to the wagon and was soon joined by Oliver and Henry.

"What are we going to do about this, father?" Henry asked. "They are in such despair."

"We are going to get some wholesome food inside of them," John said. "We will cook right here near the wagon and get them outside into the sun and fresh air to chase away the sickness."

John threw back the wagon canvas and opened the food box. Oliver scavenged for dry wood, while Henry gathered rocks for a fire pit.

In a few minutes, a lively fire crackled.

John had cut thick slices of bacon off of the smoked pork belly he had bought from a Missouri farmer. In no time, bacon and cornpone sizzled in the big iron skillet.

One by one, the Kansas Browns dragged themselves out of the tent into sunlight. John cut slices of pork belly and mixed the pone as fast as he could move from one side of the wagon tailgate to the other. When one frying pan full of food was done, he forked the meat and pone into plates, and then filled it again.

Oliver and Henry passed the plates around. At first, the Kansas Browns ate hesitantly and some not at all. John couldn't tell whether the ague had sapped their appetites or they were just too weak to eat.

"You have got to eat," John said. "There is much work to do and you can't do it on an empty stomach. Force it down if you have to—but eat."

John strode to the canvas door of the main tent door and tied it back to allow for the flow of air. He walked inside. Soon he began tossing out the moldy, hay beds, blankets and all. He went from tent to tent throwing out dirty clothing, trash, and anything in which disease could thrive.

When he finished, he returned to the wagon. The food was almost eaten, the conversation somewhat lively, and eyes of the Kansas Browns shown a little brighter.

John looked toward the heavens and sent up a silent prayer of thanks.

"Why are you all sitting there jawing?" John asked. "I told you we have cabins to build, crops to bring in, and animals to find."

Chapter 11

John Brown Jr. was a big-boned man of thirty-four. He wore a full head of dark, curly hair and a beard that covered wide jaws. He was reserved in speech and manner, and since settling in Kansas last year with his wife and brothers, he had gravitated toward politics.

The constant threat of the pro-slavers had prevented him from building Brown's Station into the family complex of his dreams, and it had also curtailed his political activity. Although he was ashamed before his father for not having made a success of the Kansas migration, he was thankful for his presence. His father was a man of action. When John Brown spoke, men listened.

The Brown men and their wives were fueled by father's energy and endless capacity for work. Those suffering from the ague alternated between hot and cold sweats. Toil, sunup to sundown, soon drove out the sickness. Freezing temperatures and icy winter conditions made the work all but impossible at times. But in spite of all the hardship, Brown's Station christened its first cabin in a little less than two months' time.

John Jr. stood with his father and watched as Jason eagerly showed Ellen the features of the cabin that had been built for them. The roof was fashioned from one of the tents and it had a chimney.

Ellen beamed.

“Now I can cook without smoke worrying my eyes,” Ellen said.

John smiled and John Jr. stared in awe. His father was a man of very few smiles.

In between working on Jason and Ellen’s cabin, the family had gathered in the hay, beans, corn, and potatoes. Now time would be devoted to bringing in the scattered livestock.

As the month of April drew to a close, news of the growing conflict between the Free-Staters and the pro-slavers became a nightly topic of conversation in Brown’s Station. To their utter surprise, it was also quite evident that to most Kansans in positions of power, Free-State Kansas meant no Negroes allowed.

The pro-slavery side of Kansas politics exercised a decided advantage over the Free-State side. Pro-slavers won the election of March 30 through force and intimidation, casting five thousand illegal votes to seat their candidates. President Pierce threw the weight of the presidency behind the pro-slavers by removing Free-State Governor Reeder and putting in pro-slaver Wilson Shannon. The Free-Staters, seemingly powerless at the hands of the pro-slavers, had only managed to draft a constitution.

At this point in Kansas history, two opposing political forces bulled toward a collision course by crafting separate constitutions, passing their own laws, and holding elections which promoted their staunchest supporters.

By the close of May, the Brown family had built John Jr. and Wealthy a cabin in a little hollow just off of Middle Creek. With the completion of this cabin, a sense of order and a degree of happiness settled over Brown’s Station.

Chapter 12

November found John pleased with the progress made at Brown’s Station. It was hard to believe that he had been in Kansas for slightly than a year. Pro-slaver interference at the family compound had been curiously and thankfully absent, allowing for the building of two cabins, the gathering and planting of crops, and the thriving of the Brown animals. He truly felt the active exercise of God’s will.

One evening, an invitation came from his brother-in-law Samuel Adair and John’s half-sister Florilla, requesting John’s presence at Thanksgiving dinner. Samuel was a preacher, and he and Florilla had settled in Osawatimie several years prior. They were the primary reason that John’s sons and their wives migrated to Kansas in the first place.

Early the next day, John set out for Osawatimie and Thanksgiving dinner, on one of John Jr.’s horses. The horse that had pulled the wagon from Chicago fully recovered, but was more suited for the plow. He had raised his sons and daughters to appreciate and cultivate the attributes of a good piece of horse flesh. John Jr. had made a good start with the fine-boned, grulla mare that eased John along at a ground-eating pace.

When he reached the Adair cabin, he found it to be comfortably furnished with chairs, lamps, and pictures that reminded John of North Elba. He instantly

became homesick for Mary and the girls. Florilla had prepared a fine meal of roasted goose, succotash, Johnny-cakes, and nuts.

After the meal, they sat in front of the hearth, sipping tea.

"It does not portend well for the Free-Staters," Samuel said. "I have heard that armies of wicked southern fighters are being recruited for the pro-slavery effort in Kansas."

John was further distressed by this news.

"I came to Kansas to deliver arms to my sons for defense against the pro-slavers," John said. "But it is quite apparent to me that the Free-State men are slow to defend their cause. I am now growing of the mind that God has raised me up and delivered me to Kansas to break the jaws of the wicked on my own."

There came a knock at the door.

Reverend Adair got up from his chair and opened the door to an excited messenger.

"They've murdered Charles Dow!" the messenger said.

"Who has killed Mr. Dow?" Samuel asked.

"Frank Coleman, a pro-slaver from Virginia," the messenger said. "Jacob Branson called a meeting in Lawrence to protest the murder, and the sheriff arrested him for disturbing the peace."

Samuel turned to John.

"Governor Shannon appointed a pro-slavery sheriff over the county," Samuel said. "His name is Samuel Jones, and he's a violent man from Missouri with no stop in him."

"You haven't heard the worst of it," the messenger said.

Samuel turned back to the messenger.

"Armed Free-State men from Lawrence confronted Sheriff Jones and freed poor Jacob at gunpoint," the messenger said. "Sheriff Jones notified Governor Shannon and at this moment, the pro-slavery militia and hundreds of Missouri ruffians are descending on Lawrence."

"Why would the governor take such action?" John asked.

"Sheriff Jones convinced him that Lawrence was in open rebellion," the messenger said.

John stood.

"What do you know of the Lawrence defenses?" John asked.

"Most of the men are armed and preparing for the fight," the messenger said.

John grabbed his frock coat and walked to the door.

"I must return to Brown's Station, Samuel," John said. "I believe the Browns are needed in Lawrence."

Chapter 13

John loped the grulla mare into Brown's Station and turned for John Jr.'s cabin. He was pleased to see that all of his sons were gathered there. He loped the mare up to the assembled group and then swung down from the saddle.

"I take it you've heard about the current state of affairs in Lawrence," John said.

"Yes," John Jr. responded. "What will you have us do about it?"

"I prefer to act on our own information," John said.

"I will ride to Lawrence and see for myself." John Jr. said, then walked away from the group to saddle a horse.

"We must begin preparations," John said to his other sons. "Hitch the wagon and drive it to the cache."

Oliver and Henry hurried for the wagon. The remainder of John's sons following him back into the forest where the arms were stored. When the wagon arrived, the door was raised to the underground hiding place and Owen and Salmon climbed down into the darkness.

Soon, a lantern flickered then flared.

The underground vault had been built to keep the arms safe from any raiding Missouri ruffians.

Oliver and Salmon handed up boxes of Sharps Rifles and handguns for loading onto the wagon. The broadswords and Bowie Knives were brought up last. When all preparations had finally been made, they went back to the cabin and waited for John Jr.'s return.

Soon after darkness fell, the steady beat of a galloping horse's hooves drew them all outside. John Jr. loped in out of the darkness and then stepped down from the winded horse and immediately loosened the cinch.

"The pro-slavery militia and two thousand Missourians are ready to burn the town," John Jr. said. "They're camped south of the Wakarusa River, awaiting the Governor's order to attack."

"We had better get moving," John said.

John climbed aboard the wagon, shook the reins at the horse, and drove out of Brown's Station. John Jr., Salmon, Frederick, and Owen followed riding flank. Oliver, Jason, and Henry were left behind because another bout of the raging chills and fevers of the ague rendered them incapable of further physical demands, especially exertion that the impending battle might bring.

Traveling on through the night, they reached Lawrence about noon the next day. As the Browns approached the bridge south of town, a gang of armed Missourians blocked their path.

John did not have to utter a word to his sons. Each tightened the formation and edged in closer to the wagon. The horse hesitated as it approached the men blocking the way, but then John shook the reins at it and the nervous animal continued on. To a man, the Browns were armed with a broadsword, two pistols shoved into their belts, and a Sharps Rifle in their hands. The other weapons in the bed of the wagon were covered with canvas.

The Missourians ogled the Browns' weaponry, and then slowly moved their mounts aside as John and his sons edged on through their midst without a remark.

John mused at the Missourians' failure to attack or even utter a word as the Browns invaded their ranks on the way to defend Lawrence against them. He could not decide whether the non-action was attributed to a lack of blood thirst or cowardice. Either way, he was glad that his sons were not called upon to be tested under such overwhelming odds and so early in the Free-State struggle.

He was heartened by the sight of Lawrence's men. Some stood, rifles ready, others fortified barricades that they had thrown up, and a few moved about the streets in wagons loaded with the materials of war. The Browns continued up Massachusetts Street to the Free State Hotel.

A portly man of medium height and aggressive mustache, hurried over to greet them.

"I'm G.W. Coffee, editor of the newspaper."

Editor Coffee thrust out his hand, and John shook it.

"I'm John Brown and these are my boys."

"You're just in time, Mr. Brown," Editor Coffee said. "The Committee of Public Safety is meeting inside. James Lane and Charles Robinson are directing Lawrence's defense."

Editor Coffee led John and his sons through the Free State Hotel's dining hall, which was crowded with men and vibrated with excited talking. Editor Coffee took them past one room, where John suddenly stopped.

A woman and five small children sat crying before the body of a dead man being displayed in a pine box.

"What happened there?" John asked.

"Oh, that's Thomas Barber," Editor Coffee said. "Pro-slavery men murdered him yesterday."

"Have the killers been brought to justice?" John asked.

"You must be new here," Editor Coffee said. "There is no justice for Free-State men unless we take the law into our own hands."

John could barely contain his anger.

"Someone needs to do something about this," John said. "One Free-State life lost is too many without even one act of retribution."

Editor Coffee momentarily stood startled at John's expression of anger.

"The urgency of the current situation may change all of that," Editor Coffee said.

They continued to the committee room, where John was introduced to James Lane and Charles Robinson.

James Lane was a thin, enthusiastic man, with wild dark hair, a scraggly beard, brown obstinate eyes, and a narrow face. Charles Robinson had the grip and arm strength of a man capable of physically backing up his demands. His balding head and prematurely-gray beard did not detract from his wiry appearance.

Editor Coffee then described the encounter that John and the boys had just had with the gang of Missourians. The details had just been relayed to the editor by a man who apparently was hiding under the bridge at the time the Browns passed.

John informed Lane and Robinson about the cache of weapons that John and the boys had brought into town.

"We could use a man like you as a captain in the first brigade of the Kansas volunteers," Robinson said. "The unit of Liberty Guards, in particular, consists of fifteen men and their command is yours if you accept."

"I'll do whatever I can to help the cause," John said.

"The committee is presently negotiating with Governor Shannon," James Lane said. "A peace treaty is anticipated, but the assistance of you and your sons is greatly appreciated nevertheless."

The negotiations with Governor Shannon went on most of the night. John and his boys walked the streets, keeping watch in order to prevent a surprise attack.

The next day John learned that Governor Shannon had come to Lawrence and was at that very moment meeting with Lane and Robinson within the confines of the Free State Hotel.

Hours later, Lane and Robinson emerged from the meeting with Governor Shannon and immediately called for a public gathering. The crowd formed quickly and anxiously awaited the news of whether disaster had been averted.

"I am pleased to report that we have signed a treaty of peace with Governor Shannon," Charles Robinson said.

"What about the Missouri filth holding formation just outside of town ready to burn us out!" A man shouted from the crowd.

"Governor Shannon has denied responsibility for their presence," James Lane said, "He has agreed to negotiate for their withdrawal."

"Negotiate with whom?" another man asked.

"Senator Atchison of Leavenworth and his captains," Robinson said.

"I've not known of a single peace treaty that was obtained without giving up some rights," John said.

Lane's chest heaved and a slight grimace crossed Robinson's face at John's statement.

"The agreement requires that we not resist the pro-state territorial laws," James Lane confessed.

A low roar of angry conversation quickly spread through the crowd. Robinson and Lane walked back into the Free State Hotel. The grumbling crowd soon dissipated.

John was pleased because in the sum total of the matter, the Free-State men were now organized and armed and they had shown grit in the face of the Missouri horde.

His short-lived captaincy of the Liberty Guards was rescinded.

Chapter 14

Ice storms and bone-chilling winds hammered Brown's Station during the weeks of December. John Jr. observed his father's doldrums with great concern. John was a man of action who did not fare well during periods of idleness. Having been a farmer, tanner, surveyor, sheep herder, wool merchant, postmaster, and land speculator, his father had not achieved lasting success in any of these fields. John Jr. attributed this multifaceted career to his father's need for constant challenge and change. At the moment, John occupied his time and mind by splitting countless cords of firewood in anticipation of what he predicted would be the coldest winter of their lives.

Inactivity at Brown's Station also spawned spirited political discussion. Event by event, his father was drawn deeper into the midst of the Kansas Free-State and pro-slavery struggle. Throughout all of their lives, John had counseled that slavery

was a cancer that must be cut out of the American fabric at all costs. Emerging Kansas political developments kept John on edge and heightened his irritability.

The Free-State Constitution drafted on December 15th, was ratified at the Topeka Constitutional Convention. It contained a special clause that excluded all Negroes from entering or residing in the State of Kansas. Hence, no Negroes no slavery.

John Jr. dreaded informing his father of the ratification. When he finally built up the courage to weather his father's certain tirade, he told him. The ratification angered his father to such an extent that the mountain of wood behind the cabin grew by several more cords. It wasn't until his father had reasoned that as a first step, a racially intolerant Kansas was better than a slave holding Kansas that he became tolerable to live with on a day to day basis, and only because he was certain that the Negro exclusion provision would fall in time.

One afternoon, John seemed overtaken by cabin fever and politics to such an extent that John Jr. bundled up, saddled two horses, and led them to the wood pile to fetch his father. John watched him approach in between swings of the axe.

"Would you accompany me to Uncle Samuel and Aunt Florilla's?" John Jr. asked.

"I cannot go today," John said. "Much wood is still needed for the weather ahead."

"Alright," John Jr. said. "Pro-slavers were seen in the area, and I am a little worried about Samuel and Florilla's safety."

His father leaned the axe against a pile of wood and straightened.

"Pro-slavers you say?" John asked.

"That's the report." John Jr. turned back to the horses.

"I believe I am up for a little ride," John said.

They mounted up. Conversation was sparse on the way to the Adairs. John Jr. could not fathom the reason for his father's continued despondency, but he suspected that it had something to do with the letter that had arrived from North Alba, written by his wife Mary, John Jr.'s mother. Mary wrote that although the Brown homestead had prepared for a long winter, the cold had proven too severe for the livestock and many animals had died.

In a matter of hours, John Jr. and his father arrived at the door of Samuel and Florilla's cabin.

John Jr. knocked.

Samuel answered with confusion masking his bearded face.

"What brings the two of you out in this frightful weather?" Samuel asked.

John gazed sideways at son.

"I have apparently made Brown's Station quite unlivable of recent," John said. "My son has lured me to your cabin under false pretense in the hope of uplifting my spirit."

John Jr. shrugged and kept his eyes on Samuel. His father did not tolerate lying, even if it was in fun and for his own good.

Samuel looked from John to John Jr., then smiled and nodded his understanding.

Florilla walked into the living room from the kitchen.

"Please come and sit by the fire," Florilla said. "I just put a sugar pie into the oven and will boil a pot of coffee."

John, Samuel, and John Jr. sat in front of the fire and talked of family matters and old times. When the sugar pie was finished baking, Florilla served them generous portions along with cups of steaming, hot coffee. When the conversation shifted to politics, Florilla walked back into the kitchen and busied herself.

Suddenly, John stood.

"We must be getting back to Brown's Station," his father said. "It is clear to me that you and Florilla have not been overrun by pro-slavers."

Confusion narrowed Samuel's eyes at John's remark.

"That was the pretense under which my son brought me into your household," John said. "The pleasant time with you and Florilla is much appreciated and will surely lighten my mood."

"Florilla told me to be sure and invite you and the boys to eat Christmas dinner with us tomorrow," Samuel said.

"Although we are Christians," John said, "Strict Calvinist teachings, to which we have all been exposed, do not attach a special importance to Christmas Day over the Lord's Day."

"Florilla and I are both aware of your beliefs, John," Samuel said. "However, Christmas offers the opportunity for praise and thanksgiving for the birth of Christ."

John studied his brother-in-law and then looked at John Jr.

"I had nothing to do with this invite, father," John Jr. said.

"Your household is presently ravaged by sickness and depression," Samuel said. "I should think that a little praise, thanksgiving, and fellowship would do you all good."

"I can hardly be opposed to such an ardent and persuasive request," John said. Samuel smiled.

"Florilla will be pleased," he said.

When John Jr. and his father reached Brown's Station and entered the cabin, his brothers sprawled listlessly around the room. His wife Wealthy and Jason's wife Ellen sat at the supper table with their heads resting on it.

His father sighed deeply, did an about-face, and walked back out of the cabin.

"Where's he going?" Wealthy asked. "It's too late to chop more wood."

"I don't know," John Jr. responded. "He seemed in pretty good spirits after the visit to Uncle Samuel's. He even agreed that we can eat Christmas dinner there tomorrow."

Owens head jerked up.

"Father actually wants us to eat a Christmas dinner?" Owen asked.

"Yes," John Jr. answered.

"I'm too sick," Jason said.

"I can't stand the thought of eating," Oliver said. "Even if it is tomorrow."

"You know what it means when father agrees that we ought to do something," John Jr. said.

His father's voice called to them from the outside. John Jr. went to the door and thrust it open.

"I've got business in Lawrence tonight," his father said. "I shall meet you all at Samuel's by tomorrow noon."

Chapter 15

John Jr. sat in the living room of the Adair cabin, holding conversation with his Uncle Samuel. His brothers lounged on the floor and in the chair about the room, trying to ease the various stages of ague from which they suffered. Wealthy and Ellen were in the kitchen helping Aunt Florilla prepare the meal. A small, potted evergreen tree stood in the corner. It was decorated with popped corn and dried berries that had been strung on lines of sewing thread.

Close to noon, Aunt Florilla walked into the living room from the kitchen.

"Dinner is almost ready," she said. "Do you think he's coming?"

"As far as we know," John Jr. said. "He told us he had business in town but would be here by noon."

"He must have had trouble with the pro-slavers," Jason said. "We should have gone with him."

Worry grew in John Jr. because he had not considered the prospect that his father may have been set upon by ruffians even though the freezing weather had chilled most of their marauding.

The creak of a wagon wheel outside the front door of the cabin made John Jr. breathe a sigh of relief. Soon, his father stood in the doorway, tall and dignified in his black frock coat. He had apparently stopped off at Brown's Station, for he looked scrubbed and wore his stiff, hard-boiled collar and his gold collar pin. His reddish-brown hair swam neatly to the back of his head. He stepped into the Adair cabin, his stride long and fluid as his eyes swept over them like a shepherd's over his flock. He looked cheerful, but not about the mouth. The feeling seemed to flow from his steel-gray eyes.

"I would be much obliged if my sons would accompany me outside," John said.

The boys dragged themselves up off of the floor and out of the chairs. John had retreated to the wagon, and they trudged over to him. He reached into the wagon bed, and then he handed John Jr. two bundles wrapped in brown paper.

"The top package is for Wealthy," John said. "The other is for you."

John Jr.'s mouth dropped. Wrapped presents on Christmas Day were a frivolity that his father often spoke against.

"What is it?" John Jr. asked, barely able to contain himself.

"You've all done without so much for so long," John said. "These items are sorely needed, and today is a good day to provide them."

John again reached into the bed of the wagon, and this time he came out with two wrapped packages for Jason. He reached again and Henry had two.

Finally, Owen, Oliver and Frederick got their packages.

They all walked back into the Adair cabin. Wealthy and Ellen rushed forward with wide eyes, grabbing, poking, and squeezing their packages.

The room enlivened with excited chatter.

Owen, Henry, and John Jr. received new overalls and a small bag of hard candy. Oliver, Jason, and Frederick received new heavy coats and small bags of hard candy. Wealthy and Ellen got new dresses, a bottle of toilet water, and a small bag of hard candy.

John Jr. stood astounded. Never before had his father done such a thing. Even his brothers appeared speechless. Wealthy and Ellen each kissed John on the cheek and his father's face flushed bright red. Those kisses were another first.

Florilla, Ellen, and Wealthy had prepared a meal of turkey, downed on the wing by a lucky shot from Adair's twelve-gauge shotgun, cornbread dressing, boiled potatoes, baked beans flavored with molasses, baked bread, and last summer's mulberry preserves.

All of them crowded around the Adairs' table, which had been extended on one end with planks and a barrel and covered with a patchwork tablecloth sewn by Florilla from old dresses.

When they were seated, all heads bowed.

Samuel rendered a stirring tribute to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ and the supreme sacrifice that God had made in sending his only son to die for their sins. At the end of Samuel's prayer, heads remained bowed for the next prayer ritual that all family members had come to expect.

"God," their father prayed, "We appeal to Your merciful grace to deliver those of our Negro brethren who live in bondage."

"Amen," every voice in the room said.

During the meal, the mood was light and the conversation exuberant.

After a while, John seemed to sink back into a melancholy mood.

"May I ask the reason for your sadness on such a happy occasion?" Florilla asked.

Father looked up from his plate.

"I am missing my Mary, the girls, and North Elba," father said.

Chapter 16

The month of January blanketed Brown's Station with freezing rain and snow. The temperatures plunged below the freezing mark, and tree trunks cracked and broke under the weight of the ice and the force of the wind. The snow drifted high against the Brown's Station cabins, and mail delivery was stalled for days on end.

The money and the meat ran out, and the provisions dwindled. Cornmeal Johnnie-cakes and coffee made from boiling parched corn soon became the main sustenance.

John was determined that he and the boys stay involved in local politics. It was important that pro-slavery efforts and Free-State progress continue to be monitored, even during this period of trying weather.

In late January, a family traveling in a covered wagon stopped unexpectedly at Brown's Station.

John and his sons walked out to greet the new comers.

“Willis Crenshaw is the name,” the man said.

“I am John Brown and these are my sons.”

Willis shot his wife a look at the mention of John’s name.

“One of my oxen went lame,” Willis said. “I’m looking to buy another if you’ve got one to sell.”

“I’ve got a likely young steer,” John Jr. said. “He’s not full grown yet.”

Willis and John Jr. examined the lame ox, and then John Jr. walked to the pen to get the steer.

“Won’t you bring your family inside to the fire and stay for dinner?” John asked.

“Don’t mind if we do,” Willis said.

John was determined to learn why Willis had a reaction when he heard John’s name.

Willis’ lame ox was slaughtered, and that night they dined on meat.

After the meal, John enquired about the status of Leavenworth politics.

“I’m afraid to tell for fear that the latest victim might be kin to you,” Willis said.

“I am quite certain that I have no family in Kansas aside from those in this cabin and the Adairs in Osawatomie,” John said.

“Captain R.P. Brown, leader of the Free-State militia in Leavenworth, was hacked to pieces,” Willis said. “Pro-slavers dumped his mangled body right in front of his home. His poor wife almost died from shock at the sight. The killing has sent a clear message to all Free-State men.”

“What kind of weapon was used?” John Jr. asked.

“Swords, hatchets, nobody’s sure,” Willis said.

“Have the killers been brought to justice?” John asked.

Willis shook his head. “There’s no justice for Free-State men in Leavenworth. That’s why my wife and I came to Pottawatomie.”

John shook his head in disgust.

“Please do not take offense at my comments, Mr. Crenshaw,” John said. “I am eternally tired of hearing able-bodied Free-State men tell me that there is no justice for them in Kansas. Only a coward would hide behind such a declaration and fail to fight back.”

Willis recoiled like he had been slapped across the face.

Chapter 17

The Midwestern sun finally broke through the Kansas clouds in February, sparking a slow thaw. When the mail began to flow, news came to Brown’s Station that President Pierce had proclaimed all Free-State supporters to be rebels, and the Negro exclusion in the Free-State Constitution as treason. President Pierce’s crowning blow involved sending the United States Cavalry to the area as a sure sign that he meant to enforce his proclamations.

As in the past, the two opposing political forces, pro-slavers verses Free-Stators, continued to move ahead with separate constitutions, differing laws, and bias leadership.

John sought the aid of Congressman Joshua H. Giddings because he believed that the president's cavalry, war-machine had been dispatched to Kansas to enforce slavery. Giddings did not perceive the threat as John did and proved to be of no help.

One evening as the family sat down to supper, John Jr. provided more grim news that hit even closer to home.

"Pro-slavers are setting up court in Pottawatomie to enforce the pro-slavery laws," John Jr. said.

"Where?" Owen asked.

"Dutch Henry's Tavern," John Jr. responded.

"That's where the Missouri scum gets drunk most every night," Oliver said, "Dutch Henry practically owns slaves himself."

"Who will be the judge?" Owen asked.

"Sterling Cato," John Jr. said, "We all know he's as staunch a pro-slaver as anyone in Kansas."

"If Judge Cato has his way," Henry said, "We'll all end up in prison or dead like that captain in Leavenworth."

John Jr. gazed at his father.

Although John's sullen expression and reddened face told John Jr. that he was affected by what he had just heard, his father was curiously silent.

"The pro-slavers are pushing us closer and closer to the fight," John Jr. said.

"For once," John said, "I have no desire that the pro-slavers cease their acts of aggression. Their foot shall slide in due time."

"I know that verse is out of the Bible Book of Deuteronomy," Jason said, "But what does it mean?"

"Whatever the pro-slavers plan against us," John said, "At God's appointed time, He will interrupt the pro-slaver plans and heap destruction upon their heads. And unless I am wrong, that is when the Free-Stators will finally be driven to fight back."

John Jr. pondered his father's words and waited while Wealthy and Ellen poured them more tea. When the women left the room, the discussion continued.

"Judge Cato's court opens on April 21st," John Jr. said. "Deputy U. S. marshals are already serving court subpoenas on pro-slavery men whom they desire to sit on the grand jury."

John Jr. was proud of his next announcement and hoped his father would be.

"Thirty-five Free-State men have organized a company of fighters called the Pottawatomie Rifles," John Jr. said, "And they've selected me to be the captain."

John Jr. glanced several times at his father but could not tell what he thought about John Jr. leading the Pottawatomie fighting unit.

When April 21st finally arrived, John Jr. and the Pottawatomie Rifles got their first test. Judge Cato was scheduled to hold court that day as planned in Dutch Henry's Tavern. The tension was heightened by a rumor that the pro-slavery grand jury had planned to indict a number of Free-State men for being abolitionists.

As a test of the pro-slavers' resolve and a testament to the Brown family's abolitionist roots, Salmon and Henry had gone into Dutch Henry's to see if they would be arrested. The Pottawatomie Rifles, John, Owen, Jason, Oliver, and Frederick waited two hundred yards down the road from the tavern.

"It's been fifteen minutes," John Jr. said. "We'd better ride in there and check on them."

"I believe it would not be in our best interest to walk into Judge Cato's court armed," John said.

John had not formally joined John Jr.'s fighting unit, but came along out of curiosity as far as John Jr. could tell. The decision was made to leave the guns with Frederick, Jason, and Oliver, who had instructions to bring them on the run if signaled.

The Pottawatomie Rifles rode to Dutch Henry's, but only John Jr. and John dismounted. The tavern's exterior was constructed of heavy logs, and the boardwalk put together with roughhewn lumber. The strong, sour odor of fermenting brew wafted from vats somewhere in back of the building.

John Jr. matched his father step for step as they approached the tavern door. The mounted Pottawatomie Rifles nervously milled the road in front of the establishment.

When John Jr. and John walked through Dutch Henry's tavern door, Judge Cato was addressing the grand jury. No one looked around or paid the newcomers any mind. Salmon and Henry sat at the back of the room near the corner on the right and had apparently gone unnoticed. Stuffed deer and buffalo heads hung on the wall above them.

The two Sherman brothers were big-fisted, heavy-jawed Germans, and they lounged behind the full length bar to John Jr.'s left. Pictures of European women in various stages of undress dotted the wall behind the owners. The bar was lined with pro-slavers, standing elbow-to-elbow.

Tables full of Missouri ruffians crowded the floor in the center of the tavern. Not a pint of beer or glass of whiskey could be seen anywhere. The temporary abstinence was undoubtedly by order of Judge Cato, who sat alone at a large desk across the room. The grand jury was seated to Judge Cato's right. They were twelve hard-looking men, some of whom John Jr. recognized.

"Allen Wilkinson is the new pro-slavery district attorney," John Jr. whispered to John. "He holds slaves not two miles from here."

"What about those two Germans?" John nodded toward the Shermans.

"They don't hold slaves as such," John Jr. said. "But the Negroes they've hired to work in their fields and around the tavern might as well be. They work for next to nothing and can never seem to get even on the money the Shermans say the Negroes owe them."

"Does each of you gentlemen swear to enforce the laws of the pro-slavery convention and ignore the competing laws of the Free-Slavers?" Judge Cato asked of the grand jury.

"I do," the grand jury members said, almost as one.

"I am an abolitionist." John Jr.'s voice echoed through the tavern. "Does this court intend to have me arrested?"

John Jr. felt his father edge in closer to him as every eye in the tavern cut their way. For the life of him, John Jr. could not ascertain what had prompted him to speak out as he did.

"The court is not concerned with such outside issues at the moment," Judge Cato snapped.

“Any grand jury member or peace officer who tries to enforce the counterfeit, pro-slavery laws does so at his own peril,” his father said.

John Jr. motioned Salmon and Henry over, and the four backed slowly out of the tavern door. He had never felt such a sense of pride in himself, his father, and his family.

Chapter 18

Newspapers all over Missouri got wind of the incident at Dutch Henry’s Tavern and printed the following story line.

District Judge Sterling Cato’s Pottawatomie court overrun by abolitionists. Judge Cato assaulted.

Judge Cato and Allen Wilkinson must have had some serious concerns about the Browns’ and the Pottawatomie Rifles’ intentions because no Free-State men were indicted or arrested on that day. Shortly thereafter, Judge Cato moved his court to nearby Anderson County, which could be described as a more suitable environment for pro-slaver intents.

The confrontation at Dutch Henry’s shoved the Free-State and pro-slavery tensions over the edge. Rumors circulated that an invasion by the Missouri ruffians was imminent.

Threats of violence broke out on Pottawatomie Creek, with the Shermans, Allen Wilkinson, James Doyle and his sons on the one side, and the Browns and Pottawatomie Rifles on the other.

John sought more information on the Shermans, Wilkinson, Doyle, and Doyle’s sons. The Sherman brothers were squatters, unmarried, and regularly stole livestock from the immigrant wagon trains.

Wilkinson was rumored to take pleasure in beating his wife and his slaves into unconsciousness. He was the champion of the pro-slavery government in the Pottawatomie area.

James Doyle and his sons were belligerent slave-catchers from Tennessee, who did most of the dirty work for Wilkinson and the Shermans.

On the night of April 23, a lone rider rode into Brown’s Station and hailed John as he came in from plowing one of the fields.

“Are you the leader of the Pottawatomie Rifles?” the rider asked.

“My son is the leader for whom you search,” John said. “Why do you ask?”

“Your son and his men may be needed,” the rider said. “Sheriff Jones, the pro-slavery puppet, was shot just outside of Lawrence earlier today.”

“Is he dead?” John asked.

“I’m afraid not,” the rider said.

“Aside from being a pro-slaver,” John said. “Why was the sheriff set upon in the first place?”

"He and a posse had arrested a group of Free-State men for interfering," the rider said.

"Interfering in what?" John asked.

"The Sheriff accused them of being the culprits who helped Jacob Branson escape when Sheriff Jones arrested him for protesting the Dow killing."

"Maybe the sheriff will soon get it through his head not to trifle with Free-State men," John said. "What makes you think the Pottawatomie Rifles will be needed?"

"Senator Atchison commands the Missouri ruffians and he has ordered them to attack Lawrence," the rider said.

"Tell me about this Senator Atchison," John said.

"He's a slave holder out of Platte City, Missouri," the rider said.

"Alright," John said. "I'll inform my son of all that you have said."

Soon after Atchison gave the order to attack Lawrence, two Free-State men were murdered near that town, and the Missouri forces were said to be gathering along with pro-slavery fighting men hailing from all over the South.

John received word that a company of Georgians had encamped on the Pottawatomie near Brown's Station, and he summoned Salmon.

"I believe we have some surveying to do?" John said to Salmon.

Salmon's face screwed into a frown.

"We do?" Salmon said.

John had packed the surveying instruments away shortly after his arrival from New York, but the recent developments would render them useful yet again.

"Georgia boys are encamped near Pottawatomie Creek and I aim to see what they're all about," John said.

John and Salmon loaded the surveying instruments into the wagon, and then hid two Sharps Rifles, pistols, and two broadswords under the canvas behind the seat. They traveled south down California Road past the Doyle's, then the Wilkinson's, and finally Dutch Henry's Tavern. South of the tavern they came to Pottawatomie Creek. From there, they turned southwest. Soon they came upon an encampment of close to eighty Georgians, who were drunk and boisterous.

Salmon's breath quickened as John reined the horse and wagon directly toward the rowdy men. At the sight of the Browns the Georgians' drunken chatter ceased. About twenty yards from the curious Southerners, John stopped the wagon and he and Salmon climbed down from the seat. John started unloading the surveying instruments and a very nervous Salmon pitched in.

"Y'all can relax," one of the Georgians said to the others. "They's government surveyors."

John set out the surveying instruments and then proceeded to run a line through the center of the enemy camp. He glanced back at Salmon who remained close to his Sharps Rifle. His son's face looked drained of blood.

"You boys are kind of far from home," John said.

"We was sent for," one of the men responded.

"To do what if you don't mind my asking?" John said.

"Kill abolitionists until every last one is burnin' in hell," the man said.

"Are there a lot of abolitionists around these parts?" John asked.

“Won’t be for long.” The answer came from another man, who appeared a little more sober than the rest. “We’re ‘specially huntin’ John Brown and his boys. You heard of ‘em?”

John straightened from the instrument he had been peering into and gazed at the man.

“Do John Brown and his boys know you fellows are out to get them?” John asked.

“Not that we know of,” the more sober man said.

John took up the surveying instruments and turned to walk back to the wagon.

“What difference does it make if they know we’re after ‘em?” the man asked.

“We don’t want to be around,” John said. “The Browns might mistake us for Georgians, and I’m fond of living.”

The surveying instruments were quickly loaded. John and Salmon climbed aboard the buckboard, and John reined the horse back to the road.

When they reached the road, John couldn’t help but glance back over his shoulder.

The Georgians were on their feet, arguing amongst themselves, and pointing at the retreating wagon. John glanced at Salmon and try as his son might, Salmon could not conceal his smile and relief.

Chapter 19

After the encounter with the Georgians, father stayed close to Brown’s Station, kept the guns loaded, and watched over the family like a mother hen. He also expressed special concern for John Jr.’s safety, but John Jr. was determined to have a hand in the making of a free Kansas. As a politician and leader of the militia, John Jr. was willing to admit that he still had much to learn about the hearts of men. He was confident that given time, his father would teach him all there was to know on that subject.

On May 8th, the focus shifted to Lecompton, the pro-slavery stronghold. The Lecompton grand jury indicted a number of Free-State leaders, including James Lane and Donald Robinson. The *Herald of Freedom* newspaper and the Free State Hotel were also indicted as abolitionist institutions inciting treason. Companies of Missouri militia began to gather in Lecompton.

One day, a frantic messenger rode into Brown’s Station.

“Senator Atchison’s army is camped on Mount Oread and preparing to attack Lawrence,” the messenger said, “They have a cannon! Please bring your men!”

John Jr. could hardly contain his excitement.

The Pottawatomie Rifles had already been put on alert due to the presence of the Georgians and the new developments at Lecompton. John Jr. gathered his men and also sent word to the Minute Men of Osawatomie, who had agreed to fight with the Pottawatomie Rifles if called upon.

When the Pottawatomie Rifles left Brown's Station for Lawrence, John, Owen, Salmon, Henry, Oliver, and Jason rode with them. The Osawatomie militia had not yet joined the group.

The small company stopped at the Marais des Cygnes River, where they encountered a second messenger.

"They're burning the town," the second messenger said.

"What can you tell us of the defense?" John Jr. asked.

"There is none," the second messenger said. "The Committee of Public Safety issued an order to the citizens that they were not to put up a fight."

John jerked his horse to a halt.

"I don't believe I heard you right," John said.

"It's true," the second messenger said. "Not a single shot was fired to defend the town. Printing presses were destroyed, they set fire to the Free State Hotel, and they were looting the town when I left."

John shook his head in disgust.

"Don't the Free-State fools know that they must fight back or all will be lost?" John said.

John Jr. immediately sent a man back to find out what kept the Osawatomie militia.

"We'd better step up the pace, men," John Jr. said. "The Minute Men will just have to catch up with us."

John Jr.'s small company galloped on toward Ottawa Creek, where they met a third messenger.

"The cavalry finally arrived and took over the town," the third messenger said, "The Missourians high-tailed-it back to Lecompton. The crisis appears to be over."

The Pottawatomie Rifles milled in confusion and refused to ride further.

John Jr. felt confused as to how he should deal with this kind of resistance from his own fighting men, and his father must have sensed it.

"I would rather my body be riddled by Missouri bullets than to hold back here like a coward," John said.

The Pottawatomie Rifles nevertheless decided to camp near Prairie City and wait for reinforcements.

Chapter 20

A deeply troubled John Brown stared into the campfire as the Pottawatomie Rifles waited for instructions at Prairie City. He could not come to grips with the failure of the men in Lawrence to defend their town, their businesses, and indeed their dignity as men. At every juncture, the pro-slavers seemed to gain the upper hand and with impunity. The Free-Staters seemed to be men of strong talk but very little action.

The words John's father Owen, said to him in Munroe Falls more than a year ago, came back.

“The path of your duty is to submit yourself totally and cheerfully to God believing that He will do right.”

He also recalled Owen’s statement about Spartacus.

“And do you not recall that the blow struck by Spartacus sparked the end of slavery in the whole of the Roman Empire?”

John’s instincts and emotions were driving him in a direction that could only be described as uncharted territory. He grew increasingly impatient for some sign that he was on the right track with God regarding his decision to assist the Free-State cause at all costs. It very nearly unnerved him to think that he had embarked on yet another failed scheme that was apart from God’s will. He reasoned that it could not be the Lord’s will that the pro-slavers should win, and he was willing to submit himself totally to God’s purpose. If he be the one called upon to strike the blow that would end slavery in American, he was willing to do so.

Early the next morning, yet another rider pulled up in camp with more news.

“Senator Sumner of Massachusetts was beaten almost to death in Senate chambers by Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina,” the rider said.

John rushed to the man. “Why was the senator set upon by Brooks?”

“He spoke out on behalf of Free-State Kansas and called the Missouri invasions a crime,” the rider said.

“And what justice was accorded Senator Sumner for so brutal a beating?” John asked.

“None,” the rider said.

John’s head dropped into his hands.

Suddenly, he saw his duty and pathway clearly, as if God had spoken to him directly.

He turned to the men.

“I am seeking volunteers who will obey my orders and ride with me on a mission that I will disclose in due time,” John said.

“Father, I object to any of these men leaving,” Captain Brown Jr. said. “The enemy is near and we may need every fighting man among us.”

John did not directly contest his son’s authority.

He did an about face and walked quickly to his horse. When he rode out of camp, Owen, Henry, Oliver, Jason, Frederick, and Salmon rode with him as did Theodore Weiner, and James Townsley.

John Brown and his small contingent rode directly to Brown’s Station, where they packed provisions, sharpened broadswords, and loaded the rifles and pistols.

When preparations were finally completed, two more members of the Pottawatomie Rifles rode into Brown’s Station.

“I hope you will act with caution,” one of the men said.

John whirled on the man.

“Caution you say, sir?” John said. “I have grown eternally tired of hearing that word usher from the mouths of Free-State men. It is nothing but a word of cowardice.”

John climbed aboard the war wagon, and he and his small contingent rolled out of Brown’s Station.

Chapter 21

John Brown Jr. rode into Lawrence with five of the Pottawatomie Rifles. Their mission involved learning the true state of affairs and to assess the damage done to Lawrence by the pro-slavers. He learned that James Lane and Donald Robinson had been arrested by the pro-slavers before the attack on Senator Sumner. He found Samuel Pomeroy, who in the absence of Lane and Robinson, now chaired the Lawrence Committee of Public Safety.

Pomeroy paced the office and appeared confused as he contemplated the fate of Lawrence. John Jr. sensed that Pomeroy was clearly out of his depth as the committee chairman.

"The governor rejected all pleas to spare the town until we agreed to submit to the pro-slavery laws," Pomeroy said.

"Then why was the town attacked?" John Jr. asked.

"We refused to disarm," Pomeroy said. "The citizens of Lawrence would not be bound to such a request."

John Jr. scrubbed his forehead with the back of his hand.

"I do not understand how the citizens could refuse to disarm and then stand by while the pro-slavers burn their homes and businesses," John Jr. said.

"It's more complicated than that," Pomeroy said.

"If my father were here," John Jr. said. "He would name it cowardice."

"There is no need for name calling," Pomeroy said. "I am making the best decision that I can under the circumstances."

"What is the fate of Lane and Robinson?" John Jr. asked.

"I have no word on their current whereabouts," Pomeroy said.

John Jr. shook his head in disgust, and then departed Pomeroy's office and returned to his militia.

Chapter 22

At twilight, John Brown and his small contingent moved onto the prairie north of Weiner's Store. They encamped in a stand of trees located near a branch of Pottawatomie Creek and waited for darkness.

Over a cold supper of Johnny-Cakes and jerked venison, John outlined the details of his plan. At the realization of the deed that he had been called upon them to perform, Townsley's mouth gaped and his eyes dropped to the broadsword hanging from his belt.

At close to 10 o'clock, the wind began to blow and mist hung in the cool air. John and his contingent broke camp and traveled east until they reached the California road. Weiner, Frederick, and Townsley remained near the road with the war wagon, to act as lookouts. John and the remainder of the contingent crossed

California Road, waded Mosquito Creek, and reached the Doyle cabin at about 11 o'clock.

John approached the door and knocked.

"What do you want?" the man inside drawled.

"Mr. Wilkinson sent me," John said.

The door opened.

Doyle's eyes widened as the dim light from inside the cabin shined on John's face.

"You're one of them damned abolitionist that invaded the grand jury meeting at Dutch Henry's Tavern."

"You are our prisoner, sir," John said.

Doyle spit at John's feet.

"The hell you say," Doyle said. "The Missouri boys will hunt you down and make you pay. I'd advise you and this rabble to get off of my property before I get my gun."

"You and your sons step out onto the porch," John said.

Mrs. Doyle appeared in the doorway behind her husband.

"I told you not to go along with Wilkinson and the others, James," Mrs. Doyle said. "I told you."

Mrs. Doyle stepped around her husband to address John.

"Please, sir," she said. "Spare our fourteen-year-old son."

"I shall, ma'am," John said.

Doyle stepped out onto the porch and his two older sons followed. The wind whipped at their unbuttoned shirts.

"You're not even going to give us a chance to defend ourselves?" Doyle asked.

"What chance did your boys give Charles Dow, R.P. Brown, or Thomas Barber?" John countered.

"If you got any sense," Doyle said. "You will let us go and high-tail it out of here before I get mad."

Salmon and Owen stepped forward with broadswords drawn.

"Kindly come with us," Salmon said to the Doyles.

Doyle stepped confidently off of the porch and motioned for his sons to follow. Salmon and Owen led them away from the cabin.

Suddenly, the night filled with shouting, sounds of fighting, and the frantic screams of terrified men.

Moments later, Salmon and Owen walked in from the darkness.

"What have you to report?" John asked.

"They fought us desperately," Salmon said. "We hacked Doyle and one son to death near the road."

"The other son ran away," Owen said. "I put a gash in his head at the rim of the ravine."

John fought the feelings of sadness for the deed that he had called upon his sons to perform. He salved his conscience by reminding himself that the killings were God's will.

"Let's move on," John said.

The contingent left the Doyle's, picked up the others waiting on California Road with the war wagon and traveled south to Wilkinson Farm.

John climbed down from the wagon, walked to the Wilkinson's door, and knocked.

The dog inside the cabin began to bark.

"Who's out there?" the man inside said.

"I need directions to Dutch Henry's," John said.

"Keep heading south," the man inside said, "Toward—"

"I prefer that you come out and direct me," John said.

Muffled voices argued inside the cabin.

"Are you not the Pottawatomie enforcer of the pro-slavery laws?" John asked.

"I am," the man inside responded.

"Then you are our prisoner, sir," John said. "We are prepared to break down the door if necessary."

After a few moments, Wilkinson opened the door and peered around the edge. John pushed open the door and walked inside the cabin. Wilkinson's pistol hung loosely in his hand and John quickly relieved him of it.

Mrs. Wilkinson came from somewhere in the back. A dark bruise was visible under one eye.

"Where are you taking him?" she asked.

"He's going to a place where he'll never harm you or anyone else again," John said.

Wilkinson shot a look back at his wife.

"See what you have caused," Wilkinson said to his wife. "You will pay for this."

Mrs. Wilkinson burst into tears.

John grabbed Wilkinson by the collar and shoved him toward the door.

"I truly detest bullying cowards like you," John said. "Get him out of my sight."

Weiner and Henry led Wilkinson outside.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," John said.

He walked out of the Wilkinson cabin and waited on the porch.

In a few moments, John heard Wilkinson scream.

Soon, Weiner and Henry walked back into the light thrown from the open cabin door.

"I cut his throat," Weiner said.

"I want you men to go on to the Dutch Henry's place," John said. "There is one more thing I need do here."

"What?" Weiner asked.

"Wilkinson has slaves and I aim to turn them loose," John said.

He walked south of the house to four small, rundown shacks. When he opened the door and entered the first shack, five Negro men squatted on the floor around the light of a single candle wedged into a hole that had been poked in the top of a tin can.

They leaped to their feet at the sight of him.

"Don't be alarmed," John said. "I'm here to inform you that you are free to leave."

"Who you be?" one slave asked, "An' what Massa Wilkinson goin' say?"

"I am John Brown, and Wilkinson is dead."

The lines of the Negro's mouth drooped into an expression of perplexity and pain.

"White men goin' think we done killed our Massa and run off," the Negro said.

"I am quite confident that when morning comes you will be the least men on anyone's mind," John said.

From one slave shack to the next, John made the same announcement and met the same perplexed and painful stares.

Finally, John walked away into the darkness.

He caught up with his small contingent at Dutch Henry's. The men stood at the door listening to the voices of several men inside the cabin.

Salmon and Weiner finally forced the door and they all rushed inside.

Dutch sat at a table playing poker with three strangers.

"Well, well," Sherman said. "If it ain't the local abolitionists come to rob me."

"Who are you men and why are you here?" John asked the others seated at the poker table.

One of the men stood and stepped forward.

"I'm only here to buy a barrel of brew from Dutch Henry," the man said. "I don't know about nothin' else."

"You may leave," John said.

The man hurried out of the door.

"I sell ladies corsets and was on my way to Colorado when I was invited to play a little poker," another man said.

"I suggest that you be more selective of your poker companions in the future," John said.

The man grabbed his jacket from the back of a chair, scooped the money from the table, and hurried out of the door.

"I just work for Dutch Henry," the last man said. "I'm not involved in his doings."

"I recognize him from the grand jury that day, father," Oliver said.

"Dutch made me," the man said. "I have no truck with Negroes."

"Take your leave," John said.

Dutch smirked as the last of the poker players left the cabin.

"Damn-it it all to hell," Dutch said. "You boys busted my hot streak."

"I do believe that your luck has just run its course," John said.

Dutch slowly rose to his feet, towering over everyone in the room. A massive chest and arms strained every last thread of his short-sleeved shirt.

"You don't think I'll just stand by and let you take my money, do you?" Dutch asked.

"Our purpose is to exact more from you than your purse, sir," John said.

Dutch cocked his head sideways as he thought.

"You don't want my money," Dutch said. "So what is it then?"

"We are here to claim your life," John said.

Dutch recoiled.

"For what?" Dutch asked. "A bunch of niggers. First off, killing me, even if you and this riffraff could accomplish that, will not stop Kansas from becoming a slave state. That is a done deal my friend."

"Are you through talking, sir?" John asked. "For I am through listening."

Dutch Henry's mouth dropped, and his eyes momentarily flashed confusion, then fear, and then anger.

The huge German's teeth clenched, his fists balled, and he charged. The battle inside the cabin was short and brutal. William Henry 'Dutch' Sherman was finally dragged to the creek and hacked to death by broadswords. The Brown contingent washed their bloody weapons in the cool water before they departed.

Chapter 23

Sunday, May 25th

The five members of the Pottawatomie Rifles who accompanied John Brown Jr. to Lawrence rode through the town in stunned silence, as did he. The early morning light revealed that smoke and ash had settled over the town from the charred ruins of the Free State Hotel and that of Free-State, Governor Charles Robinson's home. Frustrated merchants stood outside of their businesses, speaking angrily about the looting that had occurred at the hands of the Missouri ruffians.

Heretofore in the Free-State pro-slavery struggle, there had been sporadic killings, livestock stolen, and random property damage. The verbal threats made by the Missouri ruffians had not resulted in violence on a wide scale. But with the sacking of Lawrence, the Free-State champions now had to face the fact that the pro-slaver forces had teeth and meant business.

"What are we going to do about this, captain?" one of the Pottawatomie Rifles asked John Jr. "We don't have enough men to ride against the Missouri ruffians gathered in Lecompton."

The question perplexed John Jr. for he had no idea what his command should do next. He wished that his father was there and that he had not gone his own way in anger. John Jr. and his command were in need of his father's advice and counsel.

"I'm of a mind to ride back to Prairie City for the rest of the militia and reinforcements that should already be there waiting," John Jr. said.

"Even if the Osawatomie men join up with us," the man said, "We can't stop four hundred Missourians, much less the thousands of southern fighters gathering in Lecompton."

The militia man's concerns hit home with John Jr. because he was of similar opinion.

"We won't accomplish anything by remaining here," John Jr. said.

When John Jr. and the five Pottawatomie Rifles finally reached Prairie City, the Osawatomie men had joined their company as did his brother Jason, who had not gone with his father's small contingent on their secret mission.

Fear and confusion masked the faces of the men as John Jr. detailed the destruction that he had witnessed in Lawrence.

"I think we should remain in the area," John Jr. said, "And offer what protection we can."

“Our own homes might be the next to burn,” one of the men said. “I’ve got a wife and kids to think of.”

“We’ve all got family,” John Jr. said, “But we are stronger riding together than we’d be trying to face the Missourians alone.”

“Why should we risk our lives for the people in Lawrence when their own men won’t lift a finger to defend them?” the man said. “I’m for going home.”

The men grumbled amongst themselves, and John Jr. felt his command crumbling.

“I’m riding to Palmyra to see if there’s any information on Governor Robinson’s whereabouts.” John Jr. said.

He reined his horse toward Palmyra and was relieved to see that most of his men and part of the Osawatomie men followed. The company covered the three miles to Palmyra with hardly a word being spoken. When they arrived, the small town was quiet and no one had any information regarding the whereabouts of Governor Robinson. John Jr. was at a loss as to what his next course of action should be. He believed that sending the men home was the wrong thing to do at the moment. On the way out of Palmyra, they came upon a farm with four Negroes hoeing weeds in a planted field of calf-high corn.

“I’m going to free those men.” John Jr. reined his horse into the field toward the Negroes.

The Negroes continued working but cut their eyes at him from time-to-time, until he rode within yards of where they worked.

“You men are free to go,” John Jr. said “I’ve come to set you free.”

The Negroes never once stopped hoeing and cast confused glances at each other.

“There ain’t no hidin’ place we can go ‘round here where the Doyle slave-catchers can’t bring us back?” one of them said.

“You can come to our settlement and wait there until we can get you to the Underground Railroad,” John Jr. said.

Two of the men looked fearful and unsure.

“You can trust me,” John Jr. said. “Those are my men on the road and they will give you protection.”

One of the men laid down his hoe, and then the others followed his lead. John Jr. turned the horse back toward the road and the Negroes followed.

The remnants of the Pottawatomie Rifles and Osawatomie men had huddled their horses and were engaged in heated conversation upon John Jr.’s approach. Jason had distanced himself from them, and worry wrinkled his forehead.

“That’s nigger stealing,” one of the Osawatomie men said. “We don’t want no part in it.”

“Slavery is a sin against God,” John Jr. said. “I promised these men that they would go free and we’d protect them if need be.”

“Some of us men don’t share your love of niggers,” another Osawatomie man said.

John Jr. looked to the Pottawatomie Rifles. The message written on their rigid faces further disheartened him.

“We think you ought to send ‘em back,” one member of the Pottawatomie Rifles said. “We all agreed that our resistance would not include slave stealing.”

"I'm bound to take them to Brown's Station until their escape can be arranged," John Jr. said.

"We won't ride with you if you do," the Osawatomie man said.

The Pottawatomie Rifles avoided John Jr.'s gaze. The Osawatomie man rode toward the Negroes.

"Y'all go on back before somebody sees you on the road and accuses us of nigger stealing," the Osawatomie man said.

The Negroes turned and trudged back across the field.

At that moment, all of the sleepless nights, stress, sickness, and uncertainty that John Jr. had endured over the past months, seemed to exact their toll. Rendered speechless and suddenly light-headed, he turned his horse for Brown's Station and rode away.

Jason soon caught up with him and they rode side-by-side in silence. The Pottawatomie Rifles and the Osawatomie men followed John Jr. and Jason at a short distance, talking in low tones.

In the space of two miles, John Jr. heard the distant pounding of many horses' hooves coming up from behind.

He turned his horse and waited.

A company of United States Cavalry galloped down on the militia. The Pottawatomie Rifles and the Osawatomie men milled in confusion and some looked as if they would bolt. John Jr. and Jason rode back to join the group.

"I am certain that we have nothing to fear from the U.S. Cavalry," John Jr. said. "Keep your heads about you."

The cavalry stopped just short of the militia and all were enveloped in a cloud of their dust.

"I'm Lieutenant Church," the man said as he slapped the road dust from his shirt with a pair of riding gloves. "Is John Brown among you?"

The militia sat silent.

John Jr. urged his horse to the front of the militia and faced Lieutenant Church.

"I am Captain John Brown, Jr."

"In the name of the United States Government," Church said, "I'm directing you to disband these men immediately."

John Jr. turned back to the militia.

"Go home men," John Jr. said. "We will not defy the U.S. Cavalry."

Most of the Osawatomie men quickly scattered across the fields.

"Where can I find John Brown who I assume is your father?" Lieutenant Church asked.

"He departed from us yesterday on a mission of his own," John Jr. said. "I have no idea as to his whereabouts."

Lieutenant Church rode closer to John Jr.

"If I learn that you have lied to me," the lieutenant said. "I will personally run you through with my sabre."

The lieutenant's harsh words plunged John Jr.'s mind into deeper quandary. He, the Pottawatomie Rifles, and a few Osawatomie stragglers resumed the journey up the road toward Brown's Station.

Not twenty minutes after the cavalry had ridden on, a messenger charged toward the remaining members of the disbanded militia with his horse at a dead run. When the rider got to the men, he slid his tired animal to a halt.

“They went and killed Doyle and his sons, Wilkinson, and William Sherman,” the rider said.

“Who did?” one of the men asked.

“John Brown,” the rider said. “Cut them to pieces with swords.”

John Jr. stared stupidly at Jason, whose mouth gaped in utter shock.

“The pro-slavers will burn us out for sure now!” one of the men screamed. “Why couldn’t your father just leave things be?”

Most of the remaining Pottawatomie Rifles and Osawatomie stragglers kicked their horses into a ground-eating lope, leaving John Jr., Jason, and a few loyal militia men in their dust.

Chapter 24

Captain Henry Clay Pate’s insides thrilled at the prospect of killing John Brown. The gruesome murders of the Doyles, Wilkinson, and William Sherman sent shock waves of fear through the pro-slavery ranks. John Brown had quickly risen to the surface as an unknown and deadly quantity. The pro-slavery cause could ill-afford a counter presence strong enough to ignite the Free-Staters.

Pate’s honor as a southern gentleman, born of Virginia blood, required unflinching displays of bravery and courage in all manly endeavors. Pillaging Kansans, who had no will to fight back, was an endeavor that kept up the morale of his southern recruits, but it was not an exercise befitting a man of his background, military prowess, or education.

The arrest warrants issued from the U.S. Marshal’s office detailed Brown’s brutal murder of five pro-slavery men of good standing in the Pottawatomie community, and the descriptions renewed Pate’s pause.

“Kindly assemble the men,” Pate said to his lieutenant, Brockett.

As Pate waited for Brockett to gather the militia, he studied a map of the area. Pottawatomie was a little more than two days ride from Franklin, and he and his men were camped on the Wakarusa River near Franklin at the moment.

Within minutes, Lieutenant Brockett returned to the tent.

“The men are ready, captain.”

Pate walked out of the tent. The men had assembled in a grassy area near the creek. He walked over and stood at the head of the group.

“I hold in my hand arrest warrants sent down from the U.S. Marshal’s office,” Pate drawled. “Most of the bloody massacre occurred in Pottawatomie.”

Pate read uncertainty in the eyes of his militiamen. They were civilians with a cause and not as competent or manageable as trained military men.

“We must capture or kill the abolitionist killers,” Pate said.

Most of the younger men cheered and waved their rifles and pistols in the air. Shock still registered on a few faces of the older men.

“We will leave within the hour,” Pate said.

“How many of us did they kill?” one of the militiamen asked.

“Five respected leaders of the pro-slavery cause,” Pate responded.

“We huntin’ niggers or white men?” another man asked.

“John Brown is a white man,” Pate said. “The warrants specify that we are to bring him in dead or alive.”

“How’d this John Brown kill ‘em, captain?” a man asked.

Pate was hoping to avoid the explanation of the actual killings until the militia was in the Pottawatomie area and its attention keenly focused on finding John Brown. It was too late for that now. He raised the U.S. Marshal’s warrant in order to read it out loud.

“The five murdered men were dragged from their homes and cut to pieces with broadswords.” Pate lowered the document and gazed at the men.

Eyes stared blankly as each mind imagined its own version of the frightful deaths.

Chapter 25

Toward evening, John Jr., Jason and the loyal, remaining members of the Pottawatomie Rifles and Osawatomie stragglers pulled into Ottawa Jones’ place, which was located just off of the California Road. The men were too tired to ride another mile and the horses jaded.

Although Ottawa wore white man’s clothes, his long silver hair hung to his waist in two braids. His skin was deeply tanned, and his sure step was that of a much younger man. A magnificent looking Indian, he naturally believed in the abolitionist cause.

Ottawa sat on the porch as they rode into his yard.

“Howdy, Ottawa,” Jacob Benjamin said as he rode up to the porch. “Can we bed down here for the night? We’ve been ridin’ hard since morning.”

Ottawa nodded and motioned them toward the barn. They rode to the barn and unsaddled, watered, and fed their horses. Soon a small fire flared, and in minutes the aroma of boiling coffee wafted the yard. The men ate a cold supper of jerked meat and hardtack.

John Jr. and Jason squatted alone in the shade of an old oak tree growing by the side of the cabin, sipping the hot coffee.

“Do you believe he actually did such a terrible thing?” Jason asked, after a while.

“If he did,” John Jr. said, “I think it is good news.”

Jason’s tired eyes widened in disbelief.

“How can you say that?” Jason asked. “They say he killed five men in cold blood.”

John Jr. sighed.

"I know it seems that way," he said. "But you know that father never does anything without a reason, and we came to Kansas knowing that the fight for freedom might come to this."

A board creaked at the end of the porch.

They looked around and Ottawa Jones stood there. The old Indian pulled a cob pipe from his shirt pocket, struck a match, and held the flame over the bowl. After a few quick puffs, the tobacco took, and Ottawa waved out the flame and tossed down the match.

"This John Brown is brave warrior," Ottawa Jones said.

"How can you call him brave?" Jason said. "He murdered five innocent men."

Ottawa took a long draw on the pipe and let the smoke trickle out of the sides of his mouth.

"A war chief must have big vision," Ottawa Jones said. "Young men see only to next day."

"What does that mean?" Jason asked.

"It means father killed those men for an important reason even though we can't see what that reason is," John Jr. said.

"I wish he was here," Jason said. "I really need to talk to him."

"Me too," John Jr. said.

Chapter 26

Captain Henry Pate and his militia had been riding about four hours before they came upon the town of Palmyra, which consisted of a general store, boarding house, saloon, post office, bank, and a dozen cabins. He could tell by the chatter and animation of his men that they wanted to take the town.

Lieutenant Brockett rode up beside him.

"The men want to know if you mind them having a little fun, captain," Brockett said.

"I won't stand in the way of their amusement," Pate said.

Brockett rode back to the men.

With a whoop and a holler the militia kicked their horses into a gallop and rode gleefully into Palmyra.

Pate, being a southern gentleman, much preferred the gallantry of battle and acts of bravery. The destruction and pillaging did not provide him with the same satisfaction that it provided his men. But then, they were not on his level. He condoned and encouraged the ransacking and plundering of Free-State homesteads as a morale booster and to administer a stark lesson to the opponents of slavery.

Chapter 27

John Brown and his small contingent of men slowly navigated the darkness as they moved away from Pottawatomie Creek and headed for the California Road. He and his men had spent the previous night and all the next day near the creek. Now, under the cover of darkness, he hoped to reconnect with John Jr., Jason, and the Pottawatomie Rifles.

When they reached the California Road, a man riding a paint horse rode toward them. The lone rider came on through the darkness with the confidence of one familiar with the area.

“Rides like it might be James Hanway,” Weiner said. “That looks like his old paint horse, too.”

“Call out to him and make sure,” John said.

“Hanway!” Weiner said.

“Is that you, Theodore?” the man asked. “Is it safe for me to come forward? I’m headed home.”

“Come on,” Weiner said.

Hanway was all eyes when he reached them.

“Have you heard any news?” John asked.

Hanway took a long look at John.

“Five men were killed in Pottawatomie last night and your name was mentioned.” Hanway looked like he awaited a response.

“I am seeking the whereabouts of my son John Jr. and his command,” John Brown said.

“I heard they were hold up for the night at Ottawa Jones’,” Hanway said.

John and his men mounted up and traveled the California Road toward Ottawa Jones’ place. The closer they got to Ottawa’s, the more apprehensive John became. He wanted so much for his sons, his eldest in particular, to understand his actions at Pottawatomie. However, he was not confident that any of them would be able to see beyond the cold killing of the five men. Like his father Owen, John had taught his sons the story of Spartacus. He was still not sure that they had grasped the real significance of Spartacus’ revolt against slavery in the Roman Empire and the violence and bloodshed that resulted. He did not hold out much hope that they would understand the why of the Pottawatomie killings.

It was well after midnight before John and his men pulled in at Ottawa Jones’ cabin. The Pottawatomie Rifles were asleep on bedrolls thrown in the yard. A few of the men stirred at the creak of the war wagon and the plod of the hooves, but most appeared dead to their surroundings.

Ottawa Jones stood on the porch in a long nightshirt that fluttered around his thin legs in the breeze.

John climbed down from the wagon and walked to the porch.

“Hello, my friend.” John reached up and shook Ottawa’s hand. “I am seeking my sons, John Jr. and Jason.”

John always had a strong affinity for the Indians and their plight, and he enjoyed their company. He and Ottawa had spent many an evening talking of life, politics, and the bible.

“Your journey has been long,” Ottawa said.

John sensed a deeper meaning to the Indian’s words.

“Yes,” John said. “And it is only the beginning.”

Ottawa jerked his thumb toward the rear of the cabin. "Sons are out back."

John turned to walk to the rear of the cabin but stopped mid-stride.

"How are they?" John asked.

"Much troubled," Ottawa said. "They see with eyes of young men."

John walked around to the rear of the cabin and found his sons asleep by the side of the tool shed. John Jr. sat with his back against the shed wall and his knees draw up to his chest. His lowered head rested on his arms. Jason lay curled into a ball on the ground next to John Jr.

John sat on the ground and watched his sons sleep for a few minutes. Then he prayed. He must have dozed because he opened his eyes from a catnap as one of his sons stirred.

Daylight had begun to flow over the horizon.

"Hello, father," John Jr. said.

Jason sat up immediately.

"Father?" Jason said.

"I trust that you two have fared middling well," John said.

"Were you involved in any of the killing, father?" Jason blurted.

"I did not raise my hand against any one of them," John said, "but I was there and I approved of it."

"I think it was uncalled for and a wicked act," Jason said.

"God is my judge," John shot back. "We were justified under the circumstances."

A commotion near the barn brought them to their feet. When they reached the area, a few of the Pottawatomie Rifles were arguing with the members of John's contingent. Three of the horses being ridden by John's men were recognized as belonging to Wilkinson, Doyle, and William Sherman.

"Them stolen horses are proof that your father and brothers did the killing," George Grant said. "We should turn all you Browns over to the law."

All of the Pottawatomie Rifles were on their feet now, and the anger began to build.

"I resign as your captain," John Jr. said, as he stepped in closer to his father, "And I'd advise you to forget about turning anybody over to the law."

The Pottawatomie Rifles and the Osawatomie stragglers retreated to their horses and began to saddle up. John Jr. and Jason also prepared to leave.

"You boys are welcome to ride with us," John offered to Jason and John Jr.

"I can't ride with you, father," Jason said.

"I'm worried for Wealthy's safety," John Jr. said, "And I need to talk with her about all of this."

John sighed inside and grew deeply perplexed at being shunned by these of his sons. He turned to his men.

"If any man of you has second thoughts about the cause we are fighting," John said, "I shall harbor no ill feelings if you choose to depart."

Chapter 28

Monday, May 26th

John and his little army filed down California Road in search of a secluded place to camp. Near Brown's Station, they encountered a man riding alone. The rider was armed with a rifle, two pistols, and a Bowie Knife. His bedroll was secured behind the saddle cantle, and his saddlebags bulged.

The man recognized John and rode right up to the war wagon.

"Mr. Brown, I'm August Bondi. I heard about the killings on the Pottawatomie and figured you'd be needin' men. I wish to join your outfit."

Bondi was of medium height with thick arms and neck that spoke of great strength.

"I welcome you, Mr. Bondi," John said.

John and his men set up camp in a heavily wooded area on the Vine Branch, which was located about a mile northwest of Brown's Station. It was not yet clear to John what his next course of action should be. The horses were left saddled, the rifles and pistols kept loaded, and the broadswords sharpened for quick action.

Just shy of darkness, grass rustled and a dry branch snapped in the nearby timber. The Brown camp went on instant alert as someone or something walked toward them. All rifles were trained in that direction.

"Hello, the camp!" the voice at the edge of the timber said. "I'm Carpenter of Prairie City."

"You may ride on in," John said. "Keep your hands where we may see them."

Carpenter rode into camp, tied his horse to a sapling, and approached the small fire.

"I've been searching for you all day," Carpenter said.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Carpenter?" John asked.

"Missouri raiders have attacked Palmyra," Carpenter said. "It's just a matter of time before they do the same to Prairie City. They've gone crazy since the killings in Pottawatomie."

John's anger began to rise for he was not in the mood for chastisement from this man or any other.

"I've been appointed by the citizens of Palmyra and Prairie City to ask for your help and protection in the defense of our Douglas County," Carpenter said. "We are at war, and need someone of your experience to protect our interests."

John's spirits soared. He had finally encountered men with a long-enough vision to see that the Pottawatomie killings amounted to more than cold-blooded murder. It also gave him hope that the Free-State men might soon come to the realization that they must fight if they truly wanted Kansas to be a free state.

"We shall do what we can, Mr. Carpenter," John said.

"You might want to camp near Ottawa Creek," Carpenter said. "It's more secluded there. I'll draw you a map."

After Carpenter left, John motioned Owen over to him.

"I'm sending you to find John Jr. and Jason," John said. "Now that the pro-slavery hostilities have escalated, they will be safer riding with us. I would also like to know how the Adairs, Wealthy, and Ellen fare in Osawatomie."

Early the next morning, John's spirits were again lifted when Charles Kaiser and Benjamin Cochran, rode into camp to join him.

Kaiser hailed from Bavaria, and his face was badly scarred.

"I survived many a battle fought with sword and lance," Kaiser said. "As you can see by looking at my face, I did not come through unscathed."

"I am sure that the other men fared much worse," John said. "Where did these battles take place?"

"During the Hungarian Revolution in 1848," Kaiser said.

"What brought you to Kansas?" John asked.

"I have a mining claim near here," Kaiser said.

Benjamin Cochran was a former member of the Pottawatomie Rifles under John Jr.

"I done some thinkin'," Cochran said. "What you and your men did was justified. If somebody don't stand up, we'll lose our state to slaveholders and such."

"Do you bring any information on the Missouri forces?" John asked.

Cochran chuckled, and then spat a brown stream of saliva drawn from the quid packed in his cheek.

"Oh, they're huntin' you somethin' fierce, John Brown," Cochran said, then gazed at James Townsley and Theodore Weiner. "Sorry to report that your homesteads and Weiner's store have been burned. Your families are safe though. I saw to that."

The day wore on and later that night as John and his little army sat around the fire making plans and discussing battle strategy, Owen rode into camp without John Jr. and Jason.

He dismounted, loosened the saddle cinch, slid a feedbag over the horse's ears, and walked to the fire.

John's heart sank. He prepared himself for bad news.

"Are John Jr. and Jason still alive?" John could not wait to ask.

"Yes, father," Owen said. "But they refuse to join with us."

"How's John Jr. holding up under the strain?" John asked.

"He's fit-to-be-tied," Owen said. "The Osawatomie men have threatened to turn him over to the Missourians. He's hiding back in the dark timber above Uncle Samuel's place."

"How are Wealthy and Ellen taking all this?" John asked.

"Hard," Owen said.

John shook his head in exasperation. He had not dreamed that the more difficult the Kansas crusade became, the more the struggles would divided his family.

"And what of Jason?" John asked.

"He's determined to stay at Brown's Station," Owen said. "He hopes the violence will end and we can all go back there and live in peace."

John got up from the fire and quickly walked off into the darkness.

Chapter 29

Thursday, May 29th

Captain Pate halted the militia about a mile from Brown's Station, awaiting the advance scout's return and report.

In a little more than an hour, the scout returned.

"With the exception of one of John Brown's sons," the scout said. "The settlement looks abandoned."

"It might be a trap," Lieutenant Brockett posed.

Pate thought for a moment. His eagerness to capture one of the Browns overrode his caution.

"Let's go get him men," Pate ordered.

When the militia rode into Brown's Station, it had indeed been abandoned.

"Search the cabins for the boy," Pate said.

Within minutes, three of the militia pulled the struggling and screaming boy out of the largest cabin. Then they punched and kicked him into submission.

"Get a rope!" one of the three said.

"No!" the boy cried. "Please don't hang me—please."

A rope was thrown over the thick branch of a tall oak, and the boy was half carried and half dragged over to it. A quick noose had been fashioned and one of the men slipped it over the boy's head.

"No, please." The boy burst into tears. "I had no part in the killing."

Lieutenant Brockett rode up beside Pate.

"Are you sure you want this, captain?" Brockett asked.

"He's an abolitionist," Pate said. "It serves him right to be hung."

"I was just thinking about Governor Shannon's directive to turn all prisoners over to Captain Wood and the cavalry," Brockett said.

Pate hesitated. He had aspirations for higher rank and a bigger command. It would not do for him to allow the militia to hang the boy against the governor's directive.

"Hold on there, men," Pate said.

He rode to the tree.

"Put the irons on and bring him along," Pate said.

"But, captain," one of the men said. "He deserves hanging."

"That is not for us to decide," Pate said. "This man must be turned over to the cavalry."

The militiamen, although unhappy, released the boy, and he fell to the ground onto his face.

Pate dismounted, walked over to the boy and kneeled.

"What is your name?" Pate asked.

"Jason," the boy said.

"Where is John Brown?" Pate asked.

"I don't know," Jason whimpered.

Pate pulled on the noose that was still around Jason's neck.

“I want the truth now, boy,” Pate said. “I just might allow my men to finish what they started.”

“I swear I don’t know,” Jason said.

Brockett rode closer.

“Some of the men said that John Brown has more kin in Osawatomie,” Brockett said.

Pate stood.

“I believe that is where we’ll go next,” Pate said. “Bring this one along.”

“What about the Browns’ cabins, sir?” Brockett asked.

“Burn them to cinders, lieutenant.”

Chapter 30

John Brown’s little army, although well-armed, lacked for fighting men. He had hoped that news of the Pottawatomie incident would bring in large numbers of recruits willing to fight for the Free-State cause. As the days passed, he grew more unsettled about the prospects for a Free-State victory in Kansas.

That evening, Samuel Shore, captain of the Prairie City militia, found his way into Brown’s camp. Captain Shore was a tall, slender man with graying hair and quick intelligent eyes.

“I came to tell you that warrants have been issued for the arrest of you and your men,” Shore said. “You’ve got the U.S. Cavalry, deputy marshals, and the Missouri raiders out looking for you.”

John was not surprised by the news, and he feared only for his sons.

“I have considered the prospect that we may have to leave Kansas and continue our fight elsewhere,” John said.

“You and your men are much too valuable here,” Shore said. “Why not join up with the Prairie City militia and increase all of our chances against the Missourians.”

“I have already made a commitment to defend Palmyra and Prairie City,” John said.

“We both sorely lack for men,” Shore implored. “That’s all the more reason for us to combine forces. Where else can either one of us gather an army?”

“I’ve often thought of raising a Negro insurrection,” John said. “Free Negroes and those in bondage are ready to take action here and in the South. The southerners fighting in Kansas would have to go home and tend to their own slave issues.”

“I doubt whether the Negro has any fighting potential,” Shore said. “They seem to love their masters and display a most peaceful demeanor.”

“I traveled through the South a few years back,” August Bondi chimed in. “I believe the Negro fears the lynch rope too much to raise his hand against the white man.”

"You have not studied the Negro right or long enough," John said to both men. "They are fighters and lack only for a strong leader. Have you not heard of Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, or Toussaint L' Overture?"

Shore shrugged his shoulders.

"Still," Shore said. "An insurrection does not solve the immediate problem of recruiting fighting men."

"One would think that the Kansans would wake up and defend their own interests," John said. "Especially after having their towns and homes plundered and burned, and their livestock stolen."

Their attention was drawn toward the forest.

Frederick walked toward them escorting a smallish, solemn-faced man, who wore a full beard. The man's pant legs were tucked inside his boots and he had a revolver stuck in his belt.

"I found this gentleman wandering the forest about a mile from here, father," Frederick said. "He said he was looking for John Brown."

The curious-looking man walked forward and stood before John and Shore, looking from one to the other.

"I'm James Redpath, reporter for the *New York Times*," the man said. "I've been searching for your camp for some time, Mr. Brown."

John stood, and Redpath's dissecting gaze followed him up to his full height and then settled on him.

John shook the reporter's hand.

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, sir," John said.

His interest peaked because bringing the Kansas plight to the forefront of the national news seemed like a Godsend. Such exposure could not help but attract men and money to the Kansas Free-State cause.

"I heard how you and your seven sons fearlessly drove a wagonload of guns right through the Missouri ruffians' battle lines when they threatened to sack Lawrence the first time," Redpath said.

"I am certain that it wasn't as grand an occurrence as your words imply," John said.

"My very words describing the event came to me directly from an eyewitness account, Mr. Brown," Redpath said. "That subject aside, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the Pottawatomie incident."

"With all due respect, Mr. Redpath," John said, "I will not discuss the Pottawatomie affair. If I am to be arrested and tried for that incident, it would not do for me to engage in a public discussion on the front page of your newspaper."

Redpath smiled and then gazed long at the men standing around Brown's camp. Finally, he turned back to John.

"With all due respect," Redpath said. "How do you expect to best thousands of Missouri ruffians with this ragtag group of men?"

"The Missouri ruffians are men without principles," John said. "Give me a dozen God-fearing men and I would oppose a hundred of such ruffians."

Chapter 31

Pate's militia eagerly surrounded Samuel and Florilla Adair's cabin and trained their rifles on the windows and door.

"Come out with your hands in the air!" Pate said. "You are all under arrest."

The door opened halfway.

"This is the home of the Reverend Samuel Adair," the man standing in the doorway said. "Who is it you seek?"

"John Brown and his sons," Pate responded. "Send them out unarmed, and we will spare your home from the torch."

"There are no men inside this cabin other than myself," Adair said. "I implore your caution as there are women inside who are here seeking refuge."

"We will have to search your home, reverend," Pate said. "If it is as you say, we will leave you in peace."

Pate turned to Brockett.

"Will you do the honors, lieutenant," Pate said. "Take a couple of men with you."

Adair opened the door to Brockett and two militiamen. In little more than a minute, they came back out and signaled the all-clear.

Pate waited until Brockett rejoined the militia.

"Got any ideas on where Brown and his sons would go to hide?" Pate asked Brockett.

"The Tennessee boys think Brown may be hiding in the forest behind the cabin," Brockett said. "Why don't we turn them loose and see if they kick up a track."

"I will let you handle that," Pate said.

While the Tennesseans scoured the forest behind the Adair cabin, Pate and the rest of the militia watered themselves and their horses at the Adair well. Thirty minutes later, a series of three signal shots sent the remainder of the militia racing into the timber.

When Pate reached the five Tennesseans, who had been sent into the forest, a bloody man lay babbling on the ground at their feet.

"I believe your orders were to find a track," Pate said. "Not beat this man silly and unrecognizable. Who is he?"

"Said his name be John Brown Jr.," one Tennessean said. "Don't figure he be lyin'"

"Did any of you bright fellows think to ask about the rest of Brown clan before you half killed him?" Pate asked.

"Said he don't know," another Tennessean said. "Only found one track in this timber."

"Shackle him to his brother and let's get moving," Pate said.

Chapter 32

Saturday, May 31st

Samuel Shore rode into Brown's hidden camp early. There was a sense of urgency about him.

John offered a cup of coffee and Shore accepted.

"I'm afraid I've got bad news," Shore said.

John waited in silence for Shore to pour his coffee.

"Your sons John Jr. and Jason have been arrested by Captain Pate of the pro-slavery militia," Shore said. "Pate was also appointed deputy U.S. marshal, and he's on a rampage arresting any man whom he suspects of Free-State ties."

John's guts tightened.

"Where has Captain Pate taken my sons?" John asked.

"I don't have that information yet," Shore said. "The word is Pate marched your boys down the road in the heat of day, wearing chains like Negro field hands. It was also reported that John Jr. looked to be severely beaten."

John raised his hand to his lowered forehead, closed his eyes, and offered a quick, silent prayer for the safety of his two sons. Then he looked around at the men who made up his small army.

"I fully expected my family to eventually pay some price for our efforts on the side of freedom," John said. "However, this news comes as a very bitter pill."

"I once again ask you to join forces with the Prairie City militia," Shore said. "Pate's men broke into the blockhouse at Palmyra and stole a cache of firearms. The ruffians must be stopped, but I don't have enough men to do it."

"We will fight with you and your men, sir," John said, "I shall await your report on the whereabouts of Captain Pate."

A much elated Shore rode out of Brown's camp.

John's other sons gathered around.

"What's going to happen to John Jr. and Jason, father?" Frederick appeared almost beside himself with concern.

"We must pray for their protection and release," John said.

"I don't understand why the Missourians are so hot against Kansas in the first place," Salmon said. "They are overrunning this state like it belongs to them."

John was in no mood to talk as he considered his son's quandary, but he relented.

"I believe the Missourians are desperate because they own some fifty thousand slaves valued at about twenty-five million dollars," John said. "Missouri is hemmed in by free states on the north and the east, and their slaves are escaping into those states by the hundreds. If Kansas becomes another escape route, it spells the end to Missouri's slave economy."

John walked off into the forest to pray.

Chapter 33

Captain Pate led his disgruntled command along the Santa Fe Trail. Frustration ranged high among the younger men. Youth had rendered them eager to engage

John Brown and his men in battle. Many of the older men rode in silence, almost fearful, like they expected John Brown to leap out from behind every tree and shadow.

The command finally reached Black Jack Creek, which had a history of its own. Travelers to and from the West stopped there because of the sweet, cool water, the talking trees, and the peacefulness that seemed to exude from below ground. Pate hoped that the Black Jack would somehow quell the frustrations and calm the fears of his militiamen.

Pate's command pulled into the grove of trees along Black Jack Creek and began to set up camp. The grumbling among the men had ceased, but discontent was displayed among the younger men by the way they snatched at the tent ropes, tossed the supply boxes haphazardly to the ground, and jerked on the reins of their horses. The older men cast furtive glances at the horizon and constantly checked the bullets in their rifles and revolvers.

Pate's visions of a higher rank and a larger command had begun to fade as his consternation increased at the inability to discover John Brown's hiding place and deliver him to justice, dead or alive. When the camp cooks announced that the victuals were ready, he chose to eat with the men rather than in his tent because he wanted to hear their discussions and gauge the level of their anxiety and frustration.

Supper passed with little or no conversation, but that all changed when the whiskey jugs came out and began making the rounds. He had tried to discourage the over-consumption of whiskey, but to no avail.

If his men had been a regular U.S. military unit, he would have had the real authority to put a stop to the incessant drinking. His control over the volunteer force was loose at best. As he well knew, southern men did not take kindly to infringement on their personal liberties.

Pate went back to his tent and unfolded maps of the area. He desperately needed for tomorrow's search to produce some evidence of Brown's whereabouts if not the man himself. Another day of frustration would only lead to more drinking, and then he'd have to find another Free-State homestead for the men to ransack.

Brockett, his faithful lieutenant, entered the tent.

"How are the men?" Pate asked.

"A few are talking about going out on their own to engage in a little mischief," Brockett said.

"I want it made clear that there shall be no independent forays," Pate said.

"Yes, sir," Brockett said. "I'll be as clear as I can, but you understand—"

"That this is not an official government fighting unit," Pate interjected. "Yes, I understand that perfectly, lieutenant."

Lieutenant Brockett eyes squinted.

"What's eating you, captain?" Brockett asked.

Pate gazed at his lieutenant.

"Why haven't we found any trace of this John Brown character?" Pate asked.

Brockett took a moment to think.

"My brother-in-law once hunted an old Grizzly Bear," Brockett said. "He never could get a glimpse of that old bugger or even cross a paw print. One night, he found out why but it was too late then."

Pate stared at Brockett, his full attention gotten.

"The old bear had been tracking him," Brockett said. "Without warning, all eleven-hundred pounds and ten-feet tall of this monster roared into camp when my brother-in-law least expected it."

The hair stood up on the back of Pate's neck.

"And your brother-in-law?" Pate asked.

"He lived," Brockett said. "But the old bear clawed out one of his eyes and bit his arm in two."

Pate shook his head to remove the horrible scene that his imagination had lodged in his mind.

"Wonderful story, lieutenant," Pate said. "Precisely what is the point you are trying to make?"

"If you stop moving around and wait in one spot," the lieutenant said. "John Brown will likely find you. Particularly since you've captured two of his sons."

Pate unfolded another map and pretended to study it, but his mind was far from the page.

Brockett lit a cigar and soon the rich aroma spread through the tent.

"What drives a white man like man John Brown to be an abolitionist?" Pate asked after a while. "Negroes are right happy doing for the white man and couldn't survive on their own even if we were to set them all free this moment."

Brockett scratched his head and then combed his fingers through his dark hair.

"I don't rightly know," Brockett said. "Owning slaves flows in our blood. That's all we and them boys out there have known, even unto our grandfathers and greats. Working a slave is as natural to us as saddling a horse to ride across a field or hitching a mule to a plow."

"But why is he so against slavery to the point where he'll mutilate five of his own race for niggers he doesn't even know?" Pate asked.

Brockett took a long pull on the cigar, and then blew the smoke toward the ceiling canvas.

"John Brown is surely out there somewhere asking why we white men came from every corner of the South to fight and die in Kansas for a bunch of niggers we don't even know," Brockett said.

Pate's anger flamed and he frowned at Brockett's words.

"It's to save a way of life that's near and dear to us all," Pate said. "If you can't—"

"I'm with you, captain," Brockett said. "And so are the men out there. You asked me some hard questions about John Brown and I gave you the best answers I could."

Brockett got up and pushed back the tent flap to leave.

"Lieutenant," Pate said.

"Yes, sir," Brockett answered.

"Double the night guard until further notice," Pate said. "And have the wagons moved to shield the open area to the northwest."

Chapter 34

John Brown sat before the campfire, staring into the flames. His heart was heavy for John Jr. and Jason.

His father Owen's words came back to him.

'The path of your duty is to submit yourself totally and cheerfully to God believing that He will do right.'

John's spiritual side understood and accepted the duty that God had placed upon his heart, but his human side had a big problem with the fact that his sons had been captured and subjected to ill treatment. For all he knew, both could be dead.

"Father, Captain Shore has returned."

John looked up at Frederick and then to Shore standing behind.

"What news have you brought, Mr. Shore?" John asked.

"Pate's men were seen on the Santa Fe Trail heading for Black Jack Creek," Shore said.

"How many men ride with him?" John asked.

"Seventy or eighty," Shore responded.

"We will join you at Prairie City in the morning," John said.

John and his small army worked through the night making preparations for war. The next morning, he climbed aboard the war wagon and the men mounted up. The Brown fighting contingent consisted of Owen, Salmon, Oliver, Frederick, son-in-law Henry, August Bondi, Charles Kaiser, Theodore Weiner, and James Townsley.

When they arrived in Prairie City, Samuel Shore and two boys met them on the street in front of the old log church.

"We captured two of Pate's men not an hour before you arrived," Shore said. "The third man escaped."

"What information did the two provide as to the location of Pate's men?" John asked.

"They confirmed that Pate is indeed camped at Black Jack Creek," Shore said. "Another group of Pate's men apparently came into town earlier this morning or late last night and took Dr. Graham and Preacher Moore prisoner. These two boys are Moore's sons and they came to ride with the militia."

"We have to attack them now and get our pa back," the eldest looking of the Moore boys said.

"I believe that we would fare better to move into Black Jack Creek under the cover of darkness and attack at dawn," John said.

"I agree," Shore said.

"But why?" the eldest Moore boy asked.

"Because the man who escaped will surely alert Captain Pate," John said. "If Pate is a true military man, he will be ready for us. We must use the element of surprise."

The Moore boys walked away dissatisfied and close to tears.

John took out his map and spread it over the war wagon's tailgate.

"I would like you to carefully describe the layout of the land surrounding Black Jack Creek," John said.

"You need to know that since the Pottawatomie affair," Shore said. "The whole of southeastern Kansas has come under attack by the southern forces. Work has been suspended and the conditions amount to a state of war."

"It is the will of God," John said.

Shore stood before the map and studied it a moment. Then he moved his finger in a circle over the land on the map that surrounded the Black Jack Creek.

"The whole area is some of the highest ground in these parts," Shore said. "Pate and his men couldn't have picked a better place to defend."

"Why is that?" John asked.

"The creek is surrounded by a grove of Black Jack Oak on the west, south, and east," Shore continued, "Leaving us with no choice but to attack from the north. We'll be moving down an open hill that slopes into the fire of Pate's guns."

"Am I correct to assume that there will be no cover from Pate's fire on any part of the hill?" John asked.

"Midway down the slope," Shore said. "Heavy rains have washed deep gullies into the trail where the old wagon ruts used to be. There's taller grass at the foot of the slope and a few more ruts, and you've got ravines that branch off from the creek itself."

Chapter 35

Captain Pate listened intently as the excited militiaman described his narrow escape from the abolitionists in Prairie City.

"If this were the regular army, sir," Pate said. "I would have you court-martialed for disobeying my orders. Your antics have undoubtedly made our position known to the abolitionists and therefore have jeopardized our mission."

"We was just having a little fun, captain," the man said. "It won't happen again."

"Please remove your person from my sight," Pate said, "and remember that although I can't court-martial you, I can eliminate a problem by other means at my disposal."

The man appeared undaunted.

"What do you mean by 'eliminate'?" the man asked.

"You know full well what I mean," Pate said. "Now get out."

The militia man left the tent, and Pate summoned Brockett.

"I must assume that the captured men have disclosed our position to the abolitionists," Pate said. "We must prepare for the skirmish that will surely come. If John Brown is foolish enough to attack, I wish to afford him no means of escape."

"When do you wish the men deployed, captain?" Brockett asked.

"Immediately, lieutenant," Pate said. "There is not time to waste."

"With all due respect, captain," Brockett said. "I can't see the abolitionists risking a daylight attack."

“Why not?” Pate asked.

“The slope is the only way down to the creek,” Brockett said. “It leaves them exposed to our sharpshooters. They also have to know that we’ll be waiting for them.”

“You give the abolitionists too much credit, lieutenant,” Pate said. “So far they have proven themselves contemptible cowards, afraid to fight even when their homes and towns are being destroyed right before their eyes.”

“I don’t think I’d put John Brown in the coward category just yet,” Brockett said.

“It was a cowardly act to kill those men in cold blood the way he did,” Pate said. “It shall be to my credit and honor to deliver his person to Captain Wood and the U.S. Cavalry.”

“I wonder how many men John Brown has riding with him?” Brockett asked.

“According to the report on the Pottawatomie massacre,” Pate said. “He can’t possibly have more than ten or twelve at the most. I’m certain that we have more than enough men and firepower to turn back any attack John Brown can lodge.”

“He did commit the acts at Pottawatomie under cover of darkness,” Brockett said.

“All right, lieutenant,” Pate said. “Prepare the men for a daylight attack, and then take whatever precautions you deem necessary for a night attack.”

Chapter 36

At 10 o’clock p.m., John Brown, recently appointed captain by his men, and Shore set out from Prairie City for Black Jack Creek with their combined fighting forces. The journey was little more than three miles.

Brown’s total force numbered fifteen men, having been recently reinforced by the addition of Dr. Westfall, Benjamin Cochran, O. A. Carpenter, and Preacher Moore’s two sons. Shore’s militia numbered twenty men.

The small army traveled across the rolling prairie rather than risk the Santa Fe Trail, where they were apt to be spotted by Pate’s scouts and lookouts.

The quarter moon was sufficient light for men accustomed to riding at night, and the horses’ night vision allowed them to avoid the pitfalls that the men failed to see. Progress was necessarily and intentionally slow.

Brown and Shore’s forces set aside most of the night to cover the short distance to Black Jack and plan for the battle. The only sound to be heard was the occasional strike of a shod hoof against a stone and the creak of saddle leather.

It was decided in advance among the men, that Brown would command the combined forces during the actual battle. Brown had not fully formulated or disclosed his battle plan to anyone, other than to specify the dawn attack. He preferred to see the terrain with his own eyes before making any tactical decisions.

At about midnight, Brown’s army had slowly wound its way to within half a mile of Black Jack Creek. They stopped near a clump of oak brush and sparse Black

Jack Oaks. The only landform that now separated them from Pate's force was the crest of the Santa Fe Trail.

The little army dismounted, left the cinches tight, and tied the horses to the trees and brush. John then gathered the men.

"Captain Shore and I will climb to the top of the trail for a look," John said. "We will have a better idea of how Pate's forces are situated after that. From this moment forward, we must be prepared to carry the battle to the enemy."

Fortunately for John and Shore, the quarter moon had moved across the sky enough to render the bottom half of the hill pitch black. The two captains clung to the darkness as they ascended to the crest. When they reached the moonlit portion of the climb, they crawled on their bellies to the top.

Pate's camp lay quiet. The flames of several campfires cast eerie shadows into the trees and over the open plains.

"How many men was Pate said to have at his command?" John whispered.

"At least seventy," Shore answered. "Why?"

"I count, maybe, forty," John said.

Chapter 37

1:00 A.M., June 2nd

Captain Pate sat in the tent rationalizing about an old Grizzly Bear. He squeezed the butt of his Navy revolver for reassurance, and then chided himself for the chilling feeling that momentarily moved up the back of his neck. He reminded himself that he was an educated, southern gentleman with honor and vastly capable of besting John Brown and his rabble.

The tent flap parted and Brockett walked in.

"What's it looking like out there, lieutenant?" Pate asked. "Have you seen any Grizzlies?"

Brockett chuckled nervously.

"My brother-in-law said he didn't see it until he smelled the hot stench of its decayed breath as it lunged for his face," Brockett said.

"For God's sake, man. I only inquired as a joke."

Pate walked to the whiskey bottle on the table, poured three fingers of straight Kentucky Bourbon and tossed the golden liquid down his throat.

"I moved the four supply wagons a few yards farther out onto the prairie away from the ravine," Brockett said. "I've got five sharpshooters with rifles in each wagon. Another twenty men are hiding in the ravines and behind the trees surrounding the creek."

"Well done, lieutenant," Pate said.

Chapter 38

3:15 A.M., June 2nd

John Brown assembled the combined forces at the bottom of the hill and outlined his battle plan.

“The horses will be left in the brush under the guard of my son Frederick and three men from Captain Shore’s company,” John said. “The remainder of us will climb to the crest of the hill together. My men and I will take the center position. Captain Shore’s men will flank us, eight on one side and nine on the other. When we get to the moonlit portion of the climb, we will get down on our bellies and crawl. We will wait below the crest until there’s just enough shooting light. I will give the command to commence firing. Is it all very clear?”

The men had no questions. The air was charged like the moment just before lighting strikes.

“All right let’s move,” John said. “Keep pace with me.”

Climbing slowly and easily, the little army reached the point just below the crest of the hill and settled into position at about 3:30 a.m.

At close to 4:00 a.m., a sliver of light appeared on the eastern horizon. Pate’s supply wagons, the trees, and sleeping men began to stand out in the fragile-gray, early-morning light.

“Check your weapons and prepare to attack on my order,” John whispered down the lines.

Fifteen minutes later, John stood and quietly levered a shell into his Sharps Rifle.

“Let no man be faint of heart,” John said. “Now follow me and watch your step.”

Rifles cocked, almost in unison, on both sides of him. He jogged down from the crest of the hill, and the little army kept pace with him.

They hadn’t gone twenty yards when shots rang out from Pate’s camp. Brown’s little army fired volley after volley as all of the men started to run down the hill.

Suddenly the canvas was thrown back from the supply wagons and Pate’s sharpshooters began firing.

“Get down!” John cried.

The men ducked into the knee high grass growing halfway down the hill, training their return fire on the supply wagons.

After weathering ten minutes of steady, return-fire, Pate’s sharpshooters abandoned the supply wagons and sprinted for the Black Jack Oaks.

John paused to reassess the situation.

All the men in his group were still with the fight as were Shore and a couple others, but most of Shore’s men did not make the charge down the hill as agreed. They remained crouched at the crest, firing long-range shots that had little or no effect.

“Keep up your fire,” John said to his group. “I must go back for the others.”

John ran back up the hill to Shore’s men.

“Stop wasting your ammunition,” he said.

A few of Shore’s men sat in the grass trying to clear jammed rifles. The ones that weren’t firing gaped stupidly down the hill at the other men.

“Why didn’t you stay with us?” John asked. “We need you down there?”

"I'm just a farmer," one man said.

John could read uncertainty and fear in the eyes of Shore's men as they watched the fight taking place on the slope below.

Disgusted, John left Shore's men on the crest of the hill and ran back down the slope. When he reached his men, he raised his rifle into the air.

"Follow me!" he yelled.

John charged farther down the slope and dived into a gully wash. His men followed and leapt into the wash beside him. From there, they kept up a continuous volley of deadly fire. As the battle raged, John began to pass up and down the lines, shouting encouragement to his men. He came upon Dr. Westfall tending to Henry, who looked to be in a bad way.

"He's been shot through the lungs," the doctor said. "I'll do what I can for him."

John touched Henry's arm and nodded encouragement.

He next found Carpenter, who had a bullet lodged in his shoulder.

The battle had raged for two hours when Shore crawled into the gully wash next to John.

"I sent two men for help and ammunition," Shore said.

"If I am not mistaken," John said. "I believe Pate's men are falling back."

"Look!" Shore cried.

Dr. Graham, one of the Free-State men taken captive by Pate's forces near Prairie City, ran through the grass toward them.

"He's escaped," Shore said.

Dr. Graham stumbled and half fell into the gully wash next to John.

"Keep on shooting," Dr. Graham said. "They're beginning to weaken, and a goodly number have already escaped through the forest."

John's spirits soared.

"Who among us is a crack shot?" John asked Shore.

"Carpenter," Shore said.

"But he's been hit in the shoulder," John said.

"Try him anyway," Shore said.

John crawled back through the gully washes until he reached Carpenter.

"Pate's men are escaping into the forest," John said. "Can you bring down the remaining horses and mules?"

Carpenter looked across the battlefield into the trees.

"I reckon so," Carpenter said.

Carpenter raised the peep sight on his Sharps Rifle. With one arm he levered a cartridge and took aim, balancing the rifle barrel on John's shoulder.

"Try not to kill any men," John said. "It appears that we have them on the run and they may give up."

After firing six shots, Carpenter had dropped six horses and mules. Pate's men rushed about in a state of panic. Pounding hooves coming from behind made John jerk around.

Frederick charged down the hill with his horse at a dead run.

"Reinforcements are here!" Frederick yelled. "We have them surrounded, father!"

Frederick continued that cry all the way down the slope, and then he started back up again.

John watched the hill crest, expecting more volunteers to come storming over any second now, but there were none.

“Can you see the reinforcements?” Carpenter asked. “I don’t think I can shoot another horse.”

“No,” John said. “I believe it must have been a ruse because reinforcements surely could not have arrived so soon.”

“I hope the trick works,” Carpenter said. “I’m in need of a doctor.”

Chapter 39

Pate crouched behind a tree reloading his Sharps Rifle when he observed Brockett crawling through the grass toward him. The firing on both sides had slowed from the deafening volleys of the early battle.

“Captain,” Brockett said. “Most of our men have deserted through the forest.”

“How many are left?” Pate asked.

“Twenty or so,” Brockett said. “The attackers have shot most of the horses and there is little chance for escape.”

Pate laid down his rifle and gazed around at the remaining men. He felt numb.

“Perhaps we should surrender,” Brockett said.

“We can’t surrender,” Pate said. “If that’s John Brown out there, he and his rabble will not honor a military flag of truce.”

“It’s worth a try,” Brockett said. “The way I see it, we have no choice. The enemy just got reinforcements and we’re surrounded.”

Pate felt lightheaded with fear, his visions of fame and glory gone. Surrendering to John Brown would mark the end to his military career and certainly to his life for he had captured two of Brown’s sons and burned their claims on North Middle Creek.

“All right, lieutenant,” Pate said. “Do what you must.”

Chapter 40

“Look there.”

Carpenter pointed toward Pate’s camp.

A boy stood behind one of the Black Jack Oaks, waving a white flag of truce.

“Cease fire!” John called out.

Peace suddenly returned to Black Jack Creek as all shooting stopped.

John stood and motioned the truce bearer forward.

The boy stepped from behind the tree and another man came with him.

“He’s got Preacher Moore,” Shore said.

John walked down the remainder of the slope and met the truce bearer. Preacher Moore continued on up the slope to his two sons.

The truce bearer trembled with fear.

"If you're John Brown," the boy said. "Please don't kill me. I was sent to surrender."

"I am certain that you are not Captain Pate," John said.

The wide-eyed boy shook his head no.

"Are you really John Brown?" the boy said, his fear giving way to curiosity.

"I am," John said. "I will only accept surrender from your captain. Tell him he has five minutes."

"I'll fetch him if you promise not to shoot me in the back," the boy said.

"You have my word," John said.

The boy backed away from John for a few yards, then turned and sprinted into the Black Jack Oaks.

Within the five minutes, a dark haired man of medium height and gentlemanly bearing walked out of the trees dangling the flag of truce from his right hand. The man walked slowly up to John. The flag slipped from the man's grasp and fell into the grass.

"Are you Captain Henry Clay Pate?" Brown asked.

"Yes," the man said. "I am a deputy U.S. Marshal acting under orders of—"

"I understand exactly what you are and do not wish to hear any more about it," John said. "Is it your intent to surrender, sir?"

Pate's mouth moved but no words came out. He turned and looked perplexingly back down the hill toward Black Jack Creek and the remnants of his fighting men.

"Are you the Grizzly Bear?" Pate asked.

John's eyes narrowed in confusion.

"I am John Brown."

Pate turned back and studied him.

"Can you give us fifteen minutes more?" Pate asked.

John drew his revolver, and Pate's eyes enlarged.

"I knew better than to surrender to the likes of you," Pate said. "Go ahead and shoot."

John leveled his revolver at the pro-slavery captain.

"You are my prisoner, sir," John said.

John's army spread out behind him.

With John's revolver pressed against Pate's spine, the beaten captain walked into the oak grove to his men.

"Tell them to lay down their guns," John said.

"I refuse to give such an order just so you can kill us all in cold blood," Pate said.

Brown clapped his pistol to the back of Pate's head.

"You have ten seconds to give the order," John said. "I assure you that I will not hesitate to open your skull with a bullet."

"Y'all lay down your weapons," Pate said.

Pate's southern fighters dropped their weapons, and Brown's army moved forward and collected them.

"I'll have your revolver and that Bowie Knife on your belt," John said to Pate.

Pate surrendered both weapons.

"What will you do with us now?" Pate asked.

“I intend to exchange you and your men for my two sons, whom you personally captured,” John said. “If they are dead, sir, that will also be your fate.”

“You can’t defeat the forces of slavery even if you kill me,” Pate said.

“This battle and your surrender have proven that slavery is not invincible, sir,” John said. “I have struck a telling blow here in Kansas and I will soon strike another in the very heart of slavery.”

