

Bloody Kansas
A Tragedy of the Old West

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Preface

Thank you, kind reader, for taking a chance on an underground eBook. Please know that this work was written, edited and typeset without any involvement whatsoever from any faceless corporations or for-profit ventures of any kind. With the exception of Microsoft Word, all software used in the creation of this document is 100% open-source, and as a wise man once said, God bless the internet. Just clicking on this innocent PDF constitutes a leap of faith on your part, and I thank you for it from the bottom of my heart.

This work is a labor of love. It is 3 years in the making, and I have endeavored to pour every ounce of my intellect, my heart and my soul into it. It is many things. It is an attempt to teach a little US History in a manner it is hoped the audience will find enjoyable. It is the culmination of 23 years of practicing my very favorite hobby, writing fiction. Most importantly, it is an act of spirituality. This book is my prayer, and these are my confessions.

Thanks without measure are owed to so many, and there is only space here for a very few. First of all, a big thank you is owed to my best friend Michael Jaglarz for his encouragement and support over the last 14 years of my life. Thanks are also owed to Dr. Kavita Pandit, Dr. David Roberts, and Dr. Denise Wright of the University of Georgia for being such wonderful teachers and showing me how truly satisfying a life of the mind can be. Last but not least, I shall be forever grateful to Illona Stewart, the wonderful woman in my life, for all of her love and support when I needed it the most. I love you dearest. It can never be said enough, thank you.

Writing fiction is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, and it is also the most rewarding. Certainly there will be many who disagree with the message contained herein, but I hope my friends of differing opinions can at least appreciate the spirit of good citizenship and love for all of humanity in which these words have been spoken. I have enjoyed writing this book very much, and I certainly hope you enjoy reading it.

Farley W. Jenkins, Jr.
Athens, GA
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Prologue

The Story Fire

Somewhere In the West

Autumn of 1893

The story fire was lit, and it soon began to hold the darkness at bay. The face of the wise elder soon came into view against the backdrop of the cold but crisp and clear night sky. Everywhere the tall trees stood watch over the last of the tribe, like sentinels sent down from Heaven with orders from the Great Father to stand watch over them. It had been three years since a Cherokee had dared shoulder weapons in defiance of the white government. These five were the last of their tribe who had not agreed to be penned up in a reservation and live the white man's way, although they knew it not.

A father and his three sons cast a forlorn gaze to the eldest and wisest of their remnant. For years they had lived a hand to mouth existence, for everywhere they went they were not wanted. White men were fearful and suspicious of them, as if at any moment they would burst into wildness and start slaughtering their children and taking scalps. Red men were too frightened of drawing a watchful white gaze to have anything to do with them. They were tired, they were hungry, they were lonely, and they could never hope to pass on their way of life. Once they finally collapsed, their particular species would be extinct forevermore.

In his wisdom, the elder knew what his tribe needed to bear up under the heavy burden. It was a story, for the story makes real the longings of the soul. The story brings to light that which dwells in the darker realms of one's being. It is that which leads one to look within and find the light of the Great Father to illuminate the way through the wilderness. The tribe came to their elder with questions.

“Father, why does the white man hate us so? Why does he fight with us until we cannot go on and must lie down before him? Why is it so important to keep the Cherokee ways from passing on into the spirit realm? Has their time not passed? Why is it that you say this is worth paying any price, even if it is our own lives?”

The elder drew in a deep breath. His son had asked a valid question that he, as the tribe’s guardian of wisdom, was obligated to answer, even if it was beyond his ability to do so. He looked up to the Heavens, towards He who created wisdom, and then he looked back down to his family that he might share his prayer with them.

“My son, the white man is not so different from you and me. They, too, come before their Father with questions and seek that which is right and good. However, while we seek only what is right for the Cherokee, they seek to impose their right upon the whole of the world. We, the Cherokee, live surrounded by life and we learn from Creation. We know that just as the way of the bird is not good for the badger, neither is the way of the white man good for the Cherokee. They, however, have built a dead world that has blinded them to the ways of life. So, they have taken up the ways of death.

“The white man has a saying, ‘The road to Hell is paved with good intentions.’ The best and truest friend I have ever known was a white man. He was a great seer of visions. He spoke with the Great Father and returned from Heaven with stories of such wisdom that he inspired an army of followers of many colors and stations in life to shoulder heavy and terrible burdens and follow him. He, too, followed the path of the story fire, but in the end, he lost his way...”

Chapter 1

The Father

Boston, Massachusetts

Spring of 1858

The Reverend Doctor Esau Channing was a man with no time for a lot of things. He had no time for rest; there was simply too much work to do. He had no time for waste or for wastrels; God had simply provided too much for fools to squander away. He had committed his life to the church, but he soon found that he had no time for his church. So he committed his life to the study of what is right and good for all. He was completely committed to God, but God's price is time. Though he left his father and mother to cling to his wife as he had been instructed, he soon found that he had no time for his family.

He was rarely at home when his son Jacob was growing up. Even when he was home, he was always in his study consumed by his books. He had no time to play with his boy. He had no time for play or for the things of childhood period. His business was too important; Esau had to save the world. Too many men had become lazy, growing fat off the fruits of others' labor so they could spend their time whiling away the idle hours sitting in the shade and sipping mint juleps. Slavery, alcohol, the tyranny that allowed men to profit from the labors of another, all of these evils had to be swept away to make the world ready for the coming of the Lord's kingdom.

Raised only by his mother, the boy grew soft and Esau had no time for either of them. Jacob developed his fathers love for books, and he was soon to be found invading his fathers study in search of reading material. He was quickly

banished, as Esau had no time to waste instructing the youngster in the proper use of books. He developed his father's love of the church, and went with his mother every Sunday while Esau stayed behind to prepare his next lecture. He developed his father's love of freedom, and began attending Abolition Society meetings at a very young age.

Indeed, Jacob's apple seemed to have fallen miles away from Esau's tree. He had time for everything. He had time to feed every animal that wandered into the neighborhood until he had soon collected his own private menagerie. He had time to talk to every stranger he encountered on the street, so eager he was to hear all of the world's stories. He had time for King Arthur, Robin Hood and every other silly little story for boys he came across. Many times he tried to talk to his father and hear his story, only to be shooed away. Esau simply had no time for the boy's daydreaming.

But in the fullness of time Jacob grew into a man much like his father. His sense of right and wrong was absolute, and his moral compass always pointed the way north. He followed in his father's footsteps, first into Harvard University and later into Harvard Divinity School. From the pulpit, Jacob developed a style not unlike his father's, as his right was always right and his wrong was always wrong. But his manner of speaking was different in many other ways, for Jacob's sermons were gentle, loving, and embracing. Although Esau would never say so, he was pleased to see his son come into his own. If he had wanted a machine, then he would have constructed one.

So after many years of hard and careful study, the day had finally come to pass that Jacob should take up his inheritance. Esau walked at a brisk pace through the crowded streets of Boston and through the doors of the Federalist Street Unitarian Church. Today was the day he would give to his son his blessing, and ordain him as a minister of the Unitarian Church like his father and grandfather before him. A rare smile just barely turned up the corners of the lips of the Reverend Doctor Esau Channing. For in his son he was well-pleased, although the good doctor would never find the courage to say as much to him.

Chapter 2

The Son

Morning had broken, and dawn's early light banished the darkness from the sanctuary of the Federalist Street Unitarian Church. Jacob had been there all night. On his knees he held an unwavering vigil. He prayed without ceasing that God would take away all of his imperfections and shape him into an instrument of His divine will. For try as he might, Jacob simply could not escape the doubt that plagued his mind and slowly chewed away at his heart. He was not worthy. He was not worthy to preach the Word and he was not worthy to receive his father's inheritance, and there was no denying that fact.

But the doubt that seemed so complete by the darkness of night just seemed to melt away like snow in the springtime once sunrise was upon him. Jacob knew that the Light of the world dwelt within the hearts of each and every human being. One only needed to have faith in order to let it come shining through. For faith brought hope, and hope brought love. It was Love that had the power to reveal to man his true nature. They were beings of light, all of them, and this crude matter was nothing but an illusion. It was nothing but the play of light upon water. Jacob knew, and he wept at the beauty of the revelation. His faith had been rewarded.

The massive wooden door to the church creaked open, and through the portal came his father. Jacob finished his nightlong prayer and rose to meet his patriarch. Esau was a great bear of a man, who towered over his son with red hair that smoldered as if it were made of fire. Jacob by contrast was a short thin wisp of a man with blond locks that appeared so gentle it was almost as if they were not even there. He walked over to his father and began to say hello, but before he could even open his mouth Esau embraced his son for the first time in his life. Again,

Jacob wept. Esau held his son at arms length that he might behold him.

“You have done well son. You have worked hard and you have achieved. Today is your day, and you deserve it.” Jacob glanced down for a moment, for he couldn’t quite bring himself to believe the truth of the words that had just been spoken.

“I have tried father. I tried so hard to live up to what you expect of me.” Esau was not one to miss an opportunity to lecture his son.

“Do not sell yourself short Jacob. You have proven yourself, and now the real work begins.”

Knowing that this was all the approval he was likely to get, Jacob smiled and clasped his father on the arm. He knew that the work he had done to reach this crowning achievement had been the easy part. Now it came time for the hard part. He must accept it.

But his father was not the only one to come share in Jacob’s boundless joy on that happiest of occasions. One by one, they came through the door. One by one, they lined up to congratulate him, and to tell Jacob that they loved him. One by one, they took him by the hand and shared in his triumph. One by one, his father took their hands in his firm and overpowering grasp and thanked them at length. One by one, Jacob let his hand be held and responded to his well-wishers with little more than mute meekness. Although he was a man of words, on this occasion he found that he had very few. One by one, they gave Jacob a look of understanding and took their place in the pews.

At long last, the moment had arrived. Esau stepped up to the pulpit to welcome the assembled congregants, and Jacob took a chair by his fathers side. He felt his heart threatening to leap right out of his throat as he looked out at all of the people he loved most in this world. In the front row sat his mother, without whose love and compassion he would never have found the courage to stand up to a harsh and cruel world. Beside her was his friend Ruth, who had hardly left his side throughout all of his years at Harvard. By her sat Peter, who had been his best friend since boyhood. Jacob wished for all the world that he could just leap right off the stage and into their loving arms, but he knew that the ceremony commanded respect.

His father went on at length, as his father was a man who went on at length. He spoke of the duties of fatherhood, of how a minister must always be a good father to his flock. He spoke of how taking up his father's work was the highest aspiration of any son. He spoke of immortality, of how a man's words could never truly die if there came another who became the message. He spoke, and he spoke, and then he spoke some more. For three solid hours his audience endured him, as any who knew Esau Channing knew that whenever he opened his mouth one had best be prepared to listen for a very long time. Finally the moment came when Jacob rose. Esau laid hands on him and gave his blessing, and at long last he presented to the world the Reverend Jacob Channing. Hands trembling with the tremendous weight of responsibility, Jacob rose to the pulpit with great expectations for his time in the sun.



Chapter 3

The Romantic

Ruth Qualman was a long suffering woman. She had been quite taken with young Jacob ever since the day her father, a professor of Rhetoric at Harvard, brought home his brilliant young protégé to meet their family. She was astounded at the gift of this young man who, at the age of nineteen, could make an argument so convincing that lawyers three times his age were unable to refute him. He was so very much like her father, as his words seemed to draw every ear within range of them. But at the same time, Jacob was very much unlike her father. His words were tempered by compassion and understanding; they lacked the demanding and uncompromising quality of her father's words.

Ruth quickly found herself falling under the spell of young Jacob. She hardly left his side throughout all of his days at Harvard, as every time he spoke she wished to be there that she might drink in every word and be intoxicated by them like wine. Every time he spoke she gazed straight into his eyes that she might see the soul from which these beautiful words proceeded. But Jacob would not meet her gaze, and he kept his soul hidden away. Ruth soon realized that her love for Jacob gentle and mild knew no bounds. She also realized that this love would only lead her into suffering, for Jacob's love of the world knew no bounds.

Ruth had always found Esau's words every bit as harsh and unyielding as her own father's, but she endured them. She had come to hear Jacob speak on his day of days, and for that she was willing to pay any price. She applauded with the others and felt her eyes well up with tears when she saw Jacob finally receive that for which he had labored so long and so hard. When Jacob stepped up to the pulpit she found herself leaning forward as expectantly as any young hopeful waiting to

hear her hero speak.

“Thank you, father, for your words of wisdom, and thank you all for coming. I have heard from many of you today words that lead me into questioning. You say that I am good, and I ask you why, for the goodness within me is but a reflection of the goodness that has been shown to me. You say that I am kind, and again I ask you why, for one can never show kindness until one has felt kindness. You say that I am loving, and again I ask you why, for the love I feel began from without, not from within. As a wise man once said, one candle lights another, and it takes but one small candle to hold back the darkness. Indeed, it is not my achievements that you have come here to celebrate but your own. God lifts those who lift one another. My love is the love that has been revealed to me, and if I have seen farther than others, then surely it is because I stand upon the shoulders of giants. Thank you.”

The gathered celebrants rose to their feet. They gave Jacob warm smiles and even warmer applause. The applause lasted for a long time, as Jacob was a man beloved by many. Many in the crowd could be seen shaking their heads and muttering to one another in disbelief that he who had spoken the least had said the most, but that is exactly what had just happened. Esau the officiator returned to the pulpit to find he had to wait a while for the applause to die down enough for his words to be heard once more. He thanked the assembled well-wishers once again and gave to them his dismissal. The crowd rose to their feet once again, some still shaking their heads in amazement.

A line formed near the pulpit once again, as all felt the need to give Jacob’s hand a good hearty pumping and express their great appreciation for the kind words he had just spoken. Esau took a place by the side of the now Reverend Jacob Channing, but this time he found himself the subject only of polite nods. At the end of the line stood Peter and Ruth, for they wished to have time enough to express their renewed sense of affection for their best and truest friend.

Finally Ruth’s time came and again she took Jacob by the hand. “Jacob that was wonderful! It was so stirring and touching; it moved me nearly to tears.”

Jacob dropped his hand and gave his friend a beaming smile. “Thank you Ruth. As always you are too kind to me. We haven’t spoken in a while, how have you been?”

“Very well, I just read the most wonderful book. Tell me, have you read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*?”

Jacob’s mouth opened in an O of surprise, as he had finished the book only recently and been moved all the way to tears by it. He glanced over at Peter by her side. His nodding and earnest expression told Jacob all that he needed to know. Both of his friends had heard the call to action as well. The feeling of fellowship and comradeship rose up, and it was shared. “Don’t go anywhere, either of you. We simply must discuss this.”

One by one, they left by the way they had come. One by one, Jacob wished them well. One by one, Jacob said goodbye and promised they would see one another again soon, regardless of whether he meant it or not. He found a warm, long, and loving embrace for his dear mother before she went forth. His father found for him only a polite nod before he walked away once more, so unable to believe that he had just been eclipsed by his own son. Alone at last, the three friends smiled at one another, so happy to be together once more. Peter stepped out into the teeming city, with Ruth following soon after. With a deep and cleansing breath Jacob stepped from the sanctuary, out of darkness and into light.



Chapter 4

The Circle of Friendship

The madness of city life was strewn all about the friends with people rushing this way and that; here, there and everywhere without a care in the world but for their own affairs. But Jacob, Peter, and Ruth had no care for the world, as they saved their attention for one another. They talked and they laughed and they filled the empty hours with smiles as they sat by the street and sipped their tea, for their love for one another was a love that endured the cruelty of the world. But eventually their talk turned to the business of the world. Ruth, being moved the most, was the first to speak.

“I simply cannot believe it! How can people treat one another with such cruelty? To whip their fellows like laboring animals? To keep them in chains while they sell off their fathers, mothers, wives, husbands, and children like so many head of cattle? And the government does nothing about it! They are monsters, all of them. They must be.”

Peter shook his head before giving voice to his disagreement. “They are not monsters, just men. Always and in every age the greed of man has shown itself in cruelty to his fellow. This is but the latest in a long such line of such sin and shame. I fear it is inevitable.”

Jacob could not accept his friends cynical outlook. “I refuse to believe that this demonic behavior is unavoidable. In every age there has been cruelty, yes, but there has also been resistance to said cruelty. Moses, King Arthur, Robin Hood, there have always been men who were not afraid to take a stand for what is good and what is right. If we give in to our fear then we have already lost my

friend. There simply must be something that we can do.”

Peter would not accept his friend’s idealistic outlook. “But what can we do, just the three of us? Who would listen? The government most certainly never would, making one compromise after another. It has not the backbone the Good Lord gave to the common chicken! With these Southern fire-breathers threatening to go their own way and form their own nation, I fear that any push would only lead to even more intolerable cruelties.”

Jacob shook his head and refused to give ground. “Sitting around here and fretting certainly will not improve matters one whit. Silence makes a statement louder than words. At the very least we must speak out. For if we do not then by our inaction we condone what these slave drivers are doing. There must be someone who will listen. Surely we are not the only ones who feel in our hearts the stirrings of compassion.”

But Peter was not that easy to convince. “You think that men listen to their hearts, do you? If that were the case then our nation would not be having this problem in the first place. No my friend, men do not listen to their hearts and they have little if any concern for almighty God. Men listen to their wallets, and they have concern only for the almighty dollar. If the enlightened men of New England push, then these Southern barbarians will only band together and push back.

“Think about it. From where is Old England making their money these days? From textile manufacturing, that is where. And where do these factories obtain their raw materials from? They receive the necessary fibers from these very slave drivers that you are denouncing. My friend, this problem is bigger than you and me. If there is to be a fight, then England will not be on the side of civilization. And you and I both know that her navy has the power to reduce our little flotilla into so much driftwood. And with her redcoats fighting side by side with these harsh men of cruelty we could never hope to prevail.”

Jacob did think about it, but he was not that easy to convince either. “I hear what you are saying friend, and certainly we have a hard struggle on our hands. But if we sit on our hands and do nothing then we are no better than these spineless men of government you speak of. The very intolerability of this cruelty demands our action. The time for words may very well have passed, but if we believe in democracy then we must try again. And if the time for deeds should again come as

it did for our forefathers, well, the forces of democracy have outlasted the forces of tyranny before. I believe they can do so again. But by words or by deeds, by God I will do something. And if I must go alone, then go alone I shall.”

Ruth took his hand under the table and let him know with the gentle pressure of her fingers that he would never be alone, but Peter could not help but laugh. “So you shall battle all the world’s dragons single-handedly, shall you? Forgive me, I had no idea that I sat in the presence of Saint George himself. You are only one man, my poor deluded friend. What difference can you possibly make in a world that does not care?”

Jacob’s resolve cooled and hardened. “I know not, but at least I have the courage to go out there and find out.”

In the heat of the debate, the two men had not noticed Ruth digging through her handbag and producing a newspaper. She dropped a recent issue of *The Liberator* on the table between them. The headline read “The Battle for Kansas.” “Here is something that we can do. Kansas is where it is all boiling down. Whichever side, slave or free, takes Kansas will have a majority in the Senate once it achieves statehood. If the free states had a majority in Congress then they could outlaw slavery once and for all. The conflict there has been awful, bloody even. Certainly every pair of hands would help. We should go there.”

Peter glanced at the article and scoffed. “Three people would hardly swing the vote. The Kansas Territory borders on Missouri, a slave state. We would be outnumbered there. And I doubt that men who whip their fellows on a whim would think twice about slitting out throats. Besides, you put far too much stock in government. As I have stated previously, the government has accomplished nothing but delay on this question.”

Their debate dissipated, its energy scattered into the four winds. Their conversation turned to happier topics, though the somberness remained. With time evening passed into night, and the three bid one another a bittersweet goodbye and each went their own way back to the places they called home. But Jacob walked with just a little more purpose and stood just a little bit more upright. He had not said anything, so eager he was for the quarrel to be finished, but Ruth’s idea had indeed planted a seed in his mind. He would walk alone for the present, but his conviction was such that he would do something, or else he would die try-

Chapter 5

The Multitude

Night passed into morning, and it was the next day. Jacob rose with the sun to take the first step in his long journey. He prepared himself carefully as a man setting out to precise and exacting work. He put on his most presentable suit of clothes and combed his hair just so, leaving not one strand out of place. He read the most inspirational passage of scripture that came to mind, and prayed that the Spirit would be with him as he set his hand to the plow. And so it was.

He stepped from his father's house to the crowded city streets and walked over to the speaker's corner. He knew it well; many times had he listened to men speak at this very place. And now it was his turn to speak out. He found another minister of his denomination giving cool and rational discourse on the very same topic he wished to speak of, as it seemed to be on everyone's lips in those days. Seeing his young colleague approaching, the middle-aged man stopped in mid-sentence to give a nod acknowledging Jacob's newly acquired right to speak to the people. The elder clergyman stepped from his elevated position to join his fellows, giving the newly minted minister a chance to give his maiden oration. Jacob paused just long enough to pray that the Fire of Heaven would come down upon him. Then he rose to the occasion and unleashed the thunder held within.

“Brothers and sisters, friends and Americans, lend me your ears, I beg of you. For I have not come to praise Washington but to bury him. Democracy past has given way to tyranny present, and only by removing from our closets the skeletons of Washington, Jefferson and all the other whip-cracking hypocrites shall we ever regain our birthright. Our fathers elected a general, but they got a coward who laid the foundation of our government upon the sinking sands. And who do we have

to lead us today? We have thieves and slave drivers, tyrants and murders, every last one of them!”

The crowd gathered to hear Jacob speak. Some came only for the novelty of so booming and fiery a ministerial address. But most applauded Jacob for his words. “I tell you the truth, it would have been better for us if that city had never been built upon the swamp. For the swamp that is stinks ten times worse than the swamp that was. Instead of governance, we got tyranny. Instead of a Congress, we got a pack of cheats, liars and thieves. Instead of judges, we got executioners. Instead of a President, we got a murderer. And it matters not whether they are the Southerners who whip the slaves or the Northerners who allow them; they are all complicit in the great crime that has been perpetrated on our nation for centuries now.”

There was a great press in the crowd as all were now seeking the way forward that they might better hear the youthful firebrand. For Jacob was right, there were indeed many who felt just as he did. And his time had indeed come. “The time for talk has passed long ago, for endless and tiresome talk has only confused the issue. I tell you the truth; there are now only two kinds of men in our once great nation. There are those who will stand up and fight for the civilization that we know to be right and good, and those who would sell it off for a mess of pottage. If you would auction off the fair maid of our nation’s virtue, then to hell with you, for surely that fate awaits you. But if the blood of ‘76 still beats in your heart, then we are miles from daylight my friends.”

Apprehension now covered every face in the crowd as Jacob paused for dramatic effect. The silence was so thick that one could not have cut it with an axe. The old men by Jacob’s side wished that he would cool his temper, but not his rhetoric. They could find no fault with the young man’s message, and so they held their peace. Jacob did not. “I tell you the truth; it is only by leaving civilization that we shall ever find it. The time has come when good men must meet spinelessness with steel. We must meet cruelty with an intolerance of our own. We must draw a line in the sand and declare ‘This far, and no further.’

“The citadels of civilization have folded one by one. They have yielded ground until they had none left. Our only hope is to build a new one, and I shall tell you where that foundation is to be laid. It is in the west. It is in Kansas. It is there that we shall turn the tide. It is there that we shall stem the coming flood. I go

now as a lone voice crying out in the wilderness. But I go to prepare a way that is straight, so that others may follow. Who is with me?"

The blood of the multitude bounded up into their temples. Immediately they responded with a mad howling.

"We are coming!"

"We are with you Reverend!"

"We shall make the slave drivers pay! We shall make the tremble with fear!"

The blaze was lit, and it burned hot. His kindling spent, Jacob gazed out in wide wonderment at the fury he had unleashed.



Chapter 6

Sins of the Father

Jacob rose early on a summer morning. For over a month he preached, he published, and he prepared for his long journey west. Enthusiastic supporters had sent him money, supplies, and guns. One had even given him a strong stallion to speed him on his way. Now his bags were packed, his horse was saddled and only one last thing remained. The time had come for Jacob to say goodbye and to leave his father's house never to return. Jacob prayed a good long while beforehand, as he knew the hardest part of his journey would come at the beginning.

Predictably enough the Reverend Doctor Esau Channing was scribbling away in his study. Although morning had broken but a short time ago, it was obvious from the length of his lecture notes that Esau had been working for quite some time. When Jacob walked in and saw him, he wondered if his father had even slept at all. Bracing himself for the coming storm, Jacob said his goodbye. "The time has come father. I am leaving you now."

Annoyed at the intrusion, Esau snapped at his son. "Your interruptions never did come at a convenient time. I would think that at some point in the last quarter of a century you would have realized that my work is too important to be stopped in mid-stream."

Now it was Jacob's turn to bear fangs. "Is it so important that it permits you to act as if you have no family? Is it so important that you neglected to raise your own son? Is it so important that you ignored my poor mother until she wilted away like a flower in need of sunshine?"

Finally, Esau ceased his scribbling and looked over at his son. “You forget yourself Jacob. You may be a man now, but you are still my son. It is written that one should honor their father and their mother.”

Jacob waited not a moment before returning fire. “Does the son of a slave driver honor his father by blind obedience? Does he honor his father by neglecting his duty to speak out against the evil that dwells within his own house?”

Esau rose and crossed his arms defensively. “I am not a slave driver”

Jacob would not yield. “Perhaps not, but you are not a father either. I learned the ways of manhood by myself. And so I now journey forth by myself.”

Esau looked down for a moment before continuing. “You intend to go through with this foolishness then?”

Jacob stood like a stone wall. “Yes, I fully intend to seek my destiny in the west. I am a man now, and I am going my own way.”

Esau shook his head and turned his back on his son. “So be it. Go out into the wilderness and starve alone. You never did have a thought in your head, and you will be dead by winter’s end.”

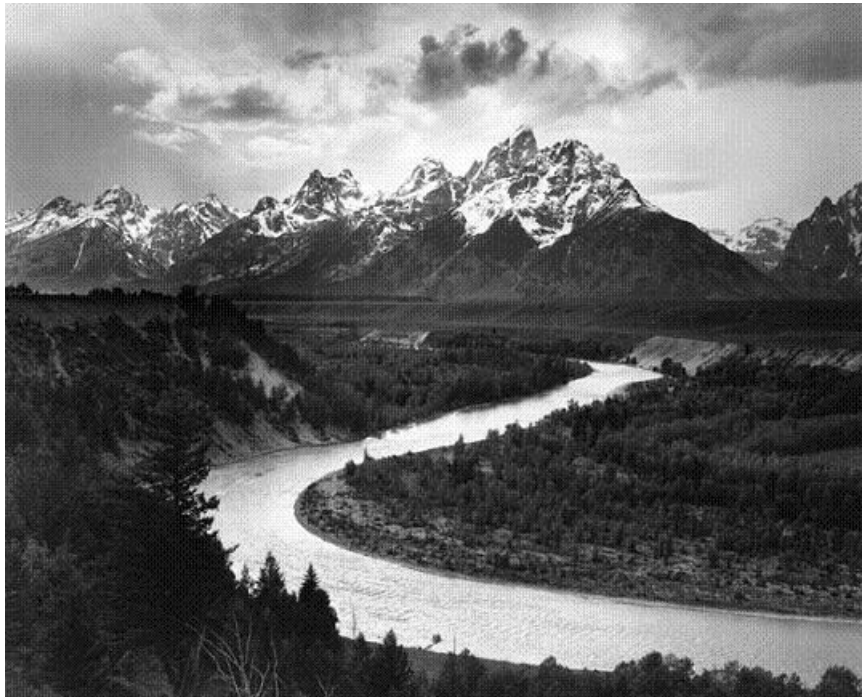
Jacob refused to be baited. “You say that your work is important. Well, my work is important as well. You have laid the intellectual groundwork for the abolition of slavery, and I have always admired you for it. But someone must put theory into practice, and it would seem that task has fallen to me. I know not why the good Lord set this path in front of me, I only pray for the courage to walk it without hesitation. Did not grandfather own slaves in your old house in Providence? Is it not also written that the sins of the father may be visited upon the sons, even unto the fifth and sixth generations? If you will not atone for the grievous sin that is upon our family’s head, then by my deeds I shall work for our repentance. I am going to Kansas and I am going to claim it as free soil. I will erase the dark blot of slavery from this family, and from this nation if I am able. So help me God.”

Esau found that he had no reply to his son’s tirade. He had been beaten, and he knew it. Jacob pulled a book from the bag by his side and continued. “You

never did let me take a book from this study, so instead I shall bring one into it. You should read it father, it just might change your mind about a few things.”

Jacob placed a copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on top of Esau’s pile of notes. His father pushed it to the farthest corner of his desk. Jacob shook his head. “You never did listen to me father. Goodbye, and take care of yourself. It would seem that is what you are best at.”

Jacob turned on his heel and walked out of the study. He walked out of his father’s house and over to his horse. He tied down the last of his luggage and made a few last minute adjustments. Jacob climbed into his saddle and rode off on his journey with the wind in his face and the rising sun at his back.



Chapter 7

Here I am Lord

High in the Appalachian Mountains

Summer of 1858

Jacob rode day and night like a man possessed. Past cities and towns, past farms and families, through highways and by-ways, he rode with the singleness of purpose that had grown to consume his life and all of his thoughts, words, and deeds. Indeed, he was a man possessed; possessed of a dream. Boston was so far away that Jacob hardly thought of it at all at all anymore. He had been gone for barely a month now, but all of the events of Boston seemed as if they had happened a lifetime ago. His father's house loomed so small in his consciousness that Jacob felt quite disconnected from the memory of it. It was like remembering something that happened to another person.

True to his word, Jacob had no father now. He was a child only of the crossing. The crossing had shaped him into a new man, a man of steel forged in hardship and isolation. Jacob spoke to others only when it was absolutely and essentially necessary. The vast majority of his time was spent in quiet contemplation; in the meditation of travel. He hardly ever slept anymore. He slept so little that Jacob wondered if the new him even required the respite of slumber. He hoped not, and Jacob prayed that he would hold fast to this tireless quality once he reached journey's end.

Jacob loved to travel by night, and found it was the noonday sun which now brought him weariness. He loved how the coolness of night contrasted with the hot summer days. He loved the song of the creatures of the night. But most of all,

Jacob loved the stars. Here in the heights of the Allegheny peaks, Jacob had never felt closer to the stars. He knew that these mountains were the midpoint of his trek. They stood as the dividing line between East and West, between the cities of the eastern seaboard with their teeming masses and nature red in tooth and claw. Here the air was crisp and clear, so very unlike Boston choked with the smoke of a thousand fires. At this altitude, with the air this pure, Jacob had never seen so many stars so clearly all his life. Not even through a telescope.

The moon was bright and full. Its light was shining down on Jacob's path so brilliantly that he had no need of a lamp to light his way. Although the terrain was mountainous and rugged, Jacob kept his eyes fixed on the vault of the heavens. He swung his gaze wide across the panoramic night sky, remembering back to his Astronomy class at Harvard. Beyond the brilliant orb of the moon lay Mars and just beyond that was Jupiter. A little further was, but wait, how could that be? The planets were in perfect alignment!

Jacob was no scientist, but he knew that planetary alignment was a very rare event indeed. That it should occur right here in the middle of his journey when he was situated in a perfect position to observe it seemed highly improbable. One might even describe it as miraculous. Unable to look at anything else, Jacob stared straight ahead at the celestial event. It looked to him very much like a highway, much like the one he now rode upon but of a heavenly rather than an earthly nature. That was it! It was the Path of Heaven. Jacob now knew why God had chosen to show him such a thing. He could not describe exactly how he knew, but he knew. Of this much Jacob was quite certain. His path was a Heavenly one, and he should always rely on the Heavens to guide him rather than the passing pleasures of wishy-washy men. Humbled that one as unworthy as he should be chosen, Jacob spoke briefly with his Creator.

“Here I am Lord, send me.”

His eyes remain fixed upon the vision his Heavenly Father had sent him as a sign of the face of the shape of things to come.

Chapter 8

The Freedom Fighter

Two Rivers was a man beholden to none. Born a Cherokee, he lived his childhood surrounded by the beauty and life of the Blue Ridge Mountains. So taken was he by the incomparable beauty of that life and the Spirit that moved within it that he swore to forever remain Cherokee. But events would conspire against him. He would not be permitted the things of childhood for very long.

Throughout his boyhood Two Rivers had been instructed to keep one foot in the white world and one foot in the red. Although his father was but a simple woodcutter, he went to school every morning. He learned to cast the white man's spell of language and letters, of numbers and equations. But every afternoon he went with his father into the forest to take his true education. He learned of the web of life that sustained the Cherokee and that they were all a part of. He learned that the Cherokee must seek to nurture if they in turn would hope to be nurtured. On Sunday morning he was taken to church for instruction in the white man's scriptures and hymns, but by afternoon he was taken to those places where the Spirit of his Great Father truly moved over the waters for an education that cut straight to the heart of spiritual matters. Day by day Two Rivers grew towards manhood with the head of a white man but the heart and soul of a Cherokee. But he was never truly permitted to grow into a man.

Childhood's end came to Two Rivers like a thief in the night, with a bayonet pressed into his back and an order to march or die. Two Rivers and all of his family and most of his tribe chose to march, but many of them died anyway. His father, his mother, all of his brothers and sisters and kinfolk; one by one they all fell by the wayside. When Two Rivers finally reached the land that the white

government had promised to be his nation forevermore, he arrived as an orphan without a family. So many had fallen he was practically a man without a country.

Two Rivers had paid a terrible price for his manhood, as many tears marked the trail to his new home. Always he would be haunted by his father's ghost. Always he would clearly see in his mind's eye the broken and bleeding body of his patriarch expiring slowly and painfully on the side of the road where it had been tossed like garbage. Being without a family, there was nothing to hold him in the new land. Being without a father, there was no one to warn him that revenge cast only his own heart into the grave. Faced with the white man's orphanage, Two Rivers ran as fast as his feet would carry him into lands still wild and untamed. There he banded together with other orphans to live wild and untamed. But it was not the path of life that Two Rivers and his new tribe walked; it was the path of death.

In his grief, Two Rivers had forgotten the face of his father. They wreaked a bloody and terrible vengeance upon every white man they could find. They fell upon them like highwaymen, cut their throats without warning and without mercy, took all of the gold for which the white man had sold them down the river, and then vanished like ghosts upon the landscape. So great was their thirst for blood that when they came upon a stockade filled with the blue coats of their tormentors, they only looked one to the other and said "Perhaps today is a good day to die." They fell upon the Blue Coats like thieves in the night, faces streaked with blood, red as demons and screaming like banshees. For most of Two Rivers' newfound family, it was a good day to die.

The Blue Coats took a sevenfold vengeance upon the band of rebels. Their numbers multiplying like insects, they swarmed across the four corners of the Earth like a pestilence upon the land. The Blue Coats found horses and guns to hunt Two Rivers and his blood brothers like game. So stung they were by the hornets nest they had stirred up, the orphans scattered into the four winds that they might yet stay one step ahead of the hangman. Two Rivers followed the path of the deer, praying for swiftness and cunning as he ran from his predators. Though he knew it not, now only Two Rivers remained to tell their story.

The as yet unsettled lands to the north afforded the freedom fighter with the protection of anonymity for a time, but this did not last very long. Soon white men decided that this land too must be settled, cultivated, and conquered in the name of

progress. One by one, the trees that had nurtured and protected Two Rivers were cut down so that rich men could rape the land and build up a bunch of ugly boxes. One by one, the deer that had cared for and nourished Two Rivers were slain as white men hunted with greed, killing more than they could ever eat. Finding no more protection in the forest, Two Rivers traveled west onto the plains. There he saw a strange sight indeed.

At first Two Rivers avoided the fire that cast a red glow into the night, but then he saw that only one man sat beside it. Figuring he had few other chances for survival, Two Rivers decided to approach the stranger. His thirst for blood quenched a long time ago; he hitched his wagon to the hope that this strange man might have wares to sell. Why else would he travel alone unless he was a salesman? As Two Rivers drew near to the firelight, the sight grew curiously and curiously. The man's muddy clothes marked him as a son of the city, not of the frontier upon which he sat. He was small and lean, and he had none of the calluses that spoke to the hard work needed to sustain one in the countryside. But he did indeed have many more supplies than one man could possibly have a use for. He must be a salesman. Two Rivers rode into view and spoke with him. "Sir, I have had a hard ride and I am in need of food. I am wondering if you might have any available for sale. I have gold for the purchase."

The unfamiliar white man smiled at him and gave him a look of genuine goodwill that ignited Two Rivers' curiosity even further. He gestured to his side. "I have no need of gold, only of friends to share my fire. Come, sit and eat." Puzzled at this funny little man and his alien ways, but filled with an inquisitiveness that demanded satisfaction, Two Rivers did exactly that. This white man acted much more like a Cherokee. He gave not for gold but for brotherhood. He did not talk just to hear himself speak, but only gazed at the fire as if contemplating the ways of Spirit. As he took his meat, Two Rivers watched the smoke rise to meet the Heavens and wondered at the things he had seen.

Chapter 9

The Lesson

Night passed into morning, and it was the next day. His hunger satisfied, Two Rivers saddled his horse and prepared to leave. But Jacob stirred before he could leave. The younger man stood and gave Two Rivers another of his mysterious and ethereal smiles. He spoke.

“I am afraid that you caught me so lost in thought last night that I neglected to introduce myself. I am the Reverend Jacob Channing.”

Jacob extended his hand in friendship, and Two Rivers thought about it for a moment. So he is a preacher; that would explain why he was so free with his possessions. But why did this itinerant shepherd make no attempt to convert him when his red skin marked him as a heathen? Curiouser and curiouser. Oh well; Two Rivers figured that, having gone this far, he might as well see how far down the rabbit-hole goes. He took the hand that was proffered in the spirit it was given.

“I am called Two Rivers.”

“Well I thank you for finding me Brother Two Rivers. Wont you join me for breakfast?”

Brother? Two Rivers knew that he and the funny little man shared no ties of blood, and he had most certainly not agreed to be baptized into whatever strange sect this man belonged to. This he just had to know.

“Why is it that you call me brother? We share no ties of blood or baptism.”

“All men are brothers my friend. Come, let us build a fire that we might cook and share fellowship together.”

Friend; well, this stranger was certainly a friendly enough sort. Two Rivers figured he at least owed this newcomer enough not to let him get killed on what was obviously his first day in Kansas.

“I don’t think that would be a good idea. There is a plantation not far to the south of here. The master of that house claims this land as his own. If you build another fire then the smoke will alert him to your presence and he will send his men after you. We should break camp and ride further to the north before we eat again.”

Jacob suddenly stood up much straighter, and a look of cool resolution came over his face. “Yes, I saw that plantation as I rode in last night. That is exactly why I decided to settle here, for I have come to bring this war to the very doorstep of those slave drivers.”

Two Rivers could not help but be amused by this youngsters blustering. “So you have come to fight a war have you, general? You and what army?”

At this a smile passed across Jacobs lips, and resolution gave way to eagerness. “The army of patriots and righteous men that will surely follow after me, for I have come to prepare the way and we will claim Kansas as free soil.”

Two Rivers grimaced and looked away. He had gotten more than he had bargained for. Oh well; he would still be hungry were it not for the good Reverend’s generosity. Two Rivers had seen enough death for one lifetime, and so he decided to take the brave, if foolish, young man under his wing.

“Well, that’s all well and good, but where is this army of yours going to sleep? Out on the open plain where they can be seen from miles away? What are they going to drink? What will they eat? We should head further north and to the east, towards the trees. There is a stream there; we can cut down trees to build cabins and hunt for deer in the forest.”

Jacob found himself unable to argue with his elder’s logic. “Very well then;

let us pack up and then you may lead the way Brother Two Rivers.”

They spent the better part of the day picking up and relocating their camp. That afternoon, having a little daylight left, they went into the forest to cut some wood for a more permanent settlement. They found a suitable tree and Jacob hastily raised his axe to cut it down. Horrified at this disrespect, Two Rivers quickly raised a hand to stop him.

“Wait! You can’t cut that tree down yet! You have not even asked it for the gift of it’s life.”

Puzzled, but not wanting to give any offense to his new-found friend, Jacob lowered his axe. “Oh, very well then.”

Two Rivers lovingly placed a hand on the trunk of the tree, and spoke to it with a great deal of care and respect in his voice. “Brother Tree, we ask you for shelter. We ask to send you to the spirit realm, that through your death we might live.” His customs observed, Two Rivers nodded and raised his axe. Jacob stood on the other side of the tree and helped as best as he could. As they worked, Two Rivers instructed his young apprentice in the ways of woodcutting and the ways of Spirit. Jacob soon realized that his Harvard education would do him little good out here, but there was a wealth of knowledge that he could learn from his elder.



Chapter 10

The Fugitive

Through a dark and moonless night the fugitive ran, and his tormentors followed. For all of his existence the life of Cassius had not been his own. Born to a kindly old master, he had been allowed to remain with his father and mother for a time. They loved him dearly, and they cherished the love binding their family together. It was one of the few things in this world that was theirs; one of the few things they could hold on to that would lift their eyes from their burdens and fix them upon the Heavens that watched over them. But it was not to be so.

Master Sartoris did not have a cruel bone in his body. Before the sun set in the evening he would give his slaves time to be with their families, and he never sold them apart despite the financial hardship this caused him. He was very careful to instruct them in matters of the Spirit and the scriptures every Sunday. But he was old, and he expired when Cassius was still very young. Master Sartoris had not been so careful in the instruction of his own son, who had grown into a man of cruelty. Torn from his family with much wailing and many tears, Cassius was sold down the river.

Master Jones was a man of cruelty and indifference. He expected a man's work from Cassius, although he had not yet had a chance to come of age. He withheld from Cassius his daily bread on those days his lust for gold had not been satisfied. Master Jones instructed his overseers to whip every last bales worth of work out of his slaves. And if any were worked to death, then it was their fault for their laziness. Cassius found it hard to hold on to the things of life, and began to pray that he would not be long for this world.

But many of the other slaves had been instructed in scripture as well, and they sought to lift up young Cassius. They spoke of Moses, and how the Spirit had given him power to defy the tyrant Pharaoh and lead his people into the Promised Land of freedom. They said it had been written that the day was coming when the last shall be first and the first shall be last. They said that things were not like this in all of the land; that to the north all men were free no matter what the color of their skin. They spoke of freedom the same way that the preachers who had visited the Sartoris plantation spoke of salvation, and for Cassius the two became one and the same. He nourished that hope and learned to be as vigilant as watchmen who wait for dawn.

And so the day came when Cassius saw his opportunity. Master Jones picked up his plantation lock, stock and barrel and moved it further north, into the land called Kansas. Cassius knew that the Promised Land must be near, as he could feel it in his bones. Master Jones and his overseers grew distracted; making sure that all was in readiness for their scheme of politics and power. The night came when there was no moon and clouds covered up the stars. It was so dark Cassius could barely see the hand in front of his face. And so he ran.

Cassius ran like a man possessed. He left everything, left his pregnant wife behind, and he ran. So consumed he was by the fever dream of freedom that his vision had tunneled into just that one thing. He knew that his tormentors followed, he could hear their dogs barking behind him. Through a dark and moonless night the fugitive ran, and many beasts followed behind him with slavering jaws seeking to devour him.



Chapter 11

Sanctuary

The sound of dogs barking in the night woke Jacob and Two Rivers from their sleep. Puzzled, they stepped from their cabin to see what was afoot. To the south they saw a lone figure running as if his life depended on it. And indeed it did. Seeing a place of hiding, he ran up to their cabin to beg for his life.

“Please, suh, you gots to hide me. Theys a-gonna kill me if they finds me. You gots to hide me, you just gots to!”

Jacob looked over at Two Rivers, the measure of his resolve written in his face. He was not about to let this man to be given back over into torment. Two Rivers saw that his friend would not be dissuaded and nodded his assent. Jacob turned back to the running man.

“Come with me,” he said. “We will take care of that pack of mad dogs.”

The three men stepped into the cabin. Cassius ran into the corner, kneeled and prayed for deliverance. Two Rivers picked up a shotgun and placed shells into the breeches of two barrels. Jacob went over to the shelf and took the largest Bible from it. He opened it and took from its hollowed insides a Colt .45 Peacemaker.

“That is a very strange verse from the scriptures you found there Reverend,” Two Rivers said. “What book is that from?”

Jacob loaded his pistol and cocked it. “The Book of Exodus,” he replied.

Howling like demons and barking louder than their dogs, the drunken overseers tore through the night. Glad for the chance to have a little fun, their taunts echoed across the plains.

“We’re gonna get you nigger! We’re gonna get you and string you up! Show that pretty little wife o’ yours what happens to crazy niggers ‘at think they’re rabbits!”

The thunder of Jacob’s warning shot stopped them dead in their tracks. Shaken from their revelry, the overseers found themselves staring into three gun barrels held by two men whose eyes gleamed with the coldness of steel. Jacob gave them another warning.

“You men have stepped onto free soil, and no one will be strung up today. I strongly suggest that you turn around and go back the way you came, or else it will be you who find your graves on this night.”

Their spokesman moved forward from the pack. “You gonna kill all of us then college boy? We got guns too; you ain’t gonna pull that off before we kill you like the nigger-loving trash you are.”

The cold, mechanical click of Jacob’s hammer sliding back into place warned the overseer’s foreman from continuing. “Perhaps not, but I will kill the next man who comes any closer. The man you seek enjoys the protection of this roof, and I am willing to die before I see one of God’s children chained and whipped like an animal.”

The overseers looked one to the other. They decided that today was not a good day to die. Their spokesman gave a warning shot of his own before the pack rode out.

“Stranger, I don’t know who the hell you are but you just bought yourself a whole heap o’ trouble. You just crossed Master Jones, and he always gets what’s his. You just better watch your step, ‘cause you ain’t heard the last of this, not by a long shot. Come on boys.”

Their dogs called off, the overseers melted back into the darkness of the night. Breathing a sigh of relief, Jacob and Two Rivers lowered their weapons. They

eased their respective hammers out of firing position, although they would remain loaded on that night and many more to come. Their battle won, the two comrades retired into their cabin. But they would sleep with one eye open, as the war had only just begun.



Chapter 12

On Taking Joy

The three friends passed an uneasy and sleepless night, and dawn broke on the next day. Two Rivers walked outside to build a fire, and Jacob brought out food to cook their breakfast. Cassius soon appeared in the portal to their cabin with his hat in his hands and the downcast eyes of a slave. He spoke in low and muted tones.

“Suhs, I’s be powerful thankful to y’all, what with saving my life and all. And I’s shore would appreciate it if you lets me stay heah fo’ a while. I’s ain’t no lazy man, I’s works fo’ my keep.”

Jacob beamed a wide and disarming smile towards his new friend, and gestured towards a place by the fire. “Please, come and break bread with us friend. It is a joy to have you here. I am the Reverend Jacob Channing.”

Cassius eagerly accepted the hand proffered him and gave it a hearty two-handed pumping. “Well it shore do be a joy to meet you too, Rev’rund. I’s called Cassius.”

Not one to be unfriendly despite his few words and cool demeanor, Two Rivers offered his hand in friendship as well. “I am called Two Rivers.”

Cassius’ exuberance continued unabated. “Well I’s shorely be delighted to meet you as well suh.”

Jacob continued to beam at his new-found friend. “There is no need to sir us

Brother Cassius, we work for a living. You are on free soil now, all men are equals here.”

Somewhat confused but absolutely overjoyed to hear that he had reached his destination, Cassius gave his whole-hearted consent. “Yes suh, uh, I mean yes Rev’rund Channing.”

Jacob could not help but laugh despite himself. “It’s just Jacob, or Brother Jacob if you must insist on formality.”

“Oh, uh, shore thing Brother Jacob.”

Jacob gave a low chuckle and continued. “That will do. It is good that the Lord of the harvest has sent us another pair of hands, for we have much work to do. We are building a church on this land, and we would be delighted to have your help.”

Again Cassius bubbled over with joy. “Oh I’d be powerful honored to help you build yore church, Brother Jacob. I’s always been a praying man, ever since my mamma teach me how when I’s just be a little boy.”

The three men sat by the fire and broke bread together and took joy in one another’s fellowship. After the fire was smothered they gathered their tools and went forth into the forest for the day’s woodcutting. But on this day Jacob and Two Rivers brought along a couple of extra tools. Two Rivers walked along with an axe in one hand and his shotgun in the other. Jacob checked the condition of his pistol and stuffed in into the small of his back. Ever the good shepherd, Reverend Channing was ready to fight off the wolves.

They reached the forest and the day’s work began. Cassius soon fell into the familiar rhythms of work and began to sing while at his labor as he was accustomed to doing.

“Oh it’s a hundred and ten, a hundred and ten in the sha-a-ade. Comin’ wa-ay down, Father won’t you carry me?”

Jacob smiled at the man’s apparent enthusiasm. “I do believe that I have never seen a man take so much joy in his work before.”

Suddenly taken by self-consciousness, Cassius smiled meekly and looked down. “Well, I’s never really taken joy in mah work befo’. I’s only work so’s I’s don’t get whipped, so I’s only work just hard enough not to get whipped. I’s only sing to take mah mind off it. But this here work be diff’reent. This don’t be fo’ no mean old man, this here be the Lord’s work. That do be a joy fo’ me, it shorely do.”

Jacob grinned from ear to ear. “Precisely, you have spoken truth Brother Cassius. When one labors for the fruits of the Spirit, then the Spirit of joy grows in a man’s heart. And one’s hand will work that much swifter, for his work is not for the glory of any man but for God. Truly one should work with joy for those things that bring him joy.”

Cassius nodded his agreement. “Amen.”

Jacob realized that the Spirit had sent him another friend from whom he could learn a great many things. Cassius taught Jacob the spirituals his folk worked to, and Jacob taught Cassius the hymns of his church. Two Rivers held his peace, as Two Rivers was a man who held his peace. But as he worked quietly he too wore a smile on his face for the fist time in a long time. Their songs echoed from the trees and sounded throughout the forest as three men took joy in the work of their hands.



Chapter 13

The Mercenary

Cletus Snopes was a man shaped by hardship. His father was a hard man with a hard heart, and he ruled the Snopes family homestead with a rod of iron. Cletus had barely begun to stand when his father told him, “If you’re old enough to walk then you’re old enough to work.” And so Cletus joined his father and brothers in scratching a living out of the hard ground. Cletus always felt in the deepest, most hidden part of his heart that something better must be out there, but saying so would only earn him another beating. It didn’t take much to earn a beating in the Snopes household. Most of the time all it took was their patriarch getting into the whiskey again.

Cletus was never a praying man. His house was moved by the spirits of the bottle, not by the Spirit of the Lord. He was never a caring man either. His father had hard words for many. When he was in the liquor his father would go on for hours cursing niggers and redskins for their laziness. Cursing politicians for their lies and preachers for acting like their shit don’t stink. Cursing rich men for pushing people around, although Cletus thought that last part was the pot calling the kettle black.

Cletus took up his father’s work, as he had never known anything else. He grew corn, but most of it was distilled to make rotgut. Supposedly this was so the family could make some extra money, but most of the profits were drunk by a certain Mr. Snopes. Cletus always hated his father, and like most boys who hate their fathers he grew into a man much like his father. He took up his habits of drinking and cursing the world at a very young age. He would never be a man in his father’s eyes until he could hold his whiskey. But Cletus always nourished the

hope of escape; that one day his life might be just a little more than looking up the north end of a southbound mule. Then the day came when he saw his chance.

Cletus heard opportunity knocking in the form of a handbill in the general store. Someone else had to read it for him of course; his father had no use for letters or the fancy-pants professors who knew what to do with them. It was from Master Jones, the owner of the largest plantation in those parts, advertising that he was leading a settlement to the Kansas Territory and would need many hired hands for the venture. Cletus jumped at the opportunity, never looking back. He never even told his father that he was leaving. That would only earn him another beating.

Cletus loved being an overseer for Master Jones. Finally, instead of taking the punishment all the time he was the one dishing it out. He quickly earned a reputation both among the slaves and the hired hands as a man with a heart of stone, and a man who got things done. After a while just a sideways glance from Cletus Snopes was enough to make a slave redouble his efforts. Master Jones looked upon him with favor as a man after his own heart. Cletus rose quickly through the ranks of new hires to become foreman of overseers, and he was absolutely overjoyed. Finally, he had done it. He was more than just poor white trash. He was somebody.

When one of the slaves went rabbit and took off, it fell to Cletus to take revenge and teach the others a lesson. After his first attempt was frustrated by a couple of trigger-happy do-gooders, he was summoned by Master Jones for a private meeting. He instructed his foreman to go alone next time, leaving the more feint-hearted of the hired help behind, and appeal to the sensibilities of these strangers. Cletus was informed that a horse would be loaded with whiskey and with gold, and he was to use either or both to barter for the return of his Master's property. Failing that, he was to take the pair by surprise and bring back their heads, dragging behind him the body of that uppity nigger. Riding off, Cletus filled his flask and smiled at his good fortune in landing such a plum assignment.

On arriving at the cabin, Cletus found it empty. Sipping from his flask, he looked around but found neither hide nor hair of his charge. But he would not be alone for much longer. Out of the treeline from the east walked a lone man with red skin holding a shotgun. But neither the sight of the weapon nor the strange man's hard stare frightened Cletus. After what he had lived through nothing scared him anymore. He took another slug of whiskey and set to bartering.

“You lookin’ for firewater there, chief? I got what you need right here, got a whole horse loaded down with it. It’s all yours too, all you gots to do is hand over that crazy nigger y’all been hiding.”

A heart-stopping mechanical click to his left made Cletus raise his hands and slowly look over. He found himself staring down the barrel of a .45 held by a well-dressed man who spoke with the careful precision that came from higher education.

“Brother Two Rivers enjoys the protection of this roof. I highly recommend that you put a little more respect in your voice when you speak to him.”

Cletus was not afraid, and continued bartering. “Ain’t no call for this. I ain’t here to fight y’all. I’m here to make you rich. Gotta whole heap o’ gold in them there saddlebags. All yours too, you just gotta hand over the nigger.”

Jacob stepped in front of his target, all the while keeping his pistol pointed straight between the mercenary’s eyes. Two Rivers raised his weapon as well.

“Do you really think that I care about the gold that has corrupted your heart and taken possession of your soul? I am here to do the Lord’s work, and I will not hand over my friend to be torn apart by a pack of hungry jackals”

Cletus snorted in derision. “You one of them preacher-men, ain’t ya? Ain’t no reasoning with you then. Well that ain’t no problem, ‘cause you a dead man now. Master Jones gonna hear about this. He’s gonna hear about this and he’s gonna fix you good. He always gets what’s his.”

Jacob waved towards the hired man’s horse with his pistol. “Go back to your master little dog, and give him a message from me. You tell him that his sins are an affront in the eyes of God. You tell him that his slave driving days are numbered. You tell him that the Reverend Jacob Channing says Kansas *will* be free.”

Cletus submitted and walked over to his horse muttering under his breath, “Crazy motherfucker.” As Jacob and Two Rivers followed him with their eyes and their guns, Cletus rode off sipping from his flask and mentally cursing the ones who had turned him away. Fancy-pants preachers, lazy-ass redskins, crazy-ass

niggers that don't know their place, he'd fix 'em. They would see. Cletus Snopes was gonna fix them all good.



Chapter 14

Why We Fight

Dawn broke over the horizon on a Sunday morning. It was a cold Kansas day in late autumn, but Jacob's heart was warm with love. Sunday was always his favorite day of the week. It was a day to lay down one's burden, rest from the labors of this world, and focus on the Love that sustained an individual through to the next. Two Rivers was also taken by the Spirit on that day. He walked from the cabin and greeted the sun with a hearty "Ho!" As sunlight filled the settlement, Cassius stepped through the portal of the cabin wiping the sleep from his eyes. Jacob joined them outside, and the three friends built a fire, cooked a meal, and sat down to break bread together.

After breakfast Cassius gave Jacob an inquisitive look. "What we goan do today Brother Jacob?"

Jacob smiled at him. "Today is Sunday. We rest, and we nourish our souls. There are hardly enough of us to merit a proper worship service, but we may hold a prayer meeting if you wish."

Cassius met this suggestion with a vigorous nodding. "Oh yes, I's surely would like that. I's always did go to the prayer meetin', even when I's just be a youngun'."

At this Two Rivers stood, saddled his horse, and rode off into the forest. He had seen too much blood and horror in his life to believe that the white man's God was still in Heaven. Jacob said not a word about it, as he was content to let his friend worship in his own way. He walked into the cabin and returned with two

Bibles, one large and one small. He returned to his seat by the fire, placed the smaller Bible in his lap and opened it to the Book of Exodus. The larger Bible he placed close by his side should any uninvited guests require another verse from the metaphorical book of Exodus. He sat in quiet contemplation for a moment, and then he looked up at Cassius to begin their meeting of Spirit.

“Let us pray. Lord, we gather here today to hear the Word spoken, that we may learn from it and be lifted up in heart and in mind, in body and in soul, for Your service. We ask that the Spirit may come upon us that we may be sustained for the long struggle that surely lies ahead of us. Although we are only two in number, we gather in the promise of the Word that even if only two or three gather in Your name, You will be with us. Amen.”

Cassius nodded his agreement. “Amen.” Jacob began to read the story from the beginning. He spoke of baby Moses who was abandoned by his family to be raised a prince. He spoke of how the Lord called him to free his people from tyranny and slavery, and was given the power to work miracles. He spoke of the many afflictions sent to Israelite and Egyptian alike as a result of their conflict. He spoke of how the Red Sea parted to give safe passage to the Hebrews, and then came crashing down on Pharaoh’s army, thus delivering the downtrodden people. Jacob began to continue, but then he paused and looked up.

“Brother Cassius, being a praying man I am sure you have heard this story many times before.”

Cassius nodded his affirmation. “Oh yes, I done heard it so many times since I be knee-high to a june bug I’s could prob’ly say the whole thing by heart my own self. I shore do like the way you tell it though, Brother Jacob. You really say it with heart.”

Jacob smiled, rubbed his chin, and continued. “It is a good that you know the story, but do you know what it means?”

At this Cassius was baffled. “What it mean? Well, I’s caint rightly say. Ain’t nobody ever asked me that befo’. Dont nobody care what a field hand be thinkin’. What you think it mean?”

Jacob answered this question with another. “How do you think it was that

Moses led his people to freedom?”

Cassius thought a little while longer, and then he spoke his mind. “Well, let’s see. Ole Moses, he be powerful scared at first. He didn’t want it. But he took what the Good Lord put in front o’ him, and he pull it off. He don’t be scared o’ ole Pharaoh. Or maybe he was. That be it. He be scared, but he stand up and do right anyway. That how he do it.”

Jacob smiled at the excellent performance of his student. “Precisely, you have spoken truth, Brother Cassius. Moses was a man like you and I, and he felt fear as you and I do. But he did not let his fear control him. He did right and acted for the good of his people even though it placed his life in jeopardy. That is courage, and that is how Moses freed his people.”

Cassius stroked his chin for a moment and thought about what the lesson meant for his own life. After a short pause for consideration, Jacob asked another question.

“Brother Cassius, I am sure that by now you have realized that Brother Two Rivers and I are willing to fight, and if need be to die, in order to preserve your life and your freedom. But do you know why we fight?”

Cassius furrowed his brow before continuing. “Well, I caint rightly say that neither. When I found y’all that first night, I thought fo’ shore y’all must be angels. That Two Rivers be so scary sometimes I think he must be the Angel of Death his own self. I shore am glad he be on our side, I tell you that much. But I see now that y’all just be men like me. I don’t rightly know why y’all stick yore necks out fo’ little ole me, but I shore be humbled that y’all do, I tell ya that much.”

Jacob smiled, and continued the lesson. “It is written that man is created in the image of God. Have you heard this?”

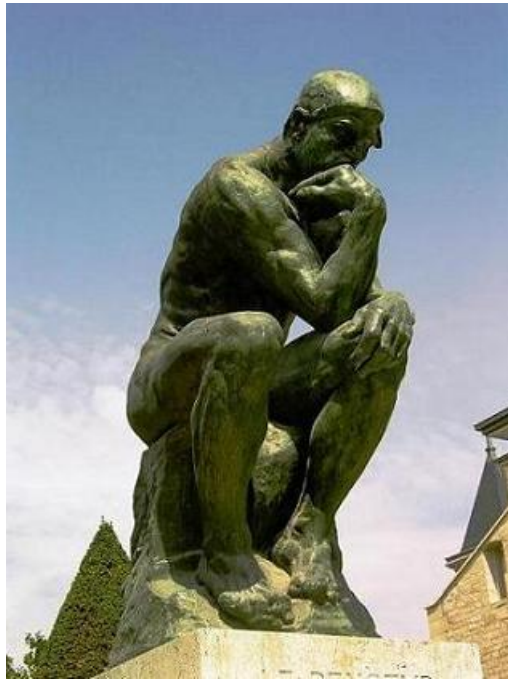
Cassius nodded. “I hear tell that befo’, but it do confuse me. I mean, all men don’t look the same. Do God’s face be white like yourn, or black like mine, or red like Two Rivers?”

Jacob raised an index finger and drove his point home. “Ah, but the scripture speaks not of outer likeness but of the inner likeness of man unto God. For unto

man was given free will. It is this that separates man from beast. God so loved us that He allowed us the freedom to choose between things of this world and things of the Spirit. And in so doing, He gave unto all of us the beauty of His nature. It is for this reason that slavery and tyranny are abomination in the eyes of God. It takes away a man's free will; that was given him by God and is not the province of man to take away. It fools men into thinking that this body and this world is all that there is. It fools men into thinking they have the right to decide who should live and who should die, when only God is wise enough to make these decisions.

“It is for this reason that it is important that we all do as Moses. That we stand up and do right despite our fear and the faintness of our heart. That we stand shoulder to shoulder and fight with courage no matter what odds have been laid against us. For these slavery men can only kill our bodies. They can never kill the Spirit of God that lives within all of us.”

The calm look of understanding a great Truth came over Cassius' face. He looked toward Jacob with the light of a great spiritual awakening shining in his eyes. “Amen.”



Chapter 15

The Tyrant

Master Jones had always loved Monday morning. It was a time of business. It was a time when his servants danced to the tune that he called and paid the piper. Every time one of his slaves picked a swath of cotton, another coin fell into his coffers. Every time one of his overseers whipped a slave into working harder the gold in his treasury multiplied like magic. Money was important, as it bought power and control. Power was all that mattered. Fools did not understand this one great and simple truth, but Master Jones did. That was why he was lord of the dance.

It wasn't that he was unhappy with his life in Missouri. He had the biggest house, the strongest animals, and the prettiest wife that money could buy. But something didn't feel right. There were still others with more power than he. That simply could not be. None of them were Master Jones! It was not right that others could tax his land and his slaves. He should not have to render unto Caesar, he should be Caesar!

Master Jones realized that he had grown complacent in Missouri. He had gotten used to being the biggest fish in a small pond. Thus when Kansas was opened to settlement with the promise that the question of slavery would be decided by a popular vote, he got an idea. All he had to do was move enough of his people into Kansas to swing the vote his way. Then slave states would outnumber free states in the Senate, and the slave powers would have him to thank for it. With his people populating Kansas, he could be elected Senator. And with sixteen of thirty-one states in his pocket, he could be elected President. Then all would be as it should be, with Master Jones seated at the head of the highest table in the land.

So the slave driver plotted, and he schemed, and he planned. He bought more slaves to build the houses and grow the food for the real people who would come after them. He hired more overseers so that he would have enough muscle to give his people some breathing room. All it took was gold. People wanted it, and Master Jones had it. Flash enough gold and the glitter would hypnotize everyone whose eyes caught the light of it. They would go skipping up to Kansas like little children following the pied piper.

First he would be the king of Kansas. Then he would be the king of America. Finally, once he was Caesar and others must render unto him, he would raise an army and navy so big and so strong that he would be king of the world and lord of all he surveyed. He would show them. The glory that was Rome would rise again. Jones would take his rightful place on the throne, and all would know that he was their Master.

The first phase of his plan went without a hitch. He established a foothold in Kansas. The slaves were all working and the overseers kept a watchful eye on them. But then a fly buzzed into his ointment. A slave ran off. Slaves run off sometimes, and that was okay. Usually his men would just run him down and string him up as an example to the others. It did not happen often enough to present Master Jones with any significant loss. But this time the runaway found a cabin full of do-gooders who had a nasty habit of sticking guns in the faces of his recovery teams. Oh well, they were just hired hands. One could not expect them to grasp the wider complexity of things. So Jones decided that if he wanted something done right, he would have to do it himself.

On a fine Monday morning Master Jones woke with the sun and got all in readiness. He strapped on his finest pearl-handled dueling pistols and made sure every hand coming with him carried enough lead to knock down an entire forest. Behind his horse came a cart heavy with gold. Jones figured he must at least try to reason with these men. After all, everyone has a price. He just needed to do a little haggling to find out what that price was. He would offer these troublemakers a choice of gold or guns. But by hook or by crook, by God he would get what's his.

His caravan left at dawn, riding to the north and the east. They came upon the cabin in question with the smoke of a recently smothered fire rising up in front of it. Jones knew they had to be somewhere close by.

“Channing!” he bellowed. “Come on out Channing, I wish to speak with you!”

Jacob’s pistol could be seen before he could, but within an instant both his eyes and his barrel came gunning for the tyrant. An instant later every gun held by the hired men was pointed at Jacob, and Jones laughed at the foolhardy display. He spoke with his opponent.

“So, you are the famous Reverend Jacob Channing. My men have told me about you.” Two Rivers walked over from the treeline, his shotgun raised in readiness to rain lead on Jones’ men with both barrels. Cassius slipped out the back of the cabin with a rifle. He took a hunters position by the wooden structure, drawing a bead on Jones and ready to take down the biggest game of all at the first false move. Jacob spoke.

“You must be the famous ‘Master’ Jones. My friend has told me about you. You should know that I will never hand him over to you for torture and a violent end. If that is what you are here for then you would save us both a great deal of time if you just turned around and walked away right now. I know that time is money for men such as yourself, and money is what you love.”

Again Jones laughed. “You make friends with slaves, do you? Would you make friends with a pack mule? Neither is good for anything but bearing a heavy burden. Come now good Jacob, be reasonable about this. Look at all of the gold that now sits upon my cart. Every last coin of it can be all yours. All that you have to do is give me what’s mine.”

Jacob’s eyes narrowed in determination. “It is Reverend Channing to you, and you already have your answer. You are no master of slaves here Jones, this land is free. Kindly take your filthy lucre with you when you leave.”

Jones saw an opening, and he exploited it. “So it is land you want, is it? Done, you can have all the land that you can see from here. What I ask for in return is a simple thing; I desire only the recovery of my lost property.”

Jacob had heard quite enough. With a quick glance behind him he saw that Cassius was in position. The good Reverend shifted his position so that his comrade would have a clear shot at the head of the snake, and he shifted his aim to the

guard at Jones' right. Jacob pulled a second pistol from his waistband and pointed it at the guard to Jones' left. Then he forced the endgame.

“I am setting the terms now, so listen carefully. The land you and your men stand upon is free soil. My friend Cassius and any of his fellows that set foot upon it shall be forever free. You can either leave now or we can start shooting at each other. All of us are quite prepared to die here today in the cause of freedom. What do you say, Jones? Are you ready to find out how many of your men are loyal?”

Jones face twisted into a mask of hatred that betrayed his true nature, and he turned towards his men. “Come on boys, we’re leaving.” He turned back towards Jacob. “This isn’t over, Channing, not by a long shot. You may have won the battle, but the war is far from over. I shall return.”

With his left hand, Jacob returned his secondary armament to his waistband, and with his right he drew a bead right between slave driver’s eyes. “Anytime Jones, you know the address.”

Jones turned and started to walk away, and then he turned back for a parting shot. “I always get what’s mine.” To this Jacob replied only with a wave of his pistol. The three freedom fighters walked close to one another, but they did not lower their weapons until the caravan had ridden out of sight. Then they looked one to the other, but they did not speak a word. They didn’t have to, as each knew what the other was thinking. The price of victory is eternal vigilance.

Chapter 16

In God's Country

The stakes had been raised, and so Jacob and Two Rivers decided to go on a scouting mission to see what they were up against. They set out before dawn the next morning. Cassius stayed behind to keep watch over their cabin. The two scouts spoke not a word as they rode out. Jacob's heart was pounding so hard that it was threatening to leap right out of his chest. Two Rivers felt just as calm as the day is long. He had faced far more perilous foes than Jones before. He had also seen so much death in his life that the thought of dying was no longer a troubling one for him. If anything, it was a comforting one, as death would be for him a release from the ghosts that haunted him.

They came upon the Jones plantation just as dawn broke over the horizon. They hugged the treeline closely to avoid detection. This was not easy, as a great many trees had been cut down to build the many structures that now lay before them. Rows upon rows of mostly empty houses were laid out close to where the forest once stood. Beside that were many barns and storehouses. A steady stream of slaves brought in bags of meal and cured meat. Off to the far corner was a slave shantytown that looked as if it were tacked on as an afterthought. To the south were fields of corn and wheat that stretched as far as the eye could see. To the north cattle and horses grazed themselves upon the prairie. In the center of it all the Jones family mansion rose up like a medieval manor. At its top was an observation tower where the unblinking eye of Master Jones watched over them all.

Jacob and Two Rivers saw many sad eyes of slaves going out into the fields to take in the autumn harvest. They saw many crooked crosses that stood as a

testament to just how many of them had been worked to death. They saw many hard eyes of overseers who held whips and guns to testify that here they were the lords of life and death. They saw a blight upon the land that stretched further and further with each passing day. They saw a group of overseers saddling horses, and decided that now would be a prudent time to return lest they be discovered by the patrol riders.

As the pair of scouts rode back, they tried to make sense of what they saw. Two Rivers spoke first.

“This is not good my friend. We are already outnumbered, and they are preparing for a heavy settlement. With that many houses and that much food, and as much gold as that damn Jones has, he will not have any problem convincing many people to move here. And they will all be in his pocket.”

Jacob, his heart weighing heavy, spoke second. “This place is an abomination in the eyes of God.”

Two Rivers could not help but laugh at his friend's religiosity. “Why is that? Because they keep slaves, right?”

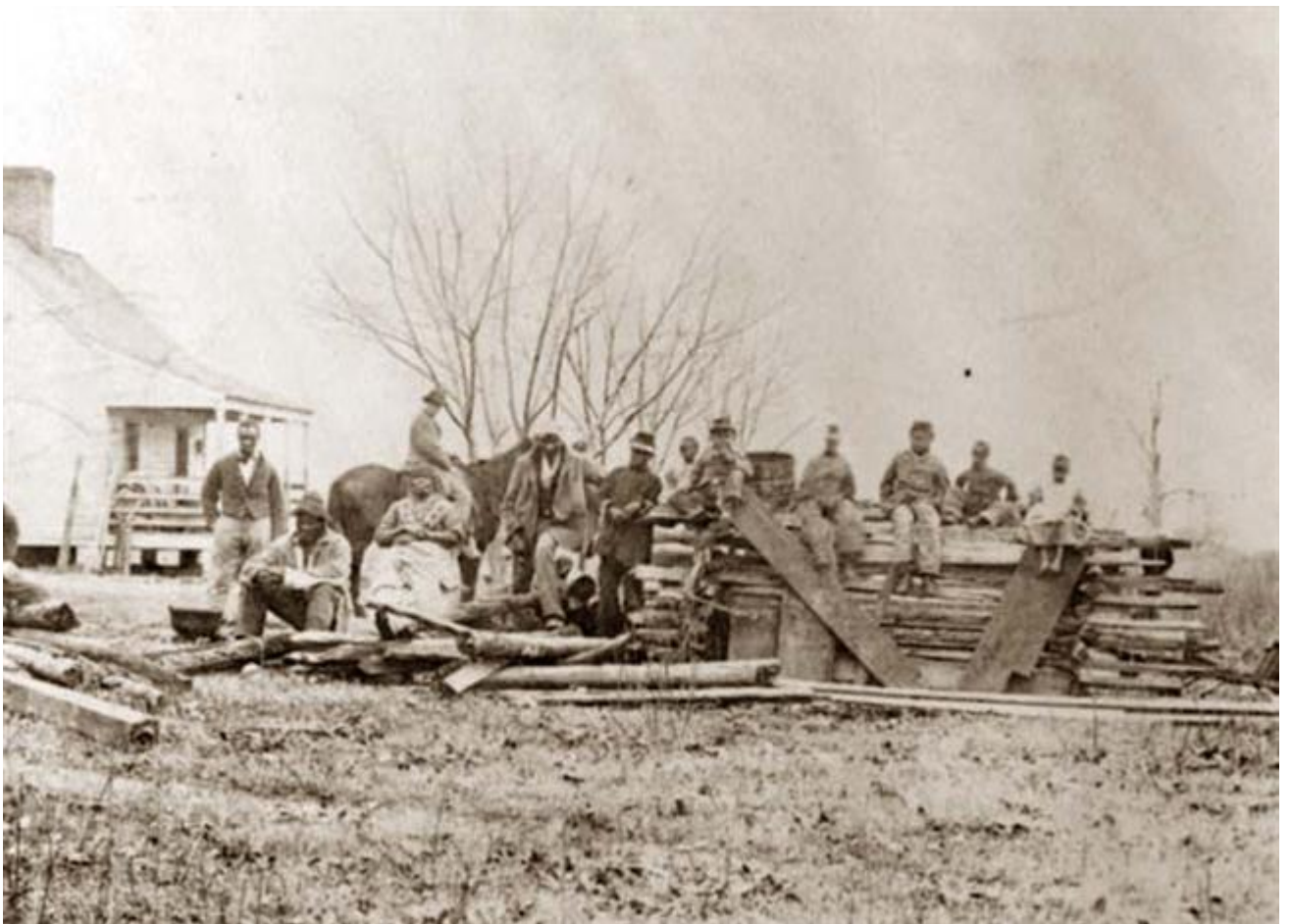
Jacob shook his head. “No, it is more than just that. They think they own this land. They are trying to conquer it. When my people come, we must seek to live with the land, not just on it. We will need you to show us the way, Brother Two Rivers. For nobody owns this land, nobody ever can. This is God's country, all of it. The land does not belong to us, we belong to the land.”

Two Rivers could scarcely believe that he had just heard such wisdom from a man nearly half his age. On the night he met Jacob, he had begun to suspect that all white men were not the same. Now he knew this to be true. He looked over to his friend and gave voice to his revelation.

“Well I'll be damned. I never met a white man who believed in the Great Father before.”

They rode the rest of the way in silence, for no more words were necessary. But things would never be the same between them again. Never again would Two Rivers regard Jacob's God with suspicion, for now he knew that Jacob's God and

his own were one and the same.



Chapter 17

Shining Through

Late one afternoon the three friends were cutting lumber into boards to build Jacob's church. The sun burned bright but the wind carried with it the cold taste of winter. Suddenly a lone rider appeared in the north. They all grew troubled and put down their axes. Two Rivers picked up his shotgun and Cassius grabbed his rifle. Each checked the condition of their weapons and pulled their hammers back into firing position. Jacob stared at the figure moving across the endless prairie. Two Rivers stepped up to Jacob's right and Cassius to his left. Each was ready to guard their friend with their lives. Two Rivers gave voice to their unease.

“That would be a scout for Jones' war party. We should shoot first and ask questions later.”

Jacob scratched his head, still transfixed by the lone rider coming in across the plains. “If that is so then why is he coming in from the north rather than from the south?”

“They have circled around and doubled back,” Two Rivers replied. “They are trying to confuse us. We have to take him out, now.”

Jacob shook his head, not quite convinced. “We can't just shoot him down in cold blood. Then we would not be any better than that damn Jones. Even if that is another one of his dogs, he has made no threat to us. Maybe he just wants to talk. Hold your fire, I'm going to go see what he wants.”

Now it was Two Rivers turn to shake his head as his young friend walked up

to the stranger. Cassius traced the curve of his rifles trigger with his right index finger as he squinted towards the lone rider. He wanted to make sure he could quickly raise the weapon, take aim, and take him out should this unknown man present a threat. Jacob squinted as well. There was something familiar about this rider. Once Jacob came close enough to make out his facial features he cried out with joy and went running towards him. It was Peter!

Grinning from ear to ear, Peter jumped off his horse and ran to embrace his oldest and dearest friend. Then the two men smiled and clapped one another on the back as they beheld on another for the first time in months. Jacob shook his head in disbelief, laughed, and made a declaration of his joy. "You came!"

Peter laughed and responded. "Well I couldn't let my best friend have the adventure of a lifetime without me! Out west, living off the land, this is very exciting! And boy do I have a story to tell you. Things are moving very quickly back home Jacob."

Jacob shook his head again, still not quite believing what his eyes were telling him. "There will be time enough for stories later. Come, let us eat."

Peter recovered his horse and followed his friend over towards the cabin. Jacob introduced his oldest friend to his two newest ones. As the sun set across the horizon they built a fire, cooked their dinner, and sat down to share a meal together. When they had finished, Jacob found that he could contain his curiosity no longer.

"So, what news from back home my friend?"

Peter leaned forward eagerly, and the fire illuminated his face against the growing darkness. "Good news my friend, very good news; the seeds you planted in Boston have found fertile soil. When you left, the movement you started multiplied in magnitude. The Kansas Freedom Settlement Society has many supporters all across New England. Not the least of which is your father."

Jacob's jaw dropped almost to the ground. "But how can that be? My father called me a damn fool and said I would starve alone in the wilderness on my way out the door."

Peter shot him a wolf's grin. "It would seem that you made an impression upon him. Every day he publishes and preaches on the virtues of your cause. He has convinced many and brought some very influential individuals into our camp. And he is not the only one. Feast your eyes upon this my friend."

Peter pulled from the small of his back a recent issue of *The Liberator*. On the front was a picture of Jacob speaking in Boston Commons. It carried a full page endorsement from William Lloyd Garrison himself, urging all who loved liberty to pledge their support to the Kansas Freedom Settlement Society and join the struggle to found a new bastion of democracy in the west. Jacob was floored. Peter continued.

"We have many friends with pull. We have significant financial backing. And the best news is, I am only here as an advance party. There are nearly a thousand settlers coming over with the spring thaw. Kansas will be free soil my friend, and you can take that to the bank."

Jacob looked off to his side and stared up into the night sky, still shaking his head in disbelief. His heart felt lifted right up into the heavens. But when his mind turned to recent events, his heart grew troubled.

"Peter, this place is not like Boston at all. It is dangerous here. These slavery men have hearts of stone. They think nothing more of taking a man's life than they would of putting down a lame horse or a mad dog. We're not in Massachusetts anymore."

Peter pulled back his coat to reveal the butt of a pistol sticking out from his waistband. "I am not afraid of them. I have already overcome much hardship to get here. If these running dogs of slavery come to take your friend or give us any other trouble then my pistol will have something to say about that. I am committed to the cause, to your cause. I won't back down from a fight. I am here. And I will be with you Jacob, even unto the end of the world."

Chapter 18

Winter's Heart

The first snow began to fall in the winter of 1858. The four friends turned their thoughts towards their winter stores. They had chopped plenty of firewood. Jacob and Peter had brought as many dry goods with them as their horses could carry, but neither of them had counted on the necessity of keeping four men alive through a cold and cruel Kansas winter. It was decided that they should hunt for as much game as they could find and jerk the meat while there was still game left to hunt for in the forest. Jacob and Peter, being men of the city, went with Two Rivers to take instruction. Cassius, having been brought up in rural Missouri, was already an experienced hunter. So he took his rifle and went forth into the forest as a lone wolf seeking his prey.

Cassius had always loved hunting. It was about the only time in his life he had ever known the comfort of solitude. Having been raised a slave he was constantly in close quarters with others. It seemed he could not even put on his pants without an audience. As he walked alone amongst the trees and scanned for movement he felt different somehow; closer to the ground. Running away had stirred such a panic in his heart that it took months for him to calm down. But the loyalty shown to him by Jacob, Two Rivers, and, more recently, Peter had granted him the safety net he needed. After thinking on it for a while, Cassius realized what this strange feeling was. For the first time in his life, he was not afraid. But perhaps he should have been, for Cassius was not out of the woods yet.

Far forward and to his right, Cassius spotted a rustling amongst the leaves. Hoping this meant that his hunting trip had not been in vain, he crouched behind a tree and raised his rifle. But it was no deer that Cassius had spotted, it was

an overseer. And it was coming right for him. As the threatening figure walked closer, Cassius realized that this overseer was one who had been particularly cruel to him. For the Jones plantation, that was saying quite a lot.

Slowly but surely, the overseer's careful and deliberate steps brought him closer and closer to Cassius' position. Then he stopped. He saw Cassius' face over by the tree and realized that he had come across game of a different kind. Game he had already gone hunting for on three separate occasions. The overseer grinned as he raised his rifle. What choice did Cassius have? He fired, and he ran like he was being chased by the devil himself. Perhaps he was.

Cassius was so terrified that he could not even feel his feet touching the ground as he ran faster and faster through the forest. He had committed the most grievous and unforgivable of sins for a black man raised in the south. He had shot a white man; an overseer no less. He had killed a white man who had been given power over him. One who had the power to decide whether he had done right or wrong. One who had power to decide if he should live or die. If Cassius were caught now, then death would come to him slowly and painfully. It would probably take days for him to die, and his family would be watching the entire time. He ran like a madman, for his life depended on it. There could be no turning back now.

Once again Cassius ran into the cabin on the prairie that had become his sanctuary. Once again he kneeled in the corner and prayed for deliverance. He prayed with all his heart. He prayed all day long. As the sun sank low in the sky, Jacob, Peter, and Two Rivers returned with a deer draped across each shoulder. When they stepped into the cabin, it took only one look into Cassius' eyes lit with fear to let them know that they had bigger problems than cleaning their game. He told them his story, and then they sat in silence for a while. Jacob spoke first.

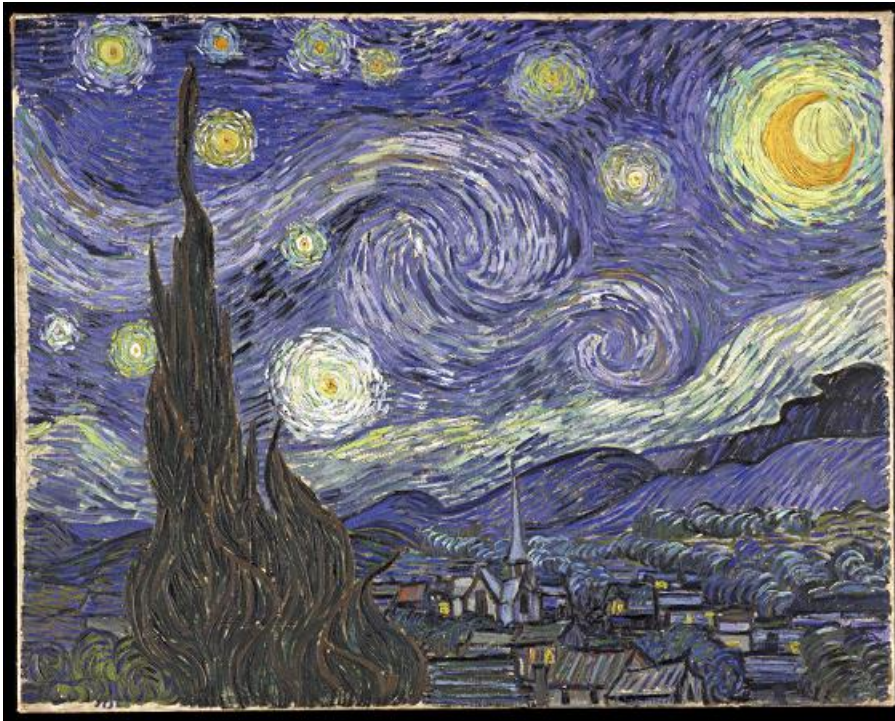
"Friends, we have a problem." Two Rivers nodded his agreement.

"Indeed; by now they have realized that the hunter is missing and have gone out looking for him. It will not be long before they find his body and realize what happened. Then they will organize a war party and come here after dark. They will try to sneak up on us and kill us in our sleep. We must be ready for them."

They walked outside to inspect their perimeter and come up with a plan for defense. Peter spoke up.

“They will be coming at us from the south. We should dig in here and lie in wait for them.” Two Rivers shook his head and voiced his disagreement.

“These men fight like cowards. They have come for us three times already and three times they have run off like dogs with their tails between their legs without firing a shot. They will come at us from the treeline and not reveal themselves until the last possible moment. We can take them, I have a plan...”



Chapter 19

The Dogs of War

Nobody in the cabin slept that night. Jacob, Peter, and Two Rivers sat fingering their weapons and wordlessly staring at one another. No words were necessary. The fear they felt sat heavy enough upon them without giving voice to it. Besides, none of them had anything encouraging to say. They felt like men condemned, and they sat waiting to die. Cassius stood watch amongst the trees. This was one of the few occasions where his black skin actually came in handy. They sat, and they waited, and the moon crept slowly across the night sky. It felt as if they had waited for an eternity. But soon enough Cassius ran in with a warning.

“They comin’! Everybody load up and git ready. They comin’!”

Finally, it was time. The band of patriots all burst into activity as they set a trap for their tormentors. Two Rivers separated the barrels of his shotgun from the stock of the weapon and slid his shells home.

“Once more into the breach dear brothers.”

Jacob loaded his pistols and readied them for action.

“Cry havoc.”

Jacob, Peter, and Cassius took their positions in the east-facing entrance of the cabin. Cassius lay with his rifle in the doorway to provide accurate shots and snipe away at the enemy one by one. Jacob and Peter crouched beneath the windows to either side with a pistol in each hand to lay down covering fire at a rapid

rate through wide and interlocking fields of fire. Two Rivers crept out the back entrance and waited for the war party behind the cabin. He had a surprise for them.

The four freedom fighters heard a rustling amongst the leaves. Their enemy drew near; it would not be long now. Once they were all hidden behind nearby trees, they began to creep out. They crouched low and held their weapons tight as they took slow and silent steps forward towards the cabin. As Two Rivers had advised, Cassius didn't shoot 'till he saw the whites of their eyes. The nearest overseer stopped and drew in a sharp breath. They had been spotted! Before he could warn the others Cassius fired the first shot, thus ensuring the man would never speak another word in his life. It had begun.

The overseers quickly ran to the treeline for cover. Jacob and Peter popped up and encouraged Jones' men to keep running. No such luck; once they had found cover behind the trees they started shooting back. Jacob and Peter got down to reload. Two Rivers crept up as close to the edge of the cabin as he dared with all of that lead flying his way.

With a nod, the three in the cabin simultaneously returned fire. As they did, Two Rivers bolted from the cabin to the treeline. So fixated were his adversaries on the three people shooting at them that they did not even notice that the veteran guerilla fighter was taking position on their left flank. The first shotgun blast caught them by surprise, and with the second they began to scatter. Two Rivers dropped his shotgun and pulled out a pair of pistols to provide enfilading fire. Cassius picked off a retreating overseer and drew his own pistols. Peter and Cassius ran out to take the fight to the enemy, and Jacob put down what suppressive fire he could.

It did not last much longer. Soon the head overseer was heard yelling out the only words spoken during the battle, "Let's git!" Three Kansas guerillas suggested with their guns that their opponents run as fast as they could. Their blood was so up they did not even notice that only three were firing, not four as there should have been. Once it was over, the only sound to be heard was the anguished moaning of the wounded. The three got up to inspect the battlefield. As Jacob walked over to the trees he noticed that one of the wounded was not dressed like an overseer at all. It was Peter!

Jacob cried out in disbelief, "Peter!" He ran over to pick up his bleeding com-

rade and cradle him in his arms.

“Peter, you can’t die. Can you hear me? You can’t die Peter! We need you. I need you. You have to stay with me. Oh Peter...”

Jacob’s words trailed off as he was overcome by tears. Two Rivers ran over as fast as he could. He brushed the younger man aside and kneeled to inspect Peter’s pierced side.

“It is not bad. He will live, but I have to get this bullet out of him. Go back to the cabin. I need water and cloth to use for bandages.”

Jacob ran back inside the cabin to fetch the needed items. Two Rivers drew his knife and cut Peter’s clothes away around the wounded area. Peter screamed in agony as his friend dug out the offending ball of lead. Jacob found what he was looking for and ran back. He stopped in his tracks and nearly dropped the bucket of water he was carrying as shots rang out. Cassius was shooting the wounded overseers. Jacob trembled for a moment but continued. At that moment he had more immediate worries than his friend’s fall into darkness.

By the time Jacob had returned Two Rivers had found what he was looking for. He tossed the bullet aside and reached for the water and a rag. He cleaned the wound as best he could and held the rag over the bleeding area. He reached for Jacob’s hand.

“Here, hold this. Put as much pressure as you can directly over the wound.”

Two Rivers took the shirts Jacob had brought him and cut them into strips. Then he bandaged Peter’s torso. Two Rivers inspected his work, and then he nodded. The bleeding had stopped; Peter would indeed live. He spoke to the others.

“Come on, we have to get him inside. Help me carry him.”

His grim task completed, Cassius helped the others tend to Peter’s broken body. Once they were inside, Jacob sat with his friend’s head upon his lap, laid hands on him, and prayed for his life. Cassius and Two Rivers sat in silence, each trying to make sense of the horror they had just witnessed. Nobody in the cabin slept that night.



Chapter 20

On Taking Revenge

Once again the sun crept up over the horizon. Everyone in the cabin gave thanks for the end of that terrible and bloody night. Everyone except for Peter that is; by that time he had passed out from blood loss. Two Rivers walked over to inspect the condition of his patient by the light of day.

“He is fine. His breath and heartbeat are strong. Someone will have to stay here and keep watch over him though.”

Cassius volunteered for the task. After all, without Peter’s selfless courage he would either be dead or praying for death by that time. Two Rivers showed him how to change the wounded man’s bandages and keep the wound clean. He instructed Cassius to make sure Peter drank plenty of water and ate something once he awoke. Then Jacob and Two Rivers walked outside. The dead bodies of overseers lay strewn across the landscape in an awful scene of death. Jacob shook his head in sadness and regret. Two Rivers had a suggestion.

“We should take their scalps and lay them at Jones’ doorstep. Send him a message”

Jacob was so traumatized that he considered it for a moment. But then the better angels of his nature won out.

“No, it is not for us to judge. God will judge these men, as only He is wise enough. Besides, taking revenge will only lead to more violence and bloodshed. I fear I have already seen too much of that for one lifetime. I will give these men

a Christian burial. Whatever their sins, they are human beings and deserve that much at least.”

Two Rivers shook his head at his friend’s naïveté.

“You saw what that damn Jones tried to do here. Those men were trying to kill us in our sleep, without warning. If we did not shoot first, then we would be the ones who lay dead here. He doesn’t want talk; he wants war. He will stop at nothing, and this will not end until either you or he goes into the ground. You are going to see a lot more violence and bloodshed before this is over.”

Jacob did not say a word. He just picked up a body and started walking towards the south. By now Two Rivers had realized how stubborn his friend could be when his mind was made up, so he picked up another body and helped. Once they were all laid out far from the cabin, they procured shovels. They began to dig graves out of the cold, hard ground. Two Rivers had a difficult time letting go of his anger.

“Cassius took revenge.” At this Jacob nodded.

“Yes he did, and I fear the implications of that action. Had we nursed the wounded back to health and returned them to their families, then Jones would have realized that murder is not our objective here. Perhaps then we could have found a diplomatic solution to our problem. A wiser man would have found a way not to start a war. Now the gloves have come off, and there will only be more dead bodies. Still, perhaps I will be able to find a way to win without further acts of violence. I must try at the very least.”

All day the two labored. The sun was going down as they finished the final graves. Jacob bowed his head to say a few words, as was his ministerial obligation.

“Lord, we commend the souls of these fallen men unto Thee. We ask that you judge them wisely and fairly as only You are able. We, the living, pray for Your wisdom. We pray for Your light that we might somehow see a way out of this terrible darkness that has fallen over us. Most importantly, we pray that You will build in our hearts a spirit of forgiveness, Lord. We pray for the courage to forgive others as You forgive us, that somehow we might bring an end to this endless cycle of killing. That these dead might not have died in vain. In Your name we

pray. Amen.”



Chapter 21

If You Build It

All across the great plains of Kansas the harsh winter wind howled. There was no sanctuary to be had from it out on the open prairie. On that landscape labored four friends, hard at work building a sanctuary of their own complete with pews, pulpit, and a nave for the choir. Peter was back on his feet, and he worked twice as hard as the others in an attempt to prove he was just as healthy as a horse and needed no nursemaiding. Two Rivers was the foreman of their construction crew, showing the others how to draw the forms in their mind forth from the wood. Jacob had a beatific smile on his face throughout the entire process, as this church now rising out of the plains was for him quite literally a dream come true. Cassius worked in a trancelike state, for the meditation of his work drew him very near to the God of his understanding. He began to sing.

“Oh, fo’ a closer walk with Thee. O-oh, fo’ a closer walk with Thee! Oh Lord, my prayer, is fo’ a closer walk with Thee.”

Cassius’ spiritual gave order and rhythm to the labor of his friends. Soon they found every nail being driven home in time. Jacob began to sing along. He made a mental note to have his choir transcribe the spirituals that Cassius sang when they arrived. And they would; Jacob had faith. As with every song, it’s time eventually passed. Two Rivers broke the silence.

“You are sure that these friends of yours are coming, then? This is going to be one strange church without a congregation.” Peter laughed at the older man’s lack of conviction.

“You have quite obviously never been to New England my friend. There a man’s word is his bond. New England men are not like these southron scoundrels, they can be counted upon to keep faith with their fellows. They are coming. They said it. They meant it. It would behoove us to work as hard as we can to make all in readiness for their arrival.”

Two Rivers remained somewhat less than convinced. He repeated doggerel remembered from childhood.

“Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the door, and where are the people?” Jacob laughed, as accorded his good nature.

“They will come, or they will not come. That is not what is important. This work, building this church, is important enough in and of itself. No workman who sets his hand to the plow and looks back shall be worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is much more than just a church my friends. This is an act of faith.”

Cassius bobbed his head vigorously and voiced his agreement. “Amen.” Jacob had said exactly what Cassius had been thinking, although the preacher had spoken the truth far more eloquently than the field hand ever could. Two Rivers held his peace, as Two Rivers was a man who held his peace. Peter held his peace as well, having been properly chastised for his bragging and his arrogance. Jacob paused for just a moment to gaze up at the sky which lay behind the winter storm clouds. He knew. He did not know exactly what he knew, but he knew. Of that much Jacob was absolutely certain.

Chapter 22

They Will Come

First Unitarian Church of God on the Plains

Spring of 1859

It was finished! Jacob had done it. With the help of his friends, Jacob had built his church. He walked through the sanctuary and lovingly traced every curve of the wood with his hand; every wall, every pew, every door and every window. Not that everything was finished of course. The windows lacked glass. Jacob could only hope that some skilled craftsmen would arrive willing to donate their time and their talent. Jacob had only brought a few Bibles and hymnals; he would need more. But all of that could wait. Besides, Jacob intended for this church ever to be a work in progress. He had resolved that this would be a church unlike any other.

Jacob stood at the pulpit, familiarizing himself with that intimidating view from above. He sat in the pews, testing that view from below. He spoke, he shouted, and he sang, familiarizing himself with the acoustics of the place. He walked up and down the aisles, looking all about as tears welled up within him. It was a work of beauty. It was the work of friends. It was a labor of love. Neither wind nor rain, neither snow nor sleet, neither the fear that stalks by night nor the terror that walks by noonday was enough to stop this wonderful work from taking its place upon the prairie. Jacob felt more filled with the Spirit than he had at any time since his ordination. He kneeled, he bowed his head, and he prayed with all his heart.

“Oh Lord, I dedicate this work of our hands to You. I consecrate this house upon the plains as a house of prayer and worship that You may be glorified by it.

May all who enter here be filled with Your spirit, and leave with renewed vigor for Your work. Lord, I know that this house of wood is not truly Your church, for Your church is the body of brothers and sisters who will come here to be unified by Your name and worship You with one accord. Let them come, Lord. I pray for a congregation. As I have dedicated my life to Your service as Your shepherd, I pray for a flock. Let every pew be filled so that every heart may be lifted and every voice may sing. I pray these things in Your blessed name. Amen.”

At that moment Cassius ran through the front entrance. He was so excited that he could barely contain himself.

“Brother Jacob, Brother Jacob, you gotta come see! Come outside Brother Jacob, you gotta see this!”

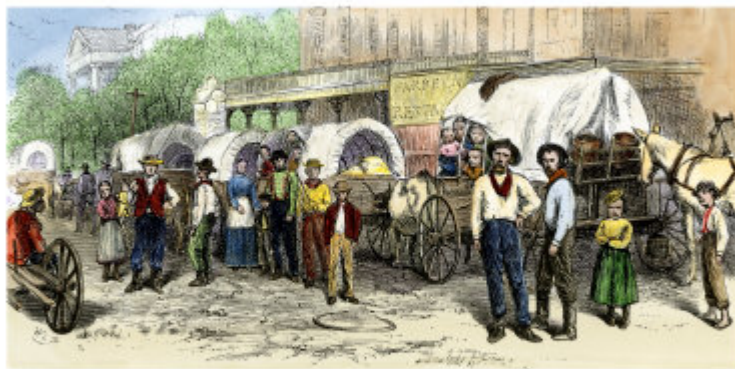
Curious as to what all of the excitement was about, Jacob rose and followed Cassius outside. He looked to the north, where Cassius was pointing. And there they were.

The first wave of settlers came riding across the plains, and Ruth rode at the head of their formation. Laughing with joy, Jacob ran out to meet them. He embraced his dear friend Ruth, though not so dear to him as she would have preferred. She held him tight, and vowed never again to let him go. After a long and loving embrace, Jacob found his tongue, “You came!”

Ruth smiled at him and replied, “Well I couldn’t stay sitting around in Boston and let you have all the fun out west, now could I?” Jacob merely shook his head by way of response.

One by one, they came. They came walking, they came on horseback, and they came riding on wagons. They were singles, they were couples, and they were families with children. They were young and old, they were rich and poor. They were doctors and lawyers, carpenters and blacksmiths, butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers. They were Republican and Socialist, they were immigrant and native-born, they were Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. They had all left their individual lives behind to be united in the dream of a free Kansas. One by one, Jacob took them by the hand. One by one, Jacob thanked them for coming. One by one, Jacob blessed them for believing in his dream.

And so it came to pass that the fondest dreams of Jacob's heart came true on that day. He gazed out at the very large assembly of friends old and new. A new church would be filled with congregants. A new city would rise up out of the wilderness. A new day would dawn. And Kansas would be free.



Chapter 23

The Council Fire

That night was lit by a hundred campfires. Outside the cabin Jacob, Peter, Ruth, Cassius and Two Rivers sat around one of those fires. As he looked out at all of the flickering lights illuminating families and friends Jacob could not help but worry. They were safe for now; Jones would not dare launch an attack with their numbers so suddenly and drastically increased. But that would not last for long. Jacob looked back to his own fire and shook his head.

“These people are not safe here. Jones will keep his distance for now, but he will be back. He’s going to bide his time and hit us at the first opportunity he gets, that’s a given. I fear that I have only led all of these people to their doom.” Peter was not about to let his best friend sell himself so short.

“They all knew the risks when they came here, Jacob, and we are not entirely defenseless. Any man here would gladly lay down his life for the cause. Jones’ men fight for gold, but we fight for the greater good. We are far from home, but their home is close by. When the time comes, we will stand and they will run.” Ruth added her voice to the council.

“You said it yourself, Jacob, God lifts those who lift one another. If we all look out for one another, then we will be fine.” Cassius nodded his agreement.

“We be outnumbered from day one, but we still be here ‘cause we stick together. I see how y’all stick out yo’ necks fo’ me, so I don’t think nothin’ o’ stickin’ my neck out fo’ y’all. All these people here do the same, then we be just fine.” Two Rivers held his peace, and Jacob spoke once more.

“Very well, but we have to build. Tent canvas will not stop a bullet. We need to start thinking about what we should build.” Again Peter was quick to respond.

“We need to build walls and fortifications. We need to dig in here and be ready to take a stand. We must be strong enough to throw back any assault that damn Jones throws at us.” Ruth shook her head and voiced her disagreement.

“These people did not travel all this way to live in a military stockade. They need hearths and homes if they are to have something to fight for. Besides, we cannot rely solely on brute force. That is their way. We came out here to find a new way to live.”

Two Rivers stood up and pointed to the moon. Then he traced a circle in the dirt with his boot. He addressed the council.

“This is what we should build. Jones follows the way of the straight line, as he wishes to be seated at the head of every table. He puts his people into boxes, so afraid he is that they will plot against him. That is the slave driver’s weakness; he is only one man. We should follow the way of the sun and moon, building circles just as we are now seated around the council fire. All within the tribe have a voice, and what is known to one is known to all. That will be our strength.” The elder took his seat and looked Jacob straight in the eye.

“You, Jacob, you are the flying eagle who sees the distant horizon. I have seen the way you look at this land. You see not what is but what can be. You have spoken with the Great Father in the spirit realm, and He has shown you the nest that our tribe should build. These people know that, and that is why they have traveled far to join you. Share with them your vision, and they will bring it down from the spirit world and into this one.” Jacob felt the weight of the heavy burden of leadership deep in his heart, and he cast his eyes downward.

“I never asked for this kind of responsibility.” Ruth walked over to him. She took Jacob’s hand in hers, and turned his eyes into her own loving gaze.

“These slave drivers never asked us what we wanted, Jacob. Your friend is very wise, you should listen to him. These people came here to follow your vision. You already know the answers to these questions you are asking. Tell the

people, and believe in yourself. We all believe in you.”

Jacob looked around. Peter and Cassius were nodding their agreement. Two Rivers was looking straight at him with an intensity that spoke to his belief in the great seer of visions. Jacob found his backbone.

“So be it then. We shall build a tribe.”



Chapter 24

A Tale of Two Cities

Two cities were built upon the plains that spring as two societies grappled for control of the newly settled soil. Two men led their people in the building and two differing visions of the Good guided them. Each was as different from the other as night is from day and they stood poles apart. There were only a few miles of distance between them, but they might as well have existed in two different countries. Each regarded the other with cold suspicion and looked forward to the final settling of accounts.

To the north lay the city of Adams. There the desire to live in closer harmony with one's God and one's fellow man drew many from New England far away. Their leader was a man of words. Through his words he drew them in, he lifted them up, and he brought them closer together. No one in Adams saw the need for elections or courts, as Jacob had wisdom enough to guide them and mediate their disputes. The city appeared as a wheel upon the prairie, moving ever closer towards its destiny.

To the east people built their homes. Each was as unique and beautiful as the people living within them, and each was crafted with loving care and with help from neighbors. They stood on land that was once forested, and while many trees were cut down for the building many were also left standing. The people sought to live with the land rather than on it, and many tree-lined boulevards connected one to the other.

To the west the people tilled the soil and brought their daily bread up from the good Earth. Walking out from east to west one would first encounter the barns

and storehouses that brought the land in to the people, and then the stables and blacksmith shops that brought the people out to the land. Beyond that lay rows of corn and vegetables and endless golden fields of grain. Beyond that grazed cattle and horses. Many people of Adams hailed from the crowded cities of the eastern seaboard, and more than a few were quite taken with the giddy freedom they found in riding out on the prairie to keep watch over their herds. Beyond that lay the open plains and the continuing call to adventure.

To the north the people built their places of business. The Northern traditions of industry and mercantilism were reflected in banks and bureaus; in workshops and warehouses. There were bakeries and barbershops. There were newspapers and neighborhood associations. There was a mutual aid society to help the recently resettled. There were printing presses dedicated to faithfully reproducing every speech, every sermon, every word that passed from the lips of the man who had become their leader. Close to the city center was a stage where many famous abolitionists came to encourage them. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Beecher Stowe herself had come by to praise their works to the sky and urge them to stand firm against the scourge of slavery.

To the south the people built their defenses. There were no walls, as Adams was an open city. However, one could quite easily tell that the people here lived under the constant threat of danger. Walking in from south to north one would first encounter earthworks and rifle pits. Here the men shouldered arms and stood their posts. Beyond that lay armories and the parade ground. Here the local militia drilled and passed in review. Every male citizen of Adams did his duty for the defense of their fair city.

At the center of it all lay Jacob's church. Its steeple rose up to the sky like the hub of the wheel; like the desire of the people to climb closer towards the Heavens. From it led four roads in the four cardinal directions like the spokes of the wheel. Through the city ran a stream of crisp, clear water. It brought nourishment and life to the people, and it was good. For the pilgrims who had come to Adams, it was the best of times.

To the south lay the city of Jefferson. Here the promise of getting ahead drew many from Missouri nearby. This was a city laid out like a patchwork quilt, with various elements scattered here and there without very much thought, planning, or coordination put into the building. In shape it resembled a box; so much so that

a visitor might be led to wonder if all of the guns were there to keep people out or to keep people in. Elections were the first order of business so that the rank structure might be clearly defined. But it was an election in name only, as there was but one mayoral candidate. No one dared run against Master Jones for fear that the well of gold might run dry.

On the perimeter of the city the wealthier residents of Jefferson built their plantations with hopes of keeping up with the Joneses. They were invited to his parties and balls. They served as city councilmen and judges. They bent over backwards to imitate their Master in every way. Indeed, it would appear that when Jones sneezed they all caught cold. Their mansions were all made of ticky-tacky and they all looked just the same.

In the more central regions of the settlement the less wealthy residents of Jefferson built their cabins, shanties and lean-tos. For many who lived here the forty acres of land Jones had given every family was the first they had ever owned. Those who could afford slaves brought them of course, and while most did not they eagerly looked forward to the day when they could advance their station in life. There were many slaves at the Jones plantation who could be rented for just pennies a day, and this seemingly inexhaustible supply of cheap labor brought with it the promise of plenty. And they were promised even more to come once the northern portion of the territory was opened up to settlement by right-thinking people. The dream of getting rich quick brought in hordes of people with dollar signs in their eyes, but for those who labored in that dream's name it was the worst of times.

South and north, slave-owning and free-thinking; the two cities stood in diametric opposition to one another. One plutocracy and one theocracy; one come from Missouri to build their fortunes and the other come from Massachusetts to build a shining city on a hill. One valued competition and the other valued cooperation. But like most identical twins, when they looked at one another they saw only their differences and not their similarities. And it was their similarities much more so than their differences that inevitably drew them into conflict with one another. Each was arrogant. Each was convinced that they knew the one right way for everybody to live. And each had vowed to wipe the other right off the map by any means necessary.

Chapter 25

Heaven is In Your Heart

Dawn broke over the horizon on a clear Sunday morning, and sunlight shined down upon the people. Most quarters of Adams were empty, as they had all agreed to make Sunday a day of rest even though this was not the tradition of all. By ones and twos, by threes and fours they all left their homes and made their way to the church. Although all had not been raised with this tradition either, they had all adopted it. For it was far more than just a religious service to them, and Jacob's comments held far more meaning than mere observance of the transient forms of any particular religion. The First Unitarian Church of God on the Plains was a place where threads of many colors were knit into a single community, and every heart found hope and encouragement in Jacob's words.

The people greeted one another as they walked down the streets, making their way westwards and thus recreating the journey that brought them all together. But this pleasant conversation usually came to a halt once they passed through the portal of Jacob's church, as it was a moving sight to behold inspiring awe, silence, and contemplation. It now looked quite different than it did on the day it was first consecrated. It had to be enlarged, for one thing, as Jacob had not counted on the people coming in such large numbers. But many hands made that work pass quickly. The windows were put in by very skilled artists, and the stained glass scenes inspired much reverence and reflection. The hymnals in their pews could not be found in any other church, as Jacob had enlisted the help of many musicians and composers in producing a completely new one. The songs in it were drawn from the traditions of Cassius' folk and many others represented in their community. Indeed, it had become a church unlike any other.

Soon the sanctuary was so full it seemed as if the people would have to climb up to the rafters in order to find more room. At a nod from Jacob, Two Rivers walked up to the pulpit to issue the call to worship. The murmur of quiet conversation was hushed as Two Rivers, unaccompanied, began the service with a traditional chant of his people. There were no words, as the chant was intended to communicate that which transcended the power of mere words to describe. The hush continued after he was after he was finished. All who heard the chant were convinced that it was important, that it meant something, even though the sense of what exactly it meant escaped them. Two Rivers was seated, and Jacob stepped up to the pulpit to greet the people.

“Come, one and all, young and old, rich and poor. Every man, woman, and child; you are all welcome here. Come all who labor, here you shall find rest. Come all who mourn, here you shall find comfort. Come all who seek, here you shall find. Here we shall all share in our sorrows and our triumphs, together. Here let us gather to take one another by the hand, to lift one another. Let us worship.”

There was a great deal of singing in the service. Jacob had always been a lover of music. Cassius sat in the front row and sang with such enthusiasm he put the choir to shame. He could read neither the words in the hymnal nor the musical notes, but he did not have to. He could feel the music. He could feel it in his heart, he could feel it in his bones, and he could feel it right down to the very core of his being. He could feel it in his soul. His fellows sometimes laughed at his expressive zeal, but these cool northerners always appreciated the warmth their southern comrade brought to their services. Jacob found his sermons punctuated by the occasional “Yes!” or “Amen!” or “Preach it Brother!” He also found himself quite glad to finally have confirmation that the audience is listening. The time for music passed, and Jacob returned to the pulpit to begin the sermon.

“Brothers and sisters, we gather here in the shadow of a grave and growing darkness. We gather under the constant threat of danger, for the wolf is always at the door. The real danger does not come from the guns and knives of our enemy, for those things can only kill our bodies. The real threat is to our immortal souls. This threat stems from the message of our enemy. This is the message that the things of this physical and mundane world is all that there is. This is the message that worldly goods and prestige among our fellows will make us happy. This can never be, for those things are fleeting and of no ultimate consequence. To believe this lie is to cut off our souls from the anchor of meaning and drift alone and lost

across the endless sea of nihilism.

“But I believe that we who gather here today have not fallen victim to that lie. I believe that we stand firm. We stand firm in the knowledge that we suffer, and that we will continue to suffer. For it is through strife that God creates, and it is through suffering that God teaches. If we seek to distract ourselves from this suffering through pretty little baubles or through mindless and meaningless entertainments, then surely our suffering has no meaning. But if we accept our suffering, if we seek to learn the lessons that it has to teach, then our suffering is quite meaningful. For then we may grow, we may transcend it, and we may offer our hand in friendship to our brothers and sisters who suffer with us. For truly the bonds formed by common trial are stronger than those forged of iron. I tell you the truth, who suffers the most, is who God loves the most, as it is through suffering that we are initiated into His service.

“We stand firm in the knowledge that if we do not all stand together then surely we shall all hang separately. It has ever been the strategy of rich and powerful men to divide and conquer. Our only hope of survival is to have courage. We must have the courage to look one another plainly in the eye, see that we are different, and to accept each another despite that difference. It matters not what name we call God by; be it Christ or Yahweh or the Great Father. It matters not whether we pray to the Holy Ghost or the Blessed Virgin. It matters not whether we pray in Hebrew, in Greek, in Latin, in German, or in English. It matters only that we do pray, and that we do call on God. For we are all beautiful, and we are all created in the image of God no matter how we are created. If God had wanted a world filled with machines all steaming along in lockstep then that is what He would have created. But he chose to create each of us just as unique and beautiful as a snowflake. Our strength, and our only hope as a people, is that we remain undivided. I tell you the truth; it is only by standing together as one nation, one family, one tribe, that we may ever hope to weather the coming storm.

“We stand firm in the knowledge that ours is a God of love. Nay, I spoke wrongly. We stand firm in the knowledge that God *is* Love. I tell you the truth; whenever you feel love for another, what you feel is God coming to dwell within your heart. Whenever you show love to another, then you show them the face of God. Surely God’s presence is among us for he dwells in every kind deed, in every kind word, and in the laughter of every child. If you seek meaning, then look to your left and to your right, for you need look no further than your neighbor. If

you seek strength, then you should also look towards your neighbor. If you seek life, then you need look no further.

“Brothers and sisters, do you not see? Salvation lies not in any church or synagogue. It dwells not in holy wafers or stone tablets. It cannot be found by doing any good deeds or by living in accordance with any just laws. It is through love that we come to the law, not the other way around. God does not live in a church, He lives in our hearts. Heaven lies not in some far-off land beyond the clouds, Heaven is in your heart. Salvation lies in embracing one another. For by embracing one another, we embrace love. And if we embrace love in this life, then Love will embrace us in the next.”

At the conclusion of the service, the congregation rose and joined hands for the benediction. Jacob bowed his head and folded his hands for the closing prayer.

“Lord, we now leave this church of wooden walls to go forth into the real church, which is the world. We pray that whatever strength we have found here we will take with us as we return to the everyday struggle. Both the struggle for freedom as well as the greater struggle, which is the struggle within. The struggle to purify our hearts that we might live in accordance with Your spirit, which is love. We pray as we go walking back to our homes and our lives that you will walk with us that we might have a closer walk with Thee. In Your blessed and wonderful name we pray. Amen.”

At these closing words the bell began to ring and the choir began to sing. Ruth waved to Cassius to indicate she wished for him to join her in the choir. There were very few dry eyes in the congregation, and there was much embracing. Jacob went walking down the aisles and out the door. The congregation followed him, convinced now more than ever of the rightness of their decision to leave their old lives behind and follow him. The choir was singing them on their way. They began to clap their hands and sway back and forth; their voices filled with a new emotion. They sang as if they had only just discovered the joy of song. With Peter walking on his right and Two Rivers walking on his left, Jacob led a procession through the streets of Adams. The people walked closely behind them, so close to Heaven they felt as if they could reach up and touch it.

Chapter 26

An Exchange of Letters

On the next day dawn's early light found Jacob already seated in his office. His face was cocked to the side with his chin resting on his left hand. His face was grim as he contemplated his next move. Things had been very quiet on the southern front over the past few months. Jacob's scouts had reported that Jones was building a city much bigger than their own, and this task had most likely distracted him from further harassment of the abolitionist band. But now the buildings were built and the settlers were settled, and Jacob feared the start of a new campaigning season would soon be upon them.

Their last dance of destruction had resulted in a great deal of bloodshed. Jacob wanted to avoid that if at all possible, but how best to go about it? Jacob tapped the side of his cheek with his index finger and fretted. Last time Jones had made all the moves, and Jacob had been forced into adopting a merely reactive stance. Each move upped the ante, bringing larger and larger threats of violence until finally exploding into all-out war. This time, Jacob thought, he should be the one to make the first move and adopt a more proactive stance. His moves should be diplomatic ones, and violence should be reserved only as a last resort. Yes, that was it. Jacob laid a sheet of paper out on his desk, picked up a pen and began to write.

“Dear Mr. Jones,

I have been thinking long and hard about last year's unpleasantness. I deeply regret the loss of your men, and I would like to offer you an olive branch. I propose that we both agree to cease using violence as a means to political change,

and that we table the question of slavery until such time as a general election may be called in the territory at large. We are not so different, you and I. We have each shouldered the responsibility for other men's lives. We cannot let the conflict between us lead to further bloodshed, or else we shall prove ourselves unworthy of our positions. I await your reply.

Humbly Yours,

Rev. Jacob Channing"

Jacob sealed the letter into an envelope. When the young man who had volunteered to serve as church secretary arrived, Jacob pressed him into service as a messenger. He handed his eager young recruit the letter. Jacob gave him instructions to go walking into Jefferson, carrying no weapons, under a white flag of truce. He was further instructed to give the letter only to Jones, wait for his response, and say as little as possible. The younger man took the letter, touched his hand to his brow by way of salute, and went walking right into the lions den. Jacob watched him leave, and then he returned to his desk and buried his face in his hands. He prayed for the safety of his secretary, and he sincerely hoped that he had not just sent the young volunteer off to his death.

Later that day a pair of sentries came walking into Jacob's office. They were helping along his messenger, who was quite visibly bruised and shaken. They reported to Jacob seeing a group of riders coming in from the south. They rode up to just outside the range of the sentries' weapons and dropped the young man to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Then they went riding back the way they had come. The messenger was found bound and gagged. When the sentries removed the rag from his mouth, they found Jones' reply stuffed inside. They handed the somewhat moist piece of paper to Jacob.

Jacob thanked them and sent his secretary home for the day. The guards returned to their posts and Jacob inspected the reply he had received from Jones. It was short and to the point.

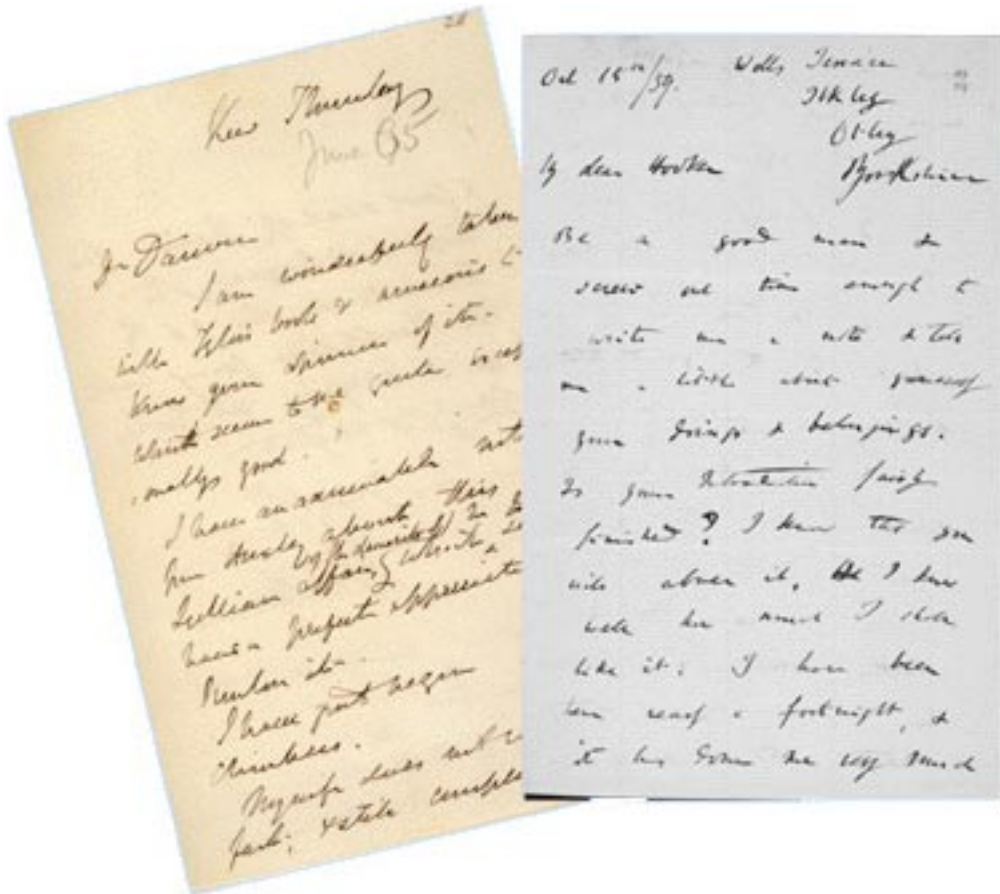
"Dear Goody Two-Shoes,

I am going to ride you right out of Kansas on a rail. I always get what's mine.

Yours,

M. Jones.”

Well, at least he was honest. Jacob wadded up the grim missive and tossed it into the corner. He returned his chin to his hand and his index finger to his cheek. Jacob resumed fretting. Things were bad, and they were about to get a whole lot worse.



Chapter 27

Which Way the Wind Blows

Adams, Kansas

October 25, 1859

The wind whipping in from across the plains had grown cold, and the news blowing in from the east had grown colder still. The headline of the most recent issue of *The Liberator* was in bold type so large that it took up nearly half the page, and it seemed to shout at the reader like a messenger carrying the worst news since Hannibal laid siege to Rome. “Raid on Harpers Ferry! John Brown Captured!” Below that was a picture of the would-be revolutionary clapped in irons and being led into a stockade by a pair of soldiers. It was news of apocalyptic proportions throughout the country, and Adams was certainly no exception. John Brown was a hero to many in that city on the prairie. Even those who did not approve of his methods most certainly approved of his rhetoric.

On the north side of town, Ruth was walking toward the Mutual Aid Society building when a grim-faced companion thrust the newspaper into her hand. She stopped walking to take a look at it, and her jaw dropped when she read the article. After it sunk in, she resumed walking as she talked with her friend.

“So it has finally come to this. I suppose I should have seen it coming. It seems to be the way things are going these days. What choice did the poor man have? Those slave drivers just won’t listen to reason. I’m surprised they are even going to bother with a trial; they obviously intend to execute him. They might as well be honest about it and just march him straight to the gallows. The man is a saint. That’s who he is, a modern-day saint. And now he’s about to become a

modern-day martyr. This is bad.”

On the south side of town, Peter was on his way to the parade ground for militia drills when a comrade handed him the paper. He leaned on his rifle, read the news, and looked up with a thundercloud on his face.

“Well, now we see how those damn whip-crackers like getting a taste of their own medicine. Thank God there is at least one civilized man with some backbone. Now the rest of our northern brothers can see what we are up against. Tried for treason against the state of Virginia; what a load of absolute malarkey! How exactly does one commit treason against a state?”

“And the government sent federal troops against him. What an unqualified travesty! I sure would like to meet this Robert E. Lee character in a dark Boston alley, I’ll tell you that much. We are in great danger my friends. We’ll have to step up our training; make sure every man here knows how to use these rifles. Double the guard as well, this news is sure to rattle that damn Jones’ cage. We should seriously consider calling up the entire militia to active service. With our own government turned against us somebody has got to stand up for what is right. It’s time for a new revolution, by God. This is bad.”

On the east side of town, Two Rivers was helping a newcomer build his home. They paused when they heard a group of men walking toward the parade ground discussing the day’s news. On receiving a copy of the paper, they passed it around so each could read it. Afterwards, Two Rivers shook his head and resumed swinging his axe. But try as he might, he just could not hold back the biting commentary.

“I never will understand why you white men just want to dive into every pool you come across head first without a thought for what rocks at the bottom you might dash your head upon. Instead of waiting for change, this John Brown tries to set the whole world on fire in a single night. Any fool with a torch can burn down a house. Destruction is all that comes overnight, it takes time to build. All he has done is stir up a hornets nest. This is bad.”

On the west side of town, Cassius was hard at work bringing in the autumn harvest. He and his fellows paused their labors for a moment when one of the townsfolk rode in to read them the news. Cassius leaned against his scythe and listened, then he shook his head in disgust.

“Shoulda known better. Them niggers been whipped so much they be scared o’ they own shadows, and you can fegit about the white man. That John Brown fellow might as well have asked ‘em to put them guns against they own heads. Prob’ly woulda had better luck askin’ ‘em to do dat. And know what; do he think they be better off now?”

“I tell you what Jones and his like gonna do now. They goan round up every nigger that look at ‘em funny or they hear talkin’ under his breath. Then they goan beat on him and burn him and cut pieces off him ‘till he confess to bein’ in on it wit’ Brown. Then they goan string him up, but not befo’ he name names. Then they goan round them up and do the same. It ain’t never goan stop. They is goan be a whole lotta blood spilled ‘count a what that damn fool John Brown done gone and did. This is bad.”

In the center of the city, Jacob was at his desk composing a sermon when his secretary brought in the paper. Jacob read the article, and his eyes nearly popped right out of his head. He read it a second time just to make sure the event was real and not just his imagination running away with him. Then the man of prayer and meditation rose from his desk and started pacing back and forth in an uncharacteristically physical attempt to deal with his stress. He placed his left hand on the side of his face and started tapping his jaw with an index finger as he tried to figure out the full import of what he had just read. Finally, he spoke.

“So, Mr. Brown has decided to light the fuse on a powder keg that has been building for two and a half centuries already. Now Jones and every demagogue like him are going to stoke the fires. Everyone who listens to them will start stroking their guns and seeing slave revolts waiting to happen across every corner. Every state from Virginia to Missouri will start raising militias. I was hoping that a diplomatic solution to this problem may yet be reached, but I fear that it is too late now. You don’t need a weather vane to see which way the wind blows.

“With this the battle lines will be drawn. Houses will be divided against themselves. Brother will be set against brother and sons will rise up against their fathers. There can be no turning back. It has begun, and from this point out blows must decide. This situation is about to explode. The whole world has been turned upside down in a single night. This is bad, and it is about to get a whole lot worse.”

Chapter 28

A Fire Bell in the Night

Darkness had covered the land, and the residents of Adams lay sleeping in their beds. Suddenly the bell of the church began to toll, and sentries went running every which way but up to rouse the men of the town.

“To arms! We are invaded! Arm yourselves; we must defend our fair city!”

In no time at all an army of night-shirted minutemen came pouring out of their homes and into the streets. The call to arms was hardly unanticipated, and just about every male resident of Adams had taken to keeping loaded firearms in their bedchambers. They were too late, however, as their city was already in flames.

The raiding party from Jefferson had ridden far out to the west, and then they circled back and came at the abolitionist stronghold from the north in an attempt to confuse them. They succeeded; most of the sentries were facing south, and by the time they had spotted the flickering torches coming their way it was already too late. Those torches were tossed on the aid society building, the printing press, the bank, and other offending structures. Then they turned west and tossed torches on the stables, the barn, and the granary. All remaining torches were tossed into the partially harvested wheat fields.

Only after the raiders had set off into the black of night could a defense of Adams be raised. Hasty shots were wildly fired at the distant and disappearing targets. After the first volley most men of Adams had nothing with which to oppose their invaders but harsh language. Peter cursed as he stood in the flaming fields of wheat, and then he turned to address the men.

“Saddle horses! After them! They’re not getting away with this!” Peter turned and ran to organize a pursuit, but before he took his first step Jacob grabbed his shirt and pulled his face to within inches of his own.

“Have you gone raving mad? How are you going to saddle horses, the stables are on fire!” Jacob turned to address the men.

“Form bucket brigades! Everyone, we must form bucket brigades, we gotta get these fires out!” As the men ran to replace rifles with buckets, Jacob turned to speak with his secretarial shadow.

“Pass the word to the sentries; we need every warm body out here to fight these fires. Women, children, everyone who can walk needs to get out here before the whole city burns down. Run!” Once again the church bell rang out its emergency summons, and once again the sentries ran through the residential sector with a frenzied cry.

“Fire! The city is burning! We must put out the fire! We need every man, every woman, every child, every bucket”

As fast as they could, the people formed lines between the stream and the burning buildings. Every vessel that could hold water was passed between them. They needed no lanterns to see with, as the city had become their torch. Throwing buckets of water on the flames felt like spitting in hell. Despite their best efforts, the people of Adams feared they were beholding the funeral pyre of their dreams.

Finally, as the first light of morning broke across the horizon, the last fire was extinguished. Some buildings had been saved, but others were little more than blackened ruins. As the wearied people marched back to their beds, those that still had beds at least, Jacob could see sadness, loss, and devastation written in every eye. But he knew that would not last for long. Soon would come the rage, and it would burn every bit as hot as the fire that had just been fought with mixed success. Soon it would threaten to consume their souls just as the physical flames had threatened to consume their city. For some, it had already begun. As Jacob stood in the streets and bore witness to the results of the attempted act of poldicide, Two Rivers walked up to his side.

“We have to retaliate, tonight. If we don’t teach that damn Jones a lesson now then it will only encourage more raids.” Jacob shook his head, wondering how things had ever gotten this bad.

“No, there will be no retribution tonight. We have our lives, and we should be grateful for that much at least. We will rebuild. That will show Jones that he cannot burn us out.” Two Rivers remained unconvinced.

“An eye for an eye, is that not what your scriptures say? He burned our city, we should burn his.” Jacob stared out at the ruined buildings and felt like a man diminished.

“An eye for an eye will only leave the whole world blind. If I have learned anything from my time here, it is that violence only leads to more violence. We will turn the other cheek. There has been enough destruction, now it is time to build.”

Jacob walked off to his church. Two Rivers turned his eyes towards the rising sun. The skies were red that morning; as red as the blood many were eager to shed. Smoke continued to rise from the city like a sacrifice on the altar of hate. Some fires had been extinguished, but others were just beginning to smolder.

Chapter 29

John Brown Lives

Adams, Kansas

December 2, 1859

After much wailing, many hard words and many threats of violence, the date set for John Brown's execution had come. There was no work in Adams that day, as it had been set as a day of mourning. Everyone was wearing black, every eye was downcast, and every word was muttered in a mournful tone. Though Pottawotamie was some ways away and his raid there conducted some time ago, John Brown had become the patron saint of Kansas abolitionists. As the time set for his execution came and passed, he became their martyr.

Jacob conducted a memorial service that evening. Every resident gathered on the northern edge of the town late in the evening. After sundown, Jacob lit a candle. He then lit Ruth's candle, who in turn lit Peter's, and so on until all held a lit candle. Jacob then led a procession through the streets of their city. Most of the buildings had been rebuilt, but some damage from the fire was still visible. Some of those marching held pictures of the man they had come to mourn, but they all marched in silence.

Jacob led them through the doors of the church and walked up to the pulpit. One by one, the people filed in behind him and sat down in the pews. Their candles gave off an eerie glow which was indicative of the sense of unreality they all felt. The fire gleamed in every eye now turned expectantly towards Jacob. He wished he could say something to make it all better, but he knew such a thing simply was not possible. Still, he hoped to give them some encouragement at least.

Jacob broke the somber silence.

“My friends, it is with heavy hearts that we have gathered here to be together in our time of great sorrow. The tragedy that has occurred today in the state of Virginia weighs heavily upon us all. It is a crime against humanity of such great magnitude that it has driven down the value of human life everywhere. I wish there was something I could say; words to make this better. But you will find comfort in only one source, and that is one another.

“On this night, we stand firm in our conviction of three great truths. First, that while you can kill a man, you can never kill what a man stands for. Opposition to the great crime of slavery has not died this day. While the champion of our cause may have fallen, many remain to pick up his torch. The hangman’s noose can only kill our bodies. It can never quench the fire that burns in our hearts. And so, on this night, we ask ‘Oh grave, where is thy sting?’

“Second, we stand firm in the knowledge that truth can never be hidden. Like the candles now lighting our sanctuary, ever shall the light of truth hold back the darkness. All on this good Earth that lives and breathes yearns to breathe free. On this great truth our final victory is written. And so my brothers and sisters, we should seek not to hide our candles in any grave. Rather, we should let them shine down from the highest hilltop that the unjust rulers of this world may read the handwriting on the wall.

“Finally, we stand firm in the truth that John Brown is not really dead, as he lives on in the hearts of us all. Whenever those who seek justice stand firm against the tyrants and slave drivers of this world, he shall be there. Whenever one of our brothers and sisters escapes from whips and chains, he shall be there. This, my friends, is the truth that shall embolden us towards our final victory. John Brown’s body may lie rotting in the grave, but his truth goes marching on.”

Chapter 30

Baptism by Fire

Later that night Jacob walked alone through the streets of Adams. The candles were all extinguished and the people had all gone to bed. But Jacob found that sleep escaped him on that night. Though he felt spent and exhausted, weary in heart and in mind, in body and in soul, rest yet remained unknown to him. Jacob contemplated the mystery that he should yet exist here at all. He should have been dead many times over by now; dead from hunger, dead from exposure to the elements, or dead from the bullets of his enemies. Indeed, with all the risks he had taken, Jacob found no logical reason that he should still draw breath. Yet against all odds, there he stood, alive and unharmed. He had rallied others to his cause and became the father of a new city. Jacob was sure that there must be some reason that he endured as he had endured.

But what was it? What did it all mean? Nothing had really changed. The tyrant to the south still held fast. Jacob's survival only galled him to ever more uncivilized acts of violence. The austere existence of Jacob's people only inspired him to burn what little they did have. He still robbed his fellow man of free will with whips, chains, and guns, and for it he was rewarded with even greater wealth and power. Jacob felt resigned to his fate. To be hated for loving justice. To build up the things of life, only to witness them being consumed by the fires of death.

Jacob walked along and stared up at the stars, vainly demanding of them an answer. What should he do? To meet iron with flesh only left him with broken bones. To meet a sword with words only left him cut down. To meet hardship with hardship. To meet cruelty with even greater cruelty. Surely this would overcome the enemy. Wouldn't it? Jacob felt lost and confused. He decided to go into the

church and pray.

As Jacob walked through the doors he heard in the sanctuary the sounds of sobbing. He saw Cassius seated in the front pew with his face buried in his hands. Jacob walked over, sat down next to him and placed a hand on his shoulder, seeking to comfort the mournful man by his mere presence. Cassius seemed to be soothed somewhat, and found his tears to be spent. He gave voice to his trial.

“It be over a year now. I ain’t seen her. I don’t know if she be alive or dead or sold down the river or nothin’. If she be still livin’ then she done had my baby by now. I cain’t stop thinkin’ ‘bout ‘em. Cain’t help but feel like I abandoned ‘em. Cain’t help but wonder if she be better off with me by her side, if maybe then I could help her raise that baby up right. Oh Brother Jacob, I miss ‘em so much!”

As Cassius voice broke, Jacob wondered as well. He wondered if he had failed his congregation. Failed them through his inaction. Failed by counseling them to turn the other cheek as each cheek grew bloodier and bloodier still. What they needed was justice. What they needed was to fight for it. He thought of the fire within the heart he had spoken of so many times. A fire could bring light and illuminate the dark path. A fire could also burn. It could burn away injustice and iniquity and sweep the land clean for a new beginning. Jacob would light that fire.

“Tell me Brother Cassius, have you been born again?” Cassius’ eyes narrowed in confusion.

“Well, preacher down at the Sartoris plantation, he baptize me in the river, but I don’t know ‘bout being born again. I don’t really feel no different than I did befo’.” Jacob shook his head.

“He baptized you with water, but I have come to baptize with fire. Do you wish to be made anew?” Cassius looked over at his spiritual leader with a gleam in his eye.

“Yes.” Jacob rose and turned towards him.

“Then kneel.” Cassius knelt, and Jacob laid a hand on his brow.

“Brother Cassius, do you wish to receive the fire of the Holy Spirit?”

“Yes.”

“Do you wish to reclaim that which is rightfully yours and has been taken from you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you wish to defy the tyrant Pharaoh and lead your tribe to the Promised Land?”

“Yes!”

“Then rise, Spartacus, and go forth to free your people.”

Spartacus stood and met Jacob’s gaze. His eyes held not fire but ice. His jaw had not the droop of a slave but the stone set of a warrior. Jacob met ice with ice, stone with stone, and Spartacus needed no further instructions. He had been born again. Hew walked towards the door, but before he walked out he turned to address Jacob one last time.

“You know, I finally understand what you say tonight. John Brown ain’t dead. He ain’t dead at all. John Brown ain’t dead ‘cause he’s alive in me.”

Chapter 31

Spartacus' Revenge

Jones Plantation

Early Morning of December 3, 1859

Lucilla was roused before dawn that morning. That was not unusual, as the conditions in the slave quarters she slept in were quite crowded. Whenever one moved or snored all were aware of it. Lucilla sought to use these times wisely, as they were the only times that she was alone with her infant son. She cradled her offspring close to her. The slave woman's husband had run off over a year ago, and now this little baby was all she had left of him. The others said that he had taken up with some preacher not too far from here that protected him, but Lucilla knew that was just wishful thinking. No white man would ever help a nigger.

Lucilla heard a rustling again, and this time she grew worried. There was only one reason why anyone would seek to gain entrance to the slave quarters at this hour. An overseer must be on the prowl for a female to have his way with. Now that Lucilla had a child, she was particularly vulnerable to the predatory behavior. Threats on the baby would be all an overseer needed to buy her silence. She closed her eyes and lay as still as she could, hoping and praying that another victim would be selected. She felt a rough male hand on her shoulder and her heart leapt right up into her throat.

But there was something familiar about this touch. She rolled over and opened her eyes to a familiar face indeed. It was her husband! But what was he doing back here? He would get them all killed!

“Baby, what you doin’ back here? They be lookin’ fo’ you baby. They say you is one crazy nigger. Baby, they is gonna kill you!” Spartacus’ calm and resolute voice was heard in contrast to his wife’s worried whisper.

“I’m here to rescue you. Goan get you and the baby outa here. There be folks close by here. Folks with guns, folks that be here to help the niggers. We goan get all the niggers outa here. Goan get ‘em outa here and goan give ‘em guns. Then we come back here and see how that damn Jones like it when the bottom rail be on top. We ain’t gotta be ‘fraid no mo’ baby!”

But Lucilla was more afraid than she had ever been in her entire life. She placed a hand on her husband’s shoulder, looked him in the eye, and begged for his life.

“Baby, if you love me, if you ever loved me, then you will turn around right now and run as fast as you can and never come back. This here be crazy talk, baby, you goan get us all killed.” Spartacus would not yield.

“No, I ain’t runnin’ no mo’. I ain’t ‘fraid no mo’. It they turn to be ‘fraid now. They done kilt enough o’ us, now it be they turn to die.”

Lucilla’s eyes grew as wide as saucers. She felt icewater pumping in her veins. She was so terrified that her vision grew dim and she was afraid that she would faint.

“They be right, you is one crazy nigger!”

But Lucilla was not the only one who was alerted to Spartacus’ presence. Footsteps were heard growing closer to the slave quarters as the overseers came to make sure his conspiracy would be a short-lived one indeed. Spartacus pressed an index finger to his lips.

“Get ready to run baby. Get all the niggers up and get ready to run, it be harder for them to chase you if you all run at once. You run straight up north. There be a town not too far from here. Just axe somebody fo’ Brother Jacob, he help ya.”

Spartacus stacked himself by the door and drew a pair of pistols from his waistband. Lucilla was so frightened she thought she would die from fear before the

overseers even got their chance. Spartacus waited until the footsteps were right outside the cabin, and then he popped out. He gunned down one overseer and then another in quick succession. There were only two, but the sound of the gunshots insured that would soon change. Now the entire plantation was awake. Spartacus stuck his head through the door of the slave quarters.

“Run! Everybody run, now! I’ll cover ya!”

But they did not run. They only stared at the deadly drama playing itself out right in front of them in mute horror as those who have known nothing but fear their entire lives will do when the opportunity to escape presents itself. Now an army of overseers drew near; all of them armed and ready to crush the slave rebellion before it got started. They started shooting, and Spartacus stood his ground. He was pierced by one bullet and then another. Still, Spartacus stood his ground. One overseer fell and then another. Still, they stood their ground. Then Spartacus ran out of ammunition. Then he was done for.

The overseers stopped shooting and surrounded him. They were determined to take this one alive. The first one that rushed him got a pistol-whipping, but the next one knocked him down. Spartacus did not go down without a fight, but he went down none the less. They had him. Kicking and screaming, cursing and bleeding, they dragged him off to face unspeakable horror.



Chapter 32

Strange Fruit

Jacob woke with a start that morning. He had fallen asleep with his head on his desk last night. It was just as well, he practically lived in his office these days. But something seemed odd this morning. Jacob couldn't quite put his finger on it, but something was not right. Then he realized what it was. There was a great commotion outside. People were milling about and muttering to themselves. But how could that be? It was first light; people should just now be waking up. Jacob walked into the sanctuary and down the aisles towards the front door. As he walked he could hear gasps and cries and sobbing coming from outside. Something was definitely wrong. Jacob quickened his pace.

There was a crowd outside. Most of them had their mouths covered and were staring and pointing at something up in a tree. An armed sentry walked up to Jacob and raised a hand to stop him.

“Reverend Channing, sir, you might not want to see this.”

But it was too late, Jacob had already seen it. His friend Spartacus was hanging from the branches of the tree. His friend that he had taken in and defended and inspired and baptized and given new life was now naked and swinging from a noose. His body bore the marks of fresh torture and from his neck was hung a placard bearing a message of hate:

“You're next you nigger-loving jayhawker trash.”

Jacob's knees turned to water. He opened his mouth to speak but his voice had

run away in terror. Ruth walked up behind him and placed a hand on his shoulder, but Jacob brushed it off. He was inconsolable. So it had come to this. The life he had given was turned to death. The hope he had given was twisted to horror. So be it. Jacob knew what he had to do. His resolve stiffened. He stood up, turned around, and walked back into his office. Once again he pulled the largest Bible from the shelf and turned to the Book of Exodus. He took a box of ammunition from his desk and loaded his .45 caliber Bible verse. Jacob figured he would also need the Book of Judges for this close encounter, and produced his secondary armament. Once he was locked and loaded he walked back outside. It was a sight to see.

On the streets was no longer a crowd milling about but the men of Adams getting organized. Peter stood at their head doing his part as the duly elected captain of the militia.

“Form ranks men! This is no drill, we are going into battle! Ready yourselves!” Once the men were in their formation, Peter turned on his heel and saluted.

“Sir, the men are formed. We are armed and ready for action, sir!”

Jacob walked up to him and spoke in a low, conspiratorial tone.

“Peter, this is my battle. It is my fault that my friend is dead, and I will see to it that he is avenged. I cannot ask you or any of these men to come with me.”

“With all due respect, sir, you cannot ask us to stay at home while you go off and get yourself killed. He was my friend too, damn it all! And this is not just your battle.” He turned his head and raised his voice to parade ground volume.

“Isn’t that right men?!”

“Yes sir!”

“We are coming!”

“We are with you Reverend!”

“They can’t kill us! If Kansas is free then we live forever!”

The men cheered. Their captain turned to once again face the man they were proud to call their leader.

“The men are formed and ready sir. We are going with you. We will fight. If our lives are required to make Kansas free, then so be it. We are all willing to pay that price. It is our duty to make sure there is no more strange fruit hanging from these trees, and you cannot ask us to shirk it.”

Jacob shook his head, but he relented. He knew that once an idea had burrowed its way into Peter’s head trying to dig it out was an exercise in futility. Then there came another sight to see. The women of Adams came walking down from the north side of town. Ruth walked at their head. Behind her many of the women were carrying heavy cases marked “Bibles.” Jacob walked up to Ruth, his brow furrowed in confusion.

“What is this? Are you going on a missionary trip?” A sly smile turned up the corners of Ruth’s mouth.

“Of a kind; we are coming with you. *I* am coming with you.” Jacob’s eyes grew wide with fright.

“No! Ruth, you cannot do this. It’s bad enough that the men of this town are determined to sacrifice themselves. It is dangerous out there!” Ruth’s face wrinkled in a rare expression of outrage.

“Damn your stubborn hide Jacob Channing! I love you, and I do not care about danger. I let you go once, and I will never do so again. If you are going, then I am coming with you, and it is just that simple. Besides, he was my friend too. All of these women know the danger, and they all volunteered. Isn’t that right ladies?!”

“That’s right!”

“We are coming too, Reverend!”

“We stand by our men!”

A self-satisfied smirk crossed Ruth's face. Again Jacob shook his head, but again he relented.

"So be it then. If you will not be turned from this path then I would rather have you walking beside me than sneaking up behind me." Ruth nodded and turned to speak with the woman standing beside her.

"Sister Betty, would you be so kind as to pass out Beecher's Bibles?"

"I would be happy to Sister Ruth."

The cases were opened, and the .50 caliber muzzle-loading "Bibles" were passed through the ranks of the women. Jacob gazed out in wide wonderment at this outpouring of support. He decided it was good, as now Spartacus would surely have his revenge. Two Rivers came walking up, and the crowds parted so that Jacob's most trusted advisor might have a word with him. Two Rivers walked up and looked into Jacob's eyes. He was frightened by what he saw written in those eyes. This time, Two Rivers found that he could not hold his peace.

"What happened to turning the other cheek, Reverend?"

"What happened to an eye for an eye?"

"I have seen this before. Many times have I seen young braves walk the war path with blood in their eyes, and always their path was a short one. I know that you grieve for your friend. He was my friend too. But you cannot bring him back by dying. Then I will only lose two friends on this day." Two Rivers turned to address with the crowd.

"Are you so eager to become martyrs? Do you want to live through this? Then fight smart. Fight like you're outnumbered. Fight like an Indian." He turned back to face Jacob once again.

"If you are determined to this, then I cannot talk you out of it. But I am coming with you, and we are both coming back alive."

The die was cast. Every adult in Adams had set themselves on a course from

which there was no turning back. There was activity everywhere as they saw to their weapons and encouraged their comrades. Peter addressed his men one last time.

“All right, this is it! We have prepared for this! You are ready for this! Remember your training, and you will come back alive. All squadron commanders, perform pre-combat inspections. Let’s get ready to move out!”

But Peter’s brave words rang hollow in his ears. He knew it was a lie. All of their training had focused on mounting a defense of Adams, not launching an invasion of Jefferson. He pulled Two Rivers aside and spoke to him in a hushed but panicked tone.

“Tell me you have a plan!”

The adults all marched off, and Adams became a city of children. Those old enough to know what was happening were quick to organize games for the younger ones. For the younger children it was a holiday. They laughed and played with wild abandon as only children can. The older children wore smiles on their faces, but the merriment masked the horrible knowledge that they carried inside. By the end of the day, many of them would be orphans.

The abolitionist army was on the march. Jacob led them south. Ruth was at his side, and she determined that she would never leave his side for so long as she lived. Peter and Two Rivers walked through the ranks. They passed the ammunition and they passed the word. They were ready for the final battle. As the men and women of Adams went marching along, they sang their battle hymn.

“John Brown’s body lies a-rotting in the grave, but his truth goes marching on!”

Chapter 33

Blows Must Decide

Jefferson, Kansas

December 3, 1859

A cold wind whipped through the town square of Jefferson. It cut like a knife. People used to warmer climates were bundled up against the chill, and they bustled about on their daily business. They had no idea of the threat they were under, or the power of the coming storm. The Jones family mansion lay on the south side of the town square, and opposite that lay the courthouse. To the west was city hall, and to the east lay the First Baptist Church of Jefferson. Master Jones stood on his wide porch leaning against a column as he watched the ants go marching to turn the wheels of his creation.

Suddenly a trio of uninvited guests made their way past the courthouse. Jacob walked in front with Ruth to his left and Peter to his right. Jacob called out his nemesis.

“Jones! Your brother lies dead in the field, and his blood cries out for vengeance!”

Jones walked up to his adversary with a glib smile on his face and a pair of hired goons flanking him. Unbeknownst to him, the people of Adams were taking position on the north and east sides of town.

“Reverend Channing, such a pleasure to see you again sir. I trust you received the present I sent you?” Jacob’s blood boiled.

“This is the last straw Jones. I am shutting you down once and for good.” Jones’ eyes narrowed.

“Do you demand satisfaction, sir? If so then we can settle this right now, man to man.”

“Not good enough Jones. This is bigger than you and me. I am here to deliver your eviction notice. You can either walk away from Kansas right now or I will send you and all of your wretched kind home in a pine box.” Jones’ eyes grew narrower still.

“Make your move.”

Jacob was only too happy to accept the invitation. He whipped out his pistol and fired a in a fraction of a second, but his target was no longer there. Jones had gone running back to his mansion. His thugs raised their weapons, but they were distracted before they could shoot. Two Rivers rode in without warning. He let out a loud war cry and blasted one of the mercenaries into the next life. Peter made short work of the other one. A contingent of Adams men rode in behind Two Rivers on horses liberated from their enemy. They jumped off and took up firing positions by the church. A group of sharpshooters opened fire from the roof of the courthouse. The rest of the Adams militia moved in behind them. Jacob and his comrades fired at every armed man they saw in front of them, but they could not stay long. There were just too many of them.

The sounds of battle were everywhere. Women and children ran away screaming, and the sound of the gunshots was loud enough to make ones’ ears bleed. Overseers and other gunslinging yahoos seemed to be coming out of the woodwork to repel the invasion. Jacob, Peter, and Ruth ran back to the relative safety of the courthouse. Outnumbered and outgunned, the men of Adams pressed forward as best as they could even as they were being mowed down like blades of grass.

Meanwhile, to the northeast of town, overseers were running from their charges to join the battle. They turned a corner and found an army of women lying in wait for them. It was about the last thing they expected, and it was the last thing they ever saw. Once the overseers had been cleared out, the women of Adams turned towards the surprised slaves.

“You are free now. Run, we will cover your escape.”

They didn't have to be told twice. The slaves of Jefferson scattered into the four winds as those who have known only the discipline of the lash will do once there is no longer anything keeping them. The women began to make their way into town from the east.

Back in the town square the battle was not going well for Jacob and his comrades. While they had the element of surprise, now that their opponents were alerted to their presence they found numbers were against them. All around them a lead rain cascaded down in sheets. The thunder of battle was terrible. It sounded as if everyone in Kansas had dropped what they were doing to start shooting at one another. Perhaps they had. Jacob reloaded and frowned. He did not want to cede the initiative to the slave drivers. He looked over at his best friend.

“For the cause, Peter?” Peter finished his own reloading and nodded.

“For the cause, Jacob.”

They ran out towards the Jones mansion and fired at every puff of smoke and flash of sparks they saw through the fog of war. Ruth ran out beside Jacob with an upraised rifle, but she did not get very far. Before she could pull the trigger, a bullet caught her square in the chest. Horrified, Jacob stopped and picked her up. Peter covered their withdrawal. Jacob put her down and cradled her in his arms. He looked her in the eyes as the life passed out of her. Only at the end of Ruth's life did Jacob find the courage to speak the words she longed to hear.

“I love you.” Ruth stirred and craned her neck upwards to meet the gaze of the man she loved one last time.

“I know.”

Ruth cast her eyes to the Heavens that were her destination, and then she gave up her ghost.

Jacob wept.

Before long his grief gave way to madness, and Jacob let out a loud and terri-

ble cry.

“NOOOO!!!”

Without a thought or a care he ran out into the town square firing wildly. Peter ran up behind him, but he was quickly knocked down by the wall of bullets that was thrown up in their path. Jacob was so traumatized that he barely even noticed. Two Rivers saw disaster waiting to happen. He ran from the church to the town square and knocked him down in an attempt to talk some sense into him.

“Listen to me. This is not a good day to die. Those people behind you need a leader. Without you they will fall apart.” Jacob gave a look of anguish to his only friend in the world.

“They’re dead. They are all dead.” Two Rivers gave him strength to go on.

“If you honor what they fought for, then you will not seek to join them. Any fool can die for a cause. It is living for a cause that is hard.”

Jacob was talked off the precipice, and the two friends crawled back to the courthouse. By this time the women had fought their way to the church and were taking position along the east end of the city center. The defenders of Jefferson saw their fellows being cut down in growing number. The town square had become a kill box from which there were only two options, retreat or death. Outflanked and outmaneuvered, many of them broke and ran as hired men do when they are not willing to die for their supper. Jacob watched the carnage continuing around him as the bodies piled up higher and higher. He had had enough. He decided to put a stop to it.

“Hold your fire! Everybody, hold your fire!” The word was passed and the people of Adams stopped shooting. Slowly the remaining defenders of Jefferson realized that nobody was shooting back and held their fire as well. Jacob stepped out into the town square.

“Jones! Show yourself, I wish to parley!”

Jones, now the master of nothing and no one, stepped from his hiding place and met with Jacob in the center of the town square. Jacob began their truce ne-

gotiations.

“Have you had enough Jones, or has your thirst for blood not yet been quenched?”

“You started this bloodbath Channing. And now you have ruined me. You once offered me truce. I am ready to accept it now.” A look of iron determination came over Jacob’s face.

“I am setting the terms now, so listen carefully. Either you and all of your slave driving kind can pack up and go back to whatever hole you crawled out of, or we can go back to shooting at each other. Those are the only options available to you. Make your choice.” A thundercloud passed over Jones’ face.

“Have it your way then, I will leave. But I warn you, honor has not been satisfied. The next time I see you, I will kill you.” Jacob met him blow for blow.

“If I ever see you again, then I swear by everything holy that I will shoot you down like the mad dog you are.” The two mortal enemies stared at one another, and then they walked away.

After the pounding they had taken, Jones’ former fellows wasted no time in clearing out. Jefferson became a ghost town. To the north of town the survivors of Adams dug a fresh cemetery. A forest of small wooden crosses marked the final resting place of those who had given their lives for the freedom of people they had never even met. Jacob and Two Rivers carried the bodies of their friends with them when they left, as now only they remained to bury the dead. They had won, but the price they paid was too high. Spartacus, who was born again only to die so quickly and so horribly. Peter, who had come bringing hope at a time when it seemed there was no hope left in the world to be had. Ruth, whose love for Jacob gentle and mild had proven itself to be stronger than the grave. They were buried behind Jacob’s church. In truth, no one made it out alive. Even those who walked away would ever carry with them the weight of what happened on that terrible day in Bloody Kansas.

Epilogue

The Smoke and the Fire

Somewhere In the West

Autumn of 1893

The elder paused in his tale, and his progeny eagerly leaned in to hear the rest. After choking back his tears, the old man continued.

“The Adams tribe had won the battle for Kansas, but the war that followed was long and horrible. Jacob and his people took as their sign the Blue Coat, so that all who saw them would know that they were hard men and showed no mercy to those they looked upon as an enemy. The Grey Riders came forth to oppose them. The Grey Riders fought with such courage as any young Cherokee brave would envy. When they saw that they were outnumbered, they merely looked one to the other and said ‘Perhaps today is a good day to die.’ They fought as men who were already dead. The Blue Coats came into the land of the Grey Riders exactly as they came into the land of the Cherokee, bringing with them the end of the world. They burned everything and left nothing alive. At their passing the land was filled with dust and ashes and bricks and buildings and machines and dead things.

“Jacob had not seen the last of his enemy. The preacher and the slave driver would meet again in a land called Gettysburg; a city that became a graveyard. True to his word, Jacob shot down his nemesis, but not before he was pierced by the sword of the slave driver. He walked the war path with blood in his eyes and murder in his heart. His path was a short one. For all his study of scripture, Jacob knew not the truth of one very important saying. ‘He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword.’

“Now only I, Two Rivers, remain to tell his story. I found a shaman to cleanse me that I might step from the war path. Eventually I found a Muscogee-speaking woman who bore my children. But soon I will go to be with my friends, and once again our council fire will be complete. My sons, I raised you on the path of life so that you may not know the sorrow that weighs so heavily on my heart to this very day. That is why we keep alive the ways of the Cherokee.”

The tribe sat in silence for a while, but soon they found that their curiosity had not been satisfied. Another voice was heard.

“But father, what happened to Jacob after the battle with the slave driver? Did he remain in Kansas with his people? Did he ever return to his father’s house?”

The hour had grown very late, and only a few coals were left burning in the story fire. The elder had already told more than he had intended. The story had taken on a life of its own, as stories have a tendency to do. He found that he lacked the strength to continue.

“No my son; that is a story for another time. The moon rises high; we must rest. Now it is time to put out the story fire.”

The story fire was extinguished, and the smoke carried their prayers up to the Heavens, where the Great Father hears them all.



The End