



THE BUSHWHACKER

A CIVIL WAR ADVENTURE

Jennifer Johnson Garrity
Illustrated by Paul Boehm

The Bushwhacker

A CIVIL WAR ADVENTURE



Published by
PEACHTREE PUBLISHERS
1700 Chattahoochee Avenue
Atlanta, Georgia 30318

www.peachtree-online.com

Text © 1999 by Jennifer Johnson Garrity
Illustrations © 1999 by Paul Bachem

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover and book design by Loraine M. Balcsik
Composition by Melanie M. McMahon

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Garrity, Jennifer Johnson.

The bushwhacker / Jennifer Johnson Garrity ; illustrated by Paul Bachem. —1st ed.
p. cm.

Summary: While the Civil War rages in Missouri and Rebels destroy their farm home and scatter their family, thirteen-year-old Jacob and his younger sister find refuge in an unlikely place.

ISBN 13: 978-1-56145-201-9 / ISBN 10: 1-56145-201-7 paperback

1. Missouri—History—Civil War, 1861-1865 Juvenile fiction. [1. Missouri—History—Civil War, 1861-1865 Fiction. 2. United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865 Fiction. 3. Frontier and pioneer life—Missouri Fiction.] I. Bachem, Paul, ill. II. Title.

PZ7.G1855Bu 1999

[Fic]—dc21

99-26029

CIP

The Bushwhacker

A CIVIL WAR ADVENTURE

Jennifer Johnson Garrity

Illustrated by Paul Bachem


PEACHTREE
ATLANTA

*In memory of my grandmother, Zorah Knight Johnson Pinasco
and*

To Shirley Brown, who taught me to love books.

—JJG

*“He that imposes an oath makes it,
Not he who for convenience takes it.
Then how can any man be said
To break an oath he never made?”*

—Samuel Butler

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	vi
Introduction	vii
October Fire	1
The Road North	18
Maggie	32
Squaw Man Trade	43
Ruins on the Hillside	55
The Agreement	70
War Hatchet	82
The Man by the Creek	98
Stranger in the House	109
The Circuit Rider	127
Revenge	145
Hoot Owl's Call	156
The Soldier	166
Leave-taking	182
Epilogue	194

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the librarians at the American Studies Center at the Royal Library in Brussels, Belgium, for their consistent and cheerful helpfulness. Thanks also to Ron Pen (Associate Professor and Director of the John Jacob Niles Center for American Music at the University of Kentucky) for providing me with the songs “Shady Grove” and “Brightest and Best.” Special thanks to Professor Michael Fellman (Simon Fraser University, British Columbia) for historical advice.

Most of all I want to thank Kathleen Istudor for her invaluable help and encouragement, and Kim, Kelsey, Collin, and Eliza Garrity for their patience and love.

Introduction

Missouri was just about the worst place a person could live during the American Civil War. The slave state was Union by vote, yet many Missourians, including Governor Claiborne Jackson, sympathized with the Southern cause.

When Governor Jackson was chased out of Jefferson City by the Union army in the summer of 1861, many Missourians were outraged—even those who supported the Union. Federal troops from surrounding states poured into Missouri, taking control of the larger cities and railroads, often treating Missourians with unnecessary brutality.

Bands of civilian warriors, called bushwhackers, sprang up around the state. These pro-Southern guerrillas waged cruel war against the occupying Union troops as well as pro-Union civilians. Union sympathizers also formed their own guerrilla bands and terrorized Secessionists.

No one was safe. No one knew whom they could trust. Missouri's people, including my own great, great grandparents, lived in confusion and fear throughout the remainder of the war.

In no way do I wish to defend bushwhackers in this book. Neither do I defend the Union army's actions in Missouri. My desire is simply to tell Missouri's tragic and complex story.

—J. J. G.

October Fire

OCTOBER, 1861

Missouri breathed slow and heavy that evening. Our corn hung dust-covered and still, and the fields were hushed except for the buzz of a few old crickets hanging on with the warm weather. I wiped sweat off my nose with the back of my hand, for my fingers were stained from squashing earworms I'd caught eating on the stalks. Pa'd said to leave them be, that the coming frost would take care of them good enough, but I didn't like to see anything or anybody tear down what we Knights had worked hard to build.

Muttering to myself, I wiped worm guts on my trousers. Where was Eliza? Why didn't she have to work extra like me at harvesttime? Well, I guessed I knew where she was. Sitting inside the house on her lazy hindquarters.

"Jacob, you go on picking in that back field till sundown," Pa'd said to me at the supper table. "Indian summer's almost used up, and winter's breathing hard down our necks."

Yes indeed, I carried my weight at corn-picking time, but Eliza flopped her skirts in the horsehair chair of an evening, doing her fancy needlework. It seemed to me that when I'd turned thirteen in spring, I was all of a sudden expected to do

a man's share of the chores. Well, if it worked the same way with girls, I figured Eliza had it coming to her in about five years. She'd only just gone eight in June; old enough to do at least a child's share of the work, but I swear she didn't do even that much.

I'd just pinched another worm and flung it to the ground when our dogs started in yapping over by the house. A shout cut through the corn and stuck me sharp in the ear.

"Ezra Knight!"

Who wanted my pa that couldn't just come on up to the house and ask for him the way folk usually do?

"Ezra Knight!"

The hollering came from somewhere out front of the house. I stretched up on my bare toes and looked through the corn in that direction, but I couldn't see anybody. The sun was hanging low and the house lay west of the cornfield, so I didn't get much but an eyeful of sun.

I snapped off one last cob, dropping it in the leather-strapped basket slung over my shoulder. I'd been wishing the sun would sink down fast so I could quit. Now I had all the reason I needed. Digging a hole with my bare toes to mark my place in the row, I moved on down to the handcart sitting at the field's edge to dump my pickings. I was just pulling the basket strap over my head when I spied two horses circling our yard.

I stopped short, for the men who straddled them wore kerchiefs tied around their faces. My heart jumped up in my throat, sending blood pounding so loud in my ears the whole world went silent. Feeling my knees buckle, I dropped the basket and sank down behind the leafy stalks.

Being harvesttime, I'd been so busy corn picking that I'd left off worrying and fooled myself into thinking they'd never come.

But I ought to have known better. We were Union folk in a county full of Rebels; it was only a matter of time.

“Secesh!” I whispered, Secesh being what we called those Confederate Rebels wanting to secede from the Union. Anyone who didn’t know all about the Rebel gangs we called bushwhackers would have been an ignorant soul indeed.

Bushwhackers had been strutting up and down our part of Missouri ever since General Price whipped the Yankees at Wilson’s Creek in August. They got bolder and meaner with every barn they burned and every bridge they blew up. Running like wildfire all over the countryside, they took pleasure in tormenting good Union folk. Lately they’d been bragging that they were going to run every Union man out of Missouri by Christmastime.

Yes sir, bushwhackers were fierce, thieving murderers who fought for the South on their own terms, taking orders from no one. When I heard the older boys in Boonesboro whispering about them behind the livery stable, my hair stood on end. They said bushwhackers scalped their dead, just like Indians.

From my bed one night I’d heard Ma tell Pa how afraid she was. She asked him to cross us over the border into Iowa to live with her folks till the war ended, but Pa held fast.

“Missouri’s a Union State by vote, Myra,” he’d comforted her, “and the Union will protect its own.”

The next day on the way out to the fields I’d asked him why Ma was afraid. He lay an arm across my shoulders and pulled me close to him. As we walked, he explained how things stood with Missouri.

“Jacob, ever since the country split in two last winter, you’ve known there are plenty of folks in this state who want to drag Missouri out of the Union, even though most want to keep her in.”

I nodded. Of course I knew it.

“You’ve heard me say plenty of times that I’m a Union man, and you know that means I’m against secession. There’s just no sense in splitting the country up, to my way of thinking. But most of our neighbors here in Howard county don’t think that way.”

“Why not, Pa?”

“Well, their feelings are all tied up with the Southern states—they’re tired of the government over there in Washington telling them what to do. So they’re hopping mad about Missouri going to the Union side, and it’s getting harder and harder for folk like them to live peaceably with folk like us. There’s a mess of anger on each side. Why, it’s getting so a man can’t even trust his neighbor.”

“Will they try to hurt us, Pa?” I asked in a whisper.

He smiled. “Likely not, Jacob. That Secesh governor of ours got chased out of Jefferson City for good back in July. Missouri belongs to the Union now. Sure, that old peacock General Price is giving the Federals trouble, and Rebel bushwhackers are running wild all over the place. But more and more Yankee troops are slipping into the state. It’ll likely take some time, but Federal troops will help keep those Secesh in their place. Like I told your ma, the Union will protect us.”

As I crouched among the corn, keeping one eye on the back of the house, I hoped Pa’s words were true. The sound of dishes rattling floated out the open back window along with little Sarah’s chatter. I listened hard for the squeak of the front door and my pa’s footsteps on the porch, but that sound didn’t come.

Pointing rifles to the sky, the two masked riders paced back and forth, weaving their horses across the yard, trampling down Ma’s garden. Where there were two I knew there’d be at least

ten hiding in the woods nearby, for bushwhackers ran in packs, like slinking wolves.

The riders turned to black shadows against the blood-red sky, and I guessed they'd put themselves there on purpose to blind my pa as he looked out the window. Shielding my eyes, I squinted against the glare of the falling sun. I couldn't see the front of the house, but when Pa finally answered I could tell he stood at an upstairs window, probably with a rifle at the ready.

"What's your business here?"

"Ezra Knight!" called up one of the riders. "We got business with all the Lincoln-lovin' scum in Howard County. Come on down and answer for yerself!"

"You'd best move off my property!" shouted Pa. "I won't answer to you, nor anybody!"

A horse whinnied; the air hung silent except for the chirping of the crickets in the fields. Rocking on my knees, I squeezed my eyes shut tight. "Oh God, oh God, please, please, please!" I begged. "Make them go away!"

"We ain't gonna stand for Union trash in this county! It's you, Knight, that'll have to git off the property!" one of the men shouted.

"It's my farm and I'll stay right here!" yelled Pa. "A man's got a right to his own politics."

The two strangers snorted out a laugh before one of them answered, "Not in Missouri!"

The front door banged open. Ma's shrill voice burst out, "Leave us in peace, for God's sake!"

Little Jerusha cried out then. Her fretful howl turned something loose inside me. My family was in danger. What kind of shameful coward was Jacob Knight, cringing in a cornfield? No. I'd stand with Pa.

Springing to my feet, I tore across the yard, taking all three front steps in one leap. Ma stood on the porch with Jerusha in her arms and Sarah clinging to her skirts. Eliza cowered behind her in the doorway, her face white as a muslin bedsheet beneath her yellow hair. I spun around. The shadow-riders paced back and forth against the red glare of the sun.

“You hidin’ behind yer wife’s skirts, Ezra?” snickered one of the men, and the other roared out an ear-splitting guffaw. “This skinny boy of yers has got more gumption than you! It’s you we want, not yer wife and kids!”

My face went hot and I felt my lips quiver with shame. How dare they insult my pa!

“I’ll not come!” thundered Pa’s voice from above, just seconds before a shot rang out. Ma’s scream pierced the still air beside me and the whole world set to spinning.

Shot followed shot as I pushed Ma in the front door, with Jerusha, Sarah, and Eliza. I kicked it shut and bolted it. We huddled in a heap on the floor while Pa fired down at the bushwhackers and they fired up at him. A bullet shattered an upstairs window, raining glass down like hail on the porch roof. Another tore through the glass above our heads and nipped our mantel clock. Still another sent Ma’s china bulldog flying across the room in a thousand pieces. Sarah burst into tears.

“Hush up!” I screamed. Ma reached out and pulled her close, whispering something in her ear as they lay side by side, surrounded by splintered glass.

Between shots I heard our dogs yapping in the fields and the chickens squawking. I buried my face in my hands, digging my fingernails hard into my scalp. “Oh God, make them go!” I prayed it hard, over and over, till smoke began to drift in through the broken windowpane, stinging my nose and eyes.

“Oh Lord, they mean to burn us out!” cried Ma, cradling Jerusha in one arm and pulling Sarah closer with the other. Eliza began to sob, burying her face in Ma’s lap.

I raised myself onto my knees and looked outside. Sure enough, a dozen horsemen stampeded through our yard, waving lit torches above their heads and making straight for the barn. Full to bursting with summer hay, it quickly shot up in flames the color of the sinking sun.

Now the Rebel gang circled our house, whooping and hollering and swinging their torches.

“Jacob, get down!” hissed Ma, but I couldn’t move. Feeling the horses’ pounding hooves deep in my gut, my eyes locked on a rider making straight toward me. He turned his horse in the nick of time and streaked across the window, then circled around and trotted up close. He was so near I could smell the kerosene-soaked rag tied to the flaming stick he held. I could see the brown and white swirls on the horn-handled knife hanging from his belt. With one filthy paw he shielded his eyes and bent down to the jagged hole in the glass.

“Jacob!” Ma screamed, but I stayed put.

The bushwhacker shot his eyes around the room. As soon as they lit on me they opened wide, then wrinkled up at the corners as he gave a low laugh. His heaving breath sucked and puffed the kerchief in and out a few times before he growled, “Yankee trash!” Then he swung his torch above his head twice and sent it crashing through the remaining glass. The flying shards sent me wheeling backward, covering my face with my arms as the fiery missile flew over my head and landed on the rag rug near the hearth.

“The quilt!” shouted Ma.

I jumped up and made straight for Pa’s rocker, grabbing the

quilt hanging on it and beating out the flames. But no sooner had I put the fire out than in shot another burning stick. I beat that fire out too, but more torches kept coming. Ma pulled herself up off the floor and dragged the three girls back into the kitchen.

“Jacob!” She flung the back door open. “Take Eliza. Run!”

I stood for what seemed like forever, staring at her face, at her wet cheeks shining in the eerie light of the barn fire. What could she mean, telling me to run off? Surely if we ran we ought to all run together! But she grabbed my shoulder and shoved me hard out the open door.

“Don’t stand there like a fool. Run, boy!”

“But...but Pa—” I stammered.

“Run!”

So I ran, with Eliza right behind me.

Our horses were loose and the Rebels were tearing around, trying to catch them. Out of the corner of my eye I saw one leading our cow across the side yard toward the woods, and still another dragging a bushel of squash out of the burning barn. Our dogs yapped and howled; hogs ran wild in every direction, squealing and snorting and all but drowning out the shouting and gunfire. Between the almighty roar of the fire and the confusion in the yard, no one seemed to notice Eliza and me running toward the back fields. If they did, they didn’t much care; they were too busy laying their thieving hands on all our goods.

We stumbled through the corn, the leaf blades cutting our faces, our bare feet tangling up in the stalks. Halfway through the field I heard Pa crying out in pain, sounding like a wounded animal.

“Pa!” I screamed, making to bolt back toward the house, but Eliza butted right into me and knocked me flat.

“No, Jacob! Ma said run!” Her pale blue eyes flashed in the fire’s light.

“Pa’s hurt!” I cried, pulling myself up by a broken cornstalk.

Eliza yanked me up by the arm and pushed me ahead of her. “You run, Jacob, like Ma said.”

I wavered, caught between running on and turning back. Tears stung my eyes as I realized Eliza was right. Ma said to run. Surely she knew what she was doing. And I couldn’t help Pa now. I turned and fled, pulling Eliza by the hand.

We ran till we’d cleared the plum thicket that backed up against the Fayette road, then we struck out northeast along it, Eliza clawing my hand so tight her nails dug into my skin. I dragged her along as fast as I could, for by now the sun was half gone, and darkness gathered around us. We ran till we sucked for air, but I kept moving though my bare feet throbbed with every step. By and by Eliza began to drag back, yanking on my shirtsleeve and whimpering.

“Jacob, wait—”

“Stop yankin’ on me!” I jerked my arm away and wheeled around, all set to hush her, but I thought better of it when I saw her face, streaked with dirt and shiny with sweat and tears. She’d done all she could. She was only eight years old, after all.

When I’d caught my breath I took her hand and pulled her into a clump of bur oaks that grew between the road and the stream we called the Little Turkey. We lay down side by side in the brush, our breath coming hard. My whole body trembled, though I kept as still as I could. I put my arm across my sister, and felt her shaking too.

“We’ll wait here,” I whispered.

We lay quiet a long time, listening to the blue jays above us in the oaks. They rustled and flapped and moved through the

treetops like they didn't know whether to roost or fly. "Thief! Thief!" they shrieked, like they'd seen what happened and meant to warn the whole countryside.

Wheels creaked by on the road, but not knowing who they belonged to, we stayed put, careful not to make a sound.

"Ma'll come and get us soon," whispered Eliza. "Won't she?"

"That's right."

She lay awhile without speaking. "And Pa," she added.

I could feel my eyes closing though I tried my best to keep them open. "Yes, and Pa," I murmured.



Just before dawn I woke up shivering, angry at myself for sleeping so long, knowing I ought to have kept watch. What if Ma and Pa had come along the road in the night looking for us, too afraid of the bushwhackers to call our names out loud?

I sat up in the grass and listened. The jays were calling sunup. Through the bur oaks I could see pink and orange streaks of light just above the horizon. The leaves stirred above me and a rooster crowed far off. A light, smoke-smelling wind rustled through the creek woods, and I hugged my knees under my chin to keep warm. Dragging my feet up like that nearly set me to howling, and for the first time I knew I'd run clean across broken glass putting out the fires.

While my fingers set to picking out the sharp glass splinters, my brain spun around and around. I knew Ma had stayed in the burning house so as not to leave Pa, and that Jerusha and Sarah were too little to run away with Eliza and me. Where were they now? I hung my head between my knees and hid in shame. I ought to have gone back for the little ones! I ought to have stayed and fought at Pa's side. But Ma had ordered me to run.

Our farm was a good eight miles from Boonesboro, the nearest town; we couldn't have reached there in time to send help. And as far as we could tell, all the folk on neighboring farms were Secesh. Ma could only have meant for us to lie low in the woods till the Rebels cleared out. Well, we'd done that. There was no use in us hiding any longer. It was time to head back home.

Reaching down, I shook Eliza awake. "Get up. We're goin' home."

She always was a quick riser. She got right to her feet, rubbing her eyes, then said she needed to go off and do some private business in the woods first.

I nodded. "Go on. But hurry. Ma and Pa'll be wondering where we are. And give me that white skirt you wear under your dress."

"What for?"

"Never mind. Just give it. Hurry."

She pulled it off and tossed it to me before going behind some trees. It took me the whole time she was gone to bite a hole in it with my teeth and rip it into strips.

"Jacob! What are you doin' with...Jacob, you're bleedin'!" she cried, kneeling down and staring at my feet, open-mouthed. "Oh, Jacob, you're hurt bad!" She began to whimper.

"Hush now, it ain't nothin'," I lied. "Just help me."

"Don't make me touch it!"

"I've picked out the glass!" I snapped. "Hand me the strips, that's all!" I wrapped my feet and tied the strips in knots at the top. When I'd finished, Eliza pulled me up and I limped as best I could toward the road, leaning on her shoulder.

Hobbling along the Fayette road, my hopes grew tall. I had faith in my pa. He was as good a marksman as I'd ever seen, one

of the best in Howard County. I just knew he'd shot at least half those bushwhackers right off their saddles! Yes sir, my pa had likely sent those Secesh cowards hightailing it for the woods, running for cover clear into the next county.

"Jacob," Eliza interrupted my thoughts. "Our barn's burnt up. Do you think our house—"

"Naw!" I fairly shouted. "Now, Eliza, you saw me beat out those little fires. Ma could've done the same, after we left."

She sniffled. "But...but why didn't Pa come down and help us? Why didn't he take us all away from there?"

I stopped and turned toward her, my temper flashing hot and red. "Don't you say one word about Pa!" I snapped, grabbing her by the shoulders and giving her a hard shake. "They'd have killed him for sure, like they've been killin' Union men all over Missouri!"

Eliza choked on a sob and sniffed hard. "I didn't mean nothin' by it, Jacob. I was just wonderin'."

"Well, stop." I let her go and started on again.

We reached the plum thicket at the edge of our back field just as the bottom edge of the sun cleared the earth, then we picked our way through the undergrowth. When we cleared the thicket, Eliza made as if to bolt straight home. Yanking her back hard, I motioned for her to keep quiet. Smoke hung thicker here, and a heavy quiet lay over the fields. She looked up at me with her eyes wide and nodded her head. I let go again.

Dropping on all fours, I crawled out to the corn, waving for Eliza to follow. We crept low to the ground until I reached a spot where I thought I could best see the house. I stood up and pushed the leaves aside. What I saw stung like a dry hickory branch snapping into my face. A black, smoking shell stood where our house had been. Pieces of ash shot up from it with

every little gust of wind, scattering across the fields. The barn that'd been near to twice as big as the house was nothing but a heap of charcoal.

Fightin' Tom, our rooster, strutted circles around the yard, crowing with all his might. All ragged and soot-covered, he jerked his head from side to side, looking around for his lady friends. Most likely they were all in Rebel stew pots by now.

"Pa!" I called, pushing through the corn. "Pa!" My voice cracked and floated up into the early morning sky along with some guilty crows. Eliza crept up behind me and slipped her hand in mine. I squeezed it tight.

"They're dead, ain't they, Jacob?"

"No! Don't say that. Ma! Ma, you come on out now! It's all right, those bushwhackers ain't here no more!"

The wind shook the corn and blew ash into our faces. Eliza choked and coughed, then started in sobbing. "Sarah!" she screamed above the rustling corn leaves. "Sarah, you stop hidin' from us!"

With eyes stinging from smoke and tears, we picked our way around the edges of the blackened ruin. We found charred pots and Pa's upturned rocker, still glowing red in places when a breeze touched it. At the sight of it, Eliza began calling out for Ma and Pa. But by the time the sun was high and had gone from orange to yellow, I knew they weren't coming.

"You sit here," I told her, pushing her down onto the ground. Choking on a smoky gust of wind, I fought hard against the one thought that just wouldn't clear out of my mind: only the worst would keep my folks from coming for Eliza and me. Could it be my family didn't escape those flames? Had Pa fought to the very end, and Ma stayed right there in the house with him? Then I searched a ways until I found me a good long

stick. My stomach went sick as I walked toward the smoking ash pile, knowing what I had to do. Not two steps away from it, I stopped.

“No!” I screamed, whirling away from the ashes and heaving the stick deep into the corn. No. If that were so, Eliza and I were lost for sure. My hope was still alive, and I couldn’t bring myself to kill it. A sudden thought struck me. I stepped toward my sister, glancing around the yard. “Eliza! Do you see the wagon anywhere?”

She got to her feet and looked around, shielding her eyes from the bright morning sun. “No, Jacob. You reckon those bushwhackers made off with it?”

“Could be,” I answered. “But you remember the McRae family, don’t you? How they got burned out near to two months ago? Bushwhackers set fire to their house, then cleared out. Well, they piled up their wagon with all they could save, then took off south, down Jefferson City way. I’ll just bet Ma and Pa done the same thing!”

Eliza looked up at me with her muddy, tear-streaked face, her lower lip trembling. “Gone to Jefferson City? Without us?”

“Either that or Iowa,” I said, remembering how Ma’d begged to go there. Ma’s sister Lucille lived on a farm somewhere near Iowa City, but that was all I knew. I couldn’t even recall her last name. I forced a smile. “Ma and Pa know we can catch up. Shoot, Eliza, we can do that easy.”

“Well, which way, then, Jacob?” Eliza whined, as if I could know for sure.

“Just hush a minute, and let me think!”

Pa would surely move north, to Iowa, I decided. To push deeper into this God-abandoned state made no sense. Missouri

had burst into flame and fallen to ash just as surely as our house and barn had done, and we had no more life here.

Union folk were sorely outnumbered in these parts, and I'd heard Pa say more than once that bushwhackers took off their masks by day, pretending to be law-abiding citizens. Who was to say the man who'd hurled a torch through our window wasn't someone we sold grain to in town, or even our nearest neighbor?

It was no easy thing to tell if a body were Union or Secesh these days, if that person wanted to keep it a secret. Just because a man owned a slave or two didn't mean he was Secesh. And not all Union families were like us; some kept slaves. No, Yankees and Rebels grew side by side in Missouri's garden; it was getting impossible to tell one from the other anymore. And if Pa didn't trust folk, neither did I. I wouldn't go looking for my family at a neighboring farm.

My throat squeezed up tight, nearly cutting off my breath, and my lips tingled cold with fury. "Burn in hell!" I screamed at all the Rebels in Missouri. A flock of crows lit out of the corn, squawking and beating the air like a hundred drums.

Fightin' Tom clucked and fussed and circled the yard, flapping ash-clouds off his wings. Eliza put a hand on my shoulder and gave it a shake. "How'll we find 'em, Jacob?"

I knew then that I was Ma and Pa to Eliza now. I bent my head and rubbed my forehead hard with a sooty hand. When I finally answered her, I tried to make my voice as steady and sure as I could, for her sake.

"We'll walk to Boonesboro. If we don't find 'em there...we'll head north, toward Iowa. Could be we'll catch 'em on the road." My eyes wandered over to Ma's trampled down kitchen garden. "Come on, Eliza, and help me dig!"

With our bare hands we dug up what carrots, turnips, and potatoes we could find, then picked off a little, green, late-planted pumpkin. Eliza made a sack with her apron, and I threw into it all that would fit, till it bulged out tight and almost ripped. Skirting the cornfield, we found only a pile of fresh-picked ears where the handcart had stood.

“I guess those thievin’ maggots took more than they could carry,” I said, stuffing as many of the ears as I could into my pockets. Then we pushed through the plum thicket toward the Fayette road.

I plunged headlong into the thicket on my torn-up feet, biting back the pain, eager to put miles between me and that ghost of a farm. We’d pushed near to halfway through when a sharp cracking noise sounded ahead of me. I backed up into Eliza; she dropped most of the vegetables and shrieked in my ear. A horse’s whinny sounded ahead in the shady thicket. Twigs snapped and cracked as the horse moved toward us. Slapping my hand over Eliza’s mouth, I pulled her back behind a plum tree.

Then I saw that it was Sally, the bald-faced mare Pa favored riding, still haltered up and getting caught on the branches because of it. She twisted her head from side to side, snapping twigs to get the halter free.

“So those greedy bushwhackers didn’t make off with you after all!” I all but shouted, never so glad to see a horse in all my life. I let go of Eliza. Reaching up and stroking Sally’s neck, I caught her by the throatlatch. She snorted, puffing her hot breath into my hand, then pushed her muzzle onto my chest, looking for something to eat. I reached down for a fallen carrot and fed it to her.

“It’s all right, Sally,” I whispered as she chomped it down. “I’m here. Thank God you’re here too.” I pressed my face into

her cheek, grateful not to have to walk all the way to Iowa on bleeding feet.

It took some time to get Sally turned around and out onto the road, but we managed. Pa had trained her well; even bare-back she was a good mount. When we'd gathered up the vegetables again and tied them up good in the apron, I climbed onto Sally's back, then pulled Eliza up. We set the apron sack between us, Eliza holding it tight with one hand and holding on to me with the other.

At first Sally made as if to run off in the direction of home. Without reins, it was all I could do to turn her around by yanking hard on her halter's left cheek strap. We turned circles three or four times in the road before I got it through her head we weren't going home. When she finally swung around to the south I kicked my bloody heels into her flanks, and we took off down the Fayette road toward Boonesboro.