

Chapter One: Clara Brown_Kentucky, 1830s

In the bustling marketplace of 1830s Kentucky, Clara Brown experiences a painful scene as she clings to her youngest child, Eliza Jane, who is sobbing uncontrollably. Clara anxiously tends to Eliza, trying to calm her before the auction block—a place where enslaved individuals are sold—which fills Clara with dread. Having been born enslaved herself, Clara fears for her daughter's well-being, hoping Eliza will be sold to a caring family instead of facing harsh treatment.

Clara's tragic history unfolds as she recalls her own childhood; her enslavement began at birth, and she was separated from her family at a young age. Despite the hardship, Clara married Richard for love, a rare occurrence among the enslaved. Together they had four children but faced unspeakable loss when their owner, Ambrose Smith, died. The family's only option was to be sold individually, a fate Clara dreaded as they took turns on the auction block.

Eliza's heartbreaking separation from Clara, culminating in being sold away, stirs a profound grief within her. Clara's pain is magnified by the haunting memory of the day Paulina, her other daughter, drowned, leaving Eliza traumatized. Clara worries for Eliza's emotional state and future. As the auction proceeds, Clara is ultimately sold to George Brown, a merchant who employs her within his household.

For twenty years, Clara works tirelessly for the Browns, contemplating the fates of her children who have disappeared from her life. Margaret has died; Richard has been sold to a plantation, and Eliza's trail is silent. When Clara is freed by George Brown's will, she struggles with the looming deadline to leave Kentucky.

Settling in St. Louis as a housekeeper for German immigrants, Clara learns new culinary skills and immerses herself in a different culture. She diligently searches for Eliza among the Black community but meets with no success. When the Brunners decide to move to Kansas, Clara seizes the opportunity to accompany them, driven by hope that she might find her daughter in this new land, unknowingly heading towards the turmoil of what will become known as Bleeding Kansas. Clara's determination to reunite with her child is unwavering, embodying the strength of a mother's love amid relentless despair.