

An Adventure in Arrow Rock

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Chapter Seven

Pastor John Brown

"A moment of grace?" Samantha asked as the five kids and their teacher stepped out of the theatre and into the sunlight. "What's that mean?"

The group walked along High Street, contemplating their clue. Suddenly, Charlie heard what sounded like singing.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound...

"Do you hear that?" the teacher asked. The kids nodded.

"Look!" Rory said, pointing to a simple, white chapel. "It's coming from that church."

"A moment of grace!" Samantha gasped. "Let's go!"

The music lured the students into the empty but lovingly preserved church. As the wooden door banged shut, the song faded away.

"Anyone else thinking that Arrow Rock is kind of spooky?" Henry asked.

The kids tiptoed to the first pew to sit together.

Charlie watched them and suddenly realized hours had passed since he'd seen any kids holding a phone. Instead of anxious and distracted, they looked engaged and curious as they gazed around the church.

No one was startled when a shimmering man emerged from the side of the chapel. The man stood before them, a friendly expression on his face, brown skin glistening.

"I'm John Brown," he told them from the altar, clearly practiced at addressing a congregation. "Welcome to Brown's Chapel Free Will Baptist Church. How has your journey been?"

"Busy," replied Zuri, breathlessly. "We drove here from our school in Columbia, and we've been running all over town looking for pieces for this old, missing vase. We met an Osage warrior, George Caleb Bingham, Meredith Miles Marmaduke and Celeste Holm! Arrow Rock is fantastic."

John chuckled.

"Fantastic, huh?" he asked. "You've seen a lot of places and met many people today. But there's a community here you've yet to meet."

The kids looked at him with interest.



"I'm speaking about the black community here in Arrow Rock," John told them. "This church was built in 1869, and I was its first pastor. It was the center of the African American community. We even had a school here! People worshiped, gathered, ate, sang, celebrated and mourned here. The ties we made guided us through the ups and downs of history."

"We learned about the slave traders at J. Huston Tavern," Amir told him.

"That's part of it," John said. "But there's more to the story than that. Those stone gutters running along Main Street? Skilled black tradesmen built them. Same for many of the brick buildings. After emancipation, many formerly enslaved people moved here to start new lives. By 1880, half of this town's population was black. We had our traditions, lives and community in Arrow Rock. This place is very much ours, too."

John's eyes fell on Charlie, holding the almost completed vase.

"May I see it?" he asked.

Charlie handed it to the ghost, who reached into his shimmering pocket. His hand emerged, holding the last piece of pottery, which he slid into place. The vase was complete! The students squealed with delight. But Charlie was watching John's hands. Something about the way he handled the vase seemed so natural.

Was John Brown the artist behind the mysterious vase?



NEWSPAPER CONNECTIONS

Are there ethnic communities in your area? If so, use the newspaper to learn about how they were treated when they came to the area, whether it was recently or long ago. Present the information to your class.