

# Whistles through the Rocks



"Daniel, look!" I exclaim. "That peculiar object is a Tin Lizzie."

"What's a Tin Lizzie, Michael?" Daniel asks.

"Tin Lizzie is another name for a Model T Ford, which is a type of car," I explain as I squint my eyes in the bright sunlight to get a better look at the car coming down the tracks.

"Michael, how can a car ride down the railroad tracks?" Daniel asks. "Doesn't it need some kind of special wheels?"

"It looks to me like someone has replaced the wheels with train wheels, so that it can travel the rails," I reply. Daniel and I can't wait for the Tin Lizzie to get a little closer so that we can talk to the driver.

"Good afternoon, boys," the driver says as the car quickly comes around the bend, "What are you two doing up here by the railroad tracks? I suppose you're gathering coal like most boys do."

Daniel looks up with his eyes wide open in excitement and says, "We finished awhile ago and we have already returned from the blacksmith's shop."

"How did you get your car to ride on the railroad tracks?" I ask.

"That was easy," the driver replies. "I just replaced her wheels with train wheels. Now I can go up and down the rails whenever I want to, and I don't have to wait for a train!"

I then introduce myself and Daniel to the driver. "My name is Michael and this is my brother Daniel. We live on a farm in Burnt Chimney. What is your name, sir?"

The driver looks at us with a gleam in his eye and says, "Chapman at your service, boys."

Daniel and I are full of questions for Chapman. "What happens if a train comes while you are driving on the rails?" asks Daniel. Chapman explains that when a train comes, the Tin Lizzie can be driven onto a siding to let the train pass.

"What brings you out today, Chapman?" I ask with great curiosity.

"Today I am delivering mail and I am heading to Rocky Mount to pick up a couple of passengers from Penhook to visit a private school," Chapman replies.

"You know something Chapman?" squeals Daniel with delight. "Since you drive your Tin Lizzie on the railroad tracks, you should call it Railroad Lizzie." Chapman grins like a schoolboy with the thought of calling his car a Railroad Lizzie.

When Daniel and I hear the news that Chapman takes passengers in his Railroad Lizzie, we get a brilliant idea. We decide to ask him if he is willing to take us for a ride up and down the railroad tracks. Chapman explains that his day is full today and that he needs to be on his way to Rocky Mount. He also informs us that on Sundays, he takes passengers up and down the rails all day because the railroad trains are not running and he doesn't deliver mail on Sundays. Daniel and I agree to wait until Sunday.

Chapman starts up the Railroad Lizzie and before he says good-bye he shouts, "Don't forget to bring eighteen cents for a gallon of gasoline. That will keep Lizzie going for at least 20 miles." With a wink and a smile, Chapman heads off down the rails to meet his passengers in Rocky Mount.

Daniel and I discuss the fact that we have seventy cents from selling coal to Jake, the blacksmith.

"If we give Chapman eighteen cents, we will still have fifty-two cents to give to dad to help out our family," Daniel says with a slight quiver in his voice.

"Michael, do you think Mom and Dad will let us go?"

I echo Daniel's feelings and respond by saying, "All we can do is ask, but you know as well as I do that our family needs every penny we can get our hands on right now."

"At least we got to see Railroad Lizzie today and talk to Chapman for awhile, Michael," Daniel says. "That was fun, wasn't it?" I look at Daniel's sad eyes and return an understanding glance.

The walk home seems long. Daniel and I are concerned about what Mom and Dad will say when we ask if we can go for a ride with Chapman on Sunday. I can't help thinking about dad this morning on our walk home from the train accident. He wants me to be a man. He is ready for me to be grown up and to take on more responsibilities.

Right now, walking home with Daniel, I don't want to be grown up. I want to be a boy and go for a ride in the Railroad Lizzie. I realize that times are tough and that we all have to pull together. Yet, there are times when I want to feel the freedom of a child, to run and play whenever I feel like it.

I don't want to disappoint Dad by asking to spend money for a ride down the rails. I don't know what I should do. Maybe when we get home and I see Dad face to face I will know what to do. For now, I will enjoy a few more minutes with Daniel while the dream is still alive.

In the modest light of dusk, the crisp snow beneath our feet almost appears blue in color

as we see the farmhouse from the road above. Dad and David are still sawing logs and loading them onto a wagon beside the barn. I know that when Dad sees us, Daniel and I will have to help them load up the wagon so that it will be ready to take to Rocky Mount in the morning.

All that I want to do right now is go inside, put on some dry clothes, and sit by the stove in the kitchen to warm up and wait for Mom to put supper on the table.

When Dad sees us he immediately says, "Where have you boys been? Come on over here and give us a hand before dark."

I look into David's sad and weary eyes and know that he is feeling the same way that I do. David came home from work just before Daniel and I walked down the hill.

Daniel and I work swiftly so that we can all get inside as soon as possible. It isn't long before we are finished and I am sitting beside the stove in the kitchen. Mom gives me a warm hug and asks how my day has been. I tell her about the coal and the money from Jake the blacksmith. I am waiting to tell her about Chapman and the Railroad Lizzie but I am afraid. I want to wait until we are all sitting down to supper so that I can ask Dad if Daniel and I can go for a ride on Sunday.

In a few minutes Dad finishes washing up and comes into the kitchen for supper. He looks exhausted from lack of sleep and working hard all day cutting wood. Mom and Dad talk for a while about tomorrow's trip to Rocky Mount.

Mom needs Dad to pick up a few things at the general store while he is in town. David can hardly eat and finishes early so that he can go upstairs to bed. While Mom gets up to clear the table of the supper dishes, Dad and I sit at the table.

Dad asks me what Daniel and I did all day. I proceed to tell him about the coal, Jake the blacksmith, and Chapman with his Tin Lizzie. Dad then asks me to go with him to Rocky Mount tomorrow and help unload the wagon at the train station. I agree to go with him.

We sit for a while longer at the table until I finally work up the nerve to ask him if I can go for a ride with Chapman.

"Dad," I say. "Do you think on Sunday Daniel and I can go for a ride on the Railroad Lizzie with Chapman? It will only cost 18 cents and Daniel and I can pay for it ourselves with the money we earned from gathering coal."

Dad narrows his eyes before he answers.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# A Chance Meeting

