



The unrelenting heat from the sun beats down on my head as I work in the endless rows of tobacco fields today. Summer is in full swing. The flowering dogwood and redbud trees are offering their blossoms for all to enjoy. The warm summer breeze is refreshing and clean. There isn't a cloud in the vast blue sky.

I notice that Daniel is growing taller and both of us have gotten stronger. I, in particular, have grown stronger in many ways. I know now how important it is that I assume the responsibilities that go along with being an adult. Many things have changed and will continue to change for my family in Burnt Chimney. The coming of the railroads has brought us into a new way of life, and the old way of life has now passed away never to return again.

I can see changes in Dad as well. He no longer seems to be annoyed with Daniel and me as we share our enthusiasm over the railroad. As a matter of fact, Dad is being very helpful to us by giving us an understanding of the history of the railroad and the importance of it. More importantly, Dad is being very helpful to David. Although Dad is grateful that David has a job shoveling coal, he wants the best for David. They have been working diligently on learning Morse code and using the telegraph machine. Dad also has been encouraging as David waits for a job opportunity.

David has been going through some changes as well. He is more confident about himself. He has a better attitude about going to work and shoveling coal.

This is most likely due to the fact that he has learned another skill and he feels that he will probably not be shoveling coal for the rest of his life. He is excited when he gets up every morning and yet anxious that another day will go by and he will not receive any news about a possible job opening.

For the most part, our family situation is on an upswing. Since the railroad made its way through Rocky Mount, our family has been able to sell wood to the railroads, gather coal and sell it in exchange for money, and receive money through David's job shoveling coal. We still don't have an abundance of resources; however, we are beginning to recover from the financial stress that was caused by the war.

Life is different now with this new industrial revolution. Our family is learning to accept it and perhaps even embrace this new way of life.

Naturally, just when I think that things are

heading on an even keel, the winds of change begin to blow. Change can be a frightening thing with its uncertainty about the future. This time, however, change is something that has been long awaited, and it comes from a most unlikely source. It is now the hottest part of the day. I can see Dad in a distant tobacco field waving to me. He is letting me know that it is time for Daniel and me to go inside and get out of the hot sun. Mom is preparing our lunch and she doesn't like to be kept waiting. Even though Daniel and I are wearing straw hats, the heat continues to penetrate through them. As we walk back to the farmhouse, we can hear the familiar sound of a train as it makes its way down the tracks. The faithful train makes its way past our house on schedule every day. It doesn't seem to care if it is raining, snowing heavily or if it is the hottest day of the year. It has one job to do and today, like every other day, it will complete its route and nothing will be able to stop it.

Interestingly enough, there is something different today. Most days, there are no passengers that depart from the train at the Wirtz Station, except for my brother David. However, today a well-dressed gentleman walks casually onto the train depot platform. Since Daniel and I are walking in the opposite direction toward the house, we can't get a very good look at him. We don't think much of it and continue on our way home.

Once inside, Daniel and I run upstairs to splash some water on our faces and to get cleaned up for lunch. Both of us collapse on top of our beds until Mom calls us downstairs. It feels good to get out of the bright sunlight. At first, it is difficult to see until our eyes adjust to the dim light of our bedroom. We are thankful to be shaded by the rooftop, so that we can cool down for awhile.

Daniel and I hear Mom as she calls and quickly run downstairs. While we are eating, we hear a knock at the front door.

"Who could that be at this time of day?" Mom asks.

"I don't know," Dad says as he gets up from the table. "I wasn't expecting anyone today."

Then Daniel blurts out that we saw someone get off at the train depot before we came inside. "I wonder if that is who it is?" asks Daniel.

"Well, hello, John," Dad says as he answers the door. "What a surprise to see you. What brings you way out here today?"

Daniel and I can't believe our eyes. We had not seen John since the day he rescued us from the men who tried to steal our coal. We are also surprised that Dad seems to know John. Dad waves his hand for John to come inside.

"It has been a long time since I've seen you boys," John looks over at us and says. "I wanted to drop by and say hello and see how everyone is getting along since I was in the area."

With a big smile on his face, Daniel says, "Oh, we're all just fine now. My knee is much better. Thanks for the bandage."

John looks at me and asks, "How about you, Michael? How have you been doing?"

"Much better these days," I reply. "Did you know that the night you dropped us off Daniel and I got lost in a terrible snowstorm?"

John looks around the house and replies, "It looks like you found your way home all right. Today is a far cry from a snowstorm; it's a scorcher out there." Dad invites John to sit down and have

something to eat. We talk for a while and tell John about all of the exciting things that have happened to us since we last saw him.

When we finish eating, John looks over at Dad and says, "I understand that your boy is looking for work as a dispatcher, is that true?"

Dad begins to tell John about David practicing Morse code on his telegraph machine and that David has been unable to find any work for several months.

"Well, I think I can help you out," John explains. "I know of an opening at the Mud Cut Station. The job is his if he wants it. He will have to travel a little bit."

From Rocky Mount, he would have to take the train past the Melton and Redwood Stations in order to get there. I know the people who work at the Mud Cut station, and they would take good care of him."

Dad looks at John in disbelief. "Would you really do that for David?" Dad asks.

John looks back at Dad and says, "Of course I would, but you'll have to let me know as soon as possible. I can't hold the position for long."

Dad goes on to say that he will talk to David this evening; however, he is sure that David will take the job.

"Consider it done!" exclaims John. "Have David report to the Mud Cut Station first thing Monday morning."

Daniel and I walk John back to the train station before we go back to work in the tobacco fields.

"It was great to see John again." Daniel says. "He saved our lives."

I look down at Daniel into his bright sparkling eyes and say, "Now he is going to help David. In a way, John is going to save David's life as well."

We go back to work deep in the rows of the tobacco fields and wait for evening to come. We can't wait to see David get off of the train, unsuspecting that his life is about to change forever.

That night at the supper table, Dad breaks the good news to David. David is filled with excitement. He is also a little anxious about all of the changes that he will soon undergo. He knows that soon he will be leaving his safe home with our family and going out into the world on his own.

I also know that things will change for me as well. I will now have to fill David's shoes. I will have to be the adult that Dad depends on for greater responsibility. I am ready and know that Daniel is ready to fill my shoes as well.

On Monday morning, David leaves for the Mud Cut Station. He decided that he will not move out of the house at first. He will take one change at a time, the first being his new job.

While Dad, David, Daniel and I wait for David's train to depart for the Mud Cut Station, we can hear the familiar sound of an odd-looking vehicle as it rolls down the tracks. **NEXT WEEK ...**

