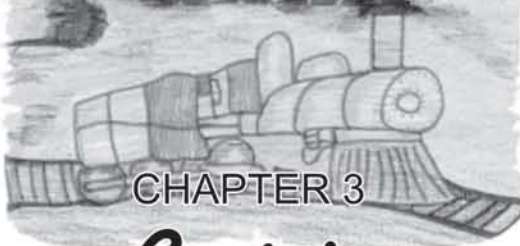


Whistles through the Rocks



CHAPTER 3

Captain

G. W. B. Hale

When I open my eyes, I can see Daniel standing over me with a concerned and frightened look on his face.

"Are you all right?" he asks.

"I think so," I reply. "What happened?"

"You must have hit the lower branches of a tree," Daniel replies. "The snow was coming down so hard that you couldn't see where you were going, Michael."

"Well, Daniel, I better figure out a way to get you back home," I say. "We can't stay out here all night."

As I stand up and look around I can't see anything but the blackness of night and the cold white snow flakes as they fall in streaks before they hit the ground. There is no way I can find my way back to the house in the middle of the night. I want us to stay in one place so that if Dad comes out looking for us we won't miss him. However, the air is biting as it blows across my face, and I want to get Daniel home.

The only thing that I can think to do is start walking. I don't know if we are walking closer to the farmhouse or farther away, but it is better than standing still. The frigid air seems to be getting colder. Daniel stops for a moment. He seems to be looking at something.

"Michael, look over there," Daniel says, with a confused look on his face.

"Something keeps going up and down and it looks like it is coming toward us."

Way off in the distance, I can see the faint appearance of a light. I don't know if the light means trouble, but I decide to take Daniel's hand and walk in that direction in hopes that the light will lead us to someone who can help.

As Daniel and I get closer, I can see that it is our brother David who is coming to find us. David has a horse and the wooden sled from our barn. He has placed some blankets on the sled. Daniel quickly climbs onto the sled and wraps up in a warm woolen blanket. The only parts of Daniel that can be seen are his pink nose and wide blue eyes as they stare out into the night sky. I climb cautiously onto the back of the horse because I am still a little unsteady from the bump on my head.

"I am glad I found you!" David exclaims. "I was afraid you were lost forever."

"Oh, you can't get rid of us that easily," I respond.

"Mom and Dad are so worried about you," David says. "Where have you been?"

"It's a long story and it has been a long night," I explain to David.

When we get home, Mom has a pot of soup ready for us to eat. When we have finished, she puts us to bed. I begin to tell her about the many things that happened throughout the day, but she says, "It is too late for explanations now. We can talk in the morning. For now, I want you to go to sleep. I'll see you in the morning."

The next morning, Daniel and I go downstairs into the kitchen where Mom is making breakfast. Dad is sitting at the table and we begin to tell our story. Daniel tells about gathering the coal and the two men that chased us and I begin to tell about John. I explain about the train ride and how we ended up getting lost in the middle of the night. I am thinking that Dad will be really impressed that we met the man who started the Franklin and Pittsylvania railroad. Instead, Dad seems pensive and slightly annoyed. I can tell that he is waiting for Daniel and me to finish so that he can say something.

"You know boys," Dad says, "there is a lot more to it than that. It takes more than one man to start a railroad. It takes an entire community. Also, the train that you rode on was not the first train. The first engine was the Captain G.W.B. Hale. It was a wood-burning locomotive, unlike the coal-burning locomotive that you rode in yesterday. Named after a Confederate veteran, it ran from the main office in Rocky Mount to Franklin Junction. You would have never gotten to Burnt Chimney on that train. It hadn't connected to Roanoke yet. Many things had to happen first."

"What kinds of things, Dad?" Daniel asks.

"Well first, many of the businessmen in Franklin County had to sign petitions seeking money for the railways,"

Dad continues. "Then, railway services had to be found that would be willing to come to Rocky Mount. Also, it was important to find out if the citizens of Rocky Mount even wanted a railway and permission needed to be granted."

"Did the citizens agree, Dad?" I ask.

"Not entirely," he says. "Some agreed and some didn't. There were many who were afraid that the railways would make the county go broke. They were so fearful that many decided to move into other counties such as Bedford and Botetourt counties."

"What finally happened?" Daniel asks.

"It was put to a vote and the decision was made to let the railways come through Rocky Mount," Dad said. Dad went on to explain that the first tracks were completed in 1880 and that the first train, the Capt. G.W. B. Hale, would travel the line from Pittsville to Rocky Mount.

"That's when I started to stack wood along the tracks," Dad added. "The train made many stops for fuel, and I was one of many farmers who helped to replenish the wood supply."

After breakfast, Daniel and I go about doing our daily chores. We are both tired after all of the excitement of yesterday and decide to stay home for the day. Today is

quiet and peaceful and our farm in Burnt Chimney feels like the safest place in the world to be. The air is still cold but the sun is shining and the snow has stopped falling. The snow on the ground glistens and sparkles as it reflects the sunlight.

When it is about dusk, Daniel and I wait for the train to pass by our house. Maybe we are hoping for a glimpse of John so that we can thank him for helping us. Perhaps we just want to relive the excitement of riding in a train from yesterday. For whatever reason, Daniel and I watch as the train rolls down the tracks toward the curve that bends around the cemetery across the tracks from our farm. Instantly we can hear a terrible noise. It looks like the train is heading straight instead of following the tracks around the curve.

Chapter Four:

Train Wreck

