

Whistles through the Rocks



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A Summer Secret

David steps onto the train that will lead him down the tracks to a brand new life. He is restless with excitement. Dad, Daniel and I wave good-bye to David as he looks out of the train window on his way to the Mud Cut Station.

We watch as the train makes its way down the tracks until it is no longer in sight. While the smoke from the locomotive still hangs heavy in the air, we can hear the sound of a car approaching.

As the car gets closer, we soon realize that it is Chapman and his Railroad Lizzie. When we take another look we can see that he has a passenger with him. It doesn't take us long to figure out that it is Betty, the girl we met during our first ride with Chapman. She must be back home for the summer. As soon as Lizzie comes to a stop, Betty jumps out of the car and gives each of us a hug.

"Classes at Chatham Hall were finished a week ago and I am just now getting home," explains Betty. "I couldn't wait to take another ride in the Railroad Lizzie. What are you two doing today?"

"Our brother David starts a new job at the Mud Cut Station as a dispatcher," Daniel explains.

Betty looks up and smiles, "That sounds so exciting. Maybe we could all take a ride one day and visit him while he is working."

Daniel and I both agree that visiting David sounds like a great idea. We spend a few more minutes talking to Betty before Chapman is ready to go to his next destination.

"Well boys, we better get going back down the hill," Dad finally says. "We have plenty to do today."

We wave good-bye as Betty and Chapman ride off down the rails. Betty is turned around smiling. She seems much happier now that she has returned home again for the summer.

The three of us walk back down the hill. I start thinking about all of us back at the train station and wonder why Dad spent so much time talking to Chapman. At the time, Daniel and I were talking to Betty and I didn't notice.

Now, it seems kind of strange. Dad didn't mention anything on the way home, so I guess that it can't be anything too serious. We spend the rest of the morning working out in the fields in the steamy hot sun. Off in the distance, I can see

three white-tailed deer as they play. I watch as the mother deer and her two children graze in the lower field. When they hear Dad calling us to go inside, they quickly jump and run off. They don't have to work in the fields all day and they don't have grown-up responsibilities.

They are free to jump and play as often as they like without a care in the world. In some ways, I envy them. I wonder if they envy me. As we walk away from the fields of tobacco, Daniel and I are glad when our Burnt Chimney farmhouse is back in sight. When we are inside, we wash our hands and faces in the wash basin upstairs. We then rest for a few minutes before we go downstairs to eat. When we reach the kitchen, Mom and Dad are already seated at the table. They are deep in conversation as Daniel and I sit down to eat.

Then Dad turns to us and says, "Boys, I have something to tell you. On Saturday, your mother and I are going to take you to visit your aunt and uncle in Rocky Mount. Uncle Will needs some help on his farm and we thought you boys wouldn't mind helping out."

Daniel looks up smiling, "I wouldn't mind at all. In fact, I'd love to go. We haven't been to see them in a long time."

"How about you, Michael?" Dad asks.

I glance over at Dad and reply, "That's fine. Our families always have a great time together."

Dad has a curious look on his face when he begins to say, "Your mother and I are not staying with you. We thought you boys might enjoy staying there by yourselves for a few days."

"Oh," I reply. "I guess that would be kind of nice." Although I am puzzled as to what is going on.

"Then, it is all settled," Mom says. "Your dad and I will pick you up on our way into Rocky Mount on Tuesday when we deliver wood."

Later that afternoon, when I go back outside to work in the fields, I can't help thinking about the conversation in the kitchen with Mom and Dad. I am excited about going away for a couple of days by myself, but I also feel confused, like there is something that they are not telling me. I feel like there is more to the situation than going away for a few days alone to help Uncle Will.

Soon Saturday arrives. Daniel and I pack up our things to take to Uncle Will's. It is already hot by the time we load up the wagon and get going. David isn't coming home this weekend, so it is just the four of us in the wagon. Daniel and I feel uneasy, partly due to the excitement of our trip and also because of the heat and dust in the air.

I keep thinking about all of the time Dad spent talking to Chapman the other day at the railroad station and the peculiar conversation we had at the kitchen table. I wonder what it all means. I hope Mom and Dad aren't in any trouble. I feel sure that if there was something serious going on they would tell Daniel and me.

When we get to Uncle Will's farm, he is waiting by the road to get us. He says a quick "hello" to Mom and Dad as they drop us off with our bags. They tell us good-bye and they don't even get out of the wagon. We turn away from the road and walk with Uncle Will for a short while until we get to the house. In a quick moment, Dad and Mom disappear down the road in a cloud of dust. Aunt Evelyn greets us at the

door and shows us where we can put our bags. We have something to eat before we go out in Uncle Will's fields to work.

While we are riding out to the fields, Uncle Will asks, "Would you two like to go to the Rocky Mount Station tomorrow afternoon? I have something I want to show you."

Daniel quickly says, "Yes, I want to go and I know Michael wants to go even more than I do."

I nod my head in agreement. At this point, I am glad to be doing anything other than working out in the fields all day.

"What do you want to show us, Uncle Will?" Daniel asks.

He looks at Daniel with a gleam in his eye and says, "I can't tell you. It's a secret, but you'll find out tomorrow."

On Sunday morning, Daniel and I get up early and get dressed. We go into the kitchen and have breakfast with Uncle Will and Aunt Evelyn. After breakfast, we all get ready to take the ride that will end up at the Rocky Mount Station. I really don't know why we are going there on a Sunday when the trains don't run. But Uncle Will said that he had something to show us.

I start to think that maybe we are going to meet Betty at the train station. But I don't want to ask and ruin Uncle Will's surprise.

However, Daniel speaks up and says, "Uncle Will, are we going to the Rocky Mount Station to meet our friend Betty?"

"I don't know who Betty is, but we are going to see some other passengers," Uncle Will says with a smile.

"Who are they, Uncle Will?" Daniel asks.

"Their names are Dan and Ida Hengst,"

Uncle Will answers with a laugh. Daniel and I can't believe it. I look over at Uncle Will and ask, "What are they doing at the Rocky Mount Station? I thought they were at home?"

"You'll see once we get there," Uncle Will says.

We stand by the railroad tracks for the longest time. Finally, we see something moving rapidly along the tracks in the direction of the Wirtz Station.

When the Railroad Lizzie speeds by us, we see Mom and Dad seated in the back. They are smiling and laughing as they turn their heads back around and wave. This is the happiest I have seen them in a long time. They remind me of the white-tailed deer that run and play in the lower field beside the barn. Today, they don't have to work in the fields all day and they don't have grown-up responsibilities. I realize for the first time how important it is to Mom and Dad that I am becoming a responsible adult and just how important it is for adults to taste the freedom of being young once in awhile.



The End