



Mom pours Henry another cup of coffee as he sits back in his chair again and begins to tell the story of The Punkin Vine. Henry starts his story by telling us why the railroad needed to stretch all the way to Roanoke. He explained that many of the farmers in Franklin County found that they needed the railroad to transport tobacco and other products harvested on their farms to Roanoke and on to North Carolina. At the same time, construction of the Roanoke and Southern Railway was beginning in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The folks in North Carolina were trying to build this railway all the way to Roanoke.

In order for the Franklin and Pittsylvania Railway to connect to Roanoke, the Norfolk and Western Railroad had to lease the R and S line to the F and P. The Franklin and Pittsylvania Railway agreed to lease the railway and construction was completed in 1892. That is how The Punkin Vine was born. The Roanoke and Southern Railway was later purchased by the Norfolk and Western Railway.

"It is getting late and we better get these boys to bed," Dad says.

We say our good-byes to Henry and Dad sees him on his way out the door. Daniel and I head back upstairs so that we can get a good night's rest before our long day in Rocky Mount tomorrow. We can hear Mom in the kitchen as she clears the dishes from the table and washes them at the sink.

Soon after Daniel and I go upstairs, I can hear David's footsteps as he goes off to bed as well. It isn't long before the entire house is quiet. The wind is blowing gently through the trees outside of my window. Some of the cold winter air rustles the drapes above my bed and gently rushes across my face. I have a chance to think about my day and revel in the glory of it.

Today we took a ride on a Railroad Lizzie. We met a girl named Betty on her way to a private school in Danville. We came home and loaded up the wagon with

wood. For supper, we talked to a mystery guest named Henry who told us many new things about the railroad. What will tomorrow bring? Could it possibly be better than today? Daniel is already asleep, and I close my eyes to join him with a promise in my heart that whatever happens tomorrow, I will make it a great day.

In the morning, I awaken to the sound of Dad hitching up the horses to the wagon just below my bedroom window. I look out and immediately know that it is not going to be a warm spring-like day like it was yesterday.

The sky is full of clouds and the wind of a crisp morning air blows fiercely. Dad is completely covered up from head to toe as he prepares for our trip to Rocky Mount. David, Daniel and I hurry to get dressed and eat our breakfast. We can tell that Dad is anxious to get going. Maybe he feels that the weather will turn and he wants to get home before it gets too difficult to travel.

"We better get going, boys," Dad opens the door and hollers in.

"Michael and Daniel, don't forget to bring a couple of sacks in case there is some coal for you to gather. David, if we get to town early enough maybe you can help us unload the wagon before you go to work."

"Sure thing, Dad," David answers back.

The ride to Rocky Mount seems long and tedious. Daniel and I are full of energy and can't seem to sit still in the wagon. After what seems like an eternity, we reach the Rocky Mount station. Together we unload the wood off of the back of the wagon. Daniel and I stand inside the wagon and hand the logs down to Dad and David.

When there aren't many logs left, Daniel and I jump down and we all stack wood along the railroad tracks. It is much quicker work unloading the wagon than it is loading the wagon at the house. David and Dad go inside the station while Daniel and I stay outside to pick up coal along the tracks.

Since Dad has the horses and wagon, he will give us a ride to the blacksmith's shop where we can drop off the coal in exchange for some money.

From where Daniel and I are gathering coal, I can see Miss Rachel sitting in front of the bay window as she uses the telegraph machine. Dad is speaking with another gentleman and David is getting ready to go to work. David's job of shoveling coal is a difficult one and he hopes that one

day he can operate a telegraph machine like Miss Rachel. Dad told me that not too long ago he secretly mail-ordered a telegraph machine for David.

Miss Rachel has been teaching Dad Morse code so that he can teach David.

My sack is getting full, so I stand up and look around for Daniel. I spot Daniel way down the tracks. He must have gotten carried away gathering coal and doesn't realize how far away he has walked. I don't want to scare him, so I walk down to where he is filling his sack. When I reach out to take Daniel's hand, two men jump out from behind one of the locomotives that is stopped in front of the turntable. Daniel and I take off down the tracks toward the Rocky Mount station.

The two men run after us, grabbing at our sacks of coal. Just then, Dad comes out of the station and sees what is happening.

He yells down the tracks, "Hey, you get away from my boys!" When the men realize that we are with Dad, they turn around and speed down the tracks in the other direction. Daniel and I can see that they jump onto a railroad car that is coming out of the turntable heading toward Roanoke.

Dad quickly grabs the two of us and we all go back inside the station.

In a panic, Dad says to Miss Rachel, "There are two men out there who just tried to take my sons' coal and they jumped a train heading toward Roanoke."

"Which train was it?" asks Miss Rachel.

"It was number 702, I think," Dad answers.

Miss Rachel immediately sends a message over the telegraph dispatch to warn the other stations along the way. "If those men are still on that train, someone will find them," she says. "I've seen those two around here before and I know a lot of people who will be glad when they are caught."

"This isn't the first time that they bothered my boys either," Dad says as he looks over at the two of us. "I would appreciate any help you have to offer."

Daniel and I sit down on the bench for a while and rest. Dad finishes his business at the station and the three of us get ready to go back home.

Suddenly, a strange clicking sound is coming from the telegraph machine.

NEXT WEEK:

CHAPTER TEN
*Taking
a Risk*

