

Littlejim

by Gloria Houston

1 “Pupils. Pupils,” Mr. Osk tapped his stick on the top of his desk set on a platform at the front of the room near the black iron stove. It was time for the day of classes to begin.

2 Soon Littlejim had finished his lessons. He had finished first and used the time to draw. He was trying to draw the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers with all the cities located in the Fertile Crescent from his geography book with the blue cover.

3 Then he changed his mind. Paper was too precious to waste, and this day Littlejim wanted to draw something very special. He wanted to draw his papa’s big Percherons. Scott and Swain were as fine a matched team of horses as the Henson Creek folk had ever seen. Littlejim dreamed of the day he would be full grown, so he could be a logger and have a team just like Scott and Swain. Together he and Bigjim would cut and haul the big logs from up on Double Head to Uncle Bob’s sawmill.

4 Bigjim was the finest logger on the Creek, and Littlejim was very proud of his father. But he knew that Scott and Swain could share part of the credit. Their huge legs and strong broad backs could snake the biggest chestnut logs out of a laurel thicket. Their strength was great enough to pull the pole wagon loaded with lumber from Uncle Bob’s sawmill up the steepest hills on the River Road to the railroad station in Spruce Pine. When they were brushed and curried off a Sunday morning, they looked fine enough to pull the box wagon where Bigjim, Mama, Littlejim, Nell and Baby May rode all the way to Papa’s church at the foot of the creek.

5 Littlejim was might nigh as proud of the big gray horses as his papa was. This day he wanted his drawing to be the one Mr. Osk displayed above the chalkboard as the best drawing of the week. That way every pupil in the school would know that his papa, Bigjim Houston, had the finest team ever seen in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.

6 “What you drawing?” asked Ivor Vance, one of the older boys, over his shoulder. Ivor peeked around to see if Mr. Osk had heard him.

7 “I’m drawing Scott and Swain,” whispered Littlejim to the taller boy. “I wish I had some fancy colors. I could make them ever so pretty. What are you going to draw?”

8 “I’m going to draw an autymobile,” said Ivor. “My uncle says he’s going to buy one.”

9 “How you gonna do that?” said Littlejim. “You’ve never seen one!”

10 “Well, I heard all about it when my daddy went to Spruce Pine to catch the train,” boasted Ivor.

11 “What was it like?” asked Littlejim.

12 “It was like a wagon or a carriage, so’s my pa says, except no horses were pulling it,” said Ivor.

13 “How can a wagon go without a team to pull it?” puzzled Littlejim.

“I don’t know,” said Ivor. “But my pa says it went down the road just as pretty as you please. And my uncle says he’s going to buy one.”

14 “Well, I want a team like Scott and Swain to pull my wagons when I grow up,” said Littlejim. He lifted his paper to puff the erasings off the corner with his breath. He admired his work. Ivor scrunched up his mouth and closed one eye.

15 “You’re mighty good with that pencil,” said Ivor. “Mr. Osk is sure to put your picture up today.” Then he crumpled his own drawing. He was better at figures, and he knew all the history dates by heart.

16 Littlejim squirmed. Praise from an older boy was rare, especially from Ivor, who was best at almost every activity at the one-room school. Littlejim tried not to be too proud. “Better not do that,” said Littlejim. “Paper’s scarce as hen’s teeth, what with the war and all, so’s my papa says. Use my eraser.”