

the little horse mystery

Chapter One by Kay Hively

Nathan Curtis stepped on the bottom rail of the little white fence. By swinging one leg over the top rail, he had a good seat to watch the parade as it came down his street. He was eager to see the soldiers go by on their way out of town. Nathan's house was the last one on the street, right beside a cornfield.

Nathan had heard that men were training on the town square. He wanted to go watch them but his parents would not allow him to do so. They said that was no place for a 10-year-old boy.

Some of his friends had seen the soldiers marching up and down the streets and riding horses around the square. Sometimes, at school, he could hear a drummer calling the soldiers to duty. The men were training to fight in a civil war that started last year. Nathan's father said the soldiers were volunteers who would march off to fight one day.

At last that day had come. It was Saturday, and the volunteers were leaving town. Someone said they would go all the way to Tennessee. Nathan had never been to Tennessee. He had never even been out of Illinois. He did not understand why the men had to go so far away to fight. His father said that was because most of the fighting was down south or back east.

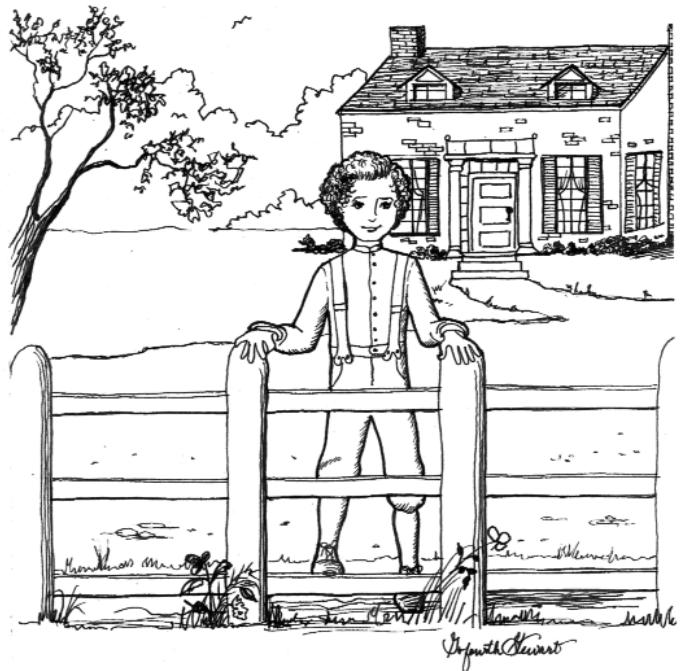
Nathan thought it would be exciting to ride a horse and fight. He had read stories about men who fought big battles. Even when he went to church, there were stories from the Bible about great battles. In most of the stories, the soldiers were brave and noble.

As Nathan sat waiting on his perch, his parents came out of their house and joined him by the fence. More and more people were gathering in yards and along the street. Everyone was excited.

Far down the block, people began to applaud and whistle. Then came a loud drum roll. Nathan was so excited he almost fell off the fence. Only the steady hand of his father kept him from tumbling to the ground.

Nathan leaned forward and strained his eyes, looking for something to appear on the parade route. Suddenly, a big man in a dark blue uniform came down the street riding a beautiful chestnut horse. In the bright sun of April 1862, the gold braids on the soldier's uniform seemed to glow. A sparkle of light flashed from a silver sword that hung from the officer's waist.

The soldier in the handsome uniform, riding the beautiful horse, was the most glorious sight Nathan Curtis had ever seen. He could hardly wait to see all the other soldiers who would soon be passing in front of him. The parade was under way.



Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do –

- Name the state where Nathan Curtis lived. Find that state on a map. The volunteers are going to another state to fight. What state is that? Find it on a map. Are the two states close together?
- What is a volunteer? Have you ever been a volunteer? Does anyone in your family serve as a volunteer? A volunteer can do many things besides fight in a war. Name ten things a volunteer can do? If you could be any kind of volunteer, what kind would you be?

Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation with support from Verizon Foundation. Copyright 2002.

Next Week: Chapter Two – Good-bye, Abner