

# the little horse mystery

## Chapter Seven by Kay Hively

After what seemed a very long time, Mr. Curtis closed the front door and returned to the hallway. He said the man at the door was one of his neighbors. The neighbor had come to report a house in town was on fire. He also said there were rumors that runaway slaves had passed through town and set the fire.

The neighbor warned Mr. Curtis to be on the lookout for runaways.

In spite of the fire and the rumors, Willie's father said his family would move on. He said there were many miles ahead of them and they couldn't wait any longer. Mr. Curtis said the family could stay another day if they wanted, but the offer of shelter was refused. The need to move on was more important than the risk of being captured.

As quietly as they could, everyone rose from the floor in the hall. As soon as he was on his feet, Nathan slipped up the stairs to his room. When he returned, the escaping family was ready to leave out of the back door. Their only baggage was a knapsack of food Mrs. Curtis had given them.

Nathan hurried to Willie's side and handed him the new shoes he had worn to church that morning. Willie shook his head no, but Nathan's father nodded his head yes. Without a word, Willie tucked the shoes under his arm. But as he left the house with his family, the little slave boy placed something in Nathan's hand.

Standing in the kitchen door, Nathan watched as the brave little family disappeared in the dark. Only then did he open his hand and find the wooden horse.

As Mr. Curtis shut and locked the kitchen door, Nathan knew he would never see Willie again. But he also knew he would never forget the little boy who had hid under the stairs.

Nathan's mother put her arm around him and kissed the top of his head. It was time for bed she told him. Tomorrow was a school day.

In his room, Nathan stood the little horse on a table by his bed. As Nathan was climbing into bed, his father came into his room. Mr. Curtis reminded Nathan to never tell anyone that their home was a station on the Underground Railroad. It had to be a secret. Nathan promised he would never tell. He didn't want to get anyone in trouble.

Through the window by his bed, Nathan could see an orange glow in the distance. It came from the fire the neighbor had told his father about. As Nathan lay looking out the window, he wondered about Willie. Would he and his family make it all the way to Canada? Would the new shoes fit Willie's small feet? And he thought about Mr. Lincoln and his friend Abner.

It seemed that everyone was fighting this war. Even his own family was involved in the fight. The sad part is that the war had turned one American against another.



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## Classroom Extensions

### Things to Think About and Do –

- Look up the definition to these words: 1. rumor 2. shelter 3. baggage 4. knapsack 5. station. Learn the definitions and how to spell the words correctly.
- Why did Nathan give Willie his new shoes? Why did Willie give Nathan his little horse? Write a poem about friendship.

**Next Week: Chapter Eight – Liberty on High**