

## CHAPTER ONE

As soon as Mr. Robbins said "School dismissed," Jonathan quickly slipped out of his seat. He maneuvered his way to the front of the schoolhouse in the direction of the door. Before he reached it, his farm friend Edward grabbed his shoulder and Jonathan turned to face him. "Do you have to go right home?" Edward questioned as they skipped down the broad slate steps.

"Why, what do you want to do?" came the reply.

"Let's go down to the canal and see what's there," Edward said.

The two boys were especially interested in the canal at this time of the year. The Erie Canal had just opened up for the season, and all sorts of debris would appear between the banks. There were odd pieces of wood, floating carcasses of deer, groundhogs and other animals that had drowned in the frigid canal water. As they crossed the grassy area bordering the canal, both boys hurried closer to identify a number of small, light brown objects bobbing in the murky water of the canal.

"They're - they're eggs!" shouted the boys.

Edward picked up a long branch from a bush and tried to sweep an egg to within his reach. Although the muddy bank was slippery, he managed to grasp a floating egg without sliding into the canal and brought it up for examination. As he did, the egg exploded in his hand!

The terrible smell of rotten egg filled their noses, and the foul liquid

spotted their clothes. Edward gagged, and put his hand over his mouth and nose, looking as if he would throw up. Jonathan ran a few steps away, his nose pinched shut.

"Ohhh!" he groaned. "Wash it off, Edward."

His friend pulled off his foul-smelling shirt, then hesitated.

"The canal's dirtier than the shirt," he choked out.

He threw the shirt away from him, and splashed a little water on his face and arms, all the while spluttering because of the smell. Jonathan soon did the same, his shirt sleeve needing more rinsing than his face and arms. As the shock of the incident began to fade along with the smell, the boys started to smile, then giggle, and soon threw themselves on the ground with howls of laughter. When they could laugh no more, Edward gasped, "None of our chicken eggs ever blew up like that!"

"No wonder they float - with all that rotten stuff inside," Jonathan said. "I'd like to take one to...," his voice faded away as they both turned toward the sound of hoof and harness of an approaching team on the other side of the canal.

They exchanged mischievous glances, and reached for the branch to sweep in more rotten eggs. By the time the mules and driver were some twenty yards away, they had five eggs between them. They hurried, but remembered to handle the eggs like the fancy glassware in the mercantile store downtown. They sat in the grass looking like innocent schoolboys curious to see the canal boat float by, and carefully lined up the eggs in the

soft spring grass. When the mules and driver were directly across from them, they stood up and aimed for the mules' broad sides, and let fly!

One egg fell short, and the splash and putrid odor alerted the driver and spooked the near mule, which sidestepped and moved around as much as the harness allowed. The second and third eggs found their mark, with a resulting pop that could be heard across the canal.

"Hey! You!" hollered the startled young driver - then the next words were choked back by the foul eggs.

Just as well, because the words were as foul as the eggs. Jonathan and Edward were laughing now, and throwing the eggs at the same time. One hit a mule and the last hitting the bank. The mule driver struggled with the reins as the lunging and sidestepping were brought under control.

By this time the captain had heard the commotion and was in the bow of the boat, adding his foul language to that of the hoggee. The captain was shaking his big fist and seemed to be looking for something - anything - to throw at them. The boys knew that there was no way for the boat crew to get their hands on them, and they sat down as they grew weak from laughter. The captain angrily stomped back to the stern of the canal boat, where he stared at the two boys.

The boys slowly stopped laughing, scrambled to their feet, and ran away from the canal bank. By the time they got into the open field they were running at top speed. Jonathan began to think of the possible consequences of their actions.

*What if they had been recognized? What if that captain did business with Jonathan's father?*

When they finally slowed and sprawled in the grass, Jonathan said, "D'ya think we'll get caught?"

Jonathan looked at his friend carefully. Edward's round face was surrounded by curly dark hair. The early summer sun was already beginning to tan his face and arms. Jonathan thought that Edward looked like a miniature of his father as he brushed his hair from his dark eyes.

Edward squinted from the sunlight as he looked back at Jonathan. He admired Jonathan's lanky height, and could see why people sometimes looked twice at the boy. His hair was the color of dark straw, and had a wave at the front that dipped just over his bright blue eyes. His mouth was quick to smile, and his laugh seemed to tumble out. Instead of a tan, Jonathan's freckles were beginning to show on his face and long slender arms.

Their eyes met, but neither spoke because they had no answer to Jonathan's question. Suddenly serious, the boys started for home, occasionally looking back toward the canal.

By the next morning, it seemed that Jonathan had forgotten about the egg-throwing adventure. He finished his chores earlier than the usual time, and started down Penny Street toward school. Today he was going to go home with Edward after school was out to help on the farm. He could hardly wait!

As soon as Jonathan saw Edward on the dirt road, he hollered and held up a bundle made up of a change of clothes.

"I can stay!" Edward responded by stretching his arms up and shouting.

It wasn't easy for them to concentrate on their studies. Several times during the school day Mr. Robbins tapped the ruler on a desk in the front row and chided them for daydreaming.

After what seemed like a long day for the boys, school was dismissed, and they started at a trot for Edward's family farm. Jonathan loved farming, or so he thought. He had helped Edward with chores, and liked the physical activity and the smell of the hay and even the cows. He had not, of course, worked from sunup to sundown for seven days a week. Even this short time doing chores would be an exciting time for the boys to be together as friends. After changing into chore clothes, Edward and Jonathan received their job to do before milking - cleaning and oiling the team's harness. It was dirty and salty from the sweat and dust of spring plowing. Edward's father thought it would be a good job for them. Jonathan would be enthusiastic about helping and Edward would want to show his friend how well he could work. The job took longer than either boy thought, but Edward's father gave them a big grin and squeezed their shoulders.

"Nice job, boys. Wash that Neatsfoot oil off and see if your sisters have got all the cows in. Time to milk!"

Jonathan couldn't help smiling. He wanted to help with the milking very much, although Edward said that his father probably wouldn't allow it. All but two of the cows were in the barnyard pushing toward the barn door. Edward's sisters were driving the last two down the lane toward the barnyard.

"What's the matter, girls? Won't they do what you tell 'em?" Edward taunted his younger sisters.

The older threw a stone at Edward in response, but it wasn't even close.

Her anger disappeared when she saw Jonathan.

"Hello, Jonathan," she smiled broadly. "I'm glad you're here."

"Hello, April," he returned. "Glad to help."

The five youngsters shooed the cows inside the barn. Smelling the molasses that was mixed with the ground up feed, they pushed their way to a space in the row of cows and stood in place eating like the others.

The fourteen cows all had names such as Spot, Brownie and Mary, but Jonathan was only able to identify the obvious Brownie. As the milking progressed the boys carried pails of fresh warm milk to the spring house where Edward's mother strained the milk and poured it into large tinned cans. These cans were picked up by a man who delivered it to people around town.

As each cow was milked, the boys released it to spend the night back in the pasture. When the milking was complete, the girls took all the

milking utensils to be washed, and Edward's father worked with the boys sweeping and scraping the dairy floor. They shoveled the muck and straw out the side door, and when the pile was big enough, it would be spread from a wagon to fertilize the fields in the fall. The boys made sure the cows were out of the barnyard and into the pasture. Then they placed the gate rails to keep the cows there.

Jonathan smiled again. "I love to do this farm work," he said.

Edward shook his head. "You'd get tired of it if you had to do it all the time," he replied.

Surprised by his friend's response Jonathan said nothing.

They walked to the end of the farm lane near the house and Jonathan said, "Thanks for letting me come over. See you tomorrow in school."

"Ayeh, it was fun working together," Edward smiled. "G'night."

Jonathan called over his shoulder. "G'night."