

**SHOUTIN'
ON THE
HILLS**

by Nona Freeman

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Chapter 1

For Land's Sake

Carrie poked a long pole against the dark tide moving stickily by her perch on the gnarled roots of aged oaks. With the intensity of a four-year-old crusader, wild honey-colored braids swinging, she tried to push clear the small creatures already snared.

"Poor mousie! Let me help you," anxiety shrilled her voice.

"C'mon, froggie, hop! HOP!"

The slow stream of sorghum molasses came from three barrels her papa had dumped to gain storage for the light-textured ribbon cane syrup he cooked on halves for the Rocky Mount community.

"Go back, grasshopper! You're headin' for trouble. Mouse, listen to me! You don't want to go that way!"

But nothing heeded her warnings and none of her efforts availed the mired strugglers. Failure melted her to dejection. Silent tears trickled across her folded arms propped on bony knees until Lizzie Mae interrupted her little sister's misery.

"Car-rie!" she called. "Carrie Lee! Oh, there you are."

Carefully skirting the viscous flow, she found a seat on a nearby root and lowered her voice confidentially.

"I overheard Frank and Hardy talking to Mama and Papa and you'll never guess what they said." Entranced with her startling news, seven-year-old Lizzie Mae did not pause for a response. "Since Frank and Hardy came back from Arkansas, they've been talking privately to Mama and Papa and if any of us younger children come near they send us away. But now I know what it's all about. They want us, all fourteen of us, to move to Arkansas!"

"Arkansas!" Carrie exclaimed. "But I don't want to leave everything here. Georgia is our home. Why should we go away?"

"Do you remember everyone talking about how Uncle Phillip Powledge and Uncle Mack and Aunt Francis Justiss, and the Sewells and Morgans all sold their homes and went to Arkansas a few years ago? Frank said Papa can homestead land there like they did."

The two little girls huddled closer speculating on this surprising possibility until booming thunder and sudden gusts of wind made Lizzie Mae consider the darkened sky.

"Oh, Carrie, there's a big storm coming. We'd better run."

As they ran hand-in-hand Carrie thought, "Maybe the rain will melt that 'ole molasses before all the little things die."

The scattered Powledge clan hurried to safety before slashing winds. Foreboding darkness quickly smothered early afternoon brightness. Hard splatters of rain caught most of them before they reached the safety of the house. Six-year-old Willie Ruth joined Carrie and Lizzie Mae in

an uneasy huddle at Mama's knee as the storm's fury roared outside.

Scotch-Irish Molly, with black hair and blue eyes, gently comforted her daughters. They buried their faces in her voluminous skirts to dull the sound and to keep from seeing the ghost-like room: white counterpanes hastily thrown over mirrors, and pale faces, eerie in the dim light.

Hours later when the tornado tamed into a soft downpour, Willie Ruth and Carrie stood on the open walk-through to the kitchen looking at the damage they could see. Two of the massive oaks lay uprooted flat on the ground and a corner of the barn's roof had sailed away. Looking up they saw something floating down from the sky. Willie Ruth identified it: "Look, Carrie, it's a red doll dress!"

It almost touched the ground, then an air current lifted the tiny dress and deposited it at Carrie's feet. She turned as she stooped to pick it up so Willie Ruth would not see her sudden tears. Lost things made her hurt inside.

News of an astonishing quirk of the tornado came from the Powledges, who lived near Macon. When they walked around looking at storm damage, they heard a baby cry. Tracing the sound they found the tiny girl where the storm had deposited her high in the forks of a tree, unharmed and still wrapped in a blanket. With their home blown away, her parents mourned their child as dead, but those tears soon ended in joy.

Later, the family wondered if the storm helped Jacob Powledge make up his mind about moving to Arkansas, for soon afterward he announced to his family one night at supper: "We're moving to Arkansas, lock, stock and