



The Penny Whistle- A Novella

by B.J. Hoff

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Northeastern Kentucky, 1890's

So morose had been her state of mind throughout the morning that she had scarcely noticed anything different about Mister Stuart. It was almost noon before it struck her. The teacher was standing at the blackboard with his pointer, marking off decimal places for Maggie's arithmetic group. After a moment, he reached for his pocket watch—and withdrew his hand...empty. With a slightly baffled expression, he glanced down over his vest. Then his gaze cleared, and he dropped his hand back to his side.

In that moment, Maggie knew what had escaped her until now: Mister Stuart's gold pocket watch was gone! She had seen him make the same gesture two or three times throughout the morning, each time with the same reaction.

He had sold it. He had sold his fine gold watch!

The sudden realization brought Summer's words of the night before rushing in on Maggie: "Even if we was to give him a brand new flute, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he didn't just sell it and give the money to the collection for the Crawfords and the Widow Hunnicutt...."

Maggie stared at the teacher as if she had never seen him before. She knew for a certainty that Mister Stuart had sold his gold watch to help the Crawfords and Mrs. Hunnicutt. Summer had been right. She had known what Mister Stuart would do. "Feed the hungry...heal the sick...that's what Mister Stuart would do...Mister Stuart and Jesus...."

Maggie sat watching Mister Stuart, and as she did, she began to pray, never mind that she wasn't on her knees and that her eyes were wide open. She prayed that somehow—though she didn't know how in the world such a thing could ever be—she, too, would learn to live like Jesus wanted her to live.

And then, with her heart of hearts, she also prayed that Jesus would let Mister Stuart live—a long, long time.

Please, Lord...please....

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