

In The Quiet After:

Elias

A Historical Romance

By **Olivia Blair**

March 29, 1876

Isaiah worked closely with Josiah by the window. Elias and Daniel repaired chairs on the other side of the room.

Isaiah glanced out the window, frowning as he held wood steady for Josiah. "It's near time. Anyone close enough to finished to fetch Nathan?"

"I got him." Elias sat his last chair on the floor, sliding it once. "I just finished."

"Thank you." Isaiah called as he turned his attention back to the wood Josiah was cutting.

Elias dusted his shirt off as he exited the workshop. It didn't take long for him to absentmindedly walk to the schoolhouse.

"Miss Collins." Elias nodded to the teacher as he entered the room. "I trust you and Mr. Whitaker are well."

"That we are, Mr. Carter." Miss Collins turns the ring on her finger gently. "We'll be settled soon enough."

"Nathan, it's time to go home." Elias smiled at him before looking back at Miss Collins. "If you don't mind, could you tell Mr. Whitaker that his furniture will be ready for him tomorrow?"

"Of course, Mr. Carter. Thank you."

"Have a good evening, Miss Collins." Elias nodded to her once as Nathan took his hand.

"Lias, where's Papa?" Nathan looked up at Elias as they walked.

"He's finishing up some work with Papaw. Shouldn't be long before they're finished."

Nathan nodded, humming softly.

Elias began swinging his arm carefully so that it tugged Nathan gently.

"Lias!" Nathan giggled, grabbing onto Elias with his other hand.

"What? I ain't doing nothing." Elias looked away, feigning innocence.

Nathan dropped fast, attempting to swing on Elias's arm.

Elias grinned, reaching around to pick Nathan up and toss him over his shoulder.

"Come on, Nathan. We shouldn't keep your ma waiting." Elias took off running towards his brother's house.

April 3, 1876

“Boys, finish up. I’ll get to Nathan.” Josiah dusted his hands off.

A chorus of “Yes, Pa,” sounded throughout the workshop as he left.

Josiah rolled his shoulders and stretched his neck, his joints popping as he moved.

He pushed open the door to the schoolhouse, looking around until his eyes fell on Nathan.

“Papaw!” Nathan launched from his seat to hug Josiah’s leg.

He sat his hand on top of Nathan’s head with a smile. “Where’s your bag?”

Nathan looked up at him with wide eyes as he stepped back. “I forgot. I’ll go grab it.”

A young woman approached Josiah as he watched Nathan run back to his desk.

“So, you’re the grandfather Nathan has been talking about all day.” The woman smiled as she looked back at Nathan. “He’s been very excited to tell me about you.”

Josiah hummed softly. “I’m one of them. His pa is my boy.”

“Then you must be the elder Mr. Carter.” She nodded. “The one that has a chrysanthemum?”

His grin grew wider. “He mentioned Mum-mum?”

“He did and something about flowers?” She tilted her head, looking at Josiah.

“That’d be my granddaughter. Chrysanthemum Rose.”

“Oh, well that makes a great deal more sense.” She watched as Nathan ran back over, his bag half open.

“Papaw, it won’t close.” Nathan held the satchel up in front of him.

“Let’s see.” Josiah took the bag, shifting items around carefully. “Your ma know you brought so many toys to school?”

Nathan grinned, shushing him. “Mama doesn’t need to know.”

Josiah blinked at Nathan slowly. “Yeah, I ain’t asking this time.”

“Nathan mentioned that you make toys.” She smiled as Nathan reached up to pat his bag.

“The best toys!” He announced.

“Make a lot of things, Miss.” Josiah chuckled softly. “I’m a carpenter. Though I reckon the toys are what matter most to him.”

“He’s very fond of them.” She noted. “I’m not certain how many he brought but Nathan kept showing me different toys throughout the day.”

“You trying to distract your teacher, boy?” Josiah looked down at him.

“No, Papaw.” Nathan shook his head. “Just wanted to play with her is all.”

“I’m sorry about that, miss?” He paused.

“Clarke.”

“Miss Clarke, the boy’s still learning limitations.” Josiah sighed.

“That’s quite alright, Mr. Carter.”

Josiah held his free hand out to Nathan, who took it quickly.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Miss Clarke.” Nathan waved.

“If you need any work done, don’t hesitate to let me or one of my boys know, Miss Clarke. I built this school and we would like to fix it if anything breaks.”

“I’ll be sure to do that. It was lovely meeting you, Mr. Carter.” Miss Clarke waved after them as they left.

Josiah glanced down at Nathan as they walked. “So, how do you plan to keep your ma from noticing all the toys when I drop you off?”

Nathan reached for the bag and Josiah sat it in his hands gently.

“Mama won’t know.” Nathan pressed the satchel against his chest.

Josiah chuckled softly. “So, what’s the plan then? Hope she don’t notice?”

“I’m a big boy.” Nathan puffed up his chest. “Mama won’t check.”

Josiah hummed raising an eyebrow. “Don’t worry. Papaw won’t tell.”

“Good.” Nathan nodded, squeezing Josiah’s hand. “Let’s go to your house, Papaw.”

“You don’t want to go home yet?” He smiled at the small child beside him.

“I wanna see Mamaw!” Nathan hopped once. “And Mum-mum!”

“I don’t know if Mum-mum will be there, but we can go see Mamaw.” Josiah changed direction to head towards his house.

“Mamaw’s pretty.” Nathan smiled. “I like her eyes.”

“She is pretty.”

“I like your nose.” Nathan declared, nodding once at his papaw.

Josiah laughed in surprise. “Then you must like Charlotte cause she got Mamaw’s eyes and Papaw’s nose.”

“Charlotte is pretty.” Nathan scrunched his nose. “But she can be mean.”

“You think she’s bad now? Should’ve seen her when she stole a horse.” Josiah glanced at the horse tied up by the house as they approached.

“She stole a horse?” Nathan yelled, looking up at Josiah with wide eyes.

Josiah shushed him softly. “Keep your voice down. We don’t need the whole town knowing.”

“She stole a horse?” Nathan whispered at him loudly.

Josiah laughed, guiding Nathan into the house. “Why do you think we have one?”

“What are you boys talking about?” Carolyn smiled, stepping close to kiss Josiah’s cheek.

Nathan attached himself to her leg quickly. “Mamaw! Did you know Charlotte stole a horse?”

Carolyn looked up at Josiah who pressed his lips together to contain a laugh.

“I did.” She nodded. “Honey, why don’t you go play? Mimi’s supposed to bring Mum-mum by later.”

“Alright, Mamaw.” Nathan ran off to lay in the living room floor, playing with his toys.

“How did that possibly come up?” Carolyn raised an eyebrow at Josiah, who raised his hands in mock defense.

“Very naturally.” He pressed a soft kiss to her forehead. “After we both called you pretty.”

Charlotte entered the house behind them, packing a basket of laundry to go sit on the bench.

Nathan looked up when she sat down, then looked again when he realized it was her. “You stole a horse!” He leaned close, narrowing his eyes. “Tell me how.”

“Your pa would kill me.” Charlotte laughed before lowering her voice to a whisper. “When you’re fifteen.”

He nodded slowly. "You better. I'll be waitin'."

Nathan returned to organizing his toys from his bag onto the floor. He looked down at a wooden horse before turning to Charlotte.

He held the carved horse out to her. "Borrow. I want him back."

"I'll take good care of him." Charlotte took the toy, sitting it on the bench beside her. "He won't leave your sight."

"Good." He nodded once, turning back to his other toys.