

Let this coming of age story of a boy named Bean take you back to a simple time. Set in a small southern town encircled by a river and gleaming white cotton fields, discover how peacocks, zombies, trains and a treehouse are sure to entertain.

LITTLE RIVER:

A place for beginnings and of things to remember

By Dadfire

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CHAPTER ONE

The Trouble With Beans

In so many ways it was truly the best time to be a kid. I'm not talking about money or material things at all. No, I'm talking about the day, the moment. There wasn't any big plan for the future. Heck, we didn't even think much about that. We just thought of the day we had on "that" day, not the next. It all came down to one word - simple. We lived in a simple house with simple things, living our lives like most other people around us.

I suppose it could be broken down to just simple purpose. What we had then we didn't know was so special. Life was so uncomplicated and so easy. All you had to do was put on your clothes and go out the door. It didn't matter where to; school, work, play, with no big plan to figure it all out. We would just come home to the same dusty old house each night, with that big, noisy attic fan blowing, and go to sleep with anticipation of the next day.

Every story has a beginning, but this one will start with how I got the name that most folks knew me by.

My given name was Benjamin Franklin Barnes. John F. Kennedy had just been elected president. People would often make a comment to me of how I was named after a president. I would usually only respond, "Reckon so," even though I had learned in school that Benjamin Franklin was never actually a president of the United States. It's funny how older people can believe something for so long, when it is so easy to find out the truth. I could tell them they were wrong about him being president and sometimes I actually did, but most adults don't like being corrected, especially from a kid. So I usually didn't say anything. Besides, why would I want to spoil my pride of having been named after a "president."

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I was just called Benny until I was about six years old. That was when people around town also started calling me the nickname Beanie or Bean for short. It started out as a joke mostly, but later folks called me that in a natural sort of way. I didn't mind and even got to liking the nickname Bean. I thought it was cool to have a nickname like that and for a reason to be explained, made me famous around town. As it happens, when spoken, Beanie sounds like Benny and Bean sounds like Ben, and so it really didn't make much difference. Having some kind of real history attached to your name, made it more special than just being named after some old famous person.

But back to my story of how I got the nickname Bean. It was because of what happened when I was playing down at the old big barn that wasn't too far from our house. You could always find something to do around the barn when you might be bored of sitting around the house. Jack and I could play in the hay, in the loft, and make up lots of games using the big barn as our prop. Sometimes we would climb around on a tractor, a combine or some other big piece of farm machinery, chasing each other around. It was especially fun playing in the cotton and bean trailers that were usually there as well.

I happened to be by myself on this particular day. When I arrived, I saw the most wonderful thing. There it was! A trailer full of fresh soybeans, waiting for me to jump in and play around in. Being able to jump down in those beans and swim around in them, especially in a big trailer that is full, is like having this huge playground all to yourself. I didn't have to share it with anyone or sit in a line to get my turn. It was just me and the beans, and I had it all to myself. I would climb up to the top of the trailer, jumping into my pool of beans, dozens of times. I would lie there, swimming in them like I was in the biggest, city swimming pool you could imagine.

Just like in water, pulling your arms and moving your legs through those millions of beans, it could tire you out very quickly. I was

having so much fun, but it didn't take long to wear myself out. I found myself stuck in the middle, sinking down and struggling to keep my head above the beans so I could breathe. The weight of the beans just kept pushing me down toward the bottom. I would reach my arm up as far as I could to try to clear the beans away to get some air. They would fill back in faster than any air was getting in. I had beans jammed up my nose too, so the only way I could breathe was to open my mouth. The more I struggled to get out, the farther down I sank. I was sinking in a quicksand made of soybeans.

I couldn't yell or scream out in any way. If I opened my mouth at all to yell for help, the beans would just come pouring in and start choking me. I remember getting really weak, thinking to myself, 'this just might be it for me.' But for some reason, I wasn't filled with panic.

The last thing I could remember was lying there buried in those beans, and hearing this faint voice. It was calling my name in a slow, drawn out manner, over and over, "Bennn'-ny... Bennn'-ny... Bennn'-ny." It was a reassuring, gentle voice, and it made me feel at peace about my dilemma.

The next thing I remembered, I woke up to an ambulance beside me, with an oxygen mask over my nose and mouth. Dr. Thombs from town was telling me to take slow, deep breaths. Daddy and mama were right there too when I woke up.

Mama said, "Son, you scared the living daylights out of us," and was very understanding about the whole thing.

But, daddy admonished, "Boy, I got enough people to worry about without you getting into a whole bunch of trouble with beans!"

I heard mama thanking our neighbors the Wilsons, and Dr. Thombs, for what they had done. They had probably saved my life. Mama knew I usually told her if I was going very far from the house. My bike was still there, but I had been gone for several hours. It was getting late, and she was getting worried. Mama asked Jack if he had

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seen me, but Jack just shook his head. She began calling out my name, making her way down to check at the barn. She knew it was a favorite place to play. Mama had been looking all around the barn when she stopped Mr. Wilson and his wife Martha who were driving by. They told mama they didn't see me while driving down the road. The Wilson's joined the search and they all began calling out my name.

Mama knew we loved playing in the trailers and asked Mr. Wilson to check them. He climbed up and down several trailers peeking in for any sight of me. Finally, in one full of soybeans, he saw part of a shoe sticking out of the beans. He yelled, "I think he's in here," and he began to dig me out while his wife ran to the house and called for help. They told me that when they got me out, I was barely breathing and a little shade of blue.

I don't know how much longer I would have lasted if the Wilsons hadn't come by. Dr. Thombs told me I had passed out and almost suffocated, and claimed it was a miracle that I survived. They jokingly said they had gotten enough beans out of my nose, ears, and other places we don't want to mention, that they could have started an entire crop of soybeans.

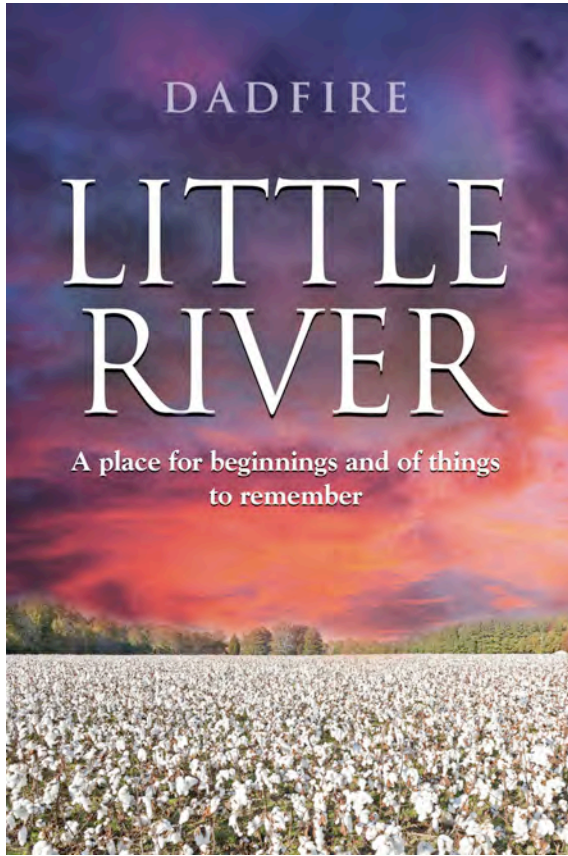
For years, the voice I heard calling my name, while lying lifeless in the bottom of that trailer would haunt me, but I never mentioned it to anyone.

What had happened with me and the bean trailer, eventually had gotten around town. Mama, for a long time after the incident, would often stop me and playfully pull down hard on my ears. It would make me holler and think my ear was going to come off my head. Pretending to search intensely in my ear, she would exclaim, "We better check to make sure no bean stalks are growing down in there!" Thank goodness, none did!

Little River

From that time forward, the neighbors and some people around town would see me, and with a little snicker say, “How's it going, Beanie boy?”

So, the name just stuck, and I kinda liked being famous!



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