

Gone with the Train is an historical, adventure fiction novel set in the 1920s. The book is about two teenagers, David and Sally, that risked their lives in Florida after they hopped on a freight train there to escape a severe drought.

Gone with the Train

By John Bernardo

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GO NE

— WITH THE —

TRAIN

A steam locomotive, numbered 969, is pulling a red passenger train through a lush, green forest. The locomotive is emitting a large plume of white steam that fills the air. The train is moving along a set of tracks that curve through the woods. The background shows rolling hills covered in dense forest under a soft, hazy sky.

John Bernardo

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It's now half past midnight and a gibbous moon shines through a cloudy night sky. Northern Star steadily barrels ahead as it moves northward toward the Cedar Crest Station.

But as the train puffs and screeches closer to Moose Mountain, the Quaker River will become deeper, rural roads running along the Quaker will get narrower, riverside cliffs will be steeper, and branches of tall treetops will lean over and scrape against the top and sides of the train's locomotives and rolling stock.

Now Train 55 continues thundering up the tracks while it rapidly rolls by a thicket of trees that stretches up to the pitch-black sky. A few minutes past by and the train, with its lead locomotive's headlights shining, slices through thick fog that just drooped over the rail line.

Meanwhile, the wind is howling louder and blowing harder. Fortunately, the train crew didn't see any lightning bolts or hear any roaring sounds of thunder, not yet anyway. Nevertheless, heavy

downpours of rain continue to splash onto Northern Star.

However, the weather has no impact to the train operation. The giant locomotives and railcars aren't shaking and the railroad train is rolling full steam ahead to Moose Mountain. But the whistling, autumn wind woke up Sally, David and Alexander. All three of them are currently looking out the windows and watching sheets of rain come down onto the moving train.

David, concerned about the weather, decided to tiptoe to the back of the train and talk with the conductor. He knocks on his door and the conductor opens it with a bowl of soup in his left hand.

“What can I do for you son?”

“I just wanted to know about this windy, rainy weather. It has me a little concerned.”

“Don't worry. It should clear up in the next half-hour or so. I didn't get a telegraph from the dispatcher or telegrapher about dangerous weather.”

David said nothing and walked back to his seat.

It's now almost 1 a.m. Train 55 is scheduled to pull up to the depot at Moose Mountain in about 40 minutes.

Meanwhile, Monroe places his bowl of steaming soup in a cardboard box. Then he reads the dispatcher's telegraph.

The message reads: "Train 55, be aware that there is a fast-moving storm in Delaware. It should move through New Jersey in about ten minutes and be in your New York area in about 25 minutes."

Robert read the telegraph and a minute later, a second one fell on his desk. This one reads: "The storm has sustained winds of 69 mph and they can gust over 90 mph. You need to stop the train, evacuate all on board and go to a shelter right away."

After reading those two telegraphs, Robert mumbles to himself, "This must be a joke because it's the end of October and we don't get those windstorms up here. Only southern states get that weather now."

Maybe the crew thinks the telegraphs about the storm are jokes and that they aren't in any danger but the birds know there is a big storm coming. Flocks of crows and other birds already flew into dense shrubs and tightly gripped their feet onto low branches just above tree trunks.

Anyway, Robert quips and chuckles about the telegraphs. Then he heads to the cab and tells Vinny about them.

Vinny said, “I don’t believe that. Do you? This must be a joke. Send a telegraph to the dispatcher right now. Let him know that he must have drank too many glasses of wine before they sent us these messages.”

Robert agrees with Vinny, heads back to his office and sends a telegraph, writing it the way Vinny reacted to it. Now he sits on his rickety stool and waits for a response.

About three minutes later, he receives two telegraphs, one from the dispatcher, the other from the railroad telegrapher.

The dispatcher’s telegraph states: “This is not a joke. You need to stop the train as soon as possible; the windstorm just swept by the southern tip of New Jersey.”

The telegrapher’s message read: “I already called fire rescue and other emergency units to your area regarding the weather. This is an emergency. Stop the train soon and safely evacuate everyone on board.”

Robert grabs the telegraphs in his office and brings them to Vinny so he could read them. In the meantime, the rain is constantly coming down and the wind is getting stronger and gustier. But still no one is witnessing any flashes of lightning or is hearing any booms of thunder.

Also, the train is still steadily steamrolling straight ahead and there isn't any indication that the crew or passengers are in any danger. Nonetheless, Robert is walking into the head locomotive cab.

Both Vinny and Frank are holding a steaming, bright red mug of hot coffee.

Seconds later, they add a pinch of brown sugar to the black coffee and gulp it down.

Then Vinny asks, "Robert, would you like me to pour you a fresh cup of Folgers coffee?"

Monroe didn't answer him and without further ado, he informs Frank and Vinny what the wires from the telegraph office stated. Immediately, both Vinny and Frank smile and laugh loudly.

“You are kidding me, right?” Vinny questions Robert while he sips his coffee and giggles. “Let me read that now.”

Robert hands over the telegraphs to Vinny. He then reads both of them in about five minutes.

Vinny put his hands behind his head and said, “Robert, I read the telegraphs and it looks like I have to stop the train shortly anyway. I just saw a red horizontal lamp signal light up just about 5 yards north of us.”

“Looks like I will park at the next siding for about 15 minutes or so. I’m waiting for a southbound freight train to pass us on our main track line,” Vinny said.

He went on, “However, even if these telegraphs are true, there are no buildings or shelters where I can drop off the passengers. On both sides of the tracks, there’s nothing but wilderness until we get to the depot at Moose Mountain.”

“So, what do we do now?” Monroe asked with a puzzled look on his face.

“After I park at the siding, I will wait for the lamp signal to turn green. Then I’ll be clear to go onto the

main line again and I'll move the train at full-speed until we reach the Cedar Crest Station."

Robert frowns and said, "I guess you're right Vinny; looks like we have no other options."

Vinny just moved the train seven yards up the tracks and stopped the Northern Star on a siding. It's now about 1 a.m. The moon and stars are nowhere to be seen on this dark, rainy and windy early morning.

The woodlands along the tracks are quiet too. Even the ravens flew away from the storm after they warned the crew that they may be in danger. Meanwhile, the wind keeps screaming as it pushes most of the leaves off the trees. Big branches are whittling away and now they're nothing but a bunch of twisted twigs.

Digressing to Vinny, once he regains control of the train, he will approach a big wooden bridge before arriving at Moose Mountain. This is a bridge that will span over a troubled river, the Quaker River. Meanwhile, the wind keeps gusting and the river keeps rising.

About fifteen minutes have already elapsed and the railroad lamp signal up ahead from where Vinny sits

remains red. The engineman for The Great Comet, a southbound freight railroad train powered by two giant grey Globe locomotives, just tooted the horn three times. The Great Comet will soon pass by Vinny's passenger train.

The Great Comet's engines are transporting 30 black tank cars full of kerosene, 40 gray hopper cars containing iron ore and track ballast, and at the end of the train, 25 red gondolas are carrying steel coils and timber.

Suddenly, Great Comet whizzes by Northern Star and the engineer blasts the train horn two more times. The vertical lamp signal just turned green and black soot is now billowing from the smokestack.

A minute later, the wind starts whirring and Vinny's train whistles twice to acknowledge the passing freight train. Then Vinny maneuvers the locomotives back on the main line and places the train at full throttle.

But regrettably, the windstorm blew timber off of the Great Comet and within moments, the gusty wind pushed some lumber into the Northern Star. The wood,

that traveled at lightning speed, severely damaged the right side of a coach car and shattered a window on the left side of the dining car.

Then as soon as the timber smashed into the train, it made a loud booming sound and woke up most of the passengers. Conductor Monroe is immediately making an announcement and informing the passengers to stay calm and that everything is okay because it was just a bird strike.

Right now, Northern Star is a battered troubled train and in just about five miles up the tracks, it will meander on a wobbly wooden trestle bridge over the troubled Quaker River.

Vinny is steering the train at full speed and is approaching the rickety railroad bridge. Fortunately, the passenger steamer cleared the span just in time. Subsequently, the wind blew the bridge down right after Northern Star cleared it.

Now the storm has transformed the bridge into a bunch of two-by-fours that are presently sitting on the bottom of the river. Next, within seconds, the fierce wind caused powerlines to snap off their poles. The

strong air also pushed branches off a crowd of autumn deciduous trees.

Indeed, Vinny is still controlling the engines and drove Train 55 over the bridge. However, the river is cresting, rising higher, and continues to seep towards the track ballasts which form the track bed.

Under typical weather conditions, the ballasts, packed between, beneath, and around the wooden railroad crossties, bear the load from the ties, help drain water by the tracks and keep down wild-growing vegetation that might interfere with the track-bed.

However, this weather is not typical, not with winds expected to gust over 90 mph. And later, lightning and thunder, along with downed trees and airborne vegetation, may mix with the wind and rain, and make this ferocious storm worse than it already is.

Yet despite the inclement weather, Vinny won't stop the train. He already mentioned earlier that he can't stop it anyway because the crew and passengers can't wait for help in the middle of the storm in the middle of the woods.

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In the meantime, mist is drifting in the area, but nevertheless, the Northern Star, with headlamps glowing, rolls forward at full throttle and Vinny is determined to park it at Moose Mountain. Train 55 continues moving straight and full steam ahead. Presently, it rapidly rumbles by herds of rain-soaked hemlocks and hickory trees, which swiftly sway dangerously close to the train tracks.

While Train 55 chugs ahead, Senior Conductor Monroe and his assistant conductor, Larry Evans, both sit on brown folding chairs in Monroe's office. As both of them chew on chestnuts and drink bottles of Poland Spring water, another telegraph falls on Monroe's desk.

This one, from the railroad telegrapher, said: "The windstorm is gusting up to 74 mph and keeps gusting and getting stronger. It's expected to reach Junction City in about 15 minutes; but don't worry, help is on the way."

Immediately, Robert and Larry read the message and head to the cab so Vinny could read it.

Vinny reads the telegraph and said, “I understand but I can’t stop the train. I must continue at full throttle until I get to Moose Mountain.”

Both conductors didn’t reply. Instead, they left the cab and head back to Monroe’s office.

Now the weather just became worse. Besides heavy downpours of rain and howling gusty winds, thunder is booming and lightning bolts are flashing. Strong winds are pushing rocks down from nearby cliffs and giant stones struck both sides of the steamer. Trees also fell near the rails and wind-blown branches are hitting the roofs, doors and windows of the trembling passenger train.

And as the storm surges, both the river and rain steadily seep closer to the top of the track bed. It also looks like the early morning New York rain and wind isn’t going to stop anytime soon. That could mean within minutes, the tracks and train, along with the passengers and crew, may sink like the Titanic did in 1912.

Nonetheless, the puffing train keeps roaring on the rails in the pouring rain. The wet wheels of the soaked

and beaten Northern Star continue to turn and squeal even though its locomotives are losing steam. Powerful winds and large lightning bolts, which illuminate the pitch-black sky, just knocked down trackside trees. Moreover, the scary storm pushed telegraph wires and powerlines off of their wooden posts.

Meanwhile, the blistering wind is blowing damaged trees and burnt-out cable wires onto the train. Also, the angry storm keeps shattering more windows on both sides of the passenger cars.

Seconds later, the thunder boomed louder as sheets of rain and waves from the flooded river splash onto Train 55. Passengers are screaming, panicking and trampling over one another while they fight to stay alive and try to escape the troubled train. Monroe and Evans just made announcements and asked them to remain calm; but no one was listening.

Northern Star's sturdy locomotives are still hammering the wet rails and the railroad train remains steadily on course but behind it, gusty winds are shaking the railroad cars from side to side. Suddenly,

within seconds, the Northern Star will derail and soon it will be under the Quaker River.

It looks like the passenger steamer, which currently is only seven miles away from Moose Mountain, is not going to make it to Cedar Crest Station. Right now, the steam engines are being swallowed by the crested river. Vinny and Frank are swimming out of the cab while desperately trying to keep their heads above water.

Most of the crew and passengers have already drowned and died beneath the submerged train, rail line and surrounding flooded forests. Luckily, about a dozen barely-breathing passengers, which include David, Alexander and Sally, clutched onto floating trees on the surface. The windstorm also pushed some boats from the flooded Quaker River over the train tracks, which are now underwater. A few other travelers are holding on to the disoriented, broken wooden vessels to keep afloat. But obviously, they need to be rescued rapidly or they won't survive.

Fortunately, within a minute or two, a light coming from another train parked about two yards from the

accident scene, flashed. And instantly, a cavalry of troops with green lanterns stormed out of the train.

The soldiers immediately approach the folks floating in the water and cast wire ropes, with black rubber tires tied to the end of each one, to the weak and drowning passengers. David, Sally, Alexander and a few other barely alive people were able to grab the tires. Then just before the floodwaters would get too close to the troops' train, the men plucked them quickly out of the crested river like Alaskan brown bears that fish for salmon along a running stream.

Finally, the wind, lightning, and thunder stopped. The rain stopped too and suddenly, a full moon reappeared and a bunch of bullfrogs are croaking. The three teens and other passengers are now being treated on two hospital cars, the cars are part of a military steam-engine train called the Evergreen Express.

Meanwhile, as the engineman leans on the throttle, the Evergreen Train exhales a huge halo of white smoke and speeds away from the submerged rail line by Moose Mountain. Full-steam ahead on top of wet, cold northerly tracks, Evergreen will stop in twenty

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miles where it will run out of track. The steamer's destination is Evergreen, its full name is Fort Evergreen. Evergreen is an American-Canadian Army Post that stands on the United States-Canadian Border.

Meanwhile, Ben Wilkens is walking along Chestnut Street which was just a few blocks from the park where David and Sally are. However, Wilkens isn't headed to the park, he wants to see if he can speak to another person about Fort Evergreen.

Then a minute later, a man in a white Borden Dairy Company Truck delivering milk bottles to Rockville residents honks the horn and waves to the private eye.

Wilkens returns the smile and waves to the milkman. Within a few minutes, the milk truck passes by and a trolley car stops about six feet ahead of Wilkens.

Immediately, two fairly young, armed soldiers step out of the street trolley. The men, dressed in army-green uniforms, approach Wilkens. Wilkens already knows that they are with the Evergreen Army.

One infantryman grinned at Wilkens and said, "Hello sir, I'm Private Ted Simmons; I presently serve the U.S.-Canadian Army at Fort Evergreen."

Wilkens replied, “I’m Ben Wilkens, a private investigator, what can I do for you?”

“Mr. Wilkens, we are in North Carolina now because our commander, General James McGovern, ordered us to track down three juveniles that are absent without leave.”

Simmons continued, “Their names are Alexander Livingston, David Owens, and his sister, Sally Owens. Yesterday, one of our sergeants apprehended Livingston in New Jersey but David and Sally are still at large.”

The other Evergreen soldier, who didn’t identify himself, showed Wilkens photos of Alexander, David and Sally. Wilkens looked at them for about three minutes and then handed them back to the MP (military policeman).

“No, I don’t know these teens but I’m also looking for someone now. His name is Robert Rollings, he’s a 12-year-old boy and has been missing for 4 months; he was last seen in Delaware.”

Wilkens hands a picture of Robert to the men.

Both glance at the picture and Simmons said, “No, we don’t recognize him.”

Wilkens then takes out a red handkerchief from his back pants pocket and blows his nose.

Then he said, “Well gentlemen, if I see who both of you are looking for I will contact you. If you see Robert, please contact me.”

The private eye quickly gives his business card to Simmons.

“Thank you, we will be in touch.”

Two minutes later, the two MPs hop on the next trolley car.

Ben is currently meditating for a few minutes and then mumbles to himself, “I need to see David and Sally early tomorrow morning and tell them what happened.”

Now the investigator keeps moving but briefly stops to get a newspaper at a magazine and newspaper stand. He soon finds a news stand and hands the vendor a nickel for a newspaper. He begins reading the paper hoping that he could get more information on the Evergreen Army.

Wilkens also decided not to go home yet. Although Marty's Motel is a crummy place, he decided to stay there one more night so he can get to see David and Sally first thing in the morning.

At the park, Sally and David are still walking around the trail while they continue bickering on what their next move would be.

Meanwhile, the sun resembles an orange as it descends on the horizon. It's now twilight amid a reddish, purplish, and marmalade-orange-like sky. Soon nighttime will supersede daytime.

Presently, the wind whistles amongst the trees and frogs croak by puddles left over from an earlier rain.

Now it's early evening and a crescent moon, along with a pocketful of stars, just lit up the pitch-black sky.

Suddenly, David stop walking to catch his breath and looks over to the street just in front of the park. But he couldn't believe what he saw so he closed his eyes and then opened them again.

But when he opened his eyes again, he wasn't dreaming. He just saw a green and brown streetcar pass by with the name of Evergreen painted on it.

Immediately, he warned Sally.

He yelled, “Sally stop walking and come here now!”

“What is wrong David?”

Before David could answer her, searchlights began gleaming out of that streetcar.

“Sally, let’s get behind the clubhouse now,” he sternly said.

Within seconds, the lights coming from the streetcar focused on the park. Luckily, the soldiers only saw the trail and some trees. They did not see David or Sally. Not yet anyway.

About two minutes passed and the Evergreen streetcar rolled away.

“Sally, we need to go back to the house now. I’ll tell you what happened when we get there.”

“Okay, I’m with you.”

Quickly and carefully, the duo went back to Miss Magilicutty’s home. David knocked on the front door.

Right away, she opens the door and her eyes are bloodshot and angry. Then she bellowed, “Where were you? I was worried sick about both of you. Supper was

ready about 3 hours ago; I was just about to call Ben and have him look for you.”

“We’re sorry, we won’t let that happen again,” David groaned with a frown.

“Okay, both of you wash up now. Both of you must be hungry; I’ll heat up the food right now.”

Sally smiled and said, “Thanks Margaret.”

While Miss Magilicutty was warming up their meals, the phone rang. She quickly adjusted the pilot light and answered it after two rings.

“Hello?”

“Margaret, it’s me, Ben. I know the teens have school at 8 tomorrow morning but I need to see them, it’s important.”

“Okay what time?”

“I will be at your home at 6:00 am.”

She paused a minute and answered, “That’s fine. I’ll make sure they eat breakfast and are dressed in their school uniforms before then.”

“Okay, I’ll see you then.”

“David and Sally, supper is ready.”

“Okay, we are coming down the stairs now,” David moaned.

Magilicutty had supper prepared on the kitchen table and it looked like she just cooked a Thanksgiving feast in April. In the center of the table is a roasted turkey. Next to it, there’s stuffing, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce and a variety of green vegetables. In addition, the beverages included water, iced tea and lemonade.

David stares at the food and commented, “Wow, I haven’t had food like this in a long time.”

“Did both of you wash your hands before you came to the table? By the way, you can call me Maggie if you’d like.”

Both David and Sally nodded and said, “Yes, Miss Magilicutty.”

“Okay, great. Well, dig in and enjoy. Ben Wilkens will be here tomorrow. He said he needs to speak to both of you in the morning before you go to school.”

David bit into a turkey leg and said, “What does he want to talk to us about?”

“I don’t know the details. He just said it is important.”

Magilicutty went on, “After supper, please go to bed. Both of you need to wake up early tomorrow.”

After she devoured a sweet potato, Sally replied, “Okay Maggie.”

Twenty minutes later, Sally and David went upstairs to their room. Miss Magilicutty remained downstairs and is cleaning the kitchen table where they just ate.

A minute later, David whispers to Sally, “We need to leave tonight or early in the morning before Ben gets here.”

“Really?”

“Yes Sally. We have no choice. The Evergreen soldiers may come here and catch us. I don’t know about you but I don’t want to be locked up in a stockade.”

David continued, “About every four hours, I hear a train whistle sound off about 5 or 6 times in the distance. The next time I hear that, we’ll leave and go towards the direction of the train horn.”

“What about Ms. Magilicutty?”

“We will leave quietly and by then she will be asleep.”

It’s now 4 am, the morning before Easter Sunday. Outside, the sky is dark and inky-black. The moon is full and milky-white but there isn’t a star in sight.

On the ground, David hears the train whistle and quietly goes into Sally’s room.

“It’s time, let’s go quietly.”

Now they tiptoe down the staircase and notice that Miss Magilicutty fell asleep on her maroon, armed chair in the living room. She also left the light in her swan-necked lamp on. A sweater, which Magilicutty was knitting on earlier, leaned against her left knee and her cane laid on top of her stomach. Close to her, was an end table which is holding up an empty wine glass.

Obviously, Magilicutty couldn’t ruin their plans, so David dashes towards the front door. However, he couldn’t open it because it was locked from the inside.

“Sally, try to open that window by the piano.”

Sally gently opens the window and both of them, dressed in their brown and green-colored school

uniforms, leave the house undetected. Just then, the sounds of the train disappeared.

Suddenly, the early morning air temperature dipped just below 55 degrees F and heavy sheets of pelting hail start to fall from the dark sky.

But the hail that fell onto Sally and David didn't slow them down as they are determined to escape from the Evergreen policemen. Meanwhile, from afar, David listens to the sound of a train horn again.

"Sally, the train is somewhere by the east side of town; I don't know exactly how far it is from us, maybe a mile."

Sally stays silent and just moves ahead with her brother.

"We may not have to walk all the way. Maybe the city trolley car will stop by us," David explained.

David and Sally continue following the sound of the train whistle which seems to get louder as the morning gets older. It's now almost 5 a.m. and a trolley car pulls up in front of them.

David asked the driver, "Are you headed to the freight railroad station?"

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“Not exactly, but I can get you close to there because you are the only 2 riders I have now.”

Without hesitation, Sally and David board the trolley.

In the meantime, time steadily ticks by, it’s almost 5:30 a.m. and Wilkens checked out of Marty’s Motel. He is now heading to Miss Magilicutty’s house to see David and Sally.

A half an hour later, Wilkens knocks on Margaret’s front door. She then opens it right away.

“Ben, you’re here right on time. Come inside and sit anywhere you like. I’ll go upstairs and get Sally and David.”

Wilkens didn’t sit down. Instead, he paced back and forth on her living room carpet.

Seconds later, Margaret screamed, “Ben, I can’t find them. They are not here!”

Wilkens ran upstairs, looked for them and asked, “Did you lock the front door last night?”

Wilkens and Magilicutty went downstairs to the living room and Wilkens immediately detected what happened.

“Maggie, they are gone. They climbed out of the window by your piano.”

“Ben, they’re gone, gone where?” she nervously asked.

“I think they’re gone with the train. I also have a hunch where they are headed.”

He continued, “Let me use your phone. I need to call Rockville Sheriff Oliver Hawking; he will bring me to find Sally and David.”

“Bring you where Ben?”

Wilkens didn’t answer Margaret and in five minutes, Sheriff Hawking parked his dark-blue 1922 Police Paddy Wagon in front of Magilicutty’s home.

The wagon’s siren is blaring and its bright blue and red lights are flashing.

Wilkens approaches him and said, “Sheriff, I think Sally and David are gone.”

“Gone where Ben?”

“I think they may be gone with the train. Maybe they already hopped on a freight car.”

Wilkins went on, “Oliver, please take me to the freight railroad station and yard by Old Post Road near Clarksville. Hurry, they may be in danger.”

“No problem Ben, I’m on it.”

However, just as the sheriff’s wagon began to speed up and head towards Old Post Road, the same two Evergreen soldiers, that already met Wilkins, were only a half a mile away from them in an army-green truck.

The Evergreen soldiers see the lights and hear the sirens coming from the patrol car. They are curious to find out where the sheriff is going. Immediately, the soldier driving the truck did so at top speed. After 15 minutes flew by, they catch up to the paddy wagon and now are following Sheriff Hawking.

It’s currently 6:30 a.m. and the Evergreen Army Truck is about three car lengths away from the police vehicle.

Wilkins turns around and said to Hawking, “Oh no, it looks like the Evergreen troops are following us; that’s not good.”

Sheriff Hawking said nothing and just kept speeding. About 20 minutes passed and they pull up to the freight train depot that stands near an abandoned red barn and neglected hayfield.

Immediately, Wilkens is watching David and Sally climb onto a half-open, navy-blue boxcar near the end of the train. The boxcar they're in contains a bunch of bushels of Nebraska corn. Next to the corn, there are several crates of Wisconsin green beans and sacks of Idaho potatoes. The produce is strapped and stacked about six feet high on one large, wooden pallet. And although the vegetables didn't give Sally and David much leeway to stand or walk, it is a good place for them to hide until the train stops.

Within three seconds, the private investigator leaped out of the police cruiser.

"Oliver, I need to get on that train before it departs; please stay here."

Yet what Wilkens didn't realize was the Evergreen soldiers see him too and soon they are going to step onto that same freight train.

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In the meantime, Sheriff Hawking is standing outside his car with his rifle drawn and ready to shoot someone if the situation warrants that.

Wilkins sprints toward the parked train and leaps onto an empty gray hopper car that is just behind the car where David and Sally are on.

Meanwhile, Hawking watches the two soldiers get out of their truck and step onto the last car, an oily-black tank car presently full of petroleum gasoline. The tank car has a red light flashing on the back of it and is directly behind the railcar Wilkins is on.

About thirty minutes ago, the freight train was serviced at a nearby roundhouse. Right now, its tar-black tender is full of water and loaded with coal. The red light is flashing too but the train hasn't moved yet.

And before some unauthorized people hopped onto its rolling stock, the conductor, engineman and fireman already boarded the train and don't realize that the trespassers will soon be riding with them.

Dawn just cracked and it's almost 7:30 a.m. Currently, a thunderstorm developed and black clouds

are blocking the light that was coming from the corn-yellow sun.

Seconds later, it begins to rain and the rain is now coming down hard letting out sheets of pouring water. Simultaneously, the hard-blowing wind is gusting over 35 mph and is pushing branches off of some nearby trees.

A minute later, the thunder boomed and lightning bolts are flashing all around the freight train. Currently, the Evergreen soldiers are smoking unfiltered Lucky Strike cigarettes while they stand on a rusty ladder affixed to the tank car. Both are keeping their eyes and ears focused on the train.

Private Simmons chuckles and said to his partner, who calls himself Butch, “We have the flashing red light and know the train will move soon; once it stops, we’ll arrest David and Sally.”

But what the men didn’t realize was that the tank car that is directly behind the other cars isn’t coupled or connected in any way to the rest of the train. Therefore, when the train starts to move, the tank car will remain stationary in the freight yard.

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Nonetheless, the railroad signal turned green, a piston is pushing a rod which is turning the lead locomotive's wheels, blackish-grey smoke is belching out of the smokestack and the crew is listening to the clank of train brakes releasing.

Now the steam-powered freight train is jolting ahead on slick tracks while the lighting is brightening the hazy sky. Just five minutes later, the train starts to pull away from the freight rail facility, round a bend on the main rails and rub against some untrimmed brush. However, the crew and the train departed the yard without its last car, the tank car.

The Evergreen soldiers standing on the end of the train didn't know the train moved. In fact, they think it is still parked. They didn't even feel any movement on the ladder where they are that is bolted to the rear end of the tank car.

Suddenly, lightning strikes the ground close to where the soldiers are. Then the next bolt strikes and ruptures the fuel flow hose attached to the bottom of the tank car. Instantaneously, that lightning bolt sparked a fire, blew up the rail car and the military

policemen were instantly killed. Both men died so quickly that they never knew what hit them.

However, despite the storm and the tank car fire and explosion, the steam train keeps rolling. David and Sally are rolling with the train too as they are huddling behind corn, green beans and potatoes.

On the contrary, Wilkens could no longer hang onto the train. He slipped and fell off the slick hopper car that he was clinging onto.

Subsequently, the private eye landed sideways over the tracks. Apparently, Wilkens badly bruised his right shoulder, right arm, right hand, and right foot. Sheriff Hawking immediately arrived on the scene and radioed the paramedics to attend to the private investigator.

However, Wilkens isn't the only person that needs medical attention. Another man, wearing a gray Derby hat who is much older than Wilkens, fell off the train too. He injured his left leg and now it is severely bleeding.

This other man, who may have been a vagrant that hopped on the train before Wilkens, is tall, light-

skinned and has a long, gray, scruffy beard. The unidentified man also has a long, horsey, wrinkled face.

Peering inside his mouth, his upper and lower teeth are so broken and uneven that they resemble icicles hanging from a windowsill.

The elderly man is also covered with a dark, black overcoat that blankets his torn, white shirt. Furthermore, this man's shirt literally has more black dots on it than what we'd see on a Dalmatian. The man is also wearing a tattered, zebra-striped tie and baggy, brown pants. A few minutes passed and Hawking sees him with blood gushing from his leg and walking barefoot around the tracks. So, immediately, the sheriff radioed the medics so he could be treated too.

Meanwhile, two Rockville fire engines with five firemen and one Clarksville fire truck with three firemen, responded to the flaming, smoking tank car. First the firemen pulled the two deceased soldiers' body parts out of the burning car. Then they extinguished the fire.

Presently, the wind no longer blowed, the rain stopped and the lightning disappeared. The brittle April

sun broke away from the dark clouds and brightened the sky.

Wilkens is strapped in a stretcher but before being placed in the ambulance, he whispers into Sheriff Hawking's left ear.

"Sheriff, the freight train that Sally and David are on is called Smokey Mountain Freightways that is operated by the Carolina Central Railroad. Its first stop will be at Shell City, Maryland to get coal, water and be serviced. Its next and final stop will be Clifford Heights, New York where the train will offload the freight."

Hawking shifts his tan cowboy hat toward the left side of his head, grins and said, "Golly gee, gee whiz; how in the world do you know all of this?"

"Did you forget? I'm a private eye working on this case; sheriff, please have your deputies follow that train or meet it in Maryland right away. Find the teens before the Evergreen Army finds them first."

"Okay, but what about you?"

Wilkens is currently in an ambulance and asked one medic to reach into his front pants pocket to

retrieve his business cards. The man gave the business cards to him.

Ben yawned, gave Sheriff Hawking his card and said, “After you find them, call me and tell me where you are. After they discharge me out of the hospital, I will meet you and those crazy youngsters.”

Meanwhile, the wheels of the train that just departed the yard continue to make metal to metal sounds while it is currently wailing on the rails. Smokey Mountain Freightways is steadily moving northward, full steam ahead, hauling heavy loads of freight along with two uninvited riders.

Minutes before the train picks up more speed, Hawking quickly glances at two big, gray H.K. Porter locomotives as they pull 30 railcars (10 pepper-red gondolas, 11 blue boxcars, 7 gray hopper cars and 2 tar-black flat cars) while it meanders on the tracks.

The wind is now swirling and the locomotive’s steam and smoke are amongst the treetops. The steam-powered freight train continues to zigzag and zoom over northerly tracks. In the meantime, Wilkens is just about to be transported to Clarksville Hospital.

Hawking decides to turn around again to look at the train but it is gone and the teens are gone with the train too. Yes, indeed, those two teens are gone with the train that Hawking just glanced at. Now all that is left there are untrimmed, overgrown, thorny hedges that are drooping over the east and west sides of the tracks.

Also, due to the rain, wooden crossties are soaked and now they lie in between a crowd of endless, drenched pines.

Moments later, just before Wilkens was about to be whisked away to the hospital, the sheriff said, “Excuse me fellas, I have one more thing to say to Ben.”

One bushy, brown-haired, emergency responder, sporting a brown, bushy mustache and beard with dark brown, bushy eyebrows, grunted, “Okay, but make it fast.”

Hawking smirked and said, “Ben, after we get them, maybe they’ll settle down, live a normal life and go to school just like most teenagers do.”

Wilkens blinks, sighs and said, “Yeah, maybe; but remember, they’re not like most teenagers.”

A minute later, three black-bearded monks, dressed in black-colored robes and black-hooded cloaks, stepped out of a monastery located a few yards away from the incident scene. They decided to quickly approach Wilkens and Hawking and wanted to get some information about what happened.

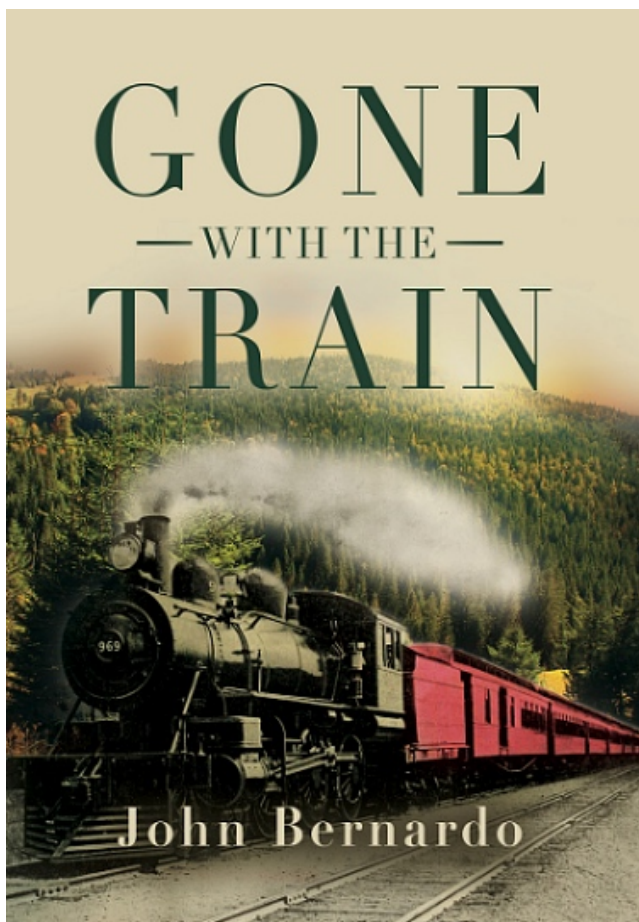
The head monk immediately looked up at the billowing smoke and then down at the charred tank car. He then asked Hawking, “Sheriff, I am curious, I just heard the explosion; can you please tell us what happened here?”

Both Wilkens and Hawking frowned, shrugged their shoulders and simultaneously replied, “It looks like we are looking for two teenagers again that just went on another long train ride.”

About the Author



John Bernardo is the published author of seven books. His last fiction book is titled “The River.” Bernardo is also the author of five nonfiction books. He lives with his family in Florida. *Gone with the Train* is his first novel.



Gone with the Train is an historical, adventure fiction novel set in the 1920s. The book is about two teenagers, David and Sally, that risked their lives in Florida after they hopped on a freight train there to escape a severe drought.

Gone with the Train

By John Bernardo

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