

## LITTLE HOUSE IN THE BIG WOODS

They pulled heavy woolen stockings over the woolen stockings and the shoes they were already wearing. They put on mittens and coats and warm hoods and shawls, and wrapped mufflers around their necks and thick woolen veils over their faces. Ma slipped piping hot baked potatoes into their pockets to keep their fingers warm, and Aunt Eliza's flatirons were hot on the stove, ready to put at their feet in the sled. The blankets and the quilts and the buffalo robes were warmed, too.

So they all got into the big bobsled, cosy and warm, and Pa tucked the last robe well in around them.

"Good-by! Good-by!" they called, and off they went, the horses trotting gaily and the sleigh bells ringing.

In just a little while the merry sound of the bells was gone, and Christmas was over. But what a happy Christmas it had been!



## SUNDAYS

Now the winter seemed long. Laura and Mary began to be tired of staying always in the house. Especially on Sundays, the time went so slowly.

Every Sunday Mary and Laura were dressed from the skin out in their best clothes, with fresh ribbons in their hair. They were very clean, because they had their baths on Saturday night.

In the summer they were bathed in water

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from the spring. But in the wintertime Pa filled and heaped the washtub with clean snow, and on the cookstove it melted to water. Then close by the warm stove, behind a screen made of a blanket over two chairs, Ma bathed Laura, and then she bathed Mary.

Laura was bathed first, because she was littler than Mary. She had to go to bed early on Saturday nights, with Charlotte, because after she was bathed and put into her clean nightgown, Pa must empty the washtub and fill it with snow again for Mary's bath. Then after Mary came to bed, Ma had her bath behind the blanket, and then Pa had his. And they were all clean, for Sunday.

On Sundays Mary and Laura must not run or shout or be noisy in their play. Mary could not sew on her nine-patch quilt, and Laura could not knit on the tiny mittens she was making for Baby Carrie. They might look quietly at their paper dolls, but they must not make anything new for them. They were not allowed to sew on doll clothes, not even with pins.

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They must sit quietly and listen while Ma read Bible stories to them, or stories about lions and tigers and white bears from Pa's big green book, *The Wonders of the Animal World*. They might look at pictures, and they might hold their rag dolls nicely and talk to them. But there was nothing else they could do.

Laura liked best to look at the pictures in the big Bible, with its paper covers. Best of all was the picture of Adam naming the animals.

Adam sat on a rock, and all the animals and birds, big and little, were gathered around him anxiously waiting to be told what kind of animals they were. Adam looked so comfortable. He did not have to be careful to keep his clothes clean, because he had no clothes on. He wore only a skin around his middle.

"Did Adam have good clothes to wear on Sundays?" Laura asked Ma.

"No," Ma said. "Poor Adam, all he had to wear was skins."

Laura did not pity Adam. She wished she had nothing to wear but skins.



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One Sunday after supper she could not bear it any longer. She began to play with Jack, and in a few minutes she was running and shouting. Pa told her to sit in her chair and be quiet, but when Laura sat down she began to cry and kick the chair with her heels.

"I hate Sunday!" she said.

Pa put down his book. "Laura," he said sternly, "come here."

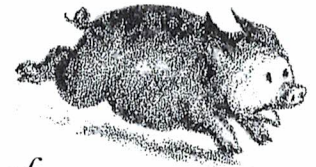


Her feet dragged as she went, because she knew she deserved a spanking.

But when she reached Pa, he looked at her sorrowfully for a moment, and then took her on his knee and cuddled her against him. He held out his other arm to Mary, and said:

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"I'm going to tell you a story about when Grandpa was a boy."



### *The Story of Grandpa's Sled and the Pig*

"When your Grandpa was a boy, Laura, Sunday did not begin on Sunday morning, as it does now. It began at sundown on Saturday night. Then everyone stopped every kind of work or play.

"Supper was solemn. After supper, Grandpa's father read aloud a chapter of the Bible, while everyone sat straight and still in his chair. Then they all knelt down, and their father said a long prayer. When he said, 'Amen,' they got up from their knees and each took a candle and went to bed. They must go straight to bed, with no playing,

laughing, or even talking.

"Sunday morning they ate a cold breakfast, because nothing could be cooked on Sunday. Then they all dressed in their best clothes and walked to church. They walked, because hitching up the horses was work, and no work could be done on Sunday.

"They must walk slowly and solemnly, looking straight ahead. They must not joke or laugh, or even smile. Grandpa and his two brothers walked ahead, and their father and mother walked behind them.

"In church, Grandpa and his brothers must sit perfectly still for two long hours and listen to the sermon. They dared not fidget on the hard bench. They dared not swing their feet. They dared not turn their heads to look at the windows or the walls or the ceiling of the church. They must sit perfectly motionless, and never for one instant take their eyes from the preacher.

"When church was over, they walked

slowly home. They might talk on the way, but they must not talk loudly and they must never laugh or smile. At home they ate a cold dinner which had been cooked the day before. Then all the long afternoon they must sit in a row on a bench and study their catechism, until at last the sun went down and Sunday was over.

"Now Grandpa's home was about halfway down the side of a steep hill. The road went from the top of the hill to the bottom, right past the front door, and in winter it was the best place for sliding downhill that you can possibly imagine.

"One week Grandpa and his two brothers, James and George, were making a new sled. They worked at it every minute of their play-time. It was the best sled they had ever made, and it was so long that all three of them could sit on it, one behind the other. They planned to finish it in time to slide downhill Saturday afternoon. For every Saturday afternoon they had two or three hours to play.



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"But that week their father was cutting down trees in the Big Woods. He was working hard and he kept the boys working with him. They did all the morning chores by lantern-light and were hard at work in the woods when the sun came up. They worked till dark, and then there were the chores to do, and after supper they had to go to bed so they could get up early in the morning.

"They had no time to work on the sled until Saturday afternoon. Then they worked at it just as fast as they could, but they didn't get it finished till just as the sun went down, Saturday night.

"After the sun went down, they could not slide downhill, not even once. That would be breaking the Sabbath. So they put the sled in the shed behind the house, to wait until Sunday was over.

"All the two long hours in church next day, while they kept their feet still and their eyes on the preacher, they were thinking about the

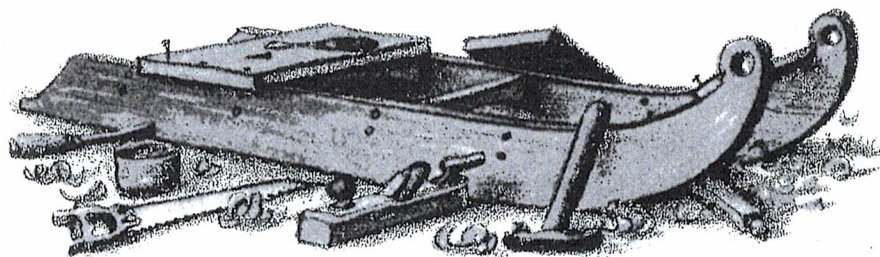
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sled. At home while they ate dinner they couldn't think of anything else. After dinner their father sat down to read the Bible, and Grandpa and James and George sat as still as mice on their bench with their catechism. But they were thinking about the sled.

"The sun shone brightly and the snow was smooth and glittering on the road; they could see it through the window. It was a perfect day for sliding downhill. They looked at their catechism and they thought about the new sled, and it seemed that Sunday would never end.

"After a long time they heard a snore. They looked at their father, and they saw that his head had fallen against the back of his chair and he was fast asleep.

"Then James looked at George, and James





got up from the bench and tiptoed out of the room through the back door. George looked at Grandpa, and George tiptoed after James. And Grandpa looked fearfully at their father, but on tiptoe he followed George and left their father snoring.

"They took their new sled and went qui-

etly up to the top of the hill. They meant to slide down, just once. Then they would put the sled away, and slip back to their bench and the catechism before their father woke up.

"James sat in front on the sled, then George, and then Grandpa, because he was the littlest. The sled started, at first slowly, then faster and faster. It was running, flying, down the long steep hill, but the boys dared not shout. They must slide silently past the house, without waking their father.

"There was no sound except the little whirr of the runners on the snow, and the wind rushing past.

"Then just as the sled was swooping toward the house, a big black pig stepped out of the woods. He walked into the middle of the road and stood there.

"The sled was going so fast it couldn't be stopped. There wasn't time to turn it. The sled went right under the hog and picked him up. With a squeal he sat down on James, and



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he kept on squealing, long and loud and shrill, 'Squee-ee-ee-ee-ee! Squee-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee!'

"They flashed by the house, the pig sitting in front, then James, then George, then Grandpa, and they saw their father standing in the doorway looking at them. They couldn't stop, they couldn't hide, there was no time to say anything. Down the hill they went, the hog sitting on James and squealing all the way.

"At the bottom of the hill they stopped. The hog jumped off James and ran away into the woods, still squealing.

"The boys walked slowly and solemnly up the hill. They put the sled away. They sneaked into the house and slipped quietly to their places on the bench. Their father was reading his Bible. He looked up at them without saying a word.

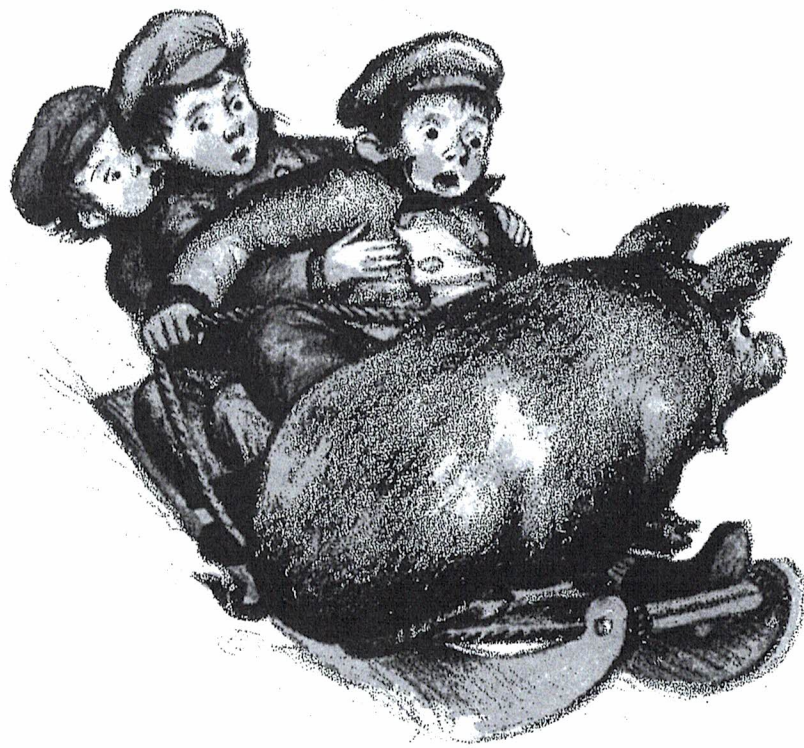
"Then he went on reading, and they studied their catechism.

"But when the sun went down and the Sabbath day was over, their father took them

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out to the woodshed and tanned their jackets, first James, then George, then Grandpa.

"So you see, Laura and Mary," Pa said, "you may find it hard to be good, but you should be glad that it isn't as hard to be good



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now as it was when Grandpa was a boy.”

“Did little girls have to be as good as that?” Laura asked, and Ma said:

“It was harder for little girls. Because they had to behave like little ladies all the time, not only on Sundays. Little girls could never slide downhill, like boys. Little girls had to sit in the house and stitch on samplers.”

“Now run along and let Ma put you to bed,” said Pa, and he took his fiddle out of its box.

Laura and Mary lay in their trundle bed and listened to the Sunday hymns, for even the fiddle must not sing the week-day songs on Sundays.

“‘Rock of Ages, cleft for me,’” Pa sang, with the fiddle. Then he sang:

“Shall I be carried to the skies,  
On flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize,  
And sailed through bloody seas?”

Laura began to float away on the music, and then she heard a clattering noise, and

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there was Ma by the stove, getting breakfast. It was Monday morning, and Sunday would not come again for a whole week.

That morning when Pa came in to breakfast he caught Laura and said he must give her a spanking.

First he explained that today was her birthday, and she would not grow properly next year unless she had a spanking. And then he spanked so gently and carefully that it did not hurt a bit.

“One—two—three—four—five—six,” he counted and spanked, slowly. One spank for each year, and at the last one big spank to grow on.

Then Pa gave her a little wooden man he had whittled out of a stick, to be company for Charlotte. Ma gave her five little cakes, one for each year that Laura had lived with her and Pa. And Mary gave her a new dress for Charlotte. Mary had made the dress herself, when Laura thought she was sewing on her patchwork quilt.



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And that night, for a special birthday treat, Pa played “Pop Goes the Weasel” for her.

He sat with Laura and Mary close against his knees while he played. “Now watch,” he said. “Watch, and maybe you can see the weasel pop out this time.” Then he sang:

“A penny for a spool of thread,  
Another for a needle,  
That’s the way the money goes—”

Laura and Mary bent close, watching, for they knew now was the time.

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“Pop! (said Pa’s finger on the string)  
Goes the weasel! (sang the fiddle, plain  
as plain.)”

But Laura and Mary hadn’t seen Pa’s finger make the string pop.

“Oh, please, please, do it again!” they begged him. Pa’s blue eyes laughed, and the fiddle went on while he sang:

“All around the cobbler’s bench,  
The monkey chased the weasel,  
The preacher kissed the cobbler’s wife—  
Pop! goes the weasel!”

They hadn’t seen Pa’s finger that time, either. He was so quick they could never catch him.

So they went laughing to bed and lay listening to Pa and the fiddle singing:

“There was an old darkey  
And his name was Uncle Ned,  
And he died long ago, long ago.  
There was no wool on the top of his head,  
In the place where the wool ought to grow.

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“His fingers were as long,  
As the cane in the brake,  
His eyes they could hardly see,  
And he had no teeth for to eat the hoe-cake,  
So he had to let the hoe-cake be.

“So hang up the shovel and the hoe,  
Lay down the fiddle and the bow,  
There’s no more work for old Uncle Ned,  
For he’s gone where the good darkeys go.”



## TWO BIG BEARS

**T**hen one day Pa said that spring was coming.

In the Big Woods the snow was beginning to thaw. Bits of it dropped from the branches of the trees and made little holes in the softening snowbanks below. At noon all the big icicles along the eaves of the little house quivered and sparkled in the sunshine, and drops of water hung trembling at their tips.

Pa said he must go to town to trade the furs