

**ONCE UPON A FARM**

**Written by W.V. Smith**

**Copyright 2026**

<b>FIREFLIES IN THE HOUSE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>THE SHEEP CHASE</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>HALLOWEEN IN THE BAY</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>THE CHRISTMAS NOTE</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>TOMMY'S DIRTY DAY</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CITY COUSINS AND THE TREEHOUSE</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>CATS AND KITTENS</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>BUSTER AND THE PORCUPINE</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>WOLVES UNDER MY BED</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>SANDY BABYSITS</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>DAD HAS AN ACCIDENT</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>BUS TO THE BORDER</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>THE SUGAR ROSE CAPER</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>GOODBYE — HELLO</b>	<b>56</b>

## **SUMMARY**

ONCE UPON A FARM is a middle grade chapter book told in fourteen linked stories, set on a Northern Ontario farm in the 1960s, and told through the eyes of Cindy, a spirited girl growing up alongside her adventurous older brother Tommy.

Each chapter is a standalone adventure rooted in the rhythms of farm life: chasing sheep, catching fireflies, trick-or-treating in the city, Christmas morning surprises, surviving babysitters, and saying goodbye to the family dog. Together, the stories paint a vivid portrait of a childhood defined by wide-open spaces, mischief, sibling loyalty, and hard-won lessons.

Key characters include Cindy, the curious, brave, and sometimes reckless narrator; Tommy, her resourceful and daring older brother who always seems to know what to do; Ma and Dad, steady and warm parents whose authority is balanced with humour and grace; and Buster, the beloved farm collie whose story anchors the book's emotional heart.

The novel moves through fourteen chapters, building from lighthearted escapades — fireflies released into the bedroom, a stolen sugar rose from the wedding cake — to deeper moments of growing up: the first solo bus trip across the border, watching the farm be sold, and eventually leaving behind everything they have ever known.

The book ends with the family driving away from the farm toward a new life in Timmins. In the trunk, hidden beneath the luggage, are seven bottles of Tommy's homemade potato champagne — because no matter how much things change, Tommy will always be Tommy. And Cindy will always be watching.

## FIREFLIES IN THE HOUSE

Tommy and Cindy shared one bedroom on the second floor of the farmhouse. In the spring, their window looked out through a large lilac tree over a yard to the garden.

"Time for bed, kids. Off ya go," called Ma.

"But it's still light outside, Mommy," Cindy whined. "How can we go to sleep when it's light outside?"

"You have school tomorrow and it's eight o'clock. You'll see nothing with your eyes closed."

Unhappily, the kids tidied up their toys and made their way up the stairs.

One, two, three, four, creak! Tommy knew that the fifth stair always creaked when he stepped on it in just the right place.

Tommy slept in the bottom bunk and Cindy slept on the top. Holding the mattresses in place were flat thin strips of metal with springs on each end. While lying down, Tommy stretched his legs up and placed his feet flat against the bump where Cindy's bum pressed into the mattress. With one big kick, Tommy sent Cindy flying up into the air. In fact, she went so high that her nose nearly touched the slanted ceiling of the century-old farmhouse.

"Do it again!" Cindy squealed with delight.

Bounce! Bounce! Bounce! Cindy flew into the air over and over again. The children roared with laughter. Then Tommy gave the biggest kick he could, but his feet had slipped to one side of the bump and Cindy went flying out of the top bunk, sailing through the air and onto the floor. BANG!

"OUCH!" Cindy wailed.

Tommy was laughing so hard he could hardly speak.

"That hurt!" cried Cindy.

Thump, thump, thump, thump, creak!

"Oh no," Tommy whispered, "Hurry up, get back into bed. Ma's coming."

The children could always hear Ma or Dad coming up the stairs and knew how much trouble they were in by how loud the thumps were hitting the steps.

Cindy quickly scrambled up the ladder and was into her bed by the time Ma got to the room. Both children were under the covers, head on the pillows, eyes tightly closed pretending they were fast asleep.

"OK you kids," Ma said, hands on her hips. "What's going on up here?"

Silence.

"Tommy!" Ma demanded.

Tommy sleepily lifted his head. "What's the matter Ma? You woke me up."

"Don't give me that! What was that bang?"

"Bang? What bang?" Tommy said innocently.

"One more word or noise from up here and I'll send Dad up. Now GET TO SLEEP!"

Ma left the room and headed back down the stairs. Cindy looked over the side of her bed at Tommy.

"That was close!" she giggled in a whisper. Then she looked out the window. The view from the top bunk was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. The yard was filled with tiny floating lights blinking on and off like stars that had fallen into the grass.

"Oh Tommy, look outside!" she gasped.

Tommy jumped out of bed and stared out the window. "Fireflies!" he whispered.

"Fireflies? What are they?"

"Fireflies are bugs that light up at night," Tommy said as he pushed the window up and placed a piece of wood under it to hold it open. He grabbed a small glass jar from his desk that had been the temporary home of a caterpillar and made his way through the second story window.

"Where are you going? You'll break your neck and Ma will be so mad."

"Stay here and be quiet. I'll be right back." Tommy disappeared down the lilac tree. The moon was bright and Cindy could see Tommy and Buster running around the back yard. Within five minutes, Tommy was back up the lilac tree and crawling in the bedroom window. He took the stick out and pushed the window down to close it tight then tiptoed to the door and shut it. He fished the jar out of his pyjama pocket and opened the lid to release a swarm of fireflies into the bedroom.

Cindy felt like she was in a Disney movie. It was magic. There were Tinkerbells flying everywhere.

"Oh my gosh!" she whispered.

"Watch," Tommy whispered as he caught a fly and smushed it all over his cheek.

"Eeeeeoo," said Cindy, her face wrinkling up. But that look soon turned to complete amazement as she saw Tommy's cheek glowing in the dark. "Wow!"

"Here, try it!" Tommy caught a fly and handed it to Cindy.

"No way! YOU do it again."

It was quite a while before the children crawled back into their beds and fell asleep.

"Lloyd, you need to have a look at the window in the kids' room," Ma said to Dad the next morning at breakfast. "There must be a hole somewhere."

Cindy and Tommy's blurry eyes popped open wide as they looked at each other.

"Oh?" Dad took a sip of his coffee.

"The room is filled with flies and it's the only place I can think of where they might be coming from," Ma said sitting down.

"Oh?" Dad said again looking at Tommy who sat frozen. "What kind of flies?"

Cindy's eyes darted back and forth between Ma and Dad.

"Fireflies, looks like," said Ma.

"I'll have a look," said Dad. The children were unusually silent. "Looks like something got into the lilac tree outside the kids' room last night."

"Oh?" said Ma.

"Some branches were freshly broken off, like something was trying to climb up or down it," said Dad looking at Tommy again.

Tommy looked at the clock. "Come on. We gotta go. The school bus will be here any minute."

And with that, the kids grabbed their lunch boxes and ran out the door.

"Gee, Dad always seems to know what we've done," said Tommy.

"And Ma too!" added Cindy.

## THE SHEEP CHASE

One spring day, Tommy and Cindy decided to visit the sheep grazing in the field to find any new lambs that had been born during the night.

"You kids be careful!" Ma warned. "The momma doesn't like people around her babies and they especially won't like Buster being around them." But Tommy was a fearless older brother and Cindy, two years younger, was brave just tagging along behind him.

Tommy opened the gate and led the way into the field, commanding Buster to stay behind. Buster was a very beautiful, obedient dog. He was an orange marmalade-coloured collie with a husky nose and curled-up tail.

"Will the momma-sheep eat me?" Cindy asked Tommy.

"No, silly! Sheep eat grass," Tommy laughed. "Ewes will butt you, so you have to run if they start charging you," Tommy said very matter-of-factly. Cindy walked a little closer to Tommy, suddenly not so brave.

"What's a ewe?" she asked, amazed at how smart her older brother was. Tommy was always reading books, building things, taking things apart and putting them back together. Dad trusted Tommy to do lots of important jobs, like carrying the full milk pail.

"A ewe is a girl sheep," said Tommy.

"Here, Lamby, Lamby, Lamby!" called Cindy as they got closer to the flock. Cindy had adopted a lamb as her pet right after it had been born last week. In the flock of about thirty sheep and lambs, Lamby was difficult to spot. Some sheep were all-white while others were white with black faces and black legs. The children walked further into the field when they spotted a new black-faced lamb.

It was so exciting to find a brand-new baby animal. Cindy completely forgot the warning and the danger and started running towards the lamb, shouting, "It's a baby!"

Then she heard Tommy shouting, "Cindy, the momma is after you! RUN!"

Cindy turned to look and, sure enough, a large ewe was charging towards her. Cindy's little legs could not move fast enough. Her heart pounded. Tommy could run a lot faster. He was already at the gate. Cindy could hear a mixture of Tommy's yelling, Ma's warning, Buster barking and the clunk-clunk of hooves at her heels.

Suddenly, Cindy felt a hard thump as the ewe's head rammed into her bum. Flattened, face to the ground, sharp heavy hooves were dashing across her back. Screaming and crying at the same time, Cindy was frozen with fear and couldn't move. No matter how Tommy shouted for her to get up and run, she could do nothing but wait to be gobbled up by the angry sheep.

Then a hand grabbed her arm and pulled her up. Tommy had come back to save her. Together they scrambled back through the gate and headed towards the house, only to be greeted by an anxious mother wondering what all the screaming and yelling was about.

"I guess you two will listen to me next time I tell you to be careful," said Ma at the dinner table that evening.

"Pass the potatoes please," said Dad looking at Cindy with a little grin on his face. He noticed that she was kneeling on her chair instead of sitting. "What's the matter? Can't you sit?"

"My bum hurts Daddy!"

Then everybody laughed, including Cindy.

## HALLOWEEN IN THE BAY

September 1962 was very exciting. Cindy would be six years old in a month and finally old enough to ride the school bus. With her new lunch pail in hand, wearing a dress Ma made, she walked with Tommy and Buster down the long driveway to wait at the gate.

"Here it comes!" squealed Cindy as the big orange bus came over the hill.

"GO HOME BUSTER!" Tommy commanded the dog. "GO HOME!" Buster's wagging tail suddenly dropped as he obediently started to make his way back up the long driveway, stopping only to watch the children safely get in.

"Good morning, Tommy," said the bus driver.

"Morning Hector," replied Tommy.

"And who's this young lady with you? Is that Cindy?" Hector smiled a great big smile. "Your first day of school, eh!" Cindy grinned and nodded. "Brand new lunch pail I see." Cindy nodded again. "I've got a special treat for you to celebrate your first day of school." Hector reached into a box beside his leg and pulled out a little brown paper bag. "Here! Now go and get a seat and don't be chewing that in school."

Hector was a chubby round-faced happy man with bright red hair and sky blue eyes. Cindy sat down beside Tommy and opened the little bag, amazed that he knew her name and that it was her first day of school.

"Whaddya get?" asked Tommy, trying to see past Cindy's fingers into the bag. "Wow!"

Cindy's eyes grew big as she saw five cherry red gum balls and a whole roll of orange Life Savers.

At the end of every day, Buster was always waiting in the front yard. As soon as he saw the bus, he ran down the driveway to meet the children.

In October, the light carefree summer clothes changed to warm jackets and long pants. The last school day before Halloween, Hector had a box by his foot and handed everyone a little brown bag filled with Halloween Kisses, Lick-a-Maid straws and Pop-Eye Candy sticks.

Ma helped Tommy and Cindy with their costumes. Cindy dressed up as a Wicked Witch and Tommy was a Cowboy.

"Hurry up and finish your supper," Ma said as she started to clear off the table. "It's a half hour drive into The Bay and it's almost 5:30 and you have to get your costumes on."

"Why do we have to go to North Bay to Trick-or-Treat?" Cindy asked, shoving potatoes into her mouth.

"There's not enough people out here," said Tommy. "We could drive around for an hour and only get to five houses. If we go to The Bay, we can park at Aunty Jo's house and walk to 100 houses!"

"Wow! We'll get lots and lots of treats," squealed Cindy. Aunty Jo was Dad's sister.

"Has everyone gone to the bathroom?" Ma asked just before the children piled into the car. "There's no stopping once we're on the way."

"I went," said Tommy.

"I don't have to go," said Cindy. She was so excited that she didn't want to waste time going to the bathroom.

By the time they parked at Aunty Jo and Uncle Jake's house it was already getting dark.

"Trick-or-Treat!" Tommy said to Aunty Jo who was the first to throw a handful of candy into his loot bag.

"Cindy, you'd better go to the bathroom," Ma warned. "You won't be able to go once you're out Trick-or-treating."

"I don't have to go Ma." Cindy couldn't wait to get more treats in her loot bag and there was just no time to pee. "Come on, let's go!"

Ma stayed to visit with Aunty Jo, while Dad and Uncle Jake took the kids from house to house. As the loot bags got heavier and heavier, Cindy realized that she should have gone to the bathroom. But if she said anything, they would all have to turn around and go back to the house and the Trick-or-Treating would be over. Tommy would be angry. So Cindy decided to not say a word and hold it.

The next few houses seemed like forever. While Cindy walked or ran, she was OK, but when she stood still, as the candy seemed to drop in slow motion, it was all she could do to not pee right there on the spot. She crossed her legs as tight as she could to stop the pee and if she moved, she'd be in trouble. The lady who had just dropped the candy into her bag saw that Cindy was frozen in place.

"Come on!" Tommy said.

"What's the matter, dear," asked the lady.

"Nothing," Cindy said in a strained voice.

"What are you doing? Come on!" Tommy said again.

Then the lady noticed that Cindy's legs were crossed tight. "Do you have to pee? What's your name, dear?" she asked.

"Cindy."

"Well come on in Cindy and use my bathroom. I don't mind."

"I can't," Cindy said, totally embarrassed. She remained frozen.

Dad and Uncle Jake were waiting on the sidewalk chatting but were now wondering what was holding up the kids. To Dad's surprise, the woman who was talking with Cindy picked her

up and was carrying her stiff body into the house, leaving Tommy, just as surprised, standing all alone at the front door.

"What's going on?" Dad asked Tommy as he quickly walked right into the house to look for Cindy and the lady.

"We're in here, in the bathroom," he heard the woman call. Dad followed her voice into the house to find Cindy sitting on the toilet.

"I'm sorry Daddy!" Cindy cried. "I couldn't wait. I was going to pee my pants."

"Why didn't you say you had to go?" asked Dad.

"I didn't want to go home yet," cried Cindy, tears running down her face. "My bag isn't full yet."

Dad thanked the woman and apologized for the wet footprints that he'd left on her floor. Uncle Jake was waiting at the door with Tommy.

"If you hadda wet your pants, we would've gone home!" Tommy grumped. "Now stop crying."

"Don't worry about it," said Uncle Jake, giving Cindy a hug. "You've got so much candy, you'll never be able to eat it all."

"We'll go to a few more houses," said Dad. "Then we'll head back. It's getting late anyway."

Tommy was satisfied and Cindy was relieved, in more ways than one.

## THE CHRISTMAS NOTE

It was around six in the morning when Cindy opened her eyes and saw only blackness. She listened very hard to hear if Dad was downstairs in the kitchen starting a fire in the wood stove. She pulled the blankets and flannel sheets up tight to her nose which was feeling the December chill that descended on the farmhouse at night.

She heard a scrape and a faint bang. Was that the stove top opening and closing? Cindy held her breath and listened harder, wiggling her toes out from under the covers and quickly pulling them back into the warmth.

"Tommy!" Cindy half whispered. "WAYNE!" Tommy groaned from the lower bunk.

"You awake?" Cindy persisted. "Can we go downstairs yet? Do you think Daddy is up?" There was no reply.

"WAYNE!" she shouted.

"What?" he groaned again as he rolled over.

"It's Christmas! Get up! Do you hear Daddy yet?" Tommy's eyes sprang open, both children listening, breathlessly.

BANG! CLUNK! That definitely was the sound of the wood burning stove top in the kitchen.

"Yup, he's down there." Tommy threw his covers off. "Let's go!" He quickly pulled his flannel housecoat on and kicked his feet into his slippers.

Cindy's feet could not get down the ladder fast enough. Grabbing her terrycloth housecoat and pulling on her own fluffy worn slippers, she was at Tommy's heels, past Florence and Sandy's bedroom, down the hall, and past their parents' bedroom where Ma was still in bed.

"You kids get back to bed!" Ma shouted. "Dad doesn't have the stove lit yet. You'll catch your death of cold."

"The fire is on Ma. Come on. It's Christmas! Get up everybody!"

The children were down the stairs before Ma could protest any further. Cindy could see the light from the kitchen and Dad was standing in front of the wood stove, shoving more wood into the top. She could see the flames trying to escape their fiery iron prison. The round stove top banged as Dad dropped it into place with its handle.

"Good morning," Dad said with a smile. "Merry Christmas. It's pretty cold in here still. You'd better have your slippers on."

"Yup. Sure do Daddy," Cindy said as she followed Tommy into the dining room where the Christmas tree stood. Dad had turned the Christmas tree lights on already. It looked beautiful and the smell of the spruce needles filled the room. Two weeks ago, all the kids went to The Back Bush with Dad, trudged through snow that came up to Cindy's hips, and found the perfect Christmas tree. Ma thought it looked very thin, but once it was filled with every decoration from the Christmas boxes, there was hardly an empty spot. The tinsel glittered magically.

Cindy's eyes quickly found her handmade Christmas stocking. Aunt Edna had made one for each of the children. She sewed pieces of red boot-shaped felt together with colourful embroidery floss and glued felt Christmas shapes down the front.

There were two stockings on the couch with Florence and Sandy in felt letters on them, stuffed to the brim. WAYNE's was bursting at the seams beside the china cabinet and WENDY's sat right in front of the Christmas tree.

Cindy dropped to the floor and dug through her stocking, a stuffed dog, pink cream soda, a rosy apple and chocolate marshmallow Santas tumbling out onto the floor.

Despite the fact that no one had eaten breakfast yet, everyone was sipping their favourite pop and munching on chocolate. Easter and Christmas were the only times Ma allowed the family to eat candy and drink pop before breakfast. What a treat!

After the socks were emptied, the children moved on to the grand event, the BIG Santa present.

Cindy sent her letter to Santa shortly after the Eaton's and Sears Christmas catalogues had arrived in the mail with their magical toy sections. Ma said to only ask for three things and to put them in order. Santa would do his best to bring the number one choice. To ask for more than three items would send a message to Santa that you were greedy and he wouldn't bring anything. Cindy and Tommy always chose their three things very carefully but Santa had never failed to bring the number one choice.

This Christmas there was only ONE thing Cindy wanted, the new Chatty Cathy doll. It stood up to Cindy's waist and had a string on the back of her neck. Each time the string was pulled, Chatty Cathy said something different, like "Do you love me?", "I love you," and "I'm hungry!" She came in her own case with drawers and a spot to hang her clothes.

With chocolate on the corners of her mouth, Cindy's eyes darted around and under the tree looking for her brand-new Chatty Cathy.

"What are you looking for?" Ma said, kneeling down beside her.

"I asked Santa for Chatty Cathy, but I don't see her. Maybe he didn't get my letter." Cindy felt frantic.

Ma looked concerned. "Hmmm, well who do you think this is for then?" she said as she pulled over a huge doll house.

"But that's not what I asked for, Ma. Did he make a mistake and leave me someone else's doll house?"

"Look," she said in a hushed voice. Ma pointed to an envelope taped to the roof of the doll house. "It says 'To Cindy' on it. Santa left you a note."

Cindy's eyes opened wide with amazement. She ripped the envelope open, pulled out a piece of paper and began to read.

Dear Cindy

I ran out of Chatty Cathy dolls. I'm so very sorry. I hope you will have lots of fun with this doll house. I promise to bring you a Chatty Cathy next Christmas if you still want one.

Love

Santa

Cindy was stunned. She couldn't believe it. Her heart sank. She read the note again, and turned it over. The paper was familiar. It was from a note pad that sat by the telephone in the kitchen.

A slow realization came over Cindy. She was holding a note written by Santa Claus, that magical man who never showed himself to anyone except in story books. The man who would never come back if you saw him, Ma said.

Cindy always knew Santa was real, but now he was REALLY real!

"He got my letter and read it. He knew that all I wanted was a Chatty Cathy and he cared enough to be sorry and brought me a beautiful doll house," Cindy reasoned. She thought about how busy he was, with thousands and thousands of children depending on him and yet he took the time to sit down and write HER a note!

Cindy wasn't sad or disappointed for not getting a Chatty Cathy. The doll house and the note were the best Christmas presents ever. She added Santa's note to her keepsake box. And sure enough, the following Christmas, Chatty Cathy was waiting under the tree.

## TOMMY'S DIRTY DAY

Tommy was only eight years old when Dad let him drive the tractor for the first time, pulling a manure spreader filled to the very top. Cindy's feet were still too short, so she sat on Dad's lap and steered while he worked the pedals. She had to keep the front wheel inside a narrow rut in the road, and that wasn't easy.

Uncle Emmett was Dad's brother. He had a round face, a sunny smile and rosy cheeks all year long. Whenever he came to visit, Cindy ran to meet him.

"Uncle Emmett's here!" she squealed. "Is there something in your pocket for me?"

"Why would there be something in my pocket?" he asked, hands on his hips.

"Because there always is," Cindy said, bouncing. "May I look?"

"Well, you can look, but I don't think there's anything there."

Cindy reached into one deep pocket. Nothing. She tried the other.

"Ah ha!" She pulled out the shiniest silver dollar she had ever seen.

Uncle Emmett looked puzzled. "How did that get in there? I don't remember it being there."

"Maybe it's magic," Cindy said, smiling. "Can I keep it?"

"You sure can."

She raced upstairs and placed the coin into her keepsake box with her other treasures. Through her window she saw Dad, Uncle Emmett, Tommy and Buster heading toward the tractor shed. They were going to the back field up the hill past the crab apple tree, the field where Tommy and Cindy had many adventures. Once, Buster had even tangled with a porcupine there.

The morning was already warm. The clouds looked like cotton candy. Cindy hurried outside.

"Where are you off to?" Ma called.

"To help Dad!"

"Be careful!"

The tractors rumbled toward the back field. Tommy rode on the back hitch, holding tight to Uncle Emmett's belt. Cindy stood beside Dad on the other tractor, gripping his shirt.

When they reached the field, Dad gave Tommy an important job. His tractor was hitched to a manure spreader filled to the top.

"Drive in straight lines," Dad said. "When you get moving, reach back and turn that crank."

"Slow down at the end and turn easy," Uncle Emmett added. "If you do well, you can keep going. And don't go fast!"

Tommy beamed. This was his chance to prove he was big enough to help.

He started the tractor and pressed the gas. It chugged forward. He reached back, turned the crank and quickly grabbed the wheel again.

Behind the tractor, the spreader came to life. It pushed the manure to the back where a spinning fork tossed straw and cow poop high into the air.

Tommy pressed the gas a little harder, against Uncle Emmett's warning, who was watching with Dad, both with knowing smiles.

The tractor sped up. The manure flew higher and wilder.

It fertilized the field.

It fertilized Tommy.

Still, Tommy kept going. He was determined to do a good job.

Then, SPLAT! A large piece of cow poop hit Tommy on the back of the head.

He quickly lifted his foot from the pedal. Dad and Uncle Emmett hurried over, laughing.

"Why did you stop?" Dad asked.

"I just got hit with poop!" Tommy shouted.

Uncle Emmett tried to stop laughing. "I told you to keep it slow, but you're doing fine.

Want to keep going?"

Tommy wiped his face. His shirt, overalls and even his hair were covered in blotches of manure. He started the tractor again and off he went. By the time the job was finished, Tommy smelled stronger than the cows.

When Cindy and Tommy tumbled into the kitchen later that day, Ma gasped and held her nose.

"Take those clothes off right there! Everything, and straight upstairs to the bath!"

"Tommy stinks!" Cindy giggled. "There's cow poo in his hair!"

"For goodness sake," Ma muttered, picking something suspicious from the top of Tommy's head.

Tommy didn't care. He had done an important job.

With a hop, skip and jump, he ran upstairs.

"And use LOTS of soap!" Ma called.

## CITY COUSINS AND THE TREEHOUSE

Every summer Uncle Phill and Aunt Marian came from the city to visit the farm. Their two children, Grace and Fred, were the same ages as Cindy and Tommy. For the city cousins, visiting a farm was an adventure.

"Eeeooooo," Grace cried when the children walked into the barn where the cows and pigs lived. "It stinks in here. I'm sorry if that sounds mean."

Aunt Marian was from England and had a British accent. Cindy thought she sounded like the Queen of England. They usually brought a bag of Grace's outgrown clothes which were store bought, pink and frilly. Most of Cindy's clothes were handmade or Tommy's hand-me-downs.

Uncle Phill was a Sergeant Major in the American Army.

Grace and Fred were very polite and mannerly. After eating their dinner, they would ask for permission to leave the table.

"May I be excused from the table, Dad?" Fred would ask.

"You're all done, Son?"

"Yes, Sir," Fred would reply.

"You may go then," Uncle Phill would say.

After Grace would ask too and permission was given, Cindy and Tommy would jump up from the table, without a second thought or a word of permission.

While the girls spent time playing with dolls and baking in Cindy's Easy Bake Oven, the boys did target practice on tin cans at the dump behind the garden with Tommy's new rifle he'd gotten for his birthday. Then after finding the perfect treehouse tree, they spent hours pulling wagonloads of building supplies up to the forest. From the farmhouse, the girls could hear the

echo of banging hammers and sawing. Uncle Phill and Dad went to check on them several times and reported they were doing a great job.

"Grace and I want to go with you today to help build the tree house," Cindy said to Tommy one morning.

"No way! No girls allowed!" Tommy said. "It's all finished anyway. You can play with your dolls."

"Ma!" Cindy wailed, "Tommy won't let us go up to their treehouse."

"Tommy," Ma said, "Grace is a guest here too. So you take them to the tree house and let them see it." Then she looked back at Cindy, "then you come back here. You and Grace have lots to keep you busy without bothering the boys."

"OK," said Cindy. "Come on. Let's go!"

All four children, with Buster bouncing ahead, made their way across the yard, through the gate into the barnyard, past all the barns and up the hill into the forest. Finally, they arrived at one of the biggest Sugar Maple trees in the forest.

"Look," said Fred pointing up. "Look up, way up there!"

The girls strained their necks looking up through the branches to see the bottom of a huge tree house.

"Wow," said Cindy. "How do you get up there?"

Tommy walked over to a rope that was tied to a neighbouring tree and untied it.

"Step back," he said as he let the rope slowly slip through his hands, lowering one end of an 8-foot wooden ladder. Its other end was attached to the tree. After climbing this ladder, the children climbed another 8-foot wooden ladder that was completely nailed to the tree. This

second ladder disappeared into a hole in the bottom of the tree house which was the size of a small bedroom. The boys had put a lot of work into it, giving it a solid roof and a big window.

"Can we play up here today?" asked Grace. "We could put curtains in the window."

"And we could bring up cups and saucers and have tea parties!" added Cindy.

"And a little table could go right here," Grace pointed to a corner.

"I could pick some daisies and put them in a jar to go on top of the table." The girls were very excited.

Tommy and Fred looked at each other. "Sure," Tommy said. "But we'll need food so that we can have a picnic here."

"Yah!" squealed Cindy, so excited at the thought of eating inside the tree house.

"We'll go to the house and make sandwiches and bring them back," offered Grace.

"Yeah," said Fred. "And bring some grape Koolaid too."

The girls couldn't believe how nice the boys were being. Especially when the boys had a big sign out in front of the tree house saying, "NO GIRLS."

About an hour later, the girls were back, pulling a wagon filled with egg-salad sandwiches on Ma's fresh baked bread, a pitcher of grape Koolaid, chocolate chip cookies still warm from the oven and some apples from the crab apple tree. They also brought a bag of Cindy's playhouse plates, cups and saucers.

"We're back boys," called Grace. "Lower the ladder."

"OK, look out," called Fred. The ladder came down slowly.

"You girls stay down here while we carry everything up," said Tommy. "The ladder might break with too much weight on it."

Tommy was very smart and Cindy knew that he was right.

Once the wagonload of stuff was up in the tree house, the girls stood and watched as Tommy pulled the bottom ladder up.

"Hey!" shouted Cindy. "Lower the ladder so we can come up."

"No girls allowed," shouted Tommy.

"What?!" shouted Cindy.

"Fred, you lower that ladder or you'll be in trouble," said Grace.

But all the girls could hear were the boys' laughter in between mouthfuls of egg salad sandwiches.

"Come on Grace. Let's go tell Ma. Come on Buster!" Cindy clenched her fists and marched towards home.

"Gosh," said Grace as the girls headed back down the hill. "They're being so mean."

It took everything Cindy had inside of her to not say all the bad words that she heard Uncle Emmett say when the tractor broke down. Ma and Aunt Marian had watched the girls making the picnic with a feeling that something bad was going to happen, so they weren't surprised when they arrived back so soon, upset and hungry.

"You girls stay here. We'll make you some lunch. You can play house and just forget about the boys. That wasn't very nice of them, was it?" said Aunt Marian.

"Yes," said Ma. "They'll get a talking to when they come home for dinner." The boys had wanted to sleep overnight in the tree house that night, but because they had treated the girls so badly, they weren't allowed. But after apologising, it was agreed that the sleep over could happen the following evening.

The next day was filled with excitement as the boys planned their overnight sleepover. They made several trips with the wagon filled with supplies including sleeping bags, flashlights,

comic books, snacks and Tommy's new rifle so they could scare away bears if one came near the tree house. The parents agreed with the boys that the girls would not be allowed to go with them.

As night time arrived, Uncle Phill decided that he should go up to the tree house to check on the boys to be sure they were safe. He was very quiet because he didn't want the boys to know he was checking on them. When he arrived at the tree, he could hear the boys talking and laughing. How great it was to hear these cousins, who were only able to see each other once a year, getting along so well and having such a great adventure together.

Uncle Phill had an idea to put a little extra excitement into the boys' adventure. He turned the flashlight off and began to scrape it against the tree trunk. The talking from the tree house suddenly stopped.

"What's that?"

"What?"

"I heard something."

Silence.

"I don't hear anything."

Silence.

Uncle Phill scraped the flashlight against the tree again.

"There! Did you hear it?"

"Yeah."

"What is it?"

"I don't know. Maybe a bear."

Uncle Phill's plan was working. He scraped more and then to add more excitement, he growled.

"Holy cow! It's a bear!" There was shuffling in the tree house and then... BANG!

Tommy's rifle fired and Uncle Phill heard the bullet hit the ground nearby.

"Shoot again!"

"WHOA! WHOA! HOLD YOUR FIRE BOYS!" Uncle Phill shouted.

"Dad? Is that you?" Fred called.

"Indeed it is son. Hold your fire Tommy."

With flashlights back on, one shining up and one shining down, the three of them realized how close this exciting adventure had come to being tragic. It had not occurred to Uncle Phill or Dad that Tommy would take his new rifle on an overnight adventure in the forest. It also had not occurred to Tommy to ask the bear to identify itself before he pointed the rifle straight down through the tree house door and pulled the trigger.

New rules were set regarding the rifle and everybody was happy that Uncle Phill had lived to tell the tale. Dad said the rifle would now stay locked in the house unless he was with Tommy.

## CATS AND KITTENS

The farm had four cats. Two male cats were named Blacky and Candy, and the female cats were Smokey and Bobby. Smokey was friendly, but Bobby was not. She had short, crooked front legs and one eye that looked the wrong way. When Tommy or Cindy tried to pick her up, she hissed, scratched then ran.

One spring day Tommy noticed something interesting. He was always reading books and knew lots of stuff.

"Smokey and Bobby are going to have babies!" he announced.

"How can you tell?" Cindy asked.

"Look at Smokey's fat belly," Tommy said, pointing to the dark gray cat's belly. "See how fat she is! There are kittens inside."

"Wow! When will they come out?" Cindy asked.

"Soon. We'll watch Smokey and Bobby. When they're skinny again, we'll know they had their babies. Then we'll find them," Tommy said.

Weeks seemed like years. Every day, the children would watch for Smokey and Bobby, who only seemed to get fatter and fatter. Then one morning, when Cindy was helping Ma bake cookies, Tommy came running into the kitchen.

"Smokey's kittens have been born! Come on!" he squealed.

"Ma, can I go?" Cindy asked excitedly.

"Go on," Ma said with a reluctant smile. "But be careful in the barn!"

Cindy could hardly get her black rubber boots on fast enough. New kittens were so exciting to find. Out the door the children ran and into the barnyard.

They looked behind the cow barn, calling "Smokey!" They looked around the granary, calling "Smokey!" They looked inside the hay barn, calling "Smokey!"

"There she is!" Cindy shouted, seeing a dark gray tail disappear into the top layer of hay bales about 20 feet up. Tommy started climbing with Cindy not far behind. Climbing the bales was like climbing a ladder. The bales were stacked layer upon layer on top of each other like bricks.

"Help me!" Cindy called repeatedly. Tommy was much faster and had to come back several times to pull Cindy up to the next layer of bales.

Finally they reached the top. At the spot where the cat's tail disappeared, Tommy gripped the twine on a heavy bale and dragged it out. Following the tunnel, he pulled out more bales one at a time.

Then he put his ear to the hole and motioned for Cindy to be quiet.

They held their breath.

From deep inside the hay came the tiny mewling of kittens.

"I can hear them," Tommy whispered as he took hold of another bale and pulled it away.

"Oh my goodness," Cindy squealed. Snuggled in a den were Smokey and three little kittens. She rushed to pick one up. Because Smokey was a friendly cat, she didn't mind the children around her kittens.

"Something is wrong with them! Look. Their eyes are sealed shut!" Cindy was almost in tears.

"There's nothing wrong with them, silly!" Tommy said, picking up another kitten. "They are born that way. Their eyes will open soon."

"Can we take them to the house?" Cindy asked.

"No. We'd better leave them here. Smokey will take good care of them. We'll come back to visit every day," Tommy said. "I'll put this last bale back and then we'll go find Bobby to see if she's had her kittens."

"OK," Cindy agreed.

A couple of days later, while the children were playing outside, Cindy spotted the other female cat no longer fat.

"Look, there's Bobby!" Cindy shouted. "She's had her kittens too! Come on!" The children jumped up and began to run after the not-so-friendly mother cat.

They chased her around the granary, through the cow barn and into the hay barn. She had something in her mouth that looked like a dead kitten.

"Tommy, Bobby is eating her kittens!" Cindy cried. "We have to catch her!"

"She might be just moving them," Tommy shouted, out of breath. Then the children stopped in their tracks as they both saw the dead kitten lying on the floor of the barn.

"Oh no! We're too late," Cindy said, falling to her knees in front of the lifeless kitten. Then Cindy became very angry. "That Bobby is a bad bad mother!"

"Yeah!" Tommy said, just as angry. "Let's get her!"

Off the children went again in pursuit of Bobby. The children knew that this cat was always different, never friendly and always had a crazy look in its eye. Now they had proof that Bobby was evil.

It was weeks later before the kids caught sight of Bobby again, this time disappearing into the sheep barn. The children knew they had her cornered. The sheep barn had a ladder that went up into a very low loft. Once up the ladder, Cindy and Tommy had to crawl on their bellies, ducking under the beams in the roof. The loft ceiling was so low that neither child could see

beyond the cross-beams. Cindy was too scared to put her hand beyond the beam to feel for an angry, biting cat. Tommy, as usual, was braver.

He stretched his arm deep into the darkness. After several tries, suddenly they heard a mean growl and hiss. Bingo! They had found Bobby.

"I've got hold of something furry," Tommy said. "Look out! I'm going to pull her out!"

But what Tommy pulled out was not Bobby! It was a hissing, fuzzy, big blue-eyed tabby kitten.

"What the heck!?" exclaimed Tommy. "Here," handing the kitten over to Cindy. "Hold this one."

Cindy stuffed the kitten into the arm of her jacket, holding the ends. Tommy shoved his hand back in the dark deep opening. More hissing and growling could be heard.

"OK, I've got her now!" Tommy said, pulling out another hissing fluffy kitten.

"Well, holy cow!" Tommy laughed. "Maybe Bobby's not so bad after all. These kittens are at least two or three weeks old." He handed the second kitten to Cindy who stuffed it into the other jacket arm. Tommy dug back into the opening. Cindy couldn't believe that Tommy was not getting all bit-up by the crazy cat. After double and triple checking, Tommy was confident there were no more kittens in the hole and decided the two kittens should be taken to the home.

If Bobby moved them, the children might never find them again and without people, the kittens would grow up wild. As the children made their way back to the house with the two kittens stuffed inside the arms of Cindy's jacket, the children were surprised when they looked behind and saw that Bobby was following them. It was then that Tommy realized that Bobby was worried about her babies and didn't want to be separated from them.

Dad said that maybe when Bobby had her litter some weeks ago, one died and she was merely removing it from her den.

Ma suggested a meal of bread soaked in warm milk for the kittens and oddly, Bobby sat calm and purring beside her munching babies. Cindy felt very bad that she had been so mean to Bobby. Just because Bobby acted and looked different from the other cats didn't mean she was evil or crazy.

## **BUSTER AND THE PORCUPINE**

Buster was the best dog in the world. He was a farm dog who never came into the house. At night, he would make his way to the cow barn, slip in through a hole in the side and sleep with the cows where it was nice and warm. Buster also never ate store bought dog food. After every meal, Ma made sure there were leftovers to scrape into Buster's dish outside. Buster got a special treat when the big bone from the middle of a ham arrived in the dish.

Buster would snap at the bumble bees if they buzzed around his head. Once he snapped one right into his mouth and with a "Yelp!" he'd let it go.

On beautiful summer days, Tommy and Cindy would go fishing. They first cut down some thin branches to use as fishing poles. Then Tommy would pull big heavy rocks up to one side, because he was so strong, and Cindy would quickly gather all the dew worms into a can. The big fat gooey ones were the best. With fish hooks and fishing line in their pockets, away the children went with Buster bouncing ahead of them to the Blue Sea Creek in The Bush Across The Road. Buster loved to go fishing because he could wade into the creek and lap up fresh cold water.

After a fishing adventure, it was the children's chore to pull or cut all the burrs out of Buster's long thick fur. The husky half of Buster meant that his fur was very thick and dense because huskies need that kind of fur during very cold winters. He also had a large fluffy curled-up tail. The collie half of Buster showed up in a very wide white ring of fur around his neck. And where a collie is brown, Buster was a yellowish orange marmalade colour. The children were never afraid because Buster was always there protecting them.

What started as a typical summer day ended quite differently.

Buster faithfully led the way as they walked for about thirty minutes to the back of the farm when Tommy noticed that Buster was heading straight for a moving animal. At first he thought it was a ground hog.

As Buster approached the animal, it suddenly got bigger. That's when Tommy realized that the animal was not a ground hog, it was a porcupine!

"No Buster!" Tommy shouted, breaking into a run towards the dog. "Stop! NO!"

Cindy, running behind Tommy, was screaming too. "Buster, no! Bad dog!"

But it was too late. Buster yelped and jumped back. Sharp quills were stuck inside and all around his mouth.

Cindy began to cry. "Oh my goodness! Oh my goodness!"

Buster began to paw at his mouth trying to pull the quills out. His white paws turned bright red.

"Come on! We have to get Buster home!" Tommy shouted, frantically trying to encourage the dog to follow him. "Home Buster, home!"

Cindy cried louder. "Oh my goodness. What will we do?"

"Holy cow! Stop crying, Cindy! Run home to get Dad. I'll bring Buster," Tommy said. So at full speed, Cindy began to run. Behind her she could hear Tommy coaxing and coaxing poor Buster down the hill towards the house, shouting, "Ma! Dad! Help!"

When Cindy finally got close to the house, Ma and Dad were already in the yard running toward her because they had heard her cries for help.

"What's happened?" Ma asked.

"It's Buster..." Cindy tried to talk, out of breath and sobbing. "He's bitten a porcupine and he's all picked up and bloody."

"Call Melvin," Dad said calmly to Ma. "I'll need help with this." Melvin was a good friend who lived on the farm next door.

Ma took Cindy into the house, while Dad ran out to meet Tommy and Buster.

When Melvin arrived and saw the dog, he agreed that this was going to be a gruesome task to get all those quills out of the dog's mouth. But wasting no time, Dad and Tommy held Buster down, while Melvin used a set of pliers to pull them out, one by one.

Ma made Cindy wait in the house. Buster's cries came and went, yet the faithful obedient dog never tried to bite Melvin, Dad or Tommy and never tried to get away. Buster knew that they were there to help him. Dad gave Tommy many important jobs to do on the farm because he was smart and strong. The job of holding Buster was one of those jobs.

Cindy wondered why the quills couldn't be just cut. Tommy told her that they had to be removed. If left in Buster's mouth, the dog would starve because he wouldn't be able to eat. It seemed to take forever, but finally all the quills were out.

Dad thanked Melvin for driving over to help and invited him and his wife Beatrice over to supper that evening. And what a great supper it was! There were lots of leftovers for Buster which Ma made sure to mix up into a soft mush. Buster did not chew bones for a while, but he made a full recovery.

## WOLVES UNDER MY BED

Sometimes living in a farmhouse that was over one hundred years old was scary. It was made of logs covered with siding that looked like red bricks. The floors creaked and the doors squeaked.

When Sandy and Florence were old enough, they moved from the farm to North Bay to live with Aunty Jo and Uncle Jake so they could work in town. That meant Cindy and Tommy could each have their own bedroom across the hall from each other. Cindy's room had twin beds.

No longer having Tommy in the bedroom made nighttime a little scarier for Cindy. On nights when there was a full moon, Cindy would hide under her covers listening to Buster howling responses to the bush wolves.

"Yip yip Oooooo," Cindy heard from The Bush Across The Road. "Yip yip Ooooooo."

"Yip yip Oooooo," Buster would answer.

Back and forth the howling would continue until she'd hear the window in her parents' bedroom open quickly.

"BUSTER, STOP THAT HOWLING!" Dad shouted. Buster would stop because he was a good dog, but the distant "Yip yip Ooooooo" still floated through the window.

Cindy had never seen a wolf, yet she was very afraid of them. Tommy told Cindy that there were wolves under her bed and they would snap at her heels if her feet got too close to the edge. This made getting in and out of bed very challenging, jumping from bed to bed, then making the final jump to the door of the bedroom. Even more challenging was getting back into bed.

One night when Cindy was upstairs walking from the bathroom to her bedroom, she heard a growling sound.

She froze.

Her heart was pounding so hard, she could hear it in her ears. She took a small step and the floor squeaked.

"Grrrrrr!"

Cindy knew right away that the wolf under the bed was out and waiting to gobble her up. She couldn't speak. She couldn't scream. She couldn't move.

"GRRRRR." It was louder, followed by a scratch scratch scratch on the floor.

"BOO!" Tommy shouted as he jumped out of the bedroom into the hall.

"EEEEEEK!" Cindy screamed, now crying loudly.

Tommy laughed. "Stop crying. It was just me. You're such a scaredy-cat!"

"I thought you were a wolf!" Cindy sobbed, tears running down her face.

"What's going on up there?" Ma shouted, making her way up the stairs. "Come on kids, now get to bed."

"Tommy pretended he was a wolf and scared me," wailed Cindy.

"Come on. Both of you. Into bed." Then Ma tried to assure Cindy, "Wolves cannot get into the house. Never, ever."

"Maybe they'll come in through the window, Ma," whimpered Cindy, now tucked under her covers.

"They cannot get through the window OR the door."

"Maybe they're hiding under my bed, Ma. Tommy said they were!"

"There are no wolves under your bed. See? I'll look right now." Ma looked under the bed then glared at Tommy. "Nope, nothing there."

"Maybe they're in the closet, Ma."

"There are no wolves in the closet. See? I'll look in the closet." Ma opened the closet door and sure enough there were no wolves.

"But Buster howls for the wolves to come and play with him." Cindy was having a hard time believing.

"Buster is howling to keep the wolves away. Buster is protecting us. You have nothing to worry about with Buster outside. OK?" Ma pulled Cindy's cover up close to her nose and kissed her forehead.

"OK," Cindy whispered.

A few minutes after Ma went back downstairs, Cindy had to go to the bathroom again. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to fall to sleep. She knew everything that her mother had said was true. There were no wolves at the window, none under the bed and none in the closet. Buster was outside protecting the house. She pushed down the covers and put one foot over the edge of the bed then pulled it back quickly. She stood up and jumped to the second bed, jumped off the end and ran to the bathroom.

## SANDY BABYSITS

Sandy was eight years older than Cindy and belonged to the 4-H Club, where farm kids learned things like how to take care of a calf and sewing clothes. While Sandy liked making clothes, she didn't like anything else about the farm. She thought the farm was stinky and she was afraid of the chickens.

One day, Ma told Sandy to go and collect some eggs from the hen house. Five minutes later, Sandy returned empty handed, claiming there were no eggs. Ma was puzzled. There should have been several eggs that day as they had not been collected yet. Ma led Sandy back to the hen house. Straw nests lined the walls, some with chickens sitting on them. Ma put her hand under one of the chickens and pulled out an egg.

"What do you call that?" Ma asked Sandy.

"Well," Sandy answered with a quiver in her voice, "I hope you didn't expect ME to put MY hand under there!"

"And how do you expect to get the eggs?" Ma asked.

"I don't know," said Sandy defiantly. "But I'm NOT putting my hand under any chicken."

"Lan-sakes-alive, child. What kind of farmer's wife will you turn out to be?" Ma said, mostly to herself.

"I'm not going to be a farmer's wife and I'm not going to live on a farm." And with that, Sandy marched out of the hen house.

One Saturday evening, Sandy was tasked with babysitting Tommy and Cindy while Ma and Dad visited friends, Melvin and Beatrice. Roy, their son, came over to keep Sandy company. Before leaving, Ma told Sandy all the things she needed to do to get her younger brother and

sister to bed. Dad gave Sandy one very important outside job to do. Before dark, she needed to herd the sheep in the field into the Sheep Shed.

After Ma and Dad left, Sandy suggested a game of Monopoly.

"YEAH!" Tommy and Cindy squealed together. Tommy dragged a chair to the cupboard over the washing machine, climbed up and pulled down the ragged, taped-together Monopoly box.

Cindy set the game up on the dining room table while Tommy counted out all the money.

"I'll be the banker," said Roy.

"I'LL be the banker," said Sandy. "There'll be no cheating going on here." She eyed her three opponents with a warning. "House rules are \$500 for landing on GO and anyone can borrow from the bank."

An hour into the game, there was no money in the bank because Roy had borrowed it all and put hotels on all his properties. Once you have a hotel on a property and someone lands on it, they need to have lots and lots of money to be able to pay or they are out of the game.

When Sandy landed on Roy's property, she had no money. Sandy was so angry that she ran from the table and threw herself on the couch, face towards the back.

"I'm never speaking to you again, Roy Sullivan!" she exclaimed.

Tommy and Cindy looked at Roy. "Oh oh!" Cindy thought. "Now what?"

"Let's just keep playing," said Tommy. "We don't need her."

Roy jiggled the dice in his palm, then stopped, then jiggled them again, then stopped.

"Oh, come on Daisy," Roy said, using his pet name for Sandy. "Come on back."

"No!" came Sandy's voice. "Don't talk to me!"

"Here," Roy said, shoving some of his money to where Sandy had been sitting. "You can have some of my money."

"I DON'T WANT YOUR MONEY!" Sandy said.

"Can I have your money?" asked Cindy.

"Don't you want your sister to come back and play?" Roy asked.

"If I throw myself on the couch and pout, will you give me some money?" asked Tommy.

"I'M NOT POUTING!" shouted Sandy, still facing the back of the couch.

Roy finally stood up and walked to the couch. "Come on Daisy. I'm sorry," he said softly, sitting beside her.

"Oh, for goodness sake," sighed Cindy. "Kiss, kiss. Hug, hug. YUK!"

After a good deal of coaxing and apologizing, Sandy finally agreed to come back to the table to play. After Roy cashed all of his hotels into the bank and paid back everything he owed, the game ended quickly.

"It's getting dark," Roy said. "I'd better get home. I'll call you tomorrow, Daisy!"

The Monopoly game went away and the children settled on the couch to watch television before bed.

Suddenly Sandy sat up straight with a frightened look in her eyes.

"OH NO! I forgot about the sheep!"

From a moment of fun to a moment of terror as Sandy realized she had to go outside in the dark and herd the sheep into the Sheep Shed. Not only did Sandy not want to disappoint Dad, but she was truly frightened to walk out into the field in the dark.

"Come on, kids. Get your coats and boots on," Sandy said, as she muttered to herself something about never being a farmer's wife. "We have to get the sheep into the shed. Do either of you know where a flashlight might be?"

"I do!" said Tommy, as he dragged the chair again to the cupboard over the washing machine.

The threesome made their way out the door and into the darkness.

"I'm scared!" Cindy whined, holding the back of Sandy's coat tightly. "The wolves are going to get me."

"No they won't. Don't be a scaredy-cat!" said Tommy with his bravest voice.

Through the front yard, past the cow trough, down the gully and up to the Sheep Pasture they went, with only one flashlight shining the way. It seemed to take forever before the flashlight finally spotted the sheep.

Cindy never let go of Sandy's coat but Tommy boldly led the way. Thankfully, the thirty sheep were huddled together making it easier for Sandy to herd them toward the Sheep Shed. After an hour of "Get!" and "Go!" commands, the sheep were all in the shed and Sandy locked the shed's door.

"Can you let go of me now?" Sandy asked Cindy.

"No!"

Sandy sighed and led the children back to the house with Cindy still hanging onto her coat.

When Ma and Dad came home later that night, Sandy was sitting very quietly on the couch, the children asleep in their beds.

"Did everything go alright?" Ma asked.

"Yep," said Sandy quickly.

"Everything go alright with the sheep?" Dad asked.

"Easy as pie," said Sandy.

## DAD HAS AN ACCIDENT

One summer morning Dad announced he was going to The Bush Across the Road to chop wood and Tommy and Cindy could come along to pick lyko to sell at the Lucky Dollar store.

"How much, Dad?" asked Tommy downing his orange juice.

"Seven cents a pound. There's some bags in the granary you can use. But let's get going. I got a lot of work to do over there."

"What's lyko?" Cindy asked.

"They look like little Christmas trees, about this high," Tommy explained, holding his hand about 5 inches above the table top. "People use them to make Christmas decorations, right Dad?"

"Yep," said Dad. "Lykpodium. But nobody around here calls it that."

"You kids be careful and stay out of the creek and stay out of Aunt Liza's house!"

Many times Tommy and Cindy explored the old abandoned log house across the road from the farm. It once was owned by Dad's Aunt Liza. It was like walking into a thriller movie, stepping gently up the old creaky stairs Ma always predicted would collapse into the cellar, then standing in the middle of the upstairs bedroom, hearing the wind whistling through the broken windows.

Buster led the way down the driveway while Dad walked behind with his axe over his shoulder.

Upon entering The Bush Across The Road, Cindy could already hear the far-away shushing noise of the falls and rapids of Blue Sea Creek.

"You'll find lots of lyko down by the creek," Dad said, as he headed off in another direction to where he'd left the chainsaw the day before. The kids knew the way because they had been there lots of times to go fishing.

"Come on Buster," called Tommy as he headed towards the sound of rushing water with Cindy close at his heels. Cindy was scared to be in The Bush Across The Road. This is where the wolves howled at night.

It took about fifteen minutes to make their way through the forest, over gigantic rocks, down into a gully, through some thick brush with the sound of the rapids getting close. Then the reassuring sound of Dad's chainsaw echoed far away. Cindy felt safe with Tommy, Buster and Dad within earshot.

Tommy found the lyko patch and the kids started pulling them up by their roots. As Cindy's bag got heavier and fatter, she imagined buying bubble gums and blackballs at the Lucky Dollar store with the money she was going to make. The sound of the chainsaw was replaced by the chop chop chop of Dad's axe.

Suddenly, Dad shouted so loud that the children froze.

Before his echo faded, Buster was leading the way towards Dad's voice with Tommy and Cindy behind.

"WAYNE! WENDY!" he was shouting. With all their strength the children ran, not thinking about the bags of precious lyko left behind.

"DADDY!" Cindy shouted. "DADDY!"

"DAD, WHAT'S WRONG?" Tommy shouted.

"RUN HOME! GET MA," Dad shouted back.

Cindy had never heard Dad sound frightened or anxious before. He was a kind, quiet and calm person, but his voice now was strained. He needed help. As the children emerged from the bush into the field, Cindy finally saw Dad walking as fast as he could toward home using his axe as a crutch. As she got closer, she heard a hollow swishing sound like waves under a dock and it was coming from a long gash in the side of Dad's black rubber boot. Each time his boot hit the ground, blood seeped through the cut in the rubber.

"Hurry home, kids. Tell Ma I've cut my foot and I need to go to the hospital," Dad winced as he hobbled through the field.

"Oh Daddy!" Cindy began to cry.

"Just hurry home kids!" Dad said, suddenly calm again. "Hurry and tell Ma to get the car."

Buster could tell something bad had happened because he was already across the road heading for the house. It seemed to take forever to run through the field, past Aunt Liza's house and through another field. Cindy's legs felt like they would give out and Tommy was panting like it was his last breath.

"Ma! Ma!" Tommy shouted as loud as he could.

"Ma! Daddy's been hurt," Cindy cried. "He needs to go to the hospital!"

Hearing their shouting, Ma ran out of the house and looked down the road and across the field to see Dad still making his way slowly across the second field.

"Everyone in the car," shouted Ma as she ran in the house to get her purse. They met Dad just as he reached the road. He took his boot off and wrapped his shirt around his foot. It only took a moment for the shirt to become red with blood. He told Ma that as he had been chopping a

piece of wood, it had slipped and the axe came down with the full force of his strength onto the side of his foot.

In thirty minutes they were at the North Bay Hospital. It took ten big stitches to close the gash and the doctor told Dad he had been very lucky.

"You kids will have to go back to The Bush Across The Road to get your bags of lyko," said Dad at supper that night. "I'll drive you to the Lucky Dollar store tomorrow. They'll take it there and weigh it."

"You're not driving anywhere, Lloyd," said Ma sternly. "The doctor said for you to stay off of that foot for a few days."

"Chores can't wait a couple of days, Ma," said Dad.

"Tommy can do the chores that need to be done. The wood in The Bush Across The Road can wait."

"I guess so, yep," conceded Dad, looking at Tommy now puffed up like a peacock.

"I'm always warning the kids to be careful," said Ma. "Now I'm going to be warning you."

## **BUS TO THE BORDER**

In early 1968, Dad and Ma made a difficult decision to sell the farm. A friend of Dad's, who had done the same a few years prior, offered Dad a job in the Northern Ontario city of Timmins. For months before the move, Dad started the job, living at his friend's house, while Ma was left to run the farm with the help of Tommy and Uncle Emmett. Sandy was taking summer courses in Toronto, while Florence was working full time in North Bay.

The cows and sheep, the tractors and other farm equipment were all sold. Uncle Emmett was unhappy his brother was leaving and he wasn't alone. All of Dad's siblings and many friends thought he was making a big mistake. However, in the face of all the warnings, Dad and Ma pushed forward with the plan.

During the summer, Ma not only prepared for the move, she also prepared for Sandy's August wedding to Roy. Dad and Ma knew they had to make a trip together to Timmins to find a home, so before the wedding, they made arrangements for Cindy and Tommy to visit Uncle Phill, Aunt Marian, Fred and Grace in Buffalo, NY.

Ma helped the children pack their suitcases and wrote a letter to Uncle Phill and Aunt Marian.

"Make sure and give this letter to Uncle Phill," Ma said, placing the letter on top of Tommy's clothes with extra care. "You know where it is in case you need it," she added. Tommy wondered what she meant by that but didn't ask.

It was a very exciting adventure for the children to be on a bus, riding away from the farm and the only community they knew, alone. Four hours later, the bus arrived in Toronto, where the children needed to change to a different bus. Sandy was waiting to meet them and they

all went to a restaurant for lunch. When Sandy brought them back to the bus station she pulled the bus driver aside.

"These are my little sister and brother. They're alone going to my uncle's in Buffalo. Make sure and keep an eye out for them," she said.

"Yep, got it," said the driver, not quite paying attention.

"I'm serious," persisted Sandy. "They've never been alone on a trip before."

"Yeah, OK!" The driver wasn't making eye contact with Sandy.

"They are only eleven and twelve years old," Sandy said, touching the driver's arm, getting his immediate attention.

"Don't worry. I'll watch out for them," assured the driver finally. "Nothing bad will happen."

Sandy, now relieved, hugged Tommy and Cindy goodbye as they entered the bus.

A few hours later, the bus reached the border between Canada and the USA. After it parked in front of a border-crossing building, a man in uniform got on and began questioning all the passengers and asking for documents. Tommy told the man where they were from and where they were going. The children had no documents to show.

When the man finished with all the passengers, he got off and went into the building.

The bus waited.

And waited.

The passengers began to grumble about the delay. Then the man came back onto the bus and walked directly to Tommy and Cindy.

"You two need to get off the bus and come with me," the man said sternly.

Without a word, the children followed the man into the building and into an office where another man was sitting behind a desk.

"Sit down," the second man ordered. Tommy and Cindy sat.

"Tell me who you are and what two children are doing on a bus to Buffalo without their parents!"

Cindy swallowed hard, feeling a sudden surge of fear tingling her body. Tommy sat up straight, unblinking.

"My name is Tommy Smith and this is my sister Cindy. We're going to visit my uncle Phil Peters in Buffalo," Tommy said very matter-of-factly.

"We'll need to call this Phil Peters to verify your story," the man said. "What's his phone number?"

Tommy suddenly looked lost. He looked at Cindy.

"I don't know," Cindy said meekly.

"You could be runaways. We can't let you cross the border without verifying who you are and where you're going!" the man barked. "See if you can find this Phil Peters in the phone book," he said to the first man, who quickly left the room.

Tommy's face showed that sign of reasoning and intelligence that Cindy had so often been saved by. And then the most extraordinary words came out of Tommy's mouth.

"Yes, we could be," he said.

Cindy stared at Tommy, dumbfounded. What!?! she thought.

After a silence that lasted way too long, he added, "But we're not."

"There's no answer," the first man said after he returned to the room. "We'll have to send them back to Toronto."

Knock. Knock.

The bus driver knocked at the door. "I gotta get this bus going but I have something to tell you that might help. Their older sister put them on the bus in Toronto and made a real fuss about me looking out for them. They're not runaways."

"Hmmm," the man at the desk said looking at Tommy and Cindy suspiciously.

"Listen," said the bus driver. "I'll take full responsibility for them. If there's no one to meet them at the Buffalo terminal, I'll bring them back."

The man behind the desk stood up. "Fine."

The bus driver led the children back to the bus. "Your uncle better be there!"

Cindy was shaking as she took her seat. People on the bus were angry and mumbling.

Tommy was unusually quiet.

The bus went on its way across the border into Buffalo. At the station, the children stood beside the bus driver, with his hands on each of their shoulders as if to stop them from running.

Cindy felt sick. Tommy felt powerless.

They waited, staring at the crowd of people greeting passengers off the bus.

"There you are!" said a familiar voice. Grace and Fred ran with open arms around Tommy and Cindy. "You're late," Uncle Phill said to the bus driver.

The bus driver told Uncle Phill everything that had happened, and everyone made their way to Uncle Phill's car.

"Uncle Phill, before I forget, I have a letter for you in my suitcase from Mom," Tommy said.

"Why didn't you show that letter to the man at the border?" Uncle Phill asked Tommy.

And there was that moment of full realization when Tommy said, "I completely forgot about it!"

## THE SUGAR ROSE CAPER

The aroma of baking made its way up the stairs of the farmhouse, like warm comforting hands pulling Cindy down into the kitchen. Ma had been busy preparing cakes, cookies and squares for the out-of-town guests that would be dropping by over the next few days for Sandy and Roy's wedding tomorrow. She had made the wedding cake and today she would decorate it.

Cindy stood in front of the long mirror and gazed at the beautiful dress her mother had made. The blues, greens and mauves all cascaded throughout the material. She was going to be nine in a few months and was old enough to dress like a big girl. She skipped to her bedroom and changed into her hand-me-down overalls, carefully hanging up the dress.

On the table, beside a bowl of freshly whipped icing, there seemed to be a mountain of sparkling white sugar roses.

"Ma will never need that many," Cindy said to herself as she grabbed one and walked calmly into the living room, slipped behind a large brown armchair and popped the rose into her mouth. When the rose dissolved and disappeared, she crept out from behind the chair and headed back to the kitchen in pursuit of another tender morsel. But no such luck, Ma was watching! Cindy skipped out the door to look for Tommy.

Tommy was busy helping Dad in the barn doing an important farm job like shovelling manure. Cindy didn't mind Tommy having this job. So while Tommy shovelled, Cindy held tufts of hay for a cow to eat and then moved on to the pig pen to watch them roll around in the smelly dirt.

"Cindy! Tommy! Get up here, now!" Ma's angry shout came loud and clear.

"You'd better get up to the house," said Dad calmly. "Sounds like you two have been up to something."

It was a long run from the barn to the house with lots of time for Cindy and Tommy to push, shove, trip, pinch and laugh. As they tumbled into the kitchen, out of breath and innocent, Cindy saw Ma standing with her hands on her hips in her red and white checked apron spattered with icing sugar. As Ma's angry face settled on the two children, the laughing stopped and the room fell silent.

"Which one of you kids took a sugar rose?" she demanded, her eyes darting back and forth between the children.

"Not me!" Tommy said quickly.

"Not me!" Cindy echoed trying to sound just as sure and confident as Tommy. Her tongue came out and circled her lips just to be sure there were no traces of sparkling sugar.

"Cindy, did you take that rose?" Ma stared, not blinking.

"No Ma," Cindy stared straight back at her mother, feeling frozen by the lie, unable to look anywhere else. "I didn't take it. Honest!" She had never ever stood and boldly lied straight to her mother's face before.

There was a long pause, moments that seemed to take forever. No one spoke.

"It's written all over your face, Cindy," Ma finally broke the silence. Cindy's bottom lip began to tremble as she realized that the little sugar rose in her tummy had turned her cheeks bright red and rosy. Tears welled up in her eyes.

"I'm sorry!" Cindy cried. "Yes, I took it."

"Can I go now?" Tommy asked, totally bored with the whole situation.

"Go," Ma replied. "But you," looking back to Cindy. "Do you realize what you've done?" Cindy shook her head, still crying.

"Those roses are for the corners of your sister's wedding cake. I brought exactly the number that I needed, twelve, for the TWELVE corners of the cake. Now one corner will be empty."

"What are you going to do, Ma?" Cindy wailed.

"I don't know, but you go upstairs to your room," Ma said sternly, looking more worried than angry now.

Cindy knew that this wasn't a life or death thing, but somehow Ma's anger turning into worry and disappointment made it seem very bad. She felt as if she had somehow ruined Sandy's big day. She sat at the top of the stairs, listening to Ma fretting in the kitchen. Dad had come in to see what the fuss was all about.

"Boy, are you in trouble," Tommy said as he brushed past Cindy on his way to his room. She listened to Ma and Dad talking in the kitchen.

"Maybe you could just turn the cake with that corner to the wall so no one will notice," Dad suggested. "Maybe you could leave all the roses off, then no one will know one is missing." Dad was always so calm and even tempered. "It'll be fine! Don't worry."

Cindy crept to her room, the sugar rose feeling a little sour in her tummy.

The next day, Ma took Cindy to the beauty salon to get her first professional hairstyle. It should have been exciting but all Cindy could think about was the huge empty corner on the wedding cake. The ceremony took place in the same little white church where all the children were baptised. As Cindy sat in the church pew, she imagined the whole community, who were all invited, whispering about why one corner of the cake was bare.

Afterwards, at the reception, Cindy went to see the beautiful tall three-tiered wedding cake sitting on a long table at the back of the room. She closely eyed the corners of each layer,

held up by a miniature sized wine glass, turned upside down. And under each glass was a sugar rose.

Cindy looked closer, then walked behind the table to examine the back corners. The rose under one glass was different. Instead of a rose, it was white icing made to look like a rose. Cindy knew immediately what Ma had done. With her cake decoration skills and equipment, she made a rose that was so close to the store-bought ones, it was impossible to tell.

With a sigh of relief, Cindy realized how wonderful her mother was. Ma not only created a duplicate rose, but also took Dad's advice and turned the fake rose to the back of the cake.

Dad was right, no one noticed. Not even Sandy. Years later, Sandy had no memory of The Sugar Rose Caper.

## GOODBYE — HELLO

Ma and Dad found the perfect house in Timmins. After spending the night back on the farm, they drove to Buffalo to bring the children home to continue on with Sandy and Roy's wedding preparations and winding down the farm for the new owner who would move in in September. There was a lot of conversation around how Buster would survive living in the city, on a leash, tied up outside and eating real dog food.

One morning, a few days before the wedding, the children found Buster dragging himself all over the back yard, leaving a black-slime discharge that came out of his bottom. He couldn't seem to stand up. The cost of a veterinarian for farm dogs and cats was not part of Ma and Dad's rigid and small budget. Vets were only allowed when absolutely necessary for a cow.

Buster was seriously sick and Cindy heard Ma tell Dad that it was likely cancer. At bedtime, Cindy and Tommy both prayed for Buster to get well. After all, they had plans for Buster living in the city. He'd have a brand-new dog house and a collar with a tag saying "BUSTER" on it.

The next morning, the sound of birds twittering and singing came through the bedroom window, but Cindy's first thought was to see how much better Buster had gotten. She quickly threw on some clothes and rushed downstairs and outside. Tommy was sitting on the clothesline step, his face in his hands.

Dad's friend, Melvin, was getting into his car, throwing his rifle in the back seat. Dad thanked him for coming.

"It's something I couldn't do," said Dad, shaking Melvin's hand. Melvin drove away.

Cindy cried, "Daddy! Where's Buster?"

Dad didn't speak.

"Where is he? Please, Daddy, tell me!" Cindy begged. "Tommy. Where's Buster?" Cindy sobbed. Tommy couldn't speak.

The following morning, Cindy laid in bed, wondering how the birds' songs sounded so different than the morning before. They sounded empty and lonely. At breakfast, Cindy asked Dad where Buster had been buried. She wanted to pick flowers to put on the grave.

"I don't want to tell you," said Dad. "You'll spend all your time crying over it."

"Please Dad! I have to!" But Dad left the table without another word.

When Dad saw that the children were spending hours searching the property for Buster's resting place, he finally gave in. Every morning until the day they moved, Buster's grave had fresh flowers.

Two weeks after Sandy and Roy's wedding, the old farmhouse was emptied into a moving truck.

"Tommy, what about Smokey, Bobby and the other cats? What will happen to them?"

"They'll be fine," Tommy reassured. "They won't starve. They'll keep eating the mice and live in the barn like they always do." Cindy went to pick one last bouquet and placed it on Buster's grave behind the woodshed.

Back at the car, Cindy found Tommy rearranging things in the trunk, putting something deep into the bottom.

"Whaddia doin'?" she asked. "Looks like you're hiding something."

"Never mind, and don't be a tattle-tale!" Tommy barked.

"I won't tell if you tell me what it is," Cindy bargained.

Tommy sighed. "It's Potato Champagne," he said with dignity.

"Sounds disgusting. What's in it besides potatoes?"

"You're too young to understand," Tommy said as he slammed the trunk down.

"I am not!" protested Cindy. "You are only thirteen months older than me. I understand everything!"

"OK," Tommy turned and spoke quietly. "It's booze, hooch."

"What's it made out of?" Cindy asked in a whisper.

"Potatoes, fruit, water, yeast and the icing sugar from Sandy's wedding cake. Put it in a big pail with a lid. It's been behind the playhouse since the wedding. I bottled and corked seven bottles this morning. Not leaving THAT behind!"

"YUK!" said Cindy, screwing up her face and sticking out her tongue. The thought that Tommy had also stolen something from Sandy's wedding cake made her wonder how she had gotten into so much trouble and Tommy hadn't.

"And you'd better not tattle," Tommy left the sentence hanging in the air.

Within the next few hours, every nook and cranny of the 1962 Pontiac was packed, leaving only room for Ma and Dad in the front and Tommy and Cindy in the back. Everyone was ready to go. Dad drove the car slower than usual as he made his way down the long driveway and past the mailbox at the gate. Cindy watched Aunt Liza's house get smaller.

"No more wolves howling," Cindy thought, taking one last look at The Bush Across The Road. She rolled the window down and took a deep breath. "No more stinky cow poop!" There were things Cindy would not miss. It was a hot day and the family settled in for the long five-hour drive to Timmins.

Half-way to Timmins, a strange loud POP came from the back of the car. Dad's foot came off the gas pedal and the car slowed.

"What was that?" Ma said.

"Don't know," Dad replied. "Maybe we hit something."

Then the smell came. Cindy looked at Tommy who was suddenly very interested in a book he was reading.

"Eeeooo!" Cindy whined. "What's that awful smell?"

"I don't smell anything," Tommy said calmly, nose still in his book.

Dad glared at Tommy in the rearview mirror as he pulled off to the side of the road. The family all got out as Dad walked around the back of the car and opened the trunk.

The smell was overpowering. A mixture of sour rotteness, that had sat in the heat way too long, was soaked into everything in the trunk. Tommy took a step back, hands in his pockets, his foot kicking a rock in front of him.

"Did you put hooch in the trunk?" asked Dad, shocked.

"It's all over everything!" shouted Ma. "How long have you been making hooch? And why would you bring it to Timmins?" Ma was very angry.

"I thought it would help me make friends," Tommy said, sheepishly.

"Lan-sakes-alive, child. What kind of friends are you looking to make?" Ma said, not really asking the question.

Even after a clean up at the next gas station, the smell never quite disappeared. Dad never found the six bottles still hidden in Tommy's suitcase.