

Oskar, the Watch-Pig



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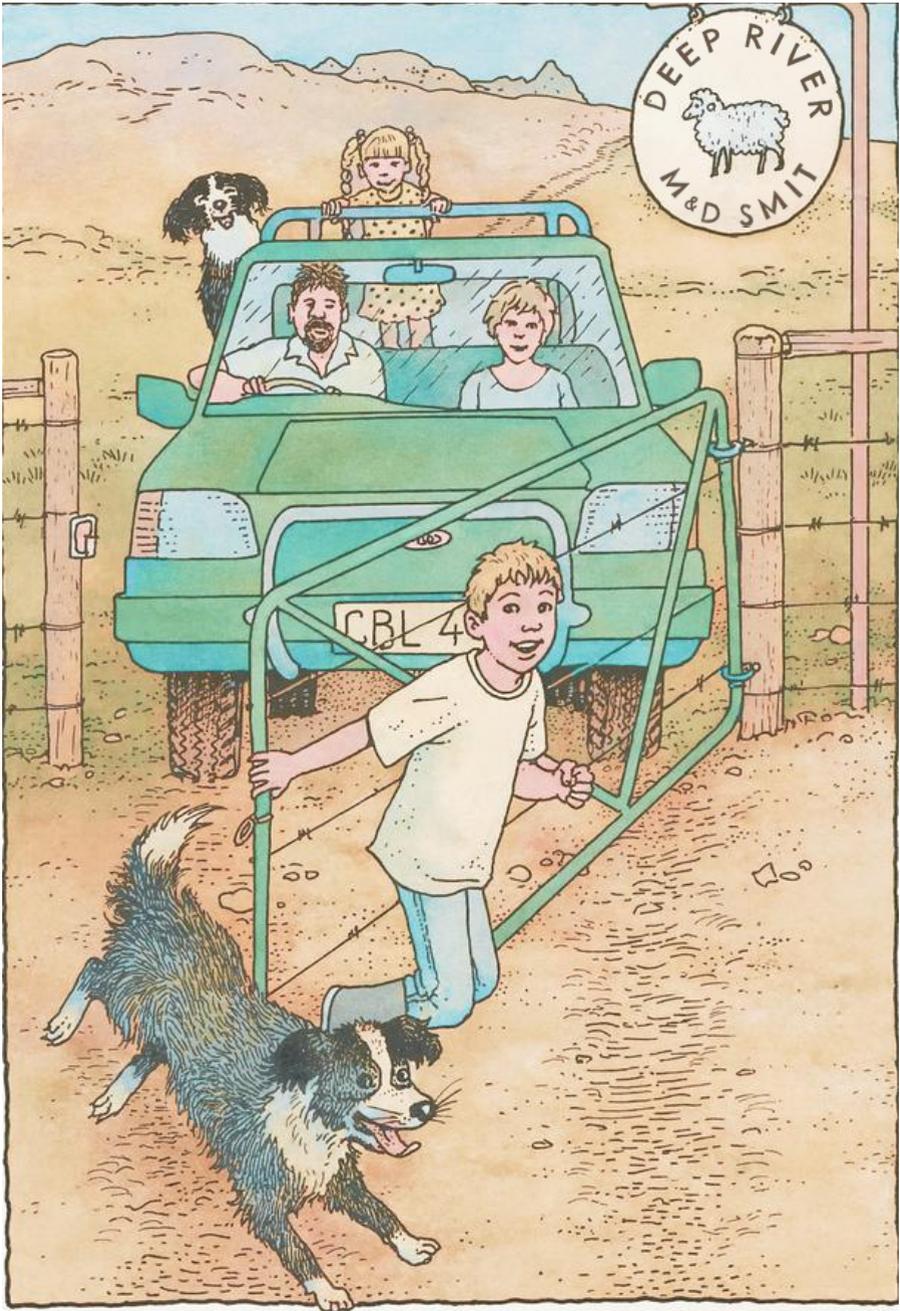
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Oskar, the Watch-Pig

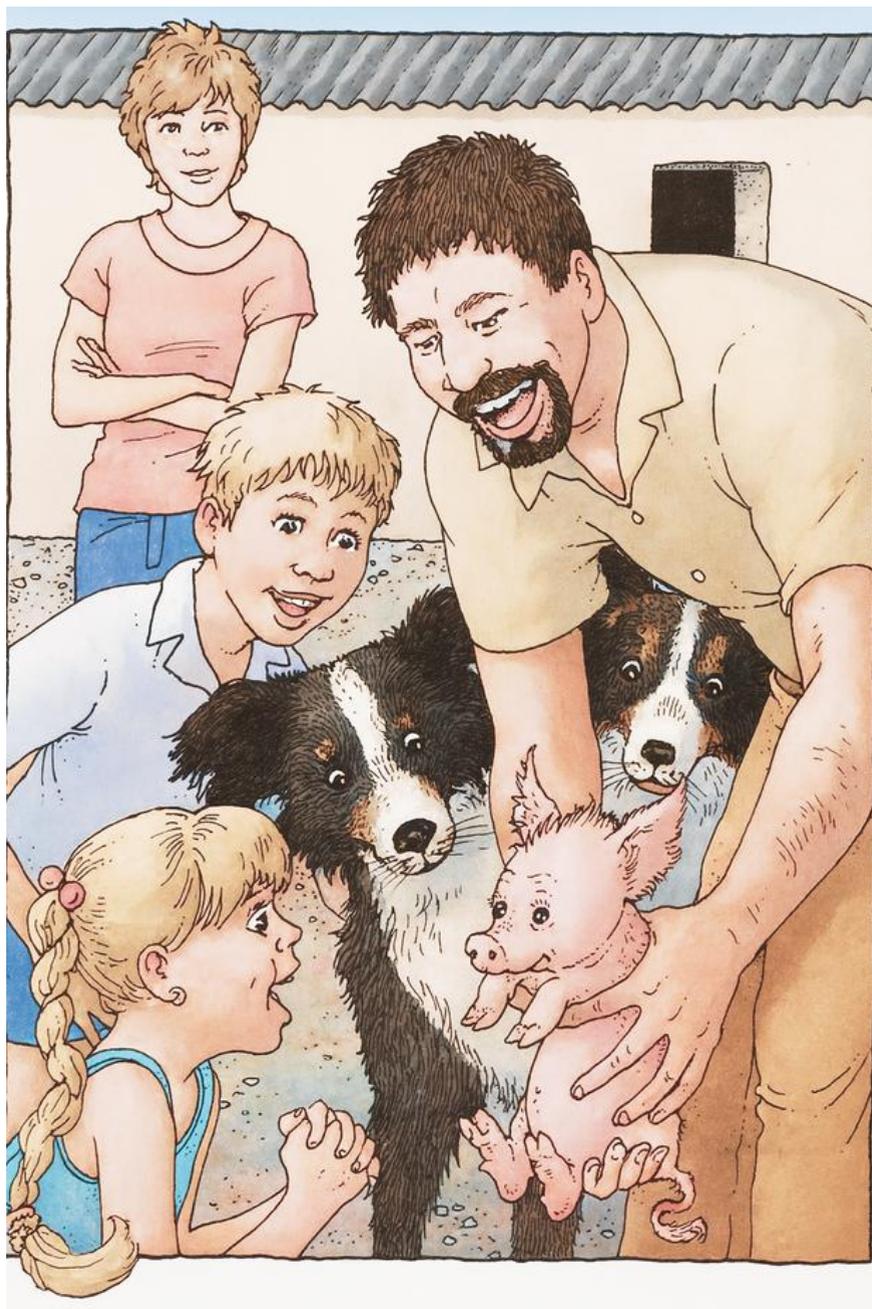
Far away from the city, at the end of a long dusty gravel road, there was a farm called “Deep River”.

Willem lived there with his parents and his little sister, Annamaria, and two bouncy sheep-dogs called Sökkies and Pop.

Willem's father was a farmer. He kept sheep for their wool, and chickens for their eggs. There were fields of vegetables and many, many fruit trees, full of apricots and pears and figs. They also had a beautiful cow called Saartjie, who gave buckets of delicious creamy milk for the children to drink. Their mother made some of the milk into cheese and yoghurt.

Willem and Annamaria knew they were lucky to live on a farm with wide open spaces and fields and a river. It was fascinating to see how skilfully Sökkies and Pop herded the sheep. Harvest time was the best time of year.

One day their father brought home a piglet from a neighbour. The piglet was tiny and pink and he had a rubbery, snuffly nose and bright eyes.



“He is only two days old. His mother has too many other babies so he has been given to us to rear,” Father said. Annamaria named the piglet Oskar.

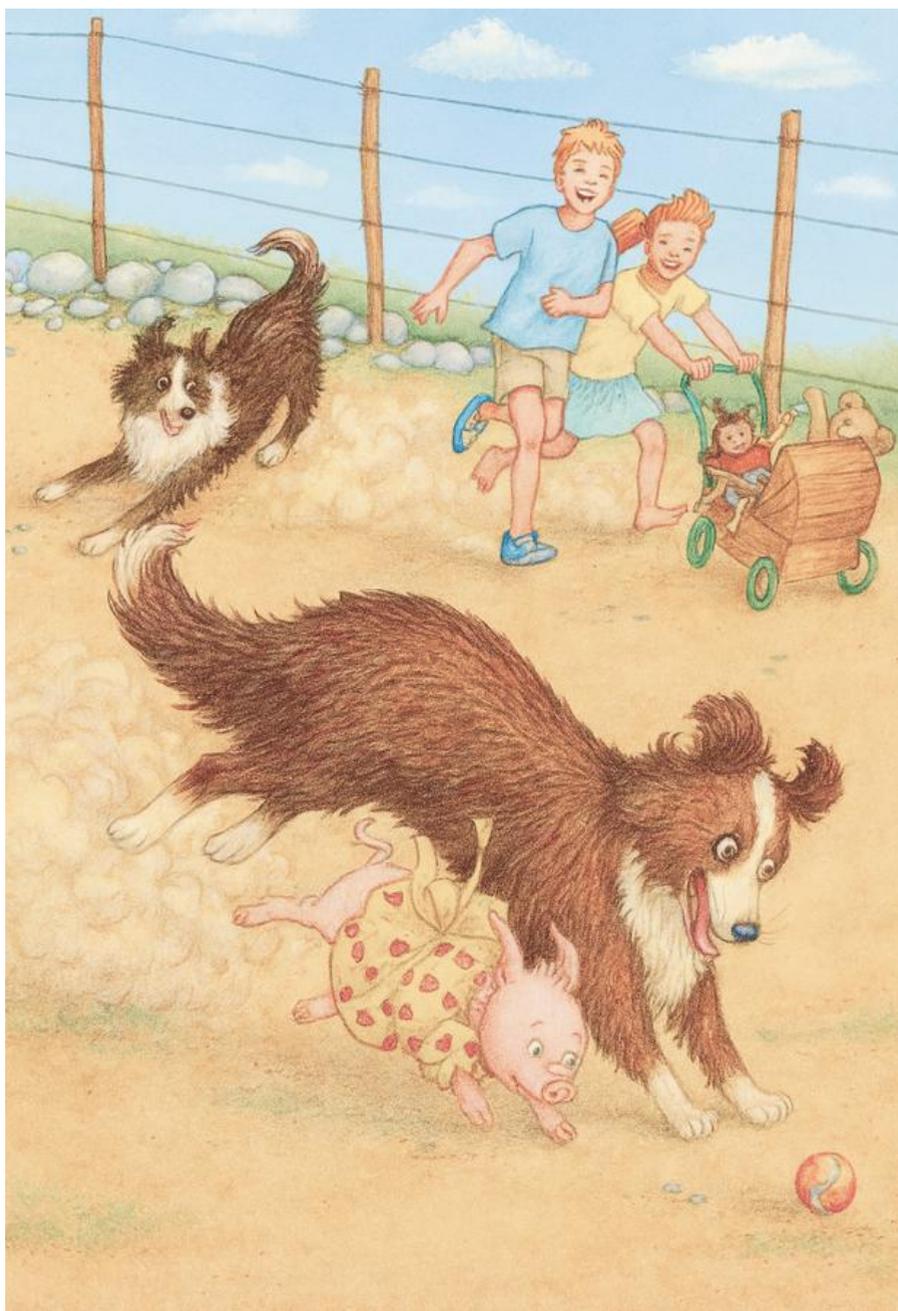
She wrapped Oskar in a blanket and fed him with a bottle. When his tummy was full she would hold him over her shoulder and burp him like a human baby. At night he slept in a cardboard box next to her bed, tucked up in his blanket. The children loved to see him scampering around on his little short legs, his ears flopping.

If he was left alone he would squeal in an amazingly loud voice, and the children would come running to pick him up and hold him close.

He quickly learned to do his puddles and pooh outside with Sökkies and Pop.

“He's so clever,” Willem said. “We can teach him all sorts of tricks.”

Their father looked worried. “Don't get too fond of Oskar,” he warned. “We're going to make him into sausage and bacon one day.”



“What?” Willem and Annamaria wailed. “Eat Oskar? How could we do such a horrible thing? Oskar is our friend!”

“This is a farm, kids,” said Father seriously. “We grow things for food. Pigs are raised for meat.”

“Not Oskar,” Willem shook his head. “I'm going to become a vegetarian. I'm not going to eat meat again, ever.”

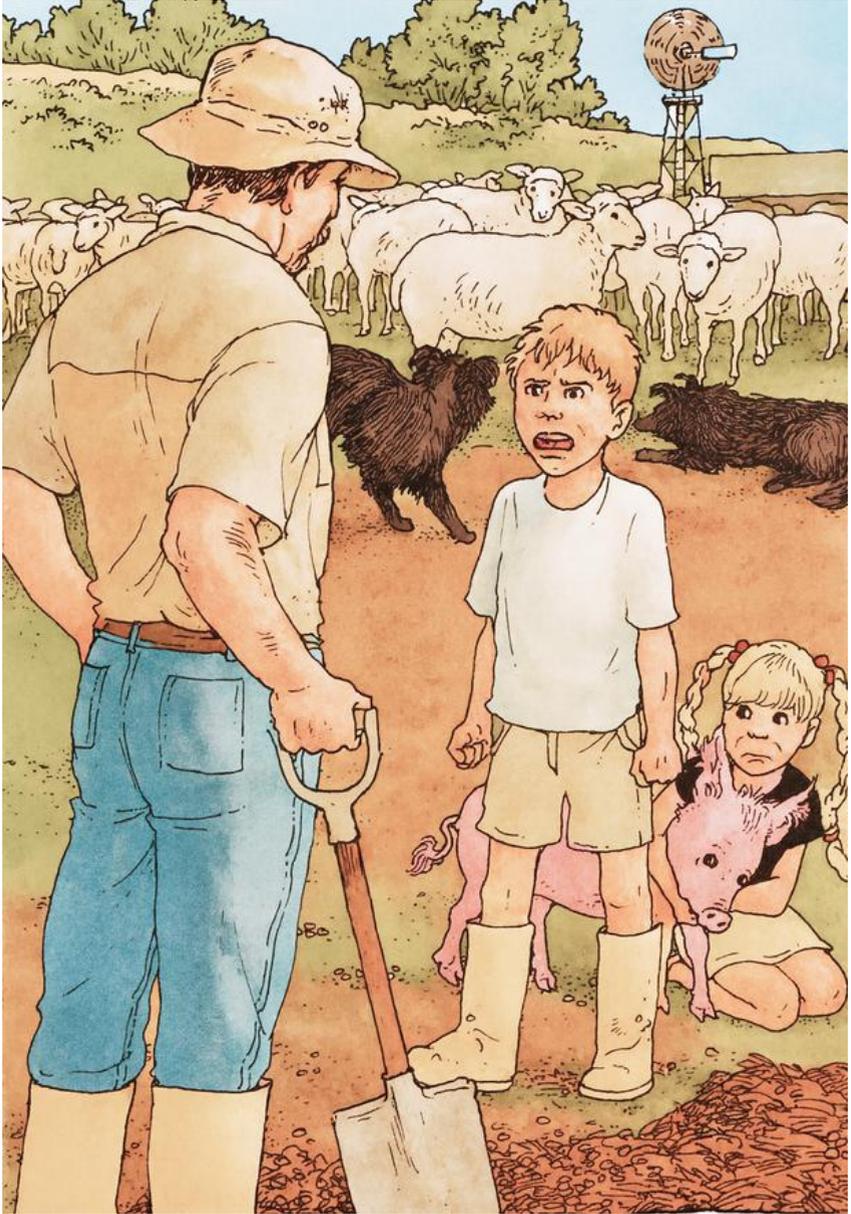
“You're too young to decide that,” said Father. “Now take off your muddy boots and go run your bath. Don't worry your heads about this meat business.”

But the children did worry.

Over the next few months Oskar grew and grew. He became plump and grew a beautiful coat of clean silver bristles. His cheeks filled out to make his face look lovely and smiling.

When the children came home from school he came running to meet them with Sökkies and Pop. The bigger and fatter Oskar became the more anxious Willem felt.

One day Oskar was no longer with the sheepdogs.

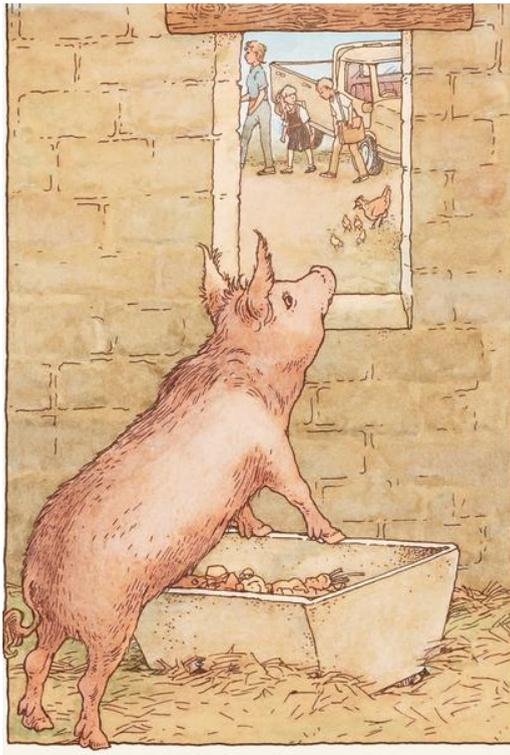


Oskar is Missing!

“Where is Oskar?” the children wanted to know. Father shook his head. “Don't ask so many questions! Go and do your homework,” he told them.

Oskar was shut in a shed. It was time for him to be slaughtered and made into bacon and sausages.

“Why? Why? You can't do this!” the children cried.



“We do need the meat,” said their Mother. “You've eaten plenty of sausages. You love them. And how can we run a farm without eating some of the animals?”

“I hate the farm!” cried Willem. “I wish we lived in a town and bought our food from shops!”

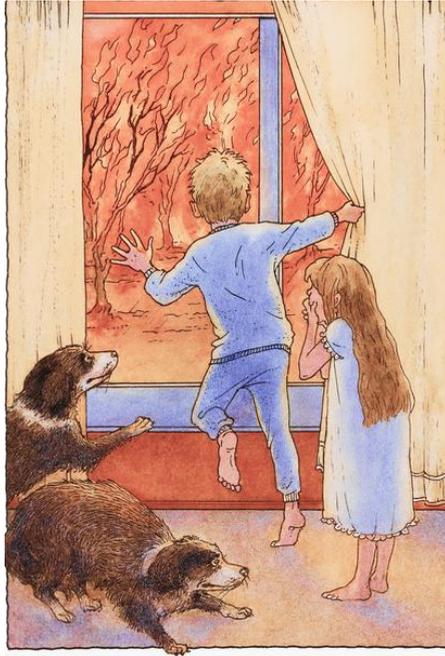
“Well, where do you think the shops get their meat from?” asked Father.

“Just leave Oskar alone!” said Willem angrily. Both children were sent to bed crying.

“I'm afraid we've handled this rather badly,” Willem heard Father say as he closed the bedroom door.

The Farm is on Fire

In the middle of the night Willem was wakened by a terrible squealing. Something was very wrong. Sökkies and Pop ran around with their tails down. A frightening red glow flickered outside the children's bedroom windows. Willem dragged back the curtains. A sickening sight met his eyes. Orange flames were peeping through the apricot trees. The barn was burning. Sparks swarmed upwards against the black sky like a million angry bees. There was a harsh crackling noise as even bigger flames suddenly burst from a store of fence poles.



“PA! MA! THE FARM IS ON FIRE!” shouted Willem in terror. Mother and Father leaped out of bed and rushed out of the house, dragging on jackets and boots as they ran. The terrible squealing and screaming got louder and louder. It was Oskar, shut in his shed!

After that there was great confusion. Neighbouring farmers brought in teams of firefighters. People rushed around shouting. The bright lights of motor cars swerved here and there. Water was pumped from dams and the river. Choking smoke billowed all about the farmhouse. Sökkies and Pop bravely herded the sheep into the veld and stayed with them.



Where is Oskar?

Willem and Annamaria were taken to the neighbouring farm for safety. Just after sunrise their father came to fetch them. Soot blackened his face; there were holes burned in his shirt, and his eyes were red. He was exhausted but smiling.

“The farm is safe,” he said.

“We had amazing help. The barn is damaged and we lost some trees, but the house and all the farm animals are fine. And it's thanks to Oskar and you, Willem, who alerted us. Without you both, it could have been so much worse.”

“Where is Oskar?” asked Willem.

“Oskar is safe,” said Father. “I think he has shown us what a good watch-pig he is. Perhaps we can do without a bit of bacon.”

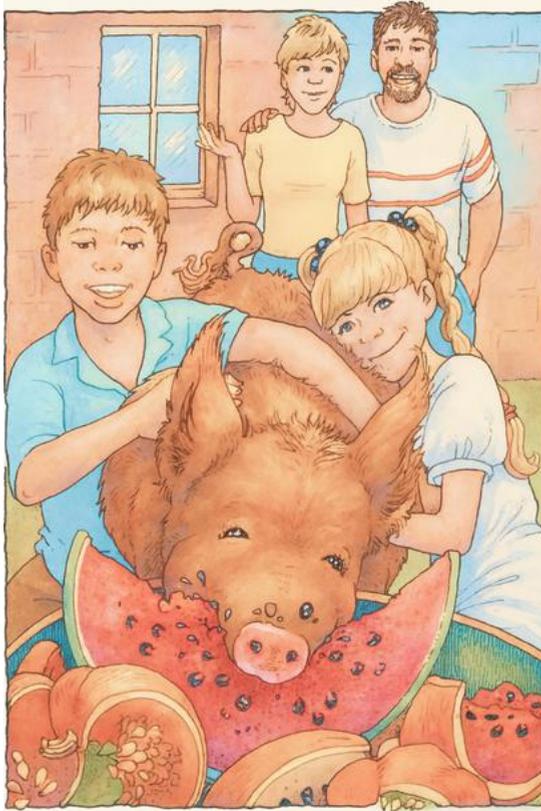
Willem and Annamaria threw themselves into their father's sooty arms, whooping and shrieking. “Oskar is saved! Oskar is saved!”



Time for Celebration

They had a great celebration when the farmyard was cleaned up the next day. There was much for which to be thankful. Oskar was treated to a huge bucket of pumpkin and watermelon, his favourite dessert!

And that is the story of how the farm Deep River got its watch-pig.



ACTIVITY

Identify the feelings experienced by Willem and Annamaria in each of the questions



This book promotes the development of compassion,
respect and justice for all life, through literacy.



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