

# Summary of Little House on the Prairie

## Chapter 1, Going West

Pa and Ma and their daughters Mary, Laura, and Baby Carrie leave the Big Woods of Wisconsin to move West to Indian country. They are moving because the Big Woods is getting too crowded. Pa sells the house and packs all their belongings into a covered wagon. They say goodbye to their family and leave early one winter morning to cross the Mississippi before the ice breaks. They travel across Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri and into prairies of Kansas. Along the way, they trade their tired horses for two black mustangs that Mary and Laura name Pet and Pat. Their dog Jack travels the whole distance by walking under the wagon.

## Chapter 2, Crossing the Creek

The wagon slides slowly down a narrow ravine in the cliffs, to reach a swiftly moving creek, where Jack and the horses drink water. The creek is running high, but the Pa decides to cross it. Laura wishes Jack could ride in the wagon, but Pa says he can swim. The horses pull the wagon into the creek. The wagon starts floating, and the horses start swimming. The creek suddenly rises, and Pa jumps in to swim alongside the horses, guiding them. The wagon makes it to the other side, but Jack is gone. Pa searches for Jack, to no avail. They leave the creek and travel up another ravine to the High Prairie.

## Chapter 3, Camp on the High Prairie

The family stops to set up camp for the night. Pa clears a section of grass to build a campfire. Laura and Mary help Ma make a supper. Pa says there is good land, timber at the creek bottoms and plenty of game. The family thinks about settling there. They hear wolves howling in the darkness. After dinner something appears from out of the dark and approaches the campfire. Pa grabs his rifle, thinking it is a wolf or coyote. It turns out to be Jack, who somehow made it across the creek. The family is happy to have him back.

## Chapter 4, Prairie Day

The family wakes up and has breakfast. Pa goes hunting. Mary and Laura help tidy the camp and then play on the prairie, while Ma washes clothes. Laura tells Ma she wants to see an Indian papoose. Pa returns with a large rabbit and two prairie hens for dinner. He says the prairie is filled with game and the creek is filled with fish. He wants to settle there.

## Chapter 5, The House on the Prairie

The family breaks camp and moves across the prairie, eventually stopping at a spot where the creek is close by. They unload the wagon and make a tent with the wagon cover. Laura finds an old Indian trail nearby. For days, Pa cuts and hauls logs to build a house and stable. He starts to build the log cabin, but work stops when a log falls on Ma, spraining her ankle. Fortunately, Pa meets a bachelor neighbor, Mr. Edwards, a couple miles away to help finish the house. In one day, they construct walls, with holes for windows and a door, and a skeleton roof. Ma invites Mr. Edwards to stay for dinner. Pa entertains everyone with the fiddle, and Mr. Edwards dances.

## Chapter 6, Moving In

The log cabin has no floor, but Pa wants to move in for protection from the wolves. Ma and the girls clean the wood chips from the floor, and Pa uses the wagon cover as a

temporary roof. Ma wants to send a letter to their family in Wisconsin, but the nearest post office is 40 miles away, in the town of Independence. Pa hangs a quilt over the door opening, and they spend their first night in their new home.

### **Chapter 7, The Wolf-Pack**

Pa and Mr. Edwards build a stable for the horses. Pet gives birth to a colt, whom the girls name Bunny. Pa sets off on Patty to explore more of the prairie. Later that afternoon, Jack and Pet start acting nervous and agitated. Suddenly Pa and Patty come racing back across the prairie. During supper, Pa says he met more neighbors along the creek. He took a short cut across the prairie, and a pack of fifty, large wolves appeared and surrounded him. Fortunately, they must have just eaten a meal because they did not attack. Pa kept Patty to a trot, and the pack followed them, eventually moving away to the creek. Later that night, while the family is sleeping, the wolves come and form a ring around the house. They start howling. Pa and Jack stay up all night, watching.

### **Chapter 8, Two Stout Doors**

The next morning, the wolf pack is gone, having followed a herd of deer. Pa gets timber, and Laura helps him build the door. There are no more nails so Pa uses wooden pegs. They eat the last of the salt pork for dinner, so the next day Pa goes hunting. Then he and Laura build a door for the stable.

### **Chapter 9, A Fire on the Hearth**

After helping Mr. Edwards build his house, Pa starts on a fireplace. He takes Laura and Mary with him to the creek to collect rocks. Pa uses a mixture of clay and water to lay the rocks for the fireplace and part of the chimney. He uses saplings and mud plaster to finish the top of the chimney. He cuts a hole in the side of the house and builds a mantel around it. Then he makes a table, and Ma cooks a prairie hen in the fireplace. The family eats inside, using chunks of big logs for chairs.

### **Chapter 10, A Roof and a Floor**

After chores, Mary and Laura spend their days outside on the prairie. Laura is getting impatient that she hasn't seen any Indians yet. Pa hauls logs for days and splits them into long slabs. Mr. Edwards gives him nails, and Pa lays the roof. Then he hauls more logs and splits them in half. He lays them face up, side by side, to make a floor. Finally he fills the cracks in the walls by wedging thin strips of wood and plastering them with mud. Pa says if he earns enough money from hunting and trapping, he will buy glass for the windows.

### **Chapter 11, Indians in the House**

Pa leaves to go hunting. Jack wants to go, but Pa chains him to the stable to guard the house. He orders Laura and Mary to not let Jack loose. The girls are sitting by Jack, comforting him, when Jack starts to growl. Two Indians approach and go into the house. Jack starts growling and lunging, the girls fear for Ma and Carrie. Laura wants to let Jack go, but Mary says no. Laura and Mary run into the house. The Indians are standing by the fireplace, and Ma is cooking. The Indians smell badly because they are wearing skunk skins. They eat the cornbread and leave. Pa returns. Ma says they are short of cornmeal, and the Indians took Pa's tobacco. Pa chastises Laura for wanting to let Jack loose.

## **Chapter 12, Fresh Water to Drink**

Pa makes a bedstead for him and Ma, with a shelf on top for storage. Ma fills the straw-tick mattress with clean, dry grass. Pa starts digging a well. He digs until he is too deep to throw the dirt out. He trades work with a neighbor, Mr. Scott. They build a windlass with two buckets over the well. They take turns digging and turning the windlass to haul the buckets of dirt. Every day, Pa sends a lit candle down the well to check for poisonous gas. Mr. Scott thinks it's unnecessary. One morning Mr. Scott says the well is fine, even though he hasn't sent a candle. He starts digging and loses consciousness. Pa ties the windlass rope around himself and goes down the well to rescue him. Pa lights a small sack of gunpowder and throws it down the well to disperse the gas. They resume digging and finally reach water. Pa builds a platform over the well, and the family has fresh drinking water.

## **Chapter 13, Texas Longhorns**

Cowboys come through the prairie, with a cattle herd, on the way to Texas. They hire Pa to help keep the cattle out of the ravines as they cross the creek bottoms. As payment, the cowboys give Pa a cow, with her calf, and a chunk of beef. The family enjoys beef steaks for dinner, and Carrie gets the first cup of fresh milk.

## **Chapter 14, Indian Camp**

It is midsummer and the days are hot. Pa, Mary and Laura walk across the prairie to a deserted Indian camp. They see ashes from the campfires, holes from the tent poles, and tracks from moccasins and animals. They find Indian beads, and Mary and Laura collect a handful each. Mary gives her beads to Carrie, and Laura does too because she doesn't want to look selfish. Ma gives them string to make a necklace for the baby.

## **Chapter 15, Fever 'N' Ague**

The hot weather brings swarms of mosquitoes, and everyone is constantly bitten. Laura is achy and feverish, and the whole family soon is sick. Ma and Pa try to take care of the girls, but eventually they are too weak to do anything. Dr. Tan, a black doctor who cares for the Indians, happens by the house and finds them. He and Mrs. Scott nurse them back to health. Settlers all over the prairie have the "fever 'n' ague", which is known today as malaria and is contracted through mosquitoes. The family is very weak, and Pa recuperates in the house by making a rocking chair for Ma.

## **Chapter 16, Fire in the Chimney**

Fall comes and Pa prepares to travel to Independence for supplies. He goes hunting to get enough meat for Ma and the girls while he is away. The afternoon is cold and windy, and Ma builds a fire. They hear crackling in the chimney, and Ma goes outside to find the top of the chimney on fire. She knocks the burning saplings off the chimney with a long pole. A burning stick rolls under Mary, who is sitting in the rocking chair with Carrie. Laura pulls the rocking chair away, and throws the stick back into the fireplace. Ma douses the fire with water. Pa comes home and rebuilds the chimney with green saplings and mud.

## **Chapter 17, Pa Goes to Town**

Pa leaves for Independence. Ma, the girls and Jack are nervous without him. Mr. Edwards comes by everyday to check on them and help with chores. Mrs. Scott comes by to visit and talks about how bad the Indians are. Mr. Edwards says Indians are camping in the bluffs. The days are extremely cold and windy. Pa finally returns home, with plenty of supplies and glass for the windows.

## **Chapter 18, The Tall Indian**

Indians start riding by on the path next to the house. Jack does not like them and has to stay chained up. An Indian comes to the house. Ma cooks dinner, and Pa and the Indian eat silently together. Then they silently smoke. The Osage Indian speaks French, but Pa doesn't understand. Winter is coming, and Pa hunts and traps everyday. He stretches and dries animal skins for trading next spring. One day while he is gone, two mean-looking Indians come. They take all the cornbread and tobacco. One wants to take the animal furs, but the other stops him. Pa tells Laura the government will make the Indians move west, now that settlers are coming to the prairie.

## **Chapter 19, Mr. Edwards Meets Santa Claus**

The winter days are cold, windy and rainy. Mary and Laura know that Santa will not come because it's not snowing and the creek is too high. Pa shoots a wild turkey for Christmas dinner, and Ma hangs the girls' stockings anyway. Early Christmas morning, Mr. Edwards appears at the door, freezing cold from crossing the creek and bearing gifts for Mary and Laura. Ma puts the presents in the stockings, while Mr. Edwards tells the girls how Santa met him in Independence and asked him to deliver the presents. In each stocking is a tin cup (so Mary and Laura don't have to share anymore), a peppermint stick, a little heart-shaped cake, and a penny. Mr. Edwards also brings sweet potatoes for the dinner. Everyone has a happy Christmas.

## **Chapter 20, A Scream in the Night**

The girls spend the cold winter days inside, while Pa hunts and traps. One night, a terrible scream wakes everyone up. Pa thinks it might be Mrs. Scott and goes out to check on them. The Scott house is peaceful, and on the way back, Pa hears the scream again, under his feet. It's a panther in a treetop in the bluffs below. Pa does not let the girls play outside until he has killed the panther. He tracks it for days but doesn't find it. He meets an Indian who, through sign language, tells him he killed the panther the day before.

## **Chapter 21, Indian Jamboree**

Pa leaves for Independence to trade his furs. One day, Laura and Mary hear the Indians chanting. Ma is nervous. They do their chores early and lock themselves in the house. The Indian chanting continues into the night. Pa returns and says there is some kind of Indian jamboree going on at the creek. In town, he bought a plow and seeds, along with food supplies. He brings crackers and pickles for a treat. He gives Ma calico material for a dress and the girls each, a headband.

## **Chapter 22, Prairie Fire**

Spring comes, and Pa starts plowing the field. Many Indians are riding along the trail now. They come to the house often, for food and tobacco. One day billowing black clouds cover the sun. Pa runs from the field with the plow, shouting that it is a prairie fire. He and the horses plow a furrow around the house and stable. Laura and Ma fill a tub with water and soak sacks in it. Pa starts small fires on the other side of the furrow, and Ma beats the flames that cross the furrow with the wet sacks. The prairie fire approaches fast, and Pa's backfire meets it. Pa and Ma beat out small fires in the yard. The fire roars past and away. Mr. Edwards and Mr. Scott wonder if the Indians set the fire to get rid of the settlers. Pa says the Indians are peaceful, and many tribes have gathered in the bluffs to get ready for the spring buffalo hunt.

### **Chapter 23, Indian War-Cry**

More Indians are at the creek, and there is an uneasiness in the air. Pa leaves the field early and locks everyone in at night. They hear wild drumming and yelling from the Indian camps, and then the war-cries start. Pa sees an Osage Indian racing along the trail towards the Indian camps. The days are quiet, but the war-cries resume every night. No one goes outside, and no one can sleep. Pa says the tribes are quarreling. Finally the tribes leave the camps, traveling west and south. Pa meets an Osage Indian who tells him that the other tribes wanted to massacre the settlers. The Osage Indian that Pa saw racing toward the camps was a great soldier who stood up to the tribes and threatened to fight them.

### **Chapter 24, Indians Ride Away**

The prairie is peaceful again. One morning the family sees Indians riding on the trail, heading west. They are led by the great Osage soldier. All day long, Osage Indians ride by the house, including women and children. Laura sees the Indian babies and wants one.

### **Chapter 25, Soldiers**

Spring comes, and grass starts to grow on the burned prairie. The family plants seeds in the field and in a garden by the house. Mr. Edwards and Mr. Scott tell Pa that the government now says they are 3 miles into Indian territory and have to leave. Soldiers are coming to take the settlers out, but Pa says they will leave tomorrow. He decides to head north towards Independence. Pa gives Mr. Scott the cow and calf. Mr. Edwards says goodbye to the family. Ma and Pa get the covered wagon ready for loading the next morning. They have been on the prairie for a year.

### **Chapter 26, Going Out**

The family loads the wagon and sets out north, along the creek. They come across a couple sitting on their wagon. Someone had stolen their horses during the night. The couple refuses to leave their wagon, and belongings, to ride with the family to Independence. Pa says he will send a soldier for them, once they reach town. Night comes and the family stops at a burned house with a well. They set up camp and eat dinner. Pa plays the fiddle until the girls fall asleep.