

A Prairie Thanksgiving

Laura basked in the buttery sun, wisps of her plain brown hair tickled her cheeks as she lay staring at the cloudless sky. Thanksgiving was tomorrow, and it would be the warmest one in years. Days ago, Laura's nose had turned a beautiful cherry red in the frigid air. She'd gone to sleep that night nestled under thick blankets Ma had laid out, the music of Pa's fiddle still dancing in her head, just to awaken to the sun, bright and balmy like it'd never really left at all.

Laura ripped out a tuft of grass, tossing the blades into the creek below, and watched them float away like dandelions scattered in the wind. She thought about last year when Pa's crop had been destroyed by a fierce hailstorm. They'd barely had anything to eat that Thanksgiving. Now, Laura's mouth watered at the thought of the apple pie Ma had made. Laura pinched the edges while Mary laid two perfect little dough leaves on top. Then there was the pig Pa had smoked, and the fresh butter Ma had churned, all pretty and yellow upon the table. It would be the best Thanksgiving ever. They'd have enough to fill their bellies and even have a little left over, and that thought made her skip all the way back home.

Soon, the heavy rattle of wagon wheels clattered down the hill. A man hollered at Pa, who hopped onto the buckboard as the horses turned, rushing back the way they'd come. He didn't return until after dark. It felt like forever until Pa trudged slowly inside and sank wearily into a chair.

"The Martins' house caught on fire. They have nothing left but the clothes on their backs," Pa said.

Laura's eyes were round as she thought of the Martins and their five children.

"They're sleeping in the barn until they can rebuild for winter. A few of us men are going over tomorrow to help."

"But, Pa! Tomorrow's Thanksgiving!" Laura whispered.

"Yes, Laura. It is," was all Pa said.

As Laura trudged to bed, all she could think about was the Thanksgiving meal they'd prepared for tomorrow...and how their friends would have nothing.

The next morning, Laura swallowed hard as she watched Ma ready the table.

"Ready to eat, girls? Pa has some time before he goes to the Martins', so we can eat together."

Mary and Laura looked at each other. "Could we take our food to share with the Martins instead?"

Ma smiled. "I was hoping you girls would say that."

Laura couldn't help but try not to cry all the same.

When they arrived at the Martins', Laura spotted her friend Tommy Martin. The smells wafting from the basket on her arm made it seem even heavier.

“We brought you food for Thanksgiving,” she mumbled. Tommy snuffled, refusing to let the tears in his eyes spill onto his cheeks.

As Laura stepped forward, she stumbled, and the worn string on her boot they’d tried to salvage so many times broke for the last time. She sighed, pulling the broken pieces out while Tommy dug in his pocket for his knife. Leaning down, he cut off a long piece of one of his own laces, tying each end of Laura’s broken one to the ends of the new piece.

“But, Tommy!” Laura objected.

“Mine’s still plenty long. You need it more than me,” he said.

That night, as the Ingalls girls nibbled on their fried pies Ma had made for each of them, Laura listened to Pa playing his fiddle by the glow of the firelight. His words from the night before played in her mind. “*They have nothing left but the clothes on their backs.*”

Tommy had willingly given her all he had...the gift of a true friend. She guessed there was always something you could do to help each other, even if you didn’t think you had much to give. And giving what little you had was the most meaningful gift of all. She smiled, hoping the Martins were enjoying their Thanksgiving meal. Her own table may be scarce tonight, but Laura’s heart and her home was full, and that’s all she could ever ask for.