

LAURA INGALLS WILDER

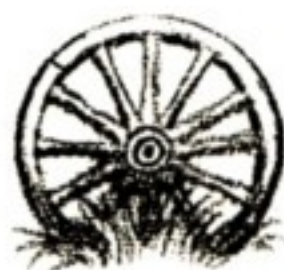
# The Long Winter



ILLUSTRATED BY GARTH WILLIAMS



## MAKE HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES



**T**he mowing machine's whirring sounded cheerfully from the old buffalo wallow south of the claim shanty, where bluestem grass stood thick and tall and Pa was cutting it for hay.

The sky was high and quivering with heat over the shimmering prairie. Half-way down to sunset, the sun blazed as hotly as at noon. The wind was scorching hot. But Pa had hours of mowing yet to do before he could stop for the night.

Laura drew up a pailful of water from the well at the edge of the Big Slough. She rinsed the brown jug till it was cool to her hand. Then she filled it with the fresh, cool water, corked it tightly, and started with it to the hayfield.

Swarms of little white butterflies hovered over the path. A dragon-fly with gauzy wings swiftly chased a

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gnat. On the stubble of cut grass the striped gophers were scampering. All at once they ran for their lives and dived into their holes. Then Laura saw a swift shadow and looked up at the eyes and the claws of a hawk overhead. But all the little gophers were safe in their holes.

Pa was glad to see Laura with the water-jug. He got down from the mowing machine and drank a mouthful. "Ah! that hits the spot!" he said, and tipped up the jug again. Then he corked it, and setting it on the ground he covered it with cut grass.

"This sun almost makes a fellow want a bunch of sprouts to make a shade," he joked. He was really glad there were no trees; he had grubbed so many sprouts from his clearing in the Big Woods, every summer. Here on the Dakota prairies there was not a single tree, not one sprout, not a bit of shade anywhere.

"A man works better when he's warmed up, anyway!" Pa said cheerfully, and chirruped to the horses. Sam and David plodded on, drawing the machine. The long, steel-toothed blade went steadily whirring against the tall grass and laid it down flat. Pa rode high on the open iron seat, watching it lie down, his hand on the lever.

Laura sat in the grass to watch him go once around. The heat there smelled as good as an oven when bread is baking. The little brown-and-yellow-

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striped gophers were hurrying again, all about her. Tiny birds fluttered and flew to cling to bending grass-stems, balancing lightly. A striped garter snake came flowing and curving through the forest of grass. Sitting hunched with her chin on her knees, Laura felt suddenly as big as a mountain when the snake curved up its head and stared at the high wall of her calico skirt.

Its round eyes were shining like beads, and its tongue was flickering so fast that it looked like a tiny jet of steam. The whole bright-striped snake had a gentle look. Laura knew that garter snakes will not harm anyone, and they are good to have on a farm because they eat the insects that spoil crops.

It stretched its neck low again and, making a perfectly square turn in itself because it could not climb over Laura, it went flowing around her and away in the grass.

Then the mowing machine whirred louder and the horses came nodding their heads slowly in time with their feet. David jumped when Laura spoke almost under his nose.

“Whoa!” Pa said, startled. “Laura! I thought you’d gone. Why are you hiding in the grass like a prairie chicken?”

“Pa,” Laura said, “why can’t *I* help you make hay? Please let me, Pa. Please.”

Pa lifted his hat and ran his fingers through his

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