

## Selection 4

LAURA INGALLS WILDER

# By the Shores of Silver Lake



ILLUSTRATED BY GARTH WILLIAMS

### Strategy Focus

Laura and her family are going on their first train trip. As you read, think of **questions** about what they see and think during their train ride.



*The Ingalls family is leaving their farm on Plum Creek and heading west. They have been sick with scarlet fever — Mary so severely that she has gone blind. Now they are well enough to travel. Pa has gone ahead to work for the railroad and to claim a homestead, a piece of land given by the government to settlers willing to farm it. Ma, Mary, Laura, Carrie, and baby Grace are taking the train to meet him.*

## Riding in the Cars

When the time came, Laura could hardly believe it was real. The weeks and months had been endless, and now suddenly they were gone. Plum Creek, and the house, and all the slopes and fields she knew so well, were gone; she would never see them again. The last crowded days of packing, cleaning, scrubbing, washing, and ironing, and the last minute flurry of bathing and dressing were over. Clean and starched and dressed-up, in the morning of a weekday, they sat in a row on the bench in the waiting room while Ma bought the tickets.

In an hour they would be riding on the railroad cars.

The two satchels stood on the sunny platform outside the waiting-room door. Laura kept an eye on them, and on Grace, as Ma had told her to. Grace sat still in her little starched white lawn dress and bonnet, her feet in small new shoes sticking straight out. At the ticket window, Ma carefully counted money out of her pocketbook.



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Traveling on the train cost money. They had not paid anything to travel in the wagon, and this was a beautiful morning to be riding in the wagon along new roads. It was a September day and small clouds were hurrying in the sky. All the girls were in school now; they would see the train go roaring by and know that Laura was riding in it. Trains went faster than horses can run. They went so terribly fast that often they were wrecked. You never knew what might happen to you on a train.

Ma put the tickets inside her mother-of-pearl pocketbook and carefully snapped shut its little steel clasps. She looked so nice in her dark delaine dress with white lace collar and cuffs. Her hat was black straw with a narrow turned-up brim and a white spray of lilies-of-the-valley standing up at one side of the crown. She sat down and took Grace on her lap.

Now there was nothing to do but wait. They had come an hour early to be sure not to miss the train.

Laura smoothed her dress. It was brown calico sprinkled with small red flowers. Her hair hung down her back in long, brown braids, and a red ribbon bow tied their ends together. There was a red ribbon around the crown of her hat too.

Mary's dress was gray calico with sprays of blue flowers. Her wide-brimmed straw hat had a blue ribbon on it. And under the hat, her poor short hair was held back from her face by a blue ribbon tied around her head. Her lovely blue eyes did not see anything. But she said, "Don't fidget, Carrie, you'll muss your dress."

Laura craned to look at Carrie, sitting beyond Mary. Carrie was small and thin in pink calico, with pink ribbons on her brown braids and her hat. She flushed miserably because Mary found fault with her, and Laura was going to say, "You come over by me, Carrie, and fidget all you want to!"

Just then Mary's face lighted up with joy and she said, "Ma, Laura's fidgeting, too! I can tell she is, without seeing!"

"So she is, Mary," Ma said, and Mary smiled in satisfaction.



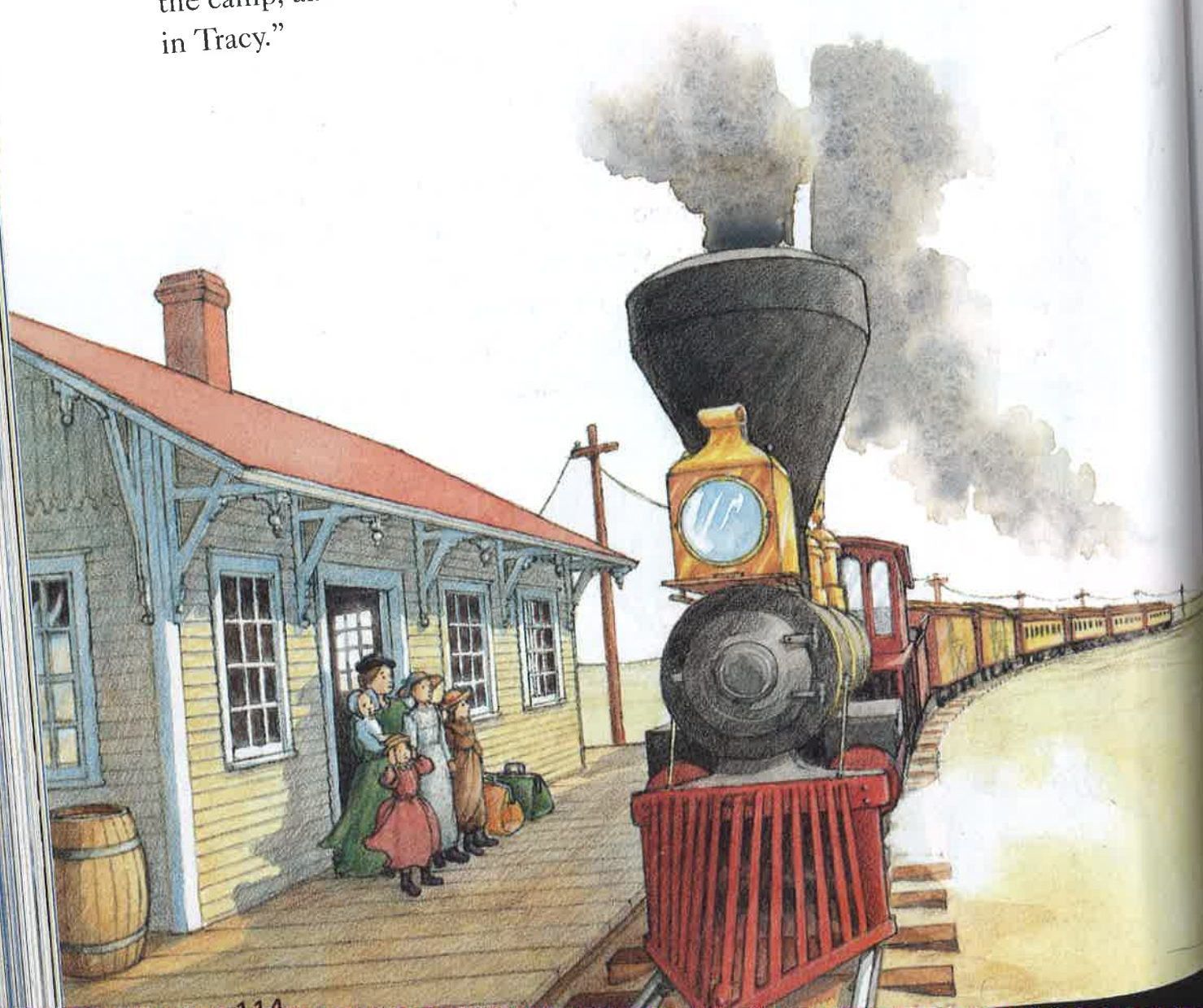


Laura was ashamed that in her thoughts she had been cross with Mary. She did not say anything. She got up and she was passing in front of Ma without saying a word. Ma had to remind her, "Say 'Excuse me,' Laura."

"Excuse me, Ma. Excuse me, Mary," Laura said politely, and she sat down beside Carrie. Carrie felt safer when she was between Laura and Mary. Carrie was really afraid of going on a train. Of course she would never say that she was frightened, but Laura knew.

"Ma," Carrie asked timidly, "Pa will surely meet us, won't he?"

"He is coming to meet us," Ma said. "He has to drive in from the camp, and it will take him all day. We are going to wait for him in Tracy."



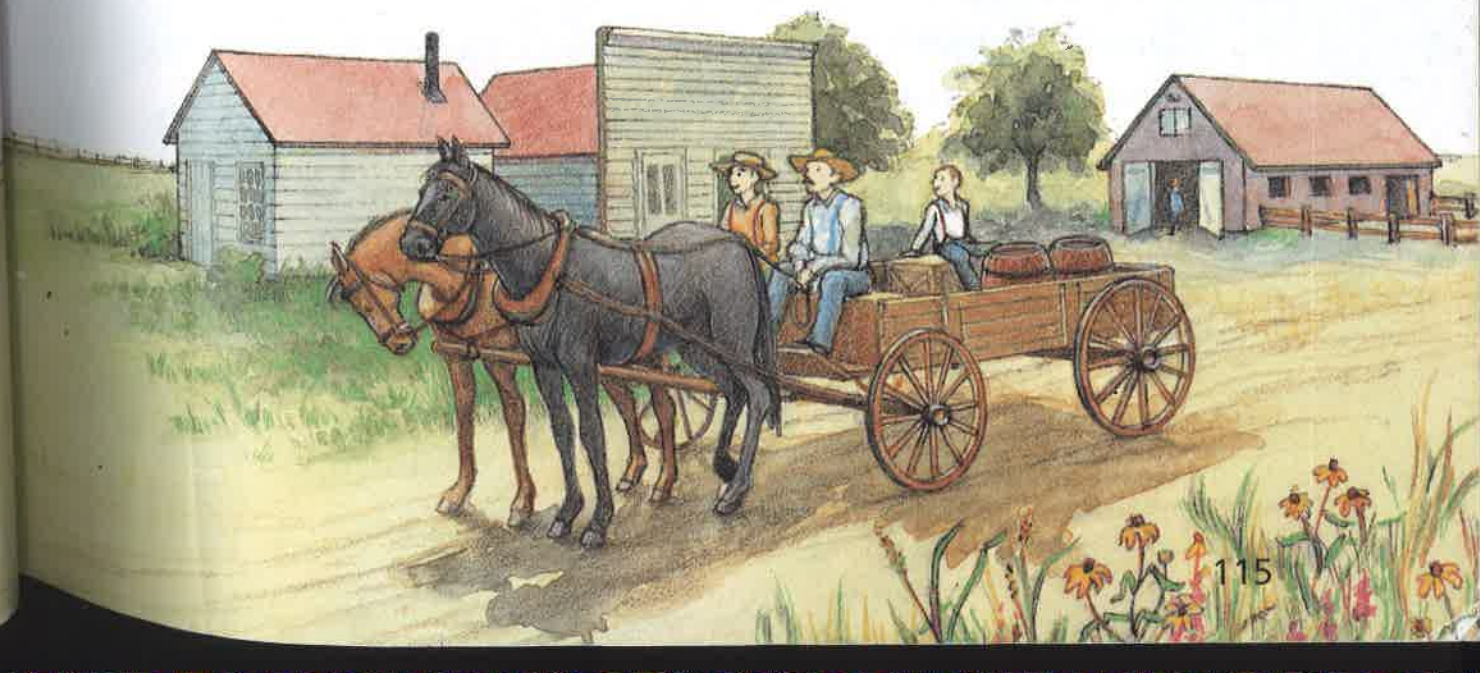
"Will he — will he get there before night, Ma?" Carrie asked. Ma said she hoped so.

You cannot tell what may happen when you go traveling on a train. It is not like starting out all together in a wagon. So Laura said bravely, "Maybe Pa's got our homestead picked out, already. You guess what it's like, Carrie, and then I'll guess."

They could not talk very well, because all the time they were waiting, and listening for the train. At long, long last, Mary said she thought she heard it. Then Laura heard a faint, faraway hum. Her heart beat so fast that she could hardly listen to Ma.

Ma lifted Grace on her arm, and with her other hand she took tight hold of Carrie's. She said, "Laura, you come behind me with Mary. Be careful, now!"

The train was coming, louder. They stood by the satchels on the platform and saw it coming. Laura did not know how they could get the satchels on the train. Ma's hands were full, and Laura had to hold on to Mary. The engine's round front window glared in the sunshine like a huge eye. The smokestack flared upward to a wide top, and black smoke rolled up from it. A sudden streak of white shot up through the smoke, then the whistle screamed a long wild scream. The roaring thing came rushing straight at them all, swelling bigger and bigger, enormous, shaking everything with noise.





Then the worst was over. It had not hit them; it was roaring by them on thick big wheels. Bumps and crashes ran along the freight cars and flat cars and they stopped moving. The train was there, and they had to get into it.

"Laura!" Ma said sharply. "You and Mary be careful!"

"Yes, Ma, we are," said Laura. She guided Mary anxiously, one step at a time, across the boards of the platform, behind Ma's skirt. When the skirt stopped, Laura stopped Mary.

They had come to the last car at the end of the train. Steps went up into it, and a strange man in a dark suit and a cap helped Ma climb up them with Grace in her arms.

"Oopsy-daisy!" he said, swinging Carrie up beside Ma. Then he said, "Them your satchels, ma'am?"

"Yes, please," Ma said. "Come, Laura and Mary."

"Who is he, Ma?" Carrie asked, while Laura helped Mary up the steps. They were crowded in a small place. The man came pushing cheerfully past them, with the satchels, and shouldered open the door of the car.

They followed him between two rows of red velvet seats full of people. The sides of the car were almost solidly made of windows; the car was almost as light as outdoors, and chunks of sunshine slanted across the people and the red velvet.

Ma sat down on one velvet seat and plumped Grace on her lap. She told Carrie to sit beside her. She said, "Laura, you and Mary sit in this seat ahead of me."

Laura guided Mary in, and they sat down. The velvet seat was springy. Laura wanted to bounce on it, but she must behave properly. She whispered, "Mary, the seats are red velvet!"

"I see," Mary said, stroking the seat with her fingertips.

"What's that in front of us?"

"It's the high back of the seat in front, and it's red velvet too," Laura told her.





The engine whistled, and they both jumped. The train was getting ready to go. Laura knelt up in the seat to see Ma. Ma looked calm and so pretty in her dark dress with its white lace collar and the sweet tiny white flowers on her hat.

"What is it, Laura?" Ma asked.

Laura asked, "Who was that man?"

"The brakeman," Ma said. "Now sit down and —"

The train jerked, jolting her backward. Laura's chin bumped hard on the seat back, and her hat slid on her head. Again the train jerked, not so badly this time, and then it began to shiver and the depot moved.

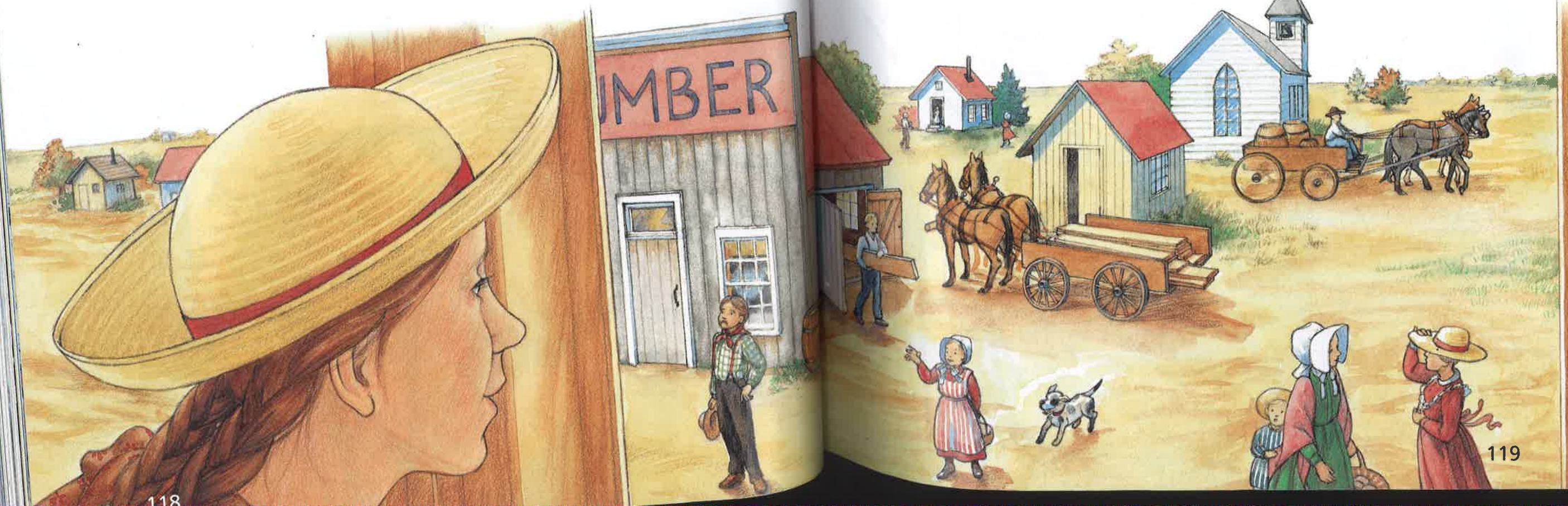
"It's going!" Carrie cried out.

The shivering grew faster and louder, the depot slid backward, and under the car the wheels began to beat time. A rub-a-dubdub, a rub-a-dubdub, the wheels went, faster and faster. The lumberyard and the back of the church and the front of the schoolhouse went by, and that was the last of that town.

The whole car swayed now, in time to the clackety-clacking underneath it, and the black smoke blew by in melting rolls. A telegraph wire swooped up and down beyond the window. It did not really swoop, but it seemed to swoop because it sagged between the poles. It was fastened to green glass knobs that glittered in the sunshine and went dark when the smoke rolled above them. Beyond the wire, grasslands and fields and scattered farmhouses and barns went by.

They went so fast that Laura could not really look at them before they were gone. In one hour that train would go twenty miles — as far as the horses traveled in a whole day.

The door opened, and a tall man came in. He wore a blue coat with brass buttons, and a cap, with CONDUCTOR in letters across its front. At every seat he stopped and took tickets. He punched round holes in the tickets with a small machine in his hand. Ma gave him three tickets. Carrie and Grace were so little that they could ride on the train without paying.







The Conductor went on, and Laura said low, "Oh, Mary! so many shining brass buttons on his coat, and it says CONDUCTOR right across the front of his cap!"

"And he is tall," Mary said. "His voice is high up."

Laura tried to tell her how fast the telegraph poles were going by. She said, "The wire sags down between them and swoops up again," and she counted them. "One — oop! two — oop! three! That's how fast they're going."

"I can tell it's fast, I can feel it," Mary said happily.

On that dreadful morning when Mary could not see even sunshine full in her eyes, Pa had said that Laura must see for her. He had said, "Your two eyes are quick enough, and your tongue, if you will use them for Mary." And Laura had promised. So she tried to be eyes for Mary, and it was seldom that Mary need ask her, "See out loud for me, Laura, please."

"Both sides of the car are windows, close together," Laura said now. "Every window is one big sheet of glass, and even the strips of wood between the windows shine like glass, they are so polished."

"Yes, I see," and Mary felt over the glass and touched the shining wood with her fingertips.

"The sunshine comes slanting in the south windows, in wide stripes over the red velvet seats and the people. Corners of sunshine fall on the floor, and keep reaching out and going back. Up above the windows the shiny wood curves in from the walls on both sides, and all along the middle of the ceiling there's a higher place. It has little walls of tiny, long, low windows, and you can see blue sky outside them. But outside the big windows, on both sides, the country is going by. The stubble fields are yellow, and haystacks are by the barns, and little trees are yellow and red in clumps around the houses."



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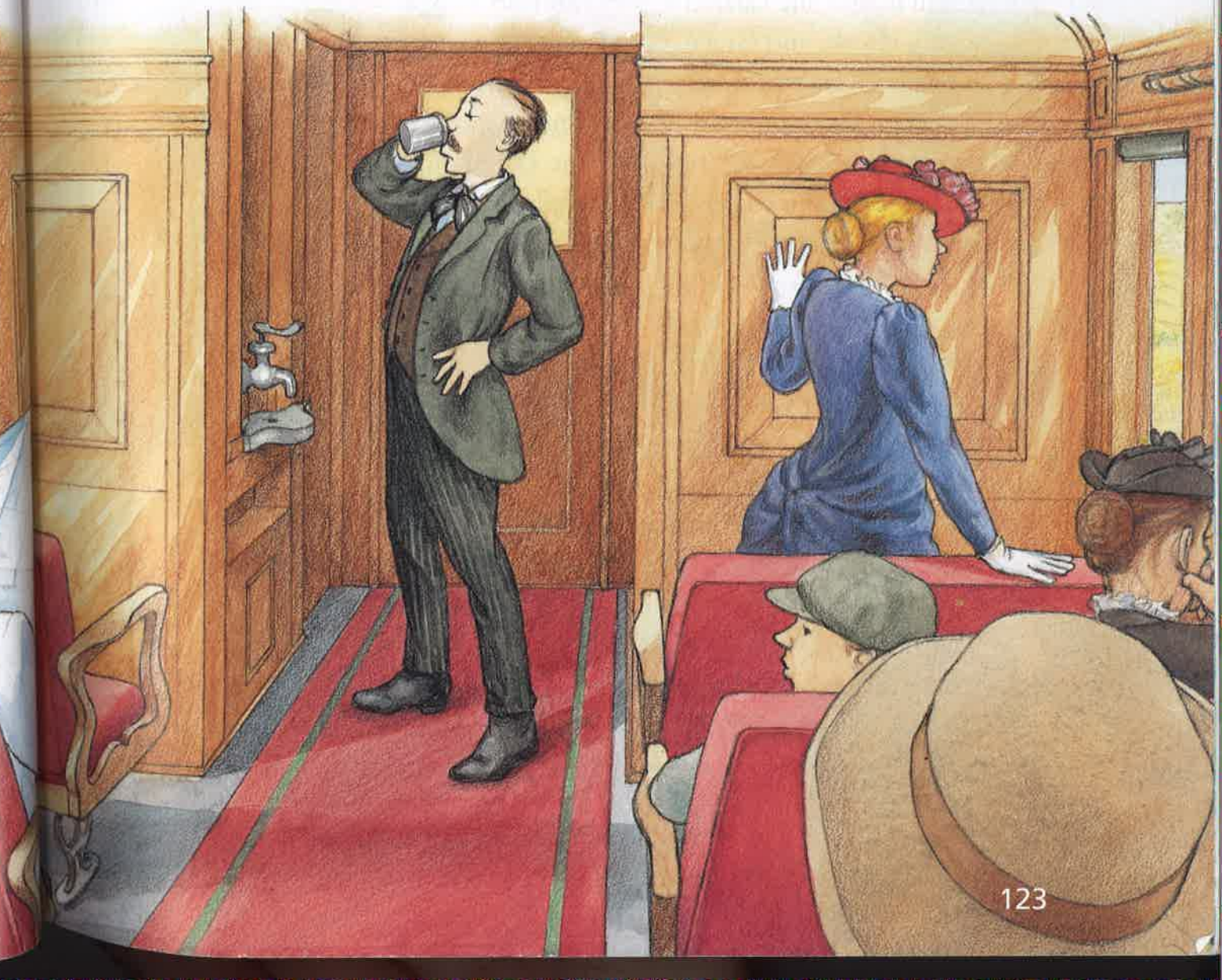
"Now I will see the people," Laura went on murmuring. "In front of us is a head with a bald spot on top and side whiskers. He is reading a newspaper. He doesn't look out of the windows at all. Farther ahead are two young men with their hats on. They are holding a big white map and looking at it and talking about it. I guess they're going to look for a homestead too. Their hands are rough and callused so they're good workers. And farther ahead there's a woman with bright yellow hair and, oh, Mary! the brightest red velvet hat with pink roses —"



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Just then someone went by, and Laura looked up. She went on, "A thin man with bristly eyebrows and long mustaches and an Adam's apple just went by. He can't walk straight, the train's going so fast. I wonder what — Oh, Mary! He's turning a little handle on the wall at the end of the car, and water's coming out!

"The water's pouring right into a tin cup. Now he's drinking it. His Adam's apple bobs. He's filling the cup again. He just turns the handle, and the water comes right out. How do you suppose it — Mary! He's set that cup on a little shelf. Now he's coming back."





After the man had gone by, Laura made up her mind. She asked Ma if she could get a drink of water, and Ma said she might. So she started out.

She could not walk straight. The lurching car made her sway and grab at the seat backs all the way. But she got to the end of the car and looked at the shining handle and spout, and the little shelf under them that held the bright tin cup. She turned the handle just a little, and water came out of the spout. She turned the handle back, and the water stopped. Under the cup there was a little hole, put there to carry away any water that spilled. Laura had never seen anything so fascinating. It was all so neat, and so marvelous, that she wanted to fill the cup again and again. But that would waste the water. So after she drank, she only filled the cup part way, in order not to spill it, and she carried it very carefully to Ma.

Carrie drank, and Grace. They did not want any more, and Ma and Mary were not thirsty. So Laura carried the cup back to its place. All the time the train was rushing on and the country rushing back, and the car swaying, but this time Laura did not touch one seat that she passed. She could walk almost as well as the Conductor. Surely nobody suspected that she had never been on a train before.

Then a boy came walking along the aisle, with a basket on his arm. He stopped and showed it to everyone, and some people took things out of it and gave him money. When he reached Laura, she saw that the basket was full of boxes of candy and of long sticks of white chewing gum. The boy showed them to Ma and said, "Nice fresh candy, ma'am? Chewing gum?"

Ma shook her head, but the boy opened a box and showed the colored candy. Carrie's breath made an eager sound before she knew it.

The boy shook the box a little, not quite spilling the candy out. It was beautiful Christmas candy, red pieces and yellow pieces and some striped red-and-white. The boy said, "Only ten cents, ma'am, one dime."

