

REDWOOD PIONEER

BETTY STIRLING



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As they rounded a curve in the wide stream, and the thick redwoods shut off the sound of the falls behind them, Mike was sure. The roar was like the noise of thunder. "Mike, it scares me. Let's stop here," Mary pleaded. She covered her ears with her hands. "Come on," said Mike. He was entranced with the sound of the water. He had to see the falls. Mary followed timidly. Then they saw it. Mike gasped. He had never expected to see a waterfall like this.

Set in the Redwood forest of California in the 1870s, this story follows Mike O'Grady and his family as they leave their potato farm to settle in the Redwood forest. Ten-year-old Mike is sad to leave his family's farm, but he soon finds his new home exciting and discovers a love of nature and of drawing. From being threatened by a wounded grizzly bear to discovering waterfalls, Mike's adventures combine in a fun, wholesome book packed with good messages.




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Chapter 1

Goodbye, Potato Farm

Mike O'Grady was moving from the little valley where he had lived all his life. He turned and took one long last look at the cabin. It seemed so forlorn and lonesome sitting there in the middle of the unplowed potato fields.

He rubbed first one blue eye and then the other. But he was not going to cry, even if he did feel as lonesome as the little cabin looked. Mike was going to be a pioneer, and pioneers are brave.

“Mike, come on, quickly!” called his sister Martha.

Mike turned and ran after the slow-moving wagon. Bossy and Maury, the two sleek cows, switched their tails at him as he caught up. They were tied to the back of the wagon. Mike skipped past the cows. Sean and Liam, his two little brothers, and Mary, his little sister, were sitting in the back of the wagon. Their bare feet swung over the end, and they giggled when Mike tickled them with an oat straw.

Mike ran ahead of the two donkeys and caught up with Pat and Tom, his older brothers. They were walking ahead with the third donkey, who was loaded with the odds and ends that wouldn't fit into the wagon. Pat and Tom were talking about mysterious big-boy things and didn't even notice Mike as he trudged along beside them.



He wished he weren't the middle one of the family. There was no one his size to talk to. Tom and Mary were the nearest to his age, but Tom was five years older and Mary was four years younger. Martha was only a little older than Tom, but she didn't count anyway. She was always busy. Why, she was almost a second ma to the little ones. The big boys had all the fun, too. They always went places with Pa. Mike, the middle one, had to stay home with the younger children.

Mike pulled a couple of green oat stalks to chew on. If Pat and Tom wouldn't talk to him, he would walk with his father.

They came to the top of the hill that separated their old home from the sight of any other cabins. From here they could look down on a valley that was dotted with small potato farms, and beyond that, there were more green hills.



“I see two more cabins, Pa,” Mike said as they started down the narrow road. He often came to this hill to hunt rabbits for dinner, and he watched for new cabins.

“Too many people, Mike, too many people.” Patrick O’Grady shook his head.

Mike looked up at his pa. There were no neighbors near their old cabin yet.

“When you were born, Mike,” his father went on, “all of this valley was wild. There wasn’t a single cabin. Not a one. In less than ten years, all these cabins and houses have been built. In another year or two, the whole valley will be cleared and planted.”

He pulled on the reins. One of the donkeys was trying to eat the grass at the side of the road. “Giddap, lazy one,” he said.

The donkeys plodded on slowly. The road went downhill, but not steeply. The wagon couldn't roll fast on its big wooden wheels. Mike jerked up another couple of oat straws to chew. He liked to draw them through the place in the side of his mouth where he had pulled out a baby tooth last week. He rubbed the straw over the sharp edge of the new tooth.

"By next year there will be other cabins near our old cabin, Mike," his father said again. "That's too close. We need room to stretch. So it's off to the wilderness again for us." He looked pleased.

Mike sighed. He almost wished that he didn't have so much room to stretch. He wanted someone to play with.

They were passing the first farm now. Three small children stood wide-eyed at the side of the road to watch. Mike tried to look grown up as he walked past them, but he peeked out of the corners of his eyes.

The biggest of the little girls said, "Hello," shyly.

Mike smiled at her. "Hello," he said, and walked right on. He wasn't used to strange children. He didn't know what else to say.

By dinnertime they had come to the top of the green hills they had seen beyond the valley. Mike had never been this far from home before.

While his mother and Martha spread out a cloth under a big oak tree and set out the cold food, Mike stood still and stared at the country ahead. He had never seen such a big valley before. So many, many farms! Such big houses!