The Tale of Little Pig Robinson

Beatrix Potter · *1930 · English original, Internet Archive b1111925 (Frederick Warne, 1930)*

You remember the Owl and the Pussy-cat, and the piggy-wig who stood in a wood where the Bong tree grows. This is the story of that pig, and why he went to live there. Little Pig Robinson is sent to Stymouth market from Piggery Porcombe because his aunts are too stout for the stiles, and the carrier's donkey cart is in a ditch. He has one fault: he cannot say no. A ship's cook leads him aboard the Pound of Candles. He rows away in the jolly boat, and the cook never finds him.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How does a well-sent little pig, who cannot say no, come to live in the land of the Bong tree?

"ROBINSON rowed away from the "Pound of Candles.""

Chapter VIII

Aunt Dorcas and Aunt Porcas send him alone with a basket to market. After a long, merry walk and a good day's selling, a sailor in a blue jersey offers him snuff and a look over a ship in the ginger trade, commanded by Captain Barnabas Butcher. If Robinson had only known, that man was a ship's cook. On board he is overfed for a birthday dinner with apple sauce. A yellow cat helps him into the jolly boat and sees that the other boats leak. He lands upon a large and fertile island, grows fatter, and is not at all inclined to return to Stymouth.

KEY CHARACTERS

Little Pig Robinson
a well-sent, polite little pig whose fault is that he cannot say no

Aunt Dorcas and Aunt Porcas
very stout aunts at Piggery Porcombe, uneasy once he is out of sight

The ship's cook
the sailorman in a blue jersey, who leads him aboard for a birthday dinner

The yellow cat
who understands the apple sauce, provisions the boat, and sees that the others leak

Captain Barnabas Butcher
commander of the Pound of Candles, a ship engaged in the ginger trade

Grades 2–5
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
A Pig upon a Ship
CHAPTERS I–II

A harbour frame, and a Devonshire orchard at the top of a steep red lane.

- When the narrator was a child, the fishing boats came home to a little seaside town, and half the people ran down to the quay, including cats. A white cat called Susan, belonging to an old fisherman named Sam and his wife Betsy, saw a small pink pig scampering on the deck of a ship called the Pound of Candles. She could not understand that pig on board a ship. But the narrator knows all about him.
- You remember the song about the Owl and the Pussy Cat and their beautiful pea-green boat, and how, in a wood, a piggy-wig stood, with a ring at the end of his nose. Now Potter is going to tell the story of that pig, and why he went to live in the land of the Bong tree.
- When that pig was little he lived in Devonshire, with his aunts, Miss Dorcas and Miss Porcas, at a farm called Piggery Porcombe, in an orchard at the top of a steep red lane, with red cliffs and a bit of bright blue sea below. Both aunts were very, very stout, and the stiles in the neighbourhood of Stymouth are narrow. When the carrier's donkey cart went into a ditch, they sent Robinson to market with a big basket, and stood in the porch, uneasy, watching him out of sight.

02
The Walk to Stymouth
CHAPTERS III–V

Stiles, a market basket, and a shop where you will not knock your head against a ham.

- The walk was a long one, but downhill, and Robinson was merry. A motherly ewe called after him: “Mind yourself in Stymouth, little pig.” He crossed many fields and awkward stiles, and at last joined a stream of country people on foot and in carts, all going to Stymouth Market.
- Stymouth is a pretty little town at the mouth of the river Pigsty. Robinson sells what he has brought. A responsible brown dog called Stumpy—who has ten shillings a week left him by a rich old gentleman—shows him the way to Mr. Mumby's.
- Old Mr. Mumby keeps a general store, and sells almost anything except ham, a circumstance much approved by Aunt Dorcas: what possible pleasure can there be in entering a shop where you knock your head against a ham that may have belonged to a dear second cousin? Errands and kind delays follow; the Miss Goldfinches hope Sim Ram's pony may give him a lift. Whatever were they thinking of, to let him come alone? He will never get home before dark.

03
A Fault: He Could Not Say No
CHAPTER VI

Snuff, barley sugar, and a ship engaged in the ginger trade.

- Stymouth was full of inns; too full. Outside the Crown and Anchor a sailorman in a blue jersey sauntered across the road, staring very hard at Robinson. “I say little pig! do you like snuff?”
- If Robinson had a fault, it was that he could not say no; not even to a hedgehog stealing eggs. Snuff made him sick, but instead of going straight away about his business, he shuffled, grunted, and accepted a pinch to take home. In return he offered barley sugar. The sailor ate an alarming quantity, complimented him on his five chins, and begged to show him over a ship commanded by Captain Barnabas Butcher, and named the Pound of Candles. Robinson did not very much like the name. It reminded him of tallow, of lard, of crackle and trimmings of bacon. But he allowed himself to be led away. If Robinson had only known—that man was a ship's cook!
- Old Mr. Mumby at his shop door called out anxiously, “Robinson! Robinson!” but there was too much noise of carts. They went down the steep steps to the harbour hand in hand. Later Mr. Mumby was the first to give useful information to the police, when Robinson had been missed. But it was then too late.

04
The Cook's Birthday
CHAPTER VII

Porridge, apple sauce, and a yellow cat who is not asleep.

- On deck Robinson sings “Poor Pig Robinson Crusoe” until even the ship's cook is no longer civil, and says that if he does not leave off singing through his nose, he will make him into pork chops. Then Robinson fainted, and fell flat upon the deck.
- It must not be supposed that he was ill-treated. Quite the contrary. He was even better fed and more petted than at Piggery Porcombe. After a few days' fretting for his kind old aunts, he found his sea legs, and ate as much as he pleased. A whole sack of meal and a sack of potatoes appeared to have been provided especially for him. He got lazier and lazier as the ship sailed south. What he did not understand was a mysterious date: the date of Captain Butcher's birthday, to be celebrated by an extra good dinner, with apples for sauce.
- A yellow cat has understood. While the Captain plays cards in the cabin, the cat takes a hasty farewell, pushes Robinson over the ship's side, and he slides down a rope into the jolly boat. The cat unfastens the rope, throws it after him, and pretends to sleep up in the rigging. Shoes, a compass, a potato pot, a bucket, an armchair, and other useful things have already disappeared.

05
The Land of the Bong Tree
CHAPTER VIII

A boat that does not leak, and a cook who never finds him.

- ROBINSON rowed away from the “Pound of Candles.” He tugged steadily at the oars. The moon rose like half a great silver plate, and he saw three boats starting in pursuit. But every boat leaked badly, thanks to the cat, and most of the sailors were glad to row frantically back.
- What should he see but the top of the Bong tree! He landed in a convenient sheltered bay. The shore was covered with oysters. Sweets grew upon the trees. Yams abounded ready cooked, and the bread-fruit tree grew iced cakes and muffins. The island of the Bong tree was very like Crusoe's, only without its drawbacks.
- The Owl and the Pussy Cat visited it eighteen months later, and spent a delightful honeymoon there. Later still, Stumpy and little dog Tipkins found Robinson perfectly contented, and in the best of good health. He was not at all inclined to return to Stymouth. For anything we know he may be living there still. He grew fatter and fatter and more fatterer; and the ship's cook never found him.

> *"ROBINSON rowed away from the "Pound of Candles.""*
> Chapter VIII

A Fault · Temptation · Captivity · Deliverance · A New Home

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 2–5

1. The book is Potter's longest small tale, and it is framed twice: first by Susan, who only sees the pig on the ship; then by Lear's song, which this story sets out to explain. The nonsense ending is earned by a real kidnapping.
2. Robinson's politeness is the whole danger. He accepts snuff he does not want, offers barley sugar, and is led away smiling. “If Robinson had only known—that man was a ship's cook!” is the turn.
3. He is not starved; he is fattened. The kindness on board the Pound of Candles is the cook's preparation for Captain Butcher's birthday. Watch how appetite and peril keep company.
4. The yellow cat works quietly: a rope, a leaking of the other boats, a pretended sleep in the rigging. The cook, brandishing a knife and fork, never finds him. The island is plenty without the drawbacks of Crusoe's.

Quotations are verbatim from the English original, Internet Archive b1111925 (Frederick Warne, 1930), Internet Archive identifier b1111925 (Frederick Warne edition of The Tale of Little Pig Robinson; first published 1930). OCR of the scanned Warne text, lightly tidied for hyphenation and page numbers only. US public domain as of 1 January 2026., the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-tale-of-little-pig-robinson/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.