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The Tale of Pigling Bland

Beatrix Potter · *1913 · English original, Project Gutenberg #572*

Aunt Pettitoes has eight little pigs, and they do eat. Spot stays home; the others must go. Sedate Pigling Bland and volatile Alexander are sent to market in Lancashire with licenses and conversation peppermints. Alexander loses his paper and is walked back by a policeman. Pigling, going on alone, falls into the hands of Mr. Peter Thomas Piperson, and finds a little black Berkshire pig locked in a cupboard for bacon. They cross the bridge hand in hand, and over the hills and far away.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can two pigs keep their liberty, once they have been sent to market, and stolen for bacon?

"My name is Pig-wig."
Pig-wig · The cottage

Aunt Pettitoes warns them to beware of traps, hen roosts, bacon and eggs, and always walk upon their hind legs. The narrator adds that if they once cross the county boundary they cannot come back. Pigling never wanted to go; he wishes he could have a little garden and grow potatoes. At Piperson's he is felt like a flitch, and Pig-wig has been stolen for hams. They start at cockcrow, outface a grocer who reads the mixed papers, and run for the river. The county line, which was a warning, becomes the way out.

KEY CHARACTERS

Pigling Bland
a sedate little pig who never wanted to go to market, and wishes for a garden

Pig-wig
a little black Berkshire pig, stolen for bacon, who names herself and dances

Alexander
volatile brother who loses his license and is walked home

Aunt Pettitoes
an old pig with eight of a family, and not enough milk

Mr. Peter Thomas Piperson
the cottager who seizes Pigling and locks Pig-wig in a cupboard

Grades K–3
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01
Eight of a Family
THE FARM

Too many little pigs, and two who must go to market.

- Once upon a time there was an old pig called Aunt Pettitoes. She had eight of a family: four little girl pigs, called Cross-patch, Suck-suck, Yock-yock and Spot; and four little boy pigs, called Alexander, Pigling Bland, Chin-Chin and Stumpy.
- The eight little pigs had very fine appetites—"Yus, yus, yus! they eat and indeed they DO eat!" Every one of them has been in mischief except Spot and Pigling Bland. Good little Spot shall stay at home to do the housework; but the others must go. "There will be more to eat without them."
- Chin-chin and Suck-suck went away in a wheel-barrow, and Stumpy, Yock-yock and Cross-patch rode away in a cart. Pigling Bland and Alexander went to market. Their coats were brushed, their tails curled, their little faces washed. Aunt Pettitoes wiped her eyes, then their noses, and shed tears.

02
Papers and Peppermints
THE ROAD

A warning about the county boundary, and a paper that is not a license.

- "Now Pigling Bland, son Pigling Bland, you must go to market. Take your brother Alexander by the hand. Mind your Sunday clothes, and remember to blow your nose—beware of traps, hen roosts, bacon and eggs; always walk upon your hind legs." Pigling, a sedate little pig, looked solemnly at his mother.
- The narrator pins the licenses inside their waistcoat pockets, and says impressively that if they once cross the county boundary they cannot come back. Aunt Pettitoes gives each a little bundle and eight conversation peppermints with appropriate moral sentiments in screws of paper.
- Alexander skips, pinches, gobbles his dinner and his peppermints, and mixes the papers. Round a corner they nearly run against a policeman: "Stole a pig? Where are your licenses?" Pigling's paper is in order; Alexander hands over a scrumpled sweet-shop bill, and is walked back to the farm. Pigling gives him a peppermint, and goes on alone dejectedly.

03
A Little Garden
THE CROSS-ROADS

A hiring fair, a second paper, and a hen roost.

- At the sign-post it is five miles to Market-town, four over the hills, three back to Pettitoes Farm. Tomorrow is the hiring fair. Pigling had never wanted to go; the idea of standing all by himself in a crowded market, to be stared at, pushed, and hired by some big strange farmer, was very disagreeable. "I wish I could have a little garden and grow potatoes."
- He puts his hand in his other pocket and feels another paper—Alexander's! He runs back frantically, but it is too late. He took several wrong turns, and was quite lost. It grew dark; he cried, "Wee, wee, wee! I can't find my way home!" At last he crept into a small wooden hut: "I am afraid it IS a hen house, but what can I do?" The hens clucked of bacon and eggs, traps, and "To market, to market!"
- In less than an hour Mr. Peter Thomas Piperson came with a lantern and a hamper to catch six fowls. His eye fell upon Pigling, squeezed up in a corner. "Hallo, here's another!" He seized him by the scruff of the neck and dropped him into the hamper, then five more hens upon the top of him. At the cottage—"This one's come of himself, whatever"—he turned Pigling's pockets inside out (the papers and peppermints already hidden). He throws his boots against the wainscot; there is a smothered noise. After supper he consults an almanac and feels Pigling's ribs: it was too late in the season for curing bacon, and he grudged his meal. Besides, the hens had seen this pig. "You may sleep on the rug."

04
My Name Is Pig-wig
THE CUPBOARD

Peppermints under a door, and a pig stolen for hams.

- After breakfast everything in the cottage is locked up. Pigling washes the porridge plates and sings "Over the hills and far away." A little smothered voice chimes in. He snuffs at a locked cupboard, and pushes a peppermint under the door. It is sucked in immediately. In the course of the day he pushes in all his remaining six peppermints.
- When Piperson returns he is affable, forgets to lock the meal chest, locks the cupboard door without properly shutting it, and tells Pigling upon no account to disturb him next day before twelve o'clock. All at once at Pigling's elbow a little voice spoke—"My name is Pig-wig. Make me more porridge, please!"
- A perfectly lovely little black Berkshire pig stood smiling beside him, with twinkly screwed-up eyes, a double chin, and a short turned-up nose. How did she come here? "Stolen," replied Pig-wig, with her mouth full. "What for?" "Bacon, hams," she answered cheerfully. "Why on earth don't you run away?" "I shall after supper."

> *"My name is Pig-wig."*
> **Pig-wig** · The cottage

05
The County Boundary
THE CLOSE

Cockcrow, a grocer's cart, and the bridge.

- They start before the hens come out, slipping away hand in hand across an untidy field. "Come Pig-wig, we must get to the bridge before folks are stirring." The sun rose while they were crossing the moor. "That's Westmorland," said Pig-wig, and she dropped his hand and commenced to dance.
- In sight of the bridge, wheels: a grocer reading a newspaper. Pigling walks frightfully lame, holding her arm. "Show me your license?" He hands up the papers. "This here pig is a young lady; is her name Alexander?" The grocer finds "Lost, stolen or strayed" in the advertisement column, whistles for a ploughman, and tells them to wait. He knew that pigs are slippery; but surely such a VERY lame pig could never run!
- "Now, Pig-wig, NOW!" Never did any pigs run as these pigs ran! They raced and squealed down the long white hill towards the bridge. They came to the river, they came to the bridge—they crossed it hand in hand—then over the hills and far away she danced with Pigling Bland!

Liberty · Prudence · Loyalty · A Boundary · Home

What to watch for as you read

GRADES K–3

1. The book is "a Tale of the Christmas Pig," but the fear in it is ordinary and exact: bacon, hams, a hiring fair, a license. Watch how the nursery rhyme "over the hills and far away" becomes the plot's last sentence.
2. Aunt Pettitoes names the dangers in order: traps, hen roosts, bacon and eggs. Pigling meets them in that world. The warning about the county boundary, meant to keep them in, is the crossing that saves them.
3. Pigling preserves peppermints for emergencies, and they become the first speech through a locked door. Small provisions, gravely kept, do serious work.
4. Pig-wig is cheerful about the use that was to be made of her, and decisive about supper and flight. Pigling is shy, toothachy, and lame only when he needs to be. Their escape is a dance after a run.

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