

Suddenly one said accusingly, "Why did you eat our lunch?"

Children who live near the wilderness understand the word hunger.

Their expressions of sympathy must have opened the flood gates of pent up emotion because, as the children crept inside, the Boy poured forth his story.

He had run away! He had come on foot, all the miles from Bellevue, trying to keep hidden by day and creeping as best he could over the dark roads, with only the moon for light, by night. He had been without food for nearly two days, except for wild berries and roots, until he had discovered the "Hidey-hole". Watching from the woods, he had seen the children enter and leave their little playhouse.

"Why did you run away?" they queried with great interest. This was exciting and they could scarcely wait to hear more of his tale.

He looked at them a moment, seemed to gather courage from their friendly little faces, and finally said, "If I tell you, will you promise 'cross your heart, and hope to die' that you'll never tell that you have seen me or where I came from?"

This was very solemn oath, and the little girls went through the prescribed routine in a very solemn manner. They crossed their hearts. They clasped each other's criss-crossed hands. The Boy laid his hands upon theirs and the covenant was duly made.

Now feeling entirely secure, the Boy continued to talk. There had been a bad epidemic of typhoid in Bellevue. His father and mother had both died. He was left entirely alone. The family had originally migrated west from New York state, and the Boy had no idea where to find relatives, if indeed there were any. A kindly neighbor had taken him in, but he knew that he was an added burden for their scanty supplies. When a farmer offered to board him in return for work the Boy felt that he ought to accept the offer.

The farmer's demands were beyond all reason, and when the Boy had been too exhausted to perform some of the tasks required, the farmer had beaten him. Sick with grief and loneliness the Boy had twice run away, had twice been caught and returned.

At the third attempt he had succeeded in reaching this village -- and found the "Hidey-Hole."

"I won't go back!" he cried. "Nobody can make me!"

To Sara and Anna this was a thrilling adventure, and they made it their personal problem. They carried out food, when it could be sneaked out from the barn. They brought a comb, and a warm, if threadbare, coat of their brother's. Being a little shocked at their pensioner's dirty face and hands they even managed to secure some lye soap, a basin and a ewer of water.

That was the beginning of the trouble. Grandma Benedict missed the basin and began to make inquiries. The brothers Ellis and William, of course, knew nothing about the whole affair. They didn't even know of the "Hidey-Hole". Sara and Anna, who had solemnly promised with "Cross my Heart and Hope to Die" were under oath to know nothing either.