

Jem's Wild Winter

Goldtown Beginnings Series

Jem Strikes Gold

Jem's Frog Fiasco

Jem and the Mystery Thief

Jem Digs Up Trouble

Jem and the Golden Reward

Jem's Wild Winter



Jem's Wild Winter



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Jem's Wild Winter

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New Words

blacksmith—a person who makes and repairs things using fire and iron

bobcat—a wild cat with a spotted coat and a short tail

cougar—another name for a mountain lion

forty-niner—a prospector in the California gold rush of 1849

kindling—small sticks or twigs used for starting a fire

mothballs—small white balls made of poison to keep moths from eating wool clothing

musty—having a stale, moldy, or damp smell

potbelly stove—a wood-burning stove with a round body

provide—to give or supply something that is needed

rut—a long, deep track made by wagon wheels

tawny—a yellowish-brown color

trapline—a series of traps to catch wild animals

trunk—a large chest used for storing things



CHAPTER 1

A Chilly Morning

Rattle, rattle . . . bang!

“Shh,” Mama whispered. “Don’t wake the children.”

Too late.

Jem opened his eyes. Except for a faint glow, everything was dark inside his family’s tent.

Mama held a lantern in one hand. Her other hand clutched a blanket around her shoulders.

She was shivering.

Pa squatted in front of the potbelly stove. It stood in the middle of the tent.

Jem didn’t like that stove. It took up too much space. It was always in the way.

Sometimes Jem bumped into the potbelly stove and tripped.

In the summertime, he often stubbed his bare toes against the stove's legs. *Ouch!*

More than once, Jem had asked Pa why that ol' stove had to take up so much room in their tent. Pa hardly ever lit it.

Now, Jem knew why the stove was there.

A cold chill sneaked under Jem's covers. He pulled the quilt over his head until just his eyes peeked out.

Brrrr! Why was it so cold?

Holding the quilt close, Jem rolled onto his side and watched Pa light the stove. Tiny flames licked the wood shavings.

Pa blew into the stove until the kindling caught fire. Then he added larger pieces of wood.

Soon, the fire was snapping and crackling.

Pa closed the stove's small door and stood up. "That should take the chill off."

Jem sat up. "Is it morning yet?"

Icy air swirled around his body. He shivered and dove under the covers.

"Not yet," Mama answered. "Go back to sleep."

Jem's teeth began to chatter. "I c-can't. It's too c-cold."

Mama ducked into a dark corner of the tent. When she came back, she laid another quilt over Jem's cot.

It was a big quilt. Big enough to cover his little sister's cot too.

Jem rolled over and looked at Ellie. She was asleep. The banging and rattling had not woken her up.

Lucky duck! Ellie couldn't feel the cold if she was asleep.

Jem kept shivering. "I'm still cold."

"The stove will heat this place up in a hurry," Pa said. "But until then, I have an idea."

He walked to the tent flap and slipped under it. Where was Pa going?

Jem found out a minute later.

Something big and heavy jumped up on his cot.

"For goodness' sake, Matt," Mama whispered. "Did you have to bring him inside?"

Jem's eyes grew wide. "Nugget!"

"Shh!" Mama shot at Jem.

Even in the dim light, Jem knew Mama was not happy.

She kept talking. “He’s wet and smelly and—”

“Nugget’s not used to this weather,” Pa said softly. “Besides, he’s a better blanket than a dozen quilts.”

Mama sighed. Jem knew she didn’t agree, but she would go along with Pa anyway.

Pa and Mama always stuck together.

Jem was glad about that. It meant that for the first time ever, his dog could sleep on his bed.

Nugget inched his way closer to Jem’s head. He didn’t make a sound.

Neither did Jem.

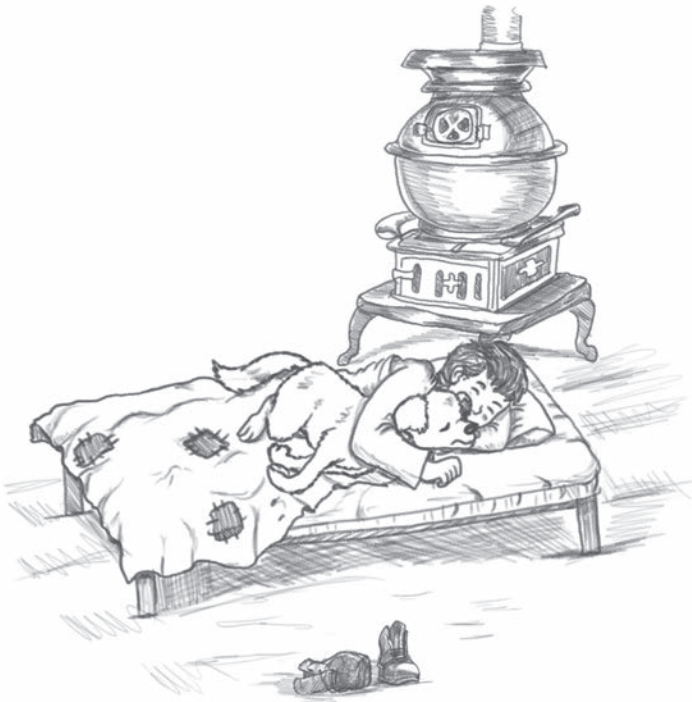
Mama blew out the lamp, and she and Pa went back to bed.

The only light came from the small air holes in the stove’s door.

Jem put his arm around Nugget and pulled him close. The dog’s warm body was already heating him up.

Swish, swish, swish. Nugget’s tail brushed against the quilt.

He licked Jem’s cheek once. Twice. Then he settled down and let out a quiet doggy sigh.



Jem stared at the firelight flickering through the air holes.

He was thinking hard.

Why would Pa and Mama let Nugget come inside in the middle of the night?

Jem listened. It wasn't raining.

Rain always made loud pattering sounds on the tent's canvas roof. Sometimes the raindrops were so noisy that Jem and Ellie couldn't hear each other talk.

Tonight, Jem didn't hear even *one* raindrop.

Besides, even when it rained, Nugget didn't come inside. He stayed dry under the outdoor table.

Sometimes he crawled under Mama's big outdoor cookstove to stay warm.

But on this cold night, Nugget was inside.

Jem yawned. Maybe it was too cold for even a furry dog to stay outside.

Pa added wood to the stove two more times before morning.

Jem woke up each time but fell right back to sleep.

The last time Jem woke up, the whole tent was warm.

He shoved Nugget off the cot, threw aside the quilts, and sat up. He stretched and yawned.

"Stay away from the stove," Mama warned. "It's hot."

It sure was. Jem smiled. It felt good.

Mama stood at the potbelly stove and stirred something in a pan. Next to the pan, coffee boiled.

What was going on?

Never in Jem's eight years had he seen

Mama cook inside their tent. She always cooked and baked outside.

“Why are you cooking on that little stove top?” he asked. “It barely holds anything.”

Mama turned to Jem. “Go peek outside and you’ll see why.”

Jem jumped off his cot. Barefoot, he ran to the tent flap and yanked it aside.

A gust of cold wind hit his face. So did hundreds of icy white specks.

“Snow!”