

Gid Granger

By Robert Davis

Illustrated by Charles Banks Wilson

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press

Also by Robert Davis

Padre Porko: The Gentlemanly Pig

Pepperfoot of Thursday Market

That Girl of Pierre's

Hudson Bay Express

Partners of Powder Hole

Print book published by
Holiday House, Inc., 1945
eBook formatting © 2011 Bethlehem Books

Slightly revised by Publisher
All Rights Reserved

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press
10194 Garfield Street South
Bathgate, ND 58216
www.bethlehembooks.com

To Emily Dutton Proctor
Friend of all the Gids and Cissies



Contents

<u>1. Eben Pushes Off</u>	1
<u>2. The First Day</u>	8
<u>3. Limpy's Big Black</u>	16
<u>4. Amber Money Scheme</u>	27
<u>5. Bull by the Horns</u>	40
<u>6. Strangers in Town</u>	51
<u>7. Doc Takes Command</u>	59
<u>8. Half-Pint Helper</u>	70
<u>9. The Carding Machine</u>	79
<u>10. Link Wait's Trouble</u>	89
<u>11. The Lord Giveth . . .</u>	100
<u>12. 4-H Goes to Work</u>	109
<u>13. A Family Council</u>	120
<u>About the Author</u>	125



1. Eben Pushes Off

THE ONE-ROOM depot at Gilead was like a birthday cake smothered under overhanging eaves of frosting. On level fields the snow was three feet deep, but in the lee of rocks and evergreen clumps the wind had blown it into drifts as deep as a man's head.

The two figures standing by the cutter moved closer to the shelter of the building. Eben paused to listen for the train, then resumed his low-voiced advice to his younger brother.

"You'd better plant four acres of potatoes, Gid. By plowing close to the fence and crowding the last row of the orchard, you might even make it four and a half. And don't be stingy with the manure. The Government wants us to raise a pile of food. They'll help you sell whatever crop you get. And get Maine seed, no matter what it costs. The County Agent will help you borrow a sprayer."

The younger boy nodded and stepped forward to pull the blanket closer around the horse's throat. Brownie stamped a foot, and the string of bells around her neck jingled sharply. On the cutter's

seat, a rough-haired collie opened one eye and closed it again. Far up the line the train whistled for a crossing.

Eben spoke faster. "If Lutie's calf is a heifer, raise her. She'll be worth it. And you might try the west half of the pasture in corn, if it dries out early. Gee, I wish we had a tractor, so you could plow deeper. Eggs are going to be high. Chickens, too. Five of Pinky's pigs will be fit to market in April. Jud Wilson's the squarest butcher, I guess. Maybe you can raise three litters this summer, if the cheese factory will spare you the whey."

He slapped his mittened hands together and stared unseeingly up the track. "I'm sure sorry to leave the pick-up in such rotten shape. Shorty says the cylinders will be scored if you run it any more. The overhaul job'll cost thirty dollars. I don't see where the cash is coming from, but you'll have to wangle it somehow. If it wasn't for Mom's principles, you could get an advance from Jud on the pork."

The brothers were interrupted by the emergence of the station agent from his tiny building. As usual, Obed Stack's spectacles were high on his forehead and his necktie twisted under one ear. The snow squeaked under his boots as he approached.

"I been thinking about yeh, Eben. It was a night just such as this that old Gid went off to enlist. In th' other war, y'understand. You favor him some. But he was heftier, more of a man. You come of good stock, Eben Granger. Don't you never ferget it."

The southbound flyer was entering Gilead cut, brakes grinding to a stop. Gid quieted the restive horse.

"So long, kid." The older brother swung the sack containing his belongings over his shoulder. "Tell Mom my insurance will be in her name. She'll get the allotment every month, as much as they'll let me send. And she's to give Cissie five dollars of it for whatever the kid fancies. No questions asked."

Eben was now on the platform of the moving car. His words floated back as the train gathered speed. "You're the man of the family now, kid. Man of the family."

Gid did not stir until the red lights had winked around the curve, and he became aware that Shep had jumped to the ground and was barking impatiently. The boy took the warm place on the seat, pulled the robe from the horse's back, tucked it around his knees, and gathered up the reins.

“Man of the family.” The idea would take time to sink in. Gid turned the words over and over in his mind, half fearful of what they meant.

He let Brownie walk as far as the covered bridge, for she was built for plowing, and too heavy to trot uphill. In the intense cold, the trunks of the elms cracked like rifle shots, and threw purple shadows on the fresh snow. Brownie’s breath froze to her whiskers and eyebrows in cottony flakes. Shep stopped cavorting under the horse’s nose and whined to be taken back into the warmth of the cutter. Gid moved over to make room.

After crossing Whetstone Creek, the road home skirted two sides of the triangular common of Gilead Village. At the upper end stood the meeting house, flanked by the burying ground and the parsonage of the Boy Reverend. On the second corner was the Hadley House, which the founder of the town, migrating from Connecticut before the Revolutionary War, had built and occupied. It was now the property of Nathan Farwell, an unmarried, retired merchant, who was said to be writing a history of Bethel County.

Warm inside his sheepskin coat, Gid’s mind played upon the houses and the people of the sleeping settlement. It was a good town. He was only seventeen but Gilead was already in his blood. He knew each inch and person of it. Great-Grandfather Gideon had left Ledge Farm when Lincoln called for volunteers. Father Gideon had gone to the other war. Now Eben was on the train going to this one. The boy had the feeling that he was somehow marching in a procession of Grangers. It gave him a prickle between his shoulder blades.

On the third corner of the common, in the rear window of the general store, Gid could see a single light. Lincoln Wait would be working over his accounts. There was loose talk in the village that Link was in money trouble. Gid hoped it wasn’t so. The store-keeper had done folks a sight of favors. By rights he should be a millionaire—would be, they said, if his grandfather hadn’t stocked a lot of stuff nobody would buy.

On leaving the common, the snowy track to Ledge Farm crosses and recrosses the creek. After a two-mile climb Brownie turned sharp left, at the fork. By now the boy could see the red shade on the dining-room lamp. Mom had waited up and would have something hot. As the horse broke into a clumsy gallop, Shep jumped

out and ran ahead, barking. They turned up a lane, passed between the house and the toolshed, and halted in front of the barn. Gid slid from under the robe, lifted the latch, and let the wide doors swing open. Of her own accord Brownie stamped in upon the wooden floor. The old dog yawned, showing his pink tongue and white teeth.

It was an old-fashioned barn, built by Gid's grandfather, with a runway down the center for carts, and maws overhead for hay. Across one end were whitewashed stanchions occupied by sleeping cattle, across the other end, stalls for horses, and a closet for harness and tools. From the cellar underneath came a drowsy grunting from Pinky and her brood.

Mackie whinnied to his partner as Gid loosened the harness buckles. Brownie shook herself, walked to her stall, and reached into the rack for a mouthful of hay. A couple of cows, in the dimness beyond the lantern light, heaved themselves heavily to their feet. Having persuaded himself that all was in order, Shep was treading a bed of straw in the corner.

Mom folded her glasses as Gid kicked the snow from his feet and came in through the woodshed.

"Go all right?" she inquired with a smile.

The boy nodded, hung his knee-length coat on a hook, pulled a chair in front of the chunk stove, and began to ease off his felts. Before he was through, Mom was back from the kitchen with a covered dish in one hand, a steaming pitcher of thickened milk in the other. Gid grinned, tossing a strand of red hair from his eyes.

"Mom, you're sure a mind-reader," he exclaimed. "All the way home I was hoping you'd have milk toast."

Mrs. Granger patted his arm as she brought in a third plate, piled with cookies. In the bedroom doorway Cissie appeared, rubbing sleepy eyes, her molasses-taffy hair in pigtails, a blue wrapper hugged about her slim middle. Like her Mother, she wanted to hear everything.

Between spoonfuls, Gid recounted the trip: how Eben had been the only passenger, what Obed Stack had said about Pop, Eb's advice about Lutie's calf, where he had said to plant corn, where potatoes, even about the fox track leading from Belcher's Ridge toward their own henhouse.



“And there’s something else.” The boy hitched forward in his chair. “The last thing Eben said, right when he was getting on the train, was that he was going to send his whole allotment to Mom. But she’s to give Cissie five dollars of it, to spend for herself. And Eb said we’re not to ask what she does with it.”