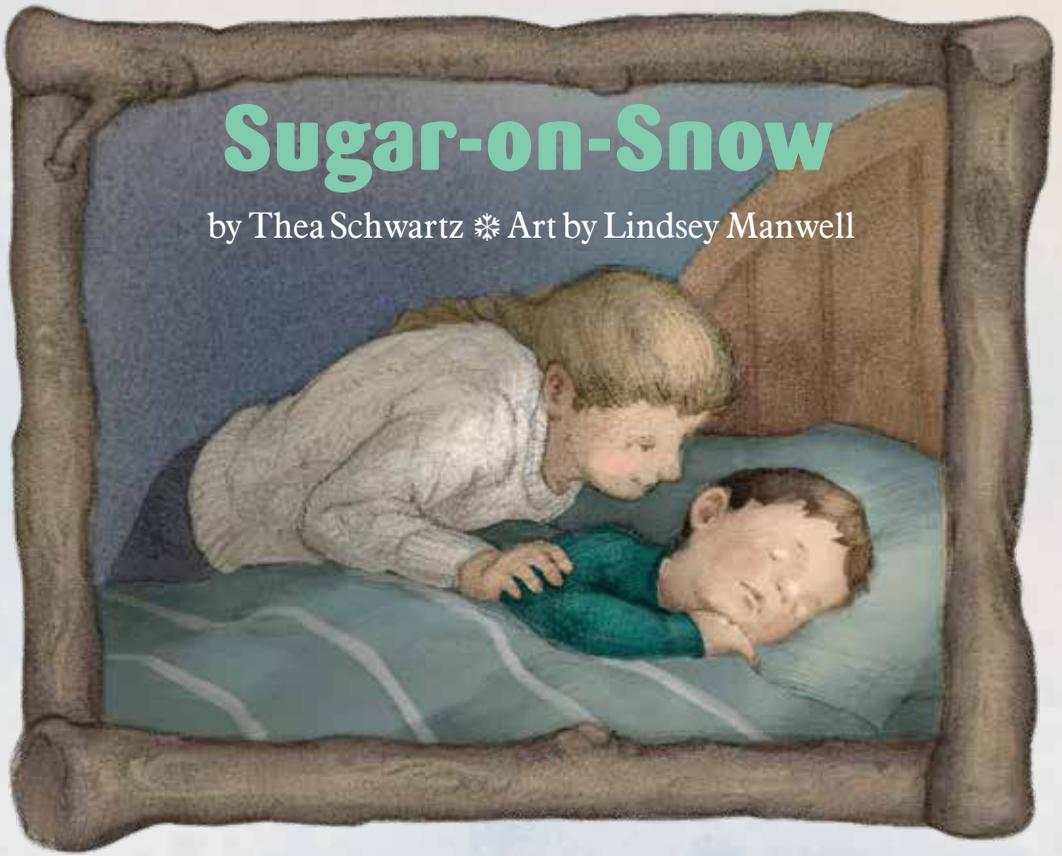


Sugar-on-Snow

by Thea Schwartz ❄️ Art by Lindsey Manwell

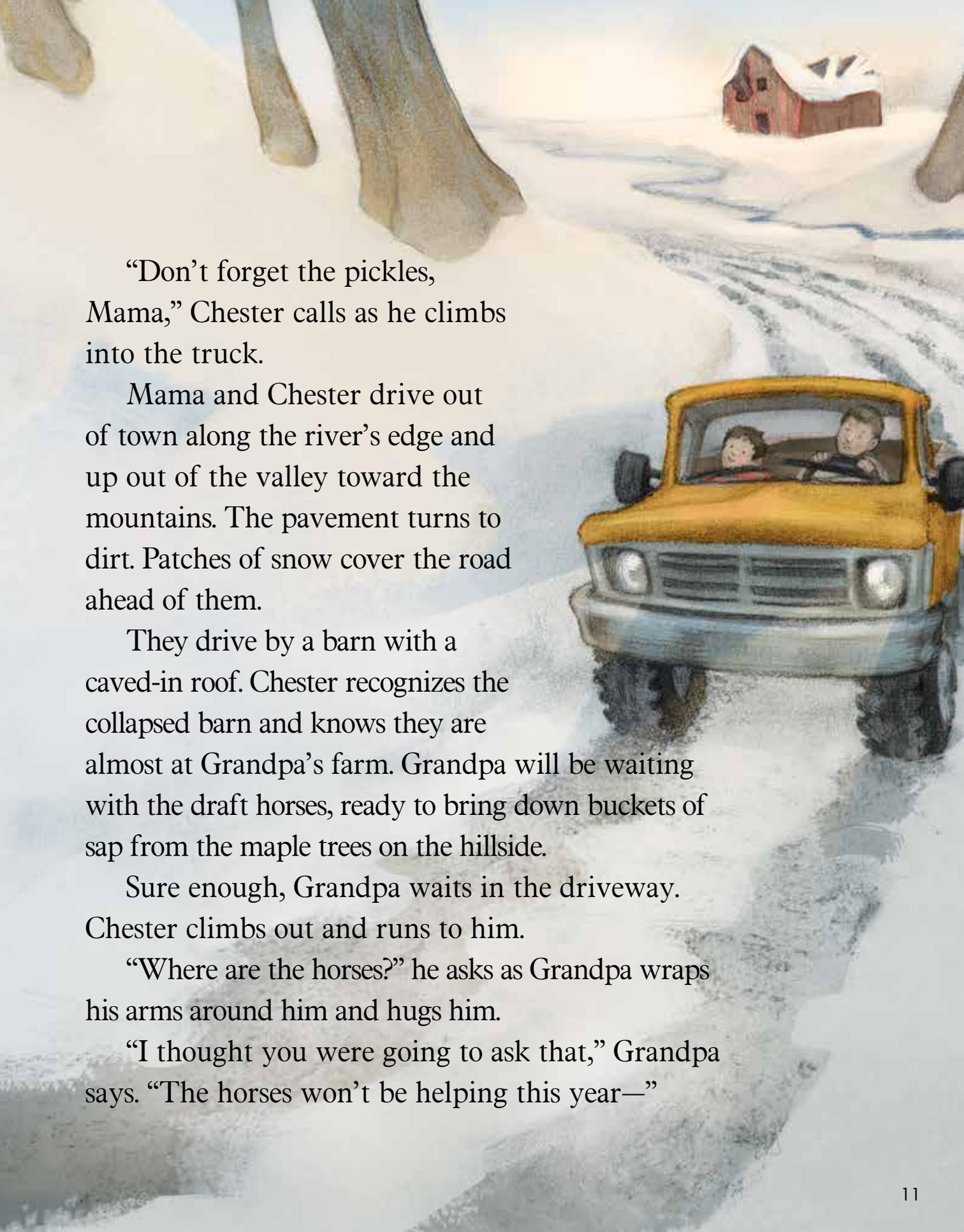


“**W**hen the wind is in the east, then the sap will run the least,” Mama whispers in Chester’s ear. “When the wind is from the west, then the sap will run the best.”

Chester opens his eyes. “Is today the day? Is the wind from the west?” he asks.

“Yes,” Mama answers. “Grandpa telephoned from the farm. It’s been clear and cold at night and sunny during the day. The sap is flowing, and he’s waiting for us.”

Chester jumps out of bed. He puts on his long underwear, wool socks, jeans, and sweater. He gobbles down his scrambled eggs and gulps his orange juice, then pulls on his snow boots and snow jacket.



“Don’t forget the pickles, Mama,” Chester calls as he climbs into the truck.

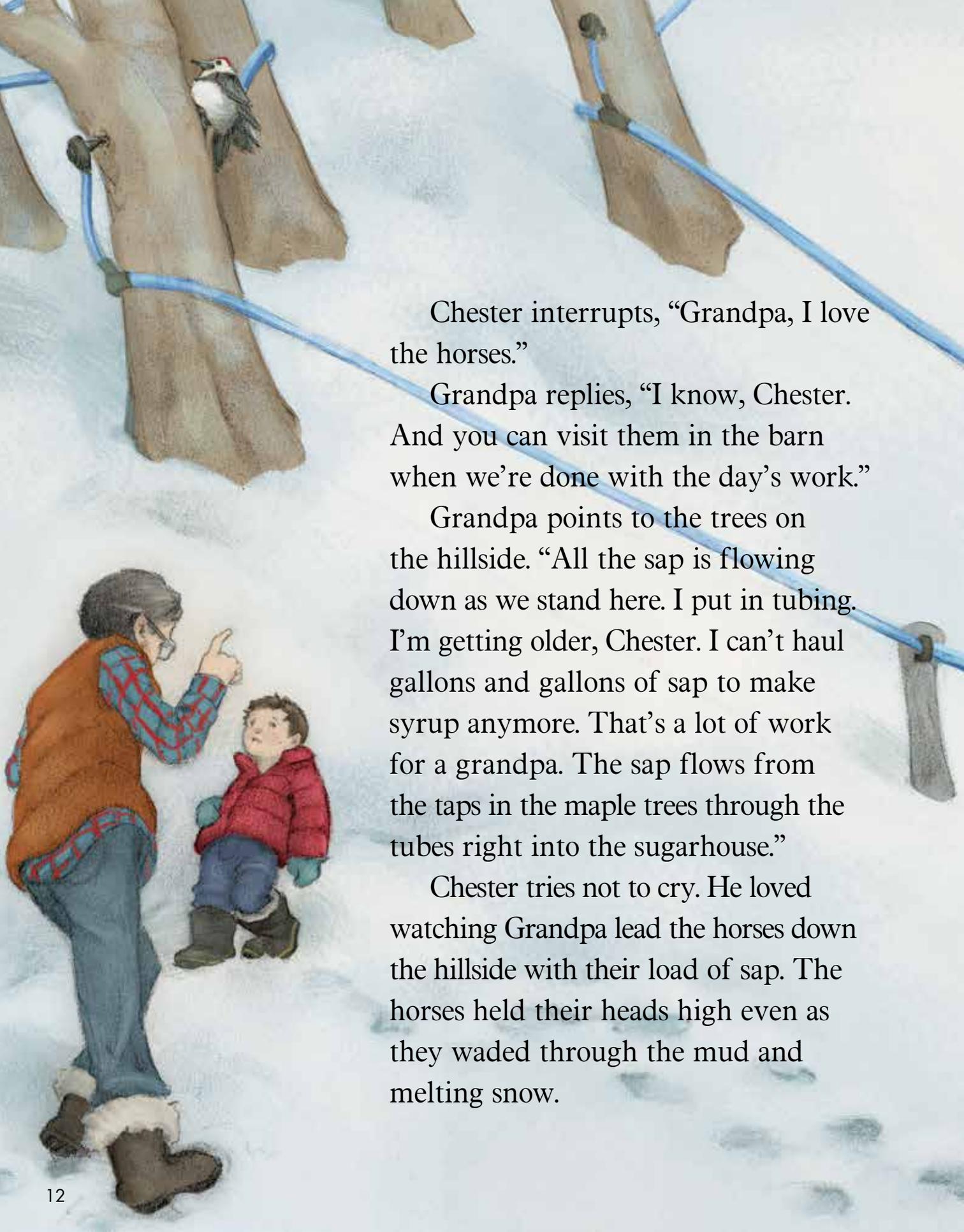
Mama and Chester drive out of town along the river’s edge and up out of the valley toward the mountains. The pavement turns to dirt. Patches of snow cover the road ahead of them.

They drive by a barn with a caved-in roof. Chester recognizes the collapsed barn and knows they are almost at Grandpa’s farm. Grandpa will be waiting with the draft horses, ready to bring down buckets of sap from the maple trees on the hillside.

Sure enough, Grandpa waits in the driveway. Chester climbs out and runs to him.

“Where are the horses?” he asks as Grandpa wraps his arms around him and hugs him.

“I thought you were going to ask that,” Grandpa says. “The horses won’t be helping this year—”



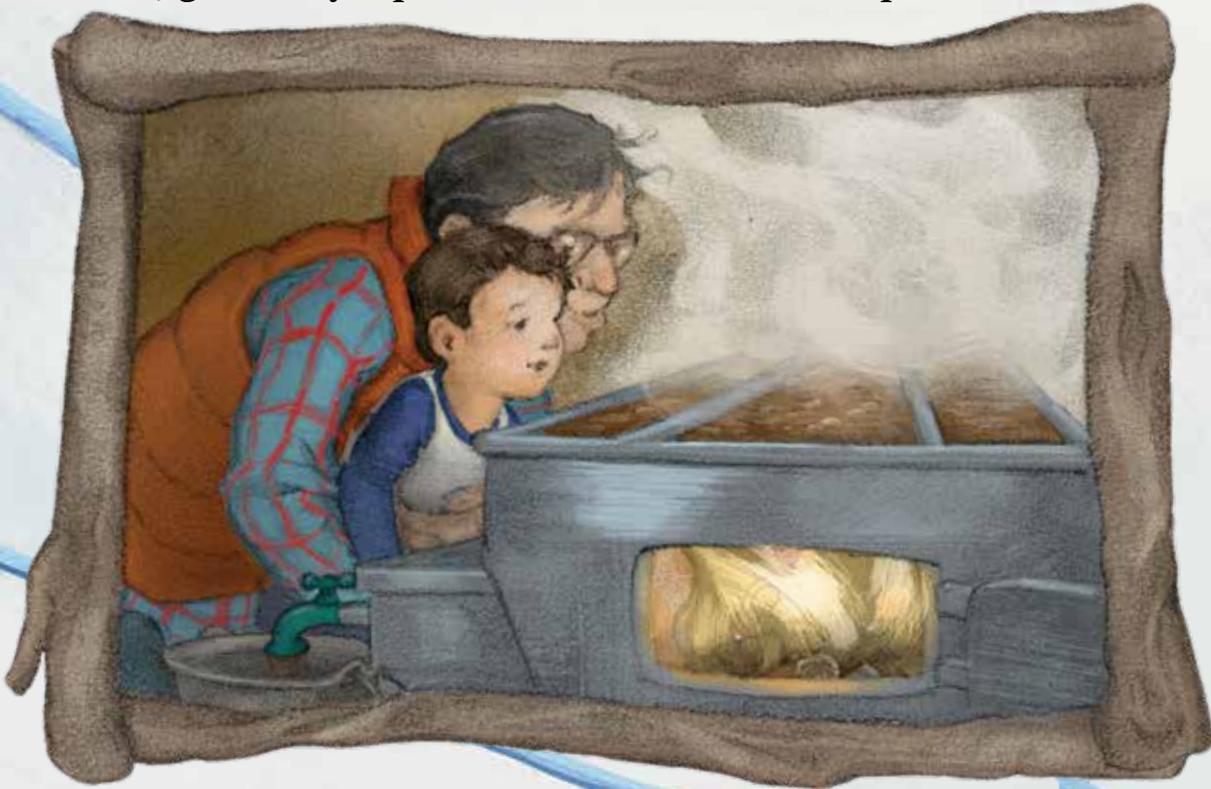
Chester interrupts, “Grandpa, I love the horses.”

Grandpa replies, “I know, Chester. And you can visit them in the barn when we’re done with the day’s work.”

Grandpa points to the trees on the hillside. “All the sap is flowing down as we stand here. I put in tubing. I’m getting older, Chester. I can’t haul gallons and gallons of sap to make syrup anymore. That’s a lot of work for a grandpa. The sap flows from the taps in the maple trees through the tubes right into the sugarhouse.”

Chester tries not to cry. He loved watching Grandpa lead the horses down the hillside with their load of sap. The horses held their heads high even as they waded through the mud and melting snow.

Grandpa leads Mama and Chester to the sugarhouse. When he smells the sweet steam of the boiling sap, Chester forgets about crying. Grandpa lifts him up to peer into the pan. The sap bubbles and foams as it thickens. Soon the watery sap will boil down to the thick, golden syrup Chester loves to have on pancakes.



Grandpa feeds wood to the fire under the pan of boiling syrup. Mama and Chester carry wood from the woodshed into the sugarhouse for the fire. They make many trips from the woodshed to the sugarhouse and back again. Soon Chester's arms are tired. His hair is sticky from the sap steam.



When enough syrup is ready, Grandpa fills a small pot. “You get the snow, Chester, and meet Mama and me in the kitchen,” he says and hands Chester a bowl.

Chester walks outside to a patch of clean snow. He scoops up the snow, packs it in the bowl, and brings it into Grandpa’s farmhouse.

In the kitchen, Grandpa is at the stove boiling the syrup. He sticks the candy thermometer into the pot. “Just the right temperature! It’s maple sugar now,” he says and removes the pot from the heat.

Mama opens the jar of pickles she has brought. Grandpa pours a little of the cooled maple sugar onto the snow in the bowl. He gives Chester and Mama each a fork.

Chester twists his fork into the sugar-on-snow and puts it in his mouth. Then he takes a bite of a pickle and says, “Mm! Sweet and sour, sour and sweet.” With a big grin, he adds, “A maple treat I love to eat!” 🐜