



Brookfield Days (A Little House Chapter Book; Caroline #1)

By Maria D. Wilkes

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It's 1845, and Caroline Quiner lives in a little frame house in the frontier town of Brookfield, Wisconsin. Each day brings new adventures for Caroline as she helps Mother, Grandma, and her five brothers and sisters run the family farm.

The Caroline Chapter Books are gentle adaptations of the Caroline Years novels. They introduce beginning readers to Caroline Quiner, the little girl who would grow up to be Laura Ingalls Wilder's mother.

The Caroline Chapter Books are part of an ongoing series of Little House Chapter Books.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Maria D. Wilkes first read the Little House books as a young girl and has been fascinated by pioneer history ever since. She did extensive research on the Quiner, Ingalls, and Wilder families, studied original sources and family letters and diaries, and worked in close consultation with several historians and the Laura Ingalls Wilder estate as she wrote the Caroline Years books. She lives in New Jersey with her husband, Peter, and her daughters, Grace and Natalie.

Doris Ettlinger, a graduate of Rhode Island School of Design, has illustrated many books for children. She lives in Warren County, New Jersey.

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Chapter OneMother's Helper

Morning sunshine peeped through the windows of a little frame house in Brookfield, Wisconsin. Upstairs, Caroline Quiner lay in the big bed she shared with her sisters, Martha and Eliza. She blinked and rubbed her eyes. She wiggled her toes under the sheet and stretched her arms high above her head.

The house was still except for the sound of Mother's brisk footsteps moving across the kitchen floor below. Caroline could hear the fat pork sizzling in the frying pan. She knew that soon the sweet smell of hotcakes would fill the house, and she couldn't wait for Mother to call up the stairs so they could all start the day. Caroline loved helping Mother and making her smile. Especially now, since Mother didn't smile as much as she used to before Father left.

Caroline's father had been gone for almost one whole year. He had sailed away on a big boat, and he had never come back. Mother said Father was in heaven. Caroline missed him very much, and she knew Mother did, too. Now Grandma lived in the frame house with them and helped Mother take care of them all. Sometimes things were very hard without Father there, but Mother always tried to be cheerful.

"Time to wake up," Mother called from the bottom of the stairs. Caroline jumped out of bed and gently shook Martha's arm.

"Mother says to wake up," she said.

"Hush, Caroline," Martha grumbled as she pulled the sheet over her head.

Martha was the oldest sister. She was eight years old and never liked getting up early.

Just then three-year-old Eliza's eyes popped open. "Up, Martha, up!" she said, and began to bounce on the bed.

Caroline quickly pulled the curtain and tiptoed over to the boys' side of the room. The early-morning air felt cool against her bare feet.

Joseph was the oldest of all the children and Henry came next. They shared a big bed, too. Caroline reached out and shook Henry. He pushed his sandy curls away from his face and sat straight up.

"Morning already, little Brownbraid?" he asked, and Caroline smiled and nodded.

Ever since she was three, Caroline had been called "little Brownbraid." Her father had given her the name. One day, Mother had twisted Caroline's thick, soft hair into one long brown braid. Father saw it at breakfast and said, "How pretty you are, little Brownbraid!" It became his special name just for her.

"Mother says it's time to get up," Caroline said to Henry.

"Then it must be time to get up!" Henry laughed. He nudged Joseph awake, and Caroline turned back to the girls' bed and pulled the curtain behind her. She was just putting on her own white petticoat and everyday dress when the room began to smell like Mother's hotcakes. Suddenly, Caroline was in a hurry. She shook Martha's arm once more.

"Wake up!" she called.

Martha threw the quilt back and leaned up on her elbows.

"All right, all right," she yawned. "I'm awake."

Caroline turned around so that Martha could fasten the long row of buttons on the back of her blue cotton dress.

"Hurry, Martha!" Caroline pleaded.

"It's too early to hurry," Martha said sleepily.

Caroline didn't think it was too early. She was too busy thinking about the hotcakes. Hotcakes were her favorite. She loved to drop a pat of butter on the steaming cakes. Then she'd pour sugar syrup over the stack and eat them before the syrup even had a chance to drizzle off the hotcakes onto her plate. Her stomach rumbled just thinking about it.

As soon as Martha was dressed, the three girls rushed downstairs. The kitchen was warm and cozy. Joseph and Henry had already brought the wood in from the woodpile. The fire in the hearth hissed and popped. The sunshine made the room glow with light.

Mother was standing at the hearth. Her straight black hair was neatly pinned behind her head. She looked up and smiled at the girls.

Grandma was rocking slowly in front of the fire. She had baby Thomas on her knee and she was singing softly to him.

"Good morning, Grandma," Caroline and Martha and Eliza sang out.

"Good morning, dears," Grandma smiled.

Grandma braided each girl's hair, and then they quickly washed their hands and faces at the washstand by the fire. Caroline began to help Martha set the table.

Finally, Mother carried the platters of hotcakes and crisp fat pork slices from the stove to the table. Grandma

filled each cup with milk. Martha set a big bowl of applesauce and a crock of butter in the center of the table. "Bring the sugar syrup, please, Caroline," Mother said, and her eyes twinkled.

Caroline gave Mother her brightest smile. Then she ran to the pantry. When Mother asked her to get the sugar syrup, it meant she could pour it on her hotcakes first-before Eliza and Martha and Henry, even before Joseph! Mother knew just how much Caroline loved sugar syrup.

Back at the table, Caroline set the sugar syrup right next to her plate. She took her seat while Mother said the blessing.

At last it was time to eat hotcakes! Caroline poured out the thick syrup and passed it along. She picked up her fork and took a big bite. The syrup and butter and hotcakes all melted together in her mouth.

When breakfast was done, it was time to start the morning chores. Everyone had different chores to do. Joseph and Henry went off to chop more wood for the fire. Mother and Martha washed the breakfast dishes.

Caroline was only five years old and too little to wash dishes, but she helped dry each plate and cup. Then she handed the dishes to Martha, and Martha put them back on the dish dresser.

"Time to make the beds and tidy your room, girls!" Mother said and handed the big broom to Caroline.

Caroline and Martha did their morning chores as fast as they could. They were in a hurry to get outside. Caroline knew the chickens were waiting. Feeding the chickens and gathering the eggs was Caroline's special chore.

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