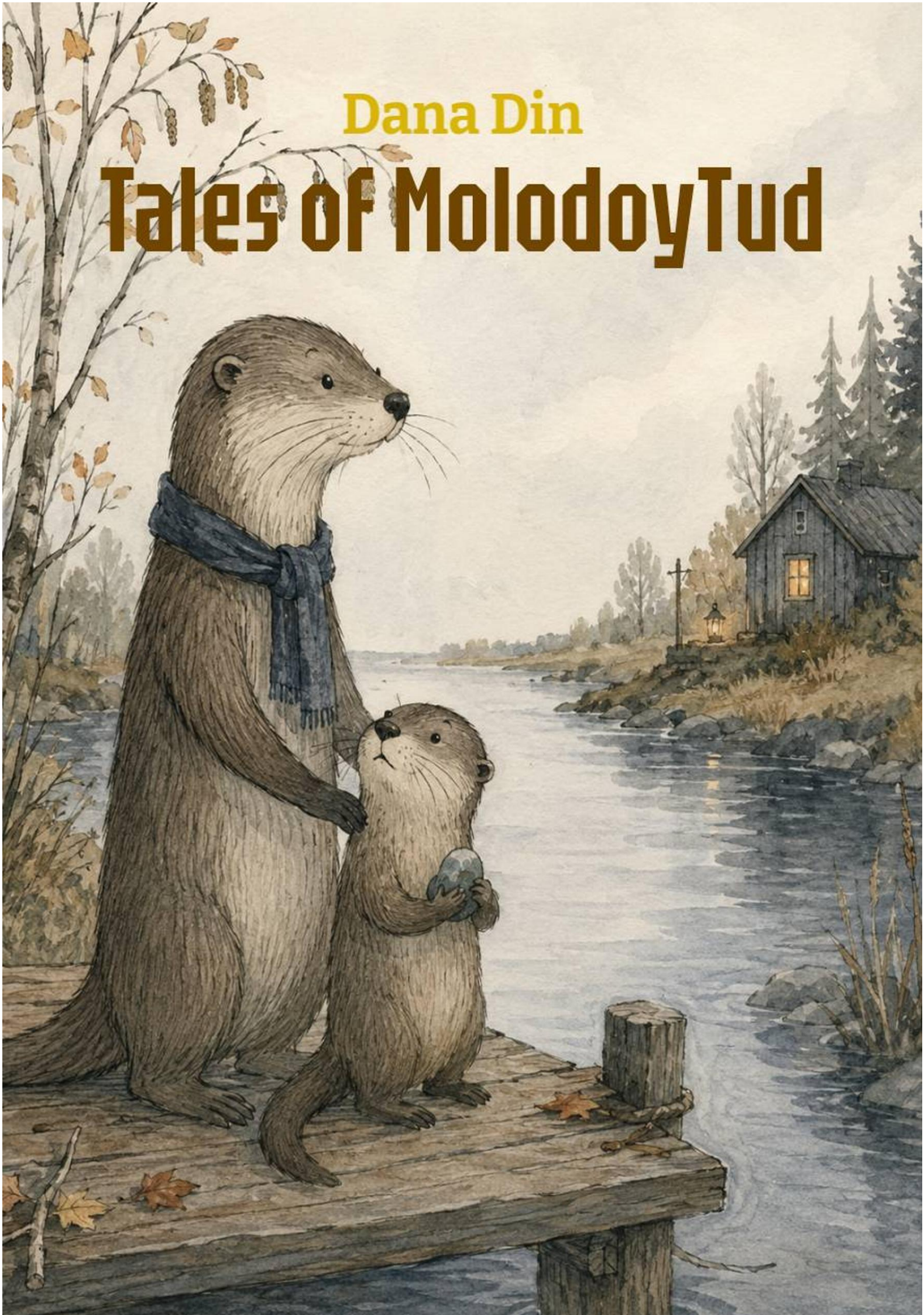
Dana Din

Tales of MolodoyTud



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«Автор»
2026

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Tales of the Tudovka RiverLittle Stories from Mologoy Tud — for reading aloudA cycle of gentle tales set in the village of Mologoy Tud, in Russias Tver region. For readers aged 6–10 and their parents.Meet Papa Otter and his curious son, Little Otter, as they live through a full year on the narrow, cold, crystal-clear river Tudovka

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Chapter 1

Autumn in Molodoy Tud

Autumn came into its own in Molodoy Tud reluctantly, like a late guest . For a long time, the sun continued to warm the meadows with a gentle hand, so that even as November approached, shy clover blossoms still raised their little candles, and tiny, delicate daisies went on blooming, pretending that nothing had changed. But that morning, the grass glimmered with a fragile veil of pale frost, and the nights chill did not retreat until noon. The air already carried the unmistakable scent of wet fallen leaves and the breath of winter drawing near.

In the cosy little house by the river, where the air always smelled of dried herbs and water, birch logs were already crackling in the stove. Mr Otter pulled on his blue fisherman boots, dashed out onto the porch, filled a little bucket with clear, tinkling water from the swift-flowing Tudovka, and hurried back inside to put the kettle on and cook the morning porridge. As he drew the water, he twitched his whiskers, sniffed the wind, shook his head, and gave a quiet whistle. Winter is on our doorstep. We have no time to lose. When the kettle on the stove began to hiss crossly, announcing that the water had come to a boil, Mr Otter went over to his sons little bed and whispered: Time to get up, little Otterling. We have important things to do today. But the cozi downer was so wonderfully warm. Little Otterling buried his whiskered muzzle deep in the feather bed and gave a plaintive little whimper. Sleep had not yet let go of him, and he, Little Otterling, was quite unprepared to let go of sleep. Mr Otter lowered himself onto the edge of the bed with a heavy but tender sigh and stroked his sons warm back. Winter doesnt ask whether youre ready, little one. We need to see how the other animals are preparing for its arrival. And lend a hand if anyone needs help. Up you get, son. The porridge is on the table waiting for you

After breakfast, they set off along the path that wound beside the Tudovka, heading upstream towards the bend in the river, where the sturdy Beaver Lodge could be seen. Even from a distance, they could hear the tapping and rustling. The Beavers had been already, eaten their breakfast, and got straight to work.

Father Beaver was diligently patching the dam, while his younger son puffed and panted as he carried branches to him.



Do you need a hand, neighbours? - Mr Otter asked politely. Father Beaver wiped his paws on his apron, straightened up, and gave his handiwork a critical inspection.

-The river will freeze over in December, neighbour, and we must finish in time. Otherwise, the lodge could be swept away. This is no laughing matter. Were managing on our own for now!



A cheerful Mrs Beaver peeped out of the round window and offered their guests hot cranberry juice with honey. They each drank a mug, feeling the warmth spread through their paws, then set off again with renewed energy, following the banks where the alders had already shed more than half their leaves. The few that remained trembled on the branches in the wind, like forgotten handkerchiefs left out after washing. On the mountainside, along the path to the deep woods, stood Foxs house: a wooden cottage with intricately carved window frames. The mistress herself sat on the porch and grooming, her nose turned up to the wind, while tufts of fur went flying in every direction. Before winter, Fox was brushing out her old coat so that a new, thick winter one would grow in sooner. *(The wind carries the russet fluff onto the beaver dam and presses it into the mud. Come spring, the softest, fluffiest grass will sprout there. The forest loses nothing.)* Oh, its you otters, Fox sniffed, without turning around. I see youre out inspecting everyone, as though youve nothing better to do

yourselves. Everything is perfectly fine here. My house is dry and warm. Simply marvellous. Mr Otter said nothing. He had noticed that the cottage door hung slightly crooked, and that the snow blizzard would inevitably whistle through the gap. But he knew there was little point in telling Fox how to look after her home. At last, he grumbled: "Dont go showing off, Fox. If you need help, just say so." "Well, Im not sure, she drawled haughtily. I seem to recall you had a wonderful little comb. Mine has gone missing somewhere. And this old fur must be brushed out before the cold sets in. Otherwise, the new coat wont grow properly". Fox turned away, as though she had done them an enormous favour.

- Ill bring it, -Mr Otter said curtly.

-Just dont be long. I have a great deal to do.

"Is she asking for help?", Little Otterling whispered when they had walked a little way off. "Shes asking for a comb. Thats different", dad replied just as quietly. "But its still a kind of help. We simply pretend not to notice the difference. "

The fir trees on the slopes still stood green, but their colour had grown deeper and heavier, like cloth soaked through with icy water.

Among the firs, on the stone terrace of an old manor house, a sleepy Bear sat in the rays of sunlight. He was sorting the pinecones the squirrels had brought to the storehouse and grumbling at the flighty little creatures for their carelessness. Bear had come up with the idea of a squirrel storehouse long ago. Before that, the squirrels hid their supplies wherever they pleased, in the first pile of leaves they came across. Later, they would rush about in a panic, squeaking that they had forgotten where they had stashed their food. The fuss was so exhausting that it gave Bear a headache even in the deepest part of his winter sleep. So he had set aside one of the manors storerooms for their supplies. Having given the squirrels his final instructions, Bear slowly turned towards Little Otterling and looked at him for a long, serious moment with his deep, ancient eyes.

- Little Otterling. Im going to sleep. For a long time. All the way until spring.

- But who will look after the forest? Little Otterling asked in alarm. You will. And your dad. Keep an eye on things. And one more thing… make sure the cellar doesnt flood. The spring waters will rise, and Ill still be asleep. Check on it, will you?

Bear held out a little amber stone: smooth and golden, a piece of pine resin in which a tiny pine needle had been trapped forever.

- This is for you to remember the sunny summer by, in case winter makes you sad. And one more thing… look after the forest. Ive always done it myself. And now its your turn.

Little Otterling nodded. The stone was warm and glowed like a captured sunbeam, dozing in the hollow of his paw.

Early evening came. It was not yet five pm, but twilight had already slipped down from the hills and tangled itself in the tops of the fir trees. Mr Otter and Little Otterling were on their way home.

A hot bathhouse awaited them there, while Mama Otter had spent the whole day bustling about the house. She had arranged jars of raspberry jam and pickles on the shelves in the cool pantry, hung dried mushrooms , and insulated the windows with duck down. She had even found time to visit Miss Fox and lend her the wonderful little comb made of willow twigs. When she returned, she lit the bathhouse stove and scent of burning birchwood drifted along the riverbank.

Along the length of the river, one by one, lanterns began to glow in the homes of the woodland and river creatures. Their little lights shimmered in the cold, dark water and winked at the stars in the high, deep blue sky. Little Otterling clasped the warm amber stone more tightly in his paw. He gazed at the glowing lights and thought that as long as they kept shining, there was not anything to be afraid of.

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