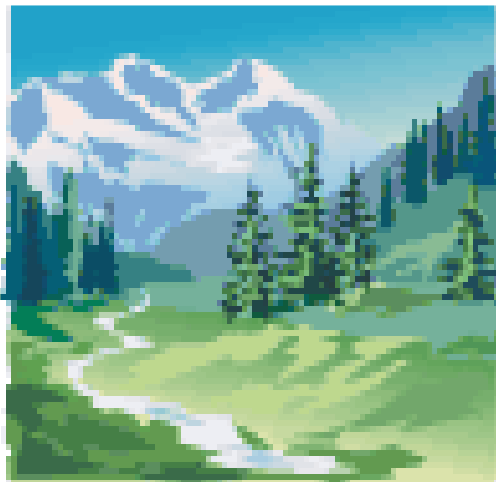


*The Stream That Ran Away*

*by Mary Austin*



A decorative border of blue birds, possibly swallows, arranged in a rectangular frame around the text. The birds are facing right and are spaced evenly along the top, bottom, and sides of the page.

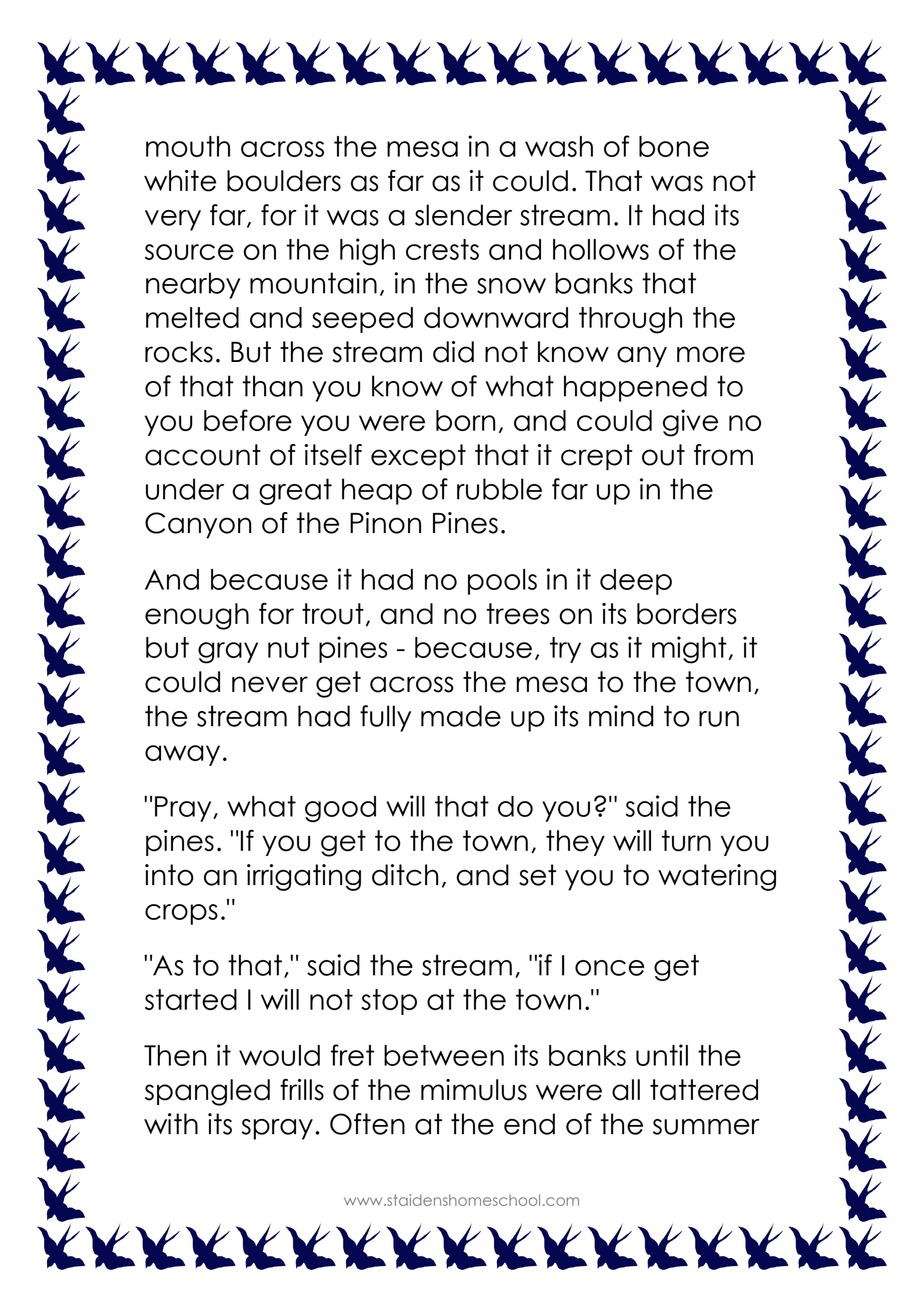
## **The Stream That Ran Away**

by Mary Austin (Adapted)

In a short and shallow canyon running eastward toward the sun, one may find a clear, brown stream called the Creek of Pinon Pines - that is not because it is unusual to find pinon trees in that country, but because there are so few of them in the canyon of the stream. There are all sorts higher up on the slopes - long-leaved yellow pines, thimble cones, tamarack, silver fir, and Douglas spruce - but in the canyon there is only a group of the low headed, gray nut pines which the earliest inhabitants of that country called pinons.

The Canyon of Pinon Pines has a pleasant outlook and lies open to the sun. At the upper end there is no more room by the stream border than will serve for a cattle trail - willows grow in it, choking the path of the water - there are brown birches here and ropes of white clematis tangled over thickets of brier rose.

Low down, the ravine broadens out to inclose a meadow the width of a lark's flight, blossomy and wet and good. Here the stream ran once in a maze of soddy banks and watered all the ground, and afterward ran out at the canyon's



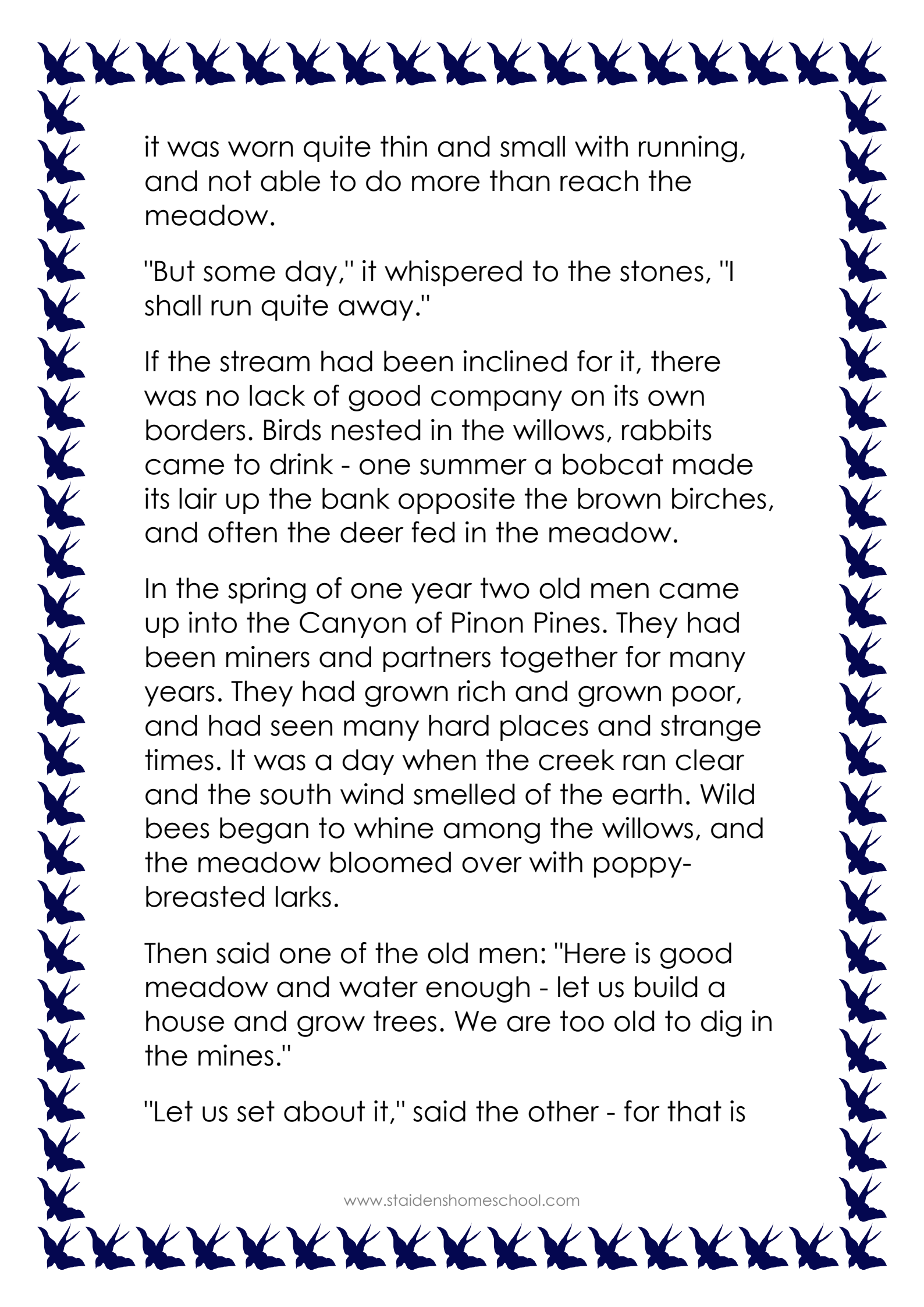
mouth across the mesa in a wash of bone white boulders as far as it could. That was not very far, for it was a slender stream. It had its source on the high crests and hollows of the nearby mountain, in the snow banks that melted and seeped downward through the rocks. But the stream did not know any more of that than you know of what happened to you before you were born, and could give no account of itself except that it crept out from under a great heap of rubble far up in the Canyon of the Pinon Pines.

And because it had no pools in it deep enough for trout, and no trees on its borders but gray nut pines - because, try as it might, it could never get across the mesa to the town, the stream had fully made up its mind to run away.

"Pray, what good will that do you?" said the pines. "If you get to the town, they will turn you into an irrigating ditch, and set you to watering crops."

"As to that," said the stream, "if I once get started I will not stop at the town."

Then it would fret between its banks until the spangled frills of the mimulus were all tattered with its spray. Often at the end of the summer



it was worn quite thin and small with running, and not able to do more than reach the meadow.

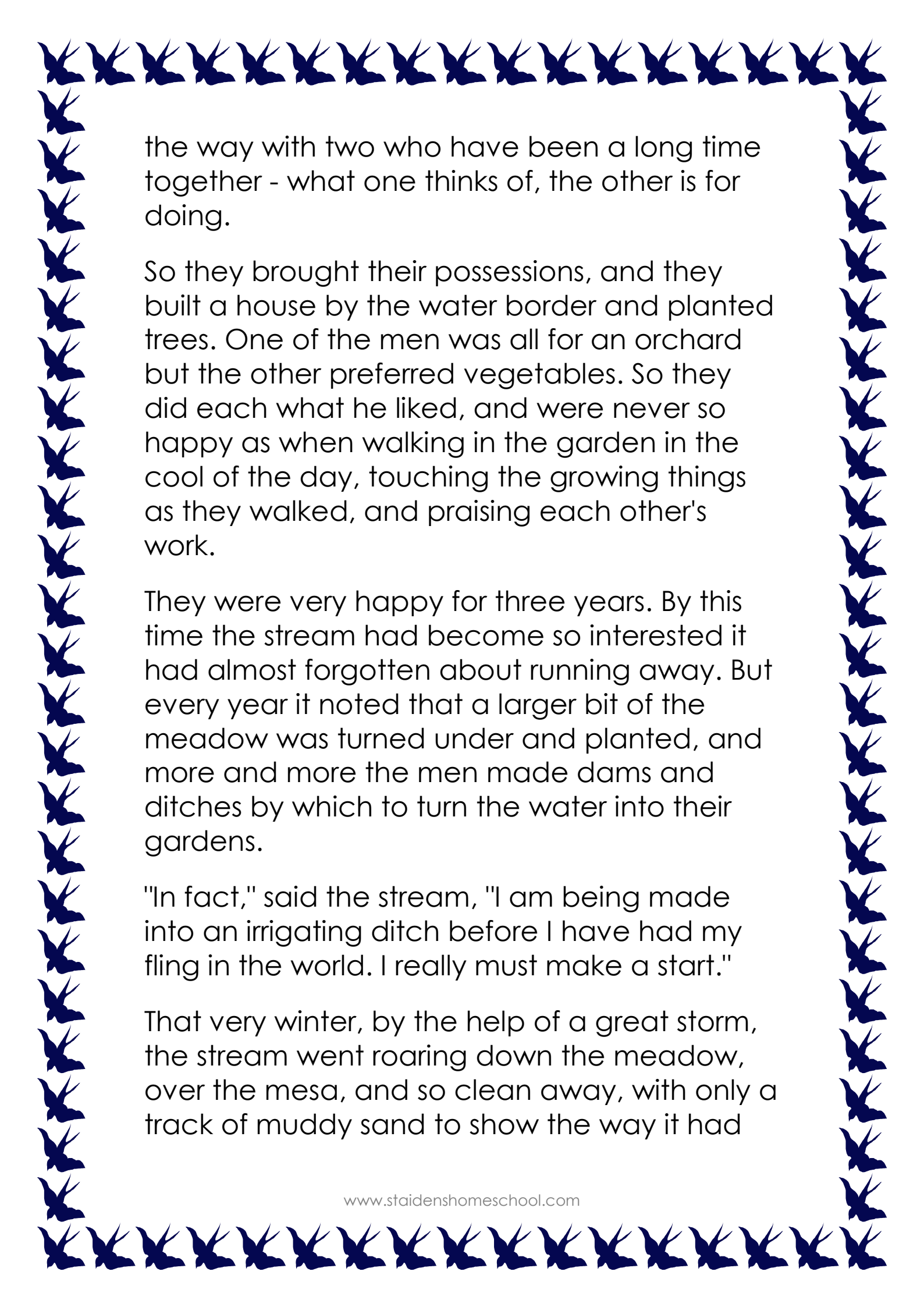
"But some day," it whispered to the stones, "I shall run quite away."

If the stream had been inclined for it, there was no lack of good company on its own borders. Birds nested in the willows, rabbits came to drink - one summer a bobcat made its lair up the bank opposite the brown birches, and often the deer fed in the meadow.

In the spring of one year two old men came up into the Canyon of Pinon Pines. They had been miners and partners together for many years. They had grown rich and grown poor, and had seen many hard places and strange times. It was a day when the creek ran clear and the south wind smelled of the earth. Wild bees began to whine among the willows, and the meadow bloomed over with poppy-breasted larks.

Then said one of the old men: "Here is good meadow and water enough - let us build a house and grow trees. We are too old to dig in the mines."

"Let us set about it," said the other - for that is



the way with two who have been a long time together - what one thinks of, the other is for doing.

So they brought their possessions, and they built a house by the water border and planted trees. One of the men was all for an orchard but the other preferred vegetables. So they did each what he liked, and were never so happy as when walking in the garden in the cool of the day, touching the growing things as they walked, and praising each other's work.

They were very happy for three years. By this time the stream had become so interested it had almost forgotten about running away. But every year it noted that a larger bit of the meadow was turned under and planted, and more and more the men made dams and ditches by which to turn the water into their gardens.

"In fact," said the stream, "I am being made into an irrigating ditch before I have had my fling in the world. I really must make a start."

That very winter, by the help of a great storm, the stream went roaring down the meadow, over the mesa, and so clean away, with only a track of muddy sand to show the way it had



gone.

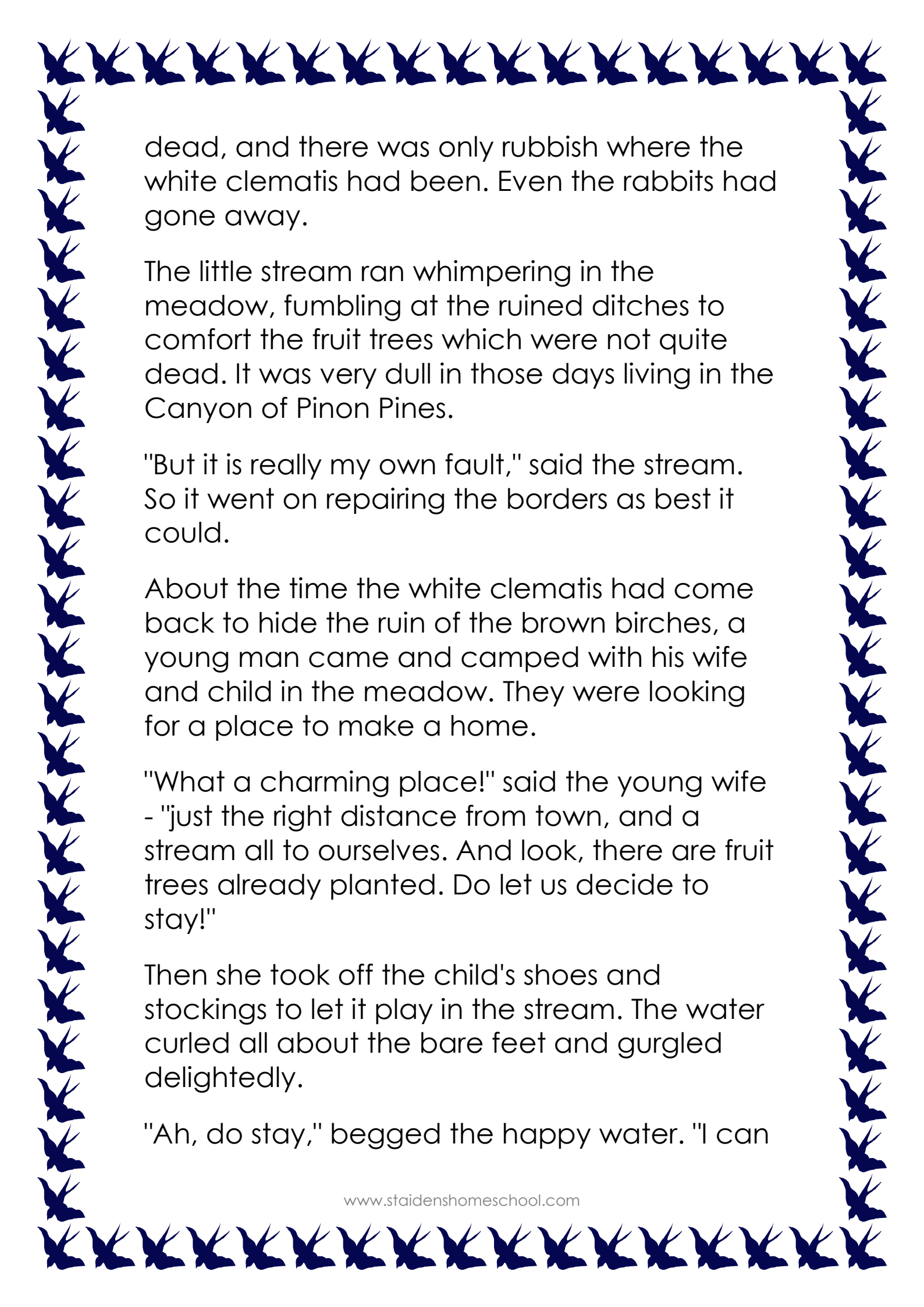
All that winter the two men brought water for drinking from a spring, and looked for the stream to come back. In the spring they hoped still, for that was the season they looked for the orchard to bear. But no fruit grew on the trees, and the seeds they planted shriveled in the earth. So by the end of summer, when they understood that the water would not come back at all, they went sadly away.

Now the Creek of Pinon Pines did not have a happy time. It went out in the world on the wings of the storm, and was very much tossed about and mixed up with other waters, lost and bewildered.

Everywhere it saw water at work, turning mills, watering fields, carrying trade, falling as hail, rain, and snow - and at the last, after many journeys it found itself creeping out from under the rocks of the same old mountain, in the Canyon of Pinon Pines.

"After all, home is best," said the little stream to itself, and ran about in its choked channels looking for old friends.

The willows were there, but grown shabby and dying at the top - the birches were quite



dead, and there was only rubbish where the white clematis had been. Even the rabbits had gone away.

The little stream ran whimpering in the meadow, fumbling at the ruined ditches to comfort the fruit trees which were not quite dead. It was very dull in those days living in the Canyon of Pinon Pines.

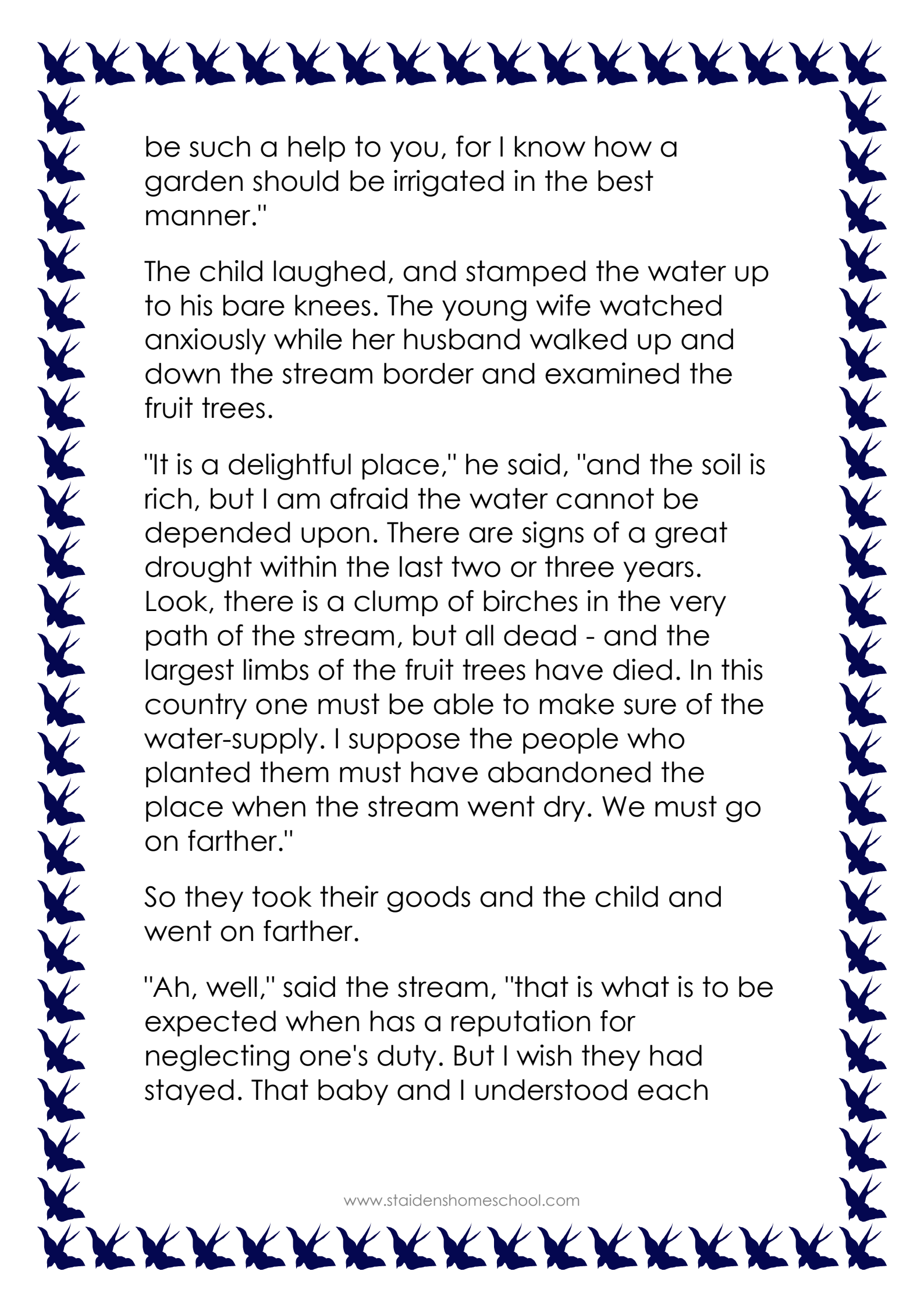
"But it is really my own fault," said the stream. So it went on repairing the borders as best it could.

About the time the white clematis had come back to hide the ruin of the brown birches, a young man came and camped with his wife and child in the meadow. They were looking for a place to make a home.

"What a charming place!" said the young wife - "just the right distance from town, and a stream all to ourselves. And look, there are fruit trees already planted. Do let us decide to stay!"

Then she took off the child's shoes and stockings to let it play in the stream. The water curled all about the bare feet and gurgled delightedly.

"Ah, do stay," begged the happy water. "I can



be such a help to you, for I know how a garden should be irrigated in the best manner."

The child laughed, and stamped the water up to his bare knees. The young wife watched anxiously while her husband walked up and down the stream border and examined the fruit trees.

"It is a delightful place," he said, "and the soil is rich, but I am afraid the water cannot be depended upon. There are signs of a great drought within the last two or three years. Look, there is a clump of birches in the very path of the stream, but all dead - and the largest limbs of the fruit trees have died. In this country one must be able to make sure of the water-supply. I suppose the people who planted them must have abandoned the place when the stream went dry. We must go on farther."

So they took their goods and the child and went on farther.

"Ah, well," said the stream, "that is what is to be expected when has a reputation for neglecting one's duty. But I wish they had stayed. That baby and I understood each



other."

It had made up its mind not to run away again, though it could not be expected to be quite cheerful after all that had happened. If you go to the Canyon of Pinon Pines you will notice that the stream, where it goes brokenly about the meadow, has a mournful sound.