

The Hero of Bucking Tom

Lorne's father is a rancher in the foothills of southern Alberta. He had come West in the early seventies, when Ontario had reached a state of settlement and civilization repugnant to the old man's feelings. He wasn't old in those days, however; in him was the spirit of the true pioneer, and he never felt so full of the spirit of youth as when he trekked from Winnipeg with his wife and first born baby, Mary.

They came in a prairie-schooner, drawn by oxen, and, although Mrs. Davis had not the same high spirit of adventure as her husband, yet she knew him too well to raise any protest.

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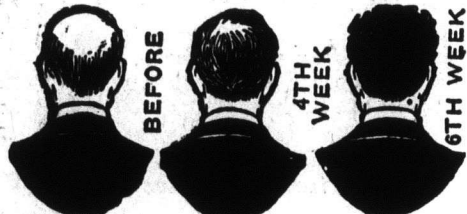
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At the time our story opens Mary is a ruddy-cheeked lass of twenty-five, and Lorne, their second child, born in an ox-cart, is twenty-four and his father's right-hand man. He takes after his father in his high-spirited, adventurous disposition and in his faculty for seeing the humorous side to every situation.

Mr. Davis had this Fall a serious difficulty in obtaining a sufficient number of men for the Fall Round-up, the greatest annual event in the history of Bar Cross Ranch. To be compelled to accept men from the city, "tenderfeet," for this highly skilled work, nearly broke his heart.

Lorne's mirth was caused by the appearance of one of these hired men, a man ostensibly from the city, with patent leather shoes, the worse for wear, stylishly cut clothes, and a shirt whose front had once been glossy.

This man had been taken off the train at Stop-off Depot. It was getting late in the season and the round-up must start with the increase of the moon, with skilled men or unskilled, and Dad Davis for once was compelled to take what he could get.

The name of the newcomer, Lorne soon found out, was Jack Morton, and he was from Toronto. His countenance showed real pleasure at having, for the first time, an opportunity of seeing Western life and habits.

After supper the evening was spent in mending saddles, cinches, lariat ropes, and such like paraphernalia of a cowboy's trade, in preparation for the great ingathering of the horned family of the Bar-Cross Ranch.

In the morning, after a breakfast of flapjacks and maple syrup, Jack was asked to bring in from the range a couple of ponies for his own use during the "drive." Jack started off on foot but the voice of Dad Davis recalled him:

"Say, Bud, whar you goin'?"

"For the ponies."

"Better take a cayuse, there's half a dozen in the barn doin' nothin'."

Jack went to the barn and saw, among others, Lorne's mare, already saddled, and, having obtained permission to use it "if he could," led it outside and prepared to mount. The mare, a high-strung, sensitive beast, full of life, and prancing with impatience, seemed to resent the stranger's hand upon the bit and his awkward way of mounting; so, before Jack's right foot was astride the saddle, the mare leaped ahead and Jack was clawing the dust.

He soon recovered, however, and, conscious of Mary's laughing eyes upon him, he declined Lorne's proffered help and succeeded in getting astride the now thoroughly settled pony, but, before he could settle himself in the saddle, the animal began to buck and rear in the most alarming fashion, so that Jack found himself hanging on with both arms around its neck, and expecting each moment to be flung to the ground. The mare, wearying of this kind of exercise, started off at a tremendous speed for the creek and, there changing its mind, turned and raced back to the barn and there brought up with such startling suddenness that Jack was deposited in shameful confusion on top of a manure pile.

More frightened than hurt, he picked himself up and, after listening good-naturedly to the bantering remarks of the crowd, once more, on an older and quieter horse, brought in the bunch, and, with the help of the cowboys, caught two for his own use.

The next day found them started on the round-up. Stiff and sore, Jack felt like remaining behind but, if he did that, he would miss the fun, which he had no intention of doing. To an Easterner there is something decidedly romantic in a Western cattle drive and for Jack the sense of adventure far outweighed any person discomfort he might feel.

The first night they stopped at the Lazy V ranch, and the six cowboys occupied the bunk-house together with the original inhabitants, who also purposed to "hit the trail" at sun-up.

Thus they travelled for six days, being joined here and there by other groups of cowboys on a like errand as themselves, to the summer feeding grounds. And then one day they began to split up into groups, each group taking different directions, exploring coulees and clumps of brush for any stray cow that might have turned aside to give birth to a calf.

Jack had paired with Lorne and he soon took part in the search in true cowboy style, bringing many a jealous mother and many an unruly steer into the open country.

Then, one day, they reached a plateau overlooking a wide valley and here, grazing contentedly, was the largest herd of cattle Jack had ever set eyes on. This was the summer feeding-grounds, this valley between the Porcupine Hills and the Rockies which stretched half the length of the Province of Alberta, and Jack on that day and the days following had full opportunity to take in the beauties of the scene.

Here they met with the other cowboys and, after a few days waiting, they started on the homeward drive. The cattle moved slowly and care had to be taken that no opportunity was given to stampede. At night they would camp and the cattle were allowed to graze while two or three cowboys would keep watch, Jack taking his turn with the rest.

Two days out from Bar Cross Ranch was a river, or, more properly, a mountain torrent, which had been named The Bucking Tom River. Jack distinctly remembered the crossing on the way out and wondered how they were going to pilot the herd across. In fact, the cowboys themselves were none too sure of this river, and sundry doubts were expressed as to whether "they'd be able to make it," with the river swollen by more than ordinary rains. At one place the horses had to swim for a short distance and at this point special care would have to be taken to keep the herd from being carried away by the current.

And now, about three weeks from the time they had left it, they came again to the old Bucking Tom and there they were met by Dad Davis with a few more ranchers. Dad himself did not like the "looks of her" at this time and, with so many of his punchers "city guys," he was full of cautions and instructions.

Jack was to keep near Lorne, who took the lower and most dangerous side of the ford. The ford did not run at right angles to the river but diagonally across it, so that the lower end was nearly half a mile away.

At last, with much shouting and cracking of whips, the first batch of over two hundred were induced to enter the water and piloted safely across. Close on their heels followed another herd, led by an old bull that had made the crossing many times. Lorne, on his mare, stood by the edge of the deep water, with Jack close behind, cracking their whips whenever a young steer or heifer ventured too close to the danger zone. The older cattle, for the most part, were more easily controlled and seemed to know by instinct where to go.

One young steer got into difficulties in midstream and swept down the river before anyone could stop it, but, as the rest of the herd had no intention of following, it was left to its fate.

And now the last herd were beginning to cross and the ranchers were breathing more freely, but a young bull which had assumed leadership about half-way across seemed inclined to head downstream in spite of the efforts of Lorne and the others to prevent him. It is a dangerous policy to change leaders in midstream, as many of the herd found out to their cost that afternoon. The "leader" managed to get outside the ford into deep water where the river ran like a torrent; this started the others and there was a danger that the whole herd would follow suit and become victims of the foaming wrath of Bucking Tom.

Lorne shouted a word of warning to Jack to keep his place and on no account to move from shallow water and then headed his mare downstream in pursuit of the excited bull. His father shouted to him in warning but it was no use. The herd was in danger, and he could not let them drown without an effort to save them.

Swimming vigorously the mare reached the crazy leader and then something happened; Lorne tried to head the bull toward shore and in doing so turned so quickly that the mare was over-balanced by the swift current and for a full half-minute horse and rider disappeared below the surface.

Jack, who had watched the whole affair with feverish anxiety, could stand it no longer, and as horse and rider reappeared at different places on the surface, each struggling bravely for life, he headed his horse into the stream and urged it with

cruel spurring towards the spot. Within three minutes he was opposite the struggling horse, which he ignored, and a moment or so later he was within a few yards of Lorne who again disappeared, sucked under by the treacherous undertow.

Jack saw that their only hope now was in his own ability to swim and bear up the other's weight, for his horse had become panic-stricken and responded neither to bit nor whip; so, slipping from the saddle, he swam, with those powerful strokes he had learned at Toronto Beach, for the spot where Lorne was last seen and, as the drowning man once more broke the surface, he was gripped by a powerful hand and turned on his back whilst his head was kept above the surface by Jack's strong pressure from underneath. This was made more easy by the fact that Lorne was now unconscious and unable to resist or struggle.

And now ensued a spectacle such as the anxious watchers had never seen, a struggle between the angry torrent and the powerful swimmer. Nature seemed resentful of this defiance of her laws, and seemed glad of the chance to punish those who defied her. About a quarter of a mile away were the rapids and these seemed waiting with hungry jaws for the coming prey.

Could Jack with his burden make the bank before the rapids were reached? The roar of the falling water seemed to answer, "No," while the watchers prayed and hoped, "Yes." But it was a hopeless task. Had he been free he might have saved himself; his strength was failing and a groan of despair swept upward from the crowd, to be followed immediately afterward by a cry, "The rock! The rock! Make for the rock!"

A small rock, almost unseen amid the swirling waters, was now seen and Jack, whose strength had almost gone, revived and looked about him. Below, about ten yards to the right and land side of where he was, he saw the rock and, with fresh hope, swam toward it. He grasped, as only drowning men know how to grasp, a projection and, with his last remaining strength, flung his unconscious friend upon the rock and drew himself up after.

Ropes were soon brought and flung to the rock, while another was tied to willing helpers who formed a living link from deep water to the shore, and seized the exhausted Jack and the unconscious Lorne as they were dragged to the shore. There loving hands did all that was possible to revive any flickering spark of life in the rancher's son. For hours his life was despaired of, and Jack, too, had become insensible as he reached the bank. They were both carried to the nearest ranch-house and Mrs. Davis and Mary shortly arrived on the scene and constituted themselves nurses, and their loving care was soon rewarded by seeing both patients show returning signs of animation.

The next morning Jack awoke with the sunlight flooding the room and Mary bending over him; the look of mischief had gone from her eyes and in its place was a look of anxious solicitude. Jack never felt so happy as that same morning when he overheard Mary say to her brother, "Never mind, Lorne, if he cannot ride your mare he can ride the old Bucking Tom, which is more than we or anyone else around these parts can do."

Not Going to Take It

"You've overdone the matter of exercise, man," said the doctor, after Hamish had detailed his symptoms. "You must give yourself a day's quiet now and then and avoid exposure. How often do you play golf?"

"Every day but the Sabbath," said Hamish, rising.

"You must be more temperate at it," said the physician. "Twice a week in good weather is enough for you."

"Good day!" said Hamish, moving toward the door.

"You've not paid me for my advice," said the doctor, who knew his man.

"Nae, for I'm nae takking it," said Hamish, as he reached the door and made his escape.

We are indebted to Messrs. Glasgow, Brook & Co., Toronto, publishers of the "Chronicles of Canada" for permission to reproduce the painting by C. W. Jefferys on our front page cover. The illustration is that of Sir John A. Macdonald crossing the Rockies in 1886, in the first Canadian Pacific train.