

A SWIM TO SAFETY

(By Roe L. Hendrick)

"You can swim cattle or horses out if they get caught by high water," said Jim to the men at the Hooker ranch. "But don't try it with hogs. A hog will cut its throat with its mof if he has to swim more than a hundred yards."

No one appeared especially interested but Lish Hooker looked across at Jim and smiled. "Did you ever see a hog cut its throat that way, Kimmie?" he asked mildly.

"Why, I don't know I ever did," the lad admitted, "but everyone says they do."

"Did you ever see anyone who ever saw the thing happen?"

"Gene Crane was telling about it last summer, but I don't know he said he ever saw it himself."

"That throat-cutting story is what the teacher over at the Corners would call a myth," Lish declared. "Some hogs, away back before the dawn of history, ran on something sharp while swimming, cutting its neck. Maybe the hog-herd was to blame, and in order to square himself, told the boss that he had seen it."

"A boy gets nervous, though, he has something to look at that stands for money, even if he can't handle the coin himself. Henry M. understood boys; so he gave me a bill of sale for 14 hogs—any that I should pick out of the 63 on the ranch and after that, he called me his partner in the hog business. Hogs in that lean year didn't mean very much, for they were just as lean as anything else and in that condition couldn't be given away much less sold. In fact, it was doubtful whether we could keep 63 alive."

"We had planted a full quarter section of corn, and it looked nice before the grasshoppers came. After that it

the hog did it with its foot. He was lucky enough to get the story believed and it has come right down the ages, ever since, with so many people repeating it that those who had found out better couldn't get a word in edge-wise."

"No one's keeping you from telling right now, Lish," Joel Ransom said. "Bring on your proofs were all listening."

"Well," said Hooker, "I had proof enough back in the seventies when I was about Jim's age here. You remember old man Peascott—Henry M. Peascott—don't you, Joel?"

"Yes, a tall man, with side whiskers—kind of a speculator."

"That's the man. When I came here from Pennsylvania, I went to work for Peascott by the month. That was the last year the grasshoppers came, and they ate up everything in our county. Henry M. was luckier than many of his neighbors for he didn't depend on farming altogether for his living, but he was hard hit, just the same we got to the end of the year, he didn't have a cent to pay the balance due on my wages. He was grumpy, and hired me again—told me that if I'd stay by him through the lean years, I should have all there was coming to me in a lump when the fat years came. He kept his word, too."

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"We had planted a full quarter section of corn, and it looked nice before the grasshoppers came. After that it

looked like almost anything except a cornfield. However, there was a few nibbles here and there, and so we turned the hogs into the bottom and left them to rustle for themselves. They took everything that the hoppers left."

"In spite of that, the poor beasts would have starved to death if it hadn't been for the quitters, the 'back Easters'; two of them saved the day for us."

"Bogardus quit early in September, and went back to Ohio. As I was going by his dugout a month later, I noticed some potato tops that looked pretty good; and a little diggin showed that the hills had a lot of small potatoes in them. By that time the hogs in the cornfield had gnawed the stalks down to the ground, so Henry M. and I drove them across to the potatoes. You ought to have seen those razorbacks root. They turned over every inch of ground, and I don't think that a single potato escaped them."

"That piece of luck carried them in to November when another famine arrived. Henry M. had some corn out cropping back at the second bluffs, and had arranged to trade a few car loads of it for some Iowa corn; but the corn hadn't been shipped yet, and it seemed probable that the hogs would starve before it came. Then we heard that Moses Belaslee, who lived six miles upstream from our place, abandoned his claim and started back to Missouri; Henry M. sent me there to see if he had left anything that a hog could eat."

"Blaslee's bottom lands proved a gold mine to us. He had planted 80 acres of corn between the bluffs and the timber strip along the river, and for some reason, probably because the trees had helped to save it, the corn was the best I ever saw anywhere in the country that year. Of course there weren't any prime ears, but there were ten bushels of nibbles to the acre. Moses Belaslee couldn't have had much backbone. Why, some of the pluckier people who didn't did n't have anything left except the bare earth, and they got comfortably well off afterward."

"I was afraid that someone else would find that good corn, and so I went home on the run. We figured that with two weeks of pen feeding on Iowa corn and slops, we could ship them to Kansas City in March as fat hogs."

"I looked after them, but it wasn't necessary for me to go up there more than once or twice a week. They couldn't have been driven out of that cornfield into the desert, and I opened up Blaslee's sod stable, in order to make shelter for them. They wintered all right, for it was a mild season."

"Late in February, Peascott went up the river to the state line, to sell some coal in the villages outside the grasshopper belt. We could have sold round home all we could dig, but would have had to take Peascott's notes for it that no one would cash. Henry M. wanted some real money to carry us through to trade spring notes for it that no one would cash."

"We had a little spur track on our place, and I was loading a couple of 'jimmies' to be ready to make shipments in case of orders, when Mrs. Peascott came over the rise from the house, waving a piece of yellow paper."

"Go right up and get those cattle off the bottom over at Blaslee's," Lish she called to me. "There is going to be a flood."

"A what?" I said.

"A flood! I've just had a telegram from Henry. It's raining like sixty up there where he is—a regular cloud burst. He says the river will be all over the bottom down here before night, and for you to get those hogs up on the bluffs just as quick as you can."

"You know how the Saline is—kind of dusty most of the time, but a mile east every few years just to even up the bottom. I glanced over at the little stretch of shallows and couldn't see any reason for getting excited."

"Just wait till I get this car loaded," Mrs. Peascott, I said.

"No," she shouted, "drop that shovel and then stop at the house for a pair of lunch I've put for you, and get on old Jerry, he's the best horse we've got left, and ride hard! You've got to share in those hogs, remember!"

"I wasn't at all excited yet, but no one ever talked back to Mrs. Peascott, not even Henry M., so I obeyed her orders."

"As I was toting along past Murphy's head, I saw for the first time that the river had risen to the top of its banks. It had come up six feet or more in the last half hour. That opened my eyes, and I made Jerry hustle the last three miles."

"The only way of getting down the Blaslee bottoms was by a road that the face of the bluff. When I got to the foot of the slope, Jerry uplashed through a stream of water a foot deep. The rest of the bottom was already an island, with the buildings the highest part."

"It didn't seem to me that the river could come much higher, but I got those hogs up on the second bench just as soon as I could. Except in the oldest spells, I had usually found them working through the corn; but now they were too worried to eat. Although it was only the middle of the afternoon, every one of them had crowded into the old stable."

"It's funny, isn't it, how dumb beasts will be aware of a natural danger, and try to escape from it, long before a man notices anything wrong. These hogs, of course, used poor judgment in crowding into the stable instead of getting up on the bluffs, but they picked up the highest place on the bottom. The only trouble was that it wasn't nearly high enough."

"They wouldn't come out at my call, so I slipped off the horse, and ran inside to punch them up. I had no sooner got out of the saddle than old Jerry turned and made for the upland as fast as he could scamper. I yelled at him, but that only made him go faster; he too, scented danger, and meant to get out of the way of it."

"At first the hogs refused to budge from the stable. Finally I got a club, and drove them out; but I couldn't get them off the low knoll on which the building stood. It was easy to see why; by this time there was water all round it; the flood was a foot or two deep over the covered ground."

"That water rose an inch a minute. Before I could make up my mind to follow Jerry, it was too late; I should have to swim, and I was a mighty poor swimmer. The current made it impossible to cross the river."

"In twenty minutes my feet were wet, and I climbed up on Blaslee's house, which was built of stone, partly of sods, with a puecho roof. The hogs didn't go back into the barn but crowded together, close to the house."

"The new city on her own motive power. Thousands of old-time railroad men gathered in the Baby City of Ontario for the Old Timers' celebrations, and many were the hair-raising stories told of the days when, half a century ago, the railroad was first pushing its way through the barren wilderness which was then North Bay."

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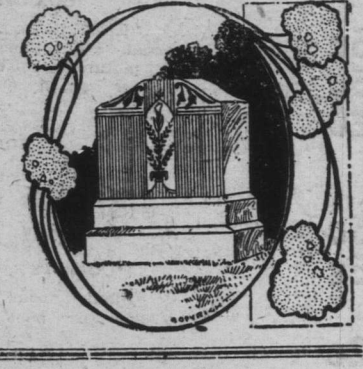
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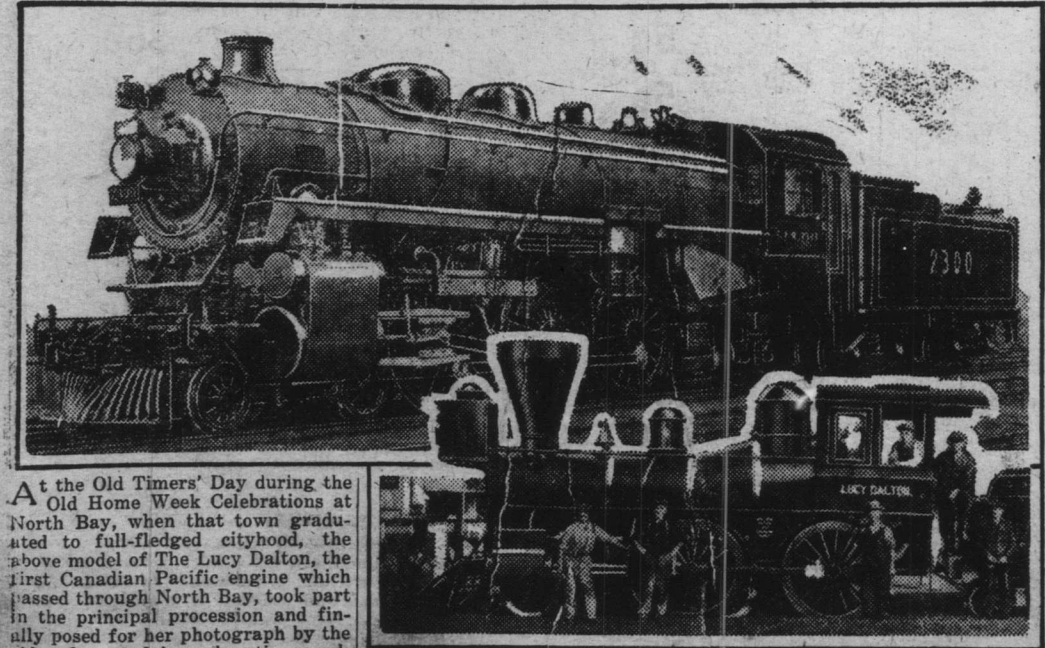
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