

DUST

A REAL FARM

Everyone seemed to have something to do if we were going to turn the weed farm into a real farm. Mother was busy turning the old house into a new home. Dad had found an old horse drawn disk and harrow that had been abandoned in a fence row which he hooked to the back of our pickup and dragged them around all the buildings knocking most of the weeds down so he and Ab could take an old horse drawn hay rake that Ab and I had found behind the barn to pull all the weeds up into a pile West of the house to be burned.

Each day seemed to bring more trucks or pickups to the revived farm hauling cows, pigs, or chickens, but of course no horse arrived in any of the trucks. Aside from that, every new day slowly turned the once dreary abandoned buildings into a farm we could be proud of almost as good a farm as Pa and Ma's farm, if you ignored the fact that there was only one Mulberry tree down by the old carriage barn and a measly little volunteer Indian Peach tree just South of the cellar.

Walking out of the kitchen onto the enclosed South porch I saw Ab looking down into a deep black hole in the center of the porch.

Ab, what are you doing?

Your Dad and I are going to bale the water out of this old cistern then I can clean it out and check to see if it needs to have any leaks or cracks plastered shut so it will hold the rain water.

It'll hold rain water.

Ab stopped working to look up apparently annoyed.

How do you know it will hold water?

You just said it had water in it.

Mother laughed from inside the kitchen and said, "Gary, go on outside to play and leave Ab alone so he can work without worrying about you falling into the cistern."

"Maybe this 'Mr. Smart Aleck' would like to go down there and hand all of that water up to me." Ab said, running around the cistern top trying to catch me while I made a quick exit through the porch door and around the house.

(Ab's always trying to catch me but I'm just too fast for an old man of twenty seven years like him.)

Walking down the slope to the cattle lot I decided to take a look at the windmill. After a very close inspection of the old mill pulling on the control lever and trying to hook up the pump handle it became very evident to me what was wrong with the mill. Someone had taken the

DUST

bottom section of ladder off of the tower. (Now why would anyone do that? It will be almost impossible to climb to the top. Oh well, I'll keep an eye open for the ladder maybe it's around here somewhere.) Walking around the windmill and tromping in all the weeds I looked without success and had just decided to go ask Ab if he knew where it might be when Mother shouted at me from the West door of the house.

Gary, come back up here in the yard. I know what you're thinking.

(Now how could she know what I'm thinking unless she's the one that took the ladder, sometimes you just can't trust your own Mother.)

Walking back up the slope I could feel that eyes were watching me from somewhere.

(I sure would like to have looked at that bird nest on top of the walk board. Rocks! All over the ground. I like rocks. I think I'll take some of them with me. This is a nice sized rock. Wait! What's that over there on that tall post?)

Gary, don't you throw that rock at the electric meter!

I'm not. I was just going to look at this rock.

Yes, I'll bet that is just one of the things you was going to do with that rock.

(I knew those eyes were looking at me. She can be real sneaky sometimes.)

"Mud puppies!" Ab said, from down in the cistern.

"What did you say?" Dad ask.

Mud Puppies. I said that the bottom of this cistern is just covered with Mud Puppies.

We'll catch them and we'll take them fishing.

I want to help Ab catch the puppies.

You can't help Ab catch those puppies.

Yes I can! If you'll let me down there I can.

"Frank! What are you doing with him?" Mother ask.

I'm putting him down in the cistern to help Ab catch those Mud Puppies.

We'll tell Ab to keep him down there. At least I'll know where he's at and maybe we can do a little work around here.

DUST

With the rope tied around under my arms, Dad started lowering me down into the cistern.

(Boy this is going to be great, Ab and I will catch those puppies. Dad said we can take them fishing, they must be some kind of hound that chases fish like Dad's Coonhounds chases coons.)

The water at the bottom of the cistern was cold and there were about six inches of gooey mud on the bottom.

Ab, turn me loose! I want to catch the puppies.

Gary, you can't catch the puppies until I untie you from this well rope.

Where are the puppies?

Ab reached down into a bucket and came up with something wet.

Here's one.

That's not a puppy! That's a wet lizard!

Ab's laughter sounded funny twenty foot down at the bottom of the milk bottle shaped brick and concrete plastered cistern.

After a lot of hollering and laughing at the sounds I could make inside of the concrete bottle, Ab tied the pulley rope around under my arms for Dad to pull me back out. But only after Mother convinced him to not tie it around my neck. Dad pulled me out through the hole at the top of the cistern and untied me, then Mother took me down to the water well where she pulled down on the windmill handle to start the windmill to pumping water and made me sit under the big iron spigot while the cold water pulsed out all over me until all of the mud was gone. After I quit shivering from spending the afternoon down inside the cistern and an eternity setting under the cold water spigot at the well, Mother made me take a nap. (She sure does know how to punish a boy for getting muddy.)

Tap-tap-tap, bang, bang, (What's that?) bang, bang, (Well I can't sleep with all that noise). Turning over I slid over the side of the bed to the floor and walked into the big Dutch kitchen.

Good morning Gary do you want some breakfast?

No! What's all the noise about?

Your Daddy and Ab are repairing the leaks in the roof with some new shingles.

What are you doing?

Washing the breakfast dishes.

DUST

Can I help?

Yes, if you would like to, thank you.

Out the door and up the ladder.

Hi Ab.

Frank, tell me I am hearing things.

Sorry Ab, but there's nothing wrong with your hearing. He's actually up here to help you again.

Ab laid down the strange looking hammer he was using.

Gary, what are you doing up here?

Mother said I could help you. What's this?

That's a new shingling hatchet, now give it to me before you chop your toe off. (Boy! Ab sure is selfish with that new hatchet. So this is how things look when you're big like Ab. I'm going to be big like Ab some day. WOW! Look at all that stuff. Buildings, cows, and chickens, but I don't see a horse. If there's one out there I'm going to find out where R.E. has it hid then I'll go away over there where those houses are. Maybe I'll even go to Pa's house. I'll bet Pa would like that.)

Honk, honk, a strange truck drove into the farm yard, rattling, banging, and squealing sounds, were coming from the back of the strange truck.

"Come on Gary." Ab said, picking me up and stuffing me in the crook of his arm.

I want to stay up here.

"You can't! We're all going down to the hog lot and unload the pigs." he said, climbing down the ladder.

On the ground he sat me down then laid the ladder down.

Why did you lay the ladder down? Don't we have to go back up there to finish the roof after we unload the pigs?

Yes we do, but while we're all busy unloading the pigs, I think the ladder will be safer laying on the ground.

Ab took off walking toward the hog lot quickly turning the corner of the house.

Ab, wait for me, you're going too fast.

DUST

At the corner of the house he picked me up stuffing me into the crook of his arm again. Sticking my arms out at my sides and my feet straight out behind, I shouted, "Ab, I'm flying, go faster."

He started running down the slope toward the hog lot while I flew over the ground with the greatest of ease until Ab caused me to make an abrupt, almost crash, landing.

At the hog lot Dad and R.E. were inside the pen with the truck backed up to the lot fence. Mother was standing up wind on the South side of the truck when Ab set me down then he climbed up over the sideboards into the truck while I climbed up onto the lot fence.

"Don't climb up there Gary, you'll be in the way." she said.

Ab said I could help. I protested.

But little man, Ab isn't your boss.

I told you so Ab ... not my boss!

"Let him stand there if he will stay put." Dad told her.

There was a lot of squealing, kicking, and running, of small hard hooves inside the truck. Soon Ab started handing pigs over the tail gate. Pigs of all sizes and colors each of them kicking and squealing. Dad and R.E. were taking them from him then putting them down they would turn the pigs loose. I kept my hands up but Ab just kept handing them to Dad and R.E. ignoring my efforts to help, so I ran around to the other side where Dad and R.E. were but Ab just kept giving all of the pigs to them.

Give me one Ab ... give me one.

Finally Ab shouted back, "Get your hands up Gary the next one is yours."

OK Ab, I'm ready.

Standing on the lot fence holding my hands as high as I could for a long time while there was a lot of running and squealing coming from inside the truck, finally Ab's face, with a big smile, appeared over the tail gate.

Here it comes Gary.

OK, let me have it.

Over the tail gate came the biggest pig of the whole truck load. Ab stuck both of the hind legs in my hands and turned loose. The pig kicked and squealed his weight pulling me off the side of the pen onto the ground then rolled me in the dirt. The last I saw of the pig was the last part of him running across the farm yard and into a patch of weeds.

DUST

Picking myself up and spitting dirt out of my mouth I looked up to see Ab's face with a big smile looking over the sideboard of the truck.

"Why didn't you hold onto him Gary?" he ask.

I didn't want the biggest one of the whole bunch you damn fool!

"Gary!" Mother shouted. But the rest of her scolding was drowned out in Ab's laughter while he held onto the sideboard to keep from falling into the truck load of squealing pigs.

Walking back to the house with a roar of laughter behind me I decided cows and chickens are OK, but I'll not help Ab work pigs ever again. He just couldn't be trusted with serious stuff. He'll just have to finish shingling the roof by himself. I'm not going to help him anymore! If I could lift that ladder up on the side of the house I would throw his shingling hatchet down the cistern! I didn't know that anybody would do just anybody that way!

Later that night when it was dark and everything was quiet I slipped out of bed and walked as quietly as I could into the Southeast room where a cool South breeze was blowing through the window across the guest bed. There I crawled up on the empty pillow next to Ab and went to sleep.