

## DUST

### BARGAIN

On Saturday evening Mother and Dad would load the pickup with cans of cows cream and crates of eggs to haul into town and sell them to Yadon's Produce that bought farm products and sold livestock feed, garden seed, day old chicks, and other supplies that all the farmers needed for their agriculture operations.

From the sale of the cream and eggs, Dad would buy the weeks supply of grocery staples, chicken feed, and of course there were those two shiny silver quarters for R.E. and I to pay admission to the latest picture show with, the biggest movie stars of the day, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, or Abbott and Costello, and there were always those Zorro serial dramas to keep you coming back every week to see if Zorro died when he fell from a perilous cliff while fighting the world's worst villain. You knew he wouldn't die, but you just had to know firsthand how he managed to escape.

R.E. and I crawled up into the back of the pickup truck.

"I'll set on the egg crate while you hold the cream cans." R.E. said.

"No! I'll set on the egg crate." I protested, pushing him away.

"Gary, you're always so stubborn!" he said, in a voice loud enough for Mother to hear.

You only say I'm stubborn when you're being selfish and I disagree.

We all rode to town. I set in the seat between Mother and Dad, while R.E. rode in the back, setting on the egg crates holding the cream cans and eating dust all the way. Mother was setting real quiet with her arms folded looking straight ahead, but Dad was happy, he just kept smiling all the way. Once, he said, "Pa was right." "That one will test your metal." And chuckled real loud.

Mother pushed me back down in the seat so I couldn't stand up to see what Dad was talking about then she held me there for a long time.

(Light poles! That means we are about to town that's good this elbow in my chest and those springs poking me in the back aren't very comfortable.)

Inside the produce I stood and watched while Dad and Mr. Yadon placed the cans of cream on the big scales with wheels under it, then Mr. Yadon set some round weight on one end and moved a small weight up and down a long bar with notches in it, all the while Mrs. Yadon was carefully taking flats of eggs out of the egg crate counting them. After a long time, Mr. Yadon counted out some money into Dad's hand. Then Dad turned around with a big smile and handed me a quarter.

Here Gary. This is for all the help you have been to me this week.

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"He must have been a lot of help." Mr. Yadon said.

Dad laughed while looking at Mother and said, "Norman you wouldn't believe it."

R.E. ran in from outside and took his quarter, then grabbing my hand, he ask Mother, "Can Gary go with me now?"

Please! Take him away.

(What's he up to now? He never wants me to go with him anywhere.)

R.E. dragged me out the door onto the sidewalk where there were a lot of people, cars, bright street lights, and the smell of the creamery mixed with the smell of fresh pop corn coming from the open door of the theater across the street.

"I found a goat!" R.E. said, with excitement in his voice.

"What's a goat?" I ask, with the feeling that I was an important part of his devious plan.

"Come on I'll show you and we can buy it!" he said, pulling me down the sidewalk in front of the Hockaday hardware store.

Stopping, I jerked my hand free from his grasp.

(I know what that means. He wants my quarter.) "What do you mean, WE can buy a goat?"

You and Me! The man only wants fifty cents for it!

How much money is that?

My quarter annnnd your quarter.

No! You're not spending my quarter.

Gary, come on, it will be half yours and half mine.

(Now he is talking in that nice-a-t-nice voice again that means he needs me to help him, so if anything goes wrong he will have me to blame for it and Mother will believe him, then I will be in trouble and Dad will go into his red faced chuckling routine.)

R.E. was standing in the middle of the sidewalk looking at me with that pleading look in his eyes, feet wide apart, both hands down at his sides, palms turned forward.

Gary! I said it's a GOAT. My teacher Mrs. Scruggs read a story to us at school about a goat. I know all about them.

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(Now he is going to throw his education at me about how he's been to the first grade where he learned everything that I need for him to figure out for me.)

In this book she read it tells about these boys having a goat. They trained it to pull them in a cart everywhere they wanted to go, to town, to their Grandparents house, and to see their friends. We can make a cart and all of that if we buy this goat.

I don't know.

Just come with me to look at it.

Walking down the sidewalk R.E. put his arm over my shoulder real chummy like thinking by genius of craft he had made a real kill.

Through the Saturday night crowd of Farmers, Indians, Shop Keepers, Bowl Pullers, Amish, Mennonites, Cowboys, Soldiers and Sailors, made up a virtual kaleidoscope of color and sound. With the smell of natural rubber tires, horse sweat, popcorn, gun and hardware oil, cheap perfume, and powder, R.E. led me to the street corner of the Hockaday Hardware Store, where Mr. Halle was standing holding onto a binder twine rope. Tied to the other end was something with long droopy ears, big brown eyes, long eye lashes, and four feet.

(It sure doesn't look like much for fifty cents.)

"Are you two young farmers looking for a bargain in the way of goat livestock?" Mr. Halle ask, with a smile.

Well Gary? What do you think? Are we?

Looking up at the man wearing a straw hat, stripped overalls, and light blue shirt, with sleeves rolled up above the elbows, I ask, "Will that goat pull a cart?"

She probably would if you taught her to.

R.E. nudged me with his elbow. "Well?"

Inside my pocket I was holding onto the shiny silver quarter so tight it was cutting into the palm of my hand. Reluctantly, I pulled my hand out opening it slowly to show the man my entire worldly possession, a gesture that caused R.E. to quickly reach into his own pocket producing another quarter.

"You did say fifty cents. Didn't you Mister?" R.E. ask.

That's what I said, but first we better find you boy's Daddy and make sure he wants you into the goat business.

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Walking down the crowded sidewalk toward the Produce, R.E. forgot all about me, while he walked with one arm over the goat's back and holding tightly onto his quarter with the other hand while Mr. Halle lead the reluctant goat through a sea of people on the crowded sidewalk.

Dad and Mother were standing on the sidewalk outside of Yadon's Produce visiting with Carl and Mrs. Luderman when we appeared out of the crowd.

"No!" Mother said, when she saw the goat under R.E.'s arm.

Dad glanced at Mother then looked in our direction. With a sudden smile he started shaking his head with amused eyes fixed on Mr. Halle.

"I didn't think so." Mr. Halle said, in a gentle amused voice.

"But Mother!" R.E. protested. "It's a real goat!"

I know exactly what it is. And I said no! Now that's that.

R.E. looked down at the sidewalk as she continued.

I thought you was big enough boy to keep Gary out of trouble for a little while! And I'll be darned if you didn't lead him right to the biggest trouble in town!

(I knew it! I just knew it. He has talked me into trouble with Mother again and all I did was walk to the street corner and back with him, but if Mother is that against us having a goat they must be a lot of fun.) I suddenly wanted that goat worse than anything else in the whole world.

Mr. Halle turned around walking back down the sidewalk to the corner again, leading the reluctant spotted goat who was now trying to chew himself loose from the binder twine rope.

Mother decided to keep a hold on R.E. and I until it was time for us to go to the picture show just in case there might be another fifty cent goat somewhere in town.

"You boys come with me until time for the show while I go down the street to Mr. Stutzman's Dry Goods." as she started to walk down the North side of the street.

Mother, Stutzman's is on that side of the street.

I know, but we'll walk half way then cross the street.

Why not cross here at the intersection? It's shorter.

"R.E. the Beer Joint is on that side of the street." she whispered. "Don't ever walk down that side of the street."

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I looked across the street and sure enough there were no people on the South side of the street. (If Mother won't walk down that side of the street then it would be a good place to hide. I don't ever remember of anyone walking down that block of downtown for as long as the Beer Joint was there, but the hinges on the back door of the Beer Joint next to the alley was completely worn out. Of course I observed that unusual condition from afar.)

After the walk to Stutzman's Dry Goods, R.E. and I went to the picture show to watch Roy Rogers save the farm again. Later in the night as we all went home together with my head in Mother's lap, I looked up through the windshield at a beautiful harvest moon, and went to sleep.

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