

TAILS

OF
WOO



By Audrey Ward

In the early 1930's, farmers and stockmen were in dire need, due to the depression. Most of the banks and lending agencies were insolvent and the few that were not forced to close would not take on any new loans.

Without financial help everyone was forced to take extreme measures. Taxes were left unpaid, notes were given for water irrigation, work was done without the aid of hired hands and, in short, economy prevailed in every way possible.

Fixed expenses remained the same, but 'income' became an 'outgo', with \$4 lambs, 75 wool, \$4 hay, 50¢ per hundred grain, etc.

The government finally came to the farmers' aid with a lending agency, but it was still impossible to make both ends meet, owing to prices received for produce. Under these conditions, it is needless to say, 'there was no joy in mudville.' People's faces were as long as a piece of rope and laughter was a thing faintly remembered.

I was to meet my brother and another packer who were in charge of our sheep. This meeting place was pre-arranged. We met, as planned, and the same old tale of woe was with us, as we were badly in need of rain and feed was poor.

I carried my lunch with me and we decided to eat before loading the pack-horses with groceries and stock salt.

We had just started eating when a boy came galloping off the hill. He said he was herding saddle horses and upon seeing us, thought he would come down and visit for awhile.

We had plenty of lunch and he was hungry. While eating he told us that since he was graduated from the eighth-grade, he decided to get a job and help with the family's income.

He said his boss, a friend of ours, had told him that since times were so hard, he could not pay very big wages, but that as they had a full case of hen eggs, they would be partners in a new business venture.

Since there were dozens of magpies nesting along the creek, they would substitute hen eggs for magpie eggs and the birds would not only hatch the baby chicks, but would also feed them until they were old enough to take care of themselves, at which time the men would drive off the magpies and harvest the crop of baby chicks.

The boy's boss also said that the egg substitution could work both ways, as they could eat magpie eggs, thus releasing more hen eggs for the new venture, but he was not sure he wanted to eat magpie eggs, even though it might cut down on their new income source.

The lad did not stay long, as his horses were giving him some trouble. While we were packing up, we all had a good laugh at this new depression enterprise. After arranging for a new meeting ten days later, we parted as each boy went to his respective camp and me to the ranch and home.

As I drove along, I could not help thinking that even when we were small boys, we would not have 'bit' on anything so absurd as the magpie story.

Then I recalled the time one-armed Clark told us that if you circled a ground owl, keeping it on your left, that the bird would follow with its eyes until its head would unscrew and drop off. And we did think at times that one of the birds' heads was getting loose.

And then there was the time when I was persuaded to put eggs in my hat and a pail of milk in each hand and carry them to the house. I had to open and close a gate. That is where I met disaster; and what a mess it was!

Then there was the time that old Cowboy Charley bet us that we could not tie a rope around our necks, throw the loose end over a limb, grasp the loose end and climb up to the limb. We could and did, but when we tried to come down, it was a different story. We needed a ladder to get down, but old Charley had mysteriously dis-

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