

The Free Press Short Story

BAGDON & CO.

GERTRUDE NORTON LISENBERG

EZRA BAGDON stood in the door and let his gaze wander along the winding trail that led to the dim horizon, over the rim of which lay the city of Badgerville. There was no sign of any traveller along the alkali trail as far as the eye could reach, and noting this, Ezra took a seat on a rude bench just outside the door.

"I reckon that ain't goin' to be any more trade this evening," he murmured, "seem' as that's no travellers in sight." He stroked the head of a large dog that lay by the door. "I guess we hain't made very much to-day, have we, Muggins?" he added, addressing the dog.

Ezra Bagdon was a man of middle age. He kept a little wayside store near the old Military trail on the Arkansas River, going with his team and wagon once a month to Sunset City to lay in a new supply of goods, which consisted mostly of bacon, flour, rice, sugar, and coffee.

He had taken a claim there two years before, and as the drought had deprived him of a crop, he had hit upon the idea of turning his shanty into a store that he might earn something to carry him through the winter. There was much land open to settlement farther west, and a constant movement of home seekers along the trail furnished him with steady customers.

When he had his little establishment ready for business, he painted a red sign and hung it over the door. When travellers saw

"BAGDON & CO. GROCERIES & PROVISIONS" they sometimes wondered who the "Co." was and such were told that it was Muggins, the dog. "Yes, he's my pard," Bagdon would say. "I reckon this bin a lot worse pardners than Muggins. He's bin with me ever since he was a pup, an' I didn't feel like givin' inter anything without takin' him in with me."

Muggins was part shepherd and part "just dog," as Bagdon would say—a big fellow with splashes of white and black on his soft, silken coat, and with the strength of a panther.

As the sun went down and the shadows of night began to descend upon the plain, Bagdon rose, and calling Muggins to follow, he entered the store and lit a lamp. He next drew forth a book from a pine desk behind the counter and began figuring.

"We have took in jist nine dollars an' sixty cents," he said to Muggins, who stood near by watching the process of casting up the accounts for the day. "That ain't very much, but as we don't have any rent ter pay nor taxes, I reckon it will keep us from starvin'. I aims ter give twenty per cent, an' that would mec us fer the day a profit uv a dollar an' ninety-two cents. What do you think of that, Muggins?"

The dog wagged his tail in mute approval. It was evident that he had gone through the same experience before.

Bagdon opened a box took out some crackers, and then cut a chunk of cheese from a hoop on the counter. He placed a liberal slice from the cheese with the crackers. "You don't mind if the cheese is a trifle old, will you, Muggins?" Bagdon asked, holding the cheese up for the dog's inspection.

This time Muggins barked his acquiescence, and for this he received the tempting food in a wide, shallow pan which his master took from under the counter.

Bagdon watched him with satisfaction. "We have got to economize, hain't we, Muggins?" he said. "You have got a good stomach, Muggins, an' if that cheese is a little moulty it won't make any difference. Not a bit. I ain't so lucky as you. My stomach can't stand anythin' an' I has to sort of pick my eatin'."

Bagdon sat down by the door until it was quite dark; then he went into a room back of the store which served as kitchen, living room, and bedroom. Muggins did not follow him, but lay down by the open door so as to keep watch that no one should enter unobserved during his master's absence from the store.

Ezra kindled a fire in a small stove and prepared his supper. It was near nine o'clock when he had finished eating and returned to the store. He found Muggins lying asleep at the door—but not so soundly asleep that he would not have been roused instantly had anyone tried to enter. There was no sound save the soft sighing of the night wind through the grass, and an occasional plaintive cry of the prairie owl. So calling Muggins, and closing the front door and locking it, Ezra went to the back room and retired.

The next day Ezra Bagdon drove to Badgerville to replenish his stock of goods. Muggins accompanied him.

While Ezra was bartering for his stock of goods and having them put into his wagon, he ran onto a man by the name of Sam Mayfield who also was buying provisions. He had taken a claim south of Ezra's, and intended to raise stock.

"I'd like powerful well to have that dog of yours," he said to Ezra, as the two stood by the latter's wagon after the load was completed. "He's shore a fine feller. Want to sell him?"

"Sell him?" said Ezra. "Why, he's my pardner, and you wouldn't expect me to sell my pardner."

Mayfield laughed. "No, I can't say that I would," he replied. "But I reckon some feller has done wuss than that

ter their pardners. You can killers trust a dog."

"That's right," nodded Ezra. "Muggins is more trustworthy than most men."

"I can well believe that. He looks good. If you and he ever dissolve pardnership, an' you want ter sell him, jist let me know an' I'll come a-runnin' ter git him. Guess I'll not git off from town before tomorrow or the next day, but I pass your way as I go back."

"Then stop an' see me."

"I shore will. Good-by."

Before leaving town Ezra stopped at a butcher shop and bought a hunk of fresh meat—a big beef pot roast, which he laid on the seat beside him. "I reckon that'll be enough ter give Muggins a good taste," he mused. "We don't git a taste uv fresh beef any too often."

It was quite dark when Ezra reached home, and he made haste to carry the goods he had bought into the house, where he piled them behind the counter intending to put them on the shelves the next day.

When he kindled a fire in his kitchen stove, the next morning, he discovered that he had left the pot roast of beef on the seat in the wagon. What was his surprise, however, to discover that the meat had disappeared during the night.

What could have become of it? It was not probable that any sneak thief had passed that way. He remembered very clearly of having left the meat in the spring seat, and that he had not taken it out he was positive.

As he ran the matter over in his mind he climbed up in the wagon again and looked among some loose hay in the bed suspecting that the meat might have dropped into it. As he glanced about, his eyes fell on some telltale marks that gave him a shock of surprise. On the spring seat were the prints of a dog's feet—muddy footprints now almost dry.

A swift thought came to Ezra—a most unwelcome suspicion, that the footprints had been made by Muggins. Surely he would not have done this. Muggins was not the dog to steal a morsel of meat? He climbed down and called Muggins. The dog came up wagging his tail.

Ezra took up a piece of shingle and placed the dog's feet upon it. The imprints were very plain. He carried these to the wagon and compared them with the ones on the spring seat. They were identically the same, but he would not be fully convinced till he had measured them and subjected them to other tests.

There was no doubt left in his mind. He returned to the house and called Muggins. "So you got the meat, did ye?" he said, looking hard at the dog. Muggins only wagged his tail and looked innocently into his master's eyes. "I want a dog about me that I can't trust," added Ezra. "I can't be allers watchin' ye. Reckon I'll haf ter give ye away." He made a careful survey of the promises, but could find no trace of the missing meat. He did not think that Muggins would have eaten it all, but even in that case there must have been some part of the wrapping paper left. If there were, however, he failed to find it, and could only conclude that the dog had eaten what he wanted and buried the rest, paper and all.

Ezra returned to the kitchen, cooked and ate his breakfast, after which he went into the garden back of the house and dug some potatoes. As he was returning with a basket of potatoes, he saw a wagon approaching and recognized Samuel Mayfield, the settler he had met in town the day before. Mayfield stopped his wagon in front of the store and greeted Ezra cordially.

"You see I am on the road early this morning," he said. "Have to git back to look after my stock. Well, here comes my dog." He added with a laugh as Muggins approached. "I guess it would not be any use fer me ter try ter trade ye out uv him, would it?" he added.

Ezra hesitated. He felt reluctant to tell what Muggins had done. It was almost like accusing a member of one's family. "I ain't shore you'd want him," he answered, presently.

"Why?" inquired Mayfield. "I guess he stole my fresh meat out uv the wagon seat last night an' et it up," said Ezra, a trifle weakly. "I never knowed him ter act like that before, an' it mecks me mad; yes, sir, it does. It ain't treatin' me right—me that's raised him from a pup. I reckon I'll let you have him if he'll suit you."

"Oh, he'll suit me all right," said Mayfield, eagerly. "I need him to help me with my stock. A good dog saves a feller many a step on a farm."

While Mayfield was talking, he was busy getting a rope from his wagon, and in a moment he was out and was fastening the rope to Muggins' collar. Then he took the dog in his arms, set him in the wagon, and fastened the rope to the back of the spring seat. "I'm goin' ter let him ride," he said.

"You'll be good ter him?" faltered Ezra.

"I will," nodded Mayfield with energy. "I ain't the man ter be mean ter a dog. He'll have plenty uv good grub. I'll see ter that. I thank ye a thousand times fer him. He'll be a lot of company out on my ranch." He climbed up to his seat in the wagon and took up the lines. He reached into his pocket and drew out some money. He took a twenty-dollar bill and held it out to Ezra. "I don't want the dog fer nothin'," he said.

CAN'T BLAME WEATHER FOR PAINS IN FEET

"Take this, it will help you git another dog if ye want one." Ezra drew back. "No, no," he protested. "I wouldn't sell Muggins. I couldn't do it. I wouldn't part with him at all if I didn't think it was my dooty ter punish him fer doin' what he did; besides, I let you have him with the understandin' that if I want him back, I can have him."

"Sartently, sartently, Mr. Bagdon," assented Mayfield.

After Mayfield had driven on Ezra took a seat by the door, turning his gaze frequently toward the solitary wagon that was moving southward along the white trail. Already he had begun to feel a vague sense of loneliness. It had been a long time since he was without a dog. "I wonder if he'll keep a pan uv water fer him?" he mused. "Lots uv dogs die fer the want uv water."

It was an hour before he entered the store. He had almost forgotten the goods he had brought from town; and he now went to work to open the packages, and place the contents on the shelves. As he stopped to take up a box of crackers, his gaze fell on a package done up in brown paper. He picked it up. It was the package of meat he had missed from the wagon seat—the beef roast he had suspected Muggins of stealing.

Ezra unwrapped it and stood looking at it for some time in a dazed sort of way. "No, I didn't bring it in," he said positively. "Muggins did it. He seef I had forgot it, I reckon, an' he brought it in an' laid it with the other goods!" He sat down on a stool by the counter and fell to looking vacantly about the room. "I reckon I'm gettin' old an' childish," he said. "I ort ter knowed Muggins wouldn't do it. He never had done a thing like that. An' I went an' giv' him away!"

Ezra could not get Muggins out of his mind. He must go after him to bring him home. Suddenly it occurred to him that he might not be able to recover the dog. Who was this stranger to whom he had given him? Might not he have deceived him as to what he wanted with Muggins? He might sell the dog to some one else! These thoughts worried Ezra, and the picture of Muggins tied in the stranger's wagon and looking back longingly, haunted him.

"Well, I'll go an' bring him home to-morrow," Ezra said over and over in an effort to console himself, "an' when I git him back I'll not let anyone take him away again."

Several movers passed during the day, and Ezra had quite a good trade. When night came, he lighted the lamps in the store, and went into the back room to prepare his supper, leaving the partition door ajar so as to observe any one who might enter the store.

When at last his supper was cooked and on the table, he sat down; but as he did so, out of custom, he was about to reach for a portion of meat to place in Muggins' dish, when the recollection rushed upon him that the dog was gone. A swift feeling of loneliness and remorse swept over him.

"I wish I had him back so I could give him some uv this meat," he said, and even as he spoke there came a short, sharp bark at the door, a well-known bark, and with a thrill at his heart Ezra hurried to open the door. There was Muggins, trembling all over with eagerness to get in. The moment the door was opened he sprang into the room to find his master's arms clasped about him. The end of the rope that dangled from the dog's collar showed where his teeth had effected his liberation, and the hot breath and palpitating tongue that caressed his master's face were proof that he had not loitered after escaping from his bondage.

"Good old Muggins," murmured, Ezra happily. "I'll never treat ye that way agin, old boy, neyer!"

It was a happy re-union, and that night Muggins slept on a soft mat right by his master's bed, and early on the following morning Ezra put a new sign over the door, which read:

BAGDON & MUGGINS, GROCERIES & PROVISIONS

Douglas' Egyptian Liniment is an excellent leg wash for stock. Also removes corns in horses and quickly relieves bruises, sprains, swellings and joint stiffness.

Another startling thing: 100 million dollars a year is the bill industry pays (indirectly) for age feet. That's what a well known chiropodist says. That's a lot of money, jist for feet. If we would add to that, the money that feet cost, to be covered by a granadina and biege pumps; it would be staggering. The cost, not the feet.

HARD TO FIND Two little urchins stood with their noses pressed against a barber shop window.

"Gee, Mickey, look at that one!" said one, pointing to a barber welding a singeing taper. "He's lookin' fer 'em with a light!"

PAYING THE PENALTY Mrs. Gnaggs—Before we were married you said you could listen to my voice forever.

Mrs. Gnaggs—Well, at that time I had no idea I'd ever have to do it.

You save 10c lb. Red Rose Tea at the NEW REDUCED PRICES is great value. 1/2 lb. Red Label 25c 30c. 1/2 lb. Orange Pekoe 38c 43c. This VERY SUPERIOR Tea is now yours at about the price of cheap bulk teas.

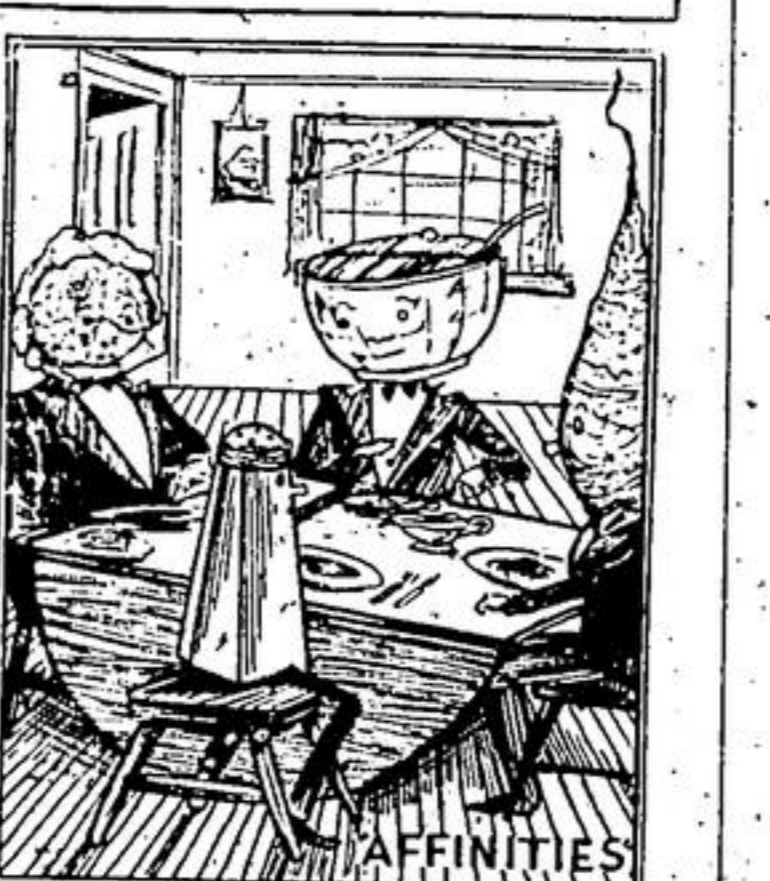
It Cuts Like Lumber. USE The NEW IVORY GYPROC Fireproof Wallboard. For Better Business in 1932—Advertise More.

104 PRIZES! First Prize - \$1,000.00 cash. Second Prize - \$500.00 cash. Third Prize - \$200.00 cash. Fourth Prize - \$100.00 cash. 5 Prizes - each - \$50.00 cash. 95 Prizes - each - \$10.00 cash. 104 Prizes - totalling - \$3,000.00. HOW MANY SUPERTWIST CORDS IN THE AVERAGE GOODYEAR TIRE?

A cool THOUSAND DOLLARS for merely estimating the number of cords in the average Goodyear Tire! Think of what you could do with that \$1,000.00. New car? . . . Cottage at the Lake? . . . Trip abroad? . . . Education for the youngster? . . . Oh, there are plenty of wonderful things one can do with real money and lots of it. And there is no catch in this contest. Someone is going to win the \$1,000.00 first prize for the nearest correct estimate. And others will get the 103 other cash prizes which vary from \$500.00 down to \$10.00.

Go to the nearest Goodyear dealer and see Super Twist Cords demonstrated - Get helpful booklet of contest directions. GOOD YEAR

BETTY BARCLAY'S HELPFUL HINTS



Today Betty Says: BRING your cooking affinities together and your dishes will attain a flavor that will surprise. Many housewives use salt and pepper plentifully with vegetables but fail to realize that sugar is also a part of vegetable cookery. It not only restores the natural sweetness to all vegetables whether cooked alone or together, but blends the various flavors into a pleasing whole. Not too much, of course, but a touch by all means. The result will delight you.