

# Acres of Memory

BY D.A. CAMPBELL

Last October I had the urge to see the old farm again, before the urban sprawl engulfs it in brick and concrete. The land which Angus had worked since he came back from the war in 1919, was now in the grip of the speculators. To the south, a few new houses had already been constructed and a realty billboard proclaimed that soon the entire hundred acres would be lost to agriculture forever.

The old frame house had long since been the victim of vandals and fire. Only the charred walls had been saved. Here, thick clumps of brambles clawed possessively at the siding and thrust their green tentacles through the broken windows.

To the left of the derelict barn, the driving shed lay in a state of complete collapse. Nothing remained to whisper of jingling harness and pawing feet, except a few pieces of black and twisted lumber, pointing like crooked fingers to the fall sky.

I told myself that all things must wither and decay. Just as the maple leaves change from green to flaming glory and thence to dust, so all living things must one day return to the earth.

Angus had said his last goodbye to me almost twenty years ago, but the memory of his rough kindness and his dogged determination will remain with me eternally. I looked down the overgrown pathway and saw his ghost urging the rheumatic body towards the barn. Angus never complained of the pain, but from the first time I met him, he had suffered and fought against it. That was a long time ago.

"Can yer drive a team?" he asked me. I must have looked confused.

"A team!" he yelled impatiently. "horses dammit - horses!"

How could anybody reply to Angus in any other way? "Sure!" I lied. The only horses I had handled had been wooden ones on rockers!

Angus limped towards a small field behind the house where the dried hay lay in windrows. Two Belgian horses stood impatiently in the hot sun - tails attempting to swish away the torment of the flies. There was a wagon of dubious vintage, with a haylifter to the back end.

"Keep 'em movin steady," he ordered. "Not too fast - gimme time to spread the hay."

I climbed up onto the seat and Angus made a clucking sound with his mouth. Away went the horses and I gingerly held the reins. We hadn't gone far before a plaintive cry from the wagon told me that things were not going too well. I stole a quick glance rearwards in time to see the furious face of Angus protruding out of a pile of hay, and the haylifter continuously discharging upon his head!

"Ho!" he screamed. The horses came to an abrupt halt.

I sat petrified and Angus dragged his aching body over the hay and thrust a not too clean-shaven face into mine.

"You sonnavitch" he screamed. "You never seen a horse before - did yer?" I shook my head.

"Yer all the same, you Limeys - think yer can do everything - git down off there!"

I should have told the truth in the first place - that I was green to farming. It was a long time before he said another word to me. Then one day he passed me on the driveway.

"Yer full o' sugar," he said. (or words to that effect).

I used to call the farm the "Hungry Hundred" - if gave grudgingly. Generally, it was a thin layer of sandy loam on gravel, but in some places it was completely eroded. It should never have been carved out of the bush, but nobody would have dared to tell Angus that!

Soon the bulldozers will level out the rolling land and the world of Angus will remain only in the mind's eye of those who knew and loved him.

I walked sadly away. Amongst a pile of stones and scrap, an old plow which once had shone with abrasion, now lay broken and rusted, like a monument to a lost cause.

But we still go on farming, don't we? People like you, and me, and Angus.

As he once said. "If there's nothin' worth fightin' fer - there's nothin' worth livin' fer." I think he was right! - don't you?

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