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Helene to the Rescue

BY ALBERT W. TOLMAN.

Hans Pedersen was in a furious temper. As he fumed, he brandished his beechen cane so wildly that his niece, Helene Finsen, and her best friend, Anna Helms, shrank back, almost fearing that a random blow would fall on their heads. They were in the living room of the Pedersen home. Hans, who was badly crippled by rheumatism, sat with his right foot in a chair. But there was nothing the matter with his tongue.

"What a fool I was to let that numskull of a Niels Kerst go out with the cows today!" he raged. "I've been waiting two hours, expecting to see him show up any minute, and no signs of him yet. All the other cowherds have come in long ago. Just wait till I get him within reach of this cane!"

Helene tried to pacify her uncle. "Niels is only fourteen. He's just a boy yet, if he is almost as big as a man. You've said yourself that he means all right."

But the old Dane refused to be appeased.

"Don't try to excuse him to me! Here's a gale brewing on the flood tide, and the marshes buried in fog. A six-year-old with the brains of a mouse could tell what's coming. It looks to me as if we were in for a storm such as we haven't seen for years. Before dark the water'll be over the meadows and up to the town. Unless he's off the island before the tide's so deep on the bar that he can't cross, he'll be drowned and every cow I own with him!"

"He may be nearly home now," suggested Helene soothingly.

"Yes, he may," snorted Hans, "or he may not have started at all. Chances are he's down under the bank on the island, whistling out whistles in that clump of willows. Probably he's forgotten all about wind and tide and fog; and he won't come to his senses, until it's too late to get off. If he doesn't appear in ten minutes, I'm going to start out after him, knee or no knee."

Helene was alarmed. When her uncle once determined to do a thing, he generally did it.

"Remember what Doctor Koch said, she protested.

"I know. But the last shilling I've got is in those cows. Perhaps I've been a fool to put all my eggs in one basket; but there they are, and all I can do now is to hope they won't be broken."

"Why can't I go for you, Uncle Hans?" asked Helene. "You remember I drove the cows for you all one season, before I went to Copenhagen to take lessons on the cornet."

Pedersen hesitated.

"It's hardly safe for you to go out on those marshes alone in the fog with a flood coming."

"Pooh! I know every foot of them. I could find my way over them in the darkest night with my eyes shut. Besides, Anna'll go with me."

"I'll be glad to," said her friend.

The cattle owner looked relieved.

"You may go, if you think you won't get lost," he consented.

"Where's my cornet?" asked Helene. "You know I used to take that with me last year. When I struck up the national hymn, the cows knew it was time to be moving, and they always followed me."

"It's on the wall in the dining room," remarked Pedersen. "I've never touched it, since you hung it there."

"Come, Anna," said Helene.

Ten minutes later they had left the town behind and were striking west-

ward through the fog over the marshes. Helene had her cornet to her lips as she walked.

Some people put their money into the savings banks; others, into real estate; and still others, into stocks and bonds, or invest it in some business. Hans Pederson's bank was a four-legged one, for he turned every penny he could rake and scrape into cows. Rightly managed, they paid a far higher interest than any other security he knew of. His herd of over a dozen was the finest in the small West Danish town of Melby. The money that came from their milk, cream, butter and cheese was put to good use. It kept Hans' old mother in comfort. It gave a crippled nephew the best of surgical treatment. It paid for Helene's course in instrumental music at Copenhagen. It gave Hans himself an opportunity to recover from the rheumatism that threatened to disable him permanently. Small wonder that his mind was centered on the welfare of his herd!

The cows of the town were pastured on the common meads and wide marshes that stretched westward, fertile and far-outlying, to the sandy shores of the North Sea. Herders took them out to their feeding-grounds in the morning, and brought them back at night. Ordinarily the pastures were perfectly safe. But when a strong wind blew from the west, the waters of the North Sea were forced up the little river and into the winding lagoons; and the marshes and meadows themselves were flooded, sometimes to a dangerous depth. Then, to avert disaster, it behooved the herders to bring their charges home in good season, or take them to refuges prepared for times of peril.

It was on a foggy afternoon in mid-June that the two girls left Melby and struck out across the marshes in search of Niels and his cows. Helene's music course in Copenhagen had closed only the week before, and she welcomed the opportunity for a tramp with her friend in the bracing salt air. The strong west wind and the dense gray mist had no terrors for either of them. They were both sixteen, healthy and vigorous; and they knew the meadows like a book. They needed no compass, as they walked briskly seaward over the damp rich grass.

"We'd better make straight for the Holme," said Helene. "Uncle Hans feels sure that Niels is there."

The Holme was a marshy island, close to the river-mouth, connected with the main meadows by a bar, or natural causeway, under water at high tide. Here the grass grew unusually rich and sweet; and it was the Mecca of the herders, particularly on pleasant days. It had one disagreeable feature: winding lagoons, narrow but deep, anyone familiar with the place, however, could easily reach any part of it by making detours.

Helene and Anna rapidly traversed the two miles that lay between the Holme and Melby. So thick was the mist that they could see only a short distance; but all the way they were looking and listening sharply for any sign of the Pederson herd and its guardian.

"They can't have passed us in the fog," said Helene. "I'm sure we should have heard their bells, for we're on the regular track to the island. But I can't see what Niels means by stopping so long. He must know that by this time everybody else has started for home."

"We'll soon find out what the trou-

ble is," observed Anna. The Holme can't be far away. Why don't you try your cornet?"

Helene put the instrument to her lips. Fingering the stops she played a bar of the Danish national hymn. As the last strains died out, a faint shouting was audible, far ahead in the fog.

"That's Niels!" exclaimed Helene emphatically. "I'd know his voice a mile off. Something's the matter! Let us hurry!"

The two girls broke into a run. Suddenly the grassy sward came to an end, they had reached the water. Helene put the cornet to her lips, and the silver notes rang out piercingly. They ceased. Again Niels' shouts were heard, this time much louder and nearer.

"Help! This way! Help!"

Helene cast a quick glance about. "Come on, Anna!" she cried. "The bar's to the right!"

They ran in that direction; and presently the narrow causeway of sand appeared. The water lapped it on both sides. Already, though it was not much more than half-flooded, the tide was alarmingly high. Only a scanty strip of road remained uncovered, and this was but a few inches above water at its highest point. Helene noted this with alarm, as the girls hurried across to the island.

"We can't stop long on the Holme!" she cried. "It'll be so deep on this bar in less than an hour that we'd have a hard fight to get back. Just feel that wind blow!"

Each moment the gale was increasing in fury, hurling the sea upon the low-lying land. The causeway was about a hundred feet long. Spurred on by fear, they flew over it at a run.

"Niels! Niels! Where are you?" shouted Anna, as once more they stood upon the grass.

A glad cry answered them.

"Here! This way!"

They darted in the direction of his voice. Scattered cows, browsing unconcernedly on the luxuriant herbage, loomed up, and vanished again in the thick fog. Guided by the herder's shouts, they soon ran abruptly upon him. He stood on the edge of a lagoon, brimming with water, from which projected the head and shoulders of a cow. The wavelets were washing over her back. Helene at once recognized the animal by the white star in her forehead.

"It's Maren!" she exclaimed. "What is the trouble, Niels?"

"When we were starting for home before the fog came in, she slipped into this ditch, and got her feet caught in the quicksand. I've tried for hours; but I couldn't get her out!"

His face was flushed; his eyes showed that he had been crying.

"You're true blue, Niels!" sympathized Helene comfortingly. "Nobody else could have done any better alone. The three of us'll have her out in a jiffy!"

The problem, however, was not so easy as she had thought. Maren was deeply mired; her feet stuck, as if they were glued. For a half-hour they worked their hardest without making any apparent gain. The gale was increasing, and the water was deepening rapidly. It began to look as if, for the sake of saving the others, Maren might have to be abandoned to drown in the rising flood. Anna and Helene felt almost as bad as Niels.

As a last resort they fastened the herder's rope around the animal's horns. All three pulled, puffed and panted; and the cow worked harder than any of them. Little by little her shoulders rose; but it was a long, slow process, and Niels particularly was almost discouraged. But Helene cheered him on; and blistered hands and strained muscles won. Maren, the cow with the white star, at last stood safely on the grass.

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The gale was driving the fog over them in a misty avalanche. Niels and the girls were startled by a sudden hissing. A low wave came rushing through the grass: the island was afloat. Helene woke to their peril.

"Drive the cows together, Niels!" she cried. "We must get off right away!"

Wave after wave, each higher than the one before it, followed in the wake of the first. Meanwhile the three worked frantically in the fog to round up the scattered herd. If the island was becoming submerged, the water must be still deeper on the causeway!

At last all the cattle were together. Helene with her cornet placed herself in front of them.

"I'll go ahead," she said. "And you and Anna, Niels, keep them from straying."

Helene put her lips to the cornet and the strains of the Danish national hymn rang out. It was the old call she had used the season before in bringing the herd home. As the silver notes floated through the fog, the cows followed her.

She reached the clump of willows that marked the beginning of the road to the mainland. Her heart sank, as she saw that the waves of the channel rolled unbroken; there was no sign of the bar.

Minutes were precious; they could not afford to waste any. Anna's face whitened, as she stared at the dull green tide; even Niels' ruddy cheeks grew pale. The cows halted, shrinking together in a close huddle.

"Forward!" ordered Helene.

Lifting the cornet again, she stepped boldly down into the water, fastening her eyes on another willow clump, dimly visible through the fog, across a hundred feet of rippling flood. Urged by the shouts of Niels and Anna, the cows plunged splashing after her.

The tide was more than knee deep. Fortunately the bar ran straight toward the bushes, so Helene had no difficulty in keeping upon its top. On she moved, throwing her spirit into the cornet, followed by the cows. By the time she reached the wind-bowed willows the ground from which they sprang was submerged, and only the taller grass tufts were visible.

Struggling up on the marsh, the procession halted in the deepening water. It was still two miles to Melby. As far as they could see ahead in the fog, the meadows were flooded. All traces of the track were lost. From behind them, higher and higher waves came rushing over the Holme, driven by the briny gale from the North Sea.

Helene took counsel with Niels and Anna.

"No use trying for Melby! The water'd be four feet deep on the mea-

dows, before we could get to the town. We'd lose our way in the fog, and perhaps go into the river. We'd better strike for the Hold."

The Hold was an elevated inclosure, intended as a refuge in time of flood; it had ramparts of earth, crowned by a living hedge.

"But do you think you can find it in this fog?" quavered Anna; she was badly frightened. "We've no marks to go by."

"It's not more than a quarter-mile north of here," said Helene. "I'm sure we can find it."

Nothing was to be gained by delaying; so again the procession started. Helene in the lead with her cornet. All depended on her judgment. Neither Niels nor Anna could render much assistance. Turning so that the gate came from their left, they went on through the rising water. But the Hold did not appear.

Helene's cornet shut suddenly off in the middle of a note. She slipped, and went down to her knees to the soft morass. She recovered herself quickly. They turned back. Helene knew that the refuge could not be far distant. But they must find it soon, if at all. Long rollers were rushing across the marsh, threatening to sweep them from their feet.

Where was the Hold? Fear that their plight was hopeless assailed Helene; but she fought it off stoutly. Niels and Anna were almost in despair; but they kept the cows together. Suddenly, right before them, loomed a low black hedge. Helene blew a loud shrill blast of triumph on her cornet.

"We've found it!"

Circling round to the other side, she led the cattle up the sloping runway to the solidly built enclosure six feet above the surrounding marsh. Soon all were safe above the tossing waters. It was now almost dark.

There they remained for hours in pitch blackness. As the tide rose, sheets of salt spray blew over them; but their little island stood unmoved in the raging flood. Toward midnight the gale abated, and the sea ran back from the marshes. Finally toward morning a rescuing party from Melby appeared with lanterns.

Home reached, the look on her uncle's face, as he gazed through his lighted window on the cows, trooping past to their stalls, more than recompensed Helene for the hardship and peril of her trip to the Holme.

Defeated by-law. Smith's Falls ratapayers defeated the three by-law submitted to them. The soldiers' memorial by-law, defeated 456 to 24; public utilities amalgamation, 402 to 89; repairs to stone bridge, 324 to 152.

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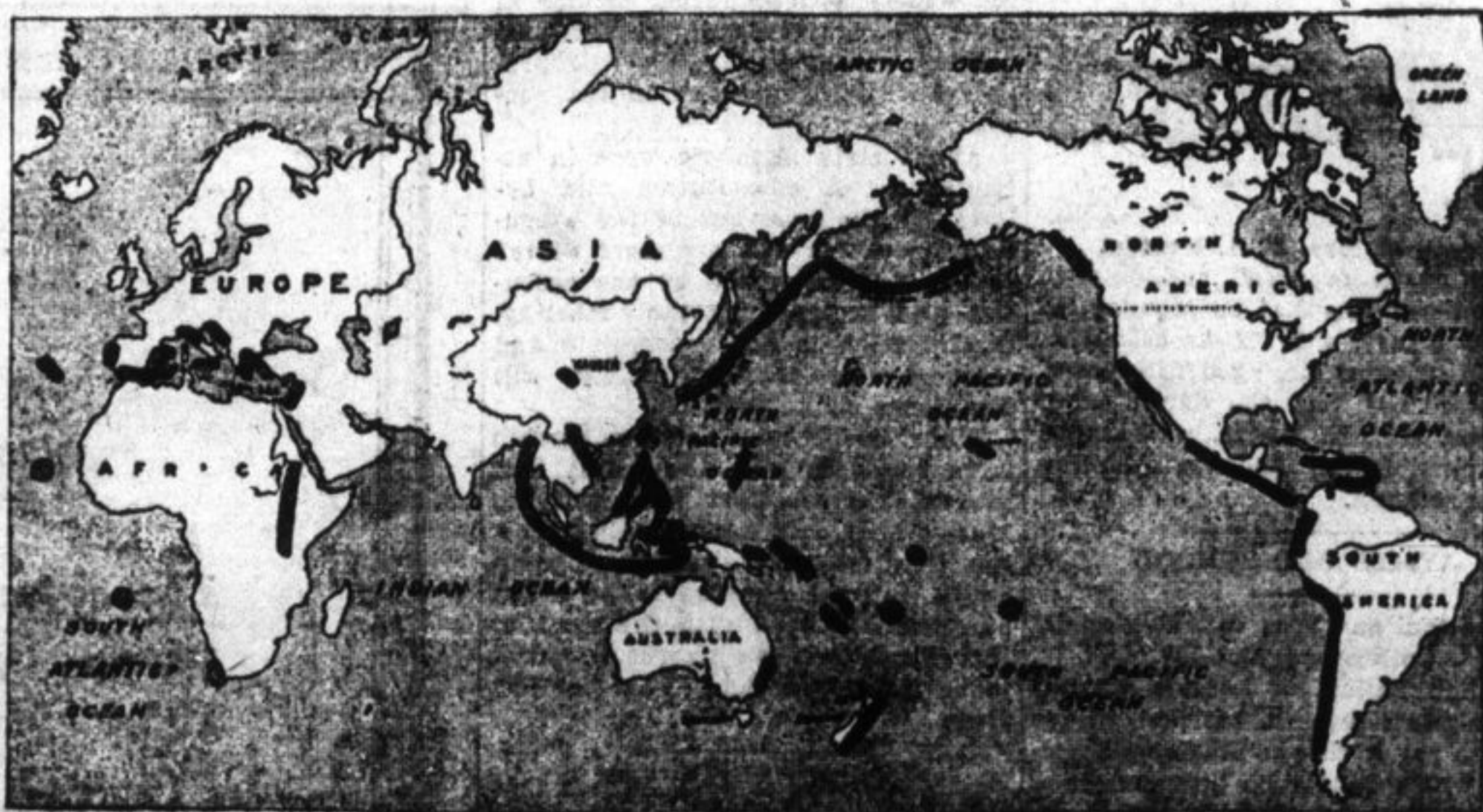
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"I would get sick headaches and dizzy spells and spots would float before my eyes. My liver was sluggish, my appetite very poor and I hardly knew what it was to eat a good, square meal. I felt tired and worn out all the time and had to be continually taking harsh laxatives.

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