

## Harvest Gang Water Boy

A VANTAGE POINTS FLASHBACK

We're threshing all day. So, my pony and I are hoppin from sunrise till dark. It's the end of September. The wheat's gotta be done today, before the threshing machine moves on to the neighbour's.

I'm twelve. Born in 1908. My older brother's working with the men this year. That's hard work. My job's not that hard, but when the



*Harvesting near Hartney.*

sun's shining and the men are sweating, I'm the guy they're looking for. I fill a couple gallon water bottles (the ones folks use for cider), tie twine to the handles and loop them around my saddle horn. Makes it awkward for the pony to run, so we walk best we can from the hand pump to the field. And back again. All day.

Last week was busy too. Cutting the wheat. Dad drove our horses, pulling the binder. It cuts and then ties the wheat into bundles. Mom and we kids followed behind, shocking the bundles, standing them to lean against each other, kernels facing up. It's hard on our hands. And our backs. Mom's the best shocker. Faster than even my bossy brother! Some day, I'll be fast too.

There was lots to do while the shocks dried. We were expecting about twenty men to arrive with the threshing machine. Needing places to sleep, wash up and, most important, lots of food. My sister and I washed so many potatoes, and then carrots. Women from the neighbourhood arrived yesterday to help Mom with the actual cooking, so I get to be the water boy while the gang's here. Yay!

Working with my pony on a fresh September day! There's nothing better! Behind me, I hear women preparing tables, laughing, calling out for this and that. Up ahead, the steam engine's chugging, belts are whirring, and the thresher is clattering. But, as pony and I dip down through a low spot in the pasture, all that fades away. Cows are munching lazily. Not interested in us, or the hubub beyond the fence. A gopher pokes up. Likely checking for boys with guns, or coyotes perhaps. A couple hawks hover. Looking for mice running from the shock piles. Wherever straw is being moved, mice are running. Hawks seem to know, to follow the threshing gang.

The nearer we get, the less I see or hear from nature. I sidle up to the men who're forking shocks into the hungry, clattering machine. The fella with tussled hair and pock marked cheeks reaches up. I hand him the bottle. His weathered finger grabs the handle and drinks nearly a quart, before handing it back, with a nod of his head and a pat on my knee. Then turns back to his work. We move on, to the next character looking our way.

Mom says these fellas come mostly from Ontario; that the rail and threshing companies recruit them to help move our wheat to the east. She says quite a few are looking for steady work; maybe to buy some land around here. Bring their sweethearts.

Everything's connected I guess. In the quiet places. And in the noisy ones. Everything feeds something else. Yikes. That reminds me. Mom said to tell Dad to bring the gang for lunch. Everyone'll be happy about that!

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