

Invasion of the Movie People

Jody had just put the finishing touches on Star's mane, combing it just as Willie had shown her, while Mary vigorously swept the dirt floor of Lucky Foot Stable of wayward wisps of straw when they first heard the rumble. Star lifted his head, pricked his ears and strained against the cross-ties to get a better look out the back doors of the little white stable. Finnegan, the cow-herding dog, suddenly awoke from a deep slumber and growled low in his throat as the rumble grew louder.

"What in the..." Mary began, exchanging worried looks with Jody. Then, in unison, Mary threw down her broom and Jody stuck the comb in the crest of Star's mane where it dangled dangerously. Racing down the aisle, they reached the open doors of the stable at the exact same instant and stared open-mouthed at the spectacle before them.

Proceeding down the long gravel lane of the McMurray dairy farm were not one, not two, but four large, boxy white trucks, veering this way and that to avoid the deep potholes randomly pitting the driveway. Finnegan ran circles around the two girls and barked madly, all the while wagging his tail in anticipation of visitors as the trucks continued toward the McMurray's stone farmhouse, raising clouds of dust as they went.

"What in the..." Jody echoed. The girls linked arms and squinted to read the black words painted on the side of the first truck in line as it turned slightly at the bend in the lane.

"Hanley's...what does it say?" Mary asked impatiently. "I can't see the rest of it. The dust is too thick."

"It says... it says... Hanley's Film... Hanley's Film and Cinema Equipment. I think that's what it says," Jody said doubtfully.

“Film and cinema equipment!” Mary shrieked. “Of course that’s what is says! Jody, it’s the movie people! They’re here! They’re going to start the movie! They need someone to greet them! Let’s go!”

With that, Mary took off at a gallop across the grass and Jody started after her but suddenly stopped in her tracks.

“Mare, wait!” Jody yelled. “I left Star on crossties! I’ve got to put him back in his stall! Wait for me.”

It took all of Mary’s effort to stand still and watch as the trucks reached the farmhouse without her, but stand she did, jiggling impatiently as she waited for Jody to emerge from the stable. She had just started to bite her fingernails when Jody finally joined her, followed by the ecstatic Finnegan, who yipped excitedly in anticipation of a new adventure.

“Mary, maybe Mr. McMurray doesn’t want us to greet the movie people,” Jody reasoned, linking her arm in Mary’s to slow her progress toward the trucks, now parked in a row in front of the farmhouse. “Maybe he wants us to stay away until he invites us to meet them. And don’t forget what Willie said.”

“I know, I know, Willie said ‘wait to speak until spoken to.’ But, Jody, what if Mr. McMurray isn’t home right now? And I know Willie is down in the barn with the cows. It’s milking time, and he won’t be done for another hour at least, even with Mr. Mooney helping him.”

Willie had rarely missed a milking in the thirty years he had worked on the McMurray dairy farm, even after Mr. McMurray hired a younger man to help out around the barn. Mr. Roy Mooney had arrived the year before with his teenaged son, Jimmy, his daughter Annie, and a toddler named Heath. After Mr. Mooney’s wife died he had been forced to sell his own farm and

Mr. McMurray had offered him the job helping Willie. Jimmy helped his father with the farm work while Annie watched Heath in the old house trailer where the family lived.

“But, you know, Jody,” Mary continued, hardly stopping to take a breath, “Willie is just going to have to get used to the fact that he can’t milk cows every day, now that he’s the wrangler on the movie. He’s going to have to work with the horses and the actors. Including us.”

“Us?” Jody giggled. “Mare, we’re not exactly actors.”

“Well, remember what Mr. Crowley said. They need us to be in the riding lesson scenes. And Willie will probably be there telling us what to do, since he’s the head wrangler and...”

Before Mary could finish her sentence, Jody grabbed her by the arm and stopped them both in their tracks. “Finnegan, stay,” she commanded the excited dog, who sat obediently but couldn’t help whining and wagging his tail so that his whole body wagged along. The girls had just about reached the farmhouse, where a crew of men was busy unloading the first of the four trucks. Mary and Jody watched in awe as two of the men grabbed the bottom of the back door of the third truck and shoved upward. The door buckled like an accordion and disappeared into the top section of the truck, revealing the equipment inside.

“Just like a garage door,” Jody whispered. “That is so cool!”

The double red doors of the stone farmhouse suddenly burst open and Mr. McMurray appeared, strode down the steps and beckoned grandly to the crew of men.

“Come on in, then, we’ve cleared a space for you!” Mr. McMurray directed in his booming Irish brogue. “Right here, and over there... now what can I help you with?”

“Well, Jode, I guess Mr. McMurray *is* here,” Mary said, disappointed that they weren’t needed as greeters after all.

“And boy, he sounds happy, too!” Jody said, smiling as she watched the kindly farmer bustling around the trucks of film equipment.

“Of course he’s happy!” Mary agreed. “This movie is going to save the farm, after all.”

It was only a few months before when Mr. McMurray had fallen ill and undergone an operation on his heart. The medical bills that followed had forced him to consider selling the farm, until the miraculous day when Mr. Ted Crowley, movie location scout, had arrived, looking for a dairy just like Mr. McMurray’s to use in a motion picture.

“And it’s going to save Star, and Willie, and us, too, in a way,” Jody murmured.

The girls watched in silence then as the men continued unloading blue and yellow metal boxes of all shapes and sizes, long black poles, ladders, fat green and black extension cords, and all manner of things Mary and Jody had never seen before. Just as the last box came off the truck and disappeared into the McMurray farmhouse, Finnegan suddenly spun around to face the gravel lane and once again set up a howl. When Mary and Jody turned to see what the commotion was about, their mouths flew open for the second time that day.

Roaring up the gravel lane, one after the other, came a whole caravan of trucks, the first in line pulling a long flatbed trailer. And sitting atop the trailer was a huge yellow bulldozer. Following that, a flatbed truck with piles of wood posts and boards secured to the truck with thick metal straps. Then a long white enclosed truck with the words *A&C Tent Rentals* emblazoned on the side. Finally, a shorter black truck and trailer bearing a drawing of a smiling cat next to the words, ThomCats Catering, Movie Division.

Mary and Jody watched openmouthed in amazement as the caravan made its way to an open field between the farmhouse and the big white dairy barn. This was where Mr. McMurray

usually parked his farm equipment but Mr. Mooney had moved everything the week before to make room for the movie crews.

“Shut yer mouths, yer catchin’ flies,” a familiar voice suddenly commanded from behind the two girls.

“Willie!” Mary shouted, spinning to face the cowhand. “Oh my gosh! Did you see all those trucks? And all the men? Did you see all the stuff they unloaded?”

“Do they need all that stuff just to make a movie?” Jody chimed in.

“All that stuff? Why, they ain’t even half finished yet. That’s just part of it. And there’ll be a lot more crew members here before it’s all over.”

“But, Willie, what about the bulldozer? And the boards and the posts? Are they building a whole new pasture field?” Mary asked.

“No, not a pasture field,” Willie replied mysteriously.

“Well, what then? They must be getting ready to dig up the ground for some reason, and build a fence,” Mary reasoned.

“Well, what else can you think of that needs a clear space, and a lot of dirt, and maybe some sand, and has to be closed in with a fence?” Willie replied with a smile.

The girls looked at each other quizzically for a moment, then the light of understanding dawned on Mary’s face, and she grabbed Jody’s arm and began wordlessly jumping up and down.

“What, Mare? What is it?” Jody giggled as Finnegan yipped and jumped right along with Mary.

“Jode! What do you think? It’s a ring! A ring for us to ride in! Just like at the horse shows!”

Jody's eyes flew open wide and she turned again to Willie. "Willie, is it true? Are they really building a real ring? Will we be allowed to ride in it?"

"Well, I guess they are, and sure you'll be riding in it, that is if you behave yourselves and don't act simple. They want people in the movie that they can count on to act right and listen to what they say," Willie explained, looking pointedly at Mary.

"Willie, you know I can be quiet and listen when I have to," Mary pouted. "Like just now, I did what you said. I didn't speak to the movie people. I'm waiting for them to speak to me."

Upon hearing this speech, Jody crossed her arms and shot Mary an agitated look, which Mary promptly ignored.

"Hmmm," Willie smiled, comprehending the reason for Jody's dismay. "Well, just remember what I said and don't make nuisances of yourselves."

"We promise, Willie," Jody said confidently. "I'll make sure of it."