

THE STORY OF A SAVAGE PIG

by

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Mailed to Sam Rodden
3 negatives
May 25-43

Our meeting with Oscar, the wild pig, was not planned and certainly the adventure ahead of us and its paradoxical outcome was never anticipated.

One day last winter when in Arizona, we fixed up a substantial lunch and six of us went off into the sajuaro-studded hills hunting peccaries. These tailless little pigs are not stodgy porkers of the pens. Built with flat, knife-blade bodies and battering-rams for head pieces, they slide through the cactus and thick underbrush on the warpath for both food and excitement. The collared peccary is found only in the southern states, and a fiercer, larger peccary roams the jungles of countries south of us. In early days when their numbers had not been depleted by civilization and they roved about in bands, it wasn't any joke to meet them, especially on foot. Having plenty of time on their hands, they liked to tree a man and keep him up there till he repented having invaded their solitudes.

There was a bumptious individual who moved onto a ranch in the Salt River region who boasted that no wild pigs were going to interfere with his freedom on his own property. One day he was out on foot looking over his line posts when he met a little band of pig squatters who were there before he was. They ganged up on him and one old boar rushed him from the rear and caught him with a tusk right behind a knee, hamstringing him so that he was helpless. The boar held on while the others attacked him. When they left him, he was a subject for a hospital and was laid up for some months.

As a pet, the peccary is a one-man animal, dependable and loyal to one person, and he is a good watch-dog for his master's place. We were not counting on getting chummy with any of them.

Stopping at the Ranger's Station for information, whom should we meet head-on in the yard like a guard at the gate, but a full-sized peccary, feet planted squarely, poker face telling nothing. No one else was around. We stopped in our tracks and stood waiting for anything that might happen. All

of us felt the general lack of sociability to strangers. Neither did we like the look of his "big teeth" nor dare to turn our backs and run away. That would have been just the chance for the fierce little porker. So we just stood and looked.

Finally the pig, after taking plenty of time to petrify us, started to toward us, gingerly planting one foot out with a hesitation before the next step. There was a tenseness in the air. Slowly he came on. Then a voice, "Don't move." The pig, his thick mane bristling high on his shoulders, came up to one of the men, sniffed his boots, gave a couple of soft grunts, and rubbed against his leg. A sigh of relief came from somewhere.

One of the women edged away and came back with a head of lettuce, and dropped it on the ground. Lettuce was elixir to the pig, and he became engrossed in putting it away. Another head of lettuce was produced, eliminating salad for our meal. But it was worth the price of a truce, and we now began to enjoy the pig - with reservations. He moved about rubbing shins with stiff bristles, grunting as if he had accepted us. We couldn't make him out. He was supposed to be chewing us up. When we left he stood in the road as if lonely, and I watched him till we were out of sight.

Later in the afternoon we came back by the Station and there was the pig still on duty. This time he came trotting up to us, greeting us almost effusively. The ranger came out and we got the whole story.

"Oscar's all right if there aint no yellin' and jumpin' about," he said. "She's a year and a half old. I found'er in a Mexican shanty in the hills. She was sick from lack of care and feedin'. At night she was sleepin' out in a pen with a doe deer and an orange cat. She wasn't as big as the cat, only about eight inches long and covered with red excelsior hair. She was tryin' to live on swill throwed out in the yard."

"Oscar, she--?" I thought. It seems that her care-takers didn't take the trouble to find out that she was a girl piglet, and later on the name stuck.

We played with the pig, took her out walking in the cactus, and when we came back to the car we filled a tin dish with left-overs from our lunch.

She pitched into it, grunting satisfaction.

The next day, Sunday, Lieutenant Owen, Commissary Officer at Morana Flying Field, near Tucson, took two hundred boys and truckful of food out near the Ranger's Station for a big send-off before the boys were transferred to Luke Field at Phoenix. I had warned him to be careful of the pig at the Station - "no yellin', no jumpin' around."

In the evening when the bunch came back to town, the Lieutenant had the laugh on me about that "fierce, little peccary" doing any damage to the boys if they got noisy and rough with her. It seems the ranger himself was aghast at the way she took to uniforms. She ate with them, devouring everything from bologna to beans, cake and ice-cream. Quite a change from roots and acorns of the desert. In the afternoon they tossed dice to see who would take her riding next in his jeep. So she went sailing around the yard, high, wide, and handsome on khaki shoulders, a veritable little Jezebel of the streets. Oscar forgot she was a "lady", and she forgot she was a savage little pig. As Morana mascot, she may be flying the skies by this time.