

The Town Drunk
Presents

Finnegan's Pig

Libbie Grant Rick's

Copyright © 2009 Libbie Mistretta

Way back when the province was first being settled there was a fine little town growin' up on the banks of the Saskatchewan. It was full of the most pleasant folks, all working hard and helping one another. Never was a man too busy to give his neighbor a hand with the sowin', and never was a woman too stingy to loan her friend a cup of flour. Yes, Saskatoon was a thrivin' town if ever there was one, and all its citizens were happy and prosperous because they shared what they had so that all had enough.

There was one man, though, who was liable to shake things up some. Finnegan was a short and crabbed kind of feller who always wore a fancy felt hat and a tweed coat because he thought it made him look real sophisticated. He never put his hands into the earth if he could help it, on account of that fancy coat of his. Finnegan always had some excuse why he couldn't help with the shearin' of his neighbor's sheep or the bringin' in of the fall harvest. "My coat'll stain," he'd say, "and where will I get another one in Saskatoon?"

Well, one fine spring Finnegan was on his way back from visiting his old rich uncle in Regina. He was waiting at the train depot in Moose Jaw to catch the next ride to Saskatoon, a-standin' off on his own because even the folks down in Moose Jaw knew better than to strike up a conversation with him. Finnegan was used to being all on his lonesome, so he was surprised when he felt a feller come up beside him and heard a real deep voice say, "Hi there, friend."

Finnegan turned and looked up at the sternest-looking Metis man he'd ever seen. This feller was tall and broad, with deep brown skin and sleek black hair cut off short and blunt at his ears. He wore clothes made all of tanned moose hide, beaded all over with mysterious and bright designs. On his head was the biggest turban of fur Finnegan had ever seen, hung with a red tassel. The Metis man nodded at Finnegan and kind of shooed him off the platform and out under a nearby tree so they could talk private-like.

Finnegan was pretty scared of this big old native man, he was that imposing, but Finnegan remembered how fine and dandy he must look in his own fancy hat and coat. He drew himself up right smart and said to the feller, "Look here, now! What do you want with me, sir?"

The Metis man said, "I've got a good deal for you, Mister Finnegan. You give me that fancy coat of yours, and I'll give you what's under my hat."

Finnegan said, "Go on, get out of here! Let me be. I'm not swappin' with any natives today. I don't want whatever's under that smelly hat of yours." But then he looked a little closer at that big old turban, and saw it wiggle just a bit, and his curiosity was sure piqued. The Metis man must have seen a little glow in Finnegan's beady eyes because he just laughed.

"Give me your coat and you'll be a rich man," Old Metis said, and his eyes bored right into Finnegan's own. But still Finnegan found the guts to resist.

"This coat is too small for you, sir! And I won't part with it anyhow. You be on your way!"

Old Metis considered a moment and then shrugged as if it didn't make no matter. "Very well, Mister Finnegan. Give me all the coin in your pocket, and I'll give you what's under my hat. You'll be a very rich man."

Now *there* was something Finnegan could agree to. He got a sly smile on his face and chuckled a little, feelin' right proud of his own smart head. You see, he didn't keep much coin in his pockets at all. No sir, he kept nearly all his money in his sock because he figured that was the smartest place any man could keep his wages. It made walking tricky some days, but Finnegan made do.

"All right, sir," Finnegan said, "you agree that I give you all the coin in my pocket for whatever is under your hat. You won't go back on the deal?"

Old Metis didn't answer. He just looked and looked at Finnegan with those sharp, unblinking eyes. Finnegan got a little flustered under that gaze, thinking maybe he'd insulted the tall, powerful stranger. But the Metis man didn't move in anger, just waited for Finnegan to produce the coins. "A very rich man. The most powerful man in Saskatoon," he finally said.

"Now how did you know I come from Saskatoon? And how did you know my name?" Finnegan knew he should be suspicious, but there was a kind of dark music in the Metis man's voice as he elaborated on all the incredible wealth that awaited the man who owned the wiggling thing under that fur hat. Finnegan felt a spark of greed light up and glow inside him, and soon the Metis man's words had fanned it into a white-hot flame. Finnegan snatched the few coins out of his pocket and thrust them into Old Metis's hands.

"Give me what's under your hat," Finnegan crowed, anxious that the deal would be off when Old Metis saw that Finnegan had given him only a couple of pennies. And indeed the big stranger did take a look at what Finnegan had given him, but he nodded as if this whole business had come off in his favor. Old Metis took his turban down from his head and shook it over the ground. He shook and shook real hard, and there was a squeal and a little puff of dust, and something pink fell out and started scamperin' around in circles between Finnegan's feet.

Finnegan leaned way down to get a good look at what he'd just bought. It was a tiny pig.

Now, I don't mean it was a baby pig, no sir. Finnegan could see by how well-developed it was that it was a full-grown hog, but as tiny as a bumblebee. He looked up angrily. Old Metis was

replacing the turban on his head with an air of dignity, as if he hadn't had a pig under there just moments before.

"Now see here!" Finnegan shouted. "What's the meaning of this? A man can't get rich on a pig the size of a bee. You cheated me, sir!"

Old Metis just raised one eyebrow, and Finnegan shut right up. "Mister Finnegan," he said in that voice full of dark music. "You believe that wealth is the most important thing in life, and you will do anything to have it, even cheat another man. You will do anything but work for it. Now you will work for your wealth. Now you will struggle for your wealth. Now you will see the real cost of greed."

Well you can bet Finnegan drew himself up, ready to come back at Old Metis with all kinds of insults. But in the blink of an eye, the native man vanished. Finnegan looked around in a panic, fair spooked out of his skin, wondering if any of the other folks at the train depot had seen the Metis man. But it seemed nobody was paying any mind to what went on under the tree in the train yard, so Finnegan scooped up his tiny pig, dropped it in his coat pocket, and returned to the platform just as his train arrived. He could feel it wigglin' and squirmin' the whole way from Moose Jaw to Saskatoon.

Next day when he was back home, Finnegan built a fence out of scrap wood so his pig had a little yard to live in. His neighbors paused in their work to stare at the spectacle of Finnegan doing some honest labor, but nobody could figure out quite what was supposed to live in that tiny yard, and from a distance nobody could see Finnegan's pig. The good folks of Saskatoon went on with their business, sowin' seeds and readyin' for the big town dance, which was just a few weeks away. Talk of Finnegan's little stock yard rolled off the gossip list in a day or two as most folks chalked it up to Finnegan being plain crazy.

Now Finnegan, he kind of liked having a pig around. The critter was real good company. He'd bring it scraps from all of his own meals and watch it eat hungrily. At first he brought tiny portions because he figured such a small critter couldn't eat more than a thimbleful. But the pig would look at him all hungry-like as soon as he'd finished, and Finnegan felt kind of sorry for the little thing. Soon he was cooking double portions and giving an entire plate full to his pig, morning, noon, and night. He was pleased to see that the pig doubled in size after the first couple of days on such a healthy diet. In a week, it was plain that Finnegan's little stockyard was too small and he expanded it so the pig had more room to run.

By now folks could see the pink critter from the road, and talk started up again about how Finnegan had a fine pink piglet now, and maybe he'd share his bacon in the fall when it came time to butcher. Some folks even started to get a little respect for Finnegan, they saw him spending so much time tending his pig and doing a real man's work.

Well, another week went by, and then another. Finnegan's pig grew with each meal until it was the size of a good butcherin' hog, and then bigger until it was just as tall as a newborn calf. Finnegan could scarce believe his eyes, nor his good fortune either. He could sell the meat from this pig and live like a king! He wondered if the pig would continue to grow if he kept feeding it more food.

He resolved to find out, and he dumped his money out of his sock and took another stash out from under his mattress and went to the general store to buy all the goods for baking. He came home laden with flour and sugar and eggs and set about baking cakes for the pig. They weren't very good cakes, to be sure, because Finnegan had never baked before in his life. But the pig didn't seem to mind. He ate up everything Finnegan tossed into his pen and then stared at Finnegan with those hungry eyes, demanding more.

You can bet that folks started talkin' once again about Finnegan's pig. It was simply huge now, and the people of the town wondered what kind of a pig it was. Some said it was a magic pig, and that it would feed the town for a whole year. Others feared it and said it was a cursed pig, sent straight from the Devil to raise havoc in Saskatoon before taking Finnegan's soul down to Hell where he'd pay for his lazy ways and his greed.

Finnegan knew the town folks were jawin', but he didn't care one whit. All he cared for was that pig of his. Every time he brought it another armload of cakes he could see that it was a little bit bigger, and each time he saw it grow his greed grew right along with it. Soon he'd spent all his money feeding the pig, and he had to resort to raidin' his neighbors' stores late at night to scrape together enough to keep his monstrous pet happy and keep his own self alive, too. He spent all his days working to expand the pig's pen, which needed to get larger by the hour, it seemed, to keep in the bulk of the fat beast. If Finnegan saw how the devilish glint grew day by day in the pig's eyes, he didn't let on.

One night there was a fearful windstorm that blew down branches all over town. Finnegan despaired the next morning, seeing how many branches were strewn about the pig's pen, which was now roomier than Finnegan's own house. He sighed and went inside to cook the pig's breakfast, but when he returned with a whole wheelbarrow full of cakes made out of stolen corn meal he was surprised to see the branches all gone and the pig smackin' its lips.

"Say," Finnegan said to himself. "This pig will eat anything, it seems." And you can bet that Finnegan hatched the Devil's own plan, he was so eager to get that pig fatted up as much as he could before butchering time.

The night of the dance, when all the town folks were gathered at the meeting hall for a night of gallyvantin', Finnegan pulled down part of the pig's fence. Then he stood back and watched as the pig went a-runnin' out into the night. Finnegan ran after it with a lantern, real pleased with himself at first because his plan was so smart.

Finnegan's pig trampled right through one neighbor's field and ate up all the sprigs of new corn that were comin' up. It only took the beast a minute or two to clear the whole field. Finnegan watched with satisfaction as the pig swelled, lickin' its chops after such a sweet and tender meal. He ran after it as it scuttled into Baker's orchard and watched with a growing sense of fear as it chomped on Baker's apple trees, chewing each one right down to the stump. Not a leaf nor a twig nor a blossom was left in the pig's wake as it trotted on to the next farm, growing bigger in the light of Finnegan's lantern.

“All right, pig, that’s enough,” Finnegan said. “Time to get back to your pen!” He didn’t know how he’d explain the missing crops to his neighbors, and he was starting to think this hadn’t been such a smart idea after all. But the pig didn’t listen—it went from one farm to the next, suckin’ down anything it could find while Finnegan grew more frantic by the second. Soon the pig was the size of a house, and Finnegan knew it was too late to stop it.

In dread he watched as the pig thundered down the road toward the town hall. Finnegan saw in his mind’s eye the carnage as his devil pig busted right into the dance and started eatin’ up the folks of Saskatoon. He ran as fast as his legs would carry him after the monster pig, not sure what he could do to stop it. At the last moment the pig swerved and headed straight for the church. Helplessly, Finnegan watched the pig chomp right into the wall, then it reared up on hind legs the size of tree trunks and gobbled up the steeple. It crashed through the pews and ate the altar in one bite, then in a final devilish gesture it swallowed the crucifix whole, Savior and all.

By now you can bet the folks of Saskatoon had come pourin’ out of the meeting hall to see what all the commotion was about. The ladies screamed and ran for cover, and the menfolk shouted and rallied about, tryin’ to decide how to deal with the devil pig. Finally Baker ran to his wagon and pulled out a big old rifle. He took aim right at the pig’s eye.

“No!” Finnegan ran out in front of the crowd and faced them, his arms flung out. “Don’t shoot my pig. It’s going to make me a very rich man!”

“Finnegan,” Baker said, “Don’t you know that gettin’ rich without workin’ is the devil’s joy? You better repent and save your soul!”

“To hell with my soul,” Finnegan cried. But as soon as he said the words he wished he could have them back in his mouth again. There in the crowd of menfolk was the tall old Metis man in his fur turban, glaring right at Finnegan. He glowered and stuck out his fist, then opened it and let two shiny pennies drop to the ground. Finnegan watched as his pennies bounced in the dust, rolled a pace or two, then finally lay still.

All the commotion from the church stopped in a hurry. In the sudden silence Finnegan shuddered at the last words he’d spoke and turned reluctantly to face his pig. It was starin’ straight down at him, and there was the gleam of hellfire in its black eyes. Finnegan didn’t have time to scream before the pig stooped down and swallowed him up, coat, hat, and all.

Baker took aim and fired, and the pig dropped in the town square with a sound like thunder.



Butcherin’ time came early to Saskatoon that year. Everybody pitched in, as the folks of the town always did. Planting and tending to the new crops was put on hold. All hands were bent to the task of preparin’ one mighty harvest of chops and bacon and pork belly. Every bit of Finnegan’s pig was salted or dried or smoked and stored away so the folks of Saskatoon could enjoy the savor of bacon for years to come. And wouldn’t you know, once they had laid away enough to last for

seven years they sold off the rest to folks passing through. Soon there was enough money for Baker to replant his orchard and for the rest of the folks who'd lost their crops to replant, too.

On the profits of Finnegan's pig, Saskatoon started attracting more settlers until it was near as big and booming as Regina. And each and every person who settled in Saskatoon was as kind as the rest, so the town was known all over Canada for bein' a haven of hospitality and ham. Life was good in Saskatoon.

The church was rebuilt before autumn came in the same year the devil pig was butchered. It was a grand and lovely church, but not too grand or lovely, for now all the folks of Saskatoon knew right down to their bones the dangers of being over-proud. In a nook near the altar were laid a felt hat and a fancy tweed coat, which were found during the butchering of Finnegan's pig. They were laid out to remind all the town's good folks of the follies of greed and sloth. And the reminder seemed to work, too—no more devil-pigs have terrorized the town from that day to this.

If you know which church to look in, you can see the coat and hat yourself the next time you're in Saskatoon.



Libbie Grant Ricks is a Level 3 ranger with 18 intelligence. She roams the Borderlands, slaying orcs. In her free time she works on her series of historical novels, which she hopes to sell some time in the next decade. Her short fiction has previously appeared in *Flash Me Magazine*.