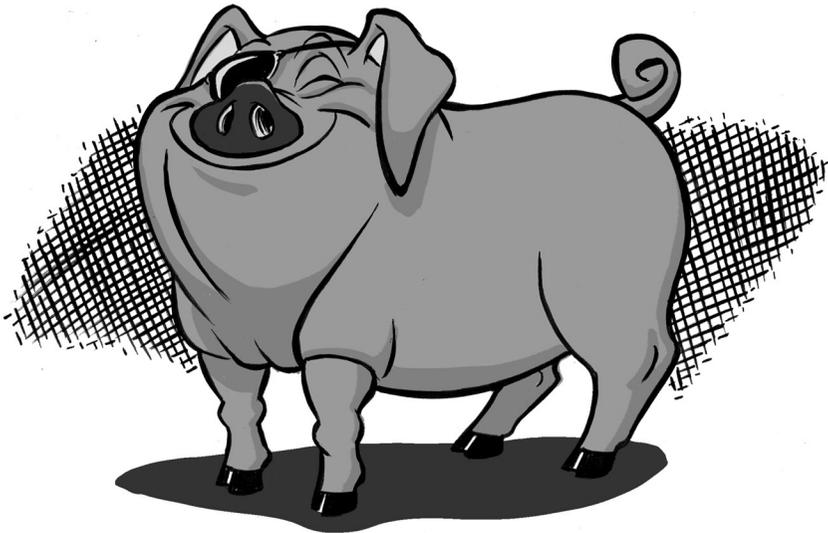


BASH and the Pirate Pig



story by **BURTON W. COLE**
illustrations by **TOM BANCROFT**



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For Melissa, forever Daddy's little girl.

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To my wife, Terry, thank you for putting up with these kids spilling out of my keyboard and wreaking havoc all over the house. You are wondrous.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, including the blessings of laughter and imagination.

—Burton W. Cole

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Chapter 1

Sentenced to the Farm of Doom

For stupid reasons that weren't my fault, I was tried, convicted, and sentenced to a summer with my wacko cousin Bash on the Farm of Doom.

We live in Virginia Beach, next to the Atlantic Ocean. I hate the ocean. It's full of waves, giant turtles, sharks, and other scary stuff. No, thanks. Give me a bag of chips—the big sack, sour cream and onions flavor—and a stack of comic books any day.

Dad shot down my sensible plans. “Raymond, you’re not going to spend another summer lying around on the couch.”

I rolled over, careful not to squish the chips, and refastened the button that popped on my Darth Vader pajamas. A corner of my comic book flapped into chip dip. I licked it off so the pages wouldn’t stick. “But, mmm, I’m reading. Don’t you want my mind improved?”

Dad grimaced. “Not when Peter Porker’s the teacher.”

“*Parker*. Spider-Man is Peter *Parker*.”

I poked my glasses back up my nose and set the chip dip on the floor. Dad picked up the dip and set it on the coffee table. “Look, son, you need to climb trees, run across open fields, and see nature.”

Chills shot up my spine. “No! Not summer camp! You have to make roosters out of macaroni and hike blindfolded with a partner who runs you into a tree.”

Mom stepped into the room and took Dad’s arm. “This is much better. You’re going to spend the summer with your cousin Sebastian—I mean, Bash—on Uncle Rollie and Aunt Tillie’s big, beautiful farm in Ohio. Isn’t that wonderful!”

When a grown-up works that hard to convince you it is, you know it isn’t.

“Not the Basher. He’s a weirdo!” My face scrunched up thinking about it. “He’s always playing tricks. He eats bugs and wrestles pigs and creates idiot inventions that’ll cut your ears off.”

Mom clucked her tongue. “Raymond, you’re always exaggerating.”

“No, I’m not. Aunt Tillie has that crazy eye tic flapping

all the time. And Uncle Rollie's always saying strange things like 'scarcer than hens' teeth.' Chickens don't have teeth. The one that nearly pecked my toes off and ate them for lunch the last time we were there didn't, anyway."

Dad chuckled. "Ol' Roly-Poly Hinglehobb says some silly things, but we always had a hoot on the farm when we were kids."

Mom sighed. "Tillie needs you to keep track of Bash, maybe keep him from parachuting off the barn roof with bed sheets tied to his bicycle again."

"Just because I'm eleven and a half, I gotta babysit a dippy doofus who just turned eleven and acts like he's seven? Don't you like me anymore?"

Mom tilted her head. "Your birthday was in February and this is June. That's not exactly eleven and a half."

A dopey haze clouded Dad's eyes. "Laughing Brook up there in northeast Ohio is such a nice, quiet little place."

Oh, no, he's not getting me with this one. "Laughing Brook isn't even on the map. I looked once. You know—to prove to Bash he didn't really exist."

Dad arched an eyebrow. "How'd he take the news?"

"He told me to clean my glasses because both he and Laughing Brook were there."

Mom waved a hand. "Oh, they have a lot of those little places. The names belong to towns that used to be there a long time ago."

"It's still not on the map. It's not safe going to places even Google can't find. Can't I just play baseball instead?"

“We tried baseball last year. You sat in the outfield during the games and read comic books.”

“Nobody ever hits the ball to right field. That’s why they put me there.”

Dad crossed his arms. “Scotty Rodgers did.”

“That doesn’t count. He’s on my team. I’m not supposed to catch balls he hits.”

“You aren’t supposed to still be sprawled out in right field when your team is batting.”

“Going to the farm will be fun!” Mom used her birthday party voice now. “You’ll have grand adventures. The fields, the woods and streams, the cows and chickens and pigs. The tractors. Don’t you just love tractors? And the sun lightens your hair to such a lovely shade of brown. It’s so pretty with your hazel eyes. Oh, you’ll have such a wonderful time.”

Yuck. What do you expect from parents named Frank and Patti? Everything’s a picnic when you’re named after hotdogs and hamburgers. I’m surprised they didn’t name me Cole Slaw.

Mom knelt next to the couch. “Your father and I have been praying about this for a couple weeks now. Were you not listening at family prayer time?”

God again. Mom and Dad said I wouldn’t be so grumpy all the time if I paid attention to God. Ha. I wouldn’t be so grumpy if they’d stop pushing me to read that boring old Bible. Besides, I prayed at suppertime.

I looked away. Yeah, I got the message. Because I’d rather sleep on Sundays than go to church, because I hated baseball,

SENTENCED TO THE FARM OF DOOM

because a bug-eating cousin needed to be babysat, they were shipping me off to a stupid farm in stupid Ohio. It wasn't fair.

Mom's eyes moistened. "Raymond, we want what's best for you." Dad squeezed her hand.

Case closed. Sentence passed. I would serve one summer of hard labor at a farm with messy animals and cousin Bash, my third cousin twice removed, but not removed far enough for my safety.