



THE UNVERIFIABLE TALES OF EARL HORNSWAGGLE THE OLDEST MAN IN BANGOR

written and illustrated by
Mark Ricketts

Earl Hornswaggle claims to be the oldest man in Bangor, Maine, clocking in, according to him, at 121 years old. However, this is the tamest of his assertions. Find yourself drawn into his gravity, and he will regale you with stories of his days as a lumber baron, schoolteacher, river driver, newspaper man, ferry operator, inventor, escape artist, and, well, the list goes on and on. It would be easy to write him off as a pathological liar, but in his oddly charismatic presence, each of his extraordinary yarns seems so very real . . .

THE LEGEND OF PAULIE BUNIONS

as told to Mark Ricketts by Earl Hornswaggle



“Those tales ‘bout Paul Bunyan, ‘bout him bein’ this huge bear-of-a-man that could clear a thicket with one axe swing, they’re all a load o’ hooey. See, Paul was a squirrely little hunchback. His eyesight was so bad, the lenses on his glasses were thick as the bottom of a Moxie bottle. I think Jean-Paul Bouillabaisse mighta been his real name. Somethin’ French like that. Up to camp, we all called him Paulie ‘Bunions’ on account of his swollen toes. They were so big, he had to wear special-made boots that ballooned up the toe—looked like clown shoes.

“Paulie Bunions was, without a doubt, the worst lumberjack ever lived. Ya see, that’s why the boys up to camp used to spin wild yarns ‘bout him. It was ‘spose to be funny. The jokes were ironical, like when you name a fat boy ‘Slim.’ ‘Cause Paulie, well, he wunt no lumberjack. That’s for certain. Point of fact, he was the camp mascot. The more superstitious drivers used to rub his head for luck every mornin’ ‘afore they headed out to work.

“Now, don’t get me wrong, Paulie was more’n just a good luck charm, he was the heart and soul of the camp. Everybody loved him, especially the camp cookee, Miss Babe. Time was, all that ol’ girl cared about was eatin’ her weight in beans and biscuits. Then Babe caught sight o’ Paulie. She looked at

Paulie as if he were a stack o' doughnuts. Ol' Babe was big as an ox and stronger'n a bull moose, but she'd stutter and turn butter-legged whenever Paulie'd come to the cookshack. Paulie was pretty smitten with her too and it wunt cause his eyesight was poorly. Paulie knew that come the teeth-chatterin' cold o' winter, a gal of her girth made for better cuddlin' than a blue tick hound. She was a skinny man's dream come true, all right, so he up and proposed afore first frost.

"Babe and Paulie's weddin' was one heckuva shindig. The whole camp smelled o' rose water, fried smelt, and woodsmoke. Doc Sawbones played the weddin' march on his squeezebox and the bride come out lookin' like a shimmerin' white tent trimmed in lace. Paulie, standin' by the preacher, smilin' ear to ear, musta thought himself the luckiest man alive. He stood so proud, you could barely see his hunch. Damned if it didn't seem like he grew an inch when the preacher asked if Paulie'd take Babe to be his lawfully wedded wife. Well sir, ol' Paulie was just about to say his 'I do's,' when the drive boss yelled out, 'log jam!' Quick as rabbits, the weddin' party took off runnin'. Paulie, quite naturally, followed after 'em, leavin' his poor bride-to-be all alone and fumin' at the altar.

"Now, Babe, she had a hair-trigger temper and Paulie runnin' off like that was just the sort of thing to set her off. You know how a blue flame is hotter 'an a red one? Well, when steam come pourin' out her nostrils, her pinched face turned more'n a few shades of blue. But who could blame her, this was 'spose to be the

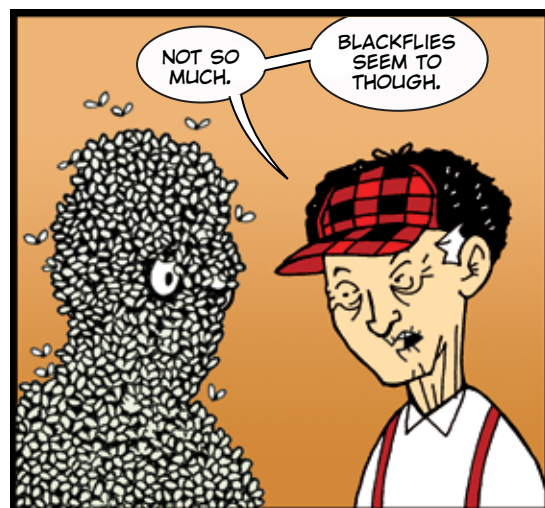


happiest time of her life. And, wouldn't you know it, just when that poor girl thought her big day couldn't get no worse, the drive boss called out, 'man down!'

"It was Paulie. He wunt even s'posed to be out there ridin' logs, but he got all caught up in the excitement. Once he started in jabbin' at the jam with a pick pole, he lost his balance, rolled a bit, then up and fell in. Well, Babe, seein' her man was in danger, didn't waste no time. She hiked up her gown and jumped in after him. Darn near drained the river on impact, partin'

water like Moses himself. Bound and determined to rescue her true love, she pushed logs aside like they were naught but tooth-picks. She even cleared the jam. After that, and not a minute too soon, Babe hauled her near-drowned sweetheart up to the shore and brought him back with the kiss o' life. Then Babe looked Paulie straight in the eyes, wagged a finger at him, and says, 'you're not gonna get outta marryin' me that easy, mister man.' »»

EARL AND I



Turn here next month for another unverifiable tale from Earl Hornswaggle.