

Best Friends



9 Tales of Daring and Disaster

By
C. R. Downing

The Adventures of Henry Langdon – Volume 1

C. R. Downing

Best Friends

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Dedication

*To the 5000+ students of my 31 years at
Monte Vista and Great Oak High Schools!*

C. R. Downing

"God made us best friends,
because He knew no Mom
could handle us as brothers."

Anonymous

Fair Game

Henry Langdon is my best friend.

You need to know that from the start. Otherwise, you might think that I was trying to harm Henry's good name. And, believe me, nothing could be further from the truth. What I want to do is to set the record straight now that all the excitement has died down.

Henry loves his mother. The family's had a rough time since Henry's dad died three years ago. Mr. Langdon volunteered to help search for a lost little girl. Nobody knows exactly what happened, but Henry's dad fell into the old quarry. The doctor said that no one could have survived the fall.

They got some money from the County and the insurance company. Mostly Mrs. Langdon does bookkeeping from home for some of the shops in town. Since his father died, Henry has been the man of the family. It's a job he takes very seriously!

Anyway, last summer, Henry decided to make his mom happy, regardless of the personal cost. He decided to help her to win the *Tastiest Pie Baker* title at the Deeds County Fair.

That was where the problem started because the number one best pie baker in Deeds County was not Henry's mom. Beulah Potts has held that title for the last 10 years.

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Henry knew that Beulah wasn't going to be easy to beat. That is why he recruited me. Together we set out on a secret mission of sabotage.

Remember, this whole thing was Henry's idea. He deserves all the credit. I did ask if this might hurt anyone. Henry sighed loudly.

"Nobody's doing to get hurt. All we're going to do is..." he scrunched his face up into his famous thinking look. "We're not doing anything to Mrs. Potts... only to her pies. Think of it as adjusting the usual to allow an uncommon outcome."

I couldn't argue with that.

Two days before the contest, Henry and I climbed through Mrs. Potts' kitchen window about midnight. Henry took a small bag of Plaster-of-Paris from his knapsack. I held Mrs. Potts' box of cornstarch open. He poured about a cup of the plaster into it. It mixed together nicely.

Henry rummaged around in the knapsack until he found a big salt container with the girl and her umbrella on it. The sugar canister on the counter soon contained about as many of the salty white crystals as it did sweet ones. You couldn't tell by looking that we had done a thing.

The last thing we did was to put a dash or two—actually I stopped counting at 5—of Tabasco sauce into the bottle of "Pure Vanilla Extract" we found on the shelf over the stove. Fortunately for us, the stuff already smelled pretty bad before we started.

Following our mission, Henry and I returned to our homes. It was quite a relief to climb into my own bed without hearing my mom hollering about my being out so late... "and probably with that Henry Langdon."

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The next morning Henry met me at our secret hiding place under General Burnside Bridge. He said that he had told his mom not to worry about the pie-baking contest because “I know you have a real good chance against Mrs. Potts this year.”

I'm sure that Mrs. Langdon gave Henry one of her famous *What in Heaven's name are you talking about?* looks while she shook her head, rolled her eyes to the sky, and sighed out loud.



July 4th was the big day. The whole town was out at the Fairgrounds.

There wasn't a cloud in the sky. Little drops of sweat made the sea of foreheads glisten in the sunshine. You could tell it was going to be hotter than a skillet on the front burner.

About 11:30 that morning, people began to gather around the long wooden table that was loaded with pies. Some of the old ladies got out their Fair Programs and began to fan themselves in the hot, July stillness. At 12:00 straight up, the three judges marched to the table.

Judge Carver was in the lead. I call him “Judge” because he really is one—and not just the pie tasting kind. He even had his official black judging robe on. Following Judge Carver was Sheriff Adams. I've never seen his shirt so neatly creased.

Normally, the Sheriff looks more like he keeps his clothes rolled up in a sleeping bag. I wanted to ask him if he owned a hanger, but Henry just gave me one of his looks.

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Just then, Henry poked me in the ribs and whispered, "I'll bet he even has on clean underwear!" We both snickered.

Mrs. Langdon said, "Hush!"

The third judge was Principal Haynes from the school. His tie looked so tight that it was puckering up his head something fierce, but he kept smiling. I guess he figured that if the Judge could wear his hot, black robe, he could keep his tie on until the contest was over. Anyway, you never did see three more dignified, serious, *honest* pie judges anywhere.

Six pies had been cut and small pieces of each one had been eaten by the judges before they got to Beulah's first pie. Everybody knew it was hers because she swelled up and just about burst with pride when the knife poised over the top crust of her peachy perfection.

Henry poked me again and wiggled his eyebrows. I nodded and smiled. Henry grinned so big I thought his cheeks were going to split.

Principal Haynes brought that knife down in a professional pie-cutting fashion. We weren't real close, so we couldn't *hear* the sound the knife made as it hit the crust. But, Hannah Gillis was heard to say later that she thought that Principal Haynes had missed the pie and hit the table with the knife.

Whatever the sound the knife made, it couldn't have been any funnier than the look on the Principal's face as he kept on trying to force that knife through the part-plaster crust.

There was a gasp from the crowd to our left. Mrs. Potts had fainted dead away.

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Never before in the entire history of the *Tastiest Pie Contest* had there been a delay in the proceedings. Even rain just speeded up the judging. But Beulah lay there on the ground in a heap moaning and breathing real shallow. Well, there wasn't much for the judges to do but hold on while Doc Quinsly ministered to the poor thing.

Having never seen a real person faint before, I was intrigued by the spectacle. For his part, Henry was holding his face in his hands. At first, I was sure he was praying for Mrs. Potts's recovery. But, when he looked at me and rolled his eyes up into his head like he can, that's when I knew he was holding his face so he wouldn't laugh out loud.

"Beulah must be coming down with something," Mrs. Langdon commented. "Or else the heat just got to the poor dear."

Henry turned his face respectfully in the other direction while his shoulders shook with what looked like sobs.

"I don't know if you should be laughing at Mrs. Potts," I whispered.

"I'm not laughing at her," Henry said. "But did you see the look on Principal Haynes' face?"

I had to smile at that. It was a very humorous expression.

In a couple of minutes, they had a wobbly Mrs. Potts back on her feet. It's tough to keep a champion down. I went back by my mom.

The very next pie to be tasted was Beulah's famous Cherry Supreme. The whole crowd leaned forward with interest to see how Judge Carver would react to a piece of heaven.

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The good Judge had no sooner popped that piece into his mouth than out it came again lickety-split right onto the ground. The look on the Judge's face was priceless as the salt we had put into the sugar hit his taste buds.

Beulah fainted again.

Several people started fanning Beulah with whatever was handy. Mrs. Langdon had a funny look on her face. She wasn't even interested in Mrs. Potts this time. She turned her eyes right to Henry.

He looked like he had eaten too many hotdogs the way he was holding onto his sides and snorting through his nose.

Mrs. Langdon shook her head. It wasn't the first time Henry had gotten himself a painful stomach by eating too much of a good thing at a picnic.

I started over to see how he was. After all, he is my best friend. He looked over at me and winked a sly wink that stopped me in my tracks. He pantomimed using a salt shaker and snorted even louder than before.

Doc had to use smelling salts to bring Beulah around the second time. When she finally got some color back, someone brought her a folding chair from the Pavilion to sit on for the rest of the contest. The judges were careful to taste pies from several other ladies before they came to Beulah's last creation.

Sheriff Adams was the lucky judge that got to taste the Banana Cream Dream. He picked up a forkful and slid it into his drooling mouth. I think it says a lot for Mrs. Potts's reputation that someone like the Sheriff would be drooling after all the pies he'd already tasted.

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I had never seen a man so affected by the taste of a pie before. As the whipped cream melted in his mouth, his eyeballs began to tear and his nose began to run.

Then his legs began to run.

He ran right to the lemonade stand where he gulped down six glasses one right after the other. The last “glass” was actually a measuring cup with straight lemon juice in it, but he didn't even seem to notice much.

I guess that Tabasco sauce has that effect when you are expecting vanilla extract.

I really can't say for sure who hit the ground first. Most folks I talked to later said it was Beulah as she fainted for the third time.

But, Henry was rolling on the ground in a fit of laughter when his Mom spotted him.

Mrs. Langdon hurried over to Henry as fast as any sprinter in a track meet. Between spasms of laughter from Henry, their conversation sounded sort of like this.

“Henry Langdon, what is going on here!” It was more of an accusation than a question.

“I told you that you wouldn't have to worry about Mrs. Potts' pies this year,” Henry's reply was punctuated with hysterical laughter.

“Just exactly what did you do, Jonathan Henry Langdon?” I didn't even know that Henry Langdon had another name.

Henry rolled on the ground and nearly busted his sides laughing. Then he pointed at me and gasped, “Aaron can tell you!”

I didn't know whether to be proud or excited or both.

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The mood of the crowd turned ugly as I related our mission of sabotage in Mrs. Potts's kitchen with all the glorious details. I included some details that I didn't actually remember happening but which sounded real good when I told them. Henry says to always make your story sound convincing.

At the end of my story, Judge Carver and Principal Haynes started toward Henry. They were threatening conviction of malicious mischief and expulsion from school.

From over at the lemonade stand, Sheriff Adams bellowed his threats of incarceration in the county jail as best he could with blistered tongue and lemon-juice puckered lips. All his contributions to the growing list of Henry Langdon's consequences were added in between very determined tongue fanning movements with his right hand.

“Aw leave th' boy alone,” Lemuel Benson drawled about then. “He warn't hurtin' nothin’!” The battle lines were drawn around that simple statement.

They never did figure out who threw the first pie, but when the big fight was finally over, several score of folks, led by Mrs. Langdon, set out looking for Henry. And most of them had switches.

Yep. That's pretty much the way it happened.

I'm writing this sitting here under General Burnside Bridge. This is the place where I found Henry that day after the pie-throwing ended. After I found Henry, we sat and talked about our success. Actually, we didn't sit long before the crowd found us both.

Come to think of it, I didn't sit anywhere for a couple of days. Several of those switches, including my mom's, found my backside along with Henry's since Henry had told them

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I helped fix Mrs. Potts' pies. And I *had* done a fine job in describing what we had done to her pie making ingredients.

I found out later that Henry had left some flowers on Mrs. Potts' porch the day after the pie contest. I don't know how, since he was on restriction and all. But, he told me he wanted to show that he was sorry she'd fainted.

The thing that me and Henry were talking about when the posse arrived was a great idea he had for how my mom could win the quilting bee in December. I heard him holler as his mom hauled him away by his ear to his bedroom for two weeks of restriction that I could be in charge of our next plan.

That's Henry, always wanting to give other people a chance to shine on their own.

The End

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