

The Pumpkin Tree & Excerpt from Emma's Gossamer Dreams-Book 5-Nurse Hal series

The sight might have looked like a natural phenomenon at first, but it wasn't. I just wished I'd have my camera with me. What happened was my mother-in-law uses every inch of her garden to plant something edible in. So one corner on the end next to the peach tree was where she planted a hill of pumpkin seeds.

Sure enough the fast growing beefy, large leaf vines took off, and the vines grew toward the peach tree, attached themselves as vines tend to do and climbed the tree. No one took much notice as long as green vine leaves mixed with green tree leaves, but when the pumpkins turned orange we could easily see them dangling from the limbs. The variety was pie pumpkin which doesn't get as big as a Halloween pumpkins, but still the orange globes were easily spotted.

Minnie made the remark that she was going to have a good crop of pumpkins. More than she needed. I said I'd love to have one to make pies with. She said take two. When the pumpkins were ready she reminded me. I took Harold to the patch with me to help carry. There they were above our heads. Good thing I had Harold helping me. He pulled down two for me.

I worked in a nursing home for years and have always been safety conscious where the elderly is concerned. My imagination went to my mother-in-law hoeing weeds in a stiff Iowa breeze with the pumpkins swaying on the branches above her. Those pumpkins had to come down one way or the other, and it should be of our choosing. Not on Minnie's head. So Harold took them all down.

Since then I've made two tries at creating a pumpkin tree. The first try when the vines went up the woven wire fence under the peach tree, the small green pumpkins perched in the wire spaces and wedged in as they grew. Wasn't easy getting the misshapen pumpkins off their perch. This spring I made another try. This time I cheated. As the vines lengthened I picked them up and wrapped them on a tree limb. The vines didn't do much growing. We had a drought this summer. That end of the garden is a jungle. By the time the artichoke plants grew six feet tall around the tree, I couldn't get close enough to take a picture of the one pumpkin that seemed suspended in the air. Oh well, better luck next year, but I may have to plant in a different location. The peach tree has lost most of it's limbs, and each winter when the snow banks up around it the weight of the snow is a burden on the frail branches. We have other peach trees so it isn't a great loss for potential peaches, but a pumpkin tree is another thing.



My Pumpkin crop for 2013

Excerpt

Emma Lapp and her brothers in Emma's Gossamer Dreams, book five of my Nurse Hal Among The Amish series, has a pumpkin and squash patch. They bring the produce out of the cornfield in a toy wagon to sell at a roadside stand in front of the house. Nurse Hal is looking for something she can do outside. Emma is teaching school, and both boys are in school so while the two baby girls are taking a nap, Hal thinks she will help out Emma by picking the pumpkins and squash.

One mild day in October, Hal decided to spend the afternoon picking pumpkins while the babies napped. As she pulled the red wagon down the lane, she noted the day was one that all the animals seemed content to do nothing. The cows and sheep relaxed in the pasture. Some of the cows stretched out flat, letting the sun's rays warm them. Just so there wouldn't be any doubt that this was a farm, once in awhile, a cow bellowed. A ewe gave a sharp baa, and a horse added a neigh.

Hal stacked pumpkins in the wagon and unloaded them into a pile close to the roadside stand. She didn't plan to make much progress before the children came home since she stopped every trip to check on the babies. She was just helping Emma.

After a few trips, Hal was weary. She unloaded the wagon and went to the house. Redbird and Beth laid on a quilt on the living room floor. They snuggled up under a blanket, enjoying the comfort of being together. The babies were growing fast. Soon they would be crawling and need more watching.

Hal thought she could get one more trip in. By then, the babies should be fretting. She took a drink from the dipper in the water bucket and went out through the mud room.

The afternoon was cool enough to need a jacket but not really uncomfortable. The sun still had some heat to it as it lowered to the West. Walking certainly helped to warm her up, and she liked being in the fresh air more than in the house.

The jenny wren followed her from the patch to the road and back. He perched on a post and sang, encouraging Hal to keep trudging with her load. When she walked close, he flew away, perched and took up where he left off. How neat was that?

Hal pulled the wagon over by the acorn and butternut squash and various shaped gourds. They were smaller. She could load more of them into the wagon. She stacked the squash as high as she dared and plodded slowly down the lane, watching where she walked to keep the squash from tumbling off.

On the slow walk, Hal was deep in thought about a cold glass of tea and the chance to sit down. Suddenly, she sensed something was wrong. It was too quiet. The wren wasn't singing. She looked at the fence posts ahead of her. He wasn't there. The sheep bunched by the pasture fence and stared through the woven wire.

Hal looked where the sheep fixated. The worse of her fears had come true. Barabbas was rambling toward her. To make matters worse, Tom Turkey raced to catch up to the raccoon, chirping a war challenge.

Hal considered escape. It was too far back to the gate hole. She couldn't get out of the way, and she

couldn't go around the raccoon and turkey. Barabbas must have gotten a whiff of her. He stopped, stood up straight and sniffed the air. That gave Tom time to close in on his predator. He pecked the raccoon in the behind. Barabbas whirled around, growled and batted Tom. The turkey backed away, bristled up and fluffed his feathered coat out to twice its size. Immediately, Tom went on the defensive. He raced at the raccoon. His feet came off the ground with all ten toenails aimed at the raccoon's face. Barabbas ducked and flattened. Tom sailed over the top of him and turned around, fanning his tail feathers out to the limit. He stomped a foot in warning. He wasn't done with Barabbas yet.

Hal watched helplessly. If only the raccoon would run away. That would solve the problem of persuading Daniel to let Barabbas go, but that wasn't going to happen. Barabbas accepted Tom's challenge. Hal had to figure out a way to stop the fight before Tom or Barabbas got hurt or killed. But how? Tom wouldn't be any friendlier to her than the raccoon if she interfered. Hal gazed around, frantically trying to come up with an idea as Barabbas and Tom connected in combat.

Her eyes lit on her wagon load. She picked up a sharply pointed acorn squash, screamed like a banshee and hurled the squash. It connected with Barabbas's back and broke into chunks around him. He turned loose of Tom and attacked the offending squash pieces, scattering them at the turkey. Hal had halted the fight, but she didn't want the battle to start up again. She hurled one squash after another as fast as she could lob them, screeching loudly.

Tom backed out of the line of fire. Barabbas hunched down and waited for the assault to stop. Squash raining down on the warriors took the fun out of their battle. Tom was just far enough away to give the raccoon the chance to skitter through the fence. He took off across the pasture and headed for the protection of the picnic grove. Watching him scramble away, Hal hoped, for Barabbas's freedom, the raccoon kept going. She didn't want to run into the coon when they went picnicking and have Daniel bring him home again.

Tom's beak touched the wire fence as he watched the raccoon leave. He stretched his neck high up and chirped a challenge. "I took care of you. Come back, and I'll give you more of the same." With more pressing matters on his mind, Tom trotted away. Hal patted her chest with a shaky hand. She hadn't known which critter to fear more Barabbas or Tom.

Strewn on the battlefield were yellow and green chunks mixed with a pulp and seeds mess from her squash ammunition. Now she worried what would be the more difficult thing to do; clean up the nasty mess, tell Daniel his pet raccoon escaped or explain to Emma how she went about destroying the girl's roadside stand inventory.

Hal unloaded the remaining squash, cleaned up the broken squash and gave the load to the hogs. She parked the wagon and pumped water into the bucket at the well. As Hal washed her hands to rid them of dust and sticky squash goo, she noticed feathers scattered in the grass and heard Tom Turkey. He made mourning chirps as he circled around two half eaten hens. No wonder he was so angry at the raccoon. Barabbas killed two members of the turkey's family.