

A Name To Bear

Three thousand head of bawling Hereford cattle were being collected from little grassy patches and wooded breaks up in Togwotee Pass country. The cool mountain air was relatively free from the swarms of biting flies and gnats that would have kept them miserable at the lower elevations and the high meadows had made the red and white cattle sleek and fat during the spring and summer. (1)_____

Fall was coming to the northern Wyoming mountains at the southern edge of the Absaroka range. It was time to push the animals back into the low country for the shelter of the valleys and the grass that had grown there during the long summer days. Eighteen hands from the Hayrake Ranch out from Dubois had moved into the high country with a chuck wagon and a forty-horse remuda for the three-day roundup.

A leather-faced Jamie Alden sat hipshod in his saddle at the edge of one of the high meadows; hand rolled cigarette pinched between his thumb and forefinger.

(2)_____ He had been "brush bustin'" steadily since he had mounted the big rawboned dun at first light.

The large, muscular man patted the sweating horse on the neck, soothing the fidgeting animal, "Just rest a minute. We'll catch up to 'em." He would work this horse until noon, then pull a sleek bay gelding out of the remuda for the afternoon.

The herd dogs had just routed a large old cow and two calves from a gully at the edge of the meadow. After a few futile lunges and bawls at the yipping dogs, the old cow remembered her lessons from years gone by. She conceded the dodging contest to the persistence of the two black and white shepherds, and led her bleating twins in a bounding retreat down the draw to join the other upset cows and calves bawling on a grassy bench fifty yards down the slope.

As the lowing, yipping and bleating receded from the meadow, Jamie thought he heard a strange noise in a draw over a couple of small ridges. (3)_____ It sounded like a calf bleating, but he had seen two of the other cowboys working that area just as he had come into the meadow.

"Well, I reckon we better check. Those boys musta missed somethin'." He pinched the fire off the spent cigarette and pulled the paper from the remaining butt, scattering little shreds of black and brown tobacco on the ground at the horse's hoofs. The dun responded to the neckreining and headed in the direction indicated by the cowboy, scrambling up the steep little scree and greasewood brush slope of the second ridge. At the top Jamie scanned from one side to the other, looking over the little brushy valley for any signs of Hereford.

(4)_____

"Well, we better get on back, ol' buddy. Guess it musta been my 'magination." He started to neckrein the horse back toward the drive activity when something caught his eye in the lower part of the draw. To a seasoned cowboy the bright red stain on the leaves was something that must be checked out. It looked like blood.

Bringing his horse down the slope several yards closer confirmed his suspicions.

(5)_____ Keeping a tight hold on the reins, he walked slowly to the side of the draw where the commotion had occurred.

There was blood on the ground and on one of the scrubby greasewood bushes nearby. It had obviously been spilled within the last half hour or so. It was still bright red all the way across the little pools and splashes. None of it had started to turn dark at the edges. A lot of scuffed area in the leaves and rocks told of a struggle here this morning.

"Cougar kill a calf here?" He spoke the question to himself, not unusual for someone used to working so much alone. He also talked to his horse often.

"I reckon I didn' hear this calf. It happened before I got up this high. Mmmm. They usually just choke 'em, don't bleed 'em right away." The unmistakable partial prints where the claws of the bear had scuffed the leaves and trash away to hard ground in the attack were obvious.

"Bear would be more likely to choke 'im, too. (6)_____ Either way, wouldn't be no blood like this. Unless this blood come from a real young calf. That's it. Musta been tender enough that its throat tore when th' bear grabbed him. Hmmm, mebbeso that ol' mamma cow ... naw, this track was made by one o' them big bulls.

"I reckon this ol' bull made it hot for th' bear, an th' calf's throat come loose from th' wrench o' th' fightin. Anyway th' bear got th' calf. Yeah, there's some more blood leadin off up th' draw. An' judgin' by th' size o' that track there, it must be a big un."

He studied the marks on the disturbed ground a few minutes. "We don't get many blacks that big an' I ain't seen a griz in these parts for a while. I think we got one now, though. 'Em boys at th' chuck's gonna be mighty innerested in these doins."

The cowboy looked past the head of the draw. There were numerous rock lined, scree-filled gullies coming off the upper part of the mountain. "Reckon he's prob'ly up there somewheres fillin' his gut about now."

Flipping the off rein around the neck of the still bothered horse, Jamie pinched the two leather straps against the saddle horn. He stuck a beat up boot-toe into the back of the front-guarded, wooden stirrup and swung easily into the groaning leather on the dun.

"Le's just see how far up we can track this feller. Mebbe we c'n get a shot at 'im."

He drew a .30-.30 carbine from the saddle boot and looked at it critically. "This is mighty light to go after griz with, but there's not much choice now." It didn't occur to him to just drop the matter. A predator on the cattle range was something to be eliminated before it could do more damage. He lay the rifle across the saddle and neckreined the dun up the side of a small ridge.

Choose from the following sentences to fill the spaces in the text. There is one extra.

- A. Or break his neck.
- B. The dun looked at him nervously as he started to gallop.
- C. It may have been his saddle creaking, but with the noise in the background, he wasn't sure.
- D. No cattle appeared to be in the area.
- E. But now their summer "vacation" was ending.
- F. He dismounted from the nervous dun.
- G. His mid-morning smoke break was needed.