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## 16. The Swinging Cinch

Nov. 27, 1940

My dear Geordie, Jean, and Bob:

That great variant we call fashion controls our methods of life, of food, of clothing, of morals, of vacations, and even of our religious observances. What was style yesterday is bizarre today. . . . Many get hurt in fashion's swing. Some designer with a neck like a crane and as callous as the long shanks of a secretary-bird sets himself to the task of designing a collar and decrees that it must be worn by all, even by a person whose neck is a reproach to proper measurement and whose carotid arteries are as sensitive as a shop girl's corn. If one were to be garbed always in the latest style of everything, it would take a small army of the underprivileged to get the use out of what he is decreed to have. The 1941 automobile is out-moded before the end of 1940. So it is all along the way.

It was even so in those long gone days when men rode many horses. Although the main parts of his equipment remained fairly static, it should not be forgotten that the epoch known as the cow country and the individual whose life was cast in it, the cowboy, lasted only about forty, and at the most fifty, years from its beginning to its close. Of course there were some styles that were almost immutable: for instance, good, strong, high-heeled boots; a strong saddle, which might be a double-cinch rig, a three-quarters rig, a center-fire rig, or the like; a good Stetson hat; and all else was variable. One man might choose corduroy pants, another Californias, and another would ride in overalls. Changes were dictated by fancy or temporary affluence. But occasionally changes of fashion crept into that life, just as it will into any other, and the folks who lived in that atmosphere were not wholly free from the lure of the gadget.

Usually a cinch was fastened by taking the long, strong strap, called a latigo, fastened to a strong iron ring on the rigging of the saddle tree, putting it through the cinch ring, back through the ring on the saddle tree, through the cinch ring again, through the upper ring again, and then looped over itself. That made secure fastening of the saddle, so long as the cinch or cinches happened to be kept tight. It was the time honored and the safe way to fasten that sort of saddle on that sort of horse for that sort of work. Nevertheless the lure of the gadget, the novelties of fashion, crept into the life of the cowboy, and one that came along getting quite a play for part of a year was a patent cinch buckle, or fastener. Instead of running the latigo strap through the cinch ring, it was run through two slots on this patent fastener, which had a hook arrangement that caught and held the cinch ring. It was a quick way of cinching a saddle, and it was used only by those who used only the front cinch on a double-rigged saddle, which was the way most of the fellows rode in the summer time.

My patent cinch buckle, for at that time I had not overcome within my inclinations the lure of the gadget, which is no small curse, came very near causing me one of the most ludicrous of disasters. On a roundup that was breaking up after finishing working the country to the northwest of Fort Pierre, it became my misfortune to have my thoughts “lightly turn to thoughts of love,” as Tennyson would explain the desire of a fellow to visit his girl.<sup>1</sup> To be in love is a great human delight, and it is far from wrong for a young person to flit from flower to flower in honorable admiration, provided a halt is called on the flitting “when you first kiss the last girl you love.”<sup>2</sup> That was my fix as that roundup closed its work, with me in charge of a lot of cattle I had gathered on the roundup that had to be thrown back to the Cheyenne River and at the same time to be ardently wishing just to see Julia Sylva, the really beautiful daughter of Manuel Sylva, a rancher located near the mouth of Antelope Creek, which ran into the Missouri River about fifteen miles below Fort Pierre.

It was not hard to prevail on some of the fellows going to the Cheyenne River to take my cattle in with theirs, to be thrown back and turned loose, but of course there had to be a reason. Always a good reason was to lose a saddle horse, and that was not too difficult to arrange as the set-up was at the moment. On the theory that a good many things are fair in love and war that would not pass an inspection by a lie detector

machine, I rode up to camp, where Harry Briggs had already cut his string and packed his bed, and asked him to steal one of my horses. He immediately asked if I wanted to go horse hunting down around the mouth of Antelope. My prompt admission won his approval of the deal, and he said, "All right, I'll take one and keep him in my pasture until you call for him." Harry's ranch was about twelve miles up Bad River from Fort Pierre.

I told him to take a young, gray horse by the name of Walker from my string. The name of that particular horse came from his ability to go along at higher speed on a flat-footed walk than any other horse of all my acquaintance. He wasn't much good for anything else. Really, the most valuable horse to work on the range was just the ordinary, three-gaited, walk, trot and gallop horse. The other gaits, such as single-foot, pace, fast walk, and the like, were nice to rest one with the change or to show off when there was good occasion, if indeed there can be good occasion for that.

Well, by the time I got through working the herd and getting the cut for the Cheyenne River country shaped up, imagine my consternation on finding that one of my saddle horses was missing. A cowboy was not supposed to lose any of his horses, and, when one turned up missing, he was frequently in for a lot of individual riding to find him. It was about as satisfying as an ace in the hole to know that, when my Walker horse was really wanted, he would be at Harry Brigg's ranch in the pasture. Fuming about the wrangler losing my horse, and arranging to have the Cheyenne River fellows take my cattle without me being along to help, left me with little to do but to cut out my string, pack my bed, and go towards Fort Pierre, about twenty miles away from the point on Willow Creek where we quit. Scotty had by this time established permanent headquarters at the Buffalo Ranch, about six miles up the Missouri River from Fort Pierre, so I went there, unpacked, and turned loose after catching a new horse for the ride down to Sylva's, another twenty miles away. With plenty of horses, one could make a good many miles in a day. Scotty saw me, and I always felt, and feel now, that he was wise to my game, but he knew that I knew that it was the law of the range that a cowpuncher was expected to ride for a lost saddle horse until he found him, and he knew that my story was almost sure to be too plausible for attack.

The horse that I caught and saddled for the ride to Sylva's ranch was a young, chunky sorrel. He was a good horse, broken to ride that spring, but far from gentle. Although he had never bucked hard with me, in fact was not a horse that knew how to do a hard job of pitching, he was certainly not too proud to try it. Also, he was a mean, skittish, unfriendly animal, and the result was that he and I were not on the best of terms. We had almost reached the stage that my old friend Judge Gaffy used to describe as "being warm personal enemies." It should be remembered that my saddle was being used then with only the front cinch, which was held in place by the patent cinch fastener.

It was small work to unroll the miles from there to the mouth of Antelope, and the sorrel pony, with his rider right side up, came drifting in to Sylva's about sundown. That called for a bite of supper under range law, which Julia quickly prepared, she being a genuine product of the cow country. It was no small delight for a hungry cowpuncher to get food from any source, but for a love-lorn swain, if a cowpuncher can properly be called a swain, to get good food direct from the hands of his one and only was almost more than the gods could have to offer. Feasting the appetite on the food and the eyes on the lady left little to be desired, especially when she was as good to look at as was Julia. Her father, mother, two brothers, and her younger sister were all at the ranch. It did not seem to be necessary in those days to get a girl away, fourteen miles from anywhere and in an automobile, in order to tell her that she stood ace high. (Although we both married others, we remained friends who continued to have high respect each for the other until her untimely death about ten years ago during a surgical operation out in San Francisco where her home was.) . . .

The next morning there was nothing to do but to ride away, and that meant following the Fort Pierre trail about halfway to town and then striking off across country toward the ranch of Harry Briggs, where I was sure to find my missing saddle horse. It took a lot of riding just to have a visit with that girl, but that added nothing to my burdens because I would have been riding all day anyway, and that made a pleasant interlude in the events of range life. As we, the sorrel pony and I, were swinging along on the trail and almost to the point where it would be advisable to go across country to

my immediate goal, my thoughts were on anything but trouble, and I may have been singing as well as thinking about “The Girl I Left Behind Me.”

Suddenly, the whole world seemed to be transformed into a fury of motion, and that saddle came into violent contact with me. One can do a great deal of fast thinking, if it can be called such, when a situation of that nature confronts him. Reduced to leisurely comment, my thought was, “Well now, surely a horse never jumped that high before,” and so it was. In the twinkling of an eye, the leg grip on my saddle had clamped down automatically with the thought of riding out the sudden and forceful storm. Just as suddenly, I, still seated squarely in the saddle, was riding through space in an arc and at the end of my bridle reins. The next contact was when the top of my head met solid ground, and with me still seated squarely in the saddle. That brought the reaction, “Good Heavens, that horse jumped so high and so hard that he turned over in the air, and now he is landing on top of me, with me still straight in the saddle.”

That thought was quickly dispelled by the reality of the situation, for I had been thrown off, my saddle had been thrown off with me, and my horse was running madly away with the bridle on him. There I was, one of the most abject and dejected things in all creation, a cowpuncher afoot and far from anywhere, with a forty-pound saddle as well as a saddle blanket to carry to some place where a horse could be borrowed. King Richard had only a faint idea of the needs of such a situation when he offered to swap his kingdom for a horse, “even-Steven.” If he had been a cowpuncher, afoot on the lone prairie, caught *flagrante delicto* in the web of circumstances, far away from anywhere that his duty called, subject to be the butt of country-wide jokes in which even his *enamorata* would join, the victim of cruel, cruel fate, he would have been more than willing to throw in with the kingdom a few African colonies and maybe Alsace-Lorraine for a horse with no registered pedigree.<sup>3</sup>

The place where this dreadful catastrophe had taken place was at the lowest point of a deep swale, and the reason it happened was that the patent cinch buckle had come undone, allowing the cinch to swing loose with nothing to keep the saddle on except gravity, an unavailing force against a bucking horse. As soon as that young horse saw that cinch swinging under him, he became frightened. His single refuge was to throw down his head and buck, and he sought refuge. The first jump sent me and the

saddle sailing off in an arc through space. By the time I had disengaged myself from the saddle and got to my feet, that horse was about a hundred yards away and adding yards faster than Willie Heston or Tom Harmon ever hoped to do.<sup>4</sup>

The potent power of prayer should never be underestimated. It should always be invoked in time of real need, of dire necessity, and I was humble and of contrite heart. From that heart direct to that running horse went the ardent and earnest prayer, "Pony, pony, if you will only stop so that I can contrive in some way to catch you, I will never be severe with you again no matter what you do."

That inaudible, unspoken prayer was answered, amazingly, for, when he had run to a point about a hundred fifty yards away from me, he stopped short and faced about. There he stood, facing me, snorting as only a range horse can, and trembling in every fiber of his frame. It just seemed that he was overcome with the fear of being alone and was repentant over the rude interruption to the thoughts of a young man temporarily in love. Just what really possessed him is still a mystery, but he made no effort to escape me as I walked up to him and caught the bridle reins. Leading him back to that saddle was a triumphant march, let me assure you, and it would give me unending joy to be able some day to build a great arch at that place and have Hitler mixing the mortar, even though he be a poor workman.

Taking that cinch fastener off and putting it in a saddle pocket was a task quickly done. Then the saddle was put on and I mounted. Then I felt richer than King Dick and, at the moment, would not have traded that horse for any gift, mortal or divine. We veered off toward the Briggs ranch, and it can be set to my credit that never again was that horse severely treated or spoken to by me. My kindness to him was soon reciprocated by a decent attitude on his part toward me, and we became great friends. Not long afterward another fellow in the outfit wanted him so badly that we traded horses, as cowpunchers were permitted to do within their strings. Because of a very hard ride he had to give him, the sorrel horse became wind-broken and of little value. Anyway, on one occasion he was exceptionally nice to me.

About noon we came along to Harry's place. I immediately went out in the pasture and ran in some saddle horses, including my Walker horse. Taking the saddle off the sorrel, putting it on Walker, and turning the Briggs horses loose was a job of

few minutes. Knowing that my friend Mamie, Harry's wife, would just about have dinner ready, I went over to the house, got fed, visited awhile, and, after proudly confessing to both of them that I had a nice visit with Julia the evening before, got on Walker and led the sorrel down Bad River to Fort Pierre and up the Missouri to the buffalo pasture where my string was. Next morning I was away with my string, heading for the outfit which was working on the Moreau River, many miles to the north. I had seen my girl, and that was just as compensating to a cowboy as to any other of God's creatures.

### Shorty

Now that we are in confessional mood on the subject of being thrown off a horse, we may as well go the whole way and confess them all. The first fall I was in South Dakota and was riding with the 73, we were on our way into Fort Pierre with a big beef herd. After dinner several of us were going out to relieve the day herders for that afternoon and the next forenoon. I was riding a bay horse called Shorty and was galloping along out towards the beef herd.

Shorty, like some horses and most humans, had some unreasoning idiosyncrasies and was disposed to indulge them. He was a gentle horse, but he seemed to be pleased always with the trouble he caused himself by getting scared of his tail. It would seem that he should have been used to it, but he was not. As we hurried along toward the herd with a strong wind from behind, Shorty's tail suddenly hove in the line of his vision as it was blown back and forth by the wind. There was no suspicion in my mind that Shorty had any apprehensions of attack from that tail, but so it was. Suddenly and unexpectedly he commenced to buck, and with simultaneity worthy of a better cause, I began to leave him. Wherever I grabbed, the saddle was not there, and soon I was dumped "clean heels over body," and Shorty was gone with the saddle on him. It would never do to let him get near the beef herd because his madness would be communicated to them, and they would run, stampede.

Everybody knew in that life that a rudderless, saddled horse had no business running anyway, and Pecos Bill, who was also going out to relieve the day herders, took in after Shorty, riding a big gray horse called Gray Eagle. Just as he closed up the gap

between him and Shorty and was reaching over to catch the bridle reins, Gray Eagle concluded that he had carried that southern gentleman far enough, and with two or three jumps, he put Pecos on equality with me. Pecos Bill was an old-time cowpuncher, and he did not like to be shown up, but it made little difference to me, just so somebody caught my horse.<sup>5</sup> Soon Cy Hiatt came in from the chase leading Shorty, and Billy Pressler came leading Gray Eagle. Pecos was angry toward me for some days, apparently without realizing that he did not need to follow my example so closely.

Shorty was a nice horse, and we continued to be friends in spite of that misadventure. Also he got his tail trimmed to a shadow of its former abundance.

## Cub

In the spring of 1900 after my friend, old Tom Beverly, was demoted from the position of foreman of the outfit, and my friend Ira Miller was put in his place,<sup>6</sup> he assigned to me a nice-looking, moderate-sized brown horse named Cub. We were then camped on the west bank of the Missouri River, about where the present grade of the Chicago & Northwestern crosses what was once the channel on the west side of Marion's Island, near Fort Pierre. . . . Going out on day herd one morning, Ira announced to me that Cub was mine to ride. He looked nice and had all the appearance of being gentle. In fact he was gentle. I put my rope on that Cub horse, led him out of the rope corral and saddled him. At the moment I had no fear of him, and there seemed to be no reason for having any. He was a strange horse to me. We soon became acquaintances, but not friends.

As I got on him, with no thought that there would be anything to the forenoon except the usual mixture of monotony and excitement of day herding southern cattle just unloaded from the cars, branded, and put into a herd. Cub seemed otherwise disposed, and he bucked with me. Although he made me pull leather, he failed to throw me. Not knowing him by reputation or otherwise, my conclusion was that he was such a horse as could be ridden by me. Less than an hour later a group of riders on circle with the Bad River Pool roundup wagon, with Bogus Mathieson the foreman in the group, came by where I was on day herd in the brakes of Dry Run. (Bogus, who was a stranger to me at the time, quit riding the range after that spring roundup was

completed, and before long became postmaster at Fort Pierre, a position he held for years.)<sup>7</sup> With that pleasant smile of his, Bogus rode up to me in the company of a group of riders to take a look at the southern cattle we were just about ready to take out and turn loose on the range. Noticing my horse, which seemed to be no stranger to him, as the rider was at the time, he said, “Young fellow, have you had any trouble with Cub?”

I said, “No. I have had no trouble with him. He bucked with me this morning, but I rode him all right.”

Bogus said, “Well, you better watch out for him, for he bucks like hell.”

With an assurance born of my ignorance, and of remembrance of the fact that I had stayed on him that morning, I said, “Oh, I can ride him all right.”

As he rode away with his group, Bogus smiled and said, “Well, anyway, I wish you good luck with him.”

It seemed that Cub must have understood the conversation and that he wanted to set me right on some things. The men were scarcely out of sight when Cub commenced his forward passing attack. There could be no alibi of being taken unawares, for he was the central point of all my attention, but that made little difference in my behalf, for he quickly dislodged me from all pretensions to a hold on that saddle and sent me up and forward on what almost seemed an astral excursion. Perhaps it would have been such, except for the application of Isaac Newton's discovery, which seemed to attach itself to me somewhere off in space and started me in a wide arc on an earthbound journey. Contact with old Mother Earth in such circumstances gives one a clear idea of what is meant by *terra firma*, for it is nothing short of a model of understatement to say that it gives one a feeling of firmness at the end of a fall. Not being versed in the science of geology, it is difficult for me to say whether any faults occurred in the earth's crust as a result of that collision the first time Cub threw me off.

With his usual practice of adding insult to ignominy and injured pride, on my return to mundane surroundings there was Cub quietly grazing and waiting for me to try my luck again if so inclined. He was one of the few range horses I ever knew that would not run away when he dumped his man. There was nothing to do except to go up to him and get back on and that was done, but with greater caution and less

confidence. None of the other fellows on herd with that feverish, restless herd of Texas yearlings, just come to the end of that long train ride from the South and from the local branding pens, had seen Cub toying with me as a wild mid-Atlantic storm might play with a dory, for all were busy with difficult cattle in rough terrain.

It was not long until Cub decided that the listlessness of good behavior furnished too little excitement for a master of his art, and he proceeded to buck down the sharp slope of one of those black gumbo hills. With an earnestness born of desperation I clung to everything that seemed in the least substantial, but there was little stability in anything about him when Cub got to rolling his skin and dancing the rumba to the music of his rider's grunts, with the result that when he was through with his part of the show, although it was an ignoble exhibition of riding and somewhat accidental as well, I was still on Cub's back. In spite of sincere efforts at forgetfulness, that ride down that hill on that hard-hitting bucking horse is still a clear recollection.

A little while later, perhaps feeling the urge to nibble a little grass, Cub cut loose again on a level place atop one of those hills. He took no undue advantage that time, in fact he never needed to and seldom did, because I was watching for it, the ground was level, and everything was set for fair competition. For a couple of jumps the battle seemed to be on even terms, if that can be said of a fellow hanging on to everything in range. Then Cub, in addition to whirling, sunfishing, and all the other things that a broke horse like him should not do, began turning himself inside out twice each jump. At that my poise left, and so did I. Too crushed to curse, completely sapped of courage, and with no assurance of being able to ride a stick horse, I stepped up to where Cub was grazing a few feet away. Gathering up the reins I got back again on that unsure seat, only to be relieved in a little while by the next group of day herders. That meant going back to camp, to dinner for me and to a turn loose for Cub. That seemed to be entirely to his liking, and he galloped off like the well-broke horse he knew how to be, straight for camp. It was nice to get off Cub voluntarily. It may be, but it is no certainty, that in later years with much more experience I could have done a better job riding Cub. He was the victor from every angle that time.

A few days later as we were camped at the Willow Creek Dam, taking these cattle out on the range, it was Cub's turn for a ride. After catching, saddling, and

mounting him, he just threw me off at the rope corral, which meant right in camp. Catching him again, which was no trick at all because there he stood with insulting indifference waiting for it, I got on and went out to the herd. Not long after being out with the herd, he threw down his head and went to it again. Maybe he was just being nice to me in giving me experience. If so, his kindness is not appreciated even yet. That time I stayed on somehow. Later in the forenoon, as we were working the herd in to water and were close to camp, Cub seemed to conclude that time was hanging heavy on our hands, and that he should shake me up a bit. He not only shook me up, but he must have shaken all the surrounding territory with the impact of my body hitting the ground. He did that so close to the cattle that they ran a little way because of the disturbance. Walking up to where Cub was quietly nibbling at the grass, I took the bridle reins and led him into camp, not over a hundred yards away. There he was unsaddled and turned loose. He was just too hard a horse to learn on.

Crushed and meditating on the disaster of complete defeat, I sat down on the ground alongside my saddle. My old friend, Tom Beverly, who had watched the whole performance from a little distance, came loping in to give me some encouragement about continuing to ride Cub. Realizing even then that a cowpuncher was of no value in handling cattle except when he was on his horse, and realizing, too, that there was no way of knowing just when I should be induced to make an involuntary dismount from the back of that horse, I merely told Tom that, when Cub was launched into eternity, it was my sincere hope that he would be in a part of that neverending domain from which I should be spared. My recollection is that it was more tersely stated than that. Anyway, that was my last time on Cub's back. He bucked very little the rest of that summer, and it should be said to his credit that he never sought to hurt a thrown rider by kicking him or the like, as some of those horses seemed only too willing to do.

Soon after my relinquishment of the doubtful honor of riding him, Billy Hess confided to me that, as he was riding him alone one day, he came to an erosion ditch about a foot and a half or two feet across. As he jumped the little ditch, Cub lit on the other side bucking. In spite of Billy's best endeavors, he had to pick himself up from the ground. He soon evolved a good excuse for getting Cub out of his string.

About three years later, as I was repping for Scotty with the W M wagon (Dick Mathieson's outfit then being run by the super-cowman Tom Jones),<sup>8</sup> one morning on circle some of the fellows got to joshing me about Cub and asking why he was not in my string. In fact there was enough reason in that I had a string of good horses. Also there was the fact that Cub was on occasion hard to ride and, in cowboy parlance, "wasn't worth a damn after you got him rode." He was just like some people, so discontented that it showed right in his face. While it might be possible that I could ride him then, he was not worth riding as compared with the horses I already had.

As we were riding along on this circle on Whitcher Holes Creek, Bunk White, who had been listening to the group efforts on me, suddenly spoke up and said, "Well, George, it's all right if you don't want to ride Cub. I don't blame you. He bucks awful hard, and he isn't any good. I used to ride him before you did, and I know. I remember one time when he dealt me a lot of misery, and when that dad-blamed Cub got through pitching with me, I was as white as a sheet."

It was a relief to me to know that Cub had reduced my colored friend to such a blanched appearance, because it must have taken something unusual to do that. While it is hard for me to believe that Cub threw Bunk, who was a superb bucking-horse rider, Billy Hess insisted to me on the side that he believed exactly that thing had happened. I still doubt it.

After the midday meal on that very day at our camp on Whitcher Holes, some of the boys who were working for the W. I. Walker outfit [Z over T brand], which was run in conjunction with the W M, were having trouble with their horses.<sup>9</sup> The Walker outfit did not have good cattle, and they had poorer horses. The result was that the better class of range hands did not seek employment there. We were going to make a long ride that afternoon without moving camp. Bunk White, not desiring to expend energy unnecessarily, had caught and saddled his horse for the afternoon ride and was sitting in his shade, watching the antics of the Walker horses and men. I had caught and saddled my horse, Dishrag, and was standing by him waiting for the excitement to subside.

Bunk apparently had not noticed what horse was under my saddle until I began to show signs of getting on him. As the safety point for a sailor is usually in the open

sea, and for an aviator is high in the air, so for a cowpuncher his point was to be on top of his horse in time of trouble, and he was all right so long as he stayed there. Bunk's amused grin subsided as he jumped up and said, "Dad-blame, here where I gets on my horse. When that gen'man does things, he perfo'ms."

The gentleman to whom Bunk referred was Dishrag and not his rider. Bunk knew better than to make any such remark about the rider. As if to verify Bunk's assertion, Dishrag "perfo'med" to the satisfaction of every one but me, and, fortunately, I suffered no disadvantage. And Cub—well, wherever he is, I hope it is bad.

Dave

Dave was a tall, slim, gray, semi-stupid, crop-eared young horse. He had been raised on the horse ranch of Judge Gaffy on the east side of the Missouri River, up near Okobojo. After being broken to ride, he was sold by Judge Gaffy and got into the hands of old Dave Crippen, a livery-stable keeper in Fort Pierre. Dave Crippen was an ex-forty-niner who had gone west across the Plains and back around Cape Horn. Such was the man who sold that saddle horse to Scotty.<sup>10</sup> Except for the fiction in which range folks indulged (that a raw horse, which could be led from a corral, saddled, and ridden ten times, was a broke horse and ready for the rider who had to do his work on him), Dave was not much of a saddle horse. In my opinion he never could be much of a saddle horse. Clearly he came within the cowboys' none too complimentary classification of "knot-head," or "buzzard-head." . . .

Dave was turned over to me as a member of my string, and it was not long before I was cursing the luck that froze his ears as a young colt. It was a belated wish that his ears could have been frozen off at his shoulders instead of about two-thirds of their length, for then he would not need to be ridden. As we were working down the north side of the Cheyenne River, Dave bucked with me one day. He could buck fairly hard, but after several jumps while I seemed to be doing all right, he reared up on his hind legs and balanced indecisively between falling over backwards and coming down on his feet. At that stage the rider must be prepared to get out of the way if the horse falls backward in order to escape the likelihood of injury. The person who got hurt or sick was of no value around an outfit, unless he still remained on his own power and able to

do his work. So he must not let himself get hurt if the horse falls over backward. Consequently, when the horse is straight up on his hind legs, the rider must be loose in the saddle. Then the difficulty is to recover a firm seat if he quickly comes back to his feet. That time Dave came back to his feet, having his rider out of balance. That was the chief reason for getting dumped.

A couple of days later near the old Mike Dunn ranch on the north bank of the Cheyenne River, Dave repeated his performance with like result. The indignity of that occasion was increased by the fact that he chose a spot where the sand burrs were thick as a dumping ground for me. Stanley Philip, then a youngster of about eleven, and not the strapping physical specimen he afterwards turned out to be, was riding with the outfit, so I asked him to go down with me on the Cheyenne River sand bar, where it was my plan to take it all out of Dave for all time. He rode his horse, and I rode Dave down to the sand bar, and immediately on getting well set, I ran my thumbs up Dave's neck, which, of course, set him to bucking immediately. A jump or two in that loose sand showed Dave his handicap, so up he came on his hind legs. When he came down on all four feet, I was off balance, and a jump or two more and my hat was thrown off, followed by me the next jump. Although it is downright silly to say that an ostrich buries his head in the sand when danger threatens, because to do so would exterminate his species over night, it is no exaggeration to state that mine was practically buried in the Cheyenne River sand that day, as I lit in it straight head on. Stanley kids me yet about the difficulty of getting the sand out of my hair.

Mention was made of my hat being thrown off. Even as great an artist as the late Charles M. Russell, who is properly acknowledged as the Cowboy Artist, frequently makes the mistake of having his cowboys lose their hats, which in real life rarely happened. But we must not be hard on Russell for that one mistake in otherwise marvelous pictures. We should remember that even Michelangelo painted a navel on Adam.

Riding Dave was just a matter of catch-as-catch-can from then on, but somehow he threw me off no more. Not long after that I was with a roundup working in the Fort Bennett country.<sup>11</sup> Going along at a fair gallop and riding between Harry Briggs and Guy Moulton, as memory now serves, Dave suddenly commenced to buck without any

known reason. A few jumps and up he came on his hind legs, but that time the balance was the other way, and he went over, landing squarely on his back. Fortunately, I was loose as he went over and got out of the way. Picking myself up sooner than he did, I held his head off the ground by the reins, thereby preventing him from getting up.

Harry Briggs shouted, "Are you hurt, Georgie?"

My answer was always to plague me on the range as I shouted back at him, "Hell, no. I lit on my head." The fact was that I lit partly on my feet, but the remark stuck.

Holding Dave's head off the ground, I gave him a boot-heel massage that completely disfigured him and necessitated letting out the bridle to the last notch by reason of the swelling of his head under that treatment. When he was finally permitted to get up to his feet and we all started again on our ride, Dave was groggy from his punishment, but, knot-head that he was, he realized there was some danger in falling over backward. Of course a horse that has that trick in his repertoire is always dangerous, so Dave was soon sold to a horse buyer taking horses down into the farming country east of the Missouri River, where he likely would not be used as a saddle horse. He threw me those three times before he went.

Of course there were occasions when he did not throw me. He did not have a clean score, but it was good enough. He could reasonably enough have hurt somebody had he been continued as a saddle horse. He never hurt me, and no other L-7 man ever rode him. It was small loss when he left.

Mouse

Then there was Mouse. A small, mouse-colored horse he was, purchased from Dan Powell. But for his trim legs and slick coat, he could almost be considered an oversized Shetland pony. Mouse was a good pony, with lots of promise and a good deal of performance. As soon as he was purchased from Dan Powell, which was just after he was broken to ride, he was turned over to me as part of my string. He was a bit snuffy at first, but petting and fondling made him friendly, although on a few occasions his nervous and energetic attitude toward things prompted him to buck with me. He was a wiry and active little fellow, and it gave me neither physical nor mental comfort. I always managed to ride him, but in my own fashion, which would never win the silver-

horned, full-stamped saddle at a rodeo contest. The rodeos of that day were serious, everyday business, without judges or prizes, just part of the day's work—a hard day's work.

I always managed to ride him until one day Mouse had his inning, and he scored. We were working up Bad River with George Jackson's pool wagon and were camped near the mouth of Plum Creek at the spot where, at a later time, Jimmie Schneider was thrown into the cactus patch.<sup>12</sup> Plum Creek was in flood, bank full. Some of us were sent out on circle down the river for a way, and we had to cross Plum Creek. That necessitated swimming the horses across. Having a disinclination to get wet all over, as soon as we got our horses into the stream I slipped up until my knees were in the seat of the saddle and then bragged about my foresight on the way over, as compared to the rest of the fellows who were taking it badly in that muddy stream. Just as his feet struck the steep bank and he had footing, Mouse, realizing that only "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted," gave me a lesson in humility.<sup>13</sup> Before I could slip back securely into the saddle, he was at it, bucking in a whirling motion so as not to get away from that water. In very few jumps he gave me a real lesson in humility, for he threw me splashing into the edge of the stream.

That was a case where, literally, pride went before a fall, and the lesson in humility was taught by a little range pony. It may be that the other fellows did not take full advantage of the situation, but my recollection quite clearly points that they did. Among those boys was a poor place to show your pride even when you got away with it, but Heaven help the poor cowboy who showed his pride and then was humbled. Anyway, it was such a good joke that even I enjoyed it, and when somebody caught Mouse and brought him back to me, I petted him and got on. . . .

In several letters you have been told about horses of mine failing to accomplish the purpose of their bucking with me. In order that you may get a clearer picture of that line of activity, and know the full extent of the times I took the count in my five seasons on the range, you are given the foregoing story of my shame. But the shame was not felt as much in my case as with some, for two reasons: (1) there were no grandiose opinions of my own ability, and (2) there was no ambition to be a great bronco rider. So the inconvenience of it annoyed, but the shame took no hold. But remember, it was

hard work riding those horses for thirty-five or forty dollars a month. We did not see that life through the yellow backs of dime novels; we saw it through the sunshine and the storm, through the dust and the mud. Each man could see his fellows, and he knew that they were sweat streaked and dirty. The make-believe makes it silly. The reality made it superb.

Affectionately,

Dad