

ROWDY

WILD AND MEAN, SHARP AND KEEN

PROLOGUE

Rowdy sat on the front porch of his ranch house and surveyed the horizon. A sultry breeze swirled about the Circle R ranch, bringing a sweet smell of coming rain. A rider was coming in. At Rowdy's feet was Dog. Dog, more interested in identifying the scent flowing in with the breeze, had yet to sense the coming visitor. Rowdy watched the rider's image grow larger as it slowly sauntered closer. The rider looked toward the Circle R. A smile edged out of the corner of his mouth. It was Roberson.

Dog, growing tired of the mysterious smell, caught sight of Roberson and stood pointing in his direction. Quietly, he stepped forward and then shot off the porch, sprinting towards Roberson. Rowdy stood and watched as Dog escorted Roberson through the gate and up to the hitching post where he dismounted. He secured his horse to the post and looked up at Rowdy. Rowdy looked back. Neither said a word. A gust of wind blew between them, spraying dust along its path.

"Got a feeling about this one?" Roberson said finally.

"More so than the last time," Rowdy replied.

"The last time... should've been the last time." Roberson spoke as he climbed the stairs to the top of the porch. Dog followed and reclaimed his spot next to Rowdy. Both men laughed as they shook hands, but Rowdy knew in the back of his mind that Roberson was right. He laughed anyway as Roberson sank into the chair next to him.

"I hear the deer are running bigger this year than they have in a while," Roberson said. He loved to hunt and jumped at every chance.

"I suppose we will see when we get there, but if this wind doesn't die down, we may catch the brunt of those storm clouds," Rowdy said, pointing at the sky beyond the ranch.

Roberson spat. Both men watched as bulging clouds spread out and up across the western sky, growing darker and more ominous by the minute.

"Danged if that isn't blowing our way!" he said.

"Come on," Rowdy said. "Let's put yer horse in the barn and head inside for some coffee. Maybe this thing will blow itself out and we can hit the trail in an hour."

The storm didn't blow out. It grew rapidly, sparking lightning flashes that trailed like spider webs across the sky. Booming thunder followed. Dog, still lying on the front porch, slowly stood up and headed inside for his favorite

napping spot.

Rain began to fall, gentle at first. Wind whipped through the Circle R and the sky opened up. Rain swept in diagonally, splashing the ground angrily. The front door rattled against its hinges while the two men tipped back in their chairs and nursed their coffee.

“Looks like we’ll be a while,” Rowdy said.

Roberson, irritated that his hunting trip was delayed, let out a grunt.

Deafening thunder rolled across the plains as the rain showed no signs of letting up. Roberson stepped to the window and looked out.

“Dang!” he said, “This is gonna clean wash us out!”

“I’ve seen worse,” Rowdy replied.

“Worse than this?” Roberson questioned. “Can’t imagine.”

Skeptical, Roberson looked out over the soggy terrain. Small streams of water ran rampant, carving miniature canyons into the ground.

Rowdy rocked back in his chair and a swift glimpse of the past rolled through his mind—Mississippi river water pouring over his skiff, supplies careening away down river, lightning flashing overhead, and roaring thunder echoed through him.

A crisp flash of lightning chased by its thunderous pursuer jolted Rowdy back to the present. Roberson turned around.

“Where did you see anything like this?”