

Cowboy

He wiped his brow as he stared down the line. His old brown eyes squinted against the red Arizona sun setting low on the horizon. Be dusk soon.

Riding out on the dusty trails, he could spot a stray, damn near a mile away, some use to say. A little pat on the neck from his well-worn leather gloves and a slight tug on the reins, the old Chestnut mare turned to camp.

Like him, her better days were behind her. Time was when she could cut a steer on the run and never break a step. Her gait was slow and steady now as they headed back in. It was as if she knew it was the last time out.

He could see the fire glow in the distance, smell it before that. The young pokes had it going on, rustling up some stew. Brims tipped back on those dusty hats, flames licking the heels of their boots. Telling lies they thought were true. With a cowboy, you just never know. They laughed out loud, chiding each other on.

His old bones protested just a little as he sat down to join them. He remembered when he was just a fresh face cowpoke starting out as these boys. Now he was the old sage. He didn't need to tell stories, they all knew he had seen it all and done it all. His presence just demanded respect and the cowboys gave it without question. He was too humble, though, to realize it. Simple things in a simple life had always been the way he lived. Heck, a nickel cigar and a hot cup of coffee sitting around a breathing fire, now that was heaven to him. Nowadays that nickel cigar was a thing of the past, cost him a lot more dimes, but a hot cup of joe was always around it seemed.

He leaned back against his bedroll, tilted his hat down low and pulled that old wool blanket around him. Those stars above seemed to twinkle a little brighter tonight in that clear western sky. The smoke from the fire wafting over him, the breeze bringing in the pines and the musk of the cattle and horses was so familiar and soothing to him. He savored it all as he started to doze off, and thoughts of a new way of life filled his head.

Returning home to be a full-time husband to his wife of all these years. She had been his rock and steadfast as they come. Tooling around with his leathers. Making holsters, belts, and saddlebags that any cowboy at heart would be proud to own. Grandkids, eyes all wide, climbing up on his lap to hear tall stories of Indians, bears, coyotes and such. The kids thought they were true, he didn't know anymore, but the glint in his eyes as he revealed the stories told the truth.

He dreamed of times gone by, roping steers, bustin' broncs, riding trails through the mountains with the snow falling down. Sharing smokes, drinks, and beers with his old compadres, bandits everyone.

A good life it had been with more memories to make. Some folks might mistake his name, but no one would ever mistake what he is.

A Cowboy, proud, and true.