

James Will

Smoky the Cowhorse

PREFACE

To my way of thinking there's something wrong, or missing, with any person who hasn't got a soft spot in their heart for an animal of some kind. With most folks the dog stands highest as man's friend, then comes the horse, with others the cat is liked best as a pet, or a monkey is fussed over; but whatever kind of animal it is a person likes, it's all hunky-dory so long as there's a place in the heart for one or a few of them.

I've never yet went wrong in sizing up a man by the kind of a horse he rode. A good horse always packs a good man, and I've always dodged the hombre what had no thought nor liking for his horse or other animals, for I figger that kind of gazabo is best to be left unacquainted with. No good would ever come of the meeting.

With me, my weakness lays towards the horse. My life, from the time I first squinted at daylight, has been with horses. I admire every step that crethure makes. I know them and been thru so much with 'em that I've come to figger a big mistake was made when the horse was classed as an animal. To me, the horse is man's greatest, most useful, faithful, and powerful

friend. He never whines when he's hungry or sore footed or tired, and he'll keep on a going for the human till he drops.

The horse is not appreciated and never will be appreciated enough, — few humans, even them that works him, really know him, but then there's so much to know about him. I've wrote this book on only one horse and when I first started it I was afraid I'd run out of something to write, but I wasn't half thru when I begin to realize I had to do some squeezing to get the things in I wanted; and when I come to the last chapter was when I seen how if I spent my life writing on the horse alone and lived to be a hundred I'd only said maybe half of what I feel ought to be said.

The horse I wrote of in this book is not an exception, there's quite a few like him. He's not a fiction horse that's wrote about in a dream and made to do things that's against the nature of a horse to do. Smoky is just a horse, but all horse; and that I think is enough said.

As for Clint, the cowboy who "started" Smoky, he's no exception either. He's just a man who was able to see and bring out the good that was in the horse-and no matter how some writers describe the cowboy's handling of horses, I'm here to say that I can produce many a cowboy what can show feelings for a horse the same as Clint done.

But Smoky met other humans besides Clint,

many others, and of all kinds, and that's where the story comes in. And now, my main ambition as I turn Smoky loose to making hisself acquainted is that the folks who will get to know him will see that horse as I seen him.

CHAPTER I

A RANGE COLT

It seemed like Mother Nature was sure agreeable that day when the little black colt came to the range world, and tried to get a footing with his long wobbly legs on the brown prairie sod. Short stems of new green grass was trying to make their way up thru the last year's faded growth, and reaching for the sun's warm rays. Taking in all that could be seen, felt, and inhaled, there was no day, time, nor place that could beat that spring morning on the sunny side of the low prairie butte where Smoky the colt was foaled.

"Smoky" wouldn't have fitted the colt as a name just then on account he was jet black, but that name wasn't attached onto him till he was a four-year-old, which was when he first started being useful as a saddle horse. He didn't see the first light of day thru no box stall window, and there was no human around to make a fuss over him and try to steady him on his feet for them first few steps. Smoky was just a little range colt, and all the company he had that first morning of his life was his watchful mammy.

Smoky wasn't quite an hour old when he begin to take interest in things. The warm spring sun was doing its work and kept a pouring warmth all over that slick little black hide, and right on thru his little body, till pretty soon his head come up kinda shaky and he begin nosing around them long front legs that was stretched out in front of him. His mammy was close by him, and at the first move the colt made she rim her nose along his short neck and nickered. Smoky's head went up another two inches at the sound, and his first little answering nicker was heard. Of course a person would of had to listen mighty close to hear it, but then if you'd a watched his nostrils quivering you could tell that's just what he was trying to do.

That was the starting of Smoky. Pretty soon his ears begin to work back and forth towards the sound his mammy would make as she moved. He was trying to locate just where she was. Then something moved right in front of his nose about a foot; it'd been there quite a good spell but he'd never realized it before; besides his vision was a little dim yet and he wasn't interested much till that something moved again and planted itself still closer.

Being it was right close he took a sniff at it. That sniff recorded itself into his brain and as much as told him that all was well. It was one of his mammy's legs.

His ears perked up and he tried nickering again with a heap better result than the first time.

One good thing called for another and natural like he made a sudden scramble to get up, but his legs wouldn't work right, and just about when he'd got his belly clear of the ground, and as he was resting there for another try at the rest of the way up, one of his front legs quivered and buckled at the elbow, and the whole works went down.

He layed there flat on his side and breathing hard. His mammy nickered encouragement, and it wasn't long when his head was up again and his legs spraddled out all around him the same as before. He was going to try again, but next time he was going to be more sure of his ground. He was studying it seemed like, and sniffing of his legs and then the earth, like he was trying to figger out how he was going to get one to stand up on the other. His mammy kept a circling around and a talking to him in horse language; she'd give him a shove with her nose then walk away and watch him.

The spring air, which I think is most for the benefit of all that's young, had a lot to do to keep Smoky from laying still for very long. His vision was getting clearer fast, and his strength was coming in just as fast. Not far away, but still too far for Smoky to see, was little calves, little white-faced fellers a playing and bucking around and letting out wall-eyed bellers at their

mammies, running out a ways and then running back, tails up, at a speed that'd make a greyhound blush for shame.

There was other little colts too all a cavorting around and tearing up good sod, but with all them calves and colts that was with the bunches of cattle or horses scattered out on the range, the same experience of helplessness that Smoky was going thru had been theirs for a spell, and a few hadn't been as lucky as Smoky in their first squint at daylight. Them few had come to the range world when the ground was still covered with snow, or else cold spring rains was a pouring down to wet 'em to the bone.

Smoky's mother had sneaked out of the bunch a few days before Smoky came, and hid in a lonely spot where she'd be sure that no cattle nor horses or even riders would be around. In a few days, and when Smoky would be strong enough to lope out, she'd go back again; but in the meantime she wanted to be alone with her colt and put all her attention on him, without having to contend with chasing off big inquisitive geldings or jealous fillies.

She was of range blood, which means mostly mustang with strains of Steeldust or Coach throwed in. If hard winters come and the range was covered with heavy snows, she knowed of high ridges where the strong winds kept a few spots bare and where feed could be got. If droughts came to dry up the grass and

water holes, she sniffed the air for moisture and drifted out across the plain which was her home range, to the high mountains where things were more normal. There were cougars and wolves in that high country, but her mustang instinct made her the "fittest." She circled around and never went under where the lion was perched waiting for her, and the wolf never found her where she could be cornered.

Smoky had inherited that same instinct of his mammy's, but on that quiet spring morning he wasn't at all worried about enemies. His mammy was there, and besides he had a hard job ahead that was taking all of his mind to figure out: that was to stand on them long things which were fastened to his body and which kept him spraddling out in all directions.

The first thing to do was to gather 'em under him and try again. He did that easy enough, and then he waited and gathered up all the strength that was in him. He sniffed at the ground to make sure it was there and then his head went up, his front feet stretched out in front of him, and with his hind legs all under him, he used all that strength he'd been storing up and pushed himself up on his front feet, his hind legs straightened up to steady him; and as luck would have it there was just enough distance between each leg to keep him up there. All he had to do was to keep them legs stiff and from buckling up under him, which wasn't at all easy, cause getting up to where he was had used up a lot of

his strength, and them long legs of his was doing a heap of shaking.

All would of been well maybe, only his mammy nickered "that's a good boy," and that's what queered Smoky. His head went up proud as a peacock and he forgot all about keeping his props stiff and under him. Down he went the whole length of his legs, and there he layed the same as before.

But he didn't lay long this time. He either liked the sport of going up and coming down or else he was getting peeved; he was up again, mighty shaky, but he was up sure enough. His mammy came to him. She sniffed at him and he sniffed back. Then nature played another hand and he nursed, the first nourishment was took in, his tummy warmed up and strength came fast. Smoky was an hour and a half old and up to stay.

The rest of that day was full of events for Smoky. He explored the whole country, went up big mountains two feet high, wide valleys six or eight feet acrost, and at one time was as far as twelve feet away from his mammy all by himself. He shied at a rock once; it was a dangerous-looking rock, and he kicked at it as he went past. All that action being put on at once come pretty near being too much for him and he come close to measuring his whole length on Mother Earth once again. But luck was with him, and taking it all he had a mighty good time. When the sun went to sinking over the blue ridges in the West, Smoky, he missed all the

beauty of the first sunset in his life;-he was stretched out full length, of his own accord this time, and sound asleep.

The night was a mighty good rival of what the day had been. All the stars was out and showing off, and the braves was a chasing the buffalo plum around the Big Dipper, the water hole of The Happy Hunting Grounds. But all that was lost to Smoky; he was still asleep and recuperating from his first day's adventures, and most likely he'd kept on sleeping for a good long spell, only his mammy who was standing guard over him happened to get a little too close and stepped on his tail.

Smoky must of been in the middle of some bad dream. His natural instinct might of pictured some enemy to his mind, and something that looked like a wolf or a bear must of had him cornered for sure. Anyway, when he felt his tail pinched that way he figgered that when a feller begins to feel it's sure time to act, and he did. He shot up right under his mammy's chin, let out a squeal, and stood there ready to fight. He took in the country for feet and feet around and looking for the enemy that'd nipped him, and finally in his scouting around that way he run acrost the shadow of his mammy. That meant but one thing, safety; and that accounted for and put away as past left room for a craving he'd never noticed in his excitement. He was hungry, and proceeded right then and there to take on a

feed of his mammy's warm, rich milk.

The sky was beginning to get light in the East, the stars was fading away and the buffalo hunters had went to rest. A few hours had passed since Smoky had been woke up out of his bad dream and there he was, asleep again. He'd missed his first sunset and now he was sleeping thru his first sunrise, but he was going to be prepared for that new day's run, and the strength he was accumulating through them sleeps and between feeds would sure make him fit to cover a lot of territory.

There wasn't a move out of him till the sun was well up and beginning to throw a good heat. He stacked up on a lot of that heat, and pretty soon one of his ears moved, then the other. He took a long breath and stretched. Smoky was coming to life.-His mammy nickered, and that done the trick; Smoky raised his head, looked around, and proceeded to get up. After a little time that was done and bowing his neck he stretched again. Smoky was ready for another day.

The big day started right after Smoky had his feed; then his mother went to grazing and moving away straight to the direction of some trees a mile or so to the south. A clear spring was by them trees, and water is what Smoky's mammy wanted the most right then. She was craving for a drink of that cold water, but you'd never thought it by the way she traveled. She'd nose around at the grass and wait for spells, so as little Smoky could keep up with her and still find time to

investigate everything what throwed a shadow.

A baby cottontail had jumped up once right under his nose, stood there a second too scared to move, and pretty soon made a high dive between the colt's long legs and hit for his hole; Smoky never seen the rabbit or even knowed he was there or he might of been running yet, cause that's what he'd been looking for, an excuse to run. But he finally made up an excuse, and a while later as he brushed past a long dry weed and it tickled his belly, he let out a squeal and went from there.

His long legs tangled and untangled themselves as he run, and he was sure making speed.

Around and around he went and finally lined out straight away from where his mammy was headed. She nickered for him and waited, all patience. He turned after a spell and headed for his mammy again the same as tho he'd run acrost another enemy at the other end; and as he got close to his mammy he let out a buck, a squeal, a snort, and stopped, — he was sure some little wild horse.

It took a couple of hours for them two to make that mile to the spring. The mother drank a lot of that good water, a few long breaths and drank some more till the thirst was all gone. Smoky came over and nosed at the pool, but he didn't take on any of the fluid, it looked just like so much thin air to him, the same with the tender green grass that was beginning to grow in

bunches everywhere; it was just growing for him to run on.

The rest of that day was pretty well used up around that one spot; adventures of all kinds was numerous for Smoky, and when he wasn't stretched out and asleep there was plenty of big stumps in the cottonwood grove that could be depended on to give him the scare he'd be looking for.

But there was other things and more threatening than stumps which Smoky hadn't as yet spotted, like for instance, — a big cayote had squatted and been watching him thru dead willow branches. He wasn't at all interested in the action Smoky was putting into his play, and only wished the colt's mammy would move away a little further when he would then take a chance and try to get him down, — colt meat was his favorite dish and he sure wasn't going to let no chance slip by even if it took a whole day's waiting for one to show itself.

A couple of chances had come his way but they was queered by Smoky's mammy being too close, and he knowed better than show himself and get run down by them hoofs of hers. Finally, and when he seen his appetite wouldn't win anything by sticking around that spot any longer, he took a last sniff and came out of his hiding place. Keeping the willows between him and the horses, he loped out till he was at a safe running distance and where he could see all around him, and

there he squatted again, in plain sight this time. He hadn't quite made up his mind as yet whether to go or stick around a while longer.-Just about then Smoky spots him.

To him, the cayote was just another stump, but more interesting than the others he'd kicked at, on account that this stump moved, and that promised a lot of excitement. With a bowed neck and kinked tail Smoky trotted up towards the cayote. The cayote just set there and waited and when the colt got to within a few feet from him, he started away and just fast enough so as the colt's curiosity would make him follow. If he could only get the colt over the ridge and out of his mammy's sight.

It all was only a lot of fun to Smoky, and besides he was bound to find out what was that grey and yellow object that could move and run and didn't at all look like his mammy. His instinct was warning him steady as he went, but curiosity had the best of him, and it wasn't till he was over the hill before his instinct got above his curiosity and he seen that all wasn't well.

The cayote had turned and quicker than a flash made a jump for Smoky's throat.-The generations of mustang blood that'd fought the lobo and cougar, and which was the same blood that flowed in Smoky's veins, is all that saved the colt. That inherited instinct made him do the right thing at the right time, he whirled quicker than lightning and let fly with both

hind feet with the result that the cayote's teeth just pinched the skin under his jaws. But even at that, he wasn't going to get rid of his enemy (it was a sure enough enemy this time) that easy, and as he kicked he felt the weight of the cayote, and then a sharp pain on his ham strings.

Smoky was scared, and he let out a squeal that sure made every living thing in that neighborhood set up and wonder; it was a plain and loud distress signal, and it was answered. His mammy shot up the hill, took in the goings-on at a glance, and ears back, teeth a shining, tore up the earth and lit into the battle like a ton of dynamite.

The battle was over in a second, and with hunks of yellow fur a flying all directions it wound up in a chase. The cayote was in the lead and he stayed in the lead till a second hill took him out of sight.

Smoky was glad to follow his mammy back to the spring and on to the other side a ways. He didn't shy at the stumps he passed on the way, and the twig that tickled his tummy didn't bring no play. He was hungry and tired, and when the first was tended to and his appetite called for no more he lost no time to picking out a place to rest his weary bones. A thin stream of blood was drying on one of his hind legs, but there was no pain, and when the sun set and the shadow of his mammy spread out over him he was sound asleep, and maybe dreaming of stumps, of stumps that moved.

When the sun came up the next morning, Smoky was up too, and eyes half closed was standing still as the big boulder next to him and sunned himself. A stiff hind leg was a reminder of what happened the day before, but the experience was forgotten far as dampening his spirits was concerned, even the stiffness wouldn't hold him back from whatever the new day would hold. He'd always remember the cayote, and from then on never mistake him for a stump, but that sure wasn't going to take any play out of him.

He was two days old now and strength had piled up fast, he felt there was no trail too long for him and when the sun was a couple of hours high that morning and his mother showed indications that she wanted to drift he sure wasn't dragging along behind. The stiffness gradually went out of his hind leg as he traveled, and by the afternoon of that day he was again shying at everything and sometimes even shying at nothing at all.

They kept a traveling and traveling, and it seemed like to Smoky that the trail was getting pretty long after all. They skirted the flat along the foot of the mountains, crossed one high ridge, and many creeks, and still his mother was drifting on. She wouldn't hardly even stop for him to nurse, and Smoky was getting cranky, and tired.

The pace kept up till the sun was well on its way

down, when it slackened some and finally the mother went to grazing. A short while later Smoky was layed out full length and dead to the world.

Smoky didn't know and didn't care much just then, but his mammy was headed back to her home range, where there was lots of horses and other little colts for him to play with; and when late that night she lined out again traveling steady he wasn't in any too good a humor.

Finally it seemed like they'd got there, for his mammy after watering at a creek went to grazing at the edge of some big cottonwoods; she showed no indications of wanting to go any further. Right there Smoky was willing to take advantage of the chance and recuperate for all he was worth. The sun came up, but Smoky was in the shade of the cottonwoods what was beginning to leaf out. He slept on and a twitching ear once in long spells is all that showed he was still alive.

That day never seen much of him; once in a while he'd get up and nurse but right away after he'd disappear again and stretch out flat on the warm earth.

He kept that up till way in the middle of the next night, and it was well towards morning before he felt like he was all horse again.

He come out of it in fine shape though, and he was stronger than ever. His vision was taking more territory too, and he was getting so he could see near half as far as his mammy could. She was the first to see

the bunch of range horses trailing in to water early that morning. Smoky heard her nicker as she recognized the bunch and it drew a heap of interest as to what she was nickering about, for he was right there alongside of her and he couldn't see nothing for her to nicker at, but pretty soon he could hear the horses as they trailed towards him. His ears straightened towards the sound and a while later he could make out the shapes of 'em. Smoky just kind of quivered at the sight of so many that looked like his mammy. He was all interested, but at the same time, and even tho his instinct told him that all was well, he had no hankering to leave his mammy's side till he knowed for sure just what was up.

The mother watched the bunch coming closer with ears pointed straight ahead, but soon as some of the leaders discovered little Smoky there was a commotion and they all begin crowding in to get a look at and greet the newcomer, about which time the mother layed her ears back. It was a warning that none of 'em come too close.

Little Smoky's knees was a shaking under him at the sight of so many of his kind; he leaned against his mammy half afraid, but his head was up far as he could get it and facing 'em and showed by the shine in his eyes that he liked the whole proceeding mighty well at that. He rubbed nostrils with a strange gelding which was braver than the rest and dared come close, and when that gelding was nipped at by his mammy he had

a mighty strong hankering to help her along just for fun, and nip him himself.

The preliminary introduction took a good hour, and the mother stood guard; not for fear that any of 'em would harm Smoky, but she wanted it understood from the start that he was her little colt and she had the say over him. It finally was understood, but it took all that day and part of the next for the bunch to get used in having the new little feller around and quit making a fuss over him.

They was all jealous of one another and fought amongst themselves to be the only one near him, and his mother, of course she'd declared herself from the start, and it was took for granted from all around that her place in Smoky's heart couldn't be considered, and all knowed better than try and chase her away from him. Fillies and old mares, young geldings and old ponies and all, had it out as to which was the most fit to tag along and play with Smoky and keep a watchful eye over him along with his mammy. All wanted the job, but a big buckskin saddle horse who all the time had been the boss of the herd took it to hand to show them that he would be the all around gardeen for Smoky, and second only to his mammy. He delivered a few swift kicks, pounded on some ribs, left teeth marks on shiny hides, and after taking one last look and making sure that all was persuaded, grazed out towards Smoky who by his mammy had watched the whole proceeding

with a heap of interest.

There was three other little colts in the bunch besides Smoky, and each time one of them little fellers came the buckskin horse had to whip the bunch so as he'd have the say over the newest one. Now Smoky was the newest one, and the buckskin horse had first rights as an outsider once again. He was an old horse full of scars showing where he'd had many a scrap; there was saddle marks on his back and at one time he had been a mighty fine cowhorse. Now he was pensioned; he'd more than earned a rest and all he had to do for the rest of his life was to pick out good feed grounds for the winter, shady places and tenderest green grass for the summer, and his other interest in life was them little colts that came in spring time.

Smoky's mother was young, at least ten years younger than the buckskin horse, but the buckskin was like a colt compared to her when it come to be playful. She had the responsibility of Smoky and while she let him play with her, kick or bite at her, she never played with him and once in a while if he'd get too rough she'd let him know about it. She loved little Smoky with all her heart and would of died for him any time, and her main interest was to see that she kept in condition so that Smoky would never be stunted by lacking of rich milk. She had no time for play.

And that's where the old buckskin came in. Him and Smoky was soon acquainted, in a short while they

was playing, Smoky would kick at him while the big buckskin nipped him easy and careful along the flank, then he'd run away from him, and the little colt had a lot of fun chasing that big hunk of horseflesh all over the country. The rest of the bunch would watch the two play and with no effort to hide how jealous they felt.

Smoky's mother kept her eye on the buckskin, but never interfered, she knowed, and it was only when Smoky came back to her, tired and hungry, that she put her ears back and warned him to keep away.

It took a few days before the buckskin would allow any of the other horses to get near Smoky, and then he had no say about it for he found that Smoky had his own ideas about things, and if he wanted to mingle in with the other horses that was his business, and all the buckskin could do then was to try and keep the other horses away. That was quite a job, specially if Smoky wanted to be with them. So the buckskin finally had to give it up and do the best he could which was to see that none of 'em done him any harm. But none of 'em had any intentions of doing the little colt any harm, and as it was it looked like Smoky had 'em all buffaloesd. He'd tear in after some big horse like he was going to eat him up and all that big horse would do was to scatter out like the devil was after him.

Smoky was the boss and pet of the herd for a good two weeks and then one day, here comes another

little feller, a little bay colt just two days old and trailing in alongside his mammy. Smoky was left in the background and witnessed the same fuss and commotion that was done over him that morning by the creek. The buckskin horse once again fought his way in that new little feller's heart, and right away he forgot Smoky.

But Smoky never seen anything wrong to that, he went on to playing with every horse that would have him and it wasn't long till he picked up with a young fillies and afterwards went to mingling with other young colts.

From then on Smoky had more freedom, he could go out a ways without having some big overgrown horse tagging along, but he never went far and if he did he always came back a heap faster than when he started out. But them spring days was great for Smoky; he found out a lot of things amongst which was, that grass was good to eat, and water mighty fine to drink when the day was hot. He seen cayotes again and the bigger he got the less he was afraid of 'em till he finally went to chasing every one of 'em he'd see.

Then one day he run acrost another yellow animal. That animal didn't look dangerous, and what's more it was hard for Smoky to make out just what it was, and he was bound to find out. He followed that animal plum to the edge of some willows, and the queer part of it was that animal didn't seem at all in a hurry to

get away, it was mumbling along and just taking its time and Smoky was mighty tempted to plant one front foot right in the middle of it and do some pawing, but as luck would have it he didn't have the chance, it'd got in under some willows and all that was sticking out was part of the animal's tail. Smoky took a sniff at it without learning anything outside that it shook a little. There didn't seem to be no danger, so the next sniff he took was a little closer, and that done the trick. Smoky let out a squeal and a snort as he felt his nostrils punctured in half a dozen places with four-inch porcupine quills.

But Smoky was lucky, for if he'd been a couple of inches closer there'd been quills rammed into his nose plum up to his eyes, which would've caused a swelling in such size that he couldn't of been able to eat and most likely starve to death. As it was there was just a few of them quills in his nostrils, and compared to the real dose he might of got, it was just a mild warning to him. Another lesson.

It was a few days later when he met another strange animal, or strange animals, for there was many of 'em. He didn't get much interest out of them somehow, but while they was handy maybe it was just as well for him to have a close look at one. Besides he had nothing else to do, and his mammy wasn't far away.

His instinct had no warning to give as he strutted towards the smallest one of the strangers which he'd

picked to investigate. He wasn't afraid of this animal and this animal didn't seem afraid of him so Smoky kept a getting closer till one was within a couple of feet of the other. Both Smoky and this stranger was young, and mighty inquisitive, and neither as yet knowed that they'd sure be seeing plenty of each other's kind as they get older, that they'll be meeting thru the round-ups at the "cutting-grounds," on "day-herd" and on "night-guard," on the long, hot, and dusty trails. A cowboy will be riding Smoky then and keeping a whole herd on the move, a whole herd of the kind that little Smoky was so busy investigating that day. They'll be full grown then, and there'll be other young ones to take the place of them that's trailed in to the shipping point.

But Smoky wasn't as yet worried or even thought on what was to come, neither was the little whitefaced calf he was exchanging squints with; and when the critter called her long-eared, split-hoofed baby to her side, Smoky just kicked up his heels, put his head down, and bucked and crowhopped all the way to where his mammy and the rest of the bunch was grazing.

CHAPTER II

SMOKY MEETS THE HUMAN

The long Spring days followed by the warmer days of middle summer had took away all signs of

snow excepting where the peaks was highest and the canyons deep and narrow. Up there was crusted hunks still holding out against the sun and hugging the shady sides of rocky ledges, and leaving out moisture that kept the springs and creeks running to the flats below.

The grass was greener up there, the flies wasn't so bad, and besides there was always a breeze and sometimes a wind which made things mighty cooling, specially in the shade of the twisted pines scattered over the country where Smoky, his mammy, and the bunch was ranging.

That high, rocky, and rough territory had a lot to do in the makings of Smoky. Playing down the steep ridges, where shale rock made the footing slippery and mighty uncertain, had took all the wobble and shake out of his legs. They fit to his body more and rounded up in size, so as they looked like they really belonged to him. His hoofs had long ago lost their pink soft shell and turned to steel grey and were near as hard and tough as steel itself; and the way he'd buck and play down a rocky canyon and jump over down timber, may not of compared with a mountain goat for sureness, but he more than made up for that in speed and recklessness, and somehow he'd always hit the bottom right side up.

It was in one of them wild scrambles down a mountain side one day that Smoky near run into a cinnamon cub which had been curled up and sleeping on top of a big stump. Smoky stood in his tracks for a

second, and in that second the cub fell off the stump with a snarl and lit a running on the other side.

The action of the cub is what decided Smoky whether to stand still, turn back and high-tail it, or follow and investigate; but his curiosity was still with him, and bowing his neck he paced high and mighty on the trail of the hairy puzzle.

Over dead timber he went, sailed acrost washes, and ducked under branches. He was gaining and would of kept the chase up for quite a spell, only, and just when things was getting real interesting, there was a crash, and to his right a dust and a commotion which sounded like a landslide. In half a second more, a big round brown head showed itself thru a tangle of broken limbs and underbrush, Smoky got a glimpse of two small eyes afire, long white teeth a gleaming, and when all the sudden apparition was backed by a roar that near shook the mountains, Smoky left. He tore a hole in the earth as he turned tail, and he wasn't pacing high and mighty as he made distance and raced back towards his mammy and safety.

His heart was thumping fit to bust as he cleared the timber and got out in open country, and for the life of him he couldn't figger out how that little bunch of fur he'd been chasing could turn out into such a scenery-tearing cyclone as what he'd got a glimpse of. He'd never reckoned the little cub had a mammy too. But Smoky was learning fast, and along with his own

experiences he learned from his mother just what was what in the timber and on the flats;-like another time on the foothills, his mammy was in the lead and him following close behind on a hot dusty trail towards a shady spot. Of a sudden there was a rattling sound, and just as sudden his mammy left the trail as though she'd been shot. Instinct made Smoky do the same and none too soon, for on the left just a foot or so off the trail was a wriggling thing that'd just struck, and missed to reach his ankle by an inch.

Smoky stood off at a safe distance and snorted at it as it coiled up ready. Somehow he had no hankering to go stick his nose nowhere near or take a sniff at the grey and dirty yellow colored rattler, and when his mammy nickered for him to follow there was a warning in her nicker; he took another look at the snake. He'd remember, and do the same as his mother had done whenever the rattling sound would be heard again.

Taking in all, Smoky was getting mighty wise along with being mighty lucky in getting that wisdom. Scratches is about all he ever packed out of any scramble, and scratches didn't count with him. His hide was getting tough and the blood that flowed in his veins wasn't from a heart that'd peter out very easy.

The little horse was having a great time up in that high country, and if he'd seen more of life, he'd most likely wondered how long it all was going to last. It would of struck him as too good to last much longer,

but as it was, Smoky took in all that life could give and enjoyed it to the limit. He never passed anything which had him wondering for fear of missing something. If a limb cracked anywheres within hearing distance he'd perk his ears towards the sound and seldom would go on till he found out just why that limb cracked that way. He'd follow and pester the badger till it'd hunt a hole; he'd circle around a tree and watch the bushy tailed squirrel as it'd climb up out of his reach. Skunks had crossed his trail too, but somehow, the atmosphere around 'em would sort of dampen his curiosity and he always kept his distance.

Smoky had met and had experiences with all the range country's wild animals excepting the lion and the wolf. His mammy kept clear of the territory where them outlaws ranged, and if by scent the bunch suspicioned them two as neighbors, they'd drift, or else keep on the lookout till the others had drifted. Smoky met them too and had scrambles with 'em, but that came later in his life, and it's a good thing it was later, for I most likely wouldn't be telling about Smoky now.

The first big event of Smoky's life came when he was four months old. There was nothing to tell him anything would happen, no dark skies nor ill winds to threaten or warn, and as it was, the little feller was just in the steady motion of keeping one end of himself clear of the few flies that was around. That short tail of his was working like a pendulum, he was standing up

and asleep, the breeze blowed thru his mane, and that same breeze made a sort of lullaby as it passed thru the branches of the big pine that shaded him and his mammy.

His mammy was asleep too, and so was the rest of the bunch, and when the cowboy that was riding up the canyon spotted 'em he knowed he could get above 'em and be where he could start 'em down before any of the bunch would see him.

It was a mighty good thing he done that, for soon as one of the bunch got wind of him and raised a head, there was a snort, they came to life and was on the run in a split second. Down the side of the canyon they went, a cloud of dust and the cowboy following.

Smoky was right with the bunch from the start. He stampeded with the leader, and once in his life it never came to him to wonder what it was all about; he just run and plum forgot to investigate.

Tails was a popping as the horses slid off the mountain, jumped off ledges and sailed acrost wash-outs. Loosened rocks bumped against boulders, boulders crashed into dead hanging timber, and petty soon a landslide brought up the rear; but even that was too slow. The ponies and the cowboy behind 'em hit the bottom of the canyon first, and when the slide reached that spot and filled the canyon with ten feet of boulders, timber, and dirt, the whole wild bunch was half a mile away and kicking up dust on the foothills at the edge of

the flat.

It was away out on the flat and where the dust wasn't so thick that Smoky took a back slant over his withers and got his first sight of the human. The way his mammy and the rest of the bunch acted, the way they run and tried to dodge or leave that human behind, sure put the impression in Smoky's mind that here was a different kind of animal, the kind that no horse would stop to fight or argue with but instead run away from, if it was possible.

But it didn't seem possible, for the rider was still right on their tails, and stayed there till he drove 'em into the long wings of big log corrals, which to Smoky seemed like trees growing sideways instead of up and down. But the little horse knowed that there was no going thru them trees. He stuck close as he could to his mammy's side. She and the bunch milled around for a spell around the big pen, the big gate closed on 'em, and wild eyed, the bunch turned and faced a bow legged, leather covered, sunburnt human.

Smoky shivered as he watched that strange crethure get off one of his kin, a horse just like any of the bunch him and his mammy was running with, all excepting for that funny hunk of leather on his back. Pretty soon the human fumbled around a while and then that hunk of leather was pulled off, the horse was turned loose, shook himself, and walked towards Smoky and the bunch.

The colt was stary-eyed and never missed a thing; and soon as the loose horse came his way he took a sniff at his sweaty hide for some kind of a clue as to just what had been setting on him all thru that long run. The sniff left him more puzzled than ever, and forgetting the horse he put all his attention on the crethure which was standing up and on two legs.

There'd been a lot of lightning up in the mountains where Smoky had been ranging that summer; he'd seen some fires up there too. That lightning and them fires was great puzzles to the colt, and when he seen the human make a swift move with a paw, and then seen a fire in one of them paws, and later on, smoke coming out of the mouth, it all made things more than ever impossible for him to figger out. He stood petrified, and watched.

Pretty soon, them same paws that'd held the fire, reached down and picked up a coil of rope, a loop was made, and then the human walked towards him and the bunch. At that move the bunch tore around the corral and raised the dust; then Smoky heard the hiss of a rope as it sailed over past him and the loop settled on one of the ponies' heads. The pony was stopped and led out to the hunk of leather on the ground; it was cinched on him the same as it'd been on the other horse, and when the human climbed on is when Smoky first set eyes on one of his kind in a fight with the two-legged crethure.

It was a great sight to the colt. He'd seen some of

his bunch play and kick often, and he'd done a lot of that himself, but he'd never seen any get in the position and tear things up the way that pony was doing. He knowed that pony was fighting, bucking for all he was worth, and doing his daggonedest to shed that sticking and ill built wonder that was on top of him. Smoky watched and shook when he heard the pony beller. He'd never heard one of his kind make that noise before, and he knowed without wondering just what the beller meant. He remembered doing near the same that time when the cayote had nipped him in the ham strings.

Smoky's eyes was blazing as he watched on thru the fight, and the pony's hard jumps dwindled down to crowhops and then a stop. He watched the man as he got off the horse, opened the gate, lead the horse out and after closing it, watched him ride on and out of sight. It wasn't till then that he came back to himself and it come to his mind to investigate the kind of place it was that cooped him in. He rubbed noses with his mammy and went to scouting around the big corral. Long strands of mane which had caught in slivers of the logs told him there'd been lots of horses here before; sniffs at the ground and more sniffs at pieces of calves' ears that'd been cut while earmarking reminded him of the critter he'd seen while he was only a couple of weeks old. Many calves had been branded in the big corral, and with all them signs which was plain enough reading to Smoky it only made him all the more

suspicious and spooky.

He was trying to get up enough nerve to go near and take a sniff at a pair of chaps hanging on the corral gate, when he noticed a dust, and under it a band of horses being hazed towards the corral he was in. With that band was a half dozen riders or more, and the sight of them made Smoky hightail to his mammy's side in a hurry. Once there, he took in all that could be seen and watched the riders drive the horses thru the gate and turn 'em in with his bunch. There was a lot of dust, milling around, and confusion, for there was now near two hundred head of horses in the one big corral; but to Smoky all that company was mighty welcome, they meant more protection, he could hide better in that big bunch and be able to always keep some of the horses between him and them two-legged crethures.

He kept hid as well as he could while the bunch milled around the corral, and in a short while, as he watched thru the horses' legs, he seen where on the outside and close to the pen a fire was started, long bars of iron was passed thru between the logs and one end of 'em sticking in the hot blaze. Then, pretty soon a commotion was stirred, and the bunch went to racing around the corral and snorting. Many was cut out into another corral, till there was only about fifty left, mostly young colts about Smoky's age, and a few quiet old mares.

Smoky had no chance to hide, and as he seen the

bow-legged humans uncoil long ropes and heard the loops whiz past him at the speed of a bullet, terror struck in his heart and he was ready to leave the earth. He heard some of the colts squeal as they was snared, throwed, and tied down, and that sure didn't help to ease the fear that'd took hold of him.

He was doing his best and keeping as far out of reach could but it seemed like them crethures was everywhere, and no place where them long ropes couldn't reach. It was during one of his wild scrambles for a get away that Smoky heard the close hiss of a rope, and like a snake coiled itself around both his front legs, he let out a squeal, and in another second he was flat to the ground and four feet tied up.

Smoky figgered the end of the world had come as he felt the human touch him, and if it'd been in his blood to faint away, he'd a done it easy; but as it was he never missed a thing. He seen one of the crethures run towards him with a hot iron, smelled burning hair and hide-it was his own that burned, but it felt cool and there was no pain, for he was at the stage where the searing iron was no worse than a touch from the human hand. But there's an end to all, whether it's good or bad, and pretty soon, Smoky felt the ropes come off his legs, a boost to let him know that all was over, and when he stood up and run back to the bunch, there was a mark on his slick hide that was there for life, — as the brand read, the little horse belonged to the Rocking R outfit.

It was all a mighty great relief to Smoky and the other colts when the branding come to an end, the bunch all put back together, and when the colts found their mammies all was turned out and free again, free to go back to the high mountain range, or run on the flats.

Smoky's mammy took the lead, and after the rest of the bunch was thru parleying with the strange horses, they joined in with her and the colt and all strung out for the foothills. The next day they all was up in high country again and everything of the day before was forgotten, forgotten, all excepting with Smoky and the other little colts. They still remembered some, on account that it had all been mighty new to 'em, and besides, the sting of the fresh brand was there on their left thigh to remind.

But as the days went by, and new things happened right along to draw Smoky's interest in life, the happenings at the corral was gradually left behind like a bad dream; the burn healed quick and left a neat brand all of which growed right with him.

Fall came, skies clouded and the rains was getting cold, and each time it cleared up again it was a little colder, the sun wasn't making as high a circle and was steady losing some of its heat, and when after a few mornings' frost the skies clouded again and the wind blowed a light snow over the high pinnacles, the bunch gradually ranged lower and lower, till, when they

reached the foothills and finally the flats, the first of the winter had set in and it was time for 'em to drift to their winter range.

Their winter range was low ridges and benches that raised up in the middle of the prairie. There was steep ravines where willows and cottonwoods grewed in big patches, the shelter of them was mighty fine when the cold north winds blowed and the howling blizzard made every living thing hunt a hole. Tall grass was there too, and could always be reached by pawing for it. In quiet winter days, when the sun came out and the wind went down, the bunch could always leave their shelter and find places on the ridges where the winds had swept the snow away, and where the grass was in plain sight.

Drifting acrost that flat open country and investigating that new winter territory had kept Smoky's eyes, ears, and nostrils mighty busy. There'd been a lot to keep him looking, listening, and sniffing. Every buffalo wallow, coulee, and rise had kept his senses on hair trigger edge, and when the first snow had come, he'd enjoy that too. It made him want to buck and play as it fell on his withers and rump, and along with the cold weather that'd turned the range brown and then white, he was finding more ambition to keep on the jump. He wasn't looking for shade no more.

If Smoky minded the cold he sure didn't show it, and if you could of felt his warm hide and seen how

thick the hair had growed on it, and how long, you'd never wondered why it was that the cold raw winds never fazed him. Mother Nature had seen to that and brought on the winter gradual, till, when the time come for it to set in, Smoky was well prepared. He was packing a natural fur coat on a good thick hide, and with an inch of tallow for a lining, and along with the rich, thick blood which he kept in good circulation he was mighty able to compete with the snows and freezing weather, and was never found to hunt shelter till the blizzard blowed over the ridges from the north.

He pawed snow for his feed that winter, for it had been quite a few months before when he found that his mammy's milk wasn't quite enough, and later turned out to be just a taste, and finally, she give him to understand that he was weaned. There was no arguing with her, and Smoky knowed better than try, so he pawed and hunted for grass like a big horse. He et snow and could stay away from water as long as any of the bunch, and even tho he lost some of his roundness thru the worst of the winter, you couldn't of noticed it on account of his hair being so long.

Being that Smoky was still quite a privileged character it helped him considerable thru them long winter months, if he'd see some big horse dig down into a special good grassy spot; he'd take advantage of his standing and chase the big horse away. He looked mighty wicked as he put his ears down, showed his

teeth, and delivered a side kick, and the big horse would act scared to death, and get away from the dangerous Smoky in a hurry. There was only one in the bunch that wouldn't scare worth a bit, and that was his mammy. He could paw in the same hole with her and maybe steal a bunch of grass right from under her nose, but there was no chasing her away. Most likely there was no such intentions in Smoky's mind anyhow, for the little horse did think an awful lot of that mammy of his; and even tho she never played with him, and even nipped him for some things he'd do, he knowed if a showdown ever come she'd fight to a finish for him.

So, as the snows piled high and the ravines filled with drifts, Smoky went on and passed the hard of the winter in near the same carefree reckless way he'd passed the summer before. Of course, pawing for his feed the way he had to was taking some of his energy, but he'd manage to reserve some for play, and many is the time when you'd see the bunch a pawing all intent to reaching the grass, you'd see Smoky tearing up clouds of light snow and a playing for all he was worth. Other colts would join him, and pretty soon the young ones would have the white scenery all tracked the same as if a thousand head of horses had stampeded thru.

The winter wore on that way, no events came to shake the quiet and peace of that part of the range, only, one day a rider had showed up against the skyline. Smoky had been the only one to see him on account he

was a little ways from the bunch and where he could see around a point. With the sight of that rider Smoky remembered ropes, a corral and human hands; and he sashayed back to the bunch fast as his legs could carry him.

Finally, the first sign of spring came. Smoky couldn't appreciate it very much on account that the warm winds which was starting the snow to melting only left him weak and lazy. His blood hadn't started to thin down as yet, and for the first short spell in his life, he had no hankering to crowhop around and play.

Then a few weeks later the bare earth begin to show in big spots and on the sunny side of the buttes green grass begin to shoot up. That new green grass tasted mighty good to Smoky; it tasted so good that the dry feed he'd wintered on and which could now be got without pawing for, was only stepped on in hunting for them first blades of green. Nothing but that would do, and as it was still scarce and hard to find that early in the year, he covered a lot of territory and got very little feed.

But the rest of the bunch was afflicted the same way; the long dry grass wasn't good enough no more, and consequences is the bunch lost some weight. But Mother Nature was on hand there again; she knowed that's what the bunch needed to condition 'em for the change of season, and sure enough, pretty soon the warm weather didn't leave 'em so drowsy no more, and

as the grass kept a growing, and finally got to be everywhere, on the ridges as on the flats, the bunch perked up again; the long winter hair was loosening and big hunks of it was left wherever they rolled.

Smoky's winter coat had faded to a brown at the first sign of spring, and now that the warmer weather had come and green grass was a plenty, there was another color showed where he'd shed off the long hair. It was what we call "mouse color" only maybe darker; no more of the slick black hair that decorated his hide the summer before could be seen, the change of color had showed itself around his ears and flanks but it wasn't till winter came that the real change had took place and turned him to a grayish mouse color.

His head and legs was a little darker than his body and showed brown, and with that little blaze face of his a looming up, he made a mighty pretty picture, a picture of the kind once you see you never forget; for Smoky was perfect any way you looked at him and it seemed like as you sized him up that the other of his kind hadn't been played square with and some of their good points stole away so as Smoky would be the perfect little horse.

Smoky had never thought of his good looks and strong body, his good looks was only a sign of his good health. He felt it all and used it to the limit for his own benefit and for whatever fun his strength and energy could afford him. That never lacked, and if he layed

down it was seldom because he was tired, it was more thru a hint from Mother Nature for him to hold on a while and store up on life and more strength.

The spring rains came and went, and each time after each spell of moisture the grass was a little taller and the country greener, the sun kept a getting warmer too, and some days was already hot.

It was during one of these hot days that Smoky's mother disappeared. Smoky had been snoozing in the shade of a creek bank and it wasn't till quite a while after he got up and started grazing that he noticed she was gone. The bunch had been drifting back for the summer range and was at the foothills of the big range, the big flat below was an easy place to spot any moving object on, but Smoky couldn't find hide nor hair of that mammy of his. He trotted around the bunch and, nickering, investigated for a spell. She couldn't be found.

He took another look at the country around, and nickering in kind of wonder, he went to grazing again. Somehow he wasn't fidgety as he should of been, maybe he had a hunch that her disappearing that way was necessary and that all was hunkydory. Anyway Smoky never missed any sleep, or feed, or play while she was gone; things went on just the same, and the little horse's hide was getting slicker every day.

A few days passed, and then one morning the big buckskin horse that was still in the bunch perked up his

ears, nickered, and loped out towards the flat. A horse was out there and coming towards the bunch, alongside the horse was a little moving object.

Smoky and the bunch stood in their tracks and watched. Pretty soon Smoky noticed something familiar in that lone horse coming towards him, but that little object a tagging along puzzled him, and head up, he trotted out a ways to investigate. Then it all came to him, for the lone horse was none other than his mammy.

He lit out on a run a nickering as he went till he got to within a few feet of her, and then he got a slant at the object a tagging alongside, a brand new little wobbly legged colt it was, shining black, and awful timid at the sight of so many strangers. It was Smoky's new little brother.

Smoky couldn't keep his nose off the baby, and his mammy had to cock one ear back at him the same as to say "careful, Son"; but Smoky was careful, and as his mammy went on to join the bunch, he followed and the big buckskin brought up the rear. From then on Smoky ranked second.

CHAPTER III

WHERE THE TRAILS FORK

Middle summer had come, the day was hot and still; even up amongst the high peaks and where the

snow was making a last stand the heat was strong, for the sun was shooting straight down and the crags could give no more shade. Up on a rocky trail of that country a small bunch of range horses was drifting one behind the other and following the leader, — the leader was Smoky's mammy, the new little black colt right at her heels and next the blaze faced, mouse colored, yearling, Smoky. A little further back was a big buckskin horse and there followed eight or ten others which made up the rest of the bunch.

They all trailed along seemed like headed for nowheres in particular. They passed under wind-twisted trees and right on thru the shade they'd give. Cool streams wasn't even sniffed at, and the long stems of grass that was everywhere wasn't at all noticed; they was all just drifting and maybe only hitting out for another special good part of the high range.—A feller watching 'em would of figgered that something or other had started 'em on the move, maybe a rider had been spotted that morning which had kettled 'em into a run, or else cougars might of been too numerous for comfort.

The little bunch kept a trailing along till they came to where the trail branched and the leader took the lower one. The little black colt and all the rest followed, all excepting the mouse color yearling. The upper trail had drawed that one's interest, and nothing would do but what he had to investigate it for a ways. He kept his

nose on the ground as he went and sniffed for clues of anything that might be of interest to him, he could see the bunch below and he figured on cutting across to 'em soon as his curiosity was satisfied.

Ahead of him a ways and above the trail was a big granite boulder a good ten feet high. A scrub mahogany had found root in a crack of the big rock and was spreading its branches well over it and making a good shade. In that shade and mighty hard to notice, was an object, a long, flat, dark buckskin object, which looked a lot like part of the rock. It was stretched out full length and seemed like without life only maybe for the tip of its long, round tail which was jerking up and down. The round head raised an inch at the sound of hoofs on the rocky trail, the ears flattened and the yellow eyes turned jet black at the sight of Smoky, the mouse colored yearling.

Smoky was coming right on the trail and would pass to within a couple of feet of the big rock that was the mountain lion s game hunting perch, many a deer he d pounced onto and killed from that perch; and not far away from that spot was bones scattered around which showed where he d drug his victims and et his fill. Wolves, cayotes, and other varmints had cleaned up what the big lion would leave and the result was white bones a shining to the sun.

The lion had a big territory which he claimed as his, but in all that rough country there was no better

place than the one he was now getting ready to spring from. He'd got meat from that spot when he failed at others, and the trail he overlooked was tracked with many hoofs, hoofs of all the kind that ranged up there, — it was a main trail to a main pass.

Why Smoky's mother didn't take that trail can't be explained much; may be it was instinct that warned her, and then again she might of got a glimpse of the tall rock and past experience made her turn to the left, but anyway she and her young colt and the rest of the bunch was safe and had left Smoky till he was thru investigating and ready to catch up with 'em.

Smoky kept on a coming and edging closer to the rock; he nosed every twig and stone along the trail till he got to within a few feet of the spot where the lion would spring. The lion wasn't a stretched out shadow no more. He still looked like part of the rock and fitted pretty well with the stump of the scrub mahogany, but he was in a position that sure tallied up with all what was about to happen. He was ready, and still as the rock he was on, and the quiver of his long tail was a plenty to show that his wiry frame and brain was sure together and intent on one thing.

Another foot ahead and Smoky would be seeing his last of daylight. The colt had one leg raised to make that last step when there's a rattling buzz comes from the foot of the rock; a four foot rattlesnake stretched out and reaches for Smoky's nose and that one leg which

was raised to go forward went back instead. It was all that saved him.

The lion had figured on his victim a jumping to one side at his leap, and he'd allowed for that, but the way it happened this time was that the snake caused Smoky to jump away just as he'd started which was a little too soon according to the lion's figuring, and what's more Smoky went to the wrong direction about a foot with the result that he just got his claws full of Smoky's mane and no more.

He scrambled in mid air and done his best to get a hold in Smoky's neck but even with all the action he put in his trying he struck mostly air, and then hard ground.

Smoky never waited to see if that flying shadow of sharp claws was after him or not; he'd started at the sound of the rattler and had kept a moving mighty fast ever since. A few feet of drop in the scenery only helped him make more speed and the short cut from the trail he'd left to the trail his mammy and the bunch was on was covered in no time.

He lit in the bunch a running, and the bunch getting a hint from his wild eyed actions that all wasn't well started a running too and for a ways they all went as tho the devil was after 'em.

But the devil (if that ain't too mild a name for the lion) wasn't after 'em. He knowed the colt had too

much speed for him and never even thought of following him, and as it was he was just a lashing himself with his long tail and mad clear thru at the thought of missing such a nice fat yearling colt as Smoky was.

From that day on Smoky dodged high rocks unless he could see the top of 'em; pine trees with stout lower limbs had him a circling too, or any other place where a lion could perch on and spring from. The little horse was gradually getting so he was satisfied to be more with the bunch and not do so much investigating; besides he d got first hand acquaintance with most all that prowled the range, and everything in general was getting to be less of a puzzle to him.

It all kept a getting to be less of a puzzle to him till finally there come a time when Smoky got so he thought he knowed it all. He figgered he had the world by the tail and with a downhill push. Like all the other colts of his age he was just where conceit had the best of him; he got strong headed and full of mischief, and then s when the older horses figgered him to be a regular pest and began knocking on him.

He was getting to be of size that could stand knocks too. They all took turns at him and pounded on his ribs every chance they had thru the rest of that summer, and tried to set him where he belonged; but it was slow work and Smoky was still getting away with

some of the bluffs when the first snows came. He was ornery all that winter, and even tho none of the horses would let him steal the grass they pawed up, he aggravated 'em a lot by making 'em think he would; and when they d kick at him, and miss, there was some more about his actions that sure let 'em know he was getting away with something.

Then one day a strange horse showed up on the skyline and joined the bunch. A strange horse is always sort of timid when first joining a new bunch that way; and Smoky took advantage of that to show there was at least one he had buffaloed, — he run the stranger around and around and kept a nipping him on the rump till the old pony was on the point of leaving and hunt new territory. That sport lasted off and on for a few days, and then one day the older horse turned and lit into Smoky. There was no battle, for Smoky was just running a bluff; and at the first turn of the events he evaporated and kept on evaporating till the stranger got cooled down a bit. After that Smoky kept his distance and acted willing to let the stranger stay with the bunch.

The winter wore on that way, and as Smoky was met hard at every ornery thing he d do, it all got to finally leave an impression on him, and he gradually lost *some* of his conceit and hard headedness. But Spring came, other seasons and all kinds of weather followed, and it wasn t till Smoky was a three year old that he really come anywheres near to living up to good

range horse etiquette. There was so much life wrapped up in that pony's hide that it was mighty hard for him to settle down and behave, and even as a three year old he sometimes had to bust out and do things that wasn't at all proper and which made the old horses set their ears back and show their teeth.

The start of Smoky's third year was all to his favor, — the spring rains was warmer than on average, the green grass shot up half an inch to the day, and more than met up with the hard to satisfy appetite which was his. Consequences is, when he shed off his long winter coat he was slicker and rounder than ever and looked like he was wrapped up in fine mouse colored silk. His blazed face loomed up snow white and to match his trim ankles. He was a picture to make any cowboy miss a few heart beats as he sometimes raced across the prairie sod and with head and tail up showed off the qualities that stuck out at his every move.

But to the bunch, all them qualities and good points of Smoky's was lost and not at all noticed. His mammy or any of the others would of thought just as much of him if he was just an ordinary horse or even an ill built scrub. They'd all liked him better if he wasn't so ornery and didn't need so much convincing, for Smoky was getting to be of a size and temper along with it where it was mighty hard for some to try to eddicate him and *show* that they could.

His eddication kept on tho for there was still a

few that packed a convincing hoof, but them few was dwindling down fast and Smoky was steady getting where he could hold his own with most any of 'em, till finally, and after many showdowns, there came a time when there was only two left in the bunch that he wouldn't stop and argue with, them two was his mammy and the big buckskin.

Smoky felt some superior and mighty proud then for a while; and it's a good thing he was a little wiser and quieter and not so full of mischief no more or he'd sure dealt them ponies misery; as it was he was now willing to leave them alone if they'd do the same by him.

Things went on that way for some time and as the days went by, the bunch was getting to be more willing to accept Smoky as a full size range horse with brains according. None tried to eddicate him no more, and if once in a while he showed young blood and some foolishness, they was all careful to overlook it. Of course Smoky was wise enough to keep away from his mammy and the buckskin at them times.

Peace was with the little bunch; all had some understanding and every horse knowed his ground. It was all so peaceful that Smoky felt it and it all begin to wear on him to the point where he felt like tackling the big buckskin, just to start something- then relief came one day and scattered that peaceful monotony from hell to breakfast.

It all happened as the little bunch, strung out, was heading for water. Smoky's mammy was in the lead as usual, and she was the first to turn the point of a ridge and find herself to within a few yards of a big black stud. Smoky was close second on the sight, and somehow as he snorted at the longmaned thick-jawed black a hunch came to him that peace had come to a sudden end.

He stood in his tracks kinda doubtful as to what to do and watched the black cloud of horseflesh, he'd let the stallion make the first false move—Proud as a peacock came the black, mane and tail a waving and stepping high. His little bunch of mares and colts had stayed back at the first sight of the strange ones, and was now watching the proceedings of the meeting.

That meeting impressed the young horses a whole lot, the white of their eyes showed with interest as the stud came up to within a few paces of the new bunch, stopped, and with a powerful neck bowed to a half circle, ears pointed ahead, and eyes a shining, stood and sized up the strangers.

He'd had plenty of experience in meeting strange bunches that way before which all left him kinda cautious, for many a time he'd left quicker than he'd come, and lost some hide to an older stud what was more up to the game of fighting; and he soon learned that it wasn't a wise idea to ram into a strange bunch and go to appropriating mares without first

investigating what kind of a leader that bunch had.

He d got wised up in many ways thru them meetings, and he learned to be some careful. He d also learned to handle his hoofs and teeth till there hadn t been any stud on that range that d been able to whip him the last three years-he d evened up scores.

Smoky hadn t moved, and as the stud still kept a standing in one spot with no indication of wanting to start anything, he got restless. Pretty soon it came to his mind that the stallion was leary of starting anything. It was a big mistake, but Smoky d had no way of knowing better. The big buckskin did know better and if Smoky had noticed, he d seen him out there on the far side of the bunch, and willing to keep neutral.

A move from the black stud decided Smoky. He d stepped close to his mammy and nostril to nostril was exchanging sniffs with her when she let out a squeal and struck at him, all of which the stallion didn t pay any attention to. But right about then Smoky landed on him, or, *at* him, for his striking front feet and bared sharp teeth missed him, missed him just enough to be a clean miss.

Smoky had never reckoned with the fighting qualities of a stallion, and he couldn t figger out how it was he d struck just thin air when he was so sure his enemy had been right there in front of him and within easy reaching distance; and what s more that puzzled him was that the stallion never offered to show fight

when he landed at him so furious. Instead he d just got out of the way of his rush, kept his ears ahead, and went on sizing up the bunch the same as if nothing had happened. Smoky felt like he hadn t even been noticed, and the actions of the stud had said plainer than words "fool kid."

A swift kick in the ribs couldn t of done any better towards putting Smoky down a peg or two, and that simple quick move of the stud s went a long ways to show what could of happened if he d been in mind to fight. All that left Smoky kinda uncertain as to how to proceed. He didn t know whether to go back and try it again or let things rest for a spell till another chance showed up.

In the meantime the black stud had found out that there was none in that bunch he d need to watch, and head down to the ground, ears back, he started cutting out the geldings, keeping the mares and fillies to put in with the bunch he already had. That was a harder job than it might sound here, for none of the geldings wanted to be cut out of the bunch they d been with so long, and even tho they went out easy enough they d turn back as the stud would be cutting out another and would have to be headed off and cut out again and again.

Then the big buckskin which had been neutral all this time finally got riled up at being separated from the mares that way and when the stud headed for him he

stood his ground. A few seconds more and there was buckskin and black hair sailing in the air, then hoofs a pounding away which would of kept up with machine-gun fire for speed, only the pounding wasn't sounding so sharp; it was hitting something solid, and there wasn't many misses.

Finally out of the dust that was stirred there came a streak of buckskin and right close to it was a streak of black, away from the herd they went, and pretty soon the black stud came back shaking his head the same as to let every horse know that he wasn't going to stand for no foolishness.

There was one more to be put out of the bunch, he was that mouse colored gelding, Smoky. He'd got in while the stud was chasing away the buckskin, he'd stood alongside his mammy and watched the fight, and there was a light in his eyes that showed he was ready to start another battle if it was necessary, but he sure wasn't going to be put out, without he was convinced it could be done, — he wasn't built that way.

The stallion spots him there and never went thru no preliminaries nor tried to scare him out with just a look; he dived right into him and Smoky met him half ways. That battle was short and wicked and Smoky managed to land some good hard kicks, kicks that'd knocked the wind out of any ordinary horse and sent 'em a sprawling; but the stallion wasn't no ordinary horse and them kicks only shook him a little and made

him all the madder. He d fought too many hard battles to let any gelding faze him and besides he was in the habit of winning.

His chance came when Smoky turned to land a couple more hard ones. The stud was broadside to the gelding, and as the hard ones came, he just reared up out of the reach of 'em, made a big lunge to one side and coming down he made a quick grab and fastened his teeth in Smoky s withers. When Smoky pulled away and the stud s teeth snapped together there was some of his silky hide between 'em.

Smoky squealed and kicked some more, then he whirled and faced the stud figgering on doing some damage with teeth and front hoofs. Just about then the stud whirled too and planted his two hind hoofs smack bang into Smoky s ribs. There was an echo which sounded like a steam engine ramming into a stone wall. That echo was followed with a mighty grunt as Smoky was lifted off his feet and throwed out a ways to a staggering standstill.

Smoky was in a daze, his vision was dim, and maybe it was all instinct that warned him of the dark cloud that d turned and was now a tearing down on him. Anyway something made him move in a hurry; all the strength that was left in him was used to make distance away from the black devil which now looked to Smoky like a big centipede, it had so many legs.

His life depended in the speed he could make,

and Smoky was running, running like he d never run before. It seemed like there was no shaking the mad stud, and just when he was on the point of giving in and make a last stand for his life that destroying hunk of horseflesh left him-When Smoky stopped, looked back, and seen the stud hightail it back to the mares, he had no hankering to follow; he was convinced.

The next few days that followed was mighty aimless to Smoky, him and the big buckskin had formed a pardnership in that time and the two wandered around like they was lost and didn t care where they went. They covered a lot of territory, passed up a lot of good grassy hollows and shady places, but they kept a drifting on. They grazed as they drifted and natural like followed up the canyons and crossed over the high passes that d been the summer range of Smoky s mammy and the bunch.

They came acrost other little bunches, but it seemed like in each of 'em lhere was a wild-eyed thick-jawed stud come out ready to kick the daylight out of 'em if any symptoms of them wanting to trail in with the bunch was showed.

In their roaming around they passed other geldings which like themselves had been kicked out of the stud bunches; the meeting with them was just plain "howdedo s" and each and all passed on and headed their own wandering way.-All would be hunkydory again for the buckskin if be could find another bunch to

run with where there was mares and little colts. He had a mighty strong failing for the little fellers and most any bunch would do if there was only a few of them in; but with Smoky, it was his mammy he missed most, his brother, and the other colts he d growed up with.

No other bunch would do as well, and the nicker he d send echoing acrost canyons and over ridges every once in a while was just for them certain few.

Smoky s mammy had no choice when that black stallion came and scattered them out to his liking that way. She was made to join that little bunch of his and she knowed better than try to do different; she knowed she d only lose some hide in any attempt to get away and that in the long run she d have to do as he pointed out.

She was wise to the range and the ways of her kind, and even tho she was as strong for Smoky as Smoky was for her she didn t miss him so much as he did her. She felt in a way that he was now big and mighty able to take care of himself, and then there was other youngsters which called for all her attention. But it was difterent with Smoky; she was his mammy and there was none other that could take her place. He d growed up at her side and even tho other little colts had come she was and always would be the mother he knowed when he was wobblety legged and needed her.

Then one day and as time had wore on in lonesomeness that way, there came a short break in the

monotony which helped Smoky forget some. Him and the buckskin had run acrost a little bunch of mares, — there was some little colts in the bunch, and a stud, a young stud.

The big buckskin sized up the stud the same as he d sized all the others he d met, and as this young feller came up full of pride and confidence to meet the two strangers, the big buckskin found a flaw in him, — the flaw was nothing more or less than just youth, he showed it in every move he made and every action. From past experience the buckskin had figgered youth and ignorance to go together, and that's what made it interesting.

Interesting by the fact that thru youth and ignorance the young stallion wouldn t maybe be able to compete against the fighting ability of the buckskin. The younger horse hadn t as yet fought many battles; that the buckskin could feel at a glance of him. He didn t turn away like he d done before, — as the stallion came on he just stood in his tracks and watched him. Smoky was doing the same.

There s bowed necks as the three touch nostrils, there s some squealing and striking and then a kick is planted, — the young stud had started things.

Smoky had caught the kick, which left him out a ways. In the meantime the buckskin followed up the lead and went at it from there. It was all a mighty fair

exchange from the start, kicks and bites was averaging pretty well on both parties, and for a young horse that chestnut stud was sure doing well. All might of come to a draw and both fighters might of quit about the same time, if it hadn t been for Smoky.

Smoky, which had got to be pretty thick with the buckskin, and had been a good pardner of his thru their lonesome roamings, found it mighty natural like wanting to help when trouble came that way; besides he was holding a grudge against the stud for kicking him the way he did, and all them things together kinda had him worked up to mix in.

His chance came as the chestnut whirled to plant a hard one on the buckskin s ribs. There was only a few feet between Smoky and the stud right then and double action started from there. The stud felt hard hitting hoofs and teeth a getting him from both sides and the punishment he received all at once wouldn t of been worse if he d a lit in a stack of wild cats.

It was then that it come to his mind, and sudden, that he should let up on the fighting and start to do some running if he wanted to keep hisself all in one piece. Smoky and the buckskin kept a pounding on him and a helping along on the good hunch till finally it was all made mighty plain. The chestnut picked himself up as best and quick as he could, and made a leap out of reach of the too many wicked hoofs and teeth, and tore up the earth for a change of scenery. The two pardners

done their best to escort him on his way.

But as that day came to an end and as the sun passed over and beyond the blue ridges, Smoky and his pardner could see a lone horse outlined against the sky; the chestnut was following. He followed 'em and the bunch they d chased him out of for three days, and once he started a fight to win back what he d lost. He just lost more hide and won nothing but another boost out of that territory. Smoky and the big buckskin had handed him the same medicine another stud had handed them.

The days that followed was mighty peaceful to the big buckskin, and Smoky seemed some contented too, he was gradually getting used to being away from his mother and new young fillies and colts he was running with made it all a heap easier to forget. Then again, the knocks he d got ever since that day when things had been so peaceful with his mammy, when he just figgered he d have to start something to bust up the monotony of that peace, all took the mischief out of him. The fight with the black stallion, the lonesome ramblings with the buckskin, and the other fights with the chestnut stud all helped eddicate him and shape him into a full sized, serious thinking gelding. It didn t take so much to keep him contented no more, and somehow or another be was seeing a heap more in life.

That s the way things stood with Smoky that summer; him and the buckskin ranged high up in the

mountains with the little bunch of mares and colts, they all snoozed and grazed thru the days and done the same thru the nights. A little play was brought on once in a while by some of the young colts and Smoky and the buckskin was always the steady victims of them. Them two older horses was colts themselves at them times and the way they d all nip one another and than sashay around hell bent for election, a human would wonder at the care Smoky and the buckskin was taking so that the colts would feel winners in all they d start.

Summer passed, the grass had gradually turned to a yellow brown and the leaves of the aspens begin banking up on the edges of the streams; fall had come, and one day the bunch started a grazing steady lower and lower till a few days later the foothills was reached. It was there that Smoky took the lead and headed for the winter range where his mammy had put him thru that first year. The big buckskin followed till, glancing back over his withers he noticed that the mares and colts had left off and branched out another direction. The buckskin stood in his tracks, watched Smoky line out straight ahead, and then looked back at the mares again. For the time being he wasn t sure whether to go on with his pardner or turn back to the bunch. It was hard for him to decide, he wanted to go with Smoky and still them little colts sure had a mighty holt on his heart strings. It was just about as he was doing the hardest figgering when one of them little fellers came

out of the bunch a ways and nickered for him. That little nicker decided things for the buckskin, he answered it and loped back to join with the other little fellers and the mares.

Smoky went on straight ahead. Maybe he was thinking strong, thinking that he d see his mammy again on that winter range. Anyway, it never come to him to look back and see if the bunch was following him, and finally when it did come to him that he was drifting on alone, he stopped and looked around in a sort of vacant stare, his instinct had been controlling him and was taking him back to his home range. But when he found himself alone that way it all left him surprised at first and then doubtful as to what to do. He was mighty attached to that buckskin, the little colts, and the bunch in general.

He looked at the far away hills of his range and he seemed like to think on the subject for quite a spell, then of a sudden his head went up, a loud nicker went out and away in the distance he could hear an answer, — the answer had come from his pardner, the buckskin.

Smoky nickered again and loped back to the bunch. He d come to feel that it didn t matter so much which range he wintered on, he was a big horse now, and a few ridges to the north or south of that range he was raised in didn t make much difference.-An old mare had took the lead and from then on Smoky just

followed side by side with the buckskin. A little colt nipped him in the flanks, and all was well.