

The Mother

By Caleb

It was a hot Texas morning. The mercury was already approaching 100 degrees and it was only 8 o'clock in the morning. Matt Stoddard came to the kitchen table for breakfast. "Howdy," he said to his wife Madison. "Dja'sleep all right?"

"Joey was up all night," she replied.

"That's tough. I slept like a rock after the cougar incident."

"You know, rocks don't actually--" she started.

"Yeah yeah," he responded, "You've been sayin' that ever since you saw that movie. Anyway, I gotta check on the cows."

"Go ahead," came her reply. "I bet he likes those cows more than me," Madison muttered under her breath as she tried to corral Joey.

"Waaaaaa," Joey cried as he dumped his cheerios on the floor by the spoonful.

Matt went to check on the cows. He milked all the females and tended to the calves. He found Betty and noticed that she was pregnant. Betty was his favorite cow. She was all brown except for a spot of white on her face. She was the only cow in Matt's herd with those looks.

"How you feelin'?" he asked. "Is it a boy or a girl? Whaddaya think?"

"Mooooooo," replied Betty.

"Typical. You cows never answer. Cows have the smallest vocabularies I have ever heard tell of. Even horses say more than neigh!" Matt went back into the house.

"Hey Madison!" he called, "Teddy and I are gonna go to the horse auction. I'll be back at 7:30." Matt and Teddy were brothers and they were very close. Teddy's farm was directly to the east of Matt's.

"It's gonna storm this evening," Teddy told Matt on the way to the auction.

'I'll move the cows into the barn when we get back. Hopefully the rain won't've started by then," Matt replied.

When they reached the auction, Matt and Teddy sat down in the back row. The auctioneer was a thin man who looked like he had spent a lifetime under the Texas sun.

The auctioneer cleared his throat and spoke up. "Howdy y'all! My name's Austin. Here's how it's gonna work today. I'll shout out a starting price and the bids will go up from there. For our first horse, I got a fine thoroughbred racehorse with no health defects, starting at eighty thousand!"

"I got eighty one," a man with a black ten gallon hat shouted from the front row.

"Anyone else?" the auctioneer asked. "Going once, going twice, sold to the gentleman in the black hat!"

The entire day went on like that. Matt wanted to buy a black horse named

Thunderer, but he was outbid by the same man with the black hat.

"I bet that guy's goal was to buy every horse in the good state of Texas," Teddy said to Matt while they were driving home. Suddenly, the skies opened and it started to pour. Lightning lit up the sky and thunder echoed off of the hills.

"Shoot," said Matt. "I hope that the lightning doesn't hit the ranch. That would be bad."

"I know," replied Teddy, "my crops are gonna get charbroiled if that beast hits anywhere near the farm."

Matt pulled into the garage. "See ya," he told Teddy. He got out of the car and went into the house. Joey was whining and struggling to get out of his highchair before he even ate.

"I'm home," Matt told Madison.

"You're late," she replied without looking up. Joey had managed to throw half

his dinner on the floor and was working on the other half. "Joey!" Madison shouted while wrestling him into his chair, "You are behaving like a monkey! Sit at the table and eat your dinner nicely."

"*Ba ba ba,*" was Joey's response. He chucked some food at Madison.

"That's enough!" said Madison, "You're going to bed." She lifted Joey out of his chair and carried him up the stairs while he cried and screamed and yelled "*Babab gag aba bay aba Baaba!*"

Matt settled down into his chair to watch the Texas Rangers play the Boston Red Sox .The Rangers were losing 5-2 in the bottom of the ninth inning when Adrian Beltre hit a walk off grand slam to win the game for the Rangers 6-5. Over the din of the game, Matt heard thunder boom down from the sky. It was almost drowned out by the T.V., but it sounded close. Too close for comfort.

As Matt drove out to the pasture, he thought about what would happen if one of his cows were struck by lightning. He realized that he wouldn't be able to deal with the death of one his beloved animals. Matt had hundreds of cows and all of them were important to him. If one of them died -- especially Betty -- he wouldn't be able to live with himself. Those cows were his pride and joy.

While driving, Matt passed some of his cows in the pasture. They looked scared and they were mooing anxiously, but they weren't running away yet. Texas longhorns are tough, but a few more bolts of lightning would send them stampeding.

Matt saw Betty while he was driving and decided to go out and check on her. "You feelin' okay?" he asked her, "I know the thunder was scary, but you'll be

fine. How's the calf anyway? The vet said that it's gonna be a boy."

"Moooo," said Betty.

"What should we name it?" asked Matt.

"Moooo," said Betty.

"Johnny? Cornelius? Ooohhh, I got it, Alfred!"

"Moooo," said Betty.

"Which one? Al or Fred?"

"Moooo," said Betty.

"We'll go with Fred." Matt jumped back into the truck and drove on to check on the other cows. As he finally came to the rest of the cows in the very back of the pasture, a bolt of lightning lit up the sky. The cows were seriously spooked now. While the thunder rumbled overhead, he hopped out of his truck and tried to calm them down. Suddenly, another bolt of lightning came down -- and hit the wooden fence.

The cows couldn't take it anymore, and they stampeded. They were scared and they ran like their tails were on fire, which they would have been if they hadn't run. The lightning strike ignited a small fire near the fence. Fortunately, Matt quickly put out the flames with his water bottle. Unfortunately, the cows kept charging -- right to the end of the pasture and through the smoldering hole in the fence.

Matt quickly drove to Teddy's house to get help. Teddy was taking a nap, so Matt had to wake him. That made it even harder for them to have any chance of catching the cows, much less getting them back into the pasture.

Once they started on the road, it was mayhem. The cows were already a mile past Teddy's farm. All of Teddy's crops were trampled. As the cows made their way into the streets of El Paso, Matt and Teddy tore after them in Matt's trusty old pickup truck.

“Hey Matt,” called Teddy, “I’m gonna try to head them off on Abington!”

“Okay!” Teddy hopped out of the truck and Matt felt his throat go dry. He was going to have to use his his gun to try to get the cows back into the pen. It would only be a warning shot, but what if one of the cows - no, that couldn’t happen. They were too precious for him to lose.

As he raced down Montoya Drive, he couldn’t help thinking about how good his aim actually was. What if his hand slipped, or he pulled the trigger accidentally? No, he couldn’t afford to think that right now. All that should be on his mind is getting the cows back onto the ranch.

While driving down North Sante Fe street, he noticed a bunch of local farmers at a bar. He rolled down his window to ask for help.

“Hey!” he yelled, “could you help me? My cows are loose in the city!”

“Where did you see them last?” asked Don Duncan, the bartender.

“They were headed down O’keefe last I saw of ‘em,” Matt replied.

“We’re on it!” came Duncan’s response. As the farmers and Duncan headed toward O’keefe, Matt continued driving right behind the cows. If the cows decided to turn around, he would be there to lead them back to the ranch.

Matt’s cell phone started to ring. He looked at the phone and it was Madison.

“Hey,” he said, “I’m sort of in a tough situation. I’ll call you back when I’m done.”

“Hold on,” said Madison. “You’re not hanging up until you tell me where you are and what you’re doing.”

“I got good news and I got bad news,” said Matt. “Which d’ya want first?”

“The good news first,” she replied.

“The good news is that I am not breaking the law. You're on speaker so I can focus on the road,” he said.

“Then what's the bad news?”

“I, uh, well it may not, I mean, it's sorta -- do I have to tell you?”

“What is it?” Madison demanded.

“The cows escaped. Talk to you soon! Bye.” Matt hung up before Madison could respond.

As Matt drove off, Madison shook her head and muttered “Matt has to choose between me and those damn cows.” under her breath.

Matt followed the cows for a few more miles. The thought that he would just keep following them forever crossed his mind. Despite the situation, Matt was getting bored just sitting in the car.

Suddenly, the cows decided to turn around and head straight at Matt. They were charging too fast for Matt to be able to

get out of the way and calm them down. As they came tearing down the street, he dove out of the truck just in time to see a cow charge past. He fell to the ground holding his gun, his finger coincidentally on the trigger. Suddenly, there was a loud noise and a dead cow. A dead cow that was all brown with a spot of white on its face. It was Betty.

Matt was devastated. He lay in the street and started crying. It was as if the world had ended.

After a while, however, a realization came to Matt. Yes, Betty was dead, but his family was still alive. Madison and Joey and Teddy were the ones who really mattered the most. Matt felt ashamed that it took his favorite cow's death for him to realize that. He hopped in the truck and headed home.