

Miraculous

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GRADE 12<sup>th</sup>  
Fiction  
Poetry  
Nonfiction

Sunlight slanted through the pine fence. If you crouched at the right angle you could see straight through without squinting. On the other side, there was a sea of tall, green-but dying- pasture grass. Leaves littered the ground- compliments to the season change and huge cottonwoods surrounding the east side of the property. It was a nice place; no major fixing needed, big lawn, lots of trees, pasture and corral space, treehouse and swing set, big shop in the back. Yeah, one of the better places on the block. The best part was the family that lived there. Don't get me wrong, they were a big family, seven or eight in all. There were five or six kids, I'm not sure how many exactly, too many to keep track of- let's just leave it at that. Both boys were blonde. The girls were all redheads, except for one. That little blonde terror. Holy crepes, what a character. I've never seen a little girl with so much spunk. She is determined. If she puts her mind to something, you can bet your boots it's gonna happen. Very strong willed. Going against her is like buttin' your head up against a stupid fence post. She has more passion than she knows what to do with. She takes the majority of it out on animals. Mainly dogs, horses, and cows. She lives outside. Her momma makes her come in and go to bed every night around 8-8:30. Other than that, she is runnin' free under the baby blue sky. She eats outside with the dogs, she swims in the 500-gallon horse troughs and climbs trees with the cats. There she is now, heading over to assist her old man. This oughta be good!

"Yes, your highness," she said with her right hand on a cocked hip.

"What do you think about going to help Bryce and Jen with cows next week?"

"Yes, a thousand times yes!"

There was a lot more screaming and giggling and little girl stuff. Let me just say, I applaud that man, putting up with all of that cannot be easy. Bless his soul. He can't be over thirty-five. Hah! Still a youngun', shoot, I bet he hasn't got a single gray hair! Ohh, I take that back. That little blondie could give anyone gray hairs. Now she's busy getting her black mare ready to ride.

"Yeehaw!" she yelled as she headed out the pasture gate into the street. I blinked and she was out of sight. I'll admit it, they work well together. That black mare and the little girl. I guess I should tell y'all her name, Jesse. The little blonde crazy child is called Jesse and feared by many. Nah, I'm just kidding, she's a good kid. Raised in a good family. Goes to church, has manners, helpful- the whole works. Yeah, she's a crazy kind of good.

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**School couldn't go by any slower. The clock seemed to be broken. It moved slower than cold syrup...or honey. I can't take this anymore! Gotta get out of this stuffy classroom. Need some fresh air. There will be fresh air on the mountains when I'm helping with cows....Cows. I love them. More like I love to be with those certain people, doing those certain tasks. I just need to go on a long ride. On my beautiful black mare. Star. We make the best team ever! When I am on her, I am invincible. I am Calamity Jane. And she is the most amazing horse. Yes, we make a good team. Scratch that- We make a great team!**

The final bell rang with the sound of sheer pleasure. Finally! I fast walked out the school doors, pushing through the groups of gossiping girls. Making my way around the slow-moving flow of

people. I headed across the blacktop and out the east gate. I broke into a run as soon as I left the crowds behind. It felt good to go fast! I made it to the crosswalk. I hustled across both roads and headed north. Onto the sidewalk. Across the bridge. Right turn. I was on my home stretch now. I was the third house down on the right. About a quarter of a mile down the worn out street, I cut down across the steep embankment of the road. I hopped over the railroad ties that created the border of lush green yard grass and dry crackly weeds.

**The sliding door on the back porch is the easiest to open.**

I veered right and cut across the grass. Then a hard left. Stick the turn, jump the porch stairs and through the door.

**Easy as pie.**

“Mom, I’m home!” I called as I dumped my backpack and jacket in the hall.

“How’s my girl?” she replied from the family room.

“Still breathing,” I said as I came down the hall and plopped down on the arm of the couch.

“Where are your sisters?”

“Probably to the crosswalk by now.”

“You left them?”

“I was never with them in the first place”

“Even better!”

“Mom, it will be just fine. It’s not like they can get lost from the school to our house!”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“Yeah, I know I am.”

She gave me the look that speaks for itself.

**Time to scoot.**

"Imma go ride Star," I said as I stood up and headed out the room.

"Homework?" she asked in a tone that stopped me in my tracks.

"Nope, just reading and spelling. But I can do those later."

"Homework first. Then your horse."

"Mom!"

"Or you can just stay inside and I'll have Ashley feed your animals tonight?"

"I think I'll just grab my book now."

"Wise choice."

I hurried and grabbed my bag from the hall and chose a comfy spot against the wall in the family room.

**Stupid reading! Who even needs it? All it does is waste my afternoon. Now I'm stuck here for another thirty minutes. THIRTY MINUTES!! The day is ending out there. And where am I? Inside reading a book. Perfect.**

Here she comes. The little ball of fury is finally free of her cage, time to have a little fun watching. First, she hurried into the shop. She came out of those big doors holding a halter. She ran to the corrals and climbed through the fence rails. Then she bolted around to the back of the pen. It was almost an L shaped corral. It bent around behind the musty brown shop. She came back leading a calm black mare with a white patch on her forehead, almost a star-shaped mark. In fact, I think her name is Star. How original!

I spent the rest of my time outside “practicing” for the days ahead. I ran all over the pasture on Star. I roped and jumped, laughed and ye-hawed. Mostly just having a grand old time on my mare. Just me and her, the way it should be.

**This is the life.**

Her old man came home around sixish. She came out to meet him on her horse. He caught her as she bailed off the horse for a hug. What trust. He wrapped his arms around her and twirled her in the air. After the spinning was over, he plopped her back on her black gold and she turned around and galloped off into the sunset. But, don't worry, she was back in three minutes. Her blonde hair goin' crazy. Her smile so big it was amazing it fit on that little face.

Dad came home in a cloud of dust. He turned into the driveway and I was right there. I jumped into his arms just like I always do. He caught me just like he always will. He twirled me. I squeezed him 'til he grunted. Routine reuniting. He threw me back on Star. Patted my leg right above my knee. Said “Atta cowgirl.” Told Star to “be safe with my little girl.” One last wink. A smile. And I'm gone again. Routine.

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I woke up in Dad's arms. We were moving. Like walking. My brain hadn't processed what was going on yet. It wasn't until I was sitting in the cab of the truck that I remembered what today was. I rushed to rub the sleep out of my eyes. I grabbed my boots, threw open the truck door and jumped down onto the cold, crunchy gravel. I first checked the horse trailer-the horses were loaded. I then raced into the house to kiss Mama goodbye.

“Have fun, my little cowgirl!” She said through a tight hug.

“Yeehaw! “ I tried to sound enthusiastic but a yawn slipped out with the “haw.” Mama chuckled and told me to go get back in the truck.

“You got pants, a shirt, a hoodie, your belt and your hat in the back of the truck. Get dressed after you get a little more sleep,” she said as I opened the garage door.

“Thank you, Mama,” I said as I shut the door and raced off to the truck. The October morning was chilly. Very chilly. Especially to a little girl who was in pjs. I jumped in the truck, slammed the door shut and cranked up the heaters.

When Dad finally came out to the truck, I had no clue- I was sleeping. I slept most of the way to Delta. I woke up just in time to get dressed. We pull into McDonald’s and grab some breakfast. After a while, everyone has swapped their howdy’s. We all load up again and head to Bear Valley. The beautiful place where Bryce has got his cows. He leases ground there and puts his cows there all summer. When it starts getting cold, like it is now, the cows are ready to come home. we gotta go get ‘em. And that’s why I am here.

There ain’t no sleeping now. Nope, I’m wide awake. Practically bouncing out of my seat, hanging halfway out the window. Dad looks over at me and chuckles.

“What sir,” I ask when I catch his eye in the side mirror.

“Nothin’ miss,” he replies.

“Hmmm,” I hum as I stick my head out the window and breathe in the fall air. It is my most favorite smell. It reminds me of all my other cow experiences. All of the long days spent on the back of a horse, moving along slowly. Laughing and joking with all of these people I have come to know and love. Somehow, someway. Even though they are rough around the edges, on a personal level, they are better than anyone else in the world.

We got there around 10:30. The dust settles and everyone piles out of pick-ups. It takes a little while to set up. People are setting up campers, others are watering horses. I run around helping everyone, talking to everyone and having the time of my life. By the time everyone is set up and settled in, it was lunchtime. We ate a lunch of wraps. Tortillas with mayo, meat, and cheese. These are the ideal food for trips like this one. The reason being, normal sandwiches get smashed after being in the saddlebags. Tortillas are already smashed, they can't get any worse! The stuff stays in the middle cuz you wrap them tight, and tada! You now have a wrap. Truthfully, this is the only way I can eat tortillas, normally they make me vomit. But I absolutely love them like this! They are hands down one of my favorite foods.

After our mini feast, it's time to go to work. We are all split up into groups. Our groups go up into different sections of the mountains and bring down all the cows we find. Simple as that, right? If only! Some will gladly lead the pack down the main road straight to the stock pen. But others, normally the young ones, don't like being pushed around. They bail off into the tamaracks and willows that cover the country. Guys follow after them and by the time you make it down the main stretch, you have whip marks all over your body. They are red and raised. They sting like nobody's business. The welts from the willows and other springy trees get on your nerves, and every time you get smacked in the face by one, your tension increases by at least five levels. It's not uncommon to hear guys out in the tamaracks just cussin' up a storm.

I am put into the best group there is! Me, Dad and Grandpa. This is a normal group. I'm always with Dad, he is pretty protective when it comes to this stuff.

That just means more memories are gonna be made. I'm down with that!



"Jess, you keep these guys in line ight'," Bryce says as I put Hershey's chocolate licorice in Dad's saddlebags.

"You know I will."

"I know, I just gotta ask every time, that way I feel better about sending them up there," he jokes as he inspects the saddlebags' contents. "Whatcha got in there?"

"Sugar and protein," I answer, referring to the licorice and jerky, "just in case a certain someone gets grumpy."

"Shoot, you're all set!"

"Yessir!"

"Jess, you ready to go?" Dad hollers from the other side of the trailer.

"Ready Freddy!" I holler back as I buckle the latch on the saddlebags and wave to Bryce as he heads off to pester someone else who's trying to get ready.

I run around the other side of the trailer to where Dad's voice came from. I see him bent over Star's front leg, cleaning out her hoof.

"It's your own ride you should be worrying' about," I say as he finishes and stands up.

"Yeah, I've already taken care of him."

"Thought so." My mare, Star, has solid black feet. My dad's gelding, Copper, has soft white feet. When it comes to horses, the blacker the feet, the harder they are, and the harder they are, the less they chip. Copper's feet are super soft, so any kind of riding that isn't in ideal conditions means chipped feet. Heck, even in ideal conditions his feet end up chipped.

We finally are ready to head up the mountain. You have to follow the main road up and then you can fan out from there. The road up is rocky. Really rocky. It reminds me of one of

those cobblestone roads in a foreign country. Riding up is frustrating. The rocks are hard on the horses' feet, so they try to pick their way through them. It takes some time to reach the top, but when we do, the view is priceless. The leaves are turning; the sun is hitting them all just right. Our camp is nestled in a little valley surrounded by breathtaking mountains. The pine trees add balance and contrast to all of the bright fall colors and there is a chill in the air. Just a little nip reminding you it is October eleventh, and winter is on the way. But then the sun hits you. It warms you to the point of a light burn. The side of you not getting the direct sun is covered with goosebumps. It chills you to the brink of shivering. You are caught in the middle of these two sensations, the heat and the cold, and it is the most amazing feeling in the world! It makes you feel alive and dead. It is wonderful. There aren't words to explain it. A smile creeps into the corners of my mouth and then I can't help it, I am grinning from ear to ear while fighting the urge to cry. Finally, the urge passes and I am safe to talk again. After cracking a couple of jokes with Dad, we settle into silence. The smile finds its way back to my face.

**This is gonna be the best day ever.**

We found a couple groups. When we got back, everyone else had the same luck. Most of Bryce's cows got back, but there were still a couple missing. Randy's missing some heifers. Bryce, Dad, Grandpa, Randy, and Jen went down to the lower holding pen to get it ready for tomorrow. I couldn't go because Dad was on Star- Copper threw a shoe on the rocks today. I stayed with Grandma at their trailer. It was a horse trailer with a tiny little living compartment built in. Nifty huh? When the boys and Jen got back, it was pretty late. We ate leftovers from saddlebags and then called it a night. I crawled into my sleeping bag and tried to find a warm

spot. No such luck. It was dark. We were sleeping in the gooseneck of our trailer. I couldn't even see my hand!

"Hey Jess," Dad whispered to the right of me.

"Huh?"

"Can you see my hand?"

"No, I can't even see my own!" Slam! All of a sudden, Dad's hand had found its way to my forehead.

"Did ya feel it?"

"You are a pain!"

"Not a pain, I just cause it," was the reply.

Morning comes slow. I woke up multiple times, crawled down from the gooseneck and opened the door to see if it was light yet. Each time was a no. I wake up to Dad's gentle shake. I sit up and stretch the sleep out of my body.

"Good, now get dressed."

"Done!" I slept in my clothes for today. I didn't want to have to change into cold clothes in the morning. Everyone who was up was sitting around a fire drinking hot chocolate or Pero. Pero is the replacement for coffee. The smell draws me over to where the mix and hot water is sitting. I make me a cup and find a seat by Jen.

"Mornin' sweetie," she says as I take a sip of my drink.

"Mornin' Jen," I reply as she takes a sip of hers. It takes about a half hour for everyone else to wake up and come out of their warm, stress-free cocoons. Once everyone is out, Bryce starts

talking. Stuff about who is going where. What all we need to do before tomorrow (loading day). I make ripples dance across the surface of my hot chocolate by dropping marshmallows into it.

“Got it?” Everyone mumbles a yes or yeah or you got it. Then everyone gets up and disperses. We all have our separate jobs to do and we all want to go to work.

We headed back up, just like yesterday. The same amazing sensation comes and goes. When we reached the tiptop, we saw a group of Randy’s red heifers. They were hanging around a giant juniper tree and then one deep red one hanging out just off the road in the sagebrush. As we got closer, they started mulling around but stayed put. The lone cow, the dark red heifer, turned and burned through the sagebrush.

“I got the group,” Dad hollered as he headed towards the cedar tree.

That left me with the runaway. I headed off through the sagebrush, and before long, I was caught up. Now the only problem was getting in front and turning it around. I had no room to move-the sagebrush was taller than me. On the horse, it came up past my stirrups. The cow wasn’t stopping and neither was I. The sagebrush was getting taller, we were now leaping over them. It was tough to stay balanced because of the fast pace and the jumps. We hadn’t found an opening yet to turn the cow around. And then, we came up to the tallest brush yet. We were both determined, Star and I, there was an opening just ahead. We jumped-more like flew- over the top of the sagebrush. And then, at the peak, I slipped. I felt myself start to fall to the left. I was too far to correct myself. Everything was happening in slow motion. One thought passed through my head.

**I am going to die.**

And then another one.

**Pray.**

I did, just a little one.

**Please help me.**

And then I closed my eyes.

The next thing I know is I'm staring at the belly of my blessed mare. My left leg is still in the stirrup, now twisted at an abnormal angle. Getting up is difficult with one leg. When I finally get up, I start crying. I bury my head into Star's sweaty chest. She is like a statue. She hasn't moved her feet since she landed the jump. If she had, my head would have been bashed in by her back feet. I get myself all sorted out and get a grip on my surroundings, Dad is still over at the cedar tree, Grandpa picked up where I left off -chasing the red heifer. After Grandpa noticed I wasn't catching up to help, he gave up the cow and came to me. I told him what happened and he went silent.

"Grandpa, are you ok?" I asked after he didn't say anything.

"I should be asking you, sweetheart," he replied.

"Oh, I'm fine. I'm not really sure what just happened."

"I know. This horse is a blessing! You would be dead right now if it wasn't for her. You keep her! You never let her outta your sights! She likes you, Jess, she really does."

Then I went silent. All of a sudden, Dad came to a sliding stop. He had a worried look on his face.

"I'm fine Dad," I say before he spoke up. Grandpa told the story because I was still a little shaken up. After the story was told, Dad hopped down and wrapped me in a giant hug.

"Oh Jesse, are you ok?"

"Yeah Dad, I'll be ok, I'm a cowgirl, it's my job"

"Randy can come and get his own damn cows," Grandpa said as his frustration kicked in again. Dad laughed and wiped my dusty, tear-stained cheeks off.

"I think we could use a treat," Grandpa said, "good thing Grandma packed us some sugar!" Grandpa pulled out a package of chocolate licorice. He passed us all a piece and we sat there in the quiet a little longer. After some time, we all knew it was time to head back.

"Jess, it's time to grab this bunch and go back," Dad said with a hint of hesitation.

"Do we have to," I answered.

"Hey! Are you are cowgirl?!" he exclaimed

"Yes."

"Then you have to trust your horse. And this horse deserves your trust. She just saved your life. Don't worry sweetheart, it will be ok. Come on my Calamity."

I nodded my head. Dad put me back on Star.

**Oh, how I love her.**

I thought as we headed down the cobblestone road. We got back and my mind was running faster than what I could keep up with.

**Star's an amazing horse. But what else impacted our miracle?**

I came to the conclusion that while Star and I had an irreplaceable connection, there was more which played into our miracle. I prayed. I prayed to a loving Heavenly Father who blessed me to land exactly where I did. He blessed Star to not take a single step after her feet hit the ground; not even to rebalance herself after a careless leap.

She came back a couple days later. Something changed. She was different. A good different. The sunlight was slanting through the fence again. The leaves were littering the ground, leaving the trees bare. The perfect ending to the perfect miracle.