

BEYOND MONUMENT ROCK

Written by

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A experienced rancher discovers a calf that is dying and is challenged, both physically and emotionally, in his attempt to save it.

EXT. MONTANA PRAIRIE - DAWN

OUR MAN (early 60's) trots up on his bay horse, giving attention to the taut barbed wire fence. His dog KATIE follows, investigating the usual things dogs do.

He dismounts and places his right shoulder on the brace post trying to open the gate, but it will not budge. He rubs his shoulder.

With a more powerful thrust it finally opens and he swings it wide.

His shoulder gives him grief as he mounts his horse. They gallop off into a never-ending sea of golden prairie.

Our Man lopes with ease across the valley. The grass has the appearance of water when the breeze rushes through it.

This is his land; towering hillsides, prominent isolated buttes, and winding creek beds. This view rivals Moses' atop Mount Nebo when looking at the Promised Land.

Our Man stops to peer into the valley. Scattered as far as the eye can see are his cattle, grazing on the lush, green sweetgrass.

He enjoys the view.

Our Man spurs his horse and they ride off across the dew-filled grass to begin gathering his cattle. Katie follows closely behind.

They approach a small bunch of cows. He takes the right side with Katie following behind.

He whistles and it cuts through the serene lull of the cattle's grazing. This calls Katie into action. She looks to Our Man and with only his point to the left she eagerly takes the command. She runs along that side nipping at the heels of the cows and their calves.

They work as a team steering the rebellious few toward the larger herd.

Katie pushes them onward. Our Man calls her back with another whistle while pointing up the hillside.

She runs up to investigate. He follows and watches from a distance, taking the gradual slope of the bluff.

High atop rests MONUMENT ROCK, a Goliath-sized and weathered sandstone that towers over the foothills of Our Man's land.

Cows graze in Monument Rock's shadow and he pushes them on toward the main herd.

Several inscriptions can be seen on the rock - names with their year of birth and death.

Our Man pulls back on the reigns to slow his pace as he moves past the rock and its inscriptions. He subtly tips his hat to the sandstone.

Katie is heard barking loudly and with concern. This jolts Our Man out of his solemn reverie and he pulls the reigns of his horse toward the bluff's steep face to find her.

At the base of the hill is an old watering hole that has begun to dry up. It is surrounded by clay mud that is cracking into thousands of intricate designs.

Katie has found a dead cow with its body submerged in the mud. It has sunk well past its shoulders and has started to decompose. She barks continuously until Our Man gets to her side and dismounts, still coddling his right shoulder as he does so.

A blend of frustration and melancholy spreads across his face.

He gently pats Katie's head, acknowledging a job well done for finding the cow.

OUR MAN

We're too late.

About 30 feet from the cows dead carcass wails her baby calf. It too is submerged with legs stuck deep in the mud.

Our Man looks down to Katie with hesitancy, searching for a second opinion from his companion.

Katie barks and whines at the calf, but knows not to rush in after it.

OUR MAN

Be still!

Katie hushes up immediately.

OUR MAN

(with hesitation)

We'll get her.

He examines the ground to find where dry dirt meets the mud.

He takes a long jump onto the back of the dead cow. His feet give way from under him and he falls to his knees. He nearly face plants into the mud.

The calf is still out of reach.

Our Man pulls out a large pocket knife and jabs it into the cows ribs. Rancid air escapes.

He takes his leather belt off and runs it through the hide and ribs, securing a solid grip to take hold of.

While leaning away from the cow, and holding onto the belt, his boot slips! He falls in to the life absorbing mud.

Katie starts barking, pacing back and forth helplessly.

With each flail of his hands and legs, Our Man finds himself sinking deeper. He too is stuck in the mud.

His eyes meet the calf's. The calf's pupils are constricted and the white surrounding them sends shivers down Our Man's spine. All seems lost.

He slows his breathing to a smooth rhythm, gathers his bearings, and finishes with a quick silent prayer. Katie calms herself as if joining in.

Our Man then looks up toward Monument Rock that overlooks the scene.

OUR MAN

Not today.

The leather belt dangles off the cows back, resting on the surface of the mud. He slowly lifts his arm, reaching for it. His fingers stretch as far as they can go but to no avail.

Exhaustion begins to set in. He is sinking. His age shows in the wrinkles set into his face, like the cracks in the mud surrounding him.

He gradually stretches his arms and legs as wide as he can make them. This hurts his shoulder and he grimaces in pain.

The end of the belt begins to sink.

Our Man surfaces atop the mud. He struggles to inch forward.

He walks his fingers slowly and steadily toward the belt. His index finger grazes the leather, but this is not enough to gain the grasp he needs.

The calf bawls and Katie barks with panic. This is not helping Our Man's situation.

His finger gains some traction and he is able to slip the belt between his middle and index fingers. After what feels like eternity, he is able to grip his hand around the belt.

He pulls it tight, causing stress on the dead cows hide. It looks as if the rib might snap in two.

With a calm, yet powerful, pull he is able to get himself out of the mud.

He finds himself back atop the dead cow, catching his breath. Katie continues to bark.

Our Man is drenched in the slippery mud. He attempts to get most of it off his boots.

With every bit of strength he can muster, he leaps back toward dry land and collapses.

He sits in silence just watching the calf. The calf tries to squirm free but only sinks itself deeper with each attempt.

The calf wails.

Katie whines, trying to get Our Man's attention. He does not respond. He continues to sit there in contemplation.

His eyes blink back from this daze. He pulls himself up and mounts his horse.

He rides over the hillside out of sight.

Katie does not follow. She stays and barks with concern as the calf struggles.

There is a long moment of waiting.

Our Man ascends back over the hillside. He now holds an old cedar plank. Katie barks for joy!

OUR MAN

Oh ye of little faith.

He laughs to himself while dismounting and walks the plank to the mud.

Katie is very anxious. He kneels down to pet her. This calms her nerves.

Our Man holds the plank under his right shoulder. He is ready to make the jump one more time.

Katie barks!

OUR MAN

I know, I know.

He switches the plank from the right side to the left.

Our Man makes the jump and finds himself back on top of the dead cow. He is careful this time and quickly gets on his knees.

He reaches out and throws the plank onto the mud between him and the calf. He takes a deep breath and guides himself onto the plank. It does not sink.

He lays on his belly and stretches out his arms. In this moment he sacrifices his pain for this calf's life. He grits his teeth as he closes the gap between himself and the calf.

It bawls and jostles itself, causing it to sink.

OUR MAN

Be still.

He sets his arm deep in the mud and forces it up underneath the calf's front leg.

With a huge heave, Our Man is able to get the calf up to the surface.

The calf struggles to get away but exhaustion gets the best of it and it must lay down, allowing Our Man do what he needs to do.

The calf is small and he is able to pull it over his shoulder. Despite the pain now throbbing in his right arm, Our Man begins the crawl back onto the dead cows back.

The calf does not squirm at all.

Once on the back of the dead cow, Our Man stands up with the calf laying atop his shoulders.

Katie barks for joy. The man chuckles.

He leaps toward the dry land. His boot hits the edge and he nearly falls back into the mud. The weight of the calf helps him gain his footing and he makes it. He has saved the calf!

He sets it down. The calf's legs are weak and it stumbles around a bit, but soon finds its legs and runs off toward the rest of the herd.

Our Man sinks to the ground with exhaustion. A soft smile emerges from his tense face.

EXT. MONUMENT ROCK - LATER

The horse grazes on grass a few feet from the large rock. Our Man and Katie rest in the shadows.

He eats a sandwich and enjoys the view of this land and his cattle.

He rips off a piece of sandwich and throws it down for Katie. She licks it right up in an instant.

He finishes the last bite and exhales a sigh of joy. Katie scoots next to him and too sighs.

He gazes out over the land and starts to blink slowly as drowsiness sets in.

Just as he is about to doze off, Katie's bark startles him awake. She has noticed a pair of cows grazing that should be up with the herd.

Katie looks to Our Man for her cue. She is ready to work again.

Our Man smiles, his eyes bright and lucid now. He whistles strong and clear and points toward the cows. Katie leaps up and bolts in their direction.

With that he pulls himself up and dusts off the remaining dried pieces of mud left caked on his clothes.

Our Man turns to look behind at Monument Rock and takes off his hat. He salutes, with a nod, to all his forefathers before him and their lifelong work.

He then looks up toward the beautiful blue sky, toward His God in Heaven, and salutes Him with a nod as well.

He puts his hat back on, mounts his horse, and gallops off down the hillside. There is still much work to be done.

