

The Cowboy and the Moon

One night, a cowboy looked up at the sky.

“Hello, up there!” he shouted, his leathery hands cupped around his mouth. It was a clear, cloudless night, and the stars seemed to shine brighter than he had ever remembered.

“Hello, down there,” a deep, powerful voice echoed through valley, as if carried by the winds themselves.

“How are you this fine evening?” the cowboy smiled.

“To tell you the truth,” the voice rumbled, “I’ve been quite lonesome up here.”

“I’m all too familiar with the feeling,” the cowboy sighed. “To be perfectly honest, I was unsure whether or not you would reply, as I can only shout so loud!”

At this, the moon chuckled. His laughter shook the ground below the cowboy, sending a cloud of dust sweeping over the tops of his black, leather boots.

“The winds are powerful beings,” the moon assured him. The cowboy looked back at the ground, his hands loosely outstretched towards the small campfire he had built for the night. The landscape around him was dry and quiet, and the only movement came from the rustling of the parched grass.

“I appreciate the warm glow you’ve cast upon me,” the cowboy acknowledged. The moon smiled sheepishly. The moon looked quite magnificent. He shone a lovely white, brighter than any of the stars, and he looked was so large that the cowboy could see the beautiful lunar maria across his surface.

“Might I ask,” the moon started, “why you decided to talk with me tonight?”

“Well,” the cowboy grinned, “my horse, Tumbleweed, ain’t much for conversation.” He turned to look at the stout brown horse sniffing cautiously at a green bush in the yellow grass. The white stripe over his nose virtually glowed in the moonlight. His ears flicked each time the cowboy shuffled his feet. “Scaredy cat,” he mumbled. He turned his gaze back towards the moon.

“Say,” the moon began, “have you got any tales about your adventures down there in the valley?”

“Why,” the cowboy beamed, “I thought you’d never ask!” The cowboy put his hands on the ground behind him and slowly lowered himself to the ground, lying on his back to face the moon. He put a fist to his mouth, cleared his throat, and began recounting his tale from the valley.

“I was back home in a small town about a hundred kilometers from where I am today. The sky ain’t quite as spectacular as it is way out here, but there’s enough fresh grass to feed the cattle I raise. It was springtime and the cows and calves were out in the pastures, grazing on the lush grass the season had blessed them with. Now, my ranch is rather close to a large, beautiful forest, home to all kinds of wildlife. I’ve had my fair share of encounters with coyotes, foxes, and even a young black bear made his way to my ranch once, but I’d always been able to scare ‘em off with the sound of a shotgun firing, or even the sound of my dog barking. However, there was one night that will haunt me for the rest of my life. It was pitch black outside. The dark clouds in the sky had blotted out the light from the stars. Even you, my friend, could not be seen behind such a solid curtain of grey. I was sleeping in my bedroom when suddenly, I felt a chill run through my spine. It was nothing like I’d ever experienced before.

There was something so sinister about the way it coursed through me, it felt positively evil. I was so startled by the feeling that I jolted straight up, now sitting upright on my bed. It was so silent that the only thing I could hear was my own heart pounding in my chest. Something was wrong. I grabbed the flashlight on my bedside table and headed out of my room. As I neared the door, I threw on a coat and grabbed my shotgun, which was propped up in its case beside the door. That's when I heard my dog. However, he wasn't barking like he usually does when an animal decides to wander up to my ranch. This time, he was growling, a low, nasty sound. The cattle began to stir. There was an uneasy feeling floating through the air, and every animal felt it. Suddenly, I heard it, that awful, awful sound. Howling. I shone my flashlight in the direction of the eerie noise, and there they were: three grey wolves. They looked at me with their bright, yellow eyes and flashed three sets of gleaming, white teeth. Then, they turned towards the cattle. The cows began running towards the back of the enclosure, but those wolves were mighty fast. I held the sight of my shotgun up to my right eye, but it was so dark that I had trouble aiming. The largest wolf leapt towards a mighty bull, raking his rear with dagger-like claws. The bull cried out in pain but continued running. The second wolf was gaining fast, and as she reached the bull's side, she lifted off the ground onto the bull's broad back, closing her powerful jaws over his neck. The bull let out an anguished moan, and as the third grabbed his back leg 'tween his teeth, he toppled to the ground. As my eyes finally started to adjust, I locked onto the second wolf. I took careful aim and fired. The wolf went limp. At hearing the sound of the gun, the third wolf decided to flee back into the forest. I breathed a sigh of relief. Then, I felt that same icy chill run along my spine. There were three wolves. I grabbed my flashlight and scanned the ranch, expecting to see it feasting on a calf he had picked off.

Nothing. That's when I heard my dog growl. I turned around and there was my dog, the fur on his back standing, his tail up like a flag, facing the biggest wolf of the three. I hadn't realized that wolf had begun stalking me, and if it wasn't for my dog, I might not have been here to tell you this story. My heart began racing and I felt dizzy. As I fumbled with my gun to reload it, I saw the wolf advance on my dog. Suddenly, they were tangled in a mess of teeth, claws, and blood. Finally, the bullet clicked into place and I turned my sight at the two animals, but they were moving too fast, I couldn't get a clear shot. Then, that big wolf had my dog pinned below him, lips pulled back revealing a set of daggers in his jaws. I knew I only had seconds before that set of teeth would be around my dog's neck. I barely aimed, praying it would hit that wolf in just the right spot. It felt like slow motion, I swear I watched that bullet fly towards the beast, hitting him square 'tween his eyes. The wolf fell down. I rushed towards my dog and held him in my arms." The cowboy paused. "He died that night, as I rocked him and sang to him. As a rancher, I've lost calves before, even a sick cow once or twice, and I had been prepared for that, but no one could have ever prepared me for losing my dog like that. He gave his life to save my own and I will never forget that."

The moon was quiet for a long time. "I have been watching Earth for billions of years, and the bond between man and his dog has always captivated me. I have witnessed a great many things in my lifetime, but the loyalty and love a dog gives his owner is perhaps the most special phenomenon I have seen. I sincerely thank you for sharing such a moving story with me."

The cowboy gave a somber smile. "I suppose it's time for me to rest for the night. I thank you kindly for your company this evening."

“And I, you,” the moon replied gently.

As the years passed, their friendship grew into something quite extraordinary, something that no man had ever seen before. The cowboy and the moon spoke every night, until one day, the cowboy grew very sick. Not three days later, he passed away in his sleep.

“It’s beautiful up here,” the cowboy breathed, watching the Earth below.

“Yes, it is quite lovely,” the moon sighed, his eyebrows lowering, his lips spread thinly across his face.

“Is there something wrong, my friend?” The cowboy asked, noticing the moon’s worried expression.

“I fear you will grow bored up here. You have no cattle to ranch, no horses to ride, no places to explore,” the moon confessed.

The cowboy smiled and chuckled softly. “Well,” he began, touching the lasso on his hip, “somebody’s got to keep those stars from falling.”