

Two Tough Hombres

by David Johnson

I always feed cows with dad. I have to, 'cause he couldn't do it without me. He even said so. But today it's cold. It's not very fun. Smokey is having fun though. He likes to roll around in the snow, and chase the mice as soon as dad lifts up a bale, but then after he bites one he spits it out. He doesn't like how they taste. Mommy hates mice too. She doesn't bite them she stands on top of things. I chased my sister with a dead mouse in a trap. It was funny.

I've been trying to move this bale, but it's really big. I called Smokey to come get the mice but he won't come. He just stays next to dad. This bale must be heavier than the ones dad is lifting 'cause I can't get it to move. Finally I just try to roll it and push it over, but the stems are really pokey, and it hurts my hands. It's as pokey as dad's face. But then he shaves, and sometimes he let's me shave with him.

After moving more bales he looks over at me. 'Hey Little Buddy, are you getting cold?'

'No.' I tell him. Only little kids get cold. But maybe if I sit in the pickup for a while it will make me strong enough to lift the bale. So I tell him: 'But maybe I should sit in the pickup so the hay leaves don't get in.'

He gets down off the pickup and puts me in the front seat. Then he goes to the other side and starts the pickup and makes the warm air blow on me. Then he closes the door and pretty soon I can feel the pickup shake as the bales land and the hay leaves fly in from the back window. It's broken.

The guy on the radio is singing 'All my ex's live in Texas . . .' In my mind I see a big X like they have on *Sesame Street*. I wonder where his other letters are. Do they live with the X's, or in 'Tennessee' with him? Seems like a guy should have his letters with him. That's what I would do.

The pickup shakes and the bales go thud. Wow, dad is really strong! When I'm six I bet I can do that too.

I bet dad will ask me to drive the pickup.

As soon as we get to the field the cows come running 'cause they're really hungry. Then dad puts the pickup in four-wheel drive cause that makes it really tough and it goes slow. He tells me to drive towards a little tree way across the field. But the tree isn't really little, it's just far away. It gets bigger when you get closer. I don't even have to stop when a cow gets in front of the pickup 'cause dad says they'll move. Even the baby ones. Their mommies don't like Smokey. Dad says I can't get out of the pickup when we are out in the pasture 'cause they might think I'm a dog and chase me and hurt me. Then dad opens the door and climbs up on top of the hay and it is really high! He doesn't even go out on the ground he climbs on the pickup. He throws the bales down to the cows after cutting the strings. They go 'MAAAHHHHHH'. They don't really go 'moo'.

The door opens again and he gets in as I slide over. He always has to duck down so that he doesn't knock his hat off. He likes cars and pickups where he doesn't have to take off his hat but they are hard to find. He takes off his gloves and drives the pickup again. Smokey is running

next to the pickup because the bales were so high that he couldn't get on and now he is waiting for the pickup to stop but it doesn't.

'Dad, how old are you?'

'Me? I'm forty-four.'

My mind is blown. You can have *two* fours? 'Just think how strong you're gonna be when you turn sixty-six.'

He starts laughing and then tells me I'm cute. It used to make me mad when people said that but mommy said that it's good to be cute and that boys can be both tough and cute at the same time.

'Dad, if a bull and a bear got into a fight, who would win?'

He says: 'Actually, people a long time ago, called the Spanish, they lived out in California where grandma and grandpa are, they used to make them fight. I think the bear almost always won.'

'Oh.'

After a moment I add: 'But what about if the bear was crippled?'

'Well then the bull would probably win.'

'Oh.'

'But what about if both the bear and the bull were crippled?'

He sighs. 'I don't know. How would I know that? I guess whichever one is hurt the least.'

Sometimes he gets mad but this stuff is important so I press on.

'Could you beat up a bear?'

He smiles and is happy again. 'Why of course I could, I could beat up any bear there is.'

'Really?'

He nods, still smiling.

'But what if you were crippled?'