

1X
The two cow ponies, pulling steadily in opposite directions, held the colt helpless until he came down on his side with a thud. Instantly he struggled to his feet, but the sagacious cow ponies tightened the ropes again and down he went. With sheep-skin chaps flying noisily, a cowboy ran across the field and sat down on the colt's head, swearing his enjoyment into his ear. Idaho lay still. It was no use to resist.

"Haw! Haw! This is real sport!" guffawed an on-looker.

"Now will you be good!" railed another.

The man on his head raised himself gingerly and stepped quickly back out of reach.

2X
"He shure is a slow job," commented a red-kerchiefed desert dandy. "He's all fight from his teeth to his heels. He's just downright devilish!"

A lanky dare-devil in waving chaps slouched into the group.

"I'll bet by tomorrow afternoon I can saddle 'im and ride 'im," he threw into the crowd as he spat a brown mouthful against a fence post.

3X
It was their own band, and a sorry looking bunch it was. They were caked with mud, and some were singed on their manes and tails. At their head, the brown mustang confidently swung on toward the ranch. The cowboys stood silently watching the bedraggled beasts approach the open gate of the corral. At the entrance, the leader swung off to the left and took the rim-rock trail. The cowboys watched him swing along up onto the high plateau, as he had done on that earlier day when they followed him with threats and curses. Now their eyes followed him with awe and understanding. He had shown sagacity and unselfishness in helping those of his own kind in dire need, and brought them safe home. But he was still the wild free mustang of the sagebrush barrens, and he would always be. At the top of the trail, before he faded into the wide land of sand and sage which he loved, he paused with his head held high, his beautiful body outlined against the glowing eastern sky. Poole's outlaw had earned his freedom.

Please return!

POOLE'S OUTLAW.

by

Phoebe Finley

I

The sun was setting. The slough that flowed out to the lake curved in and out and coiled among the tules. To the north in the mirage forty miles away, Iron Butte jutted from the very depths of the water. From over the marsh came the distant "quorks" of herons, as the pink and purple faded from the sky and night settled over the face of marsh and mesa. To the south, the sand and sage stretched away for miles. Here between the desert and the lake, was Poole's Ranch.

Jake Marden, tired and thirsty, reined his horse up in front of the ranch house.

"That thar horse, Idaho, is the limit. Cain't do nothin' with 'im, an' I never seen sech a mean critter," he called to the cowboys that came out to meet him.

"He'll kill one of us yet," answered one of them.

"Well, it won't be me. That's a sure cinch," growled another. "I'll likk 'im within an inch of his life!"

"Aw, forget it. Chuck's ready," broke in a third.

Out in one of the farther corrals, stood the object of their conversation, a dark brown, finely built colt. His mouth dripped foam, and his sleek hide was sweaty. He held his head high and gazed longingly off into the sage-brush. The men might break his body, but never his spirit. He would be free some day. ^{Perhaps he} ~~How he~~ hated those creatures who used all their strength to break his will! Lassoos!

Instinctively he fought them.
Whips! ~~He would fight them till he dropped dead.~~ From out over the dusty desert came the long drawn-out wail of a coyote. The horse pricked up his ears. ~~Sneaking creature! Even he was free!~~

Next day the breaking-in began. Idaho was escorted out on the field between two cowboys, each on a prancing pony. On the corral fence sat several buckaroos eager for sport. On the field were other riders on ponies.

"Larrup 'im!" howled one of them from the fence.

"Give it to 'im! ~~Let's see some fun!~~" screeched another.

Let's see some fun!
~~"Seak 'im one for me!"~~ yelled a third.

One of the cowboys on the field spurred his pony forward, at the same time hurling his lasso over his head.

"I'll tame you! You---!"

Idaho stiffened like taught steel and plunged into the air as he felt the rope tighten around *a front hoof.* ~~his neck.~~

"Floor 'im!" howled a cowboy.

Another lasso sang through the air and neatly clipped a hind foot of the colt. ~~X~~ ~~Rearing, the horse came down with a "thud" on his side. He rolled over and was barely on his feet when a heavy quirt struck him squarely between the eyes. A shudder ran through him; blood oozed from his nose and he staggered for a moment.~~

~~"Atta-boy! Paste 'im again!"~~ came a shout from the fence.

~~"Haw! Haw! This is real sport!"~~ guffawed another one.

Idaho reared onto his feet.
~~The colt snorted,~~ wheeled, and made a wild dash for the nearest pony. All the pent-up fury of the last few hours surged over him. But the cow-pony knew his business and side-stepped the frenzied animal. Around the corral raced *the colt.* ~~Idaho. Was this fear-maddened, raging horse the beautiful mustang of the plains? The brutal treatment of the cowboys left his glossy brown coat covered with dust and~~

~~bleed. His body was bruised, and there were cuts on his legs. But his spirit was that of the wild, care-free mustang of the desert.~~

~~Could they break that spirit?~~

That evening in his heavy stockade corral, the sore and perhaps as the bruised and battered Idaho stood gazing into suspicious Idaho gazed into the deepening dusk.

~~the deepening dusk that evening, he again wondered how long it would be before he was free, and if so, how much more he longed for freedom tonight than he had longed last night. There was an intense something inside of him that called for the desert sand and rim rock that lay beyond the heavy bars of the corral.~~

Could the cowboys change Idaho ~~from a wild, vicious beast~~ into a meek, obedient horse? Their job was a hard one. Idaho not only did not care to become meek and obedient, but was determined not to. His blood was the blood of his wild ancestors, raised on the vast stretches of the sage-brush barrens. His spirit was the spirit of the roving mustang, free and unhampered. Corrals, saddles and riders were new to him. He could not understand the noise and the excitement. He was not utterly vicious and untamable, but fear turned him to frenzy. What did cowboys know of his feelings?

2X ~~"He shure is a slow job," commented one of them.~~

~~"Treat 'im rough's my motto," suggested another.~~

~~"Vicious ain't no name for that beast. He's just downright devilish. He's all fight from his teeth to his heels."~~

~~"Well, under the treatment he's gettin', he'll calm down sooner or later."~~

~~"Hebbe so. But he's got a heap of spice and endurance. It'll take some buckaroo to tame 'im."~~

~~"I'll bet by tomorrow afternoon I can saddle 'im and ride 'im," boasted a lanky dare-devil in chaps.~~

"I'll take you up on that," said the ranch foreman.

The next morning the boys succeeded in saddling Idaho. That was as far as they could get. In the afternoon they tried blindfolding him. Idaho, sensing new trouble, pawed the ground and could not stand still.

~~"Tighten the twist on his nose!" called one of the men.~~
~~A stab of pain pierced the horse's nose as the cowboy gave the rope a vicious jerk.~~

~~"That's the ticket!"~~ ⁹ "Cinch the saddle tighter. I don't want it to slip on me," ordered Skinny.

The cinches were tightened until Idaho's eyes almost popped out.

"Ki-yi! Ki-yi! Here goes, fellows!" yelled Skinny as he landed in the saddle and the blindfold was ~~removed~~ ^{flung off.}

~~The bunch of boys scattered for the fence.~~
~~The other cowboys jumped to get out of the way.~~ Idaho took a startled glance at his back, lowered his head and threw out his hind legs. ~~His rider touched him with the spurs.~~
~~Skinny dug the spurs into his flanks.~~ The mustang bawled angrily and rocketed into the air. His head and forelegs swung to the left; his hind quarters weaved to the right. He came down stiff-legged, and the jar was appalling. Round and round the corral he raced, his ears laid flat. ~~Skinny lashed him at every jump, raking him fore and aft with his spurs.~~ ^{Skinny hung in the stirrups, his arms waving wildly; his hair straightening in the wind.} Suddenly the horse with a maniacal scream put his utmost effort into a final plunge. The rider hurtled over his head and landed in the dust. Idaho lunged forward and battered the cowboy with both front feet, all the while emitting piercing screams of hatred and anger.

~~"Get a gun!" yelled a cowboy from the fence.~~ ^{came the shout.}

The big corral gate swung open, and men on horses rushed in. Unexpectedly Idaho stopped and made a wild dash out through the open gate, thrusting aside the cow ponies as he went. Out over the plain he

raced, leaving a trail of dust in his wake. Away he went to the rocky plateaus of his birth.

II.

Things had been quiet around the ranch for some time. The boys seemed to lie a little later in their bunks in the mornings. The flapjacks and coffee didn't taste just right. The cowboys were irritated at something, but they didn't know just what.

One afternoon Jake loped in on his pinto.

"There's trouble down in the lower pasture. Somethin's stampedin' the horses," he called.

"Maybe a bad coyote," suggested a cowboy.

"Let's go down and see."

Two cowponies with their slouching riders ambled down toward the tules around the lake. As they approached the marsh they could see the heads of the horses in the distance.

"Look!" shouted one of the men.

As they swung around a bunch of tules, they were just in time to see the large sleek form of a horse break away and disappear out toward the treacherous bogs.

"*Idaho!*" *came the whisper.*

~~"Well, I'll be!" snorted a cowboy.~~

Out in front of them, mired belly-deep in the muck, floundered one of the horses.

"More of that outlaw's dirty work. We'll have to lasso this horse to pull him out."

~~They threw two ropes around the mired horse and finally got him out on solid ground.~~

"What's botherin' me is, how did that outlaw get around here

into the tule marsh from the desert without goin' through the ranch?" said Jake.

"He seems to have a secret way of his own through the bogs. If we don't get rid of him, he'll drown the whole band for us."

A few days later, ^a~~the whole~~ bunch of horses ^{was}~~were~~ missing and they could not be found in the marsh or out on the desert. For days nothing was seen or heard of them. Poole decided they had been led off and hidden by the wily mustang. Nor was he far from right. One day a rider from one of the other ranches reported that he had seen a band of stray horses on the opposite side of the lake down among the tules. ~~A bunch of~~ Riders from Poole's ranch set out to ^{investigate}~~capture the~~ ~~horses~~. They found them quietly nibbling the grass in an unfrequented part of the lake border. The outlaw was not with them. He had escaped.

III.

It was a hot July afternoon. Down in the lower pasture among the tules, the horses milled incessantly, fighting the swarms of mosquitoes that hung in clouds over the low lands and the lake. The low rumbling of the stamping bunch could be heard hour after hour. The animals switched their tails, pawed the ground, and rolled under the biting pests, scattering clouds of gray dust. A hot wind swept across the sage and out over the lake. The air was heavy and smelled of smoke. There was a rustling among the dry tules. Out of the ^{mass of reeds}~~tules~~ not far away a thin column wavered into the air. Then a gray ^{billow}~~cloud~~ of smoke rolled up and was swept along on the breeze toward the horses. The air became more oppressive. **P** The outlaw, Idaho, had been hanging around the band all afternoon. He was now pacing irritably about with the rest. Suddenly

he threw up his nostrils and sniffed the air. The smoke increased to a tumbling mass. The air was full of it. Rapidly it spread through the high tules. As the band of horses was enveloped, they knew what it meant.

For a mile wide the border of Malheur Lake is rimmed with tules, or club-rushes, from eight to ten feet high, with winding channels and boggy pathways weaving in and out. Each year the tules grow up and dying down in the fall, they form a heavy mat of dried reeds. Out toward the edge of the water are floating islands of these matted reeds, where the great colonies of water birds are, white pelicans, herons, terns, grebes, ducks, geese, sandhill cranes and many little waders. In some places the roots are fairly solid, but it is like treading on a crust of snow, for it is uncertain just when and where it will break through. The winding trails in the tule marsh are an intricate maze. Only a man or beast with a seventh sense of location ~~could~~^{can} keep from getting lost. Many a man has spent the night on the lake in an open boat, because he could not find his way ~~through the tule maze~~ to the shore. Cattle and horses ~~were~~^{are} accustomed to wander at will along these trails and spend the night wherever the dark overtakes them.

Bogging in the tule marsh is always a danger, but with the vast beds of dry tinder, nothing means so much danger as the start of a tule fire. In summer the ranchers are always on the watch. Even the stock are quick to get the premonition ~~of danger~~ when a fire starts. Many animals and occasionally a man are trapped.

Pandemonium reigned over the wide wastes and the water. Myriads of birds were winging up into the air, clamoring with fright and in haste to get away. Heavy pelicans sailed over the rolling smoke like white ferry-boats on a rough sea. Swift-winged silvery terns whirled and

flashed excitedly, piercing the air with their sharp cries. Far and away from the middle of the lake, came the ringing bugle of the sand-hill crane as he joined the crying chorus. Down in the trodden platform nests among the burning reeds, the young and helpless baby birds gasped and smothered in the smoke and heat.

The brown mustang leader of the band knew the danger instantly when he smelled smoke, and he conveyed his fear to the others. The crackling of the flames and the roar of the fire were coming nearer. Draughts of hot air swept over the horses. A wall of fire now barred the way toward the ranch house. Frenzy seized them and they rushed this way and that. The big horse threw up his head and stood like a statue for a moment. The others now huddled about him. The roar and crackling of the flames drowned out every other sound. Burning bits of tules fell hissing into the pools around the band. The way out to the west was barred by fire. Idaho whirled and took a straight line ahead of the wind and toward the treacherous bogs. In the crisis instinct told him what to do. He would save the maddened and helpless beasts behind him. He swung to the east where the trails were intricate. Once he slipped into a boggy place, but reared and pulled himself out. On he went, twisting and turning through the network of tules, his companions following in his footsteps.

IV.

At the ranch the cowboys were just coming in from the desert with a bunch of cattle.

"Heard any news?" queried one.

"Naw, nothing much. Things are dead."

"See Idaho anywhere?"

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"I'll tame you! You---!"

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"Naw, nothing much. Things are dead."

"See Idaho anywhere?"

"He's been hanging around the lower pasture."

"What's that?" Marden pointed toward the smoke rising from the tules.

"Tule fire! Get ropes, lassoes and wet gunnysacks!" yelled his companion.

By this time, everyone on the ranch had been aroused. The men were soon rushing toward the marsh. Two of the cowboys rounded up some cattle and drove them off to safety. Others swung out in the hope of getting around the fire to save the horses. The spread of the flames was too rapid. Through the late afternoon and into the night, the cowboys hunted for the band. There was only one conclusion. The horses must have been driven into the treacherous bogs and drowned, or they were trapped in the rapid fire that swept the tule maze.

As the pink rays of the morning sun came from behind the distant line of the Steins Mountains, the ranch foreman and two cowboys, tired and discouraged, were returning from the long hunt down the east border of the lake. In the distance down the road, they saw a dust. Then closer, they made out the forms of horses. It was a sorry looking bunch. They were caked with mud, and some were singed on their manes and tails. As they approached, the leader swung off to the left. When the boys opened the gate of the corral, they turned to see Idaho, the leader of the band, going up the rim rock trail. At the top he paused with his head held high, his body outlined against the glowing eastern sky. On into the high plateau he went, the wide land of sand and sage which he loved. Poole's outlaw had earned his freedom.