



JACK SCHAEFER

THE BIG RANGE

马小说

Pat Keely



PENGUIN BOOKS 216

2594

PENGUIN BOOKS

1267

THE BIG RANGE

JACK SCHAEFER

笑小说



Here are ten tales about ten people in which romanticism and realism run hand-in-hand. They tell of lives broken and they tell too of lives made whole by resolute acts of will, whether in the long living or the brief dying. They are primarily stories of character, attempts to depict the raw material of human individuality through action and plot. Each was based on an actual incident of recorded fact. The background details were derived from Jack Schaefer's study of the diaries and journals of the Western frontier. The cast is various: rancher, sheepherder, homesteader, town settler, soldier, miner, cowboy. Yet the essential purpose is the same throughout: to establish a distinct and individual major character and pit him against a specific human problem and show how he rose to meet it. And all of them, the characters and the stories that evolve from them, are conditioned by the wide-open spaces of the old West, in which the energies and capabilities of men and women, for good or for evil, were unleashed. It is little Miley Bennett taking care of his talking sheep in the Big Horn country who supplies the title and the underlying theme of this book, 'It's big, ain't it? Makes a man feel big too.'

Cover illustration by Pat Keely

J

17
E

I712.45
E6084

THE BIG RANGE 人文書庫

Jack Schaefer



PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex
AUSTRALIA: Penguin Books Pty Ltd, 762 Whitehorse Road,
Mitcham, Victoria

—

Some of these stories were originally published from
1951-3 in *Collier's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and
Argosy. The book was first published in the U.S.A.
in 1953 and in Great Britain by André Deutsch in 1955.

Published in Penguin Books 1958

Made and printed in Great Britain
by Hunt, Barnard & Co, Ltd
Aylesbury

TO MY FATHER
CARL WALTER SCHAEFER



CONTENTS

Part One

JEREMY RODOCK	11
MILEY BENNETT	43
EMMET DUTROW	59
GENERAL PINGLEY	75

Part Two

SERGEANT HOUCK	89
KITTURA REMSBERG	116
MAJOR BURL	136
ELVIE BURDETTE	155
COOTER JAMES	175
JOSIAH WILLETT	194

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I LIKE to write about the wide open spaces when they were still open and their wideness could enter into the people, some of the people, who left life's footprints on them. . . .

Back in 1940, after fifteen years of research and study, Harold E. Briggs published his *Frontiers Of The North-west*. A careful scholar, a competent craftsman, an uncompromising historian. A sound, thorough, authoritative book. As Dr Briggs approached the end of the writing, some of the wideness of the land and the people and the historical movement he was chronicling entered into him. *The true story of western settlement, he wrote, is best told when the broken lives it exacted are recorded, when romanticism and realism run hand-in-hand through the narrative.*

Here are ten tales about ten people in which romanticism and realism run hand-in-hand. They tell of lives broken and they tell too of lives made whole by resolute acts of will, whether in the long living or the brief dying. They are primarily stories of character, attempts to depict the raw material of human individuality through action and plot. Each was based, in germinal beginning, on an actual incident of recorded fact. The background details were derived from my own study of the diaries and journals of the Western frontier. The cast is various: rancher, sheepherder, homesteader, town settler, soldier, miner, cowboy. Yet the essential purpose is the same throughout: to establish a distinct and individual major character and pit him against a specific human problem and show how he rose to meet it. And all of them, the characters and the stories that evolve from them, are conditioned by the wide-open spaces of the old West, in which the energies and capabilities of men and women, for good or for evil, were unleashed on an individual basis as they had rarely been before or elsewhere in human history. The four stories of the first section are grouped together because they are all first-person narratives told by the same narrator. I note now what I did not when I was writing these stories, that this narrator, John, has a habit of taking over the telling when the tale is grim, edging towards tragic. The six stories of the second section stand each alone in the sense that each is told from a separate viewpoint, three by first-person narrators within the story and three by impersonal outside onlookers in the traditional fiction form. The two types have been arranged in alternate order to avoid confusion of the 'I' viewpoints.

It is little Miley Bennett taking care of his talking sheep in the Big

Horn country who supplies the title and the underlying theme of this book. *It's big, ain't it? Makes a man feel big too.* I would like to expand that theme here but realize that my stories must do that for me. So, as Cooter James would say: *Won't.*

JACK SCHAEFER

Part One

JEREMY RODOCK

JEREMY RODOCK was a hanging man when it came to horse thieves. He hanged them quick and efficient, and told what law there was about it afterwards. He was a big man in a many ways and not just a shadow-making size. People knew him. He had a big ranch – a horse ranch – about the biggest in the Territory, and he loved horses, and no one, not even a one of his own hands – and they were careful picked – could match him at breaking and gentling his big geldings for any kind of road work. Tall they were, those horses, and rawboned, out of Western mares by some hackney stallions he'd had brought from the East, and after you'd been working with cowponies they'd set you back on your heels when you first saw them. But they were stout in harness with a fast, swinging trot that could take the miles and a heavy coach better than anything else on hooves. He was proud of those horses, and he had a right to be. I know. I was one of his hands for a time. I was with him once when he hanged a pair of rustlers. And I was with him the one time he didn't.

That was a long ways back. I was young then with a stretch in my legs, about topping twenty, and Jeremy Rodock was already an old man. Maybe not so old, maybe just about into his fifties, but he seemed old to me – old the way a pine gets when it's through growing, standing tall and straight and spreading strong, but with the greying grimness around the edges that shows it's settling to the long last stand against the winds and the storms. I remember I was surprised to find he could still outwork any of his men and be up before them in the morning. He was tough fibre clear through, and he took me on because I had a feeling for horses and they'd handle for me without much fuss, and that was what he wanted. 'You'll earn your pay,' he said, 'and not act your

age more than you can help, and if your sap breaks out in sass, I'll slap you against a gatepost and larrup the hide off your back.' And he would, and I knew it. And he taught me plenty about horses and men, and I worked for him the way I've never worked for another man.

That was the kind of work I liked. We always paired for it, and Rodock was letting me side him. The same men, working as a team, always handled the same horses from the time they were brought in off the range until they were ready and delivered. They were plenty wild at first, four- and five-year-olds with free-roaming strong in their legs, not having had any experience with men and ropes from the time they were foaled except for the few days they were halter-broke and bangtailed as coming two-year-olds. They had their growth and life was running in them, and it was a pleasure working with them.

Rodock's system was quick and thorough; you could tell a Rodock horse by the way he'd stand when you wanted him to stand and give all he had when you wanted him to move, and respond to the reins like he knew what you wanted almost before you were certain yourself. We didn't do much with saddle stock except as needed for our personal use. Rodock horses were stage horses. That's what they were bred and broke for. They were all right for riding, maybe better than all right if you could stick their paces, because they sure could cover ground, but they were best for stage work.

We'd rope a horse out of the corral and take him into a square stall and tie a hind leg up to his belly so he couldn't even try to kick without falling flat, and then start to get acquainted. We'd talk to him till he was used to voices, and slap him and push him around till he knew we weren't going to hurt him. Then we'd throw old harness on him and yank it off and throw it on again, and keep at this till he'd stand without flicking an inch of hide no matter how hard the harness hit. We'd take him out and let the leg down and lead him around with the old harness flapping till that wouldn't mean any more to him than a breeze blowing. We'd fit him with reins and one man would walk in front with the lead-rope and the other behind holding the reins and ease him

into knowing what they meant. And all the time we'd speak sharp when he acted up and speak soft and give him a piece of carrot or a fistful of corn when he behaved right.

Hitching was a different proposition. No horse that'll work for you because he wants to, and not just because he's beat into it, takes kindly to hitching. He's bound to throw his weight about the first time or two and seem to forget a lot he's learned. We'd take our horse and match him with a well-broke trainer, and harness the two of them with good leather to a stout wagon. We'd have half-hobbles on his front feet fastened to the spliced ends of a rope that ran up through a ring on the underside of his girth and through another ring on the wagon tongue and up to the driving seat. Then the two of us would get on the seat and I'd hold the rope and Rodock'd take the reins. The moment we'd start to move, the trainer heaving into the traces, things would begin to happen. The new horse would be mighty surprised. He'd likely start rearing or plunging. I'd pull on the rope and his front legs would come out from under him and down he'd go on his nose. After trying that a few times, he'd learn he wasn't getting anywhere and begin to steady and remember some of the things he'd learned before. He'd find he had to step along when the wagon moved, and after a while he'd find that stepping was smoothest and easiest if he did his share of the pulling. Whenever he'd misbehave or wouldn't stop when he should, I'd yank on the rope and his nose would hit the soft dirt. It was surprising how quick he'd learn to put his weight into the harness and pay attention to the boss riding behind him. Sometimes, in a matter of three weeks, we'd have one ready to take his place in a four-horse pull of the old coach we had for practice runs. That would be a good horse.

Well, we were readying twenty-some teams for a new stage line when this happened. Maybe it wouldn't have happened, not the way it did, if one of the horses hadn't sprung a tendon and we needed a replacement. I don't blame myself for it, and I don't think Rodock did either, even though the leg went bad when I pulled the horse down on his nose. He was something of a hollow-head anyway, and wasn't

learning as he should and had kept on trying to smash loose every time the wagon moved.

As I say, this horse pulled a tendon, not bad, but enough to mean a limp, and Rodock wouldn't send a limping horse along even to a man he might otherwise be willing to trim on a close deal. Shoo him out on the range, he told me, and let time and rest and our good grass put him in shape for another try next year. 'And saddle my bay,' he said, 'and take any horse you'd care to sit, son. We'll ramble out to the lower basin and bring in another and maybe a spare in case something else happens.'

That was why we were riding out a little before noon on a hot day, leaving the others busy about the buildings, just the two of us loafing along towards the first of the series of small natural valleys on Rodock's range where he kept the geldings and young studs. We were almost there, riding the ridge, when he stopped and swung in the saddle towards me. 'Let's make a day of it, son. Let's mosey on to the next basin and have a look-see at the mares there and this year's crop of foals. I like to see the little critters run.'

That's what I mean. If we hadn't been out already, he never would have taken time to go there. We'd checked the mares a few weeks before and tallied the foals and seen that everything was all right. If that horse hadn't gone lame, it might have been weeks, maybe months, before any of us would have gone up that way again.

We moseyed on, not pushing our horses because we'd be using them hard on the way back, cutting out a couple of geldings and hustling them home. We came over the last rise and looked down into that second small valley, and there wasn't a single thing in sight. Where there ought to have been better than forty mares and their foals, there wasn't a moving object, only the grass shading to deeper green down the slope to the trees along the stream and fading out again up the other side of the valley.

Jeremy Rodock sat still in his saddle. 'I didn't think anyone would have the nerve,' he said, quiet and slow. He put his horse into a trot around the edge of the valley, leaning over and looking at the ground, and I followed. He stopped

at the head of the valley where it narrowed and the stream came through, and he dismounted and went over the ground carefully. He came back to his horse and leaned his chest against the saddle, looking over it and up at me.

'Here's where they were driven out,' he said, still quiet and slow. 'At least three men. Their horses were shod. Not more than a few days ago. A couple of weeks and there wouldn't have been any trail left to follow.' He looked over his saddle and studied me. 'You've been with me long enough, son,' he said, 'for me to know what you can do with horses. But I don't know what you can do with that gun you're carrying. I wish I'd brought one of the older men. You better head back and give the word. I'm following this trail.'

'Mister Rodock,' I said, 'I wish you wouldn't make so many remarks about my age. One thing a man can't help is his age. But anywhere you and that bay can go, me and this roan can follow. And as for this gun I'm carrying, I can hit anything with it you can and maybe a few things you'd miss.'

He looked at me over his saddle and his eyebrows twitched a little upwards.

'Careful, son,' he said. 'That comes close to being sass.' His jawline tightened, and he had that old-pine look, grey and grim and enduring. 'You'll have hard riding,' he said, and swung into his saddle and put his horse into a steady trot along the trail, and that was all he said for the next four-five hours.

Hard riding it was. Trotting gets to a man even if he's used to being on a horse. It's a jolting pace, and after a time your muscles grow plain tired of easing the jolts and the calluses on your rump warm up and remind you they're there. But trotting is the way to make time if you really intend to travel. Some people think the best way is to keep to a steady lope. That works on the back of your neck after a while and takes too much out of the horse after the first couple of hours. Others like to run the horse, then give him a breather, then run him again, and keep that up. You take it all out of him the first day doing that. Trotting is the best way. A good horse can trot along steady, his shoulders and

legs relaxed and his hooves slapping down almost by their own weight, do it hour after hour and cover his fifty-to-sixty miles with no more than a nice even sweat and be ready to do the same the next day and the next after that, and a lot longer than any man riding him can hope to take it.

Rodock was trotting, and his long-legged bay was swinging out the miles, and far as I could tell the old man was made of iron and didn't even know he was taking a beating. I knew I was, and that roan I'd picked because he looked like a cowpony I'd had once, was working with his shorter legs to hold the pace, and I was shifting my weight from one side to the other about every fifteen minutes so I'd burn only half of my rump at a time.

It was dark night when Rodock stopped by water and swung down and hobbled his horse and unsaddled, and I did the same.

'Might miss the trail in the dark,' he said. 'Anyways, they're moving slow on account of the colts. I figure we've gained at least a day on them already. Maybe more. Better get some sleep. We'll be travelling with the first light.' He settled down with his saddle for a pillow and I did the same, and after a few minutes his voice drifted out of the darkness. 'You came along right well, son. Do the same to-morrow and I'll shut up about your age.'

Next thing I knew he was shaking me awake and the advance glow of the sun was climbing the sky, and he was squatting beside me with a hatful of berries from the bushes near the water. I ate my share and we saddled and started on, and after I shook the stiffness I felt fresh and almost chipper. The trail was snaking in wide curves south-west, following the low places, but rising, as the whole country was, gradually up through the foothills towards the first tier of mountains.

About regular breakfast time, when the sun was a couple of hours over the horizon behind us, Rodock waved to me to come alongside close.

'None of this makes sense,' he said, without slacking pace. 'A queer kind of rustling run-off. Mares and foals. I've tangled with a lot of thievery in my time, but all of it was