

## THE BONES BROTHERS

You could search all of Texas and still not find two cowboys as lazy as Slim and Leroy Bones. Folks called them the Lazy Bones Brothers because the boys were always thinking up ways to get out of hard work. Slim and Leroy were as different as two brothers could be. Slim was short, round as a tumbleweed, and mighty proud of his brains. "I've got more brains," he used to tell Leroy, "than a hive has bees." Leroy was a tall drink of water. He was so thin that when he turned sideways, you had to look right careful or you'd swear that he'd disappeared completely. He didn't have much in the way of brains, but his friendly grin could coax the shy jack rabbits out of their burrows for a neighborly game of tag. Mostly, the brothers had a fine time riding the range. They slept under the stars and practiced their lassoing on cacti and rocks and any thing else that didn't try to run away.

Every once in a while, though, they had to earn money so they could restock their supply of red beans, coffee, and licorice. (Leroy was partial to licorice.) That was how they came to build the fence around Pops Merryweather's southern pasture. Pops was the richest rancher this side of the Texas panhandle. He'd heard stories about the Lazy Bones Brothers, but Slim and Leroy didn't charge much, and Pops never could resist a bargain. So he hired them to put up fence posts and string barbed wire around his pasture. It was squalling fierce when the Bones boys rode onto Pop's ranch. Now, squalls don't happen every day in Texas, but when they do, the temperature drops faster than a hawk diving after its breakfast, and the wind wails and moans like a fussy ghost.

Slim and Leroy didn't want to go out in the storm, but Pops

wanted the fence put up that day, and he wouldn't take no for an answer. Well, the Bones boys rode out to the southern pasture, and sure enough, the ground was frozen harder than a cast-iron frying pan. The brothers' faces drooped when they saw that. Digging holes and pounding fence posts into frozen ground was mighty strenuous work. Slim squatted back on his heels and pondered how to put up the fence without digging any holes. Suddenly, Leroy screamed. "I pricked my thumb on a rattler!" he hollered. "You got bit by a rattler?" Slim yelled. "No," said Leroy, sucking his thumb. "I said I pricked myself. Look here." He held up a snake frozen straight as any arrow. "Watch out the tail's fearful pointy"

"H'm," said Slim. He took the frozen rattler from his brother and rubbed his finger across its needle-sharp tail. "This gives me an idea," he said. "Give me that hammer." Slim hammered that snake into the dirt just like an enormous nail. The snake's tail cut deep and easy into the frozen ground. By the time Slim finished pounding, the snake stuck straight up into the air and made the prettiest fence post you ever did see! The boys let out a whoop and threw their hats high. They collected all the frozen snakes they could find and hammered them into the ground. Then they wrapped those snaky fence posts with barbed wire and rode back to the ranch to collect their pay.

Pops couldn't believe they'd finished the fence, so he rode out to investigate. Sure enough, he saw wire strung from fence post to fence post as far as the eye could see. "I reckon you boys aren't quite as lazy as people say you are," Pops said as he paid them. The brothers thanked him (they'd been brought up to say please and thank you), said good-bye, and trotted off. Three days later the sun thawed those frozen snakes.

They wriggled off, taking the fence with them. Pops never could quite figure out what had happened.