

The Basics of Fundamentals - preview

Prologue

Lester Bean had noticed the signs for the past several weeks. Trash strewn along a nearly straight line to a low spot in his fence. That morning the trash was heavier and the bottom two strands of his wire had been cut. Air moving towards him was thick and bitter.

“Easy...” he commanded as his quarter horse reacted to the smell. Pulling on the reins, he turned her head away, but there was no escaping it. The rider leaned forward and reached down to stroke the underside of her neck.

“Steady, Sheba...whoa now,” the rancher spoke softly this time.

The location was twenty miles in most directions from anything else. Lester Bean’s ranch swept down near the Rio Grande and a shallow ford in that river across from Coahuila, Mexico. He kept a three-strand fence along that line simply to keep his wandering cattle in place, or at least he tried to.

“Damned Coyotes,” Bean exclaimed under his breath as he climbed down from the saddle. Sheba continued to pull her head back in attempts to avoid the odor. He tied her to a post to be sure she would stay put and wrapped his bandana around her nose.

The “coyotes” he referred to were the two-legged kind, the ones who smuggled human cargo into the country. He could see the skeletal remains, of what was to have been the federal border fence, several yards below his. The rusting steel standards, pieces of mesh and concertina wire hanging limply from them, still brought anger to him. Lester was not a man who wasted time on anger or hate. But the trash left just beyond his property, on his side of where the border fence should have stood, stirred emotion in him.

This should not be happening, he told himself again. But lately, it had been worse.

Finding a large stick to pry with, he scattered one pile of debris to see what it was. The noise now spooked his normally steady horse.

“Easy, girl.” He stretched his empty hand toward the horse, “steady, now.” Empty cans of fish, lots of them, and wrappers from saltines had caused the odd sound. Rags, that had been makeshift shoes, were also among what he could make out in the pile. Their smell, along with the fish cans, created the pungent aroma.

He walked south toward the highway, which was nearly a mile away. US 90 ran along a stretch of south Texas east and south from Bean's land. Tire tracks lay in the sand. They had been partially rubbed away with a section of brush.

Somebody brought in supplies, Lester thought as he grabbed his phone. *This is big... and organized.*

Service this far out was minimal at best and he was beyond range. Lester walked at a brisk pace back to his fence line. He slid under the gap in the wire. Protecting his hat carefully, he untied Sheba and then reached forward to retrieve his bandana.

As Lester grasped the saddle horn he thought he heard it. He would later tell his wife he had, but he wasn't really sure. Sharp pain can blur the mind.

The round pierced his right side from the rear and went through his right arm just above the elbow. The bullet then bounced off the heavy leather of the cantle binder on his saddle, leaving blood and a scuffmark. Leaning forward toward Sheba's nose had saved his life.

"Git!" he screamed and Sheba lunged forward. Lester's adrenaline provided the strength for him to pull himself up and onto the saddle. Slipping and sliding on the slick leather surface, he held on with his good arm until his feet found the stirrups and balance was restored.

Lester heard more shots, three or four at least. Those were what he was sure of. That sound, the atomic powered bees whizzing past his head, was undeniable. He'd heard them before in Afghanistan.

Instinctively, his horse jogged right, then left as though she was dogging a calf. Sheba continued her dodge until they were several hundred yards away and out of range. Lester held on for dear life with his left hand and tried to ignore the pain. When the ride finally straightened, he lay across the saddle and Sheba's neck, his wounded right arm flailing like a rag.

It was twenty minutes later when they rode up to his ranch house.

Lester's wife, Abby, called 911 in a near state of panic. The service answered on the fifth ring.

"Pecos County Sheriff, is this an emergency?"

"Yes," Abby was crying. "My husband has been shot."

"Where are you, ma'am?"

"Near the Big Canyon... northeast of Dryden." Abby was regaining her composure. Lester needed her now and she knew that.

