Hard to Kill

Neil C. Gustafson*
A Brown Swiss cow and five men were there. Other people were watching, but only five men were chasing the cow. On the road bank, talking very loudly, were seven or eight young boys. A farmer and his wife sat in a green Chevy pick-up near the entrance to the city dump watching. A tractor slowed and the driver and his son dismounted when it stopped to lean on the huge tire to watch. To watch them chase a cow.

The Brown Swiss cow ran and dodged around the bushes and piles of tin cans of the city dump. In pursuit were the five men, but the cow managed to evade the badly tossed ropes. Only two men had ropes. The others merely chased and yelled at the cow that was now foaming at her mouth and bellowing. The cow ran into a fence and fell down. A half-cheer from the crowd and the chasers. She got up very quickly and was faced with the five men closing in on her. Coughing, her eyes wild and her stomach bouncing; she breathed hard. The men closed within twenty feet. The cow stiffened and ran over the man with the whiskers. The other four took out after her. The whiskered man got up swearing, rubbed his leg and ran after the cow with his rope. Manure on his pants.

Several more men joined in the chase, all of them yelling "son-of-a-bitch" and some of them laughing. Her mouth dripping. Twenty were on the road now. Nice crowd.

The Brown Swiss cow started to run up the bank of the dump entrance road. Exhausted, her front feet gave way and

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she fell heavy on her head bending her neck back. Quickly, the whiskered man jumped on her straddling her neck with legs. He slipped the rope around her neck and drew it tight. The cow's eyes rolled wildly, as she gasped for oxygen to regain her strength. The other rope now bound her hind legs.

The men talked loudly, and the spectators all nodded and voiced their approval. The cow now lay quietly on the bank. Everyone laughed when a man hit her with his cane and called her a "bitch cow." Some kicked her. She lay quietly.

Then the noise of the voices stopped and the men looked at each other.

"Well, who brought the gun?" asked the tallest man as he lit a cigarette.

Most of the men went for their pockets to get a cigarette; but no one answered.

"Hell! didn't anyone bring a gun?" he added.

The talk started again; no one had brought a gun. The rendering truck drove in the lane.

"Christ!" said the whiskered man noticing the truck, "we got us a cow to kill, but we ain't got no gun to shoot her with." He laughed; so did the others.

The rendering truck backed down the entrance. Out of the cab jumped the driver who quickly opened the big rear door. In the truck lay several carcasses. A cable with a hook on the end was pulled down to the cow by the truck driver.

"She ain't dead!" he said as though he were shocked.

"Nobody's got a gun," answered one. The men stood scratching and looking at each other.

The Brown Swiss cow lay quietly.

"Hell, I got a knife! Let's cut her neck," said the tall man as he reached into his pocket. Several other men suddenly reached into their pockets removing knives.

"I'll cut her goddamn throat," said the whiskered man huskily, "she's my cow. Gimme the knife, Tom!" He opened the blade and knelt beside the cow's head. She winced and tried to move as he jabbed the blade in her neck, but the men held her down. Blood ran on the ground. The men watched as he stabbed her again; drawing no blood this time. The Brown Swiss moaned.

"This is goin' to take a damn long time for her to bleed
to death," he said as he wiped the blade on his pants and closed it.

"Here, hit her in the head with this, said one handing a pipe to the whiskered man.

He took it and the pipe smashed across her long nose. Her eyes rolled and her neck tightened as the bone caved. Blood flowed more easily from the neck wound. The cow still was not dead. Her eyes, once big and scared, were dull and she lay still again.

"Hell, she's close enough to dead," said the truck driver as he hooked the cable to her hind leg. He went back to the truck and started the motor that wound the cable into the truck box. Following her body was a small trail of blood on flattened grass. The crowd started to leave and the Brown Swiss disappeared into the truck where she lay on several carcasses. The five men who had chased her stood alone lighting cigarettes.

"Bitch cow," said the whiskered one, "damn hard to kill." He laughed and so did the others.

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A scribbled bluebook
proudly displaying an "A"
hell—a pass-fail course

—Janet Brown