

The Lost Shepherd

Short Story

Micah Hefner

Capitol Hill Assembly of God

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Word Count: 1,189

## The Lost Shepherd

The worst snowstorm of the winter swirled around Jeremiah Buel and his brother, Andrew, as they attempted to move their herd to a more sheltered pasture. However, one steer refused to cooperate.

“Cut him off! He’s headed your way!” Jeremiah yelled.

Andrew rode in front of the steer, but it veered away.

“I got him!” Jeremiah called, swinging his lasso in a much-practiced arc. The loop settled securely around the steer’s neck.

“Great work!” Andrew congratulated.

“I’m freezin’ out here,” Jeremiah grumbled as a gust of snow hit him.

“Yeah, we prob’ly got six inches already, and there ain’t no sign of stoppin’. You go on in. I’ll count the cattle,” Andrew offered.

“Much obliged,” Jeremiah replied with a tip of his hat. Turning his horse around, he headed for their cozy cabin. After he put his horse in the barn, Jeremiah fought his way toward the cabin through the drifting snow. He had to pry the ice-bound door open just to get inside.

“It’s miserable cold,” Jeremiah complained out loud.

*There ain’t no one here to answer you, you fool,* Jeremiah thought sheepishly to himself. Hanging his wet clothes on pegs near the fireplace, he accidentally knocked off the worn, dust-covered Bible lying on the mantle. It had been his mother’s treasured book, so he carefully returned it to its place of honor. Again, he experienced the overwhelming emptiness that had dogged his every step since his mother’s death two years before.

A blast of frigid air interrupted Jeremiah’s memories as Andrew stumbled into the cabin with a worried announcement, “One-Horned Nellie’s calf is missin’!”

“What?” Jeremiah replied.

“It ain’t with her or any of the other cows.”

“Are you sure? It’s hard to see anything in this storm.”

“Of course, I’m sure! We gotta’ find it,” Andrew insisted.

“Yeah, but it won’t be easy. The snow’s prob’ly waist deep in places by now, not to mention that you can’t see ten feet in front of you,” observed Jeremiah as the wind howled outside.

Andrew continued, “I know it’s goin’ to be hard, but we’ve gotta’ try. What’s more, Mom would want us to go after that one helpless animal!”

Recognizing the dogged persistence in his brother’s tone, Jeremiah reluctantly gave in. “All right, let’s head out.”

He pulled on his heavy sheepskin jacket. Then he beat the ice off of his still frozen gloves and thrust his hands inside their frigid dampness. *This is going to be miserable*, he thought, convinced that one lone calf could not be found in this storm.

With their bandanas pulled up over their noses so that only their eyes were exposed beneath the brim of their hat, Andrew joked, “We look fit to rob a bank!”

“Yeah, we do, at that,” Jeremiah grinned grabbing his Sharp’s breach loading rifle on his way out the door. He gasped as the biting north wind struck him.

Stepping off of the porch into knee-deep drifts, the brothers turned toward the barn. While they saddled their horses, Jeremiah asked, “Where we goin’ to start lookin’, Andrew?”

“I was thinkin’ that we’d work our way down to the river on the south end since that’s where the cows were when the storm blew in.”

Because the snow was now blowing almost horizontally, the horses had to fight their way through the drifted ravines. Snorts of smoky breath billowed from their nostrils with each

laborious step. Squinting to avoid the icy needles that stung their faces, Andrew and Jeremiah finally reached the place where the river entered their land.

“Let’s check along the bank. I bet that calf is hunkered down in a washout,” Jeremiah shouted.

Luckily, the snow began to let up, but the frozen ground made it extremely dangerous to maneuver on horseback. Upon reaching the river, they scoured the ground for any sign of the missing calf. While navigating a steep slope near the water, Jeremiah heard a faint sound that caused him to rein in his horse.

“You hear that?” he asked Andrew.

“Yeah, sounds like a calf bawlin’,” his brother replied. “I think it’s comin’ from the river.”

The two continued their descent down the slope. The calf was nowhere to be seen.

Frustrated Jeremiah questioned, “Where is it?”

“Look!” Andrew hollered pointing to the water.

Jeremiah spied the young animal lying limply in the middle of the river about twenty feet from the bank. Its back legs had broken through the ice.

“I’ll get it,” Andrew volunteered.

“No, I’m lighter than you. I’ll do it,” Jeremiah insisted.

Andrew grinned. “Okay, I’ll be the brains of this operation. You tie your rope around your waist and then tether yourself to that big cottonwood. Take my rope to slip over the calf’s neck. I’ll hold the other end so that I can pull it out.”

Working quickly, they set Andrew’s plan into motion. The ice creaked ominously when Jeremiah stepped onto it. Lowering himself onto his belly, he inched toward the calf which was

rapidly losing strength. Jeremiah was shaking violently. He didn't know if it was from fear or cold, but he pressed on.

Finally, he reached the calf, slipped the lasso over its neck, and tightened it. Andrew began to pull it slowly toward the bank. This startled the calf and caused it to kick, breaking the ice with its sharp hooves. Tilting precariously, Jeremiah plunged into the frigid water.

With all of his might Jeremiah fought to stay afloat in the river's paralyzing cold. Suddenly, he heard Andrew shout, "Hold on!"

Andrew grabbed the rope attached to the tree and hand-over-hand hauled Jeremiah out of the water. When his brother was safely on shore, Andrew pulled the calf off of the ice, too.

After freeing both Jeremiah and the calf from their ropes, Andrew took off his coat and wrapped it around his brother. "C'mon! Let's get home before we all freeze to death!" he urged helping Jeremiah onto his horse. Next he hoisted the shivering animal onto the saddle in front of him.

In silence Andrew and Jeremiah rode back to their cabin. While Andrew put the stock in the barn, his brother stumbled inside to get out of his frozen clothes.

After rubbing down the animals and feeding them, Andrew returned to the cabin. There he found Jeremiah huddled in front of a roaring fire reading their mother's Bible.

"Are you all right? Been a long while since I seen you do that," Andrew said.

"Yeah, but I think you need to hear this." Jeremiah's finger traced the words underlined by his mother's beloved hand, "'What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which was lost until he find it?'

Know what, Andrew? That's not just talkin' 'bout sheep. It's talkin' 'bout people—  
'bout me. Out there tonight, I reckon I was like the shepherd. But, inside my heart, I wonder if  
I'm the one who's lost!"