

THE UNTAMED

bowed my back when he slapped the blanket on. Then I rolled my eyes backward to note the effect. He was grinning, actually grinning—and his hat did not show above my withers. Next, he threw on the saddle, and the curve in my spine was unmistakable; but he merely hummed a tune and began to cinch me tightly, with careless freedom, just as if we had been friends all our years. It surprised me so much that I suffered his impertinence in quiet.

There were some cowboys on the fence, watching.

“Want me to ear him, Chappo?” one asked.

“No-oo. Me and him’s friends already. Ain’t we?” He made me walk a few steps, still grinning as he inspected the significant upward tilt of the saddle. “Look at his tail, boys. We’ll shore have to call him Beaver.”

“Call him, Neutria,” one cried.

My new master nodded and then stood directly in front. I tried to look away, but his