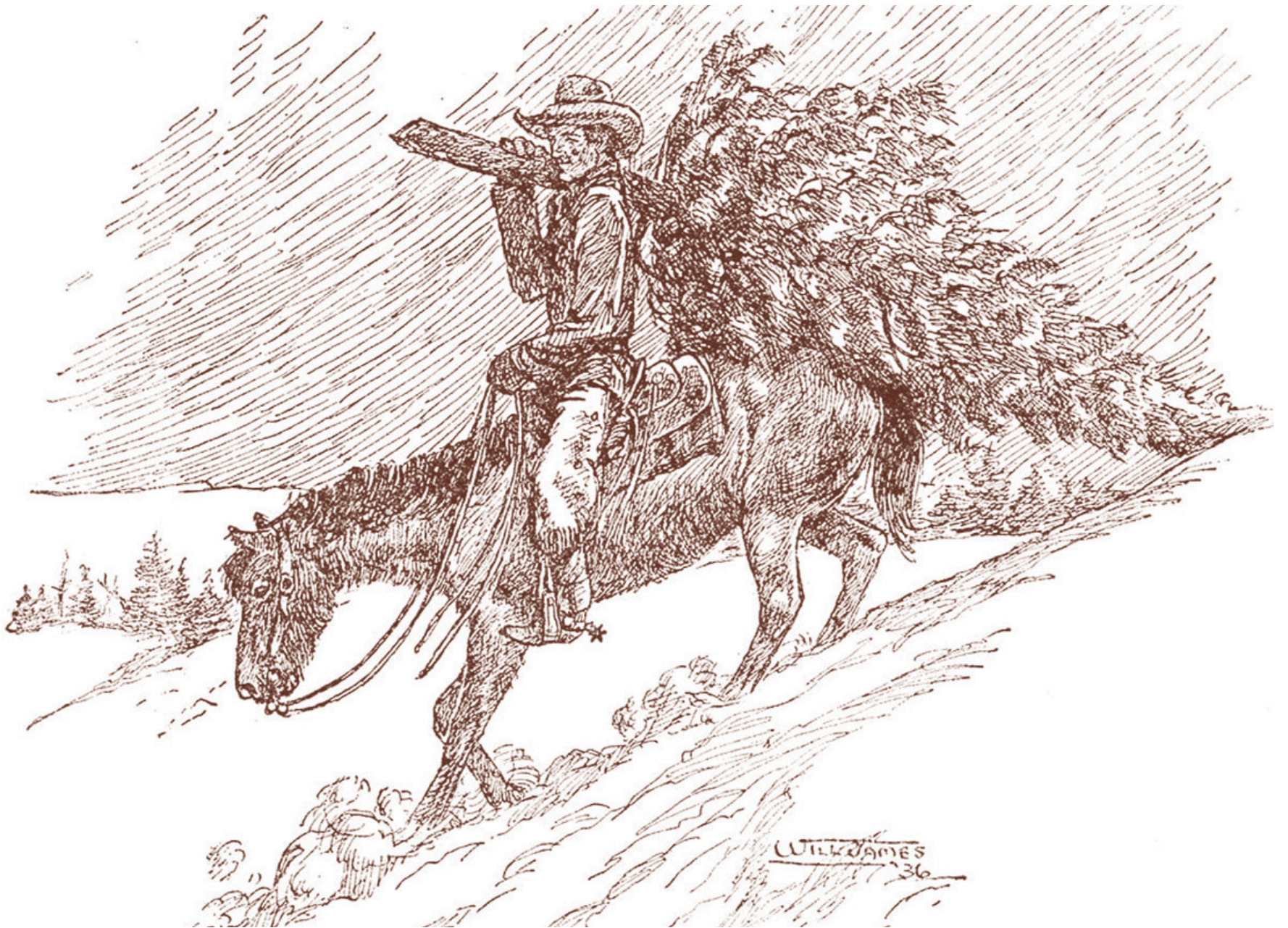


He rode back to the ranch with the tree over his shoulder.



Bringing Christmas to the Ranch

By Harold Roy Miller

I am a hired hand at a horse-breeding farm,
a small operation with lots of country
charm.

All my work and effort gets me only room
and board
and except for the horses, I'm usually
generally ignored.

But last week the ranch foreman came
up to me,
and said "Slim, we are going to need a
Christmas tree.

Since you are the newest man on this crew,
I am giving this important, illustrious job
to you."

This is rugged, rural country out here
and we have to create our own Christmas
cheer.

The holidays were causing some of the boys
to brood
and decorating a tree might brighten their
mood.

I knew the boss well. He expected me to
deliver,
although all the conifers were way across
the river.

But I was ready and willing to take a chance
and aimed to bring a fine Christmas tree
back to the ranch.

Up on the mountain peaks it looked like it
was still snowing
so I figured I had better get myself going
I grabbed an axe and my handy rawhide

rope
and started out in the direction of the
northwest slope.

I wanted to find a symmetrical tree that
wasn't too tall
and get it and myself back to the bunkhouse
before nightfall.

I figured I'd cross the river and ride up the
north ridge,
but first I would have to traverse a narrow
snow bridge.

It was already near freezing when I started
on my way.

The clouds were hanging low, thick, grim
and gray.

I'd hurried out so quickly and with many
things on my mind
that I'd gone and left my fur-lined leather
gloves behind.

Nevertheless, I reached the river and didn't
think twice

about traversing that span of frozen ice.
But as my horse crossed over and stepped
up on the far bank

The snow bridge gave way, slid into the
water and sank.

As soon as I heard the ice make that sharp
crack,

I knew that I would be taking the long way
back.

So I wasted no time chopping down a nice
scotch pine

and looped the trunk with my catch twine.

The cold blowing wind numbed my mouth
and nose.

I could hardly feel or move any of my ten
toes.

But I tried to ignore it and with my pretty
Christmas tree in tow,
I headed back toward home, dragging it
over the crusty snow.

It was at least five miles around the creek
that I drug that load
plus all the way back down the old ranch
house road.

When I got back to the bunkhouse, the boss
just grinned
as I untied the tree and stood it up on end.

The poor pine was broken, spindly and very
worse for the wear.
One side had lost its needles and was almost
completely bare.

Some of the boys said it was the most
pathetic tree they'd ever seen,
that it looked more deciduous than any type
of evergreen!

The boss propped it in the corner and tied
up a broken branch.

He said, "Slim, I give you credit for
bringing Christmas to the ranch.

You have a lot of fortitude but you ain't
too awful smart

cuz you could have taken the pickup and
got a tree from Walmart!