HANK THE COWDOG

LOST IN THE DARK UNCHANTED FOREST
PODCAST SERIES 1, EPISODE 2

Written by
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Based on
Hank the Cowdog
Book #11, Lost in the Dark Unchanted Forest
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INT. RANCH - MACHINE SHED - DAY

HANK (V.O.)
It’s me again, Hank the Cowdog.

A single **CRRRRUUUUNCH!**

MUSIC NOTE: Aaron Copland, Rodeo: Buckaroo Holiday (3:05 to 5:30), Hoe Down (2:15 to 3:31).

HANK (V.O.)
Now, a bobcat sighting on the ranch
wasn’t good for anybody, especially
when it was a bobcat as mean as
Sinister. It troubled my stomach,
and a troubled stomach can’t be
neglected.

MORE CRUNCHING!

Hank and Drover’s jowls crunch down hard on Co-op dog food
from an overturned hubcap that **CLANKS** with every snort.

HANK (V.O.)
So Drover and I were busy getting
our fill of the Co-op crunchy
kernels dog food. You know, the
hard, dry, yellowish kind that
comes in a 50 pound sack. There are
times I question what kind of stuff
they put into those kernels, and
other times, I’d just as soon not
know.

Hank tilts back his head to work over a particularly hard
kernel and swallows with a **GULP.**

HANK
(Intermittent Crunching)
You know Drover, I’ve often
wondered how much it would cost the
ranch to buy us a real dog bowl,
instead of an upturned hubcap that
retains the taste of axel grease.

Drover **CLANKS** a bite.

DROVER
Yep.
HANK
I know grass is short and cattle prices are down, but I also know that the cowboys on this outfit eat out of plates and bowls, not hubcaps.

DROVER
Mmm hmm.

Drover’s snorts and crunches build and build throughout Hank’s musings.

HANK
It just seems funny to me that there always seems to be enough grass and enough cattle market to buy plates for them, but you mention buying anything decent for the Head of Ranch Security, huh, and suddenly we’re in the midst of a drought, and a plague, and a depression!

DROVER
Yumph.

Hank’s voice rises over the increasingly furious chomping.

HANK
I suppose it’s better not to think of all the injustices in the world. Too much brooding can ruin your digestion, and life without digestion is...well, unbearable. Full of burps. But it does make a guy think that the people in charge don’t realize just how important their dogs are to the overall...

Hank is finally interrupted by the peak of Drover’s snorts. Hank clears his throat as a warning.

HANK (CONT’D)
Do you suppose you could be a little quieter in eating your food?

DROVER
(muffled with food)
I don’t know Hank. It’s pretty hard.
HANK
Of course it is. It’s always harder to eat with manners than to eat with the wild abandon of a hog, but who wants to sound like a hog?

DROVER
Not me.

HANK
Hogs make no pretense at being civilized, Drover. They crunch and they smack and they grunt, and nobody cares because they’re only hogs who eat like pigs.

DROVER
That makes sense.

HANK
But we’re not hogs, Drover. We aspire to something higher and better. We try to bring a certain air of dignity to the ritual of eating. The act of imposing dignity on the chaos of experience is called civilization, and protecting civilization has always been hard.

DROVER
Yeah, but I meant the kernels were hard...to chew.

Drover crunches a final, loud kernel.

HANK
Oh. Yes, I see. You make a good...wait...hush!

Hank holds out a paw to silence the mutt’s chewing.

HANK (CONT’D)
I’m receiving something. A distress call.

Hank’s ears perk up at the SOUND of Morse Code beeps fade up.
HANK (V.O.)
My ears, which are very sensitive and operate pretty muchly independent of the rest of my body, picked up the sound, and within seconds had passed the information along to my Brain Data Control Center.

HANK
It’s a... a cat. It’s a cat in distress.

HANK (V.O.)
I switched my ears from automatic to manual, lifted them a half-inch, and opened the exterior flaps to increase their sound gathering capacity. And gather they did.

Hank’s message trance breaks, silencing the beeps, and he looks to Drover as a wide smile takes over.

DROVER
What’re you smiling for, Hank?

HANK
Drover, we gotta see this. Come on!

102-2  EXT. RANCH - HOUSE - DAY  102-2

Galloping footfalls add rhythm to the adventure.

HANK (V.O.)
We went streaking away from the machine shed, down the hill, past the gas tanks, and towards the overflow of the septic tank. Right there the scene unfolded before us.

REEEEEEEER! A CAT’S SCREECH!

ALFRED
You smell Pete. You need a bath.

Alfred carries a wriggling PETE THE BARNCAT.

HANK (V.O.)
Little Alfred had Pete the Barncat by the midsection and was headed straight for the overflow pond of the septic tank.

(MORE)
HANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Now, for those who don’t know, a septic tank’s overflow pond is the exact wrong place to give a cat a bath, but since it was a bath for Pete, who am I to judge?

ALFRED
Take your bath Pete!

Alfred sends Pete airborne.

HANK (V.O.)
Alfred launched that cat sky high. It was glorious. Pete’s eyes grew wide as saucers as he floated out over that green bog of nasty water.

A dopplering REEEEEEEEEER suddenly stops.

HANK (V.O.)
Of course, as soon as Pete saw me and Drover watchin’ with big slobberin’ smiles, his look of terror changed to one of annoyed resignation. He prepared for the inevitable, made worse by the audience of...me.

SPLASH!

Hank and Drover let out uproarious howls of belly grabbing laughter.

HANK
HAHA OOOOWWWO00000! It’s good. Oh, it’s so good, Drover.

Alfred laughs too as Pete shakes off the icky water. Until...

WAM! The screen door to the house slams shut. All laughing needle scratches to a stop.

HANK/DROVER
Uh oh.

HANK (V.O.)
The good times were over the second we saw Sally May stomping out of the house.

SALLY MAY
Alfred! What on earth?
HANK (V.O.)
Pete crawled out of the muck with more dignity than one would expect, and do you know what he did? He winked at me.

DING!

HANK (V.O.)
Now why would a cat, covered in bog water, wink at me? More on that later, 'cause Sally May was coming in hot.

SALLY MAY
You’re just being terrible today, Alfred! I don’t know what’s gotten into you, but I won’t allow a child of mine to be cruel to dumb animals.

HANK
She means Pete.

DROVER
Obviously.

SALLY MAY
Hank’s tail and now Pete. Just look at that poor cat.

Sympathy gathering BOW BEND.

HANK (V.O.)
On cue, Pete, all wet and stringy, threw off a trembling look that would steal a tear from most any warm-blooded animal lover. A total charade!

SALLY MAY
Alfred he’s soaked. That’s not nice young man. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

ALFRED
(sniffling)
Hank said Pete needed a bath.

HANK
Not true!
(to Drover)
...but not wrong.
SALLY MAY
Cats don’t bathe in water, Alfred, they wash themselves with their tongues.

ALFRED
Well, his tongue was dirty.

Sally May calcifies in her argument.

SALLY MAY
No. You were being mean and cruel. I’ve got a new baby in the house and I can’t be watching you every second of the day. If you don’t play nice, you’ll have to come inside and take a nap.

HANK (V.O.)
With that, Sally May turned back to the house, but not before wagging a finger at my nose.

SALLY MAY
And you don’t be giving my child anymore ideas about tormenting the cat, Hank McNasty.

HANK
Me?

SALLY MAY
If I hear anymore yowling, I’ll... I don’t even know what I’ll do, but you’ll be the first one to find out Hank.

SLAM! The screen door frames her exit.

HANK
And...she’s gone.

DROVER
Hank, why’s Pete smiling at you?

HANK
That’s not a smile, Drover. That’s a smirk.

DROVER
That sounds even worse.

HANK
What are you smirking about, Pete?
PETE
Hi Hankie. You got in trouble again, didn’t you?

HANK
Maybe I did and maybe I didn’t, but you got throwed in the water. That’s what really matters.

DROVER
Yeah, that’s what matters.

HANK
How was your swim, Pete? Tell us all about it, because your unhappiness is the most important thing in the world to us.

DROVER
Yeah. Tell us about it.

Pete, the smirk still on, flicks water from a front paw in Hank’s direction.

PETE
It was really very nice, Hankie.

HANK
Oh no it wasn’t. You hated it.

DROVER
Yeah. You hated it, and since you hated it so bad, we love it.

Pete begins to slink around Hank, his tail taking quick nips toward Hank’s nose with a subtle PURRRR.

PETE
Oh, I didn’t care for the water itself, but there were other benefits.

HANK
What benefits?

DROVER
Yeah.
   (genuinely confused)
What benefits, Hank?

PETE
Well first, Sally May came to my rescue.
HANK
Of course she did. You have her completely bluffed out.

Hank swats as Pete’s tail tickles at his nose again.

HANK (CONT’D)
Get that tail out of my face! She doesn’t know what a sneaking little weasel you are.

PETE
Um hummmm, and the second benefit is that I can do almost anything to you now, Hankie, and if you do anything back to me, you’ll be in big trouble with Sally May.

HANK
Oh, you’re bluffing, cat, you can’t...

DROVER
Look out Hank!

SNICK! HISSSSSSSSS! SWAT!

The sound of Hank quickly sucking teeth, and then, SILENCE, as if stuck in a bubble of time.

HANK (V.O.)
Pete’s claws sliced the tenderest part of my nose. Whoohoo, and it hurt. My eyes squeezed shut, and a feeling started to grow, like a fever, rising up and boiling out of my ears...

An Ironside Siren, deep from inside Hank’s mind, grows louder and LOUDER!

A sustained siren holds at its peak!

HANK (V.O.)
The cat must pay!

A TORRENT OF VIOLENT BARKING!

PETE
REEEEEEEEEEER!

DROVER
Get him Hank!
A true dust up of *pouncing, swatting, banging and clanging.*

**HANK (V.O.)**
Oh I lunged, but Pete zigged and
then he zagged. I lunged again but
he bobbed and he weaved, even
again, but he flipped and he
flopped. I only needed to land one
paw to bury this cat. But then...

**WHAM!** The screen door again.

**SALLY MAY**
HANK!!!!

Hank’s snarling attack is jerked to a stop in a whimper.

**SALLY MAY (CONT’D)**
I HAVE HAD IT!

**HANK (V.O.)**
I glanced at Pete who, even though
I hadn’t touched him, was suddenly
limping around in circles, moaning
and dragging one leg behind him.
But in spite of his so-called
“injuries,” he still managed to
shoot me another wink!

**PETE**
Oooohhhhhrrrrrrrr.

**DING!**

**HANK**
Faker.

**SALLY MAY**
I warned you to leave my cat alone!

**DROVER**
Oh, she’s going for the dirt clods
Hank!

The **WHISTLE** of artillery pulls Hank’s attention to Drover.

**HANK**
Take cover Drover! INCOMING!

Hank and Drover duck for cover as a barrage of dirt clods
pepper the ground around them.

**WHACK!** Hank let’s out a wail as dust flies off his rear.
HANK (CONT'D)
She got me, Drover!

HANK (V.O.)
As Drover and I dodged a barrage of
dirt clods that could level the
best of us, I saw Pete roll on his
belly and smile. Faker.

HANK
Head for the brush, Drover!

With dirt clods pelting at their behinds, Drover and Hank
light out for the creek leaving the barrage and a smiling,
purring Pete behind.

102-3 EXT. CREEK/FOREST - CONTINUOUS 102-3

The THRASHING of bushes and brambles gives way to the
pleasant TRICKLE of a winding creek. The dogs PANT with
tongues wagging.

HANK (V.O.)
We went streaking down to the creek
where we vanished into the willows
and tamaracks that saved our lives.
I had only one regret about
the...Well, no, come to think of
it, I had several regrets about the
incident, but I’d rather not
discuss any of them. So, we sat to
lick our wounds.

DROVER
OOF. Yep, she bruised it. Ahh, my
full back end.

HANK (V.O.)
Just then, my ear jumped to the
Full Alert position.

Hank’s heavy breathing stops.

HANK
You hear that? It’s...

A low, mournful SOUND rises up and echoes through the canyon
of the creek bed.

HANK (CONT’D)
It’s like a moan.

Drover’s voice trembles at the eerie sound.
DROVER
Is it a deer?

HANK
Deer don’t moan, Drover, they fawn.

DROVER
I don’t know what that sounds like.

HANK
Hush.

The low sounds go in and out. Hank strains to hear. Unsure, he leans down into a stalking pose.

HANK (CONT’D)
(forced whisper)
Hmmmm. Come on now, let’s slip through the brush in stealthy crouch mode and establish a forward position. In case it’s dangerous, stay behind me.

DROVER
You don’t need to worry about that.

They move up the creek bank through leaves and brambles.

HANK (V.O.)
Maintaining our Stealthy Crouch Mode, we slithered through the brush. I peered out into a small clearing, and there, sitting beside the creek on a log, I saw it. A small boy dressed in striped overalls.

HANK
(Hushed)
It’s Little Alfred. He’s crying.

DROVER
And I mean crying.

The muffled SOUNDS of the boy’s crying come in more clearly.

HANK (V.O.)
Now I know that ornery little stinkpot was pulling my tail no less than an hour ago, and I know he didn’t deserve a loyal dog friend as good as me, but when I saw those tears running down his face well...

(MORE)
HANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You wanna talk about cowdog
instincts? My cowdog instincts
demanded a response.

Hank moves out of the brush toward the boy.

DROVER
You’d better stay away Hank. He’ll
pull your tail again.

HANK
Then let him.

DROVER
He’s mean, and naughty.

HANK
Maybe he is, Drover, but he’s my
boy.

Hank moves out of the bushes.

HANK (V.O.)
I went down to the creek bank and
sat beside Little Alfred and
started licking the tears off of
his cheeks. He looked up, kind of
surprised, and there for a second I
didn’t know what he would do.

Quiet sniffles.

HANK (V.O.)
Then he threw his arms around my
neck and cried.

Sobs.

HANK
Come on now, it’s not that bad.

ALFRED
My mommy doesn’t love me anymore.
She brought home a new baby and she
doesn’t care about me. I don’t like
her dumb old baby, and I don’t like
her anymore either.

HANK
I know, but...

ALFRED
I’m gonna run away from home,
Hankie, far, far away.

(MORE)
ALFRED (CONT’D)
They won’t see me again, and then
they’ll wish they had Alfred back,
but I’ll be gone, gone away.

HANK (V.O.)
This demanded a serious response.
So I cleared my throat and readied
the lecture of life lessons...

Throat clearing.

HANK
Well. I have several points to
make, pardner. So here goes...

Alfred watches as Hank begins pacing with an occasional
pointed paw to emphasize each piece of evidence.

HANK (CONT’D)
In the first place, your ma did in
fact bring home a new baby, but
that doesn’t mean she’s stopped
caring about you. In the second
place, I can testify that you’ve
been something less than a perfect
child today, and those of us with
tails might even say you deserved a
scolding as we don’t enjoy tail-
twisting as much as other forms of
entertainment.

Hank’s really getting into his own speech. He gazes up to the
heavens with a thoughtful air as he paces back and forth.

HANK (CONT’D)
In the third place, for that
business with the cat, I kind of
agree that your ma went overboard
and I may have possibly hinted that
Pete needed a visit. Your ma has
strange ideas about cats. But
that’s just how she’s built, can’t
help it. In the fourth
place...Alfred. Alfred?

HANK (V.O.)
Perhaps I let the pacing oration
get away from me, but just as I was
warming up my summation, I turned
around and Little Alfred was gone!
Now the only thing sitting in his
place, was Drover.

A lazy tail pat from Drover.
HANK
Where did he go?

DROVER
Who?

HANK
Little Alfred you dunce! Who else was sitting here just a minute ago?

DROVER
Oh, he left.

HANK
I realize that Drover, but where did he go?

DROVER
Not sure. He musta got bored with your speech.

HANK
I doubt that. I was giving him some good, sound advice about...just tell me which way he went.

Drover puzzles on this.

HANK (V.O.)
Drover looked left, right, and finally, with some hesitation, up into the trees.

DROVER
Nope. I can’t remember.

HANK
You better start remembering, son, because taking care of that boy is our primary mission today.

DROVER
Well settle down. We know he went somewhere, or else he’d still be...here.

Drover points to the spot next to him. Hank’s eyes darken and the volume of his growl increases.
HANK
Reach into the huge vacuum of your mind, Drover, and pull out the answer, and be quick about it because if anything happens to that kid...

DROVER
Wait. He went...yes...he went across the creek. I’m at least half sure of that. Yes.

HANK
What? And you just sat there and let him go?

DROVER
Well...sort of. I thought about barking but I’ve had this sore throat all day...

HANK
Sore throat!

DROVER
Allergies.

HANK
Drover do you realize what lies on the other side of this creek?

DROVER
Sand?

Hank winces and grits his teeth with anger.

HANK
Yes, sand, but no...beyond the sand, Drover. Out there. Out there is...THE DARK UNCHANTED FOREST ON THE PARNELL RANCH!

Drover’s ears fall back on his head and his voice trembles.

DROVER
Oh.

HANK
If Alfred gets lost in there, we might never find him again.

DROVER
Gosh.
HANK
Huge trees, Drover, draped with hanging vines. It’s dark in there, and scary. On every side, you got thorny plants and stinging nettles, and no one knows what kind of creatures you might find in there: coyotes, snakes, all kinds of monsters.

DROVER
MONSTERS?!

HANK
Yes, but Drover, there’s something else in that forest. One something that is even worse than monsters.

DROVER
What could be worse than monsters, Hank?

HANK
Oh, it’s bad for us, but could be even bigger trouble for Little Alfred.

Hank walks to the edge of the creek to stare deep into the impenetrable forest, his mind turning on the details.

HANK (CONT’D)
Don’t you remember, Drover? Sinister the Bobcat went into that forest.

DROVER
SINISTER THE BOBCAT!

Drover lets out a trembling yelp. He immediately holds up his front paw in a dangle of defeat.

DROVER (CONT’D)
You know, Hank, this leg of mine...

HANK
You know what that means.

DROVER
Yeah. He was a nice kid in many ways.
HANK
It means that we must prepare ourselves for the very most dangerous journey of our lives.

DROVER
Back to the house.

HANK
Not the house, Drover. For you see, what we have here is...The Case of the Lost Child in the Dark Unchanted Forest! A forest with Sinister the Bobcat in it!

EPISODE END.