

Last Of The Singing Cowboys

By Richard Lutman

Well, here I am once again folks, Sam Steelhart, last of the singin' cowboys on his way to bring Law and Order to the Wild West. The way things are changin' though don't seem like we're appreciated much anymore, which kinda makes me sad, but stick around anyway, there's plenty of action ahead.

Over there's my pard, Whiskey McCoy. Tip your hat to the folks, and do it nice now. He's about the orneriest cuss I know, but there ain't no better pard around than him. We been together ever since he found me where I'd been shot by the Utah Kid, the meanest, ugliest man you'd ever want to meet. Don't take no baths neither. Not somebody you'd have over for tea.

For a while it looked like it was all over and I was headed to that great corral in the sky, but Whiskey pulled me through. He was searchin' for gold and came across me instead. Been lookin' for that skunk Utah ever since then. Hear he's been seen in these parts lately. Why we didn't even stop for a cup of coffee or nothin' after we heard about the Kid. When we meet up this time one of us ain't goin' to be around much longer. You can bet it ain't goin' to be me. And this here's my horse, Blue Rocket. Raised him from a colt. Like that name for him? If a singin' cowboy's horse ain't named right it's like kinda bein' naked, if you know what I mean. The right horse for the right name, the right name for the right horse. I learned that in singin' cowboy school.

And here we are a-ridin' into One Spur, the biggest little town west of the Rock River. More saloons than banks and the prettiest little waitress you've ever seen. Her name's Nell Withers and she works at the Hotel Royale. Notice the way it's spelled. Like it's somethin' fancy, which it ain't. But Nell, she likes it just fine. Says she gets to meet all sorts of interestin' people. But I keep tellin' her that ain't always the case, there's a lot of bad men around like the Kid.

What's that, Whiskey? Naw I ain't goin' to marry Nell. Who'd look after you? You're the one that should be gettin' married. What about that widow back at Jenkin's Crossing? Now don't gettin' all riled up about it. Whupped better men than me for sayin' things like that did you? Yeah, not much further now. The place Nell works got a bar next to it, the Golden Eagle, that serves some pretty good whiskey. Always a good place to pick up information, and we're mighty thirsty after bein' on the trail so long. I have to sing now, so just hold on for a bit.

“Oh the prairies are where I roam
Far from the cities so bright
My pistol's in the holster
Saddle between my knees
And I'm a headin' to Texas
In the sweet prairie breeze
Yippie Yi Ki O.”

Like it? The Yippie Ki O stuff gets the gals every time, 'specially Nell. She likes it best when I play my guitar on her porch under the moon. She kinda gets all misty eyed.

You learn songs like that at singin' cowboy school. We'll be up on the bluffs soon, then I can sing another song. Well, close your ears, Whiskey. I have to sing, there ain't no way around that. Wouldn't be a singin' cowboy if I didn't. A cat sounds better? Why you old coot, I should give you a bath for sayin' that.

“When the heavens are so bright
I know that everything is right
Out on the range so far
And when the night comes I'll follow a star
Yippie Yi Ki O
Away I go across the prairie so wide
Lookin' for the other side.”

That sure was a pretty one. Yeah, I feel like havin' a drink, too, Whiskey. Nothin' like a shot or two after a long day on the trail. That's what nice about bein' a singin' cowboy. You can do what you want and not have to worry about it. The prairie's my home and the sky's my roof, don't need anythin' else, except maybe a gal like Nell now and then. Goin' to have to sing a song about that sometime. No, I ain't goin' to do it now, Whiskey. Well, there's One Spur below us. Let's ride in slow and see if the Kid's around.

Now where was I? Oh yeah, how'd I'd get to be a singin' cowboy? Get asked that a lot. When I was a kid one of 'em came ridin' through town, cleaned it up real good, made it a place you wanted to live in, kissed all the girls and rode off. Knew it was for me. The singin' part? Well, they send you to this school in Denver. Turned out I had a pretty good voice. The coyote's love it, don't they, Whiskey? You should know.

Steelhart's not my real name, though, it's Waldo, but who could be a singin' cowboy with a name like that. We have to believe in Good, Truth, three meals a day, and feedin' your horse only the best. I'm the only one left now and I don't figger it will be too long before I head back to the place of mine on the flats by Willow Creek where I'll spend my last days. When I think about it, I feel a little sad. Who'll be left? It's not everyone who can be a singin' cowboy. You have to be special and like ridin' a white horse.

“Oh when I die like good cowboys die
Bury me under that sky so blue
Where I can see the clouds roll by
And tell them all that here I lie
The last of the singin' cowboys
Whose ways were always true.”

Now don't start snifflin', Whiskey. It was just a song. Dust in your eye? Yeah, there's a lot of dust here. Well, I'm hurryin' as fast as I can. That saloon ain't goin' nowhere and neither are we.

Guess you folks can see we're just about here now. Place don't look much different than it always did. None of these towns do. I don't like the way folks are watchin' us, somethin's not right. Wonder where Sheriff Reed is? Don't like the look of that feller comin' out of the sheriff's office, Whiskey, or that feller with him. Looks like he might be askin' for trouble. We're lookin' for Sheriff Reed. You're the new sheriff? An accident? Buried two weeks ago? Your town now.

Me, I'm Sam Steelhart. Heard of me, have you? And this is my pard, Whiskey McKoy. Were lookin' for the Utah Kid. Never heard of him? That's funny, he was headin' this way. Tell your friend there to keep his hands where I can see them. I don't want no trouble. Now we're just goin' to back on outta here and have ourselves a drink. Why don't you join us?

How long am I goin' to stay? Don't rightly know, Sheriff. I like the scenery around here and the food ain't bad. Four star rating for the hotel restaurant. Ever had their shrimp scampi? Now that's a meal. You don't like shrimp? Well, there's always beans. You like beans, don't you?

What's that, Whiskey? I see him. You shouldn't a done that, Mister. Looks like I plugged him good. Now why don't the rest of you go back to what you were doin'? I don't want no more trouble. The fight was fair and square. Wasn't it sheriff? Now get your hand away from your pistol nice and easy.

That feller should have known better than to draw on me. If this don't beat all. Somebody's got a nice

little set up goin', and I'll bet the Kids part of it. I'm not goin' to do anythin' on an empty stomach. My daddy always told me to eat first, then take care of business. A man can't do much on an empty stomach. And my daddy was never wrong.

Well, look over there if it ain't Nell, but who's that she's with? Never seen him before. You see that, Whiskey? Guy's all dressed up like he's goin' to a funeral.

You comin'? The saloon. Just be careful, remember what happened last time. There weren't no pink elephants anywhere.

Well, howdy there, Nell. You're sure lookin' good. Nice to see you again. I'm not always gettin' into gun fights. He drew first, that makes a difference. See the way she's lookin' at me, but that's a woman for you. Goin' to introduce me to your friend? McLaren?

Yeah, I've heard of you. What brings you to One Spur? Business. Me? I'm on business here myself. Lookin' for the Utah Kid. He didn't like that. See the way his eyes moved. Betcha he's in on this deal, too. Never heard of him? Thought you might have, seein' how you get around a lot. Funny how the sheriff never heard of him either since he's a wanted man.

Now what's the matter with Nell? I'll ask questions to anyone I want. Man like him has to be here for somethin' that ain't going to do anybody no good. Now don't be that way. No, I'm not goin' to start anythin'. I want you to be careful, that's all. It's my business, 'specially when it involves you. I don't like him and he don't have the best reputation, either. Brings you things, does he? Treats you like a lady?

I thought I treated you like a lady. You never complained before. This is different. Women! Guess I been on the trail too long. Smell like it, do I. How about somethin' to eat? Out of shrimp scampi. I been dreamin' about shrimp scampi all day. Beans and bacon? Well don't that beat all.

I am bein' nice. Can I see you later? I've been learnin' a new song. Wrote it special for you. You're goin' to be busy? I thought you liked my songs. The opera? Thought you didn't like that stuff. You do now. With McLaren. Well I'll be a blue-nosed gopher. First guy like him comes in here and you go all soft. All right! All right!

I'll go to Lily's to eat; least there I'll be able to have a meal in peace. Now what's all that noise at the saloon?

Whiskey, what did you do now? Another drink? How many did you have? I would have thrown you out too. It's all right, Bill, I'll watch him. Yeah, I know about the new sheriff. What really happened to Sheriff Reed? Don't know anythin'. Yeah, that's what I figgered. Now calm down, Whiskey. We got some unfinished business here. We're goin' to have to watch this feller McLaren. Think he might be in on this

deal too. No, nothin' happened. This whole town is sure actin' strange. Think I'll go for a ride. Need to work things out. Now stay out of trouble, Whiskey, and watch for the Kid.

Always did like ridin' by myself. My daddy used to tell me ridin' alone was good for what ailed you, next to whiskey, of course, and a woman now and then. Just can't understand that Nell at all, thought we had somethin' goin' together.

Sure is pretty out here, feel better already. Let me get my guitar tuned and I'll sing you a piece.

“Here I roam
My prairie home
Far away from the thrall
Neither man nor beast
Can find me here at all
Among the wild white rocks
And antelope flocks.”

Kinda like that rhyme with thrall. Don't you? Sometimes its hard bein' like me. Not always easy to keep the songs comin' and goin' after the bad guys. Now what's that rider doin'? He's comin' pretty fast. It's Whiskey! Slow down, pard, slow down! McLaren! The Kid! The bank! Nell! What are we waitin' for? Headed this way! Why didn't you say so?

You did. I sure was listenin'. We'll ambush 'em, just like in the movies. Shouldn't have long to wait. Let's get ourselves hid and ready. The Kid's mine, you can have the others. Yeah, we'll have a drink after it's over. Here they come. Looks like they're in an awful hurry.

Better fire a shot first, just to let them know we mean business. We got you covered, Kid, and you too McLaren. Now don't do anythin' stupid and tell your friends to put their hands up where I can see 'em. Yeah, it's me, Kid. Been all right, and you? Well, that's good to hear. Take a better man than you to finish me off.

Let Nell go, Kid. You were a little slow this time, Kid. Plugged him clean through. Anyone else want to try? Now why don't you all undo your gun belts before I get really mad?

What's that you're sayin', Nell? I wouldn't have shot you. You know that. Well, I hope you are sorry. Dinner? Thought you wanted to go to the opera. Oh, shut up, Whiskey. You don't know nothin' about this. Got a song comin' on.

“I feel so swell
With my gal named Nell
As into the sunset we'll go
But I'll be back
You can be sure of that
To my heavenly home on the range
Yodel lay he hoo.”

Got to go back to town with these varmints, then I can ride off into the sunset once more so I'll be ready for another day of bringing Justice to the Old West and to see Nell. Maybe now she'll listen to me. And as long as Sam Steelheart's around don't you folks worry none about fellers like the Kid. Well what do you know about that. Nell kissed me.

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