

My Pal Jim

by George Albert Leddy

I just got back from over thare, I sat a while with Jim;
Sat thare sort'o helpless like, thare's nothin' I can do.
Thare's nothin' anyone can do to be of help to him;
He's a-headin' for his Sky-home, and I'm feelin' mighty blue.

Could you let me have a bourbon, Tom, to sort'o, stay my nerve?
It's mighty tough to have to sit, and watch an old Pal die . . .
Thare, thank you Tom, God bless you boy, that's mighty fine of you;
I'll pay you back someday—at least I'll try.

Did I ever tell you 'bout the time when me and Jim met up?
We were Younkers then, and ridin' herd down on a Texas plain.
The life was wild and wooly, but we loved it all you bet;
And between us grew a friendship, that the years could never change.

Well, Jim could sing a lull-a-bye, in voice so low and sweet;
'Twould calm the wildly milling herd, and lull them all to sleep.
So is it strange that when he sang, a love song sweet and low;
He won the heart of little Juan, down thare in Mexico.

Or is it strange that when the Texas Moon is ridin' high;
And all the little stars thare be, are dancin' in the sky;
And all the little breeze thare be, are playin' in the sand;
That Jim would ride away alone, down to the Rio Grande.

Down where that silvery river winds, so silent like and staid;
Where the Yellow Rose of Texas blooms, beneath the Mesquite shade;
Where lazy waters catch the gleam, of dancing stars above;
He knows she's waiting thare for him, her dark eyes filled with love.

Her gentle voice, so low, so sweet, to fill his soul with bliss;
Her gentle heart that's made to love, her lips that's made to kiss;
The Spanish blood warm in her veins, that speaks of centuries past;
The little hand, so soft, so warm, a dream too sweet to last.

The Wild Rose bloom is on her cheek, the dark curls crown her brow;
She knows no sorrow, knows no care, her heart is happy now.
He takes the small form in his arms, he holds her to his heart;
He whispers words of truest love, and vows—they'll never part.

Then came the day, he rode away, and never to return;
As days passed into weeks, I felt, his fate I'd have to learn.
I bought a Hoss, from off the Boss, a sturdy steadfast roan;
And hoof and nail, we hit the trail, to the strange world all alone.

From North to South, from East to West, from valleys deep, to mountain crest;
From spreading-sagebrush-dotted plain, to buffalo-grass where cattle range.
For twenty years, 'neith blazing sky, and burning sands, I could not die;
Yet, twenty Hosses strew their bones, along the trails that I have known.

And then, trailworn, and broken-down, I settle in a desert town.
You know, the kind of town I mean—where Outlaw hide, and Miners dream;
A water-hole, where wild-grass grow, false-fronted shacks all in a row;
A barroom here, a stable there, a hash-house in the sunburned square.

All rest by day, at night they play, they come, they go—few ever stay;
While me, a sort'o worthless chap, work here and there, at this and that.
It means a bed, and food to eat; a drink, when someone pays a treat.
For I have settled down to stay; I think, then comes another day . . .

He dragged his feet, down the dusty street, unconscious like, of the midday heat;
His shoulders stooped, and his head hung low, and his body bent, like an archer's bow;
And close to his heels, and step-by-step, a phantom-shape like a shadow crept;
Just the skin and bones, of an old grey Hound, as long as your arm, and as big around.

And they looked not left, and they looked not right—
and they never paused, as you'd think they might;
Till they came to the hash-house in the square—
then they lift their heads, and they sniff the air.

Well, Biscuit Sue was cooking stew, smelt mighty good, I'm tellin' you;
'Twas just the kind'a grub you'd want, to feed a man who's belly's gaunt.
And Sue, she fed them slow until, she felt that they had had their fill;
And then we gather 'round to find—the dog is deaf, and the man is blind.

Two pals, but really only one, who know alone, the things they've done;
The brain grown weak, the heart grown cold, a living thing without a soul.
And 'though, it's true, he'll never tell, it's plain to see, they've lived through Hell.
Those sunken features, gaunt and grim—yes, Tom, you're right—'twas my Pal Jim.

Some people think a Desert-rat, is jest a worthless sort'o cuss;
But through the years I cared for Jim, those Desert-rats took care of us.
Their hearts are purer than the Gold, the bit they take from desert sands;
And they are counted in the fold, that God alone can understand.

And when Old Doc came into town, and saw poor Jim a-settin' thare;
He sent us to a Miners Home, where we have had the best of care.
I've learned a lot by settin' 'round, and hearin' him talk to that old Hound;
As he lived again that merciless Hell, and I think I know his secret well.

Why, I've heard him say to that old grey Hound, as he sat with his hand on that shaggy head:
"It came with a sort'o hiss'n' sound, out of the night—and my Juan was dead!"
Then he'd sort'o moan, and he'd talk of blood, then he'd curse in a pious sort'o way;
Then he'd rise, and scream to the God above, that he'd—"get that Greaser and make him pay!"
And that Dog would whine, and kiss his hand, as if to say, "I understand."
And it seems to me, from what I've heard, that in twenty years—he'd kept his word.

Why, I've seen him stand, with his cane in his hand, and strike at the sand, and swear;
'Twas something he saw, that I couldn't see—something that wasn't thare.
Then his voice would break, and his hand would shake, and the cords in his neck would swell;
And he'd laugh, like I reckon the Devil laughs, when he prods at the souls in Hell.
Then he'd call to the Buzzards overhead: "Come on you fools, he'll soon be dead!
You're due for a treat, of rotten meat, that only a Vulture from Hell would eat!
So tear him raw, with your beak and claw, and leave his bones, for the Wolves to chaw!"

Well, Tom, I guess I'll be traveling on—it won't be long till my Pal is gone;
And I want to be thare to say good-bye, when he hits the trail to beyond the sky.
I want to be thare to hold his hand; perhaps, in the end, he'll understand;
And I want to be thare, to sort'o pray, to the Angels that come to light his way.

And I thank ye, Tom, for what you've done; you're mighty kind, and I won't forget.
But the hours are long to the morning-sun, the hours are long, while I wait and fret;
While I sit, and dream of the days gone-bye; while I sit, and wait—for my Pal to die.

And, Tom, I know you're grievin', too—you'd like to help me if you could.
Well, Tom, I'll tell you what I think, would really do the greatest good:
Just place two glasses on the bar, like me and Jim was standin' thare;
And fill them to the very brim, and I'll drink one for me—and t'other for Jim.
