

### Seen but not herded (Best of)

Sonny had lived his whole life under a cowboy hat, learning everything he needed to know from a cow. Like most cowboys, he was proud of the fact that he'd never been trapped into being settled or prosperous. His résumé was well-traveled but not because he lacked cowboy skills. Sonny's reputation for being able to catch the "wild ones" was well-known from Sasabe to the sandhills, but feeding cows was just too boring and so he usually followed the truck out the gate that carried the last desperado away.

For sure there was nothing to keep him at his current address. The boss was so tight he wouldn't give a duck a drink. The pay was nine hundred a month and a house. Sort of. The shack was so small you couldn't cuss the cat without getting fur in your mouth, the only heat came from a single 60-watt light bulb, and when it rained the leaky roof had better water pressure than the shower. The mouse traps needed emptying every morning.

But it wasn't the pay, or lack of it, that sent Sonny packing. He only needed a few quarters to feed the Suds and Duds Laundromat once a month. No, this time Sonny was standing on principle. It seems the boss didn't believe in spoiling the help by providing the customary side of beef like a lot of ranchers did. This really got Sonny's goat. The only meat provided was home grown venison but even the deer had found the pickings slim on this outfit.

Five years prior the rancher had bought a load of "speculation cattle" from old Mexico. BIG MISTAKE! The ranch had once been a hideout for the bandit, Joaquin Murietta, and the steers naturally found Joaquin's favorite places to hide. That's why the rancher had hired Sonny, because it was said "he could track bees in a blizzard."

During his short stay Sonny lived up to his reputation, roping the wild steers in country so steep you rode with your feet out of the stirrups in case your horse fell over a cliff. One by one Sonny caught the defectors and a single week's catch brought more at auction than what the boss would have paid Sonny all year. Still he was critical of Sonny's work. "You still haven't caught the renegade."

## It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts

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The “renegade” was a 5-year-old escape artist who had been raised on sour milk and brush and could blend in with boulders. For five years he had tested and bested the boss man at every opportunity. Some said that renegade steer had been what drove the old man to drink. Most days he just stayed in the house celebrating the bottle, cussing the steer and growing calluses on his elbows. Yet he had the audacity to question Sonny’s cowboy skills. “I thought you were supposed to be good. When are you going to bring me that steer’s carcass?”

“That steer is dead,” said Sonny. “Grass is waving over that buzzard bait.”

“Then bring me his bleached bones or his hide with a brand on it,” countered the old cuss. “You dare call yourself a cowboy and yet you can’t even corral a broken down old reprobate steer.”

Sonny looked at the boss with eyes that would chill a side of beef. He decided right then that he’d slept his last sleep in that shack and had taken his last lip from this sullen old drunk. He was tired of living below the poverty level. “I’m telling you for the last time that steer is dead,” said Sonny with finality.

“You just aren’t cowboy enough to catch him,” mumbled the bitter boss. “How can you be so sure he’s dead?” Sonny replied, “Because four months ago, a day after I went on your parsimonious payroll, that locoed steer you couldn’t corral jumped into my freezer and froze to death. And every night since then I’ve been reminded of that fact at supper time.”