

At the stroke of 3:10 p.m., the clippity-clappity clop sound of a single-horsepower multiple-hoofed oat powered personal transportation device reverberated off the canyon wall and fell onto the main street of Klegmore, an old mining town in the New Mexico panhandle. Stunned at first, it soon got its bearings, then did the sonic equivalent of an amble through the open window of the local saloon. The sound raced across the amber-stained floorboards for a good 30 seconds before heading out the back door and on towards the Levitation Hills of eastern Arizona, but the bartender didn't even bat an eye, or any other part of his wizened countenance. He was deeply absorbed in the new issue of "Mixology Today." More accurately, he was being absorbed *by* it; already the peckish pages of the periodical had assimilated his legs and trousers. Nonetheless, an article on whiskey six-draw, the latest California cocktail craze, had his unbifurcated attention. For years he'd been an aficionado of the similarly named card game and wondered if there were any other congruencies. The article's boustrophedonic text was too tiny to read with the naked eye, so the barkeep put on a pair of cornea pants. Yes, both cards and cocktail components were stored in spittoons. Yes, both, when shuffled, sounded like 400 owls attempting to outwit a giant badger in the rain. And yes, both tasted better when lightly chilled. The remainder of the article degenerated into doggerel and read like the runner-up paté recipe at a border collie barbecue.

A second clappity clop, much louder and more immediate than the first, ricocheted off the alehouse wall like a floozy with a ten dollar tip. This time the tapster *did* look up, just in time to see a stranger push open the door, swiftly case the joint with his eyes, then sidle up to the player piano. He inserted a coin into the slot, pushed the lever, and the machine, one of the new Yamahas, began to play kabuki honky tonk. Then the stranger approached the counter. "Vodka and Kool Aid," he croaked, tossing down a couple of coins so shiny they could've been minted by the Mentholated Currency Corporation within the last ten minutes. The barkeep obliged, while giving the newcomer the ol' once-over. Initially over six feet tall, he shed nearly eight inches after he removed his adobe hat. His tousled hair was fair to translucent, counterpointing his dark and stormy facial features. He wore a titanium jerkin on which basso-relievo nymphs with timpani danced the fandango. The rest of his attire consisted of a large strip of bunting with cone-shaped bills and brown plumage and, most significantly, a beautiful white lasso coiled around his neck and shoulders. The saloonmeister recognized the superb craftsmanship at once and knew it had to have come from the distinguished lariatmakers of Florida, the Orlando Lasso Guild. An ancillary flash of apperception momentarily pushed aside thoughts of chilled cocktail components, and he pushed the whiskey six-draw article in front of the stranger. "Here. Read this," he said, pointing to the barbecue-flavored end of the essay. The man stared cautiously at the text for a moment, then began to read.

Where once there had been coarse, plodding verse, there was now a scintillating sonnet. The man's locution sang; it rhapsodized. The article recontextualized into a vital piece of word art. Suddenly inspired, the detuned honky tonk piano began to sound like Dinu Lupati at his best. Even the clappity-clop sound, last heard heading west, returned for a brief echolalic event. All too soon, the stranger finished his recitation, gulped the dregs of his drink, shifted his lasso slightly, and sauntered out the door. The taverner shook his head, dislodging several desert crustaceans, marveling that he had at last been privileged to be in the presence of the Poet Lariat.