

**Lasca** by Frank Desprez

I want free life, and I want fresh air;  
And I sigh for the canter after the cattle,  
The crack of the whips like shots in battle,  
The medley of hoofs and horns and heads  
That wars and wrangles and scatters and spreads;  
The green beneath and the blue above,  
And dash and danger, and life and love --  
And Lasca!

Lasca used to ride  
On a mouse-grey mustang close to my side,  
With blue serape and bright-belled spur;  
I laughed with joy as I looked at her!  
Little knew she of books or creeds;  
An Ave Maria sufficed her needs;  
Little she cared save to be at my side,  
To ride with me, and ever to ride,  
From San Saba's shore to Lavaca's tide.  
She was as bold as the billows that beat,  
She was as wild as the breezes that blow:  
From her little head to her little feet,  
She was swayed in her suppleness to and fro  
By each gust of passion; a sapling pine  
That grows on the edge of a Kansas bluff  
And wars with the wind when the weather is rough,  
Is like this Lasca, this love of mine.

She would hunger that I might eat,  
Would take the bitter and leave me the sweet;  
But once, when I made her jealous for fun  
At something I whispered or looked or done,  
One Sunday, in San Antonio,  
To a glorious girl in the Alamo,  
She drew from her garter a little dagger,  
And—sting of a wasp—it made me stagger!  
An inch to the left, or an inch to the right,  
And I shouldn't be maundering here tonight;  
But she sobbed, and sobbing, so quickly bound  
Her torn rebosa about the wound  
That I swiftly forgave her. Scratches don't count  
In Texas, down by the Rio Grande.

Her eye was brown—a deep, deep brown;  
Her hair was darker than her eye;

And something in her smile and frown,  
Curled crimson lip and instep high,  
Showed that there ran in each blue vein,  
Mixed with the milder Aztec strain,  
The vigorous vintage of Old Spain.  
She was alive in every limb  
With feeling, to the finger tips;  
And when the sun is like a fire,  
And sky one shining, soft sapphire  
One does not drink in little sips.

The air was heavy, the night was hot,  
I sat by her side and forgot, forgot;  
Forgot the herd that were taking their rest,  
Forgot that the air was close oppressed,  
That the Texas norther comes sudden and soon,  
In the dead of the night or the blaze of the noon;  
That, once let the herd at its breath take fright,  
Nothing on earth can stop their flight;  
And woe to the rider, and woe to the steed,  
That falls in front of their mad stampede!

Was that thunder? I grasped the cord  
Of my swift mustang without a word.  
I sprang to the saddle, and she clung behind.  
Away! on a hot chase down the wind!  
But never was fox-hunt half so hard,  
And never was steed so little spared.  
For we rode for our lives. You shall hear how we fared  
In Texas, down by the Rio Grande.

The mustang flew, and we urged him on;  
There was one chance left, and you have but one --  
Halt, jump to the ground, and shoot your hose;  
Crouch under his carcass, and take your chance;  
And if the steers in their frantic course  
Don't batter you both to pieces at once,  
You may thank your star; if not, goodbye  
To the quickening kiss and the long-drawn sigh,  
And the open air and the open sky,  
In Texas, down by the Rio Grande.

The cattle gained on us, and, just as I felt  
For my old six-shooter behind in my belt,  
Down came the mustang, and down came we,  
Clinging together—and, what was the rest?

A body that spread itself on my breast,  
Two arms that shielded my dizzy head,  
Two lips that hard to my lips were prest;  
Then came thunder in my ears,  
As over us surged the sea of steers,  
Blows that beat blood into my eyes,  
And when I could rise --  
Lasca was dead!

I gouged out a grave a few feet deep,  
And there in the Earth's arms I laid her to sleep;  
And there she is lying, and no one knows;  
And the summer shines, and the winter snows;  
For many a day the flowers have spread  
A pall of petals over her head;  
And the little grey hawk hangs aloft in the air,  
And the sly coyote trots here and there,  
And the black snake glides and glitters and slides  
Into the rift of a cottonwood tree;  
And the buzzard sails on,  
And comes and is gone,  
Stately and still, like a ship at sea.  
And I wonder why I do not care  
For the things that are, like the things that were.  
Does half my heart lie buried there  
In Texas, down by the Rio Grande.

Frank Desprez was an Englishman who in 1879 came to America where for three years he was a cowboy. In 1882 he returned to England and wrote "Lasca" which was first published in the *London Society: A Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature*, for November of 1882. A couple of years later, the poem was published in the *Livestock Journal*, and in the *Miles City Stockman*. It quickly moved into the oral tradition where it remains.