

Ballad of the Absent Mare

Leonard Cohen

Say a prayer for the cowboy, his mare's run away
And he'll walk 'til he finds her, his darling, his stray
But the river's in flood and the roads are awash
And the bridges break up in the panic of loss
And there's nothing to follow, there's nowhere to go
She's gone like the summer, gone like the snow
And the crickets are breaking his heart with their song
As the day caves in and the night is all wrong
Did he dream, was it she who went galloping past?
And bent down the fern, broke open the grass
And printed the mud with the iron and the gold
That he nailed to her feet when he was the lord
And although she goes grazing a minute away
He tracks her all night, he tracks her all day
Oh, blind to her presence, except to compare
His injury here with her punishment there
Then at home on a branch, in the highest tree
A songbird sings out, so suddenly
Ah, the sun is warm and the soft winds ride
On the willow trees by the river side
Oh, the world is sweet, the world is wide
And she's there where the light and the darkness divide
And the steam's coming off her, she's huge and she's shy
And she steps on the moon when she paws at the sky
And she comes to his hand but she's not really tame
She longs to be lost, he longs for the same
And she'll bolt and she'll plunge through the first open pass
To roll and to feed in the sweet mountain grass
Or she'll make a break for the high plateau
Where there's nothing above and there's nothing below
And it's time for the burden, it's time for the whip
Will she walk through the flame? Can he shoot from the hip?
So he binds himself to the galloping mare
And she binds herself to the rider there
And there is no space but there's left and right
And there is no time but there's day and night
And he leans on her neck and he whispers low
"Whither thou goest, I will go"
And they turn as one and they head for the plain
No need for the whip, ah, no need for the rein
Now the clasp of this union, who fastens it tight?
Who snaps it asunder the very next night?
Some say the rider, some say the mare
Or that love's like the smoke, beyond all repair
But my darling says, "Leonard, just let it go by
That old silhouette on the great Western sky
So I pick out a tune and they move right along
And they're gone like the smoke
And they're gone like this song"

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