

## The Country Cowboy © by zanybooks.com

The two-step is a very simple dance. Its beat goes like this: quick, quick, slow, slow, and one's feet move like this: short, short, long, long, left, right, left right. The theme from Beaches, Wind Beneath My Wings, started life as a gospel song but became a two-step before Bette Midler turned it into a ballad.

The two-step defeated Saul the first time he tried it. Some woman insisted he dance with her, leading him by the hand away from where he leaned on the railing content to watch the dancers, content to lurk unnoticed. They threaded their way through the tables, down three steps and out onto the floor. She told him, "quick, quick, slow, slow, just move your feet," several times, but he just couldn't get it.

"We've got lessons on Tuesdays and Thursdays," the bouncer told him as he left the club. He returned to the Country Cowboy the following week and the week after, each time taking the lesson, each time leaving the club immediately after the lesson was over.

Theoretically, he ought not to have been coming back; the country crowd weren't college graduates or athletic singles; they didn't wear ties and jackets; they weren't pretending to be something they were not. Still, country music fit his mood; if your dog is gone, your truck stolen, or if, as in Saul's case, your wife has left you, every song seems to have been written especially for you.

On his fourth visit, he asked a girl he'd danced with during the lesson to dance with him. They did. He repeated everything he'd learned during the lesson. "You don't talk much," she said as he led her back to her chair.

But he'd been talking up a storm, inside his head, "slow, slow, quick, quick."

Big Red, the same bouncer who'd told him about the lessons, proved an invaluable friend. He told Saul which women always went home alone and which would go home with anybody. The club had a late night crowd, he said, that almost always went home in couples, except for the male losers of the frequent late night fights. Saul remained thankful he was a day person.

In the second month he'd been taking the lessons, he spoke to Sam Mattox, the instructor. Sam was quite a character, quite a ladies man, and quite a good teacher. A simultaneous dance master, he'd whisper an instruction in one fellow's ear while

adjusting another's arm to the correct position. "Ladies, if he squeezes your hand, I want you to yell good and loud, it will alert the other ladies not to dance with him."

Saul became extra cautious, extra gentle in response.

Once or twice during each lesson, Sam would stop the music, and wave toward the bar. The bartender would come running out with a shot glass. Sam would gulp its contents down, thank the man, then go on with the lesson. If he saw a woman try to sneak off the dance floor, he'd follow, begging her to return, following her all the way to the lady's room if need be.

"I'm finding it hard to dance with some of these women," Saul confided to him, "they don't seem to know some of the steps."

"You're the only one who needs to know the steps. You need to lead, take them with you and they'll follow."

"Like a martial art."

Sam looked at him strangely. "Sure."

Saul got better; he had to. The unspoken rule of country dancing is that a woman will always agree to dance with you the first time you ask her. After that, why she may just look right through you.

Buck Owens' Bakersfield soon became Saul's favorite two-step because it expressed all his inadequacies as a beginner surrounded by experienced dancers:

"You don't know me, but you don't like me

You could care less how I feel..."

Still insecure, each time he came, he would be sure to ask the two elderly women that frequented the club to dance. They were excellent dancers; they back-led so skillfully that a man never quite realized they were teaching him.

Never guessing at Saul's true motive for choosing the old ladies as partners, one of the women who had chosen to dance with him regularly confided, "we've learned to trust you; you don't just hit on the good-looking ones." Since, unquestionably, she was one of the good-looking ones, he didn't attempt to correct her.

Saul guessed Sam had to be surviving on more than the whiskey half of the boilermakers he gulped down each evening. He soon learned from those he danced with that Sam also gave private lessons and workshops, neither of which Saul could afford. One weekend, unexpectedly, the club was almost deserted, the many faces

that had grown so familiar, lined and unlined, mustached and beardless were simply not there. The following Tuesday, they were all back again, bubbling over with excitement from a dance cruise Sam had led.

I'd like to go on a cruise, Saul thought, take the advanced lessons, be part of the group. But one look at the flyer for the upcoming cruise two weeks later brought him up hard against the realities of his current life. "Is there anything I can do," he asked Sam, "some kind of work to pay for my passage on this next cruise?"