

**The Lone, Black Chicken**  
**By Joseph Peterson**

Intense and mysterious music resonated throughout the dusty room. An old, brown chicken sat in the corner, playing a slightly rotted piano. The music halted as the musician raised his wings to the sky in dramatic preparation for the finale.

“Stuff those keys up your beak, Quellby. Nobody likes your playing,” said a fancily-dressed chicken sitting in the opposite corner of the room.

Quellby stopped. He shuffled his sheet music and made for the door.

“Great,” muttered a rooster in a fancy top hat behind the bar, “now who will we get to play.”

“Maybe you could hire the orchestra,” said a richly-dressed hen.

Before Quellby could open the door, it flew open. A Lone, Black Chicken entered. Startled, Quellby dropped his music. The Lone, Black Chicken picked up the sheets. Quellby grabbed them and rushed out.

The Lone, Black Chicken walked to the far corner, grabbing coins from tables on the way. She propped her feet on a table and raised a wing to call for the barkeeper.

“Mr. Barkly, a pound if you please,” she said.

“LET’S SEE YOU PAY FIRST!” shouted the barkeeper. The Lone, Black Chicken drew her pistol and grabbed a coin. She tossed the coin into the air.

BAM! The shot sent the coin spinning towards the bar. Mr. Barkly caught it, still looking at the Lone, Black Chicken. BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM! Five more coins flew towards the bar. Mr. Barkly caught them all. He tossed them back one by one.

“I ONLY SELL FEED TO PAYING CUSTOMERS!” shouted Mr. Barkly.

“Fine by me,” said the Lone, Black Chicken. She pulled out a bag of feed from her coat and started eating.

“GET OUT OF MY COOP, BANDIT!” shouted Mr. Barkly. He jumped into the air, sending his top hat flying.

The rich hens at the bar pulled out sawed-off shotguns from within their hats.

“Fine, fine, I can take a hint,” said the Lone, Black Chicken. She rose and started towards the door.

“ONLY IF IT HITS YOU OVER THE HEAD!” shouted Mr. Barkly.

“Yeah, yeah,” said the Lone, Black Chicken.

She stepped out onto the street. Weathered wooden buildings lined the road. Down the street, a small rooster with a big rifle and a gold star supervised some chickens stacking gold bars in front of the bank. He kicked over a stack, pocketing a few bars in the process.

“Uh-oh,” said the Lone, Black Chicken. She looked around. Across from the bank, she spotted a group of chickens on the porch in front of the food shop.

“Perfect,” she said. She crouched low and sprinted to the base of the porch.

“You guys mind stuffing me in a barrel or something?” she asked. A portly rooster with a rifle and a jaunty cap answered.

“Wouldn’t mind at all, if somebody hadn’t stolen all my pickle barrels!”

“Oh. I guess I did steal some pickle barrels. Good pickles by the way,” said the Lone, Black Chicken.

“Now the bar can’t buy any pickles, so they can’t sell any pickles at ridiculously high prices. Now they can’t afford to hire my orchestra to play!” said a hen with a rapier.

“Whoops. Well, I guess I’ll be going, won’t I?” said the Lone, Black Chicken.

“Not so fast,” said the sheriff, coming up behind. The Lone, Black Chicken turned to face the him. Mr. Barkly and the rich hens watched the proceedings from the bar door, guns out.

“I was just leaving, sheriff,” said the Lone, Black Chicken.

“And I’ll repeat myself,” said the sheriff, “not so fast.”

Mr. Barkly, the rich hens, the rapier hen, and the jaunty rooster all aimed their weapons.

“I don’t think you’re going anywhere,” said the sheriff.

“They work for you now?” asked the Lone, Black Chicken.

“HA, NO WAY!” shouted Mr. Barkly, “WE ALL HAVE DEBTS TO SETTLE WITH YOU!”

“I see,” said the Lone, Black Chicken, “what if I told you the sheriff wasn’t all that good.”

“We all know that,” said the jaunty rooster, “and he doesn’t like us, especially after we refused to build his statue, but we hate you more.”

“What if I told you the sheriff is really, quite bad,” said the Lone, Black Chicken.

“AT THE VERY LEAST, YOU AND THE SHERIFF ARE TIED FOR WORST-NESS,” shouted Mr. Barkly.

“What if I told you that the sheriff was going to blow up the town with all the gunpowder from your weapons!” said the Lone, Black Chicken.

“Not buying it,” said the jaunty rooster.

“FIRE!” shouted Mr. Barkly. All the chickens fired. Click, click, click. The rapier hen slipped into the food shop.

“I SWEAR I LOADED THIS THING!” shouted Mr. Barkly.

“My gun has no gunpowder!” said the jaunty rooster.

“MAYBE THE SHERIFF DID STEAL OUR GUNPOWDER?” shouted Mr. Barkly.

“Nobody move!” shouted the sheriff. He brandished his weapon.

“If you want to live, leave town now,” said the sheriff. “Everyone is free to go, except the Lone, Black Chicken.”

“CHARGE!” yelled the rapier hen from up the street. She led a group of farmers brandishing pitchforks and scythes mounted on giant lizards.

The Lone, Black Chicken dove out of the way.

The sheriff dropped his weapon and ran down the street, the cavalry right at his heels. The rapier hen pulled up alongside the Lone, Black Chicken and dismounted.

“Figure you’ll want to leave, but you can stay,” said the rapier hen, handing over the reins.

“For now,” said the jaunty rooster.

“Uh, thanks,” said the Lone, Black Chicken. She mounted the lizard and started down the road.

“MARK MY WORDS, WE STILL DON’T TRUST YOU” shouted Mr. Barkly, “YOU’VE GOT A LOT OF WORK TO DO BEFORE WE LIKE YOU AGAIN.”

The Lone, Black Chicken turned toward Mr. Barkly.

“YOU GOT IT,” she shouted at him. Mr. Barkly jumped, sending his hat flying again.

Quellby rode out from a side street, blowing a tune on a harmonica. He and the Lone, Black Chicken rode off into the sunset.