

“Midnight Shoot Out
Cowboy Poetry

by

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Silver Spurs a-Jinglin'

With silver spurs a-jinglin' he walked into the bar.
He had a glittering eye and a weathered jagged scar.
It ran the length of his cheek and up into his hair.
Jake had that kind of look, like he'd been everywhere.

He set down in the corner his back against the wall.
Even sittin' down this cowboy sat really tall.
He pulled a deck of cards and started shufflin' them around.
The ace of spades fell face up when it hit the ground.

A stranger in black boots stepped his right foot on it.
His face looked like a puzzle with pieces that don't fit.
He kicked the card and challenged Jake to some six-gun poker.
The ace of spades was gonna place a bet against the joker.

Now everybody knows the joker is the top wild card
and when it's played against an ace the chips fall fast and hard.
The stranger drew his six-gun faster than the eye
but Jake was like greased lightning; the stranger had to die.

The stranger's body lurched then fell dead on the floor.
Jake gathered up the cards and shuffled them once more.
He pulled just one card out and put the rest aside.
He threw the ace of spades down where the stranger lie.

With silver spurs a-jinglin' Jake walked into the street.
The night was hot and muggy and had a deathly heat.
He climbed up on his saddle and wiped sweat from his head
then pulled his hat down low and thought about the dead.

Midnight Shoot Out

Platinum sheet lightning lit up the lone prairie.
A midnight shoot-out film played in the sky above me.
I heard a lone wolf howling a chilling haunting song
and then across the sky I saw ten riders riding strong.

The thundering of the horses hooves echoed thru the night
as I bore silent witness to this blurred and ghostly sight.
Five Hatfields on the left and five McCoy boys on the right
were mounted on their wild -eyed stallions, guns drawn for a
fight.

The tall scar-faced outlaw riders had hatred in their eyes.
The midnight sky was lit up like a blazing hot sunrise.
Their horses were pale phantoms snorting foggy breath
carrying ghosts riders in a sky that screamed of death.

I heard Anse Hatfield's voice blurt out "McCoy! This is your
last."

"You won't ride this range again." and then I heard a blast.
Ole Ran was hit in the chest, but dead men's ghosts don't fall.
Already dead, he couldn't die and so he still rode tall.

Then the midnight sky became a deadly, quiet clear.
There was no noise at all in the hazy atmosphere.
I relit my campfire to burn off the ghostly chill
and thought about dead men and ghosts and reasons why men
kill.

Bad Day in Red Deer

The sun was beating down, 'bout a hundred & ten degrees.
Even the dogs were sweating, passed out in the streets.
You could smell trouble in the air.
You could feel it everywhere.
It was a bad day in red deer. It was worse than the heat.

I was sippin' whiskey down, at the Red Dog Saloon,
tryin' to quench a powerful thirst like all the rest were doin'.
The boys were playin' pay cards,
the stakes were high and hard.
When we heard the first shots, it was just about high noon.

We heard the women screamin', and we hit them swingin' doors.
The sheriff, he'd been hit hard and was crawlin' on all fours.
Our guns were drawn and ready.
Our hands were sure and steady
and then I saw Jess Carter's face. He was settlin' old scores.

Now Jesse he'd once saved my life so I couldn't gun him down.
Then Jesse's eyes met mine as his gun hand spun around.
In that one split second,
before either of us reckoned
a bullet from another gun drove Jesse to the ground.

I dropped my gun in the dust and ran where Jesse lay.
Old memories came rushing back of kid's play yesterday.
Jesse'd fenced with death
and death took his last breath.
I bit my lip to stop the tears as Jesse slipped away.

I turned and walked away, shaky in the knees,
thinkin' 'bout the carnage layin' back there in the street.
I wiped the sweat from my head
and said a prayer for the dead.
It was a bad day in red deer. It was worse than the heat

Bringin' 'Em In

It's rough out on the trail of a cattle drive.
Some wranglers make it. Some don't come back alive.
Some die from the heat. Some die from the herd.
Some just die from heartache but they don't say a word.

And out on the trail...

You head for the watering hole, the one you used before,
but now she's dry as a bone and sunburnt to the core.
Your canteen is empty and your throat's dry and hot.
You shake it for the water you know it hasn't got.

So you keep driving the cattle up around the next bend
but still there ain't no water just desert without end.
You're startin' to cough and wretch. You know you're in deep
trouble.
Your head's gettin' heavy and you're startin' to see double.

And just when you're thinkin' you ain't got a chance,
it's wet on your forehead as the rain starts to dance.
It pours down in torrents and you laugh and jump for joy
and just for a moment you feel like a little boy.

The rain keeps pourin' down and you watch the puddles form.
The cattle are a quiet bunch in this summer storm.
They're soaked to the skin and their tongues are cold and wet.
These clouds are a long-lost friend you never will forget.

Yeah it's tough out on the trail drivin' cattle to a sale,
eatin' when you can and drinkin' water that's gone stale.
Sure the pay is good and most of the time you win
but the biggest thrill of all is just 'bringin' 'em in'!

The Smell of Death and Dead Men

It was an hour before sunset and the sun was hangin' red.
The posse and the outlaws were packin' steel and lead.
Some would walk away that day and some would fall there dead.
Those that bit the dust that day would have a Boot Hill bed.

I was just twelve years old, green and scared as hell.
I crouched down and hid behind the old abandoned well.
I watched them kickin' up the dust that motley outlaw hoard.
I saw each man's gritty stare before the gunfire roared.
The battle, short and bloody, settled up the score.
Men who'd lived and breathed would live and breathe no more.

The gun smoke slowly cleared and the street was safe again.
Pools of blood mixed with dust beside the fallen men.
I rushed into the crowded street that oozed the smell of death.
The air was thick and sour. I had to gasp for breath.
I was searchin' with a bad feelin' for my brother Bill.
I hoped he still be alive if it was God's will

Then I saw Billy layin' there, all still and turnin' gray.
I ran fast to his side, knelt down, began to pray.
But Billy had been shot dead and blood was on the moon
and them that was still livin' went back to the saloon.

It's been a real long time since that deathly day
but in my mind the carnage will never fade away.

Sometimes late at night
I recall that day and then
I swear I smell that sickly smell...
the smell of death and dead men.

Lone Run

The gleaming silver and black iron horse
thundered down the virgin track,
puffing and steaming with magnum force,
burning and churning black smoke from her stack.
Through the renegade land of the Navajo
smoke signals painted the sentinel sky.
The dark iron horse kicked and grunted below
snaking up close to the river's side.

The braves stood tall and ready for battle.
Their Indian faces were bright with war paint.
This black iron horse with no bridle or saddle,
the white man's dark dragon must be slain.
Groaning up the grade in the blazing sun
she climbed the railed ladder to Pinto Pass.
The shiny iron horse on her maiden run
didn't have a clue it would be her last.

The tribe made ready for the coming attack.
With ponies and ropes they dragged jagged boulders
around a blind bend where there's no turnin' back.
They laid in wait by the tracks' soiled shoulders.
The train crested the tall hill and ran the pass
then bullishly started her downhill run.
Her eyes were blind to the jagged rock mass
as the steel rails glared in the mid-day sun.

The tracks became a bold funeral pyre
bordered by Indians west and east.
They watched the iron horse explode and expire.
She'd breathe no more this mangled black beast.
This silver-black steed had only one run;
now she's scrap metal strewn under the plain.
She's buried there somewhere in Pinto Pass canyon.
This was her lone run; she won't run again.

Marshall Blake's Boy

I remember it like yesterday, the day they deputized him.
Ninety percent of the town turned out to take the happening in.
Jim's boy, Matt, had grown to be a strapping fine young lad,
and on that day, he'd wear a badge of courage like his dad.

Jim Blake had been the Marshall for nigh on twenty years.
He'd seen the smiles of Cimarron and he'd seen her tears.
The outlaws came and went, and Jim Blake faced them all;
and as men cast their shadows, Jim's was mighty tall.

Jim's boy Matt, the new deputy, wore his badge with pride.
He sauntered thru the saloon with an easy manly stride.
He set down at a table at the far end of the bar.
Innocence shone from his face and his new tin star.

Matt ordered whiskey straight, as the doors swung open wide.
There stood an angry stranger, steel hangin' at his side.
He called John Lucas out and growled "Lucas draw your gun."
"Right here's the end of the line; there ain't nowhere to run."

Matt stepped in to break it up. He knew John couldn't win.
Someone yelled for the Marshall and as Jim Blake walked in,
the gunfire roared then smoked. Matt Blake had been shot dead.
His first day on the job he'd bought a bullet in the head.

When the gun smoke finally cleared Jim knelt down at Matt's
side.
A grown man doesn't cry, but a tear fell from his eye.
His son lay in his arms, dead and cold as stone.
Jim had felt alone before, but this was more alone.

I remember it like yesterday, the day they deputized him
He stood there tall as he received his brand-new badge of tin
Jim's boy, Matt, was a good boy and everybody's friend.
It was a bad day in Cimarron, the day Matt's life would end.

Charlie's Dream

They ventured from the east with wishes dreams and hopes,
trekking through the deserts and cross the mountain slopes;
two weeks out already and five more weeks to go,
heading for the west where the milk and honey flow.
In wagon three was Charlie with his wife and family.
He was going west to claim his destiny.
All his life he'd struggled he was no man of means,
but Charlie was a good man and his dreams were simple dreams.

The wagon train was winding toward the promised land.
Wooden wheels were turning, burning deep tracks in the sand.
Sixty wagons long with just one goal in mind.
Sixty wagons strong to cross the California line.
Charlie's wife Gisele was the kind a poor man needs
to help him build a home and help him plant new seeds.
Charlie's three young sons would help him farm the land
and Charlie's girl Roxanne would take a cowboy's hand.

About the fourth week out the Indians attacked;
bullets from the front and arrows from the back.
The train had formed a circle with wagons overturned,
some hit by flaming arrows, choking as they burned.
The wagon train had stumbled in this strange wild land.
Wooden wheels stopped turning, dug into the sand:
Sixty wagons strong with rifle & gun.
Sixty wagons long with fear in everyone.

It took less than an hour until the last man fell.
They killed his wife Gisele in Charlie's private hell.
Roxanne was dragged away in the middle of a scream.
The Indians and arrows murdered Charlie's dream.
The wagon train was cursed and never saw the promised land.
Her wooden wheels stopped turning; no tracks left in the sand.
Sixty wagons long; no trace left where they'd been.
Sixty wagons gone; and dead was Charlie's dream.

Days of the Buffalo

Gone are the days of the buffalo
and Indians hunting with arrow and bow.
Gone is the freedom they once knew before
and Sacred hunting grounds sacred no more.

Out on this grassy windswept plain
that feeds on sun and drinks the rain,
once long ago the buffalo roamed
and the Indian had a place to call home.

Alive with the red man's sweat and tears
this plain was nurtured for many years.
It was the old ways of the red man
to take just what he needed from this rich land.

He hunted and fished, and he planted seed
just to survive, not for sport or greed.
The earth was his father, his mother, his son.
The land and the sky and the red man were one.

Then one day the white man rode onto the prairie
and changed the face of the land of the free.
One by one red men went to their graves
As the land of the free made the Indians slaves.

They were here first and this was their land
but they were robbed of it by the white man.
Red blood and white blood spilled on the plain.
The Indians would not own this land again

We took their land and called it our nation's.
We forced them out onto poor reservations.
On sad broken wings the eagle has flown
and the endangered buffalo no longer roam.

Red and White

Each man has his own background and for the most part too
Each has his own beliefs he carries false or true.
The red man has his ritual ways. The white man has his laws;
and they never fully understand one another's cause.

The white man's had his way in shaping western history.
He's fought hard for the right to say this land of ours is free.
Some live in the big city and dream in their high rise.
Others toil on the land and weep through dusty eyes.

The red man can't be hemmed in or tied to city lights.
He likes the open skies and starry prairie nights.
Fishin' for his breakfast cooked on open flames,
he hunts with a hunger and a thirst that can't be tamed.

The white man has his God and his way of life.
He has his choice of many roads that branch off left and right.
He won't take responsibility for injustices or war
and he won't give the red man back what belonged to him before.

The red man has his great spirit and sacred mother earth.
He knows that wealth and power aren't the measure of one's
worth.
He whispers to the rain and listens to the wind
and tries to stay in tune with the world he's living in.

The red man and the white man roam this earth together.
It's a shame they don't take the time to know each other better.
History's filled with bloodshed and battles left behind
that might not have been fought if man was not so blind.

Each being has a special white magic of his own
and we must take our best part with us thru this vast unknown.
As we walk life's crowded pathways, we still walk alone
and we all reap our destiny from the seed's we've sown.

Rodeo Cowboy

He's headin' down the highway goin' to the rodeo
dreamin' bout tomorrow the summer sun is sinkin' low.
He's starin' at his saddle rememberin' the times he fell.
Tomorrow night could find him in heaven or in hell.

His mind is driftin' to those dusty white gates.
He's hopin' and prayin' he'll be scorin' straight eights.
He lost everything except his pride and beat up van.
He gave up everything to be a rodeo man.

Take a hard look at his face you can tell he's been around.
Sometimes ridin' high sometimes down on the ground.
He loves the rush of the ride and the danger game,
Ridin' bulls with a suicide knot in the rein.

In his back-hip pocket he packs a tarnished ring.
That long-gone woman was his everything.
The wild side of him just couldn't settle down
and she couldn't take the traveling town to town.

That long-gone woman still haunts his weary mind
but it's too late now to try to walk her line.
He's a road warrior who never sings the blues;
A hard luck hobo who keeps on paying his dues.

The rodeo cowboy is a man who walks alone
on a long hard road that turns a heart to stone.
He's earned all his scars, ridin' the rodeo
but the deepest wounds are the ones that never show.

Out on the circuit chasin' those dusty rainbows,
that's the life of a cowboy ridin' the rodeos.

An Old Dusty Heartache

An old dusty heartache
keeps ridin' through his mind'
just an old rusty keepsake
he can't leave behind.
Her love left a scar
like a shooting star.
an old dusty heartache
keeps ridin' through his mind.

Dusty dreams and heartches
keep him movin' on;
traces and memories
from an old love song.
There's no place to rest
everywhere he finds
an old dusty heartache
keeps ridin' through his mind.

An old dusty heartache
just won't let him be.
An old haunting memory
keeps tugging at his sleeve.
Wishing on a kiss
wondering where she is
an old dusty heartache
keeps riding through his mind.

Angel of the Painted Desert

Out on the painted desert
the sun plays tricks with your mind
when you're achin' for a drop of rain
throat parched and eyes half blind.
High on the plains of devil's bluff
she came ridin' o'er the rise.
Her gentle hands were water
quenching the thirst in his eyes.

He tumbled from his saddle
no longer able to ride.
Swift with the wings of an angel
she was kneeling at his side.
Tending his wounds, quenching his thirst,
she robbed his soul from the dead.
When he awoke she'd disappeared
but her image danced in his head.

On that lonely sandy stretch
of shapeless shifting dunes
broken wishes lay beside
lost buried treasure ruins.
Skeletons lay sleeping
under rusty wagon wheels.
Was he only dreaming
or was that angel real?

Out on that painted desert
where the sand dunes meet the sky,
he still sees her ridin'
the dusty trails of his mind.
High on the plains of devil's bluff,
where the sun bends down to kneel,
mysterious things can happen
and he swears that angel was real.

Winding Road

On life's winding road a man can lose his vision
and pass right by his destiny with the wrong decision.
The key to fame and fortune is knowing where and when;
knowing when to shoot straight and knowing when to bend.

History is filled with fools and sprinkled with great men.
Great men learn by their mistakes and fools rush in again.
The wise man lives with principles he will not compromise.
The fool keeps chasing rainbows that only cloud his eyes.

One man can call medicine what another man call's poison.
Whiskey can warm one man, drown another and destroy him.
On this winding road of life a man makes his own choice.
He can talk in hazy whispers or speak strong in a clear voice.

We're all a drop of water in this river we call life.
Some live by the written word and some live by the knife.
There's black and yellow red and white, Christians and Jews.
Each man has his cross to bear and each must pay his dues.

And what of the road not taken that each of us has seen?
Did it host a nightmare or hold a precious dream?
Once we've passed it by it seems to disappear.
When opportunity is knocking how many of us hear?

When we come into this life we know not what it holds.
Some heart's have a rusty seam and some are sown with gold.
But one thing is for certain in life's haphazard game.
We come into this world alone and leave it just the same.

The Outlaw Billy Miner

*Back in the 1880s the outlaw Billy Miner
Was either breaking the law or breaking out of jail.
Up in these parts in the City of New Westminster
He did time in the B.C. Pen for robbing CP Rail.*

Bill spent some time in New York in the social climbing game.
Dressed up in a three-piece suit he used different name*.
When his cash supply was gone back out west, he came.
An outlaw riding through the land was his claim to fame.

He held up stages in the states and trains in Canada,
Always travelling with a gun and running from the law.
There never was a prison that could hold him very long.
He'd find a way to break out and then he'd be long gone.

In 1904 Canada's first train robbery
was pulled off by Bill Miner making history.
He held up the C.P.R. with outlaw Shorty Dunn.
Ten thousand worth of gold and bonds put them on the run.

Again In 1906 he robbed the C.P.R. in May.
In June he was sentenced to a lifetime prison stay.
He stood in court and told the judge "*No jail can hold me sir.*"
In August of the next year he'd back up his word.

He broke out of the B.C. Pen in 1907,
was back in jail in Georgia by spring 1911.
He busted out of Georgia pen two more times and then
in this life here on earth he never escaped again.

*On September 2nd, 1913 Billy Miner drew his final breath
and made his last escape arm in arm with the angel of death.*

*The other name Billy Miner used in New York was Eric Edwards.

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