

YANKEE HEART:

A Rough Sketch of the Cowboy Mind

Who sayz Uncle Sam's stone-hearted?
That's a tall tale told too fast.
Yep, he's skittish 'n strutting
haunted by shadows of rank and past.

He's got a swagger he keeps a-polishin',
boots shined bright for watching crowds—
he'd sooner rot in a roadside ditch
than stand second or bow.

Sam ain't no creature carved from cold reason,
ain't no clock ticking in his chest—
his blood runs hot like prairie lightning,
wild as a colt that won't be pressed.

Quick on the draw, no time for thinkin',
he fires first and sorts it later,
riding through lonesome, lawless frontiers.

Raised on dust and burning distance,
where law rides thin and nights run long,
Sam hammers legends from open country—
but governance? Lord, that tune goes wrong.

Yep, Uncle Sam iz sensitive as a bruised peach,
achin' over what the neighbors whisper,
every sideways glance a fresh-dug splinter.

Oh, he's got a heart, alright,
you can wager your last thin dime—
but parts of that heart, left in the sun,
have soured... rank with neglect and time.

His ethics ride on a lame, unwashed horse—
and brother, are they coarse!

Terri flicked her napkin against the table with a look of pure disgust, looking at her friends. "This ain't poetry," she said, her voice sharp as a rusted spur dragged slow across stone. "It's merely a half-baked sermon in a cowboy hat. Big talk, no backbone. You can't fix a busted world with clichés and swagger."

Tim didn't answer right away. He was studying the fluorescent light above them like it owed him money— that long, low hum it made, the way it flickered at the edges of its own glow. "Don't go buryin' this poem just yet, Terri," he drawled in a voice dry as old leather in mid-summer. "Manure don't look like much when it's fresh. But give it time..." A crooked smile tugged at his mouth, then he paused. "—it feeds things. Yep, what stinks today has a way of becomin' next season's crop."

Sam let out a laugh like a rusty hinge in a cheap saloon. He shook his head slowly, the way a man does when he's disappointment is frozen in his bones. "Save your breath, the both of ya," he grunted as he filled his glass with some whisky. "Nobody in this godforsaken territory can read deep enough to care, and the ones who can sure as hell ain't lookin' for Truth in a rhyme. Truth don't rhyme. It bites. Leaves an uncomfortable mark. Doesn't care if you liked the way it sounds."

Kris let out a long, heavy sigh that seemed to carry the weight of the whole conversation. "Doesn't matter," she said at last, her voice soft, nearly swallowed by the ambient noise. "All of this... The poem. The argument. Every last word we've said tonight - it's all just noise driftin' nowhere in the prairie" she muttered, staring blankly at her friends. "All of our words are irrelevant as a rain cloud in a drought." She reached into the cooler without looking and pulled out a beer bottle, the glass slick with condensation that felt colder than it ought to. She then set it on the table with a sound like a period at the end of a long sentence. "Pass it down," she murmured. "If the world's goin' to hell on a lame horse, we should enjoy this night and get drunk."

The neon light above their heads buzzed louder. For a moment—just a moment—the room felt like it was falling. No one mentioned it and they kept on drinking.