**It Beats the Hell Out of Driving a Truck**

I hate it when the hotel bar doesn’t have my beer of choice

I hate it when the hotel pens just suck

I hate it when my flight is filled with screaming squealing kids

Still all in all it beats the hell out of driving a truck.

Yes, all in all it beats the hell out of driving a truck.

I hate it when the terrorists come a bursting through the doors

Assassinating those who draw cartoons

I hate it when the sun goes down outside behind the bay

And you and I are watching it all from separate rooms

Still all in all it beats the hell out of driving a truck.

I hate it when the strangers in this pompous cocktail bar

Keep performing oral sex acts with their phones

I hate it when you are fast asleep so many miles away

And I’m sitting here drinking a beer and writing this poem.

Still all in all it beats the hell out of driving a truck.

I hate it when tomorrow promises nothing more than fear

Fear and some other twisted sense of fate

And there’s one thing that annoys me even more than all of this

I hate it when I run out of things to hate

Still all in all it beats the hell out of driving a truck.

**Flowery Verse**

I can’t let you in, but I want you to stay

My heart tells my mind, “Hold his feelings at bay

Don’t let them dock, don’t let them wish

Don’t let them yearn, and don’t let them fish”

I would ask for the doctor but I’m afraid that his nurse

Would drown me in a sponge bath of flowery verse

Tip toes and tulips and walks in the rain

Rainbows and babies they all drive me insane

Warm midnight breezes and stars in the sky

Falling for sweethearts with love in their eyes

All of these things make my malady worse

I’m allergic it seems to flowery verse

Roses and love songs and the first flake of snow

Greeting cards, chocolates, peaceful rivers that flow

Orange Autumn leaves turning passionate red

Curling up by the fire makes me wish I was dead

But it seems I’m still breathing and I can’t find a hearse

On the backstreets of romance and flowery verse

I once was a poet with a sparkling pen

I’d write about love over and over again

It’s not that I’m cynical, bitter, or cold

It’s just that I’ve grown up incurably old

It probably sounds jaded, it probably sounds terse

But my passion has faded to flowery verse

I can’t let you in, but I want you to stay

My heart tells my mind, “Hold his feelings at bay”

Millions of phrases and chapters of hope

Help the sad, and the lonely, and wounded to cope

While I have found armor, both a blessing and curse

To protect me forever from flowery verse

**Short Fuse**

I’ve been living on a short fuse

I’ve been listening to a long song

I’ve been digging through the refuse

That you left here when you did me wrong

I’ve been chilling in a cold place

Trying to find a hot spring

I’ve been living on a short fuse

About to blow up everything

I’ve been staring at a sign post

Bolted to a blank sign

Don’t know should I go fast

Or should I try to take my time

I’ve been chasing down a fast buck

Trying to make some slow doe

I’ve been living on a short fuse

Waiting for the circuit to blow

I’ve been staring at a dead clock

Waiting for the next chime

I begin to take stock

Counting cartons full of lost minds

Making wishes at dry well

In the middle of a wet dream

I’ve been living on a short fuse

Trying not to blow off steam

Short Fuse / Long Song / No Use / Gone Wrong

Short Story / Tall Tale / Guts Glory / No Time to Fail

Big Trouble / Wee Bit / Burst Bubble / Bullshit

Background noise / Front Page News

Tall Order

When you’re living on a SHORT FUSE

**I Kind of Miss You**

It’s up and down and it’s back and forth and let’s start all over again

I kind of miss you. I want to kiss you. Honey, just tell me when

You’re on the road and I’m in the air; when I land I will send you a text

I kind of miss you. I want kiss you. Honey, what happens next?

Let’s take a shortcut back to paradise

When together we had nothing for to lose

Let’s take a train to where it’s twice as nice

And we don’t know where our next meal is hiding

Or where we’ll find our next pair of shoes

This world of ice, it don’t look so nice, the streets get deserted and cold

I kind of miss you. I want to kiss you. Loving you never gets old.

The left was right and the right got left at the altar of infinite greed

I kind of miss you. I want to kiss you. Honey, you’re what I need

Money comes and money goes; lovers are counting their cash

I kind of miss you. I want to kiss you. I want to make it last

The market’s down. The jig is up. The rich men shake in their shoes

I kind of miss you. I can’t kiss you. And that’s what gives me the blues.

**Writing On The Wall**

I want the things that might have been

I want to win back what I lost

I want the things I never had; no matter what the cost

People talk about me

In whispers behind my back

They say “He’s going crazy!” “He’s going crazy!”

He’ll probably die of a heart attack

They say I’ve reached my potential

They say I’ve got it all

They don’t even realize I’ve lost my pencil

And that I never finished writing on the wall

I read the Facebook yesterday

Cover to cover, front to back

Sipped a couple cold ones; read it all a second time and fixed myself a snack

People talk about me now

They’ve got nothing better to do

Asking themselves still, somehow

Why I couldn’t make it work with you

Me I’ve got nothing but benign posts

Winter, spring, summer, and fall

And it seems to me what I regret most

Is that I never finished writing on the wall.

Someday soon I’ll die here

In my footsteps, not hiding down below

The song box will be silent; with no music left to flow

My face will be a junkyard

Of emotions with no home

No love to share, I won’t be there

The world will be all alone

And when the curious meander

And their limousines start to stall

They’ll probably stop and take a gander

And see a dead man who never finished writing on the wall.

**Far Above The World Below**

I’m a million miles away from here in a story that’s unfolding deep inside the caverns of my mind

I’m a billion days from yesteryear in a lifetime that’s still holding onto dreams that I was forced to leave behind

Clear blue skyways are my highways and I ride them without out aid of man or his insufferable ego

I ride the thermals with no need of wings, in the heavens, with no need of strings, far above the pains of the world below

Oh honey, Oh. Oh honey, Oh Oh Oh. Oh, I love you so.

Oh honey, Oh. Oh honey, Oh Oh Oh. Far above the pains of the world below

Everything is peaceful; contentment breeds a sleeveful of focused inner calm that soothes with cleansing waves of light

I don’t bow to any others, but I know I’m not alone as I continue to evolve and grow like romance in the night

No search for other purpose, no need to slaughter or to birth us, it seems so obviously worthless, nothing else I even care to know

It’s like I’m drifting through an afterlife, a newlywed with a brand new wife, far above the pains of the world below

Soon there comes a cooling shower that somehow feeds and grows a flower in an hour maybe less blessed and smiling at me from my left

As the skyway turns to pasture, nothing moves slower, fast or faster, in this wise here ever after, I never lose my breath

I feel like floating down a river warm and willing with no shiver to deliver what I once could not imagine could be so.

Teaching lawlessness to lawyers; Huckleberry Finns and Thomas Sawyers, just a voyeur far above the pains of the scattered world below.

**Hot Dog Bun**

February in Midtown Manhattan, I ordered a hot dog on a bun

Ice cold beer, crowded bar, and but still life has lost its fun

Winding back through foggy trails of cobwebs in my mind

Another attic of confusion looking for an exit sign

Piece of work, soda jerk, right brain, left my dreams

Shadows of where the past becomes the way the future seems

Roast beef to the left of me, pickle on my right

Grilled cheese there across the bar, incandescent light

Noisy and amusing, all this motion makes me down

Snow outside, sidewalks slide, while I’m trying to slow down

Juniors, seniors, in-between-ers, lined up in a row

Everyone is eating in, because it’s much too cold to go

Outside where snow is melting on a sidewalk cold and dead

Still keeps falling trying to collect in a city that’s lost its head

Everything is “on” here and I cannot turn it off

I walked in without a cellphone and I could hear my conscience cough

February in Midtown Manhattan and I’ve finished my first beer

I miss you more than ten minutes ago and still my hot dog isn’t here.

**Sometimes I Feel**

Sometimes I feel like if I let myself feel I’d just break down and cry

I couldn’t get by; I’m not allowed to find any place to hide

Whenever the day starts to wear me away

I grow much thicker skin, hold my feelings within

I’m bound to fight the devil deep inside

Bulletproof emotions, crossing seven sprawling oceans full of lust, conceit and trite, creative, greed

Chasing down the dollars, I hear a homeless widow holler, saying dollars aren’t what I need.

Looking for the reasons for the changing of the seasons

From summer sun to winter grey

Tomorrow is like a threat, whispered once that I can’t forget

And it makes me wish that I’ve already passed away

Because it feels so cold

I build myself a fortress in this forest full of choices and I’ve locked myself forever safe inside

I live here with my missus and a set of matching dishes but my adolescent wishes have all dried

They’re now a scattered mess, born of wealth and of success

All unimpressed that I can never quite come clean

If there’s an answer to my prayer, I can’t find it anywhere

I don’t know how to share exactly what I mean.

Because I feel so cold

Sometimes I know that if I let myself go, I’d fall apart at the core

I couldn’t take it no more; I’d drown here, in this river full of fear

Sometimes I fear that if these walls disappear you’ll see me naked inside

Stripped of my pride, and down to

Down to my last tear.

**Oh Honey**

Oh honey; where has this been

The fallen leaves of autumn

Whispering what might have been

Oh honey; how does this end

Do the wheels come off the freight train?

Do I go off the rails again?

Or do I end up shoveling shit in a one horse town

Not that much to do all day until that horse comes back around

And when she does, does she ask me why I still won’t ride her away?

And after she’s asked me that a thousand times, will I run out of things to say?

Oh honey; if I ask you to decide

Will you ask me for a reason?

Or will you take me for a ride?

Oh honey; I will love you until I die

Yes, I will love you without question

Just don’t ever ask me why

**Possible**

Don’t you think it’s possible

That you and I could blow this town

Find a place to end this race

And settle upside down

Don’t you think it’s possible

That we could board a southbound train

Start our flight into the night

Toward a light we can’t explain

Don’t you think it’s possible

That a love like ours could live

Indefinitely improbably

But then again love always is

Don’t you think it’s possible

That paradise is just around the bend

Kind of unpredictable

But we will make it there my friend

We will make it there my friend

We will never say goodbye

We will make it to the end

Don’t you think it’s possible

We might relax and take our time

Stroll along like a romantic song

As the morning sun begins to shine

Don’t you think it’s possible

That we could have it all once more

Everything is tolerable

Waves are lapping up on shore

Don’t you think it’s possible

Just imagine you and I

It’s not totally inconceivable

That we might never say goodbye

We will never say goodbye

We will make it there my friend

We will make it you and I

We will make it there my friend

We will make it to the end

We will never say goodbye

We will land there on our feet

We will make there my sweet

We will make it you and I

**I Love You Tonight**

You know the world is full of plenty of bullshit

But even bullshit can help make things grow

Gluten free legal pot, now that hits the spot

But to the wheat fields we have to say no

I don’t understand the newspaper

It’s not paper, it’s there on my phone

When the police kill a man, the revolution is fanned

When I man kills a cop, the cop dies alone.

But I love you tonight

And I’ll love you at dawn

I’ll love you until the earth stands still

And time stops travelling on

It’s a good life; a good time to grow older

We won’t drive; cars will drive us instead

We won’t touch the wheel; the car will know how we feel

And drop us off at our nursing home beds

As I shuffle down past tattoo parlors

Piercing and painting my friends

I lose all sensation for these affectations

And convince myself that we’re close to the end.

I was born; I was raised in this country

In this country I’ll probably die

Once a loose rebel child, rebellious and wild

I mutter “Kids today” and I sigh.

Other countries, religions, and factions

Out to get us and claiming its fate

Why can’t they just trust in our wealth and our lust?

Why is it they must, preach their gospel of hate?

**If I Don’t Go To Sleep**

If I don’t go to sleep tomorrow still gonna come

If I do its gonna come too soon

If I can’t find a race, baby I’m still gonna run

And I’ll run until they finally lower the boom

You can dance on my thoughts with your hard wooden shoes

Still my eyes will attach to a smile

You can torture my dreams with your mistreated blues

My dreams have all gone out of style

The mountains of hope and the depths of regret

On this landscape all dark and forlorn

It’s a long row to hoe when you’re trying to cope

And the weeds keep on strangling the corn

If I don’t go to sleep then I’ll never wake up

If I do then there’s no guarantee

That when I awake all these pieces of pie

Will ever make any sense to me

Put your head on a pillow before the moon hits your eyes

When it does you will not ever doze

Tell me dear should I love you or claw out your eyes

Or should I pass out here in these clothes.

**Day Old Donuts**

A box of day old donuts and a cold cup of coffee and a slice of last night’s pizza on the floor

That’s all that I’m left with on this cold Sunday morning

Except the hazy memory

Of the echo of her footsteps she

Turned away, walked out on me

Out of my front door

It felt just like a sunrise, it was finally Friday evening

A balmy breeze was blowing through the bar

The sky was orange and purple and alive with magic moments

Foreboding what would foment from a pair of wayward lovers

Who would later kiss and wish upon a star

She brushed my elbow passing on the way to her barstool

I breathed the freshest breath I’d ever breathed

I turned my head to wander, maybe dream or maybe ponder

What might happen far out yonder if I ever really found her

And we felt a spark before she had to leave

That was just the start of what became a hot flirtation

Like a cable network station when the children are asleep

We left that place together, half past midnight, I swear I never

Ever felt my pulse thump like a dance club, with a deep bump,

But now I’m just another chump with tear stains on his cheeks

**The Last Thought of an Astronaut**

Last night was the last night that I spent inside this dream

The last time and the last crime that could possibly redeem

The last man in the last band to play my favorite tune

The last thought of an astronaut who’d been howling at the moon

Yeah, I’ve been howling at the moon

Last night was the last night that we’ll ever meet again

The last death of the last breath just like a thousand other men

The last room in the last tomb in a circle in my mind

The last jewel from the last fool that taught me to unwind

Yeah, you finally taught me to unwind

The first look was a fish hook and I took the savory bait

The first taste got me shit faced both too fast and much too late

The late show was a scare crow undeniably extreme

And last night was the last fright that I spent inside this dream

Yeah, it was the last night that I spend inside this dream

It was a good long ride on an eastbound train but the wheels kept coming off

When the north wind blew for the precious few and the ice was growing soft

The right thought from my left brain wrote this song without a tune

Like the last thought of an astronaut who’d been howling at the moon.

Yeah, I’ve been howling at the moon

**The Ballad Of Pokey McSlow**

Pokey McSlow at high noon against the fastest gun in the west

It’ll probably be over real soon, though Pokey will try his best

To lay him low; to shoot him down. I know it’s so; I know this town

Businessmen will watch; the bets have all been placed

And there stands Pokey McSlow; without a look on his face.

It all started in Elmo’s cantina, with a fat old man named Clark

He was hitting on sweet Melina, in the corner smoky and dark

He was feeling her up, she was pushing him back. She threw a drink in his face to fend off his attack

And that’s when it started to get interesting. In walked a man named Parker Joe Sling

Who laid out old man Clark with just one punch

Then he ordered some lunch.

Pokey slipped in at 9:15, stood at the bar and ordered a beer

On his right sat sweet Melina, his secret love for many a year

Pokey didn’t know the man who was tickling her skirt. Melina just giggled and continued to flirt

And that’s when it started to get tense in the bar. Melina had let this go a little too far

Drinking her champagne cocktails and shots of schnapps

Pokey thought, “This is where it stops.”

Melina said, “Joe, I have to powder my nose.”, so Pokey tried to make his play

Parker Joe had is back to Pokey watching Melina walk away

Pokey grabbed Parker’s shoulder blade. Mr. Sling’s smile started to fade

And that’s when it started to get out of control. Smash, crash, crunch, the fight was taking its toll

Both men beaten and bloody when not a moment too soon

Sherriff Bob walked in and said, “You two can settle this tomorrow at noon.”

They still talk about it down in Texas; the way it went down that day

The coroner measuring the caskets; Melina sitting on a bale of hay

Pokey and Parker counting off paces; hands at their sides and sweat on their faces

The sky growing cold, dark green, and aloof; lightning bolt striking on the old courthouse roof

And shattering the concentration of big Parker Joe

Who was shot down by Pokey McSlow

Pokey McSlow at high noon against the fastest gun in the west

It turns out it was over real soon. Nobody ever would have guessed

That Parker Joe Sling would fall to his knees and then die in the dust

For the sake of a fling with a hot blooded woman that no man could trust

But Pokey shot him down; and that’s what people still say

But nobody saw the smoking gun, cooling off on that bale of hay

Backstory of the Album of

The Ballad of the story of Mr. Pokey McSlow

*Written, transcribed, and archived by John T. Wurzer*

**Pokey McSlow - Westin Hotel, San Francisco – Thursday Night**

Trevor, clad in a crimson vest over a white dress shirt with puffy sleeves had obviously never tended bar before. Pokey wondered how an upscale hotel chain like the Westin could sink so low as to put a moron behind the bar in their classy lobby bar. Trevor was looking up recipes for drinks on his phone whenever anyone ordered anything other than beer. Someone asked him, “What kind of wine do you have?” Trevor responded, “Red and White, I think.”

“I mean what kind of Red and White?” came the response.

Trevor bent down and pulled five bottles out of the cooler setting them up on the bar. The customer shook his head in disgust and pointed at a 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon Puente Alto Don Melchor saying, “That one.” Pokey finally caught Trevor’s eye and raised his hand to wave at him. When Trevor came over Pokey asked for a Michelob Ultra, and Trevor looked confused.

“In a bottle?”

“Yes, in a bottle.”

“Amstel Light or Heineken, those are the only bottles,” said Trevor.

“Amstel,” muttered Pokey.

“Light?” asked Trevor.

“Yes, light,” said Pokey, rolling his eyes. Then he returned to his poetry book where he’d started scribbling some notes.

A perfume-drenched woman who was probably 10 years younger than Pokey strode up and stood at the bar next to him waiting for service. She had been sitting at a table about ten feet away with five guys in suits that were patting themselves on the back about some medical supply contract they’d just landed. After waiting for a few minutes without being served, she turned to Pokey and said, “What does a girl need to do to get a drink around here?” Pokey, somewhat annoyed by this time, hollered “Trevor! A little help?” Trevor who had been reading drink recipes on his phone came over to take her order. She ordered tropical drinks, shots with strange names, and asked for the bartender for some menus. Trevor looked terrified, and Pokey realized this was not going to be a brief interaction so he tried to slide his phone and laptop closer to him in order to make room for the woman at the bar.

She hopped up onto the barstool next to him and asked, “So, what are you doing in San Francisco?”

“We have a major client here, and I’m pitching a new sales and distribution deal. They’re holding their annual author’s exposition this week.”

“What do you sell and distribute?” she asked.

“Satire,” he answered.

“Satire? Novels, columns, short stories, what kind of satire?” she persisted.

“Comic Books,” said Pokey.

“Cartoons!?” She gasped, “I didn’t even know that people still printed cartoons. Aren’t they all online now?”

“*Comic Books*,” Pokey emphasized. “Not *cartoons*.”

“What’s the difference?” she asked. “Pictures, words in balloons, whatever. Do they really still print them?”

“Yes, they really still print them,” he said. “Millions and millions of them every year.”

“Really?” She paused and watched as he started scribbling in his notebook again. Then she quizzed him “Wouldn’t it be faster just to type your notes on your laptop or record them on your phone? Seems like a lot of work writing everything down in that notebook.”

“Oh this isn’t work,” he said in an exaggerated Texas drawl. “I’m just writin’ to relax.”

“Writin’ what?” she said, making fun of his accent.

“Mostly poems, songs, and stuff.”

“Still, it would be much faster on the laptop. But maybe you get a better feel this way. That must be it, you get a better feel don’t you?”

“A feel?” he asked.

“Yeah, ya know—a feel for the words. A feel for whatever you’re writing about.” She paused again and then continued. “Anyway, I’m Angela but you can call me Angel. Everybody calls me Angel. Don’t get me wrong though, I’m no Angel. What’s your name?”

“Richard,” he said. “Richard McSlow.”

She started to giggle. “McSlow? That must be because you write instead of typing. They should call you Slow Poke McSlow. Do you have a nick name?”

“Yeah, I have a nick name,” he said.

Just then her drinks showed up, and three guys came over from the table to help her carry everything back to where they were all seated. Pokey thought he’d been spared until a few minutes later she walked back up to order appetizers.

After placing her order she turned to him and said, “Your nick name, what is it?”

“Pokey”, he responded. She broke out into raucous laughter as she turned to walk away slapping her thigh and squealing.

“Pokey? Pokey McSlow! Now that’s rich.”

She returned to her table all the guys started cracking up as well. Pokey turned back to his notebook, pursing his lips, and continued to write. About five minutes later he noticed it had become noticeably less noisy in the bar, and he glanced back at the table behind him where everyone had pulled out their smart phones and begun texting and posting, checking voice mail, making calls, and had consequently stopped talking to one another.

Pokey paid his tab and quickly made his way back to his room.

**Parker Joe Sling – Ray’s Cantina, Texas – Friday afternoon**

*Be a big man in a small world.*

That’s what Joseph used to say to Parker years ago when Parker was growing up; driving home from the little league game; waiting on the tee of a par 3; or sitting in traffic at a red light.

*Be a big man in a small world.*

Joseph died of Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma when Parker was 22 years old.

Parker had always been a party boy. Through his high school years and even after attaining his undergraduate degree in Accounting, he hung with the late night crowd, taking unnecessary chances, driving under the influence of a variety of substances, and womanizing whenever and wherever there was womanizing to be done.

*Be a big man in a small world.*

This phrase took on a new meaning when Joseph got sick. Although his father’s death changed his life’s path, Parker would not realize it until many years later. The “Big man theory” became more about money, position, power, and respect in business, financial, and political circles than about being the “big man on campus”. And Parker Joseph Sling became a master of the schmooze, a dissector of the deal, a networking natural. He plied his trade smoothly but with an energetic urgency that was captivating and debilitating all at once. He married a “showroom wife” who wowed influential men and could melt them with a smile. She bore him two beautiful children, Trevor and Hanna, and he reveled in their innocence throughout their younger years. He knew all the right people in all the right places on all the right levels, and he worked hard. He worked every task, every project, every social interaction as if it were a three-point shot at the buzzer, a putt on the 18th green, the last at bat in the bottom of the 9th; a win or lose event. He worked harder than his peers, and he passed them on the road to success, unconcerned about where that road might eventually lead.

Years later, after Hanna had moved to Tel Aviv with her boyfriend Seth and after Parker’s wife was recovering in the Betty Ford clinic in Sedona, Arizona, Parker strode into Ray’s Cantina in west Texas where he had been told Trevor was working as a bus boy.

Trevor had left town and headed for Corpus Christi 10 days earlier. Sometimes surprises don’t work out as planned; if they did they wouldn’t be called surprises. Other surprises, however, were on the way.

**Ray – Junior’s Restaurant, Midtown Manhattan**

The restaurant was no more than a glorified diner. However, being strategically located between the Marriott hotel and two Broadway theatres, and its being the coldest evening in February with snow falling and the wind blowing twenty-five miles an hour, the place somehow transformed itself into an upper class retro experience—Juniors.

There was actually nothing at all classic about this place; with its orange and white motif, *Happy Days* memorabilia, and bright incandescent lights. It was hard to fathom why 27 people were lined up waiting to be seated. Ray, however, spied an open seat at the bar and slipped into the restroom bypassing the hostess station altogether. When he arrived at the men’s room door he did a 180, briskly walked over to the bar and planted himself on the available barstool. “Any port in a storm,” he thought as the tattooed bartender slapped a plastic laminated menu in front of him. The pace in the diner was frenetic at the very least. It was as if someone had snapped their fingers, tapped on the face of their watch, stared everyone down and said, “Okay, you’ve got two minutes to place your order, it will arrive in ten minutes after which you will have seven minutes to ingest it.” It was a far cry from Ray’s Cantina.

Ray, having never been to New York City before and having spent the last two days at a restaurant and bar supply convention being courted by salesmen who took him to asinine upscale eateries hoping to land his business, ordered a hot dog. He realized he had forgotten his cell phone, but knew he wasn’t going to give up his seat at the bar to walk back to the hotel and get it, so he took out his pen and started scribbling a poem in his notebook. It had been years since Ray had written any poems, but somehow this trip to the Big Apple had rekindled the urge. He had written a poem for his wife the previous night in the hotel before drifting off to sleep. He often had wondered to himself if he could still write anything worth reading. He decided that the real question was whether or not anything was worth writing, and if it was, would anyone read it? Regardless, he forged ahead pressing his pen to the page.

Roast beef, pickles, incandescent lights, people scurrying everywhere; these were the things that he noticed peripherally while spilling a few thoughts onto the page—thoughts that he couldn’t help but notice were lightyears from being anything profound. Ten minutes later he had finally filled up most of a page and paused to consider how very much he missed his wife. His hot dog still hadn’t arrived. He closed his notebook, pulled out his laptop, connected to the Wi-Fi network, and started reviewing the previous year’s financial statements and the coming year’s cash flow projections for all 27 Ray’s Cantinas. Just then, his hot dog showed up and he asked the tattooed bartender for another beer.

**Dominque, Melina, and Parker Joe**

“Last call for happy hour drinks!” shouted Ray’s wife Dominique while afternoon sunlight still slithered through the blinds covering the front windows of the cantina. The afternoon drunks would soon make their way out the door into the glare of the pre-sunset light on the dusty street and stumble home to their unhappy children, unhappy wives, unhappy lives, and the despondent desolation of a moonlit late June evening. For now however, just one more round.

Then in walks Melina Maldaynis. She is wearing her usual Friday frills and finery—dress cut halfway up her thigh and blouse showing just enough cleavage to draw the eye but little enough to keep the men wondering. Melina was the perfect accent to the clean yet rustic atmosphere inside of Ray’s, and as long as no money changed hands on the premises Dominique and Ray were happy to let her flirt with the regulars, hustle drinks from strangers, and occasionally walk out the door arm-in-arm with her latest conquest. Melina was a fixture rather than a nuisance.

On a normal Friday evening Pokey McSlow would have already been sitting at the bar with a paycheck’s worth of cash in his wallet, waiting for Melina to arrive. Pokey was essentially her “Friday night guy”, but he was in San Francisco on business, making a sales and distribution proposal presentation to an egomaniacal satire aficionado and wouldn’t be back until early Saturday evening. Melina was, therefore, a bit more flirtatious than usual on this Friday late afternoon hoping to cultivate additional clientele. She made her way to the jukebox where she was surrounded by three roofers whose company had just finished repairing the courthouse roof which had been struck by lightning the week before. They offered to pour her a beer from their pitcher but Melina flashed them an almost motherly smile saying, “Beer? No beer. I need a champagne cocktail.” The young men knew that any drink with champagne in it was beyond their means so they muttered, “Suit yerself” and trudged off to the back room to shoot some eight-ball. Melina gracefully sashayed back to her usual place at the bar, purposely brushing her bare arm against a stranger’s elbow as she lifted herself up onto the barstool next to his. He was a clean shaven man, quite overdressed for Ray’s. He shot her a quick glance, took a deep breath and stared off lazily into space.

Dominique came over to the two of them and said to Melina, “Last call for happy hour, girl. You buying?”

Melina rolled her eyes and shook her head sighing, “Not right now, Dom, I’m still waiting for the Champagne cocktail of my dreams to come walking through that door. Until then a glass of water would be nice, thanks.”

Dominique started to scoop some ice into a glass when the well-dressed man next to Melina reached out with a fifty dollar bill in his hand and interrupted saying, “I’ll pick up that Champagne cocktail for her. Bring us two shots of tequila as well.”

Melina grabbed his bare wrist with her soft hand, forcefully pulling it down to the surface of the bar, looked deep into his eyes, and spoke to Dominique without turning her head, “No Tequila for me. Make mine an apple schnapps.” And then she addressed the stranger, letting her stern look curl up into a smile, “Well, aren’t you the fancy gentleman? Are you sure you’re in the right bar?”

Dominique put the drinks in front of them and took the money from the man’s sweaty hand. Melina raised the shot of schnapps stating, “Here’s to you Mr. …?” looking at him quizzically.

“Sling. Parker Joe Sling,” he said.

She continued, “Here’s to your health, Mr. Parker Joe Sling. May you stay very healthy, at least through the weekend.”

“Joe,” he said. “Just call me Joe.”

“Okay, Joe. To the weekend!” And the first pair of what was to be many more pairs of shots were drained.

Seven hours later Melina and Parker Joe slipped out the side door and stumbled down the street towards the Diplomat Hotel. Dominique wiped her hands on a bar rag and killed the house lights. She had worked a double shift because Ray was in New York City attending a Hotel and Restaurant trade show. She missed Ray when he was away and was glad he’d be back tomorrow. Sherriff Bob was hanging around just to be sure that Dominque got home safe, and he looked at her saying, “There goes trouble.”

“No doubt,” said Dominique. “No doubt.”

**Sheriff Bob - Historian’s notes, Monday morning**

Small town, no one around, dust all over the hot dry ground

Seemed like a mighty fine place to retire, to shut off the freezer and build a new fire

Warm until midnight, cold after that

Walk to work in the morning in a cowboy hat

With a spring in one’s step and a smile on one’s face

No better retirement in the whole human race

Policing a town where there is no one to rob

It was paradise found for old Sheriff Bob

Still one never quite knows when one follows a light

What’s inside of the apple until they’ve taken a bite

And the sweetest of treats and the moistest of fruits

Can get sometimes grow bitter once they’ve planted their roots

Until one’s carefree existence becomes another dull grind

With no challenge, no prospects; just calm peace of mind

But inevitably, somehow a new wind will blow

This time it was Sling and Pokey McSlow

That ought to keep Sheriff Bob around for a few more years.

*Lots of love,*

*Hope and/or pray for peace on earth.*

*John*