

Nevada

One of my Army buddies at Fort Knox was a crusty half-Cherokee rodeo rider from Nevada named Bill Parker. Bill wasn't a very big fellow, and not much about him stood out. The way he talked, though, made a lot of people think he was a braggart. I remember once, when I hardly knew him, we were all sitting around talking about how we'd like a big, juicy steak. Bill said mildly that he liked his steaks red, just dropped into a hot skillet, flipped quickly, and removed. He said he liked the blood only a little coagulated. Not long afterward I had a chance to test him on that. Lorrie and I had invited Bill and his little medical service unit of five or six soldiers over for a steak supper. I broiled all the steaks but Bill's. I treated that one about as he had suggested, except that I couldn't resist leaving it in just a wee bit longer than he had indicated. When he had finished sopping up the blood with a piece of bread he told me it was decent, but I had left it in the skillet just a little too long.

Bill came up with other surprises. We all guffawed when he said one night that he had been the World Champion Bull Rider for 1951. Without speaking further he stood up and went in, opened up his foot locker, and pulled out the big silver buckle that said it was true. He also claimed to have worked for both Roy Rogers and Gene Autry. Much to the amusement of everyone around him, he referred to them as Roy and Gene. Some time after that, when Gene Autry happened to appear in Louisville, one of the men told Bill he'd seen it in the newspaper and added with a sly little grin that if Bill wanted to go and visit with his old friend he'd be glad to ride along to Louisville with him. Bill appeared to be delighted, and off they went. When they got to Louisville and saw Autry through the crowd Bill stood up tall, cupped his hands, and yelled out, "Hey! *Gene!*" Autry wheeled around and belted back, "Hey, *Bill!* How the hell are you!" They went off with their arms on each other's shoulders.

Bill also told wild stories about the fist fights he had been in, and for a long time no one believed those either. Then one night he got drunk and was arrested and charged with assault and battery. He asked one of the guys in his outfit to go to court with him. This fellow reported back that when the judge saw three battered and bloody faces lined up in front of him he asked which were the victims and which the attackers. When he was informed that all three were victims and Bill, who had not a mark on him, was the defendant, he looked at Bill's modest frame and the three over-sized rednecks he had taken on and said mildly, "Case dismissed." Bill got so angry at the delay in his promotion from private E-2 to Private First Class that he said if they ever did try to make him a PFC he would reject it. No one thought he actually would do that, but he did. He walked into the captain's office, saluted, and told the captain he didn't want the promotion, and the Army could

take it and shove it. Then he saluted again and walked out. Once a rodeo visited a town near the post. Bill went over there and entered every event for three nights in a row, winning every one except the saddle bronc riding, which he lost once because the cinch broke. The rodeo left two days early, with all its contract riders. Another time he heard about a rodeo where they were offering \$1000 to anyone who could ride a certain Brahma bull for ten seconds. Bill went over to sign up, but they recognized him and said it was just for amateurs. A couple of nights later Bill came back drunk, and when no one volunteered to ride the bull he said he'd do it for nothing. He did, and the fellows with him said he stayed on long past the whistle and got off at his leisure.

Bill liked horses, and he liked liquor. He had some Cherokee relatives farther down in Kentucky, and they used to send him moonshine in clear glass gallon jugs. Sometimes on a Saturday we would all go down to the officers' stable on Fort Knox and spend the entire afternoon. There was an old guitar down there, and sometimes I'd strum it and sing cowboy songs, and we'd all drink Bill's Cherokee moonshine and tell stories. Bill liked my songs, and one day he declared that he was going to buy a bar in Reno, and when he did he'd hire me as entertainer. He also said that his biggest ambition in life was to become the governor of Nevada. By that time he had me convinced, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he made it.

He wasn't a very big feller, around 150, I'd guess
And he stood about five-nine, or maybe a little less
He wasn't the kind to draw your notice in a crowd
Outside of the fact that his talkin' was a little loud.
Matter of fact it was his braggin' that brought him to my note
Fer it don't take very much of that to get my goat.

He said he come from Reno, and was part Cherokee
And there wasn't any call to doubt him there, as far as I could see.
He claimed to be a rodeo rider, and he sure looked like the type
That I'd seen with two-bit outfits follerin' carnivals and the like.
But about ten tall tales later I was getting' my belly full
When he claimed to be the world's champion at ridin' rodeo bulls.

We all gave him the hee-haw on that, and it must have made him sore
Because he clammed up for a while and didn't say no more
We thought we had him figgered for a loudmouth and that's all
Makin' all sorts of fancy claims about things we couldn't call
Little things or big, nothin' seemed to phase him
He'd light in and stretch the truth, time and time again.

One of the boys was tellin' about a fist fight he had won
And Nevada began to reminisce about a bigger and better one
The other feller whipped two guys, so Nevada said he'd cleaned up three
And on and on it went until it was commencin' to gall me.
The boys were discussin' beefsteak, and Nevada said he liked his raw
Then he claimed he was goin' to be governor, and that was the last straw.

A boy there named Kentucky said he thought he'd heard enough
He stood up kind of slow-like and said, "Nevada, I'm callin' your bluff!
Get up and make a fist, boy, fer I'm about to treat you rough!"
Well, none of us liked Kentucky too much, 'cause he was a loudmouth too
But we all figured that Nevada had bit off more than he could chew.

Nevada stood up slow-like too, and looked at the crowd around him
And Kentucky let loose a roundhouse that really should've downed him.
Should've, that is, but Nevada picked it off real neat
And his left to Kentucky's chin raised him clean off his feet.

We all watched Kentucky go down, but it happened so bloomin' quick
That none of us noticed he was comin' down on a sharp-cut stick
That stick run right into Kentucky, and the blood was gushing out quick
And I knew he was a goner when his legs began to kick.
I just stood there, kind of numb, like everyone else, a-getting' sick
Until the silence was broken by a switchblade click.

The blade was bein' pointed, and holdin' it was Johnny McCutcheon
And he started for Nevada before any of us could touch him.
Kentucky had been his friend, and there was hate in Johnny's eye.
As he started movin' forward, he said, "Nevada, you're about to die!"

Then he leaped right at Nevada, and the blade flashed an arc
But exactly like Kentucky's fist, it just plain missed its mark
I heard a little thin crack, and the knife sailed out at an angle
And McCutcheon let out a scream and his arm was all a-dangle.

I guess we all just stood a while, struck dumb with numb surprise
But Nevada dropped down by Kentucky, with tears in both his eyes.
"Why did you do that, Kentucky?" He cried,
"I wasn't tryin' to start no fight with you guys!
I was just tellin' the truth, like you, and no lies!"