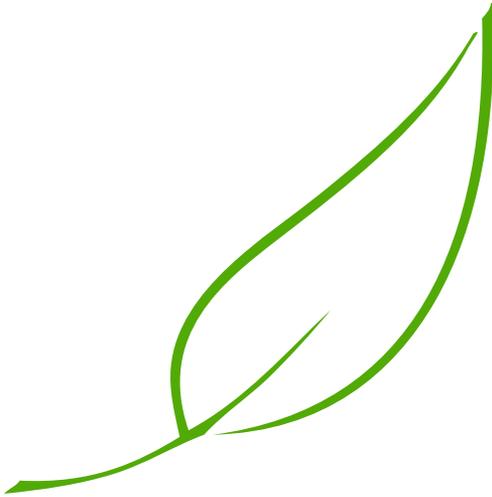


THE HORSE RHYMER

by Ken Bradbury



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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 total)

Slim, Pecos, Chester, Dogbreath, and Billy

SLIM: (*as Pecos “rides” onto the stage, mean and rotten*) He rode into town on a horse named Sam, the meanest, orneriest, man in the land. He was quiet and cool with a dangerous eye and it made you shake just to see him ride by. That was Pecos.

PECOS: (*pulling his horse to a halt*) Whoa, boy! This must be the place. Anybody seen Billy the Rhymer?

DOGBREATH: (*a crusty old timer who seems to be speaking without his teeth ... he’s highly excitable and scratches himself a great deal due to lack of soap*) (*entering quickly, scratching*) I seen him! I seen him! He’s over there! He’s over there!

SLIM: That would be Dogbreath, an excitable cus, Who don’t take baths ... quite a problem to us.

DOGBREATH: I seen him, Pecos! He’s right over there in the Short Branch Saloon!

SLIM: Pecos was lookin’ for Billy the Rhymer, a dangerous poet and social climber.

PECOS: Get out of my way ...

SLIM: ... said Pecos, and then, he found the saloon and walked right on in. (*Pecos walks into the Saloon with Dogbreath close on his heels*) The tavern was quiet when the bad man walked in, and the drinkin’ of whiskey and sippin’ of gin was silent as Pecos, he

looked 'round the room, in search of young Billy to spell out his doom.

PECOS: Anybody seen Billy?

CHESTER: Holy cow! It's Pecos! I didn't know you was still alive!

PECOS: Where's the kid? Draw me up a rootbeer while I have a look around.

SLIM: Now Billy was sittin' in back of the rest, a-readin' a chapter of Shakespeare's MacBeth. Pecos was sittin' just inches away, a swiggin' his root beer and havin' his say.

PECOS: I hear tell that this Billy the Rhymer is out to knock me off.

CHESTER: Holy cow! Nobody could knock you off, Mr. Pecos! You're the fastest man in the West! Everybody knows that!

DOGBREATH: (*jumping up a down with glee and fleas*) Everybody knows that! Everybody knows that!

PECOS: So where in the heck is he?

DOGBREATH: He was just in here! I seen him! I seen him!

CHESTER: Another rootbeer, Mr. Pecos?

PECOS: Nope. I gotta keep a clear head. This thing's gotta be settled once and for all.

SLIM: Pecos, he stood, and he walked 'round the bar, a-lookin' to see if Billy was there.

PECOS: Come out here, you little runt! Word has it that you've got your eye on my reputation as the Best in the West! If you think you're man enough to fight, then bring it on!

SLIM: Billy had just turned a page in his book when he heard Pecos shout so he took him a look. (*Billy*

enters and looks at Pecos who is looking the other direction.) And there stood the man he had heard of since birth, Pecos the Poet, the scourge of the earth. His fame had been told since Billy was born, the man who could take a good verse by the horn. Oh, legends were made of the men he'd laid low with Longfellow, Silverstein, Shelley and Poe. No man alive could match his free verse and no man but Billy could bother him worse.

BILLY: I'm Billy.

PECOS: (*turning*) Huh?

DOGBREATH: (*jumping up and down*) That's him, Pecos! That's him! That's him!

PECOS: Why, you're just a kid

SLIM: ... said Pecos with scorn.

PECOS: I's dern near growed up on the day you was born!

DOGBREATH: That's him, Pecos! That's him!

CHESTER: Shut up, Dogbreath. This could get mighty nasty.

PECOS: I hear tell that you're out to steal my reputation as the faster rhymer in the West.

BILLY: Wouldn't take much from what I hear.

DOGBREATH: Oh! Oh! Oh! There's gonna be a fight! I can see it comin'! There's gonna be a fight! There's gonna be a fight!

SLIM: Pecos, he looked Billy up and then down, and wondered where all of his smarts could be found. He seemed but kid, and a dim one at that, with nothing particular under his hat.

PECOS: You got a smart mouth, boy. I think it's about time I put an end to it.



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