

The Unionville Chronicles

Twenty-first Canto

Will Slaton was out riding the cowherd
And considering recent events:
The lost, bleeding bandit who'd spoken one word,
(A head wound makes speaking make sense.)
He thought of Twyla's brown eyes and the absurd
Compassion she'd given the dangerous gent.

He remembered fair Greta, the whore he had known
And for whose love he'd been locked up in a prison
He remembered the long rides he'd made all alone
And the fires he'd built from sage, silence and friction.
He thought of the faith that filled sweet Twyla's bones,
And the dying assassin her young heart had risen.

The cows grazed the brush and scratched against rock.
The breeze sipped their dust and their smell.
John Henry kept vigil over the flock
And rehearsed the next sermon he'd tell.
Slaton contemplated, remembered and talked
To himself over water he'd drawn from a well.

From the south, there came stumbling
The high sheriff grumbling
And the posse he'd partly employed.
A crow in the sky,
On which he kept an eye,
Offered the guidance he'd so rarely enjoyed.

When the law reached Unionville, windy and dry,
And cluttered with structure and siding,
A thin plume of white dust in a blue sky
Suggested a herd and a cowboy riding.
That there might be a witness minding business nearby
The sheriff took for glad sign and encouraging tiding.

Urging his men to a pace
Which for them, was a race
The Sheriff rode down on Don De Dolor's cattle
Spooking neither John Henry
Nor Will from his memory
The riders rode up ready for battle.

"We're the law in these parts," the High Sheriff rasped
"And require you reply prompt and true.
Four bandits are riding, fleeing our grasp.
Don't lie to me whatever you do.
One carries my bullet between his ears and his yap
And the others I plan to kill, too."

Will Slaton responded as a citizen must,
By looking the law in the eyes,
Spitting on his boots, a symbol of trust,
And a droll drawl dragged through his replies.
"On this ranch rests the thief you shot once and cussed
The others, I reckon, were probably deputized."

So the posse arrived
At Rolando's bedside
And in spite of Twyla's tearful pleas, hanged him.
Tearing apart

The pious girl's heart.
Though she begged dearest God not to blame them.

Will and the Don cut the evil man down,
For of such the road to justice is paved,
The sheriff had taken Rolando's gold back to town
While Twyla prayed for his soul by his grave.
John Henry regretted the hanging mob's mounts,
He hadn't asked if they wished to be saved.