THE BALLAD OF SAM BASS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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*The Ballad of Sam Bass* is an original play based on the life of Sam Bass the outlaw. Cowboys camped on the Chisholm trail are entertained by a stranger who sings a song about Sam Bass. Bass was a good-hearted individual who was seduced by his vices, drinking and gambling, and fell into the life of an outlaw. He was successful in eluding the law until he was betrayed by one of his own men, Jim Murphy. In the course of his song, the stranger reveals himself to be Frank Jackson, the only surviving member of Bass's gang. Jackson had talked Bass out of killing Murphy when Bass became suspicious. Creating the song serves as a catharsis for Jackson's guilt.
PREFACE

The original inspiration for The Ballad of Sam Bass was the cowboy song "Sam Bass," which I discovered while reading through Jim Bob Tinsley's book He Was Singin' This Song: A Collection of Forty-eight Traditional Songs of the American Cowboy, with Words, Music, Pictures, and Stories. In checking other collections of cowboy folksongs, I discovered the Sam Bass song in almost every collection. Tinsley quoted trail driver "Teddy Blue" Abbott as saying that this song "was probably the best known cowboy song in the old days" (178).

The lyrics to the song are simple and straightforward in telling the story of Sam Bass, a story which I found immediately appealing and dramatic. Sam Bass was a good-hearted individual who was seduced by his vices, drinking and gambling, and fell into the life of an outlaw. As an outlaw, Sam was highly successful in eluding the law and might not have been caught had he not been betrayed by one of his own men, Jim Murphy.

Duane DeMello, as his thesis at NTSU, wrote an original novel on the Sam Bass story titled The Denton Mare. While I was aware of the existence of this work, I wanted to develop my own approach to this material, free from its influence, and did not read DeMello's novel.
The works I consulted while studying the life of Sam Bass included Wayne Gard's thorough and well written biography and a biography of Bass which was written two years after his death and has been reprinted by the University of Oklahoma Press. This book, *A Sketch of Sam Bass, the Bandit: A Graphic Narrative*, was written by Charles L. Martin, who gathered his information from living eye-witnesses and contemporary newspaper accounts. I am particularly indebted to this book for its information on Frank Jackson and its dialogue, which I used as a model for Bass's style of speech.

*The Ballad of Sam Bass*, however, is not just a retelling of these biographies. Its focus is on the ballad--both the genesis of the ballad and the great appeal it had for the cowboys who kept the ballad alive by singing it. The play also focuses on Frank Jackson and his relationship with Sam Bass. Jackson was a character who fascinated me from the beginning. He was the only member of Bass's Texas gang that was not caught or killed, and he also was partially to blame for Bass's death because he talked Bass out of killing Jim Murphy when the gang had become suspicious of him.

As a result of Jackson's importance in the story of Sam Bass, the play is actually a play within a play. At the center of both dramas is Frank Jackson. The inner play deals with Sam Bass and his friendship with Jackson. The
outer play deals with Jackson and his attempt to remain safe by concealing his identity from the cowboys while at the same time dealing with his guilt at having been a party to Sam's downfall and not being able to revenge Sam's death. The resolution to Jackson's dilemma is the ballad.

Although Tinsley quotes ballad collector Jack Thorp as crediting the writing of the ballad of Sam Bass to John Denton of Gainesville, in my play, Frank Jackson creates the ballad and passes it on to the cowboys. I feel that this is not only dramatically satisfying as a catharsis for Jackson's guilt in letting Sam down, but also a historic possibility as the origins of all folk ballads are difficult to determine with any certainty, and Jackson did survive the ambush at Round Rock. In fact, Wayne Gard stated that Jackson probably made his way to New Mexico where he took up cattle ranching. Given this possibility, Jackson's making his way out of the state by connecting up with a cattle drive and passing this ballad on to the cowboys during this drive fits very nicely both into the play and with the historic facts.

The inner play deals with the seductive nature of Bass. As a young man, he came to Texas to find the wild and free life popularized by the dime novels of his day. He did not come seeking the real west, but the mythical west. After Bass was seduced into the life of an outlaw--a life which at first appeared as exciting and lively as the western dime
novels, he became the seducer—recruiting an otherwise stable citizen like Frank Jackson into his gang. It is this wild, lively, and free existence which I feel endeared Bass to the cowboys who sang his ballad. Cowboys endured a life of hardships, but as a rule were free of many of the restraints of civilization. This is the bond that I feel tied them to the story of Sam Bass—a mutual desire for freedom to live life as one pleases.

I found as many variations on the lyrics and the tune for the ballad of Sam Bass as there are collections which include this song. Since this ballad began as oral literature, it underwent constant change as it was sung by one individual and heard by another, who would then sing it to someone else. Taking this as my cue, I have made minor changes, adjustments, and additions to the lyrics of the ballad to suit the needs of the play, just as I have bent the historic facts in a few places to heighten the dramatic impact of the play. I have also included other traditional cowboy songs and in a few places have written new lyrics to popular tunes of the day because this is a play of high spirits which call for singing.

The music and lyrics for the Sam Bass song as well as the other cowboy songs used in the play can be found in Tinsley’s book. The music for the songs "Little Brown Jug" and "Camptown Races" can be found in Popular Songs of
Western drama, it is often taught, began in ancient Greece when an unknown individual called "Thespis" stepped out from a chorus which chanted a story of gods and heroes and imitated a character in that story. In a similar fashion, the story of Sam Bass is played out by Jackson and the cowboys as they sit around their campfire at night. It begins as a song and is transformed into drama as the cowboys take on the roles of the characters. In this fashion, I have tried to write a play which deals not with Sam Bass the man, but Sam Bass the myth--a man who died only to be reborn as legend.
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CHARACTERS

SAM BASS
STRANGER/FRANK JACKSON
GHOST/JIM MURPHY
TRAILBOSS, in charge of cattle drive
CHARLIE, cook for the cattle drive
BOB MATTHEWS, top-hand and second in command of drive
SHERIFF EGAN, Denton sheriff played by the Trailboss
JOEL COLLINS, companion of Sam Bass played by Bob
BILL HEFFRIDGE, a member of Bass’s Dakota gang
DAVIS, a member of Bass’s Dakota gang
JIM BERRY, a member of Bass’s Dakota gang
TOM NIXON, a member of Bass’s Dakota gang
ARKANSAS JOHNSON, a member of Bass’s Texas gang
SEABORN BARNES, a member of Bass’s Texas gang
THOMAS FLOYD, the Texas Ranger who kills Arkansas Johnson
HENRY COLLINS, Joel Collins’s brother
DEPUTY GRIMES, the only man Sam Bass ever killed
MAJOR JONES, leader of the Texas campaign to capture Bass
REVEREND AUSTIN ATEN, preacher who attends Sam Bass

COWBOYS, POSSE MEMBERS, TEXAS RANGERS, SALOON GIRLS, STAGECOACH PASSENGERS, RAILROAD WORKERS AND PASSENGERS, AND TOWNS PEOPLE
SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

TIME: A late summer evening in 1878--just a few years before the Chisholm Trail was closed.

PLACE: A cowboy camp on the Chisholm Trail, several miles northwest of Denton, Texas, and the mythical west that lives in the hearts and minds of all cowboys.
ACT I

(A trail drive campfire on the Chisholm trail. The year is 1878—two years before the Chisholm trail was closed. A group of cowboys form a semicircle around a warmly glowing pool of light which represents the campfire. The semicircle should appear to continue as a circle which is completed by the audience. Behind this semicircle of cowboys there is a chuckwagon. The cook is busy working at the wagon. Most of the cowboys have finished eating their supper. They sing.)

COWBOYS

Ten thousand goddam cattle,
Just a roamin’ far and wide;
An’ I wish I had my honey
Layin’ by my side.
Lone man! Lone man!

My gal she left this mornin’
And I ‘spect she’s gone to stay
‘Cause she lit outta here a’runnin’
With a son of a bitch from Ioway.
Lone man! Lone man!

(As the song ends, the Trailboss enters with a "stranger" who carries a large sack of flour over his shoulder.)

TRAILBOSS

You can set that down by the chuck wagon. The cook’ll hustle you up some grub.
(To Cook)

Hey! Charlie! A couple’a plates of chow

(The stranger sets the sack of flour down by the chuck wagon and starts to walk away from the Trailboss who stops him by addressing him.)

Oh! You can stow your guns in the wagon.

STRANGER

Is that some kind of a rule?

TRAILBOSS

No. I just prefer it that way.

STRANGER

(Indicating some of the other cowboys who are wearing guns.)

What about them.

TRAILBOSS

They don’t always put much stock in what I prefer.

STRANGER

I’d just as soon leave my guns on.

TRAILBOSS

Suit yourself.

(The stranger finds a spot off to the side away from the others. He rolls out his bed roll, lays down, and is soon fast asleep. Bob, who we will find is one of the trailboss’s top hands, walks over to the trailboss.)
BOB

That the new cowpuncher you said you'd fetch from town?

Yeah.

BOB

Don't look like much to me. He the best you could find?

TRAILBOSS

Only man in the whole town of Denton who wanted to make this drive. Denton ain't exactly no cowtown.

BOB

Well, He rides drag.

TRAILBOSS

Don't make no never mind to me.

(The cook crosses to the stranger with a plate of food. The stranger does not move.)

COOK

Here's your grub, cowboy.

(The stranger does not move.)

Hey! It's my specialty--Son'a'bitch Stew!

(No response)

It's damn good.

(The cook tries to gently shake the stranger awake. Instantly, the stranger jumps to his knees with his gun drawn and pointed at the cook, who drops the plate of food on the ground and cries out.)
Jesus! Don't shoot, mister! Don't shoot!

A COWBOY

Yeah, pardner, don't shoot Charlie! His cookin' ain't that bad.

BOB

Yeah! Don't shoot Charlie. Unless of course you can cook better than him. If that's the case, blast away!

(The other cowboys break out in laughter. Charlie, the cook, storms back to the chuckwagon angrily.)

COOK

Damn your hide, Matthews! You think you're so damn funny. Well, we'll see how funny you think you are when you try chompin' down on the biscuits I'm gonna fix up especially for you in the mornin'. I'll show you funny, by God!

BOB

(To stranger)

Thanks a lot, pardner. See what you done! Damn you!

(There is general grumbling by the other cowboys around the campfire as they realize what the cook's anger and embarrassment will mean to them in the morning. Bob addresses the stranger.)

BOB

Hey you! Killer! Yeah, I mean you. You got a name?

(No response.)

Hey you! I'm askin' you what your name is.
Smith.

What?

My name is Smith.

Smith, huh?! You got a first name?

I prefer that they don't.

You from Denton?

That depends.

Depends on what?

You know anyone from Denton?

No.
STRANGER
Then I'm from Denton.

ANOTHER COWBOY
Hey! I got some good friends live in Denton. Name of--

STRANGER
Never heard of them!

THE COWBOY
But I ain't told you their names yet.

(The stranger rolls over, ignoring the cowboy. Bob starts to say something to the stranger, but he is addressed by the Trailboss.)

TRAILBOSS
Are the cows bedded down for the night?

BOB
Yes sir. Got good grass here. Plenty water. Damn good range here considerin'.

TRAILBOSS
Considerin' what?

BOB
While you were over to Denton, a farmer came by and told us this was his land. Said we didn't have to move, but he wanted two bits a head for grazin'.

TRAILBOSS
Damn fool hoe-men! Put up a fence and then think they own everythin' for a hundred miles around. What did you tell him?
BOB

Told him that you had the money, and we'd pay him when you got back from town the day after tomorrow. I figured we'd push on and be long gone before he came back.

TRAILBOSS

You figured that right.

BOB

Next time through, we'll need to swing wide of this place.

TRAILBOSS

Ain't gonna be no next time for me.

BOB

What?

TRAILBOSS

This is my last trip up the Chisholm.

BOB

Oh sure! I've heard that story before.

TRAILBOSS

No! This time I mean it. I'm tired of all the zig-zaggin' this way and that. Around one man's beanpatch. Dodgin' another man's homestead. The Chisholm's gotten too damn cluttered up for me.

BOB

So what do you think you'll do?

TRAILBOSS

I don't know. Maybe I'll work cattle up in Montana or Wyoming. Maybe Mexico. Who knows?

(The Trailboss just shakes his head. He and Bob sit quietly.)
A cowboy has started playing the guitar and begins to sing.}

SINGING COWBOY

I'm gonna leave old Texas now.
For they've got no use for the Longhorn cow.
They've plowed and fenced my cattle range,
And the people there are all so strange.
    Whoo-a-whoa-a

I'll tell Saint Peter that I know
A cowboy's soul ain't white as snow.
But in that far off cattle land
I sometimes acted like a man.

(As the cowboy sings his song.
A ghostly figure enters and stands before the stranger, pointing accusingly at him. The stranger suddenly stirs from his sleep and looks at the apparition.)

STRANGER

No! It can't be. But...you're dead. I watched you die!

(The apparition continues to point at the stranger but doesn't speak. The stranger turns and looks at the other cowboys to see if they notice the ghost. They do not. He turns back to the ghost.)

Well, at least I got a second chance to do what I should've done in the first place.

(The stranger draws his gun to shoot the ghost. As he does, Bob rushes over to him and grabs the gun out of his hand. The ghost exits.)
BOB

Are you crazy! You'll stampede the cows! What are you doin'?!?

STRANGER

I...I...thought I saw somethin'...someone...

ANOTHER COWBOY

Injuns maybe?

TRAILBOSS

No. We're a good two days drive from Indian Territory.

STRANGER

I'm sorry. I wasn't thinkin'.

BOB

Try a stunt like that again and there'll be hell to pay.

ANDY

Hey Bob. Read us that newspaper--that thing you read us last night.

ANOTHER COWBOY

Oh God! Not that again! He's read that same paper to you a thousand goddam times. That's all we've heard for months.

ANDY

Well, I like it. Besides, it's better'n we had the last drive. All he had to read us was that label off o' that can. Remember that Joe?

JOE

Hell yes. I remember it. How could I forget? "Stewed Tomatoes..."
(One by one the other cowboys join in. All chant religiously.)

COWBOYS

"...Made from grade A A fancy tomatoes. Contents: Tomatoes, Water, Salt. Add to stews or good by themselves. Open can before cooking. A product of Perkins Canning Company, Atlanta, Georgia. Try our other tasty products. Guaranteed Delicious."

(The cowboys break into laughter. Bob ceremoniously takes an old newspaper clipping out of his pocket, unfolds it, and clears his throat.)

BOB

"Daily Herald--Official Journal of Dallas City. Dallas, Texas. Tuesday morning, April 11. Brazen bandits rob the train on the Texas & Pacific at Mesquite station. The Eagle ford gang headed by the notorious outlaw Sam Bass perpetrated another daring robbery. Just before midnight last night--"

(The stranger jumps up suddenly and interrupts.)

STRANGER

I don't care to hear this! From what they just said, I think they've heard it enough that they don't want to hear it either.

BOB

Well, who the hell are you to say!! You fellas want to hear this again?

OTHER COWBOYS

Sure. Why not? Suits me. etc. etc.

(The ghostly figure enters and again points at the stranger.)
STRANGER

Well...I mean that...Bandits just ain't a fit and proper subject for conversation. Don't you have somethin' better to talk about...cows? Wolves?

BOB

We'd just as soon talk about hold-up men, so butt out!

(Continues reading)

"From what could be learned from the conductor of the train and several passengers..."

TRAILBOSS

Now hold up, Bob. I don't know but that I don't agree with Smith here. Fillin' these boys heads with such notions. Bandits, Train robbers. After all--Sam Bass--who was he? Nothin' but a mean tempered, cowardly, ornery, cold blooded killer.

STRANGER

That's a lie!!!

TRAILBOSS

(Startled)

What?

STRANGER

(Staring at the ghost)

Sam Bass may have done wrong. I mean, robbin' trains ain't exactly an act of virtue. But he had a kind heart and a generous nature, and he was never a killer.

BOB

How the hell would you know. Damn! You talk just like you knew this Sam Bass fella personal.
STRANGER

(After a long pause)

I did.

(The Ghost exits. There is tremendous excitement around the camp fire.)

COWBOYS


ANDY

Hey, pard! Tell us about Sam Bass.

JOE

Yeah! What was he like? Tell us a Sam Bass story.

BOB

This guy didn't know Sam Bass. He's just pullin' your leg, and you guys are suckin' up to it.

STRANGER

Lots of folks in Denton knew Sam. He didn't exactly make himself scarce.

TRAILBOSS

This Smith fella is from Denton, Bob.

(Bob surrenders his spot to the stranger ceremoniously.)

BOB

Well, go ahead, Smith--if that really is your name. These fellas are all hot to hear your Sam Bass story. Don't let 'em down.
STRANGER

I ain't much on stories. But I've got a little song I've been playin' with. It's not much, but I'll give it a try.

(To singing cowboy)

If I could see your guitar.

(Takes guitar, strums a bit, and sings)

Sam Bass was born in Indiana it was his native home,
And at the age of seventeen young Sam began to roam.
He traveled down to Texas, a cowboy bold to be.
A kinder hearted fella you seldom ever see.

(During the next verse, the spirit of Sam Bass appears in the center pool of light which represents the campfire. The cowboys then change the scene. They remove a table and chairs from the chuckwagon and set them in the center pool of light. Additional changes can be made to give the appearance of a saloon.)

Sam used to deal in racestock, one called the Denton Mare.
He matched her in scrub races and took her to the fair.
Sam used to coin the money and spent it just as free.
Sam always drank good whiskey wherever he might be.

SAM

(Sung to the tune of "Camptown Races")

The Denton Mare has won the day.

COWBOYS

Dooh-Dah! Dooh-Dah!

SAM

To the bar, I'll lead the way.
COWBOYS

Oh Dooh-Dah Day!

SAM

Toast my Jenny mare so fair!

COWBOYS

Dooh-Dah! Dooh-Dah!

SAM

She's the mare beyond compare!

COWBOYS

Oh Dooh-Dah Day!

SAM AND COWBOYS

You can bet your ass,
The drinks are on Sam Bass.
So raise and toast a glass or two.

SAM

I'm happy enough to pay!

(Shouts)

Whiskey! Whiskey all the way around! Come on boys drink up! Have a drink on the Denton mare.

STRANGER

So, the Denton mare won another race did she?

SAM

Does that surprise you, Frank?

(From this point forward in the script, the Stranger will be referred to by his name--Frank.)
FRANK

No, Sam. Jenny's a fine horse.

SAM

She's the fastest damn horse in the whole of Texas, and you know it.

FRANK

Never said she wasn't.

SAM

She's the fastest damn horse west of the Mississippi, and everybody knows it.

FRANK

(Toasting with his glass)

To the Denton mare.

SAM

To the fastest damn horse alive!

COWBOYS

(The cowboys now play the part of other customers in the bar. They raise their glasses and join in the toast.)

The Denton mare!

SAM

Frank.

FRANK

Yes, Sam.

SAM

She's too damn fast.
FRANK

How's that, Sam.

SAM

Well, if I know she's the fastest, and you know it, and Everybody knows it, then who's gonna race against her? Answer me that.

FRANK

I guess nobody.

SAM

Well, there you have it. Word spreads around and now nobody'll race against her. This was the first match I've had in months. But it don't make no never mind. I got a friend name of Joel Collins who's got a plan to make us a pot of money.

FRANK

What you gonna do? Paint her a different color or somethin'?

SAM

No. Nothin' small like that.

FRANK

Well, what are you gonna do? What's this big plan of yours

SAM

Cattle.

FRANK

What?

SAM

Cattle--Cows. Frank, Cows!
FRANK
You gonna race the Denton mare against cows, Sam. Who'd be dumb enough to bet on that.

SAM
No. No. I ain't gonna race the mare against nobody. Me and Joel Collins are gonna drive some cows north.

FRANK
And that's gonna make you a pot of money?

SAM
Sure! You get a thousand head of cattle at say $7.00 a head, drive 'em a few measly hundred miles or so north, and sell 'em at $35.00 a head. Easy money!

FRANK
What do you mean a few measly hundred miles. It's closer to a thousand. And where are you gonna come up with the $7.00 a head?

SAM
Don't have to. Joel knows some ranchers down to San Antone who'll give 'em to us on credit. There's some folks in this world that still value a man's word. This is gonna make my fortune, Frank.

FRANK
I don't know, Sam. Drivin' cattle's a bigger gamble than horse racin'.

SAM
Well, I've always been a gamblin' fool. Besides, I'm damn lucky. Always have been.

(Sam takes a coin out of his pocket. He flips it in the air.)

Go ahead. You call it.
FRANK

Tails!

SAM

Heads!

(Shows Frank the coin)

I win again! Like I said--I'm as lucky as the day is long.

(The Trailboss puts on a sheriff's badge and a different hat and enters into the scene as Sheriff Dad Egan--the sheriff of Denton county.)

EGAN

Sam Bass. Sam Bass, is that you?

SAM

Right here, sheriff.

EGAN

I might have known I'd find you hangin' out in a dive like this. Mixin' it up with bad company. So that horse of yours won again.

SAM

That's right; she did. Somebody tell you, or did you watch the race for yourself?

EGAN

Nobody had to tell me nothin'. I can smell the winnin's on your breath.

SAM

There some new law against a man celebratin', or did you hunt me up just to tell me somethin' I already know?
EGAN

I hunted you up to tell you to stay away from my boy Johnny. Missus tells me she saw you out by the fence talkin' to him.

SAM

So what.

EGAN

Says you were showin' him how to play poker. Look, Sam, it's hard enough raisin' young-uns without you puttin' all sorts of wild notions in their heads. Gamblin' and drinkin' are just the sort o' things I'm tryin' to keep outta his life.

SAM

Is that why you fired me, Sheriff?

EGAN

That was your decision, Sam. You were one of the best hands I ever had, but hard workin' or not, a sheriff can't have one of his own household mixed up in horse racin'. You could have sold the horse like I asked you to.

SAM

Hell! You're as bad as my uncle. Worked me like a damn plough mule and paid me next to nothin'. But that wasn't enough--every time I went out and played a little poker with the boys he had to kick up a fuss. Seems I violated his rules. No drinkin'. No playin' cards. No havin' fun! Rules! Rules! Rules! Hell, that's why I ran off to Texas. I wanted to get away from all that bull.

EGAN

Now don't get me wrong, Sam. I like you, okay. Johnny likes you too. He looks up to you, and I think that down deep you got a good heart. But you got to quit hangin' around with the bad company you keep.

(The sheriff notices Frank and is a little embarrassed.)
'Cept you Frank. You're honest enough I guess.

SAM

You finished, Sheriff?

EGAN

Almost. Look, Sam, you want to say howdy to the boy, that's okay, but poker ain't somethin' an eight year old boy needs in his education.

SAM

Care to wager on that, Sheriff?

EGAN

Just so we understand each other.

SAM

You make the rules, Sheriff.

EGAN

No Sam.

(He pats his guns.)

I just enforce 'em.

(The sheriff exits. Sam watches him leave in silence, waiting until the sheriff is out of hearing before he starts to speak to Frank.)

SAM

Now that is exactly why I'm goin' into the cow drivin' business. I got to get out of here. Get me some space where a man can do what he wants without somebody tellin' him how to live his live.
FRANK

I don’t know, Sam. A cattle drive ain’t no picnic. I oughta know too. I used to work cows.

SAM

I know you did, Frank. And that’s why we need you on this drive. What do you say, Frank. I’m offerin’ you a chance to make your fortune.

FRANK

Fortune? Hell! You’ll be lucky to come out of it with your own hide. Don’t you know what lies between here and the northern cattle towns? Flooded rivers! Stampedes! Wild indians! Rustlers!

SAM

Yee-haw! You bet! Adventure! Come on, Frank. You gotta join me in this. Think of it. Ridin’ up the Chisholm. We’ll have ourselves one hell of a time.

FRANK

I don’t know, Sam. I’ve kind of put all that behind me. Learned me the tinners trade and I’ve just got my business goin’ good. I was kinda thinkin’ of settlin’ down.

SAM

But I need you, Frank. I can use someone like you who can read ‘n write. Someone in the cattle business needs to keep records. You’d be good at that sort of thing.

FRANK

No, Sam. Things are gettin’ settled around here. I think I’ll settle in with ‘em.

SAM

But I need you, Frank!

FRANK

Hell, Sam! You don’t need anybody. You’re as lucky as the day is long. Remember?
(Frank flips a coin.)

You call.

SAM

Heads!

FRANK

(Looking at coin)

Damn! You are lucky.

(Sam and the other cowboys sing "The Old Chisholm Trail" while they change the scene back to the campfire with Sam sitting in the pool of light representing the fire.)

That was the last time I saw Sam for over a year. The next time I saw him, he was somebody.

BOB

So your name is Frank, is it? Frank Smith?

FRANK

Yeah, I guess it is. What's it to you?

BOB

Nothin'. Don't mean nothin' to me what your name is.

ANOTHER COWBOY

Hey, Smith! You got any more of that song?

FRANK

A bit. Let's see now...

(He sings.)

Sam left the Collins ranch in the merry month of May
With a herd of Texas cattle for the Black Hills far away
Sold out in Custer City and then went on a spree
With a harder lot of cowboys you seldom ever see.

SAM

Frank. Did I ever tell you about the times we had up in Deadwood?

FRANK

Only about a million times, Sam.

SAM

<Disappointed>

Oh.

A COWBOY

Well, I'd like to hear about it. What kind of times did Sam have up to Deadwood?

SAM

<Sings to the tune of "Little Brown Jug"

Deadwood Gulch--Hell of a town!
Best damn thing for miles around!
Women, whiskey, gamblin' too!
Any old thing you'd care to do!

Ain't it swell! Raisin' Hell!
That's the kick that rings my bell!
Nothin' I like half so well,
Truth to tell, as raisin' Hell!.

A COWBOY

Deadwood? Sounds a lot like Dodge City to me.

ANOTHER COWBOY

Sounds like Texas City to me.

ANOTHER COWBOY

Abilene. You must be talkin' about Abilene.
TRAILBOSS

Abilene, Dodge, Deadwood—what's the difference? A cow town is a cow town. A whole mess of sin and vice, all for one thing and one thing only—to separate a poor honest cowhand from his money.

FRANK

But Deadwood weren't no cow town. It was a minin' town.

TRAILBOSS

No difference. Just means they separate miners from their money 'stead of cowboys. That's all.

A COWBOY

But what a time a fella can have in such a place. They sell somethin' you can't get no where else—a hell of a good time. Yee-haw!!

(Sings)

There you'll find for a price
Women painted up so nice,
Movin' so fine you forget
All the cattle dust you e't.

Ain't it swell! Raisin' Hell!
etc. etc.

ANOTHER COWBOY

Whiskey! Rye whiskey to wet your whistle so you forget how dry you been.

TRAILBOSS

You mean so you forget—period. I lost a lot of good cowhands in those Sodom and Gomorras! A fella can lose his mind and soul in such a place.

ANOTHER COWBOY

Well, if that's all he loses, he's lucky. I lost a whole three months pay in Dodge. Hell of a poker game, though.
TRAILBOSS

Honest, boys! You'd all be better off to stay away from such places.

FRANK

Your wastin' your breath, pard'. You'd just as soon try to keep a cow from drinkin' when they come up to a river as to try keepin' a cowboy from raisin' hell at the end of a drive.

COWBOYS

(Sing)

Abilene--Raisin' hell!
Dodge City--Raisin' hell!
Texas City--Raisin' hell!

SAM & COWBOYS

Deadwood Gulch--Raisin' hell!

(During the closing of the above song, the cowboys have changed the scene to that of a street in Deadwood Gulch, a mining town in the Dakota territory. Sam takes Bob by the arm, and Bob becomes Sam's partner, Joel Collins, in the following scene.)

So there we was--me and Joel Collins--just a'walkin' the streets of Deadwood. So tell me Joel, how much money we got after payin' off the hands.

JOEL

Close as I can figure, about eight thousand dollars.

SAM

And we owe the ranchers back in San Antone...
JOEL
seven thousand.

SAM
Which leaves us...

JOEL
About a thousand. Five hundred apiece.

SAM
Good God! All that work for a paltry five hundred dollars. Hardly seems worth it.

(A saloon door opens stage right, and a painted woman lounges in the doorway. She starts to blow kisses at Joel and Sam who are standing center.)

You know, Joel, it hardly seems worth it to go back to Texas with a measly five hundred dollars in our pockets when with a little luck we could come back home as plumb millionaires.

JOEL
What do you mean?

SAM
Seems to me that in a place like this, a man with four thousand dollars and a little luck could turn that four thousand into a whole mountain of money.

(The painted woman blows Sam a kiss.)

JOEL
You mean poker? Gamblin'?!?

SAM
I'm a lucky fella, Joel, and I play a mean hand of poker.
JOEL

I don't know, Sam. The poker players in towns like this are professionals.

SAM

But I'm LUCKY. Real LUCKY! Look at all the money I made us with the Denton mare.

JOEL

That wasn't luck, Sam. The Denton mare was a damn fast horse.

(The painted woman blows Sam another kiss.)

Oh yeah? Flip a coin.

(Joel flips a coin.)

Now call it.

JOEL

Heads!

SAM

Tails! I win! Care to try it again.

JOEL

But Sam! Most of that four thousand dollars belongs to them rancher in San Antone.

SAM

Well, it seems to me that those fine gentlemen are entitled to a better return on their money than the seven dollars a head we promised them. After I make our million or so, we'll pay them ranchers back with interest. Give 'em such a return they'll all be able to retire.

JOEL

But what if you lose their money, Sam? What then?
Well, a wise old friend of mine once told me that the cattle business was a gamble. Biggest gamble there is. If they don't know that by now, they shouldn't oughta be in the cattle business. It's just the chance you take when you deal in cows.

FRANK

(Watching from the side)

Thanks a lot, Sam.

JOEL

You sure about this, Sam?

(Sam puts his arm around Joel and points him in the direction of the painted woman.)

SAM

Relax, Joel, and prepare to enjoy the time of your life.

(Sam and Joel cross to the saloon door on stage right, and enter into the saloon with the painted woman. The singing cowboy enters the street scene, and sings a verse of the song "Rye Whiskey." At the close of the verse, Sam and Joel emerge back onto the street through the saloon doors.)

JOEL

I thought you said you was lucky!

SAM

I am lucky—damn lucky! I had three kings. How much luckier do you want.
JOEL

Well, he had four aces.

SAM

Well, that's how it goes. Win some; lose some. We ain't down that much. In fact, we'd be up a few hundred to the good if you'd quit drinkin' up the winnin's.

JOEL

It ain't me. It's the women in this town. Damn! I never seen so many thirsty women in my life.

SAM

Yeah, the prettier they are, the thirstier they are.

(Another floozy appears in a saloon door at stage left. She starts to flirt with Joel.)

You ready to cut our losses and head back to Texas.

JOEL

Naw. We ain't made our fortune yet. You still feel lucky?

SAM

Flip a coin.

( Joel flips a coin. )

Heads!

JOEL

( Joel looks at the coin. )

Look out, Deadwood, here we come!

(Sam and Joel enter into the saloon stage left with the floozy. The singing cowboy sings another verse of "Rye
Whiskey." After the verse, Sam and Joel emerge from the saloon back onto the street with a girl clinging to each of them.

JOEL

'Scuse us, honey. We got some serious talkin' to do.

(The two girls exit back into the saloon.)

Well, how much did you win in there?

SAM

Almost enough to cover your trips around the roulette wheel. Hell! You sure picked some pretty screwy numbers to bet on.

JOEL

It weren't me. My little sweety there gets such a kick out of roulette. Just don't know how to play it none too well.

SAM

You seem to lose pretty well on your own. How much do we have left?

( Joel pulls a wad of bills out of his pocket and does a quick count of their resources.)

JOEL

Just about enough to pay back those ranchers in San Anto...

(Another saloon girl appears in the stage right saloon door and starts flirting with Joel. Sam turns around and notices the girl.)

SAM

How much did you say?
JOEL

Just enough to stake you in a game that'll make our fortune.

SAM

Come on. Let's go find us some high rollers. I'm feelin' real lucky--or somethin'.

JOEL

Yeah, me too. I'm feelin'...somethin'.

(Sam and Joel enter into the saloon with the saloon girl. The singing cowboy sings a final verse of "Rye Whiskey." After the song, Joel and Sam enter the street, arguing.)

JOEL

I thought you said you was lucky. This is it, Joel, you told me. Here's where we start our fortune. Bet the ranch, you said. This hand's a gold mine.

SAM

I don't understand it. I had four kings. I don't know how the hell that guy ended up with four aces. Must be a damn sight luckier than I am.

(One of the cowboys enters the scene and assumes the role of Bill Heffridge.)

BILL

Of course he is. He makes his own luck.

SAM

Just what are you sayin', mister.
BILL

I’m sayin’ that luck ain’t got a thing to do with it. I don’t care how lucky you are—luck don’t stand a chance against cheatin’.

SAM

Cheatin’?! Cheatin’?! You mean to tell me that skunk was cheatin’?!

BILL

Seein’ ‘s how I discarded an ace that hand, I’d say it was a pretty good possibility.

SAM

Joel, do you think he was cheatin’?

JOEL

Well, I’d kind o’ suspect it, Sam. I never met anyone luckier than you, and I sure as hell never met anybody so lucky that a fifth ace just appeared out of the blue.

SAM

I can’t believe it! I just can’t believe it! Cheatin’! Cheatin’! That son’bitch was cheatin’! Well, I’ll take care of this.

(Sam starts to storm off into the saloon but is stopped by Bill Heffridge.)

BILL

Whoa there, pard’. Where are you goin’?

SAM

I’m off to settle accounts with that no good cheater.

BILL

Just because you’re lucky, don’t mean you have to be stupid. I was hopin’ you had better sense than that.
SAM

What do you mean stupid? Just who the hell are you anyway?

BILL

A fellow Texan who's been hangin' around Deadwood for a lot longer than you have. You didn't happen to notice the guns that guy was wearin', did you?

SAM

Not much to notice about 'em. They looked kind o' beat up.

BILL

Beat up? Hell! They were notched up.

SAM

Notched up?

BILL

Yeah, notched up. That's the mean son'bitch who shot Wild Bill Hickock in the back. And a bunch more face on. Don't go tanglin' with that hombre unless you're a colder, meaner, and faster killer than him 'cause luck ain't nothin' when it comes to guns.

JOEL

Listen to him, Sam. You ain't much good to me dead.

SAM

I guess you're right. No point in doin' somethin' stupid. Hell! I gotta feel sorry for someone like that.

JOEL & BILL

What?!

SAM

Yeah. Poor son'bitch is so unlucky he has to resort to cheatin'. Must take all the fun out of the game for him.
Joel

Damn you, Sam! Damn you! I can’t believe it. You feel sorry for him? Sam, that poor son’bitch you feel sorry for just stole every last cent we had. We’re broke, Sam! Bust! And you’re feelin’ sorry for the damn varmint who did it to us.

(Sam turns to Frank who has been observing the scene, and speaks to him.)

Sam

So there we were. Dead broke in Deadwood Gulch. What do you think I did next.

Frank

Oh, come on, Sam.

Sam

No. Go ahead. Guess. You’ll never guess in ten thousand years what we did next.

Frank

But Sam, you’ve told me this story a thousand times.

Sam

I did?

Frank

Yes.

Sam

A thousand times?

Frank

At least.
SAM

Oh.

(Pause)

A COWBOY

Well, I want to know. What did Sam do?

BOB/JOEL

Yeah. What did Sam do next?

FRANK

(Sings)

Oh their way back to Texas they robbed the UP train.
The gang split up in couples and started out again.
Sam made it back to Texas all right side up with care,
Rode in the town of Denton with all his friends to share.

(The scene shifts to Frank's tinner shop. Frank takes his place center where he works with a hammer and a pair of pliers on a piece of tin. He is making a pan. Sam enters the scene.)

FRANK

Well, I'll be damned! Sam Bass! Long time no see. How the hell are you, Sam!

SAM

Lucky, Frank. I've got the world by the tail with a downhill pull. And yourself?

FRANK

I can't complain.
SAM

Still workin' as a tinner I see. How's business.

FRANK

Not bad. Not bad.

(Pause)

Not good. Almost keepin' even.

(Sam pulls a couple of twenty dollar gold pieces and tosses them to Frank.)

SAM

Well, maybe this oughta pick it up.

(Frank catches the gold pieces and sets his work down.)

FRANK

Forty dollars! Sam, I can't take your money. I'm not doin' too bad. Eatin' regular anyway. You're a generous guy, Sam, but forty dollars is too much money. I don't need your charity.

(Frank tosses the coins back to Sam, picks up his tools, and goes back to work on the pan.)

SAM

Forty dollars?! Hell! Forty dollars ain't nothin'. Now you just lay down them tinner's tools and go with me, and I'll insure that you get plenty of this.

(Sam drops his hat on the ground and removes a bag from his belt. He pours of hundreds of twenty dollar gold pieces from the bag into his hat. At the shock of seeing the cascading coins, Frank
takes his mind off of his work and catches his finger in his pliers.)

FRANK

Damn!

(Frank’s mind goes back to the coins in the hat, and he speaks in a different tone of voice.)

Damn. How much money is that?

SAM

Oh, I don’t know. Had an even ten thousand dollars when I got back to Texas. Thought I’d spread a little of this Bass luck around. Don’t rightly recall what I spent. There’s a fair amount left here, though. It’s enough.

FRANK

Enough?! Enough?! Hell, Sam, it’s a by-god fortune! How the hell did you come by this? It’s a fortune. A by-god fortune.

SAM

Well, I told you I was goin’ off to make my fortune; I’m luckier than hell, and I made a fortune just like I said I would.

FRANK

You made this money herdin’ cows?

SAM

Cows?!

(Sam laughs loudly.)

Cows?! Oh, punchin’ cows is lively enough alright, but you were right. It may be lively, but it don’t pay enough. I sold out in Kansas and heard about folks strikin’ gold up to
Dakota. Figured I’m a gamblin’ man--lucky one too! Went rollin’ for higher stakes.

FRANK

You made this money minin’ gold?

SAM

Naw. Didn’t take me long to figure out that the odds are stacked against you. Minin’ gold might bring in the pay dirt, but the odds...

(Sam shakes his head.)

Not enough pay and too damn much dirt. No, I found me a way to really make my luck pay off.

FRANK

What’s with all this mystery. What did you do? Go back to racin’ horses?

SAM

Nope.

FRANK

Clean out some rich eastern slickers at a poker table?

SAM

Nope.

FRANK

Come on, Sam, how did you make all this money.

(Frank makes a little joke.)

What did you do--rob a bank?

SAM

Nope. A train.
FRANK

Huh? How's that?

SAM

I said I made this tidy pile robbin' a train.

(Frank pauses as he stares at Sam in disbelief. Frank then breaks into laughter.)

FRANK

You're a card, Sam Bass. You are indeed. Robbed a train! Ha! You almost had me believin' you. Next, you'd a told me that you were in on the bunch that robbed the U.P. train.

SAM

(Grinning with pride)

That was us all right!

FRANK

I'll be damned! You are serious. You've turned to train robbin'.

SAM

Yep. And it's a kick too. Pays off in spades, and I can't think of a livelier way to make it.

(There is a long pause while Frank stares at Sam. Frank is speechless. Finally a cowboy sitting off to the side--out of the scene--gets restless and interrupts.)

A COWBOY

Don't just sit there with your teeth in your mouth. Ask him to tell all about it. Who was in on it? How'd they pull it off?
FRANK

Hell's bells! How'd you pull off a--

SAM

(Interrupting)

Let me tell you about it, Frank. We were quite a band of desperados. Even bought a bunch of red kerchiefs that matched to hide our faces. Looked like a regular band of bandits—all of us wearin' them red bandanas

(As Sam lists the members of the gang, different cowboys enter the scene to play these parts. Each cowboy slipping on a red bandana over his face as he steps forward.)

SAM

There was Joel Collins. You remember Joel.

FRANK

Yeah.

SAM

Then there was Bill Heffridge. A hard luck Texan stuck up there in that God forsaken Dakota. Davis. I don't recall what his first name was; we always called him Davis. Jim Berry. It was his idea to rob the train. And Tom Nixon—a by-god Canadian. Me, of course. I planned the robbery on account of I had experience.

JOEL

You ain't never robbed a train before.

SAM

Well, not exactly, but when I was a kid, I saw a bunch of guys hanged for robbin' a train. I figure that gives me added hankerin' not to get caught. Besides, I'm lucky. Care to flip a coin for the honor.
Joel and the other members of the gang shake their heads no. A musical sequence follows using dance and mime as Sam and the cowboys play out the September 19, 1877, robbery of the Union Pacific train. The gang reconnoitered the train station at Big Springs, Nebraska, during the day. That night, they came back and captured the station agent. At ten p.m., the train pulled up for water. Collins and Heffridge captured the engineers. Berry and Nixon guarded the three prisoners, the engineers, and the station agent, while Bass and Davis secured the Express Messenger in the Express car. The safe had $200,000 in it, but the messenger did not know how to open it. The car contained bars of silver bullion, but they were too heavy to carry. But, there in the corner were two small boxes sealed in sealing wax. They opened them up, and to their surprise, found $60,000 in freshly minted twenty dollar gold pieces. Collins and Heffridge went through the passenger car and collected $400 and several gold watches. The gang then rode off into the night. At the conclusion of this episode, Sam turns to Frank and speaks.

SAM

My share come to ten thousand dollars. All in these twenty dollar gold pieces.
FRANK

You are a lucky dog. Made yourself quite a pile of money. A man could retire real nice on a sum like that.

SAM

If he was the retirin' type. Now me, I get kind o' restless. I'm always lookin' for somethin' lively.

FRANK

What you got in mind? Another cattle drive?

SAM

No. Nothin' like that. If my times in Deadwood taught me anything, it's where the path to riches runs. No point wastin' good luck on a bunch of dumb cows. No. I had in mind gettin' another little gang together and pullin' a few jobs here in Texas.

FRANK

Now, Sam, that's crazy! You're sittin' pretty on ten thousand dollars. Why risk it all? What if you're caught?

SAM

No way, Frank. Remember me? Sam Bass? I'm lucky--too lucky for that to happen.

FRANK

That don't have a thing in the world to do with--

SAM

Go ahead. Flip a coin.

FRANK

But Sam...

SAM

Come on. Flip a coin.
FRANK

(Flipping a coin)

This is ridiculous.

SAM

I don't care if it's ridiculous or not. Heads!

(Frank catches it and looks.)

Well?

FRANK

It's heads.

SAM

Anyway. I was figurin'--if I was gonna start up a little gang, who should I ask? And I figures--Why, Sam, stick with your friends. Stick with the ones who'LL stick by you. Men like you, Frank. What do you say?

(During this scene, the cowboys have been watching. Suddenly, Bob steps into the scene and breaks it.)

BOB

Wait a minute. You mean to tell me that Sam Bass asked a greenhorn like you to join his gang?

FRANK

(Startled)

Who told you?

A COWBOY

Why, you did. You just now said it. Sam Bass turned to you and said "stick with the ones who'LL stick by you. Like you, Frank. What do you say?"
ANOTHER COWBOY

If that ain't askin', I don't know what is.

A COWBOY

So what did you tell him? What did you say? Did you tell him you'd join up?

BOB

What do you mean--what did he say? Sam Bass never asked this tenderfoot nothin'. He's just got himself all caught up in this pack of lies he's spinnin'. Probably never even met Bass. He sure as hell never was asked to join no train robbin' gang.

A COWBOY

But he says he was.

BOB

I don't care what he says.

(To Frank)

I bet you can't look me straight in the eye and tell me that Sam Bass asked you to join his gang. Well?

(Frank turns away not wanting to admit to this.)

There. I told you he couldn't.

(To Frank)

Can't do it can you. 'Cause it never happened.

(As Bob taunts Frank, the ghost who had appeared to Frank earlier enters and points accusingly at him. Frank suddenly blurts out...)

FRANK

It's true!
BOB

What?

FRANK

It's a by-god fact. Sam Bass asked me to join his gang.

A COWBOY

So what did you say?

TRAILBOSS

He's alive ain't he. I'd say that's a pretty good indication.

BOB

So what did you say, hot stuff?

(The scene resumes with Sam.)

SAM

Yes, Frank. Say yes.

FRANK

No.

SAM

No?!

FRANK

That's right, Sam. No.

SAM

But why not?

FRANK

It's against the law.
SAM

What difference does that make?

FRANK

It means that I'm not gonna steal.

SAM

Hell! You're as bad as old Joel Collins. Remember him? He made the same objections as you are now. Almost had me convinced, but Bill Heffridge set us both straight.

(Bill and Joel step into the scene with Sam.)

JOEL

I still say it. Stealin' is against the law.

BILL

We're west of the law here in Deadwood.

JOEL

What do you mean? I seen the sheriff walkin' down the streets here just this mornin'. Looked like the law to me.

BILL

Yeah, but he's got to catch you first, and out here in the west that's pretty damn hard to do. As long as there's wide open spaces to run through and wild rugged places to hide in, then as far as I'm concerned you're west of the law.

JOEL

But it ain't right.

SAM

Come on, Joel. What did you come out west for anyway? To get away from people tellin' you not to wear your boots inside. Tellin' you not to eat your peas with a knife. People are always tellin' you what not to do. That's why I came out west--to get away from all that. I figure this is
the west, and I'm gonna do what I feel like doin', and if I feel like robbin' someone, then by God, that's what I'm gonna do.

JOEL

But...the law.

BILL

The law don't mess with anyone west of the Mississippi.

JOEL

I don't know, Sam?

SAM

Come on, Joel. Just this once let's do somethin' just for the pure hell of it. That's the only way to live.

JOEL

And a damn fast way to die.

SAM

What are you worried about. No ones gonna catch us! I'm too damn lucky! Go ahead; flip a coin.

(Joel folds his arms and stares at Sam obstinately.)

Well, hell! I'll flip.

(Sam flips a coin, and as he does he suddenly turns and speaks to Frank.)

Call it!

FRANK

I don't want to play.

SAM

What's the matter? Scared you're gonna lose?
FRANK

Heads, damn it!

(Sam looks at the coin and then starts to laugh.)

Damn! I know. I know. You win. Don’t bother sayin’ it.

SAM

If you go with me, I’ll ensure you get $100 a month.

(Bob interrupts the scene.)

BOB

Hey! What ever happened to Joel Collins? You ain’t finished that part of the story.

FRANK

(Sings)

A’ridin’ back to Texas, they robbed the U.P. train.
The gang spilt into couples and started back again.
Joel Collins and his partner were overtaken soon.
With all their hard earned money, they had to meet their doom.

(Bob turns to the cowboy who had played Bill Heffridge, and the two become Joel and Bill and play out “their doom.”)

JOEL

Hear that, Pard? They caught us.

BILL

Why, we ain’t nothin’ but Texas boys goin’ home.

(Another cowboy enters the scene as a member of the posse.)
POSSE MAN

Yeah? Well, I oughta run you in and collect a hellacious reward.

JOEL

(To Bill)

Pard, if we have to die, we might as well die game.

(The two cowboys who play Joel and Bill make play guns out of their hands and pretend to shoot at the other cowboys in the circle, who then enter into the game and pretend to be shooting at Bill and Joel. All of them yell, "Bang! Bang! Oh! You got me!" Joel and Bill die a histrionic hammy death, falling to the ground. All of the cowboys break into riotous laughter except for Bill and Joel who are pretending to be dead and lie motionless. During this, unnoticed by everyone but Frank, the ghost enters and stands over the "dead" cowboys. He stares at them and then points his accusing finger at Frank. Frank turns and faces away from the ghost and falls to his knees. The lights fade out.)

END OF ACT I
ACT II

(The scene is the same as the end of Act I except that the figures of the ghost and Sam Bass are not on stage. As the lights come up a cowboy starts strumming "Streets of Laredo" while the other cowboys talk among themselves--laughing and having a good time. Frank is still on his knees, turned away from the place where the ghost had been standing at the end of Act I. The two cowboys who had played Joel and Bill and who have been playing possum, stir.)

JOEL/BOB

What happened to Sam?

(Frank is startled at this question and turns around suddenly, looking where the ghost had been standing. His eyes search around the stage for the ghost.)

FRANK

Huh?!

JOEL/COWBOY

I said--what happened to Sam?

TRAILBOSS

That's pretty damn plain to see. Like the good book says--he who lives by the sword, dies by the sword. Outlaws like Sam Bass aren't long for this world.
COWBOY

Is that right, pard'? Sam made the last round-up? How'd he die?

FRANK

How the hell would I know?

COWBOY

Well, you said you knew him.

FRANK

So I knew him. What does that prove? I already told you guys. I told Sam no. He went his way, and I went mine. I ain't no bandit.

COWBOY

I didn't say you were. I'm just askin' you what happened to Sam.

TRAILBOSS

Same thing that happens to every mean varmint who thinks he's better'n the rest. Gunned down like the mean coyote he was. Well he got his just deserts--got what he deserved that no account killer!

FRANK

That's a lie! That's a damned lie!

COWBOY

You mean Sam wasn't gunned down? I thought he died.

FRANK

Sam died all right, but he was no killer. Sam never had the heart for killin'. He stole all right, but he never meant to hurt nobody. He just wanted their money.
BOB

How the hell would you know? You said Sam went his way and you went yours. You don't know nothin'. Just makin' this up, ain't you? You don't know nothin'!

SAM

I knew Sam.

COWBOY

So what happened to him?

TRAILBOSS

I already told you. Damn, you're thick!

COWBOY

No. I mean what happened to Sam next?

FRANK

What happened next?

(Sings)

Sam's life was short in Texas. Three robberies did he do.
He robbed the Longview passenger, express and mail cars too.
More bold and reckless outlaws the wild west never knew.
They whipped the Texas Rangers--outran the boys in blue.

(Sam comes running on stage. He sees Frank and stops. Sam
is panting hard, trying to catch his breath.)

SAM

Frank. Damn that sheriff Egan! Don't he get tired of chasin' me. Won't someone tell that fool posse I'm tired of all this chasin' around. Damn it, Frank! Ain't they tired of all this chasin' around too?!
FRANK

Well, what the hell do you want me to do about it? It's your own damn fault. I told you to put an end to pullin' these jobs. You keep pullin' off robberies, and the law is gonna keep chasin' you until sooner or later they catch up with you and that will be that.

SAM

Naw! Not me! I'm too damn lucky to get caught. Go ahead, flip...

FRANK

Damn it, Sam! That don't prove nothin'. You may be the luckiest bastard that ever walked this earth, but you're a wanted man now.

SAM

Wanted man? What the hell does that mean?

FRANK

Means that they've put up a big reward for your capture, and every last man in the state wants it.

SAM

But they've got to catch me first, and I know this country like the back of my hand. Every swamp, thicket, rock, and gulch.

FRANK

They don't show no signs of lettin' up, and as long as you keep pullin' off these robberies, it's just a matter of time.

(Two cowboys enter the scene taking the parts of Seaborn Barnes and Arkansas Johnson.)

SEABORN

They look like they lost our trail in that stream, but it won't be too long afore they pick it up again.
(Arkansas starts loading his gun.)

ARKANSAS

I say we go ahead and shoot it out now. We can ambush 'em.

SAM

All we got to do is kill a few horses and then retreat. They'll kinda go slow and won't crowd us much more if we scare 'em a little.

FRANK

Until you pull another job. I don't understand why you do it. You ain't made chicken feed from any of the jobs you pulled in Texas. It ain't worth the risk.

SAM

We ain't made much yet. But the next one might be a by-god jackpot. Who knows? The odds have got to start favorin' me. I'm a lucky guy.

ARKANSAS

We ain't made shit!

SAM

It's just a matter of time. It's just like when I was robbin' stagecoaches up in Deadwood. Never made much then, but we kept at it, and damned if we didn't take the prize.

FRANK

I thought you robbed a train.

SAM

We did. But you don't start out huntin' grizzly bears. You got to shoot a few rabbits first.

FRANK

Are you tryin' to tell me you planned a few practice robberies first?
SAM

Well, not exactly. The train robbery was kind of an afterthought. But that just goes to show how lucky I am. Stagecoach jobs kept body and soul together for a few months. Never did seem to pay off too well.

ARKANSAS

Stagecoaches don't pay shit!

SEABORN

'Least not the Cleburne to Ft. Worth stage.

SAM

Ah, but it was a lively time.

(The scene changes to the road from Cleburne to Ft. Worth. A stagecoach rolls onto the stage. Sam leaps out in front of it and fires his revolver into the air. The stage driver draws an aim on Sam with his rifle, but Arkansas leaps out with his gun aimed at the driver and shouts.)

ARKANSAS

Drop it!

SAM

Throw up your props! We want money; that's all, and there's no use kickin'.

(Seaborn walks up to the door of the stagecoach and throws the door open. He points his gun into the stage and shouts.)

SEABORN

Everyone out! Keep those hands where we can see 'em.
(Arkansas points at a box next to the driver.)

ARKANSAS

What's in the box?

DRIVER

That's my supper.

ARKANSAS

I'll bet. Throw that box down.

(As the driver throws the box down, the passengers get out. A well-dressed wealthy-looking man accompanied by a nicely-dressed young woman, two poorer-looking young men, and a man who appears to be a salesman. At the direction of the robbers, the passengers form a line. While Sam looks on, Arkansas starts to investigate the box which the driver threw down. Seaborn starts to fleece the riders, beginning with one of the poorer-looking young men.)

SEABORN

Okay, pard. Keep them props up in the air where I can see 'em.

(Seaborn sticks his hands into the man's pockets pulling them inside out as he checks them.)

Nothin'!

(Checks another pocket)

Nothin'!

(Checks another pocket)
Not a damn thing!

**THE PASSENGER**

Ain't gonna find nothin' neither. This trip cost me every cent I had in the world.

(Arkansas pulls out a wad of beef jerky from the strong box the driver threw down.)

**ARKANSAS**

What the hell is this?

**DRIVER**

That's my supper.

(Arkansas throws the beef jerky onto the ground.)

**ARKANSAS**

Damn it to hell!

**DRIVER**

Hey! My supper!

**ARKANSAS**

The hell with your supper. You're damn lucky I don't blast you.

**SAM**

Now, be fair. It is the man's supper.

**ARKANSAS**

What?!

**SAM**

Pick it up and dust it off for the man.
ARKANSAS

You're nuts!

(Arkansas stands with his arms folded and pouts. Sam walks over and calmly dusts off the jerky; he puts it back in the box and hands the box to the driver. Suddenly, Seaborn throws the other poorly dressed man violently to the ground.)

SEABORN

I said get both of them hands up in the air where I can see 'em!

(The man continues to hold up only one hand. Arkansas walks over to the man and pulls out a wallet full of money from his pocket.)

ARKANSAS

This one has money at least.

(Sam walks over to this stubborn passenger and points his gun at him.)

SAM

You heard the man. Get that other hand up!

PASSENGER

I can't. I don't have but one arm.

(The man shows Sam his stump.)

SAM

Well, I'll be damned.
(Sam takes the man's wallet back from Arkansas and hands it back to the one armed passenger.)

Here. I ain't gonna steal from no one armed cripple.

(Arkansas kicks the dirt in anger as Sam helps the one armed man to his feet. During the preceding activity, while the bandits weren't looking, the well dressed man is seen removing valuables from his pockets and giving them to the well dressed woman, who in turn stuffs them into her cleavage. As the bandits turn back around, the well dressed man pulls out a small wad of money.)

SAM

Hold it right there, mister. Just what do you think you're gonna do with that.

ARKANSAS

I'll relieve you of that.

(Arkansas takes the wad of money from the man. Seaborn in the meantime, has been fleecing the salesman. He relieves him of a small amount of cash, and discovers a gold watch.)

SEABORN

Well, now. What do we have here?

SALESMAN

Please don't take that from me, mister. Please.
SAM

Now there's no point in kickin'. We want your money and jewels, and we're bound to have 'em. No point to kick.

SALES MAN

But that watch was given to me by my sainted mother. God rest her soul.

SAM

I don't care if it was give to you by God hisself. We're bandits, see, and stealin' is what we do.

(Sam takes the watch, and reads over the inscription before putting the watch in his pocket.)

SALES MAN

But my mother gave me that watch.

SAM

Not unless your mamma's name was Acme Ammunition and Gunsmiths, Inc..

SEABORN

I don't know. He looks like a son of a gun.

(Sam and Seaborn laugh. Arkansas, who has finished searching the well dressed man, starts to search the woman. She screams.)

WELL DRESSED MAN

Take your hands off my wife!

(Arkansas strikes the man across the face with the butt of his gun. He turns back to the woman and anticipates the
pleasures of searching her well proportioned body.)

ARKANSAS

My, oh my. Now what do we have here?

SAM

What the hell are you doin'?! Arkansas, come over here.

(He does.)

What do you think you're doin'?

ARKANSAS

I was gonna search that passenger.

SAM

But that's a woman. Damn it! A woman! I will not have a member of my gang searchin' a woman. It's shameful.

ARKANSAS

But what if she's loaded? What if that guy stowed all his valuables on her?

SAM

Nobody could possibly be so low down as to do such a cowardly thing. Jeopardize a woman? The very idea! Now get those passengers back on that stage and let's get the hell out of here.

(The driver examines his soiled jerky.)

DRIVER

Damn every last one of you. You have ruined my supper. Just ruined it!
SALESMAN

The hell with your supper! They lifted every cent I had. I don't have a damn thing left to buy breakfast with. I'll go hungry in the mornin' now on account of you.

SAM

Quit your kickin'. I may be a bandit, but I ain't gonna send ya'll to go hungry.

(To Seaborn)

Give 'em each a couple dollars.

SEABORN

What?!

SAM

You heard me. I ain't gonna send these folks off on a cold night with no chance of breakfast.

(Seaborn shrugs and starts to distribute the money. He skips the first poor passenger whose pockets were empty, and this passenger complains.)

POOR PASSENGER

What about me?

SEABORN

What do you mean--what about you? We didn't take nothin' from you.

SAM

That don't mean he don't have a stomach. Give him a couple bucks.

WELL DRESSED MAN

Wait a bit. That's my money you're givin' to that no account. It isn't right.
SAM

It's my money now, and I'll do with it as I please. Now listen every last one of you. This is a disgrace. The stageline ought to be ashamed of itself for lettin' trash like you ride on this coach. This is without a doubt one of the poorest hauls a job has ever brought me.

(To driver)

I would appreciate it if you would let the proprietors of this line know that in the future I expect them to raise the level and the quality of their clientele.

(Sam fires his gun in the air.)

Now get the hell out of here, and don't none of you try to follow us or you're dead meat.

(The passengers hurry into the stage which then rides off. Frank has been watching this scene from the side of the stage. He steps back into the scene to talk to Sam after the stage leaves.)

FRANK

You're a generous spirit, Sam Bass.

SAM

Come, Frank. Join up with me. We'll pull another U.P. job yet. Come with me and you'll be rollin' in wealth.

ARKANSAS

Some wealth. Eleven dollars and one gold watch.

SAM

Yeah. But our luck's bound to change. I'm as lucky as the day is long.
ARKANSAS

Days have been kinda short lately.

SAM

Go ahead. Flip a coin.

(Arkansas flips a coin.)

Tails.

(Arkansas looks at the coin.)

ARKANSAS

Hell! That don't prove nothin'.

(Seaborn looks off stage and then yells.)

SEABORN

Run for it, boys. The posse is back on our trail!

(A chase scene follows. The bandits run around the cowboys in the circle, dodging in and out among the cowboys. A group of cowboys enter into the scene, playing members of the posse. The trailboss plays the sheriff. During the chase Arkansas quits running, turns and fires on the posse. One of the posse guns Arkansas down. Arkansas falls to the ground, dead, in the center of the group.)

FRANK

(Sings)

Sam had a bold companion named Arkansas for short. He was shot by a Texas ranger by the name of Thomas Floyd. Old Tom’s a big six-footer and thinks he’s mighty fly But I can tell you his racket. He’s a deadbeat on the sly.
(Floyd walks up to Arkansas, who is laying on the ground.)

FLOYD

Lookee here! I got me Sam Bass. Killed him dead. This is gonna get me a nice fat reward. Hot damn, I'm a rich man!

(Another Ranger walks over to Arkansas and examines him.)

OTHER RANGER

That ain't Bass. Don't look like him at all. Looks like you shot one of the gang. Funny thing.

(Starts to laugh)

Ain't no reward for shootin' one of the gang.

FLOYD

What?! Well, I'll be damned if this bandit don't pay me some kind of reward.

(Floyd starts to search the body of Arkansas for any valuables. As he does this, the scene shifts back to the cowboy campfire. The cowboy who had played Arkansas suddenly comes to life.)

COWBOY/ARKANSAS

What the hell are you doin'? Get your damn hands off of me!

COWBOY/FLOYD

Just tryin' to get back what's rightfully mine. You borrowed ten dollars off of me back to Ft. Worth.

COWBOY/ARKANSAS

I already told you once. I'll pay you back that money when we finish this drive. Don't talk to me no more 'til then.
(The cowboy who played Arkansas returns to his place in the circle. The cowboy who played Floyd turns and speaks to the cowboy who played the other Ranger.)

COWBOY/FLOYD

I'll pay you back that money I owe you when we finish this drive.

COWBOY/OTHER RANGER

So it seems.

TRAILBOSS

(To Frank)

You seem to know quite a lot about this Sam Bass fella.

BOB

Only as much as he can spin lies. I gotta hand it to you. You tell a pretty tall tale, but it don't ring true. Not one damn bit. Don't make a lick o' sense. Bandits are mean greedy son'bitches. They kill for pocket change and then run like cowards. Your story just don't hang together right.

TRAILBOSS

You got any more of that story, Smith?

FRANK

No. Ain't no more to it.

BOB

(Taunting Frank)

But you knew him so well? What'ja do? Run out of lies?

FRANK

Yeah, guess I did.
COWBOY

But what happened to Sam?

BOB

How the hell would he know? All he knows is how to puff up like a horny toad and tell great big lies. Never did know Sam.

(To Frank)

Did you?

COWBOY

But he says he knew him. Ain't you gonna finish the story?

FRANK

Ain't no more story.

COWBOY

But you said that--

TRAILBOSS

Look boys. Ain't no more story. He don't know no more about it. Ain't like he was a member of the gang.

FRANK

That's right. I'm not a bandit. Just a poor broke cowpuncher like the rest of you.

COWBOY

What happened to Sam?

TRAILBOSS

Hell! You know what happened same as anybody. He was hunted down and shot like the coyote he was.
BOB

(To Frank)

That right? Gunned down like a coldhearted pole cat? Not a damn bit like the lies you was feedin' these guys.

FRANK

Guess not.

(Frank turns away from Bob and sees the ghostly figure walking toward him and pointing. Frank stands there frozen.)

COWBOY

Well, you got any more of that song you been singin'?

(No response)

Pard'? Anymore to that song?

BOB

Hell no! Now if you like I'll read you some more from this newspaper.

(There is general agreement from the cowboys, who start to chatter. Bob takes out his newspaper clipping and reads.)

"The Eagle Ford gang headed by the notorious outlaw Sam Bass perpetuated another daring robbery. Just before midnight last night, at the Mesquite train depot, the gang stopped the train headed into Dallas. Thought to be among the gang were--

(Frank who has been staring at the ghost, suddenly turns from the figure and runs across the stage and into Sam who has entered from the opposite side.)
Frank!

Sam!

Why there you are, Frank. Been lookin' all over for you. Got me a plan what's gonna make us all rich men.

Leave me out of this.

That's exactly what we intend to do--leave you out of this.

Well, don't you want to know what it is?

I am not interested!

I don't give a damn if you are!

Banks.

Banks?

A cowboy

Banks?

That's right; banks.
A COWBOY

What's he sayin' "banks" for? Bob's tellin' about a train robbery. What's that got to do with banks?

SAM

Figured I robbed a stage. Robbed a train. Time to move up to banks...get my hands on some real money. Besides; banks don't move around.

FRANK

Sam, you gotta get out of here!

A COWBOY

I thought he was finished with his story.

BOB

Yeah, there ain't no more to this story.

SAM

Tell you what. I'll flip a coin. If you win, I'll ride on to Mexico. If I win, you come rob some banks with me.

FRANK

This ain't no game. People get killed.

BOB

What the hell! Cows get killed. What the hell does that got to do with anything?

SAM

Hell, Frank. I'm lucky! Why we hung out in Deadwood Gulch for months while we were pullin' the stage jobs. Nobody bothered us there.

FRANK

You mean you guys stayed in town.
SAM

Of course.

FRANK

After robbin' the stage?

SAM

Yup.

FRANK

That's crazy! You could have been caught and hung. You should have hid out in the hills.

SAM

Why freeze our tails off hidin' in them hills?

FRANK

Sam, no one in their right mind would stay in town after robbin' the stage that just come into it. It's ... unthinkable.

SAM

(Tapping his head)

I know. That's why they took so long to suspect us. I may be lucky, but I'm smart too.

BOB

Smart? Hell, to hear you tell it, Sam Bass was a fool. A damn idiot of a fool!

FRANK

That's a lie! Sam ain't no fool.

BOB

What do you mean he ain't. The word is weren't--past tense. Sam died. Died like all fools do who think they can take on the world.
FRANK
Sam was lucky.

BOB
Must have been lucky if he had a dime. Lettin' money slip thorough his hands just to be polite. Throwin' his money around, all the while layin' a trail for the law to follow him. To hear you tell it--Sam Bass was a fool.

FRANK
That's a lie!

BOB
You're the one callin' Sam a fool, not me.

FRANK
That's a lie.

BOB
And so's every word you've said and sung tonight. But if you really did know Sam Bass, which I doubt, then this fella you been talkin' about was a fool. Had about as much sense as one of them damn cows.

FRANK
Damn you!

BOB
Of course, you're a bigger fool than he was.

You're damn lucky I don't shoot you dead. I could, you know. I could gun you down before you could even think about pullin' that trigger. You ain't got the guts.
(The ghost suddenly walks up to Sam and speaks.)

GHOST

I'll ride with you, Sam.

FRANK

No, Sam! No!

BOB

Who the hell are you callin' Sam? My name is Bob. You gone loco or somethin', Smith?

SAM

That's the ticket, Jim. We'll walk up to some old banker and cash in our guns for a pile of money.

FRANK

Don't listen to him, Sam!

BOB

Of course they'll listen to me.

(Indicating cowboys)

How come you're so jumpy? Why don't you put that gun away before you hurt yourself? You know, you're mighty old for a tenderfoot. What makes you so hot to be ridin' off with a herd of cows, Smith? If Smith is your name.

SAM

I knew I could count on you, Jim. I knew you could stand the racket. Here! Here's a couple of twenties for you and your pa. I appreciate the fresh horses and his hidin' us in his barn while the law was on our tails.

GHOST

Sure, Sam. Anything for a generous friend like you.
SAM

Why, thank you kindly.

(Sam throws the ghost another twenty dollar gold piece.)

Here's somethin' for you for sayin' so.

FRANK

Don't, Sam!

BOB

I already told you once--my name ain't Sam, Smith!

FRANK

My name ain't Smith, Damn it!

COWBOY

But you said it was. Said your name was Smith--Frank Smith.

BOB

What this guy says and the truth are two different things. Says he knew Sam Bass, too, but that's just a bluff. Tryin' to be somethin' he ain't.

(To Frank)

So why did you change your name? Runnin' away from somethin'?

GHOST

So when do we take those banks, Sam?

FRANK

Don't trust him!

BOB

Of course, they trust me. They know me. Known me a long time. But you? Just who are you? What did you do that
made you change your name and run off? Get some rich man's daughter in trouble. Or maybe you're some kind of horse thief.

GHOST

Let's ride, Sam.

BOB

Just what are you runnin' away from, Smith?

FRANK

Damn it, my name ain't Smith!

SAM

You comin', Frank?

GHOST

Yeah, Jackson, get the lead out!

BOB

Jackson, huh? That your name, Frank Jackson?

TRAILBOSS

(Trying to remember)

Jackson. Frank Jackson. I know I've heard that name before.

FRANK

(Startled)

Huh?!

BOB

So what are you runnin' away from, Jackson? How'd a tenderfoot like you go runnin' off to punch cows?
TRAILBOSS

Frank Jackson! Of course, I remember now.

(The trailboss walks over to Bob and takes the newspaper clipping from Bob's hand and reads.)

"Thought to be among the gang were Henry Underwood, Seaborn Barnes, and Frank Jackson--"

(All the cowboys except Bob suddenly yell "Frank Jackson" in unison and draw their guns, aiming them at Frank. When it suddenly sinks into Bob, he suddenly yells "Frank Jackson" and draws his gun and points it at Frank. The trailboss walks up to Frank, and takes away his gun.)

TRAILBOSS

So, you gave into that rascal, huh? Turned Bandit, did ya'? I should have suspected it the way you been actin'. Should'a known there was somethin' suspicious about you.

BOB

Hell, I knewed it all along! Just waitin' for him to trip up and let it slip.

A COWBOY

You really rode with Sam Bass? Did you rob anybody?

FRANK

Yeah. I did. Though I'm no richer for it. Except for the money Sam was always throwin' around from that U.P. job, I seen more money in the tinner's trade.

TRAILBOSS

Is that the temptation that got you--money? Is that why you joined up?
FRANK

No. It wasn't the money. Not exactly. The money that Sam waved in front of me—Hell, I couldn't spend it in twenty years. But the way Sam waved it around. The way he talked about it. Sam made that money glitter and shine like the lights of Texas City, Dodge, and Abilene all rolled into one on the first night after a Cowboy gets his pay.

BOB

So you rode with Sam Bass. Decided to turn bad, huh?

FRANK

I wish to God I never did. Wish I never had made that mistake, so help me God.

TRAILBOSS

No use cryin' about it now. You done wrong and there's no escapin' justice. We all get punished for the wrongs we done.

FRANK

No. That's not it. There's no punishment I'm fearin' that can be crueler than what I'm livin' with now. Damn this guilt!

TRAILBOSS

So you're sorry for the wrongs you done. Sorry you robbed them folks.

FRANK

I don't give a damn for any of 'em. Damn 'em all! But Sam—Sam, why did you keep pesterin' me? If I'd never joined you, you might still be alive today.

A COWBOY

Did you kill Sam Bass, mister? You the one that shot him?

FRANK

No, but I might as well have. I let him get trapped by him.
(Frank points at the ghost, indicating that the ghost is the "him" who trapped Sam.)

A COWBOY

Who?

FRANK

Him! Him!

(Pointing at ghost)

Don't you see him?

BOB

I don't see nobody.

FRANK

But he's standin' right there.

TRAILBOSS

You all right, son? Maybe you better sit down or somethin'.

A COWBOY

Who are you pointin' at?

FRANK

(Sings)

Jim Murphy was arrested and then released on bail. He jumped his bond at Tyler and took the train for Terrill, but Major Jones had posted Jim and that was all a stall. It was only a plan to capture Sam before the comin' fall.

(Sam walks over to the ghost, who will be referred to from this point on as "Murphy.")
SAM

Well, Jim, my boy, how did you like jail life? How do you like playin' checkers with your nose?

MURPHY

Not at all.

SAM

That's nearly hell, Jim, ain't it? Ride with me and you'll never have to play checkers with your nose again. We have lots of fun and plenty of money in our camp.

MURPHY

Well, Sam, I'm thinkin' about goin' back and standin' trial and comin' clear.

SAM

Well, Jim, that's all very nice, but you ain't got no show with the United States Government. Not if they think you're a friend of mine. Now the best thing you can do is to go with me and make some money, and we will send the money back to pay the bond off as soon as we can make a strike.

MURPHY

Well, what are we waitin' for, Sam. Let's go cash in these guns of ours.

SAM

Alright, then. Let's go! Comin', Frank?

(Frank joins the scene.)

FRANK

We rode awhile.

(Two cowboys enter the scene. One plays Henry Collins, brother of Joel and the other his friend.)
HENRY

Sam.

SAM

Why, Henry Collins. Long time no see! Come to ride with me?

HENRY

Could I have a word with you, Sam?

SAM

I'm all ears.

HENRY

Alone.

SAM

Well, okay.

(Sam goes over to the side with Henry and his friend. They talk among themselves quietly. Suddenly the other cowboy yells.)

FRIEND

Blast that Murphy! Sam you ought to go and kill him right now!

MURPHY

(Scared)

Frank?

FRANK

Just be easy, Jim. I won't let them hurt you.
Good bye, boys. Keep you eyes open and watch one another. I am afraid when I hear from you again you will have hell shot out of you.

(As the two leave the scene, Seaborn Barnes whistles from off stage. Sam returns the whistle and Seaborn enters the scene.)

SEABORN
Sam, I been worried about you.

SAM
Why?

SEABORN
Well, the news come down here that one of the Murphy boys was gonna give you away, and I knew you placed a deal of confidence in them.

SAM
Naw! They won't give us away. Jim is here with us. They won't turn on their own brother.

SEABORN
I tell you this news came too straight to be false. I got no confidence in Jim. I believe we ought to kill him right here. The marshal telegraphed to Ft. Worth that Jim was goin' to lead us into Ft. Worth to rob a bank and then lay a plan to catch us. That was the reason he left Tyler--to catch us.
(Sam walks over to Jim and puts his arm around Jim's shoulder.)

SAM

No! Not my old friend Jim Murphy.

(Sam uses his free hand to quickly pull Murphy's gun from his holster and takes aim at Jim.)

Of course, if that is the case, we will kill him right here.

MURPHY

(Falling to his knees)

No, Sam! Don't! You know how it is. I told Major Jones I'd do it, but I had no notion of doin' it. You know that you boys got me into this trouble with the U.S. Government. I fell on this plan to beat 'em and give Major Jones the grand slip. If you were in my boots, you'd do the same thing.

FRANK

That's right, Jim. I'd done the same thing myself.

SEABORN

I don't know, Sam. Sounds pretty damn thin to me.

SAM

Frank?

FRANK

I've known Jim for a long time. I know he won't give me away, nor you neither.

SEABORN

I think he will, and we had better kill him now.
SAM

All right! He goes!

(Frank places himself between Jim and the other two who have drawn their guns and prepared to shoot.)

FRANK

No he don't. You can't kill Jim without killin' me.

SEABORN

Damn you, Jackson! Damn you! I don't want to kill you. We need you in this gang. Now move out of the way and let's get this over with.

FRANK

Nope.

(Frank draws his gun.)

I'll die fightin' for him if I have do.

SEABORN

Damn it to hell! All right then, I'm gonna blast you! Damn it! Move or I'm gonna blast you. Damn it! Damn it! Move!

SAM

(Calmly)

Now calm down, Seab. That ain't no way to deal with Frank. You gotta reason with him. Let me deal with this.

(SEABORN shoos Seaborn aside and stands before Jackson. Sam takes a deep breath and suddenly erupts.)

SAM

Damn it, Frank! Damn it! I'm gonna blast you! Move or I'll blast you!
FRANK

Sam, as long as I've known you, you ain't killed nobody. Shot a few horses maybe, but you never killed a man. You ain't a killer, Sam. Besides all that, Jim is a friend. A good friend.

SAM

Well, Hell! Blast the friend. I don't need any friends. They are just friends for my money. Most have gone back on me, and I've gone back on everybody.

FRANK

You don't mean that, Sam. You're my friend and you never gone back on me.

SEABORN

Enough of this damn talk! Enough of this confounded reasonin'! Blast 'em both! Blast 'em now!

SAM

Now hold on. I got an easy way to settle this. I'll flip you for it, Frank.

FRANK AND SEABORN

What!!!

SAM

I'll flip you for it. Heads you win, and Jim rides with us. Tails, you get the hell out of the way and let Seaborn blast him.

SEABORN

Now hold on a damn second. You gonna flip a coin on this?!

SAM

That's right. I'm too lucky for any traitor to get the chance to give me away. I'll flip. You ready, Frank?
FRANK

Now wait just a second here.

SAM

Frank.

(Cocks and aims his gun)

I don't see where you got much of a choice here. Heads he lives; tails he dies. Here she goes.

(Tosses coin into air)

FRANK

Wait, a second. Let me see that coin!

(Frank dives for the coin as it lands on the ground, but before he can pick it up, Sam puts his foot over the coin and backs Frank up with his gun.)

SAM

Heads. Okay, Jim, you been reprieved. Let's go cash these guns of ours in on some real money.

SEABORN

Damn it, Sam. This ain't right.

SAM

I flipped for it fair and square. I'm too lucky not to win if Jim was a traitor. Frank's all right, and if Frank says that Jim's all right, then we had better leave him alone.

(Sam picks up the coin and puts it in his pocket.)

Come on, boys! Let's ride.
FRANK

(Aside to Frank)

Jim, I don't take to killin'. I couldn't let Sam kill you, but if you were plannin' to lay a trap to catch Sam, then you ought to ride off and leave us be at your next opportunity. Sam's my friend, and I don't want to see anythin' bad come to him.

MURPHY

Naw, Frank. Not me. I don't want to catch any of them. Not if they'll treat me right. I come along to cash these guns in on a pile of money.

A COWBOY

(Breaking the scene)

Did Murphy trap Sam? Did he do him dirt?

FRANK

Jim talked us into robbin' the bank at Round Rock, and then sent a letter to Major Jones and the rangers tellin' them to be there. Sam never had a chance.

BOB

Why did you stop Sam from killin' the skunk?

FRANK

I'm not a killer and neither is Sam. Sam may have been a bandit. He may have stolen from a lot of folks, but robbin' is one thing, and killin' is somethin' else altogether. I rode with Sam for money and adventure, not to spill blood.

A COWBOY

So what happened at Round Rock?

ANOTHER COWBOY

Did Sam get gunned down robbin' a bank?
FRANK
No. Fate didn’t work out that way. We had gone into town to buy a few things at the general store.

(The scene shifts. A western street front rolls into view in the background. Sam walks down the street with Frank, Jim, and Seaborn. Sam is singing.)

SAM
As I walked out in the streets of old Round Rock, 
As I walked out in old Round Rock one day--

FRANK
Damn, but you’re cheerful today.

SAM
I got a damn good reason to be.

(To Jim)
That was a helluva good idea to hit this place ‘stead of Waco.

MURPHY
I didn’t feel right about Waco. I was scared we’d all get shot dead tryin’ to get away.

SAM
Well, this bank looks to have twice the payload of the other. Ought to be as easy as stealin’ candy from a baby. Speakin’ of candy, I think I’ll go over to the store and buy me a stick. Need some tobacco anyhow.

MURPHY
There’s somethin’ I need to be doin’. If you boys will excuse me, I’m headed over to the other end of town.
SAM

All right, Jim. We'll meet up with you in a bit. Anythin' I can get you at the store.

MURPHY

No. Nothin'. I'm fine.

FRANK

(Narrates)

We were walkin' over to the store, when a deputy walked up to us.

(A cowboy enters the scene, playing the deputy.)

DEPUTY

Afternoon, boys.

SAM

Afternoon, deputy.

DEPUTY

I couldn't help noticin' under your coat there--

(Indicates Sam's coat)

Are you carryin' a six-shooter?

SAM

Why yes.

(Draws gun)

You mean this.

(Sam fires the gun point blank into the deputy, who falls dead.)
FRANK

(Narrating)

Suddenly all hell broke lose.

(Several cowboys jump into the scene as Rangers and begin to fire upon the gang.)

Sam, you killed him!

SAM

Can't be worryin' about all that now! Let's get the hell out of here!

(Sam, Frank, and Seaborn fire back at the Rangers. Suddenly, Seaborn is hit and drops next to Sam.)

Damn!

(A bullet hits Sam in the hand and Sam's gun flies out.)

Double damn!

(A bullet hits Sam in the back and he drops to the ground.)

FRANK

Sam! Here--grab on.

(As the store front unit rolls off stage, Frank narrates.)

I put Sam on my horse and rode away from town. Finally, Sam's wounds started to hurt so bad and bleed so much I had to stop and let him rest.

SAM

Set me down here, Frank. I can't go no further.

(Frank sets him down.)
Okay, Sam, but we got to get goin' pretty quick. Those Rangers are gonna be searchin' for us.

SAM

Don't make no difference, Frank. If they catch me, I'll swing. If I try to keep ridin' I'll bleed to death for sure. Just leave me here. You better get movin', though.

FRANK

No, Sam. I can't leave you like this.

SAM

Don't be a fool, Frank. I'm a dead man. I've had all hell shot out of me. You ever seen anybody shot up this bad who lived?

FRANK

I'll run and get you a doctor.

SAM

It ain't worth the gamble. The odds are plumb stacked against you. Somebody would spot you for sure. Besides, once they find me here, they'll get me to a doctor quick enough. Now get.

(Frank stands still staring at Sam.)

Go on! Get the hell out of here!

(Frank turns and starts to leave.)

Wait! Come back! Here.

(Hands Frank a gun)

You may need this. Go ahead and take my ammunition belt too. Things may get hot for you. You may need this too.

(Sam throws Frank a bag of coins.)
That's all of it. The last of them double Eagle twenties. Can't say they ever brought me anythin' but trouble. But it's been one hell of a ride.

FRANK

No, Sam, I can't take this. This is all you got left.

SAM

What the hell! It all goes in a lifetime. Let it gush.

(Frank takes the money.)

Now get the hell out of here!

FRANK

(Frank exits the scene and narrates.)

It wasn't too long before the rangers captured Sam and brought him back to town.

(The trailboss and another cowboy enter the scene. The trailboss plays Major Jones. They walk up to Sam.)

MAJOR JONES

Sam Bass? You are Sam Bass?

SAM

There's a popular notion to that effect.

MAJOR JONES

I'm Major Jones. This is the Reverend Austin Aten.

SAM

Afternoon, Gentlemen. What can I do for you?
MAJOR JONES
I'll level with you, Bass. The doctor says you haven't very long to live.

SAM
Me? Why, hell! I'm too damn lucky to die!

(To Reverend)
'Scuse the language there, preacher.

MAJOR JONES
We both know the truth, Bass. You haven't got much longer.

BASS
Care to wager on that?

(Jones frowns.)

Guess not. Okay, okay. I'm a dead man. So what's your point. You just come here to cheer me up?

MAJOR JONES
Bass, you have done much wrong in this world. You now have an opportunity to do some good before you die by giving some information which will lead to the vindication of that justice which you have so often defied and the law which you have constantly violated.

SAM
Would you mind sayin' that in plain English?

MAJOR JONES
Who are the other members of your gang?

SAM
No! I won't tell!
MAJOR JONES

Why not?

SAM

Because it is ag'in my profession to blow on my pals. If a man knows anythin' like that, he ought to die with it in him.

REVEREND

But, Mr. Bass, think about your immortal soul.

SAM

My soul?

(Laughs)

I'm goin' to hell anyhow. I might as well take what I know with me.

REVEREND

Well, if I can do you no good, I might as well be goin'

(Starts to leave)

SAM

Wait! Preacher come back for a minute. That man I shot--

REVEREND

Deputy Grimes.

SAM

I don't rightly know his name. Is he dead?

(The Reverend knods yes.)

That's the first man I ever killed. If you don't mind, preacher, if you would kneel and say a prayer for me.

(The Reverend kneels in silent prayer.)
MAJOR JONES

How old are you, Bass?

SAM

Oh...twenty-four...twenty-five. I don't know. How long was I layin' out under the tree? What day is this?

MAJOR JONES

Friday, July the twenty-first.

SAM

Well, I'll be damned!

(Reverend frowns at Sam.)

'Scuse me, preacher. I'm twenty-five. Today! How's that for luck. Been born and...well, you know...all on the same day.

MAJOR JONES

Please, Bass. There's not much time. The Doctor says he's done all he can do for you.

SAM

Well, let me go then.

MAJOR JONES

Who are the other members of your gang?

SAM

I already told you. I ain't gonna blow on my pals.

MAJOR JONES

Bass. Please! You don't have much time--

SAM

Later, Major. Later. Not now. This is my birthday. Why this calls for a song.
(Sings)
Oh, beat, the drum slowly and play the fife lowly;
Play the dead march as you carry me along.
Take me to the green valley and lay the sod o'er me,
For I'm a young cowboy and I know I done wrong.

(To Major Jones)
Come on, Major! Sing! It's my birthday. Sing!

(Sings)
Oh I'm a young cowboy and I know I done wro--

(Gasps)
The world...is...bobbin'...around me...

(Dies)

FRANK

(Sings)
Sam met his fate at Round Rock. July the twenty-first.
They pierced poor Sam with rifle balls and emptied out his purse.
Poor Sam is just a corpse now, and six feet under clay,
And all because Jim Murphy had given him away.

A COWBOY

What did you do, pard'? After Sam died.

(Throughout the entire scene, the body of Sam lies motionless center stage.)

FRANK

I took Sam's advice and got the hell out of Round Rock. I lay low for a while. It wasn't difficult. No one knew my face, and a name is easily changed. Frank Jackson may be a wanted man, but not Frank Smith. Nobody ever heard of him.

(The ghost of Murphy enters and points at Jackson.)
A week or so later I learned the truth about Sam's death—learned how Murphy had turned traitor. Hell, it was in all the newspapers. The bastard was braggin' about it. Made it sound like he had shot Sam himself. Like he was some kind of hero. I had to do somethin' even if I had to risk bein' spotted. I rode into Denton. It was late at night. Found Murphy at home—alone.

(Frank, who still has Sam's gun, walks behind Murphy's ghost and jabs the gun into Murphy's back.)

Hello, Jim.

MURPHY

(Surprised)

Frank! What are you doin' here. I figured you'd be in Mexico by now.

FRANK

I have some business to finish first.

MURPHY

Frank, you need to stay away from here; it ain't safe for you no more. People know your face.

FRANK

I'll be movin' on soon enough, but first there's this small matter of revenge.

MURPHY

Revenge?

FRANK

(Pointing gun)

Why did you do it, Jim?
MURPHY
Do what? What are you talkin' about? I didn't do anythin'!

FRANK
You sold out Sam. You murdered him, you bastard!

MURPHY
I didn't kill Sam! It was the Rangers done it. I had nothin' to do with it. Honest! Why are you pointin' that gun at me like that, Frank?

FRANK
Are you tryin' to tell me that all those Rangers just happened to be in Round Rock that day? That Sam is dead because of some huge coincidence--some horrible streak of bad luck? That what you tryin' to tell me?

MURPHY
Please! Listen to me!

FRANK
I'm all ears.

MURPHY
You gotta understand. They were gonna throw my dad and me into prison. They said we were accessories to Sam's robberies because we took money from Sam.

FRANK
So you turned traitor! Led poor Sam straight to his death.

MURPHY
I had no other choice!

FRANK
You could have told them no--could have stood trial for it like a man.
MURPHY

But they would have thrown us in prison. You heard Sam say how we didn’t have no show with the U.S. Government.

FRANK

You bastard. Quotin’ the words of the man you murdered.

MURPHY

Please, Frank! My father’s an old man. Prison would have killed him.

FRANK

Never stopped him from takin’ Sam’s money. Sam gave to you like you was famly, and you betrayed him.

MURPHY

You can’t kill me, Frank!

FRANK

I got to kill you, Jim. It’s all on account of me that you’re still alive and Sam’s dead. I owe Sam this. It’s the only way I can make up for my stupid mistake. I should have let Sam kill you. Never should have stopped him.

MURPHY

But you did stop him, Frank. You’re a Christian man. You won’t kill me.

FRANK

It’s against my nature, but I got to.

MURPHY

But don’t you see, Frank. You stopped Sam from killin’ me. Stopped him. I’ll tell them that! I can get you off too. I can get you pardoned. I’ll tell them you helped capture Sam. I’ll even give you half the reward.
FRANK

You bastard!

(Cocks gun)

Reward?!

MURPHY

All of it! I'll give you all of it! Every penny! Just please don't kill me! I'm scared to die.

FRANK

I don't want one damn penny of that money. Blood money—that's what it is. It was bought with Sam's blood and now it's gonna cost you yours.

MURPHY

Please, Frank. Don't kill me!

A COWBOY

(Interrupting)

Did you kill him?

FRANK

He's dead.

BOB

You gunned him down in cold blood?

FRANK

He's dead ain't he?

(Frank turns and sees Sam's body center stage.)

No. No, I wanted to. I just couldn't pull the trigger. I had never killed a man before. I hesitated—it was just for a second—but that was all it took. Suddenly, Jim reached into his pocket.
(Murphy’s ghost acts this out.)

He pulled out--

A COWBOY

A gun?

FRANK

No. I wish to God that it was a gun. It was a small bottle. Before I could stop him, he drank it down all at once. Poison.

COWBOYS

Poison?

FRANK

Poison.

A COWBOY

Rat poison.

(Cowboys laugh)

MURPHY

(Choking)

There, damn you! I’m a dead man! Now where’s your precious revenge?

(Murphy falls to his knees.)

FRANK

No! Damn you! Don’t die! You can’t die! I gotta kill you!

MURPHY

My death is quick. Painless. But yours--

(Murphy points at Frank and dies.)
FRANK
Damn my fool hide to hell! Why didn't I kill him? Why couldn't I pull the trigger?

TRAILBOSS
'Cause it would'a been murder. You don't have the conscience for that.

FRANK
Damn my conscience!

TRAILBOSS
Son, killin' that Murphy fella wouldn't make any difference. You can't buy back blood with blood. It sure the hell wouldn't'a brought Sam back to life.

FRANK
Don't you think I know that! Sam is dead, and there's nothin' that's gonna change that. But you don't understand.

(Murphy's ghost rises and points accusingly at Frank. Murphy holds this pose as he backs off stage.)

That bastard Murphy died leavin' Sam's blood on my hands. I was the fool who stopped Sam from killin' him. If it hadn't been for me, Sam Bass would be alive today.

A COWBOY
Damn, I'm tired of all this talk about dyin'.

ANOTHER COWBOY
Yeah, isn't the night cold enough? My bones are chilled enough without all this talk about death. Tell us about one of his robberies.

ANOTHER COWBOY
Yeah. One of the train robberies!
FRANK

I don't want to talk about it.

BOB

Come on! Tell us about Sam robbin' the train at Mesquite.

FRANK

Just leave me alone, damn it!

BOB

Well, the hell with you. We'll just make up our own song.

(There is general agreement among the cowboys that they want to sing. They proceed to sing while Frank wanders center and kneels by Sam's body which has remained there motionless since his death scene.)

FRANK

I'm sorry, Sam. I let you down. I stopped you from killin' Jim, and then I couldn't kill him myself. Not even knowin' that you were dead because of him. Damn it, Sam! Why did you keep pesterin' me to join you. I only brought you trouble.

A COWBOY

Hey, Bob, listen to this! I just thunk it up.

(Sings)

Sam Bass had four companions. All bold and darin' lads.
There was Seaborn Barnes and Jackson, Joel Collins and Old Dad.
They robbed the trains and coaches, but still Sam's heart was good.
Sam gave his gold to poor cowboys just like old Robin Hood.

(The cowboys continue to sing Franks ballad about Sam--
singing various verses as best as they can remember them. Sam comes to life, sits up and looks at Frank who is silently staring into the ground.

SAM

Frank? What the hell's the matter with you. Damn but you look glum!

FRANK

(Looks up) Sam? Is that you?

SAM

Well, who the hell else would I be? What's with the long face?

FRANK

But—you're dead, Sam. You're dead.

SAM

Yeah. I guess I am. Part of me's dead anyhow.

(Sam becomes more aware of the song that the cowboys are singing. Sam starts to do a little jig to the music.)

My but that's a purty song. Lively too! That song's so damn spirited it plumb makes a fella forget he's supposed to be dead.

(Sam continues to strut around.)

FRANK

I'm sorry I let you down, Sam. I just couldn't bring myself to pull the trigger.
A COWBOY

Hey, I got one. Listen to this.

(Sings)

So Murphy sold out Sam and Barnes and left their friends to mourn.
Oh, what a scorchin' Jim will get when Gabriel blows his horn.
Perhaps he got to heaven. There's none of us can say--

(Stuck for a rhyme)

Hmmmm.

(Sings)

Perhaps he got to heaven. There's none of us can say--

SAM

'Scuse me, Frank.

(Sam walks over to the Cowboy who is stuck for a rhyme and whispers into the Cowboys ear. No one notices this but Frank.)

A COWBOY

Of course! I got it!

(Sings)

But if I'm right in my surmise, he's gone the other way.

(Cowboys laugh.)

ANOTHER COWBOY

No, wait! I got a better one.

(Sings)

Perhaps he got to heaven. There's none of us can tell.
But if I'm right in my surmise, that skunk went straight to Hell.

(More laughter)

SAM

(To the cowboy)

Say pard', that is a dandy. Much better!

FRANK

I wanted to shoot Murphy, Sam. I just couldn't make myself--

SAM

(Interrupting)

Now, don't take on so, Frank. That worthless Judas goat weren't worth wastin' a bullet on. Besides, he was such a coward he took his own life. I guess he just couldn't take the racket. You never let me down, Frank.

FRANK

But I did. I stopped you from killin' him.

SAM

Now that's a lot of nonsense, Frank. We flipped over it fair and simple. Heads he lives; tails he dies.

FRANK

Well, I guess I must have brought you bad luck then.

SAM

What!! Me? Bad luck? You're forgettin' who you're talkin' to. I'm Sam Bass--lucky as the day is long! Good luck is my by-god middle name. I'll show you.

(Sam takes a coin out of his pocket.)

I'll call. Heads!
(Sam tosses the coin past
Frank, where it lands behind
Frank's back. As Frank turns
away from Sam and walks over
to the coin, Sam exits the
stage. Frank kneels over the
coin.)

FRANK

Damn, you are lucky! Heads sure enough--

(Frank notices that Sam is
gone. The trailboss walks
over to where Frank is
kneeling over the coin and
picks it up. Frank is
startled that the coin is seen
by the trailboss.)

TRAILBOSS

What's that you're a lookin' at? Well, I'll be. I ain't
seen one of these in a long time.

FRANK

What's that?

TRAILBOSS

A coin with two heads on it. Not a tail on her.

FRANK

What? Let me see that.

(Examines coin)

Guess a guy can't get much luckier than that, can he?

TRAILBOSS

What?
FRANK

Nothin’. Just a joke. Look, I ain’t gonna lie to you and tell you there ain’t a reward on my head. There is, but it ain’t much, and I can get enough to make it worth your while to...you know...

TRAILBOSS

What the hell are you talkin’ about?

FRANK

What I’m tryin’ to say is that I’d be much obliged if you’d let me kinda slip off into the night. Just leave the law out of this. I could make it worth your while.

TRAILBOSS

Look here, son. As far as I’m concerned you’re just another braggart cowpoke who likes to bend people’s ears with your tall tales. And I’ll be damned if they ain’t lively whoppers at that.

FRANK

I appreciate you doin’ this. I--

TRAILBOSS

Listen to this! Go on! Talkin’ like it was the truth. Here. Take your gun back. You’ll be needin’ it. You made things pretty hard on yourself.

FRANK

How’s that?

TRAILBOSS

You’ll be damn lucky if you get away with tellin’ your story only once a night. Especially the way these boys take to that song of yours.
FRANK

Don't see where that's a problem. Hell, don't you know me? I'm Frank Smith and I'm by-god lucky. As lucky as the day is long.

BOB

Hey, Frank! Get your hide over here and sing that song again. We're havin' some trouble rememberin' the words.

TRAILBOSS

Lucky, huh? Well if that's any indication of your luck, you better hang on to this two-headed coin of yours. You're gonna need it.

(Shouts)

You all get to sleep! We're movin' out at the crack of dawn, and them beeves are gonna seem ugly and stubborn enough without you stayin' up half the night. Get some shut eye!

A COWBOY

Aw! Come on! Let him sing it just once more.

BOB

Hell, yes! It ain't gonna hurt nothin'!

TRAILBOSS

(Throws up his arms)

Suit yourselves. You always do. I don't seem to have much say so in it.

BOB

Now, how did that song go, Frank?

FRANK

Let me see.
(Frank takes the guitar and strums a chord. The lights fade to black. Curtain.)

END OF PLAY
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"Around Camp Fires Cowpunchers Sang Sam Bass Ballad."


