

# MOON RIDER

*by Janie Meneely*

**T**here's nothing like a rodeo to get folks all fired up,  
To roust out all the diehards and to fill the bleachers up.  
And so it came to happen when old Cody rode to town  
That folks was lining up to see him throw his spurs around.  
For Cody was a rider, and to watch him was a treat.  
He'd ride the toughest roughest horse and never miss a beat.  
He'd get that pony bucking and as sure as men can stand,  
He'd have the wildest stallion scarfing bonbons from his hand.

No matter that the day was hot, the sun was baking clay,  
The clowns were sweating greasepaint as the band began to play,  
As cowboy tunes came sifting through the stagnant morning air  
The toes were tapping, happy that their champion was there.  
And Cody swaggered toward the crowd and pawed around the stands.  
He winked at all the ladies, and he kissed their outstretched hands.  
Oh, he was in his element, a real cowboy king,  
The center of attention, and the master of the ring.

The riders had all drawn their mounts and had their numbers pinned,  
All lining up to take their turn despite the heady din—  
The newbies and the pros alike, all joshing in good fun,  
Just ribbin' one another till the openers were done.  
They had to spend eight seconds mounted on their bucking bronc—  
About the time it takes to sidle in some honkytonk  
And order up a frothy brew and plop down on a stool—  
About the time it takes to make a boastful man a fool.

The first was Slugger Fitzhugh—as green as prairie grass.  
They tossed him up on Cougar just to see if he would last.  
He'd style and flash a'plenty, such as any rider must,  
But Cougar bucked and shimmied, and old Slugger bit the dust.  
The next one up was Pecos Sam, a brash but seasoned hand.  
He mounted up on Skinflint (never knew that horse to stand),  
And Skinflint started in to go, hooves flying off the ground—  
No sooner Skinflint started up, then Sammy started down.

A few two-bitters came up then, and gave the game their all.  
The clowns were busy scraping up the last few ones to fall,  
When Jonas Green came out the gate with cold steel in his eyes.  
Oh, he was tough as nails, and he's the one took last year's prize.  
The ladies in the bleachers all leaned forward in their seats.  
Oh, they'd feel nought but pity for the man that Jonas beats.  
And Jonas—he went at it smooth as oil around the course.  
He stuck just like a cocklebur atop his bucking horse.

He held his hat high in his hand, and whipped it in the wind.  
He whooped and hollered like to scare the hair right off his chin.  
Those first few seconds ticked along as slow as buzzards fly  
But Jonas stayed aloft as two more seconds slipped on by  
His horse gave off a shimmy, and he raked him with his spurs,  
And two more seconds inched along as slowly as the first  
Till at the seventh second Jonas Green came tumbling down,  
And ladies sighed to see it when he finally hit the ground.

Along came two young upstarts thinking they could win the day  
They had their chance, they lost their bets, they slowly limped way.  
Another rider bellied out and had a goodish turn  
But even he went over with a second left to burn.  
The crowd roared out its pleasure just to see the cowboys fly  
And watch the antics of the clowns and eat their apple pie,  
For rodeos ain't nothing but a hash of broken men  
And folks is mighty glad to see at least it wasn't them.

But then it came up Cody's turn, and everyone went still  
Just watching him bust out the gate was anybody's thrill  
He hollered like a banshee in a brand-new Stetson hat  
His spurs all spit and polished, and his springy hair combed flat.  
There's not a dust mote on him, and his silver buttons shone  
Was said that just the sight of him would make the broncos groan  
Oh, everyone knew Cody was the one to tame the beast  
And when he mounted up it seemed that all the breathing ceased

They had a horse at ready. All the cowboys called him Snake.  
As wild and cagey as they come, a horse no one could break  
His eyes were blazing bullets and his nostrils flared with fire  
And Cody's just the sort of bloke that really raised his ire  
Snake hated all that swagger, and he hated those dang spurs  
And he plain hated cowboys cuz they just got on his nerves.  
And Cody was no different from the cowboys on the lot  
Snake figured he could toss him off in one resounding shot  
The crowd was still as starlight when they opened up the gate  
And Snake burst out with Cody not a moment soon or late

The Snake he started pumping and old Cody gives a cry  
And then the crowd erupted just to see old Cody ride.  
He had his hand a'flailing and the spurs were digging in  
And Snake was spitting sweat and fire and starting in to spin  
Then up he roared like pine smoke when the underbrush takes fire  
His legs a'pawing at the clouds and reaching ever higher

The seconds started adding up: first one, then two, then three  
And Cody he was riding like he's glued tight to his seat  
The cowboy took it all in stride, as easy truth to tell,  
As if he was a kid again and on the carousel  
But Snake was getting weary—you could see it in his eyes  
The fire had turned to ember and his ears were flat as pies.  
He knew he had to finish it, finish or go bust  
And so he gathered up his strength for one more mighty thrust

His legs shot out like pistons and his neck went to a dive  
His rear end flashed as if it was volcanos come alive  
He hunched his back and tucked his tail and started to explode  
Just like a booster rocket with an extra heavy load  
But when the dust had settled and the daylight filtered through  
The crowd saw Cody hanging on like all rough riders do  
There's not a hair was out of place, his shirt was still tucked in  
His free hand waving like a kite, his lips a winning grin

But Snake had taken umbrage at this new turn of events  
No mortal man had ever managed to evoke such bold suspense  
No mortal man had ever come so close to make or break

No puling pissant human had outdone a horse like Snake  
With half a second on the clock Snake filled his lungs with air  
He drew in deep of oxygen to stoke the furnace there  
Once more the embers in his heart gave way to raging fire  
Once more the cauldron of his brain became a burning byre

He rolled his fire-rimmed eyes, and he released his torrid breath  
The folks up in the stands leaned in to see the stroke of death  
For surely Snake or Cody was about to cross the line  
A middlin' price for all of that the riding was so fine—  
This was a show the likes of which had never come to town  
(The sponsors were ecstatic that they'd laid their money down)  
The Devil at the crossroads would be winning his full share  
But was it horse or rider who had struck the bargain there?

With all that was majestic, that was mighty or was fierce  
The Snake had forged a will of iron no cowboy could pierce  
And that is what he brought to bear on Cody's hapless soul  
When he unleashed a blast as sure as any thunderbolt  
And that was it for Cody—he was human for all that  
For all his boots and spurs, for all his brand-new Stetson hat  
For Cody he went shooting off, clear into outer space  
He vanished in the ether, he was gone without a trace.

The crowd just sat there watching as he slowly disappeared  
His speck kept getting smaller as the clouds drew ever near  
He never once curled downward so's to mark a slow descent  
And no one ever really knew just where old Cody went

But folks round here on moonlit nights still tell their kids the tale  
Of how the Snake shot Cody out beyond the earthly veil  
Away into the heavens where the angels sit and croon  
And clear up past the stars until he landed on the moon.

That's him there smiling atcha, in his Stetson hat and spurs  
He's riding high and mighty—but he pro'bly won't return  
There just aren't any broncos up there on that dusty track  
Could ever do what Snake did, so's to shoot old Cody back.  
And as for Snake, that wizened nag, he got his own reward  
For NASA came a'calling just as soon as they got word  
And hauled him off to places where the astronauts do play  
They've got him sending folks to space right to this very day.