

Stops Along an American Dream

(Omaha to Ogden - Summer 1870)
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I can hear the Whistle blowin',
two short bursts, it's time to throttle up.
Conductor double checks, with tickets punched,
hot glistenin' oil on connectin' rods.

Hissin' Steam an' belchin' smoke rings,
inside thin ribbons of iron track.
Windin' through the Hills an' Bluffs of Omaha,
along the banks of the River Platte.

A Summer's breeze toss yellow wild flowers,
joyful laughter an' waves goodbye.
Up ahead, there's a Sea of lush green fields,
belo' a bright, blue-crimson sky.

O'er Plains where sun bleached Buffalo,
with skulls hollowed, an' emptied gaze.
Comes a Baldwin eight wheeler a rollin',
a sizzlin' behemoth on clackin' rails.

Atop distant Hills, Sioux warriors rendezvous,
stoke up the Locomotive's firebox.
Crank up the heat, pour on the steam,
we'll outrun 'em without a shot!

'Cross the Loup River, just south of Columbus,
on our way to Silver Creek an' Clark.
We're all lookin' forward to the Grand Island stop,
where there's hot supper waitin', just befor' dark.

On our way again, towards Westward's end,
hours passin' without incident.
I fall asleep, while watchin' hot moonlit cinders,
dancin' Eastward along the track

My mind is swimmin' in the blue waters of the Pacific,
dreamin' adventures, an' thrills galore.
When I awake with a start an' a jerk from my Dreamland,
we're in the midst of a Earth shatterin' Storm!

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Tornado winds are a' Whirlin', an' lightnin' bolts a' Hurlin',
one strikes the Locomotive's right dash-pot.
The Engine glows red, iron rivets shoot Heaven sent,
it's Whistlin' like a hundred tea-pots!

The Train's slowin' down, there's another town up ahead,
must be North Platte, an' we're pushin' through.
Barely escape from the Storm, get needed provisions onboard,
an' switch out the Locomotive for new.

At Dawn's first light, where the Valley narrows,
with Lodge Pole's bluffs an' antelope.
We can all see the grade movin' up, near Potter's City,
where countless Prairie Dogs call it Home.

On a high noon Sun, on a mid-day's run,
at Cheyenne, we stop for grub an' fuel.
"Hookup another Locomotive, Men,
an' start the climb to Sherman Hill!"

At the highest point on that Railroad line,
I hear a Whistle an' a frantic call.
An' a ceiling's thud from a Brakeman's leap,
to slow that creakin' Train to a crawl.

Wyomin' winds blow like a Hurrican',
the flimsy bridge sways to an' fro.
Some hold their breath, some toss down a few,
'till Dale Creek disappears belo'.

With increasin' speed, we're on to Laramie,
uncouple our helper Engine an' crew.
Twenty round-house Stalls, near the new Town Hall,
up ahead, the Rocky Mountains loom!

You can feel the weight, of their fear an' dread,
I crack a smile, then tip my hat.
"Folks, we won't attempt to scale those Alps,
the path we'll take, is almost flat.

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There ain't really much else to see ahead,
but sagebrush an' Jackalope.
It's an open Prairie, on a windswept Plain,
the Divide's, just a gentle slope.

But, there's quite a few cuts an' fills to see,
from Lookout to Medicine Bow.
Carbon's got coal, yields two-hundred tons a day,
where Hawks an' Coyotes call.

When Dusk sets in, we'll be closin' in,
on Elk Mountain's orange silhouette.
We'll arrive in Rawlins, with stars burnin' bright,
an' steam in, at exactly Ten.

It's a fair ways out, befor' that next meal stop,
afterwards, we'll feel renewed.
So Folks don't you fret, just relax a bit,
let's all enjoy the view."

Rawlins, is a rough an' tumble, lawless Town,
barely tame, still a Hell on Wheels.
A major depot for the UP Rail,
with three Saloons, an' lost, broken Dreams.

Now time to stretch, wolf down some vittles,
take on water, an' a load o' coal.
Gunshots ring out, up an' down the streets of Rawlins,
just befor' the call, "All Aboard!"

I know for sure, some folks had left,
to catch a Saloon or two.
'Cause when the Conductor tallies his final count,
we're missin' quite a few!

Nearly everyone plays cards that night,
mostly, I just sit there an' read.
A Gazetteer is open on my lap,
an' spells out, what's next to see –

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'Cross bone-dry alkali beds that parch Man an' Beast,
from Creston to bubblin' Rock Springs.
We're at the backbone of the greatest Nation on Earth,
where Winter's thaw washes West, not East.

On the outer edge of Red Desert, near Table Rock,
a bluff rises from desolation's floor.
An' red sandstones, laden with fresh water shells,
are grooved, chipped, cut an' worn.

Grease wood an' more sagebrush, tumble-weeds a' plenty,
past a Desert's rim, with heavy cuts an' fills.
It's a lonesome Road to the foul waters of Bitter Creek,
from there, to Green River's Citadel –

Mornin' breaks again, we chug out to Bryan an' Carter,
at Fort Bridger, lives Chief Wash-a-kie.
Another steep grade, snow-capped mountains to see,
down belo', there's Bear Valley Lake.

Near journey's end, some eighty miles to go,
at Evanston's rail shops, an' Hotel.
Leavin' Wahsatch behind, where there's the grandest divide,
with fortified bluffs, an' canyon walls.

A chasm's ahead, Hanging Rock's slightly bent,
a thrillin' ride, rushin' past Witches' Cave.
'lot more to see, from Pulpit Rock to Echo City,
to a tall an' majestic Tree.

It's a picnic stop, an' a place to celebrate –
marchin' Legions, that crossed a distant Trail.
Proud Immigrants, Mormons an' Civil War Veterans,
it's Here, they spiked a Thousand Miles of Rail!

We're now barrelin' down Weber Canyon, shootin' past Devil's Slide,
there's a paradise, just beyon' Devil's Gate.
Cold frothy torrents from Weber River, splash up in our faces,
an' spill West, to the Great Salt Lake.

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It's a long ways off, from the Hills an' Bluffs of Omaha,
to a place called – "God's Promised Land."
An' it took dreamin', schemin', guts an' sinew,
to carve this Road with calloused hands.

From Ogden, we're headin' West to Sacramento,
we'll forge ahead on CP steam.
An' when we get there, we'll always remember –
Stops Along an American Dream.

"Nothing like it in the World,"
East an' West a Nation hailed.
All Aboard at every stop,
along the First Transcontinental Rail!