

# “I Am Tombstone”

## A Tribute to the American West

J.L. Edwards

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## “Tombstone: A Tribute to the American West” J.L. Edwards

I am an American legend. I am a reflection of the sun. Born out of dust and thirst and desperation, I created a life from the stones of hell. There are no clear memories of my days, just glory wrapped in glory; remnants of the passion and blood played out on my streets. Every lonesome trail leading to my door is marked with monuments to pain and the human will. My spirit cannot be broken for I have been forged by the hardened hand of God. In all of creation, there is no other place that bears the scars or the moments that I have known. It is in these flashing moments, shaped by bravery and time, that I have become the stage and symbol of the American West.

In the days that defined me, my players were simple men with compromised souls. They were driven by hunger and hope and dreams. They made no promises and I gave no guarantees. Their loss was my greatest delight; their victory my greatest surprise. As they labored against the maddening mass of my parched desolation, their character grew. I began to see in their eyes the hazy images of honor and justice; virtues that I lacked. In time, they became a part of me and I of them. We nurtured each other to life and we branded each other into the fabric of history.

While some of my greatest heroes have names, most of them don't. Famous or not, I am a testament to them all. I am the legends, the cowards, the drovers and drunks. I am the endless conundrum of graves which bear no names but hold within their depths the songs of our fathers. If you listen, you can hear their souls cry out by desert night. Just as in life, they seek to claim their place in time.

From Boot Hill to Allen Street to Bisbee and beyond, ANYONE who is ANYONE has heard of ME. I am not floundering in riches, but I am steeped in wealth; and I am what they all hope to be. I am significant. But it was not always that way.

Fate, it seems, had bold plans for me from the beginning and sent me a legion of courageous sons to make it so. Through boom and bust and the treachery of each passing day, I walked the backstreets and mysteries of the times in lock step with those sons. We cheated death when we could and we celebrated the life as it was dealt. And oh how we dreamed! We immortalized big noses and doctors of poker and lightning fast hands on the pearls of a gun. There were no gentle manners or worries about formality, only western code. And the code held no place for weakness. Weakness was a cousin to death and the most recognized symbol of death was my name.

How ironic and somber was the truth as it unraveled before me. With each new day, every pounding second seemed to clarify the purpose of my existence. Eternity's path through a burg named for a grave marker had been cocked and aimed by a power from above. The target was evil and the trigger was time. And time was in motion.

As my prosperity grew, so grew the greed and the jealousy of my men. Power, backed by money and guns, became isolated in silos of good and evil. By day it was all so easy to see. By night it was hard to tell the difference. As the days passed, the transgressions of evil waxed and I was faced with a choice; that classic scenario from the hands of the Bard, "to be or not to be".

To battle my shame amidst these swirling windstorms of lawlessness it became clear to my sons that I must become a harbor for law. So a harbor we built in the palm of the desert; not for the fame of the Earps, or to roust the Clantons, or to antagonize the McLaurys, but to make a place for the nameless faces who called me their home. Somehow they all deserved a fleeting plateau of peace in their fate-forsaken lives. Oh the irony that in life as in death, that peace would come in the form of a "tombstone".

So there in the midst of nature and hell and man's evil intention, time stood still. I was staring down the barrel of history's gun. Peace I had built, but justice I had never known. And justice could not come without a

price. It was high noon in the west. My moment was at hand. There would be no backing down. No second hand chances. Time was standing still.

Like the quiet before the rain, a silence blanketed my people and the rusty workings of their lives were smothered to a halt. Signaling His arrival with dual earthquakes, The Maker was taking charge of what was to come. There on my streets, in clash made of men, the devil would duel with God. On the barren grounds of my harmless corral, it would all come down. Scores of the past would be cleansed and the ugliness of hell would be burned away.

Contrary to His usual attire, God showed up in black that day at the OK Corral. In torrents of thunder and hot lead from Heaven, Frank and Tom and Billy were struck down. The Devil had been conquered and justice was done, or so it appeared. But the story does not end there. Oh no. In fact, that is where it really begins. What happened next is the heart of the vine that would mark me forever.

There in the dire ugliness of it all, though it appeared that the angels of mercy had conquered the angels of death, a MIRACLE occurred. Where each shell of humanity had collapsed to the ground, a holy spire of light ignited the western sky. As it turned out, in all of His fury God wasn't seeking the death of my sons at the OK Corral. He was simply reclaiming the fallen angels who would transform the West. And it did not matter whether those angels were McLaurys or Clantons or total unknowns, they were all hardened warriors who had been tested by time. Not only were they God's angels, they were my sons. And even the least of my sons was greater than the empty sum of the masses who never risk or dream.

And so it is and ever will be. I am a rose in the desert. A blueprint of hope and permanence branded into the desolate hills. A lasting reminder that there are no limits to the will of mankind and no end to the soul of the American West. I am Tombstone.

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