

The dusk desert was a pretty sight; painted with a reddish gold and hues of pink, speckled with white flecks of the first stars of the evening as the sun journeyed to sleep. Those who worked the land were calling it after a long day, horses and carriages get to rest in the stables, the road indeed lonesome and welcoming the more nocturnal folks of nature to return and claim their home once more, all between a man and the world was a still and dust-laced wind. It was his favourite time of day to wander, the earth settling down beneath his boots as he walked along, hushed by the calm air.

Here, he could simply exist. He could enjoy the world surrounding without a worry for duties or tending to errands, a time to be and reconnect with his inner joy – lands of silence. Just him against the vast plains, with barely a soul surrounding to bother him. His nagging thoughts were put to rest until the morn while the others stayed to play. Pondering until the early hours was far more fun than some tavern brawl.

He set up under the faded sky and pulled out his scuffed, aged harmonica, a quick rub against his shirt before he put it to his lips and blew, a shrill few notes to test travelling through the light draught of the plains. The sounds were slow and solemn, they rang out as he watched the stars above begin to twinkle into sight. Singing to the sky was his one relief after a long, hard day.

Watching the sky it was easy to feel small seated in that vast plain, the calm wind ones only company. He didn't fear it, more a comfort to the man, suspended in the wonder of this world and blessed to be a part of it. The cowboy admired the sight a little longer, before standing and heading on his way.

As he packed up his swag he could have sworn he saw something budge in the corner of his eye. A double take and all he spotted was a cactus draped in the night's shadow, a marker for where he was. He laughed it off and continued on his way, the occasional cactus not at all uncommon for a man to mistaken for a figure – especially under the influence of a lick of moonshine.

He walked for a minute, another minute more, before he felt the hairs standing on the back of his neck and he paused. As he glanced behind him again he saw the cactus on its lonesome and it was as if he'd made no distance at all. He shook his head and continued to walk, his steps leisurely as he enjoyed the quiet of the night. Temptation eventually rose and he glanced behind; the cactus was in the distance, now. A sigh of relief and he was on his way. The sound of an old crow restless before its sleep has him making another glance – lo and behold, the cactus was close again, as if the land was shifting below his feet, oblivious to the phenomenon.

One blink, two, a glance away and a double take – the cactus remained where it stood.

He just kept on walking this time, his shadow grew heavy as if something was clinging to his serape, slowing his steps some. As he came to a standstill his body felt stiff, could barely turn his head without an ache of warning, he managed to turn it over his shoulder just enough to look behind him.

The cactus towered over him, enveloping him in shadows that seemed to stick like honey. He can't struggle, can barely speak with his suddenly parched mouth. The air grew restless, filled with odd whispers and mutterings he can't make out, but shook him right down to his core – his heart beating like a drum as he could feel himself sweat.

He forced himself to look away, his neck making a loud crack as he managed to force it and he yelled through the pain, his eyes tightly shut. The voices grow louder, stirring and stirring until they felt near unbearable. He could feel his ears practically pop, a small hum, and suddenly... nothing.

He doesn't *feel* heavy anymore, it's as if he were the same as before; lungs are empty, the sweat's died down, his muscles don't feel tense no more. He turned to look behind him now, all he spotted is the cactus in the far distance. That *dang* cactus.

It was enough to question things... perhaps these plains weren't as peaceful as he once thought.