

Billy Austin

Steve Earle

My name is Billy Austin
I'm twenty-nine years old
I was born in Oklahoma
Quarter Cherokee I'm told

Don't remember Oklahoma
It's been so long since I left home
Seems like I've always been in prison
Like I've always been alone

Didn't mean to hurt nobody
Never thought I'd cross that line
I held up a filling station
Like I'd done a hundred times

The kid done like I told him
He lay face down on the floor
Guess I'll never know what made me
Turn and walk back through that door

The shot rang out like thunder
My ears rang like a bell
No one came runnin'
And so I called the cops myself

Took their time to get there
And I guess I could'a run
I knew I should be feeling something
But I never shed tear one

I didn't even make the papers
'Cause I only killed one man
But my trial was over quickly
And then the long hard wait began

Court appointed lawyer
Couldn't look me in the eye
He just stood up and closed his briefcase
When they sentenced me to die

And now my waitin's over
As the final hour drags by
I ain't about to tell you
That I don't deserve to die

There's twenty-seven men here
Mostly black and brown and poor
And most of 'em are guilty
And who are you to say for sure?

So when the preacher comes to get me
And they shave off all my hair
Could you take that long walk with me
Knowing Hell's waitin' there?

Could you pull that switch yourself, sir
With a sure and steady hand?

Could you still tell yourself, sir
That you're better than I am?

My name is Billy Austin
I'm twenty-nine years old
I was born in Oklahoma
Quarter Cherokee I'm told