

Rye Whiskey

(a.k.a. "Jack Of Diamonds" & "I'm A Rambler, I'm A Gambler")

Words & Music:
Traditional American

Man, I thought this would be a simple song. But there are infinite variations on the lyrics. Most of these come from the exhaustive American Ballads & Folk Songs by Alan Lomax (via The Mudcat Café) So, I have given the chords with the first verse and then included all the lyric variations after that. Pick the ones that tell your story and play those to cut this down to size.

E
I'm a rambler, I'm a gambler, I'm a long way from home.
E E7 A E
And if you don't like me, just leave me alone.

CHORUS VARIANT 1:

"Rye whiskey, rye whiskey, rye whiskey!" I cry.
If I don't get rye whiskey, I surely will die.

CHORUS VARIANT 2:

"Rye whiskey, rye whiskey, rye whiskey!" I cry.
If you don't give me rye whiskey, I surely will die.

CHORUS VARIANT 3:

Rye whiskey, rye whiskey, you're no friend to me;
You killed my poor daddy, Goddamn you, try me.

I'll eat when I'm hungry, I'll drink when I'm dry.
If the hard times don't kill me, I'll live 'til I die.

Jack of Diamonds, Jack of Diamonds, I've known you of old.
You've robbed my poor pockets of silver and gold.

Beefsteak when I'm hungry, rye whiskey [*alt: red liquor*] when I'm dry.
Greenbacks when I'm hard up and heaven [*alt: religion*] when I die.

For work I'm too lazy, investment's too slow
Train robbin's too risky, it's gamblin' I'll go.

I'll tune up my fiddle and I'll rosin my bow,
I'll make myself welcome wherever I go.

They say I drink whiskey, my money's my own;
All them that don't like me can leave me alone.

Sometimes I drink whiskey, sometimes I drink rum,
Sometimes I drink brandy, at other times none.

But if I get boozy, my whiskey's my own,
And them that don't like me can leave me alone.

Oh, whiskey, you villain, you've been my downfall,
You've kicked me, you've cuffed me, but I love you for all.

If the ocean was whiskey and I was a duck,
I'd dive to the bottom to get one sweet suck.

But the ocean ain't whiskey and I ain't a duck,
So I'll play Jack of Diamonds and trust to my luck.
[alt: So, we'll round up the cattle and then we'll get drunk.]

My foot's in my stirrup, my bridle's in my hand,
I'm leaving sweet Lillie, the fairest in the land.

Her parents don't like me, they say I'm too poor;
They say I'm unworthy to enter her door.

Sweet milk when I'm hungry, rye whiskey when I'm dry,
If a tree don't fall on me, I'll live till I die.

I'll buy my own whiskey, I'll make my own stew,
If I get drunk, madam, it's nothing to you.

I'll drink my own whiskey, I'll drink my own wine,
Some ten thousand bottles I've killed in my time.

I've no wife to quarrel, no babies to bawl;
The best way of living is no wife at all.

Way up on Clinch Mountain I wander alone,
I'm as drunk as the devil, oh, let me alone.

You may boast of your knowledge & brag of your sense,
'Twill all be forgotten a hundred years hence.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN VARIATION 1:

In my little log cabin, ever since I been born,
Dere ain't been no nothin' 'cept dat hard salt, parched corn.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN VARIATION 2:

But I know whar's a henhouse, de turkey he charve;
An, if ol' Massa don' kill me, I cain't never starve.

ADDITIONAL VERSES:

O Mollie, O Mollie, it's for your sake alone
That I'd leave my old parents, my house, and my home.

I'll eat when I'm hungry, I'll drink when I'm dry
And when I get thirsty I'll lay down and cry

O baby, O baby, I've told you before,
Do make me a pallet, I'll lay on the floor.

I will build me a castle on yonder mountain high
Where my true love can see me when she comes ridin' by.

Where my true love can see me and help me to mourn.
I'm a rabble soldier and Dixie's my home.

I'll get up in my saddle, my quirt in my hand,
And I'll think of you, Mollie, when in some distant land.

I'll think of you, Mollie. You caused me to roam.
I'm a rabble soldier and Dixie's my home.

But the ocean ain't whiskey, and I ain't no duck,
So I'll play jack o' diamonds and try to change my luck.

I have rambled and gambled all my money away
But it's with the rabble army, O Mollie, I must stay

It is with the rabble army, O Mollie, I must roam.
I'm a rabble soldier and Dixie's my home.

The Union men and Yankees have forced me from my home.
I am a rebel soldier and far from my home.

I'll eat when I'm hungry, I'll drink when I'm dry.
If those Yankees don't kill me, I'll fight till I die.