

## Louisiana Red – Dead Stray Dog (1976)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Dead Stray Dog* 2. *New Jersey Women* 3. *Held Up in One Town* 4. *Bad Case of the Blues* 5. *Caught My Man and Gone* 6. *My Heart's a Loser* 7. *Riding on a Tall White Horse* 8. *Cold White Sheet* 9. *Going Train Blues* 10. *Back to the Road Again* 11. *My Baby's Coming Home* 12. *Cold Feeling* Louisiana Red – guitar, vocals

Kent Cooper's liner notes tell us that he wrote most of these songs sitting in bars, feeling sorry for himself. That information might turn most listeners away; but in the hands of Louisiana Red, who has endured personal travails that would have destroyed a lesser man, even the most lugubrious tales of woe take on the steely glint of authenticity and courage.

Red's in-studio creations can be chaotic, but for this solo acoustic outing, originally recorded in 1975 for Blue Labor in White Plains, New York, he was well centered. He pushes his high-tenor voice from desolate moans to exuberant upper-register wails, immersing himself in Cooper's bleak fables as if he had written them himself. His slide work, rooted solidly in the Delta tradition, cuts as fiercely to the bone as his vocals.

The "Dead Stray Dog" of the title tune is a haunting archetype for a lonely traveler destined to die alone. On "New Jersey Women," Red screams like Elmore James over some whip-slapping slide; "Held Up In One Town," a tale of a down-and-outer trapped in a wintry city who feasts his eyes with hopeless desire on women passing by, is enervated by Red's spine-shivering slide solo. His rich laughter and half-chuckled asides add a bracing dose of blues irony.

"Caught My man And Gone" is a dark-hued modal boogie, replete with defiant affirmations of pride in the face of mistreatment at the hands of a lover. One wishes, however, that Red had

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come up with a few more verses. "My Heart's A Loser," built around a fierce triplet slide riff, is again obviously influenced by Elmore James (with added echoes of Joe Willie Wilkins in Red's playing); "Tall White Horse" is another defiant anthem; the disturbing "Back To The Road Again" cuts to the heart of darkness that can lurk behind prideful passion.

The way Louisiana Red wraps himself around this material, most of which is not strictly blues and was written by someone else, is remarkable. A lesser artist might have indulged in histrionics, but Red mines these songs for their tragic essence. ---David Whiteis, Living Blues

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