

# **The Last Stories**

**By**

**Damon Runyon**

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Damon Runyon

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## Blonde Mink

Now of course there are many different ways of cooking tripe but personally I prefer it stewed with tomatoes and mushrooms and a bit of garlic and in fact I am partaking of a portion in this form in Mindy's restaurant on Broadway one evening in January when a personality by the name of Julie the Starker sits down at my table and leans over and sniffs my dish and says to me like this:

'Tripe,' he says. 'With garlic,' he says. 'Why, this is according to the recipe of the late Slats Slavin who obtains it from his old Aunt Margaret in Troy. Waiter,' he says, 'bring me an order of this delicious concoction only with more garlic. It is getting colder outside and a guy needs garlic in his system to thicken his blood. Well,' he says, 'this is indeed a coincidence because I just come from visiting the late Slats and having a small chat with him.'

Naturally I am somewhat surprised by this statement as I know the late Slats is resting in Woodlawn Cemetery and to tell the truth I remember I am present as a pallbearer when he is placed there to rest, but I am also pleased to hear these tidings as Slats is always a good friend of mine and no nicer guy ever steps in shoe leather.

'Well,' I say to Julie, 'and how is Slats these days?'

'He is cold,' Julie says. 'He states that it is very crimpy around the edges up there in Woodlawn especially at night. You know the late Slats always hates cold weather. He is usually in Florida by this time of year to duck the chill.'

'Furthermore,' Julie says, 'he is greatly embarrassed up there without a stone over him such as Beatrice promises to get him. He says it makes him feel

like a bum with nothing to show who he is when all around him are many fine markers including one of black marble to the memory of the late Cockeyed Corrigan, who, as you know, is of no consequence compared to the late Slats who is really somebody.'

Well, of course this is very true because the late Slats is formerly known and esteemed by one and all on Broadway as one of the smartest operators in horse racing that ever draws breath. He is a handicapper by trade and his figures on the horses that are apt to win are so highly prized that one night he is stuck up by a couple of guys when he has six thou in cash money on him, but all they want is his figures on the next day's races.

He is a player and a layer. He will bet on the horses himself when he sees spots he fancies or he will let you bet him on them and he has clients all over the United States who call him up at his office on Broadway and transact business with him one way or the other. He is a tall guy in his late forties who is not much thicker than a lath which is why he is called Slats though his first name is really Terence.

He is by no means Mr. America for looks but he dresses well and he is very rapid with a dollar. He is the softest touch in town for busted guys and he will get up in the middle of the night to do somebody a favour, consequently no one gets more or larger hellos along the main drag than the late Slats.

He comes from a little burg upstate by the name of Cohoes and I hear that he and Julie the Starker are friends from their short-pants days there, although Julie is about the last one in the world you will expect to see a guy of class like Slats associating with as Julie is strictly in the muggola department.

He is about Slats' age and is short and thick and has a kisser that is surely a pain to even his own mamma. He is called Julie the Starker because starker means a strong rough guy and there is no doubt that Julie answers this description in every manner, shape and form.

He is at one time in his life a prize fighter but strictly a catcher which is a way of saying he catches everything the other guy throws at him and at other times he is a bouncer; I do not know what all else except that he has some Sing Sing background.

At all times he is a most undesirable personality but he is very fond of the late Slats Slavin and vice versa, and they get along together in a way that is most astonishing to behold.

He is not only a handy guy for Slats but he is also a social companion and for some years wherever you see Slats you are apt to see Julie the Starker

except when Slats is with his fiancée, Miss Beatrice Gee and even then you may see Julie though as a rule Miss Beatrice Gee does not approve of him any more than she does of leprosy. In fact, she makes no bones about considering the very sight of Julie revolting to her.

In addition to being the late Slats' fiancée, Miss Beatrice Gee is at this time a prominent show girl in one of Mike Todd's musical shows and she is conceded by one and all to be the most beautiful object on Manhattan Island or anyway no worse than a photo finish for the most beautiful.

She is an original brunette and is quite tall and carries herself in a way that the late Slats says is dignity, though it really comes of Mike Todd's director putting a big copy of the Bible on her head and saying she will either learn to walk balancing it or else, though he never does tell her or else what.

Other dolls call Miss Beatrice Gee a clothes horse because it seems she wears clothes with great skill, and furthermore she is crazy about them although her best hold is not wearing them, which she also does with great skill but of course only on the stage. When she is not on the stage she is always groomed like a stake horse going to the post for a big race, and no one takes greater pride in her appearance than the late Slats Slavin, except Miss Beatrice Gee herself.

While I do not believe the story that once when she has a headache and Doc Kelton puts his thermometer in her mouth, to see if she is running a temperature, the mercury freezes tight, there is no doubt that Beatrice is not the emotional type and to be very frank about the matter many think she is downright frosty. But of course, no one ever mentions this to the late Slats because he is greatly in love and the chances are he maybe thinks Beatrice is hotter than a stove and personally I am in no position to deny it.

Well, in much less time than it takes me to tell you all this, Julie the Starker has his tripe and is eating it with more sound than is altogether necessary for tripe no matter how it is cooked and to tell the truth I have to wait until he pauses before I can make him hear my voice above his eating. Then I say to him like this:

'Why, Julie,' I say, 'I cannot understand why Slats is in the plight you describe with reference to the stone. I am under the impression that he leaves Beatrice well loaded as far as the do-re-mi is concerned and I take it for granted that she handles the stone situation. By the way, Julie,' I say, 'does Slats say anything to you about any horses anywhere for to-morrow?'

'No,' Julie says. 'But if you have a minute to spare I will tell you the story of Beatrice and her failure to take care of the matter of the stone for the late



Slats. It is really a great scandal.'

Then without waiting to hear if I have a minute to spare or not, he starts telling me, and it seems it all goes back to a night in late September when Beatrice informs Slats that she just comes upon a great bargain in a blonde mink coat for twenty-three thousand dollars and that she desires same at once to keep herself warm during the impending winter although she already had enough fur coats in her closet to keep not only herself warm but half of Syracuse, too.

'Pardon me, Julie,' I say at this point, 'but what is a blonde mink?'

'Why,' Julie says, 'that is the very question Slats asks and he learns from Beatrice that it is a new light-coloured mink fur that is sometimes called blue mink and sometimes platinum mink and sometimes blonde mink and he also learns that no matter what it is called, it is very, very expensive, and after Slats gets all this info he speaks to Beatrice as follows:

'"Baby," he says, "you cut right to the crimp when you mention twenty-three thou because that is exactly the size of the bank roll at this moment. But I just come off a tough season and I will need all my ready for navigating purposes the next few months and besides it looks like a mild winter and you can wear your old last season's leopard or caracul or ermine or Persian lamb or beaver until I get going again."'

Now at this (Julie the Starker says) Beatrice flies into a terrible rage and tells Slats that he is a tightwad and a skinflint and a miser, and that he has no heart and no pride or he will not suggest that she go around in such shabby old floogers and that she will never humiliate herself in this manner. She says if she waits even a few minutes, someone else is sure to snap up the blonde mink and that she may never again meet with a similar opportunity.

'Well, they have a large quarrel,' Julie says, 'and when Slats and I get back to his hotel apartment that night he complains of not feeling any too well and in fact he finally keels over on the bed with his tongue hanging out and I send for Doc Kelton who says it is a heart attack and very bad.

'He says to tell the truth it is 100 to 1 Slats will not beat it and then Doc takes his departure stating that he has so many shorter-priced patients he cannot afford to waste time on long shots and he leaves it to me to notify Slats that his number is up.

'On receiving this information, Slats requests me to find Miss Beatrice Gee and bring her to his bedside, which I do, although at first she is much opposed to leaving her table in the Stork Club where she is the centre of a gay throng,

until I whisper to her that I will be compelled to flatten her and carry her unless she does.

‘But on arriving at Slats’ apartment and realizing that he is indeed an invalid, Beatrice seems to be quite downcast and starts to shed tears all over the joint, and I have no doubt that some of them are on the level because surely she must remember how kind Slats is to her.

‘Then Slats says he wishes to talk to Beatrice alone and requests me to go into the next room, but of course I have a crack in the door so I can hear what goes on between them and what I hear is Slats saying to Beatrice like this:

‘“Baby,” he says, “reach in under my pillow and get the package of currency there. It is the twenty-three I tell you about and it is all the dough I have in the world. It is all yours except twenty-six hundred which you are to pay Clancy Brothers the tombstone makers in Yonkers for a stone I pick out for myself some time ago and forget to pay for although my plot in Woodlawn is free and clear.

‘“It is a long stone of white Carrara marble in excellent taste,” Slats says. “It is to lie flat over my last resting place, not to stand upright, and it is cut to exactly cover same from end to end and side to side. I order it in this form,” Slats says, “because I am always a restless soul and long have a fear I may not lie quietly in my last resting place but may wish to roam around unless there is a sort of lid over me such as this stone. And besides,” he says, “it will keep the snow off me. I loathe and despise the snow. I will leave the engraving to you, Baby, but promise you will take care of the stone at once.”

‘Well, I hear Beatrice promise between sobs, and also no doubt as she is reaching under the pillow for Slats’s plant and when I step back into the room a little later, Slats is a goner and Beatrice is now really letting the salt water flow freely, although her best effort is in Woodlawn two days later when it looks as if we will have to send for a siphon to unflood the premises.

‘But to show you what a smart strudel Beatrice is, she is around the day after we place the late Slats to rest saying that he does not leave her a thin dime. You see, she is figuring against the chance that relatives of Slats may show up and claim his estate and she even lets Slats’ lodge pay the funeral expenses although of course this is no more than is coming to any departed brother.

‘I do not dispute her statement because I think she is entitled to the dough as long as Slats gives it to her, and of course I take it for granted that she will split herself out from enough of the swag to buy the stone according to her promise, and in fact I am so sure of this that one afternoon last week I go out to

Woodlawn not only to pay my respects to the memory of the late Slats but to see how his last resting place looks with the stone over it.

‘Well, what do I see but Slats himself walking around and around a mound of dried earth with some withered flowers scattered over it and among these flowers I recognize my own wreath which says “So long, pal” on it and which costs me a double-saw, but there is no stone whatsoever over the mound, not even as much as a weentsy little pebble.’

‘Just a minute, Julie,’ I say. ‘You state that you see the late Slats walking around and about. Do you see him all pale and vapoury?’

‘Well,’ Julie says, ‘now you mention it, I do seem to recall that Slats is a little on the pale side of what he used to be. But he is otherwise unchanged except that he is not wearing his derby hat as usual. We do not give him his derby hat when we place him to rest, as the undertaker guy says it is not necessary. Anyway, when he spies me, Slats stops walking and sits down on the edge of the late Cockeyed Corrigan’s black marble marker, which is practically next door to him and says to me like this:

‘“Hello, Julie,” he says. “I am commencing to wonder what becomes of you. I am walking around here for weeks trying to keep warm and I am all tuckered out. What do you suppose is the idea of not providing people with overcoats when they are placed to rest? Only I do not rest, Julie. Do you see Beatrice lately and what does she says about my stone?”’

‘“Slats,” I say, “I must confess I do not see Beatrice lately, but I never dream she does not provide the stone long before this as per her promise which I can tell you now I overhear her make to you. A solemn deathbed promise.”’

‘“Never mind what kind of bed it is,” Slats says. “It is a morbid topic. And I think you have plenty of gall to be on the Erie when I am saying my last good-bye to my baby. You owe us both an apology. Look her up right away and give her a good one and ask her what about my stone. The chances are there is a hitch somewhere. Maybe the engraving is causing the delay. I am sure Beatrice will wish something sentimental on it like Sleep well my beloved, and engraving takes time.”’

‘Well, I am about to mention that she already takes time enough to have George Washington’s farewell address engraved on it but all of a sudden the late Slats disappears from sight and I take this as a hint for me to blow, too, and that very night I hunt up Beatrice to give her Slats’ message.

‘I find her standing at the bar of a gaff called the Palmetto with a couple of guys and I notice she is wearing a fur coat the colour of mist that I do not

remember ever seeing on her before and I turn to a dame who is sitting at a table and say to her like this:

‘“Pardon me, little miss,” I say, “but just to satisfy my curiosity, can you tell me the name of the fur that party over yonder is wearing?”’

‘“Blonde mink,” she says. “It is perfectly beautiful too.”’

‘“And what does such a garment cost?” I ask.

‘“Why,” she says, “that one seems to be first-class merchandise. It costs twenty-five thousand dollars. Maybe more, but not much less. It is the very newest fur out.”’

‘Then I walk over to Beatrice and tap her on the shoulder, and when she turns I motion her out of hearing distance of the guys she is with and speak to her as follows:

‘“Well, Bea,” I say, “your new coat must hang a little heavy on you considering that it represents the weight of a nice tombstone. I never mention it to you before but I hear your last chat with the late Slats Slavin including your promise but until I find you in this lovely benny no one will ever make me believe you mean to welch on your word.”’

‘“All right, all right,” she says. “So I do not buy the stone. But it costs twenty-six hundred and all I have is twenty-three thousand and an odd tinner and this coat is a steal at twenty-three. If I wait another minute longer someone else is sure to snap it up and the dealer wants his all cash. Besides Slats will never know he does not get the stone.”’

‘“Bea,” I say, “I have a talk with Slats to-day at Woodlawn. He knows he has no stone and he is upset about it. But he is making excuses for you, Bea. He figures you are unexpectedly delayed a bit in getting it there. You have the guy fooled even yet.”’

‘At this Beatrice gazes at me for some time without saying a word and I notice that looking into her eyes is just the same as looking into a couple of ice cubes. Then she gives her coat a hitch and brings it closer around her and finally she says:

‘“Julie,” she says, “I want to tell you something. If ever again you speak to me or about me I will start remembering out loud that Slats has a large bundle of cash on him that last night and I will also start wondering out loud what becomes of it and a guy with your biography cannot stand much wonderment such as that. And if you see Slats again tell him how I look in my new coat.”’

‘“Bea,” I say, “you will never have any luck with your new coat because it

means leaving poor Slats up there in Woodlawn restless and cold.”

“No luck?” she says. “Listen,” she says, “do you see the dopey-looking little punk in the uniform leaning against the bar? His name is Freddy Voogan and his papa is a squillionaire out in Denver and I am going to marry the kid any minute and what do you think gets him for me? My blonde mink. He notices how nice I look in it and insists on meeting me. No luck?” Beatrice says. “Is kicking up a gold mine no luck?”

“Bea,” I say, “it is bad enough to rob the grave as you already do but it is even worse to rob the cradle.”

“Good-bye, Julie,” Bea says. “Do not forget to tell Slats how I looked in my new coat.”

‘Well, I will say she looks wonderful in it even though I am greatly disappointed in her because it is plain to be seen that Beatrice has no sentiment about the past. So now I am compelled to report back to the late Slats Slavin that he is on a bust as far as the stone is concerned and I hope and trust that my revelation will not cause him too much anguish.’

And with this, Julie the Starker dunks up the last of the tripe gravy on his plate with a piece of rye bread and gets up to take his departure and I say to him like this:

‘Julie,’ I say, ‘if you happen to think of it, kindly ask the late Slats to look over the entries at Hialeah for the next few days and if he can send me a winner now and then I can get parties to bet a little for me.’

‘Well,’ Julie says, ‘Slats has other things on his mind besides horses right now, but,’ he says, ‘I will try to remember your request although of course you will carry me for a small piece of your end.’

Then he leaves me and I am still sitting there when a plain clothes copper by the name of Johnny Brannigan comes in and sits down in the chair Julie just vacates and orders some Danish pastry and a cup of Java, and then almost as if he hears the conversation between Julie and me he says:

‘Oh, hello,’ he says. ‘How well do you know Miss Beatrice Gee who is formerly the fiancée of the late Slats Slavin? I mean how well do you know her history and most especially do you know any knocks against her?’

‘Why?’ I say.

‘Well,’ Johnny says, ‘it is strictly an unofficial question. There is hell up Ninth Street over her. A family out in Denver that must have more weight than Pike’s Peak gets the Denver police department to ask our department very

quietly about her, and our department requests me to make a few inquiries.

‘Of course it is not an official police matter. It is an exchange of courtesies.

‘It seems,’ Johnny says, ‘that Miss Beatrice Gee is going to marry a member of this family who is under twenty-one years of age and his papa and mamma are doing handstands about it, though personally,’ Johnny says, ‘I believe in letting love take its course. But,’ he says, ‘my theory has nothing to do with the fact that I promise to make a return of some kind on this blintz.’

‘Well, Johnny,’ I say, ‘I do not know anything whatever about her but you just miss a guy who can probably give you a complete run-down on her. You just miss Julie the Starker. However,’ I say, ‘I am pretty sure to run into him to-morrow and will tell him to contact you.’

But I do not see Julie the next day or for several days after that and I am greatly disappointed as I not only wish to tell him to get in touch with Johnny, but I am anxious to learn if Slats sends me any info on the horses. For that matter I do not see Johnny Brannigan either until late one afternoon I run into him on Broadway and he says to me like this:

‘Say,’ he says, ‘you are just the guy I am looking for. Do you see the late editions of the blats?’

‘No,’ I say, ‘why?’

‘Well,’ Johnny says, ‘they are carrying big stories about the finding of Miss Beatrice Gee in her apartment in East 57th Street as dead as a doornail. It looks as if the young guy from Denver she is going to marry bounces a big bronze lamp off her coco in what the scribes will undoubtedly call a fit of jealous rage because he has a big row with her early in the evening in the Canary Club when he finds a Marine captain from the Pacific teaching her how the island natives in those parts rub noses when they greet each other, although the young guy claims he walks away from her then and does not see her again because he is too busy loading himself up with champagne.

‘But,’ Johnny says, ‘he is found unconscious from the champagne in his hotel room to-day and admits he does not remember when or where or what or why. My goodness,’ Johnny says, ‘the champagne they sell nowadays is worse than an anæsthetic.’

Naturally this news about Miss Beatrice Gee is quite distressing to me if only because of her former association with the late Slats Slavin and I am sorry to hear of the young guy’s plight, too, even though I do not know him. I am always sorry to hear of young guys in trouble and especially rich young guys but of course if they wish to mix bronze lamps with champagne they must take

the consequences and I so state to Johnny Brannigan.

‘Well,’ Johnny says, ‘he does not seem to be the bronze-lamp type, and yet who else has a motive to commit this deed? You must always consider the question of motive in crimes of this nature.’

‘What about robbery?’ I say.

‘No,’ Johnny says, ‘all her jewellery and other belongings are found in the apartment. The only thing missing as far as her maid and acquaintances can tell seems to be a new fur coat which she probably leaves some place in her wanderings during the evening. But now I remember why I am looking for you. I am still collecting data on Miss Beatrice Gee’s background though this time officially and I recall you tell me that maybe Julie the Starker can give me some information and I wish to know where I am apt to find Julie.’

‘A new fur coat, Johnny?’ I say. ‘Well,’ I say, ‘as a rule I am not in favour of aiding and abetting coppers but this matter seems different and if you will take a ride with me I think I may be able to lead you to Julie.’

So I call a taxicab and as we get in, I tell the jockey to drive us to Woodlawn Cemetery and if Johnny Brannigan is surprised by our destination he does not crack but whiles away the time on the journey by relating many of his experiences as a copper, some of which are very interesting.

It is coming on dusk when we reach Woodlawn and while I have an idea of the general direction of the late Slats Slavin’s last resting place, I have to keep the taxi guy driving around inside the gates for some time before I spot the exact location through recognizing the late Cockeyed Corrigan’s black marble marker.

It is a short distance off the auto roadway so I have the hackie stop and Johnny Brannigan and I get out of the cab to walk a few yards to the mound and as we approach same who steps out from the shadow of the late Cockeyed Corrigan’s marker but Julie the Starker who speaks to me as follows:

‘Hello, hello,’ he says. ‘I am glad you see and I know you will be pleased to learn that the late Slats gives me a tip for you on a horse that goes at Hialeah to-morrow but the name escapes me at the moment. He says his figures make it an absolute kick in the pants. Well,’ Julie says, ‘stick around a while and maybe I will remember it.’

Then he seems to notice the presence of Johnny Brannigan for the first time and to recognize him, too, because all of a sudden he outs with Captain Barker and says:

‘Oh, a copper, eh?’ he says. ‘Well, copper, here is a little kiss for you.’

And with this he lets go a slug that misses Johnny Brannigan and knocks an arm off a pink stone cherub in the background and he is about to encore when Johnny blasts ahead of him, and Julie the Starker drops his pizzlo-over and his legs begin bending under him like Leon Errol’s when Leon is playing a drunk.

He finally staggers up to the last resting place of the late Slats Slavin and falls there with the blood pumping from the hole that Johnny Brannigan drills in his chest and as I notice his lips moving I hasten to his side figuring that he may be about to utter the name of the horse Slats gives him for me.

Then I observe that there is something soft and fuzzy spread out on the mound under him that Julie the Starker pats weakly with one hand as he whispers to me like this:

‘Well,’ he says, ‘the late Slats is not only resting in peace now with the same as his stone, over him but he is as warm as toast and in fact warmer.’

‘The horse, Julie,’ I say. ‘What is the name of the horse?’

But Julie only closes his eyes and as it is plain to be seen that he now joins out permanently with the population of Woodlawn, Johnny Brannigan steps forward and rolls him off the mound with his foot and picks up the object that is under Julie and examines it in the dim light.

‘I always think Julie is a little stir-crazy,’ Johnny says, ‘but I wonder why he takes a pop at me when all I want of him is to ask him some questions and I wonder too, where this nice red fox fur coat comes from?’

Well, of course I know that Johnny will soon realize that Julie probably thinks Johnny wishes to chat with him about the job he does on Miss Beatrice Gee but at the moment I am too provoked about Julie holding out the tip the late Slats Slavin gives him for me to discuss the matter or even to explain that the red is only Julie’s blood and that the coat is really blonde mink.



## Big Boy Blues

It is along towards two o'clock one pleasant morning and things are unusually quiet in Mindy's restaurant on Broadway and in fact only two customers besides myself are present when who comes in like a rush of air, hot or cold, but a large soldier crying out in a huge voice as follows:

'Hello, hello, hello, hello, hello.'

Well, when I take a good glaum at him I can see that he is nobody but a personality by the name of West Side Willie who is formerly a ticket speculator on Broadway and when he comes over to me still going hello, hello, hello, hello, hello, I say to him quite severely like this:

'Willie,' I say, 'you are three hellos over what anybody is entitled to in Mindy's even if there is anybody here which as you can see for yourself is by no means the situation.'

'Oh,' Willie says, 'I happen to have a few hellos to spare and besides I am so glad to get back on the big street again that I feel liberal. We are here for a run.'

'Do you mean the war?' I say.

'I mean *Gee Eyes*, the soldier show I am with,' Willie says. 'We are a riot on the Coast. We lay them in the aisles in Denver. We kill the people in Cleveland. We will do a wonderful trade here.'

Then Willie sits down and explains to me that one day when he is in a camp in the desert out in California and practically dying by inches of the heat and the drilling and the victuals and the other hardships of soldier life and especially the victuals, his commanding officer sends for him and says:

'Klump,' he says, for such is West Side Willie's family monicker, 'they are organizing an all-soldier musical show at Santa Ana and there is a request out for the names of all enlisted men in this area who are formerly connected with show business.'

'I understand,' the commanding officer says, 'that you are familiar with matters of this nature and you will therefore report at once to Santa Ana to participate although personally,' he says, 'I consider it all just so much fol-de-rol and how the hell we can win the war behind the footlights I do not know.'

Well, naturally Willie does not inform the commanding officer that his

connections with show business is slightly informal but he gets on a train at once and goes to Santa Ana and there he discovers that the guy who is putting on the show is nobody but a playwright by the name of Hathaway Go who is once befriended by Willie to the extent of a meal in a one-arm gaff in West Forty-ninth and who is grateful ever since.

He is slightly surprised to see Willie appear in answer to a call for show people as he is aware that Willie does not sing or dance or play an instrument but after hearing Willie's description of soldier life in the desert his heart is touched and he says he can use a sure-footed guy to take tickets although when Willie asks what about selling them Hathaway Go gives him such a long slow look that Willie never renews the subject.

However, he is greatly downcast when he thinks of the opportunities in connection with these pasteboards because he feels that everyone will want them and when Willie is in action on Broadway he is known far and wide for his skill in manipulating with tickets to theatres and prize fights and hockey games and one thing and another that everyone wants but are unable to get unless they see Willie and pay his ice, which is a way of saying his premiums.

I often hear complaints that sometimes Willie asks more ice than the face value of the tickets but this is probably only for tickets that are very hard indeed to get and naturally Willie is entitled to some compensation for saving the customers the trouble of standing in line at the box offices to buy the tickets and then finding the tickets are all gone anyway. Besides Willie frequently has to take care of others out of his end to get the tickets in the first place so life is really not all ice with him.

'Well,' Willie says, 'I make the best of the position to which I am appointed although I must say the spectacle of throngs of customers being permitted to buy our tickets at face value at the box office when they will be delighted to pay two, three, four, five or six slugs premium if they cannot get them any other way is most disheartening to me.'

'But,' Willie says, 'I become a terrific ticket taker. In fact,' he says, 'I am known as the Eisenhower of the front door. Furthermore, this assignment comes to me in nick of time because my original outfit is sent to Europe where I understand the victuals are even worse than they are in camp and there is practically no hotel life for an enlisted man.'

'Willie,' I say, 'I am glad to see you again and I congratulate you on your military career and hope and trust you do not sustain any wounds such as tearing off a hangnail by mistake for the stub of a ticket some night. I am sure that your engagement on Broadway will be most auspicious.'

‘Thanks,’ Willie says, ‘but we are all nervous and worried over a situation that develops here. Do you remember Johnny Blues? The one they call Big Boy Blues?’

‘Why, certainly,’ I say. ‘I remember him as well as if he is my brother only I am thankful such is not the case.’

‘Do you know Big Boy Blues has a son?’ Willie says.

‘Yes,’ I say, ‘I know it. They call him Little Boy Blues.’

‘Well,’ Willie says, ‘Little Boy Blues is the star of our show. He is the greatest thing in it. He slays the customers. He is wonderful.’

‘Why, Willie,’ I say, ‘I am glad to hear this news. I not only remember Big Boy Blues but come to think of it I remember his ever-loving sheriff who is the mamma of Little Boy Blues, I hope. If he has any talent it must come from her because the only talent Big Boy Blues ever has that I recall is that he can crush a human skull with one blow of his fist even though the skull belongs to a copper.’

‘In fact,’ I say, ‘I recall the night he performs this feat on a copper by the name of Caswell. I seem to remember that Caswell is in Polyclinic hospital for eight weeks but he finally recovers and is now a captain.’

‘Listen,’ Willie says, ‘Little Boy Blues appears in our show as a female ballet dancer. He dresses as a dame in a short skirt and one thing and another.’

Well, at this I am slightly horrified as I can see what West Side Willie has in mind. I can see that it is going to be a great shock to Big Boy Blues if he learns of the matter because it is only about a year back that he is along Broadway bragging about his son being in the Army and stating that Little Boy will undoubtedly destroy a large number of the enemy single-handed.

Naturally, everybody agrees with him as Big Boy Blues strongly disapproves of anyone not agreeing with him and it is plain to be seen that after putting his son away as a destroyer he is apt to be displeased when he finds Little Boy is not only a ballet dancer but one in the attire of a doll and I so state to West Side Willie.

‘Yes,’ Willie says, ‘that is exactly what we fear. We fear Big Boy will be so vexed he will tear the theatre down stone by stone and maybe peg the stones at us. However, it is our information from Little Boy’s mamma that Big Boy thinks his son is somewhere overseas and has no idea he is in our show and it is our hope that he does not hear of it until after opening night anyway.’

‘Then,’ Willie says, ‘we expect to be rolling so good that we can replace

Little Boy if necessary, but,' he says, 'we positively need him for the first night because he is the best thing in the show by seven or eight lengths and it is a great pity we dast not give him some advance publicity. Well, I will bid you good night as I must catch myself a few snores. Our company gets into Grand Central at noon and I wish to be there to meet it.'

Then Willie takes his departure and I remain sitting there awhile thinking of what a great surprise it is to Broadway years ago when Big Boy Blues hauls off and marries a small canape by the name of Miss Rosie Flynn who is singing in the old Golden Slipper Club in West Forty-eighth Street and how Bookie Bon goes around offering to lay plenty of 9 to 5 that Big Boy gives her at least two broken arms inside of two weeks and finding no takers as Big Boy is known to one and all as a crude character.

He is at least six feet three inches high and he weighs anyway 220 pounds and he has a loud voice that causes parties four blocks away to tremble when he lets it out and he has a record at police headquarters that consists mainly of mayhem. He is a doorman and a bouncer at the Golden Slipper when I first know him but one day he climbs on the seat of a stray truck and drives it off and the next thing anybody knows he has one of the largest trucking businesses in the city.

Now Miss Rosie Flynn does not weigh ninety pounds with her girdle on and she has red hair and freckles and is by no means a spectacular singer but she is practically famous on Broadway because it is generally conceded that she is pure. The chances are she can marry into much more genteel circles than those in which Big Boy Blues moves just on the strength of being pure and it is the popular belief that Big Boy frightens her into marrying him as no one can think of any other reason for this union.

Well, after they are married and before the stray truck comes along to provide the keystone for Big Boy's success they live in a small apartment as far over on West Forty-ninth Street as anyone can live unless they live in a canoe in the North River and it is by no means a fashionable neighbourhood but it is the best they can do on their income in those days and it is there a son is born to them who is so small that Big Boy is greatly mortified and slightly perturbed.

In fact, he brings the child over on Broadway and goes around peering into the faces of various Broadway personalities who infest the Golden Slipper and then gazing closely at the child as if he is making comparisons. I never see this child again and to tell the truth I seldom see Big Boy Blues afterwards and then only when I do not learn in advance that he is coming my way but I read now and then in the blats about him slugging his truck drivers or somebody

else's truck drivers or just somebody else, so I judge he is the same old Big Boy.

But as the years go on I occasionally run into Rosie Flynn who seems to be fattening up somewhat in spots and she tells me that Big Boy by no means admires the child that she now speaks of as Little Boy Blues because he remains puny and scary but I can see that Rosie thinks very well of him, indeed. In fact, Little Boy Blues is all she talks about and as he gets older I learn from her that she has him away at school as much as possible as he is a great eyesore to Big Boy who keeps him frightened half to death by yelling at him and sometimes giving him a few claps.

From what Rosie tells me, I judge Little Boy Blues is quite a weakling and far from being a credit to a virile personality such as Big Boy but when the war comes on and Little Boy is drafted, Big Boy becomes very proud of him and wishes to be real fatherly towards him.

In fact, one day at Dix where Little Boy Blues is stationed for awhile, Big Boy approaches him with his hand extended to shake hands and Little Boy is so alarmed that he turns and runs away and keeps running until he is so far from camp that he is two days finding his way back and is put down as AWOL.

Well, I become so interested in what West Side Willie tells me about the show that I go to the Grand Central at noon myself the next day to see the soldier company arrive and it is quite an impressive scene as the members are in full marching gear with rifles and all this and that and march from the station through the streets to the theatre in West Forty-eight where the show is going to open.

West Side Willie does not march with them but joins me in following them only we stick to the sidewalk and people stop and applaud the company and the members bow right and left and smile and when I say to Willie that I consider this somewhat unmilitary, he says:

'Well,' he says, 'you see most of these guys are professional actors even if they are soldiers and they are bound to take bows when they hear applause even if they are sitting in the electric chair waiting for the guy to pull the switch.'

He points out Little Boy Blues to me and I can see that he is small and frail-looking and seems to be buckling slightly at the knees from the weight of his pack and rifle and that he has red hair like his mamma. I also see Rosie Flynn on the sidewalk ahead of me following the march so I quit West Side Willie and overtake her and say to her like this:

‘Well, Rosie,’ I say, ‘I notice your offspring has your top piece but the way he does not resemble Big Boy in any manner, shape or form is really remarkable. By the way,’ I say, ‘how is Big Boy? Not that I care, Rosie, but I wish to be polite.’

‘Sh-h-h-h!’ she says and looks around as if she is afraid Big Boy may be in earshot. ‘He is all right except his temper is shorter than ever. He chucks one of his own truck drivers into the river yesterday truck and all. I am so afraid of what will happen if he learns Little Boy is in this show. You see,’ she says, ‘I tell him the last time I hear from Little Boy he is with Coogan’s Cobras in the Pacific.’

‘Well,’ I say, ‘you do not pick a soft spot for him, anyway. Coogan’s Cobras are supposed to be the fightingest outfit in our Army.’

‘It is because I see the name in the newspapers so much,’ Rosie says. ‘It pleases Big Boy to think Little Boy is in such company. I pray he does not learn the truth before the show opens. Poor Big Boy has no appreciation of the fine and delicate and artistic. I often wake up at night in trembling at the thought of his anger if he learns of the large fees I pay for Little Boy’s dancing instruction.’

I commence trembling myself right then and there thinking of such a situation and at this point I unload Rosie Flynn and go on my way because I realize that if Big Boy learns of the fees she mentions he may not only wipe out Rosie but anyone who ever even knows her. To tell the truth, I am a little disappointed in Rosie as I always figure her to have some sense and while I do not say it is wrong for anybody’s son to dance I consider it sinful to pay fees to encourage him to do it.

Well, the day of the opening I am surprised more than no little when West Side Willie hunts me up and gives me a skull, which is a way of saying a free ticket for the show and I figure it must be because business is not up to expectations but when I mention this idea to Willie he becomes quite provoked.

‘Why,’ he says, ‘we are sold out in advance for half the entire engagement already. This show is the biggest thing since nylons. If you examine your ducket you will observe that no seat is specified. That means you have standing room only.’

But standing room is by no means undesirable in a New York theatre especially at openings because where you stand is in back of the last row which places you in a position to leave quickly and quietly in case the show is bad and this is where I am located for the opening of *Gee Eyes*.

I am a little late getting to the theatre and the audience is pretty well seated when I arrive and as I am going in West Side Willie who is taking tickets with great skill holds back a Broadway columnist and his wife a minute and says to me:

‘What do you think we have with us to-night?’ he says. ‘Why, nobody but Colonel Billy Coogan, the commander of Coogan’s Cobras. He is a tall slim guy with a lot of ribbons on his chest and he is in the third row centre.’

‘Yes,’ the columnist says. ‘He flies in from the Pacific only to-day to get a new decoration to-morrow from the President in Washington.’

Naturally on taking my place in the rear of the house I spot Colonel Coogan at once by his uniform away down front and I am somewhat astonished to observe next to him a head and a pair of shoulders that even at long distance and from behind I identify as belonging to Big Boy Blues, and what is more he seems to be chatting with Colonel Coogan.

I am standing there wondering about this spectacle but just then the curtain opens and I dismiss the matter from my mind as I can see at once that this is a pretty good show although personally I like a little more sex appeal than it is possible to get into shows in which all the performers are hairy-legged guys with no bims whatever around.

The one thing I am looking for which is Little Boy Blues does not come on until the finale and this is a very large number, indeed, with the entire cast on stage when out comes a slim and graceful young ballet dancer in a flaring short skirt and all who can easily pass for a doll if you do not know it has to be a guy in this company unless somebody makes a serious mistake.

I can see that the dancer is undoubtedly Little Boy Blues even without looking at the programme to make sure and while I am by no means a judge of ballet dancing and in fact can do without same entirely in a pinch, I realize that he gives a great performance. In fact, I realize that he is no doubt a genius at ballet dancing and as the curtain closes on him the audience lets out a roar of applause that I afterwards hear shakes the glasses off the back bar in the gin mill next door to the theatre.

Then the curtain opens again as is always the case when there is great applause and Little Boy Blues stands there on the stage panting as if he just finishes a fast hundred yards and taking bows with one hand on his stomach and also perspiring no little and the audience applauds with even greater vigour than before and at this moment I observe Big Boy Blues jump up from his seat down front.

I notice his mouth is wide open so I judge he is yelling something and thinks I to myself well, here it comes, although there is too much noise for me to hear what he is yelling about, and besides at almost the same instant he jumps up a guy in the seat directly behind him jumps up too and practically simultaneously with Big Boy's mouth opening a blackjack drops on his scone and Big Boy sinks back quietly in his seat. Then I recognize the guy behind him as Captain Caswell in civilian clothes.

Well, the uproar from the audience continues but of course it is all over Little Boy Blues' dancing and no one notices what happens to Big Boy although a couple of coppers come down the aisle and lift him out of his seat and drag him away still unconscious. Furthermore, no one pays any attention to Colonel Coogan who is up on his feet and saying to everyone around him that the slugging of Big Boy is the worst outrage since Pearl Harbour though no one seems to listen to him.

By this time Little Boy Blues is panting and perspiring more from taking bows than from his dancing so the curtain closes in on him and the first act for good and nearly everyone in the audience moves out into the lobby for the intermission to smoke and gas and all they are gassing about is Little Boy's dancing. Then I see Captain Caswell talking to Rosie Flynn in a corner of the lobby and I get close enough to hear the captain say:

'Well, Rose,' he says, 'you certainly do the community a service by requesting police protection here to-night. If it is not for your warning and my skill with a jack we will have serious trouble although to tell you the truth we have enough already with the guy we commandeer the seat from behind Big Boy. I only hope and trust that he does not have as much influence as he claims and anyway he can have the seat now.'

Then Colonel Coogan comes into the lobby still stating in a loud voice that the jacking of Big Boy is a scandalous matter and that somebody will hear from the War Department and maybe the OPI, too, when Captain Caswell steps up to him and informs him that Big Boy is jacked because he is about to start wrecking the joint in discovering that his son is a dancer in the show.

'No, no,' Colonel Coogan says. 'There is a terrible error somewhere. He knows his son is in the show all right because someone calls him up this evening and gives him the information. Mr. Blues introduces himself to me and tells me about it while we are sitting there side by side waiting for the curtain. He does not seem to know just what to think about his son being in the show at first but he asks me as a special favour not to mention it to Mrs. Blues if ever I happen to meet her because she thinks her son is with my command and Mr. Blues fears it will break her heart if she learns the truth.'



‘Colonel,’ Captain Caswell says, ‘I distinctly hear Big Boy yell when he gets up from his seat and our experience with him in the past is that he always prefaces his acts of violence by yelling.’

‘Yes,’ Colonel Coogan says, ‘he yells all right, but so do I and what we are both yelling is bravo.’

At this point I hear a slight gasp behind me and on looking around I observe that Rosie Flynn slumps to the floor in a dead faint consequently there is more excitement during which I take my departure without even waiting for the second act as my legs are very tired from the standing room only.

I am again sitting in Mindy’s restaurant along about three o’clock in the morning still resting my legs when who comes in but West Side Willie and I am most distressed to note that he has two black eyes and swollen lips and that he seems greatly dishevelled in every respect.

‘Why, my good gracious, Willie,’ I say. ‘Do you get run over by a tank division or what?’

‘No,’ Willie says, ‘Big Boy Blues belts me. By the way,’ he says, ‘everybody is all wrong about him crushing the human skull with a single blow of his fist. He hits me on top of the head twice with his right and only raises a contusion and I think he damages his duke at that. However,’ Willie says, ‘it is only fair to say Big Boy comes to the theatre to find me fresh from the hospital after he is treated for the jacking he receives from Captain Caswell and perhaps he does not have all his strength. He inflicts most of my injuries with a left hook.’

‘Well, Willie,’ I say, ‘it shows you how Colonel Coogan is deceived by Big Boy and Captain Caswell is right all the time. I suppose Big Boy’s fury over Little Boy being in *Gee Eyes* flares up anew when he has time to think about it and no doubt he assaults you as a representative of the show.’

‘Oh, no,’ Willie says. ‘Big Boy is still all pleased up over Little Boy’s performance, and what is more he and Little Boy and Rosie Flynn are enjoying a happy and very loving family reunion but Big Boy gets to brooding about the ticket speculator who calls him up and tells him of Little Boy’s presence in the show and hustles him into buying a ticket for a hundred dollars which is about a ninety-five dollar premium.’

‘I see,’ I say. ‘You are the speculator, of course.’

‘Well,’ Willie says, ‘I am stuck with a ticket that I pay six dollars for myself and I happen to need a hundred and I know Big Boy Blues will pay

anything to get in the theatre if he hears Little Boy is in the show although naturally I figure it will be only to tear the place apart. But I also know Rosie Flynn arranges for police protection so I do not see how he can do any harm even if he is there.

‘So,’ Willie says, ‘I call him up and promote him. It is more than human nature can stand to let such an opportunity pass. But besides getting belted I also undergo another slight misfortune to-night. I am relieved of my job with the show and ordered to Colonel Coogan’s combat unit in the Pacific.’

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected or standardised.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been corrected or standardised.

[The end of *The Last Stories* by Damon Runyon]