

The First Stories

Damon Runyon

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.**

Title: The First Stories

Date of first publication: 1954

Author: Damon Runyon (1880-1946)

Date first posted: Oct. 16, 2021

Date last updated: Oct. 16, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20211020

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Howard Ross & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

Damon Runyon

The First Stories

Contents

The First Stories

<u>The Defence of Strikerville</u>	11
<u>Fat Fallon</u>	24
<u>Two Men Named Collins</u>	33
<u>As Between Friends</u>	42
<u>The Informal Execution of Soupbone Pew</u>	53
<u>My Father</u>	67

The Defence of Strikerville

The squad-room conversation had drifted to the state militia, and everyone had taken a verbal poke at that despised aim of the military resources.

‘Onct I belonged to the milish,’ remarked Private Hanks, curled up luxuriously on his cot and sending long, spiral wreaths of smoke ceiling-ward.

‘That’s what I thought,’ said Sergeant Cameron. ‘I recall the time you first took on—Plattsburg, ’97, wasn’t it? I had an idea then that you came from the state gravel wallopers.’

‘I’m kiddin’ on the square,’ said Hanks. ‘I was an out-and-out snoljer with the milish two years ago out in Colorado. I helped put down the turrible rebellion in the Coal Creek district.’

This statement was received with obvious disbelief.

‘Lemme tell you about that,’ said Private Hanks, sitting up. ‘Lemme relate the sad circumstances of J. Wallace Hanks’ enlistment in the Colorado State milish, and if you all don’t weep, you haven’t got no hearts.

‘They was a bunch of us discharged from the Fifth, in Denver, in 1904. We all has a good gob of finals, and of course none of us were going back. You all know how that is,’ and Private Hanks looked suggestively at Private William Casey, who had just reenlisted that day for his fifth ‘hitch’, after a fervid declaration of a week before that he was through with the service for ever; Private Casey at that moment being seated disconsolately upon his cot, red-eyed and dispirited.

‘It takes me about a week to get ready to back up into the railroad building to hold up my right hand and promise Recruitin’ Sergeant Wilson and Uncle Sam to love, honour, and obey, or words to that effect. The rest of the gang was no better off. They was scattered up and down Larimer Street, stallin’ for biscuits, and doing the reliever act with them nice new citizens they’d bought in the flush of their prosperity.

‘We all see another three year trick sticking up as conspicuous as a Chinaman in church, but none of us is dead anxious to go back so soon. We don’t want the gang out at the fort to give us the big tee-hee after all them solemn swears and rosy air-castles we’d regaled them with when we departed. We’d like to lay off awhile until the novelty of our return wouldn’t be so strikin’.

‘Most of us is too sick to even think of looking for work. We’d maced about everyone we could think of, from Highlands to the fort, and we’re done, that’s all. We’re about twenty-five strong, take us altogether, and there wasn’t forty cents. Mex in the lay-out. Things is certainly looking fierce, and we’re all standing around on the corner waiting for the first guy to say the word for a break to the railroad building.

‘I happens to pike at one of the signs in front of an employment office to see if someone ain’t looking for a private secretary or a good manager, and it reads like this:

‘“WANTED!—Able-bodied men for the State militia of Colorado. \$2 a day and found.”

‘I leaves the rest of these sad-eyed dubs standing around where they are and stalls up into this employment office.

‘There’s a plug sitting behind the desk looking as chest as a travelling man, and I nails him.

‘“What’s this gig about militia?” I asks him.

‘“Strike-soldiers wanted—two dollars a day and found,” he says, short-like.

‘“Well, that’s where I live,” I tells him. “I’m the original soldier; all others are infringements.”

‘“You gimme two bucks,” he says, “and I ships you for a soldier.”

‘“Say, mister,” I asks him, “if I had two bucks, what d’you reckon I’d want to soldier for?”

‘“That’s my bit,” he says. “If you ain’t got it, of course I can’t get it. The noble State of Colorado, she pays me just the same, but when I can get it out of rummies like you, I ketches ’em coming and going. See?”

‘I did, all right, and it looks to me like it was pretty fair graft. This guy explains the milishy business to me. There’s a big strike on in the Coal Creek district. The milishy is out, but there ain’t enough men, so they gives this employment guinea orders to pick up all he can. He’s just the same as a recruitin’ sergeant, only different.

‘I tells him about the rest of the bunch, and he agrees to take ’em all. Then I went back and told the gang, and you’d oughta hear the holler they sent up. Milishy! Nix! Not for them! They’d starve first, and a lot more dope like that.

‘“Come out o’ it!” I tells them. “Here’s a gee hungerin’ to slip us two bucks a day and all found, and you hams standing around with wrinkles in your bellies, side-stepping like a bunch of mules in the road. He takes this on while it lasts and gets a stake. The State’s good for the money, or ought to be. Come along, children, before the boogie man sloughs you in the skookum for mopery!”

‘Course they comes! Why, this is duck soup for us all. Think of two cases a shift for snoljering! We’re there stronger than father’s socks when we lines up in that employment office.

‘The gee I talks to sends for an officer from this milish, and he takes charge of us. He ain’t a bad feller, only he’s a kid and don’t sabe the war business much. He asked me if I’d ever seen service, and when I flashes about half a dozen parchments on him, he liked to had a fit. At that, he’s a nice little feller and don’t mean no harm. Some of the guys were trying to kid him, but I made ’em cut it out.

‘This officer shoos us down to the depot and loads us up on a train for Coal Creek. He asks us what we wanted to join, and of course we’re all out for the cavalry. It seems that was just what he wanted. They had a troop up there that was away shy of men, and a bunch that can ride fits in mighty nice. And so a slice of the first squadron of the Fifth goes into the milishy business.

‘I’d hustled the bunch right through the preliminaries, and they don’t get much chanst to ponder over it until they was on the train. And then they was sore at themselves and also me. They breaks up into little squads in the smoker and sits looking gloomy-like out the window. Every onct in a while some guy would sigh and say:

‘“S’posin’ ole Bluch would see us now!” meaning Cap. Bluch Baker.

‘This kid officer was mighty nice on the train, but he finds everyone but me mighty unconversational. We pulls into Coal Creek late that night, and then he suddenly gets all-fired preemptory.

‘“Get out and line up on the platform!” he bawls at us, and, seeing we’re there, we do it.

‘There’s a lot of guys in uniform standing around and looking us over some curious, but we’re pretty tired and don’t mind. This kid officer gives us right forward, and we climbs hills for the next hour or so until we comes to a bunch of Sibley tents, and a rooky challenges us.

‘“Halt!” he says. “Who is it?”

‘What d’you think o’ that? “Who is it!” But that’s what he says, all right.

‘The kid officer tells him it’s Lieutenant Somebody with a detachment, and the rook yells for the officer of the day. We’re finally passed, although all hands looked at us some suspicious, and I don’t blame them. Another big gang is standing around rubbering at us as we drills into camp, and they makes a lot of fresh remarks. I’m pretty glad my bunch is tired, or there’d been remains to clean up. We’re assigned to tents, and a sergeant comes along and gives us a couple of skinny blankets apiece. The tent has floors, so bunking ain’t so bad as it might be, although it was colder’n a banker’s heart.

‘A kid making a stab at reveille on a trumpet gets us out in the morning, and this same sergeant of blanket fame issues us mess-kits. It had snowed a few feet during the night, and we’re none too cheerful when we line up at the mess-shack for breakfast. We didn’t have no roll-call, because we hadn’t given in our names. The camp is laid out pretty well, as we see it by daylight. The company streets were laid out in rows on a hillside, and there was a big stable for the cavalry horses at the bottom of the hill. We weigh up our comrades in arms as we see them at the mess-shack, and they’re mostly kids. A few gees with very suggestive-looking shoulders and shame-faced expressions is scattered among them.

‘The breakfast ain’t so bad, what there is of it, but I could tell by the wise look on the mugs of some of the gang that came with me that there’d likely be a minus in the ranks before long.

‘Later in the morning, the captain of the troop lines us up again, swears us in, and takes our pedigrees. I listened mighty intent, but I failed to hear anyone kick in with their right name excepting me, and I had to do it because that kid officer had seen my discharge. Then they issue us clothes.

‘Say, you orderly-bucking stiffs, I wisht you could see them clothes right now! Most of them was second-hand, and I take it that our predecessors in that troops had put in their time in civil life serving as models for ready-made cigarettes. I never heard such a holler as went up from my gang since the canteen was abolished. They cussed the state milishy, the State of Colorado, the governor, and all his hired hands, and they wound up by cussing me for getting them into it. They was the worst-looking lot of rookies I ever saw in my life, and they was all the madder because I drew a pretty fair outfit myself.

‘After clothes, we were sent down to the stables to draw our mounts. I have mentioned that those clothes caused pretty much of a holler, but it was simply a soft guffaw to the muffled roar that the gang let out when they saw them gallant steeds. I think the State of Colorado robbed the hack horse market of Denver when they sent out the milish, and they copped the whole crop of the previous generation of horses at that.

‘Skates? Say, they wasn’t horses. They were hat-racks! They were shadows of horses—visions—dreams!

‘The bunch was sore at first, but the funny side finally struck them, and they commenced picking out the worst mutts they could. There wasn’t much choice, but the lay-out my delegation drew was certainly a fright. They had all kinds of fun kidding with them horses and with the rest of the troop. They’d put their saddles on wrong side before, and all such foolishness, to make the troops think they was awful rookies.

‘But if the clothes and other things were jokes, that soldiering wasn’t. Nix! No play about that. I’ve monkeyed around in the war business a few days myself, and I never struck anything any harder than playing soldier in Colorado. You works right straight through from reveille to taps. Post duty around camp; patrol mounted, and guard down in them mines where they’d drop you in a cage so fast you had to hang on to your hat with both hands to keep your hair from flying off. When you got down a mile or two, they’d throw you off with your little gun and tell you to stick there and shoot anyone that batted an eye. Fine business, that!

‘It seems that my bunch was about half of this cavalry troop we belonged to. In addition there was a whole regiment of foot-shakers in camp, a battery with one of them old-time Napoleon fieldpieces and a Gat, and another big troop of cavalry. They called this last lay-out the Denver Light Horse, and it was a bunch of swells. Most of them looked to me like they might be calico rippers in civil life, but they sure laid it on there. They had good horses, and their uniforms fitted them. We looked like a bunch of volunteers fresh from the States, lined up alongside of them.

‘The clothes and horses let ’em out. They weren’t there with anything else, and most of them had something to say about running the troop. I give it to the guy that had command of us. He was a captain named Pard, and I finds out afterwards that he was a boss machinist or a boiler-maker in Denver when he wasn’t working at this tin snoljering business. He was a silent sort of plug, but he was strong on the tactics. He knew what ought to be done, anyway, and when he told you to do anything, you had a hunch he meant what he said.

‘This Light Horse outfit weren’t for us a-tall. The second night we were in camp, a large delegation comes yelling down to our streets, and when we looks out to see what the trouble was, we finds they had come to toss us in blankets. Get that? Toss them old heads from the Fifth in blankets!

‘They didn’t toss. Not any to speak of. We turned over four tents coming from under them, and when the hospital corps arrived, there was ghastly bleeding remains scattered about. Naturally, we didn’t get popular with the Light Horse.

‘This Captain Pard was wise to us in no time. He got hep that he had a crowd of the real things under him, and he didn’t try any foolishness with us. The rest of the camp had to drill every day. He gave it to us just once. Then he sorter grinned, said something about us appearing to be pretty well instructed already, and that’s the last drill we had. He had to take us out every day for a stall, but we put in our time laying around smoking cigarettes in some shaft house.

‘Them strikers we were hired to suppress were already pretty much suppressed, as we found it. They was mighty sore at the milishy, and I don’t blame ’em, but our fellers got acquainted with a lot of ’em and found ’em pretty decent at that. There’s about ’steen little towns in this Coal Creek district, from one to six miles apart, and our troop did patrol duty on the roads between ’em. The strikers were peaceable enough, although they didn’t have no use for scabs. They never started anything with us, so we let ’em alone.

‘They was especially sore at this Light Horse outfit. Them guys would go tearing through the streets on their horses, paying mighty little attention to life or limb, and they cut up rough with the strikers whenever they got a chanst. They had a big place downtown called a bull-pen, and these Light Horse snoljers were everlastingly throwing someone in the pen, and it made the strikers pretty hot.

‘When they finds out we’re ’tending strictly to our own business and not minding theirs, the strikers got sorter friendly with us and told us their grievances.

‘The mining companies owned the houses where the strikers lived and when the strike comes on they just naturally throws them strikers out of house and home. So the strikers go to living in tents in regular camps and making out the best way they could. The biggest camp was located about two miles out of town and was on our patrol. We had to stop there every night to see if things was quiet, and it wasn’t long before our gang was mighty friendly with them strikers. The women in the camp always had hot coffee for us, and generally a bite, and we got to thinking quite a few of them.

‘This camp I’m telling you about is on a hill, and there’s only one road to it that’s anywhere near decent for travelling. We calls the camp Strikerville.

‘We’d been doing this play soldier act for about three weeks and was just sighting for a pay-day to blow, when a striker comes to us one day and tells us that the companies is going to give them the run from where they are camped. He says he has it pretty straight that the deputies will do the job and that this Light Horse outfit is in on the play. The deputies and the milishy are to raid the camp at night and start a row; then the next day the milishy will run the strikers off altogether, on the ground that they are a menace to public peace.

‘It seems, according to what this guy tells us, that if the strikers could be chased clean out of the district, scabs could be gotten without any trouble, and the mines put to work again. He says the milishy’s part in the deal ain’t to be recognized at headquarters, but the snoljers are to go along with the

deputies like they was doing it of their own accord; same as the time a bunch of deputies and soldiers wrecked a union newspaper office over at Cadence. The headquarters hollers afterwards about “disorganized mob,” and making a rigid investigation to discover the guilty parties, but it was always noticed that the guilty parties was never caught, and the office stayed wrecked.

‘Well, this feller tells us that the gang was going to pull down the tents and wreck the whole camp. He was mostly worried about what it might do to the women and children, because there was a lot of ’em in the camp, and it was colder’n blazes, with two or three feet of snow on the ground.

‘“A girl baby was born to Mrs. McCafferty just to-day,” he says, “and it will go kinder rough with her and the kid.”

‘“Why don’t you put up a fight?” asks “Dirty Dick” Carson.

‘“Fight? What with?” the feller asks. “They took up every gun in the district when martial law was declared. If we could only put up one scrap, it would put a stop to this thing of sending these disorganized mobs, as they call ’em, around doing the dirty work.”

‘“I got a scheme,” says Dick to me, after the feller left, and he outlines it with much joy. It made a big hit with me right off the reel, and in stables that evening C Troop, as represented by the former members of the Fifth Cavalry, has a quiet meeting, and Dick and me talks to ’em long and earnest. When we gets through, we had a hard time keeping them from yelling their heads off just to show how pleased they are.

‘“It’s all for that McCafferty kid,” I tells ’em. “Think how you’d like it if you was just born and got throwed out of house and home into the snow. Also think of Mrs. McCafferty’s coffee.”

‘The bunch got so excited with sympathy, I was afraid they would tip it off to the rest of the camp. To carry out our scheme, we had to heave the first sergeant of the troop in. He made up the night patrols and assigned the other sergeants to command. Dick and me went to him and has him down to our tent where half a dozen of the old heads is gathered. It just happens that this top sergeant was a guy that had been with the volunteers in the Philippines, and he thought he was an old soldier. Along with it, he was pretty decent, and when he hears our scheme he kind o’ grins and falls for it right away.

‘There were two patrols made up of about ten men, each under a sergeant, and they worked from dark until early morning riding the roads. At roll-call that evening the top reads off the names of the men on patrol, and although everyone of my bunch had been on duty the night before, our names is included in the list. In addition to that, he increases each patrol to eleven men, so as to take in all us fellers, and he says:

“There’s going to be non-commissioned officers’ school this evening, and I want all my regular non-coms there. I’ll appoint Private Hanks to command Patrol No. 1, and Private Carson to command Patrol No. 2. They’ll report to me for instructions.”

“That looked regular enough. The rest of the troop was tickled to death, because they thought the top was throwing it into our gang for double duty. It had commenced to snow again heavy, and no one wanted to ride roads that night.

“Serves them old stiffs right; they think they know so much,” I heard one of the rooky kids say, as we scattered for our tents.

In the meantime, I sends one of our fellers through the lines just as soon as we was saddled and ready to start out, with orders to ride to the strikers’ camp and put them next. Then Carson and me went to the top for orders.

I’ve always had a hunch that when we was talking to him in front of his tent, I saw a pair of eyes gaping through the flap, and that them eyes looked mighty like Captain Pard’s, but I couldn’t prove it if I had to.

“Don’t let anyone get hurt now,” was what the top had to say, and we falls in our details and rides out of camp.

As I’m going past No. 1, the sentry hollers at me:

“More H Troop?” H Troop being the Light Horse.

“Nope! Cavalry patrols; C Troop,” I told him.

“I didn’t know; most of H Troop seems to be out on mounted pass to-night,” he says, and a sort o’ chuckle runs through our bunch.

It had started in to snow like the dickens, and you could hardly see your file leader. We were all pretty well bundled up, so we didn’t mind. The patrols were supposed to take different roads about a mile from camp, but we all headed straight out towards Strikerville. I sent out a couple of scouts to Handley, where the deputies hung out, and told them to hurry up and bring back a report.

When we climb the road to the strikers’ camp, and you had to do it pretty slow on account of the rocks and not being able to see very well through the snow, we finds a big stir going on. There’s a light in every tent, and camp-fires are burning all around. The women and kids are huddled over the fires, and the men are scattered about in little bunches, all talking at once.

This guy I sent ahead had scared the life out of them. The president and half a dozen other leaders of the union who lived in camp met us, and I made ’em get busy right away.

As I tells you, this camp is on a sort of flat plateau on top of a hill, and there is only one road to it. I made them put the women and kids in the tents furthest away from the head of the road, leaving the lights and fires

burning only where they could be seen from the bottom of the road. Then I gets every man jack and every kid of any size in the camp rolling snowballs. It was a wet, mushy snow and packed fine.

“Put in a few rocks, if you want to,” I suggested, and I guess they did.

“I posts one of the men at the bottom of the hill, and I puts the rest of them to work throwing up breastworks across the top of the road, to avoid accidents. There was a lot of loose rocks laying around, and a fine trench is up in no time.

“Pretty soon my scouts from Handley comes in, their horses dead beat.

“There’s about twenty deputies and twenty-five of them H Troop guys over in Niccoli’s saloon,” they tells me. “They’re getting pretty drunk, and someone’s liable to get hurt. They won’t start until about midnight, and then they’re coming a-hellin’.”

“Any non-coms with the troop?” I asks, and they says “No.” None of them had their carbines, either; nothing but six-pistols. That was to divert any idea that they was out on anything but mounted pass and a hunt for joy.

“Them deputies are making a fierce talk about tar and feathering some of your guys,” one of my scouts tells them labour leaders, and it didn’t quiet the agitation which was stirring them none.

“I had the snowballs stacked along the front of the trench as fast as they was made, and it wasn’t long before there was enough to fill an ore wagon. I kept everyone hard at work just the same, because I didn’t want to run shy.

“All we could do was to wait and watch, and it was pretty cold work. The snow stopped along about midnight, but it stayed pretty dark. My fellows loafed around, smoking and talking and visiting the McCafferty kid. None of the women folks went to bed, although they had no notion of what was coming off.

“It must have been about one o’clock when I hears, away off, the pound of horses’ feet on the snow and a jumbled lot of talking and laughing. I hustles my men together and lines ’em up back of the breastworks where them strikers are still rolling snowballs like mad—good hard ones, too. I had ten of the fellers load the carbine magazines, and the rest I bunched with all them strikers, carefully instructed.

“Pretty quick, my outpost comes running up the hill.

“They’re stopped down below,” he says. “They’re going to come with a rush to surprise the camp. All of ’em are half-stewed.”

“I looked over my arrangements with a critical eye and didn’t see anything lacking. My friends was lined up back of the breastworks, them with the carbines in the middle, and the strikers and the rest of my bunch on either side with arms full of big snowballs. We could look right down on the roadway, shining like a streak of whitewash across a coal pile. Back of us a

few dying camp-fires were sputtering, and lights burned in a few tents. It was as quiet as a graveyard. Then a sudden yell splits the air, and here they comes!

‘They was all mounted, and they was trying to run their horses up that steep, slippery road, yelling like crazy people. Some of them starts shooting in the air. They was riding without any kind of formation, and you couldn’t tell soldiers from deputies.

‘I waits until they are right below us in the road, and then I fires a shot from my carbine and hollers, “Halt!”

‘They stopped right in the middle of a yell for about a minute, but it was long enough. It brings ’em to a stop just below us, and I screeches:

‘“Ready! Aim! Fire!”

‘My carbine gang tears off a volley, and the rest of the gang behind the breastworks launches about a barrel of snowballs on top of the bench in the road.

‘“Fire at will!” I commands, and they does; the fellers with the carbines shooting at the nearest fixed stars, and the others whaling away with the snowballs.

‘Say! I’ve seen crowds suddenly jimmed up in my time; like the old Thirteenth on the Warren the time of the fight, or the gang at Zapote bridge the night the head of Carabao charged us, but that delegation in the road skinned ’em all a Salt Lake City block.

‘They was just naturally stood on their heads. They yelled in dead earnest, but they didn’t do no shooting; they didn’t have time. I hadn’t thought about there being any danger until I see that bunch milling around in the road; the horses rearing and snorting and kicking, and everyone trying to go in the same direction at once. I was leery someone was going to get killed. If any one of ’em had gone down in that muddle, it would have been all day with ’em. The language them men used wasn’t scarcely fit to eat.

‘All the time my crowd was slamming big snowballs down on the heads of the enemy and firing carbines, and some of the yells that rose out of the cloud of snow in the road sounded real painful. The firing squad was working them carbines overtime between laughs.

‘The women and kids in the camps came running up to the breastworks to see what was going on, and they gets next to the game right away and commences to fire snowballs too, screaming and laughing.

‘At what I judges is the psychological moment, I hollers:

‘“Charge!”

‘Then all of us sets up an awful yell and loads and fires snowballs faster than ever.

‘Them in the roadway that had their horses turned right didn’t hesitate. They went down that road with a disregard for their necks that made me nervous. Them that couldn’t get their horses turned right slipped off and went on foot. Pretty soon all you could hear was echoes dying away in the distance and the screaming and laughing in the camp.

‘We didn’t wait for them strikers’ thanks. We got our horses and got out of there almost as fast as the enemy. I separated the patrols and sent one out one way and took the other direction with my squad. We rode off a couple of miles and then went racing back. We got back to the foot of the hill considerably blown, right after old Major Kelley, Captain Pard, all the headquarters’ officers, and some of H Troop came tearing along. Back of them Carson and the other patrol was whooping it up along the road, and away back a company of infantry and a Gatling squad was kicking up the snow as fast as they could.

‘They had heard the shooting at headquarters, and an H trooper had buzzed into camp with an exciting tale about the strikers’ massacring harmless soldiers and deputies.

‘Now, of course, they knew something about this frame-up to attack the strikers’ camp at headquarters but they hadn’t figured on it turning out but one way. Only that lone H trooper had returned, and the major seemed to sort o’ expect to find many gory bodies scattered around.

‘I reported having heard some firing, but no signs of excitement. The whole works climbed to the strikers’ camp, many hunching up as close to the major as possible. I saw Captain Pard occasionally glancing at me with a funny look, as he took in that mussed-up roadway; but the major didn’t seem to notice anything. The camp was as dark as bats, but in answer to our yells some of the strikers came out looking mighty cross and sleepy. No, they hadn’t heard anything. No fighting; hadn’t heard any disturbance, and it was getting colder all the time, and the major was sleepy himself, it ended in him telling Captain Pard to instruct his patrols to make a thorough investigation. Then they all went back to headquarters.

‘On the roads, before daylight, our patrols picked up fifteen H troopers, most of them bunged up about the head or face where them rock-loaded snowballs had landed, and we turned everyone over to the guardhouse for overstaying pass limits. Sore! Oh, no! That’s a mistake! I think they had commenced to tumble, because our fellers kidded ’em a good deal.

‘When I was turning in that morning, an orderly comes to me and said the major wanted to see me at the officers’ mess. I was scared stiff for a minute, thinking the old man was wise, but I went over.

‘All the officers of the camp were there eating breakfast. Captain Pard was sitting with an H Troop officer on either side of him, and he looks at me

like he wanted to laugh.

‘“Private Hanks, did you learn anything about the occurrences of last night?” asks the major, looking stern.

‘I saw right away that none of them was on, excepting maybe Captain Pard, and they evidently had been turning it over among ’em and trying to get at the right of it.

‘“Sir!” says I, saluting, “as near as I can make out, a gang of H troopers got gay around the strikers’ camp, and the women snowballed them away!” ’

Fat Fallon

‘All soldiers go to heaven when they die,’ said Private Hanks as he sat on the steps of one of the barrack halls out at Fort Logan, carefully fishing what he called the ‘makings’ of a cigarette from his blouse pocket. ‘I bases that opinion on my own dope,’ he continued. ‘I got it figured out that the Lord wants people in heaven who appreciate their surroundings, and after the army a soldier is sure able to do that.’

‘There’s one man I’d like to meet up there. He’s down in Arizona now, commanding a penny-ante post on the desert, and I don’t suppose he’s got much show of getting to heaven from there; but if he does I’d like to be on the reception committee to meet him and say: “Come in, Fat; here’s a harp and some wings, and the gang’s all here waiting for you.”’

‘Flash Fat Fallon’s the man I mean—the whitest man I ever knew. I take off my hat to Fat, and so does everyone that ever soldiered with him. He’s a captain now, and I hope he’ll live to command the army.’

‘Fat commanded B Troop back in them days when the war business was doing well over in the islands. That was before we lead with our jack and caught Mr. Aguinaldo’s ace, and when everybody worked but Otis.’

‘We had one squadron of cavalry there to about ten thousand infantry and artillery, and that one squadron gave the finest imitation of one man being two different places at the same time you ever saw. We were out ahead of every flying column; we did a little rear-guard duty for provision trains; a little outpost duty; a little reconnoitring duty; a little barrack duty, and a little everything else that nobody else could do.’

‘Say, I went into B Troop weighing about one hundred and fifty pounds, and as soft as mush. I came out weighing one hundred and twenty-eight, but I was like cold steel all the way through. I was so tough my face hurt me. We had them little native horse for mounts; and you got so strong that you’d get off and carry your horse once in awhile, to give it a rest.’

‘Flash Fat was a lieutenant then, just from the Point, and nothing but a big, good-natured kid. He was the only officer we had with the troop, and he was all the same private out in the field. He slept with us and ate with us and joshed with us and belonged to the family generally. I’m telling you right when I say Fat used to go out and stand outpost in his turn just like the rest of us. The troop always worked separate from the rest of the squadron; in fact, the whole squadron wasn’t together for over a year.’

‘Flash got the name of Fat when he was a kid and used to be that way. We tied the “Flash” on him just to be doing. He was a kid always, and I’ll bet if you dropped in on him down there in Arizona right now you’d find him out playing ball with the gang, or up to some other stunt like that.

‘When he was in barracks in Manila, before the gugu blow-off, Fat was captain of our ball team and played catcher. We led the Eighth Army Corps league, too.

‘I’ve seen that bunch of huskies playing “run, sheep, run,” “duck on rock,” “old sow,” and things like that, with Fat right in with them, busier than a man with four hundred dollars and a thirst. If it was too rainy to be outdoors, like as not you could happen in our barracks and find Fat and a crowd playing miggles on the floor of the barracks. They used to act like a bunch of school kids at recess all the time, and at headquarters they called us Fallons Failings; but they had an all-fired healthy regard for us on the firing line.

‘You couldn’t tell Fat from a private out in the field. He never wore any mark to show any difference, and he was just as ornery-looking as the rest of us. He carried a carbine, and was always right where the guns were going off. Fat was one of the few officers I’ve seen who ever gave a private credit for doing a little thinking for himself.

‘In them days a troop or company commander didn’t always wait for orders from headquarters before he made a move. The troops was pretty much scattered, and the officers had to use their own nuts.

‘B Troop was a rough, tough outfit, recruited in a hurry in ’Frisco for the war, and Fat didn’t have no snap at first. He made his hit with us one day in barracks, when he called down a big stiff named Devaney for something. Devaney got mouthy when he thought Fat was out of hearing and was telling us what he was going to do to Fat when he got out of service. Fat heard him and steps up, quiet-like, and says:

‘“You needn’t wait until you get out, Devaney. If you think you can trim me, come back of the barracks and try it. If you do, I’ll see nothing’s done to you for it.”

‘Devaney couldn’t renig. A big bunch of us heard it, and he couldn’t side-step talk like that. He’d been posing as a fighter ever since he came into the troop, and he had most of us buffaloed. So he went back of the barracks with Fat, and for some five minutes there was the prettiest scrap I ever see. They was about the same size and heft, but there wasn’t nothing to it from the minute they put their hands up.

‘Devaney never laid a mitt on Fat. He never had a peek-in. Fat stalled him for awhile, just cutting his face to ribbons with jabs, until he got him good and bruised up, and then he put him out cold.

‘There wasn’t anyone else in the troop wanted any doings with Fat after that, and Devaney was one of his best friends.

‘It was a picnic out in the field with Fat, from one way of looking at it. A hike with us was one long josh. We kidded each other, and we kidded everybody that came along. We went into a fight like it was all a joke, but I’ve seen Fat sit down beside a guy that’d been bumped off and cry like it was his own brother.

‘One time in October we was in Manila, resting up for a few days after a hike down Imus way, when we gets orders to take part in an expedition up the lake—Laguna de Bay. They was going to clean out the town along the lake. B Troop was the only part of the cavalry to go along, but there was a lot of doughboys, so we figured we’d mostly guard wagon trains.

‘Fat comes up that night with his eyes bulging out.

‘“Say,” he says, “we’re not cavalry any more. We’re hoss marines. My orders is to load you on a casco, and we’re to be towed up to the lake by one of the army gunboats.”

‘And that’s what happened, all right. We left our horses in Manila and loaded up on one of the big, pot-bellied cascoes that’d hold a regiment. Then a crazy old side-wheel steamer that they’d fitted up with a field gun and called a gunboat hitched on to us. They was a bunch of jackies from the Olympia under a lieutenant on the side-wheeler.

‘Fat told us that we was to cruise around the lake until the troops attacked a town from the land side, and then we’d go after ’em from the water side—catch ’em coming and going, you know.

‘It wasn’t bad on the casco, because they was only about sixty of us and they was lots of room, but the idea of cavalymen being turned into hoss marines give us a pain in the neck.

‘We took it like we took everything else, though, as a big josh. Going up to the lake, we had a picnic playing sailors. We’d stand on top of the casco and hail all the boats that passed, like regular sailors, and I guess we made them jackies on the tow-boat pretty tired.

‘Fat knew what town we was to hit first, but his orders was to cruise off and on until we heard sounds of firing from the land side. Laguna de Bay is what you might call a young ocean, strayed away from its ma, and you can do a lot of cruising round without hitting land, if you want to.

‘We knew we’d have to monkey around that lake two or three days, anyhow, before the troops got up, so we made ourselves right to home on the casco.

‘Away down in the hold some one found a lot of old pumpkins, or squash, that the owners of the casco had left there, but they wasn’t no good to eat, so we didn’t disturb ’em.

‘The first night we was out on the lake, just trailing along behind the tow-boat and smoking and talking, Fat says:

‘“Fellers, when we get back to Manila again, you know what I’m going to do? I’m going to organize a football eleven and play these college dubs in the volunteers. I hear ’em around the English club telling how they used to play back in the States, and they’re figuring on organizing elevens when it gets cooler. We skinned ’em playing baseball, and we can skin ’em at football. I used to go some miles at that game when I was at the Point. Anybody know anything about it?”

‘Not many did. Some used to play it when they was kids at school, but that was so long ago most of them had forgotten it. But we was for football if Fat said so, and we talked over all kinds of plans before we went to sleep.

‘“Say, loot,” says big Peterson, “ain’t that the game where they has yells?”

‘“Sure,” says Fat. “I’ve been thinking over a lot of hot ones for us, too. We’ll have yells, and don’t you forget it. Here’s one I thought of the other day. It’s part Spanish, part Filipino, and part United States:

‘“Zooput! Zooput! Masama—
Cosa est, no soledad—
Razzle, dazzle, sis-boom-ah!
B Troop! B Troop! Rah! Rah! Rah!”

‘Fat had a voice like an army mule braying, and it wasn’t no manner of music that came from his throat when he turned it loose; but it sounded good to us. The jackies on the tow thought we was bugs for true. You couldn’t see land on either side, you see, so there wasn’t no danger of the enemy hearing us.

‘“Here’s a good one, loot,” says Corporal Benson, who was quite a poet, but all right at that:

‘“Doughboys, doughboys,
Haw! Haw! Haw!
Cavalry’ll eat ’em
Raw! Raw! Raw!”

‘“Fine,” says Fat. “Let’s all practise them two.”

‘And with him leading us, we sat on top of that casco just churning up the water with them yells. The jackies on the tow had the field gun trained on us in case we started to board ’em. We kept up until we was all hoarse, Fat and Benson making up new yells until we had about a dozen.

‘Next morning the blamedest storm came up, and in about ten minutes we was shy a tow. The rope busted, and the side-wheeler went chasing off by itself, leaving us limping along by our lonely.

‘They wasn’t no danger. That old casco wouldn’t founder and it couldn’t tip over, so we didn’t care a whoop. When I woke up I heard the fiercest sort of a racket on top of the casco, and I could make out Fat’s voice. He was hollering:

‘“Lower away the capting’s gig!”

‘“Port your helm, Mister Johnson.”

‘“Ladies first in the life-boats.”

‘“Toss me some light preserves.”

‘And a lot more like that. When I lamps on top to see what was going on, there was Fat with a half-dozen of the fellows having the time of their lives playing sailors. Fat was standing in the bow of the casco, which was reeling and tossing like it was drunk, and was yelling through his hands at the others, who didn’t seem to be doing much of anything except see how reckless they could get climbing over the boat.

‘One feller was playing look-out at the stern, and he’d holler:

‘“Breakers ahead, sir!”

‘“Where away?” Fat’d ask.

‘“Three sheets in the wind,” says the look-out.

‘“Luff, you lubber, luff!” bawls Fat, dancing about on the edge of the bow until I expect him to go heels over tea-kettle into the lake. Then he’d sing:

‘“A sailor’s life is the life for me!”’

‘Down in the hold some one was belling:

‘“Oh, Capting Fat of the Hoss Marines

Fed his soldiers on pork and beans!”

A stranger would’ve thought he was in the tack-house for sure.

‘The storm kept up ’most all day, and nary a sign of our tow did we see. Fat decided that we’d be pirates and prey upon the vessels that come across our path—only none come. We made Private Barnes come through with a white undershirt, the only one in the troop, which he wore because he said the blue shirts scratched him, and we h’isted it for a flag, after tearing out a square in the centre to represent black.

‘We had an election of officers, and Fat was made captain and me first mate. Fat called himself Bloody Biscuit, the Loose Character of the Laguna,

and I was Jiggering Jasper, the Pie-eyed Pirate of the Peskyhanna. We had Renegade Rube and Three-fingered Jack and Desperate Dave and Gory John; we had Stephen Stubbs, the Squint-eyed Scout, and all the other names you ever read in the yellow-backs. Fat had a christening of the boat. Someone had a bottle of pickles in his haversack, so we busted that over the bow—inside the boat, so the pickles wouldn't escape—and Fat says:

‘I christen thee the Bum Steer.’

‘We ran everything shipshape, too. We'd talk about “shivering our timbers” and “dashing our toplights,” and we'd jerk our forelocks and say, “Aye, aye,” to each other. If we'd only had some stray vessels to board, it'd been great.

‘We figured some on making Barnes walk the plank because he kicked about tearing his shirt, but we finally compromised on making him sit in the bow for two hours to represent the figurehead.

‘Along towards night the storm goes down, but still we couldn't see our tow. We drifted all day, and was in sight of land and going in nearer to it all the time. We had plenty of grub and tobacco to last us a few days, and so we wasn't afraid of being lost. When night comes on, we could see the lights of the houses on shore, and Fat decides that we needs some lights “aloft.”

‘“So's our tow can run into us,” he says.

‘Well, we didn't have nothing but candles, and they don't stay lit without covers. Fat has a great idea.

‘“Go down and get them pumpkins and we'll make jack-o'-lanterns,” he says.

‘We did. Everyone that had a candle gets a pumpkin and carves a scary-looking devil-head out of it. We h'isted them lanterns on sticks or hung them over the sides, and I'll bet no such looking craft was ever seen around that whole archipelago.

‘Fat was as pleased as a kid with a new toy. “That's real piratical now,” he says, and I don't doubt it was.

‘We was drifting along slowly about a mile from the shore. Little towns fringed that lake clear around, and we could sometimes hear voices. Every one of the towns was an insurgent stronghold, and some were supposed to be well fortified, which was why they was sending a strong force to take 'em.

‘After supper we was all on top of the casco, and Fat started us into practising them football yells again. No one thought about the noise. We gave them much better than the night before, and when sixty huskies are yelling all together out on the water on a still night it makes some disturbance, I'm telling you.

‘We was having all kinds of fun when someone noticed the lights going out along-shore and mentioned it to Fat.

‘“Holy smoke!” he says. “I forgot all about tipping our hand to the gugus. They’ll commence shooting in a minute.”

‘But they didn’t. It was quiet as the grave, and all we could hear in towards shore was the lapping of the water.

‘“Oh, they’re just going to bed,” says Fat, and we started in yelling again. We kept it up until midnight, with a few songs thrown in for good measure. Fat taught us to sing:

‘“Fifteen men on a dead man’s chest
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!”

and that made a big hit with everyone. We sung all the old songs we knew, and they listened mighty good to us, too.

‘Well, we finally got tired and went to sleep, leaving a couple of guards posted. Fat had all the jack-o’-lanterns thrown overboard, as the candles had burnt out, and there didn’t seem no chance of that tow picking us up that night.

‘At daybreak next morning we was grounded on shore, having drifted too close in. We was near a good-sized town, but they didn’t seem to be no signs of life in it. Fat had a couple of men slip over and take a look at the town, but they said they couldn’t see a soul. They didn’t go in very far, for fear of a trap.

‘We was eating breakfast when the old side-wheeler we’d lost hove in sight, looking pretty battered about the edges, but still afloat. She came in close to us, and the naval lieutenant in command of her bawls out:

‘“Where you fellers been?”

‘“Looking for you,” says Fat.

‘“Well, we been a-looking for you, and so’s a whole brigade of soldiers—looking for your bodies. We was just going to fire guns over the water to raise you,” says the naval man.

‘“Where’s the brigade?” asks Fat.

‘“Right outside that town, and the old man’s sore as a boil,” the lieutenant says. “You’d better go over there and report.”

‘“Any gugus in town?” asks Fat.

‘“Gugus? I should say not,” says the naval man. “That’s what the old man’s sore at. They ain’t a single enemy nowhere.”

‘“By the way,” this lieutenant bawls, as Fat gives us orders to unload, “you didn’t notice anything funny around the lake last night did you?”

‘“Nope,” says Fat; “what do you mean?”

‘“Oh, nothing,” says the navy; “only my sailors are a little superstitious, and they’ve got an idea they saw a new kind of Flying Dutchman last night.”

‘“Must have been smoking hop,” says Fat, and the side-wheeler backs off.

‘We falls in on the shore and marches through the town, which was deserted as if no one ever did live there. They was a lot of swell trenches where they ought to be some enemy, but they was no enemy to be seen.

‘About a mile outside of town they was a most inspiring sight. A whole brigade of soldiers was camped out, infantry and field guns and everything else—just laying there doing nothing.

‘They created some excitement when we marches up, and old General Hill comes a-tearing across the camp with a bunch of staff officers,

‘“Glad to see you, lieutenant,” he bawls at Fat.

‘“Feared you were lost in the storm. Had a terrible time, I guess?”

‘“Awful,” says Fat, not batting an eye. “Where’s the enemy, sir?”

‘The old man looked mad a minute.

‘“You tell us,” he says. “Here I bring a whole brigade to take towns that your troop alone could invest without any trouble. Not a single insurgent or anyone else in sight. Not any of them. All the natives, peaceful and otherwise, have taken to the hills. I guess they got scared of us, but it’s the most remarkable thing I ever heard of. Men, women, and children—all gone. I was sure I had reliable information that this country was alive with insurgents, but they’ve gone, bag and baggage, leaving only their trenches. We’ve beaten this whole side of the lake and cannot find anyone in the towns. We caught some women who didn’t seem able to keep up with the general scramble, but they’re half crazy with fear. All the interpreters can get out of them is some nonsense about a spirit ship that cruised along-shore last night with a lot of screaming devils on board. They say that’s what caused the people to hide out, but of course that’s silly.”

‘“Well, what do you think of that?” says Fat to us, after the general had gone.’

Two Men Named Collins

I know some things all right if I could only think of them. These guys say I'm crazy—crazy in the head like a sheep; but I'm as happy as if I had good sense.

I hear 'em talking in the barracks when they think I'm not around, and I know what they say. I'll make some of 'em hard to catch, one of these days. They're afraid of me because I killed a man once. Well, I evened that up, but they don't know it.

When I get out of the army I'm going back to driving hack in Denver like it was before I enlisted. It ain't my fault I'm here. It's the old booze. I gets drunk one day and went out to Petersburg. I met a guy there who belonged to the army, and before I knew what I was about I had on one of these uniforms. I only got six months more, and you bet they won't get me again.

Before I go I'll get good and even with some of these guys. Ever I catch any of them fresh officers down around Arapahoe Street after dark I'll fix 'em.

I've heard 'em say I'm the orneriest white man in the army. I don't know why. I'm big and strong, but that ain't nothing. I can take this Krag and bend it double like it was made of tin; I did it once when I got mad at a sentry because he wouldn't let me be.

I can lift any man in this company waist high with one hand. I can tear open a can of tomatoes with my teeth. But them things don't make a guy ornery, do they?

I used to get drunk whenever I could, and it made me mean. They threw it into me, too. Guardhouse all the time, and hard work. Then one day I heard a non-com tell another they was laying for me with a general guard to give me a bobtail and a dash at Alcatraz next time I come up; so I quit. I haven't touched a drop in over a year.

They's something funny about me, though, and I don't know what it is. Whenever I walk post in front of the officers' quarters them fresh guys and their women get out on the porch and watch me. They talk just like I couldn't hear, too. I heard a woman say one day when I was stepping off the post—it's an even hundred of my steps from one end to the other—that I reminded her of a caged lion.

'More like a big bull behind a pasture gate,' says an officer.

'Or a battery horse with the weaves,' another sticks in.

Stuff like that, you know. Can you blame me for being sore?

About that man I killed. I didn't mean to do it. His name was just the same as mine, Charles Collins, only they called him Pretty Collins. He *was* pretty, too. He had a load of education, and he got into the army accidentally, same as me.

I've seen lots of his kind. They're mostly to be found around Torts or at Brown in evening clothes after a show, and they've paid me good money for hauling 'em around in my little old hack.

I used to feel like jumping up and saying, 'Cab, sir,' every time he came past me on the parade ground. He was a private like anyone else, but I've seen sentries half bringing their guns down to salute when they went by. It was the way he wore his clothes maybe.

I've heard some of these guys say he spent a barrel of money going the route, and broke his old lady's heart. His old man give him the run, or something, so he breaks into the army. The officers pitied him a lot, and he used to be something of a pet with them. They didn't holler and growl at him same as they do at me and the rest. I heard the top say once that they offered to get him discharged, but he wouldn't stand for it. Anyway, they used to treat him mighty white.

I had it in for him strong.

I didn't like him from the start because they used to kid us both, changing our names around and calling him Crummy and me Pretty. I know I ain't pretty, and I knew how they meant it.

The top, when he called the roll, used to put it Collins No. 1, which was him, and Collins No. 2, which was me. They ain't anything unusual about that, I've seen companies where they'd have four or five Johnsons, or Browns, or Smiths.

I got so I hated the sight of Collins. I hated his pink and white face, and I hated him because he wasn't supposed to be no better than me, but was, somehow.

He didn't know how much I had it in for him, but he did know I didn't like him, because one day he starts to joshing me with the rest, and I took him to the mat. I had my fingers on his throat and his white flesh came out between them like I had grabbed a lump of dough.

They broke me loose, but I told him then that if ever he tried to hand me anything again I'd bust his crust. He looked whiter then ever, but he bowed polite and says:

'All right, Collins; I beg your pardon. It won't happen again.'

He offered me his hand, but I spit at it. He never spoke to me again. And I hated him more than ever for it.

They used to rawhide me something fierce in the company. I mean the non-coms did. I got all the extra duty there was doing. I knew I was getting the dirty end, but I couldn't holler. It wouldn't done me any good.

I've seen Pretty Collins come into quarters after taps just spifflicated, and nothing was ever done to him. Do you wonder I was sore on him?

Well, I just laid low and waited. I figured to get to him some day some way, so I laid low.

Finally we goes to Manila and gets sent out on the north line, where they was fighting about every day. That's when I gets next to Pretty Collins.

He was about my height and heft, so was in the same set of fours as me. When we fanned out in open order, that brought him next to me, on my right. The first scrap we went into I watched Pretty, and I was hep in a minute.

His face turned whiter than the time I grabbed him, and his hands trembled so he could hardly hold his gun. I sensed him, all right, all right. He was a coward.

When the bullets commenced to whistle I thought he was going to drop in his tracks. I'm no coward, whatever I am, and you bet I took a lot of satisfaction watching that guy suffer; because they do suffer—all the tortures of hell, I've heard.

I don't think anyone else noticed him, but Pretty knew that I knew—he looked at me once and saw me grinning.

I used to own a pit dog—Sunday Morning. He was beat by Mitchell's Money on the Overland race track one Christmas day. He was nearly all out when I picked him up for his last scratch, and he looked at me out of his eyes like he was trying to tell me pot to send him in again. Pretty reminded me of Sunday Morning when he looked at me across that rice paddy.

It wasn't much of a fight, but when it was over Pretty was as limp as a rag. The rest thought it was too much sun, but I knew—and Pretty knew I knew—and that was more satisfaction to me than if the whole brigade knew. He never said anything to me; just looked at me out of his eyes like Sunday Morning looked.

It wasn't long after that he was laying in front of a line of trenches which were across a river from us. The general commanding the brigade and his staff was with our outfit. The gugus was slapping a kind of blanket of bullets over our heads, and we was hugging the ground pretty close. The general sings out to our captain:

'Send a man down to Colonel Kelley on the left of the line and tell him to advance at once.'

You know what that meant?

A man had to chase across that open field for a quarter of a mile with the gugas pecking at him. It was a two-ace bet that he would get his before he got half way. Cap looks down the line and says:

‘Collins!’

He was looking right at Pretty, over my head, and he meant Pretty. Man! That fellow’s face was already white, but it seemed to go dead all at once. I’ll bet anything he couldn’t have moved if he’d tried, his muscles being sort o’ paralysed.

Cap kept looking at him—over my head. It wasn’t three seconds, but it seemed three hours. When I first heard Cap call I felt glad, because it meant all day with Pretty. Then when I looked at Pretty’s face I felt sorry, and there’s where I made a sucker of myself. I jumped up and started on a run down the line. Cap didn’t say anything. It looked like I had made a mistake and thought he meant me, but Cap knew better—and he knew I knew better—and Pretty knew better.

They shot at me considerable and winged me a little once, but I delivered the order and got back in time to go into the charge with my outfit.

I could’ve gone into the hospital if I’d wanted to, but I wasn’t hurt very bad. That night I was sleeping near Cap and the two lieutenants, and I heard Cap say:

‘The old man is going to recommend Crummy Collins for a stiffycate of merit. He wanted to make him a lieutenant, but I showed him the’—something—‘of such a course.

‘I meant Pretty Collins all the time, because I knew it was a chance to take him out of the ranks. He could have won his shoulder straps right there, but—’

‘Do you think he’s—’ something I didn’t get again, one of the loots asked.

‘I fear he is,’ says Cap, and I went to sleep.

Well, we put in nearly two years on the islands, but Pretty got transferred to special duty, and I didn’t see no more of him until we sailed for home. He looked kind of bad in the face, like he’d been going too strong, but he was just as popular as ever in the company. No one knew what Cap and me knew, and I didn’t tell, but Pretty kept away from me.

By this time the gang had commenced to treat me a little better, because I’d showed ’em I was a good game guy, but I didn’t have no bunkies.

I’d almost forgotten Pretty while he was away, but when he comes back again he made me just as sore as ever at him—just by being around, you know.

He didn’t get so much petting from the officers as he used to, but he was still the whole thing with the bucks.

We went to Fort D. A. Russell, just out of Cheyenne, from 'Frisco, and I gets my stiffycate of merit there. It's a big sheet of paper, something like an officer's commission, all engraved, with my name and outfit and telling what I'd done when I carried that order across the firing line. Best of all, it gives me a couple of bucks extra pay every month. I stuck it away in my chest and didn't show it to any of the guys, although they knew I got it. You're supposed to send them things home to the people, so they can frame 'em and hang 'em up in the parlour, but I didn't have no people or parlour either.

We hadn't been in Russell more'n a month when Pretty shows up one morning missing. They calls his name for ten mornings at roll-call, and then they posts him as a deserter. It like to broke these guys that'd been so friendly to him all up, and you bet I was glad.

They caught him in a couple of weeks up in Rock Springs on a drunk, and they brings him back to Russell and slaps him in the general prison. He's good for about eighteen months at the lowest, because the officers that had been so friendly to him shook him right away.

I was doing guard duty one day over a bunch of prisoners cleaning up quarters, and Pretty was one of 'em. I wasn't paying much attention to any but him, watching him moving around in that brown suit with the big white P on his back, when all of a sudden he makes a break.

He must a-gone nutty. He didn't have a chance in the world to get away. They told me he said before he cashed in that he got wild having my eyes follow him around, but that's rot. All I did, so help me, was just watch him, and I leave it to any one if that should make him go bugs.

I hollered at him to halt three times. Then I aimed at him, meaning to hit him in the leg. His head kept bobbing in front of my sights, and he was getting further away all the time, so I had to let go. He dropped and laid there kicking around.

The whole barracks come running up, and I don't remember much else, except that they relieved me and sent me to quarters.

None of the fellows would talk to me or tell me what was doing, but I heard someone say he was dead. I stayed in quarters all the next day, and no one come near me. If I'd walk up to some of the fellows they'd get up and move off, like they was afraid of me. The Cap come in towards evening and talked kind to me. He said I'd only done my duty, but that it would be best for me to be transferred, and they was going to send me to Plattsburg to join another regiment. That was all right with me. He told me to get my junk together and get ready to go right away.

It didn't take me no time to pack. While I was throwing my stuff into my chest I came across that stiffycate of merit and shoved it in the inside pocket

of my blouse.

I heard some of the fellows talking that night, and they spoke about 'him', so I knew they meant Pretty.

'His father and mother are coming in a special train from the East,' one of them said. The top and four non-coms are going to take him to Denver and turn him over to them.'

No one even looked at me all this time.

Cap give me my transfer papers and transportation that night, and next morning I went to Cheyenne and got a train for Denver. Only the Cap said good-bye to me.

At Denver I missed the first I was to take east, and hung around the depot all day. Along towards evening a train of just a baggage car and a Pullman pulled in while I was looking through the fence outside the depot. The Pullman blinds were down, and it looked so mournful and still that I had a hunch right away that it was Pretty's folks. I was right, too. A grey-haired man, who moves around brisk and talks rough to the porters, gets off and helps a little old lady, all dressed in black, to the platform. You couldn't see much of her face on account of a heavy veil, but you could tell by her eyes that she had been crying a lot.

They hadn't more'n got on the platform when the regular Cheyenne train pulls in and the top sergeant and a squad of non-coms from my old company hops off. The old man leads the little old lady up to them, and they shook hands all around and stood talking awhile.

Then they went to the baggage car, and the squad hauls out a long wooden box with a flag across it. Somehow it made me sort o' sick to look at it, because I knew Pretty was inside.

The non-coms put the box on a truck and pushes it over to the special train and shoves the box in the Pullman—not in the baggage car.

The old lady follows it in, and the man stood at the end of the Pullman talking to the top. I couldn't stand it no longer. I wanted to hear what they said, so I sneaks through the gate and around behind a train on the track next to the Pullman.

The old man was saying:

'I'm mighty glad the boy died like a gentleman, anyway. He was always a little wild, but I never believed he was a coward. I was rather pleased when he joined the army, because I felt it would make a man of him.'

'Yes, sir,' the top says, 'he was a man all right. He gave that prisoner a hard fight before he went under, and would have won out if the prisoner hadn't been stronger.'

I see the drift all right. They was making this old man believe Pretty had been killed in the performance of his duty; see? I listens to a little more, and

I makes out that the top has told him Pretty was guarding prisoners, when one of 'em turns on him and shoots him with his own gun. He was giving Pretty a great send-off.

Maybe you think I wasn't dead sore!

What right had they to tell all them lies? If it'd been me in the box they'd probably have said I was the worst blackguard in the army and got all that was coming to me.

The top and the other non-coms shake hands all around with the old man again, and then they hikes off. The old man goes into the Pullman, and the engine crew get ready to pull out. I make up my mind in about two seconds, Mex., to go in there and tell them folks all about Pretty and why I had to kill him. I see my chance to get good and even with him more than ever.

I climbed on the rear platform and opens the door. The box was in the aisle, and the old lady was setting in a seat beside it. The old man was with her, holding her hands, and she was crying, soft and easy like. He isn't crying, but he looks old and tired.

They both raise their heads when I come in and looked at me like they was waiting for me to say something.

'I soldiered with him,' I says, pointing to the box.

The old lady looked at me out of Pretty's eyes, just as Pretty looked at me that day across the rice paddy. She almost smiled.

'He was all I had,' she said. 'He was his mother's boy.'

The old man didn't say anything—just looked me over.

I don't know what got the matter with me. I couldn't say a thing—just stand there looking at them two like a sad-eyed dub. The words I wanted to tell 'em wouldn't come.

'He was a good soldier?' the old man finally asks.

It wasn't what I meant to say, but I just had to tell him yes.

'He was all we had,' the old man said. 'It is a hard blow, but it is softened by knowing that he served his country well and died in the line of duty.'

I tried to shake myself together and tell them that their boy had been a coward and a deserter, and if he'd lived would have put in a year or so in prison, with a yellow bobtail discharge at the end, but I couldn't do it—that's all.

The train commenced to back up, getting ready to start out.

'Do you know of any of his companions who have any reminder of my darling boy?' the old lady asked. 'They didn't bring anything—but his body.'

I felt something crackle in my inside breast-pocket. Ain't I a sucker, though? I stuck my hand in and hauls out that stiffcate of merit.

‘Here,’ I says, handing it to her. ‘They sent this to you by me.’

And then I hikes out of that car, for fear I might get dingey and bust out crying myself.

I know some things, all right, all right.

As Between Friends

Abimilech Fetcher sat upon the front stoop of the Parkins County courthouse, smoking a fretful pipe and paying no heed to the snow-lined breezes that searched his meagre apparel. He gazed with eyes of gloom upon the frame houses and store buildings, standing like serrated teeth; his gaze travelled moodily on to the vast expanse of flat country which aproned the small but enthusiastic town of Advance, and against the far horizon he could see the windmills, flogged by a relentless eastern Colorado wind, waving wildly. Abimilech Fetcher, Sheriff of the County of Parkins aforesaid, was a study of Gloom, done in heavy corpulent lines.

A tall, thin ragged young man, with a self-confident air and a lean, alert face, suddenly sketched himself into the picture and stood looking at Abimilech Fetcher, who returned the gaze morosely.

‘Well,’ said the young man finally, ‘I may be wrong, but if I was guessin’ and had just one guess, it’d be that there sits “Chicago Fat,” lookin’ as sad and forlorn as a millionaire in gaol.’

The dull eye of Abimilech Fetcher slowly brightened.

‘It’s me,’ he said. ‘And you might be “Kid” Switch.’

He arose and extended a cheerless fat hand. ‘Set down, Kid, set down, and tell me how come you to git shoved offen the main line.’

‘You tell me what *you’re* doin’ here,’ said Kid Switch. ‘I heard you’d quit hoboin’ some years back and had settled down somewheres, but this can’t be the where?’

‘Yes,’ replied Abimilech drearily, ‘this is it. I’m the Sheriff. Also I’m a married man, with two children and a mortgage on my house, and I’m starvin’ to death right now, Kid.’

Kid Switch laughed uproariously.

‘That’s it—laugh!’ said Abimilech bitterly. ‘I’ve gotta notion to vag you. You’re the first feller that even looks like a possible prisoner I’ve seen in a year. Whatta you doin’ here, anyway, Kid?’

‘On my way to San Francisco,’ said Switch. ‘I didn’t know this was a branch line until I got here. I snared a freight train at the junction, havin’ been chased offen a varnished rattler, and I didn’t know I wasn’t pursuin’ the main haulage-way until I peeked out and saw this wide place in the road. And to think I’ve scairt you up—Chicago Fat—who usta be one of the grandest hoboos in the world!’

‘It’s me, Kid,’ said Abimilech. ‘And I thank you for them words. Sometimes I wisht I’d stuck to the road, but I got remorse and fat and et cetera and here I be, starvin’ to death. I was a good hobo—I was a good

hobo when you was just a gay cat, and I might be a good one yet, barrin' the fat.'

'Tell me what's the trouble,' urged Switch, as he contemplated the stout figure and suppressed further hilarity.

'It's the cussed fee system,' said Abimilech. 'The Sheriff has to make his livin' offen fees. If he's on the main line, like ole Tobias over here in the next county, he can arrest enough of you hoboes in the winter time to make money. We git paid a dollar a day for feedin' prisoners and we kin feed 'em for ten cents a day, if we use judgment—that's ninety cents profit. If you've got enough prisoners you kin git fat. If you ain't got no prisoners, you starve, or go to work. I been Sheriff two years, come next month, and I ain't seen enough mallyfactors to keep me in kerosene and other delicacies.'

'If you had, say twelve prisoners for, say, ten days each, would that help you any?' asked Kid Switch.

'Help?' said Abimilech. 'Help? Say, Kid, it'd set me in swell! I'd perk up and take a reg'lar interest in life. But what's the use o' talkin'? How kin I git twelve prisoners? How kin I git any prisoners, when folks don't violate the law, or if they do they're friends o' yourn and you dassen't stick 'em?'

'I met "Cleveland" George yesterday and he tells me a bunch of the fellers are layin' out the cold spell with your neighbour, Tobias,' said Switch.

'He's a mean guy, is Tobias,' interrupted Abimilech. 'Bein' prosperous, he's natchally mean.'

'Well, he's all right to the tourists,' said Kid Switch. 'And a dozen or more of them are hangin' up with him for a coupla weeks. They're nearly all ole time pals o' yourn and mine and'd be glad to help you out if it was put to 'em right. We'll call my end just half, if that's satisfactory to you.'

'Talk sense, Kid,' urged the bewildered Abimilech. 'I don't git you. How'm I goin' to git them fellers? Tobias ain't goin' to lend me any. He's too blame stingy.'

'Listen,' said the Kid mysteriously. 'But let's find some place where it ain't so crimpy around the edges.'

Sheriff John Tobias, of Queever County, had at least a nodding acquaintance with all the gentry of the break-beams who travelled from East to West a few years ago. The county seat of Queever County is a division point on a trans-continental railroad and during the year hundreds of nomadic individuals pass that way.

The Queever County gaol is a rickety, but fairly comfortable structure and during bad weather it was the custom for the human birds of passage to lodge with Sheriff John Tobias and thus insure him, in return for good food and treatment, a prosperous business under the fee system.

He had a sort of gentleman's agreement with, the veterans of the rail that they might plead guilty to a charge of vagrancy before the only justice of the peace in the town and ten days was the limit of their sentences. Novices, who were sensitive in the matter of being called vagrants, but who desired shelter over a stretch of untravellable weather, could plead to a charge of carrying concealed weapons—a razor being a weapon in those parts, and Sheriff John Tobias was obliging to the extent of furnishing the razor.

No one really had to remain in the Queever County gaol; it was of such a frail texture that even a sparrow might have escaped without great difficulty. Half a dozen tunnels beneath the floor, leading to sunshine and liberty, told of the passing, in days gone by, of many an itinerant from the hands of less obliging officers than Sheriff John Tobias. In his regime, if a prisoner happened to be in a hurry, Tobias would permit him to go before the expiration of his term, via the front door, and would speed him on his way with words of cheer.

Through the years of his long tenure of office this arrangement endured, an indictment against the fee system, perhaps, but a source of comfort to those who travelled the Western trails in that day. The town of Queever understood the situation, but when the gaol was filled, plenty of supplies had to be purchased of the local merchants, for Tobias was content with small profits and treated his patrons liberally; the local merchants consequently favoured the full county gaol, particularly as the burden of taxation fell upon the balance of the county, which probably, did not fully understand.

Sheriff John Tobias was viewing the snowstorm from the window of the gaol office with deep satisfaction; snow meant that his gaol population would rest contented against the coming of warmer weather. The darkened skies, pinned down all around the horizon, foretold a long continued storm.

The office bell jangled shrilly and Sheriff Tobias opened the door to look upon the damp figure of Kid Switch, who had found a ten-mile tramp across

the snow a bit more of a hardship than he had figured on. Only freight trains ran to Advance and they were few and far between.

‘Well! Well!’ said Sheriff Tobias, heartily. ‘Come right in, Switch! I haven’t seen you in over a year. Come in, boy, you’ll find a lot of friends present, if you’re plannin’ to stay, and they’ll be mighty glad to see you.’

‘I hope so,’ said the Kid. ‘Stake me to some dry clothes, Sheriff; I’m as wet as a fish. I’m goin’ to hang up with you until it clears a little.’

‘Yes, sir!’ said the Sheriff, with the unction of a hotel clerk greeting a wealthy guest and leading the way to a big steel door, from behind which came a subdued murmur of voices. ‘You’ll find “Red,” and Gordon, and Kline, and Kilgallon, and the “Philadelphia Shine” and a lot of friends inside, Kid. Cleveland George left here yesterday. It’s a good Winter for me, son.’

Kid Switch was familiar with the personnel of Tobias’ guests, having been enlightened by Cleveland George. He was prepared for the roar of greeting which arose when he stepped into the ‘bull-pen’ of the none too commodious gaol. After having changed his wet clothing for capacious garments loaned by the Sheriff, Switch took a careful inventory of those present and found that, besides nine whom he knew personally, there were three subdued-looking individuals. He diagnosed them as ‘natives.’

‘They’re holdovers to the next term of the district court,’ explained Kilgallon contemptuously. ‘Plain yaps charged with stealin’ cattle or somethin’. They ain’t even got sense enough to git out o’ this pokey and we use ’em to do the cleanin’ up. I thought you was on your way to the Coast, Kid?’

‘I was,’ replied Switch. ‘But I’ve stopped over to do a friend a turn. Bring all the fellers except them rubes around me and I’ll let you in on the play.’

‘You all know the old Chicago Fat?’ was his introductory remark as he squatted upon the floor and nine choice gentlemen who had carved their initials on every water-tank between the coasts gathered about him. Most of them nodded, Kilgallon with emphasis.

‘Ain’t he the guy that got up the hoboes’ convention?’ he demanded. ‘Well, he done me dirt—’

‘Never mind!’ interrupted the Kid. ‘That’s past and gone. He’s in hard lines now.’

With vivid eloquence he painted a verbal picture of Abimilech Fetcher, once Chicago Fat, starving at his own hearth-side, as it were; he etched in pathetic touches here and there which caused the inky face of Philadelphia Shine to wrinkle lugubriously.

‘Fat was a good guy,’ said Kid Switch. ‘He was always helpin’ someone else and now he’s in distress it seems to me we oughta remember them ole ties—ties of brotherhood and such, I mean—and go over there and give him a play for ten days so he can make his fees offen us. We can step out through one of the ole tunnels to-night and hike over there in no time.’

‘No, sah!’ dissented the Shine. ‘Ah ain’t makin’ no premedjuted changes. Dis hive suits me an’ Ah ain’ movin’ till mah rent comes due!’

‘Shut up!’ said Kid Switch savagely. ‘You’ll go if the rest do.’

‘It ain’t a bad idea,’ said Kline, a pallid young man who was known to the police between the two coasts as a hotel sneak-thief, but who was, withal, romantic-looking and interesting. ‘We’ve been pretty good to ole Tobias. And after we stay at Fat’s for a week or so, if the weather is still bad, we can come back here and finish out with Tobe.’

Kilgallon, Jack Gordon, the ‘Cincinnati Skin,’ ‘Red,’ Henry Hennessey, ‘One-Thumb’ Cafferty, George, ‘the Greek’ and Heine Barr nodded grave approval.

‘We’d better take them felons, too,’ said Gordon. ‘They’ll help swell the count.’

‘Them’s vallyble felons and Tobias thinks as much of them as he does of his right arm,’ demurred Hennessey. ‘Supposin’ they’d beat it?’

‘They’ve got a fat chance!’ said Kid Switch. ‘We’ll take ’em right along and return ’em to Tobe when we git through. Set ’em to work cleanin’ out one of them tunnels now.’

Abimilech Fetcher doubted that Kid Switch would be able to carry out this plan successfully; long continued adversity had made Abimilech pessimistic, but he waited, nevertheless, in the rarely occupied bastille of Parkins County and amused himself playing solitaire as the night wore on. His teeth chattered as occasional wisps of wind sneaked through the chinks in the building and he shook his head dolefully as he looked about the bare quarters the thrifty commonwealth had designed for criminal habitation.

As compared to the county gaol of Queever County, the Parkins place of incarceration was a shanty against a country villa. Queever County had at least provided heat and electric lights. Parkins County simply purchased a tier of steel cells, set them down upon the ground and walled them in with loosely laid brick. Lanterns were the source of whatever illumination was required.

‘I never seen a worse one myself,’ mused Abimilech. ‘And I’ve seen some bad ones. I never thought it looked so fierce before until it comes to offerin’ it to my friends.’

A shout aroused him from his shivering reverie and he opened the door to admit a terrific gust of wind and an assemblage of chilled and profane men.

‘We’re here,’ said Kid Switch, shaking a blanket of snow from his shoulders. ‘Maybe you think it ain’t some job herdin’ three felons through ten miles of snow, specially when they know the country and have a yen to go home. And that coon there—’ He turned a baleful eye upon Philadelphia Shine who snuffled damply in a corner.

‘He bus’ me in the nose,’ whined the Shine dolorously.

Abimilech Fetcher was engaged in shaking hands with friends of another day. A pang of remorse bit at his vitals as he found himself surrounded by faces he had been more than glad to see in times gone by, and Kilgallon almost forgot the discomfort of that long march over the snow as he held a passage in rough repartee with Abimilech.

‘I suttinly appreciates your kindness, fellers,’ said the Sheriff. ‘I suttinly do. Now if you’ll step into them cells two in each, I’ll bed you down for the night.’

‘Ah doan lak dis place,’ sniffled the Shine. ‘Ah reckon Ah’ll go back to Mista Tobe’s.’

‘Second the motion!’ said One-Thumb Cafferty, who had been investigating the tiny cells.

At that moment the front door again opened and admitted two stalwart individuals whose coats bulged ominously and who wore gleaming stars upon their bosoms. Abimilech was relieved. He had become slightly alarmed over the tardiness of these efficient farmhands whom he had impressed as deputies that afternoon and whom he had instructed to hasten to the gaol upon the arrival of any strangers. His manner changed. He looked as stern as it is possible for a fat man to look.

‘Silence!’ he roared. ‘Gaol rules prohibit talkin’. Officers, put ’em in their cells!’ he added, turning to the newcomers.

Kid Switch looked at Abimilech, startled.

‘You ain’t goin’ to double-cross me?’ he whispered.

‘Ah-h-h,’ said Abimilech. ‘Of course not.’

He personally escorted Switch into a small cell near the door and locked him up by himself.

‘You’re a swell actor, ‘bo,’ he whispered. ‘They ain’t on.’

As the locks clicked behind the prisoners, Gordon shouted, ‘Turn on some heat, will you?’

‘Heat!’ bellowed Abimilech. ‘They ain’t no heat! Lessee, you’re Gordon, ain’t you? I know a man what looks like you who would interest some people in Oskaloosa.’

Gordon subsided immediately.

‘Hey, you!’ bawled Red Hennessey bitterly. ‘What about that church door welcome mat that got lost in Sacramento when you was there last?’

Abimilech went close to the door of the cell and hissed, ‘Statoot of limentations, Red: statoot of limentations. But maybe I kin dig up some place where the statoot ain’t run gain Henry Hennessey.’

Whereupon Red became strangely silent.

‘If these guys git to chewin’ the rag with you, just git some pails o’ cold water and throw it in on them,’ instructed Abimilech to his deputies, as he took his departure.

Then the night wore on in cold silence, broken only by the intermittent comment of the guards upon the weather and the prospective crops. The prisoners sat hunched up in their chilly cells whispering schemes of vengeance not only upon Abimilech Fetcher, but upon that incarnation of misguided philanthropy, Kid Switch, who slept the sleep of the just and innocent beneath a large country quilt which Abimilech had thoughtfully left in his cell.

Morning brought a succession of incidents, including some underdone beans and an apology for coffee. Abimilech also arrived accompanied by an aged bewhiskered individual who wore an air of vast solemnity and carried an enormous book.

Abimilech called him 'Judge.' A table was placed in the narrow corridor before the cells and Abimilech seated the tottering Judge thereat with much ceremony. Then the Judge opened his book, scanned the pages through gigantic horn spectacles and read:

'John Doe, *alias* George Kilgallon.'

'That's this wicked-lookin' murderer here,' said Abimilech, indicating the peaceful Kilgallon. 'Stand up, you Doe, *alias* Kilgallon! This is your trial!'

'Who'd I resist and who'd I assault?' roared Kilgallon.

The Judge was evidently deaf, as Abimilech bawled in his ear:

'He says he's guilty and that you're a —— ole fool.'

'Hey!' howled Kilgallon, in wild remonstrance.

'Six months!' piped the Judge, making an entry in his book.

'Richard Roe, *alias* the Philadelphia Shine,' he read next. 'Assault with a deadly weapon and attempt to commit arson.'

'Ah wants a mouthpiece! Ah wants a lie-er!' yelled the Shine in a great dismay.

'He says he's guilty,' bellowed Abimilech into the whiskers of the Court.

'Ninety days,' said the Judge.

Hennessey got three months on a charge of stealing chickens; One-Thumb Cafferty got sixty days on a charge of disturbance; the three felons were given twenty days each for vagrancy and all the others received varying sentences on various charges without having the opportunity of saying a word. Some turmoil arose, as they endeavoured to voice their protests, but the deputies secured buckets of water and quelled the incipient disturbance by a dumb show of throwing it over the already half-frozen prisoners.

'Kid Switch,' said the Judge finally. 'You are charged with carrying concealed weapons!'

'Not guilty!' shouted the Kid from the depths of his cell, where he was still buried beneath the quilt.

'This man's a dangerous character,' yelled Abimilech. 'You'd better get rid of him.'

'Two hours to leave town,' squeaked the old man and then the procession filed out, while the prisoners babbled wildly. Abimilech stopped long enough to unlock Kid Switch's cell.

'You don't want to let dark ketch you here,' he warned.

'You don't want to let me ketch you anywhere!' howled Gordon from his cell, regardless of the deputies, and there was a hoarse growling from the other prisoners.

Outside the gaol door, Abimilech handed Kid Switch a package of yellow bills.

‘That represents every cent I could borrow,’ he said. ‘It means a second mortgage on my house and everything else. I didn’t like to hand it to the gang so hard, but I can’t let this good thing get away from me. It’ll never happen again. I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes when them parties gits out.’

‘Don’t worry,’ said the Kid lightly. ‘I can square it with them.’

‘Square it!’ said Abimilech. ‘What a chance! You better beat it out o’ town now, before some of the citizens take a shot at you on general principles. Square it! What a nerve!’

‘Good-bye,’ said Kid Switch blithely. ‘You won’t hear from me for quite a while.’

And then he set off, kicking the snow before him in little flurries and Sheriff Abimilech Fetcher looked at the gaol with a complacent grin.

‘Here’s where I either git rich or bankrupt the county,’ he said. ‘I may have give it to ’em a little strong, but a feller has got to snatch his opportunities nowadays. I suppose I will have to give ’em *some* heat.’

When Sheriff John Tobias found his gaol depopulated he did not immediately notify the citizens. He sat down to think the matter over. By creating tumult, the people might become cognizant of a laxity of vigilance around the bastille which would hardly redound to the credit of the Sheriff. Besides, Tobias felt that the strange exodus was no common gaol break.

Fresh snow had fallen during the night and the ground gave no clue. No train had passed through since the preceding day, owing to blockades, and it was quite cold. Tobias was satisfied that his guests would not have undertaken travel in such weather simply because of a sudden desire for freedom.

‘Them boys wouldn’t a-took my felons,’ he argued. ‘They wouldn’t let no ornery cattle thieves go with them.’

So the old Sheriff sat quiet and pondered the matter throughout the day. The light of information broke upon him along in the evening and the people were aroused by the clamour of a huge bell in the tower of the court-house, used to apprise the public of trouble and festivity. The citizens hurried to the court-house, carrying lanterns, guns and pitchforks, to find Sheriff John Tobias waiting on the steps of the building.

As soon as he could secure order, the Sheriff made public an address.

‘My friends,’ he said, ‘they’s been a gaol burglary. My prisoners, including felons what stole cattle on the Piedras, was stole out of my gaol by Abimilech Fetcher, Sheriff of Parkins County, who now holds them without warrant o’ law in his gaol. He larcenied my prisoners, bag and baggage, including them felons, well knowin’ the same to be then and there my pussonel property and the goods and chattels o’ Queever County. He figgers to collect fees offen his illgotten gains from the County o’ Parkins, which never has no prisoners, because no prisoner would ever become such thereabouts if he had any sense. Shell this town stand for such injustice, my friends? I don’t think it shell. Shell it allow my gaol to be burglarized and my prisoners stolen away to fatten the fee account o’ Abimilech Fetcher? I don’t think it shell.’

The crowd yelled ‘No, no!’

‘Then, my friends,’ said Sheriff John Tobias, ‘I want volunteers to go with me and rescue them poor prisoners from the clutches of the rascalion Fetcher.’

Forty or fifty men stepped forward with alacrity.

‘Come on!’ shouted Tobias.

In twenty minutes a weird procession of horse-men, light buggies and footmen was streaming across the snow towards Advance, clamouring for the blood of Abimilech Fetcher.

Arriving at the county seat of Parkins County and finding the town asleep, the citizens of Queever lost no time in assailing the gaol. The prisoners, who had put in a wretched day, were vastly alarmed, fearing that they were to be the victims of mob violence, but when they saw Sheriff Tobias leading a charge through the shattered door, they set up a cheer of welcome. Abimilech's deputies disappeared with amazing rapidity.

A general reunion was in progress inside and outside the gaol, the three felons being the only persons present not transported with joy at the turn of events, when Abimilech Fetcher, in a state of great dishevelment, rushed upon the scene.

'Hey! Whatta you doin' with my prisoners?' he roared at Sheriff Tobias. 'It's agin the law!'

'Your prisoners! I like your nerve!' said Tobias. 'Whose prisoners be you gents?' he asked of the assembled gaolbirds.

'Yours!' they cried in chorus.

'Come on, then, let's go home,' said Tobias.

The prisoners assembled with alacrity, Abimilech viewed the proceedings with a feeling of dismay. Then a thought occurred to him.

'Lemme ask you one thing, Tobias,' he said. 'How'd you find out where them people was?'

'Why,' said Tobias, 'Kid Switch, he told me. I give him fifty dollars for the information. He wouldn't let it out until I paid him the money, either. What's the matter, 'Bimilech!'

The Informal Execution of Soupbone Pew

What is it the Good Book says? I read it last night—it said:
That he who sheddeth another man's blood by man shall his blood be shed!
That's as fair as a man could ask it, who lives by the gun and knife—
But the Law don't give him an even break when it's taking away his life.
Ho, the Law's unfair when it uses a chair, and a jolt from an unseen Death;
Or it makes him flop to a six-foot drop and a rope shuts off his breath;
If he's got to die let him die by the Book, with a Death that he can see,
By a gun or knife, as he went through life, and both legs kicking free!

—*Songs of the 'Shut-Ins'*

The condemned man in the cell next to us laughed incessantly. He had been sentenced that morning, and they told us he had started laughing as soon as the words, 'May the Lord have mercy on your soul,' were pronounced. He was to be taken to the penitentiary next day to await execution.

Chicago Red had manifested a lively interest in the case. The man had killed a railroad brakeman, so one of the guards told us; had killed him coldly, and without provocation. The trial had commenced since our arrival at the county gaol and had lasted three days, during which time Red talked of little else.

From the barred windows of the gaol corridor, when we were exercising, we could see the dingy old criminal court across the yard and Red watched the grim procession to and from the gaol each day. He speculated on the progress of the trial; he knew when the case went to the jury, and when he saw the twelve men, headed by the two old bailiffs returning after lunch the third day, he announced:

'They've got the verdict, and it's first degree murder. They ain't talking and not a one has ever grinned.'

Then when the unfortunate was brought back, laughing that dismal laugh, Red said:

'He's nutty. He was nutty to go. It ain't exactly right to swing that guy.'

Red and I were held as suspects in connection with an affair which had been committed a full forty-eight hours before we landed in town. We had no particular fear of being implicated in the matter, and the others had no idea that we had anything to do with it, but they were holding us as evidence

to the public that they were working on the case. We had been ‘vagged’ for ten days each.

It was no new experience for us in any respect—not even the condemned man, for we had frequently been under the same roof with men sentenced to die. The only unusual feature was Red’s interest in the laughing man.

‘Red,’ I asked, as we sat playing cards, ‘did you ever kill a man?’

He dropped a card calmly, taking the trick, and as he contemplated his hand, considering his next lead, he answered:

‘For why do you ask me that?’

‘Oh, I don’t know; I just wondered,’ I said. ‘You’ve seen and done so many things that I thought you might accidentally have met with something of the sort.’

‘It isn’t exactly a polite question,’ he replied. ‘I’ve seen some murders. I’ve seen quite a few, in fact. I’ve seen some pulled off in a chief’s private office, when they was sweating some poor stiff, and I’ve seen some, other places.’

‘Did you ever kill a man?’ I insisted.

He studied my lead carefully.

‘I never did,’ he finally answered. ‘That is to say, I never bumped no guy off personal. I never had nothing to do with no job from which come ghosts to wake me up at night and bawl me out. They say a guy that kills a man never closes his eyes again, even when he really sleeps. I go to the hay, and my eyes are shut tight, so I know I ain’t to be held now or hereafter for nothing like that.’

We finished the game in silence, and Red seemed very thoughtful. He laid the cards aside, rolled a cigarette, and said:

‘Listen! I never killed no guy personal, like I say; I mean for nothing he done to me. I’ve been a gun and crook for many years, like you know, but I’m always mighty careful about hurting anyone permanent. I’m careful about them pete jobs, so’s not to blow up no harmless persons, and I always tell my outside men that, when they have to do shooting, not to try to hit anyone. If they did, accidental, that ain’t my fault. One reason I took to inside work was to keep from having to kill anyone. I’ve been so close to being taken that I could hear the gates of the Big House slam, and one little shot would have saved me a lot of trouble, but I always did my best to keep from letting that shot go. I never wanted to kill no man. I’ve been in jams where guys were after me good and strong, and I always tried to get by without no killings.

‘I said I never killed a guy. I helped once, but it wasn’t murder. It’s never worried me a —— bit since, and I sleep good.’

He walked to the window and peered out into the yard where a bunch of sparrows were fluttering about. Finally he turned and said:

‘I hadn’t thought of that for quite a while, and I never do until I see some poor stiff that’s been tagged to go away. Some of them make me nervous—especially this tee-hee guy next to us. I’ll tell you about Soupbone Pew—some day you can write it, if you want to.’

Soupbone Pew was a rat who trained years ago with Billy Coulon, the Honey Grove Kid, and a bunch of other old-timers that you’ve never seen. It was before my time, too, but I’ve heard them talk about him. He was in the Sioux City bank tear-off, when they all got grabbed and were sent to the Big House for fifteen years each. In them days Soupbone was a pretty good guy. He had nerve, and was smart, and stood well with everybody, but a little stretch in the big stir got to him. He broke bad. Honey Grove laid a plan for a big spring—a get-away—while they were up yonder. It looked like it would go through, too, but just as they were about ready, Soupbone got cold feet and gave up his insides.

For that he got a pardon, and quit the road right off. He became a railroad brakeman, and showed up as a shack running between Dodge City and La Junta. And he became the orneriest white man that God ever let live, too.

To hoboes and guns he was like a reformed soak towards a drunk. He treated them something fierce. He was a big, powerful stiff, who could kill a man with a wallop of his hands, if he hit him right, and his temper soured on the world. Most likely it was because he was afraid that every guy on the road was out to get him because of what he’d done, or maybe it was because he knew that they knew he was yellow. Anyway, they never tried to do him, that job belonging to Coulon, Honey Grove and the others.

Soupbone cracked that no ’bo could ride his division, and he made it good, too. He beat them up when they tried it, and he made it so strong that the old heads wouldn’t go against a try when he was the run. Once in a while some kid took a stab at it, but if he got caught by Soupbone he regretted it the rest of his life. I’ve heard of that little road into Hot Springs, where they say a reward used to be offered to any ’bo that rode it, and how a guy beat it by getting in the water-tank; and I’ve personally met that Wyoming gent on the Union Pacific, and all them other guys they say is so tough, but them stories is only fairy-tales for children beside what could be told about Pew. He went an awful route.

I’ve known of him catching guys in the pilot and throwing scalding water in on them; I’ve heard tell of him shovelling hot cinders into empties on poor bums laying there asleep. That trick of dropping a coupling-pin on

the end of a wire down alongside a moving train, so that it would swing up underneath and knock a stiff off the rods, was about the mildest thing he did.

He was simply a devil. The other railroad men on the division wouldn't hardly speak to him. They couldn't stand his gaff, but they couldn't very well roar at him keeping 'boes off his trains because that was what he was there for.

His longest suit was beating guys up. He just loved to catch some poor old broken-down bum on his train and pound the everlasting stuffing out of him. He's sent many a guy to the hospital, and maybe he killed a few before my acquaintance with him, for all I know.

Once in a while he ran against some live one—some real gun, and not a bum—who'd give him a battle, but he was there forty ways with a sap and gat, and he'd shoot as quick as he'd slug. He didn't go so strong on the real guns, if he knew who they was, and I guess he was always afraid they might be friends of Honey Grove or Coulon.

He was on the run when I first heard of him, and some of the kids of my day would try to pot him from the road, when his train went by, but they never even come close. I've heard them talk of pulling a rail on him and letting his train go into the ditch, but that would have killed the other trainmen, and they was some good guys on that same run then. The best way to do was to fight shy of Soupbone, and keep him on ice for Honey Grove and Coulon.

Training with our mob in them days was a young kid called Manchester Slim—a real kid, not over eighteen, and as nice and quiet a youngster as I ever see. He wasn't cut out for the road. It seems he'd had some trouble at home and run away. Old man Muller, that Dutch prowler, used to have him on his staff, but he never let this kid in on any work for some reason. He was always trying to get Slim to go home.

'Der road is hell fer der kits,' he used to say. 'Let der ole stiffs vork out dere string, und don't make no new vuns.'

The Slim paid no attention to him. Still he had no great love for the life, and probably would have quit long before if he hadn't been afraid some one would think he was scared off.

They was a pete job on at La Junta, which me and 'Frisco Shine and Muller had laid out. We had jungled up—camped—in a little cottonwood grove a few miles out of town, and was boiling out soup—nitro-glycerine—from dynamite, you know—and Muller sent the Slim into town to look around a bit. It was Winter and pretty cold. We had all come in from the West and was headed East. We was all broke bad, too, and needed dough the worst way.

Slim come back from town much excited. He was carrying a Denver newspaper in his hand.

‘I’ve got to go home, Mull,’ he said, running up to the old man and holding out the paper. ‘Look at this ad.’

Muller read it and called to me. He showed me a little want ad. reading that Gordon Keleher, who disappeared from his home in Boston two years before, was wanted at home because his mother was dying. It was signed Pelias Keleher, and I knew who he was, all right—president of the National Bankers’ Association.

‘Well, you go,’ I said, right off the reel, and I could see that was the word he was waiting for.

‘For certainly he goes,’ said Muller. ‘Nail der next rattler.’

‘All the passengers are late, but there’s a freight due out of here to-night; I asked,’ said Slim.

‘How much dough iss dere in dis mob?’ demanded Muller, frisking himself. We all shook ourselves down, but the most we could scare up was three or four dollars.

‘If you could wait until after to-night,’ I says, thinking of the job, but Muller broke me off with:

‘Ve don’t vant him to wait. Somedings might happens.’

‘I’d wire home for money, but I want to get to Kansas City first,’ said Slim. ‘That paper is a couple of days old, and there’s no telling how long it may have been running that ad. I can stop over in K.C. long enough to get plenty of dough from some people I know there. I’m going to grab that freight.’

‘Soupbone on dat freight,’ said the ’Frisco Shine, a silent, wicked black.

‘Ve’ll see Soub,’ said Muller quietly. ‘I guess maybe he von’t inderfere mit dis case.’

We decided to abandon the job for the night, and all went uptown. The Slim was apparently very much worried, and he kept telling us that if he didn’t get home in time he’d never forgive himself, so we all got dead-set on seeing him started.

We looked up the conductor of the freight due out that night and explained things to him. None of us knew him, but he was a nice fellow.

‘I tell you, boys,’ he said. ‘I’d let the young fellow ride, but you’d better see my head brakeman, Soupbone Pew. He’s a tough customer, but in a case like this he ought to be all right. I’ll speak to him myself.’

Muller went after Pew. He found him in a saloon, drinking all by his lonesome, although there was a crowd of other railroad men in there at the time. Muller knew Pew in the old days, but there was no sign of recognition

between them. The old Dutchman explained to Pew very briefly, winding with:

‘It would be a great personal favour mit me, Soub; maybe somedimes I return it.’

‘He can’t ride my train!’ said Pew shortly. ‘That’s flat. No argument goes.’

The Dutchman looked at him long and earnestly, murder showing in his eyes, and Pew slunk back close to the bar, and his hand dropped to his hip.

‘Soub, der poy rides!’ said Muller, his voice low but shaking with anger. ‘He rides your rattler. Und if anyding happens by dot poy, de Honey Grove Kit von’t get no chance at you! Dot all, Soub!’

But when he returned to us, he was plainly afraid for the Slim.

‘You don’t bedder go to-nid,’ he said. ‘Dot Soub is a defil, und he’ll do you.’

‘I’m not afraid,’ said Slim. ‘He can’t find me, anyhow.’

The old man tried to talk him out of the idea, but Slim was determined, and finally Muller, in admiration of his spirit, said:

‘Vell, if you vill go, you vill. Vun man can hide besser as two, but der Shine must go mit you as far as Dodge.’

That was the only arrangement he would consent to, and while the Slim didn’t want the Shine, and I myself couldn’t see what good he could do, Muller insisted so strong that we all gave in.

We went down to the yards that night to see them off, and the old man had a private confab with the Shine. The only time I ever saw Muller show any feeling was when he told the boy good-bye. I guess he really liked him.

The two hid back of a pile of ties, a place where the trains slowed down, and me and Muller got off a distance and watched them. We could see Soupbone standing on top of a box-car as the train went by, and he looked like a tall devil. He was trying to watch both sides of the train at the same time, but I didn’t think he saw either Slim or the Shine as they shot underneath the cars, one after the other, and nailed the rods. Then the train went off into the darkness, Soupbone standing up straight and stiff.

We went back to our camp to sleep, and the next morning before we were awake, the Shine came limping in, covered with blood and one arm hanging at his side.

I didn’t have to hear his story to guess what had happened. Soupbone made them at the first stop. He hadn’t expected two, but he did look for the kid. Instead of warning him off, he told him to get on top where he’d be safe. That was one of his old tricks. He didn’t get to the Shine, who dodged off into the darkness, as soon as he found they were grabbed, and then

caught the train after it started again. He crawled up between the cars to the deck, to tip the Slim off to watch out for Soupbone. Slim didn't suspect anything, and was thanking Soupbone, and explaining about his mother.

The moment the train got under way good, Soupbone says:

'Now my pretty boy, you're such a —— good traveller, let's see you jump off this train!'

The kid thought he was joshing, but there wasn't no josh about it. Soup pulled a gun. The Shine, with his own gun in hand, crawled clear on top and lay flat on the cars, trying to steady his aim on Soupbone. The kid was pleading and almost crying, when Soupbone suddenly jumped at him, smashed him in the jaw with the gun-barrel, and knocked him off the train. The Shine shot Soupbone in the back, and he dropped on top of the train, but didn't roll off. As the Shine was going down between the cars again, Soupbone shot at him and broke his arm. He got off all right, and went back down the road to find the kid dead—his neck broke.

Old man Muller, the mildest man in the world generally, almost went bug-house when he heard that spiel. He raved and tore around like a sure enough nut. I've known him to go backing out of a town with every man in his mob down on the ground, dead or dying, and not show half as much feeling afterward. You'd 'a' thought the kid was his own. He swore he'd do nothing else as long as he lived until he'd cut Soupbone's heart out.

The Shine had to get out of sight, because Soupbone would undoubtedly have some wild-eyed story to tell about being attacked by hoboes and being shot by one. We had no hope but what the Shine had killed him.

Old man Muller went into town and found out that was just what had happened, and he was in the hospital only hurt a little. He also found they'd brought Slim's body to town, and that most people suspected the real truth, too. He told them just how it was, especially the railroad men, and said the Shine had got out of the country. He also wired Slim's people, and we heard afterwards they sent a special train after the remains.

Muller was told, too, that the train conductor had notified Pew to let Slim ride, and that the rest of the train-crew had served notice on Pew that if he threw the boy off he'd settle with them for it. And that was just what made Soupbone anxious to get the kid. It ended his railroad career there, as we found out afterwards, because he disappeared as soon as he got out of the hospital.

Meantime me and Muller and the Shine went ahead with that job, and it failed. Muller and the nigger got grabbed, and I had a tough time getting away. Just before we broke camp the night before, however, Muller, who

seemed to have a hunch that something was going to happen, called me and the Shine to him, and said, his voice solemn:

‘I vant you poys to bromise me vun ting,’ he said. ‘If I don’t get der chance myself, bromise me dot venefer you find Soupbone Bew, you vill kill him deat.’

And we promised, because we didn’t think we would ever be called on to make good.

Muller got a long jolt for the job; the Shine got a shorter one and escaped a little bit later on, while I left that part of the country.

A couple of years later, on a bitter cold night, in a certain town that I won’t name, there was five of us in the sneezer, held as suspects on a house prowl job that only one of us had anything to do with—I ain’t mentioning the name of the one, either. They was me, Kid Mole, the old prize-fighter, a hophead named Squirt McCue, that you don’t know, Jew Friend, a dip, and that same ’Frisco Shine. We were all in the bull-pen with a mixed assortment of drunks and vags. All kinds of prisoners was put in there over night. This pokey is downstairs under the police station, not a million miles from the Missouri River, so if you think hard you can guess the place. We were walking around kidding the drunks, when a screw shoved in a long, tall guy who acted like he was drunk or nutty, and was hardly able to stand.

I took one flash at his map, and I knew him. It was Pew.

He flopped down in a corner as soon as the screw let go his arm. The Shine rapped to him as quick as I did, and officed Mole and the rest. They all knew of him, especially the Honey Grove business, as well as about the Manchester Slim, for word had gone over the country at the time.

As soon as the screw went upstairs I walked over to the big stiff, laying all huddled up, and poked him with my foot.

‘What’s the matter with you, you big cheese?’ I said. He only mumbled.

‘Stand up!’ I tells him, but he didn’t stir. The Shine and Mole got hold of him on either side and lifted him to his feet. He was as limber as a wet bar-towel. Just then we heard the screw coming downstairs and we got away from Pew. The screw brought in a jag—a laughing jag—a guy with his snoot full of booze and who laughed like he’d just found a lot of money. He was a little, thin fellow, two pounds lighter than a straw hat. He laughed high and shrill, more like a scream than a real laugh, and the moment the screw opened the door and tossed him in, something struck me that the laugh was phoney. It didn’t sound on the level.

There wasn’t no glad in it. The little guy laid on the floor and kicked his feet and kept on laughing. Soupbone Pew let out a yell at the sight of him.

‘Don’t let him touch me!’ he bawled, rolling over against the wall. ‘Don’t let him near me!’

‘Why, you big stiff, you could eat him alive!’ I says.

The jag kept on tee-heeing, not looking at us, or at Pew either for that matter.

‘He’s nuts,’ said Jew Friend.

‘Shut him off,’ I told the Shine.

He stepped over and picked the jag up with one hand, held him out at arm’s length, and walloped him on the jaw with his other hand. The jag went to sleep with a laugh sticking in his throat. Soupbone still lay against the wall moaning, but he saw that business all right, and it seemed to help him. The Shine tossed the jag into a cell. Right after that the screw came down with another drunk, and I asked him about Pew.

‘Who’s this boob?’ I said. ‘Is he sick?’

‘Him? Oh, he’s a good one,’ said screw. ‘He only killed his poor wife—beat her to death with his two fists, because she didn’t have supper ready on time, or something important. That ain’t his blood on him; that’s hers. He’s pretty weak, now, hey? Well, he wasn’t so weak a couple of hours ago, the rat! It’s the wickedest murder ever done in this town, and he’ll hang sure, if he ain’t lynched beforehand!’

He gave Soupbone a kick as he went out, and Soupbone groaned.

Said I: ‘It’s got to be done, gents; swing or no swing, this guy has got to go. Who is it—me?’

‘Me!’ said the Shine, stepping forward.

‘Me!’ said the Jew.

‘Me!’ chimed in Mole.

‘All of us!’ said the hophead.

‘Stand him up!’ I ordered.

The lights had been turned down low, and it was dark and shadowy in the gaol. The only sound was the soft pad-pad of people passing through the snow on the sidewalks above our heads, the low sizzling of the water-spout at the sink, and the snores of the drunks, who were all asleep.

Us five was the only ones awake. The Shine and Mole lifted Soupbone up, and this time he was not so limp. He seemed to know that something was doing. His eyes was wide open and staring at us.

‘Pew,’ I said in a whisper, ‘do you remember the kid you threw off your rattler three years ago?’

‘And shot me in the arm?’ asked Shine.

Pew couldn’t turn any whiter, but his eyes rolled back into his head.

‘Don’t!’ he whispered. ‘Don’t say that. It made me crazy. I’m crazy now! I was crazy when I killed that little girl to-night. It was all on account of thinking about him. He comes to see me often.’

‘Well, Pew,’ I said, ‘a long time back you were elected to die. I was there when the sentence was passed, and it’d been carried out a long time ago if you hadn’t got away. I guess we’ll have to kill you to-night.’

‘Don’t, boys!’ he whined. ‘I ain’t fit to die! Don’t hurt me!’

‘Why, you’ll swing anyway!’ said Friend.

‘No! My God, no!’ he said. ‘I was crazy; I’m crazy now, and they don’t hang crazy people!’

I was standing square in front of him. His head had raised a little as he talked and his jaw was sticking out. I suddenly made a move with my left hand, as though to slap him, and he showed that his mind was active enough by dodging, so that it brought his jaw out further, and he said, ‘Don’t.’ Then I pulled my right clear from my knee and took him on the point of the jaw. The Shine and Mole jumped back. Soupbone didn’t fall; he just slid down in a heap, like his body had melted into his shoes.

We all jumped for him at the same time, but an idea popped into my head, and I stopped them. Soupbone was knocked out, but he was coming back fast. You can’t kill a guy like that by hitting him. The gaol was lighted by a few incandescent lights, and one of them was hung on a wire that reached down from the ceiling over the sink, and had a couple of feet of it coiled up in the middle. Uncoiled, the light would reach clear to the floor. I pointed to it, but the bunch didn’t get my idea right away. The switch for the lights was inside the bull-pen, and I turned them off. I had to work fast for fear the screw upstairs would notice the lights was out and come down to see what the trouble was. A big arc outside threw a little glim through the sidewalk grating, so I could see what I was doing.

I uncoiled the wire and sawed it against the edge of the sink, close to the lamp, until it came in two. Then I bared the wire back for a foot. The gang tumbled, and carried Pew over to where the wire would reach him. I unfastened his collar, looped the naked end of the wire around his neck and secured it. By this time he was about come to, but he didn’t seem to realize what was going on.

All but me got into their cells and I stepped over and turned the switch-button just as Pew was struggling to his feet. The voltage hit him when he was on all fours. He stood straight up, stiff, like a soldier at salute. There was a strange look on his face—a surprised look. Then, as though someone had hit him from behind, his feet left the floor and he swung straight out to the length of the wire and it broke against his weight, just as I snapped off the current. Pew dropped to the floor and curled up like a big singed spider, and a smell like frying bacon filled the room.

I went over and felt his heart. It was still beating, but very light.

‘They ain’t enough current,’ whispered Mole. ‘We got to do it some other way.’

‘Hang him wid de wire,’ said the Shine.

‘Aw—nix!’ spoke up the Jew. ‘I tell you that makes me sick—bumping off a guy that way. Hanging and electricity see? That’s combining them too much. Let’s use the boot.’

‘It ain’t fair, kind-a, that’s a fact,’ whispered McCue. ‘It’s a little too legal. The boot! Give him the boot!’

The voice of the screw came singing down the stairs:

‘Is that big guy awake?’

‘Yes,’ I shouted back, ‘we’re all awake; he won’t let us sleep.’

‘Tell him he’d better say his prayers!’ yelled the screw. ‘I just got word a mob is forming to come and get him!’

‘Let him alone,’ I whispered to the gang. Mole was making a noose of the wire, and the Shine had hunted up a bucket to stand Pew on. They drew back and Soupbone lay stretched out on the floor.

I went over and felt of his heart again. I don’t remember whether I felt any beat or not. I couldn’t have said I did, at the moment, and I couldn’t say I didn’t. I didn’t have time to make sure, because suddenly there run across the floor something that looked to me like a shadow, or a big rat. Then the shrill laugh of that jag rattled through the bull-pen. He slid along half-stooped, as quick as a streak of light, and before we knew what was doing he had pounced on Soupbone and had fastened his hands tight around the neck of the big stiff. He was laughing that crazy laugh all the time.

‘I’ll finish him for you!’ he squeaked. He fastened his hands around Soupbone’s neck. I kicked the jag in the side of the head as hard as I could, but it didn’t faze him. The bunch laid hold of him and pulled, but they only dragged Soupbone all over the place. Finally the jag let go and stood up, and we could see he wasn’t no more drunk than we was. He let loose that laugh once more, and just as the Shine started the bucket swinging for his head, he said: ‘I’m her brother!’ Then he went down kicking.

We went into our cells and crawled into our bunks. Soupbone lay outside. The Shine pulled the jag into a corner. I tell you true, I went to sleep right away. I thought the screw would find out when he brought the next drunk down, but it so happened that there wasn’t no more drunks and I was woke up by a big noise on the stairs. The door flew open with a bang, and a gang of guys came down, wild-eyed and yelling. The screw was with them and they had tight hold of him.

‘Keep in, you men!’ he bawled to us.

‘That’s your meat!’ he said to the gang, pointing at what had been Soupbone. The men pounced on him like a lot of hounds on to a rabbit, and before you could bat an eye they had a rope around Soupbone’s neck and was tearing up the stairs again, dragging him along.

They must have thought he was asleep; they never noticed that he didn’t move a muscle himself, and they took the person of Soupbone Pew, or anyways what had been him, outside and hung it over a telegraph wire.

We saw it there when we was sprung next morning. When the screw noticed the blood around the bull-pen, he said:

‘Holy smoke, they handled him rough!’ And he never knew no different.

If the mob hadn’t come—but the mob did come, and so did the laughing jag. I left him that morning watching the remains of Soupbone Pew.

‘She was my sister,’ he said to me.

I don’t know for certain whether we killed Soupbone, whether the jag did it, or whether the mob finished him; but he was dead, and he ought to have died. Sometimes I wonder a bit about it, but no ghosts come to me, like I say, so I can’t tell.

They’s an unmarked grave in the potter’s field of this town I speak of, and once in a while I go there when I’m passing through and meditate on the sins of Soupbone Pew. But I sleep well of nights. I done what had to be done, and I close my eyes and I don’t never see Soupbone Pew.

He turned once more to gazing out of the window.

‘Well, what is there about condemned men to make you so nervous?’ I demanded.

‘I said some condemned men,’ he replied, still gazing. ‘Like this guy next door.’

A loud, shrill laugh rang through the corridors.

‘He’s that same laughing jag,’ said Chicago Red.

My Father

My father is a Pioneer.

Of such an institution, Mr. N. Webster, who was himself something of a pioneer, says: 'Pioneer. One who goes before, as into the wilderness, preparing the way for others to follow.'

I do not know that this description covers my father's case accurately—it sounds more like a word picture of a Frémont or a Pike, or an irrigation promoter, with little bearing upon a man who was the playmate of the untamed William Hickok, Mr. B. Masterson, and such; nevertheless, I have my father's word for it that he is a Pioneer.

His high-heeled boots have left their imprint upon the old cattle trails down Abilene and Dodge City way. I can picture in my mind's eye his small but hardy frame encased in the fringes fashionable at that day, cleaving a path towards the setting sun as he hotly pursued the elusive maverick and furrowed the pine bars of the Red Light and the Pink Dog Cafés of that interesting period with his hard-earned dollars.

I have a deep reverence for my father as a Pioneer, which is not shared by my wife Ellen.

She sees only, in that weatherbeaten little figure, an old gentleman with a tremendous capacity for indenting the cushions in the Brown Palace Hotel, where he foregathers at night with his ancient friends and talks in a loud and querulous tone of voice.

My wife was born in the West at a time when department stores and nickelodeon theatres had crowded out the picturesque landscape to make room for a ragged skyline. Her father is not a Pioneer. He is merely the general superintendent of a railroad and travels in a private car. Her mother is not a Pioneer, either. She is a society leader.

Ellen, therefore, is inured to an atmosphere of labour difficulties and bargain sales, and could hardly be expected to sense the romance of the sunset trail as personified in a mild-looking little man with a stringy goatee, who declines to shake up the furnace on cold days. My father stands in proper awe of Ellen, and while he may raise his voice in a loud 'I—remember—when' down at the Brown Palace, his tone is low and well modulated around my house, where he resides.

Understand, Ellen is not a shrew—far from it. Neither is she inclined to be peckish. She simply came into the world at a time when pioneerism had become a sort of misdemeanour, so far as six-pistols and wild Indians are

concerned, and society felt it best to preserve a respectable silence regarding certain early days.

Also, my wife—but this does not go if she hears it—is very obtuse when it comes to an appreciation of the historical value of the notches in my father's gun. I myself know, from rumour and otherwise, that in his day my father was a man of parts, and his aim was esteemed along the border.

The Society of Pioneers decided to hold a reunion one summer, and for the purposes of that gathering they picked the old city of Trinity. There was method in this selection. The average Pioneer, like my father, has daughters-in-law and other womenfolk holding receptions and functions about his family fireside, at which no account is taken of those hoary harbingers of civilization. Trinity is well removed from the social trail and is without reserve regarding the old days.

When my father announced his intention of attending the reunion, my wife offered no objection.

'Just so you ridiculous old men do your pioneering outside the city limits, I'll be satisfied,' she remarked.

So my father, with patient resignation, packed his suitcase full of buckskin clothing and other odds and ends, and betook himself to Trinity, in company with a large number of other old gentlemen whose voices began to touch the highest pitch in the vocal scale as soon as the train moved them beyond the zone of home hostility.

When I returned that evening, I found Ellen in quite a state of mind.

'The Daughters of the Revolution have appointed me a member of a committee to go to Trinity and assist in dedicating a museum to the Spanish explorers,' she announced. 'I am to make a speech.'

Personally, I have always felt that the son of a man who fought at 'Dobe Walls was as good as the great-great-granddaughter of a family who pitchforked Britons in the Lexington road, but I do not say so. I never shall, openly.

'Trinity? That's where father has gone,' I said.

'Well,' Ellen replied tartly, 'those foolish old men haven't anything to do with this museum. This is being done by the Daughters, and as other members of the committee are taking their husbands, you can go with me.'

'It will be quite a surprise to father to see us,' I suggested.

I do not feel called upon to explain that the dedication of the museum might have been arranged to coincide with the Pioneer reunion because of the connecting historical relation of the two events. I, a scion of the 'Dobe Walls, will never gratuitously offend any Daughters of the Revolution.

I did not see my father, but I heard of him as soon as I registered our names at the best hotel in Trinity, and urged the grizzled man doing duty as

clerk to give us good rooms.

‘Kivingson, hey?’ he remarked, scrutinizing the register. ‘Any relation to Bill Kivingson?’

‘My father’s name is William Kivingson,’ I replied coldly. My wife sniffed one of the most disdainful sniffs.

‘The son of ole Bill Kivingson can have anything I’ve got,’ replied the old man. ‘Me’n’ Bill are pards; we useter raise hell together around Lamar. . . .’

‘Jonas, let us go to our rooms,’ interrupted Ellen scornfully.

‘Yore old man’s around town sum’eres,’ called the clerk, as we mounted the stairs.

Trinity is a small but enthusiastic town on the old Santa Fe trail, which preserves many of its old-time traditions and all of its saloons. It was humming with activity. The business houses and the streets were hung with bunting and beaming with hospitality, while grizzled men dotted the landscape freely. It appeared that there were really two celebrations—the Pioneers’ reunion and the dedication of the museum, the latter designed by the women as a sort of antidote for the masculine gathering.

I soon discovered that, as the son of Bill Kivingson, I was a man of honour in those parts at that particular time. The clerk at the hotel took care to point me out in my capacity of Bill Kivingson’s offspring; and my hand was cordially shaken by ageing men with a violence that threatened my physical well-being.

Ellen was busied with the other members of the committee of the Daughters, arranging the programme for the dedication, and I wandered about the town. My search was not an exhaustive one, as I did not care to encroach upon my father’s vacation, and, in addition to my natural feelings, there *are* some places where a bank attaché cannot follow even a Pioneer parent.

As I went about, mingling with the queer crowds, I heard strange and disquieting rumours dealing with the personality and actions of one whom they called ‘Still Bill,’ who appeared to be a character of some vehemence.

‘Still Bill’s broke the faro bank over to the Blue Moose,’ announced an ancient exfrontiersman as he approached a group of bronzed old men at the hotel office that evening.

‘Made ’em turn the box after he took out twenty-six hundred dollars!’

‘That Bill’s a grey wolf,’ replied a tall man with long straight hair. There was admiration in his tone. ‘If Still Bill gets to going good, there will be some fun in this burg!’

‘He’s eyes-going fair enough right now,’ replied the bearer of the news. ‘I mind the time at Trail City when he cleaned out the whole blame town. It

was bustin' the bank started him that time, too.'

'Yes,' put in another, 'I rec'leck how he stood off the marshal and the en-tire pop'lation of Dodge City for two days an' nights.'

'Well,' said the messenger, 'he's got that ol' cap'n'ball pistol—that ole forty-five howitzer—an' he was tunin' up some when I left. He useter be able to singe your eyelashes with that weep on at fifty yards.'

At this point a fat, breathless gentleman who aided locomotion with a manzanita cane, hobbled excitedly into the office.

'He's loose!' panted this latest courier, in a quavering voice. 'Ole Still Bill has done ontied himself! He's raisin' hell and puttin' a plug under ear over at the Moose! Like as not he'll come a'-bulgin' down this street pretty quick. I'm goin' home!'

'He useter be a long-winded cuss, too,' said someone. 'I don't reckon at his age, he can hold out more'n two days, but I seen the time when a week wasn't no limit!'

'They's been a-many a-ring-tailed, red-eyed son o' trouble turned loose in these here parts,' quavered the courier. 'I seen 'em come and I seen 'em go, but they's never been no white man could claw within a foot 'o the neck o' old Bill Kivingson!'

Kivingson! Bill Kivingson! *My Father!*

I approached the group. 'Gentlemen,' said I, 'you surely do not mean Mr. William Kivingson—a smallish man with a goatee and . . .?'

'Still Bill! That's *him!*' came in full chorus.

'Why,' said I, 'it—it isn't possible that he should be performing actions such as you speak of! He is a harmless old man!'

'Harmless-*hell!*' snorted the fat old Pioneer. 'Harmless like a mess o' rattlesnakes!'

'But I'm his son!' I argued.

'I don't give a hoo-raw who you are! I'm his pal and I *know* Still Bill Kivingson—knowed him before you was born. It's good night, all, fer me!'

Now of course my natural thought was to go and get my father and make him retire for the night; but the hotel clerk laid a kind restraining hand upon my arm.

'Lay off o' him, son,' he said. 'When Still Bill gits a-goin', you jest got to give him a clean track and keep well under kivver. I ain't seen him speed none in twenty years, but I know what he *could* do. Jest you go to bed and lay off o' him.'

'He won't hurt nobody,' he continued. 'All the old-timers'll keep out of his way, and he never did kill no bartenders, or such, in his life, because he needs 'em. Don't you worry about him. It's just them animile sperrits which has been plugged up fer a long time, coming out an' sniffin' around. O'

course, if he should happen to think o' somebody he don't like, he might bother 'em some; but they ain't no one about Trinity he ain't made up with long ago.'

I debated the matter in my mind and came to the conclusion that I had better follow the clerk's advice. Who was I, that I should obstruct the course of a hero of the 'Dobe Walls, equipped with a cap and ball?

I lay awake for several hours, the tumult of the street pouring in at my window. Occasionally I heard above the hum of voices a pistol shot, which never failed to produce deep silence—after a great shuffling of feet. The pedestrians seemed to be seeking shelter. In the hush which followed these explosions there would come a voice, uplifted in warlike declamation. I could not make out the words, but there seemed to be a familiar ring to the belligerent chant.

When I went down the stairs the next morning, leaving Ellen at her toilet, a strange sight presented itself. It was nine o'clock. Outside, the sun was shining from a turquoise sky, and the air was soft as down, yet the lobby of the hotel was packed with men and women who stood gazing through the windows upon that scene of peace and quiet as if a terrible storm raged without.

Across the street, I could see, the stores were filled with similar crowds. The streets were deserted. An old man disengaged himself from the throng and sidled over to me. It was the hotel clerk.

'Son,' said he, 'I don't like fer to tell you-all, but yore old man, Still Bill, he's a-goin' good and strong this mornin'. He's plum' busted this celebration, which it can't go on with him a-streamin' up and down the streets like a pestilence. He's a-holdin' forth down yonder at the Moose, an' every now an' then he comes a-boilin' up this way to see if they's any defenceless folks he can devastate. Son, yore dad is a wolf—a curly wolf, that's all—and time don't change him none.'

'He certainly is a long-winded ole body,' declared another. 'I reckon it's his superfluous energy o' twenty year a-bubbin' out all to onct. He allows he has decided to postpone the parade an' celebration until to-morrow and that he ain't goin' to permit no moosee dedication a-a-a-tall. He ain't decided yet whether he'll move this town plum' away or not.'

At that moment a high treble yell smote the air, and the crowd stayed back from the windows. I peered outside to see, far down the street, a small figure rocketing along at amazing speed. Clad in buckskins, feathered at the hems, a wide hat, it gave him the appearance of an animated mushroom, and waving a long-barrelled revolver, my father surged along in a billow of sound. While I watched, shame-faced, some of his expressions came to my ears.

‘I’m a howlin’ wolf from ole Mizzou, an’ I’m a-huntin’ gore!’ he bawled. ‘I picks my teeth with bowie-knives, an’ the bark o’ six-guns is music to my ears! Yee-owo-wow! I’m a snake in the grass, an’ I hiss when you pass, an’ I’m searchin’ for folks to eat! Wow!’

He had a clear path, and he swirled along the street for a block or two, then doubled back and disappeared in a vocal storm.

‘Ain’t he a bear?’ inquired the hotel clerk; and I could see that among these Pioneers my father’s exhibition, however much it shamed me, had aroused considerable admiration.

‘Has he hurt anybody?’ I inquired nervously.

‘*Hurt* ’em, son?’ said the hotel clerk. ‘*Hurt* ’em? Boy, they ain’t anybody get near enough to old Hell-on-Wheels out there to let him *hurt* ’em. He never *hurts* no one if he gits ’em. He jest KILLS ’em. An’ he ain’t bin able for to ketch no one here.’

‘Has he been going all night long?’

‘All night,’ replied the clerk. ‘He ain’t paused for drink for man or beast to date. An’ bimeby we’re goin’ to set a bear trap out there in the street so business can proceed. Sim Leggins has gone after the trap now. Sim is the authorities, an’ a pussonal friend o’ yer dad’s, but he’s decided Still Bill has got his twenty years’ worth.’

Beyond the shadow of a doubt I should shortly have nerved myself to going after my father—there is no question in my mind but that I should have done it; but while I was steeling myself, my wife appeared—my wife, the immaculate Ellen, appeared in the crowded lobby, clad in a Japanese kimono, her hair in curl-papers.

‘What is this I hear?’ she demanded. ‘The members of my committee tell me that our dedication is being postponed by some beast of a man—what does this mean?’

I had not the heart to tell her that it was my father. I could never have found the heart to do so. But at that moment he disclosed his identity by reappearing in the street—gun in hand and a yell in his throat.

Again he careened past the hotel, the crowd falling back dismayed—and as I stood there, the picture of embarrassment, if nothing more, my wife edged close to the window and stared.

‘Come back, Ellen, dear,’ I said. ‘They say he’s very dangerous to people he does not like.’

That was an unfortunate slip. I had never before suggested that my father did not like my wife—certainly he had never intimated such a thing.

‘Yee-ow-wow!’ yelled my father, as he swung back towards his Blue Moose retreat and disappeared.

My wife hurriedly left the hotel in a flutter of Japanese colouring, and with a toss of bedroom headgear. The crowd gasped. She was heading straight for the door of the Blue Moose. I followed—I have never permitted my wife to go where I do not go myself—and the crowd trailed along, nervously.

At the door of the Blue Moose saloon I paused, my heart beating with grave concern.

Imagine my feelings! My beloved wife, unappreciative of the danger attached to an eruption of twenty years of repressed pioneerial fervour, mindful only of the jeopardy of social standing, had flung herself headlong into the arms of Peril.

And my beloved father was Peril!

About me pressed the faces of the people, grey with apprehension, each head bent towards the door of the Blue Moose in a listening attitude.

Shortly I should have plunged through those doors regardless of consequences; shortly I should have rushed to my obvious duty.

From the interior of the Blue Moose arose a voice—a woman's voice—the voice of Ellen, my wife.

The door suddenly flew open with a bang, scattering the crowd like frightened sheep. My wife appeared. In one hand she held a long cap-and-ball revolver. In the other she clasped the left ear of a meek old gentleman, who was very white as to face, and who rubbed his hands together nervously.

‘At your time of life, too!’ my wife was saying. ‘You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you silly old man!’

The crowd collected itself again, amazed, startled.

‘Now, Elly—’ quavered my father.

‘Hush!’ she ordered, in tones such as I never wish to hear again. ‘Not another word, you ridiculous old man!’

And up the street, now teeming with an astounded multitude, she led the relentless howl wolf and snake in the grass, while I, who seemed destined always to be in the rear of the procession, followed, still harassed by emotion.

‘I’m going to lock you up in a closet until the next train leaves,’ my wife was saying. ‘You—’

‘Don’t lose my gun, Elly,’ my father exhorted humbly. ‘It’s the one with notches on it.’

A little boy, perhaps ten years of age, was running along beside them, whooping shrilly.

‘Here, boy!’ said Ellen, pushing the famous revolver into the youngster’s hands. ‘Here’s a nice plaything for you!’

‘And now, ladies and gentlemen,’ said my wife, in closing her brief remarks at the dedication of the museum, ‘it is with a feeling of deepest reverence towards the wonderful men of that early period, and to those equally wonderful men who came at a later day to develop and perpetuate the path of progress that we dedicate this small monument in the hope that it will ever keep green the memory of the Spanish explorers and the American Pioneer!’

I have a high regard for my father as a Pioneer, which is not shared by my wife, Ellen.

Transcriber's Notes

A small number of changes were made silently to spelling and punctuation to achieve consistency.

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