

## “IT CAME ON A TOOSDAY” (in the style of Damon Runyon)

“It came on a Toosday”. I am sitting with Charley One Horse, Harry the Hamster, Big Albert and Sticky Fingered Sid in the back room at Mindy’s talking of this and that and playing poker with those dirty old cards that Mindy keeps and having a few drams even if Mindy was slow in serving, when Charley One Horse says: “It came on a Toosday”.

It is a hot and sticky night in June 1928 and the dolls are parading up and down wearing next to nothing. The game is just heating up and we are concentrating on the cards when Charley’s words just come out and sorta flop on the table among all the empty bottles and half smoked Camels but to tell the truth – we are not really interested in Charley One Horse or what he says – which isn’t much.

I have been at a craps game all night and the dice were not very sweet so I am more that somewhat tired and under my usual par and not really thinking with my usual brainpower. Harry the Hamster has just blown in from Baltimore and he sits under the one light, his pork pie hat covering one blood shot eye – Harry the Hamster is usually on top form but tonight he is doing his best not to sleep - but he still has his other eye on the cards.

And Sticky Fingered Sid? Well, he is not called Sticky Fingered for nuthing, Sidney is just out of the slammer where he has been lammed up for three years on account of him being sticky fingered but at the same time not being very lucky. How does Sidney know that a cop is standing beside him when he tries to purloin a teddy bear from Macy’s? Why Sticky Fingered Sid needs a teddy bear from Macy’s no-one seems to know – and neither does Sidney.

As usual Mindy is more than somewhat skimping on electricity and the one light bulb is doing just enough to light up the centre of the table where as usual the cards sit laughing up at us.

We do not say too much at these games so when Charley One Horse says: “It came on a Toosday”, you could say that we were surprised but not too worried and we do not want to stop the game by indulging in conversation that would only get in the way of the cards.

I wish to state that I have often wondered about Charley One Horse. Charley arrived in our lives one night about 10 years ago, like one of those tumbleweeds you see blowing through old western movies where Tom Mix and his ten gallon hat is beating off the redskins.

I remember that night when Charley One horse turns up at Mindy's. It was a windy night just before Christmas; it had been snowing when the three of us, Harry the Hamster, Sticky Fingered Sid and me are sitting in the back room which Mindy reserves for us on Toosday nights for serious games when a lot of bucks pass across the table and there are no dolls to bother us.

Just like now the game is going well and my numbers are falling sweetly when the door opens and a figure stands in the doorway, a figure as big as a bear that cuts the light from the bar room next door.

The figure shakes the snow from his hat and says in a husky voice: "I hear a game goes on here and that there might be a vacancy for a visiting player".

Well, we do not know what strange force has brought Charley One Horse to Mindy's back room at this time or how he knows that our vacancy, a hustler called Nathan Detroit, has gone back to Detroit to see his sick mama but we are glad to see Charley and he comes in, puts his hat on the sideboard, helps himself to a beer, sits down and I deal him in.

Well that was the start. For the next ten years, Charley One Horse sits on the same seat every Toosday night and I wish to state that in all that time outside of conversation about the cards, he does not speak more than ten words.

While Harry the Hamster, Sticky Fingered Sid and I, speak of this and that, Charley is not given to gossip and keeps himself to himself but we do not mind him being so morose and he becomes just like a piece of the furniture that is taken for granted.

So tonight, I wonder why he speaks as he does and what is the Toosday that he speaks off. I look at Charley and am surprised to see that a single large tear is commencing to roll down his unshaven cheek; I see it fall through the air, so slowly as if time has stopped, and it falls onto the table and onto the ace of spades which is part of Charley's three of a pair. Harry the Horse and

Sticky Fingered Sid also see the tear; they lay their cards on the table and lean back in their chairs.

There is silence for a moment and I feel I have to say something so I speak to Charley as follows, "Why Charley, what is the matter? There is no need to cry, your three of a pair is not too bad." But Charley just says for a second time: "It came on a Toosday", in a sad sort of voice full of regret and he shoves his hand into a pocket, fishes out a small piece of folded paper and hands it to me which surprises me somewhat.

I figure Charley wishes me to read this paper so I unfold it and see that it is an old telegram; telegrams only mean one thing and that is bad news, like the one that Monica sent me when she ran off with that joker of a tyre salesman.

I begin to read the telegram out loud but stop after a few words. The telegram says as follows: "TUESDAY JUNE 14, 1918 I REGRET STOP YOUR SON STANLEY ATKINSON 6th MARINE REGIMENT STOP KILLED IN ACTION AT BELLAU WOOD FRANCE STOP SINCERE SYMPATHY STOP"

Now this is the worst news that any card player can have and now I understand why Charley has been stum for so long and as I look at the date, it is clear why he speaks as he has tonight. I look up at Charley and see a second tear leave his eye and roll down his face onto the table and his shoulders commence to heave up and down and he makes a noise like a leaky bellows.

Under the stark glow of the single bulb, Harry the Hamster, Big Albert and Sticky Fingered Sid and I do not know where to look and all we do is look down at the cards. We do not speak a word and after a long moment or two Charley One Horse places his cards softly on the table, takes the telegram, stands up, and walks out of the room. He says nuthin' and we do not see him ever again.

I long ago came to the conclusion that all life is always six to five against but Charley One Horse had the worst luck of any citizen that hangs round Mindy's and for that reason every Toosday night we raise a glass to his memory.

