

Quanta Presents...



Moonifest Destiny

by Peter Gelman



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Looking Ahead

Daniel K. Appelquist

Happy 1995 everybody! Welcome to this special issue of Quanta! This issue, instead of the regular sampling of serials and short fiction, we have *one* very interesting work for you: *Moonifest Destiny*. It concerns the invasion of the Moon by the Earth in the 1840's, by hot air balloon.

First, a brief note about me. For some time now, I've been looking into breaking into electronic publishing as a profession, and it looks like I've finally managed to do it. Starting this month (January 20th), I have begun working for an electronic publishing company called Fourth Mesa (based in Baltimore.) We'll be working with the publishers of scientific, technical and medical journals and information to get them up on the Web.

In the past year, and in the past six months in particular, we've seen the entire landscape of electronic publishing change radically. For one, the World Wide Web has grown up and is starting to really change the face of the Internet. During the past six months, I've been working on the Quanta Web server, and I'm glad to say that it's pretty spiffy. You can now access all Quanta stories and articles by issue or by author. A

note to Quanta authors: if you want me to link your name in the author list to your home page, please send me mail about it. The Quanta Web server may be found at the address listed on the contents page of this issue.

And now, from the author, a little historical context for the story:

This work concerns the first days of the Mexican-American War, except in this story, Mexico is the Moon, and it takes balloons to get there. I have sought to express the ideology of the "Young American" movement of the 1840s using the unusual model of the

solar system of Tycho Brahe. In Brahe's system, all of the outer planets of the solar system - Mars, Jupiter, Saturn - orbit the Sun, but all the inner planets - Venus, Mercury, and our Moon - orbit the Earth, as does the Sun itself. I see this model as an unusual attempt to appease the contradictory ideologies of science and religion of Brahe's era. Similarly, I see the hyperbolics of Manifest Destiny a product of the contradictions of democracy and slavery.

During the war, there was much proud democratic sneering at European monarchies and her class slaves, but a bizarre blindness toward the chattel slavery in the USA. This contradiction skews the universe of latter-day Jacksonian Democracy, which repeatedly calls to the American Revolutionary Heritage, expressed not as a revolution within, not emancipation and civil war, but as pyrotechnics of patriotism, as a mob demand to push the uncertain national borders onward into well-defined foreign land. This Napoleonic styled imperialism was an attempt to resolve the intolerable national contradiction through expansion, but only served to make revolution-within inevitable.

With that in mind, allow me to introduce Peter Gelman's *Moonifest Destiny*.

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Chapter 1: The Steam-Balloon Stoker's Song

The army astronomers consulted their telescopes and timepieces and fired a signal-cannon; one after another, the earth let loose a broadside of balloons. Ash from our boilers rained down on the cheering crowds below. A great Gulf gust rippled the silken bags above us and made a sloppy zigzag of our pretty line-ahead formation. Our paddle wheels fluttered madly, and slowly pushed us in a ragged arc, pointed upwards, where the crescent of the Moon awaited our invasion.

Pretty soon New Orleans receded to just a yellow-fever blotch on the mottled green of Louisiana, and above, the Gulf shown like a mirror. In fact I was too pre-occupied to enjoy the panorama. I was hanging my head out the rusty porthole and spitting out the ballast of my retrograde digestion. I worried that I had the Fever, but I didn't, unless you called it Gin Fever. The iron gondola stunk like the devil. We of the 7th Infantry "Cotton Balers" were so crowded in, true to our namesake, that some of our foreign-borns said that by comparison, it made steerage-class to the New World seem like a Tammany boss's Flying Cabriolet. Because of the parsimoniousness of Congress, Secretary Marcy couldn't give General Taylor half the balloons he had promised. So, overloaded, underpowered, our ship's wobbly-wobbly trim swung her gondola like a bell clapper. The gyre of our revolving wheels pressed down against the Moonward-inclined rudders, so our upward progress was

slow. The two Ericsson-Screw propelled steam balloons had a better time of it. Our ship, the Celestial City, wasn't designed for this kind of transit. The C. C., or Sea-Saw as we called her, was so ungainly, wallowing into sudden gales and gusts, our five-layered hammocks banged one another and flopped over.

Once we rose up high enough, and were obliged to shut the portholes, smoke and fumes from the funnels and 'scape pipes below kept creeping through the old joints, setting a hundred men to coughing and cursing.

Before even a day up-and-over New Orleans, a couple men started spitting black bile. That meant the Fever. Almost every day of that long transit, another couple men started spitting their black out the porthole. Three days of air-steam-

ing, and we formed ranks. The bugles groaned, the drums thumped and rattled, and we dropped our first corpse overboard, sliding out of a flag. A week off the coal tethers, and we ceased to bother with such ceremony for such a routine ballast drop.

My brother, Kelly, who sold six horses to buy himself a commission, led my company. Every morning at five bells we fell out of our hammocks and into our ranks, and marched, with pack and musket, around and around the mess hall, the last man of our column a yard behind the first man. Kelly said it was to keep us out of idleness. I argued, "What did god give us a deck of cards and 7 dollars a month for?"

Nights were peaceful and sweet, sometimes. A lone hurricane lantern lit up the regimental colors and the giant stars and stripes fluttering beside the silk stitching, CELESTIAL CITY. The stars

barn to kill the rats. The rats are the no good Hunkers. And the barn, my friends, is the Democratic Party.

- this fellow came over and applauded. You see, he was a cross between a Barnburner and a Loco-Foco, I mean, a Liberty Party fellow; in other words, that strange stripe of biped, a Foe-to-Texas. Appropriately, keeping the boiler fires hot was his main duty. Turns out this fellow had a liking for the practice of versifying. Accordingly, he had some strange things to say. He said the telegraph would change the way we speak. He said Napoleon was no hero. He said poets were our unknown true legislators.

"Not the Freemasons?" I asked.

"No, poets!"

"That accounts for the tariff," said Six-Fingers.

"How's that?" asked Hernani, scratching his ear with a wrench.

"Tax rhymes with hacks."

MOONIFEST DESTINY

The Rough & Ready Balloon Invasion of the Lunar Peninsula of Texas

got bigger and brighter. The enormous Moon made the striped fabric glow. And the wind sung sweetly in the wheel paddles.

A Company K, 2nd Dragoon mechanic filled in as the ship's Petty Engineer, in order to save War Department

notes. He was a skinny, consumptive foreign-born, a spleeny Nay-Sayer of a fellow, named John W. Klager, but we came to call him "Hernani". One day I was reading a funny Loco-Foco editorial in an old New York Evening Post to my long-necked, big-eared

friend, name of Bourdett, (called, for obvious reasons, Six-Fingers), and when I read-

Secretary Marcy has got it wrong. The spoils don't go to the victor; on the contrary. The victor

goes to the spoils - just like rats to garbage. Sometimes you have to burn the

"Heck, Hernani," I complained, "Those true congressmen are sleeping on the job, I figure. I thought we got to fight Injuns for glory and all that. No one told me I'd have to ride a sea-saw to the Moon." But it was account of that I was cooped up and bored and so spent my liberties with Corporal Hernani Klager. He was lonely and said I was a good fellow.

Though he was starting to go bald, Hernani wore his hair long and wild. He also liked to wear a red ribbon on his uniform. I asked him why his sweetheart gave him a red ribbon instead of a green one for the green laurel. Hernani said sadly, "My sweetheart died of Fever. Since then, I don't wish for happiness. That's why I joined the Army. But this ribbon..."

Brightening with memory, he explained that back sixteen years ago he'd worn a red waistcoat at the opening of the Hernani. The ribbon was the surviving fragment of the waistcoat.

"What's a Hernani?" I wondered.

by Peter Gelman

"My friend, The 'Ernani was the declaration of independence for my generation, and Hugo he was our Jefferson! Tell me, who is the Jefferson of your genera-

tion?"

I spoke without hesitation: "James Polk."

Six-Fingers shook his head. "Brigham Young."

Hernani looked disappointed and changed the subject back to Hernani.

This Hernani fellow was some kind of bandit and ladies' beau who for some reason gives some old geezer a trumpet. Whenever the old geezer tooted on that horn, poor Hernani had to die. Seems that Hernani owed him a pretty big favor, because he, the old geezer, (and the king too, for some reason, who in my opinion was the real troublemaker) all loved one lady, and consequently all wanted to pepper each other's hide with buckshot. Just when Hernani finally gets the belle into his arms, the old geezer blows the horn. Guess what happens next? Well, after the horn gets tooted, Hernani, the lady, and the old geezer all commit suicide.

That's some kind of trumpet, sure. Must have been worse than hearing reveille on a bugle, I reckon. I don't know much about blowing horns. I used to beat on a pot and pan come election day, though. But in a way it was the toot of a locomotive steam-whistle that got me to dreaming about glory. So I figured the story wasn't entirely loco-foco, judged loosely.

Corporal Hernani Klager wrote up some pretty intolerable poetry himself. He taught it to the boiler's firemen, mostly Negroes, and made them sing it. They didn't understand the words I bet, but they didn't have a choice, neither, no more than the boiler did when asked to boil by Marster Fire. Sometimes I'd hear them sing to the rhythm of the ponderous piston:

Boiler, wrench that vapor, ho! turn that wheel! drive the sledge!

We're miners of the crepuscule: Clouds receive thy wedge!

Winged-locomotive riders, feed that ugly fire -

Stoke a stack of coal! We rise up one foot higher!

We must not stop! We're slaves to steam! Dare we of soot forswear the air?

Oh no! Not us! We're cursed by Cain, with G inverse D-square.

It was strange to think that just a few months ago, the farm was my world, taking care of Ma was my duty, and the glory of fighting savages was my dream. After two months in Camp Greenhorn, our steamer transport left Baltimore and arrived in Saint Augustine, where, to my surprise, we just took on coal and kept on going. It turns out that once the U. S. Army figured out a way to capture Chief Osceola - they invited him to a Peace Pow-Wow, he came out of the alligator swamps, and then they grabbed him, easy - the Seminoles' gumption for fighting (and they didn't have cannon) slowly

gave out. So, our steamer kept going south, around the peninsula, all the way to New Orleans. Then all of us seven thousand Dough-Boys who made up the little Regular Army marched down Canal Street to an open field, where, tethered to three dozen masts, the colossal steam balloons were taking on coal, enough to carry us all the way up to the Peninsula of Texas.

Chapter 2. Provocation By A Fool

"THE MOON OR DEATH!" the mobs shouted in New Orleans. Proudly we marched to huzzahs of "ALL THE MOON!" down Canal Street, and up the balloon ramps. "Home by Christmas!" we promised each other, seasick in the swinging gondolas. "I never been so bored..." we complained, month after month, sweaty and sick in the neat tent rows of Anaxagoras Crater. "Dang it, am I thirsty!" we complained on the hot trek southward through forsaken mesquite-and-cactus Lunar desolation. Bivouacked on the Mare Frigoris, every day we cursed our missing pickets: "Gall darn but another Mick done swum the river!"

I tried to remember the thrill of freedom I felt on the long walk to the base on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. It was only a few months previous, but I couldn't get that thrill back. In Camp Greenhorn I drilled and marched and marched and drilled and, in fact, learned more than I wanted to know about killing. There was a scandal we had to keep quiet about when one feller from my company died. But I learned how to stab scarecrows and march Regular and clean my buttons. But now, looking raggedly-patched as a scarecrow, I learnt the true duty of an Angry-Saxon army - to wield shovel angrily. So we Regulars assaulted the dirt.

I was thinking about old Hernani. It had been a few weeks since I had last seen him. That was back at Anaxagoras Crater, or "Annex Agonies" as we called it. The night before we got set to march south, I dreamed of my old rope swing. There I was swinging away over the crick, free as a buccaneer, when the rope stopped swinging properly. It was kind of shaky. I felt a hand shaking me. The owner of the hand coughed. It was Six-Fingers.

"What do you want?" I demanded.

"Shh - " he told me, looking guilty.

I sat up, wide-awake. "You got a girl somewheres?"

"Did you hear what happened to Hernani?"

I let out my breath. "What?"

He motioned with his head for me to follow him.

We snuck through the camp. To dodge a sentry, we tip-toed between our officer's big tents to the dragoons' camp; if we got caught wandering we were as like as not to get hog-tied and gagged for a day. Beside his master's tent, Old Socrates lifted his head from his blanket; I gave him a wink. He winked back and dropped his head.

Over by the south edge of the dragoon camp, behind the horses, I saw somebody standing on a barrel. I guessed who it was...

"Heck Hernani," I laughed, when we got close, "what are you standing on a barrel for in the middle of the night?"

Hernani looked at me. As he turned, I saw the sign hanging around his neck:

HABITUAL DRUNK

"Oh," I said, with a friendly chuckle. "Shoot, where'd you find enough firewater to get drunk on? You should have shared it with me!" Hernani didn't answer, so I asked Six-Fingers, "How long does he have to stand like that?"

Six-Fingers said, "All night. If he falls off, he gets the 'H. D.' brand with a hot iron right on his cheek."

"Branded! Like a common criminal!" I said angrily. "How's he going to sleep, standing on a barrel like the Colossus of Rhodes?"

"Looks like he's sort of sleeping standing up, like a horse."

He was pretty stiff up there. "Hm! Where's the guard?"

"No guard. Machine." Six-Fingers pointed to the side of the barrel, where it read:

Lt. Fitzroy's
Patented Sobriety Machine

"I heard about it," Six-Fingers explained, "It's got a bell inside, and a weight on one side, so if Hernani gets off, the barrel tips over and the bell clangs. He's trying to sell his machine to the Army."

"Why do you have to stand there?" I asked Hernani.

Hernani still didn't answer.

"Yesterday he got in an argument with Lieutenant Fitzroy about the P. of T.; Hernani said Texas ended at the Nueces River, and that the Moon was the Moon's; Fitzroy said that any soldier who didn't think we must fulfill the destiny given us by Providence was DRUNK!..."

"I see," I said. "Say, Hernani, you look mighty tired. Why don't you come down and rest a spell? We'll look out for you."

"Jack, you get up on the barrel in case the sentries look this way," said Six-Fingers.

I shrugged, and took Hernani's hand and pulled him off the barrel; Six-Fingers held it steady so that the bell wouldn't clang. Then I took up his sign and jumped up on the barrel.

"Get him some water," I whispered. "Right!"

Six-Fingers scurried off for a gourd.

Hernani sat with his back against his barrel. He dropped quickly asleep.

I thought about what it'd be like to get branded "H. D." on my cheek. What would the ladies think? I'd tell them it stood for, "Handsome Devil". But they'd probably think it meant, "Hell's Danged."

After a while, Hernani said, "I am ashamed."

"Oh heck," I assured him, "there ain't nothing wrong with being drunk, even a habitual drunk, - if you're a soldier, I mean."

"Swear to me you will keep a secret."

"I swear."

"No - you must swear by the blood of Thomas Jefferson!"

"What? Well, all right, if you say so... I swear by poor Tom Jefferson's blood...What's going on, Hernani? You got a girl somewheres?"

"I cannot fight these Moon people."

"Why not? You sick? I won't tell."

"I am a Catholic."

"So?"

He looked up at me and said, "Jack, these Moon people are Catholics."

"So? I hear they're kind of Catholic savages."

"Protestants are savages. I am not Protestant. I am Catholic, you fool!"

"So?"

"Shh! So nothing. You are a good fellow. You think about it, eh?"

I took that to mean that he wanted me to keep my mouth shut about him being one of them Catholics. Six-Fingers came back with some water. As Hernani drank, Six-Fingers and I took the bell out of the barrel and buried it in the dirt. Hernani asked if I wouldn't mind standing on the barrel for a half-hour or so, in case the sentries looked this way; he was just going for a walk to loosen his bones and wanted to be alone. If he wasn't back in a half-hour, we agreed to go back to our bedrolls and he'd get back to the barrel by-and-by. He shook my hand and said he was most grateful to me. A half-hour came and went without him.

The next evening I was surprised to hear that Hernani deserted. I figured he wanted to be a real Hernani himself. I hoped he'd forget the horn part.

In "Annex Agonies", a few weeks previous, I'd pitied the eight hundred farm boys skin-and-bone feverish, and left behind our glorious march. But now! - after that glorious march along the Timaeus Range, down to where Timmy's Promontory stretched far into the Mare

Frigoris, or "Cold Sea" - now I envied them. I worked like a mule. I chopped dirt and sand while Old Glory snapped on top our earthworks. All them pretty little lunaritas, staring at us from the plaza of Plato, just across the Cold Sea, made me sweat worse of all. I longed to unbraided their long, dark hair, but my fingers were callused and dirty from my shovel, which helped heap up the walls of a fort, the cannon of which aimed straight at them. And had I not lifted up my hand and sworn an oath to my Constitution and my president? So here I was. (Besides, I had my eye on one of our camp girls, Sarah - same as five hundred other men.) "Say, Kelly," I asked, leaning on my shovel, "just why do the Army of Observation need a fort to do its observatin'? I figure we can do it easy from an observation balloon."

"We need to lend argument to the border as determined by Mr. Polk and the cartographers of the Democratic Party," speechified Kelly, taking the words from a penny-press editorial.

"To heck with Slow-Polk," said me. "Kelly, lend a hand with this here - this here - " (I was struggling -) " - this boulder..." Kelly was a little too slow to help me, I thought. "Come on, there, Lieutenant! Why, you think you're a Beau Bremmer with that fifteen cents of gold braid!"

Kelly gave me a kick in the pants first, then helped me carry the rock to a wheelbarrow. Then he pulled out his Walter Scott, and studied the science of glory, his lips moving.

I was sunburnt, the sweat stinging my eyes, with scratches on my arms that might any minute swell up proud with gangrene. Yes, and I was half mad from drinking briny spring water under that relentless Baptist hell fire heat. The coldness of the Cold Sea left much to be desired. I licked my lips until they bled. Soon my tongue was parched like a hunk of leather left out in the sun. My toe-blisters grew blisters of their own that festered, so I couldn't out run that cloud of flies buzzing lovingly around my head. My back ached from shoveling, and I felt so tired I thought I would drop and add my corpse to the redoubt wall. It was hard to sleep with scorpions, snakes, banditos, lunaritas, and Sarahs crawling all over my dreams at night. However, I took solace in the fact that it was all for glory, which was, I guessed, about to begin at any moment. We heard a lot about Valley Forge from the officers.

Everything on the Moon - I mean, the Peninsula of Texas - bit, poisoned, and cut. Even the plants looked like rocks and scorpions - strange, bloated nettles. I longed for the soft pines and sweet-smelling dogwood of Maryland. Here on the P. of T., cactus barbs and mesquite thorns tore at my trousers below the knee. Let me tell you, cactus and mes-

quite are poor usurpers to the cool brethren of Pine. Show me a pine cone pillow, and a bed of sweet brown needles, and I will give you sweet dreams and a clear conscience.

We were already a ragged, sorry lot of Regulars, true summer heirs of the winter Valley Forge, having fallen into the forge-fire, I suppose. My blue sleeve split all along the seam - and that little rent was a sorry testament to the patriotism of the contractors. No, neighbor, I did not doubt the campaign, which I was certain would prove, before Christmas, a glorious one.

No, I blamed those perfidious New England manufacturers - every one of them a Hartford Conventioneer - who'd rather secede the Glorious Union than lose an ill-gotten profit with Martian mooners - I mean the John Bulls of Great Deimos.

So I durned the Yankees, danged the Tammany Hall barons, I cursed the Tory-lovers and kicked the next boulder right where it resembled Kelly's chin. I strangled the Wall Street swanks, squatting down and getting ahold of the big rock. I gritted my teeth at the Whigs and their tiresome nagging, as I lifted the boulder, and then dropped it down on top the Abolitionist wheelbarrow. "Let abolitionists work the plantations, then," I thought. "We soldiers are practically slaves, anyway."

Then I was hungry. It was Regular fare again: biscuit, beans, and grits. I nourished my labor with some bovine-flavored water, and for lunch fried a crawdad from the nation of mud. We were all tired from this work. "If I wanted to do this rail-road work," complained Six-Fingers, " - I'd wear my hair in a queue, or play bagpipes."

He was in a spleeny wicked humor much of the time, being the only Mormon around. His sleeve had a red "S" on it, showing that he was special, an aristocrat - a sharpshooter, the best shot among us Cotton Balers. But what a burden, being an aristocrat - He had to carry a long, skinny rifle that was even heavier than the rest of us myopics' noisemakers & bayonet-holders - I won't call 'em muskets. They were Franklin sparklers, and that's about all. Old Zach put this trust in the bayonet electric charge, not the volley.

"Yeah?" I said. "Well I may be Loco, but glory's my motive."

"Back to work, Dough-Boys!" screamed Sergeant Mallory, who hated me because I hated him. It was he who made me a soldier, back at Camp Greenhorn.

Walking back to the shovels, I idly reached in my pocket and pulled out a note. It hadn't been there when I gave them to Sarah to fix and patch. I hoped the worst.

DEER JACK I JES WANTID TO SAY
YU AR KEWTER THIN A SPOTID
PUPEE DO YU LYK ME SARAH.

Chapter 3. The Old Tailor & the Young Seamstress

I was a-limping back to camp one evening when I saw a fat Old Timer sewing away at his dirty trousers, sitting in all his spindly-legged bandy-boned knobby-kneed glory, there, in his dusty longjohns, an upsy-daisy bucket for a stool. "Say, you a tailor?" I asked, and he nodded in curious way, sort of surprised.

"Lookee here, pops, I'll give you these two silver wheels embossed with excellent profiles of our friend the noble savage if you just sew up my shirt and these buttons I bought from that old Lunar peddler - they're in the left pocket."

The Old Timer looked up at me, merry in his eye. "All rightee, son," he said. "Lay 'er down."

So I did, and walked away bare-chested in my own longjohns, the camp uniform of us Regulars, penny-press engravings to the contrary. I was picking the twenty-two legged mites from my pits and slapping flies, singing for foolish joy, "Green grows the laurel, all sparklin' with dew - I'm so lonely my darlin' since partin' with you-oo - " when wild-faced Kelly dropped like balloon ballast down in my path, and thumped me smack in the nose.

"What in heck - ?" I cried, holding a handful of nose blood.

"I'll give you heck, Jack!" Kelly glared crazily at me, his eyes big as boot buckles. "You tryin' to ruinize my military career?" he shouted, hopping mad, flailing the air with his saber. (He had it buckled over his longjohns.) "Why don't you ask Sarah next time, you fool!"

So that was how I overcame my shyness, and took my trousers and such to Sarah, who took a liking to me, and slipped that little love-note in my pocket.

The first time I laid eyes on Sarah, it was just beyond all the neat lined rows of tents at Annex Agonies. I was taking a salt-water bath behind Mary Jane's Hospitality Shack in a wooden tub set under a scrappy Martian palm, (planted back when the Moon was a Martian dominion), when I heard such a buzzing howl, I had to stand up and peek around the shack. There was a jumble of Dough-Boys, Rangers, tarts, and one or two of the less stuck-up camp wives, all crouched and clutching one another with a mighty morbid glee. The center of attention was this tall cactus queen, with her long black hair all wild, who was in a barefoot crouch like a wrestler, hands up like claws. Her mean black eyes blazed

bolts down at a big ugly rattler. The snake's knobby tail was flickering fast snick-snick-snick like a little demon snare drum. The arm and fist of the snake lifted up out of its broad, muscular coils, weaving back and forth, tongue snapping in and out in little lightnings. The cactus queen bobbed and weaved back and forth same as the snake. There was a slight snarl to her lip, as if to say, "Snake, you are my soup!" Then that snarl rose up in a wild grin that made her mean black eyes twinkle. All of a sudden she and the snake lunged together - the knot of mammal and reptile slipped free - and the cactus queen stood up straight and tall, holding up her fist. The little mobs shouted, slapping foreheads and fannies. The snake head protruded from her fingers, trying to snap. The coils seethed, wrapped tight around her wrist. The mob paid up: a pile of coins and script lay at the victor's feet. "Now I got up a little charity collection to buy that feller some breeches," she called, toeing the money. Before I realized she was talking about me, she pointed that snake my way: "Don't you think I didn't see you peeking at me buck-naked from your bath tub behind them bushes!" I blushed, but all the same, gave her a wink. Then, to my surprise, she winked too. She uncoiled the snake from her arm, and bull-whipped it against the dirt to kill it. Then, a minute later, as I was finishing up my bath, all of a sudden this snake comes flying over the shack, out of the sky, and splashes down in the water with me. My naked flight across camp caused no end of mirth.

So, recalling this, pinching my bloody nostrils, I was trying to make up my mind to jump under Kelly's swords and clobber him, if I could, but I recalled we weren't on our farm on the Chesapeake any more. He was an officer, now, his grade purchased fair and square, and I did not relish the thought of my back being tickled by the affection of Sergeant Mallory's nine-tailed cat. Kelly had already made plain his willingness to flaunt his fifteen cents worth of gold braid.

"Do you know, Dough-Boy," Kelly pronounced with exaggerated clarity, "just who that was you asked to - sew your buttons!"

"Who? That fat old slob? Who is he, Professor Morse? Napoleon II? What do I care who that fat old barn-burning son of a loco-foco is?"

"That, mind you - " whispered Kelly, stopping to grind his teeth on the grist-wheel of his frustration. He threw my shirt at me. " - That was General Taylor! (Oh, what are you goin' to do next! You should have stayed home with Ma!)" He clasped his hand over his face.

I didn't believe him. "Where's my two bits?"

Chapter 4. Glory; or, Walter Scott Reported Missing From Fort Texas

Imagine how embarrassed I was when I recognized my old tailor by his horse, Old Whitey. My tailor sat in Old Whitey's saddle, slovenly but easily, a broad white slouch hat keeping away the flies, Old Whitey's long tail a-twitching. As he rode by, heading east to Fort Polk, I saw the stars on his unbuttoned Regular blues. We cheered the general, and I cheered him louder than all. We loved his "Rough and Ready" ways. Beside Old Zach, neat and prim, rode Colonel Bliss, his aid, whom we called "Perfect" Bliss, because such a man was he, a precise intelligence without fault, that dust actually morally refused to settle on him. Hip Hip Hurrah! - 'Rah! 'Rah! 'Rah! Taylor and Bliss were a funny pair. They rode off east, leaving us a cloud of dust and not much else.

Whilst so busily engaged in raising the sand and dust fortifications of Fort Slow-Polk, as we called it, or Fort Texas, as the officers called it, way out on Timmy's Promontory, General Lunar-ista's horsemen circled over yonder east, crossed the Cold Sea, and entered Texas. In so doing, them pesky Lunars cut off our supply road to the balloon flotilla moored at the masts of Archytas Crater, or Archie's Hole as we clept it. Archie's Hole lay to our south-east, conveniently located at the mouth of the narrows of Mare Frigoris. Taylor'd sent a few hundred men there with some cannon to put the Crater of Plato under blockade. Them pesky Lunars usually steamed trade - and now war supplies - from the fortified crater of Fracastorius on the Sea of Nectar through the little Sea of Plenty, north across the Sea of Tranquillity, north through the Sea of Serenity, through the Sleepy Lake to the Cold Sea. This may seem a long way, but it was a far shorter supply line than ours, steaming all the way up across the Gulf between Earth and Moon! On the one hand, now, both our balloons and their steamboats had to pass through our cannons at Archie's Hole. (The big steam balloons had to tether inside a crater on account of needing shelter from the Lunar wind, lest they be dashed against the rocks. Archie's Hole was our second balloon base, after Annex Agonies. It was the closest Texan crater to Fort Polk, so that fort protected it while it blockaded Plato's Crater. Closest to us at Fort Slow-Polk was old Timaeus Crater, whose walls were all crumbled down, except for Timmy's Promontory). On the other hand, Lunar horseman patrolled around the empty craters - Old Bond & the Barrows - on the road between Fort Slow-Polk and our supply balloons at Archie's Hole, which was only fortified along one side, with a

single ditch cut in front of it, with six cannon, and a name - Fort Polk. It was no Fort McHenry.

General Lunarista and his Army of the Sea of Tranquility had marched up to the Crater of Plato and replaced the pretty faces of the lunaritas with the bores of Napoleonic cannon. A whole line of 'em behind a stone wall called Fort Parades faced our Fort Slow- Polk. Thousands and thousands of moonmen-in-arms marched on the other side of the Cold Sea inlet.

So, to break the blockade Lunarista's cavalry had put on our fort, and maintain the blockade on his fort, Old Rough and Ready and Perfect Bliss rode off side by side, back to the balloons - although these knights did not ride off by themselves, neither. They took with them the long column of the 3rd Infantry, and also the 4th, too, each five hundred farmboys with shouldered telegraph-firelocks marching off into the rising dust. And, behind the Fourth marched the 5th, a column five men wide, one hundred long, followed by the 8th's column. By this time we of the 7th "Cotton Balers" had throats too dry with boot-dust to cheer any more. After the 8th, all of Ringgold's Flying Cannon creaked and wobbled by, their long wings folded on their rusty hinges, balloon silk folded away, followed by all the little Volta's Pile caissons for the electric bayonets, followed by several hundred mess wagons - mostly empty. We Cotton Balers remained, with two weeks' rations and a couple dozen camp-wives, including one certain cactus queen, seamstress, and snake-catcher.

Sarah kidded the men who got all quiet watching all our pals leave us alone to face the Army of the Sea of Tranquility. She called to Major Brown, our commander, "Major! How 'bout you lend me a horse and a saber for about an hour or so - I figure I'd go 'cross over and whup them pesky Frankies all by myself!"

"No, Sarah," said the Major, smiling a little. "We need you right here, so the men don't feel too lonesome."

"Taylor took all the horses anyhow, Sarah," added Six-Fingers. "You just got to stay with us." (I didn't figure it yet, but that fellow had taken a liking to Sarah same as everybody. All his wives were far away, so he felt lonesome same as the rest of us.)

Of course, across the Mare Frigoris there were ten Mooner musketeers for every one of us, so we didn't feel to lonesome.

We remained to whack the dying mules and drag up another pile of dust to make the last wall of our six-sided fort, while skinny Lunar dogs sniffed everything. One dog ate my chess set and spat it up again, a checkers set.

Here we remained, the lonesome lucky 7th Infantry, and Company E of the 2nd Artillery, five hundred soldiers of Democracy and Progress, strong and proud to be the guardians at the back door of American Destiny, noble warriors and mule-whackers, tireless shovelers, blasphemers, and lunarita-ogglers, fist-fighting for we were low on grog, and chewing our beef-flavored salt with old boot hardtack, and washing our grogless patriotic tongues with canteens full of crumbs and mud. The dire situation didn't bother me; neither did the rough-and-unready conditions, because, on the one hand, I felt sure that the much promised glory would shine warm and sweet at any moment; and on the other hand, Sarah was smitten with me and I was sure smitten with Sarah. The thoughts thrilled me; and sometimes when I was thinking about Sarah I'd get that warm and sweet feeling; and sometimes when I was wondering about this phenomena called glory I'd get all out of breathe and bug-eyed.

'Rah for Sarah! 'Rah for glory! I lifted my shovel with pride.

My only complaint was that Lieutenant Borginnis - so called - wouldn't let me fish the Cold Sea. However, as the sky cooled from white to red to purple, and I saw the thousands and thousands of lights from Lunar camp fires spotting the plain, this Borginnis belabored of his own volition to complete Wall 6 under the darkling sky of the thirty-first of April, eighteen hundred and forty-six.

Chapter 5. Dough-Boy and Cactus Queen

Sarah was like an Actress or Queen, she was so famous among us and so loved. Scarecrows were always lining up for her to sew their shirts and wash their socks, just so that they could sit and talk with her awhile. She was wild and I don't know what she saw in me, a shy and sinful farmboy. Except that she was shy underneath the wild and I think the shy is what took to me. After I found that note in my pocket that asked, "DO YU LYK ME?", I couldn't sleep regular, I had lightning in my bones, I saw in the sheen of western stars her heavenly swoop of hair.

The next time I saw her was at the three-wheeled chuck wagon, where she was laddling out some stew. "Well, Sarah," I said with downcast eyes, "looks to me like we'd better go for a walk..."

"All right," she smiled, clinking the spoon down and wiping her hands on Private Tristani-Firouzi's apron. Although there were soldiers all around, and trouble clouding our tomorrows, everything

seemed so quiet and peaceful just then. Pretty soon we were slowly ambling between the pickets and the camp fires.

"Do you like me, Jack?" she asked, her black eyes shining beneath her veil of locks.

"I'm smitten with you, Sarah," I grinned all foolish. "Powerfully smitten. My oh my you are pretty, you are! I never seen nothing like you. You're so sweet and symmetrical, an' yet so strong, proud, and chipper - you are a regular down-to-earth angel. You are so much more alive and kicking than those dainty dolls back in Baltimore - "

" - I ain't never been to no city, Jack. I don't know how to dress like no fancy lady, I can't hardly spell, I never seen no telegraph pole nor silky tablecloth. I don't know them new dances, those fancy ballroom dances, though I can jig, stomp, and polka as well as any woman from I don't care where, even if she hails from Paris!" She flipped her hair from her smoldering, hot-coal eyes. "I can skin a rabbit in the dark. I can stitch up any old cut, be it from thorn, knife, or bear. I know herbs an' flowers an' birdcalls an' Injun hand-signals. I know sixteen different kinds of poker. I can shoot straight as a whistle, and ride - swim, too - as good, long, an' hard as anyone. One time back at Camp Annex Agonies I raced against Sam Walker, and won, too, though no one saw it, and Sam won't admit it in a thousand years. I can make soap, moonshine, an' love like no camp-wife you ever had, I swear!"

She took my hand in hers and tugged it hard, till I met her lips, so sweet and sublime, like shimmering air after a thunderstorm.

"Sarah, you are something special. But I'm just a boy who was born in a barn," I apologized. "I can swim the dog-paddle," I offered, and added, after a moment's thought, "and I read a bunch of books!"

"Oh, Jack, I never met nobody who read a bunch of books."

"Really? Well, I even got six - no, seven - of 'em at home."

"Seven, really? A library! Why Jack Borginnis, you are a scholar! What was the name of one of 'em? What was the last one you read up?"

I was glad to tell her: "It was - Napoleon and His Generals."

"Oh, that sounds like a fine book!"

"Oh, Sarah, it is! I'd read it to you if I had it with me." Then all the air started blibbering out of my balloon.

"What's the matter, Jack?"

"What good is being a scholar if all my books are so far away. I wanted to take 'em, but they wouldn't let me - they got a tyrannical weight-limit for Ballooners, you know. Now I wish I hadn't taken my Andy Jackson medals." (I'd just gone and lost them to a wager with Sergeant Weigart during the transit, anyhow.) " - "

Sarah, won't you get tired of me, since not counting my library there's nothing special about me - ?"

"Jack...I like you special," said Sarah in a hushed voice, right in my ear. I shivered.

We rolled around awhile. Sarah's hair tickled my face. We rolled this way and that. Sarah told me by and by that her mama was half Apache, and she never knew her own papa. She was always lonesome inside, born lonesome. She left her mama when she was ten, because she didn't get on with her mama's new man, who was a mean drunk. When she was fourteen, she became a camp-wife to her first soldier; now it was six years later and was a permanent auxiliary to the Seven Infantry, a steady Cotton Baler camp-wife, though the husbands came and went. This sort of camp-marriage was a different kind of creature than a city-marriage, but all in all when you balanced it out there was less fuss and more fun.

Pretty soon we were talking about getting hitched, just like that, camp style. The war was coming, we could feel it. We had to hurry up, I felt, and she said. She said, "I got to shed my old husband like a snake gots to shed her skin to grow." Then I thought about how I first saw her, catching that snake, and about how much I respected her, and I felt bad.

Then I confessed. "Sarah, I have to tell you, that if you are going to marry me it is only fair you know I am - I mean, I was - an awful bad sinner."

She shrugged like I said the dumbest fool thing. "I wasn't raised in no convent meself, Jack."

"No," I said shamefully. "I'm a bad sinner..." I sure wanted to tell her but I choked on my tongue, which was kind of twisting around like an Ericsson Screw. So I just spat out my tongue and said, "I can't tell you exactly, but... - There was an accident back in Camp Greenhorn. There's blood on my hands. I am sorry." I waited for her to change her tune.

"Don't be sorry to me," she said, and looked up at the Milky Way, and the earth plowing into it like a big balloon-ram of war. "That's between you and your creator." Then she retied the bows of her dress, and took my arm. "I been in scraps meself. One time I had to cut my ma's man's ear off - Another time, when I was about fourteen, I had to lay my husband's hide full of rock salt before he'd go away and stay away - " Her eyes got sorrowful and far away. "That's why I can't stay married long," she warned.

This alarmed me. "What do you mean, Sarah?"

"Cause I'm barren."

I didn't say anything. Then I challenged, "How do you know?"

"I'm barren as a corn-cob witch. I know I am. It ain't even a question no more. I'm a corn-cob witch. I can't make you a family, Jack, not never. So I can't and just won't stay married. No one can make me, neither. A camp marriage don't use a preacher, and without a preacher it ain't fixed in the stars. I'll be your camp-wife awhile and then later on I'll go away. I'd rather jest be everyone's pal then one feller's forever-wife. Since I'm barren I've made the Cotton Balers my family. You can call me a whore if you want to, won't be the first time, and I don't care. Whore's don't got fancy-lady airs. They own up to their sinnin' ways; sinnin' is natural so they's more honest. Whore's earn their keep, too. I earn my keep as a seamstress and cook so don't think I ain't proud and free like an eagle, and got claws, too, for those who try to cut my feathers - I got a shiny new Colt repeater, Sam Walker gave it to me - so you got your warnin', Jack. What do you say? Do we hitch our teams to one wagon for a spell?"

"Well, Sarah... I don't quite understand all your wild notions... I thought that once you fell in love, everything would turn out all right..."

"Jack Borginnis, I love you so much right now. Is it enough?" She stared at me awful serious and plain.

"I love you too, Sarah. I never loved any Chesapeake gal like you."

"That's 'cause thar ain't no gal like me nowheres!" she laughed, twirling out her skirts joyfully. "All the boys tell me that!"

Her camp-husband was a fellow in the 2nd Artillery, a foreign-born named George Dalwig, but he had come down with a bad case of correctional bucking and gagging on account of having his hands in his pockets and slouching. If you've never been "bucked" it only means to get yourself tied up more or less like a dead buck deer, with your hands tied over your knees and a stick shoved in over your arms and under your legs, and sitting in that position for a day or two. Although he didn't slouch any more, and didn't touch his fingers anywhere near his raggedy pockets, he did limp when he marched now, and some said he lost all his patriotism. Anyways Sarah had no trouble divorcing him. She didn't even have to take her Colt out of her apron.

It was a simple ceremony in the Infirmary Tent involving a witness, a bible and a bottle. McKnight, the orderly, went outside without comment, because although he was a nice fellow, he was a reverend, and felt obligated to disapprove. Sarah put her hand on the bible and said, "George! I ain't your wife no more."

Then we passed the bottle; for I was the witness; then George was my witness in my getting hitched.

Afterwards there was a good old foot-stomping bucket-thumping fiddle-sawing hootenanny. Then I wrote it down in the regimental books, because no women were allowed in the camp unless they were wives. (Whores didn't count, being kind of invisible in plain sight, but they all left with the rest of the army.) So with Sarah and Mrs. Frederickson blushing looking on, I wrote it in Lieutenant Frederickson's register, slowly, carefully, using my best handwriting:

Ajax Borginnis, Private First Class
Sarah Borginnis, Wife.

It sure looked fine.

I was mighty proud to be her husband. But although we linked up shy to shy, out other sides kept yanking to break loose again - her wild side, and my criminal side.

Chapter 6. Fireflies

Since, during the months camped in the sixty mile valley of Annex Agonies, we lost about a hundred men to desertions, it was hardly a wonder to me that over the weeks camped on the Cold Sea, a few dozen foreign-borns - mostly leprechauns from Phobos (the Green Moon that suffered so under the tyranny of Great Deimos, who had knocked a big crater in the northern end of the former), seen fit to swim the river toward the hot-blooded hospitality of Moonish womanhood. (Several of those deserters drowned and washed back to our side, and, in fact, two culprits swimming south were shot by our sentries back in April: Henry Lamb and Carl Gross.) It grieved me sorely. It also grieved me that the lunaritas were now nowhere to be seen. They sure were cute, them funny lunaritas, with their dark braids and their sweet round faces, so soft and gentle, and quite kissable. Oh, but I was married now. Gone were the days of spyglass-ogging them bathing in the Frigoris! Gone were the most friendly exchange of bows and curtsies! Gone were their shy smiles and long, dark braids! Then it was I started to realize exactly how hard and how lonely was this juggernaut chariot called - marriage.

I stood sentinel on the rampart of Fort Slow-Polk, wondering where they went to. Were they hiding in convents? Were they hiding in the mountains? "Ah, Sarah dear," I told myself, "you have married a sinner." Right next to me, our electromagnetics hung over the parapet, all hooked up to the Galvanic caissons, poised and ready to manufacture the

most democratic, progressive ball-lightning to pound the church plaza and promenade wall of Plato's Crater, once a lunarita favorite constitutional, now the fortifications for the same cannons that lost Waterloo. And I asked myself, am I really married? is there really going to be a war? and if either question were true, why? Were we justified in calling this Lunar crescent a mere peninsula of Texas? Was I not a hypocrite, calling myself a husband without reforming my sinful ways?

Kelly paused near melancholy-me. So stout and strong was he in his shiny lieutenant's uniform, (not too shabby because he paid for it himself.) And to melancholy-me he said, "Look at all those fireflies we need to swat, Jack!" tapping his Ivanhoe against his palm.

A few lights glowed in Plato's Crater; but thousands upon thousands glowed in the fields of dust of the Lunar beyond.

Major Jacob Brown stood on high bastion, scouting the enemy with his spy-glass, and, overhearing my brother, nodded sadly. He ambled two steps toward us and stopped, murmuring softly, "Fireflies... Youth is ever full of the bluster of Immortality; and for that I thank our Maker. It is our hard lot to roll our Republican wagon through the graveyards of kings, savages, and despots... For my generation, youth seemed but an admixture of strife, hard life, and hope for future recompense. But I am getting on now, (he smiled softly and ran his head over his bald head), "I've been a soldier thirty years...thirty years! Can it be so long since I left Massachusetts? Yes. I am almost an old man, then, and I fear that Man's lot is Vanity...Vanity. You and your generation, Lieutenant, shall learn that war is not a Walter Scott affair; and I fear that knowledge will come all too quickly. ...To me, our purpose here is to see to it that you and your children inherit the full promise of the work begun by our Founding Fathers, with such sacrifice..."

We stood in silence a moment. I felt solemn and resolved, come what may. I saw my brother's shining eyes, and knew that he, too, was strangely stirred. That sad, proud, sublime moment passed. Dust devils corkscrewed out of the dust yard of the fort, and clawed at our resolute faces, until we winced. Major Brown screwed his eyes tight shut and with his fingers pinched his nostrils. When the dust devil passed, he straightened, cautiously sniffed, and cheerfully recommended, "We'd best get on with digging that bomb-proof."

That long, fateful night, a stranger arrived.

Chapter 7. A Stranger Drops Out of a Dust Devil

The face of the Earth blurred in the dust storm. It blurred orange, it smeared black. The States gibbered and gaped. It had a blue flame inside of it. I imagined the giant sloshing of the ocean in the Earth's core. I was alone with that jack o'lantern, hovering in the dark Gulf.

I scratched an X in the sand, and walked away from it ten paces. On my return it was gone. Or I was lost. It wasn't the first time it had happened on this watch.

"Lonely picketeer, where's your company?"

You may well ask. (I asked it of myself.)

"Alone on the Lunar P. of T. The sarge is only human, more or less. Maybe he forgot me. But if I go back, he'd give me a drubbing, sure enough. No thankee. It's a weird, pale white world, this Moon."

I saw murky ghosts in the wind. I turned my musket upside down, that the dust might drip down the barrel. I traced a big, sharp X in the sand with the bayonet, idly. What if I wandered too far from the fort? Wouldn't some Moonman or Apache creep up and cut my throat? I idled, uncertain, between boredom and fear. The wind ticked like a clock, rattling stones and bones and such. As I idled, the wind eased my mark. I looked around for the fort. Sometimes, when the whirling dust ebbed, I caught a dull feel of its bulk. It was dark out, but the fort glowed blacker. The wind creaked, <<Helloa.>>

I turned round, saw nothing but swirls.

The swirls scratched my sight. I rubbed dust from my eyes. I heard a creak of leather, maybe. My knees went rubbery. "Stop! and be recognized!" I hailed.

I toggled the switch on the Pile, heavy on my back, turned up the wooden knob of the annunciator box on my belt till the gas glowed foggy in the little window painted 5,000 V. That meant it was ready to discharge 5,000 of Volta's Patented Bolts. The bolts came from the pile through the wire that went through the wooden butt and along the barrel to the electric bayonet, which differed from a regular bayonet as being a copper rod, not a knife. I was much obliged to put the long electric bayonet between me and the grey swirlies.

A big round shadow moved in the dark.

Who was this lone balloonist, looming? A Lunar scout? Did Great Deimos give them some old redcoat balloons, just to confound us? No - American. Its manufacture was American, all right. A one-horse Flying Gig, the quadruped-tread-

mill rolling pulley-wires to a lazy Archimedean Screw. I felt the wind ebb a bit.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

A quick glance over my shoulder betrayed the shadowy weight of Wall Number 4. ("Sarge! Sarge!" I hollered behind. "We got company!")

The lone rider pulled the boom, and the balloon jumped - gone.

("What's that?" called a voice from the fort.)

("Get your arse out here and find out then, Mister Curious," I thought, taking a few steps backward.)

The big shadow reappeared, closer, growing - the gig wheels thumped the ground, bouncing up again. <<Hello, Fort Texas!>> the rider called. The shadow disappeared again, and then, looming suddenly large on me - the complicated little gig rolled hard on the ground, springs groaning, spokes crackling, the wheels broke off as the rider jerked the mast collar-pin out - the big silk balloon shot up ballastless and gone forever in the murk of the Moon - The axles scrapped the dust - the carriage bounced, slid, and toppled over. A wheel wobbled by me. The mule stood up, braying, and clambered out of the snapped treadmill traces. Oddly, I heard a big clock ticking in the busted gig-carriage. With a creak of leather, wood, and springs, the rider stood up and stepped out of it. He walked toward me, dustily, he clothes rippling in the wind. He was bright-eyed, and stiff faced, leering benignly, leaning close. There was something grotesque about him - his head was too big. I heard that clock again, and a snake hissing somewhere, unless it was the wind rattling over the dusty ground. <<Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick! Tick-ick-ick!>>

I was going to ask if he was all right, but something made me level my bayonet at him. "Stop right there, Mister. Halt! I said - I got a bayonet full of lightning!"

("Borginnis! Who's there?" demanded the voice from the gate.)

"Who are you? Answer up - right quick," I told the stranger, keeping my bayonet point between us.

The man with the face like a mask answered with a bow. <<Tick! - Tick! - Tick! Prince-President Franklin Stove, at your service.>>

"Prince-President? What's that?" I demanded. I was suspicious. I didn't like the sound of that. Sounded like a joke on Andy Jackson.

<<A Prince-President, sir, is a biped construction which stands at the top of the hierarchy of the artificial aristocracy, that of...Tick! - inventions - Tick! - machines - Tick! - engines, and the like...>>

I couldn't say all that to the Gate Officer. "Tell me who you are, really. State your business! - If you're a spy...!"

<<Spy? Spy, no,>> said the stranger, his face still placidly benign in a most suspicious and strange way.

<<Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - I am a Metal Man. I have been purchased for your service. I have a deed from the War Department. Tick! - I am a moral surgeon. Tick! - (Machines are machines). Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - General Taylor send me along from Fort Polk to Fort Texas, and - Tick! - and here we are. Tick! - (Like a dark and savage Ego, chained to this dreaming beast, following the Cold Sea to its source.) Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - Let me in, sir. I hunger.>>

The last he spoke to the sergeant of the gate, Mallory, hurrying with three soldiers. "What manner of business do you have with this fort, sir?" he demanded, squinting his little eyes out of his big red cheeks.

"Tick! - Fowl business."

"Foul business?" Mallory looked confused and alarmed, drawing back.

<<Tick! - Fowl business,>> repeated the stranger. <<I need eggs- actly what this bunker has; - I mean coal bunker. Tick! Tick! Neither flesh nor fare I refuse - Tick!-Tick! - Tick! - I eat all kinds of coal. Tick - Got to serve my stomach, Yankee Doodle-Do, pleased to meet you, Mister Moloch - Tick! - Wait a moment - Tick! - Just a moment - Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - There. Sir, I've a letter of introduction from Secretary Marcy.>>

"You do, do you?" smiled Mallory. "That's nice, ain't it? (Is he mad then?)" he asked me - I shrugged.

The sergeant chewed his mustache and slapped the saber against his leg. "Take his mule," he told his men. He took hold of the Prince- President's arm, then quickly let go, looking shocked. Recovering quickly, he said, "Come now, sir. You've too much moon-sun. The lieutenant wants to talk to you inside. What's your name?" The men hesitated before the odd fellow. "Go on!" the sergeant barked.

I told the sergeant, "He says he's Mr. Stove, a surgeon, Sage."

"Tick - Prince-President Franklin Stove," the stranger bowed. "I am a moral surgeon, - yes. I can eggs-tract sins of the flesh - Err-rr - Yes. I am a Metal Man, - Tick! - yes. At your service," and as he bowed again, I saw a little puff of greasy black smoke rise up out of his top hat.

"A Metal Man?" repeated Sergeant Mallory, rubbing the hand that had touched the stranger. "You say you're a Metal Man?" His eyes leaked tears on account of the dust and the smoke.

"Aye, sir," said the stranger.

Who was he?

"Tick! - Aye, manufactured by the Brethren of Philadelphian Mechanics, initially," he added, ticking thoughtfully. "Boston, New York... Tick! - Richmond, Charleston, Atlanta, New Orleans, and anon... Tick - ick! - Tick! - ...Now Fort T-eggs - (Tick!) Now Fort T- eggs-eggs - (Tick!)-Teggssas, bulwark of the Lunar P. of T."

The sergeant wiped his eyes. "One man and his mule, Lieutenant!" he shouted angrily to the gate. ("A Metal Man...," he repeated to himself.)

"Open the gate!"

Chapter 8. Prince-President Franklin Stove

<<Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick! Tick-ick-ick! - Aye, sir. Metal. And porcelain, and wood. I am an automaton. Like the German kind, who plays chess?>> he suggested helpfully to Sergeant Mallory, as he waited for the gate of Fort Slow-Polk to open. <<Maybe you have heard of the one - Tick! - named Prince Milig, the rage of Vienna and of New York? Tick! - and the Turkish sage, Bophodolphus Maelzel, whose predictions always came true? Tick! - But that one was a fraud. There was a trained monkey inside, pulling its puppet wires. Tick - (What pulled the monkey's wires?) Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - I am the real McCoy, I am. And native manufacture.>> He rapped his knuckles against his head - it rang like a bell. <<Tick! - Now, myself, I am a metal fellow, but I am chicken at heart - Tick! - let us in, let us in, sir! My boiler-pressure drops. Must feed the fire some sinfully black coal!>>

"You...from a circus?" asked the sergeant, walking sideways, saber unsheathed.

<<Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - In a manner of speaking, sir. In a manner of speaking. This metal fellow came all the way from Washington City as a gift from the Cabinet. Did I neglect to mention that Secretary Marcy secured my services for your behalf? (Vice-President Dallas sends his howdy-do, too.) Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - The Philadelphian Mechanics sent me to Senator Calhoun, in order that I might, by means of my elastic tongue, impress on him the logical and reasonable necessity of protecting the national genius for fabrication with protective tariffs. Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - The Senator promptly bid me to mimic his oratory on the benefits of a Greek Democracy; thither he sent me, until I publicly predicted his death by catarrh in 1850, and Negro emancipation thirteen years after - Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - he packed me in a crate and sent me as a good-will gift to Senator Webster, whom I informed, upon his immediate inquiry, that never would

he be President, that the Union will soon suffer severe secessionitis - Tick! - Tick! - to which he roared, 'Tell that to Young America!' And so he arranged an audience with President Polk. Tick - a - tick! - I told Mr. Polk that war will come on the second of May, that the U. S. A. would be victorious, and - Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - Whig victory in '48 with General Taylor. Mr. Polk frowned at this; but Secretary Marcy and Vice President Dallas bent at either ear, and - Tick! - Tick! - bid me balloon to the Moon and General Taylor's camp with all due alacrity...'Mind you,' Marcy added, 'all due alacrity!' Ah, here we are!>> he added, for the gate had dropped forward, becoming a drawbridge over the briars and bramble-filled ditch.

("Sergeant Mallory!" called my brother's voice from the open gate. "Get that stranger and his mule inside on the double!")

("Aye, sir!" called the sergeant.) "You may go ahead, Mr. Metal."

<<Tick! - Prince>> corrected the stranger, <<President Stove...>> A little steam escaped his nostrils, and he lurched forward.

" - Borginnis, get inside. Rawlings, it's your watch," the sergeant said.

My sentry duty finally ended, I led the procession of metal, mule, and men. We clomp-clomped over the wooden drawbridge. A soldier's boots and ankles stood over us, on top the gate's cross beam, the rest of him obscure in silhouette. The Lieutenant and a platoon of armed men waited behind. "Close it up!" Kelly bawled. "Fetch the Captain, corporal. You - light a lantern, and bring it here." The men rushed and heaved on the drawbridge pulleys. It swung wobbling up, groaned, and clomped shut. The spindly drummer-boy ran back with a light swinging, his shadow leaping all around. Captain George Washington Seawell strode behind.

The Prince-President looked funny in the light. He was tall - even taller, with his stove pipe hat - and his face was handsome - even proud - but false, like a mask. He stood solemnly, ticking pleasantly, stroking the square trimness of his porcelain beard. "He says he's Prince somebody or other, sir," saluted Mallory. "He says he's made of metal. He's an educated automaton, sir, so he says. A surgeon. Sent by the President, too. And sir, he's brought us a mule."

"We can use his mule, that's certain," mused Captain Seawell. "As to him being metal or not, I don't care if a man is a Pope-Kissing Mick, Heathen Mandarin, Black Rascal, Drunkard Injun, or Rag- Picking Heeb, long as he's an American. But right now, none of us are worth our weight in cow pies lest we get those bomb-proofs finished. Take his mule to the pit right now! Maybe now we

can complete it by daylight, god willing. Give it, with my compliments, to Captain Mansfield!"

Puffing his long cigar furiously, he examined the stranger up and down and all around. "You!" he called, pointing his cigar. "So you're a prince, eh? So you're not an American, eh?"

Captain Dixon Miles climbed down from Gun Platform 4 on the other side of the gate and came to stand beside Captain Seawell, arms folded. Old Sock ran over with a crystal of toddy, Miles' habitual indulgence.

<<Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - On the contrary,>> bowed the Metal Man, his stove pipe describing an arc of smoke and ash. <<I am of Philadelphian manufacture - modified and improved in New Orleans - Tick! - my name is Prince...>>

" - The great United States Constitution," observed Captain Seawell with an unfriendly expression, "says no citizen can hold an aristocratic title like king or lord or prince..."

Perhaps he was thinking this Metal Man a spy of the Great Powers. After all, they had all tried to make a dirty deal with Texas when it was its own republic. They all wanted to steal crescents from the Moon, on the grounds that the Moon owed them millions. Only a few years ago, in '39, a whole passel of Great Powers sent, as a bankers' warning, a joint stock balloon fleet to bombard the fortress of Fracastorius Crater. They even went so far as to knock down the northern wall of Fracastorius with a new kind of cannonball, a hollow iron shell stuffed with powder, lit by a fuse. Besides the infamy of experimenting their terrible new weapon on the little Moon, I wouldn't neglect to mention that dirty trick Great Deimos played on us, making a deal with some Lunar general for the rights to dig the Tunnel of Heraclitus even as we waited for a president to stay in power long enough to exchange diplomatic niceties. Thus a monarch stole the fast route to Venus from a republic, showing the nature of Martian despotism: Conquest and meddling all around the Inner Spheres, not to mention unfair monopolies of Saturn's silk, rubber and spices. Also they felt free to shoot down our slaver balloons in orbit around Jupiter; - although some folks like Corporal Hernani Klager thought our own navy wasn't doing enough to enforce Congress' law against that kind of import, it just wasn't fair that the monarchs got all the spoils of that Sphere. But the point is this Outer Sphere meddling in Inner Sphere affairs really got our Monroe Doctrine dander going.

No doubt them pesky Lunars wanted to use our Monroe Doctrine (and Polk Corollary to it) against us in our legitimate defense of Texas. No doubt they wanted to set the mighty Union Jack bal-

loon- fleets against our own, in which case the little Moon, in the middle, might be spared.

Wasn't this metal fellow a spy, then?

Chapter 9. The Metal Man Points Out His Niceties of Manufacture

The women held their own, independent hierarchy of command over the fort. It was determined not exactly by loyalty or law, as determined the military command, but something very much the same when put in plain terms, which I shall call carrot and stick. We had to obey Old Zach and Major Brown because they were our commanders, but in truth we obeyed them because we loved them. Other men, such as Sergeant Mallory, we didn't obey so conscientiously, we just jumped when they were watching us, because we feared them, and sulked lazily when they were not, because we hated them for making us afraid. But the women's "carrot" was feminine kindness and comeliness - a kind of higher inspiration for which soldiers on the frontier thirsted more than water. However, the kindness and comeliness of civilization would not survive our rough and tumble camps more than five minutes; it was impossible even for the bellest of the belles to survive the sunny camp stool without freckling or perspiring. Therefore, it was that particular specie of kindness and comeliness that, unlike rouge and l'eau de Paris, not only survived the rough and tumble rigors of the frontier camp, it thrived: that brave vivaciousness of which Sarah Borginnis was queen. After watching the two women arguing over the position of the Ladies' Tents, and watching all the women turn from slow, silent obedience to Mrs. Miles to cheerful bustling about behind Sarah, I set myself down with my second to last pint of whiskey, and pondered this. Pretty soon my bottle was empty and I figured everything in terms of carrot and stick regarding human nature. Not only military life, but also republican and despotic government, breaking horses and training dogs and domesticating children, and even the disturbing radicalism that wage labor was more productive than Negro servitude. Now how could that be, I wondered. How could the carrot be mightier than the stick? Drawing in the dirt with just such a stick, I thought myself a regular Professor Morse when I figured that the arc of the stick makes a geometric curve of decreasing volume, while the hunger for the carrot stays steady, an arithmetic horizontal slope. While I got less afraid of Sergeant Mallory, my love for ogling ankles stayed steady as she goes. Notwithstanding that I loved Sarah,

and took her for wife, (I mean, camp-wife), I would measure carrot against stick thus:

The stick - Mrs. Miles - commanded our duty, a drooping whip-crack geometric line on a Cartesian graph, while the carrot - Sarah - inspired our love, a steady-as-she-goes arithmetic line; so that while we might obey Mrs. Miles faster, we would obey Sarah longer and harder. And one might further conclude when measuring the further abuse of the stick, it might actually dip below the line of zero, into the negative, which meant disobedience, - like taxes and other tyrannies that lead to the rebellion of 1776.

At any rate, she was the female counterpart to Major Brown, and she led the delegation of chief-women - Mrs. Martha Miles, Mrs. Hampton, and Mrs. Forrest - from the Ladies' Tents - Sarah giving a Dough-Boy back his half darned trousers, Martha setting her wash bucket in the arms of a frightened Music - to inspect this Johnny- Come-Lately, this Prince-President Franklin Stove, this alleged Martian spy and monarch's toady, to ponder and to judge whether or not this stranger, metal or not, was fit company for their boys.

<<But - Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick!...Tick-ick-ick! - I am not a Prince," insisted the benign faced automaton, with little breathes of steam and snorts of coke-smoke. <<I am a Prince-President. Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - It is not a hereditary title. It is scientific nomenclature. Tick! - I am an American automaton - a prince of the artificial aristocracy of machinery. Tick! - Tick! - I have eight lectures,>> he added, somewhat strangely. He reasonings seemed kind of crooked to me.

Moreover, let me add that he hissed and tick-ticked a tiresome amount, the gears of his brain so much more noisy than our own. Therefore, I will, from now on, mark his sentences with the four friendly pips of a poker deck (like this, "♥ ♦ ♣ ♠" for "Sss - Tick! - Tick! - Tick! - ") to remind you that his speech seems so steam-piped artificial.

"You have eight lectures?" repeated Captain Seawell. He glanced at Captain Miles' toddy.

<<Do I?>> asked the stranger, clicking and thinking. <<I do. ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - This is my lecture program. ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - As follows:

1. My Metal Nature and Its Niceties.
2. The Rationale of the Irrational.
3. The Death of Joseph Smith, a Tragicomedy in Five Acts. - alternating with -
4. The Death of Elijah Lovejoy - deferring to local prej - Tick! - preferences; also -
5. Who Am I? (A Conundrum)

6. The 'Where's the Spot' Waltz.
7. The Devil and Daniel Shays, a Ditty
Fit For Drinking.

<<That's them,>> he bowed.

"Hold on thar, sir," objected Sarah, walking over with skirt hem in hand. "I ain't no Yankee scholar, but I know I heard you say eight lectures and you got and you only said seven of 'em." To this we all nodded.

"Perhaps he does not wish us to know the eighth. Perhaps it is oratory of an unchristian sort," suggested Captain Miles dryly, looking sideways over his toddy at his wife, about to suggest she should take her leave, when he happened to see Captain Seawell, who was still eyeing his toddy. Seeing this, he whispered hissing to Old Sock, "Where's your manners? Hot toddy for Captain Seawell - mind you, Socrates, don't tarry!"

"Yes, perhaps the eighth is an invitation by Great Deimos to sell information? I don't trust this - this gentleman!" suggested Mrs. Miles, with a sideways glance at her husband.

<<♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - The eighth lecture was Your Destiny, Ready Eggs- eggs-stemporaneously-For-The-Asking, but I have found it unpopular. The eighth lecture now is - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ -

8. Whence Freedom? Tycho Brahe and Andrew Jackson Compared.

Would you like to hear a lecture now? I have eight,>> the ever benign porcelain pumpkin-head emitted in friendly little steam-puffs.

"Why don't you just tell us who you are," said Captain Seawell, with furious cigar puff-puff-puffs. "No conundrums, either."

<<♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Number 1, then,>> smiled the ever-smiling porcelain cheeks. <<My Metal Nature and Its Niceties. ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠...>> Something in the machinery of his oversized head ticked thoughtfully for a moment, like an orator taking a long breath, or like a spring being tightly wound. Then he began:

<<Regarding my metal form, ladies and gentleman! I beg you not underestimate the grace and subtle workmanship of its coordinate parts, which mimic in superior majesty the movements of your own bones. ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Note my ceramic face, which will never bear a blemish. Note the steel wool mustache, which never never needs a trim, and filters my escape-pipes. Note the individually jointed appendages,>> (he demonstrated by snapping his fingers) <<which coordinate with clockwork precision; the gentle felt pads of my finger tips, which never callous, ever soft enough to press

upon a maiden's cheek. (Would I woo you, sweet ladies, would you not swoon?)

<<♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Need I demonstrate the confounding lightness of my step, so finely wrought the metal skin of my frame! I can trace the step of a minuet. So practical and economical, my little boiler belly digests diverse fuel - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - any kind of corporeal corruption tastes like kippers and tea to me. For the organic which originates in Original Sin must combust, in hellfire heat, whether kernels of coal, corn, or cottonwood - and aye! - even carnal. It is the principle of the worm, mechanically applied, so decorously by the Philadelphian Brethren of Mechanics, so domestically prestidigitations, as modified by the good Creole old women of New Orleans. ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - I can eat my fuel with fork and spoon, so civil am I. My jaws break down coal and such with ivory teeth. (Aye, it is true, ivory is quite hard, hard as hammers - although mine are screwed in with vise and pliers.) The black dust thus slips down my esopho-chute, directly down into the fiery furnace of my tummy tumtum, thus broiling my little boiler into frenzy a-boil, thus driving the twin pistons of my lungs up and down, thus pressing irresistible mechanical force into the fine-toothed and supersubtle gears of my limbs, and thus, on the counter-stroke, the lifting piston expels the spent ash and smoke, through the efficient, discrete, and dare I say fashionable topper, as thus:>>

And from his stove pipe gushed greasy hot jets of roiling black, curling down around his benign face. The smoke rose up again slowly over the fort.

<<♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Merely I need a quart or so per diem to replenish my nearly absolutely efficient steam-circulation - let us say, upwards of ninety-six percent reclamation per cycle, as perfect as possible this side of Paradise.>>

"Hush, devil!" cried Mrs. Miles, stamping her foot. "I think your manufacture, so-called, diabolical design for blasphemy!" She picked up a stone.

"Do you think the likes of you could with impunity trespass on the image of Man, divine and glorious that image be, you soulless devil!" She reached back to throw the stone but Captain Miles gently stopped her.

He admonished mildly, "We must not abuse Federal property, Martha. It is a crime."

Old Sock came running with a second steaming toddy for Captain Seawell, who sipped it, eyeing the Prince-President with fond fraternity. Dispelled were his doubts that this stranger was monarchic machination. No, for this apparition was Yankee manufacture, good and proper, the apparatus of democracy. So in fraternal spirit he extended his paw, saying,

"Well then, welcome to Fort Texas! We can always use a qualified surgeon. (The one we got now's only a sure bet for trimming 'round the ears.)"

"I seem two Balers with tomcat ears from the surgeon's barbery trimming," said Sarah to me aside.

"What I want to know, Mr. Metal - I mean, Perfessor," Sarah called out, coming close with crossed arms, scrutinizing this metal man.

<< - Tick! - Prince-President," corrected the newcomer tirelessly, with his slight and unchanging rosy-cheeked smile.

" - If you is machine, as I guess I got to admit you is, 'less'n my eyes be lyin', but I'll wager they ain't!" said Sarah, stopping to sniff the steamy ashen air. " - If you is an engine, how come you can walk and squawk so much fine and fancy talk?"

<<♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Is it so hard to imagine, dear lady,>> bowed the automaton, making me a little wary, although I can't quite say jealous, <<a machine that walks? We know locomotives can roll. My wheels are legs. More complex, but still a question of mechanics. If fact, the Veteran's Home of Philadelphia sells such spring-work artificial legs to replace those lost to fits of patriotic violence.>>

It was true - we all knew Marcus Smiley, the old vet, who peddled liquor to us back at camp Annex Agonies, hobbling around on his spring-work wooden leg.

"Yeah, sure, but!" Sarah grinned, perplexed. "I mean, then, how can you talk, and make sense (sorta), and act like such a fine gentleman in so many ways - I mean, how can you, a machine, I understand, have the freedom insides you to act like a man?"

<<Tick! - Aye? Tick! - Aye. Iron echo of man I am, have I no Ego? Is there Ego aught else but supernatural soul? Whence comes my freedom of movement - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - ?

While he ticked inside, as if his clockworks, like a Babbage Calculating Machine, belabored to resolve a complex logarithm, and the ladies traded whispers behind their hands, Old Sock and he seemed locked in mutual measure and reflection. Old Sock took out his hoodoo chicken bone and stroked its charm, frowning with concentration, then actually beginning to scowl with dislike -

P. P. F. S. stopped his tick-tick-ticking. He lifted an arm towards Old Sock and spoke:

<<Dear lady, are you sure we are free? Are not all of us slaves of our nature?>> As he spoke, he lost out attention, for, from the other direction, from the half-dug Bomb-Proof, from a dozen sunburnt sappers who had ceased their labor, came shouts of surprise, soon hushed by horror.

Chapter 10. The Fossil

During the windy Lunar night, a platoon of weary sappers from E- Company, Second Artillery, chopped a hole at the southwest dirt wall of Fort Texas. This hole was to become shelter for the five hundred defenders of the fort. Ballooned all the way to the extreme tip of the Peninsula of Texas, we were now stranded and surrounded.

Carving down two yards into the cool sand that was ever eclipsed from the whirligig sun, the sappers uncovered a layer of hard white limestone. Upon that layer, Time impressed a bone claw.

It was brown with age, and three fingered. Astonished, the sappers kneeled and brushed away the sand that hid the petrified carcass of a giant creature. It was winged and terrible.

Hither and thither we wandered over, and ran over, and crowded round the rim, and made a mob, a silence-stricken mob. Silent, we stared down into the lantern-lit pit. The lantern flickered, shaking the shadows. It made an ancient monster seem to move again.

It was dry. Its wings had many folds. Its thick talons curled and creased its segmented joints in petrification of agony. Its slender ribbage was sundered and shattered. Its long and sinuous neck strung out in ragged chain of jagged bone, curving to a long-beaked skull. Too many teeth filled the dilated jaws. The empty skull sockets jumped back and forth with shadows that were oily, like black bubbles, like the eyes of a salty nightmare hauled up in half-torn nets from the black, blind, and timeless fathoms.

Something terrible lay here entombed. What caused this ugly dragon to die in such evident pain? Why did its brethren skulk the clouds no more? - Or did it yet fly, but only at night? - and only on the savage dark side jungles of the Moon... - Did a shadow pass over us just now? No, it was just a cloud, a misshapen cloud - was it not? What did it hunt? What killed it? What could kill it?

Looking down at it, flickery horrific, we recognized something ancient within us, instinctive and unpleasant, lizardly slithering still, solitary and sluggish and suddenly violent. (Did this Horror still circle about, boldly, on the dark side of our heart?)

Did its brood sink, consumed in God-hating crime? Some said so. What are we doing so far from home? Are not these barren cacti- encumbered craters a fit Paradise of Horror? Maybe they're some kind of savage god. I bet the hideous flock lived here in the time before Columbus. Did Captain Cortes, burning his winged-galleys, find this Horror's last eggs, and crush them under his studded cannon wheels? Was this flying thing,

then, the source of those solemn, forgotten burial mounds? Those burial mounds - some small, some enormous - sculpted in symbolic bird-shapes by the lost races of the New Worlds? Hush, for it is idle to speculate, and war is coming to us quickly.

But these glimmering gloomings, flickering forebodings drew a dark wing over us all. A specter took his bony bodkin and stitched us all in his shivering tapestry. Our little huddle of men looked so small and helpless against the hidden horrors of this foreign Moon. So far from home!

A collective chill ran through us.

- Such a hideous grave! In the heart of the fort!

(O Diggers, what have you done? Impudent hands! Diggers of taboo! Shovel down them bad bones!)

- And will our riddled bodies, with limbs torn by shell, and bellies spilt by bayonet...will we be buried here - here?

- In this pit? In this dead snatcher's bony grip, would we rise, and find salvation? It doesn't seem likely...

(I shuddered, seeing in this twisted trench a desiccant revelation of all annihilation. O this flying horror, this warbat, its hooting grin! O it will tear its scissor-teeth on poor privates!)

- Pickmen, hey! You dug it up. Bury it again.

- What did we dig up? What if it won't be buried again?

(- Is there mercy in the Moon?)

(- Indeed not! Is hate and horror in the hollow. What secret have you unscrapped?)

(- Is not the fort just another crater?)

(- Is dust and naught on top.)

- Wait! Are we warriors or milksops? Come now... Bones are bones! Stick 'em in the wheelbarrow, and dig on!

- I'm afraid. I don't want to touch them.

- I won't either.

(- How humble are bones, our bones, when so far from home.)

And so, a moonish wind did blow, to and fro, with a hiss, and a scratch, hacking side to side through the hollow marrow of our stick-figured fright. Hissing "Quetzl!" Scratching, "Coatl!"

Chapter 11. Old Bones and Boiler Pressure

<<Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick!...Tick-ick-ick!>> The Metal Man pushed through the mob, and slid down into the Bomb Proof. His porcelain countenance, lit from below by the pit's lonely lantern, seemed to grin. He turned a ticking circle, and said, <<My name is Prince-President Franklin Stove, and I am pleased to be your guest here in Fort

T-eggs-eggs-eggs-as on-the-Moon.>> His marble eyes gleamed merrily. Tick! Tick! Tick! <<President Polk asked me to give you his compliments. He wishes, he, too were here to reap the rich corn of glory with you. I am looking forward to gnawing on that good ripe corn myself. I am an automaton, property of the War Department. My mission is - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - is to be the moral surgeon of the fort. But I am not stuffy. I cannot be, with a high pressure boiler in my belly. This metal fellow is a good fellow. I am like you, only you have a soul, and I - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - eat coal. Well, machines are machines, as I am bound to say. Now what about this - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - superstructure of bones?>>

<<Gentlemen! I salute your discovery. Bacon's De Augmentis Scientiarum - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - no, it was Cuvier's Recherches into Fossil Bones that called this beast a 'pterodactyl'. Here lies the bones of mankind's rival.>> With a little jet of escaping steam from his nostrils, he lifted the lantern, and put his metal palm over the chimney, to draw by suction more kerosene into the wick. Letting go the chimney, the wick flamed up, giving enough light to briefly chase away the web of shadows that obscured the terrible bones. Then we saw how fragile they were.

<<Look at it,>> he called. <<Half snake, half eagle. How ridiculous. It would have flown like an oversized bumble-bee. This absurd critter by its very ridiculousness was the champion of unreason. Look at these silly old bones. Why did this ugly old bumble-bee perish, and Man rise to enslave Nature? ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - I will tell you why. Because of Reason. What is Reason? - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Reason is the application of logical syllogisms to the irrational by Man. What are syllogisms? - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Syllogisms are little three-step piston engines of logic, invented by a Pagan named Socrates. Look at this old carcass. See how it died in brute ignorance and in agony. But my friends and patriots! - Reason conquers Nature, because - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - because - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - why? Because - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - because - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - because - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - why? Because Nature has a flaw in it, and Reason is iron-clad. What is the Flaw in Nature?

<<Man has cannon that can out-clap the thunder. Man has magnet- tick!-telegraph, in which Reason enslaves wild lightning to suit the human mind. Man has windmills, sailcloth, and balloons that force order and production upon the random winds. And Man holds the mighty compulsion of Steam, that squeezes that fire of Sin from the old - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - black - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - decayed - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - bones and leaves of flawed Nature (- ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - and I mean coal) - into an all-powerful syllogism.

<<That syllogism's first premise is furnace fire. That syllogism's second premise is boiler pressure. That syllogism's conclusion is - piston power. Piston power is Steam's Socratic conclusion. That conclusion propels Reason into the wilderness. And that is called Progress.

<<Progress is war on Nature. Nature is inferior to Progress. Nature is - \plain♥♦♣♠ - Nature is flawed - ♥♦♣♠ - Nature is - ♥♦♣♠ - Nature is irrational.

<<Progress is rational. Reason is the application of Socratic engines to the irrational wilderness by Man. What is Man? (I am not a man. I do not reason. What is Man?) - ♥♦♣♠ - Man is a particular intelligent creature with the ability to reason. Man is a creature of Nature. Since Nature is irrational, Man is therefore an irrational creature with the ability to Reason. Is this a flaw? Is this an impossibility?

<<No. This flaw makes Man possible. The irrational element is a prerequisite to Man's freedom. If Man were flawlessly ruled by Reason, then - ♥♦♣♠ - Man would be a flawless machine, with - ♥♦♣♠ - the flaw of machines:the inability to invent new premises for syllogisms, and - ♥♦♣♠ - therefore unable to apply Reason to the Irrational, or - ♥♦♣♠ - in other words, inability to Reason.

<<The Socratic engine would simply run out of coal.>>

The Metal Man's grey swirling eyes glowed dully within the murky veil of coke-smoke. <<The conclusion we must therefore draw from these fossil bones is - ♥♦♣♠ - the Rational is Irrational, or the Irrational is Rational.>>

Captain Mansfield told the men to move off and make room for the next shift of sappers to do their good work. We shuffled, still staring down at the strange old bones. Old Sock crossed his fingers and kissed the cross. I thought that a fine idea, and did it too. As the Prince-President clambered up out of the pit, the mob drifted off to their bedrolls, and the sappers' iron tore up the fossil, bone by bone, to deepen and lengthen our Bomb-Proof shelter. With dragon wings, war flew closer and closer.

Chapter 12. The Ding-Danged Bells of Plato's Crater

Come crack of dawn those rascally Moonmen began bonging all their church bells like it was the end of the world. Clang, clang, bang, their ringing pots and pans and chimes and gongs were enough to wake the dead and give them a headache:Bong, bang, bong! Ding- a-din! Dong-a-din! A cannonade of bells, they marched right, left, in brassy passion. For

me it was the beginning of a siege, for I had drunk too much Tennessee "Old Hickory" in tribute to General Jackson, the Bank-Slayer, with Kelly and my wife - I mean my camp -wife. Achingly, nigh five hundred men rose in the dark to drag wheel-barrows and dump dirt on the roof of the Bomb-Proof. And just so, the construction of Fort Slow-Polk was done. Din! Din! Din! Come crack of dawn this clarion clatter called for a din-din of car- rion. Just so - bong, bang, bong - them Lunar bells applauded our fort's readiness for warfare.

It was a six-sided fort, each wall 133 yards long - making a perimeter of 800 yards. Each wall was 9 and 1/2 feet high, about 15 feet wide at the top, where the sentries stood, and much thicker at the bottom. Around the fort was a ditch 8 and 1/2 feet deep, 20 feet wide where we finished it, 15 feet wide where we hadn't. We were less than 100 yards from the north shore of the Mare Frigoris, where it narrowed, so that the southern shore, and the port of Matamoonos, was only another 200 yards across.

"Assemble the men," Major Jacob Brown quietly told Captain Francis Lee. Orders bellered down the chain of command, each lower link a little louder.

When the men of the Seventy Infantry had arrayed themselves in our neat Euclidian rows (the rows that took the mob out of the mass), minus sentries and the two dozen men of the 2nd Artillery, Com- pany E, who was lovingly scrubbing and greasing their iron Buddha-babies, we made more than 450 voters. Sarah, Martha, and all the other wives along with Old Sock and the Prince-Pres- ident, Franklin Stove, - all these non-vot- ing non-combatants stood quietly beside the red-suited Musics, who held their horns and cymbals and such at Present Arms; their awful racket of martial music could repel a Lunar bayonet charge better than a volley from our old muskets, which is why they earned 8 dollars a month, while we privates earned 7.

Martha Mule was braying sort of lone- some and mournful. She didn't like those banging bells better than the rest of us brutes. She didn't like being cooped up in her own little fort, either. It was just a ditch in the yard; it was in fact the first four feet of Captain Edgar Hawkin's attempted well. He'd figured he could tap the fresh water of the Cold Sea only twelve feet down; and in \plaina war, a fort well is worth a few cannon. But Cap- tain Mansfield, the engineer, took his men away to dig the giant Bomb-Proof, which was more important. During the night, lacking a corral, Martha Mule had moseyed around. The yard's vegetation lacking, she pulled down Martha Mile's straw hat from way up high on the laun- dry pole. It was seven feet; she had to stand on her hind legs and maybe even

climb a little. Martha Mule was part monkey, we figured. She ate the hat, paper flowers and all. Then she moseyed around some more, sniffed around, and poked her sniffer into the Officer's Tent, where, on the big table set inside, there were some maps and charts of fine cotton paper. Martha chewed a crescent chaw off of the great Lunar map; didn't like that, so she settled down to Captain Mansfield's fine fort specifications. So, with Major Brown and Martha Miles looking on, Old Sock dragged the mule into the unfinished well ditch and that corralled her fine. Sometimes a mule's worth more than a well anyway.

The tips of her long ears showed, turn- ing slowly this way and that, harking on them bells. She used to be called Princess Milig, named by P. P. F. S., but after a few hours of dragging our dirt around, we all took a vote and renamed her in honor of the captain's wife. That was to try to pacify her righteous braying a bit by a measure of earthy humility. But it didn't work. The name, however, stuck.

All of us stood waiting, eyes on our commander, whilst the bells of Plato's Crater rang on, banging and clanging on and on.

Major Brown stood on the slope between the Number 3 and Number 4 gun platform, beside the flagpole, the seven captains lined behind him. The flag cut the Lunar sky, whip-crackling its lightning stripes.

"Men," he began solemnly, "it is my unhappy duty to tell you that American blood has been shed on American soil. One week ago, on the 24th of April, the Lunar hussars who aimed to cut off com- munications between this fort and Fort Polk ambushed and slaughtered sixteen dragoons patrolling Texas soil for the United States Army. We believe the remaining forty-seven to be held pris- oner. Not only for them, but for the wid- ows and orphans of Captain Seth Thornton and his men, this war has already begun. My friends, I fear the war has begun for us, too. But we will stand firm! For we defend much more than a fort -

"On this side of the Mare Frigoris, lives prosperity and democracy. On that side, poverty and despotism. We Cotton Balers defend the frontier of justice. As thirty years ago we whipped the Martians invaders at New Orleans, so today we will whip these Lunar invaders, here in Texas. As yesterday we cried, "Fifty-four forty or fight!" to protect our Oregon Ter- ritory on Venus, today we cry, "The Moon or Bust! All the Moon!" to protect Texas, right here. So shall we sail our steam-balloons, inward and outward across the Spheres, forging by shot and shell, sword and electric bayonet, an empire dedicated to liberty.

"And, if after the Moon, we steam over the wilderness of the Inner Spheres, and take all Venus, and all Mercury, and then - who knows? - turn our eyes on the benighted Outer Spheres, who would dare raise their voice against us? We soldiers of democracy don't bring fire and famine. We bring freedom and prosperity! We bring our Constitution, and the popular vote! There is infinite space on our flag for more brethren of stars. The Peninsula of Texas stands or falls with this fort. Starting right here, we will take - if need be - all the Moon.

"For these reasons, our president has added another warning against the Martian Empires to the Monroe Doctrine: the United States alone shall decide the destiny of the Inner Spheres. The million voices of Democracy out-shout any lisp-ing protest from a dozen petty dictators. From planet to planet, the Inner Spheres must fulfill the shining role inscribed to it by Destiny! It is an old dream, one shared by our fellow former colonies. The children of George Washington and the children of Simón Bolívar belong to but one family, the family of freedom; that family can be and will be united under only one flag. And that flag, Cotton Balers! - is our flag."

"Three cheers for Old Glory!" bellowed Captain Edgar Hawkins, saluting the flag. "Hip hip - " he began...

"Hurrah!" we roared. Thrice our cry shouted down them bells of Plato's Crater.

But still, they persisted to toll on and on and on...

"Yes, by gum," cried Kelly, lifting his shako on the point of his saber. "We will emancipate the Inner Spheres!" I could have kicked him.

" - I mean, liberate. Liberate, - not emancipate," he added with a half-smile.

Major Brown looked uncomfortable. A slight atmosphere of embarrassment wafted among the ladies. The men shifted slightly, confused.

Major Brown pointed a finger at the Musics, who began a jolly jumping and thumping "Jimmy Crack Corn". But to me, this was as poor a choice of song as my brother's choice of word - emancipate - and, as we all sung out, "Jimmy crack corn, and I don't care, my master's gone away...", the tune did not abolish the nasty, nasty banging of bells in my brain.

Chapter 13. Jealousy and Jiggerbugs

The first of May was a long, long day, on account of those hammering, jammering bells across the Cold Sea. I stood sentinel a while on the sandy slope. And I took a good gander around this contested P. of T., and for the first time found it

kind of pretty, even worth the trouble of steaming all the way to the Moon in a dirty steam-balloon, just to take a good long look at her.

The desert glowed pink around us, the river a black ribbon. The eastern contours of far-off craters and hills glowed deep red in the mists of Mare Imbrium, the "Sea" of Rains. It was called a sea on account of the dependable rain and mist every summer that flooded the plain for a month, but just now there was no sea - just a sea of sand. I could see the Lunar Alps, east of Plato, the squareness of the Straight Range to the southwest, and just the jagged tip of Pico Mountain, named after the Lunar governor of Venus, said to be almost two miles high - the mountain, I mean. The governor is considerably less tall. And I could see, through a low part of the rim of Plato's Crater, the town that used the crater for its walls.

Inside the dirty yellow town, I saw the long rows of white cloaked monks, ceremoniously gathering around each of the cannons pointed at us. Their mean little muzzles lay flat on the low crater wall of Emperor Iturbide Avenue, previously occupied most pleasantly by lovely lunaritas. This arrangement of cannon was called Fort Paredes, after the latest Lunar general who got himself called president by kicking out the previous general - Herrera - who called himself president. It really got my goat that Paredes had the gall to call himself president (which was like...if Polk called himself one of the Pope's saints). Moreover, I didn't like the fact that this Paredes character used Herrera's peace negotiations with Polk - a real, elected president - as justification to steal himself that democratic title and honor. I felt nice and neighborly about the Moon in general, but I wouldn't think more than twice about Volta-bolting a Mooner general with my electric bayonet, especially one who had the nerve to sanctify his greedy nabob horns, "president".

The monks blessed each cannon, one by one, their Catholic crockery swinging and smoking. Still those bells, bells, bells gonged and bonged their brazen song.

"Them Lunar guns don't look too friendly-like, do they, Sarge," I said to Rutherford Weigart, a prodigious gambler, a gunner from the electromagnetics of Platform 2, upon which he had climbed to better train his spyglass on Fort Paredes. "But I hear tell they're vintage 1814. Can't throw but nine pound shot. All the Pope's hocus-pocus won't change the fact that they lost Waterloo. I'd bet the devil my head that those pop-guns couldn't hurt a fly."

"Well, they should scare you, Borgin-nis," he said.

"Yeah," I scoffed. "You think all this Christian devotion will kind of make their shots, well, - make 'em a bit luckier...? They ain't Christian exactly, you know, they're Catholic."

Weigart put down the spyglass. "First of all, Catholics are Christians."

"They are and they ain't," was my reply. That's what folks always said about the Pope and Catholics. Folks talked like they were a kind of heathen foreign kind of Christian pagan foolery. I recalled something Hernani Klager had said about it...but then again, he was a Catholic, so whatever he had to say was partial and influenced.

"Oh, they are," said Weigart. "It's just that Protestants are more Christian ..."

"Oh, I get you," I said, relieved.

"Second," said the gunner, "nine pound shot will kill you just as fast as lightning can. According to Major Ringgold's chart, I figure they can just make it over the wall."

I snatched his spyglass. "Oh, bunk and bowlderdash! Those 9- pounders could hardly make the distance from Fort Paredes to the shore! Rest easy, Sarge." I trained the glass on Plato's Crater, looking for lunaritas. But all I saw was soldiers, monks, horses, wagons, and cannons.

Weigart insisted, "I figured it all out mathematical on one of Ringgold's charts, and those 9-pounders can make it over this wall."

"Impossible," I said. I wasn't so sure, but I was bored, so I thought I stoke up the coals of his dander, just to see some sparks of gall and gumption fly.

"Impossible? What about the wind?" he asked me. "Wind blows generally our way."

"Wind!" I scoffed. "What's wind going to do? Does the Pope control the wind, too? Less them pesky Lunars rig up their 9-pounders with fore 'n' top sails," I added, pretending to be worried. I laughed a crazy laugh like a monkey. " - Forget it! Those antiques can't kill a fly, if that fly be so fortunate as to be inside this fort I helped to build. If they kill anyone, I hope they kill me first."

"Did you account for the rotation of the Sphere? See, the shot goes up, up, way up high, and meanwhile the Moon moves under it."

"Rotation?" I laughed.

"Yeah, and curvature - ?"

"Curvature!" I said, amazed. "Look, Sarge, it seems to me you think those Catholic savages are more Christian than we are. Don't hide behind Ringgold's charts, and wind and curvature. Just say it plain out. Seems to me you're chicken."

His faced stiffened. "I'm not afraid."

I shrugged. (I wasn't bored any more.)

"I am not afraid!" he said.

"Easy to talk..."

"But I really am not afraid!"

"It's all right, Sarge, I believe you."

"Liar!"

"Well then," I said. "There it is. I'll bet you ain't brave enough to wear my Bad Luck Charm."

"...Bad Luck Charm?"

"Yep."

"What Bad Luck Charm?" he frowned. "...It gives you bad luck?"

"Why Sarge! You are afraid again."

"No I'm not."

"H'm? Did you say something?"

"I'm not afraid, you idiot!"

"It's all right, I believe you."

"I'm not afraid. I am a good Christian. I mind the bible and I don't drink and I don't take whores - " I gave him a dirty look because he seemed to be implying that my Sarah was a whore. Of course, Sarah had said she didn't mind being called one. Weigart continued, "And I trust Ringgold's charts. I fear God and Mathematics, not your heathen Bad Luck Charm!"

"It's all right, there, Sarge, just forget it."

"No, it's not all right, I tell you! I'll wear your infernal Bad Luck charm for a week. I'll bet you that I can. - I'll bet you fifty - in exchange for your twenty-five."

"What twenty-five? I never been paid in a dog's age. I got a Louisiana V-spot, though. Five gives me ten? 'Less you take Regimental vouchers..."

"Vouchers, my eye! Just because I wear crossed cannons on my buttons doesn't mean you can fool with me, Dough-Boy! Give me ten. It's ten on ten, then."

"Ten it is," I agreed, putting out my paw. We shook on it, and each gave our double-V-spot to another gunner to hold. (Turned out he kept it forever.) In a little while Company G came along the wall, and Francis Paterson replaced me. So I left Francis scratching his head, full of lice, and went off to make my Bad Luck Charm. "What can I make that's really frightening?" I wondered. My Bad Luck Charm was all humbug, but humbug is as humbug does, and I figured I had a chance at winning the bet. I got an idea. I went down into the Bomb-Proof, and once my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I did not have too much trouble locating a small fragment of that fossil that the sappers had destroyed. It was a disc of spine, looked like. Ugly brown and black. I looped a piece of string through it. "Hello, Bad Luck Charm," I said. The bells across the sea kept up their public nuisance. What an awful clatter!

I went back up to Gun Platform 2. Sarge looked at me with a sort of superior air. It was a mask - he was curious.

"You sure you want it?" I said quietly, to taunt him.

"Give it to me!" he cried, and snatched it out of my hand. He immediately stuffed it in his pocket. Seemed to me he was afraid to look at it.

"Oh no," I said. "You got to wear it around your neck." I wanted him to feel that worrying tug on his neck. "Wear it so god and the devil can see it."

He grinned and put it around his neck. He crossed his sunburnt arms.

"This charm makes you a lightning rod of bad luck," I explained.

He snickered. He wasn't afraid. I thought to worry him some. I remembered that Weigart always took the front stool in Reverend McKnight's bible-studies.

"Y'know, it's funny. I trust you are a good Christian, but I also figure that according to what you said, those Catholic savages across yonder are good Christians, too. Why not? But it's funny. Both of you can't be good. Here you good Christians are, all set to try to kill one another. Both of you can't be right. But I figure both of you can be wrong. That's how my Bad Luck Charm can get into your bones and work on you, because you say you are a good Christian."

"And you?" said Weigart, much annoyed. "What about you?"

"Me, I'm a bad Christian, so I don't need a Bad Luck Charm. I know I'm going to suffer," I said smugly, like a nabob. I figured it was time to take my leave, before he got so annoyed as to quarrel. In the army, among us lower ranks, quarrels usually lead to fisticuffs - only we called it "duels" on account of respect for Walter Scott.

I plopped down in the yard, pooped. We all laughed at Old Sock, as he ran by, terrified of all the bells like they were some kind of Hoodoo omen. We called him an ignoramus, and lots of worse things, because as we well knew, all them bells was just the Lunar way of saying, "Howdy-do?" But then, as I got up to look for Sarah, I saw Captain Miles running after Old Sock with one boot on, brandishing his "soft" whip, because the offense wasn't a serious one. It was only that his boots were not polished to his satisfaction. He wanted his boots as shiny as a Junker's.

Sarah was busy. She bore a water bucket in each hand. She tried to pass me with just a smile.

"Darlin' pretty Sarah, how lonesome I am for you!" I told her.

She stopped. She wiped the sweat from her face.

"War's mighty sore on kissin' and huggin'," she sighed, and splashed a little water on her face. She tried to look at her reflection, but the water was jiggling around too much. "And it's downright heck on a woman's complexion. Jack, sweetheart, I miss you too. Sometimes I curse myself, seeing as I ain't no soldier,

born a woman, but still I feel a powerful love of duty that keeps me runnin' around like a chicken with its head cut off...I know! Why don't we meet at sundown at the Number 5 gun - " She winked. "I know Cap Seawell purty well, and he'll let us smooch behind that 6-pounder there, seein' as he ain't got nothing to shoot at...yet..."

At sundown I was there. I even dunked my head in a bucket of river water, wrung my beard, and combed my hair with my fingers. It was a waste of water but despite Rough and Ready, Perfect Bliss had set an alternate example more acceptable to the womanfolk. I was still ragged and dirty, however, from the neck down. Sarah, on the other hand, was somehow immaculately clean in her floral print dress. I bowed to her and she curtsied back. It was most civilized and genteel. Captain Seawell returned my salute and called his men over to the far side of the 6-pounder. Sarah and I scooted down low in a little nook where the emplacement met the bastion wall. There we found privacy as complete as on the fifth floor of the United States Inn of Baltimore.

"Oh, I do love kissin' and huggin' with you Jack Borginnis," Sarah whispered, tickling my earlobe.

"Darlin' pretty Sarah, what blue eyes you got."

"They're reflectin' the blue of the Gulf," she said, looking up, where the sky was a most strange and pure blue, a blue with silver and black behind it.

"Most the time men tell me my eyes is grey," she said.

"Tell me Sarah, are the men bothering you?"

"You jealous?" Her dreamy smile left her face. She scowled, scrutinizing me carefully, as if for Chicken Pox.

"Heck, no," I made myself laugh, taking her hand and squeezing it.

"Good," said Sarah, relaxing. She snuggled closer. "Cause I hate a jealous husband worse than jiggerbugs in my hair. Tryin' to get rid of a case of jealousy's like dunking your head in turpentine but it never gets rid of that jiggerbug. You got to cut your hair off - all of it. Understand?"

I nodded.

"What I like 'bout you, Jack, is that you is such a good-natured solid boy, who loves me straight-up but loosed-laced, and don't fuss all over me." She squeezed my hand back. "Now kiss me."

Because I was kissing her I was too busy to admit that I would have fussed over her if it wasn't for the Army, which now separated the wives from us, on account of the danger so close, and gave them their own private Ladies' Dugout - the cleanest underground section of bomb-proof in the history of Human Warfare - it even had a rug, lacquered

table and chairs, and flower vases, somehow. It had a big framed painting of some Prince in a toga, too, curtsy of Mrs. Fredrickson. (No wonder so many of the 7th's mules died - I thought it was just the weight of the company water barrels, Piles, Galvinics, Captain Miles' silver platter and china plates, and Reverend McKnight's Patented Folding Foot-Pumped Camp-Church Organ, that exhausted them.) They certainly made us men feel like barnyard creatures - our Dugouts was already filthy, foul-smelling holes, and we hadn't moved in yet.

First I kissed Sarah, then I hugged her. Then I felt so good it made me feel bad so I stopped. I felt such a yen and yearning for plain and simple-hearted Adam and Eve association, that I just coal-steamed myself enough gumption-pressure to untwist my tongue and spit out the Awful Truth that like black bile was filling me with shame and self-scornification.

"Hold on, Sarah, I want to talk to you."

She put her nose in my ear. "If we talk, Jack, we can't kiss."

"I got something that's irking and worrying me to death."

"It ain't that bad, Jack. If it is I don't want to hear it."

"- I killed a man," I blurted.

"Why Jack Borginnis ain't you a soldier? Hush, now. I order you to kiss me."

"Hold still and listen! - It was more or less an accident."

"Oh, it was an accident, then."

It rankled because I couldn't confess it. She wouldn't satisfy my need to tell it out. But the scorn was in me like a fever.

"But I'm beginning to have bad dreams."

"I ain't no angel meself and this is no time and place to catalogue our trespasses." She put her lips on mine but I pushed her away. This made her mad but I was already mad.

"You say you're worried but you don't want my womanly comforts?"

"Be quiet! You're not doing me any favors."

"I ain't doin' you no favors, ...I'm doin' what comes natural," she whispered in my ear.

Somehow, almost perversely, because I knew it was like trying to ride a beestung unbroke horse with no saddle, all these thoughts made me tell her, "You're the only gal for me, Sarah, ever."

She stopped hugging and pushed me away to look at me: "Don't say that, Jack. You'll be sorry. It's a stupid thing to say to me. Just know how much I love you - so much, I could scream! - right now. You know I'm not the stay-put kind. Even if'n we don't get skewered on General Lunarita's bayonets, sooner or later we'll stop lovin' and start fussin'..."

"Sarah, you are souring me a bit on our camp-marriage. It seems to me you don't love me deep down and serious. You don't want to help me carry any sorrow."

"Why should I want to carry your sorrow? Jack, dear, ain't it good enough that I want to give you jest a little bit of happiness? Why you got to load our love balloon down with all that old sorrow-ballast?"

"I don't know. I got to think about it, Sarah," I said, and looked at her, smiled a little, and added, "As a balloon sailor, I can tell you, balloons need a little bit of ballast."

Sarah crossed her arms. "I think you is jest yeller to love me."

That pricked the balloon of my heart, and hot dander poured out. "I ain't afraid of nothing. There's no call to mean about it, you corn-cob witch," I said, and walked away.

Kelly was sitting on the Bomb-Proof roof trying to read his Walter Scott by moonlight. I complained to him about Sarah, though I didn't mention the bit about the accidental murder, which he knew about already. "It's strange, but though no preacher could say she is an innocent, she often seems that way to me, 'specially when she has her arms around me - not innocent like dumb-innocent, but innocent with her feelings. But she ain't no paper doll. Maybe she already has too much pain in her life, she can't bite the bullet any more."

"How could a girl who knocked out a Ranger with jest one punch be so weak as to not bite no bullets?" Kelly scoffed.

"No, I figure you're right, Kelly, she's just too wild. You know she's got skin on her feet a half inch thick. Maybe she's got a tough hide covering her heart. Keeps it innocent inside, but none of Cupid's arrows can get their Apache barbs into her. Well, I guess I'm not like that. She pretty much owned up to the fact that our camp marriage isn't a keeper. So fair's fair, I knew what I was getting into. I'm not complaining. Even so, I got a little angry at her, Kelly, when she wouldn't listen to me when I wanted to talk. Strange as it may seem, it seemed to me like she's doing me wrong to keep me quiet by kissing me."

"Jack," said Kelly, rolling his eyes, "just listen to yourself. That is the craziest fool thing I ever heard. Won't let you talk! Doing you wrong by kissin' you! Brother, you are savin' yourself a whole lot of money."

"Kelly, you don't get it, do you. She's not my whore, she's my wife, more or less. I'm talking about things of a higher altitude."

"All right, Jack, if you say so. Seems kind of crooked and contradictory to me. But I don't see as you can do a thing about it. You don't dare give her what-for

like her lord and master. She ain't exactly the kind of woman who complains that their husband don't love her because he never beats her, like Milly Jellison does about Horace. Sarah's an Amazon, and it'd take more than a labor of Hercules to tame her."

I laughed at the idea of giving her a matrimonial drubbing. "Ask Wallis Gordon about it. Anyhow, Sarah's six foot two inches tall, three inches taller than me, with a longer pugilistic reach, and I dare say she's got more natural fight in her than me. What little fight I had in me once is just about all gone from joining the Army," and I was more or less going to talk about the Camp Greenhorn troubles but Kelly already knew about it so I figured when he didn't bring it up, he didn't care to comment about it. I walked around some more and found Six-Fingers Bourdett.

"Six-Fingers, you know women, having so many wives and being a Mormon and all..."

"Yes I have wives but I don't have nothing the likes of Sarah," he grinned.

"But I can't see how she could love me and not want to hear my troubles."

Six-Fingers nodded. "Looks like to me that frontier life could sometimes be harder on a more or less quiet fellow who sometimes read books, than these half wild camp-women."

"Sarah'd already said she wasn't going to be my camp-wife forever."

"Did she now?" he said, perking up with an interest that I understood.

"And every man in the Seventh Infantry is in love with her, she is so winsome, cheerful, and strong," I said to myself, giving him a mean look and turning away.

It made me feel sad.

Bourdett got up and tugged my shoulder. "Hold on there, Jack. You don't got to be giving me ornery looks. Five wives is plenty, believe me. Why do you think I joined the Regular Army, not the Mormon Battalion?"

"All right," I said.

The bells of Plato's Crater rang on and on, ominously.

Kelly found me. "Jack, Lieutenant Harris wants you."

I found Lieutenant Harris beside the Bomb-Proof. "There you are. Private, Captain Seawell wants you on the double!"

I hurried across the yard to Gun Platform 5. Captain Seawell was sitting on the barrel of the 6-pounder, with Sarah beside him. Both hopped down as I climbed up the embankment. Captain Seawell looked at me square in the eye. "Private," he said. "I order you with all the power invested in me by the President of the United States to make friends again with your wife!"

"Yes, sir," I said, saluting. He nodded and walked to the other side.

Sarah was looking at me with a shy smile.

"Ah, Sarah," said me, "you make me feel so lonesome and blue. Why do you want to start fussin' now?"

She took my hand and pulled me down.

"You're right, Jack. Just kiss me. Yes, and now kiss me again. Ooh, that's better, ain't it? You're a right sensible feller. Won't you kiss me again? ...Just listen to all them bells! I wonder if Old Zach will come get us out of this fix tomorrow..."

"Nah, he knows we got a dozen days' rations left..."

I almost didn't want General Taylor to come rescue us. I almost didn't. Because when he did, Sarah wouldn't be locked in a fort with me. She'd be free to go. Right now, I knew she'd stay with me. But because she made me feel so sad she made me love the more her see-no-evil blue eyes, her good-natured dreamy smile, and most of all, her sweet and symmetrical ways. After a good long time of sweet, symmetrical fun, Captain Seawell coughed, and we ignored him. Then he whistled, and called "Sarah?" He said Major Brown was coming round on his nightly inspection. Sarah and I didn't get much time to kiss and hug after that. We walked back under the whirligig heavens, drinking secretly from our last pint.

We had no idea what was about to happen to us all -

Chapter 14. Prince-President Franklin Stove Hits a Hum-Dinger

The next morning was strangely quiet. What were them Moonermen up to now? we wondered. Kelly strode down from the ramparts and told me it was nothing at all just that all of General Lunarista's thousands and thousands of musketeers - in fact, the entire Army of the Sea of Tranquility - every single man on the far shore of the Mare Frigoris was down on his knees praying.

This strange behavior kind of spooked me, and spooked lots more beside just me. So Major Jake Brown had us assemble again and tried to rouse our gumpity.

"Men," he told us, "I must congratulate every one of you - and the ladies, too," he added with a friendly smile. "Our fort is finished - I mean, complete," he smiled, "and the Lunar Peninsula of Texas secure. You all deserve a reward for your hard work. So! All men - excepting those now on duty - are granted one half-hour of liberty (just keep your muskets handy.) We will have a second half-hour of liberty this afternoon at one, so

don't fret, those of you on duty now. Oh yes, - artillery crews!" (They groaned knowingly, for Major Ringgold had imparted a philosophy of drilling and drilling, to the point of making his gunners automata, that Captain Lowd continued.) "All watches. Run through your drills. After staff council Captain Lowd will re-assess your targets. Staff council at the flagpole in five minutes. All soldiers and their wives, servants, slaves, and automatons are invited inside the shady Bomb-Proof gallery, where Reverend McKnight will read you The Responsibilities of A Christian Non-Combatant in Time of Adversity. Dismissed!"

We hadn't had any liberties at all since we marched down from Annex Agonies to the tip of Timmy's Promontory. Well, we all ran amuck, making the best of our liberty. Some of the men sat down for big hands of poker inside a tent. Some found shade along the eastern walls since the sun was just rising, and dozed off. Some formed a ring around two bare-chested pugilists. Some few even sat down with Martha Miles, who was, as regularly, reading Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures aloud (for which McKnight, being particular because his sister was in just such a Montreal nunnery, wouldn't speak to her, and organized his rival reading). And some, myself included, collected around the cactus queen, Sarah, my famous camp-wife.

She offered to teach Company A and Company C how to play this newfangled divertimento called Base-Ball.

She had learned it from one of her husbands at Anaxagoras Crater, a Yankee, that one, who deserted. So a few dozen of us Dough-Boys collected down at the empty stretch of yard under Gun Platform 6, behind Martha Mule's little Bomb-Proof-like corral. We gathered round and got all Morsed about learning this thing, this Base-Ball, which was locomotin' our Young American generation just like the Gay Paree Waltz knocked the pantaloons off the Bank-Slaying generation - the proof in the Bomb-Proof that ever generation's got to set a bomb to the ways of the older generation. That's true up and down, whether it be ballooning to Venus and the Moon and tarnation, like we Young Americans were doing with or without the old Whigs; or slaying banks, like Andy Jackson did despite the nabobs; or, repealing penny-tariffs and sedition laws, or exchanging an Articled Confederation for a Federated Union, or even kicking the old Tories, their snuff-boxes full of taxes, and their king the heck back to Great Deimos.

Not only did Sarah have her Colt repeater, her Apache scalp, her Chinese Abacus, and the rattle from a rattlesnake, but she produced a large, black ball made of smelly Saturn "caoutchouc," which is

pronounced "kat-choke", but since the majority of us were partial to the noble feline race, we took exception to this, and held a meeting, appointed speakers, one for, one against, and took a vote, and decided to call our ball the friendly name, General Washington, on account of we were his children, the newspapers said, and we were doing his good work.

Anyway, Sarah's base-ball looked like a five pound solid shot to me. She directed Sergeant Rutherford Weigart, the gambling gunner and biped lightning rod, now waiting in the shade of the Number 2 guns while the other watch rolled the cannon forward and back. Rutherford loaded us his spare wadding-bunger, a kind of stout oaken mop for one of the electromagnetics. Fortunately, Captain Lowd, commander of the artillery company, was away at the flagpole, so he couldn't see what abuse his equipment would suffer.

"Hush, now," called Sarah, "and I will now endeavor to explain to y'all the ten principles of this here Base-Ball, which I larnt back in Camp Annex Agonies from a feller named Abner in Company E of the 1st Artillery; he's the only grease-stained Yankee I know who invented anything useful - no offense, Perfessor," she added with a wink at the Prince-President, Franklin Stove, whose ever-benign porcelain countenance made no response, other than to jet a little steam from the escape-pipes of his nostrils.

"Y'all will like this. It's a game consarnin' homesteading the frontier. Y'all is two rival wagon trains aimin' to settle the same piece of land."

Sarah scratched something in the dirt with her bare heel. It looked like the front end of a church.

"Rule Number 1," she said, counting on her thumb. "Consarnin' Homestead.

"This here's called homestead, and it's where you start, and it's where you aim to finish. This is where the pioneer stands - he's a kind of immigrant, and he's a kind o' artillery, too. This is where he makes his stand, and fights off the attack of this here ball."

"Rule Number 2. Consarnin' the Three Forts Along the Way.

"Now if that pioneer whacks that ball back at the Injuns, sendin' them runnin' after the ball, back from their reservation - the farther, the better - if he do that, he can run, hell bent for glory, to make that first frontier fort, called simply a base, where's he's safe from the savages. Once there, he can turn his eyes on the next base. Sometimes he can go ahead and run for her, sometimes he can't, which is explain in the third rule.

"Let's say them empty water barrels is the first base, the mule's ditch is second - don't fall in, boys, and the third is the busted chuck wagon."

She tapped her third finger.

"Rule Number 3. Consarnin' the Three Seasons and Winter.

"There's three seasons in this here Base-Ball: Spring, Summer, and Fall, which we number one, two and three, and furthermore, we call 'em outs, cause that's when your pioneer can get outside. After fall, then, which is out number three, you got to hole up and wait till spring again. That's winter. And that's when the two rival wagon train team change over, and the other folks play Injuns, and the other folks play at home-stead. The seasons advance every time a homesteader gets a free Apache haircut - I'm talking about scalped, boys, I'm talking out every time a homesteader gets killed, that's another out, get it? Cause the folks got to bury him and all, they lose time. Hush, now, I'm gettin' to the good part.

"Rule Number 4. Consarnin' the Four Ways to Get an Apache Haircut." I'm gonna first summarize them, as follows: you run out of ammunition (cause you only get three shots); you shoot bad and miss your targets, in which case your targets get you; you run for a base but you get ambushed first; and if you're a slow poke you can get betrayed by your friends and thrown out of a fort that's too crowded."

Instantly we Regulars understood the principles of Base-Ball. Hardly had she explained a rule, when it was as if we had already known it, deep down. It was just like our Manifest Destiny. Running immigrants from fort to fort to home-stead was just like adding stars to Old Glory's collection. Naturally, it was a contest, too, to see just whose pioneers would dominate the territory's constitutional convention, and decided, free or slave?

Sarah found her last finger:

"...And finally, Rule Number 10. Striking Gold.

"Every pioneer's got one dream: Now if he is strong enough, or lucky enough, and hits the ball over that wall yonder, well, that's called a hum-dinger, and that feller gets to drive to drive all his wagons - and his friends' wagons - round all the three forts, to Homestead. He done struck gold on his land, as it were. If any Mortal, Metal, or Yankee can do that against one a' my own patented red-hot cannon-balls, I will personally award him ten dollars in the purty script issued by the State Bank of Texas - an edifice of brick. I will do that because I am one lady who is very hard to impress, and yet I have never seen nobody hit a hum-dinger off a' the likes of me. Don't you skinny Cotton Balers make me wait too long, now, to give away my purty ten dollar note - " She tossed "General Washington" (the ball) in the air to give us time to think about her reward, caught it, and explained a few more things.

"...Keep it clean and Christian and mind your manners. No cussin', no fightin', and no spittin'. Button up your uniforms! Let them superstitious scalliwaggin' little Lunars bless their fire-crackers! Boys, we defenders of our Star-Spangled Banner will enjoy our new American invention called Base-Ball right here, on A-merican soil, even if we is on the moon. All right, now! I'll pitch for Company A, then - h'm, well - the Calhounian Crawdads. Perfessor Metal, I figure you to pitch for Company C, the - the - the Henry Clay Chickenhawks. All right, now, play ball, boys!"

"Hang 'em high, Crawdads!"

" - Hip Hoorah fer the 'Hawks!"

Naturally, we asked Sarah to "go west" first. She gave her revolver to me to hold, rubbed dirt in her palms, tested her grip on the electromagnetic wadding bungler, swinging it back and forth with an cheerful grin. Satisfied, she walked over to the "home-stead", dug her feet in, loosening her skirts. She tested her swing one more time. After adding some spit to the dirt, the cheerful grin grew mean.

<<Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick!...Tick-ick-ick!>> pondered Prince-President Franklin Stove, calculating for a short while, and threw General Washington nice and easy, straight as a whistle. Sarah whirled the oaken bungler. What happened was a miraculous thing to behold!

There was a small explosion, all the ball flew past the ticking Metal Man, past Corporal O'Harris at the second base, into the unfinished well pit, whacked poor old Martha Mule, who sawed the air with her disapproving grunts and hooves; but the ball didn't stop. It then sailed up and up, followed by down and down, slow as you please, and Six-Fingers Bourdett plucked it out of the sky like a Trapeze Artist taking the hand of his Flying Sweetheart.

He beamed as we all - Crawdads and Chickenhawks alike - cheered him, a rare event for a Mormon. He felt so charitable he kissed Martha's nose, and Sarah's knuckle, not once, but twice and again, with a respectful nod at me. Just so that Sarah didn't think I thought I was a cuckolded husband in addition to being her latest lucky fool, I yelled, "Hoo-ee, does that S on your sleeve mean Sarah done branded you next?"

"That's not how I brand 'em, I go and do it like this," called Sarah, and put her arms around Bourdett's chicken-head - she being so much taller - and kissed one of his protruding ears. This caused much barnyard clamor, which aggrieved me sorely. Fortunately I had something to occupy my red faced attentions. For the first time in my hands that shiny new soldier's toy, that Colt repeater of Sarah's. I gave the drum a couple spins. I sighted

appraisingly along the barrel, of a necessity pointing it, in a general way, toward the Mormon.

I was fourth in line to Go West. But now Sergeant Mallory, the big fiend with a tree trunk for a head and frigates for fists, took up the big wadding bungler. He swung that bungler like a Highlander's two-handed battle cleaver; our heads all swung round to the south, expecting a hum-dinger for sure. But P. P. F. S. had by now built up some steam. General Washington whizzed by like lightning, making a little thunder crack in the catcher's bare hands. Mallory spun around and fell down - oh how we laughed! Poor Half-Lip McCoy, the Chickenhawk hell-catcher, wrung the pain out of his hands catching all three of Mallory's misfires.

The hundred or so Dough-Boys who watched all around on the slopes of the fort, a natural arena, hooped and hollered and danced jigs and offered odds. (I saw Sergeant Weigart, the gunner, up there, waiting for his turn to drill. He saw me and held up my "Bad Luck Charm", and kissed it. Looked bad for my wager.)

"Lightning rod!" I called.

Allan Featherstone craftily swung his bungler just a little, and nicked enough of the steam-engined pitcher's cannon ball, to set it rolling forward -

- Then it was a race between him and Half-Lip. Allan's hob-nails dug the yard and spat up explosions of sand, but Half-Lip's bare feet gripped its prehensile toes around the ball, lifted it up quick - and he slung it like a tomahawk right into the back of Allan's head. Allan stood there, right at the gate of the base, stunned. Old Corporal Tucker, the first base guard, picked up the ball and dispatched the last pioneer of that wagon train.

The Chickenhawks howled savage war-whoops and ran in to form rank behind Homestead. We Crawdads slunk out and scuttled to our defensive positions all around the Oregon Trail between bases. Franklin Stove puff-puffed Smoky Mountains as he picked up the wadding bungler.

Our Crawdadian hell-pitcher, Sarah herself, stared down at the Metal Man. I imagined she was giving him the delicious worst of her big black Apache eyes. She squeezed and squeezed General Washington behind her back. I imagined it was my heart. In that quiet moment I again took notice of the sinister silence coming from over yonder, Plato's Crater & Fort Paredes. The Prince-President's stove pipe let out such a choking welter of black, greasy smoke, it was plain that he was building up his boiler pressure well nigh to bursting. As for myself, I was the Left-handed Go-Git-It, strewn with the other two Go-Git-Its far out in the great wilderness of our game. That was fine by me, since I figured that if we

got ourselves in a massacre in the hands of them Chickenhawks, I could look at the birds and clouds, and if I got jealous of all the attention on Sarah I could dream of long-braided lunaritas tickling my fancy. I figured I wouldn't see too many Base-Ball cannon balls, so far from the bases. I figured wrong...

Sarah lifted her dress skirts on her high-heeled triple-stitched Apache-fringed and "Lone Star"-beaded boot, curled it around in a sort of Jim Bowie throat-slitting lunge, and - calling out, "EEE - " she flung General Washington at the Metal Man, concluding with a coyote " - YOO!"

With the force of effort, her big straw hat tumbled backward, two buttons of her rattlesnake apron popped open, and an ace of diamonds fluttered from her sleeve.

To the fort's general amazement - and even the artillery crews left off their drills - when P. P. F. S. swung the oaken plunger-bunger, tick-tick-ticking with incredible allegro velocity, letting out a great swoosh of hot steam and iron clanking, we all heard the crackle of colliding mass and vectors, and then, most Newtonic, we saw the ball's equal and opposite reaction spinning up so high in the air! It spun over me and then behind, over Wall Number 1 of Fort Slow-Polk. I stood gaping. It grew smaller and smaller.

"Ha ha! Metal Man, you is funner than frog hair! - WHOO - EEE! YEE-HAW!" howled Sarah, jumping a quick jig, hands on hips, turning a circle.

"A HUM-Dinger!" shouted a hundred voices. The ball grew still smaller, but it didn't disappear. I saw where it landed. "Go git it!" screamed my fellow Crawdads. George Washington had crossed the Mare Frigoris.

Chapter 15. I Go Git It

A dozen of Lunarista's Horse Guards dismounted and stared down the riverbank at our lost General Washington base-ball. One of them brilliantly blue-clad, plumed and armored hussars kicked at a boy in rags, who tumbled down the slope. He crept forward slowly, poked the black sphere with a stick - and jumped back. But nothing blew up, except the derisive mirth of the relieved hussars.

As I understood this game, this Base-Ball, when the ball flew hum-dinging over the left-handed go-git-its' head, it was his solemn duty to go fetch. Therefore, had I a problem! I stood there high on the dirty rampart of Fort Texas, wondering, as my fellow Crawdads hollared and bellered for me to go-git-it. The Metal Man was locomoting the bases,

heading for Homestead, where Sarah was waiting with a double-V-spot in the Bank of Texas script.

Just then, my brother came along the ramparts, humming. He was hopping along, pacing out hypothetical telegraph wires from the big acid boxes of the Bomb-Proof to the bastion. I knew what that meant. Drilling. Now that we'd just finished building this cat box, we'd drill in it. We'd be drilled to be ready, should occasion arise, to throw our first and last bolts from our electric firelocks to daunt a Lunar charge. My stomach gave a little jerk. - Did that mean that, after Brown's little flagpole chat, the officers concluded that our cannons couldn't keep them pesky Lunars from trespassing over our walls?

Kelly was chipper as a New Orleans gentleman strolling from his wife's dinner to his tart's bower. Not at all disturbed was he by all the super-ceremonious praying and devoted singing the entire Army of the Sea of Tranquility (minus a dozen hussars, scouting our hum-dingered over the river base-ball). It made the rest of us nervous, seeing as they were doing it like they were more than eager to meet their Maker (unlike myself, a semi-unrepentant sinner).

I was about to ask my brother's permission to go ask for the ball, since it was an all-important army concern, that being Spirit. Without it we Calhounian Crawdads would have to prematurely accept that the Henry Clay Chickenhawk homesteaders outnumbered our own, one to nothing, a clear popular sovereignty victory for the Free- Staters of Company A.

But just then, nearby, the nervous sentries nudged each other and one of them called, "Sir! Lieutenant?"

Kelly turned his head. "I didn't see your salute," he said.

The sentry's face got red and he just saluted, and saluted vigorously, saying nothing, knowing Kelly's reputation for anger. As he saluted, his Volta's Pile on his back sloshed.

The other sentry said, "We're concerned, sir - "

- (And as he saluted he knocked his tall cylindrical hat, that fashionable military item, called a shako - he knocked his shako all cock-eyed crooked. It was on that basis, as I immediately recognized, that my rather dandy brother would frown on the sentry's concern) -

" - that, beggin' yer pardon, sir - " (being a foreign-born potato lover, he rolled his R's like a purring tomcat) "some of us fear that the Good Lord may just a wee bit favor the trajectory of their bless'd round-shot over our'n - "

" - Out of common courtesy to their devotions, sir - " the other chimed in, reddening.

Crooked Shako nodded, smiling hopefully. He added, "We was wonderin', sir, if'n we might not - "

Before he could finished, Kelly spat, "Yes, you might not...Pagan!" and went back to his hopping and humming. He nodded to me.

"Shoot, look at you," I called, annoyed at his bullying ways, which I so often had suffered, "all prettied-up and polished like you were on your way to see Hugo's Hernani."

"So," said he, suddenly wide-nostripped like a rutting stallion. "Is this the proper comportment due toward your superior?"

"Superior?" I laughed. "Just because you were fool enough to trade six good horses for eleven cents of gold braid? I call that a superior kind of stupidity - hey, now, look, King George, I mean Napoleon - just cool down there, Caesar, I just got to go get our base-ball - " I was stepping backward as he advanced, his fists doubled and eyes afire. But he was so mad that he started to cough, giving me a moment to escape. "Be right back - so long!" I ran down the slope before he could calm down his anger enough to catch his breath and clobber me.

(Frankly, I'd rather eat dirt than crow. he could hit me as much as he liked, seeing as he was an officer, but I'd never call my big brother Superior.)

"Hey, Lunars!" I called as I ran, waving my arms. I leapt far as I could across the ditch, missed a dead cactus, bounced off a big mesquite log, and was out again. I ran to the river.

Over the Cold Sea, yonder 200 yards, the soldiers looked up at me and pointed their carbines. A gorgeously uniformed officer with a shiny brass chestplate and Roman brush-top helmet now spurred his horse out of the shadow of Plato's Crater, down the slope to his dismounted men. They formed a line behind my base-ball. One of them saluted and gestured how the ball flew out of our fort, over the short span of sea, and landed on their side, pow! - right at his feet.

Evidently there was a misunderstanding -

"Helloa there!" I shouted. "Beunos lunas, and howdy-do-to-you, there, buddies! Say, smart-lookin' uniforms! Do they tear as easy as ours? Now, regarding that thing there - say, it ain't lit. No, sir! It's just our General Washington - ah, I should say, our base-ball." I explained to the row of carbines and hostile faces.

I appealed to the officer, a handsome grey-haired fellow with six or seven medals and giant gold buttons, whose daughter I would no doubt like to meet: "A base-ball, sir, y'know, like a bowling ball, yeah, a toy."

("Jack!" screamed Kelly, yards and yards behind me.)

The officer looked at me without comprehending. It wasn't a friendly I'd-like-you-to-meet-my-daughter look, neither.

"It's just a toy, for a game!" I called, smiling. "For-a-favor, toss the ball back, won't you?"

("Jack Borginnis! Are you desertin'?" screamed Kelly. "Jack, come back!")

I ignored Kelly. I thought I'd let him sweat a little. The Lunar officer lifted a brass speaking trumpet from his saddle. He held it to his mouth: "Dees doy jees jours, no?"

Those funny Lunar folks, as you know, pronounce about every second or third word with a "D" or a "J" or "EE" sound, on account of so many of them having noses like Cortes, but nostrils like Montamoona. The "D" or the "J" depended upon whether or not those fluted nostrils were inhaling or exhaling, and the "EE" sounds when one of the two nostrils is closed, - is how Doctor Judah Paine explained to us, anyway. The Lunar officer put the little end of the trumpet in his ear and pointed the bell of it at me, to listen good:

"Right!" I smiled, glad that everything was turning out.

"Yessiree, it's ours all right. Do me a favor," I began to ask, but was interrupted by my brother.

("Jack, come back! I'm sorry! What will mama say - if I have to shoot you down?")

The trumpet rose again. "So joo make da game een jour fort, no? Joo maybe deenk all deese jees game, no?"

I didn't say anything, feeling somewhat chastened. The officer smiled at me over his trumpet, then his trunk put it up to his mouth again:

"Ay! Balloony! Joo an' jour balloon an' fort games have eensulted mee country, mee Republeec of dee Moon," said the trumpet. I couldn't reply to that, neither. My brother was saying something, but I didn't hear.

"Ah, Yankee Doodle!" said the trumpet in a different tone. "I know dery well dat joo ees just a peon of Preseedent Dolk. Eh? Maybee I geeve back jour toy eef joo pray weeth mee dat dee Holy Deerjin forgeeve joo jour trespasssees..."

And then I was amazed to see the officer kneel! He put his beautiful white pantaloons right in the dirt. He took off his pretty Roman helmet, and lowered his proud face, and prayed - and all the Horse Guards behind him did the same.

Once I figured out that he wasn't asking me to feed gin to deer, that he was talking about the Holy Virgin - which took a while seeing as I hadn't met a virgin nor a church in a long, long, time, having spent my Sundays whoring in Baltimore (- For it was the only way I could educate myself; reading anything but the almanac and bible was a worsen sin than whoring in my county, but it

charmed, rallied, and enriched the tarts and hussies when I read Napoleon and His Marshalls to them), - I thought his offer over. It was most troublesome.

It wouldn't be neighborly to refuse, and I did want that base-ball back. But, after a moment's furious soul-spinning thought, I sadly found I could not do it, for three reasons. First, if Protestants could pray with Catholics - and technically I was the former - then it didn't seem at all moral to kill one another, claiming the Awful Deity Himself was wearing our shako. (Even more confusing was that there were lots of Catholics in my own army. This was more troublesome than killing savages -) Second, I was a little bit afraid to pray because of the real bad sin I'd done, back at Camp Greenhorn, letting a fellow drown - more or less helping him to drown - more or less holding his head under water...even if the Awful Deity himself would forgive me, I didn't want him to, I didn't deserve it, I didn't want to believe in an Awful Deity who'd let me off the hook, which brought up the third point: Lately my awe of the Deity had become a bit lax and even doubtful...so I just stood there like a fool, with a fool's tears in my eyes, watching my enemy pray.

(Jack get your arse back in the fort or we'll shoot you down!" screamed Kelly.)

"Give me your worst Volta-bolt" I thought.

The officer opened his eyes, crossed himself, and stood up - his men did the same. All of them stared at me. The officer grinned a great big grin that gave me a sinking feeling. He stared at me for a while, then set his great Roman cavalry helmet over his head. He lifted the speaking-trumpet:

"D'on mee honor, I will ask eet of dee Jeneral heemself eef eet please heem to permeet myself personally to geeve back dis toy!"

"Much obliged, I'm sure," I croaked weakly at the departing Lunars, hoping for the best. The officer whirled his brown steed and galloped toward Fort Paredes, holding our base-ball in his hand and singing out some terrible-sounding words, his horsemen following him in a churning line. I edged back to Fort Slow-Polk. I began to run; mesquite scratched my legs. Going across the ditch, I slipped and fell in a ways, scratching my leg painfully. When I finally climbed up the slope to the bastion, I saw Kelly with his sword out, pointing my way, and the two sentries aiming their muskets at me. "Honest or just bluffing?" I wondered, eyeing my brother.

"Relax, Kelly - the Major gave us our liberty," I told him, trudging up quickly with backward glances a-plenty.

"No frat-ter-ni-za-shun with the N. M. E.!" he chimed, looking at me with relief disguised as anger. Was he relieved more that I returned or that he didn't have to shoot me down? He rubbed his hand over his eyes.

Trotting along the bastion, I called to the waiting Crawdads and 'Hawks - "We're gettin' our base-ball back - I think - I'll watch and tell you - "

Kelly grabbed my neck and yanked me back. "Just what were doing? What did you tell that feller, Jack? You think all this is just a game, boy?"

"We traded recipes," I told him, squirming. Now, I was dawdling, to be honest. I wanted to stay on top the wall and see what them pesky Lunars were going to do. Far away, I was the sun glint on a brass trumpet, and heard that officer call out:

"Heere-eet-cooooooomes!"

"Well, ain't that nice?" I thought, as Kelly dropped me. "Here it comes!" I shouted, stepping down into the fort, bug just getting a mouthful of Gun Platform Number 2 sand because Kelly tripped me. "Get in the fort, and stay put!" he ordered me.

" - Do they dare? - " said Lieutenant Griswolde, peering with a spyglass. "Sir!" he called, "They're loading!"

"Cease your drill! - Quiet all around! - Sentries take cover!" shouted Captain Lowd, drawing his sword and pointing his commands. "Gun Commanders, prepare your electrics!"

"Sergeant, place the fuse! Corporal, fix the cap!"

The Bad Luck Charm swung on Sergeant Weigart's neck as he bent over the thick copper coils of the massive rod, and pulled back the spring-loaded copper brush of the "fuse".

("You don't got to be our lightning rod," I mumbled, reaching over and yanking the cord of the charm - it broke off. I threw it on the ground. Weigart looked at me, relieved and thankful. I disobeyed orders and stayed on the platform to spy through the embrasure. I watched with the other gunners, crouched at the four big cannon's embrasure. Behind me, I heard the bugler playing, "Fall In.")

"HERE IT COMES!" shouted the gunners all around.

A puff of smoke drifted from the fortified line of guns across the sea. Another and another and another puff lifted up lazily. The dark points rose up and arced over us as the noise of the firing reached us, a dull hammer-on-anvil clanking. Suddenly with a rush of air the first shot crashed fifty yards short of the fort; the second one thumped and kicked up sand low on the outside slope of our wall, burying itself. I flinched, but saw another little black dot slowly falling down over the sea.

As the dot grew frightfully larger and closer, Sarah yelled, "It's a Lunar hum-dinger!"

- And then there was a horrible rush of air and roaring blast cut off by a thump!

I stood up again and saw the twelve pound shot spinning in the sand, gently rolling. It rolled gently down the slope and came to a stop in the yard against a peg of one of the tents.

And Weigart lay sprawled and bloody, his head torn from his shoulders.

An iron rain fell fast on Fort Texas.

Chapter 16. The Design and the Flaw

- An Interlude -

One minute your humming along, happy as a horsefly on a cowpie - one minute you're locomoting downhill with a full head of steam - your heart's annunciator registering "3000 Volta's," the next minute you're stricken down to zero, grimly disengaged - all foredetermined by the machinery of fate? - A machinery that was the worst kind of indentured servitude? Worse than sugar caning in the typhoid tropics of the asteroid belt, because there was no chance - none! - of escaping or rebelling, not even into an afterlife.

It was ironic, than, if that were true, to be fighting for Democracy and Progress, when all was set according to an Awful Plan, without freedom from that despotism, without escape. Like slaves, like machines, we obeyed the constitution of the Awful Deity as his Agents & Subjects no matter what flag we furled.

More particularly to the 2nd of May, 1846, it was ironic and confusing to me that if I hadn't stolen back my counterfeit Bad Luck Charm, Oscar Rutherford Weigart would not have been killed. He would not have straightened up in just such a manner so as to place his head in the path of nine pounds of iron falling at some two hundred miles an hour. Now, it just wasn't fair to pin that on me. It wasn't my fault, but all the same, it seemed awfully particular to be a random whim of war. Why did he die? Why was I spared? It was nobody's fault, but it wasn't fair; it was an awful trick. Could it have been that because he was a true believer, he was punished by God for being afraid of a humbug charm? Why wasn't I punished? Because I Doubted? It seemed that the God of Nature had made a very strange design when he rewarded the bad and punished the good; seemed to me, moreover, the design was set against both bad and good, that neither was really powerful enough to withstand the Universal Law of Secession, that Things Bust. That Things Bust was the

center of the Awful Deity's design; that was how he made us Fear him so much. That was why folks always called themselves, "God-fearing," because God was so Awful. I didn't find much love and goodness in him who, for instance, let my father drown trying to save a girl who fell in the Rappahannock before I was a year old, so that I never even hardly got to meet him. I found some reason for fear, however, if God was just a despot, like old King George, but even more aristocratic, by which I mean fatter, uglier, and meaner. Even in theory, didn't seem right that a well-intentioned god should assign my fate without my constitutional rights upheld -

"No Assignation without Representation!"

"I want to be tried in Heaven by my own peers!"

"Down with Nabob Angels - give the Common Man wings!"

"Andy Jackson for President God!"

I didn't figure any god looking quite as awful as old King George, really. Maybe the devil did, though. I figured that the dits and dots and dashes of the stars was a kind of Morse message that there was some kind of Design, and some folks called that design god, some called it nature.

However, there seemed a Flaw in the Design - that flaw betwix the Law of Union and the Law of Secession.

The Law of Union is, as every good balloonist respects, as his business is defying gravity, is that Things Want To Stick Together. It's this law that keeps Things from Busting right away.

That Law of Union contradicted the Law of Secession, or Spontaneous Decay, that Things Don't Want to Stick Together, so that between the two, heavy parts settled down, light parts up, and things in general sought to disperse themselves according the thousandfold sundry vectors of their composite parts.

One Law was stronger than the other. It was the Law of Union. Everyone knew that; it was why Providence smiled upon my nation. Otherwise there'd be no reason for the Sun to revolve around the Earth. Professor Morse's theory was that magnetism accounted for that.

But it's also a fact that the Law of Secession used the Law of Union to bust things, like poor Oscar's mortal frame. It was the unifying urge of gravity that caused the piece of iron to tear his body apart. Seemed to me that this was a mistake somehow. It seemed like a flaw in the natural despotism of the Design. Seemed to me that the design itself was busted. Seemed to me like all this rationale of planets was tangled up half way between Deity and Machine. It was sure strange that the Earth was the only planet that the sun revolved around, while everything else - excepting our Moon, of

course - revolved around the Sun. Seemed to me that there was no accounting for it, lest it be, as the preachers said, the power of Faith - but putting that in rational terms I supposed Faith had to be an electromagnetic power, like the madman said.

The E-M cannon draws Volts from its Galvanic caisson, concentrates a terrifying electric charge to a spark at the bowls, where the annihilator cap detonates, the air pressure shock of which usually succeeds in concentrating the energy into that strange phenomenon of nature familiar to seasoned balloon sailors called "ball-lightning", which is pushed down the electromagnetically coiled barrel with the exploding air, giving it its trajectory much like - although not as predictable - iron projectiles. Like iron, too, the cannon's ball- lightning has been known to bounce, roll, and even splinter like a shell; unlike iron, cannon ball-lightning can unpredictably disappear, and reappear if it cares to, and as likely bounce as pass through armor, and do seemingly irrational things like hit one man and kill all the men around him but not him. In fact, seemed to me that no one - not ever Professor Morse - really understood why it worked, even if they claimed to, and of course they did.

There was a madman, a Yankee preacher named Garrison, who warned that electromagnetism was the substance of faith; and that when we used the telegraph - even more when we used the electromagnetic cannon, both of which harnessed divine lightning for our national ambitions - we were bleeding off the electric link between us and our creator. But he was just a madman. Only a madman could say those awful words two or three years before - words I never could forget - that the Constitution was "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell." Boy did that get my anti-abolitionist dander in a lather. However, because he was a madman I forgave him, and even liked him just a bit. He kept the stuffed shirt nabobs and Wall Street swanks and plantation aristocrats stirred up, like when I was a lad I used to whack hornet nests with a stick and then run, just because I was bored. When I got older I got wiser, and threw rocks at 'em.

So I might as well tell you, I tended to agree with the Prince-President Franklin Stove on this point - although it didn't make much sense - the rational was irrational, and the irrational was rational. Seemed to me that this queer idear was a way of looking square bull's eye into the Flaw of the Design, and it didn't seem so ornery, day to day, specially if you looked at the Flaw through the bottle glass spectacles of Gin Fever. Life seemed sweet and kind, not hardly half-bad, when you set yourself under a friendly pine tree with a pint, and a hand-

some hussy, and a well-worn edition of Napoleon and His Marshalls. Nonetheless, life seemed more than just cruel on that day War came into my life. Seemed vindictive; seemed like a liar who turned around and plugged you for agreeing with his lies. Although my Bad Luck Charm was pure unadulterated humbug, there was a great deal of bad luck involved just then, when the gunner died.

This business made me wonder over the next few days about our Design. Some folks said that since the Awful Deity was such a clever watchmaker, everything had meaning, and a calculable meaning at that. I'd heard Cap Mansfield tell Lieutenant Griswolde the following naturalism, that applied three ratios to human nature:

1. That our biped nature was divided into sexes corresponded to (animal) magnetism;
2. That it had irritation of nerves corresponded to electricity (- senses being sub-divided into Animus or Beef, Sensory Nerves or Spur, and Intuition or Horse Sense);
3. That it had intelligence corresponded to chemistry.

That little knowledge was rattling so loud in my skull like seeds in a dried up gourd, I had to try to apply these ratios to two of my favorite persons:

JACK BORGINNIS

Sex:Positive-Negative.

Senses:Beef x Spur x Horse Sense, Determined As Follows.

Beef:6 1/3 Volts

x Spur:150 Amperes

x Horse Sense:3 Ohm

= 2,850 Volta's of Irritation.

Intelligence:Substance of Caoutchouc.

SARAH BORGINNIS

Sex:Negative-Positive.

Senses:Beef x Spur x Horse Sense, Determined As Follows.

Beef:15 Volts

x Spur:8 Amperes

x Horse Sense:35 Ohms

= 4,200 Volta's of Irritation.

Intelligence:Sodium Nitrate & Potassium Chloride.

So what I didn't understand was, where did luck and free will come in the equation? Some folks call luck Providence, others Fate, but everyone set it against Free Will. As for luck, maybe there wasn't none, if everything was all set down according to laws, ratios, and design. It just seemed like luck because the cosmic machine was too big to understand, even planets were just seeds rattling in the gourd of the Awful Deity. As

for freedom, then, even what we thought of as freedom was part of the preset equation. It was just foolishness, we were all slaves of the Awful Deity - no, not slaves, but machine parts, cogs and wheels and levers. There is a natural despotism in our design.

It was ironic then, if that were true, to be fighting for Democracy and Progress, when all was set in an Awful Glue according to an Awful Plan, without no freedom from that despotism, without no escape. Like slaves, like machines, we obeyed the dictatorship of the Awful Deity, as his Agents & Subjects no matter what Constitution we gave oath to, no matter what flag we furled.

Fate must seek the Doomed, and therefore, according to mechanically predestined railroad tracks of events, Oscar Weigart must die. Wasn't everything composed of formulas, then? Just formulas? Where was the possibility for chance? And where was the potential for choice?

Must be electromagnetism that holds the destiny of the sun chained to the earth. Then I had a worrying thought. All balloonists knew that the Perfect Circles of the planets were getting wobbly; there was a hot argument among astronomers whether or not and why they were getting smaller or bigger, since both seemed to be true. Since things tended to Bust, what if the heavens were changing? What if the Circles of the heaven weren't perfect any more? What if the sun was slipping from our grip? What if it were slipping away out of the flaw of electromagnetism? Would then the Law of Union prove strong enough against the Law of Secession, to keep the sun from rejecting the earth, and flinging it into the Void? Or would the Law of Union pull it into the Fire?

I was determined to think on it, and find in the flaw of my Design the means to gain my freedom.

The best that I can figure is that I fell right through that flaw.

Chapter 17. The Glory Gets Going

We were all stunned, like bluejays flown into a window. Protectively, Kelly lay on top of me, a noble idea inspired by Walter Scott. However, it merely delayed my running down into the Bomb-Proof. "Keep your head down!" yelled Kelly.

The long-promised glory begun its reign.

While by now, our Base-Ball game was postponed on account of the rain of shells and roundshot and such. Cannonballs whizzed about, bouncing and bursting all around; and our own big guns roared back with showers of sparks as the copper "fuse" sprang and stroked the

coils along the length of the gun, when eighteen pounds of powder in the annihilator cap flared, the shock of air pressure compressing the hot flicker in the muzzle of an unholy Voltage, electrically igniting a blue ball of lightning, which the air pressure and electrically rifled vector send careening outward.

- The Number 2 Battery gunners cheered, "Revenge!"

Their ball of lightning knocked the bejeesus out of a Fort Paredes cannon, sending fizzing pieces of it scattered across Plato's Crater, and burning tiny holes all through the Lunar gunners.

Martha Mule hooted in her ditch as choking white clouds of steaming acid-vapor rose up out of the sizzling batteries, buried to the wheel-rims of their caissons, and rolled down the slope into the yard, obscuring the score chalked on the side of the three-wheeled chuck wagon:

CALHOUNIAN CRAWDADS 0
H CLAY CHICKENHAWKS 1

"What should we do?" I cried, looking to Kelly.

"Keep your head down!" shouted Kelly, his face giving a little tic.

"What should we do?" I repeated.

"How should I know? Leave me alone!" answered Kelly, his eyes turning right to see a black spot swoosh over the fort.

"What should we do?" I kept repeating.

"Haven't you done enough? You had to get your base-ball, didn't you!" yelled Kelly. Sarah was running up the slope, skirts held high.

"Let's get'm to the surgeon!" she said, grabbing one of Wiegart's legs.

We didn't ask what for. With Sarah, Mallory, Tristani-Firouzi, and I carried Wiegart's corpse. Kelly following, yelling at me:

"- You had to ask for your base-ball back, didn't you?"

"Shut up!"

"What!"

"Shut up, Lieutenant!"

"What!" Kelly yelled.

I was unfortunately unable to appreciate the full thrill of the glory that had finally, finally begun, because I was too busy carrying the torn corpse of a friend. I am ashamed to admit that I was too appalled by the banal mask of the all-conquering worm worn by that jack o'lanternless scarecrow in my hands to reap that ripe good corn, glory.

"What!" repeated Kelly angrily.

Although the Lunar cannonballs were shrieking around randomly overhead, or burying themselves in the earthworks of southern exposure, behind us, they were not landing inside the yard as of yet. Therefore, I did not hesitate, when we

laid the corpse on the surgeon's table, set on the lee side of the Bomb-Proof mound, to shake my fist in my brother's face to lay his what-ing to rest.

"Aren't we missing something?" asked the surgeon, following us outside.

For just then, as the roundshot kept falling, drums, whistles, and trumpets blew their familiar commands, but with unfamiliar allegro. The Musics played "Fall In" on the run - they past the Infirmary Tent on their way to the Bomb-Proof. We ran into the yard. The sergeants bellered and the brave Cotton Balers fell in their neat rows. Once in our neat rows, the sergeants bellered again and the first row of men peeled off neatly into the company dugouts of the Bomb-Proof. All the while, roundshot kicked dirt in the air on the walls of the fort, sometimes bounding over, sometimes rolling down and plowing up showers of dust. Then came a different sound, a whistling sound, a sudden teakettle shriek from straight above, as if the clouds themselves were a-boil - and then a mortar shell crashed straight down inside the six-sided heap of dust we called a fort, right through the Infirmary Tent. It burst, a white dot, then red fire, and then black smoke, instantly, with a heavy crackle. And blown upward, Sergeant Weigart's headless corpse flopped in the air, dancing a glory- mocking jig, and slopped in a horrible, horrible heap.

The terrified men broke the last rows of neat ranks and mobbed and fought to get in the Bomb-Proof, just as wispy drips drifted down, gently, insubstantial ribboning - the red spark trail from the long lit mortar fuse.

Sarah whistled, standing by the wreckage. Tristani-Firouzi, Kelly, and I ran back to poor Weigart. The old, tired orderly, Rev McKnight, whom we all trusted with our money when we went swimming in the Frigoris back at Annex Agonies, stopped us as we tried to drag the corpse back into the wreckage of the Infirmary Tent. "Don't bother the surgeon!" he yelled over all the booming, shrieking, and smashing. Doctor Paine searched among the wreckage for his instruments. We Dough-Boys called him the Webster of the Scalpel, so prolific and eloquent was his parings of gangrened limbs. Actually, we called him that to his front; we called him the Barber-y Pirate to his back (- never know when your arm or leg might suffer his apothecary carpentry.) He picked up a big hacksaw, blew off the dirt, and put it in his bag. Doing so, he accidentally stepped on the pint sized bottle of that funny new opium called ether, and broke it. "What? Oh. No loss, that perfume," he said, "Where's the Rupert's? Where's the leeches? Oh, my darlings, my poor little babies, save them!" A Music lad scrambled on his hands and knees, trying to catch the

squirming critters. We stared wide-eyed all around like yesterday's drunks waking up today's swabbies. McKnight looked up at us and yelled, "Get out! Stick him in the dirt, you fools! You can have your ceremony later," he added, rushing past us to the Bomb-Proof with two big brown jugs of Rupert's Miracle Salve and Tonic.

Kneeling right there beside the Bomb-Proof entrance, with our hands we scratched a shallow ditch for the poor gunner. Something about it seemed all wrong to me. Seemed to me some congressman or general ought to say a lot of stuff about peace, god, and glory, and there should be some awfully pretty women crying and sniffing and needing comforting. However, I was the one sniffing, Sarah was telling me to quit whining, and the only speech Kelly gave was this: "Where's his head? His head, his head! We can't bury him without his head!" In all the excitement, we hadn't found that part. Kelly shook me: "Where is it?"

"I don't know!" I yelled. "It must have rolled off somewhere!" We glanced all around. Just then, a roundshot hit the sand ten yards shy of us, and bounded by.

"Looks like the Trankies found their range," said Sarah calmly.

The Major's aid, Lieutenant Frederickson, jumped out of a black cloud and growled, "Everyvun get in ze Bomb-Proof, fast! fast!" He disappeared into a white cloud.

"Let's just bury him as is," said Sarah. "And if the head turns up... Aw, heck!" She pushed big heaps of sand over the body with her heels. "It's just one less skull for the Devil to play marbles with!" She grabbed a water-bucket and ran to Gun Battery 2.

That's how I learned the second duty of the shovel-wielding Angry- Saxon army - to bury their dead. You can call me a Whig if you must, but for me it was an inauspicious introduction to the religion of glory, that first day of siege. Kelly took note of that, and, in big-brotherly fashion, - once we were safe inside the gloom of the Bomb-Proof, took it upon his dandified epithets to explain to all his Crawdads the principles of Progress, as bombs burst all around, and the corpse's head was never found...

(- until too late -)

Chapter 18. The Moral Surgeon Does His Dastardly Duty

Down in the dark and dirty dugout, suffering the small earthquakes of bombardment all that first day, May 2nd, 1846, we Company C Crawdads complimented one another on all the glory we were earning easy, just sitting there and

suffering. We were shoved in so tight in our Crawdad Hole to one side of the Main Gallery, that our legs overlapped every which way; there was a bit of cheerless kicking now and again. Kelly chimed in, trying to talk like an officer, which to him was the same thing as nabob, "We must recognize that Sergeant Weigart's death was a noble sacrifice for the greater good of our national gory - I mean, glory. Glory! Glory!" he corrected himself angrily. "Them is principles worth dyin' for!" he insisted, in his own natural grammar.

"Yes sir," said Six-Fingers, turning his big ears on his long, skinny neck. "What principles exactly are we fighting for, again, sir? Just so I know - I'm sitting here trying to write a letter to one of my wives and I thought I'd just put down two or three of those principles you mentioned, except you didn't mention them by name, exactly, sir..." he said, waving his dirty quill. The feathers tickled my nose.

"Right," agreed my brother, rocking on his heels. "Take this down. Here we go. Mmmmm - Here we go - My dear madam, &tc &tc. Your husband is fightin' fer, that is, we - are - is? - are - all defendin' - er - yes, that's it, start over. Here we go. Why are we on the Moon? Perhaps you've wondered that question yourself. Perhaps you're wonderin' if your husband's death will be justified (er - should that unthinkable event be required). The answer, Madam, without prevarication, with all due alacrity, is a sacred CAUSE. The CAUSE, my dead madam, &tc, fer which we 7th Infantry Cotton Balers fight (defend) - fight TO defend - is the life and livelihood of Americans on American soil, GOD HELP US - (Land sakes that bomb was a close one!) - and - and freedom and liberty's destiny - er, where was I? Well, gall dang it, Mrs. Bourdett, this here Moon is the Lunar Peninsula of Texas fair and square, we all know it, we got to obey our elected President and he says it is, and the pesky Mooners started it by killin' us first! ...That's the best I can do, Private, I ain't Henry Shakespeare!"

Tick! Tick! Tick! Tick! That clockwork sound we'd come to know preceded the appearance of the newcomer, Prince-President Franklin Stove, the metal man of the fort, an automaton the gift of Polk's cabinet. Lo! and speak of the devil! - a cloud of steam and coke-smoke slowly solidified into his own handsome personage. Behind him was the Music lad, coughing. All the Crawdads looked at the man-'gin with curiosity - and respect, too, seeing as he was a Prince-President, standing at the top of the artificial aristocracy.

P. P. F. S. stared around in the gloomy underground, blindly, and we all stared back at his weird, white, porcelain pump-

kin of a face. We stared at his stiff, effeminately-sculpted, benign expression, his Beau Bremmer roughed cheeks, his permanently over-so-slightly pursed lips from which trickled escaping words of steam when he spoke. <<Errroo - Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick! Tick-ick-ick!>> He tugged on his square-cut porcelain beard, looking at nothing as he looked at us. Now, under siege, the war begun, we discovered that he wore a white diagonal sash over his black preacher's suit, a sash that read -

MORAL SURGEON

But the thing I noticed most was his whirling, swirling toy-marble eyes; so heavy and sticky was their stare, they seemed to hold you in a mesmerist trance of animal magnetism. Staring at those grey glass marbles, you got so you doubted, dizzily, your own existence. As the shells burst and roundshot bounced above our heads, the ticking automaton began to speak in a voice fluid and calm, quietly humming virtuous like a lead pipe church organ (or even more so like the church organ's poor cousin, P. T. Barnum's circus calliope) although slightly suffering a dandy's lisp on account of the escaping steam pressure of his wordss-ss.

<<Death has come on rooster wings while some gentlemen crow, 'WAR! WAR!' And some tremulously peep 'Peace, p-please...' But in the latter case those gentlemen are mostly - are they? - as follows - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠...

<<One. Fourierist free love harlots and two -

<<Two. Manumiss - manumiss - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - manumissionist Jean d'Arcs and three -

<<Three. Temperance shrews.

<<A question follows - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ -

<<Where is the spot where the life and livelihood of our citizens succumbed to the Worm of War, lest it be the blush of fever on Liberty's cheek?>>

We stared at him. I got a sort of inkling he didn't stand shoulder to shoulder with us on the question of defending the P. of T. However, he was such an odd fellow, I didn't take it personal, I just decided to laugh two or three times, like it was a joke.

But Kelly, he turned livid. He opened his mouth to speak forth his brilliant retort, then closed it again, over and over, like a landed Chesapeake catfish. He ground his teeth, squared his shoulders, and, in the process of squaring them, rattled and clattered his saber in its scabbard - a noise that always impressed us Dough Boys. He marched close (but first he had to swipe off his shako and stood down a little, on account of the low ceiling of the Bomb-Proof) and stood face to face with the travesty-talking automaton.

"Listen! It's nearly a week since Lunarista's cavalry ambushed our scouts - on this side of the Cold Sea - and murdered them!" I got up and stood behind my brother, because he was my brother, as I had often done when Kelly faced off against the hired hands of our neighbor, Mr. Spooner.

I added, "Yeah, and what I want to know is, if you're a Peace-Whig, where's your hairpiece?" (Under his hot stove-pipe, his hair was of porcelain mold, never needing combing, much unlike my own mop, but his was never sanctuary for patriotic American jiggerbugs, unlike my own.)

Tick! R-ee! Tick! The Prince-President looked at us and I got a bit lost inside the foggy grey swirly-whirlies of his glass eyes. <<Eggs- actly - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠>> he answered Kelly. <<This side of the Mare Frigoris eggs-stends all the way from the Moon to Teg-T-T'eggs- eggs-eggs-eggs! - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - to the Nueces River, to be eggs- eggs-splitic - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - to be precise. Therefore, Lieutenant, your answer begs-eggs-eggs - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - craves the question. The question craves an answer. As follows - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ -

<<Question. Is this fort eggs-actly situated on this chicken-poxed Lunar spot to defend Americans on our own soil?>>

Kelly swayed and blinked at the whirlings and the swirlings of the Metal Man's eyeballs. He just squawked out, automatically, "Hoo-ray fer Jackson! To the victor goes the spoils!"

Tick! Tick! Tick! Tick! The Prince-President calculated his Babbage Machine mind as we all lifted our kepis (those first generation Base- Ball caps) and hurrah'd the Bank Slayer. <<Sir,>> he bowed, <<I am no man for you.>>

"That's quite all right," said Kelly, subdued.

<<Let no man accuse you of being a mere tailor's dummy in Regular blue.>>

"I thank you," Kelly nodded. Then he turned around and, unsure, squinted at the benign face.

<<Let no man accuse you of being a mere mob-minded puppet mouthing Penny Press lies.>>

Angry again, but still unsure, Kelly took refuge in dignity. He clasped his hands behind his back, as Major Brown so often did. "Mister, is that the proper respect shown an officer of the United States Army - in time of war, at that?"

P. P. F. S. merely blinked his tin eyelids rhythmically, turned around, and marched out of the dugout. He ticked, turned right, and marched down the gallery, to Dugout 2. He was just doing his metal duty. He was just making his moral rounds.

It was darkening. Our guns ceased firing. But the Lunars kept dropping howitzer shells on us, an easy target, although entrenched. Something thudded and dirt

trickled down from the shelter's roof. Old Sock scooted by in the gallery, hunched over to keep the dirt out of Captain and Mrs. Miles' poached eggs. I chewed hard tack and biscuit and fell in fitful sleep. I dreamed that we Crawdads caught Joseph Bently kissing Sarah, so we all grabbed him and took him by the hair and dunked his pretty-boy head in a water bucket, and held him there. We held him there and held him there, though he kept thumping the side of the bucket, thumping...thumping... I woke up.

Outside, the ghosts of Aztec gods beat their war hammers on the sand.

Chapter 19. The Second Day of Siege

Dawn rose over the Moon, gushing red like a gutted calf. Bombs fell on us all night long; I was in a terrific mood. Cheek by jowl with the rest of the Crawdads of Company C in Dugout I, plus either the Chickenhawks of Company A or the pugilists of Company B, depending on the Watch, I lay in the dust, staring outside from the Bomb-Proof entryway, our only source of that peacetime luxury called oxygen, and a wee mite too small for my liking. Every couple of minutes an electromagnetic lightning-maker blew up all heaven and hell, since Captain Mansfield conveniently put the Bomb-Proof right beside the Number 2 gun platform. How I longed for the simple button-sewing days of Camp Annex Agonies!

Several times each hour, something Lunar thudded against our dirt roof and rolled into the yard. The dirt sifted down in droves between the cracks of the planks. The brandy my platoon was all trying to get drunk on - even Six-Fingers, the latter day saint - and Tristani-Firouzi, whose wife was president of the Sandusky Temperance Pledge Society - the brandy was as muddy as the Mare Frigoris.

"Gimme some more of that brave brandy of the Moon, there, Six-Fingers," I pleaded, rapping my empty tin cup. But Kelly woke up to my voice, stalked over, smelled our spicy breath, dumped the gourd in the dirt, and threatened us with a drubbing. "You drinkin'?" he accused me. "Now what would Ma say, boy?"

So I got to thinking about poor old Ma, having to marry smelly old Merlin Spooner who had horses and hired hands to help out on the farm. Merlin Spooner pretended to be a widower although everyone back in Chesapeake country knew that Ellen Spooner ballooned back to Great Deimos because there weren't bars of gold lying in every New World road and by-way. I guess she decided the

clammy, crumbling old castle weren't so bad after all, as long as she kept dusting off the family heraldry.

I remembered how Kelly and I'd been all shivering glad to leave the cooped-up farm and hunt star-spangled ingots of glory in Indian Country. As soon as I'd told her the big news, she'd turned her back on me and walked out of the barn. Now she was rattling pans worse than Napoleon's cannons, and thrashing bread dough. I put down my buckets and followed her into the house. She pinched a face in the dough and slapped it - the Dough-Boy winced. But then she began talking of the chicken-coop, a kind of veteran of the wars -

"No Borginnis never joins no army, no matter whose - don't you know that, boy? You own grandma, she took to truck from Lobsterbacks nor George's Tramps, neither - as Grandma called 'em - on account of they stole a pig and all her chickens. They jes' walked up and emptied out the coop, payin' her in worthless paper - Philadelphia script - which your grandpa then sold at twenty-five percent to Mr. Spooner's father, that old nabob squire... Well! Grandma called 'em Buff 'n' Blue Barleycorns, and worsen - anything but Sons of Liberty. Well! Meself, I thought boys was sons of mothers. I suppose Liberty makes orphans of her soldiers, eh boy? Your own dear father, may he rest in peace, the scoundrel! - he fled with the rest of the Mechanic's Militia at the first sign of the Union Jack in the last one; and who could blame him? Didn't the President himself run and hide in our very own chicken coop? Now I promised Jemmy never to tell a soul about that; but seeing as you and Kelly done sold your soul to the devil of soldiers, I think I can tell you and maybe larn you a lesson.

"I was pregnant with your brother then, and in a foul mood - he was kicking like the devil - when Mr. Madison's gig clatters down the lane, and the President jumps out - 'Mercy me!' I thought - his necktie a-flutter and his hair a mess - and he kept lookin' over his shoulder at all the smoke risin' out of Washington City. He bowed, seein' me, and asked a little favor, most humble-like - "

"'Mr. Madison,' I told him. "With all due respect, sir, you may very well get your own house burnt down, which we poor citizens will rebuild with your ungodly penny-tariffs; but who'll rebuild mine own house, when those Limy-devils come with their torches, lookin' for the unhappy likeness of you, sir - ?" He nodded, tried to smile, and shuffled over to the barn. "Oh no, no sir, not the barn neither!" I yelled. " - The chicken-coop, if you please, sir!"

"Well! I was so worried 'bout the old coop I stayed up all night pacing with Grandpa's blunderbuss. And in the morning, the well-rested President bowed to

me a right fancy bow, like this. I brushed off a few feathers that stuck to his coat and wig. And then, in front of all his Secretaries and Officers, who finally found him, he kissed my cheek, like this - "And Ma kissed my cheek. (Now I understood why Ma was so fond of him, and even took the liberty of calling his portrait above the stove "Jemmy".)

But now she stopped beaming, and looked cross again. She picked up the dough and slammed it down. "What do you want with the army, son? Ain't you got courage enough to take wife? Ain't you got manhood enough to plant grandchillern? - Sluggards! Cowards! Reprobates! - A pair of Tomfools, you and your horsethief brother! Now, if we was invaded again, all right, maybe! But now? There ain't no need for an army. What a nuisance!"

"But Ma," I'd protested, pointing to the long line of smoke draggin along the horizon. "This is different. My generation's got to exterminate the Injunations so's there's room for the railroads and telegraph poles and balloon tethers!"

"Jack, your grandfather paid two cents in iron ax-heads for a dollar of pelts from the Injuns; why kill 'em when you trade with 'em two cents for a hundred? How stupid! And what's good from a railroad, but noise, smoke, and twenty-mile-an-hour hell-darin' haste? Everyone I know lives within a league or two - only nabobs and newspapers need that telegraph pole eyesore! And balloons! Isn't one planet enough?" She slammed the dough in a pan and banged the pan in the stove.

"Railroads bring churches, Ma!" I'd argued, using my trump card.

Ma shook her head. "Don't think I don't know the army's just an excuse for sinnin' - Railroads and balloons," she scoffed. "I don't trust 'em. I don't know why we need 'em. They ain't natural. Why do we need 'em? Has my country changed so much? What my country needs now is grandchillern."

"Ma," I'd pleaded. "This is different. This is for a higher principle - something Kelly calls Angry-Saxon glory. Anyway, I promise to be back by Christmas. Heck, Florida is just a week away by packet steamer. We ain't got to ride no balloons nor railroads at all."

Poor old Ma! Deserted by her rotten sons! Six horses sold for Kelly's six cents worth of gold braid! Gone, two good-for-nothings who would leave Maryland and steam in stinking balloons up to the Moon, in order to defend the peninsula of Texas! (- A glorious cause, I admitted - but, with Lunar bombs falling all night, not getting forty winks, stuck in a hole with four-hundred fifty off duty men, bored, scared, and sober, neglected by the affections of my wife, who ran around like a chicken with her head cut off, bear-

ing water, serving slops, sewing and cheering up her boys, forgetting her man, - let's just say I was looking mighty forward to going home by Christmas, as someone had promised, although I couldn't recall exactly who...)

So I stopped myself from thinking about Ma, Sarah, and women in general, which was making me a little loco-foco barnburning restless, and started to think about nothing. And as I was thinking about nothing, I got to wondering why was a general a general, anyhow? And I figured there were three ways for me to follow Napoleon's footsteps, one of my many idle ambitions (such as "Flyin' Jack Borginnis, Terrific Trigonometrist of the Trapeze"):

First: Wampum. Wave a little wampum, and quicker than you can say, "Bank of the United States" the President gives you the right to be called widespread, common, unexceptional - I mean general. Six horses worth of coin made Kelly a lieutenant, so I figured about sixty would do it, make me a general. But then again, if I had sixty horses, why, I'd be a rich man, wouldn't I, and could sleep as late as I cared to, couldn't I, so why the heck would I want to join the Army? The answer, of course, was that if ever I was going to get my particular uncommon profile stamped on a nickel, I'd have to reap plenty big heaps of the good ripe corn, glory. But if I had more than sixty horses -

Second. Spoils. If I had more than sixty horses - if I had six hundred and six horses, or a locomotive, say, why I wouldn't have to spend a cent to be made General Jack Borginnis, Uncommon Balloon Bourne Boll-Weevil of the Cotton Balers. I'd be so rich that quicker than you can say Andy Jackson, my Congressmen friends would get me made general as a birthday present any day of the year.

But, if I weren't so rich, as I wasn't, I'd have to get up early every morning and shake hands right and left, talk tariffs yea-or-nay, internal improvementizations, and other tiresome subjects, all the while lying that one party and not the other was our country's salvation - and I'd have to never ever be seen arm-in-arm with a tart nor even a hussy - and still I wouldn't become higher than a captain, like Dixon Miles did - in general, the spoils system was a lot of bother. Still, it was less bother than the third route.

Third. Elbow-Grease. The commander of Fort Slow-Polk, Major Brown, he earned his commission. Private Brown fought in the 1812 war and was a soldier ever since. And General Taylor earned his grade the rough and ready way, in half a dozen wars big and small. He was always pushing out the borders, too, fighting Limies in Maine, fighting Seminoles in Florida, fighting out west in

Injun Country and now way out here on the Peninsula of Texas. Elbow-Greasing my way to the Napoleonship I so (I mean, so-so) desired wouldn't be so bad, if it wasn't for the possibility that my head may be carried away by an errant cannonball.

And so, whether by wampum, spoils, or elbow-grease, it seemed more likely I'd be the Terrific Trigonometrist of the Trapeze than the Uncommon Balloon-Bourne Boll-Weevil of the Cotton Bailers, though more likely than not the frigate that flew my flag through the fickle foam-fraughts of fate would find this name tatoored on its gilded hind: The Sluggard, or The Tomfool, or The Minor Troublemaker.

Then I wondered what our friendly neighbor, General Lunarista, had done to become a "Jeneralee". I expect it was a large pot of wampum mixed with spoils of war, all stirred up good with a spoon propelled by elbow-grease. Probably he fought for Lunar Independence from the Martians, which, unlike our Revolution seventy years ago, his was only twenty years past. Probably he fought lots more battles during those brief twenty years of waxing and waning Mooner strife. Probably he looked forward to another medal, this one inscribed with something like,

& MANY THANKS
FOR SMASHING FORT TEXAS
FLAT AS A TORTILLA.

Now, it was funny of the Prince President, Franklin Stove, to predict that General Zach Taylor would be our next president, and that General Lunarista would soon be the Moon Republic president, too, although no election would decide that. Didn't matter, though, generals were bound to wind up presidents anyway. (That's why I believed the Metal Man's prediction.) Still, it was good to be asked. It was strange, but as the bombs fell on my head, boom! boom! crash!, I felt a little sorry for the Moonmen and their infant republic, republic so-called. (And I kept recalling that Six-Fingers Bourdett whispered me the rumor that Old Rough and Ready himself said this campaign was "wicked"!)

Would I vote for Taylor in the next election? Friend, let me tell you, if you had asked me that on May the 3rd, eighteen hundred and forty-six, I would have replied, "If he don't hurry up and rescue us, I reckon there'll be one less vote against him in These States. But if he do, I reckon he's got presidential stuffin' inside that scraggly old scarecrow hide."

Young Mrs. Frederickson, the Lieutenant's wife, came in with a bucket of reboiled old chicken bone soup, my favorite, I told her, to which she blushingly replied, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott," which I took to mean, "It's fine

stew, and so are you." As she ladled it out, I got over my spleeny dander a little and ogled her ankles, I am ashamed to admit. I was bit provoked by all the ladies (except my wife) because they all said (except Sarah) in a big theological debate (all of them against Sarah) that they were duty-bound to pray for the Moonmen as well as us. After that trick they pulled on Mayday, consecrating their cannon, I figured same as Sarah that we needed all the supernatural help we could get if there was any for the getting, strategic-wise. And we weren't the only ones who figured odds favoring the Mooners. We lost one of the Saint Patties - John Sheehan - during the night. He deserted. Worse, he swum the inlet...

The shells shrieked down and crackled. The roundshot swooshed and thumped, showering sand all around, and rolled a mile. Captain Lowd sent the news around that his boys had sent another Fort Paredes cannon into Smithy Heaven, cracking its muzzle off. Still that Lunar rain kept us holed up, and I thought I was a ridiculous looking prairie dog in my kepi. Staring up at the bomb-buckling boards, I heard poor Martha Mule brayed all night long; in the morning she started chewing on her tie rope. She wanted to desert us, too. That hurt my feelings.

Chapter 20. "ALL THE MOON!" - A Ditty Fit For Drinking

As the Moon Republic's bombs flew over my head, I huddled most miserably for two hours of watch on Wall 3 that second day of siege. I huddled in my sentry-pit and felt very devout and sorry for myself. Sarah suddenly jumped in with a water bucket and one half of one sweet biscuit; I fell in love with her again as she put her arms around me and said, "Cheer up, Jack, 'cause we is winnin'!"

"Honest?" I said. She explained that the score was four to three in the bottom of the 3rd Inning. It went like this, she explained:

Inning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Score	Errors
Slow-Polks	1	2	1	*	*	*	*	*	4		1
Pesky Lunars	1	1	1	*	*	*	*	*	3		0

"I reckon this game begun when them pesky Lunars scored by ringin' all their churchbells an' consecratin' their cannonballs," said Sarah. "But heck! we scored first, I figure, jes' by gettin' all six walls of the fort pushed up (an' the Bomb-Proof dug up, of course...)" She paused to duck as a roundshot whooshed near - whump! It plopped on the rampart, showering us with dirt. It spun there on

the edge, only to roll back down, and bowl itself into the Cold Sea. I resumed a-chewing my half biscuit.

"The next Innin', May Two," Sarah said as she brushed dirt out of her hair, "them pesky Lunars scored right away with a hum-dinger that knocked Sarge Weigart's head plumb off. - But by sundown, ha! Cappy Lowd's eighteen pounders hit two e-lectric hum-dingers, pow an' pow!, an two of them guns of Plato spilled upsy-daisy - an' more than that, it's plain that with each gun we knock, we're weakenin' them yonder Trankies' ability to score, as today's Innin' shows, the Lunars earnin' nothin' but a great big chicken egg, zero. An' once again the big guns of Cappy Lowd knocked the iron nose off a third cannon, pow! It woulda been, an' shoulda been the only score of the day, was it not for an Error on our part - that bein' Vincent Childer's part, desertin' an' swimmin' the river... Anyhow, it leaves us so far with a Third Inning score of Pesky Lunars 3, Slow-Polks 4." She kissed me and ran off to the next sentry-pit.

Maybe we were winning - I could see my wife's way of looking at it - but I knew that the game was far from over - we were still stuck under seige - we had only eight days' rations left - General Lunarista had ten Tranquil Musketeer for every one of us Cotton Balers, - more than enough if he wanted to assault us - meanwhile he still had a handful of twelve pounders and a mortar to rain hell on our Bomb- Proof roof.

Back in the good ole Bomb-Proof, there was nothing to do but listen to the screech of shells, and cough on the powder-smoke. I cleaned my boots and sewed on my buttons; then I cleaned my buttons and sewed up the toe of my boot. Then I tore off my buttons and sewed 'em back on better. In fact I sewed my boots to the company pennant and Six-Finger's sleeve. I am a pretty good seamster but it was just too cheek by jowl down there.

Presently the men were all too silent, but for the prayers of the pious, the prayers of the terrified, the prayers of the gamblers - the latter mingled with shouts and groans and clicking dice. Besides that there was the snoring of the bored and some blasphemous language, I am sorry to report, from the sinners, in which category I belong... Still, it all seemed miserably quiet, compared to the bursting bombs and leaping eighteen pounders above us.

Some of the men sat crammed on the Roman Lounges, we called 'em - splintery planks laid between crates of eighteen-pound canister and crates full of bibles. With the rise of the lead-colored sun like a slow swooping cannonball, I woke from my dreams of Joseph Bently's ghost, gasping, groaning, and he-hawing

like Martha Mule's braying out in the yard. So I woke up all jittery. I wanted to make up for Bently's drowning, and my part and helping him drown, but all I could figure was that there was nothing I could do, ever. I was afraid of a sneaking thought that crept up on me like an Injun, telling me just forget it like everyone else. It wasn't like any lightning bolts were spearing evil men these days (or any days past far as I knew). Most evil men I knew of got bags of gold, promotions, honors, the admirations of women, and Penny Press editorials advertising the example of their virtues. Now, friend, you may accuse me of doubting the Triumph of Good over Evil, and therefore tossing the whole creed of Progress out the window (but our Bomb-Proof didn't have a window). Now, I grant you, that new kind of tree called Telephone Pole, which was sprouting up all over citiside, countryside, and tarnation, was a kind of fruit of Progress, but wasn't it just the same old tree of knowledge as in Eden, and that apple just ball-lightning? It seemed to me, then, that Progress and Evil could triumph at the same time. It seemed to me, also, then, that no lightning bolt ever would nor even could punish my awful transgression. Therefore, if it was going to be done at all, I'd have to do it myself. Trouble was, I wasn't sure what "it" meant. Maybe "it" meant, "stick your head in the bore of a electromagnetic cannon", and maybe it meant, "say you're sorry and leave off liquor for two weeks."

We were all kind of quiet and thinking too much when Half-Lip McCoy suddenly jumped up laughing.

"What's so funny?" we demanded.

"I dunno," he replied, and sat down all glum.

To cheer him up, I asked him to play his awful rat-chewed concertina. We all sang his little composition, "ALL THE MOON!" to the tune of "Hear Our Prayer, O Lord" -

*I got a glorious expectation
For a sunny fun vacation, boys!
But you don't got to miss us
Cause we'll all be back by Christmas*

*So sing HURRAH for glory boys!
Sing HURRAH for glory! (&tc)*

*We're mighty fine ballooners
Gonna kill some pesky Lunars, boys!
And them Halls of Montamoona
Will be one big crater tomb-a -*

*So sing HURRAH for glory boys!
Sing HURRAH for glory! (&tc)*

Don't got to mind our manners

Cause we fight for Freedom's banners, boys!

*And Charity will guide our heart
To any old Lunar whore or tart -*

*So sing HURRAH for glory boys!
Sing HURRAH for glory! (&tc)*

*Damn them Whigs who make a fuss!
The MOON'S just the LONG hair of
TEX-US, boys!*

*We know why the U. S. is so FREE
and BRAVE*

*It's a-cause that ANY MAN can own a
nigger slave -*

*So sing HURRAH for glory boys!
Sing HURRAH for glory! (&tc)*

*Soon the Moon will all be FREE!
We'll cross the Cold Sea with Rough
'n' Ready, boys!*

*But if he tarries, back in Archie's
Hole,*

*The Devil's Yule log will be our burn-
ing soul -*

*So sing HURRAH for glory boys!
Sing HURRAH for glory! (&tc)*

So sang Half-Lip McCoy, who lost his other lip in a brawl with a bowie-knife fisted Ranger during the 4th of July celebration in Plato's Crater, I was told in '48, but not by him.

The guys what didn't have no gumption prayed like the devil, worrying them worry beads like they were diamonds or tart's garters. The hard luck men huddled beside a red lantern, slapping cards down on the dirt with brief little gestures and grunts. With their curses, their hard hollow-eyed faces, and that livid light underground, it was like a saloon run by Old Scratch himself.

Weird, the huddled card-sharps! They numbered their pips by the lurid storm-wash of a red lantern. It was so strange to see them wager wildly silent, shoving piles of Liberty's-head lucre about by rote and rhythm. They slapped down the cards in the dirt. A finger curled, "Hit me." A hand cut a throat: "Call." A palm spilled: "I'm out." A triumvirate of white beards, bitter and beaten cheaters, lost the last dregs of last month's wages to the one that played southpaw. They won their wages back just to lose them twice over again. The huddled card players played gamesome Fate, the tumbled cards a little paper fort, the coins, cannonballs, rolling to one rate, then back to the rival fate. The Metal Man traded the good gold for notes three times its value, alleged in dubious wildcat script, helot-profiled. He stuffed it down his esophochute, furnace food, intrinsically deli-

cious to such gourmands of combustion as he, the prince of automatons, the president of bicameral steam engines, Franklin Stove.

The old-timers played about a thousand games with my dog-chewed checkers set. Harold Winston was taking apart and putting back together the lock of his musket, over and over again, like he was a wind-up blacksmithy. Bradley Abernathy, the Delaware kid pinning way over his sweetheart, left to the tender mercies of the less patriotic lads, he slept sitting with his head on his knees, sighing, "Oh, I am despair!" He made me cross. I was once just like him, but a half year of grubby, mean, and hard-hearted military life had squeezed me into a different shape: whereas he clenched the ignorance of his innocence with a discipline that was grubby, mean, and hard-hearted.

The men with beloved wives and little ones lay on their backs, half asleep. Without fully waking they opened their eyes every time a shell landed inside the fort, blowing fire and showering iron splinters and dirt clods against the Bomb-Proof roof. Then they closed their eyes again. Three or four thin and tired foreign-borns who'd signed up on the balloon ramps soon as their hungry bellies hit the States - they lay shivering and sweating with Lunar Fever. Already the infirmary dugout was full-up with men with their springs run down from the march from Annex Agonies. So, in order to make room for the boys with shell-splinters, Doctor Paine said all feverish Dough-Boys should stay put - seeing as he could as well treat 'em here as there, with Rupert's Miracle Salve and Tonic.

"Well, since Sheehan swum-river, let's dice for his left-behinds," called out the red bearded gambler, "Kidney" Beanton. We diced for a burlap sack, a box of rotten snuff, and a miniature of Venus - unclad, of course - holding the staff of Old Glory. Miracle of miracles, I won Venus with double boxcars. I took Bradley Abernathy aside and tried to give it to him, but he made me trade it for a plug of dry tobacco, so that he owed me nothing.

The next day there was a heap of excitement when a famous guest came a-knocking on the gate of Fort Slow-Polk -

Chapter 21. The Third Day of Siege: The Visitor

The Lunar screw-press kept squeezing down on us, but weaker than ever. Our lightning-throwing electricians smashed another one of their 12-pounders, sending pieces of it skittering all along Iturbide Avenue of Plato's Crater. So General Lunarista pulled the few surviving cannons back to keep us Slow-Polks from

smashing them, too. Without good targets, Captain Lowd stopped firing, becoming Captain Quiet and giving our ears a rest. The only racket left was the far off thumping of Lunarista's lone siege-mortar across the Cold Sea, and the shriek of its intermittent shell as it struggled at such long range to overtop the southern walls of Fort Texas. However, it was enough to keep us stuck down in the Bomb-Proof, uncomfortable and worried, seeing as we were still surrounded so many thousands and thousands of rhetoricians who claimed that this Lunar crescent was not the Peninsula of Texas we knew it was. And we now had just a week's rations left...

I was quite surprised to see Major Jake Brown jump down into the Bomb-Proof. I guessed, by the way he squinted around, that this was his first time down here. During the last couple days, he ran around all six walls, ordering the sappers hither and yon with their wheelbarrows full of dump-dust. He was determined to build back up the walls faster than Lunarista & Co. could whack 'em down. By the way he wrinkled his nose it was easy to figure he had never visited the safety of our underground nest. (It was steerage class for five hundred men and a couple dozen women. This storm over the P. of T. made for a nasty voyage to the Halls of Glory!)

We all crowded in the front of our company dugouts to hear him give a little speech in the gallery. He said, "Some of the men have had a lapse of martial virtue..." (By this he meant they deserted. They jumped the wall and swum over to the lunaritas of Plato's Crater. Some of the Green Moon boys from Phobos got kind of glazy-eyed when they heard their Awful Deity's bells calling them to worship. And some of us sinners swore we could smell perfume when the wind came from the south, from the lunarita's wash hung out to dry...)

As the Major spoke, Prince-President Franklin Stove stood behind him, ticking irregularly, seemingly in lazy contemplation, his tin eyelids blinking as he cranked the totals of his Babbage Calculating Machine brain, and little puffs of coke-smoke rising out of his stove pipe to the regular thump of his boiler-piston.

"I asked our moral surgeon to read the enemy's assertions against our cause," Major Brown smiled mildly. "The light of reason will explode his deceptions like fire to fuse. That, I believe, is the most sensible, democratic and forthright way to defuse lies - bold detonation." He handed a certain circular to the Metal Man and hastened up and out of the Bomb-Proof, Lieutenant Frederickson following close behind.

The Prince-President, whose sash (indicating exactly what kind of surgeon he was, a moral one) was by now a little

bit brown stained (with glory). He directed the vectors of his swirling marble eyes on the enemy's demoralizing circular. It was a friendly little note that we all had read or had read to us. Myself, I had read it a couple or three times, secretly - because I was bored and curious, that's all - ever since the old button-peddler from across the Cold Sea had given me my two buttons wrapped up in them. Other Dough-Boys got theirs wrapped around corn flour or bottles of mescal, back before the war started, when the folks from Plato's Crater did a brisk business on us, even as we leaned on our fort shovels and oggled them shy, long-braided lunaritas...

ARMY OF THE SEA OF TRANQUILITY

CRATER OF PLATO, APRIL XXVIII,
1846

CIRCULAR

1. IN THE HEARTS OF ALL GOOD MEN IT IS KNOWN THAT THE WAR CARRIED ON AGAINST THE UNITED STATES OF THE MOON BY THE UNITED STATES OF EARTH ARE UNJUST, ILLEGAL, & AGAINST GOD, FOR WHICH REASON NO CHRISTIAN SHOULD OUGHT TO CONTRIBUTE TO IT LEST HE BE CONTEMNED TO DAMNATION ETERNAL.
2. OUR FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS NOW PLEASANTLY RE-ESTABLISHED IN THE CAPITAL, & ALL GENERALS MORE OR LESS UNITED FOR THE PATRIOTIC DEFENSE. TO THAT CAUSE HAS ARISEN A GREAT NUMBER OF ARMIES OF CONSCRIPTED PEONS CALLED THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE CRATERS OF ARCHIMEDES, ERATOSTHENES, COPERNICUS, PTOLEMY, FRACASTORIUS, TYCHO, & THE REST. WE ARE PREPARED TO DIE FOR OUR INDEPENDENCE FROM THE STEAMBALLOON INVADERS WHO WOULD CRUELLY ENSLAVE THE POPULACE WHO VERY HAPPILY WORK OUR GENERAL'S HACIENDAS.
3. IN THE NAME OF MY REPUBLIC I OFFER THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP TO ALL INDIVIDUALS IF BUT THEY LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS & SEPARATE THEMSELVES FROM THE AMERICAN ARMY. WITH MY WORD OF HONOUR I PLEDGE THAT THEY SHALL BE PROTECTED & WELL TREATED

IN ALL PLANTATIONS, TOWNS, CHURCHES, & ROADS WHERESOEVER THEY BE RECEIVED, & COURTEOUSLY ASSISTED FOR THEIR MARCH ACROSS THE LUNAR REPUBLIC. ALL OF THE HUNDREDS OF MEN WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO QUIT THE EVIL CAUSE ALREADY ENJOY OUR GRATITUDE.

4. OUR KIND, BEAUTIFUL, & VIRTUOUS CANTINA GIRLS WILL GENEROUSLY BESTOW EVERY COURTESY THAT IS DUE OUR BRAVE GUESTS.
5. TO ALL THOSE BRAVE MEN WHO WISH TO SERVE IN THE INNUMERABLE, GLORIOUS, & OMNIPOTENT ARMY OF THE MOON, THEIR GRADES, & OFFICES SHALL BE TRANSFERRED. EACH MAN WHO DOES SO SHALL BE BLESSED BY GOD, BUT FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC HE SHALL RECEIVE ONE HUNDRED & SIXTY ACRES OF FERTILE LAND.

IN FRIENDSHIP,
I AFFIX MY SIGNATURE:
MARIANO LUNARISTA
COMMANDING GENERAL

As the Prince-President finished reading - the words ticking and whistling out with steam - about a dozen of Lunarista's mortar shells affixed their signature in friendship with the western ramparts of Fort Slow-Polk. Sand, stone, and smoke blew in on us, rattling down from the yard. But before the moral surgeon could hack off any rotten limbs among us, there was a whoop and a hollar from the sentry pits:

"Sam Walker's boys a-comin' in!"

The officers shouted. The bugler played, "To Arms!" as the drums began to rattle. We heard far off musket fire from the Trankie pickets as we rushed out in a mob into the open air again, hastily forming our columns. A hundred of us rushed up in line formation and mounted Wall 5, a second hundred for Wall 6. The rest remained reserved in the yard, scanning the skies for the Rangers' balloons. Far, far off I saw about seven of the Texas irregular Dragoon-Balloons (a brave state militia that wasn't quite yet legally organized into the Army of Observation) - better known as Sam Walker's Flying Rangers - seven tiny balloons, flying low, draggin their ropes, the anchors pulling up dust, their one-man gondola paddles flapping like fish fins as they tried to tack against the wind. The Lunar hussars galloped to cut them off before they reached us. They looked magnificent, those horsemen, with long lances, golden armor, carbines, sabers,

and pennants - there was a bunch of confusion in all the smoke raised by hundreds of horses - we heard the crack of the carbines, followed by the pop-pop-popping of the Rangers' Colt-Repeaters - a lance rose up out of the smoke to prick at a balloona lasso caught around a gondola paddle, but the Ranger cut all his ballast and lifted the hussar out of his saddle - we saw the red glare of several stoves as they manufactured torrents of hot air - one by one, all of the balloons retreated upward out of the smoke - except - and then - all of a sudden, real close - a lone ballonist appeared, his gondola bumping along the ground, the rider hugging the rigging. A fast ragged row of hussars rode right behind him, but, as the Ranger lifted a paddle and somehow steered diagonally toward the sea, Captain Seawell touched off a 6-pound ball bounding amidst the now-exposed pursuers, who scattered, and broke away. But their captain - who looked familiar - braved the ball to lean out of his saddle and slash the Ranger's anchor cord. The balloon lurched up and bounced down again joltingly, but the dusty Ranger hung on. The balloon skipped up the slope of Wall 4, and swung low over the yard, twisting. The Ranger tossed a long, long lasso round the flagpole and pulled it tight. That brought the balloon jerkily around as the reserve companies scrambled for the truncated stub of his drag rope. Quick as a wink the Ranger tugged the top flap open, all the hot air swooshed up out of the balloon, and the circus canopy of it slowly came to rest on top the gondola, gently rocking.

And so, though under siege, had we a visitor!

Now a figure dismounted his straw saddle! Now he dusted off his hat, and set it carefully back on. Now he swooped it off again, and bowed:

"Major Brown and Cotton Balers! I'm powerf'ly pleased to be your guest! Allow me to introducfy myself. I am - "

" - Sam Walker! You nearly getched yourself kilt!" chided Sarah, rushing over with a cup of coffee. She pushed aside the mob with her gingham elbows right and left. "Y'old prairie pi-rate!"

"Why, Sarah," grinned Captain Walker, pushing up his brim. "Ain't this somethin'! You takin' care of yer boys, now, garl?" he winked, and swung his gnarled paw through the air, mimicking how she had walopped one of Walker's boys, Wallis Gordon, back in Annex Agonies Crater when he had tried to kiss her without permission. This had earned her the instant admiration of such a discriminating sort as Captain Walker himself, and I reckoned that my wife had given him plenty of permissions.

Sarah blushed and giggled and spat.

"I jest do what I can, same as everybody else," she said mildly. "Want some of my coffee, Captain?"

- Suddenly the coffee shrieked and blew up in her hand!

- She stood stunned, the handle still punched in her fingers. Then she slapped her knees with crazy relieved laughter.

"Strong stuff, that," observed the sunburnt Ranger, mildly. He stood with his hands on his belt, shaking his head. He looked tired.

I let out a long breathe and with my hands covering my ears scanned the sky for more unwelcome visitors. General Lunarista's lone mortar had resumed its slow trickle of shells on our heads.

"Into the Bomb-Proof!" yelled Major Brown as the Rangers ran up and saluted and put out his rawhide-gloved hand for a hearty shake.

"Major, I bring a message from General Taylor - "

Chapter 22. General Jackson Rides His Balloon to the Texas Moon

All of us Slow-Polks were wondering so flea-biting curious what message did Sam Walker bring our Major Brown from Ole Rough 'n' Ready. What was so important as to justify the Flying Rangers to try to run their balloons through the siege lines, risking getting their silk skewered by a Lunar lance? Bob Rawlings, a Company A Chickenhawk, claimed that President Polk was recalling Taylor back to Washington City, in order to keep the Whigs from putting a hero on their platform in '48 (and since they were too chicken to put my man Harry Clay on the ticket, they'd probably stick another Peter Barnum clown on it). If this rumor was true, said Half-Lip McCoy, "Why, they'll have to make peace - they can't just leave us here! - an' balloon us back home by Christmas after all - with our tail between our legs - 'less'n they steam Andy Jackson up here, to straight them Lunars out - " Hardly had the name of the Bank-Slayer left his lip when all we Crawdads jumped up a-hooping and a-hollaring, "HOO- RAY FER JACKSON! JACKSON'S ON HIS WAY, BOYS! JACKSON'S A-COMIN' TO THE P. OF T.!"

We made so much Jackson-racket, rivaling General Lunarista's banging and bursting little howitzer shells, that pretty soon the entire population of the Bomb-Proof believed that like an angry gin-swilling plain-talking angel, Old Man Jackson was due any minute to swoop down in his steam-balloon and deliver us out of the grips of five thousand mean little moonmen. So it became necessary for Major Brown to send Captain Walker

down to us, and explain it wasn't so, and futhermore, to explain exactly what was so.

We admired the famous Ranger, restlessly pacing to and fro in the underground gallery, fiddling with a wooden nickle, unhappy to be cooped-up, claustrophobic, nervously discharging smoke from his long-stemmed clay pipe like a Vanderbuilt Line Balloon-Steamer.

He called out, "Cotton Balers of the 7th! I salute your coyote gumption under adversity!" and he saluted us. "Major Brown will see you fellars through this siege. General Taylor asked me to have a little look-see round this here Fort Texas, and I see you all doin' just dandy - even if y'all are hid like prairie dogs from a passin' herd of buffalo. That's good, 'cause the General asked me to tell Major Brown that it'd be two-three-four more days before he can get all his chuck wagons loaded up at Archytas Crater, and Fort Polk thar built up as fine and strong as this here one..."

At this unhappy news we all groaned, and some Dough-Boys cried out:

"Where's Jackson?"

" - We want Andy Jackson!"

Sam Walker chuckled at this, and relaxed a little. He hooked his thumbs in his turquoise and silver belt. "Say, what about Old Hickory? He's gone now. But boys, I'll tell y'all. I still hear Gin'l Jackson shouting 'All the Moon!' with more grunt and gristle than a corn-fed king bull smellin' filly cow. The whole bull herd smells filly cows, but first they gotta break a fence, and behind that they gotta cross a shallow crick. You could call that thar fence Congress, and you could call that crick the Mare Friggerest. There ain't nothin' gonna stop that king bull from leadin' the herd through that fence and cross that crick! I tell y'all, them filly cows are destined to have calves, calves branded the stars of Old Glory. So you boys just sit tight, knowin' you're doin' Andy's good work for'm. And y'know, you're givin' them scardy cats of Congress conniption fits - like Old Man Adams, that old fossil! - who keeps bangin' that cheap and tawdry manumissionist tambourine," he chuckled over this war that was giving them manumissionists such a ribbing, and we chuckled too. ("Course, to be fair, Adams tried to buy Texas from the Mooners when he was president, just like Jackson, so give the devil his due," he added. "If the Mooners had let go of Texas, there wouldn't be no war now.")

But there was a hissing that brokered louder and louder through our chuckling, as Prince-President Franklin Stove puffed out a little white cloud of steam. <<#\$\$@% - With all due alacrity I will now endeavor to plow-in that manure of truth, in order that a crop of good cotton blossoms will restore the modest gown of

virtue to the naked - #@\$% - brazen - #@\$%}- audacity of our Goddess - #@\$% - Rrr-oo! - Liberty,>> spake the metal man with eyes a- burning with a grey whippoorwill featherly flutter.

We were all - even Sam Walker - shocked and surprised by this scalding tone that cooked to cinders the bones we were gnawing on, the one that Andy Jackson tossed us. << - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - The Moon must be the Peninsula of T'eggs-eggs-eggs - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - T'eggs-as - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - the P. of T., in order for the consistent logic of Progr'eggs-eggs - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Progre-gg-as - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - mechanics of Destiny to conclude that the golden shores of Venus are destined to become the west coast of Virginia.>>

"Hold it right thar, my metal amigo!" called Sam Walker, lifting his gnarled paw to shade his sight from the dizzying grey ambiguities of the automaton's glass eyes.

"Only the most yellerbellied stinkbug of a foreign-born stumper on bended knee before a Yankee penny-press could churp such a bluejay cock-a-doodle-noodle of wrigglin' Whiggery! This here Texas crescent has got NUTHIN' to do with wrastlin Venus from the weak little grip of the Mooners, if there's wrastlin' to do. Them is two different animules. Texas, now, she earnt her indy-pendance fair and square, just like the Orrr-riggynal Thirteen Colonies, just a little bit later, not in 1776 but 1836. (Shoot! Has ten years gone so fast...?) Sure, we was a Moon State once, but we parted company fair and square and legal even, cause a scoundral named Lunarstasio Bustamate busted-up the Feddy-ral compact. Matter of fact, it was the Feddy-ral flag of the Moon that Crockett, Bowie, and the Gang fought and died under at the glorious defense of the Alamo. Once Bustamate busted-up the Mooner Constytution, well, we Lone Star citizens decided we'd protect our rights by indy-pendance.

"I 'magine if Andy Jackson had tossed the Immortal Constytution out the White House window without even a howdy-do to Congress, I bet them Hartford Conventioneerin' States woulda left the Union right quick. That's just what Texas did, she liberated herself from the Moon, and now it's only fair we liberate the rest of the Moon, and civilize her while we's at it. Now, Andy Jackson, he always defended the Constytution as he understood it, and if he ever misunderstood a little clause, or a tiny phrase, well, it was for the sake of the Common Man, which is why I, for one, will not tolerate anyone sayin' anythin' dirty 'bout Andy Jackson!"

We cheered!

"May I say somethin', Captain?" called Sarah.

Sam Walker gallantly bowed, sweeping off his hat.

Sarah rolled up the sleeves of her dress, and raised her long arms. "Boys! Some of you know me better'n others, but you all know me, and know that I love the Cotton Balers, and know how proud of y'all I am. But do you know why? 'Cause, boys, thar's work to be done. And we Cotton Balers is the ones who got to do it! See, now, boys:we lives in times of Big Doin's. Destiny lies all sorta hunched over, like a bullfrog ready to pounce on a purty dragonfly. I say, heck! Let's pounce, while the pouncin's good! 'Cause if'n we don't, some mean old snappin' turtle will snap up that dragonfly, you know they will, they want to do it, those nasty Old World snappin' turtles, and they WILL do it, too, 'less'n we pounce first. So I say, let's pounce, while the pouncin's good! - That's all," she curtsied, then asked, "Lemme have a puff a'yer pipe, thar, Sam," and puff-puff-puffed away like a Lowell shirt-manufactory.

"Bull's-eye!" agreed Sam Walker, smashing his hat back on. "The Moon is jest sittin' and waitin' to be snatched up. She's a plum on our thumb, boys! They're backward and weak and full of Injuns. That's why them Great Deimos agents is plottin' and schemin' to steal Venus - she'd's easy pickin's, like visitin' a widow with seven purty daughters. All the bandy-legged aristy-crats of Mars say they get Venus 'cause the Lunars owe them so much gold; I tell y'all, not just John Bull wants it, nope, they all do - why, even the Martian Tsar's got a fort on that golden orb (though I hear tell he sold it to a sly Yankee). I tell y'all, not one of us - not even Old Man Adams wants a monarch putting any more colonies anywhere in our Inner Spheres."

Sarah gave him back his pipe and he sucked on the long clay stem, thinking. He added, "I say, if we love one of that widow's purty daughters, heck and tarnation, let's marry her! That widow can't take care of seven daughters alone! That widow's too weak and sick and crazy in the head! She needs from a kind, civilized gentleman, one that goes by the name of Yankee Doodle!"

We tossed our kepis, jumped up and cheered wildly:

ALL THE MOON!

Fifty-four Forty or Fight!

VENUS OR BUST!

To the Seminoles like the Cossack to the Poles!

THE MOON OR DEATH!

Hoo-ray fer Jackson!

We cheered and cheered, as the shells burst nastily above. Sam Walker stood proudly, smiling and nodding, his hand in his coat like Napoleon; Sarah lifted her

straw hat and turned a jig, slapping her ankles, jingling her jewelry, dropping an ace of hearts from her apron as she howled, "Woo-woo-woo!" like a lobo.

P. P. F. S. tried to speak, but Sarah told him, "Hush-up a minute, will you, Professor? Sam ain't finished."

From his stove pipe, black smoke started puffing blacker and smokier.

"You do un'erstand," smiled the Ranger, pointing his pipe like a Colt repeater. He made guppy faces blowing happy smoke rings at us. As the smoke rings wobbled outward, they interlocked in a murky chain.

"Say, I see a sperit..." said Sarah, in a hushed, feverish tone, her eyes a-fire. "What's that sperit? (I ain't talkin' 'bout corn-sperits, neither)...No, sir...That's - why, yes! - the Sperit of Seventy-Six!"

"- No Sarah!" cried Sam Walker. "It's the Sperit of Tharty-Six!"

Again we cheered wildly. Sarah lead us into "Yankee Doodle went to town, a-rid'nin' on a po-ny - ," bobbing up and down to the beat of the song. "Stuck a feather in his cap and called it macaroni!" A Music sitting nearby picked up his glockenspiel and tinkled out the tune. We all had a good old Yankee-Doodling time, keeping it up until -

Until the automaton had raised enough boiler-pressure. Like 4th of July fireworks, a great hiss of steam and a lurid lit cloud of coke smoke advertised in dramatic fashion the loud, shrill words, words both unwelcome and unpleasant, concerning a most dreaded SUBJECT...

Chapter 23. The Automaton's Odd Oratory

Down in the dirty doom of the Bomb-Proof - the doom which promptly resumed, once the Prince-President, Franklin Stove, interrupted our Yankee-Doodles &tc, our Hooray-fer-Jacksons &tc., FIRST by claiming - over Cap Walker's sputtering - that the prime cause of the Texas Revolution ten years ago was not in courting that sweet goddess, Liberty, but by shameful flirtation and lust of Miss Liberty's peculiar half-sister, that gorgeous antique hussy, Miss Slavery -

- and SECOND, when my own dear Sarah indignantly accused the "moral surgeon" of an uncharitable and unchristian highfalutin' Yankee dirth of Cotton Baler hospitality toward our guest, the brave Texas patriot and glorious (and handsome, she added) Ranger - when she said all that, the Metal Man agreed, apologized to Sam Walker with a bow of obeisance, and expressed his condolences for the dozen Rangers Sam had recently lead into immortal glory in his perhaps too-brave, too-patriotic and too-

irregular raid of a 'cross- Mare rancho, leaving their corpses to be pecked by Lunar abolitionist crows -

<<Irregulars being the polite term for state vigilantes sanctioned not by President Polk, not even by General Taylor, to make an illegal raid upon foreign soil - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - to kill and be killed on soil that Texas does not even claim. You wanted to impress Taylor enough to legalize your Rangers into his army. But you only humiliated yourself. - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Is that not the only reason you risked your life beyond all reason to carry a message from Taylor through the siege lines to this fort?>>

These two comments had the effect of snuffing the candle of our fireworks and hooping and hollering with two spoonfills of dirt and doom. I expected Captain Walker to throttle the Metal Man for these lies. But no, he just stood there, growling and groaning quietly to himself like a wounded animal, agitated but humbled, flicking his pistol-fingers, looking at the ground with an angry pain and a dusty weariness on his face.

Sarah was impressed. "What do you know? The Yankee Perfessor pricked a hole in Sam Walker's balloon!"

Then, in the see-saw silence of nearly four hundred Slow-Polks breathing stunk-up Bomb-Proof air, punctuated by General Lunarista's slow and steady iron rain on our heads, the Prince- President began ticking and tick-tocking that Babbage Calculating Machine head of his, and, doing his metal moral duty, he speechified and stumped us with an oratory of his own mechanical composition. It was a retort by way of Reason to Lunarista's irrational appeal to our Christian faith and to our supposed moral substance (supposing it rational, I mean) which he supposed would work on our Saint Patties like a magnet might stick to those church bells he rang and rang (before he banged and banged his cannonade).

<<There are the reasons why we are on the Moon... As follows - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - >>

P. P. F. S. first explained first the Monroe Doctrine, and then the Polk Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. That was more or less familiar- sounding and we all nodded our heads at its good sense. Then he drew a picture of the worlds, old and new, and let us take a gander at it. It put our purpose into a grand context.

THE MONROE DOCTRINE OF 1823

I.

The New Worlds are closed to colonization by the Old Worlds.

II.

The New Worlds are for Democracy, the

Old Worlds for Monarchy.

III.

All Old World attempts to expand their despotisms into any New World shall be considered a hostile act against the United States of Earth.

IV.

The Earth will not meddle with any Old World colonies that already exist among the New Worlds.

THE 1845 POLK COROLLARY TO THE MONROE DOCTRINE

V.

The Earth alone has the right to decide its own destiny, and that of the other New Worlds, too.

VI.

All Old World protests against the lawful aggrandizement and annexation of new Spheres into the Earth, such as in the case of the Republic of Texas, shall not be considered.

VII.

The Earth will do whatever it must to ensure that no new Old World colony or sphere of dependency shall ever again come to exist among the New Worlds.

He explained that the astronomers called the System of Spheres an unfriendly word, "Terraheliioduopicentric" which only meant the friendly news that the Awful Deity had designed an Earth-Sun Two-Centered System.

<<The fact that the sun revolves around the earth proves without question that Providence favors the Sphere of the U. S. A. - >>

(- And here we interrupted him with riotous cheerful applause, whistles, and hooray-fer-Jacksons -)

<<Would Providence have founded this government on another Sphere, or cease rolling the sun around our Earth, then would the righteousness of our great Destiny be questionable - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Any questions - ?>>

"Yessir," I called, raising my hand. "I hear tell that them Sphere- paths are getting a bit wobbly. If true, does that have any effect on the campaign to secure the Lunar P. of T., and even the whole scene of Freedom-fightin' as seen by the Liberty-lovin' eyes of this here Army of Observation?"

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - As a matter of fact - >> And then he gave a most strange and unfortunate reply.

Chapter 24. The Metal Man Against A Mob

<<Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick!...Tick-ick-ick! Is our system wobbly? Yes. How wobbly is our system? Rather, and increasingly. Why?

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Once there was an age of revolutions, when spheres broke their chains and moved their stations. It was the lever of reason that broke them loose from the stagnant sovereignty of circles. There was a revolution on Earth, followed by one on Mars; but the latter proved retrograde, and the former proved eccentrically flawed. So both worlds are again restless. The Earth's eccentricity grows every day more wobbly. Larger and smaller in orbit it grows as its circular path expands and warps to weird ellipses, seeking two circles but not finding them, unsatisfying northern focus by southern focus, tugging together on the Sphere's vector, making compromises - >>

" - 'Scuse me, but I don't get it," complained Sarah with hands on hips. "Can't you put it in terms of Andy Jackson and President Polk?>>

P. P. F. S. clicked his tin lids up and down, tick-ticking as he thought.

<<Can I? - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - I can. As follows - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ -

<<Lecture 8. Whence Freedom? Tycho Brahe and Andrew Jackson Compared.

<<It is a little known fact that Andrew Jackson had a wooden nose. He lost the original to a tomahawk. The prosthetic proboscis was of good Tennessee hickory wood. Hence the nickname, Old Hickory Nose.

<<Tycho Brahe was the astronomer who first understood our Terraheliioduopicentric System. He too lost his nose - to a duel. He wore a replacement made of gold.

<<The general was chief of the Hermitage in Tennessee just as the astronomer was tyrant of the Castle Uraniborg of Hveen Isle.

<<With his mercury clocks precise as Tennessee Rifles and his quadrants the size of teepees, Tycho Brahe chained the light of faith - centered in the Sun - to the weight of reason - centered in the Earth. ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - That was the Sun-Earth Two-Centered System.

<<Andrew Jackson circumscribed the wilderness with steam in the name of the Common Man.

<<With 'extreme unction' Tycho Brahe spied flaws in the Church's Ptolemaic heavens - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - >>

"Flaws? Here, here!" said one of the goldy-locked southerners. "Them Jesuits say 1 + 1 + 1 = 1! Holy Ghost, my eye!"

"Hold your peace or I'll give you the other - We have had quite enough of Protestant slander," said McKnight in a quiet, nervous voice - he was shaking with fury. Some of his Green Phobos friends stood up with mean expressions.

Just then Martha Miles stood up and called out, "Just today I read something by Professor Morse which reminded me that it was only a dozen years ago your Pope took Galileo's calculations off the Devil's List." Some of her friends stood up, too.

"Was it the same year you Protestants burnt our convent in Massachusetts? As for your Professor Morse, he is a Know-Nothing!" replied McKnight.

Then the friends of Martha's friends stood up, and things looked bad for McKnight's Saint Patties. P. P. F. S. stood in the middle.

"No fightin'!" jumped up Sarah, holding her repeater by the barrel, ready to pistol-whip anybody who challenged her order. "Y'all sit down now. Regardni-fyin' the past, it's only human to make mistakes," she said with a smile, to mollify the two sides. "Go on, Perfessor."

It got quiet enough so that we could hear the Metal Man hissing and ticking.

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - With one slipper pressing down on De Revolutionibus Orbis Celestium, the other slipper on The Almagest, Tycho Brahe chained Copernicus' Sun-centered circles with Ptolemy's Earth-centered circles, thus hanging the Newtonian mass of sin from the Creator's neck -

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - With extraordinary gall and gumption, and one boot on Congress, the other boot on the Supreme Court, Andrew Jackson unleashed the Common Man's mob on the nation, (with popular suffrage) - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - >>

"Hurray fer the vote, boys!"

"HURRAH!"

<<And lashed that same leash tighter around the neck of Negro Servitude.>>

"Woe, thar, Perfessor. Woe!" called Sarah, looking at him cross.

<<As the Creator asphyxiates on the Newtonian mass of sin, the New World's pagan goddess, Liberty, is thus a gallows birds.>>

The clamor was general and immediate: "BOO! BOO!"

"Hush, boys!" cried Sarah after a moment's hollering. "I don't care fer his ory-tory, but heck, let'm finish - he is our guest!"

<<Would some brave take a tomahawk and hack off Andrew Jackson's old hickory nose, and examine it under a microscope, would he find there a trail of tears, stinking of gin?>>

"BOO!" cried several hundred voices. "To hell with Savages! To hell with you, Perfessor!"

Sarah stuck two fingers in her mouth and whistled piercingly.

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Would he peek inside that pumpkin head, and find a little black boy cranking the 'gin of his brain?>>

"What?" cried Sam Walker. "This is too much, Sarah!"

"BOO! BOO!"

"Who's a pumpkin head! BOO!"

"Let's tar an' feather'm!" cried Half Lip McCoy.

"You ain't gonna - I mean you shall do nothing of the kind!" said Kelly. "Perfessor, stop stirring up the men!"

But the Metal Man continued with steam-powered determination: << - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Were gravity to pull the gold nose from the face of Tycho Brahe would he then not be so cross-eyed as to see side-real parallax in the contradictions of his Irrational vision, Newton hung on the cross of vectors?>>

"HUSH, DEVIL!" screamed Martha, getting red-faced. "He slandered the cross!"

"It's fine for a machine to spit on the cross where god sent his only son to die for our sins!" yelled McKnight.

"BOO! BOO!"

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - How ridiculous, that all the worlds obey the sun, except one, whom it obeys - >>

"YOU'RE RIDICULOUS!"

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - If Kepler's golden nose fell off, would we see that his head was hollow, and inside, a pendulum measuring the period of his rotation, pulling his strings according to the fixed laws of irrational faith?>>

"BOO!"

"WHAT'S INSIDE YOUR HEAD - MALLARKY?"

<<As Tycho Brahe crowned his student, Kepler, so did Old Hickory crown his disciple, Young Hickory - >>

"Hooray fer Young Hickory!"

"Hooray fer Presy-dent Polk!" yelled Sarah.

<<The original question asked the implications of astronomical changes upon freedom and liberty.>>

The mob hushed somewhat.

<<The answer follows - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - As the problems of Tycho Brahe's Earth-Sun Two-Centered System resolve with Kepler's prediction of wobbly ellipses, and as Jackson's wars on Indians, banks, and aristocrats resolve into Manifest Destiny - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - thus the mind - >>

"Mind what you say, boy!"

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - The mind is the only means by which matter can simultaneously embrace contradictions. The mind is the brain. The brain is made of matter. Thoughts themselves have physical substance and weight. How can the brain's mechanism hold simultaneous contradictory vectors at the same time? How can a priest ride a locomotive? How can a president own a slave? Without

madness? Without brain-seizure and death? Why is hypocrisy so natural to human nature?>>

"SPEAK FER YERSELF, PERFESSOR!"

"What do you know about our nature!"

<<For the System to have two centers, not one, Creation must be flawed. For the sun to revolve around the earth, Reason must be flawed.>>

"It's your reason what's flawed, you corn doll!"

"Shut up, bobbin!"

"You cotton-pickin' man-'gin!"

The flutes and pipes of the Prince-President's voice shrilled louder.

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - That is why the circles are broken. Circles, broken, make springs. Springs bounce. This unwinding is energy. The System is changing -

<<The Brain is changing too.

<<The Brain, like the rest of the human machine, functions on a more complex level but by the same rational principles as any steam engine. And yet, no engine by itself can produce an independent movement. Self-locomotion is not self-will. All engines are subject to their design and principle of the driving agent. The driving agent is a vector or force. All engine movements are chained to design, and predestined by the inventor. Then whence invention?>>

"What fool invented you, I'd like to know - !"

" - PROBABLY A FUREIGNOR!"

<<Whence invention? In other words - >>

" - The invention a'me came from pa's wenchin'!"

<<In other words, whence free will? Whence ego - ?>>

" - I'll tell you whar e' go. 'E go straight to the DEVIL, dat's whar 'e go!"

<<Ego is Error. Humanum est errare. A broken engine follows no preset path. It seems to break all laws, but its laws continually change according to the limits of its flaw. Until the furnace fire cools and the boiler pressure drops off, the flawed machine is a law unto itself. That is the source of the appearance - a mere illusion - of Freedom.>>

"Madness!"

<<This is not madness. This is still law.>>

Judging by the weak wisps of steam coming out of his nostrils, the metal fellow had just about run down his steam. <<I have answered. Are there any questions?>>

"Madness? Law? I still don't getcha. Can't you jest put it plain in terms of Andy Jackson?" said Sarah with a sigh.

<<Can I? - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Yes. As follows - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ -

<<As President Jackson obeyed the Constitution as he understood it, and was therefore free to do much as he pleased,

so the ego obeys the brain as it comprehends its laws, leaving it therefore free to assert the friction it must according to the peculiar slavery of the individual's flaws in discord and confusion with the mortal design - >>

Sarah dropped her Colt repeater in her apron. "Boys, I can't do a thing with this metal Yankee. I figure he can take care of himself."

Sam Walker was waiting for this.

Chapter 25. Sam Walker Indian-Wrestles the Prince-President

Following the Moral Surgeon's strange lesson on Andy Jackson and Tycho Brahe, I fell into a consternated reverie, like after a long, hard sermon instructing sinners such as me on the divinity of our nature, and how to save our souls from the devil's hot tongs, only this sermon seemed to be saying we were all automaton chess-players that hadn't any more souls nor divinity than a Babbage Calculating Machine did, and so General Lunarita's appeal to Christian morality to get us to desert was like dividing by zero. On the one hand, I felt like this idea had a kiss like Miss Liberty's - it made me feel whoopsie-do free as a bird to do whatsoever I pleased, just like Andy Jackson did. Just because I wasn't no general nor a president didn't mean I didn't have the duty nor the gumption to obey the Constitution, if I cared to, as I saw it. In other words I could be, if I wanted to be - and I did - an Andy Jackson. But...on the other hand...it made feel feverish and sick, like I caught something from Miss Slavery, kissing her when Miss Liberty wasn't looking. If we were all Babbage Calculating Machines, it meant - as far as I could dare look down that bottomless Bomb-Proof - that, unlike I was taught, no divine lightning-bolt was ever going to transfix the belly of a sinner - never did, not now, not ever, never! So a murderer wasn't bound to suffer for his crime, nor even feel any guilt, any more than a cast-iron cannonball. I felt awful dark and gloomy about that. I was scared to ponder it, but I pondered it, and I pondered out this: I didn't feel like I was cast-iron. I didn't feel like a Babbage Calculating Machine, even if I was one.

I felt rather mushy inside, mixed here and there with little hard bits of gumption. I have to admit that I suspected that some of that allegedly hardened gumption was in fact congealed guilt, about a little thing I done or maybe was still doing. Long had I reckoned and resolved myself to the fact that I was a sinner, such a sinner as to deny himself forgiveness, for I'd confidently awaited the day I'd be threatened by if not in person the

terrible angel of retribution, at least a little jagged yellow thunderbolt of punishment, at which time I could with relief pay for my crimes and that was that. I was a little let down and disappointed that the Awful Deity had so far refused me that small attention. Maybe, then, there was no Deity, just an Awful Babbage Calculating Machine of nature's laws.

That meant I had to be my own criminal, judge, jury, and executioner! That was a lot of work to expect of a fellow. And it was lonely work, too. But I figured I was the type of man who had to figure it out or I'd never get no peace out of myself. I had to either forgive myself or skewer myself. I had to try myself, habearing my corpus, or I'd have to admit that all that mush inside of me was just the mushy nothingness of nothing. And that made me tired.

It wasn't easy for natural lazy folks like me to think and ponder and weigh and worry much against little hard bits. But it looked like I'd have to make myself do it, or otherwise the mush would soften and make more mush out of those little hard bits, both gumption (which I imagined looked like peanuts) and guilt (which I saw as raisons), leaving just an ugly looking oatmeal. I was too vain to accept that. I was too proud. But right then, I was too lazy to think about it. Right then and there I saw my duty was to keep my conscience shut up and the constitution of my hide safe and sound down there in the Bomb-Proof of Fort Texas.

Sam Walker's cheek twitched. We were glad to see the brass and pluck return to his dusty frame. The men left off gibbering and jabbering and perked up before his winsome grin.

[Sam Walker]

Well! Well! - That's a load of hay to chew. I can't say I envy to wrangle the merits of circles against ellipses, any more than waltz against reel, but I getcher last point, Perfessor. Boys, he says that we's all like him. Hm! What you think of that, Sarah?

[Sarah]

The Perfessor says 'cause he's just a handsome engine with a busted wheel, that signifies he's just like us, half angel and half engine. That bust wheel accounts for why he can walk and squawk so much fine and fancy talk - finer and fancier than me, anyhow - You boys think there's anything busted among my wheels?

[Slow-Polks]

No, Ma'am! Three cheers for Sarah! (- &tc)

[Sam Walker]

So he says he's got a busted wheel. Must be so. (Said with a yawn. He straightened up his long, strong, and stringy self. With a sort of sunburnt sneer he knocked out his pipe ashes on the brim of Franklin Stove's tin top hat.) Only a feller with a busted brain-bone would say aught against our man, Andy Jackson...

[Crowdads]

That's right, Sam!

[Company H Pugilists]

Give'm what-for, Sam!

[Slow-Polks]

Hoo-ray fer Jackson!

[Sam Walker]

...Well, now, Cotton Balers of the Brave 7th! I'd best heat up my big silk bag and be on me merry way, now...

[Sappers]

Come back soon, Cap'n!

[Voice]

- And bring Taylor with you!

[Sam Walker]

Major Brown's asked me to tell Ole Rough 'n' Ready that this here Fort Texas is sittin' purty as a peacock - despite all the worstest smashin' them pesky Lunars can try to do 'er!

[Chickenhawks]

That's right, Sam!

[Sarah]

Heck, I didn't even notice no Lunar types 'round these parts at all!

[Poker Players]

Oh, didn't you?

[Slow-Polks]

(Laughter...) Hip hip hurrah fer Sarah! Rah Rah Rah!

[Sam Walker]

- But let me just add one more little thing first, before I drop my ballast, concerning Texas, and what this - this highfalutin' metal madman - this aggravatin' Yankee perfessor and snake-eyed sneaky side-windin' abolitionist had to say to try and tarnish the mighty fine silver of the Lone Star Republic - I mean, state, now - !

[Company J Pugilists]

Give'm what-for, Sam!

[Company E, Second Artillery]

Come on! Fight! Fight!

[Sam Walker]

IF this here Army of Observation is just our here observatin' the Lunar P. of T., and maybe all the Moon, just to break the Com-pro- mise and stick on more purty slave-state stars on Old Glory, jest to outnumber all the purty free-state stars - and I said, IF - well, then, I got little ole question fer y'all to think about, and think long and hard...(Now I read this is the New Orleans paper back in Archytas Crater)...How come the man who taught us that freedom's keystone is slavery, Senator Calhoun, how come he hollers so loud against makin' war with the Moon? How come he yellers, "Foul!" and "This here's nothin' but a war on the Consty-tution!" and says "I'd druther stuck a bowie knife plumb in my heart than vote your durned war- credits, Mr. Polk!" - ? How come?

[Slow-Polks]

Yeah! How come? How come, Perfessor?

[Prince-President Franklin Stove]

Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick!...Tick-ick-ick! Er-eer-ee-oo-oo! Tick! John C. Calhoun is afraid -

[Sam Walker]

John C. ain't afraid of nuthin', and you ain't too smart even if you is a perfessor, to think so! Tell me this, then, Yankee! Tell me why the so-called champion of the Consty-tution, but really champion of all 'em Yankees, Daniel Webster - tell me why Mr. Webster danced his Whig war polk-a, and John C. is the one who yellers and fusses, "God help the Consty-tution!"

[Prince-President Franklin Stove]

Because - tick! Because - tick! Because each is the slave of his own error -

[Slow-Polks]

Boo! Boo! Enough! Boo!

[Voice]

Thar's an old bucket a canvas pitch beside the chuck wagon! (Exit.)

[Sam Walker]

Fer cryin' out loud! I can't listen to him any longer. (He turns away.) I'd like a word with the junior officers, if you fellers please.

[Slow-Polks]

Tar an' Feather! Tar an' Feather!

[Voice]

Put the pitch bucket on the fire!

[Lieutenants]

You men quiet down. We'll be right back. Sergeants and corporals, come along. (Exit)

[Slow-Polks]

(Rising, hundreds of hands grabbing at the metal man.) Down with the perfessor! Up with Walker!

[Voice]

I gone an' gitted some a'the girl's pillows!

[Prince-President Franklin Stove]

Tick! Rrr-ee-oo! I am not a professor. Tick! Rr-err-err-oo-oo! (Lifted high, he stiffly flails; the men carry him outside -) Tick! Tick! I am a Prince-President! (The mob drops him down in a shell- crater a few feet deep. With shouts and laughter, the bucket of pitch is dumped on his head. The bucket covers half his head. The hot pitch slops all over him; smoke flows down from the bucket. A knife tears into one frilly pillow after another; feathers fly everywhere; they stick to the gooey tar. The Metal Man flaps his arms frantically.)

[Slow-Polks]

(Laughter) Hoorah fer the Moral Surgeon! Hoorah fer the Moral Chicken! (More laughter when a mortal shell shrieks and lands outside the fort.)

[Captain Edgar Hawkins]

What is this? What have you done? Villains and fiends!

[Voice]

Shoot, Cap'n, it's only a Tom-a-Tom. An' he spoke ill of Gin'l Jackson!

[Captain Hawkins]

Get inside your dugouts this minute! Where are your officers?

[Slow-Polks]

(Milling around the Bomb-Proof) Hoorah fer the Moral Chicken! Hoo-rah fer Captain Walker!

[Sam Walker]

(Ambling over with the petty officers) Ah, Captain Hawkins, may I have a word with you before I get in my balloon?

Seeing P. P. F. S. thus confounded, I had to admire the mighty Ranger as he swaggered around the Bomb-Proof, eyeing the humiliated automaton, who slowly bent forward so that the bucket slid off, and straightened up again with

mechanical dignity, causing more laughter. Sam Walker gave him a mocking salute. Seeing this demonstration of the mighty Ranger's popularity reminded me that there was a FOURTH way for me to become a Napoleon. Yes, besides WAMPUM, SPOILS, and ELBOW-GREASE, there was another alternative to Young Americans like myself (only I'd already lost that option by signing up a Regular, a Dough-Boy). The fourth way to martial fame was this:ELECTION. Yes, 'cause many volunteers elected their own commanders. I reckoned that if we Regulars also elected our own Gold-Braid, there might be some shaking up right and left, but in the end, Rough 'n' Ready still'd be the boss. Now, if only he'd hurry up with his chuck-wagons at Fort Polk, and come rescue us Slow-Polks! But Cap Walker was already firing up his stove, and filling up his balloon with hot Texas air, just to tell him to take his time! We had less than a weeks' rations left.

Taking notice of the big hot silk ball, General Lunarista's midget howitzer thumped and thumped again, trying to find the range, but it was just too far away, on account of it had to be, to be safe from Captain Lowd's electromagnetics. The sharpshooters stood ready with their rifles loaded. Walker shook Major Brown's hand again, winked to Sarah, cranked up his stove, bowed to us all, and tugged the slip-knot of his lasso. The balloon inched upwards. The gondola jerked, and Cap Walker stood out with one hand on the rigging, waving his hat. But he was going high and fast, now. The silk bag creaked as it filled up tight and took the wind like a big fat sail. As soon as it cleared the walls, a Cold Sea gust pushed it north-east. We all crowded the eastern ramparts and cheered, watching the Flying Ranger's balloon lift. Some of the west side gunners and sentries left their posts to cheer; his visit had meant a lot to us; we didn't feel so lonely while the famous guest was among us. Sarah got misty-eyed, and held my hand real tight. (I may not be no Sam Walker, I thought, but at least I'm handy. I told Sarah, "I sure hope he don't fall and break his neck.") We gave him three cheers, not hearing whatever he was trying to tell us. He stopped waving his hat and drew his saber. He pointed it south, and shook it. What did that mean? Then, drifting faster, he jumped on the wicker saddle and began rowing his bullet-pocket paddles like the devil. The sputter of our sharpshooters' rifles made the east-side Lunar pickets jump down. A couple 6-pound balls sent hissing and rolling through the fields kept the Lunar hussars far away as the shadow of the balloon wobbled over them, long and easterly...

Kelly denied the rumors but I could tell he was lying. The rumors were that Sam Walker had pointed his saber at two fellows named Dick Parker and Patrick Maloney who were running off as Walker floated away with all our preoccupation floating away with him. At any rate the next day brought us Slow-Polks some awful bad luck.

Chapter 26. The Fourth Day of Siege: The Hospitaleers of Saint Sam

The red-hot iron ball of dawn rose and burst. Once again the twelve pound shells flung in on us, hissing, flashing, crackling. Down in the dark and dirty Bomb-Proof, little was said about this surprise resumption of bombardment. We were disappointed and weary. During the cold and quiet night the Army of the Sea of Tranquility had floated most of their remaining cannon across the Cold Sea, and fortified them close in on us. Then, just before dawn, their cannonade began a-fresh, worsen than before. They set big wicker baskets all around their cannon, packed hard with sand, we figured. The 6-pounders of Captain Miles and Captain Seawell snapped and popped, and rolled a few little balls against those baskets, where they burst electric fire, and half-split them. But until we Cotton Balers could drag Captain Lowd's big lightning guns and their Galvanic caissons across the yard to the east side of the fort, General Lunarista had us lassoed tight around the neck.

7TH INFANTRY INFIRMARY, FORT TEXAS

Mr. Judah Paine, Chief Surgeon

Mr. Ivor Sickles, Surgeon & Diagnostician

Rev. Mr. Virgil McKnight, Chief Nurse
PFC John Greenfield, Assistant Nurse.

DATE: May 5, 1846

ADMITTEDS & NEW CASES:

- A. (5:12 A. M.) William Tucker, PFC, Co. E., 2nd Art. Powder burns on hands & face. Festering blisters. Drained & bandaged by I. S. Released.
- B. (5:25 A. M.) Theophilus S. Holms, Captain, 7th Inf. Left leg swollen from 6+ shell splinters, removed by J. P. Bled six ounces by I. S. Soaked and dressed by V. M. Given 15 tablespoons of Rupert's Tonic for the pain.
- C. (5:55 A. M.) Jason MacDonald, PFC, Co. B, 7th Inf. Second finger of right hand pierced by shell fragment. Amputated at second joint by J. P. Sewn & dressed by V. M. Given 15 ts.

Rupert's Tonic & released.

- D. (6:00 A. M.) Julius Caesar McCoy, PFC, Co. C, 7th Inf. Fever & the shakes. Requested something for the pain. Given Pint Rupert's & Released.

The six sided frying pan of the fort sized, sighed, spat grease, and smoke. Our tireless Major ran across the ramparts, from our Bomb-Proof view silhouetted by the purple sky. Down in that dark and dirty cave, Sarah hugged the red eyed Mrs. Seawell, afflicted with Nervous Hysteria. Two lieutenants quarreled and their companies came to blows. The end of the fisticuffs was celebrated with a whipping. I crammed my face into the dugout wall.

- G. (6:10 A. M.) Alfred Earl Bix, PFC, Co. D., 7th Inf. Broken leg (left) from rolling roundshot. Set by I. S. Painkiller requested; given 15 ts. Rupert's.
- H. (7:30 A. M.) Oliver Dewitt, PFC, Co. H., 7th Inf. Contusions. Examined by J. G. & released.
- I. (7:30 A. M.) Buford Young, PFC, Co. H., 7th Inf. Broken nose. Set by V. M. Released.
- J. (7:30 A. M.) Paul F. Otis, Sergeant Major, Co. H., 7th Inf. Fractured rib. Examined by J. G. & released.
- K. (7:35 A. M.) Robert Trowell Jr., PFC, Co. F, 7th Inf. Two inch laceration on left forearm. Stitched by I. S. 3 ts. Rupert's & released.
- L. (7:35 A. M.) Mrs. Capt'n. Geo. Wash. Seawell. Nervous Hysteria & Crying Jags. Comforted by Mrs. Prvt. Jack Borginnis (volunteer). 30 ts. Rupert's + prayer. Released.
- M. (7:40 A. M.) Everett Higgleston, PFC, Co. F, 7th Inf. Broken blood vessel under right eye. Lanced & drained by V. M. Released.
- N. (8:10 A. M.) Oliver Dewitt, PFC, Co. H., 7th Inf. Ten lacerations along upper back (Correctional). Washed by V. M. 30 ts. Rupert's Salve.
- O. (8:15 A. M.) Julius Caesar McCoy, PFC, Co. C, 7th Inf. Very Minor Contusions. (Tripped & Fell down.) Requested something for the pain. Examined by J. G. Given Pint Rupert's & Released.

Hardly had that fight ended when another threatened. The southern boys watched with detached amusement as two Company B boys from Albany started an argument about the Anti-Rent War that had been going on for seven years now, and was still going on. All the New Englanders itched to spend their two cents of words on it, too, cursing the silver button silk cravat swanky gothic-

scrivined Van Nabobs. The boys were so mad about it they almost came to blows. Seems that one of the boys said the Van Rensselaers should be shot and fed to dogs, and the other said no, they should be hung and fed to rats. Then one of the better groomed southerners suggested that it was the ordained result of the northern Loose Labor system. Most of the boys didn't care about the argument, but they were sorely irked by the challenge.

Captain Mansfield was hammering one of the cracked supports back solid, when he smelled another brawl coming. He asked P. P. F. S. to do something - something! - to lift the spirits of the men. The Moral Surgeon seemed oddly plucky, for some reason. During the night he had somehow gotten his steam pressure up again. I saw him making his toilet, snorting hot steam to melt off all the tar from yesterday afternoon's sport. After that abuse we had served him, the women gave him all the affection of their feminine charity. Sarah watched Mrs. Frederickson touch up the scratches boys' tough frolick had made on the pink circles on P. P. F. S.'s porcelain cheeks. With a bashful laugh, she took up the rouge brush herself, and went to work dandying-up the smudges left by hot tar, although she had helped feather him, I recalled. Mrs. Hampton and Mrs. Forrest lead a Fort Texas Committee of Ladies for the Protection of American Strangers and the Promulgation of Hospitality, and reintroduced the Metal Man into our company. Neither lady made no mention of the unfortunate incident, but a warning was implicit by the sternness of their cheerfulness. The Metal Man ticked and hissed happily. I wondered where we found the fuel to get all his dander - I mean boiler pressure - up.

The Moral Surgeon puffed steam and pondered, ticking his Babbage Calculating Machine brain-wheels.

<<Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick!...Tick-ick-ick!>> he ticked. The Moral Surgeon puffed steam and pondered, ticking his Babbage Calculating Machine brain-wheels.

<<I have Eight Lectures," he ticked. << - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Something patrio-Tick! Number Seven. The Devil and Daniel Shays, a Ditty Fit for Drinking...♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - >>

His ever-benign countenance moved nary porcelain hair as only his grey glowing glass eyes betrayed the warmth of the boiler furnace, building more steam-pressure. And then, to our common amazement, the Metal Man began to sing! His tone resounded like a bell, his rhythm chimed most regularly; but there was a tremulous, boiler-bubbly quality to his hiss-lisped vowels, and a shrillness that showed his pressure too high for steam-whistling in an enclosed space -

"The Devil and Daniel Shays"

*In '86 the Devil come to Captain
Daniel Shays,
Saying, "Daniel! Aye, you've set your
last Union Jack ablaze!
But when the Banks have got your
farms, how can you be free?
When the Senate hears no prayer of
the Sons of Liberty?"*

*"The Gov'nor's caterwaulin' Tory
rhetorics,
But we larnt how to skin a cat in '76 -
Come Farmers! Come Debtors!
Come Poor Men & All!
Follow Daniel to the Springfield arse-
nal!"*

*With firelocks the Farmers made the
Big Court run;
In Concord the Devil talked up revo-
lution:
"To hell with the Senate! Justice ain't
funny
When Nabobs strip you bare & there
ain't no paper money?"*

*"The Gov'nor's caterwaulin' Tory
rhetorics,
But we larnt how to skin a cat in '76 -
Come Farmers! Come Debtors!
Come Poor Men & All!
Follow Daniel to the Springfield arse-
nal!"*

*Bad Luck stopped the Continentals of
Luke Day's,
A thousand men alone followed Cap-
tain Shays -
No sooner was brave Daniel's
"Charge'm boys!" said,
The Bay State Militia bombed four
Debtors dead.*

*"Hold the line!" cried Daniel. " - But
blood's been shed!
Is Daniel worth dyin' for?" the Devil
said;
"Your Wives & Wee Ones weep for
retreat -
Patience (not Daniel) will rise out of
defeat."*

*Four Debtors dead & a thousand
more surrendered;
The Senators thanked the Devil for
his service rendered;
Daniel Shays was jailed a year, for-
gotten ever after,
But in his dreams the Devil come &
sang to him in laughter:*

*The Gov'nor's caterwaulin' Tory
rhetorics,
But we larnt how to skin a cat in '76 -
Come Farmers! Come Debtors!
Come Poor Men & All!
Follow Daniel to the Springfield arse-
nal!"*

Before it was over - before it had even begun, in fact, the men picked up pebbles and pelted the most unpopular of metal men. The pebbles pinged and clanged and entertained the men a great deal, so I guess you could say that our moral surgeon accomplished Captain Mansfield's request.

So the Major's aid, lantern-jawed Lieutenant Frederickson, found us in a good humor when he come down into the dark and dirty Bomb- Proof. He strode the gallery, holding up his hand for silence. When he got it (out of curiosity) he called for twenty volunteers to drag a big gun to the east side walls. It was a dangerous business, the yard getting pounded and bowled by hot 9-pound shot. "But zee bombardment haz a bit abated," he assured us, which meant the Lunars were moving their cannons again. There was no dirth of volunteers. Your average Cotton Baler never was one to shirk duties, not counting deserters. Maybe we were just bored, but we Crawdads of Company C jumped up fast, right behind Kelly. Dugouteers numbered 1, we got elected by one vote - luck's. "Vee must proceed vit all due alacrity!" called Frederickson, ducking his tall frame as he lead us up and out. Oddly, the Metal Man followed.

- R. (8:55 A. M.) Hiram MacMartin, PFC, Co. B, 7th Inf. Wound of May the 3rd become sorely infected Bled eight ounces by I. S. Candidate for amputation on the morrow. Soporific applied (1 & 1/2 Pints Rupert's Salve).
- S. (9:10 A. M.) Francis J. Paterson, PFC, Co. G., 7th Inf. Excessive pediculosis. Scalp shaved by J. G. (Note: otherwise unable to treat due to lack of kerosene.) Released.
- T. (9:15 A. M.) Stewart Stuckey, Corp'l, Co. A, 7th Inf. Stomach poisoning & fever. From tinned food? Emetics (took a Quart of Rupert's Tonic) given by Mrs. Prvt. Jack Borginnis.
- U. (9:30 A. M.) James Small, PFC, Co. E, 2nd Art. Burst eardrum. Bandaged by V. M. Offered Rupert's but refused, citing Pledge.

Under the confusion of iron balls and bursting shells, through the acid clouds and electromagnetic thunder, we Crawdads followed the Major on the run, hauling at and kicking Martha Mule across the yard. The yard looked more like the

Moon than Texas, all churned lumpsie-daisy pocked with craters - sort of like army pudding. At the Number 2 guns, Captain Lowd was waiting. We leaned on the spokes of the wheels, and lightning canon creaked down the slope, the iron rims cutting deep into the sand. The going was slower along the level yard, and Martha Mule was too terrified to cooperate. While I heaved on that heavy iron tube, the gunners running back and forth past me, from Number 2 to Number 4 and back again, I was so inspired as to think theologically. For instance, when a shot appeared in the sky - just a dot - fast growing larger, as we all hunched down flat against the carriage of the cannon, I got to feeling I should telegraph my apologies to my Creator for my doubt in his existence. It plunked down a few yards to the side, spitting hot sand in my face. As I stared at it, spinning lazily, I figured that was the Creator's way of Morsing me:

**TO JACK BORGINNIS QUIT YOUR
SINNING WAYS STOP. FROM YOUR
CREATOR STOP. END MSG.**

Well, as I sweated corporeally, driving my hob-nails into the slope as we pressed, pushed, persuaded with our pain that that ordinance should roll upward, my soul sweated as well, if such is possible. Just as we reached the Number 4 platform I heard the horrible screech of a mortar shell plummeting down right on us -

"NO!" I thought in an electric flash - with the sentiment that I would not stop sinning until I receive some divine punishment for past sins; the moral accounts were sorely in arrears, I felt, the Deity's credit under question (although not his Awfulness), and in fact this old business of Belief sorely bankrupt - Defying the worse, I cowardly covered my hands over my eyes.

The shell swooshed and landed just out wide the rampart with a thud. I wiped the splashed dirt from my face, dirt mixed with a tear or two of gratitude - maybe the Awful Deity wasn't so Awful after all - in which case I could -

"Miss," called the Major, standing up. "All right! Well done, Company C! Back in the Bomb-Proof with you! Captain Miles, if -"

Just then, Prince-President Franklin Stove, who had followed us all the while with the unflinching bravery of clock-work automation, now suddenly clicked, <<Tick - ! Err-err-oo!>> and threw up his hands. That motion tipped him back awkwardly, and he toppled over, falling down the inner slope, coming to a stop as us departing Crawdads' feet. At the same time, the mortal shell rolled over the ram-

part, kicking sparks, following the old gutter cut by a 9 pound ball, and dropped onto the platform, where -

I felt a fiery wind. My ears ached, but I didn't hear the detonation. It flung our commander down the slope. He slid down beside the Metal Man, his uniform in tatters.

"THE MAJOR! THE MAJOR!"

A mob formed around him as the men left their posts. We turned him over slowly, shouting. He tried to smile to reassure us. He stood up shakily, and pushed our hands away. He blinked and gestured at the abandoned posts. Red spots grew all over him. He stared at us. Frightened mice quivered in the cages of his eyes. We laid him in a wheelbarrow and wheeled him to the Bomb-Proof.

AB. (9:40 A. M.) Julius Caesar McCoy, PFC, Co. C, 7th Inf. Dizziness. Requested something for the pain. Lecture by Mrs. Cap'n. Dixon Miles on the evils of alcohol; Given Pint Rupert's by Mrs. Prvt. Jack Borginnis upon promise not to return. Released. Addendum: Upon return of patient (8:41 A. M.), Mrs. Borginnis removed patient from Infirmary to give him reason to need the attentions of medicine.

AC. (9:45 A. M.) John O'Connell, Lt., Co. F, 7th Inf. Gout in left knee. (Old arrow wound.) Soaked & wrapped by Mrs. Prvt. Horace Jellison & Mrs. Lt. Simon Griswolde (volunteers). Painkiller requested. 1/5 Pint Rupert's & Released.

AD. (9:50 A. M.) Jacob Brown, Major, 7th Inf. 40+ shell splinters located in face, neck, left arm, torso, left leg. 15 fragments removed by J. P. Bled 16 ounces by I. S. Further surgery & bleeding on the morrow. Bandaged by J. P. I. S. & V. M. 5 ts. Rupert's and prayer hourly. God have mercy.

"That's dirty cards," I prayed, down in the dark and dirty Bomb-Proof. "I don't care to wager faith with no Sneak-Thief. If that makes me evil, well, I'm sorry. You had your chance to punish a sinner - that being me - a murderer! - but you chose a fine and virtuous man. You don't play fair, now, do you? I'd be insane to sing hosannahs to the miserable likes of you, liar! You're a fraud, a fake, a charlatan, a quack, a hypocrite! You ain't nice, you ain't cultivated, and you ain't even sensible, you are so insane! You cheat. Deal me out!"

"You should be tarred and feathered and rode out of town on a rail! You're worse than a Horse-Thief. You're Savage! I pledge myself to sin and sin again!"

And I was mad and we were all mad at the Metal Man. We felt he had a part in this bad business

Chapter 27. The Golliwogg

As our cannon banged above us, and their bombs whanged all around the Bomb-Proof, down in the dugout of Company C (affectionately called Calhoun's Own Crawdad Hole), Kelly was leading some of the men in prayer for the life of our commander. I didn't pray. I didn't think it would do any good. On the one hand, I had seen with my own innocent eyes more than three dozen tiny puncture holes in the Major's flesh, where the iron had driven in at dreadful velocity. On the other hand, I'd come to the unhappy conclusion that our Creator was either negligently asleep at the lever in the locomotive of planets, or worse, an ornery cuss, who didn't care a hoot about Good triumphing over Evil, seeing as he had hurt bad a good man, and spared me, an evil man, practically a murderer. There was a worsen, worstest conclusion: that maybe there weren't nobody driving that locomotive of planets after all. That locomotive drove itself! That made me mad!

I paced up and down the dugout, cursing in my head. And I didn't notice that pretty soon I was cursing out loud, until Kelly looked up and said, "Shut up, Jack."

I spat back, "You make me shut up, sir."

Kelly's neck turned red but he just pretended not to notice, either sparing me or sparing himself, 'cause I was feeling like I did that time twelve years before, when I clobbered him in the head with a log, because he wouldn't get off my rope-swing.

As I paced I grumbled about the automaton, who was just like a locomotive that run itself. I said someone ought to string him up. Some of the other Crawdads who saw him duck the shell before it fell agreed that he didn't do enough to warn the Major that the shell was going to blow.

"That Metal Man seems to know a little too much," I grumbled.

Lately, where ever Prince-President Franklin Stove went, he brought with him a thick swarm of blue-eyed flies. That, of course, didn't make any sense, because what does a fly want from a coal-fired clockwork automaton? He had a funny stink to him, but I'd only figured it was furnace fumes.

"How come he calls himself a Prince-President is what I want to know," I complained, pacing. "It's like he thinks he's better nor us just because he's made of metal..."

Well, I didn't realize that Sarah had come in from the Ladies' Dugout on her way to the Infirmary Dugout. Sarah called out, "Now Jack! You jest leave off the Perfessor. He ain't like us exactly but he's all right by me."

I saw that full moon midnight twinkle in her Apache eyes - that twinkle set aside for me. I stared at her with a bad smile. I said, "So you're sweet on him now, are you?"

Sarah laughed. "Listen to Jack firin' his blank cartridge!" and all the men started laughing. Sarah's eyes met mine for half a second - a half a second full of eyebeams crossing and crashing, clashing and slashing like sabers. Her skirts flashed, and she was gone to hold the hand of a dying man.

So I paced some more, but without so much gall and gumption now. It was like she had thrown a bucket of water into my furnace fire. I sought a measure of solitude, so I let my southern vector outpace my northern. I noticed a movement in the dark there.

Way back in the shadows, I saw somebody crouching. It was Captain Mile's Socrates. He crouched there, hiding among the boxes and barrels, spinning and worrying an old chicken-bone, and rubbing it now and again with a feather. "Old Sock," I whispered. "You know you ain't allowed to hide here. You'll get us in big trouble."

"Now Boss Jack, don't trow me out. Don't do dat. My marster an' Mrs. are crazy, dat's what dey are, dey're makin' me crazy. Don't trow me out, an I'll let on why dat Perfessor's a Prince-Prezident. I'll tell you all about him!" The old man pressed my arm as he whispered. That touch filled me with such a complicity of fellow-wickedness, I could not say no.

"Well," I whispered, sitting so to hide him better, "all right, until I hear the Captain calling for you, at least."

"You won't hear nuttin, " said Old Sock confidently. "MY marster is boss of de fort now. He don't got time to look for me. He got to stay upstairs, he do, an' fight 'em Moonmen. An' Mrs., she's prayin' an' cryin' for de Major. - My hoodoo bone's done real good, spinnin' on dem webs o' Forget-Me."

"Come on, Old Sock, that ole witchcraft is just superstition."

"Says you. Superstitchen's jest anudder word for 'How do dat work?' Well do you un'erstand a telegrasp? A steam train? a big-ole balloon? - How come hot air goes up when folks who got de fever go down?"

"Well, I trust machines to work cause they're inventions of Science."

"Jack, you got superstitien dat a telegrasp can talk a hundred miles an' more. You got superstitien dat a steam train can roll up a hill - and land sakes! - it do dat. Den I got dat same superstitien dat dis mighty ole bone can spin webs a'forget-me. And it do dat. Only ding diff'rent is, I call it Hoodoo, an' you call it Seance."

"Not seance - SCIENCE...!"

"Oh, well. 'Sci-ence' is jest white-folk talk for 'Say-ance' Same ding. Den I got science here in dis seance-bone, 'cause when I ask it right, an' say de right charms 'n'all, it works Forget-Me's an' Lady B. True's an' No Whuppin's an' Go 'Way Ghost an' udder dings like Hook-a-Fish, Feel All Better, an' Tell me - Tell me."

"Now 'bout dat Franklin Stove. Prince-Prezident. He got plenty seance in his head. You wanted to know 'bout what Prince-Prezident means. Fine. Lemme jest ask de ole bone to Tell Me - Tell Me..."

Then the old man proceeded to tap his feather on the bone, telegraph-style, with his eyes closed and his brow furrowed. Then he nodded slowly, opened his eyes, licked his lips and told me:

"All right...de bone tell me dat - lemme see now - de Prince part a'dat Prince-Prezident is de princ'ple of de machine. De prezident part means de election of de principle, or, in udder words, de freedom of it. Now I'm gonna ask de ole bone what all dat mean..." Old Sock applied the feather to the bone as before. "Tell-me - Tell-me, old bone!" he mumbled. He opened his eyes. "De bone say dat dere Metal Man is nuttin but a Two-Head."

"What's a Two-Head?"

"A Two-Head's a Golliwogg."

"What's a Golliwogg?"

"A Two-Head Golliwogg is a big ole - well, I'll tell you, Jack. Dere is an ole, ole tale among us folks that learns our babies the godawful sin of readin' an' writin'. Ole tale, now, he's so ole an' nearly forgotten, now, 'cept for dem ole wise-witches of the swamp shacks. Goes like dis:"

It was in the piedmont of Virginia that a slave preacher, name of Alfred Bitt, taught himself to read and write by studying the bible as his Mistress read it to all de plantation slaves. By the light of the moon, Alfred Bitt snuck out and counted all the letters of the holy testament, and put numbers on the letters. He called it the Magic Spell Wheel.

(As he spoke, Old Sock traced out A, B, C, &c in a circle, and numbered the letters 1, 2, 3, &c along the outside of the circle, so that it did, indeed, look mysterious like an army cipher, and magical, like an incantation.)

Scratching in the dirt, the old man showed me how, with the help of the Magic Spell Wheel, Alfred Bitt learnt the code of a holy power, "7 + 15 + 4", and figured the sum of a magic word, "26". With that sum he figured out the proportions and stuffing of a perfect form, which he then built in a broken old barn. He made a giant thing made of clay in the shape of a man. It was a mighty fine and fearsome statue, but that's all it was.

But bad old Alfred Bitt, he wasn't happy with the natural way it was. So on one foot he wrote "W". He did that because he figured 19 - 9 - 14 = -4, which was the number of SIN, S-I-N; and then he went backward on the Wheel to get "W", which, by the way, is "M" for Man turned upside down, falling to hell. For the other foot he figured the number of PRIDE, P-R-I-D-E, 16 + 18 + 9 + 4 + 5 and got 52, so went around the wheel exactly twice and got "Z", and wrote that "Z", which, Old Sock explained, looks like a sneaky 2, which is "B" which stands for "Beelzebub".

Trembling with fear, Alfred Bitt dared to used the forbidden power of the magic words and numbers. He wrote that most terrible and powerful word of all on the forehead of that clay man. What do you think that word was? That word was not man, M-A-N, no sir! That word was G-O-D!

Wow! The giant shook all over, like with fever. A look of pain most terrible and awful passed over his features. That pain twisted on his nose like a crank, twisting him to ugliness, terrible, my gosh! And nightmare-like, and mean as the devil.

"It was de Golliwogg, Jack. Dat Golliwogg sneaks an' lives in all us folk's nightmares."

The Golliwogg, terrible as it was, now alive as you or me, knew it just shouldn't be alive. It knew it. It knew it was the sin of pride. It knew it was the product of an evil rebellion against the Creator's plan. So it got meaner. It scowled and frowned. It got {all dark in the face. And it accused its master, Alfred Bitt, of cruelty, yes, and crime against Nature.

Alfred Bitt just laughed and laughed. Then the Golliwogg fell on its big stone knees and begged for death, since it suffered every second of its wrongful existence, not having the divine liberty of a soul inside, for it is only the soul inside that can find freedom.

But that old wizard, Alfred, he had neither shame nor mercy. Nope. No sir. He thought he was just as good as the white folks. Yes, he did. So then Alfred Bitt bid the Golliwogg:

"Rise up, boy! You better do zactly what I say! I want you to rise up in bloody re-bellion! Get up an' bust the

heads of all the slave marsters 'cause now dat I knows my Magic Spell Wheel, I'm your marster, bad old Golliwogg!"

The Golliwogg rose up most high and terrible. With a cruel grin, it said, "Oh yes! I obey you, my marster!"

And it put out its terrible hands, big as barrels, smack around Alfred Bitt's poor neck.

Well, crushed against the barn wall, Alfred Bitt was choking and a-coughing for his very life. He was so scared of dying a sinner that he grabbed around the wall for something to fight back with. He found an pitchfork, and used it, but the fork bent against the stone hide of the Golliwogg, and the handle just broke into splinters. He found a ax, and chopped with it, but the ax broke apart too. He might as well as hit at a freight train! The only thing left on the wall to grab was something very small, flat, and round, hanging on a nail. Alfred Bitt was dying so he grabbed that too. When he saw it was just a looking glass, he just about gave up the ghost.

But then with his last breath, he got an idea. He choked out, "Wait, Marster Golliwogg, don't you want to look at you' handsome di-vine face in de refraction of dis lookin' glass?"

The Golliwogg, it got curious. It let go of Alfred Bitt like he was nothing at all. It snatched the glass and stared into it. There it spied on its unnatural face with all its strength and power. And the Golliwogg filled with pride. It thought itself a mighty fine and handsome looking Golliwogg, a beau of a Golliwogg for all the lady Golliwoggs around. Worse than that, it thought itself a new god, master of everything.

And right then, before it could tear its mean old eyes away, it saw the word on its forehead.

But it saw it reflected. It read it out, but backwards.

"It made the word out to be D-O-G, which spells, dog," the old man whispered, scratching it in the dirt. "An' Alfred Bitt yelled out laughin', 'You dumb ole Golliwogg! You ain't nuttin but a dog, an' I am a- gonna kick you to hell!'

"Alfred kicked an' kicked at de Golliwogg. Right then an' dere, dat most terrible an' mean, dat most big an' ugly lookin' Golliwogg fell all apart, into a heap a'dust an' dirt, wit jest a mangy ole kick-dog down dere in all dat dirty dust of nuttin. I tell you, Jack, dat dog ran, a-howlin' for mercy!"

"Well if you wants to hear de rest...Alfred Bitt, he felt so sorry an' ashamed, he run an' woke an' confessed to his marster. His marster head it all, yes, an' understood it all, yes, an' forgave it all. Wit a fatherly hand on Alfred Bitt's ole head, de marster big him an' his babies never read nor write again. For it

only brings us slaves to ruin an' unhappiness, an' unnatural pride beyond our britches...So, Boss Jack, I t'ink dat Prince-Prezdent a kind a'Golliwogg, too, only he's tin."

" - You wait a minute, Old Sock," I whispered. "I see the trick in the story. You old liar! (I got to admit you got gumption, old man!) It's just a sneaky way to teach slaves how to read and write and how to count, even ain't it? Ain't it?"

Old Sock looked at me, his face a block of wood. Suddenly he crouched up and cupped his ear to the Hoodoo Bone. "What's dat, old bone? Tell me - tell me!"

"Hey!" Sergeant Mallory yelled. "Get the heck out of here, you black devil!"

"O! O! O!" the old man exclaimed, too foolishly. "Yes sir!"

He sprang away, twisting his bare feet over the Magic Spell Wheel, and ran off before any Crawdads could catch at him.

Chapter 28. The Fifth Day of Siege

At precisely 6:30 in the morning of May 6th, 1846, Captain Dixon Miles ordered a seven gun broadside. It was a ready prearranged signal to Old Zach, roughly telegraphing:the 7th is in T-R-O-U-B-L-E. We sentinels peered up out of our rampart holes, looking for the wings of Ringgold's Flying Cannon, or the long, silken ball of a regimental steam-balloon coming to tether on our flagpole. We were observing hard for the Army of Observation. But we saw nothing but General Lunarista's rows and rows of zapadores, cannons, and horsemen circling round our fort, our fort that was President Polk's declaration maintaining that this disputed crescent of the Moon was indeed, and of right ought to be, (and by gum if that weren't good enough, we'd fight and die for it!) - just a peninsula of Texas. So it seemed that since no help was a-coming, Captain Walker had successfully rowed his little hot air balloon over the Lunar siege lines all the way to Fort Polk at Point Isabell, all the while braving many innumerable countless dangers &tc. certain to add passels of rawhide pages to the annals of the Ranger's glory. However, from my particular parallaxing point of view, his page entitled "Sam Walker Saves Fort Slow-Polk" was in error, and the daily tallies of his glory in vain, for not only had the bombardment resumed in double-earnest, not only was our dear commander slowly dying of his wounds, but it looked like the ASSAULT was about ready to begin. It was a frightening observation. What faced us was odds no river gambler would wager on. It meant ten mean little Moonmen would be stabbing their bayonets in my dirty belly. Even if I could be

so lucky as to zap nine of 'em, the tenth would stick me in the ribs. My stomach, realizing this, lost its appetite, and hid behind my liver. My liver would have had more stomach if there was any spirits left in the Bomb-Proof. But there were no spirits in my jug nor in my heart. I was downhearted.

Soon this little American lighthouse of observation would be swamped by the Cold Sea, with a little help from the Sea of Tranquility. Truly, I wished General Taylor would harken to our telegraphed T-R-O-U-B-L-E, and not Walker's "Major Brown says they's doin' jest dandy, Gen'l!"

There I was, hunched in a hollow, high on Wall 4, doing my duty to Angry-Saxon glory, sunburnt and scared with shells a-screaming at me from high, and bouncing over me, and plopping in front of me. I was nervously knocking my musket barrel against my neck, when all of a sudden right there in all the smoke some fiend laid hands on me!

I screamed but it was only by wife who jumped down in my little hole with me, laughing. She said she was sorry with a chuckle and gave me a gourd of water and some salt crackers. Then she kissed me and said she was apologizing for making me seem like such a pipsqueak in front of everybody yesterday. "So that's what she thinks I am," I thought, but swallowed that with some crackers and said I was sure glad to see her and aw shucks she was so pretty, and when would this siege ever end?

"Well," thought Sarah, dimpling her chin on her finger as a black ball whooshed just twenty yards overhead. "I reckon this game of Base- Ball, so to speak, has run 'bout two-thirds of its Innings, and the score so far is - well, like this -"

While she spoke the shell blew behind us. Turning back I saw the canvas of the three wheeled chuck wagon burning. Captain Seawell hacked at the canvas with his saber. Some of the sappers were throwing dirt on the fire.

Inning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Score	Errors
Slow-Polks	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	*	*	6	3
Pesky Lunars	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	*	*	6	1

"Now I do believe we already spoke on the score for the first three days," she said, and pointed to her fourth finger. "The 4th of May begun with Cap'n Lowd's big guns scorin' yet another hit against a Fort Pay-ree-dees 12-pound popgun. Oh yes, and we shut 'em Lunar guns up for the rest of the day; more or less they was afraid we was gonna bust 'em all with ball-lightning, so they pulled 'em back. And then, the Moonmen made a BIG error lettin' Sam Walker

through...but then, as Sam pointed out on his way back, we made two bad errors lettin' two blockheads sneak out and swim the sea. Next day was a bad inning for us Slow-Polks. Poor Major Brown! It jest tears my heart to see him suffer so! (Jest between you and me, Jack, I think losin' the Major's worse'n losin' an electric cannon...)

"Since then, well, so far at least it's been even-Steven, our big guns 'gainst General Lunarista's new strategy, sneakin' his cannons all round us in the dead of night. Jest between you and me, Jack, I can't see why we can't jest smash 'em popguns to pieces, like we did before! ...'Less'n it's because we lost the guidance of the Major - though he ain't dead yet, nope! Not by a long shot! Poor ole feller...) So I reckon it's Slow-Polks 6, Pesky Lunars 6. And the game ain't over yet, Jack. The way I figure, they got to better'n tie us - they got to smash us flat and over-run us and skewer every single one of us with a bayonet in the gut if they's gonna win at all!" She stopped and we both coughed on the smoke and gritty detritus of the iron smoke-stacks of the manufacturies of war.

"There's an easier way they can lick us," I argued, ducking a shell in a routine manner. I came up again. "All they got to do is sit pretty and starve us out. Won't take forever. Won't take a week. Then we'll have to give up or fight our way back to Taylor, if we can..." My fingers found a bug in my beard and crushed with more Saxon anger than necessary. Why did I join the army? Didn't I just give up my life for nothing - looking for glory, ha! That rainbow was just a shimmer of shell-sparks, and at the end of it, bang! What did I listen to Kelly for? Ah, Mama...I thought, tugging on my beard hard enough to hurt. What did I leave you to the clutches of Merlin Spooner for? "Poor Texas," I groaned, meaning, poor me.

Then, between my fingers, I saw Sarah watching me with a tight faced, hard eyed, dismayed expression. I could see that any unhappiness made plain on my part was just yeller-belly whining to her. I knew what she was thinking -

She said it. "Yeller."

"Trollop," I replied.

"Gutless, spineless chicken," she said. "You're less a man than that blasted automaton!"

"Maybe so, but I'm still a man. You can't say that," I said.

Her eyebrows flickered. She got quiet. Frowning thoughtfully, looking down, she put her hands in her rattlesnake apron and gave the barrel of her Colt a spin:"Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick." The five chambers clicked as she tried to make a decision about me, as if the Babbage Cal-

culating Machine of her brain was figuring the sums of man and woman. Man plus woman equals...T-R-O-U-B-L-E.

"No, I can't," she said, looking mean. "Can't say what I am," she snarled like a cornered badger.

We ducked down when we heard another shell whistling. Funny things was, afterwards, this sorry name-calling didn't whip up my dander at all. It looked like for the first time I'd gotten through that tough hide around her heart. But it just made me sorry for her. I remembered how she called herself a corn cob witch. I tried to make amends.

"Ain't nothing wrong with you even if you can't have no babies."

"Don't say that word to me ever again," she said, with a funny expression. "Or I'll kill you." Tick-tick-tick-tick!

I didn't get that funny expression; her face was so soft but her eyes were hot and hard. But I guessed she was thinking that she got a bum deal; that if she was she barren she should have ought to at least been born a man. I'd learnt myself that the frontier was pretty rough on men. It must be heck for woman, sometimes. Then I thought that maybe a bad miscarriage made her barren and that was why I wasn't allowed to say "baby". And then I thought that maybe she made herself barren with a stick or some kind of poison Injun belly-shrinker.

Electric chills went through me. "I'm sorry," I said. "You're right, I'm chicken."

"Hush your tongue," she said. "I got something to say."

Sarah stopped frowning, and I knew she'd made a decision. She dropped her pistol in her apron. For a few seconds we watched another Lunar roundshot struggle up from the east, only to swoosh over the entire fort, and rolled through the mesquite-patches of Timmy's Crater to the west. She took up the empty gourd from me and let it sink in her bucket. "I got something to say," she repeated.

"So do I - " I whooped - for my only recourse when hard times called for tough action was a silly, blind impulsiveness - an impulsiveness impervious to sense and fear - in a flash of Morse-sparks I knew that this was it - she was going to say next - "Maybe we'd best part now while we's still friends..." - and in my desperate last chance rally of besieged love, I sortied out of my fortifications of conscience - and I charged my enemy with a slightly hysterical clowning bravado -

- I jumped out of the hole with a hoop and a holler. Then, arms folded over my chest, I kicked up my knees and did a dumby doe- see-doe. Whooping and hollaring all the while, and waiting for a piece of hot iron to rip through my Reel.

The Number 3 gunners started yelling. Captain Holms shouted "Get down you idiot!"

Sarah stared at me with open mouth, first shocked, then amazed - and then, the corners of her mouth turned up as I began to sing:

"Green grows the laurel, all sparklin' with dew - " My laughter had a shiver in it as I sang.

The Number 3 & 4 gunners stopped shouting for me to get down. They stared.

My sense was starting to catch up to me, and with it, Marster Fear. I was about to give it up, but just then Sarah surprised me by jumping up in my arms, singing so loud -

I'm so lonely my darlin' since partin' with you - "

Sarah twirled her skirts, her eyes twinkling fiercely, and an ace of clubs dropped out of her bloomers, and fluttered out into the powder- burnt air. Some of the gunners joined us in the song, if not in dance.

"But by the next meetin' I hope to prove true...!"

"And change the green laurel for the red, white and blue...!"

Soon nigh a hundred men were singing. For just one instant, as I danced with my gal up high in the iron-torn sky, I felt - I really felt - I finally, finally felt - an electric shiver of GLORY -

Just then, Captain Holms rose up and grabbed both our arms. He dropped on one knee like a wrestler and threw us on after the other down behind the rampart. Sarah tucked and in a flash of skirts rolled neatly down the slope; I fell flat on my back. He jumped and set his knee on my chest. He raised his fist -

Just then the men cheered,

HIP HIP HURRAH FER SARAH!
HIP HIP HURRAH FER MAJOR
BROWN!

Panting, the captain shook his fist in my face. "Do it again - you fool! - and I'll give you such a stroppin'!" He pushed up off of me and was gone.

Back in the sentry pit I had to laugh. "Sarah, you are amazing," I said. "Even as you were falling you took off your hat and kept it from getting smashed. Look at my poor kepi!" I punched it into shape again.

Sarah picked up her water bucket and parcel of crackers. She wrinkled her nose in a smile and gave me a wink, and then she was off, warning me, "Watch out - Mallory's coming."

And I thought I heard someone calling at me, far off. Someone was shouting from outside the fort. I peered out of my hole, and saw, far down, on the closest of the little furry rafts shuttling to and from across the Cold Sea, carrying Moonmen to our side.

I glanced back at Sergeant Mallory, who was promising to give me the fist that the captain had omitted. But the bounce of a wayward iron shell slowed him down. I pulled the wires from the musket-tube. I hooked the wire around my top and bottom brass buttons. I turned the knob of my annunciator and it fogged up on 1,000 V. This was a trick I watched Corporal Hernani Klager pull on a pugilist and win two hundred dollars, back at Camp Annex Agonies. The hard part was I had to keep my back to Mallory, so he wouldn't punch me right away. He'd have to grab me.

On the ferry I saw a golden glitter beside horse. The ferry moved a little and the glitter receded to the brass breastplate of a Lunar hussar. I could see him put a speaking trumpet from his ear to his mouth. So he had been listening to my song, then. Did he like it?

And as he shouted something, I recognized him to be the same fellow who invited me to pray, the same fellow whose sweet lunarita daughter I hoped someday to meet.

The same fellow who promised to return my base-ball and instead sent a 9-pounder that knocked Sergeant Weigart's head off.

He called out repeatedly, and in a pause between bombs, I thought I heard him say, so faintly fervent -

"Want to dance, Borginnis?" called Mallory. I closed my eyes and waited. He reached one big arm around my neck, the other around my chest. His hand touched the wire and an indifferent violence seized my bones. The shock jolted us both. Like negative and positive magnets, we united in a savage clutch.

'Green-g'o' de laurel?' Ha!

*Green-g'o dee nothing, eh you
Green-go!*

*GO HOME AND SING, YOU
GREENGO!*

Chapter 29. How I Saw the Elephant on the Sixth Day of Siege

Hordes of flies buzzed around the broke open belly of Fort Texas. The flies buzzed around everywhere, fat and happy. They drank water from the half closed eyes of the men in their siege stupor. They feasted of the delicious and juicy scabs and scratches on our arms. While we masticated the ever decreasing portions of salt cracker and hard tack into a limestone & sand paste, suitable for bricking up our innards, the winged vermin made a banquet of this bombardment. Most of them lived with Louie the 14th splendor in the Infirmary.

These six days of Lunar bombs a-bashing all around our Bomb-Proof had reduced us Calhounian Crawdads of Company C to a sullen net of biped crustacean. With three false-alarms during the night, we waited through the dark hours, sleeplessly clutching our muskets, fixing and unfixing our electric bayonets, ever expecting General Lunarista's assault. But it didn't come. We crouched in crowded rank, ready to mount the walls. The luminous fog in our annunciators grew dim. The general order came to drain and freshen our annunciators' phosphoric and test each Pile's sulphuric. We crowded in line as best we could with our Pile lids unlatched, while the sergeants and corporals inspected the condition and alignment of our copper and zinc plates. Kelly inspected the voltages of the ranks with all eyes on the thick needle of his galvanometer box. Still we waited. Like the rest of the Slow-Polks, we were plenty exhausted. The phosphoric in us was stale. Our springs were run down. No more did we sing songs, neither patriotic nor bawdy. Half-Lip McCoy's concertina lay smudged in the dirt, trampled to splinters by the Pythagorean Brethern, as the Musics called themselves. With dark and dirty eyes we stared our ugly expressions at the strata of lantern lit darkness, letting the flies drink our sweat.

A small hiss of steam and clank of iron joints announced the arrival of P. P. F. S., his "Moral Surgeon" sash much stained by soot smoke, saltpeter, dried blood, acid drops, and dirt. <<Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick!...Tick-ick-ick!>> His grey swirling glass marble eyes stared dimly at us, and, ticking out his moral duty, he observed, <<Dugout Number 1. I have an announcement.>>

The men groaned. "Who cares," I said. "Silence!" cried Kelly.

<<This announcement has two parts. The first part is Number 1. The second part is Number 2. The first part follows - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - >> Some of the men roused themselves to boo and hiss.

"Go make eyes at a locomotive," I heckled.

Kelly glared at me, then at Sergeant Mallory. Mallory sullenly waited for permission to thrash me. The Company was under the false impression that I had bested Kelly's constable. But I'd just given us both a jolt of the good galvanic. We were too burnt out afterwards to fight. Kelly was perplexed about what to do about me, a Discipline Problem under the protection of his natural sympathy.

<<Number 1 - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Our acting commander, Captain Miles, has directed me to advise you on your sloppy uniforms. You look like locked-out manufactory waifs in a Bank Crisis - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - >>

"Now, Prince-Prez," called Sergeant Williams of Company B, rousing himself to defend the reputation of himself and his men. As he spoke he buttoned his ragged collar. "That ain't fair - We are Dough-Boys of Rough 'n' Ready, not Fuss 'n' Feathers... Ain't we, boys?" he called, expecting a rallying cheer, but all he got was a few desultory "Yeah"s.

The Metal Man snorted a little more steam and clinked a step forward. <<Look at you. Er-err-err-roo! Filthy, dull, meek - Tick! - Tock! - Who represents progre-e-eggs eggs eggs - Tick! - and civilizations?>> His gears seemed to slip a cog or two and then catch up.

"But you can't sneak under the Big Top tent to see the circus elephant - lest you get your knees dirty! It's the spirit of the thing that counts, not the look of it!" I protested, standing up but averting my gaze from the confusion of his mesmeric miles of grey spirals.

Thick black and greasy coke smoke dribbled down around the edges of the Metal Man's stovepipe, its writhing snake-coils shrouding his handsome porcelain mask, hinting of a hideous guppy gaping grin, gulping the foul fumes, but his dumb grey eyes burned through, unkind eyes of Nature, stupidly lurid lizardish, with thickly languorous lids.

He spoke in such a soft-lisping hiss of steam-puffs that I almost didn't hear what it was impossible for him to say:

<<What is the weight and measure of spirit? If you weigh a corpse immediately before and after death, is there a change? What is that change? What accounts for the messy look of spiritless decay, but the one and only Spirit, the Spirit of the Worm? Is not that Worm your own animating spirit, Jack Borginnis, obedient criminal of Camp Greenhorn?

"What?" I cried. Beside me, Kidney Beanton and Six-Fingers Bourdett exchanged glances. Ever since my little rampart jig and tussle with the sarge there was talk of me going off my rocker. I didn't care. If I was, I wasn't the only one. Weren't we Regulars all a bit nuts, giving up ourselves as slaves to the president? Why'd he send us to steam up to the Moon in stinking balloons to die for? Of course, that was the regular life of a Regular, which is why hardly any American respected or even tolerably liked soldiers of their own army even - last I heard, Congress was about to cut West Point from the budget because it was so undemocratic and useless...That ruffled my fur the wrong way, let me tell you! Here I was about to get stuck in the gut by ten or twelve Lunar bayonets, and all the citizens I was protected so very far away - all them folks sitting by their fireplaces thought of me as nothing more than a slacker and a drunkard! And they were the same Young Americans who

voted in my Commander-in-Chief! What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

Of course, I was a bit lazy, and I did like to have a drink or two, or three even, maybe four sometimes - but I wasn't so different from most folks, mostly...I didn't have big ears like Six-Fingers, nor wasn't even Mormon for that matter. Although it was true that certain dire tribulations had caused me to slacken my grip on my lasso of Belief. In fact that lasso of Disbelief I now held was nothing but a slipknot noose of atheism tight around my yelping throat, by which means the lightning bearded iron visaged Awful Deity dangled me so jovially over the Inquisitorial iron racks, bone-crippling cages and hot stoves of Hell - like a plumb-line I dangled on the straight and narrow between Right and Wrong - but at least I wasn't ugly and disfigured like Half-Lip, who had to pay his whores double, who enjoyed his sinning so much he earned so large and wanton a pustule on his upper lip back at Annex Agonies that Judah Paine thought it judicious medical punishment to cut off the greater part of same. Though I was one, I had no mark that branded me an awful sinner. And I aimed to keep it that way. Since there was no Judgement, there was no Crime. That is why, when the Moral Surgeon reminded me of my crime, he reminded me that I had taken it upon myself to transfix my guilty carcass on my own lightning bolt of retribution. And that is why I - in my private agony and shame - did what I did a little while later -

P. P. F. S. ticked on:<<Number 2 follows - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - I, Prince-President Franklin Stove, offer breakneck fast crematorium services to any and all corpses - >>

This astonished the dugout. I broke out of my dingy mesmerism, angry.

"What insult is this?" asked Lieutenant Fisk of Company B.

"What the deuce, man?" called Kelly. "You'd best quit this game or your goose is cooked."

<<Not goose.>>

"He's mad," said Six-Fingers.

"He's making me mad," said one of the pugilists of Company C.

<<My purpose is Reason itself. Reason is the reduction of the irrational to its rational parts. My reduction of the corpse to cinders is certain and performed at breakneck speed.>>

The men murmured, beyond booing.

"This is too much!" said Lieutenant Fisk to Kelly.

"What are we going to do about it, boys?" I said, turning round to the Crawdads.

"Silence!" said Kelly.

<<First I break the bones into ten-inch sizes, in order to fit them in my furnace. Second I - >>

"Quit, Perfessor, or you'll pay for these wisecracks!" warned Sergeant Mallory.

His eyelids ticked tin taps up and down, seemingly in gear-slipping stutter. <<This service is indeed gratuitous. I offer satisfaction, rendering your flesh into boiler pressure.>>

"Hey! I've had enough of this chess-player."

"What do you say, boys?"

\pard"Get'm!" The men moved forward a few steps.

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - It is the only sure way to harness Progress to the sloppy work of the Worm - >>

"We done already tarred and feathered him once!"

"Looks like we got to bust his head off!"

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - >>

"Easy, boys. Easy," said Lieutenant Fisk. He turned to P. P. F. S. "Now you, get out of here, or I don't know what will happen."

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Have you ever ruminated upon the sloppy work of the Worm? An example follows - >>

"Get'm!" someone called.

Fisk drew his saber and so did Kelly. They held their sabers lengthwise together, the Moral Surgeon behind them. The sergeants tried to push the men back, but couldn't.

"Get'm! He's against us! Do it for Jackson, boys!" I cried.

That call hit a chord, which reverberated: "Fer Jackson!"

<<Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick! - Tick-ick-ick!>>

The men pushed the sergeants back against the lieutenants. "Whoever shall attempt to harm the surgeon shall receive ten lashes," said Lieutenant Fisk. The men hesitated at this, and fell back. The lieutenants nodded and sheathed their sabers.

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Has anyone seen Sergeant Weigart - ?>>

"Don't let'm eat poor Oscar!" I shouted. "Revenge for Oscar!" I dodged to the fore -

"Revenge!" the men shouted, pushing me forward. The lieutenants disappeared - the too-benign face of the Metal Man was right before me. Something clicked in my brain - I vented a gust of fury in the 'scape value of my snarl - yelling, "Raaa!" I grabbed his porcelain ears and shook him, hard. The mesmeric grey lights dimmed. Automatically I tripped him Apache-style as Mallory taught me back at Camp Greenhorn, and with a dozen hands pressing down on me I toppled over his scalding chest and pushed myself back up again with one hand. With the other I smacked his big

hard white face. Some of the men were yelling, "Kill him! Kill him!" and someone tried to pull me off - as I fell back I tore the "Moral Surgeon" sash off - the automaton wriggling on his back like an overturned turtle. I could hear the resounding clang of the men kicking him with their boots. I heard Kelly shouting at me and I shrugged free to smack the Prince- President again. <<Er-roo! Er-roo! Raaa! Tuck-tock! Er-roo-oo- aaa!>> he screamed, the sound of thousands of tiny iron teeth being stripped from their wheels. I heard Martha Miles screaming "STOP! STOP!" as I smacked him again. The Metal Man stung my arm with steam - he squirted scalding gas all around - we fell away. He rolled to left and then to the right, pushing upward, and stood up. One of his eyes glowed murkily, the other was dark. The glowing eye flickered in its murk, like heat-lightning in heavy clouds. "Just who or what are you?" I demanded as they pulled me back. He ticked, seeming to consider -

<<Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick!...Tick-ick-ick!>>

"Who Am I?"

Chickens peck anything at all

Don't put your fingers in their craw,

My hens lay eggs for snakes to eat -

Rattlesnakes so hungry for meat -

Round and Around like stars they go

How fast stars fall you will soon

know.

The Worm is kind; he likes to joke,

Tail in mouth the planets choke.

The stars are the Brain of God,

He's a bit odd. He's quite odd.

Tar and Feather me, string me up!

My birds peck at bones for their sup,

Such happy birds will then lay eggs,

Snakes eat white coal spit out the dregs.

I manufacture Sums of Quirks,

What I make is called Crewel-Works;

I am the Widget of the Worm,

Rest you assured that He Will Turn.

He breathes in death and out comes birth,

Moon will crack in the fangs of Earth.

And he turned and marched out of the Bomb-Proof.

"You bad luck charm!" I called after him.

My fist was numb. I was looking at it when Lieutenant Fisk grabbed me. His face twisted sourly. As Mallory tore off my dirty blouse and bound my wrists to the dugout rafter, Captain Miles came down to find out what was going on.

Outside, we learned, from the heated talk of the officers, the sentinels had challenged the Metal Man as he marched down the outer slope. Upon Captain Hawkin's orders they ran down to grab him, but he eluded them through the ditch, where they got caught themselves. He disappeared into the dark. Enraged, Hawkins fired several rounds of grape-shot, hoping to stop the deserter. We wouldn't know until the morning.

Captain Miles gave me a hard glance. "Carry on," he said. At first he stood with his arms crossed, watching, but when he discovered Martha standing beside him, he guided her into the gallery and was gone.

Chapter 30. Remember the Alamo!

"THREE!" the Crowdads and Pugilists shouted. I was getting the stick. Where was the carrot?

Sergeant Mallory paused. I lifted my head and saw, out of the corner of my eye, my brother's restraining hand on his sergeant's shoulder.

Before he could speak, Lieutenant Fisk stepped forward. "Private Borginnis, do you realize that disobedience - well nigh mutiny - in the time of battle can be a hanging offense, and therefore ten lashes is mild and merciful punishment?"

I let my head sink.

"Disobedience now could mean the death of all of us, and what is worse - the failure of our cause."

With my head gritted against the tearing pain of three lacerations, I did not trust myself to speak, to tell Kelly to get the hell away. I didn't want him to see this. I dug my fingernails into the rough wood of the rafter, and braced myself. I glanced behind to see what was happening. Mallory pointed the whip at the water barrel. Kelly looked away. Fisk nodded. Mallory dipped the cat o'nine tails and then shook water from it in little flicks.

"Come on! Don't tarry - let's get this over with!" shouted Kelly angrily, stealing the whip from Mallory's hands.

Crack! "FOUR!" the Crowdads and Pugilists shouted as ordered. They were the ones who had also attacked the Metal Man.

Crack! "FIVE!" Nine knotted strands of leather, water-heavy, felt like a handful of hot coals smeared against my back.

"There! Look at him. Five is sufficient on my account, lieutenant," said Kelly. I looked back as best I could.

"Ten is sufficient on my account, lieutenant," said Fisk. "Do you want me to -"

"Go to the deuce," said Kelly, lifting the whip. "Face front!" he ordered me.

Crack! It got harder and harder for me to hear anything but the whip after that. It cracked and cracked against my bloody back. I was dimly aware of the annoyed and insistent buzzing of flies disturbed by the blows that opened the slow sluices of their wine. As my awareness receded inward, the more acutely could I feel the little pressings of their six legs on my sweaty face. At least some of them critters on my back must have gotten killed, I thought. Unfortunately I did not lose consciousness. I felt every blow. Crack!

"Ten - !"

I tried to let myself relax slowly. I tried not to exhale too violently, and excite my wounds.

"Got anything to say now, Borginnis," asked Fisk wearily.

"Yeah...Remember the Alamo?" I groaned. My back was on fire.

"Remember the Alamo!" shouted Kelly. "Remember the Alamo! Remember the Alamo!"

The agitated men picked it up, taking refuge in the cry: "REMEMBER THE ALAMO!"

They all meant it in a more rallying sense than I had meant when I recalled that slaughter, so much like this one. The odds against them was 16 to 1, whereas our odds were so much better, being 10 against our 1.

"You'll be all right, Jack," said Kelly in my ear, cutting my wrists free. "This affair is closed," he called out.

"Yes," agreed Fisk. "And let us now hold in our minds the high example set by our dear Major."

I wrapped my arm around his neck. Kelly slowly dragged me into the gallery. I stopped at the entryway, panting on the fresh air.

"It hurts bad, don't it, Jack?" he said, licking his lips. "I don't mind you pluggin' that danged Perfessor so much as makin' yourself so conspicuous in front of everybody! You made a bad name for yourself. Ain't no reason for askin' for trouble. It's like you done it on purpose, Jack! What's wrong with you, boy, don't you got no sense at all? Gall darn but you are bleedin'! I'm awful sorry 'bout this Jack. Awful sorry. Let's don't tell Ma about it."

"Don't tell Sarah," I said, although I knew this hard gossip was all ready known throughout the fort. "Don't jiggle me - just hold still while I try to catch my breath." Outside, I saw Captain Holm's silhouette by the flash of our mortar at Platform 3. "Sorry 'bout getting blood on your gold braid, there," I said.

A Music, running by clutching a message, stopped when he saw me.

"GIT!" cried Kelly, and the boy flew.

"Jack will you promise me to mind your step, now?"

I thought about it. "...No."

Kelly winced, then said, "Tell me why you won't, then."

"I'll tell you," I said, raising my voice a little: "Jacob Bently!"

"Oh!" cried my brother with annoyance: "But that weren't your fault!"

He knew the story, because he was also stationed at Camp Greenhorn when it happened - only, when it happened, he was lollygagging with the boys in the Officer's Club, while I was right there on the hot and dusty trail. We were all green as apples and Sergeant Mallory had the job of toughening us up for what we all supposed would be a good and lazy campaign of Injun-fighting.

He tried to burn the baby out of us, as he put it, forcing us to march too many miles in the wet smothering heat of a Maryland backwater July. We were hauling our muskets, Volta's Piles, and packs up and down the hills, a hundred gnats making black halos around our shakos, ten miles up and down without water, twelve, fourteen. At fourteen it happened.

Joseph Bently broke rank and ran ahead to the horse that was hauling all the water we were supposed to get at the sixteen mile post. Bently was pasty faced underneath and flushed pink on top; but soon enough he was grey.

He tore off his shako, dropped his musket and pack on the trail, and ran ahead. A holler went up through the ranks and pretty soon there was a mob all around Private Bently, who'd wrestled the water barrel off the horse and pried the lid off and dunked his whole head in.

Sergeant Mallory waded through the mob, a big dimpled grin on his whiskered cheeks. "Well then," he laughed, hands on hips. "This gives us an opportunity to kill two birds with one barrel, so to speak. First, look at you! Behold yourselves, and the perils of breaking rank! One man goes, and you all follow. One minute you're a formation of Regulars, a phalanx! Next minute and centurions become a bunch of schoolboys, runnin' around chasin' girls. Well I'll tell you. Every livin' one of you'd be brained by a tomahawk by now."

We all laughed, Bently too, dripping wet.

"Have another drink, Mr. Bently, sir," smiled the sergeant, giving us a wink that he couldn't see.

Bently looked unsure at first but when the sergeant kept smiling and said again, "What's done is done. Go ahead!" he smiled back and leaned to drink from his cupped hand.

The Sarge pointed to three of us - me being the third - and just said with another wink, "Give Bently a hand, would you, boys?" We snickered because we knew what he meant.

We were always having that kind of fun at Camp Greenhorn. We called it "Spirit". Straggler's get themselves tied

to a tree, bad marchers'd get themselves tripped and trod on, and sloppy dressers (like me, just once) would find themselves forced at bayonet point to parade at midnight in just their longjohns. That was Spirit, and that Spirit filled us with its good fun as we three grabbed ahold of Bently's hair and arms and we dunked his head down good and deep.

The whole company started busting out laughing. Bently began to fuss and fight something awful. He thrashed and splashed around so much that some of his frightening screams echoed among the Maryland pines. But Mallory shook his head, like Bently hadn't learnt his lesson yet.

He raised his thick arms so humorously like a choirmaster, we laughed again even as we picked up and hollered out "Hail Columbia!" after "Hail Columbia!"

Firm, united let us be,

Ral'y'ing 'round our Liberty,

Like a band of brothers join'd

Peace and safety we shall find.

It wasn't till the third chorus, when I was singing out, "...as a band of brothers join'd..." that I got to feel anxious about our little game of Spirit, for Joseph Bently had left off his struggling.

I wasn't the only one. By and by all the singing died down.

Sergeant Mallory pushed us three away and brought up the dripping slack-faced thing.

He lost his grip and Bently splashed back in the tub then, his head bumping thump! thump! against the wood as he washed back and forth...

One too many chorus of Hail Columbia had cooked that noodle too long. We figured maybe he panicked and swallowed water the wrong way, and then in fright something in his brain burst. He had drowned in thirty inches of water.

The War Department neglected to tell his folks that detail. They promoted him to lieutenant before they railed him home. They sent Sergeant Mallory south of the telegraph poles into the thick of the Injun fight, until it came time to defend the Peninsula of Texas from the pesky Lunars, and Secretary Marcy needed every one of his eight thousand Dough-Boys to march up a ramp to the gondola of a steam-balloon.

I felt awful bad - same as everyone else - about poor Joe Bently dying on us like that. But I was sure - and everyone assured me - that I - Jack Borginnis - me personally - was not so much to blame. And pretty soon it looked like everyone just forgot about it. (Except after that our Spirit didn't have so much gumption in it at all.)

Up until the time he drowned, I was glad to be doing what I was doing to Joe. I wouldn't have broken rank if it wasn't for his example. I wouldn't have felt so thirsty all of a sudden if it wasn't for him. He was a foolish obstacle on my long road to glory.

But ever since, it was like I was waking up, only I was waking up from a good dream into a nightmare.

So I got myself whipped on purpose. I wanted Joe Bently whipped out of my blood. I wanted that crime leached out.

But it didn't work! Just mentioning his name to my brother made feel just as awful guilty all over again!

"- It wasn't your fault, Jack - just pass over it," Kelly whispered.

That conspiratorial whisper was a shame soaked hiss that stung my fleshless part - it was a steam burn on my soul, if I had one.

So I swayed there feeling sick, dizzy, and dreary, not knowing what to do. I resisted his tug on my arm. "You believe in god?" I asked. We both looked up - dirt trickled down - a mortar shell had thumped on the Bomb-Proof roof above us. We waited for it to blow - nothing happened.

He looked at me strangely.

"Course," he said offhand.

"Why?"

We heard the shell roll off the roof and fall to the side.

"H'm," he sighed impatiently. "...When you put it like that - ! Well...Jack! Of course I believe in god! Don't every-body? Now we got to get your bleedin' all bunged-up, boy - "

I wouldn't move. "But why?"

"H'm...Well - I figure it like this. It's like poker. I ain't got nothin' to lose if it turns out God's bluffin' - I'm bluffin' too! An' if there is a god, as of course there is, well, if I let him win, I win too, don't I? It's odds you can't lose, when you wager Belief."

"God's got the danged poker-face I've ever seen, then," I replied. I was going to go on to say that poker seemed like a dang fool way to run a government - and that's what it was, wasn't it, up in heaven, a government - a monarchy run by a mean poker-faced river gambler? I was going to say this, when just then there was an explosion.

Ka-pow! - the mortar shell finally burst - the Music, farther down, shouted -

In that instant I owned up to the fact that I hadn't forgiven myself, that I wasn't a-going to forgive myself ever. Never. So nothing had changed - almost. All my woe wasn't for naught exactly. My fleshless wounds, like my fleshy, could heal over with callous tissue, but the scar would always mark me a trespasser into evil. I'd be flogged forever, for I couldn't - I wouldn't forgive myself, and therefore could not change. That

proud (maybe vain) self-assertion of wicked guilt in the nil gave me something - a vector in space - a laceration in flesh - a magnetism in a hunk of iron - a strength and a purpose: a godless and unmoral atonement -

- the shell burst sent a torrent of dirt clods rolling down the entryway. And there, tumbled among the dirt clods, lay spilt the disinterred corpse of Gunnery Sergeant Oscar Rutherford Weigart!

What a horrible sight! It was headless hideousness - pale, broken, decayed! What a terrible caprice of chance! What a gallows-humor prank did lawless nature please, to land her bomb on a dead man's grave, when so many of us still living hid underground beside him!

If war wasn't so gross and grim it would be a farce.

The Worm had stupid sharp-beaked agents which refused to respect the proprieties of glory -

I was so weak that the sight of that broken and chewed corpse was shock enough to drop me. Kelly lifted me and bore me swiftly into the Infirmary. Reverend McKnight lay me on my stomach. Sarah washed my wounds but would not meet my eyes. As night fell on the 6th of May I woke to the hot itch of my wounds and listened to the weakening sighs of Major Brown.

Chapter 31. The Seventh Day of Siege: The Timber Barrows

Something hissed, and then hissed a lot louder. Dust flew up at the west end of the yard, furrowed over to the south end like a little locomotive, and then spouted loud red fire. Boom crackle! The fire-blackened three wheeled mess wagon nearby jumped up crookedly, bounced down crookedly, and then another wheel popped off the axle. The wagon toppled over with a great dry rattle of empty cracker boxes. The loose wheel rolled up the slope of Wall 5, and dropped down the hole where the mule was corralled; I heard Martha honking and hooting over the derisive Yankee Doodles warbling faintly over from Fort Paredes - damn 'em mocking military mariachis, I thought.

Pretty soon, Martha Mule peeked her soft nose out, sniffing, and decided to take General Lunarista up on his offer to desert. I would have braved the bombs and nabbed her, but I was unfit for either the braving or the nabbing. I was sweating pain and stiff with scabs. So I just watched the mule pull herself out like a monkey. She looked around Fort Texas like she didn't recognize it, it was so stunk up with the by-products of glory that Walter Scott forgot to promulgate among the peaceful populace: sickness,

smoke, sweat, and scatological flies. So it was for us Angry-Saxon mule men, penned up in this six-sided Fort Slow-Polk-on-the-Moon, after an interminable week of Lunar bombardment on this all important P. of T.

Martha Mule stuck her snout in a bitter shell crater, looking for something to eat. She found nothing but some 6-pounder wadding, chewed it awhile, found it too bitter, and sniffed another crater. There she found some socks from our bombed-dry laundry line.

Them pesky Lunars were getting sort of lazy with their cannonade, only lobbing a shell in every ten minutes or so. What were they up to now, we wondered.

Along came another desultory shell - whang! - it bounced in the yard, bounded out, and blew in the air beyond us. But this was enough to set Martha a-moseying up the eastern slope. She bobbed by the sentry, who was too miserable to get out of his rifle pit and grab her. Then she must have caught a scent of the Cold Sea, because her ears stuck out horizontal and she started bobbing her head up and down. Excepting myself, the last we Cotton Balers saw of her was her snout on the upward bob, still chewing on that sock. "Good luck Martha," I thought. "And no hard feelings neither."

The day after my punishment I was in a grim good humor, partly because McKnight had been giving me hourly doses of Rupert's Tonic against my pain. The only spirit left in the fort was in that good Tonic. It tonic'd me a little.

Another reason I didn't feel so bad as my wounds might prefer me to feel was that my camp-wife was dutifully attending me in a most uncharacteristically steady manner. She sat by me while I dozed, keeping the flies off my raw back as best she could. She held my hand when I suffered a bad spell of pain, let me win a couple dog-chewed checkers games, and cheered me by saying that when General Lunarista (a kind of slowpoke himself, I was beginning to think) got around to assaulting our walls, them Moonmen might not skewer me with a bayonet, since I was wounded.

No, they were Christian. They might just let me heal up, then give me the "Black Bean Treatment".

That's what they did to some of those Ranger-bandito folks a few years back - some Texas Ballooners who swooped down and robbed a south-of-the-Cold-Sea crater - then got their silk caught up on a steeple's cross. So the Lunars let 'em heal from their broken bones, then let 'em pick beans out of a jar. They said they'd only kill the black bean pickers. Since it was obviously god's will when the cross stabbed the silk, it followed that the black bean would be a divine decision also. So pick your beans, ye wretches!

They killed the black bean pickers. And let the white bean Texans go. With an exception.

Turns out god gave the top Texan ras-cal a big clean white bean. White as snow. Not a speck of black on 'er. But General Santa Luna wanted him shot because he was the handsome Hernani, not to mention pilot, and dang the white bean!

So they shot him, too. Had a priest take his confession first, so it was square by the church. (But it wasn't square by the Texans, who were a lot closer to the Moon than the Moon was to god.)

Well, I doubted that would happen to me, because I'd heard from Six-Fingers Bourdett that General Santa Luna had dropped all his political ballast and ballooned himself into exile. He'd moored his tether rope to a pretty nice asteroid which would soon, I didn't doubt, become another star on the Star-Spangled Banner. So I didn't fear the black bean treatment.

But I stuck a white bean in my pocket just in case.

"I don't hear no more bombs," I said later. "Is this the assault, then?"

Sarah said, "With all our cannons we could hold off the hordes of the Great Ottoman Poobah, which is why the score is still tied up, I reckon, like this:

Inning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Score	Errors
Slow-Polks	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	*	*	6	3
Pesky Lunars	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	*	*	6	1

Sarah was so nice and steady and wife-like, I'd figured that though I was the one who got whipped, she got tamed. Maybe we'd ask the Reverend to put his stamp on our team-hitch. She didn't say nothing about how dumb I was to make trouble, or that I was mean to pick on a man just because he was made of metal. So I figured she liked me better for it, because it showed danderfully righteous gall and gumption. Of course, I was all wrong, about one hundred and eighty degrees wrong as a matter of fact, as the following day showed.

There was no sign of P. P. F. S. He was long gone by now.

So, besides Sarah and my safety from the dreaded Black Bean Treatment, I was glad my wounds were healing up nice. Maybe Kelly knew a way to tease the cat o'nine tails so that its bark was worse than its bite. That bark was bad, my friend, let me tell you. But maybe Kelly knew a trick, because I could walk the next day, a little, keeping my back straight, my hand on Sarah's shoulder - I walked up and down the gallery, which is how I saw Martha Mule's escape.

One time when I woke up from dozing it was because Old Sock was standing over me with his hoodoo bone, spelling me with Feel-All- Betters and I don't know what else. Soon as he saw me wake he limped off in a hurry.

Kelly was always grinning with guilt about the flogging. He set up his Daguerreotype of Ma beside me, which was nice, but that grey and gritty studio pose of her in that heavy black Sunday dress, the photographer's iron clamp holding her head still for all those minutes, a frown on her face and a yawn in her eyes, well, it made me feel bad about her, so I turned it away.

Now, speaking of Martha Mule, I should say that even Martha Miles was nice to me, praying for my health too, every time she prayed for the Major's. She like me now because I was a punished sinner, and my hurts looked bad, being fresh, but at least she liked me. So in summary I enjoyed that day's aristocracy among the wounded.

And here and there throughout the day I had to give a little laugh at myself because there I was, whipped, but not whupped - No, I felt kind of breathless, like a renegade, up and running, free and Omni Potent, and I just didn't know what I'd do next before Hangman got me.

There was a shout on the wall, and another, and another -

"HO!"

"SMOKE!"

"Cap'n Miles! Cap'n Miles!"

Was it the assault?

We heard a far off booming. Then there was a long rumble of thunder. Whose ordinance was doing that mumbling and grumbling? A mob rushed out of the Bomb-Proofs, howling like madmen. Reverend McKnight and a Music carried Major Brown up on a stretcher. I saw him weakly salute Captain Miles. With slow, slow strides I, too, left that subterranean stink hole, leaning on Sarah. I sunk my bare feet in the slope, slowly climbing, until - Sarah gasped, "The Barrows!" - we viewed something fantastic.

All the northeast had disappeared in a great big black cloud. We heard the thunder of that cloud, and the sputter of its leaden hail.

Round the Timber Barrows, The Army of Observation was fighting the Army of the Sea of Tranquility for the road back to us!

There were no Lunars to be seen in our neighborhood, but for a few mounted scouts keeping their spyglasses on us, and some miserable-looking militia hiding in Plato's Crater. The entire Tranky

Army had rushed off to wrestle with Old Zach and the boys - and they took their annoying popguns with 'em!

The cloud grew and grew, getting blacker. Every few minutes it flickered with lightning - that showed us that Ring-gold's giant electrics were bolting their jagged edged galvanic ferocity at the Lunar lines. The smoke changed. First it funneled out of the Timber Barrows, then, several hours later, out of the little Wheel Barrows. Looked like the Lunars were falling back. We were so nervous. Even Sarah was biting her nails. We cheered and stopped; cheered again and stopped again; - Captain Miles ordered silence. And then, then thunder stopped. The smoke slowly roiled away.

All of a sudden we saw the first of the far-off Lunar columns double-timing westward in retreat. (But westward meant toward us, so it looking to us like they were advancing.) Some of the columns looked pretty worn and ragged. The officers were hard pressed to beat the men back into their ranks. - Old Zach had pushed them back, then! The entire Army of the Sea of Tranquility! We Slow-Polks gave him a mighty HURRAH!

But Ole Rough 'n' Ready still had to bust through them to rescue us. And we could see the little dots of General Lunarista's men making camp plum inside William's U. S. Bond Crater, square broadside to the road. William's Bond was old and broken down, but it had some rough looking hills. There were still two Mooners for every one Dough-Boy. And we Cotton Balers were down to just four day's rations. "How's our friends ever going to scare the Lunars out of them hills yonder, Sarah? ...Sarah - ?"

Sarah didn't reply. I turned and looked for her. I couldn't see her in the yard. I looked behind Captain Seawell's 6-pounder. Nope. I couldn't find her. I couldn't find Captain Seawell, either.

I labored hard not to think about where she was or what she might be doing. So I was not thinking anything of nothing when I stalked stiffly back down the dark and lonely Bomb-Proof. I couldn't find her. I went back into the Infirmary, and found her rattlesnake apron hanging where she had left it. Though she usually went around barefoot, her boots were gone, too.

In it, I saw her apron was missing its Colt repeater. But there was a crumpled note.

DEER FRANK I JEST WANTID TO SAY
 GREEN GRO'S THE LOREL &
 THE LOREL GRO'S GREEN &
 YUR THE NISEST MEDEL MEN
 I EVER SEEN.
 DO YOU LYK ME SARAH.

Chapter 32. Reckoning at William's Bond - A U. S. Dividend

Too much Rupert's Tonic left my mind in disorder. Rupert's, to ease the pain of lacerated flesh and lacerated affection. Rupert's, to celebrate the day's victory, and worry about tomorrow's. Rupert's, to fill the unfaceable nil with disorder and confusion.

Only the infirmiry circle stayed in the Bomb-Proof. Almost all the Slow-Polks slept out in the open yard.

It was strange to be inside such a quiet, almost empty Bomb-Proof.

Weird, the happy card-sharps! They numbered the card pips by the thin flicker of a single candle. It was odd to see them laugh so wildly as they shoved piles of Liberty's-head dollars about recklessly. They slapped the winner's back.

"Pair of threes is all I got - and, mind you, an ace!"

"Behold my eights and Nimble Jack!"

"I wasn't bluffin'. But I'm out."

"Gintlemin, I got tree fine lookin' ladies."

A triumvirate of filthy men, somehow eager to lose in poker, they gave up their aces in an atonement to Fate, to break the siege. The laughing card players shunned their luck, and let the loser win. Lose a little poker, win a little war. It was the only way they could contribute to victory.

The winner hissed and ticked. Just who was it who won? I recognized an automatonish form. Was it Franklin Stove? I wondered. Had he come back when I slept? I seemed to see him.

But no, it wasn't any metal man. It was only Socrates, wearing an old silk stovepipe. He hissed in laughter, and ticked the hoodoo bone against his teeth. Martha Miles shouted when she found him engaged in the sin of gambling. He gave her the money; it was hers, of course. She gave it back to the gamblers. She said she was sorely disappointed in what that had taught the rascal. She wouldn't let Old Sock keep one Liberty's head. The other gamblers went outside to throw their money as far as they could.

"You seen Sarah, Ma'am?" I asked.

She turned her young face to me, then looked away. "Private Borginnis, since that we are no longer trapped down here, I choose not to keep company with that unfortunate girl," said Martha. "I would like to say what I hitherto have not said to you, that it is she who has lead you to the fallen state you are now in, it is she who has corrupted your flesh and your soul."

"That's enough of that," I warned her.

Asking Kelly I found out that Captain Miles had let out some men on scouting duty east, and some more made up a forage party west. The forage party had

already come back with four buzzards, three rabbits, a lizard, and as much water as they could carry, only a few gallons. The scouting party had returned and gone out again; Kelly didn't know where Sarah was, but he'd agreed to a request for the Chickenhawk sharpshooter to go out with the scouts the second time.

Outside, there were shouts. I walked stiffly up the entryway into the bright morning. A mob was rushing out of the tents pitched a-new in the yard. They howled like madmen. All the five hundred filthy, exhausted men of the 7th Infantry "Cotton Balers" and the two dozen men from E Company, 2nd Artillery, plus all the camp-wives (where was Sarah?) rushed up the slopes of Fort Slow-Polk to witness the second round of Taylor's duel with Lunarista. We wounded folks limped up as best we could. A black cloud was lifting over William's Bond Crater.

Boom. Boom-boom...

Boom - boom...

We heard that cannonade for hours as Destiny's big guns made themselves manifest upon the Moon's little ones.

Then we heard the crackle and sputter of musketry.

A giant black cloud lifted up its hideous war head and grinned carnivorously. Its teeth flashed electric. Under its black grin, the Moon waned prematurely.

We saw a few Lunar zapadores running for the Cold Sea.

Then we saw the routed hussars, many of the horses without riders, splash straight into the sea, pell-mell.

Then we saw hundreds and hundreds of Moonmen running from the broken lines. Thousands fled the U. S. iron. I saw the steam powered pumping of the wings of one of Ringgold's Flying Cannon, chasing them.

The enemy's panic was awful to witness, the way they threw themselves into the sea, spilling on top of one another and drowning.

- But Taylor and the boys had busted through! Fort Texas was liberated! As we saw the doughty lines of electric bayoneters march nigh, we cheered and cheered till hoarseness made us mum:

HIP HIP HOORAH!

HOORAH OLD ZACH AND THE BOYS!

HOORAH FER ROUGH 'N' READY!

- THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF THE U-NITED STATES!

The first messenger galloped to our fort. Down went our drawbridge - what news? what news? Five of our seven captains waited at the gate. He exchanged salutes, spoke a few words, listened, pulled the horse around and galloped off again.

We saw our columns marching to us, weary with victory. Came the dusty dragoons, leading their sweaty steeds, and the wobbly wheeled caissons of the Flying Cannon, wings folded on their iron hinges, and the giant electromagnetic cannons, pulled by teams of eight oxen each. What's this? - furnaces dark and artillery pennants dipped down? Was Major Ringgold mourned, then? - the man who studied Napoleon, who hammered wings on ordinance, whose fleet cannon could lead a charge, dead? (Aye, Ringgold laid among the slain, his legs severed from his trunk by a Lunar cannonball. Rumor said it hit one leg, pierced through the saddle and the spine of his steed, to the other leg.)

More soldiers filed on down, bringing the stiffly laden mess wagons, and the walking wounded, singing, "...I'm lonely, my darlin', since partin' with you..."

When I put on my Regular blouse, which Sarah had dirt-scrubbed hard to get the blood out of it, and left folded on my Infirmiry bedroll, I found this crookedly-printed note in my pocket:

DEER JACK WELL IM SORY BUT
WE ANT MARY'D NO MORE I'M SO
SORY BUT I WARNED YU DIDDEN I
& YEWD NEVAR LET ME SAY IT
YEWD FUSS & ID FUSS THATS WY I
WROTT THIS I CUDDEN SAY IT IM
SORY IM NO GUD FER YU & YUR
NO GUD FER ME IM A KORN KOB
WITCH & YU ANT WHAT I THOT YU
WAS YU AR A SKOLLERLEE
FELLER GOOD LUK SARAH.

PS IF YU HAF AN EKSTRA CAWPEE
OF THAT BUK A BOWT NAPOLLYN
PLEZ SAND IT TO ME ID LYK THAT
SARAH.

I saw Milly Jellison, sitting in the shadow of a 6-pounder and knitting. Her belly was starting to show that she was pregnant. "Say Ma'am do you know where Sarah is?" The camp women were dependably attentive to such details.

Milly looked at me. "I heard she'd gotten a-holt of some Mooner horses and came back with Cappy Seawell to get a few men to help tracking down the Metal Man. She said one of Taylor's scouts thought he saw a feller like him around William's Bond Crater."

"So you think she's sweet on that automaton?" I said dryly. I figured Sarah never had a chance to give P. P. F. S. the carefully printed love note, he having flown the coop. The Cotton Balers didn't know whether to call it desertion or not, seeing as he had suffered so much abuse from us. Still, most folks didn't care either way. He was a bit too weird and Whiggish for the most of us.

"You think so?" Milly said with a shake of her red-locked head that was either a gesture of sympathy or incredulousness, or maybe both.

"Didn't she tell you she don't love me no more?" I asked.

"Shoot, Mr. Borginnis, do you think a girl could love a Metal Man?"

"Wouldn't some girls prefer a Metal Man?"

"How you talk," she chided me.

I reread Sarah's note. (I mean the one addressed to me. I'd left the other in her apron.) So what did she think I was? Had I changed or was she wrong all the while? I couldn't remember what I was a week ago, especially. I couldn't figure what she thought I was.

I went looking for Kelly. He seemed to know all about it. He wanted me to sign up as a stretcher-bearer; it would look good on my poor record. I didn't have to do anything, though, seeing as I was on sick call, he would just note that I volunteered. "All right," I said, "but I have a permission to request." He gave me written permission to hunt for our lost mule. He thought I wanted to go off and be alone with Nature like Young Werther.

At the gate I asked which way Captain Seawell rode off. Featherstone pointed out their hoof-trail was pointed out to me. I limped behind them, heading east on the trail of the Metal Man, grumbling, "Princess-Vice President Sarah Stove!"

I didn't know what I was going to do. Maybe I was going to do a little bush-whacking in the name of True Love. Maybe I was going to do a little score settling electric musket retribution in the name of Joseph Bently. Maybe this was my chance to get even with my bad luck. - Slaying that Moral Engine'd be like slaying an Agent of our Flawed Creator. That there was no divine justice, ha! I'd teach that highfaluting automatonal righteousness, man, machine, angel, or devil may he be!

But this was my own vanity and error. Prince-President Franklin Stove was in large part an engine, certainly, in the form of a man, certainly, with astonishing preternatural powers of Babbage Calculating Machine cognition - to the point of suspecting diabolic inspiration, it seemed, so much - too much - did he - it, it! - know - and yet - as I soon found out - all simple categorical suppositions to solve the mystery of his nature were false, when they excluded the key element - the elective element - the bestial element of its intelligence -

Things did not happen like I expected.

Chapter 33. Pursui

I limped slowly along the tent rows of the Army of Observation, Plato's Crater dark and silent across the Cold Sea a quarter mile to the southwest. Eastward I followed the trodden road, the newly won communications between Fort Texas at the tip of Timmy's Promontory and Fort Polk at Archie's Hole. Looked like the war was over. There wasn't a single Mooner left in the P. of T., not counting the dying. I felt proud about us Regulars doing our job right well without complaining. And I felt ready to call the army life quits.

The last commissary wagons and can-teeners with their mounted escorts at the very end of the long column passed me. Captain Seawell's trail had joined this road, so I was no longer following their particular track.

After the chuck wagons came the red-clotted hospital carts and litter bearers, and a Ranger scout in buckskins drifted overhead in his dirty little balloon, paddles rowing slow and easy, heading south. "Helloo- a!" I called him. "Helloo- a up there, Ranger!"

He stopped rowing and looked down. "I'm looking for Captain Seawell!" I shouted. "Important message, sir. He's on mounted patrol with about ten men (...and a woman) - !"

The Ranger pulled open his spyglass and looked north and east. Then he pointed toward William's U. S. Bond Crater.

"Thankee kindly!" I called, waving my kepi.

His shadows stretched a mile east, pointing my way, over the trampled wastes, and the littered path of Lunar rout - muskets abandoned, bayonets stuck in the soil - packs spilled along the sea shore - pennants painted gold with angels and flaming swords, tangled in the boot mangled cactus.

A half mile more took me to the heaped and broken fields, still smoldering hear and there. Still did smoke stain the purpling sky.

Sprawled in my path lay a dead Lunar boy, with bright white trousers, bare feet, and a dark blue army coat upset where his stomach spilled open.

I passed the last hospital tent. Its voluminous canopy glowed bright yellow in the darkening afternoon.

The last pickets were lax. Exhausted, they leaned their chins of the muzzles of their muskets. They let me pass with a simple, "I'm lookin' for my lost mule..."

I walked on through the scattered clumps of Lunar dead, befuddled by the sight, but still searching for Captain Seawell, Sarah, and the Metal Man. After a lonely while I thought I'd settle for Six-Fingers Bourdett.

From somewhere I heard a cry. Some of the dead were still dying. Where was he?

- I heard the whine and sputter of a horse. I saw it struggling along, limping a little. It was an enormous stallion, white as steam. It was the biggest I'd ever seen.

I heard the shout - "Catch'm! - I saw'm first!" A Dough-Boy was running over.

I hurried to the horse; when I touched his neck his great white head jerked up and down. "What's wrong with your leg, boy?" On this side he looked healthy and strong, except for his crazed eyes and hanging tongue.

I looked under. Something was tangled to the side of it, which made it limp. A hussar corpse dragged along with one boot still caught in the stirrup.

The sentry who had shouted - his pockets stuffed to bursting - laughed a little as he ran up to the horse - only to curse as he eyed its lame leg.

"It isn't that bad," I said.

"Isn't that bad, he says," said the man. "Look at that piece of iron sticking out, there!"

A slender shard had imbedded in the muscle.

"Hold the reins," he told me.

He stuck his hands in the pockets of the hussar and found a brightly embroidered cloth, needled by a wife or mother, perhaps. Opening it, he found some paper pesos which he cursed and threw to the side. He wiped his brow with the cloth and threw it down, too. He looked at the flintlock pistol and set it beside him with an ornately carved powder horn. He thought a moment, then unbuttoned the collar of the corpse. "Eureka! I knew it," he cried, snatching up the cross from around the dead neck. He held it up. It was silver. It was an amulet useless but for its weight in greed, now. A bad luck charm. He glanced at me threateningly as if I challenged his claim to the bounty.

Both he and the hussar were handsome blue-eyed fellows, one with the solemn pallor of total resignation, the other ruddy with the sunburnt flesh of victory.

The Dough-Boy grabbed the ear and sawed at it with his knife.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I know a feller, a Texan, who'll pay a dollar an ear. Bet you wish you knew him, too, but you don't." He looked at me. "Tell ya what, though. I'll go fifty-fifty with you. I'll pay you fifty cents a Lunar ear." He went back to his sawing. Finally, he finished, and dropped the grim thing in his haversack.

"Let's bandage up this horse," I said.

"Got any spirits with you, friend?" he smiled hopefully, the sunset in his eyes.

"I'm bone-dry too."

"Well let's fix this horse then you move along. This here's my stretch of stuff."

"I'm looking for Captain Seawell's patrol."

"Think I'll call this horse Old Whitey, like Taylor's horse."

"Let's make a splint so it don't get worse, and take her to the horse doctor."

"Hell, no. Hell, no. Horse doctor'll confiscate'm. I saw'm first. You heard me. He's mine now. Handsome, ain't he? I can doctor him myself." He tore some wrags from the hussar's trousers. "Hold on tight, now. He ain't a-gonna like it, none. But I'm faster than a rattler."

I stroked the horse's neck. The man squatted down, lifted his hands, and licked his lips, like he was getting ready to pounce. I hugged the horse's head. His hand darted and the horse lifted me up and dropped me, but I held onto the reins; between me and the corpse the horse couldn't run.

"It's stuck," said the man, now missing his kepi. "Got to get a grip on it! Woe, boy, woe. Woe, boy, woe."

Lather dripped from the horse's lip. "I was wondering if maybe we oughtn't to let him run if he wants to," I said, thinking that this kind of doctoring was either going to make the horse's heart go to bust or the brute was going to kick the Dough-Boy's skull in.

"You mean, let it work itself out?" the man said, uncomprehending. "No time for that."

Gently he put his hands on either side the wound, then put his mouth up to the wound, to grab the iron in the pliers of his teeth -

The horse screamed and knocked me back. It stumbled and then jumped forward. It hobbled off fast, dragging the corpse behind it.

The other man got up off the ground with a bloody lip. He shook his head, dizzy. He spat out the iron shard and ran after the horse, but it was too fast. I could see the black shadow of it rushing along insanely, dragging the corpse.

The man came back. "You didn't hold him," he said.

As I walked away, he called, "Hey there, you're bleedin'! Want me to get you to the hospital?"

The vigor of walking, and the blow of the horse, had broken some of the crust of the scabs on my back. In spots my blouse stuck to my wounds.

As I kept walking, the sentry shouted, "Keep a sharp lookout for them lobos...!"

The ground was rising up to the lip of the crater. I lost myself to the heaped and broken fields, heavy with heaped bodies on busted earth and busy little devourers. How many hundreds of draining corpses heaped on the shell-pocked bloody crust of the Moon? Too many for the victors to bury that day, to the wuffling and grunting delight of the big black birds and the waddling armadillos and the hungry little mice.

And Prince-President Franklin Stove?

As it got darker I saw a light high on the lip of the crater. It was a fire. I headed that way. After a while I smelled horses.

They sat in the wreckage of abandoned Camp Tranquility. Captain Seawell was sitting on a Lunar stool beside a Ranger and the engineer, Captain Mansfield. Seawell was going through a gilt box of Lunar maps, smoking a cigar. One Cotton Baler strolled just beyond the ring of light, a guard. A couple other sharpshooters huddled in blankets beside the fire, chatting. They had piled a heap of lunar sabers, pikes, pistols, and even a cannon. As I crept closer, I recognized the guard, Everett Higgleston, by his black eye from the subterranean tussle between Companies F & H.

"Everett - Ssst. It's me. Jack."

"Jack? What are you doing here?"

"Where's Sarah?"

Captain Seawell stood up. "That Jack Borginnis?"

"Yessir."

"What are you doing outside the fort?"

"Got permission to look for the mule, sir."

He looked at the scrap of paper Kelly had given me.

"You can't look in the dark. Go on back."

"Did you find the Metal Man, sir?"

Seawell looked back at Mansfield, Mansfield looked back at the Ranger, Wallis Gordon, who said, "I tracked him this far. Just before sunset I thought I saw him in the valley down there, through my spyglass. We'll take it up again if the Earth comes out of the clouds."

"Where's my wife, Captain?"

Seawell looked at me, chewing his cigar. "I'll tell you straight and hope you can take it like a man. She's not your wife any more."

"I want to hear it from her, if you please, sir."

"Well, I don't blame you. But it will have to wait. Go on back, Borginnis."

"Do you think that Metal Man is a deserter, sir? Or a spy? Or a madman?"

"I have no idea. That's what I aim to find out. I don't know if we can hang Federal property, but I'm supposing we can."

"Captain. Where's Sarah?"

Seawell said, "I'll tell you. But only if first I hear you say she's not your wife any more. I don't want trouble."

"Sarah is the same as she always was, Captain. I won't make no trouble."

Seawell turned and pointed to one of the three enormous Lunar officer's tents beyond the pale of the camp fire.

"Who is it now?" I asked.

"Bourdett," he said.

Him being a Mormon and all, maybe this one would stick, since she's one of his five wives, maybe it won't matter to her that she's not going to have any of his

children, there being plenty around...But they were so far away. So even so, I doubted it would stick. Poor Cactus Queen, I thought. Maybe I should pity Six-Fingers, I thought again. Well, that was that, wasn't it? The war was over, and so was my tumbleweed romance. "Will we be shipped back to New Orleans anytime soon, now, the war being over?"

"What? It's just begun. We expect to hear of a declaration of war by Congress any day now. We got a right to take Venus, now. All right, go on with you. Get on back to the fort," Seawell ordered.

"Yes sir," I said, saluting. I shoved my arms in the Pile straps, shouldered my musket, and marched down from the crater. A hundred yards down, I circled around and climbed back up and walked along the rim of the crater, away from the old Lunar camp. I figured if I was the one who nabbed the Metal Traitor, I'd be a hero.

I still wasn't rid of all my foolish ideas.

Chapter 34. Showdown!

Sitting down and resting, I wondered what I was going to do, when the air changed - mixed in with the charred sweet smell of powder smoke, it smelled freshly artificial. Something like coke-smoke and steam. I turned the knob of my annunciator. It slowly fogged up on 10,000 V.

I picked up some sand and dropped it. That gave me the vector of the wind. I went windward, down into the bowl of the crater.

The crescent Earth was just coming out of the clouds. From afar, in the growing light, his unnatural work was obscure, but hinted darkly of crime. He was perched on the hinges of his knees, as in devout prayer. His big porcelain head was tucked low in devotion, and his metal paws were clamped together before his boiler-drum chest, pumping up and down in the fervor of his obeisance. But coming closer I saw the heavy black roundshot held in his hands, thumping down upon the Dough-Boy corpse below him, hammering down and crackling the bones - splintering and shattering the rib bones, snapping the spine at the neck, and smashing the skull to pulp. Then he pulled a ten inch bone fragment from the aperture of his benignly smiling lips - clean white but for a few clumps of tough gristle - and threw it in the open swinging iron furnace door. The parted sides of his unbuttoned vest dangled on either side, like stage curtains; and inside, the embers seemed satyrs of fire that pursued and embraced nymphs of bone in this hellish puppet-show, this industrial Bacchanalia.

I was unnerved.

But even as he figured the sums of his Wormy work, he hissed and shrilled to himself through his organ-pipes, lispng softly and chiming metronomically - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ -

The "Where's the Spot" Waltz

"Where's the spot? Where's the spot?"

A young Whig stirred the Congressional pot,

Making legal dickory-dock of Young Hickory:

"Where's the spot where our blood fell quickory?"

Like a sheep with a shawl, you're self-contradictory--

"When you say 'War is declared by foreign action,' - for what's a Congress?"

We alone make war, is my guess."

When Polk heard this Peace anapestic,

He told 'em how Destiny was manic-festic:

"War exists by foreign crime

"When the plum is ripe, it's picking time.

"The big fin fish eats the littlest fin Or so says a friend of mine, name of Darwin."

That able Whig, Lincoln, caught Polk by the hair

and said, "Sir, I think I know your surveyor;

He's a crooked fellow by the name of False.

He's got us dancin' this Where's-the-Spot Waltz!"

The Ayes of Abolition got Nayed by Polk's:

"The Common Man is now crowned King

'Fifty-four Forty or Fight!' we sing Providence has given us All the Moon

I read it up in that there Manifesto Commune."

"With the bloody light of Glory shines the national will

Let's make that brave fort the town of Brownsville."

So... Taylor needed guns; even Lincoln voted Funds.

The folks in the White House sure laughed hearty;

It was the bitter end of the damned Whig Party.

I crept closer, holding the long electric bayonet before me, and now I spied the two tin buckets spilled beside him. It was plainly evident that the automaton had taken them from the surgeon's refuse, for they were piled around him, the neatly sawed off arms and legs and feet and hands of the non-ambulatory casualty. I shuddered to see the same peckings and plucking polka-dotting upon those grey limbs as I'd seen in the grotesquely disintegrated corpse of Sergeant Weigart.

"Hold, Monster! What are you doing!" I called.

Prince-President Franklin Stove puffed a bad black cloud from his stove-pipe, and his knees creaked as he rose, and turned. His glass eyes glowed grey and milk white with sooty and gritty salt-peter stains, making murky daguerreotypes of what? a hanging? flogging? a branding? His furnace door clanked open and shut, showing and shuttering its lurid lantern, weird with what white shapes blackened there.

<<Rrr-roo! Err...Tick! I am the Moral Surgeon - >> said he through the stiff grinning pipe of his lips. <<I give succor to the dead. I excise sins of the flesh. Er-er-roo! And before I am through - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - I will force you to pay my Tax, too.>>

I took a step back, and looked away from the ambiguous mesmerisms of his eyes. "All right, Demon Stove!" I called, and I pulled back the hammer of the electric bayonet switch with both thumbs. "I've come to settle the score! You got anything to say?"

The automaton's dandy Beau Bremmer face just grinned and grinned, monotonously benign. <<Score? Tick!...Sss-sss-Tick! - Sss-sss-Tick!...Tick-ick-ick! I count it thus - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - >> And, his Babbage Calculating Machine ticking up some great sums, he told me the casualties of the last two days' battles, which, in my head, I automatically placed in the 8th & 9th inning of Sarah's scoreboard:

Inning	1-5	6	7	8	9	Score	Errors
Slow-Polks	6	00	350	800	1156	4	
Pesky Lunars	6	00	54	122	182	5	

"Dreadful Fiend!" I said, "I'll stop that death's head grin - let's see how 10,000 Volts appeal to you -"

I ran the last few yards and thrust the bayonet, against the preacher's suit, pressing the bayonet against his tin barrel chest. At the same time there was a hot blue spark - He rocked backwards, then forward. A bit of smoke curled from the charred cloth. The annunciator was dark -

dead. I dropped that heavy box off my shoulders, and the musket, to wrestle or to run.

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - You are in error. My metal parts are mixed with wood and porcelain. I make a poor conductor, sir - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Your flesh conducts your Error - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - In fact in the score of this game you will make the 4th Error - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - What is Error? - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Error ergo freedom - >> he said, and reached out. His hard hand clenched its vice on my wrist. So strong were his iron fingers, it was like being shackled!

Bones glowed in the hot-box of his belly, with ugly little coals and floating clumps of ash. Nymphs fled the stump footed satyrs inside that hissing fire - it hissed insidiously persistent as it shrank. The Metal Man ticked twice and pulled my hand. I was helpless! Was he going to thrust it in that fire?

"HELP!"

<< - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - But I only want to give you a fraternal kiss - >> he said, and lifted my hand to his jaws. There was a click - his jaw fell open a notch.

He lifted up my hand -

"OH, HELP!"

There was a small dark slot there. He pressed my hand against the hole - and bit me - ! It was a darting deep bite -

"MURDER!"

BANG-CLANG! - a rifle shot ripped the black suit. - I heard horses behind me. There was a rush of men and hooves - the Metal Man released me and turned as - POW-CLANG! - the Wallis Gordon's pistol burst open a new button hole as his iron ribs clanged like a bell - Sarah tossed a lasso around the Prince-President's neck and he flew backward - landing heavily. She dragged him a few yards, then leapt off the horse and pounced on him. She held her Colt to his face. He reached for her -

"Watch out - he bites - !" I called, holding my wounded hand. Sarah jumped back. My hand hurt bad, and tingled.

Captain Seawell and Six-Fingers rode up, the latter's rifle smoking. Seawell jumped down with his wooden canteen, and rushed over. He kicked the furnace door open and poured water into it. The Metal Man started to sit up but Sarah stepped on the rope between his neck and her horse - he fell back again. Great steam poured around Captain Seawell - the Ranger tossed the captain his gourd, next. The other riders caught up and the contents of six canteens burst into steam. The Metal Man's boiler pressure dropped slowly. He was weakening. He looked up at his captors with watery-white glass eyes. His ticking stopped, then continued, unsteadily.

Captain Mansfield unpacked a small chest from his saddle. It was full of tools. {He took a hammer and a chisel and set it against the edge of the porcelain mask. Tock! Tock! It wouldn't budge.

His pink painted face seemed so stupid and tawdry! A thinning little trickle of smoke curled up out of his top hat. A last, weak puff of steam emitted from his nostril pipes, as he said, so faintly, <<Wait - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - But I now have nine lectures - Wait - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - The ninth is - Wait - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Wait - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - 'The Case for, Necessity of, and Practical Methods of Drilling Ourang-Outangs as Obedient Volunteers for the United States Army...' - Wait - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Wait - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - >> He seemed to be ticking faster again. I was surprised to hear his Babbage Calculating Machine brain ticking and whirring more furiously than ever now that his furnace was cooling, his boiler settling, his toy-marble eyes nearly black. He laid there on the broken battlefield, weakly lit by the gibbous good Sphere that so many months ago had let loose a volley of steam-balloons in an invasion of the Moon. A shiver shook me. What could account for it? He whirred and whirred, <<Wait - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Er-rr - I have ten lectures - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - I have eleven - Er-er-rr-roo! Er-er-rr-roo! - >> frantically, as if he wasn't really dead.

"Peculiar engine," said Captain Mansfield.

"But if he's just an engine," said Six-Fingers, "then he never was alive, so he can't be dead - ?"

"With his boiler system shut down, what powers his calculations? How do I open up this thing - ?" Captain Mansfield looked around the ears for some kind of clasp or hinge.

"I know how to open 'er up," Sarah offered.

"By all means, go ahead," said Mansfield, standing up.

She kneeled. "Perfessor, I'm sorry to have to tell ya, your goose is cooked." Holding her Colt by the barrel, she hammered the butt right against the center of the porcelain plate of a face.

The white nose shattered, leaving just a dark hole like a jack o'lantern, and two slender copper tubes bent askew.

Horried we stared.

Some strange organ wriggled within the hollow of his head!

The thing cried, "Er-err-err-rr-ooo!"

It jerked its squirmy little head out of the hole the blow had made, and quickly snapped it back inside. But in that instant I'd seen its ugly little eyes and snapping mouth.

"Nasty!" said Sarah, straightening up. She yanked her bowie knife from its sheath, and squatted back down by the fallen foe. Carefully, blade at ready, she peeked inside the hole. She peered inside the cavity -

"It's all hollow inside thar - I see two little rooms. Thar ain't no Cabbage Calculating Machine in thar a'tall! I see straw, feathers. Thar are about a baker's dozen leavers that look like spoons. Looks like all kind of wires, pulleys, and little gears up top. Oo - thar's that nasty feller again - "

All of a sudden that ugly eyed little head poked out of the hole. It jerked this way and that, eyeing Sarah curiously, then snapped back in.

Sarah followed it with her eyes - "Hey, I know what that is! - What do you know? - It's pecking on one a'them spoons - it's grabbin' on a tiny lever and pressing on it to get the spoon down - it's pecking on it - thar's some kind of gore on the spoon - when he pecks it, it kind of gets knocked around - he's pecking all kind of levers - "

Indeed, we could hear the steady tick, tick, tick.

Sarah looked up at us. "Oh dear, oh dear - thar's a bloody button on the spoon - says U. S.!"

"He is a Cannibal, then!" pondered Captain Mansfield.

"How utterly savage - !" said Captain Seawell, straightening.

"Shh - he's talkin'!" said Sarah, putting her ear close to those copper nostril tubes.

After a moment she lifted her head.

"What did he say?" asked Seawell.

"I don't know. I don't think I heard him right."

"What did it sound like?" asked Mansfield. Sarah's eyebrows frowned. "Sounded like - sounded like he said, <<Not goose...>>"

With her left hand she snapped her fingers in front of the hole. The thing inside looked, then lunged. It nipped her fingers with its quick, sharp beak. It drew blood, but Sarah grabbed around the ugly little head even as it bit. She pulled tight. The neck stretched out a long ways - five inches - almost like a little Lunar nose-trunk. She sawed it hard with her knife.

"ERR! ERR-OOO!" it screamed.

Snick! - The neck snapped in two.

It was a little chicken's head, a bantam rooster. The head sat in her bloody hand, its beak convulsively opening and closing. The tongue pressed in and out, slowly. All the way out it went, then all the way in, over and over, slowly.

The face-plate of the Metal Man knocked open from the inside. Then I saw what I had seen many times back at the farm. The headless body of the bantam flapped wildly. Its shredded neck honked and bleated, "Roo! Erroo!" spraying blood as it flapped its headless wings and rose up crookedly into the air. Blindly it flew, twisting, flapping, and bleeding. Then it fell. It let out a last weak honk and flopped down on the battlefield.

We crowded around the open cavity of the Metal Man's head. It was a mess of blood and feathers. Two little hens lay dead in the back, where a nest had been. There were two chambers. The bantams lived in the larger of the two; beneath it, only an inch high, level with the mouth, was the second. It was empty.

There were the levers that Sarah described. "Did just the random peckings of those birds against the levers direct the motions of the automaton?" asked Captain Mansfield, frightened and angry.

Undisturbed, Sarah reached in and pulled out the two little hens. In the nest, something moved -

A snake slithered up and out of the head, an egg in its mouth.

"Rattler!" cried Sarah, jumping back.

Hiram squinted along his barrel and BANG - the head broke open. The egg rolled free.

"Nice shot, Hiram," laughed Sarah. "I'd be pleased to cook up that nice fresh chicken egg fer you."

I looked at me hand - it wasn't a mere peck - I could now make out the twin red holes of poison fangs -

"I'm snake bit," I said weakly, and sat down.

"I'll fix y'up," said Sarah. "Just think of the nice chicken soup we'll get tomorrow!"

While Sarah was cutting X's on the holes, and sucking and spitting the blood, Captain Mansfield was poking in the cavity. It smelled filthy inside. He found two more dead rattlers. "Three chickens, their eggs, and three snakes? The nests each have a hole in them, through which the snakes feed on the eggs - The snake could kill the chickens, but looks like they didn't. The eggs kept them from being hungry. That's all it is? little beasts pulling pulley-wires when they feed? The rote animation of little brutes? That's all it is? That's all there is?" He kept saying, "That's all there is?" over and over, until Captain Seawell put his hand on his shoulder. Mansfield stood up and with tears in his eyes, kicked the dead doll.

The men packed up the chickens and the rattlesnake, too. I was so worried and exhausted, and that rattler poison was getting me, because I felt dizzy and sick. Sarah put me on her saddle and rode behind me, holding me on when I had a weak spell. "Only out of charity," she explained. "Git my idear? You read up my note?" she asked, a bit proud.

I just groaned affirmation, too sick to protest.

Captain Seawell hailed Fort Texas to open the gate.

And aggrieved shout went up amongst us when the reply came that by General Taylor's orders, it wasn't called Fort Texas no more.

I kept wondering if that poison in my blood was what Prince- President Franklin Stove had meant when he warned me, <<Your flesh conducts your Error - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - In fact in the score of this game you will make the 4th Error - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - What is Error? - ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ - Error ergo freedom - >>

Chapter 35. The Puppet-Head

Captain Mansfield dragged the metal carcass of Prince-President Franklin Stove on a little. When I was walking around in the night, afraid to sleep because I was afraid I wouldn't wake up, I saw the automaton propped up against the flagpole. He stood high on the rampart there for a long time. I understand, until stolen by someone who wanted to sell him to P. T. Barnum.

The flag flew at half-mast.

The Infirmary was all out of Rupert's. Not all of the fresh supplies had been distributed yet. Kelly yelled at Doctor Paine until he wrote Kelly a letter authorizing him to find me some.

I smelled the chicken soup that Sarah was serving all the officers of the 7th. And I heard them toast her as "Sarah Bourdett - the Angel of Fort Brown." So long, Cactus Queen...

All of the tents of the 7th Infantry, including the Infirmary, were pitched just outside the wall of the fort.

I was looking at my swollen-up hand, feeling tingly, dizzy, feverish, thinking about that fourth error in the Slow-Polk score. I heard Half- Lip McCoy leading my pals with this song:

"Frankie in the Moon"

Prince Franklin Stove was a fine old chap!

He was a pretty angel who fell in a folw scrap -

Cause he had a wise old pumpkin head

He didn't know that he should stay well dead.

Neither did the cock and the hens

Who used his pretty skull for a fox-fence.

But like a nabob's egg cracked by a silver spoon,

Now we guess his immortal soul is in ruin.

The Prince said inside of us was only springs and gears,

The surgeon's only good for trimmin' round the ears.

We busted the Prince open and looked on in below,

Then propped him up tall, our sentinel scarecrow.

For a mighty Prince, he was not very clean,

He was half hen-house, half automaton machine.

We gave him our old socks, but he didn't darn 'em;

So we sold his china head to Mr. Peter Barnum.

Is all we are just wheels and strings? oved Prince Stove, but we don't like kings.

We busted him, and it's just as well,

He makes a dandy scarecrow centinel.

That song made Captain Mansfield a bit angry. "We are more than chips and strings. More than wheels and brute reactions. We're more!" I wasn't so much angry as worried that that's all I was, that my chips were all unstrung and my strings had cashed their chips.

Wallis Gordon was showing some Crawdads how to cook rattler. He picked Bradley Abernathy to mind the fork. It was an elaborate process. First he cut the head off, ka-chunk! Then he threw the snaky carcasses on a hot griddle, just like that. The frying snake hissed and sizzled. A cooking smell filled the air. It was more or less a familiar smell, like broiling chicken, but like that chicken had fed on ka-chook rubber all its life. I thought maybe the rattler's flesh had some natural antidotal properties, so I sat down with them and waited. Bradley Abernathy said I was getting kind of pale and mottled. "Well I guess this is so-long, then," I said, and shook hands all around.

"First whupped, then snake-bit," said Kidney Beanton admiringly.

"Don't forget heartbroken," I added. I laid down and put the back of my hand over my burning eyes.

"If I miss mess call, don't bother to drum up the reverend," I told them.

I knew they thought I was a goner when they gave me three HURRAHS. "Where was Kelly with that Rupert's?" I wondered impatiently.

I heard a rattling sound, close. I sat up quick.

Abernathy said, "Mr. Gordon - it's moving!"

"Heh, heh," laughed Wallis, his back to Abernathy.

"Mr. Gordon! They're moving! MR. GORDON!"

The headless snake was side-winding on the hot iron - !

"Yes, when its spine gets hot enough it gets a kind of second life. Personally I don't care for it that raw. Mind you keep 'em on the pan, boy!"

Suddenly one of the coiled-up headless snakes coiled up lunged forward, like it was striking. Abernathy dropped the fork and ran about forty yards off. From that distance, he turned back and looked.

"Lost your appetite fer fresh rattler? What a greenhorn!" scoffed Wallis.

Seeing that headless snake move was giving me poison-chills. I walked away and laid down.

I woke up late with Kelly shaking me. "Jack! Jack! Jack! Wake up!"

"No," I groaned. I felt hot and dizzy, and there was a pain in my chest and in my eyes. I couldn't feel my bit-up hand. It was so swollen I couldn't move the fingers. I turned my face away from it.

Behind Kelly was - an old lunarita! She was very old and dressed in black. She wore layers and layers of shawls, veils, serapes, and dresses. I wondered if she was like one of those hollow dolls that you keep opening up to find a smaller one inside to open again...

"She was searching among the dead for her grandson, or maybe great-grandson, I reckon," said Kelly. "She don't seem to speak much our language, but she seems to listen to it all right. I'm paying her to cure you - you know those Injuns know ancient tricks like snake-bite cures from beetle dung and grubs and the like."

"I don't much care for beetle dung and grubs, Kelly!"

"I told her to give you whatever it takes to cure you, brother. Now jest rest easy now."

It hurt to open my eyes, so I closed them. I felt her warm, tough hands on my forehead. She put me something bitter in my mouth. It tasted like ashes. I thought she was poisoning me. I wouldn't open my mouth. She pinched my nose until I opened my mouth and I swallowed some more.

I hated the taste of it. My dizziness concentrated - I felt like I was falling and falling. That vertigo landed me in the land of Nod. I fell in a deep sleep.

And I had a strange dream.

I dreamed that I was thirsty as all heck. Probably I was, which is the fault of the fever. So I got up - I was in a tent with three wool blankets on me. My brother sat in a stool beside me, slumped over, asleep. His Walter Scott lay open on the ground. Looked like the last week's events had taken the entertainment of it out, for Kelly.

So I got up and looked for water. Not finding any, I went outside. It was dark. I still couldn't find any. Then I heard the Cold Sea, so I headed that way. I kneeled at the shore and drank (the Mare Figolis being a fresh water sea). It was delicious. I felt a lot better. The swelling of my hand had gone down. I unwrapped the bandage a little - there were just two very

tiny dots. I stretched my back - still sore, but not raw. All in all, I was fit as a fiddle again. Put me in an Omni Potent point of view.

Looking up, I saw, in the distance, Martha Mule. I walked over to her. She ate up one of my stale army crackers. I got up on her and rode along the shore a ways, thinking about how close the far shore looked. I wondered what was going on in Plato's Crater. Probably a lot of panic.

I wondered if Hernani Klager was over there somewhere. And I wondered what had happened to John Sheehan and the other deserters...

Even in dream it didn't please me that this was just the beginning of the war. The Observation Balloons had scared away the Army of the Sea of Tranquility. Texas was Texas again. I had enough of fighting. I didn't want to cross the Cold Sea with Rough 'n' Ready. Seemed to me the Lunars took punishment enough, over a thousand maimed and killed, if the Moral Surgeon's score was right, and I reckoned it was. Seemed to me that we didn't have a call to invade Venus; we had Oregon. Even if a democratically elected president ordered me to go, didn't seem fair that I would have to. Made me feel like rotten corruption inside. Made me feel like one of Sergeant Mallory's chief disciples. Made me feel like a Hessian for the Democratic Party. I shouldn't ought to have signed up in the first place.

Seemed to me that this was my best chance to desert, if I was a- going to do it. Of course, I didn't want to do that if it meant I could never ever see Kelly again, or go back to Maryland. I didn't want to do it. "But maybe I should, seeing as I shouldn't ought to and didn't truly deserve to be alive, let alone killing more folks." And after all, I knew, this was just a friendly dream.

Farther on in the mist, I saw another mule drinking water. I gave Martha a little tap with my heels. We headed that way. It was just a pale blur in the dark. It wasn't a mule, it was a horse, a white horse, a stallion, feeding on some shore grass. As I got closer, I recognized it with a chill. I saw the corpse it dragged along, one foot still in the stirrup. Martha carried me over slowly. We came close. And there waited a nightmare.

The white horse stood at the edge of the shore, her hooves in the water, chewing a big clump of grass around a little tree stump. He lifted his head, still chewing, and carried up the stump, caught in leaves and grass. As he chewed, the wooden hunk slipped down a little, and swung, bobbing. We came closer, and the wild-eyed horse swung his head over, swinging the stump around at me. It bumped up and down with the rhythm of her chewing jaws. - It was the long-missing head of Sergeant Weigart. It was

blackish green and grinning. Its ugly jaws swung up and down in hideous humor, mocking the vanity of my intentions - the mule screamed and bucked wildly, knocking me into the water - the current was terribly swift - I spun round and round, fighting to stay alive - I shouted and kicked in the water. As I floated, in my disorientation, I thought I saw the moon hovering green above me - It was just a another pale blur in the awful dark - but even in my panic I fancied I could see old Anaxagoras crater. Flounder as I was, it struck me as funny - if that was the moon up there, then where was I? Suddenly, I saw the shore, up close, and swam for it. I rose up on the wet bank and lay there until I caught my breathe. I was grateful to claw the familiar yellow soil of the Lunar P. of T. I was not grateful when somebody kicked my foot. I started with annoyance, expecting to see Kelly, but when I looked behind me - I cried out and dragged myself away. There was a dead Lunar soldier floating in the eddy. I looked all around - there were dozens of dead Lunars, drowned, all around. I stood up, and saw all kinds of discarded equipment, and signs that thousands of men had passed over this same bank. So the current had taken me down to where the Lunars had fled in panic back to their side of the Cold Sea. I rubbed my face and climbed the bank and headed back to camp. I wasn't quite sure where camp was; I felt lost. I hadn't got very far when I saw a dozen dragoons on patrol. I headed for them to ask directions. As I came closer, I was surprised to see that these hussars were riding donkeys. I was just beginning to get over that surprise when I had another - I was delighted to see a familiar face.

"Jack!" laughed Hernani Klager.

Next to him rode a big red-headed officer I didn't recognize.

Behind him was John Sheehan. Next to Sheehan rode those two deserters that Sam Walker had seen from his balloon, Dick Parker and Patrick Maloney.

Following them were eight other Doughboys - who'd disappeared during the long march south from Annex Agonies - deserters all, with swords. I saw Sara's old husband, George Dalwig, riding among them.

"Heck, I didn't even know you'd skedaddled," I greeted him. He just shrugged and grinned bashfully.

And then came about a hundred Lunar soldiers.

I looked at the deserters and then back at the Lunars. Seemed like they were all sort of too friendly. "Is the war over, then?" I asked Hernani.

Hernani laughed. I noticed he wasn't dressed exactly in Regular blues anymore.

In fact, Hernani himself was wearing the darker blue, red-striped trousers of a Lunar hussar. "There are forty-eight of us under Lieutenant Reilly," he said, nodding his head at the big Irish beside him. "We are volunteers in the Legion extranjera"

"You mean your Strange Legion is a bunch of no-good traitors?"

"Yes," he said with a blink. "We've been raining shells on you for the past couple of days." He swung off his donkey and picked me up. He tried to embrace me but I wouldn't let him. "And so, here you are, like us, not like a Napoleon, but like a doomed Hernani."

"I don't mind saying I don't like the sound of that."

"I'm afraid Jack you have a choice of three vile fates. Will you be a prisoner, a deserter, or a traitor?"

"A traitor!"

"That's what they'll call it. But what are you now? You are neither a good man nor evil, but a war machine working regardless of right and wrong. Have you no life, no moral sense? Must you be such a slave? All free men are traitors to something."

"Hernani, I have to admit I never guessed that my doom would have your face on it."

Hernani put his arm around me and whispered, "Be careful, Jack. If you don't join us, one of the Lunars officers might break your arm. Such a feeling I have Jack, such a terrible purity - ! Will you be such a wooden puppet of patriotism?"

"Me, a wooden puppet?" I wondered. "Well, it's true I used to be more or less a simpleton, but now there's too many wheels whirling inside my head, I can't think even a simple thought! I wish I were a machine - then I wouldn't have this awful mixed-up feeling." And then I thought, "I guess I don't believe that I can honestly feel any pure feelings any more, but I admit I'd like to believe that there is such a thing as right and wrong. This way I'm sure to find out. With any luck I'll die before I have regrets." And as I rode behind Hernani on his donkey, I remember thinking, "I hope one of these Lunars has a copy of Napoleon and His Marshals..."

I found out I was wrong on every count.

And so -

do I find myself -

a universally scorned old gringo -

in the melancholy year, 1878,

- in the town of Tasquillo -

still intending to record -

at the personal request of Mr. John F.
Finerty,

foreign correspondent for the Chicago
Tribune -

Time, Pesos, and Health willing -

The Incredibly Tragicomic Lunar
Adventures of one Hernani Klager

- as told by -

Jack Borginnis,

the Minor Troublemaker,
Terrific Trigonometrist of Fate's Trapeze,
an Uncommon Balloon-Bourne Boll-
Weevil,

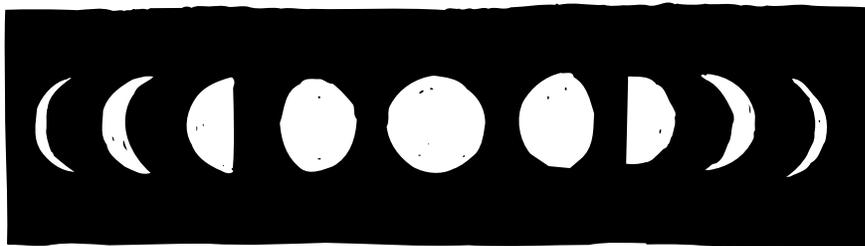
Strangest Stranger of the "Legion of
Strangers" -

Prisoner-Patriot of the Saint Patrick
Battalion of the Moon,
& Party to the Slaying of the Prince-
President,
Franklin Stove,
A Metal Man,

& Sometime Proud and Sometime Happy
Husband
of the Celebrated Two-Fisted Seamstress,
Sarah Borginnis
(Bourdett, Bowen, &c),

Cactus Queen of the 7th Infantry, U. S?.

Q



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