

'Dally's Youth'

by Louis McGann

"How's that mother of yours, anyway?" asked Mr Stasseri, the chemist, as he packed the opioids into a brown paper bag.

"She ain't fairin' too bad," I replied, through gritted teeth, anxious to get out of there. I kept my eyes firmly rooted on my feet until he handed me the bag.

"Alright, now you take care Dallas! Stay outta trouble," he said, smiling through rows of pearly white teeth.

"Will do, Mr S!" I shouted, as I hurried to the exit of the drugstore.

As I was looking down at the bag, I heard the familiar chime of the bell just above the door. I barely had enough time to look up before I was rudely shoved aside by none other than Tom Birch.

"Watch it kid!" he muttered. I was shook; Pete had told me all sorts of rumours about that guy, like how he'd shot three cops while he held up a gas station outside of Burlington.

"How's that mother of yours anyway!" That phrase was rebounding off my mind like a basketball that just wouldn't settle. What'd Mr S care anyway. I bet he didn't know that Pop was a lousy jailbird alcoholic that had left Ma when he found out she was pregnant with me. I bet he didn't know that Ma had walked

out. It wasn't like he needed to know anyhow, as long as he didn't get too nosy.

I stopped for a second as my eyes welled up with tears and my knees grew weak.

I sat down on the curb which was illuminated by the faint glow of a streetlamp.

"One of these days you're gonna end up walking into some lucky guy's switchblade if you're not careful!"

I gazed into the dark abyss before me and a figure stepped into view. It was Pete.

"You got the stuff?" he inquired.

"You bet!" I replied eagerly as I handed him the brown paper bag.

"You know, you dig okay Dallykid," Pete said smiling with his eyes.

"Gee, thanks!" I replied wistfully.

Pete Goodman was what some people might've called an idler, good-for-nothing hoodlum, but I hung out with him because he was like a mentor of sorts. He taught me how to pick a lock, shoplift and most importantly how to lie. His pop was killed fighting in Korea so he left home at eighteen to find work. So far, all he had done was loiter on the streets and cause trouble.

"Hey, why don't you and I swing by Jim's and share these with the guys?" he exclaimed.

"Sounds like a plan!"

As we headed down 4th Street, the piercing noise of sirens followed by the blue and red flashing lights caused a rude awakening for the both of us. We turned as two cop cars pulled up and two crusty looking cops raised their weapons and fired. What ensued was a frenzy of screaming, gunfire and broken glass. The last thing I remember before blacking out was a searing pain in my left thigh and the sound of Pete's head hitting the curb.