



PAGE TWO. An Uproarious and Disconstructive Publication.

HE WAS A BAD MAN!

Stackolee, Stackolae, he was a gamblin' man,
As ev'ybody ought to know!

- I think it was Tennessee Ernie who put that one in the juke boxes some years back - before he recorded "Sixteen Tons", and therefore long before the public really came to associate him at all with a folksong tradition.

Speaking of "Sixteen Tons", did you know that record sold a million copies in a shorter time than any of its predecessors, and that it and a derivative imitation of it called forth a vituperative counterblast from the editors of the Oil and Gas Journal, who maintained that it gave a false and misleading impression of the American Way of Life?

I wonder why so many people went for it, then... I suspect that rather a lot of them knew what it was to sell your soul to the company store.

But this particular story isn't about a guy who sold his soul over that counter. No, Stackolee, he wasn't that kind of a man at all. He sold his soul all right, so they say - but he got a higher price on it than just a grub-stake. He went to the right market.

The way they tell the story, he was born some time in the middle of the last century. Where he got his name no one rightly knows. There was said to be a steamboat on the Mississippi called that - Edna Ferber used that idea in Showboat. Then again there was said to have been a boy who was the son of one of the riverboat captains; his surname was Lee and his given name Stacker, and supposedly a coloured boy who worked aboard admired him so much he took over the name.

A lot of coloured folk, around Emancipation time, borrowed the name of their boss, or were given it, or adopted that of a man they admired. So any way out of these, or maybe any other way, a kid came to be brought into the world who went under the name of Stackolee.

Now right from the start people knew he was going to be something special. He was born double-jointed and with a mouthful of teeth, and even that wasn't the half of it. He also had a caul over his face.

He grew up to be a hellion. He was popular with the women because he was so big; he got along all right with all folks, because he could play blues guitar and boogie piano and like that. So he didn't waste his time earning an honest living. Not when he could be drunk half the time and sleeping around the other half!

He settled down - if you could call it that - on Market Street in St Louis, with his girl friend (by all accounts she was as much of a hellion as he was, and she was known as Stack o' Dollars,) and his prized collection of Stetson hats.

Now it was this collectinn that proved to be his downfall. It was this way. Ol' Scratch, he'd been keeping a close watch on Stackolee - it was pretty sure this was one customer Hell wouldn't lose in a hurry. But - being the way he is - Ol' Scratch wanted to make things certain past a doubt.

And this was how he fixed it. One night when Stack was rolling home drunk, he showed up in the middle of the road all fire and brimstone, and hauled Stack off to the graveyard.

"I got a hat for you, Stack," he said. "This here hat is like no hat no one else in the world got. I made it out of the hide of a man-eatin' panther what I skun alive."

So he showed Stack the hat, and it was an ox-blood Stetson, and Stack knew he just had to have it.

"It's a magic hat, Stack," said Ol' Scratch, friendly. "So long as you wear it you can do all sorts of magic, and you'll never come to harm."

And that settled it for Stack. Right there and then he traded his soul, put the ox-blood Stetson on his head, and went off into the world to raise twice as much hell as he ever could before. After all, didn't he have something straight from down there along with him?

They tell how he could eat fire, and walk on red-hot slag, and make himself all kinds of shapes and sizes - they even say he used to go out walking at night in the shape of an animal. It was about that time they started to tell about him in a song:

Stackolee didn't wear no shoe -
Couldn't tell his track from horse or mule.

Now it isn't quite clear how it was that he and Stack o' Dollars came to break up. Seemingly, it was because all the time before, he'd been fooling with these no-account women all over (his favourite, the song tells, was a voodoo queen from New Orleans's old French Market quarter). But before old Stack sold his soul, when he came home Stack o' Dollars could whup even him for rambling where he oughtn't to. She was so tough herself she had her teeth stopped with diamonds, and no man dared try taking them off her because she could have mauled him so badly.

So when Stack got his ox-blood Stetson off Ol' Scratch,

PAGE FOUR. Heard of the little moron who was so bashful

he couldn't come to any harm, and that included being beat up by Stack o' Dollars. He always used to say that he liked her so much because she was the only woman who could do that. The way I see it, life got boring for them.

Anyway, however it was, some time about 1905 Stack left St Louis and lit out across country. He hadn't been West for a long time - didn't think it was healthy, because once when he was very young and very foolish, he'd gone looking for Jesse James and Jesse had just naturally tied him in knots. Now, though, he reckoned the coast was clear.

So he headed for San Francisco, and when he'd been in that part of the world for a month or so, he dropped in at a bar one day and ordered a drink. Barman said he wasn't going to wet a glass till he saw the colour of Stack's money, and that made Stack so mad he just grabbed hold of the taps on the bar and pulled.

Well, all the water pipes were connected together, of course, and Stack, he hauled on them so hard the whole city fell down. Afterwards, they said something about an earthquake, and Stack was pretty pleased about that. He didn't want to get into trouble just because he didn't know his own strength.

But he didn't seem to be happy anywhere else but St Louis, so after a while he went back there, and he headed right straight into the trap Ol' Scratch had laid for him. You see, Ol' Scratch was getting impatient - this magic hat was working too well, and Stack was overripe for hellfire.

So one time he changed himself into the likeness of an innocent married man, a friend of Stack's, called Billy Lyon, and when Stack was sitting in on a poker game, he walked up and stole that ox-blood hat.

That made Stack but mad. So he got his .44 and he went off looking for Billy. Of course, it wasn't really Billy who'd taken it, but Ol' Scratch in disguise. Stack didn't know that.

"Have mercy!" Billy cried. "Please don' take my life - I got two li'l babies, yeah an a innercent wife!"

But Stack wasn't listening. He just shot Billy three times and looked around for his Stetson. But Ol' Scratch had it, and when the police came by looking for him, they took him inside.

So, in spite of everything, they got him for the killing. Stack o' Dollars came back to him and got him out on five thousand dollars' bail, but when the trial came up, Ol' Scratch thought he had Stack nailed down.

So did the judge!

Judge looks over his glasses, says, "Mr Stackolee, Jury finds you guilty of murder in the fust degree."

As for the way it all ended, no one seems to be quite sure. Some folks say the judge gave Stack seventy-five years, and Ol' Scratch had to sit around and bite his nails before he could collect Stack's soul. Other people say not, though they agree on one thing - that Ol' Scratch's plan fell down, and he didn't get what he wanted in spite of his scheming.

The way they tell it, Stack had got to be so bad, when he reached Hell he ordered Ol' Scratch himself about!

"Get off your throne, Tom Devil, put your pitchfork on the shelf.

I'm Stackolee, Mr Devil, gonna rule hell by myself!"

* * *

Stackolee was a bad man, went down to hell below,
Didn't leave nothin' but a Stetson, and a smokin' .44.

NOISES OFF

A lot of people have been saying recently that they don't seem able to find anything worth saying about NOISE LEVEL except "I like it!" or "It's terrible!"

Candidly, I'm quite pleased (especially with the first of these two, naturally!) Because while there are quite a lot of magazines published in OMPA which aim at stimulating arguments and holding discussions and amusing the members, I'm trying to put out one that will just interest people.

These little essays I've been doing recently on folk heroes are intended for just that end. I know several people in OMPA couldn't really care less about folklore, but I think it's a pity, because in the form of legends and fairy-tales, nursery rhymes and children's games, it makes part of all our lives. I've been re-telling a few stories from my own particular field - folksong - because I happen to know more about it than of other branches, and also because many of these songs are known to people who may not realise they are a department of folklore.

Next time, I want to tell you about a man who died all over the place - in a song. He hasn't got a name, but you all know him. And the history of his dying is one of the most fascinating and exasperating pieces of detective work I know. The trail leads from Ireland, via London and the Wild West, to New Orleans! The man was a rake and a cowboy; he served in the Royal Navy and Air Force, and died of bullets, multiple injuries and VD. Quite a guy...

PAGE SIX. And the little moron who ate some dynamite? He

Once, a long time ago, yours truly and Ron and Daphne Buckmaster were thinking of putting out a one-shot. This dialogue is all that ever came of the idea...

"We're three busy B's, aren't we? Let's call it Comb, the comb-ozine."

"Don't like it. What else do bees produce? Honey?"

"Not now, darling! Wax?"

"I give that the brush-off when I'm typing."

"Royal Jelly? No - we'd have to hekto it."

"What about Prostitute - the magazine for prose?"

"That's verse than the others. What about Dungeon - it will be a sell?"

"Where you ought to be. Try Phfft - the one-shot that misfired. Or how about Blunderbuss?"

"Is it a blunderbuss when you kiss another man's wife?"

"That depends on her husband. But a blunderbuss isn't quite a one-shot. It's full of all sorts of things."

"Perfect! Grapeshot? Grapenuts? All-Bran - if we run a serial it's bound to be regular."

"What about Somewhat?"

"Well, what about it?"

"More than somewhat."

"Yes, something could be made of that - but I'm not going to say what while Daphne's in the room."

"Ours - o-u-r-s - because it was produced in the small hours."

"WF - WE, not quite all there."

"Speak for yourself. What about Eufanism - edited by Barbara Eufan Todd?"

"Eufanasia?"

"That's too good for you - you should be roasted over a slow fire. Besides which, all the 'fans' have been done - or if they haven't, someone should teach them the facts of life."

"Speaking of roasting, who's going to volunteer to burn the toast?"

"I only go into a slow burn."

"Ideal - here's a fork. Let's call it Rupee - then we could make this the Annish."

"You're pie-eyed!"

"Sixteen Annas - one whoopee!"

"I'd rajah have a Hyphen."

"Pshah! I find that insultan."

"Akhonndn't care less. Here I am sikhing inspitation on the pathan of Hyphen while doing your kukri for you - "

"And another Injun bit the dust. Don't drop the toast!"

"I didn't drop it!"

wanted to make his hair grow out with bangs. PAGE SEVEN.

"Are you calling Himalaya?"

"No, but I'm going off Tibet in a moment. I want to be the Lama Ghod."

"For a moment I thought you mint it."

"None of your sauce!"

"What are you beefing about? How about Porkupine - the zine that goes straight to the point?"

"What about Esquire - the untitled fanzine?"

"You're going to have a belted ear'ole in a moment!"

"I've always known I was well-bread."

"Did they call Ear'ole Flynn that because he was born with big ears?"

"Ears to OMPA!"

"Right! Yours will be in the next mailing."

"Shame on you, sending corn to OMPA. Send bunions instead - Pilgrim's Progress is out of copyright."

"When I get to Belfast, will all the trumpets sound for me on the other side?"

"How many mansions are there in Walter's house?"

"Heaven knows!"

"Don't you think he's been mansioned enough?"

"VAWILLISIN is blasphemy."

"It sounds more like rubbish."

"Thou shalt not take my name in vain."

"Oh."

"How can you say that a ttery took you in?"

"We are getting bloody-minded, aren't we? Did it ever strike you that a succubus is underdone?"

"I would say slobbery."

"Why?"

"Don't go on like this, or we'll be getting a bad review in Authentic. Edited by Ted Tubb, the celibated pro-author."

"Don't be silly - he's wedded to his Art."

"That's indecent, if you like!"

"I do!"

"I wonder if he'll send us s-x technical books like Bert used to."

"Didn't he edit the Authentic Book of Rape?"

"I didn't know Chuck had ever sold to Authentic."

"Why didn't Harris call his OMPazine Tweed?"

"...antidote...coffin...bedspread...dolomite..."

"What on earth are you burbling about?"

"We can't start until we find a title, fool!"

"You mean you've been sitting there all this time? Why, it's simple. We'll just call it off."

So we did.

PAGE EIGHT. Relax! It'll be over in another few moments.

NAUGHTYBIOGRAPHY

I hear from Sandy Sandfield that you had a great time at Kettering over Easter. Me, I wasn't there. I couldn't afford to go and have a holiday as well. Maybe it's owing to the good company, but at any fan gathering my money leaves my pocket as fast as it possibly can.

So while the attendees were debauching themselves, I was busy packing and making sure I hadn't forgotten my francs and things like that. I'd been working solidly except for a brief break at Christmas for nearly a year, and so Marjorie and I went off to Paris for five days.

Ah, that was great! The nearest thing I know to space flight is climbing the Eiffel Tower, which we did on the afternoon of our arrival. We'd had to leave at about twenty to six on Easter Monday morning, which was ghastly, but we'd got over that. (We went by Skyways - recommended).

Thereafter, we walked around Paris, visited Versailles, ate and drank, went to the theatre (including the Folies Bergere, which was extremely disappointing), strolled in Montmartre, did a riverboat tour on the Seine, bumped into a blues guitarist from Lancaster, Penna, while sitting outside a bistro drinking wine, hunted the bouquinistes' stalls in the hope of finding George R. Stewart's "Names on the Land" among the French translations of Vargo Statten (I found it, by the way!). On our last evening but one - it was Thursday - we dropped in at a restaurant a couple of doors from where we were staying in the Quartier Latin, and discovered a couple of guitarists and some guys singing Mexican songs - likewise an English harmonica player...

Only trouble was, I picked up a case of food poisoning, and came home feeling downright miserable on Saturday. How much of that was just due to having to come home, I can't say.

But I have no hesitation in lending my support to the lost cause Walt Willis originally floated way back at the Royal (changing it slightly): GAY PAREE IN SIXTY-THREE!

ATTENTION-DRAWING DEPARTMENT

Change of address is hereby announced. (See colophon). Fan-type and other visitors usually welcome.

By the way, Vic Delman is now married and living practically next door to me.

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Ciao!