

[James Morton]

W14991 1 Conn. 1938-9 Morton

James Morton, American born, of Scottish parents, has been employed in the wire mill for many years. Mr. Morton is a widower, age approximately sixty, lives since the death of his wife at the home of a brother.

“Business? Terrible. They keep tellin' you it's due to pick up, but it don't look like it. Still the old place runs along pretty good. That's one thing about it, it usually keeps goin', and they don't go in much for big layoffs. Keep you on the payroll.

“I'd like to help you out, but hell, I don't know's I can explain things right. Why don't you go to some of the real old timers over there? You been to see the Whites, and Charley Buckland, and them fellas? They can tell you what makes the wheels go 'round.

“Plenty of changes over there, sure, but they come on kind of gradual and the first thing you know, you're forgettin' there was ever any other way of doin' things.

“Nothin' much ever happens in the mill. You keep workin' day in and day out. They don't even have the fun they used to have after workin' hours any more. Just a bunch of dumb hunkies workin' there these days. And nobody's got a hell of a lot of money to spend. The lads used to get together once in a while and have some real times.

“I mean clambakes and the like of that. Did you go to see Jack Taylor? Did he tell you about the time he got his head cracked at the clambake? No, I don't suppose 2 he would. After all that ain't got anything to do with the mill, except all the fellas from the mill were there.

Library of Congress

“Matt Monahan was the one that done it. You wouldn't want to meet a nicer lad than Matt when he was sober, but when he had a few drinks in him he was a holy terror. He come up in back of Jack and tapped him with a piece of pipe. No reason at all. Lucky thing it just hit Jack a glancin' blow. He turned around and grabbed Matt and gave him a toss. Matt must have sailed about ten feet through the air, but he lit runnin' and kept on goin'. He knew if Jack got hold of him he'd kill him. They took Jack to the doctor's and got his cut sewed up and brought him back again.

“Old Johnny McLaughlin went to work on him, tellin' him about this girl named May. Her old man was supposed to be an engineer on the railroad, see, and they told Fritz how much she liked the boys, but the old man was suspicious and watched her like a hawk, see?

“But the old man had a night run every once in a while, see? And then a fella could get to see her. Well, Fritz fell for it. I don't think he ever see many girls before he come here, and he was such a dumbbell he didn't make much headway with 'em.

“Johnny had it all fixed up for a certain night. He had Ding Dwyer, and some of the other fellas down to the Bridge all set, and myself and Tom Chipman were in on it. He got Fritz to buy some candy for 'may' and a couple of pints of bootleg liquor, and we started out this night in Tom Chapman's 3 car. Of course, you've prob'ly heard about this game, I don't think Johnny McLaughlin had any monopoly on it, though he did it for years, whenever he got a new prospect.

“Well, we got to Johnny's place and Fritz had been helpin' himself to the liquor and he was feelin' fine, and singin' at the top of his voice. There wasn't any lights in the house, of course, and we began to quiet Fritz down, tell him not to make any noise, because we didn't like the way things looked.

“But he was just drunk enough so he was feelin' brave. 'let's go,' he says; 'I want to see May.'

Library of Congress

“We got up on the porch, and Johnny knocks on the door. Right away Dink Dwyer starts hollerin' from the inside. ‘so you're the so and so who's been comin' to see my wife,’ he yells, and he opens the door and fires a revolver. Blank, of course, ‘Oh my God,’ hollers Johnny: ‘I'm shot.’ And he falls down on the porch and keeps on yellin’.

“Well Fritz don't wait to see if Johnny dies or not. He dropped the box of candy on the porch and started out and believe me there wasn't any grass grew under his feet. He didn't keep to the road, he went right across country, and came out somewhere on the railroad track and up town that way. He stops in Cuppy Anderson's all out of breath and tells 'em Johnny McLaughlin's been shot. They just gave him the horse laugh.

“I suppose you couldn't get away with that stuff now that they got a cop workin' steady every night. Not unless you went some place 'way out in the country. There was other fellas used to play that trick from time to time—ever hear about when 4 they did it to Dick Bradstreet, and he jumped in the old canal and lost a brand new watch? But I never see anyone get the kick out of it that old Johnny got.

“One night they turned the tables on him. They got a nice, juicy custard pie from Cuppy Anderson, and when John knocked at the door one of the fellas shoved it right in his face. And by God, he was mad. Did you ever notice how them fellas that like to see somebody else get the dirty end of it get madder'n hell when they get it themselves?”

“Another thing I see one time was a fake hangin'. But that wasn't fellas from the mill that did it. Me and some of the rest of them were there, but all we did was watch the proceedin's. It was a bunch from a carnival that was in town. Just about the time the Ku Klux Klan was rainin' raisin' hell around the country.

“This carnival bunch had it in for a couple of their own gang. A man and a woman. So they dressed up in sheets one night and grabbed these two and took 'em up by the Two Mile Bridge, blindfolded, and put ropes around their necks, and pulled on the ropes a little bit.

Library of Congress

Some said they swung 'em off the ground, but that ain't true. They had to stop when the woman fainted. But they made 'em promise to leave the carnival.

“It wasn't the Ku Klux Klan and it wasn't any town fellas, no matter what any one tells you. It was all them lads from the carnival.”