

[William Knox]

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William "Bill" Knox:

"Knifemakers? God bless your soul, kiddo, I was a knifemaker myself, even if I was a Yankee boy. Worked at it off and on for forty two years. Since I was fourteen years old. Started over in Woodbury and worked all over hell, down in Newark, and up in York state and in Bridgeport. I never liked it there though. Company was too big. Remington Company. Wasn't fast enough for 'em. Everything was machinery and speed, and I had it learned the old way, and couldn't get the new ideas through my noodle.

"I'd be workin' at it yet, I guess, if there was anyplace to work. I done everything, kiddo, everything. I was a cutler and a grinder, and I done heftin'. What's that? Why, heftin', was what you might call roundin' and polishin' the handles." (Probably 'hafting'.) "Don't know what they call it now. Probably got some new name for it.

"It was a good trade, and lots of work once. I'd work till I got a promise of a little more money someplace else and then I'd move on. Tow Two -three cents an hour more and I'd move on to a new job. Or sometimes I'd take a dislike to the boss and tell him to go to hell. I quit two-three jobs that way. That was part of the trade, if you learned it from the johnny bulls, the way I did. I mean they'd tell you not to take any lip from the boss, because a good knifemaker could always get another job. And wa's't it the truth? Hell, yes. I worked in this place down't the Bridge a couple of times. And I worked up in Northfield, too. Worked all over hell, kiddo.

"And now look at me. Walkin' around the streets eight hours a day to keep from goin' crazy. What good's it do to know a trade? I 2 kin do buffin' and polishin' too. The other day

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they called me down to the clock shop, and a feller axed me a lot of damn fool questions, and I told him all the red tape he wanted to know, and then he told me to go home and they'd call me if they wanted me. Guess they figgered I was too old, kiddo. Well, that's where they're wrong. Any man ever hired me got a day's work out of me and don't you forget it. Hain't a man livin' can say different.

"I been choppin' wood all winter. Now they hain't no more to chop and I don't know what to do. I met the Selectman today. I told him, I says, 'I kept away from you as long's I could, but by God, I can't do it no longer.' I says, 'I's willin' to work, er do anything you want, but I's gettin' down pretty low, and you'll have to help me some way.' Well, he knows I don't like to bother him if I can help it, and he knows I'll give him a day's work for what he gives me. So he told me he'd fix me up somehow. Said there was goin' to be one of them bug-huntin' jobs open pretty soon. I says, 'I hope so,' I says, 'I kept away from you pretty good, I hain't bothered you in a long time.' I wouldn't have today either, only I happened to meet him on the street. He was pretty good about it, he says 'I know you hain't Bill.' I worked for 'im before you see, and he knows I work. But hell, they don't give you nothin'. They give me four dollars a week for food, last time. Four dollars/ a week, to feed four people. That's a lot, hain't it? And they won't pay over ten dollars house rent for you.

"I git so damn nervous, honest, I don't know what to do, just walkin' around. Feller says to me t'other day, 'Bill, let's go fishin' up to Northfield pond,' he says, 'early tomorrow mornin'.' I was to meet him at three o'clock. Well, I got so fidgety, I couldn't sleep.

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Got up and dressed and was up there at midnight. And then, by God, I fished all night for two lousy little bullheads. They wa's't bitin'. That's the kind of luck I been havin' lately, kiddo.

"I got a son up in Bantam. Says to me, 'Pop, you can come up and stay with me as long as you're a mind to. But, 'he says, 'I can't take Gemp.' That's my granddaughter. That's

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what we call her, 'Gemp.' She's thirteen years old, and she lives with me. What the hell am I goin' to do with her? She's goin' to school here in Thomaston. A real nice little girl. I wouldn't let her go anywhere she didn't get a good home. I got to cook supper for her now. We always have an early supper, about five o'clock, and then if there's anything in the house to eat, we have a snack before bedtime.

"My wife, she hain't livin' with me any more. Stays down with her sister on River Street, and swears she won't come back. I can't even speak to her on the street. They won't even let me do that.

"And what with this hangin' around I get nervous as a cat. I went to Doc Wight about it, I couldn't sleep and couldn't eat very good. And Doc shined a flashlight in my eyes, and then he said, 'Bill, you always was crazy, and your trouble is you're gettin' crazier.' I says, 'doc, I know that.' I says, 'I could've told you that. You have my worries and you'll go crazy too. All I want is something to make me sleep.' So he says. 'All right Bill, I'll see what I can do for you.' So he give me somethin' to make me sleep. I's takin' it now. I's under dope half the time. But I can't say's it makes me sleep very good, kiddo.

"What I need is to do a day's work. That'll make me sleep. Have you heard of any knife companies that're still doin' business in your 4 travels? But, hell, I s'pose I've forgot all I ever knew about it. They say there's one goin' up in Winsted yet. I think it's run by some Eytalians, er somethin'. I s'pose they's think I's too old, like the rest of them. That's where they'd git fooled, though.

"But what're they gonna do if they ever want to start up the knife business again, kiddo? They hain't any knifemakers left. They'll have to go over to England and bring some back, like they did before. All the old ones are dyin' off. I oughta be dead myself, I's overdue, but I's too damn tough. Well, so long, kiddo, see you later."