

I'm Bound Away

By the time ^{it was dark} the sun had set the rain had changed to mist and the mist had dissolved finally into a thick fog so that when the freight train slowed into the yard all of the freight yard lights were hidden behind misty halos. The train came to a slow stop and hesitated for a moment. Then far up the line he could hear the couplers slamming together so he braced himself against the boxcar door as the train reversed itself, and backed out of the yard for a mile or so until he could no longer make out the lights. Trees surrounded the siding, thin black trees which rose up into the low sky. Above the trees, far off to his right the clouds had a strange phosphorescent quality of distant city lights. Again, without warning, the train suddenly squeaked to a stop, a stop which to this professional train rider well schooled in the patterns of rail freight stops meant at least a stay for the night. The boxcar door was open but there was not enough light for him to see back into the car. He bent down and felt through the hay until he touched thick boot leather. He twisted it slightly to get a response. There was a groan and a rustling sound in the hay.

" Hay, "

There was a groan of annoyance at being disturbed.

" Hay, " he said again. " get up. I think this is where you wanted to get off. "

The body suddenly jerked to life. In another instant the man was up on his

feet, looking out of the boxcar door. " Yeh, that's Fort Worth alright. I can smell it. " His voice rasped. He coughed again.

" Well, I guess this is it, " said the other man as he reached his hand out of the darkness. The hand shake was brushed away.

" Not yet kid. Not yet. Let me catche my breath first. " He sat down slowly and let his legs dangle out of the door. His hand was on his chest and he was wheezing, suppressing the coughs that seemed to boil up inside of him. He was having a tough time doing it. " Got to be quiet kid. The yard's crawling with watchman. If they get you here you're in jail for sure, an' it aint fun in the Ft. Worth jail. I know. " He suppressed another cough. The other man watched his whole body contort in the effort.

" Where you goin from here, " said the other man still standing back in the darkness of the boxcar.

" Got a sister. " The attack seemed to get worse. " Not far from here. Husband's got a job and a house. It'll be warm there an I can lick this. " The sick man coughed more violently than ever. He could not keep the attack back though he put his coat sleeve over his mouth to stifle the soughs. " I better get before I get the cops down on our ears. "

" Wait, " the other said. " I don't think you can make it alone. "

" I can make it, kid, " said the sick man, "but you're welcome to come along. " The coughing subsided and he took a cautious breath of relief. " I can promise you at least a meal and a roof over your head. Her husband works. How 'bout it? "

* There was a moment of silence. The other man squatted on his haunches so that his head was even with the sick man's head. He picked up a piece of straw and ran it through his fingers. Far up the railline came the sound of couplers clashing together as another train moved out of the yard.

" How about it, kid, " said the sick man.

" Raw

feet, looking out of the boxcar door.

" Yeh, that's Fort Worth all right. I can smell it, " the voice rasped.

" Well, I guess this is it, " said the other man as he reached his hand out of the darkness. But the handshake wasn't taken.

" Goddamnit, keep your voice down. The yard's usually crawling with watchman. You're in jail for sure if they get you, an' believe me you won't like that Ft. Worth jail. Tere right unfriendly to hobos, us itinerants."

He reached back down into the darkness and pulled up the canvass bag. He grabbed the side of the boxcar door and was about to jump when he changed his mind. " I guess this is goodbye kid, " he said. " I want to wish you luck. Say, I never ask you this, but since we been travelin two days now I got an interest to where you're goin'. "

" Where there's a job and a roof over my head seven days a week. "

" Anything definate. "

" No. "

" Well then let me know when you reach heaven then, kid. " The hand reached back into the darkness and touched his. It was wet from the perspiration and the fever that he had had when they first met. Then the hand was quickly pulled back again and the man grasped the door and prepared to jump. He heard the sound of feet hitting the granite bed rocks and scurrying off on the tracks behind him.