

CHAPTER 9

NO SPARROW FALLS

It Just So Happened that Uncle Gene was the runt of the family. I heard this said by more than one Calloley and never lovingly and/or teasingly. In fact, all of his sisters and brothers were disparaging of Eugene's talents and lack of them. He was the last boy to be born, the smallest of the siblings, and he never left home. He was a liar, a fabricator, a braggart. And of all of Thode and Eva's offspring, he was the most fun to be around.

THE HORSELESS CARRIAGE. He was a fine automobile mechanic who owned a fine old 1920s Chevrolet, touring model, out back in the garage, that "we" endlessly worked on, building and rebuilding. He would be head down in the engine, or a pair of feet sticking out from underneath, and I would hand him tools as he asked for them. "No, the big wrench." He could, also, swear pretty good. Car repaired, he would crank it up and we would go for a ride.

He always called me "Kid". "Well, Kid, we did a pretty good job today." It was a kind of the Saturday ritual.

SATURDAY NIGHT MADNESS. But there was often more to it than that. Late in the afternoon, maybe as often as once a month in the summer, we would finish up and he would say, "Well, Kid, we did a pretty good job. Think we deserve a `pitcher show?'" Oh, boy, you bet. I'd go home and get cleaned up, and he would get cleaned up and we would crank up that old Chevy and head for Downtown Denver and the string of motion picture houses that lined both sides of Champa Street for about two and a half blocks. We'd walk along looking at the billings, trying to peg just what kind of picture that was. At each theater he would ask, "Well, what do you think?" I was to make the choice. So I would watch him carefully trying to determine which picture he seemed to be most interested in. That's the one I would choose.

After the movie we would go to a nearby pool hall, have a soft drink, and watch them shoot pool.

BLACKSMITH TONGS. Gene was a blacksmith who built carriages. I got to go to his place of work occasionally and there, as in his garage, he was no runt. He was in charge. He could make that white hot metal do his bidding.¹

FIRST BICYCLE. There ain't much in a young fellows life more important than his first bicycle. Uncle Gene saw to it that I got my first bicycle. He didn't buy it new. He built it from parts. But it was a bicycle and it was mine. What do you mean, runt of the family!

¹When building carriages was no longer part of the "modern world," Uncle Gene worked at the bedding company where Grandfather worked; also, at Davis Brothers Drug, where Grandfather worked; and finally at the May Company.

TRAGIC SADNESS. But he did have a problem. A real one. He was alcoholic and suicidal. After I grew up enough to go to college, I came home one day and found my mother and grandmother and Aunt Ethel in a panic. Gene was out in the garage. He had a gun and was threatening to shoot himself or anybody else who came near. Everybody was in a dither. What to do? When I started to go out to the garage, my mother (rather sensibly) tried to stop me. I might get shot. I told her that Uncle Gene might do many strange things, but he would not shoot me. And, of course, he didn't. I went out there. He had the gun in his hand. I said, "Give it to me." He did. I took it and walked back to the house, gave the gun to my aunt and told her to get rid of it.

It was a long time later that he actually did commit suicide. Grandfather had died, and Grandmother. Alcohol really got to him. Money ran out. He chose to leave. He died at 3020 South Lincoln.

MORE THAN A SPARROW. I preached the funeral sermon. He was not leaving without somebody telling them who he really was: The runt who was the only one in the whole family who was really fun to be around. And this time the sermon text was real scripture:

Can you not buy a sparrow for a penny and yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father.²

He is where I am.

²Matthew 10.29, The Jerusalem Bible.