



# CHIEF'S FILE CABINET

Ronny J. Coleman

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## Engine House

Down by the tracks, there's a broken down shack, shattered, a wreck, torn asunder.  
How it got to that state, how it suffered that fate, you probably never pondered or wondered.

Tis shabby at this time, but back in its prime, twas a fire hall aglow with warm lights.  
When it's fire bell went clang, the men lightly sprang, lively their Engine went full flight.

Many a thrill, I witnessed on that hill, often I raced there just to wave!  
Harnessed horses careened, metal rims screamed when the Engine went forward to save.

The rumble of wheels, on bricks had appeal as the clanging of the bell added rhythm.  
Roaring and crashing, smoke stack asking, responding to the latest cataclysm.

Oh, yes, in the past, hearts really beat fast. The steamer! The horses! The clamor!  
I can clearly recall, how beautiful twas all, the courage, excitement and glamour.

Alas and aback, I can never go back to the days of this halcyon glory.  
Nonetheless I can recall what some might call a legend, as myth or a good story.

When this old man had youth, this is the truth, that firehouse was one of the best.  
The crew was all men, on whom you could depend to pass the severest of life's tests.

There was Cap'n Al, who was everyone's pal, as big as a mountain and strong.  
He never seemed sad; he was leader of that rowdy throng

Fingers long and thin, with a lopsided smile for a grin; his chin was tanned and cracked like leather.  
Sparse hair wiry and gray, his eyes had lots to say; the voice was gravely and dry as hot August weather.

Engineer Phil, I can see him there still, was stoic and calm as an oak.  
While Puperman Fred, with his hair bright red, was always the one with a joke.

Two more of the lads, just like their dads, were firefighters clear down to their souls.  
When the alarm rang out, they came out with a shout, spiraling, spinning round the brass poles.

The jokes that you heard, were often absurd, the crew stayed alert and agile.  
The place was always frantic, with their humor and antics; silence was not golden, feelings not fragile.



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Small boys did absurd, always around to absorb the sights and keen odors.  
Horses and leather, fair or foul weather, this was before we had even heard of a "motor."

There was horse sour sweat and hay smells you bet to draw the young lads like flies.  
Sometimes as a joke, the kids would all stoke the Cap'n to tell some of his "lies."

Not bad ones you see, but Cap'n felt free to tell the tallest of tales.  
About horses and kings and other great things including the Prince and Princess of Wales.

The loft was a place, where you buried your face in the sweetest of sweet smelling hay.  
But it was the darkest of sins, to get in the coal bins for you stayed simply filthy the rest of the day.

Coal oil light, was never too bright, but its glow in the window was warm.  
On a chilly cold night, it was always alight beckoning you inside, out of harm.

Excitement? You bet, I'll never forget the raucous and the roar of bedlam,  
That accompanied the bell, when the Cap'n said, "Well, it's time for you kids to go home, scram!"

Rushing outside we'd look back with pride, horses would make ready to dash.  
Horses so fleet, that once in the street, they were gone in only a flash.

Out of a deep sleep they often would leap being wide awake, ready to go.  
As the gonger tapped out, they quickly went about their tasks and their duties just so.

A thousand or more times, they'd answered the chimes; the tapper spelled out its Morse code.  
But the sound of that bell, you would never really tell that tragedy and drama dwelled down the road.

One hot August night, with a moon out so bright, should have been so different than the rest.  
It was Box sixty-six, oh! What a fix, the boys just knew this was their big test.

It could've been a spark, or maybe an arc that created the demon-like flame.  
No matter the reason, seems always the season for flames to grow stronger without shame.

The fire had started out slow, but then the glow of flames began to flicker and flash.  
Growing stronger each moment, the flame was a tyrant, turning possessions into heat, light and ash.

There was no sentinel to give out the signal, so the devil-like fire ran wild and free.  
Flashing to ceiling, amuck with no feeling, no greater power or force will you see.



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With a whisper of a sound, wallpaper turned brown, gases seeped forth like ghosts.  
The level of heat covered the room like a sheet, as item after item began to roast.

With no warning save fate, it was entirely too late, the room exploded like a furnace.  
Like a dragon's breath dealing destruction and death, the fire had a head start in this race.

No one ever knew, who it was that blew the trumpet of warning that summer night.  
No matter anyway, for all you could say was that the fire was ahead, all right.

When the quick hitches fell, the Cap'n could tell, his wages that night he would earn.  
As the horses pranced, they neighed and they danced, primed, ready to gallop to the burn.

The doors flew back hit the walls with a crack, the team charged forth from the station.  
The sky was a glow, the clouds that were down low, reflected the orange coruscation.

Already a header, the sky turned redder than sunrise on a bright early morn.  
Flames up in the sky, black smoke boiled high, demonic fire, had once again been born.

Growling like thunder the wheels ground under the roadway bricks into dust.  
Out of the stack, the smoke boiled out black, the reins on the team strained, ready to bust.

Glistening with brass, the steamer did crash the silence of the early morning quiet.  
With each piston stroke, the neighbors awoke to the sights and the sounds of a riot.

The pressure dome shone, with its high polished chrome as it rocketed on down the street.  
Prometheus bound, the engines great sound, as a memory was a joy, a real treat!

They crossed the track not once looking back; Engineer Phil had control of his steeds.  
Hooves went ker-thud in the dust, they the creek mud, as thoughts went from dreams to new deeds.

Seconds hissed by as the engine did fly in no matter of time they were there.  
No time to have fear, each moment was dear, as the city was now in their care.

Great pillars of flame spiraled up as it to blame, those had it ignored it in the night.  
Twisting and turning, the building was a burning an awesome, yet beautiful sight.

Huge fist sized sparks; scribing gigantic arcs threatened the rest of the city.  
It would've meant defeat, for the crew in the street for this fire was never going to show any pity.



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Lesser men might've been beat by this hellish heat, but the demon had challenged the wrong crew.

They never slowed down, mouths fixed in a frown, they knew exactly what there was to do.

Technology of that time was not in its prime; the tools that they had were quite bad.

Be that nonetheless, they did their best to show they had courage, each brave lad.

There was horse to flake, couplings to break, to mount a bit and proper fight.

Each man knew the facts; a nozzle and an axe were made ready for use, just right.

The hydrant glowed bright, in the orange hued light, created by the fire's vicious stare.

No time to advent when faced with this scene, you really had to have been there!

Hearts were apace, in this the deadliest race; they pounded in their chests like a hammer.

As if on demand, this Cap'n's commands flowed out with never a stammer.

Ol' Cap could decree, but not foresee this task at hand could not fail.

If he would succeed this fire must accede to the power of an awesome assail.

Horses that lay in the gutter began to quicken and shudder, snaking as if alive under pressure.

Twisting and turning, while the building was still burning, first nozzles ran brown then they turned pure.

Steam valves hissed but pistons never missed a beat while attacking the inferno.

Flames twisted and leaping, ignoring the seeping jets of water its enemy, eternal.

Like cannons on line each nozzle worked fine, but the inferno simply refused to go out.

Despite the inferno of heat, the fire had to retreat when faced with such courage and clout.

Stoking the box for more heat, the pistons kept beat, you could hear the rumble of its power.

The flywheel spun round making humming sounds, the beautiful old lady was in her finest hour.

Other streams were in the air, playing on the fire's lair, trying to make the monster fall back.

Father and son, each and everyone, they worked with never a slack.

Their muscles did strain, till they felt pain, but no one shirked from his task.

Coast soaked wet, bodies were covered in sweat, and no more of them could you ask.

Instead of growing weaker, becoming even meeker, the crackling of flames became a roar.

To the wonder of folks, the column of smoke wiped out sky and moon in its soar.



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Flames are not kind, conflagration not benign and unwilling to accept the smallest of blunder.

Cap'n Al chose to move forward his hose into that cauldron of mystery and wonder.

Ignoring the pain, each man continued to strain under the stress of danger and his gear.

Moving real slow, keeping down low, the nozzles they moved dangerously near.

Advance was in haste, as the fire laid waste, this building weakened and crumbled.  
As the biggest beams burned, the inside walls turned, bricks began to crack and crumble.

The crew made a stand; their duty at hand was to stay between the fire and the city.  
If not checked, this fire would surely wreck homes businesses and lives without pity.

Inspiring fear and bright it was an awesome sight, as the conflagration grew auspicious and strong.  
A loud roar and a crash, then came a big flush, the firefighters knew something was wrong.

The crew gave not an inch, didn't even flinch, hands readjusted the nozzle to the target.  
In the time to blink an eye, four brave men were about to die in a sight that no one could ever forget.

With a split second blur when it did occur, the wall it let go at the top.  
No time to avert, avoid being hurt, the collapse simply could not stop.

The building was rent, a shower was sent of fireworks and flying debris.  
Breaking loose at the fuse it was now a race between life and death don't you see.

The Chief had started to shout, "you men get out", but the words they never did sound.  
As something went "crack" when the wall began to slack in a heartbeat it had cracked to the ground.

Firefighters in trouble there in the rubble; hands tore at the debris without care.  
Fingers were bleeding, but no one was heeding, their buddies were there, under there.

No prophet of doom could've created worse gloom, hope drained out of all their faces.  
As one opening appeared, the worst that was feared was a sight that froze each in their places.

A helmet lay crushed, fear quickly rushed onto the minds of those crowded round.  
A strange silence then fell, all there could tell, that those heroes were dead on the ground.

Morning light fell on that scene from hell as grown men stared out through tears.  
Working much slower, voices went down lower, in respect to their comrades of years.



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As the sun's early rays forecast the new day, they fought and wrestled with debris.  
The language was crude as bricks and beams moved, in effort to make the casualties free.

Their bodies were sprawled just where they crawled when the wall came crashing down.  
Not a whisper was spoken as the lads now broken were gently removed from the ground.

Laid out on the lawn in the light of the dawn, the men were covered and hidden.  
In a career that is fraught with chances to be caught, sacrifice is never forbidden.

Late morning sun, when the battle was won.