

Chapter 10

Lom and the Bomb or A Tosspot's History of Hanford

Written by Charles Wendy in 1944 for a Christmas Party, I believe. Being a partial reconstruction of a manuscript found in a gutter on Falley Street. The present version is far from complete, since parts of the original were totally illegible, and great holes were eaten in the script, as if it had been splattered with some highly corrosive liquid.

It was back in the roaring Forties, that me and a guy named Lom
Went out to the Hanford desert and built an atom bomb.

Back of a door on the old Sixth Floor, we hatched a mighty scheme
With a bunch of guys quite savvy and wise - a remarkable potent team.

There were Johnnie the Genie and Roger and Greenie - and also on the mission,
Were Dale and Paul, and Tom and Milt Wahl, the experts on atom fission.

We were sure we could bust 'em, and it was our custom that every day at noon
We saluted the sun with a shot of rum in an Orange Street saloon.

And so the clan foregathered at the sign of the TNX
A gang of moral, spiritual, physical, mental, and nervous wrecks.

Westward by rail we blazed our trail from the haunts of the Mystic Brothers
And in our track, by horse and hack, came ninety thousand others.

The Southern cars contained no bars - this notably hampered our style-
The food they had was incredibly bad - it poisoned us most of the while.

Of all that crew, a very few remained serene and merry
Like Old Marse George, who brought a large box lunch and a quart of sherry.

By the moonshine mills of the Tennessee hills, we lingered for awhile
To drink a little mountain dew and build a little pile.

Near the muddy stench of a turkey ranch, of all unlikely places,
Where bottles were open and English was spoken, stood Charley West's oasis.

Now Charley West was of the best - folks came from far and near
With bottles full, to shoot the bull and sample Charley's cheer.

And there you'd meet with Ira and Pete, and there you'd quench your thirst
By filling your mug from the sizable jug provided by Willie Hirst.

We invaded the Windy City, where we sped from bar to bar -
Raising hell from the L and L to 606 and the Yar;

And once in awhile, to change our style and exercise the bean
We'd talk of piles with Johnny Miles, or chatter with Eugene.

By stage and train, and pony and plane, we beat our way to the West
To the shifting sand of a desert land, where we ended our long, long quest.

'Twas a land of sage, where young men age and everyone goes to pot
Not because of the blazing sun, but because of the Hanford rot.

The sun beat down on Hanford town, and the salamanders fried
The sky was an open furnace door, and the coyotes gasped and died.

The red-hot dust made a hard-baked crust that choked your craw and ticker
And you hankered much for the cooling touch of a shot of raw red likker.

You filled your mug with a hearty slug of Waterfill and Frazier
And swore, by God, that you now were odd, and rapidly growing crazier.

And that was the land where we went with a band as wild as you'll ever meet
And made our home where the coyotes roam, in a rattlesnake's retreat.

There was Calvin of the Kidder clan, who tamed the mighty river
But the stuff so rank that he poured in his tank, at last ate out his liver;

And his sidekick Dave, a bucko brave and a rollicking engineer
Whose pipes would corrode in this dismal abode because of the Western beer.

A remarkably bibulous baritone, who went by the name of Jones
Developed a knack, when thoroughly swacked, for singing on telephones.

And a man for Martinis, who wanted 'em dry and would frequently complain
That you didn't put in sufficient gin was redoubtable Willard Crane.

There were lots of these joes - every one on his toes, each one of them destined for hell
To become horned and tailed, and only bewailed by the barkeeps who knew them so
well.

It was not a surprise that these were the guys who made that fearful bomb,
And the drinkinest sot in the Hell-bent lot was the beggar we knew as Lom.

An engineer without a peer, he was nevertheless accursed
By a dread of the water with which he oughter indulge his insatiable thirst.

In a rumbling bass or a piccolo pitch, he could sing like a skyful of birds;
But his memory rotted - unless he was potted, he never remembered the words.

When feeling quite mellow, he'd bellow the ballad of Abdullar Bulbul Ameer;
When he sent Nancy Brown from the hills to the town, he drew many and many a tear.

But he never could help that hair-raising yelp, like a coyote whose throat has been cut,
That infamous shout that he always gave out in that song with the chorus of "What?"

Much likker was spilt while the plant was built - we were having plenty of fun
Till that fatal day when we found that k was bound to be less than one!

A fabulous break - a horrendous mistake - it was spotted by Johnnie the Genie
And bringing the news, like sputtering fuze, came greying, hawk-nosed Geenie.

Said he, "this day there's hell to pay - those blasted MetLab jerks
Got out of joint with a decimal point, and bollixed up the works!"

Then up rose Lom. Said he, "This bomb we'll make a damn sight quicker
With a single vessel, some functions of Bessel, and proper amounts of likker."

To his buddy, Fred, he turned and said, "But the Holy RPG
If the likker we lap won't flatten the Jap, it'll be a surprise to me!"

You get Johnnie Wheeler, and I'll get Kelly Woods.
'If my hunch is right, by tomorrow night we'll deliver the bloomin' goods.!

"Get me your biggest kettle, and get me a good long pole -
You can damn well guess that to stir this mess I gotta have Elton Cole.

And one more thing that's bound to sting - I don't like it a bit myself -
But get me every bottle off every likker shelf."

They raided George Struthers, and hundreds of others, who had the stuff they'd want;
And they left, when they went, a sizable dent in the bourbon of Jim duPont.

They gave Johnny Torrey a cock-and-bull story, and carted away his rye;
They swiped from Burt Faris his absinthe from Paris, and never batted an eye.

They got rather rough when they snaggled the stuff of the Lehman lad named Paul
It made his heart sink to be minus his drink, and he wept when they took it all.

When they swiped his Scotch, there was carved a notch in the pistol of Walker Sloan;
When they raided Hood, it was understood that the transfer was merely a loan.

They told Marshall Acken his bottles were crackin' - they'd take 'em away for repairs;
Charley Gross was just dandy - they snaffled his brandy, with him snoring soundly
upstairs.

And along toward dawn, they awoke Frank Vaughn, and got him out of bed
And took his case of Cognac, and the last of his Dago Red.

To the canyon that morn, they carted this corn, all hic-coughing and beery
To the place where sat an enormous vat in charge of Apple and Perry.

And Lombard swore, "There's one thing more we need to make it go -
It's that Triple Sec that left me a wreck at the house of Osterich!"

Through all the day, the logbooks say, they poured the stuff in the kettle
And that devil's brew did simmer and stew as it chewed away at the metal.

And Lombard stood, and conferred with Hood, and called for still more likker -
With a fiendish leer, he poured in beer - to detonate it quicker.

Of a sudden there rose to my horrified nose an odor straight from Hell-
The monstrous stench made each man blanch, and several staggered and fell.

The odor was bad - but it showed that we had a product completely new;
And Lom took a sniff - just a delicate whiff - and he said, "We'll name it PU!"

The rest of the fellows wandered around in various stages of coma;
They were out on their feet - there was nothing could beat the wallop of such an aroma.

And after a bit, even Lom would admit the potion was horribly heady -
He spat his chew in the hellish brew and said, "By gad, she's ready!"

You've heard the yarn of that August morn, 'way back in '45
When the first one fell, and blew to Hell that Hiroshima dive.

In Richland the air was full of despair - the likker supply was shot
For every single bottle had gone to the Pu pot.

'Twas Willie May who saved the day - he siphoned off the dregs
And brought them down to Richland town in several stainless kegs.

We greeted Bill and this awful swill with howls and yelps of glee-
It was long enough since I'd seen the stuff that it tasted good to me.

As quick as a wink, as you'd jolly well think, he was mobbed by a drooling gang.
Every renegade jerk went completely berserk, and they whooped and they howled and they sang.

The things that they mumbled were maudlin and jumbled – they fairly were frantic with joy;
And what blew the fuze was the Red Onion blues, as played by that Hageman boy.

To finish the job, this Hell-bent mob got most downright unChristianly tight.
They were singing the Mackey anthem when I went out like a light.

So I don't recall the end of it all; but this is what I'm told;
The last to stand with a drink in his hand was Lombard, the brave and the bold.

I attach some notes that Dad had penciled in the margin on a version of this manuscript,
plus a couple obvious ones from me. But he omitted many details and I hope others can fill in details. For example, what is the meaning of k being less than one?

Lom -- Lombard Squires
Tennessee hills -- Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Windy City -- Chicago

Eugene -- Eugene Wigner
Hanford -- Hanford, Washington
PU -- plutonium
Richland -- Richland, Washington