

Dr. Lucky and Miss Belle Teagarden

by [Paul H. Yarbrough](#) (November 2023)



Bright Light at Russell's Corners, George Ault, 1946

This is a very old story. But like most stories, they ain't really *stories* unless they're *old*. Otherwise, they're news. And I'm telling it from memory as there ain't no well-documented bibliography gathering dust out there in some dungeon of a library or newspaper. Except for maybe some graffiti encrypted on the bathroom wall out behind my general

food and grain store, what I'm telling is probably going to be the only record of the way it transpired—this particular chronicle of life's fortune.

Dr. Lucky, real name Aaron Loukstein, got the name Lucky for a couple of reasons. First, he had run away from an orphanage in St. Louis when he was 15, just before we got into a war with the Germans the first time. He caught a barge down the river to Greenville, Mississippi, where he got caught stealing his supper one night, and came within a whisker of going to jail. Now, that wasn't particularly lucky. The lucky thing was a man in Greenville took him in as his own—pulling a young Jewish boy in from the diaspora made God smile, that particular man supposed.

The man, Ezra Miller, a man of some wealth, being a farmer, banker and a political chestnut, and, a direct descendant of Judah Benjamin, first Jewish cabinet secretary appointed by a president—Jefferson Davis. He also happened to be the judge whom the boy came before in court. He saw the boy as an intelligent sort, so he took him in, believing in second chances, and not only sent him through college, but sent him through medical school at Ole Miss. The second reason for the nickname being his name sort of morphed, as they say, into a *nickname* vocabulary with such smoothness—Loukstein—Lucky.

Dr. Lucky had wanted to marry his high school sweetheart, Jennifer Sklar, after he finished college and medical school, and then return to Greenville to be a doctor. And, as the roots of youthful love are strong, they are sometimes shallow in the beginning; so, when Jennifer went off to Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans, the tie-line soon broke and, with it, Dr. Lucky's heart. And also, Jennifer's momma and daddy had been happy she had found a nice, Jewish boy, and one with such good ties to a fine man such as the well-known Ezra Miller and of course the lineage of Judah Benjamin.

But a good college education a long way from home put their

daughter's thoughts for Aaron Loukstein on the *forget* side of the ledger for a while. And when momma and daddy were killed in an automobile wreck her senior year, she never returned. Aaron Loukstein's marriage plans also had drifted off of life's timeline. The ledger book had slammed shut—leaving him with a broken heart; into dust shattered, and scattered.

He settled down close to the river in a small town down the river in Warren County, Magnolia City, and set up as the only doctor in town, not far from my store. He always had kind of like a dream of building a clinic up in Isaquena county, about as poor a county as one could find, anywhere. There wasn't a single doctor in that county, so most of the new babies got *mid-wifed* into life; and there was dang near a plague of hookworms going around such that they could've been a cash crop.

The big depression had made money hard to come by even for doctors, so getting a clinic built looked a bit bleak. Dr. Lucky resigned himself to doctoring in a small town, allowing his own *wound to time*-heal as he chased hookworm plagues and delivered babies. He was the only doctor "in town."

One day a nice group of my store clientele all were setting around the store cracker barrel exchanging philosophical thoughts, and drinking R.C. Colas and such. Since no ladies were present, an occasional belch struck mightily into the philosophy-thinking and paused it.

"Burp!"

"Nice one, Buck."

"Burp ... thank you, Lester."

It was in the middle of one of those belch-pauses that a stranger, who might've come out of one of them jungle picture

shows, considering his attire, entered and set the bell at the top of the door a ringin'. *Ring, ring, ring.*

"Hello." The stranger spoke as if he had just walked onstage into a Tennessee Williams play. "My name's Robichaux. Poissan Robichaux. I understand you're Dr. Lucky? Am I correct?"

Dr. Lucky had just walked in a couple of minutes before to pick up a large supply of aspirin I had ordered for him. He turned his head toward the stranger, as if expecting this Robichaux fellow to reveal some pain or ailment.

"Well, that's a name everybody calls me by. Kinda like my real name now, I suppose." He turned away from the cracker barrel and took a look with what them writer-types might call a *reflexive discernment*—something a fellow like Faulkner would say—at the stranger: a thin man, wearing khaki trousers, a plaid shirt, an old crumpled Stetson and an eye patch over one eye. "And who might you be? Are you sick?" His disheveled appearance and mono-eye-look certainly would catch a medical man's *draw*, as well as his *concern*.

"Not that I know of, but I'd like to make you a proposition, Dr. Lucky. And it just might be *lucky* for both of us."

And, of course, everyone in the store turned to see this visitor "Robichaux." It had been a long time since any of them had seen a Cajun in Warren County; and definitely none had seen a one-eyed one.

Everyone paused at drinkin' their Royal Crown Colas and Orange Crushes and stared. It wasn't Robichaux's appearance but his Cajun talkin' that really got 'em I suppose. Sorta a twitchy way of talkin' English.

Robichaux, with one sharp eye as a fixated line of sight became aware of the spotlight that he found himself in, and since he wanted to keep his business with the doctor in great confidence, he took him by the elbow and escorted him outside

to the porch steps. All bottles required a two-cent refund if you left with them, so the crowd remained inside. I didn't allow them to drink sodas out on the porch without the two cents on account of a couple of fellows who would seize the opportunity to slip off with the bottle and come back later and try and sell it to me without having paid me for it in the first place. But back to the doctor and stranger.

"Dr. Lucky, I am a geologist."

"Well, I suppose geologists need medical help every now and then," he said. Though he treated all comers the same—even Ned Hightower who hadn't hit a lick since he got off the county farm for stealing chickens—and he did wonder why the one-eyed stranger had mentioned his profession—by the way, Ned was one of them that had to be watched for his bottle deposit reclaim.

"No, no. Like I said, I ain't sick. I want to find oil. And I have a good idea on a spot where we can drill. And it's not so far from here, if you'll allow me to speak to you on the subject."

Dr. Lucky took out his pretty-much broke-in briar pipe and struck a match on the porch post. A strong puff backed up and the smoke in his eyes caused him to squint a bit. He hadn't seemed to pay much attention to the oil comment. "What happened to your eye?" Professional curiosity more than likely I'd suspect. Like a race car mechanic wondering what caused a guy's tire to blow out.

"Well I was out on a well down in Acadia Parish when we drilled into a high-pressured zone and the whole damn thing blew out. Fortunate I didn't get killed. I also lost two toes; but as long as I keep my shoes on you can't tell. That's 'cause I learned how to limp pretty straight."

Led by the nosiest of my customers, a fellow who about half-assed worked in the cotton gin, Pug Twitchell, three or four of the patrons in the store had moved to the door, inching

their way into the doorway without spilling outside, their necks craned, trying to hear. A curious time for them; a stranger and a strange-looking-talking one at that, from a far land, and him a'speakin' about things blowing up and toes getting severed and all.

"I ain't never even got one of them walkin' canes," Robichaux said. Don't need it—except maybe to whack a Yankee once in a while."

A couple of onlookers glanced at an old man who had been on the porch sitting in a straight-back chair, whittling with his pocket knife. He paused for a second in his whittling exercise to spit tobacco juice. I allowed him as something of a venerable old patriarch of my general food and grain store, though he didn't have an official title—I tried to discourage titles—just so nobody got too uppity. But he was there, as usual, whittlin' and spittin'.

The *patrons* thought maybe the old man had absorbed something of the doctor's and geologist's private conversation through, perhaps, some sort of acoustical osmosis. And, it seemed to be the general opinion that this old whittling man could read lips as every now and then he revealed things he couldn't have *heard* over the years. However, if he had deciphered anything he kept it to himself today; didn't even wink. Just kept whittling and spitting. Everybody finally went back to the cracker barrel, giving up for the moment.

Dr. Lucky took a small slow drag on his pipe, lifted his head a bit and exhaled, the smoke remained almost stationary the air being hot and still. "Anybody get killed in that explosion?"

"Just the Tool Pusher—but nobody liked him much anyhow."

"So, Mr. Robichaux, how might I help you find oil, *not far from here?*" Dr. Lucky's interest in finding oil appeared to have sharpened.

"Well, I believe I have already found it, technically, but it takes money to get it."

Another drag; another exhalation. More stationary smoke. "Well, I don't have a lot of money. I started my practice about the time the crash hit hardest. Mostly, if I got paid at all, I got paid in chickens or interests in cotton sales; sometimes pecans. My cash is pretty limited. But that aside, where'd you learn your geology trade?"

"Sir, I went to Tulane, the finest higher learning school in the South."

"Really?" Dr. Lucky didn't seem impressed, having himself attended the University of Mississippi. The patriarch sent a specially arcing brown missile a-flight, a reflex to his attentiveness. "But why come to me? There are plenty of gamblers over in Vicksburg, I can assure you. And it seems to me you want a gambler not a man of medicine."

Mr. Robichaux pulled Dr. Lucky by the arm a bit farther from the porch, trying to distance a bit more the *earshot range*. "That's quite true doctor, but I can *assure* you that most dice men and poker players will cheat you if they get the chance. They're like them Yankee sympathizers over in Jones County. Renegades all. Them sons-of-bitches would cheat their own grandma."

"Well, Sir, as I said, my funds are probably not such that I can finance any oil wells deals. How much would it cost?" He scratched his ear with the tip of his pipe.

"Well, I expect the lease will cost me about six hundred dollars. If I can get it."

"Lot of money," Dr. Lucky replied. "But not that much it seems to me. For the right interest, I might come up with six hundred dollars. That is, if I understand your geological elucidation."

"Well, that's just about a dollar an acre for the lease. It's a bit more to drill."

"How much more?"

"About fifteen thousand."

Dr. Lucky bolted like an unbroke quarter-horse! "Good heavens man! You don't want me. You want Santa Claus."

"Yessir. But, you see, I propose to *give* you the six hundred dollars. Actually, my partner is gonna pay for the lease and the drilling. She's a lady down in New Orleans by the name of Miss Belle Teagarden."

"Give me \$600.00?" Dr. Lucky took his pipe from his lips. "A Miss Belle Teagarden is gonna give me \$600.00?"

The patriarch spit at a dragon fly buzzing about, and missed. He kept whittling. The tobacco juice had landed in the dust.

Now it is truthful to say that Dr. Lucky's adopted father had been somewhat prosperous before the crash, but by that time Dr. Lucky had already finished medical school. However, the crash found the judge, Greenville farmer and banker destitute and ill, and most of his political connections had slid into the ditch. His old farm down in Isaquena County was about all he had to leave Dr. Lucky before he died. But, Ezra Miller had always claimed that property to be special. That's what he had said.

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Poissan Robichaux, supposedly, had stumbled on the most remarkable find of his career. In Isaquena County, he had done what geologists call subsurface mapping. Now this is a procedure whereby they look at surface features, samples from

old wells and even old log records of other wells drilled in the same or similar areas. They cobble together all this stuff and draw a map of what the subsurface, below ground, would look like if you could see it on top of the ground. And usually what they want to imagine is a big hill, or anticlines, as they call them, because that's where most oil will settle, or be trapped as they call it. And, if you can believe it, his big hill had a prediction of ten million barrels of oil underneath it.

Mr. Robichaux's landman, a fine gentleman from Sunflower County, whose name is unimportant, though he wore red suspenders and smoked cheap cigars, in case you ever saw him, had checked all the courthouse records and confirmed what the Tulane Cajun already knew: that Aaron Loukstein, heir of Ezra Miller, appeared of record as sole owner in fee simple of the 600 acres that *certainly* covered up ten million barrels. Dr. Lucky would get \$600.00 for leasing and one eighth of the royalty of the oil produced.

The boys had finished their R.C.s and so forth and had gathered around the patriarch in great anticipation. They had noticed his reaction to the last comments between the doctor and the geologist. And they knew he had broken the readin'-lips-distance code. "What'd they say? What'd they say?" sounding something like a small church choir chiming away on a refrain of prayer.

"Well apparently that Cajun fellow, got some kinda deal going with Miss Belle Teagarden, of New Orleans, Louisiana." He turned his head and spit for distance, hitting a dandelion and scattering the seeds like a little flower bomb. The patrons looked at one another, each, not desirous of revealing more ignorance or being the first to say: *Who is she?*

Finally, the patriarch, age cultivating impatience, not to

mention most of the boys had always been a bit local anyway, said: "Belle Teagarden runs the *biggest* whorehouse in New Orleans!"

Pug, who had slipped past me without putting up his two cents for his bottle, took a big pull on his Orange Crush. "And you mean she's gonna be gittin' an oil well drilled around here?" He wiped some sweat from his forehead with his sleeve, and took another pull. "The *biggest one*, you say? My goodness." He took another big pull on his Orange Crush.

"Hell, she's already made more money than a Yankee banker can steal!" the patriarch raised his voice—quite unusual for him.

"Maybe the doctor and this Mr. Robichaux are going to make her some honest money. Maybe she's thinking about retirement," somebody mumbled from the back.

"Maybe she's gonna move up here," Pug said. "The biggest one," he said again. He drained the Orange Crush.

"Well, she ain't bringing her hired hands, Mr. Pug Twitchell," someone in the back barked. They all laughed. "And, anyhow, your wife won't even let you listen to Stella Dallas. Fraid it'll corrupt you." Great raucous laughter ensued and echoed down the street.

Well, only two or three days after receiving a telegram from Mr. Robichaux, Miss Belle Teagarden came driving up to Magnolia Mississippi in her 1937 red Pierce Arrow convertible sedan with her colored driver as spiffy-dressed as Louis Armstrong. Matter of fact some of the patrons thought it certainly to be Louis, at first, from the pictures they'd seen of him. The car itself had a brand-new look and even had one of them little silver-looking hood ornaments of a necked cupid, kind of leaning forward with his little butt sparkling in the sunshine, his bow pulled back with an arrow readied for

flight. Magnolia City had not seen *such*, ever: silver necked cupids and Louis Armstrong look-alikes.

Dr. Lucky and Mr. Robichaux were at the hotel when she drove up; a gorgeous woman, about forty or so. Her white Magnolia dress and light brown hair piled up on her head like a nicely piled roll of hay that, by golly, sparrows could nest in comfortably; her bright, red lipstick and gold earrings steamed up a vision of a Venus de Milo come to Magnolia City.

Indeed, a sight. *Louis* remained by the car door he had opened. I doubt he had ever seen white men get *this* excited, outside a football game, even in New Orleans.

"So, you are Doctor Loukstein? But they call you Dr. Lucky, I understand. May I call you that?" Honey could not have flowed warmer or sweeter from any lips of any of the female species. An angel had landed in Magnolia City, the boys were sure. She glanced at Mr. Robichaux awaiting an introduction, which came a bit tardy.

"Yes Ma'am. I guess I am," Dr. Lucky said. "And I gather you are Miss Belle Teagarden? Mr. Robichaux's told us a lot about you. For some reason, I feel like I've known you most of my life." She smiled. "Says y'all want to drill a well on my farm. Correct?"

"Perhaps," she almost whispered the answer. Even a simple question seemed seductive coming from them smooth, vermillion lips: syrupy, soft. I think in the picture show that's what they call a lady's demure. Boy hidey, did she *demure*.

"Perhaps." He repeated as softly as she. His eyes blinked with what one of them *Life Magazine* story writers would call an *affirmative agreement* with her comment about *most of my life*. I could even hear a quietness it seemed like, even among the boys' talkin' and drinkin' their R.C.s and such.

By this time the patrons had drifted and gathered around and about the hotel to get an eyeful, and to see if they could

overhear any wonderful-type news they could marshal into rumor and tall tale for future cracker barrel gatherings. After all, stores and cracker barrels and collections of fellows were a breeding ground for some of the most grand and wildest stories ever told.

Pug perspired greatly. Miss Teagarden, of course, noticed everyone—though difficult not to notice a town mob; though as her *business* had kept her in the public eye, you might say, stage fright didn't bedevil her. "Well, my word, look at all these precious and handsome looking gentlemen." She pulled a hand fan from her purse and fluttered it in front of her face. She offered a *group* smile. Pug became giddy, then stifled a belch. I thought he might choke.

Dr. Lucky looked around, then gently took Miss Teagarden by the elbow. "Why don't we step inside the hotel out of the heat."

"Good idea. It is awfully hot out here," Pug said. He stepped forward.

"No, no. I meant Miss Teagarden, Mr. Robichaux and me. We have some business to discuss. Just the three of us."

Pug backed up, a hurt look taken all over him, I'd say. I think he was crushed, not having been invited inside. Then Miss Teagarden did something that just about caused Pug to explode. She took his chin in her hand, bent forward and kissed him on the forehead. His eyes seemed like they was spinning just before he dropped like a rock onto the porch step. We would have called an ambulance if there had been one to call. And anyway, the only doctor in town was leading the lady away from him. He leaned his head against the post and smiled, a dreamy smile, a goodbye smile.

The lobby was small but private, since the desk clerk sat

alone—and he being about a clock-tick away from a nap, himself. The old ceiling fan knocked itself into a spin for about all it could muster, but it did cast a better breeze than outside offered, and of course inside it was shady anyway. The lease and oil dealing began.

“Well, now if it’s okay to ask, how long have you two known each other?” Dr. Lucky asked.

Miss Teagarden smiled. Mr. Robichaux looked down at his shoes—one at a time—since he only had the one eye. Finally, after a pause that left a silence broken only by the clerk’s snoring and the fan squeaking, Miss Teagarden said. “Well, we met shortly after I went into the real estate business.”

“Real estate?”

“Yes. My family left me some money my last year in college, and I invested it in real estate.”

“Well, I’ll say,” Dr. Lucky said.

“Yes. I have an interest in a few *houses*.”

“Yes, of course.”

Now I don’t want to hurry the story along without sufficient detail being laid out, but it’s about necessary now to pull together some of the extended elements that make the story more fully achieved and summarized. And like I said, it’s an old story, therefore each and every conversation I cannot recall by way of every “jot and tittle.” But here it is:

After high school, Poissan Robichaux had gone to Tulane to study the trade of geology. He had also discovered a walk on the wild side during his spare nights and weekends. Therefore, his frequent trips to the alluring French quarter of New Orleans over the next few years had brought him back to the

briar patch of seduction he had found as a youthful academic—supplementing his business, of course. The combination of the two came about as Miss Belle Teagarden and Mr. Robichaux were having French Champagne one night and the subject of her desire to one day sell her *houses* and get into a more respectable business.

And what Poissan passed along to Miss Teagarden this twenty years later was that in all his travels and on-the-ground studies all over the world there existed one spot up in Isaquena County, Mississippi where he would like to see a well drilled because of an ocean of oil to be found. And, the property had been owned by a Mr. Ezra Miller, banker and farmer, from Greenville. Belle fell in love with the prospect.

So now, both Miss Belle Teagarden and Mr. Robichaux were in love with the prospect, and Dr. Lucky's heart pattered to the beat of his *unbuilt* clinic. And one-eighth of millions was still millions. So, he signed the lease.

The patrons of Magnolia City were in love with the whole dang situation, and themselves wanted to invest in the oil well. But even rounding up all the bottles they could for refund money they couldn't come up with more than forty-two dollars among the bunch. Miss Teagarden told them she didn't want any partners anyway. She'd rather just spin the wheel of fortune a hundred percent. She put up the full fifteen thousand dollars.

And spin it she did. The Teagarden/Robichaux Miller #1 was as dry a 3000' well as you've ever seen. If there was ten million barrels under the farm, that well wasn't gonna give up any of it.

The patriarch and the patrons went back to their whittling and store-front watching. Pug told them they had better start trying to stay in good health since the nearest doctor resided 20 miles away in Vicksburg now. The patriarch spit at a

cockroach crawling across the porch, at the suggestion of his having to travel such a distance just to get healed of something.

All of them remained healthier than Mr. Robichaux, however. He had been so in love with another prospect that he had decided to do some hands on with a gambling drilling crew. The upshot was that he fell off the crown block and crashed to the derrick floor. He tore off one of his ears and broke a leg in three places leaving him with an extra limp. Last heard, he had moved to Grand Isle and put what money he had left into a shrimp boat. He said he kept losing too many parts to keep prospecting for oil.

Dr. Lucky got his clinic built up in Isaquena county and moved up there close to Vicksburg into the old farmhouse. Miss Teagarden left New Orleans, *Louis* driving her all the way to Isaquena County in that big 1939 Pierce Arrow.

She had put a big slice of her *real estate* fortune into Dr. Lucky's clinic. She thought a medical clinic would be her new *respectable* business. At least the *nurses* she now paid had a different kind of training.

And she dropped her *stage* name of Belle Teagarden. She went back to Jeniffer Sklar, briefly. Just long enough until she changed it again. She married Dr. Lucky and they became Dr. and Mrs. Aaron Loukstein. He was, indeed, a lucky guy.

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