

**Larry  
McMurtry**

**AND**

**Diana  
Ossana**

# PRETTY BOY FLOYD

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A Novel

SIMON & SCHUSTER

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY TOKYO SINGAPORE



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For  
Livio Albert Aldo Ossana, Sr.  
1924–1993





## COLLABORATORS' NOTE

In 1993 we wrote, for Warner Bros., a screenplay about Charles Arthur "Pretty Boy" Floyd. The screenplay is an austere form; it welcomes no *longeurs*. So while we were writing our screenplay, we both decided that we would like to write at more length about the life (as we imagined it) of Charley Floyd.

We began by talking out, and then writing down, an extensive, detailed outline of the book as we envisioned it. Each day, L.M. wrote a skeletal five pages; then D.O., putting flesh onto bone, made them ten.

The book before you is the result.

LARRY McMURTRY  
DIANA OSSANA



"I knowed Purty Boy Floyd. I knowed his ma. They was good folks. He was full a hell, sure, like a good boy oughta be . . . He done a little bad thing an' they hurt 'im, caught 'im an' hurt him . . . They shot at him like a varmint, then they run him like a coyote, an' him a-snappin', an' a-snarlin', mean as a lobo. An' he was mad. He wasn't no boy or no man no more, he was jus' a walkin' chunk a mean-mad. But the folks that knowed him didn' hurt 'im. He wasn' mad at them. Finally they run him down an' killed 'im. No matter how they say it in the paper how he was bad—that's how it was."

MA JOAD.  
John Steinbeck,  
*The Grapes of Wrath*

If you'll gather round me, children,  
A story I will tell,  
About Pretty Boy Floyd, the outlaw,  
Oklahoma knew him well. . . .

WOODY GUTHRIE,  
"*The Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd*"

He would be thirty years old forever.

MICHAEL WALLIS, biographer,  
*Pretty Boy: The Life and Times  
of Charles Arthur Floyd*



# Book One

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1925-1929



# 1

Bill “the Killer” Miller rubbed his pistol—rubbing it reassured him—as they waited for the armored car to pull up. Charley blew on his hands to warm them. An hour before, he had been at work on the second floor of the Kroger Bakery, catching hot bread trays as they came whirling down the bread chute, twenty-four loaves to the tray. If he had blown on his hands then, it would have been to cool them. Even wearing thick gloves, it was all Charley could do to handle the hot trays.

“Stop rubbin’ that gun, you’re makin’ me nervous,” he said to Billy. “That gun’s ready to shoot. You don’t need to rub it.”

“I guess I know how to treat guns,” Billy said, annoyed that a big hick like Charley Floyd, a country boy with no polish, would have the gall to tell him how to pull off a robbery.

“It’s my gun, remember?” Charley said. “The only reason I’m lettin’ you handle the firearms is because I figure I’m better at



tyin' knots. You keep the guards covered while I hogtie 'em. Then we'll grab the money, and scam."

Billy Miller felt a little rueful. Only the week before, he had been the proud owner of a nickel-plated Colt .38, but he had lost it in a poker game at Mother Ash's boarding house, where he and Charley stayed.

"Wally Ash cheated, the rat-faced little turd," Billy said. "Otherwise, I'd be carryin' my own weapon. I should plug the son-of-a-bitch."

"I wouldn't do that if I was you," Charley said. "If you shoot Wally, Ma Ash'll throw us out, and the grub's good."

"Who cares? We'll have to leave anyway, once we pull this job," Billy replied.

"Speak for yourself," Charley said. "I might leave, or I might not."

"If you don't, it won't be the grub that's keepin' you," Billy said.

Billy was rubbing the handle of the pistol again. He was too nervous to sit still while they waited for the armored car with the Kroger payroll in it. The Mississippi was only a few miles east, but it was so foggy that morning, Billy couldn't have seen the water if he'd been standing on the Eads Bridge.

"I might leave, and I might not," Charley said again, wondering if he ought to put the headlights on. Ahead, across Chouteau Avenue, were the train yards. Now and then, he could hear a train whistle, but he couldn't see the yards, much less downtown St. Louis a mile away to the north. In fact, he couldn't see past the front of the car—it occurred to him that if the armored car happened to stop behind them instead of in front of them, the guards would be inside with the payroll before he and Billy even knew they were there.

"You think you're gonna get in Beulah Baird's britches, that's why you don't want to vamoose," Billy said, smugly. "Don't give me that bull about the grub."

"Aw, applesauce," Charley said. "I'm a married man. It's Beulah's hard luck that Ruby saw me first."

He grinned when he said it, to show Billy that he was mostly joshing. Bragging about girls while waiting to pull a robbery