

Illustrated by Carl Gfroerer

A Good Citizen

By JOHN BLUNT



ANDREW GREEN heard his sentence with scant attention. His mind was of the slow type that is capable of centering only upon one thing at a time; and just then his thoughts were not that of court of justice at whose bar, for the first time in his life, he stood prisoner.

Something the judge said concerning five years, with a reference to leniency for a first offense, he realized vaguely was the point of this oration to which he was compelled, risen on his feet, to listen. Five years? And "good behavior"—if he remembered the term rightly—would cut that down to but little more than three. It was going to be easy, just as he had thought.

Andrew Green had no kick coming—so he felt, in his plodding way. A trial by his peers had found him guilty; now he was being "sent up," to spend approximately one-twelfth of his natural life under lock and key.

This was what he had expected from the instant the hand of the policeman dropped on his shoulder, arresting him in the act of what afterward was spoken of as "burglarious entrance." Yet he had committed no crime, as he saw it.

A man owed him money. An accumulated debt, that had grown week by week till it amounted to quite a sum. He had worked for it, wanted it, and when he demanded payment it was refused. Always with excuses, but they were proven lies.

For one day the man—his employer—without warning had closed the doors of his business, declaring himself bankrupt. It was just a trick to cheat all his creditors, this apparent failure. Soon the man had been found, openly boasting of his cleverness in swindling those he owed.

And so he had money, had he, to pay Andrew Green his back wages? Slowly, as always, Andrew had sat down to think it over. He wanted to be a good citizen; to act within the law.

He had gone to a firm of attorneys to see what could be done. There was nothing he could do—so they told him.

Andrew Green had come back and done some more thinking. Quite thoroughly he had thrashed the matter out. That money was honestly and fairly due him. No two ways about it. When he had satisfied his own mind that he was in the right, Andrew Green was ready to act.

He had gone straight to the best's home and taken what was his by force. That was his way of getting the justice for himself that had been denied him. But—

He was caught. That ended it, so far as Andrew Green was concerned. He knew how his rash move must look in the eyes of the power to which he had appealed for help in vain. He had flagrantly outraged the law, and for his offense that cold, austere divinity must punish him.

All right, they could take him away; lock him up. He would pay the penalty. Just then he felt but little interest in the length of his term. And still less in whatever ordeal that imprisonment might hold in store.

The future. That was all he was thinking of. The world he would have to face after he had settled his debt. What was it going to be like when he came out?

Back in his brain, dimly ranged, were scraps of the things he remembered to have read of ex-convicts who had tried to go straight.

They had a hard time of it, those men, it was rumored. Nobody wanted anything to do with them. They had been in prison. It was an indelible stigma, setting them apart from their fellows—making of them outcasts, pariahs, instead of men fit to associate with.

But he could not let it be. When he had served his time, no "done his bit" was the more correct technical phrase. He must come out into the world without skulking, just as he had gone from it. He could not afford to be classed as a hardened criminal, stigmatized for that reason. He would be hunting a job some three years hence, needing work badly. It was quite likely.

Yet, if he could just make everybody see that he was an honest man who in trying to get the rights which were denied him had been unfortunate enough to make the blunder of being caught—he must make them see it. There had to be a way. It was up to him to think it out.

All through the long railroad journey that followed within the hour, sitting in the stuffy day coach beside the deputy sheriff to whose wrist he was handcuffed by six inches of steel, Andrew Green kept his slow mind working to plot out a course toward his sole end.

"Seems to be all right for McClintock's shop," he told the guard. "They're short-handed there, I hear. Have him put to work."

No. 1106 was led away. The room to which he was taken was small, low-ceiled and filled with many men, clad as was he, at work before a number of bare, oblong tables. The air in this "shop" reeked with a familiar acrid odor.

A thick-set guard with an undershot jaw, relieving the other keeper of his charge, escorted the latest prisoner to a vacant chair at one of these tables and gruffly bade him get busy.

No. 1106 looked down at the men already at this table—no one of whom looked up at him. It seemed they dared not snatch even an instant from the

He broke off so abruptly that his whisper ended in what sounded like a warning hiss.

"Short, eh?" said a gruff voice behind No. 1106. It was the superintendent, and No. 1106 rose to confront him. "Rotten work, too!"

McClintock was pawing through the pile of lumpy, odd-shaped cigars that the new prisoner's bungling fingers had tried to make. Some of them were unrolling even then in the guard's hand.

He looked up at No. 1106 with a queer glint in his small eyes.

"Guess we'll have to drill you some!" No. 1106 met his gaze with anger in his own.

"I want to see the warden," he said shortly.

teen minutes—with the rest of his shop-mates, he was led back to the room with the long tables and the sickening smell of tobacco, and there set to work as on the day before.

He stuck to his task again till the gong rang without complaining. Of course, the cigars he tried to make showed no improvement over his previous efforts. And their number was but slightly less scant at quitting time.

For this McClintock, when he made his tour of inspection among the tables, struck at him with his heavy first a second time. But this was the rankest injustice!

No. 1106 did not go down under the blow as he had before. Instead, he saw it coming, parried, and struck back at his assailant.

It was a glancing blow that just grazed the superintendent's cheek.

But what happened after that No. 1106 remembered only as a wild nightmare. The guard blew his whistle. Other guards poured into the shop.

All of them leaped upon the prisoner and McClintock as they fought between the tables. No. 1106 felt his arms beaten helplessly down. There came a heavy rain of blows upon his unprotected face which bore him, still struggling desperately, to the floor.

A sharp pain in his side, as though from a heavy boot hurled against his ribs, and—after that, suddenly, all the lights had gone out for No. 1106.

He did not leave his cell next day with the rest of the prisoners. He was too bruised and lame to be of much account. But this lay-off, as it turned out, was a lucky thing, after all.

For this day the warden chose to make his peripatetic inspection of the cells—an examination pursued for sanitary reasons.

As No. 1106 saw the officer going past his door along the tier he sprang up, disregarding the protest of his aches, calling loudly after him.

ber he got done in a day established no record for his capacity, still he had brought his required stint up to the average. There could be no kick coming on him as a laborer, anyhow.

But always that sharp, unrelenting watch was kept on him. He would do something yet that would give his watchers their chance.

Or—perhaps that chance might even be made to order.

At the close of one day, as No. 1106 stopped work with the clanging of the big gong, to lean back in his chair to survey the results of his past ten hours of labor as represented by the stack of well-turned-out cigars on the table before him—suddenly he started in surprise.

That stack seemed smaller than it should have been. No mistake about it—it was smaller!

No. 1106, impelled by what impulse he did not know, looked just then toward the heap of cigars in front of his companion on the left. It was twice the size of his own mound.

The hair at the back of his head bristled like a dog's when some unseen menace is near. McClintock was standing behind him. No. 1106 stealthily shifted his feet under the table, then he rose suddenly, to wheel on the guard.

The superintendent of the shop was looking down at the contrasting piles of cigars before No. 1106's place and in front of the other convict. And there was no mistaking the smile on the guard's face as he surveyed those differing piles.

Slow thinking as he was, No. 1106 was still not so stupid that he did not understand what had happened. To make his day's work fall below the required amount, the other prisoners had been stealing from him, surreptitiously but steadily, all day long. Doing it under McClintock's orders, too.

It was a put-up job. Angry No. 1106 took a step forward in the direction of the guard. That was all McClintock was waiting for, apparently. Just this one hint of insubordination. The whistle leaped to his lips. Again there came that short, shrill blast.

In through the door, outside which they had obviously been waiting for just this signal, two additional guards came on the run. They took hold of No. 1106, making him a captive in no time.

McClintock strode up to where he stood between the keepers.

"You'll mutiny again, will you?" growled the superintendent, shoving his face into No. 1106's white, tense countenance. "Well—maybe not, when we're through with you this time!"

This time it started with solitary confinement.

No. 1106 was locked in a remote cell, so small that, by standing in the center of the floor and sweeping out his arms to the full length, he could touch all four walls. It was dark in here, too—a stifling pitch-blackness in which he failed to see his hand when he held it only an inch in front of his face.

Fourteen hours, without food or water, No. 1106 was left in this hole in the ground alone. He became possessed, after a while, with the notion that he was never going to get out, see daylight, breathe free air again. After that, despite the humid atmosphere of the place, he was kept nice and cool in the cold sweat that broke out all over him.

After a while, though, he was released.

His same two captors, accompanied by McClintock, brought him into another cell. This was larger and much lighter, and No. 1106 could make out the furnishings of the room in which he now stood quite clearly.

They consisted, first, of a large, empty barrel, nailed to a sort of platform of boards on the floor by one end, the other tilted toward the ceiling at an angle of 45 degrees by a rope and pulley.

Besides this strange-looking barrel contraption there was also a cask, smelling vilely of brine, in which stood an odd-shaped paddle of leather and a number of plain wooden chairs ranged about the wall—plainly for the accommodation of any audience that might be assembled to witness what was in the habit of going on in this room.

No. 1106 was stripped to the waist and bound to the barrel with his arms hugging it. In this position he found himself unable to move so much as a muscle. Then, while the other two guards retired to the chairs against the wall, McClintock removed the leather paddle from its pickle.

An ingenious weapon, this. Its flanging surface perforated with a number of little open holes, wherever it struck the suction must inevitably draw into these perforations some of the victim's skin.

No. 1106 received three lashes. There may have been more if there were, he did not know it. Mercifully with the third whistling descent of that cruel leather on his bare back he fainted dead away.

When he regained his senses he was back in that ink-black cell from whence he had been taken to the torture chamber adjoining. He was lying on the floor, his jacket tossed over his head and the upper part of his body—like something useless thrown aside, to await carting off.

He moved, and the pain made him scream aloud. The flinty surface of the stone scraping across his raw back brought the icy perspiration jetting from his brow to bathe his drawn, anguished face.

His broad frame shook with the dry sobs that were literally wrung from him by an agony of mind more poignant than any mere bodily pain.

Whipped!

Bad enough to be beaten against odds and yet with his hands free to give some account of himself to adversaries. A man could stand that.

But to be taken, held helpless like a dog, a beast, while—his heavy body heaved with the shudder that passed through it. This was the last straw.

When No. 1106 was able to return to work he had only to look on his face to see that what had been said of him was true. He was a "bad one."

For this reason he was given the confidence of the prisoner in the next cell to his some little time later.

He was an expert safe-cracker doing a trifling bit of twenty years as the only possible solution to a number of puzzling bank lootings which had thrown the upper portion of the state into a veritable

panic something more than three years before.

He was planning an escape. Friends and well-wishers on the outside had succeeded in smuggling in to him a few cunning little tools, and with these he had now sawed through all but one of the bars of his cell door.

He also had hidden under the blanket in his bunk a bunch of skeleton keys. It was going to be a ridiculously simple matter to open any door on that tier once he had contrived to get outside of his own.

Needing help in beating off any interference which might arise when he made his break, the crackman had taken the occupant of the adjoining cell on the other side into his confidence—promised to release him, making the husky prisoner, who would be a "hard nut" to handle, a party to the escape.

As No. 1106 also had a name for being a tough customer, he might come along, too, if he chose. Was he willing to make the try for liberty?

No. 1106 was willing.

At gray dawn, two mornings later, his cell door swung silently open. No. 1106 was ready, and he stepped out into the corridor. He felt the muscles under his jacket swell with this first touch of freedom.

A dim figure rose beside him. It was the safe-blower he recognized. No. 1106 felt something long and heavy pressed into his hand. He looked down.

It was a bar from the cell door of the crackman—already fitting snugly around a bend in the corridor ahead, following another shadowy form in gray.

No. 1106 stepped after. Round that bend in the corridor he came face to face with the same turnkey who had first told the warden he was a desperate character.

No. 1106 swung his iron bar once. The turnkey went down in his tracks without a sound—something like a telescope closing.

Down the dark stone steps No. 1106 lumbered into the ground-floor corridor and along it toward the big door that led to the prison yard outside—now standing open, he saw, with the two prisoners ahead of him just slipping across the threshold.

A keeper was lying on the floor beside the open entrance, his head pillowed on his arm. Asleep, No. 1106 thought. As he came opposite the quiet form he slipped in something with which the adjacent flagging was wet—a brownish pool.

The keeper was not asleep, No. 1106 knew then. He stepped across the body and emerged into the yard.

Straight in his path rose a guard. It was McClintock, already raising the whistle to his lips.

No. 1106 did not curse him. He did not open his mouth, which had again clamped grimly shut.

With one wide sweep of the hand that held the bar he passed on. Behind him the guard, covering his mutilated face with his hands, shrieked once with the sudden pain. No. 1106, not looking back, broke into a loping run.

Across the yard toward the wall where his companions were waiting he pounded. They had already scaled the top when he arrived.

Catching the lowered hands that were reached down toward him, No. 1106 was drawn up, helping himself with his knees along the granite surface till he, too, rested an instant on the parapet.

Over, then, on the other side, the three dropped simultaneously. And off across the spread of open country that separated them from the woods beyond they sped, bent double—running as no one of them had ever run in his life before.

They had gained that wooded cover before the first alarm sounded from the grim stone pile behind them. Out on the still morning air there boomed the warning cannon.

They turned and plunged on through the forest. Suddenly their leader—the crackman—stopped.

"Right here, I guess!"

He was down on his knees. Digging in the underbrush with his hands, he pulled out a long wooden box, covered with zinc against all harm from the weather. Opened, the box disclosed its contents as a number of second-hand suits of clothing, shoes, hats, et cetera, of all sizes.

"Help yourselves!" The safe-blower was tearing off his jacket of gray, and hastily wriggling into one of the coats from the box. "I guess my pals ain't forgot nothin' we need. Work lively, now!"

That night, from a local that piled a small branch of the main railroad, three men descended at the depot of a little upstate town. They were shabbily dressed, but their true, but there was nothing in their nondescript apparel that would attract particular notice.

They went straight to a cheap saloon, inconspicuously located in the village, where, at a peculiar knock from their guide, the door was swiftly opened and as swiftly closed again after they had vanished inside.

All took seats round a little table in the back room. Drinks were ordered and served.

"Well," said one of the trio, a heavily built man with a brutal cast of countenance, lifting his glass with a laugh whose slight trace of nervousness hid nothing of its exultancy—"here we are!"

The crackman leaned forward with his elbows on the table. He gave a quick nod.

"Yes," said he, "and now we're here, why, what's the matter with us getting busy? I've got a job all spotted in this jerkwater burg. The rub bank, you know—it's a pipe, and there may be a thousand apiece in it for us all. We're just the right number."

"You, Jerry, can come along on the inside and help me with the safe. And for lookout—he paused, turning toward the motionless, silent bulk of the third man, who sat slouching far down in his chair. "Why, you'll do, pal. We can count you on in this, can't we? That is—"

—he gave a sarcastic laugh—"that is, unless you're afraid of breakin' the law?"

The motionless one stirred.

"To Hades with the law!" said Andrew Green, but lately No. 1106, leaning forward across the table to join the conversation.

"When do we start?"



Out on the still morning air there boomed the warning cannon.

work over which they bent with a sort of feverish haste.

They were making cigars, the newcomer saw. Their trained fingers appeared fairly to fly at the task. Of course No. 1106 had never made a cigar.

He turned back to the burly guard.

"Why, I don't know how to do this!"

The superintendent of the shop, giving an order to one of the workers at the next table, turned slowly. He looked No. 1106 narrowly in the eyes for a moment or two in silence. Then he knocked him down.

The new prisoner got up, bleeding at the mouth. His hands were opening and closing at his sides, but his eyes held only an expression of blank surprise as he turned, reeling slightly from the dizziness in his head, to look after the guard, who had already turned away.

A sharp tug at the bottom of his jacket pulled him down into that vacant chair at the table. No. 1106 looked half-gazedly around.

"Why—" he began.

"Shut up!" mumbled the convict beside him, his gaze still on his work. "Unless yuh want to have it handed to yuh again. Don't let him catch yuh loafin'. Grab some o' that tobacco an' git busy, like yuh was told!"

Dumbly, without reasoning, No. 1106 did as he was bid. After a while he could make something that was an apology, at least, for a cigar. For the rest of that afternoon, till the gong rang, he worked clumsily, stolidly on. But always with a smoldering fire of indignation glowing hidden within him. He had been struck unfairly!

"Good night fer yours, bo!"

The prisoner in the seat beside him, his own work stopped, nodded at the small heap of misshapen tobacco rolls in front of No. 1106's place.

"Yuh're new here, so I'll tip yuh off," went on the convict in that same guard-like murmur. "This shop, like the broom, the chair, the overall factory an' the rock pile, works under contract. Different foims on the outside buys our labor—see?"

"We gotta toh out so much work ev'ry day. Else his nob, McClintock, ain't goin' to drag away his little rake-off at the end o' the year—the bonus they give him on whatever we toin out over an' above the amount called for in the contract."

"Are yuh hep now? Yuh're s'posed to make so many cigars ev'ry ten hours. Real ones, to, y'understand. Yuh fall below that number, an'—well, yuh'll see, all right, what's goin' to drop you off. Yuh ain't done a full half-day's work here—"

The other shoved him rudely into his place at the end of the line of workmen that now had formed, ready for departure, in the aisle between the tables. The order came to march, and the close-drawn, single file of convicts wound from the shop.

Outside in the corridor, as No. 1106, trailing the procession, swung to the right down the long, narrow hall toward a distant clatter of cutlery on crockery that advertised the whereabouts of the room in which the prisoners were fed, a hand descended upon his shoulder.

"Discipline," said the voice of McClintock behind him.

Two guards, who had been watching the line as it passed, stepped briskly forward and jerked No. 1106 from his place.

But now he felt his wrath giving way to curiosity. What possible punishment could be visited on a man who, in his very first attempt at such work, had failed to produce as much as the seasoned laborers? To discipline anyone for that—it was a joke.

Unresisting, No. 1106 allowed himself to be borne away to his cell, where he was locked up for the night. They were depriving him of his supper. Well, that didn't hurt. He had no appetite; the smell of the tobacco he had been constantly handling for more than four hours had taken away all desire for food.

But when he saw the warden in the morning—

—that guard, McClintock, was a brute. He would prefer charges against him right away—bring about his instant discharge. Such a ruffian wouldn't be tolerated there a day longer when he was shown up. The big bully!

Only—and this thought made No. 1106 pause—from the way that prisoner spoke who had sat beside him at the table in the shop, as though what had happened to him was a regular occurrence, almost as if it were a joke.

But probably all the rest of the prisoners under his charge were too much afraid of him to make the report. Well, No. 1106 was not afraid.

When they opened the door of his cell next morning to lead him out he repeated his demand of the night before that he be taken to the prison's head.

A laugh was his answer. The turnkey who gave it accompanied the mocking guffaw with a push that sent him stumbling, at the peril of his neck, down a steep, dark flight of stone steps to the corridor below.

Here he was buffeted into line with the other prisoners on their way to breakfast. After he had been fed—in fif-

The little pink-and-white gentleman came back. No. 1106 told him his story.

"Aren't you mistaken?" asked the warden, but in the tone of one addressing a fractious child, scared by its own invented terrors. "I am sure nothing like that can happen here!"

"No?" said the new prisoner eagerly. He pressed closer to the bars of the door. A turnkey who had been fidgeting outside with a muttered oath hastened forward. But he was too late to prevent No. 1106 from pulling up his jacket and undershirt, thus exposing to the warden's eyes the great, angry welts that stood out on his flesh in livid ridges.

"That happened here," the prisoner said grimly.

The warden was hesitating, fingering his chin. Plucking his sleeve, the turnkey nodded vindictively toward the man behind the bars.

"Get into a bad mix-up with some of his old pals on the way here," the keeper lied. "He's been givin' us all kinds of trouble since he came. Now he's tryin' to get the guards in wrong, if he can. You don't want to believe all he tells you, cap!"

The warden looked relieved.

"That's straight!" the turnkey nodded quickly, following up his advantage. He looked back at No. 1106 and shook his head. "He's a bad one, he is!"

III.

THAT was the reputation the guards saw was fastened upon him.

Though he settled down from then on, doing his work as he was bid, without remonstrance for the cuffs with which that unskilled labor was received, and offering no further show of resistance to whatever form his rough handling took, nevertheless he was branded and singled out as a "bad one"—only temporarily under control.

His enemies were out to "get" him now, for he had committed the ultimate, unpardonable offense of "squealing."

His every move was watched with catlike vigilance. Some day he would make a slip, do something for which he could be punished with a semblance of a reason; and then—

But the weeks went by, and the months, and still No. 1106 made no slip. He had remembered that he was going to be a "model prisoner." It was harder than he had thought, doing this. Sometimes, smarting under the injustice of his treatment, he wanted to rise up and—

While the cigars which he made were perhaps less perfect than the best man in the shop could turn out, and the num-