

O. HENRY AND AL. JENNINGS

(Continued from last week)
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE.

The deputy reared from me, his face ashen with rage. Like a tortured maniac, I sprang at him. The guards rushed forward, made a leap at me, stopped abruptly, livid and simpering, as though suddenly stricken. If any one of them had touched me I could have torn him to pieces.

I was ready to be killed outright sooner than submit to the horrors of that "punishment cell." I had seen too much of it—the prison demon dragged out of solitary and whipped into bleeding insensibility a couple of times a week—other prisoners given the "water" until their faces were one red, gushing stream and the anguished screams filled the air.

The basement where these things were done was directly under the hospital. I passed above it and I could look down on the way to the transfer office. Three weeks before a man had been beaten to death over that trough. The awful debauchery of that murder had scared into my mind.

convicts in the prison. He was a diamond robber—the cleverest croon in the pen, a man of neat speech and cultured manner. He had stolen some of the most priceless gems in the State. All the detectives in the country had not been able to locate the jewels. The jewelers offered thousands in a reward for the recovery of the diamonds. No third degree, no punishment could force from the man the location of his treasure.

In the prison was an editor, sentenced for the murder of a rival newspaper publisher. This fellow would have crucified his own mother to gain an extra crust for himself. He was always warning his way into favor by snatching on convicts. For some strange reason—perhaps because of their intellectual equality, he and the diamond robber became friends.

One morning the newspapers carried blazing headlines. The stolen diamonds had been found. The robber's secret was out.

Suspense and a surcharged excitement held the prison in a grip. We knew the episode was not closed. We waited.

questions and suppositions across the "grapevine route" from one cell block to another. "Who had told?" "What would happen?"

The answer came in a sudden viciousness that revealed the whole betrayal. The robber sneaked one day down the corridor. He had a bottle in his hand. He had calculated his time. He fell into line just as the editor was going to his cell.

There was a frenzied scream, a moment's scuffle, a loud, prolonged, tormented cry. The editor lay on the corridor floor, one eye burned out and his face puffed and flaming with the carbolic acid that was eating into his flesh. When he came out from the hospital he was half blinded and his face, such a seamy mass of ugly scars, hell itself wouldn't own him. He had won the confidence of the diamond thief and betrayed him.

der it, his arms across the top, was already a mass of blood.

He uttered not the slightest moan. None but a hell hound—and that's what a guard becomes when he has done a thing like this a hundred times—could have laid those heavy paddles, with their edges sharp as razor blades, across that raw and jagged flesh. The robber was actually beaten to the bone. Long after he was unconscious, the merciless flaying went on.

The guards stopped. Half an hour passed. The robber came to. The guards propped him up. The deputy warden glowered over him.

"Now say that you are sorry. Say that you'll obey the rules," he thundered.

Man Strapped Down And Hacked to Death.

The mangled, bleeding victim, who couldn't stand, couldn't speak, raised a gray, death-stricken face. And after a long pause, a husky curse came from his lips.

"... him. I wish I got his other eye."

They strapped him back to the trough and hacked him to death. Broken bones, ragged flesh, they struck into it until it doubled a limp mass into the trough.

That's what "seventy-five" meant in the Ohio penitentiary in 1899.

They called me a man killer. I never murdered a man in my life. I shot quick and clean in self-defense. I would have felt myself a degraded beast to have fouly killed like that.

Robber Beaten to Bone by Guards.

"Seventy-five" was the punishment ordered for the robber for the assault on a fellow prisoner. He was a tall, slender fellow, graceful and muscular—made like a white marble statue.

Prison is not the place for dark dealings. Every convict knew in less than an hour that the robber was to "get his." I walked out from the transfer office and looked down the stairs into the basement. The robber, strapped across the trough, his ankles drawn un-

Conversation was forbidden. The guard might come into the range of my moment. Be careful of the friends you choose. On the outside it may be safe to pick up acquaintances at every siding. I'm glad you were socially inclined at Honduras. The O. P. is a different country. Have no confidants."

It was valuable advice. I would have escaped six months of torture in solitary confinement had I heeded it.

"And when you graduate into the first grade, I'll see what 'pull' can do for you. There may be a chance to have you transferred to the hospital."

That was all. The stealthy foothall of the guard brushed along the corridor. We looked at each other a moment. Porter flipped a pill into my hand and carelessly walked off.

As he left, the bitter isolation of the prison was intensified. The cell walls seemed heaving together, closing me into a black pit. I felt that I would never see Bill Porter again.

Quizzical Answer On Porter's Fall.

He had said nothing of himself. I knew that he was convicted on a charge of embezzlement. I never asked him about it. One day in New York, years later, he alluded to it. He was shaving in his room in the Caledonia hotel. We were talking of old times in the Ohio penitentiary. He was going to tell him of the bank robbery we had pulled in the outlaw days.

"What did you fall for?" I asked. He turned upon me a look of quizzical humor, rubbed the water from his chin and waited a moment before he answered.

"Colonel, I have been expecting that question for six years. I borrowed four from the bank on a tip that cotton would go up. It went down and I got five."

It was but another of his quips. Porter, I believe and all of his friends share the confidence, was innocent of the charge laid against him. He was accused of misappropriating about \$1100 from the First National bank of Austin. He had been railroaded to prison. I believe it.

Blow at Prison to Meet as Convicts.

He was busy, I know. And he would have gone to almost any extremity to avoid asking a favor from the guard. It would have cost him to the quick to win a refusal from these men who were his inferiors. Was he merely waiting his easy opportunity to see me?

I didn't understand Bill Porter then. I learned to know him later. I know now the reason for that long delay. I can appreciate the goading humiliation O. Henry suffered when he stood before my cell acknowledging himself a criminal even as myself. Porter knew my high esteem for him. Always reticent, it was an aching blow to his pride to meet me now, no longer the gentleman, but the fellow convict.

Weeks went by. I didn't see him again. The promise of help and a position in the hospital, where food was good and beds clean, had put a flavor even into prison stew. He counted on Porter. Gradually the confidence waned. I grew bitter with resentment and a cold feeling of abandonment. I had been used ragged by every one. It began to eat in on me that Bill was one with all the other ingrates I had helped.

Many Obstacles To Prison Favor.

I did not know that he was working for me all the while. I did not realize the obstacles that block promotion in a prison. I decided to help myself. I tried to escape. I was caught, sent into solitary for 14 days and then brought down to the hell hole for trial. Dick Price, a convict I had helped,

friend and a life term, tried to save me. While I was sitting on the bench outside the deputy warden's room, Dick went past me.

"You've got a fellow Jennings in solitary for trying to escape. I gave him the saws. He's a new man. Ain't been here long enough to know the ropes. I wised him up to escape. Give me the punishment."

Dick spoke in a loud voice. I knew it was a cue for me. He had not given me the saws. He knew nothing about the escape until a horse thief peached on me.

I was called before the deputy. "How did you like your new home?" he asked with a leer. He meant the "hole" in solitary. "I found where you got the saws."

Dick Price had nothing to do with it.

"I thought so," he said. "Dick's a mighty good boy. Been here a mighty long time. Come clean on this now and I'll make it easy for you."

Threat of Beating Arouses Enmity.

"I can't." "You'll have to." "I can't." "By God, I'll make you." I knew what he meant. It made me desperate with fury.

"By God, you won't." "Here take this fellow and give him seventy-five."

Only a man who has been in hell's mouth—who has seen the blood spurt as men stripped and

chained are beaten until their flesh is torn and broken as a deer, lick knows the indignity and depravity of a prison beating. I saw myself cowed by this screaming brutality. It made a fiend of me.

"You take me, you beat me over that trough—try it, and if I live through it, I'll come back and cut your damn throat!"

(Continued next week.)

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CHAPTER TWENTY.

I did not want to see Bill Porter in convict stripes. Four months we shared the same purse, the same bread, the same glass. We had traveled through South America and Mexico together. Not a word had he said of his past. And here it was torn open for me to see and the secret he had kept so quietly shouted out in his gray prison suit with the black band running down the trousers. The proudest man I have ever known was standing outside a barred door, dispensing quinine and pills to jailbirds.

"Colonel, we have the same tailor, but he does not pride us with the same cut of clothes." The old droll, whimsically drawn out without a chuckle. I looked into the face that would have scorned to show its emotion. It was still touched with grave, impressive hauteur, but the clear eyes, in that moment, seemed filmed and hurt.

"I think it was about the only time in my life I did not feel like talking. Bill was looking at my ill-fitting hand-me-downs. I had received the castoff clothes of some other prisoner. They hung on me like the flapping rags on a scarecrow. The sleeves were rolled up and the trousers tucked back. My shoes were four sizes too large. When I walked, it sounded like the clatter of a horse brigade.

Have No Confidants, Says Bill Porter.

"But you'll soon be promoted to the first rank," Porter said. He had deliberately sought the task of dispensing the pills in order to give me a word of advice.

"Colonel," he spoke quickly,

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