

# O. HENRY AND AL. JENNINGS

(Continued from Last Week)

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Such is the story of Jimmy Valentine as it unfolded itself in the Ohio penitentiary. O. Henry takes the one great episode in that fabled life and with it he wins the tears and the grateful smiles of the nation. In that throbbing silence, when the ex-con opens the safe and the little sister of the girl he loves is saved from suffocation, Jimmy as he might have been, not Jimmy as he was, is before us. Few who have breathed hard in that gripping moment would have denied Dick Price his chance, would have refused him the pardon he earned, would have doled him to his forlorn and lonely death in the prison hospital.

Bill Porter was not the grim artist to paint that harsh picture for the world. He loved a happy ending. He could not even give the exact details of the safe opening. It was too cruel for his winsome fancy.

That was ever Bill's way. He took the facts, but he twisted them as he would. I asked him about it later. In the story he gives the hero a costly set of tools wherewith to open the vault. He does not have him file his nails.

**Tolerance One Of Porter's Traits.**

"Colonel, it chills my teeth to think of that gritting operation," he said. "I prefer the set of tools. I don't like to make my victims suffer. And then, you see, the tools enable Jimmy to make a

present to a friend. That gift illustrates the toleration of the man who has been in prison.

"Jimmy decided to quit the game himself, but he does not expect the whole world to share his fervor of reform. Instead of burying the instruments of his former profession, as your reformed citizen would have done, he straightway sends them to a former pal. I like that my spirit in my character."

"The ordinary man who takes a New Year's resolution immediately sends down censure on the fellow who isn't perched on the wagon with him. Jimmy does no such thing. That's one of the advantages of spending a few vacations in prison. You grow mellow in your judgments."

This soft, golden toleration was one of the gracious traits in Porter's character. It won him friends even though his aloof dignity forbade familiarity. In the "pen" he was universally respected. The meanest cut-throat in the ranges felt honored to serve him.

**"Drag" With Barber Makes Club Sport.**

Porter's "drag" with the prison barber was the subject of raillery at the club. The barber was not a hirsute artist. He seemed to take a mean delight in turning out grotesque, futuristic patterns in headgear. But for Porter the most exquisite precision was observed. His thin, yellow hair was trimmed to a nicety. The kind, easy manner of the man had completely captivated the burly-hearted convict barber.

If it had not been for this hum-

orous, penetrative understanding in Porter, the Recluse club would not have endured a month. He was its equilibrium. Many a violent clash ended in a laugh because of an odd fling Bill Porter would interject into the turmoil.

Men who have been walled off from free contact with their fellows become excessively quarrelsome and "touchy." We were scooped together like children in an over-large family. We had no escape from each other's society.

The isolation of prison life whets antagonism. Men who could travel to the ends of the earth in friendship would, in a sudden raging bitterness, spring like tigers at each other's throat. Even in the happiness of our Sunday dinners these explosives would break out among the members.

**"Soap in Soup" Starts Club Clash.**

It would start with the merest trifle, and all at once there would be fiercely angry taunts—flung from one to the other. In one of these uncalculated eruptions I sent in my resignation to the club.

Billy Ralder had protested that he could taste the soapuds on the dishes. I was the chief dishwasher. I did not like the imputation. I would not have minded Billy's protest, but old man Carnot backed him up with further criticism.

"Most assuredly we can taste the soap," he said. "But worse than that I do not like the garlic. Now, Mr. Jennings, why ran you not pick the odious vegetable out of the roast?"

Carnot was an irascible old epicure. He wanted his napkin folded oblong and his knife and fork laid down in a certain millionaire fashion. He never failed to resent the introduction of the garlic Louisa loved.

Every one at the table took up the issue. They could all taste the soapuds, they said. "Damn pigs, all of you! Take the honor at the dishpan yourselves," I was furious with resentment. I could have hurled the pots and skillets at them. The next Sunday I did not go to the club. I told Billy I was finished with them. Billy had no patience with the sulks and left me in a huff.

**Porter Reconciles Dishwasher Al.**

Porter came over to the post-office and knocked at the door. "Colonel," he said, and there was such understanding indulgence in his tone I felt immediately appeased. "don't you think you better reconsider?"

"You're the very salt of the earth. The club is absolutely flat without your presence. You see, we only agreed with Billy to sustain him. He's a cripple. He can't stand alone."

It was just the sort of pampering to mollify unreasonable hot temper. Porter was always ready to smooth us down. He was always ready to bear our grievances. His own troubles he bore alone.

Whenever he did reveal his thought it was by an accidental out-cropping in a lightsome talk.

He and Louisa used to indulge in long discussions on astronomy and evolution. Porter was facetious, Louisa serious and very scientific. Louisa would be mixing up a gravy or a sauce.

"You're something of a little creator in the culinary line, Louisa," Porter would say. "What do you suppose were the ingredients used in the creation of the world?"

**Porter Talks of Untam'd Tiger.**

"Louisa's attention was instant. He would talk about protoplasm and the gradual accommodation of living organism to environment."

"Tut, tut," Porter would mock. "I hold fast to the Biblical story. What else should men be made of but a handful of mud? The Creator was right, men are but dirt. Take Ira Maralatt, for instance."

A queer, yellowish pallor spread over Bill's face. I knew that the name had slipped from Porter's lips unconsciously.

"Colonel, it is a ghastly thing to see a man degraded into a beast like Maralatt," he said. "Last night they beat him to strips again. I had to go down to the basement to sponge him off. I tell you it would take a floor mop to do the job right—he is such a giant."

It was the first time I had ever heard Porter speak of Maralatt, the prison demon, yet he had perhaps sponged him off two or three times a week. Maralatt was the untamed tiger of the "stir." He was the prison horror. He had attacked and stabbed a dozen guards.

**Terrific Screams Indicate Murder.**

For fourteen years he had been in solitary, practically buried alive in the black hole in the basement without a bed, without blankets, without light.

When the guards would attempt to clean out the cell Ira would spring at them. They would overpower him, beat him and hang him up by the wrists. Still he was unshooked. He kept the prison in incurring spasms of fright.

No one knew who would be his next victim. He was as ferocious as a mad bull.

I had never seen him. Porter's exclamation filled me with curiosity. I went over the next evening to ask him about Maralatt. We were standing in one of the wards just above the punishment cell.

A sudden wild, terrific scream tortured and agonized, split the air. There was a frenzied scuffle, a booming thud, and a guard's voice shrielled out in frantic terror.

Porter's tranquil face quivered. "Maralatt," he whispered. "Murder at last!"

## CHAPTER 32.

The next morning excitement shot like a flash from face to face. A big secret was out. Maralatt had nearly strangled a guard the night before. He was to be moved from his dungeon in solitary to a steel cage built in solid stone at the end of the east corridor.

For months they had been building the cage. It was a revolting thing, made as if to house some ferocious jungle beast. It opened into a niche in the stone about four by eight feet. In the niche Ira was to sleep.

We got the tip from the warden's office. I had been sent on a message across the campus. I came into the alley-like corridor, passing a few guards. A look of riven terror held them staring and silent. Their frightened eyes were fastened on the door that led to the solitary cells.

The door sprang open, and a spectacle to freeze the heart with its terrific and grisly horror was before us. I saw the prison demon. Half-shouldered, gigantic, lurched forward, he towered above the dozen guards like a huge, ferocious gorilla-man. I could see his face. The hair was matted about him the clothing torn in ragged strips.

The guards stood at a distance, pushing him forward with long poles. They stood on either side. The demon could not escape. At the ends of the poles were strong iron hooks, fastened into his flesh and at the guards pushed the hooks jagged into the prisoner's bones. He was compelled to walk.

On his foot was the monstrous Oregon boot. Every step must have been an agony. There was no sound from the prison demon. Across the grass to the new-made dungeon in the old A and B block the hellish procession took its way. Ira Maralatt was riveted to his steel cage and a sign, "Prison Demon," pasted above the grating.

The prison demon became an attraction at the penitentiary. His fame had spread over the city—almost over the state. He was known as the brute man—the hell fiend. Visitors wanted a sight of him. The old warden saw a chance to turn a penny. For 25 cents citizens were taken down the east corridor and allowed to start at the degraded thing that had once been a man.

**Prisoner Tries To Dodge Gazers.**

Ira was not always a willing party to the bargain. He had a mean habit of crouching down in the far corner of his black cage and cheating the visitors of their money's worth. One day a distinguished citizen stood in the alley half an hour waiting for the demon to exhibit himself. Threats and prods from the guards were fruitless. The matter was reported to the warden. Incensed and blustering, he came running down the corridor.

"Open the door," he called to one of the guards. No one moved. They did not dare obey the reckless order.

"Open the door," Coffin yelled, snatching the club from one of the guards. He sprang into the cage, the club raised, rushing furiously toward the crouching giant in the corner.

"Come out, you fiend!" he bawled. The demon reared, hurled himself upright and lunged with the violence of a raging Colossus against the warden. The sudden mad impact bowled the warden over.

Ira snatched the club and flung it forth for a crashing blow on Coffin's head. Two guards dashed into the cage, caught Ira by the feet and sent him thundering backward against the wall.

"The visitor got his 25 cents' worth that day."

The warden's escape was little short of a miracle. It taught him a lesson. He devised a safer scheme for bringing Maralatt out of his wretched hole. From a window in the inner hall he had a hose attached to the cage. It would send down a storming current of ice cold water that would cut the flesh of the cowering demon.

Ira would come roaring like an infuriated lion to the bars of the cage. He would grab the steel in his mighty hands, shaking it, and filling the alley with wild, maniac screams.

This practice continued two or three months. The new warden came in, took down the sign from Ira's cage and prevented the shameful exhibits.

The sequel to Ira's tragic history came many months later, after I had been appointed private secretary to Warden W. N. Darby. Darby had a kind, magnificent sympathy in his enthusiastic nature. He had an eager ear for suggestions, even from the meanest convict. A chance incident opened the dark book of Ira Maralatt's ghastly life.

One evening I was walking down the east corridor on my way to the asylum. I had taken an apple from the warden's table where I ate. I was bringing the fruit to a poor fellow in the prison "bughouse." He had lost his mind and his eyesight in the hope polishing shop. The hooves were polished on emery wheels.

Millions of steel particles darted about, often puncturing the convicts in the face and neck. The sparks had gotten this poor devil in the forehead and eyes. I used to bring him an extra bit to eat.

As I passed the prison demon's cage I caught a glimpse of a haggard face at the low opening into the stone cell. Like a dumb, pathetic apparition, wretched and uncertain, the lumbering figure groped from corner to corner. The red, sunken eyes seemed to be burning deep into the smeared and pallid cheeks.

One hand that was but a mammoth yellow claw was pressed against the rough mat of black hair. More like a hurt and broken Samson than like a hell fiend, Ira Maralatt looked as his eye met mine in startled fear.

Something in the defenseless misery of his glance held me. I ran back to his cage, took the apple from my pocket, pressed it through the bars, rolling it over to Maralatt. He drew back. I called to him.

"There's an apple for you, Ira." He made no answer. I stepped into a shadow in the corridor and waited.

In a moment I saw the huge

creature creeping stealthily forward on his hands and knees. The great yellow claw reached out. The broken cuff and link on his

arm clanked on the cement. The chain was imbedded into his wrist and the flesh bulged out over it. The hand closed over the apple.

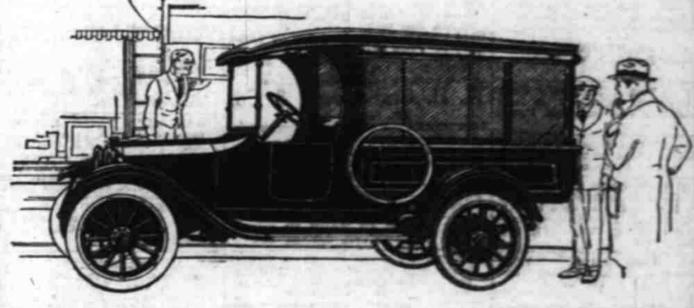
The demon leaped back to his corner. (Continued Next Week)

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