

O. HENRY AND AL. JENNINGS

(Continued from last week.)
CHAPTER FIFTYTHREE

Five years more in prison! It might as well have been fifty. A brighting tornado of rage overcame me, whipping out every nerve, every honest thought. I felt lashed and tormented as though the blood in my veins were suddenly turned into a million scorpions, stinging me to a hot fury of madness.

I rushed into the postoffice, dashed the neat bundles of treasures I had gathered to the ground. Photographs of some of the "cons"—a steel watch fob, a "kife" in the contract shop made for me, an old wooden box fashioned by a "str bug" in the lumber mill—these and a few other things I had wrapped together. I wanted these mementoes. Billy looked at me and the tinkets strewn on the floor.

"Don't seem to be too chipper. Al. Ain't sorry to kick the dust of the O. P. off your boots, be ye?" I was kneeling on the floor, dumping the treasure into a big handkerchief and dumping them out again, scarcely conscious of the repetition. I was afraid to talk, afraid even to look at Billy. A murderous hatred was rearing like an angry snake in my mind.

Before I was aware of it Billy had shuffled over to me, helping himself along with the chair. He sat down, grabbed the bundle out of my hands and tied it up.

"Who hit you, Al?" "Double crossed. 'Tain't New York, 'tain't Oklahoma, it's Leavenworth for me—five years." I spat the words out in a vicious gust. Billy dropped the bundle, his mouth sagged open. Amazed and unbelieving, he stared at me. "Can't be true, Al. They're kidding you."

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As I came near him he took a step toward me, dangling the handcuffs. "Something possessed me, unreasoning as a tiger, possessed me. I made a leap. The marshal drew back. We faced each other both ready to spring. And then Darby, breathless and flurried, was between us.

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