

# **THE LIGHT SIDE OF CORRECTIONS: FEDERAL PRISON CAMP**

Minimum Security, Contraband Oranges, Excessive Complaining,  
Inappropriate Mirth

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I have tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from my memories of them. In order to maintain their anonymity in some instances I have changed the names of individuals and places, I may have changed some identifying characteristics and details such as physical properties, occupations and places of residence.

## **Acknowledgements**

Family and some incredible friends got me through more than I could ever repay them. Thank you.

But there's something else I want to say.

The inmates I encountered repeatedly shocked me with their strength of character, their intelligence, helpfulness, friendliness, honesty and other admirable traits too numerous to name.

I would like to acknowledge all in prison, guilty or not.

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### **1. Journal**

Observations, thoughts and recordings. Written in the tone of a witty amateur who got his dumb ass thrown in prison. Maybe not so witty after all. Don't look forward to any kind of seriousness, personal development or virtuous character traits on my part. I will not lie to you with inflated claims of literary merit.

### **2. Supplementary Notes**

Something like sarcasm packaged in court records. Contains obvious points to the effect of mild-to-moderate criticism of prisons. Also, general nonsense bordering between journal entries and headline spoofs.

## **Overview**

So, on slogging through an FPC:

Over the last few months I decided that I'm qualified to lecture you about some of the dos and don'ts, can and cant's, will and won'ts, and of course the humble ais and ain'ts of minimum-security life. You will find:

- journal-style articles
- "survival guide" hints and tips
- opinions regarding the legal system
- inmate personalities
- two fictional short stories
- maybe some text porn

## **Regarding Supplementary Notes**

Self-explanatory pieces detailing fictional research and impossible proposals. Will you marr... Wait, not those kinds of proposals. I apologize in advance for some long titles, but I do so half-heartedly. In defense of long titles, attention spans have become very short and whimsical. A little effort on your part will be usef... zzzz.

...

Oh, right. So that's the kind of thing we need to stop.

## 1. Journal

### *Entry 1*

This doesn't look like a prison. Country clubs and gardens would be jealous of the landscaping job here. The fellas working the grounds do an impressive job. Oh, you think you're good too? I don't know, I think the crew here is better. Unless you've been through the grinder, I wonder how much effort you'd put in for fuck-you-cents-an-hour.

Anyways, I do what I can to never allow a "this sucks" attitude to settle. It seeps in, but is quickly chased away. Though of course it does suck, being prison. It could be a real prison though. You know the drill: boxed in by sharp fences, race gangs, beatings, shankings, open showers, all that fun stuff.

But I digress. This place is what some here call Camp Yum-Yum. Not that harsh. Nevertheless, the pain is the nagging realization that anyone here shouldn't be in prison at all. We can take a leisurely stroll into a safe residential area liberally sprinkled with kids during broad daylight. We are trusted to self-supervise ourselves 90+ percent of the time. The argument for confining us is flimsy. Not to claim that everyone here, or in all FPCs, is innocent of their crimes. They may be guilty as charged. But even if so, their crimes do not justify prison. If they did, the offenders would be in a real prison.

I've seen daycare centers with more security. Seriously. At least a little fence to keep the wee ones from playing in traffic. No such restriction here. Real prisons require a clever escape plan for those who want to get out before their due time. Minimum security prison escape plan: walk in a straight line pretty much whenever. By the time the guards realize you're out, you will have technically escaped.

Before a bunch of pot smokers and petty thieves get any bright ideas, realize that escaping a prison does not mean escaping the system. Once caught – and you will be caught – the Bureau of Prisons will fuck you up for violating their trust. For those wondering: Canada and Mexico have extradition treaties with the U.S. Don't even bother.

We are like plants in the garden: immobile and providing scenic “jobs” to the local bean counters.

### *Entry 2*

The U.S. is scheduled to run out of money in something like 1.5 months. Is it anti-American to hope so? Here I use “American” in terms of what this country is today, not in terms of Montesquieu’s ravings or laughably outdated and un-modern fantasies about liberty or some shit. People sometimes try to soften the sentiment by saying “Well, I don’t like the government, but I’m still for the ideals.” Weak.

A ramshackle of mindless bureaucracies that blatantly ignore their own rules and limitations is not defensible on moral grounds just because the rotting script for the whole shebang is half-decent. What matters is what happened, not what was intended. If the State were defensible based on its abstract motives, well-intentioned impulses and intellectual foundations, no reformation or revolt would be justified. After all, the script or Constitution or tradition of any government looks good on paper. On paper isn’t good enough. Strict liability dontcha know.

### *Entry 3*

Can you believe there are romance novels in the prison library? In a prison library? I’ve been here for more than ten months and I’m still dizzy from the literary culture shock. First, to define terms:

Romance = anything that, to be blunt, simply can’t possibly be worth reading, unless you’re stuck in this dingy joke. Denoted by a “heart” sticker on the book spine. I went around the library and listed every romance author I saw, then lost the list.

Right now, you and I are thinking the same thing: Romance being what it is, would a schoolyard-sex-joke name have an effect on book sales? If I ever write romance, I will let you know. My pseudonym will be Enormodik Boobtit.

#### *Entry 4*

It's easy to have a thing against the guards and staff (collectively referred to as "COs" from now on).

Today, a CO held a door open for me. The gesture shocked me. There was no special reason for him to do so. We weren't "tight." Hell, we didn't even know each other's names. I was just another dumb convict and he was just another blue uniform I'd rather avoid.

Don't ever get close to the COs.

Yet, with no visible need on my part and no social custom I'm aware of that encourages kindness between Us and Them, he stopped and patiently waited for me. For my own trivial comfort. I mumbled a "thanks" but methinks more was warranted. I didn't mean to come off at all dismissive; quite the opposite. You have to understand, I was in silent shock. I was too surprised by the gesture. Say what you will, but it seemed bigger when it happened. In terms of this world, this was obviously a triviality, no big deal anywhere. But still... Somewhere between the random pat-downs and forced overcrowding, even COs let slip something or other that makes them likeable.

#### *Entry 5*

I heard that some judges are former prosecutors. Remember those math proofs in school? "Given/Statements/Reasons/Magic/Conclusion." Ever use that bullshit in real life? Me neither. Well, let's make the best of it:



Given:

1. Adversarial nature of our justice system: the defense insists on innocence or milder punishment. The prosecution likewise insists on guilt and harsher punishment.

2. Prosecutors are trained to view all defendants through “guilty” lenses.

3. Prosecutors advance their careers and establish their credibility and expertise in the field with a high number of convictions. Salesmen operate in a similar incentive scheme.

To expand on this point:

3A. The most highly esteemed salesmen are those that sell the most crap, regardless of whether or not customers need that crap. Likewise,

3B. The most highly esteemed prosecutors are those that get the most “guilty” verdicts, regardless of whether or not defendants deserve that crap.

4. Highly esteemed prosecutors advance their career to gather job titles such as “totally impartial and fair magistrate with a history of balanced and levelheaded, calm, unbiased scholarship and insight regarding the finer points of innocence and guilt.” The prosecutor-to-judge apparently fulfilled these requirements for promotion by insisting that everyone they run into be punished, executed, fined or otherwise harassed if at all possible.

5. Once these levelheaded, well-adjusted individuals have worked years ruining people’s lives in exchange for a corner office and a pat on the back, they cement their power on the judicial bench. It should be emphasized that judges are wedged into ball-ticklin’ authority. The judiciary is sparsely populated, but it alone can match some aspects of the entire Executive Branch and All of Fucking Congress.

6. So then these characters sorta-promise – with scant consequences should they fail to live up to that promise – to uphold one principle above all: innocent until proven guilty.

~~You figure the conclusion.~~ You are likely an American. “Figuring” about anything past the next shopping splurge isn’t your strong point, so I’ll do it for you. Just sit back, relax and let me take care of it. I got tissues ready, so don’t apologize if you make a mess. They all do.

Judges are supposed to be the last line of defense against irrational politics. There exists a notion that “the people” or their conniving, slimy, status-obsessed representatives are fit to decide anything logically. This notion is goddamn asinine.

Book after book on marketing and advertising pounds home a consistent thesis: we don’t buy rationally and that’s when our money’s at stake. What if it isn’t, and the consequences for our decisions aren’t going to affect us in the short term, as do bills? What if the consequences of what we think – “think” – fall on an amorphous, misty “population” or “country” that nobody really internalizes? Judges get job security and “honor” with literal titles such as “Your Honor” because they are allegedly virtuous, wise, bla bla.

If their objectivity is in question, the whole thing becomes a lottery. Criminal and non-criminal become a function of luck. Odds are, whoever’s reading this is not a criminal. Not on paper, anyways. Like a lottery of punishment, someone is picked for a crime, with defense against the accusation more or less futile. (This is not to be construed as professional legal advice, please contact an actual attorney about your legal situation.)

Several books and studies back me up on this, but fuck it, I don’t know enough copyright law to cite them by name without incurring the wrath of some damn tort claim or whatnot.

Plus, if you haven’t heard about the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), I’ll sum it up for you. Imagine that your civil liberties are one chess army, and a soft, creeping, oozing arbitrary police state are the opposing chess army. With 2012 NDAA, civil liberties is down to one pawn and a limping rook. The opponent has three queens.

Maybe the charges against you are accurate. But if not, the result is likely to be the same. You'd think you could count on the judge to, ya know, have good judgment. Ha-ha! If you're not guilty, they wasted their time, and that doesn't look good on anyone's job evaluation. Jury instructions? As rigged as a soccer match. Appeals? Denied. Oversight of the prosecution? You wish.

Once again, disclaimer: this is meant to be barely-educational material, for mis-informative purposes only. Please contact an attorney, they'd love to hear from you. Just talk about the weather or invite them over for tea. Throw in words like "amicus brief" and convince them to sign up for a usurious \$100,000 law school loan so they feel at home. If you are trying to seduce an attorney, refer to yourself as "the Promissory Party, heretofore, wherewith, ipso-facto, allegedly, aforementioned but not to be construed nor not construed in accordance with any circumstance, act, event, phenomenon or entity to the exclusion thereof."

Everyone likes pillow talk.

### *Entry 6*

There are plenty of pleasures in the camp. Nutty cones, for one. Commissary sells these things for 60 cents each. I bought one for someone a few weeks ago. Over the next several days, I forgot about the favor. For those of you wondering, yes it was a favor and not protection payment.

Then today, bam, a fresh cone floats in front of my face. I become sexually aroused. It's attached to a hand, to an arm, to the guy who I bought the cone for half a month ago. The arousal faded. I relished the cone; for a few minutes I was out of this drab little make-work nuthouse. For just a few minutes, the cone took me to where angels make love.

### *Entry 7*

Many guys here nurse grievances against the system. Surprise! They write letters and rants to reform this, fix that, amend whatever. All to conform to Justice. Difficult to disparage their motives, but there are a few points of polite contention.

The claim(1): The well-connected get away with it and the rest of us get the shaft. No disagreement here.

Counterpoint(1): Only as long as you stay in the country. While moving out can help, I believe there is nowhere, absolutely nowhere one can go and find the plebeians treated on par with the head hombres. Having said that, some countries truly do have better laws and civil liberties protection in place. Remember when it actually made sense to want to live in the US? Take a chance somewhere. Look at the recent history of court decisions, blogs and journals written by citizens and expats, business and hiring practices (official and otherwise) and whatever else gives a realistic snapshot of life in the new land.

Of course, not everyone has the resources or opportunity to immigrate. There is literature that serves as a sharp rebuke for the impulsive would-be immigrant or hopeful adventurer. I may not be among those fortunate enough to get out of here. Or, ignoring my own warning, I may lose in the immigration investment and land in some ass-flavored clusterfuck. Learn a new foreign language. Don't rely on a "teaching English" gig. That market is pretty much milked.

The claim(2): Inmates mope and cry about "waste of taxpayer money." It allegedly is a bad thing that taxpayer money is thrown away on asinine endeavors within the prison bureaucracy.

Counterpoint(2): Taxpayers vote for "tough on crime" candidates. Taxpayers consistently clamor for Orwellian bullshit in the name of fictional security. Taxpayers will make an effort to deny the ex-criminal decent housing and work, however reformed or qualified he may be. Paying for their stupidity and prejudice is the least taxpayers can suffer through.

It is not nearly enough. We need more red tape, more pointless expenses, more prison guards getting paid to pick their noses. Taxpayers are sedated by sports, talk shows, gossip rags and so on. Such a life -- "life" -- makes one immune to rational or ethical arguments. Their money is the only thing that matters to them. Waste it. Doing so is fair reward for the government they have created and allowed.

### *Entry 8*

Ok, I'll be honest. There was an entry here, but I decided against it at the last minute. By this point the "Entry #" thing is done and I don't want to go through and revise the rest of the "Entry \_\_\_" titles. I'm sure there's some AutoFormat thing I should have done to adjust automatically, like with numbered lists. Ok, you know what? You try writing a book. Keep trying. Try long enough to forget about how lazy I am. Pretend there was a really good point in here that changed your life. Like proof of reincarnation or steering system repair tips. You know, important stuff.

### *Entry 9*

News Update: Iran cuts off the U.S. from the international banking system. Sigh... what can we say? Despite Iran's abuse, the U.S. keeps coming back for more. It's that nonchalant charm of "I don't give a damn" that drives U.S. wild. America could probably get involved with more respectable countries such as Switzerland or Iowa, but that's for when we're older and looking for a long-term partner. (They'll still want us then, right? *Right?!*)

But right now, those Persians just have that rebellious/suicidal/homicidal charm that drives us wild. Come here you big Xerxes-named stud. Show how baaaad you can be. If you're a naughty, naughty boy, all of U.S. will let your Cyprus penetrate our Strait of Hormuz, if you catch my drift.\*

\*The Middle East could use a booster after losing its entire sovereignty and identity to Western shopping malls, reality TV and other cultural detritus.

### *Entry 10*

“A real man takes time to look twice in the mirror.” Or “double-check his appearance,” or something like that. I briefly glanced at some ad for what I’m guessing is a grooming product or article of clothing. A real man doesn’t chase clothes beyond minimum necessities. Next to the thing about looking twice in the mirror – wouldn’t want a hair out of place – there’s some idealized dirt bag with a Winning Smile and a meticulously manicured Assertiveness. He’s cool yet passionate, detached yet engaged, mysterious yet approachable. Basically he’s like a virginal perfect-10 porn star who is fanatically devoted to you and only you, all 400 pounds of you. Clearly he is this way because of this Wonderful Thing Being Sold.

I object to this message. I won’t get into all the things that define a “real man” because this is not an autobiography. Let me leave it with a few facts:

- A real man is not ghetto, country, cosmopolitan or any other identification that begins and ends in pop culture. Those are fashions and trends.
- A real man plays sports. Though I know this is a point of contention, I will claim that they do not make it a habit to watch sports. Watching sports requires no effort, no chance of merit-based success/failure and accomplishes nothing.
  - There is much entertaining in those venues but little that is manly. Even if I’m wrong, this bullet point is a swift little Fuck You to anyone who got a job because they and the hiring manager cheer for the same team. When *that* is a significant variable in one’s professional success, I can’t summon respect for the society that cocoons and condones such bullshit.
- Most importantly -- A real man does not “take the time to double-check his appearance in the mirror.” A real man shatters the mirror by glaring at it. Glaring, not looking. Then he gathers the jagged glass fragments – extra points if they’re poisoned or on fire – puts them in a bowl and eats them. Then he eats the bowl because pottery is lame. A real man

washes down his food with rocket fuel. The resulting belch should be indistinguishable from thunder straight out of Zeus's cock when He is Phobos-and-Deimos-deep in Hera.

### *Entry 11*

I'm going to try this writing exercise. You look at an image and write at least one story stemming from that image. Recommended that the story have an actual plot, but let's walk before we run here.

The image is a bed. Sheets are scattered. This is my bunk before I tidy up. Bland wall, nothing else. My goal is to take this ho-hum visual and use it as a foundation for magnificent tales of intrigue, drama, wit and money.

.....

James made sure she was out. He needed the room to himself. Even though the AC was on, a nervous sweat broke through his skin. His hands shook with anticipation as he opened the worn-out backpack. In the dim light, flawless yellow-green surfaces winked at him. A pilfered alloy shimmered from different angles. The loot was a mixture of gold, osmium and some rare-earths all held within an aerogel-like matrix. All James knew was that it was ridiculously valuable. He was looking at the new gold standard. Industry loved this alloy. Corporations and governments were already at each other's throats to understand, manufacture and stockpile it. And now, James had a substantial cache. He glanced at the clock. His dreams deflated as he realized Stacy would be back soon. She wouldn't understand. She'd freak out as if this was refined U-235. She was... honest. James smiled at his fiancé's naïve morals. He slipped the narrow metallic bars under false bottoms in a cabinet. He worked quickly. Some cash was added to the mix. It was from ATMs, though mysteriously, the transaction was never recorded on James's accounts. Stacy didn't know about this, nor would she. The laws he had to break, the people he had to hurt, the overall trouble and risk was worth it. He needed all this wealth.

As a doctor, James had access to confidential medical records and genetic profiles. He knew his fiancé was destined to die soon. This stolen loot would pay for a pricey and risky treatment. Expertise was not the problem. The money-suckers were rare materials needed for the treatment. James couldn't perform the treatment by himself. He didn't steal out of greed. He wanted a chance to save Stacy.

“Quit being a cheapskate. We can afford it. This place will pay for itself soon enough.” You don't have a few years, unless...

“Sweetheart, I promise this house isn't what you think.”

It was exactly what she thinks, but he couldn't tell her his real reason for hesitating. James wanted to make sure they had enough to keep Stacy happy and healthy when the “surprising” illness erupted. Predictions were that symptoms would hit, and hit hard, somewhere between three months and four years. Yes, predictions could be better. Unfortunately, Stacy's genetic profile guaranteed it would happen sooner or later.

“How so?” She was getting irritated.

“Well,” James was a good thief but a bad liar. “The piping is surprisingly shoddy. I checked. There'll be leaks within a few months. Plus, have you looked at the foundation? That ground under the building is not the bedrock we want.”

Stacy rolled her eyes impatiently.

“No, seriously. A flood, some freeze-thaw cycles and bam. This house will slant, even droop into the ground here and there. It won't be pretty.”

James was almost sure what he said was somehow possible.



Stacy hesitated. Better than when she yells. Lately, this has been often, as James and the neighbors were well aware.

“Look, let’s keep our options open.” James pressed the perceived advantage. “Not that this place doesn’t have its perks. It does, you’re right.” Never eliminate an option when negotiating with hostiles. Even adorable hostiles.

“You had better make a decision one way or another. I’m sick of your bachelor-pad dump. Quit stalling, move us into a real home or hit the singles bars.”

“Stacy, come on.”

He didn’t get a chance to finish. Stacy stomped out, making sure to slam the door forcefully enough to make her point. Point made.

After a brisk walk, Stacy felt bad. She shouldn’t have been that hard on him. She’d make it up. The baker didn’t have many patrons this late in the evening. She got a delicious pastry, James would love it. Fruit mix and chocolate.

To drive the relevant point home, Stacy’s baker didn’t have many patrons in general. The bakery was deep in the red. Setting up shop in this part of town was a costly mistake. The owner thought that people would go for it. Yes, at a price, but how else could quality be attained? The neighborhood was packed with big-box dinosaurs.

The bakery owner was right to an extent. Some customers came in, his shop had a great reputation. But the revenue just wasn’t enough. He cut back on employee wages, figuring customers wouldn’t stand for shoddy food but, to some extent, he could stretch the staff. I mean, at least for now. Business is business, you know. Gotta cut somewhere, and there weren’t many corners to begin with.

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