



The Star Rover
London, Jack

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About London:

Jack London (January 12, 1876 – November 22, 1916), was an American author who wrote *The Call of the Wild* and other books. A pioneer in the then-burgeoning world of commercial magazine fiction, he was one of the first Americans to make a huge financial success from writing.

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Chapter 1

All my life I have had an awareness of other times and places. I have been aware of other persons in me.—Oh, and trust me, so have you, my reader that is to be. Read back into your childhood, and this sense of awareness I speak of will be remembered as an experience of your childhood. You were then not fixed, not crystallized. You were plastic, a soul in flux, a consciousness and an identity in the process of forming—ay, of forming and forgetting.

You have forgotten much, my reader, and yet, as you read these lines, you remember dimly the hazy vistas of other times and places into which your child eyes peered. They seem dreams to you to-day. Yet, if they were dreams, dreamed then, whence the substance of them? Our dreams are grotesquely compounded of the things we know. The stuff of our sheerest dreams is the stuff of our experience. As a child, a wee child, you dreamed you fell great heights; you dreamed you flew through the air as things of the air fly; you were vexed by crawling spiders and many-legged creatures of the slime; you heard other voices, saw other faces nightmarishly familiar, and gazed upon sunrises and sunsets other than you know now, looking back, you ever looked upon.

Very well. These child glimpses are of other-worldness, of other-life-ness, of things that you had never seen in this particular world of your particular life. Then whence? Other lives? Other worlds? Perhaps, when you have read all that I shall write, you will have received answers to the perplexities I have propounded to you, and that you yourself, ere you came to read me, propounded to yourself.

Wordsworth knew. He was neither seer nor prophet, but just ordinary man like you or any man. What he knew, you know, any man knows. But he most aptly stated it in his passage that begins "Not in utter nakedness, not in entire forgetfulness... "

Ah, truly, shades of the prison-house close about us, the new-born things, and all too soon do we forget. And yet, when we were new-born we did remember other times and places. We, helpless infants in arms or creeping quadruped-like on the floor, dreamed our dreams of air-flight.

Yes; and we endured the torment and torture of nightmare fears of dim and monstrous things. We new-born infants, without experience, were born with fear, with memory of fear; and MEMORY IS EXPERIENCE.

As for myself, at the beginnings of my vocabulary, at so tender a period that I still made hunger noises and sleep noises, yet even then did I know that I had been a star-rover. Yes, I, whose lips had never lisped the word "king," remembered that I had once been the son of a king. More—I remembered that once I had been a slave and a son of a slave, and worn an iron collar round my neck.

Still more. When I was three, and four, and five years of age, I was not yet I. I was a mere becoming, a flux of spirit not yet cooled solid in the mould of my particular flesh and time and place. In that period all that I had ever been in ten thousand lives before strove in me, and troubled the flux of me, in the effort to incorporate itself in me and become me.

Silly, isn't it? But remember, my reader, whom I hope to have travel far with me through time and space—remember, please, my reader, that I have thought much on these matters, that through bloody nights and sweats of dark that lasted years-long, I have been alone with my many selves to consult and contemplate my many selves. I have gone through the hells of all existences to bring you news which you will share with me in a casual comfortable hour over my printed page.

So, to return, I say, during the ages of three and four and five, I was not yet I. I was merely becoming as I took form in the mould of my body, and all the mighty, indestructible past wrought in the mixture of me to determine what the form of that becoming would be. It was not my voice that cried out in the night in fear of things known, which I, forsooth, did not and could not know. The same with my childish angers, my loves, and my laughters. Other voices screamed through my voice, the voices of men and women aforetime, of all shadowy hosts of progenitors. And the snarl of my anger was blended with the snarls of beasts more ancient than the mountains, and the vocal madness of my child hysteria, with all the red of its wrath, was chorded with the insensate, stupid cries of beasts pre-Adamic and progeologic in time.

And there the secret is out. The red wrath! It has undone me in this, my present life. Because of it, a few short weeks hence, I shall be led from this cell to a high place with unstable flooring, graced above by a well-stretched rope; and there they will hang me by the neck until I am dead. The red wrath always has undone me in all my lives; for the red wrath is my disastrous catastrophic heritage from the time of the slimy things ere the world was prime.

It is time that I introduce myself. I am neither fool nor lunatic. I want you to know that, in order that you will believe the things I shall tell you. I am Darrell Standing. Some few of you who read this will know me immediately. But to the majority, who are bound to be strangers, let me exposit myself. Eight years ago I was Professor of Agronomics in the College of Agriculture of the University of California. Eight years ago the sleepy little university town of Berkeley was shocked by the murder of Professor Haskell in one of the laboratories of the Mining Building. Darrell Standing was the murderer.

I am Darrell Standing. I was caught red-handed. Now the right and the wrong of this affair with Professor Haskell I shall not discuss. It was purely a private matter. The point is, that in a surge of anger, obsessed by that catastrophic red wrath that has cursed me down the ages, I killed my fellow professor. The court records show that I did; and, for once, I agree with the court records.

No; I am not to be hanged for his murder. I received a life-sentence for my punishment. I was thirty-six years of age at the time. I am now forty-four years old. I have spent the eight intervening years in the California State Prison of San Quentin. Five of these years I spent in the dark. Solitary confinement, they call it. Men who endure it, call it living death. But through these five years of death-in-life I managed to attain freedom such as few men have ever known. Closest-confined of prisoners, not only did I range the world, but I ranged time. They who immured me for petty years gave to me, all unwittingly, the largess of centuries. Truly, thanks to Ed Morrell, I have had five years of star-roving. But Ed Morrell is another story. I shall tell you about him a little later. I have so much to tell I scarce know how to begin.

Well, a beginning. I was born on a quarter-section in Minnesota. My mother was the daughter of an immigrant Swede. Her name was Hilda Tonnesson. My father was Chauncey Standing, of old American stock. He traced back to Alfred Standing, an indentured servant, or slave if you please, who was transported from England to the Virginia plantations in the days that were even old when the youthful Washington went a-surveying in the Pennsylvania wilderness.

A son of Alfred Standing fought in the War of the Revolution; a grandson, in the War of 1812. There have been no wars since in which the Standings have not been represented. I, the last of the Standings, dying soon without issue, fought as a common soldier in the Philippines, in our latest war, and to do so I resigned, in the full early ripeness of career, my professorship in the University of Nebraska. Good heavens, when I so

resigned I was headed for the Deanship of the College of Agriculture in that university—I, the star-rover, the red-blooded adventurer, the vagabondish Cain of the centuries, the militant priest of remotest times, the moon-dreaming poet of ages forgotten and to-day unrecorded in man's history of man!

And here I am, my hands dyed red in Murderers' Row, in the State Prison of Folsom, awaiting the day decreed by the machinery of state when the servants of the state will lead me away into what they fondly believe is the dark—the dark they fear; the dark that gives them fearsome and superstitious fancies; the dark that drives them, drivelling and yammering, to the altars of their fear-created, anthropomorphic gods.

No; I shall never be Dean of any college of agriculture. And yet I knew agriculture. It was my profession. I was born to it, reared to it, trained to it; and I was a master of it. It was my genius. I can pick the high-percentage butter-fat cow with my eye and let the Babcock Tester prove the wisdom of my eye. I can look, not at land, but at landscape, and pronounce the virtues and the shortcomings of the soil. Litmus paper is not necessary when I determine a soil to be acid or alkali. I repeat, farm-husbandry, in its highest scientific terms, was my genius, and is my genius. And yet the state, which includes all the citizens of the state, believes that it can blot out this wisdom of mine in the final dark by means of a rope about my neck and the abruptive jerk of gravitation—this wisdom of mine that was incubated through the millenniums, and that was well-hatched ere the farmed fields of Troy were ever pastured by the flocks of nomad shepherds!

Corn? Who else knows corn? There is my demonstration at Wistar, whereby I increased the annual corn-yield of every county in Iowa by half a million dollars. This is history. Many a farmer, riding in his motor-car to-day, knows who made possible that motor-car. Many a sweet-bosomed girl and bright-browed boy, poring over high-school text-books, little dreams that I made that higher education possible by my corn demonstration at Wistar.

And farm management! I know the waste of superfluous motion without studying a moving picture record of it, whether it be farm or farm-hand, the layout of buildings or the layout of the farm-hands' labour. There is my handbook and tables on the subject. Beyond the shadow of any doubt, at this present moment, a hundred thousand farmers are knotting their brows over its spread pages ere they tap out their final pipe and go to bed. And yet, so far was I beyond my tables, that all I

needed was a mere look at a man to know his predispositions, his co-ordinations, and the index fraction of his motion-wastage.

And here I must close this first chapter of my narrative. It is nine o'clock, and in Murderers' Row that means lights out. Even now, I hear the soft tread of the gum-shoed guard as he comes to censure me for my coal-oil lamp still burning. As if the mere living could censure the doomed to die!

Chapter 2

I am Darrell Standing. They are going to take me out and hang me pretty soon. In the meantime I say my say, and write in these pages of the other times and places.

After my sentence, I came to spend the rest of my "natural life" in the prison of San Quentin. I proved incorrigible. An incorrigible is a terrible human being—at least such is the connotation of "incorrigible" in prison psychology. I became an incorrigible because I abhorred waste motion. The prison, like all prisons, was a scandal and an affront of waste motion. They put me in the jute-mill. The criminality of wastefulness irritated me. Why should it not? Elimination of waste motion was my speciality. Before the invention of steam or steam-driven looms three thousand years before, I had rotted in prison in old Babylon; and, trust me, I speak the truth when I say that in that ancient day we prisoners wove more efficiently on hand-looms than did the prisoners in the steam-powered loom-rooms of San Quentin.

The crime of waste was abhorrent. I rebelled. I tried to show the guards a score or so of more efficient ways. I was reported. I was given the dungeon and the starvation of light and food. I emerged and tried to work in the chaos of inefficiency of the loom-rooms. I rebelled. I was given the dungeon, plus the strait-jacket. I was spread-eagled, and thumbed-up, and privily beaten by the stupid guards whose totality of intelligence was only just sufficient to show them that I was different from them and not so stupid.

Two years of this witless persecution I endured. It is terrible for a man to be tied down and gnawed by rats. The stupid brutes of guards were rats, and they gnawed the intelligence of me, gnawed all the fine nerves of the quick of me and of the consciousness of me. And I, who in my past have been a most valiant fighter, in this present life was no fighter at all. I was a farmer, an agriculturist, a desk-tied professor, a laboratory slave, interested only in the soil and the increase of the productiveness of the soil.

I fought in the Philippines because it was the tradition of the Standings to fight. I had no aptitude for fighting. It was all too ridiculous, the introducing of disruptive foreign substances into the bodies of little black men-folk. It was laughable to behold Science prostituting all the might of its achievement and the wit of its inventors to the violent introducing of foreign substances into the bodies of black folk.

As I say, in obedience to the tradition of the Standings I went to war and found that I had no aptitude for war. So did my officers find me out, because they made me a quartermaster's clerk, and as a clerk, at a desk, I fought through the Spanish-American War.

So it was not because I was a fighter, but because I was a thinker, that I was enraged by the motion-wastage of the loom-rooms and was persecuted by the guards into becoming an "incurable." One's brain worked and I was punished for its working. As I told Warden Atherton, when my incurability had become so notorious that he had me in on the carpet in his private office to plead with me; as I told him then:

"It is so absurd, my dear Warden, to think that your rat-throglers of guards can shake out of my brain the things that are clear and definite in my brain. The whole organization of this prison is stupid. You are a politician. You can weave the political pull of San Francisco saloon-men and ward heelers into a position of graft such as this one you occupy; but you can't weave jute. Your loom-rooms are fifty years behind the times... ."

But why continue the tirade?—for tirade it was. I showed him what a fool he was, and as a result he decided that I was a hopeless incurable.

Give a dog a bad name—you know the saw. Very well. Warden Atherton gave the final sanction to the badness of my name. I was fair game. More than one convict's dereliction was shunted off on me, and was paid for by me in the dungeon on bread and water, or in being triced up by the thumbs on my tip-toes for long hours, each hour of which was longer than any life I have ever lived.

Intelligent men are cruel. Stupid men are monstrously cruel. The guards and the men over me, from the Warden down, were stupid monsters. Listen, and you shall learn what they did to me. There was a poet in the prison, a convict, a weak-chinned, broad-browed, degenerate poet. He was a forger. He was a coward. He was a snitcher. He was a stool—strange words for a professor of agronomics to use in writing, but a professor of agronomics may well learn strange words when pent in prison for the term of his natural life.

This poet-forger's name was Cecil Winwood. He had had prior convictions, and yet, because he was a snivelling cur of a yellow dog, his last sentence had been only for seven years. Good credits would materially reduce this time. My time was life. Yet this miserable degenerate, in order to gain several short years of liberty for himself, succeeded in adding a fair portion of eternity to my own life-time term.

I shall tell what happened the other way around, for it was only after a weary period that I learned. This Cecil Winwood, in order to curry favour with the Captain of the Yard, and thence the Warden, the Prison Directors, the Board of Pardons, and the Governor of California, framed up a prison-break. Now note three things: (a) Cecil Winwood was so detested by his fellow-convicts that they would not have permitted him to bet an ounce of Bull Durham on a bed-bug race—and bed-bug racing was a great sport with the convicts; (b) I was the dog that had been given a bad name: (c) for his frame-up, Cecil Winwood needed the dogs with bad names, the lifetimers, the desperate ones, the incorrigibles.

But the lifers detested Cecil Winwood, and, when he approached them with his plan of a wholesale prison-break, they laughed at him and turned away with curses for the stool that he was. But he fooled them in the end, forty of the bitterest-wise ones in the pen. He approached them again and again. He told of his power in the prison by virtue of his being trusty in the Warden's office, and because of the fact that he had the run of the dispensary.

"Show me," said Long Bill Hodge, a mountaineer doing life for train robbery, and whose whole soul for years had been bent on escaping in order to kill the companion in robbery who had turned state's evidence on him.

Cecil Winwood accepted the test. He claimed that he could dope the guards the night of the break.

"Talk is cheap," said Long Bill Hodge. "What we want is the goods. Dope one of the guards to-night. There's Barnum. He's no good. He beat up that crazy Chink yesterday in Bughouse Alley—when he was off duty, too. He's on the night watch. Dope him to-night an' make him lose his job. Show me, and we'll talk business with you."

All this Long Bill told me in the dungeons afterward. Cecil Winwood demurred against the immediacy of the demonstration. He claimed that he must have time in which to steal the dope from the dispensary. They gave him the time, and a week later he announced that he was ready. Forty hard-bitten lifers waited for the guard Barnum to go to sleep on his

shift. And Barnum did. He was found asleep, and he was discharged for sleeping on duty.

Of course, that convinced the lifers. But there was the Captain of the Yard to convince. To him, daily, Cecil Winwood was reporting the progress of the break—all fancied and fabricated in his own imagination. The Captain of the Yard demanded to be shown. Winwood showed him, and the full details of the showing I did not learn until a year afterward, so slowly do the secrets of prison intrigue leak out.

Winwood said that the forty men in the break, in whose confidence he was, had already such power in the Prison that they were about to begin smuggling in automatic pistols by means of the guards they had bought up.

"Show me," the Captain of the Yard must have demanded.

And the forger-poet showed him. In the Bakery, night work was a regular thing. One of the convicts, a baker, was on the first night-shift. He was a stool of the Captain of the Yard, and Winwood knew it.

"To-night," he told the Captain, "Summerface will bring in a dozen '44 automatics. On his next time off he'll bring in the ammunition. But to-night he'll turn the automatics over to me in the bakery. You've got a good stool there. He'll make you his report to-morrow."

Now Summerface was a strapping figure of a bucolic guard who hailed from Humboldt County. He was a simple-minded, good-natured dolt and not above earning an honest dollar by smuggling in tobacco for the convicts. On that night, returning from a trip to San Francisco, he brought in with him fifteen pounds of prime cigarette tobacco. He had done this before, and delivered the stuff to Cecil Winwood. So, on that particular night, he, all unwitting, turned the stuff over to Winwood in the bakery. It was a big, solid, paper-wrapped bundle of innocent tobacco. The stool baker, from concealment, saw the package delivered to Winwood and so reported to the Captain of the Yard next morning.

But in the meantime the poet-forger's too-lively imagination ran away with him. He was guilty of a slip that gave me five years of solitary confinement and that placed me in this condemned cell in which I now write. And all the time I knew nothing about it. I did not even know of the break he had inveigled the forty lifers into planning. I knew nothing, absolutely nothing. And the rest knew little. The lifers did not know he was giving them the cross. The Captain of the Yard did not know that the cross know was being worked on him. Summerface was the most innocent of all. At the worst, his conscience could have accused him only of smuggling in some harmless tobacco.

And now to the stupid, silly, melodramatic slip of Cecil Winwood. Next morning, when he encountered the Captain of the Yard, he was triumphant. His imagination took the bit in its teeth.

"Well, the stuff came in all right as you said," the captain of the Yard remarked.

"And enough of it to blow half the prison sky-high," Winwood corroborated.

"Enough of what?" the Captain demanded.

"Dynamite and detonators," the fool rattled on. "Thirty-five pounds of it. Your stool saw Summerface pass it over to me."

And right there the Captain of the Yard must have nearly died. I can actually sympathize with him—thirty-five pounds of dynamite loose in the prison.

They say that Captain Jamie—that was his nickname—sat down and held his head in his hands.

"Where is it now?" he cried. "I want it. Take me to it at once."

And right there Cecil Winwood saw his mistake.

"I planted it," he lied—for he was compelled to lie because, being merely tobacco in small packages, it was long since distributed among the convicts along the customary channels.

"Very well," said Captain Jamie, getting himself in hand. "Lead me to it at once."

But there was no plant of high explosives to lead him to. The thing did not exist, had never existed save in the imagination of the wretched Winwood.

In a large prison like San Quentin there are always hiding-places for things. And as Cecil Winwood led Captain Jamie he must have done some rapid thinking.

As Captain Jamie testified before the Board of Directors, and as Winwood also so testified, on the way to the hiding-place Winwood said that he and I had planted the powder together.

And I, just released from five days in the dungeons and eighty hours in the jacket; I, whom even the stupid guards could see was too weak to work in the loom-room; I, who had been given the day off to recuperate—from too terrible punishment—I was named as the one who had helped hide the non-existent thirty-five pounds of high explosive!

Winwood led Captain Jamie to the alleged hiding-place. Of course they found no dynamite in it.

"My God!" Winwood lied. "Standing has given me the cross. He's lifted the plant and stowed it somewhere else."

The Captain of the Yard said more emphatic things than "My God!" Also, on the spur of the moment but cold-bloodedly, he took Winwood into his own private office, looked the doors, and beat him up frightfully—all of which came out before the Board of Directors. But that was afterward. In the meantime, even while he took his beating, Winwood swore by the truth of what he had told.

What was Captain Jamie to do? He was convinced that thirty-five pounds of dynamite were loose in the prison and that forty desperate lifers were ready for a break. Oh, he had Summerface in on the carpet, and, although Summerface insisted the package contained tobacco, Winwood swore it was dynamite and was believed.

At this stage I enter or, rather, I depart, for they took me away out of the sunshine and the light of day to the dungeons, and in the dungeons and in the solitary cells, out of the sunshine and the light of day, I rotted for five years.

I was puzzled. I had only just been released from the dungeons, and was lying pain-racked in my customary cell, when they took me back to the dungeon.

"Now," said Winwood to Captain Jamie, "though we don't know where it is, the dynamite is safe. Standing is the only man who does know, and he can't pass the word out from the dungeon. The men are ready to make the break. We can catch them red-handed. It is up to me to set the time. I'll tell them two o'clock to-night and tell them that, with the guards doped, I'll unlock their cells and give them their automatics. If, at two o'clock to-night, you don't catch the forty I shall name with their clothes on and wide awake, then, Captain, you can give me solitary for the rest of my sentence. And with Standing and the forty tight in the dungeons, we'll have all the time in the world to locate the dynamite."

"If we have to tear the prison down stone by stone," Captain Jamie added valiantly.

That was six years ago. In all the intervening time they have never found that non-existent explosive, and they have turned the prison upside-down a thousand times in searching for it. Nevertheless, to his last day in office Warden Atherton believed in the existence of that dynamite. Captain Jamie, who is still Captain of the Yard, believes to this day that the dynamite is somewhere in the prison. Only yesterday, he came all the way up from San Quentin to Folsom to make one more effort to get me to reveal the hiding-place. I know he will never breathe easy until they swing me off.

Chapter 3

All that day I lay in the dungeon cudgelling my brains for the reason of this new and inexplicable punishment. All I could conclude was that some stool had lied an infraction of the rules on me in order to curry favour with the guards.

Meanwhile Captain Jamie fretted his head off and prepared for the night, while Winwood passed the word along to the forty lifers to be ready for the break. And two hours after midnight every guard in the prison was under orders. This included the day-shift which should have been asleep. When two o'clock came, they rushed the cells occupied by the forty. The rush was simultaneous. The cells were opened at the same moment, and without exception the men named by Winwood were found out of their bunks, fully dressed, and crouching just inside their doors. Of course, this was verification absolute of all the fabric of lies that the poet-forgery had spun for Captain Jamie. The forty lifers were caught in red-handed readiness for the break. What if they did unite, afterward, in averring that the break had been planned by Winwood? The Prison Board of Directors believed, to a man, that the forty lied in an effort to save themselves. The Board of Pardons likewise believed, for, ere three months were up, Cecil Winwood, forger and poet, most despicable of men, was pardoned out.

Oh, well, the stir, or the pen, as they call it in convict argot, is a training school for philosophy. No inmate can survive years of it without having had burst for him his fondest illusions and fairest metaphysical bubbles. Truth lives, we are taught; murder will out. Well, this is a demonstration that murder does not always come out. The Captain of the Yard, the late Warden Atherton, the Prison Board of Directors to a man—all believe, right now, in the existence of that dynamite that never existed save in the slippery-gear'd and all too-accelerated brain of the degenerate forger and poet, Cecil Winwood. And Cecil Winwood still lives, while I, of all men concerned, the utterest, absolutist, innocentest, go to the scaffold in a few short weeks.

And now I must tell how entered the forty lifers upon my dungeon stillness. I was asleep when the outer door to the corridor of dungeons clanged open and aroused me. "Some poor devil," was my thought; and my next thought was that he was surely getting his, as I listened to the scuffling of feet, the dull impact of blows on flesh, the sudden cries of pain, the filth of curses, and the sounds of dragging bodies. For, you see, every man was man-handled all the length of the way.

Dungeon-door after dungeon-door clanged open, and body after body was thrust in, flung in, or dragged in. And continually more groups of guards arrived with more beaten convicts who still were being beaten, and more dungeon-doors were opened to receive the bleeding frames of men who were guilty of yearning after freedom.

Yes, as I look back upon it, a man must be greatly a philosopher to survive the continual impact of such brutish experiences through the years and years. I am such a philosopher. I have endured eight years of their torment, and now, in the end, failing to get rid of me in all other ways, they have invoked the machinery of state to put a rope around my neck and shut off my breath by the weight of my body. Oh, I know how the experts give expert judgment that the fall through the trap breaks the victim's neck. And the victims, like Shakespeare's traveller, never return to testify to the contrary. But we who have lived in the stir know of the cases that are hushed in the prison crypts, where the victim's necks are not broken.

It is a funny thing, this hanging of a man. I have never seen a hanging, but I have been told by eye-witnesses the details of a dozen hangings so that I know what will happen to me. Standing on the trap, leg-manacled and arm-manacled, the knot against the neck, the black cap drawn, they will drop me down until the momentum of my descending weight is fetched up abruptly short by the tautening of the rope. Then the doctors will group around me, and one will relieve another in successive turns in standing on a stool, his arms passed around me to keep me from swinging like a pendulum, his ear pressed close to my chest, while he counts my fading heart-beats. Sometimes twenty minutes elapse after the trap is sprung ere the heart stops beating. Oh, trust me, they make most scientifically sure that a man is dead once they get him on a rope.

I still wander aside from my narrative to ask a question or two of society. I have a right so to wander and so to question, for in a little while they are going to take me out and do this thing to me. If the neck of the victim be broken by the alleged shrewd arrangement of knot and noose, and by the alleged shrewd calculation of the weight of the victim and the

length of slack, then why do they manacle the arms of the victim? Society, as a whole, is unable to answer this question. But I know why; so does any amateur who ever engaged in a lynching bee and saw the victim throw up his hands, clutch the rope, and ease the throttle of the noose about his neck so that he might breathe.

Another question I will ask of the smug, cotton-wooled member of society, whose soul has never strayed to the red hells. Why do they put the black cap over the head and the face of the victim ere they drop him through the trap? Please remember that in a short while they will put that black cap over my head. So I have a right to ask. Do they, your hang-dogs, O smug citizen, do these your hang-dogs fear to gaze upon the facial horror of the horror they perpetrate for you and ours and at your behest?

Please remember that I am not asking this question in the twelve-hundredth year after Christ, nor in the time of Christ, nor in the twelve-hundredth year before Christ. I, who am to be hanged this year, the nineteen-hundred-and-thirteenth after Christ, ask these questions of you who are assumably Christ's followers, of you whose hang-dogs are going to take me out and hide my face under a black cloth because they dare not look upon the horror they do to me while I yet live.

And now back to the situation in the dungeons. When the last guard departed and the outer door clanged shut, all the forty beaten, disappointed men began to talk and ask questions. But, almost immediately, roaring like a bull in order to be heard, Skysail Jack, a giant sailor of a lifer, ordered silence while a census could be taken. The dungeons were full, and dungeon by dungeon, in order of dungeons, shouted out its quota to the roll-call. Thus, every dungeon was accounted for as occupied by trusted convicts, so that there was no opportunity for a stool to be hidden away and listening.

Of me, only, were the convicts dubious, for I was the one man who had not been in the plot. They put me through a searching examination. I could but tell them how I had just emerged from dungeon and jacket in the morning, and without rhyme or reason, so far as I could discover, had been put back in the dungeon after being out only several hours. My record as an incorrigible was in my favour, and soon they began to talk.

As I lay there and listened, for the first time I learned of the break that had been a-hatching. "Who had squealed?" was their one quest, and throughout the night the quest was pursued. The quest for Cecil Winwood was vain, and the suspicion against him was general.

"There's only one thing, lads," Skysail Jack finally said. "It'll soon be morning, and then they'll take us out and give us bloody hell. We were caught dead to rights with our clothes on. Winwood crossed us and squealed. They're going to get us out one by one and mess us up. There's forty of us. Any lyin's bound to be found out. So each lad, when they sweat him, just tells the truth, the whole truth, so help him God."

And there, in that dark hole of man's inhumanity, from dungeon cell to dungeon cell, their mouths against the gratings, the two-score lifers solemnly pledged themselves before God to tell the truth.

Little good did their truth-telling do them. At nine o'clock the guards, paid bravoes of the smug citizens who constitute the state, full of meat and sleep, were upon us. Not only had we had no breakfast, but we had had no water. And beaten men are prone to feverishness. I wonder, my reader, if you can glimpse or guess the faintest connotation of a man beaten—"beat up," we prisoners call it. But no, I shall not tell you. Let it suffice to know that these beaten, feverish men lay seven hours without water.

At nine the guards arrived. There were not many of them. There was no need for many, because they unlocked only one dungeon at a time. They were equipped with pick-handles—a handy tool for the "disciplining" of a helpless man. One dungeon at a time, and dungeon by dungeon, they messed and pulped the lifers. They were impartial. I received the same pulping as the rest. And this was merely the beginning, the preliminary to the examination each man was to undergo alone in the presence of the paid brutes of the state. It was the forecast to each man of what each man might expect in inquisition hall.

I have been through most of the red hells of prison life, but, worst of all, far worse than what they intend to do with me in a short while, was the particular hell of the dungeons in the days that followed.

Long Bill Hodge, the hard-bitten mountaineer, was the first man interrogated. He came back two hours later—or, rather, they conveyed him back, and threw him on the stone of his dungeon floor. They then took away Luigi Polazzo, a San Francisco hoodlum, the first native generation of Italian parentage, who jeered and sneered at them and challenged them to wreak their worst upon him.

It was some time before Long Bill Hodge mastered his pain sufficiently to be coherent.

"What about this dynamite?" he demanded. "Who knows anything about dynamite?"

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