

CHAPTER VIII

In solitary, in Cell One, Warden Atherton and Captain Jamie proceeded to put me to the inquisition. As Warden Atherton said to me:

"Standing, you're going to come across with that dynamite, or I'll kill you in the jacket. Harder cases than you have come across before I got done with them. You've got your choice--dynamite or curtains."

"Then I guess it is curtains," I answered, "because I don't know of any dynamite."

This irritated the Warden to immediate action. "Lie down," he commanded.

I obeyed, for I had learned the folly of fighting three or four strong men. They laced me tightly, and gave me a hundred hours. Once each twenty-four hours I was permitted a drink of water. I had no desire for food, nor was food offered me. Toward the end of the hundred hours Jackson, the prison doctor, examined my physical condition several times.

But I had grown too used to the jacket during my incorrigible days to let a single jacking injure me. Naturally, it weakened me, took the life out of me; but I had learned muscular tricks for stealing a little space while they were lacing me. At the end of the first hundred hours' bout I was worn and tired, but that was all. Another bout of this duration they

gave me, after a day and a night to recuperate. And then they gave one hundred and fifty hours. Much of this time I was physically numb and mentally delirious. Also, by an effort of will, I managed to sleep away long hours.

Next, Warden Atherton tried a variation. I was given irregular intervals of jacket and recuperation. I never knew when I was to go into the jacket. Thus I would have ten hours' recuperation, and do twenty in the jacket; or I would receive only four hours' rest. At the most unexpected hours of the night my door would clang open and the changing guards would lace me. Sometimes rhythms were instituted. Thus, for three days and nights I alternated eight hours in the jacket and eight hours out. And then, just as I was growing accustomed to this rhythm, it was suddenly altered and I was given two days and nights straight.

And ever the eternal question was propounded to me: Where was the dynamite? Sometimes Warden Atherton was furious with me. On occasion, when I had endured an extra severe jacketing, he almost pleaded with me to confess. Once he even promised me three months in the hospital of absolute rest and good food, and then the trusty job in the library.

Dr. Jackson, a weak stick of a creature with a smattering of medicine, grew sceptical. He insisted that jacketing, no matter how prolonged, could never kill me; and his insistence was a challenge to the Warden to continue the attempt.

"These lean college guys 'd fool the devil," he grumbled. "They're tougher 'n raw-hide. Just the same we'll wear him down. Standing, you hear me. What you've got ain't a caution to what you're going to get. You might as well come across now and save trouble. I'm a man of my word. You've heard me say dynamite or curtains. Well, that stands. Take your choice."

"Surely you don't think I'm holding out because I enjoy it?" I managed to gasp, for at the moment Pie-Face Jones was forcing his foot into my back in order to cinch me tighter, while I was trying with my muscle to steal slack. "There is nothing to confess. Why, I'd cut off my right hand right now to be able to lead you to any dynamite."

"Oh, I've seen your educated kind before," he sneered. "You get wheels in your head, some of you, that make you stick to any old idea. You get baulky, like horses. Tighter, Jones; that ain't half a cinch. Standing, if you don't come across it's curtains. I stick by that."

One compensation I learned. As one grows weaker one is less susceptible to suffering. There is less hurt because there is less to hurt. And the man already well weakened grows weaker more slowly. It is of common knowledge that unusually strong men suffer more severely from ordinary sicknesses than do women or invalids. As the reserves of strength are consumed there is less strength to lose. After all superfluous flesh is gone what is left is stringy and resistant. In fact, that was what I became--a sort of string-like organism that persisted in living.

Morrell and Oppenheimer were sorry for me, and rapped me sympathy and advice. Oppenheimer told me he had gone through it, and worse, and still lived.

"Don't let them beat you out," he spelled with his knuckles. "Don't let them kill you, for that would suit them. And don't squeal on the plant."

"But there isn't any plant," I rapped back with the edge of the sole of my shoe against the grating--I was in the jacket at the time and so could talk only with my feet. "I don't know anything about the damned dynamite."

"That's right," Oppenheimer praised. "He's the stuff, ain't he, Ed?"

Which goes to show what chance I had of convincing Warden Atherton of my ignorance of the dynamite. His very persistence in the quest convinced a man like Jake Oppenheimer, who could only admire me for the fortitude with which I kept a close mouth.

During this first period of the jacket-inquisition I managed to sleep a great deal. My dreams were remarkable. Of course they were vivid and real, as most dreams are. What made them remarkable was their coherence and continuity. Often I addressed bodies of scientists on abstruse subjects, reading aloud to them carefully prepared papers on my own researches or on my own deductions from the researches and experiments of

others. When I awakened my voice would seem still ringing in my ears, while my eyes still could see typed on the white paper whole sentences and paragraphs that I could read again and marvel at ere the vision faded. In passing, I call attention to the fact that at the time I noted that the process of reasoning employed in these dream speeches was invariably deductive.

Then there was a great farming section, extending north and south for hundreds of miles in some part of the temperate regions, with a climate and flora and fauna largely resembling those of California. Not once, nor twice, but thousands of different times I journeyed through this dream-region. The point I desire to call attention to was that it was always the same region. No essential feature of it ever differed in the different dreams. Thus it was always an eight-hour drive behind mountain horses from the alfalfa meadows (where I kept many Jersey cows) to the straggly village beside the big dry creek, where I caught the little narrow-gauge train. Every land-mark in that eight-hour drive in the mountain buckboard, every tree, every mountain, every ford and bridge, every ridge and eroded hillside was ever the same.

In this coherent, rational farm-region of my strait-jacket dreams the minor details, according to season and to the labour of men, did change. Thus on the upland pastures behind my alfalfa meadows I developed a new farm with the aid of Angora goats. Here I marked the changes with every dream-visit, and the changes were in accordance with the time that elapsed between visits.

Oh, those brush-covered slopes! How I can see them now just as when the goats were first introduced. And how I remembered the consequent changes--the paths beginning to form as the goats literally ate their way through the dense thickets; the disappearance of the younger, smaller bushes that were not too tall for total browsing; the vistas that formed in all directions through the older, taller bushes, as the goats browsed as high as they could stand and reach on their hind legs; the driftage of the pasture grasses that followed in the wake of the clearing by the goats. Yes, the continuity of such dreaming was its charm. Came the day when the men with axes chopped down all the taller brush so as to give the goats access to the leaves and buds and bark. Came the day, in winter weather, when the dry denuded skeletons of all these bushes were gathered into heaps and burned. Came the day when I moved my goats on to other brush-impregnable hillsides, with following in their wake my cattle, pasturing knee-deep in the succulent grasses that grew where before had been only brush. And came the day when I moved my cattle on, and my plough-men went back and forth across the slopes' contour--ploughing the rich sod under to rot to live and crawling humous in which to bed my seeds of crops to be.

Yes, and in my dreams, often, I got off the little narrow-gauge train where the straggly village stood beside the big dry creek, and got into the buckboard behind my mountain horses, and drove hour by hour past all the old familiar landmarks of my alfalfa meadows, and on to my upland pastures where my rotated crops of corn and barley and clover were ripe

for harvesting and where I watched my men engaged in the harvest, while beyond, ever climbing, my goats browsed the higher slopes of brush into cleared, tilled fields.

But these were dreams, frank dreams, fancied adventures of my deductive subconscious mind. Quite unlike them, as you shall see, were my other adventures when I passed through the gates of the living death and relived the reality of the other lives that had been mine in other days.

In the long hours of waking in the jacket I found that I dwelt a great deal on Cecil Winwood, the poet-forgery who had wantonly put all this torment on me, and who was even then at liberty out in the free world again. No; I did not hate him. The word is too weak. There is no word in the language strong enough to describe my feelings. I can say only that I knew the gnawing of a desire for vengeance on him that was a pain in itself and that exceeded all the bounds of language. I shall not tell you of the hours I devoted to plans of torture on him, nor of the diabolical means and devices of torture that I invented for him. Just one example. I was enamoured of the ancient trick whereby an iron basin, containing a rat, is fastened to a man's body. The only way out for the rat is through the man himself. As I say, I was enamoured of this until I realized that such a death was too quick, whereupon I dwelt long and favourably on the Moorish trick of--but no, I promised to relate no further of this matter. Let it suffice that many of my pain-maddening waking hours were devoted to dreams of vengeance on Cecil Winwood.