RAP SHEET

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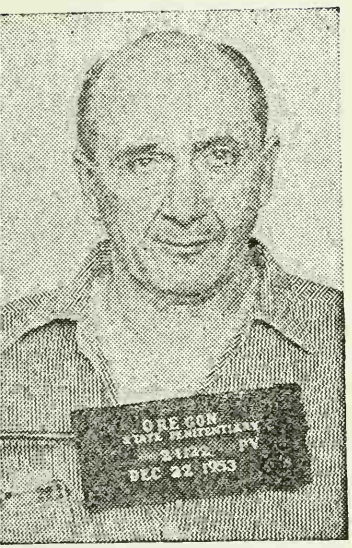

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SHEET

my life story

by Blackie Audett (James Henry Audett)

foreword by Gene Lowall

New York

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I've tried to tell the story of my life in my own way, just like I lived it—which was in my own way, too. I hope you'll enjoy reading it, because I sure didn't enjoy living it.

And now that the story has been told, I want to dedicate it to Roy R. Hewitt and Merlin Estep because I was more than just another client to them, and my troubles was more than just legal business.

JAMES HENRY AUDETT

foreword

When I first sat down with Blackie Audett—bank robber, safe burglar, escape artist extraordinary—I was certain he would sing a song I've heard so many times I practically know it by heart.

In twenty-odd years as a newspaperman and now as a special investigator for Bert M. Keating, the district attorney of Denver, I've met more than my share of people who take the law very lightly—if at all. I've questioned them by the dreary dozen, in fact, and whether they were murderers, rapists, psychopathic deviates, or any other criminal type, almost never have I found them engaging personalities. Frequently they are either vaunting braggarts or sniveling repentants who wish they could only live life over again, and so on ad nauseam. The story they tell is a tale of woe, delivered with a strut or a crocodile tear, and somewhere along its course is a booby trap—a trap set to ensnare sympathy or to promote some self-serving end. "I never had a decent break" or "I got a bum rap" is the common theme.

I went to see Blackie Audett because I had a job to do. That job was to help him organize and develop an autobiography

which he was, of all things, reluctant to write. I was, in short, to be technical assistant to the reliving of a spectacular life.

All I really knew about Blackie then was that for more than thirty years he had lived outside the law. And knowing that much, I thought I knew everything. With minor variations, he would be like all the others.

I could not have been more wrong.

I took along a tape recorder and with that machine on a table between us I sat down and sized up my man. And he sized me up. We both kept the left hand high. At first he was a little shy. Guarded. I was, too. We both felt around for a place to begin, I with a tinge of skepticism, he with a clearly apparent reluctance to wade too deeply into personal revelations that he seemed to fear I wouldn't understand.

We sparred for a quarter-hour or so, while tape slid through the machine to record vague fragments of narrative by Blackie that had about as much zip as a weather forecast. Then at random I threw him the name of an obscure mobster I had known many years ago. He brightened and threw back an anecdote associated with that name. I tossed out another. Back came an episode it recalled. So, one thing became certain to each of us. We both knew our business and the people it involved. And each of us, moreover, was fully aware the other was not going to be able to put anything over, and get away with it. So we both talked, while the tape spools spun out Blackie's yarn. First *I* talked and he replied. Then *he* talked and I interjected a question now and then to keep his story tracking. Finally, it became a matter of Blackie talking while I just listened.

It was easy for me. But it wasn't easy for Blackie. He was unaware at the time that I knew it, but Blackie is suffering from cancer. Because he tired easily, our sessions were short. Each time when we resumed, he picked up the thread where he had dropped it and the tape spools spun on and on. When we were through, I had several hundred yards of Blackie's personality—his voice, his chuckles, even the trace of mist that

came now and then to his eyes. For me, it was then merely a job of rethreading the beads.

The man I met was serene, mild-spoken, possessed of the rare quality that enabled him to laugh, if not loudly, at yesterday. He did not regret the past because he realized that, of all things in life, it was the one most impossible to repair. And at the same time he took no pride in it. His associates had been rebellious spirits who wrote an inglorious page in American history. He, too, had been a rebellious spirit—a spirit quite possibly derived from the fraction of proud Indian blood that flows in his veins—and as such he found in the Dillingers and the Baby Face Nelsons something kindred to his own nature. Freely he chose their way of life, with all its consequences.

As he told his story—the story which is this book—I responded as I had never thought I could. Here was a man who typified everything that both training and experience had taught me to oppose, yet I found myself liking him for being human, warm and, in his own way, honest. I liked him also because he talked without either bragging or excusing himself, without comment of any kind except to say—and he spoke very seriously then—that, in his judgment, the worst crime he could ever commit or could conceive of committing would be to encourage anyone, particularly the youth of today, to follow his way of life. Beyond that, he leaves it to others to point the moral and adorn the tale.

But not to me. It was my fortune to help him tell it, and I can be neither judge, critic, nor apologist for the life which was Blackie Audett's.

GENE LOWALL

Denver, Colorado
May 16, 1954

one

two

three

one

"... and then up jumped the devil"

1

Off and on for nearly forty years, people have been calling me Blackie.

They called me Blackie when I was a bootlegger and when I was running Chinks. And that's the way they tagged me when me and the boys was robbing banks practically wholesale back in the 1930's.

Blackie the pal of Johnny Dillinger. Blackie the guy on the lam. You could see my picture on "wanted" circulars in post offices and railroad depots from here to yonder in them days. . . .

But I started out on a farm. A farm on the prairie just outside Calgary, Alberta. That's a good many hundred miles from the Columbia River Valley in Oregon, where I was born. I wasn't much more than a baby when we moved out of the States.

The first things I remember much about—and some of them I don't care much to remember—are things that went on out there on the farm. And in our life up there in Canada. Things like my old man flogging me to a standstill for the both of us with a harness strap when he got drunk. Him hit-

ting my mother with his fist when he was that way. Him and the hired man making fun and mistreating my pony.

Things like that can make you bitter. And that kind of bitterness sticks with you the same as scars from floggings you got when you was a kid.

It was one of my old man's beatings that first put me on the lam—when I was ten years old.

It started out as just another night with my old man coming home drunk from Calgary. He beat hell out of me for something I wasn't to blame for. I even forget now just what it was, it was so long ago. I packed up my things, climbed out the window and saddled up my pony, Noble.

It ended with me riding through the night to Calgary and me and Noble sleeping in a livery stable there until morning. Next day I sold Noble. I was just that fed up, I sold the thing I loved the most. But the $150 I got for him looked mighty big. Then I went out and got me a job. That was the day I growed up.

I went to work as a callboy on the Canadian Pacific, calling train crews when it come time for them to hit the road. I was big for my age and could pass easy for fifteen years or so, which I done. After getting set up with a job, I moved into a little old hotel near the railroad yards, along with a man name of Conklin. He had got me the job and I liked it fine. From then on out, I wanted to be a railroader the rest of my life.

It was around the Canadian Pacific yards where I first picked up the moniker of Blackie. My hair was thick and black as coal. George Conklin got to calling me Blackie. The others around the yard office picked it up.

There was another name got attached to me just about the same time. Working in the yards, I used to wear coveralls, and the railroad men said I looked like a teddy bear. So they started calling me "Ted," which I've been known as off and on ever since.

I had been working for the Canadian Pacific a little over a year when I ran into Shorty.

Shorty had been our hired man in times gone by. He had lived with us, out to the farm. Him and my old man used to go on benders together. I never liked Shorty much, because he used to mistreat Noble.

Anyways, when I run into him on the street in Calgary, we was both a little surprised. He asked me how come a kid like me was so far from home. I asked him did my father have him out hunting me.

One thing led to another till I told Shorty the whole story. He didn't lose no time getting back to the farm and telling my father.

A couple nights later, when I was out on a call, the Mounties come into the yard office. They asked the dispatcher about me and where I was and all that. They said I was a runaway and my old man had asked them to pick me up and put me in jail.

Well, George Conklin overheard the whole business. I'd told him long before just why I left the farm and all. He'd said right then he was on my side, all the way.

George knowed the route I usually taken coming back from my calls. So he slipped out while the Mounties was talking with the others and headed me off. He was waiting in behind a switch shack when I come by. When he told me it was the Mounties, I got scared for sure.

We done some quick figuring there in the dark and it ended up with me ducking over to the hotel, sneaking my things out of the back and meeting George later behind the depot. I give him some money I'd saved, and he bought me a ticket to Spokane.

I don't know where them Mounties was, but they sure wasn't watching when I climbed on the Spokane Flyer that night and headed for the States.

A few years later, that very same train figured in one of the biggest holdups in the history of Canada. Five gunmen

—two of them pretty young—heisted the mail car for a half-million dollars.

One of them two youngsters was me.

The Robinsons called me Ted.

It was the name I give to Mr. Robinson (I'll call him Robinson because he still might be alive and I wouldn't want he should be embarrassed) when he hired me. He was chief engineer of the power company in Spokane—first place I hit up for a job.

He done more than hire me. He taken me into his home as a son. He already had a daughter.

That was Dolly. She was a month younger than me.

Dolly was as sweet and smart as she was pretty. Her and I hit it off right from the start. In some ways, we was like brother and sister. We never exactly knowed when we come to be sweethearts. But we did.

I was a switchboard boy down to the power plant, the two years I lived with the Robinsons. I handled the big switches that "killed" the circuits the line crews was working on, so's there wouldn't be any accidents.

Me and the linemen used to horse around a lot, playing practical jokes and all. There was a big fellow name of Joe, who was foreman of one of the crews. I was always playing tricks on him, and sometimes he got a little sore. But he would always get over it in time.

It was coming along for New Year's 1916. The linemen was planning a big New Year's Eve party. Joe stopped me in the hall one day right after Christmas and asked me to go along.

I told him I didn't figure I should, because I wanted to spend New Year's Eve with Dolly. She had planned we would go to midnight mass and then home and fix some popcorn and candy and things.

When I told her about my invite from the boys, she insisted

so much that I go along with them that finally I went and did.

Well, the boys had the party set up for a place they called The Point, out on the edge of town. It was a pretty rough section, full of bootleggers, gamblers and like that. We went out there that New Year's Eve and things was pretty gay. Maybe you might say they was rougher than they was gay. Joe insisted I have a drink with them.

I'd nevèr tasted liquor and I told them why—because of my old man. Joe said, "All right. Just give him a little glass of wine. That won't hurt him none."

So they brought in some wine and I taken a sip of it. It tasted pretty good. I had another. And then I guess after that I drunk everything in the place.

Brother, that was it. I never knowed to this day what all happened that New Year's Eve. I never knowed nothing till I woke up next morning in a room that was spinning like a merry-go-round.

I was sick. My head was hammering like them honky-tonk pianos out there at The Point. I finally got the bed stopped. It quit spinning long enough for me to crawl out.

First thing I thought of was Dolly and the Robinsons, and what they would think. The more I thought about that, the more sick and ashamed of myself I got.

I wanted to get out of that room. I couldn't think about going home. I just wanted to crawl away some place and die.

When I got out on the street I seen I was down on the skid row—cheap flophouses, pawnshops and pool halls. It was raining. A cold wind was blowing down out of the Cascades.

I got sick all over again and was hanging onto the side of a building by an alley, past caring what else might happen to me, when someone put their hand on my shoulder. I heard a voice say, "Lad, you look like you got troubles."

I looked around, scareder than ever, and seen a big man in uniform. It was a soldier's uniform. Not the Mounties.

The man said, "I know something that will take all your troubles away. What you need is another drink."

Well, that done it again. What was left of me got sick some more. I'd have done almost anything to get over that feeling. Then I remembered my old man used to take a few more drinks when he come off a bender. I decided I couldn't be no worse than the way I was, so I said, "Mister, you be the doctor."

He taken me by the arm and we went down the street a ways to another hotel. The man he steered me up to a room he had there. He pulled out a bottle and sloshed some whisky into a glass. He told me to swallow it right down.

I gagged, but I got it down. He poured another one. He didn't pour none for himself. I didn't see nothing strange about that, at the time. Pretty soon I felt better. Then the man told me he was a sergeant in the Canadian Army. He said a lot of nasty things about the "Goddam Krauts." It was the duty of every red-blooded man, he said, to wipe them off the face of the earth.

Well, the sergeant poured me another drink. I started to tell him I had to get home. Then I guess I changed my mind. I remember later, sort of dim, that him and I went back out to The Point. Beyond that, I didn't remember nothing.

When I come to, it was pitch dark outside. We was in some kind of joint and my head felt like somebody was trying to pound their way out of it with a sledge hammer.

There was something on my left sleeve. It was a blue band, with white letters on it. I had a hard time getting my eyes teamed up enough to see what the letters said. Then I heard the sergeant's voice again. "Don't strain your eyes, kid," he was saying. "It only says 'Volunteer for Service in France.' "

That kind of sobered me up. I asked him what was going on.

Well, he told me. He said he was proud of me. He said the whole world ought to be damn well proud of a kid like me. He said I had signed up to fight for the king, in France.

I told him I didn't know no king, and even if I did, I didn't owe him nothing.

The sergeant pulled out some papers and held them under my nose.

"Oh yes, you do, kid," he said. "Don't get no funny ideas. You have signed the oath of allegiance to the King of England. This here is it."

Well, there was some hen scratches at the bottom of the paper that looked a little bit like my name. There was some more of the same kind of marks on another paper that said I had volunteered for duty in the Canadian Army.

I begin to get a little crawly in my guts and at the back of my neck.

"I ain't going," I told the sergeant. "You can't make me go. This is Spokane, Washington, U.S.A. I ain't no Canadian. And my country ain't in no war."

The sergeant he quit being friendly, mighty quick.

"I think you're forgetting something, kid," he said. "You're forgetting what you told me this afternoon, when you was bragging about having the Mounties after you. You want I should notify them?"

I didn't remember telling him nothing. But I must have, or he wouldn't have knowed. Anyways, when he said "Mounties," that sobered me up cold.

"So if you want to holler for a cop, go ahead," the sergeant went on. "You'll holler yourself right into jail. Your train leaves for Calgary in an hour. Which way do you want it? That train, or the Mounties?"

So I went down to the train and climbed on. I was on my way to war. I was thirteen years old and mighty scared and mighty homesick.

2

It was cold up there in the camp, where they started trying to train us in the blizzards. Camp Sarcee, I think they called it. It gets mighty cold in Canada any winter, even if you ain't already got ice in your stomach from fear and shame.

Me and Eddie Davis—that was a kid a year older than me who'd got into the Army about the same way I did and was my buddy through the big end of the war—like to froze right there in the barracks, let alone get out to drill.

Finally they moved our outfit down closer to the States where it was warmer, but not much. They put us up in an old warehouse made over into a barracks. The older men grabbed off the bunks close to the stoves, set up along the middle of the place. Time me and Eddie got the drift of things—we was so young and green—all that was left was bunks way over against the wall. It looked like a mile to the nearest stove, and felt twice that far.

Well, I guess it was the greenness that saved our skins.

About three in the morning the place caught fire. The whole roof was burning when we woke up. Part of it was already caving in. There was yelling and screaming in the dark all

over the place, and men running half-naked every which way.

Me and Eddie, being young and dumb, we took our soldiering pretty serious. We'd been in the Army almost a month by then, moving from camp to camp as they tried to find a place warm enough for us to train. This one was a little too warm, though. They had learned us only about one thing in that first month. That was never to leave the barracks except when fully dressed, with all our gear. It was right there in the rule book that they had give to me and Eddie. So that's exactly what we done. And we set a record doing it that I'll bet hasn't been tied before or since in the history of soldiering. We found our guns and packs and scrambled outdoors just before the rest of the roof caved in.

We come to attention out in the street and stood there like dummies in all the confusion. We was scared so stiff there wasn't any other way for us *to* stand.

We was standing there when the major of our outfit come along. We saluted, just like on parade. He stopped and stared, first at us and then at all the confusion and half-dressed men running around. He grinned and told us it looked like we was the only soldiers he had in the outfit.

Then he taken us over to where they was trying to assemble the regiment. Me and Eddie, we just kept our mouths shut. Mainly, we kept them shut so nobody could hear our teeth rattling, and they wasn't rattling from cold.

Well, there was a truck stuck in a big hole where some ammunition or something had blowed a great big hole from the fire. The driver was trying to get her loose. He was spinning the wheels and the sergeant was cussing and the lieutenant was waving his arms. Our major he began hollering at the lieutenant and the lieutenant he was spluttering like he was going to be the next thing that blowed.

The major, he does his exploding right on the spot. He says to the lieutenant, "Hell! Either one of these two brats here could get that truck out of there in five minutes."

Then everybody starts pointing. The major points to me.

The lieutenant points to the sergeant, and the sergeant points to the poor guy sweating in the truck. Him and I switch, and it's my turn to sweat. The major, he's standing there tapping his riding crop against his foot. I climbed up and slid under the wheel.

Well, I had drove tractors and Caterpillars out on the farm, but a big strange army truck was something else again. I throwed her in gear, shut my eyes, and floor-boarded her.

I made it by the skin of my teeth. She spun and hung a minute, then come out of that hole like a cork out of a bottle.

And that's how I got my first good job in World War I.

The colonel saw it all. Come to find out, he'd been searching for a chauffeur through the whole outfit—an outfit that was mostly plow jockeys and sheepherders. He told the major to have me report to his headquarters when the fire was out. I was to be chauffeur of his big staff car, the colonel said.

The job didn't last long, though, mainly on account of the colonel had a daughter.

She was a couple years older than me and she kind of liked the boys more than most, I guess. Anyways, she used to come by and make eyes at me when I was shining up her old man's car. One day she tells me she wants to go for a ride.

Well, I figured her being the colonel's daughter, and all, she probably was sort of my boss, too, just like he was. So I taken her out for a spin. A few days later, here she come again and wanted to go for another ride.

This time it didn't go so good. The colonel wanted the car while we was out driving. The car was gone. I was gone. And his daughter was gone, too.

The MP's was waiting for us when we drove back in the gate. I got a summary court-martial out of it. The colonel's daughter went to bat for me, but it didn't do no good. I lost the job and was sent direct to France.

I never seen the girl again.

I wrote to Dolly a short time after I arrived in my first camp up in Canada.

I'd got up nerve, finally, to write and tell her the whole thing and how ashamed I was. She wrote back and told me she and her folks still loved me, and if I had only come to them they would have understood. They had been worried to death. They had found out I'd been shanghaied into the Army. Mr. Robinson had tried to get me out, but it didn't work.

Anyways, I felt a little better about it, after the letter, and took to writing Dolly every day. She wrote to me every day, too, all during the war.

When we got to France, me and Eddie was throwed back together again. I'd lost my soft job with the colonel, and me and Eddie both felt that likely the next thing to happen to us would be to get killed. They'd begun using tanks not long before that, and a tank company was attached to our outfit. Me and Eddie, we eyed them tanks over and they sure looked good to us. We figured they would be the best things you could think of to be inside of when the shooting started, what with all that armor around them and all.

Nobody told us, but at that state of the war the average life of a tank driver was about thirty-five minutes, in combat.

Anyways, me and Eddie went up to the same major who had complimented us there at the barracks fire and volunteered as tank drivers. They was hard pressed to find anybody who knowed enough even to change a tire in our outfit.

So, an hour later we was in the tank corps, the both of us. And we went right into some of the heaviest action of the war—up on the Somme and along in there.

Once in a while they would give us a short leave and we'd make the most of it. Sometimes we'd get to Paris or Bordeaux. Places like that.

My first leave, I went to Nice with some of the other fellows. We had quite a whoop-de-do and I run into a beautiful French girl named Lili.

Me and Lili hit all the high spots and had ourselves a big time. I seen her two or three times after that, on leave. I liked her and I think Lili liked me a lot, too. But it was just one of them war affairs.

When I come back to Europe years later, on the lam, I went looking for Lili. That search taken me into quite a set of adventures.

Along about the time I met Lili, I made the second big mistake of my life. I shot a man.

For that, they put me in jail. It was the first jail I was ever in. It done something to me.

Happened this here way:

I was sitting in the barracks one night reading a bundle of mail that had come from Dolly. She had sent me a picture of herself, taken on her fifteenth birthday a short time before. She said she wished I'd been there to celebrate both our birthdays together, like we used to. Her birthday come in February and mine in January.

I was setting looking at that picture and thinking about them wonderful days back in Spokane when a sergeant come up behind me. He taken a look at the picture and made a dirty remark.

Well, I went blind mad. I pulled my pistol and shot him. I didn't kill him, just shot him through the shoulder. There was an awful hullabaloo over it. They sent me to the guardhouse while they waited to see if the sergeant would live. Then they sent me to a detention prison, to wait some more.

In the detention prison was a lot of the scum of the earth —older men who was deserters and things like that—criminals. Some of them even was being held for the firing squad. The place was an old French prison down fairly close to the Spanish border, where they used to keep convicts before they

sent them to the galleys. The other prisoners was always talking about ways to get out. Quite a few did. They would go over the wall and take shelter in Spain, which was neutral.

I thought about making a break for it a time or two, but somehow I never done anything about it. All I done was set behind the bars and bitter up.

The sergeant lived. And because they needed tank drivers so bad and the war was going against us, they let me out of prison. I went back into battle.

Not long after that, I was made lieutenant. Just by accident, you might say, I was promoted and decorated for what the orders said was "bravery." But the real truth was I was decorated for cowardice. And so was Eddie, right along with me.

It was just one of them freak things that can happen in a war.

We was in the first battle of the Argonne Forest, as I remember, going hot and heavy. The Germans had a position along the canal that had to be took. Our captain called for volunteers to take six tanks and move in on this position, so the bridge across the canal could be blowed up.

Well, me and Eddie volunteered. We spread our patrol of tanks and started after them Krauts. I guess me and Eddie wasn't as brave as we thought we was. We separated from the others and started looking for places where Krauts was unlikeliest to be. But the way me and Eddie took, ended us right up behind them Germans in spite of ourselves. I guess they thought they was surrounded by a big force.

Anyways, they blowed up that bridge right there and then, themselves. They spiked their own guns and surrendered, in a group.

Well, we was about as surprised as they was. But they come out with their hands up, so we figured we might as well take them prisoner. So we brought them back—two hundred and sixty Germans and their busted guns. Just me and Eddie.

Like I said, we got decorated and both of us was promoted

to lieutenant, for bravery in the field. Only me and Eddie knowed how hard we had tried to be where the shooting wasn't. But we never let on.

It was some months after I got back with the outfit, after the shooting scrape, and we had moved on up into the Saar, that I really got blowed up.

A piece of high explosive shell hit me in the forehead and fractured my skull. My vision blurred and my eyes was crossed. That fracture didn't heal so good. Later, after I got back to Winnipeg, Canada, a piece of bone was removed and my eyes got well. I still carry a silver plate in my head. It used to show up on the electric eye when they checked me in and out of the cell blocks at Alcatraz. I guess it give them guards more worry until they found out what it was than it ever give me.

After I was hit, I was sent first to a hospital in Bordeaux. From there they shipped me to England and finally, on the *Empress of India,* I got back to Canada. This time I knowed I was really out of the war. It was about over anyway.

I wound up in a hospital in Winnipeg. Dolly and I was exchanging daily letters by that time again. And practically all we wrote about was when we would get married, as soon as I got out of the war and the hospital. Matter of fact, that's all we had wrote about them last couple years of the war.

Dolly was going to meet me at Kingsgate, Alberta, on the international boundary, just as soon as I got out of the hospital. We was going to be married after we got home to Spokane.

And then up jumped the devil, like the crapshooters say when seven pops up wrong. It seemed like almost everybody in creation got sick in the big flu epidemic.

I had wrote and told Dolly the date of my release. She wrote back, saying she would meet me at Kingsgate on a certain day. I was kind of weak and shaky when I got out of the hospital, but I got on the train. I chewed my fingernails all the way to Kingsgate. There hasn't been a happier moment

in my life than when I looked out the window as we come pulling into the station, there at Kingsgate.

But I couldn't see Dolly anywheres.

I got off the train and raced around among the crowd. I couldn't find her. I asked around the station, but nobody had saw anyone that looked like Dolly. I went across the Line to the States side and asked the custom officials if she had got off there. But no one had seen her there, either. By that time I was going wild. I waited around several hours, trying to figure out what could have happened. Then I couldn't stand it no longer. I caught a train for Spokane and taken a cab out to the Robinsons' house.

It was just as I was getting out of the cab that I seen the funeral wreath on the door.

Mr. Robinson was on the porch to meet me. He was crying. He told me Dolly had died of the flu just a few hours before. They hadn't even taken her to the mortuary, yet.

I went in. She was still holding my telegram in her hand—the wire I had sent, telling her when I would be in Kingsgate. On the bed beside her was a bunch of pictures I'd mailed her a few days before from the hospital.

Her mother was in another bedroom, very sick and delirious. She kept calling out to Dolly to be sure to go down to the station and meet me. She would moan and toss and say, "Dolly! Don't miss Ted at the depot. Your dress is all finished. In the front closet."

I cried, right along with Mr. Robinson. I guess that was about the last time I ever cried.

Dolly's mother died the next day. Mr. Robinson was so broke up and sick that I took charge of the double funeral. When that was over, I just sort of went to hell for a while.

I guess I never got over it to this day.

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I went back to Calgary soon after the funeral. It had changed a lot in the six or seven years since I'd seen it last.

There was something like $3,300 burning holes in my pockets—my back pay and mustering-out money from the Canadian Army. I felt rich and growed up. Pretty much of a hero, too. That's the way I felt on the outside. But I was hurt deep down and all broke to little bits inside.

Homesick, war-tired and lonesome, I started out to look up my folks. I wanted to see my mother. I had never wrote from the night I rode Noble away from the farm and hit out on my own.

I wasn't afraid of my old man no more. I figured I was big and rough and able to take care of myself. I was on the other side of seventeen and an old soldier.

I decided to go home in style. So I hired me a car and drove out to the old farm on the prairie. A total stranger answered my knock. He told me it was his farm now, that my folks had moved away years before. He said my father and mother had got divorced and he believed my mother had moved back to Oregon.

That sort of taken the wind out of my homecoming—what wind there was left after what had happened in Spokane.

I turned around and went back to Calgary. There, I asked a few questions around among friends of my mother. They told me they'd heard that after she went back to Oregon the flu epidemic hit there, too. Her mother, my uncle and some other members of the family had died, they said.

So I got on a train and went back to Portland. I visited awhile at home and was sure glad to see my mother, but I just didn't seem to fit in their life any more. My father had went his way and I never seen him again. As for my mother's folks, it wasn't that they weren't glad to see me and hear the tales I had to tell, but I guess I was just too restless and upset and heavy-hearted to take much interest. A week later, I was back in Calgary again.

There was still plenty of money in my kicker, so I bought a car—a Studebaker Special—and begun to live pretty high. A kid with money and a car never has much trouble finding friends. So it wasn't very long before I run into some guys that was as restless as I was. One was a kid I'll refer to only as Henry, because he is still alive and what him and me went through together back in them times might hurt him now if anybody knowed it.

I met Henry in the hospital in Winnipeg and through him I met the others. There was a fellow I will call Casey, another I'll call Snow, and another name of Fields.

My money went pretty fast. I was getting along toward broke. One day this fellow Casey and me was sitting in a joint. He'd been drinking some. I never drank after that one big bender in Spokane.

Casey, he said to me, "Blackie, you and me need money. Lots of money."

I told Casey he was dead right. Question was, where to find it quick. The big slump was on after the war. And the jobs there was didn't pay much right then.

Casey studied awhile. Then he said again, "How'd you like to get your hands into the biggest pile of money you ever seen?"

"Well, now," I said. "You begin to talk my language. You show me where that pile of money is and I'll show you how. I like to get my hands in it."

"No matter what you had to do to get it?" Casey said.

I thought that one over for a minute. Then I said, "That's right—no matter what."

Casey finished his drink. He leaned back in his chair and taken a long look at me, up and down.

"Can you handle a gun?" he said.

I snorted.

"Like I can handle a knife and fork," I told him. "That's all I been doing for the last few years."

Casey, he squints up his eyes and pulls out a toothpick. He begins chewing on it and looking me over real careful like. I can see him right now, sitting there, like it was yesterday.

Finally, he said, "How you fixed for guts, Blackie?"

I looked him square in the eye and said proud as a lance corporal on parade, "They give me a medal that says I got more than my share of 'em."

He kept on squinting at me and his voice dropped very low.

"You got enough of 'em to rob a train?"

"All by myself?" I said, startled.

"Course not," Casey said. "Me and some friends of mine will be along."

"What train you got in mind?" I asked him.

"The Spokane Special," Casey said, real low. "She'll be loaded with a bank shipment, a week from tonight."

Well, we talked some more and I told him I was all for it. I figured I didn't have nothing more to lose out of my life and it was worth a gamble. So Casey taken me down the street and we met up with Fields and Snow.

"Blackie's in on the caper," Casey told the other two.

"How about Henry?" I asked. "I kind of think he might like some of this dough. He ain't afraid of guns. He got blowed up in the war, just like I did. Besides, he's as broke as I am."

Well, they figured we could use Henry, too, because the way Casey had it figured, it would be a five-man job. Casey had worked for the Canadian Pacific in years gone by and he knowed the setup.

We drove out in my car that night and picked the spot—a little junction about twenty-five or thirty miles out of Calgary. There was a switch there to a track that went on down off the main line to another town, out at the end of creation somewheres.

We looked the place over and decided we could uncouple the train and make the crew take all but the mail car down on this other track. Then we could rob the mail car without fear of a rumble from the next way station on the main line.

It looked like a good setup, though at the time I didn't know no more about how to set up a heist than I did about what happens to people if they get caught at it.

Well, we tanked up my Studebaker a few nights later and started out. We hid in the woods near the junction till it was dark. Then we went to the station and taken the agent. He was alone, so it was easy to stick him up, tie him hand and foot and put him in the baggage room. Then we set the switch and the block signal and waited.

It was only about twenty minutes till the train was due. We was down in the shadows under the water tank. My guts was beginning to crawl around a little, like they done sometimes in France. The feel of the gun in my hand helped a lot, though, just like it had over there in battle. Besides, there was enough of us in on the caper so none of us dared to show the others he was nervous.

The Spokane train was right on time.

I don't know what the engineer figured when he seen all them block signals set against him at the junction. Anyways he brought her to a screeching stop right beside the station. Henry and me was ready. We climbed up into the locomotive and throwed down on the engineer and fireman with our guns. They got their hands up quick, but they sneered a little when they seen we was so young. They told us we couldn't get away with it.

We said we would take care of that end of it and all they had to do was what we told them. Henry—he was always sort of hot-tempered—swung at the fireman's head with his gun. They backed up into the tender and set down on the coal.

Meantime, Casey had uncoupled the mail car. Snow and Fields, guns out, was standing off the train crew, who come running up along the cars to see what was going on. We told the engineer to spot the mail car on the siding, couple back onto the rest of the train and take on out. Casey had throwed the switch to the junction track, so there was no place else for the train to go. The engineer taken one last look at them guns of ours. Then he opened up the throttle and the drivers begin to roll.

It was forty miles to the next station down that junction track.

We pulled my Studebaker up on the grade alongside the mail car. We hauled the money pouches right out the door and into the back end of the Studebaker. The whole thing only taken us about ten minutes. Then we got the hell out of there, fast.

But right there again, up jumped the devil in my life.

It was early spring and there was a chinook blowing. There was a little snow on the ground, but it was melting fast and the grade was pretty muddy. We was so busy getting the money out we clean forgot that snow and mud. And I forgot—or maybe never even knowed—about something else that was even more important.

About a week before, I had tore out the side of my left front tire—ripped it out crossing some street car tracks or something. Them tires was worth about $50 apiece then and I was running low on cash. So I taken the torn tire down to a vulcanizing shop in Calgary.

They patched it good as new. But they was a little too proud of their work. Their vulcanizing machine was fixed so it molded their name and address right into every patch they put on. It made the patch just like a rubber stamp, you might say.

Well, after we grabbed the money we drove hell-for-leather back to Calgary.

We got a room in a cheap hotel and poured the loot out on the bed. It was the biggest pile of money I ever seen, before or since. And I've seen a lot. The five of us begin to count it. It taken us what seemed like hours.

I like to fell over when Casey called off the final total. It was $560,000!

We cut it up right there and then. My share was about $108,000. Henry had the same. Him and me packed our money in a couple of suitcases and got going. The other three went the other way. I never seen either one of them again.

Me and Henry we drove off down to Lethbridge, Alberta, and put up in a hotel. We handled our two suitcases like they was full of dynamite. And they sure was. Anybody thinks he can carry a hundred grand around in a suitcase and think no more about it than if it was a dirty shirt, just let him try it.

We sat there on the bed and counted our money over several times, just to get the feel of it. Funny thing, I never once thought about it not really being my money at all, or how I had come by it nor nothing. I felt plumb good to be so rich. Henry just sat there, bug-eyed.

Finally he said, "Let's buy us the biggest steak in town. I'm hungry."

I said, "Let's not be foolish and show off. Let's buy something useful. Let's buy a new car."

"But you got practically a brand-new car right now!" Henry said. "You ain't had it more than a couple of months."

"I know," I told him. "But I seen one of them McLaughlins in the window and I always wanted one, ever since I was a kid. The first thing in the morning, I'm going out and buy me a McLaughlin."

A McLaughlin is the same as a Buick, only built in Canada. They was, and I guess they still are, a mighty nice automobile.

Well, me and Henry set up most of the night talking about one thing and another that we would do next. We figured it might be a good idea to put a little of the money some place else and not have all the eggs in one basket. So we each taken a few thousand dollars for our pocket, and then we counted out $15,000 apiece and put the combined money in a small satchel.

We taken this bag down to the express office and shipped it addressed to me at Fernie, B. C. I put the express ticket in the toe of my shoe.

Henry wanted to get started out of Lethbridge right away, but I wanted to get me that new McLaughlin. Next morning we done just that. We traded in my Studebaker and I paid the rest in cash. Then we started for a little town a few miles down the road where I knowed a pretty girl.

Her name was Helen. I'd met her at a party in Calgary a short time before. She sort of reminded me of Lili. Anyways, whatever there was about her, she kept me from thinking too much about Dolly.

We got on down there to this little town—I think the name of it was Granum, Alberta. We stopped off at a sort of a combination rooming house and restaurant where Helen worked. Me and Henry got us a room and lugged them suitcases with the big end of the money still in them upstairs. We shoved them under the bed, and that was that.

Me and Helen went out to a dance that night. Henry stayed with the money. He wouldn't budge—said he would stand guard. Besides, he was hungry again and wanted a steak. We couldn't wait around for Henry to just set there on top of a couple hundred thousand dollars and feed his face. So we drove around in my new car and I guess I showed off all over town. If everybody in the district didn't get enough of a look to remember me and that car, it wasn't my fault.

Meantime, things had been happening back in Lethbridge.

There was a detective of the provincial police there at that time name of Scotty Lawrence. When word of the train stick-up hit Calgary and Lethbridge, it was Scotty Lawrence who was put in charge of the investigation.

He went out to the scene of the robbery and I guess he turned over every rock and cinder from hell to breakfast for clues. We had left plenty, we found out later.

In the snow and mud, Scotty found several imprints of the vulcanized patch on the tire of my Studebaker.

Of course, it was no trick then for him to find the tire shop, and from there to put me and my car into the picture. Scotty checked around Calgary and, finding no trace of me, he figured Lethbridge as a likely place I would head for.

So Scotty went on to Lethbridge.

Meanwhile, the people where I had traded in my Studebaker had cleaned it up and put it in their showroom window for sale. Scotty Lawrence comes walking by the place the very next day. There in the window, staring him right in the eye, is the patch on the busted tire of my old car.

That done it, all the way.

Back in Granum, me and Henry was taking things easy. Being just a couple of green kids on our first caper, we figured we was safe as a church once we was clear of Calgary and Lethbridge.

That's how we figured. But Scotty Lawrence was working

on a different set of figures. And they was adding up to me and Henry.

So, dreaming we was safe, me and Henry slept late the second morning we was in Granum. I got up first and started down to breakfast, so I could talk to Helen while she was working. When I got to the head of the stairs I heard somebody say my name down below. They was speaking loud and grufflike. I knowed without having to look that it was the police.

I already had my head around the corner at the top of the stairs and they seen me. There was nothing I could do except somehow try and warn Henry. I knowed the jig was up, so I spoke up real loud.

The officer was pulling his gun. It was Scotty Lawrence.

"You want to see me about something?" I hollered. "I'm Blackie Audett. I'm the man you're asking for."

Scotty was on the stairs by then, taking them three at a time, with his gun throwed down on me. I hollered again, "If you're a policeman, say so. And put away that gun."

By that time Scotty had me, and the other police was swarming in.

"He may have a pal around," Scotty hollered at the others. "Search the place, to attic."

Well, I knowed I was all through. But I sure hoped Henry had heard enough to get him on the road with that money. He had. When I started hollering, he grabbed up his clothes and the suitcases of money and taken right off through the window.

There was a feed store or something of the sort next door, with a one-story flat roof. That roof was right even with our window. Henry stepped right off onto the roof and hid behind a chimney while he pulled on his shoes and pants. As he run, he tossed the two suitcases over the eaves into the alley.

A minute later the police busted out onto the roof and

caught Henry, picking them up and putting them down across the rooftops.

So they had the both of us.

They tossed us in jail in Macleod, the main town of the area, a few miles away. It was just a little jail and we was the only prisoners. We was pretty famous prisoners, too. It was the first and maybe the last time they ever had two robbers in that jail there who had heisted a train of half a million dollars.

The officer in charge was a provincial named Corporal Watt. Him and his wife lived downstairs. The jail was on the second floor.

Part of Corporal Watt's duties was to bring us our meals. The rest of the time, they just left us up there in a little cell by ourselves.

The police, naturally, was more interested in the missing money right then than they was of us. They knowed where *we* was, all right. But the money and what had happened to it was something else again. We figured they had found it for sure in the alley, where Henry had throwed it. If they hadn't, somebody sure had. Two hundred grand can't just lay around in an alley forever.

They questioned us for hours, together and separately. We denied everything, in spite of them telling each of us that the other one had spilled the works and we might as well come clean.

So pretty soon we put it together from their questions that they didn't have no more idea where the money was than we did.

Then one afternoon Helen come to the jail to see me. When she showed up, Scotty Lawrence he come down with an attack of nose trouble. He begin sniffing around to find out why Helen was so all-fired anxious to get in touch with me.

Scotty's sniffing taken him on a quick run back to Granum

to search Helen's room. Meantime, they made her wait downstairs, on one stall or another, at the Macleod jail. In her room Scotty found the two suitcases full of money. The whole works was soaking wet. Well, they brought the money back to Macleod and faced Helen with it.

They had discovered it stacked in a closet in her room, so there was nothing for her to do but tell them the truth about where she found it.

When Henry throwed them suitcases over the roof there had been a slight interception. There was a big rain barrel sitting down there in the alley, right below the eaves. Them suitcases hit spang into it, one on top of the other. Henry couldn't have done that good if he'd been trying. There was enough water in the barrel to cover the bags, and there they set.

When the police searched the alley, nobody thought of looking into that barrel of water. That evening, Helen went out to get some rain water. There in the barrel she found them two suitcases. She hauled them out and opened them up, right there in the alley, and you can just imagine! Holy mackerel and Katy bar the door!

The police was pretty rough on Helen, but they couldn't figure what part she could have had in the train robbery. They wouldn't believe what she told them about finding it. They questioned her for hours, but she stood with the story about the rain barrel. They told her they would put her in the pen for life if she didn't tell them the full story of the robbery. She couldn't tell them nothing, naturally.

Then they brought me and Henry downstairs and told us Helen was going to prison unless we come through with the identity of the others in the stick-up. I told them I not only knowed nothing about any others, I didn't even know nothing about no stick-up. They couldn't prove nothing on Helen just because she had the money in her room, without me and Henry squealed. We said we never seen them suitcases before in our lives. Helen stood by her story and they

finally had to let her go. They put us back in our cells to wait transfer back to Lethbridge or Calgary, where we was to be charged and held for trial.

We was sitting on our bunks, there in Macleod, feeling mighty low.

I said to Henry, "If they ever get us back to Calgary or Lethbridge we are sunk. If we're ever going to get away, it's going to have to be here. And quick."

"It sure don't look any too good for getting away, here or no place else, when you get right down to it," Henry said.

"One thing in our favor here that won't happen in the next jail is we only got one guard," I said. "If we can take care of him we're on our way."

Henry thought that one over and come up empty. He just set there glumlike. Then he said, "Sure wish we had that there steak we didn't buy in Calgary. Wonder what Watt will bring us up tonight?"

That done it. I seen our answer, plain as day.

"You got it!" I told Henry. "Corporal Watt's our man!"

Then I spilled the plan to Henry.

Corporal Watt come up alone with our supper every night. It was cooked down below and he brought it up on a tray. They had our cell fixed good and proper, so far as the door was concerned. First, it was locked with a big jail key. Then there was a chain and padlock. Just to make sure, there was a pair of handcuffs snapped around the steel bars at the edge of the door.

Each night when Corporal Watt brought our supper, he had to set the tray down in the hall, pull a big ring of keys out of his pocket and unfasten the three locks. Then he had to bend back down, pick up the tray and carry it in.

I went over all this with Henry.

"That's when we take him," I said.

But it wasn't quite that simple. If we tried to take Watt bare-handed, he would put up a yell before we could get out

the door. Our only chance was to knock him cold some way before he could holler.

It was Henry who figured out the answer to that.

There was a sort of lean-to right outside our barred window. It had a crumbly old brick chimney sticking up out of it—a lot of loose bricks. We could get our arms out through the bars, but not far enough to reach the bricks.

Well, Henry, he was right on his toes. He tore strips off our blankets and we fixed a running loop in one end to make a lasso. We begun to toss it at the chimney.

It taken us a couple of hours to snag one of them bricks, but we finally got a hold of one and hauled it in through our window. Then we tore off another piece of blanket and made a sling for the brick. That made us a sap big enough to knock down an elephant.

We hid it in the bed and waited for Watt to show with our supper.

Henry wanted to be the one to let him have it, but I was a little leery. I was afraid Henry, hotheaded like he was, would hit him too hard and kill him. Last thing we wanted to do was kill Watt. We was deep-up in enough troubles, way things was. We just wanted to knock him out. Finally Henry agreed to let me go ahead and do the honors.

"But you better make it good," he said. "There ain't going to be no second round."

The corporal was right on time with supper. He set down the tray and went through the rigmarole with the locks. Then he picked up the tray and come on in.

He never knowed what hit him. We drug him into the cell and pulled off his shoes and coat. They had taken our own shoes away from us and our outer clothes.

We had to have shoes if we were going to make a break. I wear a size seven. Watt's boots was size ten, but I pulled them on. Then we went on downstairs.

Watt's wife was standing by the stove. We stood her off with the gun we had taken off her husband. Henry held the

gun on her and I rustled around for another pair of shoes, some fur caps and stuff the provincials wear as a kind of winter uniform. I also stole a couple more guns.

I wanted to find my own shoes for a very special reason. In the toe of the left one was the express claim check for the $30,000 suitcase we had sent to Fernie.

I found the shoes, but not in time to change. So I carried them with me and wore Watt's big boots. We must have put up quite a picture busting out of that jailhouse, part in our own clothes and part in the uniform of provincial police.

Watt was still out cold when we took off. We didn't see nobody when we come out into the street.

There was a fellow run a Dodge garage that I knowed, down the street. His name was Sandy McDonald. He was not very friendly toward us and he'd given the police some information about us being up there in Granum. But I didn't hold that against him.

What I held against him that night was a gun. We walked in on him and told him we had to have a car and what we would do to him if we didn't get it. He believed us, completely.

He come up with a brand new Dodge he had in the place, and didn't put up no squawk when we made him drive. I told him to head for Granum and not get no unhealthy ideas.

My car—the McLaughlin—was in Granum. I really wanted that car. I scarcely had had a chance to drive it. So we taken this fellow McDonald and he drove us to the garage in Granum where I had stored the McLaughlin.

Well, we let the garage man and his car go on back home a little too quick.

When we located my car in the Granum garage, the police had put a log chain through the spokes of the front wheels and padlocked it. Besides that, they had taken off the whole distributor head. The McLaughlin Special was a

brand new model and there was no spare parts around there that would fit it.

So there we was. No car. And we had let the Dodge man go.

Well, me and Henry went out on the street and there was on old Mitchell Six sitting there. The keys was in the lock. We got in and took off.

We didn't have a cent to our name and just a beat-up old wreck of a car. On top of that, them clothes we was wearing made us look like a couple of scarecrows coming off a bender. We sure had come down in the world fast. Only a few days before we had been running our fingers through half a million dollars!

We taken out as fast as that Mitchell would go and we come to a little town—Claresholm, or something like that. The police by that time was setting up roadblocks of one kind or another all over that district. In this little town we come to, the provincial duty had taken and put a bunch of chicken crates across the street. I guess that's all he could find in town that was big enough to reach across the road. There was ten or a dozen of them. Most of them had live chickens in them.

Well, Henry was driving. Just before we get to them chicken coops, there was a policeman standing in the middle of the street—a fellow name of Jack Swain. Henry knowed him. Swain was waving his arms, trying to flag us down.

I pulled out one of the pistols we'd grabbed at the Macleod jail and fired a shot in the ground, right by his feet. With that, this here Jack Swain, he jumped right straight up in the air. And when he come down, he was heading the opposite direction. His feet was already going when he hit ground and he was really picking them up and putting them down.

He was running so fast he couldn't make the turn at the corner. The last we seen of him he went sprawling into a

ditch. Me and Henry was laughing so hard Henry couldn't scarcely make the turn neither. When he did make it, there was them damn chicken crates right smack across the road. We was moving too fast to stop or go around. We just hit them head-on.

Them chickens went every which way. All over everything. Chickens in the windshield. Chickens in the back seat. Everywhere. But we kept going, chickens and all.

We got out of there, chewing feathers for all we was worth.

But we bogged down in the snow and sand with that old Mitchell a few miles out of town. We had to leave the car and we was sure the police was hot on our trail. So we taken off afoot into the Porcupine Hills.

Them Porcupine Hills stretch for miles along the border between Alberta and Montana. There is a ranch every now and then, or was at that time. But mostly the hills was just open range land. One ridge looked just like the next and the only way you could tell how you was headed was by the sun.

Well, after walking so long it seemed like we must surely be almost to Mexico, we come on to this old deserted barn and there was these two horses. Anything looked better than walking, right then. But it turned out to be something of a tossup. Them horses was the most spavined, broke-down plow team this side of a glue factory, and skinny to boot. It had been a tough winter in Alberta and the spring grass wasn't even up to one bite high. Riding them skinny horses for miles and miles couldn't of been any better than being rode out of Canada on a fence rail.

We was leery about riding in broad daylight, but we was afraid of getting lost if we tackled it at night. Henry had been raised-up there in that country, so that helped a little. He had a general idea of where people lived that he knowed. Besides, he was hungry and still complaining about having

all that money and not enough to eat. I told him what was left of that money was a long way off and it would be some time before we got to it.

It was coming on dark when we rode over the top of the hill, and there was a house in the valley.

Henry looked it over careful and decided maybe he knowed the people. He didn't, it turned out. But we rode up in the barnyard and there our old plug horses practically collapsed. So did we.

The rancher come out to see what was going on and Henry told him we'd got lost on a hunting trip. The rancher sort of snickered.

"You boys hunting in disguise?" he said. "And with your bare hands to boot?"

Well, one thing led to another and we told him the truth. A little of it, that is. Much as he needed to know.

The rancher he was sympathetic. He said he'd had a little run-in with the law himself awhile before. He taken us in the house and his wife fixed us up a good hot meal. They bunked us down out in the barn.

Next morning there was two fresh young saddle horses tied to the rail outside the barn. The old plugs was gone. The rancher just give us the wink and said, "Leave the horses at Smith's ranch on the Montana side, when you get around to it. I'll be down that way in a week or so. Now get the hell a long ways away from here, before the provincials get nosy."

His wife give us a big package of food and we taken out, feeling pretty pert. We was practically in sight of the U.S.A. We circled way up in the hills so as to come into Montana through the rough country where it wasn't likely the police would be looking for us. Besides, there was another ranch that Henry knowed about that was just a good day's ride. He figured our lunch would about last till we made this second ranch. That was Henry every time.

We got to the second ranch about sundown and Henry knowed the people this time.

When we rode up, there was a big pack of dogs come barking at us. We figured that was good, because if the police or anybody come in the night, them dogs would warn us.

These people treated us royal, but we decided we had better sleep in the barn again, just in case. The people knowed exactly who we was and what we had done. A provincial policeman had come through earlier that day and told them to be on the lookout. But they was distant kin to Henry, and besides, they didn't have much use for the law either, on account of some question there had been sometime before about their brand showing up on the wrong cattle. We was among friends.

But the police found some friends, too, that night. Man's best friend, like the feller says.

Scotty Lawrence had noodled out the general way we would have to take and had men spotting all the ranches in the district. During the night, Scotty sneaked up to the ranch with a bunch of hamburger and made friends with them dogs. He short-circuited any chance barking with them hamburgers. Then he hid his men around in the woodshed and places and laid low until daylight.

It was not until me and Henry had sat down at the breakfast table that Scotty struck. He come crashing into the kitchen from the woodshed with that same big thumbbuster gun in his fist. At the same time, another policeman busted the kitchen window with his gun barrel and covered us from there. Four others come hot-footing it in from the yard when Scotty blowed his whistle.

We didn't even have to surrender. The cuffs was on us before we could even say we wanted to.

They taken us down to where they had a couple of cars stashed out in a draw. They tied us up in enough chain and padlocks to hold an army. A few hours later we was back in

Macleod, the same jail we had busted out of two days earlier.

Corporal Watt was waiting for us, with his head bandaged up like an Arab in a turban.

Well, they decided to try us in Macleod. We got word to a firm of lawyers and one of them come to see us. His name was Mackenzie King. Twenty-five years later he was to become Prime Minister of Canada. The firm decided to defend us.

While we was waiting trial, I found a way to get that express ticket for the $30,000 smuggled out of the jail and into the hands of a man Henry knowed. Our man got the satchel, all right, but we never seen or heard of him again.

We went to bat in Macleod on five charges—train robbery, assault with intent to kill, shooting with intent to kill, jail break and robbery. When all the testimony was in—including the testimony of Corporal Watt, who come to court still looking like an Arab—the judge dismissed all the charges except assault with intent to kill.

It seemed kind of funny since we hadn't intended to kill Corporal Watt at all, and took special precautions not to. They did have all the evidence in the world that we had robbed the train, but that was wrote off the books by the court. The other robbery charge should have been kidnapping, because that had to do with McDonald and his Dodge, but that was dismissed, too.

Anyways, they found us guilty of assault to kill Corporal Watt, and Judge McLeod—he had the same name as the town we was tried in—sentenced us to ten years apiece in Northern Prison at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

It was my first real rap.

4

They first taken me and Henry to Northern Prison in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, like I said.

We didn't stay there very long, the way things turned out, but it was plenty long enough for me. And Henry didn't think much of the food, anyways.

When I processed in at Northern, it was the first time I had really been in prison, outside that time there in France. But Northern was different. It was a big stir and everyone in it was there because the Crown had said he was a criminal. All I could think about as the days went by was some way of getting out. I get the jitters when I'm walled in.

They was rebuilding part of the prison at that time. There was a big hole cut in the kitchen wall that was to be a door into the new part. Outside of the hole was a pile of scrap lumber, left over from building.

I got in good with some of the inmates handling the dress-out room. That's where the inmates about to be released get fitted for their civilian clothes before they go. I managed to get hold of two suits of clothes from the dress-out room and hide them in the scrap pile.

Meantime, I made plans with Henry that we would meet at the scrap pile, put on the clothes and then worry about getting over the wall. But I guess me and Henry slipped up at the wrong end of our planning. We was too eager. One of the guards had saw me hide them clothes.

That night we met in the kitchen. We crawled out through the hole and poked our heads up in the moonlight. There they was, the guards, with guns throwed down on us. They never said a word. They taken us straight to the warden's office.

The warden kept us cooling our heels under guard for about an hour, wondering what was going to happen. We found out, soon as he got us on the carpet.

"Boys," he said, "when you come in here I told you there was only one man that could do anything for you. That was me. I'm going to do something for you now. You want to get out of here so bad, I'm going to let you go."

We never even batted an eye. He just signaled to our guards and they marched us out. An hour later we was on a train. When we got off, we was at Stony Mountain Penitentiary, the high-security prison of Canada—the Alcatraz of that part of the British Empire.

I was then still under nineteen years old.

The warden at Stony Mountain at that time was a hard man. Harder even than the one at Northern. He told me and Henry this was one jail we might as well make up our minds to stay in, and he'd personally see to it that we did. He told us, "The only way anybody gets out of this prison is to walk out through the front gate the day his term expires."

Ten years is a long time. I figured right then that I wasn't going to rest until I figured my way around them doomsday words.

Stony Mountain was carved right out of solid rock on a mountaintop. The walls is built right in the rock. None of the buildings on the inside is close to the walls. The wall

itself is about forty feet high. On the side where there is a cliff, there is a drop straight down of more than two hundred feet. The only way in or out is through the main gate to the road.

Me and Henry was split up in the prison and the only time we ever seen each other was in the bath line, once a week. They'd march us in bunches to the bathhouse and head-count us in and out.

Them times we got together, we spent more time figuring than we did bathing. We figured and figured, but we couldn't think up a way out. Seven months went by. Then one cold winter day—bath day—our chance dropped right into our laps.

There was a big truck come into the yard with a load of stuff. It was to take another load of prison goods out.

There was a good-sized blizzard going when they marched us down to the bathhouse. It was bitter cold. Our line marched right past where this truck was pulled up into a little alley between two buildings. It was one of them big Liberty trucks that they used during World War I. They had a big high hood and a little bitty motor that set way down low under the hood.

The driver was waiting inside a doorway, back from the truck and with his hind end to the blizzard. He wouldn't be getting nosy in that alley until it was time to go. There was hardly room enough between the truck and the building to slide a cat through. But I figured I could make it by the skin of my teeth. If we could get that hood up we could slip under it and scrooch down, one on each side the motor.

It was only because my idea was so crazy that it had even a burglar's chance of working. I got Henry aside in the bathhouse and laid out my plan.

"Listen," I told him. "We got one chance in a million of making it through. We'll very likely get caught. We might even get killed. We might even freeze to death. How are your guts?"

"Never better," Henry said. "You figure it out and lead the way. The best thing I do is follow."

There was two or three things against us. One was that unless we got someone to stand count in our places when we left the bathhouse, the line would come up two men short. Then the alarm would go out and nothing could move through any gate until we was found. Another thing, it would be no trick at all to get the hood up and get under. But somebody outside the truck would have to close it down on top of us.

Well, there was a guy name of Tubby Wright who was to go out in four or five days. Because of that, he wasn't being watched near as close as the other inmates. If we picked someone who still had a lot of time to do, he would probably want to go with us. So we elected Tubby. He told us he would come through.

Then we got hold of the barber and another guy and they said they would stand in for the count. So we was fixed.

We got into our clothes—we was just wearing our light prison dungarees, shirts and caps—and ducked out a side door of the bathhouse. That put us into the alley where the truck was standing. The driver was still in the little office, out of the storm.

We slipped along the side of the truck and got the hood open. We seen Tubby dillydallying along, out into position at the head of the alley.

It only taken a couple of minutes for us to get safe and snug under the hood. A minute later we heard Tubby snap the catches and leave.

We was in there like sardines. Henry was on the side where the exhaust manifold was. I was laying practically on top of the motor. We braced ourselves so we was as clear of the engine as we could get, but you can't hold a position like that too long. Something's got to give. A little later the truck pulled out.

It was only twenty miles to town, but it seemed like the

trip taken a hundred years. Henry kept yelping at me under his breath that the heat from the manifold was burning his legs off. At the same time, the spark plugs, which was right under me, was biting at my belly every time I taken a deep breath. You couldn't move more than an inch or two, the way we was jammed in.

At last the truck stopped. I guessed and hoped we was in town. The driver climbed out, but we didn't dare move or make no noise.

We waited and waited. Finally, we just couldn't stand it no longer. It wasn't really too long, because it had been late afternoon when we left the prison. We couldn't hear nobody outside and when we figured it was dark enough, I started working on the hood. I couldn't budge it. Tubby had done his job too good. He had snapped down all the fasteners. She just wouldn't give.

At last I managed to pry loose one of the sections of tubing that runs the wires down to the spark plugs. With it, I worked on the vent fins at the side of the hood.

"You're making enough noise to wake the dead," Henry whispered.

"You're going to be one of 'em if they catch us before I get this hood loose," I told him.

After what seemed like hours, I got them vent fins spread far enough so I could get my hand through and unsnapped the first catch. That gave us some purchase with our backs. We pushed and heaved and finally boosted the side of the hood loose by main strength and a lot of noise.

We climbed out. The truck was in a shed. Nobody seemed to be around. We was in the clear. It was mighty cold. Our thin prison clothes didn't do much to cut the bite on that wind when we got out into the alley. We sneaked down into the railroad yards, figuring we could catch a freight train and get down across the line into Minnesota.

There is only so much cold you can stand. So we crawled into a sand house—one of them little shacks down in the

yards where they keep sand for the locomotives. They pour it on the tracks when the rails get slippery. It was a lot warmer down in the sand.

We had only been in there a few minutes when somebody opened the door. We wouldn't have cared too much, right then, if it had been the warden. But it was just a yard switchman.

He taken one look at us and give a yelp.

"Hell's jumping fire!" he hollered. "You guys must be them two that busted out of Stony Mountain today! Don't you know these yards have been crawling with police for hours?"

We told him we was trying to get to Minnesota.

He said, "They'll be looking for you all over these yards all night long. But there is some talk around that you didn't make it out and are still hid out up there in the prison. They couldn't figure any way you could get out."

We told him how we done it and he got a big laugh out of it.

"Anybody who could get out of there ought to earn the right to stay out," he said, after studying a minute. "There's a freight train all made up and ready to leave for Minnesota. It's carrying a dead-head caboose. Nobody would think to look in there."

So he taken us down there and hid us in the car. Then he went to get us some warmer clothes.

Well, me and Henry climbed up in the cupola of the caboose after our man had left. From there we could look down both sides of the train and see was anybody coming. I told Henry, "I got a sneaky idea our man is going to double-cross us for the reward."

"Could be," Henry said. "Anyways, why take the chance?"

We crawled out the window of the cupola and on down along the top of the train, so we could watch what happened. In a few minutes we seen our man come back. He was carry-

ing a bunch of coats and things. We was sure tickled. He was all right.

We jumped down off the cars and met him back at the caboose.

He had a bunch of coats and other clothes. Besides that, he gave us each five dollars. He said for us to sit tight, as it would only be a few minutes until they would hook on an engine.

We still kept watch after he left. Pretty soon we seen some men coming down along the train. We figured they was police for sure, this time. They wasn't carrying lanterns or anything that made them look like trainmen. We climbed out again and run back again along the train.

It turned out they really was trainmen, after all, but it was too late then to get back in the caboose.

We found a boxcar and crawled into it. It was about half-full of coal. We sat in there on the coal, freezing to death in spite of the extra clothes. We had to do something. I crawled out and sneaked some of the greasy waste out of the journal box of one of the wheels on the car. That's the way they keep the axles greased—packing them with cotton waste to hold the grease in place.

I taken the oil waste back up onto the coal and set it afire in a tin can we found beside the track. It burned, all right. It smoked like a chimney. In a few minutes we was both as black as the coal we was sitting in.

While we was getting our fire started, they hooked on an engine and we started rolling. It was sure a big relief. Well, we squatted down over our little fire and tried to keep from freezing. It wasn't too far to the international line and we figured we could stand most anything.

After a few miles the train stopped. We supposed the police had stopped it to search for us. There was no way to put out the fire, so we just kept quiet.

We heard some men talking outside the car and I peeked

out through a crack in the door. They was all gathered around the wheel where I had pulled out the greasy waste. We heard one of them saying, "Damn thing is red hot and stuck. We'll have to sit here until she cools off."

That was because I had pulled out the waste and the bearing went hot for lack of grease.

About that time one of the men yelled, "Hey! This whole damn car is on fire! Look at the smoke coming out that door!"

That was enough for me and Henry. We slid open the door on the other side and taken off.

We made for a patch of woods. It was freezing cold and we knowed we couldn't stand it very long. We could see lights of a little town a ways up the track, so we hit out for there.

We walked into a little restaurant. There was a Chinaman in there alone. He run the place, it turned out, and he spotted us for what we was the minute we walked in. He told us to come with him and he taken us around to the kitchen. We cleaned up while he got us some food. After we had ate, he taken us on further in back to a room where there was three or four more Chinamen sleeping on mats on the floor. He got us a couple more mats and we laid down, snuggled up with them Chinks. It sure was nice and warm.

The Chinaman told us he was an ex-con himself out of Stony Mountain. He had done a stretch up there for narcotics. He said he would be glad to help us any way he could. I told him if he could get a wire through to my mother in Oregon she would telegraph some money.

He went out and done it, sending the wire so worded that it wouldn't mean nothing to anybody but her. Next day the money come. We paid a friend of the Chinaman to drive us over the line and on into Crookston, Minnesota.

Well, we was safe and sound, back on U. S. soil. We had escaped from Canada, and the Dominion was left holding the sack for nine years and three months of the time we was supposed to do. I never went back to that part of the country

though, the way things turned out later, I spent a good part of my time for several years in another section of the Dominion.

Under the law at that time, if they didn't catch you before the time of your term expired, they wrote you off the books. So that's how my sentence sets at Stony Mountain—off the books.

Me and Henry split up. I went back to Portland. I was dead broke, on the lam, and hot as a two-dollar pistol with the authorities everywhere.

5

There wasn't any way I could get a decent job back in the States without tipping everybody off that I was a fugitive from Stony Mountain.

I was bitter at the whole world. I couldn't go see my folks, because that would just get them in trouble, too.

So that's when I went to bootlegging—running whisky across the line from British Columbia into Idaho and Washington.

I worked part of the time for a bootlegging syndicate and part of the time on my own. When things got too hot to run whisky, I smuggled alien Chinese into the United States. Then I'd go back to running whisky. Then I'd run a few Chinks again. All in all, I made quite a lot of money.

Then I got into a jam that taken me into my next pen and my next escape.

Running Chinks is about the craziest experience you can have. You couldn't talk to them and they didn't seem to mind being hauled and pushed around like they was whisky. One time I had five Chinks in the back seat of my car. Just outside of Sand Point, Idaho, the police jumped me up. I'd got far enough ahead of them so I could get the Chinamen out of the

car, all right. I got them all hid in the bushes before the police caught up with me. But I forgot, in all the excitement, to throw the Chinamen's luggage out after them. They each had a couple of boxes—boxes where one part slid over the other and was tied with a strap.

When the police grabbed me, there was no Chinamen. But they sure wanted to know whose luggage all that was. I said it was mine, not thinking what might be inside them boxes.

They taken me on into Spokane and up in front of the United States Commissioner for smuggling Chinamen.

The courtroom was packed. Somebody had passed the word that a big shot had been nabbed. But it was only me.

I told the commissioner the stuff in them boxes was mine.

He motioned to a deputy marshal and said, "Let's take a look at what this man carries in his luggage."

The marshal busted open one of the boxes and started pulling out the stuff. First thing he come up with was some old Chinese newspapers. He handed them to the commissioner. The commissioner handed them over to me. He was trying to look real stern and serious. He said, "These look like they might be very interesting. Let's just hear you read some of it to the court."

Well, I looked the papers over and all there was on them was those up and down dodads the Chinese make with their brushes. I couldn't even tell which end was up.

"Come on," the commissioner said. "Let's hear it."

So I had to admit I couldn't read Chinese. I said they must be some old papers a friend had give me.

The commissioner nodded to the marshal and the marshal he pulled out the next item—a pair of Chinese clogs. The commissioner leaned back in his chair.

"Let's see you try these on for size," he said.

There was nothing for me to do but go along. So I took off my shoes and struggled with the clogs. They must have been all of size two. The people in the courtroom by that

time was beginning to snicker. But the commissioner didn't do nothing about it. All he said was, "Next item."

The next was one of them mandarin coat things—looked like a fancy nightshirt. He made me slip it on for size, too, right in front of everybody. By that time the whole courtroom was roaring. My face was redder than a spanked baby's hind end. Well, the commissioner wasn't through yet. He said, "Let's get it all out here."

So the marshal pulled out a pair of Chinese opium pipes.

That done it. That wasn't so funny. They turned them boxes inside out trying to find some opium to go with them pipes. They didn't find no opium. And there wasn't no Chinamen. And if I wanted to say that stuff was mine, well, that was my business.

At least, that's what the commissioner told the officers that had nabbed me.

The commissioner said, "Case dismissed. Give this man that pile of junk and get him and it out of here while there's still a little dignity left in this court."

By that time the newspaper photographers was there and they insisted on taking my picture in the mandarin coat, smoking the pipe and reading them papers, all at the same time. I got out of there.

I went back out to Sand Point and taken a look around them bushes. But there wasn't any Chinamen around there, neither.

I drove back to Chinatown and walked into the first place I come to with the boxes. All I said was, "Here."

I handed the boxes to the Chinaman behind the counter and done a quick sprint back to my car.

Another time I'd come down what was called "Whisky Gap" out of Canada. I was driving a Buick coupé with a big turtle-back trunk in the rear end. I had the turtle-back packed full of Chinamen—four of them, packed in like firecrackers.

Out by the Washington Lake, on the outskirts of Seattle,

I picked up a police tail. I seen them moving up on me in the rear mirror. I put on speed and so did they.

Then I hit a bump. Up flew the turtle-back and there was my four Chinamen, staring back at them police. I kept right on going as fast as I could and the police couldn't catch up with me. I've often wondered what the cops thought when the lid flew open and there was eight slant eyes staring at them from where the taillight should have been. I've often wondered what them Chinamen thought, too. All any of them ever told me, in all that time I was smuggling Chinks, was "no savvy."

I was connected up with two tongs—the Hop Sings and the Lee Toys. I got $500 a head for women and $300 for men that I run across the Line. The tongs paid the money.

Most of the smuggled aliens was very poor. The tongs gave me half the money up in Canada when I loaded up. I got the other half when the cargo was delivered in the United States. If I lost my Chinamen enroute, I only got half-pay.

Most of the women that come over was brides that had been sent for. None of them was smuggled in for prostitution, though you always used to hear a lot about that being the whole purpose. It didn't do the business no good, and it finally fell into the hands of a lot of dishonest people in the dope racket. I got no use for a dope peddler. That is where I draw the line.

Whisky running wasn't too dull a business in them days, when it come to excitement.

One time I was making a whisky run out of Sand Point. I had about twenty cases in the back of my souped-up Studebaker. The sheriff of Sand Point had one of them old Stutz Bearcats. The Stutz could run rings around that Studebaker, even though I had it all hopped up.

Just out of Sand Point, this sheriff moved in on my tail. So I jumped off the highway and hit a dirt side road. He went right on by. Missed me completely.

Well, about four or five minutes after he went by, I turned back onto the highway and taken right in behind him. Safest place in the world to be.

I had only got on down the road about five or six miles, though, when I busted an axle. There I was, stuck, with twenty cases in the back end. It was the middle of the night.

The sheriff from another county happened to be cruising the same road. He pulled on up behind me. He seen what was the matter and got out and wanted to help. Guess he figured I was a stranded tourist.

He was so polite I suspicioned he was just working up a gag to amuse himself.

I explained my troubles and he offered to tow me into Spokane. I was a little leery about that, but there was nothing I could do but go along with the gag, if that was what it was going to be. He hooked on and off we went, load and all.

Right at the edge of Spokane, he pulled me into a little garage where I had told him I wanted to go. I had the fix on at this garage and I knowed that part of it would be all right.

But after we got our tow unhooked I thought this here sheriff would never leave. He just stood around and talked and talked. Me and the garage man stood there and sweat.

Well, while me and the sheriff was standing there, who drives up but the first sheriff—the one in the Stutz who had jumped me up in the first place.

The garageman meantime had hooked on to my car and towed it on down the street on the pretense he didn't have parts on hand.

The first sheriff he asked his buddy did he see any bootleggers on the road. The second sheriff says all he seen was a man with a busted axle and he'd towed him in.

The first sheriff had never saw me, only my car. And the car was gone. He didn't even describe the car to the other sheriff, just sort of mentioned the whole thing in passing.

So they stood talking and I stood there ready to take off across lots the minute one of them said boo. Finally, they both left, and I taken my first full breath in fifteen minutes.

I had been working for a syndicate most of this time. When you hauled for a syndicate in them days, you always hauled a little extra for yourself. Sort of a bonus.

I didn't have much trouble. I had crooked prohis themselves riding around with me most of the time. They was playing the deal both ways.

Sometimes us rumrunners used syndicate cars, sometimes our own. Usually we had an escort or pilot car ahead of us. A lot of times we had a car running ahead of us and one behind, too. It all depended on where we was going and how bad they wanted the load to get through.

I had been in the liquor racket quite some time before my travels taken me back to Spokane. I'd steered clear of Spokane because there was too many unhappy memories there. I finally did get back there, running liquor.

When things got too hot pulling the border in automobiles, we sometimes made a deal with the railroaders. Best place to work it that way was Spokane.

I mind one crew we could trust, operating out of Spokane to British Columbia. They used to stash liquor for us in the coal bunker. One time they brought two fifty-gallon barrels of alcohol across on their own and got fouled up trying to make delivery. I bought the hundred gallons, put fifty of it in ten-gallon cans and loaded them into my car. The rest, I reshipped to Portland in a barrel labeled molasses. Somewhere along the line a prohi discovered there had been some mistake.

When my barrel reached the North Bank Station in Portland the police was waiting. They was ready to nab whoever showed up to claim it.

I had a friend working for the railroad company and he tipped me off that the barrel was being watched. I sure didn't

want to lose that alky, but there wasn't nothing I could figure.

There was an old railroad man standing around the freight depot. He was wise to what was going on and offered to help, for a cut. He arranged for the freight charges to be paid under a phony name. Then the barrel was moved out of the warehouse to a spot on the loading dock.

The police, though, still kept a watch, day and night, from the window of a barber shop across the street. I was tipped to that, too.

Me and the railroad man, we sure didn't want to lose that alky. So we got a brace and a couple of bits. One was large and the other smaller. I got some milk cans. Then we snuck under the loading dock until we was directly under the barrel. We bored a large hole up through the planking, then a smaller one right through the bottom of the barrel. Out come the alcohol into the milk cans. We dragged these out from under the dock and into my truck. I gave the railroader two of the cans of alky.

I guess things got kind of dull in the barber shop for the police guard as the days went by and no one come to claim the barrel. But they continued to watch until one day some one gave the barrel a push. It tipped over and rolled on down the dock, plumb empty.

I was running whisky from along in 1921 until I got married in 1924. That was in Walla Walla, Washington. We eloped.

6

Me and Ethel was very much in love.

When we eloped at Walla Walla and got married, we taken out for Denver and started life over. I felt good—and very happy. It was almost like Stony Mountain and the bootlegging and all was just a bad dream and I was back in the days of Dolly and the Robinsons. Ethel convinced me that bootlegging and Chink smuggling was no good.

I was twenty-one years old.

Well, we stayed down in Denver in a nice little apartment and I went to work with a contracting company.

We lived in Denver and around there almost two years and I kept clear as I could of all my old-time racket buddies. Once in a while one or two of them would drift through Denver and look me up. But I always told them no sale, if they had any ideas that figured me in.

It come along Christmas in 1925, and we decided to go back to Washington and see Ethel's folks. Her old man had been pretty sore when we eloped, but by that time we figured bygones was bygones.

Guess they wasn't.

Anyways, when we got back to Walla Walla, Ethel's folks decided she was going to stay there. Besides, her old man had found out about me bootlegging and all. So he told me he was going to get Ethel to divorce me and for me to hit the road.

Well, we got into quite a row over it and the old man pulled a gun on me. That seemed like a hell of a thing for anybody to do at Christmas. Besides that, me and Ethel had hit it off good and we was happy.

But I guess Ethel, being their only child, and her always thinking her Dad's word as good as law, it just had to be that way. So I taken out.

Ethel divorced me a few months later.

I drifted back to Denver to pack up my things. I felt about the same as I had when I went back to Calgary after the war. I didn't give much of a damn what happened.

I hit out for Spokane and went back to running a little whisky.

I had a partner name of Adolph Green. He'd got picked up in Butte, Montana, and he wired me in Spokane to come down to Butte and maybe help him out of the spot he was in.

He was to go to court the very next morning, so I drove down that night and went right to the courthouse. I got into the courtroom just a few minutes before they convened. I set down right behind Adolph so I could talk to him a minute before the judge taken up his case.

Two prohis come in with another fellow and I could see they was going to take up this case before they come to Adolph. Nobody seemed to pay much attention to this other fellow—he was just an ordinary guy and the two prohis set him down practically in front of me, next to Adolph.

Then the judge come in and the clerk called off this fellow's case. The judge ordered him to stand up.

He stood up all right—with a .32 automatic in each hand.

He was pulling the triggers even before he was fully on his feet. He never said a word, he just started shooting.

He fired eight pot shots at the two prohis—almost point blank. With the other gun he pumped seven shots at the judge.

The two prohis dove head first over the back of the nearest bench, and under it. Neither of them so much as pulled a gun.

The spectators—them that wasn't too scared to move—stampeded for the doors. Me and Adolph was among the scared-to-move ones. The judge he never batted an eye. He never even ducked.

It was all over in about three seconds. Then with the last shot this fellow tried to shoot himself. He even missed with that one and only put a little nick in his scalp.

With that, the court attendants nailed him. The two prohis come up from behind the bench and taken over. They dusted off their pants, pushed their chests out and started to arrest everybody that was anyways near.

The first one they nabbed was me.

The judge, meantime, banged his gavel and calmly announced that court would be resumed. The prohis hauled me up in front of him and told him I had come into the room just a few minutes before the shooting started. They said they was sure I was the one that had smuggled in the guns.

I was just a handy cover-up because I guess they hadn't even searched their prisoner when they brought him into court, but they couldn't let the judge know that.

Well, I told the judge I never saw the man before in my life, which I really hadn't, and that there was nobody in the courtroom more surprised than me when the shooting started. Them prohis couldn't produce any evidence to support their suspicions so finally they turned me loose. The judge ordered them to.

The whisky running taken me back into Portland a lot and that's where I fell in with Danny Powers.

He was a bank robber and really knowed his business. He taught me a lot of things. He had a friend name of Jack White. All three of us was all fouled up, one way or another, and needed money bad.

We was in Portland, nosing around, and the Rose City Bank looked like a pretty nice touch when we cased it out. It was outside the heavy traffic and the getaway would be easy. That was one thing we always had to figure—traffic. You can't take a bank down in the business district without running a big risk of getting trapped in heavy traffic.

We set the time for ten minutes after the doors would open. Then we went to our apartment—as I remember, it was the Lovejoy Apartments there in Portland—and disguised ourselves with some stage make-up Jack White had. He was good at it, and just touched us up enough so our main features would look different.

We arrived at the bank right on the dot and walked in separately. The places we would take was already worked out.

Danny went to the left, Jack to the right and I taken the main lobby. There was only a few customers at that hour, but all the employees was there. We pulled our guns and I herded everybody into a sort of directors' office in the back, where I locked them in. Meantime, Danny and Jack cleaned out the cages and vault and we taken off without even a rumble from inside or out.

We had a suitcase ready in the getaway car, and as we drove away we stuffed the loot into the suitcase. It was just about twelve grand. Then we switched to another car we had planted out, locked the suitcase in the trunk of the second car and drove to a restaurant—a place called the Coon Chicken Inn. We had to get rid of our disguises, soon as possible.

We went in the back and where the washrooms was and scrubbed off our make-up. Then we went out front and ordered us some breakfast. All told, we hadn't been gone from the bank much more than ten minutes.

Just as we started eating, two cops walked in. We froze and got set to shoot. But they just set down at a table right next to us and ordered coffee.

They looked us over, like cops will, and then started in on their coffee. I figured they recognized me on account I was a pretty well-known bootlegger. Dan and Jack they didn't know, since they was new in town, so I guess them cops just tagged us as three rumrunners talking business.

When they finished their coffee, one of them went to the phone. I suppose he called his office, like they do at regular intervals. He talked just a few seconds, then he come charging back to where his partner was standing, sparking with the waitress.

The first cop was shouting, "The Rose City Bank has just been heisted! They want us downtown right away!"

So out they run, without another glance at us.

We never turned a hair, and when our stomachs settled back into place, we paid our check and left.

We split up. Dan and Jack drove away with the loot and I picked up my own car, which hadn't figured in the caper. I drove to a room I had by myself downtown.

I'd barely got there when some officers pounded on the door. They arrested me and taken me to jail. Turned out, they was rousting everybody who had any known connections with questionable people, and they knowed I was pretty well tied in with shaky ones all over the West.

They give me the works down at the jail, but I told them I wasn't anywhere near the bank when the heist happened and I could prove it. I said I was sitting in the Coon Chicken Inn eating breakfast at the time. I told them about the two dicks at the next table and said I was right there when

them cops was notified of the robbery. The sheriff he called in them dicks and also the waitress. All they could do was back up my story.

The sheriff asked me who my friends was and I told him they wasn't friends—just happened to be in the restaurant when I was and we got to talking.

So that time it was the cops give me my alibi. The sheriff turned me loose and I was in the clear on the Rose City Bank job. But the authorities was a long ways from through with me. I guess the feds figured *they* had to pin something on me. They did.

There was a car reported stolen in another case. They come up with a witness so blind he wore glasses a quarter-inch thick. All the same, he identified me as the man he seen in the middle of the night in the stolen car. So the feds got on my tail and picked me up in Vancouver, Washington. They tried me on Dyer Act charges. That's the federal law against driving a stolen car from state to state. I was found guilty and sentenced to McNeil Island—the federal penitentiary in Puget Sound, between Seattle and Tacoma. I got five years.

It was just like the time at Stony Mountain. I got convicted for something I didn't do and they never even tried me for the crime I had committed—robbing the Rose City Bank!

There I sat in McNeil Island and the first thing I had to do was get out of there. And that's exactly what I done, six weeks later.

It was Washington's birthday—a holiday, even at the penitentiary. The regular guards was off duty. There was a relief guard on our cell tier acting as turnkey. The men was just numbers to him. He didn't have no idea who was who, by their faces. So I figured this was the time.

I stepped up to this substitute turnkey and give him the number of a trusty I knowed. They let trusties come and go

pretty free outside the gate, because there wasn't no way to get off the island, anyways.

Well, the turnkey checked the number I give him and seen it was the number of a trusty who had an outside job. So he just pulled the big lever that opened the gate and I walked right out. Nobody even said boo.

I drifted down to the boat landing and fooled around, cleaning up trash.

The warden's son had a slick little speedboat I'd noticed from time to time during the weeks before. I drove speedboats quite a lot during my rumrunning days and I could handle them almost as good as I could a car.

So I edged down to the landing and begun wiping and shining up that boat that belonged to the warden's son. I eased along until I could slip the cable that tied it to the wharf. Then I moved along with my polish cloth until I got to the motor. There wasn't a guard in sight except up in the gun towers four hundred yards away. Nobody was watching the boats.

I give the engine a spin and she started off with a roar. It taken me only about thirty seconds to back her out, head around and hit for shore.

Meantime, up behind the wall, the real trusty whose number I was using showed up at the gate. The turnkey seen something was wrong and flashed the guard captain. The guard captain flashed the deputy warden and the alarm was out.

They notified the Coast Guard on the shore opposite the way I was heading, just about the time I got started from the dock.

By the time they got squared around, I was more than a half a mile from the dock, with the throttle wide-open. That was when the Coast Guard cutter taken out after me. I knowed they had more speed than I did and I begun to look around for a way out. There was a big log-tow moving slowly up the Sound with a tug pulling it, almost in front of

me. It looked like it was a mile long. There was quite a stretch of cable between the tug and the first log barge. The tug was pulling heavy and the cable was taut. That put it about four foot above the surface of the water.

I never even cut the throttle. I just ducked my head and went under the cable, full speed.

Well, the Coast Guard cutter was too big to go under the towline, so they had to cut way back and go clean around the barges. That give me a pretty good start. I pushed that little speedboat for all she was worth. She was a sharp little boat and the warden's son sure knowed what he was doing when he picked her.

I was a mile ahead of the cutter when I cut through the narrows and turned in toward the mud flats above Tacoma. I plowed into the beach in a little cove, still going wide-open. The boat cleared the water and went skidding onto the mud like a toboggan. She skidded clean up into some brush, out of sight.

I high-tailed it out through the woods and wound up finally in Yakima, Washington, where I had friends. I got hold of a car and hit the road.

two

Gunville, U.S.A.

7

When I taken out, after that first escape from McNeil, I wound up back in Denver.

Things was pretty hot there at the time, so I drifted down into Colorado Springs. I moved around here and there and met up with Jake and Ralph Fleagle, and Danny Daniels. They was heisters who had been pulling a few jobs around Kansas and Colorado.

The Fleagle boys hadn't pulled their big bank job at Lamar, Colorado, yet, but they was in with all the bootleggers and hot guys that hung around Denver. The Fleagles was always careful never to pull nothing in Denver, so they would have a place to come and cool out.

It was in Colorado Springs that I got rigged in with them on a pay-roll job at Pueblo, Colorado.

We drove down to Pueblo from Colorado Springs and cased out the bank there where the pay roll was made up. Saturday was pay day at the steel plant and for three weeks we hung around and watched how they delivered the money.

It was the same every Saturday. They put the pay roll in

one car and it was always followed back to the plant by another with two policemen in it. There was several roads they could take between the bank and the steel plant, and they never taken the same one twice in a row.

The day we set up for taking the pay car, they crossed us up. We figured them for one road to the plant and they turned off and taken another. So the only thing we could do was head them off at the plant and get the job done there.

We beat them out to the plant by a good ten minutes. I parked in close to the gate where they always took the money in. Jake, Ralph and Danny went into the time office and started asking about a job. About then the pay car drove up. Right behind it was the two policemen in their car. I waited till the pay-roll clerk and his guard started into the time office. Then I walked up behind the police car on the driver's side and throwed down on the cops with my gun.

I made the cops toss their guns out into the yard and I gathered them up. Then I herded the policemen into the office. Jake and them disarmed the pay-roll guard. We grabbed the money sack and was on our way, without a shot fired.

We holed in at a motel outside Pueblo and cut up the money. It was a fair haul—about $10,000, as I remember. Then we busted up.

Jake went back to Arkansas where the heat was off. Danny headed for New Mexico and I taken out for the Coast. Danny was the first one caught. They sentenced him to Canon City Penitentiary and he was killed there a few years later in the big riot—1929, I think it was. He was one of the ringleaders in that riot. I never knowed his square name and all I ever knowed him by was Danny Daniels.

They got the Fleagle boys later, on the Lamar job. They hanged Ralph, and Jake was shot in a gun battle with the police.

I headed back up into Oregon and got jumped up at Bend as a fugitive from McNeil. They never even questioned me

about that Pueblo job. They just rousted me back to the island and behind the bars.

The warden was hopping mad because the papers had made a big fuss about his son's speedboat. He put me in solitary. A little later, they transferred me to Leavenworth to serve out the rest of my sentence.

Leavenworth at that time was the high-security prison in the federal setup. Alcatraz had not yet been opened. So anybody who seemed to have too much jack-rabbit blood—I mean somebody they thought was getting a little too slick to hold—they just sent them to Leavenworth.

There was two reasons for that. One was the chances of escape from Leavenworth was mighty slim. The other was the wardens in any of them other places was not too anxious to have you around, once you escaped from their pens. You might do it again and then the warden's feet would really be on the carpet back in Washington.

They put me and another prisoner on a train with two guards.

Me and one guard—they called him Old Dangerous Dan around McNeil, on account of he was always taking pot shots at inmates—was in one compartment. Jimmy Nagle, the other prisoner, who was going back to Leavenworth to do twenty-five years, was in the next compartment with the other guard.

Well, the two guards they wanted to play some rummy, so they put me and Jimmy together in a compartment and handcuffed and leg-ironed us. Then they left.

This Jimmy Nagle, he was sitting staring out the window and looking mighty blue. He says to me, "I just can't go back there and do that twenty-five years. I just as leave be dead."

I said, "Well, there's another way. Let's jump this here train."

Jimmy brightens up at that, but then he points to his leg irons.

"How can we do it in these locks and chains?"

"Easy," I said. "Watch here."

So I wiggled my wrist around and slipped one hand out of the cuff, the way I learned when I was up in Stony Mountain in Canada. It's a pretty good trick, but easy once you know how.

"I can get yours off just as easy," I told him. "Then all we have to do is duck Dangerous Dan and that other guard, jump the train and we'll be in the clear."

Well, we set it all up and I practiced getting us out of our locks. But at the last minute Jimmy backed down. He was afraid.

"They'll kill us, then explain their way out of it afterward," he said.

"Hell with it. They'll have to shoot fast to catch up with me," I said.

I'd been kidding Old Dangerous Dan along about him being so tough. He packed one of them old .45 thumbbusters and I'd been telling him he couldn't hit the side of a barn with it. Me, I was ready to take the chance, Jimmy or no Jimmy.

As we was pulling out of Grand Island, Nebraska, I stuck my head out the door and asked the porter what the next town was and how long we would stop. He said we didn't stop no more until we got to Hastings, but he told me that on down the line about twenty miles the train slowed up for a new grade. There was a little town there, he said—Murphy, Nebraska.

That give me time to figure.

When the train started to slow down, I went in and told Dan I wanted to go to the lavatory. I knowed just what he would do. He got up and went with me.

I went in and started to shut the door. Dan, he slipped his big number-ten shoe against the jamb so I couldn't get the door clean shut. It was closed enough, though, so he couldn't see what I was doing.

I slipped off one cuff. I didn't take time to slip the leg irons. By that time Dan already was hollering.

"You going to stay in there all night?" he was shouting. Then he pushed the door and started on in. I swung on him with the handcuffs. I'd wrapped them around my fist like a knuckle-duster. I knocked him back out the door and he went sprawling in the aisle.

I slammed the door shut and locked it. It was a steel door and pretty substantial. Dangerous Dan was up and hammering on it and kicking at it almost as fast as I could get to the lavatory window and bust out the glass. I scrooched through the window and dove headfirst out into the night. Dangerous Dan was still hollering bloody murder the last I heard.

The train was going faster than I'd figured, and I had them leg irons on and everything. I hit the grade and rolled —felt like about a mile. I wound up in the ditch, half-stunned. The train rolled on a few yards and stopped right beside me.

They had pulled the emergency cord when Old Dan hollered that a madman was getting away.

Then the train backed up until the engine was right opposite me. It stopped again and the engineer looked right down in the ditch and seen me. It was bright moonlight and there was a little snow on the ground. You could've seen a man a mile away in that moonlight and snow.

The engineer, he didn't say a word. He just looked the other way.

There was a lot of noise and yelling going on back along the train as the guards and train crew come busting out and pointing up and down them tracks, deciding which way to get started after me. I crawled out of the ditch and hobbled up along the side of the engine.

The ladder of the tender was right in front of me and I swung up there and hid down in the coal. Where I was I could peek down over each side.

Here come Old Dan and the other guard a-puffing and a-panting up one side of the train. Dan was waving that old thumb-buster .45 in the air like it was a Roman candle. His nose was bleeding where I'd hit him. He looked a little mad, and the way he sounded left no doubt.

On the other side, the conductor was leading another posse of trainmen and passengers. I was sure trapped up there in that tender.

I knowed I couldn't take off across that snow in the moonlight, so I slipped out of the other handcuff and the leg irons. I left them on the coal and jumped down off the tender, right in the middle of that posse. As I jumped I hollered, "He ain't up here anywheres!"

"Nope," the man next to me said. "I guess he sure ain't."

Off about seventy-five yards or so from the tracks there was a bunch of brush. It loomed up almost like a little grove in the moonlight.

"Maybe he's yonder in the brush," somebody yelled.

So we all started running over there. There was about a dozen in the party I was with. I just joined up and run with them.

Meantime, the guards doubled around the front end of the locomotive and when they seen which way the crowd was running, they joined up too. Dangerous Dan was yelling for the posse to get back on the train because a desperate criminal was on the loose and somebody might get hurt.

The crowd was too noisy and excited to pay any attention to Dan. Me, I was getting a little spooky at them guards joining us, and as they got closer, I edged farther away, all of us still on the run.

We wasn't the only hunting party out there thrashing around in the moonlight. Another group had got off the sleepers farther on back and was running around in the night, every which way.

There was some corncribs and other buildings on back about another two hundred and fifty yards from the track.

Some of these other posses had run in among them to look for me. Dangerous Dan and his partner was only about a hundred feet from our group when one of our party spotted a shadow moving among the corncribs. I seen it too. I knowed it was only somebody else from off the train. But I was the only one that knowed. Anyways, I hollered at the top of my lungs, "There he goes yonder in them buildings!"

The whole bunch I was with swung around and headed for the cribs. Dan come plowing by me, about twenty-five feet away. But he was so busy looking straight ahead and waving his gun he never so much as glanced my way.

All the others taken up my yell and was hollering, "There he goes! Get him."

So off they all run, pointing and jabbering like a cage full of monkeys chasing a peanut, Dangerous Dan and the other guard leading the pack.

Me, I made out like I was winded and slowed up. I let them all get by me. Then I turned around and started to walk back to the train. Some of the others was doing the same, so nobody paid no attention to me.

I slipped in alongside of the coaches and climbed up to the top of the baggage car. I laid down flat alongside the vent that run the whole length of the car. Nobody could see me from the ground.

Pretty soon I heard the searchers begin to drift back. The engineer begun tooting his whistle. He had to get going. I heard the train crew yell to the passengers to get back aboard. Then I heard Dan hollering him and his partner was going to stay and search. He told the train crew to spread the alarm at the next town.

I figured if Dan got back on the train, I would drop off again. But he didn't, and so I stayed right with her.

We begun to roll. And as I peeked over the edge of the baggage-car roof the last I seen of Dan he was heading out for them corncribs again.

Well, I wiggled along the top of the baggage-car roof un-

til I could jump down on the coal tender behind the engine again. It was pretty cold up there on top.

The fireman seen me jump down and naturally he knowed who I was. He climbed back over the coal and said to me, "Just keep your head down and we'll keep our mouth shut. It ain't none of our business."

I'd cut myself up kind of bad when I hit the grade jumping out the window. He taken off the big bandanna handkerchief he had tied around his neck and ripped it up for bandages. It wasn't enough, so he borrowed the engineer's bandanna, too. The fireman asked where they was taking me. I told him, and why. Him and the engineer laughed about the show I had put on when we stopped. The fireman said again it wasn't none of their business whether I made it to Leavenworth or not.

The engineer said, "When we get into Omaha, there'll be cinder dicks all over this train like flies. Them two guys you ducked back yonder will have figured out by now that you must have got back on the train. If them cinder dicks find you on the train, we will all be in the butter. Here's what you better do . . ."

He told me the train slowed down just before pulling into the Omaha station.

"There'll be another train—Number Forty-Four, westbound—waiting there to pull out. We come right in beside it. You flip off this one and onto Number Forty-Four and you'll miss all them cinder dicks."

Well, I didn't quite miss them, but things worked out pretty well.

One of them special agents climbed on the engine when we was way out on the outskirts of Omaha. The fireman had slipped me in behind some canvas curtains that hung between the locomotive and the tender.

This here cinder dick, he climbed up the steps right beside me. He could have reached out and touched me, but he never even looked behind that canvas.

He talked to the engineer and fireman a minute and started over the top of the train to look for me.

By that time we was almost into the depot. The engineer asked me did I have any money. I told him I had $200 sewed into the lining of my coat sleeve.

"Then right about here is where we say good-by," he told me. "When we get opposite Number Forty-Four, you drop off and climb into the first open door you see. Act like you didn't have time to buy a ticket and pay the conductor your fare as they're pulling out. They'll be leaving almost as soon as we pass them."

We was starting to pull by the westbound while we was talking. So I waved good-by and done just what the engineer said.

Ten minutes later I was headed back for Denver, in a berth on Number Forty-Four. I was sound asleep when we went back through Murphy, Nebraska. I never got to look out and see whether Dangerous Dan was still sniffing around them corncribs.

It wasn't until years later in Leavenworth that I found out what happened to Jimmy Nagle that night. He could have made it off the train easy, what with all the ruckus going on about me.

Jimmy's guard had handcuffed him to the berth when he taken out on the great man hunt with Dangerous Dan. He couldn't remember how I told him to get out of the cuffs. Jimmy told me about it himself. He was still in Leavenworth when I finally made it.

When I got jumped up and caught, just before they taken me back to McNeil Island that second time, I had left a car in storage in Denver. It was still there when I got back from Nebraska.

Well, I was pretty hot all over the country by that time, because the papers made quite a spread about me busting loose off the train. So I laid low a couple of days. I was living in a cheap hotel on Curtis Street in Denver and the sec-

ond morning, when I went out for breakfast, I run smack dab into an acquaintance of mine at Fourteenth and Curtis.

It was the very same deputy U. S. marshal who had taken me to McNeil Island not long before.

Anyways, as we passed each other, I done a double take, I was so surprised. So did he. By the time he spun around for that second look, I had said good-by. I ducked into a big power company office right there in the next block and lost myself among some people who was milling around paying bills. I looked back and seen this marshal was right on my tail.

I charged right on out another entrance into a side street. I grabbed a passing cab and hit for the Union Station. I laid out near the station until it was time for a train I knew about. Then I bought a ticket for the furthest place away I thought I could afford. Police was nosing around, but I give them the slip.

There was a couple of guys starting eying me on the train. I figured them for cinder dicks, so I dropped off the train at Yuma, and looked up some friends I had there. They sort of hid me out. I was getting pretty hot on trains by that time, so I figured I better get my car from Denver.

I got word to a friend of mine, name of Happy Kingsley. He drove my car out to Yuma, Colorado, and next night I drove on to McCook, Nebraska.

That deputy marshal must have got right on the ball back there in Denver. They nailed me fifteen minutes after I hit McCook.

The sheriff at McCook, he was pretty pleased at grabbing off a guy as hot as me. And he sure let me know it. I dummied up and made out like they had grabbed the wrong guy. I said I was no more Blackie Audett than he was.

He got up from his chair and went over to a bulletin board on the wall. He pulled down a flyer that was hanging there and stuck it under my nose.

"Take a look at that, then," the sheriff said. "And then

look in that mirror behind the desk and tell me you ain't Blackie Audett!"

Well, that "wanted" circular sure had my picture on it, big as life. It said I was a fugitive from McNeil Island, and everything else. But I still denied everything. The sheriff said he would let me think it over in the tank and see what I had to say about it in the morning. So they taken me upstairs to the jail.

They celled me in that night with an old gray-haired duck who had been picked up a few hours before they got me. He looks me up and down and says, "So you're the bird that made it off the train the other night. Quite a kid, ain't you? How'd you do it?"

Well, I told him the story and he told me who he was. He's an old-time bank robber, name of Thayer. He was a fugitive, too. He'd crashed out of the penitentiary in Lincoln, Nebraska, a short time before.

"I was doing life there," he told me. "This time they'll put me in the hole till I rot."

"You got any ideas?" I asked him.

"Not a one," he said.

With that we went to sleep. Next morning I woke up famous.

There wasn't no question about who and what I was. The Denver and Omaha papers had the whole story—all about the train and everything. This old bird Thayer he looks me over again and says, "You *are* quite a kid, ain't you? The human jack rabbit!"

I looked the bars over in the cell and told Thayer, "Looks like the jack rabbit is about in its last hole, though, don't it?"

About that time the sheriff come up, and his chest was so far out the buttons was nearly popping off his shirt. He sure was strutting. He had some visitors with him and he was telling them all about me and what a desperado I was.

A little later, his daughter come up with a girl friend.

The sheriff was with them, too. He exhibited his prize captive like I was a show horse. The girls taken quite a shine to me and asked could they have my autograph. We kidded back and forth and the sheriff's face got red and he grabbed them by the elbows and hustled them out.

Well, old Thayer was getting a kick out of it and we got to swapping yarns. I told him about that other jail in Macleod, Alberta, and how me and Henry taken Corporal Watt. With that old Thayer he rears right up in his bunk.

"Now we're getting somewheres!" he said.

He told me every night the sheriff brought up the meals on trays, just the same as Corporal Watt done. He had to set down the tray and unlock the door, too, just like it was back there.

"Now," Thayer said. "Does that give you any ideas?"

I begin looking around the tank. There was a shower in one corner with a curtain across it. The curtain was hung on a piece of pipe—inch pipe, about three foot long.

We twisted around on this pipe and seen we could work it loose. We taken a piece of string and rigged it up so the curtain would hang natural like, and pulled out the pipe and hid it in the bunk. I done this while Thayer was talking to some other prisoners in another tank, so they wouldn't notice what I was doing.

When time come for the sheriff to bring us our supper, I taken the pipe out of the bunk and slid it down my pants leg.

The sheriff he come up and went through the whole routine with the locks on the door. I was ready with the pipe when he come through with the tray. The supper went all over the floor. Me and Thayer grabbed the sheriff's gun, wallet and keys and taken out, locking him in our cell.

We nearly stumbled over the sheriff's daughter and her friend as we charged out the front door. They screeched and hollered something about gangsters.

I throwed them a kiss and kept on running.

The sheriff's car was setting there in front of the jail—an old Dodge. We grabbed it and drove off. Luck was with us again. Anyone could short out the ignition in one of them old boats in two seconds.

We had only gone a few blocks when we noticed the old tub was practically out of gas. We come to a filling station and I pulled into it. Another car—one of them big, fast old Auburns that was such hot stuff back then—was there ahead of me at the pumps. I waited while the attendant pumped the Auburn full.

Thayer was getting the fidgets looking back up the street. He wanted to know why the delay.

"We're going to save some money and some time," I told him.

The attendant was just taking out the hose when I walked up alongside the driver. I was holding the sheriff's gun down by my side.

"End of the line, buster," I told him. "This is where you get off."

"What's the idea?" he said, big-eying me like a scared owl.

"This here," I said, and flipped up the pistol.

He didn't have no more trouble getting the idea. He let go all holds and jumped. Me and Thayer was in the Auburn and gone by the time he hit the ground.

We knowed the police would be after us, all over that neck of the woods. So we jumped the highway and ducked down side roads until we hit Oberlin, Kansas.

Thayer had some friends near there, on a farm. To get the car out of sight we drove it into an old barn. But that Auburn was just too long. We couldn't close the door.

Finally, I got the car hid, all right. Jockeying the car around, I snapped off an upright supporting one end of the haymow. Half the hay in Kansas came down on top of us.

It would have took two men and a small boy a couple of weeks to dig that Auburn out of there. So we was practically afoot again.

These friends of Thayer's taken us to a house nearby and give us some supper. While we was eating the phone rang. It was a nosy neighbor telling these friends of Thayer's about our crash-out from McCook. Well, these people come up with money enough for a getaway stake and asked us to go away, quick.

We split up there, Thayer and me. I made it to a little way station on the railroad nearby and caught a train for Omaha. I went right back through McCook that night, but I sure kept my head down.

From Omaha I went on to Chicago, where I had my first meeting with Al Capone.

8

The money I borrowed from them people in Kansas was running pretty thin, time I hit Chicago. I needed a road stake bad.

Back in the days when I was running booze up in the Northwest, I done favors now and then for this one or that one from some other part of the country. Some of them was pretty big boys—or was working for some big ones.

That's the way we used to work it, back when I was in the rackets. I do a favor for you—maybe someday I might need one myself. I scratch your back, you scratch mine. I guess some people on the other side call it the Golden Rule.

Anyways, I'd picked up some emergency phone numbers from here and there, over the years. They was numbers you could depend on to come through, did you get jumped up or stranded someplace in an emergency.

It was sure an emergency when I hit Chicago—broke. I called one of them numbers I had.

The voice on the other end was real cagey. It checked me out real careful like. But I knowed all the right answers. Then the guy, he told me he is Frank Nitti. He said to meet him in a speak he named.

Well, Frank Nitti—they used to call him The Enforcer—he was one of the right-hand men to Al Capone in the Chicago mob. Real big-time.

When I got to the speak—it was up on Rush Street somewhere—Nitti he's sitting in the back, along with a guy he named to me as Jake. The two of them sized me up and after a little sparring, I seen I was in the green with them. I was okay. So I spilled out my troubles.

Nitti excused himself and went to the phone. While he was gone, this Jake told me who he is. His last name, he said, is Guzik—Jake Guzik. He was a wheel in the Capone mob, even then—almost as big as he was when Kefauver got on his tail almost twenty-five years later.

That was "Greasy Thumb"—Jake Guzik.

Well, Nitti he come back and in a little bit another guy joined us. Nitti and Guzik they introduced him. Name of Al Sutton.

This Sutton, he was a nice guy, but a little on the blowhard side. He told me he is a brother of Willie Sutton—Willie the Actor, they called him, years later. For all I ever knowed, they *was* brothers. You don't ask to check birth certificates when you're in our line of work.

Anyways, it ended up with Nitti and Guzik lining me up with Al Sutton. He fixed me up with a room in a hotel and give me the low-down about spots and people I should know. He got me a gun and a shoulder holster.

I was back in business.

This Al Sutton was a pretty slick operator. At the time I met him he was around thirty—about four or five years older than me.

A couple of days after that first meeting with Nitti and Guzik, Al Sutton meets me in a speak we was using as a drop. That's what the boys called a place where you can get or leave messages or talk things over and not be disturbed—a drop.

Well, Al he tells me "The Man" wanted to look me over.

I figured who he meant all right, but I asked him just to be sure. He says, "You'll see."

We drove off down the street a ways. We went upstairs in the hotel and there was boys all over the place—real tough boys that would as soon let you have it as look at you, unless they knowed you was in on the rig.

They passed us through and we wound up in a fancy suite of rooms. There was a fat guy in his shirt sleeves sitting beside a table that was all stacked up with bottles, glasses and overflowing ash trays. He was chewing the butt of a cigar and barking to somebody on the phone. He had a big scar down one side of his face. It was the first time I ever seen him, but it was not going to be the last.

His name was Al Capone.

Well, Capone hung up the phone and looked me over like I was a bottle of bathtub gin. Sutton give him the run-up on me. After that, Capone warmed up a little. When we left I knowed Capone had give Sutton the okay on me and I was free to do anything I felt big enough to get away with around Capone's neck of the woods—that is provided I don't forget who gave me that okay. I understood that all right.

That fat guy in the $500 suit, sitting there in the Chicago hotel room that day like he was king of the golden river was a lot different than the guy who worked alongside of me, some years later, in a laundry at Alcatraz. That day, he was the top rooster of the rackets in all America. That next time he was just Alcatraz, No. 85. And I was No. 208.

Sutton was a night man, mostly. But he was pretty handy in the regular routine of taking banks, too.

A night man is what the boys called a thief who would rather knock off a safe or vault after dark than take the chance of heisting the joint in the daytime. Al Sutton was a jam-up safe man and he taught me a lot of tricks.

On the average, Al could take a safe in seven minutes. I

never knowed him to miss, but the safes might have been a little easier then than they are nowadays.

Al Sutton had a great personality and looked more like a banker himself than he did a bank robber. He could walk into a mark we had set up and talk business with the main guys and make them like it. And all the time he would be casing the joint.

That's how it was when he cased out the loan office where we used painted stage settings as part of the act.

This here loan office was right down in the edge of the Loop—I forget the street, but it was just off Michigan.

The safe was a big one and it set in plain sight in the main office, on the sidewalk level. That part of the office didn't have too much wall space behind the safe—maybe ten or twelve feet. The safe was the only piece of furniture standing against that particular stretch of wall. There was a light fixture just above the safe and this light stayed on all night.

Passers-by on the sidewalk could look in, if they had a mind to, and there set the safe staring them right in the eye. That made passing traffic just as good as paid night watchmen. And cheaper, too—if you didn't figure guys like Al Sutton into the costs.

Well, Al met me at the speak and told me we was going after that big safe. It's to be a three-man job. He said the safe is always loaded on account the loan people have got to feeling very secure because they keep it in such plain sight.

Like always, Sutton had a plan already mapped out to go along with his idea.

He had a friend that used to hang out around State and Lake and in there, in the theater section. This friend was an artist and worked around the theaters painting scenery. Sutton said he taken this artist down past the loan office and showed him the deal. The artist he had a regular photographic memory and told Al he could duplicate that piece of wall and the safe in front of it on canvas.

"He's doing it right now, up in a loft over on Halstead," Al told me.

Later that day we drifted over to the loft and the picture was all done and drying. It looked mighty good to me. Sutton said it would be ready for business that night. Meantime, he taken me down to the loan office and we sauntered back and forth on the sidewalk, getting the feel of the joint. Sure enough, that picture was an exact duplicate of the back of that office, safe and all.

As I recall, it was Danny Powers we rung in on that job with us—him or Bob Steele, I forget which. Anyways, it was one of them boys that was working with us along there in the late 1920's.

That night we met at the loft and rolled the picture up on a pole like a big window blind. We sneaked it down into the alley beside the loan office and stashed it in a court. Then me and Sutton got up on the roof and pried open the skylight. Two minutes later we was in a back room of the loan place. It had only taken us a few seconds to cut the bug—the burglar-alarm system—on the back door and open it from the inside. The lookout man was ready with the window blind thing and we hauled it in through the back door. We had it all fixed with pieces of rope so we could hang it up in no time at all. It was a regular mask, you might say, for the whole job.

Well, it was pretty late—or rather early in the morning—and the sidewalk traffic had thinned way down. We watched until the street was clear for a minute, then we hung up our back drop and unrolled it from the ceiling. Al was at work on the safe almost before our "scenery" had quit shaking. He worked fast and probably cut his par time for busting into a can by at least two minutes. It seemed like hours to me though.

We cleaned the safe, put the stuff in bags and took out, leaving our decoy curtain still hanging there. We'd made a

hole in it for the light fixture, so I guess nobody noticed it all night long.

When we got the stuff up to the hotel room and sorted it out, there was $16,000 in cash and $27,000 in negotiable bonds. Them was just as good as cash, the way we was fixed in them days.

I always wished I could have seen the faces of them loan sharks when they come to work in the morning and found that decoy hanging there like an empty mask.

Me and Al Sutton drifted around on various kinds of jobs for quite a while together.

Sometimes we was around Detroit, where we got the okay to operate from the old Purple gang. We was around Cleveland now and then. And I got into New York and Baltimore quite often doing chores for Nitti and Capone, so as to square the go they give me to operate in Chicago.

I had pretty well cut my teeth on bank heisting in the Pueblo and the Rose City Bank jobs. But it was Al Sutton who really showed me the business. I picked up a pretty good knack for it from Al and it was my trade, off and on, for quite a while.

Mostly, in them days with Sutton, we was not working with the noted people that I worked with a few years later—like Johnny Dillinger, Floyd, Bob Brady and them. The guys that worked with us back there in 1928 or so wasn't very noted in the newspapers. I made very sure I wasn't noted either.

Besides, we had the nod from The Man, Al Capone, and there was so much heat on him all the time there wasn't much left to go around when it got down to us.

Anyways, I learned quite a lot about that end of the banking business when I was with the guys out of Chicago. And that's where I made my first contacts with the Kansas City combine that later become my ace in the hole.

The first bank heist I figured in with Al Sutton turned out so puny it was hardly worth our while.

It was in a little town just outside Chicago a ways—I even forget the name of it now. I was the hot man on that caper. The one with the heater—the gun. It was a two-man job.

There was only one teller's cage and it was little. We had picked closing time for the job, though usually it works best just after they open up. Reason we waited was we had had the word a sizable shipment was coming in during the day. We wanted to nail it before it went into the vault.

Me and Sutton come waltzing into the place just as the teller was getting ready to close. I walked up to the cage like I was going to present a check. Instead I leveled on him with the business end of the heater. I told him what the score was and I guess he sure believed it. He practically trembled out of his clothes.

Meantime, Al went into the cage and cleaned it out. Then I went to the vault, but there was nothing there but peanuts in the way of cash. We had had the right dope that there had been a shipment of money, but they had went and put it into a cannon-ball safe in the front of the bank, instead of their vault.

The safe had a time lock on it, and we was sure running out of time anyways, the way it was. We didn't have enough leeway to work on the cannon-ball, which is one of the toughest kind of safes there is. So we just taken what Al had scooped out of the cage and lammed.

The cage come for only four grand—hardly enough to pay for our trouble. And there sure is plenty of time and trouble involved if you're going to take a bank the way it should be took.

A lot of the trouble is to fix things so there will be no slip-up in the getaway.

We generally figured on using the same number of final getaway cars as there was operators in the heist. Before we

staged the job we would run the roads—every possible road in and out of town—until we knowed them like the natives. Then we would plan our way out and stash the getaway cars well out along the road. We would have another old beat-up car besides. This we used in getting directly to the bank and away after the heist. We would figure if the job was big enough we could just abandon that heap.

The other cars was good fast ones, and quite often we would have a woman driver waiting in it. And in the final cars would be a change of clothes—completely different than those we wore in the heist. Sometimes we would have a big bag of groceries, or a picnic basket, or an overnight bag in the planted car. Then if we was stopped by the police, we would just be a couple on the way home from shopping, or on their way to an outing. Many times I've got through a roadblock that way, just conning myself through a dozen cops that would have shot my heart out if they had of tumbled.

When I think of the planning that went into some of them jobs we pulled, I always remember Eddie Bentz.

Eddie Bentz was the best caser and getaway planner in the business, but he seldom worked the job beyond that. He mapped it all out for a percentage and then kept his head down somewhere until the dust settled. Then he come to collect.

I didn't run into Eddie much in the early days of my bank-heisting career, but I heard a lot about him. Later, I worked pretty close with Eddie when he was calling the shots for Johnny Dillinger, Homer Van Meter and some of them other big leaguers I got tied up with in the 1930's.

Eddie worked sometimes on percentage and sometimes on a straight fee. He was always going around getting jobs cased up and ready and then peddling them to the boys when the time looked right.

He never left nothing to chance. When he taken a job for, say, Johnny Dillinger or Charlie Floyd, he had everything

in the bag when he brought up the subject. Eddie always had a good front and a big line for the suckers. He would go into a bank and get an appointment right with the president. Sometimes he would make like he was planning to go in business in the town and was looking around for a bank connection. He always had a brief case full of phony credentials of various kinds.

Well, the banker would be interested in new business, and when they are they get inclined to big talk. Pretty soon Eddie would weasel out of the banker almost everything he needed to know about the bank. Now and then he would even get blueprints.

Then Eddie would run all the roads, maybe as far as seventy-five miles, picking a couple of the likeliest ways out. One as an alternate, if anything come up at the last minute to gum up the first choice. He would even hide gasoline out along the way—five or ten gallon, here or there. He even went so far as to have first-aid kits all packed up and ready for each getaway car. Then he would get in touch with one of the boys.

Sometimes Eddie would ask ten per cent of the take and sometimes he would just sell the package direct for maybe $5,000, if the job was a big one.

In later years Eddie turned wrong. He double-crossed some of the boys and got a few of them in prison. Finally, the law caught him, too, and the last I heard he was sweating out the rest of it on The Rock. That's Alcatraz. The "rest of it" means life.

I mind another job I was on with Al Sutton back in them old days. I remember it pretty well, on account of it was the last one for me for quite a while.

It was up near Cedar Rapids, Iowa, a small town some name or other I don't recollect. There was so many of them little towns and banks they get to looking all the same, when you think back pretty near twenty-five years.

Anyways, this was a two-man job and me and Al Sutton

elected ourselves to it. In this one we reversed the plan used back in that first job near Chicago. We taken the place at the start of the day instead of the end.

We was waiting around on each side of the bank when the janitor come to open up. We moved in on him from both sides as he unlocked the door and we frog-marched him right on in on the ends of our guns. We tied him up with adhesive tape and waited just inside the door. As each employee come in we taped them up, too, and stored them away in one of the offices.

That went on right up through the vice-president, who come in about 9:30. Him we didn't tie. We just herded him on up to the vault and waited for the time lock to spring.

That's one of them things you have to watch—the time lock. You have to gear up your own time right to that clock or you find yourself in hot water. If you're too early you just have to stand there with nothing to do but sweat and bite your fingernails. That's part of the casing of a job—to find out when the time lock springs.

Well, we was right on the button this time and the lock come open just as we marched the vice-president up to the vault. We cleaned the place out and then give the vice-president the tape treatment. We had to work fast because the kind of a lock that was on that vault gives a signal down at police headquarters when it goes. Then the bank is supposed to call back with some kind of code that everything is clear. In them days they generally waited with that call until some top official checked the vault. That give you about ten minutes' slack between the time the lock went and the call should be made.

Nowadays they've trimmed that down so the all-clear has to come just as soon as the time lock releases. If it don't, the cops come running.

It taken Al a little longer to clean the vault than it did me to tape up the vice-president. Him and the other employees give me a lot of talk about what was going to happen to me

when I got caught. I just chatted back and kidded with them to keep their shirts on and nobody would get hurt. Then me and Al taken off for a cool-out spot in Illinois.

That bank come for $10,000 in cash and $60,000 in bonds. Like I said, them bonds was as good as cash, if you taken the discount you had to take to fence them off. Anyways, it was a nice little bundle.

What I didn't know was it was going to have to last me quite a while.

A few days after the Iowa job, I was back in my room in Chicago when I got word Al Sutton wanted a meet at the speak on Rush Street. He was looking a little gloomy when I come in and sat down. I asked him what the score was.

"You're going to have to lam," he told me.

"Who says so?" I asked.

"The Man," Al said. "He said you'd got yourself too hot in that job down by Cedar Rapids. The bank employees you was chattering with practically drawed your picture from memory when they talked to the cops. You sure got yourself scuffed up."

He waited a minute and then went on to say, "Speaking of pictures, you're getting away too many of them, hanging on bulletin boards in post offices and places over the country."

I said to Sutton, "I seen a few of them. I tear them off the bulletin boards every time I see them—figure it makes a few less. But how come Al Capone is getting so damn pious about this? What's he got to worry about?"

Sutton said, "Bootlegging, dope and prostitution is one kettle of fish. Bank robbing is something else again. He says for you to lam. What he says goes, if you want to stay healthy."

I told him I was already on the lam and was scuffed up when I hit town. I said, "Was there any suggestions in my walking papers on where I'd better lam to?"

"How about Europe?" Sutton said. "You know your way

around over there. And you'll be took care of from this end."

Well, I headed out for Baltimore and hid there while some contacts was made for me in Washington, D. C.—they was pretty big contacts, at that.

The upshot was that in a couple of days I had me a passport and all the fixings.

A few days later I was on an ocean liner out of Halifax. I had a good-sized bundle of cash in my hip pocket and my passport said I was a businessman from Kansas City, on a vacation tour of Europe.

As a matter of fact, my passport could just as well have read "Gunville, U. S. A." That's what counted in most cities, them days—guns.

9

I ain't a gambler, but I done all right in Monte Carlo.

I was down there on the French Riviera, taking things right easy. Chicago and Kansas City was a long, long ways away.

On the other hand, Marie was nice and close. She was closer to me than anybody ever had been since Dolly died. I was around twenty-seven years old at the time, and mighty lonesome, when I hit Europe on the transatlantic lam. It was a different Europe than the one they carried me out of on a stretcher years before. It was gay and all signs of the war were pretty well gone.

I landed up in Nice. That made me think of Lili, back there in them days when I was a kid. I drifted around to some of the old places and asked for her. That's how I met Marie.

She was Lili's cousin. She answered the door when I rung the bell at an address I had dug up for Lili. Marie told me Lili had got married years before and moved to South America. She asked me in and we talked for quite a while. One

thing led to another and we started going around the spots together.

It was nice to have Marie along. One thing, she was very pretty and knowed how to wear good clothes. Another, she could speak several languages, including perfect English. And that's a big help when you're on the lam in a country where the best you can do is a half-dozen words in the language—and them mostly the kind of words that can get you slapped in the face.

Well, one thing led to another and me and Marie taken up together. A lone man traveling around Europe right away causes nose trouble on the part of the police. A couple ain't noticeable, and nobody pays much attention if you don't get out of line. But one alone, and the police get nosy.

There was another thing about Marie. She knowed the police in almost every big city, and had ways of finding out did any rumble come up. I never asked no questions about how come she knowed so many things, and she never asked none about me. We just drifted around Europe, having the time of our lives.

Every now and then I would get more money along the way from Chicago and Kansas City. One thing about Capone. Did he think he owed you any favor, he never forgot. Some ways, Al Capone wasn't too bad a guy in the days before he went haywire with paresis and before he become Alcatraz No. 85.

Like I said, I done all right in Monte Carlo.

Whenever I've gambled in my life, it's been for high stakes. I cleaned the wheel one night at the Casino. Them francs wasn't worth too much, even then, but you could buy quite a bit with them when you got right down to it.

Me and Marie we bought us a ticket for Athens, Greece. The reason was that one night, right after I made that hit at Monte Carlo, we got rousted up early in the morning by the police at Toulon. They wasn't there to arrest us, they just

wanted to tip off Marie that the Sûreté—that's sort of the FBI in France, up in Paris—had orders to take a long look at any stray Americans wandering around.

Seems there was a lot of undesirables tripping around Europe from the States them days. Skimming some of the cream off the boom times that had sprung up in the hot spots. France was crawling with well-heeled Americans. And with them was crawling all sorts of jewel thieves, con men and boosters. Cheap crooks. Honest crooks like bank robbers, who don't make no bones about what they are, wasn't bothering Europe none. The pickings was still too good over home.

Anyways, them detectives in Toulon convinced Marie it was our move. So that's why we went to Greece. We stayed around there in the best hotels for several months. But things got pretty dull.

Greek was one language Marie didn't know. We had a hard time eating. We would order one thing and get another. Maybe that's why so many Greeks come over here and went into the restaurant business. They couldn't figure out their own menus, over there in Athens.

Finally, Marie and me got tired of it. We figured France had cooled off enough so we could go back. We hit Paris with a comfortable wad of cash still between us and the big outdoors. We taken in all the places, like the Left Bank.

I found it more interesting even than any First National Bank I ever heisted back home. Marie knowed all the places to take in, and those to steer clear of because they was hot.

Paris can heat up for you fast, though, just like certain cities over here.

The Sûreté agents always got nose trouble, seems like. And them prying around into your business can become almost as bothersome as getting crepes suzette in Athens when you ordered ham and eggs.

Me and Marie fixed to get married in Paris in the spring —like they do in story books. But the winter got so hot in

other ways, we decided not to stay around for spring. We taken off.

We never did get around to getting married.

We wound up in Bordeaux and was snug and comfortable there until one night the police come, just like they had in Toulon. Only this time they didn't come to tip us off. They come to take us in, and they done just that.

Well, my passport had my picture on it and everything in order but the police wanted to take a look at my fingerprints. That done it. It wasn't two hours later that a French cop that could speak English come to my cell in the Bordeaux jail and said, "So, you're a fugitive from McNeil Island Penitentiary in the United States?"

I knowed that was my ticket home. It sure had been a long time, and I sure covered lots of the world since I jumped that there jail in McCook, Nebraska.

They split us up, me and Marie, and the last I seen of her was when she waved good-by in the hall of the Bordeaux jail. I have wrote letters and asked around from time to time over the years since then. But I never knowed what happened. All I ever did find out was that the police set her free soon after they taken me to Paris to return me to the United States.

I left the last $1,200 of my bundle in a place only me and Marie knowed about, where she could get it when she wanted it. I had that hideout scouted out for me later by a contact I had in Europe. It was empty. I hope it done her some good.

It still wasn't spring in Paris when I left, and it sure as hell wasn't when I landed up in New York. It was cold. Mighty cold.

Especially them leg irons they locked on when they headed me for Leavenworth.

10

When they taken me off the boat in New York, I landed up in Washington, D. C. And I wasn't after no phony passport this time.

I was there for one purpose only—to be taken to the Leavenworth penitentiary to finish the sentence I left behind me when I Duffied it from McNeil in the speedboat, two years or so before.

They put me in a detention cell in the U. S. Marshal's jail, along with a crippled fellow about fifty years old, name of Panzeran.

He told me he was going up for twenty-five years for murder—a killing in the District of Columbia. He said they had accused him of twenty murders when they tried him, but only made one of them stick.

"I don't rightly know how many people I *have* killed, but likely they're right," he said.

And it wasn't too long after he said that to me that I seen Panzeran kill his last one—right in front of me, inside the walls of Leavenworth!

Well, they handcuffed me and Panzeran together the next

morning when they put us in the prison car, there at Washington. They put three deputy marshals right there with us every minute. They was making mighty sure that history didn't repeat itself, as far as I was concerned.

I just couldn't figure no way to wiggle myself loose this time.

This Panzeran, he kept talking about the twenty-five years he was going to have to do and that he was going to find a way around it, come what may. I told him I knowed just how he felt. I had felt exactly that same way, from Stony Mountain on out.

I only had about eight months to do, I figured, because at that time, as I understood the law, it was not a violation to escape and a sentence was not extended because you did.

That way, my sentence had been running right along, just like I was still at McNeil Island, all that time I was on the lam.

Anyways, when I got to Leavenworth they celled me alone because I was an escape artist. At least, that's the way they had me tagged on the prison records. They put Panzeran in the cell right next to me. He was celled alone, too, because of his murder record. We was in adjoining cells that way for two months.

My friends had not forgotten me. They had got the word that I had been jumped up and grabbed. And they knowed exactly where I was being sent. So there was a commissary waiting for me at the prison when I got to Leavenworth—cigarettes and everything like that to make me comfortable. Some of it come from Chicago and some from Kansas City, from people who thought they owed me a little favor.

One evening a guard come to this Panzeran's cell and told him to be sure and make early breakfast next morning because he was going on the carpet. That meant he was going before the warden on some charge or other of violating rules. So that night Panzeran he shoves his commissary over into my cell.

"I won't need this stuff no longer," he told me. He didn't say nothing more.

Next morning, when they put us into the line for breakfast, Panzeran moved along just ahead of me until we got to the entrance of the laundry. Then he ducked. A minute later a hell of a commotion started. The line stopped and I was right opposite the laundry door.

There stood Panzeran, with a piece of steel about three feet long in his fist. He was beating the head off a man named Warneke, the superintendent of the laundry. Warneke was on the floor and Panzeran was splattering his brains with the steel club. A guard named Buck Folgry was sitting on a stool back of a little counter thing just beyond the door.

He started to get up but Panzeran yelled he would kill him if he moved.

"You're a good guy and I don't want to have to kill you," Panzeran hollered. Then he seen me in the door and yelled, "Don't jam yourself up in this, Blackie! Stay out of this. You ain't no part of it."

With that, Panzeran come lunging out of the laundry before any guards could stop him. He was still swinging the steel club as he darted down the corridor. He was yelling he was going to get the deputy warden, too. And a lot more of them.

He made it to the deputy warden's office, which was just on down the passageway a ways. That was where Panzeran had been slated to go on the carpet.

By that time, all hell had broke loose. But Panzeran was moving fast. He run into the deputy warden's office before anyone could lay a hand on him. The deputy wasn't there. He had went to the shoe factory in another building just a few minutes earlier.

Meantime, they was clearing us other inmates out of the passageway and running us back to our cells. Some other guards come with machine guns and set them up so

Panzeran would be nailed if he tried to cross the passageway. The clerks in the deputy's office was all convicts and they sure wasn't going to start nothing they couldn't finish. They had all run for cover in other offices.

Panzeran come to the door of the deputy's office and seen the machine guns. He ducked back. Then he tried another door. Same thing. With that he throwed down his steel club and just plain walked on through to The Hole—that's what we called solitary—which was right in back of the deputy's office. He surrendered to the guards at The Hole and they locked him up.

Six months later he was executed. Nobody ever knowed just what made him kill Warneke. Just blowed his top and done it. That's the way things go, sometimes, in a big stir.

Frank Nash—he was a tough baby from way back, with plenty of connections—he had the fix on, almost as soon as he hit Leavenworth. He had the fix on to get out just as soon as he could, and he done it.

Frank come in carrying twenty-five years on his back. He was past fifty then. He knowed there was only two ways he would ever leave Leavenworth—over the wall or toes up. So when he come in he had the way out already cooking.

And talking about cooking, that's the way he done it. And that's how I come into the picture.

Frank Nash was a cool one. So cold you could get goose pimples just being around him. Blood of a water moccasin and eyes to go with it. That was Frank Nash. He was my first cellmate in Leavenworth.

It was a short while after the Panzeran ruckus that Frank come in. I had been alone in my cell up to that time on account of I was an "escape artist," like I said. Then all of a sudden I had a cellmate. Here come a guard one day with old bald-headed Frank and moves him in with me.

I knowed very well why I was all alone. The guards and

the deputy warden had told me often enough why. So when I come up all of a sudden with a cellmate, why, I smelled a stool-pigeon play somewheres in the woodpile. But I knowed who Frank Nash was, and it just didn't figure.

Then I found out right quick.

I had a cellmate because Frank Nash had the fix on. Him and some connections he had on the outside, that was also connections of mine, had set it up so he would be celled in with me, for a very special reason. I could be trusted. He told me the play the second night we was together. He never told me what the fix was and nothing ever was proved after he was gone. But I sure knowed the fix was there.

Here was what had to be done, according to the plans:

Frank had to learn to cook. That was the key to the whole rig-up for his breakout. Frank, he didn't know no more about cooking than I did about growing tulips. But I was a cook, and them contacts of ours on the outside knowed it. They also knowed there wasn't nothing that would ever make me talk if I didn't have a mind to. So they rigged it that Frank should be celled with me until he learned to cook.

It wasn't but a couple of days till I seen the reason why. There had been an arrangement already made that Frank would be assigned as a cook for the deputy warden. That made him a long jump closer to the wall than he ever could have been otherwise. So Frank he fixed it to be celled with me long enough for me to coach him on the cooking business. Then he went out and went to work as the deputy warden's cook. From there he went his way.

When he left, I never seen him again till I seen him shot to death by mistake in the Kansas City Union Station Massacre, three years later.

I learned quite a lot about Frank Nash in them few weeks we celled together, but I never did like him. Too cold-blooded. But we had the same friends in high places here

and there and that was good enough for me. So when Frank told me he wanted a little favor done for him *after* he was gone over the wall, I agreed to do the job.

The job he left me to do sounds kind of simple when you say it.

All I had to do was help smuggle two .38 pistols into the prison. That's all! Just handle the hot end of two of the most white-hot pieces of contraband there could ever be in any stir—guns.

The deal was this:

Frank Nash, he was going to lam for it alone. But there was six of his buddies inside who was raring to go, just as soon as they could rig a crash-out and find an opportunity to use the rig. So Frank he promised he would fix them up with guns.

There was a guard in on the play—a guard who now is dead.

The guns were to come to him and then he would get them to me. After that, it was up to me to get them to the boys Frank wanted to help—Willie Green; a guy name of Curtis; another one named Hook; a man named Underhill; another I knowed only as Brownie; Charlie Burda; and old man Thayer. Thayer, he was the same one I crashed out of the McCook jail with that time back in Nebraska.

Frank told me I was welcome to cut myself in on the escape. I said no sale. Right then I was in the middle of the legal battle that put me on the outside a couple of months later.

My lawyer was working up a case to show that under the law they couldn't make me do the time the government said I owed them while I was a fugitive from McNeil Island. Like I said, the way the law stood, my sentence run along all the time I was on the lam, just like I had been serving it. I even piled up good time—that means reducing the sentence for good behavior—because I didn't make no trouble at McNeil all the time I was gone!

That was the setup when Frank give himself the Frenchman's parole and taken it on the lam. That was in 1930.

I set tight and waited for the next play. It wasn't long in coming.

Them guns come into the prison in a cigar box.

The guard slipped them to me one morning in the toolroom. I was working in the machine shop at the time, and there was a stool pigeon name of Edwards working right there with me. At least I figured he was a stool pigeon, but Willie Green and Curtis had give him the okay.

Well, when the guard slipped me the cigar box he was standing behind the partly opened door to the toolroom in such a way that Edwards couldn't see who he was. Edwards seen the box, though, and figured it was a couple pints of whisky. He was craning his neck and bug-eying the door, but the guard was gone.

There was nothing to do but let Edwards in on the rest of it. I opened the lid and showed him what was inside. His hair like to stood on end.

"For Christ's sake, man!" he whispered. "I don't want no part of this."

"You got a part of it, whether you want it or not," I told him. "You seen these guns. You know what they're here for just as much as I do."

"Yes, I know," he said. "A big crash-out!"

I told him to figure that part out himself. Meantime I had to get rid of them for a while.

The only place I could find to put them quick was under a desk that was at one end of the toolroom. The guards sometimes set there, but mostly it wasn't occupied. This desk was up on a little platform, about eight inches above the floor. That left a hollow place underneath.

There was two boxes of shells with them guns. Them I slipped into my pocket. Then I got this Edwards to help me lift one corner of the platform enough to slide the guns underneath. The place under the platform hadn't been

cleaned since they had set it up and there was a heavy layer of dust on the floor.

There wasn't a soul around the toolroom but me and Edwards. He was sweating blood by the time we got the guns out of sight and the platform back in place.

Next, I went into the washroom and moved out one set of lockers a few inches from the wall. I knowed they had been remodeling in there and there was holes through the plaster in places. I dropped the shells down one of them holes and busted down a little more plaster on top of them. I shoved the locker back in place and scattered some more of that plaster rubbish around quick and got out of there.

When I come back out, Edwards was gone.

Well, there was a fellow name of Hi was foreman of the machine shop. He liked me pretty well. A little later that morning he come by where I was working and slipped me the word.

"There's hell to pay," he said. "Edwards is over to the deputy warden's office and things sure is popping, I hear. Must be something pretty important, because the feathers are getting ready to fly."

I knowed only one thing—Edwards had got scared and snitched.

I did some fast figuring. The only way I seen out was to get Hi on my side. I told him about the guns and where they was hid, right at that very minute, not fifty foot from where we was working.

"I got to get them guns out of there and somewheres else if Edwards has snitched," I said. "It's got to be done before they have a chance to look."

Hi didn't even look surprised. He just taken a look around. The only one in sight was a guard at the other end of the room. Hi sent him on an errand to the tin shop. Then Hi whirled around to me and said, "Let's get going!"

Hi lifted up the corner of the platform and I got the guns out. Next thing was what to do with them. Hi pointed across

the room and said, "In that oil cylinder, over there on the shaper."

That shaper—a big machine tool—had been laid up for repairs and was being put back together again. There was an oil cylinder on it, about six inches in diameter. Hi said, "Slide them guns into that there cylinder and put the cap back on."

That taken about ten seconds. So at last we was high and dry. Hi called some inmates in from the next room and told them to finish putting the shaper back together. I started back to my work, but I hadn't taken more than two steps when here come a couple of guards. They collared me without a word and marched me to the deputy's office. The deputy didn't ask a single question, neither. All he said was, "Take him to his cell and get all his personal belongings together."

"What's this all about?" I asked him.

"You know damn well what it's all about," he said.

"If I did," I said, "I wouldn't of asked you."

The deputy looks me over, cold as a sledge hammer on a winter morning.

"That's the kind of talk," he said, "that gets your teeth kicked in. Take him away."

He told them two guards if I tried to speak to anybody, to pick them up, too. And if anybody tried to contact me or talk to me, to take them right along on the party.

I told the deputy I had some personal things in the machine shop and asked could I get them. He finally relented enough to let the guards take me down there. I just had to get some kind of word to Hi. I done it. I got the signal to him to dummy up.

I hauled some stuff out of my locker and taken it back to my cell. Then the guards taken me on to the warden's office and the warden told them to handcuff and leg-iron me and take me over to the Annex. That's the old military part of the prison. The Big Top, as they call it, is separate and newer.

That's where most of the inmates are housed. They put me in solitary in the Annex.

The warden in charge of the Annex come right down to my cell and started grilling me about the guns. I denied knowing anything about any guns and played dumb as a duck. We sparred around most of that day and the next. Neither of us got nowhere with the other.

Meantime, hell was to pay all the way from Leavenworth to Washington about them guns. James V. Bennett, assistant director of federal prisons at that time—he's the director now—flew in from Washington. He come down to my cell and he taken up where the warden left off. He showed me pictures that had been taken in the dust where they lifted up the platform. There was marks in the dust that he said was imprints of the guns. I told him they looked like hen scratches to me. That went on and on.

"We know you got them guns," he told me. "There's no mistake about that. What we want to know is who was the guard you got them from."

That tipped me that Edwards must have saw more through the partly open door than I thought he had. But it also convinced me he didn't see quite enough. He knowed it was a guard who slipped me the box, but he didn't know which one. So I told Bennett, "If it was a stool pigeon that told you this story about guns, then he ought to know where they're at. I don't."

Bennett said, "Don't worry about that end of it. You're the one that's in trouble. You might as well come up clean with the whole story."

I said, "I can't get in any more trouble than I'm already in. I'm in prison. Couldn't be any more trouble than that."

"That's what you think," Bennett said. "If those guns ever come into play you're going to be the first man who'll take the fall for it. No matter what happens."

So I dummied up and didn't talk no more to Mr. Bennett.

They brought up FBI agents, and I wouldn't talk to them neither.

"All we want to know is who the guard is," one of them agents told me. "Tell us who the guard is and we'll take you back to the Big Top and your old job."

"It don't make any difference to me where I am at," I told the federal agents. "I only got so much time to do, anyway. It makes no difference to me. I am just as well off here as in the Big Top. I don't know nothing about nothing."

Then they told me the same thing Bennett had—that if them guns ever come into play I was going to be the first one tried for it.

There was about a week of that same sort of questioning and nobody got no place.

Finally, they taken me back to the Big Top and put me back into population—which meant that I had the general run of the yard with the rest of the inmates. But that didn't fool me. I knowed they turned me back so they could watch and see did I make any contacts. I just went my way and never cracked to nobody. I acted like I was a new fish that just arrived inside and was afraid of his own shadow. At last I got to Willie Green for a minute and passed him the word where the guns was.

Hi, the foreman, he was biting his nails down to the first joint.

He didn't know who them guns was slated for, but he knowed all too well where they was at. And when the guards and agents went through the machine shop, Hi had the shaking horrors. Somehow they never searched that shaper. They never found them shells, neither, in back of the locker. They moved all them lockers out and poked down them holes with flashlights, but there wasn't anything but busted up plaster showing and they didn't dig into that.

The next job was to get them guns out of there. That would really be a ticklish job, with everybody on the alert.

But that was Willie Green's headache, not mine. I had done my part of Frank Nash's bargain.

The whole prison was getting restless because the grapevine had the whole story about guns getting in for a crash-out. I told Willie the only way to get them would be on a Sunday morning, when everybody was in the yard. I had a lieutenant and two guards always tailing me and there wasn't much I could do but act as a sort of decoy.

So the next Sunday morning I got fifteen to twenty inmates around me and we went sauntering on down to the other end of the shoe factory, which was about as far away from the machine shop as we could get.

We all congregated down there and some others drifted down to see what was going on. The guards come swarming down on us like flies because they figured this was it. They figured the break would come somewhere in that mob, but they couldn't bust it up without risking a big brawl. That would only help any escape plot that was brewing.

I was the central attraction and they was watching me so close they forgot there was a Willie Green or a Curtis. Them two was up at the machine shop breaking in a window and getting the guns out.

We kept our little act going fifteen minutes or so till at last here come Willie walking by. He give me the high sign and I knowed everything was jake. So I just walked on away about my business.

That was more than them guards could stand. One of them grabbed me and said, "Why the hell didn't you guys go through with what you was going to do?"

"Go through with what?" I said, and I just walked away.

While I'm thinking of the machine shop, it brings to mind that there gold-plated safe of mine.

I made a safe shortly after they brought me back from France. About the time me and Frank Nash was celled together. There in Leavenworth they had a lot of safe men.

Some of those fellows bragged that they could open any safe ever made. Al Sutton had learned me more about safes than all of them knowed, put together. So I decided to make one they couldn't open.

I made it out of brass. It was only about five by eight inches. Too small for practical use, but it was a nice novelty. It was a "six-tumbler" job.

All of them guys that had been so sure they could open any safe ever made tried to open it, but no one ever did.

One day the deputy warden found it and confiscated it.

He wanted to know what I made it for. I told him. He had a lot of fellows try to open it, so he could watch. Finally, he told me he'd give me permission to make another one that I could keep if I'd give him the combination. That I did.

The first safe, he went and give it to one of the banks in Kansas City. They had it on display as a novelty for a while. Later they had it gold-plated.

Maybe they still got it.

It was about a week after that Sunday morning caper in the yard that Willie Green, Curtis, old man Thayer and the others shot their way out of the front of the prison.

They crashed into the warden's office and Green slugged the warden's secretary with a gun butt. They kidnapped the warden and ordered him to open the main gate or they would kill him. So the warden ordered the guards to open up.

They taken him out onto Metropolitan Street and held up a passing car. They throwed the driver out on his ear and they all piled into the car, including the warden as hostage, and taken off.

It had been raining hard for several days and the side roads was treacherous. The car skidded into a ditch a few miles from the prison. The warden wouldn't get out and walk with them, so they shot him. They left him there for

dead, but they didn't kill him. They shot him with a shotgun —one of the bunch of guns they taken when they crashed through the office. The warden was wounded bad, crippled for life, but he lived.

They all went on to a schoolhouse nearby and grabbed the schoolteacher's car. They only got down the road about a mile when they run into a cow and wrecked that car, too.

That's where they broke up. Green, Thayer, Curtis and Hook went one way and the other three went another. That was Brownie, Underhill and Charlie Burda. Underhill and Brownie got caught in a field. Curtis, Green, Hook and Thayer they sneaked around in the woods and ended up in a farmhouse.

All the police in that end of the state was in on the hunt by then. They surrounded the farmhouse and begin shooting it out with them four cons. The boys had grabbed plenty of guns and ammunition and I guess they staged quite a war. But the guards and the police kept creeping in and creeping in.

Finally old Thayer got on the phone and called another house that was on the party line. He pretended he was the farmer at the barricaded house—it happened to be empty when the boys moved into it—and said there was a shooting going on and he wanted to get out. These people that he called they told him to just take a stick of wood for a cane and hobble on out the back door into the woods like he was the old crippled fellow who lived on the place.

So Thayer he done just that. He pulled on a pair of old overalls and a hat and walked right on out through the posse and everybody. Nobody paid no attention to him. He just walked away.

The other three was finally killed by the posse, but Thayer escaped.

His luck had run out, though. Three days later, he taken down with pneumonia out in the woods. He finally crawled to another farmhouse where they recognized him as an es-

caped convict and turned him in. They brought him back to Leavenworth, but he never recovered. A few months later he was dead.

Me, I stayed on at the prison for about two months after the break, then my lawyer got me sprung on a writ.

They never did pin those guns to me and there was nothing they could do but turn me loose. The court in Topeka finally upheld the stand my lawyer had took to get the writ. The government even taken the case to the United States Circuit Court of Appeals, which in the end affirmed the ruling of the district court and made me a free man. But that was much later.

When I got out on the writ that day, Johnny Lazia, the North End boss for the Kansas City combine—the tough guy of the Pendergast machine—was waiting for me in a car on Metropolitan Street. He had orders to take me under his wing.

11

My first job in Kansas City was to look up vacant lots.

I looked them up, precinct by precinct, and turned them lists in to Mr. Pendergast—that's Tom Pendergast, the man who used to run Kansas City back in them days. When we got a precinct all surveyed out, we would give addresses to them vacant lots. Then we would take the addresses and assign them to people we could depend on—prostitutes, thieves, floaters, anybody we could get on the voting registration books. On election days we just hauled these people to the right places and they went in and voted—in the right places.

The payoff for that was the nod. The nod was simply the privilege of doing most anything you wanted to do without fear of getting pinched. If you voted right as a resident of one of them lots, you got a card. Nobody with one of them cards could possibly get in jail.

For the women who voted right, on them vacant-lot addresses, it mostly meant an unofficial license to hustle unmolested.

Practically every hustler in the Middle West dropped

through Kansas City at one time or another in them years to get on the bandwagon. Naturally, some of the police got to thinking they better get on it, too. So, quick as these broads would hit town, they would get shook down by crooked cops for a percentage of whatever they made. And if they didn't cooperate, they got rousted out of town.

Well, that was nothing to me. Live and let live, that was my policy. But it did get under the hide of a kid from down in the Cookson Hills in Oklahoma.

His name was Charlie Floyd—Pretty Boy Floyd, the papers called him. He was one of the first of the big-time heisters—the Jesse Jameses of the 1930's—that I fell in with.

I met up with Charlie Floyd sometime right after he got out of Jefferson City Penitentiary.

He was quite a kid. Good-looking, easygoing and a playboy. He liked the girls a lot. And the girls liked him. He spent his money like a drunken Indian when he had it.

Well, some of them girls he liked pretty well there in Kansas City was squawking their heads off, around that time, about the payoff they had to make to some of the cops on the vice squad. Charlie Floyd told them girls to hell with it. He told them they didn't have to make no payoff and he would see to it that they didn't.

This got around to the vice squad and they set out to get Floyd and send him to prison. From what I knowed, I'm sure Charlie Floyd was framed and sent to Jefferson City Penitentiary on a bum rap because he agitated that revolt amongst the hustlers.

Charlie was pretty bitter when he come out of Jeff City. He never done much worse than steal chickens when he was a kid down in Oklahoma. So he vowed when he come out that never again would any policeman put him behind bars—particularly Kansas City policemen. And did they want to make something of it, he let the word out that they could step right up any time and give it a try.

Well, Charlie he had built up quite a reputation in Jeff

City as a tough kid. So when he come out he begin living up to it. He wore a gun at all times, just like you would a necktie or a pair of pants. The Kansas City cops, they didn't say too much whenever they got word Charlie Floyd was coming in. If he was coming in the South End, most of the police got busy in the North End. And if he was coming in the North End, they all went to the South End.

A lot of them went fishing.

Charlie was supposed to have picked up that moniker of "Pretty Boy" from the girls in the sporting houses up around Thirteenth and Cherry. He never did like the name very much. But it stuck with him until the day they killed him at East Liverpool, Ohio, in October, 1934.

Charlie Floyd played a lone hand most of the time, but once in a while he would tie up with some of the other boys on a big job. Him and Maurice Denning worked together quite a lot. And me and Maurice worked some jobs together. It was through Maurice that I met Charlie Floyd. Floyd was with us on a couple of smaller capers, but nothing that amounted to much.

I went up pretty fast in the organization there in Kansas City.

It wasn't long until I was the go-between for Tom Pendergast and some of the big-time machine politicians in other parts of the country. Technically, you might say I was working for Henry McElroy, the city manager. He was sort of a front man for Pendergast.

McElroy, he didn't deal direct with any of the people that was getting the job done out in the precincts and elsewhere. It was me that done the dealing. It was me that taken the orders to Johnny Lazia. It was me that, in the end, tried to warn Lazia that an outside mob was moving in and wanted to get him.

He laughed at me. The next day Johnny was dead.

These jobs I had to do for Pendergast and McElroy taken

me all over the country. I got some pretty ticklish ones, too, mainly because Mr. Pendergast trusted me.

Like the time I delivered $260,000 in cash to Huey Long.

I taken the money right down to Louisiana in my billfold like it was cigar coupons. Twenty-six $10,000 bills.

They look just like any other bills. The best way to tell one of them from a single is that the single has a picture of George Washington in the middle and the ten-grand note has a picture of Salmon P. Chase on it.

Just take a look in your billfold sometime and notice that difference, if you don't believe me.

It was in the early 1930's sometime, just before election. I don't remember just the year it was. Anyways, the money was to help out on the election.

I went down to Huey Long's home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He had been notified I was coming and what I was bringing with me. He had me come right on in. I handed him the money and he didn't even count it. Maybe he did later. Maybe he counted it after I was gone.

I also give him a message from Mr. Pendergast. He had said to tell Huey Long there was no doubt of what the outcome of the election would be—he could rest assured he would be elected.

Huey grinned and said, "There's no doubt in my mind, either."

We talked for about an hour. Then he said he had to go to the capitol building for something he wanted me to take back to Pendergast. As we left the house, four bodyguards fell in with us—two in front and two behind. I was pretty sharp on the lookout in them days, but I didn't even see where they come from. They all of a sudden was there. They stuck right with us every minute.

After that first meet-up with Huey Long, I got to know him pretty well. He offered me a job, later. Said he would like to have me work for him and maybe help him get to be President. He talked to me a lot about his ideas.

He told me all about his plans to become President. Huey was sure he was going to be the presidential candidate in 1936. He was going to try to get nominated as a Democrat, but if he didn't make that, he was going to run as an Independent.

I asked him what about Roosevelt. They was sort of on the outs, right then. Huey said Roosevelt wouldn't live out his term, his health was too poor. He said Roosevelt was going to die in office.

Well, I have thought a lot about that since then. Huey was partly right.

Roosevelt did die in office, but he lived ten years longer than Huey did.

I was more or less on my own after I really got set with the Pendergast machine.

My time was my own so long as I done the things I was told to do. I not only got around the country a lot, but I got around the city and I seen a lot of things.

One time I am sitting in a joint—sort of combination restaurant and loafing place I guess you would call it—and a little girl about nine years old come in. It was chilly outdoors and her face was blue. Her shoes was so beat-up she was practically barefoot. She was carrying a cardboard box of homemade flowers.

The kid wandered from booth to booth trying to sell her posies. Nobody wanted any. She come up to where me and another guy was sitting, and somehow or other she got clean under my hide. I asked her some questions, and the things she told me would melt the heart of a Leavenworth guard.

She said her mother was a widow and wasn't very well. That little girl said she had to get all her flowers sold every day if her and her mother was going to eat. She said their landlady was going to throw them out if they didn't pay their back rent.

I wanted to be sure it wasn't just another hard-luck story

—some of them kids were pretty tough and had more tricks than you could shake a stick at—so I went home with her to see her mother. Every word the kid had said was true. They sure was in a spot.

So I paid up the rent and moved them out of that old flea bag they was living in. I paid up some rent in a decent place and I told the widow woman to get herself a flock of groceries and charge them to me. When they was gone I said for her to get some more and put them all on my account.

Well, that went on for a while and all of a sudden I got a bill from the grocery store that was almost twice as big as the last one before. Next time it was the same thing. I couldn't figure it out, but I decided they was probably just extra hungry.

Then one day I found out all about it. The widow had gone and got married, and I was feeding the new husband, too. But the payoff was this:

The man she married was a cop. That made me just a little bit sore.

12

It got so almost everyone I had to do business with in my work for Pendergast was a thief of one kind or another. Some of them was cheap boosters, junkheads and prostitutes. Others was completely out of that league. They was the big-timers who needed a little favor, just like I did one time up in Chicago.

That's how I met Bob Brady, the bank robber.

I met up with him sometime in 1932, I think it was.

He had just crashed out of the McAlester, Oklahoma, penitentiary. He hit Kansas City on the lam, dead broke and hotter than a sheriff's pistol.

Johnny Lazia rousted me out of bed on the telephone one night and told me to pick up a bundle of money at a certain point. It was a pretty good-sized bundle. He told me to take the money and a suitcase full of clothes to a place down in the North End.

I had never seen Bob Brady in my life until then. And he sure didn't look like much when we met in a hall bedroom in a little rooming house where he was hiding out, there in

the North End. He was still wearing prison dungarees, and there wasn't a dime in them. He was dirty and about two days past needing a shave.

He slicked up in the stuff I brought, shoved the money in his hip pocket and said to me, "This is where you take over. Where do we go now?"

There is a resort town name of Excelsior Springs, a little way out of Kansas City. Nobody paid much attention to comings and goings of strangers there in them days. Most everybody that stopped there was some sort of an invalid and didn't want to be disturbed. So the natives left them strictly alone, so long as they paid their way and there wasn't no rumbles.

That's where I taken Bob Brady that night. I checked him in at a bungalow court.

Bob was very grateful and told me when I left, "We'll square this off, soon as I can cool down a little. How are you fixed for heat, yourself?"

I told him I was free as a bird, clean as a whistle and had money and a Pendergast ticket to keep me cool. That Pendergast card would square almost any jam I could get into, I told Brady.

"Even up to and including heisting a bank or two?" he asked.

"Well, now," I told him. "That's something else again. But when you get right down to it, you got a pretty good idea there."

Bob said, "You could use some dough, couldn't you?"

"There ain't ever been a time in my life when I couldn't use some dough," I said. "But right now most of all. I'm figuring on getting married."

Well, Bob he told me he had a couple of setups in the bank line that he had fixed to take before they jumped him up and sent him to McAlester. They was just as good now, he said, as they was before.

"Then count me in," I told Brady, "whenever you get set."

So that's how I switched from the wrong end of politics back into the wrong end of the banking business again, two years after I got out of Leavenworth.

I had told Bob Brady about planning to get married.

I wasn't fooling. Her name was Vi. She was an airline stewardess and I had met her one time on a flight to Chicago. We went around together in Chicago and places. Then all of a sudden I pretty near lost her.

She was in a crash on a flight between Philadelphia and Atlantic City. She got hurt pretty bad and was in a hospital for months. That was up in Philadelphia. I used to fly up every week or two and see her. Guess you might say we had quite a hospital courtship.

Anyways, me and Vi was about halfway between two sets of plans, along about the time I met Bob Brady.

One plan was Vi's. That was she would go back to the airline as soon as she was well enough. The other plan was mine. That was we would get married, and to hell with the airline business.

That's the way things set when Bob Brady made me the proposition that a little bank heisting might help me and Vi set up housekeeping, such as it is when you're in the bank robbing business.

By the time Bob Brady was cool enough to work, Excelsior Springs was full of hot guys on the lam.

Homer Van Meter dropped through—he was a big-timer out of St. Paul. Jimmy Gillis—he's probably knowed best as Baby Face Nelson—he stopped off. Even Johnny Dillinger holed up there for a while on the way East. It was like a bank robbers' convention.

Nobody around the town tumbled in the least that they was hosts to some of the hottest people in the whole United States. As for the boys, they kept their noses very clean, their heads very far down and their mouths shut.

Well, I was watching out for Bob Brady and keeping him well under cover until the dust got settled down from that McAlester crash-out. I would drop out and chin with him every day or two, and it was through him that I met Johnny Dillinger and the rest of the boys.

Bob Brady was as good as his word. He really meant it when he told me he was dealing me in on them jobs he had in mind.

He told me about a job over in a little town on the Kansas side, where there was a bank he said ought to come for twenty grand. Bob had done all the casing and other work long before. It was only a matter of bringing things up to date.

We talked the whole thing over about a week and it happened that during that time was when Johnny Dillinger dropped through. Bob figured we would need a good machine-gun man on this job he had in mind. So he put the deal up to Johnny. That was Johnny's specialty—machine guns.

The twenty grand looked mighty big, so Johnny said to deal him in.

We taken only one car for the job—we used my car—because it wasn't very far. Just a little farm town. Can't think of the name of it right now. Bob said the bank was fat because it was about the only one right around there that hadn't gone busted in the depression. It was doing a lot of business. He said he had awfully good information that they had plenty of cash on hand, all the time.

Well, it sure had to be an awful good bank in them days that would go for any $20,000. I said so. But Bob he was sure it would make a fancy touch. Johnny, he was all steamed up, too. So we was there on Monday morning when she opened.

We never had cased the inside of the bank—Johnny and me. We only knowed what Bob told us. But Johnny said him and his tommy-gun would take care of any arrange-

ments we might have to make sudden-like when we got inside. Me and Bob would take the cages and the vault.

The last guy you would want to see when you walk in to take a bank would be a state trooper, standing in the lobby. But there one was. Big as life, talking to the president of the bank.

I don't know what this trooper figured that thing was that Johnny had in his hands. He just stood there with his mouth open.

It sure wasn't no fiddle, that there tommy-gun of Johnny's. He just up with it and squeezes off a burst, right over the heads of that trooper and bank president. You can't shoot one of them things off with one or two shots, neither. It was quite a burst that Johnny fired.

Well, the president and that there trooper practically got their thumbs hooked in their ears, they come up with their hands so fast. I went over and lifted the trooper's gun. Then I lined him up along with the bank employees against the wall.

That burst of shots Johnny fired wasn't exactly silent. So me and Bob figured we better take them cages fast before too many people out in the street got nose trouble and wanted to see what was going on. So we grabbed what was in the cages and the vault. Then we lit out.

We had no trouble at all getting back to Kansas City and on to Excelsior Springs, but we sure didn't get much for even what little trouble it was. When we counted it out on Bob's bed that night, there was only $2,200 in small bills. Bob had been only ninety per cent off in what he figured the bank was good for.

About all we accomplished out of the whole job was to heat the three of us up something awful, mainly because that state trooper happened to be there. He recognized Johnny Dillinger, but he didn't make Bob nor me. We didn't know that. So we taken off from there quick.

Me and Bob went up into Illinois and Johnny went some place else.

I didn't see Johnny again for quite some time.

The best cool-out place, next to Excelsior Springs, in them days was a spot up beyond Milwaukee. It was called Little Bohemia because that was the name of one of the resorts.

There were several other places right in that same district, too, and you could get a cottage back in the woods where nobody would bother. The whole thing got to be knowed in general as Little Bohemia, though some of them cottage hideouts was several miles from there.

Me and Bob we headed for Little Bohemia. Homer Van Meter, who had dealt himself out of the Kansas caper, was already there when we pulled in. He was just taking a rest, sort of. But he was cooling off a little, too. Homer, he was hot all the time.

Me and Brady, we was a little short of money because the Kansas job had turned out so puny. We talked things over with Homer and decided the best thing to do was set up another blast—that's what we sometimes called our jobs—just as soon as we could. We figured we better set up one even if we had to buy the plans from Eddie Bentz.

That's just what we done.

First off, we needed us some machine guns. We had split up with Johnny and he taken his tommy with him. Homer he was fresh out of a chatterbox, too. So me and Bob volunteered to go out and pick up some artillery.

You just don't go out and buy a machine gun.

If you think it's easy that way, just step into a store and try it. We could always get ammunition, but we sure needed them machine guns. Nothing like a machine gun to make people in a bank see things your way.

So, did you want a machine gun, the only way to get it was to steal it. And the best place to steal it was from the

police. We done it time and time again later on. There was almost no risk to it at all.

There is nothing a policeman likes to see any better than his name or picture in the paper—provided he is a hero. But there is few things worse to him than to see something in the paper that makes him look silly. He would rather eat crow to almost any extent than make public something where he played the part of a chump.

That's where we cashed in.

We would cruise around some middle-sized town until we knowed the route of the prowl cars pretty well. Then we would pick up the tail of one of them until they got way out in the weeds at the edge of town somewheres. Then we would make our setup.

One of us would get out of our own car and hide out in the dark. The other one would stop right there and make out he had car trouble. We usually didn't have to wait very long because them cops almost never missed their cue. Maybe they know a hell of a lot better nowadays, but back then they done it almost every time—the same route.

They would stop and one officer would get out to see if he could help with the car trouble. That left his partner all alone and off guard. The one of us who was stashed in the dark would then jump the cop alone in the police car. The other would take his partner.

Almost always in them days there was a machine gun in the police car. We would take it and any other artillery that might be lying around, including the guns the cops was carrying, and then we would be on our way. That left the officers high and dry with nothing to do but holler for help. But mostly they never did.

They almost never hollered because it would be too embarrassing to explain. It don't look too well in the papers to see how guardians of law and order got heisted for their equipment, and come out without a scratch. So they would keep mum and figure out how to replace their guns.

That's how me and Bob picked up the artillery for the job that Homer Van Meter was setting up.

Homer Van Meter was a dapper little guy, about a hundred and forty pounds.

He was well educated and could talk his way in and out of almost anything that might come up. He was the businessman type and very quiet. Nobody ever noticed him. He could walk into a bank and case it out while he was fiddling with a deposit slip or something. When he come out he would have the setup just like a photograph in his mind. He could even tell you how many blotters there was on the desks—details like that.

This time, though, Homer wasn't the case man. He had bought the whole setup outright from Eddie Bentz.

The bank Homer had in mind was in western Nebraska and Eddie told him it would probably go for about twenty-five grand. I won't name the town because there was elements that come up later that might be very embarrassing even now to some innocent people.

The three of us dropped down there and run the roads and a few things, just to make sure Eddie's plans was on the beam. They checked out right on the nose.

Homer cased out the inside of the bank, and that was okay, too.

We drifted back to Omaha and holed in for about a week. That was so we wouldn't pick up any heat from being seen in the bank the same day we done the casing. People don't remember license numbers very long. And by the time a week has passed, they couldn't tell whether you was five foot six or six foot five.

The bank was on a corner. We pulled up and parked the car right behind a fireplug, so nobody would be apt to block us in.

We was using my car, but it had hot license plates on it. It was going to be a one-car job, according to Eddie's get-

away plans. We left the car door unlatched and standing ajar so we wouldn't waste no time on the getaway.

I was the center fielder, again. My job was to heist the customers and employees in the lobby, while Bob and Homer was taking the cages.

There was probably six or eight people, mostly customers, in the lobby when we walked in. I had a machine gun and I didn't get no argument when I told them people what to do. I lined them up against the wall in the front part of the bank, where they couldn't be seen from outdoors.

Meantime, Bob and Homer throwed down on the bank president and the cashier and used them as shields while they went in to clean out the cages. I had just got my people resting easy, with their hands as high over their heads as they could reach, when in walks a young woman.

I told her to move over into the line-up. She kicked up a little fuss but I convinced her that the best way to get hurt would be to keep on fussing. So she stepped into the line and made a face at me.

She was hardly in position when in come another girl, the exact duplicate of the first one. They was twin sisters. The second one, she kicked up a fuss, too, and told me I couldn't get away with it. I said, "Look, sis. You're too pretty to get hurt and so is your twin sister. I don't want to hurt nobody, least of all the prettiest pair of girls I seen in many a day."

Well, even though there was a bank robbery going on, the sisters simpered. The second one said, "You think you're so smart, don't you! Well, the police may be here any minute to give me a traffic ticket. I'm double-parked outside. Besides, my kids are in the car, and they'll tell the first policeman that stops just where I am."

I don't think it was like she said—about the illegal parking. I think somebody touched off a bug inside the bank. Anyways, she was dead right on one point. The police had

already arrived outside, only we didn't know anything about it until we got ready to lam with the money.

I was backing out the door, keeping the machine gun on my crowd and at the same time looking over my shoulder out into the street when I got the scare of my life. What I seen made my hair crawl.

There was a car double-parked, all right, but it was empty. And setting in the front seat of *my* car was them two little kids—a girl about three and a boy a year or so older. They was just setting there, playing in the seat and taking turns pushing on the horn. They had got tired of waiting for their mother, I guess, and had went exploring.

I throwed my overcoat over the machine gun I was carrying, so's it wouldn't show too much, and made a run for the car. I wanted to get them kids out in the clear before Bob and Homer come running out with the haul.

I taken about two steps when a bullet zinged past my head from across the street. I ducked behind a pillar and seen there was an officer scrooched in behind another pillar across the street. While I was looking, he taken another shot. I was just across the sidewalk from my car, with the kids in it.

The cop—it turned out later he was chief of the police of the town—he was a mighty poor shot. That second bullet glanced off the wall and cracked the windshield of my car, right in front of them kids. But they just set there having fun.

Well, I could have pinned the cop down easy with the machine gun, but I sure didn't want to risk hitting anybody in the store behind him. And even more, I sure didn't want him taking wild pot shots that might hit them kids. So I run back into the bank and herded Bob and Homer back in with me. They was just coming through the revolving door when I come ducking back in. We got all fouled up in that there revolving door and I could practically feel

bullets heading for the back of my neck. But nothing like that happened—only that horn tooting out in the street.

I didn't have time to say nothing. I just handed Homer my hat and coat and the machine gun, grabbed up another overcoat off a rack beside one of the desks and slipped into it. It was light-colored, and so was the hat I grabbed with it. My hat and coat was dark, so I hoped that cop across the street had poor eyes. I grabbed these two twin sisters by the elbows and pushed them out a side door that led into the other street. I said to the mother of the kids, "Every second counts. Do just as I say. Haul them youngsters out of that car as fast as you can, before there's more shooting, and get going. I'll take care of this end."

Then I run across the street, yelling and pointing back, like I was fleeing from the bank robbers. The police chief was still behind his post, peering out.

He hollered for me to get down because there was bank robbers across the street. I knowed that if he got wise and throwed down on me I would probably have to kill him. He was an old man and, besides, I didn't want to hurt nobody more than I had to.

So I dropped down like he said and scrooched right up beside him. He moved over to share his pillar with me.

That's when I hit him over the head with my gun.

I stunned him, but didn't knock him out. I grabbed his gun and jerked him up on his feet. I hustled him across the street in front of me on the run, holding him up by the back of his coat.

I don't know what all the other police was doing at the time, but everything had been happening so fast I suppose they hadn't had time to get there. The twin sisters hadn't wasted any time, though. When I got over to my car, the kids was out of it, into their mother's car, and all of them was getting out of there fast.

Bob and Homer was just coming out onto the sidewalk again. They was using the bank president as a shield, the

same as I was the chief of police. We loaded both of them in the car and headed for the edge of town.

Both was pretty well along in years and I guess they figured this was the end of the line. But the only thing we done was dump them out, just beyond the edge of town.

Well, the plans we bought off Eddie Bentz hadn't gone so good this time. So we figured our best bet was to jump the main highway and pull off onto a country road. That taken us down into a farm district beside the river. We laid low in some brush until dark.

Then we pulled on up to a farmhouse where we seen a light.

It was a long time before I seen them twin sisters again. Must have been all of a couple of years.

I was in a police line-up in Omaha. I had got jumped up and grabbed at last for bank robbery. Bob was dead, and Homer was dead by then—gunned out in the big man hunt of 1934.

I was the only one left.

They was trying to pin everything that hadn't been solved since Cain killed Abel onto me. They had witnesses from all over that part of the country looking me over. Among them was the two sisters from the little town out in western Nebraska.

The one that was the mother of them two little kids, she was the first of the two to go past me on the line. One of the federal agents said, "Did you ever see this man before?" She looked at me very close but never batted an eye. She sized me all up, then shook her head.

"There are two reasons why I must have been mistaken when I told you I thought I could recognize your man," she told the feds.

Then she just sort of smiled at me and walked on. I knowed what them two reasons was. One of them would have been about five years old by then, the other, a year or

so older than that. Her kids. Guess she figured I had saved their lives.

Her twin sister, she taken the cue from the other one and just walked on by me without a word.

So they never did pin that job in Nebraska on me. But they sure as hell pinned on plenty of others. Them two sisters wasn't the only witnesses against me, by no means.

The feds had enough on me to send me down in flames. Maybe it was high time they did.

It's a funny thing, but people in general ain't, as a rule, too hostile to bank robbers.

That is, they ain't if you never hurt nobody in the heists. If you was halfways a gentleman in the robbery, people kind of was on your side after it was over. The bankers felt different about it, of course, and so did the FBI. But people in general, they never got too het up.

Whenever a bank was robbed we used to kind of listen around afterward and find out what the public thought. That way you could tell whether you was just hot with the police or hot all over. Sort of helped to know that in planning your next move. Like a politician taking a poll.

We would go to restaurants and places right after a job and lots of times we would hear people talking about it. Many's the time I've heard people sitting right next to me in a restaurant saying, "Well, they didn't hurt nobody. I kind of hope they don't get caught."

Maybe that ain't the proper attitude to take toward a bank robber, but that's the way we found it, many's the time. They didn't feel that way about it if anybody got killed, though. But nobody ever was killed or even hurt bad in any job I ever worked on.

Well, times was mighty hard back there in the early '30's and people didn't care much whether the banks got robbed or not. Maybe some of them sort of hoped they would. You

take some family that's just been kicked off their place by the bank and lost everything they worked all their lives for, well, they ain't going to be too hostile, maybe, if you want to hide out around their haystack.

Sometimes they might even sneak you a fried chicken.

Once or twice when I was on the hideout like that I've even had them suggest that such and such a bank down the road might be a good prospect, and might deserve to be took.

That's about the way it was with that farm couple we moved in on after that bank job out there in Nebraska.

The song and dance that me and Bob and Homer give them farm people about being cattle buyers with car trouble didn't stand up very good. It couldn't very well when the phone started ringing and I told everybody to sit still and say nothing, and I would answer it.

The call was from a neighbor woman down the road a ways. It was a party line and she was just full to the chin with gossip. She wanted to spill it all to her friend—our hostess, you might say.

I made out like I was the hired man. I told her the lady of the house had gone outside. This neighborhood woman said for me to say that Alice had called, and not to worry. The police thought the bank robbers was still in the neighborhood, this lady told me, but *she* knowed better. She said the bank robbers had followed her car several miles as she was driving home that afternoon. She said she seen them turn off to an old deserted mine down by the river bottoms, way over in the other end of the county, and that's where they was that very minute. She just knowed it. She said the police was down there searching right then.

When I hung up, I told the woman what her friend had said and her and the old man got a great kick out of it. The farm woman, she got real friendly and fried us up some

chicken. Of course we paid for it, and paid her well. We could afford to. That there bank had come through with $37,000.

After supper the three of us and the farmer and his wife set around awhile and the family told us it was just by luck we found anybody at the place.

"We got foreclosed on, just the other day," the farmer told us. "They're taking the farm away from us this week. We owed the bank $5,000 and they foreclosed."

We asked him what he was going to do. He said, "I ain't got an idea in the world. We ain't even got a way to get out. They own the car, too."

Well, I pulled Bob into the other room and we had a little talk. He had his cut of the bank take right in his hip pocket, and I had mine. Bob, he peeled off twenty-five C-notes from his roll. I done the same. I called out in the other room and asked the farm woman did she have an envelope. She scurried around and brought me one.

We slid the fifty C-notes in the envelope and sealed it up.

About this time Homer was getting uneasy. He said if the cops was searching the other end of the county, this would be a good time for us to be leaving at this end. Me and Bob agreed. So we said good-by to the farmer and his wife. As we left, I put the envelope into her hand.

"This is something extra," I told her, "for the best fried chicken I ever tasted."

Then we taken off. I often wonder what the people at the bank thought when that farmer come in and paid off his mortgage. At least, that's the way I hope it turned out.

I never said a word to Bob about it, and he never said a word to me. It wasn't nothing, anyways. I've had to pay a crooked cop that much, more than once—for him just to throw around later on broads and booze.

We split three ways after we left the farm and got into the clear. Homer went to St. Paul and Bob went to Omaha. I slipped back into Missouri. I figured Kansas City might

still be a little hot for me on account of the bungling job we'd pulled with Johnny Dillinger over there on the Kansas side.

I needn't have worried because I never was made on neither of them jobs. Anyways, I steered clear of Kansas City for a while and went on East to see how Vi was making out.

I met up with her in Atlantic City and she was feeling real good. She had come through a couple of operations fine and was completely recovered from the injuries she got in that crash. She was a little bit unsteady on her pins, but she not only could walk but she could dance.

We went out and hit a few of the hot spots around Atlantic City. I told Vi some things had happened that made it better if we put off our marriage for a little while. She didn't like the idea very good, but she said I probably knowed my own business best. She said she would probably go back to the airlines for a while. She did and I drifted back to Little Bohemia, where I met up with Jimmy Gillis.

The newspapers always referred to him as Baby Face Nelson, but his square name was Lester M. Gillis. Mostly the boys called him Jimmy. I knowed, personally, how he picked up that moniker of Baby Face Nelson. I ought to know. I was right there when he got it.

I was in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, with Johnny Dillinger. We was waiting there to meet up with Jimmy.

He got jumped up by the police some place between Des Moines and Cedar Rapids, coming in. They exchanged a few shots. That was Jimmy, every time. He was trigger-happy. Someone take a shot at him, first thing he wanted to do was shoot right back. Sometimes he didn't even wait for them to shoot first.

That's what finally got him killed.

Anyways, this time he got clear and come on into Cedar Rapids. He come into this restaurant where we was all to meet up, about 4:30 in the morning. He never let on like

he knowed me and Johnny. Me and Johnny was sitting at opposite ends of the counter, paying no attention to each other. We both seen that something was up, the way Jimmy acted, so neither of us let on we knowed him, neither.

Johnny he was pretty hot, so he got up and left. The place was getting practically crowded with hot guys, and that was the smart thing for him to do. I set there to give Johnny a chance to get clear, so we wouldn't be seen together on the street. Jimmy, he set down at the counter and had himself a cup of coffee. Then he got up and pulled out, too.

Well, Jimmy had no more than gone than in come the police. They inquired around about who had been coming and going, and then give the waitress a description of Jimmy. They didn't pay no attention to me. They didn't even notice I was reading my newspaper upside down, I was that nervous.

"Bank robber!" the waitress gasped. "You don't mean that baby-faced kid that was just in here a little bit ago? Why sure. He was sitting on that stool, right there!"

So that's how Jimmy got that name. He'd used the name of Nelson from time to time—George Nelson—so the papers got to calling him Baby Face Nelson.

Jimmy was a little different than Bob Brady, Homer and Johnny. They was cool-blooded. Jimmy was a little too hot-blooded. Like I said, he would rather shoot it out any time instead of run, even though running might have been the best bet at the time. Get Jimmy in a spot where he could get away without firing a shot and he'd prefer to stay and shoot.

One time up in Washington State we was in a hotel and a policeman come up to check on Jimmy's car. Instead of ducking out the back, Jimmy stayed and fired two shots at the policeman. So there we was all heated up for nothing. We finally got clear, but it would have been easy the other way.

I mostly stayed clear of jobs Jimmy was in on. He was too trigger-happy to suit me. I worked one job with him one time. I think it was just out of Duluth, Minnesota, a ways.

Bob Brady was in on that one with us. We had teamed up in St. Louis that time, but it was a little hot around there so we drifted on up north to Duluth, where we fooled around for a week.

We looked the territory over and figured a little town right between two lakes. It was winter then and the lakes was froze over. You could drive right across them. With the lakes open it was almost impossible for the police to set up roadblocks.

Everything went along fine and dandy in the bank and then we come out on the street. There stood a cop on the corner. He wasn't bothering anybody, and I don't think he even knowed the bank had been robbed. We had clear sailing for a getaway, but Jimmy he couldn't stand prosperity.

"Let's see can that son of a bitch do some running," Jimmy hollered.

And he opened up on the copper with his gun. That policeman run all right. He headed straight for cover. Jimmy laughed about it as we pulled out, but it wasn't so funny. We sure heated ourselves up in that end of Minnesota for nothing.

We cut up the bundle. As I remember, it was only about $5,000. Then Jimmy went one way and me and Bob went the other.

Jimmy's pot shot at that policeman didn't do us no good at all. We had to get out of Minnesota quick. We headed for a little town name of Winona. That's where we run into trouble. There was roadblocks all over and we got jumped up half a dozen times by the police. We was practically lost among all them frozen lakes. Then finally we got clear and come to Winona. It's right on the river.

There was some kind of a college or something there. We

come around the edge of this school, with a state trooper close on our tail. There was a little lake there, froze, so we took to the ice.

They had been fishing through the ice—they had sawed holes through the main ice here and there and these had froze over, thin. One of our front wheels hit one of them holes and broke through. There we was.

We taken out afoot hard as we could run, and the first thing I knowed we was on the campus of this college, right by a dormitory. Police was swarming all over the place with flashlights. The college kids in the dormitory was whooping it up, watching the fun.

Me and Bob got separated. I ducked over against the side of one of them school buildings. I come to a little door and tried it. It swung open. Inside, things was black as tar. There was a policeman coming hell-for-leather after me, right around the corner of the building. So I dove through the door into the dark.

It *should* have been black as coal in there. The place I dove through was the clean-out door into the base of a great big chimney on the heating plant of the school!

The soot in there was halfway up to my knees. I coughed and sneezed enough to notify all the police in Minnesota where I was, but none of them found me.

I waited in the chimney till I figured the coast was clear, then I snuck out. I started to duck around some shrubbery looking for Bob and I run square into a bunch of them school kids who had come out of the building to watch the excitement.

I must have scared them half out of their wits. I was soot from one end to the other. They started running and yelling for the police.

I got out of there and ducked behind some more bushes alongside the street. There I stumbled right over Bob, crouched there. I thought sure I was a goner when Bob grabbed my feet. He knowed who I was, but I wouldn't

have blamed him for not recognizing me. I was Blackie, for sure, from that there soot.

Well, the kids hollering got the police more confused than they had been before.

Me and Bob got away from that school and spotted a state trooper's car standing in the street. He had left it there while he was busy chasing us through the bushes. It was locked, but that didn't make no difference. It was a Ford, and at that time Fords was the easiest cars there was to pick up. You could take a quarter and push it right up into the ignition on that particular model and it was just like you had a key. The ignition went on and the quarter stuck right there.

So me and Bob shoved a two-bit piece into this four-wheeled slot machine and off we went. We dropped it the first chance we had down the road and picked up a car that wasn't quite so hot.

That was the first and only time I ever went to college.

Me and Bob was hot up there in Minnesota where the temperature was mighty cold, so we figured we couldn't get any hotter down where it was warm. We changed cars a few times and wound up in Miami.

There I run into Vi. She was flying between Miami and Havana. We all got up a party one night and flew down there to wind it up. Vi was the stewardess on that flight. She resigned the job in Havana.

There's where me and her got married.

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I got word from Kansas City that things was okay there, after all. So me and Vi went back and set up housekeeping.

Vi knowed that I wasn't what I claimed to be. I had always told her I was a cattleman from Texas. When she found out I was packing a gun, I tried to explain it away by telling her that us Texans always carried guns. She just laughed.

"Don't worry about it," she said. "But don't tell me any tales like that. Whatever you are, I love you."

Vi was a pretty woman. A redhead, about five foot five. The airlines picked them for pretty and they sure made no mistake on Vi. She had a sister who was a stewardess, too. Her sister was a blonde, and almost as pretty as Vi. Both of them was pilots. They had private licenses to fly. They flew a lot in them little rented planes. Lots of times that's how I got around the country when I had to move fast. Vi flew me where I was going.

It wasn't long after we was married before Vi was pretty sure what I was up to. Sometimes I would be gone for a week or more at a time. Sometimes it takes even up to three

weeks to get all the casing done, the roads run and all the other work when you're figuring a big job.

Vi never spoke about my work and I never talked about it with her. I told her I wanted to pile up a big bundle of money and then we would go to South America, or Europe, or some place. She worried a lot, I know, for fear I would get killed. I was always planning to quit, but I was getting into the "wholesale banking business" pretty deep by that time. And it taken a lot of money to operate and live, what with protection and all them other expenses.

I hung out around Excelsior Springs quite a bit along in there, because by then I was almost constantly in touch with Bob or Johnny Dillinger or some of the other boys. The way I figured it up, we pulled nearly a dozen jobs them two years right after me and Vi were married. Altogether, I figure I was in on twenty-seven bank jobs in my career.

Johnny Dillinger was cunning as a fox and had the morals of a billy goat.

As far as money was concerned, it was come easy, go easy with Johnny. He just as soon pay fifty dollars for a T-bone steak as a dime for a pack of cigarettes. He always bought the best of everything. But his shopping sense that way was no good with women.

I've heard a lot of people say that Dillinger had shifty, beady eyes. I've even read that in the papers. That just plain wasn't true. He was a man completely without fear and he could look you square in the eye for as long as you could stand it.

Johnny was soft as putty where children or women was concerned. He would stick up his life to protect a woman or child. He thought the world and all of his mother and father. Many's the time he told me they was the only two pals he ever had in all his life who always stood by him through thick and thin, in spite of all his shortcomings. He had a lot of girl friends, and he was putty in their hands, too.

The smartest one was Evelyn Frechette. Evelyn stuck with him when the going was rough. But there was another one who was even more important in Johnny's life. Her name was Anna Sage. She was the one that cost him his life. The newspapers called her The Woman in Red.

I was in a little different spot than the rest of the boys. I had a lot of things to do beside heisting banks.

I was still under obligation to Mr. Pendergast and Henry McElroy. If it wasn't for them, I would still have been rotting in Leavenworth. I never forgot that.

It was June of 1933—the seventeenth of June—that Frank Nash stepped back into my life.

I only seen him a few minutes, but them few minutes was mighty important to a lot of people. In them few minutes five men died. In them same few minutes, the FBI made a mighty big mistake.

It was a mistake that nobody now alive knows, the way I know it. But I'll get into that a little later.

Anyways, on the night before all this was to happen, I was setting in Johnny Lazia's club on Sixth Street. I was in the office at the back, setting right across the desk from Johnny. The phone rang and he answered it. It was a woman's voice and she was talking loud enough so I got the drift of both ends of the conversation.

She said Frank Nash had been arrested in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and would be returned to Kansas City at seven the next morning. It was the same Frank Nash who had been my cellmate in Leavenworth before he crashed out back there in 1930. He had been on the lam ever since.

Well, this woman who was talking to Johnny Lazia she told him Frank wanted to be taken away from the law at Kansas City the next morning, because it would be his last chance for a getaway before they taken him back to Leavenworth.

Johnny told the woman not to worry, everything would be

took care of. Then he hung up. He turned to me and said, "Any of the boys in town that's heavy enough for something like this?"

I told him I didn't know of nobody at the moment, except possibly Verne Miller and Solly Weisman. I told him they were hanging around the Sheffield Hotel. They might do.

"Get hold of them and tell them to get in touch with me," Johnny said.

I had no use for Verne Miller. He was as wrong as they come. I didn't trust Verne no further than you could spit. You got to be either on one side of the law or the other. But Verne, he was an ex-sheriff from some place up in South Dakota that had went wrong. He tried to play both ends against the middle.

I know how he finally wound up. He wound up just outside of Detroit, naked as a jay bird, tied up with baling wire and shot full of holes. Solly Weisman wound up the same way, just a few days later, outside of Chicago.

That was their payoff for their part in the Kansas City Union Station Massacre on June 17, 1933.

Them two was paid off by the mob. They collected their money in advance from Johnny Lazia and then bungled the job and killed Frank Nash, by mistake. Miller had been too eager on the trigger of a tommy-gun. Then he wanted protection—him and Weisman. But they was just too hot and awkward for the mob to handle. The only way was to get rid of them.

Well, I passed the word to Verne and Solly that Johnny wanted to see them. I told Johnny I wanted no part of it. I had agreed, as part of my deal with Pendergast, that I wouldn't take no part in any crimes inside Kansas City.

I left Johnny's place after I got them chores done and went on out to McElroy's to spend an hour or so. I had barely got there and was visiting with Mary McElroy when the phone rang. It was Johnny Lazia, asking to speak to me.

He told me Mrs. Nash was going to be in St. Joe on the eleven o'clock plane that night, ready to meet Frank next morning when the boys delivered him from the law.

Johnny wanted that I should meet her at the plane in St. Joe. I told him I didn't much care about being involved in a caper like that, but I would meet her. Then a little later Johnny called back and told me to forget it as he had made other arrangements. The whole thing was getting way too complicated to suit me and I didn't want nothing more to do with it. So I said good night to Mary and went back downtown. Just to make sure I didn't get bothered, I went to the Roosevelt Hotel and taken a room.

Vi had been back East awhile, visiting her sister. Meanwhile, I had been living at the Avalon Hotel. The only person in the world that knowed I switched rooms that night was Mary McElroy.

The next morning about 6:30, the phone rang in my room. The clerk said there was a young lady downstairs waiting to see me. I knowed it couldn't possibly be anyone else but Mary, so I got dressed and went on down.

I told Mary I had made some plans for that morning and was going to be very busy. She said, "Never mind the plans. I've got some important business, too. I want you to go with me."

Well, at that time Mary was pretty much hooked for George McGee, who had kidnapped her the year before and was doing life in Jefferson City Penitentiary for it. She had fell in love with the guy—the very guy that had held her prisoner in a shack near Kansas City, Kansas, after she was kidnapped. I had drove Mary down to Jefferson City to see him several times at the prison, and I told her that morning if it was another one of them trips, count me out. She told me it wasn't that. She wanted me to drive her to the Union Station.

"I just want to be mighty sure where you are, if anything happens," she told me.

Well, there was no way out, so we got into her flame-red Packard roadster—they called them roadsters in them days instead of convertibles—and drove on down to the station. We parked right on the end of the plaza. Just as I was parking, I spotted Solly Weisman and Verne Miller cruising by in another car. I said to Mary, "What's all this about?"

She said, "You know what it's all about. And I am going to see that you stay out of it. You're going to sit right here with me where I can watch you until it's over."

I had Weisman and Miller spotted. But I couldn't see no other cars. No two men would be fool enough to take on such a job as this one by themselves.

About five minutes later, Nash and four officers come out in front of the station, toward the plaza. As they started across the plaza, I glanced in the rear-view mirror and I seen Solly and Verne's car start up and cruise down toward us.

Then I seen the other car. It turned onto Twenty-sixth Street and started right down behind Weisman and Miller. Verne and Solly moved in on the right-hand side of the plaza and the other car pulled in on the left-hand side. The police car, a two-door sedan, was parked right in between them.

Frank got in the police car first. Then one of the officers started to get in. They had some kind of discussion, then they slid Frank Nash over under the wheel so one of the officers could get in the back seat. Since it was a coach, they had to fold up one of them front seats so he could. That's why they slid Frank over into the driver's seat.

Well, I seen the switch, but I guess Verne didn't see it. I am also sure that Maurice Denning—one of the toughest gunmen there ever was in the world, who was one of the men in that second car—didn't see it neither.

The other man in the second car I'll never name, because I don't know whether he is dead or alive.

It was the second man who was driving. Denning was set to jump out with a gun in his hand. So was Verne Miller, from the other car. Both of them hit the pavement about

the same time and hit it shooting. They poured slugs into the man behind the wheel of the police car, fast as they could shoot.

The two police officers, who was still standing on the right-hand side of the police car, went down under the gun fire. Verne Miller walked right up to the side of the car, still shooting. Then I guess when he seen his mistake—he knowed he had made the mistake of his life. He turned and hot-footed for the car where Solly was waiting.

Maurice Denning and this other guy already was on the move. Before even the smoke cleared, all of them was gone.

Me and Mary McElroy watched the whole thing from less than fifty yards away. Of course, there was a big uproar and me and Mary got out of there before we was spotted. I don't know how we done it with that big red Packard, but we did.

Now comes the big mistake that was made by the FBI.

One of the officers that was killed was a federal agent. The FBI was on the case in a matter of minutes. They got a bum steer somehow or other, because later they killed Charlie Floyd and hanged Adam Richetti as being the two men that was in the second car.

I knowed better, because I seen with my own eyes who was in that car. Both of them that was in it got clean away.

I have heard several stories in later years about what happened to Maurice Denning. Some say he is dead. But there's others say he is still alive and on the lam outside the United States.

It don't make no difference to me, one way or the other. But nothing will ever make me tell who that other man was.

14

After that there massacre at the Kansas City Union Station, I figured things would be just as good for me if I was some place else.

I couldn't be sure I hadn't been spotted and I wasn't anxious to have no agents nosing around about who I seen or didn't see. They just might nose out some other matters that I just as soon stayed the way they was.

The Chicago World's Fair was getting under way, so me and Vi went on up there.

The Capone era was almost on its last legs. The Treasury was on Al's neck, but he had been king so long he just hadn't been able to figure he wasn't going to stay that way forever. Frank Nitti was running the show by that time around Chicago—that was long before Nitti dutched himself out. Committed suicide. I never did like Frank Nitti any too well, or Guzik neither. So I moved on up to Little Bohemia awhile.

Little Bohemia was just a nice comfortable distance from the fair. And even without the fair, it was nice and comfortable any way you looked at it. We hung out around that

part of the country most of the summer, with me ducking in and out to keep up my end of the work with Bob Steele and the other boys.

Bob Brady, he was off somewhere on his own most of the time. Johnny Dillinger was here and there. I didn't see too much of Johnny for several months. He had got himself tied up with Anna Sage. She was a call girl in Chicago. He met her on a call. Johnny taken quite a shine to Anna and set her up in a house. Johnny blowed eight or ten grand on her in clothes and cars and things, but I knowed all the time she didn't think no more of Johnny than she did the next tramp that come down the street.

Bob Brady come drifting through Little Bohemia along in the summer and told me he had a setup in a little town just outside Chicago—a bank job that looked like a soft touch. Me and Bob Steele went along on the caper. Everything seemed to be going fine, but somewhere along the line someone must have stepped on a bug.

Anyways, when we come charging out to the getaway car, a lot of federal agents was coming to a screeching halt right out at the corner.

A couple of them agents jumped out and opened up on us with machine guns. Brady and Steele made it to our car without a scratch. But just as I was getting the car door open, that gunfire cut both legs out from under me.

The boys hauled me in and we got going. We outrun them after we got in the clear. Both my legs was broken and I was bleeding pretty bad. We made tourniquets out of handkerchiefs to keep me from bleeding to death and drove on into Chicago. The boys hid me out in a private house where we was solid.

That was about the closest squeak I ever had.

The next closest one was funnier than it was serious, but it was a little painful, too.

Me and Bob Brady was casing out a bank in northern Iowa. Bob dropped me off at the alley and then drove on

down the street a couple of blocks to park, so our car wouldn't be noticed.

I'm standing in the alley waiting for him to come back when there right in front of me a policeman come snooping down the alley. Me and the cop met up face to face. He ordered me to put my hands up.

"Why the hell should I do that?" I asked him.

"You better or I'll shoot you," he said.

Well, I had two things in mind. I wanted to stall for time long enough for Bob to get back. At the same time, I knowed the cop had only five shells in his revolver. I could tell that because, dark as it was, I could see what kind of a gun it was.

I had a gun myself but it was in a shoulder holster and I didn't dare do any reaching in that direction as long as the cop had a shell left in his gun. So I started arguing with him. I said, "Look! You ain't got guts enough to shoot anybody!"

"You think I ain't?" he said.

"That's right. You ain't even got guts enough to shoot into the ground."

He lowered the muzzle of his gun and pumped a shot in the alley.

"Think not, huh?" he said. "The next one goes into your belly."

"You're just trigger-happy, pal," I told him. "You're so nervous, you just pulled the trigger by accident."

"By accident, hell," he said.

And he pumped two more shots into the ground near my feet. That left two more shots and I just had to draw him into wasting those. He started to raise the gun and that time I guess he was a little nervous. He let one more go right at my feet.

The bullet hit the third toe on my left foot.

I guess he was as surprised as I was. I yelled and grabbed my foot. Before he could get his wits back or raise the gun

any further, I hit him with my fist and knocked him down. Then I taken out at a high limp down the alley. Bob Brady was there by then and we got away from there. Bob, he hadn't even heard the shooting.

The cop he come to the head of the alley just as we was pulling out and let go with that last bullet. Nothing happened.

We went back about three months later and taken that bank, but we didn't see that cop. And I never got my toe back to this day.

Well, like I said, after that there bank job outside Chicago, the boys taken care of me in hideout for almost three months while I was healing up. Vi, meantime, had gone on back East again, while I was laying low with my busted legs. So it was late fall when I got back into action and was home again in Kansas City.

They wasn't too glad to see me back there in Kansas City —Johnny Lazia and them—on account they was afraid any minute my heat might catch up with me. And them, too. Still, they couldn't do nothing about me because Tom Pendergast kept his hand on my shoulder.

One night I got a call from a woman who asked me to meet her at the Sheffield Hotel. She was waiting when I drove up and she asked me to drive her to an address in the North End. She was a stranger to me, but I asked no questions.

When we got to this address, there was Wilbur Underhill, hid out.

I had not saw Wilbur since him and me and Bob Steele knocked off a bank earlier that year out in Oberlin, Kansas, or somewhere around there.

That was another job where we kidnapped a cop and taken him with us as hostage till we got clear of the town. He was lucky he didn't get killed. He just come walking right into the middle of our robbery and went for his gun when he seen what was going on. I was covering the lobby

and I convinced him, in time to save his life, that any gun pulling would be mighty unhealthy.

I guess that's about as close as I've come to having to kill somebody in a robbery. I would have had to that time if he would have went any further on that draw. It would have been him or me.

Well, be that as it may, here was Wilbur back again.

When I got down to that place in the North End, I figured he got the word to me because he needed help on another job. But that wasn't what he had in mind. He said he was too hot to travel on his own and wanted me to drive him to a little town near Shawnee, Oklahoma. That's where his girl friend lived. He said he was going down there and marry her.

It's coming along for 1934, and I had planned to drive out to the Coast. I had some business out that way, and at the same time I could see my folks for Christmas.

It finally turned out that I would drive Wilbur down to Oklahoma and then go on from there. It was a bad mistake all around.

We stopped for gas at McAlester—right near the penitentiary where Bob Brady crashed out that time in a packing box, a couple of years before—and the station attendant spoke to Wilbur. He called him by name. That give me the jitters because here was Wilbur taking me right down into a country where he had growed up. Turned out him and this station attendant had lived on adjoining farms when they was boys.

Same thing happened again, just out of Shawnee. A night watchman come by and spoke to Wilbur. I told Wilbur I was getting enough of it, but he just shrugged. He told me to pay no attention.

"Everybody's taking a payoff for something down here," he said. "They won't bother us."

Well, I dumped Wilbur off at his girl friend's house and told them I was sorry I couldn't stay around for the

wedding. I was mighty glad to get out of that end of the country before somebody started calling *me* by name—somebody with a badge pinned on them.

I headed on up through Denver on my way to Portland for Christmas.

A few miles outside Cheyenne, Wyoming, there was a hitchhiker standing alongside the road. He looked kind of cold and miserable so I picked him up. He was just one of them drifters that was on the move, with nothing to do and without a dime in their pants, there during the big depression. I helped him take a few of the wrinkles out of the accordion he had developed in place of his belly. I fed him up at places where we stopped along Highway 30.

I taken things pretty easy going through them towns in Wyoming and Idaho, because I had hot plates on the car. I had not stole the car. I had borrowed it, sort of, from a friend. I had put them hot plates on it when I taken Wilbur to Oklahoma. I should have knowed better.

Anyways, just outside of Baker, Oregon, I picked up a tail. It was a state trooper. I would speed up to seventy-five or eighty and he would speed right up behind me. Then I would drop her back to thirty-five or forty, and he would drop back. I knowed he was casing me out careful, but I couldn't figure out why.

Just as we got into Grant, Oregon, I sure found out why. There was a roadblock across the highway and enough cops to stop Johnny Dillinger himself.

"Well, this here looks like the end of the line, buddy!" I told the hitchhiker. "Pile out and put your thumbs in your ears. Get you mitts right up there high. Them cops got guns."

The hitchhiker tumbled out of the car and them police was all over him before he hardly got his feet on the ground. They didn't pay much attention to me. Only kept me covered. It just didn't make no sense.

The police was talking among themselves while they was

searching the hitchhiker, right down to his hide. At last I got from their conversation that they was certain he was, of all people, Wilbur Underhill.

I seen one of them double-check my license number and heard him say, "Yep. These are the numbers they put out from Oklahoma. It must be him."

Then the picture cleared up for me. Wilbur had put too much faith in them people down there. Somebody had snitched. They had reported the car he was riding in.

The kid hitchhiker was about Wilbur's size and fitted his description in a general way, so them Oregon police figured they had nailed them a big one. They didn't seem to be too troubled over who *I* might be. They was just interested right then in the big catch.

The hitchhiker didn't have no more idea of who Wilbur was than nothing. He just stood there, trembling out of his clothes, and expecting to get shot the next minute. Them police wasn't any too gentle.

Well, they taken us down to the jail and begin giving this kid the works. They questioned him up one side and down the other. Then they got around to me. They tried to question me, but I just dummied up. I told them the kid was just a hitchhiker and wasn't Wilbur Underhill no more than he was President Roosevelt. And that was all I told them.

They had been working us over for about an hour when an officer come hurrying in from an outer room. He was all excited and spilled the beans before the captain could stop him. He said a radio message had just come through from Tulsa. Wilbur Underhill had been shot and killed just a little while before in Pitcher, Oklahoma.

That sure blowed their case sky high. There was nothing to do but turn the hitchhiker loose. Me, they held for a while, but they had to turn me loose, too. There was no tag out for the car—at least out that far from home—as yet. And they was so discombooberated by the big Underhill

pinch blowing up that they never run my prints nor nothing.

I didn't stay loose very long, though, because before I got to Portland, there *was* a tag out for the car. The feds nailed me on a charge of driving a stolen vehicle across the state line. So there I was, one of the hottest bank robbers in the country, picked up again on the measly Dyer Act.

They put me in jail in Portland and held me for trial. I never did get home for Christmas.

Bob Steele was the only one of the boys that was available right at that time.

He was back in Kansas City and I knowed how to get the word to him. Bob flew out to Oregon and slipped me the tip-off he was standing by to work up some way to spring me out of jail. He even went so far as to set up to deliver me when they taken me from the jail into the federal courthouse for arraignment.

Bob was kind of impulsive, but he had a plan that was very simple and probably would have worked. But I figured I had a good chance of beating the stolen car rap and thought I better not take any foolish risks. If something went wrong and I was found guilty and had to go to McNeil Island, why, we could work something out then.

Bob's plan for the courthouse delivery was to nail it down right there in the basement of the federal building. Nobody could have asked for a better setup. They take you into the basement to the elevator. Not a soul can see from the street or the halls what might be going on. Bob figured he would plant in a little hall just off the elevator entrance and heist the guards when they brought me in. There was no locked doors or nothing. We could run right out into the street and into the clear.

But I was afraid somebody likely would get killed. It wasn't worth the chance. So I told Bob to let it ride and I would go to bat in court.

It was while I was waiting for trial that Bob Brady got killed.

He got fouled up in the summer of 1933, and was sent to prison at Lansing, Kansas. Him and some others crashed out of there along the last part of January, 1934. They was free four days. Then they got jumped up down in southern Kansas before they could make it to the Cookson Hills, where they was headed.

They shot Bob Brady in a cornfield near Paola, Kansas. He was the second one of the old outfit to go. Wilbur beat Bob into hell by less than a month.

When they start going that fast, anybody could be next.

My trial was like the old story about the operation was a success but the patient died. I could prove that the car wasn't stolen, but I was found guilty of stealing it, anyway.

So back to McNeil Island I went for a five-year jolt. My trial was in April. It was May 1, 1934, when I hit the island. I escaped on June 14.

The cream of the man-hunters from all over the federal prison setup was at McNeil that spring. They was there for training as the new staff for Alcatraz. The Rock. It was all set up to be the high-security prison of them all. It was scheduled to open the middle of that summer.

They had about sixty extra guards at McNeil for training. They even had a pack of man-hunting dogs. Them dogs had been specially trained to be vicious and to hunt down men. Trainers claimed they could follow a scent through a swamp.

A couple of days before my crash-out, one of the guard lieutenants stopped beside me in the yard and pointed over to where the trainers was working the dogs.

"Blackie," he said, "you think you're so good at escaping. Why don't you try it? I would just love to turn them dogs loose on your tail."

I just looked up at him dumblike and said, "Maybe you

got a good idea there. Them dogs look like they could use a good workout. Maybe I'll give them one, one of these days right soon."

That lieutenant he just laughed and laughed. So I laughed right along with him. He thought I was kidding. But my plans for crashing out already had been worked up to the last little detail—for two nights later.

When they taken me out to McNeil Island that spring, they put me in the "fish crew." Them was the guys they'd already ticketed for Alcatraz, as soon as it was open.

There was a guy in this bunch they called Big Six; another one name of Red Kerr; a Jimmy Stadek, and some of them. There was about twenty of us all told that was chalked up for The Rock.

Well, these boys heard I was coming out to McNeil—that I'd been convicted in Portland. They knowed my reputation as an escape artist and so first thing, they got hold of me and asked me did I have anything noodled up for getting away.

They didn't have anything to lose, on account of they was all headed for The Rock, anyways. They was ready to try anything.

Well, I figured twenty was just a little bit heavy for an escape party. You can't keep a secret among twenty cons. Word of any plans would have leaked out almost as quick as we thought them up. So I just told the boys no sale.

If there was going to be any escape-noodling done, I decided the plans was going to take care of me and nobody else. I wasn't going to have my figuring leak out to the deputy warden as fast as I could figure it. So I just went to work with the fish crew and kept my head down.

The other boys they went ahead without me, though, and hatched out a plan. I found out about it on the grapevine, so I suppose everybody in the prison knowed it by the time they was ready to crash.

These boys—six or eight of them—had hunched it up that they could seize one of the two big launches that had just been bought for the island and float it off the beach at high tide. The launches was up on ways, getting their final coat of prison gray.

First, the boys would have to get out the gate and down to the water. But that meant they'd have to overpower the captain of the guards and use him as a hostage to force the gate.

Every morning at ten o'clock the captain of the guards made his rounds, checking the work detail. He always was alone, and the round taken him from building to building. There was one corner he had to make that was out of sight of the guard towers and most of the yard. That was where he had to be took.

Big Six and Stadek and them tipped the mitt to me in the yard. They told me it was all set, except they couldn't decide who was going to take the captain. They sketched the whole caper and said they thought I was the man for the job, being new in the joint and not so much suspected in every move as they was.

The way they had it set up, I would be waiting at the corner of that building with a shiv—that's what they call a knife around prisons. I would put the shiv on the captain and then we would all go crashing out through the gate and down to the ship landing. At high tide they figured we could launch the boat by main strength.

I thought it over and told them I would go along. They had sliced it down to a small enough escape party so they could be trusted. One of the boys had a shiv stashed and he got it to me. Next morning I taken my position at the corner, but just a few minutes before the captain was due to show up, one of the boys relayed the word to me there had been a tip-off. The last relay man got to me, plumb winded in his hurry, just before that captain got to the corner.

"We got to pass up the whole thing," he whispered. "The

yard detail is set to take us the minute we make a move. Leave the captain go by."

That was a close one. I got out of it just by the skin of my teeth. A minute more and I'd of had that captain on the end of a shiv and likely I'd have been shot in my tracks by guards watching for the first false move.

Well, after everybody quit sweating, I told the boys to deal me out the next time they thought up anything. I already had my own plans, anyways, so it didn't make much difference to me whether theirs worked or not.

For quite a while before that there foul-up, I had been in touch with Bob Steele—through a guard that had been fixed up with a C-note.

This guard—he later committed suicide—hustled messages back and forth between me and Bob, who was holing up in Tacoma. Bob sent his wife, Myrtle, over, posing as my wife, on visitor's day and she told me that Bob was set and everything was being done that could be done. He even had a car all ready for my getaway, she told me.

We set up the date for June 14.

There was a world championship fight scheduled for that night. In them days, when there was a big fight on, everybody was practically glued to a radio somewheres. Even the prison guards likely would be less alert than usual and be sneaking listens to that there fight. It was between Max Baer and Primo Carnera, the big Italian who was the champion then.

It looked like the best chance that would be coming along for quite a while. So I sent Bob word I was practically set.

But I had to have a gun if my scheme was going to work. That cost me another C-note. This guard we was bribing, he smuggled it to me in a package a couple of days or so before I was set up for the lam. I fastened it to my thigh with adhesive tape. I even slept with it taped to me. I just had to keep that gun.

Careful as I'd been, the tip leaked out amongst some of the boys that I was going. But it was a tight tip and only a few of the cagiest cons knowed it. Even so, that was too many to suit me. I found out about it only a short time before I was set to crash. A con known as Big Tiny eased up to me in the yard and slipped me the whisper.

"I know you're going," he said. "Want to take somebody along that will really stick with you?"

I never knowed Big Tiny's square name, but I had found out he could be trusted. Only trouble with Tiny was, he weighed two hundred and fifty pounds. That's quite a lot of beef to drag along when you take it on the lam. So I said, "Who you figuring in? You?"

He told me he was only fronting for a friend of his, name of Fitzmaurice. Fitz was doing ten years and couldn't take no more of it.

I told Big Tiny I would take Fitzmaurice along under one condition—that I wouldn't tell him how I was going or where I was going until the time come. I didn't want to take no more chances on leaks.

Fitz accepted them conditions, so the boys that had been fronting for him angled around to get Fitz celled in with me. That cost a little money, but they rigged it.

I taken it mighty easy before I tipped my mitt to this Fitz. I didn't so much as speak to him the first night he moved into my cell. I even went so far as to check with Big Tiny the next day, just to be sure he was the right guy, and not a planted stool pigeon.

Then I told Fitz all he needed to know.

There's a big siren up on top of the administration building at McNeil. It's a steam siren with a "cat whistle" cylinder that can be worked like a sort of trombone to make a wailing noise. That's the alarm in an emergency. It's been heard as far away as Seattle—close to fifty miles.

The cat whistle has a separate valve. I knowed all about

that valve, because I helped install it in 1927, on my first trip to McNeil.

I was assigned to a work-shop crew when they put me back in McNeil in 1934. We was sort of general handy men, making repairs, fixing busted windows and the like.

I had stashed away some putty and a pair of wire cutters. Bob Steele got a hack-saw blade smuggled to me, through this guard we was paying off.

Working on this repair crew, it was no trick at all for me to loosen up a piece of glass in a window between the cellhouse and the prison auditorium. There was bars on the cellhouse window, besides the glass. But there wasn't no bars from the auditorium on outside into the yard. I sawed two bars through on the cellhouse window I had fixed and stuck them back in place with putty. So there was my way out, ready, from the cellhouse.

Next, I waited for a chance that would take me up on the roof. I had my saw blade hid in the seam of my pants. I puttered around at some little job that had to be done until I got up near enough to the siren to work fast on that there valve. I sawed the valve stem most of the way through.

I had to do this the final day, just before they put us in our cells for head-count at five o'clock. I sawed the valve stem through enough so it would break. Then I put a wrench on it and twisted it off. Nobody could know she wouldn't work until it was too late.

Then I went back to my cell and stood head-count.

A few minutes after I got back, they opened up the cell doors to let us out for supper. They never paid much attention when we was marching to the dining room, because there was no place we could go. So when me and Fitz got opposite the window to the auditorium, we slipped out of line and ducked behind a corner in the cell tier.

We had already been tallied in a few minutes before on the head-count, so nobody would miss us for a while.

We waited until the line passed. Then we slipped out the

bars I had stuck with putty and lifted out the pane of glass. In seconds, we was inside the auditorium. We went on out through it and sneaked down alongside of the building to the fence. We had to go in between two guard towers, and that was pretty ticklish.

The guard in the first tower was setting there reading the paper.

Me and Fitz squeezed in between the fence and a sand pit right below him. That put us out of sight of the other guard, but the first guard was practically sitting on top of us, reading his paper.

I got out my wire cutters and went to work on the fence. Fitz kept watching through some planking that shored up the sand pit. Every time I would cut a wire, it would sing like a busted fiddle string. Each time it did, the guard would straighten up and look all around. But he never thought of looking right below him. When nothing more happened, the guard would go back to his paper, Fitz would signal me the all-clear and I would snip another wire. Then we would have to go through it all over again.

It taken quite a while to make a hole big enough for us to squeeze through.

We was through the fence and out on the road when we was spotted by a tower guard on top of the administration building. This one got clean up out of his chair, shaded his eyes with his hand and looked us over. We figured the jig was up.

But we kept our nerve while he was watching us, and just kept moping along the road like we was trusties headed for some disagreeable job. Finally he seemed satisfied and signaled the guard in the next tower to pass us through. We turned off down to the dock.

We was right on top of the dock guard on duty there before he knowed anything was wrong.

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While me and Fitz was hiding back in that there sand pit, cutting our way through the fence, I taken time to peel out the gun I had taped to my leg. Before we crawled out I tucked that hundred-dollar .38 into the waistband of my pants.

The dock guard, he was reading the paper, too, when we jumped him.

He was tilted back in his chair and had his little radio tuned up, ready for the big fight. I was within ten feet with the .38 throwed right down on him, before he looked up from his paper. He never said a word—just tipped right over backward in his chair. Me and Fitz piled into him and frisked him for a gun, but he didn't have none.

There was two cons assigned as boat tenders on the landing float. They was trusties. They never said a word when we come marching out, herding the guard ahead of us. Them two cons wasn't going to take sides, neither way. They just stood there with their teeth in their mouth, so I handed the gun to Fitz and jumped into the launch. The motor started

on the first spin. Fitz shoved the guard ahead of him into the boat and jumped in beside me.

"We got to take him along," I hollered to Fitz. "We can't leave him here to blow no whistles on us."

"Let's kill him right here!" Fitz yelled back.

"We'll give him a run for his money," I said. I slammed her in reverse and backed away from the float. "We'll dump him over the side when we get in the clear. If he can't make it, that's *his* hard luck."

"My God, man! You can't do that to me!" the guard yelled. "I can't swim a stroke."

"There ain't no better time to learn," I hollered back. I waited till we was about two hundred yards from shore and then I yelled, "Overboard with the son of a bitch!"

Fitz shoved him over. That guard either learned to swim awful fast, or he was the world's biggest liar. He went under, but when he come up he was hitting it for shore about as fast as we was heading out.

There was another boat ahead of us out about a mile. It was full of guards going home from the island to Tacoma at the end of their shift. We just pulled in behind this other boat, like we was the mail launch on a special trip.

"What about them two cons on the float?" Fitz hollered, over the roar of the engine.

"I ain't worried about them," I yelled back. "Anyways, I pulled the phone loose in the guard shack. That'll give us a few more minutes, at the worst."

Well, them two cons must have spent a little time figuring before they turned in the alarm. They was in an uncomfortable spot. If they squealed, they wouldn't know what might happen to them from our friends inside. And if they didn't squeal, the prison authorities would damn well want to know why.

So I guess they split the difference and give us a little start before they done any yelling.

Anyways, the boat ahead had curved off and was clean in

to Steilacoom Dock on the Tacoma side before there was any signs of alarm. They couldn't blow the siren on the island and there was no other fast boat readied up to chase us with. The prison tug was all put away for the night.

So when the cat finally come out of the bag and they got it all figured out what happened, they had to flash Steilacoom Dock by phone.

It would have been a different story if that siren had went off. Every boat in the Sound would've been on watch.

When that guard boat in front of us headed for the mainland, I cut course and headed around a little island between us and the shore. Bob Steele had sent the word where he was going to leave the getaway car—right near a little cove. I hit for there, around the little island.

Meantime, the alarm had been flashed to Steilacoom Dock. The guard boat wheeled right back out after us, but they had a long way to come. They had more speed than us, though, and they had the advantage of the other side of that island I had to round.

At the same time the prison authorities broke out that tug—we always called it "The Sergeant." It was big and heavy, but it was pretty fast, too. They loaded it with some of them fancy guards in training for Alcatraz, and all them man-hunting dogs. The Swiss dog trainers piled in, too. So out come the whole kaboodle, dogs and all.

By the time me and Fitz hit the beach, the first boatload of guards was only about five minutes behind us. The tug and the dogs was coming in from another angle and they was right behind the guards, farther down the beach.

Me and Fitz taken to the timber on the high lope.

The guards from the first boat was between us and them dogs, so I guess when they hit the beach the dogs grabbed the first and best scent they could pick up—the guards from the other boat. The dogs was howling and yapping through the woods and me and Fitz was picking them up and laying them down as fast as we could go it.

We was about two-thirds up the hill to where the car was supposed to be stashed when we heard a hell of a commotion back down by the beach. The guards was yelling and the trainer was yelling and the dogs was baying like mad.

Turned out the dogs had took in after the guards and treed them.

That give us the start we needed—to say nothing of a laugh, if we'd had the time. We still had about half a mile run to where the car was parked. Bob had left it in a little clearing in the brush. It was right there where it was supposed to be—a brand-new Chevvy sedan, loaded for bear with artillery and clothes.

When we pulled out of the woods to the main highway, a car of guards come whizzing past. We followed right in behind them, just like we was fishermen minding our own business. It was dark by then, so there was no way of telling who we was, without a close look. They never stopped to look. I guess it was because there was such a commotion still going on down there in the woods.

Me and Fitz, we taken turns at the wheel while the other was changing into them clothes Bob put in the car. Then we headed for Seattle. There hadn't been time for the police to get roadblocks up. Besides, I knowed plenty of ways to get into Seattle without raising no needless dust. I had run enough booze over them roads in years gone by to know my way around, blindfolded.

We felt a lot better after we ditched our prison dungarees, so we turned on the radio and listened to the last two rounds of the fight. I remember it well. Max Baer knocked out the Italian in the eleventh round.

Bob Steele had rigged it for us to check in at the Olympia Hotel in Seattle. We had reservations all waiting for us as a couple of businessmen from San Francisco.

Vi was waiting for me at the hotel, along with Bob and Myrtle. Bob had told Vi what was doing and she had flown on out from St. Louis. We all ordered up some dinner

and turned on the radio in the room. There was news flashes every few minutes by then about the desperadoes that had escaped from McNeil. We'd been sighted almost every place in that end of Washington. We got a big laugh out of it.

Fitz stuck around until we finished dinner. Then he pulled out for Butte.

Next morning after the crash-out we was feeling pretty smug and safe. There wasn't a chance, I figured, of them looking for me in a place like the Olympia Hotel.

We turned on the radio and had some more laughs. One newscaster had a flash that the escaped convicts was surrounded in a patch of woods between Tacoma and Seattle. Posses of police and prison guards, he was saying, was prepared to riddle the woods with gunfire if the desperadoes didn't surrender.

I told Vi I was going downstairs and get a paper. She begged me not to take no chances. But I did. There was a woman on one of the settees there in the lobby. She was reading an extra the *Seattle P-I* had just delivered. She was chattering away to a friend in the next chair about the two desperate criminals that had got loose from McNeil Island.

I was passing right in front of her and I glanced down at her paper. My own picture was staring me right in the face!

When I seen that picture in the Seattle paper, I figured it was plumb time to go. I hurried back on up to the room and we all packed up. Bob went down and checked us out and ordered the garage to bring the car around.

While we was waiting, the newscaster come on again to report that the posse had captured them two fellows they had cornered in the patch of woods. They was just two old bums that had ducked in there out of the rain.

Well, that was all the more reason we had to make tracks out of that neck of the woods. The papers was full of our escape, with everybody blaming everybody else for letting us get away. There was two wardens at McNeil at that time,

because of all the preparations they was making to open The Rock. So there was quite a fuss about who was to blame for what.

Me and Vi split up with Bob and Myrtle and we taken it easy getting back to Excelsior Springs. That there escape had cost me quite a lot of money and I was very happy when about the first word I got from a contact in Excelsior Springs was that Johnny Dillinger was in Illinois and had just bought some plans from Eddie Bentz. He wanted me to make a meet with him outside Chicago.

Vi went back East again to visit her sister. I convinced her it was a little too warm to stick around with me. Then I got busy again in the banking business—this time it was wholesale.

I was driving alone to make the meet with Johnny Dillinger up in Illinois.

I pulled into St. Louis and holed up in a little hotel. It was one of them old hotels where most of the guests is even older than the building—retired schoolteachers and people like that. A good kind of place to hide out because there is never any rumbles, so long as you keep your nose clean.

I got a room on the third floor and after I cleaned up I went out to get some supper. I walked downstairs because I always figured it was safer that way. I never took no unnecessary chances. You can't get much hotter than I was after that crash-out at McNeil.

Well, I was just starting down from the second floor to the lobby when I heard my name being spoke down at the desk. It was almost like that time in Alberta. I could tell without looking that the man who was asking for me was the same kind of fellow that Scotty Lawrence was—a copper.

I wheeled around and started back up to my room where I had left my rod. Halfway back up, I heard other voices and heavy footsteps up on the third-floor hall, coming toward

me. They had the place covered top to bottom. Somebody sure had spilled a tip.

Well, I had about thirty seconds to make up my mind. I hit the first doorknob I could reach there on the second floor. It turned in my hand. I stepped into the room and eased the door shut behind me. There wasn't nobody there, but I could hear someone splashing in the tub behind the bathroom door.

Across the bed was laying a priest's cassock and other garments. Quiet as I could, I slipped out of my own clothes and pulled on the cassock. I yanked the padre's hat down over my eyes and headed for the door. The splashing was still going on in the bathroom.

I stepped out of the room and there was half a dozen detectives gandering up and down the hall. I just walked right through them, smiling and nodding.

They tipped their hats, smiled back and said, "Good evening, Father."

I went right on through and down the stairs. My car was parked around the corner. I taken out of St. Louis, cassock and all, with the throttle down to the floorboards. I was prepared to tell the first officer that tried to stop me that I was on a deathbed call. But none did.

First place I could get some clothes, I shed the priest's outfit. I folded it up all nice and neat and dropped it off on the porch of a parish house in a little town up north of St. Louis. I would like to have knowed what the priest thought when he come out on the porch the next morning. And I've often wondered what that other priest thought when he come out of the bathroom.

Bob Brady was gone, and Wilbur Underhill was gone, too. Both dead. Johnny Dillinger had a $50,000 reward on his head, dead or alive. Things was pretty hot. We had to have lots of money, quick.

Me and Johnny met up as we had arranged. Then we got

in touch with Homer Van Meter. He was cooling out again up in St. Paul, where he had the fix on. He met us down around Des Moines and the three of us decided to take another look at a bank we had passed up the year before at St. Joseph, Missouri. It was a pay-roll bank and on pay day it was good for maybe seventy-five grand.

Homer he hadn't liked the looks of it that first time, because the way the setup stood there was practically no way to avoid killing two policemen who always come along to guard the pay roll.

"I just ain't that bloodthirsty," Homer said the year before. "I just ain't that broke."

Well, Johnny Dillinger, it didn't make no difference to him, by the time we was ready for a second look at it, how many policemen might be standing in the way.

"All I want," Johnny said, "is to get mine before somebody figures out a way to collect theirs out of that fifty grand I'm carrying on my head."

He had made that famous crash-out of his at Crown Point, Indiana, a few months before and told us he knowed he couldn't live too much longer in this country. Johnny, he just wanted to stack up a bundle and head out of the United States.

We used to get some laughs out of the stories the papers told about the Crown Point crash-out. It was always supposed that Johnny Dillinger used a wooden gun he had carved out in the jail.

It wasn't no wooden gun. It was a .38 Colt automatic pistol. It was the real McCoy, and it was a good thing nobody got in front of it when Johnny broke loose that day in Indiana. I seen that gun a dozen times and heard the story from Johnny's own lips how he come by it and everything.

He told me it was smuggled to him and it cost him three G's. You can take that or you can leave it. Anyways, that's what Johnny told me, his own self. And Johnny never lied to me about nothing, so far as I ever knowed.

Well, we taken another look at the St. Joe job and for the second time we voted it down.

We backed away from it and, as a second choice, picked a bank in a nearby town. I ain't certain, but I believe it was at Maryville, Missouri, right close in there to St. Joe. Anyways, we went up and cased out the bank and it looked pretty good.

We taken it on a Tuesday morning. We got more than we bargained for in the haul.

We got the sheriff of the county. He was standing right there at the window, cashing a check, when we come in. So there wasn't nothing we could do but scoop him up right along with the cash, so the rumble wouldn't start no sooner than necessary.

We dumped him just outside of town, like we frequently done when we had to take a hostage with us.

This here sheriff, though, he was a lot smarter than most. He didn't waste no time. He got to a phone and had us outfigured before we was even well on our way.

We jumped the main highway six or seven miles outside St. Joe and taken a cutoff that would pass up the city. This sheriff we dumped, he guessed that's exactly what we would do. So when we hit the big horseshoe bend that taken us around the outskirts of St. Joe, here he come, with other police with him, on a short cut.

He had us timed almost on the nose. We almost collided with him at the junction, but we was in the lead.

I was driving. And when I am behind the wheel of a good car I am pretty hard to catch. But this sheriff, he seemed to be sort of mad. It soon become evident I wasn't going to be able to outrun him forever.

"We got about another mile of this," I hollered to Johnny, "and then you're going to have to figure something out."

"I'll figure it out right now," Johnny yelled back.

We had a .250-3000 Remington High-Power in the back end of the car. Johnny grabbed it up with a jerk and had it

poked through the rear glass in nothing flat. He opened up with the Remington and on the third shot he made the luckiest hit of his life. The slug must have hit their first cylinder. Anyways, in the rear-view mirror, I seen that car just come apart and string itself about a hundred and fifty yards along the barrow pit.

We seen pictures in the paper of that wreck later on. Nobody got killed, but it sure stopped that sheriff.

Johnny and I split up and I pulled back into Kansas City to hole up. I sniffed around cautious and discovered there was dynamite shaping up in the wind. A feud was brewing between the dago mob that Johnny Lazia run and an outfit from Chicago that was trying to edge in on the soft pickings. The Chicago mob had picked up some muscle over in St. Louis and they was shaping up to take over the rackets in Kansas City.

All this wasn't no business of mine, because these Chicago and St. Louis boys was an entirely different breed of cats than us bank robbers. They was gamblers and dope peddlers. But they had been eying Kansas City for a long time like it was a strawberry patch, and all that was standing between them and moving in was Johnny Lazia.

Anyways, I picked up some information that a half-dozen boys had drifted in from Chicago and was fixing to take Johnny out. It was just after the Fourth of July in 1934—about the ninth, I think it was—when I made a contact with Johnny Lazia and slipped him the warning. Charlie Carollo—they called him Charlie the Wop in them days, and still do, as far as I know—was setting there with Johnny when I said my piece about the boys from Chicago. Charlie, he was one of Johnny Lazia's right-hand men.

Johnny he just laughed, and so did Charlie.

"If there is anybody going to be dumped out in the North End flats," Johnny said, "you can make book it ain't going to be me."

Well, there wasn't much more I could do so I ducked

back into cover. Only thing was, Johnny might better paid a little attention to me.

He was gunned out the very next morning as him and Charlie the Wop was starting to enter the Park Central Hotel.

Charlie, he got away without a scratch. He dove right through a hedge-fence getting away from the shooting. Charlie is a big man now—two-fifty or so. He was big then, too. He made a hole through that hedge as big as a box car. I went on out there the next morning and seen it.

Of course they never solved who gunned out Johnny Lazia. I knowed who done it. But it ain't up to me to tell nobody, though—just like that other deal at the Union Station.

I was hot in some ways in Kansas City, and at the same time there was certain circles where I was well thought of, because of my Pendergast connections.

There was a lady—pretty high society, too—I had knowed through Pendergast and McElroy for several years. She didn't even dream I was a fugitive from McNeil, and she had no more idea that I was a bank robber than nothing.

One night she invited me, along with some other people, to a bridge party up at her house. She was a friend of Mr. McElroy and I figured I better go so as to not offend nobody. When I got there she was very proud and excited.

"We sure are going to have law and order around here tonight," she said. "Mr. White of the FBI is going to be here."

Well, they made quite a joke about her having to get in the FBI to keep an eye peeled for card slickers. I went along with the joking, but I didn't laugh very loud.

This Mr. White, he come in a few minutes later and the hostess introduced me to him. Right away he started looking me over sort of peculiar like. He kept frowning like he was trying to remember something. Next thing, I'll be damned if I didn't draw him for a bridge partner.

We played till about midnight and every now and then

I would catch Mr. White still frowning and looking puzzled. I hoped it was the hands he was drawing, but I really knowed a lot better than that. I knowed he made me from somewheres but couldn't quite put me together. And I couldn't make no break nor nothing—except just set and sweat it out.

When the party broke up, Mr. White offered to drive me back to my hotel. He was just a little too offhand and polite with that invitation—sort of spider-and-the-fly, like. So I told him I had a car. I didn't, but I sure didn't stick around any longer than I had to. I caught a cab back to my hotel. From there I called back to the house on some excuse or other, just to see had anything happened. This Mrs. M., the hostess, I told her I had left something or other there. She told me a funny thing sure had come up. She said she just couldn't figure it out, but Mr. White and two other FBI agents had come back shortly after the party broke up and inquired about my address.

"I just can't understand it," she said. "There must be some mix-up some place."

"There ain't any mix-up at all," I told her. "I just don't live here any more."

With that I grabbed up my stuff, checked out of the hotel and taken out for yonder.

I met Vi in St. Louis and we went on up to Chicago for a while, but we still kept the apartment in St. Louis so she would have a place to live, did I have to lam out of Chicago.

A few months later, when I was jumped up and caught, Mr. White come to see me at the jail in Omaha, where I was being held for bank robbery.

"Remember that bridge game we played back in Kansas City?" he said.

"I'll for sure never forget it," I told him.

"Well," he said, "it was a funny thing. All the time we was playing, I had your picture right in my wallet. I'd had it

there, with a bunch of other pictures of wanted people quite a while. I never once thought about those pictures, there while we were playing cards. But I certainly made you from the start as somebody I ought to know. I just couldn't put you together until after you left."

"I put you together, quick as I seen you," I told him. "That's why I taken out so fast."

Up in Chicago I run into some information that had to be relayed to Johnny Dillinger quick. I located him over in Iowa and give him the warning.

It seems like I spent most of that month—July, 1934—giving people warnings. But I just wasn't making them stick anyhow.

The word I had was this: Anna Sage was selling Johnny out to the FBI. I got it straight from Jimmy Gillis up in Little Bohemia.

She was selling him out for that $50,000 reward. I talked to Johnny on the phone. He said he was going to Chicago, that my information was a lot of hot air. I tried to talk him out of going, but he said he was headed up there the next morning to see Anna. So he did.

I was supposed to help cover Johnny in the theater. There was two of us sitting at the back so's we could cover him.

When him and Anna got up and walked out, I followed a few feet behind. They turned to the left as they went out. I noticed a fellow looking at the pictures on the board just to the right of the door as you come out, but I didn't guess who he was.

Well, as they started walking away, Johnny and Anna stepped apart to let a couple of girls go between them, and then as Johnny started to step over closer to the building, this fellow that had been looking at the pictures stepped up and shot him.

The whole thing took just a few seconds. I guess I was about twenty feet behind the officer when he fired. It didn't

look to me like the gun was more'n a foot from Johnny's head.

That was the end of Johnny Dillinger. Anna—The Woman in Red—set him up for the FBI and they shot him—in the back of the head.

So there went Number Three of my old pals. And there wasn't a thing I could do about it.

I joined back up with Homer Van Meter and some of the other boys again. Vi stayed in Chicago for a while, then went on back alone to St. Louis. I went out on the territory.

We kept right on hitting banks, one right after another. Atchison, Kansas; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Chadron, Nebraska; Alliance, Nebraska, and a lot of others.

Homer split up with us finally and went back up around St. Paul. I throwed in for a while with Jimmy Gillis, who had been knocking over jobs on his own. We kept pretty busy for about a month. Then he went his own way.

Along toward the end of August, me and Bob Steele was down in Iowa and getting mighty crowded. We just couldn't take this jumping and hiding much longer. So we got hold of Homer up in St. Paul, where he had went to cool off a little, like he always done. He told us to join him there, where everything was fixed.

Me and Bob, we went up and holed in with Homer in his apartment for a couple of days. It was the twenty-fourth of August and we had just finished breakfast when a call come in. Homer went into the other room to answer. In about a minute he come running back, "We got to scatter!" he said. "We're surrounded. My contacts couldn't get a phone call through no sooner."

"What about the fix?" I said.

"Something come unstuck," Homer said. And with that he headed for the front door.

I guess them was the last words Homer Van Meter ever said.

Me and Bob we headed out through the basement to the back, where our car was parked. Homer he went on down the front, alone. His car was across the street by a creamery. Me and Bob got to our car without too much trouble and taken off down the alley. When I got up to the corner to turn back into the street, there still wasn't no cops in the alley. It was then I heard the machine guns firing out in front. It was there that the action was going on. If there ever had been any cops out there where me and Bob got away, they had all run to the front to get in on that show.

I just seen a little of it as I crossed the intersection. There was a big van pulled up right across from the apartment house where we had been. It was full of police and FBI agents, and all of them was shooting. Homer was firing back as he run toward the alley by the creamery to his car. I seen him fall just before he got to his car.

Then me and Bob was across the intersection and on our way, but it wasn't going to be much further.

Me and Bob Steele stayed teamed up for a spell, keeping our eyes peeled for some quick scores, which we needed bad. We was cruising, one day, along down toward St. Louis, right when we was the hottest. It was a few weeks after Homer got killed.

We pulled through a little town and seen some posters up, urging people to contribute to an institution for crippled children nearby. I forget the name of the town, but it was fairly close to St. Louis.

Me and Bob was posing at the time as a couple of Texas oil men.

We stopped for a cup of coffee and got to talking about them appeals for money for these orphans. We was a little down at the time and only had a small bundle between us. Right then, even, we was on the prowl for a little fall money, we was just that broke. Fall money was the stake

we always tried to carry—generally $5,000 or so—to buy our way out of jams we might get in.

Well, like I said, we didn't even have fall money, but we got to talking about this here drive for the crippled orphans. As we pulled out of town, we passed right by the institution. Bob he was always soft-hearted about kids, so he suggested we just drive in and see what kind of a joint it was.

The people at the institution was very polite and we just told them we was a couple of passing visitors who seen their posters and dropped in to see how the kids was coming.

They taken us around the place and it was pretty heartbreaking to see them kids. All they had to play with was rag dolls and things like that that some of the nurses had made.

The more we looked the worse we felt. So finally we got the superintendent aside and said we wanted to throw a little party for the kids. I told the superintendent I supposed there was some things the kids could eat and some they couldn't, so it might be better if she would order up all the stuff—ice cream, and whatever else she could think of. Well, it taken quite a bit of it to go around and the bill put a hole clean through our road stake. But it sure done us good to see them kids have fun. We left the rest of our money to buy them some toys and things and then we went our way.

We had a bank all spotted out and cased, down the road a ways, and that's where we had been heading. That night we holed up and got ready to take the bank the next morning. Just as we was going to bed Bob said, "I just can't forget them kids, Blackie. Let's do it up right for them."

The next morning we knocked off that bank for nine grand. We headed on into St. Louis and that night we didn't cut up the loot. We arranged that the money from the haul would be filtered back to that place for crippled or-

phans. Every nickel of it was, but in such a way the officials of the institution never had the slightest idea where it come from. They don't to this day.

I picked up a small bundle from the stash-out I had and ducked over to the apartment to see was Vi getting along all right. I hadn't heard much from her and hadn't saw her since she left Chicago.

Vi was waiting for me with bad news. Her aunt was very sick out in Salt Lake City. Vi and her sister chartered a plane next morning and took off for Salt Lake City. Because of one thing and another, it was best I stay hid out in Missouri. They went alone. They stopped in Denver that night. Next day they crashed in a canyon up in the Rockies. It was somewheres close to Leadville, or some place like that, in Colorado.

I didn't hear about it until the day after it had happened. Hot as I was, I got into Kansas City and got hold of some money. I chartered a plane and flew to Salt Lake.

I got the word before I left Kansas City that the police would be watching for me at the funeral. When I got into Salt Lake City I made a connection and found a way to get to the funeral parlor the night before the service. I went in and sat with Vi for a while during the night.

Next day, in spite of the police, I made arrangements to attend the services, setting in a private room.

I didn't go to the cemetery. I just couldn't take the chance. But my flowers was there, right along with all the others.

I just didn't feel like going back to Kansas City or St. Louis any more. Even Chicago. It would be the same. So I hit off for Hot Springs, Arkansas, and holed up there.

16

There was just no place much to hide.

Every place I went—on the bulletin boards in every post office and depot—there was my picture on a wanted circular. Every time I seen one of them I would pull it down. That made it just one notch less likely that anyone would spot me, the way I figured.

I was having a little trouble getting cars.

Back in the days when I was riding high with Johnny, we used to get quite a few of the cars we needed right out of a warehouse. Whenever we had to use a hot car, we would wheel into some big city and case out the warehouses. Mostly, we was using Fords in them days. They was fast and hard to spot because there was so many of them around all of them looked about alike. So we would case out a Ford warehouse and find a way to get inside without busting up too much of the hardware doing it.

We would pick out a car, sneak it out and then lock the place back up from the inside. The car wouldn't be missed sometimes for as long as thirty days. By that time we was through with it and we would just ditch it somewhere.

Every time we got a bullet hole in a car we would ditch it, too. A bullet hole in a fender shows up like a bass drum at a prayer meeting. There ain't no way to disguise it or explain it away. It always looks exactly like a bullet hole and nothing else. I remembered that from Johnny. Anytime there was some shooting and the car got hit, Johnny ditched it right there.

There used to be a lot of talk in the newspapers that Johnny had a bulletproof car. I know he never drove such a car in all his life. I know it because I drove a lot of the cars that Johnny used.

Bulletproof cars are no good in a bank robbery. They're so heavy with that there armor you can't get up no speed. And every time you roll up a window, that big thick glass makes the car stand out so you could spot it a mile. The only ones I knowed who had bulletproof cars was the big shots like Capone and some of them. But they used them cars more for publicity and show-off than for protection.

That wasn't the way with Johnny.

Like I said, with Vi gone and most of the boys gone too, I just drifted around from one end of the country to the other. I would throw in for a while with Bob Steele. Then again with Danny Powers. The pictures on the bulletin boards was always there, wherever it was.

One time in Salt Lake City I went into the police station to report a minor accident I'd figured in. Nobody hurt. Just a couple of fenders dented. But it's always safest for somebody hot to follow the rules in them little things, right down to the letter. No use going out of your way to set the police up with an unnecessary chance to get nosy about the big things.

I didn't think I was very hot, that far out of the Middle West, so I walked right into the police station in Salt Lake City, big as brass. The car I was driving was cool as a cucumber, so I didn't have nothing to fear.

As I was speaking my piece to the desk sergeant, I happened to glance up. Right behind him on the wall, along with a bunch of other mugs, was my own picture, staring me square in the face. It was a pretty good picture of me, too. If that desk sergeant just happened to swivel around in his chair, there I'd be, looking at him from both sides.

I couldn't lam for it before I got through my errand. That would sure touch off the firecrackers. So I just stood there and sweat and hoped he couldn't hear my heart pounding while he filled out forms and things about the accident. He never looked behind him. I thanked him and moseyed out the door, with goose pimples playing leap frog with my shoulder blades. But you can bet that when I hit my car, I didn't do no moseying. I left Salt Lake City like a tomcat with his tail on fire.

There was a fellow along about that time name of John Paul Chase had built himself up quite a reputation as a heister. But he was kind of a newcomer in the racket. Kind of small-time, then, when you got right down to it.

With all them heavyweights of the old days thinning out, Johnny Chase was getting moved up on the firing line by the feds. He got to be one of the Big Ten. Well, Johnny Chase he throwed in with Jimmy Gillis, and that's how I met up with him—up there in Wisconsin near Little Bohemia.

Johnny Chase is still rotting his life away out there on The Rock, so far as I know. Maybe they've moved him back to Leavenworth by now. Anyways, he will die in one prison or another, along with Creepy Karpis and some of them others that thought they was in the major leagues back there in the 1930's, before they ever let him out. But *they* wasn't the big leaguers. The big leaguers all are dead, except me. And maybe I was only the bat boy, at that.

Well, John Chase and Jimmy they pulled out for Chicago

one night by way of Milwaukee. Jimmy had his wife with him. That was the last time I ever seen Jimmy Gillis.

Down near Chicago, just west of Evanston, they got jumped up. Two federal officers passed them on the road and recognized Jimmy. They turned around and taken in after him. There was no question it was going to be a graveyard race, right from the start, for somebody. There was quite a few shots exchanged. One of the feds' shots hit a tire, and with that it was too bad for Jimmy. But he didn't surrender. He pulled off the highway into a side road a few yards. The feds was right on his neck.

They jumped out of their car with a machine gun and opened up. Jimmy done the same. He had a tommy, too.

His wife, Helen, hit the ditch on one side of the car and John Chase did the same on the other. Neither of them was hit. But Jimmy caught a bunch of slugs, dead center. Trigger-happy Jimmy went down with that there tommy-gun still blazing. He taken them agents down with him. Killed them both.

John Chase and Helen pulled Jimmy over to the agents' car, hauled him into it and started for Chicago. But Jimmy was dead before they went five miles. Jimmy died in Helen's arms while John was ducking through side roads to get him to the city. They unloaded Jimmy's body alongside the road and got on out.

John told me the whole story years later, when we was together at Alcatraz.

It was just luck I wasn't in on that gun fight. Two hours before, Jimmy had asked me there in Milwaukee to go with them to Chicago. Instead, I throwed in with Danny Powers and went the other way.

That was just another one of them times I missed getting killed, or having to kill somebody, by the skin of my teeth.

They had shot Charlie Floyd up in Ohio about a month before Jimmy Gillis got it there in Illinois. Them two was

the last of the old outfit. When they died a whole page of history, you might call it, ended.

Them of us that was left was so busy outjumping the law by then that we didn't have time to line up no more business. Our old hideouts was so heated up we couldn't use them no longer.

Even Eddie Bentz wouldn't have nothing to do with us any more.

I had money around at one place and another and I needed it bad. Your money just evaporates when you're on the lam and scuffed up like I was.

It wasn't as much money as you might think, neither. To read about it in the papers you'd have thought we got away with millions. We did get quite a lot—I never taken time to add up just how much—but the amounts that was sometimes reported stolen in them jobs we pulled used to give us a good laugh.

Sometimes, when we would read in the papers about our work, the figures would be up to several times the score we really made. There could have been a lot of reasons for that. Maybe the banks didn't really know how much money they had. Or maybe the newspapers made a mistake. There even could have been other reasons. But they wasn't none of my business. All we cared about was what we really got.

What makes me think sometimes that there might have been other reasons is that in later years I've been approached more than once to stage a phony safe job, or even a heist. Them that approached me usually was entirely on the up and up with me about what they wanted—losses or some other embarrassing matters covered up that way. One time I was offered $30,000 to knock off a vault, just to get some papers out of it.

I never did take up one of them deals. Whenever I pulled a heist or knocked off a safe, I always wanted to do it the honest way.

The big boys like Dillinger and Homer and them had skimmed the cream off the business, back there in the early 1930's. And most of them had died for it.

But they had proved one thing to the rest of them thieves —there was a lot of good business lying around in them small-town banks. Before it was all over, there was heisters from hell to breakfast knocking over them little banks, right and left. Got so you never knowed when you might figure a job and get there to find another outfit in ahead of you.

Something along that line happened to me one time up in South Dakota.

I was steering pretty clear of the big cities by that time, but I had to have some money fast. So me and a couple of others knocked over another score out in Nebraska. It come out pretty well—forty grand, as I remember. But we wasn't by no means out of the woods when we cleared the town.

We headed north and planned to swing over into South Dakota and then on into St. Paul. We made it almost clean across South Dakota without no trouble, giving a good wide swing around Pierre, the capital. We was heading for a place called Mobridge, a division point on the Milwaukee Railroad. We'd noodled it out that if we got too hot on the roads we could catch a train at Mobridge into St. Paul.

Well, that was where we run into conflict with some other operators.

That very morning another outfit had knocked off a bank, right there in Mobridge. They was heading south straight toward us, and we was steaming along right toward them. Neither knowed the other outfit was within a thousand miles.

The police had set up roadblocks, but we didn't have no idea that anything was hot that far away from our Nebraska score. We was a hundred miles from where they was looking for us, down south.

All of a sudden we come around a curve and run spang into one of them roadblocks—from behind. The police was all gandering the other way, guns out and ready for the mob coming out of Mobridge. We come sailing up behind them and there was nothing to do but crash right on through the block. It must have looked like a prairie twister hitting a rail fence when we done it, firing a few shots as we went through. The police fired back, but they was taken so by surprise we was almost out of range before they opened up. We floorboarded the throttle and kept right on toward Mobridge. There was nothing else we could do. We didn't know the side roads and was afraid to try them blind.

About two miles beyond the block we spotted the police behind us, closing up on our tail. They had left the block where we splattered it and took in after us. They was all in one car. We had barely spotted them when rounding a curve and coming hell-for-leather toward us was another car. There was three or four guys in it, all with guns out. We thought sure they was more police, with us about to become the hot dog in the sandwich. But they streaked right on by and opened up on the police car that was following us.

Them police must have felt like people watching a Ping-pong game. There was bank robbers zipping this way and that so fast you practically needed a program. The police taken a fielder's choice and went after that other car, where the shots was coming from. That give us our chance. I was driving, and I unwound them next few miles like a trout strike taking fishline off a reel.

We pulled on to Mobridge, but just before we got to the town we circled so we could come out on the highway headed for St. Paul. That circle put us clean around Mobridge and angled us back down toward the way we had come from, but on another highway. We just taken our first full breath and eased off on the gas when we run straight into four more cars of police, one right after another. They was heading toward Mobridge for all they was worth. They

never paid no attention to us and kept right on. We was just moseying along by that time, minding our own business. They didn't even look us over. They was going too fast. We was as confused, by then, as the police. It wasn't until we got to St. Paul and seen the papers that we figured it all out.

It just goes to show what can happen when competition gets too thick in the bank robbing business.

Me and Danny Powers wound up in Little Bohemia, but everything was different around there than it was before.

Almost everybody I knowed was getting killed, one place or another, and I was plumb out of good hideouts in that part of the country.

I told Danny I figured the best place for us to hit would be New Orleans. So we taken out. We got jumped up just outside St. Paul and we hid out on the side roads, trying to get to Omaha.

We lost the first bunch of police, but others got on our tail. When we ditched them, there would be still others. There was shooting back and forth all night long, but nobody got hit on either side. We run two roadblocks up north of Omaha, but we never did shake them police.

Danny quit me after the second roadblock, said he was going to hit out alone. I swung over toward Nebraska City, figuring maybe I could slip through and make it to Excelsior Springs.

Just outside Nebraska City I run into a third barricade. There was too many of them there. I just up and quit.

They taken me into Omaha and held me for trial, charged for the first time with bank robbery. It was there that them two sisters looked me over and passed me up. And it was there that I seen the FBI man, Mr. White, who had been my bridge partner that night in Kansas City.

They tried me on six counts and found me guilty on all of them. I drawed ten-year maximums on each.

Because of my escapes—one thing and another—the people I had been tied up with—the court ruled I would have to pull that time on Alcatraz—The Rock. But it was also ruled some of my sentences would be combined, to be served concurrently. So it looked like a top of fifteen years to pull, and the outlook mighty dark for any parole for the likes of *me*.

three

Alcatraz ... end of the lam

17

When I landed up in Alcatraz, the place had only been open a few months. They give me No. 208. That shows how few there was ahead of me. I wasn't sure just then how much time I would have to do but it was going to be plenty, anyways you looked at it. The word was at that time, anybody went to The Rock, they was all through, and toes up would be the only way they would come out.

They had the low-down on *me,* all right. They was going to make double sure there wasn't going to be no way out this time for Blackie, the escape artist. They celled me alone and wouldn't even assign me to a work detail.

There was six of us that wasn't allowed to work. There was Machine Gun Kelly, Harvey Bailey, George Bates—them in the Urshel kidnapping gang—and there was a couple of guys from Texas under death sentence. Then there was me.

Anyways, the deputy warden at that time—we called him "Gracie"—made it very plain when I was processed in that they'd had instructions clean from Washington covering me.

"There are still some security bugs that have to be spotted

and worked out in this place," the deputy told me. "Before we assign you any work, we're going to be mighty sure the place will hold you."

So, I was kept in deadlock—in my cell, and alone.

That made things a little rough there at first. Mainly because of the rule of silence.

The rule of silence wasn't nothing exactly new in the history of prisons. But it wasn't in effect in no other federal institutions. It's inhuman. It was in effect at Alcatraz for five years.

You couldn't talk to nobody—not in your cells, in the line, or in the dining room. No place. If you was assigned to a job, you could ask the necessary questions about your work, but you asked them of the guards. You didn't talk with the men around you—the other inmates. But even talking to a guard about work was better than complete silence. That silence stuff can drive you stir-batty, quick. It done it to a lot of them there on The Rock, before it was abolished.

We found a way around it, though.

We learned sign language. Like deaf mutes use. Get caught using it, the penalties was pretty stiff—up to fifteen-twenty days in the dungeon. But we got so we could talk across the tiers to one another, and at the same time keep an eye peeled for the guard.

We even got so's we could play checkers by sign language.

Each cell had a little painted stand in it. You could take a pencil and mark off a checkerboard, putting crosses in the spaces for the black and leaving the others blank. Then you'd take buttons—they'd give you all the buttons you asked for, so's your clothes would be kept up neat—and use them for men.

You and a guy across the way, say, would set up a game and then signal play-by-play with your fingers. It taken a long time to play a game. But we was all there for a long time, so what was the odds?

Guys in the other cells would even kibitz. They would

watch the signals and work out the plays on their own boards, right along with the players. Lots of times there'd be arguments over whose king taken what. But all of it silent as a grave.

And did the lookout men pass the high sign the guard was coming, why, you just scooped up your buttons and wiped the pencil marks off the stand with a rag. You got so you could remember just what the setup was when the rumble come, so when things simmered back down, you'd just set up the game as it was and go right on.

That was about the only game we noodled up to play by sign language. Cards was too complicated. Besides, the cheating would be way too easy. I'm a fair-to-middling bridge player, but I never figured out no way to deal a hand by sign language, face down.

Once in a while there would be some joker would tell funny stories, sign language. But we couldn't laugh out loud, and I don't know any way to laugh with your fingers.

One thing cons rarely talk about in stir is women.

Outside, you get a bunch of men together and they practically talk about nothing else—except maybe their accomplishments. And mostly them, too, involve women. But in prison you just keep your thoughts about women to yourself. You just try to keep women off your mind.

Nothing'll make you go stir-happy quicker than talking or thinking about things like that. I seen as many as three guys a night flip off—blow their tops—and try to commit suicide there on The Rock. The rule of silence sure would come apart, them times. They'd scream and yell about their wives or sweethearts. Even sometimes about some hustling broad they used to know.

The guards would shut them up fast. Beat them silent if they had to. It was straight hell, with nothing to cool it off, sometimes.

So most of the things we talked about in our sign-language

bull sessions was how to better conditions, what was wrong with the setup and how to get rid of the warden. And, of course, the old story—what was the chances for a crash-out. We knowed that as long as that warden was there, things would stay like they was. We tried a long, long time to "break The Rock," as we used to call it. Finally, we done it, I guess.

Anyways, there was a lot of changes, along in 1939. And the ways they set up when they opened The Rock are gone forever, I hope. I don't hold that convicts should be pampered, but after all, they're human beings—not animals.

The first strike at The Rock come shortly after I was processed in.

There was a grapevine petition got up by some of the men, demanding various things. One thing they wanted was the silence system throwed out. Another, they wanted some sort of radio and newspaper service. Little things like that.

This petition was floating around the cell tiers, deep under cover so the guards wouldn't get wind of it. One night the man in the next cell to me got me the word that he had the petition and asked me in finger talk would I sign. I give him the high sign that it was okay by me, so he slipped me the petition. There was already quite a few names on it, so I put mine down and slipped it back.

Somewhere along the line somebody stooled.

At that time they was letting one cellblock of prisoners at a time out in the yard for exercise for about an hour. That way, the guards could keep drifting around to keep the guys from talking or mobbing up. So we was all a little surprised, a couple of mornings after I had signed that there petition, when they run everybody out into the yard together. They didn't even pay no attention when we started talking. They kept us out for more than the usual exercise time. Then run us all back into our cells.

That's when we found out what they had been up to.

While we was all out in the yard they went through every cell, really tore them apart. They searched every corner and crack. A lot of men had pictures of their families—mothers, wives and children. They had even tore the pictures up.

Finally, it come out. They was looking for the petition. And they found it—in an empty cell. Somebody had pitched it in there, just in case we was shook down when they run us all out in the yard.

Them that started the petition going planned to get enough names before it got uncovered so it could be presented to the director of prisons. But we got jumped up on the thing before there was a decent number of signers. When they found the petition in the empty cell, there was no way they could pin the whole thing on one guy, who'd be stuck with all of it. So the only thing they could do was blame everybody who'd signed their name.

Next morning after the big search, the deputy warden—that was "Gracie"—come around with this petition in his hand, cell to cell. The petition said that them that signed it wouldn't work unless their demands was met. So the deputy warden stopped in front of each cell and said, "So you're not going to work unless you get radios, newspapers, cell commissaries and all this stuff?"

If the inmate said that was right, the deputy told the guards that was following him, "Toss him in the dungeon."

If the inmate said no, the deputy would order him back to work. A few of them went to work, but the majority of the inmates went through with the strike, even though it meant going to the dungeon.

Finally, the deputy got in front of my cell. He give me that there business that had to be answered, yes or no, but I fooled him, I had another answer.

"How *can* I refuse to work?" I told him. "I ain't never been assigned a job. You told me yourself when I come in here you had orders you couldn't put me to work."

The deputy scratched his head over that one. Then he said, "Well, how did your name get on this petition?"

"Must be forgery," I told him. "I ain't never seen no petition."

The deputy sneered and turned to the guards.

"Toss this wise bird in the dungeon, too," he said.

So down I went to the dungeon, for nineteen days. When I come out they give me a job. I was assigned to the dry-cleaning plant.

One of my working partners was Al Capone.

Last time I seen Al, he was riding high there in Chicago, in a $500 suit. He was setting on the moon for fair. Every time he snapped his fingers, it meant somebody should jump. Sometimes it even meant somebody should die.

It was a lot different guy that I found standing there alongside of a laundry tub, in prison dungarees, washing somebody's dirty clothes at Alcatraz.

I don't think Al Capone never killed nobody in all his life. I don't think he had guts enough to kill nobody. He always hired all that kind of work done. But in Alcatraz he couldn't hire nobody, in spite of all the money they claim he had stashed on the outside.

So he had to wash the dirty clothes, just like the rest of us done.

There was a foreman name of Billingsley in charge of the cleaning plant. We not only done all the cleaning for the prison, but all the work for the Presidio and other installations around the Bay.

One Saturday, soon after I was assigned to the cleaning plant—along with Al Capone and Jimmy the Greek and some of them others—up come two guards that was going on vacation. They both wanted to go out in their best bib and tucker—their dress-up suits. So they brought their best suits down to Billingsley and ordered them to be cleaned and pressed.

Well, it was the rule that every Saturday we cleaned the

machinery with a solution of caustic—very strong caustic. We run out all the cleaning fluid, and it was my job to fill the vats back up with this caustic and let them run. I had strict orders not to wash any clothes on Saturday, but just get all the machinery cleaned up and ready for Monday morning.

So on this here Saturday morning, I had just got the caustic solution all set up. This caustic was clear as gasoline and there was no way of telling what it was unless you examined it pretty close. It didn't look no different, there in the vat, than the regular cleaning solution.

I had just got everything going and was waiting until time come to drain it out when here comes Billingsley with them two suits. He told me what the deal was and ordered me to put them in the cleaner. I told him I had strict orders from the deputy and I wasn't going to wash no clothes on Saturday. With the treatment we was getting about that time, us inmates sure wasn't going to do anything we didn't have to do. Besides, when you're in prison it's bad business to start something. If it works, they just make it a part of the rules, and you got that much more to do from then on out.

Billingsley got a little huffy.

"I told these men that as a favor I would run these suits through," he said.

"It wasn't me that told them that," I said. "You told them. If you want them suits run through, run them through yourself. It's your baby. I got my orders."

I walked on away. Billingsley grabbed up the two suits and went on down to the first washer. I snuck a look back and seen him throw them into the vat. He never asked me what was in that there vat, and it sure wasn't up to me to volunteer nothing. I didn't say nothing and went on about my business.

Jimmy the Greek—he was a postoffice robber that had fouled up on narcotics and got sent to The Rock—he was working on the other side of the room and seen me in the

argument with Billingsley. I told him what the deal was, and about the caustic and all.

Jimmy sort of snickered and whispered, "Wow! Wait till they see them clothes!"

"Them vats was pretty dirty this week," I whispered back. "I think I'll give them about an extra ten minutes, so they'll be in good shape Monday."

So I went along, minding my own business. I eased down by the outlet and pulled the screen on the drain. I figured things had gone about far enough and I better take a look. They had. All there was in that there screen was a handful of buttons.

I dumped the buttons down the sewer, run the caustic out of the tanks and rinsed them. Then I filled them up with the regular cleaning fluid, all ready for Monday morning.

About that time Billingsley come back in.

He never said a word to me. He just walked over to the first machine, opened it up and taken a look inside. He slammed it shut and hurried to the second machine. Same thing. Then he drained the both of them and felt all around inside. He kept glancing over to where I was standing, at the other end of the room, minding my own business. He was beginning to look a little green around the gills. He yelled at me, "Hey you, Blackie!" he hollered. "What did you do with them suits?"

I walked on over, trying to look surprised.

"What suits?" I asked. "I didn't handle no suits."

"You know damn well what suits," Billingsley yelled. "Them that belonged to the two guards. You seen me put them in the washer. You sneaked them out!"

"Sure, I seen you put them in the washer," I told him. "I told you I wasn't going to touch them suits. It was your baby. You put them in. You take them out."

"But there ain't nothing there to take out," he said.

"Then that's your hard luck," I told him, and walked away.

Well, the big shakedown got under way within an hour.

The prison authorities figured that some way me and Jimmy the Greek had got away with them suits as part of an escape plot. They searched that institution from one end to the other. Just like they had for that petition. They kept on searching from time to time for years. But to this day nobody but me and Jimmy the Greek know where they went.

That there caustic solution just ate up every shred of them two suits, and left nothing but the buttons.

Jimmy the Greek was deported back to Europe not long after that, so I guess probably I'm the only one on this side of the world that knows what rightly happened.

Me and Jimmy the Greek, we didn't have nothing to do with them suits—we was just standing around like dumbbells, minding our own business when the whole thing happened. But the upshot of the whole deal was both of us drawed eighteen days in the dungeon for it. And we hadn't even so much as thought about the escape angle of it. But the deputy, he kept worrying along on that angle for years afterward.

That there dungeon they used to have at Alcatraz was something right out of the Dark Ages. It had been blasted out of solid rock when the original prison was built, way back there sometime, I don't know how long ago. Alcatraz was a military prison—maybe it first was built way back in the Spanish days—before it was remodeled to be the high-security penitentiary for the federal government. That dungeon is gone now. But back there in the 1930's, it was going full blast.

It held about eight men at a time. Sometimes they could crowd a few more than that into it. When you was in the dungeon you was in almost complete darkness day and night, except for just a little reflected light that seeped through under the stairs in the daytime. That was the only way you could tell that time was passing.

You got some water and bread twice a day. Every fifth day they gave you a meal. That's all the real food you got —every fifth day.

When The Rock first opened, they used to put leg irons on the men in the dungeon. But most of the cons found ways to slip them off. Then the inmates would throw them out on the catwalk in front of the cells and there would be a hell of a clatter. So the guards quit the leg irons and taken to handcuffing the prisoners to the bars if they got to kicking up a fuss. That was the way it was the first time I made the dungeon. That wasn't so funny.

The rule of silence didn't mean nothing, down in the dungeon, because you was as low as you could get and they couldn't do nothing more to you.

So the guys talked and hollered. Some of them even sang. Some of them blowed their stacks and went stir-nuts. Then the guards would come and sometimes they would beat them silent. The dungeon wasn't a very pretty place.

When I went down there for the first time, it was crawling with rats and bugs and I bet they could smell it clean across the Bay. Some of them rats looked like they was two feet long. They would chatter at you in the dark and you would feel them running across your legs if you tried to lay down on the floor. You had to sleep on the floor, with nothing but a blanket. But there was so much noise and stink you didn't do much sleeping. Pretty soon you just got kind of numb, like you was knocked out but still on your feet. You didn't get enough exercise to keep up your circulation, so you was awful cold. Especially when the fog come in at night. There was a lot of guys died right there in that dungeon in the five years before they abolished it in 1939.

It wasn't too long after my first trip to the dungeon that I got into another jam. I set myself up in the bootlegging business.

It didn't last very long and there wasn't a cent of profit made. But a lot of the guys sure had themselves a time.

They sent me back to the laundry after that first dungeon trip. Jimmy the Greek come back, too. They had switched Al Capone over on the presser by that time, so the big alcohol king of Chicago didn't get cut in on this little bootlegging adventure of mine.

Down in the cleaning plant every week we made up a batch of alcohol soap. It was a mixture of some kind of chemical powder, ten gallons of gasoline and ten gallons of alcohol —pure grain. We mixed it right in the vats, putting the chemical in first, then the gasoline, and on top of it all the alky.

The stuff come in every week on the service truck. We had to unload and we always taken our time doing it, carrying in one item at a time. The routine was always the same.

Me and Jimmy the Greek was a little sore at Billingsley, and we seen where a fast shuffle could be worked on them five-gallon cans that held the gasoline and alky. They was all alike, on the outside. Just plain tin cans.

This particular day, I carried in the gasoline, one can at a time, and set them beside the washer. The chemical was already in it, so I just poured one five-gallon can of gasoline and left the other one sitting there, like it was already emptied. Then I went out and got the alcohol and set the two cans down beside the full can of gasoline.

Billingsley was down at the other end of the room and wasn't paying much attention. I waited until I was sure he was watching. Then I picked up the left-over can of gasoline and poured it in like it was the first can of alky. Then I made a big show of pouring in the other can of alky. I dusted myself off, like I was all through with the job. Billingsley, of course, figured I was. So I picked up the empty cans and went on out into the other room with them. It was a little hard to carry that five-gallon can of alky and make it look like it was empty, but I done it without too much sweat.

I taken it back into the washing room and stashed it out behind some junk that was piled up there. Then I passed the word. Within ten minutes everybody in the yard was sneaking around handing me some kind of a bottle.

There was medicine bottles, ink bottles, even hot-water bottles. Me and Jimmy just relayed them back into the storeroom behind the washers and there we started bottling it up. Fast as we could bottle, the boys in the yard would be nipping along. Then they would come back for refills.

Come time to clear the yard, there was fifteen or twenty cons that had to be carried back to their cells. They taken most of these straight to the hospital, they was that plastered.

The guards and the deputy was up in the air. They had a whole cellblock of inmates drunk as lords, but they couldn't figure out how they done it. They shook them all down and finally seized about a quart of the stuff off some of the drunkest guys. So they found out it was alky, and begin putting two and two together.

The first two they put together was me and Jimmy the Greek. But they couldn't make it add.

They checked with Billingsley and he told them for sure he seen both cans of alky poured into the soap mixture. Jimmy, he didn't drink because he was a junky—a dope addict. And I didn't drink, anyways. So they sniffed our breaths and grilled us up and down. But we just denied everything and they couldn't pin nothing on us, at that time.

Me and Jimmy couldn't stand prosperity, though. We just didn't have sense enough to quit while we was ahead. We hadn't been able to bottle off the whole batch that first day and there was quite a lot still left in the storeroom in the laundry. So the next morning we whacked this up with the rest of the boys. And about two-thirds of the laundry crew was passing out on their faces by noon, all over again.

Well, that second bender done it. The deputy warden called me on the carpet the following day.

"You think you're mighty smart, Blackie," he told me. "Nothing like this ever happened before on The Rock. There's only one place that alky could have got. You figured a way to outsmart Billingsley."

I told him again I didn't know nothing about it.

"In that case," the deputy said, "you ought to have a little time to think it over. You think it over for the next nineteen days, in the dungeon!"

I went on down there and didn't say nothing. I didn't want to jam up Billingsley, bad as I disliked him. He had testified he dumped both them cans of alcohol himself. That was to clear his own skirts. But I just couldn't leave him stuck with that story. So I went down to the dungeon to sweat it out.

They let me out of the dungeon on a Sunday. Next morning, when they run us out into the yard and put us on the line, I wasn't feeling so good.

I was standing there at attention on the line and one of them two guards that had figured in the suit incident was on post right in front of me. He just stood there and looked me up and down. I guess he figured I still had his best suit hid out some place, ready to make a break with it. So he just stood there and glared at me.

Well, I just cocked my cap on the back of my head, folded my arms and stared right back at him, sneer for sneer. I'd done eighteen days on account of his damn suit and I wasn't feeling like taking any guff, after my second round in that dungeon.

It wasn't an hour later when they come around and told me I was on court-call again. That means a trip to the deputy's office. There set the deputy and this here guard that had been glaring at me out in the yard. He spoke his little piece, and I spoke mine. But it didn't make no difference what I had to say. It was the deputy that done the saying.

"Clearly a case of dumb insolence," the deputy said. "I think a little more time in the dungeon might help cure that up a little. Twenty days."

So back I went. By the time I had done that, I was in pretty bad shape mentally and physically. It turned out, though, I wasn't much more than started.

When I come out of the dungeon after that there dumb insolence rap, they moved me off Third Gallery and down onto The Flats. Them was the cells that didn't have bars —just big steel doors with little cracks between the flat pieces of steel they was made of. The cracks was only maybe a half inch or so wide. All that has been changed now, but at that time they was flats. They moved me down there where they could watch me closer, because I guess they still figured I had them suits someplace.

Well, I am setting on my bunk, not feeling too good after almost a month in the dungeon, when the night lieutenant walks by. I didn't know who it was but I heard somebody passing. So I got up and peeked out through one of them cracks. He heard me get up and stopped and turned around. When I looked out, there he was, about three feet away— peeking back at me, eye to eye.

Next morning I was on court-call again. And I'll be damned if that there lieutenant hadn't reported me for spying on an officer. Back to the dungeon I went for twenty more days.

The doctor taken me out, that time, on the sixteenth day.

That was the last time I ever made the dungeon at Alcatraz. I knowed better from there on out. All it done for me was make me cagey and suspicious of every move by every official there was in the prison. And it sure taught me that The Outside ain't the only place you can get a bum rap.

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There was strikes and uprisings popping up almost every month there at The Rock, them first couple years. The tension was so high there was a lot of fighting among the inmates—cuttings and things like that.

And like always, there was plotting going on—plotting for a crash-out. Jimmy Lucas and Whitey Franklin was the plotters in that first break-out try from The Rock. They had hatched it up that they could take the tower on top of the shoe factory. And if they got through to there, they could drop from the wall to the edge of the cliff and down to the water line below. Then they could make a swim for it.

Jimmy Lucas and Whitey cut Tom Limerick in on the plan. They had mapped it to crawl out a side window, climb up by a drain pipe to the roof and then on across the roof to take the tower guard. All they had in the way of weapons was a claw hammer apiece. They was just that desperate. None of the three of them give a damn if they was killed or not.

The first guard they tangled with was a man called Klang. He had been a Texas ranger and was one of the toughest

that they had at Alcatraz. He was a fast man with a sap and he had cracked more than a few skulls around the place, over nothing much of anything. He jumped up the three of them as they come over the roof. Tom Limerick killed him with his claw hammer.

Then they charged the tower, figuring to knock over the guard and get his gun. But they didn't know the towers all have bulletproof glass in the windows and door. Take a sledge to break it. None of the inmates knowed that, in them early days at The Rock. Besides, the doors to them towers lock from the inside. There's no way to open them from the ouside. The only way they can be opened is when they change the guard. The man on the inside opens the door, lets his relief in and then goes out. There's no latch, knob nor nothing on the outside.

The tower guard was looking the other way when the boys come out over the roof, after killing Klang. Limerick got up to the door and tried to get it open. He tried to smash out the glass with his hammer. Whitey Franklin was trying to do the same thing on the opposite side of the tower.

The guard throwed down on Limerick through a rifle port in the glass and shot him right between the eyes. That was the end of Tom Limerick. At the same time, Whitey Franklin was trying to bust his way in and get that guard before he could do any more shooting. But the glass didn't give and the guard shot Franklin, too. He knocked Whitey down with the first shot and then shot him twice more as he was trying to crawl away. None of the three shots killed Whitey.

When the shooting started, Jimmy Lucas dove for underneath the tower, which is up off the roof two or three feet. That give Jimmy a spot where the guard couldn't bring his gun down on him. But by that time the alarm was out and guards were moving in across the roof from all directions. They cornered Jimmy under the tower and he surrendered. They dragged Whitey Franklin down and it was all over, ten minutes after it begun.

Limerick was dead. A guard was dead. Whitey Franklin was in the hospital, where he finally pulled through.

They tried Whitey and Jimmy for murder and give them life imprisonment. They both was doing life already, anyways, so the new sentences didn't mean much to them.

Whitey was put in Isolation—that was D-Block, where there ain't no sound, no daylight, no nothing. He set there eight years before another chance come his way.

That was the first break-out try that I remember at Alcatraz. It was along in 1938, or in there sometime. There was another, about that same time, that you used to hear quite a lot about. It got the publicity, mainly because nobody ever knowed just how it turned out. Nobody on The Outside, that is. That one was the break Ralph Rowe and Ted Cole made.

I was working right along with Ralph and Ted in the prison shops the time they tried it. I seen them go. They had cut a bar in a window that opened right off the shops onto the edge of The Rock. The water line was straight down below. The water was deep right there, and it was quite a ways down, but it could be made in a good dive.

At that time they had a thirty-minute head-count on The Rock, day and night. Every thirty minutes—forty-eight times a day—they counted you in. It made no difference if you was sleeping or not, they woke you up, to be sure that it was you, and checked you on the roster.

Well, for some days before Ralph and Ted made their break, it was foggier than usual over San Francisco Bay. You could scoop up the fog with a ladle. Ralph passed me the word one day that if the next morning was foggy, him and Ted was going to make their try and either go to the bottom of the Bay or to the mainland. They figured they could swim by dead reckoning and make the San Francisco side, and no one could spot them in the water.

I stayed plumb clear of the boys that next morning. The fog was as thick as ever, and I didn't want to take no

chances of gumming their play by getting nose trouble over something that wasn't my business. I didn't want to get mixed up in it.

I was watching from the other end of the shop, though, and I seen Ralph jump from the window. He hit the water and come up about twenty-five yards out, just at the thin edge of the fog. He was only a dozen feet or so from safety behind that shroud of fog when he come up from his dive. Ted had went first and was already into the fog and out of sight when Ralph started swimming.

Ralph begin to flounder almost as soon as he come up. I think he hurt himself when he hit the water. He never hollered or anything that might spook them up on the wall. But Ted must have been waiting, out there in the fog. Anyways, Ted come swimming back out of the fog bank to help Ralph. Both struggled there for a few seconds and then begin drifting back out into the thick mist.

Right there the alert signal went off and guards begin yelling. But before they could open up, a big rolling mass of heavier fog moved in between The Rock and the spot where the boys had been struggling in the water. It swallowed them up before a shot could be fired. The heavy fog patch stayed there only about a minute, then lifted enough so we could see clean out to the bell buoy, about two hundred yards from the surf line at The Rock. There wasn't a sign of Ralph and Ted.

They couldn't possibly have made it out that far in the few seconds it taken that glob of fog to lift. The riptides got them. I'm sure of that. There has been lots of stories since, though, that Rowe and Cole showed up later, here or there around the country. But I seen with my own eyes what happened to Ralph Rowe and Ted Cole.

The prison cutter searched the whole area around The Rock for hours, but the officials never found a trace, of Rowe or Cole. And their connections on The Outside passed the word later that they was convinced the boys was dead.

There was one other try that was much the same—a fellow name of Harold Brest and a kid I knowed only as Jimmy. They got into the water without being spotted by tower guards or any of the patrols. They made it out from The Rock a good quarter-mile. Then officers on the boat that hauled water to the island from the mainland seen them swimming and flashed word to the dock.

The water boat stopped and set there, blasting on its whistle. That brought the prison launch out and touched off the general alarm. The warden himself was out there on the wall, and I was not twenty feet from him, when he ordered the tower guards to open fire with long-range rifles. He ordered the guards to shoot to kill.

The tower guards opened fire and that stopped the prison launch. It couldn't move in on the swimmers on account of the barrage that was being laid down from the wall. Same way with the water boat. The swimmers was blocked off by the water boat and the launch. All any of them could do was set there.

They was shooting from all angles on the wall and finally hit Jimmy. He went down. They quit firing then, and the launch moved in, picked up Harold and brought him back. They never did find Jimmy's body.

There was strikes and fights and breaks, one right after another, them first years. Lots of trouble all the time. Some of it was funny—like the ruckus Jimmy Lucas got into with Al Capone. This was after 1939, when things improved a little.

Al could be an awful troublemaker. He behaved like a spoiled kid most of the time. He had been a big shot for so long, having his own way, that he would get mad as hell when some little thing went wrong in the prison. He couldn't do nothing about it, so he would take it out on people by being mean and spreading gossip.

He picked up a dislike for Jimmy Lucas, and instead of

facing him down, Al spread the word around that Jimmy was a pervert. When it got back to Jimmy, he blowed his top. And that's where Creepy Karpis come in.

Creepy Karpis was one of the most overrated bad men that ever drawed a gun. A lot like Al Capone in some ways.

Old Creepy come to The Rock with a lot of national publicity hanging all over him, like decorations on a Christmas tree. He was a big shot and he didn't want no one to forget it. All he ever wanted was his name in the paper. Whenever he seen that, he puffed up like a peacock. But Creepy had the mind of a ten-year-old kid, and still has.

He never done me no great harm, but anybody can have all the stock I might ever own in Alvin Karpis for just packing it away. I wouldn't trust Old Creepy as far as a kid could throw him.

He got that moniker because he was so slinky and sneaky. They called him Old Creepy, but he's younger than I am. Creepy never could stand to have things quiet. He always had to stir up trouble, but it was always trouble for somebody else. It was him put Jimmy Lucas up to trying to kill Al Capone.

Jimmy got hold of a pair of shears in the barber shop and made a shiv out of one of the blades. He had this hid in his sleeve one day when the string band was tuning up for a little show that was being put on in the recreation room. Al was setting right close up to the band and Jimmy worked his way up so he was in striking distance. Then he lunged for Al with that there scissor blade. He aimed for Capone's heart, but the dago ducked in time. He got a deep cut on his arm, and that was all. The lunge throwed Jimmy off balance and he went down on his knees. That ended the serious part of the brannigan. From then on it was a better show than the one that had been planned for the stage.

Capone jumped up among the band instruments and grabbed a guitar. He begun swinging it around his head like a war club. Jimmy was trying to get back on his feet. Guards

was running from all directions. Inmates was scrambling to get clear. Capone come down on Jimmy's head with that there git-fiddle and it broke into a dozen pieces. But it sure laid Jimmy out cold. By that time the guards was on top of both of them and the fight was over.

That was a mighty nice git-fiddle, too. It was worth $250. And it was the only one the string band had.

There was a doctor on The Rock, but if you got sick you had to just about die to prove it. Some of them did die.

There was an inmate name of Jack Allen—he was No. 211, just three above me—who was celled right across the tier in front of me. Jack was doing twenty years. He was in pretty bad shape when he come in, with ulcers. He checked for sick call a number of times, but they never done nothing for him. The doctor told him he was just goldbricking and there was nothing wrong with him at all. That's what they usually said if you turned in for sick call.

"This is Alcatraz," they would tell you. "We're not here to do anything for you. You're not in here to nurse a belly-ache. Git!"

Well, Jack Allen he taken terrible sick during the night. He called the guard, but the guard told him the doctor had left word not to be disturbed if Jack done any more complaining. The doctor had repeated to the guard that there was nothing wrong with Jack and that he was just goldbricking.

About eleven o'clock that night the whole tier was woke up with Jack groaning and moaning. The guard didn't even answer. So the whole tier started batting on the bars with their cups and raising hell. At last the guard come. He looked Jack over and went away. He said he was going to notify the deputy and the night lieutenant. The tier quieted down. But it was all of two hours before the deputy and the lieutenant come. They drug Jack out of his cell and taken

him to the dungeon. They told him if he raised any more rumpus he would stay there.

Next morning Jack Allen was dead.

Turned out the dungeon guards seen he really was in trouble and had him moved to the hospital. He only lived about thirty minutes after that. They found out that the ulcers had ate clean through his stomach and peritonitis had set in.

That was an example of the kind of medical treatment you could expect, when The Rock first opened.

Another guy in that same fish crew I went in with was Joe Bowers—No. 210. Joe went off his rocker, and died of it. He died with a bullet through his brain.

I was still working in the laundry at the time. I had knowed Joe Bowers—on The Outside, off and on—for quite a while and I tried to snap him out of it there on The Rock. But he was gone. Flipped-off. Plumb stir-looney. He wasn't dangerous, but his mind was just like a little kid. The deputy put Joe on a job all by himself. Twice a week it was his job to come around to the laundry and pick up towels for the guards on the towers. The tower guards would reel down a piece of fishline and Joe would fasten the towels on the end of it. Then they would reel them back up.

All his spare time, Joe put in feeding sea gulls. They was about his only real friends. Some of them would eat right out of his hands. He could tell them apart and even had some of them named. He often said he was afraid to die, because his gulls might starve. Crazy guy.

It was a bright clear morning, without a bit of fog. It wasn't often the fog wasn't hanging thick over the Bay, but this morning there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Not a chance that anybody could make a break-out without being seen for miles—not even a poor mixed-up guy like Joe.

Joe, he come on down to the laundry and we was kidding

him as usual. We was standing there in the door, teasing him about his towel duty. He said he was in a hurry because this was the morning he had to clean up the incinerator and feed his gulls.

The incinerator sets on the side of the cliff, just inside a high cyclone fence that circles The Rock at the edge of the island. The fence is set into a cement footing with a couple of feet of the concrete sticking out beyond. From there it drops square off into the Bay—sixty or eighty feet.

Well, working around that incinerator Joe had got to feeding them sea gulls stuff that he would pick out of the trash that hadn't burned. They would come and circle around his head. When some of the wilder ones didn't come in and eat out of his hand, he would poke this garbage and stuff out through the fence. Sometimes this made it kind of messy out there on this concrete ledge beyond the wire.

This particular morning Joe told us while he was getting up his towels that the guard had ordered him to clean up that mess before he done anything else. That's why he was in a hurry.

Well, Joe went over and tried to reach through the fence with a broom handle to poke that trash over the cliff. But he couldn't make it that way, so he started to climb up over, to sweep it off from the other side. There wasn't a way in the world he could have escaped from that point because the cliff dropped straight down into the Bay. And there was a pile of jagged rocks in the surf, right below that incinerator, besides. Not a way in this world.

Joe was up on top of the fence when we heard the shooting start. We run back out to the door of the laundry.

This guard that told him to clean up the ledge was up in a gun tower, and he shot Joe right through the head when he got to the top of the fence. Joe tumbled off, hit that there ledge and bounced on down to the jagged rocks and into the surf.

That was the end of Joe Bowers. The records said he was killed while trying to escape. Joe didn't want to escape. His mind was so far gone he had about forgot there was any place else but The Rock and his sea gulls.

There was quite a fuss about the shooting of Joe Bowers, but it come from the inmates and not the officials. James V. Bennett, the director of federal prisons, was making a visit to The Rock at that time and a committee of us got permission to talk with Bennett. He told us there would be an inquest. We told him that, if guards was allowed to shoot guys down like that, a rap on The Rock would soon become nothing but a death sentence. We petitioned Bennett to get that guard assigned to duty where he wouldn't have a gun.

Well, if they ever had an inquest I don't know where they had it. There was witnesses to the shooting that wanted to go before it and testify. Even one of the other guards had said there was no call to shoot Joe. Whatever kind of an inquest was held none of the inmates ever knowed nothing about it. They just buried Joe Bowers and wrote it off the books.

The guard who shot him wound up the same as Joe, though, in the Big Riot of 1946.

That was two of the fish crew that I went in with gone—210 and 211. Johnny Carroll was No. 209, and he died in the dungeon. That left only me out of the four of us.

First thing that went when the reform come in the prison operation was the silence system. The inmates just quit observing it and the authorities just quit enforcing the rule.

But there wasn't no radios nor newspapers nor any contact with The Outside. Some of the inmates that worked in the machine shops knowed pretty much about radio. And over the years we secretly made one of the most powerful receiving sets in the Bay area. We hid it in a little cubbyhole in back of a storeroom. If you was a right guy, you

could take your turn setting in there in the dark, listening. It was an all-wave set and we could pick up stuff from all over the world, when they finally got it all set up.

It was the morning of December 7, 1941. I forget who the guy was that was taking his turn fiddling with the dials and picking up anything he had a fancy to.

All of a sudden he come running out bug-eyed.

He didn't dare uncover the set, but he relayed the words right down the line. He had just picked up Honolulu—one of the military stations on the short wave. The Japs was bombing Pearl Harbor!

It was several hours later that the official news come through.

All during the war we run that radio set and nobody ever got wise. We knowed all about it when the big rumpus was kicking up over what might happen to the inmates of Alcatraz if it become necessary to evacuate San Francisco. We knowed a lot of things that was going on around the world, long before the officials knowed them sometimes. I guess it was finally spotted and destroyed, after I left.

I got transferred to the kitchen from the machine shop, where I had been assigned for a long spell after getting shifted out of the laundry. They was short of cooks. Someone remembered about me learning Frank Nash to cook, back there in Leavenworth, I guess. Anyways, they made me a cook.

While I was on duty there in the kitchen, I was a witness to a murder.

There was two guys working in the kitchen. A man named Cecil Snow and another name of Harrington. There was bad blood between them and the officials knowed it. Snow had asked the warden to transfer him out of the kitchen and told him he knowed if he didn't get away from Harrington that one of them was going to get killed. But neither the warden or the deputy done anything about it.

That was at the time the tension was at its worst. The slightest word and someone would go off his rocker.

One day this feud between Snow and Harrington blowed sky high. I was standing just a few feet away when Harrington grabbed up a kitchen knife and went for Snow. Snow grabbed up another knife and the fight was on. Snow stabbed Harrington in the leg and it was pretty deep. It cut the big artery. The guards busted up the fight, but they carried Harrington back to his cell and let him lay there bleeding a good thirty minutes before he was took to the hospital. They had to get an okay from the doctor before he could be took to the hospital. There was no doctor around, so Harrington laid there on the floor and bled to death.

I was called up to testify and I testified for Snow. I told them at the hearing it was self-defense because Harrington had come at Snow with a knife. I also testified about the length of time Harrington had to lay and bleed before he got any help. Snow was acquitted on the ground of self-defense, but the warden wasn't very happy with me for opening up my mouth.

It wasn't too long after the time we got the news about Pearl Harbor over our underground radio that Jack Giles got away—the only man so far as I know who ever made it plumb off the island and onto solid ground.

19

This here Jack Giles was a printer. I suppose it was because he was a printer that they tried to make a tailor out of him on The Rock. Then they made him a dock-walloper. But Jack Giles, he parlayed them three skills into a getaway. Not just a try. A sure-enough lam, even if it *didn't* stay stuck too long.

The war fever was running high and Alcatraz was making uniforms. They was making almost anything the Armed Forces could use. There was almost every kind of uniform ever wore, made there in the tailoring shops. Well, this Jack Giles he got hold of a technical sergeant's uniform. Then he got him an in down at the prison print shop and made up a complete set of phony papers—passes and everything that he would need to go along with this uniform he had stole and hid. Then finally he was transferred down to the dock, where the army supply boat come in. It went out of there, too. And that was the part that interested Jack Giles.

The army boat was a two-decker. It carried passengers on the top deck and freight on the deck below. The dock was sort of double-decker, too. But all they used the lower part

for was storing army material that was supposed to be used for the defense of the island if there ever was an attack.

Jack Giles found a way to stash himself out among all this stuff that was piled down under the dock. That's where he hid his sergeant's uniform. He changed clothes down under there and when the supply boat come in, he slipped over onto the freight deck and hid.

There was several other soldiers on the boat, waiting to be taken on over to an army stockade they had on Fox Island, a ways on up the Bay. So Giles, he just mixed in with them. He didn't know the supply boat was going on over to Fox Island that trip. Usually it just loaded up and went back to the San Francisco side. So there he was, off The Rock but heading right on into another lockup. Meantime, the guard lieutenant on the dock got suspicious seeing a technical sergeant in with these rookie AWOL's and other GI's that was headed for the stockade. He called his work detail together and counted them. He was one short. He turned in an alarm and tried to radio the supply boat, but the Army and the prison officials was not too fond of each other sometimes. So the supply boat didn't come back. They just kept on going for Fox Island.

The dock lieutenant phoned the deputy and the deputy, he ordered the supply boat to turn back. The officer in charge of the boat, he told the deputy to go jump in the Bay. But the deputy, he done no such thing. First, he blowed his lid and called the Presidio. They give him what the cons used to call an evasive answer. Meantime, the supply boat is chugging along for Fox Island, with one extra sergeant on board—and one con short on The Rock.

So the deputy, he jumped into the prison launch and taken out after the army boat. The launch caught up just as the supply boat docked at Fox Island. The deputy himself collared Jack Giles as he stepped off. Jack had got off The Rock all right, but his toe-hold on The Outside was a short one. He was back in an hour. And in The Hole, to boot.

The one item of contraband—next to guns—that never got onto The Rock was women.

The only women I ever talked to in all the time I was there was a female parole judge and her secretary. That there was quite a caper.

This woman parole judge, she was a battle-axe from away back. But when you don't see nothing with skirts on for years and years, even a battle-axe don't look too bad. The secretary, though—she was something else again. Her legs was nice enough to make a silkworm happy to put in overtime. Gams. Real, live, genuine Hollywood gams, them legs was.

Every so often we had to fill out parole papers and then go up for a hearing. When I become eligible for parole the first time, the guard come around and stuck the papers through the door. Well, I knowed there wasn't going to be any parole for me, but I looked over the papers. Then, instead of signing them, I just wrote B.S. across the bottom.

When the guard come back to pick them up he taken a look and said, "Hey! Sure this is the way you want 'em signed?"

"That's good enough for me," I said. "I ain't going to get no parole, and that's the way I feel about it."

"Suit yourself," he said and went away.

It wasn't an hour before I was called before the deputy. He had the papers laying on the desk in front of him. I asked him what the trouble was. I said I'd been keeping my nose pretty clean, doing all right, just getting along. He looked me over like I was bait on a fishhook. He said the charge was making slanderous statements on official papers. He said he was plumb ashamed of me, along with some other points he touched on concerning me and cons in general.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said.

He shoved them parole papers under my nose and asked me was that my writing on the bottom. I admitted it was.

"Just what did you have in mind when you wrote it?" he bellered. "That's what I want to know!"

"Why, I just put it there for beefsteak," I said. "I figured I'd get beefsteak about as quick as I'd get a parole. So I put it down."

"Yes," he said, "it could stand for beefsteak. And it could stand for a lot of other things. But in this case, it stands for back-set—back-set ten days in The Hole."

Well, after my ten days was done, this woman parole judge still wanted to see me, beefsteak or not. They called me in on the carpet and there she was. And this here pretty secretary of hers was setting at the end of the desk, with her knees crossed—cheesecake, I think is what they call it in the newspapers.

The woman judge told me to set down. So I set. But I didn't say a word. I didn't do nothing but just set there and look at the secretary's legs. The parole judge starts chewing me out for not answering her questions and for staring at the secretary.

"I ain't got no parole coming, and you know it and everybody else knows it," I said. "Besides, I'd rather look at your secretary's legs than talk to you."

Well, that blowed her up. She chewed me up in little pieces and spit me clean out of the office. But that wasn't the end of the caper. The next day I was sent for again. This time the secretary was there alone.

She had her knees crossed again, and her skirt was hiked even higher than it had been the day before. She give me a big song and dance and said the parole judge had cooled down. Then she sprung the trap. She said everyone would let bygones be bygones, and likely I could get my parole, if I would come through with a little information.

Back in 1934, an FBI agent had come up missing in Reno. He went over there looking for some of the boys and just disappeared. I'd been out in Reno about that time and the authorities believed I knowed something. They was sure

the agent was dead, but they believed I knowed where his body could be found. They was dead wrong, but they figured I might talk a little about it to the secretary if she give me some come-on with them pretty legs of hers.

Well, I seen through the play soon as she sprung it.

"What kind of a job you got?" I said. "Are you a Hawkshaw or are you a secretary? Is that there boss of yours in the parole business or running a model agency for stool-pigeons?"

With that I clammed, and she blushed up a little. She said she only wanted to help me with my parole, if I would just come through with a few little words.

"I only got one little word to tell you, sis," I said. "And that's good-by."

I told the guard in the next room I was ready to go back to my cell. That begun and ended my experiences with women on The Rock.

There was a price tag on almost everything an inmate might fancy to buy, out on The Rock at that time—contraband.

There was ways to get files and hacksaw blades smuggled in, did you want to pay enough. Even dope. Most of the inmates had ways of getting hold of plenty money. And money is what it took. Sometimes pretty big money.

They say every man has his price. That was as true of guards at Alcatraz as it was of crooked cops in Kansas City. Anyways, that's the way I found it.

Almost none of the inmates was broke. They either had ways to get it, Outside, or had it with them. I taken four grand with me onto The Rock—four $1,000 bills. I still had it when I left, twelve years later. Fall money. But I never spent it. I kept it stashed just in case a foolproof way to get out ever come up. None ever did.

Four grand-notes can fold up mighty small if you take your time about folding them. That's how I got them in a

little hollow place in my belt, right behind where the buckle fastens on. That's how I got that bundle onto The Rock. And that's how I carried it off with me.

Money could buy you almost anything on The Rock, anything but guns—and women.

Well, like I said, I done ten days in The Hole on account of that caper with the battle-axe and her secretary. I done that time because I throwed the sneaky underhandedness of their parole system back in the face of the deputy and that woman judge.

There was a considerable difference between the dungeon and The Hole. They put you in the dungeon for real bad violations of the rules. You was supposed to go to The Hole for smaller things. But probably it just simmered down to the fact that they didn't have enough room in the dungeon, or you would have went there for everything.

The Hole was up on the third tier. They had a bunch of cells up there with solid fronts. That was The Hole. It was almost like Isolation—D-Block. There was a little screen in the bottom of each cell, and you could usually score up there for something extra to eat. The guys would sneak it to you. There was contraband smuggled into The Hole, just like anywheres else in any prison. But I never spent a nickel of that four grand I brought in with me on bribery or anything like that.

I just taken things as they come. And mostly they come rough.

It's been said that the riptides around Alcatraz Island was so strong it would be impossible to escape to the mainland by swimming.

The tides was strong, all right, and I seen them pull down more than one grown man. But the mile and a half between

the mainland and The Rock *could* be swum. Two young girls from San Francisco proved it.

It was soon after The Rock was opened and these two girls swum out just for a lark. They landed down by the point, and there was a hell of a rumpus about it. They was about eighteen, as I remember, and they told the warden they done it just to prove that all the stories that had been in the papers was hooey.

Anyways, there was stories in all the papers then, you can bet for sure, about what them girls done. It made the prison officials pretty salty, on account of they had built up the story about the riptides so much.

D-Block is still the isolation block, I guess. It was soundproof, escape-proof and when they put you there, you was as good as through. No cigarettes. No matches. Nothing. They liked to searched even the air you breathed before you breathed it, there in Isolation. About the only thing they didn't go through with a fine-tooth comb was the food they brought you from the prison kitchen.

That's where they kept a lot of them tough guys like Doc Barker, Jimmy Lucas, Rufe McKane and them. So them boys, they went and noodled up a way to saw out of Isolation and get free on the island. From there they figured they could find some way over the fence and swim for it. That there was the whoop-up, and not a word of it leaked to any place it shouldn't.

They had rigged it with The Outside to get some saws and files smuggled in. That D-Block had not at that time been equipped with tool-proof bars, and it was the only place on The Rock it was possible to saw out from.

Well, everything that come into the prison except the laundry that come to the kitchen, went through an electric eye. Was there anything in it that shouldn't be, like metal, that there electric eye caught it. But the laundry just come

into the kitchen without getting screened. That's how the saws and files got in.

But that still didn't put them into the hands of the boys that was hatching the escape plot.

Working with me at the time in the kitchen was Pat King, Whoop-'em-Up Brown and some of them. Well, the authorities never proved later how it happened or who was in on the rest of the deal. But somehow or other, the saws got into a big pan of salad that was sent to D-Block for lunch. Them guys that was in the isolation cells didn't have nothing in there with them, nor sent in—not even a match, cigarette or nothing. So the guards never dreamed about anything showing up in food that went over direct from the prison kitchen.

But that there salad that went over that one day, it was sure-enough sharp!

Anyways, that night Doc Barker, Jimmy Lucas, and a big colored guy named Champ, and a couple of others cut their way out. There wasn't no thirty-minute head count in Isolation, so they had plenty to start. They got free onto the island and there wasn't a rumble. There was a lot of lumber stacked up around there and they throwed sort of a raft together. The island is about twelve acres and there was plenty of places in the dark where they could work without being seen.

They got the raft over the fence and into the water, all right, but it come apart on them in the riptide. They had to swim to the nearest shore, which was right back to The Rock, or drown. The ebb tide was like a millrace.

Meantime, a guard finally found the cut bars over in D-Block and turned in the alarm. That touched off all the flood lights everywhere on the island. The boys had all separated when the raft busted up. They damn near all drowned as it was, getting back to The Rock. They got back inside the fence and tried to hide, but by then there was guards all over the place.

They found two of the guys hid out way down on the point—clean past the guards' quarters. Rufe McKane, he hit out by himself and they caught him under a lumber pile. Jimmy Lucas and Doc Barker took cover behind the incinerator. That's where the guards found them. They was laying flat on the ground, spread-eagle to show they didn't have no weapons.

The guards opened up on Doc Barker as he was laying there and practically cut him in two with a machine gun. They shot Jimmy Lucas and crippled him up, but he lived.

The word had been out on the grapevine for some time that they was laying to kill Doc Barker—he was ranked as a top Public Enemy in his prime—first chance that come up, just like they did Joe Bowers. There was no call to kill Doc, and he was absolutely defenseless. But anyways, they did.

Me and Pat King and Whoop-'em-Up Brown was in deadlock.

The morning after that there break by Doc Barker and them, our cells didn't open up. We was out of a job. We was in solitary until the officials found out how them hack saws got into the salad.

They never did pin it on me and Pat and Whoop-'em-Up, but they kept us locked in for a good long time. I was the first one out.

They was always investigating something, and they finally simmered this one all down to a tip that Rufe McKane had hung around with Pat King a lot. So they eliminated all but Pat and Whoop-'em-Up. The rest of us they turned loose and sent back to our jobs.

Three or four months went by and I kept after them to turn Pat King loose. I was in the next cell to him there on the main floor of C-Block. We called it "Broadway." We had all the corridors named for famous streets and places

in various parts of the country—like "Times Square," "Michigan Boulevard," and all that.

But the deputy he just didn't spring Pat loose to go back to work. So finally we decided the only way to get the job done was with a rib.

The deputy at that time was old E. J. Miller—a well-liked guy, tough as he was. He was mighty touchy about being ribbed, but he knowed men well enough to realize that when they rib the boss, it's because they like him.

So we drawed up a phony writ of habeas corpus. Alcatraz is as full of jailhouse lawyers as any other stir, so we really put everything in the book into that there writ. It was all witnessed and swore to, like the real McCoy. It had a great big seal on it that had been made down in the print shop. There was even a couple of ribbons running down from the seal.

We was going to make the ribbing so public that it would get right to the warden's office if the deputy didn't do nothing about it. And rather than have a lot of rumpus and get the thing sent back to Washington or some place, we figured the deputy would order Pat King sprung back to work.

So one day old Miller come by with some visitors. They stopped in front of my cell and there was my chance. The deputy didn't think much of jailhouse lawyers, but there was nothing he could do but accept the thing when I handed it to him there in front of the visitors and said, good and loud, it was a writ of habeas corpus. He seen that big phony seal and all and knowed right away it was a rib. But he couldn't explain to them, or couldn't chew me out, without risking he might get his nose caught in a bunch of embarrassing questions from the visitors. So he went to his pocket with it and moved on.

That night in the dining room he come up to me and said, "You think you're pretty damn smart, Blackie, but I'm just taking that phony writ of yours under advisement,

since you want to be so legal. Under advisement, see. And that means Pat King stays in deadlock, now, until I get this document all studied out. Might take months!"

I said, right out loud, "Suit yourself. But there'll be another one just like it go into Washington one of these days."

That time it worked. The deputy let Pat out of deadlock next morning. And that was the end of the whole investigation.

Pat and Whoop-'em-Up both. The deputy didn't want no director of prisons to get wind that the cons at Alcatraz could rib him. That wasn't the way things should run on The Rock.That wasn't the hard way. E. J. Miller, he wasn't like some of them deputies that had been there. He was a pretty decent guy. He could have had me killed, easy, a few years later on. But he didn't.

20

Me and Pat King, like I said, was celling next to each other there on "Broadway."

We was old-timers by then, and we wasn't much impressed by some of these fish that come in and made like they was real tough or they wouldn't have been sent to The Rock. There was a few cells directly across from us where they put the fish while they was being processed—fish are the new cons that just come into the institution.

Like I said, the deputy warden we had along toward the end of my time there was a pretty good guy. He was tough and lots of the cons didn't like him. That was E. J. Miller, but around the yard a lot of them always called him "Meathead." He knowed they was doing it and he was a little touchy about it.

Well, one day they brought in a fish—a big kid about twenty-five or so from Iowa, or some place back there. He was like a lot of them, and figured when he was sent to The Rock that made him a big shot and tough as they come. Of course, there is really no such thing as a *tough* guy on

The Rock. They all simmer down to about the same size after they been there a while.

Anyways, me and Pat listened for a while to this kid giving us the business about all the places he had been and the things he done, so at last we figured it was about time to take care of him.

This kid was wising-off about guards he had killed, and things like that, in other stirs where he had been. He told me and Pat they wasn't going to push him around on The Rock, or they would get the same. He said the guards on The Rock had took away his cigarettes and some pictures when they brought him in, and he was going to fix them.

I gave Pat the wink and he flipped it back.

"They can't do things like that to a guy like *you,*" I told the kid. "They must not know who you are!"

"Well, they done it," the kid said.

"Why, chrissake!" Pat said, solemn-like. "Something like that happening on The Rock here, it should be reported to the deputy."

"I ain't no squealer," the kid said. "I kill my own snakes."

"It ain't handled that way here," I told the kid. "The deputy gets things like that straightened right out. He holds interviews every morning, and you're supposed to report anything the guards done that's out of line."

The kid thought that one over a little while and pretty soon he called over to Pat.

"Hey!" he said. "How you get to talk to this here deputy?"

"Why," Pat said, "it's very simple, you just fill out a request. Every morning he goes through the requests and you can tell your story."

"What do you write it on?" the kid wanted to know.

We tossed him one of the printed forms you was supposed to register complaints on. We had long before quit turning any in. We knowed better. The kid studied the form for a while and pretty soon he hollered over again.

"How you make it out here where it says put the deputy warden's name?"

Pat said, "Why, you just write in his name. His name is Mr. Meathead. Just put it right down there, Mr. Meathead —Deputy Meathead. Just spell it out."

So the kid wrote something down. And when the guard come by he give it to him.

Me and Pat King could hardly wait next morning to see how old E. J. Miller was going to react to that there request. I was head cook in the kitchen at the time and Pat was one of my assistants. We had to jigger things around so we could both be in our cells when the deputy come through the block to hold his interviews, if any. We never *could* miss a rib on old E. J. Miller.

Well, Miller come in and set down at a desk, maybe twenty feet from our cells. He was holding a piece of paper. It was that there request the kid from Iowa had put in. It was the only one Miller had. He set down and taken a long look at that paper in his hand. His neck got sort of purple above his collar. Then he looked up and hollered at the top of his lungs, "All right, *you!* Come over here!"

The kid come up to the desk. The deputy was getting more purple every minute. He looked the kid up and down and then roared at him loud enough to loosen the bars, "You think you're *tough!* You think you're *bad!* You think you're somebody—calling me Meathead, right here in writing. I'll meathead you!"

The kid just stood there with his mouth hanging open, twisting his cap.

"But Mr. Meathead," he spluttered, "I was only—"

With that the deputy jumped clean out of his chair and bellered again, "I'll show you who's Meathead," he yelled. "I'll kick your goddam ass clear back to the cellblock!"

The kid come apart like a two-bit suitcase. He went running back to his cell, tripping over his own feet. Meathead, he taken a couple of steps after him. But he quit when he

caught me and Pat King in the corner of his eye. We was practically laughing ourselves sick. The deputy marched over to our cells and glared at us.

"So that's it," he said. "You two and your damn ribs again. I might have knowed."

Then he kind of turned aside so we wouldn't see him grin, and run us both out to work.

We never heard one more yip out of that kid from Iowa about how salty he was. Nobody ever called the deputy Meathead again, neither.

You take a five-gallon crock and you put some figs, prunes and raisins in it. Then you toss in some sugar and add a cup of yeast. Then you set the whole thing in back of the kitchen range for a couple of weeks. End of that time, you really got something. At Alcatraz we called it Rock Juice.

This here Rock Juice settled down nice and clear, about the color of bourbon whisky. I knowed how to make it because, like I said, I done a little brewing and still-running back in them days when I was transporting liquor. Being head cook, I could get away with things some of the others couldn't. So they elected me king-bee of the Rock Juice project. I never sampled the stuff, on account of I didn't drink, but the way it reacted on some of my crew, it must have had a kick like a tommy-gun.

It was a little risky making that there brew, because while it was working it stunk up the kitchen a little bit. But did anybody say anything, we always told them it was yeast working in the bakeshop.

When a batch was finished, we had to fix up a place to store it.

There was two desks pushed together at one end of the kitchen, where we made up the supply requests and menus and all. Each of them desks had a big file drawer on one side. We fixed it so these file drawers met each other at the back. Then we knocked the backs out and slid in a divider,

about halfway back in the drawer. Nobody would hardly ever pull the drawers all the way out, and we just kept the front ends full of old supply lists and things. So that there double hole in the back made a nice snug little place to keep the Rock Juice, once we got it jugged up.

One day a new fish come in as a swamper. The fish was swinging his mop, trying to make a big show, and the guard was telling him to be sure and get in under everything and get it clean.

Well, this swamper flipped his mop under that desk with a little too much body-English, maybe, and some of the threads of the mop got tangled up in the bottom of the desk. The guard, he cussed. And the fish sweat. And they both stooped down to unhook the mop. The guard jerked the desks apart to get the mop strings loose. When he did, there set them Rock Juice jugs!

We'd all hurried over to help, so we could prevent that very thing. But we was a little late. Anyways, there we all stood, peering over the guard's shoulder like onlookers at a crap game.

"Well!" the guard said. "Wait till I show this to the deputy!"

He stepped to the kitchen door and beckoned to the deputy, who was just outside in the cellblock. The deputy lost no time telling us what this was going to mean when it come up in court the next morning. They called it court, but it was just a matter of getting your feet on the carpet in the warden's office.

The deputy told the guard to get rid of all but one jug—there was four of them in the drawer—and save that one for evidence.

While all this rumpus was going on, Marvin Hubbard, one of my helpers, had sneaked a jug of tea out of the icebox and slipped it under a table, right close by the desk. We always made up tea that way in advance, for iced tea in the dining room.

The deputy left. And the guard, looking very stern and righteous, marched over to the sink with three of the jugs and sloshed the Rock Juice down the drain. That give us a chance to make a quick switch. Hubbard pushed the jug of tea over beside me, along the floor, with his foot. I kicked it over behind the next guy, and so on down the line. Everyone was standing there, looking dumber than usual, if possible. The last guy switched the tea jug for the jug of Rock Juice. Then we passed the juice back, the same way. By that time the guard was through at the sink and he come marching back, big as Jupiter. He picked up the jug of "evidence" and walked out.

Next morning at the hearing the guard produced his jug.

"Is this a sample of the brew them birds was making back in the kitchen?" the deputy asked, real formal-like.

"Yes, *sir*. This is the evidence you asked me to preserve."

The deputy went through the rigmarole of getting the guard to testify that the jug was the very same one that had been found in the desk. Then he looked over at me.

"You got anything to say about this, Blackie?"

"Just one thing, sir," I told him. "I think maybe you better taste it."

The deputy scowled.

"Taste it!" he bellered. "I wouldn't touch that rotgut with a ten-foot pole! Why should I taste it?"

"Why, I was only thinking," I said respectful-like, "it ought to taste a lot like *tea*. Because that's exactly what it is."

Well, the deputy looked at the jug and looked at the guard and looked at me. Then he gingerly stuck his finger down the neck of the jug. Then he touched his finger to his tongue. His eyebrows went up an inch. He done it again, and then a third time.

"It *is* tea!" he said.

"Of course it is," I told him. "We always keep extra jugs

of tea in that there desk so the icebox won't be so crowded."

Well, the deputy looked us all over again. He started to say something more, but all he said was, "Case dismissed."

As we was filing out, he called to me to come back. He pointed to the jug.

"Take this goddam stuff with you and pour it the same place the Rock Juice went."

"But, sir," I said, "there wasn't no Rock Juice."

The deputy looked at me in that funny way he sometimes got. He didn't grin, and his face muscles never moved out of that gray-granite set of theirs. But his eyes twinkled, just a little bit.

"Look, Blackie," he said, "I've done about as much time around this place as you have. I know what goes on. Now git!"

Dutch Joe Cretzer was a character I sort of taken a liking to. I guess one reason that I liked him was because him and I was, as you might say, kindred spirits. He had crashed out of McNeil Island twice, too. Just like I had. One of them escapes of Joe's wasn't exactly off the island. He made it while they was taking him to court at Tacoma. The deputy U.S. marshal had a heart attack, and that gave Joe his chance.

Joe come onto The Rock in 1940, and he was pulling life. He'd been a bank robber and about everything else, including murder. When he come on The Rock, the papers listed him as Public Enemy Number Five.

Well, right after that Rock Juice incident, Barney Coy, the stick-up man from Kentucky, tried to rig it with me to get Dutch Joe transferred to the kitchen.

I had knowed for a long time on the grapevine that a big crash-out was brewing. Barney told me this was it—him and Dutch Joe and Marvin Hubbard had engineered it. He

wanted Joe and Marvin handy in the kitchen when the time come.

Barney said if I rigged it up, I could cut myself a piece of the crash-out. I told him I would see what I could do. I decided the best thing I could do was nothing. I didn't even get Dutch Joe transferred to the kitchen.

I second-guessed three crazy-thinking cons. And I suppose you might say I win. At least, I'm here, telling this here story. Then again, maybe I was just lucky.

21

Three cons hatched up a crash-out plot that went sour, but it turned into one of the bloodiest riots in prison history. Some called it a riot. Some called it a break. Mostly, I guess, it was a mutiny.

If I hadn't turned down their offer to cut me in on a piece of it, the odds are about ten thousand to one against me being able to tell about it today. At least, them are the odds I figured, with more than ten thousand rounds of ammunition fired during the three days it was going on.

One of them rounds would have had my ticket on it, just like it turned out for them. All three of them was killed.

As it was, I got a hunk of shrapnel in my arm that I carry to this day. And I drawed a ringside seat at the biggest battle ever fought in San Francisco Bay.

I even served coffee to the mutineers a time or two at the height of the shooting. And at the same time, I was taking orders on the phone from the deputy warden. But I couldn't carry them out without getting myself killed. And I wasn't about to be no dead hero, nor was I going to

stand in the way of any inmate that was betting his life against a hopeless chance for freedom.

So that's how she set, right after lunch, on May 2, 1946.

The whole Rock had been simmering for days in scuttlebutt stew. The grapevine was singing like a fiddlestring. Something big was shaping up. I knowed what it was, on account of Barney Coy had asked me for a little help. But I didn't know when it was coming. And I didn't want to know, after I had dealt myself out of it.

But when Marvin Hubbard—he was my second cook—asked me to swap shifts and me take the afternoon watch that day, why, I knowed the time had come.

People who never been in a penitentiary don't have much idea how they're built inside—especially Alcatraz. The outside people mostly figure—at least that's what some of them have told me—that a guard locks you up in a cell, and that's it. Well, it ain't that simple.

That cellhouse where the riot started was three tiers high, with narrow steel stairways leading up, tier by tier, to the catwalks in front of the cells. The middle part was hollow, clean up to the ceiling, which mostly was skylight. The floor of this hollow part, we called it "Broadway."

There was a main door from the cellhouse out into the yard. It was kept locked. And the one key to it was kept in the gun gallery.

The gun gallery was a double-deck sort of tower thing, rising up in the middle of the hollow part, right in the center of "Broadway." There was guns in there—usually a high-power rifle and some sidearms. Only one or two guns—they kept most of the artillery in the armory, for high-security reasons. There was a big store of ammunition in the gun gallery, though.

There was a guard on each deck. He locked himself in when he went on shift. He could command the floor below through gun ports in the bulletproof glass, and did any

ruckus shape up, he was in position to snipe off anybody that tried to jump a floor guard or otherwise start something.

The guards on the floor, they didn't carry guns. They never do, in any prison. They'd get them swiped before they could bat an eye. Then there'd be hell to pay.

So you can't start nothing in the cellhouse—if you want to stay alive—without you figure a way to take out the gun gallery guards first.

Barney Coy had figured a way.

Him and Dutch Joe and Marvin had also figured their second move. That was to bust out through the skylight. The skylight couldn't be reached from any of the catwalks, or any way else from the cell tiers. Only way to get to it was the derrick.

This derrick was a big contraption on casters that could be moved around inside the cellhouse to hoist heavy repair stuff and things like that up to the cell tiers. It reached clean up to the ceiling. It was heavy and clumsy. It taken about eight men to move it. There was heavy tools, like bar spreaders and things, on this derrick. It was safe to keep them there because they was too big to swipe and ditch. And anyways, the gun guards would have you nailed before you could even pick one up.

A bar spreader is a big lever they can use to spring bars apart, does somebody try to hang himself in a cell or anything like that.

There was connecting catwalks from the gun gallery to the various cellblocks, around on the tiers. The top deck connected that way with Cellblock D, which was Isolation. That was a solid-front, soundproof block where they kept some of the real tough inmates and those condemned to death.

Whitey Franklin—him that was with Tom Limerick and them in that crash-out try when the guard was killed in 1938—he had been in Isolation eight years.

Sam Shockley was in there. And Clarence Carnes, Blackie Thompson and some of them other guys like that.

Well, the guard room at Isolation was solid front, like all the rest of it. And some of the guards used it as a place to read, gossip and otherwise goof off, because it was out of sight. The gun gallery guards used to take turns, now and then, slipping over there for a break, leaving the other one on watch. It was against the rules, but they done it.

So, like I said, that's the way she set that day, right after lunch.

I had swapped shifts with Marvin Hubbard, like I promised, and he ducked over to his cell. They didn't lock the cells of the kitchen crew in the daytime, so they could come and go on the various shifts. That put Marvin right out there on "Broadway," ready.

Soon as lunch was over, they always marched the inmates out into the yard and divided them up into the various work details—all but a few who had to stay celled in for one reason or another. So the cellhouse was practically empty within a few minutes after lunch. Not only was almost all the inmates gone, but most of the guards was out with them in the yard.

Procedure was always the same. The gun gallery guard let the main-door key down to the floor guard on a piece of string. Floor guard, he unlocked her and stood by while everybody filed out. Then he was supposed to lock up again, hook the key back on the string and the gallery guard would take her away.

This time it didn't work that way.

We had a system on our reading material we called the "lending library."

There still wasn't no newspapers allowed, but we could have whatever magazines that wasn't on the contraband list. No sex or crime or stuff like that. Just general magazines that had been given the okay.

So, suppose I had ten or a dozen of these in my cell. When I was through with them, I'd pass them along to swap with somebody who had some others I might want. Even some of the guards had cut themselves in on the deal.

It was Barney Coy's job to be the distributor.

He kept track of who was reading what, so you just give your old ones to Barney and he'd bring you back a new batch of the ones you wanted. He always done this chore right after lunch, when the cells was open and the inmates out on their jobs. You just stacked the ones you was through with on your bunk and Barney, he'd make the shuffle.

So Barney knowed, when he started his rounds that afternoon, that the guard in the top gun gallery had been itching to get the final installment of a continued story he was reading.

Dutch Joe Cretzer had ducked out of line and stashed himself under a stairway, right by the kitchen door, when the lines marched out that day. He wouldn't be missed for quite a while, because everybody had been tallied when they fell in.

Marvin Hubbard was in his cell, right across "Broadway."

I was in the kitchen with four inmates assigned to K.P. I could practically smell the shape-up all over the place. So I kept pretty well up toward the kitchen door, with one eye peeled for the balloon to go up.

That's where I was at when I seen Barney pick up his magazines and start out.

Barney climbed up to the top-deck gallery and tapped on the glass, flashing the magazines the guard wanted. He passed them through the gun port and they chatted a minute. The guard, he yawned and stretched and looked around down below. The one floor guard that was left had locked up the main door, but hadn't yet sent the key back up on the string. He was busy for a minute some place, so the gallery guard tucks his magazines under his arm and heads out across the catwalk for Isolation. That still left the other

gallery guard down below, but he couldn't see what was going on above him.

The derrick was over out of the way, close enough so Barney could jump over from it to the top of the gun gallery and haul one of them bar spreaders with him. Soon as the gun gallery guard was out of sight, Barney done just that. He sprung a couple of bars far enough so he could drop through into the gallery from the top. They had been doing some electrical work up there. He come up with a piece of this here conduit pipe—lead cable, sort of—in his fist. Just like a big sap. Then he tapped twice on the bars leading down to the second deck.

That was a signal the gallery guards had between them. When they heard that tapping, they come out on the catwalk to see what the other guy wanted.

Barney was waiting on the catwalk when the lower-deck guard popped out in answer to the taps. He let him have it with the pipe.

Meantime, down below on "Broadway," Marvin and Dutch Joe rushed the floor guard when he come back from whatever errand he'd been on. Marvin had a shiv he'd sneaked out of the kitchen. They put the shiv on the floor guard's throat and backed him in an open cell. There they frisked him and lifted his keys. He had a big ring of keys in his coat pocket and they taken the ring. Then they locked him into the cell with his own keys. This guard's name was William Miller, but he wasn't no kin to the deputy, that I knowed of.

It was all done quicker than you can tell it. There was some guys watching from their cells—guys who was deadlocked when the line went out. And I was watching, through the kitchen door. But nobody said a word. It all happened without a sound.

While Cretzer and Hubbard was working on the floor guard, Coy jumped back over the guard he'd knocked down and grabbed the first guns he could reach in the gallery—

a rifle and a .45 automatic. He stuffed some clips of shells into his shirt and come racing down the stairs to where the other boys was.

"Gimme them keys," he said to Cretzer. "We got to have help with that derrick."

Barney grabbed the ring of keys and run to a row of cells where four guys was locked in. But Barney couldn't find the right keys for the cells. He didn't wait. He come running back to Joe and Marvin, right outside the kitchen door. He handed the pistol and a handful of shell clips to Cretzer.

"No time to fool with them locks," Barney told the others. "Got to change the plan. The derrick's too heavy for just us three. Unlock the main door and we'll shoot our way through the yard."

"Where's the key?" Cretzer said.

"Didn't you grab it off the floor guard? It didn't go back up on the string."

"It wasn't in his pocket with the others," Marvin said.

"Find it!" Barney said. "I'll go up into the kitchen and nail Big Donkey. Then we'll take the yard."

Big Donkey was a big slow-moving guard assigned to my kitchen. He always set way in the back at a desk, mostly reading or maybe grabbing forty winks.

Barney come charging up to the kitchen door, that there rifle held down along his leg. I was just inside the door, keeping my head down and doing my work.

"Where's Big Donkey?" Barney hissed to me.

"Right back where he always sets," I whispered back. "But don't start nothing in here."

"Well, I'm going to take him," Barney said. "Stand clear."

"If you're going to take him," I said, "this ain't no place for me!"

So I ducked behind the ranges and taken a look out the window to see had a rumble started stirring in the yard.

Big Donkey seen me moving and hollered, "What the hell's going on?"

"Plenty!" I said, and ducked behind a steam table just as Big Donkey started up out of his chair and seen Barney in the doorway. Barney throwed down with the rifle. Big Donkey skidded to a stop and heisted his hands.

"Don't kill me!" he pleaded. "I never done nothing to you."

Barney prodded him with the rifle.

"Git on out there and into one of them cells," he said.

You ever hear a man hollering under his breath? Well, that's the way the both of them sounded. Hoarse and low-toned, like dogs growling. Big Donkey was afraid to yell, for fear Barney would kill him on the spot. Barney was afraid to raise his voice for fear they'd hear him in the yard.

Right then, Dutch Joe showed in the door, the .45 in his hand. His face was drawed into a snarl that made him look like a trapped, wild animal.

"Lock this bastard up with the floor guard," Barney said, pushing Big Donkey over to Cretzer with the muzzle of the rifle.

"Where's that main door key?"

"Miller said he slipped it into his hip pocket when he locked up after the line," Cretzer growled. "We missed it when we frisked him."

"Then get it now!" Barney snarled. "We're getting deader every second!"

"He says he flushed it down the toilet after we throwed him in the cell," Joe said.

Barney went into a wild fit of swearing. I thought for a second him and Joe was going into it right there, and to hell with the break. But Barney cooled down almost as fast as he had flipped off.

"Get rid of this bird," he said, jabbing Big Donkey again

with the rifle. "Got to get them guys out of Isolation. We got to have more help. We'll grab the arsenal and arm everybody!"

Well, there hadn't yet been a full five minutes pass, I guess, since it all begun. Them four convicts on K.P. had all dove for cover when Barney showed up with the gun. They was peering out from under tables and behind the iceboxes.

"You can't make it, Barney!" I called out. "Them locks in Isolation are all electric. They work with buttons up in the gun gallery."

"I know my business!" Barney said. And with that he went charging out to the gun gallery again.

That's where things really begin to foul up.

I guess Barney punched all the buttons there was in the gallery, trying to get Cellblock D open. But he didn't know that before the buttons would work, the armory had to be called to turn on the juice. If the buttons was punched before a call was made, a red light went on at the armory.

That's what happened. The red lights must have started blinking like mad in there. That was the first that any officials knowed that something was wrong.

That was when the phone started ringing at the floor-guard desk, out in the cellhouse.

I got up off the floor and told them K.P.'s to keep their heads down.

Phones was beginning to ring all over the place—gun gallery, cellhouse, even in the kitchen. Then I heard some shouting begin out in the yard. Guards. The guard captain was yelling orders, then countermanding them the next breath.

I taken a look out into the cellhouse. Marvin and Joe had run over by the main door. Marvin had a shiv and

that there lead-pipe club. Joe had the .45. They pulled up and stopped, one on each side of the door, just as it swung open.

It was the mail censor and the record clerk. They happened to be the nearest ones to the cellhouse when the whoop-up started in the yard. They had keys to all the blocks, so they come charging in.

Well, they run square into the arms of Marvin and Dutch Joe. Marvin got his shiv across the throat of the record clerk and Joe hit the censor over the head with the pistol. Barney had joined them by then, so the three cons dragged the two officers to the nearest cell and throwed them in.

By that time, the guard lieutenant and the steward was at the door. They got the same treatment—shoved into the cell right on top of the other two.

I sneaked a look out the window and the yard was a mess. Guards was herding inmates right and left—out to work, anywheres away from the cellhouse. The guard captain was running for the cellhouse, just as I looked out the window. I ducked across and looked into the cellhouse again, just as the captain come charging through the door. Marvin let him have it with the club. He went down cold.

Barney grabbed the captain by the feet and dragged him to the cell. Before they dumped him in, Barney tore off the captain's uniform and put it on. Then they throwed him in with the others, unconscious and just in his shorts.

The phones was still ringing, and they wasn't getting no answers over at the armory. They seen guards and officers running in, but nobody come back out. They knowed by then that something was bad wrong.

Meanwhile, Barney had run back to Isolation—D-Block —to try to spring Whitey Franklin. One tier of D-Block had electric locks, but the other had just ordinary locks. They could get them open, but they couldn't get to Whitey, who was behind them electric locks. They had promised

themselves they would take Whitey with them on the crash-out, but they never got to him.

Sam Shockley was in that other tier. They got him out. And Blackie Thompson and Clarence Carnes—four or five of them there in Isolation. Carnes was one of the youngest guys on The Rock. Only nineteen when he got there, but he had a long record of kidnapping and murder, down in Oklahoma. He was pulling ninety-nine years.

Well, like I said, they got the guys out of Isolation. But they still didn't have enough guns to go around. There was plenty of ammunition in the gun gallery, but no more guns. The others tore up stuff for clubs, and there was a shiv or two sprung up.

Just about then, the deputy—old E. J. Miller—started in. He come up through the cutoff that splits the cellblocks. He seen Hubbard and stopped. He hollered at Marvin to surrender or they'd all be killed. Marvin didn't have no gun, but he hollered back he would see Miller in hell.

But Barney Coy had a gun. Him and Clarence Carnes was ducking through the dining room to find a place to open fire on the tower guards outside, through a window, when the deputy come up the other corridor. Barney throwed down with the rifle just as Marvin was hollering he would see everybody in hell.

When the deputy seen the rifle, he broke and started to run back down the corridor. Barney fired and missed. It was the first shot fired in the riot. Barney steadied the gun and squeezed off another shot. But just as he done it, Clarence Carnes knocked the gun barrel up. That there saved old E. J. Miller's life. Hadn't been for Carnes, Barney would have nailed him sure. The deputy was long gone in the next second back down the corridor he had come through.

Barney whirled on Carnes, yelling and cussing, telling Clarence he was going to kill *him* for blocking that shot at the deputy. They was struggling with the rifle, yelling at each other.

That's when I jumped into the fracas.

I tackled Barney and got the gun down for long enough to get it through his head that killing E. J. Miller would set the whole prison against them. Miller was well liked by almost all the inmates. Barney, he yelled he was going to blow my brains out for butting in.

But I held the gun down long enough for Carnes to break clear and duck into a cell.

"This thing's gone all haywire!" I yelled at Barney. "You ain't going to make it. Quit now, you damn fool, before the big alarm goes and we all get killed."

"Hell with it!" Barney yelled back. "I'm going to make it cost them every life I can. I'm going to kill every man I can see that's wearing a uniform. I ain't got nothing to live for, because they'll kill me now, whatever happens."

He broke free from me and started for the kitchen. I followed him on the run. I knowed there'd been bad blood between Barney and one of them K.P.'s back there—fellow name of Jim Whitmer—and Barney was so crazy wild by then, no telling what might happen. Things was bad enough as they was, without a civil war breaking out among the inmates, too.

I got Barney by the collar and throwed him against one of the iceboxes.

"Do what you want to, but leave us be in here!" I yelled at him. "In about two minutes there'll be shooting all over the place. We don't want none of it in here if we can help it. The five of us don't want no part of this crazy caper!"

It was then the big siren went off. Them two shots Barney fired at the deputy convinced them at the armory that it wasn't no minor squabble going on in the cellhouse. They'd held off on the siren because they didn't want to spook everybody up around the Bay, if it turned out to be something they could handle and keep covered up.

But them gunshots changed the picture. You don't fool around when you hear them, inside a stir.

When the big siren went, Barney run to a kitchen window. He poked out the glass with the rifle barrel and opened up blind on the nearest gun tower. He taken a couple of potshots and the guard dove for it—right for the floor and out of Barney's line of fire. Barney run to another window and cut loose at the next tower.

It was then they started shooting back. And it was my kitchen they started in on, because that's where the shots had come from.

Meantime, when the big siren started to wail, them cons in the cellhouse went plumb wild.

I heard Dutch Joe yelling and cursing out there.

"Kill every son of a bitch in that cell!" he was yelling. "Cut their throats! There ain't going to be no witnesses."

I had started back from the cellhouse on the run when bullets from the towers begin cutting through the kitchen. But I pulled up at the door when I heard Joe blowing his top. I seen him run to the cell where William Miller—the first guard that was jumped—and them others was locked in.

Cretzer pulled down with the .45 and emptied it into the cell. Then he rammed in another clip and emptied again. I guess he figured he'd butchered them all, right there. But the only one he killed that time was William Miller. One shot hit the guard captain in the chest and some others was wounded pretty bad, though. A couple of them dove for the floor when Cretzer opened up. They played dead and saved their lives.

Meantime, Hubbard had found the right keys and let them others out of deadlock. But they just run for other cells and ducked under the bunks, out of line of the bullets that was coming through the kitchen door.

By that time I had moved on into the cellblock to get out of the fire pouring into the kitchen from out at the towers. But just as I got clear of that, some guards on the outside

got a ladder up to one of the cellhouse windows and was spraying "Broadway" with machine-gun bullets from the opposite direction. I was trapped. I ducked down under a steel stairway and was safe for a few minutes. My crew was trapped too, in the far end of the kitchen, by that other fire from the outside.

I was laying on the floor under the stairway when I seen Sam Shockley, Hubbard and Cretzer come edging around the other side of the block. They'd got Shockley out of D-Block. Carnes come into sight a minute later. Then Blackie Thompson.

Sam and Marvin had knives in each hand. Dutch Joe had the pistol. Cretzer was shooting at the skylight. There was guards all over the roof, and every time one of them would try to get a gun through the skylight, Cretzer would let go with a burst from the .45 and drive them back. Barney had come back into the cellhouse and was doing the same thing with the rifle. The guards on the roof lost interest in them skylights, quick.

My ringside seat was getting too hot for comfort in there. More and more of them was getting ladders to the windows and the cross fire from the machine guns was getting so thick I couldn't see where it could keep on missing me much longer. The cons Marvin had let out of the cells had hit for D-Block, where they thought it was safer. They was out of the picture for the rest of the riot.

So I ducked back into the kitchen, just in time to catch the first of the tear gas.

They begun pouring gas shells through the windows fast as they could fire. It got so you couldn't breathe or see. Me and the four K.P.'s got down on the floor and put our mouths right down to the concrete. There was about two inches of air that was breathable, right next to the floor.

Every time one of us tried to get a window open, the guards on the wall would cut loose with a machine gun.

Finally, I hung a white coat on a broom handle and held it up to enough windows, one after another, so they shot most of them out. That cleared up the air a little.

The first hand grenades begin coming in about sundown. The blasts liked to knocked us deaf.

They had landed a bunch of marines—they was only recently back from the South Pacific—and got them up on the wall. They begun throwing hand grenades down into the cellblocks, through the shot-out windows. At the same time, they was pouring machine-gun fire through every window they could get a ladder up to.

Barney was up on top of one of the cell tiers and Cretzer was on the second tier at the other end. That way, the two of them controlled the main door from both sides. The guards tried to storm them doors, but was pinned back each time. They give it up and started beating holes through the roof. It was getting dark inside the cellhouse, and they started using flares and searchlights.

Things got spooky as the night went on and them flares kept popping up and dying out. And that worked to the advantage of the mutineers. All the floodlights was on the outside and anybody showed in a window opening, they was silhouetted targets. But they couldn't get a good sight on the boys inside.

Things went on that way until about eleven o'clock that night. Barney hollered down and asked did I have any coffee. I always had some on the back of the range, so I carried him up some in a gunboat—that's one of them big, gallon-sized tin cans that fruit and other things come in, there in the kitchen. I crawled around, in between that gunfire, with the coffee and give some to Barney and everyone else I could reach. Marvin really needed some. He didn't have no gun and he'd been climbing around windows like an ape, trying to get in stabbing distance of storming parties.

The first place the guards really busted through and taken over was the visitors' room.

That was at the back of the cellblock, right next to where it opened out in the armory. This visitors' room at Alcatraz had a big sheet of bulletproof glass between the visitors' and the cons' side. The visitor spoke to the con through a tube. There was no way things could be passed through.

Well, the guards knocked this glass out with sledge hammers and got stationed up there in the visitors' room with rifles. That give them clear command of "Broadway." That's when the mutineers taken to the cell tiers. "Broadway" was sure death, then, except along the edge closest to my kitchen.

A little bit after I went around with the coffee, another bunch of guards got into the back end of the cellhouse. And while the others covered them from the visitors' room, they drug them wounded guards out of that first cell. Barney and Cretzer kept exchanging fire and another guard was wounded. But they got all the others out of the cell. I couldn't tell from where I was watching how many was dead. Looked like all was. Turned out only one was killed there—William Miller.

Then they tried to storm the gun gallery, which would give them complete command of the cellhouse. A guard by the name of Stites led the storming party. Before that flurry ended, Stites was shot and fatally wounded. They said later he was shot by Barney Coy. But the way he was wounded it would have been impossible for him to be hit by bullets from either Cretzer or Coy. It was either a ricochet or a stray bullet from the cross fire of his own party somehow that got Stites. But they pinned it on Barney and Joe later and let it go at that. Barney and Joe was dead by then, so what the hell.

They drug Stites back out and didn't try any more storming. But they tear-gassed and grenaded us all that night.

It was not until next morning that they brought in the bazookas. From then on it was Katy-bar-the-door.

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The men that was out in the work area and the yard when the shooting started, they had to stay out there all night.

They was herded over to one end of the island and bedded down on the ground, with guards standing over them with machine guns. And the guards had a plenty tough time keeping them under control. There was catcalls and a lot of whoop-up going on all night. We could hear it now and then, in spite of all the gunfire.

But there wasn't any breaks. Them cons knowed that the first false move and there'd be slaughter.

Meantime, them boys up in D-Block was getting it from all directions. And they was completely helpless, just like the five of us trapped there in the kitchen. We all knowed that the order had went out to kill every man in the cellhouse, if necessary, to get the riot stopped. But all that first night, none of us inside there got so much as a scratch.

It was a different story, though, when they brought in them bazookas and demolition bombs next morning.

During the night they flew in extra guards from practically every other federal prison in the country—McNeil, Leavenworth, Denver. Everywhere. Still more marines was brought in, too. They got two navy destroyers up—one on

each side of the island. And they even moved a cruiser up so's its guns could be brought to bear if needed.

They was set to wipe out Alcatraz, practically, just to quell three mutineers.

Well, first thing come daylight that next morning, they swarmed over the roof again and begin busting more holes through it, right over the service corridor. They knowed the mutineers was in this service corridor, because that was where the firing was coming from. But they didn't know just who, or how many. So they begin dropping demolition bombs through them holes in the roof.

My kitchen looked like the left-overs from the devil's birthday party by then. We'd stacked up everything we could that was loose—table, garbage cans, cases of canned goods, sacks of flour. Made a sort of dugout. The five of us tried to get behind that stuff and keep out of the way of the flying shrapnel. Bullets had cut through water pipes. Flour sacks had busted. The floor was one big puddle of swill.

When the first of them demolition bombs come through the roof, the blast clean missed Barney and Joe and Marvin.

I could see out around our barricade, and when the smoke and dust settled, I seen the three boys ducking for the tunnel that connected C- and D-Blocks, underground. It was a steel-reinforced concrete tunnel, and even the demolition bombs couldn't faze it.

Just as they ducked into the tunnel, Barney let go a shot —mainly to show them the fight was still on, I guess. So then bombs and bazookas really begin to pour it on. Them bazooka shells cut through the bars and walls of the cell-blocks like they was nothing.

We could hear screaming and yelling up in D-Block, where the guys trapped in there had nothing to protect them but mattresses and was setting helpless. They wasn't even able to see out at what might be coming next.

Meantime, Barney and Cretzer kept sniping away from the mouth of the tunnel, returning the guards' fire every time

there was a letup in the bombing. The guards just *had* to blow them out of that tunnel, or pull them dry of ammunition. But they couldn't get neither job done. Every now and then the guards would try to storm the place. But they would be pinned down and drove back by the fire from the mutineers.

Along about seven in the evening they got the men back in out of the yard.

They couldn't risk trying to hold them another night out in the open. They was right on the edge of a general uprising, and did anything like that bust loose, why, it would have turned into a slaughter pen. Anyways, they got them men inside A-Block, away from the shooting area, and locked them in. The cons was scared, riled up and hungry. That's dynamite, anytime. But they was more scared than anything else. They thought the whole place might go up in flame and smoke any minute. There was shrieking and cursing all night long again.

Along about ten o'clock that second night, I crawled out of the kitchen and on down through the cellhouse so I could get up into the dining hall. There was bulletproof glass in the doors there, and I thought maybe I could get my guys up there and under better cover. At the same time, we'd be able to see better what was going on.

If you're going to die, you might as well see how.

All day and night, the phones had kept ringing, off and on. Turned out, wives of the guards had been trying to get through. Newspaper reporters from the mainland. Everybody. But we just let them ring. Could have been a nice trap, you know. Get a bead on a phone somewheres, then pot-shoot whoever comes to answer it.

Up in the dining hall the telephone was ringing when I crawled around and couldn't see no way they could have a booby trap on that one. So I answered it.

"Who's this?" somebody on the other end wanted to know. It was the deputy. I recognized his voice.

"It's Blackie Audett," I said.

"What in hell you doing in there?"

"Trying to stay alive, along with a few others, sir," I said.

He wanted to know what was what. I didn't spell him out very much, but I told him me and my crew wasn't no part of it. I said I didn't have no idea where the boys was, or who they was, that was doing the shooting.

"I got troubles enough keeping my own hide the way I like it," I said.

I asked the deputy to tell that there army outside to quit shelling the kitchen and Cellblock D.

"There's helpless men in here," I said. "They didn't have nothing to do with the trouble."

The deputy didn't have nothing to say about that.

"I ain't making no promises," he said, "and if you're lying, you ain't going to have no hide left to protect. But I'll believe you for now. You could help us stop this thing, Blackie, if you would."

I told him I was willing to try. It don't give me no pleasure to see people getting killed—me included.

So he asked me could I get down to the far end of the dining hall and shut the other door. That would protect the men in the visiting room. I told him again I was willing to try. I hung up then and looked the deal over. Unless something begin coming to an end soon, I figured, we all would.

With that I dropped down flat on the floor and started crawling toward the other door. But the deputy hadn't told the guards in the visiting room about this deal. So when I come crawling down, they spotted me moving. They opened up on me, and when they did, them bazooka men done the same, aiming blind into the dining hall. I ducked into a corner, but shrapnel come cutting through every which way. That was when I got a hunk of it in my arm that I still carry to this day.

So I just figured then and there that if the deputy wanted

that door closed, he could come down and do it himself. I crawled the hell out, fast. The kitchen looked like the best bet after all. Gunfire was still coming from the tunnel now and then, and as I got back to the other door, I got a glimpse of Barney, crouched behind some blowed-up concrete.

"When you going to quit?" I yelled.

"Never!" he hollered back. "I'm going to make them kill me before I ever lay this gun down."

"Where's Marvin and Joe?" I said.

"I think Joe's dead," Barney said. "I ain't seen nobody else."

Barney looked like a wild beast, crouching there. That there uniform of the guard captain was torn and soaked with blood. He must have been hit in a dozen places. He could hardly crawl.

Well, the gunfire started again. Everything was dark except them portable searchlights they had outside. They kept them blinking on and off, so Barney couldn't shoot them out. They would turn them on a few seconds, then off. Then they would move them before they turned them on again. All other lights in the cellhouse had long before been knocked out by the blasting.

When the shooting started up again, Barney ducked back to the tunnel. That's the last time I ever seen Barney—alive.

I got back into the kitchen and tried to tie up my arm with strips from a kitchen apron. I'd bled quite a lot and I was a little dizzy. I was so near out on my feet I didn't rightly remember when the firing stopped.

All of a sudden I realized it was quiet. Quiet as a grave.

Then I heard voices and footsteps coming in.

It was the deputy—old E. J. Miller—led the first party in after the shooting stopped. He seen me crawling around in the kitchen and ordered his men to hold fire.

"There's Blackie Audett!" he hollered to the lieutenant that was with him. "Bring him out into the cellhouse. I got some questions I want answered."

Well, the guards they manhandled me a little, on account of they wasn't just sure where I set at in the picture. They hauled me over to the desk. The deputy was shouting orders to a whole army of guards and others who was pouring in by that time. He glanced me over and told the guards that had me to frisk me down. Naturally, I was clean as a whistle —not even a shiv—but they was taking no chances with anybody.

"What's the matter with your arm?" the deputy said.

"Shrapnel," I told him.

"How'd you get it, if you wasn't in the fighting?"

"Trying to shut the dining hall door. Somebody forgot to tell the guards what was doing."

He sort of grinned, quick like. But he froze right back up, in case anybody was watching.

"You need a doctor?" he said. "Hospital?"

"All I need is some sleep and some food—and a good long drag on a cigarette," I told him.

He tossed me a cigarette and a match.

"Where are they?" he said.

"Where are what?"

"You know who I mean," the deputy said. "Coy and Cretzer and Hubbard. And them others out of Isolation."

"I ain't got the slightest idea," I told him. "I wasn't no part of this thing. And my time was plumb full staying that way. Since there ain't no shooting, I suppose they're all dead."

"All? How many? There must have been a dozen, from the fight that was put up."

"So far as I know, there was three," I said. "And two guns. Them guys that come down from D-Block run back up there, or some place, when them bazookas cut loose."

Well, the deputy he just couldn't believe that. He hollered

to the guards on the tiers to drag out everybody there was in Isolation, dead or alive. Meantime, other guards had crawled down in that there tunnel where I'd last seen Barney Coy duck out of sight. They dragged him out.

Barney still had on the captain's coat—what was left of it. It was shot so full of holes and caked with blood you could hardly tell what it was. He must have died soon after that last time he yelled at me. He was already stiffening up so bad they couldn't stretch his body out on the floor. They just dumped him there by the desk.

He still had that rifle gripped in his fist. They could hardly pry his dead fingers loose from around the barrel.

They found Joe Cretzer setting up with his back to a corner shot full of holes. He still had that .45 in his hand. He had been dead for hours, I guess. *Rigor mortis* had set in and he was still in that doubled-up sitting position when they drug him out.

Marvin Hubbard was still bleeding a little when they hauled his body out. He was evidently the last of them to die.

"Bring me out six more!" the deputy hollered. "There must be at least that many more dead ones."

But there wasn't any. They brought out Sam Shockley, but he was very much alive. They hauled Clarence Carnes out. He was wounded, but enough alive to rage and swear at the guards. He was off his nut and they taken him straight to the hospital. They pulled Blackie Thompson out and handcuffed him up with Shockley.

All of them come out of D-Block, where they had been hiding behind mattresses and dodging bullets that was coming at them out of the dark. They was all about off their rockers and it taken some time to quiet the place down. Finally, they run me off to my cell and told me I could go to sleep. I still had on what was left of my cook's clothes. I had put them on three days before. I just left them on when I dove for my bunk.

Sam Shockley had been in Isolation a flat year—for stealing a steak.

He'd been working in the kitchen and he swiped a steak. So for that they throwed him in D-Block, without even cigarettes, for a year. But they had a far more serious charge to hang around his neck that day after the riot.

They charged Sam Shockley with conspiracy to murder. The warden charged that him and Blackie Thompson conspired with Barney, and that as a result, Guards Miller and Stites was killed. Whatever he done later, Sam couldn't have conspired with nobody. He had been locked up in a soundproof cellblock for a year. There was no way anybody could have got any word to him, nor him to them.

Same way with Blackie Thompson.

But both was tried and convicted for conspiracy to murder. And both was sentenced to death. I testified for Sam, and also for Thompson and Carnes. I said in my testimony that I had knowed by the grapevine that a break was coming and also knowed the prison officials was wise to that fact. I said I'd even heard guards smarting off about it—how they wasn't worried, because it was impossible for anyone to get away with it.

Anyways, nothing come of my testimony. They executed Sam and Blackie. Sam, he was a little off, but he was pretty well liked at Alcatraz. It didn't set too well in the cellblocks for a long time, when he was executed for what most of the inmates figured was a rigged-up charge.

But I guess they had to get even with somebody. Two guards had been killed, and fourteen wounded. Three convicts had been killed. There had been more than ten thousand rounds of ammunition fired—just to kill three blood-crazy cons.

When things got leveled off that night after the shooting stopped, they brought in the newspaper reporters.

They showed them how Barney got into the gun gallery.

They showed them the cells where the guards had been shot. They showed them reporters a lot of things.

But them prison authorities never showed them the other side of it—the places where they'd fired hundreds of rounds into D-Block, where there was only helpless men crouching behind mattresses; the places where they'd dropped grenades and demolition bombs; the kitchen, where other helpless people had been trapped by the heaviest sort of gunfire there could be, outside of war.

Anyways, there was a lot of stories wrote and told later about that 1946 riot at The Rock. But me, I got my own story of it. I seen it—all of it.

I never asked for no consideration for anything I done or failed to do in that there ruckus. I didn't get none. I didn't expect none. That's the way things went at Alcatraz, and all you could do was just sweat it out—unless you was like Barney Coy. And Hubbard. And Dutch Joe Cretzer. If you was, it was almost a dead immortal cinch your wind-up would be like theirs.

That's one of the things I learned in my twelve years at Alcatraz—there ain't no way to beat The Rock and live. And there ain't no use figuring or looking for one.

There just ain't no way.

23

It was more than a year after the Big Riot that the time come for them to decide if I should be paroled. I'd pulled two-thirds of the eighteen years my sentences had finally simmered down to.

So, on August 15, 1947, almost exactly twelve years from the time there in Omaha when the judge sent me to The Rock, they gave me a conditional release. That meant I was on parole, and if I violated any of the conditions, I would have to do the rest of my time—three years and 242 days.

That's what I had hanging over my head when I left The Rock.

I had come into a small legacy while I was pulling my time there. Besides, I still had the four G-notes I'd hid in my belt. Altogether, my bank roll was about $16,000 when I hit The Outside, after all them years.

Things was all changed since the old days I last knowed, in the 1930's. A whole war had come and gone. People was busy doing things I never seen and only read about in books.

But they still was eating. And cookery was the best trade I knowed.

So I went up to Hermiston, Oregon, near where I was born, and bought me a restaurant. It got off on the right foot, so I bought a second one near Umatilla, a short distance away. I got me a car and rented a house. My mother was getting pretty well along in years, so I brought her on up to my new house and set her up to manage things.

I reported regular to my parole officer and I was doing all right, even if federal agents did keep dropping in at one place or the other every little while with such bad cases of nose trouble they couldn't even cover it up. They just had to keep snooping into the business of Blackie Audett, the ex-con off The Rock.

There was two of them setting at my counter having coffee —for free—when this here Cadillac drove up outside.

I seen who was driving it, and frantically motioned him to go on about his business. It was a guy I knowed out of a mob that had been knocking over banks here and there, from Wyoming to Oregon. He just signaled me he was going to park around the corner, so I slipped out and met him there.

The Cadillac was all sagged down at the back from the heavy weight of something inside. I run over and leaned in at the driver's side.

"Look," I said, "I've knowed you, Bill"—I'll just call him Bill—"from away back. And I like you because you've always been a stand-up guy with me. But please, please, go on the hell away!"

"Why?" Bill said.

"There's feds inside!"

"Find me a cabin," Bill said. "I got to talk with you."

Well, I couldn't turn him down. But at the same time, if them feds seen me talking with a guy like him, why, they'd have my parole yanked in a minute. I taken a fielder's choice and told Bill to drive around to a certain cabin at a court out in back. I told him to keep his head down and I'd see him later.

Back in the restaurant, the feds was just leaving. I waited to be sure they was well on their way, then I ducked back out and met Bill at the cottage. It was then it come to light what was making that Cadillac sag.

The back end was full of money. Sacks of money.

Bill started dragging them out. I stopped him.

"Whatever you got in mind," I said, "forget it. Please just go away."

Bill looked surprised and hurt.

"But I thought you could use this here," he said. "I can't. It's in nickels, dimes and quarters. I got no way to get rid of it. There's about six G's in them sacks."

He went on to tell me it was part of the take from a bank his mob had knocked over awhile before.

"There wasn't no way for us to get rid of it," Bill said. "We would get jumped-up sure with all them coins. But we just didn't want to pitch it out."

"But why me?"

"Well," Bill said, "some of the boys figured you'd been out of circulation a long time and might could use it."

The last thing I needed right then was hot money out of a bank job. I told Bill so, thanked him and finally persuaded him to get going. But I wasn't through with that there money yet.

Bill, he drove on down the line a ways, but he was afraid the police somewheres might get nose trouble about the way his car looked. So he pitched them sacks into a weed patch and drove on to see another guy he knowed. Bill told him where the money was and that he was welcome.

Well, this other fellow was hot, too. He figured and figured, but he couldn't see no way clear to get rid of it. So he come lugging it back up to my place, along with one of them big coin-counting machines and some paper wrappers. He suggested maybe if we could count it and wrap it, I could find some way to trickle it back in circulation.

By that time I was practically off my rocker. I just couldn't keep that there hot money off my back. But I told Bill's friend no sale and he finally left, money-counter and all.

It wasn't too long after that when they nailed me on the very sort of charge I had been trying to avoid. They tried to tie me up with a bank robbery at Athena, Oregon. They didn't say I done it, but they accused me of knowing who did.

They taken me to trial and witnesses come forward with a lot of phony testimony. They said $30—a ten and a twenty—that was identified as part of the Athena loot, had been found in my cash drawer. It could have got there a dozen ways, without me knowing what it was. Plenty of customers pay with tens or twenties.

Then they had testimony that some of the money had been found under a loose board in my kitchen floor. That there floor was concrete, covered with rubber tile.

Anyways, the jury didn't deliberate very long. They acquitted me.

But the feds wasn't satisfied. They'd told me that if I was found not guilty it wouldn't be classed as a violation of the conditions in my Alcatraz release. But as soon as I was acquitted, up they come with a new charge—associating with a man of bad character.

This man didn't have a criminal record and was never arrested. He did have some of the Athena money in his possession for a while, but no charges was brought against him. But still and all, it was ruled I had violated my Alcatraz parole and would have to serve out the rest of my time.

They didn't send me back to The Rock, though. They shipped me off to McNeil Island to do that remaining three years and 242 days.

So there I was, right back where I started in 1926—more than twenty years before. I had been No. 6009 that first time. Nearly 14,000 men had come and gone since them days. I was No. 19982 when I went back.

It was June, 1948—almost exactly fourteen years from the time Johnny Lazia got gunned out—that they sent me to McNeil.

The deputy U. S. marshal taken me in for trial on that there Athena bank charge, he sure wasn't going to take no more chances with Blackie Audett, the escape artist. Maybe a good thing, too.

Anyways, he double-chained me.

They all knowed by that time I could slip handcuffs as easy as you can take off a watch. So this marshal he first cuffed me, then he run a chain through the cuffs, then padlocked the chain around my waist. That method of chaining me has later become known as the "Audett Chain."

The marshal showed it to some of his friends. They had similar chains made and finally it was patented by somebody. It could be used either with or without a padlock. Just as secure either way.

That deputy marshal, he done quite a bit of beefing about being the first man ever to use the chain, and even naming it after me, and still getting beat out of the patent on it.

I never collected no royalties on it, neither.

Clay Tollett was a stick-up man. He was a big operator in more ways than one. Not the least was his heft. He weighed 220 pounds.

That's a lot of man to work into the figuring when a crashout is being plotted.

Clay was as rowdy as he was big. I had knowed him off and on for years. His nickname was Seminole. He was a conman, much as he was a stick-up. And most of all, he was an actor.

He was one of the greatest make-up artists I ever seen. Clay could spend an hour with a make-up kit he always carried in his stuff and you could pass him on the street and never know him. Clay was in his late fifties last time I ever seen him, there on McNeil. But I have seen Clay made

up so he looked like he was ninety. And I've seen him fixed so's he could pass for twenty or so.

He used regular stage stuff. Some of it looked like rubber and some like putty. Once in a while he used a mixture of the two. Sometimes he fixed to look like a Mexican, and he had the lingo to go with it. Other times he was a Negro. And he could switch from that to being a Swede sailor, or a Hunky dockhand, or anything it might be handy to be.

But on the best job I ever seen him pull, the only stuff he used was nerve.

It was not too long after I got back to McNeil—along there in 1948 or 1949 somewheres. I'd been assigned to the cabinet shop—mostly because I was a cook, I suppose. Clay Tollett was working there, too. We was making big desks —some sort of architect's desks with a big heavy oak top and an extra-big kneehole in the middle. They was being used over on the Tacoma side, somewheres.

Well, these here desks was shipped over each morning on a ferry. They was all varnished up and wrapped with paper around the bottom each night, and next morning they was hoisted on a prison truck and taken down to the ferry. There was a kind of a crate or bracing nailed up around the bottom, where that kneehole was, so's to brace it. Then heavy wrapping paper was wound around the whole thing, so it wouldn't get scratched up. That made a place about three foot all around, there in the middle of the desk, that was closed to view with paper everywhere but on the bottom.

It was my job to do the paper wrapping.

Well, the whoop-up was that Clay had noodled himself a crash-out. He figured he could get himself wrapped up in one of them desks and be shipped to Tacoma. From there on out, it would be devil-take-me-by-the-hip-pockets. The only thing, them kneeholes was a mite snug for a man weighing 220. And them crating boards was a little light for the job, too.

Now, I'd been through the Big Riot and everything out

there on The Rock, and I had worked it out so I could do that tag end of it there at McNeil in a breeze—what with my good time and all. So I wasn't going to get myself fouled up at the last minute on some crash-out whoop-up that might go over the moon. But Clay, he was doing enough so he'd wind up dead on the island unless he taken the bit in his teeth—and soon. So I told him it sure wasn't up to me to look if there was something extra in one of them desk kneeholes some morning. My job was only to wrap the paper and gum it up with tape.

At the last minute before the setup was to be sprung, there come a foul-up. Orders come out that the desks would go out that night, instead of in the morning. The desk that Clay was to go out in had been all rigged up, but he couldn't stay scrooched up in that there kneehole during head-count and not knowing what time that night the desks would go out.

So somehow or other, a big electric sander got dropped right on top of that there freshly finished desktop. It gouged a big dent, and the shop foreman was mad as a hornet about it. But there wasn't anything to do but have the night shift refinish it and have it ready for the morning truck.

Next morning it was all ready. Clay all of a sudden disappeared. So I just wrapped the paper around her and told the foreman she was set to go.

They called over a squad of three inmates and two guards to hoist it on the truck. They pulled and hauled, but it was all they could do to lug the desk over by the truck. The guards accused the inmates of dragging their feet, but the guards sure wasn't doing much lifting. They called in three more inmates and they tipped and tilted and shoved that there desk around for ten minutes before they got it on that there truck bed. Them desks was heavy-built, but 220 pounds extra weight is a lot to go unnoticed. But them guards just was so sure the cons was goofing off on the loading job that they never got suspicious.

Any minute, I expected to see Clay come tumbling out, or one of them guards might stoop down low enough to see up through that crating and spot Clay crouching on the boards.

But at last they got her loaded. The truck started moving out, and I quit holding my breath.

They hadn't gone twenty feet when here come the deputy on the run, waving his arms and hollering to the driver to stop. The deputy run right on past the back of the truck and never so much as glanced at the desk setting there. He jumped up in the cab and motioned the driver to pull on to the gate.

I figured the cat was in the paint for sure, and that the deal was to get the truck over by the gun tower before anything was done, just in case Clay might be rodded. But nothing happened at the gate and the truck and desk pulled right on through and down to the ferry landing.

Turned out, all the deputy wanted was a lift into Tacoma. He wasn't wise to nothing.

Well, Clay stayed in that desk all the while it was being unloaded and put into a storeroom, over in Tacoma. Then, after everybody was gone, he just busted through the paper and was in the clear. That was the word that come back to us later on the grapevine.

Clay, he was on the lam about two years after that. Until they killed him down around Redding, California, while he was heisting a bank.

I piled up some good time, and they let me out of McNeil in 1950.

I went back to Umatilla, but my business was all shot. I'd had to default on notes and things while I was in McNeil, so creditors had grabbed off my restaurants.

I was burning mad at the way things had turned out for me. My money was all gone and my business and everything. I just wanted to get even with somebody, no matter who.

So I went over to Pendleton, where there was a safe I knowed about. I had the thing open, but hadn't took nothing out, when the police jumped me up right there inside the place. They had me, cold turkey, but I hadn't stole —only broke in.

They charged me with burglary and I was convicted. But they found me guilty of larceny instead of burglary, which carries a heavier penalty in Oregon. They give me seven and a half years.

Now I'd read the indictment against me before my trial, and I seen on it plain as day that the charge was burglary, which carries five years. But somehow or another the wording on that indictment got changed—to read larceny. So I come up with a sentence half again as stiff as I really had coming.

But be that as it may, they taken me to Salem and put me in Oregon State Penitentiary—Convict No. 21122. I was forty-eight years old, and I'd spent plenty of time in plenty of prisons in the thirty years that had come and went since I drawed my first rap, up there in Macleod, Alberta.

This time it was the end of the lam. But it sure wasn't the end of them little things that always seemed to follow me, like flies, into penitentiaries—strikes, crash-outs, bloodshed.

24

There's no telling, the sort of things happen to you in a penitentiary. Pretty near everything did to me, one time or another. But probably the most unexpected one was getting elected to public office. At least it was public enough, even if the office part was a cell.

I never campaigned. I even declined the nomination. But I was elected by a vote of nearly twenty-to-one.

I was elected chairman of a committee of inmates, set up on orders of regular state officials, to try and keep a riot from exploding.

There was a big strike simmering up soon after I processed in at Oregon State Penitentiary. The prison authorities was trying to cool it down in the good old-fashioned way—clubs and cuss words. Brutality and bloodshed. That's the way things was at Oregon State Prison a few years back. A hundred years behind the time, that's what that there institution was.

The strike had been called mainly because of brutality in the first place. And the way they taken to try and settle it just made things worse. They even called in the state

troopers. They picked fourteen of us—just out of a hat, I guess—and throwed us into solitary—as agitators, they said. We wasn't agitating nothing. At least, I wasn't. But they pulled us out of our bunks and just hustled us off.

Well, the deputy come down and I told him I was plumb tired of getting rousted around for things I didn't have no part of. But if that's the way it was in this here stir, I told him, I was sure going to see to it I taken an active part from there on out.

That should have drawed me a punch in the nose. But it didn't. Instead, the deputy told me orders had come through that a committee of inmates was to be elected by popular vote. The committee would set down with prison officials and try to work out ways to stop the strike. He was frank to say the state officials was pretty much upset. And so was the public. The strike had been going on for several days, and things was beginning to get ticklish.

I'd been assigned to the kitchen awhile before, and it was in the kitchen that the worst trouble come up. The crew in there, they just refused to work, and set down. That made it bad all over, because no food could be prepared. And hungry cons can get out of hand mighty quick. The strike spread all over the place, and the inmates refused to work unless they was fed.

So, after that there talk the deputy had with me and them others, the prison officials done something I never seen before in all the penitentiaries I've been in. They called a general meeting in the main dining room and herded 1250 cons into a sort of rogues'-gallery convention. The deputy presided, and guards was there to see nobody made no false moves.

Well, there was to be nominations and then run-off voting. Somebody nominated me. But I got up and made a little talk, saying I was new around the place and there was old-timers that knowed a lot more about conditions and other matters that caused the strike. So I declined the nomination.

But several others got up and nominated me again, so finally I agreed to go on the ballot.

I drawed 1180, some-odd, of the 1250 votes that was cast for chairman of the committee.

One of the worst things about the strike was that while most of the men had nothing to eat, the ringleaders and agitators who had knowed what was coming had stocked up their cells with food in advance. Things was so slipshod at the time it wasn't hard to do. So them really most to blame had plenty and the rest had nothing.

As chairman of the committee, I told the deputy I thought the first thing ought to be done was get everybody fed. The mess was then in its fifth day and some of the cons was getting desperate. The inmates at the meeting backed me up. Enough of them offered to volunteer for kitchen duty to make a crew, provided, they told the deputy, I was placed in charge of it.

The deputy agreed to that. He also agreed to a motion by the men that I should be sole negotiator to represent them in talks with the prison authorities about settling the strike. I wasn't too hot for that.

"I didn't start this thing," I told the deputy, "and I ain't going to take the responsibility of settling it."

"They're going to wreck the place," the deputy said, "if something ain't done soon."

"Leave 'em wreck it, then," I said. "I've seen 'em wreck better places than this."

"We have the word it's going to happen tonight," he said. "But they're willing to hold off if you'll talk to them and tell them what to do. You're the only man in the institution they have any faith in. You're the only man can stop them. Even the Governor's been told that!"

Well, that was about the hottest spot I'd been in since the Big Riot blowed there on The Rock, in 1946. I wasn't hot about sticking my neck out, when I had nothing to do with the strike in the first place.

So I told the deputy, "I won't talk to no hungry men. You order them fed and I'll go around and talk with them and see what they really want."

"The orders are that they'll not be fed until they go back to work," he said.

"Then," I said, "them orders mean the place'll be turned inside out by morning! You know and I know they can break loose out of B-Block and C-Block, easy. If that happens, hell will pop."

Upshot was that the deputy taken me into the warden's office and him and the warden went over it all again, with me setting in on it. Finally, the warden called the Governor —he was Douglas McKay, who later became Secretary of the Interior—and they agreed to let me go ahead and feed the men, providing I would talk to them and try to hold down violence.

"You'll have to guarantee there will be no uprising and wrecking the place," the warden said.

"I can guarantee nothing," I said, "but I'll give it a try."

So I fed the men—their first food in five days.

Then I went around inside and talked with a lot of them and they tossed the buck right back at me. They said they'd accept any terms I could work out with the officials. It would all be up to me.

Well, that's quite a load, any way you look at it. If I had to make a deal that wouldn't be too much better than the conditions them inmates had struck over, why, likely some edgy guy might flip off and let me have a shiv between the shoulder blades. And the riot would be only postponed.

On the other hand, if I stood my ground and demanded more than the prison officials would stand still for, why, my neck would be way out with them, too. I could have a mighty rough seven years to look forward to, if they figured I was just another jailhouse lawyer fronting for a bunch of cons.

But I finally sent word out I was ready to talk to the warden again.

He was there. And the Governor's secretary was there. And also a member of the Board of Control. It was getting late and they all figured the ruckus might flare up any minute. So did I—in spite of them cons promising me they would go along with whatever I could work out.

It was about as touchy as that there day at Alcatraz when Marvin Hubbard asked me to swap shifts—I knowed things was getting down to minutes.

The warden and the Governor's secretary told me to get on the bull horn—that's the general public address system, with speakers in all parts of the prison—and tell the men about the terms that had been worked out. It was going to be take it or leave it. There would be a new warden appointed within thirty days. One of the guards that had been a chief cause of the trouble would be transferred to other duty, away from the men. Two inmates who had been put in solitary unjustly because of the strike would be took out and returned to their regular detail. In return for that, all the men was to go back to work in the morning. Them was the terms. And I okayed them, for our side of the table.

Well, I sure was sweating when I set down to that there microphone in the warden's office. The deputy flipped the switch that turned on the bull horn.

I said my piece. There was complete silence all over the prison. The officials stood there, practically holding their breath. Then it come.

Somebody way over in C-Block started to applaud. They all taken it up and begin to chant, "Hooray for Blackie! We want to work! We want to work!"

The Governor's secretary shook my hand. So did the warden and the rest of them. The strike was over.

They made me steward of the kitchen the next day. Not just head cook. Steward. The job usually held by a civil employee.

Everything was in a hell of a mess in that there eating

department. There was no management at all. They had forty or more inmates working in there, all at the same time. Not a one of them knowed what the next man was doing, much less what he was supposed to do himself. They just passed the buck from one to the other, and almost nothing got done.

The kitchen there at Oregon prison run twenty-four hours a day. They was feeding seventeen or eighteen chow lines every two turns of the clock. So there was a line almost every hour. I put the kitchen on a three-shift system, first thing I did. But that meant I would have to have twenty-five more men or so, or the whole thing would slide right back into the mess that had caused the strike. I told the deputy that's what I would have to have. He said no sale.

I'd been watching them kids—the juveniles who was tossed right into the general prison population. They didn't assign them no work and them kids was pretty wild. They'd gang up and pester the guards. The guards would take it for a while, then tempers would snap and there'd be trouble. Then it would start all over again someplace else.

So I went to the deputy and suggested he put all them kids to work in my kitchen. The deputy just laughed.

"You can't get five cents' worth of work out of all of them," he said. "They won't do a lick, because they know they don't have to, unless they volunteer. Who's going to make them work?"

"Nobody," I said. "Nobody can *make* them do nothing. But there's another way."

I told the deputy and the guard captain that if they'd fix it so I could meet with them boys, I'd sell them my idea. So they let me talk to them kids. All I told them was this:

"Look. You boys know me. You know I'm an old-timer and been around places like this before most of you was born. I know how you feel about guards, but I don't think you feel that way about me."

The kids begin shifting around, uneasy like, figuring what

kind of a phony whoop-up this was going to turn out to be. I went right on.

"Trouble is, you ain't got nothing to keep you busy. Now, if I put you to work in the kitchen, and fix it so's all your orders come straight from me, and nobody else, will you work?"

A big redheaded kid who was sort of the leader looked me all over, suspicious like. Then he said, "You really mean it, Blackie? You'll be the boss? We'd be working for another con, and not some guard that don't know nothing but a billy club?"

"That's exactly the way it'd be," I told him. "The deputy's told me I can have the whole bunch of you. If you pitch in with me and work, I'll learn you all a useful trade."

Well, that's the way it worked out. Right at that meeting, I got a piece of paper and every one of them kids signed up his name and number as a volunteer for kitchen duty. That was the first time in the history of the institution that kids had been given a chance to work and learn something, besides how to graduate into full-scale criminals. Inside two weeks I had, I'll bet, the best kitchen crew in any institution in the country. We was guarded, of course, but did a guard see one of the boys violating a rule, he come to me about it. Then I got my boys to recommend a punishment. They didn't want to lose them jobs, so there wasn't very many serious violations.

Governor McKay, he commuted my sentence from seven-and-a-half down to five years.

He said my part in quelling that strike trouble, plus my working out jobs for the kids, deserved it. So, in January, 1952, he commuted my term. That made me eligible for parole within about a year.

Meantime, a new warden come in and there was some big changes made around the prison. I stayed on as steward until they found a civilian employee that suited them. Then they transferred me out of the main-line kitchen and put me

in charge of the guards' kitchen, outside the walls. That's a pretty big step to take with a guy whose reputation for thirty years was mostly one escape after another.

But they done it, and I played out the hand. I wasn't so much as once called on the carpet. My parole come through in April, 1953.

So, after more than thirty years of getting in, getting out, getting caught and put back in, I was on The Outside.

I had friends—on both sides of the prison bars—and some of them on The Outside got me lined up with a good, respectable job. I was made steward at a club.

There was a safe there at the club, and usually it had a pretty good little bundle of money in it—to pay the bills and all. Part of my job was to pay the bills. Them people trusted me—Blackie Audett—enough so they even give me the combination to that safe!

Funny thing. I didn't need that combination, no more than nothing. It was easier for me to open the safe the other way when a bill was to be paid, than to remember where I'd put the paper with the combination on it. I got a way that can give me the combination to any safe. But I think I'll just let that there secret die with me, some day.

Anyways, that money in the safe at the club was never so much as one nickel short, all the time I was there.

Well, that there is the story of Blackie Audett, the bank robber. That there's the full rap sheet—the parts you won't find on my criminal record.

There's probably them that feel I never done much in the lifetime that I drawed. The things I done never amounted to much of anything, you might say. Some of the things that happened to me maybe was a little different than usually happen to people. I'm not too proud of them, and I'm not too ashamed. No use to be either way. But I'd give everything I've ever owned and everything I ever hope to

own if I hadn't gone on that linemen's party on New Year's Eve, 1916. If I'd only stayed with Dolly that night. That was my first big mistake.

Still, you can't never pull any of it back and work it over, like somebody might tell you it should have been.

I've knowed a lot of good people that was looked on as bad men of the worst kind. Same time, I've knowed some bad ones that had mighty fancy reputations among their fellow citizens. They all simmer down to about the same size, do you watch them close enough and long enough.

I done plenty of both. I had to keep my eyes peeled to stay alive. And if sometimes people had trouble keeping me where I would stay put, why, that was their lookout. I hope I never made people too much trouble, though. I always had more than enough of my own to take care of.

Anyways, if a heister gets along toward sundown and is still alive, it's time for him to throw away his gun. Maybe he should have throwed it away when he first picked it up. But if he didn't, like I didn't, and it's getting along toward sundown for him, he better pitch it then. He can't win singlehanded, even if he thought he could back there when he was young. There's too many other guns. And like always, all of them are aimed at him. Come along sundown, first thing he knows he can't see them and duck any more, like he used to do back then.

So, when the time comes for Blackie Audett to process in at wherever he is going some day, he will warn the man in charge to keep an eye peeled. There's got to be a first time for everything—even if it's a crash-out from the stir where the warden might have horns and a tail.

HEWITT, ESTEP & SORENSEN
ATTORNEYS AT LAW
180 NORTH COMMERCIAL STREET
SALEM, OREGON

R. HEWITT
RLIN ESTEP
N V. SORENSEN

June 14, 1954

William Sloane Associates, Inc.
425 Fourth Avenue
New York 16, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

Since for all intents and purposes RAP SHEET ends in April 1953, a brief summary of the events that followed may be of interest to the reader.

It was on Monday morning, April 27, 1953, two days after his parole from prison, that Blackie Audett came to our offices and began to write his life story. During the two years we awaited his release from prison, we completed a large part of the study and investigation that must precede the publication of a story such as his. The foundation work thus done, with enthusiasm and sincerity that matched his phenomenal mind and memory, and doubtless reflected an understanding and a realization that he was writing far more than just his life story, he pursued the task to the limit of his endurance.

By the first of July the original manuscript was finished and early in September he entered into negotiations with Sloane for its publication. The hope, the dream and the vision was obvious upon his countenance when about six weeks later Sloane agreed to publish the work. However, the contract was not actually signed until December 7, 1953, in Portland, Oregon. Three days before the Christmas of 1953, his parole having been revoked, he was taken back to the Oregon State Penitentiary with about 2½ years of his sentence remaining.

Blackie was greatly dejected by this turn of events, for much work remained to be done on the manuscript. It seemed for a time that the story of his life might end untold. Through the splendid and considerate co-operation of Warden Clarence T. Gladden, however, the work was finished without delay.

Blackie has asked us to convey to you and to the reader his appreciation and his best regards.

Sincerely,

HEWITT, ESTEP & SORENSEN

By Merlin Estep
MERLIN ESTEP

ME/ald