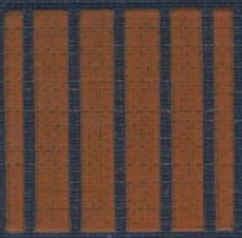

Condemned

To Devil's Island

Blair Niles

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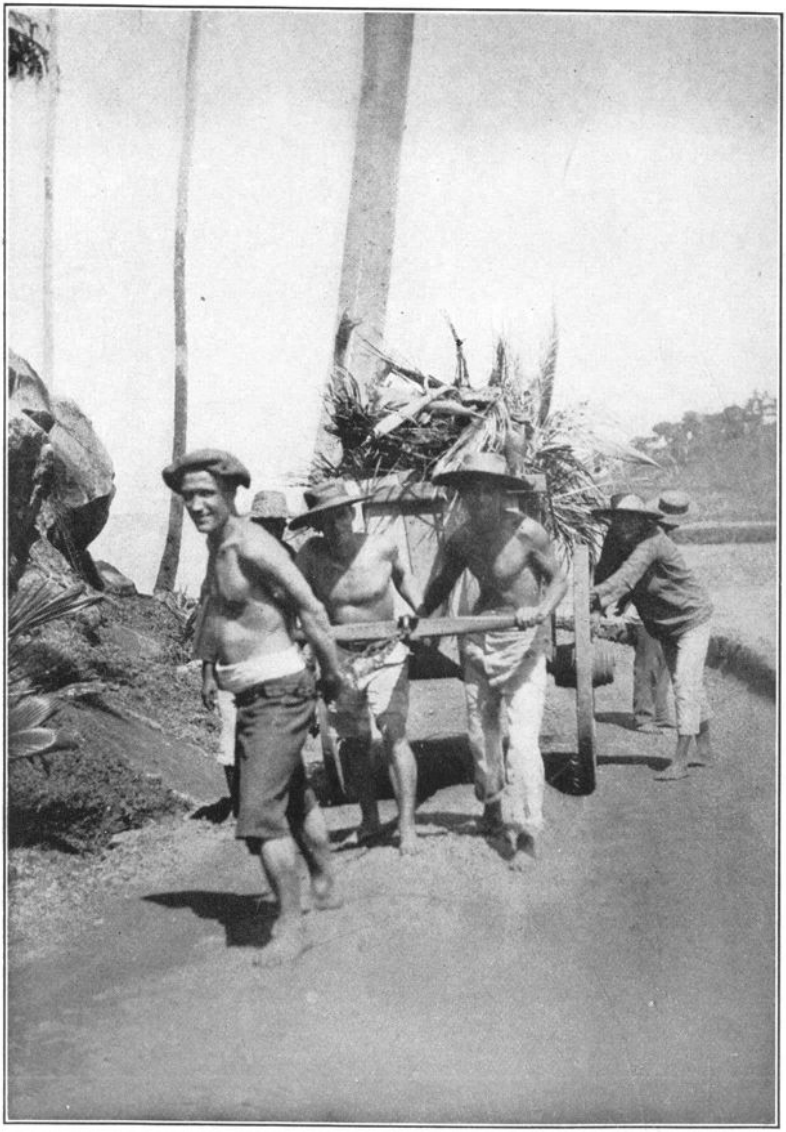

FRENCH CITIZENS CONDEMNED TO PENAL SERVITUDE IN GUIANA.

CONDEMNED TO DEVIL'S ISLAND

The Biography of an Unknown Convict

BY

BLAIR NILES

Illustrated by
BETH KREBS MORRIS
and from photographs by
ROBERT NILES, JR.

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Dedicated to
MY HUSBAND

ROBERT NILES, JR.

In different form certain parts of this narrative have appeared over the author's signature in *The Forum* and *The New York Times*

INTRODUCING THE READER TO THE STORY

In telling the story of The Devil's Island Penal Colony in French Guiana, I have adopted the method of a fictional biography, instead of a personal narrative. This method made it possible to write of Devil's Island as it appears to the men condemned to live and to suffer there as prisoners and as exiles. It did not seem to me important how I personally felt about this tragic Penal Colony but immensely important how the convicts themselves feel about it.

And so I chose to tell the story as the biography of an unknown convict whom I have called Michel.

The character of Michel is thus based upon a real person; altered in the story only sufficiently to conceal his identity.

The created characters of the book are similarly founded upon existing types and in many cases actual prisoners have been brought into the narrative. Life aboard the convict ship and the breathless dangers of convict escapes, I have related as they were told me by the men who took part in them. The prisons and the prison life have been described from my own observation. I was present at the arrival of the convict ship which brought 687 new victims to Guiana. And, in order to complete the cycle of convict life, I journeyed through the interior, following the jungle streams and trails used by escaping convicts.

The material for my story has thus been obtained at first hand. No other foreigner has ever had such opportunity to study these famous prisons. I was permitted, not only to visit Devil's Island itself, but to penetrate to the solitary cells of the Ile St. Joseph. And we kept house in the heart of the Penitentiary Concession, with, as servant, an old convict who had been thirty-nine years in the Guiana prisons.

My husband, Robert Niles, Jr., secured more than four hundred unique photographs which include a prisoner in solitary confinement; pictures taken on Devil's Island which are the first ever brought to this country and photographs of the convict burial at sea, which we were allowed to attend. In such a burial the dead man is, as the convicts express it, "given to the sharks."

The drawings by Beth Krebs Morris owe their authenticity of detail to my husband's camera record of our expedition. The photographic illustrations appear here and on the jacket of the book, with his permission, and are copyrighted by him.

Two points I should like to make clear to the reader are:

First, that Devil's Island is devoted entirely to political prisoners. The thousands of convicts convicted of general crimes—murder, burglary, forgery, counterfeit money-making, etc., etc.—are imprisoned either on the mainland or on the Islands of Royale and Joseph. But I have used the term "Devil's Island" to stand for the whole French Guiana Penal Colony, the famous Dreyfus case having established it in the public mind.

Second, that in writing the book I had no idea of muckraking. I realized that in many of our own prisons, conditions are shocking. The recent outbreaks prove that to be true.

I selected the notorious Devil's Island Penal Colony as the place where I would make my investigation, because there the drama of the criminal is staged against a background of tropical jungle, where descendants of escaped negro slaves live the jungle life of Africa; dancing the African dances and worshiping the African gods. While, locked behind the bars of prison, are criminals sent from highly civilized France. The Devil's Island Colony thus offers a startling contrast between the primitive and the civilized.

And since the French possess to an extraordinary degree the gift of self-expression, it is my hope that through the French mind, we may come to understand better the condemned of all other nationalities.

And now, through Michel, the young professional burglar whom I first saw standing ragged and barefoot, his toes curling over my doorsill, you may look into the strange, tragic prisons of the Devil's Island Colony.

BLAIR NILES.

New York City, September 10th, 1929.

PART ONE

"Prison has its atmosphere, its spirit, its body. . . . And none can sound the profound misery of the convict."

From an unpublished poem, "L'Enfer," by Roussenq, the "Incorrigible." Written in a solitary confinement cell on Ile Joseph of the Devil's Island Penal Colony in French Guiana.

CHAPTER I

The day had come at last!

In the great square courtyard seven hundred men waited in column of fours. Each in heavy gray woolen trousers, a heavy gray wool blouse, a black skull cap, and clumsy black wooden-soled shoes; while lying at the feet of each was the canvas sack into which he had stuffed his belongings. All were thus ready for the voyage.

"I am afraid!" Félix whispered to Michel, who stood beside him in one of the units of four. "I am afraid—"

And the thought back of the words drove the blood from his chubby peasant cheeks. With that look on his face, only the dimples remained of the warm youngness which he had brought to the cold moldy walls of the prison. Not that St. Martin lacked youth. Michel, for example, was only twenty, with a slender, boyish body and big, innocent, clear brown eyes, guarded by long, dark lashes. But Michel fancied himself wise in the strange philosophy of that stealthy prowling world which had drawn him into itself; whereas Félix was but a bewildered child, whispering, "I am afraid!"

"Careful, kid," Michel warned, for just in front of them old Pierre had turned at the almost imperceptible vibration of the terrified whisper. And of the many things that Félix feared, Michel knew that he feared most of all—Pierre.

Pierre's hairy tattooed body was horrible to the smooth young boy. The muscles beneath skin weathered by years of African sun seemed to Félix to writhe like serpents making ready to spring. He found Pierre's very age a thing of disgust.

Michel had, out of his sorry wisdom, cautioned against accepting part of Pierre's food ration. But to Félix acceptance was easier than refusal, and daily he had expected commutation of his sentence. His mother, he explained, would certainly do something. Because of his youth she would convince them that he ought not to be deported to serve a term of hard labor. Why didn't Michel's mother do the same? But Michel protested that he never had one. "If your mother had run off to Moscow with an army officer when you were three months old, and if you'd never heard from her, would you say you'd had a mother?"

Well, wasn't there some one else?

No, his father had given him to his grandparents to bring up. He'd hardly ever seen his father, who was the captain of a freighter and away for months at a time. The grandparents kept a *boîte de nuit* in Montmartre. The women who frequented it were delighted with the child, always small for his age,

who regarded them with so candid an admiration. “When we are no longer beautiful to Michel,” they said, “then we shall know that the game is up.”

They looked into the mirror of his eyes, and, when what they saw there made them happy, they tossed him francs so lavishly that he early formed the habit of spending.

First he discovered that money bought sweetmeats, then that it bought amusement—merry-go-rounds and ingenious toys; later that it purchased fuel for the flame of self-respect, that it brought a boy homage, the obsequiousness of tradespeople and waiters; finally it was the price of strange new thrills which people called love.

Then the grandparents had died. The money which his father sent for schooling had some time ago ceased to come. From his mother there had never been a word since the day when she’d left his father with the three-months-old baby on his hands. Michel had been all sorts of things since then; assistant to a jockey—he liked that and would have been a jockey himself if the war hadn’t come along and made a soldier of him instead. Oh, the war! He didn’t like to think about the war. Fortunately, he’d not had to go through all the ghastly four years of it, being too young to have been involved at the beginning.

When it was over he’d gone into what was an entirely new life for him; he’d secured a position as valet de chambre in a princely establishment. That experience convinced him that luxury was for him the essential ingredient of life. It was almost by chance that he’d hit upon a way of securing it which put the champagne of adventure into the pursuit. Then he found that he loved his new profession quite as much as he did the life which it made possible.

And so Félix must see that there was no one to be interested in urging commutation of Michel’s sentence. For all he knew, his father might even be dead. And as for the women—well, they weren’t the sort who could afford to open negotiations with law courts.

And he looked so extraordinarily innocent, so pathetically young, while he outlined to Félix the events of his twenty years, that only his presence in the prison of St. Martin de Ré gave the color of reality to his story.

But in all their conversations it was Michel who urged recognition of their plight.

They were to sail on a convict ship. They had been sentenced to servitude in the Devil’s Island Penal Colony in Guiana. They must concentrate upon how best to adjust themselves to that situation and how eventually to get the best of it.

Félix would never look at it squarely. He would say that it didn’t matter what he did, because always in the end he was going to be saved. So every

day he had shared Pierre's food. It was the way of least resistance. After working-hours keepers marched him off to one dormitory, Pierre to another. And he was convinced that before it was too late, his commutation would arrive. So the months slid by.

Then information had drifted through the prison that at the end of March or early in April the convict ship was again to sail. And now two men in uniform were walking up and down the lines, counting to make sure that the numbers tallied with the roll-call. Yes, the numbers checked up. A receipt was made out and signed. And the seven hundred passed from the custody of the prison warden into that of the Commandant of the convict ship.

Discipline suddenly relaxed. The silence of months was broken; not furtively, but openly. Men began to talk among themselves. The fours split up into groups. A few brought out cigarettes, and actually there was smoking in the prison yard of St. Martin de Ré.

"God," some were saying, "it will be good to get out of this place!"

And their voices, so long suppressed, sounded to them as unfamiliar as when one hears one's self shout into the trumpet of the deaf.

"God, but it will be good. . . ."

"Yes, but don't forget we go to Guiana. And they say that's death."

The older men spoke out of the memory of all they'd heard of Dreyfus and of Devil's Island.

Their words made the others remember how, when sentence had been passed, doom had seemed to echo in the very word.

Why, Guiana was the "dry guillotine"! Everybody knew that.

Seven hundred men in the courtyard. Didn't even the official figures admit that at least half of them would die in the first year of prison in the Guiana climate? Half? Three-quarters, they'd heard, would be nearer the truth!

Which of the seven hundred would it be? But with the tenacity of the will to live each thought it would be his neighbor. And in the months at St. Martin, Guiana had little by little lost its terror for them. It had gradually become part of an accepted destiny to which the mind had at first slowly adjusted itself, until at length, in the horror of St. Martin, Guiana had come even to be desired.

"But," a frail old voice realized, "it's leaving France forever."

"Forever?" Pierre jeered. "Wait and see if it's forever."

"Well," Michel spoke with the fatalistic courage which sat so oddly on his thin colorless face; too young to know so much, too delicate for its brave acceptance of stern realities. "Well, at least Guiana's not St. Martin de Ré."

The grim massive walls gave back the pale echo of a stifled cheer. Men instinctively stretched the limbs in the baggy gray garments, as though stone and mortar and iron bars had pressed against flesh and bone.

The boy was right. Guiana would at least not be St. Martin de Ré. Their speech there in the courtyard, the smoke drifting in transparent wisps from their cigarettes, would, the day before, have meant punishment cells and blows. Guiana might not be so bad after all. And in any case all would, of course, soon escape. Upon that they were determined.

"But what shall I do?" Félix was whispering again.

"Don't give in. Then after a while he won't plague you any more."

The boy caught a little of Michel's surprising hardness, and for a moment reflected it, like an image in a cloudy mirror.

"Oh, I shall resist with all my force, Michel. You may be sure."

Then came the sudden order to reassemble. The fours formed. Men raised their sacks from the floor to their backs. At last the hour so long awaited . . . so greatly dreaded . . . and finally, after all, so desired . . . the hour had come!

The monstrous iron doors moved. Opened. Laboriously, ponderously, as if reluctant to let go their guarded prey. But they opened, for they, too, had to obey the Law's decrees. They opened. And the fresh, moist April air rushed in, to be in its turn imprisoned by inflexible walls.

Slowly the column of fours passed out. You would have said they went to their death, so slowly did they move forward. Yet few went sorrowfully.

They passed out, their wooden soles clumping heavily on the courtyard floor. They advanced between a double line of fixed bayonets. Michel's square little chin went up. "Ah," he said, "see the precautions they have taken for us! Are we then so terrible?"

Outside in the mist of a light fog they saw that a crowd had gathered. "Are we then so beautiful," Pierre grumbled, "that people come to see us off?"

In the waiting group there was a cry, a commotion. A mother, recognizing her son, was fainting. Félix's mother, perhaps. A wife with a white face was holding up a baby in her arms. Accomplices in crime were there, too, scanning the advancing column to isolate the familiar features of some luckless partner. Two or three photographers ground the cranks of their cameras. Some one put up an umbrella. The salt mist was turning to fine gray drizzle.

But the moving column looked straight ahead. For there was the sea! And there like a vague ghost the solitary ship rode at anchor.

No need to hurry. No danger that she would leave one of them behind. Barges, rising and falling with the movement of the water, rubbed their wet sides against the slimy pier. All in good time they would convey seven hundred men across the drab stretch of water to the ship, whose only passengers were to be convicts.

The moment had at last come!

In the barges the men were crowded standing. Even in the rain, how wide the horizon seemed after months of prison! The focus of eyes lengthened. The air seemed to possess a quality extracted from it when filtered through iron bars. The lungs expanded, and hearts unreasonably lightened.

Then some one, catching sight of the brawny convict whose task at St. Martin had been to strike the punishment blows, shouted, “Death to him!”

“Death!”

The cry went from barge to barge and from barge to dock. The man should pay for their miseries. They would wait their opportunity, but he should pay.

“Death to him!”

But Michel shouted, “Death to Society!” It was Society which he vowed was to pay for the bitter moments of his life. He would not soil his hands with blood. That revolted him. It was, besides, a stupidity. And in all he did, Michel had the instinct of the artist; in his vengeance as well as in his calling.

“Society!” The men on the barge laughed. They were more concrete than that.

But, though they often scoffed at him, Michel, for all his youth, had their respect. They liked the absurd lack of fear which he, so small a creature, showed in the presence of burly, hardened men from the battalions of Africa. They admired, and sometimes secretly envied, the decision of his personality. He knew so well what he wanted, and could never be made to follow any path but his own. He was so fearless that they believed him to be fundamentally honest. In spite of his boy’s body they felt him to be a man, with all a man’s aloofness and inviolability of ego. So Michel said what he liked and went unmolested.

The barges put off and the Ile de Ré retreated. It became not a dock to which lighters had been moored, but an island—long and narrow, turning a rocky and forbidding face to the sea. There was the lighthouse on the northwest point. And there were Vauban’s old fortifications guarding the

harbor of St. Martin. Back of that the land was flat, and but for its orchards of pears and figs, it was treeless; lying like a raft of floating salt-marshes which had drifted a little way off the mainland shore.

So it appeared to the moving barges, from which it was possible to look beyond the great grim silent prison which is the depot of the transportation of convicts to Guiana; to look beyond that to the cottages of peasants who live upon the oyster and salt industries and upon the fruit of trees which would now soon be blossoming. And then, beyond the island, there came into view the profile of France.

But they might not look longer, for already the lighters were bumping against the ship. Single file they must climb the gangway, and, under the eyes of armed keepers, march up, and then down; down two steep iron ladders to barred cages in the hold.

From the low black ceiling of the cages hammocks hung side by side and end to end, without an unnecessary inch between; for in each cage more than a hundred men were to be crowded.

Michel chose a hammock near a port-hole. There would be need of what air you could get, when they were all packed in there like herrings.

Putting himself and his sack into the hammock he proceeded to look about. Only six port-holes—small ones. He had been wise to take up a claim near one of them. No furnishings but the hammocks. A worn cement floor; at one end of the cage a toilet, up a couple of steps. Another cage opposite—a duplicate of that in which he found himself. A little passageway between, where stood two water-barrels. You helped yourself through the bars, using a tin cup chained to one of them. Coils of rubber hose out in the passageway, by which the cages were flooded and cleansed; or, Michel had been told, the hose might be turned on the men in case of disorder. Also outside were several large electric bulbs enclosed in protective wire frames, and a couple of candle lanterns for emergency use. Nothing but the hammocks inside.

Bringing his eyes back to his immediate surroundings, Michel saw that Pierre was arranging Félix's sack in a hammock near his own. It was an end which Michel had seen from the beginning. He shrugged and lit a cigarette. It would be an hour at least, he thought, before the embarkation could be finished. He was tired after the excitement of the morning. That's what the monotony of prison did for you; excitement tired you. How many months had he been at St. Martin? . . . Four. . . . Four months, and now that at last something had happened, he was tired. They'd stood so long in the courtyard and in the barges. He smoked slowly to make his one cigarette last. Yes, he was really worn out. He blew the smoke into rings and watched

them with a quaint, elfish smile. He was thinking of that double line of soldiers, bristling with bayonets. “They did us that much honor,” he thought.

And then the siren cut short his casual scraps of memory. The siren whistled. Engines pulsed. They were off. The impossible and the inevitable had happened. The judge had said, “Seven years’ penal servitude in Guiana.” But until the siren blew, that had never seemed real.

The ship was moving. They had, then, actually sailed. And unseen by them, Michel knew that slowly France grew dim and finally disappeared. The lighthouse would be the last thing you could see.

CHAPTER II

"May I tell you about it again?" Félix asked.

"Oh, I don't mind."

The two boys sat in niches formed by frames which divided the ship's side into eighteen-inch segments. A narrow ledge connecting the frames furnished seats for a fraction of each cage's quota. A similar ledge ran along the barred side, but the niches were the coveted places, and many convict shipments had left on the paint the dark smudge of heads and shoulders.

In their stiff regularity these niches seemed to Paul Arthur a travesty of the choir of some medieval monastery. They faced the tragedy of bars, as such a monks' choir often faced a sculptured cross; or looked, perhaps, upon some soft old picture, whose mellow creams and blues, crimsons, and rich dark browns like oiled shadows, portrayed a life-sized Christ hung between two thieves, whom He planned that day to meet in Paradise.

From the opposite ledge under the bars near the water-barrel, this ironic symbolism crossed Paul's mind, as he sat, a silent prisoner, moving in that strange company as though he were merely an on-looking spirit; as though he were a philosopher who but temporarily occupied the suffering physical body of a convict bound for Guiana.

But Michel, unconcerned with symbolism, stared absently straight ahead, through the bars of their cage, across the narrow passage and through the bars of the next cage, whose occupants he saw as though longitudinally

divided by the repetition of vertical bars. He thought how odd it looked to see half a face, half a body, then the inch of bar, followed by the continuation of face and body, then by another bar, with possibly nothing left over, or only just a narrow slice of a man.

Yesterday the sea had been rough, and Félix a limp yellow thing, too sick for speech.

For twenty-four hours the ship had heaved and tossed, her frames groaning under the strain. Ports had been closed and hatches shut down. Waves had hurled themselves against the six circles of glass. Many were seasick, and with each hour the close air had become more and more foul. When the sick opened their eyes they saw that through the bars men traded clothing for the packets of tobacco which the sailors offered in exchange. They saw, but were indifferent as to whether or not the bartered garments belonged to them.

Closing their eyes, they listened to the rhythmic groan of the ship and waited for the waves which broke in measured beat. And always memories like colossal shadows moved through their brains, only to reappear, to pass out, and to return in dizzy procession.

To the seasick there is no future. There is only a ghastly present and an immediate past; a monstrously distorted past, wherein every emotion, every experience, is magnified and multiplied, to recur again and again with the repetition of the complaining frames and of the slapping spray.

On such a ship, a remembered corpse would take on gigantic proportions, a judge would appear of heroic size, a prostitute move with an allure greater than any reality, and lost moments of joy or pain would vibrate with an intensity they never actually possessed, while with closed eyes men waited for the deathly sinking and the wrench of the recovery as the creaking ship rolled and tossed with the measure of the sea.

And in the hold of a convict ship seasickness is stripped of all alleviations. No bells to summon attentive stewards murmuring, “Very good, sir. Coming directly.” No “Get out into the air, sir; it’ll do you good.” No lounging in deck-chairs, before which officers pause to predict better weather. No friends or relatives to suggest that you try this or that. No one who cares a damn whether you live or die. Perhaps no one ever again who cares.

In those black hours all of Michel’s past had seemed to him wiped out, except the sound of the *prévôt* whipping prisoners in the disciplinary cells of St. Martin. It was that sound which had beat upon his brain, assuming the rhythm of the angry sea. At the lowest depths of his misery he had heard some one exclaim:

"What do we expect? Aren't we traveling free?" And those who were not ill had laughed loudly.

But today was calm. Under charge of the armed guard they'd been taken in squads for a fifteen-minute walk on deck, while the sailors hosed out the cages. The air and the calm had brought back speech to Félix.

"May I tell you again, Michel, how it all happened?"

Félix had been to a fête in a near-by village. He had more to drink than he was used to. So had the two friends with whom he'd gone. That was how, on the way home, they'd come to think of going to a cabaret for just a little more. And Félix paused to wonder why it is that when you have had too much is always the time when you want one more. The cabaret, he went on, had been closed for the night, but the door had been easy to force. Yes, Michel remembered that he had already told him how all would have gone no further than that, if only the *patron* had not got out of bed and accused them of coming to steal. So they had fallen upon him and given him a beating, a thing which, of course, they wouldn't have done but for having had more than enough to drink. After that they had made themselves free of the bar and had robbed the box of four hundred francs.

But it had been their first offense, and the *patron* had had only five days in the hospital. What did Michel think about it? How did he think young fellows, who had never before broken in to steal, had come to do such a thing? And the sentence . . . five years' hard labor and deportation. Was it not excessive? And why hadn't his mother been able to get him commutation? Perhaps she hadn't done all she could. If she could know what prison is . . . but who ever understands who has not heard the key turn in the lock? The horror of St. Martin, and now this ship . . . and the terror of what was to come!

Félix grew tearful with pity for himself.

"But you don't mind, Michel. Not as I do. Sometimes I think you are almost happy!"

It was the first time that Félix had seemed aware of any state of mind but his own. And Michel, his reserve relaxed with the lowered resistance of the past twenty-four hours, began to explain:

"You see," he said, "I have my profession. You want your mother. You want to go on raising artichokes. You're willing to grow old raising artichokes. But I . . . I want to stand at the top. I want to do the things that take skill and daring!"

Michel spoke rapidly. He had the Latin gift of expression, and he had so often analyzed for himself the end he sought, that he did not need to grope for clarification of word or thought.

“For the big jobs,” he continued, “you have to foresee everything. Your eyes must be quick—and your hands—so that you never make a useless movement, or an unnecessary sound. Never make a mistake. At the crisis you must be as cool as ice.

“Then it’s just as though you weren’t inside yourself at all . . . but somewhere out in the audience looking on and thinking how wonderfully the fellow is doing it.

“And the greater the danger, Félix, the greater your joy. You’re playing with your life and you’re playing in the dark. Any minute—even if you haven’t made one blunder—any minute it may be all up with you. You can never be certain how the cards are going to fall.”

“But, Michel, how can you like it? They’ve caught you and you’re on your way to seven years’ hard labor—and seven years’ exile after that. You’re even worse off than I am. I’ve got only five. So how can you be so cheerful? What’s the use of a profession if it ends you in prison the same as me?”

“Yes, prison is terrible.” Michel conceded it. “But I’m what you call cheerful because I’m not going to waste my time while I’m there. I’m going to learn. Why, some of the greatest of us are in Guiana. I’ll learn all they can teach—and then, of course, I’ll escape.”

In the afternoon, stripped to the waist, two men fought in the cage . . . Pierre and David. Both men were elaborately tattooed in indigo against the yellow brown of bodies tanned in the service of the Public Works in Morocco.

Pierre was covered with a close pattern of the African fauna and flora—elephants and lions, baboons and strange birds with enormous beaks. At the base of his throat was etched a magnified human eye. Pierre called it the “eye of the police.” Just below the eye and on each shoulder was a pansy, which in the symbolism of tattoo signifies “thoughts of mother.” All was drawn with Egyptian feeling—straight lines and elimination of detail.

David was done in flourishes and curves. His taste had run to the heads of ladies of the era of Pompadour and picture hats; to an angel with a trumpet; to a ship, which typified escape; while across his chest ran the motto whose translation reads, “My food is tobacco,” followed by the Arabic word “Barkat,” meaning, “That is all.” As the finishing touch a blue band of tattoo circled his neck, with instructions to “cut on the dotted line.”

Men were betting their clothes on the outcome of the combat; even odds at first, for Pierre and David were well matched, hardened by the same rough life.

Scared and pale, Félix looked on. He knew that they fought for the possession of his body, and tensely he watched the victory pass from Pierre to David and back to Pierre. He saw blood, a thing which had never happened among his mother's artichokes. He didn't know that the fight would not be to the death, nor that each had decided that if vanquished a certain girl-faced boy named Louis was to console him for the loss of Félix.

So with numb horror Félix watched the figures thrust and parry, while the ring of on-lookers sang, that the keepers above decks might hear nothing of the battle. It began to matter to him that Pierre should win. After all, he had eaten Pierre's food. He would be, perhaps, a little less afraid of Pierre than of David. With David he could never forget that gruesome "Cut on the dotted line."

Thus with a sense of relief he saw David go down, and heard the shout, "He's yours, Pierre!" But Pierre, wiping a little streaming trickle of blood from the pansy at his throat, paid no immediate attention to his prize.

"Bah, what a place!" And Michel turned to the port for air.

That night from the opposite cage a shriek woke all the hammocks. It started high and shrill, and slowly diminished in power until it died away in a low, terrible gurgle.

In the morning it was found that a man had been assassinated, and sailors brought the report of two mortal combats in the aft cages. The bodies of the dead, they said, would be thrown into the sea.

That was the day when at the early promenade Gibraltar had been sighted. Within twenty-four hours the ship would touch at Algiers to take on Arab convicts. There was talk of attempting escape at Algiers. One of the prisoners had succeeded in unscrewing a port-hole. And Félix, who had sat all day speechless, weeping in his niche, raised his head to listen. Men were saying that while officers and keepers were busy with the embarkation, the port would be removed, and one by one all who could squeeze through might escape. But at five o'clock a sailor coming in to make fast the ports had discovered the loosened screws. Never mind, escape was merely postponed until they reached Guiana.

And Félix went back to his quiet weeping.

"He's not a bad man," Michel comforted. "He will, I think, be good to you. He's only following the custom, you know."

Still Félix wept. What consolation was it to him to know that Pierre simply carried on the custom of the battalions of Africa? All his hopes, all his futile little plans, were finished. Without will-power, he had trusted to the successful intervention of his mother—and failing that, he had relied on

chance, on being perhaps assigned to a different cage on the ship, and at the end of the voyage being sent to a different prison.

"But if it hadn't been Pierre, it would have been some one else," Michel reminded. "There's no way out of this sort of thing unless you stand against it yourself."

And Michel realized that the quality of strength was not in Félix.

After Algiers there would be, in fourteen days, Guiana. Life settled down to the routine of the voyage: coffee and biscuits at six; six-thirty, fold up the hammocks; at seven, walk on deck; at ten, soup and meat or soup and fish; four o'clock, soup and beans; six o'clock, hang the hammocks.

And all the hours between to kill; herded in iron-barred cages in the hold of a ship.

Little groups were formed, made up of men who had met in other prisons, or whose specialty happened to be the same, or who chanced to come from the same city or village. More of the strange prison "marriages" were arranged; some amicably and some settled by force.

Félix had become calm and strangely listless. But at least he no longer sat silently weeping. Michel thought he had adjusted himself to what he'd not had the moral fiber to avoid. And Michel's brain was in the grip of his own thoughts. He was resolving to control his destiny. But how? And he fluctuated between detailed schemes and a certain superstitious confidence in a predetermined fate. He remembered the prophecy of an uncle;—made long ago when he was still a child. The uncle had predicted that he would grow up to become one of the greatest of rascals. A chief of police had later corroborated it: "Oh, I'll see you again," he'd said. "This is only the beginning for you." Michel had thought often of their prophecy.

If they were right, then his career was not to be snuffed out in any foul prison of the Devil's Island Colony. His uncle, now dead, he recalled as a very intelligent man. As for the chief of police . . . Yes, surely he was to escape from Guiana.

So he sat apart with his thought, identifying himself with none of the groups. Listening sometimes when they bragged of their deeds. This one had robbed a jeweler to the value of many thousand francs. That one had made a fortune in the manufacture of counterfeit money.

Paul Arthur also listened. "It is significant," he thought, "that no one boasts of murder. If life has been taken, it has somehow to be justified." And of course a woman was the most romantic way of justification, self-defense the most convincing.

"This is all very well," Michel said to Félix, "but none of the real Aces are on board. Those I hope to meet in Guiana."

With the passing days all thoughts turned more and more to Guiana—from the past to the future. Like the Ile de Ré and the coast of France, the past seemed to recede. The ship sailed into a space where life hovered between what had gone before and what was to come. In that no-man's space it was enough to be free from the cruelty of St. Martin. It was enough to be able to smoke, to gamble, and to sing in the hold of a convict ship.

Then on the sixteenth day out from St. Martin, tropical heat, like some exotic bird blown out to sea, boarded the ship. On the morning promenade flying-fish were seen, darting in and out of an oiled sea, where only the light spray of their movement disturbed the viscid calm. The cages had become suddenly unbearably hot. Several men had died in the infirmary. The news trickled from prisoner to prisoner until all knew that the decimation of the seven hundred had already begun.

On the seventeenth day the sailors promised, "In three more days you'll see Guiana!" The period of suspension between past and future was over. Men now spoke only of Guiana. Three days. How the time dragged. They were eager to reach the prisons of Guiana in order to escape from them. All the talk was of escape. Guiana was seen in rose. They had forgotten completely that it was known as the "dry guillotine." No one believed any longer in the ominous mortality figures. Dreyfus and Devil's Island were no more mentioned. They were nervously impatient to arrive—that much sooner to escape to liberty.

Meanwhile the heat increased. Michel could never decide whether the minutes on deck were a relief or not, for upon return to the cage the stifling air seemed more unendurable than when they left it to go on deck. When the sailors turned the hose into the cages, the men undressed and stood in the salt spray. Sleep was impossible. From Michel's hammock he could see Pierre's naked chest with the light from the bulb outside streaming over it, as though by intention the spotlight had been thrown upon the "eye of the police" and the pansy which meant "thoughts of mother."

On the eighteenth day the sailors said that tomorrow they would land in Guiana. But not until six o'clock on the afternoon of the nineteenth was land seen. Land! The news came from a convict at a port-hole, and at once there was a rush to see.

What?

Only twelve had places. They relayed their observations to the less fortunate.

Nothing but trees. The jungle, of course.

The ship seemed to be at the entrance of a river. That would be the Maroni.

The anchor rattled down.

So they would not get up to St. Laurent until the morning. The sailors had predicted this.

A canoe passed close to the ship.

There were two . . . no, three . . . black men in the canoe. They were practically naked.

And in the bottom of their boat was a big bunch of yellow bananas.

The canoe paddled out of the line of vision. Light failed, and then all at once it was dark. And very quiet. The stillness of the engines was as startling as sudden noise; and from the shore no sound came to fill the void they left. But in the cages there was no silence. Throughout the sweltering night men talked. And all their talk was of Guiana and of how they would soon, of course, escape—even if they had to live naked in the forest, like the blacks who had passed in the canoe.

CHAPTER III

In the morning the port-holes were to the strong. If a man of frail force found a place, it was by grace of a powerful patron. For at the ports only two faces might be pressed against the dingy glass; thus only twelve men might look upon the land with which all were so vitally concerned. In the mind of French convicts Guiana has long stood next to the ultimate horror. And now through eight-inch port-holes it might at last actually be seen. . . .

"What is it like?"

"Tell us what it is like."

Behind the faces flattened against glass, men crowded, questioning.

"What do you see?"

"Only trees. Nothing is different from what we saw last night."

"Trees and more canoes full of black men."

"*Ma foi!* How wide they open their mouths when they laugh!"

"Oh, *là! là!* but they have white teeth!"

"Now here comes a launch."

"Frenchmen on board."

"No, blacks in white men's clothes."

"The pilot, perhaps."

The twos at the port-holes gave their places to other twos. They reported that men from the launch were climbing up the ship's ladder; then, that the launch had gone away.

"Yes, it must have brought the pilot."

Somehow the morning passed. Nothing more was to be seen from the ports. Even the canoes had disappeared. All now had a turn at the windows. But there was only the amber water which the Maroni pours into the sea, and a little distance off, a bank of motionless green forest. Jungle-stained water and an unbroken wall of vivid green.

"Why . . . it's beautiful!" Michel murmured to himself. He hardly knew what he'd expected. Jungle would naturally be green. Yet it was so amazingly green!

Back in the cage was hot seething impatience.

"If that was the pilot, why, in God's name, don't we start?"

"And why of all days have they cut out our walk on deck this morning? What harm would it have done to let us out of this for a little air?"

"Yes, and why not give us a chance to see what sort of place they're shipping us to?"

From an old man who had been a seaman came the conclusion that they must be waiting for the tide.

"Well, while they wait they might let us out of this hell . . . we've a right to fifteen minutes on deck."

"Right?"

"Mon dieu! Who talks about rights? Convicts don't have rights."

Then there had come the grinding sound of pulling in the anchor.

The strong again possessed the ports. From the comments of the few who peered through the dirty circles of glass, those in the cage must construct the voyage up the Maroni.

But all were aware that engines had begun again to throb, and that the ship moved. They did not need the sight of the bank sliding by to tell them that they were off. And hearts contracted with sudden realization of the fact. In two hours, a passing sailor had said they would be at St. Laurent—at the distributing center of the great Devil's Island penitentiary system which was to absorb them into itself. What would it be like? What did the comrades at the ports see?

Again only trees—miles of jungle—a twisting river—green deserted islands—trees.

Some one cried out, "Monkeys!"

"Monkeys? Where?"

"Like hell he saw monkeys!"

In the unbelievable heat of the cages, men dripping perspiration packed their canvas sacks and dressed themselves in the gray wool of the St. Martin prison. Some one had a mirror. It was passed around. "*Coquetterie!*" Michel laughed, combing his hair until it lay quite smooth, flat and damp, like yellow corn-silk, against his hot little head. He felt possessed by a bizarre, mocking gayety. His blood pulsed with the engines which drove them to the end of their long journey. It was enough to know that they were arriving, that they would soon be in Guiana, to which all were going with the fixed purpose of escaping from its prisons.

The boat gave two long melancholy whistles. The vibration died on the air. But there came no answering salute from the shore. A convict ship announces its arrival, but no siren condescends a response. In the cages this went unremarked, for some one was shouting that he could see the dock.

"And people—a lot of people. A few on the dock. Many on the river bank." There were women in light dresses—bright colors under the trees.

The anchor went down, rattling over the ship's side, until it came to rest in the thick deep mud of the river bottom.

"Now we're coming up to the dock."

"We're alongside."

"What are they waiting for? Why don't they let us off?"

"They're putting the gangway down."

"Men—officers and keepers—are coming on board. They're all in white—with helmets."

Finally the doors of the cages opened. Keepers gave the order, and one by one the prisoners filed out, each bearing his sack upon his back.

They streamed up the two flights of iron ladders to the deck and then down the gangway to the wharf. And all, as they reached the deck, blinked in the strong white tropic light, and all, half blinded, stumbled down the gangway; hurrying as though propelled from the rear, shot, as it were, out of the bowels of the ship. Their progress seemed a flight from the sick crowding discomforts of the voyage, from the prisons of France, from trial and arrest. And yet on their faces was more than the bewilderment of sudden, blinding light; there was a groping curiosity on the threshold of their new life.

Keepers stationed at intervals barked commands:

"Not so fast."

"Faster than that."

On the deck Michel halted, as though there were no armed guard, as though he were merely a voyager before whom the spectacle of St. Laurent had suddenly unfolded.

Stems of cocoanut palms, graceful as the swaying bodies of nude dancers with green plumed headdresses trembling against a strangely exciting blue. Dark massed foliage of mango trees. Under the trees strong reds, pinks, blues, and greens of women's dresses. Beyond were white houses set in green. And white foam-clouds drifting across the gorgeous blue.

No one had ever told him that Guiana was like this. He gave a little gasp. Whatever he was to feel here, he knew he was to live intensely.

A rough hand pushed him forward with a curse. He came quickly to himself. That was familiar. That was what a convict expected. The curse hurried him forward down the gangway. On the wide, sloping bottom step he slipped and fell.

Was it an evil omen, he wondered, as, flushed and confused, he scrambled to his feet?

No, he would not think of it. Besides, others were slipping and falling too. It was a bad step—unexpectedly sloping like that. Several men had gone flat. Why didn't the keeper at the foot of the gangway warn them?

Now there came a fellow with a crutch; his leg had been amputated near the hip. Would he be able to make it?

The gangway rope was so low as to be useless. To steady themselves, the men put out one hand against the ship's side; the other hand grasped the sack under which their back stooped.

There was a prisoner carrying a one-legged comrade on his back. On the dock he stood him up carefully, as though he'd been some great, mutilated toy which might be so balanced as to stand alone.

Thus, like gray gnomes hurrying from some dark dungeon, they poured from the ship to the wharf, where they were quickly formed in rows of four. There, keepers moved up and down the always lengthening line; counting, and comparing the numbers with the ship's records.

In their rows of four the men stared silently. From the moment the doors of their cages had opened, dumbness had fallen upon them. There had been no sound but the heavy thumping of wooden-soled shoes, and the surly shouts of the keepers.

Now in the long, blinking line not a word was spoken. They stared in silence; their eyes gradually adjusted to the light opened wide as if in an effort to take in more than is possible to any normal range of vision.

They saw French women on the dock. They must be the wives of officials with special permissions, for obviously the crowd was kept to the river bank. Most of these women were fat, but one was pretty—in a thin yellow dress, and carrying a rose-flowered parasol. To men just driven out of the hold of a convict ship she had an unearthly cool daintiness.

The fours slowly moved forward as men were added to the rear line. Those in front saw that the women in gay colors on the bank were black, brown, yellow—negro, mulatto, Chinese. And Michel's eyes traveled back to the fair girl under the blossoming parasol. Ah, St. Laurent might not be so bad!

He noticed perhaps a dozen men—barefoot, in soiled white trousers and blouses, across which were stamped numbers—long numbers, like 47,950, or 46,320. They had been making fast the ship's ropes, and now they stood about, watching the drab stream. Michel concluded that these numbered men were convicts who had preceded him to Guiana, and he smiled tentatively. They returned a blank stare, and he quickly withdrew his greeting. Of course, he reasoned, they could not smile because of the guards who passed up and down the line. He extracted encouragement from the fact that one or two were smoking. It might not be so bad a life, and then in a few months he would have escaped. It did not occur to him to wonder why, if it were so simple, Number 47,950 or 46,320 had not done so.

He looked again for the woman under the bright parasol, but with a gesture of disgust she had moved away; out of range of the pungent odor of heavy flannel drenched with the perspiration of nearly seven hundred men, and away from the odor of nearly fourteen hundred leather shoes, also soaked with perspiration.

Michel returned to the contemplation of what might be seen of St. Laurent.

"Forward!" The word echoed along the silent staring line. Sacks were lifted. As he stooped to his, Michel sent a fleeting thought back to the ship. "You have brought me here, but a more beautiful ship than you shall soon carry me away."

"En avant!"

The line advanced.

The hundreds of wooden soles clattered deafeningly over the plank flooring of the wharf. The rows were at first wavering, for men moved stiffly, uncertainly, after so many days of inaction. But gradually the column straightened to follow the stout khaki official who led the way.

They thus passed along the river-front. And always they were silent, always staring with eyes greedy to absorb St. Laurent before they should be marched through the prison gates for which they knew they must be headed.

Strange ugly black birds hopped awkwardly out of the way of their advance; flying up to perch on the roof-tops, where they sat in dumb rows of rusty black. There was a cart drawn by oxen with huge, flat, spreading horns, and bodies gray like elephants.

On the right was the river—the wide coppery river which separates French and Dutch Guiana. On its farther side they saw a little village, very white in the sun. The Dutch bank hung like a bright curtain-drop beyond the broad stream, which was in its turn the back-drop for a foreground where on piles of logs sat groups of men more haggard, more devastated, than any tramp ever seen in the Paris slums. They were white men, gaunt and ill, whose beards grew like weeds in an abandoned lot; rags of men, who sat staring at the marching column.

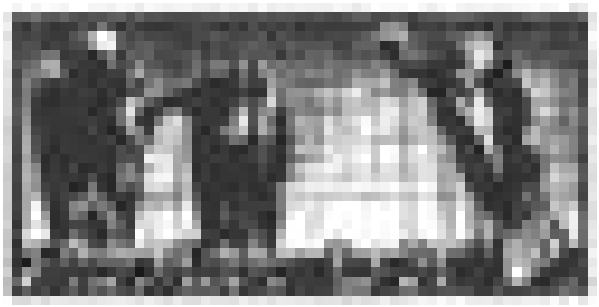
On the left, brick walls enclosed little gardens like green flowered aprons in front of small wooden houses. There were people on the steps and on the walls—many negro girls in dresses as brightly scarlet or purple as the hibiscus or the bougainvillea of the gardens. A negro woman threw kisses and cried, "Have courage, my boys!"

"Without doubt a prostitute," they concluded.

At a small dock, opposite the white Dutch village across the river, the column turned left. Now they saw the great walls of the Penitentiary. They saw its iron gates over which stood the words, "*Camp de la Transportation*."

Of course they had expected it. For what else had the convict ship brought them so far? And yet . . . coming with that sudden turn upon high walls and an iron gate, and seeing the irrevocable words, the column unconsciously slowed down in rhythm with the momentary interruption of its heart-beats. And the wooden soles dragged under the arching roof of trees.

The great gates opened. They showed low buildings in a courtyard carpeted with long afternoon shadows—shadows of breadfruit trees. An old man fell fainting against the gate-posts. A turnkey helped him to rise. The column marched into the courtyard. Half a dozen of the sick and dying were borne in on stretchers. And the gates closed.



CHAPTER IV

Prison possessed Michel. St. Martin had been but a clearing house, a place where one awaited transportation. But Guiana was permanent. Guiana was the land of the deported. And Michel was there to serve his seven-year prison sentence, to be followed by an equal term of exile. Of course it was far from his intention to submit to any such period of servitude. He constantly reminded himself of that. Yet he would do nothing prematurely. While he was learning all that prison had to teach he would be perfecting his plans.

On board ship, lying wakeful in his hammock, watching the great tattooed eye thrown into relief by the shaft of light which fell across Pierre's chest, he had thought out what was to be his policy.

And now overwhelmingly the prison had possessed him. He was an explorer in that strange world whose avowed reason for existence was set down as "expiation of crime, regeneration of the guilty, and the protection of Society." This world had its own code, its own customs, its distinctive slang, its abiding tragedy, its frail pleasures. And Michel's curious, adventuring mind would investigate it all.

This attitude of inquiry carried him through the dreadful day when he had stood stripped in the office where authorities registered finger prints and made inventories of men's bodies, recording every distinguishing mark, every wart or mole, every birth blotch and every tattooed design, making measurements, and adding these things to one's name and age and birthplace, and to the individual crime histories and sentences sent over by the French courts—all indexed and cross-indexed to facilitate emergency reference.

In that office, Paul Arthur thought, part of a man seemed amputated and preserved in card catalogues; much as entomologists impale upon pins all that is mortal of once-living insects, classifying as hymenoptera, lepidoptera, and so on and so on, the brittle remains of creatures who had known life. With the same conscientious precision the prison files catalogued something which was vitally part of a man's being. They robbed him of inviolability of personality, of privacy of body, privacy of possessions and of correspondence; collecting, as it were, his human rights.

And standing naked in the room, man after man looked on with a sense of horror while that which had been an integral part of his ego was inventoried; impaled for all time in the criminal archives of Guiana; impaled while it still lived. It was as though it struggled there on its merciless pin.

And man after man submitted, each in his own way. Michel burying his hot resentment under an inquisitive bravado, a questioning "What next?" Pierre with a strong hatred, Félix with mute terror, Paul Arthur with the detachment which was his refuge. He drove his spirit out of the unclothed body which officers of justice examined, itemized, and recorded. He forced it to occupy itself with impersonal reflections. As convicts seated in niches along the side of a barred cage had suggested to him monks gazing at some dim stained-glass-lit painting of a Christ hanging between thieves, so now Paul thought of entomologists scrupulously arranging their collection.

He saw himself as but one in the procession of men stripped to the "body, parts, and passions," about which theologians once argued with futile violence. And he pictured the hundreds of such bodies, parts, and passions which are yearly cast into the prison vortex; to be starved for the protection of Society, for their own reformation, and for the expiation of deeds known as crimes.

Looking thus upon the physical man, he realized for the first time the marvel of creation there unveiled; man in his erect position above all four-footed things, a being of inalienable dignity even in his humiliation.

"A convict," he thought, "but still a man. Remove their uniforms and revolvers, and are these officials more than that? Why are they then officials? While I . . . I am a convict? Why? What has happened to make that enormous difference in the fate of bodies cast in the same mold; with the same extraordinary motors propelling blood through the same intricate pipes and valves; with the same amazing factories converting vegetable, mineral, and animal substances into energy and tissue; with the same perfect mechanical appliances for self-expression; bodies each with directing brains, with telegraphic nervous systems, and with organs of miraculous creative powers?

"Evolved into the same image, why then are some of us convicts and others officials? What happened to bring that about?"

These were questions which Paul often put to himself, emphasizing the unbelievable word "convict." Thus he fluctuated between devices for forgetting and attempts to accustom himself to the fact.

There were vacancies in one of the dormitories of seasoned convicts. Half a dozen of the new arrivals were to be transferred to fill the empty places, and among them were Michel and Paul. This would plunge them immediately into the reality of the Guiana prison, and Michel, with his resolve to learn as soon as possible all that there was to know, considered the change a great piece of luck.

They found their new quarters a boiling caldron. Outside, while the turnkey fumbled at the lock, they heard loud, excited voices. But the door opened upon a sudden silence in which words seemed congealed upon the lips of a group whose very gestures appeared solidified by the unexpected opening of the door. The prisoners had been as usual locked in for the noon hour, and the reappearance of the turnkey was startling.

What was up?

"Bah, just a lot of the new gang."

The door was closed, locked, and the turnkey went away.

The six looked about. No one offered to show them a place. No one, in fact, took any sort of notice of them. The men went back to their interrupted discussion, but speaking now in lowered voices.

Along each side of the room, in groups of three, were ranged planks facing end on, out from the wall into the center of the room; each group roped to a supporting frame and separated from its neighbor by perhaps twelve inches. Between the two rows an aisle some six feet wide ran the length of the room.

Each convict was entitled to one of these groups of planks, to the segment of wall to which it was attached, and to a corresponding portion of a single wall-shelf. The planks formed his narrow bed. Upon the wall and the shelf he might keep his few possessions.

Michel and his companions established themselves in the scattered places which appeared to be unclaimed. Michel unrolled his blanket, put on the shelf the small canvas knapsack containing his extra blouse and cotton trousers, placed his wide-brimmed, flat-crowned straw hat on top of the knapsack, and on two unappropriated nails hung his tin cup and bowl.

These, with a pair of wooden sandals, he had received from the prison in exchange for all of which it had robbed him. Also, as the scientist's beetle has its tag, so he had a number, stenciled large and black across his blouse and below the waist-line of his trousers.

Having disposed of his equipment, he lay down on his blanket to rest until the bell should order work squads to gather in the courtyard. He didn't venture to join the men crowded at the far end of the room. But now that he was settled he would listen.

The door had opened again, this time to admit two men delayed at the sawmill which rented them from the penitentiary administration. They were now being let in on the discussion. It seemed that some one named Darnal had hanged himself that morning.

"Dead?"

"Certainly, dead. Isn't that what happens to you when you hang yourself?"

"Well, I'm glad of it."

"Much good it does us except to prove what everybody knows."

"What of that? Who does it prove it to? They'll just put another like him in his place."

"Yes, and maybe the next bird won't have the grace to swing himself."

"If it could get back to France!"

"You know damn well it won't do that!"

"There's one thing that seldom leaves prison—the truth. It's exiled—*en perpétuité*, like the rest of us."

"We can prove that our bread is watered."

"And that boxes of sardines and condensed milk disappear from the cargo."

"And beans and rice and sugar out of our storehouses."

"We know what sort of meat we get, while the difference in price goes into somebody's pockets."

"And we know the doctors haven't proper medicines."

"But what good does it do us to know all that?"

"Hasn't the Director laughed at the idea that there's such a thing as public opinion?"

"Much good it would do us if it did get back to France!"

"Much good anything does pariahs! And that's what we are."

A wasted little man, with singularly bright eyes which seemed to have burned two deep holes under his bristling iron-gray brows, jeered:

"Ho! You all forget that at least they teach us how to steal. We should be grateful!"[1]

Michel raised himself on one elbow. "Are you saying that the keepers steal from us?" he asked.

"Good God!" some one shouted. "Hear the infant! Hear him!"

"Steal from us?" The gray man turned the fiery embers of deep-sunk eyes upon the boy, who sat up now, waiting for the answer, with scarlet spots of excitement burning on his cheeks.

"Steal from us? How do you think they're able to live in this God-damned, God-forsaken country? Do you suppose they're drawing magnificent pay? Not a bit of it. They're getting a good part of their living out of us—out of the food we're entitled to, little enough as that is, heaven knows. Their houses . . . those are free, too. And we do their work. Cook for them. Grow their vegetables and raise their chickens. They pay us in some favor which costs them nothing. And when their time is up, they retire on a pension. Whatever they do here, they know we're afraid to tell. We're craven, and they know it. They've all got revolver courage, you understand.

"Now here's the first time one of them has gone so far that the authorities had to jail him. Misappropriating some thousands of francs belonging to the Administration. That's all. But could he face what we've marched to, revolvers at our backs? No, the cur couldn't see a prison sentence through!

"Knew too much about prison, that was his trouble."

The group dissolved; four to play *belote*, some to smoke, others to sleep on their planks until the two o'clock bell sounded. Only Eugène Bassières, still smoldering, remained talking in a high nervous voice.

"Do they steal? Yes, they steal and we steal. Pretty nearly every cursed one of us, from the top straight down to the bottom and back again, steals. But we—" his tone was dry with the dregs of his bitterness—"we steal because otherwise we'd die!

"Can a man live and work on a cup of black coffee at daybreak; at noon half a loaf of bread with only enough flour in it to make it stand up, a chunk of boiled meat—a hundred grams, to be exact—and at night a cup of rice or beans? Yes, and we get the water they've boiled the rice and the meat in. I mustn't forget the water. They call that *bouillon*. Sounds well, doesn't it? *Bouillon!* Sounds like a menu. Waiter, bring me *bouillon*!

"Can you live on this sort of fare, you think? Not for a week, with the strength of France still in your blood; but live on it for months and then years? With disease in you, too. Try fighting hookworm and dysentery and fever with our seven hundred and fifty grams of bread and our hundred grams of meat and our quarter of a liter of rice—always remembering the water they've been cooked in!"

"Listen to Eugène!" The man dealing three cards to each, twice around, held up the game. "Listen to Eugène! He's found a new pair of ears."

"Can you live on that?" Eugène shouted. "Try it and see. Ten centimes a day spending money. That'll have to do you until you get promoted out of class three up to the first class, where, if you're lucky, they may hire you out to a civilian and let you earn fifty francs a month. That's the limit of your ambition, and you've got to have 'good behavior' to get it. Wait and see whether it's easy to get 'good behavior' here. If you're a tale-bearer, yes. If you're a spineless jelly-fish, perhaps. Always remember to say nothing but '*Oui, monsieur*' and '*Non, monsieur*.' That's their idea of a good convict."

"Everybody passes. Deal again."

"One, two, three; one, two, three; one, two, three; one, two, three." The cards fell in little crimson heaps before each player.

"Not so much noise over there, Eugène."

But Eugène went on as though he'd not heard:

"Now you see, don't you, that if you're honest you can't do much more than keep yourself in tobacco? That's why we steal. Because it's the only way we can live. You'll soon learn how . . . that is, if you don't know already.

"You'll steal wood if you work in the jungle. If they send you to the coffin factory you'll steal enough timber to make paper-knives and boxes and what not in your spare time. Maybe you'll be able to sell them, and maybe you won't. If you're a clerk you'll steal paper and pencils. Or if you work in the kitchen or the store-house you'll steal some of our food. You'll have to. It is the mode of the prison. That is, unless you are willing to sell your body and be some man's brat,[2] and then he'll steal for you as well as for himself. Look around, and wherever you see a young convict who seems better fed and better dressed than the rest, put him down as somebody's brat.

"You're young yourself and not ill-looking. That may be your way."

"Never that," said Michel. "I'm clever enough to steal for myself."

Eugène looked at him searchingly and then raised his voice to announce:

"Here's a boy who isn't going to be brat to any of you."

"Who says so?" A derisive hoot from the *belote* game.

"I do. I know character when I see it. No use wasting your time. He's not that sort."

And from the corner where he turned the pages of a book, Paul said, "You're right there. I crossed in the same cage with him. He'll only go his own way—and it's not that way."

Michel wondered how he knew. On board ship he'd scarcely noticed the quiet man with the deep, level voice. Only his horn-rimmed spectacles had registered with Michel.

It had rained in the afternoon.

While they waited in the courtyard for the final roll-call before dormitories were locked for the night, the convict work squads shivered in clammy wet garments. So little stood between their bodies and the Guiana rain.

Looking across the yard, Michel had caught sight of Félix and left his place in the line to go over to speak to him.

"How do you get on?" he asked—anxiously, because the skin of Félix's face seemed pale and drawn, taut like a drumhead. "How goes it with you?"

And out of dazed, blurred eyes Félix had recognized Michel.

"Oh, I'm in Pierre's dormitory now. He bribed the turnkey to get me moved."

There was no more, for, angrily waving his umbrella, the short-legged, long-waisted, rampant-mustachioed Corsican keeper ran up to curse Michel

back to his place.

"If you weren't a damned greenhorn you'd be reported for this," he bellowed.

Michel stepped into line.

"These keepers are dogs," he heard an Arab convict mutter.

And Michel, prison-broken to silence, mentally chalked the incident up in the long score which he kept against what he called Society.

The keeper moved away.

"Your friend over there looks good for the bamboos," whispered Eugène Bassières, who stood next Michel in the waiting squad.

"What?"

"Your friend—the boy you went over to speak to—he looks, as we say, good for the bamboos."

"What does that mean?"

"The bamboos? That's the cemetery—at least the part of it where they throw us when we're finished. No frills like funeral rites and tombstones, you understand. Why should a Guiana convict expect a blessing? Has he any money to pay for the rest of his soul? Nobody's going to say a mass to get him out of purgatory. No, when you go to the bamboos you're just dumped somewhere in a piece of ground set aside for the condemned. It's the prison of the dead, and instead of a wall, it's got bamboos growing around it. . . . That's the end— Deceased; 'D.C.D.' in blue pencil on your registration card. And it's all over with you. . . ."

So Félix was going to die. . . . Poor Félix wasn't much more than a child. It couldn't be possible that he would die.

"Yes," Eugène continued, "prison has shocked your friend. I've seen a lot go off that way. . . . They go fast. No special disease. Just prison."

"What's your name?"

"Michel Arnaud."

"Where from?"

"Paris."

"What did you do?" The man on the plank bed to his left put the questions to Michel that night after they'd both stretched out to sleep. "I mean why are you here?"

"Because I wanted the things money buys," was Michel's prompt reply.

"Oh, I see. And you tried to get them?"

"Yes, in the only way I could. Once I lived in a prince's house—a Russian prince. I suppose you don't know what a prince's house is like?"

Michel took in the big young figure which lay next him. A heavily built man, not more than twenty, with the slow, mild manner of the country-bred.

“A prince’s house? No, I couldn’t say what that was like. How did you happen to be there?”

“I was valet de chambre. I picked up the trade after the war. It’s easy enough, and any other sort of work was scarce. This prince had been living for years in France. That’s how the revolution didn’t hit him. He had everything—money and honor. And he never earned a sou of it himself.

“It seemed as if I was born for the luxurious life that man lived. I loved everything about it—the silver, the wine out of red and gold glasses, the smell of flowers in the rooms, the soft carpets, and at night candles everywhere—the way they are on the altars of a church. I liked the women, too. The scent they used and the way they kept their bodies like silk.

“The prince had all this, and I knew he’d never earned it. My way of getting a little of what he had was more honest than the way it had all come to him. What he had was the life’s blood of the poor.”

“Well, you’re here, and I suppose he’s still a prince?”

“Yes.” Then after a silence: “And now what’s your name?”

“Antoine Godefrey . . . Matricule 46,207.” He added the number as though it were an address.

“You’re from?”

“Avignon.”

“And you’re here for?”

“Murder.”

Then Antoine Godefrey turned his back and closed his eyes as though he slept. His left arm lay along the brown blanket and Michel saw that the forefinger was missing. He wondered how that had happened.

On the right Michel’s neighbor lay staring mutely at the ceiling. He’d not seemed to observe the presence of a newcomer on the planks next him. Looking straight ahead, with apparently unseeing eyes, he’d eaten his cup of rice, and then stretched out on his planks, lying on his back and staring up, as stiff as a corpse but for the rise and fall of his chest and an occasional twitching of the lines of agony drawn about his finely-modeled mouth. The grief on his upturned face seemed permanently carved, as unalterable as the expression of an effigy in marble; forever looking up with unchanging expression.

Outside, dull, steady rain fell. It had begun in the afternoon; at first a light, pearly drizzle, then, with a rush of wind through the palms of the Avenue des Cocotiers, it had come roaring like a waterfall. Wrapped in wings like shiny black waterproof coats, vultures had perched on the roofs, gargoyles of wretched resignation. The gutters of the village streets had run red like blood. And there’d been a faint, derisive whistle in the wind.

How cold and wet they'd all been, Michel remembered. Perhaps that was what had made Félix look, as Eugène had said, "good for the bamboos." It must have been the rain, and not what Eugène had thought. Yet in the first year—he suddenly recalled that even the Administration figures admitted that of every shipment, at least half died in the first year. . . .

There was no break in the thud of rain on the roof. The man across the aisle snored faintly. What had he done? Michel wondered. For that matter, what had all the others in the room done? Ninety men stretched on planks, with twelve inches separating convict from convict. Eugène Bassières, for example, and Paul Arthur, the man with the low, even voice, who so seldom spoke, so that when he did, you listened. What had they done to be locked in behind bars while they slept?

The rain checked his flickering speculations. He wouldn't have thought there was so much water in the sky. He'd heard some one say that this being the month of May, rain was to be expected every day. Something about the way it fell made him horribly nervous. He felt as though he could stand it if it would only let up just a minute. Then he could pull himself together, and it might go on again. This, he thought, is how you feel about the ocean when you're seasick. And the thing that's so awful to you is knowing you're helpless, that nothing you or anybody can do will stop it.

Prison, he decided, is something like this; something you want to have stop for just a minute. But could anybody stop it? he wondered. Or would it be just as impossible as stopping rain or the sea? Now the rain sounded as though endless buckets of water were being dumped on the roof. And that would go on, no matter what anybody did. He could hear it sliding off the roof into the great puddles on the ground. And he couldn't think why it made him so nervous.

Antoine Godefrey seemed to sleep. The rigid man who stared up at nothing breathed slowly, and the number stamped on his blouse rose and fell with the measure of his heart.

"Ah," Michel thought, "I didn't know there could be so sorrowful a place."

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[1] An authority for instances of official graft in the Guiana prisons is George Le Fèvre, a French journalist who visited the penal colony under the aegis of Ex-Governor Chanel. He published the result of his observations in a book whose title is *Bagnards et Chercheurs d'Or*.

[2] In the womanless world of the Guiana prisons the men who satisfy Adam's desire for Eve are called *mômes*. The English "brat" is of course necessarily an inadequate rendering of the local significance of *môme*.

CHAPTER V

The turnkey handed Michel a bit of paper many times folded. Faintly penciled inside, Michel read:

"Félix died in the night. They will bury him this afternoon."

It was signed "Pierre."

Michel crumpled the paper into the pocket of his cotton trousers, joined his work squad, and was marched out through the gates under the words, "*Camp de la Transportation*."

The village streets were deserted but for convict corvées filing out of the prison and branching off to the right and left to pass along streets named for Rousseau and Voltaire and Victor Hugo; to pass also the official building which flaunts the familiar "*Liberté*, *Fraternité*, *Egalité*"; and the blue and white Palace of Justice, where four times a year convicts are tried for the various crimes they commit as prisoners.

In this direction and that the squads proceeded to their assigned tasks; to workshops where they produce chairs and tables, wooden spoons and bowls; to shops where it is their duty to keep the supply of coffins equal to the demand; to sawmills and lumberyards, and to the river-front where they land the logs floated downstream on rafts.

Their exodus did not disturb the sleeping houses, quiet behind scraps of gardens and little walls with bricks arranged in geometric pattern like the colored designs on boxes of children's building-blocks. The citizens of St. Laurent may sleep in the dawn, for the convict corvées are for the most part barefoot, walking humbly like Trappist monks—finding it less painful to accustom themselves to bare feet than to the irritation of the clumsy wooden sandals provided them.

So on silent feet they leave the prison. And on their lips there are few words, for one wakes tired after a night in a Guiana prison.

Michel's squad moved straight along the Rue Maxime du Camp. It moved toward the rosy flush of sunrise. Yet the air was heavy with possible rain, for it was still the month of May, and the dry season not due until after the middle of June.

Passing St. Laurent's solitary church, the men heard priests intoning early mass. In the branches of the mangos and the flamboyants, birds twittered, invisible among the leaves. Cocks crowed everywhere, and on the roofs vultures unfurled their wings, showing light buff bands across the black. In spread-eagle position they dried their rain-soaked plumage, occasionally giving a wing-flap to hurry the process, and then soaring off to

circle hopefully above the village streets where soft-footed convicts wearily dragged themselves to work.

Behind each squad sauntered ruddy keepers, placidly smoking cigarettes. With big black umbrellas on their arms, sun-helmets on their heads, and heavy revolvers on their hips, they were ready for any emergency—rain, sun, or disobedience.

"What time do they bury the dead?" Michel asked, in a voice so low that he had twice to repeat the question before Eugène replied.

"In the afternoon—about five o'clock."

The squad turned left to the river where a pair of oxen stood ready to drag the great chain by which a waiting locomotive would haul floating logs. It was a small locomotive, mutilated at Verdun, but since cobbled into sufficient repair for the job of pulling logs up the steep bank of the Maroni.

Standing in the water, Michel, armed with a heavy iron prong, helped steer the logs to the river's edge. There, others attached the chain and gave the signal that set the engine in motion. Then slowly the logs mounted. The oxen returned the chain to the workers at the river's brink; it was fastened to other logs, and the signal was again shouted to the locomotive. This process, many times repeated, made up the forced labor of a convict's day.

Sometimes, with low, moaning thunder, the skies deluged the toiling men. And sometimes the sun swept the sky a brilliant blue and raised great blisters on the bodies of white men sent to Guiana to be cured of the disease which is crime. And always the oxen gazed superciliously upon the scene, their flat corrugated horns pointing back in huge semicircles, the skin of their noses wrinkling above moist round black nostrils, their thick hairy lips quivering as they lifted them to a level with their horns. With this scornful pose of the head they were travelers, contemptuous of life in a country other

than their own. They were Indo-Chinese oxen, and Guiana was a mean land where oxen were directed by wretched creatures who perished under the sun.

Michel was often amused by their ponderous arrogance, but today he did not raise his eyes to be diverted by oxen. Today he could think only of Félix. He tried to reason that he hadn't really loved the boy. He hadn't seen much in Félix to love. He'd thought his character as pudgy as his body, and Michel detested pudginess. But his argument came always back to the fact that he'd known Félix's anguish. That was the bond. That was why, through the long hot morning of alternate downpour and blazing sun, he'd not been able to put out of his mind the boy who had turned to him in terrified misery.

At noon in the dormitory Michel lay with closed eyes and heard Félix saying, "I am very afraid."

"He must have been so dreadfully afraid of dying," Michel thought. "He would even be afraid of being buried."

In the afternoon when the long shadows of scornful oxen and toiling men pointed east, Michel found Eugène looking at him. He then saw Eugène go over and enter into some sort of discussion with the keeper. And he knew that Eugène was making his opportunity for him, giving him a chance to slip off unobserved and to make his way back to the Rue Maxime, and a little farther to the bamboos.

He was early. Alone with graves. Here and there comrades had marked a friend's resting-place with a small black wooden cross. But few of the condemned dead were thus set apart from the great company of unnamed mounds, shut in on three sides by bamboos like a colossal plumed hedge.

Wandering about this pathless field, Michel came upon a newly-dug grave. Standing on its brink, he looked down and saw at the bottom of the excavation a group of bones lying in an inch or so of muddy water. He saw a skull, shoulder-blades and ribs, arms and outstretched fingers, hip and thigh bones and the complicated articulation of feet—a complete skeleton, its anatomical order but slightly disarranged by the removal of earth.

As Paul had looked contemplatively upon the fleshly body of man, Michel gazed now upon the framework which had supported that troubled

body. He was conscious of an overpowering sadness, into which walked the memory of Félix, explaining that the *patron* of the café had had only five days in the hospital, and did Michel think it right that a young fellow should go to the Devil's Island Penal Colony for so trifling a thing as that?

Michel stood, a motionless little figure with bare feet sunk in the soft newly-upturned earth; a little figure whose loose white cotton trousers and blouse were conspicuously numbered, and whose flat wide-brimmed hat marked him a convict.

It was very still there in what Eugène had called the "prison of the dead." The great pale polished stems of the bamboos creaked gently as they rubbed one against another, while in their feathery foliage the breeze stirred very softly.

"So they bury us one on top of the other," Michel heard himself say, speaking aloud as if he would break the stabbing calm. And then, startled at the sound of his own speech, he looked up and saw that barefoot men brought Félix in a wooden box swung between their shoulders. He knew it to be Félix, because he saw that Pierre walked behind the men.

Side by side, Pierre and Michel watched them lower the box until it rested on the skeleton which lay at the bottom of the grave. They watched them shovel back the earth, and all the time there was no more sound than if they'd every one been ghosts. There was only that faint creaking of bamboo stem rubbing against bamboo stem.

Michel wished that he'd brought some flowers to lay on the mound.

Then, leaving Félix there among the bamboos, they turned back to prison. Again Michel and Pierre side by side. But neither knew how to speak to the other.

It was late. The vultures were coming to roost in the palm branches. St. Laurent's little church was tolling the Angelus.

Three peals of the bell, followed by the interval in which to murmur the salutation:

"Mary, full of grace and blessed among women. . . ."

Again three peals:

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us poor sinners now and at the hour of our death. . . ."

Then chaotic, triumphant clanging of the bells, as though they would proclaim the prayer answered. All at once the clanging stopped, and the dusk seemed suddenly surprised into silence.

The heavy bodies of the dumb roosting vultures weighed down the supple palm fronds. There were no work squads in sight. One of the men who had buried Félix reminded them that if they were late for the roll-call it would mean punishment. But never mind, it didn't matter.

What was that in the road ahead? A man was lying in the road. Four convicts came pushing a little wooden cart. Had there been an accident, and was the cart brought to carry some one to the hospital?

They hurried forward to see.

Then Michel recognized the man in the road as Antoine—Antoine Godefrey, his neighbor in the dormitory.

He saw that Antoine lay on his back, beating bleeding hands against the gravel of the road. There was sand in his black hair, and tears flooded his closed eyes, leaking out between the lids and forming pools in the deep cavities of his eyes.

Michel heard Antoine saying over and over:

"Oh, my poor mother! How she cried and cried! I was condemned to die . . . they would have cut off my head. It was my poor father who saved me!

"Ah, and I was the only son and the oldest.

"Oh, my poor mother! How she cried and cried! And they would have cut off my head. . . .

"But it was self-defense! I shot to defend. Why have I been punished like this! Guiana! But it was my father who saved me, because my mother cried and cried!"

Antoine was drunk and beating his hands until they bled, while with unseeing eyes drowned in tears, his heart mourned without restraint.

How strange that Antoine, so silent and heavy, had all this within him! Michel remembered the emotionless voice in which he'd answered his question with the one word "murder," and then turned on his side and appeared to sleep. Yet all along, this must have been inside Antoine, waiting to express itself when rum had let down the barriers.

Now the men had tied his feet together and put his struggling body into the cart, where one prevented his throwing himself out while the others trundled the cart off down the Rue Maxime du Camp.

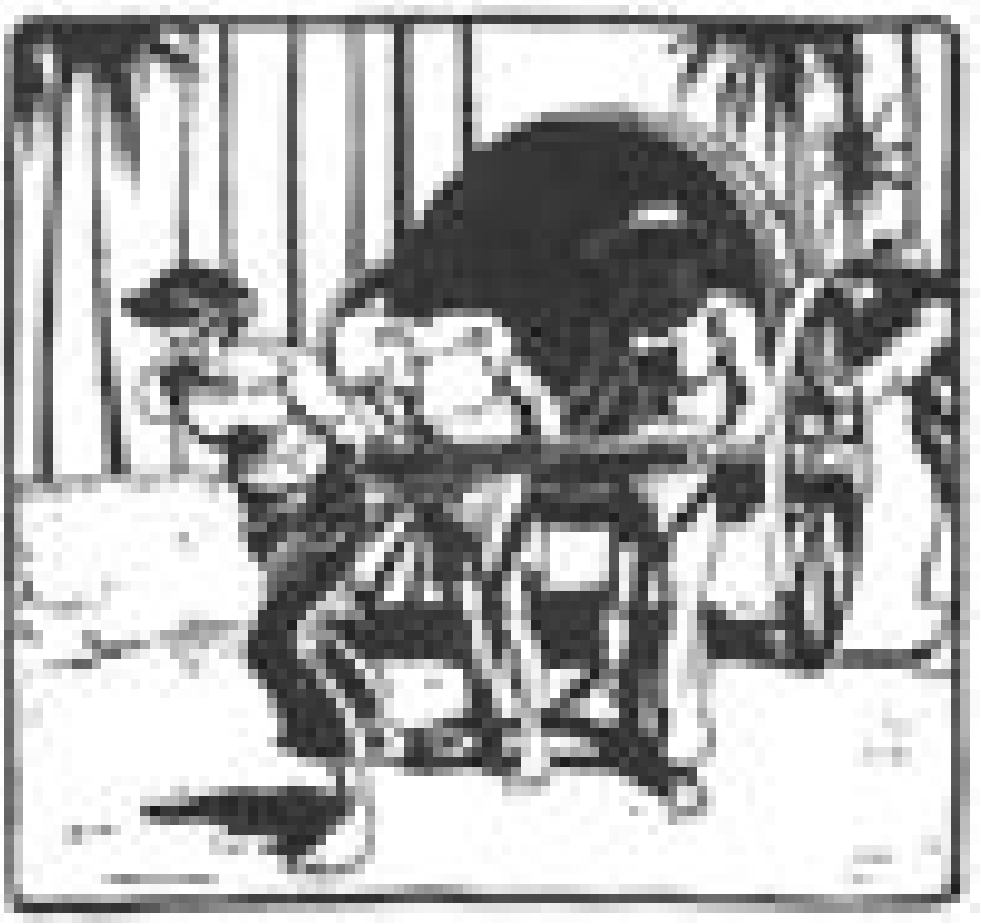
Then, as though Antoine's unburdening heart had released something in himself, Pierre spoke.

"Do you know," he said, "what is my advice to every young fellow landed in this hell?

"I'd advise him to take a knife and stick it in the back of some old devil like myself. He'd only have to do it to one."

Michel took this without comment, for already they were at the prison gates.

They had all arrived together, Michel and Pierre, Félix's pall-bearers, and the cart where Antoine still lamented that his mother had wept and wept.



The gate opened. All but Antoine lifted their hats; all but Antoine raised both arms above their heads, while the turnkeys passed hands over their bodies.

It was the prison routine. Nothing must be smuggled into the prison. Turnkeys must see that under the crowns of hats, and about the bodies of men, there was nothing. Search was the formality without which no convict was ever admitted through the gates. This gesture of lifted hats and arms became in time so automatic as to be almost subconscious.

They entered. No, the squads stood in formation. The roll had not yet been called. Unless the turnkey told, they might escape detection and punishment.

CHAPTER VI

Michel sat on his plank bed, huddled in a coarse brown blanket. It was raining again. Everything was saturated. The blanket which he drew about him was damp. He shivered, for nowhere is one so easily chilled as in the tropics, where the pores are forever open. He shivered and was sickly conscious of the fetid prison odor. He felt a vague physical unrest which was not illness, but a state of nagging craving. As Eugène had prophesied, his body was rebelling against the denial of all human appetites. He was suffering the first pangs of that long, slow starvation which he had discovered was to be the most unbearable part of his prison sentence. He felt depressed and indescribably lonely. Bah, in a minute he would actually be sorry for himself! He resisted that, for he scorned self-pity. He had done what he had done, and he was not repentant. Therefore he would not ask sympathy—not even from himself.

Eugène passed, on his way to join the gamblers at the other end of the room. He smiled at the wretched little figure wrapped in its blanket. Smiled, and offered a cigarette. A smoke would have comforted, but Michel, suddenly remembering Félix, shook his head, fearing that it wouldn't have been offered unless Eugène wanted something of him. Already the poison of prison had entered into Michel.

Eugène went on, leaving him a little regretful. He was so lonely. Even Antoine's monosyllables would have been better than nothing. But the cart had wheeled Antoine off to a cell. Michel looked furtively at the man on his right—he'd heard some one call him Janisson. Janisson lay, as usual, rigid, with wide-open eyes fixed on the ceiling.

Michel's gaze wandered about the dormitory, become in these weeks so familiar. The dreary rows of plank beds. The little knapsacks, each on a shelf at the head of the bed. The occasional picture post-cards pinned on the wall, post-cards for the most part depicting women—women in lace lingerie, women drawing on filmy silk stockings, women in bathing tights; blonde women and brunettes, with bobbed or flowing hair; laughing women showing pretty teeth; women with large amorously languishing eyes.

But to Michel all this was as familiar as the prison stench. He could no longer look upon it with bright birdlike curiosity. He saw it only as a place where he'd have to spend the seven years of his sentence; that is, unless he escaped. . . . But escape seemed not to be so easy as they'd all thought.

Meanwhile he was tired, hungry, cold. And above everything he wanted to talk to some one.

Across the aisle which separated the rows of beds, half a dozen men were chanting a song of the Guiana prisons:

It rains; it rains.
In this sad land it rains.
Oh, France, how we regret thy skies,
While it rains and rains.

We weep. We weep.
Ever must convicts grieve.
Here where the parrots mock men's woe,
While it rains, we weep.

The intoning voices, mingled with shouts from the gamblers who, seated on the floor on a blanket, dealt hands for *Marseillaise*. Rain fell on the roof and dripped off into vast puddles.

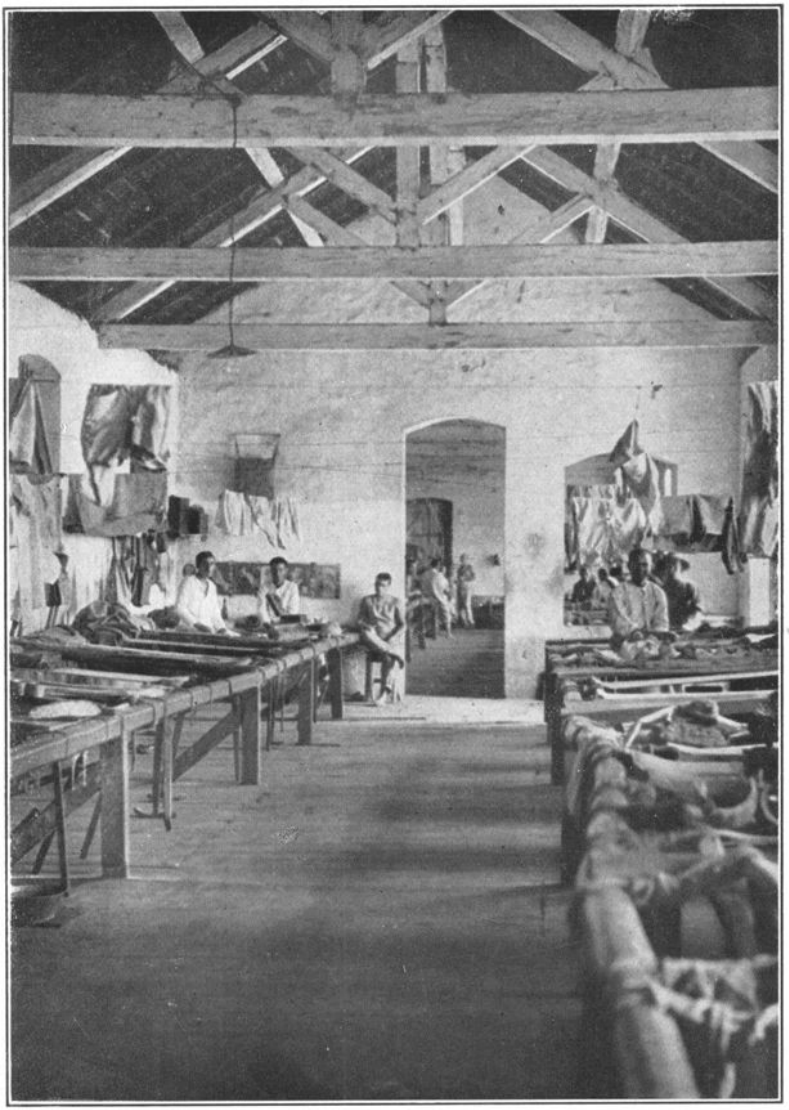
We mourn; we mourn.
Dishonored sons of Gaul—

Michel could bear it no longer. He would speak to Janisson.

"Antoine was drunk," he said. They were the first words which came into his head.

"Trying to forget, of course." Janisson turned his eyes in Michel's direction. He had a low vibrant voice.

"I suppose so."



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THE DORMITORY OF A FRENCH GUIANA PRISON.

The conversation died. Michel attempted to blow into it a breath of life.

"What are the cells like here?" he asked.

"Just cells. Like cells everywhere perhaps. Walls. Iron door. Lock. Plank bed. And not more bed-bugs, I imagine, than we have in the dormitories; though they must be hungrier, with only one man at a time to feed on. But I don't know much about the cells. I've never had cell punishment. I do my

work . . . don't answer back . . . and don't set fire to my stomach with their vile rum."

Again a silence.

So Antoine was trying to forget. Well, he hadn't seemed very successful. Félix's way was surer.

"And what do you do to forget?"

Michel was startled, for at the question Janisson sat up quickly.

"Do I forget?" The words were like a stifled cry. "Do I forget? Am I not remembering night and day? You see me lie here remembering. Thinking and thinking until I am too tired to think. . . . And then I dream.

"I seem always just about to understand. Something in me says, 'Try only a little more, and in a moment you'll understand.'

"If I could get it thought out, I believe I could be resigned. But I always come to a place where everything turns black and I can't go any further. Then I start over again at the beginning.

"I start with being a little boy. The patisserie was on the road out of Toul. It was just a little distance beyond the fountain. For there was a fountain. I don't know if it was a big one, but it seemed so to me then—the biggest and most beautiful fountain.

"I grew up in that patisserie beyond the fountain. I grew up with the smell of cakes and buns hot out of the oven.

"When I was old enough I had my trade. I loved my trade. Machinery. . . . Do you know machinery?"

But the words spilled out as from an over-full reservoir, and Janisson didn't wait for Michel's answer.

"Oh, I miss my trade here. My trade and my wife. A man misses them both. But I don't suppose you know anything about a wife. You're too young."

"Oh, I'm not so young." Michel took advantage of a sudden and unexpected pause. "Really I'm twenty. It's because I'm small that you think so. But I don't know about wives. You see all the women I've known were prostitutes—except my grandmother. And I'm not sure about her."

"Then maybe you won't miss what you've never had. Maybe it gives you less to regret.

"It was the war that took my wife. No, not what you think. Not a bomb, but a fine foreign officer who'd come to save France!

"Oh, the war! How long it was! And at the end no home—only a mistress!

"And now I think and think, and it seems as though from the time I came back from the front I never decided anything for myself. After the war

everything seems to have happened like a Fate that I couldn't control. Was it so with you?"

"No, I always decided for myself. There was good luck and bad, of course. Sometimes the cards fell my way and sometimes not. But it was I who did the deciding."

"Then perhaps you don't feel confused. You aren't going round and round like a squirrel in a cage, making yourself dizzy trying to get at the reason of it all.

"I see myself coming back and my mother-in-law telling me about my wife. And she was glad, you understand. She was young herself. Very pretty, and always jealous. Wherever I went, I heard she'd been saying this and saying that. Oh, *là! là!* The trouble women can make for a man—"

"In your life, yes," Michel realized, suddenly seeing Janisson as a woman might see him. The lean beauty of his figure. The perfect proportion of line. The strength and grace of long, flexible muscles. The careless relaxation in which power slept lightly, as though it would wake at the slightest summons.

And when this statue emerged from its coma—when it came to life, as at Michel's question, "What do you do to forget?"—it became charged with a current of human magnetism. Whoever entered its field must inevitably be drawn to it, as little tin ducks obey toy magnets. And when a strange glitter replaced the fixed glaze of the somber eyes, every fluttering moth of a woman must fly straight toward their flame. Michel conceded the man's charm.

Yes, undoubtedly, women would make trouble for Janisson . . . while he —Michel—could glide soft-footed in and out of their lives and never be to them anything more than a merry companion. There was nothing of the Hamlet in his childlike grace or the easy smile with which his lips slid back to show white, even teeth. His voice was light and soft in contrast to the deep pitch of Janisson's. When Janisson spoke, it woke something in his listener. There was in it such immense capacity for emotion. So his body translated into physical pain the anguish of prison, grief seeming to circulate through the veins to his heart and out through arteries until it had penetrated the tiniest of the blood-vessels. Just as his voice seemed to transmute prison into sound.

Michel listened with a sense of something trembling and troubled within him.

"Ah, yes," Janisson was saying, "when I look back now I see that for a long time I was moved about. Not deciding for myself. Perhaps I'd never decided anything. Life had run so smoothly . . . loving my home and my trade as I did.

“Anyway, after I came back from the war, something I’d no control of seemed to move me. That’s how it was the day she was pointing the revolver at me. I was standing by the table. There was a hammer on the table. It was only an inch away from my hand. No, it was in my hand. I was looking right into the barrel of the pistol. Then everything went black. I didn’t see her or the revolver. I saw only black. I heard something fall . . . something hard, and then something soft and heavy. The light came back. I saw she was on the floor. The revolver was near her feet. Where was the hammer? It wasn’t in my hand. I tried to remember. It was on the table . . . then in my hand . . . then blackness . . . the fall . . . and where was the hammer?

“I went over to her. She’d been struck square in the temple. Could I have thrown the hammer? Why, I hadn’t even aimed it! If I had, I’d certainly have missed her. What had thrown it? It was the thing which had been moving me about . . . without my deciding.

“Some one came in.

“ ‘What’s the matter? Has she fainted?’

“ ‘No, it is I who have killed her.’ . . . And all the time I was thinking how pretty she was and how jealous.

“This is what’s going round. This is what I’m trying to think out. Back to the beginning. To the first things I recollect. The fountain and the pastry shop. Through the war . . . to the revolver and the hammer and somebody asking, ‘Has she fainted?’—and hearing myself say, ‘No, it is I who have killed her.’

“And then you want to know what I do to forget!”

And Janisson laughed.

“But it was self-defense!” Michel reasoned.

“What witnesses did I have? I was in her house. That was enough.”

“But with a good lawyer.”

“Oh, I had a good one! He made a hard fight. Dug up my war record. Three times cited for bravery. Took a fortified house. As dispatch-rider, I kept communication open between our lines and the American forces. Twice brought in wounded Americans on my motor cycle. Got a ball in the leg—

“ ‘But that’s over now,’ the judge said, ‘and doesn’t count any more.’

“Then Guiana. Twenty years’ penal servitude. Exile for life. Plenty of time to think. Over and over again for all the time I’ll have in this world.

“If I could just understand why it happened. One black moment, and everything finished. Perhaps if I could understand, I’d be able to rest. Anyway I could stop thinking. . . .

“Oh, if I could go back to the good fellow I used to be! I want my trade and to be legitimately married again.

"But why do I talk to you? I never talk. Why to you? What did you do to bring you here, anyway?"

"I'm a burglar," Michel said.

"A murderer tells his story to a burglar, eh? Oh, *là! là!*"

"Yet to look at us are we any way different from other men?"

And Janisson seemed to come out of the dizzy repetition of his tragedy, and for the first time to look at Michel.

"You've got an open, honest little face. I like the straight way you look out of your eyes. Yes . . . I'd take a chance on trusting you. Haven't I proved it? Talking to you like this?

"And I—do I seem like a man who'd kill a woman? I often look at this hand that reached out for the hammer, and I say to myself, 'It's a mistake. Must be a mistake, you couldn't have done a thing like that.'

"No, we aren't different from other men. Not more different than their bodies are different from ours. Take away what a man owns or what he's done, and look at what he is. That's the important thing. Yet two years ago I wouldn't have seen that what counts is what a man is! I'd have thought then that there was a lot to choose between me and a burglar. And suppose I'd been the judge, wouldn't I have sent a murderer to Guiana? Without thinking twice about it, either! I'd have told him he was lucky not to get the guillotine he deserved. Now I can see that what I did might happen to any man. It had taken only a second of time to change me from an honest man to a murderer.

"And before that happened I'd have laughed at the idea of trusting a burglar—"

But Janisson stretched himself flat again, and again slipped into rigidity without finishing the sentence.

. . . . . .

Weep, convicts, weep—dishonored sons of ancient Gaul . . .

The song seemed to have a thousand verses. Over in his corner, Paul Arthur was reading. He was everlastingly reading. That was evidently his way of forgetting. It wouldn't be Michel's. He wanted action. Should he go now and watch the game? Or should he go and talk to Paul? But what was the use of interrupting him? . . . No, he wouldn't do either. He would go to sleep.

He slid down on the planks. But he couldn't sleep. He kept seeing Antoine lying in the road, throwing his hands about. Thinking of Antoine set his thoughts in a new groove. The Antoine beside whom he'd slept now for nearly a month, with whom he'd occasionally swapped a word, that

impassive Antoine, he'd suddenly discovered, had no real existence. Something altogether different lived inside, as a turtle lives in its shell. From time to time you may see a turtle's head, or note the movement of his feet. Or again you may see only his shell.

Félix had been the first in whom Michel had suspected an inner reality. Before Félix, he'd known only shells of varying designs. He'd observed only the simpler human qualities—desire and envy, hatred and revenge, cunning, courage, fear, extravagance, generosity, thrift, industry, and idleness. He had thought that he knew mankind. Yet he had noted only isolated gestures, as obvious as the protruding head and feet of the turtle.

Today he'd seen the Antoine who lived within the slow listless body of the man who'd slept beside him. And now there was the squirrel cage hopelessly revolving inside Janisson.

But always it was only a glimpse, a sudden penetrating light, blinding while it lasted. You wanted to cover your eyes, for the thing you saw was so much brighter, so much more clear-cut, than the world to which vision is accustomed. It made you feel ill at ease. You were more at home among the garments of disguise.

The real Antoine, for example, was making sleep impossible. The cry he'd heard in the road was keeping him awake; whereas the Antoine who lay down at night, rose up at dawn, went out with the work squad, and returned again to his bed of planks, had never affected him one way or the other.

It was that cry of the real Antoine which now drove Michel to appeal once more to Janisson. He must talk, since he could not sleep and did not wish to think.

"Have you been here long, Janisson?"

"I came out a year ago."

"And you've been in St. Laurent—in this prison all the time?"

"No, I spent a few months in Cayenne."

Janisson's replies had their origin in the shadowed surface of his consciousness. Beneath that surface the same bewildered effort to understand flowed eternally into the dark sea of despair.

"What's Cayenne like?"

"It's just a little place. It's the capital of this cursed country. But just a little place. Muddy streets and vultures. A square with tall palms. They say a priest planted them. The governor's house—that's an old monastery. Part of the prison was once a convent. It's all much the same as St. Laurent—maybe a trifle bigger. But otherwise more or less the same. Always in the village the same faces—black faces. In the prison the same smell. A convict there is just about as wretched and hungry as here.

“But in Cayenne you have the ocean. You can look far out to the blue water—to the open sea. You know that you could follow it northeast to France or south to Brazil, or west to Venezuela. You could follow it to freedom.”

In his sad, beautiful voice the man talked to little Michel’s order.

“And there, just as here, back of you there’s the jungle. Jungle all the way to the Amazon in one direction, and to the Andes in another. Unbroken—but for half a dozen gold concessions in the interior. At the end of your *peine*, if you’re still alive, you can go to those mines to work. It’s a good quick way to die of fever. The white men who come back come shaking like the poplar leaves at home.

“That’s all this French Guiana is—jungle and rivers and prisons. Prisons on the Iles du Salut. Prisons at Cayenne and Kourou. Prisons here on the Maroni.

“It’s a lost country. The only country in the world to which nobody ever came for pleasure. You think you’re sad now. But wait a year. You’ll see how prison kills you bit by bit, how it starves you in every way a man can be starved. There’s not a desire of your heart or your body that won’t be starved. You’re young. Nature’s as strong and alive in you as if you weren’t a convict. Your body will cry out for variety in food. It’ll turn against the rotten, tasteless stuff they give us. It’ll say, ‘Can’t I have my soup and meat hot? Can’t they be seasoned?’

“It’ll remember pepper and sage and thyme and bay leaves. It’ll demand something sweet and something sour. It’ll want to be clean and to be rested. It’ll want love. Your mind will crave diversion. It’ll want to be amused, and it’ll want to laugh.

“Maybe now and then you can buy yourself a banana or a cake of chocolate. Perhaps you’ll be able to put the prison vices in the place of love—but where will such vices lead you?”

“How about escape, Janisson?”

“Escape? You all come here thinking of escape! If it were so easy, do you believe there’d be a single man in this room?

“Once I had a chance. I’m not fool enough to try the jungle. But this looked like a real chance.

“It came to me in Cayenne. Sometimes a Brazilian fishing-smack puts in there, you know. And they say that for five hundred francs the captain will smuggle a convict off to Brazil. It’s not easy. For he must send a rowboat to take you out to his schooner, and it’s a tricky coast. But if you have five hundred francs it’s not impossible. It’s been done. Not often, for how many have such a sum?

"How many of us have even fifty francs? And think of it, my chance was offered me for only fifty francs! And I didn't have that!

"It was one of the captains who offered it. I didn't go to him. He came to me and made the offer himself. Out of a clear sky.

"I didn't like the look of him. He was a greasy little Portuguese. Pockmarks all over his face, and a muddy yellow skin—the color of the water in these damned tropical rivers. He had big shifty eyes, bloodshot—and the whites were yellow. Thick lips and yellow teeth. A fat stomach with a heavy gold watch-chain on it. Gold earrings, too, and pointed yellow shoes. A dirty-white suit. Smelt of rancid hair oil and onions and rum. You could almost get drunk on his breath.

"No, I didn't like his looks. Not a little bit. But he offered me my liberty for fifty francs.

"My liberty, you understand! I was to give him fifty francs and take along my own food. We could make Brazil in six days, he said. I could manage with a loaf of bread a day, and quinine in case fever came on. Then I'd need a civilian hat, shirt, pantaloons, and shoes. I could get them second-hand in the market. Fifty francs would have got me to Brazil. And I didn't have it!

"When that captain said 'liberty'—but you don't know yet how a convict feels when a man comes to him and talks about liberty!

"Freedom to go and come. Freedom to get a letter that some lousy official hasn't read.

"I could see myself on that Brazilian sailboat. I could imagine the sigh of relief when I knew we were out of danger. Oh, dear God, that sigh of relief! . . .

"And in Brazil I could forget this place. Why, I'd go back to my trade and be the good chap I once was! I'd do well. And after a while I'd marry. I'd have a wife and children. There'd be food and wine. And sometimes a moving-picture. Sometimes music. And dancing in the cafés.

"No more being counted or answering to roll-calls. No more locked doors and men with revolvers to spy on you.

"Oh, I'd live! I'd get back my strength. It was not too late. Fifty francs was all I needed. That would have done the whole thing—would have brought me all that! Cheap, wasn't it? A man's life for fifty francs!

"But I didn't have it.

"And maybe, anyway, when I got to the rendezvous I'd have found the police waiting. That's happened, you know. Or maybe that oily Portuguese thought I carried a *plan*. I couldn't tell. Must be something crooked about offering me my passage for fifty francs. A man with a face like that . . ."

"What's a *plan*, Janisson?"

"How did you pass through St. Martin de Ré without hearing of a *plan*? It's what you keep your money in."

"But where?"

"Where do you think a convict could keep money? In his *musette* on the shelf here, where anybody could rob him? Where any keeper has the right to confiscate it? What's left to a convict except his body? Well, that's where he hides his money . . . if he has any."

"How? And what's a *plan* like?"

"It's like a big capsule made out of aluminum or tin. It'll hold seven or eight bills of any denomination. Screw it up tight and insert it. Here you have to be your own safe-deposit box, you understand.

"Of course, a *plan* is against prison rules—just as it's against the rules for you to spend more than fifty centimes a day. But four-fifths of the men carry a *plan* all the same."

"And the captain, why were you afraid he thought you had one?"

"Oh, the captain! You see, he might have done a post-mortem on me. That's happened, too. One of these captains made a practice of it. He'd promise a convict his freedom. Then when he got him aboard the vessel he'd shoot him. Operate. Take the *plan* out of his intestines, and chuck his body to the sharks. Nobody knows how many poor fellows have gone that way. He got so bold that he began taking them in bunches—instead of one at a time.

"That's how he got caught. One of the victims escaped and came back to tell what he'd seen. The next visit that captain made to Cayenne, he was arrested and tried. He's doing a life term now.

"So maybe my not having the fifty francs saved me. But what's the good? Wouldn't I rather die and get it over?"

"Where do you get them . . . these *plans* you talk about?"

"Some of the prisoners make them. And that's against the rules, too. But you can buy one for ten francs."

The group playing *Marseillaise* broke up. The song of rain and tears had an hour ago come to an end.

The gamblers pocketed their winnings. And all went to rest, each taking off his shirt, rolling it up to be used as a pillow, and lying down in the trousers of the day. Some used the blanket to lie upon; others felt the need of it as a covering.

Then in the dormitory men fell one by one asleep, and from each the disguise dropped as muscles relaxed, while the memories of the individual, his hopes and his pains, accompanied him to the brink of the merciful river of sleep which bore him to a forgetfulness disturbed only by dreams, like

flickering shadows of that somber, overhanging reality beneath which flowed the river of oblivion.

On their planks they lay like dead men, and above each quiet body hovered the ghosts of women. Old mothers with tired, outstretched hands groping to gather lost babies to their withered breasts. And phantom women, once held in the empty sleeping arms. Wives perhaps, who had borne children to these men whose roads terminated in prison. Daughters of joy—sometimes tearful, sometimes mocking. Wraiths of women. Always the ghosts of women drifting through the night of prison dormitories. Women who had loved and hated, suffered, sacrificed, desired, comforted, tormented. Women with giving hands or with hands of greed. Martyrs or tempters. But all to some degree caught in the giant web of prison, even though only to wander through the dreams of the condemned.

Sometimes the dead on the planks moaned—sighed, as though the effect of a drug wore off. They stirred and again slipped into stillness.

Only Michel remained clearly awake, dreamlessly awake. But no longer troubled. For his mind was busy with schemes, finding its refuge always in action. He was vowing to save every sou until he owned a *plan* himself. He would hoard until he carried in his body the price of his freedom. How would he earn the sous? That he didn't know. But what other men had done, he could do.

PART TWO

"Death hovers over an immense distress. . . ."

Roussenq in "L'Enfer."

CHAPTER VII

A ragged, thin little figure paused before turning into the Avenue des Cocotiers. At that particular spot it always paused to look for a moment across the dancing light on the river to the spotless little village of Albina on the far shore—surely a Noah's Ark village, with the white paint on its houses and its green painted trees still fresh and sticky.

The figure paused because that village typified liberty. It stood on Dutch soil, and no matter how many refugee convicts its authorities might return to the St. Laurent prison, somehow Albina seemed the portal to freedom.

When the figure paused, its every line drooped. The black numbers across its dingy blouse were blurred beyond legibility. Its sagging shoulders might have been bowed under some burden too heavy for their strength; a weight invisible to mortal eyes, but nevertheless exerting a definite physical pressure of which the result was plainly apparent. The corners of the mouth curved perceptibly down. And you knew that had the skin not been bronzed, it would have been pale ivory. But the curtain of dark lashes still went up on the young confident eyes of Michel.

For the figure which stood looking across the river to Albina and beyond to the green mass of jungle was Michel.

In gazing across from St. Laurent to the jungle, his eyes hesitated always at the center of the stream, resting for a moment upon the shimmer of water which marked the spot where the raft had capsized and his friend, Raymond, had gone down. A foolish escapade. Michel was ashamed to think of it. Ashamed to remember that for all his wise resolutions he had yielded to a fit of despair, stolen a crazy old raft, and set out with Raymond. Too penniless even to hire a canoe in which to cross, what had they expected? Of all the mad enterprises! Costing Raymond his life and Michel a term with the "incorrigibles." Next time he would be better prepared. And he thought with satisfaction of the bills rolled up inside the *plan* which he carried safely out of sight within his emaciated body which had so denied itself that, franc by franc, those bills might be accumulated. But he must be what the convicts call "full"; that is, he must have at least five hundred francs in his *plan* before he attempted it again. Of course he'd never have been such an imbecile as to go unprepared, if everybody hadn't been low with fever, dying at the rate of seven or eight a day in the St. Laurent prison alone. Even a man as strong as Antoine . . . how quickly he'd gone! There'd been the night when he'd waked Michel to say that he felt on fire. But locked there in the dormitory, nothing could be done until morning, when they put his hot body on a stretcher and carried it over to the hospital. And three days later,

Antoine, like Félix, had gone in a box to the bamboos. It had been a terrible summer, when keepers had died too, and their wives. Death had been everywhere . . . death, and a relentless heat which never let up. It hadn't seemed to make much difference what chances he took.

He was wiser now. There was always that shimmering spot in the river, just upstream from the wreck of the *Edith Cavell*. That spot would warn him. So he let his eyes rest there for a moment before they passed on to Albina and to the jungle beyond.

Michel looked, and then, shortening the focus of his eyes, he turned to walk along the sandy way under the cocoanuts, past the church, and on to the Boulevard de la République. On the corner was the Chinese grocery shop, and halfway between the shop and the river stood the high stucco walls of the penitentiary.

Here he chose the east side of the street, partly because it was easier to resist spending his savings if he did not pass the Chinaman's door. The best way to keep a stomach under control was not to pass a shop smelling of cheese and onions and coffee. It was well not to look at hams hung from rafters, or at tin boxes of biscuit and condensed milk. Such things made the stomach contract, and then it was hard to save the fractions which went to make up the bills carefully hoarded in one's *plan* as the price of one's freedom.

Also he chose the east side because he didn't like to pass the barracks where, in soldier clothes, a clumsy adolescent negro from Martinique loafed in the sentry box outside the garrison gates. He'd felt that way ever since the day he'd heard one of these boys say, "We're here to guard the convicts."

In such small ways Michel made existence as bearable as possible, avoiding any needless irritation of stomach or spirit.

The overseer of the mill often sent Michel on an errand into the village, to buy cigarettes or to deliver notes to a certain lady—selecting him because ladies considered him a child, and because he recognized the code according to which Michel could be depended upon to return accurate change and never to repeat his transactions with the lady. Not that Michel had ever explained his code, but that the overseer knew his type. It always went with a certain defiant self-respect which survived even prison.

And Michel liked the distraction which the errands provided. If he hurried, he had time to collect gossip for the amusement of his dormitory. And many of his pennies were earned by picking up an additional commission by the way, carrying some package for a negro woman, and the like. Of course the overseer knew that Michel's errands took longer than necessary, but his dependability and discretion outweighed this fact. Particularly his discretion.

As for the scene itself—that no longer tempted Michel to loiter. It was all too familiar. His eyes had ceased to observe the large spatulate shadows of the breadfruit leaves, or to find amusement in the contemptuous oxen from overseas.

In front of him a vulture walked, stiffly lifting its legs high and planting its feet wide apart to avoid stepping on its own toes. With soft wing-flaps, another joined it from the air, hopping awkwardly for a short distance with wings still open. Then closing them slowly, as one might thoughtfully furl a fan, it dropped into jerky step with its companion. It was the dry season, and their plumage had lost the texture of sleek oilcloth with which it took the rains. Now it showed rusty black, like shabby mourning.

Once these birds had interested Michel as everything new always did. Then their funereal garb and their strange dumbness had made him nervous. Now they were too familiar to be consciously registered on his retina. He had come to observe only those things which touched the intensity of prison life, or which were in some way part of the mirage of his future.

Thus a Bush-negro in the street was to him significant since he was part of the jungle through which Michel intended one day to escape. Whenever possible, he would talk with these forest people. It would be such a man who would, in the darkness of his great adventure, put him across the river to the Dutch shore. For Michel would never again try that himself. That first attempted escape, ending fatally for his comrade, had decided him that it must be a Bush canoe which should transfer him from the French to the Dutch bank of the Maroni.

Thus, for Michel, there was perennial romance in the black jungle men who walked so arrogantly the village streets. They were to him the essence of freedom. They had renounced white civilization. They worked only when it pleased them. They never performed for hire any task which they considered menial. They were their own masters. Also they were masters of the river highways of Dutch and French Guiana. And as there were no other highways than the rivers, all hinterland transportation was in their control. When it suited them, they might convey a white man or his supplies to some interior gold placer. If the journey did not fall in with the caprice of the moment, or if there happened to be a dance within canoeing distance, then the white man might wait upon black pleasure.

When their slave ancestors had run away from cruel owners, they had renounced for themselves and their posterity all forms of slavery—economic as well as physical. They had gone back to the traditions of their African forefathers. And many of them had been then newly arrived from the black mother-continent. These had personal knowledge of the old customs. Thus in the Guiana jungle black tribes—Djoekas, Saramaccas, Bonis—had set up

the old gods, danced the old dances, and made love with the old gestures and the old songs.

Occasionally it amused these Bush-people to put on their best beads and their best loin-cloths and come into the village of St. Laurent, where gangs of white men, always in a keeper's gunshot, worked a month for less than a Bush-negro would charge to paddle a man across the river to Albina. They often watched these work squads marched back to prison. They would gather to stare curiously through the gates in the high pink wall to the buildings within; to the rows of barred dormitories, and to the blocks of punishment cells.

The convicts whom they thus watched march in and out of the great forbidding gates were, in their physical disintegration, scarcely men to the strong-bodied blacks, whose power was but half veiled by their draped lengths of calico—red and purple and orange-striped calico.

The blacks stared, that they might describe in detail, over the tribal camp fires, what they'd seen in St. Laurent. For did it not prove the wisdom of their ancestors?—demonstrating how right they'd been to run away and to repudiate the white man's ways?

But Michel saw no philosophical significance in these Bushmen. They fascinated him, not because of their strength or their freedom, but solely because in his mind they were linked with that vision of the future upon which his spirit fed.

It was to lend actuality to this future that he stopped now to exchange greetings with a black giant who sauntered with inquisitively roving eyes along the modest highway which St. Laurent labels Boulevard de la République.

"*Bon jour.*"

"*Bon jou'.*"

"Do you come from jungle on Dutch side or French side?"

"Dutch side."

"Oh, then some day you're going to see me in your jungle."

"Well, maybe." And the negro grinned widely and whitely.

Overhead the sky was of that concentrated blue which, upon the day of his arrival in Guiana, Michel had found so exciting. But of the sky he had also grown oblivious. He'd forgotten entirely how on that long-ago day he had a premonition that he was to live intensely in this far land.

Certain of the outlines which had then stood sharply clear for him in the white light under that blue dome had lost their definition, blurred by association, by monotonous repetition.

The men who lounged in doorways, or sat expectant in little wooden wheelbarrows, now registered only hazily on Michel's consciousness, like

pictures slightly out of focus, pictures seen through the fog of inattention which vivid preoccupation hangs between itself and irrelevant objects. While the Bush-negro had for him the clear reality of a mirage which owes its existence to hope. He would not be concerned with *libérés*—with men who had finished their prison terms and were serving the years of their exile. That was one of the things it was better not to think about.

Yet he could not help hearing one of them say to another, "You know, I haven't had a thing to eat for two days."

And he remembered that the monthly freight boat from Marseilles was not due for a week yet. Then for a couple of days there would be work for the *libérés*. In the interval they must exist as they might, doomed to live in that forgotten corner of the world where most of what little regular employment there was went to the convict labor let out by the Administration at prices with which the exiles could not compete. Moreover, convict labor was preferred, for an employer might then shift the responsibility of supervision to the prison authorities.

Thus it was that these pitiable wrecks of men waited in doorways and beside their wheelbarrows, hoping to gain a few sous by the execution of trivial commissions, by the delivery of purchases made in the shops about which they hovered hungrily.

Nothing to eat for two days. "Ah," Michel reflected. "Ah, with release the true prison begins."

But he never looked upon those rags of men as though they were the future—his future. As youth never sees itself in age, Michel would not contemplate himself in those gaunt unkempt creatures. He never even considered the possibility that he might one day be such a *libéré*. The idea was no more credible to him than a cemetery to the living.

No, the future which he visualized lay beyond the jungle which is back of Albina. This future lay out in the glittering world, where with money one may buy fairyland; where he would buy the velvet incandescent life which he'd seen revolve about that Russian prince to whom he'd been valet de chambre. He saw the world as a paradise of sensuous delights where only money was necessary to bliss.

Often sudden pictures of the prince flashed back to him in all the detail of reality. The prince in evening dress, standing before the hearth, lazily twisting the corners of a black mustache, and smiling a little while he awaited dinner guests. The prince at table, lifting his goblet, and then the clink of glasses and laughter. And on the prince's right a lovely woman with surrendering eyes, while outside in the night the car which was to take the

party to the opera waited with great glowing lights. These pictures came to Michel not as memories but as prophecies, in which his figure replaced that of the prince. For this was what life was like to those who had wealth. And Michel seemed to see his own hand reach out to pick up money—limitless money which lay within his easy reach. He had only to pick it up.

That was to be his future!

But this undercurrent of thought ran subordinate to Michel's keen pursuit of news. Now and then he swapped a word with a *libéré* acquaintance. He craved popularity. Popularity with his kind was to him one of the sweetest of the joys which money bought. It was this desire for approval which sharpened his own appetite for news. For in the stagnation of prison routine, the man who could supply a passing diversion was assured of applause. So weary were the convicts of the orbit of their existence.

Somewhere far away the world had died for them. The rare news which trickled through the prison came by way of the monthly mail and concerned events so long past that they seemed like historical happenings from which time had squeezed the juice of life. They might, in their intangibility and in their seeming triviality, have been spirit messages.

Of what possible import was it to Guiana convicts that there had been a revolution in China, that a Bolshevist leader had died, that Italy had a Mussolini, or that the Prince of Wales had made a triumphant sensation in a democracy? Who of them cared?

It was not such news as this which Michel sought on his errands in the village. He looked for events which touched the bitter prison world itself, for the sensational happenings which are the headlines of its newspaperless existence—details, for example, of the fate of some prison fugitive, or of some scandal among their keepers.

Such an item would bring his comrades clustering eagerly about him. It would furnish a theme which would for days divert the listless gangs, coming and going at the command of the prison drum which marked their hours—which beat out the measure of their servitude.

Sounding the reveil which woke them at half-past five. Giving them thirty minutes in which to slip on their blouses, to fold their blankets, to dip out and drink the measure of their coffee, before at six it drummed them out to answer the roll-call by squads and then to march to the "forced labor" to which they were condemned. It drummed also the return at half-past ten and the roll-call by dormitories which preceded the unvaried breakfast—half a loaf of bread and half a liter of soup to each and to each the chunk of meat, seven hundred and fifty grams. At half-past one there would be the drum again. Reassemble and roll-call by squads. Two o'clock, go out to work. At

five-thirty the return, the drum, and the roll-call by dormitories. And fifteen minutes later, the locking of the doors. Everlasting counting, and everlasting drums.

Almost as familiar were the village bells, though fainter with distance. The bells of early mass; the market bell at six in the morning; the bells which ordered to school the children of the civilian population of the prison village; and at intervals throughout the day more church bells—the daily Angelus, the bells for christenings, bells for weddings, and a tolling bell for the burial of the non-convict dead.

There were other sounds, too, equally familiar. Cocks and the bark of dogs; shouts of children and chant of priest; the sawmill's whistle; the trotting feet of horses pulling the one carriage in St. Laurent; the horns of St. Laurent's two automobiles; the Lilliputian shriek of the locomotive hauling in timber felled by the men of the outlying jungle prisons; the diminutive engine noisily bustling off with the two equally diminutive cars which twice a week it conveys over French Guiana's ten miles of railroad track to the prison at St. Jean; between trains, the soft clicking of the handcar propelled by convict man-power and carrying provisions or officials from prison to prison; rarely the sound of a braying donkey; spaced many days apart, the siren of an arriving ship; much silence, in which the fall of a palm leaf or the thick thud of a cocoanut striking the earth was a noticeable occurrence; occasionally, not every day, the uplifted voice of the one-legged *libéré* who was the town crier, proclaiming an expected ship, or advertising some bargain in a shop; sometimes another old *libéré* going up and down, urging the universe to have its umbrellas and its porcelains repaired, and still another carrying about a tray of pastries whose charms his quavering voice set forth in a little song of his own composing. And, of course, always the Mairie clock pounding the hours—the church clock too, when it was not out of order. While at night, there was the dynamo, giving twentieth-century electricity in this village which owes its being to crime. The dynamo breathing in the accelerated crescendo of a train working up speed. Beginning just after the six-o'clock cicadas had stopped, and competing with the night chorus of emotional frogs.

Often wakeful convicts would lie listening, fancying the dynamo in truth a train which was surely on its way. And listening, they would finally put themselves to sleep with the delusion that they were on board, bound for the port of their desire.

There were no other sounds in St. Laurent. And always these were interspersed by great somnolent spaces.

On the corner of the Rue Thiers and the Boulevard de la République, Michel smelt the news with which he hoped to break the tedium of prison in St. Laurent. He ran into a cluster of *libérés*, and as several of the men were known to him, he melted quietly into the group.

"What was it all about?"

"Just the last chapter in Roux's story, that's all."

"Was there ever such a fool?"

"Imagine writing a letter like that to the Director!"

"What did he say in the letter?"

"Said he ought to be allowed his morning coffee. That he was entitled to it, since they hadn't made their case against him. Told them they could never convict him on the evidence they had.

"Wasn't he two centimeters taller than the man they wanted to prove him to be? Wasn't his hair darker? And even his eyes not quite the same shade? And there was no tattooing on his arms. How did they explain that, when Roux had a ship tattooed on one arm and a serpent on the other? Didn't the authorities admit all that themselves? Wasn't it in the identification files?

"He said they'd nothing to condemn him but two scars—one on the back of the left shoulder and the other on the hand—just where the files said Roux had had two moles. But you couldn't convict a man on that.

"Queer, of course, but only a coincidence after all. And so until they found better proof of guilt he had a right to his morning coffee."

"Yes, and he reminded them, too, that they hadn't been able to check up on the finger prints, because of his having been burned the time he put his hands in the sulfuric acid, thinking it was a pail of water. So that they really did have nothing but those two scars to identify him with Roux."

"And of course he was right. He had it all his own way until he was ass enough to write this letter."

"What was the letter about?"

"Oh, it was a long letter! He went all over the case like a lawyer. Said he had to admit he'd fought in the war under another fellow's name; fought and been wounded and then convicted of theft and sentenced to five years of Guiana—all under the name of Fournier, when his real name, he said, was Verbloke."

"What made him admit that about the name?"

"Had to. While he was at sea, on his way out here, Fournier, if you please, turned up and brought the accusation that his name had been appropriated."

Some one asked: "But how did they pin it on Roux? I never understood that. Roux got away from here ten years ago—in the first year of the war. Escaped from Kourou with a pile of francs belonging to the Administration.

He might have lost his life trying to get away. Nobody even heard of him after he left. So what made this Fournier think it was Roux who'd taken his name and gone to war with it?"

"And where was this real Fournier himself when France needed men in the trenches?"

But no one could guess how Fournier had got on the track of Roux.

"Of course there was reason enough for Roux to want to change his name, for after robbing the Administration he had a life sentence of forced labor coming to him."

"Certainly no man would want to stand in Roux's shoes."

"In Roux's skin, you mean! If he was really Roux, he'd fast enough have no shoes to stand in!"

"But how in hell did this Fournier know anything about Roux?"

But that no one could answer.

"What's this mystery man calling himself in the letter? Fournier or what?"

"Oh, he's still saying he's Verbloke! Says he was a Belgian, born at Ypres."

"He's safe enough there, because any papers to the contrary went up in smoke when the Germans burned Ypres."

"Well, what can they do?"

A newcomer added himself to the group on the corner of the Rue Thiers. "What can they do?"

"Yes, but you haven't heard the latest—" And the episode of the letter and its contents were again recited, every one talking at once.

"Still, what can they do? Might as well give Verbloke his morning coffee, eh?"

"Ho, but you don't know the mess that letter got him into! The Director took it over to the office and looked up Roux's file to see if they had a sample of his writing."

"And did they?"

"They did. And from A to Z it was the same as this so-called Verbloke's handwriting."

"Oh, *là! là!*"

"That spells solitary confinement for Verbloke."

"But have they proved he's Roux? How'll they explain his being taller—two centimeters taller?"

"And darker?"

"Well, he was only twenty when he escaped with the agent's money. That's ten years ago."

"And a man can change in ten years. Look at us if you doubt that."

"How about the tattooing? Roux was tattooed. This fellow isn't."

"That's not so easy. But they say there's a process to take it off. If you've money to pay for it."

"Then there's his accent. Roux was from Marseilles. Verbloke's got the tongue of the Midi."

"What does that show? Only what a clever rogue this Roux-Fournier-Verbloke is!"

"But not clever enough to doctor his handwriting when he wants a cup of coffee."

Michel left them re-telling the story as the group grew in size. He must get his errand done and hurry back. This was headline stuff for his dormitory. The official inquiry into the identity of this man who was accused of robbery, escape, masquerading under another man's name, and of theft again, had been the topic which furnished distraction after the doors were locked and the turnkeys had gone away. But for weeks the case had languished. No fresh evidence. The authorities seemed blocked, unable to convict, and yet persuaded of guilt.

Then, with everlasting discussion, the facts had grown stale. Now Michel was possessed of new developments. It was only the night before that the letter had reached the Director, and it was that very morning that he'd compared it with Roux's files. The news had leaked through the village after the work squads had left the prison. A *libéré* repairing the office roof had brought the information to the Rue Thiers not five minutes before Michel had happened along on his way with the certain note for the certain lady.

But this was no day to waste moments in gossip with that full-blown Corsican lady who in the mornings sat on her porch in curl-papers and stained blue negligee; veiled from the street by a luxuriant pink coral vine, which yet permitted her the diversion of passing convicts, or of the gorgeous sauntering figures of the jungle negroes. Usually Michel tarried a little when he delivered notes, watching the lady play with her pet monkey, a little creature with small sharp very white teeth and tawny silky hair, who went by the name of "*mon petit* Joujou."

Such things as his mistress wished to communicate delicately to her suitors, she confided in their presence to Joujou, addressing him with passionate tenderness. It entertained Michel to listen.

"Yes, *mon petit*, what a country for your poor mistress to live in! Is it not true, darling? And so you mustn't bite her; you must love her. Isn't she good to you, beautiful one?

"Doesn't she comfort her Joujou because he has left his home for her?

"But, yes, you know she does, my precious toy.

"And you mustn't be jealous and bite her with those sharp, sharp little teeth. You shouldn't be cross because she ties you up at night.

"Ah, but she has to tie you up, because you would spoil her frock—her only frock. Yes, my little mouse, you would. And if she didn't have a pretty frock to wear, then the big Monsieur wouldn't love her any more. He wouldn't take her any more for supper to Mademoiselle Geneviève's and he wouldn't buy her perfume in the Chinaman's shop. And she adores restaurants and perfume, doesn't she, my pet?

"Poor mistress! So far from home. Trying to pretend that Mademoiselle Geneviève's shack is a restaurant. Making the best of things, isn't she? So you won't be jealous any more and snap at her with those naughty little teeth, will you, my heart?

"You'll remember that she ties you up because she must take care of her only frock, her nice red frock which the kind Monsieur has given her."

To all of which the darling Joujou only squeaked in a high, piercingly shrill voice, clinging with all four limbs about the fat freckled arms of his mistress, or climbing up to her shoulder and disposing himself like a fur scarf about her neck. In his little pinkish-gray face his hazel eyes shone large and bright, ceaselessly roaming from object to object, staring intently at each for the merest fraction of time, and then quickly shifting to something else.

"Yes, you would spoil her frock, love. You know you would. They didn't teach you any manners in the tree-tops, my bad little Joujou."

Michel often sat amused by this, shrewdly guessing it to be a morning rehearsal for the night's performance. But he lingered chiefly because he hoped that the tremulous "Good cakes, my ladies, my ladies" of the old *libéré* cake-seller would pass along the street; for when it did, Joujou's mistress always purchased, and there would always be for Michel one of the sticky pastries, as warm from the sun as though it were just out of the oven.

But today Michel must hurry back with his news.

Should he tell it first in whispers at the mill? Or should he wait until they were all locked into the dormitory for the noon hour? He thought he would wait, though in doing so he ran the risk of losing the glory of being the first to broadcast it to his comrades.

In front of the church two *libérés*, back from hunting butterflies in the jungle, compared notes on the day's catch.

One had a Morpho in perfect condition.

“See, it was as perfect as the decoy.”

He would sell it to the butterfly broker for two francs and a half. And he carefully opened the folded triangle of paper to show his comrade the unblemished blue of its big wings. It was the only good one that day, and he’d been on the chase since early morning.

The other had had no luck. He’d set a lure of ripe bananas to trap the rare Argea; hanging the fruit on a cord stretched between two trees and then sitting by, ready with his butterfly net. But he’d not even seen one—let alone snaring it. Now he was wishing he hadn’t been so ambitious. He wished he’d tried for the less valuable Morpho.

“Of course,” they said, “if we only had been able to put up a butterfly watch-tower in our own reservation, then we could have gone in for the species which fly thirty or forty feet high.”

And they agreed that some day, when they had saved up enough, they’d launch the enterprise of the watch-tower together.

Seeing them, Michel crossed over to say:

“What do you think this Verbloke fellow has been foolish enough to do? Write a letter of complaint to the Director in his own hand. And that turned out to be the hand of Roux!”

“Impossible!”

“What a joke, eh?”

The town crier came down the Avenue des Cocotiers under the trees, his body swinging from the armpits between his crutches. The empty trouser-leg was folded up out of the way. At each forward step the body seemed to hurl itself after the crutch. And every few paces he paused, took a long breath, and shouted:

“Extraordinary opportunity at the House of Théolade!

“Grand reductions on everything in general!

“Calico of the first quality!

“Hammocks and crockery!

“Purchasers, run without delay to the Maison Théolade!

“Extraordinary opportunity!”

Suspended between his two supports, he came around the side of the church.

“Calico of the first quality—”

“Have you heard about Roux, so-called Fournier, so-called Verbloke?”

The crier stopped.

“No, what happened?”

“Started a correspondence with the Director and used Roux’s handwriting by mistake.”

“Game’s up, then.”

“Yes, and all for a cup of coffee.”

The church clock struck ten.

Michel made off at top speed for the mill, stirring up a little wake of scorching dust as he went.

The crier looked after him.

“Youth in him still,” he said.

Then, bracing himself firmly and filling his lungs, he hurled his advertisement at the noncommittal jalousies of houses, lifeless in the heat.

“Extraordinary opportunity at the House of Théolade!”

He passed slowly down along the Boulevard de la République.

The butterfly-hunters sat on the church steps, each putting his butterflies back in a little tin box. They talked, now of Roux and of the singular folly of letter-writing, and now of how so soon as there was money, they would make a clearing in the forest and erect there a butterfly tower—a *mirador*, as they called it. Then they could supply the export brokers with high-flying varieties.

While they talked, the work squads returned to prison, marching past the church, dragging their feet as though invisible balls and chains weighed them to the dust.

From far down the Boulevard, opposite the Hospital gates, the voice came back:

“Purchasers, run without delay to the Maison Théolade!”

And in the prison the ten-thirty drum sounded. Those who had food in St. Laurent would eat. And then the hush of the siesta would put to sleep all save the inexorable clocks ticking men’s lives into eternity.

CHAPTER VIII

The last of the work gangs had gone through the gate—automatically lifting their broad flat straw hats, mechanically raising their arms. Under the superintending eye of keepers, turnkeys passed searching hands over their bodies and saw that nothing was secreted under hats. To add to the prison meat and bread, some had bought a few bananas, one or two had cakes of chocolate, another a tin of condensed milk; and these purchases were scrutinized.

When the outer gates had been closed and made fast, the roll called, the men counted, and the quota locked each into its dormitory, then, instantly, the mask of impassive pain had fallen. The face which the convicts turned to the world, to their keepers, to the free citizens of the village, and to the staring jungle negroes—that face was dropped, and another took its place.

This second mask was the convict as he chooses to reveal himself to his comrades. Sometimes it was an elaborate mask, artfully designed to represent what its wearer would appear to be. Sometimes it was but a thin and transparent covering for the ego which lurks beneath all human masks, a shrinking, trembling thing with a passionate will to live, a burning will to self-expression. And yet always so fearing the herd that, cumbered with a protective mask, it must pass disguised through life.

In prison, stripped of many trappings, so little veils the ego that if one approaches with that reverent tenderness which is its right, if one touches gently its bruised and battered wings, one may look upon this precious thing which differentiates man from beast; this thing which so inadequately confesses itself in the reactions and manifestations of I, my, mine, and me.

But no matter how scantily veiled, an ego must be patiently sought, for only when driven by pain, or freed by exaltation, will it drop all disguise and for a moment stand naked. Thus when bars shut in the condemned, the shift from that immobile mask which they turn to the world to the face which they would have their comrades see, is made as dexterously as a prudish woman changes from one garment to another.

Locked in the dormitories, the convicts of Guiana find speech. Occasionally one confides in another. Frequently groups organize—usually for escape or for schemes by which they may add to the slow accumulation of the price of freedom. Always there is that strange love-making which is the prison substitute for nature; nature inexorably demanding the satisfaction of instincts and appetites, refusing to accept prison as reason for abstinence.

“There are only three sorts of men in prison,” Michel often said, “the men who keep brats, those who become brats, and those who learn how to relieve themselves. . . . I have decided which I will be.”

While Paul Arthur, looking on, would reflect, “Prison is after all but the world in miniature. If you who are outside the bars would look prison in the

face, you'd confess the resemblance. In our dormitories men sicken and die, cheat and betray, quarrel and kill, love and mourn, hunger and thirst. While you have what you call lost and fallen women, we have the 'brats' who are lost and fallen boys. Like you, those responsible for the wreck often scorn their victims; though with this difference, that we respect the true invert and scorn only prostitution.

"And then sometimes, even with us, it happens that passion flares up into a holy flame. Yes, once in ever so long, something beautiful grows out of the filth of prison.

"Sometimes one of us climbs out of that abyss to a summit. And as for those in the abyss—they aren't the beasts you think them.

"If you weren't afraid to come down among us, where we have to live, you'd see. As step by step you went lower into our pit, you'd understand all along the way the causes. In the blackest depths you'd find you could see. It would be as if some one held a lantern to show every rung of the ladder that leads to us.

"But to you standing safe on the top, looking down, we are strange and horrible—we frighten you. Why? Is it because you see yourselves in us? . . . Yet our roots are up in your civilization. Don't forget that!"

But on the day when Michel brought news of Roux, all this complicated interrelation of ego and ego paused while men gathered about, to hear him tell how the fellow who'd gone under three names had finally convicted himself, and all because he must have coffee in the morning.

"I knew he was Roux from the first," said one.

"Pity you couldn't have told us."

"Afraid it might get back, and I'm no tale-bearer."

"Well, this Roux was a fool long before he wrote that letter."

Michel saw that the speaker was one of two strangers. St. Laurent is the heart of the great Devil's Island Penal Colony through which circulates the stream of convicts; here new arrivals are brought once or twice a year by the convict ship; men being shifted from St. Laurent as a center, sent from one mainland prison to another, for punishment to the Iles du Salut, or returning to St. Laurent at the completion of solitary *réclusion*, and of terms as "incorrigibles."

And Michel, familiar with every face of the eight hundred who daily passed in and out of the gates of St. Laurent, knew that of course the two strangers must be from one of the outlying prisons.

"How was that?" he asked. "How was Roux a fool?"

"He was a fool to have got himself tattooed in the first place."

“But he was young when he did it, and now he’s had it taken off, hasn’t he?”

“True, but clever men don’t brand themselves.”

The speaker had a keen thin face, small piercing eyes under a gray thicket of brows which met across the narrow bridge of a high nose—a strong face with a determined jaw and the compressed lips of the self-controlled; not a flabby muscle nor a weak line anywhere. Prison weariness in the face. But no clew to any soft spot in the character.

“No,” he repeated, “a clever chap doesn’t brand himself.”

“This man is an Ace,” Michel thought. “At last an Ace!”

Six years of Guiana, and here was the first man that he instantly conceded to be an Ace. The heroes he’d expected to find had turned out to be poor unfortunate wretches, without definite purpose, men who’d drifted into the traps which had seized them.

Not that Michel had learned nothing from them. He’d picked up much information about necessary papers, false passports and references, about the tools of his trade and where they might best be secured. The most superior electric drills, for example, were to be had in Pittsburgh; a catalogue could be obtained upon request. Good oxygen blow-pipes came from both Pittsburgh and Germany. While his accumulated knowledge of the professional possibilities of the chief cities of the world would have made a fairly adequate burglars’ guide-book. And he had memorized it all.

He knew the approximate population of Rio de Janeiro, of Buenos Ayres, Havana, New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, Yokohama, London, the various cities of France, and the resorts of Switzerland. He knew the leading hotels and banks and the character of the inhabitants, their pursuits and amusements. He was pretty familiar with exports and imports and with the names and itineraries of ships and railroads. He even knew something of the air services.

This knowledge, much of which is not to be found in books, was all in Michel’s head. He could produce it at a moment’s notice.

Rio, he could tell you, was a city of about a million population. It exported coffee, sugar, and rum. It had few factories and many rich villas. For the illegal pirates of civilization, such as himself, its opportunity lay in its villas, though swindling might also net good results. Incidentally it was worth seeing as possessing the most beautiful harbor in the world, to say nothing of the fascination of dancing girls doing the syncopated tango.

Havana he had noted as rich, with many steamship connections to all parts of the world. Its wealth and its easy means of flight made it one of the best cities for men of his trade.

In New York the most satisfactory line of business was that of valet de chambre. In New York, he'd been told, it was considered a very recherché thing to have a valet de chambre. The chief drawback there was the difficult technique of papers, references, etc.

Beyrout. Population Greek, Italian, English, French, Armenian. French spoken largely. Commerce with Damascus, Aleppo, and all of Syria. A city of opportunities; known as the "Queen of Poker." But facilities for departure insufficient.

Steamship lines as well as cities offered possibilities, especially those between San Francisco and Yokohama, where French maîtres d'hôtel were in demand; and he had some valuable names on whom he might count in San Francisco.

This was the sort of thing that Michel had assembled from talk with many men, but he couldn't call any of them Aces.

The new man he knew at once to be different. Every one else had thought Roux clever, until the episode of the letter proved them wrong. But this man showed that from the beginning Roux'd been a fool. And the second stranger underscored the point.

"Why does a fellow get tattooed, anyway? Just to show his comrades he's a man, of course. If he were convinced of that himself, he wouldn't think it had to be proved by paying somebody to drive needles in him, marking him so that when he gets in wrong, there he is—done for by his own stupidity."

By this time Roux had so completely lost prestige that the fizz had gone out of Michel's news. But he didn't mind. For here evidently was not one Ace, but two.

"Who are they? Where'd they come from?" he asked Eugène.

"The tall fellow with the beak's named Bernard. The other, the short stocky one is Verne. They've both just come out of solitary confinement on Joseph."

"What for?"

"Oh, for next to the greatest crime we can commit here."

"Trying to escape?"

“Certainly. Isn’t that what gets us the heaviest punishment—next to threatening one of our precious keepers?”

“As if even an animal doesn’t try to get out of its cage!”

Some of the men lit cigarettes. Others took off their blouses and lay down to rest. Heat went like fever through the crowded room where so few inches separated convict from convict. And men closed their eyes to shut out the sight of each other.

But the newcomers still held half a dozen listeners.

“Of course,” Verne said, “nobody can foresee everything. Sometimes the best fail. I remember the case of the money-changer’s shop in the Rue Lafayette. That was a matter of renting the apartment above the shop, waiting your chance to break through the ceiling, and then opening the strong box. Only two men were needed. One on guard at the window. The other to do the job. The thing would net some eight hundred bills.

“About eleven o’clock, before the street quieted for the night, one of the two took up his post at the window, and the other set to work on the floor of the apartment above the shop. In half an hour he had the parquet up. He found then that he had two beams to cut through before he could let himself down.

“Now when he began to saw, the man at the window reported that a crowd ran out of the Bar next door and stood looking up at the house.

“But just as soon as the sawing stopped, the crowd went back into the Bar.

“False alarm. The man began again. In two minutes they were back in the street.

“That happened three times. No use. They had to give up and make their getaway. But what the hell was the trouble? They couldn’t guess. The thing puzzled them. They agreed that the one who couldn’t be recognized in the neighborhood—the one who hadn’t rented the apartment—was to go back the next day and find out what on earth had happened.

“Naturally he found everybody in the Bar was talking about how men had tried the night before to rob the money-changer’s shop.

“ ‘Well, what stopped them?’ the accomplice asked.

“ ‘Why, the glasses here on the bar began to dance as in an earthquake,’ they told him, ‘and we all ran out to see what was the matter. We did that three times. But none of us was able to figure the thing out. This morning the money-changer reported to the police that one of his back windows was broken. The police entered. Discovered the overhead apartment vacated, with signs that somebody’d been sawing. They explained that it must have been the sawing that set our glasses going.

" 'But not a trace of the upstairs tenant! People wonder if he was murdered and the body hidden somewhere.'

"It only cost one glass of absinthe to get the whole story, and it's a case where certainly nobody made a mistake. It was just damned hard luck, and nothing else.

"But this Roux fellow with his tattooing and his letter to the Director—he's just a plain fool."

"Yes, even Titin would have failed in a case like the dancing glasses," the hawk-faced Bernard reflected.

"Who's Titin?"

"That was our nickname for Baptistin Travail. We always called him Titin."

"Ah!" Michel had been right. Men who knew the great Baptistin Travail by nickname were certainly Aces themselves.

Some one commented that Baptistin ought to have been called "The King of the Alibis," and Verne said that thanks to his alibis, Titin had actually fourteen times had the benefit of a "not present," even though the court had been convinced he was guilty.

"And yet," Bernard said, "he was thirty years old before he tried anything big."

"That was the time he and two others robbed the strong box of the Messageries Maritimes, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and they got away with a little fortune. Two days later Titin proved to the police that he'd spent the night of the theft playing billiards with an officer of the gendarmerie and a fat wine merchant from Barcelona."

"And a couple of years after that he cleared out a big jeweler's shop, and went free because he had such notable people to swear alibis that their word couldn't even be questioned. He knew how to choose his accomplices, too. Remember the man he had on watch the time the American soldier gave the alarm?

"Titin was inside using an oxygen blow-pipe on the safe. The man on guard was across the street. If he saw anything suspicious, he was to come over and knock twice on the window-grating. Then this American soldier came along with a pretty nursemaid he'd picked up in the Luxembourg Gardens. He was on his way to his favorite *boîte de nuit*, but he took the trouble to stop by and tip the police off to the fact that he'd heard a blow-pipe at work. The first the man on guard knew, the police were in the street. No time to cross over and give the signal. His mind worked fast. That was the sort of fellow Titin knew how to choose. There was nothing to do but for him to fire a shot at the window where he was supposed to knock, and then

get away himself with all speed ahead. And it didn't take Titin long to do ditto.

"Oh, when Titin had studied an affair, it was as though the thing were done! And he'd only to pick the money. Yet in a case where the impossible happened—something nobody could have expected—he knew how to act quickly. Never a blunder on his part.

"And then he was the sort of Ace who never soiled his hands with blood. He played a clean game.

"But the finest idea he ever had was the Peninsular Express. Though he didn't make a cent out of it, I call it his biggest success—magnum opus, as they say."

"Tell about it."

Bernard laughed at Michel's eagerness.

"That's a long story."

"So much the better."

Half a block away down the Rue Maxime du Camp a bell was sounding; three peals and an interval; three more and an interval—just long enough to murmur very fast, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us poor sinners now and at the hour of our death. . . . Mary, full of grace and blessed among women . . ."

"There goes the Angelus! It's only noon. Tell about the Peninsular Express. What is it?"

"It's a train which periodically leaves Brindisi for Calais—Brindisi's in the heel of Italy, you know.

"Well, this train leaves Brindisi on arrival of the P. & O. boats from Bombay. It takes off the mail and a few passengers who have to get to London in a hurry. The train makes the run in about thirty hours. Saves a week over the steamer route through Gibraltar and up to Liverpool.

"It was Titin's great idea to rob this Brindisi-Calais Express. You can understand that it was an affair for study. And Titin made the journey first by foot. Walked every step of the way. Up through Italy to Ventimiglia, Marseilles, Avignon, Lyon, Dijon, La Roche, Villeneuve St. Georges, and Calais.

"He had to find out at what points a man could safely board the train and where he could quit it when the job was done. There'd have to be two points where signals might stop the train without attracting attention, either from the personnel on board or from the inhabitants of the country. And these points must be far enough apart to give time for the job.

"And would you believe it, in all that distance there were only two such points? And he found the thing would have to be put over in winter because you had to have darkness at those points.

"Oh, Titin studied that affair! He had everything arranged before he took anybody in with him. The key to the valuables car—everything. Not that there was any special trouble about the key. Between trips the car waits in the shed at Brindisi. To a man of Titin's experience it was nothing to take the impression of the lock and get his key made.

"But he had it all done before he was ready to put the scheme up to two of us. Four men would have been better than three, but Titin had only two that he could trust not to bungle the matter of the signals.

"When Titin outlined an affair, it was just as though you'd seen it acted out before you. And from the first minute I knew it was his biggest idea. There might be schemes with more money in them. But there'd never be a scheme a man could be more proud of pulling off."

"What did he expect to get out of it?" Eugène asked. "What would be in that locked van?"

"Anything might be in it—anything. You know how rich India is, don't you? Oh, Titin had thought that out!"

"Planned it," Eugène said, "the way men lay their schemes to play the stock market. Only difference is, you're here, and they aren't."

A boy who'd seemed asleep opened his eyes: "Reminds me more of the way a general staff plans out how a regiment will take an enemy town, and pillage and burn people's houses. Only, as Eugène says, we're here, and the general staff haven't got chests broad enough to pin all their decorations on."

"So you, too, have grudges?" Bernard laughed.

"You'd have one yourself if you'd ever been what the Americans call a lamb in the stock market. Then you'd understand how much easier their big deals are than Titin's. Want to run up a stock value? What's simpler than to pass around a private tip? Oh, a very private tip! Everybody who gets it must swear not to tell. But, of course, everybody does. That's the idea. It even gets into the papers. Such and such a mining stock is about to pay a big extra dividend. When you've seen it in print, then you know it's true. Cutting a melon, that's how they say it in America. And, of course, everybody wants a slice. Up goes the value—rocket-high. The lambs run crying for what they'll get. Oh, I was one of them! I'll admit my grudge. I got one of those private tips. I was accountant with the company. So my tip was specially private, you understand. I thought I couldn't lose. I put up all I had and bought on margin. 'What an education the children would have,' I thought. And my wife—for once we'd go out to dinner and not choose by the price-list. I'd give her a party just for us two, and she'd be dressed for it. The family'd never have another chance to say she'd thrown herself away on an accountant.

“The more I thought about it, the more it seemed I ought to buy of that stock. Maybe I’d never have another tip so good as this was bound to be. An inside tip, remember! The public wasn’t to know.

“So I borrowed money and bought another hundred shares. The price went up and up. I borrowed some more. They sent a tip around that this was no time to sell; that the sky’d be the limit; that a lawsuit about property boundary lines was just about to be decided in the company’s favor.

“I managed to buy twenty-five shares more.

“Then the price suddenly dropped five points.

“Just some faint hearts taking their profits, they told me.

“But the next day there was a ten-point drop.

“Brokers called for more margin.

“What was the matter?

“It began to be said the suit would be decided against the company, and the stock dropped some more.

“But I wasn’t worried about the stock. I knew the mine was all right. You see I was on the inside, and I’d never heard of any trouble over boundary lines. I used to watch the directors going into the president’s office. And none of them seemed worried. No, the mine was all right. The thing that troubled me was how to get margin to hold my stock. I knew what the mine was earning. All I had to do was to hold on to my stock.

“I began to play with the president’s signature. Funny how easy it was to copy. Not so different from the way I wrote myself. How could there be any risk? Just as soon as the public got to know that the mine was safe, then prices would rocket again.

“So that’s why I’m here. But the men who planned it all, sitting round the president’s table, they made money both ways. When the stock went up, they sold it to us. When it flopped, they let us sell it back to them. And all the time the mine went on producing copper, making money, just the way I knew it was.

“But I’m a forger doing time in Guiana, while they’re worth their millions. The kept women they call wives are hanging pearls and diamonds round their necks and making bows at court. I made my bow in a different sort of court. The moral? Never commit crime without the best legal opinion.

“So my advice to you, Bernard, is to get yourself appointed director in a mining company. Just as exciting as holding up that Brindisi-Calais Express. Pays better and is about a thousand times safer.”

“Granted,” said Bernard. “But maybe I’ve too much heart for that stock game. And maybe I don’t know how to get to be director. What I do know is how this Brindisi affair ought to be played.” Bernard put his hat down on the

plank bed. “Let’s say here’s Italy. Brindisi’s on the rim. But we don’t come into the picture until the train gets into France.

“It arrives Marseilles six o’clock P.M. Changes locomotives.”

He put a match down to represent Marseilles, another to mark the location of Avignon. Halfway between the two he put a cigarette.

“That cigarette,” he said, “is the spot where we’re waiting—two of us. We’ll call it point A. Remember it’s night, and dark. A little before eight we feel a vibration when we put our ears to the ground. One of us is at attention on the signal. The other is ready to board her when she stops. There’s a long whistle. And then pretty soon there she is. On time, coming like hell. The big white light head-on. Neither of us speaks. No need to. Everything been settled. Each knows what he’s to do. And anyway when we see her coming at us like that, and we knowing how we mustn’t make a blunder, we don’t want to talk; all we want to do then is to take a deep breath.

“One of us operates the signal. She slows up and stops. One of us, the one with the keys, the tool-kit, and the carrying belt, jumps aboard. The train goes on, and that man knows that the fellow at the signal has done his part.

“All this must take, at the maximum, one minute, so as not to attract the attention of the train men.

“Away she rushes then, but now she’s got a passenger in her locked car.

“He knows just how much time he’s got for the job. He’s got nine hours. He goes to it.

“At nine P.M. the train’s flying past Avignon. And he has eight hours more. At eleven she’s roaring through Lyon, and he has seven hours left. At two-thirty in the morning she’s put Dijon behind her. Just two hours more before he must be packed up and ready to jump off at the second point, which is just the other side of La Roche. We’ll call that point B.” And the match-box was shoved over to establish the site.

“That’s where man Number Three will be waiting with an automobile or a motor cycle. It’s still dark. The train’s roaring along. The man aboard’s ready. He’s counting on Number Three’s being at the signal. He feels her slow down and stop. He jumps out. But in what’s left of the minute he doesn’t move or speak. Not until the ‘Go ahead’ signal has sent her tearing off toward Villeneuve St. Georges.

“Now for a quick getaway. They step on the accelerator. At ten o’clock in Calais the police will be out for them. No time to lose. Give her some more gas.

“Titin carried the thing through just the way I’ve told you. He was the one who boarded the train. He’d cut his tools down to a diamond for glass, a small blow-pipe, an electric drill, and a monkey wrench, and, of course, he

had an electric flash. He'd dressed himself in something dark; his idea was to look like a respectable servant. And he had his papers in order. Everything had been thought out. There wasn't a hitch. He even succeeded in getting off with a lead case full of pounds sterling in bills. And yet he didn't make a cent out of the enterprise."

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, the Bank of England had pierced in pin-holes on every one of those bills the words, 'Lapsed. Out of date.'

"Every damn bill was worthless! Rotten luck, wasn't it?"

"But Titin's achievement was brilliant, all the same!

"Naturally, he ought to have had a man on board to help him. The job needs four. And some day we're going to do the thing right."

"I wish I could be one of the four!" Michel was flushed with the thrill of the great Oriental Express stopping at the bidding of his hand.

"You?" Bernard squinted in appraisal.

Some one in the group said, "You don't know it yet, Bernard, but nobody'd be more trustworthy than that kid."

"Never disappoint a comrade who tied up with him," another corroborated.

Michel felt his ribs pressing like a straight-jacket on his swelling pride.

"Would Titin take me on, you think?"

"Titin? Titin'll never finish that job himself. He's dead."

"How?"

"All I know's hearsay. I never saw him again. But the rumor came that during the war, a government—you can guess which one—employed him to break into the safe of a certain consul of one of the enemy powers. The object, secret papers. I suppose I might as well tell you that it was a certain consul's safe at Berne. Though I'm not vouching for the truth of any of this, you understand. I was where I could only get gossip, a word from one and a word from another, out of which I pieced the story together. Then I heard that Titin had accepted and succeeded.

"The next news was he'd hooked up with the chief of a bandit band—the Band of Villette.

"After that he was seen in Rio. A year later he was reported arrested. Then they said he'd escaped to Spain. Then that somewhere he'd been taken again and that his case had come before the Assizes in Paris. That was 1923. He was condemned to twenty years' forced labor in Guiana, ten of them to be solitary confinement, and, of course, with the twenty years went life-exile after the term. Nobody ever thought the 'King of the Alibis' would get trapped like that.

"While he was waiting for the convoy ship at St. Martin, they say the king of that power for which he'd broken into the safe at Berne demanded for him full pardon from France for services rendered, and that the pardon was granted."

"Oh, stealing's a fine thing," Eugène cried, "provided you don't get caught, and provided you're doing it for a government. Then it's 'services rendered.' "

"True, but Titin's pardon was too late. It came a couple of days after he'd died. Died mysteriously in the infirmary at St. Martin. As I understood it, he'd been admitted as a patient at two o'clock in the afternoon, and at four he was dead.

"I knew he always carried a *plan*—'charged,' as we say—and I wasn't surprised that when things went against him he drank the poison. Titin wasn't the sort of man who could have borne living in a cage!

"But his scheme—the Brindisi Express; that's as good as it ever was."

The prison bell rang. It was half-past one. Men sat up. Cursed. Pulled their blouses over their heads, got up, and reached for their hats. Turnkeys came and opened the doors. There was another bell. Keepers assembled in the courtyard. Their faces were red and moist, their great mustaches drooping after their hot sleep. The air in the courtyard scorched like the blast from a furnace, and gray dust lay on the breadfruit leaves.

"What brought Bernard to Guiana?" Michel took advantage of their awaiting a tardy keeper to question Eugène.

"A woman. In Paris they called her the 'Golden Helmet'; because of her hair, you understand. Bernard wanted her. So did a lot of other men—men who buy beauty. And like a mining stock, her price went up. I don't know how much Bernard, or any of them, loved her. It might have been love, though Bernard doesn't look a lover, eh?

"Anyway they were all in the market for beauty; so Bernard had to have money, a lot of money. He tried out several schemes and then went in for counterfeit money. He needed big money, and he needed it quick."

The gates opened. It was two o'clock. The squads passed out. And the gates shut.

Michel kept tally of the timber which came into the mill.

Six logs of purple-heart, nine of letter-wood, seventeen mahogany, fourteen purple-heart.

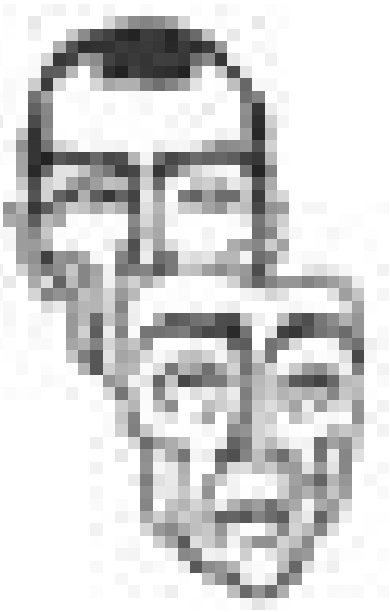
Machines cut the logs into planks. Revolving wheels made men dizzy. Sometimes a man's hand was caught in the machinery. That, he remembered, was what had happened to poor Antoine. You had to be careful. Keeping the tally was better. You could think about something else while you did it.

So many of mahogany, so many of letter-wood.

You could think of the Brindisi-Calais Express. There, where Bernard had laid the cigarette, was point A. You were waiting there in the dark for the train. It came whistling and rushing. Your hand operated the signal. It was you who made the mad hurrying iron monster pause. You had just one minute at the maximum.

And after you'd stopped her, you must remember to send her on again. You must be quick and sure. It wouldn't do to lose your head. Or to hesitate, not even for the smallest fraction of a second.

You watched her disappear. Your part was done. Now you must get quietly away in the dark. You must get away while France still slept.



CHAPTER IX

Michel had had the first chapter of Madame Vidal's story from Joujou's mistress. But that was months ago. He'd been waiting on the top step of her scrap of a veranda while she wrote in answer to the note he'd come to deliver.

The street had been quite deserted when suddenly there had walked into it a slender white figure under a green-lined pongee parasol. The woman walked slowly, as though she hoped by loitering that something of interest might happen before she turned finally into her own gate.

"Not so pretty as the day I first saw her," Michel thought. "She looks pale now, and tired. On the day our convoy came in, what a beauty she was! In yellow, with flowers all over her parasol. And the sky . . . just as blue now . . ."

It had been long since he'd happened to see Madame Vidal. The change in her shocked him.

"St. Laurent," he thought. "What a place for her to be!" And then he'd been aware that Joujou's mistress stood in the door, and that her eyes followed the line of his until they converged on the same moving point; on the figure of the woman whose steps lingered.

When she had passed out of sight, turning into the Boulevard de la République, Joujou's mistress had remarked casually that Madame Vidal was in love with one of the *transportés*. Waving her note to hasten the drying of the ink, she had waked Joujou, asleep on her shoulders. He had squeaked his annoyance, making cross little faces at Michel.

And Michel had asked with which convict was Madame Vidal in love.

It was with the tall dark one who was her houseboy.

In astonishment Michel had exclaimed, "What? With Louis?"

The lady had argued: Why not? Wasn't he a well-set-up young man? Who'd once played parts at the Comédie Française? And wasn't Madame's husband a brute?

A brute, certainly. A duck-legged clumsy brute with square pudgy hands and feet, a bullet head, and protruding froglike eyes. Convicts had lost count how many of their fellows had fallen before his revolver. Some thought eight, and others insisted nine. But from none of that did it necessarily follow that Madame Vidal was in love with Louis. Who said so?

Why, everybody knew it . . . knew that she was quite frantic about him. It was true, wasn't it, Joujou?

But who, for example? Who had said it?

Every one, of course. And after all, was it surprising? The facts being as they were, and Louis quite probably the only lover Madame had ever had. Her marriage had undoubtedly been arranged. That was obvious. And who could expect a woman of precisely her type to be a slave to a wedding-ring! Absolutely she was the type to whom temptations come. And Louis . . . undoubtedly Louis would make love very prettily. She knew about that, having had an actor for a lover herself.

All of which Joujou had affirmed in a liaison of squeaks, sliding one into the other as French consonants merge into adjoining vowels.

Then the lady had yawned, folded up her note, and sent Michel off with it.

Mechanically choosing what shade there was, Michel took the direction of the mill—pausing nowhere, for his thoughts hovered about Madame Vidal and Louis. He was remembering how, on the convict ship, Louis had fallen to the man who had "Cut on the dotted line" tattooed around his neck, and how later he'd been brat to Mulot, who'd bought him from David, and then the night when Mulot had put him up as the stake in a *belote* game, at which old Grodet had won.

But Madame Vidal couldn't know any of that. Probably too innocent to have understood what it meant even if she'd heard about it. What a horror for her to be sharing Louis with men like Grodet! Grodet was called the worst of the prison, as Vidal was voted the most brutal of the keepers. After Vidal, Louis was certainly an improvement. Still, it was a sickening thought, however you took it. And Madame was the freshest, loveliest thing in St. Laurent!

Now that he came to think of it, it was her air of innocence that had captivated him that first day when he'd seen her on the dock under the flower-sprigged parasol. Pretty? Yes. But it was her innocence that made you remember her. That was why her affair with Louis troubled Michel. Yet what could he do? Still, it was sure to end in sorrow for Madame. The thing was dangerous. Soon all the prison would know. You couldn't keep an affair like that quiet, and then what would happen? With men like Grodet and Vidal involved?

It was not long before the rumor had gone about that Madame knew; that a Martiniquaise negress who went out by the day to sew had told her; explaining it all quite clearly. And Grodet was repeating as a luscious joke that the little Madame had actually sent for him and ordered him—Grodet, if you please—to break off relations with Louis.

Grodet was fond of rehearsing the scene, dwelling upon how gravely he'd advised her that it would be well to devote herself to her own ménage and let his alone.

Convicts who'd been kicked and cursed by Vidal had been inclined to sympathize with his Madame. Some had said they thought Grodet ought to call it off. There were other brats to be had. And, as Joujou had agreed, who could blame the little Madame, since she was so obviously the type?

But Grodet was saturated with the bitterness of years. And this was his first sweet drop of revenge.

Passing one day on some soft-footed errand, Michel had met Madame coming out of her gate, and his hand had gone in unconscious military salute to the battered brim of his hat. He'd seen then a sudden thought light Madame's pale preoccupied face, and to his amazement he'd heard her asking him to come in: saying there was something she wanted to know, something that perhaps he could tell her. And explaining that Louis had gone to the market. Michel had never before heard her voice. He was long to remember it; to remember even the little squeak of the gate as it closed after him, and to recall how the big green Amazon parrot, swinging drowsily on its perch, had opened one eye at the sound of the gate.

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THE PUNISHMENT CELL-BLOCK IN ONE OF THE PRISONS OF FRENCH GUIANA.

Madame lived in one of the row of keepers' houses that stand on the Rue Maxime du Camp, facing the Mairie, and halfway between the penitentiary and the church. They are little one-story houses, with pink and red flowering hibiscus and *rose de Chine* looking over geometric brick garden walls.

Michel had been marched countless times past these houses. Now, for the first time, one of their gates had opened to let him in.

Madame led the way along the brief flagged walk and into the house.

But, remembering himself to be a convict, Michel ventured no further than the threshold, where he stood with his dusty toes curving over the doorsill.

Madame took off her hat and threw it on the table. Her dark bobbed hair lay in flat moist waves.

Really, how had she ever consented to marry Vidal?

When she looked at him Michel saw that her eyes were blue, deeply blue like the Guiana sky at the end of the dry season, when the rains are just beginning to break. She looked at him intently—and Michel saw her hesitate, as if after all she would not trust him. Then her expression altered, and he felt that she was deciding to risk it; then that she was debating as to whether or not she should be entirely frank.

He waited. But with her first words he knew that she would speak without reserve or subterfuge. In the years of prison, Michel had been learning to read human beings.

"I want to ask you something," she'd said, "and you must answer me truly.

"Of course, I realize that you . . . all of you . . . know about me. Now you must tell me honestly whether you think Grodet will give Louis up."

Yes, she was the type. How appealing she was when her eyes opened wide and looked at you as though she took it for granted that you wanted to please her! To think that Louis had dared to touch her! Louis who was only a convict like himself. And what an extraordinary life Louis had been living, spending his nights in the prison and his days in the service of this fresh dainty thing! A man couldn't get further away from crime than that. Already in just these moments prison seemed incredible.

Yes, she was the type. How could he tell her the brutal truth? He saw that a faint breeze breathed upon the white lace curtain which separated the front room from the back; that the table cover on which Madame had thrown her hat was checked red and white in squares; and that there was a bowl of flowers on the table—roses. When had he seen flowers in a bowl before? Not since he'd been valet de chambre to the prince. And everything was so comfortingly clean—the curtain, the tablecloth, and Madame herself. He noted that a calendar hung on the wall, advertising in chromo the perfume with which a blonde lady was anointing her handkerchief. He saw that the month was set forth as April, and from the room back of the curtain he had heard the ticking of a clock.

No, he couldn't tell her how implacable Grodet was. He must leave her with hope.

"If he will not do it for you, Madame," he heard himself saying, "he will not do it for any one."

"That is not an answer. And besides, I have sent for him and begged him . . ."

"Perhaps he has already given him up, Madame."

Then for the first time a flush had risen and spread over her neck and face, even to the lobes of her ears, showing below the black waves of hair. A flush like the afterglow of an experience that has but just dropped over the horizon of reality into the limitless spaces of memory. "No," she said. "I have reason to know that he hasn't."

"But he can't refuse. He must understand."

What else could Michel say?

Afterward he was glad he'd left her with hope; that he hadn't told her how merciless he knew Grodet to be, nor how in her torture Grodet seemed to find a relief for his own. Michel was glad, for two days later Madame Vidal had shot Grodet full in the breast. She'd sent for him again, and again he'd laughed at the notion that he would give up his brat to please her or any one else. But, though she'd aimed squarely at his breast, Grodet hadn't died. He'd lived to tell the story in all its details and to produce proof of his facts.

Madame Vidal, Grodet, and Louis had been sent down to Cayenne, where Madame was to be tried in the civil court.

The affair had been a sensation. Then months had passed without news, and in the meantime there'd come the investigation of the Roux-Fournier-Verbloke mystery.

Now the little coastwise *Oyapok* was in, and it was reported that Madame Vidal had been acquitted, that Grodet had been sent to solitary confinement on Joseph, and Louis put among the incorrigibles on Royale. And every man in every dormitory of the prison was in revolt.

Grodet they conceded to be an old rascal. Nobody had any love for him. All loathed Madame's husband. And Madame was pretty. But the injustice!

That was what had set the prison aflame. A jealous woman had shot to kill. And she'd been acquitted because a convict is always in the wrong. Because no one believes a criminal's evidence.

"What was the sense of their having a trial at all?" Eugène stormed. "The case was decided before any testimony was taken!"

Some one contributed the gossip that, in order to clear Madame, next-door neighbors had sworn that just before the shot they'd heard Madame cry, "Rape! Rape!" So of course she shot to preserve her honor. Nevertheless, Madame was not to return to St. Laurent.

Michel wondered now if he ought to have told. He remembered the look of desperation which had hardened Madame's face when she stood by the table with the red-and-white checkerboard cover. He could hear her saying, "But that is not an answer." Perhaps she'd been planning it then. Looking back, he could almost see the idea come: at first as a wild impulse, which was later to stiffen into resolution.

But how could she let them bring in that stuff about rape? Yes, perhaps he really ought to have told how she'd called him in and questioned him. No, he couldn't have done it. He'd never betrayed confidence. And anyway, no testimony from a convict could have brought justice to Grodet; the thing having been decided, as Eugène said, in advance.

But Madame herself, how could she have . . .

Then he remembered her rosy flush when she thought of Louis. And he understood that it had been her way of saving Louis. Since her shot hadn't freed him, letting Grodet go to solitary confinement on false testimony would for a time at least accomplish that end.

She didn't know that Louis had, as the prison put it, "dipped soup with first one man and then another," and would in all probability do so again, for that was his type. Without his protectors he was too delicate to have survived Guiana.

The news had come at the end of the long dry weather. If there'd been any one to tear off the pages of Madame Vidal's calendar, the month registered would have been November. It was the season when every nerve was on edge.

"Hell is here. It's not with Satan!" a man shouted.

"A hopeless hell," Eugène added. "Hopeless. Remember that Director who used to say there was no such thing as public opinion? He was right. That's been proved. The journalists who came—there've been three of them, Londres, Le Fèvre, and Merlet—they thought they could help us. And I thought they could. But what happens? They go back. There's a lot of talk. What comes of it? Something, yes. But how little! Abolish the chains the incorrigibles used to wear. No more black cell. No more punishing men by making them work naked in the jungle. Yes, that's something. It's cleaning up hell a bit. But hell itself goes on.

"The same old starvation. The same old fevers and dysenteries."

"And now," a man interrupted, "if a woman feels like shooting one of us, all she needs is a revolver and some one to testify that her honor was in danger."

"But the worst of it all is what it does to us—what it turns us into. We can't hold out against it. It disintegrates us. . . ." Eugène's mask, always

difficult for him to maintain, had fallen.

"Who can resist it? Let him be what he may in his past—doctor, actor, lawyer, musician, poet, soldier, contractor, coolie—here he'll conform to prison. No matter what his race—French, German, Italian, Belgian, Arab, Chinese, Annamite, or Senegalese—here he's a *transporté*, a convict and nothing else. Whether he's innocent or guilty. It won't take him long to lose respect for himself and everybody else. He'll pick up the prison vices. He'll drink or gamble, or keep a brat. Or perhaps do all three. Not one in a thousand can hold out.

"That's what I'll never forgive prison for—for making me a worse man than I am. I feel as if my mind were a black cave, where bats have lived so long that it's slimy, and that it'll never lose the stench of them. A little more, and I won't be fit to live anywhere else but here. That's what it's doing to me!"

Eugène's thin legs twitched nervously. His eyes seemed to be consuming his mask, as though they would burn to ashes his yellow withered face. His self-revelation made the others uncomfortable. It was awkward to see a man let himself go that way. But Eugène, carried along by the flood of his passion, was oblivious of that.

"Our regeneration! What a farce! What hope is held out to be a good man? A little pardon. If a man's *peine* is for life, maybe they'll commute it to twenty years! Or if it was twenty years, he may get it cut to eighteen. And then exile here for the rest of his span! What's that to strive for?

"No, a sneak and a scoundrel swims better here than the fellow who's fool enough to be honest. It's the tale-bearer and the politician who win what few good places there are.

"Our regeneration! What a farce! When their real aim is to destroy us. We're an expense to France, eh? And a nuisance to keepers. When we go under—die, commit suicide, or assassinate each other—they're only glad. There's one less of us to bother with. And if a woman takes it into her head to shoot one of us, she goes free.

"As for the prison marriages, it's a joke to them, with their wives and mistresses. Men condemned to celibacy under conditions which make that torture. Everybody knows what happens to sex when you take away all a man's other interests. Oh, a priest has compensations—a criminal has none. Prison leaves him only his body, and then starves that. Yet keepers laugh at prison love!"

"Well, Eugène, nobody's disputing any of that," Bernard reminded. "You don't expect Society to cherish us, do you? What did you think prison was, anyway?

"No use getting steamed up like that. The question is, what are we going to do about it? Verne and I are getting out. Why don't you come with us?"

And Bernard made the customary Guiana gesture to express escape; with his right hand striking his left arm above the elbow, and at the same time shooting the left forearm quickly forward.

"Verne and I are getting out. Why don't you come with us? We've been arranging it with some men from Nouveau Camp. They're getting the canoe ready. Putting on a rudder and sail. We've a good pilot—an old sailor who knows the coast. But we've room for another who's able to pay his share.

"Come along with us. No good getting worked up about what you can't help. Get out. That's the only way."

"I've tried to escape before. So have you. And where are we? What I want is rebellion. Why don't we do something intelligent? Use our brains. All get together. United action. We've no arms. So why not try passive resistance? Let every man on a given day just lie on his bed and refuse to get up until they give us proper food. Food enough to keep us alive. Let's try it and see what they do. Everybody must stand together. Otherwise it's no use. Who's willing?"

In the silence Eugene heard the dynamo of the electric plant start and saw the dim low power lights come on.

"Well, if you don't like that, here's another scheme. Let's go together, in a body, all of us, and as many as will join us from the other dormitories, let's go to the Director and protest. Tell him we're dying inch by inch. I'll put the case and I'll put it strong. How's that?

"Good God! What're you all afraid of?

"If I had only twenty to back me, I could go to the Director. I'd tell him that if he thought he was more powerful than we are, he was mistaken. I'd tell him that the most powerful man is the one with nothing to lose. Because he's desperate.

"I'd show the Director that we were desperate, and I'd make him see why. Then I'd remind him that we have nothing—that we've lost all. So I'd make him understand that we don't care what we do. That we might do anything. Since nothing can matter to us any more.

"If I could make them realize that we've borne too much, that we are rats in a corner, desperate rats, then you'd see there'd be a change. There'd be no more jeering about far-off public opinion.

“Yes, I’m for rebellion.”

“Don’t blow up, Eugène. You can’t organize convicts.” Bernard put his hands carefully around a match. Matches cost money. “No, no use. Better come with us. Better make another try at escape.”

“This shows what prison has done to us,” Eugène moaned. “It’s made us craven. Lock men up. Count them. Crucify them body and soul. Scorn them and distrust them. And what do you get? You get a convict; a man who’s come to scorn himself and his comrades, to distrust himself and everybody else. Here we are, a lot of brave men. Yes, we are brave. We’ll risk death for liberty. But we haven’t got the guts to stand up and put our case straight. Our manhood’s gone. That’s what’s happened. Just as if they’d filed it away with our finger prints. There’s nothing left of us but a body fighting for its existence.

“Oh, I could bear being heartbroken! But it’s being spirit-broken that’s killing me.

“And now here’s Bernard saying he can make a place for me in his party. And I’m to go to the W.C. and get my *plan* so that I can count up my money to see if I’ve enough to pay my way!

“Think of that, men! Think of being sunk so low that you must go to the W.C. to get at your money! I’ve known fellows who had to take a dose of

castor oil before they could pay a debt! Out in the world men use combinations to open their safes. But we—our Open Sesame's castor oil!"

"Oh, you can't rouse them, Eugène! No use ranting. The hookworm and the mosquito have destroyed that manhood you talk about. And curses did the rest. Better come with us."

"See here," Verne put in, "I've got a thought. Most of us are scheming to escape sometime. I say, let's all who can, pull it off tomorrow! The more there are out at one time, the more chance some will have to get away. What do you all say to that? Let's give the man-hunters a busy day!"

"Fine." Verne had dramatized into the semblance of rebellion the obsession—the idée fixe—of the Guiana prisons. Escape. That they understood, since the dream of it never left them.

"Fine. We're with you."

Their united shouts woke an old man asleep on a corner bed.

"What's so fine?"

"Escape. A lot of us are escaping tomorrow. We're organizing to go—as many as can—on the same day."

The old man sat up. His face was gray-white, like his dingy prison clothes. In the shadowy corner his outline was vague, like that of a spirit-photograph, or like the shape of a man cut out of fog.

"Fine, is it?" And he tapped his forehead with his forefinger in the gesture with which the half dozen old men of the Guiana prisons speak of escape. Shaking their heads as over an infantile madness, which, like a disease, attacks all but the aged.

"Fine, is it? And who has this wonderful idea?"

He looked about with cataract-blurred eyes, recognizing only movement; never detail.

"Who has it? Because it's my idea. The very idea I had myself. A long time ago. Thirty years ago. All were to try at once. That was it.

"Oh, I was young then and full of young folly! Why have I lived so long and lost my folly?

"Not one of those who came out in my convoy remains. I'm Number 22,315. Nearly thirty thousand convicts have come over since. Their numbers run up into forty-nine thousand odd.

"Yes, I'm Number 22,315, and I'd only been ten years in prison when I had that idea you call 'fine. . . .'

"I got the black cell and dry bread for that idea. I was always having ideas in those days. Some got me the cell. And some got me one year, two years, four years more *peine*! I've had the chain, too, and I was an *inco* when the incorrigibles worked naked in the jungles round Charvein. I've had everything but the guillotine herself. But I've seen her at work. I could tell

you about her. She's quicker, the 'widow' is, than this dry guillotine. Often I've thought the 'widow' would have been better. But I've kept on clinging to life."

The tremulous voice trailed off like mist, and then like mist drifted back.

"Yes, they brought us out of the blockhouse, and out of the punishment cells, and made us kneel in the yard.

"The 'widow' stood there on her five white stones. Hespel was the executioner. He was serving twenty years himself. All the officials were there too—in uniform. That's the law.

"But we weren't going to let them see how we felt kneeling to see a comrade's head fall into the basket. Some of us laughed, and we heard afterward that they said we had no feeling. So they never knew how awful it was to us to see a man killed in cold blood, legally murdered, you might say.

"Hespel didn't guess that day that the 'widow' would get him, too. Yes, she got him. Old as I was, I lived to know that what he'd done to others happened in the end to him. She'd got the executioner before Hespel, too. And when he heard his sentence he made the prophecy that she'd get the man who's executioner now.

"As a last favor he asked them to let him set up the 'widow' himself. Said he couldn't trust anybody else to do it right. When he had all ready, he said, 'Mind you put me in properly.' And he died bravely. It's only his due to tell how bravely Hespel went.

"He had a nickname. What was it, now? Does any one remember? It's just gone from me. Who knows what was Hespel's nickname?"

"We called him the 'Vampire.' "

"Yes, that was it. He was the vampire of the Maroni. He got that name when he was living free in the jungle, before they caught him and brought him back to prison. . . . Ah, escape. . . .

"Who was talking about escape and a fine idea?

"All together, eh? But maybe this old man will live to see some of you come back." He spoke with a great and mournful gentleness.

"How many I remember! Leaving by sea and by jungle. Six hundred or so a year, and most of them caught before they got far enough away to stretch their wings, as you might say. Those who got out to sea . . . half of them drowned. Of the other half, most of them brought back; sent back to punishment, to solitary confinement. Oh, they paid dear!

"In quantities I've seen them come back to pay.

"Some had got as far as Havana, some to Martinique, some to Demerara. A few sent the good news of their freedom from Rio, from Caracas, from Spain. And we forgot those who went to the bottom . . . and those who died in the jungle.

"Eight would leave, and all perhaps would be on the next mail from Demerara. Nine would go, and no news. Dead or free, we never heard. Seven, and all shipped back from Trinidad. Six, and one came back to tell how they'd been wrecked on the mud banks of Nickéry. So many lost at Nickéry that the Dutch of Surinam got to calling the place 'the Frenchman's tomb.'

"Oh, I know Nickéry myself!"

"You mustn't talk to us like this, Raynal. Let us go with good hope!"

"Ah, yes, with good hope! I, too, went with good hope."

And wearied by his emotion, the fragile old figure of warning lay down, turning his face to the wall as though, having said his say, he left life to go on as it would.

Prison life, of course, for after his forty years of Guiana, that was all the life that counted.

No one knew what crime had brought Raynal to the Devil's Island Colony.

It never occurred to any one to ask. Somewhere in the files it was, of course, recorded. But it had been so long ago that the youth who had committed it had been years dead in the man. And old Raynal would perhaps have been unable to give more than the bare details of that crime. Occasionally, as though aware of that former existence, he would ask what France was like now; and listening, he would murmur, "Mon dieu, mon dieu! Very likely I wouldn't know my own street any more!"

While Raynal's breath fluttered in and out of his body, fitfully as though each time it were undecided whether or not it would return, the prison dormitory, careless of his warning, discussed the future.

How many would leave in escape? Bernard put the question.

Michel would. He'd thought he would wait until he could better finance the attempt. But he might as well go now. He'd agreed to combine with a certain Basil—a fellow in his work squad. He would speak to him the first thing in the morning. Pooling the contents of their *plans*, they'd have a reasonable amount. Enough anyway to make a try by the interior streams of Dutch Guiana. They didn't have the price of a sea escape.

Eugène decided to accept the place in Bernard's group, which was to strike out by sea for Venezuela.

A silent man, who lived only for the monthly mail and who spent his dormitory hours in writing long letters to a devoted wife in Corsica, confessed that he'd already organized an attempt for the next day. There would be five in his party, and they were to head for Brazil; by the trails back of Godebert, northeast to the Mana River, a five days' march; then up

the river to a point where they could strike through the forest to the boundary stream between French Guiana and Brazil. There they'd embark for Pará.

He offered to let the others take a copy of his map. It was a good one. He'd been working at it off and on for years.

As it dealt especially with the interior, Michel was eager to avail himself of it, adding its details to his own map.

Another who'd been working out a sea escape suggested that he and Bernard make a comparison of their respective charts.

Little chimneyless kerosene flares were lit to supplement the inadequacy of the electricity.

They flickered like candles before some shrine. And moths flew between the bars, heading deliberately toward their own destruction.

The maps were spread out on the beds—maps penciled on odds and ends of paper; maps compiled from the personal experience of their makers, much as the early conquerors charted their world.

Michel, unconcerned with the sea, was particular about the accuracy of the blue lines representing forest trails and streams; trails of butterfly and rubber-hunters; trails leading to villages of the Bush-negroes; creeks and rivers threading the jungles, and here and there intersecting; the Wana Creek connecting the Coermotibo with the Maroni; the point where the Coermotibo joins the Cottica; the small contributory creeks—the Majoekas, the Cedars, the Red Creeks, the Creek of the Cow, and the Creek of the Ox—all so darkly overgrown with vegetation that there by day refugees might hide from the man-hunters.

So, on the map, Michel traced his journey down to Paramaribo, the chief port of Dutch Guiana, where he hoped to stowaway in some outbound vessel.

The groups whose destination was to be Brazil studied and noted the serpentine route of the Mana and its branches, the location of various placer mines, and finally the direction indicated through the jungle to the Brazilian frontier.

Bernard verified the coastal mud and sand banks, the currents about Les Hattes at the mouth of the Maroni River.

It is a prison saying that you must pass Les Hattes or die. For at that point the navigator must avoid the mud flats of the French bank and the sand banks on the Dutch side. There buoys painted green mark the wreck of ships. And there the flood current unites with the great general current which sets to the northwest, and the waters of the Mana coming up from the southeast unite with the waters of the Maroni from the south, all to the confusion of the tidal current.

So many refugees had been drowned off Les Hattes that in passing, all make the sign of the cross and pray, “Let me be free or die.”

Therefore Bernard would have as exact as possible a chart of the waters about Les Hattes, and of the distance out beyond the rollers where it is safe to turn to the west and to head for Venezuela; and he would record also the approximate time which, under favorable conditions of wind and tide, may be made from one point to another.

Now there was left only to assemble their few belongings. If a man had an extra blouse or trousers it was well to take them, since they might be sold to some negro rubber-hunter and thus converted into money; and though it was cumbersome to carry, a blanket would be a comfort. Food basins would be necessary, useful for bailing, for example. Not much to do to get ready a convict’s possessions.

To these things Michel added a small pocket mirror, which was absurdly dear to him. He had felt that he shouldn’t have bought it, that the money ought to have gone to the slowly accumulated price of his freedom. The mirror had been the one extravagance of the past six years. “Ah, in prison,” he thought, explaining to himself his tenderness for the treasured mirror —“Ah, in prison, where man is so cruel, one learns to love things.”

When all possible preparation had been made, and nothing remained but the purchase of provisions in the morning, then the kerosene flares were put out and men lay down to rest and to listen to the dynamo so like a train getting up speed, like a train surely bearing men to the land of their desire.

CHAPTER X

The stillness of midday paralyzed St. Laurent. Squads of convicts had flowed from all directions into the prison, and its doors had been closed and locked behind them. Here and there had been vacancies in the squads. Keepers had reported those who did not answer to the roll-call. There'd been more than usual. The man-hunters must be sent out. But it was the hour when officials breakfast and wine, and then doze comfortably in the manner of the tropical siesta.

The sun blazed white in the streets. And it was very quiet. Even the St. Laurent roosters were at that hour too listless to crow. There was not a breath of air to stir the breadfruit leaves.

Then—very gently—the taciturn man who watched for the mail boat and between times wrote adoring letters to his wife in Corsica, he who had the night before confessed that he was leaving in escape for Brazil, now in the breathless somnolence of noon detached a rowboat from its moorings at the dock and softly paddled it around to the brickyard.

The yard was hot and deserted. No one was anywhere to be seen. Then stealthily five men, whose ears had been listening anxiously for the faint drip of a paddle, came furtively out of hiding and got into the boat. Without a word, they, too, took up paddles, and the boat moved swiftly down the Maroni.

At the same moment Michel and Basil were excitedly shopping in a little Chinese store on the outer rim of the village. Ostensibly the shop door was locked for the hour of siesta, but in the hot dusk of its interior, fugitives might buy provisions for their great adventure.

Michel thought they should both have big machetes with which to carve a path where vegetation blocked the trail, or to cut material for a raft in case they were unable to obtain a boat from the Djoeka negroes of that jungle settlement which was to be the first stage in their journey to Paramaribo on the Dutch coast. And machetes would be needed also for cutting the palm leaves which would be their shelter by night.

Basil was younger than Michel. This was his first try for freedom. Thus it was Michel who decided upon machetes, upon three loaves of bread and three boxes of sardines, upon a can of tobacco, cigarette papers, matches, and a quart of kerosene for the little lamp which Basil had made of an old condensed-milk tin.

After years of painfully hoarding every sou that they might deposit it in those aluminum capsules which they carried about within themselves, this debauch of spending was like heady drink. They made little jokes: about

their purchases, about each other, about the fat doll-like Chinese baby asleep on the counter between loaves of bread and a pile of red peppers. They waked a mangey dog lying on a heap of flour sacks and they found it ridiculous that, without opening an eye, he set at once vigorously to scratching fleas. And the shapeless Chinese dame who served them shook her head over their young folly.

Now to bargain for transportation across to the Dutch shore. Outside, several Bush-negroes lay about in the shade. This was their port of call at St. Laurent, and moored at the foot of the bank lay their great dugout canoes.

A big black fellow sat up and drowsily stretched his long arms. Yes, he would put them over, but he would expect an extra fare, since it was not his custom to work at that hour. And because escaping convicts could not safely stand about, arguing, Michel agreed. The man then added a few more sous for conveying their knapsacks. Very well, there was no time to waste. It was important that they disappear as soon as possible into the Dutch jungle. And in the center of this particular canoe was a thatched roof under which they might squeeze, so that to all appearances only a solitary negro paddled across the Maroni. The protection of the roof alone was worth the extra tariff.

The roof arched from one side of the boat to the other. It was so low that as they sat in the bottom, Basil had to bend his head forward. The palm leaves of which it was woven were brittle, tickling the top of Michel's head and the back of Basil's neck. This roof shut out all but the straight-ahead view, where hot light quivered over the surface of the river, with, beyond, Albina, white and red-roofed against dense green forest.

Behind them the paddle of their oarsman splashed like the cool drip of a fountain. And his broad silver bracelets flashed in the orbit of his stroke.

"Not to Albina," Michel ordered. "Land us higher up."

The black brought his paddle to rest with a thump on the gunwale.

"That will cost more," he said. "More money."

"How much more?"

"Half a fare."

"We will pay it." Michel knew that recapture was as much to be feared from Dutch as from French officials. They must avoid Albina.

Again the paddles swept through the water and out. The canoe's nose turned sharply to port. Albina disappeared from the range of vision permitted by the low curve of the thatch, and the green Leper Island in midstream took its place. With the current against them, the going was slower. But there was no reason for alarm. Should any eye look out from St. Laurent or from Albina, it would see but a Bush-negro paddling his canoe upstream, bound undoubtedly for Apatou on the upper river, where the falls

of Hermina foam over the sudden drop in the river-bed. And such a canoe pointing upstream was too familiar for comment.

What a mad idea Eugène's scheme for organized rebellion had been! How much better to free yourself! In imagination Michel took freedom for granted. That was what convicts meant by going with good hope. Then the canoe had turned and was making again across current for the Dutch bank, for a wall of jungle which rose from the river's edge.

Skillfully the boatman let the bow nose her way into water so tree-shaded that without possible detection from the river Michel and Basil might scramble stiffly from under the canoe's roof.

But where was the trail which was to lead them to that village where canoes were so cheap that between them they might afford to travel to Paramaribo by inland creek and river? Where was the trail? They seemed to stand in unbroken forest.

The trail? Their boatman, looking up from carefully knotting his earnings in an end of his red loin-cloth, indicated what appeared no more than the space between a few broken branches. That was the trail.

With an "au revoir" he again took his place in the stern and pushed out from under the trees, out into the blinding dazzle of noon on the Maroni.

Adjusting their knapsacks, Michel and Basil turned their backs upon prison and took to the vague jungle trail, Michel leading the way.

Progress was slow. It was difficult to decide which was trail and which merely forest; necessary often to cut away encroaching vegetation, and sometimes to climb over the damp mossy trunks of prostrate trees.

The noonday hush was upon the jungle as it had been upon St. Laurent. In the stillness they seemed to crash clumsily forward; at intervals they halted for a brief rest, and then they were aware of the personality of the great tropical forest.

Above their heads the jungle stretched high. The sky was visible only through a close pattern of spreading and interlaced branches. On all sides they looked into jungle—tangled jungle where vines hung like rope ladders let down from on high. They looked into a matted undergrowth of infant trees which aspired one day to lift their heads to the sun. Great orchids sat like potted plants on the spreading branches, or found niches in the fluted and contorted tree-trunks. Huge pale green tree-ferns triumphed in that dim world of the jungle floor. Occasionally a big blue butterfly glittered through the forest, going very fast, miraculously avoiding collision with branch or tree, flying in wavy vertical lines, like some wildly fluctuating fever chart. And always leaves drifted softly down to carpet the jungle, the everlasting

falling leaves of the tropical jungle, seeming almost alive in their fluttering descent.

The sense of freedom had gone out of the fugitives. They felt still imprisoned, but prisoners now of this strange dumb forest, where in no direction could they look more than a few feet ahead, this forest where thorns tore the flesh and the clothing of men who would journey through it. In its uncanny half-light anything—beast or man-hunter—might be standing quite close, close enough to spring upon you, and in mocking mosaic of sun and shadow you would never have the fraction of a warning.

The thought drove them forward.

Then where was the trail? No vestige of it. Yes, there, in quite the opposite direction from the one Michel was about to follow, Basil pointed out, cut in a tree-trunk, the initials H.M.L. and beneath them a number, almost obliterated by moss.

A predecessor thus silently guided fellow refugees. What had become of him—this H.M.L.—Michel wondered, and tried to fit the initials to some comrade whom he'd known. But in vain. Basil was equally unsuccessful. They speculated. Had H.M.L. won his way to freedom? Or was he doing punishment on Joseph? They did not discuss whether death had ended his *peine*.

Wind swept through the forest, died away, and was followed by the rustle of rain, which came first to the tree-top roof, and not for an appreciable time reached the jungle floor. Its sudden chill checked the warm drenching perspiration. “We must keep moving,” Michel warned, stumbling over the lianas in his way. Their clammy garments clung to them, and their relaxed muscles became quickly sore and stiff.

Then the sky cleared. Rain ceased to fall, though down where Michel and Basil walked, it continued for some minutes to shower from the foliage. The sun again filtered through to rest in bright stenciled spots upon that underworld so removed from the tree-tops. Michel saw now that the light was low and that it drifted in directly ahead of them. And he knew that as the map instructed, they were proceeding west, and he remembered that it was the hour when back in St. Laurent, the work squads would soon be marched back to the prison dormitory for the night.

“We’re free, Basil!” he cried.

An invisible bird whistled shrilly as though in his very ears. It was answered by one far off. They, too, echoed freedom.

There was another space of stillness. And then an insect set up a preliminary strumming. A distant dove began interminably to play on two tremulous notes. The whistling gold-birds sounded again, calling and answering from every corner of the forest, clamorous and persistent as vesper bells.

From high came the squawking cry of macaws, flying in monogamous couples. A flock of parrakeets chattered high. And in the top of a stark dead tree which stood like a stripped corpse among its green brethren was perched a solitary Amazon parrot, scolding and complaining to itself. Michel noted the bird as resembling Madame Vidal's big green parrot. And now a million insects strummed.

"We must find leaves for a shelter," Michel said, knowing that light would not last long.

Slipping their knapsacks to the ground, they circled about in search of palms. Basil shouted that he'd found a hollow tree. There they installed their camp; working quickly to lay a bed of leaves and to supplement the shelter of the hollow by a dozen great palm fronds, laid across a frame of four forked saplings driven into the ground and connected by a couple of straight lengths which served as beams. They had both many times heard the construction of such a shelter described in the prison dormitory by men who had tried jungle escape before them. But they had not realized how heavy a task it would be at the weary end of the day. It seemed that at any moment their feet would refuse to obey the command to move, so tired were they after the repeated extrication from tangled vines and the repeated climbing over fallen tree-trunks.

Then it was all at once shadowy dusk in the forest, though in the outside world day had not yet quite faded. It was dusk, and suddenly it was black night. They lit Basil's improvised lamp and set it carefully in the hollow of the tree. By its light they ate—a loaf of bread and one of their three boxes of sardines.

They could eat lavishly, for according to schedule they should easily reach the Djoeka village before noon the next day. And there, they were sure to find bananas and cassava cakes. But the kerosene must last as far as Paramaribo. They would smoke, therefore, in the dark.

And how dark it was! The dusk had silenced gold-birds and parrots; frogs taking their places—frogs signaling to each other in the nervous click of the telegraph, frogs sounding in the rhythmic syncopation of castanets, or frogs bellowing like lost young calves. And all this going on simultaneously as though some vast orchestra had gone mad.

"What does it all mean?" Michel pondered, rolling a second cigarette. "What are they all trying to say?" He put the question to Basil, now half asleep beside him on their leaf bed. Basil murmured something about mating and reproduction, dropping asleep in the middle of that exhumed fragment of zoölogy.

"Yes," Michel agreed, "but why?"

And then he too fell asleep.

Some hours later he was suddenly wide awake. In the wan glow of what outside the jungle was a moon so brilliant that he might have read by its light, he saw the massed foliage of the forest. He sat up, startled. He was not in prison. That was the first thought. At last he was not in prison! He drew a long deep sigh of relief. Sliding back that he might lean against the tree, he pulled up his knees and clasped his hands about them. While he was asleep the frogs had become quiet. Now the jungle was vastly silent.

Dear God! He was not in prison!

The thought somehow reminded him of Janisson. It seemed to come to him in Janisson's beautiful mournful voice. He was sorry not to have said good-by to Janisson. But months before, Janisson had been transferred to one of the jungle prisons. Perhaps by now he, too, had escaped. . . . Perhaps.

From Janisson his memory shifted to Paul Arthur. It had been nice that he'd chanced to run into Paul that morning in the prison yard. Since they were no longer in the same dormitory he'd not seen much of Paul.

Queer that Paul never tried escape. But Paul was always queer. Different.

Escape reminded him that by this time Bernard and Eugène must be well down toward the mouth of the Maroni . . . perhaps even actually at sea, if the tide were with them. Would he ever meet them again? He would be interested to hear the story of their escape. But prison and all its associations seemed already far away. With the descent of night the sense of a close-pressing jungle had vanished, as though dissolved in a great black solution of night. Why, then, was he not happy? He knew relief, but not happiness. Pale light had strayed into the blackness, as though it were lost and crept about the jungle trying to find a way out. In its ghostly luminosity Michel, too, felt lost—lost forever. In the profound silence the falling of a branch, the rustle of some night creature in the foliage, quickened his heartbeat. Night in the forest he found infinitely sad.

Basil lay beside him, deathlike in the stupor of heavy sleep. He did not wake when Michel lit a cigarette.

Mist rose from the cooling earth, and the union of mist with moonlight drifted through the forest like translucent cloud. The jungle seemed cut out

of velvet . . . lustrous black velvet. Tree-trunks and hanging lianas were of velvet; velvet ferns and orchids and great serrated palm leaves. Black with softly blurred outlines, and upon the black the pearly light cast a bloom; like dewy bloom on wild sloes.

Yes, the night was beautiful, never to be forgotten. But its sadness stabbed Michel's heart.

"So it is," he thought, "that a convict sees the jungle."

But why, since he was now free, did he still feel himself to be a convict? He had imagined—so many times imagined—the first night of his liberty. He had pictured himself as gay. Now he was afraid that perhaps he could never again be gay. Perhaps, as Eugène had said about their manhood, perhaps gayety too was filed away in the prison records.

Into the still melancholy there came the sweet tinkle of piano notes. The lost spirit of some musician played, with one hand, a little air high in the treble.

Back there in the dormitory of the penitentiary, Michel felt, he had died—died and come to this world of unearthly beauty where velvet blackness was silhouetted against silver mist, and where a dead comrade with work-weary unaccustomed fingers played upon the wraith of a piano, trying slowly to regain his lost skill.

It was of course the piano-bird. Michel knew that. Captured fugitives had often told him how, lying awake in the jungle, they had listened to the piano-bird. But, for the moment, fact was less real to him than the vision of a dead comrade, come unexpectedly upon a phantom piano in the realm beyond "the bamboos."

Tears rise easily to convict eyes. It is the mask's duty to dam them back. But let the mask fall, and they rush to blind the eyes. They rose now and shut out from Michel the groping moonlight. He was possessed with pity for life, which, as he looked back upon it, appeared to be at once so lovely and so sad.

The bird notes ceased. He scoffed at his sentimentality, and in the space of silence drowsed a little.

Then suddenly, directly overhead, something rent the night. Something of terrifying awe. As though powerful wind filled the pipes of a huge organ and gave forth sound as elemental as the forces which preside over the birth of new worlds.

Michel was instantly staring awake again. Basil started up in mute terror.

The sound mounted in increasing volume and tempo, rose to a climax, and ceased. The bellows refilled with wind, and the surging crescendo of sound again reverberated through the night. As wild and free as wind

howling about a masthead on a stormy sea. Exultant as wind. An unchained liberated wind. There was freedom in it—wild freedom which knows no law but that of inevitable Nature. As the sound rose, died away, and again soared to its peak, Michel and Basil trembled. They had fled from the tyranny of prison. Now this incarnation of freedom terrified them, robbed them of speech and of movement.

So at the foot of a jungle tree, men made in the image of their God listened, trembling, to the emotion which howling monkeys pour into the night.

They listened, and then suddenly it was over. Cracking branches told them that the troop left the tree to travel through the forest. When the cracking died into distance, there was left only the rustle of leaves.

To dull human ears, unable to detect the nuances of sound, all things in the jungle come suddenly. Silence is swift, sound is a surprise. Without apparent warning, creatures speak or cease to speak. Night drops quickly. And all at once day comes on duty. The forest wakes. Birds trill and whistle. The mist rises and carries with it the fancies of night. The morning is happy and freedom is as golden as sunshine where butterflies drift like escaped gems.

It is good to eat. Michel and Basil recklessly consumed a second box of sardines and another entire loaf of bread. In the first stream—there was sure to be a stream—they would drink and bathe.

Now forward. Which way? Keeping the sun at their backs and heading a little north of west. The trail? There! where some one had cut away festooning vines. How good it was not to be one of the work squad which just about that moment would be marching down the Rue Maxime du Camp, past the church where a priest would be intoning early mass.

Life was after all extraordinarily sweet.

Just ahead they heard the soft gurgle of water. It was a tiny shallow creek murmuring around one end of a fallen tree. Over its surface as over a mirror danced emerald dragon-flies. And into the mirror the sky looked and saw itself to be of the very essence of blue, with here and there still white clouds like mountains of foam, toward which pointed the inverted tree-tops of the reflected jungle.

The stream was to Michel proof of their good luck. First they would drink, and then, since it was early and they had such abundant time, they would bathe. Hanging their shirts and trousers on branches of the fallen tree, they poured basins of water over each other, while their feet stood upon reflected sky and the tree-tops. Joy had at last come back to them. For the first time in all the years of their *peine*! They yielded to happy impulses.

Sunlight danced on their bodies and sparkled in the spray of tossing water. In the boughs overhead a bevy of black spider-monkeys with long wavy tails ran back and forth, excited by the dazzle of sun on the tin basins as they were raised to pour water like yellow wine over the white men who stood in the creek.

The noisy jungle morning banished all sense of time or obligation, until, with the sudden stillness of the forest, these facts were recalled to Michel. "Now we must go," he decided. "We've played too long."

With the sun high it was not so easy to take their direction—a little north of west. As for the trail, half a dozen points looked equally promising. But perhaps there would be initialed tree-trunks to guide them. They would go a little distance in first one direction, and then in another, until they came upon some sign.

They would follow the creek, rolling up their loose cotton trousers and wading until prevented by deeper water, become now the color of tea too long brewed, wherein the reflected sky and forest were blurred and darkened. But on neither side did the forest show guiding signs.

Accordingly they returned to the bathing place, since that was obviously at the end of yesterday's trail. There, taking to the bank opposite the fallen tree on which they'd hung their clothes, they struck into the jungle, Michel as usual going ahead.

The forest was ominously quiet; the position of the sun showed it to be already noon. Who would have thought they'd spent so long in the creek? Michel, assuming the responsibility, blamed himself.

"Let's stop and eat," Basil suggested.

And while Basil opened the remaining box of sardines and, with the idea of saving half, divided in equal portions the remaining loaf of bread, Michel, who'd been cutting their path, rested.

It was odd they hadn't come yet to that Djoeka village. They should have made it easily by noon—in spite of having squandered so much time in the creek.

Michel took off his coat and fanned his head. At his feet hurried an endless line of big red ants. The ants reminded him of the story of a fugitive who, fallen ill in the jungle, had been completely devoured by red ants. . . . There must have been many cases like that. . . . But Basil had the lunch ready. They would feel better after food and a smoke.

They ate in silence. For why hadn't they come to that Djoeka settlement?

Michel said he thought they'd better not rest after lunch. They'd better go back to the creek and start out in another direction. No use to go on. If they'd been on the right track, they'd have long ago come to the Djoekas.

But the creek, the fallen tree, all their landmarks, had disappeared. The heat was stifling, and they began to be thirsty. Memory of the night when he'd first talked to Janisson flashed into Michel's mind. He heard Janisson telling him how the jungle stretched mile upon mile, south to the Amazon, and across the Guianas and Venezuela until it halted at the foot of the Andes.

"Escape!" Janisson had said. "If escape were as easy as it looks, do you think there'd be one of us in this prison dormitory tonight?"

Then Basil severed the wires which led Michel from the present to the past. "I must rest," he protested. And Michel conceded it to be a good idea. Since there was no creek from which to take their bearings, it would be just as well to wait until the lowered sun roughly suggested the points of the compass.

Yes, Basil agreed, when the sun was just a bit low they could easily take their direction. There was even a chance of reaching the Djoekas before night.

Meanwhile they sat upon a mossy log and watched little brown and green lizards dart among dead fallen leaves, suddenly stopping after each dash forward, as though frightened by the soft rustle of their own progress. A heavy pod dropping from a great height struck the ground with a thud, and they both started. "So quiet here," Michel laughed nervously. "So quiet. It makes you jumpy."

With the first indication of a lowered sun they set out, bearing a little to the right, which would give them the desired northwesterly direction. There was really a good chance of making the Djoeka settlement before dark. They luckily happened upon the merest thread of a brook. Sardines and dry bread were terribly thirst-provoking.

As they went on, the call of gold-birds echoed about them. The sun was dropping like a great weighted ball. Now a sweet double note like a faraway flute sounded. Soon it would be night. And all day there had not been a trace that human creatures had ever walked in this jungle.

Michel had known, of course, that it would have been better to travel all the way to Paramaribo by canoe. But they had had so little money between them that the price of a boat in St. Laurent would have left nothing for provisions. And every one had said that canoes were cheaper in that interior village for which they were bound. He could not reproach himself for his decision.

When light faded again from the lower jungle, all hope of reaching the Djoekas that day also faded. For six-o'clock bees and raucous parrots warned that a place for the night must be found.

While they ate the last of their half loaf of bread, Michel heard himself making conversation. He was saying how the jungle seemed to keep a time of its own, with birds and insects taking the place of the time-marking prison drum.

Basil listened in silence. Both were thinking that they were eating the last of their provisions. And where was the Djoeka village? They must find it tomorrow. But how? Before the sun dropped out of sight Michel cut with his machete an arrow pointing west. But west was a vague word in a jungle which marched to the foot of the Andes in one direction, to the Atlantic in another, and to Brazil on the south and the southeast.

Again the savage roar of the howlers woke them from exhausted sleep. But when the howlers swung off through the boughs, they seemed to bear sleep away with them.

The monstrous shadow of fear stalked in the moonglow.

Michel reasoned with this awful shadow. Hadn't there been escaped convicts who'd lived in the jungle—lived there for months?

But he wondered how they'd done it. Had they lived off the jungle itself? Could you do that? The Djoekas did. They knew what wild fruits were safe to eat and what were deadly. And they knew where to find them. But then their fathers before them had been forest people—Bush-people, from whom they'd inherited knowledge of how to make bows and arrows and the poison with which they killed fish and game.

Could a Frenchman—lost—cut off from human kind—live on the jungle alone?

What, for example, would they do tomorrow, now that their last crumb was gone?

If they failed to find the village, he supposed, they would fall ill and be devoured by red ants. No, there seemed no way in which a lost Frenchman could survive the jungle. Existence there was possible in only two ways, he argued.

You must either settle yourself near a Djoeka tribe and learn from them how to live the Bush-life. Or you must manage somehow to secure money and to establish communication with a source of food supply. But to learn the Bush-negro ways involved the danger that any day one of them might deliver you to the prison authorities and thus collect the reward—the price set upon the convict. Ten francs. That's what you were worth if they took you on land. Fifty francs if you were captured at sea.

The prison bitterness swept Michel from the perilous present, back again behind bars. What a price to set upon a human creature! How valueless man considers man! And what man so cheap as a Guiana convict! Not surprising

that there'd been desperate fugitives who'd survived and remained free by the taking of a paltry life or so. At least that was what rumor said.

There was the man they called the King of the Jungle; a sort of human Bushmaster like the greatest of the deadly snakes. This man was said to maintain his life by murdering and robbing the rubber-hunters; the balata-bleeders, as they were called. It was said that he roamed the forest, changing continually his route. Heard of now near Mana, now reported not far from St. Laurent. Again seen in the neighborhood of Cayenne. He would come in to sell his rubber, appearing in some isolated shop on the fringe of a settlement, and so heavily armed that the shop-keeper didn't dare risk calling for help. All feared him and gave him what he demanded. Moreover he bought from them his provisions and his ammunition, paying always the top price, and often not troubling to wait for his change. He would go away laughing and saying no rubber-hunter was so good and honest a customer as he. For, they explained, he gave himself out to be a balata-bleeder. But people said that it was the rubber men whom he hunted, knowing "as his pocket" the jungle where they worked.

But his reputation was supposed to have made his escape from Guiana impossible. By land they said he would have found every negro village ready to betray him. By sea no one can hope to buck the waves alone, and so feared was this King of the Bush that no man would have set sail with him.

So there he was, doomed to roam the jungle, condemned as it were anew, imprisoned in the forest, with the forest itself as his keeper.

Still he lived. But then he wasn't lost. Could a lost man—a lost Frenchman—live?

Clouds came and extinguished the moon. Rain fell. Slow steady rain, leaking down through the leafy ceiling.

The night before Michel had felt himself to be a lost spirit, wistfully wandering among shades. Now he was a lost human body, lying cold with terror under a flimsy palm shelter through which oozed rain.

The morning was joyous, jeweled after the rain. But the heavy-eyed fugitives were without food.

"We'll be hungry enough," Michel said, "when we get to the Djoekas."

No trouble this time about direction. There was Michel's arrow cut in the tree and pointing just a little north of west.

But for the day's march they had only fatigue to show; fatigue, and the great emptiness of hunger. Fortunately there was water. They had come into a spider web of intersecting creeklets. But with the water there was also the

irritation of mosquitoes. Michel said they must watch and see what the monkeys ate. But not a monkey showed itself that day. “Anyway,” Basil commented, “we aren’t walking in the tree-tops. So what good would it do us to know?”

Michel, remembering the dead convict who, in attempting escape, had been caught and pinioned in a trap set for wild pig or tapir, suggested that he and Basil might rig up a trap which would snare one of the larger birds. They had plenty of matches with which to build a fire.

It was a comforting scheme. Plodding through the undergrowth, they thought much of the plump bird which they would turn as it roasted before their fire. The manufacture of the trap served as an excuse to abandon earlier than usual their futile heartbreaking tramp. The vision of the roasted fowl put them peacefully to sleep.

But when the howlers waked them on this their third night of liberty, horror towered in the spectral moonlight. It took fantastic shapes. It became the King of the Jungle, armed with gun and automatic. It shot, to find too late that its victim were fellow convicts, who had not even one sardine left, and whose *plans* carried but the price of a canoe in that village where they were cheap. Or again the horror appeared as a trap holding pinioned their two dead bodies, toward which hurried streams of ants, red ants coming from all directions. While from the near-by creek came snarls—loud and vicious. Then a cry of infinite pain. After that, silence. And then very close the soft padded tread of something large and stealthy. Again silence.

But in the morning their trap was empty. It had perhaps been faulty in construction. Or that prowling jaguar might have frightened away their prey.

To start again on their tramp, with only a drink of creek water with which to pacify hunger, was a dreary business. What use to bother about direction?

Then Basil spoke. He spoke one word only: “Liberty.” But it lit again the torch of resolve.

“Liberty!” Michel echoed. Fervently, as one might swear everlasting allegiance.

Along the way there were bright convolvulus flowers, pink and lavender. At every creek they drank. Water and the dream of liberty sustained them.

Then suddenly Michel saw, standing like a skeleton in the midst of green life, a lofty tree which held out the bare bones of its branches like supplicating arms.

“Basil,” he cried, “look!”

“At what?”

“At the tree! Don’t you see it?”

“Look! That’s the tree where we saw the parrot!”

“What parrot?”

For Basil had had no Madame Vidal memories to fix in his mind a certain species of green parrot.

“Why, the parrot we saw the first night! Before we were lost. Don’t you understand? It sat there on the top branch.”

“Well, what of that?”

“That means that we’ve come back. We’re back at the place where we lost the trail!”

Now in two hours, or at the most three, they would arrive at the Djoekas.

Where had they been all this time? Had they gone far into the forest and then doubled back on their tracks? Or had they been circling round and round always within hailing distance of the trail? The blessed trail!

As they went on, there were at intervals reassuring initials carved on tree-trunks. There were even the remnants of several leaf shelters once the protection of comrades, who had long ago, of course, achieved their freedom. So, at least, it pleased Michel and Basil to believe.

It was in the heat and quiet of noon that they came at last upon the village.

Peaked thatched huts—perhaps two dozen of them steeply sloping from the ground to the ridges of their roofs; huts which looked as though merely roofs had been set down on the river bank; huts whose triangular façades were painted in primitive design where indigo was the prevailing color.

Luxuriant banana leaves drooped over the thatch. There was fruit among the leaves and fruit on the papaya trees. On flat stones between two huts a woman was baking big round white cassava cakes. A youth wearing a yellow loin-cloth walked up and down playing on a reed flute. When he turned he caught sight of Michel and Basil just as they emerged from the edge of the forest.

"*Déporté! Déporté!*" he shouted.

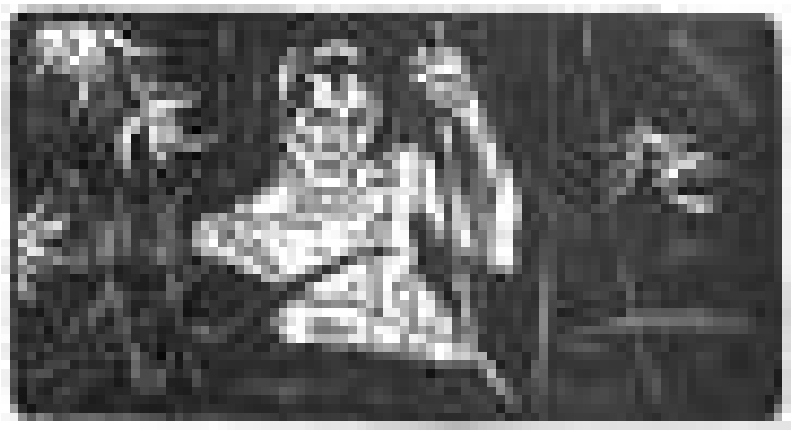
And the woman left off turning the cassava cakes to shout, "*Déporté!*"

Children ran up from the water-side. The aged tottered from the huts. All to hoot "*Déporté*," and to crowd about the two white men, bleeding and torn by the jungle, their hands blistered and their feet bruised; men weak with hunger and dropping with fatigue.

As the birds of day gather to jibe and peck at some stranded blinking owl, so the Djoekas surrounded the fugitives, jeering "*Déporté!*" Taunting with the general term applied to the French convict by Dutch Guiana, much as the world designates the whole French Penal Colony as Devil's Island.

"*Déporté!*"

After the centuries the black man had at last his chance to revile the white.



CHAPTER XI

It was night when Michel and Basil came from the shack where they had slept throughout the afternoon. In a little cleared space between the huts a fire burned brightly. And over the fire sat two black men; not of the Djoeka tribe, not indeed Bushmen at all, but negroes drifted to the jungle from far-flung satellites of one of the major stars of civilization. These men wore battered felt hats—factory-made; and one of them actually had shoes—high, black, laced boots. Their clothes were shapeless cotton shirts and trousers. Beside them lay the tools of their trade; huge sharp-pointed spurs, the belt and cable with which jungle rubber-hunters mount the trees, and big knives kept razor-sharp to cut the channels which conduct milky rubber down tree-trunks and into waiting canvas bags.

Evidently here were rubber-bleeders just in from the jungle.

The tall one, whose white trousers were tucked into high boots, rose to kick the logs into brighter flame. The little man with thin black legs, who sat on his haunches cramming tobacco into a pipe, was speaking; but in a tongue unintelligible to the French fugitives. He spoke in the English of Trinidad, and he was saying that he had tramped all day, and many days, but had not now for ever so long come upon a single rubber tree.

The tall man who stammered over his words was consoling.

"Why I love the rubber," he said, "why I love it, is that perhaps you walk the first month and no trees. Maybe the second month and no trees. But the third, you may find enough to pay for the other two months!"

But the little man, hovering like a black spider over the fire, complained that that was exactly why he was discouraged. "There's too much 'maybe' in it. I don't love it. I'd chuck the whole business if I could."

The Frenchmen understood nothing of all this. They understood only that the little black-spider man with the mustache like sparse crinkled wire was having trouble getting his pipe to draw, since, like everything in the village, his tobacco was of course damp. Therefore, they decided that his bad humor had no connection with them, and that it would be safe to come out of the shadow into the firelight.

As they came forward, drawn by the cheer of the blaze, little Trinidad, between pokes and puffs at his pipe, growled, "*Déportés*." The tall lean black turned. "Hugh!" he said, and, ignoring their timid settling opposite him across the fire, he himself sat down and began removing his wet boots; it had rained heavily since noon, letting up only at sunset. He stuck twigs into the ground and on them hung the boots upside-down over the fire.

"Want anything to smoke?" he asked in a bastard French, apparently addressing no one in particular.

"Oh, a thousand thanks"—Michel's heart lightened—"a thousand thanks, but we have tobacco and cigarette papers."

"Well, that's honest, for you might have had some of mine."

Then after a pause, "Where are you bound?"

"Paramaribo."

"When?"

"Tomorrow."

"Got a boat?"

"We think so."

"Think so? Don't you know whether you've got one or not?"

"We showed the chief here our money. And we pointed to a canoe down by the river. At first he said no, but then he took the money and gave us a boat. Not the one we wanted—a smaller one. Not a very famous canoe, to be sure. It was half full of water, but we bailed it out, and I think it'll last us to Paramaribo."

"You think so? How much do you know about canoes?"

"Nothing. Never was in one until we crossed to the Dutch side three days ago."

"Nothing! And you're paddling yourselves to Paramaribo, eh?"

"Yes."

"You'd better move that boot," put in little Trinidad. "It's scorchin'."

The fire burned furiously now, and steam oozed from the leather and from the far end of the logs.

"How much you're payin' for that canoe?"

"All we had. Twenty-five francs."

"Four shillin's," the tall man who was from Demerara translated to himself; while Trinidad, after thirteen years in Dutch Guiana, put it into guilders.

"We thought," said Michel, "that there was a Djoeka here who spoke some French."

"There is, but he's in the Bush now. In this rainy time when the water's high, they cut timber and float it down the river."

"Twenty-five francs, eh? Well, you couldn't have got it for that in St. Laurent. I know what you'd have to pay there. I've done some rubber-bleeding over your side."

"You see this shirt?" And Demerara leaned forward into the light. "I bought this shirt last week, from a comrade of yours who came through the jungle where I was workin'. You know him?"

They saw across the chest a number. 48,143.

"No, not by number. What was his name?"

"Never asked him that. Jesus Christ, but he was hungry! Didn't have a cent with him. Nothin' in his purse but a little strip o' colors he said they'd given him in the war. That and two extra shirts was all he had."

"How far'd he think he'd get with an outfit like that? Hardly get him far enough to be arrested and sent back," Trinidad gloomily observed.

"Think?" Demerara argued. "These *déportés* don't think! Do you suppose they think when they're tryin' to get away from there?" He stretched a gesturing arm toward the east. "When your punishment's too heavy, you don't think."

The Frenchmen were not appealed to for an opinion, though the discussion continued in their language.

"I've been over there and seen. They don't have hope. It seems everlasting."

"I've worked over there myself. But those men are bad. All bad."

"Of course they're bad. But they don't have hope. It's hope we're talkin' about, isn't it? And that's what makes 'em too desperate to think. They don't care if they die. They're in a corner when we meet with 'em in the jungle. In a corner with their backs against bars."

Then turning back to the fugitives, Demerara resumed: "That comrade of yours who came through last week, I gave him some cassava. He was so famished he couldn't wait to have tea to wash it down. By the time I had the tea made, he'd finished that dry cassava cake an' forgotten he'd had it.

"Yes, it seems everlasting, your punishment does. That's why you run off with nothin' but a couple of shirts to turn into money."

Michel began to speak, but no one listened, for the rubber-bleeders had gone back to English and a discussion of their own affairs; how much their respective backers had advanced them for provisions and whether in the end it was better to be financed to the extent of a hundred or a hundred and fifty guilders, since eventually the sum was taken out of your earnings.

On sufferance at the black men's camp-fire, the Frenchmen did not venture to interrupt. In uncomprehending silence they rolled and lit cigarettes and in silence they smoked, watching the fireflies pricking the darkness beyond the zone of light. In that darkness shadowy figures moved. Some one walked about with a flaring torch, showing now a group over a supper pot, now the long slopes of thatch from the roof-ridges down to the ground; and then the naked Djoeka who bore the torch would bend to disappear through the low door in one of the triangular façades of a hut.

Michel was wondering if the old woman who'd given them dried fish and cassava when they arrived would open her heart again. And he was turning over in his mind the question whether, through the tall man as

interpreter, he might offer to wash the cooking-pots in return for food, when there she came with hot boiled breadfruit.

How was one to understand these people? Michel speculated. With a white man—with the French, anyway, he thought—you knew that a man was either kind or cruel or indifferent. Here was an unaccountable mixture of all three. When the sport of pelting them with "*déporté*" had waned, there had been the incredibly old woman who'd fed them and who'd shown them the empty hut where they might sleep. Meanwhile the shrewd old chief had palmed off on them his smallest and meanest boat. Then the rubber-hunter, after condemning them wholesale, had seemed kindly and had understood their desperation and how everlasting was their punishment.

Michel meditatively ate his breadfruit. No, you couldn't predict how these people would act. It was all impulse with them, he decided. You could never feel secure. Perhaps if no white man had ever taken advantage of them, it would have been different. But they—or at least their ancestors—they, too, had run away from tyranny and cruelty. It must be the memory of that which would suddenly soften their hearts.

A man came out of the vague region of the huts and stood before the fire. And the rubber-hunters shifted from English to the "talki-talki" of the Djoeka, speaking with marked respect to the man who stood looking into the fire.

Although he was of no more than medium height, although his one garment was a strip of green and white striped cloth knotted over one shoulder and hanging to the knees of his bare legs, and although he wore in his ears piratical gold hoops, yet there was a matchless dignity in his pose.

Trinidad addressed him with humility, for the topic was the concoction of a certain snake-medicine.

"And how have you made it?" questioned the Djoeka.

"You take de snake. Cut de head off it, de tail too, an' put dem to dry. Must well dry it. Den you grin' it. You poun' it. You poun' it fine. After finish, you take it with some rum or little cold water. Or if you don' want it so, you could eat it dry. Dis medicine protec' you a year. After a year you mus' renew it again.

"In case a snake bite you, you cut skin by a vein. If he bite in foot, cut under knee and put medicine in three places. Den cut three places in ankle, an' you put it. But with it you don' take no acid nor no lime. An' it cure you."

The Djoeka professionally smiled to himself, a smile of reserve and condescension. He was a medicine-man and had his own snake anti-venom practice!

And then a second figure came out of that gloom where huts were of uncertain solidity; a naked old man, whose withered body was whitened with clay, came to squat before the fire.

"What—?" Michel asked.

"He? Oh, he's getting ready for the Jumbe dance." Demerara did the explaining. "The Jumbe's in him, an' he must get ready to dance till the Jumbe leaves him."

"What's the Jumbe?"

"That's a demon these Djoekas believe in. You haven't heard the Jumbe-birds in the jungle? They never come but at night. They fly very soft. You don't hear their wings. Just their call. Some's askin' all de time, 'Who are you?' An' some's sayin', 'Whip-poor-will.' That's what they say anyhow in English. I don't know what you think they say in French. All the dead who can't rest for their crimes live in the Jumbe-birds. An' I tell you there's plenty in these Guiana woods! Dead slaves used to come back in the Jumbe-birds, too. An' when they'd cry out near a house, it would mean sorrow was comin' to that house.

"But the Jumbe-Birds don' make trouble here. For here is a medicine-man with good 'can-doos'—good charms. The birds don't make trouble here."

"He is the medicine-man?" Basil asked.

"Yes, the big medicine-man of these river tribes. Men send far for him."

"Myself," said Trinidad, "I saw one of his cures. A man had gone hunting. He'd gone to shoot a bird he heard callin'. An', a Djoeka had gone to get de same bird. So that when de man shot, he had badly shot the Djoeka. In Albina the doctor had said no hope for de Djoeka. But dey send for this medicine-man an' he came with leaves an' wash an' dress de wound. An' he put de man to lie on a white cloth. An' he say he mus' not live with his wife till he is cured. But he mus' have a young girl to tend him. An' every day one of the shot fell out of the wound an' you saw it on de white sheet. This for nine days and then he was well."

While they talked, others had gathered. Djoeka mothers with bundled babies in their arms; girls carefully groomed, their hair braided in melon shape, their skin glistening with palm oil, a brilliant length of cloth knotted about each waist; silver bracelets and earrings; necklaces of beads; and always the decorative scarification under which charcoal had been injected, like a bas-relief tattooing, patterned as though after the footprints of varying species of birds.

Foreheads, cheeks, arms and bodies, were thus decorated, and all glossy with palm oil. About one of these girls, whose name he translated as "Nice-to-look-at," Trinidad put a caressing arm. With him it was part of the rubber

business to have a sweetheart in every Djoeka settlement. Demerara permitted himself no love-making. Of a man six feet tall and wearing boots, dignified behavior was expected.

Children also came to the fire, bringing small carved stools upon which to sit their little naked bodies as near as possible to the flame. “They are always cold, these people,” commented Demerara. “In an’ out of the water all day. In the sun one minute an’ the river the next.”

Some one began to beat a drum. Three children left the fireside to dance. An old woman clapped her hands to the time of the drum. The girls tied clusters of dried cashew nuts to their ankles and joined the dance. The jingling nuts added whole groups of notes to the underlying theme of the drum. Mere shadows came out of the dark and in the firelight became the figures of men and women who fell into the dance. Everyone now was clapping. A woman sang. Soon all were singing. All but the medicine-man, looking on detached, and the wizened clay-whitened creature possessed by the Jumbe who stared into the fire as though there were no dancers.

The warmth, the rest, the momentary freedom from anxiety, the flicker of the flames, the repetition of the rhythm, all crept like a drug through the senses of the Frenchmen.

One by one the dancers took turns at leading the group. The women danced bent at right angles forward from the waist. They danced with arms and hands, with eyes and hips, with syncopated pounding of bare feet on the earth. As they advanced, the saffron palms of their hands danced curiously against the dark background of their bodies. But when they whirled and retreated, always bent forward, it was their hips which emphasized the rhythm.

“Prison?” Michel thought. “Can it be that prison exists?”

Now that it no longer confined them, now looking on at the unrestraint of the Bush-negroes dancing under the open sky, it seemed that prison could no longer be true. Could it be possible that only four nights ago they had slept locked in a dormitory?

“Africa,” the chorus sang, “Africa, the country from which we have come.”

They were advancing again. Necklaces of blue and red beads swung vertically from the horizontal necks of the dancers, while the breasts of those women who had suckled many children hung pendulous, like the brown nests of orioles swaying from the branch of a jungle tree. Dogs had come to enjoy the fire; thin dogs whose bony bodies looked like the Djoekas’ bamboo fishing-baskets, dogs surely too lean to be a temptation to jaguars. A woman lifted her baby in her arms and made its little body follow

the rhythm. Mist rose from the river and hung like a gossamer curtain between the village and the inclosing jungle. Through its gauzy texture the jungle showed, again cut out of black velvet, cut in the fantastic shapes of night.

The dancing figures came on, whirled, and retreated, the men erect or in crouching position, the women always swayed forward. And no dancer ever touching another.

The tempo of drum and song, of cashew nuts, and of clapping had quickened. Faster. . . . Faster. . . . This was Africa transplanted to the South American forest—Africa enduring through the generations, handed on without aid of the written word.

But to Michel, Africa was only the stopping of the convict ship at Algiers to take on more prisoners condemned to Guiana. To him the Djoeka dance was not the great dark mother-continent, it was the jungle. For the jungle was still real. He felt it all about him—everywhere. It made the village of a dozen huts seem a metropolis of comfort and security. Yet he knew vaguely that the village was itself of the essence of the virgin forest.

There was a clearing. Toadstools like peaked huts had sprung up there. And there black shapes had come out of the jungle; shadows which had solidified and taken on life, that they might dance to the music of jungle instruments, to the drum made from a hollowed log, and to the clustered bells which were only dried cashew nuts.

Men long shut behind bars trembled at its savage freedom, as they had trembled at howling monkeys reverberating in the night.

Over and over the same thing. A fixed unseeing expression on black faces. The pitch of the song lowered, seeming now to come from deep within and to be as involuntary as breathing.

Trinidad had earlier in the evening done a few abandoned steps himself, but the forces typified by his felt hat, dilapidated though it was, had made him drop out of the dance. Watching from his seat on a triangle of logs near the fire, it might well have been his ancestors who, called up by the dark mystery of encroaching all-surrounding jungle, were now materializing in the firelight.

And still the old man, grisly with clay, sat motionless. The moment had not come when he would dance until the Jumbe left him. Perhaps the next night or the night after, but not yet. Demerara smoked and turned his boots so that they might dry evenly. And the medicine-man looked on, thinking, remembering.

While for the two French outcasts, contemptuously tolerated beside a tribal fire, rhythm had become the potent drug by which they at last forgot . . . forgot all, as in St. Laurent men like Antoine tried to forget in drink.

Over and over the rhythm . . . until Demerara, rising, spoke to Michel and broke the spell. “We have a watery moon,” he stammered; “you may have rain tomorrow.”

Ah, yes, it was the rainy season.

CHAPTER XII

How far was it to Paramaribo?

Michel, shaking the yellow forelock out of his eyes, put the question to the lean old Djoeka chief through the medium of Demerara, who, with his climbing-spurs and his cable belt slung over his shoulders, stood at the top of the bank, watching Basil bail last night's rain out of their canoe.

How far was it? The chief's long, black upper lip stretched itself as though measuring the distance. "To Paramaribo? Well . . ." Demerara translated, "well . . . if one walked from the sunrise to the sunset of a day, one would still not be there; but if on the second day one should walk from sunrise until midnight, one might then arrive. Still . . . for those who had little experience in walking, it might require a third day."

"Doesn't he know we aren't walking?" Michel interrupted. "It's the distance by canoe that we want to know." But Demerara explained that to a Djoeka canoeing is walking, since to him a highway is always some creek or river.

In that journey down to Paramaribo, as it existed afterward in Michel's mind, certain details invariably recurred. He recalled always the group assembled on the bank to see them depart. The Djoeka children—little smiling hop-abouts. Demerara, equipped for his day's tramp in search of rubber trees. A woman presenting cassava cakes and bananas. Enough to last until the night of that probable third day. The medicine-man with a gift, too—a dried fish.

Again the puzzling mixture of scorn and kindness!

Then the jeers when Basil barely avoided capsizing as he took his seat in the bow of their leaky, teetering dugout. The Djoeka laughter at the fugitives' attempt to navigate; at the sudden uncontrolled swerving of their canoe, now to the right, now to the left. But when Michel had called back, "Never mind, we leave in the hands of the god Hazard, who manages all things well," and when Demerara had put into talki-talki the blithe hope of the steersman of that crazy little craft, then from the Djoekas there had gone up a cheer of "Good luck!"

And yet, Michel thought, "It would have been all one to them to have betrayed us!"

Realization of their gamble with destiny gave him a sense of predestination. Whether one Michel Arnaud and his friend Basil should safely journey to Paramaribo; whether there they were to find a ship in port; and if so, whether or not it was to be possible to stowaway aboard her; and

whether, when the inevitable discovery was made at sea, they would then be permitted to land unmolested in some neutral port of call, whose government had no agreement with France to return fugitives from the Devil's Island Penal Colony—these questions Michel felt to have been already answered, to have been, somewhere, sometime, mysteriously decreed. The dice had been cast, the lottery decided. He saw himself and Basil piloting their leaky dugout as but the involuntary agents whose part it was to execute that predetermined design.

All through the first dreary day of rain he was oppressed by this conviction of predestination. His awkward hands manipulated a Djoeka paddle, aiding the silent flow of the current, that he might be borne down to Paramaribo, to a Fate previously determined, fixed beyond alteration. To think that he'd once been young enough to believe that a man could control his own destiny!

How the raindrops had stood out on the oiled bodies and the frizzled hair of the Djoekas who passed in canoes, bound up- or downstream! There'd been a woman with a baby who held over herself and the child a flat wooden tray as though it had been an umbrella. The rain had pattered in great drops on the surface of the river and had then been absorbed into the stream. These details he remembered.

With the coming of night the skies had cleared. It had been too beautiful to sleep. They had kept the canoe in midstream to avoid the mosquitoes along the bank. They let the current carry them along, only now and then dipping their paddles. Alone in the middle of the deserted river. Not a human thing to remind them that they were convicts fleeing. It was as though they had become as emancipated from past and future as birds on a bough. Still, perhaps, predestined, yet untroubled, because for a few golden hours it had been enough merely to live. They sang. Snatches of long-forgotten songs. Songs of music halls. Not that, in such a mood, they cared a damn about the theme of the songs, but that they sang merely because they were impelled to express their tingling joy of living. Serenity. Freedom. Tranquillity. Mysterious and lonely beauty. Borne on the breast of a river which flowed between dark miles of jungle. A high round moon lighting the night. Wings of joy throbbing in their hearts and escaping in the sordid little songs which were their only medium of expression.

But their joy glorified the songs. Michel would never forget that joy. "It was," he often thought, "a night unique in my life."

Day had come to them there. They had paddled until noon and had then rested in a shadowed jasmine-scented creek. There the jungle seemed to float, as they themselves floated. In all directions the forest was flooded from the recent weeks of rain. Every creeklet had overflowed its banks. The

flood lit up the somber forest, lit it softly, flickeringly, as candles light a dim cathedral. It multiplied and illumined the heart-shaped leaves of the moca-moca, the sudden entrance and exit of a great vivid blue butterfly, the pink water-lilies, the snow-white flowers with long bright green stamens, the mossy trunks of fallen trees, the sprays of orchids—yellow, lavender and purple, pale green. Sitting very still in their canoe, they heard close, almost within reach of their hands, the deep snarl of tiger-birds, and they thought at first that a jaguar lurked there.

A Djoeka canoe glided into the scene. The snarl ceased.

Michel remembered that the Djoeka had held his paddle suspended while he stared at them. Then with a significant grunt he had let it dip once more softly in and out of the dark jungle-stained water, until he had disappeared around a turn of the creek. Bats, startled by his passing, had come fluttering back to their hollow tree, and the tiger-birds again snarled in the fruit tree. That had been for long the only sound. . . .

"What are you thinking about, Basil?"

"Liberty."

"Oh, with you it's always liberty! Now I was thinking about these Djoekas. I suppose they're not different from all savages, but I never happened to see savages before. I was thinking that they never seem to do anything they don't want to do. Haven't you noticed that? And you never see a tired Djoeka either, or one that seems much poorer than the others. Some wear a few more beads and bracelets. Some houses are a little bigger and have more painting on them. But after all there's not much difference."

"Yes, that's true," Basil assented absently.

"And then they want so little—a hammock, a loin-cloth, a few beads and bracelets, that's all they spend money for. When everybody wants as little as that, why, then everybody can have what he wants. And their houses and canoes they make themselves. But imagine wanting only that! Just think of one street in Paris alone. Why, you couldn't walk a block in the Rue de Rivoli without wanting a thousand things!"

But Basil made no response. The social life of Bush-negroes did not concern him. And Michel fell into silence, pondering upon a jungle existence as contrasted with Paris, which in his memory glittered like a great show window. There you might see all the desires of man, things of which these Djoekas knew nothing. "Take the Djoekas' pleasures, for instance—even their pleasures cost them nothing. They make them themselves. If they want dancing they dance; or music, they make that, too, for themselves. Oh, *là! là!*" What would Michel not give to see a jolly vaudeville!

One of the resolves Michel had made on board the convict ship had been that he would not repine, he would not look back. And only rarely had he let the past enter that Guiana prison, where he had concentrated always on preparation for the future. But now, perhaps on the eve of his freedom, he let himself remember Julie. Ah, they had known together the grand life even though it had ended in the Court of Assizes!

Strange how these negro savages had brought it all rushing back. Seeing their poor pleasures had somehow made him think of all the joys a man might know in Europe . . . in Paris above everywhere else.

The last day. Many Djoeka canoes, coming and going on the river. Djoekas calling to each other, canoe conversing with canoe, even after a turn in the stream had separated them by impenetrable jungle. The walls of foliage giving back the echo of their words. Logs tied together being floated down to Paramaribo. The changing face of the land. No longer untouched forest, but at intervals plantations and the chimneys of sugar mills. There was now no more magic. There were only facts. And a great crisis of something predetermined toward which two fugitives in a canoe were moving. There was danger. And they hid in a creek, deciding to wait there that they might make the final stage under the dark wing of night.

Unseen, they listened to the voices of the river. The moments were heavy with suspense. In a few hours they would know whether a boat lay at the dock in Paramaribo. And in a little more time, whether they were stowed away in its hold.

Through the waiting hours an invisible bird complained, plaintive and monotonous.

Now that the end was so near and the magic gone, Michel saw as Paramaribo would see. Two barefoot white men, without money, ignorant of the language of the land. Frenchmen and fugitives. Why, every Djoeka baby had recognized that! What madness their hope had been! And yet . . . suppose, after all, it were freedom that had been predestined? Why not? It had happened before. Often it was the best-equipped escaping parties which had been captured—or wrecked somewhere along the coast. While it had been known that some man who'd walked off desperately into the jungle, suddenly, without preparation—perhaps to avoid being sent to the deadly climate of the camp at Kourou—that that man had, by a miracle, reached safety and liberation.

So hope returned. And Michel argued, had not the Paris Chief of Police prophesied that he would see him again?

Again night on the river. But this time they were cautious, paddling under the shadow of the bank, then crossing to the opposite side, because

ahead was the red lantern of the police post at Lupreta. And finally in the distance a ship, lying at a dock. Lights in her port-holes. What astounding luck! The good god Hazard! So it had been written that there was to be a waiting ship in this port where ships are spaced days, or sometimes weeks, apart.

At the foot of a flight of dark steps, they abandoned their canoe and mounted to the bank. A few yards in front of them stood a tree on the river's margin. It served as a protected point of vantage.

Sheltered behind it, they took their bearings.

They saw that a street ran along the water-front. River on one side, with the ship docked there. On the other a row of houses. On the right an open grassy square, and beyond, a great house, brilliantly lit; undoubtedly the governor's palace. Above it, seen framed by drooping palm leaves, their friend the moon. Directly ahead as they looked down the water-front street, a corner house, with lamplight streaming through amethyst glass.

A strange East Indian woman, whose white drapery clung about her like the garments of statuary, came toward them across the square and then passed under the light of a street lamp which showed her arms and ankles heavy with silver bracelets. And there'd been a gold ring in her nose. Two negresses in long full shapeless calico dresses, like black-faced nuns in gaudy habits, stood long on the corner talking loudly; parting, returning to the argument, and again parting.

So it had been written, Michel thought, that they were to land safely in Paramaribo where at the dock a ship waited. But would those negro women ever go and leave the way clear to the ship?

The women at last moved on, but a motor came around the square and stopped in front of the house with the amethyst glass. A man got out of the car and helped a woman step to the sidewalk. The door of the house opened. A servant in white livery stood at attention. The light from a great wide high-ceilinged hall poured out. The man was in white dress clothes, and the woman tall and lovely in a pale green gown. They stood for a moment laughing and talking to some one who remained in the car. And then together they mounted the steps. The lamplight streamed over the white shoulders of the woman as she paused for a moment to call gayly after the disappearing car. The door of the house closed. The motor vanished down the water-front street.

Now quickly to make for the ship . . .

The gangway was empty. The deck empty. In silent bare feet they'd climbed to the deck. . . .

It had been written that they were to board the ship.

But there on the dark side of the deck they ran into the black sailors. There were shouts—gesticulation. Michel had led the escape back down the gangway. But at the foot of the steps now stood an officer of the police.

That, too, had been decreed.

Lying side by side on the floor of a cell, each withdrawn into himself, they knew that they were taken, though not one word of what the policeman had said had been intelligible.

They were taken. That meant return by the next mail boat to St. Laurent. Return. Trial. Punishment.

"Money," Michel broke the silence. "If we had money we might buy passage to Amsterdam on that ship!"

"What makes you think so?"

"Because money'll do anything. For a hundred of their florins I'm convinced we could save our lives."

But Basil was not so sure.

"Ah," Michel cried, "how I curse money! It's because money buys all the joys of life that we break laws. . . . And then isn't it because we lack money that we get convicted? And now it's that that's sending us back to St. Laurent. Oh, St. Laurent is an octopus, stretching out its arms for those who haven't money!"

With that bitter thought his memory of the journey from the Djoeka village to Paramaribo always terminated.

CHAPTER XIII

In the blockhouse at St. Laurent it was as though they had never made that excursion to Paramaribo, as though they had dreamed the terror of being lost in the jungle, and as though Djoekas possessed by rhythm had danced only in the firelight of some fantastic hallucination. And that night of ecstasy on the tropical river—that was like having passed over into another world where all the things that mattered here mattered not at all.

On its monthly call the little French mail—the *Biskra*—had picked them up at Paramaribo and returned them to St. Laurent.

They arrived as the ten-thirty drum was sounding in the prison yard. Work squads had been pouring through the gate of the "*Camp de la Transportation*," lifting their hats and raising their arms, that the turnkeys might search for forbidden articles; and then passing in to the roll-call by dormitories and to the old monotony of nauseating soup, revolting meat, and heavy soggy bread.

All was as before. On the street corners *libérés*, ragged and disheveled, sat in their wheelbarrows. Across the river little Albina stood out white against the dark forest. All was as before, except that the jungle, which had once been the future, had now become the past, and that instead of joining the squads lined up for roll-call in front of their dormitories, Michel and Basil were marched to the disciplinary quarters, in whose courtyard were embedded the five flat white stones upon which from time to time the guillotine is mounted.

In that disciplinary section stand the blockhouses where convicts guilty of crimes or of escape are held in detention awaiting trial. In these buildings, each some sixty feet long by fifteen wide, fifty convicts may be housed. They lie side by side on a low plank platform, each at night attached by one foot to an iron bar, so devised that it may be locked and unlocked from outside the building. Here men may wait a week, a month, four months, for their cases to come before the Maritime Tribunal which at stated intervals in the year sits in judgment, with power to inflict sentences of solitary confinement, of additional years of imprisonment, and even of the guillotine itself.

And in the blockhouse it is forbidden to smoke and forbidden to play cards. Once or twice a week the occupants are sent naked into the courtyard, while officials thoroughly search the blockhouse. Men live upon the usual meat, soup, and bread. And there is much talk—talk of escape—the crime which brought most of them to detention in the blockhouse; talk also of their

probable sentences and of schemes which might somewhat mitigate life; how, for example, to secure tobacco.

Those waiting sentence in the gloomy, half-lit room welcome as a diversion every newcomer. And there every one has his hour when his story is the day's news. And these fragments added together form that dramatic saga of adventure, of daring, of heroism, of death, or of capture, which is so common a thing in the Devil's Island Penal Colony that it might almost be called part of the prison régime.

It is thus by word of mouth, from prison to prison, that the details of these victories and these defeats are circulated, contradicted, corrected, until at last every convict is in possession of the latest thriller. And through them each story is passed on, handed down to those who are to come; to men who have not yet fulfilled what has been written, not yet committed the crimes which are to send them to Guiana.

Thus in the blockhouse Michel and Basil told their story, which will one day be re-told to French boys who have perhaps scarcely thought of prison, and never of the Guiana toward which each moment they are moving. The Brazilian, the Belgian, the Spaniard, the Maltese, and the Frenchman who heard their tale will repeat how two were once lost in the jungle, and how it was by remembering a certain bare tree where a green parrot had been seen that they were again set on their way.

"And money," Michel always finished. "If we'd only had money, we wouldn't be back here."

"Yes," commented a young Parisian, "money's what we lack. We've got courage enough, God knows. And it takes courage. If you've known only city streets, the jungle frightens you. I sometimes wonder now how I ever dared pick up my knapsack and walk off into it alone. I'll admit I couldn't have done it if I hadn't come to a point where anything seemed better than prison. It was a piece of injustice from a keeper at Charvein that made me feel there was no use trying. You see, I had the fool idea that I'd make good here. I'd shot a man. It was a silly quarrel over a woman—a woman who wasn't worth it, either. It happened in a café, and we'd been drinking. We hadn't been long out of the trenches, and we didn't carry our drink any too well. And as for shooting, wasn't that what we'd been doing all those long years of the war! . . . And so I killed him. . . ."

The boy paused, and a quiver passed over his face, which was pale and sensitive. "My father," he said, "will never forgive me. Sometimes my mother writes, but she must not let him know. He's forbidden it. It was because of my father that I tried to make good here. I wanted to be reconciled to my father. But I was hungry and sick and so tired of it all. When that fellow at Charvein spoke to me the way he did, making good

seemed hopeless. What was there to work for? The people at home never understand Guiana. Nor how we have to fight here to keep from going under. It was despair that gave me the courage to try to get away. I felt I had to go that day. I couldn't stand it any longer. I couldn't wait. And so one comrade found some food and put it in my knapsack. Another gave me a knife to cut my way. And one let me have a tracing of the trails, and told me the best way to make a raft.

"Oh, an explorer with his tents and his guns and his folding bathtub and all the rest of it would have laughed to see the outfit with which I started to explore my way to liberty! A lot of us Guiana convicts could qualify for medals from geographical societies.

"Well, the first day was easy. For I followed the trails of the rubber men. I had food, and just to be free was so good that I wasn't thinking much ahead.

"Then the trails came to an end. And of course the food was doing that, too.

"The second day I never saw the sun. Rain all day. Poured. Made me wonder where all the water comes from. But I kept going. That matter of running out of food made me know I couldn't take a day off to shelter myself from the rain. I kept right on, cutting every foot of my way. And that's slow moving. But I don't need to tell you—you know all about that!

"Then I came to mud and thorn trees. I went down ankle-deep. Roots covered the ground, and they were shaped like these iron loops we have to put our feet in. Well, the roots caught me just that way. And I stumbled and fell. If I tried to hold on to a tree, the thorns were so terrible I had to let go. Worse than anything were the mosquitoes. They wouldn't let me stop to rest. But when night came I had to. There was nothing but mud to sit on. So I backed up against a tree—and waited for dawn. Smoking one cigarette after another and fighting mosquitoes.

"It was an endless night.

"When the light came, I was so stiff and sore I could hardly move. But there was nothing else to do.

"Again the same thorns and the same roots. I slipped so often that I was covered with mud. The sweat rolled down my face. I had walked the whole day before I came to a creek. Then I had to work fast to get a raft made before it was too dark.

"I set to cutting bamboos and moca-moca. The moca-moca's light as cork, you know. It seems as if it had been created especially to help convicts escape! Always plenty of it along the river banks. So I made my raft, and in the middle of it I put a bamboo pole. I undressed then and hung my clothes with the knapsack on the pole, and then jumped into the water to cool off. I

didn't bother to get dressed again. I just got on the raft and let it go wherever the creek wanted to take it. The stream widened out, and the current got more and more rapid. I was drawing my first long breath when all of a sudden the raft ran against something and capsized."

"What happened?"

"I never knew. I floundered about for ever so long. But the creek was blacker than the night. I couldn't see. And I could feel nothing but the cool water. No raft. No knapsack. Everything was gone . . . food and clothes. I was naked. Alone. Lost. A Parisian helpless in the jungle.

"What to do?

"I swam for the bank. Not a cigarette to think it over with. I decided to stay in the creek all night. Then in the morning I would swim down with the tide. I waited. Was it long? It was forever. Once in a while I'd duck my head under water . . . just to cheat the mosquitoes for a minute or so.

"As soon as there was day, I began to swim. I was a rag for hunger. Like you, I didn't know what you could eat and what was poison. I saw fruit but I didn't dare eat it. I swam, and when I was blind-tired, I'd pull out and sit on a log to rest. There'd be biting ants on the log, and mosquitoes always. I didn't know what a helpless beast man is until I tried being naked in the jungle.

"I was afraid to think of night. But night came. Now I was too tired to stay in the creek. I knew I couldn't keep awake. I'd fall asleep and sink to the bottom. That would be the end. So I decided to climb a tree. I might lie in a crotch, perhaps too high for mosquitoes. A Parisian, naked, climbing a jungle tree . . . really it seemed as if a man oughtn't be born as defenseless as he is.

"Another long night. Off and on I'd sleep a little. There weren't so many mosquitoes, but things were crawling over me and sticking into me.

"At last again the day. Again the creek where a strong current carried me along. I was past swimming. All I could do was to keep afloat. Then I saw that my creek was about to empty itself into another bigger creek. And there in the bigger creek was a canoe tied by a vine to the bank. And I heard voices.

"I climbed ashore and went toward the voices. I came to a fire, and there were three men around the fire. They were white men, and they spoke in French. They heard the leaves and twigs crack under my feet. All jumped up. I was a ghost to them. A naked ghost with a torn bleeding body.

"I saw that the same idea struck them all. That I was a madman lost in the forest. But they gave me food. They let me lie down in their hut and sleep. Nobody bothered me with questions. I didn't wake until night. Then they told me to wash and put on some of their old clothes.

"Now," they said—"we're *libérés*, and of course you're an escaping convict. But what on earth happened to you?"

"I told my story. They wanted me to stay, but they knew I was right to go before the man-hunters got on my trail. I explained that at Les Hattes I had comrades. I planned to organize with them and escape by sea. Les Hattes I found was only a day and a half away, and there was a trail.

"So I left them with good heart. I thought luck had turned my way. I had clothes, and they spared me a little food—they hadn't much left themselves. They'd been out for rubber and in a couple of days were going back to trade it in for supplies. But they gave enough to last me to Les Hattes. I went off full of hope.

"I was out of the mud and thorn country, and I marched well all day, and at night made myself a leaf hut to sleep in. The next morning I would reach Les Hattes. My brain was busy with plans for the big try for freedom. Then, almost in sight of the village, they got me. Man-hunters on the track of other fugitives found me.

"That was the end. Throw up my hands! Return to prison. Punishment. All the suffering for nothing. It's a lottery. Few of us get through. But the chance is worth taking. I don't give up."

And to the bare bones of the story, Michel added his own memories. "Was it long? It was forever!" Yes, a night like that could seem endless. He saw again the strange unearthly moonbeams which crept groping through the jungle. He saw the black mass of tree and vine, and Fear stalking there. . . .

And now they were in the blockhouse, waiting for the tribunal to pass upon their cases.

One day the turnkey brought news that people were saying that Dieudonné had escaped again—this time from the prison at Cayenne. Some one in the blockhouse remembered when he had escaped from the Islands. He'd made a banana raft . . . just a bunch of banana stems tied together. That was all he had had with which to breast the great coastal rollers of the Atlantic—that, and his courage. Of course he hadn't a show at rescue. His one hope was a flagless ocean. Since International Law supports the regulation that no ship flying other than the French flag may pass within one mile and a half of Devil's Island, of course a flag means a French ship, and to a convict on a raft that is certain capture and punishment. And on the other hand there's the sea—the sea full of sharks. It takes a *man* to try escape from the Islands. But then Dieudonné was a man. All were agreed upon that. And when Guiana convicts say that a man is a man, they mean that he is strong, reckless, defiant, of indomitable spirit, that he will never

give up the struggle for liberty, and that he has never been known to betray a comrade!

Dieudonné, they agreed, was all this. But he was something more . . . he was lucky. Hadn't he cheated the guillotine in Paris? That was in 1913, when all the surviving members of the famous Bonnot's gang of bandits had been condemned to death. The cells of the Santé prison had opened, and one by one three of them had gone to the guillotine. It was Dieudonné's turn. But Bonnot had made a death-bed statement that Dieudonné had not taken part in that last hold-up. And so, at the eleventh hour, his sentence had been commuted to forced labor in Guiana for life. So had luck been with him.

And luck had followed him to Guiana; for actually, with his flimsy banana raft, he'd succeeded in making the coast. True, he'd then been re-arrested and sent to Joseph for two years solitary. But he'd survived that, and had had the good fortune to be transferred to Cayenne on the mainland. And now he was off again. Would he succeed?

"Ho," the turnkey said, "Dieudonné's nothing to Allut! Allut holds the record for escapes. He's always escaping. Never gives up. Came out in 1915 with twenty years' *peine*. In 1916 he escaped through Dutch Guiana to Paramaribo, was arrested on board a ship bound for Java, came before the tribunal, and got two years added. The next year he stole a boat and got away with seven others. The French mail ran across them off Demerara. The tribunal gave him three more years. Now he had twenty-five. He said he was gambling away his life for liberty. Two years later he was again at sea, and got five more years. Then it was four years before he managed to escape. He'd been pronounced tubercular and sent to Nouveau Camp. From there, with six others he made for the sea again, but they ran aground off Nickéry. Four out of the seven lost their lives. Only three came back to St. Laurent for punishment. Waiting his trial, Allut sawed his way out; yes, sawed his way out of his cell and at the noon siesta got over to the Chinese village, stole a boat, stopped at the invalid camp for provisions and to persuade some of his comrades to go along. But a look at that boat of his was enough. No rudder, and the sail he'd made out of an old shirt and a pair of trousers. Only one man was reckless enough to join him. So the two, with a few bananas, some sweet potatoes roasted in the ashes, and five loaves of bread, went to sea. Five days later, off Marowana in British Guiana, they capsized. Allut saved himself by swimming. His companion went down.

"Then he was back again for punishment. And now for his double escape—first from the invalid camp, and second from the St. Laurent prison—he got twice five years added. That made thirty.

"They sent him to the Islands. He stole three thousand francs from a keeper—for another escape, of course. He was caught and shipped down to

St. Laurent for trial. . . . That was eight or nine months ago."

Yes, they all remembered about that.

"Well, I was aboard the boat that brought him. They had us up in the bow. There were quite a lot of us. Damn seasick, most of us, too. It's rough after you get in the rollers. I was half asleep when I was waked by revolver shots. Two keepers were shooting out to sea. What on earth had happened? The man next to me said somebody'd jumped. It was too dark to see. A keeper came up to the bow and called the roll. There were two gone. Allut and another. Nobody thought there was any use stopping the ship. If they'd missed the shots, they'd pretty certainly be drowned. But both of them actually turned up later at the invalid camp, got some food and a boat, and were off before anybody reported them. Nothing's been heard since. Perhaps this time he's escaped."

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TYPICAL OF THE EXILE'S LIFE AFTER HIS PRISON TERM—IT IS AN EXISTENCE DREADED BY THE CONVICT.

"And hasn't he earned his liberty!" Michel was flushed with the heroism of the man.

There came another piece of news to break the tedium of blockhouse life; the tedium of soup, meat, bread, of being searched, of bribing the

turnkey to carry on a profitable smuggling of tobacco, and of the telling and re-telling of their tales of escape. Now it was rumored that the convict ship was expected, and that among its passengers was Gabriel Mourey. The turnkey had the information from an official, for officials take a collector's pride in impaling celebrities on their files. And Mourey, who had robbed the New York banker, Shattuck, locking the household in the wine cellar while he skipped to Mexico with the Shattuck jewels—Mourey was unquestionably a celebrity, an Ace. It was said that Shattuck had spent a fortune to bring him to justice.

Those in the blockhouse heard the melancholy whistle of the ship's arrival.

Mourey, they agreed, would of course be sent to the Islands. And he'd find it took a man—a Dieudonné—to get away from those Islands lying off the coast in a whirlpool of heavy seas with the great northwest current rushing and swirling and foaming over dangerous rocky shoals, while between them and the continent huge rollers combed the coast. What a place the Islands were for incorrigibles, for those chronically addicted to escape, and for the political prisoners isolated on Devil's Island! It seemed as if they'd been made to order to serve as hopeless islands of banishment.

There were men in the blockhouse who knew the Islands. Michel listened. Basil would not get the Islands this time, since it was his first offense. But it was certain that Michel was soon to know the solitary confinement on the Ile Joseph.

So the weeks passed. The time of the tribunal's sitting approached. Some of its members were expected on the *Biskra*, due in a few days.

The turnkey had seen Mourey. He reported that his nickname on board the convict ship had been "Baby," and that he looked it, with his feminine voice and his gentle manners. He'd told the turnkey that he'd had no idea that he was endangering the lives of the Shattuck household, that he'd even investigated the number of cubic feet of air necessary to maintain life in a human being for a given period, and he'd calculated that they'd certainly be rescued from the wine cellar before that time was up.

"Still," Michel commented, "I suppose to the Shattucks it didn't make much difference whether Mourey was intentionally suffocating them or not."

But the *Biskra* was approaching. They heard its whistle. And it was bringing their judges. . . .

It brought also a new occupant to the blockhouse. The door had opened, a man had been shoved in, and the door had again closed. For a moment Michel had not recognized him, so greatly had he changed since the night they'd all plotted escape together. Yet the man was surely Verne. He had the same short legs, the same square-cut body, the large head and features which

should have gone with a taller frame. There was even the same brown mole on the left, just off the center of the chin. But the whole man seemed shrunken, like a withered edition of Verne. Yet it was undoubtedly Verne. But he was alone. Where were Eugène Bassières and Bernard?

But Verne shook his head, as though in the weeks something had robbed him of speech, and returned him a dumb man to the blockhouse at St. Laurent. They left him alone; let him lie in that dreadful silence with one arm thrown over his eyes, as if it would shut out something which he dreaded to see.

He didn't seem to know what went on around him. And then one day he roused himself to ask Michel for the story of his escape. Yet he hardly seemed to listen. He would drift off into some memory of his own, would bring himself back and ask some question which showed that he had not been paying attention. And then quite suddenly he began to talk, at first slowly and with painful effort, and then in a torrent of speech, as though he could get rid of the nightmare by putting it into words.

Michel, he said, would remember how Eugène had urged organized revolt, how no one had supported him, and how Bernard had finally won him over to making another try at escape.

Yes, Michel remembered.

Well, they'd got off safely, their goal Venezuela, where everybody said there was no extradition treaty obliging the government to return fugitives from the Penal Colony. And did Michel remember how they'd planned there to rebuild their lives? And how Bernard had reminded Eugène of the escaped French convict who was rumored to have risen to be Chief of Police in Caracas?

Oh, yes, and Michel had wished that he, too, had had the price of a sea escape!

Then, said Verne, Michel would also recollect that there'd been nine in their party and that they'd proposed to make the dash for freedom in a dugout canoe . . . in thirty feet of hollowed tree-trunk to which they'd added a keel, a rudder, and a sail. Only one of the nine had had any experience in navigation. He was an old sailor, a man named Pierre—

"Had he an eye tattooed on his throat?" Michel asked.

Yes, he'd called it "the eye of the police," Verne remembered. And there were pansies—for "thoughts of my mother," he always explained.

Then it must have been that Pierre who'd come out in the same cage with Michel, so long ago.

Yes, of course. Well, this Pierre had been their helmsman—Verne continued—since not one of the rest of them had had any knowledge of the sea, water being as strange and terrifying to them as ever the jungle was to a

Parisian. So they had gone, putting their trust in Pierre. Night had hidden their departure from St. Laurent, an ebb tide speeding their canoe down the river.

Michel said that, lying wakeful in the jungle, he had thought of their starting and hoped the tide would be in their favor.

But rain had fallen heavily and without let-up. They'd been forced to bail with their tin food basins. When it suddenly cleared and they'd hoisted their sail, a good wind had carried them, as their plan was, straight out to sea. Now if they could only get through the great rollers which so endlessly break along that coast! And if they could but avoid arrest in the two Guianas —Dutch and British—which must be passed before they could reach Venezuela!

They'd been borne swiftly through the mouth of the river and out into the sea. They'd hardly had time in passing Les Hattes to cross themselves and say, "Freedom or death."

Out into the sea—the ocean had been superb. It had been a sheet of silver. Old Pierre said he had never seen anything like it. And certainly none of the rest had. Every ripple had been of silver, silver all the way to the horizon. It had all been so easy. Why had they feared? They began to talk and laugh while their boat cut its path through silver. The sea had been so lovely that none of them had looked much at the sky, except that Verne had noticed how thickly powdered it had been with stars. They'd forgotten the sky until Pierre grumbled that clouds were gathering. Then quite suddenly they saw all light go out of sky and ocean; they'd been left in utter blackness. Waves had slapped the sides of their boat, and they'd felt under them a surging sea which tossed their canoe as though it were the butt of some cruel joke. All realized that one man—Pierre—held their fate in his hands. None had experience enough to relieve him. With the passing hours they had watched him more anxiously than they watched the sea itself. They'd seen their lives dependent upon his strength and upon the wisdom of his judgment. From time to time one of them lit a cigarette for him or gave him a swallow of rum.

All night he sat grimly at the helm, steering for Venezuela. In the pale dawn he was still there.

Throughout the day the boat tossed under a blistering sun, as at night she had tossed in the darkness. But always Pierre faced her toward freedom.

And again night fell. But the demon of the sea was still unchained. Like ranges of mountains, the waves rolled in, piled range upon range, black now in the night. Shivering with cold and with fear, the men had bailed; and while they bailed they'd watched the muscles pulse in Pierre's arms. Did his grip weaken? And how long could he hold to the task?

Nothing had ever been seen like his fortitude, his endurance. Forty-four hours had passed before he confessed that he must have a few hours' rest. "We must make a landing," he'd said, in a voice so tired that it had been no more than a whisper—the voice of a man whose strength was gone.

Then they'd headed her south. But where were they? Would it be Surinam or Demerara, Dutch or British Guiana?

With their altered direction, the rollers swept them forward so fast that the vague line of the coast darkened and seemed rushing to meet them. But what coast was it? The water had grown suddenly shallow and very muddy.

"It's the marshes of Nickéry," Pierre had said.

And the men had felt their blood stand in their hearts. Verne had remembered old Raynal, rising up from his sleep to tell them how the Dutch call Nickéry the "Frenchman's tomb," since so many are the fugitives which sleep their last sleep in its mud. And he'd wondered how many more, thought to have reached freedom, lie beside those whose end is known!

"It is Nickéry."

Before them stood the jungle into which the sea penetrated and disappeared. Hundreds of dead trees rose stark from the water. And toward this sunken forest the rollers were hurling them.

"Jump!" had been Pierre's command. All had obeyed.

"Jump! And hold her back."

Half buried in the mud, they'd pitted their combined strength against the rollers which drove the boat forward. But a great sea lifted her out of their hands and raised her to the trunk of a fallen tree, receded, and left her there.

Scrambling out of the water and on to the tree, they'd silently taken in their situation. A falling tide . . . fifty yards away a flooded forest growing out of unfathomed mud . . . an evil forest, sinister trees with bare roots stretching down into the mud; pale yellow roots which looked like the legs of monster crabs, so that it seemed as though the forest was being borne into the sea; as though regiment upon regiment of giant crabs advanced to meet them, carrying on their backs low spreading green trees, as parasol ants march under their burden of leaf fragments.

In such a forest there was no landing. Each moment the tide was slipping out, leaving exposed the glistening slime of the mud banks. Mosquitoes fell on them like rain. That was the situation . . . with Pierre already asleep, broken by fatigue. There was nothing to do but wait the flood tide. Meanwhile Pierre might rest.

Then at last the sun had set. An early moon rose. The water came whispering back to the lower branches of their trees; flowing and ebbing with the apparent indecision of tides, but always little by little rising to the level of the stranded boat.

Pierre woke. “We must push her off,” he said.

The men climbed down and slowly slid the canoe free of the tree and out toward the sea, where once more they were to battle with the surging rollers.

When day came, the coast of the “Frenchman’s tomb” had vanished, and again they were on the high sea headed for Venezuela. But now they drifted in a limitless calm under a burning sun. In the disaster off Nickéry, their water jar had been overturned. That meant there would have to be another landing. But so long as thirst could be borne, they would go on; for all were anxious to be well out of danger of the marshes.

Always a little farther. Endure a little longer. They had to urge each other on: for Pierre’s force all flowed into his arms. Some one else had to steer the rudder of the spirit. Verne remembered how Eugène had made them laugh, and how Bernard had talked of liberty. This, he thought, went on for three days before they surrendered and made again for land. But he could not be sure about time. All had gone well with the landing. A friendly village of British Guiana blacks had given them food and water, and after forty-eight hours of rest, all spirits rose. Venezuela, the blacks told them, was but three days off. Victory seemed already won. When they pushed off from shore the negroes sent up hurrahs for good luck, while in the boat, the fugitives had responded with the old familiar stirring song of liberty!

The morning of the second day they’d rounded the southern end of Trinidad, and there far off they actually saw Venezuela! On the following day they would make their last landing.

With night a wind sprang up. A gentle wind at first. But soon the stars went out, and great black clouds drove across the sky. Never mind . . . was it not to be the last night, the night before freedom? The wind strengthened and blew the canoe toward the west. *Eh bien*, in the west was Venezuela!

“At this speed,” Verne recalled Eugène had said, “at this speed we’ll be in Panama tomorrow—instead of Venezuela!”

They were the last words Eugène was ever to speak. For all at once the boat was overturned. Perhaps there were cries, but Verne could not remember. As he fought his way toward the boat tossing upside-down like a dark cork on black waves, he heard nothing but the wind and the sea.

Two men gained the boat before him. Of the other six, nothing was to be seen. Only three clung to the canoe floating in that terrible darkness.

Morning came, and in the pale early light these three recognized each other. One was the little dark Italian; one was Bernard, and the third was Verne. On all sides there was water. A peaceful sea stretched unbroken from horizon to horizon. Somewhere beneath its polished blue, six men full of hope were gone. And among them were the brave Pierre and Eugène Bassières. . . .

Michel thought he'd forgotten how to feel, but now he knew that he'd loved Eugène. He'd loved him for his sincerity, for his courage of spirit, for the mental daring which set him apart in prison, where physical daring was so usual that no one gave it a thought. But Eugène's sort of courage was rare among the condemned. And then he'd known how to put into words the rebellion of the soul, which all felt but could not express for themselves. There would never be any one like Eugène. . . . Eugène's eyes—he would always remember their fire. . . .

And then Michel's brain realized that Verne had gone on with the story, that he was telling how the remaining three had clung desperately to the boat. Alive—yes, but how ghastly their plight. Exhausted. Hungry. Thirsty. Clinging to an overturned canoe in a deserted sea.

The day had passed. No sail crossed even the farthest horizon.

By night the Italian had been talking wildly. He saw land. He felt the bottom under his feet. He was going to walk. Why didn't the others walk, too?

It was dreadful, Verne said, to hear him. And then suddenly he let go. For him it was all over.

With the creeping moments of the night, the remaining two had felt their strength slowly ooze—like a tide which would never again turn.

Morning had come. Again a calm sea. The sun rose over a radiant ocean. "Yet today," they'd thought, "today we are going to die. . . ."

But another day had dragged out its allotted hours, and in the brief dusk of its close, one of the two, without a word to the other, had begun to swim. He swam out a hundred yards, never turning to answer the faint call sent after him. Then all at once he disappeared. Bernard—who had needed money with which to buy the love of the beautiful "Golden Helmet"—Bernard had gone.

"Was it despair or madness?"

Verne couldn't decide.

Hours then of solitary anguish. He saw all his past whirl in his reeling brain. He saw it give place to an imaginary future, pictured as clear-cut as the stars which were so bright that he remembered the little banners of light which they cast along the still dark water. The anguish had left him, and he saw strangely bright visions.

Morning dawned, and before his bewildered eyes there lay the low line of the Venezuela coast. Or was he also mad? Was it really land, or only the mirage of his overstrained brain? Was it true that a rising tide carried him and the canoe gently toward a line of coast? Soon he could see mangroves

and then distinguish their pale roots stepping out into the water. And farther along, a little stretch of sandy beach.

He must reach that beach. He must not let the ebb carry him away. Perhaps it was no more real than the land which the Italian had felt beneath his feet, no more real than his shining visions of the night. But he would try for it anyway. He struck out from the canoe, swimming with the tide in his favor. He called up a strength which he would have said did not exist. He doubled that strength until he felt that at last he could touch bottom. Then he stood up and stumbled through the shallows to fall fainting on the blessed solid earth of that little white beach.

When he woke, two negroes had stood looking down at him.

He'd opened his mouth to speak. He'd tried to say, "I am thirsty," but he was not sure that the words came through. Perhaps he only gasped. But the fact was comprehended, and one of the men gave him some rum. Standing over him, they'd argued one with the other in a language he couldn't understand. Was it Spanish or English? If it were Spanish, then he had won his freedom. If it were English, there was doubt. They might be friendly, or they might deliver him to the police. It was a lottery . . . another gamble with destiny.

In spite of all his will, his eyes had closed, for the last atom of his strength was gone. He felt himself lifted and placed in the bottom of a boat. He felt the boat pushed off, and terror rushed over him. He roused himself to call. They shook their heads. They didn't understand. But was it English or Spanish that they spoke? . . . "Spanish," he remembered that in his fading consciousness he kept repeating, "Spanish would be all right."

He'd made a supreme effort to focus his attention. He was too weak. Yet he must know. Perhaps it was Spanish that they spoke. Perhaps they were going to some Venezuela port. If he knew that, then he could sleep. He tried again:

"Venezuela?" he asked.

"No."

Then they were British. Could it be possible that he had come back from the dead for this?

Wind had filled the sails. He remembered that there'd been a strong odor of fish. It was then, a fishing-boat. But for what port was she bound? He opened his eyes and saw that the sun stood on the left. She was headed south. And with that knowledge the dark curtain of unconsciousness had dropped.

"Ah," he concluded, "I had reached Venezuela at last . . . only to be taken on Venezuelan soil by British blacks!"

And when Verne's story was finished, there was silence in the blockhouse. For what could be said to a man whose feet had stood actually upon the soil of freedom!

CHAPTER XIV

The tribunal sat, and the blockhouse prisoners received their sentences: six months—a year—two years—three years of reclusion, on the Ile St. Joseph. And because the cloud of solitary confinement hung over them they talked; even the most silent talked, as though to make the most of speech while it was still possible. But the talk was now less of escapes than of the hurrying future for which they had so little time to prepare. For some, as in the case of Michel, it was to be the first experience of the Islands, and they had many questions.

The Islands? They were the nightmare of the mainland prisoners. What were they really like?

"When you see them," Verne said, "you'll think they're lovely. Three little islands so close together that as you approach, it seems as if you might almost throw a stone from one to another. But there's a strong current between them, especially between Devil's Island and the other two. Often it takes six boatmen as much as twenty minutes to get a rowboat across, and there are days when the passage can't be made at all. They've actually had to rig a sort of cable to Devil's Island, so that they can be sure of getting provisions over."

"What do the Islands look like?

"Well, Royale's about two hundred feet high—but it's steep, so that it seems higher. On the top it flattens out into a little plateau. The prison's up there. So is the hospital. And there's a lighthouse tower in the hospital. There's a small church, and a few houses for officials. And a fort with a regiment of black soldiers—mostly from Martinique. Halfway down the slope is the Commandant's house. And of course there's a little pier with a couple of storehouses. But ships don't come in; you have to row out to them.

"The whole island is about a mile long. Devil's Island is much smaller. You could almost walk around it while you smoked a cigarette. Yet because of Dreyfus having been there, that little bit of an island has given its name to the whole colony. Odd when you know that most of the fifty thousand convicts who've come out in the last seventy-five years have never even set foot on the place!"

But the blockhouse prisoners were uninterested in Devil's Island. In Royale, yes, for they might go there on the expiration of their solitary confinement. But it was Joseph . . . the island of punishment . . . that they were curious about.

"Tell us about Joseph."

"Joseph. . . ." Verne seemed reluctant to speak of Joseph.

"Joseph is just reclusion. The island itself is about half the size and height of Royale. There's a winding road up from the pier. You pass several keepers' houses. About halfway up there are some prison buildings for the men who do the work of the island. Farther along there are the quarters for insane convicts. I was never in there. But sometimes I've heard them from my cell.

"And then—then there's the reclusion; low whitewashed buildings with red roofs and 'Reclusion' painted in big letters on the walls.

"And that," Verne said, "that's the place of silence. When you first go in, it seems as if you were the only man there. Your cell is in a corridor, with rows of doors opening into cells all alike. There are cards on the doors with the name and number of the man inside, the date he arrived, and the length of his sentence. But it seems as though the cards lied and there was just nobody in reclusion but yourself.

"Reclusion!" he laughed. "Do you know what we call it over there? We call it the Château!

"And that's what I've let myself in for—three years more of the Château! Though I only had six months to serve before my liberation!"

"But why," Michel exclaimed, "why did you go on escape? Why didn't you wait until your term was up? Then if you got caught, at least you'd have had a lighter sentence!"

"Why? . . . I'll tell you why. I wanted to go while I had the strength and courage for it. I didn't dare wait. I'd felt my body weakening, and I was afraid to wait. I had to go before it was too late. How often I've watched the *libérés* of St. Laurent sitting in their wheelbarrows, with death slowly eating them. I couldn't face such a future. I knew if I waited I'd come to that. Maybe to dirt and drink too, the way they do. I've often dreamed of myself in a wheelbarrow, hanging about, hoping for some little job, and so wretched that when I earned something I spent it on rum.

"That's the reason I went in Bernard's party. After all, it's just as hard for a *libéré* to get away. The only advantage he has is he gets less punishment when they catch him, and that was more than balanced by going while I was still strong enough. If I had it to do over I'd do the same thing. . . .

"But, God! To have stood on the soil of Venezuela only to be taken by British Guiana blacks!"

"And what do you do in reclusion?" Michel asked.

"Do? You think. What else is there to do? Every morning they let you walk for a while in a little walled-in place like a city back yard. High walls. You see nothing. You must not speak. But at least there's the sky over your head.

"The rest of the time you just think. . . ."

The Parisian not yet recovered from the scratches and bruises of the jungle wanted to know, "How about escape?"

"From Royale it's been done; not often succeeded, but sometimes. There was Dieudonné, of course. It's even been tried from Devil's Island. But from the reclusion of St. Joseph, who could hope to get away?"

The turnkey reported that in three days a coastwise ship would take them to the Island, and that Gabriel Mourey would be on board. Michel was interested. He would know another Ace.

"Oh, there are plenty of Aces at the Château," Verne said.

There was, for example, Roussenq. Not that Roussenq's crime or his prominence in the world had anything to do with making him an Ace. He'd only been condemned by a Council of War for something like setting fire to his mattress and giving a superior officer a box on the jaw. But Verne was not certain just what the offense had been. That was what he'd heard. At any rate it had been of small interest. No. Roussenq's reputation had been made in the prison itself. There he'd won the title of King of the Black Cell. He'd come out originally with a sentence of twenty years, but for various offenses that had been added to until he now had a total of twenty-five. He'd already served fifteen, and in that time he'd had, people said, more than four thousand days of the black cell. And now that that had been abolished, it was time in the ordinary solitary cell that he accumulated. At every sitting of the Commission, there was Roussenq to get thirty to sixty days more of cell punishment.

For what offenses?

"Oh, for refusal to allow himself to be put in irons . . . thirty days in the cell.

"For refusal to be taken out of irons . . . the same sentence.

"For putting his head between the bars and crying out to the keeper: 'Another punishment, if you please!' "

A Commandant had said that he was an *hystérique* of the black cell, and that the only way to punish him was not to punish him at all. And orders had been given the keepers to pay no attention to him. Yet always he was before the Commission to receive a sentence.

On his plank bed in the Château he had carved the words, "Roussenq spits on humanity."

And when Albert Londres[1] had visited the prison, it was Roussenq who had said to him, "I am no longer a human being. For me humanity has ceased to exist. I am not now a man. Prison has entered into me. And I am the prison."

A rumor had come from France that when Poincaré was President, an old woman had made her way through a crowd waiting to welcome him. She had thrown herself at his feet, begging: "Pity! Pardon for my child! I live only to see him again—once more before I die. You can do so much. Do this for me!"

That old woman was the mother of Roussenq. The President had promised, and news had crossed the ocean to reclusion on Joseph, informing Roussenq that five years of his sentence had been commuted.

But there still remained to him three years. Perhaps now he would live to see the end of prison. But what then? "Only," said Verne, "the wheelbarrow and the starvation of the *libéré*. Or he may die on the Islands, and finish in the skin of a shark. Who knows? But of this you may be certain, Roussenq will never weaken."

"Hasn't he suffered enough," Michel cried, "paid dearly enough for burning a mattress and striking an officer?"

"Yes," said Verne, "and Roussenq never does anything to sweeten prison. He never does. He scorns all the wretched little tricks by which the rest of us lighten the burden. Roussenq doesn't try to escape. He'll drink the cup down to its last dregs. He'll show that he's stronger than prison. He'll drink it all, and he'll ask for more—'Monsieur, another punishment, if you please!'

"That's Roussenq.

"I suppose some would think that he made the worst of it, and yet I don't know. Maybe that's his way of making the best of it. Just as men like me—like Dieudonné and Allut—make a try for escape every chance we get. That's what keeps us alive—the thought of escape. Between times my practice is to make the punishment as light as I can. I try to eat, no matter how disgusting the stuff is. For to succeed in escape, you've got to have your health. Then I keep calm. That's the big thing in solitary confinement. Hang on to your nerves. For men go mad in reclusion.

"When I go down to Joseph, I always carry with me the means of making a light, in case I get something to smoke. I've known men who couldn't stand solitary; let their nerves go to pieces. They'd do anything to get out—just for a few weeks in the hospital.

"When they're desperate like that, they do strange things. I've known a man to lose his sight because of what he'd done to infect his eyes—done deliberately, so as to be sent to the hospital. As if enough of us weren't sick anyhow without practicing all sorts of devices to get to the hospital. No, you've got to make yourself remember that when you leave reclusion you must be strong enough to make another try for freedom. If you keep that before you, you won't get in such condition that you'll risk blinding yourself

just to get out—just to spend a few weeks on a mattress at the hospital, where you can talk to your comrades."

Basil said he knew a man who'd dropped a heavy stone on his foot to keep from being sent to the fever-ridden camp at Kourou. And some one else had had a friend who, for the same reason, had cut himself and put glass in the wound. Another had threaded a needle with a horsehair and drawn it between the skin and the flesh. The infection had run into tetanus. It would have finished him but for the doctor's getting it in time!

In reclusion, Verne said, men couldn't get horsehairs and didn't have knives, but they could almost always get the seed of the castor-oil plant. The plant grew on the Islands. If you inserted one of these seeds under your skin, it would form pus in twenty-four hours. And the hospital was sure. It was sure, too, that you ran the danger of amputation. Then, powdered quinine rubbed into the eyes would give you the look of the insane. And there were things you could do to back up the idea. There were ways of simulating madness; ways that weren't nice to think about. And as for that, what was it all but insanity anyway? Prison itself was insane. And who'd believe that a man would risk tetanus and death and blindness just to get out of a solitary cell? Who'd believe it?

"That's the big difference between Roussenq and every other convict. If we bear punishment, it's because we must. But Roussenq courts it, and then he bears it.

"And do you know what he does in his cell? He's writing a poem! Yes, actually. It's about the prison. He calls the poem 'Hell.' He began writing it in 1913; revised it in 1915. It had at that time about two hundred verses. Since 1915 he's been adding to it. There'll be five hundred when it's finished. That's how he spends his time. Better anyhow than infecting yourself—"

So they talked in the blockhouse. For what was of importance to them except prison matters? Prison characters; reclusion and how best to endure it. News came that the "noise of Dieudonné's death was going about."[2] That was discussed, but dismissed in the imminence of reclusion. "Sell any underwear you have," Verne advised. "It'll all be confiscated at the Château. And a little money in your *plan* will do you no harm."

And thus prepared, they marched in columns of twos through St. Laurent to the ship waiting at the pier; marched barefoot, in shapeless cotton garments and battered, rain-beaten straw hats; the twos so close together that you would have said they walked hand in hand. But when you came nearer, you knew that one man was shackled to another, while in front and on either

side and behind the column strolled keepers, each nonchalantly smoking a cigarette.

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[1] Albert Londres, a French journalist who in *Au Bagne* has given his impression of the penal colony in French Guiana.

[2] In July of 1927 Dieudonné was arrested in Brazil. He was granted pardon by the French government and has since returned a free citizen to France, to begin life anew at forty-three, after fifteen years of Guiana.

CHAPTER XV

In the solitary confinement of reclusion, as Verne had said, you think. What else is there to do? And it is very quiet, for reclusion is the house of silence and of punishment.

Yes, Michel agreed, you would say that you were alone here, that all down the corridor in both directions the cells were empty. Nothing to do but think. . . . Of what then to think?

He looked about the cell. The cell was nine feet long by seven wide by twelve high. Its ceiling was an iron grill, and separating the grill and the roof was an open space. Down the center of the building between the cell-blocks, on a level with the top of the walls, ran a narrow elevated platform, perhaps three feet wide, with on either side an inclosing railing. Like a captain's bridge, it was a point of vantage, for there the keeper on duty might look down through the grill to the occupant of every cell. Nothing but the human heart being hidden from him.

The cell was windowless. What light and ventilation it had, drifted down from the space under the roof. And as the roof was of solid tile, both light and air had journeyed from the windows of the outer corridor before finally reaching the dim close cells.

"It's all dark as the jungle," Michel thought to himself.

The walls were whitewashed, the heavy door painted black. The only furniture, two wooden pails—one providing water, the other serving as the entire sanitary system. In one corner was a narrow plank bed, raised and fastened against the wall. Michel was to learn that it was against the rules to lower this bed by day. In the matter of personal possessions, reclusion limited him to his old brown blanket and to the shirt and trousers he was wearing.

Under these conditions he was to live for six months. Clearly, there was nothing to do but think.

And Michel thought. At first in fugitive pictures; scraps of scenes from the recent past wandering through his mind, in and out again. The men in the blockhouse at St. Laurent. Fragments of their talk. The door opening, and Verne standing there; so changed since the night they'd all planned escape. Only the mole on his chin remaining the same; as if it hadn't been wrecked at sea, hadn't finally reached Venezuela and been captured there by British blacks, to be taken to Georgetown on a fishing-smack, and sent back on the next *Biskra* to St. Laurent. And Dieudonné . . . was he really dead as they said? That would be a pity. He was a brave fellow. But so had Eugène been brave. And Bernard, and God only knew how many more.

Michel heard the advance of creaking shoes. The keeper was passing along his elevated look-out.

What did the keeper see? He saw in the cell next to Michel a heavily built figure tattooed in some pattern indistinguishable in the half-light. The figure paced silently up and down. Nine feet and turn; nine feet and turn. It was the figure of a man, bare above the waist. It walked with its powerful shoulders bent forward, its head held low. Almost as though it were in the process of retrograding to a quadruped position. It did not raise its eyes as the keeper passed, but like some restless caged animal, paced desperately back and forth.

Fifty years ago in France it had taken its first toddling steps. It had laughed and waved chubby arms in amazed delight at its new accomplishment. Day after day it had patiently practiced until it was no longer uncertain. Yet each baby step was but bringing it nearer to this appointed end—to this cell where it paced nine feet and turned; nine feet and turned; where, if it raised its eyes, it saw only white walls and a thick black door.

This troubled pacing is so common a custom that it has its own phrase in the prison slang of Guiana. The keeper scarcely observed it, as he paused to light a cigarette.

Passing on, he saw Michel standing irresolute in the center of his cell, as though he did not know what to do, how to begin the six months of reclusion. Farther along in another cell the keeper's eye fell upon Verne, staring at the door, as if by his very will-power he would cause it to open.

At the end of the corridor a man sat on his haunches in a corner of the cell. If he had risen and unfolded himself he would have stood nearly six feet tall. Yet his weight was but a trifle over a hundred pounds, so had this man been exhausted by prison, where, for ten out of the seventeen years he had served, he'd eaten soup only one day out of three, living for the other two on dry bread alone.[1] This was Roussenq—become a prison Ace by virtue of his suffering and his rebellion.

Keepers never lingered near his cell. They did not comment on the fact that Roussenq often wrote on bits of paper. For it was better not to rouse this man. A word, and he might have had the whole place in an uproar. It needs little to set men in solitary confinement aflame with hysteria. The keeper therefore turned and retraced his way.

Michel thought the silence terrible after the creaking footsteps had died in the distance. What a place! If you didn't know it was for six months, he thought, the walls perhaps wouldn't seem so close. You must think of it only minute by minute, not looking ahead. Verne had warned that you must keep calm. You must guard your health, and above all, hang on to your nerves. As

for disease, scurvy was most to be feared. One way to bring it on, Verne said, was to sit or lie on the floor, which was of cement made with sea-water. The floor was always damp. So you must keep moving. . . . Scurvy was a bad thing to get.

Michel began at once to walk; nine feet and turn, like his neighbor. But neither caged man knew that the other paced, for both were barefoot.

Michel wondered what time it was. The keeper again creaked the length of the building and back, leaving silence behind him.

After a while a turnkey brought soup and meat. God! Was it only the middle of the morning of the first day? Nothing more would happen now until the rice at half-past four. How would it be possible to endure six months of this? But what other men had borne, Michel argued, he could bear. And there'd been men—many men—who had suffered years of this.

He would walk. He must keep calm and must not get scurvy.

The hour for rice at last came. And at half-past five the plank beds might be lowered.[2] Michel rolled up his blouse to serve as a pillow, spread his blanket on the planks, and lay down in his trousers.

It was dark and so terribly silent. Was Verne far away? Oh, if some one would only speak!

At length he slept. Was it a groan that waked him? Yes, there it was again. So there was some one in the next cell. Who? It didn't matter. It was a human creature and a comrade. That was enough. Some one was, then, close to him. Realizing that, he felt he could sleep. No, he would let the man know that he had a neighbor. Michel coughed. There was no response. He tried again. Then there came an answering cough. More silence.

It was damp and chilly. Michel thought he would put his blanket over him. But how hard the planks were without it!

Then from a height above the floor he heard a whisper.

"Who are you?" it asked—in the words of the Jumbe-birds of the jungle, who, Demerara had said, are supposed to incarnate the spirits of departed criminals.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Michel Arnaud. Doing six months' reclusion for attempted escape."

"Where'd they catch you?"

"Paramaribo."

“So far as that? Hard luck.”

“How on earth did you get up there?” Michel suddenly realized that the whisper came apparently from over his head.

“Jumped up from my bed until I caught hold of the grill; then lifted myself up, so as you could hear my whisper.”

“Better be careful. Somebody else may hear you too.”

“I don’t give a damn. That’s how you get after you’ve been here a while.”

“Who are you, anyway?”

“Grodet.”

“Grodet!”

Madame Vidal with her glossy blue-black hair, in close moist waves. Her hat—a big pale gray hat thrown on a red-and-white checkered tablecloth. And her voice asking if Michel thought Grodet would give Louis up. Behind a lace curtain a clock ticking somewhere, and out on the veranda a green parrot which had opened one eye to look at him.

“Grodet!”

“Yes. That tells you all about me, doesn’t it?”

In the morning there was exercise in that little walled-in space which Verne had described as about the size of a city back yard. The day then passed as before. Agitated pacing of the cell. The squeak of the keepers’ shoes. Mosquitoes bad, especially about the floor. So long before the morning meal. Not that Michel wanted the food when it came, but it marked the progress of the day. Longer still between the morning meal and the afternoon rice.

Interminable days.

Michel had been a week in reclusion when he invented the game of the future. The idea came to him one night about seven o’clock. It had been impossible to sleep. Then suddenly his thoughts had been projected.

It is night in St. Laurent. He is lying in the dormitory, thinking that the mail boat has been sighted for the next day. And he cannot rest because he has decided to embark clandestinely. His suspense makes the night seem long. But at last the doors of the dormitory open. It is the morning coffee. All dip in and fill their measures. Before drinking, Michel says to himself, “Is it my last?” Five minutes later he hears the prison drum. It is the reveil. He rolls a cigarette and smokes.

Then he is marching out through the gate of the "*Camp de la Transportation*."

He hears the siren of the approaching boat. In the afternoon he will run away. He will make his purchases for the journey at the same Chinese shop where he and Basil prepared for their escape through Dutch Guiana. But this time he has more money. (His fancy permitted him that; not enough to discount the reality of the dream, but enough to increase a little the quantity and variety of his supplies.) He is buying a box of pâté de foie gras; just one. And there are cakes of chocolate and plenty of sardines.

Then he hides in the bamboos to wait for darkness. But he will not try to get on board until midnight. He hears the clocks strike; always the Mayor's clock a few minutes ahead of the church clock.

At last it is dark. The clocks strike seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven. A century of time between the hours. Then he leaves the bamboos. He must pass through the village in order to reach the dock. But the village is deserted. Now, within three hundred feet of the steamer, he stops. Only for a moment. Just to enjoy the beautiful sensation of escape.

He is going. There is the boat. And he will never see St. Laurent again. He reaches the ship. He drops his prison hat into the river and puts on the cap which he bought from the fat Chinese baby's mother. He looks down on the hat where it lies on the surface of the water. He decides to reach the deck by a swinging rope. Hand over hand. He climbs six feet; rests; and climbs on again. Up, hand over hand. . . .

But Michel did not reach the deck, for at that point he'd fallen asleep and in the morning the game had lost reality. In the morning it was incontestable that he was in a solitary cell in reclusion on the Ile St. Joseph. It was all nonsense about the ship and the rope.

Most of the day he paced uneasily. It would be nice if Basil could somehow smuggle him some tobacco. It was not impossible. It might pass through as many as fifteen hands. But still there was a chance that it would arrive. He would dream of that.

Late in the afternoon, after the rice, he heard Grodet's whisper: "Smoke a few puffs and throw it to the next cell."

Smoke what? But in a moment over the top of the cell wall a cigarette came, to fall at his feet. He smoked three puffs and threw it over the opposite wall. "Pass it on!" he called; and then was terrified at the way his voice broke the silence.

"Not so loud next time," Grodet whispered.

Then it was night again and possible to play at the future.

Michel sees himself finish the remaining feet of the rope. Now he is on board. He descends. He goes to the forward deck. He finds a locked door. Quite simple. He knows how to open it. He closes it after him very quietly. He lights a match. How providential! It is a storeroom. Piles of rope and anchor chain. Pieces of canvas sail. Good. He will lie down on the canvas and cover himself with a sail. But first he must tie the door shut with a bit of rope. How nicely everything is going! He lies down and sleeps. The siren wakes him. He feels the pulsing engines. Now he is too happy to sleep. He lies waiting for the rolling of the vessel which will tell him that they have left the river and are out at sea.

The first port of call will be Paramaribo. That is easy to imagine, since he has only to remember.

The water-front street. Only it will be morning when he arrives this time, with hot sunshine instead of street lamps. He will see the strange East Indian women and the negresses in their immensely full dresses. There will be the same square house on the corner, with the garden back of it, and the amethyst glass in its windows. But he is thirsty. Before the boat docks at Paramaribo he must leave his hiding-place to find water. He unties the rope and gently opens the door. It is still night. Only here and there an electric light. Carefully along the deck. More luck. The open door of a lavatory. He drinks deeply.

He spends the hours in Paramaribo hidden under the pile of canvas, but no one enters the storeroom. Everything is going marvelously well.

Georgetown comes next. That's where the fishing-smack took poor Verne. No need to imagine Georgetown in detail, for he will stay in hiding there. But of course he knows that in the town there will be the usual vultures and palms.

When he next goes out for water, the ship is anchored in a bay. There are the lights of a town, and back of them rises a dark hilly island. This is Trinidad. It is hot and stuffy in the storeroom, and the night air is good. And in the morning they are due to arrive in Fort de France, Martinique. That's the end of the ship's route. There he'll have to land. That will be the crisis. . . .

The keeper on duty passed overhead. Looking down into the cells, he was aware only of the bodies of men; old bodies and young bodies, delicate and heavy. But it never occurred to him that they were more than that; that something was going on within each man, something so intense that his own life was pale in comparison. To him, they were all convicts and he was there to see that none escaped and that all obeyed the rule of silence. He had no idea that Grodet, sitting cross-legged on his bed, could not sleep for longing

for the presence of a tall dark boy called Louis, who had once played parts at the Comédie Française, and who knew so well how to make love.

"Where is he, I wonder?" Grodet was thinking. "Where? And who is there to help him? Who sees now that he has enough to eat and that his work is not too great for his strength?"

Grodet pictured to himself the slim youth of Louis. He loved him. Men didn't always love their brats. But he loved Louis. The boy was so different from a rough old fellow like himself. All clean white flesh. Not a tattoo mark on him. Clean as a statue. Not a blemish to be listed in the prison files. What a slow easy way he had of moving! As if nothing made any difference to him. Something like a cat in the way he moved. That little Madame Vidal,

now . . . no wonder she'd loved a boy like Louis. Who could help it? So beautiful in this ugly place!

Grodet admitted to himself that it was natural, too, that Louis should have loved her.

"But I couldn't give him up," he thought. "It wasn't spite as they all believed. And it didn't matter that I'd only won him at *belote*. I'd come to love him. And I had nothing else. Not a joy but Louis. Never even a letter to expect when the mail came in! No future to look forward to—twenty years of prison and then exile for life. Starvation and Guiana to the end! I had only Louis. How could I give up all I had!

"And he was so much better since I'd begun to work for him. Rounder and younger. Yes, he was losing the prison look. It was I who managed so that he got work at the Vidals', where I knew he'd have better food. Oh, I was a fool not to have seen what would come!"

The keeper had stopped, blown his nose on a big handkerchief, and gone on. He glanced down at Michel. All quiet there. The thin little body was curled up on the planks; the head forward, the knees and arms drawn up to meet the head, in the position in which the embryo lies safe from the world. The keeper did not guess that this boy had put himself to sleep imagining that he was on board a ship which in the morning would dock in Fort de France on the island of Martinique.

Roussenq closed his eyes as he heard the keeper approach. He had been murmuring stray lines from the poem upon which he had been at work since 1915—the poem whose title was "Hell."

"In August," the keeper was thinking, "I'll be out of this. Home for a year on leave. Paris will look good—and my little daughter—how she will have grown. Probably won't remember me. . . ."

Roussenq, he absently noted, was asleep. He looked down through the grill at the long, haggard figure of the man stretched upon the plank bed near the bottom of the dim shaft of the cell. "Asleep," he thought, and turned on his heel and went away.

Roussenq began again very softly to murmur:

The opaque veil I am going to lift.
And no consideration shall fetter me.

Here bodies wish above everything
To alleviate their torments.
And here death hovers over an immense
Distress. . . .

Cast into our sad cells,
Condemned to silence, we desire to speak.

Oh, far from raising man, prison
Lowers him to the abyss. . . .[3]

The keeper had gone. Grodet moaned, and Verne rose from his planks to pace nervously the length of his cell and back.

"Ah, the bitterness of having set foot on the soil of freedom, only to be captured by British blacks!" He could not rid himself of that thought. And it was driving him mad to remember.

How dazzling the sun on the quay of Fort de France! Such bright sun after the storeroom, which has been as dark as a solitary confinement cell on Joseph.

In his dream Michel safely passes the sailors. He has landed. The crisis has been easy, after all. On land, he pauses before a blackboard on which is chalked: "The *Porto Rico*. Sails tonight at 5 P.M. Destination, Vera Cruz."

Of course he does not hesitate. He must get out of Martinique with all speed, and here is a ship due to sail in three hours. He goes on board. He drops into the ship's kitchen and asks the cook what chance there is of something to eat.

"Where are you from?" the cook questions.

"From Paris."

"Paris? I can't say you look like Paris. How do you happen to be out here in a rig like that?"

"I came from the gold mines, where, as you see, I've not made a fortune."

The cook laughs and gives him a plate of hash, some rolls, and a cup of coffee.

It is a feast, and he decides to confide in this cook:

"I want to go as far as Havana. Anywhere to hide on board?"

"Easy enough. I'll show you. . . ."

At that moment Grodet was preparing to light a cigarette. He had gone to reclusion carrying two *plans*, one containing the few francs he possessed, the other a bit of steel, a pebble, and a tiny thimble-sized box of charred rags. To make a light he struck the steel against the pebble until he obtained a spark sufficiently strong to ignite a morsel of rag. And from that he lit his cigarette.

He smoked several puffs, inhaling slowly and deeply. Then the cigarette went over the wall to Michel, on its way to comfort half a dozen convicts. The compact little lighting-outfit was then returned to the aluminum capsule, which was securely screwed shut and secreted in the only hiding-place a convict has, in the only possession which remains to him—his physical body.

To Michel a real cigarette came as a delightful conclusion to his imaginary breakfast aboard the imaginary *Porto Rico* on his entirely fictitious escape to Martinique.

When he had finished his turn and tossed the precious cigarette over to the next fellow, he let himself go back to the *Porto Rico*.

The cook has stowed him away in a corner of the hold. He has promised to supply food every day. The *Porto Rico* has sailed, and in the morning there is the cook bringing breakfast, and actually a "Je sais tout" left on board by a passenger. He thought Michel, being from Paris, might like it to pass the time.

This cook is beginning to seem too good to be true. Michel makes him snub-nosed, freckle-faced, and cross-eyed. And his French must be very bad. He has picked it up on a tramp freighter where he was scullery boy when he first ran away from home.

Where was home? It was in a city called New Orleans.

The cook sits on a packing-box and watches Michel eat.

"Tell me about Havana." Michel fancies himself asking this between luxurious sips of coffee.

(He drew upon prison tales of Havana to supply the fictitious cook with information.)

"Havana is the capital of Cuba. The pearl . . . what is it the pearl of? Of Central America? Perhaps. Anyway it is a beautiful city of a million inhabitants. Much shipping. Many wealthy Yankees. Climate and products of a tropical country. Plenty of business. Women of the underworld make a fortune in Havana." But that doesn't interest Michel. . . . "Rich villas? Yes. Any number of them."

Michel determined if possible to find a closed villa. If he is to continue on the *Porto Rico* to Vera Cruz, he must make a better appearance, and for that he will need money and clothing.

On the day of the doctor's weekly visit to the solitary confinement cells on the Ile St. Joseph, there were actually voices in the corridor.

Roussenq, the doctor found, was as usual—some malaria, but not a hospital case. Verne was showing the strain of what he'd undergone at sea—rapid pulse, troubled with insomnia, but that couldn't justify recommending him for the hospital. Grodet had the physique which resists prison. And Michel had no complaint to make. He was living in his dream, and absorbed with the rich villas of Havana.

The cell doors were then locked. And in the silence men gasped, as though silence suffocated.

The doctor would come back at the end of another week. But sometimes it happens that his return is too late and that in the interval the stillness of reclusion has been broken by a sound—the sound of the death rattle.

In a corner of his cell Grodet squatted on his haunches. His face was buried in his hands. Ah, if he could but be ill! If he could only get over to the hospital on the Ile Royale! Then he might see Louis. Of course, he would surely see Louis. It could somehow be managed. In prison all things are possible. Why didn't his body give in? He would lie on the cement floor. He might then get a bronchial trouble. Yes, but he might also develop scurvy, and he didn't want that.

Despair mastered him. In a frenzy he took, one after the other, his two wooden pails and hurled them against the door with all the strength of his powerful arms.

In the next cell Michel was startled by the crash and splash. It broke into his dream of following a road along the sea where he had just discovered a promising villa whose blinds were closed as though the occupants were away. He had just been deciding that since the garden was so nicely kept, the family must have left the house furnished and ready for their return.

And now what on earth was Grodet doing?

Complete silence followed the crash. Grodet was again crouching in his corner; calling himself a fool, because now he was sure to come before the Disciplinary Commission and get additional time. Why was he always doing something to make the score against him mount?

He looked wild-eyed about the cell. The walls seemed to have contracted. They seemed to be shutting in on him. He thought that in a moment there wouldn't be room to turn around. Rain was pounding on the tile roof. The cell, always dim, was now as dark as at dusk. And the walls . . . the terrible white walls were coming closer, and at the same time

elongating, until Grodet felt himself to be at the bottom of a fathomless pit, fast growing narrower and deeper.

It was then that he screamed.

The high falsetto shriek of a snapped brain. It was tinder to every other strained nerve in the place. Men howled and beat with their fists upon the cell doors.

Reclusion had seemed to Michel so deserted that he always felt himself alone, even Grodet's occasional whisper sounding more ghostly than human; this reclusion had now become a madhouse crowded with invisible lunatics who beat hysterically on their doors.

"I mustn't give way," Michel said to himself. "Above all," he reminded himself, "it is important to hang on to your nerves, for men go mad in reclusion."

But it was hard to keep calm with that howl of pain and rage and fear mounting to the roof where rain fell like blows on the rows of red tile.

Then steps came hurriedly down the corridor. There was sudden silence. Nothing to be heard but the pounding of rain on the roof. Grodet had retired to his corner. The men wouldn't tell who'd started it. Yes, but the shattered wooden pails would betray him. Never mind, thank God the cell walls had gone back where they belonged!

"Prison has its atmosphere, its spirit, its body." So the convict Roussenq has written in the poem which he calls "Hell."

All was quiet again in reclusion, and Michel, who would forget the terror of Grodet's scream, was fancying himself on a beach outside the city of Havana.

He is sitting on some rocks, awaiting night. He must not return to the villa until he has the protection of darkness. It is peaceful there on the rocks. Above like a big headlight is the moon, and in the distance the glow of Havana at night. Really it is so pleasant and restful sitting there that it seems a pity to have on hand the job of breaking into that villa. He is tired and listless. Breaking into a closed villa is not an Ace's job. No adventure in it. Why couldn't he imagine something big—like the Brindisi Express? He is too tired. But he must go on with it. He must continue to pretend—to pretend that in twenty-four hours the *Porto Rico* is clearing for Vera Cruz, and that he must be prepared.

Wearily he leaves the rocks and makes his way to the villa. It is quite dark. No lights in the house. He makes a careful circuit of the place. There are two doors, one of them close to a window. He tries the doors, but lacks

the means to open them. The window, however—extraordinary that people are so careless—the window is easy.

Once inside, he strikes a match, shading it with his cap.

He sees before him a stairway. He ascends to a hall. He strikes another match and sees a second stairway. He mounts softly and opens the first door. A third match guides him to a window. He pushes back the shutters and lets the moonlight pour in. The room is a bedroom, comfortably furnished, but with dust thick on everything. No fear, therefore, of being surprised by the owners.

Now to business. He investigates a bureau. And, as though it, too, were a burglar, the long bright shaft of moonlight searches the drawers. They are full of linen, a man's linen. There is a closet where the moon discovers men's clothes to be hanging.

True, the clothing is a little large. But no matter. Michel puts on two pairs of silk socks, and two sets of underwear, so as to have a change. At last he sees himself once more a gentleman.

Opening from the bedroom is a study; books and a desk. He finds a small automatic pistol. A fountain pen and a box of cigars. The cook on the *Porto Rico* will enjoy the cigars. That reminds him that he is hungry. When he has finished this floor, he must explore the dining-room.

He feels his way across the hall and into another room—again he opens the shutters. Oh, a woman's room this time! He strikes a match to examine the dressing-table. A powder-box labeled "mauve," a half-empty pot of rouge, a partly used bottle of scent, "L'amour d'Egypte" . . . what a silly name for a perfume! The match goes out. Michel opens the bottle and sniffs. Too strong. The prince would never have had about him a woman who used scent like that. He replaces the glass stopper.

Next he must have a look at the chiffonier. Empty. Examine the bed. Women have a trick of hiding their money and then forgetting it. Good! Under the pillow is a little bill-fold. Swollen as if crammed with bills, carelessly stuffed in. Now another match. The bill-fold is embossed red and gold Florentine leather. How much shall he find inside? He really needs at least a thousand dollars. But as much as that would be too lucky to be real. Better make it a hundred. No, he positively must have five hundred. A lady who used mauve powder and "L'amour d'Egypte" scent would certainly have costly tastes. Perhaps she'd been intending to pay a dressmaker's bill and so had a large amount in her purse. Why couldn't he make it a thousand? Very well, he decides on a thousand. When he parts from the cook at Vera Cruz he must give him at least a hundred. He couldn't consider giving him less.

In the dining-room, more luck! A box of English biscuits and a jar of jam. Sherry in a decanter.

(It was not at all unreasonable to find sherry.)

As for the thousand, it will take him from Vera Cruz to New York, and if he is careful, even to France. . . .

Roussenq in his cell thought of his poem. "Far from raising man," he wrote, "prison lowers him to the abyss."

Michel was at rest, but Verne tossed in a sleep haunted by a burning and deserted ocean where he clung to a capsized canoe, while Grodet, listening for the keeper's step, furtively unscrewed a *plan*. Five francs left. The smuggled package of tobacco had taken all the rest. "But," he thought, "the turnkey ought to be satisfied with five."

In the peace of his new resolve he fell asleep, the five-franc note clutched in his hairy sunburned fingers.

And in sleep he was able to recapture lost moments. For Grodet, prison actually had rare moments to be treasured and relived. Certain memories quickened the pulse of his dream and made his breath come tremulously, tenderly. . . .

But like electric batteries, such memories need to be recharged. The five-franc note—

Grodet came partially back to consciousness. Surely for five francs the turnkey would supply the infallible castor-oil seed, which, inserted under the skin—

The risk? How many had taken it for no greater motive than a few days in the hospital! And for Grodet the chance of seeing Louis again was worth any risk.

On the doctor's next inspection, Grodet's left hand and arm were enormously and dangerously swollen. He must go immediately to the hospital. The keeper was suspicious. It looked to him like another case of self-mutilation. "Possibly." But the man was ill, all the same. "Amputation. . . ." The doctor's voice trailed off down the corridor.

"I'm off. Going in a few minutes," Grodet whispered over the high dividing-wall.

"What's the matter?"

"Bad arm. Swelling and inflammation. I've got a couple of seeds left, if you'd like them."

"No, I'll try to stick it out."

"*Eh bien*, good-bye."

Michel heard them come to take Grodet away. After that the silence was awful.

"Here," Roussenq wrote, "bodies wish above everything to alleviate their torment.

"And death hovers over an immense distress."

Michel did not feel well. The game of pretending no longer convinced. Listlessly he took himself from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, and then by rail to New York. In New York he arrived at a huge station. He called it "The Central Pacific Railroad Station." He set himself up in a hotel in the French quarter. Was it on Thirty-fourth Street? He had a tailor make him two suits, one black and one blue. And of course an overcoat for the steamer. He went to music halls and moving-picture shows. He would distract himself. He would forget Guiana and solitary confinement. He never again wanted to hear the words, "Devil's Island."

But his fancy was less detailed. He had lost count of his money and didn't know whether or not he'd spent all that thousand dollars. The game had ceased to dupe him. Still he went through with it, there being nothing else to do. He sailed on a great White Star steamer, which he named the *Gigantic*, having forgotten the actual names of the liners. He went prudently third class to Liverpool—or should the ship dock at Southampton? No matter. And then to London. Once it would have amused him to plan what he'd do in London. But not now. He'd go at once to Paris by way of Dover and Calais.

Paris! The word roused him for a moment. He saw himself in a deck-chair, waiting for the moment when he would first see lighters on the coast of France. How his heart would leap! Only the thought of France retained power to move him.

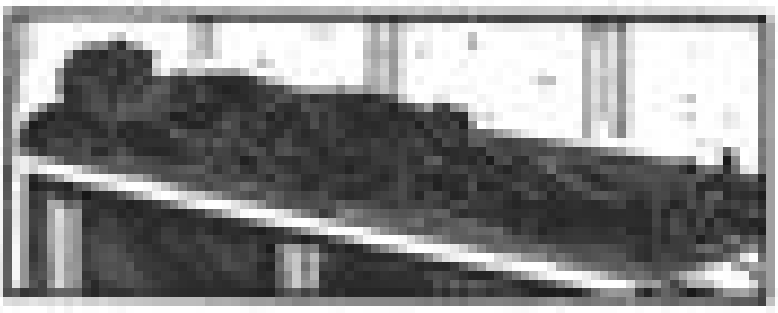
Keepers came on duty, went off, and were replaced by others. There was the morning exercise, when for a brief time he saw the sky. There was later the soup and meat, and in the afternoon, rice. But he had no longer the courage to eat. He had no special symptoms. Nothing to talk to the doctor about. He was only tired.

He would lie down on the floor, and then, frightened by the thought of scurvy, he would get up and walk with feverish dizzy haste. Then he would repeat the game of the future.

He is eating fried potatoes with the cook on board the *Porto Rico*; eating enough for three.

But imagining potatoes only makes him more aware of his chronic craving for the sort of food one could eat.

Then, he'd focus his mind upon a vision of himself stretched in a deck-chair, wearing the blue suit and the overcoat. He tried to believe that the cold air of the Channel was giving him back his life.



But he knew the dream to be all a lie. The reality was only a barefoot little body wearing white cotton trousers, stamped with a prison number. How could he project that into any rosy future? He was ashamed of having lost his spirit.

Gradually his thoughts were now leading him back along the path to the past. In the beginning they came in fragments which he resolutely drove from his mind. There was at first the figure of Julie. It had been an April day. They were selling flowers in the street. It was not long after he'd left the service of the prince, and he still had his pockets full of money. Julie had been walking arm in arm with another girl. They were both pretty. But Julie . . . Julie was a doll with blond hair cut à la chinoise.

Ouf! He would not think of it. But large slow reluctant tears had left his eyes and were creeping down his cheeks.

Unfortunately he'd spoken first to Nanette, Julie's companion, so that he felt honor pledged him to her.

He remembered his surprise when late in the afternoon there'd been a knock at the door, and Nanette had called, "Come!" and there had been Julie, more than ever like a doll. They'd all dined together, and he'd made an opportunity to confess to Julie that it was she who was his choice. "Ah," Julie had said, "didn't you know that Nanette and I divide our receipts?"

What a vexatious pity that he hadn't known!

But how long ago and how infinitely far away! Another life in another world. What did it matter now!

Tears had trickled down and lay salt on his lips. When he lifted his hand to brush them away, he noticed violet spots here and there on his bare arm.

But with Grodet gone there was no one to ask what such spots meant.

There was only silence.

Now that Michel had begun to look back, the memory of his life with Julie came oftener, and would not be driven away.

Julie did fine embroidery for a lingerie establishment. All day she put the most exquisite stitches in nightgowns; creating Cupids and fleur-de-lis and bow-knots on crêpe de Chine. The establishment specialized in trousseaux. Julie had said it was incredible what prices the garments brought.

Of course Julie couldn't have looked as she did on what she earned at fine embroidery. She never made a secret of the profession by which she achieved the charming effect of an expensive doll. She confided to Michel that she often thought of giving up the embroidery, for the pay was small and she was ambitious. But she kept on with it for the foolish reason, she said, that it made her independent of her patrons. Something in her, she explained, insisted on freedom of choice. And that Michel found very flattering to himself.

He'd bought Julie a wrist watch in the Rue de Rivoli, telling her that henceforth she would have no excuse for being late at her rendezvous with him.

Often they dined at restaurants and had liqueurs afterward, sitting at a little table on the sidewalk. It had been summer and the weather beautiful. Then they'd spend a week-end at Trouville.

That had finished his money, and he'd had to confess to Julie that it was necessary for him to go away for a week or so on business. He had one or two projects in mind.

He remembered how he'd felt on coming back a fortnight later to find Julie gone; returned, he suspected, to her former lover, a man named Donald.

He'd gone at once to Donald's hotel and waited there in the café until they came in. Both had greeted him pleasantly, and he'd invited them to drink. At the table, under cover of a thundering motor truck, he'd asked Julie if she would come to him for the night. She'd consented, provided he could get Donald's permission. And Donald had agreed on condition that she return in the morning.

So together they went to the cinema, and Julie had asked whether his affairs had progressed well and been happy to hear that they had. Then she'd told him that Donald had been treating her badly and that she'd resolved to leave him.

That had given Michel the idea of taking Julie for a month's holiday at Nice. "Let's go tomorrow," he'd said; "we can outfit in Marseilles."

But before the train left, it had been necessary to call on a friend of Julie's—a girl she'd known in the House of Correction. It seemed that Julie owed her a small debt and wanted, of course, to settle it before she left.

Michel remembered that he'd given the girls coffee and that it had then been so late that they'd had to take a taxi to the Gare de Lyon, where they'd caught the express to Marseilles.

And in Marseilles Julie had spent four merry days in running from dressmakers to hat shops.

Michel could after all this time perfectly recall her clothes. There'd been a pretty white flannel suit, worn with a white hat. And a purple silk frock with a cape to match. They were expensive, but in them she'd looked delicious. How proud he'd been when he had her on his arm! Other men had stared. And women, too. Julie had been really so bewitching. And the costumes which he, Michel, had bought her, had been perfection. He'd never been able to decide which he preferred. Perhaps it was the purple, because of the way the silk cape fluttered about her.

It was at Nice that he felt he'd begun to live. They'd made excursions to Cannes, to Monte Carlo, even as far as San Remo across the border. There'd been dancing and games in the Casinos. There'd been music halls and the theater. In a word they'd lived like princes, never thinking of the future. And Michel had known the intoxication of admiring eyes. His pretty Julie in her extravagant clothes was the symbol of his success in pulling off an "affair."

Looking back from a cell in reclusion, Michel saw that month at Nice as a Moslem sees his heaven—as the realization of all desire. But it was the admiration of the herd which he most craved to know again.

Then when there remained only enough money to send Julie back by third class to Paris, the end had come. The thought that she would return to Donald had been so disturbing that Michel's next enterprise had not been carefully studied. He saw that now. He'd been reckless. . . . And burglary is an exacting profession.

Ah, well! And now those strange violet spots had appeared on his legs and on his body. He felt unspeakably tired, and his bones ached. Grodet's cell seemed to remain empty. The silence was profound. It seemed limitless, like the depth and vastness of the sea on a black night.

What do men do in solitary confinement? They think. What else is there?

And nothing to think of but Julie with her purple silk cape tossed about in the wind. While in single file great bitter tears followed each other down his hot cheeks. Yet, always honest with himself, he knew that he mourned, not Julie, but life, of which she was the symbol. He mourned the joy of life.

The privations of Guiana, the denial of every appetite of the flesh and of the spirit—had served only to make gayety and luxury seem more than ever desirable. This was the life for which Michel wept, lying limp on the floor of a prison cell, with his yellow forelock falling down into his eyes.

While almost within sound of his sobs Roussenq had written:

> Mute, and solitary
> This is our fearful routine. . . .
> Here we come to love our sorrow as an intimate thing,
> Which never leaves us, which we know so well
> That from its torment we make our support.

The day came when Michel remembered Julie, not as a doll-like blonde with hair cut à la chinoise, but as a girl on whose forehead lay blue-black waves. A purple silk cape fluttered about this girl who was asking him in a steady quiet voice whether he thought some one named Grodet would consent to give up a person called Louis, while the ticking of a clock had come from an adjoining room.

How hot it was! Michel pressed his burning palms against the cell wall.

In the afternoon a front tooth suddenly detached itself from his swollen feverish gums.

And then he knew.

That was what happened when you had scurvy.

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[1] The punishment by dry bread has since been abolished.

[2] The author was told that recently it has been permitted to have the beds down all day.

[3] In the autumn of 1927 Roussenq was said to be still in solitary confinement.

CHAPTER XVI

Dawn. On the Iles du Salut roosters crow long before the sun has sent light to glow above the curved horizon of sea, back of the Ile St. Joseph and the Ile du Diable. That they live in the Devil's Island Penal Colony has no influence upon the character or the temperament of roosters, who remain as shrill, as stridently self-centered, as that long-ago cock who fulfilled a prophecy on the morning after Gethsemane.

They crow before the prison bells have officially waked the convicts sentenced to Royale, Joseph, and Diable. But of those whose rest is thus broken, only the non-criminal will taste the flesh of chicken. For the very cockcrow of the Iles du Salut partakes of irony.

When light comes finally to lie in a brilliant band upon the pale water, it finds the sea wan, as after a sleepless night; wan and still. Only close to the rocky island shores do the waves break into foam. Nothing human is anywhere to be seen. The doors of keepers' houses have not yet opened. The bars and bolts of prison are fast. The cabins which confine the nineteen political offenders, who have inherited from Dreyfus the living tomb of Devil's Island, remain locked.

And in this guileful beauty of dawn, the Islands seem to float so lightly as to convey the illusion that surely if the caprice occurred to them, they might easily drift away.

Only the barred buildings, the high inclosing walls, and the guns which sweep the sea give the lie to this lovely dawn.

Between the horizon line and the Islands the water soon reflects the pomp of sunrise. The multiplication of glory taxes the strength of physical eyes. And now prison doors have opened and men have passed out to begin a new day of their *peine*. To them the beauty of its birth is counterfeit. What does sunrise over the Iles du Salut suggest of toil and hunger, of disease, of mosquitoes and vermin, of thwarted broken spirits? Such a sunrise mocks their sorrow. For convict eyes strip from the Islands all the sham loveliness in which they masquerade before the early risers on board that monthly courier which for a moment drops anchor off Royale en route from Martinique to Cayenne. The condemned know the Islands in their true character. They know them to be rocks decorated with cocoanut palms, mango and almond trees, rocks falsely made up to appear enticing. Their prisoners see in them no quality of transient floating between ethereal heavens and magic mirroring waters. For the convicted there are no shams. Life is naked. The Islands are tethered immutably to the fiery core of the planet. There is duplicity in a sea which reflects the gorgeous panorama of

the sky, while in its depths sharks are provided with cruel teeth. "*A bas la poésie!*" Poetry is rot. The climate is an executioner. The sea a treacherous jailer. The sea separates them from freedom. Every attempted escape from the Islands means so unequal a battle with death that Fate seems an unsportsmanlike cur.

A man might even have in his *plan* the hard-saved price of his liberty, and what use would it be to him on the Islands? As far as freedom is concerned, it would avail him precisely nothing, for only by his unaided strength can he conquer the surging current which divides the Islands from the mainland, seven miles away. An appalling distance to men who must make it with flimsy rafts, or not at all.

On clear days they may look beyond the ocean rollers to the undulating shore of the coast, and on such days a semaphore on the summit of Royale provides the only communication with the continent. But only when the weather is clear. Let the atmosphere be ever so lightly hazy, and the Iles du Salut are entirely cut off from speech with the world.

Condemned to these Islands, perhaps for so much as the whole span of life, all but the strongest disintegrate—as the dead disintegrate. Slowly they lose the one thing upon which the convict feeds. They lose the drug by which the convict lives—his dream of possible escape. Without that hope, they move in a nightmare.

And in this despair of the Islands men come sometimes to forget liberty itself. It is the final triumph of prison to make of a man an outcast even among outcasts. There is then nothing left but to satisfy at any cost the stubbornly persisting animal passions.

So in the red-gold dawn desperate men file from the prisons of the Iles du Salut. "Reality," as Roussenq has written—"Reality has them by the neck."

In the hospital on Royale, Michel had pulled himself up to a sitting posture. After the first cockcrow he could never get to sleep. The hour before the dawn was bad. As soon as it was light he would so prop himself up that through the window, as through a barred veil, he might watch the palms in black silhouette against the splendor of the rising sun. Little by little the prevailing winds have molded the shape of these slender palm boles, and so endowed them with life that they seem to march over the crest of the Island, down to the cool white froth of the waves which dash against the rocks.

Michel's gaze traveled beyond the ward of the hospital, where men lay on bare mattresses, with their coarse brown blankets thrown over them. Yet wherever his eyes might rove, he could never rid himself of the presence of

these men who stared out of imploring pain-blurred eyes. He was aware that one or two were, like himself, sitting up, and that their bodies, naked to the waist, were skeletons over which the skin was taut and yellow. He knew that of those who lay motionless, some would never again pull themselves up in bed. One would perhaps never again so much as open his eyes. . . . And Michel was conscious that on every face—perhaps even on his own—was ineradicably carved . . . grief.

The double door of the ward was closed. On the other side a heavy bar held it fast. High up on the door a slab of wood was slipped back from a peephole, where a human eye appeared, to survey these patients sent over from reclusion on Joseph. The eye was almost at once withdrawn, and the wooden shutter slid back to close the opening.

Michel sighed. It was the day on which he was to be transferred from the hospital to the prison on Royale, there to complete the remaining months before he passed into the class of *libérés*, with his years of exile to serve.

In the bed next him Grodet waked.

"Tonight," he said, "I'll sleep on planks again."

"And I, too."

"Yes, but you're not going back to solitary. You'd practically finished your six months when you fell sick. But I—I've got nearly three years more . . . to say nothing of the time they'll add for this!"

Grodet waved a hand from which the forefinger and the thumb were missing. Their amputation had been the price he paid for getting from solitary confinement to the hospital. But he made no complaint. That was the risk you ran when you infected yourself. Had the doctor been a day later he would have had to lose the whole hand; two days later, perhaps his life.

Grodet looked down at the strange mutilated thing which was his hand. He was not yet used to it, for the bandages had come off permanently only the night before.

The sunrise glow had faded, and Michel saw the palms no longer as black silhouettes but as vivid green, standing out now against a pastel sky, now against the light emerald of the ocean.

"If I'd only done it a week earlier," Grodet said, half to himself.

And Michel understood.

For Louis had disappeared from the prison on Royale three days before Grodet had drawn through the skin between the thumb and the forefinger of his left hand that threaded needle which he had poisoned with the seed of the castor-oil plant. When Grodet reached the hospital Louis existed only in the prison files where the fatal "D.C.D." had been blue-penciled across his registration card.

"I wonder what really happened," Michel speculated, "and will the news ever reach Madame Vidal in France . . . and what will she think?"

Grodet rose up and walked to the window. "They're getting the rowboat ready," he said. He was looking across the narrow channel to Joseph, to the low red-tiled roofs of reclusion. A cell waited him there, a dark, damp, mosquito-infested cubicle where he would have three years to realize that he had lost the only thing he had.

He turned back to Michel, as though to lift his head above the black wave of loneliness which engulfed him.

"When I come out," he questioned, "where will you be?"

"God knows. But I'm not to die in prison. That's certain. That was predicted . . . was predicted ever so long ago. By no less than the Chief of Police in Paris! I've always remembered how he said that he'd see me again."

"Eh? Well, you've made it good so far."

"Yes. I owe life to the doctor this time. But when Basil and I were lost in the jungle, then it was Fate that saved me. And now, in six months my *peine* will be finished—in six months, you understand."

"And what then?"

"What then?"

Escape . . . success or failure? The crowded hurrying pageant of the world? Or a ragged man with a wheelbarrow, earning here and there a sou?

No, not that! Verne was right. A man couldn't contemplate that.

The scenes flashed through Michel's mind.

"Yes," Grodet reminded, "what then?"

The door opened. The guard was ready.

"Au revoir!"

"Au revoir and good luck."

The iron bar shoved into place.

From a bed farther along, speech emerged from a withered body.

"Is that the man whose brat killed himself?"

"Yes."

"Why'd he do it?"

"Nobody's been able to tell me," Michel answered. "I don't even know how it happened."

"I can tell you that," volunteered a man across the way. "It was toward the end of the long dry weather. The water supply was so low that they'd cut us down to an allowance of a liter a day each. That was for everything, you know—

"There'd been a lot of sickness, too. And the men were crazy—taking any chances. It was about that time when a comrade tried to get away disguised as a water buffalo."

"How was that?"

"He was missing at evening roll-call. Search was made. The oarsmen were ordered out with the boats. But the sun was setting, and it would soon be dark. Far off a speck was seen on the water. They focused the telescope. It was only a dark mass on the surface, with, above it, the horns of a water buffalo. Nothing but a dead water buffalo floating out to sea, they said. Darkness shut down. The boatmen were ordered back. But we all knew it was a man bound to a plank, covered with banana leaves, and swimming—paddling with his arms and legs—bound for South America, if you please.

"The buffalo horns? They were his camouflage. Hadn't a buffalo died on the Islands a few days before?

"So when this Louis was missing, we naturally thought he'd gone on escape. A quiet good-looking fellow—one of those girly-boys. I remember we were a little surprised that he'd had the guts to try escape from the Islands—he was such a soft sleepy sort of a chap. Still, there was his place in the squad vacant. Escape seemed the only explanation.

"Then the next night he walked in. We were lined up outside the dormitory answering to the roll when he came and stood in his old place—third from the end in the second row. He looked like a man who'd had every drop of blood drawn out of his body. He stood there, not speaking, not

seeming to see anything, and then just before he was called, he dropped. Finished. . . .

"The guard on duty said afterward that he'd passed through the gate without a word. The guard thought he was seeing a ghost. But it would have been nearer the fact to have thought he was seeing a corpse. For there'd been an incision made in the vein on Louis' wrist, and by the time he turned up at the roll-call there was precious little blood left in him."

"Suicide?"

"Who knows?"

"With what motive?"

"Nobody could guess."

"Where'd he been in the twenty-four hours since he disappeared? And where'd he been when he shed all that blood? It's not easy to hide on a little island like this."

"That was the mystery."

"Then three days later old Grodet was brought over from Joseph with his left arm puffed up like elephantiasis. Right away there was an amputation and a long fever. All through his delirium they said he was calling for Louis. But after he understood what had happened he never spoke his name—not once."

Noon. Hot in the prison dormitory. A lifeless pall of heat had dropped from the zenith upon the three desolate little islands. Seen from an airplane, they would have appeared as abandoned as though long deserted and awaiting re-discovery. All life was shut into the prisons, into reclusion, in the cabins on Devil's Island, in the hospital, the fort, the cottages of keepers. Outside nothing stirred. All was as still as the leaves on the almond trees, or the plumes of the palms, which need so faint a suspicion of a breeze to rouse them.

But within the prison there was no suspension of the bitter tense life which gnawed at the vitals of the convict. To cheat that hidden wolf, men were gambling. Those who had no money gambled with the next day's food —willing to go forth empty to work, if only in a few moments of excitement they might cease to remember. And to this end the games became sometimes a matter of life and death.

Two men were quarreling, and suddenly the quarrel was a fight with knives. A bee buzzed and droned above Michel's head. He noticed a picture postcard pinned on the opposite wall in the direct line of his vision. It represented a girl in a bright pink dress, whose skirt and sleeves were widely banded with blue. A soldier was bending over the girl and kissing her full on her upturned lips. And in the space which separated Michel from the chromo

postcard, men fought with knives. There was no darkness, no flicker of chimneyless kerosene flares to cast over the scene an illusion of unreality; no flames here and there piercing the shadows, as though a master artist had cunningly placed his lights to bring out certain weird tattooing upon a bare hairy chest, the tense muscles on a burly arm, the blind anger on pain-furrowed haggard faces, light flashing on knife-blades, and a dark trickle of blood.

No . . . it was in the hot noon, in the clear merciless noonday glare, that Michel saw a soldier kiss his pink-frocked girl, while knives darted like daylight lightning, and blood flowed—in warm slow vermilion rivulets, creeping down the stripped torsos of men. In this pitiless noon he saw death come.

Or is it murder? No one will trouble to make the distinction. Five minutes ago a convict lived who is now dead. That is all. But then that is equally true after the swift dropping of the guillotine's great knife, true when a man swings at the end of a rope or when the current of the electric chair is switched on, true also on the field of battle. There was life. And now it is no more. Is it death or murder?

"Isolated," Roussenq wrote in his solitary confinement—"isolated, a man need no longer witness prison which has so shocked and revolted him. . . ."

SUNSET. Michel waited on the pier of the Ile Royale. The little steamship *Oyapok* had been sighted, and the convicts who were to be returned to St. Laurent had been brought down to the pier to be ready when she came. Some, having finished their Island punishment, were being sent back to the St. Laurent penitentiary; but Michel would in a few days have completed his prison term. His months on Royale were now part of the past, for Michel was going back to receive his liberation and to enter upon the dreaded period of exile.

Down the winding road which leads up to the hospital, four men came slowly—barefoot convicts—carrying on their shoulders a plain unpainted wooden box.

"Ah," some one said, "there's to be an immersion, I see."

A convict was to be given to the sharks. As on the mainland men say of such and such a convict, "Oh, he is good for the bamboos," so on the Islands they say of an ill comrade that he is "good for the sharks." Since on tiny rocky islands six feet of land may be spared only for prison officials, or for a criminal of the rank of political offender, the convict dead are wrapped in

sacking and put in a temporary coffin—a communal coffin, as it were, which the dead share between them. Every few days, at the sunset following the death, this wooden box makes the journey from the hospital, on the shoulders of men, down the winding red road, to the rowboat waiting at the pier.

Michel watched the cortège approach. By how small a margin he had himself missed such an end! He saw the four who carried the coffin place it across the gunwales of the boat. The six convict boatmen picked up their oars. Two keepers with ready revolvers took their seats in the stern. The living must not be allowed a chance at escape.

It was a pale gold glittery sunset. Sea and sky were softest blue, so perfectly matched that at the horizon line one merged imperceptibly into the other. Great gold fingers radiated from the sun. And there was no sound but that of oars dipping in and out of molten gold. The *Oyapok* had not yet come into view, and the men rowed toward an abandoned ocean, with behind them the three quiet islands where grief always broods.

Then the order was given to ship the oars. Two men opened the hinged lid of the coffin. They rose, standing balanced with feet wide apart. They lifted the body—and released it. . . .

It seemed almost to dive beneath the shining surface. As though it voluntarily plunged into eternity.

The men now rowed quickly back, every gaze fixed ahead—as if all feared to see the great, pallid, ominous shapes of sharks hurrying to the unmarked spot where a moment before something which had been a man had disappeared.

On the pier those who waited the arrival of the *Oyapok* sat silent. Behind them they heard a keeper say, "Look how heartless those creatures are! You'd think they'd realize that sooner or later many of them will fill the skin of a shark. They've no feeling—not even for themselves!"

The men sat stolid.

"The *Oyapok* ought to be here," said one. "She was sighted an hour ago."

NIGHT. Wind in the top of the cocoanuts. The convict lamplighter had passed with his taper, when the *Oyapok* at last dropped anchor. The oarsmen lit a lantern and put it in the bottom of the rowboat. They were ready.

Stepping over the lantern to take his place, Michel suddenly realized that in three days prison would be over for him. He would not spoil the lightness

of the thought by letting himself remember starving *libérés*, waiting in their wheelbarrows, as Verne had so often pictured them.

The lantern threw its light up on the faces of the oarsmen. A young convict with clean-cut features and large dark eyes, which looked straight—straight even into keepers' eyes—directed the oarsmen.

"Pull! . . . Now all together!"

The ocean was heavy. The night wind had whipped into waves the glassy surface of the sunset sea. How had any one ever escaped with a raft!

"All together! . . . Pull!"

The oars swept through the water; they were brought up across the faces of the rowers and down again in a great circle.

Now the boat was passing the spot where a comrade had so recently been given to the sharks.

"Who was it anyway?" some one in the bow questioned in an undertone.

And Michel heard the oarsman's reply:

"A man named Verne." The oar swept up and again down. "Sent over this morning from Joseph. Found dead in his cell. Too bad. They say he almost got his freedom—actually landed in Venezuela!"

Yes, Michel had heard correctly; beyond any possibility of mistake.

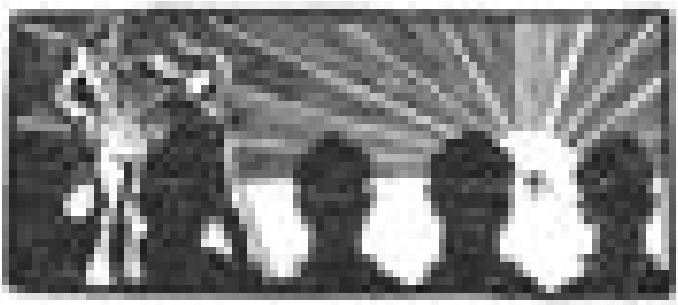
They were nearing the *Oyapok*. Even to a rowboat she seemed small. They heard a dog barking on board above a confused clamor of voices. Orders were shouted. Oars were shipped, and they drifted in slowly to the gangway.

The rowboat pulled off. From his place on the forward deck, Michel could still see the lantern bobbing up and down like a lighted buoy with the motion of the waves. Then it was too far to see the lantern, and the rowboat was only a small dark something moving away into the night.

On Royale the kerosene lamps of half a dozen street lights glowed like great pale fireflies among the dark foliage, two down by the pier, one halfway up, in front of the Commandant's house; another on the "*Point des Blagueurs*" where keepers like to sit in the evening exchanging yarns; two on the little plateau at the summit; with, higher than all the rest, the light in the hospital tower. Looking back at the Ile Joseph, there was only a single light, low near the shore.

How black the water was! Headed for the mouth of the Maroni, the *Oyapok* rounded the end of Royale. There Devil's Island was added to the other two—the three so close together, Michel remembered, that you could almost throw a stone from one to the other.

And Devil's Island was dark, without anywhere a single glimmer of light.



PART THREE

"And here one may not hope ever to be different."

Roussenq in "L'Enfer."

CHAPTER XVII

"They say Seznec will be on board."

"Who's Seznec?"

"He's the man whose case has caused as much talk as 'Bluebeard's'!"

"Why?"

"Because it was such a mystery. You know, they could never find a trace of the fellow he's supposed to have murdered. . . . They can't even prove the man dead. He vanished—that's all. And suspicion pointed to Seznec."

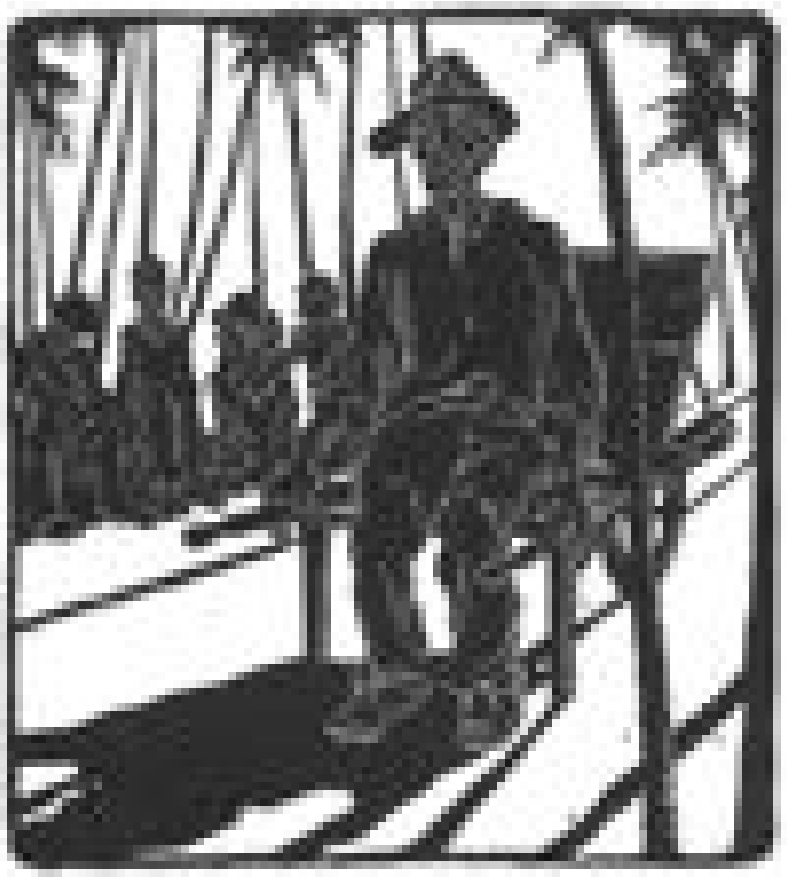
"Who told you all about it?"

"The keepers have been telling it in the village."

It was April 29 in the year 1927, and a group of men roosted on a pile of logs near the river bank on the French side of the Maroni. They were devastated men—gaunt, hollow-eyed, unshaven, and often toothless. Rags but partly concealed their bodies. The very patches on their patches were in rags. Buttons were missing where civilization demands buttons, and it had been years since any of them wore a collar or a necktie. Hats were dilapidated, and only a few had achieved the supreme ambition of shoes. These were *libérés*—free men; free, that is, to come and go in the penitentiary concession of St. Laurent, provided that at stated intervals in the year they appeared to answer the *libéré* roll-call. But not free to leave the Penal Colony, even so far as to cross the Maroni to the Dutch side.

On this April afternoon they had deserted their wheelbarrows and come to perch on the logs by the river bank, knowing that on the day of arrival of the convict ship there would be no business in the village of St. Laurent.

A grizzly, bearded man—more ragged than all the rest—folded up a letter and put it in his pocket. It was from a woman whom he'd not seen for twenty years. The letter began, "My dear husband." It spoke of the struggle to make a living, and it dwelt upon the virtues of three children whom the man could visualize only as white-frocked babies—the oldest not yet four. But one of these babies, the letter told him, was about to be married—to a young druggist, a fine and honest fellow. Under the circumstances, the letter went on to say, it was a good match for the child, though not, of course, what they might once have hoped. And the two boys were beginning to earn. So that the man on the log was not to be anxious about any of them. And he was assured that their mother never let them forget the father who lived always in her heart as the tenderest man in the world, who would not have willingly harmed a fly.



The letter was dated five years before. There had been none since. The druggist had written to explain why there might never be another. But the man who returned it so carefully to his pocket could not remember that. When he re-read the letter he thought always that it had just arrived on the last mail boat. And each time he read it with fresh delight and with moisture in his oddly shining eyes. He was fond of talking of his family to any one who would listen, and he would always add, “I am here by accident. . . . You must know that I am an anarchist, and”—lowering his voice to a confiding tone—“it was in an argument on that subject—such a deplorable accident, you understand.”

Michel remembered once having seen this man. It had been a year or more ago, before he and Basil had escaped to Paramaribo. It had been on a day when the cargo boat was in, and he’d run across the bearded old derelict carrying half a dozen hat boxes from the dock to a shop on the Boulevard de la République.

"Paris hats!" he'd informed Michel, with the confidential wink of one who fancies himself a gay dog about town. "Paris hats!"

And Michel, his head full of rosy visions of the future, had thought, "Poor beggar! I'll never sink to what he's become. Long before that I'll have escaped."

Now that the incredible thing had happened and he was himself a *libéré* among *libérés*, he thought that surely he could never be so physically and mentally wrecked as the exiles with whom he sat, waiting the arrival of the convict ship.

For example, it was impossible, Michel thought, that life should so ravage him that he would become as the man who sat next him. "A young fellow, too," he commented to himself, "still under thirty . . . just about my age, I should think. And look at him! Past all redemption now—"

The man's red-brown head fell forward on his chest, was jerked up, and fell forward again. His bare feet were covered with ulcers, and through his tattered shirt, Michel saw that a withered arm lay helpless against his side.

When he opened his eyes and began to speak it was obvious that the man was ill, for great shudders shook his body.

"It was a day just like this when I came out," he began. "Just like this—

"I had eight years . . . 'desertion in the face of the enemy,' you know. I might have got the guillotine or a bullet for that, if I hadn't been so young. Only seventeen—"

"God, what a breath he has!" Michel moved farther along the log.

"But my brother—my brother wears a string of war decorations. You wouldn't believe that, would you? And he's rich, too . . . married money."

The man's teeth chattered over his words.

"Oh, his wife doesn't know about me. . . . She mustn't, you understand. When her family came to inquire into us, it was my poor mother who told that I'd been lost in the war. Missing, you know.

"And so I mustn't be heard from. Never. That's very important."

There was a pause in which somebody murmured, "Hard luck!"

"Well, it was all my own fault. My brother—he was older than I—said that I was a fool to have volunteered ahead of my class. Didn't know what I was getting into, he said. And he was right. You see, I was only seventeen and just a drummer boy.

"Then when I got this," he pointed to the helpless shrunken arm, "and when they had to cut away my shoulder, I couldn't seem to go back and face it all over again. . . .

"Yes, the day I came . . . something about today reminds me of it all."

"But what about Seznec?"

"Yes, what about Seznec?"

A lean, sallow, walrus-mustached man took up the story.

"He's the celebrity on this convoy, the way Mourey was a year ago. I forget who it was the time before that."

"What's become of Mourey, anyway?"

"He's on Royale. I saw him four days ago."

Turning to look at Michel, who had not spoken before, they saw a frail little man, like an aged child, with a face at once appealingly young and incongruously old under the corn-colored forelock which was always falling into the wide-open, yellow-brown eyes.

"So you saw Mourey? And do they still call him 'Baby'?"

"Yes."

"What's he doing? We thought he was in solitary."

"So he was. But he's out on good conduct now. He's one of the men who work the semaphore on Royale."

"Huh! . . . We haven't seen you before: You've just finished your *peine*, eh?"

"Yes, only this morning."

"But what about the new celebrity—Seznec?"

"Strange case. It was like this, at least this is what they're telling in the village. Seznec and a fellow named Quemeneur started from Brest in a motor, Seznec driving. Quemeneur was a dealer in automobiles, and Seznec had proposed to him to drive to Paris to look at a forty-horse-power Cadillac which an American named Charley had offered to sell Seznec. Quemeneur was supposed to have with him a check or an order for eighty thousand francs, in case he decided to buy.

"Well, somewhere en route this Quemeneur disappeared—vanished.

"Seznec was called as a witness. His story was that having trouble with his car, he'd persuaded Quemeneur to go on by train to Paris, while he tried to return to Brest in the car. This, he said, happened at Ermont. But the garage men at Ermont swore that he'd told Seznec that nothing was wrong with the machine, and that he'd even offered to drive them in it to Paris himself, but that Seznec had refused.

"The next discovery was that there'd been no passenger from Ermont to Paris on that day.

"Then it turned out that for a long time Seznec had been in serious business difficulties. From the prison he'd sent a note to his wife—hidden in the collar of a shirt—asking her to destroy some papers which she would find under a certain spot in the parquet flooring. It was these papers that convinced the police of the desperate state of Seznec's affairs.

"Still, it hadn't been proved that Quemeneur was dead—to say nothing of his having been murdered.

"Some clairvoyant came out and said that he could take the police to a spot in a forest where a vision had shown him Quemeneur's corpse. But nothing was found in the forest.

"Then tar was discovered on Seznec's mud guards—though there was no tar on the roads he said he'd taken, while between Ermont and Paris there was.

"It began to be thought that if Seznec hadn't actually done the deed himself, he'd arranged it with Charley, the American.

"Who was this Charley? Seznec insisted that he didn't know him by any other name. He was just Charley. And Charley had disappeared as completely as Quemeneur.

"Seznec denied everything. Said in all his forty-eight years he'd had a clean record. His wife believed in his innocence. And a woman who knew Quemeneur well said she'd seen him embark at Havre for Canada. And somebody else reported seeing him in Morocco.

"But all the same, Seznec has got hard labor for life in Guiana—"

While they talked a crowd had slowly straggled down to the river. All St. Laurent in its best clothes, making a fête of the arrival of the *Martinière*—of the only convict ship left afloat in the world.

The daughters of Chinese shop-keepers arrived on bicycles, calling to each other in a pretty, precise French. Negro and mulatto girls had put on raspberry-colored stockings with their very short and very vivid red or purple or green dresses. Martiniquaise women in long flowing skirts, tight bodices and sleeves, and piquantly twisted turbans, bore themselves as imperiously as the Josephine statue in their native town of Fort de France—empresses done in calico and mulatto, always scornfully comparing Guiana with their own Martinique.

Trays of cakes and candies, melting in the heat, were peddled up and down the lines of this waiting crowd, and every small face, be it black or yellow, was sticky. Aloof from all this were Bush-negroes, who had draped themselves in gorgeous lengths of striped calico and come by canoe down jungle-shadowed streams to see the great ship bring white men across the water to live locked behind bars. And of course dogs permeated the crowd. In St. Laurent, where so many are hungry, all the world must keep dogs.

"What time did the pilot go down?" people were asking.

"Then the *Martinière* ought to be here any minute."

In St. Laurent, where nothing happens, where there is not even a moving-picture house, the great spectacle of the year was thus at any minute

due.

Now the penitentiary officials were coming; Monsieur le Commandant Maire, Monsieur le Chef du Centre, Monsieur le Chef des Travaux Publiques, and finally Monsieur le Directeur himself. All were in white—white helmets, spotless white uniforms—and those who had war decorations displayed them. Even the insignia of the Legion of Honor waited to receive the convict ship.

The ladies of officials came, too, in the brief skirts and the brief hair of 1927. And there was a phalanx of khakied and armored keepers. These favored ones went out on the pier itself, where they stood about in voluble little groups.

It had been raining earlier in the day, but now the sky was pure deep brilliant blue, tingeing with blue the filmy drifting cumulus clouds. The ladies on the pier put up Parisian parasols, gay and flowered.

Michel left the logs and crossed the road to a point under the almond trees, where he would have a better view of the ship's approach.

"All these years since she brought me," he thought, "and I've never once seen her come in."

The sun sparkled on the river, and a high tide set the water lapping the brink of the bank. Then suddenly, between two green islands in midstream, there she was—a ghost, pale gray, intangible, like a chiffon ship. And from the crowd there went up a single exclamation—like a hushed, awed shout.

The ship seemed not to move, and yet she vanished behind the second island, to reappear in a few moments, and to cross to the French side of the Maroni. She turned and proceeded head on, with now a puff of dark smoke floating back from the funnel. Coming thus, bow on, it was seen how high she stood, for a broad terra-cotta band showed between the water and her gray body. How the ocean waves must have rolled her about!

She advanced silently, close to the green forested bank, until, with a sudden turn to starboard, she made for midstream, presenting now her port and showing that from her stern there floated the tricolor of France. Another shift and she was head on, carefully skirting sand and mud on one side and rocks on the other.

Only once did she speak. Once she uttered two subdued, melancholy whistles. But nothing from the shore made an answering salute to the convict ship.

Now she was near enough for the spectators to realize her deserted decks. Sailors . . . a few ship's officers . . . the black pilot . . . a row of some twenty-five keepers . . . that was all. Yet Michel knew that in her hold the

Martinière was carrying, locked in cages, six hundred and eighty-seven convicts.

A little distance from the pier—perhaps a ship's length away—the anchor went over; and, as if pivoting from the point where it lay in the mud of the river bottom, the ship very slowly revolved until her starboard was edged up to the dock.

Michel's clear far sight distinguished at each port-hole the two pale faces which he knew would be pressed against the glass; desperately eager to see to what manner of land they had been condemned. When Michel saw a hand pass across the glass in an attempt to free it from the condensed moisture, he remembered the infernal heat of the cages. And he knew how those who had no place at the ports would be questioning, "What is it like? Tell us." It was from such fragments of sentences that he had had his own first impression of St. Laurent.

How confident they'd all been of escape! . . . Then!

The *Martinière* possesses the terrible gift of evoking memory.

The gangway went down. Michel crossed back to the pile of logs, past which he knew the line of march must file.

One of the *libérés* was talking about the port-holes, pointing out the circular rings of iron which reduced the port-holes from the legal diameter of twelve inches to that of eight.

From where he sat, Michel could see the men pouring out of the ship and forming on the pier in rows of four. Watching them hurry and stumble down the gangway, he remembered the slippery bottom step. Yes, many still fell on that step.

The lengthening line moved slowly forward, pushed from the rear by the formation of more and more rows of four, until the head of the column had advanced within a few feet of where he sat.

He noticed a queer-looking man, taller than the rest, gray-haired, and with one side of his face scarred as from a bad burn. A keen-faced man. Michel wondered who he might be and why he was there. Then his roving gaze passed on and was arrested by a tall dark boy, with the sad questioning eyes which Michel remembered so well in Louis. The hand grasping the canvas sack was thin and white, with long fingers. Louis had had just such fingers, and Louis had moved with the same listless grace. Altogether the similarity was odd. Perhaps this fellow also was an actor. . . .

And why had Louis let the blood out of his vein? Had Grodet understood? What could have been the motive? Could Madame Vidal explain. . . . Why?

The order to march was given.

What a noise their wooden soles made, clattering over the pier! And how the men blinked and stared!

Michel remembered what they would be noticing. They would be seeing the vultures awkwardly reeling and flapping out of the path of their advance. And they would be curious about the citizens come to see them arrive. But chiefly they would be looking across the Maroni to Albina, to the jungle of Dutch Guiana, through which convicts had been known to escape to freedom.

"The only thing," he thought, "that they won't let themselves see is us—the *libérés* they're going to be, if the bamboos or the sharks don't get them!"

"Which is Seznec, I wonder?" came from one of the men on the logs.

"Whew! What a smell of sweat!"

How their clumsy gray wool garments distorted them into grotesque caricatures of the shapes of men! The canvas sacks were like excrescences growing on their backs. Yet out of his experience, Michel was able to some extent to separate them into types.

He knew that at least a third would have come from the various Houses of Correction. These would be the younger men—under twenty-five; led to the Houses of Correction by some folly of youth, some mistaken early training, or by the gutter urchin's lack of all training. It was of these younger men that prison would sooner or later make brats . . . if that had not already happened.

Here and there in the passing column were maimed men, men without arms or legs, men overwhelmed by fate and driven to crime and to cunning. Their mutilation put them past the possibility of becoming brats, or of keeping brats; past also the hope of successful escape; past indeed all hope.

The powerful, muscular, strangely tattooed men, Michel placed as from the battalions of Africa, sent there for military service because disqualified, by some early offense, for admission into the regular regiments, which require clean judicial records. These men arrive in Guiana generally between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five. Hardened by Africa, they are the sort who stand the best chance of surviving conditions in the Devil's Island Colony. Michel recognized in them the future "strong arms" of the prison, those who almost always keep brats. Pierre had been of this species.

And he easily singled out the more refined and intellectual. They might be of any age. Among them would be many of the first offenders, men who had fallen before some sudden and overpowering temptation. They might be guilty of forgery, of embezzlement, or of murder, blindly committed. They had the look he remembered in Janisson, the look of men doomed now to think forever of but one thing.

How different their tense faces were from the stunned expression of the peasant boys—boys of the type of Félix!

"Every race and every crime!" Michel reflected, as four by four they marched by—Arabs, blacks from the African colonies, Orientals from French Indo-China, Europeans—following the stout khaki-uniformed official who strode at the head of the column.

All obeyed the contradictory shouts of keepers:

"Not so fast!"

"Faster than that!"

All moved dumbly forward along the water-front; staring about them at St. Laurent, and beyond to the jungle back of Albina; marching over roads made by convict hands, between houses erected by the condemned—their destination, prisons constructed by the convicted who had preceded them.

And watching, Michel realized in its full horror to what they marched. Sentenced to so many or so many years of *peine*, to forced labor throughout their prison terms, and then to exile—to five, six, seven years, or to exile *en perpétuité*. Banished from France . . . banished from all the world outside this Penal Colony and its deadly tropical climate. And though no judge ever utters the words, Michel knew these men to be sentenced to starvation of mind, of spirit, and of body. Ambition, love, diversion . . . all that had been left behind. To each man remained now only his body, and with all else lost, Michel understood how the necessities of the body are magnified, intensified, until its thirsts and its hungers become insupportable. He knew so well the restless physical yearning which was to devour the marching men, the nights of troubled turning on plank beds. Unless death or escape freed them. Death . . . most probably it would be death. And who would there be to care or to remember? That tramp of sweating feet in heavy-wooden-soled shoes was a funeral march. How many feet there seemed . . . many more, he thought, than twice six hundred and eighty-seven! A funeral march! Yet every man looked hopefully beyond Albina to the jungle.

The line turned up the Rue Maxime du Camp. The crowd followed, and Michel with them.

Ah, what melancholy magic this spectacle had to awaken memory!

There were the prison walls. There the great gate under the words, "*Camp de la Transportation*." Coming upon it, Michel, *Libéré Number* 15 ——, felt the blood suddenly leave his heart and his feet drag in the dust, just as on that day seven years before when, as an arriving convict, he had first seen the gate in the prison wall.

He watched it open now to admit the six hundred and eighty-seven. He watched them pass through to the life whose aim was "the expiation of crime, the reformation of the individual, and the protection of society."

CHAPTER XVIII

"How strange that we have lived to see the day of our liberation!"

Two men sat together on a bench under a row of almond trees on the river bank just beyond the pier where the *Martinière* lay quiet, emptied now of her convict cargo and temporarily abandoned by officers and sailors, gone in search of what amusement might be found in St. Laurent.

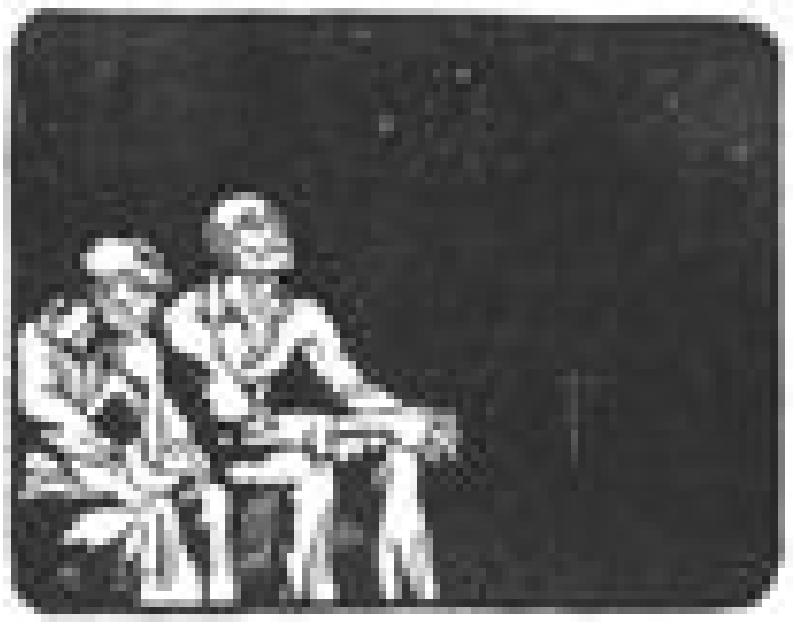
It was a star-bright night. The tide was again rising in the river and its waters lapping softly at the foot of the bank where the two men sat talking, recalling their own voyage out in the hold of a convict ship, and Paul Arthur telling Michel how he'd first noticed him sitting in one of the niches under the port-holes, and looking, he added, like a young monk—an elfish monk, perhaps.

"Did you think then," Michel asked, "that this would ever happen to us?"

"No, this was the one impossible thing. I was convinced that I was destined to be one of those who die under Guiana imprisonment."

"And I . . . I was just as certain of escape!"

"Yet I still live—why should I remain when so many have died? Why? . . . I wonder."



“Oh, it had all been written, I suppose! Just as it was written that I was not to escape.”

A pause. The voice of frogs and the contented gentle murmur of the tide about the piles of the dock. The slightly stiff leaves of the almond trees rustling.

“I watched the men marched from the ship today,” Paul said, rather as thinking aloud than as speaking.

“Of course. So did I.”

“It was like looking on at a funeral march.”

“Yes, it was like that. Did you notice the tall fellow with the scarred face? That was Seznec. They say he doesn’t expect to be here long. Believes his wife is going to prove his innocence.”

But Paul was not interested in Seznec’s story.

“What do you think I was doing,” he asked, “when you came and sat down here? . . . I was trying to remember the stars. Do you know that this is the first night for seven years that I’ve been able to look up at the stars? In all that time I’ve seen only so much of the sky as was framed by the prison window, stars through a little rectangle of bars. And for seven times twelve months the moonlight has come to me strained through those bars.

“Now—” He drew a deep breath and threw out a widely gesturing arm. “Now, how big and dazzling the night is!

“The immensity of it!

“You see, I never tried to escape. These years have been all prison for me.”

“I know. But why didn’t you?”

“Try to escape? It was too mad a chance. And I was afraid. No, not of death, but afraid of my nerves—that they wouldn’t stand up under the solitary punishment.

“And besides, I had an odd fancy to see my sentence through to the end.”

“But the rest of us lived on the hope of escape. How could you get on without that?”

“I don’t know that I did get on. I existed. That was about all. And I managed existence only by living always in the present moment. I wouldn’t look back. And I didn’t dare look forward. I never let myself see ahead to the thing that has come—to our liberation, I mean. And now that it’s here, now that liberation is the present moment, I can’t face it. What I am to eat? Where I am to sleep? What is to happen in the seven years of my exile? And after that? No, I can’t face it. I’d go mad. And so I was sitting here enjoying the stars and the blessed fact of being on the free side of the bars.

"When you came, I'd just located the Dipper. There she is." Paul pointed across the river. "There, upside-down and low over the trees. Between her and Albina, down near the horizon, you see the Pole Star. And following along from the Dipper's handle you'll see Arcturus, and farther still, Vega—in the sign of the Harp, you know.

"Long ago I made a voyage to Buenos Ayres, and I got a little acquainted with these southern heavens.

"And now it gives me a curious peace to look up at them again. For just a moment the bigness of it all makes our agony seem small. Oh, I know the peace won't last! But I must hold on to it while it does.

"Think what an atom of the universe even our whole solar system is . . . and how we're dashing madly along through space at the rate of seven hundred miles or so a minute toward Vega, they say, over there in the Harp. That's where we're going, whether we like it or not. So what difference if our butterfly wings have beaten against bars!"

"But, Paul, this is all the life we have! And to us it's no butterfly existence!"

Three men in white uniforms, with shoes crunching on the gravel, left the road and came toward them. Prison officials, or perhaps officers from the *Martinière*.

Paul and Michel stopped talking. The white uniforms halted.

First uniform: "That's Albina . . . those lights at the river's edge."

Second uniform: "Albina?"

Evidently he was a stranger; he would be from the *Martinière*.

First uniform: "Just a Dutch village . . . some Bush-negroes, a couple of Dutch officials, and a handful of soldiers. And back of it, God knows how many miles of this pestilential jungle!"

"What are the lights on the water?"

"Where?"

"Those little floating lights, bobbing about on the surface."

"Oh, they're kerosene flares. The fishermen use them to mark where they've let down their nets. It's a good night for fishing—no moon. The water's dark on a night like this. The nets are dark, too, and the fish go full speed ahead. Nothing to warn them. Then all at once they've run their noses into the net. And it's too late."

Third uniform: "*Eh bien!* Now you've seen what we have to show. A prison. A negro village. A tropical river. Nothing more exciting than a dozen fishermen's lights! No distraction . . . positively none. I tell you, if I'd not had a wife dependent on me, the same ship that brought me here would have taken me away. It would not have mattered where—north or south, east or

west. I wouldn't have remained twenty-four hours in this evil land—to live among wicked men. No, the ship that brought me would have taken me away!"

First uniform: "Yes, I have often asked myself whether it is we who imprison the convicts, or the other way 'round?"

The three white figures moved away down toward the dock where the *Martinière* lay in the starlight.

"What an irony it is!" Paul exclaimed, when they had passed out of hearing. "That there should be a question of which is more to be pitied, the mouse who is caught or the cat which is doomed to catch the mouse!"

"Most men choose the rôle of cat, however," Michel commented.

The silence that followed that incontestable statement, Paul broke by asking:

"In these seven years I wonder if you've thought much?"

"In reclusion you can't do anything but think."

"And what do you think—shut up like that for weeks, for weeks and months?"

"Oh, you think how safe you are from having an automobile accident!" Michel spoke with a flash of that buoyant spirit which he'd once so gayly opposed to the organized body of civilization.

"Just compare a cell with the Place de l'Opéra, or Trafalgar Square!" And he smiled, a wistful, oddly toothless smile; a smile strangely old and strangely young.

"No, but seriously, what in God's name did you think—locked in alone for all that time?"

"I thought about the future—pretended a future, you know. I lived on that until I began to get sick and couldn't believe in it any more. Then my mind went back to the time before I knew anything about prison.

"But don't let's talk about that. Tell me about yourself."

"Myself? . . . I've gone to and fro between the dormitory and my work. Thinking . . . ah, how a convict is endlessly thinking! But I've tried to think impersonally: not of Paul Arthur in prison, you understand, but of prison itself."

"I see. Well, how did prison strike you?—thinking of it that way."

"It seems to me man's supreme folly."

"Folly! I'd call it crime. What they condemn us to is a greater sin than any we've committed. How do you make it out a folly?"

"Because it fails in the two important things it sets out to do. It punishes. Nothing more. And even the punishment defeats its own end. When it comes to reformation and to protecting Society, it accomplishes precisely the

opposite of its intention. Don't you remember how Eugène Bassières used to say that the worst of it all was that we were condemned to be criminals?"

"That's true. We're put in a fine school for what they call crime. I've had that much from it anyhow."

"And then what? If we were out of adjustment with the existing order when we came, we're as a rule a thousand times more so by the time we're freed."

"Yes, we've become desperate by then. Look at me. I wasn't much more than a boy when I came. Look what I've suffered, what I've learned, what I've seen since then! After seven years, as I've passed them, what do I fear? Death? I don't even consider it, so indifferent does it leave me. I'm only twenty-seven now. But of what value is life to me—to any convict? What attraction has it for me, since I no longer believe in anything? All is a lie. All! . . .

"Love? I no longer think of it. Friendship? Bah, disinterested friendship is a farce! Take away from a man everything, and this is the result.

"What would have become of me here if I hadn't always felt my conscience clean? I'd always obeyed it. My one comfort has been that I'd nothing to reproach myself with.

"Oh, yes, I know I'm a burglar! That's understood. But is it so great a sin? The world would say, 'How black is his soul!' Yet isn't it rather that I'm too advanced in my ideas? Isn't the banker who speculates with the savings of the poor, in his fashion a greater criminal? I have robbed only the rich. I'd scorn to cheat—even at cards. I've won the confidence of men here. They'd all say that. Often I've been told that in any affair I would be chosen as a partner.

"Sometimes I've been afraid that perhaps I owed my moral force to the fact that I'm physically weak. And that thought disturbs me. If I'd been strong would I have become an assassin? The idea frightens me. For how could I have borne prison without my clear conscience! Still, that's not quite true, is it? I suppose even if I'd had any sense of guilt, it wouldn't have lasted long here, for you know as well as I do that if you suffered from remorse, prison would at least free you from that. Doesn't everybody here feel that he's paid . . . paid a thousand times!

"And I talk about my seven years—about the years of my youth, but what of the men with long *peines*—twenty years, forty years? Think of Janisson. Or perhaps Janisson is dead? I've not heard."

"No, Janisson goes on. He has fourteen years more. I saw him not long ago. You'd hardly know him. I saw them bringing him in on a hand car from one of the jungle prisons; from Charvein, I think it was. He was shaking like a leaf—cold as ice. They were taking him to the hospital.

"Yes, that's how Janisson goes on."

"And when he's finished—if he lives to finish—what then? He'll be perhaps fifty. But he'll be broken. He'll look seventy . . . maybe more than that! And he'll be exiled here for the rest of his life. Even escape would be no good to him by that time. He wouldn't be fit to go back to the world. And escape! Is escape much easier for us now that we're *libérés* than it was when we were behind bars? Don't forget there's still the jungle and the sea. When the years have crushed you, you lose the spirit you once had. Then it's always tomorrow that you're going to fight sea and jungle. And after a while the day comes when, if men talk of escape, you tap your forehead and shake your head. You've come to think escape is madness. That was why Verne went while he still had courage, though it was only six months before he was due to be freed. Verne was the sort who studies men. And he was afraid to wait. . . . Poor Verne!"

"The sharks?" Paul asked.

"Yes. On the night I left the Island—just four days ago."

A brilliant shooting star, trailing a plume of light, darted across the sky and passed beyond their vision.

"You know," Paul said, "it all seems to me as mathematical as that cosmos up there. . . .

"We, for example, are criminals. We're the sores under the fine garment of civilization. But what caused us? Whatever it may be, it's just as scientific as the cause of any physical ulcer. Something is responsible for us. Scientifically responsible, I mean—"

"That seems reasonable."

"Then the whole point is to discover the cause. That makes it seem just about as senseless to punish crime as to punish the lepers over there on the Island. The only way to go at any problem is the way the scientists went at yellow fever. Quarantine, yes; but not as a punishment. Quarantine and investigation. Science, and not man-made justice. Nothing else is common sense.

"An increase in our numbers means a sick Society. Yet what we've each done was the one act possible to us under the given circumstances. Every man is made in the factory of his history as an individual; made by heredity and by past environments. You admit that, don't you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Very well. Then that manufactured man is placed in a certain combination of conditions. When the force of any individual man meets the force of any given conditions, then something happens. And it's the only thing which can happen. It must, in fact, happen. It's just as inexorable as

chemistry. And when that something conflicts with the laws of the game . . . then it's crime.

"All this is what I've been thinking as I ticked back and forth through my prison years.

"I've come to see the modern world as a toy shop where we're turned loose, all wanting in varying degree the things we see about us. And all the time civilization is inventing new and fascinating toys for the shop. But there are signs everywhere saying that only those with money may possess. And civilization puts up even the price of love. . . . In fact you might say that women are the most costly toys in the shop!

"You see, for them, too, desire is constantly increasing, because human ingenuity is devoted to multiplying our wants and to exhibiting them in every conceivable alluring manner. Did you ever think what the shop windows mean to a shabby girl who loves beauty?

"And we make it all worse by our glorification of people who possess the toys. That creates the most insidious of all desires . . . the wish to be thought well of, to be admired.

"So temptation is all the time stronger, while, at best, resistance is stationary. It's as if we were propagating the germs of crime and never doing anything to eradicate the cause or to build up resistance. Yet what could be more important? Because they're germs from which nobody's secure. They're likely to attack any man any time, no matter how safe he may feel.

"And yet Society puts its whole trust in the fear of prison; as if impulsive crime reasoned, or deliberate crime didn't always think itself protected against arrest—"

But Michel sat staring straight ahead at the fisherman's lights glimmering on the surface of the river, and Paul, seeing that he no longer listened, broke off.

"I'm sure you're right," Michel stammered apologetically, coming to himself with a start. "You must be right, for you've thought so much about it. But somehow I can't seem to care. You see, while you were talking, it suddenly came over me that I was standing at the door of the future, and that perhaps there might be something different written in my future. Could anything, you think, change life for me? A woman, perhaps? Oh, not physical love! I don't want that any more. I'm too tired. At least that's how I think about it now, though it may be only a mood which will pass. However that may be, I feel that what I want is some one who needs me, who's dependent on me, and who loves me. Who loves me—

"It might happen, you know. Life is so bizarre."

He paused. But looking at the little figure beside him—destitute, with a body wasted by prison, a future blighted by the irrevocable criminal stigma

—Paul could not fill the pause. There was a tightening in his throat which choked back words.

"Can't you picture me," Michel resumed, "at thirty-five or forty perhaps, with an irreproachable past? Oh, you may see me wearing a high silk hat! . . . I may become some one at last!

"Or is it the guillotine which is hiding in the future? That's more likely. For me to dream of life is what you call folly. And love—love, I must remember, is a lie. . . .

"Roussenq, you know, has written a poem. Written it in his cell in reclusion. He calls it 'Hell.' Men on the Islands often quote from it, and I remember a line which says, 'Here one may not hope ever to be different.' "

What could Paul reply? Himself on the threshold of the same hopeless future, he could only stretch out his hand.

The sailors were returning to the *Martinière*. Half a dozen women of the village had come with them as far as the dock. They had been drinking, and among the loud voices one was certainly that of Joujou's mistress. Michel recognized it at once. Perhaps in the morning she might have an errand for him. He would see her tomorrow, for tomorrow he must find food.

"We ought to go now," he said. "We have to look for a place to sleep."

Along the dark avenue of cocoanuts, back of the church, they proceeded on silent naked feet toward the squalid streets of the exiles, where disease and hunger walk abroad, syphilis and tuberculosis, anaemia and fever.

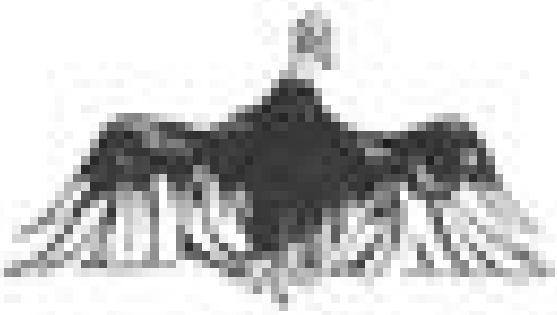
"There!" Paul exclaimed. "There's Orion—low in the west. When we turn the corner beyond the church, we ought to see the Southern Cross. It should be just rising."

But Michel cried in a smothered sob, "Oh, Paul, I don't give a damn about your stars! I can think of nothing but the future. And the future is terrible!"

"The future must be—I know that. Tomorrow and all the tomorrows, we must see ourselves day by day decompose—like men rotting while they still live. But let me tonight feel only freedom! I'd forgotten how beautiful night was, and how vast the sky!"

They passed around the slumbering church, and there, quivering low above the dark mass of horizon jungle, were the four glittering stars of the Southern Cross.

"It is frightful," Michel moaned, "to go on—believing in nothing. . . ."



Transcriber’s Notes

The spelling of the following name, words and phrases have been made consistent: Eugène Bassières, getaway, half a dozen, half-light, inclosing, mail boat, medicine-man, music halls, newcomer, river-front, roll-call, rubber men, tablecloth, tattooed, ‘the Frenchman’s tomb’, third class, tree-top, upside-down, upturned, water-front, will-power.

The illustrations by Beth Krebs Morris are not shown at full resolution because they are not in the public domain.

[The end of *Condemned to Devil's Island* by Mary Blair Rice (as Blair Niles)]