

Fear and Burnout: Five Stories

A man goes far to find out what he is...
- Roethke

SOME CONS are terrifying simply because they are there; they don't have to do anything. Others are terrifying because of the people who want either to help or to hurt them. The most terrifying case of burnout-inducing stress I endured took place when I was not even on prison grounds. I was in a hospital, guarding a wounded prisoner who had a contract out on his life. I had no weapon, no partner, and no police coverage. The man was moved daily, and no one knew his room number; each guard had to find him when he came on duty. For three weeks, we both hit the floor whenever the door opened.

WILKINSON

Wesley Wilkinson was doing two years less a day in Westgate B for aggravated assault. He was black, skinny, and about as unathletic as you could get, but short of being effeminate. None of the stereotypes held by whites applied. He didn't have rhythm, and he didn't have "soul." Said he was a washout with girls because they found him dull. He wasn't into any cause or movement. He was an American, but without a hint of down-home Black English enunciation. He came

from a family of educated people, most of whom were educators. Black was no more beautiful than any other colour of biped. To Wesley, human beings were pretty much human beings. What he did have was an M.A. in math and he was a teacher in the Seattle school system. A career interrupted and quite possibly ruined by his conviction in Canada. I was his case manager.

Wesley had met a single white female teacher at a math conference in the States, and she had indicated an interest in him. So he drove up to Vancouver one Friday night, screwing up the courage to call her once he got to town. After he checked into a good hotel, he found her number. He went to dinner alone, and when he returned to his hotel, he finally phoned her. They arranged that he call her back the next day around noon and perhaps then they would make plans for Saturday night. Wesley read for the rest of the evening, then went to sleep.

However, Friday night, in front of a nightclub dive in North Vancouver, an assault occurred and the black perpetrator drove away in a car of a certain colour.

Wesley awoke much too early to call the lady, so he had breakfast and went for a drive around Stanley Park and the West End.

He was pulled over in Stanley Park by the Vancouver police because he was the right colour and the car was more or less the right colour; he wound up in the city tank. On Monday, he was remanded in custody at Oakalla's West Wing. At that point, the hospital wasn't sure whether the victim of the Friday-night assault was going to pull through. Not wishing to involve his family or the lady he scarcely knew, Wesley looked in the phone book for a criminal lawyer.

The criminal lawyer wanted a huge amount of cash up-front to represent him. Wilkinson called his family. They raised the money. His bail was set so high that he hadn't a prayer of raising it. He would have to remain in jail through preliminary hearing and trial. The high-priced lawyer showed at the bail hearing, but Wesley never saw him again. Wesley kept calling but could never reach the lawyer and the lawyer never called him back. (The trick here is to annoy the client so much that the client will fire the lawyer, who is home-free with the retainer without having had to do anything.) So Wesley went to trial

with a lawyer who was ill-tempered because he had been stuck at the last moment with a legal-aid case.

To Wesley, the evidence against him seemed ridiculous. The legal-aid lawyer recommended that he stick with provincial court and a judge without jury. (It is the accused's prerogative to elect the court up to county- or supreme-court level, where it is harder for the Crown to prove its case, but where the penalties are stiffer if the Crown succeeds.) Wilkinson was convicted, not on the basis that he committed the crime and was seen doing it, but that he had no one to provide an alibi for him at the time of the crime. The legal-aid wizard advised against appealing either conviction or sentence; Wesley could keep his nose clean and be paroled in eight months.

I've seen some bad judicial calls in my day, and this was one of the worst. But Wesley wasn't the sort of person to raise hell or scream foul. He didn't like troubling people. He hadn't so much as a single parking ticket on his record. He didn't drink, smoke, or do drugs. Probably the first time he ever saw pot was in Oakalla.

At Westgate, he got along well enough with the cons. He was on a decent tier and he was cordial to everyone and did as bidden. After he had been around long enough for the tier to decide he wasn't a fink, he and I conversed through long evening shifts about every subject imaginable. (At Westgate, guards are locked on the tier with the cons.) We were dismissed as a couple of eggheads talking about academic bullshit. The cons knew Wesley was green as grass and without jail-wisdom, but he was solid enough not to rat out anything to a guard. I always made it a point to sit with him within earshot of the guys playing cards to minimize their suspicion.

I thought I knew Wesley Wilkinson pretty well. Every now and then in mid-conversation about the States or teaching, a kind of distance would come over him, but I dismissed it as homesickness. Homesickness is not unusual. He quickly worked his way up through the gangs. With good behaviour, prisoners move up to levels of less and less supervision. He was sentenced around the first of the year and by the time of early summer, he was allowed out alone to mow grass. He reported back to the unit only at shift-change. Wesley was pulling his time like a champion.

During yard, which on the weekends began before shift-change and ended at dinner time, the cons could play baseball, run the track, or simply sit on the bleachers and enjoy the sun. Wesley usually took a book and sat on the bleachers and read, looking up now and then to check out the ball game.

One day, I came on shift and went out to relieve Tower Five. I took the shotgun and radio and sat down in the tower. When I looked over the yard, I could hardly believe my eyes. There was gangly Wesley humping around the track. Skinny as he was, he couldn't even make a single lap without pausing to rest and puff and blow. But he persisted. He kept it up day after day, and soon everybody got used to Wesley out there on the track alone running lap after lap, faster and faster.

On the tier we talked about his running. He said the usual things: he felt better, it was the first time in his life he had actually been fit, it was interesting to discover what your body can do.

I was on patrol up near the gym looking down on the yard one day while Wesley was running. It was a warm afternoon. I turned for a minute to give a light to a handcuffed con who was being escorted to segregation. I was just about to light a smoke of my own when I heard a brouhaha behind me, then a warning shot.

Wesley had left the track and was running up the asphalt drive toward the fence around the gym. This made no sense whatsoever. No one was chasing him. He was going in exactly the wrong direction for an escape-south, up the hill, toward the fence which surrounds the gym. I started running to cut him off. If he intended to come left, he'd run right into my shotgun, or the one east of me, or the West Wing patrol, or the patrol truck, or all the guns at the gate.

The parts of the scene simply didn't fit together. No one in his right mind would attempt to escape wearing a tank-top and shorts. The fences were heavy hurricane mesh topped by barbed wire slanted inward, topped by concertina wire, which never rusts, retains its razor sharpness seemingly forever, and catches the light like bits of mirror.

There were certain traditions and rules about escapes from Westgate B, the source of most of the many escapes at Oakie. First, you didn't go alone; you escaped in pairs because most of the time the local RCMP detachment only had one mutt on duty. The dog, unable

to track both cons at once, would be forced to pause and make a decision. Second, you would get everyone at yard to agree in advance to charge over to the easternmost fence and sit down for forty-five minutes to an hour, so no one could tell which of the 150 to 200 bodies had escaped. That delayed the Mounties, as they couldn't give an article of clothing to the dog to put it on the correct scent. Third, you smuggled out to the yard two chequered mackinaws and two pairs of gloves per escapee, and wore as much clothing as you could under the two coats as armour against the razor wire. And finally, you made sure the guard in Tower Five was not paying attention to anything but the inside of his eyelids; then you ducked around the work-shops to the fence bordering Royal Oak because the fence was lowest there. An athletic type could be over that fence in no time. The Tower Five screw would radio for help and might fire a warning shot, but he wouldn't aim at the escapees because of the likelihood of blowing a few cars off the street just the other side of the fence. It was then a race to make it across the fence and between the houses before the prowler car roared down the hill or the horsemen cut you off on their way up the hill.

When I saw Wesley I yelled, "Stop!" and fired a warning shot into the air. I pulled down my aim on him with the vague thought that a shotgun pointed at him might change his mind. I don't think he saw it or me. He hit the hurricane fence and started climbing. Then I was right under him screaming at him to come down. He reached up with his bare hands and grabbed the barbed wire and kept climbing. He hit the razor wire and gave a final thrust to get himself over. Either the pain hit him or he ran out of gas. For a few seconds he held onto the hurricane wire on the far side of the fence to minimize the pain, then he let go. He was hanging with his full body-weight from the razor wire. Johnston, the other shotgun guard, was beside me by now and the patrol truck was roaring down the lane.

When Wesley let go, the razor wire really did its work on his chest, under his arms, his wrists. It literally flayed him. His black, black skin fluttered in tatters from the deep pink gouges as though someone had gone at his upper limbs with a chisel. It seemed as though every major artery and vessel in his arms had been severed. Blood rained all over

the ground and on me as I tried to climb the wire and grab him and lift to lessen the weight. The width of my feet and the damned leather soles of my joint shoes prevented my making any climbing headway. Johnston was also trying to scramble up, but it was useless. We could reach his feet and push up but we couldn't unhook him. I'm not sure Wesley was fully conscious at this point.

I slid down the fence and started to take another run at it, when Johnston got the driver of the patrol truck to pull up under Wesley. We jumped up on the hood. We were joined by a guard who was a fraction of an inch under seven feet tall, and we got Wesley unsnarled, into the prowl, and down the road to the hospital. Wesley was unconscious.

The unit had sent out a couple of guys to cover our positions. As we backed down the road I saw the cons and guards in freeze-frame. No one had made a move for the usual sit-down against the east fence. Wesley hadn't put out the word that he was going to try.

It was a weekend and there was no doctor on at the Oakie hospital. Staff minimized the bleeding and fired Wesley off by ambulance to Vancouver General Hospital, where they transfused and sewed and patched for a week.

I pulled one morning shift at the hospital as his security. He greeted me with a smile, "Mr. Yates, thanks for helping get me down. I don't know anything about what you and everybody want to ask me. I have no idea why I . . . "

His eyes underscored the truth of what he had said.

Shit happens.

Shit happens especially when a man can't pull time and isn't even consciously aware that he can't.

After the stitches were finally out and the bandages gone, the scarring on his arms was beyond description.

PETOWSKI

When guards burned out, they sometimes did so in spectacular fashion, but none so spectacularly as line screw Peter Patrick Petowski. He was proof of the adage that bad things come in threes.

Pat was huge - over six-feet-six. He had kinky hair which was always too long even for the sloppy dress code at Oakie. His front teeth had been knocked out in a prison scuffle a few years before, so he wore a bridge of which he was extremely careful. Whenever heading into action, Pat first removed the bridge, which gave him a menacing Dracula mien. He had an enormous flock of kids at home to which he was devoted, but he confessed it was nice to come to work and get away from the throng. For years he got great evaluations, but then things began to go sour for him.

First, there was a nickel-and-dime escape artist who uncuffed himself on the steps of the Main Gaol and took off toward Deer Lake. The West Wing patrol man nailed him with a .38 wad-cutter slug through the leg without touching bone or artery. Pat got the duty of escorting the young punk to Vancouver General Hospital emergency. He feigned being in such pain that he sucked Pat in. While everyone's back was turned, the kid rolled off the bed and around a corner, found himself a doctor's smock and was out the door.

This was during one of the budget cutback periods. There should have been two guards on duty. The beds in emergency have nothing to cuff the con to. If you turn your back for a moment, goodbye.

Pat pulled a three-day suspension.

Next time up was big-money and big-media time. The Coordinated Law Enforcement Unit had spent five years and a great many tax dollars collecting evidence on the Gallo gang. The unit's crowning achievement was catching Gallo himself. Gallo was godpapa of the most powerful Mafia family on the coast.

For reasons I'll explain in a chapter to come, this extravaganza probably cost the taxpayer somewhere between 50 and 150 million dollars. This for perspective.

It is fairly difficult to spring an inmate from a maximum-security institution, but it is much easier from a hospital, or while in transit to or from hospital. At Oakie, the easy way to get to hospital was to inflict yourself with some medical condition which the primitive jail couldn't handle, or to describe symptoms that required expensive toys to run tests. For example, if you were really talented at faking a seizure, chances were you'd be sent downtown for an EEG. Gallo

wasn't that talented. So he had to resort to one of the traditional methods of getting medical attention while in prison: a subcutaneous injection of sputum. In a couple of days it looks like early gangrene. Gallo was sent down to Vancouver General.

The higher-profile the inmate, the more comprehensive the medical care and - theoretically - security. However, still in budget cutback gear, Oakie was sending out one measly screw per shift to guard a man it had taken years and millions to put in jail. And guess which lone unarmed screw was assigned to Gallo on the first shift? Petowski the Luckless.

It was a very slick operation. While in hospital our inmates were put in private rooms, because it freaked civilians to share a room with someone handcuffed and leg-ironed to the bed. Gallo was no exception. It was later discovered that he had six *soldati* in the stairwell nearest to his room, and members of his biological family dressed in nurse and orderly uniforms running around on the ward.

A couple of ersatz orderlies wheeled a mobile X-ray unit down the hall until it blocked Gallo's door. They had a white uniform his size ready for him. Doubtless they had a cuff-key. (Smith and Wesson and Peerless cuffs and leg-irons all use the same key for lock and doublelock.) Devices like handcuffs are called "restraints" and that's about the size of it. They slow folks down, but they don't stop them from doing what they truly wish to do. Those who don't have their own cuff-keys can fangle one from a ballpoint-pen filler in a matter of minutes.

Gallo joined his friends in white and pushed the mobile unit down the hall to the stairwell where the heavy fire-power was waiting. Goodbye, Gallo.

And he was gone for a couple of years - until Mafia Multinational informed him that Interpol had cranked up the heat and his absence was fucking up operations. Likely after deals were struck, Gallo took the moral high road and gave himself up. He's probably out of federal by now.

Pat's story was that he baby-sat Gallo until his bladder was about to burst. Private rooms have private johns. He went for a leak and when he came out, gee whiz, Gallo was plumb gone. And that's the

way it was. He stuck by the story and he was fired. Then the line screws threatened to lock down the cons and go out on a wildcat. By the time the dust settled and the media circus was over, the union and the politicians agreed on a three-month suspension and Pat was back. He stuck to his story, even to staff. This was a frightened man. He knew nothing. Saw nothing. Solid as an old-time con.

A more likely scenario is that a quiet-spoken gent of Mediterranean extraction waved a sawed-off shotgun under his nose and told Pat that whether he knew it or not he desperately needed to take a leak and that it would take him a specific number of minutes to do so. After that, he could follow *Manual of Operations* escape procedure.

For Petowski, things were going downhill. The three-month suspension hurt him financially and, to make things worse, his wife was pregnant again. By the time he and I were assigned to be present at the hospital as security while serial child-killer Clifford Olson was administered sodium pentathol by a UBC psychiatrist, Pat was getting a little spinny, and his appearance and demeanour spoke volumes about his state of mind. Half the time, he forgot to put in his bridge, and everyone was calling him Dracula. He stank and his pointy little goatee was ratty as hell. It looked as though he hadn't changed his uniform in weeks.

Olson was being given pentathol as a last-ditch effort for grounds to raise the common-law "insanity at the time of the crime" defence. After the injection, Olson was asked to focus on one of the more bizarre of his murders. In astounding, lucid detail he recalled every step of his actions, state of mind, time of day, right down to the length of the spike he drove through the skull of his victim. We and a veritable battalion of guards escorted Olson back to Main Gaol, the defence's experiment having failed. Olson had recalled far, far too much for an insanity defence to stick.

It was dinner time. They had saved a couple of meals for us in South Wing. Pat was a big man and he loved to eat. This night he sat there in the staff room and ate nothing. Stared and smoked and stared. I wasn't really in the mood to take on a heavy Oakie meal myself, but I poked at my tray and tried to get a few words out of the usually very voluble Pat. I tried wing gossip. I tried a couple of

raunchy jokes. I even half-heartedly tried a little black humour about what we had just heard at the hospital.

At this, Pat turned to me: "You know, Yates, I'm religious and not religious. I only go to church when the wife blackmails me and reminds me I need to be an example for the kids. I don't take communion or go to confession or any of that bullshit. Tonight, I feel like going to confession. I don't know what to confess, but I feel as though I ought to unload something. All my life I have listened with one ear to all the cock about good and evil. Good is obvious enough. But I could never really get the hang of evil. Satan was never really anything to me. I think that tonight I have really been in the same room with evil. Olson isn't crazy. For the first time in my life, I have experienced evil. Real evil. Church evil. I need to get to confession."

I tossed my tray on the cart and headed back to West Wing. I heard

later that Pat had asked to be relieved because he wasn't feeling well.

You don't tell your P.O. you need to go to church and talk to a priest.

A few days later during a lazy afternoon shift I heard sirens blasting up from the bottom of the ridge and assumed there was an escape from B-side. But I didn't hear any rushing about to get staff from the wings down for back-up and sounds of rookie warning shots in the air. Something else was amiss.

Pat was in one of South Wing's shotgun towers. Without saying anything on radio to the other towers, much less to Central Control, he stood in the tower aiming the 12-gauge at the bunched-up cons in the yard without saying a word. They froze and pointed toward his tower. Then he raised the barrel and aimed first at one then at the other of the other two towers. The other two shotgun guards instantly tried to radio him.

Pat had clicked off his radio. He was unreachable by the towers and by Control which, by this time, had been alerted that something was going down. The barrel of Pat's shotgun moved back toward the gathered cons as though he was going to gun down the bunch. The moment he moved the gun, the other two guards flattened themselves in their towers and called Control to ask for orders.

Mike Adler, the most respected officer in admin, raced to South Wing and came out at the count position. Pat was still moving the

barrel from the yard to the towers. Mike shouted and asked whether Pat had a situation. Pat, lost in his funk, didn't answer. For half an hour, Mike talked and Pat moved his aim from cons to screws. Pat even swung the barrel dead on Mike, who continued to talk as though a man in a tower wasn't giving every indication that he was about to pull the trigger.

As inexplicably as it began, it ended. Pat propped the shotgun in a corner of the tower and climbed down. He later said he had been overcome with an impulse to wipe out the yard and the towers. It didn't make any sense even to him, but he couldn't help himself.

The local wing director is allowed to send any staff member to occupational health, not to return to work until cleared by psychiatric staff. There was no clearance for Pat. He went off on long-term disability and that was the end of it.

I heard later that he had been placed as a weigh-master on a highway somewhere up-country in B.C. Later, his family situation blew to hell.

KAZIZ

Ben Kaziz was wanted in Egypt for a capital offence. He maintained that he was a political refugee and had committed no crime in Egypt, and if extradited he would be put to death. In order to avoid this and to stay in Canada - even in jail - he attempted to put someone else to death. The incident has become a classroom staple in teaching guards the risks inherent in lowering your defences even for a moment.

Whatever the truth about the extradition for which he was being held, the man could not do his time in population. He looked more East Indian than Semitic, and was so thin and spidery that he annoyed the population cons just to look at him. Every time we tried him in population - including the hospital - he got thumped around. Someone finally suggested the option of signing himself into protective custody. He wound up in the South Wing Observation unit. South Wing was the place where only those who can't handle population were put. South Obs was where you put those who can't even handle time with the other misfits. Obs was also the place where the

high-profile media types like Olson resided - those whom everyone wants to kill and those who want to kill everybody. A door locked from the other side separated the unit from the rest of the wing.

The Obs unit had only twelve cells. Six and six back to back, with big department-store mirrors so the desk screw could see every movement in every cell. Observation meant observation - a guard staring at you twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Chiefly, his focus would be on the devout wackos who were awaiting forensic psychiatric profile and those committed to suicide. The worst of all was the high-profile inmate who just might in a moment of despair do himself. Oakalla had weathered numberless media hurricanes.

Kaziz was pleasant enough one to one. Before long he had the South Wing Obs cleaner job. In any prison, cleaners are trustees who carry out day-to-day tasks without close supervision and have the run of the landings. They earn the position through good behaviour and popularity. In South Obs, the cleaner was let out to mop the range. If addressed by other cons, he was not to answer.

It was a shitty winter's day and the heat was on too high. A younger guard was sitting at the observation position, his eyes fixed on the mirrors and the cells he could see straight-on. He had taken his tie off and unbuttoned a couple of buttons of his shirt. Most of the cons had their shirts off.

Kaziz was mopping in desultory patterns on the floor. He stuck his head through the door between the range and the office and asked that a couple of windows be opened. The kid at the desk started to get up, but his partner, Jack Denyk, was already pacing around and so went to the corner to get the stick to reach the window lock fastener.

Jack Denyk was an ex-military exercise freak in his mid-forties. He had been a boot-camp instructor and still believed all the "temple of the body" doctrine he fed his recruits. Jack encouraged inmates to do calisthenics and sometimes joined them. He was not crazy about working Obs. The space was too close.

The kid sat down again and stared. Denyk had his arms up above his head when Kaziz jumped on him from behind like a monkey, his left arm around Denyk's throat, a shank (homemade knife) in his

right hand. He managed to plunge it into the back of Denyk's neck three times before the kid (violating procedure here) bolted through the door, disarmed the Egyptian, and nearly killed him throwing him into his cell. The kid then ran to the box and hit the button. "Staff up to Obs! Staff up to Obs! Denyk is down . . . Aw, fuck, I think the cocksucker killed Denyk!"

By the time the herd got up the stairs, the hysterical young guard was rocketing around the unit. Kaziz was at the bars of his cell screaming, "Now I not go Egypt! . . . No go! . . . No go! . . . No Egypt!"

Eventually they stretchered Denyk to the Oakie hospital and did what they could while awaiting the ambulance downtown. No one was making book on whether Denyk would make it.

He did and didn't make it. Amazingly, the Egyptian had missed Denyk's carotid, jugular, and spine. It was never clear in the stories that came back whether any of the ganglia at the base of the skull had been damaged. But Denyk never worked another day. At anything. He was a bachelor with only two or three ex-military types close enough to him to qualify as friends. Once out of hospital, his whole body seemed to twitch all the time. Doctors assumed the twitch would go away but it didn't, and life just seemed to leak out of him day by day.

After the incident I saw him at the Safeway a couple of times, but he never spoke or nodded, and then I didn't see him any more. He cut off contact with everyone in the jail and his name was never mentioned again at Oakie, except when the incident was brought up in training as an example of what can happen to those who lower defences just for a moment.

As for Kaziz, he swore that his lawyer had counselled him that there was a surefire way out of extradition. It was to kill someone in Canada. He would be tried in Canada and the lawyer had a whole briefcase full of defences. He could claim that he had gone "stircrazy" at the time of the crime and could not "appreciate the nature and quality" of his act.

A quick huddle was held involving Corrections, Justice, Immigration, and Egyptian officials. Either the charges were dropped on the

Canadian incident or the proceedings were stayed to expedite extradition to Egypt, where it was assumed Kaziz would meet his maker. But he beat all charges in Egypt and an Arab acquaintance told me that Kaziz was back in Vancouver and, having been diverted from the system, couldn't be prosecuted.

Denyk is alive or not alive. No one I know has heard from him in years now.

DUMARAIS

There was a Belgian executive named Monel Dumarais who lived in the West Wing for some time because of a complicated white-collar case. He claimed to be true-blue Belgian, but I once lived for four years in Germany - the Belgian spoke German flawlessly. He was a very cheerful man of about sixty who, because of his age, was not pushed around. He minded his own business and quickly earned a job as a cleaner and moved into the "country club" of Two Right. The tier had an area, much like the common area of the living-unit concept in newer jails, where they could play cards at a real table, get extra desserts, and other privileges.

The crimes of the accused on the cleaners' tier ran the spectrum from fraud (the Belgian) to murder. Eligibility for a cleaner's job was based solely on institutional record. I watched who got the cleaner appointments fairly closely for reasons of self-preservation. Trouble came when a Murder One was appointed to the cleaners' tier. He had been no problem before his arrival, but as soon as he moved in, the cons in the protective-custody (P. C.) tier were at the gate bitching and roaring. They contended that he took every occasion to threaten them and abuse them by throwing things down the tier. I told them I would keep an eye on him.

I saw him slip up the stairs one morning from Two to Three. I went up the other stairwell and listened. He wasn't shouting but he was indeed harassing them. I reamed him out and then threw him out. The very next day, I caught him baiting the P.C.s again. I couldn't believe anyone could be that stupid. Being a cleaner is a big deal and, once fired, you don't get rehired. I gave him the bum's rush down to

Two and told him he was fired and charged, then locked him on the cleaners' tier until I could get someone to take him to another tier.

As it happened, we had some electricians in and I had to do security for them up on Five most of the morning. I'd had a couple of cups of coffee and had to piss like a racehorse. I dashed down to the makeshift john on Two after calling the desk for someone to take over.

As I came down the stairs, I found my Belgian buddy glued to the cleaners' tier endgate with a big smile on his face (which was usual), but what he was saying in German was not amusing. "*Hoffentlich, Sie kommen nicht herein.* [I hope you aren't planning to come on this tier.]" In German, I explained that I had to take a leak. The Belgian was cool. He kept a bantering tone as he told me that the cleaner I had fired was waiting in number 14 for me to come on the tier (I saw him stick his head out and peer up the range) to take a piss and he was going to shank me. He added that I might perhaps prefer to piss my pants than die avoiding the embarrassment. I told him to scamper on down the tier. I would wait a while and then handle it. I then went over to Two Left and asked a con if I could use his john. No problem. I needed to kill some time to keep the heat off the Belgian.

I told the P.O. We quietly got some cuffs and clued in two or three staff and waited until one of the cleaners asked to have the gate cracked so he could make a call. When the gate swung open, I flew through the opening with the others on my heels, down to 14 and through the cell door. The ex-cleaner was sitting on his bunk, and I threw a body-check into him that would have made an NHL scout take notice, then tossed him on the floor face down with an arm-lock. The P.O. frisked him and turned up not one but two razor-sharp shanks. The con started screaming at me, "You fucking pig . . . you fucking pig . . . who ratted me out? I'm looking at twenty-five years, and taking you out wouldn't mean shit. I'll get your ass yet." Then he was hauled off to seg.

I made it a point of staying clear of the Belgian for a few days to make sure no one made the connection. Then we went back to German jokes as usual.

Without the Belgian or German or whatever he was . . .

I've had some nasty day and nightmares about that one. The

randomness of it all. The fact that both of us spoke German, that the Belgian was even on the tier at the time I came down the stairs. What if it had been a different guard? The "what-ifs" roll on and on.

I still have the shanks in my little bag of memorabilia.

PAULSEN

I have yet another shank which has special meaning for me. Like most of them, it is the handle of a soup spoon with the dipper broken off, egregiously stamped PROVINCE OF B.C. (there has to be something symbolic in that; one is sure of it around contract time) and honed sharp on a cement floor, which makes an excellent whetstone.

Oakie was dark on graveyard shift, and darker the deeper you ventured on a tier. I was on the third or fourth of my hourly rounds and at Four Right 12. Without the flashlight, I couldn't have seen my shoes.

The range one walked down was between three and four feet wide. Enough room to jump right or left if a con was crazy enough to make a grab for you from the line of cells. Or so I thought.

As I was moving the light from the ceiling of number 11 to number 12, I picked up in my lower peripheral vision an arm flashing quick as a fish out between the bars. The light was in my left hand. With my right I grabbed the wrist and rolled forward with it. I was so startled, terrified, and enraged, I had visions of ripping the arm out of its shoulder socket. The shank clattered on the cement, but I hung on and kept turning the arm. A god-awful cry of pain flew out of the mouth of the owner of the arm and shank - so loud and so piercing that it awakened both sides of the wing.

I pocketed the shank, finished my count of the tier, walked back and called Central Control. They hauled the shanker off to the hospital where I was sure they would find that he had to be sent to a specialized unit for microsurgery to repair the massive damage I had done to the arm.

When they came back with the news (after depositing the would-be slayer in the digger) that his arm wasn't even sprained, I listened in disbelief. I had had his arm across the steel cross-strut.

My rolling with the arm had the effect of causing him to drop the shank, but it also saved his arm, allowing it to bend in its natural directions. Very much at odds with my intentions.

When the con came back into population I went down the tier to talk to him.

"Hey, what the fuck did I do to earn a shank?"

"Nothin, man. You just happened to be the first uniform down the tier."

"Were you at court that day?"

"Yeah."

"What did they lay on you?"

"Fifteen, and they didn't give me any dead-time" (time off the sentence for time already served in remand).

"They usually don't except for Murder Ones. Gonna appeal?"

"Yeah. Conviction and sentence. Looks like I'll be here for a while. Thanks for not charging me in outside court."

"I never do. Nice job on making the shank. I'll display it proudly at home."

"Right on. Are we cool, boss . . . I mean, between us?"

"I thought I was gonna shit myself when your arm shot out . . . but I didn't. You nicked the shirt, but stores replaced it. We'll be cool, as long as you ask whether it's Uncle Mikey before you shank anyone."

"You're on."

Celebrities

A cynic is a blackguard whose faulty vision sees things as they are, and not as they ought to be. -Ambrose Bierce

Dear Sister:

Yes, you're right. The punkers are going to save us. They will fill the streets of Vancouver. We will be five people with one message. All the media will be at the trial. The whole world will hear us. There will be riots in the streets of Vancouver and the exploitation of women will be over forever . . .

*Love and Solidarity,
Bill*

THE ABOVE IS an approximation of a typical letter that passed among the Squamish Five, an infamous gang of three male and two female "revolutionaries" who blew up pornographic video stores, among other things, across Canada in the early 1980s. The letter differs from the real thing in that the spelling, grammar, and punctuation are correct and it is not long enough to contradict itself several times. But all the elements are there.

What elements, you may well ask? Exactly.

Night after night I read mail like this as it passed between the men's and women's units. We read mail to determine whether in the

outgoing pieces there was any reference to guards or their vehicles, and in the incoming, any hint of an implicit or explicit drug deal. Inmate mail, every word of which guards are *supposed* to read, is an amazing body of communication.

I hadn't paid much attention to the Squamish Five as they went on their dynamiting spree from Ontario to B.C., so when they came through the door I wasn't prepared for their celebrity status. And what I really was not prepared for was the kind of twist their presence threw into the whole dynamic of the wing.

One day as I passed through the visits cage to go on shift, I saw seven people in a glass conference room. The two Squamish Five women had been brought down from the Women's Unit (three or four hundred yards away) and the three men from West Wing. They had a female lawyer and a male lawyer and, God help me, they were sitting there all holding hands around the table. I couldn't hear what was going on, but the sympathetic look on the faces of the lawyers was a sight to behold. Every now and then I could hear a muffled shout of "Right on!" or "Solidarity!" come through the soundproofing.

The case was very much in the press and very high-profile. The only thing that Squamish had to do with it was that Squamish was the place they were holed up when the Mounties apprehended them. I learned that the Five had come into Oakie that morning, and that their lawyers needed to meet with all of them together. Lawyers' visits are high-priority and considered sacrosanct.

I went on into the wing and got ready for afternoon shift. Eventually the three men filed back into the wing, heads held high, and aloof from cons and guards alike. They were looking at charges of conspiracy, possession of illegal weapons, stolen explosives, all kinds of property crimes. But in their own eyes they were better than the rest of the prison population.

We put the three men on the same tier. I could see them conversing among themselves but they wouldn't even speak to any of the other cons. None of them smoked, so pure were their ideals. One con offered one of them a tailor-made cigarette and the jerk simply turned his back on the con and snubbed him as though he were an insect.

This didn't look good. My heart was not gladdened to observe such behaviour. This was a fairly heavy tier, and I could see cons I had known for a long time looking at them as though they were Martians who had just stepped off a saucer. The three of them were spouting their caca about being political prisoners who had committed no crime.

Later that day an old-time con who was in and out of Oakalla like a yo-yo saw me at the endgate and came up and asked, "Jesus Christ, where did you get these assholes?"

"I dunno. I've been on days off. I have no idea."

"What is this `political prisoner' shit?"

"I don't know anything about that either. I wasn't aware they were involved with politics. Are they Communists or Progressive Conservatives?"

"Well, it's not going down well on the tier."

I learned later that when they first went on the tier, one of them made a moral high-road comment about the decor of the cell he was put into. All the cells at Oakalla were plastered, walls and ceiling, with the raunchiest photographs of women in every spread-eagle position imaginable, some of them even committing amazing acts of contortion with animals and objects. Each guy who came in tried to add to the graphics. Otherwise all you would have to look at was the yellow lead-base paint. These pictures served the very practical purpose of assisting fantasies when the cons were attending to sexual relief.

The guard who installed the Squamish Three in their cells hadn't a clue what they were objecting to. You get to the point that - after you've seen thousands of these pictures - you can't even see them anymore. What would be surprising would be a cell without them. The three had dutifully gone in and removed every single picture from the walls and destroyed them. This really pissed the cons off because they never knew when they were going to be moved from one cell to another, and it's always nice to have some different wallpaper in the next cell.

For sexual relief, masturbation is always available, requires the least amount of equipment and the fewest number of people (and/or other animals). And you quickly learn in jail that human beings are

infinitely resourceful in obtaining sexual gratification under the heading of what I call "guerilla sex." Top of the list of choices was to have a drag queen on the tier. Next, although not treated as grandly as the transsexuals (or sometimes transsexuals-in-progress), homosexuals were teased about being "gearboxes" but were still respected for their valuable service. The gearboxes were known to use long-necked shampoo bottles for insertion in orifices in the privacy of their cells but sometimes gave the whole landing a view in the reflection in the window. Those who worked in the kitchen were revered for certain raw items of food which could be smuggled back to the tier. Like liver. I'm told by the old-time cons that when Oakalla was Oakalla Prison Farms and the fields abounded with ducks, chickens, pigs, cows, and horses that no imaginable form of what the law would call bestiality went untried. If it moved, it was fair game.

The prison rapes which television so loves to showcase do occasionally occur, usually when a rookie is sufficiently clueless to put a young, unmarked, untattooed, smallish person on a tier. An experienced guard wouldn't think of doing such a thing without seeing how many favours he had on the tier which he could call in - preferably from the heaviest con on the tier. If the heavy owes the guard, one of two things will happen. Either the heavy will take the kid under his wing and make him his mascot and go-fer, or he will give the kid one black eye and send him up to request being taken off the tier. The latter is a message that the heavy hasn't sufficient control of the tier at that time to guarantee the kid's safety. In either case: no rape.

The misconception is general that heavy-time cons love trouble, and rape of a "new fish" is their idea of a good time regardless of how much trouble it stirs up. The fact is, the rape is probably not worth the trouble because if the kid comes off the tier traumatized and beaten up (and it takes very little to get them to name all the perpetrators), the trouble is Big Time. The entire tier is likely to go off to segregation for starters. This is a serious disruption of tier routine. Next, all of them could be labelled "skinnners" and wind up asking for protective custody. Next would come an exhaustive internal institutional investigation. Then another by the Corrections police force, Inspection and Standards. Finally, the kid's lawyer would demand that the

Crown lay charges in outside court (sexual assault is sexual assault wherever it happens) as well as crank up a case to sue Corrections branch. If you were a con attempting to do your time quietly, the rape of the kid is likely to cause you very, very serious forethought.

This is notable. I think I have seen about as many sexual shenanigans as any guard over the years, but if a man comes to jail a heterosexual, regardless of the number of encounters he has with drag queens or homosexuals, he resumes his heterosexuality on the street. And I don't know of any homosexuals or queens who changed sexual orientation while in the joint.

Perhaps these three Squamish stooges thought someone was going to begin treating them like Solzhenitsyn or Koestler or Faludy just because they had blown up parts of certain institutions they thought were emblematic of society's ills. They came in with such high media profile that everyone assumed that these people were extremely dangerous, extremely organized, and perhaps a cell of who-knew-what seditious and insurrectionist and possibly terrorist group. In their fantasies, they had sacrificed themselves to this visionary idealism.

After seeing their on-tier behaviour and the seance they were having behind the glass, I was quite sure that anyone who would behave as they did was either a cretin or a fanatic. When the cops had nabbed them in Squamish, they were in possession of an arsenal of illegal weapons. One of them looked like a cross between a Mediterranean basketball player and Bjorn Borg. I kept looking at this guy and wondering whether this was the new Che Guevara or a black belt in some esoteric martial art. By the time the whole show was over, I wondered whether any of the Five had mastered use of any of the guns the cops found.

One of them was sent as an emissary down to the shift P.O. to explain they were political prisoners and sorely resented being kept with criminals. The P.O. responded that the place was bursting at the seams. He might be able to split the group up and put them on other tiers if they so desired, but, until he had grounds, other than their claim to be political prisoners, they would stay in the cells assigned to them on the tier assigned to them. Unless, of course, they felt they

couldn't handle it in population and wished to sign themselves into protective custody.

What was that?

"Protective custody is the place for rapists, snitches, child molesters, and all others who for one reason or another will not be tolerated by population inmates."

Weighing the options, perhaps that was a possibility as a temporary measure.

"But then, there is a saying that you pull one day of P .C. and you pull P .C. for the rest of your life."

What did that mean?

"That means that once you've done time in protective custody, anywhere else you go in jail someone is going to recognize you and it'll be open season to relieve you of life and/or limb."

Suddenly protective custody didn't sound so good.

The P .O. then offered him the drill on an inmate's options to write his M.L.A., his M.P., the Ombudsman, he could even contact our own internal police force, Inspection and Standards, if he felt that he wasn't receiving treatment consonant with his status.

The Squamish One left assuring the principal officer that he had every intention of doing all the above. I think he actually expected that there would be a special place in a maximum security prison for those mercilessly incarcerated because of their high ideals. Maybe they thought they were going to get the kind of cushy treatment that the Watergaters got. Maybe they had been watching too many Hollywood movies.

There was quite a bright, affable guy on the same tier who was in for a computer crime. His charge was complex and he bragged to me, "You don't have an expert witness in Canada who is intelligent or well-educated enough to testify conclusively against me, so I'll beat it." He was right, and several millions wealthier.

I asked him what was going down on the tier with the Squamish dildos. He had no idea. He had tried to relate to them as an educated, first-time inmate and had failed. When he had first gone on the tier himself, he had been bright enough to adapt very quickly. It had taken him about half an hour to learn how to speak "Him 'n' I" (prison

grammar) and to begin picking up prison argot. He said he'd never seen anything like the Squamish Three in the few months he'd been there. Either these guys were stupid beyond belief or they had an ace up their collective sleeve that he couldn't detect. I asked him where they were coming from in their *raison d'organisation*. Damned if he knew. No information there.

They wrote and received copious letters, most to and from the Women's Unit. I kept expecting to see long passages of Marx, Engels, Che Guevara, the Russian anarchists. No one was ever quoted. There was no philosophy. Then I thought they must be writing in some sort of code. But, if there was any plan to their blasting things off the planet, I certainly never discerned it in the letters. Whatever they blew up deserved it and that was about as far as their collective intelligence and insight carried them. In short, what they had done made about as much sense as a bunch of kids walking down the street and scraping a key along the paint of a brand-new car just for the hell of it. Except that these people's ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-nine. That was the only difference. The Squamish Five was a group of fuckfumbles. What really amazed me was that they actually got it together enough to set off the explosives without blowing themselves to bits.

At first, the cons on the tier were much more patient with the three of them than they normally would have been, probably because they were baffled by them. Tiers have their ways of taking care of people who fit into certain categories. Eventually, the new cons will be made to fit in on the tier one way or another. It is quite literally a do-or-die situation. But with the Squamish Three I think that initially the cons were looking for something that really wasn't there, just as I was. None of us had ever seen anything like this.

However, the cons do not suffer idiots gladly, and it was time to bring this disruption to a cease.

A blanket-party is called this because a blanket is affixed over the head of the victim so he can't identify his assailants.

A sock-hop derives its name from the ready and practical weapon of a bar of soap in a provincial-issue sock. It has several advantages. Staff cannot keep soap and socks off the tier. The weapon rarely leaves marks. Like nunchuks, the bar of soap strikes with several thousand

pounds per square inch, and the victim will feel the beating for a couple of weeks. Unlike fists against a face, there is virtually no sound when the soap in the sock strikes the person under the blanket. Finally, using the soap obviates using a fist with resultant tell-tale skinned knuckles.

When coming in as a new fish, the inmate is advised by staff and by cons in the change room to drift down the tier and ask questions. If told to fuck off, ask someone more voluble. Someone will come and tell you the drill sooner or later. But do not go on the tier with a chip on your shoulder and test the whole tier. Unless - and I've seen it happen - you really are the baddest cat on the tier, in which case, you are the instant new boss. But this is the exception.

If you go on the tier with a "when in Rome" attitude, you will not draw heat from guards or violence from the tier. Keep quiet and the tier will come to you. No one is so heavy that he can whale on someone's head whenever he feels he needs a workout.

Prisons simply don't work that way. On the other hand, there are those like the Squamoleans who just don't get the drift - neither from guards, nor from the inmates.

But then the cons' patience wore out. It took only one blanket-party and sock-hop one night to get the Three into cadence, as it were, with the rest of the tier. The following morning, a little worse for the wear, the three of them came off the tier for breakfast aping con body language, speaking when spoken to by tiermates, using prisonese, and talking about ordering chonies (chocolate bars) in canteen. They were about as convincing as Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor. They whistled around the tier collecting beaver pictures and gluing them to the wall. Turns out these dudes had resources for survival unknown even to themselves. My computer buddy and the others roared for days over the metamorphosis.

At the time, I was dating a guard at the women's jail. After each shift, we exchanged reports. There were two romances going on amongst the Five, and one odd man out. And he was odd. So odd that he later severed his trial and liquidated their solidarity. The two Squamish women continued to pledge undying love to their lovers in Oakie. Meanwhile, their political-prisoner stance had also taken a

turn for the worse. Women's prisons are predominantly lesbian, and a new con joins one "family" or another or suffers the consequences. They were persuaded to acclimatize. No problem.

The men put their new pictures to good use and went along with whatever was happening on the tier. And, of course, continued the rant against the exploitation of women in their letters to their girlfriends.

Jack Dunham died at length. But not before this - the closest that serial child-killer Clifford Olson came to death while at Oakalla.

The old-timers who remember Olson from his brief stay in the seventies at New Haven (an institution run on the Borstal honour system program; Olson walked away) say he was never the sort of inmate you could become friends with, but he certainly wasn't disruptive or tough. By the time he hit Oakalla, facing eleven murder counts, he was a garrulous, institutionalized prima donna (thanks to his media celebrity), and a horse's ass.

Few inmates at Oakalla had ever been more disruptive than Olson. Almost all day-to-day operations were snafued. He had visitors almost daily - publishers, movie producers, his wife - at which times the entire Centre Hall had to be cleared and the guard trebled. When alone in his cell, he was happy enough to have a guard to talk to. He had several mattresses piled on top of one another instead of a bunk. A bunk could be taken apart and used to hurt others or himself. But he never did impress me as being self-destructive. He had survived too many institutions and brushes with death.

He was a slight man of about forty then. Black hair, no grey. Without conscience, yes. Enthralled with the limelight, yes. He told me he had twenty-two more bodies buried and that would give him the biggest record by one body. But after he was convicted and sent off to protective custody in Kingston, Ontario, he was flown back to B.C. to show the cops the burial place of his other victims, and he couldn't produce one. Monomaniac, yes. Megalomaniac, yes. Psychotic, no. Suicidal, no.

He indulged in bursts of gratuitous petty savagery whenever he

had an audience. I was guarding him one day while he was having a visit (secure visit, glass and telephones) with a Hollywood type. It had taken us half an hour to clear Centre Hall. He was locked in the visits cage. But no one spotted the East Wing kid who was the Centre Hall cleaner, a good-natured youngster who had gotten messed up on angel dust and broken into an entire business block on a Sunday in broad daylight, piling up his booty on the curb. He couldn't remember any of it. It was his first offence.

The kid had been in the far corner between the gates to East and South sweeping when Olson was brought through. The other staff had gone back to their wings until time came to move Olson back to South Wing Obs. I was smoking and talking to the Centre Hall man when the cleaner passed by with the broom on his shoulder. I heard a voice from the gate to the tank. Olson had left his guest and was standing at the gate. "Hey, kid, got a light?" The cleaner nodded and started over. I don't think he even knew that it was Olson in the tank. It looked innocent enough. When the kid got close enough Olson hocked and spat in his face. Instantly, I had a punch-up through the bars on my hands and got whacked a couple of times separating them.

Olson had done it simply to grandstand for the producer. I was really angry. I had taken a couple of punches and banged my hand against the bar and it hurt like hell. Centre Hall took the kid off to East with instructions from me that he was not to be charged. I told Olson his visit was over and Centre Hall brought a platoon from the other wings to escort him back. I told Olson I was going to charge him. His response was, "Damn, Yates, what're you gonna do? Put me in jail?"

He was right, of course. He was already segregated. I wrote up the charge and he was convicted in Warden's Court. It was included on his institutional record, but there was no penalty.

Almost daily for much of the time that Olson was at Oakie, it seemed that there was a new script for hitting him, snatched out by whoever to whomever. Olson has seen a lot of prison. He knows exactly the chapter and verse and odds of guard behaviour and that of population cons. He knows how to play one against the other. He has experienced a great deal, including being shanked nine times while in Prince Albert prison. The shanker - who had no regrets, except that

the bastard didn't die - was so highly celebrated by population cons when he later came to Oakie that the West Coast media speculated (doubtless some joker inmate phoned them) that he had intentionally got himself arrested to have another shot at Olson.

It was near the time that Olson was to go to trial on the first of the eleven counts of Murder One that Jack Dunham started to feel ill. At first, he tried to write it off to twenty-plus years in service, heavy smoking and hard drinking. He even thought he might be a candidate for a by-pass. Finally, he went to his doctor, who launched a battery of tests. One afternoon he learned he had no fewer than seventeen malignancies sitting like land-mines in his body. As he walked down the hill from the main gate for graveyard shift that evening, he was not exactly part of this world.

Clifford Olson was being held in the South Wing Observation unit, which is virtually protective custody inside protective custody.

Jack was on the desk. Sprott was in the P.O.'s office. Both were senior screws. They sent an auxiliary screw up to Obs to stare at Olson all night and locked the door to the stairway to Obs behind the kid.

It's difficult to stay awake in South Wing Obs. The night lurched on. Ollie Brent, the night-jailer, did his rounds fairly early.

Jack couldn't concentrate enough to read. He couldn't doze. So, with purpose, he rose and walked to the P. O. s office where Sprott was sitting with feet up, eyes closed.

"Sprott. Can't find my fucking locker key," he said.

"Wake up a con to pick it for you."

"It's a cheap lock; I'll cut it off with the bull-cutters. Be back in a few minutes."

Dunham walked to the South Wing gate and called Centre Hall. The Centre Hall man walked slowly over and keyed the gate. They walked together across the common area to the visits cage. The Centre Hall man keyed this gate and opened it. Dunham walked through and called Front Hall. The Front Hall man came and popped his side of the visits cage. Dunham walked down the hallway and turned left into administration, which included Central Control and the armoury. Stan Barnaby was the P.O. on duty.

"Hi, Barnaby. Lost my locker key and I need my chewing tobacco out of it," Dunham said.

"Filthy habit, Jack. . ."

"Piss off and give me the key to get the bull-cutters." Stan passed him the flat to the armoury through the opening between the bars and the high counter.

Dunham keyed the door to the armoury, which is like a safe door. He opened it just enough to slip in. Barnaby was busy muttering to himself and sorting the mail.

Inside, Dunham breathed. To the left was the line of 12-gauge shotguns and below these were the Smith and Wesson .38s. He took one. Below the hand-guns was the drawer containing ammunition. He palmed five rounds, slid the drawer quietly back in, and put the .38 in his inside jacket pocket. Then he grabbed the bull-cutters by one handle and stepped out the door, which he closed, and keyed the lock.

"Here you go, Stan. I'll bring the cutters back after next count." He slid the flat across the counter to Barnaby.

"Yeah, fine." Barnaby had piles of mail all over the cage.

Jack went into a toilet close to the stairs and once inside he loaded the gun, leaving the hammer on the one empty chamber, as per standard operating procedure. He replaced the gun in his inside left pocket, flushed the toilet, and stepped into the hall. The Front Hall man was sitting on the steps waiting; he stood, turned the flat in the lock, lifted the locking bar and Dunham went through. The Centre Hall man was waiting on the other side and popped him through. They retraced their steps across the hardwood floor and Dunham was soon back in the wing, bull-cutters in hand.

Sprott was still sitting with his feet up, eyes closed.

"I'm going up to spring the rookie for a coffee."

Sprott grunted. Dunham at the desk dialed Ohs and the sleepy kid answered, "South Wing Obs."

"Coming up to spring you for coffee," Dunham said.

"Great."

Dunham started slowly up the flights of concrete steps to Five Landing, listening to the gritty noise of his joint-issue shoes.

At Five, he took the large brass lock in his left hand and his right slid down the long chain to the key which could unlock every padlock in the wing (except his locker's). He eased the chain through its loop, swung open the door, and climbed the two short flights to the Obs landing.

"How're you hackin' it, kid?"

"Fine, Jack, fine."

"Go and get some brew. While you're down there get Sprott off his ass and do the three o'clock count. You need the exercise. Don't forget the lock."

"Right." The kid dove down the stairs.

On this night, only one cell was inhabited: Olson's. Dunham eased into the chair behind the desk and looked into Olson's cell. Olson twitched a little in his sleep but didn't waken. Dunham sat and gazed. Then he reached inside his jacket pocket and eased back the hammer on the double-action .38. A muffled click. He withdrew it from his jacket and rose. As he moved around the glass barrier between the office and the short line of cells, Dunham trained the weapon on Olson's head, which was mere inches from the bars of the cell. He moved toward Olson until the crown of the barrel was no more than two inches from Olson's temple.

He could hear every part of Olson's breathing. He could hear his own. He had squeezed the trigger on a weapon exactly like this one on more than one occasion. He felt calm. Calm. Perfect. It was absofuck-ingly perfect.

A con fucks up. You reprimand him. He observes, "What're you gonna do, put me in jail?"

What would they do with Dunham? Sentence him to death? He received that very sentence from the quacks the previous afternoon.

Fuck'em.

A couple of weeks later, I heard rumours of Jack's disease. Then I had occasion to work one graveyard shift with him before they hospitalized him for good. He was exactly my age, forty-six. As we spoke, I was somehow looking into the eyes of my own death, and there was nothing to do but put death on the table between us and open it like a bivalve. He was, by turns, agitated and obviously in pain, then dazed.

Whenever the pain became too great, he would disappear to the staff room and return with dilated pupils. He was on heavy dope by this time but had told the brass nothing. He had cancer. So what? It is an adage that there are only two real requirements of a maximum prison screw: Be breathing and be on time. Jack was handling both of these. The eight hours of conversation was more relaxed toward the end than the beginning, and we put in words that he was dying and I was not. Rather, his dying was kicked into turbo and my dying was bumbling along at the usual rate of 4500 heart-thumps an hour. He also told me about Olson.

"Looking back, it was maybe the most brilliant idea I ever had." He had just downed his pills. The linkage between thought and speech was a little stiff. "I didn't plan anything. Never gave it a thought until that night. I simply listened to all the wild-assed notions the cons had about hitting him. I didn't know anything you didn't know. Except that afternoon when the doctors dropped the guillotine on my life, it just happened of its own accord. Can you imagine what a fuck it would have thrown into the whole system?"

I was amazed. "It was probably the only hit that would have worked. The one good shot the cons had at it, they muffed. You had it all together. You had Olson cold. He was history."

"Yeah . . . he was history... Why didn't I squeeze it off?"

"I got no questions,' I said.

"Sometimes, in my funk, I'm sure I did blow him away. I'm not religious, never been religious. But who knows what's on the other side and what sort of mood whatever is running the universe is in? Maybe there is something to the Ten Commandments. Maybe God, if there is one, is friendlier toward skinner-killers than knuckle-draggin' Oakie screws. The way things have been going for me since I went to the doctors, it seems that way. How do you figure it?"

Six months later he died in hospital. Maybe he got his answers.

One day in 1982 as I came in to work and headed down to One Landing, I noted that the guards on Two didn't look entirely comfortable. Mafia Gallo Gang Lieutenant Dimatteo was standing near the door to

the desk cage on Two with something strange and round in his hands. It was about the size of a human head and slightly pumpkinish, with brown lumps bulging from it. I stopped to watch.

Dimatteo was taller than the tallest guard - who was at least sixfeet-seven and had to duck under everything we had in the West Wing then - and, at around three hundred pounds, heavier, too. Dimatteo liked comfort. He wore his joint-issue runners with the heels tromped down like slippers, which made him sound like everybody's mama slapping around in the runners. We had a hard time finding clothing big enough for him and his T-shirt was always hanging out. He looked like the Mount Rushmore version of Cheech. His curly hair was all over the place, and his moustache was haywire and full of food half the time.

I watched Dimatteo advance on one guard after another with the large brown warty sphere held out at arms' length with both hands. "You wan some Italian bread? Is very good."

Guards usually like free food, and the round loaf Dimatteo was holding looked as though it was full of nuts and fruit and all sorts of good stuff, yet the prospect of taking a bite was freaking out the legendary heroic crack troops of the West Wing of Oakalla. They were spooked.

I have no idea what they thought, collectively or individually. Did they suppose that anyone would be dumb enough to jap food and then offer it to a guard with whom he would live in the same wing for an indeterminate length of time (in the case of the Gallo family, a very long time)?

Georgie MacDiarmuid, a large man who looked tiny beside Dimatteo, writhed and lied that he had eaten just before coming on shift. (To eat before coming on shift would be unguardlike. Meals were part of the wages. And the cons at Oakie were great cooks in the olden days before the caterers got in.) Then Dimatteo went after Eggie Dillingham - ex-British military, nearly sixty, a strange and bitchy old crank. "Get away from me, you crazy big bastard with your evillookin' fookin' food."

Dimatteo kept a straight face but his Sicilian eyes glinted with

delight as he blew away one guard after another with the mere offer of a hunk of bread. God, I loved it. I knew Dimatteo pretty well from the Scared Straight program (in which juvenile offenders are obliged to visit an adult jail with the aim of terrifying them into giving up their lives of crime) and liked him; he had just the right touch with the kids. He was a great actor. He would take the little apes down the tier, make them strip and do push-ups while he sat on his bunk and lectured them with his best *mano negro* accent and expression. Then he would make them continue the push-ups with his foot on their asses explaining all the while what would happen to that ass should they pull time.

Then it was my turn. "Looks great to me," I said truthfully.

Now, until this time Dimatteo himself hadn't taken a bite. The bread was a culinary artifact. But when I accepted a piece, he held the head-shaped loaf up and, in a ritual gesture, ripped it apart. You could tell that the act puckered the guards' sphincters. He handed me my hunk, tore off a wedge for himself, and we began chewing at the same time. It was delectable. Sweet and full of all sorts of chewy surprises.

They had been had, oh, supremely had, by a loaf of bread.

I headed up to my landing, with Dimatteo shuffling behind me, and we sat down and polished off almost the whole loaf before Georgie MacDiarmuid peeped up the stairwell and asked, trying to save face, "Have you got any of that wop shit left?" Dimatteo was gracious in victory. "You no want before? You eat before work? Well? Here . . . sure." He gave him a hunk, and Georgie brandished it in triumph as he descended to Two Landing.

Dimatteo was a member of the notorious Gallo Mafia family that ran a large drug and rackets operation in B.C. They were by no means in control of the West Coast, but they had been around for a long time. Gallo himself hadn't a trace of an accent, so I assume he was born in Canada. The same could not be said of his ranks, most of whom retained their Sicilian citizenship for occupational reasons. (Once convicted in Canada of an indictable offence, chances are good the Canadian system will deport them; this puts them on the fast

track to get back to North America by buying the people who push the papers in both countries - with no jail-time to serve in either country.)

Over a period of five years, the costly but effective Co-ordinated Law Enforcement Unit, made up of the cream of the local cops and Mounties - the A-team of B.C. law enforcement - concentrated exclusively on the Gallo gang, collecting some eight thousand hours of videotape before they busted twelve of the boys and hauled them to us at Oakie. Try to imagine how many people that operation involved, how many specially tricked-out vehicles, and how much the cost of the toys inside those vehicles - because most of the tape was shot with starlight-lens technology- as well as the cost of police overtime, technicians, lab assistants, paper-pushers, and so forth. Not to mention the cost of phony drug-buys.

Such an undertaking makes the taxpayer not only one of the drug-lord's best customers when he is out of jail, but also his benefactor when he is inside. The Gallo gang pulled the better part of two years of "dead time" (remand time: awaiting trial, awaiting sentence); that's about \$85,000 a year per man - in early-1980s' dollars - times twelve, not counting court costs for a trial that went on for 1.65 days. Try to get your mind around how much money the whole extravaganza cost, and then imagine how much gang money is still stashed safely in bank accounts in Switzerland, the Cayman Islands, or the Bahamas.

When the Gallo gang arrived at Oakalla in late 1981 and early 1982 charged with conspiracy and a long list of other related crimes, they were all housed on the same tier. There were about a dozen of them -including, originally, Don Gallo himself, who escaped.

As long as they behave themselves, there is no reason why you cannot house two or more co-accused on the same tier. The only time that this polity becomes a problem is when one or more of the co-accused have a falling out and their trials are severed. But the Gallo gang were more than solid - the *cosa nostra* commitment is a condition of solid beyond solid.

On the street and at their trials, members of the family wore very expensive, tasteless clothing, custom-tailored, of course. And even in jail they all took - especially *Consigliere* (second-in-command)

Senatore - meticulous care of their hygiene and appearance at all times. Senatore had chiseled features and looked like he had just stepped off the set of *The Godfather*. He was always complaining -with a big pearly smile - about what an embarrassment Dimatteo was because of his appearance.

When you have a dozen of a group like the Gallo family in a remand wing, as we did, very few of the traditions of prison apply. For instance, while the average con who had no desire to participate in a riot did so anyway when it was expected of him by his tiermates, to avoid being killed or having to sign into protective custody, the Gallos could sit out a riot with perfect impunity. They reeked of power, and it gave staff and cons the booglies. You had the feeling that they could have the entire province erased with a telephone call.

They entered jail with their rank long-established. There was no jockeying for position on the tier; no horseplay; no loud arguments. They thought and acted as one well-engineered, well-conditioned, well-oiled machine. It was beneath their dignity to get out of line and cause the staff problems. They were jail-wise beyond belief. When they socialized outside their group it was only with the super-cons (white-collar criminals with big connections, and mega-heavies like Mike Garcia, who was looking at his third life sentence and was the real warden of Oakalla). These guys were professional criminals who accepted time in stir as an occupational hazard and made the best of their time. They were never any trouble on the job.

Contrary to media depiction, a prison "heavy" is not a person who lifts weights, is covered with scars and tattoos, and lumbers around like an ape. These goons are the lackeys and go-fers of the real heavies. A heavy is a pipe artist: someone who could walk up behind anyone of any size with a pipe or similar instrument, crush his skull, ditch the weapon, then have a big lunch and a long, dreamless afternoon nap. A heavy is not a troublemaker. He does control the tier and sometimes an entire prison. He knows when he owes a guard and he remembers that certain guards owe him for his assistance in times of crisis.

As a group, the Gallo gang were heavy. They didn't have to do much to establish their dominance. Their reputations preceded them.

They took jobs as cleaners and they really shone in their participation in such programs as Scared Straight.

If the Galloans liked you, they joked with you and played harmless practical jokes on you in the wing. After you had been had, they would give you the open hand under the chin and "*compliments!*"

I don't know for a certainty that the following occurrence took place compliments of the Gallo family. It is only in hindsight that I suspect them. There were other high-profile criminals in the wing at the time.

One day early in my first year on the job I had been home perhaps an hour after morning shift when the telephone rang.

"Yates? This is Winston Caldwell, you know, up on Five Right?" I almost filled my boots. I had two Murder Ones in the wing - one a murder-dismemberment. One had the last name of Winston. The other was Caldwell.

Bear in mind that I was green as grass. No one had bothered to suggest that I de-list my telephone number. Most peace officers do not list their numbers.

"You must have the wrong number." I hung up. It immediately rang again. I clicked on the answering machine and sat down in stark panic. My estranged wife's telephone was still listed under J. Michael Yates. I called her. She said a man had called for me a little earlier but declined to leave his name. She had told him I didn't live there. I called the wing and talked to the afternoon brass. They had no idea what a line screw does in such circumstances, other than deep-six the listed number, and suggested I talk to the director in the morning. I called the phone company and explained the circumstances. They gave me a unlisted number within twenty-four hours.

I sat on the couch, stunned, all evening. A couple of times I picked up the phone when it rang. Same voice. I simply hung up. They knew they had me on the run and the fun was just beginning.

I went to work the next morning feeling completely paranoid. I watched every con come through the line - including the Gallo people - for some inkling of who was responsible. All shift I watched. I was so busy watching the cons, I fucked up a couple of minor procedures and caught hell for it. At the beginning of the shift, I reported

the calls to the director, who suggested I get an unlisted number, and contacted the Burnaby Mounties, who suggested that the wing monitor the outgoing calls.

I thought about quitting, but soon it became a challenge to outsmart them. It was clear that the brass and the cops were going to do nothing. Two days after I had the new unlisted number (which, as required, I had given the brass in the wing, my wife, and no more than ten trusted others), the phone rang and "Winston Caldwell" was at my service again. I slammed down the phone.

I methodically called everyone who had the number and accused them of breaching the security I requested. I called a few more than once and really pissed them off. When I got my unlisted number I had to tell my wife why, and she accused me of putting the lives of everyone we knew at risk. It only fortified her point that I was an asshole for stooping to such an unsuitable job. War-time. I was scared and mad - at her just as much as the caller - but rational enough to worry about my kids.

I decided to distance myself from my family in order to protect them. I thought of one woman I knew who met the two criteria I had just invented: she lived about as far away from Burnaby as you can without having an Alberta visa, and she had a roomy house left behind by an escaped husband. I drove out and suggested I move in with her, explaining up-front about the telephone. She didn't think it a problem; her number was still listed under her husband's name. There was no way the Voice would puzzle that one out. I wasn't so sure and decided to put a second line into the house.

She came over and we packed up my apartment, the movers came, and I vanished, smug that I had 'em licked. Even if "Winston Caldwell" and company found out where I was, it would be evidence that I no longer had any connection with my ex-wife and the children.

These are the thoughts of a madman. Who, particularly one's ex-wife, is going to go for such bullshit? You don't dissociate yourself from your children just because you part ways with a wife. My new living arrangements only got me into a situation of "extreme prejudice" with her.

I called the phone company to arrange for the second line and on the first morning shift I had off, the telephone dude installed the new line. I made not a single call on that line or on the line belonging to my new landlady. I was alone in the house. I read and wrote all morning, then I ran into a snag writing something and so walked into the bedroom (as was my habit at such moments) for a creative nap. I zonked until the brand-new telephone on the brand-new line rang. It was between noon and one.

"Hi, Mike . . . Winston Caldwell here." Wham.

Now, you'd think I might have deduced that, inasmuch as I had not told a living soul that number, the caller or whoever was behind it must have someone at the phone company on his payroll. Wrong. I spent the afternoon apartment hunting. You can just imagine how delighted my landlady of a few hours was when I informed her that I was moving because I feared for her safety. I was playing an insane and expensive geographical shell-game that I couldn't possibly win.

I was so spooked that I hit the road there and then and spent the next few nights in a sleeping bag in an empty apartment in north Burnaby until the movers brought my belongings. I ordered a new phone line (having a phone was a condition of employment; I was on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week). More calls.

I was wacko. Every decision I made contradicted the previous one. I had to move again.

My friend and co-screw Teddy Daignault lived in an apartment block right across from the gate to Oakie. I made yet another needless move into his building. New line. More calls. Teddy was about as laidback as they come and even he was peering out from behind curtains and opening the door of his apartment to check out the hall. One day the phone rang and it was my man.

"Look, asshole, if you jerks really want me, I can be had in the joint or on the street, you know it and I know it." The fact was, it had taken me three months to think of it. The Voice gave me a belly-laugh and the phone clicked. That was the last phone call.

If the Gallos own that one, it was the grand-daddy of their jokes. I think the hair on my chest turned white in those three months.

The Queen of Drag

*Some things are better than sex, and some are worse,
but there's nothing exactly like it.*

- W. C. Fields

BECAUSE of my teaching background I was often pressed into service as a training officer for auxiliary staff. I enjoyed this. The only thing I enjoyed even more than this was working a tier where we had a drag queen or two in residence. The most fun of all was to have a rookie *and* a drag queen or two on the same landing.

For afternoon shift, I was assigned Randy, a young turkey whose uncle was in federal corrections and had recommended it as a career. Randy was big, he could handle himself, and, so far, he demonstrated ample possession of the most important faculty in a line screw: common sense.

Day after day on afternoon shift I had been going over with him Section a8 of the *Correctional Centre Rules and Regulations*. When an inmate commits an infraction of the C. C.R.R. he can be charged by a Corrections peace officer and go to trial in Director's Court, known in earlier times as Warden's Court, and since time immemorial by the inmates as Kangaroo Court. Indeed, to get proceedings under way one infamous unit director used to bellow, "Bring the guilty cocksucker in here!" (In fact, he was a fairly lenient judge.)

Each day I reviewed with the rookie one of Section 28's twelve sub-sections and gave him a verbal synopsis of case law: trials I had

participated in and heard of, how each section had been interpreted. Some of the language could be misleading as hell. And there were other considerations.

"You have to consider the circumstances every time you're about to lay paper on [charge] a dude. For instance, time. On morning shift, no problem. There's lots of staff and if the guy decides to jackrabbit [escape] on you, there is all kinds of light for chasing him down over the flats, and the Burnaby horsemen can head uphill with their mutt squads."

"Right."

"Afternoon and night shifts present entirely different problems. Tonight you may well catch several cons having a blanket-party with some poor sonofabitch. You catch them cold. It's a good bust. The perpetrators are going to do serious digger-time [segregation]."

"Okay."

"Any difference between the seriousness of the breach of the *Rules and Regs* on afternoon and night shift?" This is my trick question.

"No. If a guy fucks up, he goes to court."

"How about the way we handle it?"

"Same."

"Not necessarily."

"You trying to tell me that sections of the C. C.R.R. mean one thing at one time of the day and another at another?" The kid was baffled.

"Nope." It was about 2100. Good shift, good jail. The Stanley Cup semi-finals were on and the inmates were laid-back and watching the black-and-white TVs covered in sparrow-shit on the catwalk. (We had real jailbirds in the Old West, our name for the West Wing; they had nested above the catwalks for years and didn't fly south for the winter.)

"Look at it this way. If you lay paper on the guy after dark, you have one less bad-ass for the night. But there are eight guards on an afternoon shift and an inmate count of damn near two hundred. S.O.P [standard operating procedure] is that two max guards have to escort the guy to the hospital so that we can certify that he isn't thumped up [injured], then we have to walk him down to A-side [segregation] and skin-frisk him with seg staff, then hoof it back.

This all takes about forty-five minutes, longer if the hospital is busy or if the nurse is on call in one of the wings."

"I see where you're comin' from. We got staff tied up."

"Security diminished by twenty-five per cent. Now, if you were an inmate and had some serious tier business, wouldn't it be a good ploy to get a couple of stooges to fake a rumble and get them charged, knowing that you were getting a couple of screws out of the way?"

"I get it."

I had developed a few bromides as a training officer. First, I explained to the recruit that there were twenty-one rookies hired at the same time I was. Within a year, I was the only one left. Almost no one can be a maximum prison guard for any length of time, and of those, very few ever develop any talent for it.

Next, very few are capable of determining when an inmate is a fellow human being and when a jail is a jail. That means that if you are not a shrewd assessor of human character, then you had better learn to be one fast. Some people are inside because they never had a break in their lives and some are in because they were "born to lose" (the text of one of the more popular jailhouse tattoos). You give the former the benefit of the doubt and you bend the rules for the latter only when it suits your purpose. In certain circumstances, you think of the inmate as an individual, a fellow human being. In others, you must think first of the good of the institution in general. It's a matter of making judgement calls, and it can't be taught except through experience.

Then: Read the book, but don't throw the book. Do not go prescriptively into any situation. Read the circumstances and take the entirety of the whole wonderful living organism of the prison into account.

"We're gonna swap tiers. I'll do a walking count of yours and you do mine while I cover."

"How come?"

"Same cons, different eyes. You might see something I been missing all night and vice versa."

I crossed over the landing to Four Left.

Randy keyed the lock and levered the bar. I swung the bar and the

hurricane-wire endgate open and walked slowly down the range before the cells, giving every six-man (look-out) plenty of time to warn whomever. Stopping to ask this guy about his family and that one when his preliminary appearance is coming up, it took me about ten minutes to get down to cell ²⁰ and count them again on the way back. I tried not to get in the way of the guys glued to the TVs.

I walked out the endgate and Randy secured it. Then we walked over to Four Right and I opened the endgate and Randy started down the range. I could see him imitating my easy saunter. He would have loved to pussyfoot and catch someone doing something. He didn't yet understand that he wore one uniform and the inmates wore another uniform. Inside each uniform is a different life. The courts have seen fit to do certain things with the lives of the inmates and it is not up to guards to second-guess the courts or to meddle in lives inside the institution unless it disrupts MODS (management, operation, discipline, or security) of said institution.

He reached the end of the tier. I saw him move closer to the bars of one of the end cells. Then he looked toward me at the endgate for a reality check. Christ, I could see the whites of his eyes. From the look on his face, I thought he had found someone strung up.

He headed toward me, picking up the pace as he came. By the time he reached the endgate, he was almost sprinting. Some of the cons peered out of their cell doors as he rocketed past, wondering what was up.

I locked the gate. Randy was dancing and moving toward the middle of the landing and motioning for me to come over.

"Jesus Christ! Holy fuck! Mr. Yates, I caught'em."

"Caught who doing what?"

"It was down there on top of a guy."

"Slow down, Marshall. Who is it?"

"That transvestite thing with the tits."

"The it you're talking about isn't precisely a transvestite," I said. He was talking about Sherrin, a transsexual-in-progress. The entire psychiatric and surgical process takes several years and involves some fairly radical physical transmogrification. To a rookie, it must look very strange to have something with facial hair but with breasts, as

well as other features normally attributed to the human female, walking around on a tier with yard-apes who spend much of their day doing push-ups and curls with their hinged bunks, and walking around as though they had a rash under each arm, so overdeveloped are their lat muscles.

Even the old-time guards splutter and don't know which pronoun fits a drag queen. But regardless of how early they are in the process, queens prefer to be referred to in the feminine. That's no problem as far as I'm concerned, adult male institution or not.

The state dispenses hormones to them - their "itty-bitty tiny pills," as guards affectionately call them - and, in some cases, the state pays for castration (the nip) and the creation of a vagina from the penis (the tuck) if they happen to be incarcerated at the time that the psychiatrist in charge decides that they are ready. This practice gets mixed reviews at all levels of Corrections. But then all levels of the bureaucracy are paranoid and deem it safest to err on the side of the rights of the inmate.

They remain legally men until both the tuck and the shrink pronounce them otherwise, at which time the authorities attempt to install them in women's institutions. But this presents other problems -the women's jail tradition is as long and irrational as the male open-contract on anyone accused of a sex offence. By tradition, even after transsexuals become women legally, they are not tolerated in population and must go into protective custody.

The inmates, of course, joyfully play all sides off one another. Sherrin, one my favourites, who poor Randy was so excited about, had a doctor so well trained that whenever Sherrin's dark roots began to show, she had only to hand in a medical chit (request) and she was taken to the hospital, where she could peroxide her hair. This event always caused great grumbling from staff over the contention that these "freaks" were given "special privileges."

I liked working the drag-queen tiers. A drag-queen tier is a clean tier (I generalize, of course). And a drag-queen tier is a mellow tier. I can't remember violence ever occurring on a tier with a dragger on it.

Back to poor Randy, who was certain we had an institutional emergency on our hands.

"They were doin' it and she was on top. In cell nineteen."

This projected a very strange image on the screen of my mind. I had been over Sherrin's file many times. She had been in jail on my tier dozens of times for prostitution, assault, theft-under - any number of nickel-and-dime beefs. I knew she had not had the tuck, but she had had the nip. No gonads. Was she functioning in the male role? Couldn't be.

Just about this time, an apparition appeared at the endgate. Sherrin wasn't even five feet tall, and she was wearing a T-shirt long enough to be a nightgown. Like most drag queens she was grotesque in the abstract sense of the word. She did not evince womanliness but an outrageous and stupendous caricature of womanliness - close enough to woman that a drag queen usually works the street with a "real girl" rather than another dragger, but wide enough of the woman-mark that women are not threatened by them.

"Doing *it* with Sherrin on top?"

"You got it."

Sherrin over at the gate couldn't make out what we were saying but she was getting impatient.

"Mr. Yates, are we taking names and numbers?"

"Hang on, Madame, we'll be with you shortly. Just as soon as I can wring out of this young officer just exactly what he thinks he saw." Back to Randy. "Do I understand that you're accusing her of handling the boy part of the operation and he was doing the girl part."

"Oh, no. He was . . . uh . . . just lying on the bed face up and it was bouncing up and down on top of him just like a woman on top of a man."

"*Mutatis mutandis.*"

"Yeah . . . huh?"

"With minor changes from, say, what you might expect as a man with a woman on top."

"Yeah. Yuck. How can they do that?"

"That's really not at issue."

"Well, do I charge them?"

"Not even the director can tell you when to charge an inmate and

when not to. You are the reporting officer. You make up your own mind. Give me your copy of the C.C.R.R."

He handed me the small cream-coloured book. I turned to Section 28 and read sub-section 10, "No inmate shall use indecent language or gesture or participate in an indecent act."

He listened carefully, took the book back, and seemed to be checking the shape of every letter.

"You've got to make up your mind before end of shift."

"Christ, I just don't know what to do."

He agonized for several minutes while I strolled over and talked to Sherrin. I refused to discuss whether she and her partner were to be charged.

Randy called me back, saying I had to help him or he'd have a nervous breakdown before end of shift. This got my attention. He could have a nervous breakdown after end of shift but not before. I demanded his book of rules and regs again. I read the charge out to Sherrin, who sang along with me because she had memorized the section.

"Were you, Madame, caught by Mr. Marshall in full fornicatory motion as reported?"

"Boss, you know damned well I was. I don't bullshit you. I just want to know whether I'm going to seg, bag and baggage, for the night."

"Then I have only one final question."

Sherrin had caught on to my tone of voice. Randy was still standing as though petrified.

"Were you doing a decent job of it?"

"Count on it."

I closed the book, replaced it in Randy's jacket pocket, and walked over to my chair and sat. "Problem solved. See you both on shift tomorrow night."

I should explain that while certain guards seem (or pretend) not to be able to handle drag queens, on the tier (and on the street) they are treated with the greatest of deference. He who manages to capture the attention and services of the tier drag queen is one who is held in

high esteem. If he shares his transsexual paramour with the rest of the tier he is held in the highest of all possible esteems. Pimping, in or out of jail, is virtually irresistible. Two walls in each cell are available for the stacking of decks of tailor-made cigarettes, and I have seen them quite literally stacked from floor to ceiling with packages and cartons of cigarettes in the cell of an enterprising drag queen with an attentive pimp. I was privileged to see one marriage on the tier (without benefit of chaplain, but nonetheless solemn and sincere). She got out before he did (having gone on to federal); the last I heard, she was living in the Fraser Valley outside Vancouver so as to be near the husband, who was in Kent penitentiary.

This may seem like sexual custom from another planet. Perhaps this is a comment on me rather than society in general or prison population, but I found the ceremony just as moving as any I ever saw in the usual places in society.

We all have certain needs for bonding, contact, and sex; why should someone sentenced to time not have similar needs? At what point do we delimit our parameters of "punishment"? If we cannot starve prisoners because of U.N. guidelines, how can we deny them other appetites? Is one more important than the other?

Oakalla turned a blind eye to "guerilla sex"; Vancouver Pretrial, where I worked later, went out of its way to pretend that the sex drive did not exist: it was a chargeable offence for more than one con to be in a room at once; therefore there were many dry hands and requests for hand-lotion from the nurse after a racy movie. Blue magazines were forbidden. When will we learn that certain things cannot be legislated whether by statute or standing institutional order? The inconsistency between Oakalla and Pretrial (both supposedly maximum institutions) was outrageous. The reason cons view the system as arbitrary is that it is indeed arbitrary. His needs, nay, human nature, are rarely considered in the Brave New World of Corrections.

When I entered corrections, certain things altered my perspective. First of all, there was my perception of the significance of human size, and its use and abuse. All around me were people in the same

uniform who were a head taller and a hundred pounds heavier than I - and I am six-foot-one with a big frame. Big guards. Big cons.

In jail, the small ones who survive are wily, very wily. When I was green as grass I had a very small training officer, name of John Chapman, from India. (East Indian inmates never suspected that he spoke Punjabi, Hindi, and Bengali, as well as pidgin-Canadian. They often learned this to their chagrin.) One day early in my training Chappie looked at me and said: "You're a pretty big guy. That's helpful in this business." Not knowing him, or enough to be suspicious of a remark like that, I took it to be a compliment and nodded. He went on for some minutes about size and strength, then ordered me to follow him. I did. He unlocked a door. Inside was a schemozzle of badly maintained gas-masks, truncheons, and helmets. He picked up a couple of plexiglass shields and stood them side by side. "See? Same size. All of them the same size." I nodded. He put one of them in front of him. "Ya see, a little fella like me can get behind one of these and virtually my whole body is protected." I nodded. "As for you, you overgrown, pea-brained, rookie stiff, one day they'll call down here saying that there's a riot at the women's jail. They'll give you one of these and you'll go through the door with it in front of you. Women don't fight fair. They never heard of Queensbury rules. The first three-hundred-pound female you see with a leg of a chair in her hand will fake you high by waving it at your head. You'll lift the shield to block it. Then she'll kick your nuts up to your fucking earlobes." I nodded. Intuition told me that he was right. I needed lessons in becoming smaller.

In the Scared Straight program, the big guys, especially the heavy dudes, really shine. Prisoners and staff work together to dispel any illusions these young men might have about what would happen to them should they end up in our institution. We never know when young offenders will show up for the treatment - nor could we imagine that one day drag-queen Sherrin would outshine us all in our efforts.

Half-way through one eventless Ookie morning on Four Landing in the West Wing, my partner and I heard steps coming up the stairs. We looked over to the left. We saw a head, then shoulders, then the

rest of the body. It finally arrived on our level and its head damn near touched the ceiling. Every muscle in its body was taut, flexed. And it couldn't have been any more than sixteen years old, in jeans and a T-shirt. It had a look on its face that said it was absolutely fearless.

More steps. The special-services officer who was escorting the kid was looking downcast. He explained that this was a Scared Straight number.

"Your sense of success doesn't seem overwhelming," I observed.

One of the cons at the endgate called the kid over and gave him a homily that had worked on other kids. Phillips, the special-services officer, complained, "I've had this punk in tow all morning. Nothing works."

"What about One Landing," I suggested. This was where the Gallo gang lived. "Senatore? Dimatteo?"

"Dimatteo [who was as tall as, and far heavier and stronger than, this child] took him back into his cell and made him take off his clothes and do two hundred push-ups with Dimatteo's foot on his ass."

"And?"

"The kid told him to get fucked. Dimatteo told him that if he ever wound up in a jail like this he would be raped every fifteen minutes and the kid said bullshit. He'd kill the first nerd who unzipped his fly. Never saw anything like it."

"He's juvie?"

"Sure."

"Tried and found delinquent?"

"Bingo."

"What for?"

"What else? Assault. He beats the shit out of tall trees just for practice."

"Sounds like he's got the makings of a real dog. We'll have him here in a year or two - or sooner if he winds up with a manslaughter charge and is raised to adult court."

The cons on Four Left were clearly striking out at getting through to this young gorilla. Phillips pushed the kid over to Four Right to give them a kick at the cat. They tried everything. They pointed to the

scars on their bodies, their jailhouse tattoos. They told him horror stories about being beaten and raped, they showed him bullet wounds, and showed him legs terribly scarred from the teeth of "alligator" dogs (attack police mutts). He told them about a police dog he killed with a two-by-four. Needle tracks didn't impress him. Slash scars from attempted suicides didn't impress him. He was impervious. Phillips asked whether we had any ideas.

"Sounds like you've done all the standard stuff," I said. "Phillips, my son, you can't win 'em all. If the judge sentences them to the treatment, all you can do is submit them to the treatment. The cons are giving it their best shot. Listen to them. They're as frustrated as you are.

On Four Right, while all this palaver had been going on, the little drag queen, Sherrin, had been standing in the background, too short to be seen, listening. I heard her voice calling "Boss, oh, boss!" I walked over to the gate. She had elbowed all the machos out of the way and was standing there in her nightgown-length T-shirt, staring up at the kid.

I looked at the kid, whose granite expression was twitching a little, but this didn't seem significant to me. Sherrin probably wanted a phone call. Normal landing operations had been suspended while staff and inmates directed attention to the task at hand: scaring the kid straight.

"Mr. Yates, open this gate. right now," she squawked in her amazing falsetto.

My right hand slid down the chain toward the key reflexively. "What d'ya need?"

She pointed at his crotch. "I'm going to suck his dick!" She was so short she could have blown him standing at full height.

The kid went nuts. He crossed and uncrossed his arms, he reached over and hung onto the hurricane wire. He shifted his weight from foot to foot. He began to change colour. And - I couldn't believe it -his damned knees began to go on him. We thought he was going to faint.

Sherrin could smell blood. "C'mon, boss. Mr. Yates, open the gate. Right here, right now, I'm gonna suck his dick right off."

This was the variable the kid hadn't figured; the proverbial ball of fire in the night. Right on. I was into it.

"Makes sense to me, Sherrin; a girl needs a little young stuff now and then." I inserted the key in the lock, kicked the lock off, and grabbed the bar to open the gate. You can make a hell of a dunk and clang with the gate, as though you were opening it, without actually activating the opening system. I dunked and clattered.

The kid was now holding himself up on the screen. When he thought the gate was about to go, he wailed "Noo-ooo!" and burst into tears. Then he covered his face with his hands. My partner had to help Phillips pack the kid down the stairs because his knees had turned to cooked spaghetti. He wailed all the way down and was still sniffing when they arrived back at Willingdon Detention Centre for Juveniles.

This is how it is, Will Rogers. I never met a drag queen I didn't like. Sooner or later.