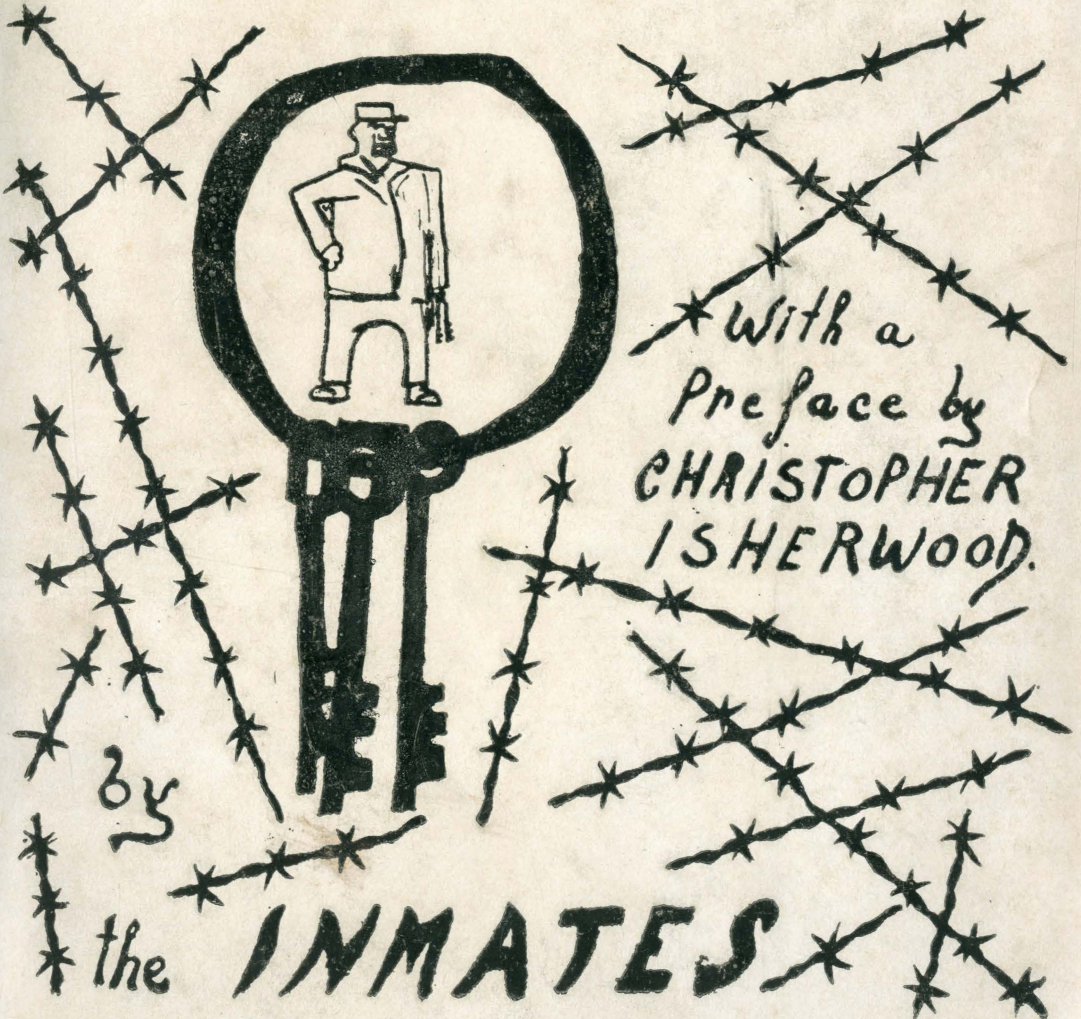


PRISON ETIQUETTE

The Convict's Compendium of Useful Information.



With a
Preface by
CHRISTOPHER
ISHERWOOD.

By

the

INMATES

THE DANBURY STORY

HOWARD SCHOENFELD

The Warden adjusted his glasses.

"Men," he said, "This is my last appeal to you. Your group is conspiring to buck the authority of the bureau of prisons. If you persist in your foolhardy conspiracy not only your lives, but the lives of the 600 other men in this institution will be adversely affected. So will the lives of the thousands that will follow them. If you won't think of yourselves, think of them. Do you want them to be punished for your actions?"

The Warden paused. His future in the prison system was bound up in his ability to meet such situations as this, and he was doing his best to reason with us. He was a man of about fifty, with a clean cut, intelligent face.

His position was both delicate and difficult. If word of our impending strike reached the public there would, undoubtedly, be a terrific reaction to it, and he was certain to be made the scapegoat. On the other hand if word failed to reach the public he would probably be accused of suppressing the news, and meanwhile his authority within the prison seemed sure to be undermined.

The Warden was a man with a comparatively advanced outlook. There were adequate recreational facilities in his prison, smoking

was permitted in the mess hall, movies were shown once a week, inmates were allowed to put on shows, the yard period was long, the institution's soft ball team was given ample time to practice, and the prison generally was run along what are considered liberal lines.

The Warden was a good natured man with a sense of humor and a keen feeling of sympathy for the underdog. Ironically, he requested the prison bureau to send us to his prison; and, to be perfectly honest, the worst we suffered under his administration was solitary confinement, whereas wardens at other prisons allowed guards to beat and torture inmates of our type.

The Warden was a sports enthusiast of the first order. No broadcast of a fight or an important game passed without the inmates hearing it. He had been known to rouse the whole prison after lights out to show a new fight film, even going so far as to let the men in solitary out to see it. And no inmate was happier than he over the fact that the prison soft ball team was undefeated in a really excellent league, and was scheduled to play the other undefeated team, a group of college men, in a few weeks, for the championship of that area.

The prison team's high standing was due to the good pitching of a convict in our group of strikers, and it was this, coupled with the Warden's love of sports, that was partially responsible for the extraordinary event which occurred in the prison later.

The Warden was a liberal with a position of authority in an evil system. On the whole he attempted to use his authority to alleviate the evil. The attempt was foredoomed and futile. Despite everything he had done, his prison was still a hell on earth.

Negroes were segregated, teen aged convicts were thrown into solitary, foul food was served frequently, the lunacy ward was used to coerce the sane, reading matter was censored unmercifully, stool pigeons plied their rotten trade, men 'blew their tops', and the constant surveillance and grinding monotony of confinement took its inevitable toll.

The reforms instituted by the Warden seemed to us to be of

a piddling nature when placed alongside the general horror of everyday prison life, through we weren't striking against the prison system at that time. Many of us had clashed with the system and would continue to do so, but on this occasion our strike was of a more fundamental nature.

Inescapably, the Warden was forced to oppose us, and uphold his authority; and, with it, the authority of the evil system that gave him his power. For a kind man, which he seemed to me to be, it was a tragic situation.

A good impulse prompted him to ask the prison bureau to send us to his prison. His fate was to discover us unmanageable. We were a proud, stiff-necked lot who openly boasted we were the most radical men in the country. We lined up that way, radical versus liberal, and began our struggle.

The Warden continued to speak.

"If you carry through with this strike, not only will your lives be affected, but liberalism itself may be wiped out in the prison bureau. All of you know how hard some of us in the bureau have struggled to better the lot of the inmate. We've made progress lately, and we expect to make more, but the forces against us are powerful, and the balance delicate. A strike at this time may upset the balance and throw the prison bureau backwards to the conditions of 20 years ago. None of you men want that."

"But we aren't striking against the prison bureau," someone said.

"It doesn't make any difference why you're striking. The question is can any group in a federal prison call a strike at any time. The issue here is whether your group of twenty or thirty men has the authority, in this prison or whether the people of the United States through the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the Warden have it."

The Warden was good humored and even friendly despite the forcefulness of his words.

"I want to be fair to you men," he said. "In many ways the circumstances behind this strike are unusual, and therefore I'm willing to make concessions. For example I might allow your group

to cease work on the designated day and turn the chapel over to you, provided you give your word not to ask the rest of the inmate body to join you. You'll have to make it clear, however, that you're not protesting against the prison bureau and that the nature of the services are religious, rather than a strike.

The fairness of this proposal struck me at once and I was genuinely sorry we couldn't agree with the Warden on it. Unfortunately, any arrangement other than a strike would have destroyed the meaning and effect of our protest.

"Any inmate who wants to join us has been invited to do so," a convict said.

The Warden shook his head.

"Impossible. Supposing everybody joins you. Who will man the hospitals and take care of the sick? Who will take care of the kitchen and other chores?"

"We'll leave skeleton crews on duty," another convict said.

"None of the other inmates are going to join us, anyway," someone else said.

Others chipped in with similar comments.

The Warden raised his hand for silence.

"I've made my offer," he said. "It's up to you to decide whether you'll take it or not. If not, you'll have to take the consequences."

We decided to take the consequences.

The other inmates, though they failed to join the strike, kept us informed and-or misinformed via the grapevine of the Prison Bureau's moves the following day.

The Bureau, thoroughly aroused, acted swiftly.

Apparently fearing a general strike of riot proportions, carloads of Department of Justice men, armed with machine guns and tear gas, were unloaded at the prison gates, according to the grapevine. Other Department of Justice men, it seemed, were released in the prison disguised as inmates. Guards, on their own hook, and

probably without official knowledge, went their rounds letting the inmates know they'd be safe in starting fights with any in our group of conscientious objectors, if they wanted to do so. Our case as pacifists would be less clear in the public eye if we fought back, thereby making it possible for the Bureau to get tougher with us.

Early in the afternoon stool pigeons began circulating among the men in an effort to bring inmate pressure to bear on us. The prison would be punished as a whole if the strike took place, they explained. Smoking, letter writing, and visiting privileges would be withdrawn from all. Other punitive measures would be taken.

The six or seven hundred bootleggers, counterfeiters, embezzlers, smugglers, pimps, white slavers, con men, dope peddlers, robbers, murderers, and what have you, comprising the so-called criminal population of the prison stood to lose considerably by our strike; yet not one of them put the slightest pressure on us to change our stand.

During the few months we had been in prison the inmates had grown to love and respect us—as we had them. They were a patient, forbearing body, daily putting up with the most degrading and despicable treatment by the prison bureau. We cast our lot in with theirs from the beginning, and all of our group of ministers, divinity students, and socialists had been in solitary or restrictions at one time or another for protesting against the evil conditions under which they lived.

Furthermore, in our group of absolutists, were many spiritually developed men of almost saintly stature. Even the judges who sentenced them recognized it. One judge, after hearing the Union Theological Seminary students in our group, wept and apologized as he passed sentence on them. Another judge, sentencing Arle Brooks, after reviewing his life of service to others in a probationary report, remarked that he felt like Pontius Pilate.

These men and the others seemed to me, a socialist, to be the first truly religious men I had ever met, and I have known rabbis, ministers, priests, and church goers all my life. Under their

influence many an inmate, who had never known kindness or even decent treatment before, discovered his own spiritual potential.

The guards and prison officials were also aware of the unusual situation in the prison, and more than one commented on it. There was less swearing, fighting and sex talk; more studying, discussion and quiet re-appraisal. A general restoration of self respect seemed to be taking place among the men.

Our strike was one in which they had no apparent stake; yet they were as zealous of our welfare as if they had been blood relatives.

By late afternoon the prison was in a state of nervous apprehension. When the supper whistle blew that evening the men poured out of their cell blocks and surged across the prison yard toward the mess hall, carrying us along with them. Midway, they came to a sudden halt.

The Warden was standing on a small box in the center of the yard. Guards quickly rounded the men up and herded them into a bunched mass in front of him. Other convicts continued to pour out into the mob. I moved toward the rear and two guards detached themselves and moved in behind me. Other guards stationed themselves wherever there were conscientious objectors. The men stirred restlessly, anxious to get to their suppers. Night was falling and a high wind was whipping through the yard.

The Warden began to speak.

As everyone knew, he said, a general strike was being called the next morning by a small group of inmates. The nature of the strike as he saw it did not concern the rest of the inmates and he expressed the belief that they wouldn't join us. We were not striking against the Prison Bureau or the administration of the prison, he pointed out, but against the government of the U.S.

The patriotism of the group calling the strike, though we were not yet at war, was of a questionable nature. We had deliberately disobeyed the law of the land and that was why we were in prison. We had been trouble makers from the beginning and now we were willfully calling a strike against the best interests of the nation.

Everybody was against war, including himself, and he had gone along with us as long as he could, offering to allow us the use of the chapel for prayer and meditation on the designated day, but we had rejected the offer, preferring to flout the authority of the prison bureau and the government.

The selfishness of our course was apparent. A strike in the prison bureau at this time might prove disastrous. The Bureau was more liberal than at any time in its history. He dwelt on the gains that had been made recently and emphasized the benefits accruing to the inmates. Our strike would be a blow to those gains, giving the reactionary opposition an opportunity to criticize, and halt them, possibly destroy them altogether. The inmates would see the wisdom of steering clear of our strike, and the selfishness of it. He expressed his confidence in the men, and knew he could count on them for support. He paused for applause.

Silence met him.

Hastily, he continued his speech. He emphasized again the gains that had been made in the bureau, the threat to them, the selfishness of our group of men. We had so little consideration for the inmates we were going to deprive them of their food, if we had our way, by calling the kitchen help out on strike. We were going to deprive the hospital of help, leaving the sick and dying to shift for themselves. The Warden was interrupted by a clear, but respectful voice.

"That's not quite true, Warden."

The speaker was Arle Brooks, a minister of the Disciples of Christ, known among the men for his meek character and spiritual humility.

The Warden focussed his attention on Arle.

"Seize that man," he said, pointing at him.

Guards quickly surrounded Arle, locking their arms together around him.

The inmates, knowing Arle's character, broke into spontaneous laughter at the unnecessary precaution. The laughter died instantly when the Warden ordered Arle taken away and thrown into solitary.

A wave of angry muttering swept through the crowd.

The Warden demanded silence and went on with his speech. The muttering continued ominously. The Warden quickly ended on a patriotic note, got off his box, and staying close to his guards disappeared into one of the buildings. Guards shoved the men across the yard toward the mess hall. The muttering continued.

After supper we circulated among the men as much as possible, attempting to quiet them. By lights out, the prison was somewhat calmer. I was quartered in an inside steel wire enclosed space, called a medium custody dormitory by the prison officials. The floors were concrete and the small area was enclosed by concrete walls. In it were eight or nine crowded rows of steel cots on which the men slept. Between the steel wire and the back wall was a small walk along which guards made their nightly rounds. In the dead of night I was aroused by a guard carrying a flashlight. He shook me awake.

"Get your clothes and follow me."

I picked my way through the mass of sleeping men and followed him into an adjoining room where I was allowed to dress. Speech was forbidden. After a long wait a guard came down the cat walk leading two other conscientious objectors. We followed them silently down the corridor through the maze of the prison. I had no idea what was in store for us, but knowing the prison bureau, I had no doubt that it was going to be unpleasant. We emerged in front of a large waiting room. Inside were the other men of our group, sitting silently. We went in and took our places with them. I lit a cigarette. A guard took it from me. The clock on the wall ticked.

A Lieutenant of guards entered and checked our names against the list he was carrying. He disappeared down the corridor, suddenly; and, as suddenly, reappeared. He read a name.

"David Dellinger."

Dave arose and followed him. David was a divinity student whose first act in prison had been against the segregation of Negroes. Walking into the mess hall he had deliberately stepped

out of the white men's line and sat at a Negro table. The mess hall is the most heavily guarded spot in a prison and the simple action took extreme courage. His punishment was swift and ruthless; yet afterwards, he had consistently opposed the Bureau's racist policy along with the rest of us. Outside, he had done settlement work in slums, while still attending Theological Seminary. Previously, he had held an English exchange scholarship which, in the religious world, parallels the Rhodes Scholarship. He failed to return.

We waited. The guards watched. The silence was heavy, broken only by the ticking of the clock. The sound of footsteps, coming from the distant end of the corridor, reached us. The Lieutenant arrived at the door, entered, and looked at his list.

"Sturge Steinert," he said.

Steinert arose and followed him. We listened as the echo of dual footsteps receded in the corridor and faded out. Steinert was a socialist who had been a student at Temple University. The American Legion had awarded him a scholarship for winning an essay contest on Americanism. The scholarship, I believe, was withdrawn when he carried his ideals into practice. He also failed to return.

The Lieutenant entered and read another name.

"Gordon Goley."

Goley was a religious man who had renounced all things material, and devoted his full time to a study of the Bible. Independently, through prayer and meditation, he had attained a spiritual stature as yet unachieved by most western religionists. His unaffected simplicity and truly holy character were a source of inspiring strength, and his mere presence in any group was a powerful agent for good. In the ancient meaning of the term, he was, and is, probably the only living holy man in the United States.

He too, failed to return.

The Lieutenant called for us, one by one. The wait, for those of us who were not at the top of the list, seemed interminable. I became extremely nervous. I looked around the room at the men

waiting with me, for reassurance.

They were the finest people I had ever known. Gathered up from everywhere they seemed to me to embody the conscience of America. Each could have obtained his release from prison instantly by registering in the draft, and nearly all, being ministers and divinity students, would have been automatically exempted from service. The rest, for one reason or another, would also have been free at that time. Each in his own way had led an exemplary life, and I was proud to be associated with them.

Eventually, the Lieutenant entered and called my name. I arose and followed him. Walking down the corridor, I remember being amused by the situation, and for the moment, enjoying the sensation of participating in a comic opera. The reality of the waiting Lord High Executioner destroyed the brief pleasantry.

At the end of the corridor I was frisked before being led through the steel barred door that opened into a section of the prison that was devoted to administration offices. The Lieutenant opened the door to the Warden's office, and motioned me to enter.

I had had the sensation of being in comic opera, but the sensation now on entering the Warden's office, was that of stepping into an Arabian Night's adventure.

For months we had seen nothing in the way of furniture or decoration except steel cots, metal chairs, and concrete walls. The Warden's office, by contrast, seemed luxurious. Furnished with thick rugs, modern furniture, invitingly deep chairs, and an abundance of wall pictures, the comparative splendor of the room momentarily dazzled me.

Incongruously, the Warden completed the picture. Apparently having left a social function to return to the prison, he was still wearing full dress evening clothes, the coat of which he had discarded in favor of a smoking jacket. He was sitting at his desk, a volume of poetry in one hand, while, with the other, he tuned a station in on his desk radio. The luxury of his office coupled with his, for a prison, bizarre dress had the effect of sharply emphasizing the differences in our positions.

The Warden invited me to be seated and, to my astonishment asked me had I read Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass", which he had in his hand. His manner was friendly and disarming though he continued to manipulate the dial of the radio nervously throughout the interview. He expressed his regret that he hadn't had the opportunity to discuss my viewpoint with me previously and hoped when I was released we could meet on more social terms over a glass of beer. I returned the polite sentiment. He went on to show his interest in my reasons for joining in the present strike, and I showed him a copy of a note I had given earlier to the Captain of guards, stating my motives. He read the short note, which, as I remember it, went something like this:

"As an expression of solidarity with the student peace strike outside, the majority of the people of the United States, and countless millions throughout the world, I intend to refuse to work on April 23, 1941. I am not striking against the U.S. government or the Bureau of Prisons, but against war, which I believe to be the greatest evil known to man."

The Warden brought the interview to a close a few minutes later and called the Lieutenant of guards who led me away, and threw me into solitary confinement.

A friendly guard explained to me later that a dictaphone was concealed in the Warden's office, connected with his radio, and that transcripts of his interviews with each of us were made and sent to Washington. What the purpose was, I cannot imagine.

Solitary confinement was referred to as 'constructive meditation' by the prison authorities. It differed in no way, insofar as I know, from solitary confinement anywhere. Men went in, endured the terrifying ordeal, and came out weakened, sometimes dulled and apathetic for months or years afterwards, and sometimes broken altogether. During my stay in prison at least one man attempted suicide in solitary preferring death to the barbaric torture.

My cell measured five of my paces long and two wide. The walls and floor were bare concrete. The door was metal with a small glass square built in it. Guards spied in on me from time to

time. Owing to our number, a new cell block, not ordinarily used for solitary purposes had to be opened up, and the advantage was that light seeped in to us through glass apertures. Strict silence was maintained, though I soon discovered I could get a response from George Houser, who was in the next cell by pounding on the wall.

The first day dragged uneventfully, the second monotonously, the third worse. I paced my cell for hours on end, throwing myself on my cot exhausted, and losing myself in daydreams. Insatiable sexual desires overwhelmed me, and I lost count of the days in the interminable silence, which was broken only by the dull voice of the guard during count. I began to look forward to mealtimes when an inmate, prevented from talking to me by the presence of a guard, deposited a tray inside the cell. One evening I found a cigarette and match neatly taped on the underside of the tray. Delighted, I smoked it to the end, burning my fingers, becoming dizzy and nauseated on the smoke.

The days passed. I made up songs and listened to the words in my head. I wrote mental essays, novels, plays and short stories. I scratched my growing beard and braided my hair to while away the time. I reviewed my life, picking out the incidents I liked best and dwelling on them endlessly. I thought about god and prayed. I pounded the wall and paced the cell. One day I began screaming mad parodies of patriotic music at the top of my lungs, and brought a guard scurrying down the corridor to my cell. I told him I'd been bit by a patriot and had caught patriotic fever. He grinned at me and told me to shut up. I fell on my cot and laughed at my own joke.

More than anything I longed to hear a voice, not dully counting but saying something with feeling in it, a speech, a polite conversation, a political discussion, or even a poetry recitation.

I got my wish on the calmest and quietest day of all, a Sunday when not a sound of any kind was audible in the cell block. Unexpectedly, Ernest Kirkjian, an ascetic of Armenian descent, began to sing the Latin version of Ave Maria. The holy music

sounded incredibly beautiful after the awful days of silence, and it seemed to me I was hearing, really hearing and feeling, the human voice in its true splendor for the first time. The saintliness and purity of angels seemed to me to be in Kirkjian's song, and something profound and hitherto untouched inside me, went out and mingled with it.

The song ended, and down the corridor, Bill Lovell began to intone the Lord's prayer. The other Christians joined in and recited it, and Al Herling, Stan Rappaport and myself joined together and recited an ancient Hebrew prayer.

It was a good day.

Weeks passed.

One day a guard entered the cell block, walked down the corridor and opened the door to Benedict's cell. Benedict, like most of the pacifists in our group, was a fine athlete. Outside, his physical prowess was a legend in amateur athletic circles, and, in particular, he excelled as a soft ball pitcher. Big muscled, strong and agile, his speed ball was so swift only one man in the prison could catch him. The prison team, built around his pitching, was tied for first place in its league, and his ability to hold the opposition scoreless had placed it there. The inmates, probably for the first time in the history of prison ball, were solidly behind their team, which originally entered the league expecting to serve as a scrub practise team for the other amateurs in that area.

The Warden, a sports lover, was delighted with the unusual situation, and it did not surprise us to hear the guard offer Benedict his freedom if he would pitch the championship play-off games, which were scheduled for that day. Benedict pointed out he was in no condition to pitch after his long confinement, and wasn't sure he could make it. The guard explained he would be given time to limber up and mentioned how disappointed the inmates would be if the championship was lost. Benedict thereupon said he would do it. He added, however, only on condition that all the

men in solitary, including the inmates not in the pacifist group, were released, The guard said he would speak to the Warden about it, and we heard him trudge down the corridor.

We waited in silence till he came back. The Warden could not agree to Benedict's terms, but he offered a compromise. He would release all the conscientious objectors for the game, and Benedict permanently. Benedict refused. The guard disappeared, returning shortly thereafter with another offer. The Warden would release everybody for the game, and Benedict permanently. Benedict refused. The Guard disappeared.

About a half hour later a Lieutenant of guards entered and told Benedict the men were warming up for the first game. The inmates, he said, were aware of his refusal to pitch, and were resentful towards him and the rest of us. He then said he thought he could prevail on the Warden to release all the conscientious objectors permanently, and the other men in solitary for the game, if Benedict would do it. Benedict refused.

Fully an hour passed before the Captain of guards entered and released us. The prison team had lost the first game of the series, and the Warden, unable to endure further losses, had agreed to Benedict's terms.

Grinning hugely, we left our cells, and laughing at each other's pasty complexions, bearded faces, and unkempt hair, hurried out into the prison yard. A wave of applause went through the inmate stands as Benedict rushed down the field and began warming up.

Benedict, in true Frank Merriwell fashion, summoned his strength after the long weeks of demoralized living, and, in a superhuman and prodigious performance, pitched batter after batter out, enabling the prison team to rally and score, and win the series.

Word of the remarkable feat reached the neighboring cities through the sports pages of their newspapers, and later, when Benedict was released, over 20,000 people paid fancy admission prices to see him in action at a benefit game.

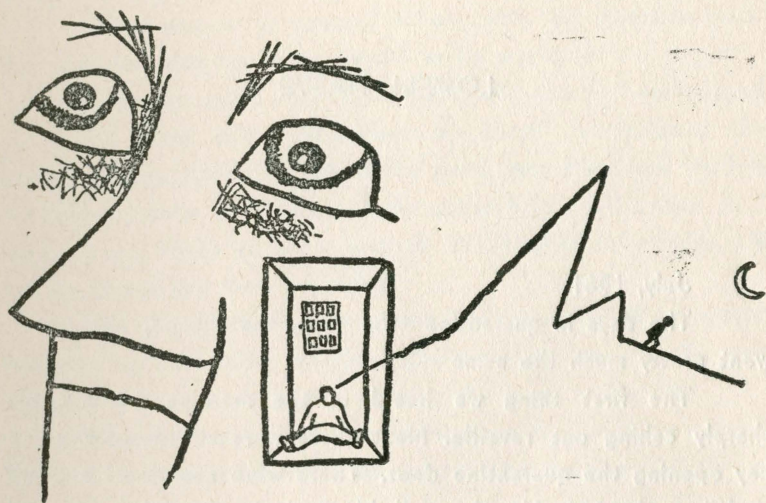
Morale broke down completely in the prison after the games,

when we were rounded up, including Benedict, and thrown back into solitary. The guard on duty was so disgusted he did not even bother to lock our cells.

The next day at noon the Warden reversed his stand and released us. The midday whistle had blown and the men were already in the mess hall, eating. We straggled across the empty yard, basking in the sun, enjoying our freedom. A spontaneous wave of applause broke out among the men as the first of our group entered the hall. Surging across the hall the wave became a crescendo. Six hundred pairs of hands joined in and the crescendo became pandemonium. Guards ran up and down the aisles; they were ignored. The pandemonium increased when Benedict entered the hall, maintaining itself at an incredible pitch. A volcano of thunderous and deafening applause burst out when Arle Brooks entered, but when the so-called criminals who had been in solitary came in, the convicts literally went wild, beating their metal cups on the tables, and stamping their feet.

We stood in the center of the hall, astounded at the demonstration. It became clear to me that although they were applauding Benedict, Brooks, and all of us who had been in solitary, they were doing something more. A mass catharsis of human misery was taking place before our eyes. Some of the men were weeping, others were laughing like madmen. It was like nothing I had ever seen before, and nothing I ever expect to see again.





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