

MANHUNT

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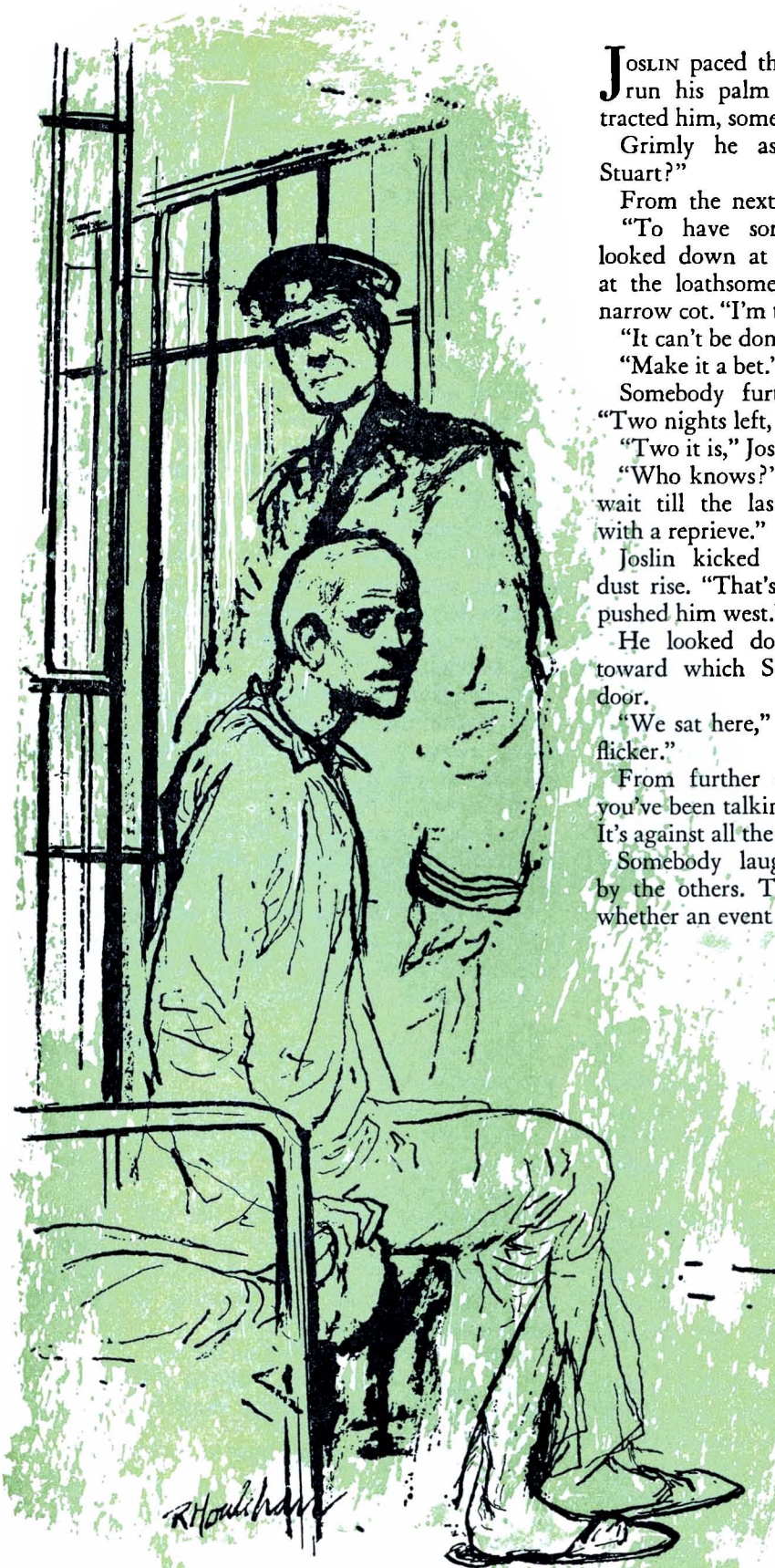
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JOSLIN paced the small cell. He stopped briefly to run his palm along the bars. The motion distracted him, sometimes.

Grimly he asked, "Want to make that bet, Stuart?"

From the next cell, Stuart asked softly, "Why?"

"To have something to think about." Joslin looked down at his shoes without laces and back at the loathsome sink and bedpan as well as the narrow cot. "I'm trying it anyhow, you know."

"It can't be done," Stuart said.

"Make it a bet."

Somebody further down the cell block asked, "Two nights left, huh, Joss?"

"Two it is," Joslin said.

"Who knows?" Stuart said. "The governor might wait till the last minute before coming through with a reprieve."

Joslin kicked at the stone floor and watched dust rise. "That's what Smitty was saying till they pushed him west."

He looked down to his left, in the direction toward which Smitty had gone, toward a small door.

"We sat here," he added, "and watched the lights flicker."

From further down, Will Arbenz said, "What you've been talkin' about is crazy. Nobody'd let you. It's against all the rules to let you."

Somebody laughed. The sound was taken up by the others. They laughed heavily, as they did whether an event was funny or only mildly amusing.

bet
I
don't
die

by

ARNOLD

ENGLISH

*Know what it's like waiting for
the chair—the electric chair?*

It was evening. In the other wings of the prison, the men would be finishing dinner and planning ahead. Maybe Joslin's name figured in some of the hushed conversations.

Will Arbenz said huskily, "The chances of a last-minute reprieve are pretty small. If you had a chance, you'd know it. We all have to get used to what's going to happen."

Arbenz was due to go in three months. His gravelly voice and exact knowledge of procedure made Joslin's nerve-ends crawl.

"We can make it a worthwhile bet, Stu," Joslin said, a little nervously. "If I lose, you get my things."

Stuart grunted. "For two weeks," he said dismally.

"Look what you'd be getting," Joslin grinned, tapped the wall between them for emphasis. "My address book, for instance. It's full of girl's names."

"I can sure use it!" Stuart gave that particularly hearty death-cell laugh. "What else?"

"Red tie and blue suit. We're about the same size."

A guard passed on his way to light a cigarette for one of the prisoners. Joslin watched the guard, counted two hundred footsteps from the cell to the station down at the other end.

"Any money in this deal?" Stuart grunted. "Not that I need it, but my missus can use it."

"I've only got about fifty bucks," Joslin said regretfully. "Suppose I win, what do I get?"

"I've got about a hundred dollars downstairs in the property clerk's office."

"Forget the money. What else?"

"Suit, shirt, tie, wallet."

"I don't give a damn what the stakes are. Now, here's the bet." He lowered his voice so that only Stuart would be able to hear. "That even if I don't get a reprieve on Wednesday night, I'll beat the chair that night."

"How?" Stuart was almost hoarse. "You tell me that much or there's no bet."

Joslin took a deep breath. "Here it is: I'm going to kill one of the guards Wednesday night."

Stuart was silent for a full minute, then asked, "What's that got to do with the price of tea in China?"

"Easiest thing in the world, Stu. Kill one of 'em and what happens? Everything stops. New records have to be made, a full investigation has to be held. That means they won't be able to do it then."

"And afterwards?"

"I'll figure something else to keep me out of the chair."

"Won't work," Stuart decided grimly. "They're pretty damn careful around here."

"Maybe they are. Maybe not. Anyhow, that's what the bet's about."

Down the cell block, Will Arbenz was saying loudly to somebody else, "Did your lawyer take advantage of clause 415? A lot of 'em forget that."

Arbenz had written out his own appeals, and told everybody the exact wording. The man's only serious reading matter were books on criminal law, and he probably knew them by heart.

Joslin said suddenly, loudly, "What time is it?"

"Seven o'clock," he was told.

Joslin had purposely smashed his watch on coming into the death house, and been sorry about it ever since. But he knew he'd be laughed at if he bought a watch now.

"It's ten minutes since I asked," he said wonderingly. "For ten minutes I didn't even think about what time it was."

Down at the other end, the cell block door opened and Father Mullins came waddling in, smiling and nodding to all of them, asking if they wanted anything, if they would like to talk to him. Only Arbenz accepted that offer. Joslin, trying to read one of the innumerable pocket edition westerns in his cell, could hear Arbenz' talk to the priest as a low muttering.

Joslin slept somehow. He woke in time to see day-break. He felt sick. Pain laced his stomach. Every five minutes one of the other men, Brent, called out the time.

The day's jokes and semi-wisecracks had already started with somebody asking Arbenz, "Your life insurance paid up?"

One of the guards had thrown in the morning newspaper. Joslin glanced idly through it. The sound of leaves turning in other cells came plainly to him.

Stuart said, "Anybody know a three-letter word for arbitrate?"

Brent, a southerner, was reading aloud the day's installment of the Pogo comic strip. Arbenz complained at an opinion in one of the editorials.

In the last few months, Joslin had taken to smoking; a cigarette was rarely out of his mouth. He didn't want to get up for a light now because of the pain in his stomach.

When he finally arose, and signalled to a guard to light his cigarette, Brent asked him sarcastically, "What do you smoke them things for? You could die of lung cancer."

Lunch was pretty good, as were most of the meals.

In mid-afternoon, under heavy guard, the men were taken out to a special section of the yard. They were permitted to walk or run. Arbenz, with pants rolled up above the knees, did setting-up exercises and counted heavily at each move. Brent stood still, looking calmly up at the sky.

Joslin forced himself to stand absolutely motionless. When Stuart approached, he said, "Don't bother me now." Stuart shrugged and resumed his walk around the rim of the yard. He walked very quickly, hands at his sides.

When the exercise hour was done, the men were marched back to the cells.

In mid-afternoon, Joslin was taken to the visitor's room. He walked heavily, head bowed.

His lawyer waited for him, a tall, gray-haired man. He wore a blue suit. Last time his lawyer had worn a brown one, the time before that a blue sharkskin. The ties were always different, too, usually of hard silk. A black-edged handkerchief always peeped out of a breast pocket.

The two men faced each other across a table in a small room. Armed guards stood at each end of the room.

"I've talked to the governor," the lawyer said. "Going to see him again tomorrow afternoon. I'm doing what I can."

On the way back to his cell, Joslin found himself trying to detect sympathetic looks from the guards.

At about seven-thirty he became grim; the execution had been scheduled for seven o'clock the next night. He resisted the impulse to pace the cell, to smash everything, to rumple and dirty the bed, to scream. He lay back, forcing himself to be quiet.

Stuart rapped lightly on the wall between them.

"Go ahead, Stu. The line's clear."

"Your lawyer say anything, Joss?"

Like the other men, Stuart was always hopeful.

"Nothing I haven't heard before."

"Still in all, you never can tell," Stuart said. "Remember what happened to Smitty, don't you? Twice they put him off, boy. Twice."

Suddenly Stuart's big fist hit the wall. "I killed a girl in five minutes. It didn't take months of torture! No reprieves, no petitions, just my hands around her neck and that was all. If you want to know something, Joss, I think it was damn humane!"

"Hands," Joslin said thoughtfully. "I guess that'll be the way."

"The bet?" Stuart whispered. "That what you mean?"

"Sure. It's probably the one chance I've got."

From a cell further down, Arbenz' voice was raised in anger. "My constitutional rights were disregarded and that voids the conviction. Anybody knows that much."

Joslin's nerves were being stretched almost to the breaking point. Everything irritated him. His nose was running and he felt dust and dirt everywhere.

He didn't sleep at all during the night, but lay awake watching as much sky as he could see from the recessed window above. Toward morning, he was watching the effect of every change in light on the cracks in the ceiling, the never-ending patterns that were being made.

A soft tapping on the wall signalled that Stuart wanted to talk. "You asleep, Joss? I was just thinking, they say it's all over so soon you can't hardly take a deep breath."

Somebody made that remark at least once a day.

"Just the same," Joslin said, "the bet's still on."

He had a recurrence of the pains he'd felt yesterday morning, cutting his stomach in two. He heard every step of the awakening of the men, with interest as if it were all new. Radnik prayed in the morning. Brent was talking to Arbenz about southern cooking. In cell five, McGivern sang something jaunty, then abruptly cut it off.

Men turned the leaves of their morning papers. Brent was reading aloud the day's installment of Pogo. Stuart growled over the sports news.

Joslin was barely conscious of a guard telling him, "Your breakfast's getting cold." When he didn't acknowledge it, the guard said irritably, just like a parent, "There's plenty people in the world would give a fortune for a good breakfast like that one."

Joslin's eyes had started hurting; there was still the pain in his stomach . . .

It seemed impossible that lunch had already been set down near the cell. That time was going so fast made him get up quickly, almost frantically. In a moment, he fell back, breathing heavily.

An assistant warden came along and asked Joslin if he wanted to see any reporters. Joslin didn't answer.

"That isn't getting you anything," the assistant warden snapped. "Do you mind if a couple of reporters are witnesses, tonight? You can tell me if you think any of them are objectionable to you. . . . Okay, if you feel like keeping quiet. You want to send any messages? . . . Okay, okay, you ain't talking."

Joslin had no family. If he'd had one, he would probably have wished he didn't have one.

Because he hadn't said a word to the assistant warden, the idea was getting around that Joslin was numb, paralyzed with grief. The guards were therefore expecting to have an easy time with him.

The assistant warden was talking to somebody else, when Arbenz asked him, "Nothing on Joslin's appeal?"

"Nothing I know about."

"He's got a chance, hasn't he?"

"How should I know!" the assistant warden demanded, and left muttering.

In the afternoon, Joslin was taken to a small room where the prison barber, one of the inmates, shaved his head. Before Joslin left, the inmate called out, "I hope the governor likes you."

When he arrived back at the cell block, Arbenz and Stuart were joking about waiting lists for cells. They stopped abruptly.

Stuart paced his cell. From where he lay, Joslin could hear him cracking his knuckles. Father Mullins arrived, and asked Joslin patiently if he wanted to talk to him. Brent and McGivern began arguing about baseball, began making fantastic bets.

Joslin had been asked for his preference as far as dinner was concerned, but he had said nothing.

When dinner was placed on a small chair outside the cell, he discovered that he was hungry. And if he ate, he thought, he would be sustaining the part he had set himself to play.

He didn't move or talk when told by the assistant warden that his lawyer's final petition had been denied.

He could hear Arbenz ask, "Are you sure?" and mutter, "I'd have thought he was pretty well set."

When McGivern barked out, "Shut up!", Arbenz muttered, "These goddam lawyers, they don't *care* what happens to you!"

Later on, the cell block door opened. Two sets of footsteps approached. Joslin grew tense. He didn't look up, but forced himself to lie still.

The door of his cell was opened.

"Come on, Joslin."

Joslin turned, lay down full on the bed, then rose from it. He was slow and calm. His face looked haggard.

One of the guards, a heavy man shifting the weight on his feet, asked, "You all set?"

He nodded instead of answering. The top of his head, shorn as it was, felt cold. On the threshold of the cell, he touched the bars with one palm, then the other.

He stepped out of the cell. The other men were standing at the bars, watching him intently, carefully.

Stuart called, "Don't break down, fella."

Arbenz said, "You'll be all right. Just take—take it easy."

Radnik said intensely, "I'll pray for you, Joss."

The face of one of the guards flushed, for some reason. He was a thin young guy with big eyes.

Joslin walked to the middle of the cell block, his

steps heavy. His features were without expression.

Suddenly he made his move. Turning, hands out, he dived for the thin guard's throat. The other guard swore; at once, Joslin felt blackjack blows about his body.

Other guards ran toward them, those who usually stood in front of the cell block. The pain in Joslin's body grew worse. His eyes swam. He couldn't have seen much anyhow, because of the mass of bodies swarming over him.

The thin guard gurgled and spat, tried to use hands and knees.

Joslin no longer knew what was happening. His whole world was made up of pain. Somebody had hit him in the mouth and warm blood flowed down his throat.

"Use the blackjack!" somebody called out.

The blows around his head increased in tempo and fury. Joslin sensed power leaving his hands. His mouth opened reflexively, as his insides tried to throw up.

He now heard what was being said without making sense of the words, each standing by itself—without meaning. Then, for an instant, clarity returned.

"Schwartz is going to live . . ."

The guard probably, the young one with the big eyes.

"That's more than you can say for *him*."

Words were fading again into a dim consciousness.

"What else could you expect after the blackjack-ing he took."

"Guess you're right," somebody else said.

"You got to hand it to Joslin, though: he beat the chair after all. . . ."

