

WEIRD TALES

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

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*A "Spooky" Tale With a
Grim Background*

The GHOST GUARD

By BRYAN IRVINE

IF EVERY one of the sixty guards and officials at Granite River Prison had been asked for the name of the most popular guard on the force, there would have been sixty answers—"Asa Shores." If each of the fifteen hundred convicts in the prison had been asked which guard was most disliked by the convicts, fifteen hundred answers would have been the same—"Asa Shores!"

If some curious person had asked of each convict and each guard, "Who is considered the most desperate, the hardest, the shrewdest criminal in the prison?" the answer would have been unanimous, "Malcolm Hulsey, the 'lifer.'"

True, it does not seem reasonable that Asa Shores should be liked by every guard and official and disliked by every convict. To those not familiar with the duties of prison guards it would seem that Asa Shores' method of handling the convicts, if disapproved of by fifteen hundred convicts, would surely be disapproved of by at least one of the sixty guards. But the explanation is simple.

Asa Shores' great great-grandfather had followed the prisons as mariners follow the seas. Then Asa's grandfather took up the work and followed it, with an iron hand and an inflexible will, until one day a cell-made knife in the

hands of a long-time "con" entered his back at a point where his suspenders crossed, deviating enough to the left to pierce his heart. Came next Asa Shores' father, who went down in attempting to quell the famous Stromberg break of 1895.

Asa, therefore, his prison methods impelled perhaps by heredity, looked upon every wearer of gray behind the walls as a convict, nothing more, nothing less. He neither abused or favored any convict. A one-year man was to Asa a convict and no better than the man who was serving a life sentence.

The crime for which any convict was sent up was of little moment to Asa; neither did he bother about who among the inmates were considered desperate. The fact that a man wore prison gray was sufficient, whether he be a six-months sneak-thief or a ninety-nine-year murderer.

When Asa shot and killed Richard ("Mutt") Allison, when the latter attempted to escape, the warden had said:

"There was really no need of killing that half-witted short-termer, Asa. He was doing only a year and was perfectly harmless. A shot in the leg or foot would have been better."

And Asa's reply had been:

"I had no idea who the man was, though I have seen him dozens of times, and I did not know how long he

was doing. But I would have made no difference if I had known. He was a convict, sir, and he was attempting to escape. If he was only half-witted, as you say, he should have been in the insane asylum, not in the penitentiary."

So that was that.

I Asa ever gave a convict a smile it had never been recorded. It is a known fact that he was never seen to frown upon a convict. He was, in short, the smileless, unyielding personification of "duty," and every convict hated him for what he was. When Asa shot he shot to kill—and he never missed. Four little white crosses on the bleak hillside near the prison proclaimed his flawless marksmanship.

Why was this big sandy-haired, steel-blue-eyed, middle-aged Asa Shores liked by his brother guards? There were many reasons why. It was as if Asa's unnatural, cold, vigilant, unfeeling attitude toward the convicts was offset each day when he came off duty by a healthy, wholesome desire to drop duty as a work-horse sheds an irritating harness. He was the life of the guards' quarters; a big good-natured, playful fellow, who thoroughly enjoyed a practical joke, whether he be the victim of the joke or the instigator. If he had a temper he had never allowed it to come to the surface. He excelled in all sports in the gymnasium, and somehow, somehow, he found more funny stories than any other man on the force. The trite old saying that "he would give a friend the shirt off his back" fitted him like a new kid glove. He gave freely to his friends, and, in giving, seemed to find real joy.

After twelve years' service on the guardline, Asa was still an ordinary wall guard. This would seem discouraging to many; but not so to Asa. It was not generally known that he drew a larger salary than did the other wall guards. He was an excellent wall guard. Hence, he was kept on the wall, while newer men on the force were promoted to better positions. But Asa drew the salary of a shift captain and was therefore content.

He did not even seem to mind when he was taken from comfortable Tower

Number One, morning shift, and detailed permanently to Tower Number Three on the "grave-yard" shift at night from eight P. M. to four A. M. This change was deemed necessary for several reasons. First, because Asa positively refused to discriminate between short-termers and long-termers, or desperate men and harmless "nuts," when using his rifle to stop a "break" or the attempt of a single convict to escape.

The men being locked in their cells at night, Asa, as a night guard, would have little opportunity to practice rifle shooting with a running convict as the target. Another reason for detailing him to Tower Number Three was because trouble was expected some night at that point in the yard, and with sure-fire Asa on the job the officials felt that any attempt of the convicts to escape would be promptly frustrated.

One of Asa's wholesome habits, when no convicts were near him, was singing. It was not singing, really, but Asa thought it was and he shortened the long, lonesome hours at night on Tower number three with songs—*song*, rather, because he knew and sang but one. It was not a late or popular song, and, as Asa sang it, it sounded like the frog that croak in the marshes at night:

*"When I die and am buried
deep,
"I'll return at night to take a
peep
"At those who hated me.
"I'll ha'nt their homes and
spoil their sleep,
"Chill their blood: the skin
will creep
"On those who hated me."*

Not a pretty song; nor did it make cheerful those guards who passed near Tower Number Three while making the night rounds. But Asa loved that song.

IT WAS while the wall was being extended another two hundred feet to make room within the inclosure for a new cell house that Asa shot the "lifer," Malcolm Huber.

The end wall, extending from Tower Number Three to Tower Number Four, had been torn down and the stones moved two hundred feet farther south to be used on the new wall. A temporary barbed-wire fence had been erected about the area in which the convicts worked on the new wall. Extra armed guards were stationed at intervals of fifty feet outside the inclosure to guard the working convicts.

Malcolm Hulsey had successfully feigned illness one day and was allowed to remain in his cell. Cell house guards had seen him lying in his bunk, only the top of his head showing above the blankets. At lock-up time the cell house guards making the count, saw a foot protruding from under the blankets in Hulsey's bunk and what they believed to be the top of his head showing at the head of the bed.

At ten-fifteen that night the eagle-eyed Asa Shores, on Tower Number Three, saw a dark figure slip under the lower wire of the temporary fence and run. Asa fired once and saw the man fall.

Then Asa, to comply with the prison rules, yelled "halt!" The command, of course, was needless, Hulsey having halted abruptly when a thirty-thirty rifle ball plowed through his shoulder.

After the convict had been carried to the hospital, his cell was opened by the curious guards. A cleverly carved wooden foot protruded from under the blankets at the foot of the bed, several bags of old clothing reposed under the blankets and a thatch of black horse-hair showed at the head of the bed.

Before Hulsey left the hospital the new wall was completed. Tower Number Four, across from Tower Number Three, had been torn down and a new tower Number Four built on the new corner of the wall, two hundred feet farther south. On the other corner, across from New Tower Number Four, was New Tower Number Three. Old Tower Number Three was left standing until further orders. Asa Shores remained on the graveyard shift on Old Tower Number Three.

While off duty one day Asa, prowling about inside the walls, met Mal-

colm Hulsey. The "lifer" was still a bit pale and weak from the gunshot wound.

"One thing I'd like to have you explain, Mr. Shores," said Hulsey. "You plugged me in the shoulder, then yelled 'halt!' Why didn't you command me to stop before firing?"

"Well, it was this way, Hulsey," Asa replied, unsmiling and looking the convict squarely in the eye. "I aimed at the spot where I calculated your heart ought to be, but the light was poor and I had to shoot quick. I naturally supposed you were dead when I commanded you to halt, and, believing you dead, I could see no reason for being in a hurry with the command. Sorry I bungled the job that way, but my intentions were good."

"But," the scowling "lifer" persisted, "you haven't told me yet why you shot before commanding me to halt."

"Oh, that?" Asa drawled with a deprecatory shrug of his massive shoulders. "That is merely a matter of form with me. I very often, after shooting a convict, yell 'halt' some time the next day—or week. Besides, if you had a nice chance to bump me off, you wouldn't say, 'Beware, Mr. Shores, I'm about to kill you.'"

For a half minute convict and keeper gazed into each others eyes.

"I get yuh," Hulsey finally said. "And I guess you're right. I have an idear though that my turn comes next, Mr. Shores; and there'll be no preliminary command or argument."

"Fair enough, Hulsey," Asa replied as he turned away.

A T LAST the big new cell house was completed.

Asa wondered whether he would be left on Old Tower Number Three. It had been decided, he knew, that the old tower would be left on the wall but perhaps not used.

To celebrate the completion of the new building, the warden declared a holiday and issued orders that all the inmates be given the privilege of the yard that day. There was to be wrestling, boxing, foot-racing and other sports.

Asa Shores' sleeping quarters was a

low-ceilinged room on the ground floor in one of the towers of the old cell house. Asa had been warned a number of times that his room was not a safe place to sleep in the day time. Convicts in the yard could enter the room at any time during the day, without being seen by the yard guards or wall guards. Though the one door to the room was thick and heavy, Asa seldom if ever locked it.

Asa had risen in the afternoon, complaining to himself about the noise being made by the convicts in the yard. His peevishness vanished, however, after a cold wash, and he sang as he stood looking out at one of the windows and brushing his hair:

*"When I die and am buried
deep,
I'll return at night to take a
peep
At those who hated me.
I'll ha'nt their homes and
spoil their sleep,
Chill their blood; the skin
will creep,
On those who—"*

Asa's song ended there—ended in a horrible gurgle. A "trusty" found him an hour later lying in a pool of blood near the open window.

His throat had been cut by a sharp instrument in the hand of a person unknown.

Hulsey the "lifer" was questioned, of course, but there was absolutely nothing to indicate that it was he who committed the murder.

The guards looked sadly upon all that remained of Asa Shores and said to each other in hushed voices:

"It had to come. Asa was too good a convict guard not to be murdered."

And though the prison stool pigeons kept their ears and eyes opened, though each guard became a detective, the murder of Asa Shores remained a mystery.

Old Tower Number Three was closed and the doors locked. There was no immediate use for it; but the warden was contemplating the advisability of having another guards' entrance gate

cut through the wall under the tower. In this case, of course, the tower would be used again.

NIGHT Captain Jesse Dunlap sat alone in the guards lookout, inside the walls, at one o'clock on the morning following the murder Asa Shores. Bill Wilton, the night yard guard, was making his round about the buildings in the yard.

Captain Dunlap lazily watched the brass indicators on the report board before him. The indicator for Tower Number One made a half turn to the left and a small bell on the board rang. The captain lifted the receiver from the telephone at his elbow and received the report, "Tower Number One. Anderson on duty. All O. K."

Dunlap merely grunted a response and replaced the receiver on the hook. Presently the indicator for Tower Number Two turned to the left, the bell tinkled, and Dunlap again took the receiver from the hook.

"Tower Number Two. Briggs on duty. All O. K." came the report over the wire.

Then came New Tower Number Three; next Tower Number Four. From the three outside guard-posts came the reports, and one from the cell house, each guard turning in his post number, his name and the usual "O. K."

All the indicators on the board, except that for Old Tower Number Three, were now turned. Captain Dunlap relaxed in his chair, sighed heavily and lit his pipe. Lazily his eyes wandered back to the indicator board.

The unturned indicator for Old Tower Number Three held his gaze and utter sadness gripped him for a moment. Night after night, promptly on the hour, he had seen the indicator for Old Tower Number Three flip jauntily to the left and had heard the tinkle of the little bell on the board. It had always seemed to him that the indicator for Asa Shores' tower turned with more pep than the other indicators, that the bell had tinkled more cheerily, that good old Asa Shores' report carried a note of cheerfulness that lightened the lonesome watches of the night.

Now the old tower was cold, even as poor old Asa was cold; the doors were locked and barred. Never again, thought Dunlap, would he hear Asa Shores' familiar song on the quiet night air. What were the words to that song?

*"When I am dead and buried
deep,
"I'll return at night to take a
peep
"At those who hated—"*

Captain Dunlap suddenly sat erect in his chair. The pipe fell from his lips and clattered on the floor, as his lower jaw dropped and his eyes opened wide to stare at the indicator board; for—

The indicator for Old Tower Number Three was moving—moving, not with a quick turn to the left, but in a hesitant, jerky way that caused the root of every hair on Captain Dunlap's head to tingle. Never before had the captain seen an indicator behave like that. In fact, the indicator system was designed and constructed in such a way that, being controlled by electric contacts, the various indicators would snap into position when a push button in each tower was pressed by the guard on duty in that tower.

In short, an indicator, in accordance with all the rules of electricity as applied to the system, must remain stationary or jerk to the left when the button in the tower was pressed. But here was indicator for Old Tower Number Three wavering, trembling to the left, only to fall back repeatedly to a vertical position. Then again, jerkily, hesitantly to the left, as if a vagrant soul strove to brush aside the veil that banished it from the living.

Captain Dunlap sat rigid and watched the uncanny movements of the bright brass indicator. Vague, fleeting, chaotic thoughts of crossed wires, practical jokes, wandering souls tumbled one after another through his brain.

If only the bell would not tinkle! If it did ring? Well, death then, though it had taken away what was mortal of Asa Shores, had not conquered his eter-

nal vigilance and strict attention to duty.

Farther to the left wavered the indicator, hesitatingly, uncertainly, then—*the bell rang!*

A weak, slow ring, it was, that sounded strange and unnatural in the deathlike silence of the dimly lighted lookout.

CAPTAIN DUNLAP was a brave man. He had smilingly faced death a dozen times in Granite River Prison.

But always his danger was known to be from living, breathing men. Abject terror gripped him now; a nameless terror that seemed to freeze the blood in his veins, contract every muscle and nerve of his body, smother his heart.

But even then reasoning struggled for recognition in his mind. What if it were a part of Asa Shores, a part of him that remained on earth to defy death and carry on? Hasn't Asa always been Captain Dunlap's friend? Why should he fear the spirit of a friend?

Dunlap reached forth a trembling hand, took the receiver from the hook and slowly, reluctantly, placed it to his ear. How he wished, hoped, prayed that no voice would come over the wire!

But it did come, preceded by a faint whispering sound:

"Old t-t-t-tow—" a long pause, then weakly, almost inaudibly, as if the message came from a million miles away—"Old t-t-tower n-n-n— three. S-S-Sho—"

Another pause, a jumble of meaningless words, then a chuckle. God! Asa's familiar chuckle!

"On duty. All O-O—all O—"

A light laugh, a sharp buzzing sound, a sigh, the faint tinkle of a bell, then silence!

Dunlap heard no click of a receiver being replaced on a hook. The line was apparently still open.

Still holding the receiver to his ear, the captain moistened his dry lips with the tip of his tongue. His free hand went involuntarily to his forehead in a vague uncertain gesture and came away damp with perspiration. Must

the answer that ghost call? Must be hooked to the thing that held the line.

When he at last spoke his voice was husky, a strange voice even to him:

"Who—who did it, Asa? Who—who—if you are dead—if this is you, Asa, tell me—who did it."

Again that queer, unfamiliar buzzing sound. Then, from Old Tower Number three, or from beyond the grave perhaps, came a faint, whispering, uncertain voice:

"He—he—it was"

The voice ended in a gurgle.

Dunlap replaced the receiver on the hook, and as he did so his eyes rested on the indicator board and he gasped sharply; for the indicator for Old Tower Number Three went wavering, trembling back to a vertical position on the time dial!

This unheard-of behavior of the indicator was the deepest mystery of all. The indicators, each controlled independent of the others by push buttons in each tower, were constructed mechanically to turn only from right to left.

The indicator for Old Tower Number Three had turned back from left to right!

CAPTAIN DUNLAP made no effort to solve the mystery.

Old Tower Number Three was securely locked and could not be approached except by crossing over the wall from New Tower Number Three on the South-east corner of the wall, or from Tower Number Two on the Northeast corner of the wall. Dunlap himself had closed and locked the doors and windows of the tower. There was but one key to the tower doors, and that key was in Dunlap's pocket.

Unlike the other towers, Old Tower Number Three could not be entered from the ground outside the wall. It was built solidly of stone from the ground up, and the only entrances were the two doors communicating with the top of the wall on either side of the tower.

Besides, strict orders had been given that no one enter the tower unless ordered there by a shift captain. And,

too, in the glare of the arc lights near the wall, it would be impossible for anyone to cross the wall to the tower, without being seen by other wall guards.

Could the mysterious report have come from one of the other wall towers? Impossible for this reason. When the push button in one of the wall towers—say, that in Old Tower Number Three—was pressed by the man on duty there, the indicator on the board in the captain's lookout turned to the left a quarter-turn on the time dial, the small bell on the board rang and all telephone connections with the other wall towers were automatically cut off until the captain had replaced the telephone receiver on the hook after receiving the report from Old Tower Number Three.

Dunlap said nothing to Bill Wilton when the latter returned to the yard lookout, after making his round in the yard. It would be best he reasoned, to say nothing to anybody about the mysterious call. They would only laugh at him if he told them about it. If the indicator had not returned to a vertical position on the time dial he would have some proof on which to base his wild story of the ghost call. But the indicator had, before his own eyes, returned to its former position after the call.

An hour later, at two A.M., Dunlap fearfully watched the indicator for Old Tower Number Three. Reports from all other posts had been received. Then, just once, the indicator trembled uncertainly, made almost a quarter turn to the left and snapped back to a vertical position. At three o'clock it did not move. Nor did it move at four o'clock.

A week passed. Not a tremor disturbed the "ghost tower" indicator.

Then, one morning at one-thirty o'clock, an unearthly, piercing scream in the cell-house awaked half the men in the building and sent the cell-house guard scurrying down to cell twenty-one on the corridor; for it was from this cell that the blood-chilling scream had come.

The bloodless, perspiration-dampened face of Malcolm Hulsey, the "lifer," was pressed against the bar of the cell door when the guard arrived. The convict's

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The Ghost Guard

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great hands grasped the bars and his two-hundred-and-fifty-pound bulk, clad in only a regulation undershirt, twitched, started and trembled from head to foot. A horrible fear distended his eyes, his teeth clicked together and the muscles of his face worked spasmodically.

"Sick. Hulsey?" the guard demanded, hardened to such nerve-shattering outbursts in a building full of tortured souls.

"I saw—I saw—" Hulsey began, his teeth chattering and rendering speech well-nigh impossible. "I saw—Oh, Mr. Hill, please give me a cellmate—now, tonight! I—I'm a sick man, Mr. Hill. Nerves all shot to pieces, I guess. Can't I have a cellmate to talk to, Mr. Hill?"

"What did you see?" the guard asked.

"He was standing right where you are now," Hulsey whispered hoarsely. "Pointing his finger at me, he was, when I opened my eyes and saw him. Smiling, too. I—I—a violent shudder—I could see through him, Mr. Hill; could see the bars on that window beyond him. I—"

"Who? See who?" the guard interrupted.

Hulsey seemed to realize, then, that he was talking to much; that he was not conducting himself as the hardest convict in the prison should.

"Why," he stammered. "I saw—I thought I saw—an old pal o' mine. He's been dead a long time. Nerves, I guess. Thinking too much about my old pal and the good old days. Nightmare. I guess."

"Yeah—nightmare is right," the unsympathetic guard growled. "But don't let another blat like that out of you, or we'll throw you into a padded cell. Got the whole wing stirred up. Get to bed now and forget that good old pal o' yours."

"If I only could!" Husley whispered huskily to himself, as he got back into the bunk.

TWO WEEKS passed.

There were no more outbursts from cell twenty-one. The "ghost tower" on the wall was silent, cold.

Then, at two o'clock one morning, Captain Dunlap saw the indicator move. It sickened him, made him wish ardently that he was a thousand miles from Granite River Prison.

The indicator moved slowly, hesitantly, to the left and the bell tinkled weakly. The captain placed the receiver to his ear, but no sound came; the line was dead. The indicator fell back to its original position as the captain replaced the receiver on the crotch.

A few minutes later the yard guard entered the lookout. Bill Wilton, the regular yard guard on the graveyard shift, was away on leave and the substitute guard was new at the prison.

"Didn't I understand you to say, Mr. Dunlap," the new guard said, "that there was no one on Old Tower Number Three?"

"You sure did," Dunlap answered.

The guard pulled his left ear and looked puzzled.

"Funny," he finally remarked. "Was sure I heard somebody in that tower, singing soft and low like, when I passed under it a few minutes ago."

"What was he singing?" the captain asked, bending forward and fixing a penetrating gaze on the recent arrival at the prison.

"Let me see now," said the guard meditatively. "Couldn't make out much of the song. Something about 'when I die in the ocean deep,'—No, that wasn't it. 'When I die and am buried deep'—that's it. Then there was something in it about this dead guy coming back to ha'nt people, and a lot of bunk like that."

"I see," said Dunlap, as he eased himself out of the chair. "I'm going up and have a look around in that tower. You stay in here until I return."

Dunlap went outside the walls and up through New Tower Number Three,

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where he questioned Guard Jim Humphrey. Humphrey had not seen or heard anything unusual in or about Old Tower Number Three.

Captain Dunlap, as he walked over the wall toward the ghost tower, admitted frankly to himself that he was "scared stiff." Pausing at the door, he glanced nervously through the window.

The yard lights lit up the interior of the tower sufficiently to assure him that no one—or "thing"—was inside. He unlocked the door and entered.

With a flashlight, he thoroughly examined the telephone. Dust had settled on the instrument. The receiver and the transmitter had apparently not been touched since Asa Shores left the tower. Dust had settled on the doorknobs inside. That the knobs had not been touched since Shores' death was obvious. The one chair, the window-sills, the small washstand and wash basin, all were covered with a thin, undisturbed film of fine dust.

There on the telephone battery box reposed Asa's old corn-cob pipe and, near it, a small box of matches. The window latches were just as Dunlap had left them when he closed and securely locked the tower a month before.

It was a puzzled and nervous prison official that left the tower, relocked the doors and returned to the inside lookout.

Next day Malcolm Hulsey, the "lifer" was admitted to the hospital. The doctor's diagnosis was "nervous breakdown."

BUT HULSEY, though his nerves were all shot to pieces, was still capable of shrewd plotting.

His admittance to the hospital had been hastened by a diet of soap. Hulsey was so anxious to get far away from Granite River Prison, and was so certain of his ability to do so if he could only be admitted to the hospital, that he had resorted to the old but effective expedient of soap eating.

Soap, taken internally in small doses, will produce various baffling and apparently serious physiological changes in the body. Hulsey looked sick and felt sick, but he was not dangerously ill.

For many months Malcolm Hulsey had been watching closely the movements of the night guards. During his stay in the hospital, while recovering from the gunshot wound in his shoulder, he had "doped out" a possible means of escape, and he was on the point of making the attempt when the doctor pronounced him sufficiently recovered to be returned to the cell-house.

The "lifer's" plan of escape was simply this: At midnight, while Captain Dunlap and his crew were on duty, the yard guard made his round, counted the patients in the hospital and left the yard through the guards' gate to eat his lunch in the guards' dining-room outside the walls. When the yard guard returned to the inside lookout he carried with him a hot lunch for Captain Dunlap.

In counting the men in the hospital, the yard guard did not as a rule enter the building. He merely turned on the lights in the one large ward and looked through the window. The convict hospital nurse on night duty stood ready, and when the lights were turned on, proceeded from bed to bed and partly uncovered each patient so that the yard guard outside could see and count them.

There were several factors in Hulsey's favor now, one being that a new substitute guard was on duty over the guards' entrance gate during the absence of the regular guard who was away on vacation. There was only one patient in the hospital besides Hulsey. The yard guard must be lured into the hospital, overpowered, his uniform stripped from him, then Hulsey, garbed in the uniform, would attempt to deceive the guard at the gate and be given the keys.

At fifteen minutes to midnight, on Hulsey's first day in the hospital, the "lifer" quietly rose from his bed while the white-clad convict nurse's back was turned. Three minutes later the unsuspecting nurse had been neatly laid out from a well-directed blow behind the ear, bound with sheets, gagged, stripped of his white suit and tenderly tucked in the bed recently occupied by Mr. Malcolm Hulsey.

The other patient, a feeble old con-

vict, was gagged and tied down in his bed with sheets. Hulsey then donned the nurse's white suit and, after arranging the nurse and the old convict in their beds so that they appeared to be sleeping peacefully, the "lifer" lay face down on the floor and awaited developments.

At twelve o'clock the new guard appeared at the hospital window and switched on the lights. Having counted the men in the hospital every hour since eight o'clock, the guard intended now to give the patients a hasty glance and proceed to the gate. There were his two patients, apparently sleeping peacefully. But where was the nurse?

Hulsey's heart pounded like a riveting hammer as he lay sprawled on the floor. Would the ruse work? Would the guard enter the hospital to investigate, or would he report to Captain Dunlap when he saw the white-clad figure on the floor?

The guard's eyes then rested on the man on the floor.

"Huh!" he ejaculated. "Funny place for nurse to be sleeping!"

But the nurse's sprawled form did not indicate slumber. The guard was puzzled. Perhaps the nurse had fainted, or fallen and hurt himself. The guard tapped on the window with a key. No answer, no movement of nurse or patients.

Then the unsuspecting "screw" locked the door and entered. An older guard would have reported to the Captain. He was in the act of bending over to turn the pseudo-nurse upon his back when his ankles were suddenly seized and his feet perked from under him.

The guard's head struck an iron bedstead as he fell, thus relieving Hulsey of the unpleasant job of beating him into unconsciousness.

Several minutes later the "lifer," wearing the guard's uniform, boldly approached the gate.

"What's on the menu tonight, Frank?" Hulsey casually asked, pulling his hat further down over his eyes.

"Same old thing—hash," the gate guard answered, as he lowered the keys.

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Through the suspense, anxiety and uncertainty were terrible, Hulsey whistled calmly as he unlocked the first gate. The large bull lock on the outside gate was not so easily unlocked. Hulsey fumbled, his hands shook, his whistling, in spite of all he could do to keep it up, wheezed, went off key, then died in a discordant wail.

"Say!" the gate guard suddenly blurted. "Look up here!" By cracky, your actions don't look good to me."

HULSEY did not look up. He gave the key another frantic twist, and the lock opened.

In that short space of time the wall guard had raced into the lookout and seized a shotgun. As he stepped to the door of the lookout, a dark figure disappeared around the corner of a building twenty feet from the gate.

A moment later the alarm in the guards' quarters rang frantically, and a dozen sleepy-eyed men tumbled from their beds, slipped on shoes and trousers and ran out into the yard.

The gate guard could only tell where he last saw the escaping convict. To capture the man on such a dark night seemed hopeless, considering, too, that the fleeing man had a seven-minute start. However, the half-dressed guards scattered and made for a heavy willow thicket several hundred yards beyond the spot where the convict was last seen.

For five minutes after the pursuing guards disappeared in the darkness, silence reigned over the prison. Then—

From a distant point in the dark thicket a hair-raising, half-animal, half-human shriek of mortal terror shattered the stillness of the night and echoed and re-echoed about the high prison walls.

White faced guards, temporarily unnerved by that fearful wail, crashed through the brush, their flashlights playing about like the eyes of spending demons. Then they found Malcolm Hulsey the "lifer."

Groveling face down in the mud of a little creek bank, hands clutching at empty air, great spasms of maniacal

terror passing through his body, the one time terror of the prison muttered insane, incoherent things.

Two guards pulled him to his knees. Others turned flashlights on his face—a face such as is seen in horrible nightmares; a ghastly face partly covered with black mud; a wild face where it shown through the grime. The eyes were wide, protruding, glazy.

"See! See!" the convict rasped hoarsely, pointing a mud-smeared hand at a dense black nook in the thicket. "See! He stands there and points at me—and laughs! It's *Lee Shore!* He's been in my cell every night for weeks—laughing at me! He sang a death song to me—always sang—always laughed! Wouldn't-let me sleep! *He's coming toward me! Stop him! Please—*"

Then another horrible shriek, a shudder, a gasp, and the guards dropped the lifeless form of Malcolm Hulsey in the mud.

By some queer whim of fate, the speechless guards involuntarily switched off their flashlights. Utter darkness, utter silence enveloped them. Then a faint sound was heard.

"Listen!" came the hoarse voice of Guard Jerry Clark. "Do you hear it?"

Very little of it could be heard. It was a faint sound and growing fainter.

*"When I die and am buried
deep,
I'll return at night to . . ."*

Then it was gone, and all was still again.