

# Part 2, Chapter 38

## "How Men Their Brothers Maim"

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### People :

Author : Alexander Berkman

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## 38

### "HOW MEN THEIR BROTHERS MAIM"

I

THE SOLITARY IS stifling with the August heat. The hall windows, high above the floor, cast a sickly light, shrouding the bottom range in darksome gloom. At every point, my gaze meets the irritating white of the walls, in spots yellow with damp. The long days are oppressive with silence; the stone cage echoes my languid footsteps mournfully.

Once more I feel cast into the night, torn from the midst of the living. The failure of the tunnel forever excludes the hope of liberty. Terrified by the possibilities of the planned escape, the Warden's determination dooms my fate. I shall end my days in strictest seclusion, he has informed me. Severe punishment is visited upon anyone daring to converse with me; even officers are forbidden to pause at my cell. Old Evans, the night guard, is afraid even to answer my greeting, since he was disciplined with the loss of ten days' pay for being seen at my door. It was not his fault, poor old man. The night was sultry; the sashes of the hall window opposite my cell were tightly closed. Almost suffocated with the foul air, I requested the passing Evans to raise the window. It had been ordered shut by the Warden, he informed me. As he turned to leave, three sharp raps on the bars of the upper rotunda almost rooted him to the spot with amazement. It was 2 A.M. No one was supposed to be there at night. "Come here, Evans!" I recognized the curt tones of

the Warden. "What business have you at that man's door?" I could distinctly hear each word, cutting the stillness of the night. In vain the frightened officer sought to explain: he had merely answered a question, he had stopped but a moment. "I've been watching you there for half an hour," the irate Warden insisted. "Report to me in the morning."

Since then the guards on their rounds merely glance between the bars, and pass on in silence. I have been removed within closer observation of the nightly prowling Captain, and am now located near the rotunda, in the second cell on the ground floor, Range Y. The stringent orders of exceptional surveillance have so terrorized my friends that they do not venture to look in my direction. A special officer has been assigned to the vicinity of my door, his sole duty to keep me under observation. I feel buried alive. Communication with my comrades has been interrupted, the Warden detaining my mail. I am deprived of books and papers, all my privileges curtailed. If only I had my birds! The company of my little pets would give me consolation. But they have been taken from me, and I fear the guards have killed them. Deprived of work and exercise I pass the days in the solitary, monotonous, interminable.

II

By degrees anxiety over my friends is allayed. The mystery of the tunnel remains unsolved. The Warden reiterates his moral certainty that the underground passage was intended for the liberation of the Anarchist prisoner. The views of the police and detective officials of the twin cities are hopelessly divergent. Each side asserts thorough familiarity with the case, and positive conviction regarding the guilty parties. But the alleged clues proving misleading, the matter is finally abandoned. The passage has been filled with cement, and the official investigation is terminated.

The safety of my comrades sheds a ray of light into the darkness of my existence. It is consoling to reflect that, disastrous as the failure is to myself, my friends will not be made victims of my longing for liberty. At no time since the discovery of the tunnel has suspicion been directed to the right persons. The narrow official horizon does not extend beyond the familiar names of the Girl, Nold, and Bauer. These have been pointed at by the accusing finger repeatedly, but the men actually concerned in the secret attempt have not even been mentioned. No danger

threatens them from the failure of my plans. In a communication to a local newspaper, Nold has incontrovertibly proved his continuous residence in St. Louis for a period covering a year previous to the tunnel and afterwards. Bauer has recently married; at no time have the police been in ignorance of his whereabouts, and they are aware that my former fellow-prisoner is to be discounted as a participator in the attempted escape. Indeed, the prison officials must have learned from my mail that the big German is regarded by my friends as an ex-comrade merely. But the suspicion of the authorities directed toward the Girl-with a pang of bitterness, I think of her unfortunate absence from the country during the momentous period of the underground work. With resentment I reflect that but for that I might now be at liberty! Her skill as an organizer, her growing influence in the movement, her energy and devotion, would have assured the success of the undertaking. But Tony's unaccountable delay had resulted in her departure without learning of my plans. It is to him, to his obstinacy and conceit, that the failure of the project is mostly due, staunch and faithful though he is.

In turn I lay the responsibility at the door of this friend and that, lashing myself into furious rage at the renegade who had appropriated a considerable sum of the money intended for the continuation of the underground work. Yet the outbursts of passion spent, I strive to find consolation in the correctness of the intuitive judgment that prompted the selection of my "lawyers," the devoted comrades who so heroically toiled for my sake in the bowels of the earth. Half-naked they had labored through the weary days and nights, stretched at full length in the narrow passage, their bodies perspiring and chilled in turn, their hands bleeding with the terrible toil. And through the weeks and months of nerve-racking work and confinement in the tunnel, of constant dread of detection and anxiety over the result, my comrades had uttered no word of doubt or fear, in full reliance upon their invisible friend. What self sacrifice in behalf of one whom some of you had never even known! Dear, beloved comrades, had you succeeded, my life could never repay your almost super-human efforts and love. Only the future years of active devotion to our great common Cause could in a measure express my thankfulness and pride in you, whoever, wherever you are. Nor were your heroism, your skill and indomitable perseverance, without avail. You have given an invaluable demonstration of the elemental reality of the Ideal, of the marvelous strength and

courage born of solidaric purpose, of the heights devotion to a great Cause can ascend. And the lesson has not been lost. Almost unanimous is the voice of the press -- only Anarchists could have achieved the wonderful feat!

The subject of the tunnel fascinates my mind. How little thought I had given to my comrades, toiling underground, in the anxious days of my own apprehension and suspense! With increasing vividness I visualize their trepidation, the constant fear of discovery, the herculean efforts in spite of ever-present danger. How terrible must have been *their* despair at the inability to continue the work to a successful termination! My reflections fill me with renewed strength. I must live! I must live to meet those heroic men, to take them by the hand, and with silent lips pour my heart into their eyes. I shall be proud of their comradeship, and strive to be worthy of it.

### III

The lines form in the hallway, and silently march to the shops. I peer through the bars, for the sight of a familiar face brings cheer, and the memory of the days on the range. Many friends, unseen for years, pass by my cell. How Big Jack has wasted! The deep chest is sunk in, the face drawn and yellow, with reddish spots about the cheekbones. Poor Jack, so strong and energetic, how languid and weak his step is now! And Jimmy is all broken up with rheumatism, and hops on crutches. With difficulty I recognize Harry Fisher. The two years have completely changed the young Morganza boy. He looks old at seventeen, the rosy cheeks a ghastly white, the delicate features immobile, hard, the large bright eyes dull and glassy. Vividly my friends stand before me in the youth and strength of their first arrival. How changed their appearance! My poor chums, readers of the *Prison Blossoms*, helpers in our investigation efforts, what wrecks the torture of hell has made of you! I recall with sadness the first years of my imprisonment, and my coldly impersonal valuation of social victims. There is Evans, the aged burglar, smiling furtively at me from the line. Far in the distance seems the day when I read his marginal note upon a magazine article I sent him, concerning the stupendous cost of crime. I had felt quite piqued at the flippancy of his comment, "We come high, but they must have us." With the severe intellectuality of revolutionary tradition, I thought of him and his kind as inevitable fungus growths, the rotten fruit of a decaying society. Unfortunate derelicts, indeed, yet parasites, almost devoid of

humanity. But the threads of comradeship have slowly been woven by common misery. The touch of sympathy has discovered the man beneath the criminal; the crust of sullen suspicion has melted at the breath of kindness, warming into view the palpitating human heart. Old Evans and Sammy and Bob, -- what suffering and pain must have chilled their fiery souls with the winter of savage bitterness! And the resurrection trembles within! How terrible man's ignorance, that forever condemns itself to be scourged by its own blind fury! And these my friends, Davis and Russell, these innocently guilty, what worse punishment could society inflict upon itself, than the loss of their latent nobility which it had killed?... Not entirely in vain are the years of suffering that have wakened my kinship with the humanity of *les misérables*, whom social stupidity has cast into the valley of death.

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