

"The action of the directors three weeks ago," said the warden, "made my resignation necessary. I leave the prison to-day. A few days ago a man who was discharged from the prison last year read what the papers have published recently about your case, and he has written to me confessing that it was he who got your tobacco from the captain of the guard. His name is Salter, and he looks very much like you. He had got his own extra, and when he came up again and called for yours the captain, thinking it was you, gave it to him. There was no intention on the captain's part to rob you.

"Until the receipt of this letter, I had opposed the movement that had been started for your pardon; but when this letter came I recommended your pardon, and it has been granted. So you are now discharged from the prison.

"The stage will leave for the station in four hours. You have made certain threats against my life." The warden paused; then, in a voice that slightly wavered from emotion, he continued: "I shall not permit your intentions in that regard—for I care nothing about them—to prevent me from discharging a duty which, as from one man to another, I owe you. I have treated you with a cruelty the enormity of which I now comprehend. I thought I was right. My fatal mistake was in not understanding your nature. I misconstrued your conduct from the beginning, and in doing so I have laid upon my conscience a burden which will embitter the remaining years of my life. I would do anything in my power if it were not too late to atone for the wrong I have done you. If, before I sent you to the dungeon, I could have understood the wrong and foreseen its consequences, I

would cheerfully have taken my own life rather than raised a hand against you. The lives of us both have been wrecked; but your suffering is in the past—mine is present and will cease only with my life. For my life is a curse, and I prefer not to keep it."

With that the warden, very pale, but with a clear purpose in his face, took a loaded revolver from a drawer and laid it before the convict.

"Now is your chance," he said, quietly; "no one can hinder you."

The convict gasped and shrank away from the weapon as from a viper.

"Not yet—not yet," he whispered, in agony.

"Are you afraid to do it?" asked the warden.

"No!" he gasped. "You know I am not. But I can't—not yet—not yet!"

The convict, whose ghastly pallor, glassy eyes and gleaming teeth sat like a mask of death upon his face, staggered to his feet.

"You have done it at last!—you have broken my spirit! A human word has done what the dungeon and the whip could not do. . . . It twists inside of me now. . . . I could be your slave for that human word." Tears streamed from his eyes.

He reeled, and the warden caught him and seated him in the chair.

"That human word," he whispered—"if you had spoken it long ago—if—but it's all—it's all right—now. I'll go—I'll go to work—to-morrow."

There was a slightly firmer pressure of the hand that held the warden's; then it relaxed. The weary head sank back and rested on the chair; the strange smile still sat upon the marble face, and a dead man's glassy eyes and gleaming teeth were upturned towards the ceiling.