

Later, the stealthy, shivering group stole forth from the room and down the black hallway that led to the street. The last man out cast a terrified glance at the still, shapeless object in the corner as he closed the door behind him and fled after his fellows. When they came from the passage into the full light of day, each skulker looked at his hands and found that they shook as if with a mighty ague.

Even as they blinked their eyes in the glaring sunlight, an excited young man came rushing toward them from the opposite side of the street. They paused irresolute. The newcomer was white, excited — yes, jubilant. In his hand he carried a newspaper, the heavy black headlines standing out in bold relief.

“He’s got a’ reprieve!” he was shouting eagerly. “Look ’ere! See wot it says.”

Fascinated, they slunk back into the dark passage, to listen in stupefaction while the joyous Blacky repeated the astounding news from the prison.

“Mr. Jenison and his wife done it,” cried Blacky, his eyes gleaming. “It says so here. They went to the gov’nor this morning and put it up to him in a way that made him grant a reprieve for thirty days, so’s Mr. Jenison can get the real facts before him. That means a pardon sure, kids. Say, Jenison’s all right! He’s the kind of a friend to have, he is. He never quit on Dick. Say, where’s Ernie? We’d better put him wise.”

“It won’t make any difference to Ernie now,” said one of the rogues, wiping his wet brow with his hand.

Blacky fell away with a great look of dread in his eyes. He understood.

“We’d better duck out o’ this,” he muttered vaguely. “It says here that the cops are going to question Ernie. They’re out huntin’ for him by this time, kids.”