

"Up From the Death Cell" *The Story of a Man Who Won a Fight Against Big Odds*

BY JOHN W. KANE.

Kane Is Lodged In the Penitentiary's Murders' Row, of Which the Death Cell Is a Part

SYNOPSIS.

Kane's regeneration in jail begins after he is saved from a mob. He has killed two street car men. He determines to make people understand—that the killing, though done in a robbery, was unpremeditated and in a way was done in self-defense. At length he writes his confession. In the county jail a prisoner in the adjoining cell is visited by his wife. With her is Violet Grey, a girl of means, who is struck by the thought that Curly has better stuff in him than his condition indicates. Impulsively she gets him saws with which to escape. The plan fails. He and she are suspected. Then Kane goes to trial for murder is convicted, and is sentenced to die by shooting or hanging on June 24, 1924.

CHAPTER XV.

I was received at the state prison by the deputy warden. The law required that a proper commitment be handed to the penitentiary authorities, which would, of course, include the sentence the person so delivered was to undergo. My commitment, then, had to be a kind of death warrant within itself. And the sheriff had no more than got the instrument out of his hands than he turned to me, gave my hand a parting clasp and, seemingly anxious to get out of the room, walked away.

At his desk, the cell-house cus-

todian said in that deferential tone used when addressing an obedient condemned man, "I'll have to ask you to remove your clothes, Mr. Kane."

He did the searching. "The supposition is," he explained to me, "that a man in your situation might want to kill himself. I don't believe that you or one man out of ten others would do it, but the rule is that we must make a careful examination like this."

I nodded my understanding. "Fact of the matter is," continued he, "I've often thought it might be best just to put about a dozen different death dealing things into a fellow's cell, and tell him that he might take his choice as to which he wanted to use. That would save time and expense, and it would be easier on the man himself, wouldn't it?"

"Perhaps," I answered, hoping that he might soon let up on the palaver. "The man in the chair," the man from the front then arose. "I'll see you later, Jack," he said. "If there's anything you want that we're allowed to give you, just inform either one of the two heads"—meaning the warden or his deputy—"and it will be sent in at once."

I thanked him, then the next moment arose to accompany the cell-house man to the bathroom.

"Now then, Mr. Kane," observed he, after we had arrived at the bathroom door—the building was in an inner court—"my orders compel me to watch you bathe."

The cell in which I was locked opened out upon a narrow sheet-iron passageway, along the outer edge of which extended an iron railing. That tier of cells was the second from the bottom, and from the front of it I could look through the crossed checkerboard-like bars and down upon the cement floor that reached from the front of the lower tier of cells across to the brick walls of the building. Barely within the range of my vision I could see a man sitting in a chair on that lower floor at the far end of the corridor. I was wondering what he was doing there, when I heard a voice somewhere near me.

"Well, Mr. Kane," the voice spoke with a German accent, "how do you like the place?"

"I haven't been here long enough to tell much about it," was my answer. "Are you on this tier?"

"Oh, yes—unless I'm dreamin'," answered my neighbor laughingly. "What cell you in?"

"I never noticed the number," I told him—"it's about the third or fourth from the end."

"The Name of Our Street." "I'm only about four doors from you then," he returned. "You don't know the name of our street, do you?"

"No—I haven't even learned that much yet."

"Listen then," said he, "and I'll tell you. It's called Murders' Row." He laughed heartily.

A careful inspection of the interior of my cell showed that it was, with the exception of that front part, solid sheet steel. Over the door there was a narrow iron shelf attached securely to the wall. The bed was about three feet in width, being made of four upright iron posts supporting iron railings, and there were woven springs that made the bed comfortable to lie upon. As bedclothing, there were two heavy new blankets and a pillow. The only wooden appurtenance in sight was a small, oblong-topped stool, which was used as both a seat and a table—the latter whenever my meals were brought in, at which time the edge of the cot served as a chair.

"Mr. Kane," came my neighbor's voice again, "what is your first name?"

"John," I told him. "I'll call you that then," said he. "And what day are you to face the music, John?"

"June 24," I answered. "And if you're in a like situation, what day are you supposed to go?"

"June 6—just eighteen days ahead of you: time enough for me to arrive and get acquainted before you come, eh?" And again he laughed—that time so loudly that I feared the noise might be against the rules.

"We're allowed to talk this way, are we?" I inquired.

"The Death Watch." "Sure thing—but we can't sing." "I don't think I'll care to sing," I remarked.

"Oh, yes, you will—you'll get used to it here," he assured me, "and you'll feel about the same as people do any other place."

I doubted that, but made no answer.

"If we're to be neighbors, what am I to call you?" I asked.

"Dutch Charley, or Charley—or just Dutch."

"Tell me what that fellow is doing away at the other end of the building there in a chair."

I spoke so the man inquired about could not hear me.

"Oh, he's helpin' to sit up with Frank durin' his last days of sorrow," answered Charley. "You've heard of Frank's case?"

"Frank Flowers, from down in the city?" I asked.

"Yes—he got tired of havin' his old lady around. Well, he's to take his journey next Friday, and that guy in the chair is one of the death watch."

I remembered having read of the case. A probably insane barber had shot his wife to death as she lay asleep.

"Is he to be shot?" I asked in a lower tone still.

"Sure thing—and we'll have the joy of hearin' the rifles," answered Charley.

"Why, of course, we can—unless we stop our ears. I've been on this tier for nearly two years, and I've heard the rifles for three of them."

"Will Grow Used To It?" "Is that so—and how did it make you feel?"

He laughed again—but the laugh was forced.

"Well, I don't feel much either way," Charley explained. "I've been around here so long that there's not much feeling left."

I knew even then that there was some truth in the idea of experience along certain lines begetting a lack of feeling. When first I had seen bloodshed, my feelings had been terribly ruffled; but after some months where it was common—particularly after my service as a soldier in an enemy's country—I was by no means so sensitive.

Dutch Charley had begun to pace back and forth in his cell. I happened to know that his case had gone through all the courts. And I

wondered what his thoughts could be just then. With all hope gone save that very last—an appeal to the governor and pardon board—what could the man four doors away be thinking? He, being nearer to where that silent death watch was sitting in front of the other poor wretch's cell, could see in that direction better than I. Could Dutch Charley's imagination carry him far enough to cause him to see himself there in that death cell rather than Frank Flowers?

Whether or not, however, the man next to me on that terrible row was able to picture himself in the place then occupied by Flowers, it was then common knowledge that all hope so far as the latter was concerned had been abandoned. The case had not been appealed to the board of pardons—Flowers himself, a sure sign of his insanity, I think, had opposed such action—and the rifles would bark out for him at a little after 10 the following Friday morning. What could he be thinking? If the man had even a wreck of a mind, what were the thoughts of it dwelling upon just then? And if, despite his most unusually heinous crime, his mind was normal, what in that event could his thoughts be, with less than seventy-two hours to live? And I—if an appeal to a higher court should fail, and if then a pardon board should refuse to interfere—was I, too, to sit back inside that death chamber, while a silent and careless-appearing uniformed man sat out in front of it?

Two Steps, a Turn, Two Steps.

I choked. Had there been no doors between me and the outside world, I should have rushed from that hell. But perhaps I should not so much as glimpse any of the joyous things of life—not even a ray of sunshine—until the day I was led out to die.

Two steps, a very short step, then a turn; two steps, a very short step, then a turn.

My thoughts turned again to Dutch Charley. He had been in that cell for two years. How was it possible to retain even a semblance of sanity? His voice sounded strong, but there was a strained note. Why did Charley wish to appear cheerful? Had his time there taught him the value of cheerfulness—even if it were feigned and forced? No doubt. And I would talk more with the man in the hope of learning everything possible that might have some bearing upon my welfare.

The thought of other prisoners had scarcely entered my mind, when I heard the tapping of a gong in the distance; and then straightway came another sound—a sound that I had heard when held at the state prison for safe keeping prior to trial—the "clug! clug! clug!" of the lock-step.

A white-aproned and white-capped fellow came shuffling along carrying a tray, while behind him walked a guard.

"Are you ready for dinner, Kane?" the officer inquired.

"I'm not particularly hungry," I answered.

"Well, here it is anyway"—and he quickly removed the large padlock, and opened the door—"just put these dishes out on your bench there!"

"Don't Sleep By Day!"

The tray-bearer held the end of the tray through the doorway and I began to unload the dishes. There were roast pork, apple sauce, fine white bread, a small pot of coffee, a

glass of milk, a cut of lemon pie and a cigarette. I perhaps showed my surprise.

"You'll be pretty well fed now—that's the practice," the guard told me. "The cigarette isn't a regular part of it. Jack S—, the chief clerk"—meaning the fellow that had accompanied me in from the front—"Well, well—I appreciate all of it," said I. "But a man will need some exercise on this kind of food, won't he?"

"Oh, yes—you'll get a walk out there in the court the afternoon, if you want it," he explained; "and no doubt you will."

I did want the walk—and I got it between the hours of 3 and 4 that afternoon. The exercising ground was under the eye of an armed guard who sat on a wall. But I soon forgot about his presence and the walking seemed to strengthen and help me.

After my return to the cell, the signal for which was the guard's appearance at an upper window, I talked again with Dutch Charley. He had been permitted to exercise in the forenoon. He explained various matters. He told me not to sleep in the daytime, because that would prevent sleep at night.

The night came—the time after all movement of inmates had ceased throughout the prison; it came much earlier in the outside world. And before the gong had tapped three times as a signal for inmates to prepare to retire, I had lain down in preparation for the sleep that I longed for—even though it was to be the haunted sleep known only in a condemned man's cell.

THE DEATH WATCH—CHAPTER SIXTEEN, FRIDAY.

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