

Bugs, Dog Meat, and Stringers: An Oakie Lexicon

*When we remember we are all mad, the mysteries
disappear and life stands explained.*

- Mark Twain

SAMMY Schmidt, a very bright, easy-going screw, was behind the desk with a harried look on his face. Coming in from Centre Hall, I could hear whap! then swearing, several times, long before I went through the gate into the West Wing. A thin, flat sort of whap. Nothing one would normally associate with the known collective larynx of Oakalla.

Sammy noticed me and smiled. "Morning, Mikey."

I was about to answer when, without breaking eye contact with me, Sammy smacked the counter with an eighteen-inch ruler. Perhaps we had an infestation, perhaps this was a new form of Tai Chi.

"Good morning," said I.

Sammy's eyes flicked to his left and he whapped the counter again, to his left this time, without changing his business-as-usual expression.

"Bug," he announced.

I stepped through the door of the cage and peered at the counter where he swatted, expecting to see the corpse of some sort of beetle. Nothing. He whacked the counter again.

I figured I'd been had at approximately 0645 hours by a kid. "Stand there and watch both stairwells at once," Schmidt said.

I did. The stairs left and right went down about ten steps then switchbacked for another ten. I could see the nearly-shaved top of a head and eyebrows appear in the stairwell on my side. The ruler whizzed by me and whacked the counter near my elbow, and the head disappeared. Then it reappeared in the stairwell on the opposite side. Whack. It was like the midway game where gophers stick their heads up and one smacks them with a mallet except, in this case, just the noise was sufficient.

"He's nuts," Schmidt explained. "And if I stop hitting the desk, he'll be on the landing and all over me in a second."

"Lock him on his tier."

"Can't."

"Why?"

"He's on One Right and the maintenance crew is working there, so the gate's open."

"Put him in his house and throw a chain around the door."

"Can't leave the desk."

"I'll put my stuff in my locker and come back for the lock and chain."

Bugs (crazies) worried us more than any other kind of inmate. This one understood that the whack of the ruler meant "Don't come up here." After I locked him in his cell, I stood by the endgate for a long time watching and listening. If he had begun ritual noisemaking, we would have had a serious problem. But he was quiet. Population cons will tolerate a bug only as long as we seem to be doing something about him. They know we'll get him off the wing and to forensic medicine for a psych profile just as soon as we can. On a weekend, this is impossible.

This was Saturday. We couldn't get him out until Monday. Sammy was keeping him off the tier so that the other cons weren't disturbed, and keeping him off the landing so operations could proceed, by turning his ritual behaviour into a game with the noise of the ruler. This guy had not said a syllable since being booked in. He had a face-sheet with only a face on it.

Heavy-time cons have no qualm about exterminating a bug, especially a noise-maker. A continuous noise in a jail can drive you

around the bend, and for most cons this is not a long drive. I knew that if we didn't keep an eye on this small, wild-eyed wraith, we could find him piped behind a garbage can.

The twilight-zone creatures truly vex the law. Having allegedly breached the Criminal Code of Canada, they must be remanded in custody by the judge. They are jailed because it has not yet been established that they cannot appreciate "the nature and quality of their acts." It has not yet been established that they were insane at the time of the crime. It has not yet been established that they, for reasons of insanity, are unfit to stand trial. This can only be established by Forensic. They are our problem until then. We must keep them alive. Some have made a true disjunction from the generally accepted reality and are therefore psychotic and suffering from mania, schizophrenia, paranoia. For some a trauma has shut them down mentally. Others, after several thousand hits of LSD, angel dust, free-based cocaine, alcohol, are little more than vegetables. It is not ours to diagnose.

Some, like this one, seem harmless. Others hallucinate at no apparent provocation and come at you with whatever as a weapon. Not because you have angered them, but because they think you are Satan, Jesus, or a gremlin. The good news is that when they are hallucinating rather than seeing you, their reflexes are lousy.

When you are locked alone on a tier full of murderers and bank-robbers, you go about business. And you can't go about business without turning your back on them. Sane criminals are generally not a problem. They are self-serving. Cutting the throat of a guard would not serve them well, normally. Bugs, on the other hand, have no such focus on their best interests. On bugs, you do not turn your back.

We got through the Saturday with the bug. Schmidt and I looked in on him from time to time. He was a little strange at the food line -didn't want to eat at all. We managed to persuade him to take a tray. He trotted with it to his cell, scraped off its contents into his shitter, and flushed it.

Sunday morning on the tier began with the announcement that I was on church duty.

Any way you look at it, church is a major pain in the ass because it

is the least complicated way to make a major drug pass between one wing and another. When there is some big action going down, as many as fifty cons per wing will turn out for church.

It was widely known that I would do almost anything to get out of church duty. I usually wound up losing the argument.

We had a brand new rookie in the wing. This was his first shift in max. His eyes were so wide open, I don't think he had dared to blink since the top of the shift. I was told to take him with me to church.

Landing by landing, we collected the herd and headed for the church on Five. I looked around and noted that we didn't have a huge herd of West Wingers. This gave me joy. Obviously, we would not have to deal with a big drug transaction. As they filed past me and up the stairs I noticed that the silent bug himself was going to church.

I oriented the rookie. The West Wing cons sit in these chairs near the West Wing door, the South Wing are in the middle, and the East are on the other side. Notice the nice broad aisle between the wings. They don't cross the aisle for any reason. They don't toss things across the aisle. Feel free at any time to get up and stroll the aisle. Fuck the sermon. Security is first. Check anything you want to check. You want to frisk anybody down, let me know. We'll get the East P.O. to let us through the door and one of us will check it out. No problem.

I continued, "Now, as soon as you hear the Bible-thumper begin to wind down, although we've told them all a thousand times not to, he's going to say, 'I have some pamphlets here for those of you who wish, blah, blah, blab,' and they're all going to jump out of their seats and mix East with South and West. All the big action is going to happen right there in the confusion in front of the pulpit. The minute you hear him begin to say 'For those of you,' you jump up and sprint toward the sky pilot. Stand in that fucking aisle. Order our West Wingers to stay seated until we tell them otherwise. Pick up a chair and threaten to thump somebody with it. Whatever. You let a West Winger move a hair toward the other wings and I'll hand your *cojones* to the P.O. after church. South and East can have an orgy up there in front of the preacher. That's their problem. They have their staff here.

But we aren't taking more problems back into the wing than we came in with. No contact. Am I coming across?"

"Loud and clear."

"That's just marvy. Now, plant your ass in that chair back there and get ready for action. I'll be taking notes on how you handle yourself." Sure I will.

Well, the preacher was a little bit late. Then, what finally appeared from a back room was fairly unbelievable. He was a kid, twenty, maybe twenty-two years old. He was so terrified he couldn't even make eye contact with the cons. Even my rookie wasn't that afraid of me. Damn. The regular Protestant minister liked to fish; he was probably off somewhere dangling a line.

When the preacher finally quit talking to the podium, he began to explain at a factor of about ten times longer than necessary that he was going to preach his Christmas sermon. At Christmas he hadn't had a chance to use this sermon, and he'd worked really hard on it, so they were going to get the benefit of hearing it for the first time. This was March. Late March. Any other group of people on earth would have turned into unlawful assembly steaming toward riot at such news. Our cons sat still.

The preacher started his sermon and I started to doze. If I nodded off, one of our nerds would go for it, sure as hell. I had to come up with a plan.

The rookie was sitting to my left and about five rows back. I turned around and glared at him, making sure I caught his eye. Then I looked very slowly and suspiciously around the room as though I was looking for something in particular. The rookie had no idea what I was looking for. I had no idea what I was looking for. But it was good for about ten minutes of the rookie imitating me: he stared around the room as though he could see right through people - into their pockets, into their very skulls.

When I finished, my chin sank toward my chest and I passed out. I'd prayed that the clerics would complain about my antics in church to the brass, who would disallow my ever taking cons to church again. My prayers were not answered.

I snored and it woke me up. I turned around and made eye contact with the rookie and showed him with my eyes what correct professional church security is. He surveyed the room, looking hard.

I looked out over our West Wing cons. Everything looked good. Our guys were being really polite to the Christian, who probably should have been shot for insulting their lack of intelligence.

The bug was sitting alone only about five feet from me, not bothering anybody. None of the other cons would sit in the same row with him, but that was okay. The bug didn't mind. And the bug wasn't causing any trouble. This gave me a warm feeling inside and I went back to sleep.

I woke up again and went through my little ritual of winding the rookie up again. He must have been getting eyestrain. The veins were standing out on his neck. He was white-knuckling his chair so that he could launch himself if need be into the middle of what he supposed would be a hellish fray. I looked back over the backs of the heads of the West Wing cons again. All was well. The bug was sitting in the same position, except that he'd brought his left foot up from the floor and now had it on the seat of his chair. That was okay, the bug wasn't bothering anybody. I went back to sleep.

The next time I woke up and checked out the cons, he had both feet on the chair. I slept again after first getting the rookie to turn his head around like an owl.

The next time I snored and scared myself to consciousness and looked over my flock, the bug had eased his ass up to the back of the chair. I could see he had good balance and he wasn't making any noise. The preacher was mumbling so hard into the lectern that he hadn't even noticed that the bug was sitting on the chair back, presumably so that he could hear better.

Once more I dozed but, for some reason, not to the previous depth. When I focused again on the bug, he was standing on the seat of his chair. I still didn't see any problem. The man had been in the West Wing for two days and hadn't said a word. I was not going to get up and disturb everyone and scare the hell out of the preacher simply to tell the bug to sit down. I sat there with my legs and my arms crossed, blearily blinking my eyes, watching him.

His penultimate move was to stand up on tiptoe and open his mouth. For a while, nothing came out. And then he bellowed in a voice that could shatter a rock: "FAAHHWUCKK YOOOU !"

To the preacher, this had to be the voice of God on high, the signal that he was under siege, that an entire prison riot was about to erupt. He was about to be crucified in his own church, murdered in his own cathedral - which might not have been a bad idea, given his cruel and usual Sunday punishment. In mid-exhortation, he dropped behind the lectern and bobbed up only enough to show his eyes.

I did the professional thing. I bent double and vanished into gale after gale of laughter. I laughed until all the staff and cons in the room were roaring. The bug was still standing with his mouth open. Nothing further issued from it.

I gave the East Wing P .O. the eye and nodded toward the West Wing door, and he moved over my way. I went over to the rookie and told him, "This is probably just a scam; there's something big going down. I'll get back if I can. Don't worry about a thing. You'll handle it." He looked terrified, but on full alert.

I walked over to the bug, reached up, and tapped him on the shoulder, and beckoned for him to come down. He did so. The East Wing P .O. popped the door, and we spiralled down from Five to One. Without another word, the bug jumped into his drum. I snaked a chain around his drum and locked it and there he stayed until Monday morning when he was transported to Riverview for his psych profile. For the duration of his stay in the West Wing, he made not another sound.

Attempted escapees are often called dog meat because of the Mountie dogs that are usually sent to fetch them back. This story illustrates the point.

The year was drawing to a close and the days were shortening conspicuously. West Wing yard was over. The PA. system had called the cons in. The Tower Two man was down and had sprinted for the main building with a full bladder. With the yard clear, the Tower One man had vanished inside, too. The count man was on the inside of the

corrugated wall doing a sweep of the yard, nosing around for drug-drops and hidden weapons. I was doing a last sweep of the outside of the yard wall in case any of the visitors had stuffed anything in any of its seams or tried to toss something over and hadn't been successful.

I was giving the padlock on Tower One a last yank to make sure it was secure when the radio erupted. "Red Alert. Hospital."

I wheeled around and looked down the hill. I could see hatless bodies near the door in staff uniform. I could hear a vehicle burning it down the drive toward me but couldn't see it until it whizzed past me. It was the prowler truck.

I squeezed the radio. "Mainland base, this is portable 2401. "

"Go 2401. "

"2401 responding to Red Alert at hospital. Inform West Wing."

"Roger."

I sprinted down the drive to the stairs and started down them. The guards at the hospital door were unarmed and required by policy to remain at their posts to maintain hospital security. They were yelling and pointing in the direction that the escapee had gone. The prowler truck screamed around the switchback from the Main Gaol level to the hospital level and locked up its binders. The door popped open and remained open.

Young Jacques Duhamel, the driver, jumped out on the run. He disappeared around the east corner of the hospital leaping into the tall grass. Jacques hadn't been in the service very long and was nervous about working the wings. So they had planted him in administration from where you are dispatched to be the Front Hall man, Centre Hall man, work the gatehouse, or drive the prowler truck. As I rounded the east side of the hospital I heard him shout, "Stop!" Then I saw Jacques unholster his .38. I could see a figure in prison greens going like hell down the grass toward Deer Lake. I bellowed, "Stop!"

Jacques fired a warning shot in the air. I couldn't quite see what he could see because evening was falling so fast.

The con had escaped from the hospital, a fairly heavy-duty Native kid, and I could now see him bouncing down the hill toward the flats like a kangaroo.

There were guards at Oakie who shouted for the escapee to stop.

Then they fired warning shots in the air. Then they fired a round or two into the ground. Shucks. Missed. Less paperwork. Not long before, there had been a case up north where an escapee had made it to the perimeter fence. The guard aimed at his leg, but just as he squeezed the round off, the runner dove over the fence and suddenly there was a dead con hanging by one foot from the concertina wire.

In the distance, I could hear the sirens of the horsemen. Jacques was holding his gun with two hands just as Henry Abbot, the training officer, had taught him. He fired in the air after yelling "Stop," and then he pulled down and aimed carefully at the bouncing, moving target and let off another shot. The con dropped out of sight. I figured that the shot had scared the runner and he had flattened in the grass. I had my .38 out but never fired a shot. Jacques was always too close to the line of my fire.

Then the con was up and bouncing down the brown grass again as though the slug hadn't touched him. He didn't seem to be limping. But this would not be abnormal even if he had been hit. We shoot wad-cutters. Jacques fired again. The con went down again. He could have been crawling around anywhere in the tall grass - or have been down for the count.

At the time it was noticed that we had a Red Alert (escape) some-one contacted the Burnaby Mounties, who had deployed two mutt squads. One car came in the main gate and followed us. The other mutt squad came up from the Gilpin Street RCMP station. Off through the dusk I could see a dog leaping up through the grass and a Mountie leaping along behind. The kid didn't have a hope in hell of escaping. Before we reached the place where he'd gone down, we were walking through bloody grass.

We found him. Jacques had got him with both rounds. The first was by the book: an amazing shot from at least thirty yards at a target moving all over the place. It had gone neatly through the flesh of the kid's right leg about mid-way between hip and knee. He was bleeding considerably, but the bullet hadn't hit an artery.

The second shot was amazing, too, especially as it had been loosed at a running target. It was amazing that the escapee was still alive. The second shot had got the kid in the back of the neck - straight through

the back of the neck. The wound was bleeding, but the slug had missed carotid and jugular, spine, and everything else vital that it might have hit.

Except for his exhaustion, the escapee could probably have gotten up and gone for it one more time. But he was out of gas. He was whimpering and snivelling a little and holding out his arms to receive the cuffs.

I arrived with the pistol still in my hand. Jacques was standing over the guy, radio in one hand and pistol in the other, both hanging at his sides. The con was breathing hard, but he was not out. I holstered my gun and cuffed him as he lay on the ground. Then the RCMP mutt arrived and stood there like a pointer. His master, while still running down the hill behind us, gave a command and the dog began to rip at the con's leg. The con tried to pull away but the more he did, the more the dog sank his teeth in and growled and ripped and chewed flesh and clothing.

I yelled at the Mountie, "What the hell is going on? What the fuck are you doing?" The cop was puffing and blowing and running and egging the dog on as he approached. I took a couple of kicks at the damned dog, and the dog took a couple of snaps at my foot. I yelled again, "The con is down and cuffed and wounded. Call the fucking dog off!"

Jacques hadn't moved. At this point, the con was bleeding from the shot to his neck and from the shot through his leg, and now his other leg was all bloody because the dog has chewed it all to shreds. The cop did nothing to call the dog off. "Call off the fucking dog!" I snarled.

I unholstered my pistol again - in case the dog wanted another go at my leg. The three of us had pistols drawn. Jacques continued to stare.

The cop said, "The dog needs practice."

The mutt kept on growling and pulling and biting. The con was screaming. I took my .38 and drew the hammer back and hunkered down, keeping the bead on the head of the German shepherd.

"You call the dog off right now or I'll blow this flea factory all over this hillside. Maybe they didn't teach you about a little statute that

says you use excessive force and you go to jail. You come to jail, you asshole, and you belong to me.” The dimwit thought a bit. I continued, “I’ll personally call your N.C.O. and lay the information.”

He called the dog off, bitching and moaning that guards were assholes. I radioed to Mainland base and told them it was all over. We had the escapee and we needed an ambulance.

I looked at the cop, who had the dog chained up, and said, “You get the fuck out of here.”

Jacques moved for the first time. He unbuckled the Sam Brown belt which held his gun and radio and started up the hill to the driveway. He dropped the belt. He walked up the drive. He took the gun, opened the cylinder and emptied it on the ground. He dropped the gun on the ground. He pulled the keys to the patrol vehicle out of his pocket and dropped them on the ground. He turned and walked toward the gate. That’s the last we ever saw of him.

The kid who didn’t escape healed quickly. He was back in Oakie hospital in a week or ten days, scarred terribly from the dog. Beside these scars the little bullet-hole wounds hardly seemed significant.

In jail, stringers are not free-lance journalists, they are cons who hang themselves at the end of home-made rope. How a guard deals with stringers has a great deal to do with his longevity in his chosen career.

Once when I reported for morning shift, I went upstairs as usual and looked at the sheet and the board and saw the names of all kinds of new inmates. I also saw that I would be working Five Landing with a kid named Klocker, whom I’d never seen or heard of. Since I didn’t see any unfamiliar faces around, I presumed he was already up on Five drinking coffee.

Normal procedure in the morning was to open the tier-box, lift the night-bar, and then lift the day-bar. You could go up a landing and do that yourself, but you could not open the endgate even with the cells still closed and walk down the tier without back-up.

Your landing partner is your back-up. In this case, I was Mocker’s back-up. In order to get from One to Five Landing, I had to climb ten flights of stairs, because of the elbow and half-landing as the stairs

reversed. You had to be in good shape to run up to Five from One or Two. The more junior you are, the higher the landing the desk man assigns you to.

Each half-landing was fully glazed, and in the West Wing gave a magnificent view of Deer Lake and the North Shore mountains. I ambled up toward Five, pausing on each landing and each half-landing to gaze out, have a swig of coffee and a drag of cigarette. A few voices on the tiers could be heard as the cons were waking up asking one another the time and the day. When I got to Three Landing, I could hear very loud talking. At first it sounded like an altercation between a couple of inmates, growing more angry in tone. I picked up my pace. When I arrived on Five Landing, I could hardly believe my eyes. The endgate had been left wide open.

As I ran across the landing, I heard a man shouting, "I'm giving you a direct order."

On every landing there is an intercom or squawk-box. I ran for it. The rest of the staff of the shift were on Two Landing when I left it, so I knew that my rookie partner was up on Five alone, and I hit the box.

"Go Five."

"Get me staff up to Five Landing."

Not only was the endgate to Five left wide open, so was the tierbox. The night-bar and the day-bar were up for the entire tier. The shouting was coming from about five cells in. Mocker was half in and half out of the cell with his back to me. "This is a direct order! Come down from there!" he screamed.

Some of the cons were starting to drift out of their cells, curious at the noise. I shouted down the tier: "Back into your drums! Right fucking now! And shut the door. Now!" They jumped back in, and I could hear their doors rolling closed and clicking. I dropped the bar, leaving open only cell 5 where Mocker was standing. With the rest of the tier sealed off, other potential problems were averted. I could see hands holding shards of mirror trying to get a view. Just then the staff arrived up both stairways, puffing and blowing.

I ran down the tier to cell 5. Then I stood there wondering whether I was asleep and this vision before me was a dream. The rookie was screaming orders at a corpse that was hanging from a beautifully

braided rope made from government-issue sheets. Not only was he ordering it again and again to come down and reminding the corpse that he was giving it a direct order, he was also poking it in the chest with his middle and index fingers, causing it to sway and turn in balletic arabesques and arcs.

I looked around at the regular staff of the wing, who were peeking in the bars and looking over my shoulder. They were as amazed as I was. You always think you have seen everything in a jail, but this is never true. The rookie was unaware of our presence. He continued to scream and push the corpse. I put my hand on his shoulder. He didn't turn around. I said, "Mr. Klocker. He's dead."

Klocker continued to scream. The kid had separated himself from reality. I looked at a couple of our bigger staff and stepped aside. They walked in. Each one took the young guard under an arm and, lifting him off the ground, escorted him off the tier and down the steps. He screamed all the way, yelling about direct orders and the responsibility of the inmate to accept such an order. Nowhere in his stream of hysteria was there any acknowledgment that he had looked upon the face of death - much less that he shouldn't have been down the tier without back-up at the endgate in the first place.

The rest of us followed standard operating procedure. One man grabbed the corpse around the knees to lessen the tension on the neck. We tried to untie it, but the knot wouldn't untie. So we cut it. (Strictly speaking, maximum guards are not to carry pen-knives. One always appears when needed. We needed one.) We carried the corpse out to the landing. By the look of eyes, tongue, skin, and vital signs there was nothing we could do. He was quite dead. But standard operating procedure required that we administer artificial respiration until the paramedics arrived, and this we did.

That was the one and only time I ever saw Mr. Klocker.
I'm not sure whether he ever sent his uniform back.

The Oakalla Riot of 1983

*. . . whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul,
- Herman Melville*

NOVEMBER 22, 1983. Vancouver Pretrial Services Centre. "Lock down! Lock down!"

It was Ted Colley's voice. It came over at the emergency volume of ninety decibels, rather than the normal seventy. And there was an adrenal stridency to it. Most curious was that the "Attention, all units . . ." which preceded every announcement affecting the prison entire was missing.

Coney didn't rattle easily, but this order was the soul of urgency.

It was about 1900 hours and wet out. It had been raining for days as only it can in Vancouver. A few months earlier, I'd transferred from Oakalla to Vancouver Pretrial.

The evening news was just winding down on TV, and I was only half paying attention to it anyway. Old Burton, a favourite con friend of mine, who was sixty-six years old and had spent forty-four of those years in prison, was telling me about the old days in Alcatraz and Leavenworth and Kingston, and as usual I was fascinated by his quiet narrative. It had taken me the Oakie years and the time I had spent at Pretrial to receive the compliment of hearing such an oral history from this tall, quiet, gentle, and wise, wise man who was completely 138

institutionalized and loved the adventure of his life of living in institutions.

He read Colley's voice exactly as I did and we came out of our chairs like pilots ejecting. He strode swiftly to his room and slammed the steel door.

I leapt up on the big wooden hassock.

"Lock down. Right fucking now!"

I jumped down and ran from door to door checking that there was a con inside.

Greg Mooney, my partner, had the door waiting wide. He slammed it and rolled the bolt with the flat.

"Look." He pointed at the window in the door to the other unit, Three South. The rookie guard in there, Whitley, hadn't even begun his lock-down.

Greg and I, both ex-Oakalla, sprinted for the unit door of Three South. I nodded at the lock; he cracked the door.

I went in like a rhinoceros.

"Lock down. Now!"

One con was fucking around the sink fixing a cup of coffee to take into his room. "Goin' Boss, wait'll . . ."

I whacked the cup out of his hand, threw his arm up behind his back and shoved him into his drum, coffee all over the place.

Whitley began, "Yates, this is my unit..."

As I was still wrestling the con through his door I cut Whitley off "You, asshole, get in the hall . . ." As I was closing the con's door, he whimpered mockingly at the top of his voice, "Just because they got a riot at Oakalla . . ." "How the hell do you know?" I ask. "The fuckin' radio." "Right." I checked the rest of the rooms on the South and pulled the doors. Secured. I headed for the gate. Greg was already chewing Whitley out so I had to boot the gate a couple of times before he came over and let me out. When I emerged from the unit, Whitley started for me. "Hold that thought, Whitley," I said, walking past him to the staff-station and the telephone.

Ted Colley answered, "Control."

"Oakie is up," I said.

"Good guess."

"No guess. Radio."

"But I killed the radios at the same time I called lock-down."

"Not soon enough. The media probably knew before the cons did."

"Some shit has been cooking out there since afternoon. Couple of staff got trashed, but now it's really gone up."

"Which wing?"

"Where else?"

"The Old West."

"Bingo. The team is going out. Two SWATs from the Mounties and city SWAT are already there or rolling. We're going in too. The fuckheads never practised the tac team going anywhere but across the street to the police station. There's a vehicle problem. You might have to take your own."

"Might, hell. I will. I'll get there alive. Be sure they get all the gear in. Like mine."

"Wish I was going."

"Stick it. And bring mean elevator."

I put down the phone. As I came out the staff station door, the rookie began on me. I grabbed the front of his shirt and his tie and lifted and slammed him against the wall.

"An emergency order came over the PA. You fucking ignored it. Just shut up and read my lips, asshole. There is a full-scale riot at Oakalla. When one prison goes up, you lock up all nearby prisons and go into media blackout as far as the cons are concerned. There is a reason for this. Sympathy riots. If all the major prisons in this province go up, there aren't enough people to do anything about it. If you can't take orders, get the fuck out."

The elevator door finally opened. Colley's voice came over the speaker. "You wanted a limo, sir?"

"Yeh, take me home to Oakie. I've had enough of this high-tech hell-hole."

The elevator opened on One Landing and Coney popped me

through to the staff area where I picked up my patrol jacket, put the rain-condom on my hat, and headed out the several doors to the alley-entrance. I made the three block walk/sprint to my Suzuki cheap jeep and fired it up. I was away. It would be twenty minutes from downtown to Burnaby and Oakalla.

As I bounced up Cordova through the sheeting drizzle, I tried to construct the scenario I would encounter.

Oakalla had been unstable for some time. Its instability from a staffing point of view was the reason I had transferred to Vancouver Pretrial in September 1983. It was a natural enough move, given my credentials, from remand to remand. Vancouver Pretrial was supposed to replace the West Wing, Oakie's remand wing. All remands for Vancouver jurisdiction would now be housed at Pretrial in Vancouver. Only remands from outside Vancouver would go to Oakalla. This meant big cuts from Victoria. If you could eliminate the staffing of one wing and close down tiers on some of the others, "cost-centre directors" would begin looking good in the eyes of the ministry hierarchy. So the West Wing was closed.

I had seen poor old Oakie take several beatings. The riot damage was costly to repair, but the money never went into upgrading the place. After this or that riot, they could have put bars of high-tech alloy like the thirty-hour bar at Pretrial. Instead, they repaired the old pot-metal bars that anyone with a wire-saw can get through in about thirty minutes. They could have replaced the porcelain toilets with stainless steel. Many things could have been done, but weren't.

I could see the lights of numerous police wagons whirling as I approached Hastings. Huge snarl-up. They were turning back traffic. A city bull with his red-cone flashlight came to my window. "You'll have to detour.. ." He saw the flashes on my shoulder.

I reached in my pocket and grabbed my ID. "Can you fire me though? I'm Vancouver Pretrial SWAT on my way to Oakalla. Your SWAT is already there."

"Yeah, yeah, right, right . . . uh . . . Swing left and your jeep should be small enough to make it between the firetruck and the curb. Where are your unit vehicles?"

"Remember the Keystone Cops?"

He grinned and got me through. Sheriffs' vehicles, fire-department vehicles, and ambulances seemed to be heading in the same direction as I was.

Unlike in the movies and television, riots do not happen spontaneously. There is always a pumping-up period during which snitches let you know what's happening, chapter and verse. The information is handed up the chain of command. Everybody knows it's coming, but in ten years I have never seen the brass take any measures to prevent a riot.

Food was the immediate catalyst of the '83 riot. Vancouver Pretrial had opened in August 1983 with catered meals and no inmate involvement in the kitchen. The cons at Oakalla could see the dollar signs on the wall. Oakalla food was not fancy but it was solid, fresh, and provided a number of inmate jobs. There had been rumblings and skirmishes for a month prior to this November night as soon as rumour turned into announcement that Oakalla was soon to be catered.

But the mixing of inmates (remand and sentenced) who by law should not have resided together had served to turn Oakalla into a powder keg before this announcement was made.

With the closing of the West Wing, the lay-off of auxiliary staff, and the scattering of regular staff like me to other units and institutions, suddenly there was a problem of what to do with the non-Vancouver-jurisdiction remands. The brass in its wisdom decided to stick them in the East Wing (a sentenced unit). It was against the law and against the manuals, but who'd notice? The remands didn't like it and their lawyers screamed. The sentenced inmates didn't like it, either; who wants to play cards with a stooge who knows nothing about jail culture, doesn't even know the lingo, and is scared to death? And then there was the problem of what to do with the P.C.s - the rapists, the molesters, the flashers, the streakers, and the rats.

If the West Wing was empty, rendered redundant by Pretrial, how could a riot involving more than one hundred and fifty cons occur? You may well ask.

When they closed West Wing, they stirred all the above immiscible elements into the East Wing. Inmates made their demands clear: they wanted the protective-custody people out. But the brass took no

action. It would have cost money. There were a few sit-ins and skirmishes. Then a mini-riot that did enough damage to require repairs to be made without inmates peering over the shoulders of tradesmen. Someone got the bright idea to move the East to the West. Good thinking. They were in the West Wing but answered the phone "East Wing." Except for a few jokers who answered "Weest Wing" and "Est Wing."

Inmates had very little to do other than observe the cuts, the political pandering, and the bad morale of staff. When enough is enough, a jail goes up. The average riot requires three to five perpetrators. The rest go along to the extent that they must to avoid being labelled and having to sign into protective custody. Once in motion, a riot has a life of its own. The perpetrators keep it cooking. The followers just want to get it over with without hurting anyone or being killed or having extra time added to their sentences.

During the next few hours (and in the following weeks) I learned the details of the exordium:

About a year after I began work at Oakalla they hired a fresh herd of auxiliaries. In this group was a good-natured mountain, name of Cohn Tucker, a retired bobby from London's tougher districts. What a breath of fresh air compared to the ex-military types and ex-ounties in corrections. Colin had been trained with emphasis on crime prevention, rather than law enforcement. His presence inclined one toward reasonable behaviour. He was there to be helpful, to defuse potentially explosive situations.

Colin was a jewel. About fifty years old. He liked his family and food and the job at Oakalla. He was six-feet-seven or -eight and weighed something more than three hundred pounds. His forearms looked as big as my thighs. He spoke quietly. If two cons were rolling around on the concrete, intent on killing one another, Colin needed only to stroll up and inquire whether there was a problem in order to end the fight.

On the afternoon of November 22,1983, the East was in the West and all was not right with the world. Nor had it been right for some time with the cuts, the moves, the mixing, the overcrowding. That day yard was held despite the rain. The inmates of the East didn't very

much like living in the West and the yard was one of the reasons. The East yard had a view. You could see who was coming and going and say hello to your visitors as they came in. The West yard was a maximum yard, with solid metal walls topped with deadly concertina wire. The only view from the West yard was of the building, the guard on count position, the sky, and the two occupied shotgun towers.

During yard that day there were various scuffles - staged - to lure staff out into the yard crowd. It didn't work. The cons then tried a sit-in, but many were hungry and it didn't take a lot of coaxing to get them back into the unit. The cons agreed that, after dinner, when the cells were opened on One Left, they would grab the first line screw who ventured down and take him hostage.

Colin Tucker and his back-up went down after dinner and began opening the tiers. They were about to go on to the next tier. There was a call from One Left. "Hey, boss, you better have a look at this guy in twenty." Nothing especially suspicious about this, and it could have been Colin's back-up who took a stroll down the tier, but it wasn't.

As Colin walked down the tier, the cons began coming out of their cells and packing in behind him. When he neared cell .20, the last cell on the unit and farthest from the endgate, they threw a blanket over his head and pulled weapons from their pantlegs, pockets, and inside their shirts. Colin thrashed with his huge arms and fists and sent numbers of them flying. But he was hit and he was hurt and then he was down.

His partner locked the gate, per maximum procedure, and yelled, "Staff to One! Staff to One!" at the top of his voice. Colin was being piped (whipped with a pipe), but he kept his arms over his head and so his arms were broken instead of his skull. He was badly cut up with shanks of various types. And when he went down, his legs were piped and some ribs were kicked in. But massive Colin kept getting up. He simply wouldn't let himself be dragged into a cell.

Finally, staff entered the tier and began slamming cons into the cells. An ambulance was called. Colin had dragged himself half-way up the tier. He had two broken forearms, one broken leg. The shanks

hadn't hit any vital organs, but he was badly shredded. Any more kicks to the ribs and his liver would have been punctured, and it would have been the end.

After the medics packed Colin off to the hospital, the wing began to turn frenzied. The inmates on all tiers began pumping up, looking for the final catalyst for a solid confrontation.

Now the line staff were plotting what to do. It is possible to bring out one man and explain verbally and physically that breaking the bones of guards is inappropriate behaviour in a maximum institution. It is quite another problem to address this message to an entire tier.

On every tier, except the one where Colin was injured, inmates were going from cell to cell ensuring support. The phone was ringing constantly as staff from other wings tried to find out what was going on.

The local director, who had already gone home, was called. He was on his way back, as was the wing senior correctional officer. The principal officer discussed with administration whether to try for a lock-down using present staff, or have the other two wings lock down first and then have their spare staff back up the West Wing lock-down. Administration finally decided that they would quietly lock down the other wings, then lock down the West.

A riot will occur whether or not the inmates are locked in their cells. With his adrenalin sufficiently up, an inmate can use the very cell itself to destroy a cell. On the tiers, there are always weapons squirreled away: weapons hidden deep in mattresses or high on cross-struts of bars. Weapons whose two or three parts are scattered around the cell so that the average screw would never put together in his head the sum of those parts.

Toothbrush knives, made from one or more disposable razor blades heated and sunk into the non-bristle side of the toothbrush, and string wrapped around the handle to guarantee a good grip; shanks, made from metal spoons, but also made of pieces of glass with strips of sheet wrapped around for a handle; heavy objects of any kind in a woolen issue sock; braided strips of sheet which are tied

to metal handles of water spigots or anything else heavy; zip-guns, made out of a pipe with a wooden handle strapped onto it, using a rubber band and something hard enough to strike the cap of the smuggled-in bullet - unfortunately a zip-gun is useful only at close range, and there is no guarantee the bullet will exit the front of the weapon - even the cell furniture, such as the bunk, may be reduced to several weapons.

Things were heating up on both sides of the bars when staff from South and East wings arrived to back up the West Wing staff in the lock-down. They locked down One Left last - where the assault had occurred. The other nine tiers were noisy, but there was no violence during the lock-down. There were more staff than inmates when they went in to lock down One Left. Not a peep. Staff from other units returned to their posts. The local director and the S.C.O. arrived to read the incident report on the injuries of Colin Tucker.

At about 1830 the noise, trashing of cells, and burning began. Pre-cautions were taken among the inmates, and instructions passed to novices. These included: Keep materials that can be burned against the north wall where they would be harder to hit with the fire-hoses; stash matches and lighters under the mattresses, which were covered in plastic; when guards and firemen come out on the catwalks to extinguish fires, hit them with pieces of heavy, sharp porcelain from the toilets which the inmate was to smash later on signal.

When a full riot hits, staff begin to operate by the book. They call local police for back-up. With a full wing up, Oakalla would bring in off duty officers. A command post made of Oakalla brass must be established, and liaison officers for the fire department and police appointed. The media must be called and hook-ups established for their equipment, if they don't bring their own.

Lines must be kept open to the ministry in Victoria. The regional and district directors had to be summoned to the jail, as had the district director from Vancouver Pretrial and a team of his men, including me.

When I finally reached the intersection of Royal Oak and the Oakalla gate, there were guards, Mounties, and miscellaneous others trying to hurry traffic along. I could see that there were still a few

places I could tuck the jeep among the fire and rescue equipment and zillions of cop and press vehicles in the parking lot.

I stopped and turned on my left signal. The cops directing traffic swarmed across to dismember me. I rolled the foggy window down a little. "We have a situation here, sir, you'll have to keep moving," barked the Mountie.

"That situation is precisely why I'm here."

A couple of Oakalla guards with flashlights were looking on with big grins on their faces.

I said to one, "Marshall, why don't you take this defective rent-a-cop back and get one that works."

The horseman became upset at that and began dancing around. "I'm ordering you to keep moving."

I popped the clutch and the Suzuki lurched left. The cop jumped out of the way, the hand reflexively reaching for the snap on his holster. Two Oakie guards, Marshall and MacDiarmuid, were standing there with la-gauges. The Mountie made eye contact with them. They shook their heads. I flew down the drive.

A semi bearing a CBC logo was in the lot, as well as a vehicle from every rat's-ass radio and TV outlet in town. One nitwit was doing re-asks to test the equipment in the rain. His made-for-air grey flannel suit was soaked. "And what, in your opinion, did the guards do which was the last straw, the thing that really precipitated the riot?" he intoned.

The cameraman was cursing. The guy with the shotgun mike was trying to see if the rain was soaking through the black plastic sock. I walked by them in mid mock-interview, and couldn't resist. "Well, you see, the guards gave a TV idiot a real cock in the ear." They heard. "You, guard, what's your name?" The cameraman pointed the camera, but the light wasn't on. "Bessasson, Charlie Bessasson" Gave them Oakalla's director's name and kept on walking.

At the gatehouse, guards, cops, and fire-department brass were milling around. Anyone could have walked in. No one would have known the difference. Off duty guards were trying to find out what was going down and make up their minds whether to leave or stay for the overtime. The same with the cops.

Around the parking lot and upper ball-field, vehicles had been pulled nose to the fence with engines running and lights on to flood the back area around the South and West wings with light.

On cherry-picker arms, portable lighting units were being hoisted up over the tin wall of the West Wing yard, trained on the stairs at the west end of the wing, which led down to the yard.

I could see that the fire-doors, installed since I quit working there, had been ripped out. How the hell do inmates, supposedly beginning with no tools in a maximum-security institution (until 1983 the highest-security joint in the province) rip doors, frames and all, out of their brick and cement collars with their bare hands? Those installations were fabricated of 12-gauge steel.

Rioting cons had the complete run of all the tiers, the fire-escape and the yard. One would dash out on the fire-escape at Three or Four Landing and do a dance and scream, "Come on in, Campbell. I'll do you personally."

Deployed over the hillside above and on both sides of the Main Gaol were North Vancouver Early Response Team (the proper term, these days, for SWAT) and the Vancouver City SWAT, both with their sharpshooters strategically placed should anyone try to get over the concertina wire. In all likelihood they were peering at the whole circus through their starlight-lens scopes. As I walked down the drive, I passed the Burnaby horsemen's SWAT vehicle, a black milk-truck full of toys. The team were all standing around with canisters of gas in their hands arguing about which gas to fire. As far as they were concerned, using gas was a foregone conclusion.

I had seen this movie before. The cops fire in the gas and then hang around outside and watch while corrections teams go in and have their skin and eyes and lungs destroyed. Just listening to them gave me the screaming itchies. (The gas makes everything unbearably itchy.)

The cops were dressed in their umpire uniforms - foot and shin guards, crotch cups, chest pads over flak jackets, and helmets not on yet. They didn't need any of this gear because they had no intention of going in and exposing their bodies to bullets from zip-guns and flying objects of all description.

There was a horseman there I liked by the name of John Lardas. I walked over and we had a wet handshake, both genuinely glad to see one another. It was a little tough to carry on a friendly conversation over the din coming from the prison looming above us.

"I didn't know you were SWAT," I said.

"I'm stuck with running the show, it looks like." He rolled his eyes as we could hear a couple of his men discussing the properties of the various gases. They were almost coming to blows over which gas to shoot. John looked at them and they lowered their voices.

"John, my friend, tell me you aren't going to piss that nastiness into the wing and then invite me to stagger around trying to find bodies."

"Well, they managed to get sixty-odd of them out, but there are eighty and change left in the wing according to the last report I got. As you can hear, the frolic goes on with no sign of let-up. My guys are not eager to go in."

"John, drag your feet on the gas, if you can," I asked. "I want to talk to the command post and get a better picture of what's going on. Things may not be as bad as they seem."

I started up the front stairs of the Main Gaol two at a time. The front doors were thrown wide open. As I hit the top of the stairs, I found the Pretrial SWAT men sweating like bulls in all their gear. They were taking cuffed prisoners coming out from Centre Hall and chucking them into a truck for transport to the segregation unit at Westgate A. The real villains went to the "Oakalla cow-barn" - an ancient, dungeon-like segregation unit from the Dark Ages, located beneath what used to be a cow-barn.

Pretrial line screws, Corelli and Wade, did not look like happy campers. At the order of our brass they had suited up, ready for action. It was November and wet, but very hot inside. They shone with sweat.

"Why are you wearing all that shit?" I asked.

"Because Humpty and Dumpty told us to put it on and prepare to hit formation." Wade hocked and spat in a long arc past the truck door and into the darkness beside it.

"How you gonna formate if you haven't got them all together in

the yard?" I asked. "Near as I can see, they've turned the whole wing into a Swiss cheese, ducking out of one landing and up or down the fire-escape to another." The footing inside - the marble foyer, the wooden hall, the painted cement-was slick from the rain water.

Windfors was part of the ferrying-command bringing cons from Centre Hall and East Wing for transport to Westgate A to the segregation unit. He had on the bottom of a tux and pieces of the top. He had been on his way to a date when he saw all the toys turning in at Oakie gate. He'd made the mistake of turning in to find out what was going on and had been nabbed by an S.C.O. at the gate. I asked Corelli about my equipment.

"I dunno. I think we had a full twelve bags [all the equipment for each individual was packed neatly in a duffel bag] at the outset. But, by the time we did musical seat and musical vehicle so that the guys with the bird-shit on their hats could be sitting in the proper places, some of the gear got rearranged."

"Is my gear here or still out in the truck?"

"Damned if I know. It could even be still in the closet downtown."

It was five hundred or more yards of gauntlet of fire-hoses and vehicles and people back out to the parking lot and Christ knew who had the keys to the vehicles.

"What am I doing here?" I asked.

"What are we doing here? Captain Queeg insisted that we suit up in the parking lot, get in formation with sticks and helmets and double-time all the way here to the Main Gaol. Then we stood around like assholes being laughed at by horsemen SWAT and everyone else until the brass caught up. I think they thought they were going to run the show. Queeg and company went inside to the command post and got told they were off jurisdiction. We asked if we could take these fucking suits off. No. We were to stand ready. The Oakie guys backed up the truck here and obviously needed a hand, so we've been helping load bodies ever since. It's something to do. The brass haven't said anything."

The Oakalla guards, many of whom we worked with when we were at Oakalla, appreciated the help. They had their coats off, sleeves rolled up, and shirts unbuttoned. The truck was pulled up to the

main steps and the Pretrial tactical squad was gathered around sweating and cursing. Just inside to the right was the door leading down to records. The next door on the right led to Central Control and the armoury, and that hall was perpendicular to another hall which led to middle-management administrative offices, staff-lounge, and Protestant and Catholic chaplain offices. Most of the latter had been taken over by command post, with direct lines of communication out to Central Control and press.

"Hey, Yates." On the left, across the marble foyer, was a waiting room with no door. It was dark. The voice came from there.

Instead of heading down to the command post for assignment, I walked across to the unlighted room. I looked in.

"Yeah?"

"Yatesie, c'mon in."

"Who is it?" My eyes began to adjust to the bad light.

"George Mastryk." His cigarette brightened and dimmed in the dark as he smoked.

"Havin' a break?"

"Sit down."

I sat.

"Listen, I'm not just taking a break. It's scary as shit in there. You can't . . . I can't . . . You're supposed to stay till it's over. They think it's going to be a long one. After we had locked the West down they started rioting in their cells . . . banging and chanting at the same time. You should have seen Tucker, he was hamburger. The fucking noise was everywhere. I ran to the bars over One Landing and puked my toenails up."

"Come on, Georgie, you're an old trigger-puke. You puked your way through every venue at the academy when we were doing the physical."

"I puked because I was terrified. I never knew noise could make you puke."

"How bad is it in the West?" I asked.

"All the staff is just milling around," he said. "We got about fifty cons out after the lock-down, and every fucking one of them will have to sign into protective custody. I think there are still about a hundred

of them running around in the West, setting fires. They destroyed all the shitters, of course, and we could see sharp pieces of porcelain flying around all over hell. I think they still have a lot of porcelain left."

"Didn't you tell me they were locked in their drums?"

"Yeah." Mastryk lit a new cigarette from the one he was smoking after blowing on the tip. He offered me one. I shook my head.

"When I came down the hill I could see them running around on the fire-escape, and in and out of the fire-doors, like mice in and out of a Swiss cheese. How the fuck did they get out?" I asked.

"Bunks." Mastryk said. "You know how the bunks are bolted with a collar or a toggle into the plaster. You lift the bunk enough times and the bolts pull out of the wall. No big deal. Every now and then they pull out of the wall just as a matter of wear and tear. The bunk breaks into pieces of angle-iron, very strong and just about perfect as wrecking-bars to smash the old pot-metal bars and pop the spot-welds. It's easy to bend a hole big enough to squeeze through. You give guys pieces of bunk for a crowbar and get them under the collar of a fire-door and the whole thing will pop out like a rivet out of a hole."

I was getting the picture.

"I'm too curious to hang around here with you all night. You deal with your own demons. You'll think of something and do it. You always have, man. Bear in mind you've been here for fourteen hours and fatigue may have something to do with your view of the world."

I walked back toward Centre Hall. I saw Godfrey Jutra, a principal officer in East Wing, there and wanted to talk to him. The roar coming from the West Wing was deafening.

"Jutra, I've got an idea." I announced. "How many guys from the Old West are there around?"

"Counting you and me, maybe six who are close by. I just saw Sprott and O'Dell near the gate in the South with coffee cups in their hands."

"Good, that's four. Six would be a good number, half a tac-team wedge. Any more than that and we'd be too big a target and if the shit came down we'd be falling all over ourselves.

"Derek [Van Hendrik] and Windfors are in here, too."

"Get one of your lackeys to round 'em up," I said. "Can you handle going in?"

"If I don't get in there and do something, I'm gonna pass out in the water and drown," Jutra answered.

My mind was racing. "Who's in the command post?"

"Mike Adler and Ollie Brent."

"We gotta get their okay and have them tie some piano wire around the nuts of the Mounties before they fire that gas."

Jutra yelled at a rookie hanging around the gate in the East and told him where to find the guys we wanted and to have them wait for us in Centre Hall.

"When we go in, I figure we got to have a good plan," I said.

"What's the plan?"

"Get up high enough in the wing that we can yell at them, tell them who we are and call in some old favours."

Jutra thought for a moment. "The smoke is deadly up high. We'll need the fire guys to bring it down with fine spray. And they can hard-stream the assholes back into the cells who come out to chuck porcelain or pot-shot with zip-guns."

"Now you're cookin: Let's go for it. Centre Hall!"

The Centre Hall kid cracked the gate and we went through the visitors' cage. The Front Hall man was waiting at the other gate and had it open.

Uniforms of every description were milling around: ambulance staff, trauma team, SWAT, line screws, firemen, horsemen, and the press, who had been given a room down the hall and a rookie screw to run back and forth. We threaded our way through and made it to the command table. Ollie Brent and Mike Adler were running the show with Bessasson upstairs in his office on a hotline. Mike looked up.

"Mr. Adler."

"Jutra and Yates. What can we do for you?"

Jutra began: "Yates tells me that the Mounties are thinking of firing in gas."

"We haven't okayed it. It has, however, been mentioned a couple of times."

"We'd like thirty minutes of slack to try something," I said. "Mike, we've got, counting ourselves, six West Wingers who know the wing by feel. We want to go in. The firemen have an emergency lighting system they can string in behind us after we're in position."

"Who are the four others?"

"Sprott, O'Dell, Windfors, and Derek Van Hendrik. We think we can get the rest out without the gas and without weapons. We have a good idea who the perpetrators are."

Mike sat back in his chair. "There are eighty-seven monkeys swinging around in the wing."

"Yessir, but I have all the triple-uglies down at Pretrial. We think that most of these guys are just doing the usual go-along-or-be-labelled number. And even if they are heavier than we think, what's it going to cost to try?"

Mike was listening hard. But I just didn't have the magic word to tip the scales. Jutra did.

"Mike, if they fire the fucking gas, and you send every guard on grounds in there, you're going to have over a hundred staff off on compensation tomorrow and maybe a couple of stiffs, too. You'll be running on pure auxiliary power manning the rest of the jail. All we're asking for is half an hour to see whether we can make something happen. They've been jacking around in there at full speed for quite a few hours. A lot of them are bagged. If one of us gets beaned, you got one off on compensation. If we get nowhere, we'll back out and you can send everybody in boots and saddles."

Mike liked the numbers. "You guys understand that you're volunteering for this?"

"Yup."

"Ollie, you witness that I'm not ordering these six men?"

"Witnessed. And remember I said it's probably a waste of time." Ollie winked at me. He liked the idea. He and Mike had eaten enough tear-gas over the years to know exactly why we didn't want any part of the Mountie games.

I turned and saw John Lardas at the door and wondered whether he had heard much of the conversation. He was smiling his most inscrutable Mountie smile.

Brent turned to Mike Adler: "I think we should discuss this." The two of them rose and went over to the window overlooking the West Wing yard.

Jutra and I lit up and waited. Little did I suspect that this would be the last night of my life that I would smoke with enjoyment. My old friend, the cigarette, and I were about to part company.

Mike and Ollie returned to their chairs and sat down gravely. Mike looked up toward the door: "Officer Lardas, would you join us for a moment?"

John came in and nodded. Mike continued, "Would you please inform your people that we're going to delay the firing of gas for thirty minutes?"

"Yessir," John replied. He was itching to ask questions, but he was a savvy professional. He knew he'd find out more by keeping his mouth shut and allowing corrections to bring the info to him. He turned and headed for the door.

When he was out the door, one of the rookies was told to close it and Mike and Ollie asked us what we needed.

We wanted the firefighters right behind us with charged hoses and the portable lighting system, but no lights until we gave the word. Then we talked about gear. Apart from a few army-surplus gasmasks, there was none. Oakalla hadn't had an organized tactical team for years. The government had decided it was too expensive to buy the equipment and find a secure place for it, let alone spend the money on man-hours to train staff to use the equipment.

"Get us the masks, a couple of sticks just in case, and maybe three sets of cuffs per guy, and we'll go for it," Godfrey said.

We headed for Centre Hall to pick up the rest of the team. The firemen, being the kamikaze pilots they are, all wanted to come up with us when they heard our plan, but we persuaded them to cool it, and they pared their initial follow team down to three. Godfrey had a radio and O'Dell had a spare, turned off. It was agreed that we would use the radio as little as possible and at the lowest possible volume until we were in position. Mike and Ollie had our portable numbers. We headed for the West Wing gate with the Centre Hall man. From here on we could only talk in whispers.

As soon as the wing gate closed and locked behind us the noise was on us - pounding, screaming, the sound of metal against metal, wood against cement. If we stood at the centre of the landing, no one in either of the two tiers could see us. Godfrey pointed to Sprott and Derek to check out Two Right and Two Left and make sure the gates were secure. They flattened themselves against the tier-boxes. We had flimsy joint-supplied plastic flashlights stuffed in our ass pockets and one of the firefighters had a mega-light, but the plan was to use the light from the windows to check out the tiers. The cons would chuck pieces of toilet or shoot their zip-guns at anything that looked like a light on the landing. Derek and Sprott nodded that the endgates were secure and inched back to us.

Derek said, "Good news, good news. They've got the tier barricaded about five feet back from the gate. They fucked themselves for keeping six on the landing."

"Same on the right," Sprott said. "They can't see shit unless they're between cell six and the end of the tier. But the fire-door is wide open. I can see the lights outside."

Derek told us that the fire-door was open on the left as well. I said we'd better check out One Landing. It was below ground. Godfrey agreed. I went for One Right and Windfors headed for One Left. I hit the floor, belly-crawled across, and started down the stairs, feet first. It was too quiet. I could see shadows falling across what I took to be the wet floor as romping cons passed between the windows upstairs and the lights outside. It was way too quiet. I reached the half-landing beneath the window. From here I could see the tiers on the other landings above. There were fires in a few of the cells and bodies were moving back and forth between the barricades and the fire-doors. This made me all the more suspicious about the silence on One Landing. I stared as hard as I could into the darkness in the direction of the endgate and continued slithering down the stairs, keeping as flat as I could. I knew I was too low down to be seen. I looked across the landing to see if I could see Windfors moving. Then I bumped down another couple of stairs and . . . yaaaah.

Suddenly I understood why One Landing had no action. At the bottom of the stairs, the water was groin-deep and christly cold. Then

from the other side of the landing I heard Windfors yell, "Shit!" as he took the plunge, too. He flicked on his flashlight. Suddenly there were shouts from Four or Five Landing.

"Douse it and get over here," I stage-whispered. Windfors turned off the light and virtually walked on water to the cover of the tier-box. Behind him there was a hell of a crash and shatter as someone chucked a hunk of porcelain down. We stood there in the water, dead-silent.

We could hear the cons above speculating whether so-and-so saw a light down on One. Fortunately the commotion outside in the yard was in our favour. A bunch of cons were racing around the yard and lobbing whatever they could get their hands on over the metal wall, hoping to bean a guard or a cop. Another couple of chunks of debris fell in the general area where Windfors's light had been, but the chuckers lost interest when the light did not reappear. After a few minutes of standing stock still in that swill full of ash and defecation we figured it was safe to exit, stairs-right.

Back on Two Landing I reported to Godfrey that One Landing was clear because of the water, and thanked the firemen very much for not pointing out that they had been shooting water into the wing for hours. They thought it funny as hell. Godfrey kicked on the radio, relayed our report to the command post, and told them we were heading up to Three Landing.

One of the firemen suggested that his people could douse the hell out of Three, Four, and Five and it would chase most of them out into the yard and give us some cover going up.

Godfrey got back on the radio. "Command, this is 2743. Can you have the firemen on both sides of the wing shoot all the water-power they have on both sides at our signal?"

"Just a minute," Mike Adler said.

We waited. Then Mike came back. "Say when."

Godfrey lined us up. Sprott and Windfors dropped back behind the firefighters to help pull hose. We would go up as low as possible, up the right stairs, flattened against the wall, under cover of the water from outside, then fire our own hose down Three Right to keep the ones in their cells inside and keep the ones in the yard outside until we

checked the endgate. Then we would move to Three Left and repeat the procedure.

Godfrey squeezed the radio, "Hit it now!"

We were flattened against the wall when the barrage of water hit. What glass was left in the window frames blew all over the place. We were face down, covering the backs of our necks, and were soaked to the skin in seconds.

"Let's do it . . . now, now, now," Godfrey shouted. We started to drag hose, but it snagged somewhere on Two. Our leather-soled shoes were slipping on the painted concrete. I had one fireman by the collar of his slicker helping him pull the hose. It freed up and we were suddenly on Three firing a strong stream of water down the tier, inmates yelling every insult they could think of.

"Try to get an angle on the cells." Godfrey yelled. "Fill 'em with water. The colder and wetter we can make the cells and the cons, the better our chances."

Instantly the air was full of flying pieces of metal bunk, porcelain, and large hunks of wood from the trashed desks. Fortunately, the rioters didn't know whether we were coming up Three Left or Three Right or both. A cross-strut of a bunk cleared the bars, whanged against the painted brick of the wall end-first, then batoned over and conked Derek on the head. Most of the energy was out of the projectile by the time it rapped him on the napper, and Derek was wearing a hat that took the brunt of the blow, but it gave us a sudden and profound sense of vulnerability. We pulled hose with all the adrenalin that uncut terror could produce.

Godfrey yelled, "Now!" The hose bucked and the stream leapt into one cell after another through all twenty on Three Right, except for 3, 4, and 5, which were blocked off by the barricade. But we could even get some water into them over the top of the barricade. There were only two or three cons on the tier and they ran for the fire-door, wet as drowned rats, and well-propelled by a stream of water in the backside.

Sprott dashed across the landing and peered around the tier-box on Three Left. There was a sharp, loud crack, then the sound of

ricochet. A zip-gun. The shot wasn't loud enough to have been made by anything larger than a .22, probably fired from deep down the tier, almost at the fire-door. Zip-guns are notoriously inaccurate and often do more damage to the shooter than the target. The inmates were just hoping scare hell out of us.

We humped the hose across the landing and fired the stream down the tier full-bore until there was no more movement or sound on the landing. We shut off the hose and went back to the centre of the landing and listened. The only sound came from above, below, or outside. Mostly outside because the streams of water were still coming in the windows.

Derek asked the firefighters, "Where is the best place for us to be so that you guys can douse fires and cons as necessary? Five Landing?"

The head firefighter said, "Probably Four. We could reach anything above or below."

"Yeah," Derek agreed. "I think that if we get as high as Five, we'll be too exposed. The endgates are secure so far, but we don't know how much they hammered them before we got here."

By the time we got to Four to douse Left and Right, the cons had set everything inflammable alight. It was awful, breathing in that smoke. I ripped off my glasses and put on the old World War Two gas-mask. I couldn't see a damned thing because the plastic eyes were scratched, I didn't have my glasses on, and the smoke was too thick. The firemen were shooting a heavy stream into the cells to flood them and then switching to a fine spray to bring down the smoke. The good news about the smoke was that the cons couldn't see where to aim the pieces of shitter, although hunks kept hitting the endgate and all of us felt that we were covered in ground glass.

Suddenly the cons were there lighting fires (and, we found out, covering up inflammable materials to be lighted later), but while we were yanking masks on and off and firing water at an angle down into the cells burning most brightly, the smoke would make the tier seem to be empty.

Godfrey yelled that he thought they'd torn down all the fire-doors. So I got on the radio. "Mainland control. Tactical squad in

West Wing. We're on Four trying to determine whether any of the fire-doors are still secure. Would you have one of the searchlights you have out there train on all the doors, one after another?"

"Roger."

"We're on Left. Have them start with Left. Then swing to Right. And ask them to hold on each door for maybe thirty seconds. The smoke is pretty thick."

"Roger. Do you have any bodies in custody?"

"When we get 'em, you'll have 'em."

"The RCMP SWAT are getting pretty antsy"

"One canister of gas and they'll swim back to their detachment. We can't do anything until we get the smoke down and get the lay of the place. So far, it's looking good."

"Roger. Y'all stay in touch, y'hear?"

"Get the lights cookin'."

The smoke was thinning. One by one, the big light revealed that there wasn't a single fire-door left. The rioters had taken out even the frames. Each opening was surrounded by irregular brick.

Derek whistled, "Jesus, they've got complete run of all the tiers behind the barricades, the fire-escape, and the entire yard."

Whang! A brick was lobbed up from about Two Landing and broke in two as it hit the landing bars. Made a hell of a noise. We retreated to the centre of Four Landing. The firemen kept pouring water in.

O'Dell asked, "What's the fuckin' plan?"

"No plan," Godfrey replied.

"No plan?"

"An objective is close enough. Dummy up!" Derek said.

Windfors protested. "If you're going over the top of those barricades with nothing but a fucking stick and a gas-mask, count me out."

I joined in, "These assholes have been wearing their asses off for hours trashing the place and running up and down. I figure they're tired, for starters."

"And wet," said Derek.

"And cold," added O'Dell.

Godfrey had about fifteen years in at Oakie. "Listen, I've seen

things make or break just on how you talk to them. We got to be careful what we yell down the tier. Never use the words 'surrender' or 'give up'."

"How about just asking whether anybody else wants to come out."

"Yates, why don't you do the talking. I hear they teach you to talk at Pretrial."

"Suppose someone decides to come out," I asked.

Godfrey said, "I've got that part figured. Standard procedure. Yates yells, Derek backs him up. Yell around the tier-box until they get tired of chucking things. O'Dell and Sprott will frisk and cuff. No shirts. No shoes and socks. No belts. No personals. Anybody brings out any personals, take your stick and whack any Walkmans, watches, anything - books, whatever. They could have shanks in any of that shit, and most of the watches are used for brass knuckles, not for telling time."

The firemen had done a great job of clearing the smoke. We could now see almost all the way down the tier. We checked that all the tier gates were secure, and unlocked the tier-box to Four Left so that we could pop the gate when necessary.

I cupped my hand and shouted around the tier-box and waited for the noise to subside. "Hey, you guys in there!" There were still some men in the unit - we couldn't see them because of the barricades -and others were racing up and down the fire-escapes outside; still others were in the yard.

The expected response came. "Fuck you, screw . . . fucking pigs . . . come on in here, we need a hostage . . . Hey, Clem, you ever fuck a rookie screw? . . . Step out to where I can see you; I have a present for you."

I tried again, "Listen, it's Yates from Pretrial."

"Oh, shit. Holy cow. V P S.C., the fancy-dancy made-in-Tokyo jail. Heavy number. You used to work here in the West, didn't you?"

"Yeah. Listen. For one goddamn minute, listen, then, if you want to carry on, do as you like." There was a bit more hooting and trashing, but I could tell from the volume and cadence that they would hear me out. Then there was silence.

"There are two Mountie SWAT s and one city SWAT and a Pretrial

SWAT outside. That fact is not a problem, until and unless someone authorized reads you the Act. [The Riot Act gives them thirty minutes to disperse and desist or they can be shot with impunity by peace officers.] We're up here to try to get the last of you out before the horsemen shoot in the gas. They're going to gas the unit and the yard. Then we have to do the mop-up. You guys are wet and cold and we're wet and cold. Perfect conditions for the gas to make you feel like your eyes are on fire and make you wish your skin would fall off. And the same goes for us. You know and I know that they're gonna have a hell of a good time dicking around with the gas and concussion grenades and never step foot in here and risk broken eardrums and fucked-up eyes. If there are any more of you who want to come out before the SWAT s go nuts on the place, we'll take you down one at a time. Come out the Four Left gate. We'll escort you down personally to Centre Hall and guarantee your safety. Most of you will be taken to the East [the renovations had just been completed]. Anybody who wants to jack around once he gets out here on the landing goes to A-side [segregation]."

"No cow-barn," a voice yells.

"I was told it was filled to capacity when I arrived. No cow-barn." Long silence.

I went on, "If we don't bring anybody down in ten minutes, they're gonna start shooting the gas and we're outa here." More silence.

"How many of you out there?" one of them asked.

"Six. Just enough to frisk, cuff, and escort. No more."

More silence. Who.

"Me, Yates, from Pretrial. Godfrey from East. Sprott and O'Dell from South. Derek Van Hendrik and Windfors from records."

"Bullshit!"

"Send someone over the barricade to check it out at the gate. I won't unlock the gate."

Silence except for heated debate in stage-whisper. In the distance we could hear people rattling up and down the metal fire-escape and yelling in the yard. I gave them ten minutes and radioed command, "I

have ²¹¹⁵. We move out at ²¹²⁵. No gas until we get to Centre Hall. Flying pieces of shitter are bad enough without taking a tear-gas canister in the head. No gas till we radio from Centre Hall!"

"Roger."

It was a gamble. I knew that if they believed what I said, the rioters knew where we were, and how many of us there were. On the other hand, if they didn't believe me and one guy came out and saw I told them the truth, it would boost our credibility.

If they'd been quietly taking down a barricade on another tier, they could have used a fire-door as a battering ram to get through an endgate on a lower tier and trap all six of us above them. We knew this. The fire dudes knew this. They fired a few streams at the spot-fires they could see on lower tiers. Every now and then a shadow streaked down a tier and out a fire-door or rushed in the door and ducked into a cell.

Derek hissed, "Listen."

We could hear movement but couldn't see anything happening on the tier. The barricade was fifteen or twenty feet down the tier. Then we saw a head appear above the junk of the barricade. By the time the first guy made it over the top, we could see another one following him over. The first guy looked over his shoulder. He looked like he was about to run toward the gate.

Godfrey shouted at the first con, "Okay, guy, put your hands on your head, lock your fingers, and walk toward us." The other one was down off the barricade and standing there. "Hang on, fella, we'll be with you in a minute."

I opened the gate and O'Dell and Sprott had the inmate assume the position against the wall, pat-frisked him, and had him take off his shirt and shoes and socks. He had a pen and some other stuff in one of his pockets. Sprott pointed to the table. The con dumped it on the table and Windfors whacked the stuff with his riot-stick and swept it across the landing.

Godfrey shouted out, "Next guy, same routine. Right here. Lock those fingers tight."

Sprott and O'Dell had cuffed the first con, and I walked over and took him by the cuff chain and his left arm. He yelled, "You guys!"

They were telling the truth. No firing squad!" From the tiers on the left came shouts of, "Right on!" "Fuck 'em. Burn, baby, burn!" "Dummy it, asshole!" It sounded good to me. They were tired. They were no longer one collective bag of hysterical adrenalin.

Derek got on the radio to command post, "Officer Yates is coming down escorting one. Please have someone escort the inmate to Centre Hall. We have several more up here and we need Yates back immediately... and, uh, get the gas brigade to back off. Remember our deal."

"Roger."

Going downstairs reminded me of movies I had seen of Hawaii where you can walk under waterfalls. There was a wall of water pouring off every landing, down our necks. I was beyond cold, but it was good to be moving. The painted stairs were slick and the con was slipping and sliding. I had to hold him up. "Glad to get out of the shit?"

"Right on, man. It's almost prelim time for me. I needed this bullshit like an extra asshole."

Then we were in the light of Two Landing and heading for the dry floor of Centre Hall. Bailey was waiting by the gate. He took the con and I dashed back up the stairs as fast as I could without falling on my ass. I tried to hit the walls of water where the downpour was the thinnest.

Upstairs, the cons had begun to come out. I ferried down about four more. Then they started to come over the barricade so fast, Godfrey looked a little worried. We locked the Four Left gate after each guy, and Godfrey kept the next one about ten feet back until we were ready for him. Then we ran out of cuffs and Godfrey had to radio down for more. By this time we had ten or twelve out.

When I surrendered the next con on Two Landing, they handed me at least fifty pounds of cuffs and stuffed my pockets with "spare cuffs." These are nylon straps which only pull one way. They work well and bite less than metal cuffs but you have to cut them off. I packed this load back up to Four, only to find the landing full of smoke. I dropped the cuffs and looked around for my gas-mask. Windfors already had his on and pointed under the table. My respiratory system felt like a prairie fire. My eyes were tearing and streaming down my face behind the mask and the

plastic was steaming up from the tears and sweat. I couldn't see a damned thing. The firemen were shooting fine spray all over the landing and down the tiers to knock down the smoke, then shooting hard streams as soon as they could locate a bright fire. We supposed the perpetrators had taken back control of the situation and it was the end of Operation Stop the Gas.

The cons were putting inflammable materials against the wall closest to the landing and against the back of the cell. The firemen called for back-up and more hoses. It took almost an hour to douse all the burning shit and get visibility back; to be able to take my mask off and put my glasses back on.

Little did we know that, except for the firemen with their Scott air-packs, we were breathing all manner of toxic fumes, from the burning paint and plastic mattress covers. I've since learned that the most damaging gases are invisible and odourless.

Then a voice from the gate on Four Right shouted, "Hey, you guys, I want to come out."

All of us gave one another glances that said, "No way" We had the Left Landing well covered and well watched. But they could have had fifty cons on the right stacked up like cord-wood in the cells and behind the barricades.

Godfrey yelled, "You wanna come out, you go back down the tier and outside and come out on Four Left like we said."

"Come on, man, I'm right here. Just pop the gate," the con pleaded. Spratt caught the eye of one of the hosers and gave him the signal to hit it. The fireman not only blasted the guy away from the gate, he got him square in the ass as he was going back over the barricade. That was the end of that.

Then, when we were nearly ready to throw in the towel and pull out, the stream of cons began trickling over the barricade again. The next guy over was not a happy rioter. He didn't really want to come out, but he had cut his hand badly on the sharp steel of the fire-door frame while prying it away from the brick. He was one of the housedogs of this mess. (Housedogs attach themselves to whichever power group they think will prevail.)

Once out on the landing, he didn't want to go along with the search. His hand was bound up in a huge ball of torn sheet. Godfrey told him his shirt had to come off. The con replied that he couldn't take it off because the bandage wouldn't go through the sleeve. The con liked that bandage entirely too much. Derek locked the tier door. We jumped him and unwrapped the bandage and out dropped a shank. "Great," I said. "Another one for my collection."

We plastered him up against the wall and cuffed him. Windfors took off his shoes and socks and checked to see whether he had anything taped to the bottoms of his feet. He had a hexagonal wristwatch in his pocket which felt like it weighed a pound. It didn't even work. A big wristwatch with sharp edges is more effective than brass knuckles as a weapon. You adjust the strap so that it fits snugly over your fist when you clench it. We tossed it on Windfors's table and Windfors almost ruined his truncheon trying to smash it. All he managed to do was put a little crack in the crystal. The con was screaming that it was given to him by someone near and dear. Windfors dropped it on the floor and jumped up and down on it with both feet. It was indestructible. I reached down and put it in my pocket. The main thing was that there be nothing within reaching distance which could be converted into a weapon.

The con was cuffed, but he was turning into an orangutan. Godfrey ordered Sprott to help me escort him down. Sprott was an ex-SAS commando. As Sprott approached, the con stood on one leg and attempted to kick him in the nuts. Sprott side-stepped and kicked the standing leg out from under him, and the con fell on his ass. We each took him by an arm and started down. The stairs were very slippery and the con was yanking us this way and that. We crashed into a lot of walls on the way down - con-first. We had to steady him at every waterfall on the way down, with him under it. By the time we got to Two, he was mellow.

There was no pattern to the flow of cons. There would be a herd of up to five, then none for half an hour. I'd go back to my shouting routine: "Anyone else coming out?"

We had no idea how many we had taken out, nor any sense of

space and time up there in the darkness and smoke. Despite the waterfalls, we took turns taking them downstairs just to keep circulation up. At one point Windfors was doing jogging in place to keep warm. He was so wet he didn't want to do escorts and take a splash in the waterfalls. But he was jogging where the light outlined him. An incoming chunk of toilet smacking the bars and shattering took care of that effort.

We'd reached that point of fatigue where you keep on keeping on without feeling anything. Daylight was now on us and we cut the lights, but I had no idea what time it was. I had put my watch in my pocket to keep from drowning it under the waterfalls. When a new fire started, none of us bothered putting on our masks.

No one had come out for what seemed an eternity. Then a poor old con laboured his way over the barricade, his arms full of legal papers. He must have been in his sixties. Christ knows where he had holed himself up during the night. They dumped his papers on Windfors's table. Windfors was going to sweep them into the watery trash-heap on the floor when Derek said, "No, just look through them. I know him. He's harmless. He's defending himself in court and the trial's in progress."

When I took him down, I tucked the papers inside my jacket to keep the water out. They cut his spare cuffs downstairs and gave the papers back to him. Then I went back up to Four for perhaps another half an hour. By this time, other guards were drifting up for a look and I could see staff down below going over the top of barricades and partially dismantling them to sweep the tiers. I had a serious crick in my neck from peering down Four Left around the tier-box.

Someone tapped me on the shoulder. Bob Trevelyan. "Count's clear," he said.

"Bad joke, Bob, I'm not in the mood." I said. On the other hand, Bob was not a joker.

"Really. The board downstairs doesn't lie. The count is clear."

"Fuck you. The ringleader is still in there."

"No, he's not. He's in hospital."

"What?"

"No shit. He's been on the waiting list for some kind of nothing surgery and they kept him in overnight."

"He dreams up this fucking circus, then misses his own riot?"

"You got 'er."

"What time is it?"

"O-six-hundred and change."

"It's all yours, brother. I'm outa here." I started down the stairs, and I was so stiff I had to hang on to the banisters and take it one step at a time and rest on each one. At the time, I still lived right across the street from Oakie. All I could think of was going home to a hot shower and bed.

But when I got to Centre Hall, Percy Deverell, an S.C.O. from Pretrial, was standing there. "All Pretrial tac-team personnel back to the unit for debriefing," he said.

"Sir, I live right across Royal Oak."

"Standard procedure, Mr. Yates."

It must have taken me half an hour to get from Main Gaol to the parking lot and get in the car. I was tempted to go home and get into dry clothes first, but I knew I'd never get back out of the apartment without passing out. Pretrial was a long way from Oakie. It meant driving downtown through the morning rush-hour traffic.

During the debriefing at Pretrial, half of us dozed while the rest of us sat there shivering. Nothing of value was said in the debriefing, and they could have kept their compliments on how well the team comported itself. I had some spare civvies in my locker so I changed into them and tossed my uniform in the trash. Then I drove back to my apartment near Oakie. It was 0800 when I crawled into bed without a shower. Then I got up again at 1300 and was back at Pretrial on shift at 1500. The only one of us stupid enough not to book off on compensation.

Two days later, my voice completely gone, I was ordered to go home and put in for compensation (disallowed by Workers' Compensation). My respiratory system was full of infections. I spent the next three weeks in bed on antibiotics with a humidifier humming. I could never tolerate smoke or smoking again.

I received a commendation (much harder to get than a Ph.D.) for bringing the last eighty-seven cons out without injuries - with a lot of help from my friends, namely the other team-members and the cons who appreciated the way we handled the situation.

The government reported the damage at \$200,000. But the workmen who repaired the wing compared notes with other contractors. That's how I learned that repairs cost between five and six million dollars.