

# THE HOOLIGAN

BY

W. S. GILBERT

1911

Edited by David Trutt

THE HOOLIGAN by W. S. Gilbert  
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THE HOOLIGAN  
Published 1911&1920 in ORIGINAL PLAYS, FOURTH SERIES  
by W. S. Gilbert

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THE HOOLIGAN was named by W. S. Gilbert as “A Sketch in One Act.” Gilbert’s last dramatic efforts, THE HOOLIGAN and TRYING A DRAMATIST were included in the 1911 first edition *Original Plays, Fourth Series*. They were withdrawn and then reinserted in the 1920 and following editions. These two efforts have since been on the list of Gilbert authored plays.

They were made available by Lucy Gilbert after his death on May 29, 1911 to *The Century Magazine*, an American publication. THE HOOLIGAN was apparently edited so that original English spelling, such as “favour” became “favor”. It is also possible that some of the hooligan Solly’s words were re-spelled for the benefit of the American audience. This editor has concluded that Lucy Gilbert sent one of her husband’s personal copies to *The Century Magazine*. A different copy was used by publisher Chatto & Windus for inclusion in *Original Plays, Fourth Series*. This editor cannot determine the order of these items, nor what Gilbert’s final intent had been.

The following play uses the *Original Plays* spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. The wordings of the two versions are very close. Where there is a difference the **Original Plays version is in bold** and the Century Magazine version is underlined. This presentation is intended make it easy to follow the version of the *Original Plays* as this has the most common circulation.

It is difficult to scan Solly’s dialogue because Gilbert had written to simulate English Cockney pronunciation and had also used many slang expressions. In response, this editor has produced a Reading Copy, starting on page 12. The spelling and grammar has been corrected, and the slang has been upgraded to the extent that it could be understood by the editor. It is suggested that a reader unfamiliar with THE HOOLIGAN may wish to begin on page 12.

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## DRAMATIS PERSONAE - THE HOOLIGAN by SIR WILLIAM S. GILBERT:

NAT SOLLY, *a Hooligan under sentence of death.*

THE PRISON GOVERNOR.

THE DOCTOR.

THE CHAPLAIN.

TWO SHERIFFS.

MATHERS, *a Warder.*

CHIEF WARDER.

**SCENE—*A Condemned Cell.***

A SKETCH IN ONE ACT A CHARACTER STUDY

(*Scene: A condemned cell. Bed in corner, R L U. Small deal table with three rush-bottomed chairs, C. Enclosed Inclosed lavatory, L R U. corner. A painted crucifixion on the side wall facing audience. Door, R L C in flat. Tin utensils on shelf, L R. Bible and prayer-books on another shelf, L R. Two semi-circular windows, barred, in L R. flat. Two strips of cocoa-matting on floor. Two electric lights Electric light inset in flat C, with glass front.*)

(*Nat Solly, a hooligan lad of twenty, under sentence of death, is asleep on the bed. He is very restless, and moans and cries in his sleep. Two Warders discovered seated.*

**Clock strikes six.**)

1ST WARDER. Six o'clock. Time for the relief. (*Turns towards Solly.*) Poor devil, he's had a bad time of it. Tossing and tumbling and moaning and screeching out ever since he turned in at ten. Never see such a faint-hearted chap in all *my* going a-fishing!

2ND WARDER. The weakest, cowardliest, softest-spined chap we've had here since Bill Shorter, who, when his time come, had to be carried on a chair. Like a wet hammock *he* was, and this chap's just such another. Take it **they'll we'll** have to carry *him*.

(*Key heard in door, which opens. Enter Chief Warder with two others. One carries prisoner's own clothes.*)

CHIEF WARDER. Anything to report?

1ST WARDER (*saluting*). No, sir. Prisoner turned in at ten when we come on duty—slept a little, moaned and muttered a good deal. That's all, sir.

CHIEF WARDER. Right. Take his prison clothes away and give him his own. (*1st Warder gathers up prisoner's prison suit. His own clothes are placed ready for him. To two new Warders.*) Wake him now. Note anything he may say and report to Governor. (*To other Warders.*) Come!

(*The Chief Warder and those who have been on night duty Exeunt.*)

1ST NEW WARDER **MATHERS** (*mutters*). Funks it, it seems. Well, it's wonderful how quiet they take it, as a rule. Even these regular London cock-tails make up their minds to it, and when it comes to the point, behave more or less like men. But this chap—ugh! (*Goes to him.*) Come, my man, it's six o'clock; you'd better turn out.

SOLLY (*starts with a cry, rubs his eyes, yawns, then realizes the situation*). Six o'clock! Oh, my Gawd, it's to-day! Two hours! Two hours, and then—! Ain't there—ain't there *no* answer come?

MATHERS. To your petition? No, none, and you mustn't look for it now.

SOLLY (*throws himself sobbing on the bed, moaning*). No answer! Not a bloomin' word. (*Sobs.*)

MATHERS (*kindly*). Why, it's not to be expected. Don't think of it. It'll only unsettle you. Turn your thoughts away from it. Come, buck up and face it like a man. (*During this, Solly is slowly drawing on his trousers, sobbing as he does it.*) Cryin' won't do no good; put your heart into it, and look it straight in the face. That's the way to take it. What are you looking for?

SOLLY (*wearily, looking about*). I 'ad a brace [*suspenders*].

MATHERS. It's been took away—fear of accidents. The braces is always took away.

SOLLY. An' my neck-cloth? I don't see no neck-cloth.

MATHERS. That's been took away. The neck-cloths is always took away.

SOLLY. Fear o' accidents? (*Mathers nods.*)

SOLLY (*slowly puts on waistcoat and coat. The other Warder helps him.*) I say—ain't there no chanst of a reprieve? Ther's a good hour and a 'arf yet.

MATHERS. No, no. It'd have come before now if it was coming at all.

SOLLY. Oh, it's 'ard—it's 'ard! I ain't like a ordinary bloke. I'm feeble-minded; the doctor said so, and 'e'd know. Then I've never 'ad no chanst—I've never been taught nuffin', and I've got a weak 'art. I was in 'orsepital six weeks wiv a weak 'art! Oh, my Gawd, it's 'ard—it's 'ard; see 'ere—my fa'ver was a 'igh high toby cracksman; my muvver was a prig and did two stretches; my **bruvvers** brothers and sisters was all prigs, and every chap as I ever knowd was a thief o' sorts—cracksmen, cly-fakers, and wot not! Am I to be judged like a bloke wots been brought up fair and strite, and taught a tride, and can look on a ticker wiv 'is hooks safe in 'is trowsers pockets? Oh, my Gawd, it's 'ard, it's 'ard! (*Sobs on bed.*)

MATHERS. Poor chap! all that's true enough, but your's isn't a case of doin' a stretch for pinchin' a watch. It's much more serious than that. Come now, have a wash.

SOLLY. Wot's the good?

MATHERS. Why, it'll freshen you up wonderful.

SOLLY. Garn! I don't want no wash! Washin' never freshened a bloke yet. I say—'ave you—'ave you seen many of 'em?

MATHERS. Ah—five-an'-thirty or thereabouts.

SOLLY. An'—'ow did they take it?

MATHERS. Mostly like men who've made up their minds to it. Come, buck up, my son! Many a man's gone through it afore you and faced it, fair and square. Come, pull yourself together, and show yourself as good as them.

SOLLY. Ah, but I ain't as good as them. I can't—I can't face it, and that's Gawd's troof! (*With an effort.*) But I'll buck up—I will. Split me silly, but I'll buck up.

MATHERS. That's right.

SOLLY. See 'ere. (*Holds out his hand, which trembles violently.*) Steady as a rock. See 'ere. (*Straightens himself.*) Strite as a post! (*His effort fails and he falls sobbing on bed.*)

MATHERS. Poor chap. You've had a bad night's rest, I expect, and that's unnerved you.

SOLLY. Bad night's rest! I ain't 'ad no night's rest. Just a bleeding nightmare, I've 'ad. Oh, them nights! them nights! The **day's days is** bad enough for a pore bloke wot can't read, and nuffin to do but to count the flies on the wall and wonder wot it's goin' to be like when it comes—only broke up by a hour's trudge outside and a cigarette by the Governor's permission. Ah, the days is bad enough, but the nights! O Gawd, the nights! The lyin' awake for hours—with a sick feelin' at your 'art—and **wen when** you drops off, comes dreams that makes you blarst the sleep that brings 'em!

MATHERS. Dreams about the poor girl?

SOLLY. Abaht 'er? No fear. It's one dream that comes every bloomin' night, and sometimes twicest a **noight night** and more! There's the court—not a reg'lar proper court such as one's seen eversomany times, but a court half a mile acrost an' a quarter of a mile deep, wiv a red judge eversofar off in the middle; five 'undred jurymen on one side, a couple of 'undred lawyers in the middle, an' a thousand public coves on the other—the jury noddin' *their* 'eds all the time, and the lawyers noddin' their 'eds, an' the public noddin' theirs—all a-noddin' cept the **ole hol'** judge.

An' 'e **ses, ses he, says, says 'e**, "Prisoner at the bar," **ses he, says 'e**, "them jurymen has found you guilty, and blow me if I ain't o' their way of thinkin'," **ses says 'e**. "And this 'ere's the sentence," **ses says 'e**, and 'e claps a black cap on 'is **napper nopper** an' 'is two arms stretches out o' his red togs—and they grows longer an' longer—quarter o' a mile long they grows—till 'is fists is close to my froat, the bilin in court noddin' their 'eds all the time, as much as to say "That's right—go on—give it 'im!" an' when **he 'e** reaches me **he 'e** clutches me round the gullet and squeeedges me wiv both 'ands till I'm fair choked—the crowd a noddin' all the time, as if to say, "Just so; we quite agrees, go on!" An' just **wen when** I feels I'm a-dyin' I gives a screech and wakes up shiverin' wiv cold an' all of a 'ot perspiration, like a bloomin' toad, wiv my 'art a-beating nineteen to the dozen!

MATHERS. Of course it's a bad time for a man, the last few days; but you're through 'em now, and says you—What's the use of funking it? It's got to be. That's what *you* says—it's got to be. There's no possible means of escape. There's nothing to be got by showing the white feather. Funk or no funk, the end's the same. That's what you says. So stiffen your heart, my man. Try to think of it as something that's got to be and that it'll be over before you realize that it's taking place. (*To the other Warder, who nods.*) That's the way to look on it, ain't it, Joe?

2ND WARDER. Why don't you relieve your mind and own up to the Chaplain? The Chaplain will be here at seven, and he'll stop with you to the end. Take my advice as an old hand, and tell the whole story. It's wonderful how I've seen a man relieved by owning up to the Chaplain.

SOLLY. Hown up? I 'ave howned up. I ain't got nuffin more to hown; hown up to the Chaplain? Why, I howned up to the judge! "Not guilty," says I, strite out. But did the **hold hol'** fathead believe me? Not 'im!

MATHERS. You see, the evidence against you was too strong.

SOLLY. Hevidence? Call that hevidence? Why, it was bloomin' lies! Bloomin' lies **ain't and** evidence! They swore I tried to kill the gal, when all I meant to do was to give her a scratch—just to teach 'er like. She'd bin my gal for two munce and more—two 'ole munce, mind yer! I'd guv her things—ah, a pot of things—joolery, mind yer—**reel real** gold joolery, what the fence 'd ha' given me thutty bob for. I **giv'** give her a ring—ah, and a brooch. She knowed they was pinched, but she didn't care—not she. I bought 'er a 'at—bought it honest—no snide, mind yer—and took 'er to theayters and 'alls and prig's 'ops.

Then, blarst 'er, she took up with Joe Pitcher—a pal o' mine, 'e was—we'd worked Endell Street and the Lane and the Garden togevver for munce and munce. Well, **wos was** I goin' to **stant stand that?** Not me! I turned nasty. I tell yer strite, nasty I turned, and **wen when** I swore I'd—I'd giv' her wot for, he put 'er up to givin' me away to the cops! There's a bleedin' sneak for yer—'stead of lettin' 'er face it like a woman, he goes and puts 'er up to givin' me away to the cops! Blimey he did! And she **dun done** it, too.

**Wos Was** I goin' to stand that? Not me! So I cut her—I **own hown** it free—honly a scratch, I meant—no more, mind yer, than wot she deserved—an' my 'and slipped—I never 'ad no luck—and I cut deeper than wot I meant. Now, who wouldn't ha' done wot I did—I arst you fair? If the 'Ome Secretary knowed I only meant to make 'er smart a bit—'e's a soft-harted gent, and would never 'ave 'ad me put away for sitch a thing as that!



SOLLY (*continues*). It worn't made clear to him, the puddin' 'ed!—nor yet to the judge—nor yet to the jury, it wasn't. The fatheads wot wrote the petition smuvvered it all up, and oh, my Gawd! I've got to go to-day! (*Furiously.*) Devil strike me blind! but if I 'ad that blarsted old howl of a judge 'ere, that cussed old turnip 'ed wiv a wig on it, I'd—(*Checking himself with an effort.*)—I'd forgive 'im! S'elp me I'd forgive 'im! I'd forgive the 'ole bilin! There, ain't I listened to the Chaplain? Strike 'em all blind, I'd forgive the 'ole bleedin' lot! And the 'Ome Secretary—boil 'is cussed **old hol'** 'art—I'd forgive 'im too! That's a proper frame of mind, ain't it? I arst you, is it or is it not? Mind yer, I never meant to kill 'er—mind that—it's my case, see? Now, a bloke ain't to be 'ung for wot 'e never meant to do. It's murder—it's them wot's murderers, not me! I just meant to scratch 'er; I **own hown** that free and manly-like. It's Gawd's troof.

I see 'im along wiv 'er, wiv my brooch an' my ring, pinched for 'er and given free. An' when I **ses says** “Sal, you're my gal—come along o' me,” he up an' **ses says** 'e, “Garn, you ain't no man; you're just a 'eap o' tea-leaves!” And 'im wot I'd worked the Lane and Garden wiv for munce, and could ha' giv' away time after time, he kicked out back'ard an' caught me on the bloomin' shin, and when I 'owled she larfed, fit to split 'erself. So I swore I'd knife 'er—meanin' only just **enuf enough** to smart—and 'e turns and takes me by the scruff—me wiv a weak 'art, mind yer—and 'e kicks me till I was fair sick.

Then she goes to Bow Street and arsts for a warrant for freats—a chap in court 'eard 'er—an', o' course, I laid dark for a bit. An' one night I comes out an' I finds 'er wivvout 'er pal; she'd bin on the razzle and was staggerin' along singin' and 'owling, and I covers my face and goes behind 'er an' I did wot I swore I'd do. But I never cut a gal before—not in the 'ole course of my bloomin' life I didn't—and that's in my favour, mind yer—and my 'and slipped on account of youth and inexperience. Now I arst you fair, is a bloke to be '**ung becos 'ang because** 'e never cut a gal afore? I arst you—is 'e or is 'e not? And they wot calls themselves lawyers wouldn't put that in the petition! And 'im what called me a 'eap o' tea-leaves and kicked me silly—I showed 'im manly-like wot a 'eap o' tea-leaves can do when 'e's put to it! And 'im to go and give evidence of freats—'im wot I could ha' put away a dozen times if I'd a mind to it! But no—that's 'im, that is—that ain't me! (*Knock—he starts in terror.*) Wot's that? It ain't time yet!

MATHERS. No, no—keep quiet, man—it's only your breakfast.

SOLLY (*shuddering*). Breakfast!

(*Mathers goes to door, opens it, and receives teapot and mug, slices of bread, and plate of eggs and bacon, and places them on table.*)

MATHERS. There you are. Turn to and drink some tea. There's the ham and eggs you asked for yesterday.

SOLLY (*shuddering*). 'Am an' heggs! Ugh!

MATHERS. Come, eat a bit. It'll give you strength.

SOLLY (*looking at his breakfast with disgust*). There ain't no knife.

MATHERS. No, it's cut up ready. You'll have to eat with a spoon.

SOLLY. Fear **of** o' accidents?

MATHERS. Just so—they will happen. Come, try and eat something. It'll stiffen you up wonderful.

SOLLY (*tries to eat, but makes a poor job of it—drinks some tea*). I carn't eat.

MATHERS. Nonsense, man. They always eat their breakfast.

Solly. Do they? (*Tries again—fails.*) It's no good. I *can't* do it!

MATHERS. Well, take some tea.

SOLLY (*drinks—the cup clattering against his teeth*). I carn't drink no more. (*Noise at door.*) Wot's that! (*In utter terror—noise of door being unlocked.*) Wot's that! (*Suddenly.*) They've come for me! It's not time! It's too soon! (*Wildly.*) There's a good hour yet—a 'ole hour!

(*Door opens and Governor enters, accompanied by Chaplain, Doctor, two Under-Sheriffs in court suits, Chief Warder, and others. Solly throws himself on his knees.*)

SOLLY. Gen'lmen—kind, good gen'lmen—tain't time! For Gawd's sake, don't take me yet. I ain't ready—there's another hour—a good hour—an' I want to speak to the parson. I want to hown up. I done it, gen'lmen—I **own hown** it free. I hown it free an' manly—an' I want to tell it all to the parson! (*To Chaplain*) For Gawd's sake, 'ear me! I'm not ready yet—give me a hour—'arf a hour—an' me feeble-minded! I ain't ready—give me 'arf a hour and I'll tell everyfink! It's crool—crool to take me afore my time. (*Suddenly ferocious.*) Damn all yer 'arts, I won't go! Yer shan't take me! (*Two warders hold him to prevent violence.*) Gawd split yer—take yer hands off! It's murderin' me, an' I won't go—I won't go!

(*Struggles desperately with Warders, who hold him securely. At last he falls exhausted and sobbing, and the Warders release him.*)

GOVERNOR. Solly, be calm and listen to me. (*Solly sobbing and gulping on the floor.*) We have not come to take you away; we are here to bring you good news. (*Solly looks up, amazed.*) We are here to tell you that your petition has been favourably received. Taking your youth, your evil training, and the influence of bad associates into consideration, His Majesty, on the recommendation of the Home Secretary and of the judge who tried you, has been graciously pleased to commute the death penalty into one of penal servitude for life. (*Solly stares vacantly, as if he understood imperfectly.*) And I trust that this merciful exercise of the Royal Prerogative will have its due effect upon you, and that when you regain your liberty—which, if you behave well in prison, will take place in twenty years—you will abandon your wicked course of life, and so justify your narrow escape from the fearful doom to which you were sentenced.

SOLLY (*who has been gazing wildly at the Governor during this speech as one who is completely dazed*). Commuted! Penal servitude! Then—then I'm not to be 'ung? I'm to live?

(*Governor nods assent. The Chaplain goes to Solly to raise him from the floor. Solly springs up, straightens himself, looks wildly around him, gives an agonized cry as of a man in acute pain, and falls senseless on the stage. They bend over him—the Doctor turns him face upwards upward, feels his heart, and puts his ear to Solly's mouth.*)

DOCTOR. Heart failure.

**GOVERNOR. Dead?**

DOCTOR. Dead.

**CURTAIN**

## A SKETCH IN ONE ACT: A CHARACTER STUDY

(*Scene: A condemned cell. Bed in corner, R U. Small deal table with three rush-bottomed chairs, C. Enclosed lavatory, L U. corner. A painted crucifixion on the side wall. Door, R C in flat. Tin utensils on shelf, L. Bible and prayer-books on another shelf, L. Two semi-circular windows, barred, in L flat. Two strips of cocoa-matting on floor. Two electric lights inset in flat C, with glass front.*)

(*Nat Solly, a hooligan lad of twenty, under sentence of death, is asleep on the bed. He is very restless, and moans and cries in his sleep. Two Warders discovered seated. Clock strikes six.*)

1ST WARDER. Six o'clock. Time for the relief. (*Turns towards Solly.*) Poor devil, he's had a bad time of it. Tossing and tumbling and moaning and screeching out ever since he turned in at ten. Never see such a faint-hearted chap in all *my* going a-fishing!

2ND WARDER. The weakest, cowardliest, softest-spined chap we've had here since Bill Shorter, who, when his time come, had to be carried on a chair. Like a wet hammock *he* was, and this chap's just such another. Take it they'll have to carry *him*.

(*Key heard in door, which opens. Enter Chief Warder with two others. One carries prisoner's own clothes.*)

CHIEF WARDER. Anything to report?

1ST WARDER (*saluting*). No, sir. Prisoner turned in at ten when we come on duty—slept a little, moaned and muttered a good deal. That's all, sir.

CHIEF WARDER. Right. Take his prison clothes away and give him his own. (*1st Warder gathers up prisoner's prison suit. His own clothes are placed ready for him. To two new Warders.*) Wake him now. Note anything he may say and report to Governor. (*To other Warders.*) Come!

(*The Chief Warder and those who have been on night duty Exeunt.*)

1ST NEW WARDER MATHERS (*mutters*). A coward *him*, it seems. Well, it's wonderful how quiet they take it, as a rule. Even these regular London cock-tails make up their minds to it, and when it comes to the point, behave more or less like men. But this chap—ugh! (*Goes to him.*) Come, my man, it's six o'clock; you'd better turn out.

SOLLY (*starts with a cry, rubs his eyes, yawns, then realizes the situation*). Six o'clock! Oh, my God, it's to-day! Two hours! Two hours, and then—! Ain't there—ain't there *no* answer come?

MATHERS. To your petition? No, none, and you mustn't look for it now.

SOLLY (*throws himself sobbing on the bed, moaning*). No answer! Not a single word. (*Sobs.*)

MATHERS (*kindly*). Why, it's not to be expected. Don't think of it. It'll only unsettle you. Turn your thoughts away from it. Come, buck up and face it like a man. (*During this, Solly is slowly drawing on his trousers, sobbing as he does it.*) Crying won't do any good; put your heart into it, and look it straight in the face. That's the way to take it. What are you looking for?

SOLLY (*wearily, looking about*). I had my suspenders.

MATHERS. It's been taken away—fear of accidents. Suspenders are always taken away.

SOLLY. And my neck-cloth? I don't see any neck-cloth.

MATHERS. That's been taken away. The neck-cloths are always taken away.

SOLLY. Fear of accidents? (*Mathers nods.*)

SOLLY (*slowly puts on waistcoat and coat. The other Warder helps him.*) I say—ain't there a chance of a reprieve? There's a good hour and a half yet.

MATHERS. No, no. It would have come before now if it was coming at all.

SOLLY. Oh, it's hard—it's hard! I ain't like an ordinary bloke. I'm feeble-minded; the doctor said so, and he'd know. Then I've never had a chance—I've never been taught anything, and I've got a weak heart. I was in the hospital six weeks with a weak heart! Oh, my God, it's hard—it's hard; see here—my father was a highway robber; my mother was a petty thief and did two stretches; my brothers and sisters were all thieves, and every chap I ever knew was a thief of sorts—burglars, purse snatchers, and what not! Am I to be judged like someone who's been brought up fair and straight, and taught a trade, and can look on a watch and keep his hands safe in his trousers pockets? Oh, my God, it's hard, it's hard! (*Sobs on bed.*)

MATHERS. Poor chap! all that's true enough, but yours isn't a case of doing a stretch for pinching a watch. It's much more serious than that. Come now, have a wash.

SOLLY. What's the good?

MATHERS. Why, it'll freshen you up wonderful.

SOLLY. Go on! I don't want a wash! Washing never freshened anyone yet. I say—have you—have you seen many of them?

MATHERS. Ah—five-and-thirty or thereabouts.

SOLLY. And—how did they take it?

MATHERS. Mostly like men who have made up their minds to it. Come, buck up, my son! Many a man's gone through it before you and faced it, fair and square. Come, pull yourself together, and show yourself as good as them.

SOLLY. Ah, but I ain't as good as them. I can't—I can't face it, and that's God's truth! (*With an effort.*) But I'll buck up—I will. Kick me silly, but I'll buck up.

MATHERS. That's right.

SOLLY. See here. (*Holds out his hand, which trembles violently.*) Steady as a rock. See here. (*Straightens himself.*) Straight as a post! (*His effort fails and he falls sobbing on bed.*)

MATHERS. Poor chap. You've had a bad night's rest, I expect, and that's unnerved you.

SOLLY. Bad night's rest! I ain't had a night's rest. Another nightmare, I've had. Oh, the nights! the nights! The days are bad enough for a poor bloke who can't read, and with nothing to do but to count the flies on the wall and wonder what it's going to be like when it comes—only broken up by an hour's trudge outside and a cigarette by the Governor's permission. Ah, the days are bad enough, but the nights! O God, the nights! The lying awake for hours—with a sick feeling at your heart—and when you drop off, come the dreams that make you curse the sleep that brings them!

MATHERS. Dreams about the poor girl?

SOLLY. About *her*? Not that. It's one dream that comes every night, and sometimes twice a night and more! There's the court—not a regular proper court such as is seen ever so many times, but a court half a mile across and a quarter of a mile deep, with a red robed judge ever so far off in the middle; five hundred jurymen on one side, a couple of hundred lawyers in the middle, and a thousand public blokes on the other—the jury nodding *their* heads all the time, and the lawyers nodding their heads, and the public nodding theirs—all nodding except the old judge. And he says, says he, “Prisoner at the bar,” says he, “these jurymen have found you guilty, and blow me if I ain't of their way of thinking,” says he. “And this here's the sentence,” says he, and he claps a black cap on his head and his two arms stretch out of his red robes—and they grow longer and longer—quarter of a mile long they grow—until his fists are close to my throat, the crowd in court nodding their heads all the time, as much as to say “That's right—go on—give it to him!” and when he reaches me, he clutches me round the gullet and squeezes me with both hands till I'm nearly choked—the crowd nodding all the time, as if to say, “Just so; we quite agree, go on!” And just when I feel like I'm dying, I give a screech and wake up shivering with cold and all of a hot perspiration, like a blooming toad, with my heart beating so rapidly!

MATHERS. Of course it's a bad time for a man, the last few days; but you're through them now, and as you say—What's the use of being a coward? It's got to be. That's what *you* say—it's got to be. There's no possible means of escape. There's nothing to be gotten by showing the white feather. Coward or no coward, the end's the same. That's what you say. So stiffen your heart, my man. Try to think of it as something that's got to be and that it'll be over before you realize that it's taking place. (*To the other Warder, who nods.*) That's the way to look on it, ain't it, Joe?

2ND WARDER. Why don't you relieve your mind and own up to the Chaplain? The Chaplain will be here at seven, and he'll stay with you to the end. Take my advice as an old hand, and tell the whole story. It's wonderful how I've seen a man relieved by owning up to the Chaplain.

SOLLY. Own up? I have owned up. I don't have more to confess; own up to the Chaplain? Why, I owned up to the judge! "Not guilty," said I, straight out. But did the old fathead believe me? Not him!

MATHERS. You see, the evidence against you was too strong.

SOLLY. Evidence? Call that evidence? Why, it was all lies! Lies ain't evidence! They swore I tried to kill the gal, when all I meant to do was to give her a scratch—just to teach her. She'd been my gal for two months and more—two whole months, mind you! I'd given her things—ah, a pot of things—jewellery, mind you—real gold jewellery, the kind the fence would have given me thirty bob for. I gave her a ring—ah, and a brooch. She knew they were pinched, but she didn't care—not she. I bought her a hat—bought it honestly—no stealing, mind you—and took her to theatres and halls and dances.

Then, blast her, she took up with Joe Pitcher—a pal of mine, he was—we'd worked Endell Street and the Lane and the Garden together for months and months. Well, was I going to stand for *that*? Not me! I turned nasty. I tell you straight, nasty I turned, and when I swore I'd—I'd give her what for, he put her up to giving me away to the cops! There's a rotten sneak for you—instead of letting her face it like a woman, he goes and puts her up to giving me away to the cops! That he did! And she did it, too.

Was I going to stand for that? Not me! So I cut her—I confess it freely—only a scratch, I meant—no more, mind you, than what she deserved—and my hand slipped—I never had any luck—and I cut deeper than what I meant. Now, who wouldn't have done what I did—I ask you fairly? If the Home Secretary knew I only meant to make her smart a bit—he's a soft-hearted gent, and would never have had me put away for such a thing as that!

SOLLY (*continues*). It wasn't made clear to him, by that pudding head lawyer!—nor yet to the judge—nor yet to the jury, it wasn't. The fatheads who wrote the petition smothered it all up, and oh, my God! I've got to go to-day! (*Furiously.*) Devil strike me blind! but if I had that blasted old owl of a judge here, that cursed old turnip head with a wig on it, I'd—(*Checking himself with an effort.*)—I'd forgive him! So help me I'd forgive him! I'd forgive the old bloke! There, haven't I listened to the Chaplain? Strike them all blind, I'd forgive the whole blasted lot! And the Home Secretary—boil his cursed old heart—I'd forgive him too! That's a proper frame of mind, ain't it? I ask you, is it or is it not? Mind you, I never meant to kill her—mind that—it's my case, see? Now, a bloke ain't to be hung for what he never meant to do. It's murder—it's them who's murderers, not me! I just meant to scratch her; I own that free and manly-like. It's God's truth.

I saw him along with her, with my brooch and my ring, pinched for her and given free. And when I said "Sal, you're my gal—come along with me," he up and said he, "Go on, you ain't no man; you're just a heap of tea-leaves!" And him who I'd worked the Lane and Garden with for months, and could have given away time after time, he kicked out backward and caught me on the shin, and when I howled she laughed, fit to split herself. So I swore I'd knife her—meaning only just enough to smart—and he turns and takes me by the scruff—me with a weak heart, mind you—and he kicks me till I was fairly sick.

Then she goes to Bow Street and asks for a warrant for threats—a chap in court heard her—and, of course, I laid dark for a bit. And one night I came out and I found her without her pal; she'd been on the sauce and was staggering along singing and howling, and I cover my face and go behind her and I did what I swore I'd do. But I never cut a gal before—not in the whole course of my life I didn't—and that's in my favour, mind you—and my hand slipped on account of youth and inexperience. Now I ask you fairly, is a bloke to be hung because he never cut a gal before? I ask you—is he or is he not? And they who call themselves lawyers wouldn't put that in the petition! And him who called me a heap of tea-leaves and kicked me silly—I showed him manly-like what a heap of tea-leaves can do when he's put to it! And for him to go and give evidence of threats—him who I could have put away a dozen times if I'd a mind to it! But no—that's him, that is—that ain't me! (*Knock—he starts in terror.*) What's that? It ain't time yet!

MATHERS. No, no—keep quiet, man—it's only your breakfast.

SOLLY (*shuddering*). Breakfast!

(*Mathers goes to door, opens it, and receives teapot and mug, slices of bread, and plate of eggs and bacon, and places them on table.*)



MATHERS. There you are. Turn to and drink some tea. There's the ham and eggs you asked for yesterday.

SOLLY (*shuddering*). Ham and eggs! Ugh!

MATHERS. Come, eat a bit. It'll give you strength.

SOLLY (*looking at his breakfast with disgust*). There ain't no knife.

MATHERS. No, it's cut up ready. You'll have to eat with a spoon.

SOLLY. Fear of accidents?

MATHERS. Just so—they will happen. Come, try and eat something. It'll stiffen you up wonderful.

SOLLY (*tries to eat, but makes a poor job of it—drinks some tea*). I can't eat.

MATHERS. Nonsense, man. They always eat their breakfast.

Solly. Do they? (*Tries again—fails.*) It's no good. I *can't* do it!

MATHERS. Well, take some tea.

SOLLY (*drinks—the cup clattering against his teeth*). I can't drink any more. (*Noise at door.*) What's that! (*In utter terror—noise of door being unlocked.*) What's that! (*Suddenly.*) They've come for me! It's not time! It's too soon! (*Wildly.*) There's a good hour yet—a whole hour!

(*Door opens and Governor enters, accompanied by Chaplain, Doctor, two Under-Sheriffs in court suits, Chief Warder, and others. Solly throws himself on his knees.*)

SOLLY. Gentlemen—kind, good gentlemen—it ain't time! For God's sake, don't take me yet. I ain't ready—there's another hour—a good hour—and I want to speak to the parson. I want to own up. I did it, gentlemen—I own it free. I own it free and manly—and I want to tell it all to the parson! (*To Chaplain*) For God's sake, hear me! I'm not ready yet—give me an hour—half an hour—and me feeble-minded! I ain't ready—give me half an hour and I'll tell everything! It's cruel—cruel to take me before my time. (*Suddenly ferocious.*) Damn all your hearts, I won't go! You shan't take me! (*Two warders hold him to prevent violence.*) God split you—take your hands off! It's murdering me, and I won't go—I won't go!

(*Struggles desperately with Warders, who hold him securely. At last he falls exhausted and sobbing, and the Warders release him.*)

GOVERNOR. Solly, be calm and listen to me. (*Solly sobbing and gulping on the floor.*) We have not come to take you away; we are here to bring you good news. (*Solly looks up, amazed.*) We are here to tell you that your petition has been favourably received. Taking your youth, your evil training, and the influence of bad associates into consideration, His Majesty, on the recommendation of the Home Secretary and of the judge who tried you, has been graciously pleased to commute the death penalty into one of penal servitude for life. (*Solly stares vacantly, as if he understood imperfectly.*) And I trust that this merciful exercise of the Royal Prerogative will have its due effect upon you, and that when you regain your liberty—which, if you behave well in prison, will take place in twenty years—you will abandon your wicked course of life, and so justify your narrow escape from the fearful doom to which you were sentenced.

SOLLY (*who has been gazing wildly at the Governor during this speech as one who is completely dazed*). Commuted! Penal servitude! Then—then I'm not to be hung? I'm to live?

(*Governor nods assent. The Chaplain goes to Solly to raise him from the floor. Solly springs up, straightens himself, looks wildly around him, gives an agonized cry as of a man in acute pain, and falls senseless on the stage. They bend over him—the Doctor turns him face upwards, feels his heart, and puts his ear to Solly's mouth.*)

DOCTOR. Heart failure.

GOVERNOR. Dead?

DOCTOR. Dead.

**CURTAIN**