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Chapter 16

Warden Atherton, when he thinks of me, must feel anything but pride. I have taught him what spirit is, humbled him with my own spirit that rose invulnerable, triumphant, above all his tortures. I sit here in Folsom, in Murderers' Row, awaiting my execution; Warden Atherton still holds his political job and is king over San Quentin and all the damned within its walls; and yet, in his heart of hearts, he knows that I am greater than he.

In vain Warden Atherton tried to break my spirit. And there were times, beyond any shadow of doubt, when he would have been glad had I died in the jacket. So the long inquisition went on. As he had told me, and as he told me repeatedly, it was dynamite or curtains.

Captain Jamie was a veteran in dungeon horrors, yet the time came when he broke down under the strain I put on him and on the rest of my torturers. So desperate did he become that he dared words with the Warden and washed his hands of the affair. From that day until the end of my torturing he never set foot in solitary.

Yes, and the time came when Warden Atherton grew afraid, although he still persisted in trying to wring from me the hiding-place of the non-existent dynamite. Toward the last he was badly shaken by Jake Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer was fearless and outspoken. He had passed unbroken through all their prison hells, and out of superior will could beard them to their teeth. Morrell rapped me a full account of the incident. I was unconscious in the jacket at the time.

"Warden," Oppenheimer had said, "you've bitten off more than you can chew. It ain't a case of killing Standing. It's a case of killing three men, for as sure as you kill him, sooner or later Morrell and I will get the word out and what you have done will be known from one end of California to the other. You've got your choice. You've either got to let up on Standing or kill all three of us. Standing's got your goat. So have I. So has Morrell. You are a stinking coward, and you haven't got the back-bone and guts to carry out the dirty butcher's work you'd like to do."

Oppenheimer got a hundred hours in the jacket for it, and, when he was unlaced, spat in the Warden's face and received a second hundred hours on end. When he was unlaced this time, the Warden was careful not to be in solitary. That he was shaken by Oppenheimer's words there is no doubt.

But it was Doctor Jackson who was the arch-fiend. To him I was a novelty, and he was ever eager to see how much more I could stand before I broke.

"He can stand twenty days off the bat," he bragged to the Warden in my presence.

"You are conservative," I broke in. "I can stand forty days. Pshaw! I can stand a hundred when such as you administer it." And, remembering my sea-cuny's patience of forty years' waiting ere I got my hands on Chong Mong-ju's gullet, I added: "You prison curs, you don't know what a man is. You think a man is made in your own cowardly images. Behold, I am a man. You are feelblings. I am your master. You can't bring a squeal out of me. You think it remarkable, for you know how easily you would squeal."

Oh, I abused them, called them sons of toads, hell's scullions, slime of the pit. For I was above them, beyond them. They were slaves. I was free spirit. My flesh only lay pent there in solitary. I was not pent. I had mastered the flesh, and the spaciousness of time was mine to wander in, while my poor flesh, not even suffering, lay in the little death in the jacket.

Much of my adventures I rapped to my two comrades. Morrell believed, for he had himself tasted the little death. But Oppenheimer, enraptured with my tales, remained a sceptic to the end. His regret was naive, and at times really pathetic, in that I had devoted my life to the science of agriculture instead of to fiction writing.

"But, man," I reasoned with him, "what do I know of myself about this Cho-Sen? I am able to identify it with what is to-day called Korea, and that is about all. That is as far as my reading goes. For instance, how possibly, out of my present life's experience, could I know anything about kimchi? Yet I know kimchi. It is a sort of sauerkraut. When it is spoiled it stinks to heaven. I tell you, when I was Adam Strang, I ate kimchi thousands of times. I know good kimchi, bad kimchi, rotten kimchi. I know the best kimchi is made by the women of Wosan. Now how do I know that? It is not in the content of my mind, Darrell Standing's mind. It is in the content of Adam Strang's mind, who, through various births and deaths, bequeathed his experiences to me, Darrell Standing, along with the rest of the experiences of those various other lives that intervened. Don't you see, Jake? That is how men come to be, to grow, how spirit develops."

"Aw, come off," he rapped back with the quick imperative knuckles I knew so well. "Listen to your uncle talk now. I am Jake Oppenheimer. I always have been Jake Oppenheimer. No other guy is in my makings. What I know I know as Jake Oppenheimer. Now what do I know? I'll tell you one thing. I know kimchi. Kimchi is a sort of sauerkraut made in a country that used to be called Cho-Sen. The women of Wosan make the best kimchi, and when kimchi is spoiled it stinks to heaven. You keep out of this, Ed. Wait till I tie the professor up.

"Now, professor, how do I know all this stuff about kimchi? It is not in the content of my mind."

"But it is," I exulted. "I put it there."

"All right, old boss. Then who put it into your mind?"

"Adam Strang."

"Not on your tintype. Adam Strang is a pipe-dream. You read it somewhere."

"Never," I averred. "The little I read of Korea was the war correspondence at the time of the Japanese-Russian War."

"Do you remember all you read?" Oppenheimer queried.

"No."

"Some you forget?"

"Yes, but--"

"That's all, thank you," he interrupted, in the manner of a lawyer abruptly concluding a cross-examination after having extracted a fatal admission from a witness.

It was impossible to convince Oppenheimer of my sincerity. He insisted that I was making it up as I went along, although he applauded what he called my "to-be-continued-in-our-next," and, at the times they were resting me up from the jacket, was continually begging and urging me to run off a few more chapters.

"Now, professor, cut out that high-brow stuff," he would interrupt Ed Morrell's and my metaphysical discussions, "and tell us more about the ki-sang and the cunies. And, say, while you're about it, tell us what happened to the Lady Om when that rough-neck husband of hers choked the old geezer and croaked."

How often have I said that form perishes. Let me repeat. Form perishes. Matter has no memory. Spirit only remembers, as here, in prison cells, after the centuries, knowledge of the Lady Om and Chong Mong-ju persisted in my mind, was conveyed by me into Jake Oppenheimer's mind, and by him was reconveyed into my mind in the argot and jargon of the West. And now I have conveyed it into your mind, my reader. Try to eliminate it from your mind. You cannot. As long as you live what I have told will tenant your mind. Mind? There is nothing permanent but mind. Matter fluxes, crystallizes, and fluxes again, and forms are never repeated. Forms disintegrate into the eternal nothingness from which there is no return. Form is apparitional and passes, as passed the physical forms of the Lady Om and Chong Mong-ju. But the memory of them remains, shall always remain as long as spirit endures, and spirit is indestructible.

"One thing sticks out as big as a house," was Oppenheimer's final criticism of my Adam Strang adventure. "And that is that you've done more hanging around Chinatown dumps and hop-joints than was good for a respectable college professor. Evil communications, you know. I guess that's what brought you here."

Before I return to my adventures I am compelled to tell one remarkable incident that occurred in solitary. It is remarkable in two ways. It shows the astounding mental power of that child of the gutters, Jake Oppenheimer; and it is in itself convincing proof of the verity of my experiences when in the jacket coma.

"Say, professor," Oppenheimer tapped to me one day. "When you was splicing that Adam Strang yarn, I remember you mentioned playing chess with that royal souse of an emperor's brother. Now is that chess like our kind of chess?"

Of course I had to reply that I did not know, that I did not remember the details after I returned to my normal state. And of course he laughed good-naturedly at what he called my foolery. Yet I could distinctly remember that in my Adam Strang adventure I had frequently played chess. The trouble was that whenever I came back to consciousness in solitary, unessential and intricate details faded from my memory.

It must be remembered that for convenience I have assembled my intermittent and repetitional jacket experiences into coherent and consecutive narratives. I never knew in advance where my journeys in time would take me. For instance, I have a score of different times returned to Jesse Fancher in the wagon-circle at Mountain Meadows. In a single ten-days' bout in the jacket I have gone back and back, from life to life, and often skipping whole series of lives that at other times I have covered, back to prehistoric time, and back of that to days ere civilization began.

So I resolved, on my next return from Adam Strang's experiences, whenever it might be, that I should, immediately, I on resuming consciousness, concentrate upon what visions and memories. I had brought back of chess playing. As luck would have it, I had to endure Oppenheimer's chaffing for a full month ere it happened. And then, no sooner out of jacket and circulation restored, than I started knuckle-rapping the information.

Further, I taught Oppenheimer the chess Adam Strang had played in Cho-Sen centuries ago. It was different from Western chess, and yet could not but be fundamentally the same, tracing back to a common origin, probably India. In place of our sixty-four squares there are eighty-one squares. We have eight pawns on a side; they have nine; and though limited similarly, the principle of moving is different.

Also, in the Cho-Sen game, there are twenty pieces and pawns against our sixteen, and they are arrayed in three rows instead of two. Thus, the nine pawns are in the front row; in the middle row are two pieces resembling our castles; and in the back row, midway, stands the king, flanked in order on either side by "gold money," "silver money," "knight," and "spear." It will be observed that in the Cho-Sen game there is no queen. A further radical variation is that a captured piece or pawn is not removed from the board. It becomes the property of the captor and is thereafter played by him.

Well, I taught Oppenheimer this game--a far more difficult achievement than our own game, as will be admitted, when the capturing and recapturing and continued playing of pawns and pieces is considered. Solitary is not heated. It would be a wickedness to ease a convict from any spite of the elements. And many a dreary day of biting cold did Oppenheimer and I forget that and the following winter in the absorption of Cho-Sen chess.

But there was no convincing him that I had in truth brought this game back to San Quentin across the centuries. He insisted that I had read about it somewhere, and, though I had forgotten the reading, the stuff of the reading was nevertheless in the content of my mind, ripe to be brought out in any pipe-dream. Thus he turned the tenets and jargon of psychology back on me.

"What's to prevent your inventing it right here in solitary?" was his next hypothesis. "Didn't Ed invent the knuckle-talk? And ain't you and me improving on it right along? I got you, bo. You invented it. Say, get it patented. I remember when I was night-messenger some guy invented a fool thing called Pigs in Clover and made millions out of it."

"There's no patenting this," I replied. "Doubtlessly the Asiatics have been playing it for thousands of years. Won't you believe me when I tell you I didn't invent it?"

"Then you must have read about it, or seen the Chinks playing it in some of those hop-joints you was always hanging around," was his last word.

But I have a last word. There is a Japanese murderer here in Folsom--or was, for he was executed last week. I talked the matter over with him; and the game Adam Strang played, and which I taught Oppenheimer, proved quite similar to the Japanese game. They are far more alike than is either of them like the Western game.