

I remember the first time Andy Dufresne got in touch with me for something; I remember like it was yesterday. That wasn't the time he wanted Rita Hayworth, though. That came later. In the summer of 1948 he came around for something else.

Most of my deals are done right there in the exercise yard, and that's where this one went down. Our yard is big, much bigger than most. It's a perfect square, ninety yards on a side. The north side is the outer wall, with a guard-tower at either end. The guards up there are armed with binoculars and riot guns. The main gate is in that north side. The truck loading-bays are on the south side of the yard. There are five of them. Shawshank is a busy place during the work-week—deliveries in, deliveries out. We have the license-plate factory, and a big industrial laundry that does all the prison wetwash, plus that of Kittery Receiving Hospital and the Eliot Nursing Home. There's also a big automotive garage where mechanic inmates fix prison, state, and municipal vehicles—not to mention the private cars of the screws, the administration offices . . . and, on more than one occasion, those of the parole board.

(Money)
Income
prison-
labor
SCREW
=

The east side is a thick stone wall full of tiny slit windows. Cellblock 5 is on the other side of that wall. The west side is Administration and the infirmary. Shawshank has never been as overcrowded as most prisons, and back in '48 it was only filled to something like two-thirds capacity, but at any given time there might be eighty to a hundred and twenty cons on the yard—playing toss with a football or baseball, shooting

STEPHEN KING

craps, jawing at each other, making deals. On Sunday the place was even more crowded; on Sunday the place would have looked like a country holiday . . . if there had been any women.

It was on a Sunday that Andy first came to me. I had just finished talking to Elmore Armitage, a fellow who often came in handy to me, about a radio when Andy walked up. I knew who he was, of course; he had a reputation for being a snob and a cold fish. People were saying he was marked for trouble already. One of the people saying so was Bogs Diamond, a bad man to have on your case. Andy had no cellmate, and I'd heard that was just the way he wanted it, although people were already saying he thought his shit smelled sweeter than the ordinary. But I don't have to listen to rumors about a man when I can judge him for myself.

Andy
for
vetting
o

"Hello," he said. "I'm Andy Dufresne." He offered his hand and I shook it. He wasn't a man to waste time being social; he got right to the point. "I understand that you're a man who knows how to get things."

I agreed that I was able to locate certain items from time to time.

"How do you do that?" Andy asked.

"Sometimes," I said, "things just seem to come into my hand. I can't explain it. Unless it's because I'm Irish."

He smiled a little at that. "I wonder if you could get me a rock-hammer."

"What would that be, and why would you want it?"

Andy looked surprised. "Do you make motivations a part of your business?" With words like those I could understand how he had gotten a reputation for being the snobby sort, the kind of guy who likes to put on airs—but I sensed a tiny thread of humor in his question.

rock
hammer
T

"I'll tell you," I said. "If you wanted a toothbrush, I wouldn't ask questions. I'd just quote you a price. Because a toothbrush, you see, is a non-lethal sort of an object."

"You have strong feelings about lethal objects?"

RITA HAYWORTH AND SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

"I do."

An old friction-taped baseball flew toward us and he turned, cat-quick, and picked it out of the air. It was a move Frank Malzone would have been proud of. Andy flicked the ball back to where it had come from—just a quick and easy-looking flick of the wrist, but that throw had some mustard on it, just the same. I could see a lot of people were watching us with one eye as they went about their business. Probably the guards in the tower were watching, too. I won't gild the lily; there are cons that swing weight in any prison, maybe four or five in a small one, maybe two or three dozen in a big one. At Shawshank I was one of those with some weight, and what I thought of Andy Dufresne would have a lot to do with how his time went. He probably knew it, too, but he wasn't kowtowing or sucking up to me, and I respected him for that.

"Fair enough. I'll tell you what it is and why I want it. A rock-hammer looks like a miniature pickaxe—about so long." He held his hands about a foot apart, and that was when I first noticed how neatly kept his nails were. "It's got a small sharp pick on one end and a flat, blunt hammerhead on the other. I want it because I like rocks."

"Rocks," I said.

"Squat down here a minute," he said.

I humored him. We hunkered down on our haunches like Indians.

Andy took a handful of exercise yard dirt and began to sift it between his neat hands, so it emerged in a fine cloud. Small pebbles were left over, one or two sparkly, the rest dull and plain. One of the dull ones was quartz, but it was only dull until you'd rubbed it clean. Then it had a nice milky glow. Andy did the cleaning and then tossed it to me. I caught it and named it.

"Quartz, sure," he said. "And look. Mica. Shale. Silted granite. Here's a piece of graded limestone, from when they cut this place out of the side of the hill." He tossed them away

for some

like

rock - hammer

→

and dusted his hands. "I'm a rockhound. At least. . . I *was* a rockhound. In my old life. I'd like to be one again, on a limited scale."

"Sunday expeditions in the exercise yard?" I asked, standing up. It was a silly idea, and yet . . . seeing that little piece of quartz had given my heart a funny tweak. I don't know exactly why; just an association with the outside world, I suppose. You didn't think of such things in terms of the yard. Quartz was something you picked out of a small, quick-running stream.

"Better to have Sunday expeditions here than no Sunday expeditions at all," he said.

"You could plant an item like that rock-hammer in somebody's skull," I remarked.

"I have no enemies here," he said quietly.

"No?" I smiled. "Wait awhile."

"If there's trouble, I can handle it without using a rock-hammer."

"Maybe you want to try an escape? Going under the wall? Because if you do—"

He laughed politely. When I saw the rock-hammer three weeks later, I understood why.

"You know," I said, "if anyone sees you with it, they'll take it away. If they saw you with a spoon, they'd take it away. What are you going to do, just sit down here in the yard and start bangin away?"

"Oh, I believe I can do a lot better than that."

I nodded. That part of it really wasn't my business, anyway. A man engages my services to get him something. Whether he can keep it or not after I get it is his business.

"How much would an item like that go for?" I asked. I was beginning to enjoy his quiet, low-key style. When you've spent ten years in stir, as I had then, you can get awfully tired of the bellowers and the braggarts and the loud-mouths. Yes, I think it would be fair to say I liked Andy from the first.

"Eight dollars in any rock-and-gem shop," he said, "but I

is Andy

realize that in a business like yours you work on a cost-plus basis—”

“Cost plus ten per cent is my going rate, but I have to go up some on a dangerous item. For something like the gadget you’re talking about, it takes a little more goose-grease to get the wheels turning. Let’s say ten dollars.”

“Ten it is.”

I looked at him, smiling a little. “Have you *got* ten dollars?”

“I do,” he said quietly.

A long time after, I discovered that he had better than five hundred. He had brought it in with him. When they check you in at this hotel, one of the bellhops is obliged to bend you over and take a look up your works—but there are a lot of works, and, not to put too fine a point on it, a man who is really determined can get a fairly large item quite a ways up them—far enough to be out of sight, unless the bellhop you happen to draw is in the mood to pull on a rubber glove and go prospecting.

“That’s fine,” I said. “You ought to know what I expect if you get caught with what I get you.”

Andy. “I suppose I should,” he said, and I could tell by the slight change in his gray eyes that he knew exactly what I was going to say. It was a slight lightening, a gleam of his special ironic humor.

“If you get caught, you’ll say you found it. That’s about the long and short of it. They’ll put you in solitary for three or four weeks . . . plus, of course, you’ll lose your toy and you’ll get a black mark on your record. If you give them my name, you and I will never do business again. Not for so much as a pair of shoelaces or a bag of Bugler. And I’ll send some fellows around to lump you up. I don’t like violence, but you’ll understand my position. I can’t allow it to get around that I can’t handle myself. That would surely finish me.”

“Yes. I suppose it would. I understand, and you don’t need to worry.”

"I never worry," I said. "In a place like this there's no percentage in it."

He nodded and walked away. Three days later he walked up beside me in the exercise yard during the laundry's morning break. He didn't speak or even look my way, but pressed a picture of the Hon. Alexander Hamilton into my hand as neatly as a good magician does a card-trick. He was a man who adapted fast. I got him his rock-hammer. I had it in my cell for one night, and it was just as he described it. It was no tool for escape (it would have taken a man just about six hundred years to tunnel under the wall using that rock-hammer, I figured), but I still felt some misgivings. If you planted that pickaxe end in a man's head, he would surely never listen to *Fibber McGee and Molly* on the radio again. And Andy had already begun having trouble with the sisters. I hoped it wasn't them he was wanting the rock-hammer for.

In the end, I trusted my judgment. Early the next morning, twenty minutes before the wake-up horn went off, I slipped the rock-hammer and a package of Camels to Ernie, the old trusty who swept the Cellblock 5 corridors until he was let free in 1956. He slipped it into his tunic without a word, and I didn't see the rock-hammer again for nineteen years, and by then it was damned near worn away to nothing.

The following Sunday Andy walked over to me in the exercise yard again. He was nothing to look at that day, I can tell you. His lower lip was swelled up so big it looked like a summer sausage, his right eye was swollen half-shut, and there was an ugly washboard scrape across one cheek. He was having his troubles with the sisters, all right, but he never mentioned them. "Thanks for the tool," he said, and walked away.

I watched him curiously. He walked a few steps, saw something in the dirt, bent over, and picked it up. It was a small rock. Prison fatigues, except for those worn by mechanics when they're on the job, have no pockets. But there are ways to get around that. The little pebble disappeared up Andy's

sleeve and didn't come down. I admired that . . . and I admired him. In spite of the problems he was having, he was going on with his life. There are thousands who don't or won't or can't, and plenty of them aren't in prison, either. And I noticed that, although his face looked as if a twister had happened to it, his hands were still neat and clean, the nails well-kept.

I didn't see much of him over the next six months; Andy spent a lot of that time in solitary.

A few words about the sisters.

In a lot of pens they are known as bull queers or jailhouse susies—just lately the term in fashion is “killer queens.” But in Shawshank they were always the sisters. I don't know why, but other than the name I guess there was no difference.

It comes as no surprise to most these days that there's a lot of buggery going on inside the walls—except to some of the new fish, maybe, who have the misfortune to be young, slim, good-looking, and unwary—but homosexuality, like straight sex, comes in a hundred different shapes and forms. There are men who can't stand to be without sex of some kind and turn to another man to keep from going crazy. Usually what follows is an arrangement between two fundamentally heterosexual men, although I've sometimes wondered if they are quite as heterosexual as they thought they were going to be when they get back to their wives or their girlfriends.

There are also men who get “turned” in prison. In the current parlance they “go gay,” or “come out of the closet.” Mostly (but not always) they play the female, and their favors are competed for fiercely.

And then there are the sisters.

They are to prison society what the rapist is to the society outside the walls. They're usually long-timers, doing hard bullets for brutal crimes. Their prey is the young, the weak, and the inexperienced . . . or, as in the case of Andy Dufresne, the weak-looking. Their hunting grounds are the showers, the

rape

cramped, tunnel-like areaway behind the industrial washers in the laundry, sometimes the infirmary. On more than one occasion rape has occurred in the closet-sized projection booth behind the auditorium. Most often what the sisters take by force they could have had for free, if they wanted it that way; those who have been turned always seem to have "crushes" on one sister or another, like teenage girls with their Sinatras, Presleys, or Redfords. But for the sisters, the joy has always been in taking it by force . . . and I guess it always will be.

force

Because of his small size and fair good looks (and maybe also because of that very quality of self-possession I had admired), the sisters were after Andy from the day he walked in. If this was some kind of fairy story, I'd tell you that Andy fought the good fight until they left him alone. I wish I could say that, but I can't. Prison is no fairy-tale world.

The first time for him was in the shower less than three days after he joined our happy Shawshank family. Just a lot of slap and tickle that time, I understand. They like to size you up before they make their real move, like jackals finding out if the prey is as weak and hamstrung as it looks.

Bogs

Andy punched back and bloodied the lip of a big, hulking sister named Bogs Diamond—gone these many years since to who knows where. A guard broke it up before it could go any further, but Bogs promised to get him—and Bogs did.

Guards
look
the other
way

The second time was behind the washers in the laundry. A lot has gone on in that long, dusty, and narrow space over the years; the guards know about it and just let it be. It's dim and littered with bags of washing and bleaching compound, drums of Hexlite catalyst, as harmless as salt if your hands are dry, murderous as battery acid if they're wet. The guards don't like to go back there. There's no room to maneuver, and one of the first things they teach them when they come to work in a place like this is to never let the cons get you in a place where you can't back up.

Bogs wasn't there that day, but Henley Backus, who had been

washroom foreman down there since 1922, told me that four of his friends were. Andy held them at bay for awhile with a scoop of Hexlite, threatening to throw it in their eyes if they came any closer, but he tripped trying to back around one of the big Washex four-pockets. That was all it took. They were on him.

I guess the phrase gang-rape is one that doesn't change much from one generation to the next. That's what they did to him, those four sisters. They bent him over a gear-box and one of them held a Phillips screwdriver to his temple while they gave him the business. It rips you up some, but not bad—am I speaking from personal experience, you ask?—I only wish I weren't. You bleed for awhile. If you don't want some clown asking you if you just started your period, you wad up a bunch of toilet paper and keep it down the back of your underwear until it stops. The bleeding really is like a menstrual flow; it keeps up for two, maybe three days, a slow trickle. Then it stops. No harm done, unless they've done something even more unnatural to you. No *physical* harm done—but rape is rape, and eventually you have to look at your face in the mirror again and decide what to make of yourself.

Andy went through that alone, the way he went through everything alone in those days. He must have come to the conclusion that others before him had come to, namely, that there are only two ways to deal with the sisters: fight them and get taken, or just get taken.

He decided to fight. When Bogs and two of his buddies came after him a week or so after the laundry incident ("I heard ya got broke in," Bogs said, according to Ernie, who was around at the time), Andy slugged it out with them. He broke the nose of a fellow named Rooster MacBride, a heavy-gutted farmer who was in for beating his stepdaughter to death. Rooster died in here, I'm happy to add.

They took him, all three of them. When it was done, Rooster and the other egg—it might have been Pete Verness, but I'm not completely sure—forced Andy down to his knees. Bogs

rape

-psycho-
logical
aspect
of rape

two
options

Andy
fights

Diamond stepped in front of him. He had a pearl-handled razor in those days with the words *Diamond Pearl* engraved on both sides of the grip. He opened it and said, "I'm gonna open my fly now, mister man, and you're going to swallow what I give you to swallow. And when you done swallowed mine, you're gonna swallow Rooster's. I guess you done broke his nose and I think he ought to have something to pay for it."

Andy
fights

Andy said, "Anything of yours that you stick in my mouth, you're going to lose it."

Bogs looked at Andy like he was crazy, Ernie said.

"No," he told Andy, talking to him slowly, like Andy was a stupid kid. "You didn't understand what I said. You do anything like that and I'll put all eight inches of this steel into your ear. Get it?"

"I understood what you said. I don't think you understood me. I'm going to bite whatever you stick into my mouth. You can put that razor into my brain, I guess, but you should know that a sudden serious brain injury causes the victim to simultaneously urinate, defecate . . . and bite down."

He looked up at Bogs smiling that little smile of his, old Ernie said, as if the three of them had been discussing stocks and bonds with him instead of throwing it to him just as hard as they could. Just as if he was wearing one of his three-piece bankers' suits instead of kneeling on a dirty broom-closet floor with his pants around his ankles and blood trickling down the insides of his thighs.

"In fact," he went on, "I understand that the bite-reflex is sometimes so strong that the victim's jaws have to be pried open with a crowbar or a jackhandle."

Andy
fights
back

Bogs didn't put anything in Andy's mouth that night in late February of 1948, and neither did Rooster MacBride, and so far as I know, no one else ever did, either. What the three of them did was to beat Andy within an inch of his life, and all four of them ended up doing a jolt in solitary. Andy and Rooster MacBride went by way of the infirmary.

RITA HAYWORTH AND SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

How many times did that particular crew have at him? I don't know. I think Rooster lost his taste fairly early on—being in nose-splints for a month can do that to a fellow—and Bogs Diamond left off that summer, all at once.

That was a strange thing. Bogs was found in his cell, badly beaten, one morning in early June, when he didn't show up in the breakfast nose-count. He wouldn't say who had done it, or how they had gotten to him, but being in my business, I know that a screw can be bribed to do almost anything except get a gun for an inmate. They didn't make big salaries then, and they don't now. And in those days there was no electronic locking system, no closed-circuit TV, no master-switches which controlled whole areas of the prison. Back in 1948, each cell-block had its own turnkey. A guard could have been bribed real easy to let someone—maybe two or three someones—into the block, and, yes, even into Diamond's cell.

Of course a job like that would have cost a lot of money. Not by outside standards, no. Prison economics are on a smaller scale. When you've been in here awhile, a dollar bill in your hand looks like a twenty did outside. My guess is that, if Bogs was done, it cost someone a serious piece of change—fifteen bucks, we'll say, for the turnkey, and two or three apiece for each of the lump-up guys.

I'm not saying it was Andy Dufresne, but I do know that he brought in five hundred dollars when he came, and he was a banker in the straight world—a man who understands better than the rest of us the ways in which money can become power.

And I know this; after the beating—the three broken ribs, the hemorrhaged eye, the sprained back, and the dislocated hip—Bogs Diamond left Andy alone. In fact, after that he left everyone pretty much alone. He got to be like a high wind in the summertime, all bluster and no bite. You could say, in fact, that he turned into a “weak sister.”

Staff

—briber
staff

Money
is
power

Bogs leaves
Andy alone

That was the end of Bogs Diamond, a man who might eventually have killed Andy if Andy hadn't taken steps to prevent it (if it *was* him who took the steps). But it wasn't the end of Andy's troubles with the sisters. There was a little hiatus, and then it began again, although not so hard or so often. Jackals like easy prey, and there were easier pickings around than Andy Dufresne.

He always fought them, that's what I remember. He knew, I guess, that if you let them have at you even once without fighting, it got that much easier to let them have their way without fighting next time. So Andy would turn up with bruises on his face every once in awhile, and there was the matter of the two broken fingers six or eight months after Diamond's beating. Oh yes—and sometime in late 1949, the man landed in the infirmary with a broken cheekbone that was probably the result of someone swinging a nice chunk of pipe with the business-end wrapped in flannel. He always fought back, and as a result, he did his time in solitary. But I don't think solitary was the hardship for Andy that it was for some men. He got along with himself.

The sisters was something he adjusted himself to—and then, in 1950, it stopped almost completely. That is a part of my story that I'll get to in due time.

In the fall of 1948, Andy met me one morning in the exercise yard and asked me if I could get him half a dozen rock-blankets.

"What the hell are those?" I asked.

He told me that was just what rockhounds called them; they were polishing cloths about the size of dishtowels. They were heavily padded, with a smooth side and a rough side—the smooth side like fine-grained sandpaper, the rough side almost as abrasive as industrial steel wool (Andy also kept a box of that in his cell, although he didn't get it from me—I imagine he kited it from the prison laundry).

I told him I thought we could do business on those, and I ended up getting them from the very same rock-and-gem

Stopped
1950

Rock
blankets

RITA HAYWORTH AND SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

shop where I'd arranged to get the rock-hammer. This time I charged Andy my usual ten per cent and not a penny more. I didn't see anything lethal or even dangerous in a dozen 7" x 7" squares of padded cloth. Rock-blankets, indeed.

It was about five months later that Andy asked if I could get him Rita Hayworth. That conversation took place in the auditorium, during a movie-show. Nowadays we get the movie-shows once or twice a week, but back then the shows were a monthly event. Usually the movies we got had a morally uplifting message to them, and this one, *The Lost Weekend*, was no different. The moral was that it's dangerous to drink. It was a moral we could take some comfort in.

Andy maneuvered to get next to me, and about halfway through the show he leaned a little closer and asked if I could get him Rita Hayworth. I'll tell you the truth, it kind of tickled me. He was usually cool, calm, and collected, but that night he was jumpy as hell, almost embarrassed, as if he was asking me to get him a load of Trojans or one of those sheep-skin-lined gadgets that are supposed to "enhance your solitary pleasure," as the magazines put it. He seemed overcharged, a man on the verge of blowing his radiator.

"I can get her," I said. "No sweat, calm down. You want the big one or the little one?" At that time Rita was my best girl (a few years before it had been Betty Grable) and she came in two sizes. For a buck you could get the little Rita. For two-fifty you could have the big Rita, four feet high and all woman.

"The big one," he said, not looking at me. I tell you, he was a hot sketch that night. He was blushing just like a kid trying to get into a kootch show with his big brother's draftcard. "Can you do it?"

"Take it easy, sure I can. Does a bear shit in the woods?" The audience was applauding and catcalling as the bugs came out of the walls to get Ray Milland, who was having a bad case of the DT's.

Rita.
Hayworth

Moral
message in
prison

Moral
message

asking
for
Rita
Poster

"How soon?"

"A week. Maybe less."

"Okay." But he sounded disappointed, as if he had been hoping I had one stuffed down my pants right then. "How much?"

I quoted him the wholesale price. I could afford to give him this one at cost; he'd been a good customer, what with his rock-hammer and his rock-blankets. Furthermore, he'd been a good boy—on more than one night when he was having his problems with Bogs, Rooster, and the rest, I wondered how long it would be before he used the rock-hammer to crack someone's head open.

Posters are a big part of my business, just behind the booze and cigarettes, usually half a step ahead of the reefer. In the sixties the business exploded in every direction, with a lot of people wanting funky hang-ups like Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, that *Easy Rider* poster. But mostly it's girls; one pin-up queen after another.

A few days after Andy spoke to me, a laundry driver I did business with back then brought in better than sixty posters, most of them Rita Hayworths. You may even remember the picture; I sure do. Rita is dressed—sort of—in a bathing suit, one hand behind her head, her eyes half-closed, those full, sulky red lips parted. They called it Rita Hayworth, but they might as well have called it *Woman in Heat*.

The prison administration knows about the black market, in case you were wondering. Sure they do. They probably know almost as much about my business as I do myself. They live with it because they know that a prison is like a big pressure-cooker, and there have to be vents somewhere to let off some steam. They make the occasional bust, and I've done time in solitary a time or three over the years, but when it's something like posters, they wink. Live and let live. And when a big Rita Hayworth went up in some fishie's cell, the assumption was that it came in the mail from a friend or a relative. Of course

RITA HAYWORTH AND SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

all the care-packages from friends and relatives are opened and the contents inventoried, but who goes back and re-checks the inventory sheets for something as harmless as a Rita Hayworth or an Ava Gardner pin-up? When you're in a pressure-cooker you learn to live and let live or somebody will carve you a brand-new mouth just above the Adam's apple. You learn to make allowances.

It was Ernie again who took the poster up to Andy's cell, 14, from my own, 6. And it was Ernie who brought back the note, written in Andy's careful hand, just one word: "Thanks."

A little while later, as they filed us out for morning chow, I glanced into his cell and saw Rita over his bunk in all her swimsuited glory, one hand behind her head, her eyes half-closed, those soft, satiny lips parted. It was over his bunk where he could look at her nights, after lights-out, in the glow of the ^{street light} arc sodiums in the exercise yard.

But in the bright morning sunlight, there were dark slashes across her face—the shadow of the bars on his single slit window.

