

Sixteen Straws

The Drones

One Sunday morning
While I was out walking
By the Brisbane's waters
I chanced to stray
There I found a prisoner
Layed half in the water
He'd seen me coming
And he began to say "I was a native of Erin's Ireland
And before I was brought
To this terrible place
They dragged me away
From my wife and newborn
And my ailing parents
I've been a prisoner at Port Macquarie
Norfolk Island and Emu Plains
At Castle Hill and cursed Toongabbie
At all of these settlements
I've worked in chains
But of all the places of condemnation
At each penal station of New South Wales
To Moreton Bay I've found no equal
The tyranny there makes all the rest pale
There I met O'Brien
The defender from Ulster
He'd left Ireland burning
Came here for the wake
He was a schemer
A Jacobite nightmare
He could not be broken
But he became displaced
The Jew had one hand
He was a violent man
He'd worn the 20 pound irons
Since before time began
Just before the dawn broke
His starvation awoke
He'd pick the corn from the filth
He'd find laying around
There ain't no walls at all
So remote is the North

The Commandant Logan
Was the devil for sure
His chief flogger was mad
I heard a prison guard say
He'd wash his lash in a bucket
Then drinks the remains Well I heard a rumour
In the barracks one night
The Jew and O'Brien had fashioned a knife
They meant to kill Logan
But my will was broke
My brain reeled with this secret
And the next day I spoke
They put me back on the gang
With no word of my actions
O'Brien and the Jew
Got 300 lashes
O'Brien came off his triangle
With exposed shoulder blades
His skin never healed
He turned morbid and strange We was out on the road gang
Just digging a hole
I was struggling with conscience
My nerves had dissolved
To 15 pairs of eyes
O'Brien proposed,
'Shall we go to the gallows
Be done with our woes?
You know the game
Fair play's all I'm asking
We'll draw 16 straws then nothing is wanting
Why should we grasp at the
Straws of our lives
When we're only condemned by our will to survive? '16 straws we did then did draw
I picked the long one
The Jew picked the short
He said 'pray God forgives you
At least make it quick'
14 pairs of eyes watched me
Pounding a a shiv through his heart
And for a few moments there was no
Stopping the blood
Then O'Brien said 'friends!
On a scaffold this ends
But it's a long was to Brisbane
And we are dangerous men' Well Logan was wild

We filled him with bile
He'd seen the Catholic dodge
Plain suicide
We'd ascended his powers
But not that of the King's
Or the judge down the river's
But we was happy to swing
We were marched through the scrub
Off to Brisbane for trial
Chained into a whaler
Set off at low tide
With 6 nervous marines
And 6 Enfield rifles
The arse end of the world
And indifferent blue sky Well I turned to torpor
At the stern in the sun
But I gathered the others must have come undone
I woke breathing smoke in a chaos of limbs
A red coat squirting blood
Through a hole in his chin
And a volley of fire in my general direction
There was panic and shot
And the smell of powder burning
I threw a rifle up over the side
It was dark by the water
But I could see the shore lights
Crouched down in the back
The wrong side of the guns
Getting scorched by the powder
I thought surely I'm done
I seen ghoulish things
Men show limb from limb
O'Brien was dead
There were pieces of him
I tore off my shirt
I was quite badly burnt
My eyes poured like well springs
They were swollen and hurt
I'm not sure who survived
My whole trunk was on fire
But they borke the chains off me
And I bailed over the side. "Well I was amazed by this poor wretch's tale
I'd heard not of the friends
He had left in the whaler
But I'd just seen the paper

And I had to explain
How his Commander Logan
Had died just this day
"He'd set out behind you
He was out hunting game
When he startled some natives
Took a spear through his brain"
Then the prisoner said "good"
I heard someone in boots
I turned around and that's when
The Royal Marines came

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