BANNER SERIAL FICTION

She Painted Her Face

A story of love and intrigue . . . by **DORNFORD YATES**

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CHAPTER V—Continued

—11—

"On the contrary," said I, "we're practically home. I'm going to get pen and ink—for you to take down."

Leaving him staring, I entered the room on my left, passed to a table and dipped a pen in some ink. Then I came back and gave it to Herrick and watched him begin to descend.

Brenda, of course, was wide-eyed: but it was not for me to tell her what we had found.

We waited together in silence till Herrick came back—alone.

"Elizabeth wants you again," was as much as he said.

In some surprise, I took the torch from him and again descended the stair.

As I entered the little chamber—

"Look," said Elizabeth, pointing. "Is that all right?"

I stooped to regard the vellum.

She had written a line beneath her grandfather's name.

"Elizabeth Virgil, Countess of Brief, only child of the foregoing's first-born son."

"Yes," said I. "There's no mistake about that."

She gave me the pen, and picked up the great gold ring. Then she turned to look again at the body, sunk in its stall.

"Seeing's believing," she said. "But no chemist could do today what Gollanx has done."

That, of course, was most true. By every right, the body should have been dust. Instead, it had the air of a waxwork. And that, I suppose, was why it was in no way offensive, but only remarkable.

After a long look—

"We'd better be going," she said, and turned to the stair.

There was now no cause for haste, for leave before midnight we dared not, in case Brief was not asleep: and that was the hour at which Winter was to be by the mouth of the drive. (He, of course, knew no more than that we were within the tower and that all was well, for I had twice sent him that signal a short half-hour before dawn. This, from the leads of the tower, which were easily reached.) Indeed, we were faced with the prospect of being confined for three hours with nothing to do, for though we were all worn out, excitement and impatience, between them, would not allow us to rest. But first, of course, we had to cover our tracks.

(Here let me say that I make no excuse for the outlook which I have this moment set down. It was ours, at that time: and if I am to be honest, it must be declared.)

Now that we knew the secret, it took us a very short while to return to their ancient order the elements we had displaced, but dust that the years have laid cannot be reproduced in ten minutes of time, and half an hour went by before I was satisfied with the look of the thirty-sixth step, within whose stone the key to the chamber lay. Whilst I was attending to this, with Brenda to give me light, my lady and Herrick together composed a full note of what we had found in the chamber and what the statement set forth. They were at work in the bedroom, that is to say, the uppermost room of the tower.

I had finished my work on the step and, with Brenda behind me, was going upstairs to the bedroom quietly enough. We had passed by the door and I was about, being by, to relight my torch, when a sound there was no mistaking rapped out of the dark. It was the clack of a latch.

The two of us stood still as death.

Again the iron was raised—by somebody standing on the other side of the door . . . and pressure was put on the oak—which could not open because we had made it fast . . . Then whoever was there gave in, and the latch fell back into place.

I was up the stairs in a flash, to give the alarm.

Elizabeth paled, and Herrick stifled an oath.

"If we can, we must bolt," said I. "By way of the courtyard, of course: and so to the belvedere."

"Is that step all right?" said Herrick.

"Thank God, yes," said I. "I was on my way up."

As luck would have it, our stuff was ready to hand, and before two minutes had passed, we had packed it anyhow and were ready to leave. We had intended, of course, to restore to the rooms we had used the order we had found in them when we came, but this was not now worth doing, and so we let them be.

As the four of us stole past the door, the latch was raised and let fall and the oak was urged, as though some one refused to allow that the bolts had been shot.

As fast as I dared, I led the way down the stair . . .

We were, I suppose, some 50 seconds too late.

As I gained the hall, I heard the sound that I dreaded some 18 inches away—a key being tried in the door at the foot of the stair.

It was, of course, tried to no purpose. The door was heavily barred. But it meant that both exits were held, and that we were caught in the tower as rats in a trap.

CHAPTER VI

I often think that we fully deserved our plight, for, once we possessed the secret we set out to find, we should not have lost a moment in leaving the tower. To cover our tracks was essential, but that we could have done in a quarter of an hour. Then again we needed the darkness, but dusk would have served our turn. And that we had. We preferred to ignore a grave peril because for 43 hours it had never lifted its head, losing sight of the staring fact that if it should lift its head, we were bound to be caught.

Be these things as they may, when I heard that key move in the lock, I was ready to do myself violence for throwing away the chance of escape we had had: for, had we behaved—not with prudence, but common sense, we should at that time have been nearing the mouth of the drive.

After a moment's hesitation, I led the way through the hall and into the room beyond. Then I shut the door behind Herrick, lighted a torch and threw the beam on the floor.

I touched Elizabeth's arm.

"First, tell me this," I said. "Is the roof any good?"

"I've no idea," she said, and pushed back her sable hair. "There might be a way—I don't know."

I shook my head.

To seek such a path by night would have been a desperate venture for Herrick and me: the presence of our companions ruled such an enterprise out.

"Then I can think of nothing," said I, "except to draw them away from the upper door. If we can only do that, we may still get clear. Out of the upper door, where we heard them first—across the landing you spoke of into your suite—down your staircase-turret—out of the castle and up to the belvedere. Winter will still be there, if we can be quick, to lead us over the ridge and down to the Rolls."

"A feint?" said Herrick, frowning.

"That's my idea," said I. "A demonstration down here—at the lower door. I admit it's a damned thin chance, but what else can we do?"

"What sort of demonstration?" said Elizabeth.

I looked at Herrick.

"D'you think you could do it?" I said. "Disguise your voice and—and parley with them in German? I mean . . ."

Herrick's face was a study.

"I see," he said slowly. " 'Parley.' And how, when the parley's over, do I get out? Up a hundred steps and then through a house I don't know. Or don't I get out?"

"I shall come back," I said, "as soon as they're safe in the suite."

With my words we heard somebody pound on the lower door.

"Who is within?" they demanded. "Open at once."

Herrick looked at Elizabeth.

"Is that his lordship?" he said. "I'd like to, er, parley with him."

My lady smiled.

"That was Bertram," she said. "The steward. I'm afraid he may get rather fussed."

"A little bit pompous?" said Herrick.

"A shade, perhaps. But a most respectable man."

"Leave him to me," said Herrick, and settled his coat. "And when I take up the running, stand by to move. If you should get clear . . ."

"I'll give you a flash," said I, "from the bend of the stair."

Herrick nodded and took out a cigarette.

By this time those in the courtyard were fairly assaulting the oak, and since, when the latch was drawn, the door could be moved to and fro for an eighth of an inch, a not inconsiderable uproar invaded the room.

"Put out that light," said Herrick.

As I did his bidding, he stepped to the door of the chamber and flung it back with a crash.

The uproar beyond stopped dead. Then—

"Who the devil is there?" roared the steward. "Open at once."

A thick voice replied in German.

"What does this mean—disturbing respectable people at this time of night? Go and wipe your snout, you old toss-pot, and burn the towel."

A savage hiccough subscribed this most offensive command.

Then a wave of scandalized consequence burst on the lower door. The oak was pounded and shaken, and choking cries of protest stood out of a motley clamor of orders and threats.

I touched Elizabeth's arm and made for the stair.

As the girls stumbled on to my heels, I opened the upper door.

Beyond this, curtains were hanging, heavy and thick. I cautiously lifted one, to see the broadest landing I ever knew. In its midst was an oveal well, some 40 feet wide, with a bronze balustrade about it and the heads of twin flights of stairs upon either side. (To give some idea of their size, each step was but two inches high, and some twelve feet long.) The landing itself was dim, but a brilliance rose out of the well and the sumptuous flights of stairs ran down into light. So far as I could see, there was nobody hereabouts, but the sound of voices and movements came from a lower floor.

Elizabeth, peering beside me, caught my wrist.

"Quick," she breathed, and urged me across the carpet to a door which was close to the head of the farther stair.

An instant later, the three of us entered her suite.

"Too easy," I said, with an eye on the way we had come. "And if I'm not back in three minutes, please give me your word you'll go on. I cannot tell what may happen. If there's a hitch, it may be better for us to leave by the lower door. But we couldn't do that unless we were sure you'd escaped."

Elizabeth shook her head.

"If you don't come, I shall use my judgment," she said.

I shrugged my shoulders and went. There was no time to argue. Any moment someone might visit the upper floor.

I have so far said nothing of what we were most afraid of that summer night—the entrance of Percy Virgil upon the scene. Not only was the fellow efficient—he would have secured both doors before he did anything else—but he had good cause to remember both Herrick and me; and though we made good our escape, if he set eyes upon us the police would be at Raven very nearly as soon as the Rolls. But now I disclose this dread, for as I whipped over the landing, I heard his sinister voice.

I think he was giving some order. Be that as it may, his unmistakable accents rang out of the well.

In a flash I was past the curtains and back in the tower and was cursing its stairway anew, because to go down it too fast was to break your neck.

As I came within earshot—

"Only let me get out," belched Herrick, fumbling the bolts of his door. "I'll teach you to talk to your betters. I warn you, Bertie, I'll tie your snout round your neck."

And there I flashed my torch—and saw him leap for the stair.

I turned and climbed before him for all I was worth . . .

Eighty-eight merciless steps, wedge-shaped, steep and naked, curling between walls that were hostile and, when you sought for a handhold, bruised your nails . . . After a little, you seemed to make no progress, to be no more than the pitiful, captive squirrel climbing his endless wheel . . . Up, up, up . . . For less than a minute, I know: but such is the power of apprehension, it seemed an age.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

"On the Contrary," I Said, "We're Practically Home."

Far More Good Snakes Than Bad Ones, Yet All Are Doomed Without Reason

The sight of a cottage owner on a lake in Oakland county beating a harmless garter snake to death as it attempted to crawl over his lawn calls to mind the many unwarranted prejudices that exist in the animal world, particularly among mankind, observes Albert Stoll Jr., writing in the Detroit News.

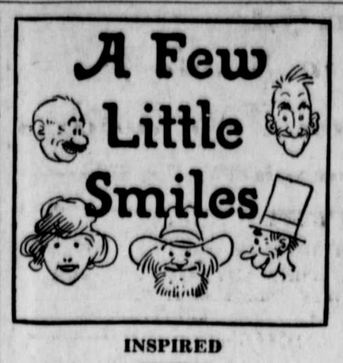
Snakes, toads, frogs, newts, skunks, weasels, porcupines, multitudes of insects, some birds and many other smaller mammals repel most of us. According to our own interpretation they have no rights, and any interference, imaginary or otherwise, with our plans or selfish desires brings on the death warrant. And our definition of good and bad among the lower creatures depends principally on our aversion to the species. We condemn snakes because there are some that are poisonous; there are far more good snakes than bad ones, yet they all suffer the same end.

The fisherman shoots merganser ducks, blue herons and kingfishers because he thinks they are eating his trout. He doesn't know for certain, but according to his light they have no business on his trout stream even though they were there long before the angler.

And so down the entire list of birds of prey, cold-blooded amphibians and reptiles; predatory animals and winged and crawling insects. We destroy more often without reason or justice thinking that we are better able to judge the worth of creatures than the forces that were responsible for their creation. And in so doing, more frequently than not, we destroy a balance that Nature ordained when the world was created.

Lamp Patented in 1798

In 1798 the first lamp patent was issued to John Love, of South Carolina, for a tallow lamp. The earliest patented lamp known is the nursery lamp made by William Hode, of Boston, dated 1812. The second earliest example, says the Rocky Mountain Herald, appeared nearly two decades later, in 1831, and the patent was issued to John W. Schulz and William Trull. Between the granting of these two patents 20 others had been issued.



INSPIRED

Teacher turned away from the blackboard, where she had been writing.

"Read out that sentence, Willie," she said.

"He was bent on seeing his old school," read Willie.

"Now, children," continued teacher, "I want you all to paraphrase that sentence."

Chewing his pen, relates London Answers Magazine, Willie regarded the blackboard. Then his face lit up. Busily he wrote: "The sight of the old school doubled him up."

Exaggeration

The teacher was trying to give her pupils an illustration of the meaning of the word "perseverance."

"What is it," she asked, "that carries a man along rough roads and smooth roads, up hills and down, through jungles and swamps and raging torrents?"

There was a silence, and then Johnny, whose father was a motor dealer, spoke up: "Please, miss," he said, "there ain't no such car."
—Humorist Magazine.

QUEER GUY

"My husband's a queer man."

"How so?"

"Says it makes him hot to have to drink his coffee cold."

Plenty Loud

Chief—I am glad that you have been punctual lately, Mr. Brown.

Clerk—Yes, sir, I have bought myself a parrot.

Chief—A parrot? I recommended you to get yourself an alarm clock.

Clerk—I had an alarm clock but soon got used to it. Now I set the clock beside the parrot and when the clock goes off, what the parrot says is enough to rouse the house.—Lustige Koelner Zeitung, Cologne.

For Younger Chickens

Just to show you to what lengths some people will go for a gag, we'll tell you about the husband who puttered around in the back yard with some boards and nails while his wife lay in bed with a bad cough.

"How's the wife?" asked a neighbor.

"Not so good."

"Sorry. Is that her coughin'?"

"Oh, no. This here is a henhouse."

Such Injustice

"Have you any references?" inquired the lady of the house.

"Yes, mum, lots of 'm," answered the prospective maid.

"Then why did you not bring them with you?"

"Well, mum, to tell the truth, they're just like my photographs. None of them don't do me justice."
—Stray Stories Magazine.

Music to Her Ears

Old Lady to Plowman—Pardon me for interrupting you at your work, but it is so refreshing to hear some one who still speaks the old dialect of the district.

Plowman—That's O. K. with me, old girl.—Providence Journal.

Remiss

Vicar (benevolently)—And what is your name, my little man?

Small Boy—Well, if that ain't the limit! Why it was you that christened me!

A QUESTION

"Did the wind whistle then?"

"I think you heard the stove pipe."

The Objection

"And why didn't you like the job I got for you?"

"When I said I'd take care of your friend's pets while he was away, you didn't tell me he ran a circus."—Houston Post.

You're Fired

Businessman—Yes, I advertised for a boy about your size. Do you smoke?

Applicant—No, thanks, but you can blow me to an ice cream soda if you want to.

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