BANNER SERIAL FICTION

She Painted Her Face

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

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CHAPTER IX—Continued

—19—

I can never describe the magic that hung in her steady gaze. Before it, the rabble melted, the mob dispersed, and my plight became an adventure, which I was sharing with her—a very insignificant business, because that we were together was so much more important than anything else.

I tried my best to tell her that all was well. And I think that she understood, for the rarest smile stole into her lovely eyes . . . And then I came back to earth, like a giant refreshed.

She was gagged and bound, as I was. But her ankles were tied together, as well as her delicate wrists. Cord had been used—to do this sacrilege. She was clad in a blue cloth dress that I did not know—no doubt to bear out the suggestion of sudden flight. Her beautiful hair was tumbled, but that was all.

Virgil was speaking again.

"You will have observed, Mr. Exon, perhaps with hope, that while we have bound my cousin's, we have not bound your feet. I will tell you why. Because she is light to carry, but you are not. And so you will walk—to the car. Now, lest you should abuse this freedom, I'm going to put you on a lead." He held up his cord. "One end—this end will be fastened about your waist: and the other about my cousin's most excellent neck. You see? I have made a slip-knot . . . the knot that they hang people with. So that any irregular movement which you may see fit to make will put to inconvenience your, er, heart's desire. In fact, if I were you, I should emulate Mary's lamb. Not that it matters—if you like to choke her yourself. But I've really made other arrangements—a shade less exacting, I think. But I'll leave it to you to judge."

With that, he stepped across me and set the loop he had made about Elizabeth's neck. Before my horrified eyes, he drew this tight—not tight enough to choke her, but so tight that the loop could not lie, as a necklace does, but stayed where he had put it against her throat. Then he and Elgar, between them, got her on Elgar's back.

Somehow I got to my knees and so to my feet, and without a word he fastened the end of the cord about my waist.

I saw Elsa standing above, with a dressing-case in her hand . . . Then Elgar began to go down, and I turned in behind him, weak-kneed for fear of stumbling and coming down and being unable to rise because my hands were tied.

Not that it mattered, perhaps. But I—I did not want to choke my darling myself.

As we went down to the terrace, I reflected on the truth of what Virgil had said—The way to win this world is to go all lengths. The man was right. It was manifestly simpler and swifter: direct action always is. But it was safer, too—because it was the way of a monster, and we believe in monsters no more than we do in giants.

Virgil was playing the monster: and that, as calmly as though he were but playing bridge. In other words, he was doing the incredible thing. If I had not seen and heard what I saw and heard that night, I would not have believed the truth though one rose from the dead. And so no one else would believe it—that Elizabeth Virgil and Exon had been haled out of the castle and put to death by a man who, six hours later, was taking his early tea with a cigarette.

I cannot clearly remember our leaving the staircase - turret and passing into the air, for the cord was none too long and I could think of nothing but keeping it slack, but I know that the moon was not up, that Virgil was moving behind me, that Elgar turned to the right and stepped out for the entrance-drive.

Perhaps ten minutes went by—it may have been less, but I know we had passed the point from which Herrick and I had surveyed the castle at dawn, when I saw in the shadows ahead the shape of a car.

This was open and low—it proved to be Virgil's own car "now under repair"—and Elgar discharged his burden directly over its side. It will be understood that I did not have to be told to enter myself, and an instant later I was upon the back seat, with Elizabeth Virgil beside me, so far as I could hear, drawing regular breath.

I suddenly realized that I was streaming with sweat . . .

The dressing-case was set at our feet and Virgil and Elgar got in. For a moment the self-starter whirred . . . Then all was silence again, except for the purr of an engine in excellent trim. Virgil sat back in his seat and let in his clutch.

It was as he did this, and we moved, that my fingers encountered something which did not belong to the seat. In an instant, they had it fast: and the moment I knew what it was, the hope which Virgil had murdered came back to life.

It was a small screwdriver . . . which Elgar or some mechanic had left in the back of the car . . . some eight inches long, over all . . . with a fine enough blade. For all I know, it may have been there for weeks, for, the seat being tilted up, it had lodged between the seat and the padding on the back of the car; and I should never have found it or known it was there, if my wrists had not been fastened behind my back.

Now, as I have said, my wrists were strapped together—not bound with cord. And every strap has a buckle, and every buckle a prong.

When a man or a beast is restrained by a leather strap, it is upon the prong of the buckle that such restraint must depend. Disengage the prong from its hole, and the stoutest strap will be loosed and all restraint be at an end.

My fingers were free. If I could contrive to thread the blade of the screw driver over the frame of the buckle and under the prong . . .

It was a difficult business. I was working blind and my fingers had not fair play, and though I soon found the buckle, I could not reach this with my fingers and so could not guide the blade, while the movement of the car was distracting the aim which I tried to make.

Again and again I was on the edge of success, and then the car would lurch and I would lose prong and buckle and sometimes my balance, too. And once the blade was in place, but, before I could drive it home, a wheel dropped into a pothole and shook it out. I could have screamed with the rage of a thwarted child . . .

And then, at last, the blade slid under the prong . . .

What happened I do not know, for I never examined the strap, but know I was trying to lever the prong from its place and the buckle was turning with it and spoiling my game, when, all of a sudden, the strap went slack on my wrists and I knew I was free.

Now my impulse was to do murder, and do it at once: break Elgar's neck and then choke Virgil to death: and but for Elizabeth's presence, I think that I should have done that—and as like as not lost my own life, when the car, which was traveling fast, crashed into a tree. But Elizabeth had to be saved. And so I did nothing at all but shake the strap from my wrists and keep my hands behind me and use my brain.

At once I saw that the first thing for me to do was to free myself from the cord which put my lady in peril whenever I moved.

With my eyes upon Virgil and Elgar, I felt for the knot at my waist. This I found and untied. Then I made a bow-knot in its stead, which I could undo in a flash whenever I pleased.

Then I saw that, for better or worse, I must not launch my attack until the car was at rest, for if, in the struggle, the car were to leave the road, Elizabeth, bound hand and foot, might fare very ill.

And then I remembered that Percy Virgil was armed.

This showed me that, come what might, I must deal with him first: else, whilst I was dealing with Elgar, he might very well put me out.

And there, without any warning, our lights were "dipped" and Virgil reduced his speed . . .

Till now I had been too much engaged to observe our way, and now I could see next to nothing from where I sat: but the road was rough and winding, and though there were trees on the right, there were none on the left. Wheresoever we might be bound for, I judged we were nearly there, and I held myself all ready to strike the instant we stopped.

I have said that the night was dark, and since we were sunk in some valley which ran north and south, we were denied the glow which heralds the rising moon. Still, I could see some six feet—and that was more than I needed to do what had to be done.

And there, as though in reply, the car passed over some rise and then swept into surroundings of which I shall always think as the mouth of Hell.

In a flash the world was transfigured.

The air, which had been sweet, became the breath of corruption—reeked of decay: the sudden chill of a morgue displaced the pleasant cool of the summer night: the steady purr of the engine changed to a snarl: and the darkness became so thick that I could not have seen my hand in front of my face. Then I knew that we were on cobbles, and, when I lifted my head, I saw the lines of three ridge-poles against the sky. We were in the great court of some mansion, long uninhabited.

Now what possessed Elgar to do it, I do not know; but, as the car came to rest and I rose to my feet, the man slewed round in his seat and dropped down a hand for Elizabeth's dressing-case. As he heaved this up, it struck me under the knees and, because I was rising and was neither up nor down, the blow made me lose my balance and sent me backwards into the seat I had left. Since this was low and tilted, I as good as fell on to my back and before I could rise again, Percy Virgil was out of the car, on the opposite side.

Not that I saw him—the darkness was far too dense. And so, at least, I knew that I had not been seen. But I knew where he was, for I heard him using my name.

"The, er, cemetery, Mr. Exon . . . it's better known as Palfrey. Nobody ever comes here, because it is said to be cursed. But, blessed or cursed, it has a magnificent well . . . Ninety feet deep, Mr. Exon And 52 feet of water—I measured it yesterday . . . And its parapet is of white marble—at least, it used to be white—and it has three statues about it . . . statues of men in armor, leaning upon their swords. How's that for a sepulchre? I wish you could see it, Mr. Exon. I'm standing beside it now. Elgar, you see, has gone to borrow some stones . . . to go into the dressing-case. As anchors go, it wasn't quite heavy enough . . ."

By now my door was open, and I was half out of the car, with Elizabeth in my arms.

"You see, we shall lower that first: and that will be attached to my cousin's feet. And then we shall lower her: and as she's already attached, that will bring us directly to you."

I was on the cobbles now and was stealing the way we had come. I never found it so hard to turn my back on a man: but Elizabeth had to be saved before anything else.

"And so, you see, Mr. Exon . . ."

And there I saw Elgar approaching, against the dusk prevailing without the court.

For a second I hesitated. Then I laid Elizabeth down and twitched the cord from my waist.

And then I went to meet Elgar, who could not see me . . . And, as I went, I ripped the gag from my mouth.

He must have found the case heavy, for when I was almost upon him, he laid it down for a moment, to rest his arm.

As he straightened his back, I took the man by the throat . . .

It was a curious business and seemed to belong to the stage or the cinema's screen, for whilst we two stood silent, Virgil, a little way off, was addressing the empty car. I could not hear all he said, but his tone was as careless as ever and once he laughed. But Elgar could not laugh. He never struck me. From first to last his hands were tearing at mine. They might as well have torn at the cobbles beneath our feet. So for, perhaps, a full minute . . . Then his knees sagged, and his arms fell down by his sides.

Still gripping his throat, I lowered his weight to the ground. Then I cracked his skull on the cobbles and let him go.

The sound was slight enough, but Percy Virgil heard it—and found it strange.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

I Was on the Cobbles Now and Was Stealing the Way We Had Come.

Society Is Formed to Protect Snakes; Authority Asserts Many Are Valuable

"If more people knew that most snakes are valuable to mankind, they would not be so eager to destroy every snake they see," says Harry C. Gardiner, who is a resident of Detroit, Michigan, and honorary president of the Michigan Herpetological society. The society has for its aims the study and protection of snakes in Michigan.

Gardiner says that the fear of snakes is deep-laid, and arises mainly from the belief that most snakes are poisonous or harmful in some way. He refutes this belief by saying that in Michigan there are 17 different kinds of snakes of which only one is poisonous—the massasauga or swamp rattler. This snake is rarely more than 30 inches long. "During my 25 years of residence in Michigan, I have never heard of a death resulting from the bite of any Michigan snake," says Gardiner.

The largest Michigan snakes are the blacksnake and the blue racer, he says. These two species are often confused. They both reproduce by laying eggs, but their feeding habits are different. Black snakes, also called pilot snakes, feed mostly upon small, warm-blooded animals, such as field mice, rats, gophers and occasionally on birds. Blue racers prey upon cold-blooded creatures, such as frogs, salamanders and small lizards, in addition to the menu of the black snake.

Commonest of all Michigan snakes is the garter snake, which, except that it may sometimes eat fish, is generally considered beneficial. This snake seems very fond of earthworms. The smallest snake in the state is a secretive little fellow called the red-bellied snake, which grows to about 10 inches.

Where Giant Tortoise Lives

The giant tortoise still roams untamed in only two places in the world—Ecuador's Galapagos islands in the Pacific and the Aldabra islands in the Indian ocean. The Aldabras, a dependency of Britain's crown colony of Seychelles, lie 500 miles southwest of the Seychelles, and are nearer Kenya.

Star Dust

★ *A Promising Newcomer*

★ *Warning Bing Crosby*

★ *Radio Veterans Team Up*

By Virginia Vale

WHEN you see "Wuthering Heights" you'll probably want to know something about Geraldine Fitzgerald. She plays the part of "Edgar's" sister, who marries "Heathcliffe," and she makes a definite contribution to every scene in which she appears.

She was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1914, was educated in a convent school, studied painting for a while, and then joined the Gate Players. The Gate Players did repertoire, so Miss Geraldine got experience in all sorts of roles. Then she was asked to make pictures in England, and did; she appeared in "The Turn of the Tide" and "The Mill on the Floss," and went right back to the theater.

But this time it was the New York theater, where she was seen in "Heartbreak House." Hollywood discovered her then. Warner Brothers gave her a contract, (with six months off each year for the theater), and she made tests on the Coast, and then returned to Ireland.

She wouldn't believe that she ought to return for "Dark Victory" until she had received three letters and a cablegram; she'd known people who rushed to Hollywood and then sat around and waited everlastingly for things to get started. But she finally returned, was borrowed by Samuel Goldwyn for "Wuthering Heights," and made "Dark Victory."

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If Bing Crosby is ever found mysteriously dead a lot of the other singers in motion pictures will probably be questioned by the police.

Some one of them will certainly be driven to commit the crime by the way in which the young man sings. For example, he strolled into the Universal sound room not so long ago, took the pipe out of his mouth, sang four songs, one after another, put his pipe into his mouth again and went home. The recordings were perfect—you'll hear them in "East Side of Heaven," which is probably his best picture to date.

BING CROSBY

All of which won't seem remarkable to you unless you know what a complicated business this matter of recording sounds can be.

Mr. Crosby has been known to astound fellow-singers even more by eating a heavy luncheon before he had to sing, without its affecting the result at all.

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Erno Rapee, Jane Froman and Jan Peerce will be co-starred in a gala musical revue which has been signed to replace the Screen Guild show on the Columbia network for the summer months, beginning June 11. There will also be a 16-voice mixed chorus.

The three stars are radio veterans, but this is the first time that they have appeared together. Rapee is one of the best known musical directors in America, Jane Froman has made a name for herself in both movies and radio, and Jan Peerce has long been a protege of Rapee's as well as one of the screen's popular singers.

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The Andrews sisters like nothing better than a practical joke. Recently, while making a personal appearance at a theater in Brooklyn, N. Y., they tried to enter an amateur contest at a neighboring theater. The master of ceremonies wanted to hear their act before they went on, and they told him they would do their version of the Andrews Sisters' original version of "Hold Tight."

When they finished he sadly shook his head. "Sorry, girls, but I can't use you," he said. "That was the worst imitation of the Andrews Sisters I ever heard."

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ODDS AND ENDS—Rudy Vallee, who recently announced on the air that he'd like to direct pictures, recently wrote and acted in a dramatic skit on his weekly broadcast, as well as acting as master of ceremonies, directing the music, and doing a bit of singing . . . Lewis Stone is proud of his record in pictures, but he's prouder just now of receiving an award for driving 500,000 miles in 34 years without having a traffic accident.

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Uncle Phil Says:

Except That of Innocence

Ever since Adam fell, man has been trying to get back to his state.

There cannot be justice where there is special privilege. Not even when the privilege is so small as to be allowed to park where you like.

Cheerfulness is courtesy. It is a social duty.

That Takes Gumption

Know where you don't belong and keep away from that locality.

An old fool is disagreeable because foolishness in age is out of character.

If one gets no gratification out of generosity, of course he won't practice it.

Is There Such a Man?

If a man can listen appreciatively while a girl talks about herself instead of wanting to talk about himself, he understands women.

The mistakes most of us regret are the mistakes that cost us money.

If our ideals make us happy, should we mind if they are illusions?

Years in Moments

At certain periods of life we live years of emotion in a few weeks, and look back in those times as on great gaps between the old life and the new.—Thackeray.

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Vain Attempts

It is impossible for a man who attempts many things to do them all well.—Xenophon.

That Nagging Backache

May Warn of Disordered Kidney Action

Modern life with its hurry and worry, irregular habits, improper eating and drinking—its risk of exposure and infection—throws heavy strain on the work of the kidneys. They are apt to become over-taxed and fail to filter excess acid and other impurities from the life-giving blood.

You may suffer nagging backache, headache, dizziness, getting up nights, leg pains, swelling—feel constantly tired, nervous, all worn out. Other signs of kidney or bladder disorder may be burning, scanty or too frequent urination.

Use *Doan's Pills*. *Doan's* help the kidneys to get rid of excess poisonous body waste. They are antiseptic to the urinary tract and tend to relieve irritation and the pain it causes. Many grateful people recommend *Doan's*. They have had more than forty years of public approval. *Ask your neighbor!*

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