BANNER SERIAL FICTION

She Painted Her Face

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

WNU Service

CHAPTER IX—Continued

—20—

For an instant there was dead silence.

Then—

"Is that you, Elgar?" he cried—and brought my heart into my mouth.

I had meant to approach him forthwith, as Elgar would have approached him, bearing the dressing-case. But now Elgar's failure to answer would tell him that something was wrong, and, once his suspicions were roused, it would be but a matter of moments before he discovered the truth. And my lady was still within range . . .

In a flash I had whipped to where I had laid her down. As I stooped—

"Mother of God!" screeched Virgil—and told me he knew we were gone.

My hands encountered nothing. Elizabeth was not there. Being bound, she could not have moved, yet she was not there. For an instant my heart stood still: and then I saw that, because of the darkness, I must be a foot or so out. I felt to the right . . . to the left. I took a pace forward, and stepped on a rotten stick. Its snap declared my presence and I shot a glance at the car. I could, of course, see nothing—except the beam of its lights. Virgil was quiet as death. Death . . . The man was armed, and Elizabeth lay hereabouts. Hereabouts, but where? I fell on my hands and knees and began to crawl, sweeping the cobbles before me with one of my hands. It was just about here—I knew it. More to the right, perhaps . . . No? Then I must have passed her . . . I made my way back. As I went, I cast to and fro—frantically. And then my hand brushed something—the sole of her shoe. My heart leaped up to heaven . . . and then fell down into hell. It was not her shoe. It was that of the man I had killed—from whose side I had set out to find her a moment ago . . .

What that discovery meant took a year from my life: for it meant that before the darkness I was a broken reed, and when I looked to the headlights to get my bearings afresh, their beam was gone.

CHAPTER X

I shook the sweat from my eyes and tried to think what to do. And since my thoughts were frenzied and mostly poisoned by the knowledge of what I ought to have done, I will not recite them here, but will state what, upon reflection—if, indeed, you can give it that name—I set out to do.

I set out to find Percy Virgil, and began to steal forward to where I believed the car was.

Now I had seen Elgar coming because he was silhouetted against the dusk which was keeping the world without. And since I had no wish to offer to Virgil the target which Elgar had offered to me, I dropped to the cobbles and once more began to crawl.

To say that I watched and prayed means nothing at all. I moved like any shadow and listened with all my might. Elizabeth's life might depend on my hearing the enemy move, and I made the slowest progress because my own advance was bound to embarrass my ear. I tried to keep the direction I hoped was right by glancing up at the ridge-poles from time to time, but the court was so broad that they gave me but little help, and after a minute or two I could be sure of nothing except that I was not heading away from the house.

And then I heard Virgil move.

The man was away to my right, and his foot had touched something that stirred—I think, perhaps, a flinder of broken slate.

I shall never forget that almost imperceptible sound that stood up out of the silence to make me a finger-post, for it was so slight, yet commanded the balance of life and death.

With a hammering heart, I turned at once to my right, no longer pausing to listen, but using the utmost care to deny to Virgil the cue he had given to me.

Before I had covered six feet, my outstretched hand met something that did not belong to the court. It might have been a silk tassel . . .

And then I knew I was touching Elizabeth's hair.

I could have wept for relief . . .

Now had I not been sure that Virgil was near, I would have picked her up and run for the woods: but he must have heard me moving and almost at once have seen me against the dusk, and then we should have been at his mercy, because he was armed. And so I determined that we must both stay where we were, unless and until something happened to make it less dangerous to move.

To show her that it was I, I smoothed her hair and held her hands tight in mine. Then, very gently, I eased the knot from her throat and lifted the cord from her neck. Then I began to unfasten the cord which was binding her wrists.

Her blessed hands were free, and her fingers, as though to thank me, were fast about mine, when something moved upon her, directly below my face. It was a sliding movement upon the breast of her frock. As it moved, I felt her stiffen; and so I knew it had nothing to do with her; and when I put down a hand, I found that it was the halter which had been about her neck.

As I touched it, it moved again—and told me the truth.

Percy Virgil was feeling the other end.

For once my brain worked quickly.

Virgil had found the cord and knew what it was. And now he was testing it—to see if both ends were free. If I gradually took the strain, he would believe it still fast to Elizabeth's neck, and would lead himself up to his quarry, hand over hand. Up to his helpless quarry? Up to his doom.

I took the loop in my hand and set out to play my fish . . .

He came with a rush at the last, and, with both of his hands on the cord, he had no chance.

Before the man knew where he was, I had his wrists.

His hands were empty. No doubt, when he found the cord, he had put his pistol away. Be that as it may, he was finished. The snake was scotched.

Of course he fought like a madman. And I—I laughed in his face. It was he that had lent me a strength which was not of this world. I think, if I had pleased, I could have torn his arms from their sockets and tossed them across the court.

I let him fight in silence. And when he was spent, I spoke to Elizabeth, lying two paces away.

"Stay where you are, my lady, and take out your gag."

She answered at once.

"I'm quite all right," she answered. "I'm standing now."

"Then listen," said I. "I want you to leave the court. When you're clear of it, wait for me. I may be a little while, because of this cursed dark."

"Very well," said Elizabeth, shakily.

I heard her turn and start moving towards the mouth of the court.

"Come," said I to Virgil. "Let's look for the sepulcher."

With that, I turned him about, without loosing his wrists.

Now I meant to find that well, if it took me an hour and a half; and so, as is often the way, I found it almost at once. At least, I found the car, which was near enough—or, rather, my prisoner found it, by fouling one of its wings. Slowly I steered him round it . . . And so, a few moments later, we stood by the side of the well.

To be sure, I circled this, brushing the parapet's side and counting the three stone statues of men-at-arms—with Virgil always moving before me, because I had hold of his wrists. And then I turned him round and bent him over its edge . . .

"I'm going to kill you," I said, "because I know it's not safe to let you live. If it was safe, I'd thrash you within an inch of your life, and then call in the police and give them the inch that was left. But you have taught me tonight that, while you are still in being, your cousin will always go in danger of death. And so, for once in a way, I'll take a leaf out of your book, and go all lengths."

The man said nothing at all, but I could feel him trembling under my hand.

As I bent him over the depths, I knew he was bracing his knees against the parapet's wall, and God knows I did not blame him, for as I leaned over above him, the awful breath of the water smote my face. It was chill, yet heavy, and reeked of death and decay, and it offered so dreadful an earnest of what was to come that for one instant I flinched from thrusting a fellow creature to such a doom.

I suppose that he felt me falter, for he threw his weight on to his knees in one final, desperate effort to hold himself back.

This, to no avail. For the parapet crumbled before him, and we went down together into the well.

I do not know how far I went down, but I know that my lungs were bursting before I came up, and the first thing I clearly remember was scrabbling upon a wall that was coated with slime and finding a crack too small to admit my finger-tips. Then I heard Virgil rise beside me—for, of course, I had let him go—and that restored in an instant the wits I had lost.

I missed his throat in the darkness, but found his wrist: but both of us knew that the odds were now more equal than they had been in the court. With a frightful laugh, he flung an arm round my neck, and I had just time to draw breath before that hellish water once more closed over our heads. I tore away his arm, but before I could seize his throat, his arm was back on my neck. Again I cast it off and forced his wrists together into one hand; but, as we rose again, he locked his legs about mine and threw his weight down. And then I thought I was done, for though at last I had managed to seize his throat, I could not kick us up to the surface, nor spare a hand to deal with the grip of his legs. Unless I could kill him quickly . . . I put forth all my strength, and my fingers sank into his throat as though it were dough.

The blood was pounding in my temples and I felt that my senses were swaying for want of air, when all of a sudden his limbs and his body went slack and I knew I was free . . . And then I was back on the surface and was blowing like any grampus and thanking God for the gift of that tainted air.

Now whether in fact I killed Virgil or whether he drowned himself in an effort to end my life, I never shall know: but I know the man was dead or else had lost his senses and so was presently drowned, for though he rose beside me, he never moved and I think that after a little he sank for good.

Though my case was not so bad, it was evil enough.

I was not wholly exhausted, but the struggle had snapped my strength, and I badly needed the respite I could not take. As was to be expected, the walls of the well were smooth, and though I proved them all round, dislodging slugs and slime and all manner of filth, I could find no sort of handhold to which I could cling. There were cracks in plenty between the blocks of stone of which the walls had been built, for either they had not been cemented, or else the cement was gone: but they were too small for my fingers, and there was nothing else.

All the time my strength was failing, for the deadly chill of the water was laying hold of my muscles and stealing into my blood, and though I did what I could to hold it at bay, the realization that I must very soon sink began, as an ill-mannered bully, to thrust aside my efforts to think what to do to be saved.

To show how desperate I was, I wasted the last of my strength in a frantic effort to find Elizabeth's key—this, with the mad idea of thrusting it into a crack and so creating a projection to which I could cling, and though, I suppose, a more utterly futile design was never conceived, as luck would have it, it actually saved my life.

To get a hand into my pocket was very hard, but the moment my fingers were in, they closed upon something which I had not known was there. And that was the humble tool which once already that night had saved two lives. It was the screw-driver, indeed.

In a twinkling I had the screw-driver out and had pressed its blade into a crack perhaps some eight or ten inches above my head.

Praying that the steel was honest, I gradually let the handle take some of my weight, and when I found that it would hold me, I let it take more. But for the help of the water, it must have bent or broken beneath my weight; but the two together bore me and gave me just that respite my weary muscles required. And, what was still more important, it gave me a definite hope that, though my plight was serious, I might in the end be saved.

And then I heard Elizabeth calling my name . . .

For a moment I thought very fast. Then—

"Lie down," I yelled. "Lie down and crawl slowly forward. I'm down in the well, but lie down. The parapet's gone."

Perhaps two minutes went by: and then a fragment of mortar fell down by my side.

"Stop!" I screamed. "Stay still. You're right on the edge."

Elizabeth answered at once.

"I'm quite all right, my darling. What shall I do?"

I wonder how many women, so placed, would so have comported themselves. No wailing, no useless inquiries, no bubbling statements of how she came to be there . . . Only the eager question—"What shall I do?"

And I was ready enough. Whilst she was approaching, I had not been wasting my time.

"Find the car," I said. "When you've found her, switch on her lights. Then back her slowly towards the mouth of the court. Her lights will show you the cord that I took from your neck. Take that and the pieces that bound your ankles and wrists. Then back the car again till you see your dressing-case. Put that into the car, and then drive slowly forward until your lights are shining full on the well. When you've done that, come back and I'll tell you some more."

"All right."

How long she was gone, I cannot pretend to say, but she must have been very quick, for though the time passed slowly, at the moment at which I pictured her finding the case, the rim of the well above me grew suddenly bright. Then she must have "dipped" the lamps, for the light came down—to reveal a ladder of dogs driven into the wall of the well.

Some wells have ladders, like that, to the water's edge, and at once I left my handhold and, swimming beneath the ladder, stretched up my hand. But the dogs did not come so low . . . For all that, I was sure that they could not be far away, because a ladder is useless, unless it runs some way down.

As I returned to my screw-driver—

"Yes, Richard?" said Elizabeth, quietly.

"Tie all the cord together and add the strap. Then open the tool-box and take the tool-kit out. If there are tire-levers there, I want them most. If not, the nearest thing to them—tools that will bear my weight. And a hammer, too. Put them into one of your stockings and let them down. We've got to make 38 feet. If you don't think it's long enough, you must add what stockings you have."

It cost me a lot not to add "Be as quick as you can," for my faithful friend was tiring—bending beneath the strain; but such a charge would only have made her frantic, when all the time she was being as quick as she could.

At last a shadow appeared.

"I'm ready, my darling. Which side shall I let it down?"

"D—D'you see the l—ladder?"

"Yes."

"L—Let it down just clear of the ladder. Which side you l—like. Don't lean on the parapet, whatever you do."

"All right. I won't."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

One Brave Mouse Put Up Good Battle With Two Big Cats and Almost Won

A stray gray mouse fought two large cats to a draw. Six men, a woman and a child will swear to it, asserts a Dowagiac (Mich.) correspondent in the Detroit Free Press.

The battle, they said, lasted three hours and then the contestants had to be separated. The mouse, winded and sorely bruised, was dispatched with a coup de grace. The cats, one weighing 15 pounds and the other seven, were taken home to nurse badly bitten muzzles.

Pat, the larger cat, had cornered the mouse, who is unidentified, and was toying with it as any supercilious cat would. But the mouse, who was not the kind sneered at in the question, "Are we mice or men," didn't play according to the rules.

When the cat cuffed him, the mouse reared on its hind legs, bared its fangs, squeaked defiantly and—eight persons swore to it—charged pell mell into the cat's whiskers.

Each time the cat cuffed him back, but not before the mouse had scratched or bitten the cat on the nose. Bewildered, snarling and spitting, Pat sparred with the mouse alone for 30 minutes. Then the marines, in the shape of Blackie, landed on the mouse from the north while Pat harassed him from the south.

The cats batted the mouse between them, but with the agility of a Tunney he held the cuffing to a minimum by nipping two astonished noses. After three hours without a rest period, the mouse, still valiant, met a hero's death under a club wielded by a spectator.

"End of the Trail"

The life-size statue, "End of the Trail," made by James Earle Fraser, and awarded the gold medal at the Panama-Pacific International exposition in 1915 has been described as follows: "The end of the trail. The point of the warrior's spear has sunk to the ground. Absolute dejection, inconceivable weariness, complete exhaustion and hopeless despair are shown in every line and curve of the sculptured figures of the Indian and his tottering horse. The sufferings of generations, the hopeless struggles of four centuries, and the final fate of the proud race that once claimed a continent for its own, can be read at a glance, and coming generations of the conquering race will stand before this remarkable creation of Fraser's genius and be moved to pity and compassion."

IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL

SUNDAY SCHOOL Lesson

By HAROLD L. LUNDQUIST, D. D.
Dean of The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.
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Lesson for June 4

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PAUL PLEADS HIS OWN CASE

LESSON TEXT—Acts 21:40—22:4; 24:14-16; 26:19-23.

GOLDEN TEXT—I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.—Acts 23:1.

"They say. What do they say? Let them say!" So reads the inscription over a doorway of one of the great schools of England. What does it mean? It bespeaks the confidence of a life lived so nobly that the barbs flung out by wicked and slanderous tongues may be faced without fear, in fact, ignored.

The best defense against the attacks of men is the testimony of a good life. Paul had lived such a life, and consequently when the hour came for him to speak in his own defense, he needed but to point to the record. It is significant that his enemies did not deny the facts. They could only cry out, throw off their garments and throw dust in the air while they shouted, "Away with such a fellow from the earth!" (Acts 22:22-24). They did, indeed, manufacture accusations against him, but even the heathen officials knew enough to throw these out of court. The impotent rage shown by wicked men when they run up against the consistent testimony of a true Christian life is one of the strongest of testimonies to the genuineness of faith.

At first glance the portions assigned for our lesson seem somewhat unrelated though taken from the same general narrative. A little study reveals a surprising unity.

I. A Matter of Conviction (21:40—22:4).

Many men and women have no real convictions. They are Republicans or Democrats because their fathers were, and often they have not the remotest idea of what it all means. They are members of a certain denomination because they were brought up in it, and have little knowledge of its teachings and no definite convictions relative to them.

Paul was a Christian because of strong personal convictions of the deepest kind. He was reared in a tradition which made him a bitter persecutor of the followers of Christ, and it was a personal experience of the regenerating grace of God in Jesus Christ which made him into the bond slave of the One he had persecuted. We need more of that kind of know-so and say-so type of faith. Joining a church as one might join a social club means nothing—but following Christ in full and free devotion is everything.

II. A Matter of Authority (24:14-16).

Just as Paul's life was built on faith which was inward, based on personal convictions, it was also a faith that was Godward, based on the authority of His Word. The Jews might call it heresy, but Paul stood on "all things which are written" (v. 14); he had a "hope toward God" (v. 15), and "a conscience void of offence toward God" (v. 16).

Those who ridicule Christianity would have it that faith is really credulity. They say we believe things which we do not know to be true, while hoping that they may somehow prove to be so. A man who reads these notes in his hometown newspaper recently wrote to ask me if I was fool enough to believe the things I wrote. The fact is that we, even as did Paul, have the strongest of all foundations for our faith, namely the Word of God. Men act in faith on the word of their fellow men—their very existence is all bound up in that faith in men whom they hardly know. They believe them, but they will not believe God. I suggested to my correspondent that he read I Corinthians 1:18-25 and 2:14.

Christian faith calls for a personal belief, but that belief is not in any word of man, but in the Word of God, which abideth forever.

III. A Matter of Witness (26:19-23).

Inward, Godward, and now outward in witness—these are the three relationships of Paul's good life. He could plead in his own defense the record of his life, for he had not selfishly cherished a fellowship with God which had lighted and warmed his own soul and then left his fellow man to sit in the chilling darkness of sin. He was obedient to the heavenly vision (v. 19), and preached repentance, faith, and good works to both Jew and Gentile (v. 20), continuing to do so with God's help even in the face of severe persecution.

Some people are just so good that they are "good for nothing." Such men do not reflect the goodness of God. Every attribute of God is an active one. He is love and He does love. He not only is good, but He does good. His children should be like Him. They are not saved only that they may escape hell and enjoy the peace of God. They are saved to serve in the winning of others to Christ. Let us covet such a good life as that which Paul lived. Our bewildered age needs the sanctifying and stabilizing influence of such lives!

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Here's good advice for a woman during her change (usually from 38 to 52), who fears she'll lose her appeal to men, who worries about hot flashes, loss of pep, dizzy spells, upset nerves and moody spells.

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