



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 . . .

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 he was.

Now I . . . 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. . . . 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 scrambling 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 . . . 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 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 comforted 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—too—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 ladder?"

"Yes."

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

"All right. I won't."

"I'm not quite ready. I'll tell you when to begin."

With that, I pulled the screw-driver out of the crack in the wall and splashed my way to beneath the ladder of dogs. And there, with a frightful effort, I scratched away the filthy jacket of slime, in search of another interstice between the stones. I had not the strength to reach as high as I wished, and for two or three desperate moments I could not discover a joint; but at



"I'm Not Quite Ready. I'll Tell You When to Begin."

last my trembling fingers encountered the ghost of a crack and I managed to put up the blade and to push it a little way in.

I hardly hoped that it would hold me, but I could do no more; and I sank down and let the steel take my weight.

When I had rested a moment, I was able to push it further into the crack.

"Are you ready, my darling?"

"Yes. I'm ready," I said, and hoped for the best.

As will have been guessed, my primitive plan was this—to drive the tire-levers between the stones of the well and so climb up by them to the foot of the ladder above.

I watched my lady's stocking pass out of the light of the lamps, with the levers jingling within it to tell me how far they had come, and three or four seconds later, I guided them into the pocket adorning the breast of my coat. As I felt for the head of the stocking, to cast it loose, I found that it had been tied to a piece of flexible wire.

At once I lifted my voice.

"That's enough. How much cord have you left?"

"About eight feet, my darling."

"What is it made of, Elizabeth?"

"Two pieces of cord, the strap and some flexible wire. The last was in the tool-box, on an inspection-lamp."

I could have cried out for joy. Flexible wire will bear a considerable weight.

Again I addressed my lady.

"I want you to move the car: so that one of its wheels is directly in line with the ladder—say, five feet away from the well. Before you do this, hitch the cord round a statue, so that it doesn't fall."

"Very well."

Whilst she was doing my bidding, I unfastened the end of the "flex." Then with a shaking hand I got it about my body, under my arms. As I made it fast, I heard Elizabeth's voice.

"Yes, Richard? The car is there."

"Take your end of the cord and thread it between the spokes and so round the tire. Then, very slowly, draw it as tight as you can. When you hear me shout, make it fast by taking two or three turns."

"Very well."

A moment later the "flex" began to move.

I dared not ask too much of so frail a rope, and directly it took the strain, I called to my lady to stop; but though it could not have borne me, it held me up and, what was a thousand times better, it freed my hands. Before she was back at the head of that cursed well, I had hammered one of the levers into the wall.

Now I was not out of the wood by a very long way, but I knew that the lever would bear the whole of my weight; and this meant that, if I could manage to plant my other levers as rungs, I could emerge from the water which threatened to take my life.

After working the matter out, I called upon my lady to loosen the

COUNTY NEWS--

St. Helens--

R. W. SIMERAL TAKES OATH AT INAUGURAL BALL--

Ray W. Simeral will be sworn in as mayor of St. Helens tonight at 10:00 o'clock at the Knights of Pythias hall, at the first inaugural ball ever to be held in this city. According to the committee in charge of arrangements, over 100 tickets have been sold to the affair.

If, through the organizations, all of the tickets are sold, there will be a fund of over \$100.00 with which the city is at liberty to start a clean-up campaign to rid the sizeroads and highways of the disagreeable garbage condition now existing, the committee said.

Immediately after the ball, all money cleared will be turned over to the new city administration for this purpose.

against the door of the car in which he was a passenger, when the door flew open, throwing him to the pavement.

STUMP BURNING WELL ATTENDED SATURDAY--

Thirty-three persons interested in burning stumps attended the meeting held Saturday afternoon on the Thurman Jeffries' farm in Yankton, where the forced draft method was demonstrated.

Several small fires are started at the base of the stump, which, fanned by blasts of air delivered through hose and pipe is said to eat into and completely consume the stump and roots.

Clatskanie--

NIEMELA, NEW UNION LEADER--

Henry Niemela, prominent young fisherman of this community was elected executive secretary of the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union at an election held this week with the results announced Wednesday.

The local man was given heavy support by the up-river fishermen's locals and received 286 votes to win over Emil Hendrickson and Sam Marinovich, both of Astoria, who received 248 votes each.

According to the fishermen, the outcome of the election is interpreted as a victory for "middle of the road" candidates in general. From the fishermen's board was dropped Charles Kantola, who has represented left-wing opinion for several years on the governing board. Astoria now has only two members on the board, the majority being up-river fishermen.

78 MARRIAGE LICENSES ISSUED HERE IN 1938--

Dan Cupid who was kept busy at various times during the past year, especially during May, June, July and August, did not make much of a record for himself. Only 78 marriage licenses were issued in Columbia county by the clerk's office during 1938 as compared to 75 in 1937. Four licenses were issued since the new marriage law went into effect on December 1. None have been issued since January 1, 1939, records revealed.

ISSUING LICENSES KEEPS TAX DEPARTMENT BUSY--

Car owners who failed to procure 1939 licenses before January 1, have been keeping the sheriff's office busy issuing permits for the past 15 days. Five hundred sixty-nine permits were issued up to Saturday noon when the office closed for the weekend, records revealed. Of this number 152 were issued Saturday morning.

During the same time last year 524 permits were issued with 200 given out on the final day.

A GORMAN INJURED WHEN CAR DOOR OPENS--

Al Gorman received severe facial bruises and lacerations as well as painful injuries to his tongue New Year's morning when he was thrown from a moving car while enroute home from Portland. According to reports Al was leaning

NATIONAL BAKERY GETS FINE NEW EQUIPMENT--

The Grannis brothers, proprietors of the National Bakery, this past weekend installed the most modern type of oven in their Clatskanie bakery.

The new oven replaces the one which has been used for the past ten years and represented an investment of approximately \$2,600.

The oven is a Masterbaker, with traveling oven and is automatic in every particular. The heat is thermostatically controlled and is absolutely even at all times in every part of the oven.

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