

Saved by a Girl's Wits

C L Paddock

Nor many years ago, there lived in France a bright, industrious young man who had lost both his father and his mother when he was just a boy. They had left him some money, and he had tried to get an education. After entering school for several years, he decided that he would be an architect. But his money was almost gone, and he must do something to earn more so he could continue his studies. He found work as a stonemason during the summer months, and went to school during the winter.

As a mason he worked on buildings of all kinds. Sometimes he labored high in the air at great risk. One day he was working on a tall factory chimney, which day by day grew higher and higher, until, as he looked down, people on the ground seemed to be mere pygmies. A lift, or elevator, carried bricks and mortar part way up the chimney; but the place where he was working could be reached only by tall scaffoldings erected around the outside of the chimney. Nowadays they have iron ladders or steps inside of chimneys, which they did not have at that time.

The young man loved his work, and he whistled and sang as he labored in spite of the cold. As he laid the bricks he was thinking that soon the chimney would be done, soon it would be autumn again and he would be back in school at his studies. He made good money as a mason, and he had quite a sum laid away in the bank to pay his school expenses. He was happy.

Just then there was a terrible noise. The chimney shook until he thought he could not hold on. He looked below, but could see nothing for a cloud of dust. Something had happened, but he could not tell just what. When the dust had cleared away, he found that the scaffolding had fallen. There he sat on his high seat, many, many feet in the air, with one leg on the inside of the chimney and one on the outside, and his only means of getting down to earth, the scaffold, had fallen.

What should he do? What could he do? He had no material with which to work. The wind was blowing, and it was cold in spite of the warm sun. Would he have to remain in that position until a new scaffold could be built? That would take several days, and by that time he would starve for want of food and water, or perish from the cold. And it would be impossible for him to sleep.

A crowd soon gathered below, but they were as helpless as he. They were excited. Everyone was talking and shouting. Some tried to talk to him, but he could not understand. Presently the owner of the factory appeared and, raising his arms, tried to silence the crowd so he could make a few remarks. "My friends," he said, "a serious accident has happened. The young man on the top of the chimney must be gotten down; but it will take days to build the scaffold, and by that time he will have perished with hunger and cold. We will give a large reward to anyone who can think of some plan to get the young man down within twenty-four hours. Use your heads, and come to me as soon as you have an idea."

After a few moments of silence a young girl stepped from the crowd. Her face was pale, but there was a gleam in her eye and a smile on her countenance. Going to the owner, she inquired if she would receive the reward if she could get the young man down. "Surely you will," replied the man.

She walked out into the midst of the people and stretched out her arms, waving back the crowd. She was soon standing alone, while the anxious spectators looked on from a distance. She began making signs to the young man on top of the chimney, and when she made sure she had his attention, she took her shoe from one foot, and then her stocking. Finding the end of the yarn in her stocking she

began to unravel it little by little. Would the young mason get her message? He caught the idea; and pulling off his shoe and his sock, he broke the thread in his sock with his teeth, and tying a small piece of brick to the end of the yarn let it down.

Below they secured some stout string, which they attached to the yarn he let down. To the string they fastened a small rope, and to the small rope a large one. The young man pulled up the thread, the string, and the rope, this he fastened around the top of the chimney, and then let himself down.

There were cheers from the crowd as he reached the ground. They were happy to see him safe, and they marveled at the presence of mind which the young girl displayed. She had used her head in a time of crisis, and saved the life of a young man.