

## Chapter 11

Lots of people were walking round and round the truck now, some talking to each other, and some silent. While Sal and Vince were talking, another man approached. The little boy watched him as he passed. The man was wearing a wrinkled white button-down shirt, brown pants, and a blue and green striped tie. He wore glasses that kept sliding down his nose that he kept pushing back up toward his forehead. “Uh.... I was wondering if you men needed any help.” He paused, waiting for some response. Sal turned his head a bit and nodded. “I was sitting back there in my van thinking about your **predicament**<sup>136</sup>. My name’s Lee.”

“Got any ideas?” Sal asked as he again looked up to the top of the truck, scratching his head.

“Well,” said Lee. “You guys got any rope?”

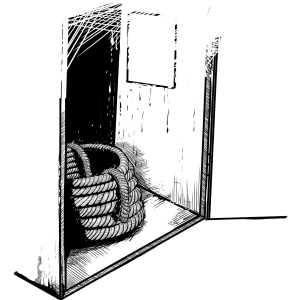
“Sure, lots!” Vince said, excitedly, hoping Lee had the answer to the problem.

“Well,” Lee started again, “If you had enough rope and enough people to help, maybe you could slip lengths of rope through the cracks over the top, hanging loops down on the sides, and people could pull down. Maybe that would lower the truck enough to get it back out.”

“I don’t know--” Sal started to say, but Vince got more excited.

“Sal--” Vince interrupted. “It might work. Don’t you think it’s worth a try? I mean, we got a lot of rope!”

“Yeah, okay,” Sal said. Vince smiled, took a little hop and turned toward the truck’s cab. He rummaged around inside for a minute and came back with a long coil of heavy rope. He dropped the coil on the ground, held one end and climbed over the cab to the top. He nearly hit his head on the tunnel’s rocky ceiling in his excitement.



He started feeding the rope through the first gap over the top. The end of the rope came out the other side. Sal crawled under the truck to the passenger side to grab it as it came down. He pulled most of the rope through, leaving a single length hanging on the other side. The boy standing at the opening of the tunnel watched with great interest.

Vince asked Willy, the tow truck driver, for a ladder to lean along the side so he

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<sup>136</sup> **predicament** is a difficult, problematic situation

could put the rest of the rope through. Back and forth, this went on, leaving U-shaped loops, hanging down, on both sides of the stuck truck every five feet or so. With Willy, Lee, and several other people helping, they completed the weaving project in only twenty minutes. But the line of cars behind the truck, outside the tunnel, kept getting longer. And while they were working on this plan, drivers from cars backed up at the other end of the tunnel were wandering in to see what was going on. When they were done, Sal called out loudly down the highway for more volunteers. More than twenty people came and took hold of a loop after Vince, Willy, and Lee showed them. The boy stepped forward to help, but Sal politely waved him away, saying that they had enough helpers.

When everyone was in position, Vince jumped up into the cab, revved the engine, and threw it in reverse. Sal called out, “1, 2, 3, pull!” Everyone pulled. The trailer box appeared to drop a bit. Vince pushed the gas pedal down. The truck lurched back, but moved no more than a few inches.

Vince wasn’t ready to give up. “One more time!” Vince yelled out. Sal counted and everyone pulled, this time harder than the last. Vince hit the gas harder. Lots of black diesel smoke came out of the exhaust pipe near the ceiling of the tunnel, but the truck didn’t move at all this time. The rope pullers in the tunnel let go off the rope and started coughing, their throats **irritated**<sup>137</sup> by the **foul air**<sup>138</sup>.

Vince got down from the driver’s seat and stood next to Sal, wondering what he would say. Sal thanked all the people for trying, shook a few hands, and patted a couple others on the back as they walked back out of the tunnel toward the fresh air.

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<sup>137</sup> **irritated** is a synonym for “bothered”

<sup>138</sup> **foul air** is smoky, smoggy, polluted, bad-smelling air