The Flying Mercury

by Eleanor M. Ingram

AUTHOR OF THE GAME AND THE CANDLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY Ray Walters

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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens on Long Island, near New York city, where Miss Emily Ffrench, a relative of Ethan Ffrench, manufacturer of the celebrated "Mercury" automobile, loses her way. The car has stopped and her cousin, Dick Ffrench, is too muddled with drink to direct it aright. They meet another car which is run by a professional racer named Lestrange. The latter fixes up the Ffrench car and directs Miss Ffrench how to proceed homeward. Ethan Ffrench has disinherited his son, who has disappeared. He informs Emily plainly that he would like to have her marry Dick, who is a good-natured but irresponsible fellow. It appears that a partner of Ethan Ffrench wanting an expert to race with the "Mercury" at auto events, has engaged Lestrange, and at the Ffrench factory Emily encounters the young man. They refer pleasantly to their meeting when Dick comes along and recognizes the young racer. Dick likes the way Lestrange ignores their first meeting when he appeared to a disadvantage. Lestrange tells Emily that he will try to educate her indifferent cousin as an automobile expert. Dick undertakes his business schooling under the tutelage of Lestrange. Dick is sheer grit, and in making a test race meets with an accident. Lestrange meets Emily in the moonlit garden of the Ffrench home. Under an impulse he cannot control he kisses her and she leaves him, confessing in her own heart that she returns his love. The uncle of Emily, learning of her attachment to Lestrange, informs her that the man is his disbarred son, whom she has never seen before being adopted by him. He claims that his son ran away with a dissolute actress, refuses to acknowledge him, and orders Emily to think of Dick as her future husband.

CHAPTER VIII.

Six o'clock was the hour set for the start of the Beach race. And it was just seventeen minutes past five when Dick Ffrench, hanging in a frenzy of anxiety over the paddock fence circling the inside of the mile oval, uttered something resembling a howl and rushed to the gate to signal his recreant driver. From the opposite side of the track Lestrange waved gay return, making his way through the officials and friends who pressed around him to shake hands or slap his shoulder caressingly, jesting and questioning, calling directions and advice. A brass band played noisily in the grand-stand, where the crowd heaved and surged; the racing machines were roaring in their camps.

"What's the matter? Where were you?" cried Dick, when at last Lestrange crossed the course to the central field. "The cars are going out now for the preliminary run. Rupert's nearly crazy, snarling at everybody, and the other man has been getting ready to start instead of you."

"Well, he can get unready," smiled Lestrange. "Keep cool, Ffrench; I've got half an hour and I could start now. I'm ready."

He was ready; clad in the close-fitting khaki costume whose immaculate daintiness gave no hint of the certainty that before the first six hours ended it would be a wreck of yellow dust and oil. As he paused in running an appraising glance down the street-like row of tents, the white-clothed driver of a spotless white car shot out on his way to the track, but halted opposite the latest arrival to stretch a cordial hand.

"I hoped a trolley car had bitten you," he shouted. "The rest of us would have more show if you got lost on the way, Darling."

The boyish driver at the next tent looked up as they passed, and came grinning over to give his clasp.

"Get a move on; what you been doin' all day, dear child? They've been givin' your manager sal volatile to hold him still." He nodded at the agitated Dick in ironic commiseration.

"Go get out your car, Darling; I want to beat you," chaffed the next in line.

"'Strike up the band, here comes a driver,'" sang another, with an entrancing French accent.

Laughing, retorting, shaking hands with each comrade rival, Lestrange went down the row to his own tent. At his approach a swarm of mechanics from the factory stood back from the long, low, gray car, the driver who was to relieve him during the night and day ordeal slipped down from the seat and unmasked.

"He's here," announced Dick superfluously. "Rupert—where's Rupert? Don't tell me he's gone now! Lestrange—"

But Rupert was already emerging from the tent with Lestrange's gauntlets and cap, his expression a study in the sardonic.

"It hurts me fierce to think how you must have hurried," he observed. "Did you walk both ways, or only all three? I'm no Eve, but I'd give a snake an apple to know where you've been all day."

"Would you?" queried Lestrange provokingly, clasping the goggles before his eyes. "Well, I've spent the last two hours on the Coney Island beach, about three squares from here, watching the kiddies play in the sand. I didn't feel like driving just then. It was mighty soothing, too."

Rupert stared at him, a dry unwilling smile slowly crinkling his dark face.

"Maybe, Darling," he drawled, and turned to make his own preparations.

Fascinated and useless, Dick looked on at the methodical flurry of the next few moments; until Lestrange was in his seat and Rupert swung in beside him. Then a gesture summoned him to the side of the machine.

"I'll run in again before we race, of course," said Lestrange to him, above the deafening noise of the motor. "Be around here; I want to see you."

Rupert leaned out, all good-humor once more as he pointed to the machine.

"Got a healthy talk, what?" he exulted.

The car darted forward.

A long round of applause welcomed Lestrange's swooping advent on the track. Handkerchiefs and scarfs were waved; his name passed from mouth to mouth.

"Popular, ain't he?" chuckled a mechanic next to Dick. "They don't forget that Georgia trick, no, sir."

It was not many times that the cars could circle the track. Quarter of six blew from whistles and klaxons, signal flags sent the cars to their camps for the last time before the race.

"Come here," Lestrange beckoned to Dick, as he brought his machine shuddering to a standstill before the tent. "Here, close—we've got a moment while they fill tanks."

He unhooked his goggles and leaned over as Dick came beside the wheel, the face so revealed bright and quiet in the sunset of glow.

"One never can tell what may happen," he said. "I'd rather tell you now than chance your feeling afterward that I didn't treat you quite squarely in keeping still. I hope you won't take it is my father did; we've been good chums, you and I. I am your cousin, David Ffrench."

The moment furnished no words. Dick leaned against the car, absolutely limp.

"Of course, I'm not going back to Ffrenchwood. After this race I shall go to the Duplex company; I used to be with them and they've wanted me back. Your company can get along without me, now all is running well—indeed, Mr. Ffrench has dismissed me." His firm lip bent a little more firmly. "The work I was doing is in your hands and Bailey's; see it through. Unless you too want to break off with me, we'll have more time to talk over this."

"Break off!" Dick straightened his chubby figure. "Break off with you, Les—"

"Go on. My name is Lestrange now and always."

A shriek from the official klaxon summoned the racers, Rupert swung back to his seat. Dick reached up his hand to the other in the first really dignified moment of his life.

"I'm glad you're my kin, Lestrange," he said. "I've liked you anyhow, but I'm glad, just the same. And I don't care what rot they say of you. Take care of yourself."

Lestrange bared his hand to return the clasp, his warm smile flashing to his cousin; then the swirl of preparation swept between them and Dick next saw him as part of one of the throbbing, flaming row of machines before the judges' stand.

"Water," He Demanded Tersely.

It was not a tranquilizing experience for an amateur to witness the start, when the fourteen powerful cars sprang simultaneously for the first curve, struggling for possession of the narrow track in a wheel to wheel contest where one mistouch meant the wreck of many. After that first view, Dick sat weakly down on an oil barrel and watched the race in a state of fascinated endurance.

The golden and violet sunset melted pearl-like into the black cup of night. The glare of many searchlights made the track a glistening band of white, around which circled the cars, themselves gemmed with white and crimson lamps. The cheers of the people as the lead was taken by one favorite or another, the hum of voices, the music and uproar of the machines blended into a web of sound indescribable. The spectacle was at once ultramodern and classic in antiquity of conception.

At eight o'clock Lestrange came flying in, sent off the track to have a lamp relighted.

"Water," he demanded tersely, in the sixty seconds of the stop, and laughed openly at Dick's expression while he took the cup.

"Why didn't you light it out there?" asked the novice, infected by the speed fever around him.

"Forgot our matches," Rupert flung over his shoulder, as they dashed out again.

An oil-smeared mechanic patronizingly explained:

"You can't have cars manicuring all over the track and people tripping over 'em. You get sent off to light up and if you don't go they fine you laps made."

Machines darted in and out from their camps at intervals, each waking a frenzy of excitement among its men. At ten o'clock the Mercury car came in again, this time limping with a flat tire, to be fallen on by its mechanics.

"We're leading, but we'll lose on this," said Lestrange, slipping out to relax and meditatively contemplating the alternate driver, who was standing across the camp. "Ffrench, at twelve I'll have to come in to rest some, and turn my machine over to the other man. And I won't have him wrecking it for me. I want you, as owner, to give him absolute orders to do no speeding; let him hold a fifty-two mile an hour average until I take the wheel again."

"Me?"

"I can't do it. You, of course."

"You could," Dick answered. "I've been thinking how you and I will run that factory together. It's all stuff about your going away; why should you? You and your father take me as junior partner, you know I'm not big enough for anything else."

"You're man's size," Lestrange assured, a hand on his shoulder. "But—it won't do. I'll not forget the offer, though, never."

"All on!" a dozen voices signaled; men scattered in every direction as Lestrange sprang to his place.

The hours passed on the wheels of excitement and suspense. When Lestrange came in again, only a watch convinced Dick that it was midnight.

"You gave the order?" Lestrange asked.

"Yes."

He descended, taking off his mask and showing a face white with fatigue under the streaks of dust and grime.

"I'll be all right in half an hour," he nodded, in answer to Dick's exclamation. "Send one of the boys for coffee, will you, please? Rupert needs some, too. Here, one of you others, ask one of those idle doctor's apprentices to come over with a fresh bandage; my arm's a trifle untidy."

In fact, his right sleeve was wet and red, where the strain of driving had reopened the injury of the day before. But he would not allow Dick to speak of it.

"I'm going to spend an hour or two resting. Come in, Ffrench, and we'll chat in the intervals, if you like."

"And Rupert? Where's he?" Dick wondered, peering into the dark with a vague impression of lurking dangers on every side.

"He's hurried in out of the night air," reassured familiar accents; a small figure lounged across into the light, making vigorous use of a dripping towel. "Tell Darling I feel faint and I'm going over to that grand-stand cafe a la car to get some pie. I'll be back in time to read over my last lesson from the chauffeur's correspondence school. Oh, see what's here!"

A telegraph messenger boy had come up to Dick.

"Richard Ffrench?" he verified. "Sign, please."

The message was from New York.

"All coming down," Dick read. "Limousine making delay. Wire me at St. Royal of race. Bailey."

Far from pleased, young Ffrench hurriedly wrote the desired answer and gave it to the boy to be sent. But he thrust the yellow envelope into his pocket before turning to the tent where Lestrange was drinking cheap black coffee while an impatient young surgeon hovered near.

The hour's rest was characteristically spent. Washed, bandaged, and refreshed, Lestrange dropped on a cot in the back of the tent and pushed a roll of motor garments beneath his head for a pillow. There he intermittently spoke to his companion of whatever the moment suggested; listening to every sound of the race and interspersing acute comment, starting up whenever the voice of his own machine hinted that the driver was disobeying instructions or the shrill klaxon gave warning of trouble. But through it all Dick gathered much of the family story.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

National Capital Affairs

Feared Nebraska May Succeed Texas as Hoodoo

WASHINGTON.—"Naval officers are guessing whether the United State battleship Nebraska, which ran upon an uncharted shoal a short time ago, is going to take the place of the ill-fated Texas, later named San Marcos, which was the hoodoo ship of the navy," remarked Captain L. L. Darbey, a retired naval officer, the other day. "Ill luck pursued the Texas almost from the beginning, and it seemed that it was never out of trouble during all the time it was in commission, except at the battle of Santiago, where it did great work.

"Before the Spanish-American war the Texas while being overhauled at the Brooklyn navy yard was sunk, because the yokes of its sea cocks were broken in the course of repairs, and the water poured in just as if the boat had been scuttled. The Texas sank, as everybody knows, and was raised as soon as possible. It was on that occasion that Captain Jack Phillips, one of the bravest and best naval officers, by the way, that ever trod a bridge, had some fun with Fighting Bob Evans, at that time commanding the Iowa. When the Texas was raised it was found that in the hull were thousands of eels that had been sucked through the open sea cocks. Knowing Captain Evans's fondness for eels Phillips had a lot of them sent over to the Iowa. He was somewhat surprised a day later to receive a note of acknowledgment from his brother officer, which read: 'The eels were fine, Jack; sink her again.'

"It was Jack Phillips, you may remember, who, after the great naval battle of Santiago, when the Spanish battleships were lying on the shores of Cuba smoking from the shot of the American ships, solemnly said to his men: 'Don't cheer, boys; the poor devils are dying.'

"Jack Phillips was one of the bravest, and at the same time most religious, naval officers I ever knew. He was the direct opposite of Bob Evans, but the two were great friends. The Texas, you know, was afterward named the San Marcos, and was the target for gun practice a few months ago. It was a fitting end for a good old ship that had always been in hard luck, except at the time when it was most needed. I say, I wonder if the Nebraska is going to take the place of the Texas as the hoodoo ship of the navy?"

Enterprising Sam Conserves the Natural Resources

IF Sam Lee should put a big gilt sign bearing the words, "Electrical Chinese Laundry," on the front of his little shop, at 3108 Fourteenth street, Northwest, any time in the near future, his customers in Mount Pleasant would not be at all surprised.

In fact, a number of those who intrust their neglige to the tender ministrations of the affable Celestial have been wondering for some time why Sam has neglected such a splendid opportunity for a bit of advertising.

But although Sam has been rejuvenated to the extent where he realizes that electrical power is much stronger, cheaper, and more efficient in the long run than the muscles and sinews of the human arms and back, he has not awakened to the wonders of the "ads."

Sam is a typical specimen of the "new" Chinaman—the product of that stirring spirit which caused the ancient empire to become transformed into a republic in a remarkably short period, and with the loss of only a few hundred heads and other incidentals.

Sam is wide-awake and alert, and in the "Melican slang" he is "on the job." Therefore, when an enterprising salesman revealed the wonders of a new and ingenious device for iron'ng clothes at the cost of but little perspiration, less physical energy, practically, no mental waste, and only a few cents a day in the cost of power, Sam said: "I buy him."

Now Sam irons with an electrical iron which saves him so many hundreds of steps a day between the stove and his ironing table. Further, the iron is so arranged that by pulling a string he releases a weight which bears down on the top of the iron and relieves him of that duty. Better still, the pulling of another string lifts the iron just the right height above the board and Sam does not have to lift it and put it on the old-fashioned iron holder.

He Wants a Wife, and Wants Her Double-Quick

AUGUUST SEYMORE, otherwise known as August Schaefelsky de Mukkadel de Castellane, one time dentist to the bey of Tunis and his harem, wants a wife, and wants her double-quick. He has from now until January 1 to persuade an American girl to marry him, or he will forfeit a legacy of $150,000 promised by a California woman.

An aunt, formerly of Oakland, Cal., told him five years ago that if he would earn "something worth while and capture an American for a wife," she would give him $150,000.

Seymore is a relative of the Castellane family made famous by the marital difficulties of Count Boni.

He is now in Washington, where he expects to remain until he finds "the woman" that his aunt told him he must have before he is entitled to her money. He has lectured, written, practiced dentistry and served in the French army. In a wife he would have a chum.

"I used to believe in my mother's view of marriage—the marriage of the eye—but I have come to the view of the marriage of reason," said Seymore. "Mother said that marriage progressed from the stage of catching, or buying, a woman to the wooing of a woman regarded in a nobler sense, and the winning of the wife.

"Now I feel that the marriage of the eye is the result of the sentimentality of youth and immaturity. Better is that marriage where the couple are partners, chums, sharing everything alike. I don't believe in the marriage where the man has the money and forces his wife to ask him for every cent she gets.

"Rather, there should be a balance of power, so that the man and the woman are on an absolutely equal footing as regards money, morals, pleasures and sorrows."

In Doubt as to Mr. Wilson's Mode of Locomotion

JUST at present Washington is wondering whether it will soon behold a president of the United States rolling leisurely by on his bicycle. It has just come out that the president-elect is fond of that manner of locomotion. He has gone on his vacation, and proposes to spend a part of it riding on his wheel. He has pedaled over many miles of English and continental roads in this fashion and likes it. Time was when Washington was filled with eminent men and women awheel, but they have all vanished save one, Assistant Secretary of State A. A. Adee. He is the permanent assistant secretary of state, a man who sticks to his own notions about things. Every summer he voyages to Europe and spends a month or so bicycling to places of interest. He and the new president should establish cordial relations very early.

If as president Gov. Wilson wants to "bike" around Washington, he will not want for good roads. They stretch in every direction, except toward Virginia. The secret service men who guard him, of course, would also have to be mounted, but that is only an incident. They have been accustomed to following the president on motorcycles and sometimes in an automobile of their own. If the new president takes to bicycling, however, official Washington will do likewise. That is a way official Washington has. If Gov. Wilson goes out much awheel, it will not be long before embassadors and ministers and secretaries and military attaches will also be pedaling along the sleeky-oiled roads and dodging automobiles. Cabinet officials and congressmen will do likewise. The revival of bicycling among the well-to-do may be expected somewhat all over the country.

Sizing Him Up.

When you call the average young man honest he is likely to feel a mild sort of gratification. When you call him competent his chest begins to bulge. When you call him a heart-breaker he slaps you on the shoulder and gives you to understand that he considers you a person of remarkable perception and unerring judgment.

Daily Thought.

A man should never be ashamed to own he has been in the wrong, which is but saying, in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday.—Pope.

Reason for Superiority.

The domestication of animals and the utilization of plants does not go very far except under a civilized people. Contrast the age of Peru and Mexico with that of Egypt. Babylonia and China; and one reason for old-world superiority in the mastery of nature is plain.

A La Mode.

"What was the chief food of the woodchoppers in whose camp you spent your vacation?" "Pork and potatoes, served in the form of chops and chips."—Christian Science Monitor.

Call of Niagara Falls

CAVE OF THE WINDS

THE ordinary visitor to Niagara finds the excursion to the Cave of the Winds quite sensational enough for his peace of mind. With proper care the trip is perfectly safe, but there is one moment of the journey when the mist and spray from the falls blot out from sight his nearest companion, which gives the man of average nerve as keen a thrill as he cares for. His verdict when he is "through" is that he is glad to have done it once, but will be content not to attempt it again. There is a certain temperament, however, which the very sight of these appalling waters seems to goad to a frenzy of mad adventure. Some time ago, for instance, a man who normally followed the unheroic occupation of keeping a restaurant, went over the Horseshoe falls in a steel barrel and was safely fished out afterward, having suffered no damage but a broken leg. This act of foolhardiness at any rate cannot be charged to youthful rashness, for the man was in his seventieth year, nor can it be explained by ignorance of what such a feat must involve, for he had already made the passage of the seething rapids some distance below in similar fashion.

In some of the most remarkable feats of which Niagara has been the scene the fascination of the encounter itself has been seconded by a certain commercial instinct. The performances of Blondin, we may be sure, were shrewdly calculated with a view to future box office receipts. In 1859 and 1860 he crossed the falls several times on a tight rope three and a quarter inches in diameter, 1,100 feet long and 160 feet above the water. He was not satisfied with the mere promenade, but would raise the hair of the spectators—sometimes there would be as many as 25,000 watching him—by all manner of freakish variations.

Gorge Below the Falls.

Since Blondin's day there have been several "equilibrist" exhibitions at Niagara, but no imitator has quite rivaled the example of daring set by the master of the profession. Perhaps the nearest approach to his triumphs was that of Dixon in 1890. He crossed the river below the falls on a three-quarter inch wire cable, and in one of his feats lay for a time with his back on the wire. But, startling as such performances may be, presumably they do not surpass either in actual risk or in trial of the nerves some of the ordinary feats of acrobats in the circus or even the daily round and common task of steeplejacks and other useful persons whose work requires a cool head and a sure step. A quite different kind of problem is that of "shooting Niagara," either at the falls themselves or at the rapids. Every one has seen pictures of the falls and can form some conception of what it must mean to take the drop over the cataract. The Niagara rapids are less familiar, so a brief topographical note may be helpful. One set of rapids occurs about the falls, just before the waters gather themselves for their great leap. But the more notable series is further down. Below the falls the river moves sleepily along for a while, but presently it is compressed into a narrow gorge through which it makes its descent to Lake Ontario. This sudden narrowing into a defile whose bed is studded with rocks churns the immense volume of water into a mass of turbulent waves, where the main current, traveling at 30 miles an hour, is swung backward and forward and from side to side like a drunken thing. These whirlpool rapids, as they are called, empty the stream into the whirlpool itself, from which it has still to surge through the Devil's Hole rapids, no less triumphant, before it once more becomes navigable near Lewiston.

The Whirlpool rapids were safely threaded in 1861 by the Maid of the Mist, but the ordeal turned the captain of the steamer into an old man. Many years later a man named Perry made the same trip in a lifeboat. A rival, R. W. Flack, challenged him to a race over the course, and lost his life in a preliminary rehearsal. But the most tragic story Niagara has to tell is that of Captain Matthew Webb. The son of an English country doctor, he entered the mercantile marine as a lad, but before he was thirty he abandoned a seafaring life to become a professional swimmer. In 1875 he swam from Dover to Calais. In 1883, though warned that physically he was not what he had been, he made the desperate resolve to swim the Whirlpool rapids. In describing his plans he explained that when he found the water very bad he would go under, and would remain under until compelled to come up for breath. He intended at the whirlpool to strike out with all his strength to keep out of the suck hole in the center. "My life," he added, "will then depend upon my muscles and my breath, with a little touch of science behind them." On the afternoon of July 24 he took the plunge from a small boat. On entering the whirlpool rapids he was almost turned over by the force of the water, but he recovered himself, and in about five minutes he had traversed the mile and a quarter from the old suspension bridge to the entrance of the whirlpool. Here he seemed for a moment to be doing well. Then he threw up his arms and disappeared.

Swimming Whirlpool Rapids.

In July, 1890, John Soules was more fortunate than Captain Webb, for his defeat came earlier. While he was in the whirlpool rapids the breakers dashed him against the rocks, and he was washed ashore, badly bruised, before reaching the whirlpool. Other swimmers who have attempted the passage have hesitated to trust their unaided strength and skill. W. J. Kendall, a Boston policeman, got through in 1886, but he wore a cork vest. He reported at the end of his journey that he had found his swimming abilities useless. The current took him into its main eddy and sucked him down like a flash. When he reached the spot where Webb lost his life the water went from under him and a wave knocked him unconscious. He was seen to be shot out from the pool 50 feet from the center. On regaining consciousness he swam ashore, thus avoiding being dashed down devil's hole rapids.

FEW REALLY CONTROL MIND

Writer's Reflections Literally True Though Few Will Be In a Hurry to Admit It.

When I walk I must have a friend to talk to, or I shall not even think. I am not of those who, like Stevenson, believe that walking should be a kind of vegetative stupor, where the sun and air merely fill one with a diffused sense of well-being and exclude definite thought. The wind should rather blow through the dusty regions of the mind, and the sun light up its dark corners, and thinking and talking should be saner and higher and more joyful than within doors. But one must have a friend along to open the windows. Neither can I sympathize with those persons who carry on long chains of reasoning while they are traveling or walking. When alone, my thinking is as desultory as the scenery of the roadside, and when with a friend, it is apt to be as full of romantic surprises as a walk through a woodland glen. Good talk is like good scenery—contingous yet constantly varying, and full of the charm of novelty and surprise. How unnatural it is to think except when one is forced to do it, is discovered when one attempts to analyze one's thoughts when alone. He is a rare genius who finds something beyond the mere visual images that float through his mind— either the reflection of what he is actually seeing, or the pictorial representations of what he has been doing or what he wants or intends to do in the near or far future. We should be shocked to confess to ourselves how little control we have over our own minds; we shall be lucky if we can believe that we guide them.—Randolph S. Bourne in the Atlantic Monthly.

Calling Down the Nurse.

Little Frank's nurse, when finding him in mischief was in the habit of exclaiming: "What in the name of common sense are you doing?" One morning, while she was bathing him, he asked: "What in the name of copper cents do you mean by getting soap in my eyes?"