

STORY BY
SINCLAIR
LEWISA RECORD SMASHED IN A CAR AND A FAST WORKER IN A
LIFTING LOVE AFFAIR—SWIFT ACTION BY THE AUTHOR OF MAIN STREETILLUSTRATION
BY HERMAN
PFEIFER

At two in the morning, on Main street of a Nebraska prairie town that ought to have been asleep since ten, a crowd was parked under a lone arc light, chattering, laughing, and every moment peering down the dim street to westward.

Out in the road were two new automobile tires, and cans of gasoline, oil, water. The hose of a pressure air pump stretched across the cement sidewalk, and beside it was an air gauge in a new charcoal case. Across the street a restaurant was glaring with unshaded electric lights; and a fluffy-haired, pert-nosed girl alternately ran to the window, and returned to look after the food she was keeping warm. The president of the local motor club, who was also owner of the chief garage, kept stuttering to a young man in brown union overalls: "Now, be all ready—for land's sake, be ready. Remember, gotta change those casings in three minutes." They were awaiting a romantic event—the smashing of the cross-continent road record by a Mallard car driven by J. T. Buffum.

Everyone there had seen pictures of Buffum in the sporting and automobile pages of the Lincoln and Kansas City papers; everyone knew that face, square, impassive, heavy-checked, kindly, with the unsmoked cigar between firm teeth, and the almost boyish bang over a fine forehead. Two days ago he had been in San Francisco, between the smeared gold of Chink dens and the tumult of the Pacific. Two days from now he would be in distant New York.

Miles away on the level prairie road a piercing jab of light grew swiftly into two lights, while a distant drum roll turned into the burring roar of a huge unmuffled engine. The devouring thing burst into town, came fulminating down on them, stopped with a clashing jerk. The crowd saw the leather-hooded man at the mighty steering wheel nod to them, grinning, human, companionable—the great Buffum.

"Hurray! Hurray!" came the cries, and the silence changed to weaving gossip.

Already the garage youngster, with his boss and three men from another garage, was yanking off two worn casings, filling the gas tank, the oil well, the radiator. Buffum stiffly crawled from the car, stretched his shoulders, his mighty arms and legs, in a leonine yawn. "Jump out, Roy. Eat here," he muttered to the man in the passenger seat. This man—the spectators did not heed. He was merely Buffum's mechanic and relay driver, a poor thing who had never in his life driven faster than 90 miles an hour.

The garage owner hustled Buffum across to the lunch room. The moment the car had stormed into town the pretty waitress, jumping up and down with impatience, had snatched the chicken from the warming oven, poured out the real coffee, proudly added real cream. The lunch and the changing casings took three and a quarter minutes.

The clatter of the motor smote the quiet houses and was gone. The town became drab and dull. The crowd yawned and fumbled its way home.

BUFFUM planned to get in two hours of sleep after leaving this Nebraska town. Roy Bender, the relay driver, took the wheel. Buffum sat with his relaxed body swaying to the leaping motion, while he drowsily commented in a hoarse, slow shout that pushed through the enveloping roar: "Look out for that hill, Roy. Going to be slippery."

"How can you tell?"

"I don't know. Maybe I smell it. But watch out, anyway. Good night, little playmate. Wake me up at 4:15."

That was all of the conversation for 72 miles.

It was dawn when Buffum drove again. He was silent; he was concentrated on keeping the speedometer just two miles higher than seemed safe. But once a mile or so, on straight stretches, he glanced with weary happiness at the morning meadows, at shimmering tapestry of grass and young wheat, and caught half a note of the song of a meadow lark. His mouth, so grimly tight in dangerous places, rose at the corners.

TOWARD noon, as Buffum was approaching the village of Apogee, Iowa, the smooth blaring of the motor was interrupted by a noise as though the engine was flying to pieces.

He yanked at the switch; before the car had quite halted. Roy and he had tumbled out at opposite sides, were running forward to lift the hood. The faguard, a heavy wire soldered on the radiator, had worked loose and bent a fan blade, which had ripped out a handful of honeycomb. The inside of the radiator looked as though it had been hacked with a dull knife. The water was cascading out.

Buffum speculated: "Apogee next stop? Can't get radiator there. None nearer'n Clinton. Get this soldered. Here! You!"

The "Here! You!" was directed at the driver of an ancient roadster. "Got to hustle this boat into next town. Want you to haul me in."

Roy Bender had already snatched a tow-ropes from the back of the racing car, was fastening it to the front axle of the Mallard, the rear of the roadster.

Buffum gave no time for disputes. "I'm J. T. Buffum. Racin' cross continent. Here's \$10. Want your machine 10 minutes. I'll drive." He had crowded into the seat. Already, with Roy steering the Mallard, they were headed for Apogee.

A shouting crowd ran out from house and store. Buffum slowly looked them over. Of a man in corduroy trousers and khaki shirt, who had plumped out of a garage, he demanded: "Who's the

best solderer in town?"

"I am. Good as anybody in Iowa!"

"Now, wait! Know who I am?"

"Sure! You're Buffum."

"My radiator is shot to thunder. Got to be soldered. I want six hours' work done in one hour, or less. How about the hardware store? Isn't there a solderer there that's even better than you?"

"Yes, I guess maybe old Frank Dieters is."

"Get him, and get the other good men, and get busy. One of you work on each side. Roy Bender, here, will boss you." Already Roy was taking down the radiator. "One hour, remember. Hurry! Plenty of money in it—"

"Oh, we don't care anything about the money!"

"Thanks, old man. Well, I might as well grab a little sleep. Where'll I get a long-distance connection?" he yawned.

"Across the street, at Mrs. Rivers'. Be less noise there than in the garage, I guess."

OVER the way was a house that was a large square box with an octagonal cupola on the mansard roof. It was set back in a yard of rough grass and old crabapple trees. At the gate were a smallish, severe woman, in spectacles and apron, and a girl of 25 or 26. Buffum looked at the girl twice, and tried to make out what it was that distinguished her from all the other women in the crowd that had come pushing and giggling to see the famous car.

She was sharply individualized. It was not that she was tall and blazing. She was slight—and delicate as a dry-point etching. Her chin was precise though soft; she had a Roman nose, a feminized charming version of the Roman nose. The thing that made her distinctive, Buffum reflected, was her poise. The girl by the gate was as quietly aloof as the small cold moon of winter.

He plodded across the road. He hesitated before speaking.

"I hope there hasn't been an accident," she murmured to him.

"No, just a small repair."

"But why does everyone seem so much concerned?"

"Why, it's—it's—I'm J. T. Buffum."

"Mr.—uh—Buffum?"

"I reckon you never heard of me."

"Why, uh—Should I have?" Her eyes were serious, regretful at discourtesy.

"No. You shouldn't. I just mean—motor fans usually have. I'm a racer. I'm driving from San Francisco to New York."

"Really? It will take you—ten days?"

"Four to five."

"In two days you will be in the East? See the—the ocean, the art galleries? Oh!"

In her voice was wistfulness. Her eyes saw far-off things. But they came back to Apogee, Iowa, and to the big, dusty man in leather, with a penitent: "I'm ashamed not to have heard of you, but I—we haven't a car. I hope they will make your repair quickly. May mother and I give you a glass of milk or something?"

"I'd be glad if you'd let me use your telephone. So noisy at—"

"Of course! Mother, this is Mr. Buffum, who is driving across the country. Oh—my name is Aurilla Rivers."

Buffum awkwardly tried to bow in two directions at once. Then he bowed to Aurilla Rivers' slender back. He noticed how smooth were her shoulder blades. They were neither jagged nor wadded. It seemed to him that the blue silk of her waist took life from the warm and eager flesh beneath. In her studied serenity she had not lost her youth.

As he drew away from the prying crowd and the sound of the hasty hammers and wrenches, he was conscious of clinging peace. The brick of the walk was worn to a soft rose, shaded by gently moving branches of lilac bushes. At the end was a wild-grape arbor, and an ancient bench, drive arbor was shadowy, and full of the feeling of long and tranquil years. In this land of new houses and new red barns and blazing miles of wheat, it seemed mysterious with antiquity.

And on the doorstep was the bleached vertebra of a whale. Buffum was confused. He traveled so much and so swiftly that he always had to stop to think whether he was East or West, and now—Yes, this was Iowa. Of course. But that vertebra belonged to New England.

And to New England belonged the conch-shell and the mahogany table in the wide hall, with its strip of rag carpet, down which Miss Rivers led him to the telephone—an old-fashioned wall instrument. Buffum noticed that Miss Rivers conscientiously disappeared through the wide door at the end of the hall, into a garden of pinks and pansies and Sweet William.

"Please get me long distance."

"I'm long distance and short distance and—"

"All right. This is Buffum, the transcontinental racer. I want to talk to Detroit, Mich.—Mallard Motor company—office of the president."

He waited 10 minutes. He sat on the edge of a William and Mary chair, and felt obese, clumsy, extremely dirty. He ventured off his chair—disapproving of the thunder of his footsteps—and stood in the doorway of a room, which, he fancied, contained all the Rivers treasures. The corner by the window seemed to be a shrine. Above a genuine antediluvian haircloth sofa were three pictures: In the center was a rather good painting of a man who was the spirit of 1850 in New England—burnsides, grim white forehead, Roman nose, prim triangle of shirt front. On the right was a water color of a house, white-doored,



GOING ON. DAY FROM NOW THE STRAIN WILL BEGIN TO GET ME. WILL YOU THINK ABOUT ME THEN? WILL YOU WIRELESS ME SOME GOOD THOUGHTS? YES!—VERY QUIETLY.

narrow-eaved, small-windowed, standing out against gray sand and blue water, with a moored motor-dory beyond. On the woodshed all of the pictured house was nailed up the name-board of a ship—the Penninah Sparrow.

On the left of the portrait was a fairly recent, enlarged photograph of a man somewhat like the granther of 1850, so far as Romanness of nose went, but weaker and more pompous, a handsome old buck, with a pretentious broad eyeglass ribbon, and hair that must have been silvery over a face that must have been deep-flushed.

By the sofa was a marble-topped stand, on which were sweet peas surely fresh that day.

The central called, and Buffum was talking to the president of the Mallard Motor company, who for two days and nights had sat by the ticker watching his flashing progress.

"Hello, chief. Buffum speaking. Held up for about one hour. Apogee, Iowa. Think I can make it up. But better move the schedule up through Illinois and Indiana. Huh? Radiator leak. 'By'!"

HE INQUIRED the amount of toll, and rambled out to the garden. He had to hurry away, of course, and get some sleep, but it would be good for him to see Aurilla Rivers again, to take with him the memory of her cool-resoluteness. She was coming toward him. He meekly followed her back through the hall, to the front steps. There he halted her. He would see quite enough of Roy Bender and the car before he reached New York.

"Please sit down here a moment, and tell me—"

"Yes."

"Oh, about the country around here, and uh—Oh! I owe you for the telephone call."

"Please! It's nothing."

"But it's something. It's \$2.95."

"For a telephone call?"

He caught her hand and pressed the money into it. She plumped down on the steps, and he discreetly lowered his bulk beside her. She turned on him, blazing.

"You infuriate me! You do things I've always wanted to—sweep across big distances, command men, have power. I suppose it's the old Yankee shipmasters coming out in me."

"Miss Rivers, I noticed a portrait in there. It seemed to me that the picture and the old sofa made a kind of shrine. And the fresh flowers."

"She stared a little before she said: 'Yes. It is a shrine. But you're the first one that ever guessed. How did you—'"

"I don't know. I suppose it's because I went through some California missions a few days ago. Tell me about the people in the pictures."

"You wouldn't—oh, some day, perhaps."

"Some day! Now, you see here, child! Do you realize that in about 40 minutes I'll be kiting out of here at 70 miles an hour? Imagine that I've met you a couple of times in the bank or the postoffice, and finally, after about six months, I've called here, and told your mother I like pansies. All right. All that is over. Now, who are you, Aurilla Rivers? Who

and what and why and how and when?" She smiled. She nodded. She told.

SHE was a school teacher now, but before her father died—well, the enlarged photograph in there was her father, Bradley Rivers, pioneer lawyer of Apogee. He had come out from Cape Cod, as a boy. The side-whiskered man of the central portrait was his grandfather, Captain Zenas Rivers, of West Harlepool, on the cape. The house in the picture was the Rivers mansion, birthplace of her father, of her grandfather, and his father's father. They—she peeped hesitatingly at Buffum before saying it—they had a coat of arms, but Apogee folks didn't think much of armorial bearings.

From the gate Roy Bender was bellowing: "Ready in two minutes, boss!" Buffum was on his feet, drawing on his gauntlets and leather coat. She looked at him gravely, while he urged:

"Going on. Day from now, the strain will begin to get me. Will you think of me about then? Will you wireless me some good thoughts?"

"Yes!—very quietly."

He yanked off his big gauntlet. He felt her hand fragile in his. Then he was gone, marching down the walk, climbing into the car, demanding of Roy: "Look over oil and battery and everything?"

"You bet. We did everything," said the garage man. "Get a little rest?"

"Yes. Had a chance to sit in the shade and loaf."

"Saw you talking to Aurilla Rivers?" Roy interrupted: "All right; all right, boss. Shoot!"

Buffum heard the garage man out: "Fine girl, Aurilla is. Smart's a whip. She's a real swell. Born and brought up here, too."

"Who's this that Miss Rivers is engaged to?" Buffum asked.

"Well, I guess probably she'll marry Reverend Dawson. He's a dried-up old stick, but he comes from the East. Some day she'll get tired of school teaching, and he'll grab her. Marry in haste and repent at Reno, like the fellow says."

"That's right. Fix up the bill, Roy? G'by."

AT DAWN nothing existed in the world save the compulsion to keep her at top speed. The earth was shut off from him by a wall of roar and speed. He did not rouse to human feeling even when he boomed into Columbus Circle, the breaker of the record.

He went instantly to bed, slept 2½ hours, then, in beautiful evening clothes and a club haircut, he attended a dinner given to himself, and, blushing before the sleek young Broadway motor salesman, he made a speech that was unusually incoherent, because all through he remembered that he was due in San Francisco in eight days. He was to sail for Japan, and a road race round the shore of Honko. Before he returned, Aurilla Rivers would undoubtedly have married the Rev. Mr. Dawson, have gone to Cape Cod, on her wedding trip. She would think only with disgust of large men with grease on their faces.

He could take one day for the trip up and back. He could get to Cape Cod more quickly by motor than by train.

He was going to have one more hour with Aurilla, on his way to San Francisco. He would be more interesting to her if he could gossip of her ancestral background. He could take pictures of the place to her, and perhaps an old chair from the mansion.

As he drove down Front street, in West Harlepool, he saw the house quite as it had appeared in Aurilla's picture with the nameboard of a wrecked ship over the woodshed, the Penninah Sparrow.

DOWN the road was a one room shop with the sign "Gatus Bearse, General Merchandise, Clam Forks, Windmills and Souvenirs." Out on the porch poked a smallish man. Buffum ambled toward him and saw that the man was very old.

"Good morning. This Cap'n Bearse?" inquired Buffum.

"Is he?"

"Uh, uh! Say—uh, Cap'n, can you tell me who's living in the Rivers mansion now?"

"The which mansion?"

"Rivers. The house across there."

"Huh! That's the Kendrick house."

"But it was built by a Rivers."

"No, 'twas't. That house was built by Cap'n Sephas Kendrick, in 1810, and there's been a Kendrick living in it ever since. Owned by William Dean Kendrick. He's in the wool business, in Boston, but his folks come down every summer. I ought to know. The Kendricks are kin of mine."

"B-but where did the Riverses live?"

"The Rivers? There never was any Rivers family."

"What?"

"The father of this here Bradley Rivers called himself Zenas Rivers. But land, Zenas' right name was Fernao Ribeiro. He was nothing but a Portygee deckhand. Fernao, or Zenas, became a wrecker. He was a good hand in a dory, but when he was drinking he was a caution for snakes. He came straight from the Cape Verde islands."

"Then Rivers was just a plain dub? Like me?"

"Plain? Brad Rivers? Well, Zenas sent Brad to school to Taunton for a year or so, but just the same, we always allowed he was so ordinary that there wasn't a dog belonging to a Kendrick or a Bearse or a Doane that would bite him. Ask any of the old codgers in town."

"I will, but—thanks."

HE CAME down the Apogee street, inconspicuously creeping through the dust, a large, amiable man in a derby.

He had only 51 minutes before the return of the Apogee branch train to the junction, to connect with the next express westward.

He rang; he pounded at the front door; he went round to the back, and there he discovered Aurilla's mother, washing napkins. She looked at him over her spectacles, and she sniffed: "Yes?"

"Do you remember I came through here recently? Racing car? I wanted to see Miss Rivers for a moment."

"You can't. She's at school, teaching."

"When will she be back? It's four now."

"Maybe right away, maybe not till six."

His train left at 4:45. He waited on the front steps. It was 4:21 when Aurilla Rivers came along the walk. He rushed to her, his watch in his hand, and before she could speak, he was pouring out:

"Member me? Darn glad! Got less'n 28 minutes before have to catch train San Francisco steamer Japan possibly India afterwards glad to see me please oh please don't be a Rivers be Aurilla just got 27'n half minutes glad?"

"Why—why—ye-es."

"Thought about me?"

"Of course."

"Ever wish I might come shooting

through again?"

"You're so egotistical!"

"No, just in hurry. Only got 27 minutes more! Ever wish I'd come back? Oh—please! Can't you hear the Japan steamer whistling—calling us?"

"Japan!"

"Like to see it?"

"Terribly."

"Will you come with me? I'll have a preacher meet us on the train. If you'll phone to Detroit, find out all about me. Come! Quick! Marry me! Just 24½ more."

She could only whisper in answer: "No. I mustn't think of it. It tempts me—I've thought of you—and the beautiful adventure—flying off half round the world. But Mother, would never consent."

"What has your mother to do—"

"Everything! With our people, the individual is nothing, the family's sacred. I must think of Bradley Rivers, and old Zenas, and hundreds of fine old Yankees, building up something so much bigger than just one individual happiness. It's, oh, noblesse oblige!"

HOW could he, in face of her ancestor-worship, tell the truth? He burst out:

"But you'd like to? Aurilla! Just 25 minutes now!" He chuckled his watch into his pocket. "See here, I want to kiss you. I'm going 7000 miles away, and I can't stand it, unless—I'm going to kiss you, there under the grape arbor!"

"Don't you ever get tired of ancestors?" he cried.

"I do not! Whatever I may be—they were splendid. Once in a mutiny on the clipper that he was commanding, Zenas Rivers—"

"Dear, there wasn't any Zenas Rivers. He was a Portuguese immigrant named Ribeiro, Fernao Ribeiro. The picture there in the house is a 'Captain Gould.' She had slipped from his embrace. But he went steadily on, trying with eyes and voice to make her understand his tenderness:

"Old Zenas was a squat, dark chap, a wrecker, and not very nice. The first real aristocrat in your family is you."

"Wait! You mean that—that it wasn't any of it true? But the Rivers mansion?"

"There isn't any. The house in the picture has always belonged to the Kendricks. I've just been off Cape Cod, and I found—"

"It isn't true? Not any of it, about the Rivers—"

"None of it. I didn't mean to tell you. If you don't believe me, you can write—"

"Oh, don't! Wait!" She turned, looked to the right. He remembered that down the street to the right was a rise of ground with a straggly village cemetery. She murmured:

"Poor dad! I loved him, oh, so much, but—I know Dad told—fibes. But never to harm people, just because he wanted us to be proud of him."

HE followed her swift steps into the house, into the room of the shrined portraits. She looked from "Zenas Rivers" to the sketch of the "Rivers mansion." She patted the glass over her father's photograph. She blew the dust from her fingers. She sighed: "It smells musty in here, so musty!" She ran to a mahogany chest of drawers and took out a sheet of parchment. On it, he saw, was a coat of arms.

She picked up a pencil, turned over the parchment and drew a flying motorcar. She turned and thrust the sketch at him, crying: "There's the coat of arms of the family to come, the crest of a new aristocracy that knows how to work!"

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NEXT SUNDAY—"CUPID," BY GOUVERNEUR MORRIS—NEXT SUNDAY