

SERIAL STORY

STANTON WINS

By Eleanor M. Ingram

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Illustrations by Frederic Thorburgh

SYNOPSIS

At the beginning of great automobile race the mechanic of the Mercury, Stanton's machine, drops dead. Strange youth, Jesse Floyd, volunteers, and is accepted. In the rest during the twenty-four hour race Stanton meets a stranger, Miss Carlisle, who introduces herself. The Mercury wins race. Stanton receives flowers from Miss Carlisle, which he ignores. Stanton meets Miss Carlisle on a train. They align to take walk, and train leaves. Stanton and Miss Carlisle follow in auto. Accident by which Stanton is hurt is mysterious. Floyd, at lunch with Stanton, tells of his boyhood. Stanton again meets Miss Carlisle and they dine together. Stanton comes to track sick, but makes race.

CHAPTER VI. (Continued.)

There was a bad turn. His eyes on the machine in front, Stanton rounded the banked curve at a pace which sent the shrieking crowd of spectators recoiling from the danger-line and sprayed yellow soil high into the air. As the Mercury lurched into the straight stretch beyond, as Floyd was in the act of turning to examine the rear tires, there came a sharp explosion and a reeling stagger of the car as a rear casing blew out, wrenched itself bodily from the wheel and rolled like a hoop into a field a hundred yards away.

The machine tottered to the edge of the road, stopping under the powerful brakes. Floyd sprang out, dragging loose one of the extra tires carried, while Stanton reached for the tool-box. They had no need or time for conversation, as they worked, people from all directions flocking around in a pushing, eager circle to watch the proceedings.

The two worked well together, Floyd's deft swiftness balanced by Stanton's strength. When the task was finished, the driver first regained his place.

"Get in," he ordered crisply. "Are you going to take all day, or am I going to catch that Atlanta?"

Floyd obeyed first and retorted second; an invaluable habit.

"If you're goin' to catch anything but a smash, I'd suggest a slow-down for that turn," he countered, in the blurred accent so softly deceptive. "No tire built is goin' to stick on a wheel under such roughin'."

Stanton shot a glance askant out of the corner of a stormy blue-black eye. He was irritated by the lost time, he felt more ill than he could have been brought to admit, and interference pricked him like a spur.

"I'll give you a lesson in driving," he cast across his shoulder, and bent over the wheel.

It was Stanton at his worst and best who made the next two circuits of the long course. Other racers, warned by their mechanics of the thunder-bolt bearing down upon them, drew grudgingly to one side, preferring the chance of later regaining the advantage. From every angle and curve the people fled, at sight of the gray car followed by its whirlwind of dust and carrying the huge "5" on its hood.

Twice the Mercury rushed past the grandstand, to a tumult of cheers drowned by the car's own roar. The second time, the two men glimpsed an official rising, megaphone in hand, and rightly guessed that they had made the fastest circuit of the day.

And Floyd had received the promised lesson, for Stanton had safely negotiated the turn that before cost them a tire, at a pace equally fast.

Safely, once; but, not content, he came around the second time driving as furiously, with unslackened speed. Down upon the turn they swept again, Stanton unerringly repeating his exquisite feat of skill and twisting the Mercury around on the two inside wheels; then the predicted happened. The crack of an exploding tire came while they were on the bend, instantly echoed by the bursting of its mate from the opposite wheel; the car tore itself from control under the double shock and shot off the course into the field beyond, plowing deep furrows in the soft earth until it overturned with a final crash.

Partly held by his steering-wheel, Stanton was flung out on the meadow grass as the car upset, its speed then so much checked that he escaped scarcely bruised. Floyd, unprotected, had been hurled from his seat by the first shock and lay half-stunned near the edge of the course.

From far and near came the people's cries of horror and shouts for aid. But before the first man reached them, Stanton was up and at the side of his mechanic.

"Floyd!" he panted. "Floyd!"

Floyd was already rising to one knee; gasping for breath, soiled with dust and grass-stains, and with the blood welling from a jagged rent in his left arm, but with his attention only fixed on Stanton.

"You're—all right?" he articulated. "47 Yes. A foot always is. You—"

But he could see for himself that the mechanic was not seriously injured, without Floyd's reassuring nod. "Call me what you like," Stanton permitted, between clenched teeth, as he dragged out his handkerchief to bandage the slender arm.

The appalled crowd was upon them. With a sputtering roar the Duplex machine rounded the turn and sped down the straight stretch, its mechanic staring back over his shoulder at the wreck. But Floyd brushed the girl's curls off his forehead and staggered erect, helpless laughter shaking him.

"Call you? I think you've got the best disposition an' the worst temper I ever saw! Tie this up an' we'll right the car. We've got to be movin' on."

There were plenty of sympathetic helpers. Incredible to the witnesses, but as Floyd had foreseen, the Mercury had not materially suffered. The big car was righted by fifty hands; Stanton and Floyd—unaided, according to racing rules—put on the new tires, and took their seats amid hearty admiration and good wishes.

Twenty minutes after she left the course, the Mercury shot down it once more. By the time the grandstand was fully aware that "Stanton had got his again," and the ambulance had been hurried clanging to the scene of the possible tragedy, the Mercury whirled past the judges, running more comely-like than ever.

But Stanton took the turns conservatively; for him.

The race was lost. Even Stanton could not regain the half-hour lead given his competitors. Late in the fourth hour he signaled Floyd to lean closer, and when he was obeyed:

"Where's the Duplex?" he questioned eagerly.

"At its repair pit for the last hour," Floyd made hopeful answer. "An' there's only the Atlanta ahead of us."

Stanton shook his head, but let out his car a little faster.

The Mercury came across the line, at the finish, just five minutes behind the Atlanta; to receive fully as great an ovation as the winning car. The spectacular driving, the record of the fastest lap and highest speed ever made on that course, the second place won in spite of the accident, almost eclipsed the Atlanta's victory.

In the midst of the joyous tumult, Floyd descended, stiff and weary enough after the continuous run of five hours and fifty-eight minutes. But Stanton did not follow; leaning upon his steering-wheel, the focus of snapping cameras, curious crowds, and blended congratulations and sympathy. Only when one of the judges came over to shake hands, was the explanation made evident.

"If I am to get out, some one will have to help me," announced Stanton impassively, and unclasped his mask, baring a face gray with exhaustion under its coating of caked dust.

And, in fact, it was necessary to aid the cramped, over-taxed driver to dismount from his car; to the wonder of

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"No," he denied laconically.

But he looked far more fatigued than his comparatively frail mechanic, nevertheless. Fatigued, and ill, "You didn't hurt yourself in our upset, I hope," Floyd said with anxiety, when they were alone in the stiff, impersonal hotel room.

"No. I had a bad night of it," Stanton explained. He sat down in an arm-chair, resting his head against the cushioned back. "Make yourself comfortable as you can, Floyd. There is nothing the matter with me—there can't be, I never was sick a day since I can remember. Probably I need feeding; I've eaten nothing since that confounded dinner last evening, and it is nearly six o'clock now."

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People From All Directions Flocking Around.

all those familiar with his usual superb endurance.

A little later Floyd, some of the grime removed, somewhat rested, and issuing from the ambulance surgeon's care with his arm bandaged in civilized fashion, felt a touch on his shoulder.

"I'm going to get out of this uproar," Stanton briefly imparted. "Come with me; send for your things and stay at my hotel tonight."

Floyd drew back, hesitating oddly. "I'm sorry," he began.

Stanton's straight dark brows contracted.

"You mean that you don't want anything personal to do with your brute of a driver? Oh, say so."

"No, no! Only—I—"

The steel-keen eyes sent one direct glance into the troubled gray ones.

"Good-by," pronounced Stanton definitely, and turned on his heel.

"Stanton!" cried Floyd, in distress.

The other kept on, unheeding.

"Stanton!" Floyd appealed, overtaking him. "Please—I give you my word I never meant that. I've got to be back at my own hotel, tonight, that was all. I'll do anything you say."

Stanton slowly halted.

"Will you come with me now, to dinner? Suit yourself."

"I'd like to," was the humble surrender. Like a woman, Floyd yielded to a superior will; like a man, there were no small reservations in his yielding.

There was a taxicab waiting; to it Stanton led the way.

The destination was one of the large hotels of the city, and neither of the companions were dressed for the public dining-room. In the guest-crowded lobby Stanton paused to order dinner sent to his own apart-

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"No. I had a bad night of it," Stanton explained. He sat down in an arm-chair, resting his head against the cushioned back. "Make yourself comfortable as you can, Floyd. There is nothing the matter with me—there can't be, I never was sick a day since I can remember. Probably I need feeding; I've eaten nothing since that confounded dinner last evening, and it is nearly six o'clock now."

But, after all, when the food was brought, Stanton could eat none of it; although maintaining a pretense of doing so, which forbade his companion to comment upon the fact.

"Were you feeling ill yesterday?" Floyd inquired, when the last course was removed and they were left to themselves. His own bearing was less assured than usual, his gaiety subdued to quietness almost savoring of timidity.

"Not until evening, after dinner."

The mechanic looked at him, started to speak, checked himself, and at last impulsively put the indiscreet question:

"Do you mind telling me where you dined?"

"Of course not," Stanton returned, without a trace of hesitation. "With Mr. Carlisle of the tire company, and his daughter. They are here for the races. He wanted to talk tires to me, Heaven knows why. We didn't get very far; after Miss Carlisle left us I began to feel so sick that I excused myself and got away to the nearest doctor."

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"No—I hardly know. I never care what I eat." He passed his hand impatiently across his forehead, suddenly giddy.

Floyd leaned nearer.

"Stanton, how do you feel? What? Tell me; I'm not just curious."

"Nausea, violent successive attacks of seasickness that left me too weak to stand. I've got the headache yet."

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