

SERIAL STORY

STANTON WINS

By Eleanor M. Ingram

Author of "The Game and the Candle," "The Flying Mercury," etc.

Illustrations by Frederic Thornburgh

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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 alight 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. They have accident. Floyd hurt, but not seriously. At dinner Floyd tells Stanton of his twin sister, Jessica. Stanton becomes very ill and loses consciousness. On recovery, at his hotel Stanton receives invitation and visits Jessica. They go to theater together, and meet Miss Carlisle. Stanton and Floyd meet again and talk business. They agree to operate automobile factory as partners. Floyd becomes suspicious of Miss Carlisle. Stanton again visits Jessica, and they become fast friends. Stanton becomes suspicious of Miss Carlisle. Just before important race three needed for Stanton's car are delayed. Floyd traces the tires and brings them to camp.

CHAPTER XI—(Continued).

The precaution was justified. On the most dreaded angle of the course came the well-known explosion, immediately followed by a second from the opposite wheel, the Mercury topped perilously.

Floyd was leaning over the back, unstrapping the extra tires, before Stanton had brought the car to a standstill. The two men were out on the ground together, dragging forth tools. Ringed about by pushing, exclaiming spectators, they worked with quick precision, wasting no time in speech. Dust-wrapped, two big cars sped by them, the red one hanging doggedly at the flank of the white.

"George thinks he's winnin'," lisped Floyd mockingly. "But he isn't goin' to; we are."

Stanton was on his feet again.

"In with the tools," he directed, with brevity.

But the blue-black eyes and gray exchanged one smiling glance before the Mercury sprang forward.

The race began its third hour, as Stanton started out to regain his lost lead. It was noon, a dazzling, breathless noon of azure and gold. Down past the grand-stand with its heaving expanse of color and movement they swept again, the joyous applause coming to them across the roar of their own motor, and on between the walls of people into the quieter back stretch in pursuit of their rivals.

There was a bridge, back there, across a shallow running brook shut in by a strip of autumn-tinted woodland. "Car ahead!" Floyd cried suddenly, as they rushed around a curve and bore down on the crossing. "Look out—Stanton—"

In the center of the bridge was a reeling, staggering car, coming to a halt and striving to maintain its equilibrium meanwhile. The chain had broken loose, its driver afterward explained, and was lashing the under-mechanism to scrap metal. Seeing too late to stop his own machine, Stanton took the only chance of saving any of the four lives, and tried to twist past the other car on the narrow bridge. Only a master-driver would have attempted the feat; Stanton carried it to the verge of success. They were along side, passing, when the edge of the wooden bridge gave way under the double strain. There was the rip of splintering planks, as the Mercury's outside wheels crushed through the flooring, a shuddering lurch.

"Jump!" Stanton shouted his vain command to Floyd, as they went down. The cool water lapped around his fingers, trickled revilingly across his intolerably painful arm, gurgling like a joyous voice as it passed by him. Slowly, with infinite effort, Stanton dragged himself up upon the other arm, the uninjured right. He must see; that was the imperious cry of brain and heart, to see. It seemed to him years ago that the Mercury had gone off the bridge, yet he knew the time could be but moments, since the ambulance had not come and he was still here.

His vision was clearing. Yes; there, half in the dainty brook, half on the green bank, lay the heap of bent and broken metal that had been the Mercury racing car. And beside it—

When he drove back the faintness that blackened the bright noon, Stanton began to drag his pain-racked body toward what lay beside the Mercury. Movement hurt, hurt unbearably, yet was a less anguish than thought. For he knew, knew the mechanic seldom escapes.

Floyd lay near the machine, unmarred to outward view except for a cut over his temple and a stain of blood on his lips. His mask and cap were gone, one hand was fung out, palm upward, and the torn sleeve left bare the

slim arm crossed by the zigzag scar gained at Lowell. He looked very young and strangely grave, as the sunlight and tree-shadows flickered back and forth across his colorless face and shining bronze waves of hair.

"Floyd," Stanton articulated hoarsely. "Floyd!"

The brook gurgled cheerfully, a belated oriole flashed past a streak of flame. Stanton's head sank back down against his mechanic's inert hand, and the world fell out of knowledge.

CHAPTER XII.

Jess.

It was two weeks later when Ralph Stanton first reopened conscious eyes, this time upon the immaculate dreariness of a hospital room. A linen-clad nurse stood beside him, and at the foot of the bed was a gentleman unmistakably medical.

"Better, Mr. Stanton?" queried the latter, breezily professional.

"Floyd?" Stanton whispered, with difficulty. "Where is Jess Floyd?"

The doctor surveyed him oddly, hesitating. But the nurse stooped over him, her expression altering to impatient compassion.

"Well, very well," she assured hastily. "Jess Floyd has gone home. Try to rest; try not to think of things."

He had known the truth before he asked the question. Stanton quietly turned his face to the wall and faintly, being very weak.

In his next conscious interval, he put another demand.

"Miss Floyd? She is alive?"

"Yes, oh yes," the nurse heartily affirmed. "Yes, indeed."

Once more Stanton turned to the wall. Jessica had not died when Jess did, then, according to her prediction; the tie of kinship had not held so far. She was in the little apartment, alone.

Later in the night his steady, silent gaze drew the attendant to his side.

"What is it? You are suffering more?"

"Ask her to stop singing," he begged. "It wasn't my fault. Ask her to stop."

The nurse took a glass from the table.

"There is no one singing, Mr. Stanton, no one at all. Drink this."

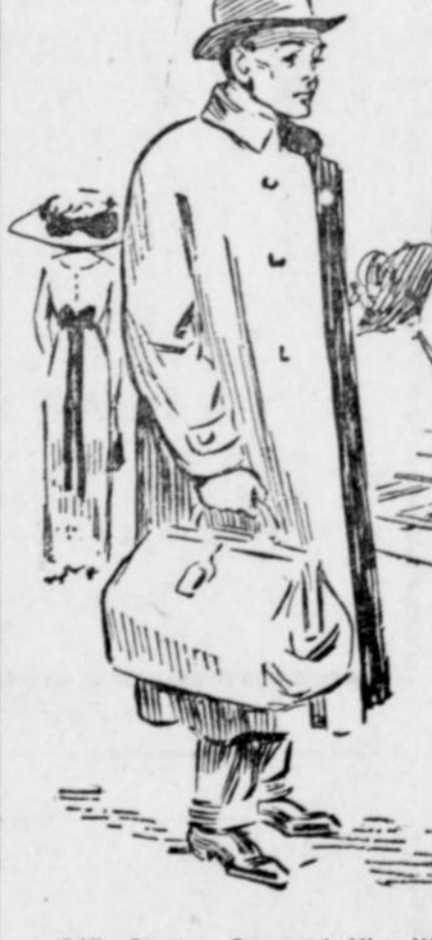
"No one? Not out there in the dark?"

"No."

He averted his gaze, and remained mute, unprotesting. After that he never lost memory again; not even in sleep, for he dreamed. Day and night, hour after hour, Jessica's monotonous song beat through his sick brain.

"Oft, in the stillly night—"

His nights were not still, always when he closed his eyes he heard some one sobbing, Jessica Floyd weeping for her brother.



Stanton Surveyed Him With Blank Non-Recognition.

But gradually the last traces of delirium faded out. Slowly his superb health reasserted its dominion and brought Stanton back to normal life. The fractured bones knit, the other injuries healed.

He never spoke Floyd's name a second time. Nor did any one mention it to him. The head of the Mercury Company came out from New York to see him and express cordial sympathy. George, who had driven the Duplex to victory after the Mercury's wreck, came to visit him more than once, a blonde, cheery presence; as did the driver of the machine on the bridge who owned his own life to Stanton's cool fearlessness and skill. Mr. Green brought his fussy condolence. But none of them alluded to Jess Floyd. There was a curious constraint that marked them all, an air of watchfully keeping silent upon some subject constantly present in their minds. Stanton looked them through and through with his hollow blue-black eyes, and asked nothing.

It was two months before he could leave the hospital. Winter had shut in, raw and bleak. The day fixed for his departure, the doctor lingered in bidding him good-by.

"I have not wanted you to be worried, Mr. Stanton," he said brusquely. "Not on any account. But from the fact that your first question was 'Jess Floyd?' I imagine you feel some re-

sponsibility in that matter. May I ask where you are going?"

Before the spoken name Stanton winced, but steadily met the other's inquisitive eyes.

"To Miss Floyd," he responded.

The doctor held out a hearty hand. "Good, I was sure of it! A patient shows a lot of his character by his physician. Good luck to you—all kinds."

How did he know of unprotected Jessica Floyd? Stanton wearily pondered the question as he descended to the carriage. Or rather, how did he know of Stanton's feeling of responsibility toward her? The mechanic was supposed to take his chance with the driver. Perhaps delirium had revealed the close bond of friendship between Floyd and himself.

At the railroad station, a tall young man approached him, as the train whistled in the distance.

"My name is Richards," he announced diffidently. "You're hard on your feet yet, Mr. Stanton; if there is anything I can do for you on the trip into the city, I'd be glad."

Stanton surveyed him with blank non-recognition.

"You don't remember me?" the young man tried again. "Have you forgotten the cub reporter who followed you on the afternoon you were arrested for speeding your machine in Pelham Parkway? You let your companion give me the story."

Stanton put out his hand, the poignant memory unendurable.

"Yes, yes. What of it?"

"It gave me my start, it meant a big life for me; and I didn't forget it. I made the accounts of the accident at the Cup race as easy for Miss Floyd as I could, when they came out. There was bound to be some sensationalism."

"Thank you," Stanton made brief acknowledgment. "There is nothing that you can do for me."

The train was hissing at the platform, but the reporter pursued him a step farther.

"You, you'll look after Miss Floyd, Mr. Stanton? That's square?"

The driver turned an amazed resentful glance upon his questioner, his hand on the rail. But, hardly aware why, he answered, however glacially.

"Yes, sir."

The reporter beamed at him, radiant.

"I knew it," he called, above the roar and clang of the starting train. "I knew it was all right."

A dull gray sky arched above a snow-patched landscape, flurries of snow were in the harsh air. Stanton sat with unseeing eyes directed out the window, chin in hand, much as he had found Floyd sitting in the west-bound train the night they started for Indianapolis. September sunlight, October crimson and gold, all gone.

A delicate fragrance drifted around him, there was the frou-frou of soft garments as some one took the seat

facing him. Stanton looked up, and saw Valerie Carlisle opposite, her blond fairness framed in dark velvets and furs, her amber eyes regarding him from beneath the shadow of her wide plumed hat.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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