

# Bandon Recorder

Published Every Tuesday and Friday by the  
Recorder Publishing Company.

C. E. KOPF, Managing Editor

Subscription, \$1.50 per Year in Advance. Advertising Rates Made  
Known on Application. Job Printing a Specialty.  
Entered at the Bandon Post-office as Second Class Matter.

TUESDAY August 8, 1911

## WHICH ROAD?

A Case Where the Wrong One Brought Great Happiness

By CLARISSA MACKIE  
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It was a hard, level road with many a sinuous curve that kept the siren tooting hoarsely as the disk obliterated the stiff seminal weeds on either hand and gave Justin Deios little opportunity to test the speed of his new racing car.

"Hi, mister, hi!" shrieked a young voice above the rush of his machine. With a few rapid movements he stopped dead short and tried to pierce the twilight with his sand-filled eyes.

"Well, what's up?" he demanded curtly.

"It's me," said the small voice, with a hint of a sob in it. "I'm up in this tree—right over your head."

"My gracious, what are you doing up there?" Justin stared upward to where the limb of a wild cherry tree bent over the road. The air was filled with the pungent smell of wild cherry blossoms and the bruised bark of the tree.

There was the glimmer of a small white face and a white blouse balanced perilously on the limb.

"Now, you just slip off that limb and drop—that's the boy! Caught you, didn't I?" said Mr. Deios.

Justin tucked the boy in a corner of the seat and prepared to resume his ride, but the boy placed a cold little hand on his and raised his voice in protest.

"Please don't, mister! I'm afraid to go up that road," he bawled justly.

"What are you afraid of? How do you expect to go home if you don't take that road?"

"I'm lost!" wailed the strayed one.

"Where do you live?" demanded Justin.

"Cro-osa High-way!"

"Well, you're all right then—this is the Cross Highway," reassured Justin.

"I ask your pardon, madam—Mrs. Stone, I came upon your place by mistake, and I asked your man if I might telephone to this little boy's parents that he was found and that I would return him at once," he stammered after a little awkward silence.

"Oh, it's little Frederick! How delighted poor Evelyn will be. Here in the telephone booth, Mr. Deios."

When Justin emerged after reassuring the delighted parents that he would return the wandering Frederick to their arms at once he found Mrs. Stone awaiting him at the end of the corridor. She held out her hand, smiling rather sadly as she did so.

"I must ask your pardon, Mr. Deios, for not giving you a heartier welcome. I was so startled at sight of you I quite lost my wits for the moment."

"You hardly expected to see me," said Deios with a rueful smile. "I'm afraid if I'd known you were here I'd never have ventured to knock at your door, hospitable as it always was in the past. Pardon me for that blundering reminder," he begged humbly.

"Certainly, Justin. Will you come and drink a cup of tea with us?" She paused at his protesting hand.

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Stone, but I couldn't—not until you change your mind about me, you know," he said firmly.

"Change my mind! Ah, Justin, we did that almost immediately after you left in anger. If you had only read and heeded our explanatory letters you would have known that Mr. Stone was quite satisfied that the fruit of the accident rested entirely on a defect in the machine and not in your driving. If you never answered our letters, if you refused to see my husband—"

"I never received your letters, Mrs. Stone, and as soon as I learned that you were out of danger I went straight and have been home only a few weeks. You see, I bought a plane and got from here—thought I'd get in a new part of the country and—"

"I'll be jigged!" he exclaimed at last.

"I told you it was the wrong road," piped the little voice rather triumphantly.

"So you did. Well, it's the first time I know this old road went beyond Cross Highway! Seems to stop right here too. Do you know where this drive leads to, son?"

"To perdition," said the little fellow calmly.

"Perdition?" repeated Justin, scandalized. "Who told you that?"

"Mother did. I asked her. I waited in the carriage once when she went inside, and she said it was perdition. So I asked cook what perdition was, and she said it was—you know the hot place."

"What's your name?"

"Frederick Templeton Leeson. That's dad's name too."

"Ah! Then you're Leeson's little chap, eh? Well, you are a good way

from home. Guess I better run up this drive and telephone to your folks that you're all right. What do you say?" Justin turned the car into the drive and sped swiftly up its length.

"I don't want to go to that—place!" wailed Master Frederick Templeton Leeson. "Cook says they fry you on a sizzling fork if you're naughty."

"Never you mind, son. You're a good boy. They won't fry you nor bake you. Very likely all the ladies will kiss you and call you a sweet child."

"I hate ladies, and I won't be kissed, and I won't be fried!" protested Frederick, kicking the shins of his rescuer with sudden fierce ingratitude. "You stop this car, mister!"

"At your command, sir," said Justin as he brought the machine handsomely under the lighted port-cochere and jammed down his levers. His siren uttered a brief commanding salute, the door opened instantly, and a man servant appeared.

"I've missed the road, my man," said Justin, "and I would like to be set right if you can direct me to the Cross Highway."

"A mile back, sir. You probably passed the turn without noticing. From there on is private property. If you turn around and go back over your own tracks you'll find your way all right."

"Thanks," said Justin, tossing the man a coin. "Oh, I wonder if your people would allow me to use a telephone for a moment. I've picked up a little lost boy and—"

"Certainly, sir. If it's Mr. Leeson's little boy it's all right. They've been telephoning here to know if we've seen him. Come right in."

He held open the door and admitted Justin and his sleepy charge into a white entrance hall softly carpeted and delicately lighted with carefully disposed electric bulbs. A wood fire whistled in the wide fireplace, and several comfortable chairs were gathered around the hearth, where a white haired woman was dispensing tea. There were several other women, some within the tall shadow of the settle.

The white haired woman dropped a teaspoon with a silvery clatter and arose to her feet. Justin saw with quick eyes that her face was startled out of its customary sweet repose and that she looked at him with astonishment and displeasure rather than welcome.

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