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The Honorable Senator Sagebrush

By
FRANCIS LYNDE

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fiber of me is rebelling against the savage necessity? God knows I'd give my life and all my hopes of happiness if the necessity could be wiped out!"

Instantly she changed her attack.

"If I can't bribe you I must and will convince you," she persisted. "You are a brave man, Evan. I know, because I have seen you tried. You mustn't turn cowardly now."

"Nor shall I," he countered quickly. "But I don't understand."

"Don't you? Isn't it cowardly to strike this cruel blow in the dark? You know your father isn't here to defend himself. You can't do such a thing without at least giving him the warning that you would give your bitter enemy."

"His absence is merely an added twist of the thumbscrews," he said in fresh wretchedness. "He is not here, and the time is too short to get him here. What is done must be done today—this afternoon. Otherwise it will be too late to stop this last and most shameless attack upon the liberties of every honest voter in this commonwealth. Don't make it harder for me, Patricia. Surely you can see how hard it is as it stands."

"I can see that you are about to do something for which in all the years to come you will never be able to get your own forgiveness, Evan," she said.

Then, with a sudden skillful flick of the speed lever, she sent the little car ahead with a lurch, steering it in the sharpest of swerves into the nearest cross street affording an outlet to the northern road.

"Stop, Patricia!" he cried. "What are you doing? I must go back to the courthouse!"

"I'll take you back to the courthouse," she promised, deftly slipping in the third speed, "and you shall be there before Judge Hemingway goes home."

But, in common justice, you must and shall first tell your father what you are going to do. Don't try to stop me! If you do I'll run into something and smash the car."

With the switch plug on the dash within easy reach, it would have been a simple matter for him to stop the car. But her single hearted devotion was not to be so easily thwarted. It had not occurred to him that he might drive to Wartrace Hall and return in time to set the legal machinery in motion to stop the frauds. So when he leaned forward it was not to throw the electric switch, as she feared; it was merely to adjust the wind shield so that the blast of the speed rush would not blow them both breathless.

For fifteen miles north of the capital the Quarretaro road is a straightaway race track, and Miss Anners proved herself a fearless driver. Almost before Blount realized it the red car was among the hills and climbing to the mesa levels. At Shonoho canyon they passed a horseman coming down the canyon road. The man's horse shied at sight of the car and threatened to bolt, but Patricia was looking straight ahead and made no movement to slacken speed. In the passing glimpse Blount thought he recognized the rider. It was the man Barto or his double.

By the time the little car was flying up the cottonwood sentinelled avenue at Wartrace Hall Patricia had broken a record. The thirty miles from the capital had been covered in forty-two minutes.

When she brought the car to a stand at the carriage entrance the young woman spoke for the first time since she had given David Blount's son her ultimatum.

"Find your father quickly and say what it is right to say. When you are ready to go back I'll keep my promise and drive you."

It was old Barnabas who admitted

the bearer of evil tidings. "Yas, sabi Marstah Majah's in de libray," was the answer to Blount's question. And, throwing coat and hat aside, the bearer of burdens not his own walked quickly across the hall and let himself into the room of trial.

"Well, son, you made out to get here, didn't you?" said the father quietly, pushing a book aside. "Draw up a chair. Where is the little girl?"

Blount saw instantly that he must be brief and pitiless.

"Miss Anners is at the carriage entrance in the car, waiting to take me back to town," he said, constraining himself to speak calmly. "I have an appointment with Judge Hemingway which must be kept, and he leaves his chambers at 4 o'clock. Do you know why I have made that appointment?"

The senator shook his head slowly.

"How should I know, son?"

"It's not a pleasant thing to have to tell you," the younger man went on, ignoring the chair to which the long stemmed pipe was pointing. "But Patricia says I must. A little over an hour ago evidence—legal evidence—of corruption and false registration in four of the city wards was put into my hands. You know what I've got to do with it, father."

The older man nodded. "Yes, I know what you think you've got to do with it. But I wouldn't do it if I were you, son. Haven't you learned that one of the first rules in the book of politics is not to hang the dirty clothes out where everybody can see them?"

Evan's heart sank within him. It was evident that his father was still unsuspecting, still unconscious of the impending blow. Only utter frankness could avail now.

"I can't discuss expediency with you," he said hastily. "This evidence I speak of involves you personally. There is trouble ahead, serious trouble, and you don't seem to realize it. The city papers will be out in the morning publishing evidence of other crooked political work—evidence which I have been gathering here and there all over the state and which was stolen when my safe was blown up last week. I did not intend to publish it if I could help it. I was holding it over my own people as a club to make them decent and to keep them decent. But I have reason to believe that it has been edited so that it will accuse only you and the machine, and by tomorrow morning the entire state will know. I don't have to tell you what the effect of this added exposure of wholesale corruption in the capital is going to be."

The senator had laid the pipe aside and was staring soberly at the fire.

"You're a man among a thousand, son," he said quietly. "When it comes to a pure question of right and wrong you don't hesitate a minute, do you? You haven't said it in so many words, so I'll say it for you. You've got me right where you can send me to the penitentiary? That's about what you're trying to tell me, isn't it?"

"Don't put it that way, father," protested the son. "I gave you fair warning. I've got to fight for the right as I see it. If I don't I shall be less than a man—less than your son. Can't you see that it is breaking my heart?"

A silence electrically surcharged with possibilities settled down over the quiet room for a little while. At the end of the pause the senator rose and put his hand on his son's shoulder.

"I haven't a word to say," he said slowly. "As you told me that first day out here, son, it's your job to hem to the line and let the chips fall where they may. Go ahead and do what seems right and law abiding to you. I'd rather go to jail twice over than have you do anything else. Is that what you wanted me to say?"

Blount dropped into a chair as if the hand on his shoulder had crushed him and covered his face with his hands. It was hard—harder than even his own prefigurings had forecast it.

It was a long minute before he staggered to his feet and groped his way to the door, leaving his father standing before the fire, still with the hand outstretched which had been laid in fatherly affection upon his shoulder. When old Barnabas had helped him into his coat and had given him his hat he sought Patricia.

"Must you go back?" she queried when he had descended the steps to climb stiffly into the seat beside her.

He nodded.

"Your duty is clear?"

He nodded again.

"And the consequences?" she asked. "I don't know," he muttered. "Ruin and disgrace for all of us, I suppose. Of course I shall resign from the railroad service and stand with my father when—the thing is done."

"Don't do it, Evan; don't do it! I have no more than a woman's reason to give you, but I am sure you are opening the door to a lifelong sorrow for yourself and—for me."

It was the last two words that steeled him to his purpose. Not even for her dear sake would he turn aside from the plain path of the oath bound obligation. It struck him like a blow that the turning aside would make him forever unworthy of her love.

(Continued next week)