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The Honorable Senator Sagebrush

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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canyon was down a long incline with a gentle curve near the bottom to hide the canyon entrance until they were within a hundred yards of it. Blount had a momentary glimpse of some barrier—a tree, he took it to be—lying across the main road. Seeing it, he realized in the same instant that Patricia was neither releasing the clutch nor applying the brakes. After that there was barely time to snap the switch and to throw the heavy glass wind shield down before the devastating crash came.

CHAPTER XIX. THE ROUNDUP.

It was only the car that was disabled. Beyond a severe shaking up neither Patricia nor Blount was seriously hurt. Recovering from the shock and being assured of Patricia's wholeness and his own, Blount sprang out to see what the collision had done to the car. The inspection was brief. With the front axle bent, the radiator crushed and one cylinder of the engine broken, the little car was safely out of commission.

"We're done for," he said shortly, helping his companion down from the driving seat.

Patricia was still trembling and pale, and he thought that the accident was accountable.

"Do you mean—that we can't go on to the city?" she quavered.

"Not unless we walk, and it is exactly fifteen miles. I happened to notice the speedometer record on the roadster when we turned around here last Sunday."

"What shall we do?" she asked when the improbability of any timely rescue made itself apparent.

Blount looked at his watch. It was already a few minutes past 3 o'clock.

"We'll sit down and wait for somebody to come along and rescue us," he said, striving to say it lightly.

"I'm sure we ought to be glad and thankful that it is no worse. We stood a good chance of being killed, both of us."

She shuddered and said: "I might have stopped sooner. There—there was time, don't you think?"

Evan had thought so, and he was regarding her curiously. There had been many motoring experiences in their acquaintance of a year and not a few hazards, and he had more than once rejoiced in her cool presence of mind in the face of sudden danger.

"I wondered a little that you didn't," he ventured to say. "I never saw you hesitate before."

The look that she gave him was pathetically pleading.

"I stopped—just one little instant to think—of your father—and—those terrible papers in your pocket and what was going to happen if you should reach Judge Hemingway in time, Evan," she confessed brokenly.

"Can you ever forgive me?"

It was a moment for the brushing aside of obstacles once and for all, and he took her in his arms—would have done it if the lonely Quarretaro road had been the busiest street in the capital.

"You are my brave, loyal darling," he said. And because she let him say it and hid the face, from which the cold pallor had suddenly fled, on his shoulder the political struggle and everything pertaining to it became as things of naught and the lonely road the way to paradise.

The silence of the immensities held them for a moment—a golden silence for the lover, but a moment of keen self reproachings for the maiden sobbing on his shoulder.

"Oh, I don't know how I could have done it—but I did!" she wept. "I—I was actually glad when I saw the tree. I didn't have the courage to—to upset the car in the ditch."

Again he comforted her, and the political rivalries withdrew into a still remoter region.

"It was to be," he said. "That is what the tree was put here for—to stop us."

She looked up at that.

"Why, that is so, isn't it? There are no trees growing around here—none at all. Who did it, Evan?"

Blount shook his head sadly. "There is only one person in the world who

could have any strong reason for stopping us," he asserted. "I can't imagine how my father managed it in the short time at his disposal. That tree has been dragged down out of the little canyon since we passed going north. You can see the trail of it in the road."

"Please, Evan," she pleaded, "don't ask me to believe that your father planned it! Why, we might have been killed outright, both of us!"

"I know," he returned gloomily, "but—hello, here comes our rescue!"

It was rather a figure of speech than an assurance. Around a turn in the canyon road came three horsemen pointing for the main highway and ambulating gently. They were hardly within halting distance before Blount recognized his three waylayers in the night of mysteries in the Lost River mountains, with Barto in the lead.

"Howdy?" said the timber looker, riding up to hang with one knee over the saddle while he grinned at the two castaways. "Lost out again, Mr. Blount? Couldn't make out to run your chug wagon over that there pine tree, eh?"

"Did you put the tree in the road?" snapped Blount, with rising anger.

"I reckon we did," was the cool reply, "and it was one job too. Had to drag it in more'n a mile down the gulch with the horse ropes."

There was material for an explosion, but Blount controlled himself.

"By whose orders did you do it?" he demanded.

"The boss."

"Mr. Hagthaw?"

"Not on your life. It was the big boss this time."

Blount's quick glance aside at his companion was a sorrowful "I told you so," and he did not question Barto further.

"Well," he said, turning back to the outlaw, "what is to be done with us?"

Barto pursed his thick lips. "If the lady can make out to ride one of the broncs," he began, "there's a right comfortable little shack of a hotel at the head of the gulch, and—"

"But we are on our way to the city," Blount interposed, still trying to master his impatience.

The timber looker shrugged.

"All right. I reckon there ain't no law ag'inst your walkin' or settin' down to wait till somebody comes along. But it might be a good while."

Blount turned to Patricia.

"Shall we wait?" he asked, and she nodded quickly, with a look in her eyes that he could not interpret.

"I don't believe we care to go and look for your shack hotel," he said to the road blocker.

Barto swung straight in his saddle and fell into the attitude of one listening. Then the grin became a menace, and he spoke sharply.

"Gimme them papers you got in your pocket and do it sudden!" he commanded. "Then you can stay here till the cows come home if you want to. Quick, I say!"

"No," Blount said crisply.

Instantly Barto's pistol was out.

"Give 'em up!" he shouted. "Shell 'em out or—"

The diversion came sternly. Around the curve from the north—the curve that had so lately been Patricia's undoing—came a huge touring car, with a big man at the wheel, a veiled woman in the mechanical seat and the tonneau crammed with armed men.

Barto snapped his pistol at the oncoming car, and when the weapon missed fire he wheeled his horse to the canyon road, up which his two companions were already urging their mounts. Two seconds later the big car had stopped at the tree barrier, and six men with Winchester's were popping the halt signal at the flying highwayman. It was speedily effective, and when the game was bagged the senator swung down from the driving seat of the big Italian car and gave his orders briefly.

"Take these fellows up yonder to the hotel at the canyon head and see that they're kept out of mischief till tomorrow night, Granger," he said, singling out the leader of his tonneau squad. "Then tell the gentlemen you'll find boxing things up there that the jig is up and he may as well come to the city. He'll find me at the Inter-Mountain when he wants to talk it over."

A little engineering feat, made possible by the big car's towrope, soon cleared the way, and when the great car, with the two women in the tonneau and Evan in the seat beside his father, was devouring the miles in the straightaway race to the city the young man said what was due.

"I was blaming you for the tree and for Barto's attempt to get those affidavits away from me," was what he broke the humming silence to say, and the senator nodded.

(Continued next week)



"DON'T DO IT, EVAN; DON'T DO IT!"
The approach to the mouth of Shonoho

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