SERIAL STORY

The FLYING MERCURY

By

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"The Game and the Candle"

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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens on Long Island near New York city, where Miss Emily Ffrench, a relative of Ethan Ffrench, manufacturer of the celebrated "Mercury" automobile, loses her way. The car has stopped and her cousin, Dick Ffrench, is too muddled with drink to direct it aright. They meet another car which is run by a professional racer named Lestrange. The latter fixes up the Ffrench car and directs Miss Ffrench how to proceed homeward. Ethan Ffrench has disinherited his son, who has disappeared. He informs Emily plainly that he would like to have her marry Dick, who is a good-natured but irresponsible fellow. It appears that a partner of Ethan Ffrench wanting an expert to race with the "Mercury" at auto events, has engaged Lestrange and at the Ffrench factory Emily encounters the young man. They refer pleasantly to their meeting when Dick comes along and recognizes the young racer.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Ffrench and his niece were at breakfast, on the Sunday when the first account of the Georgia race reached Ffrenchwood.

"You will take fresh coffee," Emily was saying, the little silver pot poised in her hand, when the door burst open and Dick hurried, actually hurried, into the room.

"He's won! He's got it!" he cried, brandishing the morning newspaper. "The first time for an American car with an American driver. And how he won it! He distanced every car on the track except the two big Italian and French machines. Those he couldn't get, of course; but the Frenchman went out in the fourth hour with a broken valve. Then he was set down for second place—second place, Emily, with every other big car in the country entered. They say he drove, like, like—I don't know what. A hundred and some miles an hour on the straight stretches."

"Oh," Emily faltered, setting down the coffee-pot in her plate.

He stopped her eagerly, half turning toward Mr. Ffrench, who had put on his pince-nez to contemplate his nephew in stupefaction, not at his statement, but at his condition.

"Wait. In the last hour, the Italian car lost its chain and went over into a ditch on a back stretch, three miles from a doctor. People around picked the men out of the wreck, and Lestrange came up to find that the driver was likely to die from a severed artery before help got there. Emily, he stopped, stopped, with victory in his hands, had the Italian lifted into the mechanician's seat, and Rupert held him while they dashed around the course to the hospital. He got him there fifteen minutes before an ambulance could have reached him, and the man will get well. But Lestrange had lost six minutes. He had rushed straight to the doctor's, given them the man, and gone right on, but he had lost six minutes. When people realized what he'd done, they went wild. Every one thought he'd lost the race, but they cheered him until they couldn't shout. And he kept on driving. It's all here," he waved the gaudy sheet. "The paper's full of it. He had half an hour to make up six minutes, and he did it. He came in nineteen seconds ahead of the nearest car. The crowd swarmed out on the course and fell all over him. Old Bailey's nearly crazy."

To see Dick excited would have been marvel enough to hold his auditors mute, if the story itself had not possessed a quality to stir even nonsporting blood. Emily could only sit and gaze at the headlines of the extended newspaper, her dark eyes wide and shining, her soft lips apart.

"He telegraphed to Bailey," Dick added in the pause. "Ten words: 'First across line in Georgia race. Car in fine shape. Lestrange.' That was all."

Mr. Ffrench deliberately passed his coffee-pot to Emily.

"You had better take your breakfast," he advised. "It is unusual to see you noticing business affairs, Dick; I might say unprecedented. I see that if Bailey's new man is capable of such work, at least, I suppose for the rest, that he would somewhat do less than take an injured person to the hospital. Why are you putting sugar in my cup, Emily?"

"I don't know," she astonishingly hesitated.

"Dick, don't come to church any more," said Dick's mother, tearful. "It'll be a big enough disappointment to Mr. Bailey, maybe, I don't know you, disappointed Lestrange."

Mr. Ffrench coughed in his chair. "I have not expressed interest in the man in conversation, I am not said, recently, that the manufacturer's manager." Mr. Ffrench was the kind of man who always spoke as if he had just finished dictating a letter, and had forgotten only to say the stereotyped ending, "Very truly yours."

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"Mr. Bailey likes Mr. Lestrange," she corrected.

"I know him! He loves him. You know Lestrange. Even with him, a man would be grateful, down to stone."

Just as Emily was thinking that beyond a high cedar hedge, Philip Bailey was at work on the Lestrange car, he was saying, "Mr. Bailey's manager, Lestrange, is a young man. Very young, I believe. Very young for the young manager, and she was sorry. Sorry, although, remembering Bailey's unfortunate speech the night Lestrange's engagement was proposed, she was not surprised. But she looked across to Dick sympathetically. So sympathetically, that after breakfast he followed her into the library, the colored journals in his hand.

"What's the matter with the old gentleman this morning?" he complained. "He wants the business to succeed, doesn't he? If he does, he ought to like what Lestrange is doing for it. What's the matter with him?"

Emily shook back her yellow curls, turning her gaze on him.

"You might guess, Dickie. He is lonely."

"Lonely! Ha!"

All the feminine impulse to defend flared up.

"Why not?" she exclaimed with passion. "Who has he got? Who stands with him in his house? No wonder he can not bear the man who is hired to do what a Ffrench should be doing. It is not the racing driver he dislikes, but the manager. And do not you blame him, Dick Ffrench."

Quite aghast, he stared after her as she turned away to the nearest window. But presently he followed her over, still holding the papers.

"Don't you want to read about the race?" he ventured.

Smiling, though her lashes were damp, Emily accepted the peace offering.

"Yes, please."

"You're not angry? You know I'm a stupid chump sometimes; I don't mean it."

This time she laughed outright.

"No; I am sorry I was cross. It is I who would like to shirk my work. Never mind me; let us read."

They did read, seated opposite each other in the broad window-seat and passing the sheets across as they finished them. Dick had not exaggerated, on the contrary he had not said enough. Lestrange and his car were the focus of the hour's attention. The daring, the reckless courage that risked life for victory, the generosity which could throw that victory away to aid a comrade, and lastly the determination and skill which had won the conquest after all—the whole formed a feat too spectacular to escape public hysteria. It was very doubtful indeed whether Lestrange liked his idolizing, but there was no escape.

The two who read were young.

"It was a splendid fight," sighed

"Never Mind Me; Let Us Read."

Dick, when they dropped the last page.

"Yes," Emily assented. "When he comes back, when you see him, give him my congratulations."

"When I see him? Why don't you tell him yourself?"

Something like a white shadow wiped the scarlet of excitement from her cheeks, as she averted her face.

"I shall not see him; I shall not go to the factory any more. It will be better, I am sure."

Vaguely puzzled and dismayed, Dick sat looking at her, not daring to question.

Emily kept her word during the weeks that followed. Through Dick and Bailey she heard of factory affairs; of the sudden increase of orders for the Mercury automobiles; the added prestige gained, and the public favor bestowed on the car. But she saw nothing of the man who was responsible for all this. Instead she went out more than ever before. Their social circle was too painfully exclusive to be large or gay.

Three times a week it was Mr. Ffrench's stately custom to visit the factory and inspect it with Bailey. At other times Bailey came up to the house, where affairs were conducted. But in neither place did Mr. Ffrench ever come in contact with his manager, during all the months while winter waned and waxed again to spring.

"That's Bailey's doing," chuckled Dick, when Emily finally wondered aloud at the circumstance. "He isn't going to risk losing Lestrange because our high and mighty uncle falls out with him. And it would be pretty tough if that happened if they met. Lestrange has a temper, you know, even if it doesn't stick out all over him like a hedgehog; and a dozen other companies would give money to get him."

Emily nodded gravely. It was a sunny morning in the first of March, and the windows were at the end of the old dark corridor, where Mr. Ffrench and they had strolled before breakfast.

"Mr. Bailey likes Mr. Lestrange," she commented