The Railroad Man's Magazine, **October 1909**

CAMPBELL'S WEDDING RACE.

BY HARRY BEDWELL.

"Extra, 1127" Does Some Stunts Trying to Reach Junction City in Time to Hear the Joy Bells Ring.

CAMPBELL, who had for some time been standing by the window, knocking holes in the cupboard with short, vicious kicks, turned from his scrutiny of the unpainted roofs of the little town that nestled under the sage-brush hill, and addressed himself to the first trick despatcher, who sat at a table near the other window.

"I'd like to know what a fellow in my fix can do," he complained. "What would you do?" he asked hopelessly.

Racey, the first trick man, completed an order before answering.

"How do I know what I should do?" he said languidly. "I've never been in such a fix, you know, and I couldn't advise you. Anyhow, you wouldn't take advice if I'd give it."

Campbell turned back to the window, and began kicking holes in the cupboard again, his rough, heavy shoes making the wood and paper yield easily to the blows.

"Better cut it out," advised Racey dispassionately. "The chief will come in here and fall all over you. if you don't."

Campbell gave another kick. "I wish some one would try it," he said.

Racey glanced at the big, broad shoulders, and shook his head. "I don't," he remarked "not in here."

As could easily be seen from his expression and tone of voice, Campbell was mad — not angry.

For this was his wedding-day. His bride-elect was one hundred miles away, and he had no way of reaching her. All arrangements had long ago been made for him to wed Nellie McDonald that evening at eight o'clock, but it was now 12.30 p.m., and he was far from his heart's desire.

Mechanically he took out his watch and ran his thumb over its face as he counted the exact time there was left.

"I could make it by a scratch, if they'd only give me a chance," he muttered to himself.

Campbell was an extra passenger engineer. The day before, in Junction City, he had asked for a two weeks' layoff, that he might marry and take a trip to the city. But they were short of passenger engineers at the time, and the trainmaster had all but gone on his knees to Campbell, begging him to take a train to Farnham, promising him that he would get him back to Junction City in time to marry that night.

But this trainmaster had not counted on No. 9 trying to knock Little Squaw Mountain off the map. No. 9's sharp nose went about two feet into the side of Little Squaw, and then stopped. When the smoke cleared away it was found that the engine and three cars were off the track, and about one hundred yards of track torn up. This, of course, blocked traffic for some time.

That morning Campbell came down to the despatcher's office and demanded, in no gentle tone, why he had not been called to go out. On learning of the antics of No. 9, and the verdict of the despatcher that the track could not be repaired and the wreck cleared away until some time in the afternoon, Campbell came very near choking the despatcher.

Then he deluged the Junction City telegraph-office with messages to Nellie, until that young lady knew not whether Campbell was killed in the wreck or merely behind it and unable to get by. Her father, who was master mechanic at Junction City, had pointed out the fact that Campbell could not be dead and send so many messages, which seemed logical enough to the girl, and relieved her greatly.

Campbell paced the despatcher's office all morning in a rage. For there had been no trains out going to Junction City, and he watched from a distance the hour set for his wedding.

The chief now came out of his office and leaned over the train-sheet.

"How are they getting along out at the wreck?" he inquired of Racey.

"They've got a track built almost around it," answered the trick man, "and trains will begin to move some time this afternoon."

"Suppose we had better call a crew for that extra east," mused the chief, with his eyes still on the train-sheet. "They ought to be ready for her by the time she gets there. Who's next up?"

Campbell swung round suddenly.

"I am," he cried, joy and relief showing in his voice. "Call me for that extra east."

"I wish you would quit bothering me, Campbell," he complained. "That wedding of yours can wait. You're a passenger engineer, and not running freights. You make me —"

In two strides Campbell crossed the room, gripped the chief by the collar of his shirt, swung him clear of the floor, and spun him around like a top.

"You call me to take that freight train out!

"YOU CALL ME TO TAKE THAT FREIGHT-TRAIN OUT!"

Campbell's voice was about as gentle as his grip. "I'm an extra passenger engineer, and you've got to call me for that train if I say so."

The chief gave a grunt as his feet touched the floor, and he glared up at Campbell for a few moments, choking with wrath.

"Take the freight train out, and see if I care," he spluttered, and stalked from the room.

Campbell turned and leaned over Racey threateningly.

"I'm going to take that freight train to Junction City quicker than any freight train has ever gone there since this plug of a road was built," he growled, "and if you lay me out any, there'll be a man short and a job over in this office when I get back."

He turned, stamped to the door and down the stairs.

Campbell cornered the call-boy in the baggage-room.

"They want you to call a crew, quick!" he said. "I'm going to take the train out, and if you get the rest of 'em around here within half an hour, I'll buy you enough cigarettes to kill you in a month."

Campbell strode down into the yard, where the switch-crew was slowly making up the train. He knew better than to try to order these men about, so he swallowed his impatience and called to them cheerily:

"'Get a move on you, fellows, and there'll be a keg of something cold in Mother Monohan's woodshed some of these nights with my card over the stopper."

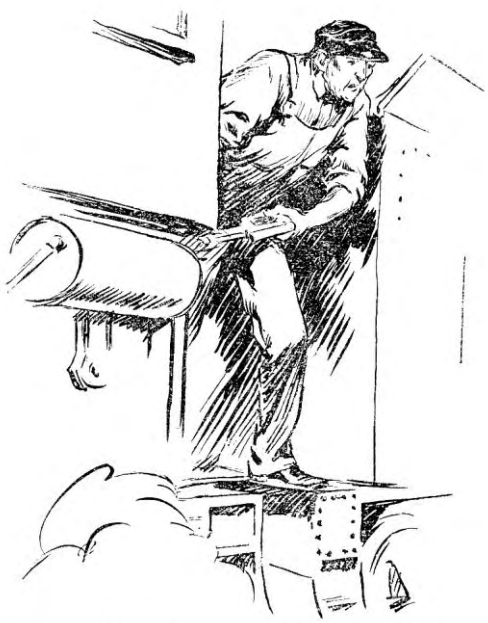
The switchmen winked at the engineer and grinned. But the engine suddenly took on new life.

Campbell disappeared inside the roundhouse, where he found some lazy hostlers trying languidly to make steam in one of the big freight-engines.

"Oh, the dickens!" he groaned, as he viewed the big boiler set on little wheels, looking so top-heavy that it might fall over at any moment. "I forgot I'd have to take a 'leven-hundred engine on a freight-train," he muttered.

He climbed into the cab, and, snatching the shovel from the perspiring hostler, pushed him to one side, and cried:

"Get out of here, you farmer!"



ONLY TO SPRING TO HIS FEET AGAIN—

The hostler slid from the cab and collapsed in a surprised heap on a pile of hot ashes, only to spring to his feet again with a muttered curse as he sat down in a tub of water to put out the fire that was eating holes in his overalls.

The conductor came out of the freight office with a handful of bills, and began checking off the car numbers on his train-book as he walked slowly down the long train.

Campbell backed the big engine down onto the string of cars, and a brakeman made the coupling and connected the air.

Campbell slid from the cab and looked over his engine in feverish haste. Then, seeing the conductor sauntering lazily down the length of the train, he rushed at him with an angry roar.

—WITH A MUTTERED CURSE, AS HE SAT DOWN IN A TUB OF WATER TO PUT OUT THE FIRE.

"Do you think you've got a week to make this trip?" he cried. "Didn't you know I was in a hurry?"

The conductor looked up into the excited face of the big engineer with languid eyes, and then continued checking off the car numbers without saying a word. But he increased his speed perceptibly, for he knew that to anger Campbell further would mean almost certain destruction.

When they had reached the end of the train, the conductor closed his book, with the way-bills folded carefully inside, and remarked carelessly:

"Better get the orders, hadn't we?"

They crossed the yards and climbed the stairs to the despatcher's office. Racey tore off the tissue orders and handed a copy to each. The two took the orders with all due reverence, and the conductor read them over aloud.

"Now, Campbell," said Racey coolly, "I don't want you tearing up the track with any of your phenomenal runs. We've got one eleven-hundred engine in the ditch now, and it will take two derricks to get her out."

"Who are you?" snapped Campbell. "I don't see your name on the time-card. Anyway, how do you expect me to get to Junction City with that drag? You've put three hundred tons more on that train than the rating calls for."

"Oh," jeered Racey, "did you think this was a pleasure trip? Well, it's not; so you run along like a good fellow!"

It looked for a few moments as though Campbell was going to do personal harm to the despatcher, but at last he turned, and, muttering something under his breath, stamped heavily from the room, across the yards, and into the cab.

He tested the air, whistled "out-of-town" and, as the conductor gave a languid signal, he started the train with a vicious jerk that made the little caboose at the rear end bounce and bob like a rubber ball.

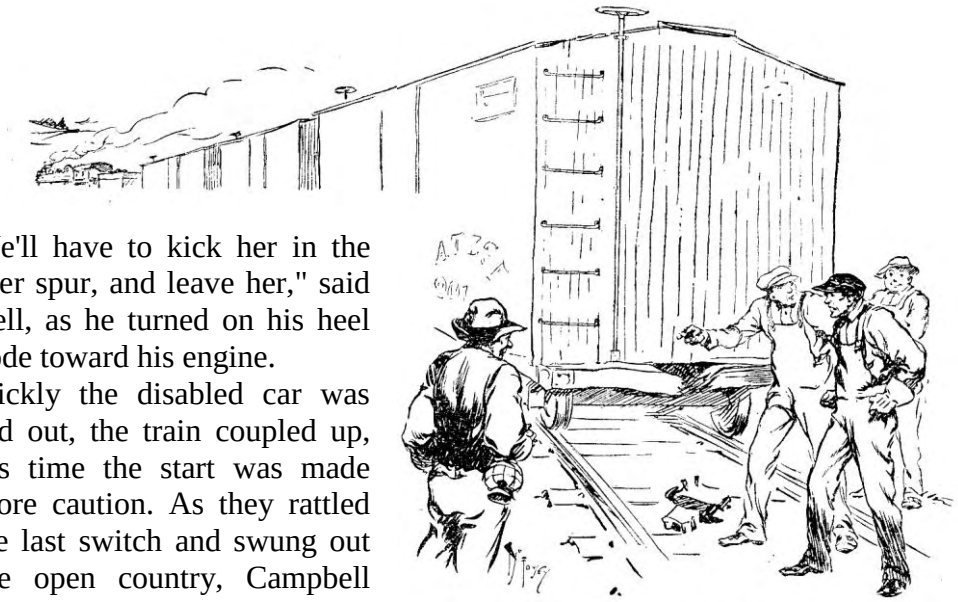
Campbell glanced back over the long train with a feeling of exaltation, then suddenly shut off the steam with a curse and a yell as the air-brakes clamped the wheels. In starting

he had pulled out a coupling, and the train had parted.

He jumped to the ground and rushed back to see what had happened. There on the ground lay the draw-bar, and a big hole in the car showed that the car could not be taken along.

The conductor came forward and glared malevolently at Campbell.

"Now, you see what you've done, you hoghead!" he cried angrily.



"NOW, YOU SEE WHAT YOU'VE DONE, YOU HOGHEAD!"

"We'll have to kick her in the bad-order spur, and leave her," said Campbell, as he turned on his heel and strode toward his engine.

Quickly the disabled car was switched out, the train coupled up, and this time the start was made with more caution. As they rattled over the last switch and swung out into the open country, Campbell glanced at his watch.

"Accident number one," he muttered; "and it's one-forty-five. We'll have to ramble some if we get there in time. Anyhow, that car makes us lighter. Budd," he called to the fireman, "this is my wedding march, and I'm going to make it a record-breaker!"

The engine rocked and reeled as the train gathered speed. The fireman's eyes opened wider and wider as the speed increased. At the end of the first few miles they were sticking far out of his head. When he could stand it no longer, he slid carefully from his seat and made his way over to the engineer's side. He clutched Campbell by the sleeve and shouted hoarsely in his ear:

"For Heaven's sake, man, don't you know this is a 'leven-hundred engine, and that it will fall over on you if you don't slow down?"

Campbell drew in his head, gave the fireman one withering look, choked a little with anger, and then thrust his head out of the window without saying a word.

The fireman, still muttering to himself, slid down into the gangway. Bracing himself, he took up a shovelful of coal, swung open the fire-box door, and threw the coal at the blazing furnace with all his might. But just as he threw it, the door seemed to dodge to one side, and the coal went high over the boilerhead, deluging the engineer.

Campbell took his eyes off of the track long enough to give the astonished fireman another withering look, then thrust his head out of the window again.

Overcome with surprise, the fireman sank down upon the coal, and gaped at the open furnace door. At last he arose, took up another shovelful of coal, and braced himself for another try. He was not to be fooled again, so he waited until he was sure of his mark, then heaved the coal at the fire-box with all his might.

But this time he more than half expected to see the door dodge him again. When it did not, he was taken by surprise, and let the shovel go in the furnace with the coal.

Not sure just what had happened, he stood for some time gazing at his empty hands vacantly, then at the roaring fire. When he did comprehend the dread truth, most of his shovel had by that time gone curling out of the smoke-stack.

Again he clutched at the engineer's sleeve, and this time his face was white with horror.

"I've thrown the shovel into the firebox!" he shouted in Campbell's ear.

Campbell turned, and this time there was the ghost of a grim smile curling his lips as mechanically he reached for his watch.

"Accident number two," he said, and his eyes focused on the track ahead. "And the wedding march has just started. Let the band play on!"

The fireman stumbled back into the gangway with white, scared face. There was but one thing to do now, and he set to work at once throwing coal into the fire-box with his hands. There was not another shovel on the train that he knew of, and he had no chance to get one until they reached the first stop. It was a hard task, but there was no help for it.

The train rushed on at maddening speed, taking the hills with a rush and seeming to fall down on the other side.

A brakeman started forward over the top of the train. He gave up before he had crossed the first car, and crawled back. The little caboose seemed to be trying to do four or five things at once, but it was a safer place than on top of the box cars.

NOT SURE JUST WHAT HAD HAPPENED, HE STOOD FOR SOME TIME GAZING AT HIS EMPTY HANDS VACANTLY, THEN AT THE ROARING FIRE.

Every few minutes the white-faced conductor swore that they were off the track, but the speed increased rather than slackened.

"I'll pay him up for this when we get to Little Grade," muttered the conductor once when the caboose stayed in the air longer than usual.

The fireman still toiled at throwing coal into the furnace, but he had to keep the door open so much of the time that it was doubly hard to keep up steam.

But the engineer opened the throttle wider.

The blind sidings and the telegraph-offices flew by in quick succession, and at all points there was a clear signal.

They were out of the hills now, and the desert was before them, where the track was straight and level. There were no trains to meet, as none had cleared the wreck.

The speed seemed to increase. The miles were reeled off in quick succession. The fireman became almost frantic with the heat and his cramped position. But Campbell sat immovable on his seat, his eyes ever on the track ahead. Mercilessly he kept the throttle open wide.

The afternoon shadows were beginning to lengthen when at length they pulled into Little Grade, and half of the journey was behind them. Here they would take on coal and

water and get their new orders to proceed.

Campbell brought the engine to a standstill at the coal-chute with a master hand. The fireman climbed wearily to the top of the tender and let down the door of one of the chutes. There was a rush of coal, but it only half-filled the tender.

"What's the matter with you dagos up there?" called the fireman with some heat. "Why haven't you got this chute full of coal?"

"Gotta no coal up here," came the answer. "No eng' to putta it up."

Campbell moved the engine up to the next chute, and this time the coal deluged the tender and cab.

The fireman climbed into the chute, picked up a shovel, and threw it onto the tender. The Italian boss looked wickedly at him as he climbed back into the cab, but the fireman cared little so long as he had the prized shovel.

"I'll go back and get the orders," said Campbell as he jumped to the ground.

Half-way to the depot he spied the trainmen entering the lunch-counter of the company hotel.

"Hey, there, you hay-pitchers!" he called after them angrily. "Where do you think you are going? We're only two hours and a half out of a division-point. Why didn't you eat before you started?"

"We didn't have time," the conductor answered. "We were called on short notice, you know."

Campbell ground his teeth, and strode angrily into the telegraph-office, to meet with another shock. "You fellows will have to put up coal," the operator said blandly.

In one bound Campbell cleared the counter that separated him from the office, and he gripped the operator by the shoulder.

CAMPBELL CLEARED THE COUNTER THAT SEPARATED HIM FROM THE OFFICE.

"Who says to put up coal?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Why — why, the despatcher," said the operator, wriggling with pain. "Yours is the first engine in here since the coal ran low, and there'll be a big delay to the already delayed trains if they come down here in a bunch from the wreck and find there's no coal."

"Tell him," bellowed Campbell. "that we have a 'leven-hundred engine, and can't go onto the chute."

"He says," grimaced the operator. "that you can leave enough cars between the engine and the cars you put up to keep the engine off of the chute."

Campbell hesitated for a moment then turned on his heel, vaulted the counter, and ran down the track to his engine.

The engine watchman had by this time cleaned the ash-pan of the engine, and was seated in the cab listening to the excited fireman's account of their record-breaking run.

Campbell choked down his wrath, and when he addressed these two his voice was as low and as sweet as he could make it.

"Boys," he began, "there's got to be some coal put up, and the train-crew has gone to eat." His voice faltered a little here, but he went on bravely. "We three can put it up, if you fellows will act as my brakemen; and, if you will, I'll give you four bits apiece."

The fireman and the engine watchman gaped in astonishment at the liberal offer, and eagerly accepted. They clambered back over the train, cut off six cars back of the engine, and Campbell ran down to the coal-spur, where his acting brakemen, coupled on five cars of coal.

They backed up the chute, coupled on the five empty cars that were on the incline, and shoved them in on a siding. Again, they backed up to the chute, this time with greater speed, and the cars of coal mounted the incline to the shed.

Campbell was hot with anger because the trainmen had taken advantage of him, and he did not observe his usual caution while putting up the coal. The cars mounted more swiftly than he supposed, and the last one was just entering the shed before he slackened speed.

Then his two brakemen came racing out of the shed over the cars, waving frantically for him to stop. He applied the air, but his helpers had neglected to connect it, and, before he could stop, two cars of coal plunged over the other end of the chute and flattened out on the ground thirty feet below.

The Italian coal-heavers tumbled out of the shed and scattered in every direction.

A grim smile showed plainly on Campbell's face as he released the engine and shot down to the level track.

The fireman opened the switch, and Campbell backed down to the train. He plucked out his watch and studied it intently.

"Four-thirty," he muttered," and delay number three. The worst half of the wedding march is yet to come!"

In motion once more! The last half of the journey! This time the fireman had the shovel tied to his wrist, for he was determined not to be tricked into losing it again.

There were a few miles of level track before they came into the mountains, and they took them with a rush. By the time they struck the heavy grades the flues were leaking badly, and the steam-gage showed a gradual lessening of pressure. At last Campbell drew the throttle wide open, and turned to the fireman savagely.

"Can't you keep her hot?" he roared.

"You're working her too hard," complained the fireman. "The flues are leaking."

Campbell slid down from his seat and peered into the fire-box. Water was dripping down onto the fire in many places.

"Great Scott!" growled the engineer. "I wish I had some bran."

"I think," said the fireman, "that the car next to the head one is loaded with bran. I saw the advertisement on the side of the car; but you can't get it, going at this rate."

Campbell gripped the fireman by the arm until he wriggled.

"Get up there on my seat," he ordered, "and run her till I come back. Don't you dare slow down, unless it's around a curve!"

He turned and climbed swiftly over the coal, wabbled across the first car, and disappeared between it and the next.

The fireman shuddered, then turned his eyes resolutely to the track ahead.

Campbell slid part way down the brake-rod between the rocking, swaying cars, and balanced himself on the only step within reach. The end door of the car was sealed with a tin seal and cleated at the end.

He gripped the seal and tore it loose with one jerk. Then, half braced, half balanced, he kicked straight down at the cleat with all his might.

He knew that to miss it once would probably overbalance him and send him down to certain death; so each kick was well aimed. Four times he struck straight down with all his might before the cleat gave way and dropped to the track beneath.

He stopped to breathe a moment; then, leaning far down, holding only by one hand, he seized the catch of the door and pulled it open.

Just as he did so, the cars swayed apart in opposite directions and wrenched loose his hold. He balanced dizzily on the step a moment, then swung downward. A sickening feeling tore at his vitals; but, with a catlike turn, he managed to light feet foremost on the bumpers, where he clung for some time to regain his lost breath and quiet his nerves.

Sacks of bran filled the open car door, and he ripped one open with his knife. A stream of bran followed; and, taking off his jacket, he made a bag of it. Holding it under the stream of bran until it was full, he bound it tightly with the sleeves.

Three feet below, death nipped at his heels — but he was not thinking of that. He was growing a little vague as to why he was running all these risks to make time, but his determination was still the same.

Closing the car door, and taking the bran in his teeth, he swung out to the side of the car, and climbed to the top. He wabbled across the length of it again, over the coal, and into the cab.

Soon he was pouring bran into the boiler. This stopped the leaking somewhat, and the needle on the steam-gage began to climb round to its accustomed place.

But now they were nearing the scene of the wreck, and were compelled to take the siding to wait until the liberated trains passed.

There was an agonizing delay of twenty minutes before the first train came in sight, and Campbell put in the time pacing up and down the track, muttering ineffectual curses at the waste of time.

Then there was another wait of fifteen minutes before all the trains were clear, and by that time Campbell was nearly mad with impatience.

He rushed out of the siding at great speed when he was liberated, and came very near leaving behind the brakeman who closed the switch.

Out in the open again, Campbell's loud-mouthed impatience gave way to silent, grim determination.

By this time the train-crew was getting a little used to fast running. Campbell's reckless pace did not frighten them so much as before.

He slackened speed not at all now, swinging around curves at a rate that took away the breath, while the downgrades seemed naught but a straight, dizzy drop.

Only when they came to the scene of the wreck did he slacken speed at all, and even here he exceeded the speed limit to such an extent that the section men standing near the track moved away to a safe distance as the cars swung by.

Darkness settled down at six o'clock. There was no moon. The headlight, which the fireman had lighted while they were at Little Grade, was burning badly, and threatened to go out entirely.

But there was no stopping to repair it.

One of the brakemen, who had taken one drink too many at Little Grade, now climbed out of the caboose and over the top of the train to a seat on a brake-wheel, his lantern proclaiming his presence.

Campbell did not see this man for some time — not until they had passed the last telegraph-office before entering Junction City. Happening to glance back, he saw the lantern suddenly shoot high in the air, drop to one side of the track, and go out.

At about the same instant there was a jar of tightening air-brakes, and the engineer was thrown through the cab window. He turned over two or three times in his flight through the air, and lit on the loose soil at the side of the track.

He lay quiet for a few moments, partly stunned, then sat up and looked about wonderingly. He saw the engine a few rods ahead of him, standing quite still. Farther along he could dimly see a break in the train, and a dark mass at the side of the right of way, which he thought must be derailed cars.

Painfully he got to his seat and hobbled toward the rear of the train. He did not seem badly hurt — merely scratched and bruised and stunned. He remembered having such a tight grip on the window it was closed before his hand was wrenched loose.

Lights appeared toward the end of the train as some of the trainmen came running forward. Campbell hobbled toward them, but was stopped by the overturned box cars. There appeared to be quite a number of them, and he sat down on the trucks of one, swearing fluently at the darkness and wondering where the fireman was.

He had forgotten the brakeman whose lantern he had seen go over with the wrecked box cars, but he remembered him now as he heard a groan from somewhere out in the darkness to the left.

The conductor and one brakeman came in sight and flashed their lanterns on the wreck. At sight of Campbell, both began to swear softly in awed tones, as though looking on a ghost.

"How did you get here?" asked the conductor at length.

"I fell out," confessed Campbell. "How many cars are off the track?"

"About five or six," answered the conductor. "Where's my head brakeman?"

Another groan from the darkness answered his question, and all started in the direction of the sound. They came upon the brakeman stretched out on his back in the sand. He sat up and blinked at the light as the men came up.

"Give me just one more drink," he begged, looking around in a puzzled sort of way. "What's happened?" he asked, after a pause. "Am I drunk, or dreaming? Or am I dead?"

"You've just had your toes over the ragged edge," said the conductor. "This rapid-fire-gun of an engineer has put us in the ditch and near killed us all. How do you feel?"

The brakeman felt his left shoulder tenderly.

"My wing's broke," he declared, and scrambled to his feet.

They walked around the wreck, counting the derailed cars.

"I count five off the track," said the conductor, as they completed the circle. "Three cars more, and the caboose would have gone," he added.

On the track they found the fireman, white-faced and very nervous, looking over the torn-up track by the light of a torch.

"Five rail lengths of track torn up," he announced as the others came up. "Is that you, Campbell?" he asked. "I thought you'd quit the job, by the way you left the cab."

"Well, this means trouble for some one," said the conductor, looking hard at Campbell.

The big engineer straightened.

"I'm going to take what's left of this train to Junction City now," he declared. "There's no telegraph-office between here and the Junction, so I'll run along in and head the wrecker out to you. Better put out your lights right away," he cautioned as he hobbled toward his engine, followed by the fireman.

"If you're not careful, this wedding march will be turned into a funeral procession," warned the fireman as they climbed into the cab.

But Campbell only gritted his teeth and opened the throttle.

The fireman plucked at his sleeve as the engine started.

"You'll have to hurry, or we won't make it," he called. "The flues are leaking again."

"Oh, we'll hurry, all right!"

As the engine forged ahead, Campbell glanced at his watch.

"Seven-twenty," he announced. "I'll have to hurry this wedding march along a bit, or it'll be late. This is accident number four. I wonder will there be any more?"

Slowly the remnant of "Extra, 1127" pulled into Junction City and came to a stop before the yard office. The engine was leaking badly again, making a puddle of water beneath her as she came to a standstill. The needle of the steam-gage showed there was but little steam, and this was fast decreasing.

Campbell climbed stiffly from the cab and made his way toward the open door of the yard office, where McDonald, master mechanic, and father of Nellie, stood looking critically at the engine.

Campbell was begrimed with coal dust; his face was streaked with blood, and over all there was a liberal coat of bran.

"You've played the dickens with that engine!" growled McDonald, as Campbell came up. "Look at her!" he cried. "She's leaking so fast she'll be dead before we can get her into the shops."

"Shut up!" snapped Campbell in a choked voice. "Call the wrecker," he ordered, "and get 'em out right away. I put five cars of merchandise into the ditch at Mile-Post 438. Where's Nellie?" he asked.

"Why — why, is that you, Campbell?" gasped McDonald. "I thought you were tied up in Farnham."

"Where's Nellie?" repeated Campbell doggedly.

"Nellie? Why, she — why, you wired that you couldn't get out of Farnham, and I think Nellie announced to her friends that the wedding was postponed for a little time. I think she went to the theater with Willis Garvin this evening. Why didn't you wire us when you started?" he asked in great excitement.

"I forgot," said Campbell weakly, as he sank upon the step.

Mechanically his hand sought his watch-pocket.

"Seven-fifty-seven," he murmured. "This is accident number five."

Suddenly he got to his feet.

"After you've called the wrecker," he said in low, decided tones, "you just hike home as quick as those legs of yours will carry you, and get ready for the wedding. Take the parson with you as you go by.

"I'm going down to the theater and get Nellie, if I have to storm the place. I'm also going to marry her to-night, or turn this town upside down. Now, hurry!" he added, and strode off toward the lights of Main Street with a step which had suddenly lost its limp.

McDonald gazed after his future son-in-law for a few moments in silence.

"Well," he muttered at length, "he's the limit." **Ω**

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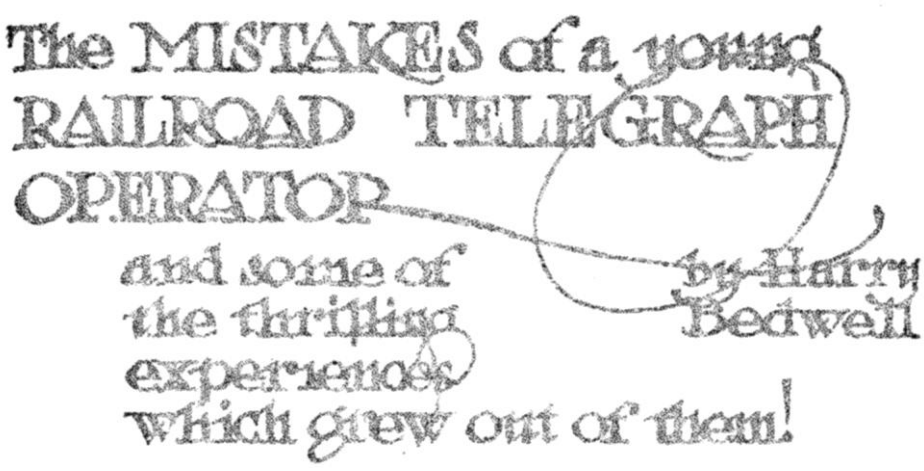


Part I.

The railroads for which the author worked as a telegraph operator are all located west of the Mississippi River. The experience, which covered three years, was recent, having terminated within two years. — The Editor.

THE real reason, I think, for my taking up the study of telegraphy and railroad book-keeping was that I was just a little lazy. In my ignorance I thought that if I could once learn the trade, and get a position, all my troubles would be at an end. Poor, misguided young heart! I was then not quite eighteen years old.

It was nearing the end of a term of high school, examinations loomed up big and black in the near future, and a little farther along, graduation. So I quietly stepped out of a side door and entered the depot of the only railroad that ran into our small town, and began to learn to railroad.

My first responsible position as agent and operator was very nearly forced upon me. The traveling auditor came to the station at which I was learning, to make a transfer of agents, and before he left he asked me if I did not think I could hold down the station. I answered doubtfully that I did not think I could. To which he laughed softly, and said that he thought that I ought to hold a small station.

A short time after this I received a telegram from the chief despatcher ordering me to go to a small station on one of the branches, and begin work as agent. He also sent me a wire pass, and said that the auditor would meet me at the station and make the transfer. As there was no examination to pass which would show what kind of an operator I was, I decided to take the job.

I arrived at the station all right, the transfer was made, and, after giving me some fatherly advice, the auditor left me alone with my first station. Of course I felt rather proud of myself, but for a time I also felt very homesick.

For a time I got along all right as there was little work to be done, but I lived in great fear of the despatcher. For this particular despatcher could, when he chose, send a lot of words in a minute, and it was his delight to frighten "hams," as he called students and young

operators. Every time my call sounded on the wire I began to tremble, and if it were the despatcher, I generally had to go outside and walk around the station to quiet my nerves sufficiently to manipulate the key.

Guessing at a Train Despatcher's Orders

Things moved along this way for perhaps a month; and then came the dreaded day. The engine of a passenger train broke down within a short distance of my station, and I was compelled to copy some train orders. And such copies as I made! No one could have read them as I copied them from the wire. Half was omitted. I had to guess at much of what was sent me when I repeated the order to the despatcher, and then I re-copied the order before delivering it to the trainmen. In the state of nerves into which I was thrown by this sudden rush of work, I was apt to leave out a part of the order when I re-copied it, or in guessing at what was left out, guess wrongly.

Think of it: leaving out a part of an order to a passenger train governing its movements against other trains! But the company was short of men, and almost any kind of an operator would do. This was a road which paid its operators and agents poor wages, and as a consequence all good men avoided it.

Surely the god of all fools watched over me with unusual care, for most of my mistakes were trivial ones and caused no accidents. But my troubles were like those of many other young operators when starting to work. The wonder of it is there are so few wrecks caused in this way. There are many narrowly avoided ones, however, of which the public never hears, and sometimes the officials themselves do not learn of them.

There was so little work to do at this small station that I improved not at all in telegraphy; and when I was ordered to another place to take the position of day operator I was hardly equal to the job.

This new position was at a place I shall call Noel. There were two other men working in this office besides myself: the agent and his assistant. I was supposed to be just the operator, but in reality I was a kind of an assistant to both the other men. I did what work they could not find time to do, and the rest of the time I could devote to getting the trains by the station with as little delay as possible.

I still had to re-copy the train orders after I received them, and this kept me very busy at times; for the despatcher sometimes sent three or four orders, one after the other. These I would string out on a piece of "clip," omitting some parts when the despatcher got too fast for me, and filling in when I copied them on the manifold.

As before, my good luck was with me for I made but few mistakes, and these caused no accidents. But still, there is no credit due me for this, for I was very careless, and recopying orders is a very dangerous practice among young operators. Think if I should have written the name of the wrong station in the order! And this is very easily done.

Young, Careless and Forgetful

Two branches ran into this station from the north, but for two miles to the south there was but a single track over which the trains of both branches ran. At the end of these two miles of track the branches again separated, this time at a little junction where there was nothing but a little shack in which was kept a register and a telephone. The telephone was connected with the station at Noel.

All trains were supposed to stop and register at this junction as the trains on either branch were despatched from separate offices, and neither branch knew what the trains on the other branch were doing. On arrival at the junction, north-bound trains would call me up on the telephone, if they needed orders or instructions; and if the conductor were in doubt as to extras, or trains that were not registered correctly, he got his information from me. I was supposed to ask the despatcher if I were in doubt; but this took time, and the trainmen generally preferred to take the risk. Thus, I had a great deal of control over this little stretch of track.

But sometimes when a train was in a hurry they neglected the formality of registering. They knew that the operator should keep rather a close watch upon them, and if a train at the junction were in doubt, they could get protection from me.

A good operator could easily have protected these trains, but I was very young, very careless, and often forgot. Sometimes a conductor at the junction needing time on an overdue train on the other branch, would call me up, and ask me to hold the other train until the one at the junction arrived at my station. Twice during my stay here I let a south-bound train by me after I had promised to hold them for a train coming from the junction. But no collision resulted, as both times this happened the incoming train was sighted by the out-going train just as the last-named was leaving the yards and was not going at a fast rate of speed. Either time, if the outgoing train had started a few minutes sooner, the two trains would have met on a crooked piece of track which ran through a dense wood.

It was a close call both times, and it was due merely to a little carelessness on my part — carelessness and inexperience. But I wonder why the railroads are permitted to employ such inexperienced and careless men? Of course they did not know that I was such a one, but that was because they did not take the trouble to put me through an examination. Neither did they know of these mistakes of mine, for the trainmen, after roundly cursing me, let the matter drop. You see, what the officials did not know did not bother them much.

"Getting Into a Tight Box"

The agent at this place was a middle-aged man, old in the service of the company. He seldom came down to the depot on Sunday, and on that day his assistant, Hills, and I ran things very much as we pleased. On Sunday we had but two passenger trains to meet, and these came near the middle of the day. The rest of the day Hills and I were free to do as we pleased. One Sunday evening we were loafing around the depot with nothing to do, when Hills suggested that we run down to the next town, a distance of about six or eight miles, and see what was going on.

There was a hand-car, we knew, down in the yards with the wheels chained together, and locked with a switch-lock. But, as both of us had a switch-key, there would be no difficulty in getting the car. Hills claimed the acquaintance of a young lady or two in the next town, so we decided to go down and look them up. After a little delay, Hills got one of the young ladies on the ‘phone, and made an appointment.

We found the hand-car easily enough, and with some difficulty got it onto the track. Then began the up and down hill ride to the next town. It was hard work climbing those two hills, and we were not what you would call in trim condition.

It must have been over an hour before we sighted the switch-lights of our destination, and stopped to open a switch. As we pumped slowly down through the yards, we saw the headlight of an engine which was drawn up before the depot. Under the headlight were two

We lay flat on the floor of the car, and hung on with all our might. Above us the handles swished up and down viciously. Our feet hung over the rear edge of the car, and our faces were within a few inches of each other at the front end

small, white lights which marked the train as an extra.

When we had the hand-car off the track, we crossed over before the engine, and walked down the station platform on our way up town. We came to a stop beside the lighted office window, and glanced in.

Inside the office were the trainmen of the extra; the operator sat at his table repeating an order. I could hear distinctly the click of the sounder. When the order was completed, the despatcher addressed a message to the conductor of the extra, ordering him to pick up five loads of time freight at Noel!

When I heard this, little shivers began to run up and down my back, for I remembered well enough those five cars of freight that this train was to pick up, and I also remembered that I had not left the register and way-bills outside. I knew that if the conductor found no bills in the box he would not take the loads; and when the chief despatcher learned of this he would probably tell me that he did not need me any more. How to get back to Noel with the hand-car before the extra got there, was the question.

A Wild Ride On a Hand-Car

I explained to Hills, and we drew away from the depot discussing the question, the young ladies forgotten in the more urgent question of getting back home and saving my job.

"The only thing to do," said Hills with decision, "is to hitch the hand-car onto this freight train."

I had doubts, but there seemed no other way out of it, and so it was decided. We rushed down into the yards, as anxious to get out of town as we had been to get in. We got the car onto the side track, ran down to the main line switch, and then pumped back up to the rear end of the extra.

We had brought the chain with us that locked the car wheels together, and we began the task of attaching ourselves securely to the extra's caboose. We managed somehow to fasten the chain to the drawhead, and then to the car. I remember we had to lock the chain to the car with the switch-lock to make it secure.

We did not have to wait long after that until the train started. The first jerk of starting lifted our light car clear of the track, and sent it bouncing along after the caboose. Then for the first time we began to have grave doubts as to the safety of our position. We peered at each other through the darkness. Then Hills said, "We had better sit down, I think." I thought so, too, and we crouched down on the floor of the small car, out of the way of the rising and falling handles.

As we passed the depot, two trainmen swung aboard the caboose, but they went directly into the caboose without seeing us. In our haste we had forgotten to reckon what the trainmen would do if they discovered us, and now we had other dangers to think of.

"I wish we had disconnected the handles from the gear," Hills complained above the noise of the moving train.

"I wish we hadn't started at all," my plaint arose into the darkness as the train gathered speed, and the handles, close to our heads, began to pump up and down with dangerous swiftness.

"And those girls," Hills cried. "What will they think of us? I wish you could remember to leave that register out!"

I felt aggrieved, but said nothing because I could think of nothing to say just then.

"Anyway," Hills called with more cheerfulness after a pause," anyway, it won't take us so long to get back home."

It was up grade for a little way out of town, and then came the down grade. It was bad enough when the long train was mounting the grade, but when the cars began to file over the top of the hill, and the speed increased, it looked worse still. At last, when the whole train was on the down grade we began to see the foolishness of our act. Our little car jumped and bucked like a thing of life, and threatened to leave the track at any moment. Indeed, I thought that the car was off the track at least half of the time. And I do not understand to this day how it stayed near the track at all.

We lay flat on the floor of the car, and hung on with all our might. Above us the handles swished up and down viciously, and a harsh, rasping sound came up from beneath that was very hard on the nerves. Our feet hung over the rear edge of the car, and our faces were within a few inches of each other at the front end. There were but few places to hold on to the car, and little room for our bodies anywhere.

"I'm going to try to unlock the chain from this car," cried Hills in my ear.

"No you won't," I yelled in a panic. "You'll break your neck if you do."

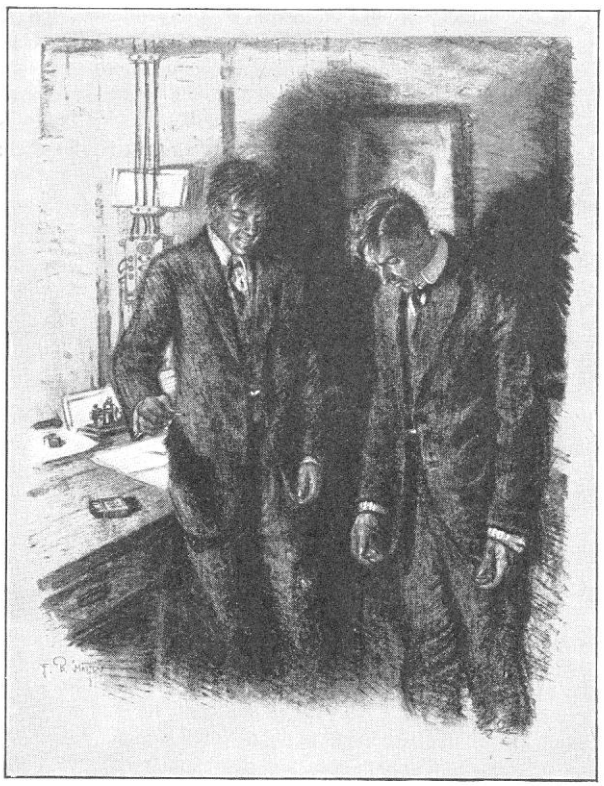
Hills must have come to the same conclusion, for he did not try to free us from the caboose.

I do not know how we managed to hold on to that lurching, bouncing car, but we did somehow. I was badly scared. In fact, I think we were both badly scared; and I think we had

good reason to be, for at any moment the car was due to turn turtle, and there was no telling where we should land, or how. I remember that I put my arm over the top of my head, even as I clung fearfully to that car, hoping thus to protect my skull if I alighted on it.

Then the engine began to climb the next little rise, and the speed slackened. I began to breathe a little easier, and to hope for the best, when suddenly there was a grinding, rending crash that sounded like the crack of doom. The car careened violently, and seemed about to fall to pieces.

My wits left me for a few seconds, and I seemed to be floating in air. I waited with caught breath to come down, but finally. I came to the realization that I was still on the car, and that the car was still bumping along on the track. I peeked out from under my arm, and saw the dark shape of Hill's head and shoulders.



We were both begrimed with dust and ashes, and looked more like tramps than the swains dressed in Sunday best of a few short hours before

"What happened?" I gasped when I had collected some of my wits.

I was somehow afraid for Hills to answer me; and yet I waited anxiously for him to speak. I was trembling so that I could hardly keep my hold on the car, and, I hate to confess it, I think that I must have thought I, myself, was out of my head, or even worse.

"I think," called Hills at last, with something like a choke in his voice, "that we must have run into the caboose and broken the handles off of our car."

I noticed then that the vicious swish, swish above my head had ceased. Hills was right. When the train slowed down on the grade our car ran faster than the train, and we had bumped into the rear end of the caboose. The handles had probably struck the drawhead, and something had broken.

The car ran more smoothly now with the handles disconnected from the gear, and as we hummed along up the grade, I had time to collect most of my wits, and prepare for the next descent.

Then Hills thrust his face close to mine, and said:

"We had better watch out when we come to the bottom of the next hill, and try to keep the car from running into the caboose."

I saw the logic of this at once. With the handles gone we would run under the caboose at the bottom of the next grade, and collide with the rear wheels, which meant derailment and probably death.

At last the speed began to increase, and we knew that the engine had topped the hill. Then the whole train slid over, and we swept down the lone descent, our little car dancing and humming along behind; but hardly so much as it had before. But we whipped around some very sharp curves that nearly took our breath away and we were glad indeed when the

slackening speed proclaimed the last grade into town was reached.

Our car began to gain on the caboose, and at last we were compelled to put out a hand, and brace against the drawhead to keep from running under the caboose. It was a little dangerous and wearisome, this, and we were nearly exhausted when we came at last onto the incline.

At last we passed the little shack in the woods which marked the junction of the two branches, and we knew that we were only two miles from home! Oh, what a relief! I began to rest a little easier, and we began to plan what we should do when we got into the yards.

We did not stop to register at the junction that night, and were rather glad that the conductor omitted this formality.

Soon we came to familiar landmarks, and, as we approached the first switch, we hauled the hand-car up to the caboose and cut ourselves free from the train. Then we stopped the car, and with much exertion dumped it off the track down the bank and out of the way.

We were shivering with the cold and fright as we ran up the track after the slowly retreating tail-lights of the caboose. The swift ride in the open through the cool night had chilled us to the bone.

We caught up with the caboose, and swung aboard. Then when it had nearly stopped, we dropped to the ground and ran ahead, reaching the depot before the conductor got off of the caboose. We got the register and the way-bills out into the bill-box and slipped back into the depot before any of the trainmen came up, and we waited in the office until they had switched the five cars into the train, and departed. Then we lit a lamp.

We looked at each other for a few moments in silence; for we were both begrimed with dust and ashes, and looked more like tramps than the swains dressed in Sunday best of a few short hours before.

"Why, where is your hat?" I managed to articulate at last.

Hills clapped his hand to his head, then looked at me ruefully. Then he grinned.

"Where is your own?" he said in return.

I clapped my hands to my head, then drew them away abruptly, for there was a very large lump on the back or my head.

But we had saved our jobs, and escaped with our lives, and that was solace enough.

An Engineer Breaks a Rule

I stayed at Noel about two months, and was then transferred to another station. For a time, I was sent from place to place as relief agent, which is not very desirable work. Then, one day, I brought up on the main line with a suddenness that was startling. My career hitherto seemed as peaceful as a parson's compared with what my first few weeks on the main line were.

First of all, I learned that I could not telegraph fast enough to keep warm; second, I learned that I had never seen real trains before. Why, it seemed to me that the trains moved by in herds and droves, and it kept me going all the time to keep the trains moving.

Then there was the block system. It seemed that that system was the most intricate thing that was ever invented, for I never could work it just right. Now, of course, it seems more simple, but then I nearly gave it up in despair. Generally I pulled the wrong lever and stopped a train when I had intended to give it a clear signal. I still had to re-copy the orders, and I soon saw that if I intended to become a railroad man, I had better learn the trade.

One evening when I came on duty, I filled and cleaned the semaphore lantern, and then

drew it up to its place at the top of the pole in front of the station. But on this particular night I did not draw the lantern high enough, and the light did not shine out brightly.

Soon after, a heavy passenger train came thundering through town at top speed. This particular train happened to be one of the crack overland trains, and any one who needlessly delayed it was liable to get his "head cut off." What was my horror, then, to see the flagman of this train coming into the office about five minutes after the train had passed. He asked for a clearance card, and I asked the reason.

He explained that my semaphore light was not shining brightly enough to be seen at any great distance, and the engineer had been unable to see in what position the signal was - whether "proceed" or "stop." But the train had been going so fast that he could not stop her until he was some distance out of town. The depot was set under the bluffs so that an approaching train could not see the semaphore until it was close in.

But the trainmen did not blame me for the delay when they reported it, and I did not "get my head cut off." For, you see, all trains were supposed to approach a station under full control so that they could stop at any moment. This train, however, had gone about half a mile out into the country before stopping.

One Omitted Word Nearly Causes a Wreck

Here I want to tell of an incident in the life of another young operator, like myself, who was working as night operator at the next station south of me. He told me the story himself. He had not worked so long as I had, and he, too, had to re-copy the orders after he had repeated them to the despatcher, and this was the cause of the trouble.

One evening shortly after he came on duty, this operator sat in the office talking to the section foreman. On the table lay some orders which he had copied but a few moments before. One of them was addressed to train Number Fifteen, and read:

"Number Twelve will run thirty minutes late, P. J. to S. J."

Numbers Twelve and Fifteen were passenger trains bound in opposite directions. Number Twelve was superior to Number Fifteen by right of direction, hence the despatcher was saving Number Fifteen from delay by ordering her ahead, and not requiring her to wait at their regular meeting point.

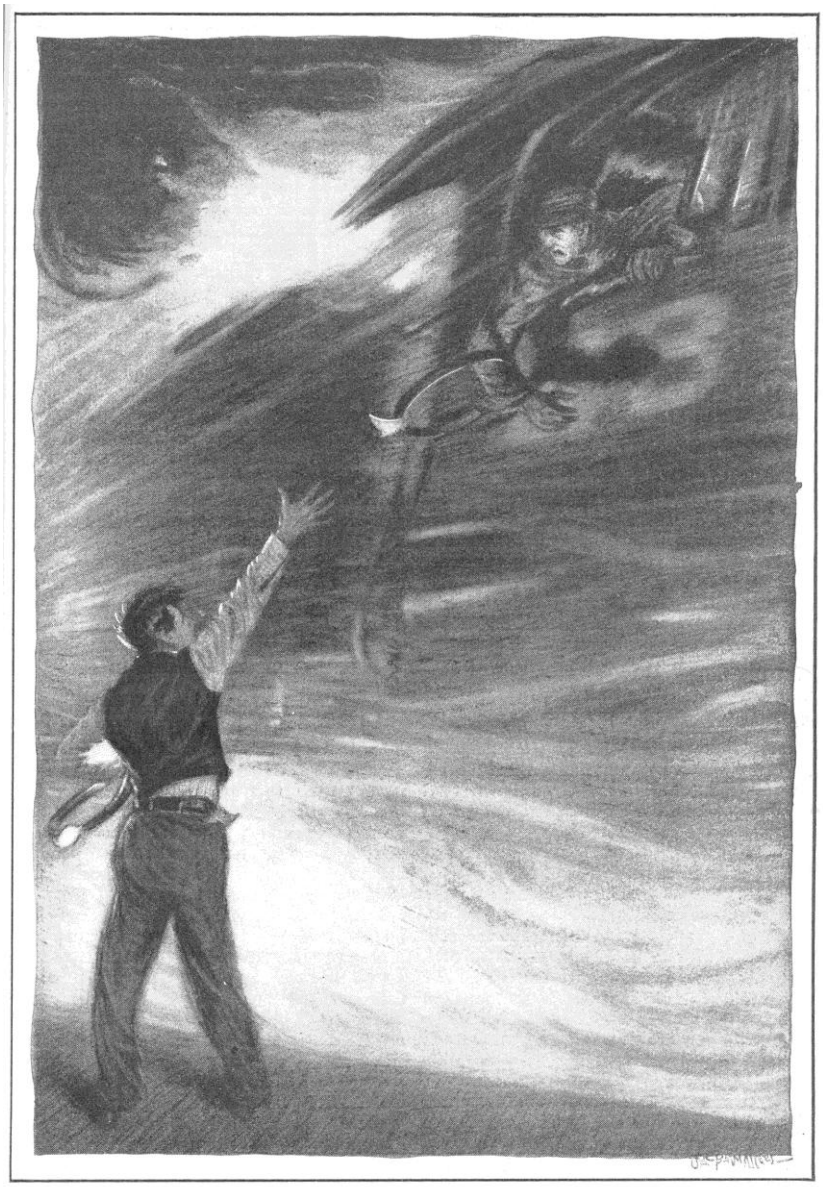
But the operator had re-copied this order, and in so doing had left out a word. The order should have read: "Second Number Twelve will run ... "

There were two sections of Number Twelve that night, and the first section was on time. But here was this operator going to give Number Fifteen thirty minutes on both sections of Number Twelve!

Soon there came the blast of a whistle proclaiming the approach of Number Fifteen. The operator sprang to his feet in a nervous hurry, and ran to the table. (The sudden blast of the whistle of an approaching train always made him nervous.) Number Fifteen was coming close, and he did not wish to stop them for the order.

He tore off two copies from the manifold, and scribbled out two copies of a clearance card. Wrapping an order and a clearance card together, he thrust them into a delivering hoop, and did the same with the other two copies. He should have had them ready before, but his talk with the section foreman had been very engrossing.

He ran out onto the platform in time to deliver the order to the conductor and the engineer without stopping the train. He watched the departing train-lights with quick-caught breath, but with no little satisfaction, for he had succeeded in delivering the order without



He ran out onto the platform in time to deliver the order to the conductor and the engineer without stopping the train

delay to the train.

Entering the office, he seated himself at the table, marked down the time that Number Fifteen went by, and began to straighten the carbons in the manifold from which he had torn the order. He tore off his own copy of the order, and was about to file it away when he heard a station up the line reporting First Number Twelve by. He glanced down at the order, and saw that he had omitted the one word second. But that one word was fatal if the first section was on time, and that station had just so reported it.

For a few seconds the operator sat there staring dumbly at the order. Then he seized the key and tried to call up the next station, which was where I was working, but he was so nervous that he could not make the call. He wasted a few valuable minutes in this way, and at last gave up in despair. In his fright he began to call for help, but the section foreman who had been in the office only a few minutes before was now on his way home, and no one else was near the station.

At last he thought of the telephone. He seized the receiver, and at last central answered. Yes, central thought she could get the next station, although she was not sure. Anyhow, she saw nothing to hurry about. There was another agonizing wait, and then I answered him over the 'phone. It was some time before he became coherent, but at last I gathered what he had done. I told him that I would fix it all right, and he gave me the number of the order in which the mistake was made.

I could see Number Fifteen coming as I sat down at the table and began to compose another order which would annul the one that he had delivered, and at the same time correct the mistake so that no one would suspect. It did not take me long to do this; but I had to stop Number Fifteen and have the conductor sign the order so as to make the change seem

natural. But I did not repeat his signature to the despatcher, as I was supposed to do, and neither did I tell the despatcher that I had stopped Number Fifteen when I reported them by.

It was not until the train had gone that I began thinking the whole matter over, and it frightened me a little. This could just as easily have been I who had made the mistake as the boy who did, and I made some very good resolutions that night which I kept so that before I left that station I could telegraph well enough to take an order without re-copying it two or three times.

Had that operator not heard another operator reporting First Number Twelve, there would most likely have been a collision of two passenger trains, all because of the omission of a word.

When the Railroad is to Blame

Of course, no whisper of this incident ever reached the officials' ears, but are not they hired to keep such things as this from occurring? How? By an examination which would have proven that neither this other young operator nor I was fit to hold a responsible position. A good operator could have told our kind by a five minutes' wire test, and there are always a number of good operators around a chief despatcher's office.

But, say the officials, we cannot get enough men as it is. Of course they cannot so long as they pay them less wages than the day laborers on the sections. But there are companies that get good men and plenty of them, and nearly all of them have a rule which states clearly that operators shall pass a wire test. But on a great many of them if the chief despatcher is badly in need of men, this examination is omitted.

Most roads give an employee a book of rules, when he goes to work, which he is told he must study. As this book of rules contains very uninteresting reading, it is seldom referred to save in cases of emergency, when it is too late. (continued.)

***American Magazine*, December, 1909**

Part II.

SOMETIMES bad wrecks are caused by a very little carelessness on the part of employees. The following did not end as disastrously as it might, but I am coming soon to some which did.

I was working nights at a place we shall call Rush. Rush is a little town at the end of a stretch of double track. That is, from Rush to a city about forty miles to the south there is but a single track; but from Rush to a city about thirty miles to the north there is a double track.

For some time the main line spout of the water tank a few miles south of Rush on the single track had been out of order, and could not be used; so trains were compelled to go onto a siding at Rush to take water. This necessitated running the train out onto the single track and then backing it onto the siding. The despatcher had a standing order out at Rush addressed to "All Trains Southbound," notifying them of this broken spout so that they would not have to be delayed in finding out if the spout had been repaired.

Number Fourteen, a southbound passenger train, was due at Rush at seven thirty-five in the evening. For about three or four weeks this train had been accustomed to get this one

order at Rush, and so got to paying scant attention to it or the stop signal in the semaphore. Generally, when Number Fourteen arrived, I would hand two copies of the order out of the window to the conductor, or, if I had the time, I would be out on the platform when the engine passed and hand one copy up to the fireman, and another to the conductor when he came up.

But, if I gave both copies to the conductor, he would, on seeing that it was "the water spout order," give the "proceed" signal with his lantern to the head brakeman, who would then open the switch. Then while the train was pulling out onto the single track, preparatory to backing onto the siding, the conductor would go forward through the coaches, and when they stopped for the rear brakeman to close the switch, he would step off and give the engineer a copy of the order.

All this was done to save time, but it rather mixed the meaning of signals so that we laid ourselves liable to what at last did happen.

A Narrow Escape

One evening, Number Fourteen was some twenty minutes late, and, of course, in very much of a hurry. Also, Number Nineteen, a northbound train, was an hour and thirty minutes late. After some figuring, the despatcher decided that Rush would be a good place for the two passenger trains to meet and pass, as Number Nineteen would not have to stop at Rush even if Number Fourteen had not arrived, for here began the double track. So he issued an order at Rush addressed to Number Fourteen, giving Number Nineteen the right of track to Rush.

Sitting in the window of the office at Rush that evening after receiving this order, I saw Number Nineteen coming toward us on the single track about four miles away. She was coming down hill and was running like the wind. I watched her until she dropped out of sight into the valley below, and made a mental calculation as to how soon she would arrive. For from then on Number Nineteen could not be seen again until she was within about one hundred yards of the depot, as a grove of trees and the stock pens hid her from sight.

Number Nineteen would, I knew, approach the station at almost full speed as, according to the order, Number Fourteen should stay on her side of the double track until Number Nineteen was by.

I glanced out of the window in the opposite direction, and saw Number Fourteen coming close at hand. She pulled up to the station first, and stopped. The conductor swung off, and came into the office to sign the order. He read it over carefully, then asked, "When will they be here?"

"She is coming up the hill now," I answered as I repeated the signature to the despatcher. Then I tore off two copies, and handed them to the conductor.

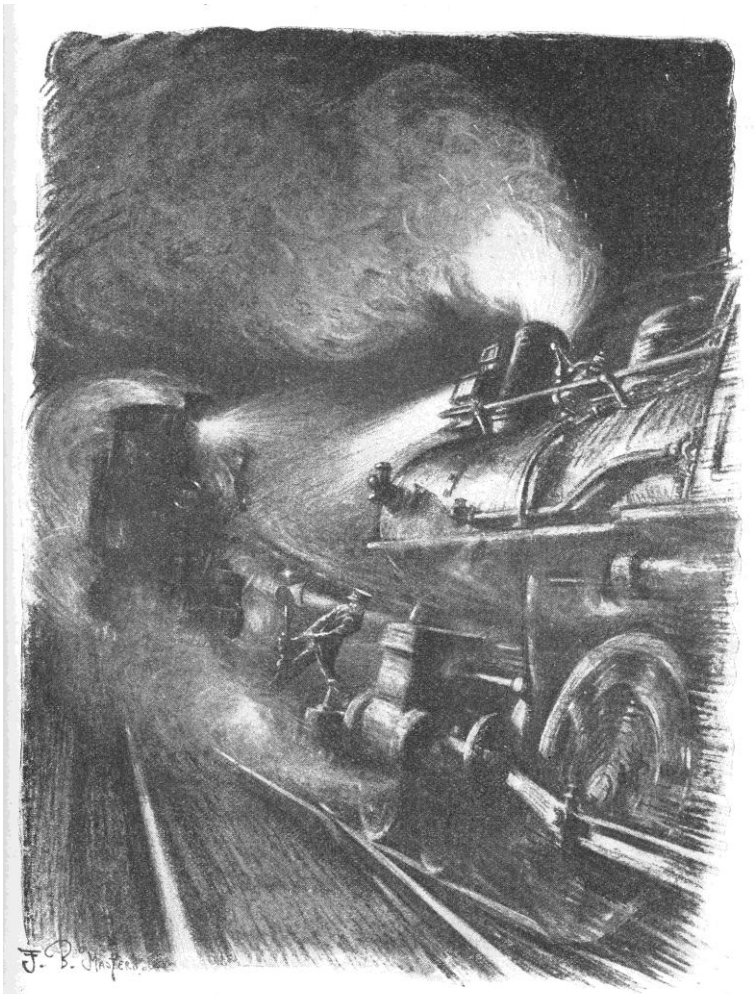
He crammed one copy into his pocket, the other he folded up neatly, expecting soon to hand it to the engineer. Then he leaned back against the table to exchange a bit of railroad gossip, for there was no hurry as his engineer had no right to move until he had a clearance of my "stop" signal in the semaphore.

But the engineer and the brakeman were in a hurry that night. They were a few minutes late and wanted to make it up, so became careless. Thinking that it was the same old "water spout order," and not waiting for the conductor's signal, the brakeman ran ahead and opened the switch. The engineer, supposing that the brakeman had received the signal from the conductor, started out onto the main line all unsuspecting the train that was rushing up the

hill but a short distance away. I do believe they would have gone off and left the conductor if they had had a clear track.

Inside the office, I got up from the chair — I do not know why — and slid along the table to the big, double window. I glanced out to see the tail lights of Number Fourteen moving forward over the switch. I also saw a moving shaft of light over the tree tops cast by the headlight of Number Nineteen, showing that they were close at hand.

Trainmen are quick to read danger signals, and the horror expressed in my face at what I saw, told the conductor that something was wrong, and he rushed to the door even before I shouted a warning.



The brakeman swung the switch shut just in time, and Number Nineteen rushed by

He ran out, and along the track until he caught the rear end of his train just as it cleared the switch. He gave a few frantic jerks at the signal cord and repeated the signal several times, at the same time calling out to his rear brakeman to leave the switch open, and stand by it.

With painful slowness the train began to back into the clear. The engineer, I believe, only vaguely understood what was wrong.

Number Nineteen roared into sight from behind the clump of trees at full speed while yet the engine and front baggage car of Number Fourteen were out on the single track. The brakeman at the switch measured the distance between the two trains, saw death reaching out a cold hand for him, but bravely stuck at his post. So did the engineer of Number Fourteen, and, likewise, the engineer on Number Nineteen.

The engineer on Number Fourteen opened his throttle wider for more speed backwards, but for some reason the man on Number Nineteen did not see the danger until he was half way to Number Fourteen; then he put on the air brakes. The brakeman at the switch set his teeth hard, gripped the stand with both hands, and tried not to be afraid. I stood in the office window watching this strange scene lit up by the glare of the headlights; and so intense was my interest that I did not realize that if the two trains met the depot would probably be swept off of the right-of-way like a house of cards.

It seemed to me that Number Fourteen barely squeezed into the clear in time. The brakeman swung the switch shut just in time, and Number Nineteen rushed by, the cylinders of the two engines barely missing. I have never seen a braver act than that brakeman's.

What Happened While an Operator Slept

This was my last position on this road. I wanted to go west, and west I went. I had resigned some time before but the chief was very short of men and could not let me go. I journeyed westward as far as —, and there got a position. My first place was as night operator in a town of goodly size not far from the city.

On this road, as on many others, they had the very loose system of leaving the station signal at "proceed" when there were no orders. Sometimes careless operators neglect to change the signal to "stop" even after they have received an order. Thus, a train sometimes gets by a station that has an important order for it. Also, there is the greater danger of a night operator falling asleep, and afterwards taking an order for a train that has passed his station while he slept. The nine-hour law lessens the danger of this a great deal, but hardly enough.

The system of having the normal position of the signal at "stop," and only changing it to "proceed" when a train is approaching a station at which there are no orders, causes but little more delay and work, and is much safer.

One accident which occurred on this road will illustrate.

A night operator fell asleep on duty one night and was awakened by the despatcher sounding his call on the wire. The operator answered, and the despatcher asked if a certain passenger train has passed. The operator answered that it had not.

A layman would naturally think that if the sound of a call on the wire would awaken an operator, the sound of a passing train would do the same. But many times it will not, as in this case. The passenger train which the despatcher was inquiring about had passed this station while the operator was asleep. But the operator took an order for the train, an order which changed the meeting place between it and another passenger train.

The order was never delivered. The two passenger trains collided, and some thirty persons were killed outright. Had the normal position of the station signal been at "stop," the train could never have passed that station until the operator had changed his signal to "proceed," and then he would have known that the train had passed.

10:45 Is Not 11:45

Another incident of an employee's carelessness causing a wreck occurred while I was still working at this first station.

An extra freight train westbound received an order to do about an hour's switching at a place I shall call Gardner. The despatcher, using the threatened delay to help along another extra bound in the opposite direction, issued an order at Gardner for the westbound train to wait there until eleven forty-five A.M. for the eastbound extra. But when the westbound train arrived at Gardner they found that there was only a few minutes' switching to be done, so the conductor went into the telegraph office at once, and signed his orders.

When the operator gave him the orders, the conductor read them hurriedly as he walked forward to deliver them to the engineer. When he handed the orders up to the engineer he said, "We wait here until forty-five for the extra east," and turning, walked back towards his caboose.

Glancing at his watch, the engineer saw that it was about eleven o'clock, and supposing that the conductor meant ten forty-five (which he did), he started out of town with only a

glance at the orders. When he had his train in motion and running at good speed, the engineer began to read the orders more carefully. When he read the one which ordered him to wait at Gardner until eleven forty-five, he glanced up, to see the other train almost upon him.

No one was killed outright in the wreck which followed, but a great deal of property was destroyed, and one engineer was badly injured.

Like the others I have mentioned, this was due to just a little carelessness — a relaxing of vigilance for a few minutes.

An Engineer Asleep in His Cab

Now I come to the second place at which I worked on this western road. It was a smaller town than the one I first worked at, and there was not nearly so much work to do — nothing, in fact, save watch the trains go by, and copy an occasional order.

About two o'clock one morning, the despatcher gave me a "Form 19" order to be delivered to a westbound passenger train. This is the kind of order which does not require the signature of the conductor, and may be delivered without stopping the train.

This was at a time before the road began using "hoops" to deliver orders with, and the operator was compelled to hand the order up to the conductor and engineer from his hand. This took some nice calculating, for the operator had to stand just far enough away from the track not to be struck by the engine, and just close enough for the trainmen to reach the order from his hand.

It was still dark when I heard the train coming, and I stepped out onto the platform with a lantern in one hand, and the order in the other. When the train was close enough, I swung the lantern high in air as a signal that I had a "19" order for them which would clear the "stop" signal in the semaphore. But the engineer did not respond to my signal with two short blasts of the whistle as is customary, neither did he slacken speed as he approached, which is also customary, for if he missed the order he would have to stop, and it is not easy to catch one going at full speed.

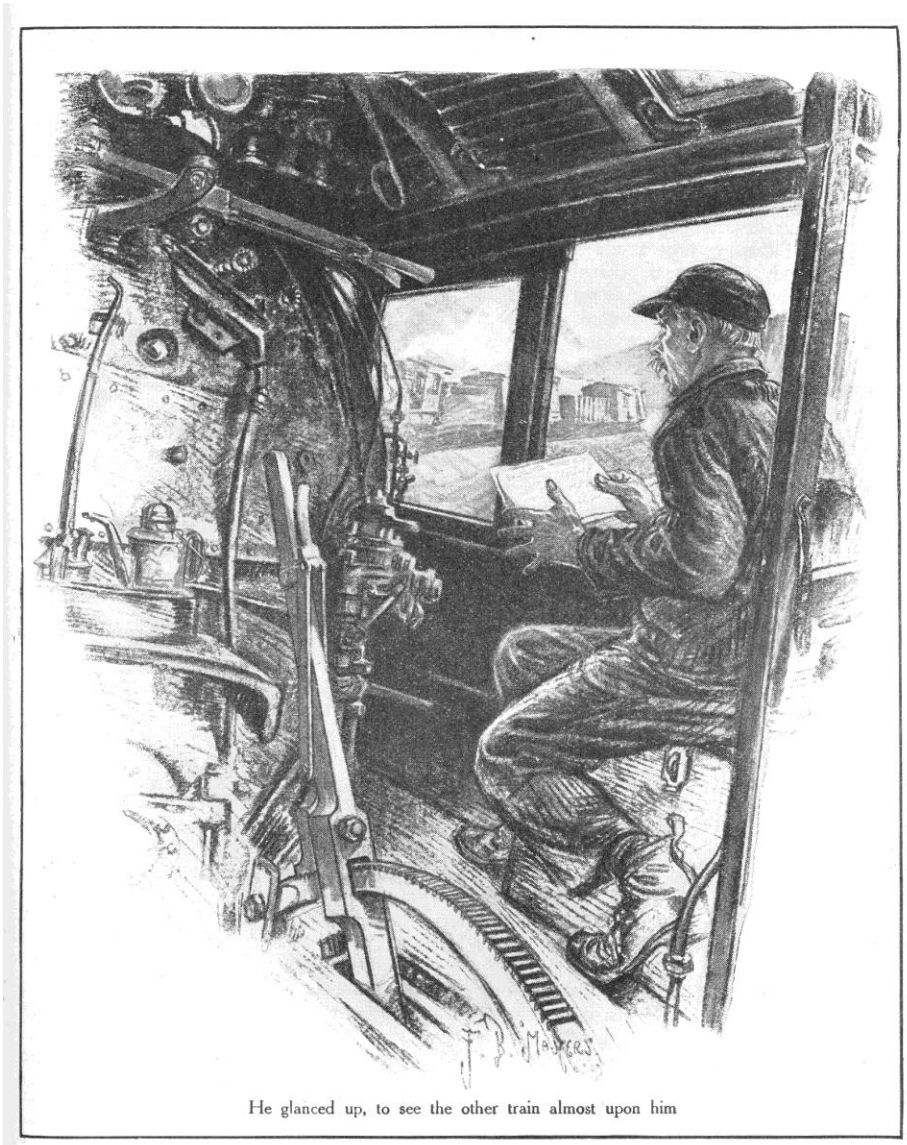
I took up a position at what I thought to be about the right distance from the track as the train swooped down upon me, but I kept edging farther away as the train neared, for I did not like the speed at which he was traveling. Then the engine shot by me, but no one reached for the order. I got a fleeting glimpse of the engineer in the cab window as he passed. His head and shoulders hung over the sill, his head rolling from side to side. The man was asleep!

Farther along the train, someone reached for the order, but only brushed my hand. Then the train was by, and had whisked out of sight around a curve, leaving me a little dazed by the suddenness of its passing.

That was the first time I ever saw an engineer asleep on a moving train, although I had heard of it before. And yet the man had probably been on duty so long that he could not help it.

But this particular order was not so important as to cause a wreck — it merely gave this train time on another passenger train, — but if the engineer slept long enough he was sure to run into something. I do not know where the fireman was all this time that he did not see my signal.

Soon, however, the train came hurriedly backing into town. The conductor had been out on the platform steps when his train passed; it was he who had brushed my hand in an



He glanced up, to see the other train almost upon him

endeavor to get the order. He had thought, though, that his engineer had caught his copy of the order in passing, but was not sure; so he signaled him to stop, and when there was no immediate response he knew the truth. He repeated the signal until the engineer awoke, and then had him back into town for the order.

If –

Transferred again. This time to a small station on the desert; but I was fortunate enough to get the position as day operator. It was a busy little town, there being a "boom" on, and it was filled with the "boom" and "boost" kind of real-estate men. A river flowed close to the town, from which river they expected to make the desert bloom.

The town was about in the middle of a long division, and both ways out of town it was up hill. All heavy passenger trains were compelled to take two engines from here to the end of the division. There was a coal chute and a water tank here, and all trains stopped. I was kept very busy telegraphing, but as I had nothing else to do, it was not a bad job. I was destined to stay here longer than at any other station before or since.

One Christmas eve a lone engine came down from division headquarters to help Number Three, a passenger train, up the hill. Number Three was very late that day, as usual, and did not arrive until a little after dark.

A few minutes before she arrived, the light engine backed down to the station so as to cause as little delay as possible in coupling on. At dusk the engineer tried to light his electric headlight, but there was something wrong with the carbon, and it would not light. He went forward along the running board and tinkered with the light until it did burn, but in his haste he must have done a poor job.

Soon after this the train arrived, and was soon speeding out of town with the helper engine coupled on ahead. Some distance out of town, however, the headlight of the head engine again went out. But, as they were nearing the end of the run, and were so late, and it was on the up grade, and it was Christmas eve, the engineer did not stop to relight the headlight, deciding to take the risk of making the run in safety.

At the first telegraph station out of division headquarters, a freight train was doing some switching that same evening. As they had to use the main line a great deal in their work, the despatcher had given them two hours and twenty-five minutes time on Number Three.

This station was set in among the hills, and an approaching train could not see what trains in the yards were doing until itself was in the yards. So, to provide protection for trains switching in the yards against incoming trains, a semaphore had been erected some distance from the end of the switch.

That evening when the freight train began to switch, the conductor set the semaphore at "stop," and to protect himself further against incoming trains he put out a torpedo near the semaphore so that in case the light in the semaphore failed the torpedo would check any incoming train.

When the two hours and twenty-five minutes on Number Three were up, the engine of the freight train backed into the clear on the siding to wait until the passenger train had passed before resuming work. The conductor and one brakeman walked up through the yards to the telegraph office, where they separated, the conductor going into the office to see if he could get more time on Number Three, and the brakeman going on to set the semaphore at "clear" so as not to stop Number Three if she was no more than the two hours and twenty-five minutes late.

At the office the conductor learned that he could get no more time on Number Three as she was due at any time. He walked out onto the platform, and from there could see the lighted coaches of the passenger train coming close at hand, although there was no headlight. Then he heard Number Three strike the torpedo and knew that his brakeman had not had time to remove. it, so he waved his lantern high in air as a signal to Number Three that the track was clear. The two engineers saw the signal, and came on without checking speed.

But down in the yard, the engineer of the freight train also saw the signal, and took it to mean that his conductor had received more time on Number Three. He could not see that Number Three was coming close at hand as there was no headlight, and he could not hear her for the noise his own engine made. His fireman got down, opened the switch, and climbed back into his engine. Then the freight engine, with some cars attached, started out onto the main line; but just as the front trucks of the engine rattled across the switch points the engineer saw Number Three bearing rapidly upon him only a few car lengths away.

At about the same instant, a brakeman near the end of the string of cars which the freight engine was pulling also saw Number Three, and immediately he pulled on the air brakes. This prevented the engineer from backing up at once, and Number Three collided with the front end of the freight engine. The three engines were derailed and upset; the cylinders of the freight engine were knocked clear off the right-of-way. The two firemen on the passenger train were killed, also the engineer on the head engine.

If the engineer on the front engine of Number Three had taken time to relight his headlight, the freight engine could have seen them coming long before they arrived. But the man paid a heavy penalty for his carelessness, and every wreck that ever happened would

not have happened IF a certain thing were not so.

"Examination" of an Operator

I left this station and the service of this company after about seven months' service. I was still bound for the land of the setting sun, and thither I drifted. This time I did not stop until I came to the Pacific. One day I walked into the office of a chief despatcher.

"How are you fixed for operators?" I asked of him.

He thought that he could use me, he said, and asked the usual questions about previous service. Then he started me on the examination. He gave me a small yellow pamphlet in which were some hundreds of questions; all of which I was to answer. These questions were all answered in the book of rules — i.e. I was supposed to know his book of rules by heart. But he saw the doubtful look I gave the pamphlet, and brought out his own book of rules, which he gave me. He did not wink when he did it, but I understood that he was badly in need of men or he would have made me answer the questions as best I could.

He showed me a table, gave me a pen, and I set to work to copy the book of rules. It took lots of time and patience, but I finished it at last. After I had passed the physical examination, I was told to go to a certain station and begin work as night operator.

I arrived at the station that evening, and the regular night operator showed me what my duties were. There were a few tickets to sell for an evening train, a few train orders to copy during the night; for the rest — nothing. In fact, there was too little work to do. I got in the habit of sleeping most of the night, which is not good railroading. But it is generally this way, either too much work or not enough. It is hard to strike a medium.

A Close Call

One morning an hour or so before I went off duty, I heard a station some distance to the north reporting that the engine of a south-bound extra had "died" there, and that they would need another engine if the train were to continue on its way. It might be explained that the usual cause of the "death" of an engine is leaking flues. The water leaks out so fast that it is impossible to keep up steam.

After a little time I heard the despatcher ordering out a light engine from division headquarters to take the place of the "dead" one; also, he changed the meeting place between the "dead" train and other trains bound in the opposite direction. One order gave right of track to a northbound extra to the station at which I was working.

The day operator relieved me at 7 A.M. as usual, and I went to get some breakfast. Afterwards, I returned to the office for a few minutes' talk with the day operator before going to bed. While we were talking, the southbound extra arrived with its fresh engine. It did a few minutes' switching, and then pulled out of town. A few minutes later the day operator reported them out to the despatcher.

"I think you are mistaken," said the despatcher when he heard the report. "Look again and see if they aren't at the lower end of the yards."

The day operator looked, I looked, and the agent, who happened to be in the office, looked; but no train could we see. — So the day operator told the despatcher.

"Is the northbound extra in?" inquired the despatcher.

It was not.

"Then those fellows have overlooked an order," clicked the dispassionate wire. "They should have waited there until the northbound extra arrived."

We in the office began to look frightened, but we understood. The conductor of the once "dead" train had received the order so long before that he had forgotten about it, as had his engineer. So they had pulled out of town right in the face of the other extra.

"The northbound extra ought to be nearing Blank about now," went on the despatcher. "One of you try to get Blank on the 'phone, and tell him to hold the northbound extra. I'll try to get CS (a station between us and Blank) to stop the southbound train." And he began to call CS, CS, CS, steadily, persistently.

The agent jumped to the telephone, and asked for the station at Blank, and the despatcher called CS on the message wire.

At last the agent got Blank on the telephone.

"Is that northbound extra by you yet?" he asked.

"It is coming right here, close," answered Blank.

"Stop them!" ordered the agent. "This is the agent at B –"

"What for?" asked the operator.

"Stop them!" again ordered the agent.

"Can't," said the operator mildly. "The engine has passed my signal."

"Put out your signal, and get outside and flag the conductor as the caboose passes. He'll stop the engineer."

"But I'd like to know what you want him stopped for," persisted Blank.

The agent was almost tearing his hair, but he managed to answer, "To keep them out of an extra south that's got away from us."

"Oh, good heavens!" cried the operator in sudden terror. "I can't stop them now. They are by me and out of reach!"

We turned to the telegraph table where we could hear the despatcher's strong, steady call. CS, CS, CS, went the sounder evenly, dispassionately, with hardly a hint of the importance of an answer, save in the oft-repeated "19" which might mean any one of a dozen things.

"Why doesn't he answer?" I asked petulantly, for the strain was telling on all of us.

"He's not due to begin work until 8:30," said the agent, "and it's only 8:20 now."

Still we sat there waiting, unable to help in any way, listening to the despatcher's steady call. CS was a small place, and had no telephone. It was like sitting at a sick bed, listening to the seconds ticking off the time which would soon bring the change for better or for worse.

At last came the answer: "I, I, CS," equally dispassionate.

"Anything coming?" buzzed the despatcher.

"Extra south coming close," was the prompt answer.

"Stop them!" snapped the despatcher, showing feeling for the first time.

"S. D.," was the simple answer without hesitation; but those two letters told us that the trains were safe. They mean, "Signal displayed." This man had redeemed the lack of promptness of the other. That was railroading!

Quits — After Three Years' Service

As I have said, sleeping on duty is not good railroading, and, since I had been guilty of that sort of neglect, I was called to the train despatcher's office. I fully expected to be, discharged, but no, I was only transferred again — this time to a place on the desert so hot and lonely that I could not stand it. So I "threw up" my job. Next, I went to work for a

railroad which stationed me on the Colorado desert in California.

As in most desert stations, there was little or no work to do. In the dull season, it was seldom that more than eight trains passed during the night, and generally there were but four or five. I seldom copied an order or a message, and only used the wire to report the trains by. But it was hard work just to stay there, sitting up through the night with nothing to do. Sleep? Yes, I did sleep some on duty, but that is to be expected on the desert in hot weather, for one cannot sleep in the daytime, and the powers that were never censured you if you caused no delays, which was easily enough avoided when there was light traffic.

This was my last position on any railroad. So here I will leave myself, as the novelists say, at the end of a railroad career that is not unlike hundreds of others. **Ω**

Railroad Man's Magazine, **March 1910**

WITH HIS FINGERS CROSSED.

BY HARRY BEDWELL.

Sammie McClaren Did Not Know Just How His Ride in the Lone, Light Engine Would End.

SAMMIE McCLAREN said afterward that he knew it was his off day the minute he reached the top of the stairs leading to the chief despatcher's office. And after he had walked the length of the gloomy hall, he was sure of it.

So when he cautiously pushed open the door to the chief's little office, he crossed his fingers tentatively before venturing into the room. The inside of the office reassured him, however. It was a narrow little room, with a desk in the center.

Behind the desk sat the short, fat little chief despatcher, and before the desk was an empty chair.

The chief did not look up when Sammie entered; but, as Sam himself would say, he was used to the bluffs of many chiefs, so he quietly took the vacant chair and waited. At last the chief raised his head from his desk and looked vaguely at Sam, or in his neighborhood. Sam squirmed uneasily in his chair and cleared his throat.

"How are you fixed for operators?" he asked.

But the chief continued to stare for a few seconds; then, he suddenly swung around in his chair, jumped to his feet, and pattered across the floor, through a side door, and out of sight into what Sam took to be the trick despatcher's room.

"He's batty," muttered Sam to himself. "This is sure my unlucky day. I think I'd better put off askin' for a job till to-morrow."

But just then the chief returned with a message in his hand, which he was reading with some intentness; so Sam remained in his seat.

Sam took note of the fact that the fat little chief chewed tobacco in a manner that reminded him comically of a goat; and that he spat about him as he walked as if under some mental stress.

"He's Dutch!" observed Sam. "And that means he's a Jonah."

At last the chief looked up at Sam with a question in his glinting spectacles.

"How are you fixed for operators?" Sam repeated doggedly. The chief looked surprised, and pleased, which facts Sam noted, as more signs of bad luck to follow. For he was used to chiefs that growl and grumble when asked for a job, and this departure from the usual Sam regarded with suspicion.

"Are you a telegraph operator?" asked the chief. "Well, sir, I believe that I can give you a job if you are. Let me see your service letters."

Sam produced a goodly sized bundle of letters, and placed them upon the desk before the chief. This showing of so many service letters was indiscreet in Sam, for but few chiefs like to hire an operator who has moved about too much.

“Well, well,” murmured the chief, opening his eyes in mild surprise. “It seems you have plenty of them. A sort of boomer, eh? Well, let us hope that you will settle down and give good service.”

“It’s my bad luck,” complained Sam, warming in spite of his suspicions. “I work just so long for a road, then something happens, and I’m fired.”

“Of course, I knew that it wasn’t your fault” smiled the chief. “You look like an industrious, conscientious young man, and I believe you intend to do right by us.”

But as the chief read letter after letter, he could not help but note that “discharged for sleeping on duty” appeared in a great many of them.

So, after unwinding yards of red tape preliminary to going to work, Sam was sent to a small station as night operator. But here his bad luck, as he characterized it, still pursued him. There was little work to do at this night office, and he could not help but sleep on duty.

After bearing patiently with him for about two weeks, the trick despatcher told the chief things, and Sam was called back to the office.

Disgust and resignation were written on Sam’s countenance as he again faced the chief despatcher in the narrow little office.

“It’s no go,” he complained despondently. “I’ve got a hoodoo in me some place.”

The chief’s eyes glinted a little behind his glasses as he looked up Sam’s undersized person, but he seemed not greatly offended.

“I’ll give you one more chance,” he said deliberately, “and we’ll see if your hoodoo remains with you.”

Sam’s mouth opened loosely. Never before in all his experience had a second trial been given him, and this change of procedure in the species was so startling that he forgot to be suspicious until it was too late.

“There is a small mining town out on the desert,” said the chief, “in the opposite direction from where I first sent you. There I have a good night job for you. There’s enough work to do there to keep you awake if you’ll do it, and the pay is pretty good. In fact, it is a good job. Will you take it?”

“Sure,” said Sam, not considering before committing himself.

“Your train will leave here within five minutes,” went on the chief; “so you’ll have to hurry to catch it. Here’s your pass. Good-by!”

Sam took the pass and departed. But he was hardly started on his journey before his superstitious fears returned and began to cause him uneasiness.

“Gee!“ he grumbled to himself as the train left the green, fertile country around division headquarters and began to roll out on the desert. “Gee! I didn’t even have my fingers crossed, when I accepted the job. Something’s sure to happen. Wish I hadn’t told him yes. If I had the two weeks’ pay that’s coming to me, I’d keep right on going.”

After two or three hours of hot riding, Sam at last arrived at his station, and was left upon the platform, where he gazed about him. All around the little town there was nothing but desert and hills; and the heat of the noonday sun was blistering.

Not far away were the mine buildings, propped up into the hills; and across the track was the station building, with a huge black-and-white sign bearing the name of the town, “Sphinx.”

After perceiving enough to fill him with disgust, Sam entered the small station, where he made himself acquainted with the agent; and that official explained matters.

He said that the regular night operator had quit, and that he needed another badly. He said, also, that there was nothing to do at night but — and here he cleared his throat and began in a sort of singsong to name over the things there were to do at night.

Sam listened to the recital for some time; then he took the agent firmly by the arm and shook him.

"Forget it!" he cried angrily. "I didn't come down here to be the handy man about town. Tell me where I can get something to eat, and then tell that chief despatcher to wire me a pass back to town. Say to him that I can't take this snap!"

The agent pointed out a little tent shack which, he said, was where they fed people," and Sam went to lunch. When he returned to the station he found the agent busy with his reports, and on him Sam gave vent to his tortured feelings.

"That's a fine hotel you have over there," he said with deep scorn. I had to go into the kitchen and wake the Chink cook before the meal was started, and then I had to worry the waitress for half an hour before she'd serve it. It's a funny town where a fellow has to work for everything he gets, then pay for it, too."

"The chief says he won't give you a pass," said the agent, with his nose in a big book. "Says you've got to stay here and take the job. Think's you'll like it if you get used to it."

"The chief says—what?" cried Sam, horrified. "Say, old man, tell me that again."

The agent repeated.

Sam kicked his battered suit-case under a table, and spat at it. Then he stood and gazed abstractedly out of the window for a few seconds.

"Said I had to stay here, did he?" he inquired at length. "Say, you're not kidding me?

"THE CHIEF SAYS HE WON'T GIVE YOU A PASS."

Said I had to stay in *this* town?" He took a long breath. "The next time I go into a chief's office I'm going to have all my fingers crossed. I knew when I got on the train something was going to happen. You tell the chief that I wouldn't take this job if he'd give me a sworn statement that he'd fire me within the week. If I took the job, I'd be sure to make good!"

“You’ll have to pay your fare back to town if you go,” said the agent dispassionately. “He won’t send you a pass, you know.’’

Sam took out his money and counted. He had about fifty cents.

“What’s the fare?” he wanted to know.

“Two eighty-five.”

Sam looked shocked.

“Say” he broke out. “Was that ride I took from town out here worth two eighty-five? They sure hang it onto a fellow when they catch him in a God-forsaken country, don’t they? Two eighty- five! Well, I’ll just have to bump the conductor of the first passenger-train to carry me in on my face. When’s the first train due?”

“It is due about five o’clock.”

Sam looked uneasily about him.

“Say, don’t you know I am very much afraid I’ll get to liking it here if I stay,” he complained; “and I’d rather never get another job in my life than to do that.”

The agent went on with his work silently.

Sam spent the remainder of the afternoon seated in a dark corner of the office with his fingers crossed. A great fear was upon him that he might become enamored of the place and decide to stay, and he was certain that if he did he would never see the outside world again.

The passenger-train arrived about five o’clock, stopping only long enough for the agent to load on some express packages which he had received from one of the mining companies.

Sam buttonholed the conductor as soon as that official had alighted from his train, and asked for a ride to headquarters, showing at the same time his service letters in proof that he was a railroad man.

The conductor grinned broadly when he saw the name on the service letters, and he brought from one of his pockets a telegram, which he handed to Sam.

The message was from the chief despatcher to the conductor, and read:

Do not carry operator named S. McClaren from Sphinx unless he pays fare.

THE CONDUCTOR GRINNED BROADLY WHEN HE SAW THE NAME ON THE SERVICE LETTERS.

Sam looked up from the message hopelessly.

"Say, con," he wailed, "don't it beat the dickens how a streak of bad luck holds out when a fellow just forgot to cross his fingers once? I suppose you won't carry me in now, will you?"

"Can't do it now," grinned the conductor. "If I hadn't received that message, I'd have carried you. But now I'd sure lose my job."

Sam's face was wrinkled into a mask of gloom as he watched the train wind away and lose itself in the desert.

"It sure do look like Nature was dead set ag'in' me," he said disconsolately, as he turned hack toward the station. Then a sudden burst of hopeless anger flamed up in him. "I won't take this job!" he cried fiercely. "I'll walk out of town first!"

"Wouldn't the conductor carry you?" asked the agent as Sam entered the depot.

"Naw! The chief spiked him. When's the next freight-train due in here? "

"There's a freight due about midnight. None before, I guess. Better take the job."

"Nope! I'll try to catch that freight-train. If I miss her, I'll walk out of town."

Sam spent twenty cents for some food, and returned to the depot to eat it. He found the agent locking up for the night.

"There's no night-man here, you know," he explained to Sam, "so I have to lock up. We sometimes have a fellow here at night who keeps the light engines alive that come down here to take out ore-trains; but there'll be no light engine down here to-night, so there's no watchman coming on duty."

"Ore-trains," repeated Sam. "Do you have trains of ore out of here?"

The agent pointed to a siding full of box cars.

"You bet!" he said with pride. "Have two out of here every week, and sometimes more. When there's a train out in the morning, they send a lone engine down the evening before, and the engine-crew ties up till the train is ready. The watchman has to keep the engine alive during the night. He's not here to-night, you see. Won't be a train out in the morning. Usually have one out on this day of every week. I wonder if I told the despatcher there wouldn't be one out in the morning? Yes, I think I did. Good night."

Sam sat him down on a truck and consumed his meal in silence. There was a short twilight, then darkness, and Sam still sat there disconsolately.

After a while he was aroused by the sound of an approaching train.

"I wonder if that mutt of an agent lied to me," he mused, as the train approached; "It's sure a train going t'ard town, and it's no more than eight o'clock. Well, if she's a freight, I'll try to hop her,"

The headlight soon hove in sight around a line of buttes, and bore steadily down toward the station. It stopped at the end of the yards, however; and a few seconds later the switch-light turned. Then the engine puffed slowly into the siding, and came to a stop not far from where Sam sat. He saw then that it was a lone engine without cars.

After taking off their greasy overalls, the engineer and fireman slid down from the cab and walked toward the town, passing close to Sam as they went.

"I suppose that watchman is around here some place," Sam heard the fireman say as they passed. "I don't want the engine to blow up."

"He's likely over in town some place," answered the engineer He's heard us come in and will be here before long. He never did fail to show up."

Sam sat quite still for a long time after the two had disappeared in the darkness; then he slid thoughtfully to the platform.

“The agent did forget to tell the despatcher not to send down an engine,” he soliloquized triumphantly, and there’s no watchman here to keep her alive. Some one’s due to get into trouble.”

At first Sam decided to let the engine be, and not interfere. Thus he would have some revenge on the fat little chief. But a new and better plan suggested itself and he pondered it for a while.

I’ll just take the engine on into town myself,” he chuckled, slapping his leg excitedly. I’ll show that chief who’s who!”

He searched about the station for a while until he found a shovel. The blade of this he worked under one of the back windows of the office, and began to pry.

After a little exertion, the catch that fastened the window broke with a snap, and the window raised clear of the sill. Then, with fingers tightly crossed, he crawled into the office and took his seat at the telegraph instrument.

He called up the despatcher and told him that the lone engine had arrived, but that there was no train to take out in the morning, and that the engineer wanted to go on to headquarters at once.

After asking a few questions, and expressing himself strongly on this waste of power, the despatcher issued running orders for the lone engine to run extra from Sphinx to headquarters, meeting two freight-trains and a passenger on the way. Sam repeated the order, then searched diligently around on the wall till he found a switch-key hanging by the office-door.

Then he crawled out of the window, took up his battered suit-case, and climbed aboard the engine.

He had ridden on an engine many times before in his life, and had once or twice run one while switching in a station-yard; so now he felt no fear as to his being able to run this one, although he might experience some difficulty in keeping her hot.

He climbed up on the right side, and after peering anxiously at the steam-gage and the air-gage, he released her, and sent her puffing slowly forward to the other end of the yards.

Soon he was out on the main line, and speeding down the track, with the lights of the little desert town vanishing behind.

“I wonder can I keep her hot?“ mused Sam when, after setting a lively pace, he climbed down to peer into the fire-box. “She sure will take lots of coal.”

He began shoveling energetically, and kept it up for a time. Then he slowed down long enough to go forward along the running-board and raise the headlight curtain, which the fireman had lowered before departing.

When he returned to the cab, he put on the fireman’s overalls, jumper, and cap, so as to look like the real thing if I’m stopped,” he grinned.

On he rumbled over the silent desert through the starlit darkness. He passed two lighted telegraph offices, and at both the light in the semaphore showed white. He found a time-card in the engineer’s box on which he checked off the stations as he passed them, so as to know where to meet the opposing trains.

At the third open telegraph office, however, Sam encountered a stop signal set against him. He whistled for a clear, board, but the light remained red.

“I wonder now what he’ll be wanting,” he grumbled as he slowed down. “Be like they’ve found me out, and are going to hang one on me. But I’ll bet there’s no one save the night operator in that office, and he can do me little harm.”

He stopped the engine before the depot, slid to the platform, and strode into the office.

"What's your board out for?" he demanded of the operator, who hung sleepily over his instrument.

"Freight-train in the ditch on the other side of the next telegraph office," said the operator without looking up.

"The engine and half the cars slid off the bank. No one hurt, though. Despatcher wants to know if you can run down to the second blind siding from here and pick up Corbin, the general superintendent; Parks, the chief engineer of construction, and a couple of surveyors. They've been out on the desert doing some surveying, and rode into the blind siding just in time to miss the passenger-train bound for the city; so they telephoned in from a ranch to hurry something along to pick 'em up.

"Parks has got to reach the city in time to-morrow morning to attend a meeting of the directors, or there'll be the deuce to pay."

"That's quite a history," commented Sam. "But how do they expect me to get them around the wreck?"

"I dunno. Reckon they'll send an engine up from headquarters, or unhitch one from a freight-train, and send it up to meet you at the wreck, where it'll pick up the old man. Despatcher wants to know if you'll pick 'em up."

"Ask him if he thinks I'm running this engine for fun. Of course, I'll pick 'em up, if I can find them in the dark. Is that all?"

"Yep!"

Sam strode out, climbed aboard his engine, and puffed away into the solitude.

"Chief engineer of construction has got to be in the city by morning, has he?" he mumbled. "Well, he'll have to do a lot of hustling if he does. Wonder what I'll tell 'em became of my fireman?"

He kept the engine going at a good pace, passed the first blind siding marked by a sign-board on a post, on through the darkness, till the headlight revealed a man in the center of the track frantically waving his arms up and down. Sam slowed down and stopped, and four men, with their luggage and tools, climbed aboard.

"What's this?" asked the man who first climbed into the cab, and whom Sam took to be Corbin, the superintendent. Where did you come from, and where is your fireman?"

Sam blinked owlishly in the gloom.

"My fireman is sick, and I left him behind," he lied. "The despatcher sent me down to pick you up. There's been a wreck on the other side of the next station, and I'm to take you down to it. An engine from the other side'll meet you there and take you on. One of you fellows will have to shovel coal if you want any speed."

Sam latched out the throttle as he spoke, and the engine shot away into the gloom. The two surveyors took turns at tending the fire, while the two officials perched themselves up on the fireman's seat and conversed together in low tones.

"I've got 'em buffaloed!" grinned Sam into the darkness. "Gee! I wonder what I'll do with the engine when I reach the wreck?"

It was not far to the next telegraph office, and here again there was a red light in the semaphore.

"I wonder what is the matter now?" grumbled Corbin. "Another wreck, or some other delay, I'll be bound."

When Sam stopped the engine before the station, all slid to the platform and entered the office.

"The despatcher says he can't get an engine up to the wreck for about two or three hours yet," the operator informed them. "The freight-engine that started to meet you broke down on the hill, and the despatcher had to cut off an engine from the passenger-train that's behind the freight and send it on for you."

"Hasn't the wrecker been started out yet?" Corbin demanded.

"The wrecker left headquarters about thirty minutes ago, and is behind the passenger-train."

"WHAT'S YOUR BOARD OUT FOR?" HE DEMANDED OF THE OPERATOR.

"That about settles it, Parks," said Corbin to his chief engineer. "You'll not be able to make it in time to put the proposition before the board, and they'll sure call the deal off because we have delayed so long."

Silence in the office for a few seconds, then Corbin spoke again.

"We might as well run down to the wreck and see what's happening. Perhaps we can get things lined up for the wrecker when it arrives."

"The section-gang left here about fifteen minutes ago," said the operator. "They were bound for the wreck, so you'd better keep an eye out for them and not run 'em down."

The five left the office and took their places in the cab. Again the engine started on its way, and was soon roaring along over the desert.

The wreck had occurred at a place where the track curved around a lone butte at the top of a grade. A broken rail had evidently been the cause of the derailment; but, as the train had not been going at high speed on account of the grade, no great damage had been done.

When Sam brought his engine to a stop, a short distance from the wreck, all jumped and proceeded to examine things by the light of torches and lanterns.

"It looks bad, anyway," was Corbin's comment as he looked about.

While the others were examining the derailed cars, Sam went over the displaced track. This took but a short time, and then he ran off in search of the section-gang.

Sam soon had the section foreman at the torn-up track, explaining to him what he intended doing. The foreman listened, said that he understood, and forthwith sent one of his men to the caboose of the wrecked train to fetch a large cable that is always carried underneath a caboose in countries where wrecks are common.

When the cable was brought, Sam ran his engine as near the torn-up track as he dared, and the cable was hooked into the front coupling of the engine, then to the only derailed car, which remained in the road of those wishing to repair the track.

Then he slowly backed the engine down the track. The cable tightened, the derailed car faced slowly about, listed to one side, and then went over on its side clear of the twisted rails.

The crash of the falling car was the first notice the officials had that work of reconstruction had began, and they rushed back to the track to see what had happened. But when they arrived they saw Sam's engine slowly backing down the track away from them. Corbin cursed, and swore the engineer had gone mad.

But Sam had not gone mad. He had merely taken the section-gang and gone to a near-by tie-pile, where the men loaded on a few ties. Then back he came, and the ties were hastily unloaded.

Corbin thrust his head in at the side of the cab and demanded to know what was going on.

I'm fixin' to take you on to division headquarters," explained Sam, so your man can catch the flier from the other side which will get him into the city early in the morning. Now you watch me do it."

There had been perhaps fifty ties broken by the derailment, and about three rails on either side torn up. Two of these rails were still serviceable, but the rest were bent and broken so that they were useless.

Under the direction of the foreman, the broken ties and rails were quickly cleared away and new ties substituted — the new ties being placed as far apart as was consistent with any chance of safety. Thus placed, they bridged the gap in the track.

Then the men placed the two good rails upon the ties and began driving spikes frantically. When the two rails were spiked in place, the men hurried to the rear of the engine and began tearing up rails from the solid track.

When a rail was loosened, it was instantly carried forward to be placed in the narrowing gap; and when this rather flimsy track was complete, the train-crew of the wrecked train was aroused from their caboose, commanded to release the brakes of the remainder of their train, and let it roll back down the hill.

The trainmen and the enginemen obeyed when they learned whence came the order, and in a short time the part of the train that had not been derailed was gliding smoothly down the hill toward a little siding not far distant.

When they were well out of the way, Sam climbed into the cab of his stolen engine, and, while the rest looked on breathlessly, he ran the engine slowly onto the flimsy track. At every slow turn of the drivers the track sagged from side to side, but it held together till the engine crossed to the more solid track.

"Good for you, Mr. Engineer," cried Corbin, as the four men climbed into the cab. "Now let her out at her best pace for headquarters, and we will try to keep her hot for you."

“What about that light engine that’s coming to meet you?” asked Sam as he opened the throttle. “We may meet her between here and the first telegraph station.’’

“Let her out anyway, if you’re not afraid to take the risk,” ordered Corbin. “We’ll try to keep a lookout for her. We ought to be able to see her long before we get into her on this flat country.”

Away they shot, Sam crouching among the levers, the fingers of his left hand carefully crossed on the throttle, his little eyes gleaming with excitement as he searched the path of light ahead for a sign of obstructions.

As they shot by the unwrecked half of the freight, the crew swung their lanterns high in air and shouted encouragement.

Corbin and Parks crouched on the fireman’s seat, keeping a sharp lookout for opposing trains, while the two surveyors toiled at the furnace. Sam seemed to have gone mad with excitement, and he drove the engine forward at ever-increasing speed.

At last he sighted the lights of the next station, but even here he seemed reluctant to stop. He drove down upon it at almost full speed, and when he did put on the air, Corbin and Parks were tossed up on the boilerhead, and the two surveyors groveled in the coal.

"I WON'T HAVE SUCH A MAN AS YOU ON THE DIVISION."

Once in the telegraph office and in communication with the despatcher, Corbin ordered the track cleared for his light engine. Soon they were all in the cab again with the required orders, and the race to catch the Overland was resumed.

That race was a masterpiece of luck and nerve. Sam seemed to lose all sense of fear or judgment as he clung to the wide-open throttle while the engine careened dizzily around sharp curves or shot down long grades. Every one hung-on as best he could, but the two amateur firemen had the hardest time.

With but little coal or water left, Sam brought the lone engine into headquarters a few minutes before the Overland arrived. As Corbin swung off the engine, he called back to Sam.

"Come up to my office to-morrow! I want to see you!" and then dived into the big station after his chief engineer.

I will—nit!" grinned Sam as he watched the super go. If the company will give me my two weeks' pay, I'll not be bothering them any more. I'm through with this business for a while."

He ran the engine down into the yards and hailed a passing switchman.

"Hey, terrier," he called to the switchman, "come take this engine into the roundhouse! I'm all in, and sick besides. I brought the engine most of the way from the other end of the division without a fireman."

After the usual grumble, the switchman took the engine, and Sam, with his battered suit-case, slipped away into the dark to find a park-bench to sleep on.

The next-morning, Sam again climbed the stairs to the chief despatcher's office. He looked a little more battered and crumpled than was his wont, and his fingers were a little more tightly crossed than was usual on such occasions.

He entered the chief's office without knocking, slumped into the chair before the chief's desk, and stared vacantly before him.

The chief looked up, and his little eyes widened with surprise.

"Well,'' he said sharply, ''how did you get here?"

"I came in by the air-line," said Sam dispassionately. "I want my time."

The chief looked thoughtful.

"How would you like—" he began.

"No! I won't take any more of your snaps!" cried Sam fiercely. "Come through with my time, and I'll call it square."

The chief sat silent, as though listening for a few seconds; then, as he had once before done when Sam was in the office, he swung around in his chair and pattered into the trick-men's room.

"He must hear the message when it's coming in," mused Sam.

As before, the chief came back presently with a message in his hand. Even more than usual, the message seemed to excite the little chief.

"This blamed division of mine is going to the bad," he complained. "Some one went and stole an engine from Sphinx last night. They'll be stealing a whole train next."

His little eyes wandered about the room in search of something to vent his anger on, and they fell upon Sam.

"You're discharged!" he shrieked, waving the message in the air. "I discharge you now! I won't have such a man as you on the division!"

This was the way chiefs usually acted toward Sam, and his superstitious feelings were lulled to rest. He was sure now that he would get his time.

"Don't do anything rash, chief," he grinned. "You give me an order for my time, and we'll say good-by."

"You'll have your time right now!" shrilled the chief. And he sat down at his desk, drew out a form, and, filling it out, handed it to Sam.

Sam took the paper and scrutinized it carefully, as if looking for flaws. Just then the door opened. In walked Corbin. "Hallo, Mr. Engineer," he said to Sam genially. "Telling

the chief about our phenomenal run last night? That was a good one, you bet. Say, chief, didn't we break all records on this mountain end?"

Sam slowly folded up the slip of paper and put it into his pocket.

"I have just discharged this man," smiled the chief uncertainly. "You must be mistaken about him, Mr. Corbin."

Corbin suddenly became cool and calculating.

"Discharged him! Since when have you had the authority to discharge an engineer?"

"Engineer, Mr. Corbin? I thought you were mistaken. This fellow is an operator, and was in our service. I have just discharged him."

Corbin looked at Sam for a few seconds in silence.

"For Heaven's sake, my friend," he said, "tell me how you happened to be running that engine last night?"

Sam calculated the distance to the door, but wavered. Vanity and a wish for revenge on the chief caused him to say:

"I'll tell you, if you'll swear never to blacklist me or have me arrested."

Corbin promised, and Sam told him the story.

Corbin laughed shortly when Sam had finished. The little chief was very red in the face.

"Well," said Corbin, ''we still owe you something for getting our construction engineer to the Overland in time. Do you want another job on this division?"

Sam positively did not.

"I'd rather go to jail," he said. "But if you'll give me a pass to the city, I'll be much obliged."

He got the pass. **Ω**

HARPER'S WEEKLY, **January 28, 1911**

The "Snake"

By HARRY BEDWELL.

THE trainmaster had just told the superintendent that he'd be hanged if he didn't believe trainmen were degenerating into milksops, when someone came in and asked if anyone had seen the trainmaster. The two men glanced up at the heavy shouldered man who was looking at them out of quick, narrow eyes.

The trainmaster said, "Well?"

"Do you need any stingers?" In this way the man made formal application for position as brakeman.

The trainmaster took stock of him from his blood red face to his heelless shoes, and saw a great absence of the milksop. He was too good for a brakeman, the official decided.

"I can use you as a snake," he made answer, thus formally offering him a job as switchman.

"All right," said the stranger. "Give me an application blank."

They gave him blanks, and for two hours he sat humped over a desk, scrawling painfully. Then he told the trainmaster his name was Keeney, and asked what he should do.

"You'll have about time to get something to eat before you report to Mr. Bailey, the yardmaster. "You'll go to work to-night," the trainmaster said, and Keeney strode out eagerly to find the yard office.

Half an hour later, a little after sunset, he came into the yard office and demanded of the first man his eyes fell upon where the yardmaster was. Keeney did not know till later that the man he questioned was one Holden by name, who had charge of one of the night switch crews, and who was a slave-driving, hotheaded devil of a man.

The aggressiveness in Keeney's tone stirred Holden's sensitive wrath. He bit off the end of a penholder with his answer.

"It's none of your damn business! Get out of here! This office ain't for the public."

He glanced up with that, then got quickly to his feet, for he saw the narrow eyes of Keeney turn green in the half-light.

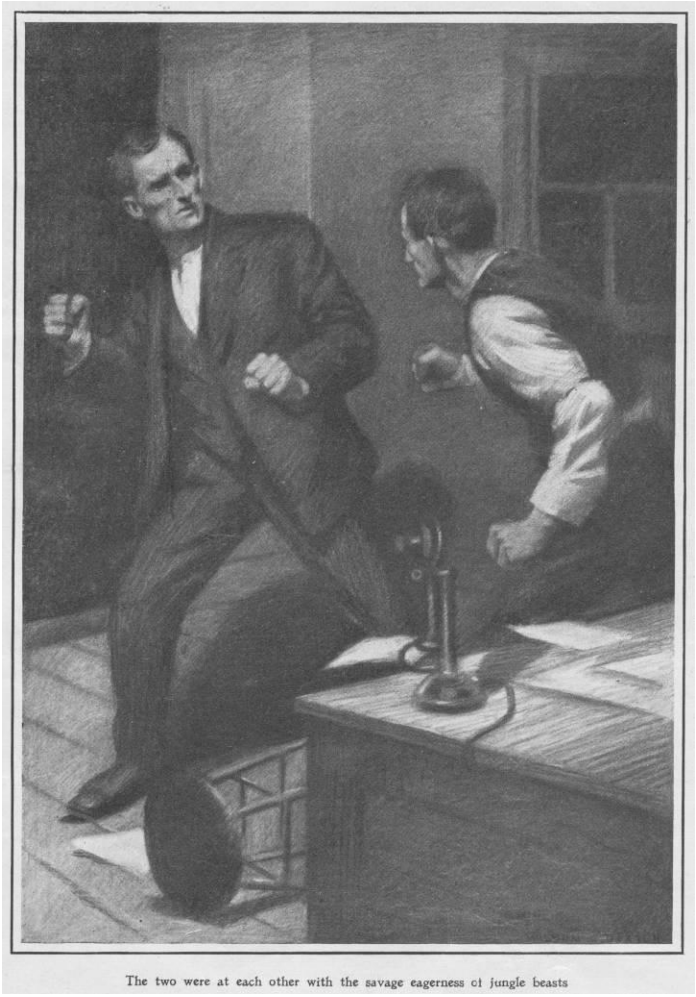
The click of the telegraph instruments was the only sound in the room for a few seconds.

"You'd better say where the yardmaster is." Keeney's voice barely ruffled the quiet, but Holden bunched himself.

"You go plumb straight to —"

The two were at each other, not warily and cunningly as men who fear pain, but with the savage eagerness of soft-footed jungle beasts. Their heavy fists whipped in blows that took away the flesh where they struck, and low snarls shook their battling bodies. Both were big, full-blooded men who came of a fighting profession, and both found joy in the battle.

Bailey, the yardmaster, came in a little later on his way home, and found half his office a wreck, with two bloody men springing at each other over the wreckage. Two yard clerks



The two were at each other with the savage eagerness of jungle beasts

and a telegraph operator were perched high on top of a file-case, screaming down advice at the top of their voices. One of them had switched on all the electric lamps to give better fighting light.

Bailey was himself a big man. He pulled the two fighting men apart and cursed them bitterly till they ceased trying to be at each other.

“What the devil are you doing here, anyway?" he finished, eyeing Keeney.

The switchman blinked his narrow eyes as if trying to remember.

“Trainmaster sent me down to go to work." He was still breathing heavily, and he spat blood with his answer.

Bailey's eyebrows went up, then down again abruptly, pinching together in a frown of decision.

“It's past time you fellows were at work," he snapped as he turned them toward the door. “Holden, this fellow is to go on your crew. Break him in to-night."

The two took lanterns and walked away down through the yards together. Each had been mauled half to death by the other, but both walked briskly with a clean swing of feet.

"You needn't have taken it so damned hard," growled Holden as they neared their engine. “Wasn't you never cussed before?"

“Never by a man who couldn't do a better job of it than you can," Keeney answered, softly.

Holden climbed on the engine.

"Take her away, he ordered, sullenly, of the engineer, and they clanged swiftly through the yards to begin work.

It was a heartbreaking night for the new switchman. Holden's heavy fist had done punishing work along his left side and forearm. Moreover, the yard was new to him and was a difficult one to master. For it broke in the middle from comparatively level ground to a patchy grade. Half-way over the hillside toward the river it sprawled, and from there the main line wound away alone down the valley and through the hills on the other side.

At their midnight lunch, Holden and the engineer told Keeney stories of cars that ran away down the steep sidings, and of the maneuvers they went through when they struck the derailing switch.

"Sometimes they'll jump into the air like a big-bellied frog," was the way Holden put it, "and sometimes they'll lay right down to the ground and roll over."

"Did you ever let any cars get away down the main line?' asked Keeney, his narrow eyes on the main-line track glinting down the steep grade under the stars.

Holden and the engineer looked away from each other.

"Yes," said Holden, "we did."

"What happened?" insisted Feeney.

Holden spoke slowly.

"That last green light down the main line there is a derailing switch. It's just beyond the last side track. There's a big ditch just there — a damn nice place to pile up cars in.

"We let a string of box-cars get away down the main line one night. A switchman broke his leg trying to catch 'em. Barney Gregg, the night yardmaster, caught the cars before they got to going so all-fired fast, and might have stopped them before they got into anything coming up the hill. But some one popped up at that derailing switch and turned the whole lot over into the ditch. We couldn't find enough of Barney to bury decently."

In the nights that followed, Keeney mastered the treacherous yard. There was never a switchman quicker than he, and with his heavy shoulders and long arms he could twist a brake till the shoes bit and screamed, and stopped cars on the steepest grades. He knew every daring trick of the profession, every long chance that would gain time.

Under warm, hazy stars, in soft moonlight, or in slanting, wind-driven rain, lightning raced through the sky, over the steel rails, and fussed and fumed about the telegraph instruments, in the yard office, he kept the hard pace set by slave-driver Holden.

He would spring eagerly at wildly careening cars, and be on top in a swift scramble. From end to end of the yard his lantern swung and tossed incessantly in quick, clear signals.

They would tear a freight-train apart savagely, then put another together again. Hoarse above the crash of cars would come Holden's roar of "*Ho*-old 'em!" and Keeney would flash the signal to the engineer; then they would tear off to get more cars to paste to an outbound train.

In the fore part of the night, feeling the yard to get their bearings after the day crews had stirred it up. At the midnight lunch they planned the work that was yet to be done, and in the cool dawn they raced and fought with the stubborn cars that the yardmaster might not complain of them.

Once when the engineer, maddened by a baffling series of signals from Keeney's restless lantern, kicked a car into a siding so savagely that even the switchman's great strength could not stop it from crashing into a string of other cars, Holden lost his self-control for a second.

"What in hell are you doing, man!" he roared at Keeney. "Do you want to butt that string of cars into the river?" It was his nature to curse, not the offender, but the man nearest him.

Keeney peered down over the edge of the car, and Holden saw the narrow eyes turn green in the lantern-light. He turned away abruptly and strode toward the engine, for the sight of those eyes made him feel again the heavy, punishing fists of Keeney.

“Think I’ve put a man on with Holden that’ll hold him for a while,” the yardmaster told the trainmaster one evening. They stood just outside the flood of light from the yard-office door, watching the switch-engines race up and down, trying to keep cars on the move westward that they might have working room. For westbound freights were packing the sidings with cars and the power of the division was working overtime.

“There ain’t room enough in this yard to-night to whip a dog,” bit out Bailey, as a switch-engine pushing a string of cars came down the main line. “These fellows are

overworked, and getting reckless. There's Number Four coming up the valley, and here's Holden pushing a string of cars out on to the main line right in her face. What's he trying to do? And where's Keeney?"

Number Four's headlight painted a bright streak across a hilltop down in the river bottoms.

"I saw Keeney with a switch list going down the coal spur," said the trainmaster. "Suppose Holden sent him to look for some cars."

"Holden's got no business out on the main line with Number Four so near," growled the yardmaster. "He's getting too — What the—"

The switch-engine was shooting the cars down the main line toward a siding to clear the way for Number Four. In front of the yard office a refrigerator-car bucked clear of the track and ploughed up a fountain of ties and cinders. The five box-cars ahead of the derailed refrigerator shot down the grade toward the end of the yard, the flanges of the wheels whining spitefully against the rails. For Holden had taken time to connect the air in the string of cars only just so far as the refrigerator, and when that car left the track it slipped it's couplings from the cars ahead.

Holden, on top of the five careening, shooting cars, felt one moment of heartsickness when he realized that he had taken one daring chance too many in not connecting the air on all the cars. Then he spun a brake tight and threw his weight against; but brake-shoes never bit so deep for him as they did for Keeney.

Down in the valley Number Four's whistle called up mournfully. She was not out of the hills as yet, and could not see the runaway cars shooting toward her.

Holden began to realize that alone he could not stop the cars from tearing up the passenger-train. He worked madly at the brakes, keeping his mind on just that for fear of panic. But the brakes did not seem to check the cars, and the increasing speed began to sicken Holden.

"He's done it!" yelled the yardmaster. "Look what he's done! In two minutes those cars will go through Number Four."

"Here, stand still!" snapped the trainmaster. "Get two switch-engines and make up two trains. Hitch the derrick on to one, and coaches on to the other. I'll get men rounded up to help. Wait a minute! What's that?" His hand shot out and pointed into the darkness.

A speck of light was just streaking across the lower end of the yard like a meteor in full flight. It seemed to take no account of ditches and fills, of cinder-piles and scrap-heaps, but swept along swiftly in a straight line.

The two men peered at the speck in puzzled silence. Then the yardmaster began to swing his arms about wildly.

"It's Keeney!" he screamed. "he's cut across from the coal spur to head 'em off." He clawed at the trainmaster, nearly pulling him out of his coat. "Run! Damn your long-legged heart, *run!*" he yelled at the flying speck of light.

"He's trying to get to the derailing switch before the cars do," gritted the trainmaster.

The yardmaster let go the other's coat suddenly.

"It's all day with Holden if he does," he said in a low voice. "It's about the same way Barney Gregg went, too. I wonder if Holden *sees* him?"

The yard had become quiet save for the roar of the runaway cars. Switch-engines stood breathing quietly, while the crews peered intently into the darkness, watching the race, their low-voiced comments barely breaking the stillness.

The speck of light swept up to the green light that marked the derailing switch, and stopped. The cars were almost on top of the two lights.

"He's made it," whispered the yardmaster, and looked to see the green light turn red as Keeney threw over the derail. But Keeney did not throw the switch.

"What's wrong with him now?" snapped the trainmaster.

Keeney's lantern raised a little in the air, then went out, shattered against the side of the first car.

The two men could not see, nor yet imagine, the heavy-shouldered switchman crouched at the side of the track, furiously pumping air into his lungs after his hard run, awaiting the avalanche of cars. He ran forward a little way with them as they came down upon him, his lantern raised that he might in its feeble light locate the iron steps of the first car. Then he sprang and clung and was swept along, his long arms almost torn from his body. The mass of cars whined on down the grade.

Keeney's huge bulk was outlined against the stars, swaying giddily with the lurch of the cars. Then the brake's shoes screamed under the twists he gave them.

A switch-engine clanged down a siding after the runaway cars. The yardmaster ran out on to the track and waved it down. He and the trainmaster swung aboard.

"Keeney is a fool — a great big long-legged fool!" the yardmaster relieved his harrowed feelings.

The two hung out of the cab-window as the engine clanked over the switches and rumbled down the hill. They saw the five cars come to a shuddering stop in the glare of Number Four's headlight.

The switch-engine came up as Holden and Keeney slid to the ground from different cars. Holden was crazy mad.

"Why in hell didn't you ditch 'em?" he yelled at Keeney. "You could so damned easy have missed catching them."

Then Holden shut up like a clam, swung around abruptly, and stamped back to the switch-engine, for he saw Keeney's narrow eyes turn green in the light of Number Four's engine. **Ω**

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THE SECRET RED LIGHTS.

PART I.

BY HARRY BEDWELL.

Bert Daily, the Conductor, Begins an Investigation of a Queer Happening on the Lobo Division.

I.

HE engineer of the work-train was forcing his undersized engine to do her best to make time.

It was Saturday night, and the crew was impatient to be at Lobo, the division headquarters, for Sunday.

The headlight thrust its wedge of white into the darkened desert. The east was beginning to be faintly tinged by the coming moon.

It was a light train that the engine pulled, a few empty flat cars, a tool-car, and the caboose. The workmen sat on the edge of the flat cars and stared vacantly into the desert. The gang-boss stood stiffly erect in the middle of one of the cars, his hands behind his back, trying to look masterful. Bert Daily, the rear brakeman, came out of the caboose and stood on the platform, gazing ahead, his lantern swinging idly in his hand.

The train rounded on a curve at the foot of a line of sand-dunes, and the flaming tail-lights of a freight-train which stopped on the track ahead of them showed almost in the engineer's face. A flagman sprang from the rear of the freight-train, and frantically waved down the work-train.

The fireman's "Hold 'em!" was tossed broadcast over the desert as the air-brakes went on with a roar that convulsed the train. It checked the train so suddenly that the gang-boss soared upward with flapping arms; then came to earth on the soft sand, alighting on his face.

The workmen were tumbled off the cars like tenpins. Bert Daily glimpsed the red lights ahead in time to anticipate the shock of air-brakes and to study the distance between his train and the freight with a calm eye.

We're going to hit 'em hard," he judged reluctantly.

The left-hand tail-light blinked once, and Daily knew the head brakeman had deserted the cab. It blinked again, and he guessed the fireman had unloaded.

"It's time I, too, was going," he said grimly as the whistle screamed a final protest, and the engineer swung clear of his engine.

Daily glanced back as he swung low on the bottom step for the jump. He saw the conductor spring from the rear platform of the caboose and bound off at a tangent, and then over a bunch of sage-brush. He fell heavily and shattered his lantern. Daily swung lower still, and sprang away easily.

The freight-train began to move ahead slowly. Then the work-train struck, and went

tearing through the caboose.

Bert Daily rounded sharply about and ran to his conductor, who was getting painfully to his feet, spitting out sand and vicious oaths with the same breath.

"We've torn those fellows up some," Daily panted. "I'll go back and flag. You have your work cut out for you."

Still running, he struck the track and swept on around the sand-dunes. He untwisted two torpedoes from his lantern-frame, planted them at the prescribed distance, then walked back some way toward the wreck and sat down.

He could catch only faint sounds from the wreck. These became fainter as the night slipped by, and at length ceased altogether. Something definite had been done — help sent for, or perhaps the two crews had settled to the work of getting under way again.

The chill of the desert night caused Daily to get up and pace about restlessly. The hours dragged out till midnight and into morning, yet no sign came from the other side of the sand-dunes to proclaim how affairs were with the two trains.

Daily's impatience waxed hot as his body grew chill. This was a deuce of a way to spend Saturday night! What were those fellows over there doing to take up so much time — and yet make so little noise? And why had there been no trains along to be stopped? Two or three were past due from the east.

So he fretted out the hours till some time after sunrise, when the desert fumed like a furnace under the hot sun. Then a train streaked up over the long horizon, shot toward him, struck the torpedoes, and stopped beside him.

"Work-train tore up the hind end of a freight around on the other side of those dunes some time last night," Daily explained to the conductor and the engineer. "Haven't heard anything of them since. Don't know if they are still there or not."

"You look as if you had spent a pleasant night of it," grinned the conductor. "We've been tied up behind a wreck ourselves."

"What have you there?" asked Daily, nodding gloomily at the two dusty coaches drawn by the engine. He had hoped for a passenger-train with diner attached.

"Superintendent Hood's car," answered the conductor easily.

A straight, slim young man, with a face of great gravity, strode from the rear end of the train.

What's the delay, Morris?" he asked the conductor.

Tone and gesture were self-conscious of his fresh, clean clothes, and his authority over these older men. Daily looked into the restless eyes with his own direct gaze, and saw the other's flinch.

This was Ellis Sargent, Mr. Hood's chief clerk.

The conductor explained why they had stopped.

"All right," said Sargent bruskly. "Run down to where the accident happened, and see what has become of the two trains. Daily, you come back to the car with me, and tell Mr. Hood what has happened."

Daily followed Sargent back to the private car, and swung up on the platform as the train started slowly forward. Sargent entered the car. Daily paused in the door-way till his eyes, used to the glaring hot light, could distinguish objects in the cool, dark car.

"Oh, it's Daily!" came Mr. Hood's quiet voice. "What has happened now?"

Daily began to see the interior of the apartment more clearly. Mr. Hood sat comfortably tilted back in a chair, a newspaper on his knee. At the far end two ladies sat at a small table, on which glasses of cold stuff clinked musically. Daily sat his useless lantern down upon

the platform.

"Here, sit down," ordered Mr. Hood, pushing out a chair with his foot. His quiet eyes had noted that Daily's face was haggard from a sleepless night of watching.

Daily slumped wearily into the chair and explained how he happened to be there, and his eyes kept turning toward the glasses of cool liquid that clinked so merrily on the little table between the two young ladies.

He had neither eaten nor drunk anything since the afternoon of the day before.

"Yes," he heard Sargent murmur to the young women, "he has been out all night flagging."

"You don't know if any one was hurt, do you?" asked Mr. Hood.

"No, sir." Daily shook his head, and the motion caused a row of sweating glasses to ring themselves about the car.

The train came to a stop, and Mr. Hood and his chief clerk walked out into the sunlight. Daily arose stiffly, and started to follow. At the doorway a quiet voice checked him suddenly.

"Wouldn't you like to have a drink after your night out?"

Daily came about slowly. One of the young women was coming toward him with a glass held out.

"If — you — please." He counted out the words slowly, to be sure of them.

He put the glass to his lips and drank deliberately. The cool stuff seemed to saturate his being with a divine fire. The grave face of the girl before him became radiant and glorified. It seemed to lure him kindly out on an azure cloud.

"Won't you have another?" the glorified face asked.

Daily willed himself to refuse, but his will was broken.

"If — you — please," he again counted out soberly.

Another glass loomed before him; again he drank, and again the grave face of the girl became glorified and floated above him in a vague mist. He gave up the glass slowly, thanked her with a tearful voice, and walked out into the hot sunlight.

The work-train and the freight-train were gone, leaving behind only the caboose — a splintered and mangled hulk tipped disconsolately to one side — the only mark to show there had been an accident.

Daily forgot to be angry because he had not been called in when the trains had departed.

"I wonder what that was she gave me to drink?" he asked the solitude.

The girl was Miss Glen Hood, the superintendent's daughter.

II.

MR. HOOD was holding an investigation in his office to determine the cause of the rear-end collision between the work-train and the freight. All those interested, and some who were not, were gathered to give testimony.

Mr. Hood, his chief clerk, and the train-master sat at one side of a big table and examined witnesses. The investigation was wearisome to all, particularly the rear brakeman of the freight-train, for the evidence tended to show that his swiftness in getting out to flag any train following his own was not great.

To the rest it was nerve-fretting, for cautious train and engine men make poor witnesses.

Bert Daily was called, told the little he knew, then went back to his chair at the back of

the room and the paper he had been reading.

Four days had elapsed since the rear-end collision, and in that time he had been promoted to the rank and pay of a conductor. He had made two trips, and had but a few minutes before going on the stand been called to take an extra east at five o'clock.

Daily raised his head from his paper to listen to the testimony of the engineer of the freight-train The engineer said doubtfully that a few seconds after rounding the sand-dunes he had seen a red light swing across the track and disappear.

"I gave her the big hole," he concluded his testimony doggedly, "and had her stopped within her own length. That's all, except I guess maybe there really wasn't any red light there."

Daily grew tired of the questioning, and wandered into the outer office. There was no one there. Business had been suspended during the investigation. Daily got himself another paper, a more comfortable chair, and sat down by a window.

Presently Miss Hood and her friend, Miss Harnett, came in quietly, nodded gravely at Daily, and sat down. Daily lost interest in the paper and stared idly out of the window.

The investigation broke up, and men began to file through the outer office. Ellis Sargent came out hurriedly, spied the ladies and Daily, and came forward with his quick, nervous stride. He turned to Daily from greeting the young women.

"I'm going out with you to-night, Daily," he said. "Wait till I get my hat and coat, and I'll go down to the yard office with you." He hurried back into the inner office.

"I hope there were no bad effects from your night of flagging," Miss Hood said, turning slowly to Daily.

The conductor looked at her idly, and the vague speculation began again in his brain as to what kind of drink she had given him to make this grave face appear glorified. Her remark hardly broke his chain of thought, for the thought of so many harder nights than that one made it seem pointless.

Why Sargent was going out with him was of more interest.

"The beverage you gave me killed all evil effects before they even came to a bud," he said.

Mr. Hood came out of his office, followed by Sargent, who carried a long coat on his arm.

"Been entertaining Conductor Daily?" smiled Mr. Hood at his daughter as they were moving to follow Sargent and Daily down the stairs. "Be careful of him. He never does anything just as you expect. There was never a man came to this division with a recommendation like his. He came in here one day over three years ago — thin, red-eyed, and rather old — and gave me a letter from an old friend of mine in the East. 'This man is as good a one as I know of when sober — but he is seldom sober,' is the way the letter ran. I put him in the train service, expecting the job to break him. He's still there."

Daily and Sargent, turned up the street to a restaurant. Half an hour later they had collected the orders from the despatcher's office, the way-bills from the yard office, and soon the freight-train was swinging out of the yards. Sargent lounged in the cupola, where Daily joined him.

The train pushed steadily into the silent, starlit desert. Sargent and Daily seldom spoke. An hour and a half, and the sand-dunes began to loom up on the right.

"It was about here the collision occurred, wasn't it?" Sargent finally asked.

Daily nodded. His eyes still continued to follow the path of the headlight. He stiffened suddenly and gripped his chair. The air-brakes went on with a roar that boomed away and

lost itself in the desert. Cars jammed together savagely, and one in the middle of the train reared and plunged clear of the track, dragging one or two others with it.

"Now, I saw that," Daily bit out as the crash of cars ceased.

Sargent arose, battered and shaken, from a corner of the cupola.

"Saw what, Daily?" he questioned.

"Saw a red light swing across the track. Come on and let's see what kind of a job that engineer did stopping us."

They dropped to the ground from the caboose steps and hurried forward. Sargent was bruised and excited, and gasped out eager, useless questions.

They found Dave, the head brakeman, swearing indifferently at two cars turned over, and a third with the front trucks plowed deep into ties and dirt. Daily walked around the derailed cars and examined the track by the light of his lantern. Sargent followed, barking useless questions and giving useless advice.

"We'll have to cut loose the engine and run in for help," he said. "Daily, this is a bad spill."

Daily rounded on him suddenly.

"Why did you come out with me to-night?" he demanded. "Was it about these mysterious red lights?"

"Yes, and to keep in touch with the freight service," answered the chief clerk, unconsciously using a phrase from Mr. Hood's instructions.

Daily took him by the shoulder and faced him toward the rear of the train.

"Do you see that red light down the track there?" he asked. "That is Billy Mack, my rear brakeman, back there flagging. You get a lantern from the caboose, run back there, and take his place. Send Mack up here to me. Now, do you think you can do a decent job of flagging?"

Daily's tone was fatherly; but it came hard to disobey his orders. Sargent went with relief in his heart, for he liked little responsibility.

"Now, we'll clean up this mess," said Daily briskly.

He ordered out cables and flanges and the other simple paraphernalia from caboose and engine, and they began pulling and hauling at the two cars that lay on their sides. They dragged them clear of the track, and left them. The track was blocked up where the wheels had crushed through the ties, and the front trucks of the third car were pulled back on the rails.

Daily worked his men deliberately, with hardly a glance at his watch, for it is not well to hurry men by reminding them just how much time they have left.

Fifty minutes, and they were ready to start. Sargent was called in and the train pushed on through the desert. Daily and Sargent hung over the railing of the rear platform of the caboose and watched the dunes steal softly by.

"It's a God-forsaken country," said Sargent, shivering at a breath of chill air.

"I'd like to ride through those dunes some day," mused Daily thoughtfully. "It must be a queer place. I've ridden through the mountains a great deal, but it never struck me before that the dunes could be interesting. Did you see that red light a while ago?"

III.

LOBO recognized few gradations in the social stratum. The occasional Saturday night dances given at the big railroad hotel were attended by individuals from every walk of local life.

On a Saturday night, when Lobo foregathered to enjoy, Bert Daily lounged in a corner of the hotel office, idly watching the crowd gather and reading a paper.

He saw Ellis Sargent come in with Miss Hood and Miss Harnett. Then the dance started and Daily was lost for a time in his reading. He threw away the paper when Sargent sat down beside him, nodding somewhat gloomily.

"Mr. Hood has decided not to investigate the wreck of your train the other night," said the chief clerk. "There have been two more trains stopped at that same place since then — both of them passenger-trains."

Sargent in his gloom was growing superficial. Every one on the division knew this, and knew also that this was but a small part of the trouble which has visited the division of late.

Among other things, an engineer had pretty well torn up his train stopping at sight of a rag effigy tied across the track so conspicuously that it was easy to see the ropes by which it was fastened. Cars left on blind sidings had been run through the derailing-switches; water-tanks and coal-chutes had been emptied on the ground by a mysterious hand, and a great many other destructive happenings had occurred during the week.

"What do you make of all this bad luck?" asked Daily, eying Sargent to see if the question was impertinent.

"Blackmail," breathed the chief clerk as if his heart chilled at the mention of the word. "We got notice this morning. It's from a gang that wants one hundred thousand dollars. They threaten to put this division out of commission if they don't get it. Mr. Hood started east this afternoon to see the general manager. As I was coming over here, I got a message that when his train stopped at the Volcano water-tank some one cut all the air-hose on the train and got away without being seen."

Daily slid upright in his chair.

"Well," said he slowly, "it's a fight. You can't buy them off this time without doing it again."

"That's what Mr. Hood thinks," replied Sargent, "but what can we do in this country of little civilization that is all desert and mountains? Either way there will be trouble."

"Sure," breathed Daily. "That's mostly what makes life worth while."

The two drifted to the door of the dining-room where the couples were dancing, and Daily saw why Sargent had deserted the ballroom to talk to him.

Glen Hood was dancing with a lithe, black-haired man, and Daily gathered from the smile's some of the ladies turned on the couple that something amusing had occurred. He guessed that in a contest for Miss Hood's favor Sargent had lost his head and his temper and had been vanquished.

As the couple swept by him, Daily saw that the man had dark skin and hard features. For a few moments Daily felt that something in life had gone wrong.

"A Mexican!" He tried the word doubtfully. "A Mexican!" Then, deliberately, "a greaser!"

The smoky light faded and long shadows sprang out of the corners of the room. The dancers whirled into a dim circle and dwindled away, leaving a face with a straight nose and

a gleaming smile, topped with stiff, black hair, standing out like a portrait on a canvas.

Then the will that had driven a broken body from end to end on the division gripped him and cleared his mind.

"A puncher from the south — or a gambler," he decided more calmly. "Anyway, I'm going to try to stop him."

Daily stepped forward quickly when the music ceased and stood before Glen Hood as she sat down. The first quick look of doubt and estimate she gave him as he made his request hurt him more than anything else had hurt him in years. In that glance she really took consideration of him for the first time, and judged him. Then she accepted him, and the Mexican melted away with his gleaming smile.

They danced twice together, then Freddy Dyer, the second-trick despatcher, came and Daily strolled out to the veranda.

As he turned slowly out of the doorway he noticed, in the moonlight, four men gathered at the far end of the veranda. One leaned idly against the railing, talking in low, insinuating tones with glinting teeth. Daily also recognized the back of Sargent. The little group stood almost motionless, listening tensely to the speaker.

Daily paused doubtfully. A call-boy touched him on the arm, holding out his book. The conductor saw that he was to take an extra east in an hour, and signed the book. Then he strolled down the long veranda.

He heard the Mexican's low laugh, and saw Sargent double up grotesquely in the dancing light — saw him strike out passionately, blindly, an amateurish blow at the Mexican's face.

Daily drew in quickly. The Mexican's nose streamed blood as he came upright with a springy jump. Then he lunged at Sargent, his arm stiff, a slender knife quivering in the light.

Back of Daily were three years of rough-and-tumble fighting, of sudden blind rages and quick attacks. As the Mexican lunged, Daily caught Sargent by the shoulder and kicked savagely at the hand that held the knife.

The knife flickered into the sand and the Mexican spat out a Spanish oath as he staggered against Daily's fist. He stumbled back against the railing, holding his wounded hand in dumb pain, peering doubtfully at Daily.

Then he squared himself on his feet, brushed by them all, strode to the veranda-steps, and out toward the railroad-yards.

Sargent was trembling under the hand on his shoulder. He turned his white face, twisted into a smile, to Daily.

"Thank you," he mumbled. "The fellow is a blackguard."

"That's all right," said Daily hurriedly. "I must be off now."

An hour later his train was nosing its way into the moonlit desert.

For a long time Daily sat in his caboose sorting way-bills. The moon dropped over the rim of the sky, and when the conductor climbed into the cupola beside Mack, his brakeman, the desert was darkness.

"Guess there's a tramp on board of us. I'm goin' up ahead to see," said Mack, and disappeared below.

Daily watched the brakeman's lantern swing out over the cars and pause mid-way on the train. From the sudden rush of sound and chill air, he was conscious that the caboose door had been opened.

The next moment he was peering down into the grinning face of the Mexican.

"Hallo!" Daily said abruptly. "How did you get here?"

"Your brakeman ran me this way, so I came in. Don't move, or I'll kill you. I shoot as well with my left hand as with my right I'm going to climb up there to that seat on the opposite side of the cupola from you so that I can keep an eye on your brakeman! Then you and I will talk!"

The Mexican climbed to the seat and peered ahead at Mack's lantern still twinkling at the middle of the train. Daily eyed him curiously, then settled back in his chair, smiling quietly.

"All right," he said, "talk your head off."

"I never dreamed of such luck as meeting you so soon again, when I hid on this train," grinned the Mexican.

The train pushed on through the desert; the two men faced each other with quiet eyes.

"All this clash and friction between us has given me an inspiration," went on the Mexican steadily, resting his revolver comfortably on his lap. "I'm going to take you from your train at Volcano and keep you with me for a time. I may kill you, but I don't think so. You see, I am trying to get this second-rate railroad to part with a hundred thousand dollars to be rid of me, but, so far, it seems to be more inclined to the company of both myself and the hundred thousand."

Daily's eyes danced wickedly.

"So you are the fellow that's blackmailing the division," he said softly. "Well, I don't see just why you are mixing me up in this deal of dollars. All I did to you was to stop you from sticking a friend of mine, and keep your own royal person alive and free. If you had ever struck Sargent, you would have been out of it all by now."

"But, as you see, I am not at all grateful," glinted the Mexican. "My kidnaping you will make the railroad sit up and take a little more notice."

"Just what are you going to do with me?" asked Daily anxiously.

"Have you stop your train at Volcano, get off, then signal your train to proceed. There are comrades of mine there who know I am coming. It is best to do as I say."

The many-toothed smile gleamed evilly in the faintly lit cupola. Daily peered ahead into the darkness thoughtfully. He saw that his rear brakeman's lantern still spotted the darkness in the middle of the train. Then he turned to the Mexican deliberately.

"I don't see the sense of it," he complained. "Have you a cigarette? I suppose you won't let me get into my own pockets. Thanks. And a match? You take me away from my work and my pay and do no good to yourself."

The match flared. Daily held it to his cigarette as he talked eagerly.

"If you go to stealing men instead of dollars you will have the whole State against you instead of the railroad: Don't you see that? Give me another match, will you? "

Another match flared, and Daily puffed hard at the cigarette. Then he argued on, leaning forward eagerly, his voice raised somewhat above the roar and click of the hurrying wheels. He held the Mexican's attention by tense tone and calm eye. As he talked, the Mexican's smile became cold and cruel and his eyes were lit with a smoldering madness.

You think you will talk your way to freedom and to life — for you fear death," he cut in coldly. "You fear death!" he repeated, "and you'll fear it more before —"

The narrow window at the back of the cupola rasped harshly in its frame as a rush of cold air struck in from behind. The Mexican's hands fluttered helplessly to the arms of his chair.

In that second of his terror, two long arms ending in two huge slabs of hands drove in on the cold air, seized him by the shoulders and jerked him backward through the little

window. The chair was broken from its one iron leg; the revolver clattered to the floor.

Feet scuffled on the roof of the car as Daily sprang to the open window. As he thrust his head into the darkness, he saw the Mexican, heaved clear of the car, squirm out of sight.

A pair of boots appeared on a line with the conductor's face, and he moved to one side to let his brakeman slide feet first through the open window.

"I knew the hobo was on the train some place," panted Mack as he struck the floor. "It took a lot of nerve for him to come in here and try to stick you up. I saw him when you struck the first match. What was he trying to do to you, anyway?"

Daily bit out short sentences of explanation as he dropped to the floor and reached for his lantern.

Here," he ordered, as he thrust the lantern up at Mack. "Stop her! We've got to go back there and hunt for that fellow."

"I couldn't help throwing him off," Mack apologized, as he wormed through the window. "He fought like a cat."

Mack's lantern swooped back and forth in the quick half-circle of the "wash-out." Some one in the cab saw the signal, the whistle screeched, and the brakes began to nip the wheels.

Daily lit another lantern, picked up the fallen revolver, and swung off the train before it had stopped.

He ran along the track to the point near where the Mexican had lit and swung his lantern. Mack joined him, and they both searched for half an hour, but found not so much as a track in the sand.

"Anyway, we couldn't see much in this lantern light," Daily complained. "We can't find him. That fall would have killed a white man. This fellow has crawled out of the way and is most likely watching us, trying to decide whether to pot us or not."

They tramped back to the caboose. The shadows played about their feet in the circle of lantern light. A light bobbed at the rear of the train, and Dave, the head brakeman, swung about to stride beside them to hear what had happened.

"Let him ramble now," said Daily, as they came up to the caboose. His lantern doubled in the air and the air-brakes whistled. "Dave, run forward and tell the engineer to stop at the next station."

More track began to drone in the darkness behind them. Daily and Mack brooded silently in the caboose while the desert whispered by. As they came to a stop at Thunder Creek, the two swung off and walked into the office where the night operator idled away life at the telegraph-desk.

"Ask the operator at Volcano if he has noticed any punchers or armed men loafing about his station this evening," said Daily.

The operator rippled a call; the instrument chattered for a few seconds.

"Volcano says there's some cow-men, or something like that, camped over by the corrals, but they haven't any wagon with them. Says one of 'em kept inquiring for a telegram, and about nine o'clock this evening he got one from Lobo."

"Tell the operator," said Daily, "to keep an eye on them, then you tell the despatcher that we are going to stop at Volcano for a little time so he needn't lay anything out for us. I want all the guns you have about the shack."

"There's the agent's sawed-off shotgun and his rifle over there in the corner. There's a revolver under the ticket-window, and one here in my desk," the operator enumerated.

"You fellows must be always looking for trouble," grinned Daily. "I'll take all but your revolver, and send them back to you to-morrow."

"Be careful of the shotgun," warned the operator. "It's dangerous at both ends."

The three took the guns and walked to the engine. In a few minutes the train was moving again.

Daily, Mack, and Dave swung onto the caboose and mounted to the cupola.

"It's funny what can happen in such a little time — ain't it?" said Mack as he began to hum, "Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown" in a nasal buzz.

"This cannon is bound to scatter shot all over the country," complained Dave, who had the sawed-off shotgun. "You fellows will have to stay well back of me when I go into action. If you get into my line of fire, you'll get your lights put out."

The train swung into the yards at Volcano, and stopped with the caboose just outside the front windows of the station.

The engineer and fireman dropped from their engine and walked through the yards toward the back of the depot. Daily jumped to the platform and walked to the office, leaving his two brakemen crouched in the doorway of the caboose.

"Have you seen anything more of those fellows who got that message from Lobo?" Daily questioned the sleepy operator.

"They're over there by the corral yet, I guess," the operator mumbled drowsily. "There's four of them."

Some one outside called something and Daily swung around to the doorway. A second later, four men rode restive horses into the light that streamed from the open window and door, one riding in close and peering down at the conductor.

"Do you belong to that train?" demanded the man on the horse.

"Hands up — all." came Mack's excited yell from the rear end of the caboose.

A horseman turned in his saddle and fired, all in one quick writhe of the body and turn of the wrist that showed practice in that exercise.

The bullet plunked into the caboose over the heads of the brakemen who were crouched behind the sheet of steel hung on the railing of the platform. The horseman fired twice again in as many seconds, and the horses danced and plunged.

Daily knelt down in the shadow under the lighted window, and fired at the man nearest him. Mack's rifle spat wickedly, and four or five guns blazed at once.

The operator seated in the window seemed to be in the greatest danger, but he was accustomed to such scenes, and quickly slid to safety under his table.

With a roar that drowned all other sounds to mere cracklings, Dave let go both barrels of the sawed-off shotgun. A horse snorted; a man yelled and cursed. Shot ripped through the windows and bored into the station walls.

With that shot the firing ceased. Flying hoofs rang on the track and plowed away into the desert. A man began muttering to himself.

Daily crouched for a little time longer in the shadow to see if any pain would develop. He felt nothing unusual, so he reckoned that by some accident no buckshot had found him.

"Gosh!" he breathed, and stood up.

He turned into the station to fetch a lamp.

The light showed one horse and two men down on the cinder platform. One of the men raised on his arm and took a quick shot at the light in Daily's hand and extinguished it. "Don't do that again," warned a voice. "Get another light." It was the engineer. Daily got another light. The outlaw surrendered his revolver to the engineer.

"Where are you hurt?" asked Daily.

"All over mostly," answered the man, and fainted.

"Let's see where Mack and Dave are," said Daily.

Mack they found sitting close beside the caboose nursing his head in both hands. He peered up at them round-eyed.

"Dave is around here some place" he told them. "I can't hear a thing you say. The noise of that gun knocked me crazy. It knocked Dave down, then kicked him twice after that."

They found Dave on the flat of his back and the shotgun on top of him.

They gathered up the wounded and took them into the office to look them over. Both of the outlaws were senseless. Dave opened his eyes to the lamplight to ask for a drink, and Mack walked the floor holding his head.

"This is an awful mess," complained the engineer, who sickened at the sight of so much blood. "But they should have known better than to tackle us," he added, and his face cleared a little.

"Of course they should," said Daily briskly. "Send your fireman over to the town for a doctor."

The conductor pulled the sleepy operator from under the telegraph table, and set him in his chair.

"No need sending for a doctor," said the operator, his fists in his eyes. "There ain't any. But there's whisky."

Daily began scribbling on a pad of paper. "Tell the despatcher this," he ordered the operator, pushing the paper under his nose; "and ask him if we shall go on to Newpoint with these fellows."

The operator reached for his key. After a few moments he looked up.

"The despatcher says you had better go on in with your train," he said, "then pick up the sheriff at Newpoint and come back to find the Mexican if you can. He says there's no one in command now that Mr. Hood has gone East, for Sargent is afraid to issue an order. You are very likely to get fired whatever you do."

"All right," said Daily. "We'll go in."

IV.

AN hour later, Daily was in Newpoint pulling the sheriff from bed.

"I've got a job for you," he told the sheriff.

He sat on the bed and talked, while the officer got into his clothes.

"I can get two men and enough horses within half an hour," the sheriff said. "You get the train ready, and I'll meet you at the station."

Another hour and they were careening westward, racing behind a sleek little engine to be on hand at daylight. In a box car between the engine and the caboose were four horses. Another conductor was in charge of the train, for Daily was to ride with the sheriff.

"I am going to sleep like a dog," said Daily, as he stretched himself out on a cushioned bench.

The sun was up when the train stopped at the point where Mack had tossed the Mexican from the top of the caboose. After a good deal of searching about in the sand they found where the Mexican had landed on his feet, bounded forward a few steps, then plowed up the sand in a hard fall. His trail began there, dragged across the desert, and was lost in the shimmering heat.

"Get out the horses," ordered the sheriff. "From the swing of his feet that fellow is pretty well in towards the mountains by this time. We have likely come too late; but we'll give him a try."

The horses were unloaded and saddled. The four men mounted.

"You may as well run into La Salle and ask for orders," Daily told the conductor in charge of the train. "We won't need you any more."

They spurred away into the silent waste and aching glare of the sun. It was like riding into a furnace.

By eleven o'clock the trail had led them into the shadow of the mountains. At noon it ceased in a rocky canon.

"This is his own country," said the sheriff, as he looked up at the mountains. "There's no use trying to find him here. Daily, we've lost."

"I don't like to think we have come all this way for nothing," Daily complained. "Let's try a little farther. That fellow may have dropped just around the next turn of the canon wall."

"We may be riding straight into hell," said the sheriff. "That canon is narrow and high, and once in it we're in a hole for sure. If the Mexican had won through all right he's sure to have picked up some of his men, and may be waiting for us."

"Shall we go in?" asked Daily quietly.

"Oh, I guess so," answered the sheriff, and they rode forward.

They made the first turn, and the canon lay there blankly before them. At the next turn it lost itself in the gloom of its own towering walls.

"No good," said the sheriff sullenly. "I won't risk it further."

"Do you see that black lump in the shadow against the wall ahead there?" asked Daily, pointing. "I am two-thirds sure it's a rock or a log, but I'm going to be sure it isn't the Mexican. You stay here."

He walked his horse forward for three hundred yards, found the lump to be a mound of earth, and then he faced back. He reined in as a rock clattered down the mountainside.

A rifle spoke faintly from high above. Daily's horse sank to its knees with a tired grunt, and the conductor leaped to safety.

The sheriff spurred for Daily. Then two rifles spoke sharply from above, and the sheriff threw himself clear of his own horse as it went down. One of his men was at his side in another moment. He hauled the sheriff up behind him, and the two horses clattered swiftly out of sight.

Daily was left alone. He cleared the width of the canon in a swift sprint, sprang up at a handful of dry shrubs, caught them, and pulled himself up among the rocks, where he lay for a few moments. The marksmen above began to pester him with bullets that spat uncomfortably close. Daily glanced upward along the mountain wall, then began slowly to climb higher to a spot more on a line with the marksman. His progress was followed by the steady, persistent spit of bullets, and it was an hour before he plumped down panting behind a huge boulder.

The bullets pecked about him for a little while longer, then ceased.

"Those fellows will about move around where they can get me coming and going." Commented Daily, idly fingering the loose stones, "and then where am I?"

He scanned the bare walls above him, then peered out at the rocks which concealed the marksman. The range was too great for his revolver, so he lay down and watched the mountains above and below.

After an hour, he caught a movement far to the left. A second later, a bullet threw dust in his face.

Another bounced from the rock a little above his head. Daily threw himself into a small

niche, and thrust his revolver forward. He fired at the next puff of smoke, and for the next few moments answered shot for shot.

He played for time and darkness. He reasoned that the sheriff would return by daylight of the next day with more men to rescue him. With the fall of darkness, he hoped to avoid the outlaws.

But the lone marksman on the mountain-side seemed intent that the sun should not set on Daily alive. He drew down nearer. A shot gently touched Daily's coat-sleeve. Daily crowed more of himself down in the niche, but the next shot came from a different angle, and cut his arm.

"Ouch!" protested Daily.

A dry, mirthless laugh came from behind a boulder. Daily watched the big rock with restless eyes, and when a gun-barrel showed over the top of it, he promptly fired.

The rifle slid from sight, then reappeared cautiously around the side of the boulder. Daily fired again, but the answering shot came close on his own, and a bullet slit open the tip of his shoulder.

Anxiously, he calculated the distance to the boulder, and gathered himself for a rush. The blue barrel came slowly in sight again. Daily fired three times quickly, and held still and tense waiting for the stinging bullet from the rifle to strike.

Then, and no sooner, would he rush the man on the other side of the boulder.

In the pause his eyes swept the mountains swiftly. The shadows were become long and dark in the low land.

Why didn't he fire? His heart beat off the seconds distinctly and audibly: One, two, three. His restless eyes turned downward in a racing glance. Then his caught breath went out in a long, slow whisper.

The impossible had happened. A saddle-horse, strayed from others belonging to the outlaws, came slowly down the canon, pulling at tufts of dry grass as it came. Three more heart-beats, and it was almost beneath him. He could plainly see the bridle hanging from the saddle.

Daily's eyes were pivoted on the gun-barrel nestling at the side of the boulder. The top of a black head came in line with the glowing steel, and Daily fired again. The horse raised its head curiously, then continued grazing. The top of the black head was withdrawn.

Then the horse thrust out its nose, planted its feet, and snorted. It had come to Daily's horse shot in the trail.

Daily bunched himself, rose, and leaped the boulder in front of him. He went tobogganing down the mountain, starting a mass of earth and stones. Twice he turned over to right himself and spit out dirt. He struck the trail, and went sprawling on.

He jumped to his feet half blinded, and seized the horse before it could elude him, ran a few steps as it shied past the dead horse, then swung to the saddle. The horse leaped forward in a few short, stiff jumps, then struck into a long, racing stride.

Guns began to sputter and spit from both sides of the canon. The saddle bow was torn away under Daily's hand, a stinging wound in his side grew into an agonizing ache.

The mountains began to careen and fade away, and the sky flamed and seethed like liquid fire; but he set his grip on the saddle and swept around the first turn in the canon, around the second, and away to the desert.

His burning, straining eyes photographed the riotous scene as he looked backward. High on a sliver of rock, seeming to move with the swaying mountains, a slim figure, with a puffing revolver in the left hand, was carved. Even after a filmy darkness settled down and

blotted out all else, that lone figure remained a darker blot against the blackness (continued).

***Railroad Man's Magazine*, June 1911**

V.

DAILY awoke the next morning from a dark, crashing universe of fantastic, swearing shapes. Sharp points of light hurt his eyes. He was not surprised to find himself in his own bed at the company hotel in Lobo, nor to catch a glimpse of hot sunshine through a slit in the drawn blind. There was a throbbing ache all through his right side and arm, and he felt a great desire to lie perfectly still. But his mind rebelled at this, and he spoke aloud to hear the sound of his own voice.

"Oh, the deuce!"

He wondered why there was no ring in his voice; then a figure moved in the gloom of the next room.

The figure proved to be an elderly woman who did nursing about town when it was needed. To her the conductor complained.

"You haven't given me one decent drink through it all," he mourned. "Now, fetch me a great big bucket of water — cool, decently cool."

The nurse brought him half a glass of tepid water instead. Daily spat out the first mouthful, then drank the rest, resentfully.

For five days he tossed on his bed and joked bitterly with the doctor and the nurse. The second day Billy Mack came in, and the two growled at each other for a little time. The fourth day Dave came. He was all bandages and bruises, but he grinned at Daily. The same day came Glen Hood and Miss Harnett. Their coming broke the monotony that was working Daily into a fever.

"Tell me what has happened since they put me in here," he begged of them.

"You are like the rest," he was told, "You think the division cannot run without you."

Then Glen Hood told what was going forward. Her father had returned with the ultimatum of the management. He was to take command of the division again. One hundred thousand dollars would not be paid to the blackmailers.

The sheriff was trying to organize a posse — large enough to search the mountains, but was having trouble getting men. Every precaution was being used to prevent further mischief. A double force of track-walkers was mustered in, and every express-car that contained shipments of bullion was heavily guarded.

Daily watched Miss Hood's face intently she spoke. He questioned her half mindful of the questions he asked.

"I have begun to wonder how I got here after I cleared the mountains," he said.

"And they didn't tell you? The sheriff found you just after dark that evening. He was returning after getting two more men from a ranch. He took you to Wingate, and No. 5 brought you here."

Daily was quiet after the two had gone. The next day he dressed and tottered weakly down-stairs to sit in the shade of the hotel veranda and watch the trains come and go.

Within a few days he was tramping about the yards, and trying to make life more burdensome to the men in the despatcher's office. He asked to be put back to work, but the doctor objected. Daily's right side had been ripped open, and his arm had been cut. He could

not go to work yet.

So he continued to idle about the yard, riding up and down on switch-engines and sitting at the throttle when he could coax an engineer from his seat.

One day he stopped a switch-engine before the station, jumped aboard, and sat waning out of the cab-window while the engineer and switchman went into the despatcher's office to get running orders to a siding two miles below town, where they were to pick up some cars that had been left there during a congestion in the yard. As he sat there, Ellis Sargent, Miss Hood, and Miss Harnett came from the building, and paused beneath the cab to greet Daily.

"Where is the engineer?" asked Sargent.

Daily explained.

"If you want a ride, here's your chance," said Sargent to Glen Hood. "They won't be gone long. Let's go."

She glanced up at Daily, then at her friend, and gravely climbed into the cab. Chuckling gleefully, Sargent helped Miss Harnett up, and climbed up after her. The engineer and the switchman came out with the order, and Daily began backing the engine up the grade into the hills.

Miss Hood and the engineer stood beside Daily, watching him. Miss Harnett and Sargent sat on the fireman's seat. The two switchmen stood on the foot-board at the front of the engine and watched the town drop away below them. The engine backed steadily up the grade.

"Would you care to sit up here?" asked Daily glancing down at Miss Hood.

"Of course," she answered, "if I wouldn't be in the way."

The engineer helped her up, and she sat down behind Daily. She leaned on the window-ledge, watching his hands curiously. They commenced the curve around the bare, brown hills.

"You don't seem to be giving your wounds a chance to rest much," she commented.

"My arm is stiff and sore yet," he said, "but I'm getting it in shape all right. See, I can really open and shut my hand pretty well now."

Daily suddenly thrust his head forward.

His face was tense. Then he leaned over to the engineer.

"Are you sure we have plenty time on that order to reach Hugo before No. 3?" he asked in a low voice.

The engineer glanced again at his order, at his watch, then at the strip of track curving around the hill.

"We haven't got any too much time," he said doubtfully. His long service in the yards, with no restraint of orders, had made him uncertain of himself on a single track.

Daily plucked the order from the engineer's hand, read it, then took a swift glance at his own watch.

"Thought I heard something coming," he mumbled as he turned his head to measure the distance already covered. "It's No. 3, all right."

Daily made his decision with a backward glance. He pushed the throttle open steadily. The engine shot on up the grade.

"Tell one of the switchmen to come up here and be ready to open the switch as soon as we hit Hugo," he told the engineer.

The engineer tweeked the whistle and motioned a switchman back. The man came up over the running-board, climbed over the coal, and slid to the foot-board at the back of the

tender.

The echo of a whistle breaking faintly through the roar of exhaust and clank of piston, came to their ears.

Daily pushed the engine hard, his hands moving deliberately, his face set on the strip of track ahead that lengthened as they swung around the hill.

"Daily," murmured the engineer, "you shouldn't have risked it."

Daily only looked at him. He had the time calculated to the second. He intended the engine should make it, and there was no fear that the switchman would desert in the face of No. 3, for Daily caught the man's cheery whistle floating back on the hot air. This man took as great a risk every day.

At the point of the hill, in a shimmer of heat, they sighted the Hugo switch-stand. At the same time a whistle screamed close around the curve.

Miss Harnett and Sargent, unconscious of the nearness of No. 3, glanced at the group on the other side of the cab, saw nothing there to cause anxiety, and turned back to study the landscape.

To the engineer it was the scream of sudden death. Long ago his nerve had been plucked out by the cold reach of death at his heart. That was why he now served on a switch-engine. The switchman, crouched on a foot-board, no longer whistling, waiting the moment to jump.

Daily drove up to the switch-stand at almost full speed, checking and stopping at just the right place.

The switchman struck the ground running before the engine stopped. He pounced on the switch-stand, unlocked it, and swung it open before Daily had time to release the air.

As the switch-engine backed onto the siding, he had time only to lock the switch and stand clear as No. 3 swept by with tremendous rapidity.

Daily felt a light hand on his shoulder as the passenger-train whistled itself out of sight.

He turned on the seat to look into the face of the girl who sat behind him, and as on the hot morning in her father's car, when she had given him cool drinks, her face seemed to draw near to him in a glory of light, to scintillate, then waver, like a reflection in a pool. Yet she had merely smiled at him. He looked at her in surprise.

"That was good to see," she said. "I am glad I came."

"I am glad you did," he murmured dazedly.

The engineer took his seat as Daily and Glen Hood got down. With the levers in his hand, all that was left of the engineer's nerve came back to him.

He coupled onto the string of cars, and drew out of the siding back into Lobo. He stopped at the station to let the four off, then puffed down to the yards.

"Inaction must come hard to you," remarked Glen Hood, as they walked up the platform.

Daily nodded.

"I'll be back at work soon," he said. "Then I'll be happy."

"Won't you come to our house some evening for dinner before you go back to work?" she asked. "Miss Harnett and Mr. Sargent are to be there to-night. Would you care to come?"

His eyes sought her face in a quick glance, to see if any of the old disapprobation was in them, then he said: "Thank you; of course."

A little later, Daily walked into the despatcher's office, where Freddy Dyer, of the second trick, hung over his train-sheet. Daily did not speak, but sat at a window and stared

vaguely at the fading light on the desert.

After a time Freddy looked up.

"They will either put you to work, or in a strait-jacket within a week," he said mildly.

For a few moments longer Daily watched the desert burn gold and purple. He arose abruptly and walked out without a word.

"I think the strait-jacket would be a good guess," smiled Freddy.

Sargent went to the hotel that evening for Daily. The two walked together to the superintendent's house.

"The sheriff and fifteen men struck out for the mountains this afternoon," Sargent told Daily. "He's going to make a try for that gang."

"The sheriff has a job that will not come easy," Daily answered. "Those fellows haven't quit yet. What have you learned from the two that were captured at Volcano?" he asked.

"Nothing. They claim to be nothing more than punchers from the South looking for work, but not for trouble. Guess we're not going to be able to do much with them."

The quiet furnishings of Mr. Hood's house, the shaded lights and soft carpets, made Daily suddenly tired after four years of hard living.

After dinner, while Mr. Hood and his chief clerk sat smoking in the dining-room, Daily sat with Glen Hood at a window of the living-room. Daily remained quiet while some hidden impulse began to work toward the surface. This calm-eyed girl fretted his more feverish nature. Sheltered and sequestered, she looked calmly on the world, and knew little of the hot, blind passions that drive men to their undoing or their immortality. She had never sounded deeply that phase of life where hard-handed men and women struggle. She was the essence of the civilization that had all but broken him.

"Doesn't a conductor dining with an official strike you as incongruous?" he asked abruptly.

"No," she answered promptly, "not here. The men of this division seem more of an absolute democracy than anything I know. You live by, with, and for your work. Besides, you are now a kind of hero. You have been shot at — and hit!"

The impulse in Daily squirmed.

"I suppose you are right." He smiled a dry smile. "You might be able to catch the point of view of the yardmaster who told the second vice-president to go some place or other when that official came nosing around the yards asking foolish questions. The yardmaster wanted no vice-president fooling around him. He wanted to be let alone to drive his men the only way in which they could be driven."

"I can understand the feeling," she said soberly, "but not entirely appreciate it. The men can see nothing that does not affect the road. That is their life. It is not altogether wholesome."

"Oh, we're not all like that," he protested. "There is your father. He thinks twice of his home, and once of the road."

"I don't know." Her words began to come more slowly, as if she feared the thoughts she spoke. "He thinks more of his work than mother does of hers — her household and her garden."

Daily heard Mr. Hood and his chief clerk moving about in the dining-room.

"That reminds me," he said quickly, "you haven't shown me your mother's garden."

"But it's dark now," she protested.

"It's starlight," he corrected. "You can see a lot of things by starlight. And the moon will be up soon."

He was on his feet and restive.

She led him to the veranda, thence to the garden.

"I'll point out the shrubs," she smiled, "and you can take my word for what they are."

As they wandered about talking in low tones, Daily's feelings began to trouble him. Presently the sky began to glow, and at length the moon climbed from behind the long horizon to gloat over the desert stretches. Old scenes, old faces, rioted in Daily's brain.

"No wonder the men are all for their work," he said slowly." There's not much else to think of here."

"But your work has made you masters of men." Her voice was low to harmonize with the scene. "But it sometimes seems a thankless place for women."

Then it came — the thing unlooked for, undreamed of till that moment. For the first time in years, Daily completely lost his head.

"You're all wrong," he said tensely. "You remember the day in your father's car when you gave me cold things to drink? I don't think I have realized it till now, but I have found out that there is no work, no railroads, nothing that is worth while without you. You understand, don't you?"

He saw her smile vanish. Her face became cold and lifeless. Then he had the bitterness of seeing what he had done. The man of action had failed by the quickness of his action.

Like other men before him, he had misunderstood her kindness. Then there was his life before he came to the division. Restless emotions and reckless acts had forced him up out of a degenerate life to work in this grueling land. Perhaps for the first time since childhood, she had lost her head, and was angered beyond control.

"Nothing has happened in this world which could give you the right to say that," she said, deliberately bent on hurting him. "But I suppose you formed the habit of speaking that way long ago, when you lived where amusement was more cheaply got than here. Oh, I can guess what your life has been! My father repeated to me the letter of introduction with which you came here, ‘a good man, sober; but seldom sober.'"

He had to control his feelings, but he fought them with his will between his teeth. His head was thrust forward doggedly. She thought his attitude portrayed the beast.

"Life is a game all right," he finally said tremblingly; "but there are a lot of people who are not gamblers. The system breaks a great per cent. Experience has taught you one thing — me another. I cannot give a man full respect who has not been through the fire and come out a better man — who has not fought his way up through a quagmire of temptations and beaten the system.

"You were right, of course," he continued. " I can see my act as you saw it, and it is not pleasant to think about. I can't even decently ask your forgiveness. We will go in now."

VI.

THE morning after the gathering at the Hoods, Daily demanded to be chalked up on the board for work. The same morning Mr. Hood took No. 5 for the west end of the division.

At ten o'clock a chill wind blew in from the open desert. Clouds began to shoulder up over the rim of the earth. It was the signal that the rainy season had come.

At noon, rumor came in on the wind that the sheriff had doubled back from the mountains, and was striking out for the railroad again.

The rumor had it that he had picked up some important information that was driving him back with the wind.

It was so faint, however, that it hardly ruffled Lobo. That flying wedge of men and

horses loosed on the desert night might show up anywhere at any time, or it might not show up at all.

At two o'clock No. 2 came in, and the loafers who chanced to be near the express-car when the messenger pushed open the door saw three armed guards sitting near the iron box at the back of the car.

No. 2 carried a valuable shipment of some kind.

Almost two hours after she left Lobo, No. 2 stopped at Delhart, and reported that between there and Glasgow she had been stopped by a gang of eight desperadoes and robbed of her shipment of gold.

One of the guards had been killed, the two others and the messenger had been shot. The desperadoes had ridden back into the teeth of the sharp wind with the contents of the iron box in their saddle-bags.

The Lobo division raised its hands to heaven and cursed itself into a purple rage.

Where was the sheriff, scampering hither and yon across the grim desert in a madcap chase after highwaymen?

Quietly, thirty minutes later, before the division could grow calm enough to act, the sheriff reported from Glasgow. He had swept down upon the gang as they were riding away from the scene of the robbery, had killed or captured all but two, and had secured all the gold save what the two who escaped had with them.

No. 2 continued on her way. The sheriff and his men boarded a train bound for Lobo with the killed and captured outlaws.

Bert Daily sat at the window of the despatcher's office, and, unmoved, saw the division go raving mad twice within an hour. Freddy Dyer, the second-trick despatcher, young, slim, and boyish, took his trick at four o'clock, summed it all up as not so bad, and held the division to its work while it was at the height of its madness.

After Lobo had settled down to await the coming of the sheriff, and the despatcher's office had become deserted save for Daily and the despatcher, Freddy looked over at the conductor and smiled slowly.

"Must have a lot of things in that hole in your head," he said acidly.

Daily nodded absently, then remarked:

"The rain's coming."

"Oh!" said Freddy, and his slim wrist rippled the current steadily.

The rain shut down over the desert. At half past six the sheriff arrived, and Daily went down to the platform to inspect the captures.

He scanned the faces of the chained prisoners and the two dead outlaws. The Mexican was not one of them.

"How did two get away from you?" he asked the sheriff.

"They had good horses, and ours were mostly all in," the sheriff lamented. "I sent three of my men with our best horses after them, but they won't catch 'em in this rain."

At eight-thirty all the lights were out in the despatcher's office save the one over the trick-man's table. Freddy Dyer, seated in the circle of light, jotted down an OS on his train-sheet, clicked an OK, then began drawing the picture of a thousand-legged bug with a crossed tail chasing No. 3 up the edge of the sheet.

The rain still swept over the desert in wind-driven sheets. Sounds from the yard below came up faintly to the despatcher.

The sounder clicked his call dispassionately, with no hint of what message might be forthcoming. Freddy's hand dropped to the key and flicked a careless answer.

"Here's a message," droned the instrument.

Freddy pulled a piece of clip toward him, and his slim hand rounded out the inky words of the message. Then he snapped the OK viciously, slid across the bare floor to the chief's desk, and caught up the telephone.

"The roundhouse, quick!" he ordered. Then, a few seconds later

"Hallo, Nick! Get an engine ready to take out the wrecker right away. There's a freight-train in the ditch eight miles on this side of Thunder Creek. Six cars and the engine off. No one hurt."

He hung up the receiver and strode out into the hall to raise the call-boy. As he turned back into his office, he took one swift glance at the board on which the crews were chalked up. He saw that Bert Daily would be called to take out the wrecker.

The call-boy came, and Freddy sent him off with a hurry call for the different crews and to notify the proper officials. Then he settled himself at his table to line up the division for the coming of the wrecker. The wire fumed under his soft touch. Sleepy night-operators for the length of the division sat up and paid heed.

Thirty minutes, then the door opened and shut, and Bert Daily strode into the circle of light, trailing a river of water across the floor as he came.

"Spilled herself all over the country," he commented when he had read the report from the wreck. "Well, they had the whole night and the whole desert to light in. Why not?"

He turned to the window and peered out into the black void that was pricked by pinpoints of light from the yard. By these lights he read what was going forward out there in the labyrinth of tracks.

"No sign of an engine from the roundhouse," he said. "The switch-engine has the wrecker ready to hitch onto. I wonder why they don't bring the engine out?"

The despatcher's hand hovered over his open key as he glanced up sharply.

"I don't know," he said impatiently. "It seems to me they move like a funeral down there at the roundhouse."

Daily took up his lantern.

"I'm going down there to see what's gone wrong. I don't want to be all night getting out there, and we can't run fast on this soft track. I'll be back to get the orders in a minute."

The door slammed, the gaslight flared, the storm still beat upon the desert. Freddy's hand settled to the key and began whipping out sharp calls to his operators.

Ellis Sargent hurried in and read the report from the conductor of the wrecked train. Then he began pacing restlessly to and fro.

Men came in more often now. The train-master and the road-master came in together. They were followed by the wrecking-boss, who was looking for information, and Billy Mack, who was looking for his conductor. At last Freddy looked up.

"All ready!" he said. "Where's Daily?"

The Lobo division stood cleared for the wrecker.

"Where *is* Daily'" asked Sargent.

"He went down to the roundhouse to hurry up the engine —" Freddy began.

"He shouldn't have done that," complained Sargent irritably. "He had no business down there."

Freddy looked coolly into the thin face of the chief clerk, then down at his train-sheet. Some one came thumping up the stairs in a great hurry, and the door bounced open suddenly as if kicked.

Daily strode a few steps into the room, stopped to take off his rubber hat, and stared

about the shadowy room. He rubbed his head doubtfully, then began to grin.

"Well!" snapped Sargent.

Daily turned his grin toward the chief clerk.

"I don't give a hang what you think about it," said the conductor slowly, " but what I'm going to say is that I saw some fellows deliberately run away with the engine that was to take out the wrecker."

Mack stood behind his conductor, and eyed the others gravely. He warned them in that look to hold their peace and wait until all the cards were on the table.

"It's just a little beyond me," said Daily absently, still rubbing his head.

“Well!" bit out the chief clerk again. "What in —"

"I'm coming to that," Daily broke in quickly. "It was while I was walking down the siding that I saw an engine back out of the roundhouse and came directly toward me.

"I waited for her, supposing the engine crew for the wrecker was aboard her, and when she came along I swung aboard.

"When I stuck my head under the curtain, some one promptly took a rap at it with the coal-pick. When things stopped going around and around and up and down I found myself sitting in a puddle of water and there was that engine streaking down the man line toward Newpoint."

"Are you sure this happened?" cried Sargent.

Daily looked at him indifferently.

"Oh, yes; quite sure," he said somewhat placidly.

The chief clerk was in command, but he knew not what to order.

Freddy Dyer slid across the floor to the chief's desk, took up the telephone, and called sharply for the roundhouse. The call was not answered.

"I'll be hanged if this isn't funny," he said thoughtfully. "We'll have to send some one down there to see what's gone wrong."

"Yes!" breathed Daily, and he caressed his head with careful fingers.

Feet shuffled up the stairs. The door opened slowly. A man from the roundhouse stood before them in greasy, dripping clothes. Behind him stood the crew that had been called for the wrecker engine. Sargent rounded on the man in the doorway fiercely.

"What's gone wrong with you fellows down there?" he demanded, more irritable than aggressive.

The man weakly spat out blood.

" If you'd been there you'd mighty well know;" he complained.

The sounder spat a call, and Freddy swung around to answer it. Then he looked up, a shadow creeping into his eyes.

"Sweetwater reports a light engine just by him, going like the wind," he said in an awed voice. "Sweetwater is twelve miles out. They must have made that distance in fifteen minutes. She can't keep going at that pace on this soft track. If they go far enough and fast enough they'll hit that wreck."

"You'll have to ditch her before she hits the wreck," said Daily unconcernedly.

The man from the roundhouse stepped forward.

"You can't ditch her," he cried in poignant fright. His voice rose and then broke suddenly. "They've got Glen Hood on that engine."

VII.

THE shuffling feet stood still and the faces showed white and intent in the dim light from

the shaded gas-lamp.

"Aw!! I guess you're crazy," Freddy Dyer spoke up disgustedly.

The man from the roundhouse sprang at the despatcher and shook him with powerful hands. He loomed against the light — big, grotesque, and greasy.

"I'm not!" he cried. "I seen 'em take her! Three men had her! There was a tall, black-headed man, who was leader, and a man that looked like a puncher! They had Joe Wardman with them — Joe Wardman, that used to be an engineer here and got fired for drinking! They had him half drunk and scared to death!

"The tall man came in first and hit Nick on the head with his gun when Nick asked him what he wanted. Then he shot two other hostlers when they rushed him. He hit me in the mouth and knocked me into the cinder-pit because I was in his way.

"Then the other two came in leading Glen Hood between them! She had a big bandage tied around her face to keep her from makin' a noise! All of 'em got onto the engine we had ready to take out the wrecker, and pulled out!"

The words came tumbling into the despatcher's face. For those few seconds the man loomed dominant above the rest.

Bert Daily jumped to his feet. He said quickly

"The man's right! It's those two outlaws who escaped the sheriff! One of them is their Mexican leader! They've taken this daring chance to kidnap Miss Hood to hold her for ransom — the ransom being the liberty of the desperadoes in jail!"

Sargent gapped at Daily stupidly. Freddy Dyer sat on the edge of his table and stared at the floor. The others shuffled their feet uneasily. Daily turned on Freddy.

"We've got to keep them out of that wreck," he snapped, "and we must get them before they leave the railroad for the mountains. Is there a light passenger engine in the roundhouse we can get now?" he demanded of the hostler.

"No; there ain't one in there that we could get ready in an hour," was the answer. "The freight-engine they took was the only one ready to go out."

The telegraph-sounder spoke again.

"They are just by Mesquite," said Freddy. "They have twenty miles the start of you; but they've slowed down some."

"They haven't got a fireman to keep her hot," said Daily.

He seized his lantern and strode toward the door. Mack followed quietly.

"We've got to do something," mumbled the conductor hopelessly.

Up from the valley to the west the plaintive moan of a whistle drifted to them on an eddy of the storm.

Daily stopped, his head thrown up, his eyes lighting evilly.

"That's No. 4, isn't it, Freddy?" he demanded.

"Yea," said the despatcher absently. "She's two hours late."

"Why can't we take her engine?" Daily bit out savagely.

Freddy looked grieved.

"You know her engine won't be able to make any kind of time after her hundred-and-ten-mile run in this storm," he said irritably.

"I don't mean the one No. 4 is bringing in," Daily complained impatiently. "I mean the engine that was to take her out of here. Where is that fresh engine? "

The despatcher's eyes opened wide.

"Why, hang it!" he cried, "that engine has been stewing down there on the passing track for the last hour waiting for No. 4."

"Come on, Mack!" cried Daily. "You fellows get out the wrecker and follow!"

As he reached the outside door some one caught him by the arm. He turned impatiently to look into the face of Sargent Mack was coming up behind.

"I must go with you, Daily," said Sargent plaintively. "Mr. Hood is on No. 4, and I can't face him now. Besides, that engineer may not want to take his engine out on your orders."

"Hurry!" snapped Daily, as the three plunged out into the swirl of the storm.

No. 4 was swinging up the yards as they raced down the platform and onto the passing-track to where the fresh engine was waiting her turn to pull the passenger-train.

"Run ahead and open the switch!" Daily shouted to Mack. He and Sargent climbed into the warm cab.

The engineer was a big man with a big black beard and a small black eye. His name was Wayland. He listened to Daily's hurried explanations and Sargent's quick orders.

"All right," he said at length, "I'll do it."

He switched on the headlight, and his hand dropped panther-like to the throttle. The engine purred softly down the passing-track to the main line, where it paused a second, while Mack closed the switch behind them and swung up into the cab.

They butted the storm in a quivering drop down the grade, and began the race across the flat, rain-drenched desert.

The engineer, half crouched on the seat, his small black eyes following the glare of his headlight, his long, tense body swaying gently to the lurch of the flying engine, seemed a part of the big machine — the will that goaded it along the glinting track, which at any place might gape suddenly before them in a washout.

The fireman bent steadily to shoveling coal. Mack lounged in the fireman's seat beside Sargent and regulated the pumps, while Daily stood at the engineer's elbow.

The lights of stations flickered by at intervals, the semaphore lights at each showing white. The storm battered fiercely at the lone, leaping engine.

Two hours of this heart-breaking run they endured — two hours of tense strung senses, of black, brooding thoughts. Then they rounded the sand-dunes at half-speed, and the lights of a telegraph office spotted the darkness ahead. Daily's breath went out in a sigh.

"I thought sure Freddy would have some word for us here," he said, raising his hoarse voice above the roar of steam and storm.

Wayland drove his engine swiftly down upon the little station without reply. Then the semaphore light fluttered, changed to green, then to a red eye that gleamed balefully in the darkness.

A long breath shuddered through Daily as Wayland reached for the cord and the whistle screamed a frantic protest.

"That fellow's gone wrong," Daily roared in the engineer's ear. "Freddy wouldn't stop us here. That operator has been asleep and is rattled. Run the signal, Wayland, and I'll take the blame - if there's any coming. Run it!"

But the engineer had snapped the throttle shut; and was applying the air. Twice he checked the wildly careening engine with gentle insistence; the third time the brakes bit deep. Wayland had too long obeyed that speck of light in the dark not to heed it in time of trouble.

Daily saw this plainly enough in the steady hand that darted swiftly to the levers, and in the bearded face that was fixed on the spot of red in the black void.

The conductor's impatience suddenly showed itself, but he calmed it by his fierce will. When the engine came to a stop under the crooked arm of the semaphore, he was the first to

jump to the platform and rush to the operator, who was running from the office, swinging his lantern at them.

"Is this Daily with the light engine?" called the operator.

Daily snapped, "Yes!"

"The despatcher says," panted the operator, "that you must have passed the engine you were after. There has been nothing by here since a freight-train going east."

Daily leaned over the operator. He was master of himself again, capable of judging motives.

"Are you sure?" he questioned deliberately. "Are you sure? Or, have you been asleep and don't know what has happened within the last hour?"

"Am I sure?" grimaced the operator, "Does this job look as if it was worth lying for? If you don't know enough to keep out of the rain, I do!" He stamped into the office, the others following.

"What's the despatcher got to say?" demanded Daily, as he leaned over the telegraph table.

"He's been asking about a lone engine east for the past forty minutes," the operator told them. "But nothing showed up till you came in sight; then he had me put the bug on you. He tried to get you at the next telegraph station below here, but the storm has put the wires all wrong, and that operator couldn't adjust for him."

Daily rounded on Wayland.

"What do you think of this?" he asked. "Could we have passed that engine anywhere?"

Wayland studied the floor and Sargent's white face.

"They couldn't have been ditched without ditching us, too," he finally said, "so they must have taken to the siding at Mud Springs and hid behind that old shed between the tracks. No one has lived there since the mines were abandoned, and if they put out all the lights we couldn't have seen them, going as we were."

"But how could they know we were coming, and why should they want to hide from us, anyway?" asked Daily eagerly.

Wayland still looked doubtful. Mack's acid voice cut in

"You said yourself they didn't have any one to fire the engine right," he said. "I reckon they stopped to get up steam, and hid there for fear we were close after them. They might be figuring on, boosting us into kingdom come with their big engine, if we got in their way, or they might have come as far by rail as they intended to come."

Daily turned abruptly toward the door.

"Tell Freddy we are going back to hunt out that engine," he tramped out briskly. "If they have deserted her and taken to the desert —"

He threw up his lantern and swung open the door. The others trooped out after him. They climbed into the cab, the bell clanged once, and the engine drove back into the storm from whence it came.

The engineer switched off the headlight.

"So as not to let 'em know we are coming sooner than we have to," he explained to Daily. "The sheriff and the wrecker are on their way by now, so we may catch those fellows between us."

Into the black void the engine slid smoothly, mingling her song with the song of the storm. Daily climbed back over the coal to perch himself on the rear of the tender. Sargent joined him, and they peered into the blackness for a sign of the big engine.

As they cleared the sand-dunes and again swung onto the straight track, a soft glow

showed for a few seconds in the blackness and then disappeared. Daily's sharp cry broke triumphantly above the storm.

Mack climbed swiftly back over the coal and peered into the darkness. Again the glow showed faintly and faded.

"It's the light from their fire-box," said Mack, as he sat down between Daily and Sargent. He felt about himself for weapon of some kind, but found nothing larger than his tobacco plug.

"Wish Dave was here with his sawed-off cannon," he mused with a grim, reminiscent smile. "Those fellows have sighted us by now."

The engine checked and stopped. Wayland hung out of his half-open cab window into the storm. A cluster of sparks began to show dimly in the void and grow brighter.

"They've slowed down some," muttered Mack in Daily's ear. "I wonder where they are making for?"

"Maybe the same place we had the row with them," growled Daily, "or some other place where they've got horses."

A wedge of light leaped into the darkness and broke over the little passenger engine in a dim flood. The outlaws had switched on their headlight.

The fight was to be on railroad ground.

Wayland broke open the throttle; his engine rolled slowly ahead.

"I'll bet Joe Wardman's got the jag of his life, or he wouldn't have the nerve to run us down," yelled Mack, as he swung his lantern above his head in a circle of fire.

Something plunked against the rear of the tender. Mack ducked his head.

"That's getting darned close for the first shot," commented the brakeman shrilly, as he pulled Daily down behind the coal.

"Why didn't we think to bring some guns along," complained Sargent, as he sprawled down beside them.

Mack considered a time in the darkness.

"It was careless of us not to," he conceded, still keeping Daily under shelter of the coal with a persistent hand.

"Be careful, you fellows," warned Daily.

"Whatever happens, look out for — Miss Hood."

The roar of the big engine behind them swept in with the rush of rain. Bullets now and then splintered the coal above the three in the tender and flattened against the boilerhead.

The fireman ceased shoveling coal to get under cover, but the engineer kept his seat, watching the other engine gain steadily upon him.

"Let go of me!" Daily ordered his brakeman savagely; then peered out over the rear of the tender.

"You fellows come when I yell," he ordered.

Then the big engine shot at them in a burst of speed, swooping down to crush them; but the swift little passenger engine shot easily away. She kept just out of reach for a few seconds and then checked.

There was a crash of draw-heads as the big engine nosed the little one, and the two were locked together in the grip of their own couplings.

Wayland began to apply the air in tentative touches that made the wheels complain.

Daily reared himself big and black against the glare of the headlight, a clean target for the men in the cab of the rear engine He heaved a piece of coal full into the center of the light. It went out with a sizzle of leaping sparks.

The sputter of guns came more clearly. Wicked little spurts of fire ran out from the cab.

Daily's voice boomed once above the riot of other sounds as he swung down over the rear of the tender and sprang to the pilot of the engine behind. Mack and Sargent went over after him.

Wayland set the air hard. The big engine roared impotently.

With the guns of the outlaws spitting fire into their faces, the three climbed over the pilot to the running-board, along the boiler, and to the cab.

Sargent followed Daily along the right side; Mack took the left.

They crashed through the narrow glass doors into the cab, and there in that restless, narrow space around the vibrating boilerhead began a struggle with the moving figures.

An empty revolver was snapped in Daily's face. He seized the arm that held the gun, twisted it cruelly, and struck at the face above it with savage blows.

Then he threw himself into a huddle of rioting bodies, got his hand into a head of coarse hair, pulled the head back, back till the body writhed over sidewise.

A cunning fist lashed the conductor across the face sharply. He clinched with his man. They rolled into the tender, where Daily beat his adversary's face, with its gleaming teeth, until it smiled no more.

A smoky, flaring light broke over the scene as Wayland came in along the running-board, a torch in his hand. The engineer pulled the throttle shut.

Mack was thrashing about with a man on his back screaming, biting, and clawing at his head in a frenzy. Mack got his bearings in the torchlight, and sent the man head over through the curtain into the night.

Daily stared a while at the lifeless thing at his feet until it began to take shape in his memory. Finally he recognized the Mexican.

Then the fever of the fight cleared a little from his brain.

"She's there in the fireman's seat," said Mack, panting hard.

Daily sprang to the left side of the boilerhead and found her tied to the fireman's seat. He quickly cut the ropes that bound her.

"Are you hurt?"

His voice was shaken with hard breathing; but the light of the fight had gone out of his eyes, and they searched her face steadily.

Her face was crisped by the smile that always dazzled him.

"No," she said, and then her old grave calm was broken. "I knew you would come and find me." **Ω**