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about fifteen minutes. It's going to be dark early to-night and I've quite a piece of road to go."

**H**EMPEL, retracing his way to the hostelry alone, noticed, just outside the hotel a small, shabby waggon loaded with three or four baskets of potatoes, and in the shafts an equally dilapidated horse, the owner of which had evidently gone inside to sell his goods, for he heard Burrell say brusquely, "But, my dear sir, why should I buy your potatoes when I have enough in the cellar to last the house six months and good ones at that, while yours would be dear at any price?"

The young farmer, under cover in the hall, still listened as the hotel-keeper went on, now in surprisingly softened tones, "All the same, man, I suppose one must live. I'll pay what you ask and here's a dollar extra for candy for the kid; we mustn't forget the youngsters. And before you go slip into the dining-room and get a square feed. It won't cost you anything, and maybe will make your coat fit a bit tighter. Good day."

Hempel stayed outside a minute or two longer until real gratitude had poured out its thanks, and then he stepped in and walked to the counter to settle his reckoning. Burrell got behind it, and as he handed the farmer the change said decisively, "Look here, Hempel; no one in his senses believes in sentiment these days. I haven't taken stock in such buncombe since longer than you were born, and you'll come round to my way of thinking yet."

The farmer, looking into the landlord's face, thought to himself, "What a mask that man wears," and left the house this time with a smile.

## The First Big Fill

(Continued from page 12.)

We had supper of pork and beans, with bread, molasses and canned fruit, and before we settled down for the evening's card-playing Jimmy went out to leave a good fire under the boiler. As he re-entered a blast of wind and snow blew out our single lamp, and for the moment we were in darkness.

"It's an awful night, for sure," said Jimmy, as soon as he could get his breath. "I could hardly find Susie under the snow. I'm not envying the boys on the road to-night, let me tell you."

At this moment the ticker broke in, sharp and intense. "BK BK BK," it called. That was for Burke.

"There's Grey calling, and he's in a hurry," shouted the operator, as he groped toward the instrument, while Findlay found a match.

I knew a few ticks myself, as most railroad men do, and I listened, breathlessly. There was something in the hum of the wire, in the howl of the storm, in the sharp, nervous click of the ticker, some presentiment that perhaps wasn't altogether human, that made our hearts beat quick as we waited. Grey and his little wife, alone in their caboose twenty miles to the westward, were calling.

"Tick-tick, tick, tick-tick, tick-tick-tick—For God's sake—" it spelled out, and then stopped. We looked at each other. The wire had snapped.

Sergeant Graham was the first to speak. "Constable Findlay will go down with you on the engine, while I ride to Tucker's post for assistance. Four constables are camped there," and almost before we knew it Graham had galloped into the blinding storm.

Jimmy ran to the engine and hustled his fire, while Burke, Findlay and I held a council of war. What was wrong we couldn't guess, but we knew Grey wasn't a man to send distress messages for nothing. With Western instinct we gathered all the fire-arms we could muster. Burke had a shot-gun, and I carried a revolver in the cab. Findlay, of course, had rifle and revolver. We found two boxes of cartridges, and by that time Jimmy was tooting for us.

Don't ask me how we made that trip. I told you our engine didn't track. Perhaps that is why she stayed on that crooked road. We weren't a mile out when our headlight was smashed with snow, and after that we simply wallowed through the darkness. We tied down the safety-valve, opened the throttle, and



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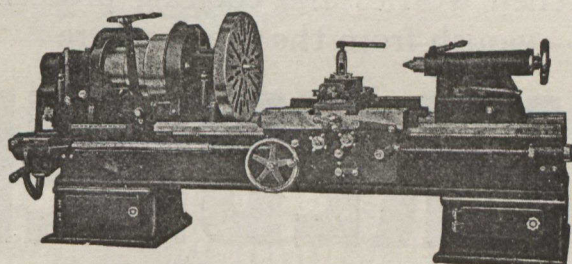
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