

"Why, the first train leaves exactly midnight," stated Simpkins, authoritatively.

Accepting his statement, Mack turned into a hotel waiting-room to rest for a couple of hours before train time.

He was relieved when the wait was over, for there was no rest for him with the burden of his momentous work pressing on his mind. With no little complacency, he found himself the only passenger alighting at Beaufort.

"I've scooped them all!" he exclaimed, gleefully rubbing his hands. In fact, it looks as if I'm the only newspaper fellow in sight."

"What's the best way to Leighville?" he inquired of the dozing despatcher.

"Humph! Another reporter," was the only response.

"Another!" cried Mack excitedly. "Am I not the first?"

The telegrapher laughed. "You're nearer the twenty-first, for I'll bet I've directed more than a dozen reporters to this explosion."

Mack was crushed by this unexpected intelligence.

"That settles my fate," he moaned inwardly. "No journalistic career for me." Before the operator, however, he maintained an appearance of unconcern.

"Well, I'm late," he went on, with affected carelessness, "but how can I reach that wonderful explosion?"

"I don't see any possible way," slowly returned the despatcher. "It would be easy if you had an auto. Three auto-loads of reporters have used me as a finger-post to-night. Then, on the earlier train came four *Gazette* men, who had a rig waiting to hurry them over to Leighville."

Poor Mack! The *Gazette* and the *Sun* were deadly rivals, each of whose be-all and end-all was to knife the other. All was reckoned fair in their fierce warfare. For Mack to find himself pitted alone against four journalistic foes was overwhelming.

"But let me see," he mused. "Simpkins is one of their cleverest men, and he didn't know of this affair till I told him. Surely the telegrapher is mistaken." And, hoping against hope, Mack plucked courage from the possibility that the dreaded *Gazette* did not have a quartette on the spot after all.

But the man at the key stuck to his story.