

Balancing against the motion of the car the conductor gnawed at the tobacco which bulged his lean cheek.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know why a pilot was sent ahead of my train?"

"Wall," the conductor drawled, "rock-slides ain't healthy, bush-fires is pizen, and——"

"Did you expect wreckers?"

"You ain't been a whole lot popular, Mr. Gault."

"Would the men of this Division expect the President of the Road to order a pilot?"

"We reckon that flies don't exactly browse on our President."

"Would railroad men of any Division or Line try to involve you, and that poor engineer, and this fireman, or the crew of this train in an attempt upon my life?"

"Wall, I guess that skunks of sorts has reckoned to murder you some, and he wasn't no tenderfoot who fixed them rails."

"Conductor, I want this matter clear. I can't believe that any railroad man wanting to murder me would risk the lives of his own comrades."

"That's a fact."

"And yet you say this wrecker was a practical railroad man?"

"He surely was. He knew his business so well that he was able to carry out the job single-handed. And, Mr. Gault, he didn't yearn to have witnesses around. No, this guy was practical, and a dam' smart man."

"Now I understand," said the President, "that without the slightest warning your engine came to a point on the Cape Horn Curve where the rails had been cut and pointed straight out over Grizzly Creek. The train must have made a straight leap into space, rolling over in the air."