

He, a railroad man, go into a *store!* And this from Madge! Madge, who, of all others—it was too much! Speckles ate his dinner, dispirited and crushed. Everything and everybody was against him.

His mother's curt inquiry as to when he was going back to work did not in any way tend to mitigate his troubles—rather, on the contrary, to accentuate them.

“Old Sour Face won't put me back,” he jerked out, in response to his mother's repeated question.

“No wonder he won't,” said his mother sharply, “if you're as disrespectful as that. I'm ashamed of you, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

Speckles was too much depressed to offer any defense. He finished his meal in silence, gulped down his cup of tea in two swallows, took his hat, and started out.

Unconsciously he directed his steps toward the yards, and, some five minutes later, arrived at the station. Here, about half-way down the platform, he spotted Mat Bolton in the open doorway of the ticket office.

As he approached, the nonchalant air with which the other leaned with folded arms against the jamb of the door aroused Speckles' suspicions. To reach the seat of his meditations—the cracker-box in the freight shed which had now become his objective point—he would be obliged to pass Mr. Bolton. He therefore began to incline his course toward the edge of the platform nearest the rails, so that, when he