

gurgling. Simultaneously there was a trembling of the rails beneath him.

He was on the shattered span.

At a crawl Jack proceeded. The vibration became more violent. On one side the track began to dip. Momentarily Jack hesitated, and paused. At once came a picture of the train rushing toward him, and conquering his fear, he went on.

Suddenly the track swayed violently, then dipped sharply sideways. With a cry Jack sprang off backwards, and threw himself flat on his face on the sleepers. Trembling, deafened by the roar of the cataract just beneath him, he lay afraid to move, believing the swaying structure would give way every instant. But finally the rails steadied, and partly righted; and regaining his courage, Jack rose to his knees, and began working his way forward from tie to tie, pushing the bicycle ahead of him.

Presently the rails became steadier. Cautiously he climbed back into the saddle, and slowly at first, then with quickly increasing speed and rising hope, pushed on. The vibration decreased, the track again became even and firm. Suddenly at last the thunder of the river passed from below him, and he was safely across.

A few yards from the bridge, and still in the mist, Jack peered down to see that the oil can was safe. He caught his breath. Reaching out, he felt about the little platform with his foot.

Yes; it was gone! The tipping of the car had sent it into the river.

As the significance of its loss burst upon him, and he thought of the peril he had come through to no purpose, Jack sat upright in the saddle, and the tears welled his eyes.

Promptly, however, came remembrance of the Riverside Park station, a mile ahead of him. Perhaps there was oil there!

Clenching his teeth, and bending low over the handle-bars, Jack shot on, determined to fight it out to the finish.

Meantime, at the main office, the entire staff, including the superintendent, the chief despatcher and Alex, were crowded in the western windows, watching, waiting and listening. Shortly after Alex had announced Jack's departure a suppressed shout had greeted the tiny light of his lantern on the bridge approach, and a subdued cheer of good luck had followed him as he had disappeared into the wall of mist.

Then had succeeded a painful silence, while all eyes were fixed anxiously on the spot opposite where a light west wind, blowing down through a cut in the hills, occasionally lifted the blanket of fog and dimly disclosed the river bank and track.

Minute after minute passed, however, and Jack did not reappear. The silence became ominous.

"Surely he should be over by this time, and we should have had a glimpse of his light," said the chief. "Unless—"

An electrifying cry of "There he is!" interrupted him, and all momentarily saw a tiny, twinkling light, and a small dark figure shooting along the distant track.

A moment after the buzz of excited hope as suddenly died. From the north came a long, low-pitched "Too—oo, too—oo oo oo!"

The train!

"How far up, Allen?"

"Three miles."

The superintendent groaned. "He'll never do it! He'll never do it! She'll be at the bridge in five minutes!"

"No; Broad is careful," declared the chief, referring to the engineer of the coming train. "He won't keep up that speed when he strikes the worst of the fog. There are eight or ten minutes yet."

Again came the long, mellow notes of the big engine, whistling a crossing.

"Who's that?" said Alex suddenly, half turning from the window. The next moment with a cry of "He's at the station! Orr's at the Park station!" he darted to the calling instruments, and shot back an answer. The rest rushed after, and crowded about him.

"I'm at the Park station," whirled the sounder. "I broke in. I lost the oil can on the bridge. There is no oil here. What shall I do?"

As the chief read off the excited words to the superintendent, the official sank limply and hopelessly into a chair.

"But might there not be some there, somewhere? Who would know, Mr. Allen?"

At Alex's words the chief spun about. "McLaren, call Flanagan on the 'phone!" he cried. "Quick!"

The operator sprang to the telephone, and in intense silence the party waited.

He got the number.

"Hello! Is Flanagan there?"

"Say, is there any oil across the river at the Park station?"

"For Heavens sake, don't ask questions! Is there?"

"Yes; he says there's a half barrel in the shed behind," reported the operator.

Alex's hand shot back to the key.

At the first dot he paused.

Through the open window came a whistle, strong and clear.

The chief threw up his hands. Alex himself sank back in his chair, helplessly.

Suddenly he again started forward.

"I have it!"

With the sharp words he again grasped the key, and while those about him listened with bated breath he sent like a flash, "Jack, there's a barrel of oil in the shed at the rear. Knock the head in, spill it, and set a match to it."

"Burn the station!"

The chief and the operators gasped, then with one accord set up a shout and darted back for the windows. The superintendent, told of the message, rushed after.

In absolute silence all fixed their eyes on the spot a mile up the river where lay the little summer depot.

Once more came the long-drawn "Too—oo, oo, oo!" for a crossing.

"The next 'll tell," said the chief tensely — "for the crossing this side of the station, or—"

It came. It was the crossing.

But the next instant from the mist shot up a lurid flare. From the windows rose a cry. Higher leaped the flames. And suddenly across the quiet morning air came a long series of quick sharp toots. Again they came — then the short, sharp notes for brakes.

And the boys and the flames had won!

The superintendent turned and held out his hand. "Ward, thank you," he said huskily. "Thank you. You are a genuine railroader."

"And — about the station?" queried Alex, a sudden apprehension in his face and voice. For the moment the crisis was past he had realized with dismay that he had issued the unprecedented order for the burning of the station entirely on his own responsibility.

"The station?" The superintendent laughed. "My boy, that was the best part of it. That was the generalship of it. There was no time to ask, only act. The fraction of a second might have lost the train."

"No; that is just why I say you are a genuine railroader — the burning of the station was a piece of the finest kind of railroading!"

"And this reminds me," added the superintendent some minutes later, leading Alex aside and speaking in a lower voice. "We expect to start construction on the Yellow Creek branch in six weeks, and will be wanting an 'advance guard' of three or four heady, resourceful operators with the construction train, or on ahead. Would you like to go? And your friend Orr? There'll be plenty of excitement before we are through."

"I'd like nothing better, sir, or Orr either, I know," declared Alex with immediate interest.