

## The Daily Short Story

### AN ENGINEER'S STORY

By Frank Filson

"Did you see that old, gray-headed fellow that went into the cab of No. 24?" asked the engine-driver. "That's Joe Egan. How old should you say he was, now? Fifty-five? Joe's, seventy-two, come next July, friend, and in spite of his age, there isn't a man that can handle his engine better than Joe, or that's more looked up to by the men and better thought of by the company. And it must be high on thirty years since what I'm going to tell you happened to Joe.

"Thirty years ago—that brings us back to the early eighties, don't it? The companies wasn't so particular in those days as what they are now. Nowadays, if a man wants a drop before going on duty he's got to take the bottle out of his pocket when nobody ain't watching him, and eat a cough drop afterwards, or else, likely as not, he'll be hunting a job next morning. But in the times I'm speaking of the company didn't care whether a man drank or not, as long as he looked sober, and brought his train in on time. And, drunk

or sober, Joe never made any mistakes with his engine.

"Still, there wasn't many nights when he didn't come in to Tapham a little soaked, and it got to the superintendent's ears. The company didn't want to get rid of Joe, for he was a pretty steady man, and although the new idea about drinking had just begun to come into use, still, everybody made excuses for Joe. You see, he'd been through the fire and done what it ain't given to many men to have to do.

"Joe lived by the line, about half a mile this side of Hapham, in a little brick house situated just where the trestle across the Mohegan begins to rise out of the swamp lands. He used to take his engine, with eight cars attached to it, over it on the return trip and run her into Tapham on the strike of nine. Then he'd walk back home till his turn of duty come again. It was a ticklish spot, because the 8.07 from Waynesboro had the right of way a few minutes after the Tapham local got speaking of the company didn't care whether a man drank or not, as long as he looked sober, and brought his train in on time. And, drunk

heard the whistle of the 8.07. You know traffic was inconsiderable in those days, and, whereas they'd have held her now, at that time one just took chances. It wasn't much of a risk. Joe saw that he could make the trestle, with a half minute to spare—only, just as he opened up, he saw his little girl on the line; just a speck of white in the night. Well, you can guess the rest. It was one life against a hundred, and Joe voted him five hundred dollars; and that's why the superintendent didn't look too close into Joe's drinking habits. I didn't mention that the shock drove the mother crazy, did I? She recovered in time—after what I'm going to tell you had happened—and they're living in Tapham now, although they never had another child.

"It must have been two years after the accident. Joe had been going from bad to worse. He was drunk nearly every night, and once or twice if it hadn't been for me—I was his fireman then—there'd have been another and worse accident. I used to talk to Joe about it, but of course that didn't do no good. At last I saw that it would be only a matter of weeks until a smash occurred, and I resolved to speak to the superintendent myself.

"It was the night after I'd come to that decision that Joe was taking



his engine, as usual, into Tapham. There were only three cars that night, but they held the President of the road and his wife and daughters, and a party of guests. They were running through to celebrate the opening of some branch line or other. I spoke to Joe and he climbed into the cab.

"Joe, I said, 'give me that stuff I see sticking out of your pocket. They'll come along and shake hands with you at the end, sure as fate, and that'll be your finish. Hand it over, Joe.'

"He was in an ugly mood that night and swore at me. The more I tried to put reason into his head the uglier he grew. He didn't care if the train went to smash and the president and directors, too, he said. He cursed them all, from Mr. Hartman down to the local traffic manager, Bill Swayne, who'd always been Joe's friend and stood by him. I saw there wasn't no use arguing with a man in that condition, and as he was a match for two of me, and fighting would only have made things worse, I couldn't do nothing, but stand by and hope for the best. And I wasn't altogether sorry, because it saved me from having to speak to Mr. Hitchens, the superintendent myself.

"We made the run in good time. Joe was a good driver, however much he had been drinking, and I had seen him taking more than a few swigs at that bottle he carried. We weren't more than half a minute to the bad when the grade began to dip down into the mud flats five miles this side of the trestle. Joe put on speed here, meaning to slow up before we started on the upgrade toward the trestle again. I could see the line of trees across the river

"Slow her down, Joe!" I yelled at him and he turned and cursed me and looked out on the line and began muttering something. There

wasn't much danger, but I knew if Joe made the trestle at 30 miles he wouldn't last overnight as a driver for the Chesapeake and Excelsior. Then, all at once, he staggered back into the cab and a second later the brakes were down and the train screeched and wined as it came to a halt fifty feet from where the trestle begins.

"Joe!" I yelled, but his face was whiter than paper, 'Bill Jones,' he said slowly, turning his eyes on mine, as I'm a man I saw Nellie on the line again!"

"I looked out, I couldn't see nothing." "You're dreaming, Joe," I said. "Bue he wouldn't touch the throttle again; just stood rocking and moaning and muttering, 'Nelly! Nelly!' Then I thought maybe some other kid had got under the wheels.

"A minute later the president was limbing along the footboard, with some of his guests. I wanted to save Joe. I told them he had seen something on the line. They looked, the whole party of them, but they couldn't find nothing. When they came back I couldn't keep them from seeing him no longer, and one look was enough. Joe was blind drunk—and in charge of the president's train.

"Can't you take her into Tapham?" he asked me. I could, but at the words Joe was at me like a madman. It would have been as much as my life was worth to try. And nobody wanted to tackle a drunken giant like Joe. So, as it was only half a mile, and the line would be clear for an hour to come, the whole party started to foot it into town.

"Well, friend, the trestle was down. There was a piece twenty yards long slipped clean out of the middle by he freshets. That's all. If Joe had run that train on to the trestle the whole party would have gone sheer into Kingdom Come. No, I'm not drawing any conclusions—only that's how it comes that Joe quit drinking and still drives his engine."

## CHASED CRUISER FOR FOUR DAYS

### Wireless Operator on British Ship Tells of Fight With Breslau

London, Aug. 26.—Wireless operator Marsden of the British cruiser Gloucester, which pursued the German cruisers Goeben and Breslau among the Ionian Islands, wrote an account of the chase to his mother. He said: "The chase lasted four days and nights, during which our gunner indulged in some long range shots at the Breslau. After missing the first shot at 11,000 yards, he spat on the second shell for luck and it went true, carrying away half of the Breslau's funnel.

"The gunner repeated the operation on the third shot which cleared the Breslau's quarter deck and put her after gun out of action. The cruiser fired thirty shots in return. Two of them smashed boats on the davits of the Gloucester's upper deck. Our ship narrowly escaped destruction from a torpedo fired by the Goeben."

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