BUD'S FIRST RUN.

Or the Hero of No. 22. By Maitland Leroy Osborne.

Bud is superintendent of motive power now, and when he speaks things happen; but what I have in mind took place a good many years ago, when he was only a wiper in the round-house at Fairview, with hair like an October sunset, a snub nose and many freckles—though the latter were not often in evidence owing to the dirt. For wiping engines can, by no wild stretch of imagination, be classed as clean or easy work. It meant crawling like a rat under the bellies of the great iron horses; with a bunch of waste and a long-snouted oil can, having his face and hands smeared with soot and dirt, ears full of ashes and hair full of grease, oil down his neck and a general sensation as of being rolled alternately in a dust heap and mud-puddle for twelve hours a day.

For exercise he was expected to break his back straining at the turn-table and helping the machinists to juggle heavy castings, and for recreation was allowed to do all the dirty and disagreeable work about the roundhouse that every one else shirked.

There were compensations however. When "Bud" was not too tired to indulge in visions of future glory, he dreamed of some day having the right side of an engine and being spoken to respectively by the master-mechanic and looked up to with awe by the frowsy-headed wipers who had sunk beneath his notice. And occasionally after he had labored diligently many weary months, the good-natured fireman of the fussy little switching engine would allow "Bud" to clamer up on the gangway and spell him for a half hour.

He began to find out the difference between an injector and a piston rod, absorbed intuitively the mysteries of the quadrant and the throttle, and at last—happy day!—was allowed to get his yearning clutch on the levers of a wheezy old freight engine and run her from the round-house down the track to the watering tank and when she had drank her fill, back her carefully up to her waiting train.

"Bud" was eighteen when he commenced wiping, bright and observant, strong and active, respectful to his superiors, and not given to needless talking. In eight months he had become thoroughly familiar with the outward and visible parts of a locomotive, understood the construction and working of a locomotive, understood the construction and working of the slide valve, injectors and air brakes and had begun to study the train sheet, the surest sign of the outcroppiug of ambition. Mason, the foreman of the round-house, had come to look on "Bud" as his reliable and most inteligent helper, and favored him accordingly.

Mason's dinners were usually brought to him every noon either by his wife or one of the younger children. But there came at last a red letter day for "Bud" when Nellie, the foreman's oldest daughter, tall, slender and brown-eyed, came picking her way daintily over the tangle of tracks at noon to the round-house with her father's dinner pail.

"Bud," crawling from beneath an engine, with oil can in hand, felt that the smoky, dingy place had suddenly become transfigured. Half-hidden behind the engine, he stole shy, wondering, glances at the bright, happy face of the girl, at her neat, cool-looking dress and her soft white hands. She removed her wide-brimmed straw hat and seated herself by her father's side on the bench, after he had spread a bunch of clean waste to protect her dress from the dust and dirt, and "Bud", watched, fascinated, while they talked.

A few days later she came again and "Bud" being near at hand, Mason called to him good-naturedly, "Come here, 'Bud" and meet my girl."

"Bud" came, feeling the eyes of the world upon him, and suddenly he was conscious of his dirt-smeared face and hands and his torn and oil-stained clothes. But the girl appeared not to notice. She smiled frankly into his eyes and held out her hand. "Bud" stopped abruptly, blushed hotly under the coat of soot and grease and attempted furtively to wipe his hand upon a bunch of waste.

"Never mind the dirt," said the girl smilingly, still holding out her hand, and soon after a brief hesitation he grasped it.

Her white, soft, yet firm fingers lay in his own black ones for an instant, while their eyes exchanged a greeting.

Being a railroad man's daughter her earliest remembrance was of great shining, snorting iron horses that her father cared. In her heart she held the traditions of railroading secretly enshrined, and perhaps under the outer coat of dirt and grease on the face of the youth into whose eyes she looked, she saw something of the clean soul within.

She talked to him brightly, with a frank kindness that went straight to the lonely heart of the orphan boy who had grown up in the hard world of labor and had had no sister.

From that time forth "Bud" watched for her coming every day and studied the train sheet with renewed earnestness. It was not long before Mason asked him to dinner on Sunday. "Bud" went gladly, and for the first time Nellie saw him with a clean face. The home-like air of the neat cottage, the motherly welcome of Mrs. Mason, the clamorous greeting of the younger children, the hearty hand-shake of their father and the frank pleasure in Nellie's look brought moisture to his eyes. After that a plate was laid at "Bud's" place at the Mason table every Sunday.

The C. N. E. & W. is a single track road, winding deviously over two mountain ranges, with a long, easy curve across a valley midway of which lies Fairview. To the eastward are two small flag stations on the mountain side several miles apart, and then comes Westonville, fourteen miles away. To the westward, four miles beyond Fairview, lies Adams, and midway between is "the summit" at Pine Bluff, pitching off to either side a five per cent grade, a stumbling block or fall heavily loaded freights.

There came a night when "Bud" alone in the round house, was giving the last finishing touches to 22 before taking her down to the west end of the yard to run extra to Westonville with a half a dozen cars of delayed perishable freight, after the passing of the Express at 10 o'clock. The Express did not stop at Fairview, and ahead of it would be a coal train that would take the siding at Adams to give the Express the right of way.

No. 22 was a big ten-wheeled Baldwin, with 56 inch drives and cylinders large enough for children's playhouses. She had a record for fast running also, and was the object of "Bud's" special pride. As he gave the last careful wipe to a connecting rod, he glanced at the clock on the wall. Past time for the coal train, he thought, and as he listened heard a strident whistle and the rumble of the train entering the eastern end of the yard.

He stepped out beside the track and the glow of the head-light swept down upon him. Sparks were flying from the wheels of the great Mogul as they gripped the rails, and the train shot by him at a much faster rate than the six miles laid down in the rules for speed within yard limits. They were late, and Sandy McPherson with his head stuck out of the cab window and his eyes fixed on the switchlights in the yard, was evidently in a hurry to make his siding at Adams and get out of the way of the Express. "Bud" watched the tail lights of the caboose disappear in the darkness, then stepped back into the round-house and glanced again at the clock. The Express would be due in twenty minutes. He climbed into the cab of No. 22 threw a shovelful of coal upon the grate and looked at the water gauges and the steam dial which showed a pressure of 118 pounds. Then he pulled the door of the fire-box ajar, swung lightly down from the cab and went outside to get a breath of the fresh night air.

Suddenly, to the Westward he heard a low rumble like a coming train, then the hind-lights of a caboose flashed into view and a few seconds later a string of cars shot past him in a shower of dust and cinders. Instinctively he counted them as they passed. Six coal cars and the caboose, headed East to meet the Express and going at terrific speed.

The coal train had broken in two on "the summit" and the rear end was running wild!

Under "Bud's" fiery locks was the brain of an ideal railroad man. When seconds mean lives the man of action must act by instinct and think afterwards. With a bound he was back in the round-house and had looked at the clock. If the Express was on time it would just be pulling out of Westonville, already too late to receive a warning from the operator at Fairview. As no night operator was stationed at either of the intermediate flag stations, there was now no way to warn the Exyress of the danger it was running down the mountain to meet. The heavy coal cars and the long train of Pullman's would meet with a crash at the foot of the mountain and nothing could save the sleeping passengers from a horible death.

Yes, there was something. The coal cars had not cleared the yard before "Bud" was stooping over a switch. A moment later his hand was at the throttle of No. 22 as she glided out into the main track. One thought only had flashed through his mind. He must catch those runaway cars. Catch them and pull them out of the way of the Express. Had there been time to discuss the situation, any engineer on the road would have told him that it couldn't be done single-handed. They would also have told him that to make the attempt meant certain death. But "Bud" did not stop to figure on the chances, he acted—like a tight coiled spring suddenly released. He lost a few precious seconds of time in stopping the engine and running back to close the switch, then climbed back into the cab, pulled the throttle wide open and No. 22 leaped forward like a race-horse. As he flashed by the station in a swirling cloud of dust he caught a momentary glimpse of the night operator, hatless and coatless and white-faced, standing upon the platform. A few seconds more and he was beyond the boundary of the yard and the level track stretched ahead into the dakness.

No. 22 was swaying and bounding now so that he had to cling to the levers to keep from being dashed headlong from the cab. She was increasing her speed with every lap.

If he overtook the coal cars while going at that terrific speed, and could not stop in time, No. 22 would plow half way through them, but with the express rushing down to meet them he dared net shut off and feel his way. He could only hang halfway out of the cab window, with the wind cutting his face like whip lashes, and watch with straining gaze the path of light dancing ahead on the shining rails. He felt the engine swerve under him as she rounded the curve, and knew that the foot of the mountain was less than two miles away. Then the coal cars came into view, so suddenly that he involuutarily shut off the steam. They were still running east but at diminished speed.

Pulling the throttle partly open again, "Bud" picked up a coupling pin, crawled from the cab window, and cling to the handrail like a bulldog at the flank of a frenzied steer, made his way slowly along the footboard to the pilot. The swaying of the engine all but threw him off a dozed times and he was cruelly bruised and battered as he was dashed resistlessly against her iron sides. No. 22 was gaining on the coal cars at every leap, and when he had reached the pilot only a few feet of space were between them. Bracing himself as firmly as possible he raised the heavy coupling bar with both hands and waited.

If he failed to guide it into the jaws of the draw-bar he would be crushed like an eggshell against the deadwoods. If they struck hard enough to throw him off he would be instantly ground to death beneath the relentless wheels. But he did not think of this. He thought of the light that had been in Nellie's eyes when she stood waiting for him at the gate the Sunday before, and of dead faces staring up at the midnight sky if he failed to make the coupling—and set his teeth hard. Then No. 22 butted her nose into the end of the coal car with a vicious jar that nearly shot him into space, but he clung, somehow, and guideed the bar true to its place. Clinging to it with one hand, he reached forward and dropped in the coupling pin, then, dizzy and bruised, made his way back along the swaying footboard to the cab.

As "Bud" shut off steam, put on the driver-braker and applied the sand, the coal cars struggled madly to pull away, then sullenly slacked up with heavy chugs as the bumers crached together.

Then he dropped the reverse lever down in the corner, pulled the throttle wide open, and as No. 22 gathered herself in the back motion for a headlong rush, he heard the Express whistling for the croseing at Stony Lonesome less than a mile away.

Anyone who has ever ridden in the cab of a locomotive running backward at approximately a mile a minute, with half a dozen heavy cars tumbling after her, can appreciate "Bud's" sensations for the next few minutes as he raced madly ahead of the Express—none others can. Rounding Cape Horn in a cat boat would be a mild and pleasurable excursion in comparison. The tremendous strain had pulled the steam down alarmingly and he found it necessay to attend to the fire. After narrowly escaping being pitched headlong from the gangway, and scattering several shovelfuls of coal all over the cab he finally managed to get a little into the fire-box. Then the lights of Fairview shot into sight. The night operator stood on the platform, lantern in hand. waved an "all right" as No. 22 went reeling and plunging past, shaking the heavy coal cars as a dog shakes a rat, then "Bud" hanging out of the cab window, saw him throw the signal to red to stop the Express, which staggered to a standstill a half a minute later, with a wondering blast of the whistle and protesting screams from the wheels when the brake shoes clutched them. The conductor, immaculate and severe in his faltless blue uniform and shining silver buttons dropped to the platform with his lantern swing from his arm almost before the wheels stopped turning, follod by the baggage master, engineer, Pullman porter and a couple of brakemen, all of them firing questions at the operator like the rattling of a Gatling gun.

The operator explained, briefly, and after the wires glowed hot with curt messages for a few minutes, handed an order in duplicate to the conductor and engineer who compared their slips of yellow paper in the light of the latters lantern. Then the engineer clambered back into the cab, a brakeman raced down the platform, lifted up two fingers to the conductor, who swung his lantern, the whistle gave a sharp toot-toot, and the Express glided away into the night with five minutes lost time to make up.

On a side track at the west end of the yard No. 22 hung her head and panted heavily after her race with death, while a hundred and fifty passengers, having been within a half minute of eternity slumbered on in blissful ignorance of the fact that they owed their several lives to the quick wit of a red headed snub nosed wiper who was just then gingerly rubbing a bruised elbow and thing of anything but that he was a hero.

But "Bud's days of wiping engines were over. The first train in the morning brought no less august a personage than the general manager himself to Fairview, and before night "Bud," somewhat to his own bewilderment, found himself on the right side of an engine with the best freight run on the division. A few months later Nellie Mason who was now Nellie Mason no longer, might be seen standing every afternoon at the same hour, in the doorway of a certain neat little cottage, where a bed of pansies glowed in the yard and morning glories clambered riotuosly over the windows, listening for the three sharp toots from the whistle of No. 22 that told her that "Bud" was "on time" and thinking of his wife.