

"Charlie Shafer. Perhaps you know him?" she inquired, as a faint gleam of recognition passed over my face.

I nodded my head, for I did indeed know him; a good-looking, good-hearted fellow, whose one only fault was a love of liquor. For this he had been discharged from our road, after making several narrow escapes from smashing his train to pieces, and had since found employment on a road several hundred miles farther west.

"Just wait here a few minutes, Mrs. Shafer," said I, hastily, as an ominous rumor which had that morning reached my ears, returned to my mind. I ran to the little telegraph office connected with the station, and sent the following message:

"John Daily, Master Trans.— R. R.: Is Shafer on the road yet?"

To which I soon received the following reply:

"Dear John: Accident, Tuesday; Shafer killed; terribly mangled; residence unknown, and was buried yesterday."

I never in all my life saw such a white look come over any poor mortal's face as faded into hers, when at last I managed to stammer out the awful fact. She never said one word, but sat there looking so white and miserable that at last, in sheer desperation, I broke the silence by saying:

"Here is some money poor Charlie intended to send you, and which Brooks inclosed in the telegram," and I put forty dollars in her hand, which I had saved to buy a new suit of clothes.

The Lord forgive me for the lie, but I had no compunctions of conscience then, as the poor little woman, never thinking of the impossibility of the money coming to her on the telegraph wires, squeezed it in her hands, while the tears rolled slowly, one by one, down her cheeks, as she murmured:

"Poor Charlie, my poor boy Charlie, that I was thinking such bad thoughts about, you did think of me and love me too, for all I said you did not. O, if I only had you back with me once more," and she fell to kissing the money as if it was the dead face of her husband, while I stood by, a little conscience-smitten, thinking strange thoughts of the way Charlie's ghost would feel to see his wife kissing another man's money, under the supposition that it was his.

Just at this moment John Martin, who had been making the woods hideous by blowing the whistle for me, rushed into the room with an oath, to know what in thunder kept me so long, so that I only had time to tell Mrs. Green to put her under the care of the conductor of the down train, take the poor little woman's hands, with the words, "Good-bye! may God help and protect you," before I had to run for it.

Mrs. Green told me, the next time I saw her, that Mrs. Shafer had been so prostrated by the news that she thought it best to leave the room in the care of the switchman, and accompany her to her home, where she had left her in care of her relatives, which was the last I heard of her for a long time.

Several years passed, and my only interest was centered in my engine, and my only ambition was to have her make the best time of any on the road. All the love which should have been expended upon wife and children, was rubbed out upon that engine, until every piece of brass work about her glistened in the sunshine like gold. My fireman had been married the night before, to a pretty girl, and I was standing the next day in the engine-house, wondering if it would not be a great deal more agreeable to buy perfumes and pretty ribbons for some nice girl, than it was to buy tripoli and other stuffs to make our engine the