

The Gates of Greatness

By Frank L. Packard.

PIT No. 3 was clear. The big doors at the end of the fitting-shop were open, giving a glimpse of the yards beyond choked with the miscellany of a division point. Above the ring and clang of the hammers, the whir and grind of shafting and machinery, came an occasional angry gasp from the exhaust of the diminutive shifting engine outside. Then a shadow fell across the shop as a big ten-wheeler, minus its tender, was pushed slowly in through the doorway. The fussy, little shunter, dwarfed to ant-like size, shoved and grunted and wheezed, then, with a final snort of satisfaction, released from its encumbrance, it shot like a rocket out of the shops into the yards again.

Carson, lounging against the bench, glared sullenly at the new arrival that, until it left the shops again, would be under the immediate charge of himself and his mate, Dick Delaney. That was the rule in the Big Cloud shops. Two fitters to an engine right through from start to finish—there might be half-a-dozen others, or more, working on it at times, most of the time for that matter, but the motion-work and general responsibility was up to the two men detailed to the engine from the moment it was rolled in over the pit.

Usually, this was the detail the men liked, and liked especially when there fell to their lot one of the gold-leafed passenger flyers that were marked up for the fast mail runs from the foothills at Big Cloud out through the Rockies to the western plains beyond.

Already Delaney had moved to the side of 518, casting a heap of tools on the floor beside the drivers.

"Come on, Jack; we're in luck. She's a corker!" he called to Carson.

With a growl, Carson jerked himself from the bench and, joining his mate, began to hammer recklessly at a cotter-pin, ending by breaking it short off in the grooves.

Delaney watched in amazement.

"What the blazes is wrong with you, Jack?" he demanded. "You're not workin' on a scrap heap! I wish you luck gettin' that out, now."

"Go to the devil!" said Carson, without looking up.

Delaney, eyeing his mate coolly, reached for his plug and took a bite.

"Go to the devil yourself, you surly cuss!" he returned evenly, and picking up his tools went around to the other side of the engine.

Until nearly noon-time each man kept to himself. Delaney had already slung the links on his side out to the cleaners when Carson swung himself between the drivers down into the pit. Delaney glanced up as Carson joined him, but the black look on the other's face was not inviting.

With a shrug of his shoulders, Delaney turned to his work. He braced himself against the fire-box, stretched out his body to get play for his arm, and began to attack, with hammer and cold-chisel, the heavy nuts that held the guard plates in position. From time to time he looked at his mate curiously. Carson's jaw was set and tense; his skin, accentuated by the grime upon his face, took on an unnatural pallor in the dim light beneath the big machine; his black eyes fixed, expressionless, upon his work, filled Delaney with a queer sense of uneasiness.

"Surly cuss!" he muttered under his breath, and the next instant, with a cry, he flung his body forward, jerking his legs back beneath him until he stood,

panting, as nearly upright as the confined space would permit.

With a crash the link-motion had slid from the rocker-arm, and Carson, with a shove, had sent it flying across the pit to strike with a nasty thud where, but a second before, Delaney's outstretched leg had been.

Flaming with anger, fists clenched, Delaney took a step toward his mate. "You did that on purpose, you—" The words froze in his throat.

Carson was gibbering—gibbering horribly, snarling to himself, a fleck of foam upon his lips.

A great fear came upon Delaney, weakening, irresistible. His hand, reaching out for support, caught at the edge of the pit. Then frantically, wildly, he dragged himself out between a pair of drivers and stood leaning dizzily against them. He passed the back of his hand across his forehead. It came away dripping wet. The left leg of his overalls was ripped from the knee to heel.

"My God!" he mumbled, hoarsely.

"My God! he's gone crazy."

The men began to troop by him in twos and threes. "Hey, Dick! You deaf! The whistle's blown," one shouted at him.

Delaney pulled himself together with a start.

"All right, I'm comin'," he called back.

He pulled off his overalls and jumper and peered nervously into the pit. It was deserted. Carson had gone. Delaney picked up his tools with a shaking hand, crammed them with his overalls into the drawer of his bench, and hurried down

of us yet if he takes spells like that. I hate to get a mate the sack," Delaney's face was puckered with honest concern, "but it's the square thing to do by the rest of the boys, let alone me. I got to!"

He rose up from the ground where he had stretched himself and started for the shops. It was still a little before one o'clock and he might get a chance to see Dixon, the fitting boss, before the whistle blew.

As he neared the gates he caught sight of the boss-fitter perched on a pile of axle-boxes outside the storekeeper's door talking to a small barefooted youngster.

Dixon's hail came up the yards:

"Hey, Delaney! Come here a minute." The foreman's little, round figure was shaking with merriment as Delaney approached.

"Here, Delaney," said he, with obvious effort to keep a serious face. "I want to make you acquainted with Master Jack Carson. Son, this is your dad's mate, Mr. Dicky Delaney."

The child searched Delaney's face fearfully with great, round, black eyes. "How do you do, Mister Dicky," he said gravely, extending his hand. "My papa's sick."

Delaney took the lad's hand awkwardly. Carson's kid! The little fingers tightened confidently, as far as they could reach, over two of his own big, horny ones.

"I like you," said Master Jack, with naive sincerity.

Dixon roared with delight.

"You're all right, bub," he cried, patting the boy on the back. "How old did you say you were?"

"Six!" Master Jack expanded his chest with dignity. "My sister's only five next birthday."

"So you got a sister, eh? And what's Miss Carson's name?"

Master Jack hung his head and dug into the ground with his big toe.

"Don't tease the kid, Dixon," Delaney burst out suddenly, speaking for the first time.

"All right," said Dixon. "What's your sister's name, Jack?"

"Isbeth Mary Carson," still continuing operations with the big toe.

"Elizabeth Mary Carson," repeated Dixon. "That's a pretty name."

Then to Delaney:

"Carson's missus sent the boy down to say he was sick an' wouldn't be in for a day or two. Tell McDermott to go on 518 with you till Carson gets back. I didn't notice anything wrong with him this mornin', hm!"

Anything wrong! Delaney shuddered, and again there swam before his eyes the scene of an hour ago in the pit under 518. Carson's eyes! He couldn't get rid of them. The glare—the murder—the madness in them! And this was Carson's kid! He looked up to meet Carson's eyes, the same round, black eyes, only now there was no menace in them.

The boy was watching him with the frank, open gaze of childhood.

"Well," grinned Dixon, "I hope you two'll know each other next time you meet. You tell McDermott, eh, Dick?"

Delaney started. "Eh? Yes. I'll tell him," he said, shortly.

Dixon nodded. "I guess you'd better run along home now, son. You can tell your ma it's all right."

The rumble of the machinery starting up reached the little group. The boy's eyes roved wistfully in the direction of the shops. "Ts makin' a engine, too," he announced.

"Which is another way of sayin' you'd like to inspect our methods, hm?" laughed Dixon. "Visitors have to have a pass. Got a pass, son?"

The lad's face fell, and he shuffled his feet uneasily.

"Aw, take the kid in," said Delaney, restlessly.

"He'd be late for school," objected Dixon. "The mother wouldn't like that."

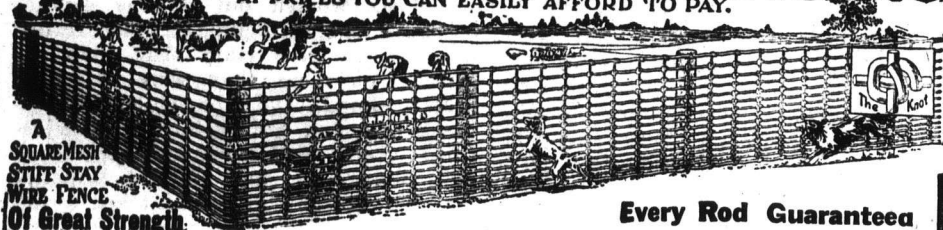
"I don't have no school only in the mornin'," explained Master Jack.

"You don't, eh? Well, all right then, I guess we'll have to let you see what's doin'."

The boy's face flushed with pleasure and he began to dance excitedly.

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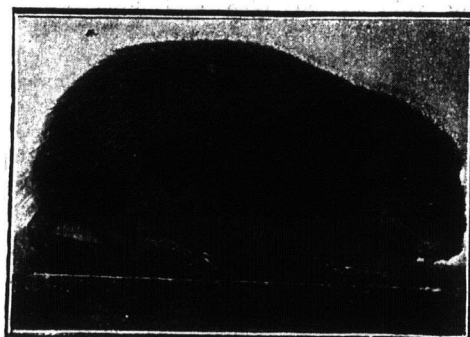
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the shop to overtake the last of the men as they filed past the timekeeper. "Carson gone out, Hicks?" he asked, as he handed in his time-check.

The timekeeper, without looking up from his task of sorting and placing the little brass discs in their corresponding numbers in the rack, answered gruffly in the affirmative.

Delaney hesitated a moment in indecision, a man hurrying by jostled him, he glanced again at Hicks, then without a word he swung on his heels and passed out through the gates, crossed the tracks by the roundhouse, and took the short cut through the fields to his boarding-house. He ate little and soon left the table, taking himself and his pipe outdoors to think it out in what time was left of the short noon hour.

He had known Carson how long? A month about, wasn't it? Carson had drifted in when the company, answering the demands of the Hill Division, had enlarged the shops at Big Cloud. And he was a good man. No question about that; Carson knew his business. A bit off-h and not the kind to take up with much, but a good mate in the shops. There were no common grounds of intimacy between them. Carson was married and lived in the little brick house a half-mile down the track; he, Delaney, was not married, and spent his evenings at the hotel with the rest of the boys. Delaney scowled at the bowl of his pipe and pulled at his mustache. That was as far as his knowledge of Carson had gone—until that morning.

"If I hadn't seen him an' jumped," Delaney muttered, his face darkening at the thought, "he'd have done me sure. An' the eyes on him! There was dirty murder in 'em! I won't take my chances again with a devil like that for love nor money, an' Dixon'll know it. 'Taint safe for me nor anyone else. He'd kill one