

# A Forest Free Lance

A NOVELETTE

By ALBERT M. TREYNOR

## Synopsis of Previous Chapters

Gerald Peyton, a lumberman, has an option on 75,000 acres of timber land and has invested all his capital in a mill and logging road. The bank has promised to lend him the money which he requires to take up the option, but at the last minute, thru the influence of Grimes and Gottschalk, otherwise the lumber trust, the loan is held up for a few days. Peyton's only hope is to get the option extended and wires his daughter Glendora to find James Kernan, the owner of the land, and arrange the extension. Kernan, however, has been taken into the woods by Grimes, but Glendora falls in with Caldwell Chivington, a surveyor, who has just been discharged by Grimes and Gottschalk because he refused to swear to a false survey, and together they board a workmen's train for the camp. They are given a hostile reception, and after a desperate fight between Chivington and Deems, the woods boss, they discover that Kernan and Grimes have left the camp by wagon. To prevent Glendora and Chivington following Kernan to town they are locked in the roundhouse by Grimes and his men. They escape by taking possession of a locomotive and breaking thru the doors with the engine.

A score of negroes had reached the track ahead, but they scattered out of the way as the engine plunged past. One man caught at the step of the cab and started to swing aboard, but Chivington abandoned the throttle and kicked the black fingers loose. The negro dropped off at the side.

"Ever run an engine?" Chivington called to Glendora. "You'll have to begin now. Just hold the throttle open. If anything happens, just push it shut."

He showed her the proper lever, and she climbed into the engineer's seat.

Three hundred yards ahead the track connected with the main branch of the logging line. There was a switch there for shunting cars onto a siding.

As Chivington stared ahead he saw a man dash out of Masters's shack and run for the switch. He recognized Deems.

"Keep her wide open," he instructed the girl; "keep her open no matter what happens! Don't pay any attention to me!"

He grabbed a stick of wood from the tender and climbed thru the cab to the running-board. Clinging desperately to the rocking engine, he swung out around the smoke-stack and dropped to the pilot.

With his left hand he grasped the head-bar and craned forward. The engine was running nearly twenty miles an hour, but Deems, in his lumbering run, had almost gained the switch.

For seconds the race was of doubtful outcome. Deems threw himself upon the switch and started to throw the lever. As he clutched the handle Chivington drew back his arm and, with all his force, hurled the stick of wood.

The missile struck the woods boss between the shoulders. He pitched to the ground as the engine rattled past the switch stand and on down the line.

Chivington scrambled back into the cab and opened the whistle in a long, triumphant blast. Then he turned exultantly to the girl.

"Now for the open track to Hattiesburg!" he shouted.

## CHAPTER VI.

### Danger in the Dark

As the engine danced and jolted over the rough track, Glendora continued to hold the throttle, while Chivington lurched back and forth between the cab and tender, feeding the hungry furnace with chunks of wood.

Presently he stopped to look at the water gage, and smiled with satisfaction.

"We're good for nearly fifty miles," he shouted above the rattle and clanking of the working gear. "This engine must have taken water and wood for an early trip to-morrow. That's a piece of luck."

The girl threw him a flushed and grateful smile.

"It was more than luck that led me to you," she cried. "That was providence!"

He shook his head deprecatingly.

"We're not out of the woods, yet," he reminded her. "Still, we have several things in our favor."

He pointed to the knuckle-joints which had been stripped from the other two engines.

"Even if we have a breakdown on the road they couldn't overtake us. We've crippled their engines until morning, and we'll be in Hattiesburg long before then."

Miss Peyton nodded, and then concentrated her attention on the track ahead. The line was only a branch which turned off northward from the main G. and G. logging road. This ran straight westward from Hattiesburg to an older camp twenty miles in the forest.

The two lines met in a clearing known as Five Mile Junction. There was a repair shed there for the company's track gang, and a few shacks for negro workmen.

From the junction, along the side of the branch line, ran a narrow, stumpy wagon road. Night had begun to fall, but it was still possible to distinguish objects on either side of the track as the engine ran thru the long forest cut.

They rounded a sharp curve, and Miss Peyton, who had been staring ahead through the engineer's window, called suddenly to Chivington. He gave a quick glance down the line, and jammed the throttle shut. Then he applied the brakes, and the engine skidded past a man who was standing in a wagon beside the track, wildly waving his arms.

"That must be Potter," said Chiv-



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