

UNDER THE STARS

BY S. E. KISER.

FOR three hours Helen Sibley had been waiting at Northport Junction. Luckily the evening was pleasant, so that she was not compelled to sit in the stony, dingy little station. There was just one pretty thing about Northport Junction, and that was Helen. If the train for which she was waiting ever came and ever departed again, Northport Junction would resume its habit of being about as unlovely a spot as one might find within the temperate zone.

While Helen remained, the place would possess one attraction that would have lent distinction to a far more important and a far more splendid centre of activity than the Junction was ever likely to become. The operator in the bay window that jutted out into the point of land between the branching tracks evidently had an eye for beauty, as well as an ear for Morse. As Helen walked up and down the platform he watched her and became thoughtful. He wondered why it was that nature bestowed her gifts so lavishly upon some girls and treated others so shabbily. The beauty that Helen possessed might have made a dozen plain girls fair if it had been distributed among them. Such was the operator's reasoning. The operator at Northport Junction was a philosopher.

But Helen was not thinking of philosophy, and if she had noticed that the operator was eagerly watching her the fact neither added to her pleasure nor caused her annoyance.

For some reason she was thinking of Tom Harlow. Perhaps it was because of the loneliness of her surroundings. It was nearly a year since she had refused to listen when Tom had said that he could "explain everything in good time," and for months she had thought that she was never going to have any interest in him again.

Thinking of Tom naturally caused her to think of Mrs. Danforth, the pretty, young grass-widow who had come between them. There was something mysterious about Mrs. Danforth. People talked about her, but nobody seemed to know just why. She had come to Springfield a stranger and she had been careful to leave her past behind her. It had not taken her long to find friends, and she was quickly admitted to the best social circles. With plenty of money, she lived at the most fashionable hotel, she entertained lavishly, and her clothes were the talk of the town. Then, one day, she disappeared, and on the following morning Tom Harlow told Helen that it had become necessary for him to go to Chicago.

A week later he returned, but a substantial citizen of Springfield had returned before him. The substantial citizen had seen Tom and Mrs. Danforth together in Chicago. Of course Tom had assured Helen that it was all right, but he had not explained. He had merely promised to do so "in good time." And Helen had naturally decided that the "good

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time" could never come. So Tom went away.

She thought over all this as she impatiently waited at Northport Junction. A dozen times she tried to fix her thoughts on other things, but always they turned back to the old subject. She became angry with herself at last, and more for the purpose of trying to forget Tom Harlow than with the hope of obtaining information she went into the station and asked the operator if it was likely that the train for Medford would arrive on time.

"She's just reported fifty minutes late," the operator informed her. "There's a washout up the road."

Helen turned away with a feeling of hopelessness and went outside again. If Northport had looked dismal to her before, it now seemed desolate. While she was trying to count the appalling number of minutes that she would have to wait, she heard the whistle of an engine away up the curve around the hill on the main line.

When the long train stopped at

the Junction Helen saw a man step down from one of the Pullman cars away at the rear. She paid no attention to him, supposing he was a passenger who had merely stepped off to get a breath of fresh air, but after the train had gone on she noticed that the man was walking slowly down the cinder path beside the track toward the station. For a moment she gazed at him and then hurried inside. It was Tom Harlow carrying a suitcase.

Selecting the darkest corner in the station, Helen sat down, turned her back toward the door, and waited, hoping that no one would come in and fearing something that she could not have explained. Her corner was so dark, and she remained so silent that Tom entered without noticing her.

"When does the train leave for Medford?" he asked at the ticket window. "It's pretty hard to tell," the operator replied. "She's reported fifty minutes late, but there's a washout up the road, and she may be held up all night."

"That's encouraging," Tom remarked. "What I've seen of this place doesn't make me yearn to spend the night here. Where's the town?"

"This is it."
"Isn't there a hotel of any kind?"
"No, nothing in that line except the farm house half a mile down the track, where the night operator and I board."

"I suppose there's no hack?"
"None that I've ever heard of."

"What time do you light up here?"
"They ought to let you use plenty of oil in such a lonesome place as this. It's getting pretty dark."

"Just a minute. Here's my call."
The operator turned to his instruments and Tom Harlow waited at the ticket window, hoping there might be encouraging news concerning the train for Medford; but he was doomed to be disappointed.

"I guess you may as well make up

your mind to hang around here all night," said the operator after the instrument had ceased clicking (he spoke rather loudly for Helen's benefit); "they say the track is washed out in half a dozen places. There's been a cloudburst."

While Tom drummed with his finger tips upon the ledge of the ticket window the operator lighted the lamp in his office and then proceeded to illuminate the waiting room, which served for both men and women.

For a moment after the light had been turned on Tom Harlow looked silently at Helen, who sat with her back toward him, her head bent and her face hidden in her hands. The operator turned to his instruments, which were clicking frantically.

"Helen," Tom said, very tenderly after he had paused beside her. She looked up at him, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes. He reached for one of her hands, but she drew away from him and shrank a little farther into her corner.

"Helen," he said again, "I've come to explain to you, I supposed you were already at Medford. I was going there to tell you."

She stood up, and when he again attempted to take her hand in his she did not object.

"Let's go outside," he suggested "outside under the stars, where I can tell you everything—where nothing will be between us and heaven."

The operator was busy and did not notice that the waiting room was empty.

"You see, Helen, it was necessary for Mrs. Danforth to take somebody into her confidence," Tom said. "For some reason she selected me. Her former husband, who was a scoundrel, had informed the secret service agents that she had been smuggling jewelry. It was merely a case of blackmail. She needed somebody to enable her to establish an alibi, and at the same



time she didn't want the story of her troubles to get out. So she drafted me into her service, and I couldn't very well be off. She was a woman in distress, that was all."

"But why didn't you tell me before?" Helen asked.

"She had asked me not to tell anybody until she gave me permission to do so."

"Then she has given you permission—and you have seen her again?"

"No, I have neither seen her nor heard from her. The man has made a confession, and the whole story is in the papers."

She walked away from him, crossed the platform and stood for a long time, looking at the silent hills that lay deep in the gathering shadows of the night. At length she turned, came half way back to him, and then stopped. He approached her, held out his arms, and asked:

"Don't you believe I have told you the truth, Helen—that I have told you all there is to tell?"

She did not speak but put her arms

about his neck and laid her neck against his breast, while his arms closed about her. Thus for a long time they stood beneath the stars.

When they returned to the waiting room the operator informed them that the train for Medford would arrive in ten minutes.

At Medford Helen had friends, and at Medford there were preachers.

Live News Notes From Rencontre

We are informed that the s.s. *Susu* has been ordered to St. John's again for the annual repairs and we trust Messrs. Crosbie or the Government will give us another boat to do the service during her absence.

Last year the people were hampered somewhat for mails and freight, owing to having the steamer taken off, and we hope such a thing will not occur this time. Where is Charlie Emerson? Now is the opportunity for him to be up and doing his duty by giving the people of his District an explanation of this serious matter and see that another boat is immediately placed there for the benefit of the people concerned.

Not Captain's Fault
We are not attributing any blame to Captain Horwood for such an objectionable action and we sincerely trust that he will continue to perform the good services in the future as he has done in the past.

He is obliging and faithful in his duties and is always ready to do his utmost to suit the requirements of the people, but when orders are given him he must humbly submit or otherwise take his dismissal.

Caplin and coffin have struck in fairly plentiful and some good catches have been secured.

The lobster fishery is somewhat short compared with recent years, and those entirely dependent on this fishery say it is the worst on record.

Much Appreciated
Mr. Parsons, our industrious and energetic teacher is doing excellent work since opening the school in April and it is the wish of the people to keep him here, knowing that his place would be hard to fill.

Mrs. Parsons is always to the fore as regards church work and is full of push and energy, and much credit is attributed to her for her valuable services as organist given to us on Sundays.

Mr. Stone, one of the writer's best pupils, who was teaching at Corbin, came here recently to spend his holidays and then will proceed to St. John's to enter the college to study for a higher grade.

All of our young men are now away some to the Banks and others to Port-au-Port, and we hope that when the time comes round they will all wend their way home safe and sound and with well filled purses.
Rencontre East, July 6.

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