

It died away, grew louder, was hushed again—and broke into a sustained roar. Came then the quick, short gasps of the exhaust—it was a freight, and a heavy one. And suddenly, from up the track, circling an intervening butte, an electric headlight cut streaming through the black. It touched the little station in a queerly inquisitive way in the sweep of its arc, lingered an instant over the platform, then swung to the right of way, and held there, the metals glistening like polished silver ribbons under the flood of light.

Straining, panting at its load, reddening the sky as the fire-box door was flung open, the big tender wheeler stormed by, coughing the sparks heavenward from its stack. The roar in the still night grew deafening, as boxcar, flat and gondola, lurching, swaying, clanking, groaning, an endless string, tugging at one another, grinding their flanges, screaming as they took up the axle play, staggered with a din infernal past the lonely and unlighted station.

The roar sank into a gradually diminishing murmur. The tail-lights winked like mischievous little red eyes in the distance—and vanished.

All was stillness and that brooding silence again.

And then a man's form, like a black shadow in the darkness, rose from the trackside, and crept to the platform, and along the platform to the station door.

The man bent forward, and the round, white ray of a pocket flashlight played upon the lock. He examined the lock for an instant appraisingly, then drew a bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, and,