

"Well, git back to yer job," it began to filter vaguely through Speckles' brain that his name was no longer to adorn the company's pay-sheets.

"Am I fired for good, Mr. Healy?" he faltered.

"You are!" said Healy. "Just that!" Then, relenting a little as Speckles' face fell: "If 'twere not fer the big-bugs down yonder"—he jerked his thumb in the general direction of the East—"I might—moind, I don't say I would, but I might—put you on ag'in. As ut is, we've instructions to cut down the operatin' expinses, an' there's an ind on ut!"

Speckles stood for a moment in dismay as Healy went back into the roundhouse; then he turned disconsolately away, crossed the tracks to the platform of the station, and, seeking out a secluded corner of the freight-house, sat down upon a packing-case to think it out.

To Speckles it was no mere matter of cutting down expenses. It was a blasted career!

Whatever Speckles' faults, and he was only a lad, he had one redeeming quality, before which, in the eyes of the business he had elected to follow, his strayings from the straight and narrow path dwindled into insignificance—railroading was born in him.

At ten he had started in as caller for the night-crews, and, during the five years the company had had the benefit of his valuable services in that capacity, there was not a man on the division but sooner or later came to know long-armed, bony, freckled-faced, red-haired Speckles—came to know the little rascal, and like him, too.