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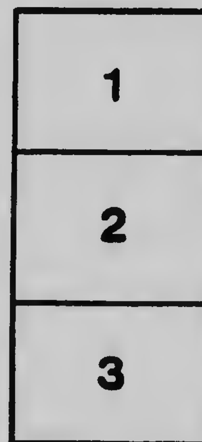

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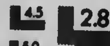

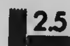

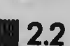
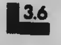
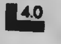
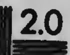
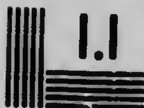
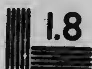

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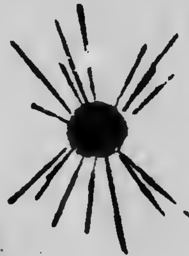
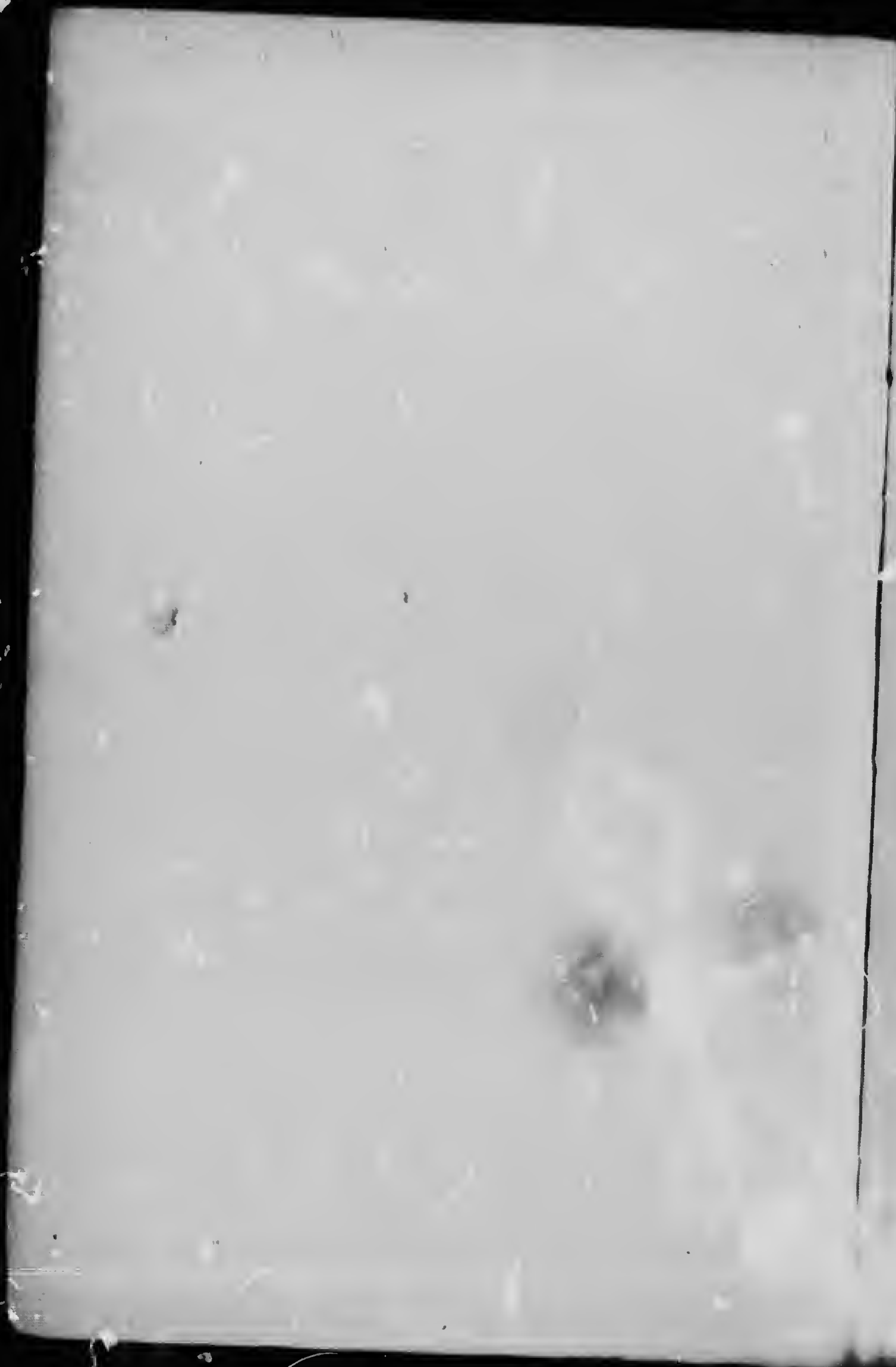


No more powerful tale of honor and courage has ever been told and if anyone's blood is not stirred by reading this book, his is a hopeless case.

ALVAH MILTON KERR

THE DIAMOND KEY

AND HOW THE RAILWAY HEROES WON IT



"DON'T SHUT HER OFF, DICK," HE SHOUTED, "DON'T — DON'T REVERSE HER!" — *Page 302.*

E DIAMOND KEY

ND HOW ... WON IT

BY

LVAH ... TON KERR

... of "Young Heroes of Wire and Rail," "Two Young Inventors,"

ILLUSTRATED BY

... ERS, POWE... O'MALLEY, EMLEN ... ELL, JAY HAMBIDGE, AND WILLIAM J. G... KENS

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"DON'T SHU[illegible] [illegible]K," HE SHOUTED, "DON'T — DON'T [illegible]ER!" — *Page 302.*

THE DIAMOND KEY

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The Diamond Key

Norwood Press
Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

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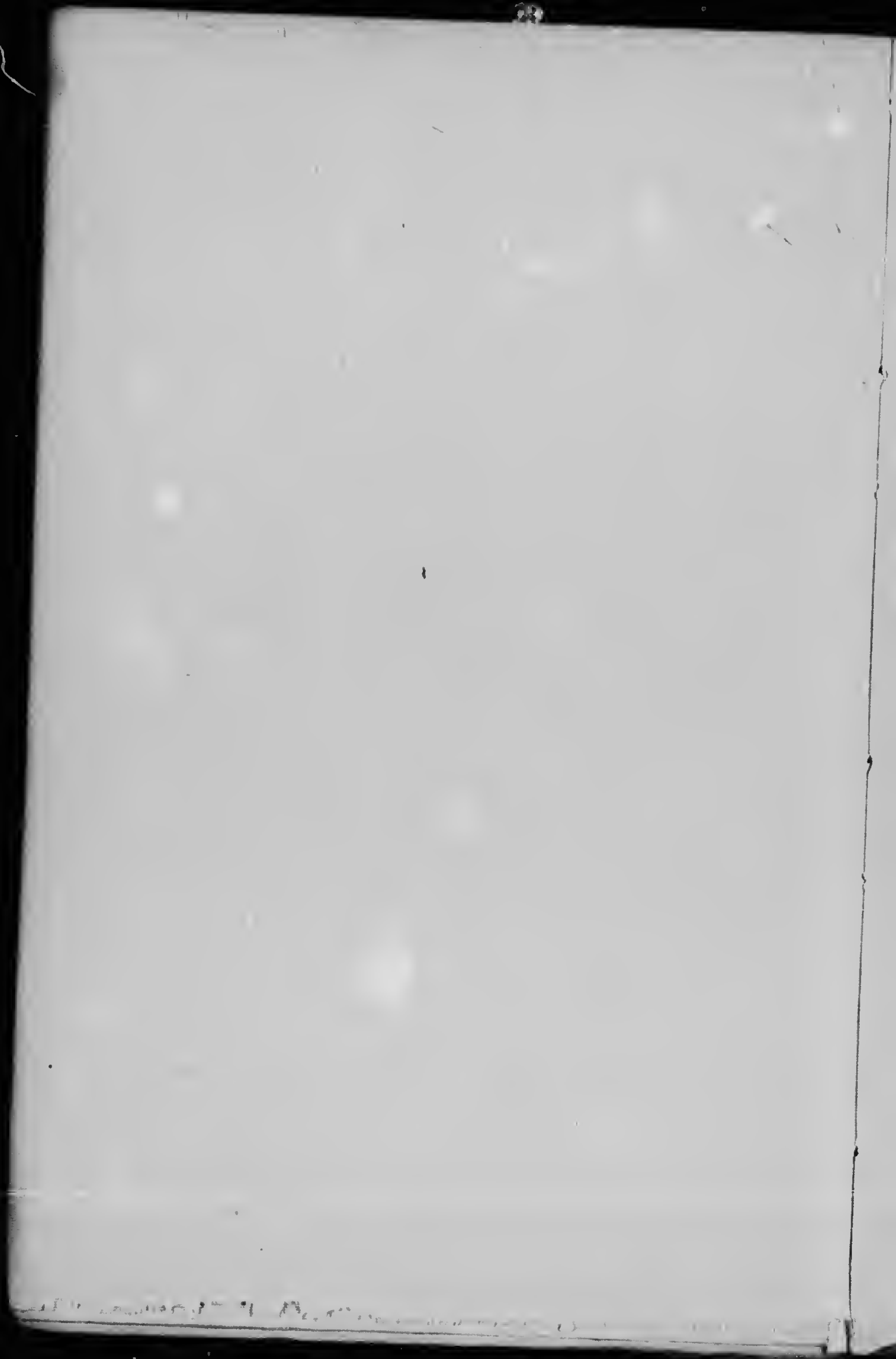
TO

My Mother

THE PUREST, GENTLEST, AND LARGEST INFLUENCE

AFFECTING MY LIFE



AUTHOR'S NOTE

IT seems both desirable and the part of courtesy to state that the larger part of such matter as forms the printed pages of this book first appeared in the form of short stories in various American magazines. However, while the chief contents of the book were thus placed before the public in detached portions, its composition proceeds from conception to close in sequence, and consonant with a definite plan entertained by the author from the beginning. Hence, it is felt that no inconsistency is presented by here joining the several portions together in a continuous whole, as originally purposed. The periodicals in which part of this narrative of heroic deeds appeared as fiction, are *McClure's Magazine, Collier's Weekly, Success Magazine, Philadelphia Saturday Evening*

Post and the *Red Book.* Both the publishers and author desire to acknowledge courteous permission from the editors of these periodicals to use the text, and with it several illustrations appearing originally with the printed matter.

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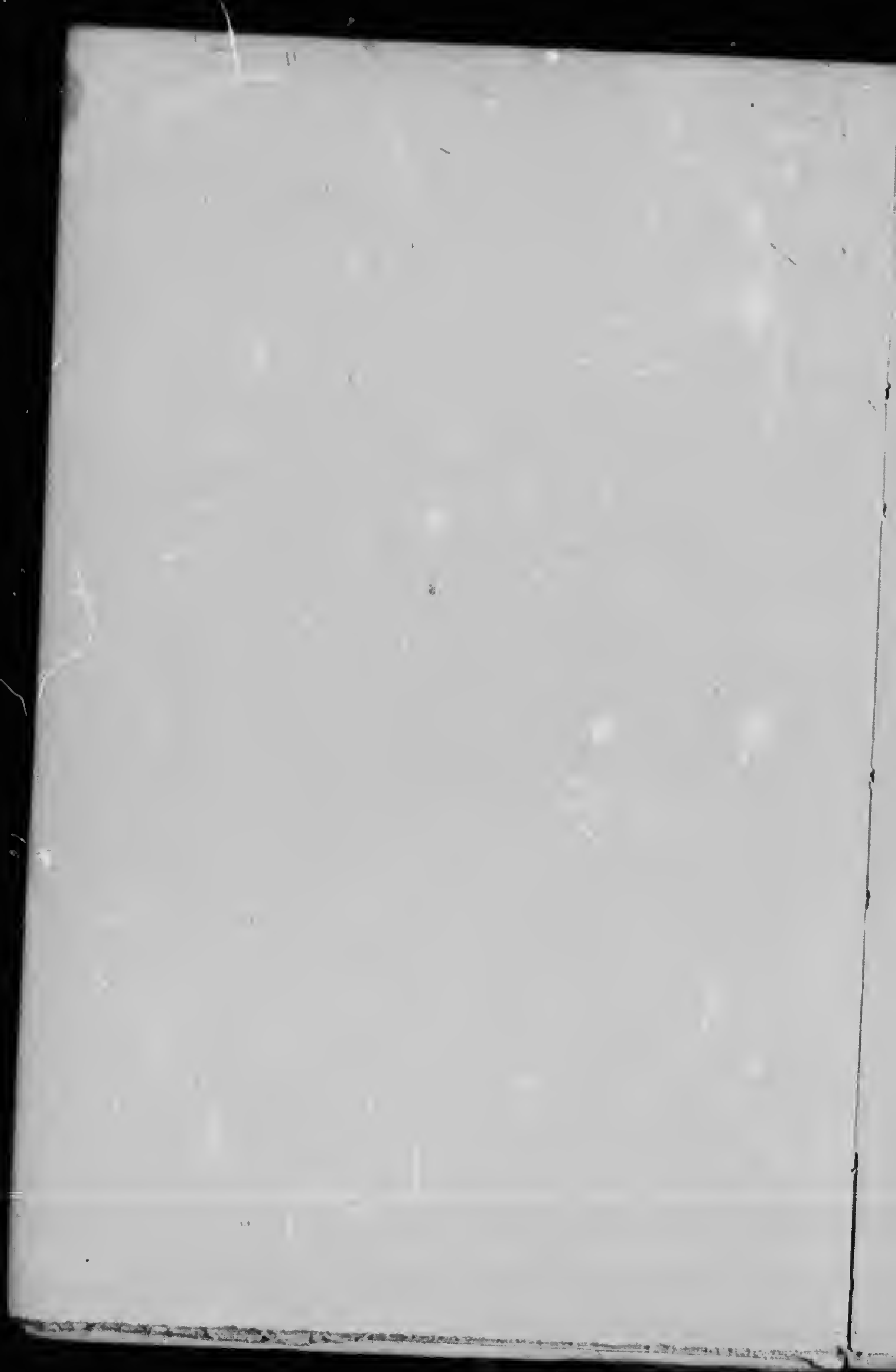
Diamond Key



ILLUSTRATIONS

"Don't shut her off, Dick," he shouted, "don't — don't reverse her!" (*Page 302*) . *Frontispiece*

PAGE

He remembers finding the "Y" switch and breaking the lock 37
"I don't sneak; I ain't that kind" 48
He put a shaking hand on the key . . . 68
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Diamond Key

THE DIAMOND KEY

And How the Railway Heroes Won It

CHAPTER I

OPENING THE THROTTLE

THIS is a story embodying stories, a record of deeds of signal heroism in the building and operation of a mountain railroad. Those who, through good fortune, foresight, or daring, achieved the remarkable things here told of were eight young men, a young woman, and a child. The episodes, some of them well-nigh unbelievably strange and dramatic, fell, quite naturally, at separate intervals of time, being related to each other only in the fact that they are part of the history of a particular region and a single great enterprise.

True, the central figure in each drama was, beautifully and not unduly we believe, honored and decorated after a fashion common to them all, which welded the events into something like a whole. At least, to one who lived through the early years of the construction and operation of the Western Central, it is difficult to think of the bravery of Wadd Hancock in the wreck at Puma Point, without remembering, also, how Freckle Hogan saved the men in Tunnel 13, and how Dippy Hamilton won at Ball Bridge. It is not easy to recall the strange thing done by Nectarine Morgan in Blue Basin, without remembering Ruth Patten's "nerve" at Placer, and Dreamy Meadows's splendid feat at Muley Gorge, or Park Taylor's part in saving the burning snow-sheds on Muley Pass. When looking back to the marvellous way in which little Muggins Tarney brought salvation to Queen's Cove, one naturally reverts, also, to Joey Phillips's presence of mind in the threatened train collision and the great land-

slide at Bonnet, and how Clark Sanborn won repute when he fired the engine of the Fast Mail. In each case heroism was achieved, even by little Muggins, though his part had the color of a miracle, and since each finally wore the Diamond Key, their stories seem one in character and memory, if not in place and time.

We train despatchers out of personal regard for him, perhaps, always believed that the Order of the Diamond Key had origin in the brain of Chief Despatcher Manvell. Being a man of imagination and tender moods, it seemed probable and natural that he might have dropped the charming idea in Superintendent Burke's mind when discussing feats of hardihood or sacrifice or unusual quickness of decision, by employees of the road.

It is quite possible, too, that something said by President Sanborn may have served as the bud from which the pretty notion blossomed. We subordinates never really knew. However, to Ames Burke, superintendent and general

manager, greatest credit was given, and no doubt justly, for it was he who, with pride and enthusiasm, always pinned the decoration upon the hero or heroine, and praised and commended his or her performance in the name of the road. It was Burke, austere and exacting for the most part, but singularly tender when touched by the heroic fidelity of others, who gave the banquets at the Lyon House in Paley Fork when, from time to time, an employee had been judged worthy of the Key. It was he who chose a small key of gold with a diamond at its centre as the emblem of honor, and gave the first hero-banquet, that memorable dinner to Freckle Hogan and Dreamy Meadows, when the one was decorated for gallant conduct in the astounding mix-up at Tunnel 13, and the other for snatching salvation for many human lives from an appalling situation at Muley Gorge.

Often the president, with some of the directors of the road, sat down with Burke at the

banquets which, now and again, graced those years, honoring with their presence those achievements in loyalty to duty that, somehow, made us all seem greater and better men. Always Manvell, our chief, and old Addicks, master mechanic, and "Yellow" Logan, roadmaster, and, maybe, Hoxie and a couple of the despatchers from Manzano, with officials from Denver, and as many conductors and engineers as could be spared, sat down at those notable feasts. It made efficiency in caring for human lives seem a supreme and splendid thing.

We fancy it may be stated with certainty that no railroad organization, other than the Western Central, ever had a decorated band of heroes. Of course, from the host of persons engaged in operating the railroads of the world, many have been commended and promoted for bravery and promptness of action. But the chief officials of the Western Central conceived it both wise and just that an employee who had brought honor to himself by

heroic service, should not only have promotion but also a badge of distinction that might serve to keep the inspiration of his action alive among his fellows.

Small in numbers as was this quaint little Order, it had at bottom much the same reasons for being as lie at the basis of the world's great brotherhoods. Scorn of danger, nobility in personal service, hazarding self that others might live, oftenest won the Victoria Cross, the Garter, or the emblem of the Legion of Honor. It was for the same causes and in the same spirit that Superintendent Burke decorated heroes on the Western Central. Many were praised and promoted; those who, in his opinion, rendered a supreme service to their fellows, received the Diamond Key.

The Western Central ought to have been called, perhaps, the Mountain Ribbon or the Cloud Trail, or some such fanciful name, for it flung its steel threads over mountains and, at points, was sometimes brushed by the trail-

ing laces of the sky. Southwestward from Denver it flowed, for a mountain railroad track always has a fluid air, lifting and falling with the ever billowing earth-waves and swaying to and fro in endless curves. That the reader may intelligently grasp such scenes in the general drama of the line as are here presented, it may be well to take to the trail of steel and follow it swiftly to its end.

Passing out of beautiful Denver, were you in the cab, say, of the big 1206 or the mighty 1300, you would see two seemingly endless streaks of iron latticed together with wooden ties, rushing toward you. As you watched, the ties would blend into a flowing blur and become a grayish belt that sped directly at you; it might presently seem a ceaselessly unrolling ribbon, faintly grosgrained and edged with running silver. As it came spinning forward and swept under the devouring wheels, you would observe that it swerved very softly to right and left and rose and fell well-nigh im-

perceptibly, for you would be flying through an almost level land, with vast plains upon your left, and sharply crenelated mountains upon your right.

As you sped, not pausing anywhere in this first flight across the Central, you would see pretty towns flash by you and houses and fields leaping towards the rear, and would at once be traversing the region in which Clark Sanborn had his test as fireman. When you had flown some forty miles you would dive in among foot-hills and the ribbon would begin to ascend. There you would pass Barn Butte, where heavy engines lie in wait to help push trains to the summit, but you, of course, would not need any of them.

Upward you would run, mounting the unrolling ribbon towards the spine of the Cradle Range. To right and left the ribbon would bend and loop upon the towering slopes, the trail always comparatively level, yet always rising. Presently the ribbon would flow

through a chaos of crags and sweep you, now and again, through tunnels, darksome, gassy, clanging embrasures piercing the mountain ramparts. Then you would spin across the rocky backbone of the range and whirl down the swaying ribbon, flying past Placer, where Ruth Patten found fame, and on acrcss the Sandrill River, and away around the base of Silver Mountain, passing Queen Cove, where Muggins Tarney cut the snowslide, and under the walls of Puma Point, where Wadd Hancock defied death, and onward through a valley to Paley Fork, the chief division station.

Out of Paley Fork, westward, you would next burst, heedless of officials, hospital, roundhouse, or repair-shops, and follow the twinkling ribbon down a long, wavering stream, until you drummed across the steel bridge at Muley River. There you would enter Dreamy Meadows's famous region. Upward then you would wind and onward over Muley Pass, roaring through twenty-eight miles of snow-sheds, and

catching glimpses of the mountain from which Park Taylor and his mother saw the memorable explosion in the Long House, then downward again by many a slope and curve through Peace Canyon, past Bonnet in the Valley of the Peace, where Joey Phillips's strange story is still told, and onward southwestward to the foot of the Saddle Bow Range.

There you would glide through Three Plumes, a sort of half-way station on the long West End Division. Sweeping through the yards, past the big eating-house and "helper" engines, you would find the magic ribbon lifting you across woolly streams, around cliffs, across great slopes, upward and still upward, until you clipped across the summit of the tumbled range and shot downward, dizzily and by many a tangent, into the tortuous canyon of the Little Bear Paw. There you would rush through Tunnel 13, made historic by Freckle Hogan, and, flying swiftly along the ever unwinding ribbon, you would cross a long trestle

in Blue Basin, glancing in wonder at Temple Mountain, and, for the moment perhaps, understanding why Nectarine Morgan here found his better self; then, presently you would strike the Big Bear Paw River, and leaping across it upon Ball Bridge, where Dippy Hamilton did his magic, you would spin along the silver-edged trail down the Big Bear Paw Valley, and, at last, among solemn brown mountains, would find Manzano and the end of the marvellous path.

You would stand in Arizona then, and would have followed the gray and gleaming track nearly three hundred miles. About you would lie extensive yards, station buildings, a round-house, and repair-shops. You would observe that the Western Central here made connections with a great transcontinental railroad, and would realize that the line over which you had come so speedily formed a "short cut" between Denver and the Central West and the

life and commerce of Southern California and the sea.

All the way as you sped, from the first driven spike in Denver to the last in Manzano, you would have threaded a realm of beauty, sometimes terrible in grandeur, sometimes pastoral and quiet. All the way you would have caught glimpses of towns as you flew, most of them small, some of them clinging to mountainsides where there were mines, some of them in narrow canyons, some in sunny, irrigated valleys. Having plunged through echoing tunnels, wheeled over yawning gorges, spun around soaring crags, and swept through winding canyons, you would probably say:

"In the making of this iron trail across the ranges many perils must have been met, tragedies must have fallen; in the daily and nightly movement of freight and human lives along this mountain road, after its completion, dangers must often have been encountered and strange things surely must have occurred."

The thought would have been natural and fully justified by facts. Numerous interesting things befell the builders, many happenings worth the telling followed, but, owing to the limit of these pages, only the more conspicuous examples, those that brought the chief actors the Diamond Key, are here narrated.

CHAPTER II

HOW DREAMY MEADOWS WON

ADAM LOGAN, the Terrible, came up to the Middle Mountain Division from the plains country. He was a famous construction-man. Doubtless Superintendent Burke appointed him General Foreman of Excavation out of certain hopes that had birth of this reputation, for the Western Central had suffered unpleasant periods of friction and delay in the course of its construction.

General headquarters and the despatcher's office were then at Paley Fork, at the west end of the East Division. The Middle Division was somewhat over half-completed, the bridges being up and the rails down well up the Muley Pass, while the West Division was little more

than a survey, twisting over the Saddle Bow Range and down into Arizona. The things that were being done by brain and muscle and giant powder and dynamite in the mountains of Colorado, during those days, were something to contemplate. The army of men blasting and breaking a way for the Western Central across the mountains were not in a genteel business; they were not genteel with one another. "Yellow" Logan, as we afterward called him, seemed needed.

When he came into the general office at Paley Fork, we stared at him. He looked a sort of human lion. His face was big and not pretty to look at, and had a really fearful strength, his beard and hair in color were very like a lion's mane, his eyes were of a yellowish cast, with brown striations at the centre, and looked at men and things with direct and merciless honesty. He did not always understand other men's motives and claims, but so far as he conceived them to be centred in right he tried to

be just; beyond that men and their wishes had to yield or break.

Superintendent Burke started to "look him over" when the man from the plains sat in front of him in the general office, but I noted that Burke's eyes fell and that Logan looked the superintendent over instead. He had letters from the Kansas Pacific, and when Burke had read them the two men looked at each other.

"According to these letters you seem to be about the sort of man I've been hunting for," said Burke. "How long have you been on construction work?"

"Fifteen years."

"Where?"

"On the Fort Scott & Gulf, on the Santa Fé, and lately on the K. P."

"Well, I'd like to have you go out to the front and relieve Foreman Swayson. He seems to be having more or less trouble with the Italians and Poles that are on excavation. I pre-

sume he isn't quite firm enough. What is your method? What is your experience?"

"If the men are fairly paid and have decent camps, then they ought to be made to work or get out, one or the other. Be sure you're right, then be iron, stick like death when it's surely got a man, that's my style. A whole round-up of men hardly ever get restless of themselves; some lazy feller among 'em gets to kicking and horning and the herd breaks. My doctrine is to find that feller and cut him out of the bunch before you get a stampede."

The superintendent smiled. "I like your doctrine," he said. "We will take a look at the line." He got out the profiles, and they studied them and talked. The next day they boarded an engine and went over the tracks, and at the end of the week Logan went out to Muley Pass and took charge.

Not long afterward "Dreamy" Meadows came to Paley Fork in quest of a job — Dreamy Meadows, of whom every one on the Western

Central ultimately heard. His real name was Tennyson Meadows, but because of his euphonious name and wistful quietude, he was at once dubbed "Dreamy," and the sobriquet stuck to him.

Dreamy was a tall, thin lad with a big head and soft, sleepy brown eyes. He had a fashion of dropping his chin on his hand and studying about things absent-mindedly, and of looking long at scenes and objects in trance-like thought. He seemed Yellow Logan's exact antithesis, yet, at bottom, he was not wholly so; he simply had not yet struck his natural gait. Dreamers have been the world's greatest workers — when events awakened them; every man who has influenced human destiny at one time or another saw visions.

Dreamy was sent out to take charge of a movable telegraph station on Muley Pass. All along the Muley and up over the Pass, construction work was in progress. Logan's headquarters and Dreamy's station were at the

same point, above Muley Gorge, half-way up the Pass. It was there that Dreamy did the deed and — awoke.

From the first, Logan did not approve of the new operator; he had no patience for slow, reflective people, and Dreamy was surely slow. We despatchers found him slow on the wire, slow even in handling a thing so swift as electricity. However, operators who cared to go out on such work were not so plentiful that we could afford to be over-particular; besides, we rather liked the looks of Dreamy when he was in to see Burke. Certainly he had looked clean and honest.

Dreamy's "office" was a sheet-iron shed, contrived that it might easily be taken apart and shifted to new ground if necessary. It stood on the mountainside where there was a wide excavation. In front of it were the terminal of the rails of the main line, and two spur-tracks, filled usually with car-loads of structural iron and supplies. Twenty feet

south of the iron shed Muley Gorge opened downward to a dizzy depth. At the bottom of the gorge, nearly five hundred feet below, the Muley mumbled and frothed over the rocks.

Directly after he took command of the working forces, Logan had a small howitzer brought up and a slug with a heavy wire attached was shot across the gorge, the wire being fastened to a steel cable. Men sent across the river at bridge Number 18, and following up the shore to a point opposite Logan's headquarters, found the wire and drew the three hundred feet of cable over, and eventually a trolley carrier and grapple were rigged to operate upon it, and a good deal of cedar timber was drawn across for use in construction. This cable was of signal utility in Dreamy's famous adventure.

Westward from Muley Point, the site of Logan's and Dreamy's station, hundreds of men were working in cuts and on fills, mile after mile of rugged mountain slopes were being bored and blasted and ripped open that

the panting iron monsters might find a path for their whirling feet, pick and shovel and drill and scraper and mule and man were busy, and the Pass trembled almost momentarily with the crash and reverberation of exploding dynamite. Northeastward from the Point the track fell downward like a looping whip-lash, and, following the Muley in a long détour, came back to within a mile of the Point to the south-eastward, on its way down into Muley Valley. This natural loop of nearly ten miles was the main means of lifting trains on to the slopes of the Pass; it also helped to save " Yellow " Logan and one hundred and forty men from annihilation.

Looking directly southeast from Dreamy's iron shed, the eye crossed the Muley and encountered a pine-covered ridge; on the other side of the ridge a mile distant was bridge Number 18, where the Western Central track crossed the Muley from the south side to the north and took the ten-mile loop to gain the

heights at Muley Point. Near the south end of bridge Number 18 was a "Y" switch. That was the topographical situation; the human situation was still more interesting.

Dreamy had not much to do — messages about supplies and an occasional train order. He commonly, therefore, had some sort of book in his fist on which he pored, or sat mistily gazing at the beauty of the mountain. As for the new General Foreman, he seemed everywhere; his keen yellow eyes appeared to dwell hotly on every man and object. Work went at high pressure after his arrival, and there was secret sniffing and grunting, but all along the line two things were acknowledged. Logan was unsparing of his own strength, and the food and bedding and general comforts of the camps were improved.

Then came the 10th of August. At twelve o'clock that day the noon silence fell upon the mountains and remained; the brawn of the big hills had struck. Logan had come to the work

in May; Dreamy arrived a week later. For a month now the General Foreman had been aware that a sour ferment was at work, for a month he had also been looking for the one blamable man, but could not locate him. The old trouble, temporarily mended by Swayson and Burke, had broken out afresh. They had rectified several things complained of by the men and had found means of getting rid of the agitators. But on the 10th of August the work stopped again. Logan took the written demands of the men down to Burke, but the demands were pronounced unreasonable and were flatly refused. Logan returned, both instructed and determined to fight the matter out.

Through several days there was dead quiet on Muley Pass, then the storm broke. Logan brought in fresh men and attempted to set them to work, but the strikers, partly by force and partly by persuasion, influenced the men to withdraw. Then Burke and the General Foreman recruited a body of some two hundred

workmen of American birth, and strengthening them with a sheriff and fifty armed deputies, started for the Pass. That was on the night of the 22d of August.

Now, from almost the first Dreamy Meadows had known which man was the chief "ferment," in which head throbbed the brain that led in vibrating the discord. The man was an Italian, a pale young fellow, who spoke English and three other languages, and who came to visit Dreamy of evenings and borrow his books.

Had the young Italian made speeches and conducted an open campaign, Logan would have quickly deposed him, and so probably would have made an end of the trouble; but Braconi, who seemed a master of logic of a certain sort and an angel of persuasion, worked secretly from man to man, teaching and organizing at night. Dreamy, being aware of this, acknowledged to himself that he ought to tell Logan, but the lad had a thorn in his side, and Logan had put it there. Openly and with

brutal candor, the General Foreman had pronounced Dreamy the laziest man on the mountain, and, though Dreamy had laughed at the stricture, in his heart he was sore.

"Let him take care of his trouble; it's not my affair," said Dreamy to himself; and so, because Logan had been inconsiderate, Dreamy was foolish and the tempest fell.

After the strike had been inaugurated, Dreamy told Logan what he knew of Braconi. To do so tickled an unworthy prompting in the youth. Logan's anger was something to see. He at once wrote a telegram to Burke saying that the Muley Point operator had been disloyal and to send another operator immediately. Dreamy sent the message without change of countenance and with an alacrity quite unusual. But Burke did not send another telegraph operator to Muley Point, for the very good reason that no operator could be persuaded to go up into that human hornet's-nest. It presently got over-warm for Dreamy.

Logan, following Dreamy's revengeful hint, unearthed several things. He promptly had Braconi and two other men arrested and "taken below," as going down to Paley Fork was called. The resistance at the Pass augmented rather than decreased, however. Dreamy himself fell foul of the strikers; they began to suspect him of sending reports "below" inimical to their interests. On August 21st, the day before Logan and Burke were going to attempt to land American workmen on the Pass, a group of strikers captured Dreamy and the Muley Point headquarters.

Matters were bitter. A piece of writing was placed before Dreamy on the telegraph table, a pistol was put to his head, and he was ordered to wire the writing down to us at general headquarters. Dreamy promptly acquiesced, but added, without pause, at the end of the message: "A pistol is at my temple and an extremely ugly gentleman is holding it, but

most of this message is a lie. Tell Logan the Terrible to come ahead."

We liked Dreamy for that. For a week we had expected that he would desert his post and come down to Paley Fork if he had to come afoot. But he stuck to the hornet's-nest like a plaster.

When Dreamy volunteered that odd postscript to the message of the strikers, he had counted on there being no one present besides himself who could read Morse, but one of the "committee" could read the telegraph a little and Dreamy came near losing his life. However, he escaped up the mountainside and secreted himself. That night about midnight he came down the mountain and crept into the iron shed on his hands and knees and called. I was at the despatcher's table down in Paley Fork and answered him.

"Where have you been and what's the situation?" I asked.

"Been lying on my stomach up among the

chaparral for the last ten hours," he said. "Situation is rocky. They got on to my Morse and I had to duck. Most of the men here at the Point are quiet; they'd be O. K. if let alone, but there's fifteen or twenty mighty bad ones here — regular reds — looks like dynamite."

I experienced a queer thrill of frost along my spine. "Where is that car-load of dynamite that was sent up there on almost the last train of supplies before the strike?" I asked.

"Here on the siding. I've had my eye on it lately; struck me they might take a notion to do some damage — blow up the bridge or something — to keep Yellow and his men away. But I guess it will be O. K.; don't think they will go so far as that."

"Are they drinking much?"

"Most of them are quiet, some are boozing like sailors. Where is Yellow and the old man?"

"Both are here; Logan got in to-night with

a lot of men from Denver. He and the superintendent will take the men up to the Pass to-morrow night; get there about midnight or one o'clock; sheriff and fifty shooters. Can you stay on hand now?"

"Nixy; it's me back to the brush and solitude. I'm about starved and don't know when I'll eat. Oh, for a pie! Say, I'll wriggle down to this coop to-morrow night, if they don't get me, and call you up and give you the *statu quo.* I'm uneasy about the nitro. Say, there's a fellow among the reds here who understands Morse, I think. If any swift operator gets on the wire and begins to tell you fairy stories about things here, you'll know it's not me. Say, give my love to old yellow-eyes and tell him I'm not mad. I'll have to creep out of here on my solar plexus; I hear some reds out on the track."

Dreamy was certainly waking up. He was becoming a creature of action. I smiled when I thought of Logan's demand for his removal

on the ground of disloyalty. On the morrow we tried many times to "raise" Muley Point on the wire, but the Point was silent. At 10.30 that night, Logan, with a train of twenty-seven flat cars loaded with men and drawn by two engines, pulled out for the Pass; an hour later Burke followed with another train-load of men.

Just before midnight, as I bent over the train-sheet in Paley Fork, a hurried, unsteady call came down from Muley Point, forty miles away. I had my ear cocked for Dreamy and hit the wire quick in response.

"Who is at the key?" I asked.

"Dreamy. Say, but I'm hungry!"

"Yes? How are things?"

"Nawsty. Most of the men want peace; the boozers and soreheads tried this P. M. to marshal 'em to resist Yellow when he arrives. From my lair among the chaparral I looked down on some pretty fights. A hand-car of sympathizers arrived from below about an

hour ago. I crept down and lay in a dark place and listened. Looks like some sort of trouble. I've kept my optics pasted to the car of nitro. I don't think they know the car has dynamite in it."

"Bridge 18 must be all right?"

"Yep; hand-car came across."

"Well, keep me posted if you can. I think things will turn out all right."

But they did not; save for Dreamy they would have gone badly indeed. When he crawled out of the telegraph shed and crept away in the gloom, a turbulent group of men were replenishing a fire with ties some five hundred feet west of the office. Dreamy crept in close and looked and listened. Braconi and the two other men who had suffered arrest were there. Having been liberated on account of lack of incriminating evidence, they had stolen a hand-car down at Paley Fork and had come to the Pass. Being infuriated with Logan, they brought an exaggerated story of the inju-

ries and indignities that were to be rained on the disaffected at Muley Point, and counselled extreme measures of resistance.

Most of the talk was Italian, and Dreamy could not understand it, but he made out from Braconi's speeches, which were partly in English, that the young leader favored running some of the cars from one of the sidings down on to the main track and chaining the wheels fast to the rails. He also advised building a barricade on each side of these cars in the cut, thus bringing Logan to a standstill, where they might possibly force him to a compromise settlement before he got the new men and the "soldiers" into the works.

Dreamy crept back to the shed and reported this to me by wire. Just before he called me, Green Elbow, a telegraph station six miles east of bridge Number 18, reported Logan going west. There was no telegraph operator between the Elbow and Muley Point. As Dreamy crawled out of the iron shed, after reporting

to me, he jumped to his feet with a yell of terror. A switch had been opened and six cars were passing down the main track. A clear half-moon threw a silvery radiance on the mountains, and he saw that the two front cars, a box car carrying twelve thousand pounds of dynamite and a flat car loaded with structural iron, were uncoupled from the others and leaving them behind. A man was walking forward on top of the rear cars setting the brakes. He came to the front end of the fourth car almost at the moment Dreamy cried out, and he, too, yelled with consternation. Some men were walking down the track after the cars, and a wild effort was made to catch the two runaways. Dreamy leaped forward screaming: "There's dynamite in that front car! Catch them! Hold them, for God's sake, men!" but the runaways went down the steep grade into the gloom like frightened snakes.

Dreamy stopped running some two hundred feet east of the telegraph shed. Like a great

and fearful sheet of flame, that which was likely to happen flashed across his soul. When that down-shooting car of nitro-glycerine hurled itself into Logan's train, when the steel beams on the second car drove through the dynamite car in the collision!—he cried out in utter terror of the vision. The shore-end of the cable that hung across the mighty chasm of the Muley was not a dozen yards from him. As he turned about, his eyes fell upon it. Beyond the yawning gorge, beyond the black mass of the forest-covered ridge, a mile away, lay the "Y" switch! A light flashed into his face, a gleam of something high and strange, and almost in the time that it took to draw a breath he had reached the cable.

In the moonlight it stretched far across the abyss like a silver thread, dwindling in the shadows of the south shore to something that looked very like a strand of gossamer. The wheeled carrier, with its down-dangling grappling-irons, hung upon the cable; a small wire

rope, attached to the carrier and winding upon a windlassed drum in drawing the loads across from the opposite shore, hung at his side. He threw the brake off the drum, leaped up, and caught the grappling-hooks in his hands and shot out along the cable.

The south end of the cable was the lower, that the carrier might cross by its own weight. With Dreamy's weight added, the carrier fairly flew. Hanging there by his hands above the great abyss, he got a glimpse of stars and moon whirling together above him, of the Muley boiling white far below, and felt the night air rushing against his face and heard wheels burring in his ears; then suddenly he was thrown headlong to the earth on the south shore. The carrier had struck the bunting-post at the end of the cable.

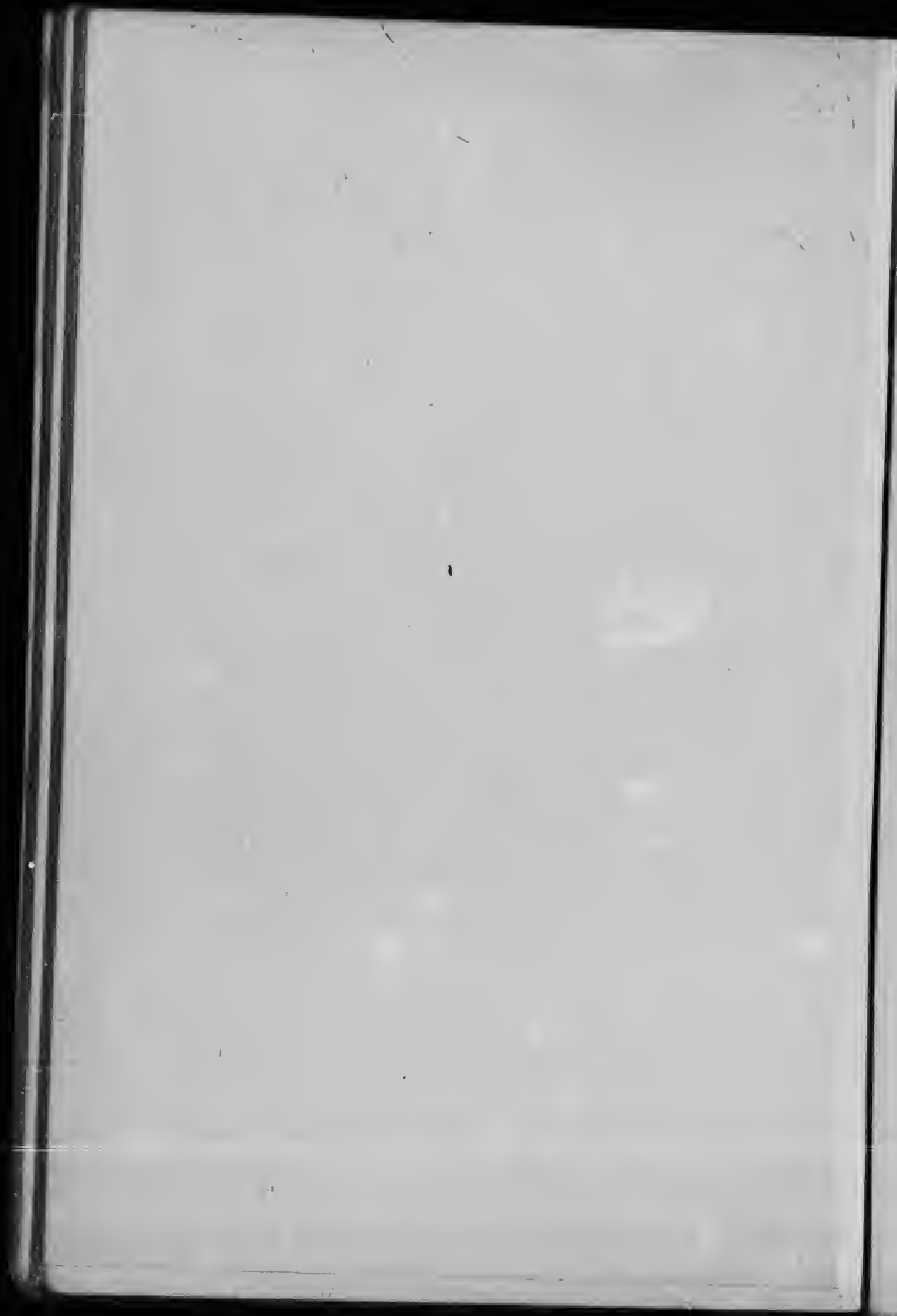
Instantly he leaped to his feet and made for the summit of the ridge. Everything that he did seemed somehow terribly clear.

He knew that Logan's train had left Green

Elbow, for I had told him so; hence when he shot across Muley Gorge on the cable the train-load of men must have been some four and a half miles below the "Y," while the two run-away cars had some nine miles to pass over before reaching it, and he himself a mile. Logan would come rather slowly, owing to the grade, while the car of dynamite and the car of iron must necessarily attain enormous speed in passing down the mountain. Could he reach the "Y" before the runaways passed it? That was the question that something in him constantly shouted as he went up the slope, across the spine of the ridge, and down the other side, springing over rocks, clambering up ledges, jumping down banks, and over fallen tree-trunks, falling and struggling up and rush-ing onward heedlessly and blindly through the moonlit gloom.

He seemed to have been many days in going that fearful mile, and his throat seemed as a pinhole through which he could get no breath,

HE REMEMBERS FINDING THE "Y" SWITCH AND BREAKING THE LOCK. — *Page 37.*



and his pulses bursting when he caught a glimpse of the bridge below him. He turned to the right then and went downward in reckless leaps. Suddenly he came to a little precipice and paused, and as he paused he heard a clamorous roar flooding down the Muley from the northwest and the faint whistle of a locomotive far down the track.

From that moment he lived in a kind of insane panic. Of just how he got down the ledge he now has no clear notion. He remembers finding himself on the ground half-killed, and scrambling up and rushing forward with strange moving things all about him, finding the "Y" switch and breaking the lock with a stone or piece of iron — he does not know which — and throwing the rails over, and then running blindly toward the ridge again. He remembers that as he ran the earth seemed to rise and strike him in the face, and that he then seemed floating as upon billows, and that something encompassed in thunder

rushed across the bridge while the bridge reeled and shrieked, and that the thunder swept down the track and out over the five hundred feet of "Y" rails and smote the rocky hillside beyond, and that the world then seemed suddenly to crush into pieces and the sky to fall down upon him, with a thousand stunning marvels of noise, and with it a great blackness that blotted him utterly out.

The windows rattled in Paley Fork from the jar of the explosion, and that was forty miles away. A million bellowing echoes went abroad over the mountains, and all along the Pass men clutched their breath and stood still. Had Logan and all his men been destroyed? Suddenly every heart was hushed and soft with pity. Dreamy had broken the strike!

Logan — who could not get his train across the bridge, the structure having been thrown out of line by the impact of the runaway cars or concussion from the explosion — found Dreamy at daybreak. The lad was in sad

plight, being deaf and dazed and discolored by the mighty wave of sound that had swept across him; besides, he had a pair of fractured ribs, gotten somewhere in his wild run for the switch. Logan the Terrible brought him at once to the hospital at Paley Fork.

"The strike and the work can wait," he said; "I don't get a chance to serve a real live king very often!"

But the hole in the earth where the dynamite exploded! We went up from the despatcher's office to see it. A house could have been thrown into the rupture and not half-filled it. Odd things grew out of that hole. One day Yellow Logan, with a mysterious look on his big face, went into the hospital at Paley Fork and drew a chair up to Dreamy's bed. Dreamy had regained his hearing and was feeling nice and new.

"Hello, Terrible Man!" he said with welcoming smile.

Logan got his hand and drew up close to

him and began to whisper. " Say, son, I want to tell ye something. That hole you blowed in the mountain up there is a quarry of the finest stone ye ever saw! The Government grant of land t' the company gives 'em only every other section. I've bought the section the quarry is on in your name for ye. I've got some papers here for ye t' sign. Burke says the company will use the stone in depots and its fine work and pay ye a royalty; besides, I expect people in Denver and Pueblo will want the stone. Y'r in it sure, son!" His great face was radiant with smiles as he leaned over the convalescent. Dreamy took his hand and looked at him with misty eyes for a long time. " You say you bought the land in my name and you think the quarry is going to be valuable?" he said.

" Sure, son, sure!"

" Then I give you half of it."

This is how Dreamy and Logan came to own the valuable Muley Quarry, though both con-

tinued their railroad work, and, what was apparently still more highly appreciated by Dreamy, his promptness and bravery won him the Diamond Key.

CHAPTER III

FRECKLE HOGAN'S GRIT

"IF it is true, as some assert, that opportunity is half of greatness, is it not also true that good environment is half of righteousness? We build ourselves, mentally and physically, out of our surroundings; we are forced to use the material that lies nearest; we naturally absorb that which lies against us. Suppose one *does* go wrong? Why should we coddle the physically sick and kick and punish the spiritually ill?" Chief Despatcher Manvell looked at Superintendent Burke in his kind, earnest way. Burke puckered his bearded lips, lifted his shaggy brows, and waited.

Manvell sat just inside the big arch of the alcove room. Outside the arch was an apartment forty feet long by perhaps twenty wide.

In the corners and along the walls were several desks; near the centre of the room were three tables given over to train sheets, message hooks, and telegraph instruments; heads, some bald, some stoutly haired, bowed at the desks and tables; the room was pervaded by pipe odors and chattering Morse.

Burke tapped with his pencil a paper-weight that lay on his desk. He had several casts of utterance — an arid, impersonal one that totally disguised his feelings; a dry, grating one that took you into consideration, yet, somehow, rubbed the skin off you, and a quick, explosive fashion of speech on occasion that was welcoming and cordial. His tone was now dry and grating.

"Which means," he said, "that the young fellow waiting out in the anteroom is to get a position, or, at least, consideration, while I have a letter here before me saying that he is — well, plainly, a dangerous man, and ought to be on the black-list. Am I right?" He looked

from under his heavy brows sidewise at Manvell.

"Yes," said the chief quietly. "It so happens that I knew a good deal about this chap back in Chicago. He used to sell papers in front of the A. and T. depot when I was fourth man in the despatcher's office back there. I saw him pull a ragged little fellow out from under the feet of an advancing truck team one day. For a moment the two youngsters were mixed up with the legs of the horses; then the larger boy rolled out of the tangle and pulled the little one after him. He looked at the squalling unfortunate with vast displeasure, then gave him a fierce shake and said: 'Now, you skip home, Runty, t' y'r mudder; y'r not big enough t' be out here mixin' wid *us men!*' I was crossing the street and I laughed and stopped and asked the rescuer if he were hurt. He rubbed the top of his head and said: 'Got a knob on me belfry, dat's all. Say, mister, buy a paper, won't ye?' I purchased a paper, he

whistled, danced a clog, and flew away among the teams and people and clanging cars, looking for customers.

"He looked to be about twelve years old, though I think he was older. It struck me that a boy who met the daily dangers and emergencies that he did would, if trained, make a good railroad man. I got him into the office as messenger boy; we liked him; sent him to night school, and had him taught telegraphy. Afterward he took a position as operator in the block system. Now, I know him pretty well, and I don't believe that the charges laid against him in the letter you have are wholly true. It was natural, reared as he was, that he should have sympathized with the switchmen in their strike, but that he could have been capable of deserting his post at a critical moment and for the purpose of wrecking a train the officials were trying to run out of the city, I don't believe. It's not like Jimmy at all."

Burke rapped the desk in front of him

sharply and turned toward a lad who sat at a table folding rate sheets. " Tell that young fellow out there — What is his name, Manvell? "

" Jimmy Hogan."

" Yes — tell him to come in here," added Burke impatiently.

The applicant was ushered in. Exteriorly he appeared to be eighteen or nineteen years of age, was profusely freckled, slightly stoop-shouldered, and small for his years, but had a keen, alert expression of countenance and a fearless way of looking at people and things. The cruel conditions of his early years had written themselves into his face and figure past any means of total erasure, yet clearly the good that was native to him had enlarged in answer to the better state that had later been his. He glanced around the long room at Tommy Loomis and Arch Jordan, who were working on way messages and car reports, and at Bunch Wilson, who was hanging over the East End

train sheet, immersed in that clear brown concentration through which despatchers see things throughout a hundred miles of track, then the youth's eyes came across Manvell's face. His greeting was fine to see. He did not presume to take the chief's hand, but his brown eyes and his freckles and every fleshy part of him glowed.

Manvell beamed. "Well, you thought you'd come out to Colorado and try the high hills, Jimmy? I have your letter asking for a job, but Mr. Burke here has a letter from Superintendent Taylor saying that you ought to be on the black-list, as you sided with the strikers in Chicago. I presume Mr. Burke wishes to ask you about it." He nodded toward the grizzled veteran at the desk.

"Yes," said the superintendent dryly. "How was it you left your tower one night in Chicago without giving the despatcher notice, thus causing a wreck?"

"Some strikers, or their friends — four men

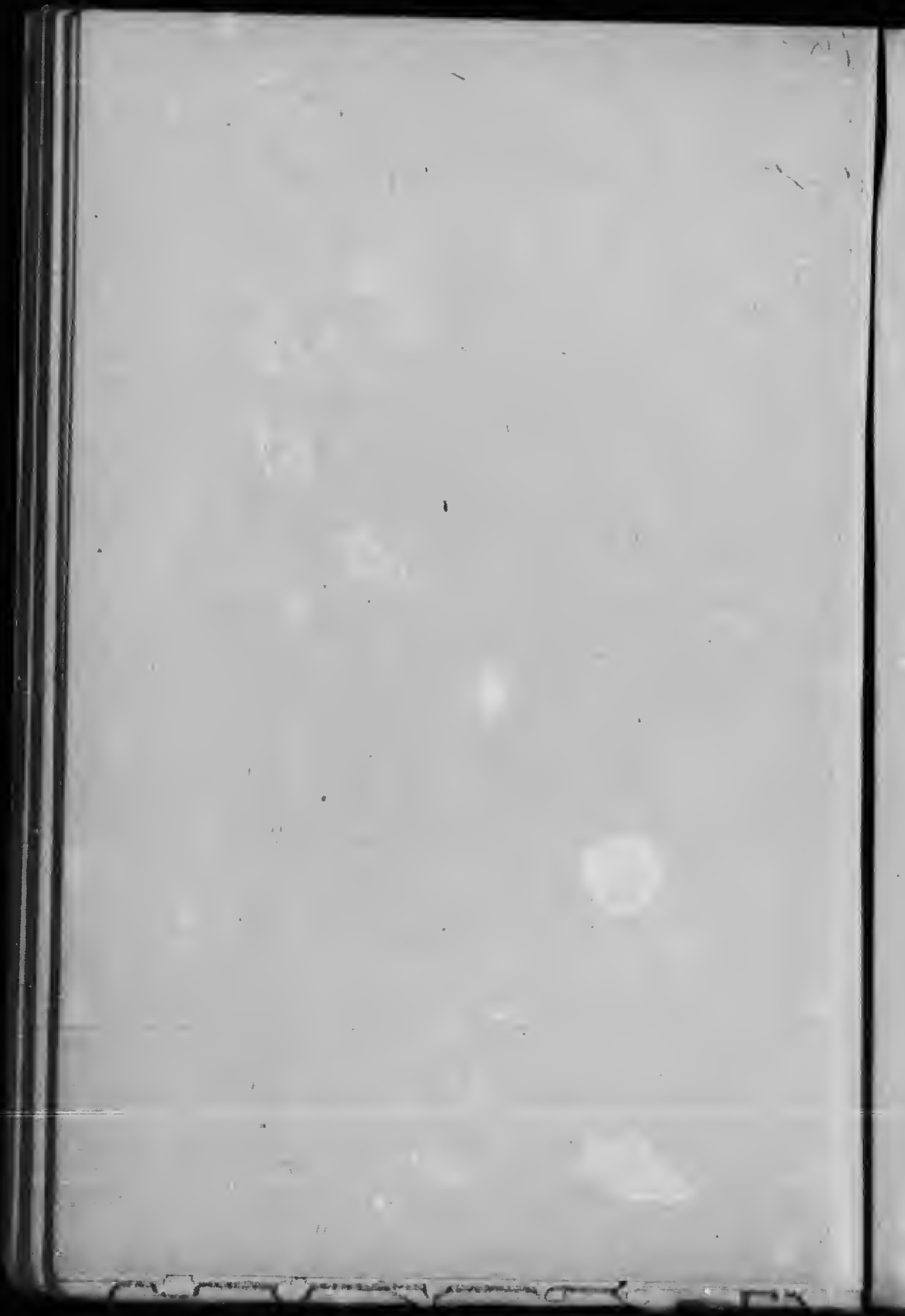
they was, sir — climbed into the signal box and took me away by force, sir. I fought 'em, but they was too much for me. I wanted the switchers t' win, sir, but I wouldn't 'a' deserted without tellin' the despatcher I was goin'. I wouldn't 'a' done that if me mudder had been dyin'. I don't sneak; I ain't that kind." The freckled youth looked at Burke with a gleam of indignation in his eyes. "I told Mr. Taylor that, but he was mad an' wouldn't believe me. If Mr. Manvell had been there he'd 'a' knowed I wouldn't do such a thing."

Manvell was looking at the Middle Division train sheet. Burke hesitated a moment. "You wanted the strikers to win, you say? Then I'm with Tayl r — I don't believe you. People act in keeping with their sympathies; that's a law."

"Not always," said Manvell, turning around.

"Well," said Burke, "if you want to send

"I DON'T SNEAK; I AIN'T THAT KIND." — *Page 48.*



him out on the wire, all right; you'll have to be responsible."

Manvell smiled at Jimmy. "Come 'round in the morning; I think I'll have a place for you," he said, and quietly continued his work.

Within the week "Freckle" Hogan, as he presently was dubbed, found himself telegraph operator in a little sheet-iron station on the Saddle Bow, away out on the West End. That was when the Western Central had been pushed clear across Colorado, and a path for the steam-driven wheels was being blasted and torn through the Saddle Bow Range, in northern Arizona. Down that way nearly a thousand men were at work on construction, and the things that were done with powder and dynamite were things to hear, but not safely see. "Yellow" Logan was at the front as chief foreman, and Superintendent Burke, naturally, made frequent visits to the scene of operations.

Freckle's "office" was a movable affair, being by times folded up like a patent lunch-box and thrown on a flat car to be transported to the point where an operator was most needed. In this fashion he worked his way well over the Range during the summer; at the cool end of September he was half-way down the west side of the mighty, tumbled billow of mountains. Besides Freckle, there were three other operators in lunch-box stations on the Range, from eight to ten miles apart and progressing by occasional removals toward the west. There were two tunnels on the Saddle Bow stretch — Number 12, just west of Freckle's September stand, and Number 13, eighteen miles farther down the western slope, piercing a towering mass of granite that blocked the right of way at the head of Bear Paw canyon. Late in August Number 12 was practically completed and the rails laid down by many a twist and turn into the yawning bore of Number 13.

All through that heaving, jumbled country there were camps and men and mules and scrapers; derricks, steam drills, car-loads of picks and shovels; piles of steel rails and switch-frogs; trains of ties and structural bridge-iron, and at many points, all through the crystalline days and cool, starry nights, dynamite and powder crashed and thundered in the blastings. The mountain eagle, frightened from his crag and soaring in vast circles in the pale sky, looked down many times during the summer on the work of the madly toiling pigmies and, seeing a long, ragged, zigzagging gash cut across the knotted breast of his lifted realm, screamed harshly and was troubled.

To Freckle, who had spent his whole life amid the dirt and ugly confusion of a great city, the strength and serenity of the great peaks, the infinite purity of the air, the green clouds of pines hanging here and there on mountain steeps, the white bath of pellucid sun-

shine, seemed strangely beautiful. At times he was oddly exhilarated by it all, again he was touched with lonely awe. Had it not been for the noise of the work and the presence of the rough laborers, he would have no doubt experienced something like fear, so startling was the change from his former condition.

Freckle lived the long days through with a sort of rapture at the bottom of his heart; he felt consecrated, equal to any task.

On the last day of September it came; peril was abroad, and Freckle found his part. Ames Burke, superintendent, and Pierce Fuller, chief engineer, went over the West End that day, looking for weak spots and "stirring things up."

They rode on several trains, chiefly construction, during the journey, dropping off here and there on errands of inspection. By sunset they were at Summit, on the Saddle Bow Range. There they boarded a train for Tunnel 13, where, in the upper Bear Paw Camp, hard by

the tunnel's black mouth, they purposed spending the night.

The train on which they took final passage for Tunnel 13 was a light one, nine flat cars of cedar ties, a box car containing five tons of powder, and a caboose. The cars of ties were ahead, the car of explosive was next rearward, then the caboose, then Tart Morgan with engine 382, pushing the train. This formation was well enough coming up the eastern grades of the range, but in dropping down the western slope the engine ought to have been hooked in ahead, more effectively to hold the train. Burke and Fuller flagged the train and boarded it at a bridge a half-mile west of Summit station or, unquestionably, Burke would have ordered Conductor Rawlins, who was in charge, to run the engine through the Summit siding and couple in ahead. As it was, Rawlins wished very sincerely that he had done so of his own accord, for Burke roundly criticized him as exercising bad judgment or being luke-

warm with laziness. However, Rawlins meekly pointed out that the train was not a heavy one; besides, he had always held the notion that it was good policy to keep an engine to the rear of powder, so that sparks from the stack might not blow back in its direction. Burke pooh-poohed the "notion," but none the less it carried a grain of sense.

It chanced, as so often falls, that several things having an influence on the ultimate situation had happened within that hour. One thing: Frank McGuire, stationed in a lunch-box office near the mouth of Tunnel 13, had gone into the bore with a message for the foreman, and had been hit by a falling rock and his right arm broken. The plucky lad had telegraphed the fact to Manvell with his left hand, and the chief at once called Freckle, sitting in his box near Tunnel 12.

"Flag Rawlins's special and go down to Number 13 and take charge until further orders," said the chief. "McGuire has been

injured. I will send a man out to Number 12 to-night to do your work. An operator at present is needed far more at Number 13 than at your station."

"O. K.," said Freckle. "I hear a train comin'; expect it's Rawlins's. I'll flag 'em and report to you from 13."

He scrambled up the caboose steps when the special stopped and told Rawlins the situation. "What's that?" sharply inquired Burke, who had heard.

Freckle repeated Manvell's order. "All right, let him ride," said the superintendent, glancing at Rawlins. He looked again at Freckle. "Are you that Chicago boy — Manvell's pet — the one Taylor wrote me about?" he asked abruptly.

Freckle's face flushed. "Yes, sir," he replied.

Burke's lips puckered, but he said nothing further. Freckle went out on the front platform of the caboose where the rear brakeman

was standing. The head man, the train being so light, had been dropped for the night at Summit, where his family lived.

"Got the engine behind the train — funny way to run down grade," said Freckle, looking about.

"Car of powder — this box car — right here next to us," said the brakeman. "Rawlins likes to have the engine back when we got powder in the string; not a bad idee, I reckon."

At that moment they entered Tunnel 12. Ahead of them, through quite the fourth of a mile, stretched darkness illumined here and there by lanterns depending from rods of iron wedged into crevices of the rocky walls, for workmen were still chiselling at the rough spots of the ragged sides and ceiling. Now one of these lanterns, no doubt loosened from its support by the jar of the hurrying train, fell down unobserved among the dry ties of the head flat car, spilling its oil and flame among them, and in three minutes' time Tragedy lifted its wild

face on the western slope of Saddle Bow Range.

Had they observed the fire earlier, had no panic supervened, the final peril might have been averted. As it was, Burke and Fuller, at Rawlins's little desk, were figuring a rectification estimate. Rawlins himself, near the rear door and steadying himself with feet wide apart, was laboriously penciling a report to the Supply Department from his train memorandum book. Tart Morgan, at the right-hand window of the engine cab, could not see the head end, as the train was moving on a long tangent to the left; the fireman was busy at the furnace; Freckle and the brakeman, talking on the platform close behind the car of powder, could see nothing directly in front. The cuts and hollows were filling with evening's purple dusk, the tops of the mountains were foiled with gold.

The train had left the tunnel a half-mile behind when, suddenly, Morgan snatched the

whistle lever and blew for brakes. The brakeman swung out to the left by the hand rods of the platform. The heaped ties of the first two cars were spotted with tufts of flame; smoke and burning bits of bark blew back in his face. As by a flash of lightning, he beheld a mental vision that swept him into panic. He leaped to the caboose door and flung it open and yelled, then dropped on the platform and seized the head of the pin in the coupling between the caboose and car of powder. Freckle jumped upon him crying out for him not to draw the pin. Rawlins and Burke and Fuller spilled themselves unceremoniously out the front door, shouting, "What's the matter? What's the matter here?"

"Head cars are on fire! Powder — powder — powder!" cried the brakeman, dragging madly at the obstinate coupling-pin.

At that moment, getting no brakes, Morgan put the reversing lever over; the couplings clanked, and the pin came out in the brake-

man's hand. Every man on the platform was shouting and struggling; in every man's brain was fear tangling with protests and fleeting glimpses of what ought to be done.

Burke stamped at the brakeman and roared hoarsely, "Put the pin back! put the pin back!" but that could not be done. The cars instantly parted, yet, in that instant Freckle Hogan leaped. The brakeman was on his knees, and Freckle went over his head and landed on the bunter-block and draw-head of the powder car, with his right hand clutching the brake-wheel rod that extended up the end of the car. In Freckle's brain flashed an imagined spectacle that for the time being drowned all fear — a picture of a train on fire hurling itself into the mouth of Tunnel 13, for the rails led directly into the great bore — of a car of powder crumbling in a mass of bursting fire, of men and machinery and all things flying into atoms.

He began hastily climbing up the brake-

wheel rod, slipping back and climbing again, struggling madly for the top of the car with the one thought of setting the brakes and bringing the surging string of cars to a standstill. He vaguely heard Rawlins shouting angrily at the brakeman somewhere behind him: "I told you at Summit to go over ahead and hold the train if anything happened; why didn't you do it?" He also heard Burke's voice, mingling terror and command and encouragement in hoarse cries: "Set 'em, boy! Get to the top! If you can set 'em on three or four cars you've got 'em! Hold fast! Don't give up!"

Freckle slipped down the rod and hung dangling and gasping; the train, free of all restraint, rushed down the steep grade, jarring and jerking and swaying as it flew. He got his feet again on the bunter-block and struggled a moment for breath, then again began to climb. Up, up, little by little, he followed the slippery rod, flung momentarily to right and

left and all but torn loose by the swaying of the car. A cloud of smoke streamed back over the top of the car, and into that stream those on the caboose and engine through the growing darkness saw him finally scramble.

He lay for a moment, spent and choking, on top of the car, then rose to his feet and laid hold of the brake-wheel and set it with all his strength. Upon the flying train of cars, the setting of the brake seemingly had not the slightest effect. He clambered along the running-board through the driving smoke and sparks to the front end of the car; the powder in the cases beneath him, to his excited fancy, seemed to writhe and boil, but more wild and terrible than all was that picture which never for a moment quit his mind, of fire and powder crashing together among the men in Tunnel 13.

From the front end of the box-car he peered down on the next car, a gray mass of ties swaying and jarring in smoke and shadow, and down upon that he leaped and fell and clutched

fast and crept along to the forward end and found the brake and twisted it hard. Then he climbed upon the next load, but there he faltered and turned his back against the biting, strangling flood of heated smoke, coughing, clutching at his breast, and all but swooning. Toppling, he knit his fingers as best he could in the barked edges of the ties and strove to keep hold of his faculties as he watched the jumbled landscape wheeling by, then he crept forward again. But he found progress impossible. The forward three loads were cars of leaping flame, the ricked ties of the next four cars were tufted as with blowing torches, back over him and lapping against the top of the box car, the driving smoke streamed like some sort of awful hair, tangled with a million fireflies.

Freckle could breathe the stuff no longer. He sprawled and swayed and strangled, got to the rear end of the car upon which he was, slipped down behind the rick of ties and covered up his burning eyes. His head seemed

filled with a hundred swirling images threaded with darting thoughts. When would the car of powder explode? How long before the fire would drive him from the train? If he jumped, how would it feel to be dashed among jagged rocks? Would he have the courage to leap to such a fate? And the fiery wreck in Tunnel 13! What a vision!

Then something came to Freckle Hogan. What is it that sometimes whispers, saying things to those who strive to save others, when the heart cries for help though the lips may only gasp for breath? The whisper in Freckle's brain said:

"Jump near the first Bear Paw bridge — at the track-walker's station — he has a box-relay on the wire there — telegraph 13 to get the men out of the tunnel — save lives — let the train go!"

Freckle was on the bottom of the flat car where there was a narrow space at the rear of the load. He crept to the edge and looked down

at the earth, a gray sheet of stones and logs and suddenly heaving walls whirled dizzily rearward. The sparks and hot smoke beat into his face; the noise and lurching and twisting of the train appalled him. How far the train had gone he could only surmise, but from the first Bear Paw bridge to Tunnel 13 the distance was about eight miles, that he knew. He lay flat on his breast with his head over the edge, watching. The heat increased, the smoke and sparks thickened, the cases of powder in the box car were leaping. Two and three and four minutes passed, year-long stretches of time, then he saw a crooked road of tumbling froth below him — the plunging train had struck the banks of the upper Bear Paw. He drew himself farther over the edge, staring hard through the smoke; he must be near the first bridge. Suddenly something seemed to shout in his ear the one wild word — "Jump!" and he drew his knees under him and sprang at the white, wavering, woolly thing below. He

went feet over head, turning in air, and the next moment felt the earth tear his scalp, and the next instant heard and felt his right leg snap and thrill him with awful pain, then he was in ice-cold water; and the wheeled train of fire went roaring on down Bear Paw canyon.

At many points between Tunnel 12 and Tunnel 13 men in camps along the half-finished line saw the terrible thing go by through the gray dusk, and ran to and fro like frightened ants. But there seemed no means of help. There was only the little box-relay on the wire in the walker's sheet-iron hut, near the first Bear Paw bridge.

Burke, grim and pale, stood on the front platform of the flying caboose, now and again catching a glimpse of the blazing thing ahead. His lips worked in his beard; his big hands gripped the hand-rod in front of him until his knuckles were white. Morgan had the throttle open, but they could not get nearer than a half-mile or more of the fiery snake ahead of them;

besides, who wished or dared to approach closer than that, when at any moment the car of powder might ignite?

" Stop at the walker's station by the bridge," Burke finally shouted to Rawlins. " If he's in maybe we can catch 13 by the wire and get the men out of the tunnel. Go back on the engine and tell Morgan to let her out until we approach the station, then to plug her so we can act quick." He glanced ahead and saw the flying wraith of smoke and flame wheeling downward through a bending grove toward the Bear Paw. And that freckled boy from Chicago was on the blazing thing, trying to stop it! He bent forward and muttered odd words.

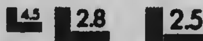
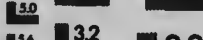
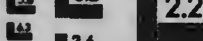
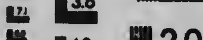
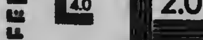
With whistling jets of steam from her cocks and the tearing snarl of reversed drivers, 382 jolted and stopped at the walker's station. Fuller, Burke, and Rawlins lunged from the caboose while the wheels were still turning, and made for the sheet-iron shed by leaps and bounds. Burke kicked the door open — Prin-

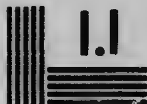
dle, the walker, was not there! Two miles up the track they had nearly run over him without being aware of it; at the present moment he was running toward the station but was far up the mountainside. The little box-relay on the table in the mimic station was rattling softly. The men glanced at it, then came out; no man among them knew the Morse code. Burke looked up at the gray sky into which big, soft stars were blossoming, and his lips moved. As his glance fell back to earth, something came crawling across the track in front of the caboose, a wet, smallish figure that dragged itself forward on its hands and knees. Burke leaped at it. "The boy—Hogan!" he shouted, and gathered the bedraggled figure in his arms.

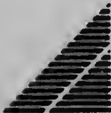
Freckle's face was close to the superintendent's; each looked in the other's eyes. "My leg's broke—get me int' the table quick—t' the relay—so's I can call 13," came from the boy's bloody lips.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)





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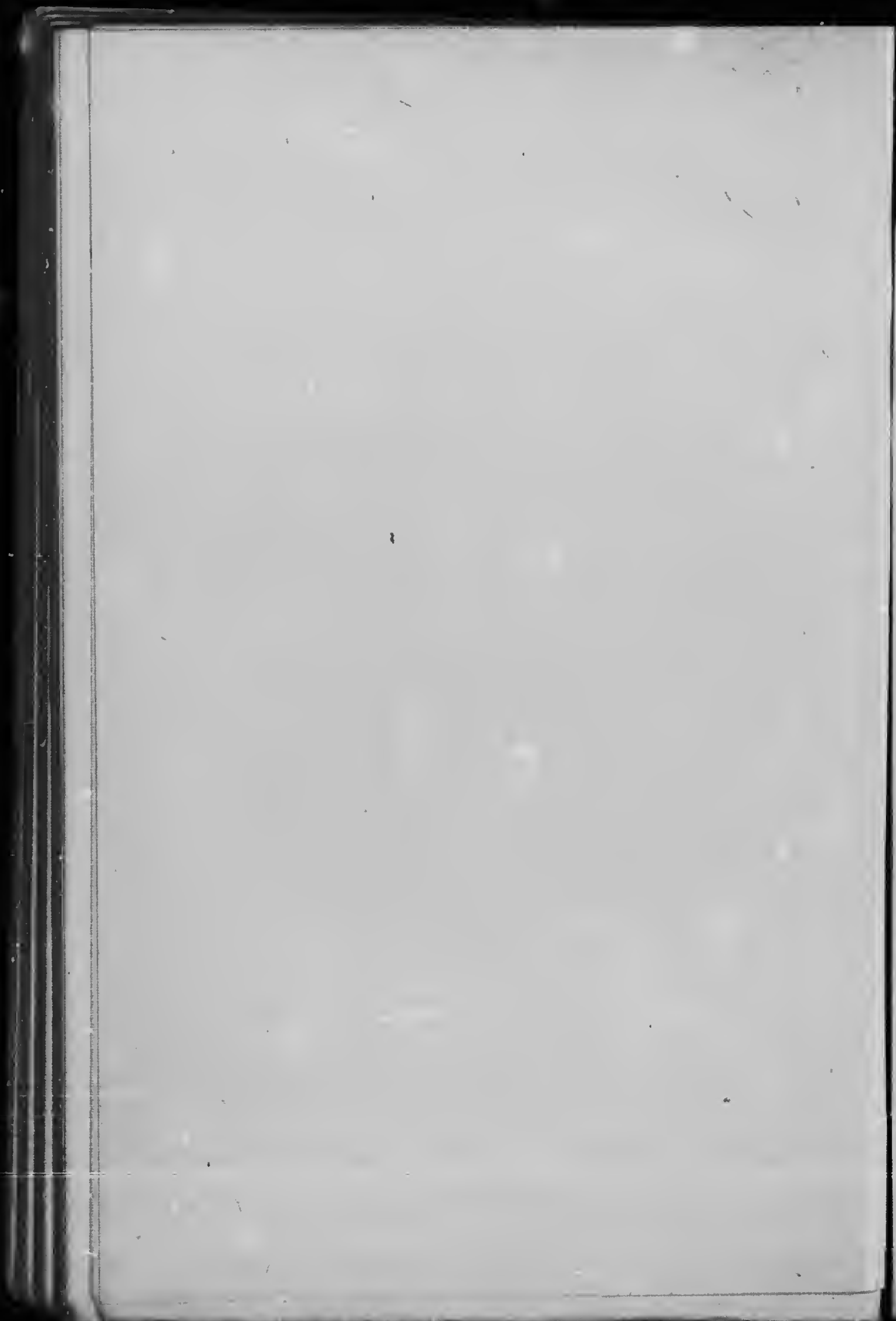
Burke turned and literally ran with him into the station. He placed him in the chair before the instrument and stood steadying him with his hands. Fuller and Rawlins ran in after them; the faces of all were white, only that Freckle's was dripping blood. He put a shaking hand on the key, his brows drawn into a knot, his nostrils distended, his lips pulled tight across his teeth; he was faint with agony. The key went up and down. "Tc, tc, tc," it said.

"Why, boy, didn't you say the tunnel operator got hurt — his arm broken this afternoon? He cannot answer!" exclaimed Burke in sudden fearful disgust.

"Yes, he will," said Freckle through his teeth; "if Frank's in his bunk in the box, no matter if his neck's broke, he'll answer — *he's Irish.*"

He pushed the wet hair from his puckered forehead and went on calling, but no reply came back. Then he ticked out a full and ter-

HE PUT A SHAKING HAND ON THE KEY. — *Page 88.*



rifying sentence: "If you're in your bunk, Frank, run to the tunnel and get the men out — runaway train on fire, car of powder at tail of train — if it don't blow up before it get there, it'll explode in the tunnel! Get the men —— "

Then the current broke. "Who — says — that?" ticked the instrument bunglingly, falteringly.

"Freckle Hogan — first Bear Paw bridge — that you, Frank?"

"Yes."

"Git the night shift out of —— "

"O. K."

"He's — gone — after the — men," filtered dreamily through Freckle's teeth, and he rolled back in Burke's arms and darkness flooded over him.

Almost at the same moment a young red-headed fellow with an arm in slats burst out of the iron shed near the mouth of Tunnel 13.

"Get away from in front of the tunnel!

Get out of it!" ! yelled, as he bolted headlong into the ragged bore. "Out of here — out of here — every mother's son of you! Runaway train — on fire — powder in train! Out of here!" Thus all the way to the breast of the blasting, seven hundred feet from the tunnel's mouth, his strong, young voice roared the warning as he ran.

Sixty men came out of the works with such speed as terror of death alone can put into human legs. Logan, head foreman, was with them.

"Scatter! Get off the right of way! Get back!" he yelled, for the steel rails were whining and Bear Paw canyon was roaring and clapping with echoes.

Then around a bulging point the thing of fear reeled suddenly into view, and all the rugged walls of the gorge and the foaming Bear Paw and the faces of the hiding men were whitened. The loaded ties were ablaze clear to the powder car and the forward end of that

was sheeted over with fire, and coals and sparks had begun dropping down upon the cases. The flaming thing went into the tunnel with a seething roar, then in a moment came an appalling crash and the Saddle Bow Range quivered down to its last strata. A vomit of stones and twisted rails and broken machinery gushed from the tunnel's mouth, a breath that turned boulders over went up the canyon, then silence fell.

Burke, tenderly laying Freckle on the seat cushions in the caboose, up by Prindle's station, heard the detonation. His mouth worked in his beard oddly. After a moment he said quietly: "Rawlins, we'll run on down to Thirteen; tell your engineer."

He straightened Freckle's limp form on the cushions, wiped the lad's wet face softly with his handkerchief, and walked up and down the car. Fuller and Rawlins looked at him furtively; in each man's mind worked the thought: "If the men in Thirteen did not get the warn-

ing in time, then — " but they said nothing. When they got down from the caboose near Tunnel 13, Foreman Logan met them.

" Well? " said Burke.

" No one hurt — machinery, everything gone," replied Logan.

" All right," said the superintendent, with a long, relieving breath. " Order new machinery sent here at once. Clear the tunnel as soon as it cools. Where's your doctor? "

" Over there in the shed with McGuire."

" Get him; boy with broken leg here in the caboose. Fetch McGuire, if he's able; I want to promote him."

Afterward Freckle went to the company's hospital at Paley Fork. He went in a special car. One morning Burke and Manvell stepped into the accident ward; Freckle looked up from his cot and his brown eyes glistened.

" Mr. Burke thinks we'd better make a place for you on the wires here at headquarters," said Manvell smilingly.

Freckle picked at the white counterpane. "Don't — know as — I'm good enough. But if you think —— "

"We'll manage that all right," laughed Burke; "you know, *we're Irish!*"

When Freckle finally was well and sound came another surprise, the Diamond Key. Invitations to a banquet at the Lyon House were received by numerous people engaged in the Western Central project. The invitations were signed by Superintendent Burke and announced that the recipients would have the pleasure and honor of meeting "two very eminent persons" at the dinner. When as many of the officials and employees as could attend were seated at the long tables in the big dining-room, it was found that Dreamy Meadows sat on the right hand and Freckle Hogan on the left of Superintendent Burke, at the head of the first table. We then began to have an inkling of what it all meant, but it became clearer when, at the close of the fine

repast, Burke rose and made a glowing speech extolling fidelity to duty in all men, and especially as exemplified by the two young fellows who sat beside him. We approved with very str· ·g applause, as may be fancied, but when Burke took from a cas. .wo small diamond-set keys of gold, and pinned onc upon the breast of each of the young heroes, saying, "These keys, or rather the brave deeds they commemorate, ought by right of justice to unlock the hearts of all men to the wearers and the world's best avenues to their service," then we cheered indeed. Afterwards we found, as our astute superintendent had intimated, that kindness flowed toward whoever wore the Diamond Key, and opportunities were open to them which, owing to that which the badge signified, they strove the harder to fill acceptably.

CHAPTER IV

DESTINY AND A SMALL BOY

"THERE, take the meddy, that's Mummy's nice little man. It will do Tollie good — make him all well."

But the "nice little man" put both the medicine and flattery aside with a wailing protest, his small, pale face wrinkling itself into a many-lined weather-map, with the mouth the chief storm centre.

"Mummy will put some sugar in — make it nice and sweety — then Tollie will take it."

Still, with this alluring saccharine addition, Tollie came only slightly nearer the mysterious bait. He blinked his blue eyes over the proffered cup, tasted the contents, and threw himself back and voiced an unqualified disapproval

of sleep-engendering potions of all sorts. He was a very, very young man, but he was old with the primal instinct of self-preservation and naturalness.

The mother looked worried. Her abundant brown hair was tumbled awry, her loose gown was slightly stringy and soiled, but, being unpinned at the neck, showed a milk-white throat. Her face was comely, though clearly the preservation of its comeliness was not her chief care; her hands, from the view-point of the æsthetic, were a pronouncement against dish-water and housework. The room about her was comfortable enough — a nickel-trimmed hard-coal stove, muslin window curtain, a cabinet organ, a reddish three-ply carpet soiled here and there and ornamented with battered toys. Outside, beyond a white picket-fence and a frozen street, spread the Paley Fork yards, the tracks and roundhouse and division station offices of the Western Central. Beyond the yards and the pinched confines of the little

town, both to north and south, soared mountains in billowy masses. Brown-bosomed for the most part, the towering slopes were darkened here and there with clots of scrubby pines, and here and there the lords of the peaks wore vast hoods of glistening white. Afar in the west the dying sun hung between two horns of a mountain-top, golden, shimmering; the air was cold and vaguely yellow; snowflakes, widely scattered and wandering like the souls of bees, drifted and wavered, seemingly too light to come to earth. Upon the mountain there was silence, in the Paley Fork yards the clanging of engine bells, the hiss of steam from exhaust cocks, and now and again the clumping rattle of drawheads battering together.

The woman in the cottage put the cup down and corked the bottle that furnished the cup with its vexing contents. She folded the little man close to her and began rocking him, crooning softly the while. In a moment she shifted her chair so that he could not see the bottle,

for each sight of it apparently gave the wee fellow a disturbing qualm. Over by the north window a larger little man sat flat on the floor, a clutter of small things about him — the disorganized works of an old clock, screws, strings, and bits of whittled wood. With a pocket-knife, a tack-hammer, and a screw-driver he was laboring at the construction of a locomotive, the motive power of which he conceived might be furnished by the spring of the dismantled clock. Clearly he was a man of action and imagination. He had a big head from which, but the day before, a tousled mass of reddish curls, worn from infancy, had been shorn clean away. His head felt rather cold, to be sure, but delightfully light and airy and nice. He ran a grimy hand over its surface now and then with manifest interest; it felt like some one else's head, or, at least, a new one. However, it was immensely satisfactory. He had real starry eyes, light brown and twinkling at everything. He looked at the disturb-

ing bottle, at the tiny white face cuddled against the woman's bosom, and down at his tools and materials sweepingly. Apparently he could conceive a great many ambitions, as well as several sorts of mischief, in a single moment, or, at any rate, within a very short period of time. He ruminated:

"Tollie's sick, that's what he is — he's thess a white little feller with no strenth, that's what he is — that ole med'cine makes him sick, that's what it does — I wonder how I can make this spring stay coiled up? I ought t' have a key t' wind it up with, that's what I ought — Mummy shouldn't give him the ole stuff — it makes him go t' sleep w'en he don't want to, an' it's awful t' go t' sleep w'en you don't want to — I wish there wasn't no night nor no ole sleep, it's thess a waste of time, that's what it is — Where did I put that file? Here it is under me — If I get a chance I'll empty out that ole med'cine so Tollie won't have it t' take, that's what I will — I'll have t' toot for

this engine w'en it runs; I can't make a tooter on it; for that takes steam — I'll make a bell for the engine out of Mummy's silver thimble, that's what I will — If Pa would happen t' step on my engine, he's got such big — My, if I only had four silver dollars t' make the drivers out of! I'll ask Pa, that's what I will — Pa ought t' take the med'cine; he said he could take a quart of it an' not get sleepy; that's what he tole Tollie — Pa showed me how t' start a engine w'en I climbed up on Big Susan t' see him yest'day; it's thess as easy; you thess push a thing over an' away you go; some time I'm going t' be a engineer, that's what I am — Tollie's gone t' sleep; I wonder if that sup he took did it? He's thess a white little feller an' ain't got no strenth; that's what he is."

Heavy feet came tramping across the porch, the woman softly but swiftly ran up a stairway with the "white little feller," and, placing him carefully upon a bed, came noiselessly

down again. A big, hearty-looking man was laughingly examining the work of the small laborer by the north window. He turned with a merry, "Hello, Lady Mother!" Lady Mother smiled but laid a finger on her lips with a hushing "sh-s-s-s!" and pointed toward the chamber above.

"He asleep?" whispered the big man.

Lady Mother nodded her head. The big man tiptoed across the room toward the little dining-room. "Have to get supper right off," he said; "ordered out on a special — go in about an hour. Fill my lunch-pail, Lady Mother; put in lots of coffee; going to be a cold night and a long run. Here, Muggins, if you don't make less racket pounding on that machine we'll have to give you some dope out of the bottle to quiet you." He looked at the young engine-builder with simulated severity. "This isn't a boiler factory; you disturb your mother and the baby. Say, Sue, you better give him a dose of the entrancer in the morning; keep

him quiet during the day." He winked at Lady Mother.

The husband and wife passed into the dining-room. Muggins laid down his tools and went over and looked at the " entrancer " with a very serious countenance. Every relation that hinged upon the existence of this soporific stuff, to his way of thinking, demanded its annihilation; all the factors of consideration ran to one point and cohered in a verdict of condemnation. He quickly cast about in search of the most secret and least incriminating means of ridding the house of it. Spying his father's big lunch-pail sitting back of the stove, his bright eyes became brighter. Pa had declared that he could drink a quart of the medicine without experiencing ill effects. Obedient to the suggestion and several other psychic promptings peculiar to six-year-old boys, Muggins seized the pail unscrewed the stopper of the coffee-tank and poured the offending concoction into the receptacle. There wasn't

MUGGINS POURED THE OFFENDING CONCOCTION INTO THE RECEPTACLE.
Page 82.

nearly a quart of the medicine, anyhow, not more than a half-pint, perhaps, and of course Pa would never mind a little dab like that. Maybe it would do Pa good, for Pa had a troublesome bunion, and the medicine might cure it. Upon full and serious consideration Muggins convinced himself that, as a point of pure logic, medicine must be good for bunions, but as a means of bringing sleep upon little boys — manifestly that was unjust and ridiculous.

Having disposed of the poppied menace, the telltale bottle remained. Alarmed by this fact, Muggins ran out and was in the act of hiding the bottle under the fence when an idea popped up in his mind. All sorts of things were in the habit of popping up in Muggins's mind, among them occasionally a real idea. The contents of the bottle had been of a milky hue. Slipping the empty bottle inside his jacket, Muggins awaited an opportunity, and after supper filled the bottle with water, adding a

little cream from the cream-jug and a pinch of sugar. The next day Lady Mother was surprised and pleased that Tollie took the medicine so nicely, and even Muggins had to have a swallow of it, since, as he declared, he felt prickly and restless, which no doubt was true.

The closing meal of the day, made memorable by Muggins's "real idea," having been hurriedly eaten, Pa kissed Lady Mother and the guileless culprit, seized his full lunch-pail, and strode over to the roundhouse to give Big Susan a lookover before the hostler should bring the mighty iron maiden out on the main track. Jack Tarney was particular about some things, Big Susan being one of the things. He had a strong and justified affection for her, the machine being one of the greatest and safest in the mountains. She was a Baldwin compound, using her steam in two sets of cylinders and gaining enormous power thereby; she had eight drivers and weighed 270,000 pounds, and she held her head high and snorted defiance

to things both small and great. To drive such an embodiment of power, to hold the reins over such a creature, feeling the beautiful monster obedient to the iron bit, was quite enough to make a man proud of and particular about the business. But a "real idea," hatched even in a child's brain, is sometimes of greater potency than an engine's strength or a man's care and pride — it embodies Destiny itself.

As Jack Tarney, perched in the cab on the right-hand shoulder of Big Susan, rolled eastward over the Paley Fork switches that evening, he looked over at the cottage. The man who leaves home to ride over mountains on a creature whose bowels are filled with fire and hot steam cannot always feel sure that he is coming back. There is ever the haggard Possible lurking beyond the Probable. His gaze lingered on the roof as it melted out of view; the "little white feller" was there, and down in the lighted sitting-room no doubt Lady Mother was sewing by the nickel-trimmed

stove, and over by the north window — it really would be nice and funny if Muggins could use four silver dollars as drivers for his engine! But that would be altogether too profligate. Hard coal, and lots of other things, were too costly in Colorado.

The stars came out over the mountains, swimming goldenly in big blue pools of sky among drifting islands of fleece; the wind sucked cold against his face in the canyons when he leaned out, peering anxiously ahead around the curves, for they were running as the second section of freight Number 12. By times he saw the rear lamps of the first section, two crimson eyes, whisked out of sight beyond jutting rocks or glaring back from some lifting grade, perhaps a mile away. By ten o'clock they were well up the twisting slopes of the Cradle Range, by eleven they were upon the summit. The moon came up, slicing the scud like a colter of pearl; the wind blew in brisk, cold puffs; the mountains looked like vast heaps of ashes.

It was still forty miles to Barn Butte, the division station, down among the hills near the plains country. Tarney got out his lunch-pail from the seat-box and began to eat and drink.

"This coffee tastes sort of funny — chicory or varnish or something," was his mental comment. "Guess it's the cream — kind of stale twang; reckon that Swede milkman must feed his cows rubber boots." Nevertheless he drained the tank.

As he dropped the pail in the seat-box he glanced ahead. The red lamps were two or three miles below. "McCracken is hittin' her up in great shape to-night," he ruminated. He leaned back and squinted around the boiler-head at the fireman. The man down on the fuel-deck looked like a perspiring negro. He had pulled the furnace door open and, bowing in the reddish glare, was washing his grimy face and arms in a bucket of water. Big Susan would need but little steam through the next twenty-five miles.

They rolled downward, following the glimmering rails around jutting heads and across wide slopes, over fills and through cuts that were mimic canyons, but always downward. Here and there they caught glimpses of the crimson eyes winking back at them and whisking out of view. Once the crimson eyes seemed not a quarter of a mile away, again they were surely a mile distant. Tarney began to grow fearfully sleepy. The feeling frightened him. He kicked the footboard roughly and rubbed his forehead, he hung out the window and drew down great breaths of cold air. Effort and air did no good; his eyelids were fringed with lead, a great robe of content, downy, delicious, was enfolding him. He tore at it, pushed it back, he hated it, yet it wrapped him closer, filling him with dreamy warmth and pleasure. He pushed up his eyelids with his oily fingers and tried to look at his watch. They must stop at Dander for orders — both sections; he must shut off and use air about a quarter of a mile

west of the station; McCracken would probably be there — then his eyes closed and the clanking noises of the engine became music, and he was suddenly walking through a valley that was full of sun and summer and jingling streams, and Muggins was with him, and Muggins had four silver dollars which he threw up in the air, and the dollars became white doves and flew away singing like thrushes. Then Muggins himself began to sing like a thrush, and Tarney was astonished that Muggins could sing so beautifully; but presently Muggins began to play a mouth-organ that made a noise like a steam calliope, and the mountains on either side of the valley hopped angrily toward them and butted together with a mighty, crumbling crash, and he awoke and found himself sprawling among stones and divers fragments of Big Susan's cab near Dander station.

The body of Big Susan was on the track, but the tender and the next three cars were splintered and flung awry. Big Susan had the

caboose of the first section literally on her horns, with the front end of the caboose jammed through the bay-window of the station into the telegraph office. Several persons had broken bones; Tarney himself had a dislocated shoulder and sundry bruises, but happily no life had been sacrificed to Muggins's "idea."

It was a clear case. Jack Tarney had slept and let his engine into the first section of freight Number 12. Superintendent Burke brought him in "on the carpet," but it was hardly worth while; only one verdict was possible — his "time" and the privilege of looking for employment elsewhere.

Tarney execrated his stupidity and nursed his hurts in ignorance of their primary cause, Lady Mother was shocked and beset with apprehensions, Muggins hid his head under the bedclothes at night, for he most distinctly "saw things." He would fain have unbosomed himself, but the horrifying immensity of

the thing — broken bones, wrecked trains, and his father discharged! His hair evinced a pronounced determination to stand on end when he thought of it. What sort of punishment would be meted him for the perpetration of such a crime? That thought also made his hair lift. A six-year-old boy is usually painfully frank; a six-year-old boy confronted by a probable personal cataclysm is sometimes painfully reticent. Muggins grew pale and without appetite, but he kept his great secret. However, his burden grew somewhat lighter upon hearing his father one day comfort Lady Mother with the statement that, as soon as his shoulder were healed, he was going down to the Queen Cove Mine to work, thus assuring them bread until spring, when he would sell the cottage and seek an engineer's position east of the mountains.

It was late January when Tarney went down to the Queen Cove, and in March fell the happening that set things right. On the Western

Central the affair is spoken of by many as the strangest accident in the history of the road; by the devout it has been pointed to as a miracle. The writer confesses that to his mind something more than senseless chance and blind coincidence look to have been at work — if these were the only elements, then chance and coincidence call for reverence.

The Queen Cove Mine was oddly situated; had this not been so the miracle — or tragic incident, as you please — could not have fallen. The mine lay in a kind of cove, a wide-lipped bore in the solid base of Silver Mountain, thirty-seven miles east of Paley Fork. At that point the Sandrill River, twisting down from the mountains of the northwest, whips its way into the Cradle Range, cutting southward around the eastern base of Silver Mountain. Doubtless in some former age its obstructed waters gnawed into the foundation of the mountain, leaving the vast excavation known as Queen Cove. This striking example of the

power of erosive forces was some four hundred feet wide at the mouth and nearly half a mile deep; its walls jutted outward for the most part and were from six to eight hundred feet high. No human foot had ever scaled those beetling ramparts. Near the most inner point of the great burrow a thin stream, during the wet season, leaped down from the heights and battered itself into mist on the stone floor. At one side a tunnel entered the rock formation, driven in on a narrow vein of gold-bearing conglomerate almost on a level with the floor of the strange enclosure. Working in this small mine were eighteen men; in the cove were three flimsy shacks and a boarding-house shed. The wives and children of three of the miners were housed in the shacks, the other miners were unmarried or had families elsewhere, Jack Tarney, after his arrival, being numbered among the latter.

Running southeastward across the mouth of the cove foamed the cold waters of the Sand-

rill; the track of the Western Central also crossed its outer opening, squeezed in between the river and the cove. A mile farther down the river lay Bridge Station, a small station, near which the track of the Western Central crossed the Sandrill and made eastward over the main body of the Cradle Range. From the little mine in the cove a mule trail wound down to Bridge Station, following the track and the river, and at that time the ore from the Queen Cove went in sacks by muleback to the station for shipment. That was the situation when Muggins did the deed.

Clearly, if, during the period of high water and ice-flow, the Sandrill should become seriously obstructed and its flood thrown into Queen Cove, as was probably the case when the cove was chiseled out of the mountain, the dwellers there would meet a sorry fate. Never in the known history of the region had this peril fallen, but on the sixteenth day of March, following Tarney's advent at the mine, it came.

The Sandrill was straining its banks at that time and was sprinkled with eddying masses of shattered ice. While it was yet dark on that morning some of the sleepers in the little camp in the cove were awakened by the jarring of the mountain and a muffled thunder of noise in the outer canyon. They slept again and awoke in ice-cold water. Acres of snow, breaking from a high shoulder of Silver Mountain and hurling with it scores of pines and train-loads of dirt and stones, had tobogganed down into Sandrill Canyon, a quarter of a mile below the cove, stopping the flow of the river as by magic. The engorging mass lay across the railroad track and filled the bed of the stream from thirty to fifty feet deep — at points it was two hundred feet wide. Given time, the river would eat a channel through the obstruction, but in the meantime the people in Queen Cove — they were as rats in a flooded hole.

Jack Tarney jumped out of his bunk in water that came to his thighs and out the door into

a flood breast deep. Dawn was breaking and the cove was filled with a greenish light; the vast walls soared about him, furrowed, bulging, dank; the whole area of the cove was awash with a flood the currents of which ran twisting and pushing everywhere; the place echoed with human cries. The chill of the water cut to his marrow. He glanced toward the cove's mouth; the Sandrill was rolling over the railroad track in a steel-gray sheet three hundred feet wide, emptying its impeded waters into the cove in angry madness. Shocked beyond expression by the awful situation, he swayed in the water for a moment, then lunged forward, spurred by the instinct of self-preservation. The long, low building used as a boarding-house lifted and turned over and rolled like a log, crushing and tearing in pieces; the three little shacks were driving toward the inner curve of the cove. A man splashed by Tarney, half-swimming, half-pushing himself by his toes on the rocky bottom.

"What's happened? Where are the women and children?" shouted Tarney.

The man was gulping and strangling. "Most of 'em and most of th' men air in the tunnel — they run in there w'en th' water begun comin' in," he sputtered.

"Fools! They'll be smothered, they'll be drowned like gophers," cried Tarney, turning toward the tunnel. But why should he try to enter the rapidly filling hole, why should he attempt the utterly impossible? A strangling baby washed by him; he grasped it and pushed toward the mouth of the cove. He had not gone fifty feet before he was beyond his depth and fighting for life. He was not an expert swimmer and was compelled to use one hand to hold the child's head above the water. Near the railroad track he was swept twice around a long circle by the angry current. As he went round he saw a man sink not far from him and caught a glimpse of objects in the cove; the shacks were rolling and bumping against the

jutting walls, mules were struggling in the water and upset wagons washing about; at one side a man and woman were clinging to a projecting ledge; at the farthest point three men and a little girl had drawn themselves up on some knotted humps of stone. The six people he caught sight of possibly were safe, but the human beings in the tunnel! The drift ascended slightly, but if the water rose to a depth of ten feet on the floor of the cove the tunnel would fill solidly to its inner end! Then inevitable death must seize all who had fled into it for safety.

A vision of this glimmered in Tarney's mind as he was borne round in the ice-sprinkled flood, then suddenly he was whipped into a current that was like a mill-race and carried downward between the mountain wall and the water-covered railroad track. He whirled along for perhaps a hundred yards when he was swept into a wide eddy and thrown ou' upon some projecting rocks, where he clutched

fast and drew himself up, struggling hard for breath. He still held the child; it began to cry. He was racked with pain and inexpressibly cold. He folded the child close in his arms; it was quaking and purple. He looked abroad and saw the wreckage of the avalanche — the wide mass of snow and débris that clogged the canyon, the river coiling and pushing as in madness against this barrier, and turning back and rolling into Queen Cove, angrily seeking an outlet. The man shuddered; the freezing flood was wide, a perpendicular wall was at his back, he saw no present means of escape. The rising sun flung a scarlet beam down from the eastern mountains; the fragments of ice seemed to take fire. He thought of the "little white feller" and Muggins and Lady Mother; they must be getting up about now. Should he ever see them again?

But Lady Mother and Muggins had been up for quite two hours. That was delightful destiny — to the imperiled folk in Queen Cove

really the greatest thing that ever happened. Muggins was coming down to see his father, and the fashion and sequence of his journey is one of the great stories of the Western Central. Bob Hammond, who now handled the throttle of Tarney's engine, was bringing the young hater of soothing-syrup down to the cove. Lady Mother, with many expressed hopes that he might be a good boy and not get into mischief, had brought Muggins over to the yards and put him aboard Big Susan at 5.15 in the morning. Bob was taking Big Susan through to Barn Butte to bring a special west; he would take good care of Muggins and drop him off at the cove all right, he said. Muggins, jocund with glee and expectation, climbed up on the fireman's side of the cab, and Big Susan rolled out through the switches.

She tramped along the track down Paley Valley steadily that morning, followed the steel through the hills that fringe the Cradle Range, then climbed around to the north side of Silver

Mountain. Here, at High Pine station, Hammond shut off and jumped to the ground. Daylight was upon the world, a glory was welling over the eastern mountains like blood-red smoke.

"Come on, Turner," he shouted to the fireman; "let's get some coffee at Mother Mason's; she's up, I see. Nothing leaving the Fork until 8.20 and Number 6 isn't due at Bridge Station until 7.06; let the engine stand. You never had any of Mother Mason's coffee? Well, it's the juice all right. She pounds the coffee fine and hangs it in a bag in the pot and lets it drip; great stuff. Say, kid, you better come along, too."

Muggins shook his head. He was munching a fried cake and had his organs of speech fully occupied.

"Well, don't monkey with things," said Hammond, as he and the fireman started across the right of way to Mother Mason's.

Muggins had been deeply interested in every

element of the journey thus far, but when the two men had entered the little house his curiosity and interest quickened. He mounted the engineer's seat and his brown eyes glowed. He put his hands resolutely behind his back and refrained for a little time from touching anything, but there was the throttle-lever, a thing of marvels, a rod to conjure with! It fascinated Muggins. His father had once shown him how to start an engine; some day he himself was going to be an engineer; why should he not begin practising? He laid hold of the shining iron and gripped and pushed and tugged at it. Suddenly it went over a bit, and as suddenly steam spouted from the exhaust cocks, and Big Susan moved away, making for Queen Cove and her part in the Queen Cove tragedy.

Through a little space Muggins laughed and rejoiced, then he glanced back and saw two men burst out from Mother Mason's door, hatless, white-faced, yelling. He essayed to stop

the engine then, but could not; panic, fiery, terrifying, gripped him. He cried aloud and ran back and forth across the fuel-deck, the world was whirling rearward on either side of him; he crept into the gangway and looked down, the earth flowed back beneath him in a gray and dizzying sheet; he crept into the cab and scrambled to the fireman's seat and hid his face in the cushion, calling wildly on Lady Mother. Every atom of the mighty engine seemingly began to hum and roar. Thirteen miles to Queen Cove and every foot of it down grade! In three minutes Big Susan began to ring her bell, she rocked and rolled so violently. Using steam and carried downward by her vast weight, at the end of five miles she had attained a frightful speed. Muggins, pallid and wild-eyed, simply clutched fast to whatever was handiest. The long-nosed oil-cans leaped in their racks, coal shot back and forth across the tender, the smoke from the stack streamed flat along the boiler, the exhausts pulsed like

fluttering hearts. Downward the engine rushed, since time began one of man's most beautiful and terrible creations. On the curves all her iron clanged and quivered; on the short, straight stretches she sprang forward as if leaping to meet some mighty task. Did angels, invisible to human eyes, fly before her, leading her to the rescue of the imperilled creatures at Queen Cove? Was some shielding power thrown round the little being in the engine cab in that wild hour? Who may say? In the boy's mind was only terror and confusion; he gasped and cried aloud and was pitched from side to side. In the world around him the mountains seemed to rise and twist, huge spurs of rock fell and melted and rushed rearward, the very framework of things seemed hurling into choas.

Down in Queen Cove the people in the tunnel, driven to its inner end, were up to their arm-pits in water; men held children on their shoulders, women were crying. Death whispered in

the flooded cavern. Out in the canyon Jack Tarney hung among the cold rocks, the rescued baby in his arms; they shook and quivered together. The rising water heaved and turned and broadened, then sounds fell upon it, a flight of echoes sweeping down the canyon, palpitating, swelling, bursting finally into jarring thunder, then the man saw that which will remain with him until his last breath.

Like a creature from another world Big Susan crossed the mouth of Queen Cove. She seemed flying; the water that covered the rails, smitten and divided by her hurling front, dashed up over her fifty feet high and bent backward like enormous glittering wings; immediately about her black body, springing up from the inundated fire-box, rolled a white cloud of steam; thus like some sort of stupendous creature, borne on crystal pinions, she swooped against the prone body of the avalanche. Her speed was surely a hundred miles an hour, and her 270,000 pounds of iron tore a way through

the snow and débris as a bullet might tear through paper. Tarney was covered by the water that fell behind her as she passed; he heard an indescribable, thunderous crash, and looked and saw the pent waters of the river rolling out through the great gash Big Susan had cut in the barrier, and knew that life still remained the heritage of all in Queen Cove.

They found Big Susan lying against the side of Silver Mountain three hundred feet below the snowslide. She was stripped from end to end. In the wreck of the cab lay Muggins, white as the snow and as still. Both of the seat cushions were around him — whether he placed them there he does not know; if they protected him or not no man can tell. Afterward, when he lay in Lady Mother's bed in Paley Fork and the company's surgeon said he would be all right in a week or two, he began to cry.

"I wants t' 'fess," he sobbed; "I poured th' sleep-stuff in Pa's coffee-tank, so I did. He said he could drink a quart of the ole stuff, he

did, and he couldn't, so he couldn't, an' it sleeped him, so it did, an' I'm sorry, so I am. But Big Susan can run thess faster an' anything, so she can; I found it out, so I did."

Lady Mother sent for Superintendent Burke and Burke sent for Jack Tarney, and after a time, when Big Susan had been put through the shops, Jack again held her throttle, but no run ever made by Tarney quite equalled the historic run made by his son Muggins when he broke the dam at Queen Cove.

It was not until after Wadd Hancock's part in the wreck at Puma Point, a spot not far from Queen Cove, that any one, apparently, thought of Muggins as being entitled to the Diamond Key. Hi adventure, to be sure, had unlocked all hearts to him, but, since he had achieved a great thing without intention or purpose, it did not occur to us that he was entitled to more than a species of reverence and admiring wonder. However, by the time Wadd had given us, nearly a year later, his example

of personal daring, we had thought a good deal about Muggins, and some one, I think it was Manvell, suggested that if Providence had acted through the boy, or even Chance, he ought to be decorated as the chosen instrument, even though an unconscious hero.

CHAPTER V

THE CRÊPE DE CHINE TORCH

HOW he achieved the thing is, of course, a matter of record. Burke's private journal of heroic feats on the Western Central contains an account of it, entered by the superintendent himself in plain black and white. But the "why" of it is scarcely indicated in Burke's chronicle, matters of the heart not being likely to figure conspicuously in a railroad superintendent's record of "signal instances of bravery, presence of mind, and fidelity to duty in employees." Hence this fuller history.

Waddington Hancock, as a name, seemed indicative of estate and functions rather beyond the pretensions and appearance of the young fellow, but he always dashed the title upon the Western Central pay-roll with a flourish good

to see. His chirography had something of the large boldness of John Hancock's signature to the Declaration of Independence. It presented the same scorn of space, together with a carelessness of position and direction and a bounding swoop of line and curve that even the famous Declarer's signature could not boast. It was also commonly emphasized on the pale blue sheet by thumb and finger marks eloquent of coal and smutted waste, for a locomotive fireman does not usually wash his hands before jumping out of the gangway to scramble into the pay-car after his "dough." The roll-clerk invariably squirmed with appreciation of the length and breadth of the space that was being occupied as he watched the construction of the signature, but Martin Bonner, paymaster, who himself always handed the checks across the tiny counter of the Gazelle, usually laughed and rubbed his florid bald head and winked. The young man's signature was, somehow, singularly consonant with his physical aspect.

He had long feet, long, well-shaped hands, a straight steel-post sort of body, a backward springing spine, and a round, yellowish, handsome head. His eyes were not large but disturbingly direct and of a laughing, gleaming blue. With his quick, bold, erect air he had a soft, musical voice and usually was sparing of words. Once, anent a quip of Bonner's relative to his soft voice, the young fellow winked and said:

"Do I write loud enough?"

"Loud!" laughed Bonner; "your writing is simply thunder!"

The fireman winked again peculiarly, and, taking his check, went out of the pay-car.

One thing, Wadd liked to sing. That was his weakness, or his strength, as one is pleased to view it. Wadd's path homeward did not naturally lie by way of the residence of Master Mechanic Addicks, but with the advent of Daffy Tuttle, his niece, a subtle influence seemed always to persuade his feet to make

the little journey by that particular street, and it was noticeable that his vocal performance invariably reached its climax in the immediate region of the Addicks' home. Wadd being engaged in firing passenger on the East End — that is, from Paley Fork to Denver and return — the schedule put him down at the Fork near midnight, with the result that the M. M., being awakened by the youth's soaring tenor, had frequent occasion to shift his iron-gray head upon his pillow and profane the darkness with protesting vocables. But always there was something of a wholly different sort exuding from one of the gable windows: something that sounded like the very soft clapping together of little hands, tender, approving, sympathetic. Tommy Loomis, one of our way operators in the despatcher's office, touched with suspicious restlessness since Daffy's arrival, had unwisely attempted a sneering stricture relative to "her coal-pounding boy soprano," with the result that Daffy's black

eyes had grown fiery as she announced the opinion that "pounding coal for the fire-box of the big 1202 was somewhat more manly than pounding the brass of a telegraph-key, and that Mr. Hancock's voice was *not* soprano but a very beautiful high tenor," which was quite sufficient to, and did, settle Tommy. It was soon clear, at least to most of us, that Daffy and the crack fireman of the East End were something more than favorable to each other.

Daffy — her real name was Daphne — was from up Cheyenne way. Jack Tuttle, her father, was for long an engineer on the U. P. He was pulling the Fast Mail when he was killed. That occurred in the wreck occasioned by the Blue Run flood. Addicks was also from the U. P. Therefore Daffy, though the expression itself rings odd, was distinctly of railroad stock. From childhood she had been acquainted with locomotives and locomotive folk. Throttles, cylinder saddles, balanced valves, exhaust ports, eccentrics, check valves, injectors,

air drums, rockers, spring hangers, reverse levers, and the like were well-nigh as familiar to her as pins and needles. She had seen engines made, or, rather, what was fully as enlightening, she had many times seen all the parts of locomotives disassociated, repaired, and reassembled. She had played in roundhouses and car shops as a child, had held the throttle of her father's engine many times in tomboy days, and still liked better than food to hang out of a cab window and feel the steel fabric roll and plunge as she watched the drivers dissolve into whirling cobwebs beneath her.

Still, Daffy was girlish and pretty — outrageously pretty, some women secretly thought — and she could "trim" hats and play the piano. Old Addicks had been heard to growl that he had not been able to make out which was the more likely to induce lockjaw, Daffy's playing or Wadd's singing. However, the M. M. was proverbially ungracious to lovers.

The M. M. was a widower (grass) and was acid of speech and porcupine of posture touching things matrimonial. His experience of love and marriage had apparently left a deposit of conclusions in his mind similar in irritating quality to pounded glass in the blood. Nevertheless, he was a just man, or, at least, aimed to be.

As for Daffy, small as she was, she was a thing of magnitude in the affairs of Paley Fork, and admittedly Paley Fork was blessed with numerous maids and matrons, and was the abiding-place of men who measurably quickened or restricted the functioning of human life throughout a good many leagues both east and west. There was something peculiarly piquant about the girl. She had a fashion of glancing around quickly, of airily tipping her head and body about, of poising a moment to fling out a word or note of laughter and hurry away, that suggested a little brown wren, bright-eyed, jaunty, deliciously impudent.

When, on her way to the post-office or the milliner's, she came down the long platform of the station, gowned in white piqué, small French heels tapping on the hot planks and black eyes glancing from under a red parasol that looked like a big, lacy, flopping poppy, then something magnetic and unexplainable swept through the division offices. At any rate, in such moments apparently half our number felt it necessary to seek the windows in search of expected trains, fresh air, or to look for some one out in the yards.

Over in the great roundhouse, too, when Daffy came down, as she often did, clad in a golf suit, with a jockey cap skewered to a top-knot of tomboy curls, and climbed into some outgoing engine, to return by the first engine met with out on the line, there was a swift and nervous adjustment by the men of coat collars, a straightening of mustaches, an all-around attempt to look pretty that was pitiably male. Truly, it looked difficult for Wadd.

Though several members of the force were "languishing" at Daffy, the stiffest obstruction impeding the flow of Wadd's inclination was probably Addicks's antipathy. Obviously the fireman was very much in the master mechanic's power; besides, Daffy, being without living parents and committed to her uncle's keeping, was hardly as free as the proverbial bird in the matter of mating. The M. M. mentally admitted that there were few men on the Western Central who could keep so high and even a pressure of steam in an engine boiler under all conditions as could young Hancock, but he *did* hate a man who sang high tenor and who was in love. Such a person must perforce be contemptibly weak. The M. M. himself possessed a voice like a bass-drum with loose nails in it; he was deep-chested, big-headed, grizzly; as for love — was he not a widower, and "sour grass" at that?

But back of hi personal prejudice, and sinking deeper roots in his mind, was a notion that,

at heart, Fireman Hancock was a coward and a quitter. A story that was not at all pretty had come up to us from the K. P., where Wadd began firing, to the effect that the young man once jumped when he ought to have stuck: that his desertion of an engine in a certain crisis had cost human lives. Tommy Loomis brought the story.

Sifted, the main facts seemed as follows: Engine 999, Lyon engineer, Hancock fireman, pulling a K. P. express, oddly collided head on with the Fast Mail near a station named Peter Bend. The express had orders to hold at Peter Bend for the mail, but went by the station very fast, striking the mail disastrously a quarter of a mile beyond the station. Lyon, dead, was found close to the station, Hancock was found just beyond the station creeping about in an open lot in an apparent dazed condition. He had jumped, he afterward stated, when the engines were not more than a hundred feet apart, and had fancied that he was crawling

back to warn a train that he thought was following. He stated, also, that just when Lyon was about to shut off steam for Peter Bend the driving-rod on the right-hand side snapped, knocking off the side of the cab and killing Lyon instantly; that both the reverse apparatus and throttle lever were smashed and could not be operated; that he had tried his best to reverse and shut off, but found it impossible; that he had clung to the engine until death breathed in his face; then he had jumped. Just how he had got back nearly a quarter of a mile and into the open lot he did not clearly know.

From certain view-points Wadd's explanation of his personal conduct in the affair looked fishy. There were people who believed that he had not attempted to avert the wreck, but had quit the engine in panic immediately after the breaking of the driving-rod, else he would not have been found so near the station. Lyon's engine had been fearfully shattered in the col-

lision and fell upon her right side, crushing her levers; therefore Wadd's statement could neither be verified nor disproved. The K. P. people had been willing to continue him in their employ, but Wadd, not relishing expressions of doubt and hints that probably his cowardice had occasioned loss of life, quit in wrathful disgust, and presently came to the Western Central. The odd thing is that history should have so nearly repeated itself for Wadd, that the Puma Point tragedy afterward set him in a theatre of action so closely paralleling the K. P. affair. We all wondered at that.

One morning in February the M. M. sent for Wadd. The youth had been visiting Daffy twice each week and indulging nocturnal carolings along her street through several months. He was fully aware that he had rivals, but was beginning to feel sure of his place in her esteem. He was not nearly so sure of his place on the Western Central. As he walked down to the roundhouse he wondered if Addicks had

not concluded to push him from his position. It certainly looked an easy solution of the Daffy problem.

Arriving at the roundhouse, the M. M. led Wadd to the 1202, and there angrily took him to task touching the condition of the engine's crown-sheet. Wadd made a brief examination and explained, showing the master mechanic how, owing to a warp occasioned by the furnace coming in contact with snow, the dampers had acted defectively during the run ended the night before, thus endangering the crown-sheet. Obviously, the fault did not lie with the fireman; at least, it had not lain within his power to escape the risk that had been taken. Addicks saw this but was the more enraged. He had hoped that Wadd could not explain.

"Oh, well," he said, impatiently slamming a wrench into a tool-box, "you are an excuse-maker, anyway. You always manage to creep 'round things."

Wadd's eyes blazed against the older man's

face through a second or two. "On the contrary, Mr. Addicks, I never creep around anything, and I shall not creep around you." He spoke steadily but with rising voice.

"Don't brag," rasped Addicks. When angry his voice was as soothing as the sound of a saw ripping into iron. "You explained about the K. P. wreck, I understand, but I don't believe the stuff you told about it, not a word of it. You crept 'round the truth, in my opinion, and what's more, I believe you were a coward then and still have the streak in you." At heart he was railing about Wadd and Daffy.

"What makes you think me a liar and a coward?" asked Wadd with a smile, though his nostrils were growing thin and spotted.

"Because no man with straw-colored hair and a tenor voice could be anything else," said Addicks brutally.

The fireman's entire face went greenish-white. He walked close up to the master mechanic and looked him in the eyes for a

moment, then suddenly Addicks felt himself literally lifted by the throat and hurled headlong into one of the roundhouse ash-pits. When he had scrambled out, and had secured a crank-pin with which to brain this extraordinary creature, Wadd was walking out of the big door, erect as a ramrod and reeking contempt from every pore. The next morning he entered the office of the master mechanic and said:

"Well, have you my time made out?"

"I never discharge employees for personal reasons," rasped Addicks. "When you've injured the company you'll get your time quick enough. Continue your present run."

Wadd softened. "Mr. Addicks," he began, "I feel like I had been too hasty. I would like to —"

"Nothing of the kind. Drop it," snapped the old man. "I'll send for you when I want you. Good morning."

When, a few minutes later, Wadd came by

the water-tank on his way home, he le ned against an upright of the tank and strangled, ending his laugh with a gasping howl.

But Addicks did not erase himself by any means; he notified Wadd in writing to keep away from the house and his niece. He hotly took Daffy to task, but Daffy only twinkled her black eyes and kissed him, and said that of course Mr. Hancock should come to the house when he liked. Addicks ordered her to pack her things and go back to Cheyenne and remain with her Aunt Sue, Addicks's sister; but Daffy never budged. She laughingly assured him that she knew precisely what he needed, and that was for some one of exactly her age and particular style of beauty to play the piano and assist the housekeeper to spend his money; so she remained.

In the headquarters building we chuckled; truth, for once, was almost as attractive as fiction. Superintendent Burke told the master mechanic to discharge Wadd at once. The

idea! Such insubordination could not be countenanced for an instant. Addicks refused point-blank. Burke said he would himself discharge the fireman. Addicks said if he did he would have to discharge *him*, also. Truth was leaving fiction far to the rear! Addicks said the affair was a personal one; he had called the young man a coward; the fireman had not responded exactly like one. The M. M. would like well enough to get rid of him, but not in that way. Burke washed his hands of the affair.

Though Daffy had said that, of course, Wadd should come to see her whenever he chose, the fireman refused to put his foot across Addicks's threshold. When Daffy met him and urged him to call he laughingly dissented.

"It wouldn't be right, hardly decent, it seems to me," he said. "The gov'nor's word goes when it comes to his own house. He don't need to get out a Government injunction. He owns his home, but he doesn't own you, little

girl; that's diamonds of a different water, you know."

Daffy suggested that she might meet him once a week at the home of a common friend. Wadd shook his head. "That's sneaky," he said; "I don't like it. If you happen to be down at the foot of North Avenue occasionally when I get in from my run I'll walk home with you. I'd like that. Seems to me when it comes to the streets we have certain inalienable rights without straining the Constitution, even of Colorado. Then there's the stars and the moon and the mountains, and Jackson's livery stable with lots of buggies in it; besides, you might come down now and then and take a ride on the 1202. You can hold the glim while I break coal, and maybe Pap will let you squeeze the choker." They both fell to laughing. Daffy set her right foot forward, thrust her right arm straight up in the air and struck a goddess-of-liberty pose.

"By the divine right vested in the natural

constitution of every fair maiden I here declare —" She stopped.

"Declare what?" asked Wadd.

She twinkled her eyes at him. "That maybe I will."

The winter wore on and the weeks drew into March. Day by day a moist freshness breathed across the mountains. The peaks pushed back their silver hoods, shook out yellow locks of sunshine, and smiled. The canyons echoed with the cymbal-shock of swollen streams, valleys grew green as ocean hollows, miners went reluctantly into the workings, railroad men wished they were farmers, and Wadd Hancock, with enlarging heart-hunger, wanted Daffy.

Singing along the "ole man's" street one night as he returned from his run, the girl fluttered out to him from Addicks's gate, and the pair walked up North Avenue until they were on the base of Sacket Mountain. A vague, whitish world spread about and below

them in the moonlight. They sat down on a shelf of stone beside the road and for a time were silent.

"I wonder when something will happen — something that will change Uncle Stephen," said Daffy.

Wadd laid his cap on the ground and pushed back his hair. "When it does happen I expect I'll get fired," he said.

The girl sat silently looking at the filmy mountain range across the valley. Her dark eyes glistened. "When it happens you'll get an engine; I've been concentrating," she said.

He laughed and arose and stepped into the road. He picked up a stone and threw it far down the slope. When the stone had fallen and was silent he turned back to her. "Well, we've been hitting high joints and grades most of the way so far," he said. "With the M. M. flagging and trying to turn switches on us, and the gang generally piling ties on the track, it

don't look like it could be any worse running if we coupled up and went double-header. What do you say, little girl?"

The wine in Daffy's cheeks deepened its rose. "You mustn't get impatient or discouraged, big boy," she laughed. "Remember that all things come to him who waits."

"That is exactly the trouble," declared Wadd; "all things *do* come. If only *some* things came to him who waited there would be more sense in the scheme. But *all* things come — trouble and hot boxes and open switches generally — so I prefer not to wait."

Daffy put her hands in his and looked up at him. "You are a good fireman, you've got my heart very warm," she laughed, adopting his fashion of metaphor; "but do you think we ought to pull out without the consent of the master mechanic?"

"Run on orders if you can. If you can't get orders go ahead on your time-card rights; that

is my doctrine," laughed Wadd. He saw stars swimming in her upturned eyes; his face grew grave and tender.

Daffy drew him down and took his face between her hands and looked into his eyes long and soberly. Tremblingly she touched her lips to his. "Dear," she whispered, "you have the signal to go ahead."

This explains why Daffy temporarily abjured the piano for the needle, why she wrote to Aunt Sue at Cheyenne, and why Aunt Sue sent her two hundred dollars. It also explains why she deadheaded over to Denver and ordered from a modiste the historic crêpe de chine and lace wedding-gown that played so important a part in the Puma Point tragedy. Daffy visited Denver a second time to have the gown fitted; then, when it would have received the last stitch, Wadd was to bring the beautiful and precious "creation" home to Paley Fork. Very naturally Daffy desired that her marriage vows should be solemnized in Stephen

Addicks's best parlor and with proper éclat. Wadd also would have liked that, but after one had thrown the owner of the house into an ash-pit and brought upon him a very appreciable measure of derision, one could hardly expect to harvest a comforting crop of consideration.

"Never mind," said Wadd to Daffy, "we can be married over at the parsonage, or, if the preacher's 'best' isn't big enough to hold our friends, we can hire a hall. I've got some joyous rags being tied together over at Bunker's tog factory. They'll be done in a few days, and when that dazzling affair of yours gets in from Denver, we'll be ready to meet all comers. I've rented the Cupple cottage, but I guess we'd better not buy the furniture until after this matrimonial sunburst has been flashed on your uncle. I may have to go hunting a job, you know."

Daffy believed that she could win her uncle's consent, and was daily noting his moods, await-

ing the psychic moment when he should seem least resistant. One evening she dropped a hint. Like magic powder, it produced a smoke of sulphuric rhetoric. Daffy waited.

On the sixth day of April Wadd found that the bridal dress was ready for transit. Trainmen on the West End as well as several on the East End remember the day. Away out in Bear Paw cañyon there was a bad slide and a wreck; and Puma Point! that would be hard to forget. Wadd brought the gown from the modiste in a green pasteboard box. The package was too large to go into the seat-box on the fireman's side of the 1202, so he placed it on the front end of the seat in the window-niche, tying it fast with twine and weighting it down with the iron head of a coal maul. To Wadd the box had a quality of life, speeding a thrill of pleasure along his nerves each time that he looked at it. Big, gray, corpulent Pap Gundy, the engineer, glanced at the box as he climbed into the cab and stood for a moment with his

hand pressed against his heart, laboring for breath.

"More duds, eh?" he panted.

"Yep, more duds," replied Wadd, glancing at the gauges.

The old engineer put his foot on the step and ran his eye across the tremulous gauge-needles. "Son, I don't feel a bit good," he said. "Do you know, I believe that a hair about two foot long has grown inward from my chest and wrapped itself around my heart, and it's tightening up little by little every day. Going t' stop the pump one of these days, I'm afraid." He shook with slow laughter.

Wadd laid his hand lightly on the old man's shoulder. "You're joshing, Pap. You're the healthiest-looking man I know; it's sure all right," he said.

"Of course, son, of course; but it feels like a strangling hair." He slowly climbed to his seat on the right-hand shoulder of the mighty machine. From the fuel-deck Wadd could see

no more of him than the outline of his back and right shoulder.

Exactly on time the great compound, with a quickening series of crashing exhausts, moved out of the shed with her string of coaches and made off toward the mountains through the falling dusk. She went purring, but with a hoarse depth of breath befitting her monstrous lungs; she rolled on her springs, but majestically and in keeping with the staying power of her two hundred thousand pounds of close-knit steel. She obeyed the throttle like a lamb, but her hunger for coal! Wadd was never at rest a moment. His hand seemed always reaching for the door-chain, and coal seemed forever spraying from his shovel into the hot mouth that ceaselessly growled and hissed with appetite. Following level rails southwestward through the first hour, she whipped the coaches along like a string of toys, but the lift of the foot-hills forced her to heavy breathing. Wadd tore open his shirt collar and rolled his sleeves

to his elbows. It took a real master of the maul and shovel to keep breath in that prodigious chest.

By nine o'clock they were at Barn Butte, a sort of assistant division station at the eastern base of the Cradle Range. There Jim Downey with the 1300, a huge decapod, hooked in as pusher and helped them to the summit. By eleven o'clock, having left Downey behind, the 1202 was bellowing on the western slope of the range, her steel skull lowered toward the Sandrill. Though the air of this soaring region was chill, Pap Gundy sat among his levers hatless and in his shirt-sleeves and with both windows wide. For the most part he sat poring on the two streaks of steel that spun toward him through the broad glare of the headlight, but at times the bright rails seemed to him only thin wires running through air and sinking under the weight of the engine. In such moments he would look away quickly to the stars and straighten up with a deep breath

and shake himself. Taking a train filled with humanity down the grades of the Cradle Range was hardly a feat admitting of vertigo or dreams.

With Wadd matters were now easier. Occasionally he jumped upon the fireman's seat, and with his hand resting on the precious box also looked at the stars. Everywhere the mountain tops seemed caught and swaying in a silvery net. There was no visible moon; on the mountains rested a vast silence through which the 1202 crashed heavily, falling toward the valley twenty miles away. At Bonebreak, half-way down the range, Bunch Wilson, who was at the train-sheet in Paley Fork, caught them and gave them an order to meet eastbound passenger Number 2 at Puma Point Siding, nine miles west of Bridge Station, the regular meeting-point. Bridge Station was on the Sandrill River at the base of the range. Crossing the stream there, the track followed the river up the canyon, past Queen Cove Mine and Puma

Point Siding, and wound westward over the base of Silver Mountain toward Paley Fork.

Leaving the Fork that night, Number 2 was twenty-six minutes late, and had to be helped to the siding with an order. In the coaches Bob French was handling tickets, in the cab Sandy McBinn was at the throttle, and with him was Stephen Addicks, watching the working of a hoped-for improvement he had contrived in the grate-shaking apparatus. The M. M. was in a mood malefic. The shaker had not performed satisfactorily, and the fireman, in attempting to force it to effective service, had jammed his right hand cruelly. He could do but little, and since the train was already behind time, McBinn descended to the fuel-deck and wielded the shovel while Addicks took the valve levers. Driving an engine was as familiar to the M. M. as waste and overalls, and he brought Number 2 down the line at a clip that made the coaches rock and squeak on the curves.

"Guess Sandy must be trying t' show the old man what he can do," French remarked to one of the brakemen. "Hope he don't slue us into the canyon when we come down around Puma Point."

"Well, if th' ole man stands for it s'pose we'll have to."

They did not know that the master mechanic's hand was on the throat-lever, nor did Addicks, with his steel-gray eyes set steadily on the forward point of the wedge of light swiftly splitting the gloom ahead, know that he was whirling Number 2 toward an oncoming train with a dead man at the throttle. Addicks proposed to take Number 2 into Denver on time.

And Gundy — no one on the express knew! He brought his train down the range to the Sandrill and across to Bridge Station in good order, though a trifle fast. He shut off a little late at Bridge Station and ran past, stopping at the water-tank instead of the station, which

was queer. When they pulled out he gave the 1202 her head so suddenly that persons on the train who chanced to be standing were jerked nearly off their feet. That was the last time Pap opened a valve. His broad left hand remained on the lever, gripped into a hard, hairy knot, his right clutched the window-sill like a vise, and he lurched forward with his chin on his chest, staring at his feet and swaying a little, death's frost in his eyes.

Wadd was busy. From Bridge Station to the Fork the 1202 would eat coal like an ore-crusher. She went up the dark canyon along the Sandrill with her exhausts beating a steady roar. Where was the use of Pap making a run for Silver Mountain, Wadd asked himself, when they had to stop at the siding? He glanced at the outline of the engineer's back and wondered. Yet, surely the old man knew his business.

They swept by the vast gash in the mountain's base where lay Queen Cove Mine, and

onward through cuts and over fills, the coaches rolling in the wake of the rushing machine. The hoarse buzz in the engine's throat deepened as she turned slightly from the river and began to plant her whirling feet on the base of Silver Mountain, and Wadd, pounding coal under her busily, his brain aswim with Daffy and the sumptuous gown and the portents of the morrow, gave small heed to his whereabouts until, with a shock of realization that nipped his hair-roots with cold, he saw that they had rushed by the siding and were rounding Puma Point. Instantly he leaped into the gangway, and swinging outward by the hand-rods, threw a quick glance back. The siding was surely vanishing eastward! At that the conductor's bell-cord wrenched sharply, giving the stop signal. With a gasp of horror Wadd sprang across the fuel-deck and up the steps to Gundy's seat. He snatched the engineer roughly about the shoulders.

"Pap! What do you mean? What are you trying to do?"

The gray head rolled back against the fireman's shoulder, the unseeing, frosty eyes close to the young man's face.

For a moment the fireman stared down upon the unearthly countenance, his faculties frozen by what he saw, then he lunged at the throttle. The dead man's hand seemed shrunk upon the lever like a claw of chilled iron. The youth laid hold of it and wrenched it away, then his hand flew back to the lever to shut off steam. But in that instant, as if stretching forth his hand conjured destruction, the 1202 crashed and leaped and seemingly rent herself into fragments. Wadd felt himself strike the fuel-deck, fire gushed from his eyes, he felt one of his legs snap, and somehow realized that boulders and mud and logs were hurling over him. The next moment, as it might be, he felt himself thrashed upon the earth. The green box lay crushed beneath his breast; things, he knew

not what, were piled upon him. He felt flattened, pinioned, smothering; he must have air or perish. With a heave and wrench that seemed fit to tear the muscles from his bones he got his head above the ruck of stuff and drew himself out. He reached in and pulled the crushed box after him. Even in that moment of bewilderment something within him asked what Daffy would think should he lose the wedding-gown. They were in an earthslide that had rolled down from Puma Point. The 1202 had driven almost through it, and now lay upon her back with her drivers in the air. The train, stretched in the mucky stuff, twisted and toppled grotesquely; the coaches rang with human cries. The Pintsch lights were burning in some of the coaches, perhaps the red lamps were aglow at the rear; but evidently the conductor and brakemen were struggling somewhere in the half-buried wreck.

Something, a kind of lightning, blazed through the fireman's brain: In three or four

minutes Number 2, an inconceivable weight of iron and wood and humanity, would rush down Puma Grade and drive into the helpless mass in the cut. He seemed suddenly baptized in fire. He threw a glance about him; there was no lantern or means of signaling at hand. Like a swimmer who blows back engulfing waters with long breaths and fights toward some point whereon life waits but a moment beckoning, he began crawling madly ahead along the track, dragging the torn box and his dangling leg after him. If he could but reach the western end of the first bend, some three or four hundred feet distant! Beyond that there was a little stretch of straight track, and, could he set the wedding-gown on fire, McBinn might possibly see the signal in time to get his train under control before he struck the hapless coaches in the cut.

He went like an insane man. Back of him there was yelling and a turmoil of noise; away in front of him a mighty, jostling thing was

roaring down the grade; but he heard nothing, only his breath gasping and pulses pounding and the bones of his broken leg rasping. The pasteboard box went entirely in pieces; he flung the lacy gown back over his shoulders and scrambled onward over the ties. Though it seemed a monstrous stretch of years, in three minutes he was at the end of the curve. He looked up and saw the headlight of Number 2 half a mile away; he glanced back at the wrecked express: it seemed fearfully near. But he could do no better. With trembling hand he tore some matches from the "pipe" pocket of his flannel shirt and raked a bunch of them along one of the rails. He drew the beautiful gown before him and thrust the blazing matches among the lace. Flames leaped up as from ignited corn-silk; the gauzy fabric began to writhe and flash. Seizing it in both hands he rose on the knee of his uninjured leg and waved it wildly to and fro above his head. The flames of it burned him, the curling laces

trickled down upon him like melting lead, but he felt nothing, heard nothing, only lashed the blazing gown back and forth, yelling with all his lungs.

Piled against the western stars, the mountain masses seemed to sway, the headlight of the oncoming train rocked and dipped fantastically, then to the young fellow on the track it began to whirl in vast circles like a stupendous coal of fire, then, as with a wink, it snapped black and all was darkness. In his brain for an instant wavered a dying impulse, a feeling that he was still on his knees flinging the flaming robe back and forth above his head, but in truth he was lying flat across the right-hand rail with his face between the ends of the ties and his scorched fingers clutching the dirt.

On passenger Number 2 fright and commotion had fallen; down in the gloom the iron way had suddenly spouted waving flames. The fire was white — but look at its motion! The engine's chime shrieked once like a bursting

trumpet, the reversing lever went over with a crash, air leaped through the pipes, and the brake-shoes jammed their gritty soles against the flying wheels until the rails flickered with spattering fire, passengers smote the seats in front of them with face or breast, drawheads battered and split, and from end to end the train surged and snarled and shook. Addicks, thrown forward upon his knees, stared ahead with his grizzly face suddenly white as chalk, McBinn leaped into the gangway ready to jump, the fireman forgot his mangled hand and lowered himself to the step, poising to spring. All seemed accomplished in a moment, almost in a breath. The train, skating in fire, quivered and jostled down toward the sputtering wedding-gown and the limp form sprawling across the track. It approached close, almost touched them, then, with a tremor and backward heave of the whole fabric, the train stopped and fell quiet.

McBinn, lantern in hand, was the first man

to reach the muffled, muddy figure, but the master mechanic was at McBinn's heels and his arms were the first to encircle the prone shape. He turned the young fellow's face to the light; it was streaked with blood and smeared with wet earth. Addicks was strangely moved. A brakeman and a postal clerk from the express came up, panting and trying to talk.

"What's happened?" growled Addicks.

"We're in a slide. Lot of folks bruised and hurt, I guess; don't think anybody's killed," said the brakeman.

"I stumbled over Pap Gundy by the engine. I'm afraid Pap—he didn't look right," said the postal clerk. The speaker looked pallid in the glare of the headlight.

Addicks was tenderly wiping Wadd's face with his handkerchief. Suddenly the eyes in the soiled face opened, widened wildly; the figure began to twist and struggle.

"Stop her! Hold Number Two!" the muddy lips cried.

"Shut her off, McBinn! Plug her! Throw her over — throw her over! Give her —"

"There — there!" said Addicks, stroking the young fellow's hair back from his forehead; "Number Two is all right. McBinn is here. I was at the throttle myself and got your signal. Number Two is right here on the track."

Wadd looked around at the men oddly, up at the front of Number 2's engine, then sank back limply and began to laugh. "Ho-o-rah!" he said weakly, "pick the hymn and I'll sing the tenor part! Say, be careful, one of my legs is busted, I guess. Touch her lightly, please. Say, I had to burn Daffy's dress; couldn't help it. She simply won't do a thing to me!" The young fellow set his jaws rigidly as the men began to lift him.

"Dress — Daffy's dress!" said Addicks.

"Stop her! Hold Number Two!" the muddy lips cried. — *Page 148.*

"Where did you get — what do you mean, boy?"

"Weddin'-gown," muttered Wadd through his teeth.

"You set it on fire?"

"Burned her up," grated Wadd.

The master mechanic was silent a moment.

"I see," he said. "Well, I'll buy her the next one myself. Another thing, son, when the 1202 has been put through the shop you can have her."

"The engine or the girl?"

"Both."

When the plucky fireman recovered several interesting things occurred. In Mr. Addicks's parlor one evening, there was a ceremony in which Wadd and Daffy participated as chief actors. They purposed slipping away quietly on a wedding-trip, but, oddly enough, the carriage that should have borne them to their train took them directly to the Lyon House, where they were taken charge of peremptorily

by a smiling committee, and where, to their amazement, they found, seemingly, half the town seated at tables in the great dining-room and awaiting their coming. There was great applause and laughter on the entrance of the blushing couple. Wadd acknowledged himself trapped as he and Daffy were led to the first table and given a seat beside Superintendent Burke. Upon the other side of the superintendent sat little Muggins Tarney and his father and mother.

It was a joyous feast, an occasion of songs, toasts, and merriment. Manvell and Addicks and Burke each made a speech, and Wadd, when decorated with the Diamond Key by Burke, tried to reply, but could not say much for the reason that his voice trembled so with feeling. We only cheered him the louder, however, for that. But when Daffy arose suddenly and took little Muggins from beside his father, and holding the wondering, rosy child in her arms before us, made a little speech at the end

of which she kissed him, saying, that, "Next to Wadd Hancock, Muggins was the greatest man present," we all went wild. Burke then amid great applause pinned a Diamond Key on Muggins's chest and the orchestra played "Hail the Conquering Hero." As the banquet, amid handshaking and laughter, broke up, we caught a glimpse of Mrs. Tarney with her arm about Daffy, and Jack Tarney gripping Burke's hand, while Wadd was holding little Muggins in his arms and the two were looking laughingly into each other's eyes.

CHAPTER VI

THE JOINING OF THE BONNETS

MEASURED by the Calculus of the Probable it looked that Low Bonnet would never have a railroad of its own, or a station to which, when dulness brewed appetite for excitement, its citizens could handily go to "see the train come in." But within the Calculus of the Possible strange things are like to fall. Even that which man conceives to be impossible sometimes comes to pass. It was thus at Low Bonnet.

Ames Burke, superintendent, believed that certain things were impossible, even in railroading, where indubitably affairs do come off that reverse all preconceived notions of logic and sequence. Among the things that Burke

thought impossible were two that concern this narrative, one that a human being could be struck by an engine running at great speed and survive the shock, the other that the tracks of the Western Central could be profitably gotten into Low Bonnet. Nevertheless, the tracks of the Western Central were brought into Low Bonnet, and Joey Phillips was struck, or apparently so, by the great 1300 when she was going at a whipping clip, and came out of the collision with scarcely a bruise.

In the construction of the Western Central it was, of course, desirable that distance should be saved wherever possible, since it was purposed that the road should ultimately form part of a great trans-continental line. It is probable that this desire was the primary cause of Low Bonnet being left by the wayside, snugly sitting in the valley on the south side of the Peace, while the Western Central's track passed along the side of the mountain a half-mile north of the river and at an altitude some

five hundred feet above Low Bonnet. The situation had not been so entirely exasperating to the citizens of Low Bonnet but for three reasons: first, the line had originally been surveyed through Low Bonnet, and a right of way and station-site presented the company by the town; second, the company, after changing the course of the line to the north side of the river, erected a depot due north of Low Bonnet on the mountainside and platted a town about it which they named High Bonnet; third, the citizens of Low Bonnet, owing to the fact that the north shore of the Peace was very abrupt, could not construct a wagon road to the station save by going nearly a mile up the stream. To be sure, they could climb to the station on foot and by a steep path, but that was humiliating. So Low Bonnet sat, not precisely in sackcloth and ashes, but in a state approximating what the English term "blue funk."

Low Bonnet was a small town, but it boasted a newspaper, the *Peace Valley Eagle,* and quite

naturally the *Eagle* screamed vehemently, pointing out that if the railroad people had constructed the track in a loop or horseshoe at the east end of the valley, the line might have been laid down through Low Bonnet in a proper and public-spirited fashion; the town council also condemned the Western Central's parsimony and arrogance in resolutions that were scorching, and Sidewell Torch, owner of the Blue Flake mine and four times president of the Low Bonnet town council, anathematized the railroad folks in terms entirely unquotable.

However, the railroad was laid and firmly fixed on the mountain slope on the north side of the Peace, and there it promised by all recognized laws of probability to remain forever — but it did not.

As a train despatcher on the Western Central, the writer was from time to time personally cognizant of tragic, unusual, and humorous happenings on the line, and heard, also, of things worth telling. But when Superintend-

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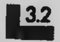
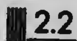

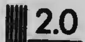

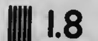

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ent Burke sent for Joey Phillips, and the youth was ushered on to the "big rug" and we gazed upon him, alive and practically unhurt after he had been struck by the 1300, we thought the record had been smashed and no other story would be worth relating. However, in operating three hundred miles of mountain track there are very frequently things happening of an astounding nature.

Joey's accident had peculiar bearing on the destiny of Low Bonnet, since the oddity of the accident brought the young man to the superintendent's attention, and the High Bonnet affair might not have come off but for the fact that Joey was made operator and station-agent there.

We men of the train-sheet pricked up our ears when Burke essayed to turn the screws down on Joey. He was a resolute, clean-looking youth of about eighteen, with a particularly good brow and firm chin. He looked the superintendent square in the face.

"You sent for me?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes; sit down."

"Thank you."

Old Burke turned his keen eyes upon the youth quickly. It was rather odd to find a mountain railroad boy so polite.

"You were run over — or rather, you were struck by the engine of the Limited at the foot of Muley Pass, or somewhere down that way, I am told?"

"Yes, sir, just where the track comes down from Muley Pass into Peace Canyon."

"I understand that your folks intend to bring claim against the company for damages for injuries sustained by yourself."

Joey turned his hat about on his knee and reflected a moment. "I don't see why they should; I wasn't hurt to speak of; besides, I tried to cross in front of the engine when it was very close," he said.

Burke looked pleased, but surprised. "Would you mind telling me fully about it?

According to Engineer Parker's report it was rather extraordinary."

"Yes, it was. I hardly know why I wasn't killed. I've been learning telegraphy at Wormsley; my oldest brother is your agent there. I went over Muley Pass and down to Peace Canyon fishing. I was walking along by the track at Echo Siding when the Limited came down the grade into the canyon. She had reached the foot of the grade and was running very fast. I was walking on the north side of the main track, on the south side was the switch with eight or ten flat cars standing on it. As the Limited came close, I don't know why, but I thought the cars on the siding were moving west and would run off the end of the switch and wreck the passenger. I started across the main track with the thought of jumping on the flat cars and setting the brakes, but the engine of the Limited was upon me before I could get across. I jumped, but she struck me, or *something* did, and I went through the

air and fell about thirty feet away. The fall stunned me, but outside of that I wasn't hurt much. I went down to the Peace a half-hour afterward and caught some trout."

Burke made a memorandum note or two, and said in his quick, jerky way: "Have you any theory explanatory of why you were not killed, and why the cars on the siding seemed to be moving when they were not?"

"I've naturally thought a good deal about it," said the big boy. "It may have been some shadow thrown along the flat cars by the waving of some trees just south of them, or the running motion of the approaching Limited may have produced the impression on my mind of motion in the flat cars. As for the fact that the engine threw me so far and yet did not kill me, that is more difficult. I suppose I jumped — the thing was done so quick I really don't know — but I suppose I jumped the way the engine was going, only a little toward the south, for I picked myself up from that side of

the track about thirty feet ahead. There must be a sort of billow or wave of air gushing out ahead of an engine when it is running at high speed, and this air wave must turn off to the right and left as water would. Maybe I jumped into and with this forward bounding air wave and was really thrown off by that instead of by a blow from the engine. Anyway, the air billow may have served as a sort of cushion over the boiler-head so that the engine struck me very lightly, if it struck me at all. There was a bruise on my right shoulder, but if it came from the engine or the fall I am not sure."

"You seem to be considerable of a thinker," observed Burke admiringly. "Have you had much schooling?"

"In the Denver grammar school and the high school, that is all."

"That's a good deal. Do you consider yourself competent to run a station?"

"I think I could manage a small one."

"I am going to make a change at High Bonnet. Would you like to go there?"

"If you would like to have me, yes."

"All right; I look for you to make something worth while of yourself."

So Joey went over to High Bonnet, and we despatchers at Paley Fork, sixty miles east, "had him on the string." More than once we canvassed his explanation of his escape from the 1300, and concluded that his hypothesis was not bad. In fact, the writer, keeping his eye for years on reports of railroad accidents, has found two cases of escape almost precisely like Joey's.

Joey seemed not to have fallen into a berth at all velvety, over at High Bonnet. The people of Low Bonnet had not made life easy for the incumbent whom Joey displaced; they doubled the dose for the new man. Being incensed with the railroad company, they "took it out" on the company's representative. He was reported to Burke several times, but the

superintendent thought the incentive mainly spleen and let the complaints pass. Still, it would only have been a matter of time when "kicking" must have loosened Joey from his place but for the unexpected unification of the Bonnets.

It chanced that I was on the wire when it occurred. The time was April and the mountain avalanche was in order. Several of our trains had stuck their noses into landslides, in two cases disastrously. Afar on the white shoulders of mountains appeared dark perpendicular streaks, showing where mighty masses of softening snow had rushed downward, crumbling boulders into gravel and crushing forests as a giant might crush a handful of matches. The streams were all swollen with rain and melted snow.

Trains had come on to our Middle Division late that day from the East End, and the Denver Express, from the West End, was an hour and thirty minutes late at Pecos, twelve miles

west of High Bonnet. That was at about three o'clock P. M. on a Wednesday, my record shows. West bound freight Number 10 rolled down through Peace Canyon and Joey reported them out of High Bonnet at one-five. He also reported that they had set twelve cars of way-freight in on Echo Siding, the engine of Number 10 having become disabled and incapable of holding a full train on the steep grade.

The rear brakeman on Number 10 was the man who committed the unpardonable sin; he failed to close the switch at Echo Siding. He must have been drinking, for surely not more than one or two brakes on the twelve cars left on the Siding were set, otherwise the cars would not have been blown out on the main line. As it was, a strong wind, sucking down through the canyon from Muley Pass, moved the twelve loaded box cars out on the main track, and they started for Arizona.

High Bonnet was eighteen miles west of

Echo Siding. Six miles west of the Siding the Peace River plunged down a twisting stair of stone called Satan's Slide, and to compass the difficult curve at this point the rails passed through a considerable tunnel. At the west mouth of the tunnel stood a sheet-iron hut, the station of a track-walker named Dillon, who, knowing something of the Morse code, had been furnished with a telegraph instrument.

Leaving the Siding at a slow pace, the twelve cars quickened their speed as the grade increased, and they came through the tunnel with a roar like thunder. The walker was nearly a mile west and he thought the whole roof of the great bore had tumbled in. He started for the tunnel on a run, and came near being hit by the string of mad things that in a few moments met him. Tumbling off the track, he watched the twelve reeling cars disappear down the curving groove in a tumult of noise; then he made for the tunnel. The runaway had about eleven miles to go to make High

Bonnet. Five miles below High Bonnet the Denver Express was coming up the grade, but the track was spongy from the rains, and she was coming rather slow. None the less, the runaway was going down to meet her at appalling speed. Dillon made a good run to the little sheet-iron hut, but the way was up grade and he fell into the house like a drunken man.

"S-k, S-k, S-k," he called and sitting at the despatcher's table over in Paley Fork, I heard him.

"I, I, S-k," I rapped on the brass.

"String of cars just went down the mountains, going like a snowslide," he said.

A thrill went over me like a gush of fire. "How many cars?" I asked.

"Couldn't count 'em, 'bout a dozen, I guess."

I held the circuit-breaker open a moment trying to get my senses together. "Must be the twelve cars that Number 10 threw in on Echo Siding," I thought.

I began to call Joey at High Bonnet with all my might. "H-b, H-b, H-b, H-b!" the dots and dashes zipped, but no reply came back. "H-b, H-b, H-b, H-b!" and still there was silence. Perspiration began to trickle down my face. A fancy that curdled my blood swayed before me. I saw the twelve flying cars go through High Bonnet, and a half-mile below the station strike the Express and break it in pieces. The lives — the lives that there would find a bloody close! In my heart for a little space was a frightful anger with Joey, then unconsciously that feeling turned to prayer. Cursing is artificial, prayer is natural, in the last extreme we all pray. As I beat Joey's call on the key I involuntarily begged God to send the lad to the wire that I might tell him to throw the runaway in on the siding at High Bonnet, even though it swept the station away.

But Joey had heard Dillon wire me, and had seen the same vision of destruction for the Express that so dismayed me. He had not waited

to say a word to me, but caught a switch-key from a nail in the office wall, and leaped through the window on to the platform. The cars were coming down from Echo Siding, from the same rails along which he so strangely fancied that he saw the flats moving that day when he jumped in front of the 1300. It was odd, yet doubtless only a coincidence. Dillon had been compelled to run nearly a mile to the tunnel station, and by the time he called me six or seven minutes had elapsed.

Joey heard the runaway; down the descending groove that followed the mountain's base rolled a boiling clamor of sound. Several people were waiting on the platform for the Express.

"There is going to be a wreck — on the switch track on the north side of the station! Keep on the south side of the station or you'll be killed!" he shouted, and ran to the east end of the side track.

He hurriedly unlocked the switch and pushed

the slide-rails over. Like a hurricane the twelve loaded cars rushed into view. Rocking and reeling in their swift flight, they whirled on to the side track. Joey drew back and bent half-way to the earth, his lips open and white, his eyes staring. Stretching along by the station stood five box cars and three flats. The twelve loads struck them with a mashing concussion that shook the mountain to its base. A roar as of crashing thunder echoed for miles around, the cars burst into fragments, the whole north side of the station sank in like a crushed egg-shell.

With shouts of fright and amazement, the people started to run, then suddenly a far more amazing thing occurred — High Bonnet, which consisted of the station and four small houses, swept down to Low Bonnet! A part of the mountain's base, nearly a half-mile long and some four hundred feet wide, slipped down like a huge toboggan and jammed its edge solidly against the south shore of the Peace, the

waters of the river being spurted up and sprayed over Low Bonnet as from a sort of gigantic hose. The two little towns were literally cemented together, and Low Bonnet at last had a depot, somewhat disfigured, and a short piece of railroad track, a good deal rumpled and out of line.

No one was injured in the landslide, the great cake of earth remaining in the main unbroken. Joey went down with it, and for the moment was stunned by the phenomenon. Then he thought of the Express. Would it plunge off the end of the rails into the abyss left by the slide? There was no means by which he could get to the north side of the great rupture. But Carl Peters, at the throttle of the Express engine, and not a half-mile from High Bonnet station, heard the jarring thunder of the slide and saw houses and track disappearing in front of him, and shut off steam.

Burke, and several of us from the despatch-

er's office, went over to High Bonnet in a hurry when Joey had climbed to the tunnel station and reported. We found High Bonnet and our station and tracks down at Low Bonnet, where, doubtless, they properly belonged. Inspection of the base of the slide revealed the ease with which the extraordinary thing had fallen. The rock formation ascended from the river bed upward under the mountain like the steep roof of a house; this inclined plane was soaked by the rains and the snow water seeping down the mountain, while the river had cut away the natural supports at the bottom of the incline. The earth imposed on this wet " chute " being shaken by the terrible collision at High Bonnet station, and probably loosened by blastings when the track was under construction, broke loose and all went down together. The river finally cut a way around through an old channel to the south of Low Bonnet.

Clearly the track could not be reconstructed to advantage where it formerly ran, and,

besides, there was now no place for a station on the mountain's foot, so finally a horseshoe of rails was laid in Peace Canyon and the line brought down through Low Bonnet. They called the place simply Bonnet after that.

Joey's nerve had certainly produced strange results, but the Express and the lives of its passengers had been saved, that was clear, and Burke declared the lad was made of the "real stuff" and entitled to the Diamond Key. As for the citizens of Bonnet, Joey was their hero; even after Blake brought him over to Paley Fork and set him at better things, the Bonnet people on several anniversaries of the great slide sent him testimonials of their remembrance and regard.

CHAPTER VII

THE MOUNTAIN'S VOICE

NECTARINE MORGAN followed the iron trail slowly; up the long, winding valley of the Big Bear Paw from Manzano, around the northern base of Ball Mountain, through fifteen miles, then off to the left and up the narrow canyon of the Little Bear Paw and onward into the Saddle Bow Range. He was of worn aspect, roughly clad, lame, and dusty. When he had traversed the miles of ties that curved and looped around the mighty hips of Dukes Peak, and came that evening to the mouth of Blue Canyon, near the Colorado Line, he had been three days on the road.

He was a young man, in stature a little below the medium height, naturally straight, but now

bent with strain and injury. Despite the tanning fervor of the Arizona sun, his flesh, where free of the stain of concussion, was milky. His eyes were large, dark, and of brilliant cast, his hair a dull bronze-red. Obviously of constitutional ingredients he had an odd blend. The dark splendor of his eyes spoke of Spanish blood, but the tint of his flesh and hair, the sensitiveness of his hands and mouth and nostrils, were eloquently Irish. Save for a number of healing bruises, he would have affected the beholder not unpleasantly. As it was, his appeal to the eye was marred by a swollen cheek-bone, a blue bruise that covered nearly the whole of his forehead, and a chin that had been split by a kick or blow and was patched with court-plaster.

Towards sunset he turned aside from the track, and, finding a cool ledge at the base of the blasting, sat down. He felt fearfully weak and worn. He had eaten little since he quit Manzano, the division station, partly because

he was drenched and burned with acids of rage, partly because he had no money. He had drank a good deal of water, both from the Big Bear Paw and the Little Bear Paw, for he was hot with fever. But the icy snow water from the peaks of the inner range had only made him seem the more thirsty. He had spoken to but few people on the way. Eight miles out from Manzano he had come to a section gang tamping ties, and had asked if he might take a drink from the willow-encased jug. The foreman had looked him over suspiciously.

"Ain't yeas one of thim divils that helped t' break th' foirmen's an' engineers' stroike?" he demanded savagely.

"I am," the young fellow had replied.

"Well, ye scab, ye floatin' greaser, yeas p'int out o' this! Ye'll have th' treat of a track-wrench over y'r pate instead of wather, if yeas loaf around here. D' ye moind now, gwan!"

The young chap had looked at the red-faced

foreman a moment with torches of flame in his eyes, then had walked onward. He was not looking for quarry such as this man. After that his lips, lately swollen, but now reduced in thickness and peeling off their outer skin, drank only from streams and partook only of the little food wrapped in his blanket by the Mexican woman at whose house he had lain sick after his great punishment.

He sat through a few moments now, staring at the stones about his feet, then lay back on the ledge and looked up at the shattered wall of rock above him. The time was late in April and the rocks dripped moisture, oozing from the mountainside into the groove torn by dynamite across the mighty slope. A drop from directly above him detached itself and, falling, struck with a cold "spat" upon the sore spot in the centre of his forehead. He gasped, and put his hand up, then lay still and watched the drops gather again and again, receiving each with a little quiver and sigh as

it fell upon his brow. There was a marvelous difference between the blows struck by these cooling, velvet things and the hard fists of Stephen Fox and Pelt Hughes. With the thought he sat up suddenly and struck one gripped fist into the palm of the other with such violence that the smitten hand leaped away and hung fluttering. He arose to his feet and a long cry, raucous, harsh, came from him, ending in a wild oath. For the moment his face was purple, his neck-cords stood out, and the tiny tatters of scarf-skin about his mouth shook with angry breath. He stepped upon the track again and hurried onward, looking hungrily ahead.

Somewhere in that region lay the trestle, he felt sure, the instrument through which he would find revenge and ease his bursting heart of its hatred and rage. Above him spread a sky of vitriol blue, streaked with films of pink; about him the Range rolled in monstrous welts, solemn and brown; below in the canyon the

Little Bear Paw pushed through the silence its flood of twinkling diamonds; but the strange beauty of the region left upon him no mark, went unrecognized. He had come a three days' journey on foot to find the trestle, and now as he neared it something boiled up about him like scalding froth, half-blinding him. He felt the sticks of giant powder in his pocket patting his side near his heart. He would see that these genii of destruction should bring down the trestle at the right moment, that Engineer Fox, and Pelt Hughes, his fireman, might feel far deadlier blows than they had given him.

Yes, he remembered it all very well, indeed; much as he might have remembered had he been plunged into a bath of fire and lived. The events of that particular night in the roundhouse at Manzano were not likely ever to pass from his memory; the crushing blows of big fists, the agony of his body under stamping feet; and, again, wild moments when he was

pinioned by the throat against a wall until the darkness was drenched with streaming fire and he slipped into oblivion.

He remembered distinctly the strange moment when he came back to consciousness, sprawling among the stones where he had been thrown into the night like so much carrion. "SCAB! GREASER!" were the hot epithets he had heard hissed above him as Hughes kicked him. After that, being left alone, he crawled away through the stones, leaving blood upon them as he went; and, finding succor and a hiding-place in the little adobe house of a Mexican woman, lay there through two weeks' mending of his hurts. During those days something gathered at the roots of his heart; sacs of venom, as at the roots of serpents' teeth. This gall of hate was foreign to his sanguine, kindly nature, and filled him with sickness and fever. Would a realized revenge cool and cleanse his blood? He did not know nor care, only pushed onward.

As he rounded a bend and emerged from the cut he suddenly lifted his hands in a gesture of astonishment and stopped stone-still. Away at the eastern end of Blue Canyon, thirty miles distant, rose Temple Mountain, a gleaming structure of alabaster. Wrapped in snow that would not melt before August, it towered skyward white, mystical, wonderful. Throned in dignity and awesome purity, it looked down upon the craggy, tumbled billows of the range, dominating all in its majesty. He gazed at it through the long hollow of the canyon steadily for a few moments, then his hands fell, and into his face crept a look of doubt and wavering indecision. He drew a long breath, walked away from the track and sat down upon a stone and looked again. The yellowish light from the setting sun beat into the canyon from the west, filling the mighty groove eastward with a translucent medium faintly golden. Through that halo of ether he looked at the spotless mountain for many minutes, feeling its spirit

of beauty and purity creep upon him, quieting, faintly delicious. His black mood slowly ebbed and he began to remember old scenes, as one who listens to tender music. At heart he was poetic, and being so, was in a sense spiritual, but personal consciousness of the quality was far from him. With his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands he gazed, and, with something like a rosy light gathering in his eyes, breathed his deep appreciation.

"God, but that is purity!" was the apostrophe, emitted in a kind of gasping sigh. His chin sank a little deeper into his hands and the gold in the air and the light of the mountain swam upon his bruised face, touching it pleasantly.

Old scenes seemed to run through the air before him, invisible yet visible, with the mountain shimmering in white splendor beyond them. He was conscious of many little things that fell in his earlier years. He remembered lying flat on his back upon a grassy

hump, back of his father's house in San Marko Valley, California, dreamily watching the honey-bees fly over from old Peter Burley's bee ranch, back of Smoke Hill. As the bees burst over the hill into the sunshine, going to the alfalfa fields and orchards down the valley, they always seemed to rise as if blown upward, he remembered, turning whitish and sparkling faintly like half-hot cinders. The stream of them going homeward flew lower and more slowly, looking gray and heavy, though they, too, when they mounted suddenly up into the sunshine, going over the hill, also sparkled. He saw them very plainly now. He remembered the morning light on a silver cross that topped the steeple of a church down in the little town of San Marko, two miles below, and how the cross seemed at times to be edged with lustrous insects, buzzing silvery wings and creeping very slowly. He still believed the cross was silver, though it was in reality spruce wood covered with tin. He remem-

bered the lights running to and fro upon the sea, twenty miles westward, and how they snapped and curled like burning shavings and went out and were ceaselessly renewed. All that passed before him seemed soft and beautiful and touched with hues of light, mirrored against the lustrous mountain.

Then he slowly became conscious of a murmur in the mountains, of echoes whispering on the soaring walls. These grew and grew until out of the mouth of Blue Canyon, halfway up its northern steep, burst a locomotive and a long train of freight-cars, and the echoes beat upon the walls like a thousand hands applauding. For a few minutes the train, curving toward the left, disappeared, then suddenly appeared before him and with the next moment was rushing by. He had risen to his feet at its approach and turned toward the track as it neared him. When the engine was almost opposite him a man in overalls, with his hand on the throttle lever and leaning from the cab

window, glanced at him. The man instantly twisted his body on the window-rest and looked back, laughing and wrinkling his features mockingly. He shouted something to the fireman and that worthy leaped into the gangway and leaned out, yelling derisively and twiddling his fingers from his nose at the gaunt and dusty bystander.

"Fox! Pelt Hughes!" broke from the young fellow's lips. He turned toward Temple Mountain, but only saw it dimly; about him and within him welled up that sultry, furious vapor that changed the face of nature. His mouth worked, his eyes blazed redly, his hands crumpled into white-knuckled knots; dream and remembrance and the music of sweet thoughts touching together in his brain were swept away in the wave of hate that rolled over him. He turned about and, unconscious of what he was doing, rushed after the train a little way, distorted of feature and shouting fearful things. Suddenly he turned aside to

the wall of the blasting and flung himself against it, beating it with his open palms and burying his bruised face in the hollow of his arms, crying out as a wolf might cry while tearing at the jaws of an impaling trap. Presently, shaking and muttering, he turned and looked where the train had disappeared; its noise in diminishing volume came up the long flexures of the Little Bear Paw. When its grinding roar had died into whispering and the whispering had lapsed into silence, he turned eastward again like a hound hot upon the trail.

At the end of a thousand feet the earth broke downward before him into a basin of ten or twelve acres in area. Into this basin Blue Canyon opened from the east, bringing a creek to the Little Bear Paw, the little river itself twisting into the basin from the northeast through a narrow defile. The track of the Western Central, emerging from Blue Canyon on its northern side, crossed the basin in the air. At the eastern edge of the basin, directly

over the Little Bear Paw, the structure might properly have been designated a bridge, west of that through some eight hundred feet it was a trestle, the track being imposed upon sixty-foot bents of iron. A mountain monster of strange kind, many-legged and with its steel spine high in the air, the trestle curved across the basin, suggesting chances of disaster.

Nectarine looked at it and threw a hand to his throat, as if the blood of his body, crowding suddenly toward his brain, gorged in his neck. This was Blue Basin trestle! The hand slipped down from his throat to the giant powder sticks in his pocket. When Steve Fox and Pelt Hughes came back on the return trip — If not at that time, then when again they came over the range from the east — He stared at the trestle, seeing in fancy a pair of the spindling supports hurled away and an engine and train plunging down to ruin, the two who had stamped him under foot writhing in torture in the crush of things.

"Would it not be just?" he asked himself. What had he done that he should have been torn and beaten and cast out? He had needed work, he had wanted to drag himself out of poverty and get on in the world. He had only taken a crumb from the great Common Table, the humble position of a wiper in the engine-house, the wipers themselves having quit in sympathy with the striking enginemen. He had been cleaning Stephen Fox's engine, the 488, when the storm fell upon him. What did he, fresh from his lowly life among the foot-hills, know of Unions, of economics, of men banding themselves together for self-betterment? He had been caught between two battle lines and trampled down, between two forces, each of which fought for more of the thing which he himself desired. Perhaps there was a world of blind men rushing blindly after that which only blinded them the more, but this which had befallen him was a mighty, personal hurt; the sore was not a matter of factions or

of causes, it lay between his own soul and the souls of the two fellow beings who had strangled and beaten and stamped his body among stones and ashes. But what about the fate of the other members of the train-crew, those who had done him no harm? How could he help whelming them in the same wild ruin with his enemies? He ran his fingers through his snarled locks doubtingly, then suddenly struck his fists into the air.

"Let 'em die," he rasped, through clenched teeth, "let 'em die; they'd done th' same thing to me; they're members of th' same gang!"

"Hello, young feller, what yeh preachin' 'bout? The sunset light on old Temple inspire yeh t' orate?" The voice was gruff, but hearty; the speaker, a big, middle-aged, roughly appareled man, was pausing in a path that crossed the slope some fifty feet below the younger man. Upon one of the stranger's wide shoulders rested a crowbar and a pick.

Nectarine looked at him, thrilling from head to foot. A human shape suddenly lifting itself in that solitude and in presence of his black intention was profoundly disconcerting. He shuffled his feet and looked abroad.

"Which way?" asked the man, laughingly. "If y'r lookin' for Denver it's not over south where y'r lookin'; it's 'bout two hundred mile northeast. Mebbe y'r lookin' for work; if so, come down an' interview me; I'm needin' a man bad."

The young fellow pulled himself together. "Well, yes, I am lookin' for work, I suppose," he admitted, "but didn't 'spect to find it here. All right, I'll come down."

When he stood in the trail the big man looked at him with his mouth twitching in his beard. "Look some hurt like; been fightin'?" he queried.

"No, didn't have a chanst t' fight."

"Hobo?"

"No."

"Scab?"

"I 'spose so."

"Sore?"

"Sore."

"You look it. Come on t' th' cabin."

Nectarine looked about him. In the basin's bottom was a great earth wound, a rent from two to three hundred feet in width and some ten feet in depth, extending from the Little Bear Paw at the south across the basin to the trestle at the north. In the excavation, near the trestle, he saw an object very like a huge brass cannon, with an iron pipe leading to it down the steep from the northwest. He knew that sort of thing very well indeed, having worked in more than one hydraulic mine.

"Gravel very deep?" he asked.

"From grass roots to bedrock."

"Dust all th' way?"

"All th' way; not very plenty, but pay."

He followed the man along the trail and presently they came to a cabin, a rather large

affair of hewn logs, half-covered with green creeper and backed by the steep slope of the canyon's side. In front of it was a small " sag " of ground with a bubbling spring in it and a garden, irrigated from the spring, and not greater in area than the floor of an ordinary room. An ancient Chinaman, queued and with skin like wrinkled brown paper, was bringing some radishes from the garden. His small black eyes glowed beadily with welcome. Upon a small board platform in front of the door lay a dog, decrepit with years, but young with love and good-will. Thumping the boards with his tail, he wrinkled his nose in welcoming laughter.

" Let's see, what is y'r name? " asked the master of the place, turning toward the young fellow.

" Nectarine Morgan."

The big man's mouth twitched in his beard again. " Juicy sort of handle," he grunted. " Where'd yeh find it? "

"In California; born there."

"Yes? Nectarines air a sort o' Spanish plum, ain't they?"

"Yes; my mother was Spanish, I think; mebby that's how it come."

"Yeh think? Don't yeh know?"

"Not sure; I never seen her; anyway I don't remember. Father never said much 'bout her. I lived with him when I was little. He was killed when they was blastin' th' San Marko irrigation ditch. I went t' school a little, 'nen worked on ranches an' in th' orchards."

"All right. Well, my name's Fox, Thomas Fox; got a brother runnin' an engine on th' road here." He made a motion toward the track on the mountainside. "This is my fambly, Mr. Morgan, John and Buck." He waved his hand toward the Chinaman and the dog. "Have a chair; set down. After supper we'll smoke an' talk business."

The man leaned the crowbar and pick

against the cabin and went inside. A wooden chair stood by the door; Nectarine sat down upon it weakly and looked out before him. Away to the eastward Temple Mountain swam in the pink sky; white, holy, gleaming in matchless splendor. With the sunset light streaming against it from the west it seemed to burn like the face of God. Nectarine settled lower in the chair, his bruised chin sank upon his breast and his dark eyes turned about under his brows furtively; for the moment his face was mantled with the shame of Cain.

As he followed Fox toward the mine early the next morning, he tried to keep his eyes from the mountain. It stood against the rose-flame of the dawn a radiant presence, smiling with light and seemingly sentient. Its white sublimity, its ineffable beauty, was like a peal of sacred music; in such a presence how could thoughts of murder live? He pushed a trembling hand across his discolored features; he still felt sore and stiff from the kicks and

blows he had received. Involuntarily his fists knotted and he dropped his eyes to the man's heels and followed onward.

When he stood in the great, shallow excavation, he saw that the sluice ran southward, carrying the débris of the wash into the river; that the power-pipe came down from the northwest through a high sag, bringing the water from a reservoir a half-mile away.

"Used t' be a small stream, regular waterfall," said Fox; "I dammed it an' made a reservoir back on the mountain; have to have an extra heavy pipe and giant to handle it, th' pressure is so great. It roots up th' dirt all right when I turn it on."

In the excavation were acres of boulders in girth from the size of a man's fist to half the bulk of a roller-top desk. In many places these huge gravel had been arranged in ricks in order to expose the bed-rock, the fine dirt and silt having gone down into the Little Bear Paw through the sluice.

"Have t' break up a good many of the boulders with nitro before we can handle 'em," commented Fox. "Think yeh can stand the work?"

"Guess so," said Nectarine, slowly. "Don't s'pose I can do much at first, I'm so lame, but I'll be all right after while." In his heart was a whisper that he ought to fly from temptation, but he had no money and here were three dollars a day and board. Besides, why had he come there? For what had he tramped through all these weary miles?

"Well, I'll do th' heaviest work till y'r better; I'm purty husky, yeh know," broke in the other, rolling the sleeves up his powerful arms. "Got t' get busy while the water's plenty; need 'bout three men here. You can handle th' giant, that's easy. Ever do it?"

"Yes, some."

"All right. I'll go up t' th' dam an' lift th' gate; keep th' giant pinted as she is now, at thet bank across there; hold 'er hard when th'

water comes into 'er, so she won't whirl with yeh." He hurried off, following a path that climbed through the slope to the reservoir.

Nectarine went to the big water-cannon and took his stand at its breech. The hydraulic giant stood close to the trestle with its nozzle pointing eastward; the excavation extended entirely to the trestle, at some points beneath it. The railroad people had been able to purchase from Fox only the right to place the piers of the trestle on the bed-rock, the ground and the gold of the tract were not theirs. The stone piers, cemented to the bed-rock, rose a couple of feet above the ground, above these rose the steel supports of the trestle. Nectarine wondered if the stream from the giant might have sufficient force to knock away the bents from the piers. Probably not, and yet — He looked up at the trestle, it seemed for the moment to swim and waver against the sky, then suddenly a train, the Southwestern Mail, burst out of the cut on the side of Blue Canyon

and wheeled across the long structure, trailed by trembling thunder.

As Nectarine stood listening to the train's dying roar, he became conscious of Temple Mountain beaming upon him from the east, dazzling white in the glow of the risen sun. He struck out with his fists before him like one blinded. How could a man work his will in evil with that majestic spirit watching from the sky? He took the sticks of giant powder from his pocket and stepping back, secreted them in a crevice. Hardly had he again fixed his hands upon the breech of the giant, when it hissed and shook with a heaving throb, and a column of water shot from its nozzle, tearing into the bank two hundred feet away. Describing a slight arch, the glittering column poured heavily against the distant bank, at the point of impact a writhing fountain of dirt and foam and tossing stones, at the nozzle a whistling jet, emitted with such violence that tiny thimblefuls of compressed air, emerging with the

stream, snapped in sudden expansion like pistol-shots. Nectarine glanced at the steel supports of the trestle. No; though the stream exerted tons of pressure it surely had not power enough to tear those iron beams away. The railroad men would never have tolerated such a peril. Yet, there were the sticks of giant powder in the crevice and nitro-glycerine was used in splitting boulders!

Fox came down from the reservoir, and, after Nectarine had received some instructions, the work proceeded. At intervals, trains went roaring overhead and in the afternoon the 488 rumbled across the trestle, going eastward with a string of loads. Steve Fox, leaning from the cab window, waved his hand to his brother, working among the boulders in the excavation, the next moment his glance fell upon Nectarine at the breech of the hydraulic giant. The engineer's smile faded into a frown, and as the train passed into Blue Canyon, Nectarine saw Pelt Hughes in the en-

gine's gangway, shaking a shovel toward him. The place and the hour grew black to Nectarine.

The following evening as the 488 rushed across the trestle going westward, a bit of paper, clutched in a split stick, fluttered down from the engineer to Thomas Fox. The big miner read it, looked at Nectarine a moment, then thrust the paper in his pocket. That night as Nectarine arose to go to his bunk the "boss" said dryly:

"Steve owns an interest in th' mine an' he says you must go. Seems yeh had somethin' t' do with his engine durin' th' strike. I need yeh an' hate t' fire yeh, but I reckon y'd best quit Saturday night. Steve says he'll try an' bring me a couple of men over from Paley Fork."

Nectarine said "all right" quietly, but his face flushed, his eyes gave off a red-green gleam, and a stone, at which he swallowed painfully, seemed to crowd upward into his

throat. In his bunk he lay awake half the night staring at the dark. On the morrow at two o'clock, or in the evening of the day following, the world would hear of an accident at Blue Basin trestle. He promised his soul that. But in promising he had not reckoned with the Mountain; the blackness of hate and the blackness of night combined to make crime seem easy; when with bloodshot eyes he faced that mighty vision of beauty and purity in the morning he felt his purpose sicken. All that day and through the night that followed and through the next day, he struggled with the Mountain. It seemed to grow loftier with the progress of the hours, to gleam more whitely, to look upon him with mingled scorn and pity. By times it seemed to stand wrapped in prayer; again, as the sun changed position, it seemed to stretch upward infinitely, singing to God; again it seemed to draw close and gaze upon him with vast, clear eyes, and all about

his head there was whispering he could not understand. He thought himself going mad.

Late in the afternoon of that strange day it chanced that Thomas Fox went down to work at the mouth of the sluice, where the tailings were forming a bar in the Little Bear Paw. The master was invisible and Nectarine began to tremble, buffeted between the lash of hate and the Mountain's cry for purity. It was Saturday, and the day's close would witness his expulsion, the second triumph of those who had done him such awful wrong. The train piloted by his enemies was nearly due, he must act now. He looked toward the crevice where the sticks of giant powder lay, toward a tiny sheet-iron house at the rear of the excavation, in which were tools and a box containing gun-cotton, caps, and a can of nitro-glycerine, then his troubled eyes wandered to the supports of the trestle. But the Mountain, soaring in the sky and shimmering golden white, shouted "No." The shout was from within himself,

and yet something seemed to flash from the Mountain and burst inside his breast, compelling the cry. When the train approached he would turn the hurling stream from the hydraulic against the supports; at least he would do that; he would not quit the place a whipped coward, remembering afterwards that he had been too weak to strike at the dogs who had torn him. He swore he would not yield, and yet the dazzling spirit towering in heaven cried "Shame," and he put a hand to his throat and struggled to keep back the word.

After what seemed a long time, whisperings and then a murmur of sound began to creep down into the Basin from Blue Canyon, then presently echoes began to clap and beat upon the mountain walls, and an engine's chime bellowed deep and long. Nectarine's battered mouth twisted and muttered, and his hand clutched and fidgeted on the giant's breech. His eyes turned toward the Mountain imploringly. Then, as things happen in dreams, un-

looked for and without apparent reason or cause, came tragedy, the strangest that ever fell in all that mountain region.

Directly north of the trestle a steep slope swept upward hundreds of feet, crowned with a ruin of stones like a shattered castle. For centuries those masses had clung there, crumbling piecemeal. As the engine's chime bellowed at the mouth of Blue Canyon a fragment of stone, half the size of a cabin, broke from the splintered crag and rushed down the acclivity. Poised as upon a thread, perhaps the vibrations of the engine's chime itself loosened the great rock to its fall.

A veritable wheel of death it came down the steep, wreathed in thunder and dashing in pieces everything in its path. With a crash that echoed through the mountains, it struck the trestle, carrying away one of the posts of a bent as if it had been no more than a parlor match, and, bounding across the sluice, swept down through the long excavation into the

river. With the blow the trestle lurched and sagged, and Nectarine, with a yell of terror, let go the giant, which whirled on its socket, knocking him down. Drenched and half-stunned, he scrambled to his feet. Back on the trestle there was a noise of wild yelling, and the crunch and jar of engine-drivers whirling in reverse; then, as with the next breath, the 488 leaped sidewise from the edge of the sagging track, rupturing one of the rails.

Black, ugly, prodigious, with her cranks flailing and all her wheels spinning, she rushed downward through the air and smote the earth with indescribable clamor. Thomas Fox, down by the river, heard and felt the thunder of her fall as if some one had struck him. Nectarine staggered back with his fingers in his hair and stared an instant, blank as ashes.

As the engine tipped from the track Pelt Hughes jumped over the tail of the tender. Nectarine now saw him hanging at the point of rupture, his body and head thrown back-

ward, his legs wedged between the tangled ties. The luckless fireman stared down from the trestle upon the wrecked engine and Stephen Fox, pinioned in the ruin below. Nectarine's heart had not made a half-dozen throbs before a caboose rolled slowly to the point where the track began to sink; then something shouted to him, the Mountain, the sky, his soul, he knew not what, but he leaped to the giant in obedience and the next instant the great, glittering rope of water flung itself through the air and met the front of the car at the edge of the incline.

For a moment the smashing, powerful stream and the downward pushing car seemed to grapple and toss, then the car stopped, wavering toward its fall yet held back by the steady, battering push of the column of water. Nectarine had seen that liquid avalanche stir boulders that weighed tons, and now, with wide, intent eyes and teeth clinched, he held it steadily against the menace wavering in the

air. Below the car, directly in its path, hung Pelt Hughes; still below, in the wreck of the 488, lay Stephen Fox, jammed and wounded and staring in terror at the wheeled thing, that, but for the stream, must leap down upon him.

Thus Nectarine held in his hand the lives of his enemies; he had but to turn the stream aside to end them. About his head he again heard that strange whispering, he heard Thomas Fox panting by him, and a voice like rattling tin say, "Hold 'er steady, boy, for God's sake, hold 'er steady!" He heard Stephen Fox groaning and imploring, he heard Pelt Hughes's voice calling in agony, he heard his own blood pounding in his ears, but he saw nothing save the wavering car and the hurling stream bursting upward over its front end, the sunlit top of Temple Mountain smiling to him through the upflung spray.

Presently he was conscious that there were men in the spray that fell down about the car on the trestle; he saw their bent backs heav-

ing; he saw the car moving back along the gentle slope of track inch by inch until it stopped and settled on the level rails, then he turned the stream away and let it plow and plunge in the excavation. He tried to hold the giant straight, but had not the strength. Upon everything there came a cast of strangeness and unreality. The air was full of red crystals, the stream from the nozzle seemed roaring flame, Temple Mountain lengthened upward and swayed like a dazzling plume, then, as if by the rending of a veil, everything was natural and clear. Thomas Fox was dragging his brother out of the wreck, and Jack Nevins, conductor, was creeping down the track with his hand reaching after Hughes. Nectarine turned the giant's muzzle downward, drove a block under the breech and walked unsteadily over to the engine. Stephen Fox lay upon the ground, his legs broken. He looked up to Nectarine's discolored face, then pushed out a quivering, blackened hand. Nectarine took it.

"Forgive me," the engineer panted, "I didn't know the kind of a feller you was." Nectarine nodded. With eyes a-swim he looked at Temple Mountain and could not speak.

A half-hour later Pelt Hughes held Nectarine's hand with the grip of one whose debt is life itself. "As long as I live you can figger on me for help, and as a friend," he blurted. "Before long y'r likely to hold down a better job on this road than either Steve or me. You won't have to be 'nitiated to get a working card from the union either."

Nectarine turned to Nevins. "How did you come t' have no train and the caboose cut loose from the engine?" he asked.

"We had a string of empty ore cars for the Fuller mine; set 'em in there and was running down to Manzano light," said Nevins. "I was smoking up in the cupola of the caboose, my three brakemen lollin' on the cushions of the seats below. I was looking ahead, and just as we came out of the cut here I saw

that boulder shoot out from under the trestle, and one leg of a bent go with it. I yelled and tumbled down through the car and out on to the front platform. Steve had seen the boulder fall and threw the reverse over and plugged the engine. As the coupling buckled I jerked out the pin and set the brake, but it wasn't quite in time to save the car. We four men scrambled off at the rear as she started down the sag. What you did, son, was about the limit for nerve and speed. The High Jints will sure have you over to headquarters."

Three hours later the wreckers were at work in Blue Basin, and Thomas Fox had gone to Paley Fork hospital with the special that bore the injured engineer. The miner returned the next morning. "Th' superintendent told me t' send yeh over t' see him," he said to Nectarine. "If yeh want t' come back here, all right; whatever Steve an' me have got y'r welcome to share. Yeh can consider y'rself one of us."

Nectarine looked at Temple Mountain, glimmering ivory white through the gathering dusk, and said: "Well, I'll go over an' see him, but I think I'll come back."

He did come back, but not until he had sat down to a great dinner with Burke and President Sanborn and a fine concourse of Western Central employees, at the Lyon House, and amid enthusiastic acclaim had received the Diamond Key. When Nectarine sat again with Thomas Fox in the cabin in Blue Basin he told the miner about it.

"They made speeches an' praised me an' pinned this gold key on me," he said. "An' I was flustered and that dazed I couldn't eat nor hardly understand what it was all about. But some way I felt good, I don't know hardly why. One man, I guess he was the president of the road, said I ought t' go t' school awhile, then come into one of th' departments an' grow up in th' business; said they'd give me a good show. Another man, Burke was his name, said

they'd help me with my expenses if I wanted t' go t' school, but I thought I'd come back and see you first."

"We will attend t' the school expenses for yeh, Steve and me will," said Fox. "We owe it to yeh. We will give yeh a tenth interest in th' mine, then yeh can go t' school on your own money, workin' here durin' your holidays and attendin' school th' balance of the time till yeh are ready t' go t' railroadin' or keep on diggin' gold, just t' suit yourself."

Nectarine looked at Temple Mountain and his lip trembled while something that looked like dew slipped down his cheeks. "I didn't understand before, but seems like it pays awful well to do right," he said. "I'll sure do my best after this."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTURE OF BEAUMONT

WE in the despatcher's office at Paley Fork were perhaps the most skeptical. The unreckonable "gall" of the threat made us laugh at first, a disdainful cachinnation which eventually gave way to rage and fears. But, really, who could be expected to contemplate with seriousness a "hold up" of an entire railroad by a single individual? The robbery of a train by an organized band of men was quite within the pale of the possible, though in the two cases where this had been attempted on our line it had failed. But this, surely, this last was living *opera-bouffe!*

President Sanborn, at the general offices in Denver, had received the first written intima-

tion, an obviously disguised scrawl which stated succinctly and with lawless scorn of courtesy that his blankety blank railroad had been " seized " and would be held until a ransom of $50,000 should be paid in hand to the bold and stormy-souled " seizor." This rather regal fee, which was to be paid for immunity from divers forms and degrees of threatened violence emanating from said " seizor," was to be left by the track at the base of a certain notable cleavage of stone, four miles east of the Sandrill River, in the Cradle Range.

The assurance that the money had been left at the point designated should be a white flag fastened to the headlight of a certain engine drawing a certain train on a stated date; it was also stated that the " seizor " would thwart any attempt to capture him at the specified time and place, by the employment of an agent at present unknown to science, but of unexampled scope and destructiveness. The

lives of officials and employees, this astounding epistle claimed, would not be taken unless necessary, but the president was assured that the road, in the event of the ransom being withheld, would be damaged far beyond the amount of money demanded, and the loss of traffic, by reason of injuries inflicted, would soon outweigh the sum conceived by the writer to be useful to his well-being and happiness. The signature at the end of the letter was euphonious, but conceivably not the writer's real name. It was "Banks Beaumont."

President Sanborn sent the letter down to Ames Burke, who was then division superintendent with his office at Paley Fork. After Burke had pondered it a moment he got up from his desk in the alcove room, and, with an expression of mingled mirth and apprehension, came out into the big room where the tables and chattering instruments of the despatchers were. He handed the letter to Chief Manvell, who read it and passed it around.

After it had been read we looked at each other and broke out laughing. Burke's face was the first to straighten into lines of seriousness. He walked over to the window and stood with his hands on his hips looking out into the yards, watching, yet not consciously, two squat bulldog engines bucking the long lines of cars into trains ready for despatching. Manvell spilled some Durham into the bowl of his meerschaum and tamped it unconsciously with his thumb. He also stopped laughing and looked at the unlit pipe mistily. Burke came back and stood by the chief's desk, absently twiddling his watch-fob in his fingers. His strong mouth drew down in his beard oddly at the corners.

"After all, the fool might," he half-sighed.

"Might," assented Manvell. He struck a match on the sole of his shoe and laid the pipe down on the desk; the flame of the match burned his fingers and he threw it down.

"If the fellow really means it and has a

mind to use 'nitro' he might do a great deal of damage before we could nail him," he went on. "Looks like a bluff, though, but if not—" he lapsed into silence, staring a moment at the clicking sounder on his desk. "Sanborn, of course, won't give up anything in answer to the threat?"

"Certainly not; he considers it a bluff," said Burke, and went into the alcove room.

"Where did the letter come from? what point?" Manvell called after him.

"Dropped into a mail-car at Summit, over on the Range," replied the superintendent.

But the lapse of ten days' time proved that the threat was not humor nor a fanciful aberration, but the forerunner of a pestilence of disasters. On the eleventh day after the receipt of the letter by President Sanborn, as the "seizor" of the Western Central had promised, the campaign of terror began. Tunnel No. 2, on the east side of the summit of the Cradle Range, was dynamited, blocking it

for two days with débris; five days afterward the track was blown up on a dangerous curv, twenty miles southwest of Denver, smashing up a freight; a week later the bridge over a creek emptying into the Sandrill near Silver Mountain was thrown off its abutments by some powerful explosive. After each one of the traffic-delaying attacks the head of the road in Denver received a scrawled epistle signed "Beaumont," saying that whenever the ransom was forthcoming the dove of peace would perch upon the rails of the Western Central and the hearts of the road's officials. Otherwise, the obtrusive supervision of the line by the "seizor" would quicken in attention and shattering virulence until the road became a trafficless cow-trail. Each one of these notes had been dropped into the letter-slot of a night mail at some point on the East End; one of them had come from Paley Fork itself.

On all the lines of the Western Central there then came a fever. It rose in temperature

from normal blood heat to the boiling point and remained there. The road's small detective force was augmented by numerous private officers; the track-walkers were supplied with repeating rifles and instructed in methods of vigilance; a protecting engine, manned with armed guards, was sent over the East End nightly; watches were set at all important bridges. Nevertheless, a week later the protective engine itself was blown up by running over a sack of dynamite, half-way up the Range from the Sandrill, and Sanborn received a letter from the ubiquitous Mr. Beaumont stating that, if the company didn't soon "give down its milk," bridge No. 18, over the Muley River, forty miles west of Paley Fork, would be dynamited, and, following that, the twenty-eight miles of snow-sheds on Muley Pass would be set on fire.

It would not be easy to picture the condition of the invisible mental side of this visible materialism that stretched its winding steel

across Colorado and down into Arizona. The Western Central's official mind approached dementia. The board of directors gathered and for one hot hour debated if it really would not be wisdom's part to purchase a quiet state of mind for themselves and a disarming plenitude of things for the zealous "seizor." However, Sanborn and Burke, who were present, and "Yellow" Logan, the big blond man from the K. P., who had done some very masterful things while the road was being constructed and was now general roadmaster, stepped crushingly upon this brewing cowardice.

They would consent to no penny of ransom being paid; they would see that this bland dynamiter was caught and made a human pepper-box by the aid of perforating lead, or, at least, landed in the penitentiary. As a resultant of this spinal stiffening being injected, and in view of the extreme gravity of the situation and the debasing effrontery of the

"seizor," the board voted a reward of $5,000 for the capture of the marauder. Aside from a very natural hunger to abate the supreme plague from which we were suffering, we all, also naturally, felt more vital of appetite for the "seizor's" undoing in prospect of this pretty bunch of money. The road's fever palpably increased. The odd thing, however, was that in the end an old ramshackle engine and a slender girl captured Mr. Beaumont and the lucre. The story is a classic on the Central.

Just where lay Mr. Beaumont's individual residence was, of course, a mystery; his general habitat seemed to stretch from Denver to Muley Pass, a distance of some one hundred and twenty miles along our line. A heavy guard was at once placed over the bridge that spanned the Muley and a long line of walkers patrolled the sheds on the Pass. Mr. Beaumont evidently did not find it immediately feasible to disrupt Bridge 18 or apply the torch to the snow-sheds, as he had threatened, but within a

few days an explosive tore out a culvert near the Muley, and, of all surprising things, a switch-engine in our yards at Paley Fork, not a hundred feet from the despatcher's office, ran over a package of nitro-soaked guncotton, precipitating a general wreck of things. No one had yet been killed outright, but several of our men were in the hospital. As might be very naturally concluded, our passenger traffic evaporated until its volume could be enumerated with something like a cipher. We were moving a little freight now and then in periods when the "seizor" and we were taking breath between shocks.

All that was definitely known of the physical aspect or appurtenances of Mr. Beaumont at that stage of the campaign was, that he apparently migrated by means of an astonishingly able horse that wore disks of rubber on its feet, and that Mr. Beaumont himself wore boots with high heels, both of which were worn away somewhat upon their outer sides and a

little "turned over." Burke dryly remarked to me one day that thus far he felt sure of but one thing; that if Mr. Beaumont won the $50,000 he would buy a new pair of high-heeled boots. Proofs of the presence of a horse with curiously shod hoofs, and a pair of "run over," but very active boots, were found at the scene of several of the explosions, printed in dirt or sand. Therefore, these came naturally to be regarded as signs and belongings of Mr. Beaumont.

Of Mr. Beaumont himself the numerous persons who were hunting him — and incidentally the $5,000 — never once saw a hair. Obviously he was beautifully familiar with all the roads and mountain-trails of that region, and it looked as if he might have constructed some secret ones of his own, possibly in the air. Whether he lived in a tree on the top of a mountain or dwelt in an unknown and unfindable cavern, somewhere in the Range, was pure conjecture. For six weeks he was a puzzling

myth, so far as personal localization went, but a most amazing and fearful reality as related to his "seizure" of the railway. Sanborn's white hair seemed to grow sparse upon his domelike head; Logan's yellow eyes got somewhat the effect of a mad dog's, and the "groove of concentration" between Burke's eyes deepened and elongated as the attacks thickened. Had the Western Central's long line of rails been living nerves they doubtless would have been found tied in twitching knots by reason of worry and terror.

We in the divisional headquarters had special cause to "gray and wrinkle" as time went on, for Ames Burke himself received a note from the dynamiter adjuring him at once to influence a settlement or the Paley Fork station would be erased. Yes, "erased" was the pleasing term employed. It was especially expressive to one who now remembers it, who sat there night after night trying to despatch trains with his hair standing on end. To be

sure we had guards about the station, but the guards might fall asleep and the "erasure" be suddenly accomplished, or the "seizor" might be using a flying-machine, and, winging his way above the building, drop dynamite down the chimney. For these reasons, and divers others equally as hideous, the one who now remembers then wore his hat solidly pulled down on his head that he might to some degree disguise the porcupine tendency of his cranial locks.

However, that man was not Tommy Loomis, though the latter despatched the trick from 4 o'clock P. M. until midnight; but it was Tommy Loomis's sweetheart who captured the "seizor." It may be doubted, indeed, if Tommy would have figured at all in this chronicle but for the "nerve" of Miss Ruth Patten, telegraph operator at Placer, and daughter of Amos Patten, station-master at that point.

Tommy was Superintendent Burke's nephew and had "prospects." He was a son of John

Loomis, one time Senator and now chairman of the board of directors and the largest owner of the stock of the Western Central. Figured by the calculus of the probable, Tommy was destined to be rich, and was estimated to reach, finally, no less a position than the presidency of the road. The velvet hand of nepotism, however, had wisely been withheld from him; he was working his way and learning the business from the base up.

That he should have fallen in love with Ruth Patten, a humble " pounder of the brass," and daughter of a man who very likely had not four dollars beyond his small salary, was as vinegar both to Burke and the chairman of the board. Therefore, the " powers " had discouraged Tommy, after a fashion that was rather surgical than hypnotic; he had been ordered to proceed to Denver at the end of the month and enter upon duties under his father's eye. Some very bitter things promised to be ladled into Tommy's cup did he commit the

mistake of marriage with this lowly mountain girl. None the less, Tommy had not the least notion of giving her up. Did the "powers" really know Ruth Patten, as he did, they might rave; but the raving would be of a sort barren of anger and justly florid with appreciation. That was Tommy's conviction.

As for Ruth Patten, she was, truly, very nice. Tommy. when he was with her, always had a sense as of the presence of wild flowers. Her plain, clean, mountain-aired clothes, her slenderness and delicate pink coloring, her shy, sweet demureness with him, made him think always of some outdoor thing he had seen somewhere, probably wild roses. Though since her fifteenth year, she was now nineteen, she had lived among the tumbled billows of the Range in the little station with her widower father, she was not without culture. She had known books and music in Denver in the days before her father failed and fell to the small offices of the station at Placer. More than that,

the girl had character and courage. One who chanced to catch the flash of her splendid hazel eyes in certain moments might easily have fancied her capable of even greater bravery than suffering the long silence of the mountains for her father's sake. She was something even more than Tommy knew.

Placer was a very small place, eight miles eastward from the Sandrill bridge, up among the tossing earth waves that weltered toward the high backbone of the Range. Ruth's firm slim fingers had made the interior of the station homelike, from the kitchen to the bird-cage above the telegraph-table in the bay-window. Tommy found it an alluring spot to visit; besides, of evenings, the despatcher's wire, though not a human heart-string, thrilled often electrically between them with that which sprang from chords that were tenderly human. Ruth's father had a gold "prospect" not far from Placer, with which he was entertaining himself at times, finding in it stimulus for cer-

tain pleasant dreams; hence, the girl was frequently in entire charge of the station, the duties of which were very light. In the long pauses between the passing of the trains she often went to walk, rambling fearlessly about the mountainside. On one of these walks she saw the " seizor," the first glimpse had of him by any one since he deigned to devote his energies to the disruption of the road.

A half-mile below the station lay a little bridge across a ravine, at the bottom of which a mountain stream, swiftly volant and singing, came out of choking greenery and shot again into greenery. Here Ruth often rested, sitting in a shady spot near the brink of the ravine, and here one sunset hour as she silently mused she spied a horseman riding out of the thicket of verdure below her. He was dressed in clothing of a neutral tint, wore a gray slouch hat, and had a drooping black mustache. At one ear he held a contrivance which looked to be a sort of combination of tin pan and a horn.

He seemed to be listening intently through this instrument, and his black eyes glanced about with keen alertness beneath the shading brim of his hat. The girl sank back flat upon the earth, her heart leaping. As she lay there she turned her head so that her gaze encompassed the upper portion of the bridge, and presently she saw a hand reach up through the ties and place a small bag of something upon one of the rails. After the hand had been withdrawn she lay motionless a long time. Finally, when the smoky dusk was thick, she sat up and looked about. The man had come and gone, so far as she could detect, absolutely without noise. She took the package from the bridge very gingerly and hurried down to the station. Amos Patten soon told her what it was, and ten minutes later, through the wire and Tommy Loomis, we all had heard.

Through the next three days and nights effort and vigilance were doubled. The penitentiary hounds had been brought to Paley Fork

several days before, and these creatures of clairvoyant nose were now rushed to the little bridge below Placer. But in vain; some sort of perfume scattered by the man seemed to sicken and baffle the dogs; to diffuse itself so widely that the beasts were all at sea. However, more feet were now in the mountain roads and trails pushing the quest. Sanborn and "Yellow" Logan and John Loomis, together with over a hundred expert man-catchers from Denver, were in the region, working like beavers with no obvious result save weariness.

However, something of real import had happened, an accident that engendered crisis had fallen. During the night that followed the evening in which Ruth Patten had looked upon the face of the "pestilence," he of the drooping mustache had ridden by devious lifted mountain ways and burrowing avenues toward the west, intent upon still further urging the company to issue its coveted "milk" by

breaking the line west of Paley Fork. With his horse proceeding on almost soundless feet, and himself, through the use of his curious audiphone, in instant command of the least noise that fell within the radius of a half-mile or more, he rode by at times, out of the traveled ways, and permitted the searchers to pass him by.

Upon one of these wily discursions, on a mountainside north of Paley Fork, the "seizor's" grand campaign of terror suddenly jolted against discouraging Chance; his horse slipped from a dangerous point, carrying him crashing down a considerable precipice and leaving him with a broken arm, a smashed audiphone, and a dead steed. Manifestly he was no longer safely equipped for either self-protection or successful furtherance of the raid. Mr. Beaumont swiftly conceived a notion for doctors and a deep desire to quit the region.

It would hardly be worth while to state that

Mr. Beaumont was a singularly original, dauntless, and resourceful soul; there had been evidence in plenty of this; but he did need a fresh horse, a new audiphone, and splints for his arm. He felt a natural desire to go away before he was captured, since capture meant the penitentiary or something worse. His procedure was characteristic; he did not do things as did other men.

Very late in the second night after Mr. Beaumont had experienced this private tragedy he brought his bruised person secretly into the Paley Fork yards in quest of exit. Now, upon a spur-track near the roundhouse stood an ancient engine, the Number 100, bought from the K. P. when the Western Central was under construction. At the time of her purchase she had not been young; now she was hoary, if the term may be permitted, and had either to be largely rebuilt or cast to the scrap pile. Addicks, the master mechanic, decided to send her to the main shops at Denver that she

might be "killed or cured," as the superintendent of motive power might will when her case had been diagnosed. Accordingly he ordered Dick Edwards to hook her on to his engine, the 484, and haul her over the Range to the capital. Dick was now crossing the division every twelve hours, with armed guards, since Phil Porter and the 300 had been blown up, and could as well as not pilot the old 100.

Mr. Beaumont, crouching in shadow between two box cars, chanced to hear the yard foreman explain to a switchman this order from the "M. M." To his penetrative wit the situation made swift appeal. He crept stealthily to the decrepit engine, which had for weeks known neither fire nor steam, and climbing through the gangway into the tender, painfully and carefully lowered himself through the intake into the water-tank. The round aperture through which water was let into the tank closed with an iron lid, hinged on one side, and fastening with a spring snap on the other.

Reaching up with the hand of his uninjured arm, after his feet rested on the bottom, Mr. Beaumont softly let down the lid. It closed with a click of the spring catch, and Mr. Beaumont, bringing to bear the wildest possible pressure, could not open it again. He had imprisoned himself!

The " seizor " sat down upon the bottom of the tank in rare perplexity, wondering how he would escape from the place without discovery after his arrival in Denver. It looked that destiny might deliver him into the hands of those who wanted him. However, as respected Mr. Beaumont's resourcefulness, he had reasons for confidence, one item of several that braced him being no less a fact than that he had very ingeniously escaped from the penitentiary two months before. Still, the situation was rather dispiriting, especially to a man who had recently taken charge of, and dominated a railroad. Had Mr. Beaumont known just how he was to find egress from the black

and musty hole he would have felt doubtless a still heavier burden of discouragement. As matters stood, one factor, at least, appealed comfortingly to this erstwhile regal highwayman, now ingloriously "bottled up" in the tank: his present lair was quite the last place on earth into which any one would look with thought of finding him.

Just after day had flowered, and it blossomed wonderfully there in the mountains, Edwards backed the 484 down to the inert and silent 100. The rusty draw-bar of the latter engine was coupled to the tender of the 484, the draw-bar being supplemented by a heavy chain. The low-hung, heavy old creature having thus, metaphorically, a ring in her nose, was led out upon the main line. After two guards with rifles in hands had climbed into the cab with Edwards, the latter opened the throat of 484 and the two engines thumped their way out through the switches and rolled away toward the Sandrill. Thirty minutes

later Nat Peters, with the 505 and a coach in which were Sanborn, Logan, Loomis *père,* and a dozen armed men, followed toward the east.

Their purpose was to conduct a search from the summit down the east side of the Range, Mr. Beaumont seemingly being utterly unfindable on the western slope.

One can scarcely fancy what a stirring of the official pulses would have ensued had they known that the baffling Mr. Beaumont was very much in the immediate procession. As for the "seizor" himself, he crouched on the floor of the tank, holding fast to one of the rods that served to break the sway and push of the water when the machine was going fast and the tank was full. It may reasonably be doubted if, shaken about in that ink-black hole, the conquest of even an American railroad served to make blackmail by dynamite seem to him utterly satisfying.

For the most part, the 484 had only to hold back the 100 on the way from Paley Fork to

the Sandrill, the grade being downward. From the Sandrill, beginning to mount the mighty steps that swung upward through thirty miles toward the summit, the old engine dragged on the coupling like a dead leviathan. At Bridge Station tank Edwards stopped the 484 for water. The two guards got down to stretch their legs, and, as the engines were again put in motion, they climbed into the 100. One of the men took the engineer's seat in the cab, the other passed back into the empty tender and perched on the top of the tank. The redoubtable Mr. Beaumont heard the man plunk the butt of the gun-stock down between his knees on the iron not thirty inches above the "seizor's" head.

"This is dandy," cried the guard on the tank to the one in the cab. "I can watch both sides of the right of way. I feel myself nearing that five thou."

The man spoken to came back and also perched on the tank. "I'll divide the mazuma

with you, Jim," he laughed. "This is a good p'int to see from sure. Besides, if Edwards runs the 484 on to a poultice of nitro, laid on the track by that mysterious son of Satan, we will be some distance from the burst of the pin-wheels and fixin's."

Mr. Beaumont, sitting in the dark tank beneath them, though longing sorely for a mouthful of fresh air and the openness of some far-away promontory by the sea, threw his curved mustache awry with a sardonic grin.

Morning sunlight was flooding down the west side of the Range when the 484 passed Placer Station. Ruth Patten, in a pretty calico and with a rose in her hair, was out on the platform. Each man on the engines smiled and took off his hat to her. The two on the tank, sitting almost on Mr. Beaumont's head, thrilled with something of the pride of cavaliers, riding, as they were, in search of the mighty mountain brigand. Besides, Ruth's

smiling eyes were the only ones that had looked upon the Human Crux, the visage of which behind iron bars was worth $5,000. They bowed with emphasis to her.

At that moment Nat Peters, with the 505 and the coach of officials and deputies, was rounding Puma Point, coming down toward the Sandrill. Chief Manvell himself was despatching on the East End train-sheet at Paley Fork, anxiously noting the movements of the few trains traversing the division. Twenty-two minutes later the operator at Bonebreak, seven miles farther up the Range from Placer, reported engine 484 and 100 as having passed eastward; six minutes later he fairly jumped upon the key and telegraphed Manvell.

"The 100 has broken loose! She just went by here down the grade like a rocket!" he said.

Manvell fell back from the train-sheet and stared at it for an instant as if it were on fire.

" My God! " he breathed, then his hand leaped to the key and called Bridge Station.

" Sanborn's special? " the dots and dashes flashed.

" Just gone," came the reply.

" Can you signal them? "

" No, they have crossed the bridge and are out of sight."

Manvell got to his feet holding fast the table. " Burke! " he said, hoarsely. The superintendent came out of the alcove room, his brows knit in anger.

" More dynamite? " he grated; " who's struck it now? "

" Don't know if it's that or not; the 100 is loose and coming down the mountain; she will strike Sanborn and the men just below Placer! "

Bunch Wilson, who was despatching the West End, and the way operator, came to the chief's table; they had suddenly grown pale. Burke unconsciously ran his sinewy fingers

through his hair; both his hands were trembling. Manvell caught the key again and the dots and dashes flew. He was wildly calling Ruth Patten at Placer now; one chance of salvation remained. But Placer was silent, no reply came back. Burke walked up and down, fiercely striking his right fist into his left palm and cursing women as employees, but Wilson and the way man stood staring at the chief; Manvell hung over the zipping key with perspiration dripping from his chin, but Placer made no sound; Ruth Patten was in better business.

Sitting by the telegraph-table in the station, sewing and thinking of Tommy, that startling announcement from Bonebreak had roused her suddenly. She, too, like Manvell, had gotten to her feet in consternation. She saw as clearly as he the tragedy that was to fall. For a moment she stared blankly, then her big hazel eyes flamed with light. She sprang out of the little office swiftly, ran into the small

freight-room and snatched a switch key from the check-rack. The next moment she was on the platform, looking anxiously about her. Amos Patten had gone to his "prospect;" no one was near. On the north side of the station ran a complete siding, upon which stood three box-cars; on the south side, paralleling the main track, stretched a spur, some three hundred feet in length. The switch to this spur lay some two hundred feet eastward from the station. The spur-track itself could not well be made a complete siding, for the reason that its western end abutted on air, the earth breaking downward at that point into Placer Canyon.

Should she turn the engine in on the north track or the south? On the north the flying mass of iron must burst into the box cars, on the south it would sweep away the bunting-post and leap down through pine-trees and mighty boulders into the gorge below. In either case it looked sorry indeed for the king

of railroad wreckers, sealed in the tank of the doomed 100.

The girl chose the spur-track. It seemed better to send the old engine to her final death than to crush good property and endanger the station itself. With parted lips and a heart that throbbed wildly, she fled along the ties to the switch. With shaking fingers she inserted the key in the lock and turned it, listening toward the east. She could hear nothing save the clamor of her pulses. The time seemed year-long in which she was trying to throw the shift-rails over; indeed, she had tugged and thrown herself against the lever of the old-fashioned target switch through quite two minutes before the rails were over and the pin pushed in. Through every snail-paced moment she had seen in horrified fancy the avalanche of iron whirl by and go down to split a bloody way through Sanborn's special.

Now, she stood bending toward the east, wide-eyed and panting, unconsciously wringing

her bruised hands together in an agony of expectation. Perhaps the runaway had climbed the rails somewhere and already lay in ruin in some gorge! No! down through the gnarled muscles of the mountain's bosom crept a flooding thunder; it rose and heaved in volume until the air quivered and the ground shook. Involuntarily the girl drew back and still farther back, her slim shape bent forward, her white face straining. With a fearful bursting roar the rushing engine struck the switch, tipped and shot along the spur. Almost opposite the station the engine exploded! A tearing, rending thunder-burst, and the air was full of dust and hurtling iron. Completely gutted, her twisted frame and gaping boiler rolled and bounded fifty feet away and hung over the edge of the gorge; her tender, crushed and keeling half-over, turned straight across the track and plunged through the platform into the station.

The girl got up from the ground, where she

had dropped involuntarily or been thrown by concussion, and with no clear sense of what she was about, fled to the station. She ran in through the door of the little passenger-room, her thoughts twisting in an inconsequent chaos of Tommy Loomis and the safety of the bird that had hung in the bay-window. As she entered the door a man, bloody and disheveled, crept out of the office and got to his feet. Gasping for breath and red-eyed he looked at her.

It was Mr. Beaumont. He looked blackened and battered as something might that had been thrown from a catapult. Mad to escape, he fumbled bunglingly at his belt where hung a revolver. The girl had drawn back with a scream of terror. The next moment she whipped a pistol from the pocket of her gown and leveled it. For days she had carried that little instrument for Mr. Beaumont. She stood up so straight she seemed to lean backward and her eye turned to amber fire.

"Drop it! Throw it over there in the corner! I know you!" Her white teeth bit off the words sharp and clean. "That's right, throw it on the floor; I'll take care of it."

The man dropped the revolver on the floor and stood swaying, his red eyes dimming as he stared. "I'm hurt," he breathed; "let me — let me sit down."

The girl's face softened. "Rest here on one of these settees," she said. The man's limbs wavered and doubled and he sank down on one of the seats, his flesh showing chalky through the grime on his face. "Water," he whispered.

The young woman looked at him steadily a moment. "There's several men in the hospital on your account," she said, but she brought some water in a tin cup from a little tank in the corner and held it to his lips. When the man had revived she stepped back and leveled the pistol at his head. "Some one will come soon," she said.

"Yes," breathed the other's lips. "Thank you for the water."

When Sanborn's special rolled up to the station they found her standing there, swaying a little but holding the pistol level. President Sanborn himself caught her as she fell.

The 484 came trundling down to Placer a few minutes later. Rounding a sharp curve on a steep grade, the draw-bar of the old 100 had pulled out. The sudden wrench had broken the chain and the ancient tub had fled down the mountains. The cavaliers on the tank had quickly abandoned her. But the explosion of the engine — there we encountered a mystery. Old Addicks, "M. M.," and physician of locomotives, offered the most plausible explanation. The throttle of the hoary antique, he said, had jarred loose. Running backward then, the pistons had pumped air into her boiler, compressing it until probably the strain reached five hundred pounds to the square inch. Unable to release the air through her safety-valve

rapidly enough, the old relic had finally been rent in twain. We at first fancied that the amazing Mr. Beaumont had somehow blown the engine up, but he refused to add this trifle to his exploits; besides, such a feat on his part had been quite impossible.

As for Tommy Loomis — he surely grew a foot in stature during the following week. Burke himself kissed Ruth when she came over to Paley Fork, and Senator Loomis — well, he said a number of things that turned the girl rosy; among these he stated, with agreeable positiveness and his arm about her, that she must come to Denver with Tommy when he took his new position, that Mrs. Loomis and he would anxiously look for her. They were not disappointed.

The banquet given at the Lyon House to Ruth Patten, in the honors of which Tommy Loomis, as her husband, shared conspicuously, was one of the great affairs of those years. You should have seen the flower decorations

and heard the speeches and applause to have appreciated it. Above all you should have seen Tommy Loomis when Superintendent Burke pinned the Diamond Key upon the lace of Ruth's corsage. The boy certainly looked that he might burst with pride. Of course the five thousand dollars reward for the capture of the bandit was given Ruth. She did a fine thing with the money, too; she helped her father develop his mine at Placer. Ultimately the mine turned out famously, affecting very happily the fortunes of Tommy and Ruth's father, the two men whose happiness lay nearest her heart.

CHAPTER IX

SAVING THE LONG HOUSE

IT happened during the summer, in the fourth year after the snow-sheds were completed on Muley Pass. The region appeared to be a place for large accidents, — a stage for tragedies and strange occurrences. The reader may fancy, if he will, a building one hundred and forty-seven thousand feet, or some twenty-eight miles, in length, lying like a stupendous worm, crooked yet motionless, across the top of a mountain range, six thousand feet above the level of the sea. Within and through this shadowy passage, by day and by night, trains of gold-bearing ore, trains loaded with man-made goods, and trains carrying sleeping and waking humanity, passed with their low and rumbling thunder. In summer

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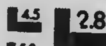
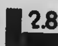

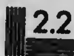
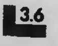
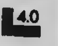

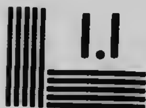
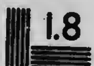

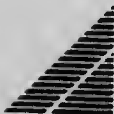

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the region rolled green and gray and brown in a heaven of warm white ether, while in winter it was as a realm smitten with a white death, snow-heaped, cold, and desolate.

That the officials of the Western Central Railroad should have been burdened with peculiar care respecting this house on the mountains may be easily conceived when it is stated that the structure had cost fourteen dollars a lineal foot, or some two million dollars altogether. Fire was the menace that always hung over the vast shed. Both winter and summer, being constructed of spruce beams and boards, it stood in imminent danger of destruction. Sparks thrown out of locomotive smoke-stacks might ignite it, tramps traversing its endless tunnel, and cooking their meals or lighting their pipes, might carelessly give it over to the monster, telegraph-wires might become crossed with telephone, electric-light, or power wires, and sting it with a spark that would sweep the pass with flames, or lightning might strike and

burn it; hence, ingenuity and solicitude were exhausted in its protection.

Beginning near Muley Point, a little station on the high eastern shoulder of the mountain, the vast shed stretched around the slope toward the west and slightly downward through the Great Bend, then began to ascend by a long, twisting grade toward a monstrous dent in the top of the mountain called the Hopper, through which it passed like a huge welt left by the blow of a giant whip, ending where the track began to wind downward to Quartz Creek, on its way to the head of Peace Canyon.

On that high range, in winter, storms raged that were deadly to all unprotected life, and at times snow fell to an incredible depth. Heavy and packed, it lay in the draws and depressions, sometimes twenty, sometimes thirty, sometimes fifty feet deep. The roof and wall boards and framework of the shed were thick and braced in many ways, that the enormous

burden sometimes imposed upon them might be safely borne. Without the Long House the passage of trains across the range in winter would have been, frequently, impossible. In summer the strange structure existed to no purpose, save that it continually beset the souls of the officials with direful fancies, and blinded the traveller to the glory of one of the most beauteous scenic visions anywhere inviting the eyes of men.

Directly opposite the Great Bend and across the stupendous gorge of the Muley River, a little house was erected on a high, projecting peak, a spur of Forked Mountain. From that swimming height the eye, aided by a field-glass, could command a view of nearly every foot of the twenty-eight miles of shed. From the warm end of May until the middle of November, by night and by day, a pair of human eyes looked unceasingly from a window in the little stone house, ever dwelling watchfully on the curving miles of the Long House.

On the window-sill, which was fashioned like the top of a table, swung a long field-glass on a tripod and swivel; at the lookout's right hand stood a telegraph instrument; and on the left was a telephone, — these latter instruments being connected to wires that wound down the crag, swung across the Muley, and climbed the side of Muley Mountain and stretched away through the Hopper to a little station on the track near the western end of the great shed. Thus by the telegraph or telephone the operator at Sag, the railway station, might be instantly informed by the watcher on Forked Mountain of the breaking out of fire anywhere in the long shed, the telegraph being available if by chance the telephone should fail, and *vice versa.*

Through four summers Park Taylor and his mother, the wife and son of Price Taylor, who died while station-master at Sandrock, lived in the house on the crag and watched the shed. Through five months of the year they

were sky people. The crystal floor of heaven seemed so close that they could almost touch it, for white clouds often drifted around the peak below the house, like mighty, muffled swans swimming lazily in the clear sea of ether that spread about them; sometimes at night a gray cloud passed by the door so close that they could almost touch it, a huge ghost wandering among the peaks and trailing its skirts of lace noiselessly across the cold boulders; sometimes they looked straight over the top of a rainbow, a prismatic bridge woven of ethereal ribbons and sunk in the ether sea beneath them; and sometimes vapors rolled about them through the mountain prongs like cataracts of black froth veined with lightning.

At night, when the weather was fine, the stars hung so large, so alive, and so fearfully near that awe and prayer seemed more natural than sleep. Then there was the silence! At times the Muley, frothing through its sunken groove, sent a faint, purring whisper along the

sky; at long intervals, when the wind was right, they vaguely heard trains rumbling in the Long House; and sometimes an eagle circled about the peaks and screamed, — these were almost the only sounds, save that through the Hopper stretched a forest of pines which, when winds blew, sent up a ghoulish, neutral, seething noise, inexpressibly lonely and sad. When winter came and they went down to the haunts of men, — to live in their home at Sandrock that Park might go to school, — for a time the noises of even so small a town seemed jarring and boisterous, and for weeks the silence of the sky clung to them and made them seem strange. Beautiful, in many ways, and wholly out of the common as was that life among the stars and clouds, they always went back to it with a qualm of dread, so oddly exacting was the task and so entirely isolated were they.

Park, a gray-eyed, strong-limbed, laughter-loving youth, watched during the night, for the

most part, while his mother kept her eye at the glass during the day. She, too, was a merry soul, but they rarely laughed while on Forked Mountain; the strain was too great. To look and look and look and never do anything, — it seemed like insanity. At long intervals one or the other of the pair broke out laughing immoderately, but quickly hushed, for laughter, too, somehow sounded out of place and half-insane. Three times during their four summers on the mountain the Long House broke into flames, and for a little space the two were swept with excitement as they flashed the startling news to Gap, but the "department" soon subdued the flames, and again silence fell and the long waiting. Then, for the mother and son, one day it all ended.

Over at Gap, fifteen miles distant, time hung somewhat less heavily. A fire-train and engine, with steam up day and night, stood on a side-track ready to run at a moment's warning to any point in the shed where a conflagra-

tion might be under way. The fire-train consisted of seven flat cars upon which were built big tanks capable of carrying collectively one hundred and fifty tons of water, and a pressure-engine. The train was manned by eight men, strong, active fellows, who lay in wait the year round, watching for the monster. Near Gap a spring gushed out of the side of the mountain, and there a water-tank was erected, from which engines and the fire-train got their supply. Between the siding and the main track stood a small station-house, in which Todd Mercer, the day operator, and his wife and baby lived. With them lived Todd's nephew, Sloan Mercer, the night operator. Throughout each moment of night and day an operator remained on duty, for once in every thirty minutes a report of the condition of the great shed came by wire from the lonely lookouts on Forked Mountain. An alarm, in the event of fire, might also arrive by telephone from one or the other of two track-walkers

who patrolled the Long House. But almost inevitably fire in the shed at any point must cut the wires of communication traversing its endless curves, hence the supreme need of keeping the wires intact from For . Mountain to Gap, and of the human eyes that looked down from the crag never faltering in watchfulness.

A half-mile west of Gap lay the property of the Fuller Gold Mining Company. Ordinarily this fact exercised no influence on matters pertaining to the Long House, save that trains of the company's quartz went through it on the way to the smelters at Denver, but with the event of which the reader is to be told the mine had profoundly to do. The company had a private siding connecting with the track of the Western Central near the mouth of the mine. The mine itself was a "drift," piercing the mountain northward, and striking the lode at a depth of some three hundred feet. At that point a transverse tunnel bored the

quartz east and west, extending in the direction of Gap nearly a quarter of a mile. The vein of water that supplied the fire-train broke from the mountain in that vicinity, and, one day, — the day of the fourth fire in the Long House, — the spring ceased to flow. The precious artery had been cut in two by the tunnel.

The day was late in August and the region was as dry as flour. Not a drop of rain had fallen for weeks. A strong wind from the southwest, hot from the sand and sage-brush of Arizona, had sucked through the mountain gorges all the afternoon. At sundown the peaks were tousled in a yellow foam of light that wavered restlessly, and, as the shadows of night fell, these, too, seemed to tremble in the buffeting wind. A fine dust, almost as impalpable as ether itself, was in the air, the sky-blown siftings of a far-off Arizona sandstorm. As Park sat down at the lookout window on Forked Mountain he said to his mother:

"The wind usually falls at sundown, but it seems to be rising."

"Yes; it would be a bad night for a fire," said Mrs. Taylor, looking across at Muley Mountain anxiously.

Park looked at the heaped masses looming and graying and purpling beyond the gorge. "Listen!" he said; "hear the pines in the Hopper; they sound like the sea, don't they?"

"Yes; I heard the ocean once when there was a storm; it sounded a good deal like that." She moved away and began preparing supper.

Toward evening John Berg, foreman of the fire-train over at the Gap, decided to empty the car-tanks and charge them with fresh fluid. The water of the tanks had not been changed for nearly two months and had grown foul. The train had not run to a fire for almost a year; the men were restless and needed exercise. Accordingly the vent-cocks were turned along the train and the tanks were rapidly

drained. When the water was low enough in the tanks the men entered and swabbed the floors and the walls. It was growing dark when the train was backed up to the big stand-tank to be refilled. One of the car-tanks had been charged when suddenly the pipe from the stand-tank ceased delivering. Berg at once mounted the ladder and peered down through the manhole into the mighty tub. The tank was empty! The pipe from the spring reservoir yielded nothing! The foreman's tanned face was suddenly filmed with gray, and lines of anxiety leaped across his forehead. He scrambled to the ground and hurriedly climbed to the spring reservoir; it was almost dry! The fountain was dead! His bearded mouth worked oddly and he stood bracing himself against the strong wind and staring down at the empty basin for a little time.

"Who could have foreseen? — who would have expected? — who ever heard of a big spring stopping? — " he began, then turned

and ran down the slope and shouted the news to the crew. Consternation reigned.

"Slack ahead," shouted Berg to the engineer; "run down to the station; we've got to report this and get orders to run to the Quartz Creek tank to fill."

They piled off at the station and crowded into the office. Berg wrote out a message to Superintendent Burke.

"Hold on," said Sloan Mercer, the night operator; "let me call Fuller's. They must have cut the vein with the tunnel; maybe you can get water there."

He called the mine office by telephone. "Yes," they said, "an unusual quantity of water is flowing from the drift; no doubt we have cut the spring vein."

"Most of the fire-train tanks are empty,—been cleaning out,—any way the tanks can be filled there?" asked Sloan.

"No,—well, if you'll dam the flow near the mouth of the mine, and lay a line to it, you

might pump the water into the tanks with the pressure-engine, possibly,'' came the reply.

"Send my message to Burke,'' said Berg; "get me an order from the despatcher to run to the Quartz Creek tank. Tell them I'll stop at Fuller's Mine and see if we can fill there. If we can I'll not use the order to the Quartz.''

He walked up and down the room, impatient and anxious. Outside the wind roared; the two-million-dollar house was unprotected; its chief defenders had been caught napping. Sloan beat on the key. Presently he handed out an order, and the fire crew scrambled aboard the train and started west.

At the lookout window, over on his crag, Park sat watching the looming bulk of Muley Mountain, an immeasurably huge tent of shadow rising against the west. Above the mountain a streak of dirty yellow stained the sky like a smear of rust, the wind poured violently against the seamed forehead of the crag, hissing and sobbing, and the pine forest

stretching through the Hopper roared like a thousand softly beaten drums. Park could not see the great shed at any point, but he knew infallibly, to a foot, where it lay. Inside the Long House a track-walker was going east. He was five or six miles distant from Muley Point. Another walker, moving westward, was some three miles from the centre of the shed. An east-bound freight-train had just emerged from the shed and had taken the siding at Muley Point; passenger-train Number 4 met it there, pulled by, and entered the shed; Berg and his crew were at Fuller's Mine. That was the situation when Park Taylor saw the fire.

As he sat listening to the voices of the wind and looking steadily at the mighty black thing looming three miles away across the gorge, he heard a rumbling thunder run downward through the noisy wind upon the left-hand side of the lookout crag and dwindle off and cease as if smothered in the distant Muley River. A big fragment of rock, tottering toward the

abyss, had toppled under the pressure of the wind, he fancied, and had plunged from the crag and found a resting-place at length in the bed of the Muley, a mile and a half away. Now and again, especially during periods of atmospheric unrest, they heard these noises, for their mountain, like every other boastful height, was bowing, grain by grain and boulder by boulder, to the eternal leveler, gravitation.

As the sound ceased Park suddenly leaned forward and gazed earnestly at the distant cloud of darkness; two-thirds of the way up Muley Mountain, just where the long shed wormed its way around the Big Bend, a shapeless, whitish object seemed to waver and roll back and forth. Was it smoke? He rubbed his eyes and looked again. His heart suddenly thumped in his throat; surely it was smoke! He put his eye to the glass and turned it quickly toward the Big Bend. Almost as he caught the focus a gleaming blade of red pierced the vague mass of gray that wavered

on the mountain's bosom. With a shout and a thrill of all his pulses, he caught the crank of the telephone bell-box and whirled it round. The bells were dead! He snatched the receiver and put it to his ear and tapped the transmitter tube with his finger-ends; the transmitter diaphragm was mute! He leaned over to the circuit-breaker of the telegraph and jerked it open; there was no current! His hands went up through his hair wildly as he rose to his feet with his blood on fire. His mother stepped quickly to his side; her lips whitened as she saw his face.

"Look!" he cried; "it's in flames! It's burning! and we've got no wires! I heard a slide of stone or something go down the mountain, — it must have cut the wires! O mother, — mother!" He was turning round and round helplessly.

His mother tried both telephone and telegraph. The instruments were as unresponsive as wood. She fixed her eye to the long glass;

flames were spurting up like red water in the smoke on Muley Mountain. Park was tearing something out of a cupboard at the side of the room and coiling it around his shoulders. He thrust a bright object into his pocket. His mother turned and looked at him. Her face shone white, but firm, and her lips moved.

"The break must be found, my son, and found quickly," she said.

"Yes, mother; I've got wire and the pliers; watch close, — maybe I can close the break."

She put her hands on his shoulders and lifted her face and kissed him, and he leaped out the doorway and was gone. She had been cooler than he, but now she turned to the table and sank into a chair, and shook from head to foot. She knew what it meant to hunt on the shattered face of Forked Mountain in the dark: death lay down that way.

From the heart of the youth plunging through the wind and gloom all personal fear died as he crossed the threshold; the need of

haste was so awful that it seemed to shrivel every other thought and consideration. Away across the valley he caught glimpses of the red destroyer tangling in the bosom of the black heap of shadow. The wind would fan it fearfully. Already the flames had probably melted the telephone and telegraph wires that threaded the Long House. Sloan and the fire-train crew would not know until it was too late! Passenger-train Number 4 must have left Muley Point; would it run into the fire and be wrecked? He plunged downward recklessly, stumbling over boulders and ploughing through yielding shale. He knew where the wires led, — around a heaving horn of the crag toward the left, then downward over a great flight of rent and tumbled stone, then along a ledge toward the right and again downward toward the left, and still downward and away through a jumbled chaos of rocks, to leap finally over the gorge through which the Muley boiled.

He followed the falling course of the line in wild eagerness. The wires, of "number six" steel, were fastened to heavy insulators on iron rods that were much like long crowbars set in holes drilled in the rock. Here and there he could touch the wires, and now and again he could see them above him, vague threads outlined against stars that were yellow spots in the wind-swept sky. The wind took hold of him, too, shaking him and breaking off his breath as with sudden blows, and leaving him flattened and gasping. He went down the long slide of jumbled slabs and hanging blocks in painful lunges, and literally fell upon the ledge that crossed the face of the crag, three hundred feet below the house. He glanced at the fiery tousle over on Muley, scrambled to his feet, and hurried along the broad shelf, panting and eager. The wires were intact all along the ledge; the rupture was somewhere below. He came to the point where the wires again turned off into darkness down the mountain.

Here there was a sheer fall of fifty or sixty feet. But one mode of descent was possible; he caught hold of the lower wire where it crossed the edge of the ledge and shot downward. His hands burned as if he were clutching white-hot coals as he flew through space, then, with a sudden crash of all his senses, he struck the iron post to which the wires were fastened, a hundred feet below, and dropped in a heap among the rocks. He struggled to his knees; the world tipped and went round him like black water, while afar, lifted on an immense billow of the black water, danced and fluttered a huge rosette of gleaming ribbons. He got to his feet waveringly and looked at it, fascinated by its brightness and striving to force his stunned faculties to receive its meaning. Beautiful though it was, he vaguely felt that it was something terrible. A warm, wet stuff was creeping down his face and neck; it got upon his lips; its flavor was saline,—sweetish. He took hold of the iron post and

tried to call to mind his original intention. What had he come there to do? His face came round to the flaunting rosette on the distant mountain of black water. Then suddenly he struck his wet forehead and stared at it in horror; his faculties seemed to break open wide, and the shed, the fire, the broken wires, Sloan waiting by the telegraph-table at Gap, his mother pacing the floor of the stone house on the crag, Number 4 rumbling down the long grade toward the flames — all leaped upon him, a cataract of things. He sprang forward with a cry and again went plunging downward through the gloom, falling in deep furrows and scrambling over ragged heaps of rocks, sliding to right and to left, hunting furiously from post to post for the broken wires.

Nearly a quarter of a mile below the big ledge he found the break, a post cut clean away by a boulder that had crashed down the face of the crag. In wild haste he fell upon his hands and knees and began hunting among the

stones for the ends of the severed wires. His breath came in sobs and his battered hands flew out before him, feeling everywhere. He glanced over at Muley Mountain; the flames looked to be leaping a hundred feet high and combing over eastward in the wind. Fourteen miles of the shed stretched away in that direction; all that part of the Long House must sink into ashes, involving a million-dollar loss and the suspension of traffic for weeks, if Berg and his crew did not soon arrive! The youth worked as if he himself were on fire.

At length his hand fell upon a cold thing, the precious steel. With a cry he wrenched the splicing wire from his shoulders and fastened an end of it to the broken wire, and, paying out the splicing wire as he went, crept onward, searching feverishly about him. Again with a thrill of joy his crooking fingers laid hold of a wire end. He drew the wires together, all his body shaking; he clipped the splicing wire in two with the pliers, and then

paused. He did not know whether he had the telephone or the telegraph wire or a part of each; there must be no mistake. He pressed a wire end against either side of his tongue. There was a needle-like dart of pain, then — blank. It must be the wire of the telephone, — no, it was the telegraph wire; some one had opened a circuit breaker and was working; the current came in short, swift throbs. His mother could not work the telegraph; it must be Sloan calling the house on the crag! If he had but found the ends of the telephone wire, then his mother could tell Sloan of the terrible situation.

There was one thing that could be done, — a chance, — he would take the chance, for not a second must be wasted. If he were not so bruised and battered and shaken, and if his hands did not tremble so! He tried with all his soul to steady himself. He laid one wire end down upon a stone, and with the other "wrote" upon it in Morse dots and dashes

by tapping one wire end upon the other, breaking and closing the circuit as one does with a telegraph-key.

"The — shed — is — on — fire — at — Big Bend!" he tapped, slowly, unevenly, laboriously. "Tell — Berg — fire — in — shed, — Big — Bend!"

He placed the wire ends against his tongue. The current came in little sharp spurts, and then ceased. Had Sloan heard? Had he gone to tell Berg? The youth on the mountainside sat still a moment, staring at the distant conflagration. The radiance of the fire fell upon the rocks and against his dripping face in filmy quiverings, and the forest in the Hopper roared like a cataract. Could Sloan have read a message sent so bunglingly? Doubt smote him; he began hunting for the broken telephone wire like one half mad with fear.

Sloan *had* read the message. Sitting among his instruments in the station at Gap, he sud-

denly awoke to the fact that all the wires were dead. The telegraph sounders ceased their gabble. He plugged the board quickly; the wires were open somewhere east. He tried the shed telephone; it was dumb. He turned to the Forked Mountain wires; they were mute as oysters. His scalp began to creep cold. The private wire to the Fuller Mine alone was alive. He called the office; a tired grunt came back.

"Is that you, Davis?" Sloan asked.

"Sure."

"What you doing there so late?"

"Sweatin' my skull over a trial balance."

"Say, is Berg there?"

"Yes; damming the flow from the tunnel so he can fill his tubs."

"Tell him the wires are all dead,—something wrong,—maybe fire in the shed. He'd better get a move on him."

"That so? All right."

Sloan went out and looked toward the shed,

came back, and began testing for current and walking to and fro; over in the stone house on Forked Mountain Mrs. Taylor went from window to window, white-faced and twisting her hands together; in the Long House a patrol came leisurely toward Gap, unconscious of peril; and away east of the fire the second walker strolled toward Muley Point. He began to smell burning wood and faced about; the odor, mixed with a thin vapor, came through the long tunnel borne on a draught of air that sucked through the shed from the west. He instantly started westward on a swift run, looking eagerly ahead, — but the fire was eight or nine miles away.

Davis, the accountant, stepped out of the office at the Fuller Mine, after his conversation with Sloan, and shouted the substance of the operator's message over to Berg, where he was working with his men near the mouth of the drift.

"All right!" yelled Berg. "Here, Jim,

you couple the train to them three cars in there on the side-track; snake 'em out and kick 'em back on the main line out of the way; back the tanks in on the side-track as near to the water here as you can. Hurry! Tell the engineer. Boys, be lively; Burke'll can the whole push of us to-morrow, I expect."

The fire-train was backed in on the spur and coupled to the three obstructing cars, — two box cars and an ore flat, — and the cars were drawn out and "kicked" westward on the main line. Jim Harvey, the brakeman, having pulled the pin between the cars they were shunting and the fire-train, threw the switch for the train to back in again on the spur, thinking he would run to the three cars on the main track and set their brakes as soon as the fire-train was in on the siding. By that course they would save several precious minutes. But just when the train was in upon the spur and he had closed the switch, Davis

burst from the office door with a yell that swept every heart with terror.

"Sloan has got a message from Forked Mountain," he cried; "*the shed is on fire at Big Bend!* SHE'S BURNING UP! SHE'S BURNING UP!"

Harvey, with a sudden thrill of consternation, dashed toward Berg and the men at the mouth of the mine. Panic swept the veins of every man; shouts, mingled oaths and orders and counter-orders cleft the night, heavy feet rushed here and there, and away from the confusion, off through the gloom, crept the two box cars and the ore flat, the wind at their backs and a falling track all the way to the Big Bend! Harvey got a glimpse of them as they disappeared, and, with a swift vision of the closing of his career as a Western Central man, started in a vain pursuit, yelling as he ran. Davis, seeing what had befallen, stopped in his tracks and stood for a moment with out-

stretched hands and clutched breath, unconscious of what he was doing.

" The cars — the box cars, — are loaded with powder, — giant — blasting! " he burst out and whirled around. " Berg, do you hear? " he cried. " Our three cars have gone down the grade to the fire! Two of 'em are loaded with powder; just got 'em in to-day! "

That staggered the foreman. He stopped in the midst of a driving activity of mind and body; his face in the flare of the lanterns looked elongated and gray. He lifted his arms as if warding off some falling object and then dropped them.

" Cut off the engine and the front tank-car, — it has water," he ordered. " We must catch the cars of powder. The passenger must be comin' down to'ards the fire, — if them cars should go through the fire and get on fire as they went and then strike Number 4! Hurry, boys; don't lose a second! Part of you stay here and see if you can't fill the tanks in some

way. Let her go, Steve; plug the escape, and don't shut off for anything!"

In three minutes they battered out through the switch and whirled down toward Gap. Sloan had seen the three runaway cars whiz by and was out on the platform. The engine and tank-car went by him in a sweeping roar. He heard a voice shouting something to him from the midst of the noise, but could not distinguish a word. He ran to the office; the Forked Mountain telephone-bell rang, and Mrs. Taylor cried some strange things in his ear, — the Long House was burning madly, Park was somewhere in the darkness on the face of the mountain, she did not know where, but clearly he had found and mended the broken wires. In turn Sloan told of the disjointed condition of the whole system of defence, and she leaned from the lookout window and stared at the rocking tangle of flames on the opposite height with fresh terror.

Berg and his men went toward the scene of

conflagration with desire and expectation at white heat. Through the first half-dozen miles the engine was driven recklessly. The endless shed roared, the headlight gushed it full of light in front, the myriad dusty beams and rafters glimmered backward into darkness, and the bottomless hole rushed upon them ceaselessly. Every man's face looked long and distorted. The cars of powder had nearly five minutes' start of them; could they overtake and bring to a standstill those unbridled rams of destruction? Could they hook into and hold cars that were probably running forty or fifty miles an hour? But few words were spoken. Steve Burns, the engineer, sat with one hand on the emergency lever and the other on the throttle, peering ahead, his brows drawn into a knot. Berg hung half-way out the fireman's window, staring into the yawning hole in front. When within four or five miles of the centre of the Big Bend he gave a yell.

"There they are, Steve! Open her wider!"

he shouted. Burns hooked her up another notch, but it was only a glimpse they got of the runaways; like shadows the cars slipped out of sight around a curve. At the end of another mile they again saw the fleeing things, vaguely, away in front. Burns reversed the lever. Berg leaped at him.

"What are you doin', Steve?" he demanded.

"We can't hook 'em," said Burns; "if we could we couldn't stop 'em here on the grade until we all went head first into the fire, — an' t' be wrecked in a fire with that powder, — well! — "

Berg crumpled his soiled hands together and pushed them across his sweat-beaded face. "Number 4, — if they — if they — " He swallowed painfully and looked strainingly ahead.

Passenger Number 4 exploded torpedoes that the walker had placed on the rails, stopped, and then advanced. It picked up the

patrol and pushed carefully ahead, but its crew knew nothing of the cars of powder. If the runaways should hold to the rails and run through the fire the walls of the Long House would be spattered with something more scarlet than flame. Berg and Burns were feeling their way onward; up at Fuller's Mine the men were working wildly in an attempt to fill the tanks; over on the crag Mrs. Taylor was praying in a transport of anxiety; and down on the front of the mountain Park, bruised and bleeding, was creeping upward when the explosion came. He was hanging among the rocks and looking over his shoulder at Muley Mountain when suddenly he saw the whole conflagration leap, apparently, into the sky, while a crash of sound went abroad that shook the heavens and rocked the mountains, and he felt himself flattened in among the stones as from a great blow. Up in the stone house Mrs. Taylor heard the walls crack and leaped back with a scream as the window-glass rattled about

her. They looked at Muley Mountain, — *the fire had been blown out as one blows out a candle!* Stars of flame winked here and there on the mountain, and a gray vapor drifted above it. That was all.

When Berg and the passenger crew met at the scene of the explosion, they found that some seven hundred feet of the shed had disappeared and that some two hundred feet of rails and ties had gone with it. Bits of the cars were found at distant spots on the mountain. The fire which had hungrily begun the destruction of the Long House had been put out by fire with a breath behind it that blew itself and all around it into blackness.

After all hands had been over "on the big rug" at headquarters, Burke said to Chief Despatcher Manvell, "It seems that that chap, Mrs. Taylor's son, did the real business. What do you think?"

"Strikes me that way," said the chief.

"Seems like a good emergency man; guess

we'd better put him on with the linemen, and, when he's a little older, — if he pans out all right, — we can push him to the first place. He and his mother mustn't go up on that old rock-pile again."

"I'll look after them," assented Manvell.

Three years later Park Taylor became general foreman of linemen, and this story of his grit on the face of Forked Mountain is not the only tale they tell of him on the Western Central.

Perhaps his advancement was due quite as much to the fact that he wore a Diamond Key, presented him by Superintendent Burke at another notable function at the Lyon House, as to official favor, for, wearing that emblem of heroism upon his breast, he was always endeavoring to live up to the high standard it indicated. It is praise sufficient to say that by his conduct afterwards Park honored the Diamond Key quite as much as it honored him.

CHAPTER X

THE PRESIDENT'S SON

PRESIDENT SANBORN of the Western Central was opposed to nepotism. He believed in merit and experience in lieu of the influences of birth, wealth, and "pull." The sons of directors and rich stockholders found his doctrine uncomfortable, so did his boy Clark. When the latter came home to Denver from an Eastern school, and stated that he had made his mind up unreservedly to make railroading his life-work, the president said:

"Your choice pleases me. I suppose you have in mind to ultimately occupy a seat at or very near the top?"

"Certainly; nothing less," Clark replied.

"Then you will have to begin at the bottom

of the class and spell them all down, one by one. On the Central there is no other way."

The young man looked about him, at the mahogany furniture of his father's private office, at the expensive rug beneath his feet, at his sire's sturdy, well-groomed figure. "You spelled them all down, I infer," he remarked, a glint of banter in his gray eyes.

"Most of them," the president said, smiling. "Not on the Central, however. I was thirty years on the way, most of the time working on other roads, in nearly every department from section foreman up to this desk. How could I wisely pass on the work of others had I never done such work?"

Clark reflected a moment. "Where would you advise me to begin?" he asked.

"I would suggest that you go out on the line, out to Paley Fork, for instance, and become a member of a section gang. Work with those men long enough, at least, to learn exactly how a railroad track is kept in order.

Then you ought to go into the roundhouse and repair-shops out there, and find out in a practical way about the construction of cars and engines, then you had better fire an engine for awhile. By doing so you will learn to run a locomotive and what sort of obstacles trainmen have to contend with. After that, if you are not discharged for insubordination or incompetency, you can take up something else."

A slow flush of something akin to anger crept across the son's handsome face. About him in the big modern building lay many fine rooms, the treasurer's department, the offices of the land department, the chief engineer's quarters, the richly appointed suite for the directors, yet, he must go out and dig dirt under the hot sun, handle oily machinery in the shops, and, finally, pound coal and shovel it into the fire-box! Firing a locomotive, he knew, was fearful bodily toil. In truth, year by year the size and power of locomotives had been augmented until few men could be found

possessed of muscle and endurance sufficient to keep them in steam. To Clark it looked not only hard, but humiliating.

"Pater," he said after a moment, "you have been mighty good to me in the past, and I appreciate it, but, really, don't you think you are rubbing it into me now?"

"No. You may not understand it now, but you will if you ever become a railroad official."

"I suppose you are right; anything that is really big and of consequence has to be struggled for, I fancy."

"Exactly so, and in the struggle one also grows big and of consequence; otherwise one couldn't capture and hold down the big thing when one got to it."

Clark laughed. "All right," he said, "I think I understand why you are president of the Central. I'll wade in; I don't believe you will keep me tamping ties and shoveling coal longer than seems necessary."

The president's strong face softened ten-

derly. "No; it would please certain feelings of mine to make life altogether easy for you, but it won't do; you have got to meet the tough things and master them. I will give you a note to Roadmaster Logan. Go out with him; he will put you on somewhere. You will draw regular wages. No money will come to you from home; college days and college luxuries are over for you, understand. You will draw from one-fifty to two dollars per day. Earn it and live on it; that will enlighten you about certain things that may be valuable to you in the future. The matter rests with you to win or lose. I don't expect to see you show the white feather."

The tall boy's teeth clenched and the color in his cheeks deepened, but he shook his father's hand and said, "All right, dad," and went out.

The next morning Clark went over the Range to Paley Fork with Logan, and the following day was made a member of a section crew on

the Middle Division. To the college-bred youth it seemed a lowly position indeed. His hands lost their whiteness and, passing the stage of blisters, became calloused, the milky scarf-skin peeled from his face in the sun's glare and his flesh grew swarthy. But he found out how to keep a railroad track in order; there no man would ever be able to deceive him. At the end of five months he shifted his position to the work-train on the West End, and began education in fills and excavations, the removal of earth-slides and how wrecks were swiftly cleared from the track. During the winter he went out again and again with a battery of four engines and a rotary and had experience of war with the snow of the sky-grades. Early spring found him in the shops at Paley Fork, garbed in overalls and working among swinging cranes, snarling lathes and the crash of steam-hammers. November found him on a night-shift in the roundhouse, dumping engine-grates over

ash-pits, filling sand-tanks, and wiping steel and brass. By June of the following spring he was hostler, bringing out engines to the main track for departing trains and taking engines into the house from arriving trains.

Naturally the story of the "nerve" of the president's son went the length of the Central. Between father and son there was a curious reticence. Not once did President Sanborn urge the boy to come home to the luxuries of the big house on Capitol Hill. "Whenever you are tired of the fight, you will be welcome here," was the fashion in which he ended most of his letters to Clark, who was wont to rejoin with something like: "Your invitation sounds good, but I'm not at present trotting with the silk stockings; too busy." Once at the end of a note to his father he added a line which read: "P. S. You haven't noticed any white feathers yet, have you?" But he had the courage and decency to strike that out.

In August of the second year he informed

Master Mechanic Addicks that he would like a job of firing. The M. M. tried to dissuade him. "Let it alone, boy; pass it up. The work is back-breaking, racking, infernal," he said. "You are not going to follow firing or be an engineer. I know your father too well for that."

"The pater said fire and fire it will be. I'm not going to sprout any white feathers at this stage of the game," was the grim reply.

The M. M. looked at the young fellow admiringly. "The old block and the chip are of a piece, that's plain. But it looks like nonsense to me. I'll let you know about it soon," he said.

At that time telegrams and letters of an epoch-making character were passing between postal authorities and railroad officials, dated from Washington, D. C., Chicago, Denver, and Los Angeles. The thing in ferment was whether or not a certain volume of mail could be given quicker transit between Southern California points and the cities of the East by way of

the Western Central than by means of the longer route through the plains country to the southward. From Manzano, a point on a transcontinental line in Eastern Arizona, across the mountains northeastward to Denver, three hundred miles of mountain road as against five hundred of "sage-brush track," that was the proposition. Six hours from Manzano to Denver would nail the contract. Fifty miles an hour and mountains galore! It had a daunting look. All along the line the tone of comment was protestation. Still, when Sanborn and Superintendent Burke and Chief Despatcher Manvell had drawn the schedule for the flyers, every man on the Central felt his blood quicken and his pride expand. But one outcome was to be admitted, the line must win.

On the eighteenth of August everything was ready for the test. Out through the switches at Manzano at 7.24 A. M. the great 1300 burst with three heavily laden mail-cars behind her, bound for far-off Denver. Instantly the

trial was on, the test was set. The whole line seemed to strain taut with excitement. Train orders flashed to and fro on the wires, keeping the track clear for the racer, every man on the Central, metaphorically, held his watch on the flyer, mentally "pulling for her."

Up the long valley of the Big Bear Paw the 1300 thundered, whirled across Ball Bridge and chased the echoes up the winding canyon of the Little Bear Paw, and onward over the Saddle Bow Range and down into Peace Valley. There, at Three Plumes, engine 1010 was waiting, and being quickly hooked to the train, rushed onward, twenty-two minutes late. Through Peace Valley, whizzing through Bonnet and around the Great Horseshoe and up over the Muley Pass, roaring through twenty-eight miles of snow-sheds, the 1010 came.

Onward she flew, snapping the mail-cars around the curves and downward from the Pass, and still onward, tearing in through the switches at Paley Fork, but, alas, thirty-eight

minutes behind the schedule! Half the population of the division station was on the depot platform, among them Superintendent Burke and Chief Manvell. The engineer and fireman of the 1010 descended to the platform grimy and staggering with weariness. Though they had worked like fiends, sixteen minutes had been added to the time lost by the 1300 on the West End.

The 1010 was instantly cut loose and sent toward the house, and a big Baldwin engine, the 1206, backed in and was snapped fast to the mail-cars. Dick Munson, reputed to have no knowledge of fear, sat at the throttle; on the fuel-deck, with hat off and sleeves rolled to the shoulders, stood Dan Madden, one of the Central's crack firemen; on the fireman's seat, with his hand on the bell-rope, sat Clark Sanborn. The M. M. had said to him that morning:

"When you bring the 1206 out to-day you better stay on her and make the trip to Denver.

I want you to watch Dan Madden work. Maybe when you've seen what firing a passenger mogul is really like you'll be satisfied to pass up the job. Besides, Madden may need help."

Clark laughingly assented. "All right, Mr. Addicks," he said, "I think I'll enjoy the ride. I wouldn't object to getting a glimpse of my good gray dad, provided I don't have to go to Denver in a Pullman and wearing a 'biled shirt.'"

Addicks patted him on the shoulder and growled good-naturedly: "Don't worry, boy, you will have dust and grease enough on you this trip before you hit headquarters."

To Clark nothing particularly new was promised by the trip, save that a fight against time was to be waged through something more than a hundred miles, half of which was mountains. The gauge of the 1206 showed a steam pressure of nearly two hundred pounds to the square inch, and a blue-white plume jetted from her safety exhaust as the air coupling was made.

Panting for the race, she stood a beautiful monster, one hundred and eighty thousand pounds of tested steel, with a tender attached to her that held six thousand gallons of water and ten tons of coal. Manvell and Burke and Addicks drew quickly toward the gangway, the face of each man grave with anxiety. Munson saw their lips moving, but could not hear what they said for the hissing steam, but Clark heard and shouted across to him:

"They say, 'Give her the whip, go into Denver on schedule if possible, but look out that she don't get away from you on the east side of the Cradle Range.'"

Munson's gaunt face lit up with a smile; he touched the sand lever and opened the throttle. Like lightning the fiery gas straining in the engine's boiler shot through her throat into the cylinders and her great drivers spun on the rails. Back in the mail-cars Conductor Dirken and the clerks were all but thrown from their feet. For an instant it seemed that the draw-

heads might be jerked from their sockets, but the next moment the train was rushing out through the switches in a clamor as of many shattering things. Clark, looking back from the fireman's window, waved his cap to the crowd on the platform. Munson never turned his head; his face changed to something like gray iron.

There was a long stretch down a valley and around the base of Silver Mountain before encountering the Sandrill River and the Cradle Range. Here were some thirty miles of slightly falling track ere the towering barrier of the Range would interpose its bulk. Here and beyond the Range time must be made. Munson centred his attention on the cut-off and throttle, giving her a little shorter stroke and a little more steam with each thousand feet traversed until the exhausts blent into a solid roar. With the flight of four or five minutes they were cutting through the air at a sixty-mile pace, at the end of ten minutes the speed had increased to

seventy, at least. The three cars of mail seemed no more than steadying ballast for the hurling mass of steel at the front. Majestically she rolled on her springs, each driver beneath her a spinning vortex of shadowy things. By times her Crosby chime-whistles sent out a long-drawn, melodious blare, as if she were calling triumphantly to mountains and tempests and earth's grandest embodiments of power.

Down on the fuel-deck Madden swayed back and forth between the coal pile and the furnace door. Already sweat was trickling down the fireman's sinewy neck. From the window-seat Clark looked down upon the swaying figure. It was glorious to sit there at ease, hearing the wind scream in one's ears and seeing the distances taken in gulps by the flying engine, but to get down in front of the hot boiler-head and toil — well, no doubt old Addicks's appreciation of the task was correct. But how about one's duty? and how about the white feather? Clark set his teeth grimly, remembering what

the " old man " had said. It was well for the first run of the Central's Fast Mail that Purpose in the young fellow's breast remained as granite, for even while he was weighing the question a momentous thing happened. Madden struck the pick into a block of coal and there burst out a flash of flame and a crash of sound. The fireman bounced back against the boiler-head and fell in a quivering heap, something like a knife ripped across the back of Clark's neck, Munson sank forward with a cry, the glass of both cab-windows burst outward and the place was wreathed in blinding dust.

Somet[illegible] in the block of coal, doubtless a bit of giant powder, damp and unexploded when the coal was mined, had been pierced and ignited by the point of the iron pick. Such explosions have occurred before, sometimes in the furnace of an engine, bringing dire results. With the crash of the explosion Clark leaped down on the fuel-deck, both hands at the back of his neck, his face awry with pain. The next

moment he caught Madden in his arms and lifted him, terror in his eyes.

"Dan!" he cried, "Dan — are you hurt? How bad is it?"

The fireman groped about with his hands, gasping and struggling. Munson writhed backward, twisting his body until his face was toward them. A ring of pallor shone about the engineer's drawn lips and his eyes looked glassy and strange. He was feeling blindly for the throttle-lever. Madden reached a hand toward him, his fingers working, his features distorted in fierce protest.

"Don't shut her off, Dick," he shouted, "don't — don't reverse her! We will lose time! I'll be all right in a minute, — in — just a — minute!" He tried to get to his feet, but one of his legs doubled under him like a limb of putty. "My right leg — it's broke!" he gasped, looking fearfully into Clark's face as he clung about the young fellow's shoulders.

As they held together, swaying with the dip

and roll of the rushing engine, Clark spoke near the fireman's ear: "I'm hurt, too, Dan, but not bad; just a scratch, I think. I'll do the firing; I'll try my best to keep her hot. We will have to stop and get you into one of the mail-cars so you can lie down. It won't do for you to stay in here."

Munson was staring at them. Suddenly his eyes cleared. "What is it — what happened?" he shouted.

Clark swayed toward him, clenching Madden's body about the waist. "Explosion in the coal," he shouted in return. "Dan's got a broken leg. I'll fire her now."

Munson threw on the air, clanged the reverse over and twisted himself painfully from his seat. "Something knocked the breath and sense out of me," he said, "but I guess I'm all right." He scanned Clark's face hesitatingly. "Do you think you can keep her hot?" he asked.

"Certainly," said the big youth, angrily.

"If you can keep her open and she stays on the rails we will go in on schedule. If necessary, wedge the safety. We must win this fight." Something that had made his father president of the road was speaking in the boy.

"Good," said Munson. "For a minute I thought sure we was whipped." As with men in battle, each thought first of the outcome of the struggle. Munson took hold of Madden. "Let him lie down," he said to Clark. As they eased the fireman to a recumbent position his lips twitched.

"I could do it, Dick, I could do it if I could stand," he wailed, and again, "I could keep her in steam, Dick, I could do it if I could only stand up."

"We will make it or blow her up, Dan, don't worry," said Munson.

Five minutes later Madden was lying on a bed of empty mail-sacks in one of the cars, and the men were doing what they could for him.

" Pile the sacks on each side of him so he won't roll," said Munson. " We will get you to a doctor, Dan, as fast as the wheels can turn. Hold fast, you fellows in here, when we go down the east side, there's going to be doings. Come on, son."

Clark and the engineer rushed back to the 1206 and climbed into the cab. Munson, though his features looked pinched as with pain, flung himself upon his seat, threw the reverse back and pushed the throttle open. The 1206 belched out her steam in crashing snorts and set off like a race-horse. Clark flung his cap upon the fireman's seat, pulled off his shirt and threw it into a corner by the boiler-head. Stripped to the waist, he turned to the maul and shovel. Blood was running down among the white muscles of his back. He pulled the furnace door open and began spraying coal from the shovel upon the seething bed of fire within. Two hundred and seventy-five tubes of fifteen-foot length lay in the boiler before him, two thou-

sand square feet of surface to be heated. The big fire-box breathed upon by the fierce draught, roared hoarsely as it devoured the coal, each time the door swung open a scorching blast of heat burst out. Soon the president's son began to breathe with his lips parted, ere long his body was beaded with sweat, his hair became a wet mat and his skin streaked and grimy with dust. Half his strength went in a continuous effort to keep upon his feet. He began to realize what it meant to labor while standing upon a swaying, lurching surface, a floor that never for a moment ceased shifting; to feel himself burning with heat and his brain and nerves shaken into giddiness by the never-ceasing jar of the floor and the clangor and shock of things about him.

They went around the long, curving base of Silver Mountain in a cloud of rushing echoes. Notch by notch Munson was working the reverse toward the centre of the quadrant, notch by notch was opening the throttle, measuring

the cut-off to the last nick. The whole composition of the engine buzzed as she flew. Munson sat low, crumpled down upon himself like a straining jockey, his cap pulled solidly to his ears, his face drawn into hard, pallid lines under its streaks of oil and soot, his eyes, unnaturally bright, gazing ahead. By times he leaned back and glanced down at the figure swaying and toiling in the heat of the boiler-head, then stared ahead.

Down around Puma Point they swept, passed the Queen Cove mines like a flash and struck the shore of the Sandrill. On the sharp curves Clark sometimes lunged clear across the cab, and back in the rocking mail-cars men grasped whatever stable thing they could lay hold of to keep themselves upon their feet. A half-mile down the Sandrill the 1206 literally leaped upon the bridge and tore across in a torrent of noise, then they were rushing up the winding groove that led toward the summit, twenty miles away. At Bridge Station the conductor threw a book

from the tail of the train, in the book was a message which read:

"PRESIDENT SANBORN, Denver: — Madden's leg broken; your son is firing; gaining on the schedule.

DIRKEN."

When the president had read the telegram an anxious, tender expression softened his face. He felt a twinge of uneasiness from the thought that Dick Munson was at the throttle. To what extreme Munson might carry the speed on such an occasion as this was a disquieting surmise.

"He ought to have had a secondary engine to help him up the western side of the Range," thought the president. "If we get the contract that must be looked after. I'll wire Burke about it."

Far over on the western side of the Cradle Range much the same thing was being said by Dick Munson, save that the words were edged

with sulphur. Through several miles, at the beginning of the long climb, the 1206 swept along the iron trail at high speed, superb, scorning the backward push of the grades, then almost imperceptibly the glimmering whirl of the drivers slackened, her breathing grew louder and longer-drawn, her gait fell from sixty to fifty, from fifty to forty, from forty to thirty. Clark fought like a demon to hold her there, but gradually she slipped down to twenty-five. She got no lower than that. To and fro she wove her way toward the summit, swerving across a slope here, wheeling along the verge of an abyss there, drumming over dizzy trestles, plunging through stifling tunnels, always upward. Clark's face and body turned to a smear of sweat and oil and dust, across the nape of his neck the flesh lay open, down his back to his waist ran a dark embroidery of blood-soaked dirt. By times he shook the grate-lever to give her better draught, again he plunged the stirring-rod into the furnace,

but for the most part he simply pounded coal furiously and sprayed it through a red-white hole that belched blinding heat into his eyes.

Half-way up the Range Munson slipped down to the fuel-deck. The dial showed one-seventy to the square inch, he wanted to push the pressure to the two hundred mark. He clung at the side of the cab, looking at Clark for a moment. The engineer's gaunt face was drawn with suffering, his eyes glistened with pain and rage.

"Here's where we lose, here's where we get whipped!" he cried, hoarsely. "Why didn't the idiots give us a helper up the Range? The high-collared imbeciles!"

Clark steadied himself and from under a tangle of wet hair glared at him red-eyed and panting. "Shut up!" he shouted, furiously, "we're not whipped! When we make the summit let her fall to the plains, let her drop, don't hold her, I tell you! We are going to make connection with the Eastern Fast Mail at

Denver, we are going in on schedule! Get out of my way and let me work!"

Munson's long arm reached out and his grimy fingers closed like talons upon the young fellow's slippery shoulders. Their hot, straining faces were close together. "Don't order me, you young lobster! No matter whose son you are, don't you — " The engineer's jaw snapped shut and his face wrinkled in agony. He would have fallen, only that Clark gripped him about the body and held him up. "I'm hurt, son, I'm hurt inside," muttered Munson. "Help me up to the seat. I think I can handle the levers till we get in."

A flash of tenderness swept across Clark's distorted face. "Lie down here somewhere, Dick," he said. "Put the cushions on the floor. Let her run, I'll look at the levers now and then."

"No; help me up to the seat. Dead or alive, I'll ride her till she goes under the last semaphore," said Munson. He crawled up with

Clark's aid and straightened his long legs to the footboard. As he did so he noticed Clark's bloody back. "Why, son, what is it? what hurt you?" he asked with strong concern.

"From the explosion — something hit me — I don't feel it, not now," was the shouted reply as the young fellow with fresh fury buckled to his task.

"Pour a bucket of water over you," came Munson's voice from above him. Clark gave the words no heed until they were within a mile or two of the summit. As the altitude increased the noise of the engine seemed to him to increase until sounds rattled and boomed on his ear-drums like musketry, bands of iron seemed drawing together about his chest and head. Struggling for breath, he turned a tank-cock and let a pail fill with water, then dashed the cold fluid in a deluge over his head and body; then he again fell to work.

As they crossed the summit and the big drivers began to quicken their revolutions,

Clark hung for a few moments out the cab window, gasping and dizzy. Away to the eastward and far below them spread an immeasurable plain. Mottled with green and gray and dotted with herds of cattle, minute with distance as insect larvæ, the mighty apron of earth swept eastward, meeting on the horizon a dim wall of slate-colored clouds. Overhead the sky was watery green, the August sun glared hotly, the air seemed motionless. Fifty-five miles still to Denver!

They went down through twenty miles at breakneck speed. Munson shut off steam, but refused to use the brakes, and engine and train flooded toward the plain like rushing water. Back and forth across slopes, around beetling crags of stone, across chasms and down canyons, they roared. There were reverse-curves that hurled Clark from one side of the cab to the other, coal rolled out from the tender on to the fuel-deck and danced under his feet, the quadrant and reversing lever strained and

wrestled together in a way that threatened to tear up the flooring. Munson, shaken and pounded by the jerk and roll of the engine, crumpled forward into a kind of knot, his hand on the throttle, his features seamed and drawn, his eyes aglow with defiance and pain. Clark, spent by labor at the high altitude, staggered and clung to whatever was handy, but kept on feeding the furnace. Slowly the needle on the dial trembled toward the two hundred mark, a steady jet of steam sang from the safety on top of the boiler. When they would strike the plain, then he wanted her to be fairly bursting with power.

Down through Quartz Cone and East Gulch they hurled, and still onward, rushing through Barn Butte, near the foot of the Range in shattering fury. From every telegraph office that they passed the time was flashed to Paley Fork and Denver. They still were behind the schedule but were gaining. Now and then Munson threw on the air, wringing sparks from the

wheels in spirting showers, for at points the danger of leaving the track was too imminent to be ignored.

As they flew along the groove toward the plain, Clark saw nothing of clouds or sun or sky, being intent upon the steam-gauge and the fire-box and the baffling problem of keeping upon his feet. But Munson, when they were two-thirds way down the Range, became aware that in the east there was rising a mountain of vapor, green, craggy, portentous, immense. He saw that the towering crag was [illegible] by a mighty wave of vapor, stretching north and south beyond the capacity of the human eye to compass it. He had never before seen in that latitude the heavens written with so large a prophecy of havoc. Though impressed with the vision and dismayed by the thought that the promised tornado might impede or entirely block the way to Denver, he conceived of nothing very clearly. Numbed and gripped by inward agony, he felt at times his senses lapsing.

One impression, however, remained queerly vivid, pricking into his brain like a thorn of fire. When they would enter the plain he must nurse the cut-off and throttle for still greater speed and outrun the approaching tempest.

They swung down from the foot-hills on to the level at a killing pace, with each man on the train clinging to something to keep himself upright, all save poor Madden, who, buttressed solidly by heavy bags of mail, ground his teeth in pain one moment and laughed the next.

"Dick's getting her there!" he would cry. "Feel him pound her! Feel him pound her! And that boy, that boy, sure he's getting the hash into her! We are going some, Dirken, sure we're only hitting the high places. Trust old Dick, he'll jam her nose against the Denver bunting-post before the President's watch ticks the end of the schedule!"

They went down into something like a vacuum, a hot, thin, motionless atmosphere, peculiarly suffocating and unrespirable, a vast

space from which the normal gases had in great part lifted and toward which a storm of gases was rushing from the east. Swaying to and fro on the fuel-deck Clark felt his breath catch at times and a sense of falling sweep over him. In such moments he dashed water over himself and buckled again to the fight. They might have been seven or eight miles northeast of Barn Butte when he noticed that Munson had swayed sidewise and was lying with his face among the levers. With a thrill of horror that sharpened all his faculties, the young fellow sprang up to the engineer's seat. He caught Munson about the shoulders, shouting wildly in his face. Munson's eyes were closed, but his lips moved. Clark put his ear close to the engineer's lips.

"I'm all in, son, — everything is black — let her go wide — pound the coal under her — outrun the cyclone or we are whipped," were the broken sentences he heard.

Clark laid the man back on the cushion, then

he saw rolling from the east the indescribable billow, the tumbling mountain of clouds at its centre, a green sky overhead and a world beneath that seemed coated with rust. Here was opposition indeed, if not actual destruction! All the elements of his physical being seemed drunk with exhaustion, but at sight of this incalculable menace his whole nature seemed suddenly on fire; in him burst an opposing tempest, a storm of mingled rage and protest and terror and determination. What! had men of the Central fought moment by moment over three divisions, battled through nearly three hundred miles to conquer this schedule, and now, within sight of the goal, were they to be blocked by the senseless elements? He saw the world-wide bosom of the storm threaded with lightning, arteries that ran fire instead of blood, but he heard no thunder save the roar of the hurling machine that bore him.

As he looked he saw, as something done by the strength and swiftness of the supernatural,

the wings of the tempest break away on either side of the mountain of clouds, and the mountain itself whirl like a gigantic cylinder, its top spreading wide against the sky and spinning dizzily. The monster looked to be fifteen or twenty miles distant, but sweeping slightly to the northwest. After it on either hand the wings of the storm rushed, from time to time huge masses of vapor being sucked into the flying cylinder. The 1206 was racing northeastward. It looked that the cyclone might cross the track within five or eight miles of the city. If it crossed ahead of the train there might be no track left at the point of impact, or, at least, ties might be dislodged and rails twisted, bringing wreck; if the train were caught in the heart of the tempest, the mail-cars, at least, might be thrown from the track, then what of the contract and how about poor Madden and Munson? A force that could fling houses about as a giant might throw paper boxes, mad gases plowing ditches through solid

ground and pulling trees up by the roots with the ease of a man pulling up grass-blades — should a human creature try conclusions with such forces?

A glimmer of all this, vision and question and answer, blazed through the brain of the dripping young fellow who, swaying half-across Munson's body, looked up at the storm. Then he leaped back on the fuel-deck and pulled out a knife and cut the bell-cord. Dirken should not stop him! He glanced at the quadrant, the reverse was biting near the centre; he looked at the throttle, it was set to the last nick; the needle of the gauge pointed to one-ninety-two. They must be making a mile a minute, maybe more, he did not know. He flung the furnace door open and stirred the raging bed of fire with the rod, pounded blocks of coal into nut-sizes and sprayed the flaming mass. He glanced towards the monster converging upon them from the eastward. He must get more speed, he must get more speed! Suddenly the

safety-valve hissed loudly. He looked at Munson, who rolled on the cushion, limp and pallid as a dead man, then he caught a chisel and hammer from the box and clambered over the man's body and out upon the board. Clinging for his life, he drove the piece of iron into the safety-valve and scrambled back into the cab.

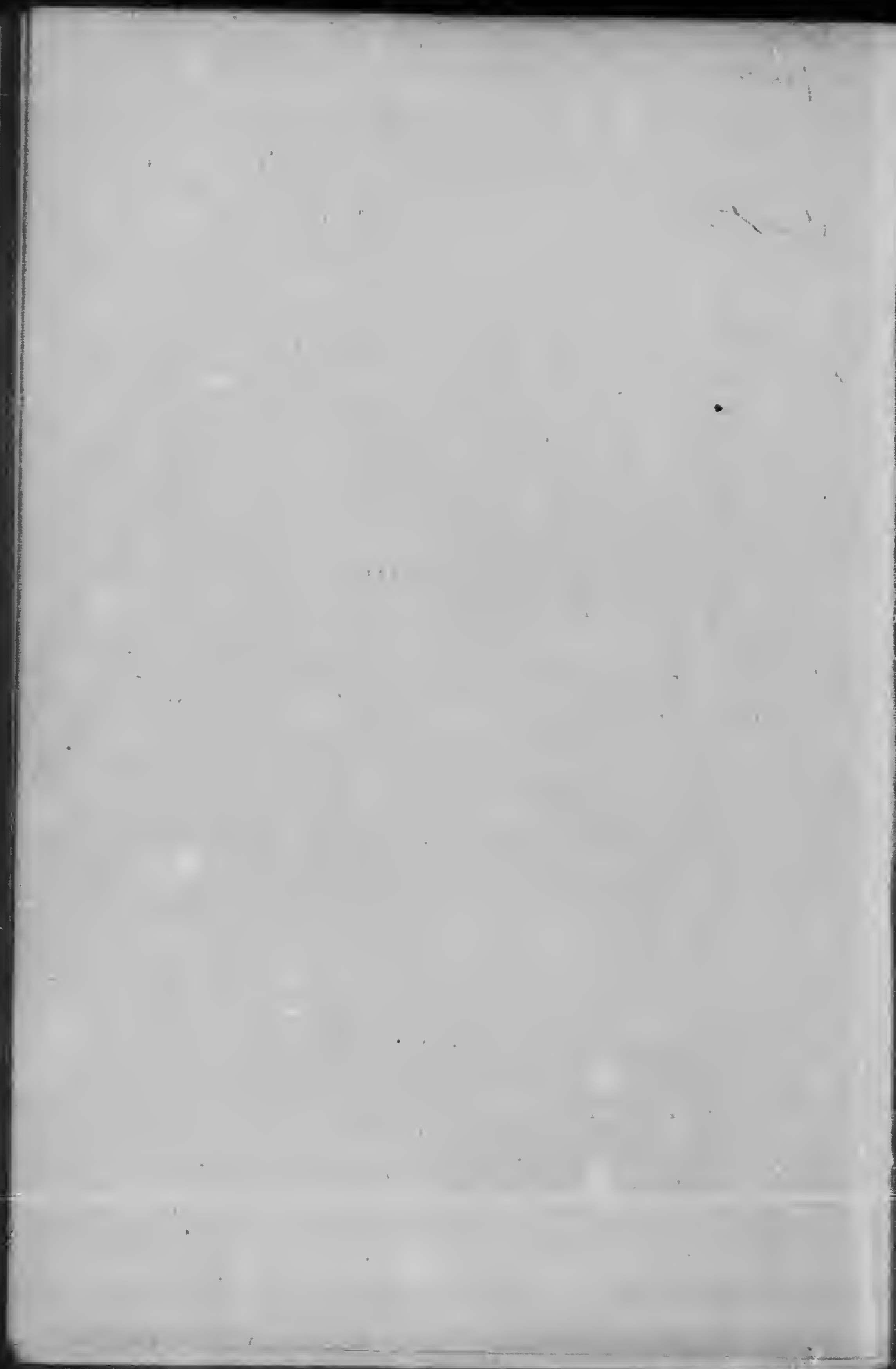
If the boiler gave way, let her, he would risk it! Storm — schedule — contract — and wounded men in need of doctors! Was he going to let her power blow itself out through her nose? Not he, not Clark Sanborn, who had been commanded not to sprout white feathers!

He feverishly battered more blocks of coal into fine fragments, then ripped the big oil-can from the supply box and threw it upon the heap and drove the pick through the can. As the oil gushed over the coal he shoveled the mass into the roaring furnace, turning his eyes by times toward the fearful thing eastward. The gauge needle trembled across the two hun-

dred mark and crept on up to two hundred and five. The 1206 was literally flying along the steel, she sped in a cloud of thunder, seemingly every atom of her aroar with vibrations.

Back on the mail-cars there were three hot boxes, each one flaming, but the chap on the fuel-deck did not look back; he was racing a cyclone, trying to outrun destruction, fighting to get a dying engineer to a physician, and to save the reputation of the Central. He jerked the long-necked oiler from its rack and flung it down on the coal and cut the can half in two with a blow of the shovel's edge, he ransacked the seat-boxes of their waste and fed the inflammable stuff to the furnace, he nursed and stirred and coaxed the last ounce of radiation possible from the blinding mass in the fire-box, himself half-blind with salt sweat and giddy with heat. One thing, the track was clear for the Fast Mail; here and there all along the way they had flashed by trains, standing securely on side-tracks; but the mountain of

HE WAS RACING A CYCLONE, TRYING TO OUTRUN DESTRUCTION. — *Page 322.*



whirling gas — there was no siding for that, it had to be outstripped and beaten.

Swiftly the forces approached each other, the vast pillar of cloud that extended from earth to heaven and the superb man-made thing speeding across the plain. Under the tread of the tempest and its bursting thunder the world jarred and shook, the whole atmosphere of the region buzzed as from the swarming of a billion invisible bees, the air was pricked with fragments of buildings, with fences, shade-trees, dust and the products of the fields. The hue of all things was a russet-green. The 1206 seemed straining every fibre, the gauge-needle crept to two hundred and eight; surely she was making ninety miles an hour, maybe a hundred, no man would ever know. Clark fed her, fed her, fed her, working like a demon. They shot past stations that he did not see. Words leaped along the wire to President Sanborn and back to Paley Fork to Manvell and Burke:

"Fast Mail in danger of cyclone; trying to outrun the storm; making fearful speed."

The whole Central in fancy was trembling and watching. Burke was pacing the floor of the despatchers' office in Paley Fork, Sanborn was down in the great train-shed in Denver, walking up and down the track, for once beside himself. But Clark did not know; he was pouring his life into an effort to melt the heart of the 1206 and to get her last drop of power into the wheels. Black, bedraggled, open-mouthed, he fought. In moments he seemed to lose his sense of hearing, the thunder of the engine dwindling until it seemed as if he were listening only to a thin stream of water gurgling down a pipe, then it all came back clamoring in awful dissonance.

Suddenly he was aware that a reeling mountain was towering above him, jets of icy air hissed against his reeking body, darting things stung him, there was so wild a roar that the noise of the 1206 sang through it like the hum

of a bowstring. The next moment he was rushing through greenish darkness and his breath seemed plucked clean out of his body, and the next he was in brownish twilight. Grasping the hand-grips he swung out the gangway and looked back. He saw box cars being hurled from a side-track and a section house crashing out upon the prairie. The whirling heart of the tempest had crossed the track just behind the train, they had grazed the monster by a hair!

They were now in the north wing of the storm; rain gushed over them and a fierce wind blew, but they were in straight-flowing currents, beyond the crushing power of the elemental vortex. The 1206 was tearing through the wind and rain with her gauge at two hundred and ten. Clark looked at his watch. His hands shook so that he could hardly hold the timepiece. He did not know precisely where they were, but fancied that they were now not more than eight or ten minutes behind the

schedule. He looked at Munson, then swung over and pressed a hand above the man's heart; pulse and breath were still alive in the engineer's bosom; that was all Clark could tell. He pushed the wet hair back from his own eyes and looked at the steam-gauge. Should he take the wedge out of the safety? Not yet, not yet! He looked at the water-gauge, it registered a supply but little above the danger-point. He set the injectors working, but there seemed little response; the supply in the tank was falling low. But surely five or seven minutes at this tremendous pace would take them into the city.

There was peril at many points; the hot journals on the rear cars, the low water, the perilous pressure of steam in the boiler, the numerous switches through which they were running as they neared the city. But the tower-men must keep the track clear, that was not Clark's business, and so long as the 1206 had an open throttle and was greedily using

steam, surely her boiler would hold. Half-thoughts, intuitions, sparks and filmings of reason, glimpsed across his consciousness as he worked, while the 1206 tore onward through lightning and wind and rain, a gigantic and hurling bolt of force.

Trackmen and citizens and the men in the towers never before saw a train go by as did that one. Across frogs and through switches she battered in thunder and at a pace that seemed appalling. Though it was raining, everywhere throughout the suburbs people were watching for the Central's first Fast Mail. They saw a train flying, the smoke from her engine's stack streaming straight back, and flames flaring from hot boxes. In the edge of the city there were people who saw a blackened, half-naked young fellow out on the boiler, knocking a wedge from the safety-valve, then, not eight hundred feet from the train-shed, the great drivers of the 1206 were reversed, the air went on and the brakes bit the wheels into

wreaths of red. Pitching and straining as if its fabric might burst in pieces, the train skated into the train-shed. It looked for the moment to be on fire from end to end. Shuddering and loudly creaking, the train came to a standstill, the pilot of the 1206 crushed against the safety-post.

Black as a negro and streaked with blood, a young fellow with a shirt thrown around his shoulders staggered down from the gangway. People were swarming about him. He heard a voice yell:

"Only two minutes behind the schedule!" He heard another hoarser voice shouting, "Fall to! Transfer the mails! Get busy, men!" Then a strong-faced, gray-haired man pushed toward him, wonder and alarm and questionings in his eyes.

"My poor boy!" the young fellow heard the man say huskily. He felt the man's arms about his body, but things were not very clear to the young fellow; the place seemed to swim

around and be paved with gaping human faces.

"Don't mind me, pater," the young fellow heard himself saying. "Pull the fire from the engine, or get water into her, quick! Dick's up on the seat there — unconscious through the last thirty miles! Get — a — doctor!" Then he heard voices all about him, excited, strident, but these lapsed and dwindled into whispers, then he was listening to a thin stream of water gurgling down a pipe, then it was dark.

A week later Clark sat by the president's desk. The president smiled. "We've got the contract for the mail at six hours and thirty minutes," he said. "With auxiliary engines properly placed I think we can handle it all right."

"I suppose I'd best take Dan Madden's place for a while," said Clark dryly, the corners of his mouth twitching.

"Young man, you will stay here at head-

quarters; I've got other things for you to do," said the president.

"But I was to fire awhile, you know, pater!"

"Drop it! As a fireman you are a graduate. Bring those time-cards over here; we will figure out the new schedule."

CHAPTER XI

DIPPY HAMILTON'S MAGIC

TO what extent Dippy Hamilton's application of the principle of "dynamic retention" affected the stability of Ball Bridge when the Big Bear Paw "went loco" will probably never be known. Attempts were made to estimate the exerted forces in tons and amperes, but, at best, the calculations eventuated in something very like speculation. Even Pierce Fuller, the chief engineer, worked out an estimate, but acknowledged that his totals were approximate only. After that, where was the use of the rest of us figuring at the problem?

Dewey Hamilton — the source of his *sobriquet* ought to become obvious, with the progress of this narrative — was nearly six feet

in height, though his years were but nineteen. His slim figure evinced a slight tendency to stoop at the shoulders, and his big head seemed always pushing forward as if to aid his keen hazel eyes in their search after hidden things. Doctor Brandette, the surgeon for the West End, having been spoken to by Hoxie, a roundhouse foreman, relative to a rather astonishing thing that Dippy did when an accident occurred in the Manzano shops, said, interrogatively: "The boy was excited, of course?"

"Yes, I reckon he was," Hoxie replied. "At least the situation was exciting. The boy didn't show it much, though; only his face seemed to sort of flash and his eyes burned golden red."

The doctor touched his own forehead significantly. "Mind," he remarked, oracularly,— "cerebral force — genius, some people call it, — in point of fact, extra high vibration."

Hoxie looked somewhat mystified. "The chap has his cocoa full of ideas about inven-

tions and new ways of doing things, anyhow," he went on. "Fonda says that sometimes the boy works like fury; then, again, he dreams and don't seem to know what he's doing. He likes him all right, but is sort of afraid to have him in the shops; he says he's afraid the young fellow may do damage or cause the death of somebody in one of his fits of forgetfulness. He says that, smart as the young chap is, he thinks he'll have to fire him."

"Seems a pity!" said the surgeon. "Where does the boy live? Who is he, anyway?"

"Set down, Doc., and have a stogie; here's one. I've got to order out an engine; be with you in a minute."

Doctor Brandette, with his instrument case in hand, had been standing upon the door-sill of Hoxie's little office, in the corner of the roundhouse. The strong Arizona sunshine beat against him uncomfortably warm. He turned back and sat down. From within the round-

house came sounds of engines breathing, of wipers whistling, of grates being shaken over ash-pits, and the dull thumping of wrenches on bolt-nuts; from the big repair shop, a hundred feet away, came a jarring rumble of sounds,— drills growling as they bit into iron, the tittering snarl of planers, the mumble of line-shafting, the occasional smashing blows of steam-hammers, and the crackling beat of electric riveters working on boilers and fire-boxes. Outside, white, sweet, and dry, the light lay over Manzano's scattered dwellings, mountains rose brown and solemn against a sky that was as a dome of blue vitriol, engine bells clanged in the yards, and now and again the crystalline air was ruptured by the clumping crash of meeting drawheads. The region seemed a fitting place for monks, vineyards, and convent bells, but here the Western Central, winding through canyons and over mountain ranges across Colorado and down into Arizona, gave its animate and inanimate freight into the

keeping of a great transcontinental line, taking in return humanity and merchandise for Denver and points north and east. Hence, the solemn valley complained to the solemn mountains in divers notes of commercial dissonance, and things were not as of old.

"Well," said Hoxie, reëntering the office, "the fellow is an Eastern chap, I'm told; came here with his father, a year or two ago; mother dead, father had bad lungs, — had been a preacher, I think. The man and boy lived in a tent over on the base of Sun Mountain, the first summer, then moved into a shack out at the edge of town. Last spring the old man croaked. They never had a doctor; too poor, I reckon, or mebby put their faith in the climate and got left. Anyhow, the man died and the boy got a job in the shops and has been workin' there since. He still lives in the shack; that is, he has a bunk there. The place is principally filled up with a work-bench and electrical fixtures of one kind or another. He

gets his meals over at Jack Morton's, near by. Morton says the kid has ideas, and will sure turn out an inventor, one of these days. They seem to like him, especially the daughter Violet. She — "

Sharp shouts of terror and a grinding crash broke from the repair shop, followed by a loud tangle of words and cries. Hoxie caught his speech between his teeth; Doctor Brandette reached for his instrument case and got to his feet, listening. The next moment they were out the door and running along the tracks that led from the roundhouse to the repair shops. They burst in through the great door and looked about. Men were shouting and running to and fro. A workman hung pinioned against the brick wall on the north side of the great room with an iron planer tipped over against him. Almost upon the man, and crushed into the planer, the body of a locomotive hung in chains and grapples from the steel mast of a moving-crane. The guide-cable of the crane

had parted, and the ponderous engine, suspended in the air a few feet above the floor, had swung around toward the north wall, crushing and overturning everything in its path. The pinioned man, Jack Morton, working at the planer with his back to the wall, had been caught in the crush. Only his feet were visible to Hoxie and the surgeon as they ran forward. Doubtless he was dead. Foreman Fonda was ripping out orders that sounded like popping whip-lashes, men in smutted overalls were tugging at the pendent engine, and others were trying to get at Morton; two with trembling hands were trying to fit a jackscrew between the wall and the frame of the overturned planer, with the object of driving the planer and engine outward that the crushed man might be released. The grimy faces of the men glistened with sweat and were spotted with pallor, and there was a curious undertone of quick, shallow breathing. Then of one thing the surgeon and Hoxie were particularly aware:

a tall young fellow thrust a crowbar upward behind the frame of the overturned planer, where the frame projected slightly beyond the boiler-head of the engine. Securing a clutch on the wall with the point of the bar, he planted his feet against the wall three or four feet above the floor, and began to straighten his body outward.

"Pull!" he hissed, through his teeth. "Pull, every mother's son of you!"

His slender body stiffened as with a sudden shock of power, his face, bent backward, the hair falling away from the broad forehead, turned purple and seemed to film and shimmer, and his hazel eyes glistened red. A half-dozen men, clutching the locomotive at different points, heaved outward with might and main, the boy's body quivered and cracked, his eyes enlarged, and his nostrils grew white, and the mass of iron moved slowly outward until his body stood stiff and straight from the wall. Then Jack Morton, released, but like a rag,

dropped to the floor and was dragged out into the open.

The youth stood upright; the crowbar was bent six inches out of line, and he could not let go of it. Fonda pulled the boy's fingers loose from the bar, and the young fellow staggered and pressed his hands over his ears and stared as if he heard strange noises. Morton, accompanied by the surgeon and several men, was borne away on a stretcher.

That evening Dippy Hamilton sat by Jack Morton's bed. The boy's face looked pinched and white, and his fine eyes were dulled with mental anguish. Morton's eyes were closed, his great lungs labored heavily, and his big right hand lay crumpled upon the white counterpane. Dippy slipped his slim fingers over the man's hand caressingly.

"The doctor said — he said you would live, didn't he, Jack?"

Morton's gray eyes opened and focused on

the young fellow's face. "Yes,—mebby," he whispered, huskily.

The youth stirred in his chair with a motion that was a kind of writhing, and the pallor of his flesh deepened. "I am to blame, Jack," he said; "if you die, then—I—killed—you."

Morton's eyes widened, and in their gray depths there was a sort of terror. "You? Boy, what are you talking about?" he asked.

"I was up on the boiler of the engine, signaling to the hoister, you know," said Dippy. "Well, I was standing up on the boiler with my face near the lower block of the fall and tackle. As the engine was being swung toward the skids an idea flashed through my mind, an idea of a great invention. It seemed to clutch and wring my brain, and I gave the wrong signal. Yes, I gave the wrong signal. I had in my hand a small piece of bar iron that I had picked up, intending to make a magnet of it when I went home. Seeing that the engine

was swinging the wrong way, and being confused by the strange scheme that had entered my head, I stuck the piece of iron between the left guide-cable and the pulley in the block in order to increase the friction and help check the draw of the cable. The piece of iron wedged the sheave so suddenly that the cable snapped, and the engine swung round to the right and crushed the planer and you against the wall. It's all my fault, — because crazy notions come into my brain sometimes, and I forget what I am doing."

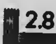
The big machinist looked down at his right hand, lying upon the counterpane; his other hand and arm were in a plaster cast, three of his ribs were broken, and he had suffered internal injuries. After a time he looked up at Dippy.

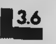
"Have you told Fonda?" he asked, slowly.

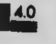
"Yes. He has discharged me. I — I — ought to be put in the penitentiary," said the

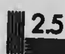
MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

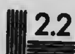
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

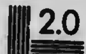


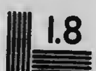


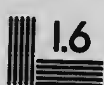












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youth, twisting his hands together in an agony of self-reproach.

Morton turned his eyes away, and looked for a time at a lighted lamp on a stand near the foot of the bed. At length he turned his eyes back to the boy. "Tommy and Susie and Violet, — they've got no mother, you know."

"Yes," faltered Dippy, with dry lips, "I've thought of that"

"If I die it'll be bad, — pretty hard for them —"

"I know. I'll give every cent I can earn to them. I —"

Dippy stopped, distraught, unable to speak, his lower lip twitching.

Morton looked at the counterpane, for a time, with unseeing eyes, his chest slowly heaving. "What sort of a thing was it? — what kind of an idea struck you when you — when you forgot and — and made the mistake?" he asked.

The youth "pulled himself together." "It

occurred to me — I seemed to see the engine-drivers magnetized on up grades, clutching the rails with twice their usual power, and so pulling much heavier trains and doing away entirely with the use of sand. It seemed to me a great idea."

Morton lifted his eyes to the young fellow's face. Despite his pain and the fearful injury the boy's forgetfulness had brought upon him, admiration shone in his gaze.

"I don't wonder that you forgot, — that you blundered," he said. "If you could apply the idea, — make it work, — it would certain put you to the front every way." He pushed his free hand toward Dippy, and the young fellow grasped and bowed his face upon it. "You didn't mean to do the damage," Morton went on; "it was an accident; whatever happens, I know you'll do right." Tears from Dippy's cheeks ran into the hollow of the man's calloused hand.

Later, when Dippy came out of the bedroom

into the living-room of the Morton cottage, Susie, seven or eight years of age, and Tommy, a curly-headed tot of three summers, were asleep in a rocking-chair. The little girl had been rocking the boy as a mother might rock a baby, and slumber had fallen upon them together. Violet, a brown-haired girl of seventeen, with a serious, tender face, and eyes that Dippy had always thought most beautiful, was preparing to put the children to bed. Dippy looked at them, deeply touched. Violet had been coming and going, throughout the evening, busy with the housework and waiting upon her father. She glanced at Dippy's troubled face. When this tall youth looked at her with his clear eyes, her own had always fallen; between them lay a great tenderness, a sweet regard, of which both were conscious, but of which no word had ever been spoken. Now, what if Morton should die!

Dippy came in front of her, put his hands

"I'LL TRY WITH ALL MY MIGHT TO MAKE IT RIGHT,"
SAID DIPPY, HUSKILY. — *Page 345.*

upon her shoulders, and looked down at her averted face. He was trembling and white.

"Violet, did you hear what I said, — what I told your father?" he asked.

She remained looking down, her body utterly still.

"Yes, I heard." Her voice was dry and scarcely audible.

"I'll do my best, — I'll try with all my might to make it right," said Dippy, huskily.

She lifted her eyes and looked into his longer than at any other time since she had known him. Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. "You have no work, now; they've discharged you?" she said.

"Yes."

"Then I'll get Uncle Dave to give you a position; I think he will, if I ask him."

Dippy felt something rise into his throat, something sweet but choking. "And you'd do this? — you'd help me after what I have done?" He half-whispered the words.

"You didn't mean it; it was an — an accident," she said, still looking at him pityingly.

Dippy's fingers tightened on her shoulders, then he turned abruptly and went out, unable to speak. The kindness of these people smote him like a mighty, melting breath, a something that fell upon him warm and delicious, yet filled him with abject humility.

Before breakfast, the next morning, Violet hurried down the hillside and across the town to the home of David Prang, the "tank man." Prang had charge of all the pumps and water-tanks of the Western Central. He was a big, gaunt man, rough and strong as a lion; but Violet was his dead sister's child, and her appeal for Dippy won its way.

"All right, my kitten, I'll put him in charge of the pump and tank at Ball Bridge," he at last said. "It will be solitary confinement, — next thing to being in the penitentiary. He ought to be confined and not allowed to run at large, anyhow." He ended with a chuckle,

but, despite his bantering irony, Violet kissed him gleefully.

So Dippy Hamilton went up to the Ball Bridge tank, and became a "solitary." He was not wholly unhappy, for he took with him his tools, uncompleted inventions, and electrical apparatus. He found it a strange, lonely place; but several things up there were exactly as he might have wished. Ball Bridge was a long iron structure spanning the Big Bear Paw, in the outlying spurs of the Saddle Bow Range, forty miles northeast of Manzano. The bridge took its name from Ball Mountain, a round-topped height, around the base of which wound the Big Bear Paw. The water-tank and pump-house stood by the track a half-mile eastward from the bridge, where a creek emptied into the river; back of the house, which contained the pump and the engine, stood a small building, in which Dippy ate and slept. This was of a plan adequate for the housing of a small family,— a main room, two bedrooms, and a kitchen.

Within a week Dippy had improvised a workbench in the main room, and ere long the place was cluttered with batteries, electric coils, magnets, and wheeled things of divers sorts, casting out green sparks or silently seizing and holding fast to other things with invisible potency. Dippy was working on his great idea of traction magnetism. Before leaving Manzano, at Jack Morton's request, he had opened his mind to Doctor Brandette. The doctor approved, and, in proof of his interest, sent a small dynamo up to the Ball Bridge tank for Dippy's use. This the youth attached to the pump engine, finding the dynamo invaluable in the creation of electric currents for the working of his apparatus. His salary as tank attendant was not large; but, at the end of the first month, he sent half of his wages down to Jack Morton. Violet returned the money to him, with expressions of gratitude from herself and father, adding that her father was recovering and that their immediate needs were being met

by weekly payments received from a workmen's order to which he belonged. Jack Morton enclosed a scrawled line in the letter, which read: "Don't fret, kid, but keep a-workin' on the idee." This line was as music to Dippy.

Through two months the young "solitary" worked in the mountain silence. The Big Bear Paw, unflushed by the Saddle Bow peaks and depleted by the summer heat, dwindled to the dimensions of a halting creek, the rivulet at the mouth of which the tank stood became a tiny thread, but the big well at its marge remained faithful and Dippy kept the tank brimming. Occasionally, David Prang dropped off at the tank from a passing train and looked things over, smiling forbearingly at Dippy's contrivances; now and again, a section foreman and his crew went by or worked for a time near at hand; but, in the main, Dippy had only the brown silence and a pair of eagles that nested on Ball Mountain for company. There was one thing that would have furnished him

a deal of companionship, had he been a Morse expert. That was a rusty telegraph instrument, resting upon a shelf in one corner of his little house. He knew the Morse alphabet indifferently; he had learned it back East when he was younger; but, in order that he might "read" a message, it necessarily had to be sent to him very slowly indeed. The zipping dashes and dots that ordinarily animated the wire were totally unintelligible to him. He often listened to messages, straining to comprehend the whizzing pulsations, but, for the most part, in vain. Sometimes, at night, when the line was unoccupied, some lonely operator, almost as unlearned in Morse as himself, would "practise" with him, and so he gained a slight knowledge of the art.

At the Ball Bridge tank there was an ancient hand-car, left at the place for the attendant's use in the event of an emergency. To Dippy's mind this was a happy providence; upon the truck of this hand-car he made his first experi-

ment in wheel-adhesion. Bending a soft bar of iron into a modified horseshoe form, winding it heavily with insulated wire, and fitting the ends of the curved bar with copper brushes, he rigged the affair between two of the wheels of the hand-car, with the brushes resting against the wheels close to the point of their contact with the rails. Throwing a current from the dynamo into the coil, he found that the bar and the periphery of the wheels became highly magnetized, the wheels clinging to the rails with such power that he could scarcely lift them away. Pushing the car along the rails, he found that the resistance, by reason of the wheels being magnetized, was but slightly increased, while the power of adhesion in the wheels was greatly augmented. Surely, he thought, if a locomotive's drivers were treated thus, the engine would need no sand and would be able to haul twice as many cars. Having no dynamometer, he could not calculate the increase of power, but it seemed very great.

The youth began to dream of many things. Why not use magnets for brakes on the wheels of trains, throwing a current into the brake-shoes from a dynamo on the engine, and releasing the magnetic clutch on the wheels by the engineer's merely moving a switch? Clearly, he thought, an engine would pull more cars with its drivers magnetized; but magnetic brakes, — how would he get at them? He would energize a couple of rails of the track near the tank, and watch the effect upon passing trains. Curiously, that thought was the salvation of Ball Bridge.

It was late in September when Dippy reached this point in his experiments; ten days later he had completed his arrangement to magnetize the rails. Wishing that the matter might remain a secret, he did most of the work at night. Selecting a right and a left rail in the track, he loosened the fish-plates, slipped sheets of hard rubber beneath them, and screwed them down again. He then tamped rubber into the joints

between the rails, thus separating and insulating a rail from its fellows on either side of the track. He then prepared a bar of soft iron, as in the experiment with the hand-car, except that the curved bar was larger and more heavily wound with insulated wire. Digging a hole some two feet deep between the ties, he placed the curved bar beneath the track and soldered an end of the bar solidly to the under side of each of the insulated rails, carrying connecting wires from the bar-coil to the dynamo, part of the way beneath the rocks and soil. When all was nicely tamped down and smoothed over, only minute inspection would have disclosed the extraordinary conditions.

Dippy hesitated through two days before he could bring himself to test the contrivance; but on the third morning, hearing the section foreman and his crew pumping their car along the track, he threw the current from the dynamo into the coil and rails. Covertly watching for results, he saw the hand-car strike the mag-

netized rails and stop so suddenly that the men were pitched from the car. Instantly he touched a lever, throwing the track-magnet out of the dynamo circuit. The section men looked about for the obstruction, and, seeing absolutely nothing, gazed at each other in amazement. Finally they mounted the car and pumped ahead, talking of things supernatural and furtively glancing about as if fearful of discovering a ghost. Dippy tried the contrivance on a freight-train that stopped at the tank for water, with the result that the engineer experienced great difficulty in getting his train in motion, though the track was slightly down grade. Then came the affair of Ball Bridge.

Near the middle of October there fell a week in which, by night and day, the mountain heads of the inner range were webbed with clouds. Black and wet the vapor-masses clung to the peaks, dissolving in rain. Through every cleft and canyon streams roared; the Little Bear Paw, the Pecos and a thousand rivulets frothed

into the Big Bear Paw until the broad waterway, full from bank to bank, became a seething torrent. Dippy, living on the mountain's base above it, through two nights heard the noise of its tumult and through two days looked down upon its turbulence, and then he began to grow uneasy. Several times he went down to the great bridge and walked out upon the long structure. The flooding waters had risen to within four or five feet of the bridge track, boiling around the piers in slavering turmoil, yellowish, clotted with masses of dirty froth, and full of battering logs and whirling treetops. At times, standing on the bridge, Dippy felt unpleasant tremors thrill through the structure. Surely the solid stone piers, held down by the great weight of the iron superstructure, would withstand any pressure the flood might pit against them! So long as the water and its burden of *débris* passed beneath the spans, doubtless the structure was safe. But, should the flood swell until logs and tree-

tops, and all the rest of the hurrying stuff should batter and bank against the bridge and be pushed on by ten thousand tons of angry water, what then?

Throughout the first three days of rain the human forces employed on the West End quickened with apprehension. Roadmaster Payne came up from Manzano with the work train, looking after earthslides back in the range, and Superintendent Burke came over from Paley Fork, on the Middle Division, and passed on down to Manzano, inspecting bridges and culverts as he went. Reporting by wire to President Sanborn in Denver, he said there was peril at several points, but that, if the rain should cease soon, all would be well. Though delayed the trains still ran.

But the rain did not cease. Throughout the fourth night the black empire of inner peaks rocked with bellowing thunder and was washed with a heavier deluge. The next morning the Big Bear Paw was foaming against the main

stringers of Ball Bridge, by ten o'clock its flood was lipping the track, and the half-million-dollar structure, stanch as engineers and steel-workers could fashion it, shook under the ramming blows of *débris* and pushing waters. The section foreman hurried down to the telegraph office at Rapids Gulch, six miles below, with a message for the roadmaster's office, and Dippy Hamilton wired, with halting and laborious care, the situation to the despatcher at Manzano.

"Ball Bridge is in danger," he said; "water up to track, logs and stuff jamming; send help."

Burke ordered Hoxie to get five locomotives ready and rush them at once to the bridge; he telegraphed Chief Manvell, at Paley Fork, to hold west-bound freight-trains, wherever they might be, and send their engines forthwith to the point of supreme peril. "I want at least ten engines on that bridge by four o'clock this afternoon," his message concluded. That

meant, approximately, one million, eight hundred thousand pounds of additional pressure upon the abutments. Surely that would hold the bridge down, however violently the Big Bear Paw might push against it. From end to end the division thrilled with effort through several hours, but at two o'clock in the afternoon its forces paused in consternation. Ten miles below Ball Bridge the river had cut into the right of way until a hundred yards of track slipped sidewise, ready to fall into the flood. Hoxie's five engines were south of this point and could not cross. Burke was with the engines. He boarded one of the locomotives and whirled back to Broad Bend Station, three miles below, and hit the road with the wire at several points. Manvell's engines, he learned, had struck a washout at the east base of the range and could proceed no further. Jim Ewell, with a west-bound freight-train, was at Horselip, half-way down the west side of the range, and Roadmaster Payne, with his work

train, was strengthening a trestle over a creek two miles west of Horselip.

When Payne brought his train to the siding at Horselip, to let Ewell pass, he received an order from Burke to take Ewell's engine and his own, with all of Ewell's loaded cars and sufficient of the work train flats, loaded with stone, to make a train of about forty cars, and to proceed to Ball Bridge and get the train upon that imperiled structure with all speed.

Hurried work began. By four o'clock Payne and Ewell, with a train of thirty-eight loaded cars, double-headed by the two engines, started down the range for the Big Bear Paw. All night and throughout the morning they had been in the rain, and now the mountainsides heaved and tossed with blowing rags of fog, clumps of pines upon the lifted heights breathed hoarsely, glimpsing black-green through flapping veils of vapor, every crevice dripped, every gully babbled with falling water, and all was unstable, — indistinct, —

perilous. At many points the road-bed was soft, and everywhere the track was wet and slippery, yet a very fury of haste was demanded by the situation; if Ball Bridge should fall it would mean a practical suspension of traffic for weeks.

The long train moved down the continually falling grade, gathering speed and momentum as it rolled. Every man's face was grave. Water spurted from under the soggy ties, as the train swept over them, the wheels cut through streaks of mud that covered the rails, the engine pilots were daubed with soil and clinkered with gravel, and the boiler-heads were spattered with filth.

Seven miles downward from Horselip the first disaster fell. As the train swept around a curve, the track slued under the rear cars, and the caboose snapped its coupling and turned half-over. In the caboose were Payne and Ewell and most of the men. The engines bellowed for brakes and used air, but the train

scarcely slackened at all. Dick Sunday, of the second engine, threw his drivers on the back turn, and the head of the right-hand cylinder blew out. Instantly both engines were wreathed in hot steam. Sunday's fireman jumped, but Dick shut off and stuck to his post, while the train roared onward. A brakeman, back on the train, set several hand brakes, and then, panic-stricken and addled, jumped down a muddy bank.

At Tunnel Fourteen the train struck a sharper grade and quickened its appalling speed. Bert Samuels, engineer of the head locomotive, his fireman, and Sunday, of the second engine, began to despair of checking the wheeled avalanche. At the roots of their hair and along their nerves began to creep a frost of terror and panic. That peril, a train lost to control, the most frequent and most feared of all disasters in mountain railroading, was upon them. Like the waters of the canyons, and impelled by the same omnipotent law, the train

was rushing toward lower ground, wildly flying in search of natural equilibrium and normal rest.

Wreathed in thunder, they crashed through the cuts, the engines bellowed like excited hounds, and the mountain walls reverberated with hammering echoes. The likelihood of the train leaving the track and splintering in ruinous confusion was constant, and, should it remain on the rails and strike Ball Bridge while going at such lawless speed, what would happen? If it should pass Ball Bridge safely, then, ten miles below, the whole fabric would certainly plunge into the river. The operator at Horselip had told the men of the washout that baffled Hoxie and his engines. Then, too, what if Ball Bridge had already fallen! Each engine, and every car in the runaway train, seemed in a transport of angry fear; to plunge into the Big Bear Paw with these wheeled monsters was an appalling prospect. Three miles below Tunnel Fourteen engineer Sunday and

Samuels's fireman quit the train. Samuels stuck to the throttle until within a mile of the Ball Bridge tank, when he, too, jumped. There were numerous lame and injured men along the line of the special's historic flight, but no one had found death. As for Ball Bridge and the train, — well, there was Dippy Hamilton and his crazy contrivance down at the tank, alert, but, seemingly, as things of succor, insignificant.

Dippy had been up all night; several times, with lantern in hand, he had gone down to the bridge, and, standing in the stormy darkness, had listened to the battering and rasping and splashing that rose about the structure. The mountain region was wild and lonely, the spirit of the night inexpressibly daunting. With the coming of day he saw the river swollen to greater height and the probability augmented almost to certainty of the bridge giving way before the increasing flood. Wet to the skin, he had gone to and fro during the day, agi-

tated, his mind wheeling from one vain project to another, crying out within himself for help. A little after four o'clock he came into the small house where he ate and slept, and stood listening to the telegraph instrument. Some one on the wire was calling him; he answered, and the operator at Tunnel Fourteen said:

"Big special with two engines, going down to get on Ball Bridge, is running away; went by here like h—; look out for yourself, and, if section men or any one else working on track, get them out of the way."

Dippy's nerves suddenly tightened like taut harp-strings, his face became white, and his brown eyes widened and were touched with glistening red. He leaped out the door and into the pump-house, set the engine going, connected the dynamo, and threw the current into the track-magnet, that oddest one, as yet, of all his "fool dreams."

Hardly was the apparatus charged before

the supreme moment was upon him. For a little space the forerunning herald of the train's approach was as the noise of a far-falling cataract, and then there was thunder in the valley of the Big Bear Paw. Dippy sprang out of the door of the pump-house and ran some three hundred feet eastward along the track. He drew back a little from the rails and waited, half-crouching, his fingers working, and his eyes like those of an excited cat. As things gone mad, the linked monsters came down from the mountains, riderless, yet hastening wildly under the invisible lash of gravitation. For nearly a mile before the water-tank was reached the track along the river was but slightly down grade; that was a factor working toward salvation; yet the train came onward swiftly, a black-headed, brown-bodied reptile of Titanic girth, swaying and wrinkling all its hurrying sections.

Dippy suddenly felt the smitten air crushing him back and the solid earth quaking, and then

the first engine struck the magnetized rails. There was a hammering crash of all the draw-heads as the engine-drivers clutched the energized steel, and Dippy looked to see the rails torn up, the cars buckle into the air, and himself crushed under the hurling mass; but the weight of the engines held the track to its bed, the front engine received a pull downward, and, practically, backward, that amounted to tons of resistance, then it passed beyond the sphere of magic, and the second engine was crossing the clutching mystery. At that Dippy, white and burning in every fibre, leaped at the iron ladder of one of the rear cars and, grasping it, scrambled to the top. Thrilling with vivid realization of the import of the moment, he began swiftly setting the hand brakes, twisting them up until the gritty brake-shoes tore wreaths of fire from the wheels. Leaping from car to car, he felt them rock and quiver as the hurling power of the whole fabric was taken in leash. Beneath him there was hissing and

rasping and the clang of drawheads, as the train's three hundred wheels were in rapid succession gripped and released by the invisible clutch of the energized rails, and then the train was beyond the great magnet and approaching the bridge.

Eight flat cars loaded with stone were near the centre of the train. Here obstruction of the air had occurred. Scrambling over the stone and setting the hand brakes as he progressed, Dippy reached the front loaded box cars, and, filled with a sense of wild power, twisted the brakes up until the cars reeled. Slowly the train slackened, and then suddenly the fire boxes roared and the hot wheels were splashing in water. The engines, wreathed in steam, plowed slowly through a dangling line of broken stuff, the trembling bridge felt nearly three million pounds suddenly crush it solidly upon the piers and the mad waters of the Big Bear Paw gurgled helplessly around the wheels.

Looking up from his straining twist of the last brake, Dippy saw the flood about him. The nose of the front engine was within a rod of the western shore and the bulk of the train stood squarely on the bridge. He put a hand to his throat and for a moment stood gasping, then his mouth opened with a yell, the triumphant shout of one who puts great and rebellious elements under his feet and holds them.

Twenty minutes later Dippy ticked a laconic message to the despatcher at Manzano. It simply said: "Train on bridge; will stick."

The despatcher relayed the message to Burke at Broad Bend. Burke read the wire, and, puckering his lips in his beard, whistled in astonishment. At nine o'clock that night he entered the pump-house at the Ball Bridge tank, having made part of the journey on foot and part in a hand-car. He grasped Dippy's hand and held it, and the two looked into each other's eyes.

"How did you do it, boy? How, in heaven's

name, did you do it?" demanded the superintendent.

A smile crept around Dippy's mouth. "By muscle and magic, about half and half, I guess," he said, quietly.

Burke glanced around the place, at the engine and little dynamo and the wires leading toward the track.

"They energize — in fact, make a magnet, — of two of the rails," said Dippy.

Burke gazed at the youth fixedly a long time. His keen eyes seemed to ask a hundred questions.

"Yes," said Dippy.

"See here, you come over to Paley Fork as soon as things are straightened out; I want you," said Burke, decisively.

"I'd rather go down to Manzano, for the present; Jack Morton and — and Violet, his daughter, are there," Dippy ventured.

Burke looked at him a moment longer. "All right!" he said. "When I have time I'll in-

vestigate you. I think you're wanted in our department of experimental engineering in Denver."

That was where Dippy landed, and there he succeeded admirably, though just how far his strange idea of traction magnetism will eventually affect his own and the future of mankind has not yet been fully demonstrated. Two important things promised by the situation certainly did come true: Dippy Hamilton was decorated with a Diamond Key, and both he and Violet now call Jack Morton "Dad."

The banquet given Dippy Hamilton by Superintendent Burke proved to be, in several particulars, the most notable of all our festal occasions. Every person who had been honored with a Diamond Key was present, also President Sanborn and his son Clark and several of the directors from Denver. The banquet-room of the Lyon House was wreathed with flowers, on the wall back of the first table glowed a great key, fashioned of electric

globes, and at a big, round table near the centre of the room sat eight embarrassed but smiling people, each of whom wore a Diamond Key. At this table Burke had caused ten chairs to be placed. At the beginning of the banquet we remarked that two of the chairs were unoccupied. In the centre of this table stood a mimic locomotive, made by Muggins Tarney, grouped about with telegraph instruments and garnished with roses. The remainder of the great room was crowded with tables and smiling, expectant people.

Superintendent Burke made a most felicitous speech, illuminating with brilliant touches all that he had said on former occasions in praise of heroism. Some of the things he said cling in my memory. "Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny," he quoted. "It is thus with those who grace the round table in our midst, in achievements as truly entitled to honor and approval as were

King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table in days of old. Each one now wearing the Diamond Key sowed an act of moral and physical valor. I have watched them since, and without question they have reaped the habit of always doing their very best, a habit that will surely form good character and bring high destiny here and in the life after this. We all, old and young, ought to learn this habit that we too may reap good destiny." We applauded this heartily, as may easily be believed. Then the superintendent eulogized Dippy Hamilton, and pinning the Diamond Key upon the embarrassed youth's breast, led him to the round table and seated him in one of the empty chairs. A storm of hand-clapping followed.

Next the superintendent turned toward President Sanborn. "Sir," he said, "I believe your son eminently entitled to the Diamond Key. By great effort, indeed almost at the cost of his life, he stuck to the maul and shovel, and, through the fire-box of the 1206, saved the

Fast Mail. Because he is your son, son of the president of the road, you have advised against his decoration, arguing that it might be thought a matter of partiality and due to official favoritism. I beg leave to take a different view. High or low, rich or poor, no matter who one may be, if he achieve the heroic on the Western Central, the Diamond Key is his. Therefore, in recognition of duty supremely well done, I pin this badge of distinction upon the breast of Clark Sanborn."

When the key was fastened he led Clark to the round table amid wild applause and seated him. When the noise had subsided Clark arose, and looking around the table, at Ruth Patten, Park Taylor, Freckle Hogan, Dreamy Meadows, Wadd Hancock, Dippy Hamilton, Nectarine Morgan, Joey Phillips, and Muggins Tarney, bowed to them with grave respect. There was something very like tears in his eyes.

"This is the greatest honor that has come

to me thus far in my life, to be counted one of this band of heroes," he said. "And the greatest honor I look forward to is to personally honor myself in being true to the idea underlying this Diamond Key. Mr. Burke, I thank you; comrades of the Diamond Key, I salute you."

That indeed brought from us a joyous racket of approval, but hardly so overwhelming in volume as was produced by a surprising thing that followed. Hardly had Clark taken his seat before President Sanborn arose. His face was all aglow.

"I am gratified, extremely gratified by what has just taken place," he said, "but these at the centre table, much as I honor them, must not be thought the only heroes of the Western Central. These are only the most conspicuous doers of great things. Every man doing his part in the dangerous business of moving trains over these mountains, trackmen and telegraph operators faithfully doing their duty

at section houses and isolated stations in lonely canyons, men skilfully handling the machinery in shops, train despatchers bending under fearful responsibility over train-sheets, all, so they do their work well, in a sense are heroes. But the chief man in pushing this great enterprise to success, both in building the line and operating it, surely that man is also a hero. In view of this fact I have personally brought a Diamond Key for Ames Burke, and I delegate little Muggins Tarney, one of the smallest of heroes, to pin it upon the breast of one of the greatest."

We came near taking the roof off at that. Ruth Patten led Muggins over to the superintendent, who, blushing like a bride, stooped to receive the badge. When, with Ruth's aid, it was properly adjusted, he kissed and squeezed the frightened Muggins amid thunderous applause.

"Now," went on President Sanborn, "since tho. wearing the Diamond Key number eleven,

including the General Manager of the road — Mr. Burke having been promoted to that position at a meeting of the directors last night — I, as chief officer of the company, pronounce the wearers of the Diamond Key an Order, a brotherhood of heroes recognized and recognizing each other as such, with power to elect officers and add new members from time to time. Gentlemen, ladies, I propose that we drink a toast in the pure water of these Colorado Mountains — a beverage delightful and intoxicating enough for any man — a wish for the health and long life of each member of the Order of the Diamond Key, and that this worthy brotherhood may grow."

We one and all arose to our feet, and a hundred lifted glasses of water sparkled on high as we cheered. Thus was the Order of the Diamond Key created and established on the Western Central.

THE END.

Young Heroes of Wire and Rail

By ALVAH MILTON KERR

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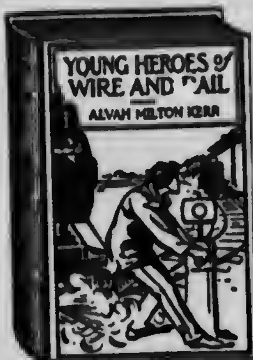

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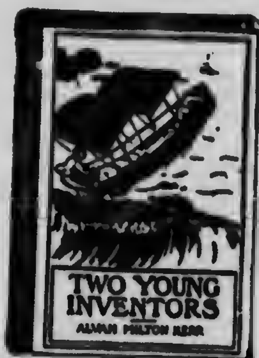

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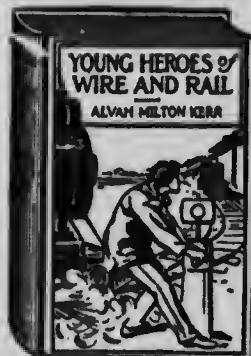

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